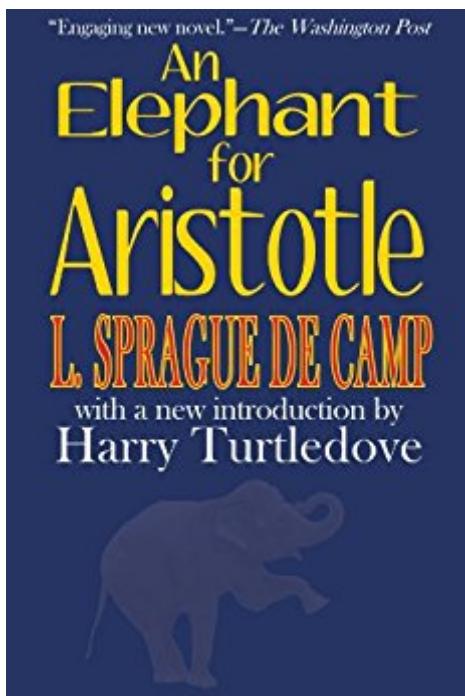


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# An Elephant For Aristotle



## Synopsis

What finer way for Alexander the Great to honor his old tutor Aristotle than to send him an actual Indian elephant. After capturing a magnificent specimen from an Indian ruler, Alexander tasks Leon of Atrax, a cavalry commander, to deliver the animal to Aristotle in Athens. Leon leads a motley crew of companions (and the elephant) from India to Greece, and in the process encounter all sorts of dangers and adventures while completing the long and arduous journey. "An amazing narrative vehicle for the display of ... a fairly complete composite of the life and times of which the author writes." —The Chicago Daily Tribune "By hybridizing a Middle-Eastern travelogue with an Alexandrine comedy of manners, the author has produced a specimen only slightly less rare than elephants in Westchester." —*Entertainment Weekly* "A historical novel with a sense of humor." —The New York Times "Engaging new novel." —The Washington Post

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Taking just 10 months to "Sheppard" an elephant from India to the Greek Isles had to have been a GREAT adventure, one not without its perils of marauding thieves, crossing deserts and mountain

passes. Alexander the Great had pressed a small group Greeks, Persians and Indians to deliver an elephant to his former teacher, Aristotle. An engaging tale... I liked it!

Excellent read. Much better than the current crop of "historical fiction" writers...

Interesting history of what might have happened if Alexander actually did give an elephant to Aristotle. And who knows, he might have.

A great read that broadened my knowledge of what life was like in Alexandrian times.

This is a weird one to try to review. L. Sprague de Camp is mostly known for fantasy novels, and I picked this one up simply assuming it was fantasy. It's not, it's historical fiction, and not the usual 19th century or medieval sort. This goes way back. I decided to read it anyway. I like historical fiction, though I don't usually meander through much before the 16th century. As such, keep in mind any review of mine contains almost no knowledge of the actual goings-on during Alexander's conquests. I was a little sad that the elephant really serves as little more than a reason for the rest of the story to take place. Alexander has just won a decisive battle against an Indian king and the elephant is part of the "loot". He decides to send it off to Aristotle, and this story is strictly about the difficulties entailed in accomplishing such an endeavor. If you're looking for an edge-of-your-seat page turner, go elsewhere. This is more like a travelogue with amusing anecdotes thrown in to keep things interesting. For the most part it's a light read, humorous in many spots, and tad sappy at the end. Indeed, the ending reminded me of a typical Shakespearean comedy - every girl gets a boy and every boy gets a girl and all of the many difficulties and misunderstandings that came along the way are resolved. Oh, and by the way, there was this elephant. The book is less than 400 pages long, but it took me a couple of months to read. Don't take this to mean I didn't enjoy it, I most certainly did, however as I stated above, it's not a gripping adventure. It was easy to read it for a half hour a day during lunch break and not feel frustrated that I had to put it away. I never once considered dropping the book, the writing itself is excellent, and the main character is an amusing chap. I just didn't have a sense of urgency to see what happened next. So, if you're looking for a casual read, and ever had any curiosity of what the world was really like "back in the day", then I highly recommend "An Elephant for Aristotle". If you're someone who has to have guns going off, cars soaring off of cliffs and damsels in constant peril, you'll wish to find another book to pick up.

Not sure why this is in fantasy, except that de Camp was best known for his fantasy writing. Don't look for dragons or wizards here. What it is, is historical fiction circa 325 BC. Alexander the Great conquers as far as modern India, where he captures a king's royal elephant. As a joke, he decides to give it to his old tutor, Aristotle. That means someone has to take the elephant, walking all the way from India back to Greek territory (what's now Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Turkey), and then on a boat from Turkey to Athens. Our hero Leon gets stuck with the job, the elephant, the mahout, and a ragtag bunch of soldiers. He has to lead the men, find food for all of them (including the elephant, which eats A LOT), suffer through snowy passes, blazing deserts, and hostile tribes. You get a lot of interesting detail of the lands and peoples, plus action, plenty of humor, and good old rousing fun. The characters are fleshed out a bit past their stock origins, and de Camp even shows us that all the "Greeks" were different sorts by giving them different accents in English, which also helps distinguish them. It's a very manly book, but I'm a woman and I liked it too. I suspect guys who were in the infantry would really like it; marching along eating mediocre food and trying to understand other people before they try to kill you hasn't changed much. Turtledove's introduction gives you enough background to go on even if you don't know anything about the history. Highly recommended.

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