

The Descent

By Jeff Long

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Hell exists.

In Tibet, while guiding trekkers to a holy mountain, Ike Crockett discovers a bottomless cave. When his lover disappears, Ike pursues her into the depths of the earth....In a leper colony bordering the Kalahari Desert, a nun and linguist named Ali von Schade unearths evidence of a proto-human species and a deity called Older-than-Old....In Bosnia, Major Elias Branch crash-lands his gunship near a mass grave and is swarmed by pale cannibals terrified of light....

So begins mankind's realization that the underworld is a vast geological labyrinth riddling the continents and seabeds, one inhabited by brutish creatures who resemble the devils and gargoyles of legend. With all of Hell's precious resources and territories to be won, a global race ensues. Nations, armies, religions, and industries rush to colonize and exploit the subterranean frontier.

A scientific expedition is launched westward to explore beneath the Pacific Ocean floor, both to catalog the riches there and to learn how life could develop in the sunless abyss. Is there a natural explanation, as the scientists hope? Or is there a true supernatural basis? Are the "demons" part of our evolutionary family tree? Is their enigmatic leader merely a freak genius, or could he be the legendary Satan?

Fathom by fathom, Ike guides the expedition--and Ali--deeper into the deadly stone wilderness. In the dark underground, as humanity falls away from them, the scientists and mercenaries find themselves prey not only to the savage creatures, but to their own treachery, mutiny, and greed. Meanwhile, on the surface, a band of aged scholars scours archaeological digs, museums, artifacts, and rare texts for clues to Satan's existence. Is he lurking in wait for the expedition, or is he roaming the earth? Or is he dead? One thing is certain: Miles inside the earth, evil is very much alive.

In the tradition of Jules Verne and H. G. Wells, **The Descent** is an epic adventure through fantastic landscapes, among creatures for whom man is both god and meat. It is a horrifying mystery penetrating the realms of faith and reason, a raw and original questioning of the divine and the demonic. And finally, The Descent is the story of a man and woman who enter the maze of the underworld and find

at its center the human heart.

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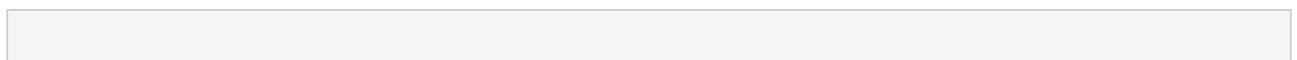
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- Sales Rank: #146775 in eBooks
- Published on: 1999-11-12
- Released on: 1999-11-12
- Format: Kindle eBook



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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

In a high Himalayan cave, among the death pits of Bosnia, in a newly excavated Java temple, Long's characters find out to their terror that humanity is not alone--that, as we have always really known, horned and vicious humanoids lurk in vast caverns beneath our feet. This audacious remaking of the old hollow-earth plot takes us, in no short order, to the new world regime that follows the genocidal harrowing of Hell by heavily armed, high-tech American forces. An ambitious tycoon sends an expedition of scientists, including a beautiful nun linguist and a hideously tattooed commando former prisoner of Hell, ever deeper into the unknown, among surviving, savage, horned tribes and the vast citadels of the civilizations that fell beneath the earth before ours arose. A conspiracy of scholars pursues the identity of the being known as Satan, coming up with unpalatable truths about the origins of human culture and the identity of the Turin Shroud, and are picked off one by bloody one. Long rehabilitates, madly, the novel of adventures among lost peoples--occasional clumsiness and promises of paranoid revelations on which he cannot entirely deliver fail to diminish the real achievement here; this feels like a story we have always known and dreaded. --Roz Kaveney, *Amazon.co.uk*

From Publishers Weekly

The premise of this millennial thriller is as audacious as it is problematic: "if there can be a historical Christ," one character hypothesizes, "why not a historic Satan?" Demystification of the ultimate Bad Guy is no easy feat, but Long (*Angels of Light*) brings it off, if just barely, in a dizzying synthesis of supernatural horror, lost-race fantasy and military SF. From the experiences of a varied cast of characters--including Sister Ali, a Catholic nun serving in South Africa, and Elias Branch, a major with NATO forces in Bosnia--a 21st-century think tank calling itself the Beowulf Circle distills a startling theory: The biblical Satan and his devils in Hell are mythic renderings of *Homo hadalis*, grotesquely malformed offshoots of *Homo sapiens* who for centuries have surfaced from underground hideouts to prey on human beings. With the help of Ike Crockett, an escapee from 10 years of "hadal" captivity, Beowulf infiltrates the Helios Corporation's mission to explore caverns honeycombing Earth's interior. Once beneath the Mariana Trench, Beowulf discovers that Helios intends to forcefully annex the world inside the earth's crust to further its business ambitions. Meanwhile, topside, Beowulf's theologians and metaphysicians surmise that the elusive "Satan" has evolved a human form to pass secretly among mankind. Like the subterranean trail blazed by its adventurers, the narrative twists, turns, dead-ends and backtracks. Inventive scenes of underground wonders alternate with talky stretches of scientific discourse and mawkish moments of romance between Ike and Ali. Though its devils prove disappointingly to be made in the image of humans, Long's novel brims with energy, ideas and excitement. 150,000 first printing; major ad/promo; film rights sold to Warner Bros. (July)
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From Library Journal

What if hell really existed? The premise of *The Descent* is just that. We first meet the protagonist of the story, Ike Crockett, as he guides a group of tourists on a Tibetan walkabout. Trapped on a mountain during a blizzard, Ike leads the group into a cave that just happens to be a gateway to hell. More hellish evidence soon emerges at sites as far-flung as Bosnia and the Kalahari Desert. Long, author of *The Ascent* (LJ 6/1/92), set on Mt. Everest, here chooses a subject that invites comparison to Dante. But his style is more reminiscent of early Stephen King, when characters still mattered. While some sex appears in the story, violence is a greater concern, though it does further the plot. The story is complex, with some surprising twists near the end. All in all, this is one of those compelling books that is difficult to finish but even more difficult to put down. Recommended for larger suspense/horror collections.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Kimberly Thibault:

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Elbert Gibson:

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Alma Brady:

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Danielle Hawkins:

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