



Heart of the World

H. Rider Haggard

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An extraordinarily beautiful Indian princess and a white Englishman fall in love but suffer deeply because of their feelings.

Excerpt from Heart of the World

The circumstances under which the following pages come to be printed are somewhat curious and worthy of record. Within the last few years a certain English gentleman, whom we will call Jones, because it was not his name, chanced to be employed as the manager of a mine not far from the Usumacinto River, the upper reaches of which divide the Mexican State of Chiapas from the Republic of Guatemala.

Now life at a mine in Chiapas, though doubtless it has some compensations, does not altogether fulfil a European's ideal of happiness. To begin with, the work is hard, desperately hard, and though the climate is healthy enough among the mountains, there are valleys where men may die of fever. Of sport, strictly speaking, there is none, for the forests are too dense to hunt in with any comfort, and, if they were not, the swarms of venomous insects of various degree, that haunt them, would make this particular relaxation impossible.

Heart of the World Details

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Trounin says

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(c) Trounin

Robert burke says

Haggard leaves the dark continent for Mexico in this adventure novel. Lost cities of gold, love, danger and treachery all makes H R Haggard novels a thrilling read.

Sabrina Nowrin says

The main idea is very much similar to 'The people of the mist' by Haggard. But you will never get bored or think that two stories are just alike.

Johnny Waco says

With *King Solomon's Mines*, *Allan Quatermain*, and *She*, Haggard hit an early peak with his popular formula of taking a brave Englishman, adding exotic locales, native women, and glorious riches, and then capping it all off with an explosive climax (the Englishman being the hero, of course). Perhaps because he followed this formula, more or less, for the rest of his career with the zeal of a religious convert, his reputation has suffered much more than those of his fellow Victorian adventure novelists Robert Louis Stevenson and H. G. Wells.

Heart of the World illustrates Haggard's decline as well as any of his works; published in 1895, a decade or more after his first successes, *Heart* fulfills all of the expectations, with a promising twist--instead of the African settings that his novels are so famous for, Haggard places this one in the New World, embarking his two protagonists, an Englishman (brave, naturally) and a noble Indian (loyal and sacrificing, of course) on a quest to find a hidden and still thriving Mayan-type city in Central America. The story is lively enough at first, if rote, and the introduction of the princess Maya is welcome, but soon the novel overstays its welcome, with the extended section set in the ancient city stretching on for what only seemed an eternity (I checked my watch). One interesting note: the noble Indian, Don Ignatio, early on is betrayed by a woman, and he becomes an unrepentant misogynist; every woman in the book is, at worst, treacherous, or, at best,

conniving. Judging by characters such as the protagonist of *She*, I can't help but wonder if Ignatio is a mouthpiece for Haggard's views on women.

Sandy says

Although I had previously read and hugely enjoyed no fewer than 40 novels by H. Rider Haggard, I yet felt a trifle nervous before beginning the author's "Heart of the World." I had recently finished Haggard's truly excellent novel of 1893, "Montezuma's Daughter"--a novel that deals with the downfall of the Aztec empire in the early 16th century--and was concerned that "Heart of the World," which I knew to be still another story dealing with the Aztecs, would necessarily be repetitive. As it turns out, however, I needn't have worried. Despite the Aztec backdrop, the two novels are as dissimilar as can be; whereas the first deals with an Englishman witnessing the Indian conflicts with Cortes from 1519-1521 and the fall of the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan, "HOTW" takes place a good three centuries later. Written by Haggard from November 1893-February 1894, the novel was serialized in "Pearson's Weekly" and later published in book form in March 1896. The novel was Haggard's 18th, out of an eventual 58, and following as it did three of the author's greatest creations--"Nada the Lily," "Montezuma's Daughter" and "The People of the Mist"--demonstrated that H. Rider was very much near the top of his game during this period, a full decade after coming out with the phenomenally popular "King Solomon's Mines," "Allan Quatermain" and "She."

"HOTW" takes the form of a manuscript written by the Mexican Indian Don Ignatio, close to the end of his 62 years. In it, he tells of the great adventure that he'd had in the mid-19th century, alongside the English miner James Strickland. The lineal descendant of Guatemoc, last of the Aztec emperors, Ignatio has dedicated his life to the fulfillment of a dream: the unification of the Mexican peoples and the ouster of the Spanish influence. Ultimately, the pair comes in contact with Zibabai, head priest and ruler of the People of the Heart--who dwell in the legendary Lost City of Gold--along with his beautiful daughter, Maya. As it turns out, Zibabai's goals are the same as Ignatio's, and so the four travel to the lost city, the titular Heart of the World, encountering many hardships on the trail. But once arrived at the legendary island city (which the reader infers is somewhere beyond the Guatemalan border), their troubles are only beginning, as politics and a love triangle go a long way in destroying their cherished plans....

Longtime readers of Haggard will not be surprised to learn what an incredibly action-packed and exciting book "HOTW" is. Before our adventurers even arrive at the lost city, Haggard has treated us to a mine cave-in, a gun battle with a band of killers, the mother of all storms at sea, a shipwreck (a shipwreck had already been featured in Haggard's 1888 novel "Mr. Meeson's Will" and in "Montezuma's Daughter," and would also figure largely in later novels such as 1906's "Benita" and 1929's "Mary of Marion Isle"), a swordfight, a run-in with nasty father and son smugglers, a battle on top of a ruined jungle pyramid, an almost lethal snakebite, and a trek across both desert and mountains. Haggard throws an enormous lot into his book to please the reader, and his four main characters are an interesting bunch. Ignatio, our narrator, is especially likable, being at once humble, shrewd, and dedicated to his cause, while Strickland comes across as a typically good-hearted, brave and handsome Englishman; the sort that the author loved to depict, and very much in the Leo Vincey mold, from "She." Zibabai strongly resembles many former and future white-bearded patriarch figures in the Haggard pantheon (I am thinking most especially of Oro, in the 1919 novel "When the World Shook"), while Maya must be added to the very long list of Haggardian women who have sacrificed all for love. (It is remarkable what a lengthy roster of strong female characters Haggard managed to amass over the course of his career; I can think of no author, offhand, who even comes close.) The author treats his readers to detailed descriptions of his Heart of the World, both physical descriptions and details about the people's lives, customs and religion, and it is all fairly fascinating stuff. As always, Haggard's ruminations on various

matters creep into his book; his thoughts regarding death, as expressed via Ignatio, are very moving indeed. (Haggard had lost his son, "Jock," two years before writing this book.) "HOTW" may be a touch less exciting than "Montezuma's Daughter," a bit less crammed with incident, and lacks a strong central villain on the order of the earlier book's Juan de Garcia (although there ARE minor rogues and badmen aplenty). Still, it is a highly satisfying creation, sure to provide many nights of excitement; a true page-turner, and all that. Ignatio, before setting down his tale, tells us "I fear that my skill in writing is small." Humble as always, the old Indian was wrong in this regard. It turns out that he could spin a tale alongside the best of them!

Shuhan Rizwan says

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Lazy Linesman says

‘Heart of the World’ is set in Mexico, part of the reason why I wanted to read this particular book. It follows the adventures of stalwart Englishman James Strickland and his Indian companion Don Ignatio as they try to find the lost Indian city of great wealth, an El Dorado in Central America. The Englishman seeks adventure, the Indian seeks to overthrow the Spanish-descended Mexicans and reestablish his people’s empire of old, both hammering home the similarities between this and ‘Solomon’s Mines’. Where ‘Heart’ varies is in its narrator: the story is recounted by an elderly Ignatio on his deathbed. This variation does not change the account greatly – it still reads very similar to ‘Solomon’s Mines’ or ‘Allan Quatermain’ when the pair and various assorted companions do battle both with nature and villainously villainous villains. So far, so expected. There is even another interracial romance – though unfortunately Haggard saw fit to make the Indian girl thoroughly un-Indian in appearance, with very light skin and deep blue eyes (having lived in Mexico for a year, I feel at least a little qualified in saying this just does not happen).

This is not to say I was underwhelmed by ‘Heart of the World’; I am merely keen to emphasise that many aspects do fit in with what one might expect from a nineteenth-century adventure novel. I really enjoyed this book, not for being surprised at every plot twist and turn, but for knowing what was going to happen. Haggard is aware that having a character narrator lends the protagonist an invulnerability until at least the last chapter or so. Instead of trying to keep his reader guessing, the author goes completely the other way: we are given prior warning to pretty much every single key event throughout. Even in the first chapter we learn which characters survive to the end and which end up with commemorative plaques. When I started reading the quarter of the book I put it down to clumsy story-telling which took all fun out of the plot. Yet, as the tale progressed, the suspense grew. It is not an adventure book in the same sense as most other Haggard works I have read; ‘Heart’ reads much more like a tragedy. We are given hints of what will occur of the next few chapters through omens, dreams, visions and the occasional off-hand comment from the narrator, and we watch events unfold with a weary sense of inevitability. Think ‘Titanic’ but without boat, ice or overpriced 3D effects.

The whole feel of the book is somewhat gloomy. We first meet Ignatio heading up an hacienda – a factory/plantation – in his final years, yet when he begins his narration we find that his overriding ambition is to lead his entire race into a new golden age. We know from the get-go that he is to fail, and that knowledge sticks with us as we follow him from the stormy waters of the Gulf of Mexico to the deteriorating city, Heart of the World. Interestingly, Haggard seems to draw some link between the ancient Mesoamerican

civilisations and the British Empire, perhaps foreseeing its eventual decline and hinting to his British readership to watch out. I pick out a particular passage comparing Maia, the beautiful princess of the ancient city, eager to break out from her people's resigned downfall, and James Strickland, an unsuccessful too-honest-for-his-own-good British entrepreneur who is fascinated by the history and wealth lying within the city's walls:

"She was in mind the more modern of the two – so much so, indeed, that, in to their talk, I might have fancied that Maia was the child of the New World, filled with the spirit of today, and he the heir of a proud and secret race dying beneath its weight of years"

Now, I would not say that 'Heart of the World' is the best example of Rider Haggard's work. It is not paced all that well, with the first half of the story feeling very dragged out. It does rely a lot more than usual on the characters sneaking around in shadows and overhearing two strangers discussing every political nuance necessary for the furthering of the plot. It also bears a disadvantage to Haggard's other works in that it is based in the Americas. His love for the African lands and peoples among which he grew up, which shine so evidently in other books, is missing here, and whilst it seems that he did do some research on certain aspects of the locations, it just reads as someone relying on second-hand accounts. Whilst the subject matter of advanced yet deceased wealthy civilisations does allow for Haggard's imagination to flourish, it lacks something of the passion we find in 'King Solomon's Mines' or 'She'.

All that said, it is still a worthwhile book. I did enjoy reading it, if nothing else for spotting the names of various places where I lived in 2010/11. It is not one I feel a strong desire to reread at any point in the near future, but definitely worth the first read through.

David says

A curious adventure book in which most of the exciting action take place in the early chapters when the main character faces an evil plantation owner and stages a memorable rescue and an exciting battle. After this, the book meanders into one of Haggard's lost worlds and becomes entrenched in the politics and rivalries of the city. The ending does feel somewhat rushed and the character of the white explorer, Strickland, does not feel as well defined as others of Haggard's heroes. It is interesting for the suggestion of the homosexual attraction of one of the main character Ignacio for Strickland and the rivalry he feels for the heroine Maya.

Kenton Crowther says

This is a workmanlike Haggard tale with some features familiar from his other books. It is fairly routine but, as always with Haggard, there are some fascinating passages.

Don Ignacio, descendant of Guatemoc, King of the Aztecs, narrates the tale. He resembles Harmachis in Haggard's *Cleopatra* (who also narrates in the first person). The pure-blooded Harmachis is the true heir of the Pharaohs. His partisans, the common folk of Egypt, wish to see him drive out Queen Cleopatra and all the other Greek usurpers.

Like Harmachis, Ignacio has the noble blood in him and a plot is festering: with the help of James Strickland, an Englishman, he will become the ruler of Mexico after he has thrown out the Spaniards and the Spanish

Mexicans. By travelling to the fabled City of the Heart Ignatio will be able to get gold to fund his campaign. In that city few babies are born, the population is failing and devitalised. But if they can supply the gold, Ignatio can raise the men in Mexico and the invaders will be destroyed or expelled.

A bubbling plot like this, with the whiff of righteousness, makes for a stirring tale.

In *Cleopatra*, Harmachis' attempt at the throne was blighted by Cleopatra's attendant Charmion, who was in love with him and furious to see him under Cleopatra's spell. And what happens to Ignatio, who has always hated and mistrusted women?

One of Haggard's ingenious touches: when Don Pedro and his villains go into the bedchamber to kill Ignatio and Strickland, the latter have been warned and they are hiding under the floorboards. The killers light candles and look for them under the beds--and they also look at the pictures on the walls, as if expecting to find them there.

Laura says

After reading *King Solomon's Mines* and *The People of the Mist*, and enjoying both of them so much, I thought I would like *Heart of the World* a lot more, specially because the first two books are settled in Africa and, consequently, based on Haggard's inspiration taken from the african tribes, while this one in particular is inspired by the Maya Civilization - which usually wins in my preferences when we are talking about old/lost/imaginary race tales. However, something about this book didn't corresponded to my expectations. I thought Ignacio a little bit boring; *señor* Strickland, even though he showed some traces of the typical british gentleman, was a little bit flat; Maya, IMO, was selfish - actually, for someone who lived her entire life in the mythical Golden City, she seemed to be very common, weak and theatrical to me.

Overall, I wasn't very happy about this book. I guess it didn't help to be studying to the university exams while reading from times to times, but the first two books got me really interested and this one... Well, I just wanted to be done with it. Also, even though it's somewhat refreshing - after the "they lived happily ever after" ending from the previous two books I mentioned - that the characters have to face various tragedies, it was annoying to 1) be aware of that since the beginning and 2) the way it happened didn't make me feel pity for them (in fact, I didn't really feel any sympathy by any of the characters).

Travis says

I didn't enjoy *Heart of the World* as much as other books by Haggard that I've read. It was a bit heavy on plotting and treachery and a bit light on action. I also don't like it when the hero(s) in a book resign themselves to fate rather than going down swinging. I did like the ending and thought it tied everything together well.

George says

A beautiful Indian princess and a white Englishman fall in love but suffer deeply because of their feelings and her Indian background. Yet another ill-fated lovers novel by Haggard! Set in Mexico in the late 18th century, the love story is set along side the tale of down trodden Indians at the expense of the Spanish and Mexicans. These Indians are Aztec descendants who split into 2 groups after the conquest by Cortez. One group flees northward and the other southward and remain separate until the events of this novel bring them together.

ArZo says

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James Benson says

A pretty standard Haggard work, lots of adventure, narrow escapes and larger than life characters painted in broad strokes. If you like his other adventure stories you'll like this one, but it's not overly memorable in all honesty.

Lisa (Harmonybites) says

I became of fan of Haggard in my teens when I read the *Wisdom's Daughter*, the first of his Ayesha books, and went back for more. *Heart of the World* is one of almost a dozen books by the author I had on my bookshelves, and this is the one I found least memorable. It's said if you can't get into a book by a hundred pages, you probably should give up. I'm beyond that point right now, and I'm just not feeling pulled forward by this. There are elements of Haggard even at his best that dates him. His narratives are rather melodramatic and overwritten, his depiction of not just races other than white, but anyone not English is, well, not exactly politically correct. Although at least in these first one hundred pages, it's notable that it's an indio, a descendent of Aztec emperors, who is our narrator, and other than his evident misogyny, very sympathetic, brave and intelligent. The depiction of women is more wince-worthy. However, I'm not sure why I'm not more engaged. A lost city, fabulous treasure, secret societies--what's not to love? But I just don't think the characters here are as compelling as Ayesha of *She* or Eric in *Eric Brighteyes*.

