

Into the Darkness

Richard Hampton

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The historical novel Into the Darkness follows a proud leader through the timeless glories of his warrior lifestyle.

In Richard Hampton's historical novel *Into the Darkness*, a governor-general of the Egyptian army works to defeat a serious threat to the pharaoh.

Hormud enlists the Nubians in a battle against Shockea, a ruthless warrior backed by the pharaoh's worst enemy, the priesthood. Hormud takes personnel and supplies to a fort up the Nile, where the attack will be staged. Traitors, assassins, and cannibals present challenges before they encounter Shockea himself.

When they're not training, planning the mission, or tending their wounds, Hormud and his men relax with plentiful food and drink, entertainment, and many women. Hormud's harem includes a wife acquired from the chief of a village he saved and a woman warrior who becomes the mother of one of his numerous children. Hormud and his men also amass gold and other spoils of war.

In the end, the centered mission is but one in a series; Hormud tests how long he can survive as Egypt's highest-ranking fighter. But because the book's fight scenes are unpredictable and few and far between, the novel is uneven. Its rest periods outnumber its action sequences. Hormud's anticipatory strategies are clever and his weapon usage and training techniques are informative, but his army's down times are repetitive and tedious. When Hormud finally confronts Shockea and his allies, the event is too similar to the book's other fight scenes to be impactful.

Though it focuses most on the army's daily routines (which it embellishes with sensory details), this casual story also includes passages that contextualize Hormud's struggles: they cover Egypt's past and Hormud's visions for the house he's building too. In conversation with his men, he is a congenial leader; he also wins over former enemies with his ready laugh and shows of strength. His harem provides him with endless love and support, while its members also support and love one another. Herein, the absence of conflicts strains credulity. Hormud's wives and soldiers, who provide comic relief and pump up Hormud's authority, are also not developed on their own merit. Further, the concise, declarative prose is flowed into long paragraphs that make for dense reading, and typographical errors and misspellings prove to be a further impediment.

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MARI CARLSON (December 31, 2022)

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