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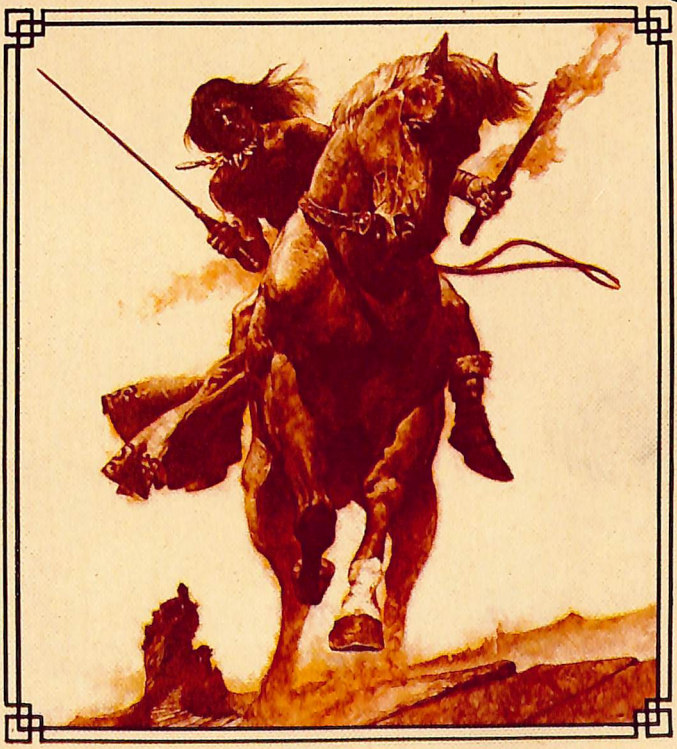
THE SPELL OF CONAN



EDITED BY

L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

A TRIBUTE TO

ROBERT E. HOWARD

AND THE WORLD OF HEROIC FANTASY

FOR EVERY READER
WHO HAS LOVED CONAN
AND THE HYBORIAN WORLD

The raw elements of Sword and Sorcery are as old as literature itself: the burly Cimmerian mercenary, wandering from gorgeous walled city to gorgeous walled city, constantly getting into nasty scrapes with cunning and villainous viziers, treacherous and greedy monarchs, alluring but dangerous enchantresses, and the usual assortment of dragons and demons, gods and ghosts.

Let yourself be guided by Lin Carter, Avram Davidson, L. Sprague de Camp, Fritz Leiber—and Robert E. Howard himself. Enter Hyboria!

THE SPELL OF CONAN

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L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

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51 Madison Avenue
New York, New York 10010

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An ACE Book

First Ace printing: July 1980

2 4 6 8 0 9 7 5 3 1
Manufactured in the United States of America

Acknowledgments

Allusions below to *Amra* refer to the so-called "Volume II" of this amateur periodical, published since 1959 by George H. Scithers. "Volume I" would mean its predecessor, the fan magazine of the same title previously published by the late George R. Heap.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

This book and its companion volume, *The Blade of Conan,* are collections of articles (with a few poems and stories) about heroic fantasy in general and Robert E. Howard's famous hero, Conan the Cimmerian, in particular. Most of these materials are reprinted from *Amra,* the amateur magazine published since 1959 by George H. Scithers; a few come from other sources. All are printed in the form in which they originally appeared save for a few minor editorial corrections, deletions and changes.

I must apologize for the fact that my own contributions so far outnumber those of any of my colleagues. The reason is not personal vainglory but the fact that during the last twenty years I have contributed the largest number of pieces to *Amra* of any of Scithers's writers. Writing for *Amra* (and occasionally for other fan magazines) is for me a busman's holiday and a secret vice.

Anyway, for those who enjoy heroic fantasy without knowing much of its background and for those who have heard of it without having tried it, these books will serve as useful and entertaining introductions to this fascinating genre of fiction and will enhance the enjoyment the readers derive from the stories.

L. Sprague de Camp

INTRODUCTION

Swordsmen and Sorcerers at Play

by Lin Carter

Surely most readers know by now that Sword & Sorcery is one of the most vigorous and enjoyable forms of literary entertainment currently viable—besides being a remarkably popular and lucrative newsstand phenomenon.

After all, publishers keep continuously in print the Hyborian Age exploits of Robert E. Howard's character Conan; and Ace has thus far published five volumes of Fritz Leiber's durable and delightful Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser stories; Belmont Books are now* running a series by Gardner F. Fox about a barbarian warrior named Kothar; Paperback Library has recently preserved in book form C. L. Moore's eerie and thrillsome saga of Jirel of Joiry, a sort of female Conan, if you can imagine such; not to mention my own novels about Thongor the Mighty, hero king of Lost Lemuria, of whose adventures six novels have thus far been printed.

These literary productions are, however, all that the general reader ever sees of the writers of Sword & Sorcery fiction: in a word, their formal and professional side.

What do they do on their days off?

Most of them write for *Amra*—hence this book!

The raw elements of Sword & Sorcery are as old as written literature itself. Your burly Cimmerian mercenary, wandering from gorgeous walled city to gorgeous walled city, constantly getting into nasty scrapes with cunning and villainous viziers, treacherous and greedy monarchs, alluring but dangerous enchantresses, and the usual assortment of dragons and demons, gods and ghosts—is he really very different from that wandering Ithacan adventurer whereof Homer sang, or the noble

*1971.

and muscular Geat who ripped off Grendel's right arm, or any one of a half-dozen heroic supermen of antique legend?

Not really.

Conan and Kull and Kothar, Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser, Elric and Dorian Hawkmoon, Gezun of Lorsk, Cugel the Clever, Thongor and Brak the Barbarian, Elak of Atlantis, Jirel of Joiry, and Bran Mak Morn—all of these stalwart and intrepid worthies are the more recent descendants of a particular school of exciting narrative born when Siegfried went up against Fafnir, Hercules battled the Lernæan Hydra, and Amadis of Gaul pitted his enchanted sword against the cunning and darksome sorceries of Archelaus the Enchanter.

But the man who drew into a certain balance the elements of the heroic adventure story, the tale of supernatural horrors, and the imaginary world fantasy, and thus fathered what we now call Sword & Sorcery was a gifted Texan named Robert Ervin Howard (1906–36). In creating King Kull and Solomon Kane, Conan and Bran Mak Morn, Howard invented a sort of rip-roaring, lusty, vigorous form of fantastic adventure that held spellbound the readers of *Weird Tales* back in the 1930's, and still entertains readers of similar taste today, more than a generation later.

Like Sherlock Holmes and Oz and Tarzan and Tolkien and Fu Manchu, Robert E. Howard's Conan became the center of a genuine cult. A loose and very informal host of Sword & Sorcery buffs got together into something called The Hyborian Legion; a fanzine called *Amra* was founded back in 1956 to publish their learned or spoofing articles, pastiches, limericks, and exegetics on Howard and the other writers who followed him in writing Sword & Sorcery.

Amra is a remarkably handsome and literate and enter-

taining periodical. It has been appearing now on a fairly regular basis for fifteen years. It has twice won the annual Hugo award as best fan publication. And the list of gifted professionals in the dual worlds of science fiction and Sword & Sorcery who have contributed to its pages is a rather astounding roster: Poul Anderson, Anthony Boucher, Leigh Brackett, Marion Zimmer Bradley, John Brunner, John W. Campbell, Lin Carter, Avram Davidson, L. Sprague de Camp, Ed Emsh, Frank Frazetta, Jack Gaughan, Harry Harrison, Frank Herbert, Robert E. Howard, Jeff Jones, Roy Krenkel, Fritz Leiber, P. Schuyler Miller, Michael Moorcock, Gray Morrow, E. Hoffman Price, Ted White, Bernie Wrightson, Roger Zelazny.

It is amusing to see what such people produce when they are at play, rather than at work. An average issue of *Amra,* for example, might have a wee translation from the Old Norse by Poul Anderson; a solemn sonnet to that neglected beast, the rhinoceros, by de Camp; book reviews by myself or Fritz Leiber; a half-a-dozen splendid illustrations by Roy Krenkel; maps of Jack Vance's Dying Earth or Leiber's Nehwon; and a clutch of letters arguing over derivations of Barsoom or the fine points of swordplay, if not sorcery, too.

If I seem unduly enthusiastic about *Amra,* I suggest you take a look at a sample issue or two and judge for yourself what all the foofaraw is about. Personally, I find it the most entertaining and engrossing fan publication I have seen since Ron Smith let *Inside* lapse or Dick Lupoff suspended *Xero*. I stumbled onto a copy some ten years ago and have been not only a devoted reader thenceafter, but a steady contributor of Simrana stories, Lovecraftian sonnetry, book reviews and articles, to say nothing of an occasional limerick and bit of narrative verse.

Nor have I found this sort of non-compensatory writing a waste of time! The first Simrana tale has since been bought for a hardcover anthology called *Warlocks and Warriors* and the Lovecraftian sonnetry of mine, which *Amra* serialized, will form the nucleus of an Arkham House book of my macabre verse to be issued in a year or so under the title of *Dreams From R'lyeh.*

But even if my Amraic appearances had not led to professional sales, I would still find it valuable and entertaining to write for and to read *Amra.* It is most intriguing to learn what other writers are like when they let their hair down and turn off an acerbic book review or bit of bawdy verse or bibliocritical article for the delectation of their peers and colleagues.

And *Amra* is just about that: a fanzine to which the pros contribute their time, effort, thought and humor.

I know of no comparable publication in the fan world which has won such enthusiastic support of the professionals, or which has published so much material of enduring value that collections (like this one) are edited from its back issues.

This book, like its admirable predecessor, *The Blade of Conan,* consists of random gleanings through the fifty-or-so back issues of *Amra.* Constant contributors de Camp and Scithers have gleaned well: I note herein some of my personal favorites from *Amra* of old, such as Avram Davidson's delicious spoof of heroic Norse sagas; and John Boardman's "The Thong of Thor," which is really a bawdy jest dressed up in verse; Poul Anderson's fine essay on the Society for Creative Anachronism; and Bob Briney's review/article on the Jack Vance classic.

Spoofery as well as serious critical studies, exegetics *and* hilarity—that's *Amra.* And if you are curious to see what the professionals turn out when they are writing for

the amusement or the critical appreciation of their colleagues, let me advise you here that the Amraic circulation is certainly not limited to the Big Name pro alone. Anyone can join the fun, and you are invited. Send $8.00 for the next ten issues to: Amra, Box 8243, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 19101.

Happy Magic!

ROBERT E. HOWARD AND HIS WRITINGS

SKALD IN THE POST OAKS

by L. Sprague de Camp

The land around Cross Plains, Texas, is flat with a gentle roll. In aboriginal days it was well-wooded country, covered by an open stand of a small oak, the post oak or jack oak. Cross Plains stands amid this flat, limitless vastness. And in Cross Plains dwelt Robert E. Howard (1906–36), the creator of Conan and, next to Tolkien, the most widely-read author of heroic fantasy.

Robert Ervin Howard was born in Peaster, Texas, near modern Weatherford. His father was Dr. Isaac Howard, a frontier physician. After several moves, about 1919 the family settled in Cross Plains, in almost the exact center of the state.

Today, Cross Plains harbors about 1,200 people—300 fewer than when Howard lived. While Brownwood, forty-odd miles to the southeast, has during this time grown from 14,000 to 20,000, people say that time has passed Cross Plains by. Save for some new service stations, the town has changed little in recent decades. But Cross Plains is a pleasant-looking little town, with neat modern bungalows surrounded by the lawns and plantings of the typical contemporary suburban American home.

As a boy, Robert Howard was puny and bookish, with a schizoid personality. A schizoid pays less than normal heed to the effects of his acts upon others. In the current

jargon, he fails to "relate" to them. Professional thinkers and writers, I suspect, are mostly somewhat schizoid, or they would not be thinkers and writers. When a schizoid personality is combined with a puny body and bookish tastes, the individual is a "misfit" and a natural butt of bullies. For such a wretch, boy life is a jungle, with the individual playing the role of a rabbit.

As he grew older, however, the harassed Howard embarked upon a rigorous program of weight-lifting, bag-punching, and other calisthenics. By the time he entered Cross Plains High School, he was a large, powerful youth. The bullying stopped, albeit Howard did not become a bully in his turn.

He remained a sport and exercise fanatic all his life. When fully grown, he was just under six feet tall and weighed around 200 pounds, nearly all of it muscle. He was an accomplished boxer and rider, owning a horse one year, and a boxing and football fan. Nobody bothered him then, but his boyhood left him with a permanent streak of cynical misanthropy.

Since the public schools in Cross Plains went only as far as the tenth grade, in 1922 Howard's parents sent him to Brownwood for a year at Brownwood High School. When he graduated from high school, he refused to go to college, saying he had had enough of scholastic discipline. Later he regretted this decision, writing: "A literary college education probably would have helped me immensely." Instead, his parents sent him to Brownwood for non-credit courses in typing and shorthand at the Howard Payne College Commercial School.

Then followed a year and a half at home, while Howard wrote with little success and worked at various jobs. In 1926, at his parents' insistence, he returned to Brownwood for courses in bookkeeping and allied sub-

jects, so that he should at least have a way of making a living. He received his diploma in the summer of 1927.

In 1921, at fifteen, Howard chose writing as his career and sent a story to *Adventure Magazine,* whence it promptly returned. In 1923, *Weird Tales* was launched. In the fall of 1924, at Brownwood, Howard sold his first commercial story: a cave-man tale, "Spear and Fang." *Weird Tales* had just come under the editorship of Farnsworth Wright, who paid Howard $16.00 for his piece.

Besides his studies, Howard held minor jobs like surveying and soda-jerking. He joined a coterie of eight or ten young people of literary tastes, living in or near Brownwood. He continued writing for *Weird Tales;* during the next two years he sold that magazine four more stories. All were undistinguished fictions of the standard *WT* type: "The Lost Race" a tale of conflict between Celt and Pict in ancient Britain; "The Hyena" and "Wolfshead" about African lycanthropy.

Such a time of groping and struggle is usual in a writer's career. Howard's distinction is that he did so well for a completely self-taught writer, dwelling in an uncongenial environment and isolated from professional contacts.

In 1928, Howard set down on paper a fictional character whom he had long borne in mind: Solomon Kane, an English Puritan of the late sixteenth century. The story was "Red Shadows," published in *Weird Tales* for August, 1928. Kane differs from most of Howard's heroes, who were brawny, brawling, belligerent adventurers. Kane is somber of dress, dour of manner, rigid of principles, and driven by a demonic urge to wander, to seek danger, and to right wrongs. In the Kane stories, some of which take place in Europe and some in Africa,

Kane undergoes gory adventures and overcomes supernatural menaces.

Howard was now making a meager living from his writings. *Weird Tales* remained his principal market, even though in 1929 he branched out, with stories in *Argosy All-Story Weekly* and *Fight Stories*. In the decade following "Red Shadows," he appeared in about two thirds of all issues of *Weird Tales,* even though many appearances were only of poems.

Howard produced a sizable volume of poetry, much of which has been published. Like his prose, his verse is vigorous, colorful, strongly rhythmic, and technically adroit, despite the fact that he said: "I know nothing at all about the mechanics of poetry—I couldn't tell you whether a verse was anapestic or trochaic to save my neck."[1]

From 1934 on, Howard often took off in his Chevrolet for a long drive to some historic site in the Southwest or to Mexico; but he always returned to Cross Plains. He continued his physical routine; lean at twenty, he became massive as he neared thirty. In maturity he was a big, heavy-set man with black hair, blue eyes under heavy black brows, a round, slightly jowly face, and a deep but soft voice.

He drank—mostly beer—but did not smoke. He was known to get drunk, but rarely, and he never got into fights. The drunken brawls and wenching at which his letters hint were, my informants agreed, mostly or wholly imaginary.

Howard was a man of emotional extremes and of violent likes and dislikes. His personality was introverted, moody, and unconventional. When he felt like it, he could hold forth brilliantly on almost any subject; but he might instead go into a fit of gloom and say nothing to a friend who had come a long way to see him. He was

hot-tempered, flaring up easily but cooling off just as quickly. Even his close friends found him an enigma. As one of them put it:

"He just didn't give a damn for a lot of things that other people do."

With such a voracious reader, it is hard to be sure that he was *not* influenced by any given predecessor. Jack London was one of his favorite writers, and he esteemed Sir Richard F. Burton's narratives of travel and exploration. In his stories, the influence of London and of Robert W. Chambers, Talbot Mundy, Harold Lamb, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Sax Rohmer, and H.P. Lovecraft is patent.

Three strong influences on Howard's fiction were, first, the romantic primitivism of London and Burroughs; second, a fascination with Celtic history and legend; and third, the racial beliefs current in the United States in the 1920's. Howard's primitivism is summed up by a remark made by a character in "Beyond the Black River": "Barbarism is the natural state of mankind. Civilization is unnatural. It is a whim of circumstance. And barbarism must always ultimately triumph." He argued at length in his correspondence with H.P. Lovecraft, upholding the superiority of barbarism over civilization.

Howard gave vent to his primitivism in the stories he wrote in 1929 about a gigantic barbarian hero named Kull. A native of stone-age Atlantis, Kull makes his way to the main or Thurian continent, becomes a soldier in Valusia, and usurps the throne of that kingdom. As King Kull, he encounters sorcerers, pre-human reptile men, and a talking cat. Howard sent several of these stories to *Weird Tales*. Wright accepted two—"The Shadow Kingdom" and "The Mirrors of Tuzun Thune"—and rejected the rest.

Of remotely Scotch-Irish descent, Howard made an affectation of Celticism. One St. Patrick's day, he appeared in a green bow tie two feet across. He exploited his Celtomania by stories laid in the British Isles in ancient and medieval times, dealing with the struggles of Pict and Briton, of Briton and Roman, and of Gael and Norseman.

Many of Howard's views would today be stigmatized by that all-purpose pejorative "racist." In presenting a racist view, Howard merely followed most popular writers of the time, to whom ethnic stereotypes were stock in trade. Writers and readers alike took it for granted that fictional Scots should be thrifty, Irishmen funny, Germans arrogant, Jews avaricious, Negroes childish, Latins lecherous, and Orientals sinister. Howard's racial attitudes were compounded by a conventional Southern white outlook, including a sentimental sympathy for the Confederacy.

Howard's primitivism, however, gave his ethnic attitudes an element of paradox. He might view Negroes as incurably barbaric; but to him that was not altogether bad, since he thought that barbarians had virtues lacking in civilized men. In criticizing French novelists, he said: "Dumas has a virility lacking in other French writers—I attribute it to his negroid strain . . ."[1] If a racist, Howard was a comparatively mild one; and his writings imply that as with Lovecraft, his ethnic prejudices abated as he grew older.

Politically—racial questions aside—Howard was a vigorously anti-authoritarian liberal. When Lovecraft praised Mussolini, Howard took vehement exception.

With the opening of wider markets, Howard was busier than ever during 1929–32. He wrote several weirds in the frame of Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos. He widened his production to include sport, adventure, oriental, and historical stories. He sustained personal

misadventures; later he wrote Clark Ashton Smith:

For a fellow who has always lived a quiet, peaceful, and really prosaic life, I've had my share of narrow shaves: horses running away with me and falling on me; one threw me and then jumped on me; one turned a complete somersault in mid-air and landed on her back which would have mashed me like a bed-bug if I hadn't been hurled over her head as she fell; went head-on through a bed-room window once; knife stuck into my leg behind the knee, once, a hair's breadth from that big artery that runs there; stepped right over a diamond-backed rattler in the dark, etc.[2]

There were also darker sides to Howard's character. As early as 1923 he began toying with the idea of suicide. This is not unusual with adolescents, but in Howard's case the idea grew stronger with time. He was heard to say: "My father is a man and can take care of himself, but I've got to stay on as long as my mother is alive."[3] Some of his poems express the wish to be quit

Of this world of human cattle,
All this dreary noise and prattle.

As one can see from Howard's really rather quiet and secluded life, the din and struggle of which he complained were all within him.

The mutual devotion between Howard and his mother is a classical case of the Oedipus complex. In his late twenties, a decade after most youths do, Howard at last began to go with girls. For years he had excused his misogyny by saying: "Aw, what woman could ever look at a big, ugly hulk like me?" But, when Howard began at last to display a normal male regard for women, his mother discouraged his new interest. One visitor re-

ported that, when a girl called Howard on the telephone, Mrs. Howard told the caller that he was not in, although he was and she knew it.

Howard's father, Isaac Howard, seems to have been an extremely bossy, self-assertive, overbearing man—an unattractive domestic tyrant, although E. Hoffmann Price (the only professional writer Howard ever met) liked the doctor when he visited Cross Plains. Doctor Howard and his son quarreled frequently and furiously, often because Howard took his father to task for neglecting his mother. Although they quickly made up these quarrels, there seems to have been little love lost between them.

Howard also began to show symptoms of paranoid delusions of persecution. He took to carrying a Colt automatic pistol against imaginary "enemies." The local people regarded him as a "harmless freak." They asked him when he was going to quit fooling around with stories and settle down to real work, even when he was working longer hours and making more money than most Cross Plainsians. But despite the hostile human environment, he stubbornly stuck to Cross Plains.

In 1932, Howard made up his most successful character: Conan the Cimmerian. He wrote:

It may sound fantastic to link the term "realism" with Conan; but as a matter of fact—his supernatural adventures aside—he is the most realistic character I have ever evolved. He is simply a combination of a number of men I have known, and I think that's why he seemed to step full-grown into my consciousness when I wrote the first yarn of the series. Some mechanism in my subconsciousness took the dominant characteristics of various prizefighters, gunmen, bootleggers, oil field bullies,

gamblers, and honest workmen I have come in contact with, and combining them all, produced the amalgamation I call Conan the Cimmerian.[3]

In conceiving Conan, Howard invented a whole world to go with him. He assumed that about 12,000 years ago, after the sinking of Atlantis and before recorded history, there was a Hyborian Age, when

. . . shining kingdoms lay spread across the world like blue mantles beneath the stars—Nemedia, Ophir, Brythunia, Hyperborea, Zamora with its dark-haired women and towers of spider-haunted mystery, Zingara with its chivalry, Koth that bordered on the pastoral lands of Shem, Stygia with its shadow-guarded tombs, Hyrkania whose riders wore steel and silk and gold. But the proudest kingdom of the world was Aquilonia, reigning supreme in the dreaming west.

Conan was a development of King Kull and also an idealization of Howard himself: a gigantic barbarian adventurer from the northern land of Cimmeria, who, after a lifetime of wading through rivers of gore and dompting foes both natural and supernatural, rises to king of Aquilonia.

Howard envisaged the entire life of Conan, from birth to old age, and caused him to grow and develop like a real man. At the start, Conan is merely a lawless, reckless, irresponsible, predatory youth with few virtues save courage, loyalty to his few friends, and a rough-and-ready chivalry towards women. In time he learns not only caution and prudence but also duty and responsibility, until by middle age he has matured enough to make a good king. On the contrary, many heroes of heroic

fantasy seem, like the characters of Homer and of P.G. Wodehouse, to have the enviable faculty of staying the same age for half a century at a stretch.

The self-taught Howard achieved a preëminently sound, eloquent prose style. He wrote in sentences of medium length and simple construction, as others leaned to do after the Hemingway revolution of the thirties. He could give the impression of a highly colorful scene while making only sparing use of action-slowing adjectives and adverbs. He was a devotee of the "well-wrought tale" as opposed to the "slice-of-life" school of fiction. Stories of either kind have their place; but for pure, escapist entertainment—which Howard's stories were meant to be—the former type is more suitable.

As a writer, Howard had faults as well as virtues. His faults arose mainly from haste. Hence his stories contain many inconsistencies and slipshod carelessnesses. He tended to repeat certain elements in story after story: the combat with a gigantic serpent (Howard said he hated snakes) or man-ape; the vast, green stone city built on the lines of the Pentagon; the flying menace in the form of a winged ape or demon.

Critics have also held against Howard the author's immaturity in human relationships, especially in his heroes' attitude towards women, and the violence of the tales. Conan swaggers about the Hyborian scene, bedding one willing wench after another; but women are viewed as mere toys. True, Conan at last takes a legitimate queen, but this is a mere afterthought. Howard was evidently as uncomfortable with love as the small boy who, viewing a Western, is loudly disgusted when the hero kisses the heroine instead of his horse. Furthermore, one critic was so staggered by the splashing of gore that he said Howard's stories "project the immature

fantasy of a split mind and logically pave the way to schizophrenia.''

What seems like excessive bloodshed and emotional immaturity, however, were normal in the pulp fiction of Howard's time. Writers did not then deem it their duty to endow their heroes with social consciousness, to sympathize with downtrodden ethnics, to detail the mechanical problems of copulation, and to make it plain that they were on the side of peace, equality, and social welfare.

Withal, Howard was a natural storyteller, and this is the *sine qua non* of fiction-writing. With this knack, many of a writer's faults can be overlooked; without it, no other virtues do any good. Whatever their shortcomings, Howard's writings will long be enjoyed for their zest, vigor, furious action, and headlong narrative drive; for his ''purple and golden and crimson universe where anything can happen—except the tedious.''

Beginning in 1932, most of Howard's time was taken up with the Conan stories. For months, the mighty Cimmerian obsessed him to the exclusion of all else. Then he branched out into detective stories and Westerns. The detective stories, which contained fantastic elements like sinister oriental cults and African leopard-men, were no great success, even though Howard sold several.

He did better with his Westerns. After he engaged Otis Adelbert Kline as his literary agent in 1933, he found his Western market expanding. Over twenty stories in this genre were sold in the three years before his death. Many were informed with a broad frontier humor, close to burlesque.

Like his earlier boxing stories, Howard's Westerns fall into two groups, serious and humorous. Some critics consider his humorous Westerns his best work. His Western heroes are as big as Conan, even less bright, and genial in a homicidal way. Howard explained his prefer-

ence for heroes of mighty thews and simple minds:

"They're simpler. You get them in a jam, and no one expects you to rack your brains inventing clever ways for them to extricate themselves. They are too stupid to do anything but cut, shoot, or slug themselves into the clear."[4]

In one of his last letters, Howard indicated that he might quit fantasy: "I'm seriously contemplating devoting all my time and efforts to Western writing, abandoning all other forms of work entirely . . ."[1]

The years 1933–36 were busy. Howard's Western market was growing and for a while he earned more than most of the men of Cross Plains. Of course, this was in the depths of the Great Depression, when $2,500.00 a year was an opulent income. Howard's circumstances were never exactly easy, since word rates were low, magazines on which he had counted failed, and his mother's illness caused him heavy expenses. Mrs. Howard had been in poor health for years and now was in rapid decline. Still, whatever Howard's maladjustments, money troubles do not seem to have been among them.

His circle of correspondents grew, with many letters passing between him and Clark Ashton Smith and between him and H. P. Lovecraft. He dated Novalyne Price, a teacher of public speaking at the local high school. She was considered a little eccentric, too, being such a perfectionist with her pupils that they repeatedly won the annual Texan University Interscholastic League contest in public speaking. In July, 1935, Howard temporarily broke off his friendship with Miss Price by a bitter letter in which he accused her of making fun of him to a mutual friend behind his back.

Mrs. Howard's health continued to decline. On June 11, 1936, hopelessly ill, she was in a coma. The nurse

told Howard that his mother would never regain consciousness. Howard went out and got into his car. About 8:00 a.m., still in the car, he shot himself through the head with his pistol. His suicide was not the result of any sudden impulse, for the previous week he had sent the Kline agency a manuscript with instructions for paying the money from its sale in case of his death.

Howard's suicide sent a wave of amazement and grief through his circle of friends and admirers. Lovecraft wrote: "That such a genuine artist should perish while hundreds of insincere hacks continue to concoct spurious ghosts and vampires and space-ships and occult detectives is indeed a sorry piece of cosmic irony!"[4]

Dr. Isaac Howard inherited Howard's estate, and the Kline agency sold several of Howard's stories after his death. During the next decade, Howard's writings remained for the most part the private enthusiasm of a few admirers.

The first serious attempt to revive Howard came in 1946, when August Derleth published a collection of Howard's fiction as *Skull-Face and Others*. The reviewer for the New York *Times* was so appalled by the violence of Howard's stories that his review was devoted to warning against the schizophrenic perils of heroic fiction and said little about the stories.

Three years later, a small science-fiction publisher began to issue the Conan stories in a series of cloth-bound volumes. In 1951, I learned of a cache of Howard's manuscripts in the custody of a literary agent who had inherited Kline's agency. Finding three Conan stories among them, I edited these for publication and also rewrote four unpublished adventure stories by Howard, changing them to Conan stories. A Swedish admirer of Howard, Björn Nyberg, wrote a novel, *The Return of Conan*, on which I collaborated.

The definitive revival of Howard took place when Lancer Books began in 1966 to bring out the whole Conan corpus in paperback. A Texan admirer, Glenn Lord, became agent for Howard's writings and tracked down a mass of Howard's papers. These included six Conan stories, one complete and the rest fragments or outlines. Lin Carter and I have completed the unfinished stories and have written pastiches to fill the gaps in the saga. How well we have imitated Howard's style and spirit is not for me to say.

The Conan paperbacks touched off a general reprinting of Howard's stories. Within the last five years,* at least nine books of Howard's non-Conanian stories have been published. Many tales by Howard, some previously published and some not, have appeared in magazines and anthologies. The magazine *Bestsellers* listed Howard among the eight writers of imaginative fiction whose books have, in the last thirty years, sold over a million copies. The others were Asimov, Bradbury, Burroughs, Heinlein, Andre Norton, E.E. Smith, and Tolkien.

I suspect that this revival is a reaction against some recent trends in fiction. Ever since the Hitlerian War, advance-guard writers have issued stories marked by certain features, carried to questionable extremes. One is the use of experimental narrative techniques: non-sentences, stream-of-consciousness, temporal disorganization, plotlessness, and so forth. Another is extreme subjectivity, or egotistical self-indulgence on the part of the writer. Another is obsession with contemporary social and political problems. Another is concentration on sex, especially in its more peculiar manifestations. Finally there is the vogue of the anti-hero. The protagonist is made, not a likable rogue like many former

*1966-70.

picaresque heroes, but a despicable rogue, a twerp with neither brains, brawn, nor character, who might have crawled out from under a flat rock.

All these developments have their place, up to a point. But, since they have all come at once and have been carried to often bizarre extremes, many readers enjoy for a change reading stories that point in the opposite direction. That is to say, stories of stalwart heroes doing heroic deeds, with plenty of hot action in romantic settings, told in plain, lucid, straightforward prose, without mention of the school dropout problem or the woes of the sexual deviant or other contemporary difficulties. How far this reaction will go, no man knoweth; but while it endures, Howard's publishers stand to profit.

During this revival, Howard has slept beneath the large, plain gravestone in the Brownwood cemetery, where his parents also lie. A panel reads: "They were lovely and pleasant in their lives and in their death they were not divided" (2 Samuel I, 23). But the Howard family was not so harmonious as all that. A more fitting epitaph for Robert Howard would be Dr. John D. Clark's introduction to the Conan books: "And above all Howard was a story-teller."

Notes:

1. From an unpublished letter by Robert E. Howard; by permission of Glenn Lord.

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4. From Robert E. Howard: *Skull-Face and Others*, pp. xv, xxii; copyright © 1946 by August Derleth; by permission of August Derleth.

HOWARD'S STYLE

by Fritz Leiber

John Pocsik's well-rounded article about Solomon Kane in *Amra,* V2 #14, led me to read "The Moon of Skulls" and "Red Shadows" for the first time. I'm once more impressed with Howard's simple, youthful, melodramatic power.

He painted in about the broadest strokes imaginable. A mass of glimmering black for the menace, an ice-blue cascade for the hero, between them a swathe of crimson for battle, passion, blood—and that was the picture, or story, rather, except where a vivid detail might chance to spring to life, or a swift thought-arabesque be added.

He knew the words and phrases of power and sought to use them as soon and often as possible, the words and phrases that the writer with literary aspirations usually avoids (sometimes quite mechanically) because they're clichés or near-clichés, words and phrases alike (I select from "The Moon of Skulls") black, dark, death, volcanic, ghost, great black shadow, symbol of death and horror, menace brooding and terrible, shrubs which crouched like short dark ghosts, outposts of the kingdom of fear, black spires of wizards' castles, ju-ju city, grim black crags of the fetish hills, henchmen of death, the Tower of Death, the Black Altar . . .

These aren't bad words and phrases really. In fact, they are the same general sort that still make some

Americans embarrassed about Edgar Allen Poe and his European reputation and influence. And Howard didn't use them like a hack writer, he used them like a poet. (Who but Howard could work into a good poem and make effective a pulpish bit like, "Jets of agony lance my brain"?) Yet his boyish, sincere, poetic use of the words and phrases of power will always make it difficult for us to demonstrate to literary people unsympathetic to the swordplay-and-sorcery field what it is we see in Howard.

The landscape, plan, diagram, or microcosm of each of Howard's earlier stories is as simple, limited, and complete as that of a boy's daydream, a hewn-out stage setting that can be held in the mind while the story progresses. It has no more parts than a good diagram. There is no worry at all how it intersects the real world. It is an inner world for a boy's solemn adventuring. In most fantasy there are only traces of this boyish stage in the development of the dream world (Eddison naming his rival nations in *The Worm* Demons, Witches, Pixies, Goblins, Imps, and Ghouls) but in Howard (especially, to my mind, in the King Kull and Solomon Kane stories) it is dominant.

Most of us, I imagine, create in childhood starkly simple landscapes for adventuring. I spent a lot of time on a rope bridge over a dark chasm; often there was a tiger at one end and a lion at the other. But it took Howard's unique talent and intensity to make powerful, genuine stories directly out of these materials with almost no disguise at all.

Broad strokes, stark landscapes, near-clichés of power—like I said.

I'm not belittling Howard when I denominate his writing as boyish. I'm thinking of his freshness, sincerity, and exuberance as much as anything else, and there is

an undeniably boyish element in all swordplay-and-sorcery fiction, even the most sophisticated or wickedly decadent. When the author of *Vathek* came of age, or into his great inheritance, his comment was something like "Now my friends will expect me to behave like a man. How much they are deceived, for I intend to remain a child always!" This was the same Beckford who when a great tower he was having built on his estate collapsed, instantly reacted, "Ah, if only I'd been there to see it fall!" (This anecdote rings true. At least, I am vastly more inclined to believe it than, say, the story of Keats reacting to one of his last deadly hemorrhages with, "I know it's my life's blood, but Christ, what a color!")

Nor am I saying that Howard used clichés of the order of stony silence, iron will, morbid curiosity seekers, and rapier-like wit—but rather the near-clichés of the horror story, such as words like strange, weird, and eerie. (If something is strange, a good writer ought to be able to spot wherein the strangeness lies, and surely his description will be more effective if he can.) Howard generally didn't over-use those particular words, but he leaned heavily on such cousin-words as grim, black, dark, ghostly.

The landscape of the Conan stories shows a definite growth from the Kull and Kane tales. (Interesting, those three K-sounds; Kull, Kane, Conan.) No longer do we find so many hosts of killers inhabiting giant rooms, ancient cyclopean ruins, and impenetrable forests—hosts whose means of sustenance is hard to comprehend and whose day-to-day life down the centuries hardly picturable. In the Conan stories there are usually hewers-of-wood and drawers-of-water, merchants, sailors, farmers, scholars, priests, along with the fighters and magicians—even if the wolves do seem at times to outnumber the sheep.

The girl-whipping-girl references in "The Moon of Skulls"—which became girl-whipping-girl scenes in several of the Conan stories—remind me that Howard must have early discovered what a potent sexual stimulus this particular image is, along with the more-or-less veiled lesbianism that is frequently linked with it. *Weird Tales* probably attracted a few readers in this harmless way, especially when the cover showed a tasty, rather tasteful girl-whipping-girl tableau by Mrs. Brundage or another. Such references and scenes were really daring then, in contrast to today's "anything goes" paperbacks and magazines. Well, *almost* anything . . . except for perverted—which includes married—sex in *Playboy* and several of its imitators; stories and pictures of girls with small breasts (one of my theories is that the favoritism shown mammothly mammalian milk-cow maidens in photo and illo is an elaborate gesture of contempt on the part of male homosexual editors for women in general and simple-minded men who go for them; stories that try to present fully and understand human beings as they are today, especially if the stories involve the problems arising from the death-grapple of technology and individuality or if they involve deep analysis of the individuals—especially in the entertainment field—who specialize in catering to and manipulating the masses; and of course swordplay-and-sorcery stories!)

The means by which whipping scenes are purveyed to the reading- and viewing-public change constantly, in accord with available material and the vagaries of censorship. Currently there is a flurry of whipping- and torture-scenes in the texts but especially on the covers of the (Demons defend us!) male adventure magazines; judging from these, a prime current sexual stimulus is the stalwart Nazi maiden in befrogged military tunic open to the navel and wielding a blacksnake whip or preparing to

inflict or supervise some other torment—her antics are apparently even more popular than those of the apelike, green-jacketed Japanee and his fair victims. (Mrs. Brundage is high art compared to these garish depictions!) But the flagellation involved is chiefly confined to mixed whipping scenes. Apparently the editors doubt or have never discovered what Howard seems to have from the start: that mixed whipping is a less potent stimulus than girl-whipping-girl. There seem to be reasons for this that go quite deep (for instance, rituals in which women whipped women were part of the women's mystery cult in ancient Rome) but I am not prepared to analyze them in scholarly fashion or any other—beyond the thought that girl-whipping-girl may appeal to the male voyeur because the scene involves no male actor of whom he might be jealous (to him it is pure sex—I mean completely useless, like pure mathematics—art for art's sake).

Once again, I'm not criticizing Howard by harping on this matter. Spicy scenes fit as naturally into the sword-play-and-sorcery story as they do into the related, larger category of the picaresque—though they are by no means a necessary part of it: several of the best Conan stories have no sex scenes at all—notably my own favorite, "Beyond the Black River."

Although it was one of his first long stories, "Red Shadows" is a wonderful compendium of Howard. Kane and Le Loup, developed with almost equal fullness, present the twin good and evil sides of one adventurous man's nature, there is a magnificent hymn to the jungle running through the prose, the African witchcraft is superb, and even the Giant Ape (which appears so often as a stock menace in Howard's subsequent tales) is handled with sympathy as well as power.

I imagine that Jack London was one of the chief

influences shaping Howard's writing. There is the same preoccupation with feats of physical prowess, with the strong man of fixed purpose whom nothing daunts, with a savagely Darwinian view of life (battle for survival, Nature bloody in tooth and claw, civilization a false fleeting dream in the reality of barbarianism). And there is much the same boyishness. London's *The Star Rover* is not quite swordplay-and-sorcery—the sorcery is lacking. But like Jensen's *The Long Journey* it is the closest thing to it.

THE GHOST OF CAMP COLORADO

A Tale of Pioneer Days in Old Texas

by Robert E. Howard

"The muffled drum's sad roll has beat
The soldiers' last tattoo;
No more on life's parade shall meet
That brave and fallen few."

—THE BIVOUAC OF THE DEAD

On the banks of the Jim Ned River in Coleman County, central West Texas, stands a ghost. It is a substantial ghost, built of square cut stone and sturdy timber, but just the same it is a phantom, rising on the ruins of a forgotten past. It is all that is left of the army post known as Camp Colorado in the pioneer days of Texas. This camp, one of a line of posts built in the 1850's to protect the settlers from Indian raids, had a career as brief as it was stirring. When Henry Sackett, whose name is well known in frontier annals, came to Camp Colorado in 1870, he found the post long deserted and the adobe buildings already falling into ruins. From these ruins he built a home and it is to his home and to the community school house on the site of the old post, that the term of Camp Colorado is today applied.

Today the house he built in 1870 is as strong as if erected yesterday, a splendid type of pioneer Texas ranch-house. It stands upon the foundations of the old

army commissary and many of its doors and much of its flooring came from the old government buildings, the lumber for which was freighted across the plains three-quarters of a century ago. The doors, strong as iron, show plainly, beneath their paint, the scars of bullets and arrows, mute evidence of the days when the Comanches swept down like a red cloud of war and the waves of slaughter washed about the adobe walls where blue-clad iron men held the frontier.

This post was first begun on the Colorado River in 1856, but was shifted to the Jim Ned River, although it retained the original name. Built in 1857, in the stirring times of westward drift and Indian raid, the old post in its heyday sheltered notable men—Major Van Dorn, Captain Theodore O'Hara, whose poem "The Bivouac of the Dead" has thrilled the hearts of generations, General James B. Hood, General James P. Major, General Kirby Smith, and the famous General Fitzhugh Lee, nephew of General Robert E. Lee. From Camp Colorado went Major Van Dorn, first commander of the post, to Utah, in the days of the Mormon trouble. And from Camp Colorado went General James P. Major with the force under Van Dorn, and Captain Sol Ross, later Governor of Texas, on the expedition which resulted in the death of Peta Nocona, the last great Comanche war chief, and the capture of his white wife, Cynthia Ann Parker, whose life-long captivity among the Indians forms one of the classics of the Southwest.

When the clouds of Civil War loomed in the East and the boys in blue marched away from the post in 1861, their going did not end Camp Colorado's connection with redskin history. For from the ranch-house and store built on the site of the post, Henry Sackett rode with Captain Maltby's Frontier Battalion Rangers in 1874, on the path of Big Foot and Jape the Comanche, who were

leaving a trail of fire and blood across western Texas. On Dove Creek, in Runnels County, which adjoins Coleman County on the west, the Rangers came up with the marauders and it was Henry Sackett's rifle which, with that of Captain Maltby, put an end forever to the careers of Big Foot and Jape the Comanche, and brought to a swift conclusion the last Indian raid in central West Texas.

Of the original buildings of the post, only one remains—the guard house, a small stone room with a slanting roof now connected with the ranch-house. It was the only post building made of stone; the others, adobe-built, have long since crumbled away and vanished. Of the barracks, the officers' quarters, the blacksmith shop, the bakery and the other adjuncts of an army camp, only tumbled heaps of foundation stones remain, in which can be occasionally traced the plan of the buildings. Some of the old corral still stands, built of heavy stones and strengthened with adobe, but it too is crumbling and falling down.

The old guard house, which, with its single window, now walled up, forms a storeroom on the back of the Sackett house, has a vivid history all its own, apart from the military occupancy of the post. After the camp was deserted by the soldiers, it served as a saloon wherein the civilian settlers of the vicinity quenched their thirst, argued political questions and conceivably converted it into a block-house in event of Indian menace. One scene of bloodshed at least, it witnessed, for at its crude bar two men quarreled and just outside its door they shot it out, as was the custom of the frontier, and the loser of the desperate game fell dead there.

Today there remains a deep crevice in one of the walls where two military prisoners confined there when the building was still serving as a dungeon, made a vain

attempt to dig their way to liberty through the thick, solid stone of the wall. Who they were, what their crime was, and what implements they used are forgotten; only the scratches they made remain, mute evidence of their desperation and their failure.

In early days there was another saloon at the post, but of that building no trace today remains. Yet it was in use at least up to the time that Coleman County was created, for it was here that the first sheriff of the county, celebrating the gorgeous occasion of his election, emerged from the saloon, fired his six-shooter into the air and yelled: "Coleman County, by God, and I'm sheriff of every damn' foot of her! I got the world by the tail on a downhill pull! Yippee!"

A word in regard to the builder of the house that now represents Camp Colorado might not be amiss. The Honorable Henry Sackett was born in Orsett, Essexshire, England, in 1851 and came to America while a youth. Building the house, largely with his own labor, in 1870, he lived there until his death a few years ago, acting as postmaster under seven Presidents, and as store-keeper for the settlers. The south side of the stone house, built into a single, great room, was used as post office and general store. Henry Sackett was a pioneer in the truest sense of the word, an upright and universally respected gentleman, a member of the Frontier Battalion of Rangers, and later Representative in the Legislature of Texas, from Brown and Coleman Counties. He married Miss Mary MacNamara, daughter of Captain Michael MacNamara of the United States Army. Mrs. Sackett still lives at Camp Colorado.

The countryside is usually picturesque—broad, rolling hills, thick with mesquite and scrub oaks, with the river winding its serpentine course through its narrow valley. On the slopes cattle and sheep graze and over all

broods a drowsy quiet. But it is easy to resurrect the past in day dreams—to see the adobe walls rise out of dusty oblivion and stand up like ghosts, to hear again the faint and spectral bugle call and see the old corral thronged with lean, wicked-eyed mustangs, the buildings and the drill grounds with blue-clad figures—bronzed, hard-bitten men, with the sun and the wind of the open lands in their eyes—the old Dragoons! Nor is it hard to imagine that yonder chaparral shakes, not to the breeze, but to crawling, stealthy shapes, and that a painted, coppery face glares from the brush, and the sun glints from a tomahawk in a red hand.

But they have long faded into the night—the reckless, roistering cavalry men, the painted Comanches, the settlers in their homespun and buckskins; only the night wind whispers old tales of Camp Colorado.

A half mile perhaps from the Sackett house stands another remnant of the past—a sort of mile-stone, definitely marking the close of one age and the opening of another. It stands on a hillside in a corner of the great Dibrell ranch—a marble monument on which is the inscription:

BREEZE 21ST 31984
HEREFORD COW
BORN 1887 DIED 1903
MOTHER OF THE DIBRELL HERD
DIBRELL

This monument marks the resting place of one of the first registered, short-horn cows of central West Texas. When Breeze was born, West Texas swarmed with half-wild longhorns, descendents of those cattle the Spaniards brought from Andalusia; now one might look

far before finding one of those picturesque denizens of the old ranges. Fat, white-faced, short-horned Herefords of Breeze's breed and kind have replaced them, and in the vast pageant of the West, the longhorn follows buffalo and Indian into oblivion.

CONAN'S GHOST

by L. Sprague de Camp

In the last two decades,* I have written a number of articles for George H. Scithers's fan magazine *Amra*. This is the organ of the Hyborian Legion, a loose association of people interested in the literary genre of heroic fantasy (also called swordplay-and-sorcery fiction) and in particular the stories of this kind by Robert E. Howard. From these pieces, I have picked those that I thought would be most interesting.

Robert Ervin Howard (1906–36) was born in Peaster, Texas, and spent most of his life in Cross Plains, in the center of Texas between Abilene and Brownwood. His father was a local physician, and both his parents came of pioneer stock. Howard received his main education in Cross Plains and completed his high-school career in Brownwood. After taking a few courses at Brownwood College, he plunged into free-lance writing.

As a boy, Howard's precocious intellect made him something of a misfit, especially in Texas. For a time he suffered the bullying that is the usual lot of brilliant but puny boys. Partly as a result, he became a sport and exercise fanatic. That soon ended the bullying, since in maturity he was nearly six feet tall and weighed around 200 pounds, most of it muscle. His personality was introverted, unconventional, moody, and hot-tempered, given to emotional extremes and violent likes and dislikes. Like most young writers, he read voraciously. He

*As of 1968.

was a pen pal of the fantasy writers H.P. Lovecraft and Clark Ashton Smith.

During his last years (1927–36), Howard turned out a huge volume of general pulp-magazine fiction: sport, detective, western, historical, oriental-adventure, weird, and ghost stories, besides his poetry and many fantasies. But, although fairly successful in his work and a big, powerful man like his heroes, Howard was much maladjusted. For several years before his death, he talked of suicide. At thirty, learning that his aged mother—to whom he was excessively devoted—was on the point of death, he ended a promising literary career by shooting himself. His novella "Red Nails," a Conan story, and his interplanetary novel *Almuric* were published posthumously in *Weird Tales*.

Howard wrote several series of tales of heroic fantasy, most of them published in *Weird Tales*. Howard was a natural storyteller, whose narratives are unsurpassed for vivid, gripping, headlong action. His heroes—King Kull, Conan, Bran Mak Morn, Turlogh O'Brien, Solomon Kane—are larger than life: men of mighty thews, hot passions, and indomitable will, who easily dominate the stories through which they stride. Howard thus explained his preference for heroes of massive muscles but simple minds:

"They're simpler. You get them in a jam, and no one expects you to rack your brains inventing clever ways for them to extricate themselves. They are too stupid to do anything but cut, shoot, or slug themselves into the clear."

Of all Howard's fantasies, the most popular have been the Conan stories. These are laid in Howard's imaginary Hyborian Age, about twelve thousand years ago, between the sinking of Atlantis and the beginnings of recorded history. In these stories, Conan, a gigantic

barbarian adventurer from the backward northern land of Cimmeria, wades through rivers of gore to overcome foes both natural and supernatural and to become at last the king of the Hyborian kingdom of Aquilonia. The saga picks up Conan as a beardless youth and follows his adventures into late middle age.

Howard wrote—or at least began—over two dozen Conan stories, ranging in length from 3,000 to 66,000 words. Of these, eighteen were published during or just after his lifetime, one in a fan magazine and the rest in *Weird Tales*.

During the middle 1930s, two old friends of mine, P. Schuyler Miller and John D. Clark, became enthusiasts for the Conan stories. Shortly before Howard's death, they corresponded briefly with him and obtained from him a sketch map of the world in the Hyborian Age, upon which the several later published maps of Conan's world are based.

For the next fourteen years, although some of the Conan stories were reprinted in anthologies and collections, they remained essentially the private enthusiasm of a small group of *aficionados* who had saved files of *Weird Tales*. Then, in 1950, Gnome Press, a science-fiction publishing house, began reprinting the Conan tales in cloth-bound volumes, edited by John D. Clark. The first volume issued was the novel "The Hour of the Dragon," which had appeared as a serial in *Weird Tales* and which was retitled *Conan the Conqueror*.

I came into this cultus late. Although I had written some stories of this type in collaboration with Fletcher Pratt, up to 1950 I had never read a Conan story (albeit I had heard vaguely about them) because I had not been a *Weird Tales* reader during Howard's *fluorit,* and Miller and Clark had never urged the stories upon me. When *Conan the Conqueror* appeared, I read it, was hooked, and quickly read all the Howard I could get my hands on.

A little over a year after this volume came out, I telephoned Donald A. Wollheim, then an editor for Avon Publications. We mentioned a story by Howard, originally titled "The House of Arabu" but appearing in *Avon Fantasy Reader No. 18* as "The Witch from Hell's Kitchen." I asked Wollheim if any more like it existed.

"Yes," he said, "I understand Howard's agent has a whole pile of unpublished manuscripts."

"What! Who's his agent?"

"Oscar J. Friend. Do you know him?"

"Sure, I know Oscar!" I ended the conversation, called Jackson Heights, and presently heard the late Oscar J. Friend's amiable Southern accent.

"Why, yes," he said. "I've got a whole carton full of Howard manuscripts. These were left with Otis Kline, who was Howard's agent, when Howard died, and Otis left 'em with me when *he* died. Might even be some unpublished Conan stories among 'em. Why, would you like to look through 'em?"

"You bet I would!"

So, on 30 November, 1951, I went to Oscar's apartment and dug through the pile. I found three apparently unpublished Conan stories: "The Frost-Giant's Daughter," "The God in the Bowl," and the "The Black Stranger."* I revised them all for publication, first in *Fantasy (Fiction) Magazine* and *Space Science Fiction* and then in the Gnome Press editions of the Conan stories. "The Frost-Giant's Daughter," I discovered, had actually been published before in different form, as "Gods of the North," in a fan magazine, *The Fantasy Fan* for March, 1934. In this version, Howard called his hero "Amra of Akbitana" instead of "Conan of Cimmeria."

The twenty Conan stories known at this time were

*Otherwise called "The Treasure of Tranicos"

published in five Gnome Press volumes. It was then suggested that I rewrite some of the non-Conan stories in Friend's collection of Howard manuscripts to make them over into Conan stories. I took four such stories with medieval or modern oriential settings, changed the hero's name to "Conan," took out anachronisms like gunpowder, and put in a supernatural element. The resulting stories were still about four-fifths Howard and one-fifth de Camp. Two of these stories were published in the magazine *Fantastic Universe Science Fiction,* and all four appeared in the Gnome Press volume *Tales of Conan.*

I thought my association with the mighty Cimmerian had ended. But then a Swedish Conan fan, Björn Nyberg, wrote a pastiche novel, *The Return of Conan,* and I was asked to rewrite it for publication as yet another Gnome Press volume. There was no shaking off the ghost of Howard, whose posthumous ghost-writer I had become. I was the ghost of a ghost. Since Conan was Howard's own idealization of himself, one might say that I was Conan's ghost.

Then things remained quiet until 1964, when Lancer Books, Inc., undertook the publication of the Conan saga in paperback, under my editorship. Legal complications with Gnome Press delayed this publication and made it necessary to issue the books in other than chronological order.

The delay proved fortunate, however, because in 1965 Glenn Lord, who collected Howard's manuscripts and other papers, published the magazine *The Howard Collector,* and became the literary agent for the Howard estate, found six more Conan stories in a cache of Howard's papers that he had tracked down. One story was complete; one was in the form of an outline; one was a three-page fragment; and the rest consisted of the first

halves of the stories and synopses of the rest. I finished four of the incomplete stories and Lin Carter the remaining one. In addition, Carter and I have collaborated on a few pastiches, based upon hints in Howard's notes and letters, to fill the gaps in the saga, and we shall probably do more of these before we are through.

I certainly never imagined, when I first read *Conan the Conqueror,* that I should ever become involved to such an extent in the affairs of Howard and his super-hero. Nor did I ever consciously plan to "take over" this literary property. It just happened through coincidence and circumstance, little by little. I daresay others could have done better what I have done to complete and promote the Conan saga—Howard himself, had he lived and matured, would surely have done so—but I happened to be the man on the spot. This involvement has caused me a good deal of exasperation and has competed with my more serious occupation as a popularizer of science. But, on the other hand, the experience has also furnished a lot of fun and some small profit, so I shan't complain.

UNTITLED FRAGMENT

by Robert E. Howard

The wind from the Mediterranean wafted a thousand scents across the packed bazaar. The surging, disputatious throng that milled there was clamorous and bizarre with the sounds and colors of the East. Lean, hawk-like desert riders, fierce and suspicious as wild dogs in a strange territory, shouldered fat, oily Algerian merchants. Beggars whined for alms, thieves plied their trade, shopmen quarreled with customers and with each other, and every now and then the crowd broke precipitately to right and left as an arrogant-eyed sheikh came galloping through disdainfully careless of the lives and limbs of others—while his turbaned retinue laid lustily right and left with their riding whips. Or a huge Negro, naked except for a loin cloth, would stalk through, or a group of saber girt soldiers would swagger by. And all the while went on the business of barter—buying and selling—Persian sashes, Bokhariot wool, Turkish rugs, weapons from Egypt and Damascus, brass buckles from Afghanistan, spice and monkeys from India, ivory from Nubia.

And there were those who dealt in human flesh. On the auction block in the center of the crowded market place stood a little clump of figures, chained and nearly naked, who looked out at the milling buyers with the patience and lethargy of oxen.

THE TRAIL OF TRANICOS

by L. Sprague de Camp

When, in 1951, I discovered three apparently unpublished Conan stories, I edited them for magazine publication, then edited them some more for book publication, and lastly edited them once more for publication in the Ace paperback series. In addition, I learned that Howard himself rewrote two of them, so altogether these stories have seen many forms.

Of the three, "The Frost-Giant's Daughter" was one of the first Conan stories that Howard wrote and one of several such stories that he submitted to Farnsworth Wright of *Weird Tales* about the beginning of 1932. Of These, Wright accepted "The Phoenix on the Sword"—the first Conan story to be published—and, on 10 March, 1932, rejected the rest. About two years later, Howard rewrote "The Frost-Giant's Daughter" as "Gods of the North," changing the name of the hero from Conan to Amra of Akibitana, for publication in Charles D. Hornig's pioneer fan magazine, *The Fantasy Fan*.

Howard wanted to see the story in print but had no hope of selling it commercially, since no magazines other than *Weird Tales* were buying fiction of that kind at the time. And he changed the hero's name because, by this time, the Conan stories were doing well and he

thought it imprudent to give any of them away free. The story has since been reprinted both in its Conan form and its Amra form.

"The Black Stranger" has an even more labyrinthine history, which I thought might interest Howard buffs and bibliographers. Judging from the appearance of the manuscript, Glenn Lord thinks that Howard probably wrote the story (30,000 words) around 1933–34. Evidently Farnsworth Wright rejected it. A year or so later, Howard rewrote the story as a 25,000-word Spanish Main pirate yarn, "Swords of the Red Brotherhood." He sent it to Otis Kline Associates on 28 May, 1935.

The course of the manuscript during the next three years is not known. Eventually, Kline submitted it to *Golden Fleece,* a magazine of historical adventure fiction, which appeared from 10–38 to 6–39. *Golden Fleece* ceased publication soon after receiving the Howard manuscript. The manuscript was returned—Howard being dead by this time—and that is the last record of any submission.

In this rewrite (never published) Howard deleted most of the supernatural elements, changed the names of nearly all of the characters, and introduced matchlock muskets and other props suitable for a story of early +XVII. The scene is the *west* coast of America, whither Count Henri d'Chastillon has fled to escape an African wizard whom he had once double-crossed in a slaving deal. Actually, the scenery and the Indians are those of the eastern woodlands of aboriginal North America, not at all like California with its towering mountains and timid, acorn-grinding natives. Moreover, Howard evidently had little French, since "d'Chastillon" is an impossible name.

The Conan of the original story was transformed into

another one of Conan's fictional doublets: Terence Vulmea, a gigantic Irishman impelled by English persecution to flee Ireland and turn pirate. Vulmea appears in one other Howard story: "Black Vulmea's Vengeance" (15,000 words) published in *Golden Fleece* for November, 1938. The plot of this novelette has much in common with "The Black Stranger." Vulmea leads an enemy—a British naval captain—on a treasure hunt on the Peruvian coast, with everybody double-crossing everybody else and hordes of savages lurking to pounce. This hero is called simply "Black Vulmea" in "Swords of the Red Brotherhood," but his given name appears in "Black Vulmea's Vengeance." The names "Tranicos" (who plays a role in "The Black Stranger") and "Villiers" (who plays a role in "Swords of the Red Brotherhood") are alluded to as those of notorious pirates.

In February, 1952, I rewrote "The Black Stranger." Not being sure that I could sell the story without drastic improvement, I edited it with a heavy hand. To speed up the narrative, I condensed it by more than 15% by small cuts of what seemed otiose verbiage. Since the original story was only weakly tied in with the rest of the saga, I added interpolations to bring in King Numedides, Thoth-Amon, and the subsequent revolution in Aquilonia.

Selon Howard, the menace in the cave was a lethal volcanic gas. Count Valenso's slayer was a black demon sent from afar by an unnamed wizard whom the Count had cheated. I put the demon in the cave in place of the gas, called in the vengeful wizard Thoth-Amon, and brought the latter to the scene of the action to free the demon from the cave and direct it against the Count. At the end, Howard has Conan abandon the quest for the jewels in the cave and signal the pirate ship *Red Hand,*

proposing to sail away as its captain to another orgy of piracy. Because this would have entailed serious chronological difficulties, I made the ship a galley bearing Aquilonian rebels looking for Conan to lead their uprising.

Thinking that too many of Howard's titles had "black" in them, I changed the title to "The Treasure of Tranicos." For various reasons, I also changed the names of several characters.

This manuscript went to Lester del Rey, editor of *Fantasy Magazine,* wherein it appeared in the March, 1953, issue. Lester had taken his turn at improving the story. He preferred the original title, "The Black Stranger," so thus it appeared. He added a new beginning of four paragraphs, from "Count Valenso . . ." to ". . . writhing again." He added the fight with the demon. He deleted my reference, in Conan's tale, to the philosopher Alcemides.

When Greenberg published this story in *King Conan,* he used the del Rey version as it stood, but with my title, "The Treasure of Tranicos."

When I made up a manuscript for the Lancer (now Ace) paperback, *Conan The Usurper,* I typed a new version of the story, working from Howard's original ms. and my own version of 1952. No longer worried about selling the story and wishing to give the reader something as close as was practical to Howard's original, I edited Howard's text much more lightly, leaving in all the corn. Not trying to condense the tale, I made only such changes as seemed urgently needed. I omitted Lester's additions (which never convinced me—I hope not because of vanity) but kept the interpolations that I had inserted to tie the story in with the rest of the epic. I kept my title, "The Treasure of Tranicos," not only because of Howard's excessive fondness for "black," but also

because the "stranger" was now not a demon but the Stygian he-witch Thoth-Amon, who was brown rather than black. I went back to Howard's original names for characters, with two exceptions: Strombanni, whom Howard had called "Strom," and Gebellez, whom he had called "Gebbrelo." Now, "Strom" is a real name, but North European—Anglo-Scandinavian. (Cf. Senator Strom Thurmond.) And all the other Argosseans named by Howard have Italianate names like "Tito" and "Demetrio." Therefore I kept "Strombanni." And "Gebbrelo" is too much like "Galbro," the name of another character in the same story.

To distinguish among these versions, here is a table of the characters in the story in its various incarnations. I is Howard's original "The Black Stranger." II is "Swords of the Red Brotherhood." III is my 1952 rewrite of "The Black Stranger." IV is del Rey's modification of my rewrite, published in *Fantasy Magazine* as "The Black Stranger" and in *King Conan* as "The Treasure of Tranicos." III and IV are lumped together because all the characters have the same names in both. V is my latest version, which has appeared in *Conan The Usurper*.

The other two stories found in 1951 have a similar history of changes by me for their first publication and of later revisions that eliminated many of these changes and returned the story to a form closer to Howard's original manuscript, but I do not think I need go into details.

I	II	III, IV	V
Conan	Terence Vulmea	Conan	Conan
Belesa of Korzetta	Françoise d'Chastillon	Belesa of Korzetta	Belesa of Korzetta

Tina	Tina	Tina	Tina
Count Valenso of Korzetta	Count Henri d'Chastillon	Count Valenso of Korzetta	Count Valenso of Korzetta
Galbro	Gallot	Galbro	Galbro
Zingelito	Jacques Piriou	Zorgelitas	Zingelito
Strom	Harston	Strombanni	Strombanni
Zarono	Guillaume Villiers	Zarrono	Zarono
Tranicos	Giovanni da Verrazano	Tranicos	Tranicos
Gebbrelo	Jacques	Gebellez	Gebellez
Galacus	Richardson	Galaccus	Galacus
Anonymous demon	Anonymous Negro wizard	Thoth-Amon	Thoth-Amon
Bracus	Hawksby	Ottandro	Bracus
Tothmekri	Montezuma	Maatneb	Tothmekri

BALTHUS OF CROSS PLAINS

by George H. Scithers

The story, "Beyond the Black River" *(Conan the Warrior,* by Robert E. Howard, Lancer Books, 1967, page 157 ff.) is, to me, one of the best stories of the Conan series. Like all of Howard's stories, this one is a rousing adventure. It introduces a bit of mythology—demonology, if you prefer—that is surprisingly Lovecraftian. And it gives an insight into the character of Howard himself.

As a story, it contains defeat as well as victory, and tragic death as well as thrilling rescue. There are the "Picts," the bloodthirsty wild men of eastern Hyborea (whom some people will see as cognates of the Amerinds, although in fact some of the Amerinds went in for far more diabolical tortures than anything Howard ever wrote), implacable enemies of the more civilized Aquilonians. Stealth, swordplay, and slaughter play their part in the story, as does magic, defeated at last by the agility and power of the Cimmerian's iron-muscled physique. And there is more.

> My brother . . . had not whispered your name to the black ghosts that haunt the uplands of the Dark Land. But a bat has flown over the mountains of the dead and drawn your image in blood on the white tiger's hide that hangs before the long hut where sleep the Four Brothers of the Night . . . . Thunder rumbled through the black

> Mountain of the Dead and the altar hut of Gullah was thrown down by a wind from the Gulf of Ghosts. The loon which is a messenger to the Four Brothers of the Night flew swiftly and whispered your name in my ear. . . . Your head will hang in the altar hut of my brother. Your body will be eaten by the black-winged, sharp-beaked Children of Jhil.

But where is this Dark Land? Who are the Four Brothers of the Night? What is Jhil? Howard never says. They are sufficient to themselves, and are not seen again; a happy contrast to Howard's somewhat tiresome habit of reusing the same names for entirely unrelated persons and places in his stories. There are *swarms* of Valerii.

But the most important element in the story is the characterization of the secondary hero, Balthus, originally of the Tauran, and the resemblance between Balthus and Howard.

Consider Balthus' appearance: "He was a young man of medium height, with an open countenance and a mop of tousled, tawny hair. . . . Though not tall, he was well built, and the arms that the short, wide sleeves of his tunic left bare were thick with corded muscle. . . . [A young man with] frank countenance and strongly knit frame." Consider Balthus' homeland: the Tauran, a rural section of Aquilonia, though long settled, is close enough to the frontier to be steeped in the traditions of the border and the wars and feuds with both Picts and Cimmerians.

But all this, except of course for the detail of Balthus' tawny hair, is a fairly good description of the black haired Robert E. Howard himself and the post oak region of Texas where he lived. And although it has been pointed out by a number of writers that Conan was an idealized version of Howard, Balthus seems to me to be a more accurate characterization of his author. The con-

trast between the man from the Tauran and the barbarian from Cimmeria brings this out even more clearly.

Conan is basically feral; his experience with civilization has produced no real change in his essential wildness. Balthus was born and raised in settled, relatively stable surroundings; his woodscraft is a deliberately learned thing. Well learned craft, it is true, but still a craft, instead of the almost instinctive behavior of the Cimmerian. Then too, under stress, Conan becomes wholly wild, while Balthus tends towards more civilized behavior. Certainly Balthus is more dependent on the people around him than is Conan, the self-sufficient and altogether self-reliant barbarian.

Yet nowhere in all this is there any suggestion that Balthus is any weakling—on the contrary, he is a fighter and an athlete in his own right—even as Howard himself was. Balthus seems small only when measured against Conan's mighty frame and almost superhuman strength and agility. "Among the settlements of the Tauran [Balthus] was accounted a good runner, but Conan was leaving him behind with maddening ease." And so it is in almost all respects; Balthus is good, Conan is better.

Through all this, Balthus emerges as the more identifiable character, and not entirely because the majority of the story is told from his viewpoint. Balthus is closer to what we—and Howard—are or can be. He is the product of civilization, as are most of us. For him, the wilderness can be a place of menace, and of loneliness. He is not, as was Conan, "concerned only with the naked fundamentals of life. . . . Bloodshed and violence and savagery were the natural elements of the life that Conan knew. . . ." and in this he is a contrast to Balthus, who is deeply affected by death, even as Howard tragically was.

There is one further detail: Slasher, the dog that Conan

and Balthus meet near the Black River itself. Howard's dog, Patch, had been with him for some twelve years; he died only a few years before this story was written, and his death was one of the greatest losses Howard suffered. Slasher,the dog of the story, joins Conan and Balthus, but it is Balthus who pats him, and it is Balthus that Slasher stays with to the end.

I suggest then, that it is Balthus of the Tauran who is really Robert E. Howard; they are more alike, both physically and mentally, than are Conan and his chronicler. When, in this story, Balthus first meets Conan,

> . . . [Balthus] emerged dubiously and stared at the stranger. He felt curiously helpless and futile as he gazed on the proportions of the forest man—the massive iron-clad breast, and the arm that bore the reddened sword, burned dark by the sun and ridged and corded with muscles. He moved with the dangerous ease of a panther; he was too fiercely supple to be a product of civilization, even of that fringe of civilization which composed the outer frontiers.

Here we have Howard-as-he-really-wished-to-be.

I think this meeting was very real to Robert E. Howard. Certainly the principal characters, Balthus and Conan, really come to life on the pages of this story. Much of the aliveness is, I believe, simply due to the fact that Howard *had* put himself into the story; had given himself an opportunity to really get to know Conan.

It is in this story then, "Beyond The Black River," that Conan and his creator get acquainted; and their meeting makes a wonderful tale.

SOMETHING ABOUT EVE

by Robert E. Howard

This review was found among REH's papers by Glenn Lord. It appeared in The Junto, *a journal circulated among a few of REH's friends.*

Bugles beckon to red disaster,
Dead men gnaw at the coffined sod,
And we who ride for the One Black Master
Are leagued in the lists with the knights of God.

I take the natural assumption that few of the readers of *The Junto* are familiar with the works of James Branch Cabell. He is, indeed, not widely read or deeply thought of by the masses; however to such of you to whom my following words are gibberish, I suggest that you read *Something About Eve,* for I am going on with my comments just as if all my readers were familiar with the book. This book for a new book is rather an old book as new books go in these days of old-new books, but I am not apologizing for taking up your time with a book you should have read some time ago—I have only just finished reading it myself. As always, those of you who object to my style, therefore, know right well that you have my cheerful permission to depart at once on your inevitable pilgrimage to the lower regions.

Something About Eve is perhaps the crowning achievement of a man who, speaking in a purely literary

sense, is undoubtedly the ablest writer of the present age. Here let me remark that there is nothing ambiguous or vague about Cabell's style—there is nothing of the rambling, incoherent maunderings of most of the modern school of writers, who seek to conceal their own ignorance by making the reader feel confused and bewildered. Cabell writes with a diamond pen, if you understand me.

Well, *Something About Eve* would be a masterpiece if for no other reason, because of its perfect English and its juicy morsels of carefully turned obscenity. Cabell has the elegant knack of being beautifully vulgar, and of concealing—from the mass—the most jubilant depravities in innuendo—this alone should be attraction enough for the feminine readers of the nation.

But there is more than this to *Something About Eve*. I was not able to discern whether or not Cabell believed himself in the existence of a Third Truth, but he at least pointed out two minor facts—that most men desire a Third Truth and no man finds it—this side of Hell, at least.

And he shows clearly that women are fatal to endeavor—whether they be the home loving kind or the butterfly breed. And of the two, Maya is infinitely more to be feared than Evadne of the Dusk. For in the arms of Evadne, a man loses only his manhood, his reputation, his honor, and frequently his life, while with Maya he loses his only worthwhile possessions—ideals and ambition. Circe made boars out of men, but Maya makes steers out of them, to browse over her level pastures of convention forevermore in content—Oh Judas—content! Let me content myself with Evadne—

Better the serpent fangs of Evadne than the cloying and stultifying domesticity of Maya and her brood—for they are both daughters, after all, of the nameless god-

dess, though men call one Lilith and the other Eve. And Evadne is but an affair of the road, a wandering off the path, an unpleasant episode, which if it be unforgettable, may at least be concluded, whereas Maya, being utter illusion, can never be brought to an end, and means the permanent halting of the rider who goes down the long road to that utterly barren and arid goal of all dreamers which is the only thing worth while, which is worth more than any earthly kingdom—and which most men squander for a fat, sluggish life in the arms of a whining, waddling daughter of Maya.

Well, the Adversary be thanked, there is nothing about me to attract either a daughter of Eve or one of Lilith—so I will ride relentlessly down the long road to Antan and the doom that waits there, while the great majority of you, my sneering masculine readers, will be sitting under your chestnut trees with the scent of Maya's cooking in your nostrils, watching the antics of your brood through rose colored glasses.

SWORDLY STORIES

THE TESTAMENT OF SNEFRU

by John Boardman

I, Snefru son of Mesu, a fisherman of Stygian Khemi, dictate these words to the scribe Hapuseneb from my deathbed in distant Zamboula. With the curse of a dying man I curse the infidel Conan, King of Aquilonia, for the misfortune which he has brought upon me and my kindred, causing me to die an exile and pauper far from the land of my birth.

It was on an evening in autumn of the sixteenth year of King Ctesphon IV, when Thoth-Amon was High Priest of Set, that the evil blow fell upon me. I was returning from the sea in my boat, having caught no fish that day, when suddenly a boat shot out from a hidden cove, and four black corsairs took me prisoner. I was in great fear, for it is well-known along all the shores of the ocean that these corsairs are veritable demons, torturing and slaying all who fall into their grasp. Under their white captain Amra, they once stormed the coastal palace of Prince Tamuneb, putting all within to the sword. My two brothers Tety and Mery, of the prince's guard, were slain by the demon Amra.

Scant relief felt I when the corsairs did not kill me but, talking in their barbarous tongue, took me and my poor boat to a pirate galley in Mangrove Bay. Aboard that ship I was taken, and flung on my knees before Amra himself, newly returned out of hell to torment Set-fearing men.

Conan they also named him, king of a barbarous realm Aquilonia in the far north where men scorn holy Set and worship such devils as Mitra and Crom.

Amra questioned me concerning the doings of the great priest Thutothmes, then just returned from a voyage to Messantia. A poor man like myself knows nothing of the deeds and thoughts of a priest of Set, and I told him so. Yet he and his corsairs mocked me, and he clad himself in my clothes, took my boat, and went off. All that night I was kept prisoner on the ship by the black corsairs, but I could scarce sleep for fear. These sea-demons boasted of the Stygians they had slain and the women they had ravished, until I deemed that they would torture and mayhap devour me.

But at dawn Amra returned, his knife gory with the blood of yet more poor Stygians. A great red jewel he showed exultantly to his black devils, and crowed that they would sail to Zingara. Then he threw me a helmetful of gold, and returned to me my clothes and boat.

Returning to Khemi, I felt that Set had been with me that night. I had fallen into the hands of the corsairs, and had not only returned alive, but with more gold coins than ten men have fingers and toes. Yet did this seeming good fortune come before my downfall, and lead to my present misery.

I tied my boat at the harbor, and returned to my hut. My wife Nefri and my six children rejoiced to see me again, fearing I had perished at sea. Nefri told me of the horrible misfortunes that had come upon Khemi that night: An infidel barbarian had slain one of the sacred Sons of Set—mayhap the same serpent that had so honored my family by taking one of my own sons that year. Also, the priest Thutothmes and ten or twelve others had been slain in the heart of a holy pyramid, and with them were the corpses of four yellow demons. 'Twas said that

the infidel took from the priest a jewel of great magical power.

To Nefri I showed the gold, and she rejoiced that no longer must we live in poverty. Yet it did not seem honest money, for it had been given me by the foreign priest-slayer Amra, and it was not inscribed with the god Set and the King's head like honest Stygian coins, but rather with moons and ships and strange barbarian kings from distant, demon-haunted lands. Nevertheless, we hid the gold in a cooking pot, and I took a small piece to the Bazaar of the Money-Changers to be exchanged for silver sethis and copper gurahs.

To the stall of Ona the money-changer I went and gave him the coin. He looked at it closely, and bit it. " 'Tis an Argossean half-argo," said he. "A rare thing to see, but since peace was made a few have crossed my counter." He gave me six sethis and two gurahs for it, and I did not bargain with him lest he ask me whence it had come.

I returned homeward in good spirits, for a sethi is a day's wage for a laborer, and the greatest catch I ever brought to market was worth but two and a half sethis.

Nefri spoke of many things: that we could move to a new home in the fashionable Zamlek quarter, that I could set up as a merchant, that our eldest son Hotpe might even study for the priesthood.

Emboldened, the next day I took a larger coin to Ona, while Nefri went on a walk through the Zamlek quarter, to see whether any man had nailed to his gate a bird's wing, signifying that he wished to sell his house. Again Ona looked at the coin, but this time he frowned. "Fisherman," he asked me, "what do you do with an Aquilonian luna?"

"A luna, worthy Ona?"

"A coin of Aquilonia, where men worship the demon Mitra and swear hatred undying against holy Set. Ho,

guardsman!'' he cried. ''This man brings me gold of Aquilonia.''

There is always a detachment of the royal guard in the Bazaar of the Money-Changers. Three men came to the stall, swords ready. To them Ona showed the coin. The captain of the guard squinted at it.

''Aye,'' he said. ''On one side the moon, and on the other the infidels show their filthy Mitra trampling holy Set. Come with us, fisherman.''

To the King's torture chambers I was taken, and there the High Priest Thoth-Amon himself questioned me, while his torturers worked their torments on my body. They brought the gold from my hut, and charged me as an accomplice of the vile Conan, who had slain the son of Set and the priests. Nefri and my children were also cast into prison and tortured, as the laws of Stygia provide for traitors and their families.

At last, the next summer, I came to trial before King Ctesphon and the High Priest. Nefri and but one of my children had survived the rigors of the dungeon, and her hair was all fallen out. The laws of King Tuthamon XVIII concerning aid to the foreign foes of Set and Stygia were read to us, and under these laws the High Priest pronounced our doom.

''Snefru, son of Mesu,'' he said to me, ''with your aid the infidel Amra, otherwise called Conan King of Aquilonia, a long-time foe of the True Faith and the Stygian nation, has slain a Son of Set, slaughtered twelve holy priests, and stolen from them the Heart of Ahriman. You have informed for him, and taken his gold for your treason. Our judgement is this: that your wife and child, and all your kin unto the fifth degree, be sacrificed to the great god Set as atonement for your impious deeds against him, and that you, Snefru, son of Mesu, be taken up the River Styx to the Holy City Without a Name, and

there put to such punishment as has not been given in Stygia for a thousand years."

On the floor of the Judgement Hall I swooned, for in that city, the heart and home of the worship of holy Set, the priests know all manner of torments which break the evildoer's body slowly and damn his soul to the dark gulfs beyond the stars. Recovering, I cursed aloud the infidel Conan, who had led me into the ways of sin against holy Set and of treason against my own land of Stygia. But nought did my words avail me, and that day I was put in heavy chains aboard a river ship and taken upstream.

Yet this end to my torments was not to be mine. On the way upriver, the ship was taken by Turanian desert raiders. All the priests were slain, and the boatman and I were taken into slavery and sold into Zamboula. Here, with body and spirit broken, I have worked for three years as a porter to a leather merchant, carrying huge bundles of hides about the streets. All Stygians shun me for my great crime, and all others scorn me as a Stygian and a worshipper of Set. Now that I am about to die, I have asked that a scribe be summoned, that my curse against him who is responsible for my misery be recorded for all the ages. I beg you all, pray to Set to have mercy on my unfortunate soul!

THE LION'S BRIDGE

by Ray Capella

The Lion of Mitra broods in his spell
Upon the edge of the bridge to Hell
The Chain of Life has still'd his wrath
'Til red Death treads across his path

The words were lost in a cacophony of echo down the gorge, as the messenger from Tarantia read them aloud. Berig reined his mount abreast of his companion and laughed in his booming bass. That, too, was lost in the maze of carven rock before them.

They stood their horses at the mouth of the ravine. Before them, almost filling the wider part of it, rose the great forms of giant, carven heads; monolithic stone gods that peopled the defile from end to end. Their huge, brooding faces glowered down upon the two travellers as they gazed at the message carved high on the brow of the nearest head.

Berig, the mercenary, shifted nervously as the echo died to a whisper and looked up at the blazing sun above them. He adjusted his basinet on his shaven head.

"So," he rumbled, "you can read the ancient writing. What of it? 'Tis an old superstition. Shall we stand in the sun the rest of the day?"

The other man regarded him calmly. His green eyes glinted in the shadow of his crested helmet. For a fleeting

second, Berig felt as if he were gazing at a wild beast. Then, the stranger motioned for him to lead the way.

Berig spurred his horse on at a fast walk, threading his way among the colossi. After a while, his back itched from having his companion behind him, for Berig considered all men his equals in treachery, and he slowed to let the other catch up.

What the messenger was up to, the mercenary had little idea. Far to the southeast, the barbarian king of Aquilonia had been defeated by trickery in the field of battle. Now the city of Shamar, in Aquilonia itself, was under seige by the Kothian army. Perhaps this pampered young scribe carried tidings of hope to the capital of Tarantia, although he came from the north. Berig studied him closely.

The stranger had qualities that annoyed Berig. Slightly taller than average, he had a compact build like the scholar he was supposed to be, could obviously read ancient records. His horsemanship and character also gave the lie to his courtly trappings and his gilded light armor. And his features were dark, aquiline. He was no more a native Aquilonian than the king, or for that matter, Berig himself.

"Why did you choose me to guide you, sire?" Berig mouthed the last word with heavy sarcasm, and added, "There were others at the garrison who know this trail. Some know it better than I."

"I picked you because of your reputation as a killer," the other said candidly. "I need a—warrior."

Berig laughed, roaring his admission. He was more flattered than insulted. Now he felt less insecure with the courtier. The man was almost half his size in girth, anyway, and Berig pitied him a little, for he had the strength and reach of a charioteer, and the other did not. And yet—

"If you needed protection, then," he asked, "why didn't you get a squad of men—or did you bypass the large outpost at the foothills?"

"My mission, subject to change, was for that outpost," the messenger explained. "But it was deserted. The king of Koth's schemes seem to have a long reach. I'm sure either he or his accursed wizard had a hand in it. In any case, I informed the captain at your garrison and started my return."

The mercenary was taken aback. If the citadel at the foot of the range was not manned, the way was open to Tarantia. Any fairly large force coming in a long detour across the northern boundary could take the weak garrisons. The few men at his post, in the plateau behind them would never withstand a large troop of men.

"Where is the 'Lion's Bridge'?" his companion asked, as if he had merely commented on the weather prior to this.

"Two more miles of this pass and you'll see it," Berig grunted. The heads of stone were now behind them and they rode through a narrow defile with unscalable walls on each side. He spurred his mount, thinking of an attacking force that might even now be at the garrison he had left. Suddenly, he jerked his reins. The horse reared. When the messenger had caught up, he barred the way with his own mount and held his naked sword before him.

"Who are you?" Berig asked. His blade flashed a warning as the other reined his horse sideways. "Keep your distance and answer me."

"My name is Arquel, Argossean by birth, Aquilonian by choice," the stranger smiled. He had not drawn his sword. He removed a wide bracelet from his arm and held it out. "As you know, I am a scribe of the court, and, at the moment, a messenger."

The ornament held symbols of the throne of Aquilonia upon it. Berig had heard only the king's palace guard wore this, but, even so, decided not to trust the man. However, he sheathed his weapon in contempt, for the man had not drawn his, and flung the armlet back at him.

"You come a long way for a courtier," the mercenary observed. "The long way, from the border, to the citadel. And now the shorter way across the mountains—perhaps ahead of an enemy column."

"Were I a spy, I'd not tell you that Tarantia's rear lies unprotected," Arquel countered, with an edge to his tone. He was growing impatient. "You guess correctly—there is a column headed through this, the only way to Tarantia. I did not come from there originally, for it was not there I learned of it. They seek to demoralize the capital by worrying it from the north, for the latest rumor has it that the king has escaped from Koth."

"Why did not you tell me this before?" Berig persisted. Arquel's shrug told him he did not believe a guide merited explanations. Once again, the feral glint shone from his eyes. The mercenary ignored it, adding, "Nothing now for us but to flee, as my garrison will do."

"Not if they follow the captain," Arquel commented drily. "He pledged his sword to the king before me, to delay the enemy. They fight a hopeless battle even now. Lead the way."

"Nay, ride before me, I trust you not." Berig argued. Arquel of Argos rode past him, a strange smile on his dark face.

"Arquel the Argossean," muttered Berig to himself, as they rode through the rocky pass. The sun was now at its zenith and the steep walls offered no protection from its glaring rays. Berig stared at the man ahead of him.

"You're the one who was prince of thieves in Poitain. They called you leopard."

The other man shrugged assent. Berig had heard of a strange man, who was at home in the library at Tamar, and who, rumors whispered, had once lived alone in the dark jungles of Shem. Then he snorted in disbelief. This gilded cockerel, survive in Shem's wilderness?

He was about to question Arquel with his usual bluntness when they reached the end of the pass. The road was now a wide trail that hugged the face of a great cliff. A hundred yards away, across the huge chasm, the face of the opposing crag rose white and stark in the sunlight. Thousands of feet below, a narrow river roared, winding its way through this rift in the plateau.

The trail led but one way—to the right, and onto a huge, rocky span that bridged the great gap. It was a single, cyclopean arch, thick and strong enough to support an army, wide enough to accommodate two chariots. As they approached it on stiff-legged, frightened mounts, they could see the great body of a crouching lion, carved to the left flank of the pass, where the bridge led into the opposite cliff 's face.

Arquel of Argos dismounted and led his horse, the guide following suit. He removed his crested helmet, slinging it to the saddle. "This is the only way through the mountains, is it not?"

"Aye, there's no other," the mercenary grunted. "The rest of this range is an impassable barrier. It's been called Mitra's own hell. Look at those bluffs beyond—what army of men could find their way past them? Only the sons of the gods could have carved their way across, as they did here and at the gorge. Move on, man, this is no place to tarry!"

Arquel moved ahead, nearer to the crouching statue of the lion. It was a massive figure, much larger than a

horse, of the same stone as the white escarpment. He held up a hand, and with the gesture his former, submissive manner disappeared. He said: "Listen!"

The two men waited, as echoes of movement reached them far back, in the pass they had just quit. The enemy was obviously past the stone heads at the gorge.

"Get on, fool," Berig swore and drew his sword. "Aquilonia is doomed, and you stand admiring the accursed scenery! You're no more Aquilonian than I. Stop in my path once more and I'll cut you down."

"Nay, this is as far as we go," Arquel said. He removed his short cape in one swift movement and lashed the sides of the steeds, which broke loose in panic and galloped on, past the statue and up the steep ravine beyond.

"Imbecile!" Berig cried, frozen in amazement as the messenger dropped the short cloak and drew his blade. "Would you stand alone against a troop of Kothian cavalry?"

"Nay, I bring a curse its fulfillment," Arquel said quietly. He grinned, eyes glinting like emeralds. "I read it to you before. 'Tis my last resort, and the reason I chose you. One of us must die here."

"Die then, dog!" Berig spat, and leaped forward. The Argossean sidestepped him, his back to the statue, and caught the next blow on his blade. The swords flashed in the sun, as the two surged back and forth across the width of the span, testing each other's skill.

Arquel fought a defensive battle, parrying each heavy blow with ease as they slid down his own steel. In a few moments he knew his skill matched the other man's greater reach. He nicked Berig's thigh to prove this to himself, and the mercenary added a bellow of rage to the cold sound of their clashing blades.

The Argossean had known of the ancient warning

upon the stone-god's brow long before coming here; there were time-worn scrolls on this, and more, at the vaults of the palace in Tarantia. Even in the face of many unearthly happenings he had witnessed, his character was more skeptical than superstitious, yet—as he had told Berig—this was a last gamble; the only recourse left now that the Kothian force was this far into the border.

Berig grunted and swore, realizing that his antagonist was playing for time. Now a troop of cavalry came into view, out of the pass across the chasm, as the mercenary pressed Arquel hard toward the nearby trail off the bridge.

The Argossean suddenly stopped fencing and commenced a systematic, slashing assault on his opponent, driving him back to where the stone lion crouched at the head of the span. They emerged from the shadow panting and thrusting at each other as the full Kothian force debouched upon the trail and out on the huge granite arch.

Armor-clad knights led their horses across, to halt fifty paces from the great statue as their bearded leader held up a hand. He took off his black helmet and watched the two adversaries.

Berig was desperate, casting glances at the troops that cost him fighting ground. He retreated a pace abruptly and removed his basinet, hurling it at his enemy's face.

The Argossean flicked the missile aside with his blade, dropping his guard for an instant. He now had his back near the statue's outermost edge. Berig lunged for the kill, but Arquel sprang nimbly onto the lion's paw, dealing the mercenary a backhand blow to the neck with his sword as he rushed past him.

In one swift movement, Arquel dropped his sword and was belly-down on the rocky paw. His left hand had swept out and grasped the mercenary's belt as the latter

swayed, his torso half out in space. Arquel braced himself and yanked the heavier man back onto the edge of the abyss. As the body slumped lifeless to the ground he spun on his heel to face the black-clad Kothian leader.

"Well fought," the man said, not without some admiration, " 'Tis unfortunate you dress for Aquilonia's court, for you must yield to us. Why did you rescue his carcass from the chasm?"

"Our friend here," Arquel grinned, prodding Berig's body with his toe, "has yet to serve for Aquilonia."

Two knights stepped forward at Black-Beard's gesture, but the Argossean turned away unconcernedly. He jerked the mercenary's body upright, lifting him onto his shoulder. Arquel moved back, and with a superhuman effort, threw the carcass full upon the stone lion's snout, spraying blood over the great head and mane.

"Ah yes, an offering," Black-Beard laughed. The two knights he had commanded stopped as Arquel turned and bent to retrieve his sword.

There was a short pause. The Kothians knew that the man must surrender himself or die fighting. Either way, he must die, for a small force bent on a diversionary mission took no prisoners. Men shifted uncomfortably amid the dust they had raised, helmets and spears glinting in the sunlight. The clinking sound of their armor and the nervous stirring of their mounts accentuated the silence about them.

The Argossean's thoughts underwent many changes in those few seconds. He felt he played the fool, risking all upon this ancient nonsense. Only he and his woman mattered, not the kingdom, where he was a stranger, nor the mighty king who ruled it. Only his coming death was real; and the warm sun on his face, the sword in his hand, the dusty, rocky surface he stood on.

There was a sigh of movement behind him. It was

almost imperceptible, yet, instinctively, his hackles rose. He sensed gigantic power stirring.

While still a child, he had once been startled by a twig that suddenly took to the air, transformed into the insect it really was. Later, he had often felt that if he watched an inanimate object long enough he would see it move. Now—uncannily—he felt that he would accomplish this childhood game if he were but to turn and gaze at the object behind him. And yet—he dared not move.

"It lives! It lives!" came a warrior's cry from the rear of the column. The two lieutenants had taken a backward step. Arquel stood rooted to the spot.

"The sun!" cried the Kothian leader. " 'Tis only the sun! Silence that man!"

As if in answer to Black-Beard's words, Arquel felt sudden movement behind him, incredible power unleashed! He left himself fall flat as a giant shadow leaped from behind; the cavernous roar of hell reverberated through the canyon.

The Lion of Mitra crashed onto the span, before him. Its great tail splintered the sword, not two inches away from his hand. Men and horses were thrown off the bridge like leaves shaken off a tree-limb, and the cry of horror came from every warrior's throat as they crushed upon each other on the dizzy perch, fighting to retreat into the pass. Even those beyond the creature's reach were pushing one another into the abyss.

Arquel whipped about, headed for the trail off the bridge, and found himself facing a gaping hole in the cliff-side, an opening some fifteen feet in diameter, left where the colossus had quit his place. A strong wind was rushing into it from above, as if the cavern beyond contained a vacuum, and he found himself swept inwards as he sprinted by its dark entrance.

He realized, as he was blown off his feet and rolled to the lip of the entrance, that the bridge had always led into

this. The trail in the steep ravine beyond was but an accident of nature aided, perhaps, by the hand of man. He clung to an outcropping on the very brink of darkness, a blackness the sun could not pierce.

Looking out he could see the white body of the stone lion, charging the mass of men on the shelving trail at the opposite side. The spears and swords of those who turned and fought broke on its impenetrable hide, as it battered its way invincibly through their ranks. Its back stood as tall as the head on a mounted man.

The wind tore at him, and as it screamed past into the opening beyond, he knew that it would never fill that space. For behind him, he sensed—there was no earth. Back there was another place—a place vaster than this world, where he knew no man belonged.

His muscles strained, arms bending him forward. He felt his thighs and legs dangling cold in space and strove to pull that part of his body in, feeling like a fly caught in a spider's web. For in that gulf behind him, his mind and his very skin felt something stir, something that was vast even in that great abyss. It chuckled hollowly in dark mirth; a sound that was no sound, but a thing he sensed. And it waited, floating there, for whatever would come through this portal between worlds.

Now there was stone beneath his knees, and Arquel struggled forward, flattened to the surface like a lizard. The air current keened through the chinks of his cuirass and his muscles knotted against its fury.

Beneath him was the point where sunlight ended and darkness began, and he knew it was part of a line that ringed the strange entrance. And he knew this door was struggling to close, for the rocks on the arch above were breaking off and rubble was showering into the wind. Nature itself seemed bent upon undoing what he had begun.

Outside he could see the cliffs heave and tremble.

Some new power had awakened.

Now his ankles and soles gripped the earth. His torso clung to the ground as if with a will of its own, bent on saving him from something too alien from Man or Death itself. The gale whipped and tore at him, but he remained in place.

When his torso felt the sun's warmth, he forgot caution and brought his legs up under his belly. He vaulted out, and for a moment his body was straight out in the opening, balanced between the push of his supple muscles and the strength of the screaming wind, only his hands gripped stone. His arms and shoulders scrabbled out, caught a ledge—and he rolled out and away.

The Argossean crawled to a safe distance and tried standing on the heaving earth. The cliffs rumbled and swayed. His back and arm muscles tingled with their exertion, but he forgot this as he watched the white ramparts shake like a waking giant.

Across the chasm, the Lion of Mitra struggled on the shelf-like trail. It had pursued the few remaining soldiers to the pass, but its own girth would not allow it to follow. The great stone beast roared its shattering, hollow cry and tried to turn, but even its perch was too narrow for its bulk. It clawed against the cliff-face, upright on its haunches, and twisted into space as the escarpment trembled. It turned end over end into the abyss, cracking to pieces on the canyon sides as it went, down and down into the torrent below.

Arquel of Argos did not see the broken statue plummet into the river. He darted far to the right of the ravine, searching for cover. On his left, the crag was caving in on itself, closing the door to darkness, showering tons of rock upon it. He coughed dust out of his lungs and dodged the boulders that came bounding down the trail. He backed into a rocky recess and froze there until the screaming world had stopped moving.

Slowly, then, he went up the ravine that was now a dizzy road, for its left-hand wall was but a rounded slope that ended on a sheer drop. The massive bridge still spanned the cliffs, but it was thinner. The place where its deadly guardian had stood was gone.

He was on the edge of the other half of the plateau, now. It led down and away to the south, blending up into a mountain-side beyond. A well-defined road circled the mountain's shoulder. Grazing near its wooded slope stood the two horses he had frightened. The Argossean wiped dirt from his face and started toward them.

WHEN SET FLED

by Fritz Leiber

After centuries of fear and rumor, the Hyborean tribes were streaming southward in a holocaust of destruction and conquest. The northern marches of Set had been breached and the broken armies of Tuthothomes XX were in full flight, nor would they be rallied until they reached the Styx and ancient Khemi—that great stand which saved the old Southern Kingdom was yet to be made. Meanwhile, the rich northern provinces of Set were doomed.

Nuthmekri was a craftsman of little fame, yet he chose to stay behind while greater artists fled. All yesterday the castle had been frantically a-bustle as the servitors of his patron Megshastes prepared for the flight southward too long delayed. Hurried footsteps, stumblings, strained puffings of slaves seeking to carry too much swiftly, impatient whinny and stomp in the courtyard of horses harnessed and hitched too soon, creaking of overloaded wagons, now and then a hollow snap as lashings parted that had been drawn too tight over loads too high—shouts, curses, wailings, and commands. Now all was delightfully quiet.

It was only a small statuette that Nuthmekri was preparing to cast, yet its form seemed to him perfect. The sand mold was ready, the little furnace was aglow, and

now Nuthmekri reached for an ingot of bronze. But here disappointment awaited him. His chest of metals was empty. Some slave must have looted it last night while he strolled in the meadows. Perhaps the fellow had heard the Hyboreans coveted bronze beyond all else and would sometimes show mercy to a man who gave it to them.

Nuthmekri's eyes roved questingly about his small tower room. There were a few statuettes and pleasingly shaped implements and utensils. These he passed over. High on one bare wall hung an ancient sword of bronze, dusty, cobwebbed fast, almost black. Putting stool on table, Nuthmekri was enabled to climb up and detach it.

Holding the antique weapon in his hand, Nuthmekri moved to the window. Through the narrow embrasure he could make out a nearby hilltop in the hot sunlight and a road crossing it. Suddenly there puffed up a cloud of dust, and the horsemen burst from it—ragged fellows on small bony mounts, with bows and circular shields and spears on whose barbed blades Nuthmekri fancied he could discern the rust of blood. There came to his ears a faint eager shouting.

Nuthmekri stiffened and for a moment he gripped the old sword like a fencer. Then he smiled bitterly and shook his head and while the horde continued to pour across the hilltop, turned away from the window to the furnace and sheathed the sword in the narrow, glowing crucible.

The slim, unbroken object was a long time melting. Again noise filled the castle—wild laughter, stampings, treadings, smashings and breakings, snarling curses of disappointment as signs of the previous looting were uncovered (an owner's self-looting—unforgivably mean and cheap—and in this Nuthmekri agreed with them), yells as edibles and potables came to light, ludricrous unintelligible howlings the emotional significance of

which only a barbarian mind could hope to comprehend.

By jerky stages the sword descended into the crucible. When the guard rested against the rosy lip, Nuthmekri took up the tongs and prepared to pour.

There was a heavy tramping on the tower stairs and a jabbering that increased in volume, then a jerking and pounding at the door, which was unlocked and only failed to open because it was being tried the wrong way—pushed instead of pulled. In the center of the shadowy room the crucible made a little sun. From it there jetted into the mold a slim, perfect stream, blindingly white.

The door was jerked open. For a moment the barbarians stood there, puzzled. Then one—perhaps he had seen molten lead poured on his fellows when they stormed the march fortresses—lunged forward and with one great swipe of his notched yet razor-sharp longsword cut off Nuthmekri's head.

The pulsing crimson fountain that arched up lazily fell finally straight upon the mold. There was a hissing and a puff of steam. The barbarian drew back a step. Then something tickled his primal sense of humor. He laughed loud and harshly and long.

The sand mold split from its bloody drenching and fell away from the tiny, black scaled figure, still faintly glowing, of a slim, robed and hooded woman, who regarded the intruders enigmatically. Her head was complete yet no spike of waste metal stuck up from it—Nuthmekri had poured just enough and no more.

Nuthmekri's body stopped writhing. His fingers uncurled from the tongs. A tiny branch of the metal from the fallen crucible ran along his arm, hardening almost instantly.

But the slayer of the sculptor was laughing at none of these circumstances. What had struck him as very funny

was that the slim shining stream of the statuette's pouring had been neatly twitched off by his victim a full three red-jetting heart-beats *after* the Hyborean's sword had shorn through Nuthmekri's neck.

LITERARY SWORDSMEN AND SORCERERS

EDDISON'S ZIMIAMVIAN TRILOGY

by Robert E. Briney

"Not by design, but because it so developed, my Zimiamvian trilogy has been written backwards."

*Eric Rücker Eddison**

The central theme, or guiding principle, of Eddison's Zimiamvian novels is perhaps best summarized by the following words of the philosopher George Santayana (words which Eddison came upon for the first time midway in the writing of the second novel of the trilogy):

> This divine beauty is evident, fugitive, impalpable, and homeless in a world of material fact; yet it is unmistakably individual and sufficient unto itself, and although perhaps soon eclipsed is never really extinguished: for it visits time and belongs to eternity.

In Eddison's words, Zimiamvia is "a special world devised for Her Lover by Aphrodite, for whom all worlds are made." In this world, and in its "crooked, spoiled" reflection, our Earth, "Aphrodite puts on, as though they were dresses, separate and simultaneous incarnations;" Her Lover, also a Deity of some never-

*Note: All quotations from Eddison are from his "Letter of Introduction" to *The Mezentian Gate*, Elek Books, Inc., London, 1958, xxiv + 247 pp.

quite-revealed sort, does likewise. The lives and interactions of these avatars, and the fascinating world(s) they inhabit, are the stuff of which the three novels are composed.

The first written of the Zimiamvian novels was *Mistress of Mistresses* (1935); this was followed by *A Fish Dinner in Memison* (1941). At the time of his death in August 1945, Eddison was working on a third book, *The Mezentian Gate*. Approximately one-third of the book had been completed, including the *praeludium* on Earth, and the great climax (the last four chapters), the latter containing, in Eddison's estimation, his best work. The middle two-thirds of the book existed only as a detailed "Argument with Dates." [Such an "Argument" was always the first step in Eddison's meticulously-plotted novels; that for *The Worm Ouroboros* (1926) is included as an appendix to that book.] Late in 1958, the existing portions of the book, together with the "Argument" and various genealogy charts and introductory notes and letters, were published in England by Eddison's widow and brother. Even in its unfinished state, the book is fit to stand with Eddison's other novels; and it illuminates much that was obscure and fills in much that was unsaid in the previous two Zimiamvian novels.

The order of publication of the three books was the reverse of their order according to the Zimiamvian chronology. Eddison's Zimiamvian dates are all reckoned *anno Zayanae conditae:* from the founding of the city Zayana. In these terms, *Mistress of Mistresses* covers a period of two years beginning on April 22 of the year 777 A. Z. C., ten months after the death by poison of the great King Mezentius of the Triple Kingdom. Aside from this book's "Overture," which takes place on Earth a few hours following the death (at age 90) of a man named Edward Lessingham, *Mistress of Mistresses*

is entirely a Zimiamvian story; it is essentially a "dream-world" fantasy, and leaves entirely unexplored the relations between our Earth and the Arcadian world of Zimiamvia. (Incidentally, the Lessingham who is one of the main Zimiamvian characters in the book is not the same Lessingham as the man who died on Earth in the "Overture": rather, they are both avatars of the same Deity, Aphrodite's Lover, who stands revealed, and even then not fully, only at the climax of *The Mezentian Gate*.)

The question of the relation between Earth and Zimiamvia led to the writing of the middle book of the trilogy, "A Fish Dinner in Memison"; this book, in its Zimiamvian portion, covers a period of five weeks in the year 775 A. Z. C., and ends nearly a year before the death of Mezentius (and hence approximately a year and a half before *Mistress of Mistresses* begins). In this novel, the story of the Earthly Edward Lessingham and his wife Mary is told in parallel with that of the Duke Barganax of Zayana and his beloved Fiorinda; Fiorinda, of course, is one of the many avatars of Aphrodite, and Barganax, of Her Lover. At the climax of the book, the strange fish dinner given by the Duchess of Memison, mistress of King Mezentius and mother of Barganax, the question is raised: "If we were Gods, what manner of world would we choose to make?" In answer, Aphrodite, (as Fiorinda) causes Mezentius to create our Earth (thus revealing to him his true nature as an avatar), and Aphrodite and Her Lover take on Earthly incarnations—as Edward Lessingham and Mary. At the end of the dinner, Fiorinda destroys this world that Her Lover has created.

But there is still a further question: "whether what took place at that singular party may not have had yet vaster and more cosmic reactions, quite overshadowing

those affecting the fate of this planet.'' It is this question, together with the (strangely related) problem of how and why King Mezentius came to die at the height of his powers, which led to the writing of *The Mezentian Gate*. This final (or initial) book of the trilogy covers a period of some seventy-four years (702–776 A. Z. C.) beginning twenty years before the birth of Mezentius and ending with his death. Thus this book, in its later portions, covers the same period as *A Fish Dinner at Memison* but the events of this previous book are not rehearsed again, but seen only second hand, through their effects on Barganax, Mezentius, the Duchess of Memison, and others. This book too is almost entirely a Zimiamvian story: only the *praeludium* takes place on Earth, recounting the last visit of Aphrodite to Lessingham, and his death in her arms. Although primarily the story of Mezentius, this book of necessity chronicles also the births and early lives of Barganax, Fiorinda, the Zimiamvian Lessingham (who appears only briefly), and most of the other major players in the other books.

Perhaps the best way to read the Zimiamvian trilogy is the order in which they were written: ''backwards.'' In this order, they seem to add up to a great deal more than the mere total of their chronological parts. Part of the effect and enjoyment is that of fitting pieces in a puzzle, seeing a wide and sweeping vista gradually form itself out of small isolated pieces; part is that of following the clues in a detective story, stumbling perhaps over the false clues and diversions, but coming at last upon the true solution. But perhaps the greatest part is the fascination of watching a creative and insatiably curious imagination at work: never content with the answers at hand, always following the will-o'-the-wisp of an idea that, when its demands are answered, leads only to new questions. Even with *The Mezentian Gate* in its unfinished

state, Eddison in 1944 could write to his brother: "The trilogy will, as I now foresee, turn to a tetralogy; and the tetralogy probably then (as an oak puts on girth and height with the years) lead to further growth." It is our enduring loss that these further works were never to be realized.

CONAN'S GREAT-GRANDFATHER

by L. Sprague de Camp

A medieval Irish historian wrote: "There be two great robber barons on the road to Drogheda, Dunsany and Fingall; and if you save yourself from the hands of Fingall, you will assuredly fall into the hands of Dunsany."

In +XX the twelfth-century Norman castle of the Dunsanys in County Meath was occupied by Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett, eighteenth Baron Dunsany (1878–1958). Besides living the sporting life of an Anglo-Irish peer and pursuing the fugitive fox with hounds and horn, Lord Dunsany also wrote sixty-odd volumes of stories, verse, and drama. Most of his fiction and drama is fantastic. Among his stories are many from which stem the entire present-day sub-genre of heroic fantasy, as developed in the tales of Eddison, Lovecraft, C. A. Smith, Howard, Leiber, Hubbard, Tolkien, and others.

Personally, Dunsany was six feet three or four inches tall, and lean, with large hands and feet. He was sometimes called "the worst-dressed man in Ireland." In youth he wore a short mustache, to which he added a somewhat straggly imperial in eld. He is said to have been a man of lively spirit and fiery temper, with a grand gift of poetic speech. Those who liked him found him fascinating, while those who did not called him arrogant.

He was an enthusiast for all games and sports, from chess (he was once the chess champion of Ireland) to lion hunting.

An Eton and Sandhurst man, in his youth he held a commission in the Coldstream Guards, serving with distinction in the Boer and Kaiserian wars. He was once stationed at Gibraltar, whence he journeyed into the Spanish countryside, gathering impressions later used in his Spanish fantasies, *Don Rodriquez* and *The Charwoman's Shadow*. Later he traveled the world, hunted wild goats in the Sahara, and made an abortive entry into British politics. Most of the second half of his long life he spent, when not traveling, alternately in his Irish castle and in an early nineteenth-century house in Kent England.

In 1940, Dunsany was lecturing on English literature at the University of Athens. The Germans overran Greece. Lord and Lady Dunsany escaped on a refugee-crammed ship just ahead of the conquerors, Dunsany wearing two hats because he saw no reason to abandon either to the enemy.

He began writing—with a quill pen, which practice he continued all his life—in the early 1900s. For a while he was associated with the Abbey Theatre in Dublin during the Irish Renaissance. But he did not get on well with Yeats, who (Dunsany thought) was prejudiced against titled litterateurs. So Dunsany got out of the Abbey Theatre. There was no feud; when he met Yeats from time to time in later years, Lady Dunsany told me, they treated each other pleasantly enough.

Lovecraft once called Dunsany's work: "Unexcelled in the sorcery of crystalline singing prose, and supreme in the creation of a gorgeous and languorous world of iridescently exotic vision . . ." which is a pretty iridescent piece of crystalline prose in itself. Some of Dun-

sany's tales are laid in Ireland, some in an Africa odder than any thought up by Edgar Rice Burroughs, and some in never-never lands of his own creation. He constantly threw off quotably epigrammatic sentences: "The Gibbelins eat, as is well known, nothing less good than man"; or "To be a god and to fail to achieve a miracle is a despairing sensation; it is as though among men one should determine upon a hearty sneeze and as though no sneeze should come"; or "It does not become adventurers to care who eats their bones."

He wrote over a period of half a century and got better all the time. Although his stories were always told in richly poetic language, some early ones failed to support the peerless prose with any particular plot or point. Later he pruned away pointless anecdotes and rhetorical extravagances.

At least nine of Dunsany's books contained stories in the heroic-fantasy genre or something very close to it: *The Book of Wonder, A Dreamer's Tales, Five Plays, The Gods of Pegana, The King of Elfland's Daughter, Plays of Gods and Men, The Sword of Welleran, Tales of Wonder,* and *Time and the Gods*. Of these books, *The king of Elfland's Daughter* is a fantasy novel, while the others are collections of plays and short stories. Of the collections, *Tales of Wonder* contains the most heroic fantasies. Dunsany wrote many other volumes of fantasies, such as *The Man Who Ate the Phoenix, Tales of Three Hemispheres,* and the Jorkens stories, some of which are very funny. But they are not heroic fantasies; many, for instance, are laid in modern England or Ireland.

In his earlier books of fantasy, Dunsany had a long association with the artist S. H. Sime, whose pictures fitted his work with marvelous appropriateness.

In his later years, Dunsany also wrote three auto-

biographical volumes: *Patches of Sunlight, While the Sirens Slept,* and *The Sirens Wake*. These are charming conversation pieces of reminiscence. But they are definitely for the leisurely reader. Like many Britons of his generation, Dunsany thought hunting the world's most fascinating occupation and gives it more space than non-hunters and wildlife lovers are likely to find tolerable. This attitude spills over into his fiction. *The King of Elfland's Daughter,* otherwise a fantasy novel in a class with *The Well of the Unicorn* and the Tolkien books, gets bogged down in lengthy accounts of deer and unicorn hunting. But this is all part of the internal conflict between Dunsany's own strong literary bent and the environment of very unintellectual, huntin'-shootin' Anglo-Irish gentry in which he was brought up, which made Dunsany what he was.

Although he had predecessors, such as the many exploiters of Arthurian legend and the lost-Atlantis theme, Dunsany was the second writer (William Morris in the 1880s being the first) fully to exploit the possibilities of heroic fantasy—adventurous fantasy laid in imaginary lands with pre-industrial settings, with gods, witches, spirits, and magic, like children's fairy tales but on a sophisticated, adult level. He was a master of the trick or surprise ending; many of his stories are mere anecdotes built around such an ending. And the dauntless hero sometimes meets an ironic and gruesome fate: "And, without saying a word, *or even smiling,* they neatly hanged him on the outer wall—and the tale is one of those that have not a happy ending."

Dunsany was a writer's writer. Although well known in his lifetime and having much influence on his younger colleagues, he never became a best seller, even though some of his plays were successfully produced.

As examples of his influence, the late eloquent scien-

tific writer Loren Eiseley, author of *The Firmament of Time, Darwin's Century,* etc., acknowledged Dunsany's influence. Dunsany's play *King Argimenes and the Golden Warrior* served as a springboard for the novel *The Well of the Unicorn* by "George U. Fletcher" (Fletcher Pratt). The Jorkens stories started a cycle of tales of fantastic barroom reminiscence, such as Clarke's White Hart stories and Pratt's and my Gavagan's Bar tales.

Dunsany's influence on Lovecraft is patent. Clark Ashton Smith also read him in youth, and his stories often show a marked resemblance to Dunsany's in concept and language, although Smith himself did not think that Dunsany had influenced him much; Poe, Bierce, and Chambers, he said, had had a much more formative effect upon him. In any case, Lovecraft and Smith influenced Howard, who also read Dunsany at first hand. So if Howard is Conan's father, Dunsany is one of his great-grandfathers.

Dunsany's influence is not a matter of accident, but partly the result of careful study of the craft of imaginative-fiction writing. He delivered a number of lectures and wrote a number of articles on the techniques of writing. He fulminated against certain sloppy but common usages of English: for instance, speaking of "weather conditions" (a tautology, because weather *is* a condition) "our Rome correspondent" (instead of "our Roman correspondent") etc.

His lack of wide popular success, on the other hand, may be traced to several causes. One is his fondness for exotic made-up names. Thus "The Sword of Welleran" begins: "Where the great plain of Tarphet runs up, as the sea in estuaries, among the Cyresian mountains, there stood long since the city of Merimna well-nigh amongst the shadows of the crags" and ends: "But back from the

ramparts and beyond the mountains and over the lands that they had conquered of old, beyond the world and back again to Paradise, went the souls of Welleran, Soorenard, Mommolek, Rollory, Akanax, and young Iraine.''

Some readers find these names fascinating and romantically evocative. But others, especially those who learned to read by sight-reading methods, are exasperated by these unfamiliar word-shapes, which mean no more to them than Chinese logograms.

Another cause of Dunsany's lack of great popular readership was his own main weakness: the fact that in many stories, the poetic eloquence conceals a lack of solid substance.

Finally, during the last half-century—until its revival in the last few decades—all fantasy seemed to have fallen victim to the machine age. Most readers are incapable of the ''suspension of disbelief'' whereof critics write. Hence they prefer stories of the here and now—although tales of super-spies who dash about in super-autos from one posh gambling joint to another and find a beautiful babe awaiting them in bed at each stop are really no more realistic than Dunsany's Gnoles and Gibbelins.

Withal, Dunsany's stories are a priceless possession for any lover of fantasy. Like first-rate poetry, they are endlessly rereadable. Those who have not read them have something to look forward to, and an assortment of Dunsany is the foundation stone of any fantasy collection.

THE DYING EARTH

by Robert E. Briney

. . . In the old age of the Earth, when the millennia have slowed its spinning and caused it to spiral closer to the dim red globe of the sun, the greatest of all empires is Grand Motholam. Its four kingdoms stretch inland from the Melantine Gulf almost to the unnamed ocean to the east, beyond the Maurenon Mountains. Largest of these four kingdoms is Ascolais, bounded to the north and east by the Land of the Falling Wall, to the south by Almery, and to the southeast by the Ide of Kauchique. The chief city of Ascolais is Kaiin, the white city, half in ruins, lying at the foot of the Porphiron Scar where the swift river Derna empties into Sanreale Bay and the Melantine Gulf beyond. Here, in these days of the dying Earth, the subjects of Prince Kandive the Golden cruise in their flower-laden barges, feast in echoing halls whose frescoes and bas-reliefs are so worn by time that the tales they once told can no longer be read, and wander off to make love in the shadows of the endless torch-lit gardens. The tempo of living has slowed, and there is nothing but feasting and dancing and loving with which to fill the days. It is the same in Sfere to the south, and indeed in all the cities of Grand Motholam.

It was not always thus. Even within living memory there were times when the pulse of life beat faster, and there was work, and even commerce—ships that came

from Canaspara, the city of fallen pylons across the Menaltine Gulf, or caravans that brought strange artifacts from the lizard-men of South Almery—and war. Some, far gone in wine, still speak of the mass slaughter of the populations of G'Vasan and Bautiku on Modavna Moor by Golickan Kodek the Conqueror. .

Outside the cities, once the tumbled ruins of the outlying districts have given way to the forests and fields, there is a different life—swift, exciting, brutal, and often quite deadly. Here in the wilderness live Thrang, the ghoul-bear, the black, man-eating Deodands, the bat-winged beaked demon pelgranes, the prowling erbs, and the gids, who leap twenty feet across the turf and clasp themselves to their victims.

The few humans who venture outside the cities, and the fewer still who make their homes in the wilderness, must go heavily protected. Not only by weapons—Liane the Wayfarer was lucky enough to live by his sword and his cunning for many years, but neither availed him anything when golden-eyed Lith betrayed him into the power of Chun the Unavoidable—but by spells as well. The common spells—the Charm of Untiring Nourishment, the Live Boots, the Spell of the Omnipotent Sphere, the Expansible Egg, the Spell of the Slow Hour—are known to almost everyone, but a few adepts like Turjan of Miir and Mazirian the magician have searched the old records and compiled books of many more obscure spells. Many of the most powerful of these were created by the arch-necromancer Phandaal, who for his sorcery was put to torture and death by Pontecilla the Pious, ruler of Grand Motholam. To him is due Phandaal's Gyrator, which causes the victim to spin about at ever-increasing speed until unconsciousness and death supervene, and Phandaal's Mantle of Stealth, and Phandaal's Critique of the Chill. The minds of most people

can encompass only two or three spells at a time, but after long and rigid training some have been able to hold as many as six at once.

There are records of only two extended journeys outside the cities. (One cannot count the visit of Turjan of Miir to the Wizard Pandelume in Embelyon, for Embelyon is not of Earth.) The first of these was the voyage of Ulan Dhor, nephew of Kandive the Golden, to the lost city Ampridatvir, the last of the Olek'hnit cities, on an island in the North Melantine. The story of his encounter with the demonic Gauns and his ending of the age-long dream of Rogol Domedonfors is well known in Ascolais. The second journey was that of Guyal of Sfere—north through Ascolais to the magic deserted city of Carchesel in the mountains of Fer Aquila, then across the mountains to Saponce, and thence to ruined Thorsingol, site of the ancient Museum of Man. There he defeated the being Blikdak, and was entrusted by the dying curator Kerlin with the care of the Museum. And there he, first of any man of his age, looked into the past of the Earth: he saw old Thorsingol, and the Sherrit Empire before it, and Golwan Andra before that, and the Forty Kades even before; he saw the war-like green men, and the knowledgeable Pharials and the Clambs who departed Earth for the stars, as did the Merioneth before them and the Grey Sorcerers still before; he saw the oceans rise and fall, the mountains crust up, peak, and melt in the beat of rain, he looked upon the sun when it glowed hot and full and yellow. . . .

And so ends a word-portrait of *The Dying Earth* by Jack Vance, one of the most vivid, exciting, and imaginative works of fantasy ever produced within the s-f field. The book was first published as a cheap, poorly-bound paperback by Hillman Books late in 1950. (Part IV of the book, the story of Liane the Wayfarer,

also appeared under the title "The Loom of Darkness" in the December 1950 issue of *Worlds Beyond,* another Hillman publication.) The book was poorly distributed and was on sale only a short time, but such was its impact on those lucky enough to have read it that it rapidly developed a reputation as one of the classics in the fantasy field. Battered copies were passed from hand to hand, or sold at hefty prices by dealers in second-hand books. Finally, in 1962, Lancer Books reprinted *The Dying Earth* as the first volume in its short-lived "Lancer Science Fiction Library," and a new and enthusiastic following sprang up. In style, mood, and overall effect the book is virtually unique. Echoes of its charm can be found in later stories by Vance, such as "The Dragon Masters" and "The Last Castle," but even Vance himself was never able to recapture fully the magic of the original. His one overt attempt to do so—a series of stories laid against the same background, published in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* and collected as an Ace paperback in 1966 under the title *The Eyes of the Overworld*—must be regarded as a noble failure. *The Dying Earth* remains on a plateau of its own, to be admired and savored, offering some new delight on each re-reading.

PRATT'S PARALLEL WORLDS

by L. Sprague de Camp

My late friend and collaborator Fletcher Pratt (1897–1956) was a connoisseur of heroic fantasy before that term was invented. He read Norse sagas in the original and extravagantly admired Eddison's *The Worm Ouroboros*. Curiously, he despised Howard's Conan stories, whose occasional crudities of concept and lapses of logic exasperated him. He hated heroes who simply batter their way out of traps by means of bulging thews, without bothering to use their brains.

Pratt also tried his own hand at such stories. Besides his collaborations with me (the Harold Shea Stories, *Land of Unreason,* and *The Carnelian Cube)* he wrote, in the late 1940s, two long novels laid in imaginary pre-industrial worlds of knights and magic, castles and empires,wars and piracies.

The first was *The Well of the Unicorn,* published in 1948 by the short-lived firm of William Sloane Associates. Despite a handsome jacket and beautiful maps by Rafael Palacios,the book had three strikes against it. One: the publishers, on the dubious theory that a writer should use different names in different genres, published the book under the pseudonym of "George U. Fletcher," thus robbing it of the benefits of Fletcher's not negligible literary fame. Two: not satisfied with Pratt's own brief introduction to the story, one of the

editors wrote another introduction and printed it before Pratt's. This ran the whole idea of explanatory prefaces into the ground.

Finally, there was the usual incomprehension of many reviewers, to whom a "real" novel must deal with the contemporary race question, or the morals of adolescents, or poverty in Applachia. Tony Boucher, although an admirer of the *Worm,* did not like the *Well* at all. Not surprisingly, the book was remaindered after a year or so. Later it was reprinted in paperback.

Notwithstanding, *The Well of the Unicorn* is in most ways an excellent novel, well-wrought and entertaining, which *aficionados* ought to know as well as they know, say, the HFs of Dunsany and Leiber.

The action takes place in Dalarna, a country much like medieval Scandinavia. Dalarna groans under the tyranny of the Vulkings, a race-proud military caste, comparable politically to the medieval knightly orders and militarily to the Romans.

Southwest across the Blue Sea lie the main lands of the Empire, comparable to the Holy Roman one of history. The Vulkings plot to gain control of the Empire, of which they are nominal subjects. South lie the turbulent isles of the Twelve Cities, classical Greek in their politics and late medieval (plate-armored cavalry) in their warfare. Other powers include the pirate Earl Mikalegon to the north and the blond heathen of Dzik across the sea to the west.

Taxed out of his farm by the Vulkings, young Airar Alvarson joins a plot against Vulking rule. He rises to leadership, has adventures, fights battles and conspiracies, learns from his mistakes, practices magic and has it practiced on him. He makes friends and foes: the pleasantly sinister old Doctor Meliboë the enchanter; the rough, passionate soldier-girl Evadne of Carrhoene (one

of the Twelve Cities); and finally the Princess Argyra, one of the daughters of the Emperor.

The story contains much more than derring-do. Characters argue out questions of good and evil, authority and voluntary agreement, and free-will versus predestination. The central theme is the philosophy of government: how to organize men to fight for freedom without losing freedom in the process? These questions are discussed with considerable subtlety, since Fletcher's sharp mind had thought much about them. The novel is also a warning against the solving of problems by easy answers, short cuts, or gimmicks. Airar knows magic; but, whenever he gets himself out of a jam by casting a spell, he finds in the long run that he has landed himself in a worse predicament than the one he escaped.

The novel has an abundance of color, movement, conflict, and intellectual stimulation. Its main weakness lies in its central characters. Airar is a tall blond, for there was a touch of Nordicism in Pratt's *Weltanschauung*. He is upright, brave, and resourceful; rather priggish and solemn; and not really very interesting despite his many interior monologues and soul-searchings. His eventual bride, Argyra, although charming and lovely, is even less developed. The best characters, as oft befalls, are minor ones: Evadne, Meliboë, Mikalegon, and Erb the Fisherman. Moreover, in an excess of subtlety, Pratt sometimes brushed over critical events in such a brief, casual manner that the reader has to turn back the pages to try to figure out how things have come to be.

Knowing Pratt as I did, I was aware of his sources to an extent denied most readers. While writing the novel, Pratt said he was literally dreaming the episodes at night before he put them on paper. Be that as it may, the influence of *The Worm Ouroboros* is strong. Moreover, Pratt deliberately used, as a springboard, Dunsany's play

King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior; he assumed that Dunsany's Argimenes had, some generations previously, founded Pratt's Empire.

Some of Pratt's characters have the same names as those in William Morris' pseudo-medieval romances, like *The Well at the World's End*. In fact, the whole idea of the well may have come from Morris. The incident of the slaying of the Vulking deserion was unconsciously lifted from one of Naomi Mitchison's stories of classical Greece, as Pratt confessed when I pointed it out to him. Poë's tale (Chap. xxvi) is based upon an actual incident that befell L. Ron Hubbard while yachting off the coast of Alaska.

At first, Pratt intended to bring the heathen of Dzik on-stage. He explained to me: "They're really Mohammedans—very nice, too." As things worked out, however, he found it expedient to wind up the story before the Dzik invasion.

The archaism of the language of the *Well* seems to derive largely from Morris and Eddison. Although Pratt's English is less medieval and therefore easier to read than theirs, he does not use it with quite their skill and polish, either. Some of his sentences achieve an almost Teutonic length and complication.

Still and all, the story rates—if not at the very top of the critical scale—at least well up among tales of HF.

The other story is *The Blue Star,* published by Twayne Publishers, Inc., in 1952 as the third of three novels presented in the large volume *Witches Three.** The frame for this story is a Prologue, wherein three men sit of an evening, drinking and talking philosophy. They speculate about possible worlds, and that night all three dream of such a world. The dream is the story.

*The other two were Fritz Leiber's *Conjure Wife* and James Blish's *There Shall Be No Darkness.*

This time, also, Pratt has an Empire. The model, however, is the Austrian Empire of the eighteenth century, say in the reign of Maria Theresa. The atmosphere, with its masked balls and its noblemen attended by gangs of thugs, reminds one forcefully of Casanova's memoirs. Whereas gunpowder is unknown, witchcraft works, in a complicated way. The ability is hereditary, being passed from mother to daughter. But it passes at the precise moment when the daughter is deflowered; mother loses the talent as daughter gains it.

Certain witches possess a jewel in the form of a small blue pentagram—the Blue Star of the title—worn as a pendant. Each witch lends this to her lover or mate. While he wears it, he can descry people's true emotions by looking them in the eye, but only so long as he remains faithful to his witch.

Again the hero, Rodvard Bergelin, joins a conspiracy—the Sons of the New Day—against the corrupt and tottering government of the Empress. The conspirators urge him to become the lover of a potential witch, Lalette Asterhax, because they need the talent of a Blue Star wearer in their intrigues. Neither Rodvard nor Lalette is in love with the other at first. Rodvard, a clerk in a governmental genealogical office in the capital city of Netznegon, has set his eye on a baron's daughter who visits the office. But he is bullied by his fellow conspirators into seducing Lalette. Lalette yields to escape the attentions of the brutal Count Cleudi.

Both are trapped in various plights and forced to flee, first together and then singly. Separately they voyage to the land of Mancherei. This province is under the rule of the Amorosian sect, which harps on the theme of love-love-love. The doctrines of the sect sound like a caricature of Christian Science. Pratt, however, can hardly have meant it so, since he was a Christian Scientist himself.

Reunited by happenstance in Mancherei, Rodvard and Lalette fall afoul of the all-powerful Amorosian priesthood. They are rescued by the Sons of the New Day; for the revolution has begun. But soon the leader of the revolution, Mathurin, who had been Cleudi's valet, turns out to be a bloodthirsty, ruthless fanatic of the Robespierre-Lenin stamp. So Rodvard and Lalette must flee again.

The novel is more pretentious but less successful than *The Well of the Unicorn*. The setting is described with vivid minuteness; nearly every casual piece of conversation throws out a flash of rich detail. This is a real achievement. As in the other novel, there are subtle disputes about morals, politics, religion, everything under the sun.

In fact, that is the trouble. The setting overwhelms the chief characters. Whereas Airar, if a bit of a stick, is at least a resolute and competent hero, Rodvard is nearer to one of these wretched unheroes that make so much modern fiction dismal reading. A shy, gangling youth, well-meaning but ineffectual, with no particular skill save that of tracing noblemen's pedigrees, Rodvard accomplishes hardly anything on his own steam. Aside from escaping from a few tight fixes, he is the passive object of others' actions rather than an actor in his own right. When he does assert himself, he usually bungles. When he tries to speak, he gets only as far as "I—" before somebody interrupts.

Lalette, with her shrewish temper, is a more positive character. But she, too, accomplishes little save, by desperate sleights and shifts, to escape from encompassing perils, first from Cleudi and later from lecherous Amorosian priests. Although some of the minor characters are vivid, most of these are singularly repulsive middle-aged and elderly women. A Doctor Remigorius plays much the same part that Meliboë does in the *Well*

(or, for that matter, that Eddison's Doctor Vandermast does in the unfinished Zimiamvian trilogy), but he has a much smaller rôle.

Parenthetically, in many heroic fantasies—including these two—there is a good deal of fornication, apparently without contraceptives. Yet none of the women ever seems to become inopportunely pregnant.

Is *The Blue Star* worth reading? Well, yes, I would say so. Pratt's stories always move right along. Something is always happening. His writing is full of novel conceits, flashes of wit, and interesting turns of phrase. And the setting is so lush and vivid that perhaps you won't mind the *faiblesse* of the characters. However, I would not say the story is worth going to much time, trouble, and cost to obtain.

When he finished *The Blue Star,* Pratt told his friends that he had planned a third fantasy novel. The chief character, he said with shrewd self-judgement, would be a woman, "because I've learned that my female characters are stronger than my male ones." This woman, finding her modern life hard and feeling sorry for herself, would wake up in the body of another woman of 1,800 years ago, on the German frontier of the Roman Empire. There she would learn what real hardship was.

However, with the approach of the Civil War centennial, Fletcher became so busy with better-paying nonfiction that, during his last few years, he gave up fiction altogether. So we shall never know how the story would have come out.

OF WORMS AND UNICORNS

by David Hulan

Several issues back in *Loki* (a fanzine I publish), I said that I would be interested in an article comparing Eddison's *The Worm Ouroboros* and Pratt's *The Well of the Unicorn,* two books which I felt, from several readings of the latter and a couple of false starts on the former, to have certain similarities. The only comment that I got was from Buck Coulson, who after titling and by-lining an "article" wrote: "There is no comparison between *The Well of the Unicorn* and *The Worm Ouroboros.* They are completely different in theme, style, and treatment."

Recently, I finally, in the course of being sick and therefore having the time to read something that can't be read in snatches, ploughed my way through *The Worm Ouroboros.* Now I feel I am qualified to write such an article myself, and since no one else has volunteered, I will.

There is no comparison between *The Well of the Unicorn* and *The Worm Ouroboros.* They are completely different in style, theme, and treatment.

However, mere lack of similarity between the books isn't going to stop me from writing an article I said I wanted to do, especially since every time I read *The Well of the Unicorn* I like it better, and it moves further up the list of my very favorite books. In fact, right now I can't

think of one I'd rate above it, although I might change my mind later. And contrast with *The Worm* is a convenient hook for an article about it, if nothing else.

Here are two books which at a very superficial glance bear a certain similarity. Both are set in pure-fantasy worlds (the "Mercury" of *Worm* has nothing whatever to do with the planet; it is, like the world of *Well,* an alternate Earth as regards its flora, fauna, length of day, etc.). Both have wars and other military adventures as leading topics. Both admit to magic, but neither depends on it for the achievement of constructive ends; to both, magic is a destructive force which can affect the real world, but which is not so powerful that a brave and determined man cannot overcome it. They are not of the sword-&-sorcery *genre* in any but the vaguest sense.

Further superficial resemblances could be found, no doubt, but the differences loom much larger and are much more important. Eddison was a lover of high style in his writing, and delighted in the most flamboyant prose and extravagant descriptions, weaving the reader about with a web of words which while pleasant tends to obscure what is happening. It is perhaps the most pronounced feature of the book and is why it cannot be read in snatches—deep purple prose of this sort takes time to get immersed in, and until you have read a chapter or two you (or I, at any rate) have difficulty in thinking in the author's vocabulary (which seems 18th century Irish). *Well,* on the other hand, is written in a clear, straightforward style after the manner of most well-done modern popular fiction; slight archaism is permitted in such incidents as the Tales of the Well, where the speech is that which would come naturally to the narrator, but never does the prose become an apparent end in itself as it is in much of *Worm.*

Once you have gotten past the florid writing, there is

really not very much to *The Worm Ouroboros*. It is an adventure story, pure and simple; its only message is the one that Heinlein had in *Glory Road*—that after heroes have done their jobs, if they have done it thoroughly, they are no longer necessary. Heinlein, in his usual manner, lets the action continue on and trail off in a realistic way; Eddison, in what appears from experience with this one book to be his usual style, pulls a rabbit out of the hat and puts the Worm's tail in its mouth. Neither is very satisfactory to the reader, and I didn't care greatly for either book.

Pure adventure stories in themselves are fine—I am a great lover of pure adventure as anyone who knows my tastes could tell you—but it is possible for a story to be great adventure and much more besides, and *The Well of the Unicorn* is a premier example of this.

The most obvious message in the book is simply that it is necessary to achieve anything worthwhile by one's own efforts; any attempts at shortcuts only result in the gain turning into something other than what was desired. From the drawing of Gython to Airar's bed by magic, which ended with her cry, "If it were only Visto!", through the tales of the Well, and how, though it brought peace to those who drank, it exacted a price which seems to those of us who value free will a terrible one, to the ultimate use of magic by Airar in coming to his father's death-scene, the use of any means other than the wit, strength, and courage of the striver was inevitably rewarded with gifts which turned to ashes in the hands of the recipient. Meliboë the enchanter is the archetype of the short-cut artist—although he possesses skills and wisdom above almost any other in the world, he is doomed to be never truly effective even in serving those whom he would unselfishly help; instead of using his real intelligence and vast knowledge in a conventional way,

he persists in trying the impermanent ways of magic. Airar, great as is his personal affection for the old magician, is eventually forced to banish him in order that his well-intentioned efforts to help may not undermine the whole of the anti-Vulking revolution.

Second only to this is the question of government. Three existing governments are well drawn in the story, and Airar is perpetually at a loss as to which is to be preferred. First there is the Vulking system, where the state is everything, and all its citizens devoted to its welfare, in return for which the state will presumably insure their safety and well-being. Second is the system of the Dodekapolis, especially Carrhoene, which is in effect anarchy, with the strong taking what they like and the weak doing with what is left. Third is the Empire under the Well—by which means the quarrelsomeness inherent in the Carrhoene system is eliminated without the iron discipline of the Vulkings, but at the cost of a great loss of initiative and will. A fourth system, that of Os Erigu, is shown but found ultimately unworkable. This is the idea that each man is free to join at will under the banner of a leader and to leave at any time he chooses, but that while he is serving the leader he must obey wholeheartedly. While looking attractive at first sight, it founders on its inability to meet adverse conditions, as the Confederate States of America, which were organized on much that principle, discovered.

What, then, is the answer? Pratt wisely does not even try to give one, because no one has ever been able to find one in the past and it is unlikely that anyone will ever find one in the future. The solution, such as it is, is the solution that has always existed and which will probably continue to—take a bit of Carrhoene and a bit of Briella, varying the proportions to the situation, and make do as best you can. It is not, after all, essential to be

philosophically consistent in your government, and no real government is. The closer they approach it, the more unbearable living in them becomes. And this, ultimately, is the point of this facet of the book.

Another point which the book makes is that while peace is wonderful and war is hell, there are times when the price that must be paid for peace is too dear, and war is necessary. The Tales of the Well are perhaps the chief illustrative examples of this point, albeit they are also significant in pointing up the other issues which Pratt wishes to air. For instance, when Vulk the Ninth decided that he could not defend himself against the father of his beloved and drank at the Well, he was indeed freed from the necessity of that war—but the means was the loss of his mistress by her repentance and return to the Church, which was his reason for avoiding the war in the first place. Nothing was gained and his crown was lost as well.

Or again, when Brodry and Bardis, Argyra and Aurareus, seeking an end to their personal quarrel, went to the Well, they found an end to the quarrel right enough, but Aurareus became a homosexual and by thus dropping out of the picture as a rival of Bardis effected the result. This is hardly a desirable means of settling an eternal triangle—yet it is the sort of solution that reliance on such means as the Well forces upon one. In a sense this is a part of the first point—that anything which is to have lasting value must be attained without magical shortcuts. Sometimes that means war or other unpleasantness.

And perhaps the most significant scene in the entire book is in the Fourth Tale, when the she-wolf who drank at the Well is unable to kill the deer though she be dying of hunger. A wolf cannot live without violence; its metabolism will not allow it to become a vegetarian. Symbolically this may be considered a fact of human

nature as well—not that violence is necessary, but that by tinkering with the natural instincts of a human you may make impossible something which is necessary to his life, and thereby you may with the best intentions in the world still kill him. The whole book is on one level a strong argument against any sort of artificial influencing of human behavior, phrased entirely differently from the classic science-fictional devices of the same nature. What does the Well do, after all, but implant a psychological compulsion against violence?

Pratt was a noted military historian as well as a writer of fiction, and this is evident throughout the book. Even the most superficial reading of the two books under discussion will reveal that Pratt knows a great deal about military tactics and Eddison knows virtually nothing. This is not necessarily a fault in Eddison; he never really tries to describe much in the way of tactics. His idea of a battle is that these two armies meet, with whichever one he wants to win this time taking the other in the flank, and then the mighty heroes of both sides hack away at each other until one or the other army gives up and runs away. Pratt, on the other hand, gives very good tactical dispositions for his armies (which may be only a few score), has well-worked-out military organizations, and in general shows that he knows what he's talking about.

A very significant thing which the two books have in common is the lack of the typical adventure-story dichotomy of Good and Evil. There are very few characters in either book who can be called truly evil—they may be opposed to the protagonists, but their motives in their own ways are as valid and reasonable as those of the protagonists themselves. The Witches were less honorable than the Demons in *Worm,* but this was treated as part of their nature and not as a conscious evil. Gro, to my mind the most interesting character in the book, is

constantly changing sides, but one feels that at every turn he is really, honestly changing his mind—that he is not a born traitor but simply a person with so great an ability to see both sides of a question that he cannot refrain from moving from one to the other as his sympathies shift.

In *The Well,* there is even less of the "good guys vs. bad guys" bit. If the slaughter of the Mariolan syndics by Vanette-Millepigue was unnecessarily bloody, it was no more than rebellious cities usually receive, and in general Mariupol seems not to have fared worse than most. The Vulkings were strong rulers and favored their kind over the Dalecarles or other subject races, but in general the picture of the land under the Vulkings resembles that of the Roman or Persian Empires—a stern and strong government, but one that was reasonably fair and which did not oppress their subjects as long as the laws were obeyed.

In short, the countries of *The Well* are pretty much like real countries, with no certainty of right or wrong but only a matter of relative preference—and that is likely to vary with the individual reader. Pratt intended that you identify with Airar and his goals, but I can imagine many people preferring one of the other societies. The Empire is a real Utopia for those who are for peace at any price—Carrhoene is practically an Objectivist state (before the "dog-smellers" took over)—Lacia is appealing to those who long for a strong state to protect and direct them. The characters in the book, like the Vulking deserion, the Star-Captains of Carrhoene, Sir Ludomir, and Earl Mikalegon, all are genuinely convinced that their system is the best, not because it is of the most benefit to them personally but because they are convinced that it is the best for all. And Airar, like the reader (in most cases), is not convinced by any arguments but sees the weakness in all, and in so doing he begins to realize that

there are questions which may have no satisfactory answer.

I would like to see some of the better fan artists go to work on these two books; *The Worm* has only a few illustrations and those rather poor, and *The Well* has none at all except for maps. There is a wealth of material here for illustration; both books abound in visual imagery crying for the hand of a good artist to put them on paper or canvas. Someone who likes scenes of large armies, for instance, has a natural in the march of the Duke of Salmonessa over the causeway to Mariola; the burning of Os Erigu, the summoning of Gython, the exorcism of the demons from the iulia, any of the many battle scenes, especially the burning of the ships in Bear Fjord (and the trapping of Earl Mikalegon by the bear is good cartoon material in itself), or a group portrait of the Star-Captains, one of the most striking groups in fiction; from *The Worm* the opportunities are if anything greater, because Eddison describes so many impressive landscapes as well as much of the same sort of thing as is given in *The Well*. I strongly recommend these books as sources for heroic fantasy material in the next Art Show.

In conclusion, here are two certified classics of the heroic fantasy *genre,* two books which should be read by anyone with any pretensions to be a serious devotee of this branch of literature. I feel that *The Well of the Unicorn* is the better of the two books because of its greater depth of meaning; it is also much easier reading. But reading the Eddison book is an experience which no one should miss; the only precaution is to be sure that you will be able to read it without too many interruptions. Otherwise the flavor will be lost and with it the enjoyment that should be yours—and that would be your great loss.

KNIGHTS AND KNAVES IN NEUSTRIA

by L. Sprague de Camp

In the 1920s and 30s, Leslie Barringer (1895–1968), a British civil servant and editor, wrote several superior medieval novels, published in Great Britain and well reviewed. Three of Barringer's novels concern us because they are on the borderline of heroic fantasy. These are *Gerfalcon** (Heinemann, 1927); *Joris of the Rock* (Heinemann, 1928); and *Shy Leopardess* (Methuen, 1948). Another novel, *Kay the Left-Handed,* is straight historical fiction (King John's England) and concerns us not.

The long novels of the *Gerfalcon* series may be called the Neustrian trilogy, because they are laid in a medieval kingdom called Neustria. Now, there once was a real Neustria. This was the name given the northwestern quarter of Merovingian France; but it vanished from the maps in the ninth century. Yet the author makes it plain that his tales take place in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, at the time of the Hundred Years' War and Joan of Arc in the real world. The characters look back on the Crusades and forward to the fall of Constantinople to the Turks. Cannon are mentioned but do not appear on stage.

*Pronounced "jur-FAWL-kun." However, the county of Ger in the story would presumably have the French pronunciation, "zhair."

Barringer's "Neustria," then, is a fictional doublet of the real medieval France. His provinces of Nordanay and Honoy are doublets of the real Normandy and Brittany. Likewise Germany is called "Franconia"; but England and Italy appear under their real names. The only reason I can think of for this device is that Barringer wanted to tell some medieval tales but wanted to create his own cast of kings and nobles. He wanted to arrange them in time and space as he wished without stumbling over the history of the real medieval world, which would certainly have gotten in his way. This is the advantage of using a wholly fictitious world for a story of heroic fantasy. Although Barringer wrought skillfully, the juxtaposition of real and imaginary geography makes this reader a little uncomfortable.

Gerfalcon tells about Raoul, Baron of Marckmont, a small young man with a talent for verse and music, a stout sword arm, and a moral standard pure to the point of priggishness. We see Raoul as a boy in a monastery school, then as a ward of his uncle, Count Armand of Ger. Raoul gets into a scrape, is flogged, and runs away. He rescues the witch Sabelle from an attacking peasant and so gets the local coven on his side. Sabelle gives him refuge (much as Zelaya does Conan, although I doubt if there is a connection) and a password to the other witches.

After further adventures, Raoul becomes a page to Red Anne, mistress of the "butcher Count" Lorin of Camscapel and mistress, in another sense, of a witch coven.* When Count Lorin captures another count by treachery and is gloating over his mutilated victim, Raoul kills Lorin and escapes from the castle by a secret passage.

*A village in the Count's demesne is called Capel Conan. Conan is of course a common Celtic name, as in the medieval Dukes of Conan of Brittany and in A. Conan Doyle.

After still more adventures, Raoul reclaims his barony and succeeds his uncle as Count of Ger. He leads his men-at-arms against a raid by Vikinglike "Easterlings" and cleans out the robber's hold at Camscapel. He is besieged in a church tower by Joris of the Rock, a brigand, and finds his true love.

I learned that a disadvantage of being a medieval French nobleman on the run was that one could not work for pay. If one did and were found out, one might be held to have forfeited *(dérogé)* one's nobility.

Joris of the Rock is a prequel-sequel to *Gerfalcon,* since it deals with the same locale and characters, begins earlier, and ends later. The main characters are the bandit Joris, his sweetheart Red Anne, and his son Juhel by a girl he once raped. We learn how he came to be outlawed (his mother was burned as a witch, and he killed the priest responsible); of his love for Anne, long unfulfilled until she joins him after Raoul kills Count Lorin. The siege of Raoul in his tower by Joris is told again, but this time from the side of the attackers instead of that of the defenders. As far as I know, this is a unique way of describing a fictional event.

Old King René's legitimate successor is his frivolous nephew Thorismund, whose rival is the king's illegitimate son Conrad (a real medieval René was King of Naples, Duke of Anjou, and Count of Provence; but the connection is verbal only); Joris kidnaps Thorismund, but Anne unconvincingly suffers conversion and helps the prince to escape. The king dies; Conrad's partisans revolt and are destroyed in a great battle. Raoul of Ger hunts down Joris and his band. Joris is slain by his own son, who does not know the relationship and who, at the end of the story, means to enter the Church.

Shy Leopardess begins about ten years after the end of *Joris*. The main characters are Yolande, the 14-year-old daughter of the Duke of Baraine, and two pages, Lioncel

and Diomede. Yolande's castle is captured by a gang of outlaws, secretly hired by her villainous uncle, who becomes her guardian when her father is slain in the fight. To obtain control of her lands, her uncle betroths her to his son Balthasar, who grows from a self-conceited youth into a practicing sadist.

Escaping the sack of the castle, the pages go adventuring with an old-fashioned knight-errant. Yolande is wed to Balthasar, whose idea of fun is to throw her kitten to his hounds. The marriage, however, is not to be consummated until Yolande reaches sixteen. One of the pages (now squires), sent with a message to Balthasar, is held by him in his castle and compelled to fight a lion (very well done) before being released.

Balthasar also becomes involved in a plot against King Thorismund. Yolande, with the help of her kinsman Raoul of Ger, discloses the plot. With the aid of Lioncel and Diomede, she traps Balthasar and kills him. Both squires have become her lovers, and the reader is intensely curious as to which lad will get her in the end. Barringer solves this problem, in a brusque and rather far-fetched way, in the course of a final battle.

All three books have much talk of witchcraft and the Old Religion. Barringer evidently accepted the witch-cult theory of the late Margaret Alice Murray.* Only in *Joris*, however, does the supernatural actually play a part. Red Anne, by putting her page Ivo into a prophetic trance, foretells the future. Later, the ghost of her dead handmaiden Lys appears at a coven meeting and reveals certain facts. So *Joris* is the one real heroic fantasy; the others are heroic but not exactly fantastic.

Of the three, I think *Gerfalcon* the best. Raoul, if a bit of a Galahad, is still an intelligent, lively, and likable

*For my opinion of Miss Murray's theory, see my wife's and my *Spirits, Stars, and Spells*, pp. 127–31.

hero. *Joris* suffers from being sprawled out over a longer period and shifting about from one point of view to another. Of its two main characters, neither is very attractive, Joris being a complete ruffian and Juhel a pious, sexless little twerp. Red Anne—a fine, full-blooded character—much reminds me of Jirel of Joiry; but C.L. Moore assures me that she had never heard of Barringer's novels until I asked her about them. *Shy Leopardess* starts well, drags a bit in the middle, and altogether rates somewhere between its two predecessors.

While the trilogy is only borderline HF, it is still well worth reading.

FAFHRD AND ME

by Fritz Leiber

Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser were born of the Bankrupt Thirties and like true depression children they didn't earn a cent for years and years—five, to be exact.

It was 1934. Five years earlier the market had crashed; the Wall Street chaps had jumped from their windows or lived for months and years in fear of red revolt by the apple-sellers and the bread-line men; one of them had gone haring off to lay the groundwork for Alcoholics Anonymous.

And in 1934 prosperity still seemed a-crumble to those of us who were around, despite the small beginnings of social security; in the next year Congress would vote the president four billion dollars for plain unemployment relief—the WPA, PWA, and such—a desperate bribe to desperate men. Midwestern bank robbers like Dillinger were folk heroes.

Jobs seemed impossible to come by and were often rather odd: during the past two years I had been hiring out as an Episcopalian minister; my friend Harry Fischer had been putting on puppet shows featuring the chuckling murderer Punch and the grisly hangman Jack Ketch.

Twenty-five dollars a 48-hour week was a princely wage for college graduates; the Blue Eagle of the NRA was affrighting business men while giving them unconfessed hope. Fascism was gathering its final hor-

rendous strength in Europe. Most extroverted brave young radicals were Marxists of some stripe; the introverted ones patched their lives together week by week, hunted work, played chess or the newly-invented contract bridge, read voraciously, and dreamed. The lavish movie houses of the same decade—Balaban and Katz baroque—seemed haunted places. TV, using whirling metal Nipkov disks as scanners, was an experiment inside GE labs. Pee-wee golf had replaced the luxurious private links with their marble-lined locker rooms. H. G. Wells was predicting in *The Shape of Things To Come* an America with the clockwork all run down, and in very truth fear and lethargy still gripped our land.

The two creators of Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser shared this uneasy lethargy. In the summer of 1934 my friend Harry Fischer had written me from Louisville, Kentucky: "I am static for fear that any motion would be fatal. The Gods have laid my soul aside to moulder for a time," and I had written to him from Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey:

"We still have those great foreknowledges of ourselves that you call adolescent fancies. But they will become mouldy and rotten and the trolls will creep into them greedily if we do not act soon. Our dreams will become the nests of little gray ones, unless. . . .

"But there is much of strong hope," I went on to say, and indeed this was true for that September I received from him a long letter in which was embedded his wholly original, seminal fragment, which I also quoted in full in the foreword to my Arkham House *Night's Black Agents:*

> For all do fear the one known as the Gray Mouser. He walks with swagger 'mongst the bravos, though he's but the stature of a child. His costume is all of gray, from

gauntlets to boots and spurs of steel. His flat, swart face is shadowed by a peaked cap of mouse-skin and his garments are of silk, strangely soft and coarse of weave. His weapons: one called Cat's Claw, for it kills in the dark unerringly, and his longer sword, curved up, he terms the Scalpel, for it lets the heart's blood as neatly as a surgeon. And this one was well feared, for he was sly as a wolverine, and while a great cheat and hard to engage in a fair quarrel, yet he did not fear to die and preferred great odds to single combat. And his style of fencing was peculiar, intermixed with strange side-steps and glides and always an attack wavering and elusive, and the sudden end at the upward flash of Scalpel from the very air it seemed. And many who claimed enmity to this one were found strangely strangled as by their own hands. So the Gray Mouser was feared and only drunken bravos dared a quarrel and they dissuaded quickly by wiser companions.

Until one night, the market night, the huxters all acry and horns blaring wares and smoky, stinking torches flared yellow-red in the foggy air—for the walled city of the Tuatha De Danann called Lankhmar was built on the edge of the Great Salt Marsh—there strode into the group of lounging bravos a pair of monstrous men. The one who laughed the merrier was full seven feet in height. His light chestnut hair was bound in a ringlet of pure gold, engraved with runes. His eyes, wide-set, were proud and of fearless mein. His wrists between gauntlet and mail were white as milk and thick as a hero's ankle. His features were clean cut and his mouth smiled as he fingered the ponderous hilt of a huge longsword with long and nimble fingers. But ne'er the less . . . .

Anyhow, they met, and the saga of how the Gray Mouser and Fafhrd of the Blue Eyes came to the innermost vaults of the City of the Forbidden God and there met death in the moment of victory in no common fashion, was begun.

In a letter postmarked September 24, 1934, I replied:

Last night I walked down by devious paths to the sea. And there I sat beside a covey of silvern gas tanks, floating in the light of a hidden moon. Upon a bulkhead I crouched and the sea lapped subtly at the rocks around my feet.

And it came to pass then (this "then" indicates something not subsumed under our time-sense), as men shall predict in the distant future, that a low black craft slid into the sea that lay before my eyes. In the back rose the omnious frame of Fafhrd, who, clad all in black, was nursing the boat along gently by means of a slender pole whose other end conversed with the denizens of the mucky bottom. Athwart gleamed a ray of silver, his gigantic longsword, which he called "the Winged Weight," because others were unable to raise it easily and yet he himself preferred to fence with it deftly rather than to use the great two-handed swinging stroke (which latter the bravos feared the more, being easily impressed).

And this night his fingers were continually edging toward its handle, for men have known of "strays" from that other sea which they sought: strays sometimes fanged and sometimes with gigantic suckers that drew the brains out through the nose. And if the "Others" knew of his and his companion's coming they might not be so careful about the sluice gate between the alien waters. "After all," as the High Priest of the City of the Forbidden God said, "Our little pets can hardly kill more than a few thousand men before they perish in the sea our space adjoins."

And ever and anon Fafhrd would change their course in an imperceptible fashion when a whisper floated back from the bow, where the grays of the Mouser's garments hung over the sea like a ghost. Even the bared blade of Cat's Claw he had wrapped in the thinnest of gray leather, that any strays or spies might not see it before they felt it. Through a strange scopic instrument he was peering into the sea—only one noted that the instrument made no ripples (as the boat did) where it entered the

deeps; and one knew that it was not into our local waters that the instrument peered. About the head and shoulders of the Gray Mouser a multidimensional distortion became apparent.

Beyond this little is known, except things that were said by the sailors who sometimes drift past the Great Salt Marsh that lies beside the city of the Tuatha De Danann called Lankhmar. And these afterwards died of the dread Gnousar sickness. But that the Gray Mouser and Fafhrd were in no way scientists or mechanics, but brought up some instrument while diving for relics of the lost continents. And at the same time there came these mysterious deep teeth marks in the blade of the latter's long-sword—of this there can only be the most reasonable doubt. But that the opening into the city where . . . (certain heresies even the king objects to) . . . was at times near Madagascar and at times near the coast of New Jersey, and that flames had only recently licked through where water only should come, and that the Gray Mouser had plotted the course or cycle of the opening and that snail tracks were afterwards found on this chart, and that certain silvern tanks are to be found on the coast of New Jersey where alien and evil waters which come from no known source were stored for a monstrous purpose, and that Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser determined upon a last adventure—of such stuff as this the minstrels sing.

However that may be, it is said that there came a swirl of waters on that calm night as if a whirlpool that lay at right angles to the boat had seized it. And one who was swimming near said that he caught a glimpse of the Mouser fighting an indistinct creature that held eight swords in as many writhing arms. And immediately afterwards all was motionless once more. Only the sea trembled slightly.

Of these two fragments the first has style and polish, a remarkable example of hitting the right tone on the first attempt. Mine is a reverie projected on the real world; I

actually did go down by those oil tanks at night and sit by New York Bay and imagine things; it is tinged with Lovecraftianisms and Dunsanianisms and packed with story-notes to myself. It is clear that Harry had been reading Irish myth and legend—the stories of the Red Branch in particular, he tells me—for the Tuatha De Danann were the pagan gods of Ireland, children of Danu, the great goddess of fertility and death. They were later identified with the Aes Sidhe, or Little People.

This link with the world of Irish myth was soon dropped, however, and was not as great to start with as might appear. Lankhmar and the Great Salt Marsh are not to be found there, and while Fafhrd as first described is a rather Celtic hero, the Mouser certainly is not—he already sounds medieval, perhaps Mediterranean, a being of dark alleyways and docks rather than green forests and meads, a small handsome grey gargoyle come to life.

Incidently, my vision of the Mouser and Fafhrd peering down into dark waters for hints of alien life—while I peer at them through the dark—is a very apt picture of the writer at his creative work. He peers into the black pool of his unconscious mind, glimpses a flash of green, notes down the exact shade of color and rhythm of disappearance—and then as much as a year later, in the course of actually writing a story, hooks and pulls out of that pool a seventy-tentacled green monster tall as a skyscraper.

Harry Fischer has written, "I am a thinker who plunges into the pool of the problem but once, yet with God-given luck to grasp the right answer"—another example of the pool analogy.

But before we pry any further into the sources or follow the growth of the Mouser and Fafhrd, let us take a closer look at the two young men who penned and typed the fragments above. Although sharing the general mood

of the mid-Thirties, they were anything but typical depression children.

I was born December 24, 1910, son of the Shakespearean actor and producer of the same name. I was deeply familiar from early childhood with the more commonly presented plays of Shakespeare. I went to the University of Chicago, where my interests, aside from writing and literature, shifted from chemistry and physics to math to psychology to theology—a quaintly precise trending from the material to the insubstantial. After a brief acting career with my father's last touring company and an even briefer try at the movies, I became an encyclopedia writer, a magazine editor, and finally a freelance writer.

Harry Otto Fischer was born July 9, 1910, the same year but all the way across the Zodiac from me—Cancer to my Capricorn. He early became a phenomenal and wide-ranging reader, soaking up everything from *Weird Tales* and *Astounding* and Edgar Rice Burroughs to Wassermann and Joyce and Proust, by way of Eric Linklater, Richard Aldington, and James Branch Cabell. As an undergraduate of the University of Louisville he worked up reading lists for advanced classes in the novel and was recognized for the range and detail of his knowledge. In 1935 he married the artist Martha McElroy, who created the earliest pictorial representations of Fafhrd and the Mouser (in several versions) and drew the first full maps of Lankhmar and the world of Nehwon. Despite his early maturing literary ability Harry went into the box business, where he is a designer and engineer, specializing in corrugated packaging. The Scalpel scores pasteboard; Cat's Claw pinks staple holes. I have never heard of any of his cartons turning out to contain poison-

ous eels of Lankhmar's salt marsh, or giant spiders of Klesh, but I dream my dreams . . .

Harry and I first met in 1930. We had much in common: a great interest in fantasy and romantic literature such as the writings of H. Rider Haggard and Talbot Mundy; a liking for sardonic Germanic wit; both fencers, chess and bridge enthusiasts too; there were strong dramatic streaks: my own Shakespeare and Ibsen, his puppet shows (which he and his wife created and produced jointly) and later his semi-professional ballet dancing (his wife designed sets).

Under Harry's influence my reading widened and my urge and ability to write grew, though mine was a slower-maturing talent. However my typical letters rather quickly jumped from ten lines to ten pages (his own were already long) and soon we were regularly exchanging missives in which news, confidences, world commentary, and talk about books were regularly spaced out with extemporized fragments of prose fantasy and poetry. We would often take up each other's conceits and, tossing the literary ball (or sometimes literary bull) back and forth, produce series of loosely related fragments. In this fashion we explored in considerable detail several imaginary worlds before that of Lankhmar came into view.

First there was the universe of the Elder Gods, shading into the realm of Loki and the trolls, which grew equally from the *Elder Edda* and *Peer Gynt*.

Next there was the philosophy of chaoticism: "The only God is Chaos, and Chaos is his prophet."

Then there were the Wischmeiers, a prolific Central-European family of rogue geniuses—perhaps a little predictive of the brilliant Hungarians who have played so prominent a part in American scientific intellectual life in the last twenty-five years: Gamov, Wiener, Teller,

Franz Alexander, Szilard, von Neumann, and their compatriots.

The first Wischmeiers were invented on the spur of the moment to confound a Louisville friend who by some almost unimaginable sleight had managed to read Spengler's *Decline of the West* before Harry and I did. It seems that Adolf and Herman Wischmeier had written a five-volume commentary on that work, disproving the German cyclic historian's theses at almost every point. They were students of Freud, a psycho-mythologist and mytho-psychologist respectively, and were currently engaged in psychoanalyzing the Norse Gods, much as Freud had taken to pieces Hamlet, Oedipus, Moses, and Leonardo da Vinci. A flesh-and-blood professor of psychology at the University of Louisville belittled their work, but never questioned their existence—minor students of Freud, he would say.

And then there was a Wischmeier who circumnavigated the cosmos in a fiery chariot (establishing incidently that it was *not* saddle-shaped)—Elijah Wischmeier, I believe.

A Chicago friend of ours, George Mann, joined the game (I think by inventing Ottocar Wischmeier, who falsified the entire history of the Middle Ages) and rapidly became more deeply interested than Harry or I in those rapscallion masterminds, those modern Cagliostros, those scarecrow profundities. George, another wide-ranging reader and thinker with a rat-trap memory—no, a memory that struck down and embalmed thousands of facts at once, like DDT—was the first student to start from scratch and win a degree at the University of Chicago under Hutchins' new plan for accelerated learning. He eventually published in *New Directions* annuals several long satiric and polemical biographical essays about members of the Wischmeier

tribe. "Anselm Wischmeier" takes apart the neo-Thomists. "Azeff Wischmeier, the Bolshevik Bureaucrat" anticipated most of Orwell's *1984* and *Animal Farm* and carried considerably more detail, but happened to be published at the peak of our wartime friendship with Russia, and so did not attract as much approving attention as it otherwise might. (George Mann has recently returned to satiric writing with two contemporary-scene novels published by Macmillan: *The Dollar Diploma,* which tells all about the fund-raising drives of the big private universities, and *The Blind Ballots,* which takes a bitterly humorous look at suburban school boards and politicking.)

I have digressed a bit here because the Wischmeiers are a good example of how contagious the game of imaginary worlds can be and of how a little almost heavy-seeming humor may lead someone to years of work behind the typewriter, secretary to someone else's dreamworld.

Writers, be warned!

Now what does all this background material begin to tell us about the origins of the Mouser and Fafhrd?

For one thing, that those origins were most diverse. Remember chaoticism! Also we were not seeking to write for publication then and not so inclined to blueprint our material from the stories of some currently successful author.

At this time I was variously addressing Harry in my letters as Loki (or just Lok), Macumazahn, and Jurgen, indicating that there had been some recent reading or rereading of Norse myth, Haggard, and Cabell. However, I hadn't read Mundy's *Tros of Samothrace* at the time—I missed the pulp printings (in *Adventure,* I believe) and I vividly remember seeing a big display of the big yellow volume in a Denver store window when I was

on tour with my father's Shakespearean company late in 1934—the last season he had it out. I purchased a copy and was enthralled.

We (in a few instances possibly only Harry then) had read Howard's Conan and earlier Kull stories, Dunsany's tales, Cabell's half satiric medieval fantasies, Richard Garnett's witty *The Twilight Of The Gods,* some of Anatole France's picaresque novels such as *At The Sign Of The Queen Penaugue,* Eddison's *The Worm Ouroboros* (though that may have come later), Jensen's *The Long Journey,* Linklater's *The Men Of Ness,* Viereck and Eldridge's history-hopping accounts of the Wandering Jew and Salome, and any amount of similar stuff. And we were both steeped in Norse, and he in Irish mythology.

Superficially Fafhrd is a somewhat regulation hero, though he grew and continues to grow much less so. As for the Gray Mouser, one can point out faint similarities to Loki, Peer Gynt, François Villon, Etzel Andergast in Wassermann's Kerkhoven trilogy, Spendius in Flaubert's *Salammbô,* Jurgen himself and Horvendile in *The Cream of the Jest,* even the Pied Piper of Hamelin and Punch as a young man, but they are greatly outweighed by the differences—quite unconvincing. The Mouser remains the Mouser alone.

Authors, of course, always put much of themselves into their characters. It hardly need be pointed out that in a sense I am Fafhrd and Harry Fischer the Gray Mouser.

Being Fafhrd to some degree has been, over the years, an interesting responsibility, which I have fulfilled more in imagination than reality.

I do fence with the three weapons and I have owned workaday sabers, both the fairly comfortable ones of the Civil War and the ponderous straight blades issued by the U.S. Cavalry just before World War I, which I can liken

only to skewers suitable for broiling roast-size shish-kebab. I have occasionally toyed with one of the latter in the manner of Fafhrd, handling it as a foil rather than a broadsword, but I find it really *is* better for thrusting; if you swing it, making a great swashing stroke, you're very apt to fall down.

And occasionally I look down at my unexercised frame and I think of Fafhrd and I go out and climb a fifty-foot mountain or scale a ten-foot rock wall. Or drive a mountain road just fast enough to make the tires start to squeak. Or sail a sailboat in a lagoon. Or plunge into a medium-size Pacific roller, but not one of the really big ones that come crashing in for three days every three years, all the way from Japan.

For a while I was handier at living up to Fafhrd's reputation for wine-bibbing, but I discovered that this was incompatible with being the skald and scribe of the expedition. As the poet Peter Viereck puts it, "Art, like the bartender, is never drunk"—though he rightly stays in the midst of every wild party.

To find out more about the origins of the Twain I am afraid you will have to consult Ningauble of the Seven Eyes—another early invention of Harry's, by the way.

Sheelba of the Eyeless Face, the balancing mystic-counselor figure to Ningauble in the stories, is perhaps the last clear trace of Irish-sounding invention in them.

But although 1934 ended with Fafhrd and the Mouser sharply crystallized, their background world or worlds was indeterminate. In 1935 I read Robert Graves' newly published *I, Claudius*. Coming atop *Tros* and the deeply evocative material on Rome in *The Decline Of The West,* it strengthened in me an infatuation with ancient Rome that probably had its roots in my childhood familiarity with Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. I started to

write a long tale of Fafhrd and the Mouser set in early imperial Rome, but it was unsatisfactory and I laid it aside. I had discovered that, to finish it, I would have to crib from Graves or do a year or so of solid research—and even then the result would probably not have been what I wanted.

In the fall I began another novela of the Twain, this time set in the somewhat mistier period and empire of the Seleucids, and finished it early in 1936. This tale was rejected by several book publishers and by Farnsworth Wright of *Weird Tales* as being too full of stylistic novelties. It went through three or four recastings and rewritings, and was finally published in 1947 as "Adept's Gambit" in my Arkham House collection *Night's Black Agents*.

At this point I want to state categorically that the cavern of Ningauble has obscure space-time linkages—perhaps some sort of seven-branched warps—which permit Fafhrd and the Mouser to adventure occasionally in other worlds than that of Nehwon.

In January 1936 I married Jonquil Stephens, one more super-swift reader, with interests ranging from the earliest British poets to the latest fact-detective magazines, from medieval manuscripts to the modern Russian novel. In the late summer of that year she put me (and a little later Harry) in touch with H.P. Lovecraft, who criticised and circulated "Adept's Gambit"—and incidentally engendered in me a larger respect for careful literary polishing and historical researching.

Just after Lovecraft's death early in 1937 I produced, in a burst of rather uncritical admiration for the man, a Lovecraftian recasting of "Adept's Gambit," complete with *lä Shub-Niggurath*s, which was afterwards scrapped.

At about the same time I was working up a most

ambitious many-chaptered novel of the Mouser and Fafhrd which had as a working title "The Tale of the Grain Ships." In the written chapters of this novel Lankhmar became more real—a sort of dark counter-Rome, eventually "The City of the Black Toga"—but, perhaps, more important, another country emerges into view. In a letter to Harry Fischer postmarked December 9, 1937, and sent from Los Angeles to Louisville, I say that I am planning a new story,

> . . . set in a country that has just been sent by kind dreams: a land a little like modern Norway in its houses but more like the Roman Empire in organization, like Thrace because of its city-states and spirit of free inquiry (limited by certain tyrants, of course, perhaps Pulgh among them) but nomadlike in mind and in its own particular fashion. A country a little like early Japan but more like the forgotten Maori kingdom of Lantta-Wilek, somewhat resembling Atlantis but with an interest in cats matched only by Egypt and Hrusp—that little-more-than-barbarie to rise swiftly and as swiftly fall in 7342 AD (called by them 457 Porkokno and meaning "after that which is mystery"). A country, nevertheless, unique in its distaste for permanent monuments, in its reverence for human memory-ability, and for its finding and losing the art of communicating with certain animals (that is, not exactly that, but something like that). As to its date—perchance it was a bit before the second sinking of Atlantis but then again there is evidence to show that it remembered the forementioned Hrusp, which would place it far in our future. At all events, there is someone in the story to take the place of Claudius and, whoever he was, he brought grain from across the great lake (the Euxine?) and got into difficulty with several ambitious rats. And that is where Fafhrd and the Mouser come when the Warcats whistle. And Fafhrd is still a northman for somewhere in the story I shall say "Nay, sire, there

always have been men who came down from the north and always shall be; somewhere in the ken of the ice and the aurora there is an eternal mystery, as great as Valhal, a mystery that brings forth men, ever tall, blue-eyed, stubborn, and bull-voiced; somewhere in the icy abyss is an ineluctable source. They shall always come by ones and twos and by little bands, curious, uncouth, and brutal, but ever in their eyes a glacial mystery."

On the back of the envelope I have written in ink (along with a picture of trolls oozing from squat stone towers in a rocky landscape):

"And the king of the new country to be described in this letter was called: Morval, Overlord of the Eight Cities and of the Northward Limit of Illik-Ving."

Later in the body of the same letter I drew a rather blocky yet moderately detailed map of my new country, this Land of the Eight Cities. North of it are mountains and then a region called the Icy Waste. To the west is ocean into which extend some promontories called the Claws. To the south is another sea, two islands in it, and then a coast with a many-mouthed river and a city on one of the mouths. This is the city that eventually became Lankhmar, but I did not know that at the time as I have labeled the chief of the Eight Cities to the north "Lakhman," though with a question mark. I go on to say:

Looking over the map with preconceptions (for even I do not pretend to know where this country was or will be) I see that it might be Asia Minor and Egypt (during the last or next ice age) or Spain and Africa at the same times, or perchance Scandinavia at a more clement time, with the country below: Germany with the peninsula of Denmark submerged. Allowing of course for inaccurate geography and changes of continental contour.

The Icy Waste is particularly dear to me. It is a dreary

stretch, scantily dotted by the great castles (once inhabited by inhuman, elder ones) now taken over by the barbaric northmen—who may, indeed, be a Cromagnon remnant or harbinger.

The foregoing quotes catch in mid-act the process of the creation of imaginary countries. Borders are left open, names are not yet finalized. I want what amounts to an analogy between Rome and the Land of the Eight Cities, on the one hand, and between Alexandria and Lankhmar on the other, yet I don't want to press the analogy too far—there must be other analogies superimposed. And while I seem to want the world of Nehwon definitely linked to the real world of today, I don't want to specify exactly where it lies and whether in past or future.

In the following years the World of Nehwon, mapped in greater detail and much greater artistry by Martha Fischer, became more definite and self-consistent, but its linkage with our reality has—wisely, I believe—never been precisely determined. It seems to lie in an alternate universe.

Meanwhile Harry Fischer was working up Mouser material in Louisville, for in the same letter I write: "That tale of Fafhrd and the Mouser and the king with two sons will be a grand one too. I delight in magicians and a story that would use several score of them, all arranged in different guilds and fraternities."

This briefly-noted imagining of Harry's he eventually elaborated into the half-written beginnings of an adventure set in the subterranean city-kingdom of Quarmall, south of Lankhmar.

I wrote about 150 pages of "The Tale of the Grain Ships," discovered one morning that I had not introduced many of the main characters or really launched into the plot, and I gave up working on it—the problem

of earning a day-to-day living had become too pressing. Remember I was still an amateur writer at the time, two years away from my first professional sale.

It was not until January 1961 that, encouraged by Cele Goldsmith's purchase of two new tales, I was able to sift seriously through the material again and write the finished tale of the rats and the grain ships, published in *Fantastic* as "Scylla's Daughter."

But I do not want to leave that golden period of 1936, that period of first massive imaginings, without one last quote from that L.A. letter of December 9, 1936—a quote which possibly tells more about the real origins of the intrigue-ridden, pleasure-sated, sorcery-working, thief-ruled city of Lankhmar, its fat merchants and cutthroats, rogues, and its linkages to a certain city in our world, than perhaps even Sheelba knows:

> Last night we were at a cocktail party given by Herr John Barrymore and the wife of his lately much publicized romance [Elaine Barry]. It was at a huge place—at least it had one two-story room in which I could stretch without limit. There we did meet the following; I shall list them without immediate comment in order to make you faint and wake and laugh: Frederick March, James Cagney, Edward Arnold, Pat Obrien, Johnny Weismuller, Frank Shields, Alan Mowbray, Louella Parsons (Hearst's Hungarian witch and all-powerful columnist), several directors, producers, and lesser fry!!!!!
>
> It amazed me greatly for a while, to see so many of America's symbols all at once. However, then I got wedged between Mr. Barrymore and Mr. March and discovered, much to my surprise, that they have bottoms that wedge in much the same fashion as any other person's.
>
> However, most of them seemed very good-natured, unassuming, and pleasant (who isn't who's making a lot

of money). Mr. Barrymore is charmingly foul-mouthed, making up in roaring and gusto to what he lacks in subtlety and studiousness. He was explaining (and impersonating) a certain gargoyle on Notre Dame at one point—how it sat and looked down at the city and said nothing but "[Excrement], [Excrement]! All [excrement]!" As I pointed out to him, it was likely for fear of what gargoyles might do in that line themselves that the makers and sculptors ended them off at the waist. And then he would roar and get maudlin and say, "When you get up tonight, take a good long sweet [urination] and think of me, will you!"

Strange as it may seem, Jonquil is not going to try to reform him as far as I can see. This is not to be taken as a compliment but as a testimonial to his hopelessness and our ambition to get on here. You see if you know someone who knows someone who has the say, things might happen. Not so much through any sort of pull or pressure, strangely, but just because one's name might be mentioned at an odd moment when there was an empty corner in a director's or producer's mind. It would all happen as it were accidentally, but out there God is on the side that has the most unassuming accidents. That is, if it isn't also true that God is accidental to Hollywood, rather than essential.

This would be a fine place for you, Gray Mouser. Everyone and everything is so confused; in short, there is so much of chaos out here, chaos built on fear, suspicion, too much and too little bureaucracy, that a person with a knowledge of the whims and pettishnesses of the blind God Azathoth would have the upper hand. Yet 'tiz hard to say, for there is much business-like activity and childish and sophisticated reasoning, too. But that only adds to the completeness of the chaos, come to think of it.

I'll say no more about this quote than that it illustrates a point I firmly hold: Fantasy must be *fertilized*—yes, *watered and manured*—from the real world.

After this Los Angeles period, Fafhrd and the Mouser languished unpublished and largely unworked-on for two years. Then in 1939 the magazine *Unknown* appeared—a black bombshell in the fantasy world. I took the silver bit in my teeth, devised a somewhat choppier, more action-packed style of narrative than Harry and I had used in our letters, set up for myself the rule that my heroes should be not Conans or Troses but earthy characters with earthy weaknesses, winning in the end mostly by luck from villains and supernatural forces more powerful than themselves, and turned out the novlet "Two Sought Adventure," which appeared in the August issue of *Unknown*—a bit of fantasy guerilla warfare before the real kind set in next month along the Vistula River. When I used the same title for my Gnome Press collection of 1957, this novelet became "The Jewels in the Forest." Another year of languishing and I gave a touch of plot to a short mood-piece and made my second Fafhrd-Mouser sale to *Unknown:* "The Bleak Shore." There followed "The Howling Tower," "The Sunken Land," and "Thieves' House." Oddly, no Fafhrd-Mouser story was ever published in *Weird Tales,* though more than one was submitted there, all but "Adept's Gambit" in the period after Farnsworth Wright. My "oddly" was confirmed by John W. Campbell, Jr., who more than once remarked in accepting a story. "This is more of a *Weird Tales* piece than *Unknown* usually prints. However——"

After *Unknown* folded in 1943 the appearances of Fafhrd and the Mouser became infrequent. In 1951 *Suspense* took "Dark Vengeance," which became "Claws from the Night" in the collection. In 1953 Bea Mahaffey encouraged me to do for *Other Worlds* "The Seven Black Priests," based on an off-trail chapter from the long story of the grain ships. Then in 1959 I did "Lean

Times in Lankhmar,'' purely from nostalgia, writing more full-bodiedly, I believe, and not avoiding grotesqueries and humor—the title, by the way, was suggested by George Orwell's *Down And Out In Paris And London,* another indication of the close back-door linkage in my own mind between fantasy and realism. I was greatly enheartened when it was accepted for *Fantastic* by Cele Goldsmith, who subsequently bought ''When the Sea King's Away,'' ''Scylla's Daughter,'' and ''The Unholy Grail.''

Over the years, through good times and bad, the Mouser and Fafhrd have become such good familiar friends to me, teasing or bullying me out of my discouraged moods when no one else could, that I have no doubt I will continue to solicit adventures from them.

CONAN'S IMITATORS

by L. Sprague de Camp

When Howard killed himself in 1936, he left a gap in American fantastic fiction. Nobody was writing anything much like his stories of Conan and Kull. Clark Ashton Smith came the closest, with his tales of Hyperborea, Atlantis, and Zothique. But, in those, the accent was on horror rather than on heroism. C.L. Moore approached the spirit in her stories of Jirel of Joiry; but she, like Smith, was *sui generis,* stressing the cosmically supernatural elements.* Nobody (save Tolkien, then unknown to the readers) was writing stories laid in an imaginary pre-industrial setting wherein, although the supernatural played an important part, the accent was on action, adventure, and heroism.

Several writers saw the hole left by Howard and undertook to fill it. I mean nothing derogatory by this; I have made a few efforts in that direction myself. Perhaps it would be interesting to run over some of the stories of this kind that appeared during the lustrum after Howard's death.

These were stories that patently tried to push the same readers' buttons that Howard had thumbed so successfully. First in the field was Clifford Ball, with three stories in *Weird Tales*. First came—"Duar the Ac-

*For an account of C. A. Smith, C. L. Moore, and Fritz Leiber and their heroic fantasies, see my *Literary Swordsmen and Sorcerers* (Arkham House, 1976).

cursed," *WT,* May, 1937. The element of imitation is painfully obvious. Duar, the barbarian adventurer, has black hair, blue eyes, and the "nerves of a jungle animal." He also runs about in loin-cloth and sandals. An ex-king who has lost his memory, he has a female guardian spirit, Shar, who appears at climaxes to get him out of trouble. She also tries to explain that he is really a member of the Elder Race and a priest of the High God. Duar just shakes his head in a dull sort of way, muttering an unlikely "Faith!"

With the help of his sprite, Duar destroys the Rose of Gaon, a great red jewel in the Tower of Ygoth, which is really the heart of a demon. Thus he wins Nione, queen of Ygoth, although Shar may not have yielded all claims.

Ball had here a number of portentous ideas, which he didn't quite know what to do with. The mysteries about Duar are never cleared up. Instead, Ball dropped Duar with an audible thud and laid the next story in the same world but in the neighboring kingdom of Forthe, in "The Thief of Forthe," *WT,* July 1937. Karlk the magician, who is really a Thing, persuades Rald, the leading thief of Forthe, to steal the necklace of the Ebon Dynasty from King Krall and his sister Thrine. Rald, who also favors breech-clout and sandals as his working garb, discovers that Karlk is not what he seems . . .

Ball has an irritating habit of spelling his characters' names in ambiguous ways, ending in e's which may or may not be mute: Nione, Forthe, Thrine, Thwaine, Cene. I suppose he meant them to rhyme with bone, north, pine, pain, and seen, respectively, but I can't be sure that, for example: he didn't mean the first to rhyme with bony, peony, cloisonné, etc. Making names nearly all monosyllables gives an unattractive, inartistic effect.

Still, an improvement over the first of the triolet can be seen. Ball sticks to Rald in "The Goddess Awakens,"

WT, Feb. 1938. Rald is now a mercenary, an occupation that fascinates writers of adventure stories, although from all I can gather it is apt to be dull in real life. Rald now has a comrade, Thwaine. On patrol, they are captured by a race of warrior women and put in an arena to be eaten by the cat goddess. This is a black sphinx-sized statue of a cat, which comes to life under the full moon. But Queen Cene falls for Rald . . .

It's a weaker story than the preceding, mainly because the writer sets up his Amazon queen and then has her go soft and squashy at the climax, exhibiting an out-of-character humanitarianism. Still, the conflict in the arena is rather good. The Etrusco-Roman institution of the arena, although almost unique among ancient peoples, has proved a favorite plot element with writers of SF and fantasy ever since the Warhoons tossed John Carter into one. Speaking of which, "Duar the Accursed" mentions the "great white apes of Barsoom." In the following tales, Ball caught himself and changed Barsoom to Sorjoon.

With that, the series sputtered out. The next contender was Henry Kuttner, one of the most prolific and versatile imaginative writers of his time. He sold a series to *WT*, beginning with a two-part serial—"Thunder in the Dawn," *WT*, May & June, 1938. Elak (whose real name is Zeulas) is the exiled brother of King Orander of Cyrena, the northernmost kingdom of Atlantis. Elak goes home from the city of Poseidonia with Mider the Druid to save Cyrena from the warlock Elf and the Viking leader Guthrum. Elak has a comrade, Lycon, whose only interest in life is getting drunk. As Lycon is neither very able, nor very clever, nor very comical, it is hard to see what good he is, save to play the conventional Sancho to Elak's Quixote.

Then comes—"Spawn of Dagon," *WT*, July 1938.

The same pair are brawling and robbing in the city of San-Mu. Gesti, who turns out to be the leader of a group of Lovecraftian fish-men of the Innsmouth species, hires them to slay the wizard Zend in his tower . . .

Next—"Beyond the Phoenix," *WT*, Nov. 1938. The twain are in the western kingdom of Sarhaddon (from the name of the Assyrian king Esarhaddon). They serve in King Phrygor's bodyguard until the king is slain by the wicked wizard Xandar, who has called up the evil god Baal-Yagoth (the derivation from Lovecraft and Howard is obvious). To save the kingdom, Elak, Lycon, and the princess Esarra (also from the Assyrian) go to the land of Sarhaddon's patron goddess Assurah, the Phoenix, which they reach by a trans-dimensional adventure.

Lastly—"Dragon Moon," *WT*, Jan. 1941. Back in Poseidonia, the two are fetched back to Cyrena by Dalan, another Druid. King Orander has been slain by magic. Sepher of Kiriath (Biblical; the names mean "book" and "city" respectively in Hebrew) is possessed by the evil entity Karkora. Sepher threatens to seize Cyrena. Our heroes, pursued, capture a galley by the conventional method of chopping the rowers' chains . . .

So ends the series, the best of those discussed. True, the stories have weaknesses. Elak is hardly developed at all; he is merely a "lithe adventurer" without the personality of Conan, Northwest Smith, or John Eric Stark, let alone that of an Aragorn. The illustrators had trouble with him. The first portrayed him as a Greek *hoplites*, the second as a Frenchman of the d'Artagnan era, and the third as a Goth. Mention of "Vikings" is an error because of the name's comparatively modern associations.

On the other hand the stories have power and vividness. In fact, the supernatural episodes are developed on such a cosmic scale, with assorted entities taking posses-

sion of our characters, that the human characters themselves are dwarfed. The stories are not the best Kuttner, but still good *WT*.

Two more series appeared in 1939. Kuttner wrote two tales for *Strange Stories*—"Cursed be the City," *SS*, Apr. 1939. Prince Raynor of the prehistoric Gobi Empire is captured when King Cyaxares, controlled by the demon Necho, takes the capital, Sardopolis, by magic. Raynor escapes with the help of a Nubian, Eblik. To get revenge, they release the god Pan . . .

In "The Citadel of Darkness," *SS*, Aug. 1939, Raynor and Eblik, with the girl Delphia, are looking for a place to settle when they are involved with an astrological magician, Ghiar. The story is, as far as I know, the only one of the genre that exploits astrology. This it does very well.

The stories are similar in spirit to the Elak tales. They are always literate and readable, even when some of the derivations from Howard and other sources show through. Alas, Kuttner never carried the series further. Shortly thereafter the paper shortage got the magazine and the army got Hank.

The remaining series consisted of two novels of almost book length in *Unknown*, by Norvell W. Page. One was—"Flame Winds," *U*, June 1939. Page bases his stories on the legend of Prester John. He ingeniously derives the name, not from Greek *presbyteros*, "elder," but from *prêstêr*, "hurricane." Prester John, otherwise Wan Tengri or Amlairic the Scythian, is a gigantic adventurer, ex-gladiator, and nominal Christian, born of mixed ancestry in first-century Alexandria. He comes to the city of Turgohl in central Asia, ruled by evil magicians. John kills a few people, picks up as comrade a small apish thief, Bourtai, is captured and fights in the arena, overcomes the wizards, but is tricked out of the rule of the city by a woman and forced to flee.

In the next tale—"Sons of the Bear God," *U*, Nov. 1939—John and Bourtai come to the city of Byoko, ruled by evil magicians. John kills a few people, is captured and fights in the arena, overcomes the wizards, but is tricked out of the rule of the city by a woman and forced to flee.

There are hints that these two tales were to have been parts of a trilogy. But you can see why the third story, if it followed the same formula so closely, never appeared.

Page has his good points. His characters are eloquent; nobody grunts "Me Tarzan, you Jane." John is a vivid curser. In fact, the characters become too garrulous at times; the story stands still while they shout picturesque billingsgate for a page at a time. If essentially a red-bearded Conan, John is a livelier and more humorous hero than his sullen Cimmerian prototype. There is plenty of color, action, and imagination; the Ball stories seem drab by comparison.

But the Page stories also have grave weaknesses. There is a certain pretentiousness about them, which makes their faults stand out. They drag for long stretches. There is much windy bombast; one tires of John's inexhaustible braggadocio. And John is always chopping off people's hands.

Furthermore, John's physical prowess is enlarged to the point of burlesque. Where Conan at least knew that he could not indefinitely fight a swarm of foes single-handed, although he might be able to cut his way through them quickly enough to escape, John joyfully takes on twenty or a hundred single-handed and slays them all. Whereas Conan knew that the big apes would kill him unless he quickly stabbed them to death, John in one story kills a tiger with a length of chain; in the other, he wrestles a bear twice his size and breaks its back. Hence John seems more like Superman than a human hero.

Page made a basic mistake, moreover, in laying the

stories in a historical time. As Leiber found in his "Adept's Gambit," it is twice as hard to make the reader believe in the supernatural in such a setting as it is in a wholly imaginary world.

To get around this difficulty, Page tried to pick a time and place whose history is blank, but even here he did not succeed. In actual history, the events of the Prester John stories would have taken place in the middle of a large and powerful Hunnish Empire, which could hardly be overlooked, but of which the author seems unaware. Page tries to bridge the difficulty of combining magic with the historical world by hints that the magic is only hypnotism or precocious science, but the effect is lame; it's like explaining, after the hero has chopped up his dragon, that his sword was really connected to a high-voltage generator and electrocuted the poor monster. Good try, no cigar.

Other heroic fantasies also appeared during this period, as those by Leiber, Hubbard, Dyalhis, and Pratt & de Camp. But in these cases, as far as I can tell, the Howard influence is slight or wanting. Neither Pratt nor I had ever read a Conan story when we launched the Harold Shea series. Of the four series described herein, I think Kuttner's Elak stories the best.

THE SKALDS OF HYBORIA

THE THONG OF THOR

by John Boardman

In days of yore the great god Thor would ramp around creation.
He'd drink a pint and slay a gi'nt and save the Nordic nation,
Or kill a Worm to watch it squirm and vainly try to fang him,
Or lock up Loki in the pokey and on the noggin bang him.

Once he did bawl through Thrudvang Hall that on a trip he'd wander
In a disguise from prying eyes in Midgard way out yonder,
So all his slaves and carles and knaves packed up his goods and gear, O,
And off he strode on Bifröst road, a perfect Aryan hero.

In Midgard land he joined a band of hardy Viking ruffians,
And off they sailed and rowed and bailed among the auks and puffians.
Whene'er they'd reach a foreign beach they stopped to raid and plunder;
Each Nordic brute got so much loot their longship near went under.

But though they rolled in coins of gold they had one joy forsaken,
For on each raid Thor's party made, no women could be taken.
Each drab and queen fled from the scene when Viking sails were sighted,
And Thor felt needs for certain deeds that had gone unrequited.

Thor's brows were black as they went back to Oslo's rocky haven;
Unto his crew he said, "Beshrew me for a Frankish craven
"If I don't wrench some tavern wench, or else may Frigga damn her."
Replied one voice, "You have first choice; you've got the biggest hammer."

Into an inn that crew of sin disbarked upon their landing,
Each tavern maid was sore afraid of pirates of such standing.
But golden coins warmed up their loins and soon the ale ran free;
Thor's motley crew poured down the brew and made an all-night spree.

Thor's glances strayed unto a maid with hair as gold as grain,
A lisp so shy, a downcast eye, and not a trace of brain;
He swept her charms into his arms and to an upstairs bower,
And did not cease nor give her ease for six days and an hour!

When he rose up and drained a cup she looked like one near death:

Her limbs were weak, she could not speak, and only gasped for breath.

"You ought to know, before I go, I'm Thor," he bade adieu.

"You're Thor!" said she, "Conthider me! I'm thorer, thir, than you!"

WOE IS ME!

by Avram Davidson

Lines Written By, or To, or For, or maybe Against, that Ignoble Old Viking, Harald Hardass, King of the Coney and Orkney Islands:

Woe is me, and wella-
day, that I set dreaming.
See, the steaming turn-spit
roast the ruptured roebuck.
Mingle men with mead-horns,
horns that hoist the highest,
held in horny hand-grips.

Often, o'er the Walrus-way
went the wicked Worm-ships.
Scoffing, skim'd past Scilly-land,
smote the smarmy strand-folk.
Leering, lop't their limbs loose.
Debauched their daughters, drooling.

Weary, over white-weave waves,
Calmly came to Norse-land.
For the captives, cards we cut.
Glittering gold did glut us,
limber lads 'neath larch-leaves.

Pass by me now the potent pot,
venison roasts vainly.
With rue and grue must guzzle gruel:
Harald has the heart-burn.

—translated from the original
Old High Middle Autochthonous,
by Avram Aard-vark'sson

TRANSPOSITION

by L. Sprague de Camp

In cruel jest, the gods did once decide
To grant the prayers of bookish men who yearn
Upon the brave Hyborian stage to stride
And true Hyborian heroes, in return,
To send to earth. So mighty Conan bold
Is sergeant of United States Marines.
Yasmina acts. Thoth-Amon, craving gold,
Sells costly horoscopes to dames of means.

But gods! The poor Hyborian Legionnaires,
Like me, like Scithers, Leiber, and the rest!
I count the weals upon our naked hides
And curse the day I ever breathed the prayers
That launched us on this inauspicious quest
And chained us to a Stygian galley's sides!

THOTH-AMON'S COMPLAINT

by L. Sprague de Camp

The ghost of Thothmekri spake thus in the Stygian gloom
Of a tomb to the shade of Thoth-Amon: "What fetches
you here?
Meseemed you had planned to escape your Cimmerian
doom
By casting your spirit ahead to a subsequent year."
And Thoth-Amon retorted: "Beshrew 'm!"

"I did, and I came to myself in a scrivener's frame,
Who'll flourish twelve thousand years hence. And re-
joicing, methought
To set myself up as a wizard, win power and fame,
And rise to the rule of that earth of the future—'twere
nought!
And the world Father Set should acclaim!"

"But rot me! The power of magic had dwindled away;
Not even a horoscope's worth that whereon it is writ.
So many inventions the folk have devised in that day,
For sorcery, demons, and wizards they care not a whit.
What's a spell that will seventy slay?"

"An engine infernal, let fall from a flying machine,
A city of millions can instantly wipe from that world.
Why conjure a carpet to soar through the sky sapphirine,

When hundreds at tenfold the speed through the welkin
are whirled
In aërial vessels serene?''

''Why cudgel one's wits by a spell a dead corse to recall?
Their leeches accomplish the same with their potions and
balms
And death by a casual juggle of organs forestall.
Far better to die by the sword than to canvass for alms,
Or else dishes to wash, like a thrall!''

THE GRAY MOUSER: 1

by Fritz Leiber

The city lifts blackroof-shields toward the stars
And shuts the jungle out with mortised stones
And seals the scent of flowers in glass jars
And locks Earth's secrets up in brass-clasped tomes.
No satyr may live there, no faun survive
The stench and clangor of each crowded sreet.
The white-fanged beasts of night cannot contrive
To gnaw an entrance through its black concrete.

Yet 'mongst the gargoyles on the slated roofs
One gray-masked face peers down with living grin
That mocks the scurry of the city's floor.
Two gray-gloved hands tease ope' the library's door
And break the ponderous books and scribble in
Footnotes that give the lie to all proud proofs.

THE GRAY MOUSER: 2

by Fritz Leiber

Soft-sandaled feet press lightly on the stones
That cobble Lankhmar's mazy alleyways;
A grayish cloak melts in the river mist
That billowing with many a darting twist
Fumes round the corner from the nighted bays
To chill with sorcery men's blood and bones;
Only a bat whose sharp ears caught one sound
Knows that the Mouser is on business bound.

A jewel from Quarmall or a girl from Kled,
A caravel said to be docking soon,
A rune that Sheelba magicked from the dead,
Or a dread whisper from beyond the moon—
What man can name the thing the Mouser seeks
Or read the smile that links his sallow cheeks?

SWORDS AND SOURCES

PROTOTYPES AND PRECURSORS

by L. Sprague de Camp

1. PIRETTES

Two of the Conan stories, "Queen of the Black Coast" and "Red Nails," are graced (if that is the word I want) by lady pirates—pirettes, we might call them. A pirette may strike some readers as implausible; in fact, I was skeptical myself until my colleague Hamilton Cochran, who has written a lot about pirates, informed me that pirettes did in fact exist. Two of the best-known, Anne Bonny and Mary Read, flourished in the Caribbean in the early 1700s. Both earned reputations as fierce fighters.

Anne Bonny had previously fought as a soldier in Europe, passing herself off successfully as a man. On the Spanish Main, she became the mistress of a pirate captain known as Calico Jack Rackam. Eventually Calico Jack lost his nerve, and he and his crew were captured. They were duly tried and hanged, but Anne Bonny was let off because she was pregnant.

Hence Howard's buccaneering women are not really so far-fetched after all, with a few qualifications. We can be pretty sure that real lady pirates were never virginal and seldom beautiful. For a couple of ugh! girls, see the picture of Anne Bonny and her friend and colleague Mary Read on page 30 of Irwin Shapiro's *The Golden Book of America*.

Anne Bonny's career may be taken as fairly typical of the breed. Even if they wished, they could hardly be virginal under the circumstances. The nearest thing to sexual abstinence they could achieve would be to attach themselves to the toughest man aboard the ship, who would usually be the skipper. And then, not being chaste and living in an age before Doctor Condon's marvelous invention had become widely known, they were ever liable, if neither hanged nor slain in battle, to have their careers interrupted or ended by pregnancy.

2. THE INSIDIOUS DOCTOR CONAN

Some readers may have noticed a suspicious resemblance between Howard's *Skull-Face* and the Fu-Manchu stories of Sax Rohmer, with the sinister oriental metamorphosed into an immortal Atlantean. A plainer case of Rohmer's influence can be seen in Chapter xii, "The Fang of the Dragon," in *Conan the Conqueror*. We read of Zorathus' iron box, "forged in unholy fires among the flaming mountains of Khrosha." Dying from torture, Zorathus gives directions: " 'Press the seven skulls on the rim, one after the other. . . . Press the head of the dragon that writes across the lid. Then press the sphere in the dragon's claws . . .' "

Valbroso, the robber baron, "pressed the skulls in fumbling haste, and as he jammed his thumb down on the carved head of the dragon he swore sharply and snatched his hand away, shaking it in irritation.

" 'A sharp point on the carvings,' he snarled. 'I've pricked my thumb.' " Zorathus screams: " 'Fool! The Jewel is yours! I give you death with it! The scratch on your thumb—look at the dragon's head, Valbroso!'

"They all wheeled, stared. Something tiny and dully gleaming stood up from the gaping, carved mouth.

" 'The dragon's fang!' shrieked Zorathus. 'Steeped in the venom of the black Stygian scorpion . . .' " And Zorathus and Valbroso die.

In *The Hand of Fu-Manchu* (1917), Chapter xiv, pp 97–101, Nayland Smith and Dr. Petrie have caught a

jeweler's assistant, Lewison, trying to steal a brass box. This coffer, the Tûlun-Nûr box, supposedly contains the secrets of the Si-Fan, the Chinese secret society working for the subversion and conquest of the world. (Petrie was supposed to guard the box but, in a fine example of the idiot plot beloved by Rohmer, fell asleep.) Lewison dies, shrieking: "The golden pomegranates!" (p. 89)

Smith works on the box. "Every knob of the intricate design he pushed, pulled, and twisted" until at last the lid rises. Beneath it, however, "There was a second lid of some dull, black wood, apparently of great age, and fastened to it so as to form knobs or handles was an exquisitely carved pair of *golden pomegranates!*" (Italics Rohmer's.)

Smith dissuades Petrie and Inspector Weymouth from hastily opening the second lid. Instead, he borrows Weymouth's handcuffs "and inserted two steel points in the hollows of the golden pomegranates. He pulled. There was a faint sound of moving mechanism and the wooden lid lifted . . .

"Visible, in either little cavity against the edge of the steel handcuff, was the point of a needle, which evidently worked in an exquisitely made socket through which the action of raising the lid caused it to protrude. Underneath the lid, midway between the two pomegranates . . . was a little receptacle of metal communicating with the base of the hollow needles.

"The action of lifting the lid not only protruded the points but also operated the hypodermic syringe!"*

Unless somebody can find a still older version of this scene, which might have served as a common inspiration for Rohmer and Howard, I think we may infer a direct

*A similar incident occurs in A. Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes story, "The Adventure of the Dying Detective."

derivation. However, Howard's version has one advantage over Rohmer's. Whereas Zorathus' box contained the Heart of Ahriman, the Tûlun-Nûr box held nothing but three bars of lead!

3. THE CONANS OF ALBION

Most Hyborians know that "Conan" is an old Celtic name, borne by four medieval dukes of Brittany. The ancestor of the line, Conan of Rennes, rose to power in the late +X by rallying the Bretons against Viking raids. There is, however, evidence of sorts that at least a couple of Conans were active in Celtic affairs long before Conan of Rennes.

The first—and by a long shot the most nearly authentic—part of this evidence is a sermon, which the Breton monk Gildas composed in about +550 under the title, *The Destruction and Conquest Of Britain*. When not denouncing the morals of the British kings of his time, Gildas, in the second of three books of his work, summarizes the history of Britain from the first Roman invasions to his own time.

Like his successors Nennius and Bede, Gildas leaves much to be desired as a historian. He is much more interested in the affairs of the next world than in those of this, and more concerned with Biblical prophecy and with castigation of heresy and fornication than with the rise and fall of mundane kingdoms. Still, when Gildas denounces a contemporary British kinglet, it is reasonable to assume that the king was a real person.

Gildas is best known as the ultimate source of the Arthurian legend cycle. Although he does not mention Arthur, he does tell how the British king Vortigern ("Guthrigern") invited in the Saxons to defend the Britons from other barbarian invaders; how the Saxons

turned on their employer and wasted the land; how a noble Romano-Briton, Ambrosius Aurelianus, rallied the Britons and defeated the Saxons; and how the war continued for another half-century until, about +500, the Britons won a great victory at Badon Hill, location unknown. This section takes only one of Gildas's 86 pages.

The longest of Gildas's three books, *The Epistle,* begins with a denunciation of King Constantine of Cornwall, whom later writers have deemed Arthur's successor. Then Gildas assails another kinglet:

> *30. What dost thou also, thou lion's whelp (as the prophet saith), Aurelius Conanus? Art thou as the former (if not more foul) to thy utter destruction, swallowed up in the filthiness of horrible murders, fornications, and adulteries, as by an overwhelming flood of the sea? Hast not thou by hating, as a deadly serpent, the peace of thy country, and thirsting unjustly after civil wars and frequently spoil, shut the gates of heavenly peace and repose against thine own soul?*

And so on for a long paragraph, unfortunately without giving any solid details of all these interesting murders and adulteries. Aurelius Conan is believed to have been king of Powys, or north-central Wales.

Following Gildas, Bede's *History of the Church of England,* in the early +VIII, introduces the Saxon chiefs Hengist and Horsa, said to have commanded the host imported by the British king "Vurtigern." About +800, Nennius's *History Of The Britons* repeated Gildas about Ambrosius Aurelianus, and Bede (or Bæda) repeated them about Hengist and Horsa. Nennius also added a hero of his own: Arthur, Ambrosius's successor as leader of the British armies against the Saxons. Unfortunately, Nennius's work is such a mass of miracles and anachro-

nisms that it is hard to take seriously. Hence the endless argument as to whether Arthur really existed or was merely a transmogrified Celtic god to whom the real deeds of some real man and the fictional exploits of various gods and mythical heroes were attributed.

The next source for the Conans of Albion—as the Celts called Great Britain—is the *History of the Kings of Britain,* composed about 1150 by a Welsh churchman, Geoffrey on Monmouth. Like Nennius, Geoffrey told how Brutus, the grandson of the Trojan hero Aeneas, led a band of followers to Britain. Of the twelve books of the *History,* Books VI to XI—a little less than half the total—provide the basis for the Arthurian legend cycle. They tell of Vortigern and his son Vortimer, Hengist and "Horsus," Uther and "Aurelius," Merlin and "Arturus."

Geoffrey claimed to have obtained information from an ancient chronicle in Old British. Some Arthurians deny the book existed; others think there was a book of Breton legends and claim to recognize passages in medieval French romances as quotations therefrom.

Be that as it may, Geoffrey used many sources. Besides Nennius, he exploited English chronicles, French romances, Greek myths, Jewish legends, Welsh traditions, Irish myths, peasant fairy tales, and his own exuberant imagination. The resulting mélange touches on known history here and there, mainly in the period of Roman rule in Britain. Otherwise it is almost as fictional as Howard's Hyborian Age, to which it bears a suspicious resemblance.

In Book XI, Geoffrey tells about Aurelius Conan. Speaking of King Constantine of Cornwall and the sons of Modred (Mordred or Medraut, who was said to have slain Arthur at Camlan), he says:

4. But Constantine pursued the Saxons, and reduced them under his yoke. He also took the two sons of Modred; and one of them, who had fled for sanctuary to the church of St. Amphibalus, in Winchester, he murdered before the altar. The other had hidden himself in a convent of friars at London, but at last was found out by him, brought before the altar, and there put to death. Three years after this, he himself, by the vengeance of God pursuing him, was killed by Conan, and buried close by Uther Pendragon within the structure of stones, which was set up with wonderful art not far from Salisbury, and called in the English tongue, Stonehenge.

5. After him succeeded Aurelius Conan, his nephew, a youth of wonderful valor; who, as he gained the monarchy of the whole island, would have been worthy the crown of it, had he not delighted in civil war. He raised disturbances against his uncle, who ought to have reigned after Constantine, and cast him into prison; and then killing his two sons, obtained the kingdom, but died in the second year of his reign.

If this account is a little vague about who did what and with which to whom, blame Geoffrey. This author, however, also tells about an earlier Conan, before instead of after the Arthurian period. This is Conan Meriadoc, of the late +IV. You doubtless remember the Hobbit Meriadoc in *The Lord Of The Rings*.

In Book V, Chapter 8, Geoffrey tells how, when Constantine (the first Christian Roman emperor, not the Cornish king) took his army from Britain to strike for the imperial purple, in his absence "Octavius, duke of Wisseans, rebelled against the Roman proconsuls" and made himself king of Britain. (No such Octavius is known from authentic history.)

When Octavius becomes old, he has only one child, a daughter. To whom should the kingdom go?

> 9. . . . *Some, therefore, advised him to bestow his daughter with the kingdom upon some noble Roman, to the end that they might enjoy a firmer peace. Others were of the opinion that Conan Meriadoc, his nephew, ought to be preferred to the throne, and the daughter married to some prince of another kingdom with a dowry in money. While these things were in agitation among them, there came Caradoc, duke of Cornwall, and gave his advice to invite over Maximian the senator, and to bestow the lady with the kingdom upon him, which would be a means of securing to them a lasting peace.*

Geoffrey's "Maximian" corresponds to the historical Magnus Clemens Maximus, emperor +383–88, who usurped the Western Empire but was finally defeated and beheaded by the Emperor of the East, Theodosius I. (Geoffrey confused this man with an earlier emperor, Marcus Aurelius Valerianus Maximianus, who was Diocletian's co-ruler and subsequently the father-in-law of Constantine I until he lost a civil war with his son-in-law and his head along with it.) Sold on Maximian, Octavius invites him over. Conan raises an army to oppose him, but Maximian gets past him by smooth words and is accepted as Octavius's son-in-law and heir. Conan and Maximian fight a bloody battle but then are reconciled.

Maximian (like the real Maximus in +383) leads his army across the Channel to the conquest of Gaul. He takes Conan with him and sets him up as king of Armorica (Brittany). After defeating the Aquitainians, Conan sends to King Dianotus of Cornwall, asking him to round up several shiploads of women to send to Brittany as wives for his soldiers. Dianotus "also had a

daughter of wonderful beauty, named Ursula, with whom Conan was most passionately in love."

Alas, the fleet is scattered by a storm. Many ships are sunk, and the 11,000 surviving virgins are cast ashore "upon strange islands," which might mean the Frisians. Here they fall into the hands of King Guanius of the Huns and King Melga of the Picts, whose brutish followers enslave or murder them all. Then the Huns and Picts invade Albion but are beaten by two legions sent by Maximian. No more is heard of Conan Meriadoc.

Geoffrey's remaining Conanian allusion is in Book VIII, Chapters 5 & 7, where "Aurelius" battles Hengist the Saxon near Kaerconan, or Conan's town. Captured, Hengist is beheaded by Eldol, duke of Gloucester.

Like his later medieval imitators, Geoffrey fills the Britain of +IV to +VI with dukes, counts, and knights several centuries before the feudal system took form and knighthood was invented. Most of the details he gives are patent fictions. When he does tell of a historical figure like Julius Caesar, he gets most of the facts wrong. He introduces several hundred characters—real, mythical, and in between. Thus he makes the old Celtic sea god, Lêr or Llyr, into "King Lear," whom Shakespeare borrowed.

A thorough exegesis of Geoffrey, along the lines of my exegesis of Howard's Conan stories, would be a lifetime's task. And there would always remain the nagging suspicion that here and there in this mass of fabrications lurk the names and deeds of a few real people, whether carried down to Geoffrey in an old British manuscript or by some other route. Lacking a time machine, we shall probably never know for sure.

WHO WERE THE ÆSIR?

by Poul Anderson

Readers of the Conan saga will recall that two of the northern tribes with whom the Barbarian had comparatively friendly contact—*i.e.*, only a moderate amount of bloodletting—were the Æsir and the Vanir. They are also mentioned elsewhere, as in "The Valley of the Worm," *Skull-Face And Others*, by Robert E. Howard, (Arkham House, 1946, pages 232 ff.) with a clear implication that these pre-glacial peoples were remembered and worshipped in later epochs as the Scandinavian gods.

This sort of speculation, that myths are exaggerated traditions of real persons and events, is by no means new. The Graeco-Sicilian philosopher Euhemerus enunciated it about 300 B.C., giving his name to the entire school of thought. Various novelists, notably Robert Graves, have had fun with the hypothetical actuality behind this or that legend. For some reason, maybe just its picturesqueness, the Nordic pantheon has come in for more than its share of such treatment. It has occurred to me that a brief review of the very oldest theories, together with more modern evidence, would have its own swashbuckling interest. I'm afraid we won't get back to Howard's glaciers, or Ignatius Donnelly's comet, but we will travel quite a ways in space and time.

The Christianization of Scandinavia did not destroy interest in the old gods. In fact, we have Christianity to

thank for preserving the data, since it introduced the Roman alphabet, a literate class, and the habit of writing books. (Runes had been used only for memorial and magical inscriptions.) The prose of Younger Edda of Snorri Sturlason (1179–1241) was written as a handbook for poets, to explain the mythology and the figures of speech which every skald must have at his command: just as similar compendia of ancient myth were essential to the writers of the Renaissance. Much ancient poetry of gods and heroes was collected by some or other Icelandic priest, probably Sæmund the Wise, and when discovered in the seventeenth century became known as the poetic or Elder Edda. In addition, the sagas often contain incidental information. By contrast, we know little about the religion of the more southerly Teutonic peoples; a few fragmentary notices in Tacitus, Paulus Diaconus, and the rest, is about all. We can only assume that the Germanic tribes of the *Völkerwanderung* had a basically similar pantheon, less elaborately developed than it became in the North at the later date of the Eddas.

But of course the Christian writers did not believe that there actually had been gods in the old days. Rather they advanced euhemeristic explanations for existing traditions. Thus the *Gesta Danorum* of the monk Saxo Grammaticus (fl. *ca.* 1200) mentions an idea current in his own time, that the Danes were descended from the Danai, or Greeks. Mediæval historians were quick to seize on such linguistic coincidences; the Danai were also believed to be the ancestors of the Tuatha De Danaan of Ireland, while the Turks were supposedly descended from the Teucrians or Trojans! Saxo himself, however, believes in the eponymous hero Dan.

After describing the exploits of some early generations, he goes on to say: "At this time there was one Odin, who was credited all over Europe with the honor,

which was false, of godhead, but used more continually to sojourn at Upsala; and in this spot, either because the inhabitants were particularly stupid, or because of its pleasantness, he was most wont to reside." He goes on to tell how Odin's queen Frigga had the gold stripped from her husband's statue for her own use; Odin thereon hanged the smiths who did it. Later Frigga played him false with one of his servants. In chagrin, Odin went into exile. While he was gone, one Mid-Odin, a wizard, took his place, feigning to be a god. Odin himself finally returned and threw out the impostor, who fled to Finland and was there killed (and had a posthumous career as a kind of vampire, which was ended by the usual beheading and impalement). After Frigga's death the returned Odin "revived the ancient splendor of his name . . . he forced all those who had used his absence to assume the honors of divine rank, to resign them as usurped; and the gangs of sorcerers that had arisen he scattered like a darkness before the advancing glory of his godhead."

This is pretty clearly a rationalization of vaguely remembered heathen practices. Certainly Upsala was a particularly holy site of the old religion; certainly men were sometimes hanged as sacrifices to Odin. The story of his cuckolding seems to recall some fertility rite: Frigga was an earth goddess, whose very name is sexual. As Frazer shows, the Mid-Odin story is another parable, the god who dies and returns, driving out the dark wintry powers which had reigned while he was gone.

But Snorri's vernacular account is more detailed and interesting. Poet, novelist, politician, diplomat, architect, inventor, Snorri Sturlason was also a historian, author of the great *Heimskringla,* the chronicle of the Norse kings. This book starts out with some gorgeous euhemerism.

Where the river Tanais, also called Tanaquisl or Vana-

quisl, runs into the Black Sea (says Snorri), there lived formerly a people called the Vanir. East of them dwelt the Æsir, whose chief city was called Asgard and whose king was named Odin. He was a mighty wizard and prophet as well as a warrior. Once when he was gone from home for a long time, his brothers took his wife and estate; on his return, though, he repossessed both quite amicably. (Another echo of some fertility cult.) The Æsir fought a great war with the Vanir (this is also mentioned, rather obscurely, in one of the Eddic poems) but reaching no decision, the two tribes made peace and exchanged hostages. The Vanir received Hönir and Mimir; because of a complicated misunderstanding, they cut off the head of the latter and sent it back to Asgard. "Odin took the head," writes Snorri, "smeared it with herbs so that it should not rot, and sang incantations over it. Thereby he gave it the power that it spoke to him, and discovered to him many secrets." The Vanir in their turn had given to the Æsir a prince called Njord, with his son Freyr and daughter Freya, whom Odin honored by putting in charge of the sacrifices.

"In those times the Roman chiefs went wide around in the world, subduing to themselves all people; and on this account many chiefs fled from their domains. But Odin, having foreknowledge and magic sight, knew that his posterity would come to settle and dwell in the northern half of the world. He therefore set his brothers Ve and Vili over Asgard; and he himself, with all the Æsir and a great many other people, wandered out, first westward to Gardarika [I presume this actually means northwest to northern Russia] and then south to Saxland [North Germany]. He had many sons; and after having subdued an extensive kingdom in Saxland, he set his sons to rule the country. He himself went northwards to the sea, and took up his abode on an island which is called Odin's Isle in

Fyen [O innsey, Modern Odense]. Then he sent Gefion [a warrior maiden] across the Sound to . . . [Sweden] . . . to discover new countries; and she came to King Gylfi, who gave her as much land as she could plow. Then she went to Jötunheim [presumably the mountainous region in northern Norway which still bears this name], and bore four sons to a Jötun, and transformed them into a yoke of oxen. She yoked them to a plow, and broke land out into the ocean right opposite to Odin's Isle. This land was called Sjælland, and there she afterward settled and dwelt. Skjöld,* a son of Odin, married her'' and founded the Danish royal house. A spectacular bronze fountain in Copenhagen commemorated Gefion's feat; graduating students from the University traditionally ride its oxen.

Odin himself moved to Sweden, where he built a great temple and divided the land among its chieftains. His craft and wizardry made him invincible, until he ruled the entire Northlands; but he also introduced many useful arts and wise laws. He died there in his bed, ''and said he was going to Godheim, and would give a welcome there to all his friends, and all brave warriors should be dedicated to him; and the Swedes believed that he was gone to the ancient Asgard, and would live there eternally. Then began the belief in Odin, and the calling upon him.'' Njord and Freyr succeeded him in turn, becoming worshipped after their own deaths, as were all the Asa lords. (The cult of a great chief is, of course, universal; and indeed the Nordic god of poetry, Bragi, has been identified with a historical figure.) Freyr was the ancestor of the Swedish and Norse kings.

Thus Snorri—or rather, a sketchy synopsis of his

*Pronounced ''shöl''; a speaker from eastern New England comes close if he says ''shirl'' as in Shirley.

colorful narrative. The question is left, was he only romancing, or does his account have a more solid basis?

Now it is a fact, proven by abundant archæological finds, that there was always contact between Northern and Southern Europe, especially along the amber trade route. Numerous artifacts, such as the famous Sun Chariot, show that the Scandinavian Bronze Age and early Iron Age were relatively peaceful and prosperous, with appropriate chthonic gods and fertility rites. All this time the Nordic peoples were very much under the influence of the more advanced Celts. The Gundestrup kettle is spectacular evidence for this, but there is enough else to prove it, including their arts and such few words of the Cimbrian language as were noted by Roman writers after the destruction of those ill-fated Jutish invaders in 101 B.C. Only after the Romans had overrun the Celtic heartland and thus destroyed this influence did a truly Nordic culture emerge. The worship of Mercury (Wotan) and other characteristically Teutonic gods must have been fairly new when Tacitus noted it among the Germans about 100 A.D. The old fertility cult was still going strong in his day; for instance, the Great Mother had a whole island to herself, probably Rügen. Indeed the warlike Æsir never wholly displaced the earth gods, whose phallic rites continued to be practiced till Christianity entered and even then were only somewhat modified to fit various saints.

It is also a high probability, if not quite as certain a fact, that the leadership of the Germanic *Völkerwanderung* came from Northern Europe. Heruli, Vandals, Goths, Jutes, Saxons, Burgundians, and several more are still remembered in the names of their home districts. In other words, as the Roman Empire decayed, the Germanic society which grew up centered itself in the Baltic region, in what is now North Germany, Denmark, and

southern Sweden. This area seems to have supplied the chiefs and hard cadres of those migratory hordes which stranded at last as far south as Africa. It is therefore also reasonable to suppose that this area furnished their pre-Christian religion.

But did the North simply invent those myths, or was it remembering something which had happened earlier?

A historical atlas will show that Snorri's geography is not so far off. The Don River basin was long inhabited by the Alans, pastoral tribesmen with a rather high culture for their time and place. These people must have learned a great deal from the ancient Greek colonies of the Cimmerian Bosporus—the Crimea—with which they sometimes fought and sometimes traded but always had close contact. The chief of these Greek cities was called Tanais.

For a century or so on either side of Christ, the most powerful Alanic tribe in that immediate area were the Rukh-Ansa, which probably means the "Bright Alans." It has been suggested that the Rukh-Ansa gave their name to Russia; certainly they or a kindred tribe named the Azov Sea. It seems equally possible to me that they were the Æsir, who were indeed worshipped by the Goths under the cognate name of Anses. And any fortress or headquarters of theirs would likely have been named Ansa-gorod, which is scarcely different from Asgard!

About 100 B.C., when the Cimmerian Bosporus was under the rule of Mithridates the Great, the "Rhoxolani"—presumably the Greek version of "Rukh-Ansa"—made a raid on it. Population pressure may well have been responsible. Mithridates' general Diophantes bounced them back. It seems very plausible that some of them then turned eyes northward, towards less crowded lands. They would not have been ignorant

of what was going on in the rest of Europe: news moved with traders, emissaries, from village to village, for thousands of miles. Roman aggression against the Mithridatic realm would have also alarmed these tribesmen, some years afterward: who's next? While the Celts had not yet been entirely broken, southern Gaul was a Roman possession and northern Gaul in poor shape. (The wild passage of the Cimbri hadn't helped a bit.) Thus the semi-Celtic culture of Scandinavia was already tottering. The population up there had been much reduced by the long succession of bad years which drove the Cimbri and their allies south; but that cycle was passing, the North was fertile again, and in that state of decadence and chaos which has always tempted invaders.

The horsemen of the Don valley had, as I remarked, learned much from the Greeks of the cities. Whether by exchange of hostages, by lucrative offers, by giving shelter to refugees, or otherwise, they probably numbered some people of Tanais among their ranks, and doubtless these educated men often won high positions. Were they Snorri's Vanir?

I suggest that, at some undetermined date in the first century B.C., a part of the Rukh-Ansa emigrated, accompanied by some Greek adventurers. Their trek was long and eventful, doubtless taking years and involving much incidental warfare; but at last they conquered a large part of the North, divided it among their chiefs, and settled down. Their numbers were not enormous—racially speaking, they were soon absorbed, just as the English in India have left no genetic trace. But the Ansa brought about a similar cultural upheaval. It may well have been they who introduced runes, which are demonstrably derived from the Greek alphabet; the practice of sacrificing horses; advanced concepts of military and political organization, which were to prove very useful

in the troubled millennium ahead; the characteristic warlike Indo-European pantheon (and is the idea of Valhalla and Ragnarök an echo of Mithraism, learned from the Mithridatic garrisons in Tanais?); and many other innovations, adding up to a complete renaissance.

Probably their lords were not named anything like Odin and Freyr. Thor, the thunder god, seems to have been the most important. As originally, like his cognates Jupiter and Zeus; Odin, a god of the wind and the dead like Mercury, gained in importance as his people grew more inclined to battle; Freyr is an aboriginal fertility god, his name allied to the stem *fro-*, relating to growth. We must not take Snorri too literally. But I do think that he wove fact and tradition into a basically sound reconstruction, a scientific theory on which, seven hundred years later, we can hardly improve.

And what a story it makes!

HOWARD AND THE CELTS

by L. Sprague de Camp

Robert Ervin Howard (1906–36), pen pal of H.P. Lovecraft and creator of Conan, was fascinated by the ancient Celts. Where Lovecraft was an Anglophile, Howard was a Celtophile. Howard was more objective towards the Celts than Lovecraft ever was towards the Anglo-Saxons; nevertheless, Howard harbored, throughout his life, a burning interest in Celtic history, anthropology, archaeology, and mythology.

This interest is reflected in many of Howard's stories. It does not appear so much in his Conan tales—his best-known works—although in his pseudo-history of prehistoric Europe, he made the Cimmerians the remote progenitors of the Celts. The interest appears most plainly in his Turlogh O'Brien fantasies and in his historical tales of Vikings and Crusaders.

Writing in Ireland goes back to +VI, the century following Saint Patrick—that is, writing in a script based on the Latin alphabet. The earlier ogam writing seems, like the Teutonic runes, to have been used mainly for tombstones and for magical spells. The first real outburst of Irish literary activity took place in 1014–1166—that is, between the expulsion of the Vikings and the submission of the Irish chiefs to Henry II of England. A mass of manuscripts was compiled, and copies of many

still exist. Among other goals, the scribes undertook to write their country's history.

As with other historians (such as those of the Greeks and the Hebrews) who tried to reach back into preliterate times, the compilers found themselves floundering in a welter of contradictory and largely fictional traditions, legends, and myths. Thus the poet Roscadach sang:

> O noble son of Ugraine,
> How does one arrive at knowledge of Ireland,
> The conquest of its company?
> Before they [the Gaels] overflowed Scythia,
> They reached the host-king of Shinar;
> They approached Egypt,
> Where Cingcris was extinguished,
> So that a great troop was destroyed,
> Who died in the Red Sea.
> They flowed through a space very faithful,
> With Pharaoh fought;
> Niul contracts with the Scots,
> The conception on our fathers.
> They took the name of "Gaedels,"
> The name "Scots" spread,
> The fair daughter of Pharaoh. . . .[1]

We hear how some of these proto-Irish went to Scythia (our Ukraine plus Kazakstan). Lord Golam fled to Egypt after a murder and was given a wife by Pharaoh Nectanebo (-IV). Some went to Spain, where they became known as the Milesians.

Other accounts tell of successive landings in Ireland by Partholan (or Parthalon) and his followers, the Partholanians, from Greece. Then came Nemed (or Nemeth) and his Nemedians from Scythia and the Fomhoraigh or Fomorians from Africa; then the Firbolg from Greece; then the Tuatha De Danann from Greece via

Scandinavia. Lastly arrived the Milesians from Scythia via Egypt and Spain.

Some of these invaders are said to have been exterminated by wars or plagues. Later, they pop up again as lively as ever. Goidhel, the eponymous ancestor of the Gaels, was said to have met Moses in Egypt. This would put him back in the late second millennium B.C.—assuming that there ever was such a person as Moses, which is doubtful. Other legends connect the Irish with the prophet Jeremiah.

Robert Ervin Howard was of partly Irish ancestry, with much English and Scottish admixture; hence his pro-Irish sympathies. While Lovecraft fumed at Irishmen for agitating against their "lawful sovereign," the king of England, Howard felt equally bitter about the sins of the English in Ireland from 1166 on down. He read Don Byrne's Irish novels but resented the author's making heroes of Ulstermen and Anglo-Normans.

Like many other dabblers in legendary lore, Howard tried to make a coherent account of the legends of migrations to Ireland. Like many mythographers, he argued that the legends must have a substratum of truth, if only one could extract it. Following the Catholic Encyclopedia, he identified the Firbolgs with the Belgae, since *fir* means "man" or "men." (Others think the term signifies "men of the boats," *bolg* meaning either a sack or a coracle—a boat made of hide stretched on a wooden frame, like an Eskimo craft.)

Howard also studied the eccentric phonology and orthography of Irish, realizing the close relation between the Celtic and Latin tongues. For an example of this kinship, the last time I was in Ireland I learned the Irish for that sentence most useful to travelers: "Where is the men's room?" It is *Cá bhuil siomra fir?*, which in Latin becomes *Qua est camera virorum?*

Howard took part in the endless arguments as to which of the two main branches of the British Celts, the Gaels and the Cymry[2] (Britons), reached Britain first. Like Lovecraft, he was still under the spell of the Aryanist doctrine, which identified the Aryans with the tall, blond, blue-eyed Nordic racial type. Howard spoke of the conquest, in Britain, of small, dark aborigines of Mediterranean type by "blond, blue-eyed giants"—the supposed Aryan Celts. Being himself black-haired, Howard was less englamorated by mere blondness than Lovecraft; most of his heroes, in fact, were brunets.

Howard cited the Venerable Bede (or Bæda) as saying that the Picts, too, had come from "Scythia." He thought Partholan a Phoenician; the Fomorians, Danes; the Firbolgs, Belgae; and the Milesians, Gaels from Scythia. He even thought that Homer's Achaeans must be Celts, because of resemblances between Greek and Irish Heroic Age poetry.

The Picts also fascinated Howard. Not much is known about them, save that they occupied Scotland in Roman times and for a few centuries thereafter. In the treeless Orkneys and Shetlands, they built fairly elaborate houses of stone slabs. Some say that *Picti* is simply Latin for "painted ones." Others derive the word elsewhence. Roman writers spoke vaguely of "Picts and Caledonians" or, sometimes, of "Caledonians and other Picts," as the people of Britain north of the walls of Hadrian and Antoninus.

In +IX, the Picts succumbed to Kenneth MacAlpin, leader of the Scots or "raiders" from Ireland, who had settled in Argyll, in the West of Scotland. Kenneth was able to subdue the Picts partly because they were simultaneously attacked from the other side by Norsemen. One source says that Kenneth "destroyed" the Picts. But this should not be taken literally, because the records

also say that he ruled the Picts happily for sixteen years more and was still called "king of the Picts and Scots" at his death. The Picts and Scots had already been largely amalgamated—Kenneth is said to have been half Pictish—and the principle change in the Pictish life style was the abandonment of their undeciphered language for Gaelic. Thereafter all the subjects of Kenneth's successors were called "Scots."

Howard summarized some of these theories about them in one of his many voluminous letters to Lovecraft. Various authorities, he said, identified the Picts as Celts, aborigines, or even Germans. Some said they entered Britain after the Britons but before the Gaels. The "wild Picts of Galloway" of Scottish history and legend, he thought, were a mixture of Celtic (both Cymric and Gaelic), aboriginal, Germanic, and Scandinavian elements, speaking a "sort of bastard Cymric." In the strict sense, he thought that the word "Pict" properly designated one Celtic tribe that had settled in Galloway and mingled with the local population. To Howard, however, the name always evoked the image of the small, dark, British aborigines of Mediterranean type.

Hence, when Howard invented his Pictish hero of Roman times, Bran Mak Morn, he conceived him as a dark-skinned, black-eyed, black-haired "pantherish man of medium height." The typical Picts he thought of as "short, stocky, with thick, gnarled limbs, beady black eyes, a low, retreating forehead, a heavy jaw, and straight, coarse black hair."[3] But when he put Picts into his prehistoric Hyborian Age, he omitted these Neanderthaloid features. His Hyborian Picts, while short and dark, are in many ways more like Iroquois than any Europeans.

The story of European migrations, conquests, and cultural borrowings is so complex and so filled with

uncertainties that even the most conscientious popularizer despairs of presenting it in detail. In discussing the racial types of prehistoric Europeans, we should be cautious. In the first place, the most obvious differences among human races are matters of skin color, hair, and the superficial tissues that give the face its distinctive shape. But the skin and hair of ancients are rarely preserved—hardly ever, in fact, in damp Northern Europe.

Human skulls look much more alike than their former living owners. Anybody can tell a Swede, a Japanese, and a Congolese apart; but if one had only their skulls to work from, one would have to be an expert to identify them, and even then mistakes would be likely. So one must take with a large grain of salt the statements of some anthropologists that some Stone Age European skulls show Negroid or Mongoloid affinities, or that some pre-Columbian American skulls indicate Caucasoid or Australoid pre-Columbian immigrants.

Then, too, the population of any single area varies in stature, complexion, and so forth. As far as we can tell, this has been the case always and everywhere. So if we find, from a particular time and place, the skeleton of a tall, broad-headed man, it does not necessarily follow that everybody there and then was tall and broad-headed.

For many years, pictures of Neanderthal men showed them as having a hunched, apelike posture. This resulted from the fact that the first nearly complete Neanderthal skeleton found, that of La Chapelle-aux-Saints, was that of an arthritic old man who could not help his slouch. Other Neanderthalers, it is now established, stood in the normal human pose.

It is, however, known that there were people in the British Isles well before -2000. About -1700, the beer-drinking, copper-using, trading Beaker Folk arrived, apparently from Spain, whence they spread all over

Western Europe. Unlike most Spainards, they were broad-heads. In the British Isles, they made themselves rulers. During their hegemony, the circle of bluestones was erected at Stonehenge.

A century or two later came the first waves of the Aryans—or rather, the remote descendants of the original horse-taming Aryans, driving horse-chariots, brandishing bronzen weapons, worshiping sky gods, and speaking an Indo-European tongue. By then, however, the original horsemen had become so mixed with conquered populations that their original (possibly Alpine) racial type had disappeared. About this time, the sarsens—the huge sandstone blocks—were erected at Stonehenge.

Another Aryan wave, the Battle Ax people, arrived towards the end of the second millennium B.C. Then still another, the head-hunting Celts, appeared in -IV. Spreading out from Central Europe from -VI on, the Celts had already overrun Gaul and Spain. At the time of their British conquest, they also invaded the Balkans and Anatolia. They brought not only iron weapons but also scythe-wheeled chariots, two-ox plows, and white-robed Druids.

In -I came the Belgae, warlike Gallo-German natives of the Low Countries. They were skilled metal workers, who used the heavy colter plow (with an extra blade to cut the sod in front of the share)* and stamped their own coins. But the Belgae had conquered only the south-eastern corner of Britain when the Romans arrived.

As for the Picts, some historians say that they spoke a Celtic language; others suppose them to have been survivors of a group of pre-Aryan inhabitants of the British Isles, speaking a tongue of another family. Other such linguistic enclaves are known in Europe. The Basques

*Later discoveries cast doubt on this theory.

have preserved their non-Indo-European tongue down to the present; the Etruscans, who likewise once spoke a non-Indo-European language, have long since been absorbed among the other Italians. The Caucasus Mountains are a living museum of such linguistic fossils.

The Picts might have represented any of the Celtic or pre-Celtic waves of invasion: Beaker Folk, Battle Ax Folk, and so on, mixed in any proportion with earlier or later arrivals. A few Pictish names are known from gravestones of the Roman period: Resad, Spusscio, Canutulachma, Bliesblituth, Usconbuts, Uiponamet, Uumpopula, and Doronauch Nerales. These do not sound very Indo-European, and certainly nothing like the pseudo-Iroquois names that Howard gave his Hyborian Picts. That question, however, calls for a more learned linguistician than I.

Howard envisaged the prehistoric invasions of Britain as being a case of blond, blue-eyed Nordic giants conquering squat Mediterranean brunets. True, the present-day inhabitants of the British Isles appear to be a mixture of Nordic and Mediterranean types, with a little Alpine and other breeds thrown in.

There is no reason, Lovecraft and Howard to the contrary notwithstanding, to think that any of these types ever existed in pure form. As far back as the records go, the inhabitants of any section of Europe have shown a mixture of traits. Not only do all the main types occur in differing proportions in different parts, but most individuals do not exhibit any one pure type but display a mixture of traits.

Hence there has never been a pure blond race. All that happened was that blondness was a survival trait in Northern Europe, under whose sunless skies the pale coloring that went with blondness helped children to avoid rickets. Further south, blondness was if anything

harmful. Hence blondness became much commoner in Northern Europe than it did anywhere else. But it was never universal, as one can see from the frequency of early historical northern characters with names like "Halfdan the Black." As one goes from anywhere to anywhere else in the Old World, the percentage of people displaying any bodily characteristic, like blondness, changes gradually, not abruptly.

The main reason for racial differences seems to have been the selective effects of climate on primitive tribesmen. Some of the functions of distinctive racial features are obvious. The Negroid's rangy build, dark skin, abundant sweat glands, and built-in sun helmet of kinky hair are adaptations to life under the fierce African sun. The Mongoloid's stocky build, his flattened, fat-padded face, and his coarse hair, with large internal insulating air spaces, are made to withstand the bitter winters of Manchuria and Siberia.

With the rise of civilization, these evolutionary adaptations decline in importance. Hence, we may suppose, the distinctiveness among European racial types was at its greatest before the rise of civilization in that part of the world—say, before -2000. After that, the increasing imperviousness of men to climate with the advance of technology, and the increasing ease of movement with the improvement of ships and the spread of the horse, made for more migration and intermixture. Hence the forces tending to mix and merge the Europeans became stronger than the climatic factors, which had previously caused them to evolve along divergent lines and split into distinct racial types.

Therefore, we should expect to find the most Nordic blondness in the North before -2000. If any group was ever made up of relatively unmixed Nordics, it was probably the "aborigines" who dwelt in Britain when

the Beaker Folk arrived. If the first introduction of a Mediterranean strain can be pinned on anybody, the Beaker Folk from Spain seem the best candidates. Another Mediterranean infusion occurred under the Romans, when many folks from the Mediterranean shores went to Britain as soldiers, officials, traders, missionaries, and so on.

The best clue to the racial types of any group of invaders is where they came from. Thus an invasion by Spaniards or Italians would cause a darkening of the British complexion, while a conquest from Scandinavia would effect a lightening. An incursion from the nearby French and Low Country shores would not much affect the British racial type, since those newcomers differed but little physically from those whose land they invaded.

It is unlikely that many Scandinavians came to Britain before the fall of the West Roman Empire in +V. The earliest records of such movements are the migration of Norse settlers to the Orkney and Shetland Islands in the +780s. This was followed by Norse and Danish raids on Ireland in the +790s and Danish raids on England in the +830s. Then came attempts at permanent conquest and settlement. These were partly successful in France and England, although in time the settlers came under the rule of the French and English kings.

In earlier centuries, the Scandinavians were more or less sedentary farmers and fishermen. Even if they were then as warlike and rapacious as they later showed themselves (which is not really known), they were restricted to preying on one another by lack of transport to enable them to plague other folk. They had not yet evolved the beautiful, efficient ships they subsequently possessed, when they had learned from the Frisians to make seagoing vessels and had improved on their teachers.

In fact, one can correlate the invasions of Britain with

the spread of improved shipbuilding techniques. In pre-Roman times, the Northern Europeans had nothing much bigger than a large modern lifeboat. Therefore the invasions of Britain were from the nearest shores, whence the white cliffs of Dover could be seen.[4]

By +V, knowledge of larger ships had spread to the Frisians and coastal Germans. This knowledge was probably fostered by examples of Roman ships, built locally, on the northern Gaulish coast, to Mediterranean designs. Hence the Saxons from our Hanover and the Angles from our Slesvig could mount invasions from their own coasts, over longer stretches of water than their predecessors would have dared.[5]

By +VI, with the further spread and advance of maritime technology, the Danes and Norwegians got into the act. A Viking longship was much like a glorified Liburnian galley of the Roman Empire, with the stouter, clinker-built construction demanded by the stormy northern seas. The outburst of Scandinavian maritime activity, as soon as the Scandinavians had ships that made it possible, can be compared to the outburst of European exploration and conquest from 1492 on, as soon as Europeans had developed the compass-equipped, cannon-armed, full-rigged ship.

In his Viking stories, Howard has Roman Britain invaded in force by Danes and Norsemen. This is a flagrant anachronism, but it need not spoil our enjoyment of the stories. Howard, although a well-read man, never had the opportunity for research in depth on the question.

Authentic Scandinavian history begins about the time of the British invasions of +IX. Earlier, it is a mass of myth, legend, and pseudo-history, with some real history mixed in, like the "histories" of Homeric Greece or of the Hebrews before Saul and Samuel.

To judge from what the later Scandinavians said about their forebears, these "blond giants" were a singularly villainous lot. The kings most admired were those who most effectively ravaged and plundered their neighbors' lands. To settle disputes, such a ruler often invited his rival to a peace conference with protestations of undying love, got him and his retainers drunk, and burned up the banquet hall with the banqueters. While not much is known of their personal habits, ibn-Fadlan, an Arab diplomat who met Swedish Vikings on the Volga in +920, described them as fine-looking people but "the filthiest of God's creatures."[6]

Most of the prehistoric immigrants to Britain probably came from the nearest shores: northern Gaul and the Low Countries. Most of them, furthermore, were presumably of much the same types as dwell there now: a Nordic-Alpine-Mediterranean mixture, not very different from their neighbors across the Channel.

Before gunpowder, large men (like Nordics and Forest Negroes) had an advantage in war, because they could run faster, reach farther, hit harder, and wear heavier armor than small men. This advantage, however, could readily be nullified by superior arms, drill, and discipline. When Caesar besieged the capital of the Aduatuci in Belgium and began construction of a belfry or movable siege tower,

> This sight at first caused them a good deal of amusement. . . . As a rule, the Gauls look down on us [wrote Caesar] for being so small of stature compared with their own larger selves; and so now they inquired how little creatures like us, with our weak hands and feeble physiques, could possibly imagine that we were going to lift up so massive a tower and place it on top of their wall.[7]

But Caesar's wiry little Italians won anyway. Nowadays, any military advantage of bodily size is trivial, as the United States found in Vietnam. Likewise, physical adaptations to climate have dwindled in importance with improvements in clothes, houses, furnaces, diet, and air conditioning.

Caesar's account may also give an exaggerated idea, shared by some more recent writers, of the differences between his Romans and their foes. The Aduatuci dwelt near modern Liège, Belgium, and there is no reason to think that they differed much from present-day Belgians. On the average, Belgians are taller than Italians; but millions of Italians are still taller than millions of Belgians. Likewise, the Swedes and the Scots average taller than the Belgians—but only on the average.

So far from prehistoric Britain's having seen the repeated conquest of small brunets by blond giants, the fact was probably the other way round. Until the Scandinavian invasions, beginning around +800, the natives in each case (including the Picts) were probably taller and blonder than the folk from more southerly lands who overran them—albeit the difference might be large in one case and negligible in another. Each wave of newcomers, however, had some technical advantage: copper over stone, bronze over copper, iron over bronze, the colter plow over the simple plow, or Roman drill and discipline over slapdash Celtic onslaughts. More often than not, the swarthy shrimps beat the noble Nordics.

In fact, before they were attacked by the technically more advanced Romans, Saxons and Vikings, the Celts seem to have had no true cities, of the sort that then spangled the Mediterranean shores. All they had were chieftains' strongholds, on islands and mountain tops, to which the folk could flee in times of war. Maiden Castle in Dorset is typical. When the Second Augustan Legion

stormed in about +45, a Roman catapult dart hit one defender in the belly; the head of the dart was found in modern times, embedded in the man's vertebra, and can be seen in the museum in Dorchester. The probable reason for the lack of Celtic cities is that Celtic agriculture was simply not yet efficient enough to furnish the surplus of food required to support such a non-farming population.

And the legends of Partholan, the Fomorians, and the rest? We might as well forget them, for all the light they shed on real British history. While some historical facts may well be embalmed in them, there is no reliable way, in the absence of independent evidence, to separate the facts from the fictions. It is like hunting, not merely for a needle in a haystack, but also for a needle that looks just like a wisp of hay.

Let us not be fooled by the happenstance that the real Beaker Folk, like the mythic Milesians, came from Spain, or that the original Aryans, like the legendary Nemedians, started out from "Scythia." The legends were compiled and written down more than a thousand years after the times of which they tell. The main source of the Irish migration tales, "The Legend of Tuan mac Carrell" in *The Book of the Dun Cow,* was written about +1100, while the migrations it recounts would have to have taken place before Caesar's probing expeditions of −55 and −54.

During most of the intervening time, Ireland was essentially preliterate. Hence the stories had to be transmitted orally. Now, as far as evidence takes us, the memory of a historical fact can be handed down by word of mouth for a few centuries but little if any longer. After that, the recollection is crowded out by more recent events or so transformed by man's myth-making propensities that it becomes unrecognizable.

It should not surprise us, therefore, that the Irish migration legends, like the stories of the Trojan War and the biblical Exodus, are so full of patent fictions that such scraps of history as may remain cannot be filtered out again. The cauldron of Dagda, whose food could never be exhausted, can be compared with the marvelous armor made for Achilles by the god Hephaistos, or Moses' magical walking stick, which could be turned into a snake or could summon water from a rock. We have the insoluble problem of trying to reconstruct history from fairy tales by leaving out the fairies.

Besides, it is most unlikely that the Irish before the Christian Era, who were never great seafarers like the Phoenicians, had ever heard of Scythia, Shinar (Sumer), Greece, Egypt, or the Red Sea. Knowledge of these far places, however muddled, must have come to Ireland with the Christian clerics who followed Patrick. They brought the Bible, which mentions those places, along with terms like "Pharaoh," which the Irish had never heard. They also brought other Classical literature, to add to the meager Irish knowledge of the outside world. That is how the Irish must have heard about Pharaoh Nectanebo, who is not mentioned in the Bible but is by several Greek authors, such as Diodoros, Plutarch, and Xenophon.

The Irish historians of that time tried to make history by merging this new knowledge (or what they thought was new knowledge, like the legend of Moses' parting the Red Sea) with their pagan myths and legends. The result bore the same relation to Irish history that the *Odyssey* does to the real Mediterranean world of the second millennium B.C., which is to say hardly any.

Celtic bards had a passion for harmonizing different stories by inventing connections among them and for explaining names by false etymologies and fabricated anecdotes. In the same way, Snorri Sturluson, the great

medieval Icelandic historian, identified Asgard, the home of the Æsir or gods of Norse mythology, with Asia.[8] After the land was Christianized, Celtic scribes preserved some of the old myths from Churchly disapproval by euhemerizing them. They demoted their pagan gods to mortal heroes, like Cúchulainn and Lancelot. Likewise the legendary invaders of Ireland—Firbolgs, Tuatha De Danann, and the rest—are probably demoted deities.

For all his Irish sympathies, Robert Howard was not altogether naive about the Celts. He blamed his Celtic blood (perhaps unfairly) for endowing him with a restless, unstable mind, which gave him no rest. In his black moods, he cursed the "black Milesian blood," which filled him with a "nameless sorrow in the black stars," while "white weeping winds are tugging at my heart forever." It filled him with "blind, brooding rage" at anything that crossed his path.

All races and nations, he admitted, had their share of "scuts and saints." He acknowledged Celtic "treachery . . . jealousy and fickleness," which brought the English into Ireland. So they did. In the 1150s, Pope Adrian IV, finding the Irish priesthood too independent for his liking, gave Ireland to Henry II (as if it had been his to give) on condition that Henry reduce these fractious Hibernians to obedience. Henry was then too busy elsewhere to take possession; but an exiled Irish kinglet, Dermot MacMurrough, got Henry's permission to recruit Norman adventurers to put him back on his throne.

When the Normans saw Ireland, they thought it would be much more fun to take over the country themselves than to fight for King Dermot. They despised, as bare-arsed barbarians, the unarmored Irish, who were slaughtered by the mailed Norman knights. The Irish claimed it was more manly to fight without armor, but

this may have been an excuse to cover the fact that their smiths had not yet learned how to make it. The new ruling class so afflicted the Irish that the latter submitted to the English king (who was actually more of a Frenchman) in the hope, soon to be cruelly disappointed, that he would protect them from the Normans.

This is a repeating pattern in Celtic history. In +82, Gnaeus Julius Agricola, governor of Roman Britain, considered an invasion of Ireland with the help of a renegade Irish kinglet, whom Agricola kept in his entourage for the purpose. But the Roman never got around to this project.

Then, when the Saxons had conquered most of England, the Britons held out in Strathclyde (Cumberland) in the northwest. About +VIII, a local British kinglet, Urien of Reged, was successful against King Theodoric of Bernicia (Northumberland); in fact he drove the Saxon clear off the mainland to the island of Lindisfarne. But then another Briton, Urien's kinsman and ally King Morcant, had Urien murdered, "out of envy, because he possessed so much superiority over all the kings in military science."[9]

The same factious spirit persists. In the uprisings against the British during the Kaiserian War, the most brilliant, daring, and promising Irish leader was Michael Collins. When the Irish Free State was formed, Collins was made commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Then he was killed in 1922 in an ambush by the Sinn Fein, the diehard republican faction. As the present Lord Dunsany once said to me:

"In the days of the Empire, the Irish made excellent colonial civil servants. Having grown up in an atmosphere of hospitality, flattery, treachery, and murder, they weren't surprised when they encountered these things in the colonies."

That still leaves the question: Whence this intransigent

factiousness, which, despite the Celts' impetuous valor, helped their defeat by the Romans in Gaul, by the Saxons in Britain, and by the Normans in Ireland? I think it has to do with the clan system of organization, which fosters loyalty to only a very small group. In land organized on such a basis, one's fellow-clansmen are those with whom one can claim kinship on grounds of descent from a common ancestor, real or mythical.

When a people is split up into many small independent tribes or clans, each acting on its own, bitter local enmities and perennial feuds are the rule. When a powerful outsider looms up, some of the units go over to the newcomer in hope of getting revenge on their local enemies. They act as if oblivious to the fact that the outsider will soon swallow them all. Thus when in +51, in Britain, the chief of the Silures, Caratacus, was beaten by the Romans, he fled to the land of the Brigantes to raise more resistance. But the queen of the Brigantes, Cartimandua, handed him over to the Romans in chains.

A similar spirit of local factiousness has appeared among many peoples: the Classical Greeks, the medieval Italians, the American Indians during the European conquest, and the modern Arabs. Such fragmented societies have often produced admirably creative people. But they are self-limited. Sooner or later, some powerful outsider gobbles all the little units, and the people have to learn wider loyalties under foreign masters.

NOTES.

1. T. P. Cross & C. H. Slover. *Ancient Irish Tales* (Holt, 1936), p. 25.

2. *Cá bhuil* rhymes with "novel"; *sio* is pronounced "sho." In Welsh, *Cymry* sounds like "kumruh."

3. R. E. Howard to H. P. Lovecraft, c. Apr. 1932; reprinted in part in Robert E. Howard: *Worms of the Earth* (Grant, 1974), pp. 9–12.

4. According to Caesar (*The Gallic Wars*, II, 8–16) the Veneti, on the

western coast of Gaul (around modern Vannes) had stoutly-built sailing ships with leather sails, but their size is not indicated.

5. The oldest record of Scandinavian Viking-faring is a Danish raid on the coast of Frankish Gaul in the Reign of Theodoric I (+511 to +534); Gregory of Tours: *History of the Franks*, III, iii.

6. J. Brønsted: *The Vikings* (Penguin), p. 265. "Clinker-built" means with the strakes of the hull overlapping.

7. Caesar, *op. cit.*, II, 33.

8. Snorri Sturluson: *Heimskringla*, I, ii.

9. Tacitus: *Agricola*, 24; Nennius, 63.

WHO WAS CROM?

by Albert E. Gechter

According to Robert E. Howard's very informative essay "The Hyborian Age" (*Skull-Face And Others*, Arkham House, 1946) the strong resemblance between the early Celtic peoples and his Pre-Cataclysmic Cimmerians is due to the fact that the Cimmerians are the ancestors of the Celts. (We might add at this point that there are some narrow-minded scholars who claim that the Cimmerians are simply modelled on Howard's concept of the Celts. May Set devour such heretics alive!)

We may safely assume, then, that many Celtic customs are derived from their Cimmerian ancestors; and judging by the evidence in the Conan chronicles, the gods of the ancient Celts, particularly those of the Gaels and Cymry, are the same as those of the Cimmerians. The longest discussion of Cimmerian religious beliefs is in a well-known passage in "Queen of the Black Coast" (*Conan of Cimmeria*, Lancer Books, 1969, pp. 82–118). Unfortunately, this particular passage *is* rather short, and is comparative rather than descriptive or analytical. Let us assume, on the basis of this evidence, albeit scanty, that the Cimmerian religion closely resembled the Druidic faith of ancient Britain and Ireland. We shall, however, expect to find certain differences after 10,000 years, but differences in detail, rather than in principle.

Turning again to the chronicles of Conan, we find the most important Cimmerian god was Conan's patron

deity, Crom, who dwelt upon a mountain top. Though some gods are strong to aid mankind, others are all too apt to do harm. Crom, cold-hearted Crom, was more likely to send doom, death, and disasters than assistance to his worshippers; it seemed to Conan useless to pray for help from such a grim and fierce god—better to work out one's problems than to call attention to one's self by prayer or supplication. Crom's one great boon was to breathe into a mortal at birth the courage to fight and the strength to withstand hardship and travail, and to Conan's way of thinking, no more should be expected of any god. In short, Crom was the god of the utterly self-reliant man.

Oddly enough, Crom's character undergoes a change in the events chronicled in "The Return of Conan" (in *Conan The Avenger,* Lancer Books, 1968, pp. 15–173): in this adventure it appeared that Crom, though neglected for 25 years by Conan, was still the Cimmerian's ally, and twice answered Conan's prayers in marvelous fashion. In all probability Crom's change of heart was inspired not so much by the two bullocks Conan eventually sacrificed to him as by a desire to see destroyed the sinister witchcraft Conan was fighting at the time.

It seems obvious that the dread god Crom Cruach, whom the ancient Celts worshipped with blood sacrifices—sometimes including human captives—at the annual feast of Samain (November first) and Beltane (May first) is the Cimmerian Crom. These feats incidentally included impressive and elaborate rituals to prevent him from angrily harming his worshippers. Whether the element of human sacrifice was derived from the Cimmerians or was added in the intervening millennia is a hard question to answer. Conan's violent hostility to human sacrifice doesn't seem the reaction of an individual whose own people sacrificed humans, but it might

well be the reaction of somebody whose tribe fought with other tribes which did. Cimmeria was a large and disunited country; it seems altogether possible that Conan's tribe did not offer up their captives to appease their gods, while at the same time other groups of Cimmerians did practice this ritual.

The name Crom Cruach is sometimes translated as "The Lord of the Mound," the mound being the *sidh*, the so-called fairy mound, the entrance to the otherworld. The mound of course corresponds to Crom's mountain, presumably since neither Ireland nor England have the really impressive mountain ranges of ancient Cimmeria.

As for the other gods known to Conan, we have the evidence of some of his oaths. At one time ("The Slithering Shadow," in *Conan The Adventurer,* Lancer Books, 1966, pp. 103–40), he swore a mighty oath by Lir and Manannán mac Lir, who in later time were Celtic gods of the sea, horses, chariots, poetry, and inspiration. Another time ("The Phoenix on the Sword," in *Conan The Usurper,* Lancer Books, 1967, pp. 173–204) Conan swore by Badb, Nemain, Morrigan, and Macha; these became goddesses of fertility, water, animals, pestilence, and death—like most Celtic deities they have become very versatile. Conan's interest in them probably lies in the fact that these were, as in later times for the Celts, the goddesses of battle. Of course, there must have been many more Cimmerian gods and goddesses.

In most respects, Conan was distrustful of the supernatural. He felt that gods were all very well in their place, but that they really couldn't be depended upon. He knew that for himself, swords and spears were usually more powerful than charms and spells. Although he had, from time to time, some miraculous visions, he was hardly a seer and put little faith in those who were. And in all this

he was different from primitive people in general and the ancient Celts in particular, who characteristically seek all the supernatural help they can get on every important occasion. As a matter of fact, Celtic heroes usually had some magic powers themselves.

Among the Cimmerians, religious faith did not depend upon hope either in this world or the hereafter; it did not lead to expectations of resurrection or immortality—and this seems also to have been true of most of the early Celts. Oddly, this seemed to inspire a sort of reckless, fatalistic courage born of desperation.

The Celts admired bravery highly; it is evident from the Conan saga that the Cimmerians before them did too. Heroes of Celtic myth are often invincible, but only one was invulnerable, probably because this advantage seemed to the Celts to detract from the accomplishment of facing danger and overcoming it. Among them, the more armor a man wore, the less his fellows thought him courageous. So it was the practice of the Celts to wear light armor or none at all, and battle wounds were considered the highest badge of honor. It is not surprising, therefore, to find it was the custom of many Celtic warriors to tear off their clothing in a frenzy of enthusiasm and to rush into battle stark naked, rather like the Scandinavian berserkers. This practice was greatly admired (though one suspects the fathers of Celtic girls tended to keep a close watch on any suitors who were known for fighting in this manner lest matters get out of hand). Although there is no direct evidence, it is altogether to be expected that a similar custom existed in Cimmeria.

Always in the ancient legends of the Cymry and the Gaels, the warrior hero is an outcast, a rebel, and a wanderer who must win for himself status and social acceptance by force and violence, thus proving his right

to a position as a hero. There were only two accepted careers for such a man: he could enter the services of a king or a chieftain as his liegeman, or he could join the *fianna,* a fraternity of landless and homeless men, a war-band of hunters and fighters. These were very exclusive organizations, into which a recruit could enter only after an arduous initiation. The *fianna* were pledged to the defense of the country in war, but otherwise they existed by plundering and exacting tribute. None the less, they were not outlaws nor brigands; they were simply not members of a tribe. It is possible that this was a holdover from a similar custom in Pre-Cataclysmic Cimmeria, and that Conan was of such a band before he left Cimmeria for richer pickings in the more civilized lands to the south. Certain it is that Conan would be at home in such a band—and soon its leader.

CONAN AND MATHO

by L. Sprague de Camp

In −241, an army of mercenary troops, which the Republic of Carthage had hired for their recent, unsuccessful war against Rome—the First Punic War—revolted against their employers. The soldiers had returned from Sicily to Carthage to be paid off. In Carthage, however, they were fobbed off with excuses by the Punic politicians, who hoped to persuade them to accept less than their due. The indignant mercenaries, egged on by a pair of self-appointed leaders, did not only demand the pay due them. When the Carthaginians wavered in the face of threats, the mercenaries' demands grew, becoming unreasonable and extortionate. The more they were given, the more they demanded.

A merciless war, in which torturing prisoners to death became standard practice, ensued. At first the mercenaries—a motley crowd of Spaniards, Celts, Balearics, Ligurians, Greeks, Libyans, and other Mediterranean peoples—had the advantage. The Carthaginians, like their Phoenician ancestors, were daring explorers but not very warlike. Although capable of fanatical resistance when their cities were attacked, they were primarily businessmen, not brawlers. Since they were never numerous enough to raise large armies from their own masses, they hired others out of their abundant wealth to do their fighting.

In the end, the mercenaries were destroyed. Their two leaders, a Libyan named Matho and an escaped slave of Oscan origin named Spendius, both perished.

In 1862, the French novelist Gustave Flaubert published a historical novel, *Salammbô*, which tells the story of the revolt of the mercenaries. This novel has been described by a recent authority as "A sinister masterpiece of imagination not to be compared with more pedestrian works of historical fiction far better briefed on the archaeological and religious background."* The novel was recently available in English in two cheap cloth-bound editions and one paperbacked edition.

Salammbô should interest connoisseurs of heroic fantasy on three grounds. First, although nominally a historical novel, it abounds in the same sort of heightened color and vividness, with everything larger than life, that also distinguishes Mundy's *Tros* stories and makes the latter favorites on the Hyborian Legionnaires. A sample shows what I mean:

> The temple of Moloch was built at the foot of a steep defile in a sinister spot. From below nothing could be seen but lofty walls rising indefinitely like those of a monstrous tomb. The night was gloomy, a greyish fog seemed to weigh upon the sea, which beat against the cliff with a noise of death-rattles and sobs; and the shadows gradually vanished as though they had passed through the walls.
>
> But as soon as the doorway was crossed one found oneself in a vast quadrangular court bordered by arcades. In the centre rose a mass of architecture with eight equal faces. It was surmounted by cupolas which thronged around a second story supporting a kind of rotunda, from which sprang a cone with a re-entrant curve and terminating in a ball on the summit.
>
> Fires were burning in cylinders of filigree-work fitted upon poles, which men were carrying to and fro. These lights flickered in the gusts of wind and reddened the golden combs which fastened their plaited hair on the

*B. H. Warmington: *Carthage*, p. 164.

nape of the neck. They ran about calling to one another to receive the Ancients.

> Here and there on the flagstones huge lions were couched like sphinxes, living symbols of the devouring sun. They were slumbering with half-closed lids. But roused by the footsteps and voices they rose slowly, came towards the Ancients, whom they recognized by their dress, and rubbed themselves against their thighs, arching their backs with sonorous yawns; the vapour of their breath passed across the light of the torches. The stir increased, doors closed, all the priests fled, and the Ancients disappeared beneath the columns which formed a deep vestibule round the temple.*

My second reason is that, I suspect, Howard had read *Salammbô* shortly before he began his Conan stories. The Everyman's Library edition (Dutton) was published in 1931. At this time, Howard was still feeling his way towards that synthesis of heroic romance, antiquarianism, and Dunsano-Lovecraftian fantasy that resulted in the Conan stories. He had written the crude but forceful King Kull stories, laid in Atlantean times, but had sold only three out of the thirteen he wrote (or at least began). Then something clicked, and Conan and his Hyborian Age were born.

My suspicion that Howard read *Salammbô* at about this time is not based upon any overwhelming resemblance between *Salammbô* and the Conan stories in general. True, there are resemblances, but then so there are to many of the historical fictions that Howard had read. There is much of the same somber mood in *Salammbô* as in many of the Conan stories, and much the same atmosphere of ready violence, treachery, and im-

*Pp. 96f of the Everyman's Library edition. In this edition, the translation by J. S. Chartres leaves something to be desired; thus the translator speaks of a statue as "sliding upon cylinders" when he means "rolling on rollers."

placable, selfish hardness. There is some slight resemblance between Conan and Flaubert's Matho:

> A Libyan of colossal stature, and with short, black curly hair. He had retained only his military jacket, the brass plates of which were tearing the purple of the couch. A necklace of silver moons was tangled in his hairy breast. His face was stained with splashes of blood; he was leaning on his left elbow with a smile on his large, open mouth. (p. 12.)

But Conan is a stronger and more vividly visualized character than Matho.

The real reason for my suspicion is two parallel passages. The first, from *Salammbô* (p. 106) reads: "The suffete [Hamilcar Barca] leaped into his chariot and took the reins; the two animals, curving their necks, and rhythmically beating the rebounding pebbles, went up the whole of the Mappalian Way at full gallop and the silver vulture at the extremity of the pole seemed to fly, so quickly did the chariot pass along."

Compare the similar passage from GB:* "Kallian's appearance was now strangely different from what it had been when he rode along the Palian Way in his gilded chariot, massive, arrogant, and domineering, with his dark eyes glinting with magnetic vitality."

These pictures of chariots on the (Map) Palian Way seem a little too similar for coincidence. Howard might have made even more extensive use of Flaubert's scenery had he ever gotten around to writing a story of Conan's period as a mercenary in Shem. This he never did. The one apparent exception, "Hawks over Shem," was originally, until I rewrote it, a tale of medieval Egypt in the reign of the Caliph Hakîm.

As things stand, Howard's Shemites are much like

*"The God in the Bowl."

Flaubert's Carthaginians. These in turn answer to Plutarch's hostile description:

> The Carthaginians are a hard and gloomy people, submissive to their rulers and harsh to their subjects, running to extremes of cowardice in times of fear and of cruelty in times of anger; they keep obstinately to their decisions, are austere and care little for amusement or the graces of life.

Like most generalizations about a whole nation by its enemies, this description probably contains some truth, but only a very small amount, since real people are enormously variable under their unifroms of costume and custom. Compare Flaubert's Carthaginian Senators:

> These men were generally thick-set, with curved noses like those of the Assyrian colossus . . . Those who had lived continually shut up in their counting-houses had pale faces; others showed in theirs the severity of the desert, and strange jewels sparkled on all the fingers of their hands, which were burnt by unknown suns. The navigators might be distinguished by their rolling gait, while the men of agriculture smelt of the winepress, dried herbs, and the sweat of mules. These old pirates had lands under tillage, these money-grubbers would fit out ships, these proprietors of cultivated lands supported slaves who followed trades. All were skilled in religious discipline, expert in strategy, pitiless and rich. They looked wearied of prolonged cares. Their flaming eyes expressed distrust, and their habits of travelling and lying, trafficking and commanding, gave an appearance of cunning and violence, a sort of discreet and convulsive brutality to their whole demeanour . . . (pp. 97f.)

The third reason for recommending the novel is that Flaubert had more than a little in common with Howard. Flaubert was a big, powerful, handsome, personable man who, however, suffered some neural weakness,

which resulted in a nervous breakdown at twenty-two. He recovered and wrote actively for thirty years, but then began to disintegrate again and spent his last decade aging rapidly and prematurely in comparatively unproductive isolation.

Salammbô has its flaws. Except for the rascally Spendius, Flaubert's characters are not outstanding. Hamilcar's daughter Salammbô, with whom Matho falls in love, is hardly more than sketched in. Matho is a good-natured but childishly simple dope. All the other leading characters are such unpleasant persons that it is hard for the reader to identify himself with any of them.

In addition, while Flaubert was a conscientious researcher, we have learned a good deal more about Carthage in the last century, and some of these discoveries make the concepts of *Salammbô* obsolete. For instance, Moloch was not the name of one definite god. The word is a dialectical variant of the Canaanitish *melekh,* "Lord." It was applied to the chief god of every Punic city. This god might be Eshmun, El, Baal Hammon, Dagon, etc. The full form was Melekh-Qarth, "lord of the city," whence the Greek Melikertes-Herakles.

Flaubert altered history in a few places for reasons of novelistic practicality. The Carthaginians were given to multiple use of a few favorite given names (as we do with our John, Joseph, and William). Hence, if Flaubert had strictly followed the record, the reader would have been confused by two characters named Hanno and two named Hannibal.

But if you want a story of violent events, told in the grand manner, and a picture of an ancient world where everything is larger and more brilliantly colored than life, "a purple and golden and crimson universe where anything can happen—except the tedious" (as John D. Clark said in his introduction to the Gnome edition of *Conan the Conqueror)* then here is the story for you.

JOHN CARTER: SWORD OF THEOSOPHY

by Fritz Leiber

Some twelve years ago in *Digest of Digests,* an ultimately-named Australian publication which reprints articles from digest-sized American and British magazines, I ran across a piece on California cults which contained a summary of Theosophy's speculations about past and future races of earth. What this summary described sounded to me very much like good old Barsoom with its green men, white priests, levitating battleships, egg-laying princesses, and all the rest. In short, I got the impression that Edgar Rice Burroughs had found in Theosophy a rich source of background materials for his Mars books; his chief job seemed to have been adding canals and atmosphere plants to landscapes originally drawn for Atlantis, Lemuria, and points Mu-ward. At the time I was bored.

Recently my attitude changed but I have been unable to locate the article or trace its lineage. So I turned to the literature of Theosophy itself and instantly found myself trapped in a vast savage jungle far more dangerously tangled than any that Tarzan ever traversed. I'd got more than I'd bargained for, and not just by way of Theosophy, for guarding the jungle's lush green flanks towered the mountain ranges of several other pseudo-sciences; spiritualism, the Atlantis cult, pyramidology, various free-wheeling theories of sex and evolution, Indian spiritual disciplines and monster cosmologies,

etc. Still, even in the darkest reaches of the great rain forest, the landscape was hauntingly familiar.

Theosophy was the creation of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, a Russian noblegirl born in 1831 who early left the steppes to circulate around India and Tibet [she said, but actually she only got as far as Egypt—L.S. deC.] before heading back to the Western World stacked with mystical knowledge, having pioneered the occult path followed by Uspenski and others. She was a whiz at extemporizing cosmologies, psychologies, and mysterious systems of all sorts, working in a period when simple religious faiths were tottering, everybody was arguing about evolution, there were no airplanes, and X-rays had not yet been discovered. The horror-story was due to undergo radical transformations at the hands of Machen, Blackwood, Lovecraft, and others, and one might say that Madame Blavatsky was searching for a horror-metaphysics. In New York in 1873, working with spiritualist stooges, she founded the Theosophical Society and in 1877 she wrote *Isis Unveiled,* a large book.

In 1888, three years before her death, Madame Blavatsky copyrighted *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy,* which fully lives up to its title and is a mighty two volumes indeed. Its 1474 pages (not including 92 pages of introductory material and index) deal with such fascinating topics as The Seven Eternities, The Eye of Dangma, The Great Vibration, "They Produce Fohat," The Seven Layu Centers, "Dead" Planets, Mystery of the Female Logos, The Purity of *Early* Phallicism, The Moon Bi-Sexual, "Modern Physicists Are Playing at Blind Man's Bluff," Professor Crookes on the Elements, Mr. Keely an Unconscious Occultist, The First War in Heaven, "Who Are The Flames?", "Could Man Exist 18,000,000 Years Ago?", The Sin of the Mindless Men, The Hairy Men of China, Flying Camels, The Seven

Virgin Youths, The Tibetan Lilith, Races with the "Third Eye," The Esoteric Meaning of "Fish," The "Curse" from a Philosophical Point of View, How to Read Symbols, A Pithecoid Man Wanted, Plastidular Souls and Conscious Nerve-Cells, and many *many* more—but these are enough to indicate something of the work's scope and also to hint at its linkages with much previous and subsequent charlatanry.

The Secret Doctrine is largely organized as a commentary on quotations from *The Book of Dzyan,** "An Archaic Manuscript" preserved from primal times by Indian adepts. (There were a lot of these amazing books kicking around Tibet if you knew where to look for them. "Pilgrims say that the subterranean galleries and halls under the ridge of Altyn-Tagh, whose soil no European foot has ever trodden on so far, contain a collection of books, the number of which, according to the accounts given, is too large to find room even in the British Museum.") *The Book Of Dzyan* was surely the prototype of such confessedly fabulous "secret books" as Lovecraft's *The Book of Eibon* and the *Pnakotic Manuscripts,* and it is written in very much the same tantalizing, quasi-poetic style as Lovecraft's *Necronomicon.* Lovecraft drew background and color from Theosophy, as instanced by this quotation from "The Call of Cthulhu": "Theosophists have guessed at the awesome grandeur of the cosmic cycle wherein our world and human race form transient incidents. They have hinted at strange survivals in terms which would freeze the blood if not masked by a bland optimism." And the Great Race in "The Shadow out of Time" has a Theosophic feel to it, even down to its final migration to Mercury (also a Theosophist prediction).

For that matter, many writers have been interested in

*Pronounced something like "John."

and influenced by Theosophy, James Joyce and W.B. Yeats among them. Writers, quite properly seeking to escape the curse of compartmentalized knowledge, are forever attempting to think of everything at once and Theosophy, with its strongly synthetic spirit, does just that.

Volume II of *The Secret Doctrine,* subtitled *Anthropogenesis,* deals with past, present, and future forms of intelligent life. According to the Theosophical phantasmagoria, there are seven "Root Races," each consisting of seven "Sub-Races." I find parallels between these and the races descended from the Barsoomian Tree of Life as described by Burroughs, especially in *The Gods of Mars.* I limit my quotes to *The Book of Dzyan:*

"THE SECOND RACE WAS THE PRODUCT BY BUDDING AND EXPANSION, THE ASEXUAL FROM THE SEXLESS." This suggests the Barsoomian plant men.

"THEN THE SECOND EVOLVED THE EGG-BORN, THE THIRD." Oviparous humanoid Martians, red and otherwise.

"THERE WERE FOUR-ARMED HUMAN CREATURES IN THOSE EARLY DAYS OF THE MALE-FEMALES." Here one thinks of the green Martians with their two pairs of arms. "THEY BUILT GREAT IMAGES NINE YATIS [yards] HIGH, THE SIZE OF THEIR BODIES." (Here there is also a link with the Easter Island statues. Theosophy never misses a bet!)

Other Theosophical writings, such as those of Annie Besant and of W. Scott-Elliot (*The Story of Atlantis,* 1914), provide further parallels. In *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science* (Dover, 1947) Martin Gardner summarizes Scott-Elliot's picture of an Atlantean subrace, the Toltec, that sounds remarkably like Burroughs'

red Martians: "They were . . . copper-colored, tall, and with Grecian features. Their science was very advanced. There were Toltec airships which operated by a cosmic force unknown today."

Parallels aside, the occult elements in Burroughs' books stand out sharply: instantaneous interplanetary travel by thought power; each planet having its characteristic ray (astrological inspirations indicated here) and airships held aloft by tanks (!) of these rays; Methuselah-size lifetimes of one thousand years, an occultist gimmick which also appealed to G.B. Shaw, whose *Back to Methuselah* gives a remarkably Theosophical picture of Earth's future; creation of phantom and living matter by thought power *(Thuvia, Maid Of Mars);* and addiction to simple living (nudism, etc.) and high thinking; and finally the oppression and persecution of wise free-thinkers by an evil priesthood.

This last point is worth dwelling on briefly. Anyone familiar with Rosicrucian advertisements knows their thinly-veiled claims of persecution by organized religion, apparently chiefly the Roman Catholic Church ("This wisdom must die)".

On Barsoom the evil priesthood is represented by the Holy Therns, whose diabolic activities sound very much like those of Rome as described by the wilder Protestant propagandists. False celibates, they riot in luxury in their secret Vatican City near Barsoom's south pole, indulging their sadistic lusts. Of course they are good swordsmen too—everybody had to double in steel in the Big Burroughs Space Show, even effetes, magicians, priests, and beautiful girls. And Phaidor, daughter of Matai Shang, Father of Holy Therns, is right up there with Pope Joan in the Sex-Spiced-With-Blasphemy department.

In conclusion, it seems to me very plausible that Burroughs' writing in California in the early part of this

century, should have found background material in the cults flourishing right around him. To discover, if it can be done, the precise books, articles, and accounts he leaned on, is beyond my energies or ambition. Research in a pseudo-science like Theosophy is of a particularly wearying sort, since the writers lean heavily on mysterious hints, jumble known history and play fast and loose with proper names, have no regard for order or consistency, and are quite willing to confuse and baffle the reader, if it seems to add to the general impressiveness. As with most crackpots and fanatics, their so-called explanations are really an arsenal of arguments, sometimes wonderfully tied together and subtly appealing to different intellectual weaknesses in the reader, but designed to prove, confute, or evade rather than to explain.

A writer can find rich and stimulating material in Theosophy (just as he can, say, in the writings of Charles Fort) *if* he accepts it as intellectual fantasy, a sort of raw material of words, visions, and notions having no certain reference to anything in reality. But if he tries to *work* with the material, to locate something specific in the jungles of Theosophical prose, he's in for trouble. I've had mine!

Yet there is one item I discovered in *The Secret Doctrine* which I would like to pass on, because it bears not only on Burroughs' own rather crude but enthusiastic concept of evolution, but also on a somewhat irrational but dramatically satisfying view of the mutant which keeps cropping up in science fiction. According to this view, a new race of men, "the mutants," equipped with many favorable mutations, springs up rather suddenly and finds itself in sharp opposition to the old mankind.

According to Theosophy, present-day man belongs to the fifth sub-race of the Fifth or Aryan Root-Race (in turn

a development of the fifth sub-race of the Fourth or Atlantean Root-Race). But we Americans are changing that (I quote from page 444 of Vol. II of *The Secret Doctrine):*

> Thus the Americans have become in only three centuries a "primary race," *pro tem.,* before becoming a race apart, and strongly separated from all other now existing races. They are, in short, the germs of the *Sixth* sub-race, and in some few hundred years more, will become most decidedly the pioneers of that race which must succeed to the present European or fifth sub-race, in all its new characteristics. After this, in about 25,000 years, they will launch into preparations for the seventh sub-race; until, in consequence of cataclysms—the first series of which must one day destroy Europe, and still later the whole Aryan race (and thus affect both Americas), as also most of the lands directly connected with the confines of our continents and isles—the Sixth Root-Race will have appeared on the stage of our Round. When shall this be? Who knows save the great Masters of Wisdom, perchance, and they are as silent upon the subject as the snow-capped peaks that tower above them. All we know is, that it will silently come into existence; so silently, indeed, that for long millenniums shall its pioneers—the peculiar children who will grow into peculiar men and women—be regarded as anomalous *lusus naturae,* abnormal oddities physically and mentally. Then, as they increase, and their numbers become with every age greater, one day they will awaken to find themselves in the majority. It is the present men who will then begin to be regarded as exceptional mongrels, until these die out in their turn in civilized lands; surviving only in small groups on islands—the mountain peaks of today—where they will vegetate, degenerate, and finally die out, perhaps millions of years hence, as the Aztecs have, as the Nyam-Nyam and the dwarfish Mulu Kurumbers of the Nilgiri Hills are dying.

CONAN AND PIZARRO

by L. Sprague de Camp

Having by the most daring, brilliant, and successful act of brigandage known to history overthrown the Inca empire and made himself governor of Peru, Francesco Pizarro quarreled with his old comrade-in-arms Diego de Almagro over the rule of Cuzco. The two fought a war with their miniature armies of a few hundred men each. Pizarro won, captured his rival, and had him strangled. In 1541 a band of former followers of Almagro gathered in Lima and burst into Pizarro's house for vengeance. As Prescott describes the scene.*

> Meanwhile the marquess [Pizarro], learning the nature of the tumult, called out to Francesco de Chaves, an officer high in his confidence, and who was in the outer apartment opening on the staircase, to secure the door, while he and his brother Alcantara buckled on their armour . . .

But Chaves, instead, opened the door and was quickly killed by the conspirators.

> . . . Rada and his companions, entering the apartment, hurried across it, shouting out, "Where is the Marquess? Death to the tyrant!"

*The Conquest of Peru, IV. v; Mod. Lib. ed., pp. 1087f.

Alcantara and several other adherents of Pizarro attacked the invaders but were laid low one by one while Pizarro struggled with his armor.

> At length Pizarro, unable, in the hurry of the moment, to adjust the fastenings of his cuirass, threw it away, and enveloping one arm with his cloak, with the other seized his sword, and sprang to his brother's assistance. It was too late; for Alcantara was already staggering under the loss of blood, and soon fell to the ground. Pizarro threw himself on his invaders, like a lion roused from his lair, and dealt his blows with as much rapidity and force, as if age had no power to stiffen his limbs. "What ho!" he cried, "traitors! have you come to kill me in my own house?" The conspirators drew back for a moment, as two of their body fell under Pizarro's sword; but they quickly rallied, and from their superior numbers, fought a great advantage by relieving one another in the assault. Still the passage was narrow, and the struggle lasted for some minutes, till both of Pizarro's pages were stretched by his side, when Rada, impatient of the delay, called out, "Why are we so long about it? Down with the tyrant!" and taking one of his companions, Narvaez, in his arms, he thrust him against the marquess. Pizarro, instantly grappling with his opponent, ran him through with his sword. But at that moment he received a wound in the throat, and reeling, he sank on the floor, while the swords of Rada and several of the conspirators were plunged into his body.

Compare this with the story of the attack of Ascalante's gang on Conan in PS:*

> "In!" yelled Rinaldo. "Death to the tyrant!" . . . True; there had been lack of time to don the heavy plumed casque, or to lace in place the side-plates of the cuirass . . . Blade and casque shivered together and

*"The Phoenix on the Sword."

> Gromel rolled lifeless on the floor . . . The rogues drew back momentarily, as their leader seized several and thrust them toward the single door, and in that brief respite Conan leaped to the wall and tore therefrom an ancient battle-ax . . . With his back to the wall he faced the closing ring for a flashing instant, then leaped into the thick of them . . . A hairy rascal stooped beneath its stroke and dived at the king's legs, but after wrestling for a brief instant at what seemed a solid iron tower, glanced up in time to see the ax falling, but not in time to avoid it. In the interim one of his comrades lifted a broadsword with both hands and hewed through the king's left shoulder-plate, wounding the shoulder beneath . . . "Die, tyrant!" screamed the mad minstrel . . . "In, now, and slay him!" yelled Ascalante . . .*

The resemblances between the two accounts are obvious—except that Pizarro, unfortunately for that indomitable old scoundrel, was not reprieved by the arrival of a demon sent by Thoth-Amon. I should guess that Howard had read Prescott's narrative of the death of Pizarro, and that he had this account vividly in mind when he wrote "The Phoenix on the Sword." Not that the second is a mere paraphrase of the first; but it seems to me that the likenesses are still too close for coincidence.

*As is well-known, PS is a rewrite of an earlier King Kull story, "By This Axe I Rule!"

LORD OF THE BLACK THRONE

by P. Schuyler Miller

Back in the late '20's and early '30's, before the wave of late-depression professionalism hit us, the shelves of many small libraries were still loaded with wonderful, fat volumes of 19th Century travel tales. These were written by people—mostly Englishmen—to whom the far places of the Earth were peculiar and wonderful, not just "underdeveloped," and who took delight in setting down the gaudy, bloody, bizarre treasure-trove of rumor and legend that they had picked up along the way. Much of this found its way into the fiction of the time, directly (with writers like Talbot Mundy and "Ganpat") or indirectly.

Because I was brought up on such a library, which had *Science and Invention* in the juvenile department and Mundy, Merritt, and many another no-longer respectable novelist on its adult shelves, I have known for some time that Sprague de Camp made one of his rare muffs when he identified Erlik, in Part II of the "Exegesis" (*Amra,* vol. 2, #5), as the illegitimate hybrid of a couple of Attila's sons. Unfortunately, I couldn't prove my case until I recently located a beat-up copy of Robert Chambers' *The Slayer of Souls* and remembered the name of an old-but-good encyclopedia of mythology.

Erlik is one of Conan's—or Howard's—missed opportunities, unless he met the Lord of the Black Throne

head-on during those missing Turanian years that Björn Nyberg has promised to chronicle. Far from being a nothing godling of the Turanian hinterland, as is implied in "Shadows of Zamboula," Erlik was one of the most formidable opponents the Cimmerian could have taken on, and he had a beautiful daughter as evil as he. To the ancient people east of Vilayet, he was Chief of the Seven Princes of Death, Lord of the Black Throne, ruler of the seven demon-haunted underworlds from which his emissaries went out nightly to hunt down the souls of evil-doers and recruit them for his black forces.

To the Altai Tatars, descendents of the Hyrkanian hillmen of the Hyborean Age, Erlik (or Erlik-Khan, or Irlek-Khan) combined in one person the attributes of Adam and Lucifer. The stories about him are a wonderful mixture of Moslem, Persian, and other High-Asian elements. Some of these are in a section of Uno Holmberg on "Siberian Mythology" in Volume IV of *The Mythology Of All Races,* published during the 1920's by the Archæological Institute of America.

The Hyrkanians, of course, were 10,000 years closer to the truth and knew Erlik better than the Tatars, but the tribesmen of the Altai said that he was the First Man, created by Ulgen the Great as a friend and companion in the first days of the world. Like Lucifer of later legend, Erlik let his pride and jealousy bring him and his followers into rebellion against the Creator. They were thrown out of Paradise into the bottom most reeking levels of the Underworld, where Erlik—perhaps out of sentiment, perhaps because he was immortal—was given dominion over the djinns, demons, and spirits of the evil dead. His beautiful, evil daughter, they say, likes to go out into the world in the guise of a sleek black fox to tempt men . . .

Robert E. Howard probably encountered Erlik in one of the books of Eastern travel that were still in the

libraries at the time he was writing, or in some work of oriental mythology called to his attention by E. Hoffman Price or some other friend versed in such things. For my part, I met the Lord of the Black Throne in Robert W. Chambers' *The Slayer Of Souls,* the most all-out adventure fantasy that the creator of *The King In Yellow* ever attempted.

The book was published by Doran in 1920, and the copyright notice suggests that it was serialized before that by International Magazine Company—where, I don't know. It belongs to the school of fantastic melodrama tapped by A. Merritt in "Seven Footprints to Satan," and repeatedly by Sax Rohmer. Its heroine is an American girl, trapped in Central Asia in the closing years of World War I and forced to become a priestess of Erlik and handmaiden of the Lord of Evil whose eight Black Towers broadcast occult poisons over the Western world. She escapes, is pursued, and uses magic to destroy her hunters and save herself, her Secret Service husband, and the world.

Chambers has stirred together three major brews of Near Eastern mythology and history, which as far as I know were not related at all. One is the Erlik legend of the Tatars. The second is the body of stories about the Yezidees, a Satan-worshipping cult, who still live in the hills of Kurdistan. The third is the history of the Assassins. In *The Slayer Of Souls,* Erlik becomes the personification of the Yezidees' Peacock Lord, Melek Taos, who like him is Satan. The head of the cult is merged with the Assassins' Old Man of the Mountain (Mount Alamout), and the Sheikh-el-Djebel becomes the earthly representative of the Slayer of Souls and master of the Eight Castles of evil magic.

The Assassins were a splinter off a Persian sect, founded some time after 1071 by Hasan-i-Sabbah, first

Old Man of the Mountain. In 1256 the Mongols under Hulagu Khan destroyed most of the Assassin strongholds, and the sceptre of the Old Man of Alamout passed down—according to the decision in a lawsuit before the High Court in Bombay, in 1866—to none other than the Agha Khan.

The West heard of the Assassins from Marco Polo and some of his contemporaries, who described the fabulous stronghold on Mount Alamout with its gardens of earthly paradise, where hashish-drugged warriors earned their reward before they went out to do the bloody will of the Old Man of the Mountain. For a more complete story, and a glimpse of the Assassins as they were some thirty years ago, I suggest Freya Stark's *The Valleys Of The Assassins*. Alas for legend, the famous mountain is only a rocky buttress capped with a small castle; Alamout was the hidden valley at its foot, where the gardens of paradise may have been planted and the houris sung and danced.

There may or may not still be followers of Hasan-i-Sabbah in the mountains of the Near East, but there are certainly Yezidees—though a much milder sort than Chambers and the *Weird Tales* writers have brought us. God, they say, is too busy to attend to all his worlds, so he gave dominion over Earth and Man to Shaitan for ten thousand years. Since Shaitan is boss, he is the one to be propriated—or at least, until his ten-thousand-year lease is up. However, no Yezidee may speak his name or any other word containing the "sh" sound of "Shaitan." Instead, they call on their demon lord as "the bright spirit," Melek Taos, the Peacock Lord. Under that name he has played an active part in many a yarn in *Weird Tales* and *Magic Carpet*.

Many of the powers of black magic that Chambers attributes to the worshippers of Erlik in *The Slayer Of*

Souls were actually attributed to the Yezidees, and for all I know, still are. William Seabrook—more skeptical of the reality of magic than he becomes later—describes a visit to one of their Towers in *Adventure in Arabia*. He saw a gigantic stone serpent that a friendly priest kept burnished with English boot polish, and peeped into the caverns beneath the tower, where unspeakable rites were said to take place. (You'll find a photograph of the serpent in *New Babylon* by Desmond Stewart and John Haycock, two later adventurers, and meet the modern Yezidees in their book and in *City in the Sands* by Mary Chubb. They also smile at you from Freya Stark's latest book, *Riding to the Tigris* which otherwise has nothing to say about them.)

Some traveler in the Near East, around the turn of the century, may have confused the Tatar Erlik with the Peacock Lord of the Yezidees, and this distorted version may have been the source of Chambers' story. That isn't our concern. But the True Erlik, Lord of the Black Throne, is nobody to slight—and as for his daughter, if Conan had ever met her in his travels, that colloquy of his sons, of which W.H. Griffey has told us, [*Amra,* vol. 2, no. 8, p. 13] might have included a few sons-of-vixens.

THE HEROIC BARBARIAN

by L. Sprague de Camp

A never-ending quest of man is the search for a hero—a character, real or imaginary, with whom the ordinary imperfect human being can identify himself. By imagining himself as achieving the hero's triumphs, Everyman gets some consolation for his own failures, fears, and shortcomings.

Gods perform this office to some extent; but gods are too mighty and remote to make plausible avatars of the ordinary man. One who imagines himself as a god, even in fun, is getting dangerously close to paranoia. Most prefer to fancy themselves as a demigod like Herakles, a quasi-divine hero like Sigurd or Aragorn, or even a common mortal of uncommon brains or brawn or luck, like Sindbad or Crusoe or Conan.

Thus, the hero-fancier hopes to enjoy, if only for a moment, the hero's might and omnicompetence; in other words, to imagine himself a Superman. Living men who have been viewed as such heroes by multitudes include such disparate characters as John F. Kennedy, Che Guevara, and Adolf Hitler. Fictional heroes are evidently safer.

Another fictional approach is for the writer to make his protagonist an anti-hero, such as had a great vogue in the 1950s and 60s. This is the wretched little twerp, with neither brains nor brawn nor character, who does nothing

but suffer and to whom the reader can at least feel superior. Many readers, however, find such imcompetent and ineffectual characters a bore to read about.

In +XIX, the German philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844–1900) popularized the word "Superman" for a hero of these superior qualities. The idea was much older than Nietzsche, going back to ancient and primitive times.

The great German windbag was a strange man. Consistency never bothered him. He wrote: "Thou [the Superman] goest to women? Forget not thy whip!" but was himself a shy, timid little man who had almost no intimate contacts with women. Like H.P. Lovecraft later, he railed at the Jews for giving the world Christianity, which he hated; but elsewhere he described the Jews as "beyond all doubt the strongest, toughest, and purest race at present living in Europe." He lauded "the dominant blonds, namely, the Aryan conquering race" but also declared: "What quagmires and mendacity must there be about if it is possible, in the modern European hotch-potch, to raise questions of 'race'!"[1]

Nietzsche hoped that the Superman was about to appear, break the shackles of the Judeo-Christian "slave morality," bring the masses under proper discipline, and unite Europe. He was vague as to how this ruling caste should arise, save for the suggestion that the mating of German military officers with Jewish women might engender Supermen.

In 1672, John Dryden published a verse drama, *The Conquest of Granada*. At the beginning, one of his characters declaims:

> I am as free as Nature first made man,
> Ere the base laws of servitude began,
> When wild in woods the noble savage ran.

The phrase "noble savage," epitomizing the idea of the primitive as the superhuman hero, was taken over by critics of Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) when that weepy Swiss philosopher praised primitive life. The notion that primitive men were better than those of today goes back to the Greek myth of the Golden Age and the Judeo-Christian myth of Eden, but it got an enormous boost from the writings of Rousseau. So far as I know, Rousseau did not himself use the term "noble savage." Neither did he ever know any savages, noble or otherwise.

In 1755, Rousseau published a *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality Among Men*. He headed his second chapter: "That Nature has made man happy and good, but that Society depraves him and makes him wretched." "Man," he declared, "is naturally good," but civilization, especially the institution of private property, renders him evil. Seven years later, Rousseau developed the same argument, along more conservative lines, in *The Social Contract*.

When Rousseau wrote, scientific anthropology hardly existed. Philosophers speculated about the "state of nature," preceding civilization, by analogies with Genesis and with existing primitives. European navigators were then discovering the South Sea Islands and sending home idyllic but fanciful, unrealistic accounts of Polynesian life. These descriptions were taken as portraying "noble savages" in actual fact. Fiction-writers made Supermen out of American Indians and other barbarians.

In 1791, one of these writers, François René de Chateaubriand, came as a youth to America to see the noble savage in his native haunts. In the Mohawk Valley in upstate New York, he was enchanted by the forest primeval until he heard music coming from a shed. Inside he found a score of Iroquois solemnly dancing a fashionable French dance to the tune of a violin in the

hands of a small, bewigged and powdered Frenchman. This Monsieur Violet had come to America with Rochambeau's army, stayed on after his discharge, and set himself up as a dancing teacher among the Amerinds. He was full of praise for the terpsichorean abilities of *Messieurs les Sauvages et Mesdames les Sauvagesses*. Chateaubriand's disillusionment did not stop him from later writing an Amerind novel, *Atala,* which became a classic of romantic primitivism.

Rousseau was not the utter fool that selected quotations from his writings can make him appear. Sometimes he even made sense. Like many men, he became more conservative with age, as experience with his fellowmen eroded his youthful idealism. Inconsistency, however, bothered him no more than it did Nietzsche. Thus he wrote a revolutionary treatise on how to bring up children but consigned his own four offspring to foundling homes as soon as they were born. While his reasoning powers were by no means negligible, they were usually overridden by his intense emotionality.

Rousseau explained that his "state of nature . . . perhaps never existed, and probably never will"; it was an ideal to shoot for. He did not, he said, mean the hypothetical state of bestial savagery, when the "war of all against all" prevailed and, as Hobbes had said, "the life of man [was] solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and shorte."

What Rousseau had in mind was a "patriarchal" culture, when people were organized in families and clans and had perhaps begun to enjoy the fruits of husbandry, but before private property had come to exist. Indications are that there was no such time. Families and small coöperative bands probably go back to our australopithecine ancestors. Even the most primitive of living men have ideas of property, if only in the form of hunting and fishing rights in certain places. But Rousseau lacked

our advantage of living after Darwin, Mendel, Freud, Lewis H. Morgan, and their successors.

The search for the non-existent "state of nature," when all men were peaceful, happy, and good, continued through the Romantic Era, fathered by Rousseau and dominant roughly 1790–1840. The movement continued afterwards, its influence being seen in some of the utopian colonies formed in the +XIX United States.

The Romantic Illusion of a primitive Golden Age has, in fact, flourished right down to the present. Jack London, who much influenced Robert Howard and who incongruously combined Marxism, racism, and romanticism, was full of it. The Illusion is not dead yet, as witness the commune movements of the so-called counterculture of the 1960s. (The only such cults or colonies that have shown viability are those like the Hutterites, which, recruited from the stolid German peasantry, combine intense religious convictions, puritanical austerity, and a passion for hard work. Would-be founders of contemporary communes may take note.)

In the 1890s, this back-to-nature sentiment appeared in the writings of Rudyard Kipling, whose *Jungle Books* (1894–95) presented one of the purest examples of such romanticism before Tarzan. Mowgli, reared from babyhood by wolves in India:

> . . . must have been nearly seventeen years old. He looked older, for hard exercise, the best of good eating, and baths whenever he felt in the least hot or dusty had given him strength and growth far beyond his age. He could swing by one hand from a top branch for half an hour at a time, when he had occasion to look along the tree-roads. He could stop a young buck in mid-gallop and throw him sideways by the head. . . . The Jungle-People, who used to fear him for his wits, now

feared him for his mere strength, and when he moved quietly on his own affairs the whisper of his coming cleared the wood-path.[2]

Kipling's animal characters make snide remarks about "civilized" men: "Men are only men, Little Brother, and their talk is like the talk of frogs in a pond." "Men must always be making traps for men, or they are not content." "Men are blood-brothers to the *Bandar-log* [monkeys]." "Who is Man that we should fear him—the naked brown digger, the hairless and toothless, the eater of earth?" (By "Man," Kipling meant the Indians, whom he never much liked. He was more respectful of his imperial fellow-Britons.)

Seventeen years after the first *Jungle Book,* Edgar Rice Burroughs wrote *Tarzan of the Apes,* which is too well known to need quotations. Burroughs said that he had not been inspired by Kipling's stories, which he had never read. Instead, he gave credit for the idea of Tarzan to the legend of Romulus and Remus. But then, Burroughs never admitted that he got his ideas for Barsoom from Mme. Blavatsky's Theosophical Atlantis and Lemuria, either, although the resemblances seem too close for mere coincidence.

Robert Howard received a strong dose of the Romantic Illusion from Burroughs, London, and Kipling among others. His idealization of primitive life was the natural result. Like other writers of heroic fantasy, he was given to sweeping statements about barbarians and based stories upon these assumptions. For instance, he said of Conan:

Now the barbarian suggestion about the king was more pronounced, as if in his extremity the outward

> aspects of civilization were stripped away, to reveal the primordial core. Conan was reverting to his pristine type. He did not act as a civilized man would act under the same conditions, nor did his thoughts run in the same channels. He was unpredictable.[3]

Others, too, stress the barbarian's supposed unconventionality, unpredictability, and freedom from civilized tabus and inhibitions. From all I can learn, however, it seems that barbarians are on the whole *more* conventional, predictable, and inhibited than civilized men. They may not observe the civilized tabus and inhibitions, but they have plenty of their own.

The reason is that among barbarians, the force of custom must be greater, to enable them to get along with each other. They do not have our elaborate framework of legal codes and procedures and of police and courts to keep unruly people in order. What barbarians lack in tabus covering one aspect of life—say, sex among the Polynesians or violence among the Comanches—they more than make up for rigid rules about other phases of behavior. Etiquette, as among the Arab *badawîn,* may be very elaborate.

In Howard's long, voluminous, and sometimes acrimonious correspondence with H. P. Lovecraft, Howard expressed the wish to have been born a barbarian or on the frontier. If he had ever actually found himself in such a milieu, I suspect that, since he was a voracious reader, the lack of anything to read would soon have driven him, disillusioned, back to "civilization." Small-town Texas may not have been the ultimate in urban sophistication, but it was even further from the truly primitive milieux, such as that of a preliterate Amerind tribe. Howard admitted that, in his present incarnation, he was not cut out for such a life; but he thought that he would have made good as a barbarian or a

frontiersman if he could have been born and reared in such an environment.

Lovecraft then accused Howard of romanticism, sentimentality, naiveté, and of being an "enemy to humanity." Howard retorted that Lovecraft's idealization of +XVIII* was just as romantic and naive. So it was. For Lovecraft entertained his own version of the Romantic Illusion in his enthusiasm for the country life of +XVIII. He liked to say that he was by nature "the compleat country squire." He was not the first to think that he had the instincts of a man of property without the property. If Lovecraft had ever worked as a chore boy on a farm, he might have been less romantically nostalgic about farm life. As the Durants have said: "Word peddlers tend to idealize the countryside, if they are exempt from its harassments, boredom, insects, and toil."[4]

Moreover, Lovecraft himself had been an equal barbarophile in his youth, writing: "The one sound power in the world is the power of a hairy muscular right arm!" and "I am naturally a Nordic—a chalk-white, bulky Teutonic killer of the Scandinavian or North-German forests—a Viking—a berserk killer—a predatory rover of the blood of Hengist and Horsa—a conqueror of Celts and mongrels and founder of empires . . . a drinker of foemen's blood from new-picked skulls. . . ."[5] I need hardly add that, in person, Lovecraft was as unlike a stalwart Viking marauder as one can imagine. He was so squeamish that he could not bear to remove a dead mouse from a trap, but threw away trap and all.

The search for Superman in the past was eventually thwarted by the progress of anthropology and archaeology. It was found that contemporary savages and barbar-

*The eighteenth century of the Christian Era.

ians, when one got to know them, were much like other people, with the usual assortment of virtues and faults and the usual individual variations. Today's civilized men, it transpired, were the descendants of similar primitives, who had dwelt in that state for hundreds of thousands of years. There was no Golden Age and never had been, either in modern Polynesia or in prehistoric Europe.

Well then, what are real barbarians like? Would they in fact make good heroes of heroic fantasy? My own acquaintance with such folk is far exceeded by that of any field anthropologist. Still, in my travels, I have had some small contact with living barbarians.

Once, *barbaros* meant a non-Greek speaker. Then the term came to mean any outsider—a person outside the speaker's cultural in-group. Since most men regard their own culture as the best, the word came to mean (*selon* Webster's) "a man in a rude, uncultivated state." Still later, the +XIX American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan gave it the meaning: "A state between savagery and civilization."

Time has dealt harshly with Morgan's simple scheme of human cultural evolution, but there is still a grain of truth in his classification. The most primitive folk live as all men did before −10,000,* by hunting, fishing, and food-gathering. We may call this the "savage" or (if you will allow me a neologism) the "theratic" stage of culture.

Then came the Neolithic Revolution with the discovery of how to raise edible plants and animals (the "georgic" stage). Around −6000 to −4000, villages grew into cities, men learned to work metals, and writing and arithmetic were invented. When people had writing,

*That is, 10,000 B.C.

arithmetic, metals, and cities, they were by definition civilized; not necessarily more honest, polite, and kind than uncivilized men, but possessed of the power that writing, metals, and cities give to those who command them. We may call this the "astic" stage.

The georgic stage, between the theratic and the astic, fits Morgan's "barbarian" classification. People in that stage may appropriately be called "barbarians." This does not imply that they, either, were better or worse as individuals than men in any other stage of culture. Examples of barbarians, in this technical sense, are the Gauls, Germans, and Britons of Classical times, before the Romans conquered them; the Central Asian nomads who, as Huns, Turks, and Mongols, plagued the civilized world from +400 to 1400; and more recently most of the Pacific Islanders, the American Indians, and the African Negroes.

When barbarians come under the influence of civilization, such classification soon loses its meaning. For one thing, the barbarians suffer a catastrophic loss of their own techniques. A tribe may successfully weave its own cloth, mold its own pots, and hammer out its own hoes and spearheads. Then a civilized trader sets up shop. He can so drastically undersell the native products with machine-made goods—British or Japanese textiles, aluminum pots and pans, and rifles and shotguns—that the native skills are soon forgotten. From a self-contained, self-supporting, self-respecting, well-organized mini-nation, the tribe becomes a mob of illiterate unskilled laborers.

But let me tell about a few barbarians whom I have known—not long or intimately, but better than a mere nodding acquaintance. I would not call any a close friend; but I knew them well enough to have an idea of what sort of fellows they were. None was a barbarian in

the strictest sense, since all had been exposed to civilizing influences. To find an "unspoiled" barbarian nowadays, however, one must go to New Guinea or some place as remote.

First there was Joe, the Iroquois, with whom I worked on a survey chain gang in my youth. I was a chain man; he was one of the lumberjacks. Joe was middle-aged, fat, and jolly, with a low sense of humor. He kept the gang laughing at his dirty jokes. He said: "Naw, I can't read and write, but I can do more tings dan men who can!" He boasted of the number of children he had begotten. As soon as his job was done, he said, he would hasten home to make another; "I got de machine all ready."

Next was Juma, the Mganda who chauffered me around Kampala, Uganda, in 1960. Juma was fiftyish, physically rather slight, and a good man: devout, conscientious, and intelligent. A pious Muslim, he once asked me to find the direction of Mecca with my pocket compass so that he could aim his noon prayers accordingly.

Among the sights that Juma showed me were the tomb-palace—an oversized thatched hut with red-painted woodwork—of Mutesa I, who reigned in sanguinary splendor a century ago when Speke and Grant came through. Juma's mother was a hereditary keeper of the shrine. Muslim or no, Juma dutifully prayed to the spirit of Mutesa. He also showed me the pool in which Mutesa had people who vexed him fed to the royal crocodiles. Mutesa would doubtless be proud of the way the present boss of Uganda, President Idi Amin, is running the country.*

Juma told me that he had had a wife, by whom he had several children. The wife died. Being old enough so that the lusts of the flesh were no longer compelling, Juma preferred not to marry again, but his mother thought

*As of 1973.

otherwise. She put pressure on him to wed and put his cousin and his best friend up to urging him also. In family-centered Africa, one's family's wishes are not lightly flouted.

At last, Juma gave in. He told his mother that, if she found him a nice girl, he would marry her. She did, and he did. Now he had more children to rear. He asked me seriously: "Mista de Camp, you sink I did light?"

Coming from one only a generation from tribal barbarism, that was a hell of a question. My reading in the Classics saved me. I remembered what an ancient Roman had replied when his friends asked him why he had divorced an attractive wife. I said:

"Do you see that shoe, Juma? It looks like a good shoe, doesn't it? But only I, who wear it, can tell you whether it is comfortable or whether it pinches. Now you, who live with this woman, are the only man who can tell whether you did right."

He thought and said: "Well, see give me no tlouble. I guess I do light."

My third barbarian was Tejani, the Sudanese. He was the young Khartûmi who drove me from Khartoum down the Nile to the site of ancient Meroê, with its pyramids. Tejani was in his early twenties, well-built, and inclined to garrulity, although my limited command of Arabic restrained this bent.

Seeing dead camels by the roadside with vultures tearing picturesquely at them, I thought that what I needed to add to the junk in my study was a well-bleached Sudanese camel's skull. I tried to explain to Tejani but, not knowing the Arabic for "skull," I said I wanted the *head* of a camel. Oh, he said, that was easy. We'd stop at Shendi, where I could buy a camel, cut off its head, and take it with me. My wife is glad that I did not follow up this suggestion.

What with the starter's giving out, so that we had to

re-start the jeep by pushing it through soft sand, we got to Meroê at two, in blistering heat. Tejani became bothersome, demanding money. This is a common form of extortion in desert countries. The theory is that the tourist will be so terrified of being stranded in the waste that he will fork over.

Having been through all this before, I merely said: "*Ba'dayn* [Later]." Tejani subsided. On the way home, we were still nowhere near Khartoum a couple of hours after sunset. Tejani swerved to avoid an ass, which had wandered into our headlights, and lost himself in a grassy field. He came to a pair of ruts and, tired and confused, started to turn the wrong way, back towards Meroê. I said in Arabic:

"The road is to the left."

He made the correct turn and found the road. But, when he began to slow down in a patch of deep sand, I added: "*Bi sur'a!* [Faster]"

At that Tejani lost his temper and burst into a stream of abusive Arabic, flapping his hand before my face. Although he spoke too fast for me to follow, from the few words I caught I gathered that he was telling me to mind my own damned business; that he was the driver, whereas I knew no more about the roads than a blind man. So relations between us were cool thereafter.

There they are: a jolly, sensual woodsman; a devout, conscientious, partriarchal moralist; and a bright but grasping, hot-tempered, and rather obnoxious youth. All had good and bad points like other men, but none bore the slightest resemblance to Conan.

In fact, if you want real-life adventurers who are unconventional, uninhibited, versatile, and adaptable, who wander the earth, and who get mixed up on hair-raising escapades, affrays, and imbroglios, you have a better

chance by looking among civilized men. Those who lead really Conanic lives are men like Eudoxos of Kyzikos (whom I made the hero of a historical novel), ibn-Batuta, Marco Polo, Miguel de Cervantes, Hernán Çortés, Samuel de Champlain, Sir Francis Drake, Captain John Smith, Sir William Dampier, Casanova, and Sir Richard Francis Burton. Civilized men, every one, and several were noted littérateurs as well. Even the most Conanic character of history, King Harald Sigurdson of Norway (otherwise Harald Hardraade, or "Harald the Stern"), a seven-footer whose real-life adventures sound more fictional than most fiction, was more or less civilized. Whether or not he could read and write, there were people around him who could.

There are, however, a few times when some barbarians, at least, cast off their tribal inhibitions and behave in more Conanic fashion. This happens when the barbarian society lives next to a civilization, when that civilization is weakened by war or other disorder, when population pressure and bad weather incite the barbarians to seek their fortunes elsewhere, and when the barbarians' military techniques, usually as a result of contact with the civilization, have become as effective as those of the latter's soldiers. Then the barbarians overrun the civilization and set themselves up as a new ruling class.

This happened in the conquest in +V of the West Roman Empire by Teutons from Germany and Sweden, Alans from Russia, and Huns from Mongolia. Western Europe suffered so sharp a slump in culture that the time is called the Dark Ages. About −XIV, the ancestral Hellenes overcame the Minoan civilization, which had been crippled by the eruption of Thera; and the Aryans conquered Iran and North India. The Huns conquered much of divided China in +IV and of India in +V. The Turks seized most of the Caliphate in +XI. And the

Mongols overran Russia, Iran, and China in +XIII. The position of Central Asia made it a fertile source of such irruptions.

By the time the African Negroes, the Amerinds, and the South Sea Islanders were confronted by civilization, Europeans had gone so far beyond them in numbers, organization, and weaponry that these barbarians, although quite as brave and warlike as the others, never had a chance. As late as the 1870s, barbarians with a big advantage in numbers over a civilized military force, who would keep on coming despite heavy losses, could still sometimes win, as the Sioux and Cheyennes did at Little Big Horn and the Zulus did at Isandhlwana. By the end of the century, even this had become practically impossible. Kitchener's Maxims and repeating rifles simply mowed down the charging Sudanese at Omdurman until none were left to charge.

Of these "misadventured piteous overthrows" of civilizations, we know best the fall of the West Roman Empire, because it produced an abundant literature, both historical and legendary. Some epics celebrate leaders of the barbarians, like Theodoric the Visigoth ("Dietrich of Bern"); some, leaders of the Ex-Roman peoples, like Arthur. Sometimes, as with Sigur (or Sîvrit or Siegfried) and Cúchulainn, it is hard to tell whether the character was based upon a real man or purely on myth.

Real barbarian heroes differed from those of the epics. The fictional heroes have been romanticized almost out of recognition. They strike implausibly noble attitudes, go on long solitary quests, and converse with supernatural beings, none of which their real-life prototypes did. Like the real barbarian leaders, however, the fictional heroes come to early and tragic ends. Bellerophon is bucked off Pegasus in flight, Siegfried is stabbed in the back, and Arthur is slain by his illegitimate son. Most of

their prototypes perished likewise, usually at the hands of fellow-adventurers.

An Odovakar might, like Conan, rise to become general of an empire. He might even, like Conan, bump off his employer (the regent Orestes,[6] father of the boy-emperor Romulus Augustulus) and seize the throne. But Theodoric the Visigoth soon besieged Odovakar, got him to surrender on a promise of immunity, and coolly murdered him. The most succesful barbarian conqueror, Clovis the Frank, never got into the epics at all. Perhaps his very success made him poor epic material, or the bards found him too grimly efficient to be attractive.

Similar fictional use of barbarian conquests can be dimly discerned in other civilizations. There are traces of the Aryan conquests in the *Rig Veda* and other Indian epics. The *Iliad* may reflect the disturbances accompanying the overthrow of Minoan civilization. The −VIII poet Hesiod told how the gods first created the men of gold, then the men of silver, and then the men of bronze, who were typical barbarian conquerors:

> Then Zeus the Father again made humankind,
> a breed of Bronze, far differently designed,
> a breed from the Ash-tree sprung, huge-limbed and dread,
> lovers of battle and horror, no eaters of bread.
> Their hearts were hard, their adamant hearts: none stood
> to meet their power of limb and hardihood
> and the swing of their terrible arms their shoulders bore.
> Bronze were their homes, bronze the armor they wore,
> and their tools; for no dark iron supplied their needs.
> And they murdered one another with violent deeds. . . [7]

From history, we learn that conquerors need not be barbarians to commit atrocities on the conquered. Civilized men can be quite as fiendish when they put their minds to it.

When Robert Howard wished that he had been born on the frontier, he had in mind this anarchic post-folk-wandering atmosphere. His error lay in thinking such ambiance typical of barbarism. It is typical only rarely, now and then at long intervals. It occurs during periods of conquest and transition, when the barbarians are destroying or being destroyed by other societies and the normal rules of human relations have been suspended.

Barbarian conquest of a civilized land, followed by a breakdown of that land's civilization, affords a fine opportunity for epics. Tragedy makes splendid material for heroic lays, and the heroes of the epics provide later fictioneers with models for characters like Aeneas, Lancelot, and Conan.

Whence the ageless attraction of such characters? The distinctive trait of the barbarian conqueror of a folk of quite a different culture is his loss of inhibitions. He has left the toilsome, dreary, humdrum round of normal barbarian life. He has escaped his usual milieu, with its tabus and etiquette, but he has not taken on the mores of the conquered, whom he despises because he has beaten them. Hence he feels that he can get away with anything. He sees no reason not to obey every whim and lust. He acts like a bumptious adolescent, liberated from his parents' control but not yet fitted into the mold of adult civilized life.

The result is a catastrophic decline in the culture and living standards of the conquering adventurer's civilized subjects, since he is more interested in confiscating property, prosecuting feuds, and indulging lusts than in

maintaining roads, harbors, and aqueducts. He is happy to squander the capital that others have saved up over the centuries and let the future take care of itself. The squalid chaos that ensues can perhaps be enjoyed by one with a typical gangster mentality but not by many others.

Hence the resemblance of many heores of ancient epics and modern sword-and-sorcery fiction to overgrown juvenile delinquents. Such liberated behavior, in the real world, does not make one a good life-insurance risk. There are always other *conquistadores* around to play Theodoric to the adventurer's Odovakar. So life expectancy is short, like that of today's juvenile gangsters. As the British historian Chadwick put it:

> The qualities exhibited by these societies, virtues and defects alike, are clearly those of adolescence. . . . The characteristic feature . . . is emancipation—social, political, and religious—from the bonds of tribal law. . . . For a true analogy we must turn to the case of a youth who has outgrown both the ideas and the control of his parents . . .[8]

Still, as Henri Bergson wrote: "Man was designed for very small societies. That primitive societies were such is generally admitted, but it must be added that the primitive human soul continues to exist, concealed under habits without which civilizations could not have been created. . . ."[9]

Being the world's most adaptable species, mankind adjusts itself to a civilized life very different from that which it led for a couple of million years. But this adaptation entails effort and nervous strain. There is always a buried tendency to revert to a more primitive pattern, like a piece of silicone putty, which, however distorted out of its original shape, begins slowly to resume it as soon as the pressure is taken off.

So it is not surprising that multitudes enjoy, if only vicariously, the uninhibited life of the conqueror, especially the barbarian conqueror of the Sigurdh type. Conan and his fictional colleagues will probably, therefore, continue popular for many years to come.

NOTES.

1. F. W. Nietzsche: *The Philosophy of Nietzsche* (Modern Lib., 1927–54), pp. 70, 563, 638, 804, *et passim*.
2. Rudyard Kipling: *The Jungle Books* (Dell, 1964), p. 327.
3. Robert E. Howard: *Conan the Conqueror* (Lancer Books, 1967), p. 92.
4. H. P. Lovecraft to F. B. Long, 1 Sep. 1929; Will & Ariel Durant: *The Age of Voltaire* (Simon & Schuster, 1965), p. 45.
5. H. P. Lovecraft to J. F. Morton, 10 Feb. 1923; to F. B. Long, 13 May 1923.
6. Cf. Howard's character Orastes, in *Conan the Conqueror*.
7. Hesiodos: *Works and Days* (Lindsay transl.), 11, 143–54.
8. H. M. Chadwick: *The Heroic Age* (Cambr., Un. Pr. 1912), pp. 422ff.
9. H. Bergson: *Les Deux Sources de la Morale et de la Religion* (Paris 1932, p. 24), *apud* Toynbee.

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