

FANTASY CROSSROADS

\$3.00

Jan. 1979

Herb Arnold

Adrian Cole

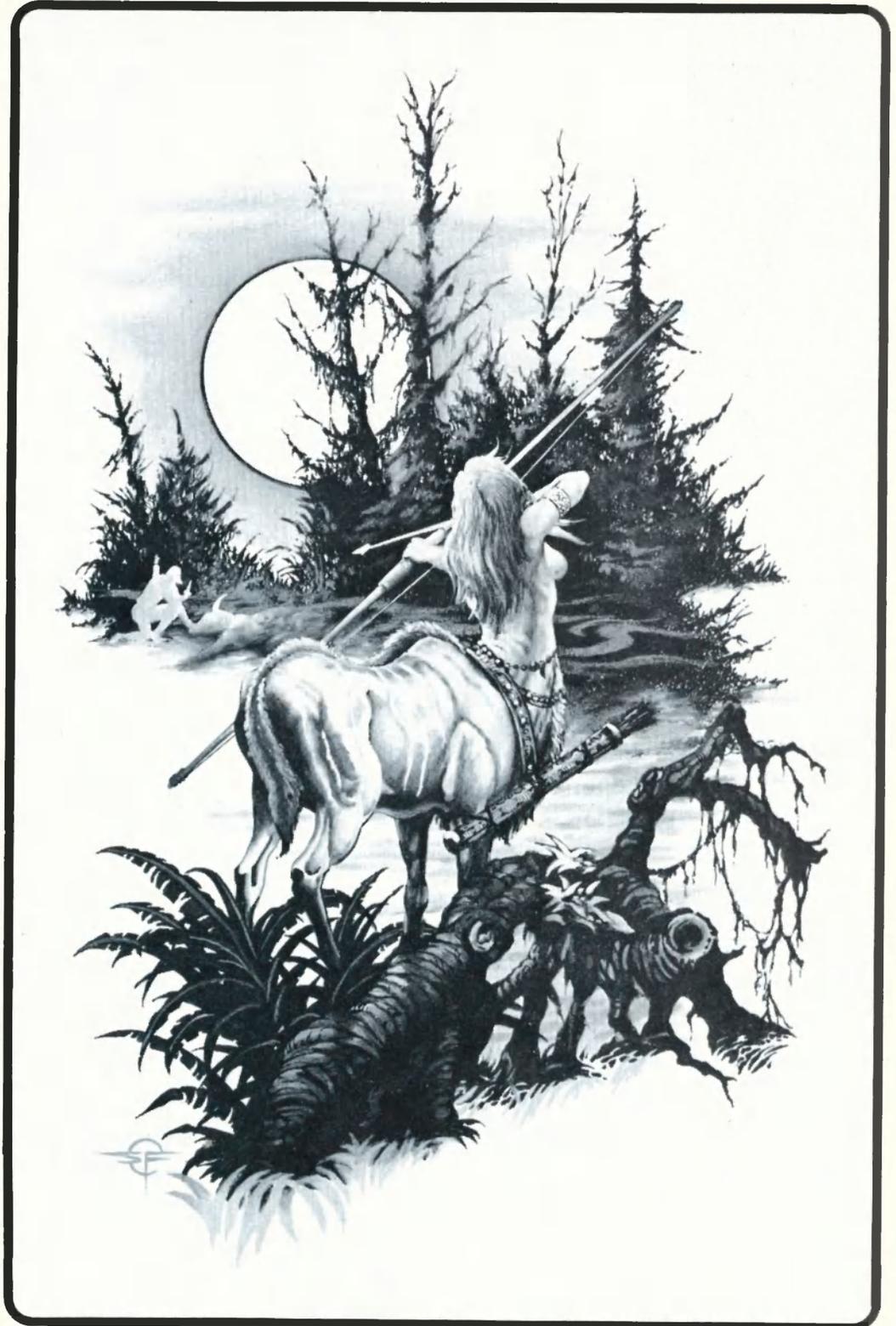
Stephen R.
Donaldson

Stephen
Fabian

Tim Kirk

Frank Belknap
Long

Brian Lumley





MINAS MORGUL

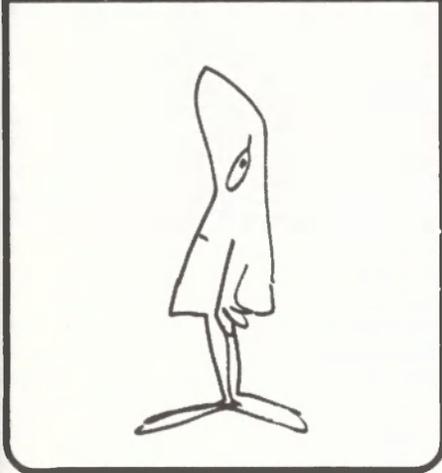
The paths of nightmare, winding through the glooms
Of shadowy mountains, lead the dreamer down
To the grim valley where like clustered tombs
The crumbling towers of Minas Morgul frown.
Here evil exhalations of decay
Give forth a corpse-light that illumines naught
Save a faint-gleaming road that slopes away
To a white bridge with hideous figures wrought.

Red lightnings flash beyond the black-fanged ridge
The signal-flares of long-impending wars.
Then down that glowing road and o'er the bridge
A monstrous Goblin army pours,
While dark and silent against the reddening sky
Circling like birds of doom, the Nazgûl fly.

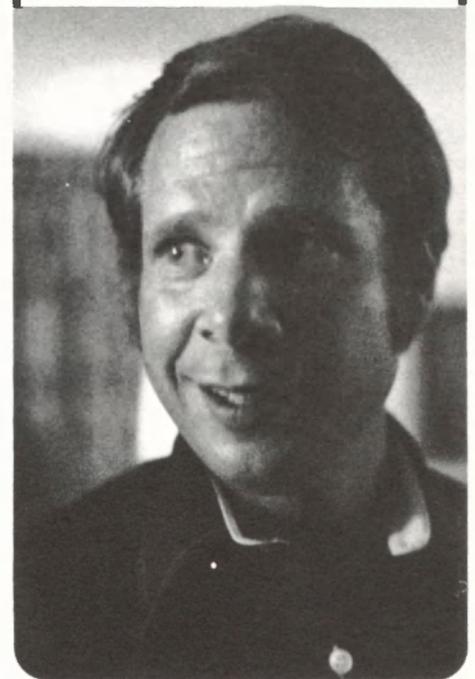
Richard L. Tierney

FANTASY CROSSROADS

Jan. 1979



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EPISTLE EXPRESS

I'd like to thank all those who wrote with comments on the last issue of **FANTASY CROSSROADS**. It's very rewarding to see the mail rate pickup. Although I cannot always answer every letter, I do read every one (I'm the only one here to read 'em) and take comments and criticisms seriously.

Because of space considerations, a couple of letters pertaining to **FC#13** were crowded out of "Epistle Express" in #14. Better late than never, they're in this issue.

Remember, printed letters of comment (LOCs) earn a complimentary copy of the issue they appear in. If you've already paid for that issue, your subscription will be extended to the next issue. So get off your duff and write.

Richard Tierney Many thanks for the copy of **FC 14**, which I received today. I've only skimmed over the Schweitzer & Van Vogt chapters of **GHOR**, but rather like the way they are taking the story. Schweitzer's ending to his chapter reminds me of a scene in Edison Marshall's **THE VIKING**, in which the hero's arm is cut off by the evil Christian king Aella. Oigor the Dane lived to return and slay Aella; hopefully Ghor will make an even greater comeback, if only your writers are up to it.

I also read "Ramblings" & was tickled to note that you rated "The Sword of Spartacus" so highly. Did I tell you that I based it on an actual incident? In 27 AD an amphitheatre actually collapsed at Fidenae, not far from Rome, killing or injuring 50,000 people—the greatest disaster of its kind ever to occur in the Roman Empire, before or after. The contractor's name was Atilius, as in the story, and he was afterward banished for jerry-building the arena. The "Great Tuchulcha" described actually was an Etruscan demon, not my version of "Great Cthulhu", and his image is as I described it also. Makes you wonder, eh? And Tages is actually the name of a great Etruscan sorcerer of legend. Finally, the collapse of the Amphitheatre at Fidenae actually did occur exactly 100 years after the rebellion of Spartacus—I may be the first fictioneer in history to notice that fact. (For an account of the disaster, see Tacitus' **ANNALS**: 4; 62., and

Suetonius' chapter on Tiberius.)

Thanks again for **FC 14**, & sorry to be so long answering your letter

L. Sprague de Camp Thanks for your letter of the fifth, which awaited me on our return from the UK. We hiked along Hadrian's Wall in a downpour, on slimy, slippery mud where a slip could send you over a precipice and straight down hundreds of feet. Then in Hereford we were routed out of the Green Dragon Hotel in our nightclothes by a false fire alarm. Never a dull moment. The Swan agency kept us on such a run that the only way to buy a postage stamp was to sprint for the PO while the other passengers on the bus were enjoying a comfort stop.

I did pick up a couple of bits of information new to me. One: a grave relief at the museum in Chester shows a Sarmatian horseman, one of the auxiliaries recruited by Marcus Aurelius in 175, plainly riding stirrupless; so much for Tamara Talbot Rice's theory that the Sarmatians invented the stirrup. Another: it now transpires that the IXth legion did not disappear in Britain, presumably to be destroyed by the Picts or other ill-wishers. Instead, it was routinely transferred to the Low Countries, where it was based near modern Nijmegen. It was later destroyed in the East by the Parthians. Still another: the Romano-Britons had a perfectly good iron horseshoe, used in addition to the hipposandal; it is recognizable by a scalloped outer edge.

Paul Allen has twice mentioned the *Horseclans* novels of Robert Adams in his column, **OF SWORDS & SORCERY**. I finally found the time and availability to read the three novels (**COMING OF THE HORSECLANS**, **SWORDS OF THE HORSECLANS** and **REVENGE OF THE HORSECLANS**). Being the disagreeable sort that I am, I wrote Robert the following: "Despite your disclaimed 'meaning' in the volumes, you have some obvious biases (not that I'd disagree with any of them) regarding weak gays vs virile men, scientists (bad guys) vs the natural man. Milo reminds me of Frederick Storaska, a self defense instructor who, between touring the country teaching women how not to be raped, goes for 2-3 week stretches in the

wilderness with only a bow and arrow. He eats off what he kills and survives where most modern men would die." It appeared to me that the *Horseclan* novels had a very definite "message".

I continued:

"Anyway, I have a certain amount of envy for such rugged types. That probably explains my interest in jogging over the past year. I'll never be able to survive in the wilderness, but at least I feel I can better handle some physical stress (like having just last week run for almost an hour and a half straight by completing a 9.3 mile course in 1 hr and 24 minutes.)

"Frankly, I'm also turned off by some of the gorey details of the *Horseclan* novels. You certainly haven't glossed over the brutality or perversion which is likely in our future.

"Anyway, I'll be looking forward to volume 4."

Robert responded with some very interesting comments which I'd like to pass on.

Robert Adams I really don't have the time to write letters, but yours disturbs me, in places, and I am wondering how many other readers have misunderstood as you apparently did, in re. my characterizations.

Jon, I meant what I said. My **HORSECLANS** books are not soapboxes and have not and will not be used for preaching. As regards my personal biases, of course I have them—conscious **and** subconscious—we all do, as you know. My dislike—okay, hatred—of faggots is deeply-rooted and deeply-personal, but the only weaknesses I have ascribed to them in my books are moral weaknesses, not ever physical ones. If you will recall, High-Lord Demetrios became quite an accomplished warrior, Vahrohnos Paulos of Notohpolis had fought and won thirty-odd duels prior to his fatal meeting with Lord Alexandros and Vahrohnos Myros of Deskahti is a former *strahteegos* of the Army of the Confederation, even the two unnamed fags in **SWORDS OF THE HORSECLANS** who make disparaging comments after the speeches of Milo and Lt. Erl Hohmun are former partisans and present officers of Milo's composite army, their mental, emotional and moral aberrations and impairments do not, you see affect their

martial prowess or their courage.

HORSECLANS IV, A CAT OF SILVERY HUE, should be out by late-summer 1979, from *New American Library*, who will be publishing the series. They also have bought **HORSECLANS V** and I possibly will sell them **VI**, as well. Ted White now three **HORSECLANS** novelets and I am doing a few **HORSECLANS** novellas for sale as juvies. Donning/Starblaze will publish **CASTAWAYS IN TIME**, the initial volume of a new series, in 1979, also. My negotiations with Fawcett fell through on **KILLCON**, but NAL as well as two other houses have expressed an interest in it.

Like most of my characters, Milo Moray is a composite, albeit, a somewhat-idealized composite.

Jon, I once saw a man, his head blown off by shards from a near-miss mortar shell, spouting blood like a Yosemite geyser, remain on the firestep of his foxhole and fire three more spaced rounds from his M1 before collapsing. In my writing, I do not pull punches, rather, I write life and love and war as it is. If unadorned truth turns off or offends, I am sorry, but I shall continue to write in the same old way, nonetheless.

God bless.

Hmmm, I guess you've experienced some gore that is pretty foreign to me. I wouldn't want you to change your "unadorned truth", but neither do I ever wish to become calloused to violence and bloodshed. Many thanks for taking the time to write.

Roger Schlobin I want to mention
802 N. Calumet Rd. to you that I'm
Chesterton, IN 46304 now including selections
from
FANTASY CROSSROADS, particularly Paul Allen's bibliographic efforts, in "The Year's Scholarship in Science Fiction and Fantasy". Hopefully, there will be some subscription impact from academic sources for your excellent publication.

Although it is obviously too late for the 1978 December installment of "YSSFF", I'm printing below the description of Schlobin's and Marshall B. Tymn's project. Publishers and others may wish to keep the editors apprised of new publications which fall within the coverage of "YSSFF." I'm pleased that Paul's exhaustive efforts are being noticed. I told the FC monster we shouldn't have skipped last issue's installment! Grrrrrrrrrr. What's wrong can't the little monster take criticism?

"The Year's Scholarship in Science Fiction and Fantasy" was created to fulfill the pressing need for an annual secondary bibliography on science fiction and fantasy. This project is the chronological continuation of Thomas Clareson's **SCIENCE FICTION CRITICISM: AN ANNOTA-**

TED CHECKLIST (Kent State University Press, 1972) and Marshall Tymn's annotated list of selected sf scholarship, "A Checklist of American Critical Works on SF: 1972-73" (**EXTRAPOLATION** December 1975).

"YSSFF" will be published annually in the December issue of **EXTRAPOLATION**. It is divided into General, Reference & Bibliography, Teaching and Visual Aids, and Author sections; each entry contains a descriptive annotation. "YSSFF" covers all American scholarship, selected British scholarship, and important criticism from major, established fanzines. It includes books, monographs, articles, Ph.D. dissertations, published M.A. theses, reprints of major criticism that have been out-of-print for a significant period, and scholarly or instructional visual media that are informative rather than simply illustrative. It will not include columns, book reviews (see Hal Hall's **SCIENCE FICTION BOOK REVIEW INDEX**, Gale Research, 1975), unpublished M.A. theses, and published letters.

It is fully expected that "YSSFF" will relieve the scholar, teacher, and fan of the arduous and sometimes frustrating search for scholarly materials and sources among the array of critical and reference tools that appear each year.

The editors welcome the assistance of individuals and publishers in furnishing materials for future lists. Items for inclusion should be sent to Dr. Roger C. Schlobin (802 N. Calumet, Chesterton, IN 46304) or to Dr. Marshall Tymn (1470 Cedar Bend, Ann Arbor, MI 48105).

Dennis Morat
Dept. of the Army
William Beaumont
Medical Ctr.
El Paso, TX 79920

I would like to place an advance order for **FC#15**, for which I enclose \$3.00.

Also, in your **Ramblings** in #14 you state . . . "Nudes sell issues . . ." I politely disagree. The reason I buy **FC** is because of the stories and the poetry. If nudes were what I craved I'd spend my money on 'Playboy.' Nudity can be pleasant, as with the **Bok** cover on #14, but essentially nudity is like sex, there's a certain sameness after a point is passed. And then, hopefully, you go on to a higher level, beyond the tactile and visual.

Brian Earl Brown A few comments
16711 Burt Rd. #207 on **FC #13**. The
Detroit, MI 48219 cover is striking—
sexist, but striking.

Pages 6-7 are a layout disaster, particularly page 7. There you have the tag end of "Epistle Express" (which is still so badly shrunk that it can hardly carry on its tradition of being a lively forum) and a sausage link of "Ramblings" and Paul Allen's review of **RIME ISLE**. The first 3 or 4 times I glanced at page 7, I assumed Ken Raney's illo was a mere spot illo and Paul's piece was part of your "Ramblings". I clearly have to cite its location as badly conceived, it might have been better to have broken the page into three horizontal sections (separated by bars) . . . I'd also consider it better if you'd shuffled layout so that "Ramblings" didn't drift all over your zine. Or perhaps broken it up into mini-articles independent of each other.



I'm shattered, after toiling over that particular page, I thought I'd created an award winning layout format! And why do you insist on adding structure to my 'Ramblings'? Anybody's ramblings are disjointed, scattered and usually lacking any semblance of order. Seriously, "Ramblings" is always filler. It is intended to fill in the nooks and crannies of the magazine.

I do not pretend to be an expert in layout. I'm sure that anyone skilled in magazine layout will continue to find me breaching accepted rules of layout. Sorry folks, I do my best.

"Epistle Express" was badly shrunk because I can only publish the letters I receive. I'm sure you found the situation in FC 14 no better, but hopefully this selection of LOCs signals a revival of our active letters column.

Finally, I'd like to know why the cover of FC #13 was sexist. If it was, in fact, sexist; then the cover of FC 6, 8, 9, 12 and 14 were also sexist. Each pictures a member of one sex but not the other. In fact the nude male by Gene Day on FC 6 was far more provocative than Maureen Chan Ridley in her two piece fur covering.

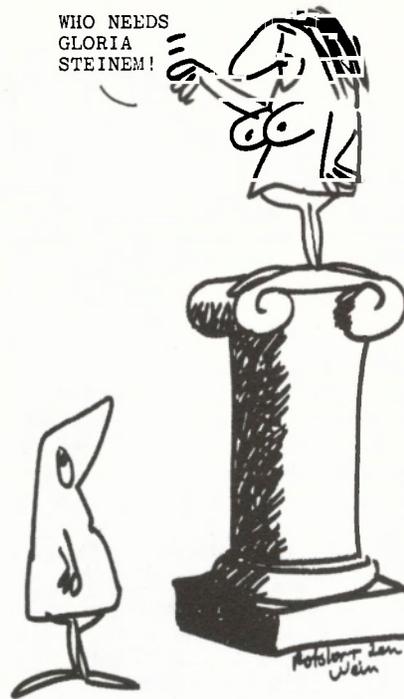
I'm surprised at the negative response to "The Huntress" (it was actually a minority opinion but still a strong minority). I look for beauty in everything I publish. I'm not trying to make FC a "men's magazine". I neither look to saturate the mag with nudes, nor will I avoid them where appropriate and done in taste.

Funny—Chapter seven of the round robin novel reads like Lin Carter's writing, but it is credited to Andrew Offutt. Did you make a mistake by any chance?

Honestly it is incredibly bad. The whole first page is so dumb and reflective that I can (not) see anyone becoming interested by it. The philosophical moralizing of that first page sounded like lukewarm, third-hand REH (Robert E. Howard). The use of words, the pulse and flow of sentences read like an amateur's attempt to ape Howard. The unpublished Charles de Lint is a better writer. Steve Trout or Robert Barger could have done a better job. I'm serious, I really think they could.

Particularly bothersome is that Offutt, like Carter, seems convinced of the need to "talk funny" with S&S stories. They take to strange word patterns and pseudo-archaic word patterns. The result is not a sense of distance from the here-and-now but of overacting—like an actor who does a Scottish brogue so thick no one can understand it.

Manly Wade Wellman—now there's a writer. His chapter barely begins before there's fights and sabre-rattling. The story is fast paced and engages the reader's (or at least my) interest immediately. The writing itself seems constructed in the same formula as Howard's, perhaps the result of both Wellman and Howard growing up as



adventure pulp writers. I'd like to see one of the paperback houses contract a S&S novel or three from Wellman. He, I think, could produce some memorable fiction.

It would be particularly curious to see him combine S&S/pulp elements with his intimate understanding of hill-folk.

I cannot agree more with your comments concerning Wellman and his fiction. But that's where we part company. "Lord General of Nemedra" was written by Andrew J. Offutt. Lin Carter had no part in it (for better or worse).

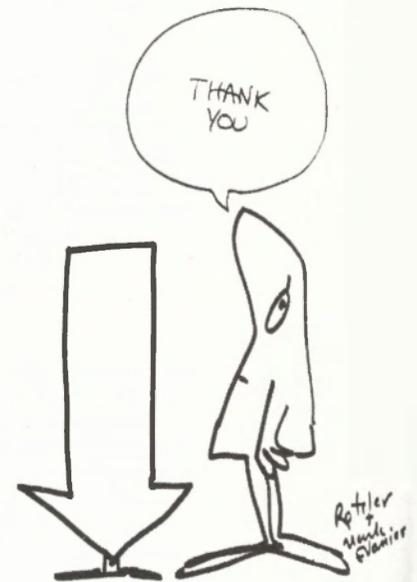
I begin to wonder if the round robin format is not unjust to its contributors. "Ghor, Kin-Slayer" is the longest round robin ever conceived (to the best of my knowledge). It'll run around 75,000 words when complete and include eighteen different authors, each with a very distinctive style. Each author tries to maintain his or her own identity while meshing their style with the other contributors. I'm sure, since the novel is based on a Robert E. Howard fragment, that each contributor also feels the need to reflect the Howard/pulp style of writing. In essence, Offutt, Wellman, Wagner, Saunders, Long, Lumley, van Vogt, Tierney, Brennan, Schweitzer and all the others are asked to write in someone else's style . . . in seventeen other people's styles!

What complicates matters is the segmenting of the novel over several issues of **FANTASY CROSSROADS**. Within the course of any novel, some introspection must take place or characters become flat (i.e. cardboard barbarians . . . now where have I heard that before). Offutt provided the segment, in the development of Ghor,

where he stopped slashing and thundering long enough to consider interior motives. That chapter was essential to the development of the larger work, Offutt's chapter would have seemed a logical interlude from action in order to develop character. Juxtaposed to a single other chapter, the total effect is lost. Offutt's chapter, both in concept and style, was needed at exactly the time it occurred. His chapter was executed in a professional, competent manner or I would not have accepted it. I'm not so awed by pro authors that I refrain from requesting changes or rejecting their work.

One further point must be made. Offutt was an important cog in the consistency and continuity of "Ghor, Kin-Slayer". Andrew spent the extra time needed to chart the major characters in the story, list major descriptive points about each and construct a map of Nemedra and surrounding countries. His work assisted subsequent contributors in avoiding inconsistencies in the storyline. No one does that extra work unless it's for love or money, it certainly wasn't for money.

I owe Andrew J. Offutt additional praise. He taught me (during the course of our dealings) several important lessons which every editor/publisher needs to learn. Andrew is a friend, so I learned the lessons fairly painlessly.



Brian followed up his criticism of FC #13 with the somewhat gentler comments contained in a letter of comment (LOC) on FC #14.

I am a bit—um—irked by your editorial comment that you ran the Kenneth Smith nudes because "nudes sell copies". That is a . . . sleazy reason to run anything. I'm not knocking commerciality, but (well what are you knocking?) the use of an unrealistic

image and treatment of women to make a buck. (Would someone please pass me that buck I made on the last sleazy issue? I seemed to have misplaced it.) That my friend is sexist exploitation.

My friend, if I were seeking to exploit women through the use of nudes in **FANTASY CROSSROADS**, I'd pick some truly erotic art. Smith's nudes are unique and beautiful. If they appeal to anyone's prurient interests, then someone else is mucked up in the mind . . . not me. I view Kenneth's work first as art. Further, if you can't decipher what is tongue-in-cheek and what is not, you'll be very uncomfortable reading future issues of **FC**. I selected the nudes portfolio over a collection of Smith's "beasties" because I felt the latter already had ample exposure. **Watch yourself Bacon, you just punned your foot right into your mouth.** Quiet Monster, no one asked you.

Now that I've disclaimed any commerciality, let me also admit to it. I ran Kenneth Smith's nudes portfolio because I thought it'd sell copies. I also ran Charles Saunders' Imaro tale because I thought it'd help sell. The round robin novel was not originated entirely out a desire to add new dimensions to heroic fantasy literature. It was conceived and published in order to sell copies. But never fear Brian, I haven't sold out entirely to commerciality. I publish "Ramblings" not for commercial considerations, but for ego boo! **Now ya did it, you'll get torn apart next issue.** Oh hush.

I still wonder what it is that makes Charles Saunders so popular among semi-pro press fans. I abandoned his latest story half-read, not because it was particularly bad but because it wasn't particularly good. As a prose stylist he is merely adequate. His characters are undistinguished and almost non-living, and his plot . . . well for my too vast and comprehensive reading of swords and sorcery I've gained the impression that all villages a S&S hero runs into have mysterious and lethal designs on straying travellers, and as is the case, the villagers are being manipulated by others for their advantage, not the villagers, and among those mysterious others—some are benevolent and others malignant. In short there wasn't a new idea anywhere in Saunders' story as far as I read—which was a good half of it.

I humbly suggest you didn't read far enough.

Darrell Schweitzer's chapter of "Generic's Fifth Born Son" (you mean "Ghor, Kin-Slayer"?) was unexpectedly well done. I had imagined Darrell too Morris-esque a writer to handle the fast pace and bloody action of Howard, but he did right well with it, ringing some interesting changes on an old "Conan" plot.

Alas the A. E. van Vogt chapter seemed a muddled piece of philosophical cheek. Writing that suggests that van Vogt has suffered psychic brain damage from his years with scientology. Sigh.

I nominate Brian for the brand new (never before mentioned or awarded) **NASTY AWARD**. It's specifically designed for critics who pull no punches, no matter how offensive they might be.

Actually I don't have a whole lot more to say. I really like John Stewart's art. It's well conceived and executed. The Kenneth Smith portfolio was not that impressive. The third plate was particularly banal. The first seemed washed out, while the last was too dim and muddy.

But for all this, I do like your zine, Jon. I guess I'm so harsh because you do so well already that I assume you can take a detailed critique of your zine.

In all honesty, I do appreciate letters of comment, whether positive or negative. As



with any reader, you have some very apparent biases (don't we all?). Ultimately, I can only present a Jonathan Bacon biased magazine. I like Saunders' work as well as van Vogt's, Schweitzer's and more. My bias, of course, is that I selected all the work in **FC** therefore it's very easy to become defensive of it. I disagree with your comments on van Vogt, Saunders and the Smith portfolio . . . but then you didn't expect me to agree with you . . . did you?

Your comments on layout, etc are well taken. I have "excuses" I could offer on each, but I'm not sure you or other readers are interested in rationales on layout shortcomings. Needless to say, I do my best. **FC** is **STILL** a hobby and nothing more. I'll not allow myself to be pushed into

a "professional" expectations corner. If I had the training, I know I could do better. But I'm not interested in making **FC** any more work than it currently is. I hope you understand me. In print it's so easy to be misunderstood. I'm trying to strike a balance between improving **FC** each issue via comments and criticisms while still keeping it a "fun" adventure. I don't publish **FC** for profit (any fan or semi-pro publisher knows it is impossible to make money publishing fanzines), I publish for the fun and entertainment it offers. Eliminate the fun and there's no incentive to publish.

Joe Marek
2323 S. 8th St.
Omaha, NE

I see that old Jonathan the experimenter has put out yet another issue of **FANTASY CROSSROADS**. I believe the fantasy reading public is certainly lucky to have **FC** back again, even if its ever-changing face unsettles them from time to time.

While the switch to a commercialized/mod typeface is interesting, the one you've chosen is too well known. I've seen it on everything from **PHANTASY DIGEST** to safety bulletins; and I do believe the old, nondescript typeface caused less eyestrain.

The choice of souvenir typeface was a result of its easy readability. It seems to be the least eye-straining. I personally like it and will keep it through at least 1-2 more issues. I may change later though.

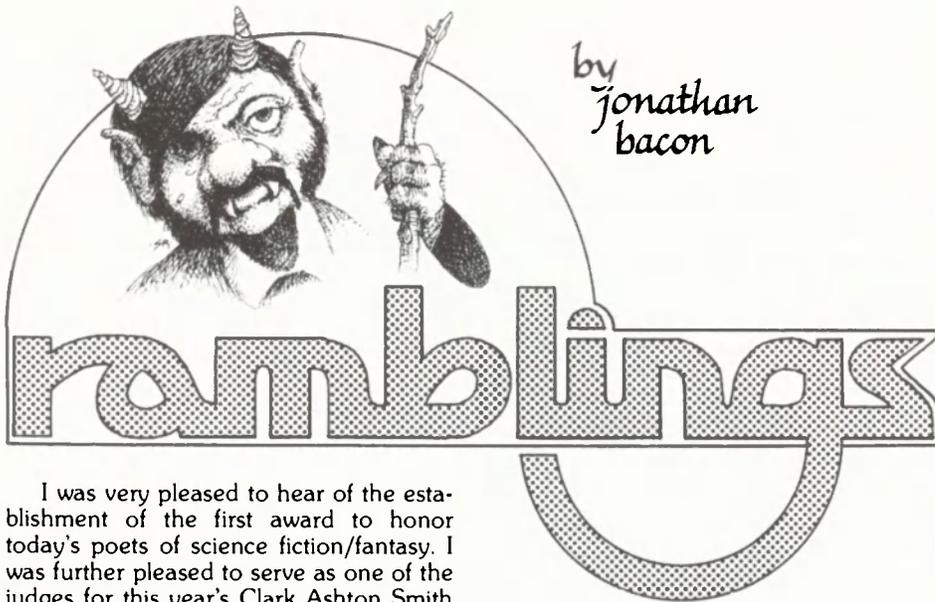
The Saunders' story was well written, the finest I've read since "The Place of Stones." A lot of his more recent stories haven't been as well done as this one. They seem almost churned out, due undoubtedly to his proficiency. This is the kind of tale that makes the Imaro series one of the most interesting ones being printed today. Too bad there aren't more like it.

The Bok tribute was certainly interesting. Considering the renewed interest in him, it's painfully apparent that a figure in the fantasy field has to die to receive significant recognition. As with others before him (Bok), it's a shame that this didn't happen during his lifetime.

Ghor's life certainly takes intriguing turns. I can't completely approve of Schweitzer's amputation plot-device, but I suppose it serves to bring the saga even further from the standard S&S fare than it has already come. While van Vogt's section was not monumentally important to Ghor as the loss of an extremity, it advanced the tale well and added a certain maturity and purposeness in excess of what we've already seen.

The use of the nude in fantasy as well as fantasy illustration is an interesting phenomenon. I can understand the authors' use of nudity to denote vulnerability, a lack

Continued on Page 42



I was very pleased to hear of the establishment of the first award to honor today's poets of science fiction/fantasy. I was further pleased to serve as one of the judges for this year's Clark Ashton Smith Poetry Awards. The award, affectionately referred to as the "Smitty," was presented at Fantasy Faire VIII held at the Pasadena Hilton (Ca.) on September 22-24, 1978.

The award is the brain child of Frederick J. Mayer and has the full backing of the Smith family. Annually three poets are honored. The "Smitty" honors the individual who has made the most outstanding contribution to the multiple genres via verse. It is restricted to a contributor in science fiction, horror or fantasy verse. Two other subdivision awards are also given. The "Star Treader" award is for the most outstanding contributor to science fiction verse during the previous year (1977). The "Book of Eibon" award is for the most outstanding contributor to fantasy-horror verse during the previous year (1977). I'm very pleased to be able to announce the winners and offer our most sincere congratulations to all nominees and award winners.

The STAR TREADER Award

Michael Bishop (winner)
Poul Anderson
Ray Bradbury
Peter Dillingham

The BOOK OF EIBON Award

H. Warner Munn (winner)
Joseph Payne Brennan
Ursula K. Le Guin

**CLARK ASHTON SMITH
POETRY Award (Smitty)**

Joseph Payne Brennan (winner)
Ursula K. Le Guin
H. Warner Munn

It is personally gratifying to see poets like Brennan and Munn receive the recognition which often eludes a versifier. Verse

is still not a popular art form (as evidenced by the continuous volume of letters claiming that each and every issue of FC is too verse-heavy), and I'm delighted to see fandom take a step towards encouraging the development rather than the suffocation of sf/fantasy verse.

Speaking of awards, I'm proud to announce the establishment of a new award in the fantasy field. Readers will remember the discussion in "Ramblings" several issues back where I suggested a new award based on the votes of fans rather than a selection by a limited number of judges. The Balrog Award will be just such an award.

Hey, Balrog's a cousin of mine, why does he deserve the honor and not me?

Hush up. Monster! Who invited you into this conversation? I had hoped you were lost in between where all good dragons go when they commit suicide.

In the first place I'm not a dragon. Secondly, you don't need to show off that you've been reading McCaffrey's dragon-rider series. And finally, I'm far more sane than you. Suicide isn't in my future. How's your future looking?

Bug out and let me get back to the Balrog Award. *Do your best!* I have no real gripe with any of the awards currently presented in the fantasy genre, however I feel a gap exists in the offerings. There is no award which is nominated by fans and voted on by fans. The World Fantasy Con award is nominated by individuals who register for the convention (both the previous and current convention) but then a panel of judges takes over. The British Fantasy Society awards are selected by the BFS membership. The newly created



Smitty award for verse is selected by a panel of judges. The Balrog Award will be totally in the hands of fans. Here's the format. *About time you cut the chatter and got down to business.*

Ten Balrog Awards will be presented annually at Fool-Con, the science fiction fantasy convention sponsored by Johnson County Community College. The convention is a two day affair held on campus. This year's Fool-Con II will be March 31 and April 1, 1979. Nine of the ten categories are open for fans to send in nominations. Those categories are: Best Novel, Best Short Fiction, Best Collection/Anthology, Best Poet, Best Artist, Best Amateur Publication, Best Professional Publication, plus an outstanding Amateur Achievement award and an outstanding Pro Achievement Award will be given. Nominations must be received no later than February 15, 1979 for the first series of awards to be presented on Sunday morning, April 1, 1979. Individuals and works nominated must be in one of the following categories: heroic fantasy (sword & sorcery), dark fantasy (horror literature), sword and planet (a la Burroughs) or fantasy (a la Tolkien). Science fiction and/or comic book material is ineligible. Nominees in the last two categories may be editors, publishers, authors, poets, artists or individuals involved in any phase of the genre.

Because of the overlap between amateur and professional status created by semi-prozines, individuals may be asked to declare themselves (if nominated in both categories) as either amateurs or professionals. Generally speaking, professional status indicates the individual makes his/her livelihood as an artist or author in the genre. Others, despite minimal compensation, are considered amateurs.

The final and tenth Balrog Award is a Special Award bestowed by a panel of judges composed of the Fool-Con special guests and Guests of Honor. For Fool-Con II the panel of judges will include: Guests of Honor Catherine and L. Sprague de Camp, C. L. Moore, plus Fan Guests of Honor Pat Cadigan and Arnie Fenner; also C. J. Cherryh, Tim Kirk and Carl Sherrell. The panel will have the results of balloting prior to making their decisions regarding a Special Award. It is expected that the judges may not necessarily award the tenth Balrog each year. Only when they feel that an individual, publication, published work or film has been over-looked will they present the Special Award.

As mentioned above, all nominations must be made and received by February 15, 1979. Official nomination forms may be obtained by writing Balrog Award, Student Activities Office, Johnson County Community College, Overland Park, Ks 66210. Official nomination forms are NOT necessary to nominate, however they will be provided to those requesting such. The official Balrog Award ballot will be mailed

out during the week of February 19th, 1979 and must be received back at the above address no later than Friday, March 23, 1979. Late ballots will not be counted. Official ballots will be sent to everyone who submits a nomination, to all Fool-Con registrants and to anyone who requests a ballot. News releases will be sent to all fanzines, semi-prozines and professional



magazines in the fantasy field. The releases will invite readers to request a ballot. Further, we will attempt to contact all registrants at the previous World Fantasy Con. We hope to make ballots as accessible as possible.

The award itself is pictured on this page and was sculpted by Jeff Easley. Each award winner will receive a statuette engraved with the title of the specific category, year of award, etc.

One further consideration, lest anyone think that Jonathan Bacon is constructing an award to boost his own ego; I'm disqualifying myself and all of my publications. I want the Balrog Awards to be an impartial statement by fantasy fans. As long as I'm involved in the actual operation of the awards, I will disqualify myself.

You must have a pretty high regard for your own work Bacon. Who, but a lunatic, would nominate you anyway?

I realize it's presumptuous of me to even disqualify myself, but it had to be done or no one would take the awards seriously.

Humble to the end . . . what a fantastic creature you are . . . modest, altruistic and simple-minded.

Thanks for the compliments and bug off, you creep.

The name's Monster, please. Not creep.

Where was I before you slithered in? Oh yes, I wanted to mention that Fool-Con II might be an interesting adventure for some FC readers. The convention is held

on the Johnson County Community College campus in Overland Park, Kansas. As I stated before, convention dates are Saturday, March 31 and Sunday, April 1, 1979. Lest anyone ponder the question too long, Fool-Con was so named as a result of falling on the April Fool's Day weekend. It's a tradition and does not necessarily reflect on participants.

Yeah, just on conference coordinators . . .

Hush up, muck mouth. If you're not careful I'll jam a balrog down your throat.

Oh you mean I'm an award winning monster?

Back to Fool-Con, admission is \$4 until March 1, 1979 and \$5 thereafter and at the door. Dealer tables (which sold out last year) are \$10 until March 1, 1979 and if any remain, \$15 thereafter. I've listed the special guests above so I won't repeat. If you want more information or wish to register (checks should be made out to JCCC) write: Fool-Con, Student Activities Office, Johnson County Community College, Overland Park, Ks. 66210.

One final note on the con. A limited number (about 150) Fool-Con t-shirts will be available @ \$4.95 each. The two color design features artwork by Tim Kirk and will probably move very fast. If you're interested in purchasing a t-shirt, order now. It'll be held at the con for you or you may have it mailed to you. Order now from the JCCC address above. (Only available in adult sizes: small, medium, large and x-large.)

Sniff, sniff. That's not a very good likeness.

It's not supposed to be you. Why would anyone honor you? Why don't you just get lost anyway?!

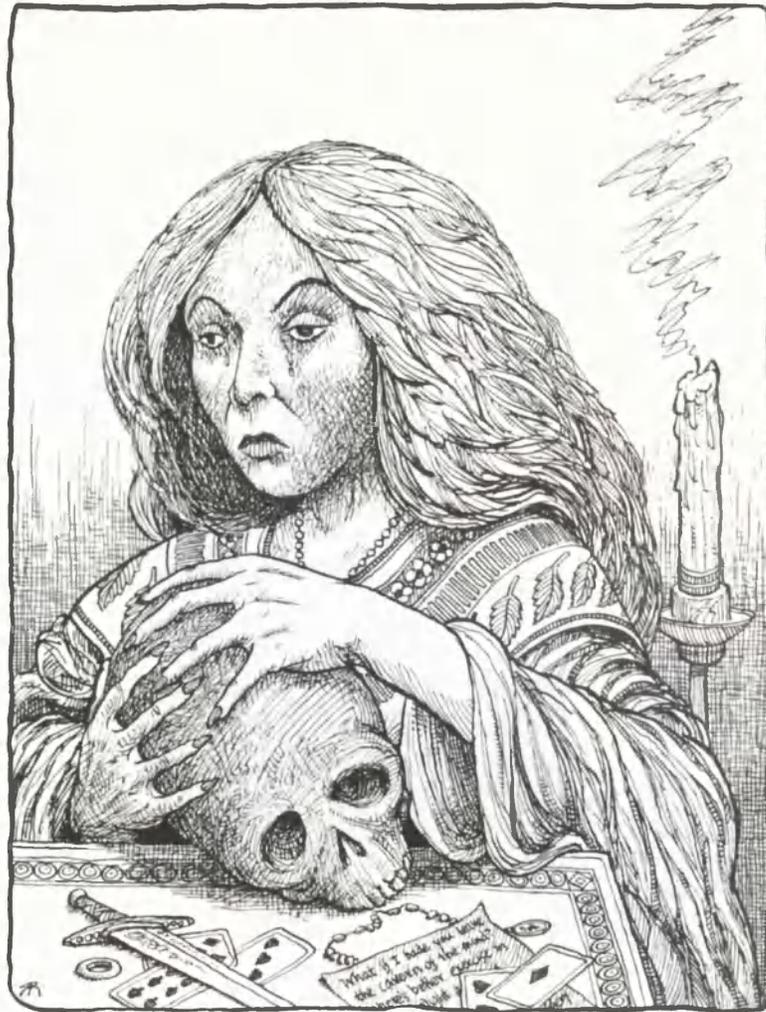
Well, if that's what you want . . .

It is . . . good riddance. I'm running out of space but did want to mention several new publications before I conclude. Don Grant (Publisher, West Kingston, RI 02898) has just dropped several hardcovers onto the market (at the recent World Fantasy Con in Fort Worth the items were introduced). In addition to the CAS bibliographic work mentioned in "Revue Rak", the new works include **QUEEN OF THE BLACK COAST**, **BAZAAR OF THE BIZARRE** and **ALICIA AUSTIN'S AGE OF DREAMS**.

The latter is the most beautiful artbook I've seen since Grant's own volume of Barr work titled **UPON THE WINDS OF YESTERDAY**. **AGE OF DREAMS** captures the intricate yet delicate fabric of Austin's work. The 2000 copy book sells for \$25 and features over 40 color works (Austin's pastels are gentle and breathtaking) and many black & white reproductions on heavy (light blue) paper stock. Don't let the price scare you off, it's a magnificent treasure.

QUEEN OF THE BLACK COAST is

Continued on Page 41



Ghost.

You are fading as sweet formless mists
when dawn is stretched to noontide's end
but I shall see you when my heart's tear falls
upon the skulls of leaving friends.

Ghost! I hardly knew your absence
or dared kiss sorrows from your hair,
yet now we wander closely distant
—these living graves we share.

• Gordon Larkin •

Interview with Stephen R. Donaldson

CONDUCTED BY JONATHAN BACON

Steven R. Donaldson is the author of the Thomas Covenant trilogy, recently a Science Fiction Book Club main selection and issued in hardcover by Holt, Rinehart, Winston. The three novels: **LORD FOUL'S BANE, THE ILLEARTH WAR** and **THE POWER THAT PRESERVES**; are currently being issued in paperback by Ballantine/Del Rey. Volume one and two should be out by the time you read this, with a final volume due early in 1979.

Bacon: From the dust jacket blurbs, we know that Stephen R. Donaldson was born in 1947 in Cleveland Ohio. We also know that from the ages of 3 to 16 you resided in India with your father who was an orthopedic surgeon working extensively with lepers. What else can you tell us about Stephen R. Donaldson?

Donaldson: Well, I imagine that a quick summary of my life (or of almost anyone else's) would make rather boring reading. I could make any number of nebulous comments about my years in India, my education, or my stint as a Conscientious Objector. But perhaps under these circumstances only my writing career itself is germane.

I made my decision to pursue writing during Freshman Orientation at the College of Wooster in September, 1964; and I pursued it as hard as I could through the academic system until I received my M.A. in December, 1971. (That's already more than seven years.) At that point, I dropped out of my Ph.D. program, and began writing full-time. But I didn't get my first "break" until Lester del Rey read **LORD FOUL'S BANE** in March, 1976. (That's eleven years six months.) By that time, I had an over-all file of at least one hundred rejection slips; and **LORD**

FOUL'S BANE itself had been rejected forty-seven times. (Both Holt and Ballantine rejected the book in the years before Lester was hired by Ballantine.)

Since March, 1976, I've been living in a completely different world. Just to highlight the contrast, I'll mention that the **COVENANT** trilogy will soon be published in England, Japan, Sweden, and Germany. I'm making enough money to support my family; and the future looks bright.

My point is that I'm an extreme example of both the difficulties and the possibilities of the writing business. On the one hand, nobody can accuse me of benefiting from "cheap success." On the other, nobody can look at me as an example of "virtue unrewarded." The best part about **COVENANT**'s success is that it contains no room for cynicism.

Bacon: It seems a bit unusual to pinpoint Freshman Orientation as the moment of decision which led to your pursuit of a writing career. What happened that pushed you towards a career in writing?

Donaldson: It's difficult to answer that without getting bogged down in biographical details. Basically, the situation is this. I was in India through my Junior year of high school; and the education I received was stimulating and challenging in all kinds of good ways. For my Senior year of high school, I was in Ohio; and the non-education I received bored me to tears. Also, I couldn't make any friends: on a social level, curiosity, a modicum of intelligence, and an unusual background were drawbacks I couldn't overcome.

Consequently, college electrified me from the first hours of Freshman Orientation. I was challenged intellectually. My former social weaknesses became assets.

And I was surrounded by fascinating people: my impression of my fellow Freshmen was that I couldn't throw a stone without hitting a serious novelist, a professional musician, a National Merit Scholar, or an inventor. (In fact, this impression was an exaggeration in degree, but not in kind. The man in the room next to mine had already written three 80,000 word novels; and he is now a successful writer. Both of his roommates blew the **NMSQT** off the paper. The two men across the hall paid their way through college as performing musicians.) Within three days, I became a mass of energy in search of a lightning rod. I detonated when I suddenly discovered that I had an idea for a story in my head. Before that moment, I had never thought about being a writer. After that moment, I never considered anything else.

I was very lucky. Very few people are blessed with such an ecstatic sense of purpose so early in life.

Bacon: You mentioned that **COVENANT** enables you to support your family. Are you married then? Any children? How do they react to the **COVENANT TRILOGY**?

Donaldson: I've been married for ten years now—ever since the summer after I graduated from college. My wife, Lynn, and I have no children. But ever since the deaths of my parents I've been the guardian for my youngest sister, Debbie. She's lived with us for the past three years. My siblings are superior people one and all, and they've always given me every conceivable kind of encouragement. There was a time in my life when they were the only people who read my fiction voluntarily.

Bacon: Besides the Thomas Covenant

Trilogy, I've seen a story in **F&SF** titled "The Lady in White". Are there other published works I've missed? How about works in progress?

Donaldson: I do have one other story "out" at the moment—a science fiction novella entitled, "Animal Lover," which appeared in **STELLAR #4** this past May. And sometime this year **F&SF** will publish a quasi-science fiction story called, "Mythological Beast." At present, that's the extent of the Donaldson Bibliography. I find that I haven't lost my talent for collecting rejection slips.

Bacon: A British author and correspondent recently wrote and raved about the **COVENANT TRILOGY**, however he finished his letter by saying: "My only complaint is a minor one, and that's that the plot and ideas owe so much to **LORD OF THE RINGS (LOTR)** . . . There's *no* escaping the very obvious **JRRT** influence. It's not a bad thing, of course, but for my money **LOTR** is the pinnacle and no one else will even get near it." How do you respond to that kind of statement?

Donaldson: My own appreciation for **LOTR** is unbounded. And crucial: I might never have tried to write fantasy if Tolkien hadn't taught me that fantasy was worth doing. And, of course, I can easily understand why readers insist on comparing **COVENANT** to **LOTR**,

Nevertheless, the comparisons bother me. I never intended **COVENANT** to be a competitor with **LOTR**. Writing itself is not a competition: any writer worth reading writes out of his/her own imagination, rather than in reference to someone else's work. In several important ways, any good book is *sui generis*; and this is especially true of **LOTR**. I would be a fool if I wanted **COVENANT** to be compared to **LOTR**. And I would be a fool if I were upset by the knowledge that any number of people prefer **LOTR**. I'm bothered by comparisons only because they seem to imply a competition which does not exist.

Bacon: My correspondent friend went on to say "the Donaldson books are certainly the best thing to come out of fantasy for a long, long time. (Far, far superior to **SWORD OF SHANNARA** which was fair.)". Why do you think that the **COVENANT TRILOGY** has garnered so much praise and the Brooks book has gathered criticism? Were you aware that your books would follow **SHANNARA** onto the market? And were you ever concerned that your trilogy might just be considered another rip-off **JRRT** imitation?

Donaldson: Good Heavens! This isn't just a loaded question: it's a mine-field. I should admit, first of all, that both

Brooks and I have been accused of writing Tolkien "rip-offs." I think this is unjust in both cases. It implies that **COVENANT** and **SWORD OF SHANNARA** were written cynically, to exploit vulnerable fantasy-lovers. I've already presented my own defense against this charge. As for Brooks, the weaknesses of **SWORD OF SHANNARA** arise not from cynicism but from admiration: Brooks was simply so full of his respect for **LOTR** that he couldn't conceive of fantasy in any other terms. Admiration may not make good art; but it does have its own kind of integrity.

Be that as it may, I, of course, had no idea of the existence of Brooks or **SHANNARA** when I resubmitted **LORD FOUL'S BANE** to Ballantine, early in '76. After all, **SHANNARA** wasn't published until April, '77. Lester and I didn't arrive at a finished manuscript for the **COVENANT** trilogy until the end of March, 1977. And I must say that I've received real benefits from following Brooks into the market. **SHANNARA** convinced the people who do the marketing that new fantasy can sell. As a result, **COVENANT** has met very little resistance from the machinery which makes books available to the public. This machinery, as you probably know, is something over which an editor, or even a publisher, has very little control.

Bacon: Other than the obvious **JRRT** influence, what other authors have influenced your work? Any favorite authors?

Donaldson: Ah, other authors. Well, my training was all in "mainstream" fiction; and my three heroes have always been James, Conrad, and Faulkner. To that list I've recently added Sir Walter Scott. I should also confess a sneaking admiration for George Meredith. No contemporary mainstream novelists rate so highly with me (for reasons which probably have more to do with me than with them); but I read Paul Scott and Anthony Powell with respect and pleasure.

However, the books which gave me the most inspiration back in the days when I was mustering my courage to attempt **COVENANT** were (of course) **LOTR**, Lewis's **CHRONICLES OF NARNIA**, Peake's **GORMENGHAST** trilogy, and Herbert's **DUNE**. Since then, I've read a lot of science fiction and fantasy with pleasure; but three writers have established themselves as my clear favorites: Patricia A. McKillip; C. J. Cherryh; and Doris Piserchia. If I ever get to read **THE COURTS OF CHAOS**, I'll make up my mind about Zelazny's **AMBER** books.

Bacon: By now, via our correspondence, I hope you realize that I do not consider the **COVENANT TRILOGY** a "cheap imitation" of **LOTR**. It stands uniquely by itself with or without the reader's knowledge of

LOTR (Perhaps most importantly it stands well with readers who do know and love **LOTR**). But **LORD FOUL'S BANE**, et. al. are derivative in the sense that they probably could not have preceded **LOTR**. There seem to be other books and authors who may have influenced you and provided the inspirational pieces that ultimately fit together to make the **COVENANT TRILOGY**. Besides **LOTR**, I see some influence from the Robert E. Howard and Edgar Rice Burroughs school of adventure fiction. Am I just seeing what I want to see, or do you feel influenced by **REH** and **ERB**?

Donaldson: Wonderful. Here's another chance for me to blow myself up. Oh, well.

I read one "Tarzan" book when I was in high school. Didn't like it. And I met "Conan" for the first time a couple of months ago. Didn't care for that, either. The only convenient explanation I can give for my lack of enthusiasm is that, as craftsmen, both Burroughs and Howard are just too crude for me. Remember, I was trained on James, Conrad, and Faulkner.

Bacon: I seem to remember an old Harlan Ellison story (for which I cannot recall a title) which appeared in a Marvel Comics adaptation back around 1972 or 73 wherein the protagonist hurries to work a few minutes late and because he's late, manages to end up *under* a wrecking ball. The character awakens in a fantasy setting where he's called on to save a "damsel in distress" being threatened by a monster. Ultimately, the protagonist doesn't abide by a chivalrous code, abandons his men to die, saves the girl by stabbing the monster in the back (rather than a heroic frontal attack) and ravishes the maiden.

In the Ellison story, the author seems to be saying that people are often in the wrong place at the wrong time. Thomas Covenant speculated early in **THE POWER THAT PRESERVES** that "life was poorly designed; burdens were placed on the wrong people". That seems basically in agreement with Ellison, yet ultimately one of the themes of the trilogy seems to be "even though we think we cannot handle the burden placed upon us in life, there is a purpose behind all things and in fact each is best suited to handle those challenges placed before them". Am I reading in too much?

Donaldson: that's a tough question. Any absolute answer would have to depend on whether you believe that individual human lives are guided by God or by Chance. Is Chance as we know it simply a mask worn by God? or is God as He/She/It is usually understood merely a mask worn by Chance? I'd rather not try to unravel such dilemmas. My own views are self-contradictory to the point of absurdity; and I've

already presented them about as well as I can in **COVENANT**.

But I would like to observe that the essential issues (and answers) in this trilogy are religious. And I do think that it is possible to give a relative rather than an absolute answer to your question. I believe (and I could probably get High Lord Mhoram to agree with me) that people are frequently inadequate to the burdens placed upon them—and that people can

rationale for the despair, the hatred and the self destructive tendencies I see in the ebb and flow of modern society. I could easily put words in your mouth, but I'd rather just ask: why did you write the **COVENANT TRILOGY**? Why use Thomas (always reminds me of the biblical doubter) and Covenant (a word loaded with implications)? Why the Oath of Peace in a genre where a warrior's oath would be more commonplace? Why symbolically loaded

idea can be looked at from many different angles. For Covenant, it is his central dilemma: he is caught between the impossibility of believing the Land true, and the impossibility of believing it false. We are all creatures of paradox, simultaneously sick and well. Despite tries to tell us that we are one or the other—sick (therefore contemptible) or well (therefore superior). The power to combat Despite comes from an affirmation of the paradox.



grow to meet their burdens. (Mhoram comes to understand this when he realizes the fallacy in trying to protect his fellow Lords from the secret of the Ritual of Desecration.) The secret opportunity hidden in every burden is the chance to rise rather than sink. Therefore we don't do our fellow human beings any favors when we try to protect them from pain, responsibility, need, or guilt: instead of helping them, we limit their humanity. Which is surely one of the besetting sins of our civilization. In **COVENANT**, the Creator and Lord Foul are gambling on the essential unknown—i.e. Covenant's capacity to grow to meet the burdens placed upon him. Both take the necessary risk of being wrong. The difference between them is that Lord Foul seeks to ensure that Covenant will find the entire burden impossible; the Creator lets Covenant find his own fate. If "there is a purpose behind all things," it is probably the purpose of opportunity: sink or swim.

Bacon: I could speculate on why I hope you wrote **LORD FOUL'S BANE**, **THE ILLEARTH WAR** and **THE POWER THAT PRESERVES**. I could also go search for answers to numerous moral dilemmas which face our society . . . and I think I'd find satisfactory answers within the trilogy. The book draws me because it's enjoyable, adventuresome fantasy . . . it's good reading. But a greater attraction is linked to a search for meaning and a

words like "desecration", "Lord Foul", "The Despiser", etc?

Donaldson: Ah, now you're *really* asking me to pontificate. Which could be dangerous. I believe that stories should speak for themselves rather than for their authors. Any attempt on my part to "explain" what **COVENANT** "says" would be reductive as well as misleading.

I wrote **COVENANT**, not because I wanted to preach, but because the story excited me in every conceivable way—imaginatively, emotionally, intellectually, morally. So, of course, I had an ethical perception in view as I worked. In retrospect, that perception seems to me to have been in two parts: what is the nature of evil? and what constitutes both an authentic and effective response to evil?

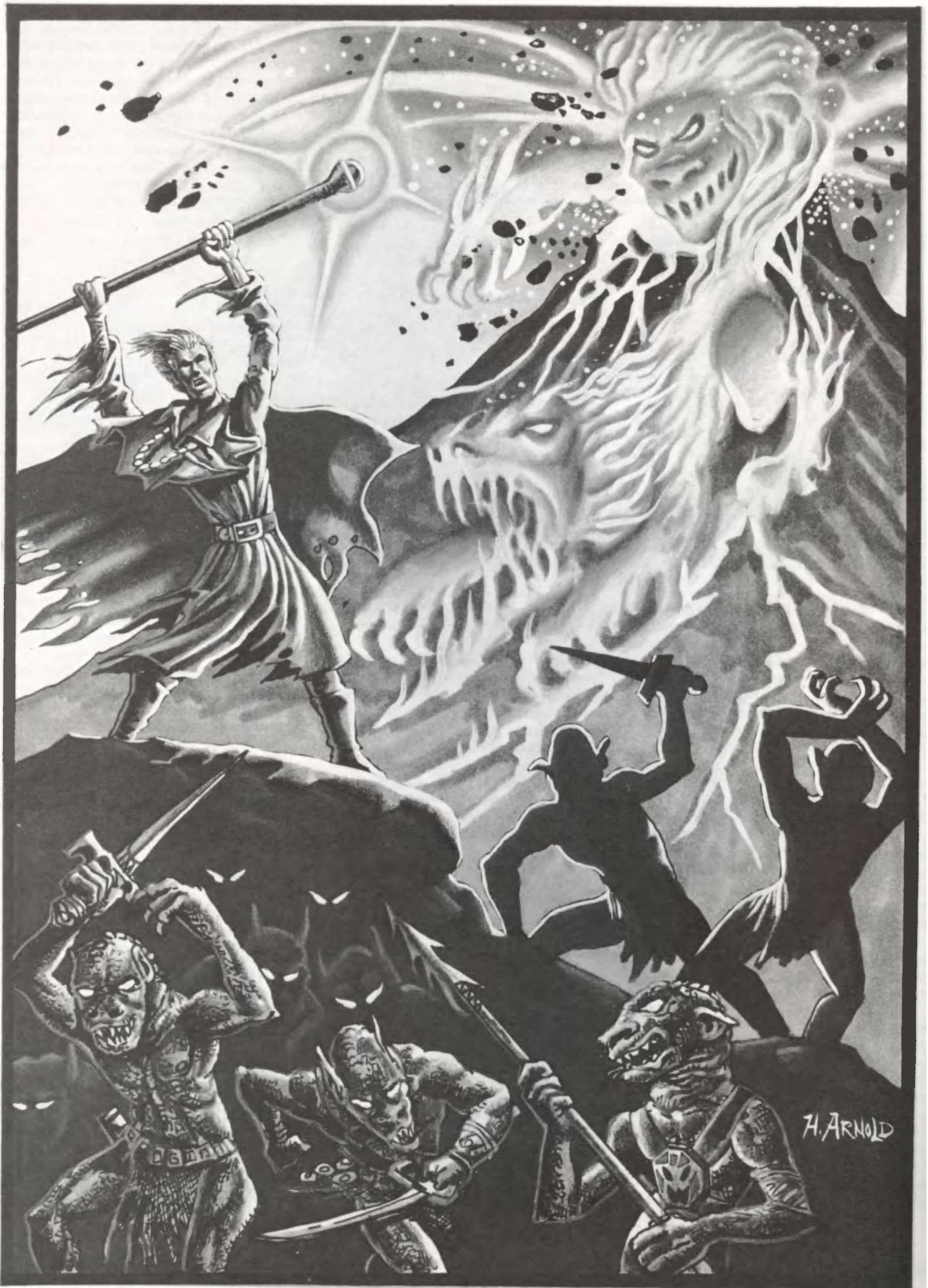
My belief on the first point (seasoned by Dostoyevsky, Lewis, my father, and several other spices) was that evil is Despite—i.e. the ability or willingness to hold Life (other human beings, the environment, whatever) in contempt. Cynicism in all its manifestations. My belief on the second point (conditioned primarily by people like Blake and Camus) was that any valid and viable response to evil must be predicated on an acknowledgment of the inherent paradox of human nature—on a simultaneous recognition and denial of the sovereignty of Despite. We are all "the Despiser." At the same time, we are all "the Creator." This

(One incidental corollary of all this is that people tend to become what's expected of them. As a leper, Covenant is treated as if he were hateful; and that pressure moves him in the direction of actually being hateful. Despite is a self-fulfilling prophecy.)

The other issues you raise seem to me to grow fairly naturally out of these basic propositions. For example, "Desecration" is what happens when someone sinks rather than rises under his/her burdens. (The burden, of course, is the necessity of finding an authentic and effective response to evil.) In the "Oath of Peace," the people of the Land tried to carry their burden by denying themselves the option of sinking. (Which was why they had so little power. They were trying to deny the paradox.) And so on.

But let me hasten to add that I had only a vague sense of these ideas when I began to write **COVENANT**. Any good piece of writing is (among other things) a process of discovery. I learned to understand (as much as I do understand) Despite and paradox by writing about them. Which is one reason why I find this kind of work to be so exciting.

Bacon: When you mentioned the "process of discovery" in writing, it brought to mind a statement Alvin Sargent (who wrote the screenplay for **JULIA**, **STRAIGHT TIME**, **BOBBY DEERFIELD**, **THE STERILE CUCKOO**, etc.) made in an



interview with Arthur Knight. When asked if he enjoyed writing, Sargent responded:

"Sometimes it's okay, but not as a rule. It's not enjoying it so much as finding, finally, some satisfaction in yourself that you made it work, that some kind of life has gotten onto the page, some surprises got written. That's always good for a high. When I surprise myself, when the characters say something that I never expected them to say. You see, that's when you know you're onto something. The trick is to get every character to surprise me, say things I don't expect to hear, make physical moves not anticipated. To be unpredictable, that's what it takes, and if that happens enough I guess I could say I enjoy writing, otherwise it's hard to enjoy unless you hanker after frustration, back pains, headaches, stomach troubles, self-distrust and out and out terror."

Do you agree with that view of writing? Did Covenant ever "surprise" you or react differently than you originally expected?

Donaldson: Sargent has a very good point. I don't write for the enjoyment, or because writing makes me happy. I write because the sense of "discovery," when it comes, is simply the most exciting thing in life. I think of it as magic: at unexpected moments, something happens to the connection between my story (which is always more opalescent than anything I can hope to communicate) and my resources of language (which are always dimly limited), and I begin to write better than I know how. This magic, this surprise, frequently comes in the form of being surprised by one of my characters; but it can appear in other ways as well—unpremeditated imagery, incandescent prose, delicious thematic twists and perceptions. Such surprises, which come more and more frequently as I drive myself harder and harder into a story (and driving myself into a story is definitely not an enjoyable process), make me live more fully than I do at any other time. I write because being alive is addictive, and I want more of it.

Bacon: It's rather interesting that you've accented a facet of the "hero" which is often overlooked in the heroic fantasy genre. Covenant holds the power to save the Land or doom it. Every protagonist has the power to become the hero we expect or to take another path. Yet we never give a second thought to that option in heroic fantasy. Why the emphasis on "choice" in the COVENANT TRILOGY?

Donaldson: There's a pragmatic explanation: all my background and training revolved around writers who spent their time analysing questions of "choice." (Tolkien does this: Howard does not.) But I also write about "choice" by choice. Any

individual personality or character is defined by the choices he or she makes—and by the areas in which he or she believes that choice is possible. All ethical (and religious) questions are questions of choice. In my view, someone like Conan is not a hero, for the simple reason that he never makes a meaningful choice between courage and fear.

Bacon: May we expect to ever see "the further adventures of Thomas Covenant" or more "tales of the Land"?

Donaldson: Yes. In fact, I'm currently hard at work (breaking my butt) on "II CHRONICLES"—the second "Covenant" trilogy. For my own purposes, I call this RESTORATION, to distinguish it from COVENANT, the first trilogy.

I tackle this job with a great deal of fear

and trembling. Few things in life are worse than a bad sequel: I'm terrified that somebody who reads RESTORATION might say, "he should have quit while he was ahead." But I decided to take the chance for a variety of reasons. For one, I don't want to sink under my own burdens. For another, my head is swarming with ideas: I think I know where to go with Covenant and the Land, and how to develop the central ideas so that RESTORATION will be an "advance" rather than a "rehash." (There's an interesting side-light on all this. While I was writing COVENANT, I watched my parents die, and LORD FOUL'S BANE was rejected forty-seven times; and I ended up writing a story about impotence. Impotence, and the imperative need for power. In my personal life, I could hardly have felt more helpless. Well, now things have changed. To give one small



example—at the moment (August, 1978), **LORD FOUL'S BANE** is the best-selling book on the entire Ballantine list. So now I find myself writing a new story about the limitations of power. Covenant is about to learn that power is not the ultimate answer to Despite.) And for another, I've just spent about a year of my life proving to myself that on the whole I'd rather be writing fantasy. A year of new rejections has helped to convince me that I don't write other kinds of fiction very well, simply because I don't find them as exciting as fantasy. I'm perfectly serious about this: I believe that good fantasy (Tolkien, Lewis, McKillip) strikes closer to the bone and blood of life than any other narrative medium—including (especially including) main-stream "realistic" fiction as it is currently practiced by the pale inheritors of James, Conrad, and Faulkner.

Bacon: You realize that you're directly contradicting the critics of the fantasy genre by claiming that good fantasy "strikes closer to the bone and blood of life". Fantasy, science fiction, dark fantasy and heroic fantasy have always been inheritors of the "escapist literature" stigma. How can you claim that fantasy deals more with life than realistic fiction?

Donaldson: Hooboy! You had to ask a question like that, didn't you?

I have three entirely different answers. The first is inductive. As I said earlier, I feel more alive when I'm writing than when I'm not. Well, when I'm writing, I feel more alive when I'm doing fantasy and other "escapist" fiction than when I'm doing realism (of which, let me tell you, I've done a ton). Therefore I conclude that good fantasy reaches deeper into the human psyche than does good realism. (This is the argument from experience.)

My second answer is rather Emersonian. He believed that the way to reach out is to reach in: man comprehends the world, and the spirit of God within the world, by exploring the innards of his own mind. Every writer does this—tries to communicate with other beings by investigating his own being. Well, I believe that anybody who explores his own mind honestly isn't going to find realism in there. In there is where the dragons live. We all exist in a state of tension between the outer world, which is realistic (by definition), and the inner world, which is fantastic. Anybody who wants to understand human behavior has got to investigate the fantasy within—and the tension between fantasy and reality. I don't question the value of investigating the outer reality. But I think that the energy which drives human behavior comes from the fantasy within. (This is the argument from authority.)

My third answer is that good fantasy (and science fiction) correct an imbalance

which exists in most realistic fiction. A man named Pelz (if memory serves) once wrote, "Beauty is controlled passion. Passion without control is destructive. Control without passion is dead." This is the essential paradox of what Blake called "reason" and "energy": "Reason is the circumference of energy." Neither means anything without the other. Well, to put Blake in my terms, "Intellect is the circumference of imagination." I believe that most realistic fiction these days has lost its potential beauty by sacrificing imagination to intellect. Control crushes passion; reason squeezes out energy. In good fantasy and science fiction, the imagination regains its crucial, energizing role. The result is the single most human thing in the world: beauty. (This is the argument from conviction.) My intellectual grad school friends used to denounce **LORD OF THE RINGS** because it had no relevance to the "real world." They were wrong. **LOTR** is intensely relevant to the human heart because **LOTR** is beautiful. I believe that the "escape" into fantasy is an escape from materialism, dead intellect, and cynicism into humanity.

However, to avoid being misunderstood, I should go on to say that people who sacrifice intellect to imagination are making the same mistake which is killing realistic fiction. "Passion without control is destructive." The person who uses fantasy to avoid dealing with reality is in as much trouble as the person who uses intellect to avoid confronting the inner dragons.

Bacon: In deciding to chance a sequel to **COVENANT** you stated that one deciding factor was a desire not to "sink" under your "own burdens". Are you saying that for personal peace, health or whatever **RESTORATION** has to be written? You make writing sound almost like a personal form of therapy or release.

Donaldson: The "burden" to which I was referring was the burden of fear. One reason why I finally decided to write **RESTORATION** was precisely because I was afraid of it. (I did say, "one reason." I don't jump off tall buildings just because I'm afraid of heights.) **RESTORATION** is an opportunity; and like most opportunities it can go either way. I don't want to lose the possibility for good simply because I was afraid of the possibility for ill.

In a general way, of course, writing is "a personal form of therapy or release." People breathe because they have to: writers write because they have to. But I'm reluctant to apply that kind of statement to any particular story. I write because I have to: I'm writing **RESTORATION** because Covenant and the Land won't let go of my imagination. There is a difference. Just ask any writer how easily he or she can postpone writing a story by writing letters,

reviews, whatever.

Bacon: After **RESTORATION** what do you have planned? Any ideas knocking around?

Donaldson: Oh, I have some ideas "knocking around." But I don't want to talk about them. The future is too uncertain. I don't want to lock myself to my present ideas: I may get better ones tomorrow. Sufficient unto the day is the trouble thereof.

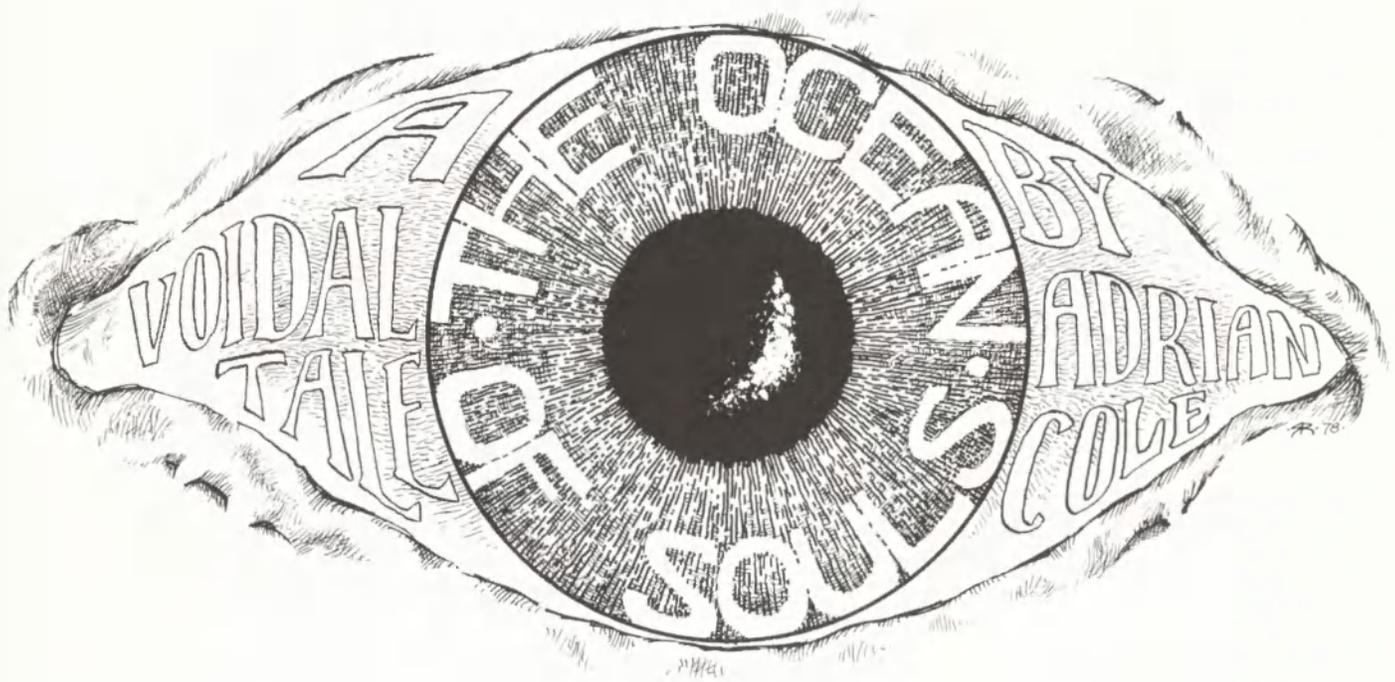
Bacon: There's one "silly" question I must ask. You've written a tremendously popular first novel. You're married with one child in the household. How autobiographical is **COVENANT**? You haven't contracted leprosy yet . . . have you?

Donaldson: In a way, that is a "silly" question. Most fiction writers tend to wax autobiographical in one way or another; but the autobiographical elements are usually pretty well booby-trapped.

In fact, I am married. **COVENANT** (or at least **LORD FOUL'S BANE**) seems to be rather successful at the moment. I am not now, and have no intention of ever becoming, a leper. Nor, for that matter, has my wife ever raised horses for a living. I used some quasi-autobiographical details in **COVENANT** because I needed to start the story with material which felt familiar to me. In a sense, that was my way of affirming the "reality" of my "fantasy." **RESTORATION** also contains some autobiographical material, but I think I've hidden it better.

Bacon: Thank you for your candor and your willingness to answer.





There are dimensions and dimensions, but there are also places neither in between nor beyond them, that bear no tangible relationship to them. Thus it is with the Ocean of Souls, a limitless, timeless zone created by the Gods, a unique universe to which none may come and from which none may go forth, save at the whim of the Gods who created it. It is a dream region, briefly glimpsed by the souls as they enter and depart on their short voyage back to the reality of a new incarnation in one of the dimensions that interweave the omniverse. The Gods alone know its secrets, its paradoxical workings; they draw into the Ocean of Souls those whom they will, and they release from it whomsoever it pleases them to release.

It is an utterly dark place, for there are no suns nor stars to light it, and no worlds coursing it. There is only the fathomless Ocean, rich with the dormant souls that dream, of former lives, perhaps. It is a domain of sleep, of death between lives. To watch over the Ocean of Souls and to attend to the duties necessitated by it, the Gods have placed within it a Keep, and have set within this Keep a master, a lord of the dead. He has many names. He it is who dispenses the whims of the Gods and sets upon their way the souls, scattering them about the omniverse as he is commanded.

In his Keep, the demi-god is called Necral—his sprawling domain is known simply as Skull Keep, for none save Necral and his few minions know of it. It has the vast skull head of a man and the body of a naked giant, reclining lifelessly in the emptiness that surrounds it as though

drowned: it is the body of an old, deceased god, though it is preserved in its state for eternity, sorcerously embalmed, perhaps, and set to drifting in the Ocean of Souls. Within its immeasurable proportions, riddled with halls and cells, are the secret places of Necral, Keeper of the Ocean, where the chosen dead await their rebirth.

Ceaseless movement surrounds the corpse Keep, as though a plague of feasting worms have made the place their haven, but these are no scavengers, merely the shadowed minions of Necral. From out of the black Ocean the Dead Fishers pole in their narrow barges, bringing to Skull Keep the chosen. Into the broken mouth of the forgotten god they take their burdens, within to be received in the Halls by the Revivers. From the cavernous eyes of the skull fly the Sowers, carrying on their winged backs the reborn souls, taking them to whichever place they are to be incarnated. Over all this presides Necral, watching everything from his sequestered chambers high in the skull of his Keep; he is as ageless and deathless as the Gods who have set him there. His emotions are hidden, his thoughts secret, his place in the scheme of things fixed, unchanging. For only the Gods may bring change to this place of brooding doom.

Necral sent his probing intelligence up into the highest levels of the huge dead skull, wherein had been set the Chamber of the Eye. Here the bone room was dominated by a massive, glittering orb, constantly sparkling with some sentient inner light, spreading its bright rays from a

thousand facets. It was the Eye of Horabis, who had once been a great demon, but who had elected to serve the greater Gods of the omniverse by rendering his fealty to them—he had given up his one great Cyclopean Eye, which looked out at all parts of the omniverse. Necral was ever wont to gaze into the miraculous Eye, for therein he could see all things. Mostly he took note of all those who were dying and nearing death out in the many dimensions of the omniverse, so that he could prepare a place for their souls in the great Ocean outside the Keep.

Scintillating light flashed as Necral's mind probed down into the countless mirrors of the Eye, mirrors which turned their images inward to the room of bone. In each facet, men were dying, but one window on the dimensions attracted Necral's fullest attention. He focused upon the events within it.

There had been a battle. It had been no skirmish, but a great, surging tide of chaos. Thousands of armoured warriors had died, bloodying acres. Perhaps kings had fallen—even Gods. Smoke eddied in gusts over the battlefield, while gaunt scavenger birds winged noisily over the slaughtered. Bodies were heaped in mangled piles, heads gathered in grisly mounds. Blood had drenched this field of mortals where the mirthless Reaper, Death, had sated himself avariciously. In the distance a castle burned, streaming out black tatters of smoke, spangled with red embers. A few figures moved like ghouls amongst the many slain. These were the robbers of the dead, who came to every aftermath, strip-

ping from tangled cadavers what riches they could find.

There were five of them, working in a group, and already their arms were ringed with purloined bands of gold, their belts hung with trinkets and jewels taken from the dead. These armies that had clashed and destroyed each other had been of great Houses, men of pride and substance, fighting for great monarchs, used to the plunder of priceless kingdoms. Well could they have afforded to go into battle bedecked with riches. But such riches could serve them not at all now. They would go to the Skull Keep with nothing.

Those five unsavoury brigands came across a heap of death-locked corpses and paused, using their bare feet to roll over the slain, noses wrinkling at the stench of death. One of the men smiled at what he saw.

"Here's a pretty sight! What d'you make of this, Grud?" He pointed at the black-clad warrior that had been exposed by his careless foot. The dead man was smeared in blood, his dark clothes clotted with it. The five bent over him hungrily.

"Mercenary, by his dress. Neither Poldarrarian nor Vobandishek wears such black finery. What manner of fabric is this? Hoo! What jewels does he wear beneath his mesh of armour, eh? If he is a mercenary, I'll warrant there's a fat belt of gold!"

They cackled. A sword was drawn and its point hooked under the shirt of the fallen man. As the point thrust carelessly beyond the fabric, the man's eyes flickered open; the thieves gasped. "Alive!" cried one.

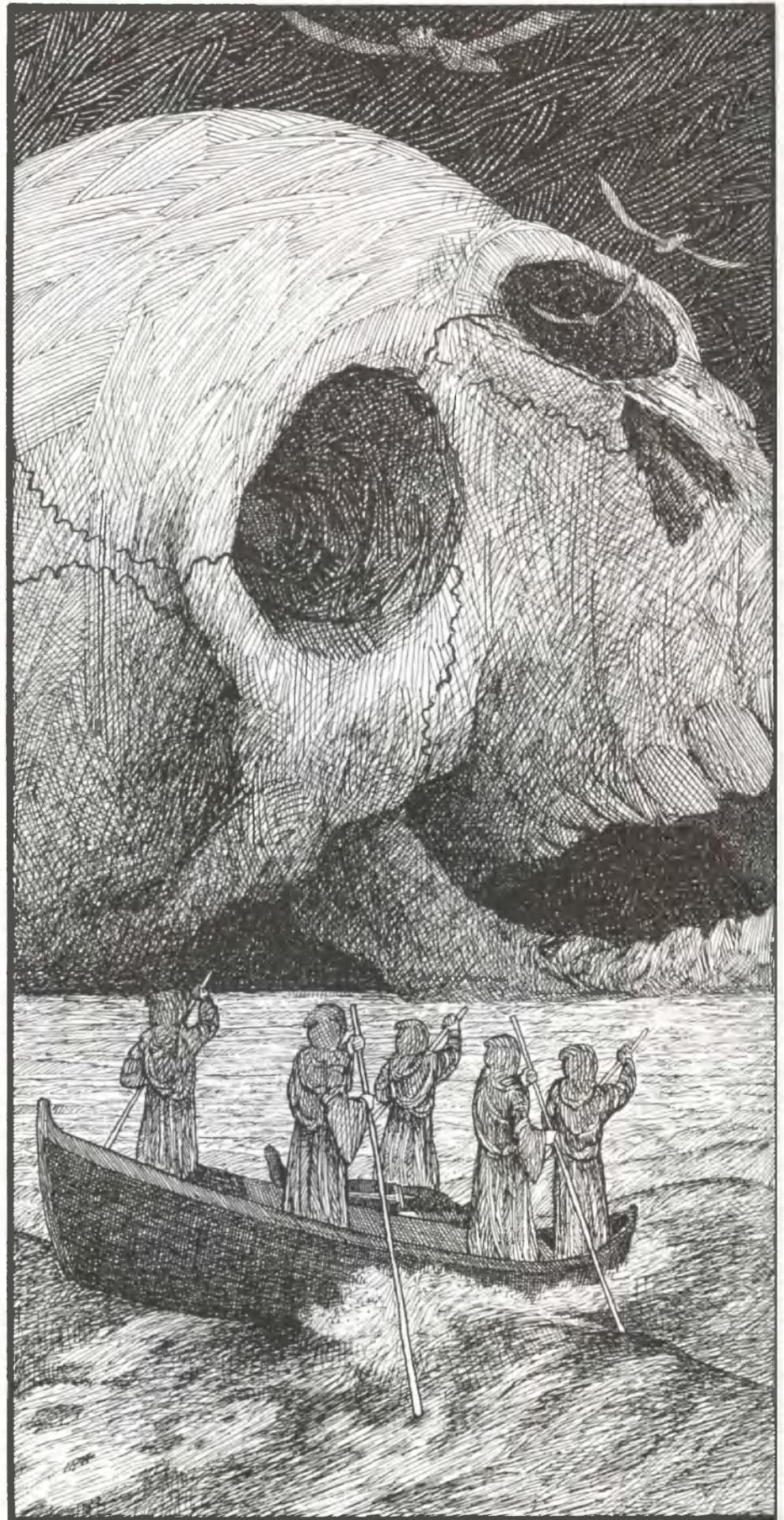
But his companion spat. "Nay, Thog, you are mistaken."

A grin spread quickly across the crooked features of the other and his companions chuckled like vultures. The sword slipped deeper under the shirt of the reviving man, cutting down in a neat, precise incision. At least it would be a clean, painless death. The shirt frayed and fell apart, but there was no expression of pain in those open eyes, and more curious than that—there was no blood.

"Cut deeper, Aug," grinned Grud. "It is you who are mistaken!"

Baffled, Aug pulled away the whole of the ripped garment. As he did so, he flung up an arm to shield his eyes from what lay beneath. He cried out and staggered back, blundering into his rough fellows, who cursed him obscenely. Grud avoided the tumbling bodies and the yelping Aug to stare down at the victim. Where his chest should have been was a gaping hole, not a ragged, gushing wound, nor a bloody cleft, but a black abyss that looked out like some cosmic window into the deep reaches of star-pocked space.

"Madness and lunacy!" shrieked Grud, lurching back. Seeing this incomprehensible vision, the other men howled in confusion, turning and feverishly scrambling



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over the mounds of the dead in pell-mell flight. The dazed man in black looked down at himself and saw the void; it seemed that he began to fall into it, collapsing within himself in a dizzying vortex of dreams.

All this Necral observed through the Eye of Horabis, musing in silence. He knew the fallen man: it was the immortal, the one who could not kill for himself and who could not die as men died, for so the Dark Gods had decreed it. He was the Fate-caster, who trod in the footsteps of Death. He was the Voidal, and it was time for him to return once more to Skull Keep.

Necral turned from the Eye apprehensively. Would that the masters of all things would make the passage of this frightful harbinger brief, so brief.

Out of the left eye socket of the gigantic skull fluttered a host of black shapes, their necks short and thick, their green eyes like huge bulbous orbs, glowing with lambent green fire. Their bodies were squat but strong, their wings thick, flapping silently, ghosting them out over the Ocean of Souls as they carried their comatose burdens to the very portals of life at the edge of the many dimensions. These were the ever-moving Sowers, bearers of the reborn, working tirelessly in clouds, replenishing the dying with the living.

On the sturdy back of one, slumped a figure, a torpid man, dreaming the dazed sleep of one who is about to know again the mystery of rebirth. As the Sower swooped on into darkness, guided by blind instinct, the man registered only passing images, dreams that would quickly be forgotten in his new life, for no one alive ever recalled Skull Keep. Death remained a mystery that the Gods guarded jealously. Yet as the Sower crossed the Ocean of Souls, there were faint lights down upon its surface; it was there that the black Dead Fishers poled their long barges through the murk towards the mouth of the Keep, their way lit by the blue nimbus controlled by the Keeper, Necral.

In one of the flat barges was stretched out a single body, that of a man dressed entirely in black, a sword strapped at his side in an ebon scabbard. Usually the barges contained several dead each, but this barge contained only the dark man—each barge usually had but one Dead Fisher to pole it, but in this there were several of the hooded figures. And usually the dead were naked—certainly they wore no weapons here. Perhaps it was these facts that netted the curiosity of the flying Sowers, or perhaps their interest had been seeded some other way. Several of the Sowers did drift down over the solemn scene, vaguely curious. Their minds were puny, geared to the perpetual task set them by Necral, but some flash of insight now made them aware of the uniqueness of the slow-moving barge of death.

The man on the back of the most daring

Sower dreamed on, but the Sower came so close to the barge bearing the dark man that several of the Dead Fishers waved it away with their dripping poles. The creature lurched in mid air and the dreaming man swung precariously from side to side. A sizzling bolt of blue energy zipped by the Sower, warning it off on its voyage and the creature's green orbs bulged with terror. It shot upward; from its back tumbled the sleeping figure, plummeting into the darkness that was the Ocean of Souls.

None of the Dead Fishers had ever shown emotion, for they had no need of it in their grim, mechanical toil; yet now there was a sense of great urgency about them. An ageless pattern had been shattered as the falling body dropped out of sight beyond the blue nimbus of light. At once the Dead Fishers acted—they began to pole the barge urgently from its course, towards the spot where the body had disappeared. This event was unprecedented in the ageless history of the Ocean, and must quickly be rectified lest there were dire repercussions. Already such a corruption of the rhythm of Necral's domain would have to be reported.

The barge drifted on, its anxious crew scouring the depths for the fallen man. A pale hand rose up like a twisted stem of wood. Arms reached out and fastened onto it. In moments the body was tugged up over the low rim of the barge and the man was dropped on the wet boards. Around him huddled the Dead Fishers, thankful for having secured him. They stared upward for the Sower, sensing its flapping shape circling them like a desolate bird searching for lost young. The barge began to slide on towards Skull Keep.

As the man had hit the surface of the Ocean, he had found his dreams acutely emphasized. Gone was the lethargic vagueness, the lack of continuity. They had become clear, a joined sequence, ultimately reality. He was *aware*. Now, shaking droplets from his eyes, he peered at his bizarre surroundings, etched in pale blue light. He was on a flat boat, moving towards a distant mass that was shaped like a giant sprawled in the darkness. Impossible.

Around him the Dead Fishers gathered, highly nervous, realizing also that he was aware, another fact without precedent here. They sought to bring the Sower down so that it could carry away its burden and restore the order of things. The man looked down beyond his feet to where the dark man reclined in apparent death. His features were sharp, picked out morbidly by the garish light. They were familiar. Who was this being? Where was this place? What dimension of nightmare had swallowed them? Rough hands made to drag the man away, but he fought them instinctively. Somehow they meant harm, he was certain.

With a sudden twist, he wrenched from

the hands of one a long pole. Above him a black shape winged down like a huge bird of prey. He swung the pole and punctured a leathery wing: a tortured shriek followed and the thing plunged out of sight into darkness. Now the guardians of the barge were in a panic. They rushed upon the man, who they thought insane, but with scything sweeps he attacked them, battering them desperately aside. Bones crunched and robed bodies doubled up in unaccustomed pain; the barge rocked dangerously. Completely unprepared for such a ferocious onslaught, the Fishers were quickly beaten back, falling back over the sides of the barge into the blackness beyond. The man saw his advantage and was swift to crush the last of their skulls.

As the last Dead Fisher flopped overboard, the man put down the pole and studied the corpse in the bottom of the barge. He leaned over the dark man, whose eyes began to flicker open. Their depth made the features even more familiar.

"I know you," said the dark man.

The other touched at his ears, mystified by something. "And I you."

"Where is this place?" said the first.

But the other shook his head. He pointed to the nearing shape, the prone body of Skull Keep. The dark man rose on his elbows and looked at it. He nodded. "I have been here before, though I may have dreamed it."

The other nodded. "This may be a dream, for there is much of mystery about this place. Shall we investigate?" he grinned.

"I think we may have no choice."

And so the barge drifted on, now poled by the man who had fallen from the sky. For some reason he kept touching his ears, as though they would fall away from his head.

As they drew nearer the floating mass, always watching for signs of an attack either from the dark Ocean or from above, the dark man tried to recall where it was that he had met his companion before. Something about the man's preoccupation with his ears worried him, for there was a significance in that which he could not yet understand. The other poled on silently, watching that amazing Keep, the dead husk of a giant, who must have belonged to a race of superhumans. From its eye sockets the two men could now see the twin clouds of Sowers, ever going forth into the ink of the heavens.

"By all the Gods, this is a dismal realm!" murmured the dark man. "What manner of being is that before us? I know it, I am certain, yet my mind is blanketed." As he spoke he could faintly discern other barges—they all plied a path through the impenetrable murk of the waters to the gaping mouth of the dead giant, where broken-toothed portals awaited. It would not be so wise to enter therein, for they would immediately be discovered and

there might well lie an unwanted feast. The dark man pointed way off to the long arms of the dead being. "There," he said. "Let us make for the hand, for I see no life of any kind there. We need time to plan our actions with care." The other nodded, studying the solid forms of the gnarled, lifeless fingers beyond.

He began to pole away from the path to the mouth and drifted alongside the towering walls that were the body of the dead giant. Across darkness the barge slithered in absolute silence. Eventually it came under the shadow of those colossal fingers, nestling in the space between them out of sight, hidden in the chasm from the watchful eyes of things that might fly overhead, or from the beings in the black barges that ever moved over the Ocean of Souls. The two men, having moored the barge deep between the massive fingers, waited to see if they had been pursued, but they had not. The dark man looked across at his companion, realizing that the latter had been studying him closely.

"You say you know me?" he asked.

The eyes of the other momentarily lit up. He nodded, his lips framing one word, clearly and distinctly. "Voidal."

The dark man echoed the word, frowning. But then it seemed that a gate had been opened into the halls of his memory, and from that shadowed place, shards of recollection gleamed. "Voidal!" he exclaimed. "Yes, I recall. I am he. Long have the Dark Gods hidden my identity from me. So . . . they still toy with me." He was nodding, lost in deep thought, seeking to pry wider the rigid gates of memory. The eyes of the other never left him.

"Once," said the latter at last, "you helped me." His words were slow, ponderous, as though he was not used to speaking. "I had been imprisoned in a cruel inner world. I recall it barely. You I invoked, and you it was who broke the fetters of that place and set free those who had been incarcerated. But for that gift of freedom there was a price." He tapped his ears grimly.

"I . . . do not recall . . ." began the dark man, puzzled.

"My hearing. I lost it. And yet here, in this unwholesome realm, I can hear once more. I am glad enough for that, though I wonder what price I must pay for such a miraculous restoration. Is this your doing, or are the Gods at play again, for they plague me!"

The Voidal nodded. "And!! Ever must I pay for my crime against the Dark Gods, though part of my punishment is that I cannot recall my crime."

"It is strange," mused the other thoughtfully, "but I recall dreams, or visions, some fair, some foul. I had a dream that I died, the victim of a tavern slut's knife. She sought to rob me, thinking me witless as well as deaf. Yet . . . that was not the life I knew when we met before. That was some other life . . . or

dream. But I recall both vividly."

The Voidal watched him closely, nodding for him to continue.

"So vivid . . . as though there were indeed other lives."

"Other lives," echoed the dark man. He stared at the darkness around them, then down at the gently rocking barge. "Yes . . . I begin to see. It was no dream. Come, I will show you something." He gestured for the other to follow, then began clambering up the difficult surface of dried flesh that still clung to the hulk of the dead god. Up the wrinkled ridges of a petrified finger the two men went until they had reached the highest joint. There, clinging to tufts of dried hair, they could watch the weird processions to and from the Keep. The Voidal pointed to the sombre barges, their cargoes of naked dead.

"Dead men," muttered the other and Voidal nodded. Then he pointed to the black vaults above, where winged shapes fluttered outwards. "Living souls, as you are," he said.

The other drew back in amazement. "Living!" He stared at the bulk of Skull Keep. "The dead come here to be . . . restored?"

The Voidal nodded. "I recall the place now. It is the Ocean of Souls, known only to us in dreams."

Slowly the other nodded. "I was being borne away to a new life . . ."

"And I," said the Voidal coldly, "was to be cast out into the omniverse by the Gods who ever use and mock me! Your unwitting intervention has broken their grip on my destiny. Yet for how long? How long before they snatch it back and force me to do their will once more?" He lifted his right hand and glared at it hatefully. "This is the instrument of their will. This dread member! Would that I could sever it from me, though it would crawl back. Never mine—it is the black hand of one of those same Dark Gods, acting through me. I have never mastered it . . . and yet *here*, in this void of death and rebirth, I may at last call upon it and use it *myself*."

The other drew back in horror.

"No, it will not harm you. It may yet be the boon of us both."

"But where must we go? How are we to escape? Will that hand shatter the walls of this abyss and thrust us back into the dimensions we know?"

The Voidal shook his head dubiously. "I think not. We cannot escape this realm without the aid of the Keeper, Necral. In this domain he is omnipotent. We must go to him. Somehow we must wrest from him the secret of the exits. By force, by guile, by trickery. Somehow we must use him!"

Glumly the other studied the lines of the remarkable Keep.

"We must find a way in and reach Necral before he discovers us," said the Voidal.

"Your sword," said his companion.

"The Sword of Silence—"

"Its powers are not for use against dead flesh."

"No," muttered the other, dispirited.

"You were being taken away to a new life," the dark man told him. "You have no quarrel with the powers here. Return to the barges—take the one we stole—and you will yet be removed and placed back in the omniverse. You will recall nothing of this. I make no demands upon you. Once I freed you—now you may have freed me—the debt is paid."

Slowly the other shook his head. "If I am reborn, it will be without my hearing. The Gods yet keep that from me. I wish to regain it for all my future lives."

The Voidal smiled grimly. "Aye, and there is much of mine that I would steal back from their grasp. Together, then."

The other nodded and they began the difficult trek over the titanic corpse.

It soon became evident that they had underestimated the sheer size and extent of the Keep, for they had gone along steadily for what appeared to be several miles, yet had made no real progress. The hide was thick, pale and tufted with coarse hair, matted in places that made progress difficult. On and on it stretched, this repellent landscape, with no sign of variation and no sign of ingress. Yet the two men did not complain, but kept up a slow, dogged pace.

Eventually they saw movement ahead and shielded themselves behind a ridge of flesh. From this point of concealment they were able to look down into a steep declivity and see clearly what transpired there. Both were stunned. The landscape of the body had been altered unnaturally. It had been quarried. Below, a strange, pale-skinned group had gathered amongst the workings. They were stunted, man-like beings, remarkably thin and stick-like. Their hands ended in clawed talons, their feet curled in a prehensile fashion. Some of them squatted on their haunches, while the bulk of the party began to attack the flesh of the Keep. They needed no tools.

"What are these?" murmured the Voidal's companion, but that much soon became evident. They were feeding on the rotting flesh of the dead giant, their cruel claws ripping off chunks of it in strips and cramming it into mouths filled with pointed teeth. Already they had excavated a deep hole in the center of the workings, evidently the work of many, many attacks. The Voidal scowled, searching his mind for a clue to their history. He could find none, but his face evidenced a rare smile as he turned to his companion.

"Here may lie our means of entry. Fate favors us. Come, prepare for a dispute, for I doubt that they will allow us an unquestioned passage."

The other had retained the long pole from the barge and as the Voidal leapt up from concealment and slipped silently

down the slope, followed, intent on accounting for himself well. They were upon the feasting horrors before the latter realized. Steel sang as the Voidal drew from its ebon scabbard his sword, though it seemed no more than a length of steel in this dismal region. He took up a belligerent stance and at once the creatures covered back.

"What are you about?" the dark man challenged.

One of them crept forward hesitantly, its mirthless features twisting pathetically as it whined at him. "No harm, master, no harm. We are the grovellers. We do but tend the flesh of the Keep that has been preserved by Necral. It is our lot to keep it in its semblance of health."

"How—by eating it!" laughed the dark man.

"We do but take what sustenance is allowed us, no more."

The Voidal drew nearer to the gaping wound that they had inflicted. "You have cut deep. This can do the Keep no good. The Keeper will not be pleased."

Their bloodshot eyes squinted in terror of the blade and he noted their shaking fear. His companion swung the pole so that it whooshed through the air ominously, deterring an attack. "What is your name?" the Voidal challenged the leader.

"I am Larg the low-born."

"We are the vassals of Necral," the Voidal told him. "Nothing escapes the Keeper." He motioned for his companion to inspect the wound's darkness and depth. The latter nodded and slipped into the cleft in the workings.

"What will you do with us?" said Larg nervously. "We are too useful to be destroyed."

"You should be punished at least," snapped the dark man. "Only Necral can say."

They began gibbering, hopping about like frightened children. Larg looked sheepishly at the wound. "Spare us, masters! We are worthless and harmless. We did but steal a few morsels of flesh."

The Voidal ignored him as the other emerged from the wound. "Is it deep?" he asked him. As he came to him, the other laughed. "Deep? Why, there is an entire elaborate system of honeycombs within! How far it extends I could not even begin to guess."

The grovellers began to mutter in anguish. Evidently this was an unqualified breach of whatever contract they had with the Keeper. The Voidal chuckled. "I see—so you took a few morsels. Tell me, where do these tunnels lead?" He made a subtle movement with the sword.

Larg looked pained. "But a short distance, sirs. They are necessary . . . to the good of the Keep. They ventilate the aged skin. They are mere burrows in which we shelter ourselves. The Keeper would not dispute it."

The Voidal's companion shook his head and the dark man again made a casual play with his sword. "I think not, Larg. I think perhaps these tunnels go much further. Like worms in a tree, you have burrowed far and wide—no doubt throughout the entire Keep! Is it not so?"

None of the creatures answered and the Voidal knew that he had struck the mark with his guess. Larg shuffled closer to him, eyes fixed upon the cold sword. There was a gleam of distinct cunning in his eye. "A word with you, warrior," he whispered.

Even the Keeper has no knowledge of our passage

"Speak."

"Our secret is out, but it is nothing, a mere item of no import. I have other knowledge that would be more useful to you. It would give you more power than you have."

The Voidal's face remained grave. "Yes?"

"I will not yield it freely."

"I see. You wish to barter this knowledge for my silence in the matter of the labyrinths?"

"You are a reader of minds!" nodded Larg with the gruesome semblance of a smile.

"Your mind would be open to even the wind. Well?"

"Do we have a bargain?"

"Perhaps. But you will have to provide me with more than a promise if I am to dismiss what I have discovered."

"So be it," grunted Larg. "I will show you." With that he stepped up to the mouth of the wound. "Follow if you will."

The Voidal obeyed, dropping down to the floor of the tunnel beyond, the other man behind him, grinning in spite of the sombre surroundings. The smell of corruption here was thick. Larg began the journey down the cramped tunnel, while behind the two men the rest of the grovellers followed. Down into the rotting flesh of the Keep they went, the tunnels twisting and turning, intersecting and crossing at steep angles. The entire body had been riddled as if by maggots. The flesh was dried out, flaking and crumbling, as though a storm wind would shake it and blow it apart. One by one the grovellers dispersed, taking different tunnels until only Larg remained to lead the way. They had been travelling endlessly, through what must have been the excavations of centuries, when Larg came to an abrupt halt in the stifling darkness. Only his eyes lit the pitch air.

"We near the place. Even the Keeper

has no knowledge of our passage so close to his sanctuaries in the Keep."

"Necral sees all," ventured the Voidal.

Larg snorted derisively. "All, warrior? You have seen the inside of this place, rotting and decomposing. The Keeper is as raddled, or has he kept that from you?"

The Voidal said nothing, musing on the information.

"This place I will show you is most hallowed. None but the Keeper knows of it, save I and my fellows. We have not shared our knowledge with any, knowing that one

day it may prove a useful weapon."

"I see," nodded the Voidal. "And that day has come?"

"Look beyond," said Larg, pointing to a small place in the wall through which a shaft of light arrowed. The Voidal stooped to press his eye to the vent. He drew in his breath at what he saw, motioning his companion to come. The latter also looked beyond. He, too, gasped involuntarily.

There was large chamber there, hollowed out of the body of the giant as if some huge internal organ had been removed; the walls were slick, tinted red as though the flesh still pulsed with life. Veins stood out like blue pillars. But it was not the structure of the chamber that had caused the Voidal and his companion to gasp—it was the things within it. For here in choked abundance there were frightful creatures that had the appearance of hybrids, as though men and non-men had been crossbred and mutated to produce the most outlandish of beings. Their outer characteristics were hideously exaggerated, and as the two men looked in at them they saw that they were all female. Some were lovely of body, but had sub-human faces, others were wildly grotesque of body but beautiful of face; still more were unspeakably horrific. All were chained, some linked to the walls of the chamber by membranous filaments, and through these transparent pipes a red substance flowed. Sizes varied—there were dwarfish, squat-faced beings and tall, gangling spiderish things. Some there were that crawled in dark corners, away from the pulsing mass of bodies near the light.

"What ante-room of hell is this!" cried the Voidal's companion.

Larg sniggered unpleasantly. "Hell, master? There is no hell here. This is the Keep that rules over the Ocean of Souls. There may be other Gods with their places of paradise and their hells, but not here."

The Voidal scowled down at the

scrawny figure. "This is the work of Necral?"

"It is. I told you—his mind is as debased as his crumbling Keep. This is a place he puts aside for his private, uninterrupted amusement."

"Then he has indeed created his own hell. Who are these specimens?"

"Hybrids. Bred from souls that he has secretly culled from the Ocean. He tortures them and molds them for pleasure, then discards them when they displease or bore him."

"Discards them?" echoed the Voidal. "He returns them to the Ocean of Souls?"

"Nay. There is a place, deep down in the frozen entrails of the Keep. There, amongst mouldering bones and dusty vessels, the discarded ones are tossed. There they reach their own oblivion."

The man beside the Voidal grunted in horror and the Voidal's thoughts clouded as he turned away from what he had seen.

"If you wait long enough," said Larg, "Necral himself will materialize beyond in one of his many forms. Then shall you see him sport with his many toys."

"We have seen enough," growled the Voidal. "Lead us to a place where we can enter the halls of the Keep."

Larg hesitated.

"And our bargain, master? Will you say nothing of our tunnels?"

The Voidal nodded. "Aye, nothing. Go back to your feast."

Larg snickered in satisfaction and began leading the two men out of the tunnels. He came to a flap of loose skin—a broken valve—and lifted an edge of it. Like a disused organ, it led into the inner chambers of the Keep. "Here we must part," said the groveller.

"Come," said the Voidal to his companion, and they slipped out of the dark and to the edge of a huge chamber that had a vaulted ceiling far overhead. Its arches were made of bone, yards thick, and from them hung vats of ignited blubber culled from the very walls. There were no columns here, only more ribbed bones ten times thicker than a man supporting the place, which was a gigantic stomach. They had gone but a few steps when they saw that they were standing on a ridge which was an exposed vein, a black pipe leading into one of the walls. Below them, working in the glow of the blubber lights, were scores of beings, diligently buzzing around line upon line of naked cadavers that stretched out into the far reaches of the great hall. These workers were Necral's Revivers, who prepared the dead souls for rebirth. Countless numbers of the naked bodies were being reanimated and led away gently to openings in the sides of the chamber, other dried veins that led off like drains. The reborn ones slid down them to some other hall, ultimately to be removed from the Keep by the Sowers.

"Do you have some scheme?" said the Voidal's companion.

"Necral has committed a grave error in creating that foul place we saw. He has jeopardized himself by doing so. Somehow we must find him and confront him."

"But surely he will submit us to some similar, dreadful fate, should we tell him we know of his misdeeds!"

"I think not," mused the Voidal. "Come." He led the way along the great vein through a tunnel that led off from the great chamber of the dead. They found another open vein that served as a tunnel upwards, moving now along the internal passageways and dried blood vessels of the huge giant. "He will be in the skull. Perhaps he already knows we are here." The Voidal's companion did not share his calmness, yet accepted it.

Suddenly there was movement around

"Behold, the two men who seek to cheat the Gods and avoid the eternal chain of life and death!"

them which came from all sides of them save the ceiling. From up out of the floor burst shadows, and from out of the walls came others, rupturing the flesh heedlessly in their determination to ring the two men. Both stood still, weapons poised. They saw now what it was that confronted them. They were rotting dead men, flesh peeling from them, eyes white, hands no more than clawed bone. A festering stench wafted from them as though they had been vomited up from some remote sewer far below. Their vile bodies came closer, arms out-reaching. But they made no attempt to press home an attack.

"They have not come to destroy us," said the Voidal. "They are Necral's creatures and will save us further search. They will take us to him."

"Then he knows we are intruding."

"Yes, but I wonder, for how long has he known?"

Goaded on by the skulking zombies, the two men moved ahead as directed in silence, and began travelling again the grim passageways of the Keep. Ever upward they were herded, until at last they passed through a constricted tunnel that led like a throat up into halls of pure bone. Here they debouched into another vast room, where a few blubber cressets sputtered like haunted eyes. Before them was a pit that seemed to drop down into an infinity

beyond reality. Around its far edges they could see line upon line of the zombie creatures, all motionless, awaiting some command.

Presently total darkness descended as every one of the winking lights snuffed out. The two men were walled in a black chasm that pressed in on them menacingly. A deep voice came across at them from somewhere beyond.

"Behold, the two men who seek to cheat the Gods and avoid the eternal chain of life and death!" it mocked.

As the echoes died away, the Voidal spoke, his voice ringing out over the unfathomable pit. "Keeper! Show yourself! We do not fear you, nor your reprisals!"

A temporary silence greeted this, but at last came a bubble of laughter, rising and swelling. Light seeped back into the chamber. Beyond, across the chasm, was a

massive head, cloaked in a black hood, all features hidden. But neither the size nor covering of that head caught the eye as did the mass of writhing evil about it. Congesting the darkness there like coils from a well, were innumerable demon-like beings, fawning and squirming about the robed figure, depraved, lunatic acolytes of the master of the dead.

"The Gods are not mocked, nor are your brave words more than swirls of a breeze to us!" laughed the being within the hood.

"Then listen well, Keeper of the dead!"

More laughter rocked the cavern. "Very well! If I must hear you, I shall, before placing you again on your endless cycle."

"You know me, Keeper," said the Voidal.

"Of course, Voidal, whom men sometimes call Fatecaster. Long have the Dark Gods used you in their schemes. Did you think to outwit them by fleeing from your cycle of lives?"

The Voidal was impassive and the man with him could see him thinking.

"You have stepped from the path of your predetermined destiny," said Necral, "but the track you have taken will only lead you back to your set path."

"Not if you put me upon some other course."

"I? Do you think I would go against the

decrees of such as the Dark Gods? In my own right, I am also a God, yet there are limits to what I may do."

"Within this realm you are omnipotent," said the Voidal.

"Indeed."

"In this realm, it is you who create the law."

"Within the bounds allowed me, that is so. But the nature of the Ocean of Souls, its bounds, its properties, these are the laws which I must obey."

"And Skull Keep?"

There was momentary silence. The hooded head moved in the darkness. "Skull Keep serves an eternal function, and one which I perpetuate. It also has its rigid laws."

"Yet you are not unable to introduce new laws or to create new precedents here."

The remark seemed to disturb Necral. "I am a god, hence have some powers!"

"You mold the destinies of all who pass through Skull Keep."

At this the Keeper laughed. "Do I? No, Fatecaster, not all. Even I must obey the word of others; why, my own fate is not my own. You will ask again that I should remould your fate—destroy what has been created for you by the Dark Gods and weave you a new one. But I cannot. What I do, they will undo if it displeases them. And if I disobey them, what must be the price of my folly? That is one fate upon which I will not ponder!"

"Will you not at least show me my destiny?"

Again the Keeper laughed, mockingly. "Show you! Perhaps I do not know it. Why should I reveal it if I did?"

"I think you do know it. You know a great deal about me. Before I leave this place, I will share all that knowledge!"

Necral laughed convulsively, while those things that squirmed about him chittered and hissed along with him. "You threaten me? You are nothing!"

"Not threaten, Keeper, no. But I will strike up a bargain."

Necral's laughter continued, but was not now so mocking. "Bargain? But you have nothing that I desire. Not unless you will trade the secret of your destiny for that of mine!" And he laughed once more.

"Perhaps I hold a key to that," said the Voidal calmly.

Silence smothered him at once. Within the black hood, twin orbs flared briefly, like red stars ablaze in some hellish outer dimension. "Don't toy with me, Fatecaster! Speak openly. What do you mean?"

"I have said that you are able to create your own laws in this place. Further—I have witnessed the application of those powers."

"Where? What have you seen? There is nothing in Skull Keep save the endless rituals of the dead."

"Rituals which a god such as yourself

must find intolerably tedious and monotonous, Necral," nodded the Voidal.

"What do you mean?"

"Surely you must have sought ways to alleviate such boredom? Surely you have created pastimes, games, unique circumstances with which to stimulate yourself in your endless sojourn in this dismal place?"

Necral's fire-eyes gleamed wickedly. "What have you seen?"

"I have seen your private hell, Necral. Its images are burned upon my mind. When I pass from this place to my next life, those images will go with me, just as I must carry with me . . . this." He drew from his cloak his right hand and held it aloft, balled into a leather-gloved fist.

Necral emitted a strange sound that may have been a gasp or groan. "Cover that abomination!" he cried.

"You know it, then?"

"Of course! Cover it I say. You have no power over it!"

"You fear lest it should point to your own heart?"

"Cover it!" snarled the Keeper and the things about him surged gently forward like hounds on taut leashes.

The Voidal did as he was bidden. "Very well. As you say, I cannot control its whims. It is not my own hand, but the hand of one of those accursed Dark Gods."

"What have you seen in this Keep?" persisted Necral.

"Your chamber of horrors that were once human women, now condemned to some vile fate to satiate your macabre appetite."

The hood nodded resignedly. "As I feared. But . . . how did you come upon that place? By chance . . . or did some grim force guide you there?" added the Keeper, unable to keep the cold fear from his tone.

"By chance, or so it seemed," replied the Voidal enigmatically. "But remember that the images of what I saw will remain with me. Although my memory is blighted by the curse upon me, you shall not wipe the memory of that place from me."

Necral considered this, fearing the intervention of powers greater than those of the Voidal or of himself. "What do you wish of me then? Be warned—do not ask for your free destiny. It was never mine to give you."

It was the turn of the Voidal to weigh his thoughts and for some time he was silent. At length he spoke. "The Dark Gods have taken my destiny, my soul, parts of my memory and my identity from me. Once I committed some grave crime against them, and for this they made me a pawn in their eternal games. I have become their Fatecaster, moving through many planes, bringing doom. I am no more than a means to an end, a vessel. This hand that curses is not mine, and I cannot control it. Tell me, Keeper, who am I? What have I done? How am I to reclaim my soul, my destiny?"

"You ask much. I cannot answer it all."

"Satisfy me or I shall betray you to those who control us both!" retorted the dark man in anger.

"You understand nothing! Power is relative, you fool! Even Gods have their limitations."

"You claim that you cannot answer all of my questions. Very well—tell me that of my history that you can."

Necral sighed heavily. "I cannot divulge the nature of your crime against the Dark Gods. Only they can tell you that. But there are laws that govern your punishment. Your identity is bound up with the crime you committed, and so I cannot divulge that either. But the Dark Gods decreed that you should atone for your sin by wandering the omniverse, bringing destruction to those who have displeased them, for know that they have many, many enemies. There are even gods that they would bring to annihilation. Your hand—that is not your own—has greater powers than you know; you are able to carry it secretly between the dimensions where the Dark Gods could not go without detection. Instead you are their messenger of doom, enigmatic and seemingly mortal. Not a creature to be feared by gods, or so it would seem. Your wandering seems to you erratic, but each step is part of a vast plan. One day your wandering will have atoned for your crime. Then you will be released, and perhaps you will learn what it was you did.

"You carry also a sword of a particular kind. It is no ordinary weapon, for it cannot kill, and yet it has other properties."

The Voidal turned to the man beside him, who had kept himself well hidden in the shadows, shaking with fear. "It was through the sword that my companion lost the use of his ears. It was a cruel fate, for since then he has gone through all other lives as a deaf man."

"It was the Sword of Silence that rendered him deaf, as a punishment."

"Why?" challenged the Voidal.

"Those who aid the Voidal hinder the Dark Gods. This man summoned you, invoking your aid to free himself and others from a world of nightmare. In that life he was called Grabulic, who often mocked the Gods—all gods. His gift was his voice, for he sang as few men have ever sung. He had been punished for his mocking of the Gods, but yet he persisted in his blasphemies. Thus the price of his summoning you was the use of his hearing."

"For how long?"

"What is time? For ever, perhaps."

"No! I will not have that on my conscience."

"Hah! It is not your doing—it is the work of the Dark Gods," Necral laughed.

"Nevertheless, I want him freed of his curse! Send him back to life with his hearing restored. Let him sing as he once did."

"So you would extend your bargain?"

growled the Keeper.

"Since you cannot answer all my questions, Keeper, you must grant me this wish also."

"Very well."

"Continue—what of the sword?"

"It is one of thirteen, one for each of the Dark Gods. Each sword has an individual property. Each time you journey into life, or are summoned by an invocation, you wear one of the swords. They are the key to the real power of the Dark Gods. Find the one who forged them. He will tell you more than I can."

"Find him? Where? Where is his lair?"

"I only know his name, which is Thunderhammer. He it is who has also forged a prison for your soul."

The Voidal spoke the name softly, several times. "I will not forget it."

"There is but one thing more I can give you. I will allow you to retain the memory of all that I have told you, in exchange for the memory of what you have seen in Skull Keep. And I will open the gates of your memory of lives gone just a little. You shall see your companion restored. He shall hear again. Perhaps he has learned his lesson?"

"I accept your terms."

"I have no wish for the knowledge of what you have seen of my . . . amusements, to leave with you."

"As you wish. Seal the bargain."

"You may not like what you learn. Go to a chamber of rest. You will dream for a while. After that I shall return you to the many dimensions of the omniverse, when you shall again follow the path made for you by the Dark Gods."

From out of the darkness came the dreams, dreams fashioned by the Keeper of the Skull. Some were fragments of memory, some were the tortured convulsions of the dark man's own mind. The distinction between memory and fantasy was not always obvious, for the knowledge that Necral could impart was limited and secretive. The Voidal saw the interwoven threads of fate, time and the many dimensions, spun in an apparently chaotic pattern, its warp and weft forming cohesion to the Gods alone. Whatever messages were written there in the fabric of creation were to be read by their eyes only. To see and understand their cosmic workings, to have it all spread out in clarity, would have brought madness rushing in like a colossal tide.

Flashing through this tapestry of time and space, the dreaming mind of the Voidal fastened on images brought into focus before it by the manipulations of the Keeper. Past lives, future ones, worlds, some to be born, others long dead, heaved and span. Cascading showers of molten stars burst across his inner eye. Single embers curled across space and he saw down to their depths, to the races and cities

that infested them like bacteria.

Conflict dominated the shards of dream and memory. Sometimes single conflict, as men fought bitterly with bare fists, sometimes swords. Armies marched, towers fell in roaring flames, swept over by human tides that quenched the infernos of blazing worlds. Gods roared defiance at each other across immeasurable gulfs, while down in the rotting cores of worlds, others crawled, hiding from even the light of dead stars.

Death, deterioration and regeneration. The cycle went on infinitely. Life pulsed in waves throughout the omniverse, drawing in and thrusting out, ebbing and flowing, the Gods a titanic moon, directing the currents. Whatever mighty purpose they had intended for it all was hidden by the vastness of the canvas upon which they worked. The Voidal saw only glimpses of color and movement, his own place in the scheme of eternity masked.

He saw himself stumbling along a broken destiny, drawn from one dimension to another by the beings who invoked him. Always he had to obey the summons, and always he had to discharge the debt of the summoners. Behind him walked a familiar entity, Death. At each meeting, he would move on into darkness and wait for the next whim of the Dark Gods. Would it ever end, or was it, too, a circle?

Always he saw himself as a man garbed in darkness, identity lost, but in one of the dreams there was a hint of something more, of another part of himself that had been lost long before. Lost, or stolen. His soul, perhaps. But there was more. Another dream brought before him the face of a woman. Brief, flickering across his vision, a moon reflecting the light of his gaze, radiant. She was gone. Nothing else remained of her, but the seed had been planted. Like a fire that had almost died, the flames began to eat into the fuel of renewed memory. She was a part of him, but what?

One last image appeared, revealed as though by the rays of a dying candle as it sputtered its last. It was a mountain, black, colossal and sombre, guarded by demons that were amassed like flies over its rubble. From near its peak came the glow of a huge fire. Sounds echoed downwards—the sounds of a mighty smithy, forging some glinting blade for the Gods. Thunderhammer. The Voidal would remember him, and his mountain. When his journey brought him to it, he would know it.

"Wake, Voidal!"

Through heavy lids the dark man looked up into what he thought must be another dream. But he knew at once that it was not. The man above him, who had once been Grabulic the Songster, looked down. "It is over," he said.

The Voidal shook himself and rose from the cold bed of stone. They were in a small

chamber of dark bone. "The dreams . . ."

"Yes, they are over."

"And you?"

"Oh, I have had my share, too. The Keeper has kept the whole of his bargain with you, it seems. I am as I was. Though I could hear in this Keep before, my ears seem more finely attuned than ever before. I hear every sound, every breath that is taken in this place of death. Every breath. The power alarms me for I can hear the onset of something—dark and damned. But soon I am to be winged away to a new life, to some other dimension."

"You have atoned long enough for your sins. And I have discharged my debt to you."

"Indeed you have. And done more. Do you recall the beautiful musical instrument with which I made even mighty men weep?" went on Grabulic, eyes alight. The Voidal smiled, for the man appeared fully restored—his audacity, his cunning, his wit, they all shone from those revitalized eyes. "Well," went on the Songster. "I shall begin the quest to recover it. I shall recover my beautiful Layola. Did I ever tell you her history? It seems—"

"Yes, yes, you did. At some length. There is no need for you to repeat it now! Tell me, how soon will you leave?"

There was a sound near the doorway. "Not soon enough for me! Ah, this must be my very escort. Well, I must away. Once you chose to call me friend, Voidal, and for that we have both suffered." He looked down at the right hand of the dark man. Suddenly there was anxiety on his face and in his voice. "No matter what the dark powers decree, I hope we will remain friends whenever our paths shall cross again."

"Perhaps they shall," nodded the Voidal, himself wary of his own hand.

"Until then," smiled the Songster.

"Find your beautiful Layola," the Voidal told him and with no more ado, the Songster exited with the shades that had come for him.

For a time the Voidal was alone in the near darkness. He reflected on what he had dreamed. Uppermost in his mind was the woman. Who could she be? His lover, his wife? He knew that his destiny had set them apart, destiny wielded cruelly by the Dark Gods. Yet he must find her. In her would be strength. And the mountain, where Thunderhammer labored for the Gods at his forge. The Voidal would know that place.

Sorrow began to taunt him now, for the woman's face haunted him. Now that he had seen her, there would be pain until he found her. His burden, his enforced fate, had been wearying, resting heavily on him like a mantle of gloom, but with the return of this much of his memory, its weight would now be intolerable.

A flutter of wings brought him from a



“Treachery!” came the scream

deep reverie that had verged on another dream. Something lurched beneath him, bringing his awareness into sharp focus. Around him was darkness. Below him came the whispering sound of a sea, and he stared down to see the Ocean of Souls skimming by like black glass. On its surface he barges drifted by occasionally, still-life figures. The dark man rode upon the back of a Sower, which took him away to rebirth somewhere ahead in oblivion. He felt sleep of a sort drizzling over him, but the sound of the fluttering wings was broken by a laugh near at hand. Looking across into the void, he saw another winged creature flap from out of darkness. Upon its back sat a hooded figure, its face hidden.

“I trust your dreams were wrapped in long-forgotten memories, Voidal,” came the voice of Necral from the hood. “Our bargain is done. I thought it would be prudent to accompany you out of my realm myself.”

“What of the Songster?”

“Already awake elsewhere, and content for a time. He will not be troubled again, unless he decides to jest at the expense of his creators.”

“And I? Where am I to be cast?”

“I cannot say. You must obey the laws of the weird cast for you. But in your dreams—perhaps there were hints, revelations?”

“Perhaps.”

“And . . . what of me?” laughed the Keeper, but there was a trace of nervous fear in the sound.

The Voidal looked cold, pitiless, as though some other creature looked through his eyes. Slowly he drew from his cloak his right hand. The scarlet eyes in the hood of the Keeper blazed in abrupt terror. “What . . . ? You have deceived me!”

“No,” said the Voidal in a strange voice. “You have deceived yourself.” Then he turned and pointed back at the gigantic body of Skull Keep.

Necral watched that pointing finger, but it did not turn to him. In a moment the hand had again been drawn out of sight.

“I had many dreams,” the dark man told him. “In one of them I saw a cycle of demi-gods as it revolved endlessly. Some of the demi-gods perished and were replaced, each one serving a time at a task allotted by other, greater Gods. Yonder, in the form of Skull Keep, lies the dead husk of the demi-god, Chandrehozer, who was once the Keeper of the halls of the quick and the dead, as you are now. In his ageless sojourn as Keeper, he sinned many times, using the sleeping souls for his amusement. For this he was punished; he was made sterile, caused to decompose minutely; there he lies, eaten away by the things that burrow secretly inside him. He has reached the end of his cycle, for corruption and decay have raddled him utterly. See!”

Necral looked at Skull Keep in horror. The hands of the dead giant twitched, and as they did so, their flesh began to crumble like dust. Other parts of the huge body were turning to flakes and sloughing away. Huge cracks appeared over the pale mountain of chest and in the bleached skull.

“But, but . . . the Keep!” cried Necral. “The halls of the quick and the dead! They are indispensable—what is to become of them?”

“It has been decided by others greater than I,” intoned the Voidal, “that they will be rehoused.”

Necral fell silent, stunned, but then let out a cry of sheer terror. “What are you saying?” But as he spoke, his shape began to transform, and his body began to bloat like some gigantic maggot, squirming as its folds of fat bulged, shredding its flimsy garments. The hood came away, to reveal a blotched, bulbous head that must have been conceived in the wildest nightmare of a lunatic. Pocked and scarred with weeping sores, the product of Necral’s disgusting excesses in his ante-rooms of hell, it began to run with hissing slime.

“You,” said the Voidal, “are the new Keep.”

“Treachery!” came the scream from lips that were already melting and slithering down the rotting chin. “Your memory—I cleaned away the memories of what you saw in exchange for your past! Yet you have retained everything and cheated me! I

demand justice! The Gods will not cheat me!"

The Voidal shook his head. "I recall only those things that you have shown me in dreams. Whatever I saw in your Keep, I have truly forgotten."

Necral's head had become an amorphous mass, its dripping filth beginning to dissipate in wispy clouds. The Voidal emitted a hollow laugh that seemed to fill the realm of night with its stentorian contempt.

"Then how is it I am punished—just as Chandrehozer before me was punished?" shrieked the fading voice of Necral.

"Those who aid the Voidal hinder the Dark Gods—the very words that came from your own mouth! I am the Voidal. I am the pawn of the Dark Gods. Neither man nor god may succour me! To do so is to invoke the wrath of the Dark Gods. I am *used*! You, over all, should know this, Necral. Yet your downfall into your self-centered pit of madness has rotted away your own caution. You have forfeited your right to be lord of the dead!"

As Necral screamed out his anguish and his final realization, the last of the old Skull Keep began to collapse into dust. Countless figures drifted away from the debris like fleas leaving the dead. Necral, now grown to a monstrous figure, blotting out the darkness, began to drift into the cloud of dust that had been Chandrehozer. The head of the Keeper had now become a hideous mask of bone, a white skull, devoid of flesh or corruption. Necral's white body, thick with layers of fat, was finally hidden from view in the ensuing storm as the former Keep disintegrated.

The Voidal was carried on inexorably over the Ocean of Souls. When he at last looked back, it was to see a remote corpse, floating in darkness. Necral had become Skull Keep, and if there was some new Keeper there, he neither spoke nor made himself manifest to the dark man. As the Voidal watched, the countless shapes that were the hungry grovellers began to wing in to the new, fleshy body, eager to satiate their hunger for nutriment.

Sleep now began to exert an iron influence and the eyes of the Voidal became heavy with new dreams. Down into darkness he took a few memories. The woman, who would haunt him until he found her; the place of the titan smithy, who knew where his soul was hidden; pieces of his own dubious history. The Dark Gods had tricked him again, for none of what had transpired in Necral's realm had been his own doing—they had used him to bring Necral down. Now he must return to life in the omniverse and tread his weary destiny anew, again serving the whim of the Dark Gods.

And yet, they had allowed him to take something back from them. He had new memories, new clues. The Songster had been made whole again. Perhaps, then, the

Voidal had partially atoned for his crime. One day he would learn the whole secret. Then, perhaps, he might even avenge himself.

Adrian Cole is the author of "The Dream Lords" trilogy published by Zebra in paperback. The three novels, *A PLAGUE OF NIGHTMARES*, *LORD OF NIGHTMARES*, and *BANE OF NIGHTMARES*, were Cole's first published work in the States. The trilogy was preceded by *MADNESS EMERGING* and *PATHS IN DARKNESS*, both published in hardcover by Robert Hale & Company of London, England.

Cole's newest creation, *The Voidal*, was originally introduced to the reading world via *THE COMING OF VOIDAL*, a Spectre Press (England) chapbook. Another Voidal adventure appears in *WEIRDBOOK #13* titled "All Things Dark And Evil." Other Voidal tales will be appearing in *FANTASY TALES*, a Gerald Page edited paperback anthology and *FANTASY CROSSROADS*.

Cole's work has been praised as crossing genres (i.e. heroic fantasy, sword and planet, dark fantasy), but then if you've read "The Ocean of Souls" . . . you already know that.



GIZZLESTINES AND GOBLIN ROSES
PREVISITED returns to FC next issue with
more verse and letters by Hannes Bok.

OF SWORDS & SORcery

BY PAUL C. ALLEN

STEVE RILEY

Prior to Robert E. Howard's creation of the sword & sorcery genre as we know it today, about the closest thing to it (aside from historical fiction) was a form of writing popularly known at the time as the "scientific romance." Today it's generally referred to as "sword and planet."

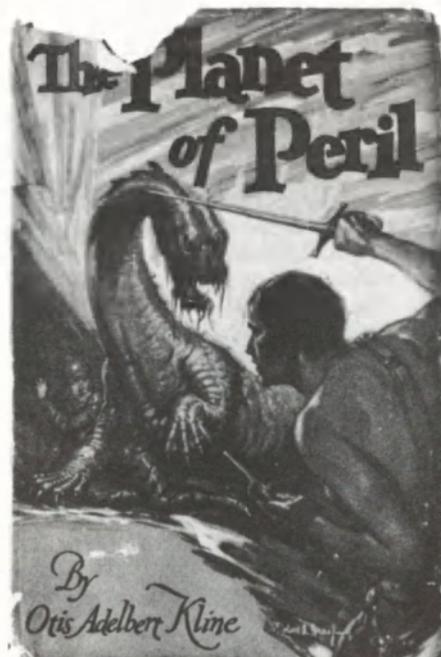
Basically, the scientific romance was a combination of the popular romance adventures a la H. Rider Haggard and scientific adventures a la Jules Verne. At times, it more closely resembled modern science fiction and at other times heroic fantasy. The particular brand I have in mind is that latter.

The man who single-handedly perfected the heroic fantasy version of the scientific romance and brought it to its height of popularity was Edgar Rice Burroughs with **UNDER THE MOONS OF MARS**, written in 1911. That popularity lasted well into the mid '30s and, every few years, a new entry in the field is published even today.

Some people tend to classify Burroughs' Mars stories as vintage science fiction that has become fantasy through the passage of time, but they're not. They have always been heroic fantasy. The plotting is definitely heroic fantasy and so is the scenery. The science is primitive and was even at the time the stories were written. Burroughs never made any attempt to explain the technology behind his primitive science other than to dream up non-existent rays and similar notions. On the contrary, he frequently obscured the science; its primary purpose was to enhance the effect of otherworldliness. Substitute sorcery for Burroughs' science and you have sword & sorcery a la a slightly Victorian Robert E. Howard.

Although Burroughs' style is dated, the stories are still quite readable today; their popularity has continued unabated generation after generation. There is nothing complex about them and there is no work

involved in reading them—they're simply exceptionally well-told, escapist adventure tales with plenty of swashbuckling action and a strong element of that old-fashioned sense of wonder. The writing is definitely Victorian in style, the dialogue sometimes stilted, the plotting frequently dependent upon coincidence and the characters sometimes cut from cardboard or poured from molds. Today, these qualities are commonly looked down upon as clichés. From the pulp writers of the 1910's to the 1930's,



they merely add to the fun—provided the adult reader maintains a historical perspective.

Accuse me of a double standard if you wish, but I am unwilling to grant modern authors this artistic license. They have the advantage of literary hindsight and should be able to improve upon what we today consider deficiencies and add some origi-

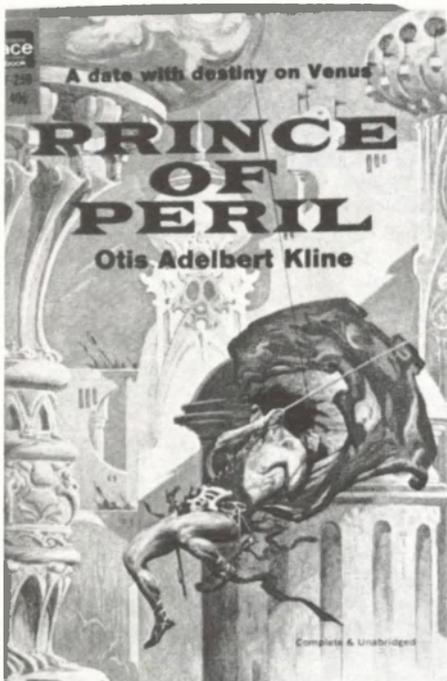
nality of their own. While I suppose it is legitimate to copy for the sake of pastiching, it's merely more of the same and the original—available in abundance—is usually preferable.

Burroughs' tremendous popularity—then and today—was due to his uncanny knack at storytelling. I doubt that many readers actually believed his stories, but it wasn't because they weren't trying. He appealed to virtually everyone: hardcore adventure fans were willing to forgive him for his long paragraphs of philosophical discussion while more intellectual types looked the other way when coincidence intervened to save the hero. His plotting was not quite as Victorian as some may think. If anything, his idea of nude heroes and heroines running around the planet Mars was pretty daring in 1911. And I imagine the hero's failure to nail the heroine until the last page (despite repeated opportunities) probably turned on a lot of readers—much like a striptease act.

While no one has ever been able to quite beat Edgar Rice Burroughs at his own game, it's generally conceded that Otis Adelbert Kline came the closest to capturing the magic of Burroughs' Mars tales. Long before he became Robert E. Howard's literary agent, Kline created two series of novels similar to Burroughs' John Carter saga. In all, they consisted of five novels and two short stories taking place on Venus and Mars and, since they are interconnected, they can easily be read as one series.

While Kline's Mars and Venus series were highly imitative of Burroughs' Mars stories, they are not copies. He was obviously making a conscious effort to emulate Burroughs' style, but he wasn't afraid to use some originality, either. Although I much prefer the milieu of Burroughs' Mars, I also credit Kline with managing to make a few improvements on some of Burroughs' techniques.

Kline's first effort with the scientific romance was **THE PLANET OF PERIL**, written in the early '20s. According to pulp expert Darrell C. Richardson, it was rejected by **WEIRD TALES** in 1923 (along with Ralph Milne Farley's first and similar Venus novel) due to a backlog of material. Kline and Farley both went to **ARGOSY** with their novels and Farley's ended up in print first; eventually **PLANET OF PERIL** ended up as a six-part serial beginning in



the July 20, 1929 issue of **ARGOSY ALL-STORY**.

The hero of **PLANET**, Robert Grandon, is abducted by a Dr. Morgan, who has been in telepathic communication with people on Mars and Venus. Previously, the good doctor had sent an Earthman by the name of Harry Thorne to Mars, exchanging minds with a Martian by the name of Borgen Takkor, who now inhabits Thorne's body on Earth. Grandon agrees to exchange minds with a Venusian just for the fun of it and ends up in the body of Rogi Thaddor on Zorovia (Venus). Takkor, bored with life on Earth, also goes along, exchanging minds with a Zorovian named Zinlo.

PLANET is Grandon's story and proceeds in good scientific romance fashion by having Grandon meet up with the most beautiful girl on the planet who also happens to be ruler (Torrogina) of Reabon. After pursuing her over roughly half the planet and engaging in a considerable amount of swordplay, he eventually ends up marrying her in the last chapter.

Within a few months after its **ARGOSY** serialization, A. C. McClurg brought the novel out in hardcover and a Grosset & Dunlap reprint appeared in 1930 or '31. In 1961, Avalon brought out a new edition in

hardcover, but severely abridged the novel and rewrote sections to fit their format. A rough word count shows the McClurg and Grosset editions (roughly unchanged from the **ARGOSY** version) at more than 90,000 words while the Avalon edition tips the scales at around 53,000 words. Equally regrettable is the fact that when Ace paperbacked the novel (F-211, 1963), they followed the Avalon edition.

The sequel to **PLANET** appeared the following year as a six-part serial in **ARGOSY**, beginning with the August 2, 1930 issue. **THE PRINCE OF PERIL** takes place simultaneous to **PLANET** and details the adventures of Borgen Takkor/Harry Thorne as Zinlo, heir to the throne of Olba, an empire on the other side of Zorovia. Zinlo gets chased out of Olba by an assassin, meets up with a princess of another empire, chases her through a series of adventures across the planet, wrests Olba back from the assassin, and marries the princess.

Although the plot may read like a typical scientific romance formula, the writing is definitely atypical. **PRINCE** is a tremendous improvement stylistically over **PLANET** and an exceptionally good novel for this particular sub-genre. I suspect it was written much later than **PLANET**. Kline manages to avoid many of the stereotypes of the scientific romance and Zinlo (really Takkor) emerges as a fully three-dimensional character. He has a quick wit about himself and a wry sense of humor. He is one of the more intriguing heroes I've encountered and it's unfortunate that Kline never chose to write more novels about his exploits.

A. C. McClurg published the novel in hardcover within months of its appearance in **ARGOSY** and Grosset & Dunlap followed up with a reprint a year or so later. It was again reprinted in hardcover in 1962 by Avalon and again abridged. Since the original was considerably shorter than its predecessor, the abridgement is not as extreme, although Avalon did extensively rewrite the prefaces to both novels. In 1964, Ace paperbacked it as F-257, wrapped it in what I think is one of Roy Krenkel's finest cover illustrations, and unfortunately followed the Avalon version of the story.

The final novel in the Venus series is **BUCCANEERS OF VENUS**. Rejected by **ARGOSY** due to the start of Edgar Rice Burroughs' Venus series, it was published by **WEIRD TALES** as a six-part serial beginning with the November 1932 issue (just a month before the birth of Howard's Conan). By that time, Burroughs' **PIRATES OF VENUS** had already run in **ARGOSY** from September 17 to October 22, 1932.

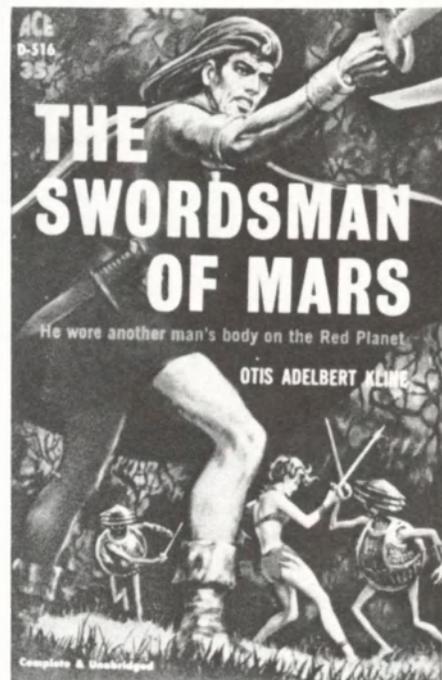
Coincidentally, Kline's novel is also about pirates. Grandon's wife is kidnapped during their honeymoon and he sets

out to rescue her. Eventually, the leaders of various empires of Venus band together to once and for all subdue the pirates who have terrorized the seas for generations. Offhand, I'd rate it well above **PLANET** and slightly below **PRINCE**.

In 1949, Don Grant published the novel in hardcover under the Grandon imprint and changed the title to **THE PORT OF PERIL** to tie it in with the rest of the series. It is quite an attractive little volume, reprinting the part one cover painting by J. Allen St. John as well as four of his interior illustrations from the **WEIRD TALES** serialization. It was later reprinted by Ace (F-294, 1964) under the same title.

Kline later wrote two short stories about Venus, neither of which is very significant. The first was "A Vision of Venus" published in the December 1933 issue of **AMAZING STORIES**. I'm sure Kline was being perfectly serious about it when he wrote it, but it reads today as a marvelous put-on; it features what has to rate as the fastest love affair in the history of scientific romances. Don Wollheim included it in his 1964 anthology, **SWORDSMEN IN THE SKY** (Ace, F-311) and it later appeared in the 1970 **ASTOUNDING YEARBOOK** from Ultimate Publishing Company.

The second was entitled "Volunteers

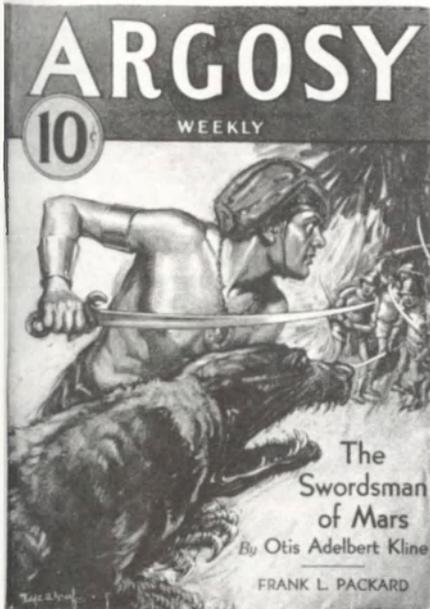


from Venus," written in collaboration with E. Hoffman Price. It was originally published as Chapter 8 of a round-robin series entitled "Cosmos" in the January 1934 issue of a fan magazine, **SCIENCE FICTION DIGEST**. It was later reprinted in **OAK LEAVES #8** for Summer, 1972, edited by David Anthony Kraft (who, incidentally, was named agent for Kline's literary estate the following year). The story is more space operish in tone and barely

interesting as a curiosity piece.

After writing **BUCCANNEERS OF VENUS**, Kline decided to switch locales and went back to record the adventures of Harry Thorne, occupying the body of Borgen Takkor on the planet Mars. The result was **THE SWORDSMAN OF MARS**, serialized in six installments in **ARGOSY**, beginning on January 7, 1933. **WEIRD TALES** was barely midway through **BUCCANNEERS** at the time **SWORDSMAN** appeared, much to the delight of Kline fans at that time.

I have a special fondness for



SWORDSMAN, so if I appear to be biased, it's because I am; that was the novel that introduced me to swords & sorcery. I can still recall that summer day in 1961 when I spotted the Ace paperback edition on the newsstand with Harry Thorne thrusting his sword out of the cover. It looked like the kind of stuff I'd always been looking for, but never found in the local library. I was 14 then and it captivated me!

In re-reading its original **ARGOSY** serialization for this column, I found that it holds up well. The writing is on a par with his writing in **PRINCE** and I generally like the atmosphere of Kline's Mars novels better than that of his Venus series. His Mars novels were the last "Burroughsian" heroic fantasy that he wrote and Kline seems to have given more attention to effective world building in them.

SWORDSMAN was the first Kline novel to be put between hardcovers by Avalon, in 1960. It was severely abridged from the **ARGOSY** serialization and the Ace edition (D-516, 1961) is a "Complete and Unabridged" reprint only of the Avalon edition. Don Grant originally announced the novel for publication under the Grandon imprint in 1949, but it unfortunately never appeared. He could undoubtedly find a ready market for the full-

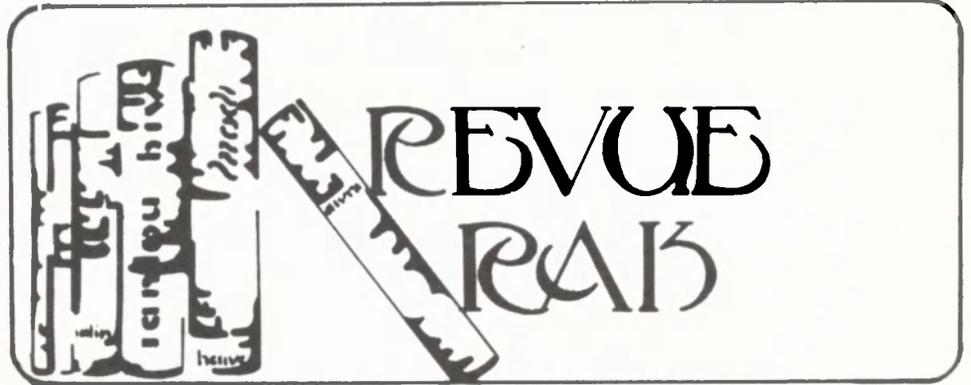
length novel today.

Kline's next Mars Novel was **THE OUTLAWS OF MARS**, serialized in **ARGOSY** in seven parts, beginning with the November 25, 1933 issue. Avalon again severely abridged it in hardcover in 1961 and it appeared shortly later in the same form from Ace (D-531, 1961). This one takes place shortly after the events in **PRINCE OF PERIL**. Dr. Morgan has perfected a space globe and sends his son to Mars. Fortunately, the space globe quickly disappears after he lands and the story gets

down to the same kind of action found in **SWORDSMAN**. (Kline never did mention what happened to the space globe, but I didn't miss it any . . .)

According to David Anthony Kraft, Kline did write a third Mars novel, but it was never published and the manuscript was either lost or destroyed. It was entitled **THE HUNTERS OF MARS** and it wouldn't break my heart if Dave were to stumble across that yellowed bundle of papers in a musty carton somewhere.

—Paul C. Allen



THE THREE PALLADINS, by Harold Lamb. Illustrated by Cathy Hill. Donald M. Grant, 1977, \$12.00.

Harold Lamb was an author that Robert E. Howard named as one of his favorites. Certainly Lamb's influence upon Howard is more than ephemeral. Today, Lamb is remembered primarily as a historical biographer for his books **GENGHIS KHAN**, **HANNIBAL**, **OMAR KHAYYAM**, **CHARLEMAGNE** and so forth, all of them best-sellers for decades. Much of his fiction appeared in earlier years in **ADVENTURE** magazine, considered the pulp to write for in its day and certainly a market Howard aimed toward.

Howard never did crack the **ADVENTURE** market though he tried. While he was a storyteller of the first magnitude and wrote many effective tales, he was not a master craftsman. His work was often hasty and suffered from redundancy, but his sheer ability, drive and originality gave him growing success during his short life.

Harold Lamb not only possessed Howard's talents, but he was additionally a superb craftsman with words and a first-class researcher to boot. He fully understood his subjects and was able to impart an accurate sense of believability to his fiction—all within an historically correct framework. Completely real, but by no means tedious. Lamb was able to bring history and its characters to life in more than simple textbook fashion.

THE THREE PALLADINS is a work of fiction, set in Cathay and the steppes of Asia, involving Temujin, who later became known as Genghis Khan, and Mingan, a

royal prince of Cathay, who remained by Temujin's side from his rise to leader of the Mongol Horde as a youth through the Khan's eventual conquest of Cathay. There is a sweep of time, power and adventure at its best in this book. Prester John, that mythical king of Asia in European eyes (though Lamb says he is a real ruler in Asian annals) plays a part in this story. He is sought out by Temujin, and Lamb depicts him not as a mythical figure, but as a flesh and blood human being. All the main characters actually existed and Lamb takes the reader one step beyond the shadowy outlines of this period in history to enact his tale. The framework is genuine and Lamb convincingly weaves a rich background tapestry.

This book is the type of writing that set Robert E. Howard's imagination afire and is an impressive debut in Donald M. Grant's projected series of putting Harold Lamb's fiction into hardcover format. Robert E. Howard fans who have yet to sample the writing of Harold Lamb owe it to themselves to obtain this volume and become better acquainted with one of the all-time masters of adventure fiction.

The book is capped off with a color dustwrapper and several fine color plates by Cathy Hill, which capture the spirit of the story and reveal considerable promise of her talents.

As a closing note, I suggest the reader also obtain Lamb's **GENGHIS KHAN**, one of his best historical biographies in this writer's opinion. The scope of this biography, fascinating and highly entertaining reading on its own, puts more perspective on **THE THREE PALLADINS**, (although

Continued on Page 42

Ghor, Kin-Slayer

A ROUND-ROBIN TALE BASED UPON A
ROBERT E. HOWARD FRAGMENT

Alone.

Alone of all the men I had recently known, of that brave warrior band I had led to snatch Shanara from lecherous, treacherous Agha Junghaz—aye, that band I had led yet again, out onto the deep bosom of the Sea of Vilayet—only to leave them at the last, dead to a man, on a gore-spattered isle of madness and mayhem.

A man alone: a lone wolf.

A crippled wolf.

Ghor the Cripple, who was once Ghor the Strong.

Ah, I was still Ghor, but more and more the old Ghor was slipping away from me, shrivelling and dwindling in time and distance. Like my left forearm that rotted now with the bodies of my former colleagues on an unnamed isle. For while a three-legged wolf must soon die, the loss of a limb need not necessarily doom a clever man, and so the man in me must now rise to the surface of my being. The Man-facet and not that of the wolf. Neither wolf nor Mi-go facet but Man. Homo-sapien, or as close as I might ever get to Homo-sapien . . .

For I could no longer afford to remain a missing link, a half-brute more creature than man and as much wolfing as creature. No, for now I must think and plan above the momentary and immediate hungers of the pack, beyond the strong and willing flesh of a Mi-go bitch in heat. If I was to survive I must think more fully like a man, putting aside all animal lusts and passions until . . . until what?

As the ship—which had been mine but now belonged to my rescuer, a Turanian sailor, some of whose men now sailed me through dangerous Zaporoskan waters—as this ship approached land I made a break from my brooding to think back on what had gone . . .

When the Turanian had found me on the bloody shore of that island of nightmare, his first thought had plainly been to set his men upon me and murder me there and then. But those that landed in the small boat with him numbered only two—three of them all told—and they were sailors, not warriors.

Instead the Turanian struck a bargain

with me: my ship for safe conduct to the eastern coast. And why not? Of what use a ship to me, half-crippled and alone? But our bargain came near to being broken almost as soon as it was struck when I saw what the sea captain's colleagues were doing to the bodies of my dead comrades.

Ghouls!—They were slicing off corpse fingers for rings of gold and silver, hacking at stiffened limbs for bangles and bracelets, tearing jewels from those that wore them in their ears and breaking the golden teeth

Ah, brave volunteers, Kaphra Thall and Zorass Jhadra!—robbers of the dead!—so, I had your word to give me safe conduct and sail me to the eastern shore, did I? And after that, what then? Who would guarantee your safety?

Genseric's sword, slightly tarnished now and dull, trembled in my good right hand. And all the muscles tensed in that hand and arm as if, with a mind of their own, they strained against my own will to lift the great blade and kill, kill, kill!

CHAPTER · ELEVEN

Swordsmith and Sorcerer

BRIAN · LUMLEY

from the gaping jaws of my dead warriors! As a wolf grown up among wolves I had often eaten the flesh of men freshly dead, but out of hunger and the will to live and for no other reason. These men were like snow-vultures at the bright jewel eyes of men nobly dead; aye, and they sickened me worse than the pain in my stump of an arm.

Seeing that even in my weakened state I was close to going into a berserk rage, the Turanian captain hurriedly told me that this was loot to ensure the safety of my passage. His crew did not care for Northmen and the trinkets would be offered as bribes to those who would volunteer to sail me into Zaporoskan territory. As soon as he said this the two ghouls who were still at their bloody work at once cried out that they would volunteer for the duty.

Later, I had promised myself, later.

And now it was later, and the germ of a plan had formed in my mind . . .

Thus as the ship drew nigh a rocky shore backed by dense jungles and low, lush hills, I stood up from where I crouched on the deck of the ship and went to the man at the tiller. It was Zorass Jhadra, whose nervous eyes scanned the early morning ocean for sign of any strange ship. I knew why, for I had overheard my escort talking during the late hours of the previous night. These were waters immemorially infamous for their pirates.

The night conversation of my—companions?—whispered where the four had gathered around the tiller in the light of an oil lamp, their faces ruddy in its glow—had told me much. And because my plan

put on flesh by the moment I had been eager for local knowledge, to know how best I might discover the whereabouts of my Shanara and follow her wherever she had gone. These are some of the things I learned:

The morning would find us some few leagues south of where the mouth of the Zaporoska emptied into the Vilayet, and between our ship and the river would stand a city of peculiarly mongrel lineage. Four hundred years ago the Turanians had built a massive fort there on the sea, manning it with warships from Aghrapur and other cities of the western shores. The task of these ships had been simple: to put an end to the activities of the pirate hordes whose vessels and settlements were like flies all along the flanks of the Zaporoskan river.

But within a few short decades the pirates themselves had taken control of the fortress, had subverted the masters of the war vessels permanently stationed there, and inevitably a pirate Armada had set about the sack of Aghrapur itself. In the ensuing sea battle of Aghrapur both sides had lost more than half their men-o'-war, and the surviving vessels had limped back to their respective berths to lick wounds and tend to the ravages of war. Then for more than two hundred years an uneasy peace had fallen over the waters of the Vilayet. The Turanians had their own problems, the Zaporoskans, too, to a lesser extent, and history would wait for neither one.

Thus the fortress on the eastern coast became Zaporakh—a small, high-walled inner city surrounded by a vastly mushrooming maze of streets and shops without—which was drawn as unlikely a mixture of humanity as could be imagined. For now that they were grown used to the comforts of a civilized, more or less static existence, many of the pirates became shopkeepers and merchants in their own rights, aye, and their sons after them.

Trading all around the coasts of the Vilayet, they turned against the true, nomad pirates of the river and almost wiped them out. Trade links were forged: by sea with the western coastal towns and cities, overland all along the eastern seaboard, and as far east as Khitai of the jade cupolas and opium houses.

The freshly opened sea- and land-routes flourished, drawing into the maw of Zaporakh all the mongrels and traders and thieves of a world in turmoil. Slant-eyed silk merchants from Khitai rubbed shoulders with bearded Hyrkanian swordsmiths and wandering Cimmerian adventurers and mercenaries; exiled Turanian lords built houses and palaces above streets where black Zamboulan cannibals had learned to eat the meat of less sentient creatures; men from Iranistan and Brythunia drank together in wharfside taverns and dined for the doubtful favours of Zamoran whores...

And out of these polyglot hordes emerged the strangest of all emblems and insignia of civilization in those troubled times, and the name of Zaporakh became synonymous with (of all things) hospitality!

Then the pirates returned . . .

The hawks of the sea were back, plundering afresh in seas which had all but forgotten they ever existed. Their numbers were smaller now, true, but by the same token the pickings were all the richer. Their bases were the old places up the river, where they could hide for months on end if need be before venturing out across the Vilayet once more, and it was reckoned that only a very few years could pass before they would constitute just such a threat as that great plague of pirates of old.

And it was pirates that Zorass Jhadra and the other three Turanians feared right now, the pirates that stood out to sea and watched the approach routes to Zaporakh for easy pickings. Merchantmen from the city usually went out under paid guard of warships, but occasionally a captain would be unable or unwilling to pay for such protection. Such as these were especially prone to attacks.

Of course, our little ship could offer nothing of riches. No, but it would make fine sport for pirates spoiling for fun and games!

Now we were headed south along the coast for Zaporakh. An hour's sailing should bring us safely into port—or would if we went unmolested. It was because I felt we would not go unmolested that I approached Zorass Jhadra at the tiller. He could not smell danger as I could, nor were his eyes those of a wolf. The sails of the hawk closing with us from the sea had been blowing on the horizon for at least three minutes when I brought them to his attention:

"Sails, Zorass Jhadra—pirate sails. She'll run us down long before we make Zaporakh . . ."

"Sails? Pirates?" the other spun round, searching the open sea. Then he saw the half-crescent sails, one large and one small, that seemed to grow out of the horizon. Immediately his face twisted into a fear-filled visage.

"Kaphra Thall!" he shouted. "Jorim, Heram Philoss—up on deck, quick—pirates!"

"Pirates?" shouted Kaphra Thall, his booted feet clattering on the planking as he sprang from below, wide awake where a second before he had slept. "Where?"

Behind him, tumbling out from the cool shade below decks, the other men came with cries of alarm on their lips.

"There she is—there!" cried Zorass Jhadra, pointing a trembling hand. "And a fast one by the cut of her sails. She'll have us before we round the headland."

Heram Philoss, a more experienced sailor, held a spittle-damp finger into the breeze. "Not necessarily. There's a good

wind off the land and ours is a light craft. If we run full with the wind she'll have trouble catching us."

"Hold," I said, putting my back to the rail. "You are paid to take me to Zaporakh." For a moment they looked at me in blank astonishment, as if they saw me for the first time. Then, ignoring me, Heram Philoss snatched the tiller from Zorass Jhadra while the other two sprang to attend to the sails and rigging.

"No," I growled low, warningly in my throat, "we do not head for the open sea." I struck Heram Philoss with my shoulder, knocking him from the tiller to crash to the deck.

As he cursed and sprang to his feet, yanking a long knife from his belt, it was as if Genseric's great sword struck of its own will. At the last moment he went wide-eyed and tried to lean backwards. Too late. The sword's tip whistled between his grimacing teeth, cutting loose his lower jaw and slicing into his windpipe. Down he went and was dead in a moment.

Now the other three threw themselves upon me, and the ship was left to wallow side-on to the wind. Zorass Jhadra's wild lunge took his curved blade high over my shoulder as I bent at the knee, driving Genseric's sword up into his groin and ripping him to his navel. "You are a mongrel cur and a ghoul," I told his corpse as it toppled, "and I am a wolf."

"I am a wolf!" I turned on the other two who gazed at me now wide-eyed and horror-stricken. With one good arm, towering in my rage, evil of eye and splashed with blood I faced them . . . and with a whining snarl rising in my throat I flew at them. Kaphra Thall put up his blade before my single down-flashing blow, only to watch his sword shiver into fragments in the moment before my own split him through head, neck and breast.

This left Jorim the Slow, who had circled round behind me with his axe. With my wolf's ears I heard the *hiss* of his heavy weapon as it sliced air, and falling to my knees I spun with Genseric's sword outstretched and dark with blood. The flat of Jorim's axe slid over my skull, barely bruising my flesh, but my blade opened up his belly and got fast in the bag of it as his entrails sprang out on the deck to drench me in their sticky welter. I ripped the sword free and drove its point to his heart before his legs could buckle. He fell to the deck and died with blood bursting from his lips.

I looked for more men to kill but there were none, only pirates looming closer. I grabbed the tiller and turned the ship toward the tip of the headland. On the other side of those wave-splashed rocks I should be in sight of Zaporakh, barely a league and a half away.

By the time I had the ship level with the point the hawk was nearly on me. Hard eyes leered from scarred, tanned faces as the pirate drew alongside. It could only be a

matter of moments before they locked the two vessels together with grappling irons. They would find little of value aboard, barely enough to cover their time and trouble, and then they would kill me and sink the ship for sport.

I took a small water cask and emptied it, throwing it on the deck within easy reach. Then I took back the belongings of my old comrades, the booty stolen by the ghouls Kaphra Thall and Zorass Jhadra. I took it as quickly as I could, as they had taken it, folding it in cloth. I stuffed the bundle in the water cask—fingers, ear-lobes and all. Then I made fast Genseric's sword to my body.

Now the pirate was very close and I could see the twirl of grappling irons in the air. Throwing oil on the sails of my ship, I set them afire—then threw the tiller over until the sharp prow of my vessel came round and the wind off the land filled the gouting sails. Too late the pirates saw their doom. I rammed them and my blazing sails collapsed onto their deck. I, too, was thrown down, and when I regained my feet I saw that both ships were broken open and doomed to a weedy grave.

I snatched up the cask and as I did so saw a flying shadow on the deck. One of the pirates had boarded my ship, doubtless bent on revenge. Wild with fury he pounced, his sword flashing down. I threw up the cask before me and his blade stuck in the rim. Before he could tug it loose I kicked him in the groin and as he doubled over swung the cask against his head. Blood and brains flew—but I was off balance.

My feet slipped in gore and I fell, toppling over the low deck-rail. As I went my head struck the rail a terrific blow, then—

—She swam up out of green deeps, supremely beautiful, awesome in her beauty, yet cold as the limitless deeps from which she seemed to rise. Green she was, as seen through ocean spume and eyes clouding in death. Drowning eyes—wolf eyes—my eyes!

But when she spoke to me I knew she was no siren, no creature of the sea. She was in my mind, not in the waves that surrounded me; for unconsciousness is much like a dream, and as all of her kind she could bend dreams to her own purpose. For she was a Goddess, the Goddess Ythillin, the Ice Woman, first daughter of those Gods of Ice whose children the Frost Giants were.

"So, Ghor, it is come to this," she said, her voice the wind that drives snow flurries whining over the glaciers. "You would flee the world of men without fulfilling the prophecy of the Ice Gods, would you?"

"Let me drown," I snarled, "but only leave me be."

"Ah, no!" she denied me. "For there's

work for you yet, mother-slayer."

"Oh? And shall I still save a civilization from destruction and give it to the Aesir?" I scorned her, seeing the bubbles of my harsh laughter rising before my face as water filled me. "Let me drown, I say—or save me if you can. One way or the other, ice-bitch, but I'll not suffer your prattle and witch-wife's prophecies. And since I know you'll not save me—then drown with me!"

With that I would have reached for her throat—except that I discovered my one good hand caught in the ropes that were wound tight about the water cask. "My hand!" I cried in outrage. "Give me back my hand for a boon, ice-bitch, and I'd choke out your life with it!"

And she laughed like a pattering of hailstones. "There's sulphur in you, Ghor—strife in your soul and hell in your eyes—aye, and life in your veins for all that you'd forsake it without a word of complaint. So it is with all your kind. But no, you'll not die here. Would you die, and have done with life—and Shanara?"

"Speak not her name, witch of the white waste!" I was moved to answer. "My pleasures were few, but Shanara was one of them. Now she is lost to me—as is my arm—and many good friends also. Why not my life, too?"

Now her eyes were serious and close and it seemed I felt her frozen breath on my cheek. "You may not yet die, Ghor. I once said that it was your lot to save a civilization. Now I say you shall save *all* of Earthly civilizations, all of sanity and order. *Mentumenen has pitted himself against all the gods—against the Gods of the South as well as those of the North—and to aid him he has called up powers he cannot control.* They are powers which would destroy us all!

"For the time being Mentumenen is mortal, human despite his sorceries, but more and more the man in him is driven out and the alien darkness in him grows. Soon he will not be Mentumenen at all but a true avatar of one of those he serves, a demon clothed in man's form. And who can say what monstrous magicks they may work through him then? For the present: he has Shanara and would use her to control you, to pit you against his enemies, against your own Ice Gods themselves . . ."

"As you would pit me against him?" I sneered. "And what, pray, are you Ice Gods to me?"

If a Goddess can shrug, Ythillin shrugged. "Despite your irreverence, your arrogance, you would save your Shanara—if you could. Our desire is to save an entire universe. The means and motives of gods are infinitely greater than those of mortals." She paused for a moment, then continued:

"I have cursed you and my curse is inviolable, but in spite of that I may yet grant you a boon. You asked for your hand back that you might choke me. You shall

have an arm, of sorts. And since magick has taken your Shanara from you, magick shall aid you in finding her. Now I will say something to you. Forget what you will of all this but do *not* forget my next words:

"There will be a swordsmith and a sorcerer. The former works in blue steel and you will know him when you see him; the other deals in white magick. Seek them out. Disobey if you dare, mother-slayer, but if you do, not only is Shanara doomed but all of the many future worlds of man . . ."

And with that she was gone.

Strong arms were pulling me out of the sea onto the deck of a man-o'-war. "Only one of the black-hearted dogs survived, eh?" a voice came to me through my retching of salt water, bringing me back to my senses. "Only one pirate, with his great sword strapped to him yet, and all the brave lads of the little trader gone to the bottom with their ship. Well, we know how to deal with this dog!"

"Hold!" I cried. Finding my feet set upon a deck once more, I struggled free of the arms that restrained me. The water cask was still fastened to my good arm. "I was the master of that trader," I snarled, "not a pirate. What use a pirate with only one arm? Now then, I've lost a ship and many friends—so where's all of this Zaporakh hospitality I've heard so much of? You are a ship out of Zaporakh, are you not?"

"That we are," the speaker agreed. "But can you prove who you are?"

"No," I glared at the speaker, who was obviously the captain of the warship, "but I can crack the skulls of any who name me liar!" And I swung my water-cask menacingly.

The captain—a short-bearded man whose rank showed in his bearing and the fact that he wore a red sash and turban fastened with a clasp of office—frowned at me and slit his eyes a little, then made up his mind. He grinned and said: "Well, pirate or none you're the only survivor; and if it was you rammed that scabby sea-hawk—"

"It was."

"Then you've a right to the hospitality of Zaporakh. We can't have honest traders suffering at the hands of—"

"Have you a cabin I can use?" I cut him off. "I would like to be alone for a little while—to take stock of things and say a few words of thanks that I am spared." It was a subterfuge and totally out of character for me, for I never had need of lying. Neither had I prayed to gods nor offered thanks for anything—certainly not for something which was all my own doing. I simply did not want anyone to see the small bundle I had placed in the water cask. It would be difficult to explain the bits of gristle that accompanied the various baubles. Without a doubt I should be branded a pirate if they were seen.

And so I was shown to a cabin with a window above decks, from which I disposed of the unwanted bits of flesh into the



sea before the ship berthed in Zaporakh. Before leaving the vessel I asked the captain:

"Perhaps you can help me yet again. I need firstly . . . a swordsmith?" And he directed me to the hot-reeking wharfside shop of a weaponcaster.

From the doorway I watched the man at work in the smoky glow of his forge, and from the first I knew he was the one. He was working on a hook fastened to a steel cup. Occasionally he would pause to try the cup on the wrist-stump of an old sailor who had lost his hand. Finally the wicked-looking hook was satisfactory and they strapped it on. The gnarled mariner waved it about in the air a little, grinned gummily, paid his due and turned to leave the shop. That was when they saw me. I brushed past the old man and approached the smith, holding out my ruined left arm.

"Something special," I told him. "A long knife, a crossbow, a hook. A weapon. You can do it?"

Slowly he nodded. "Yes, I can do it." He looked into my eyes and shuddered. Strong man as he was, with mighty shoulders and hands strong as the metals with which they worked, he gazed into my eyes and trembled—then cursed low in his throat, saying:

"I . . . I knew you . . . were coming."

"Oh?"

"Last night, in a dream, I was visited."

I nodded. "By a woman, a goddess of ice. I know."

"She called herself—"

"Ythillin," I finished it for him, my voice sour. "Listen, I have some baubles, gems, some gold and silver. It is yours if—"

"No, no," he quickly held up his hands. "I want nothing. And I can start work at once. I drew the plans this morning . . ."

From then until my new "arm" was finished I stayed with Dar'ah Humarl at his shop. Above the actual workshop on a platform half-open to the sky, I lay awake at nights listening to the deep snoring from the shadowy bulk of Dar'ah upon his corner cot. The "arm"—an awesome weapon, indeed an arsenal—took all of thirteen days to complete, and Dar'ah worked a good fourteen hours every day. During that time all other would-be customers were turned away while the smith's attention was centered solely upon the completion of this one task.

We spoke very little; he worked and sweated while I watched, though I helped wherever I could; and gradually a silent kinship, a mutual admiration built up between us. I liked both Dar'ah's strength and his silence; and his awe of me, inspired no doubt by Ythillin during her dream-visit, turned slowly to a friendly, hesitant curiosity. It made me wonder what the ice-bitch had told him of me, which I determined to inquire of him before we parted company.

I had, too, finally persuaded him to accept those trinkets which once belonged to my comrades slain on the isle of madness. Since so-called "civilized" men put such store by these inedible baubles, doubtless the gift would make Dar'ah Humarl a fairly rich man. I could not have foreseen it, but it would also make him a dead man.

Late on the thirteenth night my new limb was finished and lacquered black and gleaming, then hung up to dry, and Dar'ah promised me that on the morrow I would once more be a whole man—or as nearly so as his art could make me. From the things I had given him he took a massive golden ring set with a red gem and went out, returning presently with an armful of bread and meats and weighted down with skins of wine slung over his massive shoulders. Also, in his pouch he now carried a good many of the thin triangular coins of Zaporakh, enough to furnish him a fine living for a third part of a year.

I drank much wine and unaccustomed to the sweet stuff quickly grew drowsy. Dar'ah laughed without malice as I swayed and almost fell from the rough ladder that led to my bed of boards in the room above. When I awoke I knew something was wrong. Above me, seen through the open roof, a moon nearing its full glared down through fleet clouds like some bloodshot eye of evil. There was a blood smell.

What had awakened me?

A cry? A scuffle down below? Dar'ah's form no longer seemed to fill its customary corner. Quickly, my head reeling, I went to his pallet to make sure. He was not there, nor were the gold and silver trinkets to be found beneath his blanket! I hurried down into the shop.

My metal arm hung in its dim niche in the wall, hidden from all but the keenest eye, but of Dar'ah there was no sign. The blood smell was thicker here, and a moment later I almost fell over his body . . . Dar'ah's head lay elsewhere. I found his pouch and it was empty.

My head was clearer now and my nose picked out three distinct man-odours in the air. They must have seen Dar'ah in the city when he went bartering. Yes, there had been three of them, I knew it. They had followed him back here and waited. When all was quiet they had entered and one of them had crept upstairs. He had taken the trinkets but had disturbed Dar'ah in his sleeping. Dar'ah had followed the thief down into the shop where the other two had hidden in shadows. Swiftly, silently they had cut him down.

Black villainy!—and civilization the villain . . .

I found them in a tavern not far from the sea, one of the several places in Zaporakh that stayed open all through the night to cater for fishermen, travellers and traders

getting late into port. This was one of the lower dives, however, and my three stood at the bar, a wineskin between them and dice rolling as they gamed for their spoils. They looked like outcast Hyrkanians, hardened killers. I watched one gemmed bangle change hands and knew it for a trinket that had once encircled the upper arm of one of my men.

Approaching the men at the bar, I stepped between the noisy, drunken and gambling customers of this den. Coming up to the three, I leaned close to one of them, whispering:

"Do you know Dar'ah?"

"What . . . ?" He turned, reaching for his knife. I threw back the cloak that covered my new arm and twisted the metal wrist with my true hand. A slender, razor-honed blade flashed into view, sliding easily into the man's side. Feeling little resistance I turned my body, almost cutting my goggle-eyed victim in half. Lifting my arm I sliced at the second Hyrkanian and his face opened up redly from ear to ear.

As his comrades toppled the third man backed away, turned and ran. I twisted my metal wrist again as he reached the open door. The red blade flashed from sight into the metal case and I held up the arm to point it at the door which framed the back of the last robber. Then, before he could vanish from sight, I pressed a stud set in the metal arm. There came the sound of a powerful spring released and I felt a slight recoil. A metal bolt struck my prey in the spine, flinging him out into the street.

Leaving the tavern I stooped to wrench my bolt from the dead man's back, and glancing behind me I saw through the open doorway a sea of frozen, stupefied faces. Then I was away at a lope up the night street, a dark shadow that quickly melted into the greater darkness.

Up above me the moon looked down and smiled grimly at some secret only he knew. A moon nearing its full. I stared at the yellow face in the sky and snarled, then wondered at the fire that flowed in my veins. Something strange was happening, which had never happened before.

A swordsmith and a sorcerer, the ice-bitch had told me. Well, I had found my swordsmith and now must seek out the sorcerer, a white magician. Yet even without him I felt that the seeds of magic were already sown within me. Again I glanced at the moon, and instinctively fell into the crouch of the wolf. Then I threw back my head and howled, howled long and wild in the streets of Zaporakh. And in their beds I knew many citizens shuddered in strange-ling dreams this night . . .

CHAPTER · TWELVE

The Gift of Lycanthropy

FRANK · BELKNAP · LONG

I knew not what guided me through the maze of unfamiliar streets, past dimly lit wineshops, with the raucous shouts of drunken revelers drifting out into the night.

Never before had I felt quite so much like a wolf as my breath came and went, as if its intake was slowed by the fierce clashing of my teeth. Never once could I remember stopping to stand erect like a man, for some deep-seated instinct prevented me from drawing myself up to my full height.

I made half-growling sounds deep in my throat which seemed as natural to me as breathing, as natural as they would have been if I had been the leader of a wolf pack bent on slaying and dismembering the self-deceiving creature called "Man."

What wolves did men did also, but with more cunning and guile, pretending always to possess, deep in their minds, another self they could summon forth in battle attire at will, to fight for what they liked to call justice and mercy. In some strange way, it made the slaying of their own kind less troublesome to them. But always the slaying went on and on, just as it did with wolves. Was it not better then to be a wolf, totally untroubled by guilt?

There is nothing strange or unnatural about what wolves do when they slay and whenever I felt I was becoming more like a man I was assailed by rage and self-reproach and I made haste to put all such thoughts from my mind.

The narrow streets twisted and turned and some ended in blind alleys as they had in the border kingdoms of Nemedra, particularly in the city of Belverus, which seemed as remote to me now as was Argos and Shem and the tropical rain forests of Keshan, forcing me to circle back to escape from the sea-bordering maze that was Zaporakh. I have said that I knew not what was guiding me. But that would not have been strictly true if I could have given more thought to everything that I knew or suspected.

I never for a moment doubted that I was still under the spell of the Ice Bitch, how-

ever remote she may have been from me in space at that particular time, and that her powers remained so great that I would soon be loping inland, straight as an arrow, toward the habitation of the White Magician. I knew as well that she was implanting in my mind images, however nebulous, that would unfailingly guide me when I left Zaporakh, and passed into the surrounding countryside, if a desert waste without flowering shrubs or animal life of any kind could be thought of as a countryside.

I even knew that the habitation I sought would be of stone, a tower perhaps on an almost featureless plain, or some rock-walled chamber deep underground.

I was sure that Ythillin's guidance would not fail me. Had she not come to me out of the sea, swimming up out of the depths, awesome in her beauty, when I had come close to perishing, saying things that had made me think of her, once again, as both bitch, and the goddess she had proclaimed herself to be? So sure was I that if she had chosen to preserve me then, when my eyes had been clouding in death, her purpose in guiding me now would remain steadfast.

Exactly what that purpose was I did not know—only that meeting and talking with the White Magician was as important to her as it had now become to me.

And that was why I endured with patience retracing my course a dozen times within the boundaries of Zaporakh, knowing I would soon be on its outskirts and loping onward until its white towers, silvered by moonlight, became a receding blur in the distance.

But that, too, proved no more than a mind's gaze image, for when once Zaporakh was actually behind me and the desert waste stretched out before me with only a few scattered boulders arising, as far as my eyes could see, in a monotonous expanse of sand, my urge to make haste was so great that I did not turn to glance back until the city had vanished from view.

The horizon ahead seemed to blend

with the plain in a featureless glimmering, but a vast cliff wall soon appeared in the distance as I continued on. When I drew near to it I saw that the rock had been hollowed out to create a tunnel-like cave in direct line with my approach. It appeared to be lighted from deep within by a dull, reddish glow that seeped out upon the plain, forming a luminous, blood-red figure of a configuration I had never seen before.

Its half-triangular, half-circular shape made me feel for an instant it might be a sorcerer's talisman in luminous form which it would be dangerous for me to cross. But nothing happened as I passed through it and entered the cave.

It was a very large cave and for a moment my wolfish eyes saw only a number of vague shadow-shapes that seemed to be leaping up and down.

Then the light seemed to grow a little brighter and I saw—

I had split the skulls of many enemies. I had sliced off their arms and legs and plunged my sword deep into their vitals. I had eviscerated them by slicing downward from their chests to their groins, sending them crashing with a wolf's merciless howl.

But the skeletons that dangled from the walls impaled on iron hooks had endured mutilations that would have made anyone less capable than I was of surmounting all fear back away quickly and go fleeing from the cave, for what had happened to intruders in the past could happen again, and seemed infinitely more akin to black sorcery than white.

For an instant the skeletons seemed clothed once more in human flesh as they swayed back and forth with the light playing over them. In the red gleaming it was as if they were still being ripped and torn assunder in a hundred hideous ways, for enough flesh still adhered to the bones to make it clear that what had been done to them had seldom been duplicated. No, not even by the dwarfed human ghouls, cannibals all, that crowded around campfires in far Keshan, and muttered and mumbled low, as they tossed into campfires, one by one, every sliced-off part of what had once been a man.

He came toward me out of the shadows, the hairiest creature on two legs I had ever seen, with the features and carriage of a man. His chest, which was barrel-shaped, was covered with hair so thick it seemed almost furlike, and his huge, muscular arms would have made an ape feel an instant kinship, despite the slight difference between human hair, however thick, and the body covering of an ape.

"Don't let my small trophy collection alarm you," he said, without preamble and in a surprisingly soft-spoken voice. "Those were Ythillin's enemies—and mine. It is necessary to be harsh in dealing with men whose every instinct is hostile. It serves as a warning; it keeps rumors flying in all

directions over land and sea, and in every crevice there are deadly vipers who must be discouraged from venturing forth."

He paused an instant, then went on quickly. "Ythillin has assured me you seek my aid as a friend. And although I am entirely human I have only the warmest of friendly feelings toward wolves and their kith and kin."

He nodded and his lips split in a toothless grin. "You have no doubt heard that I am myself part beast and often turn into one and run savagely through the night. But that is wholly untrue. I am a magician and a magician can transform himself in outward appearance in any way that suits his fancy. But that outward appearance is an illusion which exists solely in the eyes of the beholder. It would not mean that I would cease to be as I am now, even if I seemed to transform myself into a crocodile, which I could easily accomplish at this moment, right before your eyes."

I spoke then for the first time, but I hardly recognized the half-wolf sounds that came from my lips until, with a supreme effort, I found myself forming words that I felt would be comprehensible to him. Or was I mistaken? He seemed to understand what I was trying to say before I regained my mastery of the human tongue.

"I do not need to transform myself in any way," I said. "In your eyes or the eyes of others. I am far more of a wolf than a man and the men and women who know me find that out quickly enough, with no need of magic to create meaningless illusion."

"You have always thought of yourself as a wolf," he said. "And that is understandable. You were raised by wolves, and it was as a wolf you watched your own mother being torn apart by wolves. But that is an illusion in your mind. I think it comes and goes. I am sure you know at times that I speak only the truth, painful as it may be for you to confess your human kinship, even to yourself."

I said nothing, for his words were as salt on a wound that bled.

"What if I made you a true wolf?" he said. "In every fiber of your being, whenever you wished to become one? Then you would become what no man could ever be, whenever the need arose for you to join forces with and secure the aid of all of the great powers that are far older than Man, and can only communicate with those who share their primal impulses, both on earth and in the gulfs between the stars. In the vastness of those cosmic gulfs there is a sharing and a kinship. Yes, even with wolves who run savagely through the night in the full of the moon."

"You could make me—"

"A true wolf," he reiterated, before I could go on. "It is within my power to bestow upon you the priceless gift of Lycanthropy. There are only a few words that you must say. They would be dangerous ones for me, but not for you. Ythillin will

protect me when I utter them, as I must, and I will not be changed in any way. But at any other time—

"No matter. My safety is assured, and for you the transformation will take only a moment or two and will last as long as you wish it to endure. Then, whenever you so desire, you may regain your human form, simply by repeating the words in reverse. You need finger no talisman. You need take no magic brew. I will see to all of that, with Ythillin's aid."

"Is that her wish?" I asked. "That cold and merciless—"

"No, no, you do her an injustice," he said. "In the depths of her mind she is attracted to you. But all amorousness she puts aside when she has some great purpose in mind that even I have not fully fathomed."

"There may be truth in what you say," I told him. "Very well. Tell me the words that I must speak—"

"It is not as simple as that," he said. "I must go into a trance first and summon all of my inner strength to make the words truly magical. And I must summon as well Ythillin's now distant presence to aid me."

"Distant?" I asked. "It was almost as if I heard her voice guiding me to you."

"Her guiding presence was no more than an aura to which she had given instructions," he replied. "It was implanted in your mind that last time you saw her. I will still need more of her assistance."

He was staring at me very steadily, and his way of moving his arms when he spoke was, I suddenly realized, no more abrupt than the quick responses which came from his lips when he saw I was troubled by some still unspoken thoughts.

"You are telling yourself that no one would bestow a priceless gift and expect nothing in return," he said. "You would regard with mistrust anyone whose generosity exceeded all bounds in that respect, and your mistrust would be justified. But the favor I shall ask of you is a small one, as favors go. Have you ever heard of Lamarin?"

I shook my head, puzzled.

"Lamarin the Invincible," he said. "He is coming down from the North to lay waste to the coastal plains and bind into slavery everyone lucky enough to survive his barbarous onslaught. Or perhaps I should say, unlucky enough. But he will destroy me through nights and days of slow torture, because we were in conflict once and he bears me an undying enmity."

He paused an instant, still staring at me steadily. "He leads a might army of thousands of heavily armed men," he went on slowly. "But he always rides ahead of his legions, a full league ahead to establish his recklessness and courage, in the eyes of all men everywhere. He is like a savage child in his self-love, but not like a child otherwise. Destroy him and his legions will scatter in panic and despair, since they worship him

as a god."

"Although I have never heard of him," I said, "he must be brave beyond most men to take so great a risk. To ride alone when men of every breed—pirates and human flesh eaters who would just as soon kill as look at you, merchants who would kill as readily to protect their wares from the rapacity of an invading army, tavern roisterers with long, sharp knives who will go out into the desert at night by twos and threes to waylay any stranger to gain the price of one more drink—"

"You have never before seen such a man," the White Magician said before I could finish. "He is huge of girth and well over seven feet in height, protected both by the magic spells known to his people, and armor forged by the most skillful of weapon makers. He bears me, as I have said, an enmity that would make him take delight in seeing me impaled above the ramparts of Zaporakh, dangling from an iron spike."

"Whether the favor be a large or small one," I said, "I promise you that I will hold it a small enough recompense for the gift of Lycanthropy."

He looked pleased. "That is all that I could ask."

If his motions had seemed abrupt before, they were more so now, for without saying another word he sat down upon the floor of the cave and folded his legs in front of him.

I watched him closely as he sat cross-legged on the floor, no longer staring at me, the fur cape that hung from his shoulders—it was fastened in the middle of his chest by a jeweled clasp of intricate design—seeming almost to blend with the hairiness of his unclothed arms and legs and the bulging expanse of wrinkled gray flesh in the region of his navel. Not once did he lower his eyes in contemplation to where he had been cut at birth from his mother, as did the shaven-headed priests of Nemedi, but stared straight ahead into vacancy.

It was not the first time I had seen a man pass into a deep trance through his own willing. It has been said that such states can be dangerous and that a journey undertaken in the dark of the mind may turn the body corpse-like and stop its breathing.

I have never seen anyone, man or woman go mad or die in convulsions on awakening from such a trance. But occurrences of that nature have been reported too often to be thought of as fabrications.

But it was not that so much as what he had told me about the power that could be gained from such an inward journey that I chose to dwell on now, since no other possible outcome was of such vital and immediate concern to me.

I had no great knowledge of magic. But that a few spoken words or a simple hexagram traced in the sand after the undertaking of such a journey could shatter the swords of a thousand advancing warriors and send them into the wildest kind of

battle disarray I had once confirmed with my own eyes, though the magician who had wrought that spell had been unknown to me.

As the memory of what had happened on that never-to-be-forgotten day came sweeping back into my mind I did something I was later to regret. I detached Genseric's sword and my new weapon arm with its screw-onable hook, turned about and set both down a short distance from me.

I had remembered something else that it might have been better not to have recalled, or to have blotted from my mind with a deliberate effort of will. When an act of magic is about to be performed, whether for good or ill, it was though wise not to tempt fate by arming one's self with a deadly weapon.

Sorcery I had never feared, as men do, or allowed it to stay my hand in battle, even though I had seen with my own eyes a thousand swords shattered and the weapon wielders destroyed. but I had been told, many times, by men familiar with the darkest secrets of sorcery, that a flashing sword in a human hand invites destruction. Genseric's deadly blade and my new arm

my mind and wanted me to put my new weapon arm aside. I was firmly convinced it would have been a mistake to trust him completely as far as the promise he had made and I had made to him in return. But not to have trusted him at all seemed unwise also, for Lycanthropy was a gift which he alone, with Ythillin's aid, could bestow. It was a gift to be prized, for once I possessed it I might even find a way to rescue Shanara, my lost love and restore her to my arms, after I had fulfilled my promise to him.

I was still watching the White Magician closely and suddenly his expression became less vacant. His nostrils quivered, as if like an animal excited by a strange and unfamiliar scent, his inward journey had aroused in him an emotion which, even in his trancelike state, was mirrored in his features.

I, too, had known such excitement when my wolfish instincts had taken complete possession of me, and even so small a thing as a faint odor had made me sniff the air and grind my teeth in a frenzy of anticipation.

Just between sleeping and waking I have traveled great distances, across gray

you understand?"

I nodded, impatient for him to go on, but knowing that I must not let my attention stray for an instant from what he felt he must tell me.

He did not speak again for a full minute, as if he wanted me to know that he was aware of my impatience, and was relieved that I had made no attempt to interrupt him by asking questions.

"The words are quite simple ones," he said, finally. "They are in a tongue unknown to you, but that is of no importance. They are harsh, short words without sibilants, and if you can say, "Tit tat," you can say them also. It does not matter if you cannot speak them exactly as I am about to do. They are so laden with magic now that even if you spoke them crudely and stammeringly the Lycanthropic transformation would start instantly.

"As I have said before, Ythillin has made certain that I will be protected when I utter them. If she had not done so, I, too, would become a wolf."

"You would have me speak them now?"

He shook his head. "That is the last thing that I or Ythillin would want you to do," he said. "You must leave this cave as you are now, if you are to keep the promise you made me, and what she may later ask of you, for she has earned your gratitude. You will know when the right time comes. It will be when you see Lamaril riding alone in the desert . . ."

"But if I do not speak the words after you—"

"You must memorize them," he said, cutting me short. "Simply listen attentively. Four words, no more—all of one and two syllables. I will speak them slowly."

"My memory—"

Again he cut me short. "They will be deeply engraved on your memory the instant you hear them. You will never forget them. That, too, is part of the magic."

He waited, but when I said nothing went on quickly: "You must banish from your thoughts the widely held but mistaken belief that Lycanthropy must await the rising of the moon or a change in its phases as it passes from crescent to round. You may repeat the words at any time, whenever you wish the transformation to occur. And when you repeat them in reverse, the last word first, you will regain your human form as swiftly as you fell to all fours. Just listen now. I ask no more."

He drew himself up to his full height and what I had thought might be incredible words seemed as commonplace as the gibberish of some drunken reveler struggling homeward in the night.

I memorized the words the instant he fell silent, repeating them three or four times in my mind and taking care to guard against so much as moving my lips. The faintest of murmurs might have escaped me, and tight-lipped silence was, I felt, the only absolute safeguard.

Lycanthropy was a gift which he alone, with Ythillin's aid, could bestow.

were both more a part of me than any ordinary weapon, though I could detach them at will. Wisdom and fearlessness in battle are things apart, and I saw no reason to abandon all caution in the presence of a White Magician who practiced black magic as well, as the skeletons that dangled on the cave wall had made abundantly clear.

I knew that I could regain my weapon arm quickly enough should the need arise. Was I matching my wolf cunning against a man who had promised me a gift it seemed well within his power to bestow? I did not know, could not be sure. A wolf as well as a man does things at times that are foolish and unwise, but to abandon all caution is a greater risk.

There was more to it than that. If any transformation was to take place in me, if the gift of Lycanthropy was a reality, it might well have been better if I had experienced the change nude. But an artificial limb that served as a weapon might prove a handicap indeed. How could I make use of it as a true wolf? And would it not delay and handicap such a change?

It was almost as if the seated figure facing me, in the depths of his trance, knew the strange conflict that was taking place in

wastes and frozen tundras, for dreams and the state into which he had passed were alike in many ways and I had no way of knowing how long his trance would last.

I only knew I experienced no surprise when it was over, in as short a time as it would have taken me to cross to the opposite wall of the cave and return again to where he was sitting.

He got to his feet slowly, drawing his fur cape more firmly around him, and looked at me with no trace of agitation in his gaze. I knew at once that he had not failed to complete the task he had set himself before sinking into a trance, for there can be no mistaking the difference—in calmness and assurance—between a man who has succeeded in a difficult task and one who has failed.

I thought for a moment he was going to speak the words then and there, but he took a slow step backwards, and continued to look at me, very thoughtfully now.

"We must both be careful to avoid mistakes," he said. "There are spells that are not easy to cast, simple as they may seem in superficial ways. The slightest mistake in what must be done can have dangerous, even fatal consequences. Do

I had lowered my eyes for an instant to avoid the slightest distraction and was only aware that a sudden shuffling sound had replaced the White Magician's harsh breathing.

I thought he had simply taken a few more steps backward, as a man will often do when he has been standing close to someone with an exacting task completed. Alert as I am to small sounds ordinarily I gave it no heed until the harsh breathing began again with something chillingly different about it. It seemed more like a panting.

I looked up abruptly then, and saw that there was no longer a human figure facing me. A huge furry shape with pointed ears, bared teeth and savagely gleaming eyes was backing slowly away from me, saliva dripping from its black-rimmed jaws.

It was backing away, I knew instantly, only far enough to enable it to hurl itself straight at me in a flying leap and bear me to the floor of the cave with the rapacious howling of a hunger-maddened wolf. A gigantic wolf, the largest I have ever seen or gone loping with through forests of the night, feeling myself to be more than the equal in strength of the breed that had nurtured me and claimed me as their own. But never before had I set eyes on a wolf such as this.

In two or three more seconds, at most, I was sure that the monstrous beast would be at my throat. Not only was it between me and the weapon arm I had made the mistake of detaching but it was certain to leap the instant I moved in that direction, or in any direction. If I had been cursed with human stupidity at its worst, I might have been foolish enough to believe otherwise. But I was not so cursed.

There was a long pikestaff hanging on the wall within reach of my hand, with shreds of blackened flesh still clinging to its pointed iron head, which was two-thirds unsheathed.

I ripped the weapon down just as the great beast leapt and struck out at him as he came hurtling toward me. I struck out with all my strength and the point of the terrible blade pierced him in the eye and passed deep into his skull with a bone-splintering crunch.

He rose on his hindlimbs, clawing at the air and I tugged at the weapon till it came loose, leapt backwards and stabbed him twice, the second thrust carrying the blade so deep into his vitals that the entire weapon was torn from my clasp and carried with him as he thudded to the floor of the cave.

Shaken a little by the suddenness of his leap, but otherwise as calm as I always remained when a killing went smoothly and without injury to myself and the pure joy of slaying was kept within bounds by circumstances of an unusual nature, I watched the great beast become a man again.

The White Magician's body was twisted in a half-loop and became continuously more twisted as he thrashed up and down, tearing frenziedly at his chest in a futile effort to dislodge the iron shaft that had impaled him. The gray wolf tail had shriveled and vanished and his animal hairiness had taken only a moment longer to become once more a human hairiness, so encrimsoned where it was most dense that his chest seemed covered with tiny, threadlike blood worms from a tidal pool as the dark wetness swelled and spread.

Suddenly a convulsive trembling seized him, and he arched himself twice, the long wolf snout, already greatly shortened, turning slowly into a human nose and a spreading flatness that was quickly transformed into the other lineaments.

For the barest instant, just before he flattened out on the cave floor and lay still, with a thin trickle of blood running from his mouth, he trained on me a look which made me remember the times when a killing rage had overcome me and I had felt myself to be driven by forces over which I had no control. At such times I had felt myself to be wholly a wolf and yet, when the madness passed, a strange, almost tormenting doubt had taken hold of me, although I could still have killed in a totally remorseless way, unshaken by the gushing forth of an adversary's blood or the dismemberment of his limbs.

But not to be completely sure of anything, to be torn by uncertainty as to what the totally unexpected might mean was like being caught in a raging flood at the brink of a precipice, with no rocks or overhanging boughs to cling to as the torrent rushed on.

I had spoken the transforming words only in my mind. My lips had not moved. It was the White Wizard who had spoken them aloud, after assuring me, more than once, that his instructional utterance would be of no danger to himself. If he had wanted to destroy me from the first could he not have done so without deceiving me in so contrived and complicated a way? A single blow while my back was turned would have felled me, or a sword-thrust the instant I was inside the cave.

Had the Ice Bitch deceived and betrayed him with a false promise? Had she *wanted* him to become a wolf, knowing that no counter spell she could cast in advance would stop the Lycanthropic change when once he had spoken the words?

Had she wanted him to leap upon me and tear out my throat? Or to slay himself, knowing that if I attacked him with a pikestaff it would be the same as if he had chosen to die by impaling himself upon it? Perhaps she had been certain, with her perceptive powers, that I would do exactly that, since in an act of folly I had detached my new arm and set it down a short distance from me.

The blade of a pikestaff could grind and tear and rend as a sword could not, rupturing and mangling the vital organs in an even more savage way. It is thought that a stake, driven through the heart of a vampire, can put an end to his nightly wanderings forever. Might not the mangling inflicted by a pikestaff destroy the magical powers of a sorcerer in much the same way,

Had the Ice Bitch deceived and betrayed him with a false promise?

denying him the slightest chance of defeating death? Had he earned the Ice Bitch's undying hatred in some way unknown to me, and brought that kind of retribution upon himself? Might it not be possible that such a retribution could only be accomplished through Lycanthropy? A werewolf, like a vampire, was an unnatural creature and if slain in his transformed state might well remain forever dead. It would matter not at all if he regained his human form again before all the breath left his body. He would crumble into dust and never rise again.

They were wild thoughts, perhaps wholly untrue, and I put them from me. I was only sure of one thing. I was in the deadliest kind of danger as long as I remained in the cave. I walked quickly to where my new weapon arm was lying, picked it up and re-attached it. Upon sheathing Genseric's sword, I passed out into the night.

The desert which stretched out before me was still silvery with moonlight. Miles upon miles of nothing but sand, with only a few scattered boulders to break its monotony from the cave to an horizon so distant that it seemed to blend with a wilderness of stars.

I began to walk, swaying a little, still assailed by doubts, but determined not to falter or turn back toward the coast. If the slumped, lifeless figure I had left lying in the red-lit cave had spoken the truth I now had the gift of Lycanthropy and was following some course that was too predetermined to alter in any way. Knowing that I could become a wolf in outward form was more important to me than anything else, and there was no weapon, however miraculous, I would have traded for a gift so priceless. I was now walking erect like a man, but for the moment walking seemed, for some strange reason, easier than loping. Perhaps it was because I was more contemptuous of

men than ever before, and could adopt their ways for purposes of convenience without any loss of my wolf pridefulness.

For a long time I continued on over the gray waste, feeling a need simply to keep walking, in search of a figure I felt I would eventually encounter if I did not abandon all thought of pursuing a course I no more than obscurely understood. I only knew that the Ice Bitch was still guiding me, and her guidance was not lacking in purpose. Even if that purpose was cold and remorseless and linked with acts of betrayal, I could not believe she actually sought my destruction. The prophecy she had made to me on our first meeting had angered me, almost beyond endurance, for she had told me that danger and strife would be mine for all the years of my life, and I would never find peace and my years would be few in number.

But she had also made it plain that she had no wish to side with my enemies and that it would be my destiny to save a civilization, in fact all civilization, in some crucial future conflict. Hence I had no choice but to follow her guidance cautiously, for I was in a new land, a strange land, and a wolf without allies in such a land would be certain to find his survival endangered.

I lost track of time as I continued on over the desert. I only know that the minutes lengthened into hours and that the present darkness was replaced by the brightness of another sunrise and then by the coming of another night, with the moonlight flooding down.

He came into view at first as no more than a jogging dot on the far horizon. But swiftly the dot grew larger and became a mounted human figure, crossing the plain in my direction, the moonlight glimmering on his breastshield and helmet.

His mount alone was astonishing, for he rode a creature I had never set eyes on before, striped like a zebra, and with the general aspect of a horse. But its head was reptilian and flattened, and kept bobbing to the right and left as it carried him swiftly across the plain. I had heard of such creatures, mythical beasts of legend from far northern lands, but such accounts I had never taken seriously. Magic can work strange miracles, and I was almost sure that the head of the beast was illusionary, created by some sorcerer's spell, the better to strike terror in the eyes of a beholder when Lamaril the Invincible rode coastward ahead of his legions and entirely alone, as the White Magician had informed me was his wont.

As he drew nearer everything the White Magician had told me about him was fully confirmed. He was the hugest man I had ever seen, apart from actual giants, who are ill-proportioned and ungainly of aspect. He had the look of a proud warrior whose every sinew had been strengthened by battle, and he bore himself like some le-

gendary prince whose right to command had not been questioned from birth, even when he had been no more than an infant mewling and plucking in his nurse's arms.

His helmet and breastshield were of intricate design, but the sword he carried was without ornamentation of any kind, a naked blade, long and sharp, which he held aloft in his hand as he rode, as if his decimations had already begun. Or perhaps as a warning to any desert ghoul mad enough to leap from behind a boulder in a wild attempt to bring him down.

His sudden appearance on the desert rim had taken me by surprise and a decision I might have made earlier I was forced to make at once. How binding was the promise I had made to the White Magician now that he was dead, and the slaying of Lamaril could mean nothing to him?

How binding when I knew so little as to why he had perished and the part the Ice Bitch might have played in his destruction? The answer came quick and certain. Even if the Ice Bitch had betrayed us both for purposes of her own, the pledge would still have to be kept. Otherwise I would know nothing. The gift of Lycanthropy was in some way linked to my destiny, and some instinct told me that, for good or ill, I must now pursue that destiny to the utmost. It would have been dangerous to do otherwise, for the thread of one's destiny can seldom be cut and I lacked all positive knowledge as to the wisdom of attempting it.

I removed my new arm for the second time, and set it down along with Genseric's blade on the sand. I stood very straight for a moment, precisely as the White Wizard had done before pronouncing the four words that had brought destruction upon him. I pronounced them slowly and clearly.

For a moment nothing happened. Then, when I looked down over myself, I saw that my body had begun to lengthen and change shape, becoming much narrower from my chest to my hips.

Coarse white hair had started to appear on my torso and thighs, and it spread so quickly that even before I dropped to all fours I knew that my clothes had disappeared as my new arm might possibly have done if I had not taken it off. I gave it hardly a thought, for it was well in accord with what has been said about the Lycanthropic change. Garments vanish in some strange way, and regain their substance when the need for them returns. I only knew as I bounded forward across the plain that the howl that came from my throat was more savage than it had ever been before, and my jaws had become so completely the jaws of a wolf that the clash of my teeth jerked my head to right and left and streaked the sand with a whitish froth.

Lamaril's mount was less than eighty feet distant from me now, but he had seemingly not seen me. He was staring

straight ahead with a preoccupied air, as if meditating on his coming conquests.

Without waiting for him to come any nearer I loped out across the sand directly in his path, so swiftly that when his vision centered on me it was too late for him to do anything but rein in his mount and raise his great sword in self-defense. He had need for such defense, for in another moment I had left the ground and was leaping straight for his throat.

It was a sudden flash of moonlight on his sword that saved him. It was too late for him to have run me through but the flash so distorted his aim that the sword struck me flatside on the right flank, hurling me to the sand.

He dismounted instantly, with a bellow of rage so loud that it echoed back from some distant crag or cave, and let his mount gallop on. He faced me again with his sword upraised, advancing upon me with a string of oaths in a language unknown to me. I knew they were oaths by the fierce look in his eyes and the rigid set of his jaw.

His hugeness alone would have cowered most men, formidably armed as he was, but hugeness in a figure as vulnerable as a man means nothing to a wolf.

It was only his reputed skill at swordplay, which the White Wizard had extolled which made me cautious for an instant and kept me from leaping straight at him again.

I circled about him instead, so swiftly that twice he lunged at me and missed. My chance came at last, when he turned for the barest instant to determine the source of what was probably no more than an imagined sound at his back or one made by the wind ruffling the sand.

I leapt at his right leg, sank my teeth into it, and tore and ripped at the flesh until he began to scream, his sword falling to the sand. It was a pitiful thing to hear such a scream coming from a man of fabled and heroic mold. But I showed him no mercy and I am sure he expected none.

I did not stop with his leg and went on and on with the slaughter, until the sand about him was darkly sodden and glistening, and his throat torn out.

I turned abruptly, rejoicing in what I saw and not in any way sickened by it, as a man might well have been. I turned because regaining my human form had suddenly become of vital concern to me. I had to know if the Lycanthropic transformation could be reversed at will, as the White Magician had said. If not, if he had lied to me, the new land at which I had arrived might prove hostile and dangerous to such an extent that I could not hope to survive for long with my belly hugging the ground and wolf cries coming from my throat.

A stout warrior in human form may be hated and feared, but a wolf running through the night is looked upon as ferocity incarnate, and becomes an instant target for hurled javelins and poison-tipped ar-

rows.

I went loping back across the sand to where I had left my weapons and in my haste to get arm and sword securely in my clasp again I spoke the words in reverse the instant I came in sight of them.

More swiftly than I could have anticipated I found myself arising to an almost upright position. I had no doubt that I remained for a moment longer almost entirely a wolf in bodily form, still half-crouching on my haunches. But the change that was making me rise was accompanied by a lessening of the fur on my back and thighs. I could distinctly feel the loss of its heaviness, and there was a faint rustling sound as the skin beneath became enveloped in the slight tightness of a returning garment. It was as if the substance of my clothing had dissolved and been held in suspension by magic, hovering over me all the while like an aura. It puzzled me less when I remembered how ice could turn into moist air, and then become ice again.

The instant I had arisen to full human height my new arm seemed almost to leap into my hand. I had no clear recollection of even bending and picking it up, but I must have done so. As I stared down at it, swaying a little, a voice spoke to me in the wind-swept, moon-brightened waste. From whence it came I did not know, only that it was clear and bell-like, as if the Ice Bitch had broken through all barriers of space and time to bring me a message that was straining her powers to the utmost. A tinkling accompanied the syllables of her speech, as if millions of tiny ice crystals were swirling around and around inside a jar of glass as large as the earth, dissolving, reforming and beating against the glass until it became resonant with the faintest of musical sounds.

"You have done well," the voice said. "It is only with your human form cast off, only with the great gift of Lycanthropy yours to summon at will . . . that you can be sure of triumph in the struggles which must still be waged, against enemies more fearsome than any you have yet met. Blood must flow freely, for the danger is great that all life will otherwise vanish from the earth.

"You have slain many times before without pity and without remorse. But just thinking of yourself as a wolf in human form was not enough. What is true of wolves is just as true of a lion or a bear or some small furry creature of the wild that must slay to survive. They alone can draw strength from the great Old Ones, who sway in the timeless winds that blow cold upon us from the depths of space. The Old Ones have not yet awakened and still lie dreaming, and they sway in a way that men would think mindless, for Man can possess no knowledge of what that kind of mindlessness can mean. They are far more ancient, stronger, wiser than the Ice Gods, whose first daughter I am, in ways that would be incomprehensible to Man. Only when you run savagely

through the night as a true wolf will their still half-somnolent strength flow into you, for men cannot communicate with them except in fugitive dreams, vague and terrifying, which they blot from their minds on awakening, in dread of going mad.

"A day will come when the Old Ones will awaken and earth will quake with their unchained rage, for they were cast into outer darkness by an accident of Time. But that day is far in the future and it would be unwise to dwell upon it now, for there is no certainty that the earth will someday be destroyed. It is enough to know that Yog-Sothoth and ocean-dreaming Cthulhu can strengthen you now as you run through the night as a true wolf, and that if you strain your ears you can hear the far-off baying of the Hounds of Tindalos."

In all of my wanderings I had never heard anyone speak of such gods. But it was well in accord with what she had said. There were gods so fearsome that men blotted all knowledge of them from their minds, lest madness overtake them.

Strangely enough, it was a matter less awesome but of more immediate importance to me that made me raise my own voice in sudden anger and fierce protest.

"Why did you betray the White Magician?" I asked. "Was it necessary for him to be transformed into a true wolf and be slain by me? Did he lie when he told me that he could speak the transforming words without endangering himself in any way? Did you not promise him he would be protected by the powerful magic you helped him summon to his aid in the deep trance into which he passed. Did you secretly hate him and wish him to be destroyed?"

"How can you hate a miserable worm?" she replied. "And what are promises given to a worm? He was a wretched, deceitful creature, willing to aid me only to gain my favor, in the hope of draining away some of my magical powers to his own advantage. His destruction was of no importance. It was all part of the testing I wished you to undergo, to make sure the gift of Lycanthropy would be worthily bestowed.

"In human form you slew a monstrous beast, instantly alert to the peril you were in, quick to seize a weapon that served you well. Then, as a true wolf, you slew again, and there was no more formidable warrior-chieftain in all of this new land than Lamarin the Invincible. You did well to follow my guidance and in your slaying you did well also.

"Together we will do better still. Our destinies are now joined and I will henceforth never be wholly absent when you slay again. But your strength will come from the Old Ones as well."

"But there is much that I do not understand," I said. "If the Old Ones you speak of are utterly malignant and hostile, not only to man, but to the guardians of Earth's civilization—yes, even to the Ice Gods—

how can they defend and protect us in the struggle that must still be waged? Are they not both your enemies and mine? And has it not been predicted that I am destined to save Nemedia?"

"Save Nemedia you will," she said, "for now, when you run as a true wolf through the night, the inscrutable powers of the Old Ones will strengthen you in more than one way. Those powers will become so much a part of you that you will now be able to bend them to our purpose."

"To our purpose?" I persisted. "I still do not quite understand. Are you saying the Old Ones can be made to either defend, or destroy us?"

"I may seem to speak in riddles, but it is not really so," Ythillin said. "The Old Ones themselves cannot be swayed by man or wolf. Neither can they be swayed by the Ice Gods. They are beyond and above all such swaying. But their powers can be drawn into every fiber of your being whenever you become a true wolf—inscrutable powers, which even then you will not completely understand, but which can be bent to defend and protect you, and aid you in the destruction of Nemedia's enemies."

Ythillin paused, then went on swiftly, her voice becoming even more persuasive because of its increasing earnestness. "As I have said, even the lowliest of animals, the small furry creatures of the forest, can become more formidable and dangerous through their instinctive use of those powers. In a very primitive way even they can bend such powers to their use in a struggle for survival."

"But man, too, is an animal," I said. "Why does he not share with a wolf—"

Before I could say more she answered my incomplete question with a persuasiveness that carried total conviction. Knowing man as I did, there was no need for me to question her further.

"Man's vaunted reason—a pitiful thing, really, a cloak for ignorance—prevents him from bending to his purpose the powers which he does, to some extent, possess. Every living creature can draw strength from the Old Ones in moments of deadly peril.

"A few men, perhaps because of their rapaciousness and barbaric near-madness may go far in making use of such powers, but never as successfully as can a wolf or a tiger. Mentumenen, for instance, has deluded himself into believing that the powers of the Old Ones can be bent to serve the enemies of Nemedia. In his near-madness he even thinks that it is the Old Ones themselves he has summoned to his aid. In the first surmise he is not entirely mistaken. He can bend the powers to some extent but you can defeat him by bending them more strongly in defense. In the second surmise he is entirely mistaken. In both he is now courting defeat and disaster."



**ROUND ROBIN CONTRIBUTORS
THIS ISSUE:**

Brian Lumley, born at Harden County, Durham, England in 1937, is the author of two Arkham House books (**THE CALLER OF THE BLACK** and **BENEATH THE MOORS**). His work has appeared in numerous British magazines as well as (on the States side) **THE ARKHAM COLLECTOR**, **ESCAPE**, **FANTASTIC**, **FANTASY**, **CROSSROADS** and **WEIRDBOOK**.

Frank Belknap Long was recently honored at the 1978 World Fantasy Con with a "Howard Award" for Life Achieve-

ment. Long has often been referred to as the elder statesman of the fantasy domain as he has been involved with practically every stage of its development. His work is popular throughout the world and includes: **THE HOUNDS OF TINDALOS**, **THE HORROR FROM THE HILLS**, **THE RIM OF THE UNKNOWN**, and his recent Arkham House biography of friend **HOWARD PHILLIPS LOVECRAFT: DREAMER ON THE NIGHTSIDE**. In addition to his fiction, Long is a remarkable poet as evidenced by his recent volume **IN MAYAN SPLENDOR** (from Arkham House and illustrated by Stephen Fabian). He also contributed to **OMNIUM-GATHUM**, the 1976 verse anthology published by Stygian Isle Press.

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the latest in the hardcover series of Conan volumes produced by Grant. This volume is illustrated by Michael R. Hague. I've long been in love with the soft pastel, Rackhamish style of Hague's work, but this book is not representative of his talent or style. Anatomy is awkward and harsh. The finesse I've come to expect from Hague is gone. I can only conclude and hope that these illustrations are early efforts. The volume sells for \$15.

The final new volume is **BAZAAR OF THE BIZARRE** by Fritz Leiber. The hardcover book includes three Fafhrd and Gray Mouser tales: the book is illustrated by Stephan Peregrine whose use of striking colors is interesting but whose perspective and anatomy is disturbing.

Further new releases include **ELDRITCH TALES #4** edited by Crispin Burnham (1051 Wellington Rd., Lawrence, Ks. 66044), **SIMBA #2** edited by Cliff Bird (6813 Newcastle Pl., Fort Worth, Tx 76118) and **DREAM DEALERS AND OTHER SHADOWS** by Steve Troyanovich (Florence Tollgate 38-1, Florence, NJ 08518).

ELDRITCH TALES #4 (\$4 postpaid) features fiction, art and verse in the Lovecraftian vein by Kenneth Huff, Steve Eng, Leon Gammell, Franklyn Searight, Llewellyn Cabos, Jim Pianfetti, Ted Pons, Gene Day, Joe West, Ken Raney, Arnold Fenner and many others.

SIMBA #2 (\$4 plus 60¢ postage) includes a nice duo-tone cover by Clyde Caldwell, verse by REH, Egan, Winona Morris Nation, Tevis Clyde Smith, "Conan of the Movies", a synopsis for a never-to-be written Conan novel (planned at one time) by Karl Edward Wagner, and other contributions by de Camp, Poul Anderson, Charles Saunders, Steve Fabian, Harold Preece, Cliff Bird and more (this does include a chapter from the Harold Preece biography of Robert E. Howard).

DREAM DEALERS (\$1.50 plus 25¢ postage) is a verse chapbook by Steve Troyanovich whose work has appeared in FC and elsewhere. Steve was my co-editor for **OMNIUMGATHUM** (published by Stygian Isle Press in 1976) and currently is assisting me with **GIZZLESTINES AND GOBLIN ROSES PREVISITED** (or in truth I am assisting him... he's done 99% of the compilation and editing).

There are dozens of other pubs I should blurb but space does not permit. Maybe next time (though I will sneak in that one of my favorite "reads" is Dick Geis' **SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW**, PO Box, 11408, Portland OR 97211. Why not spend a solid \$1.50 and get a solid mag. In fact subscribe for a year @ \$7.50!).

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this too can be read separately) and could be considered a companion volume. **GENGHIS KHAN** is currently available in paperback with a fine Ken Kelly cover, though the hardcover edition is not that hard to find in the second-hand shops. Together, they make an unparalleled reading treat.

—Stephen Riley.

EMPEROR OF DREAMS: A CLARK ASHTON SMITH BIBLIOGRAPHY compiled by Donald Sidney-Fryer: Donald M. Grant, publisher. 303 pages, \$20.00.

With the publication of **EMPEROR OF DREAMS**, Donald Sidney-Fryer has once again given us what we have become accustomed to expect from his work and indeed, what has long characterized it: scholarship, dedication, and most importantly, insight.

Without question, the leading expert on Clark Ashton Smith, Mr. Sidney-Fryer has tackled the extremely herculean task which his subject rightfully demands with a relish and dedication that will be virtually impossible to surpass.

EMPEROR OF DREAMS is doubly significant. It fills the long and arid void left by the lack of Clark Ashton Smith studies, and it rightfully showcases the many and diverse talents of Donald Sidney-Fryer.

EMPEROR OF DREAMS will be hailed both by the tenaciously devout Smith enthusiasts as well as by those individuals encountering the cosmic aweness of Clark Ashton Smith for the first time.

The work of love that went into the compilation of this book is obvious from the first page forward. The structure and internal framework lend themselves to an easy and no-nonsense exploration of the material.

Other alleged "scholars" of fantasy would do well to examine carefully Mr. Sidney-Fryer's technique and style before contemplating their next "study". He does not "take us around the world" and decorate it with triviality. He goes directly to the heart of the issue: Clark Ashton Smith.

Upon reading the book for the first time, one thing that singularly struck me was the question of *why* it has taken so long for such a work to be published. Indeed, I think this is an issue worthy of closer examination.

There can be no question that Clark Ashton Smith was one of the greatest American poets of this century. However, virtually nobody outside the genre of fantasy can even recognize his name, yet tell you anything about his poetry or style.

If you pick up any standard anthology of American verse, you will not find him represented. If you read any standard work of the directions and influences of con-

temporary American poetics, you will not find him mentioned. Still, he was a far greater troubadour than Ezra Pound or T. S. Eliot.

I think, in part, that Mr. Sidney-Fryer has made an excellent attempt to explain the circumstances leading to this situation. However, it may prove of benefit to state them again.

First and foremost, Clark Ashton Smith was a **POET**. In some instances, the popularity and craftsmanship of his prose have clouded this issue.

Secondly and inseparable from the first, Clark Ashton Smith was an **INDIVIDUALIST**. Now, in the literature of plastic America any combination of poet and individualist is enough to insure your fate. Especially if you are Clark Ashton Smith and refuse to bastardize your poetry for the mainstream mentality.

The other factor involved is the incredible irony of **TIME**. Clark Ashton Smith was so alien to the culture and time that he found himself in that I cannot even think of a clear or precise example to express the confinement he felt. Besides, he said it best himself: "I pass . . . but in this lone and crumbling tower, / Buildd against the burrowing seas of chaos . . ."

Of the many influences upon his development as poet, he is most like his beloved John Keats. There is a shyness, an aloneness within the shadows of these two great voices. At times, it is like the same voice emanating from two separate bodies.

Of the poets most like Smith or associated with similar patterns and philosophical design, Mr. Sidney-Fryer might add one more to his impressive list. That is, the great Russian poet, Aleksandr Blok.

Although it is doubtful whether Smith ever read Blok at all, there is a familiar pattern that binds the two poets and their work.

For Blok, there was the melody and shadows of his **BEAUTIFUL LADY**. For Smith, a cosmic garden of soft perfumes and shadow.

There are many other similarities worthy of exposure, but space here does not permit their exploration.

EMPEROR OF DREAMS is a superior and much needed work. In the negative column I have only two complaints.

The first is with Donald Sidney-Fryer. Mr. Sidney-Fryer is far, far *too* modest. In mentioning the stellar list of poets whose work has been influenced by Clark Ashton Smith, he left out one extremely important and outstanding poet: **HIMSELF**.

Donald Sidney-Fryer was bequeathed the figurative Cloak of Elijah which was handed down from Bierce to Sterling to Smith.

The second complaint concerns the cost of the book. Twenty dollars is excessive. Not because the book is not worth the price, but because most of the people

who might benefit most from its content and subject in all probability might not be able to afford the price.

Thus, I hope that the deluxe hardbound edition will be shortly followed by a more inexpensive paperbound edition to facilitate greater availability of this marvelous work.

Meanwhile, one last suggestion. If you can afford the cost, donate a copy of this work to your local library. If not, write or call a library and urge them to **BUY THIS BOOK!**

—Steve Troyanovich

Continued from Page 7

of falsehood, and the elemental, primal nature found in the more "rough" and violent forms of epic fantasy. Yet I question its use for the sort of commercialism that profits from prurient interests. Pages 28 and 29 focus on Frazetta's discovery of eroticness of women and serpents. Page 30 is hardly a fantasy scene. The last illustration makes use of exceptional shadowing (Fabianesque) that really doesn't conceal anything, *it merely uses subtlety*. The lack of subtlety in much of fantasy, visual and prose, harms it in a great many ways and will eventually lose it some of its readership. In this last matter I am speaking of far more than the use of nudes.

Neither the Fabian/Bok cover nor the portfolio nor the Stewart illo to "Bana-Gui" were planned to "sell issues". They occurred naturally and spontaneously. Fantasy fiction includes a great deal of nudity, maybe for the erotic overtones and maybe because in a more primitive or a more ideal civilization . . . nudity does not conjure impressions of moral depravity or dirt! The nudes were used as the most natural expression via illustration of topics contained within the story (as with Bana-Gui). I will not limit my artists nor will I encourage them to test the bounds of moral propriety.

Riley's backcover was appealingly joyish and fantastically free, as well as reminiscent of some of Easley's uninhibited works.

Steve Riley
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Framingham, MA
01701

FC 13! It's by far your most attractive issue —you're really giving Fenner hot competition. I like the cover, though I'd probably prefer artwork of some sort for this spot. Photographs can depict great things (I have many friends who are pro photogs, including one who works full-time for the Boston *Globe*

newspaper), but it's hard to capture all the intensity of a situation that artwork can. An artist can go beyond the surface of things and do more than merely draw a situation, where a photograph pretty much just captures what was in the viewfinder—the human aspect comes in for composition and darkroom tricks the developer performs. So, as you've guessed I think this feature should be on the inside pages. I like the idea but not on the cover.

The rest of the issue is exceedingly attractive in all aspects—by far your best. Your concern for a quality product and not settling for anything less has led to constant improvements and a degree of professionalism that earlier issues didn't indicate.

The inside front cover is nicely reproduced, but kudos must go to the centerspread. Even though this isn't a fantasy piece, it's a *beautiful* drawing. This is the kind of pencil work I like to do (things for school that never see print), but while I like UMass very much, they're a fine art school and consequently put a lot of emphasis on abstract work and experimentation—very tight, representational drawing such as the centerfold is frowned upon, much to my dismay. I received a "B" in drawing which I feel I didn't earn—I thought I deserved an "A", but I doubt complaining to the instructor would do much to

change the grade. He studied under Hans Hoffmann, one of the New York abstract expressionists, so his preference in drawing lies more with shapes and forms, rather than straight depiction of anything. I started the semester drawing figures very tightly (and somewhat rusty from being out of school for two years) and ended up very loose. I had to work toward the abstract (the teacher pushed us this way) but kept trying to retain some semblance of representationalism and I think this is why I received a "B". However, after loosening up, when I went back to "straight" depiction of objects, the improvement in my realistic pencil drawing was incredible. I wish instructors would leave their personal preferences out of the classroom and help each student toward their own goals—whatever they do best. I've talked with Bob Gould and other artists about this and they tell me not to worry—teachers rarely seem to like a student's most personal expressions, preferring more experimental things, so the important thing is that I try to learn as much as possible while I'm there and then apply it toward my own ends. Gould said most of the time, you graduate from art school and then end up teaching yourself just as much on your own. (Everything I know about commercial art, lettering, and aspects of printing—line shots, halftones, etc.—I

taught myself outside of school. Fine art schools still regard illustration and commercial art with a chilling sense of disdain. All this stems from the break between art and illustration—once considered the same thing—in the early 1900s when abstract art made its entry into this country and blossomed. I have really had to watch my mouth around UMass as far as talking about illustration goes. "When in Rome...") At any rate, the above longwinded lecture is to indicate just how much I appreciated Barbara Stitt's drawing. She's a lucky woman to have such talent and to have instructors who realize this and can encourage and help her to develop it to professional levels.

Paul Allen's column sorting out just what is happening with all of Moorcock's series and heroes will probably be received with wide acclaim. I've heard many people express a desire to see such an article. Paul's letter on the cover for **NIGHT IMAGES** was something I meant to tell you myself, but never got around to. He put it better, anyway.

The art in the issue was uniformly good throughout, though nothing caught my fancy as much as the centerspread. I can see why you'd put a lot of emphasis on the back cover. Too bad you didn't go through with the booklet (though I'm glad it wasn't necessary)—it would have been attractive.

BACK ISSUES STILL AVAILABLE

FANTASY CROSSROADS #10/11 features three chapters of "Ghor, Kin-Slayer" by Robert E. Howard, Karl Edward Wagner and Joseph Payne Brennan, plus contributions by Frazetta, de Camp, Tierney, Fitzpatrick, Vess, Riley, Day, Preece, Smith, Schweitzer, Lumley and many others. 24 copies of the 1200 print run remain @ \$5 each.

FANTASY CROSSROADS #12 features chapters, IV, V and VI of "Ghor, Kin-Slayer" by Richard Tierney, Michael Moorcock and Charles Saunders, plus contributions by Tevis Clyde Smith, Steve Fabian, Cliff Bird, William Hope Hodgson, John Stewart, Paul Allen, Gene Day and more. 21 copies remain of the 700 print run @ \$3 each.

FANTASY CROSSROADS #13 features chapters VII and VIII of "Ghor, Kin-Slayer" by Andrew J. Offutt and Manly Wade Wellman, plus fiction by Kuttner, an extensive article by Paul Allen on Moorcock's *Eternal Champion*, an interview with Tim Underwood on the new **ALWAYS COMES EVENING** edition and verse by Winona Morris Nation, James Garver, Richard Tierney, James Wade, Tevis Clyde Smith,

Edith Ogutsch, Jay Sher, Ruth Eddy, and others. Also art by Steve Fabian, Gene Day, Steve Riley, Jim Pitts, Barbara Stitt, Ken Raney and more. Only 132 of 1350 copies remain in stock @ \$3 each.

FANTASY CROSSROADS #14 features chapters IX and X of the round robin novel by Darrell Schweitzer and A. E. van Vogt, plus fiction by Charles Saunders, Steven G. Mitchell; verse by H. Warner Munn, Hannes Bok (previously unpubbed), Robert E. Howard, Paul Ganley and more; also a Kenneth Smith Nudes Portfolio, and a long letter from Bok. Art by Fabian, Riley, Raney, Huber, Day, Bok, and Stewart. 220 of the 1200 copies remain @ \$3 each.

OMNIUMGATHUM (a verse anthology) features verse by 44 different fantasy poets including Poul Anderson, Eddy C. Bertin, Bok, Nelson S. Bond, John Bredon (Steve Eng), Brennan, Ramsey Campbell, Lucile Coleman, de Camp, Derleth, Cliff Eddy Jr., Hodgson, Robert E. Howard, Frank Belknap Long, HPL, Lumley, Moorcock, H. Warner Munn, Norton, Andrew J. Offutt, Peake, Emil Petaja, Donald S. Fryer, CAS, van Vogt, Wade, Weinbaum, Wellman, Whitehead, Zelazny and more. Most poems are previously unpublished and the volume (64 pages plus covers) is illus-

trated by Fabian, Caldwell, Bok, Easley, Riley, Day, Vess and others. Only 67 of 1000 copies remain in stock @ \$5.

RUNES OF AHRH EIH ECHE (Robert E. Howard) features twenty six letters of correspondence by the late Robert E. Howard. This is the largest collection of Howard letters ever assembled. Several published here for the first time. The booklet also includes two additional letters written by REH's father after his suicide and an illustrated alphabet and covers by Randall Spurgin. Only 149 of the 1000 copies remain in stock @ \$3 each.

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