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DREAMQUEST



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MIDDENGARD.

- The Editor's Page -

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I think it'd be best if I gave you some idea, here and now, as to what you can expect to find inside the covers of this 'Eldritch DREAM QUEST', and accordingly I'll try to answer your queries about it before you have a chance to raise them.

What is a short story, even by the illustrious Mr. Moorcock, doing in this issue? Well, a secondary consideration of this journal ((?)) is that I'd like to foster some sort of interest in mythology and folklore amongst those of you who've never read anything other than science-fiction or fantasy. And that shouldn't be too hard a thing to achieve when you consider that the myth cycles must undoubtedly rank amongst the first fantasies ever written ... being a form of elaborate folk-fantasy. Under these circumstances I don't think that Mike's story, involving the Celtic God "Cromm Cruiach" (not the Conan variety), is at all out of place.



The Well.

Policy ? Well, the general idea behind this amateur publication is that it enables me to show my appreciation for two of the greatest fantasistes that ever put pen to paper - namely Lord Dunsany: the Irish bard who, in this field, was undoubtedly the formative influence of this century; and Professor Tolkien: who is surely the greatest fantasy novelist in the English language.

Now whilst both of these eminent authors chose essentially the same genre for their writings, their modes of expressing themselves could not be further removed. Dunsany, on the one hand, was primarily a dreamer who set down his visions with a seeming ease and beauty that is wondrous to behold - though it's apparent that his early dream - like tales of the "...islands in the Central Sea, whose waters are bounded by no shore and where no ships come..." are now sadly neglected due to their scarcity and the prices they command.

Now Tolkien, on the other, is a Philologist whose love for the old myths and folktales led him to create a very believable, half mythical 'Middle-earth' on which his hobbits and dwarven folk, and his elves and trolls could live their lives and wage their wars. The first of his 'Middle-earth' tales was, as is to be expected of a book written expressly for children, full of the whimsy, charm and homeliness of the folk and fairy tale; but it's in his second such epic, THE LORD OF THE RINGS, that the contrast between his and Dunsany's style is really marked. For Dunsany's tales were of that rare dream - like quality that inspired Lovecraft in his stories of Ulthar and Celephais; whereas Tolkien presented a truly realistic, material world full of life's whimsy and charm, it's sorrow and joy, and of it's grimness and tragedy though admittedly with the same witchery of words.

" But what exactly is a Middle-earth ? " you might well ask. I'm certainly no authority on the subject myself, so I'll just have to give you my interpretation of the term along with a number of pertinent examples. Well, a philologist of Professor Tolkien's ilk was bound to come across this old English word early in his studious career - it being the archaic and obsolete expression for this world of ours which lies 'twixt Heaven and Hell. This in turn, as anyone familiar with the Norse Eddas can tell you, is derived from the world that Odin created from Ymir's body, and which is connected to Asgard by the rainbow bridge Bifrost. The All-father's name for this abode of the human race was 'Midgard' - which is Middle-Earth - a word that came into our language in the Old English form of 'Middengeard'. It's here that the problem comes into being, for obviously a tale of Middle-earth can't take place in this day and age, with one exception that I'll mention later on. The task ahead of me now is to choose the right setting, and also the stories that fit into it.

One of these settings is obviously in a past so distant that the elves, trolls and other mythical creatures of this earth enacted a history that was handed down as legend; and which is still preserved in the form of myth, folklore and superstition. One such example, and undoubtedly the best by far, is the 'RING' saga of J.R.R. Tolkien which started off so unobtrusively with THE HOBBIT in 1937; was brought up to epic - perhaps even Classic - status by THE LORD OF THE

RINGS in 1954; and which is to be continued in the forthcoming THE SILMARILLION. Another first rate, beautifully written tale with this Middle - earthen setting is Poul Anderson's THE BROKEN SWORD epic (1954) which took the changeling Skafloc from his birthplace in Midgard to his foster-home in Alfheim: whence he took part in the Elven raids on Trollheim and even, in the latter part of the story, venturing into Jötunheim itself with Mananaan Mac Iar as his sole companion. For anyone with a love of the old Celtic and Teutonic myths this book is a veritable must. Mr. Anderson also hinted that a sequel to his saga - doubtless concerning the hero's son who, at the end of 'The Broken Sword', had become a ward of the Aesir - was forthcoming, but six years have passed us by since the story was first published and no news has come to ear yet. But perhaps we can take heart from the fact that Tolkien himself spent over fourteen years in writing the sequel to his 'The Hobbit' (as he readily admits), and surely Poul could do worse than follow suit. Another obvious example is Fletcher Pratt's pseudonymous THE WELL OF THE UNICORN (1948) which tells of young Airar Alvarson's rise to power amidst the wars and sorceries of the world of The Well. This being so it follows that KING ARGIMENES AND THE UNKNOWN WARRIOR, Lord Dunsany's second play and the Dunsany Fragment of this issue, is also in the right vein - but more of that anon.

Thus far we haven't delved into the magazine field, and it's here that we find the great majority of such stories: many of these were, admittedly, not worthy of second consideration, but amongst those that remain are some really first rate series. The best and most obviously Middle-earthen of these were Fritz Leiber's yarns about a certain loveable pair of scoundrels hight 'Fafhrd' and 'The Mouser'. These escapades of Fafhrd and The Mouser in their mythical world of Nehwon first saw light of day in the revered 'Unknown' magazine in 1939; and, incidentally, is the only series of it's kind still being published (both in amateur and pro-zines). Amongst the other possibilities are such series as the Hyperborean and Atlantean tales of Clark Ashton Smith; the Hybrian Age stories of Howard that revolved first around King Kull in 1929, and then Conan the Cimmerian in 1932; and also, amongst others, the 'Elak of Atlantis' yarns of Henry Kuttner - all of which appeared in the old 'Weird Tales' in it's hey-day.

Or perhaps, and I hesitate to say this, the events could take place in the far distant future when necromancy and mythical beings are prevalent on a dying earth ... as in the 'Zothique' tales of Clark Ashton Smith. This is, I concede, a more than debateable point - and to be quite frank with you the possibility only occurred to me because it's one of my favourite series - and as such I'd like to point out that there's plenty of room in the letter column for discussion of this and any other topic.

The other form of 'Middle-earth' is the 'other-dimensional' world more usually associated with the science-fiction field. Now before you come up in arms about this, let me make my point. In their collaboration THE ROARING TRUMPET for 'Unknown' (May 1940), L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt came up with the idea that there is an infinity of simultaneously-existing worlds .. none of which is any realer than any other except as impressions received by the individual. Furthermore these worlds, of which our myths and epics are a reflection, can be reached by manipulating the symbols of symbolic logic. The aforementioned story took the brash, irrepressible 'Harold Shea' to the parallel world of Norse mythology at the time of the 'Fimbulwinter'; it's successor, THE MATHEMATICS OF MAGIC, to the Faerie realms of Spencer's allegoric 'The Faerie Queene' and the last tale in the trilogy, THE CASTLE OF IRON, into Ariosto's 'Orlando Furioso'. Another tale by these two authors, unconnected with the Harold Shea series, took it's hero to THE LAND OF UNREASON; which is the fairy-land of Shakespeare's 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', ruled over by Oberon, and was in the same whacky vein as it's predecessors.

Poul Anderson also put this idea to good use some years later, when he wrote THREE HEARTS AND THREE LIONS for the Magazine of Fantasy and Science-Fiction. In this the hero, to all outward appearances a Danish engineer called Holger Carlsen, suddenly finds himself in the parallel world of Carlovignian romance. It appears that he has returned to his world of origin, but certain elements are trying to keep his real identity from him - for reasons best known to themselves.

I guess that everyone's found something to comment on by now,.....so,I think I'd better make a tactful withdrawl !!

-ENTISHLY YOURS-

- The Editor -

J. R. R. TOLKIEN ~

A BRIEF SURVEY & COMPARISON



Doc Weir

MICHAEL BENJAMINSON

J.R.R. TOLKIEN — A BRIEF SURVEY, AND A COMPARISON.

by
' Doc.' Weir.

PROLOGUE : I wrote this study because I was asked to do so, not because I imagined that I had any special knowledge or qualifications for the task. It is an invidious business to write about a man whom you have never even seen (though I have heard Professor Tolkien described by several of his students) , and if I have, at any point, misinterpreted or misunderstood him, I am sincerely sorry.

Such errors as it may contain are entirely my own ; such merits or virtues as it may possess will serve, I hope, to magnify his, as some small return for the very great pleasure that his work has given both to me and to many others.

- Arthur R. Weir, D.Sc. -

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The great success achieved by Professor Tolkien's trilogy, THE LORD OF THE RINGS, among the most varied and diverse readers and critics, makes it clear that we have here a genuine literary achievement which, unlike many, has had its merits recognised from the outset. It is, accordingly, interesting to look more closely at the author, and to see how far his qualifications and background have assisted him in winning the success which he has so notably attained.

The first step is to see what account he has given of himself, and for this we may use the most obvious and easily-consulted of reference-books, WHO'S WHO, supplementing it, where necessary, by University calendars.

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien was born on 3rd. January, 1892, so we know that he has had a full life's experience upon which to draw, and he served in the Lancashire Fusiliers from 1915 to 1918, so he is a man who sees war through the eyes of his own personal experience of it.

Then follows his Academic career : Reader in English Language, Leeds 1920 ; Professor of English Language, Leeds, 1924—5. Now this in itself tells us much ; the English language, with its dual origin, makes greater demands than almost any other upon the learning of any man who sets out to specialize in it : English is fifty per cent of Latin origin, so that the English scholar must have a first-rate knowledge of Latin and also of both the Northern and South-

ern forms of Old French, through which so many Latin words came to us — and, since so many Latin words are of Greek origin, it will be well for him to have a reasonable acquaintance with Greek, as well. Another forty per cent of English is of Teutonic origin, so whoever sets out to be an English scholar must know the Old High German that was the language of the hard-handed thick-skulled fighting farmers who swarmed over into the fertile and defenceless island of Britain during the fifth and sixth centuries ; also, since Britain suffered a second very considerable invasion by Danes, Norse, Frisians and Swedes during the ninth century, who even set up their own " Dane-Law " territory with its own laws and customs (which have strongly influenced English Common Law and Parliamentary Government to this day !), the scholar had better know the old Norse language as well, which has survived, little changed, as the present-day speech of Iceland. The remaining ten per cent of the English language is of the most miscellaneous origin, but so many Celtic words have survived in Latinized or Teutonized forms that it will be as well for our scholar to be acquainted with the Old Celtic that is the common denominator and origin of the modern Welsh, Erse, Gaelic and Breton speech.

Few of us who learn English as our mother-tongue realize the richness and complexity of the sources upon which we can draw, if we choose — the features that give English a flexibility, exactness and richness of implied meaning that is at once the pride of the English man of letters and the utter despair of the foreigner who is trying to acquire a reasonable mastery of the language.

The next entry is Rawlinson & Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon, Oxford, 1925—45, and this tells us that by this date we have to do with a man who is already a fine scholar and who is recognised as such in the world of learning, since you do not attain an Oxford Professorship at the age of 33 unless you are much more than ordinarily well up in your chosen branch of scholarship. Also, as part of his regular work, the holder of this Professional Chair will have to be intimately acquainted with the heroic tales that were the common heritage of the Norsemen and of the Northern Germans, and which, in their Scandinavian form, gave us, as the Norse " Sagas," some of the finest hero-tales of all time.

The list goes on : Fellow of Pembroke College, 1926—45 ; Leverhulme Research Fellow, 1934—35 (we shall see, later, to what this special piece of research led) ; while finally, and in many ways the most revealing of all, we have Andrew Lang Lecturer at St. Andrew's, 1939.

St. Andrew's University delights to pay honour to one of her most notable figures, Andrew Lang, philologist, famous literary critic, and collector of folk-lore and fairy-tales from all the countries of the earth — the editor and compiler of that splendid set of books that the older of us remember from our own childhood, and for which many generations of children have blessed his name : the Red, Yellow, Green, Blue, Violet, White and Black Fairy Books, the Red and Blue Books of Animal Stories and the Red Book of Romance. Here we had fairy-tales, hero-tales, animal-tales and the best of the romances from every country on earth, English, Celtic, Norse, German, French, Italian, Slavonic, Indian, Persian, Chinese, Japanese, AmerIndian and Pacific Island — all most carefully and artistically re-told in style and language not too difficult for reading aloud to the six-year-old, yet interesting and exciting enough to hold the attention of even the fourteen-year-old, and all enriched with the most delightful illustrations that ever rejoiced the heart of a child — in which dragons, bears and lions were properly huge and menacing, fairy princesses were beautiful beyond imagining, enchanted forests had all manner of delightfully horrible things peering out of their shadows and enchanted palaces and castles were picturesque and magnificent beyond belief ! That Tolkien should have been chosen to lecture in memory of this man, of whom a critic well said that " he was never so much at home as on that ground which is the borderland between legend and history," was a most significant pointer towards his future.

Next in order comes the list of Tolkien's own publications, showing the sort of work to which the man himself chose to turn his hand : A Middle English Vocabulary, 1922 — a sound scholastic start ; then, Co-Editor (with E.V. Gordon) of "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight", 1925. Now this, again, is significant and revealing, for while the "Arthurian" legends are mostly drawn from Old and Medieval French tales, these, in turn, are founded upon older legends, many of them

of Celtic origin — indeed the name Gawain is itself Celtic — and here we may remember the markedly Celtic sound of the Elven-tongues that Tolkien devised for his trilogy : Glorfindel's relieved and enthusiastic greeting to Aragorn :

" Ai na vedui Dúnadan ! Mae govannen !"

or the inscription that Celebrimbor cut over the hidden Gates of Moria. To any of us who have ever lived for a little time in a country district in Wales, or who have been in the Gaelic-speaking parts of Scotland, these words have a ring and intonation that is unmistakable and familiar.

Next comes Chaucer as a Philologist, a Philological Society pamphlet in 1934, followed, in 1937, by something that is almost certainly the outcome of his Leverhulme Research Fellowship, and which, from our point of view, is one of the most important of his academic publications : Beowulf — the Monsters and the Critics.

Now even the most superficial acquaintance with the Beowulf legend is enough to reveal it as the source book for many of the incidents of THE HOBBIT and of the RINGS trilogy : the hideous "Thing in the Water" that guarded the West Gate of Moria, that was the death of Óin and came near to being the death of Frodo, comes from the monsters of the enchanted lake in Beowulf. Beowulf's sword turning off harmless from the scaly hide of Grendel's mother gave us Boromir's sword turning on the hide of the great cave-troll in Moria ; in the deadly struggle between Beowulf and Grendel's mother in the cavern at the bottom of the lake, the invulnerable monster is killed only by the spell-wrought might of an enchanted weapon from of old, snatched up by chance by the hero from among the loot that litters her lair, and it is just such an enchanted weapon from of old that enables the valiant little hobbit, Meriadoc Brandybuck, to hamstring and bring down the terrible King of the Ringwraiths, who is invulnerable to ordinary weapons — and, immediately after, Merry's magic blade smokes and writhes and fades away, just as Beowulf's did in the hag's inhuman blood.

Smaug the dragon, in THE HOBBIT, and his bed of golden treasure is no more than a more detailed, and in some ways even more terrifying, version of Beowulf's fire-drake and its hoard of treasure — indeed in one place Tolkien has even used the very wording of the Beowulf poem, where, in the appendix summarizing the history of the Rohirrim, he writes :

"Of Fran, they tell that he slew Scatha, the great dragon of Ered Mithrin, and the land had peace from the long-worms afterwards."

"Long-Worm" is the very epithet used for the fire-drake in the Beowulf epic, in several places.

Following, in the list of Tolkien's works, we have, in 1946, first The Pearl — a Verse Translation and then, last of all, and the most telling : Fairy Stories — a Critical Study.

The last item in WHO'S WHO is equally revealing : Recreations : Writing verse, fairy stories and romances — and we remember P. Schuyler Miller's delighted review of the RINGS trilogy, extolling its author for his skill in producing "chantable lyrics." !

The next pertinent evidence comes from Tolkien's works themselves ; a glance makes it obvious that THE HOBBIT was written for children in the six-to-ten age group, but Tolkien has himself apologized, at the beginning of the RINGS for the fact that the promised sequel has been fourteen years on the way. Combining this with the fact that the detailed maps at the end of the RINGS volumes bear the initials of another member of the Tolkien family, it is clear that the RINGS trilogy has been written for — and pretty certainly discussed and criticized at length by — an audience just at the argumentative and cocksure age, who most probably inherited at least a portion of their father's brains, and could hardly help — brought up in such an atmosphere — acquiring at least some of his catholic literary taste, wide culture and amazing powers of constructive imagination.

It is not possible, in a short article like this, to make any sort of detailed comparison of Tolkien's work with that of the most notable fantasy writers — a theme that might well fill a moderate-sized book — but it may be interesting to conduct a brief and limited survey. For comparison we may take, in the first place, his two personal friends and contemporaries : Clive Staples Lewis, author of some of the most controversial works on modern man and religion that have been produced in this generation, together with a Science Fantasy trilogy equally noted both inside and outside Science Fiction circles — OUT OF THE SILENT PLANET, PERELANDRA and THAT HID-

EOUS STRENGTH — and Charles Williams, poet, visionary, famous critic of Dante and author of a series of semi-supernatural adventure fantasies that, for some unexplained reason, seem hardly known at all to the general public : MANY DIMENSIONS, WAR IN HEAVEN, THE PLACE OF THE LION, SHADOWS OF ECSTASY, DESCENT INTO HELL, ALL HALLOWS' EVE and THE GREATER TRUMPS, of which only the first has ever got through into a cheap paper-back edition (Penguin). It is a mystery to me why people who now extoll Ray Bradbury, to their friends' complete boredom, seem never to have heard of this splendid fantasist, who wrote (and, in my own opinion, wrote immeasurably better) in almost exactly Bradbury's own vein of semi-supernatural fantasy some years before Bradbury had ever been heard of.

With these, for complement and contrast, we may consider Howard Phillips Lovecraft and Abraham Merritt, two Americans who are acknowledged masters of fantasy.

Let us now compare, in turn, the moral outlook and demonology of these authors.

Lewis' morality is openly and expressedly Christian — his Maleldil the Young, Creator and Ruler of the Universe, is (implicitly, and all but explicitly) equated with that aspect of the Holy Trinity that, as Guardian, Saviour and Companion, is incarnated for the Christian in Jesus of Nazareth, while his "Black Oyarsa" who bedevils, in the most literal sense, the affairs of this unfortunate planet, is none other than the Christian Satan, the " Our Father Below " of his most amusing of militantly Christian books THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS.

Charles Williams' religious background, while equally strongly felt, is far less prominent and indeed is nowhere explicitly stated ; the invocation of or use of supernatural powers " from the outside " is portrayed throughout as inadmissable, not only because they are evil and dangerous, but even more because nobody can see just where even the simplest action of the kind may ultimately lead — and in Williams' fantasies such actions lead us into some peculiarly horrible places.

Merritt, specializing, as he does, chiefly in exploration fantasies of the "lost race" type, has little moral or religious background, and his villains suffer the ordinary corruptions of mankind : in *THE MOON POOL* as also in *THE FACE IN THE ABYSS* the ruling people have, by long use, become callously and completely indifferent to the sufferings of their subject peoples, and then have gradually and imperceptibly passed from mere indifference to positive cruelty and enjoyment of the sufferings of others. There is a touch of this also in his *DWELLERS IN THE MIRAGE*, while the central villains of his later fantasies *SEVEN FOOTPRINTS TO SATAN* and *BURN, WITCH, BURN !* are afflicted simply with devouring ambition — the desire for unlimited power over their fellow-creatures without the slightest regard for their individual wishes or desires.

Lovecraft's villains are of a more complex type — here there is sometimes the desire for power (occasionally disguised as the desire for riches) and sometimes the ill-conditioned under-dog's desire to tear down anything that seems to be above him simply because it is above him, but it is usually complicated with the deliberate indulgence in forbidden rites, sometimes of bestial foulness, and with communion with beings from beyond the ordinary limits of space and time who are beastliness and evil personified. In this connection it is interesting that Lovecraft seldom even mentions Christian rites or beliefs at all, but leaves it to be tacitly understood that against these transdimensional powers of evil they are of little or no use or effect.

Since Tolkien, Lewis, Lovecraft and Merritt all make use of magic in their fantasies, it is instructive to look at their magicians. Those of Lovecraft and Merritt are in the old "Gothic Romance" tradition, making use of elaborate diagrams, rituals and incantations — they in themselves are of no power worth mentioning (old Ephraim Whately, of Lovecraft's -gruesome tale "The Dunwich Horror" is quite openly half-witted !) but they command the powers they do through the rituals and spells that they have learnt. Lewis, on the other hand, says of Merlin, in *THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH*, that " He was a magician, not because of what he had learnt, but because of the kind of man he was." and Tolkien's magicians Gandalf, Rhadagast and the turncoat Saruman are of the same kind. Though they are called "Masters of Lore" their spells

are worked with the very minimum of ritual or of external paraphernalia — the Master speaks the Word, and the thing is done. It is interesting to compare this with the wonders said to be worked by the adepts of the Tantric and Mahayâna coteries in Tibet ; here we are told that the adepts of the medium grades use an enormously elaborate ritual of charms, spells and diagrams, whereas the really great masters seem to be able to work far greater wonders without any apparatus at all, and with the very minimum of ritual.

Excepting Charles Williams, all these writers have to some extent created their own historical or semi-mythical backgrounds for their stories : Lewis uses the background of Christian mythology and history and of accepted geological and cosmological science, merely observing, in passing, that the " Black Oyarsa," the perverted guardian spirit of Earth, turned to evil courses long before the appearance of man on earth.

Two of Merritt's pseudo-historical suggestions are of interest here. In *THE DWELLERS IN THE MIRAGE* he postulates the existence in Central Asia of a remote Uighur civilization at a time when the Gobi desert was still fertile country, and links this up with the more generally accepted notion that the Viking heroic legends of Odin, Thor and the main Norse pantheon date from the period of their wanderings after the increasing dessication of Central Asia had made it uninhabitable for them. In *THE FACE IN THE ABYSS*, he suggests the existence on earth of a reptile civilization, antedating that of mankind, which, in the action of the story, is represented by the single survivor, the strange being known as the Snake-Mother who is the central figure of the action of the book. Lovecraft has also used a similar idea in his tale *THE HAUNTER OF THE DARK*, namely that the fearful talisman described therein, which has again and again exposed mankind to danger from beings of hideous evil, residing in other dimensions of space and time, had also been revered and used before ever mankind existed on earth by " the serpent-men of Valusia " and by " the crinoid (= sea-urchin !) things of Antarctica." Both these authors, of course, derived the idea from the Asiatic legend of the " Nagas", the half-serpent half-human beings depicted in Hindu sculpture from the Indus valley to Java.

Lovecraft's main contribution to the mythos of the supernatural was, however, the idea, which he used again and again, that before the evolution of mankind the earth had been inhabited by beings of an entirely inhuman kind, who, by ferocious cruelty and by the practice of black magic of the most revolting kind, had forfeited their birthright and been outlawed to some other dimension of space and time, from which they ceaselessly plotted to regain their power on earth, using as their tools depraved, ignorant or conscienceless experimenters with "magic" with whom alone they might, on occasion, be able to open communication. Merritt himself once produced something parallel to this in the terrible deity Khalkru, the Kraken-God, Lord of Chaos, depicted in *THE DWELLERS IN THE MIRAGE*, who dwells in some other dimension of time and space, but who can be summoned thence by ritual to receive the ghastly human sacrifices described in the story.

Tolkien, however, by comparison with these indulges in a far grander and more wide-sweeping historical creation, going back several thousand years, and postulating the former existence on earth of a race of Immortals, the Elves, as well as of two other races, mortal but not human — the dwarven-folk, and the Ents, the great shepherds of the trees. There have been few things in recent literature more heart-renderingly sorrowful than his picture of the Elves, great, beautiful, but, since in bygone ages they helped men to forbidden knowledge, condemned to exile in Middle Earth, where they are slowly being exterminated, since though immune to old-age or sickness they can yet be killed in battle by the evilly-disposed. His "Great Enemy", who brought about the fall of the first kindly society of Elves and Men living in love and trust together, is, presumably, the Christian Satan, of whom, as we are told "the Dark Lord, Sauron (the central evil genius of the *RINGS* trilogy) was but a servant."

And here we come to one of the strangest things about Tolkien's trilogy — not only is there no mention of Christian mythology or of the Christian faith, but there is nowhere in it any mention of any religion at all ! Even more remarkable, there is nowhere any quotation from any religious work — and when one considers the dozens of metaphors and comparisons in everyday English that are direct quotations from the

Bible — such phrases as "clear as crystal" "lick the dust" "a broken reed" "a law unto themselves" or "weighed and found wanting" — this curious "spiritual disinfection" is in itself no mean literary feat :

THE LORD OF THE RINGS is not an allegory, like THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS, yet, like that and similar works, it is on the very highest moral plane, and likely in the foremost degree to promote such things as courage, humility, friendship, kindness and self-sacrifice, and, generally, to keep us mindful of that Virtue which, the Catechism tells us, is the Chief End of Man.

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-T^HE D U N S A N Y F R A G M E N T.
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by Pete Mansfield.

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The last two-score years have seen many a fine fantastic yarn put into print - as every reader of this brief article knows without telling - for the most part appearing in the magazine field that was opened up in the mid-twenties by 'Weird Tales'. Before this only the occasional author, like Haggard and Dunsany, saw fit to write in this vein: the new generation of pulp writers accordingly had few models on which to style themselves. It was only natural, therefore, that a number of authors should be influenced by the same figurehead - Lord Dunsany.

One of the first such instances that comes to mind is Howard Phillips Lovecraft, the recluse Providence author who has achieved recognition (regretably posthumous) for his creation of the Cthulhu mythos. A few of his earlier stories, in a more macabre vein, were after the style of Edgar Allen Poe and Robert W. Chambers: but his best writings by far were those that emulated the Irish bard. His dream-like tales of Randolph Carter and the Inner World, of Ulthar and Celephais, and the Peaks of Throk and the Vale of Pnoth, and of the terrifying Night Gaunts and Dholes to be found therein spring, one can readily imagine, from his love of Dunsany's High Pegana, it's gods, and the people who worship them. Even in his later writings revolving around the Cthulhu mythos can be found traces of the pantheons that Dunsany delighted in creating. Clark Ashton Smith, one of Lovecraft's fellow authors in Weird Tales, also shared his literary tastes and injected that 'Dunsanyish' strain into his stories of Hyperbercea and Zothique: and also, to a lesser extent, the whimsy that is apparent in his tales of Averroigne seems to have sprung from the same source.

The 'Jorkens' yarns which first appeared in book form as 'The Travel Tales of Mr. Joseph Jorkens' also had their share of imitators (and remember please that 'imitation is the sincerest form of flattery'). Jorkens, incidentally, was Dunsany's likeable, drink-cadging hero who was reknowned amongst his fellow Club members for his ability to tell a re-

ally tall story about his travels. As I was saying, this idea of using a tall - story raconteur as the vehicle for telling some really tall stories seems to have caught on in the last decade - bringing forth as it has the 'Tales from Gavagan's Bar' of Pratt and de Camp, and Arthur C. Clarke's stories from 'The White Hart'.

However, all this is by way of being incidental. The real reason for writing this is to point out the most interesting case of Dunsany's influence upon a younger author - namely the aforementioned Fletcher Pratt. The latter part of the 'fourties saw the publication of this writer's epic 'The Well of the Unicorn' by Sloane Associates, and any admirer of Dunsany's works reading it will feel a stirring in his memory at the mention of King Argimenes. This would naturally puzzle him if he hadn't read the author's note beforehand, as it clears up the situation completely. Do you remember how Lovecraft hinted (to make his stories more realistic) that Robert W. Chambers' "The King in Yellow" was drawn from his own pseudomythical 'Necronomicon' ? This, of course, followed the basic assumption that his 'forbidden book' was real, and that it was from this that Chambers had drawn, years before, in order to embroider his tales. Well, Fletcher Pratt explains his connection with Dunsany in the same devious way - but perhaps it would be best if I quoted from his preface :-

"A certain Irish chronicler named Dunsany caught some of the news from this nowhere and set it down under the style of 'King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior', but the events he cites took place generations before any told here, and he was only interested in a very small part of them, to wit: the revolt of King Argimenes."

Now this 'author's note' has suggested a fascinating possibility in that the Dunsany Fragment is loosely connected to 'The Well' by a number of tales that are related throughout the book. It would, I think, prove interesting if I was to draw up a history of 'the Well' from King Argimenes' revolt to Airar Alvarson's rise to power some generations later, and publish the results of my research in a later issue of this 'Eldritch DREAM QUEST', I'm sure that readers would also welcome a nap of this fabled land, so I'll see what can be done. Oh, one more thing before I finish - don't expect this item for a couple of issues yet, these things take time, y'know.

MICHAEL MOORCOCK'S THE DARK RIDER



R.M.
Nov. 60

A story of Dark Age Britain by Mike J. Moorcock.

Chapter One - THE PICTS !

Fear rode the backs of black British stallions, and it was whispered that the Wild Hunt screamed across the skies again.

Men locked or barred their hut doors at night and murmured that the old Gods had returned now that the eagles of Rome had left the rocky shores of Britain at the mercy of powers far older than the ancestors of the legions. Hadrian's great wall was left unguarded and even now the first bands of squat, fierce Picts were encroaching on Celtic territory once held under the heel of Rome.

Evening or night seemed to remain in Britain perpetually; either as a sombre cloak of shadowy grey, or in blood-red sunsets of brooding ochre.

The Picts crept silently and struck stealthily out of their hills and slipped into the lands beyond the border. Heraldizing their passage, in those days long ago, about which so little is known, a terrible story went ahead of them. A story of a great stone giant which led them to vicious victory.

The ravens of the North were coming, marking their trail with flint-tipped arrows which sped from shadows, and spears, axes and maces of hard, sharp stone.

Celtic farmers fled in fear and watched their homes burn as the Picts ravaged their lands. Worse even than the iron men of Rome were these squat savages from the hills. "Who can save us from the Picts?" They whispered together. "Who - now that the legions have flown?"

Then it was that the Dark Rider, cowled so that his face could not be seen, came riding out of the Southlands to do battle with the ferocious Picts.

Sharon, the Dark Rider, wearing his cowled black cloak upon which was embossed a Celtic cross of silver thread, be-

aring the great bronze sword Nightslayer engraved with ancient runes, riding the fiery steed with the blazing eyes which he called Starfire: Sharon came at last to succour the trembling Celtic farmers.

It was said that he spoke with an Irish lilt in his voice, like the thrilling of a golden harp, and that his skin was pale as marble, his hair black as velvet and matching his stern eyes. But none could be sure whether he was saint or priest or devil.

But the Angles who had settled, peacefully enough, in the North, said that Sharon was Odin come again to fight the troll-like Picts, to drive them back to their own dark hills. Perhaps they were right - perhaps all were right, for no-one knows, nor will they ever know, who Sharon, the Black Lord, Sharon the Dark Rider, was.

Now, at the time Sharon came out of the South, the Picts were encroaching ever further into the lands we now call Northumberland, and they had, so the stories say, the Stone Giant as their leader.

He was big, was this giant, and carved of granite. Twice as tall as a tall man, with a might and power about him which showed that he was the Picts' God. They called him Cromm - and Cromm was huge and stooping and bore no weapons other than his huge stone fists which could crush a man to jelly.

From the swirling mists of night he led his squat followers onwards, ever onwards. And one night the Picts camped on a high hill and slept.

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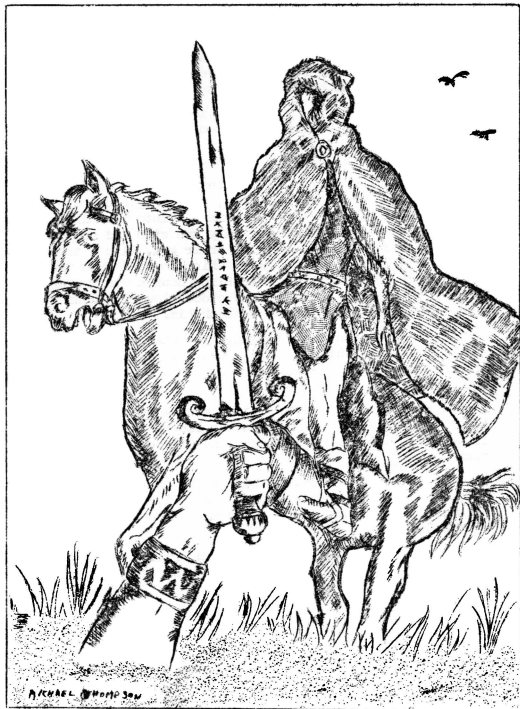
"Tell me where their camp lies!" Sharon's voice sang through the sombre air: a gust of icy wind swirled his cloak about him and his black eyes gleamed from the cowl which covered his head.

So, fearfully, the Celtic villagers mumbled the whereabouts of the Picts to Sharon, and pointed with trembling fingers to the East of their village.

"They camp on the great barrow, Lord Sharon," they said.

Without another word, the eery horseman turned his stallion toward the East and galloped into the bleak night.

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Secure in their knowledge that Cromm would guard them safely, the Picts slept, posting no guards. And they snored loudly through the stillness of midnight. But they awoke to the dull sound of a horse's hooves on the slopes of the hill and they peered into darkness and saw the Dark Rider come.

"Where is Cromm ?" Sharon's voice cut into their sleepy brains. "Where is your Old One, your Stone Giant ? Tell me, little gnomes, for I have brought the sword of my fathers, the sword of the Sidhe, to do battle with him."

And for a moment the Picts wavered, for they knew that the Sidhe were powerful Gods once, that they had come to the Pictish shores and driven Cromm himself into the hills. But when they saw that Sharon was only the size and shape of a man, they laughed and called for their god. With a trembling of the very earth, with a grunt which sounded like thunder, with a roar of a landslide tumbling down a tall mountain, Cromm arose from the ground and stood glowering down at the puny humans who stood in awe beneath him.

He spoke an alien tongue, yet Sharon could hear his words and understand them well, how, he did not know. He laughed and Sharon's cloak was swept around him in a gust of foul air,

"I am ready to do battle with he whom my ancient enemies bless," he said and he flexed stone biceps and knotted stone fists and plodded towards Sharon who dismounted and drew the sword Nightslayer.

The rune-blade screamed out of its scabbard and gleamed golden through the black gloom. The Picts staggered back, shielding their eyes, for it was as Sharon said, the sword of the Sidhe.

"This blade harmed ye once, Cromm Cruiach of the mound!" said Sharon, with a strange power in his voice. "It can harm ye again, Bowed One ! "

"But you are not the Sidhe, little man!" roared Cromm - " And men I can slay, easily. " With that he came on, his stone fists lashing at Sharon who was only half his height.

Cromm grabbed for Sharon but his hand closed on air, for the Dark Rider skipped out of his reach and cut - cut at stone ! The bronze blade should have buckled - but it did

not. It sheared through a finger of Cromm's stone hand and the finger clumped to the ground, flattening the earth.

Cromm's brows met in a terrible frown and he roared again so that the Picts fell back covering their ears.

Then Cromm grabbed again at Sharon and the Black Lord dodged backwards again - and fell as he tripped on a rock ! Cromm smiled a grimace which was evil and unpleasant to behold, and his hand, bereft of one finger, clutched at Sharon and plucked him from where he lay.

Then, very slowly so that Sharon should not die quickly, Cromm began to squeeze the breath from Sharon's body.

But the Dark Rider was not dead yet - and he cut again with the sword which shrilled in the night and shone with the runes of the Sidhe. He hacked a mighty cut into the stone wrist and Cromm howled in rage and pain. Sharon hacked once more and Cromm's fingers slackened their grip and Sharon breathed great gasps of air into his tortured lungs.

Then he drew the sword back and he hurled it full into Cromm's ugly face so that it struck the Stone Giant in his right eye. Then did the heavens break with flashing lightning and thunder rumbled across the black clouds and Cromm's face flamed- wreathed in fire which came from the rune-sword Nightslayer.

And Cromm dropped Sharon and both hands, one mutilated and broken, flew to his face and he sobbed and moaned in torment, trying to dislodge the singing sword from his eye. But it was to no avail, for the runes made powerful magic - the magic of the Sidhe.

Cromm crumpled to his knees and the ground shook and he groaned as he died. Then the skies were quiet once more and a strange peace seemed to settle over the barrow.

Cool, clean air swept over the hill and Sharon stood looking down at the dead Stone Giant. Then, slowly, the giant began to disintegrate. He broke up before Sharon's eyes and soon only dust lay on the hill, dust which was carried off by the wind.

Sharon looked for Nightslayer but all he found was twisted bronze which seemed to have been melted in a furnace.

" So be it, " he said softly, " for the sword's work is done and I can go home again. " And Sharon turned away from the place of his great battle and he whistled. Starfire came trotting towards the black-caped man and nuzzled his master's hand as if to congratulate him on his victory.

Sharon swung himself into the saddle and saw the Picts running fearfully down the side of the barrow, running towards the North.

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The villager watched as the Dark Rider came near. He noticed that Sharon was swordless.

" Did you see the giant, Lord Sharon ? " he asked.

"Aye," replied the Rider, "I saw him - and we slew him, Nightslayer and myself. You can go in peace again - for a great evil is flown from your land."

Then the Dark Rider rode away and he was never seen again in the Northlands.

- The End -

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WHILE PASSING :-

I think that this is as good as anywhere for me to impart the only important news items that have come to hand, so... I'm sure that all Tolkien enthusiasts will be pleased to hear that THE LORD OF THE RINGS trilogy has been chosen as the SFBC's December Extra, at just over half the normal price. May I quote from the SFBC's review of the epic ? Well, "....THE LORD OF THE RINGS, a winner of the International Fantasy Award, is SFBC's Christmas Extra (optional) book. It is a work unique in our time, magnificent in conception, in its writing, and its breadth of imagination. Its setting is the whole planet in its mythological era; its theme the titanic conflict, involving all creatures and races of men, over a ring of power...." "...A story magnificently told, with every kind of colour and movement and greatness.." -New Statesman-

I'd be much obliged if any member of the scheme could help me to obtain a set of this edition of my favourite work. Any offers ? You know the address to write to!

Entmoot - THE READERS COLUMN.

Now while Doc Weir isn't exactly an Ent (tho' he does have some Entish characteristics - like being long-winded) he does write a very interesting letter on Celtic literature, and old books in general. He also drags Tolkien into his epistles on every possible occasion so I thought I'd give you the benefit of his writings. o o o ----- o o o -----

((21-9-60)) "...If you're going much on Norse and Celtic mythology, try to get hold of the novel THE LAST VIKING by Eric Linklater, and read it -- not only is it a very good historical novel on the last of the Orkney Vikings, but he also includes a series of chapter-length summaries -- very well done -- of a number of the most famous of the sagas, just to show the sort of social and cultural background his hero came from, and they'd be a very fine "suggestion for further reading". If you can, you might try to get hold of Maurice Hewlett's novels written round some of the sagas, such as "The Light Heart" "Grettir the Outlaw" "Gudrid the Fair" and "Thorgrils of Treadholt" the last being the best of all. Another thing worth doing would be to read the Burnt Njal saga in both the standard Everyman's Library translation by Sir George Dasent, and also in the new modern translation that the Penguin Classics have just brought out, and then to write an article criticising them and comparing their merits and demerits." +++++ "...Another piece of background from which the atmosphere of THE LORD OF THE RINGS is very largely drawn is the famous Finnish epic of magic and fighting THE KALEVALA (also available in the Everymen series.) But if you're going to try to trace all the background material for Tolkien's epic you've some twenty years' work ahead of you ! Very interesting and rewarding work, too !" +++++ "...P.S. A Propos of THE SILMARILLION, it should not only tell the story of how the dwarves first came to exist, but should also tell how the Great Enemy originally stole the Silmarilli from Eldamar, and the tale of Beren and Lúthien Tinúviel, and also, of course, of Eärendil their son; presumably it will finish with the fall of Nargothrond, since it was in that that the other silmarils were for ever lost."

((18-10-60)) "...Re your thesis that an author's earlier

work is usually the best, may I respectfully point out that Tolkien is himself an exception to this -- THE RINGS are immeasurably better than THE HOBBIT ; and I don't much imagine you'll dispute this. Another illustration of this is Jane Austen, whose last novel PERSUASION stands head and shoulders above all the rest for human interest, while it's at least their equal for character drawing." +++++ "...I hope very much, too, that my dissertation will move you to read some of the works of Charles Williams, because if you've missed them, you've missed something well worth reading in the way of semi-occult adventure stories." +++++ "...As regards Tolkien's being a member of Hid Islenzka Bókmennta-Félag - this alarming-looking title translates simply as The Icelandic Book Production Company ! You see Icelandic is spoken by so very few people that in order to be able to print books therein at anything like a profit they have to organise the whole thing on a semi-co-operative basis, rather like the SFBC, so that before they start to print anything they know, dead certain, that it's going to sell at least so many copies, and this Society is just that -- a sort of book-club-cum-book-printing association. I should fancy that Tolkien, being, as he is, one of the great authorities in the world on Norse legends anyhow, was asked to come in for the sake of the prestige that his name would lend any such scheme." +++++ "...As I told you in my postcard, Beorhnoth Beorhthelm's Son is a famous British hero of whom you ought to have known already, and you'll find a very fine account of how he died fighting in the Saxon epic poem THE BATTLE OF MALDON, and also a prose version of the same in Bengtsson's THE LONG SHIPS. I should expect that Tolkien's article ((The Homecoming of Beorhnoth Beorhthelm's Son)) was probably in some university or learned society's journal that specialized in Anglo-Saxon literature ! Not quite the sort of thing that your local library would be very likely to have in stock ! "

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