



The Secret of Sinharat

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Eric John Stark is an adventurer and rebel. Raised on sun-soaked savage Mercury, dwelling in civilization, his calm and dark skin mask a warrior spirit. In murderous Martian Drylands, worst galaxy criminals hatch conspiracy. In forgotten ruins of Martian Low Canals, Stark finds unlikely romance and a potent secret that could shake the Red Planet to its core.

The Secret of Sinharat Details

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From Reader Review The Secret of Sinharat for online ebook

Carolyn F. says

I'm one of those people who reads the prologue, the dedications, the epilogue, the publisher's comments, the blurb about the author. This one about Leigh Brackett was fascinating. She wrote the screenplay for The Big Sleep and Rio Bravo among others and a week before she died had turned in the screenplay for The Empire Strikes Back, although it was later edited, of course.

The Secret of Sinharat: This book is about Stark who in order to not go to jail while on Mars agrees to find out what all the hub-bub is going on at a town/city where he's been asked to make an appearance. Raised by aborigines from Mercury, he's got a very wild streak and sometimes reacts instinctively. The story was good, I can't believe it fit into a magazine though unless it was printed as a periodical.

The People of the Talisman: Okay so in this story I'm not all starry eyed and found myself reading more critically. It seems to me Stark finds everything evil - the down, the gorge, different people, the atmosphere. He reacts like an animal that wants to run from danger but forces himself not to. This story was a lot strange and that's saying something about aliens from Mars.

She's a good writer and I plan on reading more of her stuff but not right now.

Martin says

Read the eponymous novella: good.
And the next: good.

I'm going out on a limb and giving this a full five on rating and recommending it completely to all fans of planetary romance and sword and sorcery. Brackett is a great storyteller and a good writer. She doesn't make that fantasy mistake of trying to do too much with her writing. She does not use florid prose to convey the fantastic, nor resort to the deus ex machina. She also avoids the Lovecraftian hoo-ha that gets a bit tiresome in Kuttner and Moore -- and hey, I even like Lovecraftian hoo-ha. It's just good solid storytelling fun here and I'm looking forward to more of her stuff in the planetary series.

Stephen says

4.0 to 4.5 stars. This was an extremely fun read and I really liked it. This is classic pulp science fiction in the sword and sorcery mold (actually sword and planet since it takes place on Mars). The main character is Eric John Stark, an Earthman raised on Mercury by a wild tribe of warriors. Just think Conan set in space and you will not be far off, except that Stark is more of a hero than an anti-hero. In this first novel featuring Stark, he is recruited by the colonial space command to infiltrate a group of mercenaries in order to prevent a war on Mars.

Well written with a fast paced plot and a good main character, this book was just a ton of fun. This was my

first experience with reading Leigh Brackett and it will certainly not be my last. Recommended.

Bad-at-reading says

By-the-numbers sword and sorcery (I sometimes suspect there's no other kind) but on Mars. There are occasional glints of cleverness in the setting, but story- and character-wise Brackett prefers telling to showing and seems bizarrely eager to play by the rules.

Jordan says

Leigh Brackett wrote the first draft of *Empire Strikes Back*. She was also included in Appendix N (aka, recommended by Gary Gygax). And I'm a big fan of the John Carter of Mars tales. These two stories were fast-paced and tightly written. Eric John Stark is a great character, a mixture of clever rogue and feral savage. I'll definitely be following up with more of his adventures.

Matthew says

Pulp sci-fi. It reminds me a bit of Burroughs's Mars books, and not just because it's on Mars. There is a wildness to the planet. From the first chapter, I thought it was going to be similar to noir detective or even western bounty hunter. But it ended up reminding me mostly of Conan - but on Mars instead Cimmeria.

Isidore says

Like many of her pulp colleagues, Brackett sought to squeeze some extra bucks out of old stories by expanding them into novel length for book publication. In the process, a lot of good short fiction was spoiled: in very few instances (Chandler, definitely; Van Vogt, maybe) was the material improved by reworking.

In the early 1960s Leigh Brackett decided to novelize two of her best contributions to *Planet Stories*, and so "Queen of the Martian Catacombs" (1949) became *The Secret of Sinharat*, and "Black Amazon of Mars" (1951) became *People of the Talisman*. This book contains both novels.

Of the two stories, "Queen of the Martian Catacombs" underwent the least modification: the first half of the tale appears to have been reproduced verbatim. Then, in order to stretch the story-line, Brackett resorts to dumbing down her hero. Eric John Stark, everywhere else quick-witted and blunt, is made to dither and vacillate over the true nature of his new girlfriend (one of two, as it happens), so the story can run on a few extra chapters. In the original version, he calls her on it in true tough-guy fashion as soon as his suspicions are aroused, and taunts her edgily about it for the rest of the story in the pleasing manner of an embittered hardboiled hero. Brackett's revisions leave the reader impatient, while the original text is snappy and exciting.

Brackett also chose to drastically rewrite the story's climax, again weakening her hero by making him less

central to the unfolding of the plot, and losing entirely a strikingly bizarre scene in which Stark undergoes the "Sending On of Minds". In the process, a busy plot is further complicated. The original ending is poignant and bleak, while the novel opts for an open-ended moral dilemma; the former is more effective.

People of the Talisman presents a more interesting case. Rather than clumsily expanding the story through padding, Brackett here substantially discards the original tale and improvises on its motifs and ideas. Only the first third of the novel retains the prose of the magazine version.

Here, I think one can argue that some of the changes are for the better. For instance, one of the story's biggest surprises is no longer given away by the title! Brackett now takes her time with the city of Kushat, giving us a stronger sense of place, and the characters Stark encounters there are given a little more time to develop.

In reworking her stories Brackett seems to have been keen on removing their weird elements; perhaps she felt they were quaint and old-fashioned in the age of James Bond. The novel opts for a climax comprised of swordplay and action, and the weirdness of the beings beyond the Gates of Death is ruthlessly downplayed. The magazine version of the story is very different. It's hard to believe Brackett did not have Lovecraft's frighteningly alien and unimaginable cities in mind when she first conceived the City Beyond the Gates; and here matters are settled more by mysterious paranormal forces than by slicing and dicing; an atmosphere of the uncanny is sustained throughout. As far as I'm concerned, the original version is far more enthralling and imaginative than the relatively prosaic climax of the novel.

While *Sinharat* is just plain messy, I can see readers who like more sword than sorcery preferring the new version of *Talisman*. But for me, the novels, entertaining enough in their own right, compromise the giddy thrills to be found in the original pulp stories.

Joel Flank says

The Secret of Sinharat by Leigh Brackett is in Paizo's Planet Stories line of books. This line brings classic fantasy and science fiction that has long been out of print back for the modern audience. I have to admit, while I'm an avid sci-fi and fantasy reader, I don't have a strong background with the classics from the 50s and before. I've read Conan and lots of other Robert E. Howard works, but not much else from that era. Because of that, I'm a huge fan of the Planet Stories line, since I can get to read lots of great classic stuff, and only the best of it, since someone who knows a lot more about this (Erik Mona) has done the legwork of picking the best stuff he can get his hands on for publication.

For those who don't know, Leigh Brackett is one of the great genre writers of the 40s through 70s. In addition to all of the prose she wrote, she is best known currently as a screen writer. In particular, she wrote the first draft of a little sci-fi flick called The Empire Strikes Back. No wonder the classic Star Wars trilogy was so much better - it had professional writers, instead of just Lucas. In addition, she's known as the mentor for a little known author named Ray Bradbury.

This book introduces Brackett's most famous character, Erik John Starck. Starck is a mercenary, wandering where events take him, and using whatever weapons are at hand to fight for his cause. He's got a code of honor that dictates his actions more than simply fighting for the highest bidder. In many ways, he reminds me a lot of Conan, and he comes from a tradition of heroes being a bit more selfish and looking out for themselves instead of being a paragon of Good. Starck lives in the sub-genre of planetary romance, where the solar system is fully inhabited by different breeds of humans (not to mention stranger creatures) and while

Starck is an Earthman, he was raised in the wilds of Mercury, and these stories take place on ancient Mars. While guns and advance technology exists, on Mars it's more common that men fight with swords or spears, unless they're from off world.

This book consists of an introduction by none other than Michael Moorcock (my all time favorite author), and then is split into two novellas. The first is the title story, and does a great job introducing Starck, giving information about his background as well as setting the scene of what life on Mars is like. The second story is "The People of the Talisman", and tells of an adventure Starck has in the frozen northlands of Mars. Both stories are lots of fun to read, and despite the datedness of life on Mars, compared to our current scientific knowledge, both stories stand up well against anything you might read that's more recent. This is strongly recommended, especially if you haven't had any exposure to any of the classic sci-fi or fantasy works. I'll be reading three sequels that Paizo has published about Stack in upcoming weeks.

Randy says

Leigh Brackett's Eric John Stark is of the same order as Burroughs' John Carter of Mars.

The original stories were published in the late fortie before we knew much about the planets of our system.

Stark, an Earthman born on Mercury, his parents worked for a mining company, raised for a while by aboriginal natives in the band between the eternal day side and the equally eternal night side of Mercury, then rescued by an Earthman.

He lives on Mars and is a warrior born.

The two short novels in this volume were published as an Ace double in 1964, both based on two of the original stories, although the second is almost completely rewritten, mainly the basic plot line.

Fun read if you're a fan of Burroughs.

Sean says

This book was a fun and very likeable "sword and planet" adventure of the John Carter type. I'm hooked and will definitely be reading the rest of the Eric John Stark books.

Barak says

Cute little story.

Ctgt says

I have been a long time fan of the pulps from the early to mid 19th century. Sci/fi, fantasy, crime/noir,

horror-you know, all those "genres" that literary types pull their chin up so they can look down their nose when discussing. *Strange Stories*, *Amazing Stories*, *Planet Stories*, *Black Mask*, *Dime Detective*, *Weird Tales*. Asimov, Lovecraft, Burroughs, Howard, Zelazny, Le Guin, Chandler, Bradbury, Leiber, Sturgeon. The list of authors is long and IMO distinguished.

Leigh Brackett is also a member of that group but much to my chagrin I had never read one of her stories. She may be more well known as a screenwriter. Let's see if you've heard of these, **The Big Sleep**, **Rio Bravo**, **El Dorado**, **Rio Lobo**, oh and **Star Wars V: The Empire Strikes Back** (She wrote a first draft for Lucas which was turned in right before she died in 1978. It was revised by Lucas and Kasdan but Brackett does receive credit for the final script).

This book contains two novellas *The Secret of Sinharat* and *People of the Talisman* which introduces us to Eric John Stark. Both stories are expansions of early works *Queen of the Martian Catacombs* and *Black Amazon of Mars* respectively. Born to human parents on Mercury, Stark is adopted and raised by an aboriginal tribe. Before reaching adulthood, this tribe is killed by miners who also capture and imprison Stark. He is later rescued and raised to adulthood by policeman Simon Ashton. Stark becomes an outlaw after running guns to indigenous tribes fighting a mining company. A highly entertaining mix of fantasy and sci-fi from a reptilian mount to a Banning shocker weapon, swords to pistols, primitive tribes to interplanetary travel.

Recommended if you enjoy early sci-fi or fantasy stories.

Riju Ganguly says

These two novellas that have been compiled into a single volume by the very considerate people at Planet Books, represent the very best of pulp era writings. Leigh Brackett, was one of the greatest story-tellers to have graced English literature, and as she breathes life into the burnt out landscape of Mars, and its disparate people (esp. her hero, Eric John Stark), you simply forget that this is a story taking place at a frankly unbelievable place, with dollops of imagination replacing science at every stage. The protagonists, antagonists, men, women, even the animals are drawn out perfectly, and even then the story rushes forward. Believe me, writing of this kind must have been mighty rare even in those days, and now-a-days? Huh... take a break, or rather, try to get hold of a couple of Leigh Brackett books.

Chris says

Brackett is the queen of pulp SF; this story is a great example, extended from a 1949 novella into a short novel. Eric John Stark finds himself trapped on the Martian desert, his mount dying of thirst, men of the Earth Police Control hot on his heels. Led by Stark's foster-father, Ashton Simon, the police are on to Stark's purpose on Mars: they know he was hired by a revolutionary to train an army of drylander barbarians and low-canallers, they're aware of the coming revolt against the Martian city-states. But since they cannot intervene in Martian affairs, they need Stark to become a double-agent and shut this revolt down, and Stark finds himself working to diffuse the very revolution he was hired to instigate.

Brackett's prose is unmistakable; it's full of vigor and wonder, following the toughened antihero Stark across the Martian desert. Brackett's writing suggests both western and noir, but was also somewhat ahead of her time, adding a postcolonial uprising to her tale. The characterization is thin, and the plotting straightforward,

but if you're in the market for adventure in the Burroughs tradition, Brackett was one of the finest practitioners of the art.

Full review found [here](#).

Bill Kerwin says

This planetary romance is also a bit of a western, a bit of a spy novel, and a bit of a detective story. But this shouldn't come as a surprise, for it is written by the woman who gave us the original screenplays for *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Rio Bravo*, and who also collaborated on the screenplay for Hawk's *The Big Sleep*.

Eric John Stark's flight through the Martian desert is cut short when his mount becomes exhausted and he is overtaken by agents of the Earth Patrol. Commander Simon Ashton knows Stark is facing twenty-four years hard time for running guns to striking miners, but he is willing to overlook it if Stark, after he joins Lord Delgaun's mercenaries, will do a little spying for Terran interests. Delgaun's ally Kylon claims to have recovered the magical crowns of the ancient Ramas, and Ashton needs someone to investigate and determine whether these claims are true. Stark agrees. He soon uses his detective skills to find the answer to Ashton's question, but by then he is enmeshed in a dangerous net of perplexing complications.

This book has everything one desires in a planetary romance: arrogant and powerful men, beautiful and resourceful women, conspiracy, swordplay, gunfire, assumed identities, ancient magic, a lost civilization, and a degenerate Martian dive bar specializing in exotic drugs.

I thought this novel dragged just a bit in its second third. It was expanded from an earlier novella, "Queen of the Martian Catacombs," either by Brackett or her husband Edmund Hamilton, and—although I haven't read the novella—I suspect this story may have been better in its slightly shorter version. In any event, it is exciting, with a few unexpected twists, and worth the attention of any discerning fan of planetary romance.

J.M. says

Excellent pulp; Eric John Stark is a ham fisted hero running around fantasy mars being better at violence than just everyone else aided and confounded by a well wrought supporting cast. Personally, I've been put off in the past by Science Fiction this soft (basically Science-Fantasy) but Leigh Brackett is a good enough author to make it work. If you like Pulp, if you enjoyed Empire Strike Back it's worth checking out.

Bryan Schmidt says

It is hard to imagine a more enjoyable read than this classic combination of two pulp chronicles by the master Leigh Brackett. Probably best known for her last work, the early draft of the screenplay that became "The Empire Strikes Back," Brackett is regarded as a master by most in the scifi field. Being woefully unread in the early scifi eras, I felt it was time I did some reading and I am so glad I did. In fact, the CL Moore and Robert E. Howard books I have in my queue will likely get moved up a bit.

One of the things I liked best about this book was it was all about characters and plot. The few scientific things were there to serve the story, not show some technical prowess or knowledge by the author. All too often in modern scifi I am turned off by such pretensions. I rarely use them in my own work because I have no delusions about my scientific knowledge which is close enough to nil to hardly bear mention.

But Eric John Stark is a fascinating adventurer, one whom it is easy to see as an inspiration for modern characters like Indiana Jones, Han Solo and others. The prose is also unpretentious. Not because of the era, but because of the writer's skill. Again, too many modern books strive to be so masterful in their verbage that I find them slow reads, sometimes requiring rereading more than once just to comprehend a single paragraph. Brackett keeps it simple, another approach I use as well in my own work. That doesn't mean it's not a complex and fascinating adventure. These stories are action packed with lots of twists and turns and characters as Stark works his way through the politics and rivalries of life on Mars.

The book didn't really seem dated to me either. There were perhaps a few simpler concepts in it than one would expect today -- things which a modern writer might replace with higher level technology, etc. But I could have read this all night if sleep wasn't necessary. It was just thrilling and delightful in every respect.

Highly recommended for all scifi fans or fans of early 20th century literature. I think you'll find it as enjoyable as I did.

bluetyson says

The Secret Of Sinharat (Planet Stories Library) by Leigh Brackett (2007)

Shannon Appelcline says

The Secret of Sinharat. I was somewhat surprised by how much I liked this story. It takes the planet and sword genre of Burroughs and gives it much more depth. The characters are much more nuanced, and the tragedy that stalks them indeed makes the story deserving of the label of noir. Also, the writing is top-notch. Overall, an superior example of the Planetary Romance genre -- something that I didn't know existed! [7/10].

Anastasia says

Classic adventure pulp, with a flavor of H. Rider Haggard and Edgar Rice Burroughs' John Carter of Mars stories. Especially like the 2nd novella in the book - "People of the Talisman" - that one gets 4 stars from me.
