

# AMRA

II, 60



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IN RE de Camp's query of v2#58 about the prisoner who played a harp with his toes, several readers have advised us he (the harpplayer, not the de Camp) is Gunnar, brother-in-law of Sigurd, all described in the *VOLSUNGA SAGA*.

IF YOU like Amra, you will undoubtedly like *Anduril* as well (maybe more!). Bigger and thicker than Amra, *Anduril* may be had from John Martin, 27 Highland Dr, Bushey, Herts, England, for 30p of Great Britannic money or 1\$ of American. (For 50¢ extra, you get Air Mail.) (Please Take Note, however; we are separate publications, and you really shouldn't order one from the other -- or verse visa either.)

WE STILL plan to reprint early ish of Amra, but we feel we'd better catch up on current publishing for now. Watch this space for details.

OTHER projects by your editorial mob include a hardcover, limited edition of *AL AZIF*, also known as *THE NECRONOMICON* (now available; see p 23, this ish) and forthcoming, a big book of Roy Krenkel artwork and a cookbook for people.

IT IS when there is such an indecently long wait between ish of Amra that we have the most trouble with the Curse; to avoid same, tell us, when you move, from whence and to where you did, complete with ZIP codes.

AND WHILE we are at it; Great Britons, Canadians, & Australians are beseeched to check the addresses on the envelopes this ish came in; and if we are not using your Postal Code, tell us what it is so we can! Please?

FOR THE newcomers amongst you, Be Ye Advised that you can tell when your sub expires from your address label: "grey MOUSER 4-61" means v2#61 is the lastish.

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# Limericks

Wiping blood from his whiskers and  
    moaning,  
A galley-slave once was heard groaning,  
    "Caught a crab with my oar!  
    Knocked the teeth from my jaw!  
I don't know if I'm gumming or Conan!"  
    -- John Brunner

A strapping young centaur named Xillies  
Never let passion give him the willies:  
    When of wenches he tired,  
    Many ponies he sired  
From the ranks of available fillies.  
    -- F C Adams

On numerous alien strands  
Of several different lands  
    King Conan found out  
    Without any doubt  
The devil employs idol hands.  
    -- John Boardman



Prince Vakar may not be too brave  
And sometimes hides out in a cave,  
    Or is humanly frail  
    But I like his tale,  
For, dammit, that's how I'd  
    behave!  
    -- John Boardman

When Stygia suffered a famine  
This fact didn't bother  
    Thoth-Amon:  
    A magical gem  
    Supplied him from  
    Shem  
With hard rolls, cream  
    cheese, and smoked  
    salmon.  
    -- John Boardman



Along learned paths gaily tramping  
And on pseudoscholarship stamping;  
    Atlantis to Thera,  
    Whatever the era,  
Pack up! It's time we're de Camping.  
    -- Lee Burwasser

He's vigorous in the attack,  
With scars on his front, side, and back;  
    But Conan he's not  
    In manner or plot,  
And my only comment is, "Braaak!"  
    -- John Boardman

When Conan an ice-dragon found  
He slew it without spear or hound:  
    Employing the aid  
    Of a lush northern maid;  
He melted the ice; and it drowned.  
    -- John Boardman



# The Gods of the Copybook Headings

Excerpted from the book *RUDYARD KIPLING'S VERSE, INCLUSIVE EDITION*  
Copyright 1919 by Rudyard Kipling  
Published by Doubleday & Company, Inc

As I pass through my incarnations  
in every age and race,  
I make my proper prostrations  
to the Gods of the Market-Place.  
Peering through reverent fingers  
I watch them flourish and fall,  
And the Gods of the Copybook Headings,  
I notice, outlast them all.



We were living in trees when they met us. They showed us each in turn  
That Water would certainly wet us, as Fire would certainly burn;  
But we found them lacking in Uplift, Vision, and Breadth of Mind,  
So we left them to teach the Gorillas while we followed the March of Mankind.

We moved as the Spirit listed. *They* never altered their pace,  
Being neither cloud nor wind-borne like the Gods of the Market-Place;  
But they always caught up with our progress, and presently word would come  
That a tribe had been wiped off its icefield, or the lights had gone out in Rome.

With the Hopes that our World is built on they were utterly out of touch.  
They denied that the Moon was Stilton; they denied she was even Dutch.  
They denied that Wishes were Horses; they denied that a Pig had Wings.  
So we worshipped the Gods of the Market Who promised these beautiful things.





When the Cambrian Measures were forming, They promised perpetual peace.  
They swore, if we gave them our weapons, that the wars of the tribes would cease.  
But when we disarmed They sold us and delivered us bound to our foe,  
And the Gods of the Copybook Headings said: *"Stick to the Devil you know."*

On the first Feminian Sandstones we were promised the Fuller Life  
(Which started by loving our neighbor and ended by loving his wife)  
Till our women had no more children and the men lost reason and faith,  
And the Gods of the Copybook Headings said: *"The Wages of Sin is Death."*

In the Carboniferous Epoch we were promised abundance for all,  
By robbing selected Peter to pay for collective Paul;  
But, though we had plenty of money, there was nothing our money could buy,  
And the Gods of the Copybook Headings said: *"If you don't work you die."*





Then the Gods of the Market tumbled, and their smooth-tongued wizards withdrew,  
And the hearts of the meanest were humbled and began to believe it was true  
That All is not Gold that Glitters, and Two and Two make Four —  
And the Gods of the Copybook Headings limped up to explain it once more.

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As it will be in the future, it was at the birth of Man —  
There are only four things certain since Social Progress began: —  
That the Dog returns to his Vomit and the Sow returns to her Mire,  
And the burnt Fool's bandaged finger goes wabbling back to the Fire;  
And that after this is accomplished, and the brave new world begins  
When all men are paid for existing and no man must pay for his sins,  
As surely as Water will wet us, as surely as Fire will burn,  
The Gods of the Copybook Headings with terror and slaughter return!

*Rudyard Kipling*  
1919



# When Ganders Last in the Barnyard Honk'd

BY VALDIS A AGUSTKALNS

A few months ago I was flying along the Ohio River to Pittsburgh while an active line squall was passing through the valley. The plane bucked vigorously. Half a dozen of my fellow passengers were vomiting, twice that number were praying audibly, and the rest looked to be on the verge of joining one or the other or both groups.

I enjoyed the ride.

Cards and traffic turn me into a raving paranoid, but I find flying a delight. (Waiting around in airports is something else altogether.)

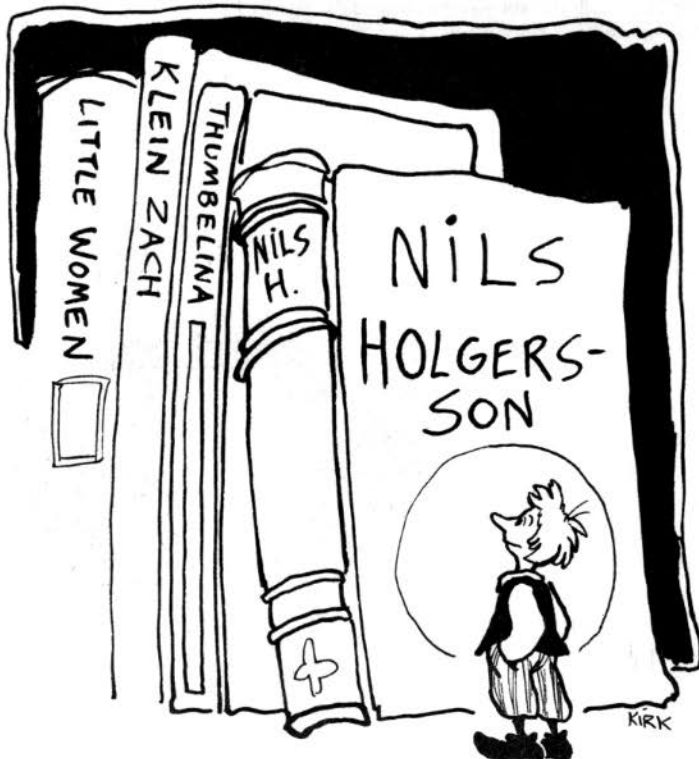
The ride was so rough that the stewardess was fully occupied handing out extra barf bags. Without even a cup of coffee for diversion, I was thrown back onto my own resources and spent most of the trip thinking about the differing effect cars and planes have on my psyche. Flying has to be safer, I concluded. After all, Nils Holgersson survived a trip up and down the length of Sweden riding for the most part on the back of an unreliable, sex-crazed gander. Moreover, the gander lacked previous flying experience while my Allegheny pilot was FAA approved and could be relied to ack on the basis of enlightened self-interest. So as the number of Christians and flutter-tummies on board rose dramatically, I found myself unable to completely repress an intolerant and condescending chuckle at their expense.

Amazing, I thought, really amazing, how books read in childhood can affect one's attitude toward planes and bumpy rides. (Nils Holgersson, in case anyone's wondering, is one of my favorite characters in heroic fantasy from Selma Lagerlöf's book of the same name.) About this time I recalled that reputable literary folk have said -- in court while under oath -- that books have no consequences in real life. An obvious error is that with respect to fear of flying. The popular form of the dogma is "No girl was ever seduced by a book." My small reputation as a Casanova is largely undeserved, so I had no broad base of empirical data to go by, but the second version seemed equally absurd. The entire sequence of thought so pleased me that I started to laugh.

Life takes some strange twists and turns.

My laughter was interpreted as hysteria, and I ended up having quite an interesting conversation with the stewardess until landing duties took her away. Before that I did manage to ascertain, among other things, that she had never heard of Nils Holgersson. Subsequent research has uncovered the fact that she is my no means unique. This is a great pity because Nilş is a swashbuckler of considerable interest, not only with airline stewardesses and their fans but also to other students of the Sacred Writ.

Bibliographies classify the book as a juvenile but that is meaningless category mongering, a publishers' disease. Certainly, NILS HOLGERSSON's first appeal was to the younger readers; and no, children were not any smarter in 1906-1907, when the book first came out, but pro-





fessional writers of the time took them more seriously. These writers appear to have felt that if a writer was not on speaking terms with children, he had no honest claim to an adult audience. This may be a quaint notion in these days of Dick and Jane and bubble-gum music, but it is one which her practice showed Lagerlöf shared. As a result, the main difference between NILS HOLGERS-SON and Miss Lagerlöf's other Nobel-Prize-winning works is the age of the hero.



Nils Holgersson is a 14 year old farm boy and an obnoxious brat. Home alone one Sunday morning, he manages to catch the household elf in a butterfly net and tries to blackmail him. The elf has a pretty short fuse, and Nils gets his just deserts: he is enchanted down to size, about 20 cm full height.

No Conan of a hero, obviously.

Because of the enchantment, he understands the language of the animals; and they understand him. Curiously enough, realism is one of the major virtues of the book. A skeptic might ask what is realistic about a book in which animals talk and a boy is transformed into a creature 20 cm tall. Well, geography, for one. Some twenty percent of the contents is the most superbly sugar coated Swedish geography (or any geography, for that matter) ever published. Miss Lagerlöf's years as a schoolteacher were not entirely wasted, and even today a reader can envy her students for the fun they must have had.

And in any case, the animals talk without any fuss. Naturally, as men do, and to rational purposes. Even more realistic is the author's attitude toward the universe. In this heroic fantasy, as in most of the other good ones, life is not cotton candy fluff. Growing up and surviving involves a measure of suffering, and Miss Lagerlöf does not try to gloss over the fact. Nils is bitterly ashamed at being transformed into an elf-sized midget. He feels that he probably is not even a human being anymore.

A child, who has often had adults tower above him, most likely can identify with Nil's predicament more fully than an adult would be able to, but this is the younger reader's only advantage.

(The Convair landed at Pittsburgh without a jolt, entirely justifying my confidence in a pilot I had never met; and I transferred to a Philadelphia-bound DC-9 with ten minutes to spare. The bad weather had not even kept me from making a tight connection. Less than an hour later I was over Pennsylvania Dutch country and from 20,000 feet looked down on more evidence of the excellence of Miss Lagerlöf's realistic imagination.)

I am fairly certain that she never flew in anything -- the Skeptical Reader who uncovers evidence that she was an avid balloonist will have the Dread Curse of the Untidy Pigeon called down upon him -- but her description of what the earth looks like from gooseback is eminently satisfactory.

During and right after takeoff, Nils is sore afraid; but soon enough, he gets his nerve up, opens his eyes, and looks down. He sees a checkered kerchief of field and forest not much different from southeastern Pennsylvania. Almost immediately he starts trying to

figure out what each colored rectangle represents in terms of his farm background and quickly enough moves on to the business of being a heroic adventurer. The pace is non-stop modern without the least trace of Victorian discursiveness.

Nils' adventures are the main plot line, but they comprise only one of five or six important strands in the tapestry of the book. The unifying theme is the passing of the Old Life. My definition of the Old Life is man before technology, one with nature, living as a hunter or gatherer. Tools and weapons in such context are not technology. Chimps and baboons use them in food gathering probably almost as well as our ancestors did.

No. The first serious technology to separate mankind from nature was agriculture, for agriculture is fundamentally a crude form of biological engineering. Natural forms: plants, animals, and landscapes, are modified for man's convenience. At first the process was almost random. Change of form could not be directed easily and took a lot of time. The illusion that mankind was still integrated into the natural life was maintained.

But of course the farmer and the herder had acquired dominion over nature. The Old Testament is by no means the first document to admit the fact.

Agricultural surpluses made urban life possible.

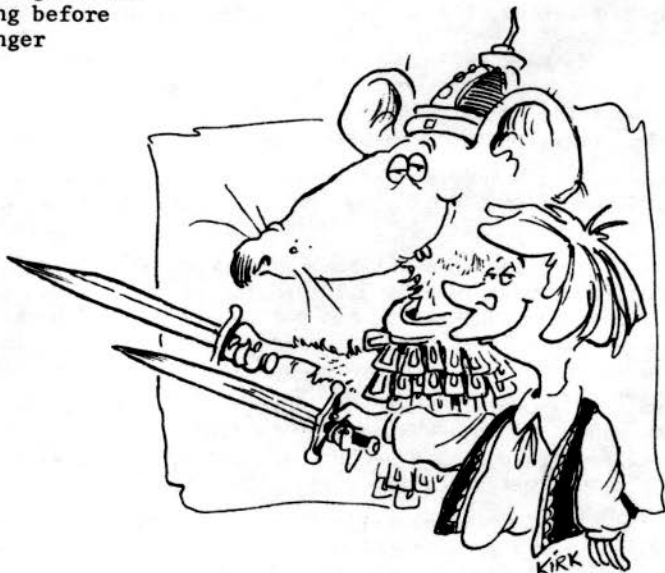
The city is an entirely new environment and creates a need not only for new physical and social technologies to make it liveable but also for new men to live in it. With the birth of the city, the New Life began to squeeze out the Old. The Passing of the Old Life is the principal theme of all heroic fantasy. Conan, for example, starts out as a crude barbarian and ends up as a shrewd and responsible monarch ruling a sophisticated, urbanized realm.

Nils' adventures follow a similar pattern although in a minor key. He is after all not interested in becoming a king. All he wants is to regain his humanity. The farm, the city, the urban environment, all of the New Life has become the natural state of man. Man living the Old Life, as Nils has to live after his encounter with the elf, is scarcely human.

Since he is a small swashbuckler, Nils hath not the conventional tools to aid him in his quest. For example, in helping the native brown rats defend their last castle against an invading army of grey rats early in the book, he can not, as Tim Kirk would have us believe, draw his Conanish sword and turn a gory tide. Rather, he employs a more modern instrument: a flute, once the property of the Pied Piper of Hamelin. Seduced by a song, the grey rats abandon the captured castle.\*

A subtle point (and one currently in the news), I spotted only years after the end of my own military career: Nils does not win the war for the brown rats. He merely returns the conflict to the previous stage of physical conflict. Treachery, which the grey rats used to capture the castle, is maintained as an exclusively human prerogative.

Nils keeps on learning throughout his odyssey. The Old Life is passing before his eyes. The sword will no longer do; but the dirk can at times be useful. Once, for example, he saves the geese he is travelling with by stabbing an otter set onto them by the continuing villain: an outlawed, vindictive, and hilariously funny fox. Another time he dispatches the leader of a band of crows who have kidnapped him so they can use his hands



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\*Your editors must admit to having used a briefer version of this review to elicit the illo from Tim, and to having used the illo to coax a longer review from Valdis, usw.

to open up a sealed pot of silver coins.

As in real life, Nils has his successes and his failures. Soon after saving the castle, he muffs a chance to raise an enchanted Hanseatic city sunken into the sea and learns that sometimes it is best for the dead past to remain buried. The didacticism is not obtrusive.

+ + + + +

All the major characters travel their own version of Nils' journey from wilderness to civilization, but I think the gander's story is the most poignant. He is just your average, young, strut-of-the-barnyard gander. Taunted by the wild geese, he abandons civilization, joins them, and is rewarded: sex and the no longer single gander.

(Miss Lagerlöf, like many writers of her time, is adequate about sex only when it is for the gander. There are some hints of possibilities for Nils and a young lady whose search for her missing father parallels his odyssey, but only for a time after the book ends.)

The gander makes out and at the end of the book returns to the barnyard and domesticity with his wild family. The tale is over before we can be sure, but it is likely that the bulk of his brood will end up at the farmer's market dressed for sale. Such is the end of all wildness. Domesticity is too sweet while it lasts, but the end is no less certain. You have to weigh the costs and benefits. The implied question: Is domesticity worth it? is answered in the affirmative by both Miss Lagerlöf and the gander.

Some elements within contemporary civilization are more doubtful. There is a lot of uninformed and unintelligent nostalgia for the wild in the air these days. Rousseau-freaks would do well to ponder the sad fate of the villainous fox in NILS HOLGERSSON. The readers last see it captured by some farmers and imprisoned in a doghouse. Nils leaves it there remarking that he expects the fox to become a "worthy watch dog on a chain".

Civilization is inexorable.

There is no escaping the New Life.

This is the poignancy of the gander's fate, Nils', Conan's, and ours. And the poor fox has not even had a choice of the kind of domesticity he will have.

+ + + + +

The only character able to escape adulthood and responsibility is the girl who has been looking for her father. She does so by transferring her burdens to him, forcing him to abandon his fling at the Old Life with the Laps. Her quest has cost her brother's life, and her escape is only temporary.

Aspects of the passing of the Old Life are illustrated throughout the book by an interweaving of legends told to or overheard by Nils. The mixing of adventures and legends is deft and entertaining. The Old Life passes in many ways. The legends are a part of the book that keeps growing on me with time, but to discuss them at all properly would take an essay ten times the size of the present one, out of the question for now.

Irwing Howe, a New York intellectual not generally acclaimed for wisdom, recently managed a precise point. "The cruelest thing anyone can do with PORTNOY'S COMPLAINT<sup>†</sup>," he said, "is read it twice." NILS HOLGERSSON is more fun the second or third time around; something new turns up every time.

Translation can strongly influence the effect of a book like NILS. A translator with too much saccharine in his blood, for example, could very easily perpetrate a horrible butchery. About twenty years ago I managed to struggle through a Swedish edition and

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†A book supposedly written for adults.

When Ganders Last in the Barnyard Honk'd



have trusted the Latvian version I own since then. English translations are in circulation but I have not read any and have no idea of their faults or virtues. However, having seen various translations of all kinds of books, I will warn that Sturgeon's Revelation applies and at best only one item in ten is worthy. Readers limited to English will just have to take their chances.

I think the chance is worth taking.

Most heroic fantasy is simply us domesticated ganders indulging in nostalgia for a past that never was. NILS HOLGERSSON is more than that. It engages our sense of the present and future as well.

Even today, every spring and every fall, I look at the V's of wild geese flying overhead very carefully. But I have yet to see an all-white one in the formation. No surprise. The New Life is here, not there, and we are living it.

*Quack*, you may say to this.

My reply is equally simple: *Quack, quack. Honk.* Read the book and see if I'm not right.

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## The Passing of Pope Joan

BY JOHN MYERS MYERS

*When Leo the Fourth, of the Popes that have reigned,  
Was welcomed in Heaven or elsewhere enchained  
But certainly severed from treats and disasters  
Pertaining to earth,  
The prelates replacing the pastor of pastors  
Concurred in the worth  
Of one proclaimed John, for the Papacy's throne;  
In truth, though, a woman remote from a crone.*

*Afoot, as her sponsors were speedy to know  
Was livelier spice than to kiss the Pope's toe;  
For once well ensconced in the Lateran Palace  
God's vicar on earth  
Was zealous to borrow from any the phallus  
Begrudged her at birth.  
So nightly a prelate extended a loan  
Portending a harvest where some one had sown.*

*Historians argue that hardly before  
Had any approved ecumenical whore,  
While stately leading a sacred procession  
Collapsed to the earth  
And mustered the infant concealed by repression  
Of fertilized girth;  
The hailers of "Papa!" were hushed as a stone  
On finding their Pontiff maternity-prone.*

*Enshriners of relics, though wondrous their scope,  
Have strangely neglected a piece of the Pope  
Who once kept the Curial princes as jolly  
As any on earth,  
Though since, in the Holiness See, melancholy  
Has manacled mirth:  
Today, at the Vatican, cardinals moan  
Careers out of joint with the joys of Pope Joan.*

The above lines form a reasonably close rendering of the prose account of the female pontiff -- a mark for modern champions of Woman's Lib to shoot at, by the way -- included in S (for Sabine) Baring-Gould's *CURIOUS MYTHS OF THE MIDDLE AGES*, which analyzes the origins, development, and international ramifications of sixteen such items. Aside from Antichrist and Pope Joan, the table of contents lists The Wandering Jew, Prester John, The Divining Rod, The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, William Tell, The Dog Gellert, Tailed Men, The Man in the Moon, The Mountain of Venus, St George, The Legend of the Cross, Schamir, Melusina, The Fortunate Isles, and The Knight of the Swan. These are self-explanatory with the exceptions of Melusina (a sort of fresh water mermaid) and Schamir (a worm with the force of character to bore through flint). -- JMM #####

# LIMERICKS<sup>2</sup>

Old Pelias swears by the Norns  
 That this is the brightest of morns:  
 "There's just come from Argos  
 A couple of cargos  
 Of powdered rhinoceros horn." -- John Boardman

Conan's weapons were many and varied;  
 With all kinds he lunged, thrust, and parried,  
 But the one he had worn  
 On the day he was born  
 Had in far the most bodies been buried.  
 -- George Barr

Conan's valor is ofttimes displayed  
 For the sake of a fairly-formed maid,  
 Or a kingdom or treasure  
 Or for just the pure pleasure  
 Of weilding a powerful blade. -- Robert Grant

Now Elric of old Melnibone  
 Has a sword with a mind of its own:  
 He uses Stormbringer,  
 A wonderous stinger,  
 Then finds that his troubles have grown.  
 -- Robert Grant

Kull thought it a rather fine jest  
 To fight at a spirit's behest;  
 But when he awoke  
 He found it no joke  
 And was mazed at the wounds on his chest.  
 -- W Paul Ganley

On a barren, dry desert was Conan;  
 Womanless, horny, and moanin':  
 "There's no beast on this sand  
 So I'd best use my hand  
 And try out the art of damned Onan.  
 -- Yale F Edeiken

Quite seldom had Conan been bested  
 In wrestling with those whom he gusted;  
 Said he, "This is new;  
 Just what is 'Kung Fu'?"  
 And they tried it some more when they'd rested.  
 -- W Paul Ganley

Conan's body was muscled so well, he  
 Made everyone else look like jelly:  
 'Twas really no joke  
 He was built like an oak,  
 With a little knot-hole in his belly.  
 -- George Barr

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 Robert E Howard left a number of unpublished short stories behind him when he died. Four of these stories have now appeared for the first time in the amateur magazine, *Weirdbook*. They are: "The Cobra in the Dream", "The Haunted Hut", "Usurp the Night", and "Black Country". Poems by R E Howard are scheduled to appear in future issues of *Weirdbook*. This lithographed magazine features weird fantasy in the line of *Weird Tales* of old, with stories by Joseph Payne Brennan, H Warner Munn, David R Bunch, William Scott Home, James Wade, Wade Wellman, and many other fine writers. The first six issues can be obtained for only \$4. *Weirdbook*, Box 35 Amherst Branch, Buffalo NY 14226.



- GROUP ILLA for "SORCERY" -



# of HOBBITS, HEROES, & EGO-BOO

BY  
LIN  
CARTER

reviewing

{ MASTER OF MIDDLE EARTH: THE FICTION OF J R R TOLKIEN,  
by Paul H Kocher  
Houghton Mifflin Co, Boston, 1972: 247 pp, \$5.95.



As was bound to happen sooner or later, the professors have begun to turn their attention to The Professor.

The book to hand is the first full-length study of Tolkien to be published since the appearance of my own *TOLKIEN: A LOOK BEHIND "THE LORD OF THE RINGS"* back in 1969. The author, Paul H Kocher, otherwise unknown to me, is listed on the backflap of the jacket as Emeritus Professor of English and Humanities at Stanford University.

His book is an admirable, in-depth study of the themes, characters, and issues employed by Tolkien, not only in the famous trilogy but in the minor works as well. Kocher professes to see similarities of thought in *LEAF BY NIGGLE* and *FARMER GILES* and the "Bombadil" poems as well as the Ring trilogy. He makes a good case for this, his reasoning seems very sound, and he has certainly done his homework. No more than had I or Ready, in the preparation of our own books, he does not seem to have entered into any correspondence with Tolkien; he has no new information to offer; and he has no particularly startling or interesting revelations to report.

However, his exploration of Tolkien's work is done with careful accuracy and thoroughness. He explores Tolkien's use of characterization to a greater degree than any other critic has yet done, and his thoughts on Tolkien's use of plot to explicate certain moral themes I found quite interesting. In trying to find something to say about the most minor and ephemeral poems, he seems very often to be reaching; and I am unable to agree with several of his conclusions. *LEAF BY NIGGLE*, for example, has never impressed me in the slightest and remains not only virtually unreadable but also (frankly) dull. Kocher finds all sorts of things to praise in it. On the other hand, I've always considered *FARMER GILES OF HAM* one of the most perfect, delightful, and charming fairy-tales in recent literature; Kocher finds it interesting chiefly as a satire of the heroic and noble elements Tolkien uses in the trilogy. Kocher has many nice things to say about *SMITH OF WOOTTON MAJOR*, too, and sees all sorts of intellectual and moral depths in what has always seemed to me a pretty bad, sad, and gloomy attempt at writing a fairy-tale.

Kocher's chief interest in Tolkien is, I would say, intellectual; he is not particularly interested in Tolkien as a story-teller or as a fantasy writer. He seems to see him as a staunchly conservative Catholic intellectual, whose moral philosophy pervades virtually everything he has published. Thus his book is slanted very obviously along that single line of criticism.

There are several things about the book which not only amaze me but appall me as well. He never once refers to any other fantasy writer in the course of the entire book.

This is simply incredible: he seems to see Tolkien as existing in a literary vacuum; and as far as you can tell from Kocher, Tolkien never read anything but the Icelandic sagas, the Irish legends of St Brendan, and *BEOWULF*. You would never guess from Kocher's book that Tolkien read William Morris, admired Haggard as a child, disliked Macdonald's use of allegory, or was a close personal friend of C S Lewis and -- to a lesser degree -- of Charles Williams. You would never know, in fact, from reading Kocher, that there even were other fantasy writers!

Now this omission seems to me a critical error of the very first magnitude. No author lives who has not been shaped and influenced by other writers; and literary criticism is just about impossible when performed under such an astounding bias. On almost every other page Kocher's book cries out for a reasoned comparison of Tolkien's skills as against those of other writers.

How does his construction of an invented milieu compare with that of Dunsany? How does his employment of invented Medieval societies contrast with that of William Morris? How does Tolkien's code of chivalry and his understanding of the heroic temperament match up to Eddison's? How does his concept of the Elves and of Faërie itself compare to that of Macdonald? How does his use of themes, concepts, plot-elements, settings, and characterizations, at least those borrowed from the Norse, Icelandic, or Germanic heroic literatures, compare with similar usages by Anderson in *THE BROKEN SWORD* or Pratt in *THE WELL OF THE UNICORN*? How does his use of Christian moral, ethical, or philosophical standards, concepts, or symbology compare with similar employments in fantasy fiction by Lewis or Williams?

There's not a word about these things in the entire book; from Kocher's viewpoint, Tolkien lived and thought and wrote in a complete literary vacuum. This is quite absurd. Kocher seems completely unaware of the entire imaginary-world tradition in literature, both before and after the genesis of Tolkien's trilogy. There's not a single reference to any of the writers who have arrived after Tolkien did, either; not even to those who, like Carol Kendall, Alan Garner, Lloyd Alexander, Katherine Kurtz, or Joy Chant, have obviously been influenced by Tolkien, to one or another degree.

Another element in the book which annoys me is the rather lavish praise which Kocher lavishes on the Professor at every opportunity. This tendency, combined with an almost complete lack of any negative criticism of Tolkien, makes for a very one-sided look at his work. Few authors in all of world literature are so utterly flawless as to be deserving of praise alone: Tolkien would appear to be one of them, from all you can learn from Kocher. He scarcely ever mentions Tolkien without praising one or another side of his talents; it gets a bit sticky after a while.

Now, Eru knows Tolkien is the finest fantasy writer alive, and one of the absolute masters of the genre, and the trilogy itself one of the five or six greatest fantasy novels written in recent generations. But I should think any critic, just to be fair, would note those areas wherein Tolkien fails. It does not take an extraordinary breadth and range of reading or any particularly acute critical acumen to notice that Tolkien's prose is generally mediocre and seldom rises to a peak of real eloquence or passion or power. One does not have to be a critic of the first water to see that Tolkien's characterization often deals in stock stereotypes. One needs only a cursory acquaintance with the rest of fantasy literature to spot his most glaring weakness in the art of world-making; that is, his failure to provide his imaginary world and its invented societies with anything in the nature of a religious organization. There are no temples, priests, prophets, oracles, shrines, scriptures, or dogmas in Tolkien's Middle-Earth; even so lowly a pulp-adventure writer as Robert E Howard or Edgar Rice Burroughs knew that warriors in an invented world are going to swear by their gods, and that few are the kingdoms or empires that will not have their meddling and intriguing priesthoods. Tolkien was too prim and proper a Catholic to invent imaginary religions, I guess; and the illusion of reality otherwise so brilliantly maintained in the trilogy suffers enormously from his failure in this area of the fine art of world-making.

But Kocher, rambling through the pages of *THE LORD OF THE RINGS*, sees brilliance and genius to every hand. At times, he bends over backwards in order to praise even Tolkien's weaknesses, as in the case of Aragorn, the least credible and the most poorly sketched of all the major characters. Kocher expends enormous effort and ingenuity to prove the portrait of Aragorn a masterpiece of rounded and intricate characterization. And while he cannot help noticing that Tolkien is, quite obviously, uninterested in women in his writing and distinctly uneasy in depicting the romantic or sexual side of male-female relations, Kocher deliberately goes out of his way to admire Tolkien's female characters,

which forces him to do a lot of reading between the lines, as it were, and to draw many inferences only implied in the text, for the simple reason that Tolkien's love scenes are the skimpiest and the least convincing to be found this side of Doc Smith.

Worst of all, probably, is the admiring way in which he extolls Tolkien's use of Evil. The ingenuity Kocher uses in this portion of his argument (Chapter 4) is truly quite brilliant; it almost convinced me. And, to be truthful, he very ably demonstrates that Tolkien has more carefully thought out the implications of Evil than I had noticed on my own. But Kocher, for all his cleverness, seems oblivious to the intrinsic weakness and fallacy in Tolkien's vision of Evil. Tolkien is really not interested in his villains at all, unlike Eddison, who handled them with a Miltonic nobility and grandeur which never once failed to take into consideration that, for all their strength and courage and nobility, they were still villains. Tolkien shrinks back squeamishly from any real consideration of the nature of Evil; the villains in the trilogy are either men, petty sneaks and whining cowards and bullies (like Lotho and Gollum and Bill Ferny), or they are just cardboard cut-outs (like the witch-king of Angmar and, for that matter, Sauron himself). The most interesting villain in the trilogy, of course, is Saruman; and he is only sketched in as a sly, cunning con-man with a silver tongue and a gift of gab, without any suggestion of real motivation or any depth to speak of.

On this topic, Kocher's book begs for some comparison of Tolkien's use of Evil with that of his good friend, Lewis. Lewis, an excellent writer in every way, and the possessor of a first-rate intelligence, never shrinks from the exploration of Evil. Where Tolkien sees Evil as cowardly, sneaky, and greedy, yet easily destroyed -- a flash of light from Galadriel's vial will do the trick, or just Tom Bombadil singing in the distance -- Lewis knows the grim, iron strength and deeply-rooted tenacity of the Real Thing. He knows it is crushed only with immense difficulty, and seldom for long. All you have to do is glance through *PERE-LANDIA* or read *THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH* to realize how little Tolkien knows, cares, or has thought about the very real and very strong power of Evil in human character and God's universe. The difference between Tolkien and Lewis in this aspect is like night and day, the difference between a





serious thinker and a playful don with a penchant for made-up languages. Kocher misses this aspect entirely: to listen to him, you would think Tolkien was the deepest philosopher since Aquinas.

To sum up, then, the main virtues of Kocher's book are his careful and intelligent and very interesting explorations of the structure and detail of Tolkien's plot, his thoughtful if over-admiring discussion of Tolkien's characters, and his ingenious exposition of similarities of theme and symbol which run through all of Tolkien's works, *majora* and *minora*. On these aspects, Kocher has much to say, and is both authoritative and absorbing. But he knows nothing about fantasy *per se*, is incapable of seeing Tolkien in the perspective of the fantasy tradition, fails to note (or pretends not to see) any of his very real weaknesses, and, in general, butters him up with gooey praise wherever possible. In this last respect, I get the impression he hopes to become his Derleth or something or at least be invited over to collaborate on the *SILIMARILLION*. I am probably doing the poor fellow an injustice: doubtless he has no ambitions other than compiling a major dissertation on Tolkien's use of the semicolon, or something equally trivial.

I'd love to know what Tolkien thinks of the book. He's a grumpy old bandersnatch, but canny enough and surely clear-sighted enough to see through the soft soap. Being human, he could hardly help being flattered, though; and -- what the Hell -- he could probably use a Derleth to rescue his notes and drafts from oblivion.

# # # # #

## Scrolls

Clark Ashton Smith: *GROTESQUES AND FANTASTIQUES*. Saddle River NJ: Gerry de la Ree, 1973; 40pp (paper).

This is a collection of Smith's weird drawings, with fifteen hitherto unpublished poems by Smith and a collection of aphorisms. Smith had a talent for short stories, poetry, drawing, and sculpture and tried his hand at all. In poetry and prose he turned out much first-class work. In drawing and sculpture, he suffered from lack of formal instruction, to which he was hostile and which he never could afford anyway. Hence his drawings and stone carvings remain talented primitives. The present collection, however, shows the talent. His weird drawings remind me of those of another enthusiastic amateur, Lord Dunsany, which I was shown at Dunsany Castle a couple of years ago.

The poetry is mostly love poetry, of which Smith wrote much besides his weird-fantastic verse. Unlike some poets, nobody ever cast any doubt on Smith's normal male sexuality; in fact, he seems to have been very well endowed in that regard. Personally I prefer his weird poetry, but that may be due to a defect in me. In any case, any CAS enthusiast will want this publication. De la Ree printed 600, and the last I heard he had sold most of them.

-- L Sprague de Camp

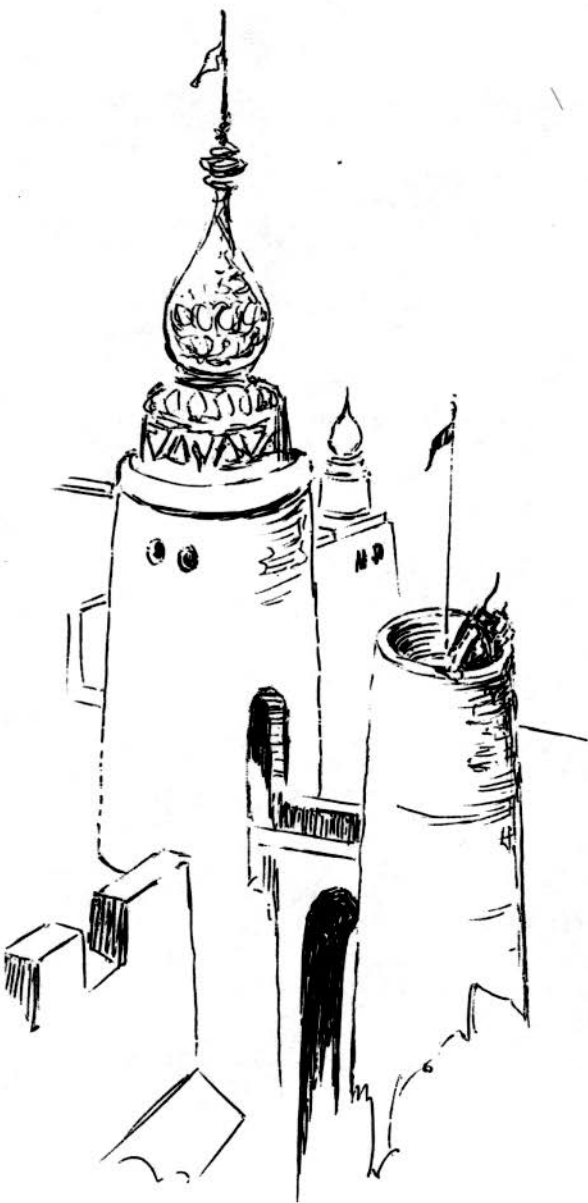
Robert E Howard: *MARCHERS OF VALHALLA*. West Kingston RI: Donald M Grant, 1972; 121 pp, \$4.50.

Any Conaniac is interested in unpublished stories by Robert E Howard -- even though stories that REH failed to sell in his lifetime are unlikely to be among his best. Here are two novelettes, among the many unpublished manuscripts collected by Glenn Lord in his work as agent for the Howard heirs.

The idea of racial memory is beguiling. Kipling and London, both well-known to Howard, used it in their time. It is too bad that no such thing exists.

In 1932, about the time he conceived Conan, Howard began a series of stories on the racial-memory theme. The modern narrator is a sickly, crippled man named James Allison, who remembers his incarnations as one of the Æsir -- the same Æsir that people a sub-arctic land in Conan's world. Howard wrote three stories in this frame: "Marchers of Valhalla", wherein Allison remembers his life as Hialmar; "The Valley of the Worm", in which he is Niord; and "The Garden of Fear", wherein he is Hunwulf. "Marchers of Valhalla" he never sold; the other two appeared in *Weird Tales* in 1934. There were no more stories in this series, as far as I know, because most of Howard's time during these years was devoted to the more successful Conan.

"Marchers of Valhalla", about 17,000 words long, is fair-to-middling Howard, albeit a hero so strong that he can shatter a foeman's skull with his fist or dismember him with Of Hobbits, Heroes, & Ego-Boo + Scrolls



his bare hands comes perilously close to burlesque. The story tells of the arrival of a band of Æsir, after world-wide wanderings, in what is now Texas. There they find the mysterious city of Khemu, inhabited by Lemurians. The dwellers hire the Æsir to defend them against another people, led by a displaced member of the Vanir. (Howard used "Æsir" and "Vanir" both as singulars and as plurals. The correct singular forms are, respectively, "As" and "Van" or "Vanr".) When the attackers have been routed, with blood and guts all over the place, the Khemuvians lay plans for getting rid of their dangerous mercenaries...

The other story, "Thunder-Rider", is one of Howard's last. About 10,000 words long, it also uses the racial-memory idea. A modern, full assimilated Comanche Indian, John Garfield, undergoes a torturous, ancient ritual to be able to remember all his previous Comanche lives. The one he tells is that of Iron Heart, a Comanche of later +XVI, when the Comanches had obtained horses but not other European cultural elements like guns. After battles with Sioux, Apaches, and Pawnees, Iron Heart is the only survivor of his band. He and his Pawnee captors find another city, harboring the remnants of a civilized, pre-historic Amerind people with names like those of the Aztec gods Xolotl and Tezcatlipoca....

It is a better-written story than the other, although it could have stood some expansion. Sometimes, as here, Howard got impatient and wound up his tale in a few sentences -- a mere outline.

The story shows Howard's growing use of local materials. He had evidently been reading up on the Amerinds. Had he lived, his fiction would probably have become more and more regional. Howard's approach to fiction contrasted with that of his pen pal, Lovecraft. Howard wrote stories laid all over the earth, although he never went far from his native Texas. Lovecraft disliked laying a story in a locale he had not seen and wrote scornfully of "armchair romanticists" who roamed the world at a table in the reading room of the local public library. He urged Howard to make use of his own Texas milieu, and Howard heeded this advice.

Both approaches are legitimate, and the best is a judicious mixture of the two. While it is very helpful in fiction to have personally known the places, people, and occupations one writes about, one does not live long enough to gather, by personal contact, all the experience that one needs to support a full-sized writing career. If I wish to write a story about professional yak-breeders, it helps if I have bred yaks. But, if I spend decades becoming an expert yak-breeder, I shall find, when I have written my novel about yak-breeding, that I have said all I have to say.

So, if one doesn't wish to be just one more of the host of one-book authors, one must

use vicarious as well as direct experience. And the craft that bears one through time and space, to get this experience, is a table in the reading room of the local library.

-- L Sprague de Camp

Robert E Howard: *THE SOWERS OF THE THUNDER*. West Kingston RI: Donald M Grant, 1973; 285 pp, \$12.00.

This is Don Grant's largest volume of the historical stories of Conan's creator. It is a splendid piece of bookmaking, lavishly illustrated by Roy Krenkel's drawings. [These two pages and the ones following are illoed by some of the rough drafts of those drawings; *THE SOWERS OF THE THUNDER* contains no less than 150 Krenkel drawings, one in color!]

There four novelettes in this book were written in 1931-33 by Howard for the short-lived companion magazine to *Weird Tales*, namely *Oriental Stories*, whose title was changed to *Magic Carpet* in a vain effort to keep it going. All the stories are laid in the Near and Middle East in Medieval and Renaissance times. All tell of a hero from northern Europe fighting for or against one or another of the great Asian military leaders of those times. All the heroes are grim, somber, unhappy men of vast size, strength, and prowess.

In "The Lion of Tiberias", a predecessor of Saladin, Zenghi esh-Shami, deals in turn with an Englishman, John Norwald, and a Norman, Miles de Courcey.

In "The Sowers of the Thunder", an Irish exile, Cahal O'Donnell, confronts Baibars, who became Sultan of Egypt. The story includes the fall of Jerusalem to the Kharesmians in 1244. Howard's main source, I am sure, was Harold Lamb's *THE CRUSADES: THE FLAME OF ISLAM* (1930).

In "Lord of Samarcand", an exiled Scot, Donald MacDeesa, survives the battle of Nicopolis (1396) in which Sultan Bayazid destroyed the last Crusade. Then Donald becomes involved in the struggle between Bayazid and Timur the Tatar.

In "The Shadow of the Vulture", a German knight, Gottfried von Kalmbach, is caught in





the siege of Vienna by Süleyman the Magnificent in 1529. Gottfried, who has given the sultan an especial reason for wanting his head, acquires a red-headed Russian warrior-girl friend in the course of the story.

The stories have all the old Howard pizzazz: the clang of battle, the shrieks of the dying, the drumming of hoofbeats, the casual cruelty that shocks us when a Hitler or a

Stalin revives it but that was standard practice in the times of the stories. Half the heroes survive while half perish; you will have to read the book to find out which is which.

Howard's historical stories have their faults. His heroes are little more than killing machines; none ever has an original idea or does anything constructive. "They're simpler," Howard once explained; "you get them in a jam, and no one expects you to rack your brains inventing clever ways for them to extricate themselves. They are too stupid to do anything but cut, shoot, or slug themselves into the clear." The boresome monotony of most of a real fighting man's life, between campaigns, is never hinted at. Some ethnoid -- Jews, Italians, Byzantine Greeks, and Armenians -- come off badly, appearing only as



hostile stereotypes. Still, the headlong narrative drive of the stories gives them a compulsive quality that sweeps the reader along to the end. One can only regret that Howard did not live to the 1950s, when historical fiction of this kind reached its peak of popularity.

-- L Sprague de Camp

Lin Carter, editor: *FLASHING SWORDS! #1*: Garden City NY: Nelson Doubleday, Inc, 1973; xvi + 175 pp, (Book Club edition) \$1.49.

Except for the publication of *RED MOON AND BLACK MOUNTAIN* by Joy Chant about a year ago, the Science Fiction Book Club has carefully avoided anything resembling the *Swordplay* and *Sorcery* tale. However, Dell Books, through Lin Carter, recently commissioned Poul Anderson, L Sprague de Camp, Lin Carter himself, John Jakes, Fritz Leiber, Michael Moorcock, Andre Norton, and Jack Vance each to write a *Swordplay* and *Sorcery* tale of about 15,000 words. *FLASHING SWORDS! #1* is the first of two volumes resulting; the second should see print before this review does. The Science Fiction Book Club picked up the books, publishing the present hard cover editions in advance of Dell's paperback ones. Both have spectacular color cover paintings by Frank Frazetta. The first volume begins with an introduction by Carter, who also prefaces each tale with comment on the author and the story itself.

In "The Sadness of the Executioner",

Fritz Leiber pits his heroes, Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser, against Death himself.

"Morreion", by Jack Vance, is a tale of the Dying Earth; the magician rather than the swordsman is the hero here. "The Mer-man's Children" is the retelling of a Danish legend by Poul Anderson, interestingly done and not as tragic as many Norse tales.

"The Higher Heresies of Oolimar" introduces Amalric, man-god of Thoorana, a character from a

novel planned by Lin Carter. This swashbuckling character seems to be a competent one; and though the mission on which Amalric is sent by the gods is not completed within the story, I was left more intrigued than irritated by this loose end.

I am looking forward to *FLASHING SWORDS! #2* with great relish.

-- Bert Duch

L Sprague & Catherine Crook de Camp: *TALES BEYOND TIME*. New York NY: Lothrop, Lee, & Shepard Co, 1973; 160 pp, \$4.95.

A collection of stories containing children, the work is subtitled *FROM FANTASY TO SCIENCE FICTION*. Includes a chapter from L Frank Baum's *THE LAND OF OZ*, Isaac Asimov's "Robbie", and other, less well-known stories, all appropriate for introducing younger readers to the field.

L Sprague de Camp: *THE FALLIBLE FIEND*. New York NY: Signet (The New American Library), 1973; 143 pp (paper), \$0.95.

This is the third novel in the "Novarian" series; not a sequel, but *synecumenical*





with the other two, *THE GOBLIN TOWER* and *THE CLOCKS OF IRAZ*. In other words, the third novel occurs in the same ethos, but has neither characters nor plot line in common with the earlier pair. In fact, this reviewer can't tell whether the events of *THE FALLIBLE FIEND* occur before or after those of the pair published earlier. This is a very good move on Mr de Camp's part; it saves the work needed to construct a credible ethos yet gives the author an opportunity to work with new characters and situations.

Mr de Camp, of course, has been doing unusual things with his swords and sorcery for years. In *THE GOBLIN TOWER* we met Jorian of Kortoli, who wanted to be a quiet clockmaker but was instead the unwilling King of Xylar, and who reverses the usual S & S plot. Jorian works his way down, from king to wandering adventurer.

Now, in *THE FALLIBLE FIEND*, we have a most unusual hero indeed! His name is Zdim Akh's son, and he is a demon -- a reptilian inhabitant of the Twelfth Plane -- who has had the bad luck to be conscripted for a year's service on the Prime Plane (i.e., the Novarian world). Zdim, for all his enormous -- by human standards -- strength, is really a very peaceful demon with a bent for philosophy. Like all demons, he's a little too literal minded to cope with the illogical, amoral humans of Novaria and consequently gets into all sorts of trouble. He's initially assigned to a wizard, devours the wizard's apprentice due to a semantic mixup (Zdim is told to guard the wizard's cave and to eat whoever enters the place while the wizard is gone; the apprentice goes out for the evening, so upon his return . . .), is sold to a circus, becomes involved in a war, and temporarily becomes an ambassador, all the while longing for the order and tranquility of the Twelfth Plane.

In several ways Zdim is one of de Camp's best heroes yet; to me, he seems more human, even, than the hordes of breech-clothed, shaggy-haired giants with names all ending in -ar who romp through countless S & S sagas. All in all, this is a fine book.

-- Al Nofi

Lin Carter: *IMAGINARY WORLDS*. New York NY: Ballantine Books, 1973; 278 pp (paper), \$1.25

This is a comprehensive how-to-do-it book on the writing of fantasy with, naturally, intensive coverage of our own interest, Heroic Fantasy. Well worth reading, even though you may disagree with some of Lin's opinions. Includes an extensive but incomplete (all such lists are incomplete) reading list.

Andrew J Offutt: *MESSENGER OF ZHUVASTOU*. New York NY: Berkeley Publishing Corp, 1973; 286 pp (paper), \$0.75.

Here is an example of the backward-planet-being-visited-by-a-member-of-an-advanced-human-culture group of S & S stories, with a definite Krishnan feel to it; deliberately, I must add -- Offutt admires de Camp and his work greatly. However, both the hero and Offutt's world, Sovold, are bloodier and lustier than anything of Sprague's. Good cover by Jeff Jones. Recommended.

Andrew J Offutt: *ARDOR ON AROS*. New York NY: Dell Publishing Co, 1973; 192 pp (paper), \$0.95. [Perhaps we should remark here that "paper" refers to the binding, not the material of the pages.]

While the Cervantes of the Swordplay & Sorcery novel has not yet appeared, Offutt is the closest to the mark yet to appear. Hank Ardor is a contemporary, lusty young man; Aros is a strange world to which he is transported by a not-yet-perfected piece of scientific apparatus. Aros has many Barsoomian touches -- there is even a Deja Thoris

bouncing around (Offutt's heroines are bountifully bosomed) -- but the natives are not egglayers. They have a pretty lusty attitude towards sex, too; and when Hank Ardor sets out to save one from a Fate Worse Than Death at the -- uh -- hands of a pair of 8 foot tall, blue-grey men, the whole episode becomes a parody of the traditional rescue story. Hank doesn't reach the scene until the middle of the second round, she's beginning to like it -- Barsoom was never like this! Excellent cover by Frank Frazetta of a powerfully muscled man writhing in the grip of an octopoidal monster, a scene which unfortunately does not appear in the text. An excellent satire on S & S; recommended.

Roland Green: *WANDOR'S RIDE*. New York NY: Avon Books, 1973; 190 pp (paper), \$0.75.

New writer, with a hero more civilized than most. The story tends more towards diplomacy and warfare in a swordly & sorcerous setting than the traditional emphasis on action in single combats. Sequels are hinted at; comments are invited.

Abdul Alhazred: *AL AZIF (THE NECRONOMICON)*. Philadelphia PA: Owlswick Press, 1973; xi + 197 pp, edition strictly limited to 348 cys, \$30.00.

[Since this work is published by the Proprietors of *Amra*, the following review is not necessarily an objective one.] This is a handsomely printed and bound book, prefaced by L Sprague de Camp with a plausible account of how the manuscript came to his hands in a bazaar in Baghdad. The bulk of the work is in a mysterious-appearing script, described in the preface as Duriac, strongly resembling the real but archaic Syriac script; the publishers carefully disclaim any warrantry of either accuracy or authenticity.

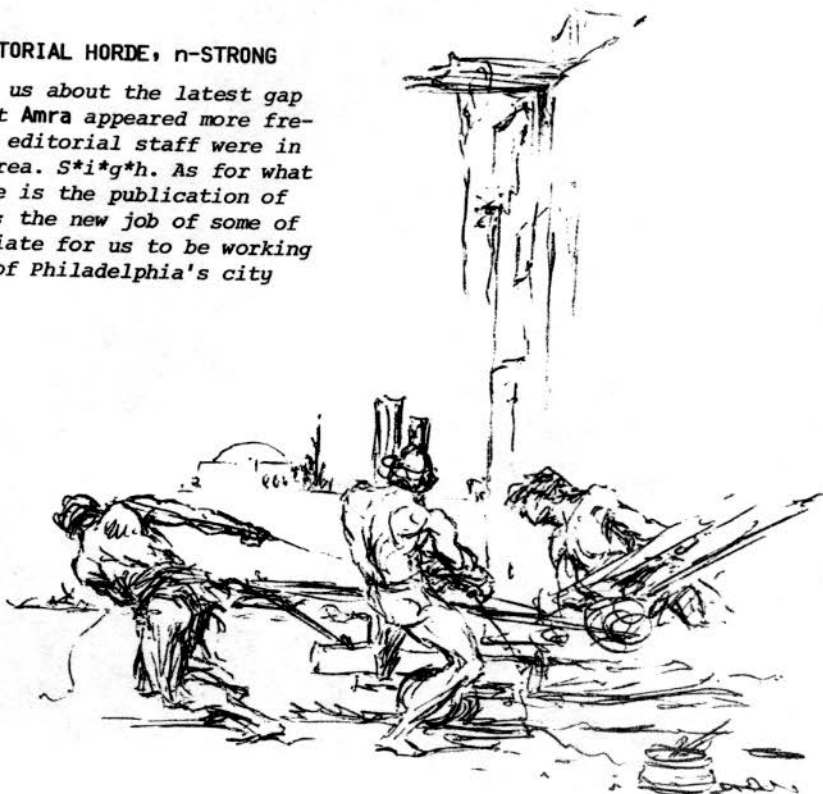
The object in publishing this volume (other than the obvious one of making money, if possible, and breaking even, if not), is to finally give librarians and collectors something to show to people who persist in believing the *NECRONOMICON* to be "real" and, with even more effect, to startle people who have come to believe that it isn't. The high price (and it is a pity that U. S. prices can no longer be quoted in silver coinage) reflects the smallness of the edition, the resulting high production cost, and the risk the publishers undertook in producing so speculative an item.

The book is *Amra*-sized -- 7 inches by 10 -- about 7/8ths of an inch thick, bound in red buckram (spine) and grey linen over hard covers, printed on an off-white, 80 pound paper. The publishers offer a folder of sample pages for the asking. (Owlswick Press, Box 8243, Philadelphia PA 19101.)

## THUDS BY THE EDITORIAL HORDE, n-STRONG

What really bothers us about the latest gap in our publishing is that *Amra* appeared more frequently when most of the editorial staff were in Germany, and again in Korea. S\*i\*g\*h. As for what we have been Up To, there is the publication of AL AZIF, mentioned above; the new job of some of us (it is rather appropriate for us to be working in the Transit Division of Philadelphia's city government); being editor&publisher (until last month) of the SFWA Forum; and gathering material for Owlswick Press's next book, a 10x13 inch, hard-cover collection of Roy Krenkel's work, concentrating on ancient cities and scenes.

Please remember when you move: give us OLD and new address and ZIP CODE!



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