



A Feast Unknown

Philip José Farmer

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The diaries of Lord Grandrith, the legendary Apeman, Lord of the Jungle and bastard son of Jack the Ripper. Blessed with unnatural long life, his power brings with it a gruesome side effect - one shared by his nemesis, the formidable Doc Caliban, Man of Bronze and Champion of Justice.

But these two titans have more in common than they could ever have imagined. Who are the dark manipulators of their destiny?

A brand-new edition of the controversial novel.

A Feast Unknown Details

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Author : Philip José Farmer

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Fantasy

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From Reader Review *A Feast Unknown* for online ebook

Jamie says

Farmer was one of the first sci-fi authors I was exposed to when I first stepped outside of fantasy. By the point that I opened up *A Feast Unknown* I had already read his tales of Riverworld, Dayworld, the World of Tiers, and more. I had already read the *Mother Was a Lovely Beast* anthology about feral children and his fictional biography with the horrible name *Tarzan Alive!*—so I was well aware of Farmer's obsession with Mr. Of the Apes.

Pulp and related fiction was an early love for me, something I got into about the age of thirteen. I had already read stories by Robert E. Howard, H.P. Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith (inspired by one of my favorite D&D modules of the time), and a Mr. Edgar Rice Burroughs. I learned how the Buster Crab and later versions of Tarzan were just so changed from the hero of the books -- who neither stupid nor illiterate. (The guy taught HIMSELF to read!) Even with some of the silly soap opera elements -- I mean, how many times can one hero suffer amnesia? -- I really enjoyed the Tarzan stories.

I had less exposure to Doc Savage, the Man of Bronze, but I was passingly familiar. I knew the basics of his backstory, knew that he lived in the Empire State Building, and would sometimes "cure" criminals by lobotomizing them. No, I'm not kidding.

The reason I mention both of these iconic pulp-era characters is that *A Feast Unknown* tells the tale of thinly disguised variations of Tarzan and Doc Savage. The pulps were written at a time when talk of sex was taboo, so while both Lord Greystoke and Clark Savage, Jr. were both powerful, handsome, and sometimes violent men, sex seems to the farthest thing from their minds. (Tarzan was a perfect gentleman to Jane when they were first alone and later did not cheat on her with the hot priestess of Opar even when he suffered from amnesia!) Farmer's basic premise seems to be simply putting sex back into the equation with these two, but then goes a bit further.

In modern times, such an exercise would probably be limited to a twisted fanfic, but this was nearly 40 years ago. Yet Farmer manages to redeem the book by not only giving a more "whole" psychological picture of Tarzan--er, "Lord Grandrith" but also explores the connection between sex and violence.

When I say connection, it becomes literal. Something snaps in the minds of the two "heroes," and they become incredibly aroused by acts of violence and even climax when they take a life. This is graphic, disturbing stuff, so I don't recommend it for people who don't care to read about gory, violent death along with the details of a man's ejaculation.

Not a great book. Considering some of the grand-scale crazy ideas Farmer has explored, this one almost seems a bit juvenile. But it's an interesting book. Farmer charges into areas most authors would be scared to even approach. His action is exciting, if a bit sick, and the psychological exploration of iconic characters is a nifty notion that I shall file away for a later day in my own writing.

Read at your own risk. At the end of the day, I'm glad I read it -- though at seventeen may have been a bit too young for the material.

Joseph says

Okay, I've done serious reviews, now it's time for something bad, something dirty, filthy even. If you do not know who Philip Jose Farmer is, well he's a gifted scifi writer who was cranking out great stuff when I was in my scifi phase in the 70s and 80s. The copy I have is a paperback done by Playboy Press paperbacks (ha, remember them?) in 1969. It was done by them because it is, well, to put it mildly, salacious. This book was an underground cult classic, something you didn't really tell most other people that you were reading. Farmer uses his incredible imagination to pit Tarzan and Doc Savage against each other in a death struggle. But, the names he uses are Lord Grandrith and Doc Caliban. Grandrith tells the story. Sex, yeah, plenty and it's graphic and dirty, biting even (sorry, could not resist that hint). But, the book is hilarious, it's campy and cheesy and more fun than the Avengers can ever hope to be. But, it is filthy. Sometimes I'm a bit dirty and filthy too. I'm going to give you a sample. WARNING ... CAUTION ... ALERT ... DO NOT READ if you are faint of heart. Nurses, lawyers, doctors, politicians and history teachers, go for it. If you like GoT go for it.

LAST

WARNING (stop now if you get queasy easily)

...
...
...

" ... In the morning, I continued down the mountain. I was hungry and thirsty, and I wished I had cut Noli's heart out instead of wasting him for the sake of revenge. I knocked over a rock hyrax with a stone and ate that. Later, I found some grubs under a pile of dirt and I scooped up several piles of ants. In the afternoon, I caught a gray lizard which looked much like an American horned toad.

I also came across some fresh goat droppings. I passed these up. I was not hungry enough for them yet. I have survived at various times by eating the spoor of animals. Antelope and elephant turds are not too distasteful. Zebra excrement is almost relishable. Lion shit and that of other meat eaters is very unpalatable and only as a last resort would I eat them. But I have. If I had not done so, I would not now be alive. ..."

OMG ... can't get these Simon and Garfunkel lyrics out of my mind now. Were they inspired by Farmer's writing?

Zebras are reactionaries,
Antelopes are missionaries,
Pigeons plot in secrecy,
And hamsters turn on frequently.
What a gas! You gotta come and see
At the zoo.
At the zoo.
At the zoo.

Orion says

A Feast Unknown by Philip Jose Farmer may not be everybody's cup of tea. There is a lot of graphic descriptions of both violence and male sexual arousal. Yet if the reader is open-minded enough to get past

these, this is a well crafted adventure novel by one of the masters of the field.

The novel pits Farmer's versions of Tarzan and Doc Savage against each other in a fight to the death over the secret of eternal life. Farmer calls these foes Lord Grandrith and Doc Caliban, and tells the story from the point of view of Grandrith. Also, it turns out there is another secret these two share that they must discover before they kill each other.

There are enough explosions, deaths, and dismemberments for a summer Hollywood adventure blockbuster, but Farmer has added a strange twist to the story that makes this risky material for the screen. As the novel opens, Grandrith finds that he becomes sexually aroused to the point of climax whenever he kills someone. This is very distracting for him, as he must outwit his most deadly enemies while his body is being drawn towards other feelings.

This is difficult material to handle and Farmer does it superbly, and with a touch of humor, while keeping the excitement level high. Leave it to the creator of *Riverworld* to invent such a fantastic story line and carry it off superbly from beginning to end.

Is this the original slash fiction (fan writings involving fancied romantic liaisons between fictional male companions)? Most articles about slash trace it back to 1970s fan fiction depicting romantic adventures between *Star Trek's* Kirk and Spock. *A Feast Unknown* was first published in 1969, a date that precedes the earliest dating for slash so far. However, regardless of whether this novel has anything to do with slash fiction, it is a great work on its own terms that was certainly groundbreaking at the time and can still be controversial to this day.

Matt Mitrovich says

If you are not interested in reading a book where Tarzan get raped by an overweight Albanian, stop reading this review now.

Still with me? Good, lets go.

Our review today covers *A Feast Unknown* by Philip José Farmer. If you have not read anything by Farmer, I highly recommend you do so immediately. My fellow Bradley alum (go Braves) is one of history's most underrated science fiction authors. His works push the boundaries of what SF is allowed to cover and *A Feast Unknown* is no exception. The novel is part of his Wold Newton Universe of novels. This series of fictional mash-ups, where many pulp heroes can trace their ancestry to those present at a meteor strike in Wold Newton, Yorkshire, England on December 13, 1795. This universe predates other fictional mash-up series like *Anno Dracula* and *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*.

We learn about our world's secret history through the eyes of Lord Grandrith, the legendary "Apeman" and bastard son of Jack the Ripper, who was the basis for the fictional character Tarzan. His world is upset when his home in Kenya is attacked by both the Kenya government and a group of Albanian mercenaries. Grandrith, however, can't hide and lick his wounds. He has a meeting with "the Nine", the secret order of immortals who control the world through their monopoly of a life sustaining elixir and they wait for no one.

As he travels west into Uganda to the lair of the Nine, Grandrith finds himself hunted by Doc Caliban, the historical Doc Savage. Savage blames Grandrith for the death of his lover (and cousin) and will not stop until

the Lord of the Jungle is dead. As the two pulp titans battle against each other, questions abound. Why can't Grandrith or Savage get an erection unless they commit an act of violence? What role does the Nine have in the conflict? What is the mysterious connection that links the lives of Grandrith and Caliban?

Titan Books has sent me many great novels and with *A Feast Unknown* they didn't disappoint. Marketing material for this reprint (originally published in 1969 by erotic publisher Essex House) has described the novel as being "controversial". Even for someone of my desensitized generation, this novel is not for the faint of heart. Murder, rape, nudity, ejaculation, bestiality, incest and cannibalism are just a few of taboos referenced or experienced in this story. In some sense I feel this novel did for pulp action the same thing *The Dark Knight Returns* did for comics or *A Game of Thrones* did for high fantasy. It took the genre out of the hands of children and transformed it into something adults could enjoy.

Grandrith himself is a complicated fellow. At one point he seriously considers genocide in order to save the environment (including the last remaining "Folk", the hominid species that raised him as a child) and is yet devoid of any racial prejudice, since he does not consider himself human in the first place. If Grandrith morality seems confusing, at least it is his own, and that is the point of the novel. Whether they be the Nine or the Ethicals of Riverworld, Farmer does not like beings demanding obedience simply because they claim to be older and wiser. Rebellion against the gods is a common theme in Farmer's works and while not many will subscribe to his philosophy, I think Farmer believes the best type of morality is the one you create for yourself.

Is this book for everyone? Probably not. I still recommend it, however, because every once in a while it is healthy to step outside your comfort zone and test your deeply held ideas and beliefs. If you can do it in an entertaining and engaging manner, than more power to you. Anywho, I am never going to be able to look at Tarzan the same way again after reading *A Feast Unknown*.

Ian Casey says

A Feast Unknown is without doubt the most concentrated dose of 'WTF' I've ever encountered in literary form. It's not only that it's extremely violent, nor that it's frequently and confrontingly sexual. It's more the bizarre and interlinked ways it juxtaposes the sexuality and violence, even to the extent of bestiality, cannibalism and homosexual rape.

For perhaps the first third of the book (give or take), the 'WTF' factor was to the forefront of my experience to the exclusion of all else. I couldn't pin down how seriously to take the tone of a book which was so preposterous and yet somehow sincere. I still don't think I have, although I do think Theodore Sturgeon put it well in his postscript by noting 'If Farmer says nothing else in a work like this – and he says many other things – he makes it clear that unlimited violence coupled with unlimited sex is an unlimited absurdity.'

That said, the folks at book club did help me push past that initial confusion and start to consider possible interpretations of the narrative and themes. Indeed, I don't think I was the only one pleasantly surprised to find how much I enjoyed it by the end or how far beyond shock value its merits extend.

Sturgeon and other sources will tell you this book is a pastiche of pulp fiction and an exploration of the literary traditions of sagas and the hero characters who drive them. I won't disagree with that, although I will say there's clearly also lot of influence from other media such as the Bond films which trod much of the same thematic turf.

I shan't go too much into the details of the story itself as I'd rather not spoil it. What I will say is that for all my early misgivings I now find myself keen to follow through on the trilogy and find out just how deep this utterly absurd rabbit hole goes. If you're not easily disturbed and could go for a thought-provoking novel on the role of sexuality in a violent heroic narrative, this is the book for you.

Mikhail Yukhnovskiy says

A very-very weird book. I give it 5 stars for that.

Alan says

This book made me feel icky, but i loved it.

Steve says

Every now and then I'm confronted by a novel that falls into a category I like to call the "What the fuck?!?" books, and I recently read one that's still kicking me in the skull for a good number of reasons.

Philip Jose farmer is an author who's had quite an impact on science-fiction thanks to being perhaps the first writer to bring grownup sexuality into the genre with his award-winning novella *THE LOVERS* (1952), and I've read a number of his other works, enjoying each. But the one area of Farmer's focus that most fascinated me was his interest in and love of the old pulp heroes, particularly Tarzan of the Apes and Doc Savage, the Man of Bronze. I've read some of the Doc Savage stories and most of the Tarzan stuff, so when farmer played with the characters, writing biographies of each and treating them as actual historical figures who lived and breathed, I couldn't help but be amused at his exhaustive examinations of his heroes' lives, being the totally straight-faced in-jokes that they were. (I heartily recommend both *TARZAN ALIVE: A DEFINITIVE BIOGRAPHY OF LORD GREYSTOKE* (1972) and *DOC SAVAGE: HIS APOCALYPTIC LIFE* (1973) to any curiosity seekers, but they're really best enjoyed by those who already have a solid grounding in the many adventures of both Tarzan and Doc.) So when I heard of Farmer's *A FEAST UNKNOWN*, an infamous tweaking of the two heroes that is as over-the-top with the sex and violence as possible, I was intrigued to read it and sought a copy for years (particularly the edition illustrated by my man Richard Corben, but good luck with that), finally finding it in a paperback edition from 1995. Now that I've read it, all I can say is an unequivocal, "What the fuck?!?"

A FEAST UNKNOWN is the alleged ninth volume in the memoirs of Lord Grandrith — a character so blatantly the Edgar Rice Burroughs jungle lord that his name may as well be "Zantar" — and chronicles the increasingly bizarre events following an attack upon his African estate by a disgruntled group of local tribesmen who just can't stand the White Man in general and Grandrith in particular. Awakening naked after his house is blown to smithereens by artillery, Grandrith begins kicking ass like nobody's business and discovers to his horror and confusion that when he kills an enemy he suffers (?) from raging erections and invariably ejaculates all over himself or his enemies. This aberration is described in extremely explicit detail and if you've ever read even one Tarzan novel — which Grandrith describes as "lying" works by his "biographer" Burroughs — you know how much killing the guy does, meaning that there are many combat-

derived boners and cumshots to be had throughout the book. In fact, during the first fifth of the story the recounting and examinations of the jungle lord's blown loads becomes exhausting, leaving the reader as spent as the readee. The worst part of it is that there's nothing erotic in any of it, especially during an early sequence where Grandrith seeks to revenge himself in like fashion upon a savage who cut open his favorite dog's vagina so he could more easily violate the poor beast.

Yes, you read that right; a character who's pretty much Tarzan cuts open a sadistic animal-abuser with the intent of fucking the guy's open viscera, only to find himself so over-stimulated that he doesn't quite make it into the gaping wound, instead crashing the yogurt truck on the guy's belly. That stirring moment occurs on page twenty of a three-hundred and twenty-page novel, so you can imagine how out of control the story becomes once it really gets going.

In short order, Tarzan, er, Grandrith finds himself hunted like a big game animal by a psychotically-enraged Doc Caliban, the tale's alternative Doc Savage, but the question is why? The answers are pretty fucking insane across the board, and loaded with cocks-a-spurtin' homoerotic imagery though it is — the "crossed swords" encounter between Grandrith and Caliban made me laugh out loud — I was very amused by the whole magillah. Farmer clearly knows what makes both of his stand-ins' templates tick and to see them engaging in such ludicrous alpha male shenanigans is perversely hilarious, which was apparently what Farmer was going for. Nonetheless, it's really weird to read Grandrith's descriptions of his assorted orgasms, sexual adventures — his unexpurgated account of his encounter with the "real life" inspiration for Burroughs' La of Opar is particularly dire — and how sweet his wife's vagina tastes, to say nothing of his fond remembrance of Kuta, "a beautiful female leopard" who was Grandrith's, uhm..."companion" when he was on the road exploring without his wife. (It is noted that Kuta dumped Grandrith presumably because he could not give her cubs.) And lest I forget, there's even a bit in which the jungle lord kills a fly that had landed upon the head of his cock by spewing DNA all over it, or as it's stated in the book:

I fell asleep for a while and awoke with a piss hard-on. A fly landed on my sensitive glans and precipitated another ejaculation. It was caught in the first spurt and died. I have never forgotten that. It may be the only one in the history of flies to have died in this manner.

Yeah, I'd wager you're probably right about that, dude. I can't even begin to imagine what Edgar Rice Burroughs, or even Johnny Weissmuller for that matter, would have to say about that one. And for those who may have imagined such a thing transpiring — I assure you I was not among them — we even see the captive, handcuffed jungle lord getting buggered by a fat slob of an Albanian named Noli:

Noli Played skillfully with me. His hand was big, but it was almost as gentle and knowledgeable as my wife's. He must have had much practice.

I failed to respond in the slightest.

If my aberration had been absent, I might have had an erection and an orgasm eventually. Friction alone can do much, and I was not frightened of him. I was angry, but I doubt that this would have inhibited an erection.

After a while, he quit with an exclamation of disgust. He began to move his hard penis against my anus. He breathed harder, and then his hands clamped my buttocks and he spread them open. The huge glans was, however, denied entrance. I have a very powerful sphincter, which I closed as far as I could. He shoved for a long time. Then he said, "Let me in, or I knock you out."

I didn't want another headache and possible brain damage, so I said, "Very well."

He spit on the end of his penis, I supposed, and, slowly but insistently, pushed the head in. The shaft slid through immediately thereafter.

I hurt, and I also felt as if I had to get rid of a huge turd. He began to slide the penis back and forth, and the pain increased. He grunted with each lunge, and I could feel the thick stiff hairs against the bare skin of my buttocks. His hands were around me again, one on my penis and one cupping my testicles. He began squeezing on these. I clamped my teeth and endured the pain. Stoic as a wild beast, as my biographer would have said, if he had known about this, although he would have shut such a scene out of his mind, because it would have destroyed his image of me. I could be tortured in his romances, but I could not, of course, be buggered.

Yeah, I actually read a scene where "Tarzan" gets boned up the ass by a sweaty Albanian, and now so have you. I was howling while reading this on the subway, tears rolling down my cheeks as I pictured Johnny Weissmuller enacting this sequence, perhaps with Charles Laughton in the role of Noli (which wouldn't have been much of a stretch for Laughton).

There's even a sequence involving a ritual by an ancient secret society that will make both the boys and the girls in the audience want to run screaming into the hills, and as I read it on the subway I felt my eyes widen and my mouth hang open in sheer disbelief and revulsion (which is not to say that I wasn't entertained)... Anyway, you get the idea, and since I can't really discuss further details of the story without ruining its thoroughly intentional and at times side-splitting outrageousness, I'll just recommend A FEAST UNKNOWN to any with a twisted sense of humor and those brave enough to have their childhood perceptions of two of the pulps' three greatest protagonists irrevocably shattered. The missing member of the triumvirate would be the Shadow, and though he may have studied in the mystic orient and seen and done a lot of weird shit, I doubt he'd be all that down with the buggery.

David Monroe says

Probably the first professionally published slash-fic. Farmer creates an analog for Tarzan and an analog for Doc Savage. They meet in a "climatic" showdown in Africa -- a fight to the death over the secret of immortality. Lots of bulging, throbbing, cannibalism, spraying of bodily fluids and mindless violence. Even as a teen, I didn't find this erotic, or titillating -- just very very odd.

Patrick says

Good Read, unusual book. True Farmer book.

Charles says

The book is pretty well written and it's certainly interesting in a weird way, but I basically found the sexual aspects amazingly silly. Doc Savage and Tarzan dueling with crossed swords? Come on!

Karl says

A Farmer book that I read back in the late 1970 in the Essex House Edition, but I could not pass up this edition with the multiple Corbin interior illustrations. This is the trade paperback edition and has a afterword by Theodore Sturgeon.

bleak says

The book contains the phrase "cocks crossed like swords", and that probably either makes the book sound great or terrible to you. My rating speaks for itself.

Manny says

To the best of my recollection, the only book I have read in which someone eats a human testicle. Maybe I just have a bad memory.

Alex Sarll says

With his Wold Newton universe, Philip José Farmer invented the modern shared-universe template since appropriated by Alan Moore, Kim Newman and scores of lesser lights. The idea of the series intrigued me even before I happened across the real Wold Newton meteorite, and when I then saw this volume on my first visit to Crystal Palace's charming library, I decided the time had come to have a look. Turns out that, contrary to the branding on Titan's edition, this is in fact some sort of alternate timeline or apocrypha rather than Wold Newton proper, but it's still very much in the same ballpark - the uncensored account of a feud between Tarzan and Doc Savage* who (**spoilers** for a 45-year-old book follow) turn out to be half-brothers - their dad, obviously, was Jack the Ripper. Now, I'm all for stories which entwine and complicate the characters created by earlier generations, using hindsight and greater freedom to find new dimensions and depths to them. But there's a thin line to walk if you don't want the result to be merely puerile or curmudgeonly, as per that *Planetary* pastiche whereby a harmless old superhero learns he's really descended from Hitler's sex midgets ("I didn't even know Hitler *had* sex midgets!"). The great Alan Moore himself couldn't avoid stumbled here at times; much of *LoEG: Century* felt like an extended grump about how that modern thing, that you modern kids like? That's actually shit, that is. So there. And for me, somewhere in amongst the coprophagia, bestiality, genital mutilations and tendency to jizz everywhere whenever he kills anyone (which is often), this Tarzan loses too much contact with the original, becomes more Tijuana bible than an investigation into humanity's uneasy position between thanatos and eros.

Part of the problem is that Farmer, for all that he sometimes had great ideas, really wasn't a great writer (my favourite line of his comes in one of the *Riverworld* books - "*It's 1.8 kilometres tall, he exploded.*") That venerable device, the author posing as editor to introduce the text supposedly told by another, is employed to explain the use of American English, which Farmer claims as his own amendments to Tarzan's text. 'Hood'

for 'bonnet' is one thing, but does this really explain the references to "Cumberland County", or driving down A594 rather than *the* A594? And does any variant of English explain the really confusing scene with two "bicyclists" who turn out to be bikers?*** And then you get the material for which the word of the moment is 'problematic'. There's an interesting theme early on where Tarzan, more in touch with Africa than most Africans, comes into conflict with the late sixties wave of post-colonial sentiment wherein urbanised black Africans assumes that, because he's white, he must be racist. Potentially brilliant - but even as he assures us he doesn't judge people in such ways, he's talking about "white men", but "blacks". OK, maybe he's an unreliable narrator - and he was raised without human niceties, so when we get the jaw-dropping reference to "relatively innocuous rape" (on account of the assailant having the small member typical of the non-human primates) then that insensitivity is at least in character. But the rapidity with which the victim gets over the whole business feels uncomfortably as if the story is agreeing with the narrator. And then, just while you're pondering this, the "piss hard-on" rears its bulbous head. This phenomenon - whereby a man who because of some plot is otherwise incapable of arousal can get it up if he needs a wee - is something I've encountered in Farmer's work before, and literally nowhere else. One is left with the suspicion that, all serious authorial intent and narrative strategies aside, Farmer did have some rather odd preoccupations.

The irony is, it's when the book hews closest to its roots - daring chases, tense stand-offs, gun battles and punch-ups without a side-order of spaff, ancient cults and lost cities - that it's the most enjoyable reading. In attempting to base something more adult on the pulps, Farmer mainly succeeds in reminding me what fun their simple core concepts were.

*Both thinly-veiled under pseudonyms here, even though Farmer elsewhere wrote of them under their proper names; I don't entirely get why. Still, let's avoid confusion and call a spade a spade.

**A scene taking place near Penrith. In the late sixties. I can't be the only reader wishing that a couple of other fictional immortals had happened past around here.
