

Amra II, 61



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SAMS

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**SPECIAL NOTICE FOR ALL GREAT BRITONS, CANADIANS, & OTHERS BEING CONVERTED TO POSTAL CODE SYSTEMS!!!&!**

If the envelope this came in does not have your **CORRECT** postal code, please send it (the correct postal code, not the envelope) to us. This will save us no end of trouble.

Now, what you've all been waiting for: The **CONTENTS** of v2#61

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And our thanks to others who also supplied the identity of the harpplayer.

Recent bookpublishing activity of interest to Hyboreans: *THE TEMPLE OF THE TEN*, by H Bedford-Jones and W C Robertson, illustrated by Richard Robertson; a reprint from the famous old Adventure magazine; 159 pp, \$5.00; Donald M Grant, address below.

From the same publisher, forthcoming: *WORMS OF THE EARTH*, by Robert E Howard, illustrated by David Ireland. \$6.00.

J B Post has collected maps of imaginary lands -- Aquilonia and Nehwon among them -- into a xii + 284 page volume. \$20.00, or \$12.00 in paper covers; Mirage Press, address below.

*LET'S DRINK TO THAT*, by Joyce Post, published by the T, O, & Ft M E St Ry G, is now out of print.

*AL AZIF (The Necronomicon)*, by Abdul Alhazred, published by ourselves under the Owlswick Press imprint, is still available. A descriptive folder is available for the asking.

Some of you may have been startled to see the story "The Crimson Bell", which originally appeared in *Amra*, reprinted recently in the Marvel Comics Group's magazine, *Savage Tales*. So were we, particularly since we have been trying for slightly over a year to reach an agreement with Marvel on reprint matters. ##



# Thuds

by the Amraëditorial Horde, n-strong  
illo by Roy G Krenkel  
being a sort of editorial

We're back! Or hadn't you noticed yet? Come on, now; the illo at the bottom of the page isn't either a view of the editorial staff, freshly risen from the depths of the Bog of Despond. Anyway, here is Amra v2#61 and -- what do you mean, you don't believe it -- here it is, right in your clutching claws (flourish of trumpets!!) the 61st number of the second volume of A\*m\*r\*a!! (Ribbit.)

What's more, we've been even doing something useful since v2#60; we're about to publish an enormous (well, 10x13 inches, 82 pages, 180 illos) collection of Roy G Krenkel's ancient cities-&-scenes type artwork in a hardcover book, complete with color frontispiece and all, and frankly, we had no *idea* how big a project this has been. Now that it's just about to go to the printer's -- O, you're interested? List price is \$16.00; estimated pubdate is the end of March 1974; pre-publication price until then: only \$15.00 from us or from our other head, Owlswick Press, Box 8243, Philadelphia PA 19101.

There is a wonderful and amazing (as well as astounding and fantastic) degree of co-operation among the small publishers in the science fiction and fantasy genre. George W Price and Advent: Publishers did the typography for our earlier work, *AL AZIF (The Necromicon)* by Abdul Alhazred; Donald M Grant of Donald M Grant, Publisher was of enormous help to us in connection with the Krenkel book, *CITIES & SCENES FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD*; and Jack Chalker of The Mirage Press has been extremely helpful in many many ways. All of these people have catalogs: Advent: Publishers, Box A-3228, Chicago IL 60690; Donald M Grant, West Kingston RI 02892; and Mirage, Box 7687, Baltimore MD 21207. So too does the F&SF Book Co, a dealer rather than a publisher, of Box 415, Staaten Island NY 10302, as well as T-K Graphics, another dealer, of Box 1951, Baltimore MD 21203.

A brand new publisher is FAX, Box 106, Naperville IL 60540, who is announcing a set of four non-Conan, Robert E Howard hardcover books, an anthology from Glenn Lord's *The Howard Collector*, and a number of items. FAX includes on its staff Ted Dikty, once of the famous Shasta Publishers, and Darrell Richardson, a long-time Hyborean.

Although our colleagues, above and throughout the fan press, make no secret of their identities, Amra continues to be emitted by an indeterminately numerous editorial horde. We're not sure why we're so vague on this point; if you find out why, do let us know. ####





# DURDANE: or is it *America* ?

by John  
Boardman

illos by  
Tim Powers

Many fantasy readers persist in regarding Jack Vance as a first-rate story-teller whose tales are enjoyable reading, but without depth or style. If this view can survive exposure to *THE DYING EARTH* or *THE DRAGON MASTERS* it can survive anything; still, his 1973 novels *THE ANOME* and *THE BRAVE FREE MEN* might be worth citing to those who hold it.

Vance's novels have a number of common features -- so many, in fact, that they might be fitted into a "future history" format like the novels of Robert A Heinlein or Larry Niven. They

take place on distant planets inhabited by the descendants of Earthmen, who migrated there in the legendary past and evolved their own societies. Often these planets lack metals, so that technologies based on wood, glass, bone, and fiber must be substituted, making them slightly "backwards" compared to contemporary terrestrial technology. Durdane, the planet of these two novels, is like *BIG PLANET* in this respect; another Vance planet, *THE BLUE WORLD*, has no habitable surface except giant seaweeds, and men extract iron from their own blood.

The societies on these planets would also be considered rather "backwards" by an Earthman of our own time. They are usually highly stratified, with nobles, priests, commoners, slaves, and various subhuman beings like the ahulphs of Durdane, the merlings of *TRULLION: ALASTOR 2262*, or a motley conglomeration of nonhumans in the four "Planet of Adventure" novels. This fits, since in Earth's history the development of technology reduces social stratification. Vance is not one of these authors who will mix atomic power, chattel slavery, spaceships, sword duels, television, and knights in armor in the same society.

And yet the dragon masters' Aerlith or the Durdane of these books is a never-never land quite unconnected with the world in which we live, move, and have our being. There are real issues worked out in Vance's books, and while following the narrative we ignore his message at our peril.

Consider Durdane -- or rather, the continent of Shant, where most of Durdane's people live. As *THE ANOME* begins, it is a hippie heaven. In its 62 communes -- or "cantons" as Vance calls them -- each group "does its own thing", is allowed to develop its own customs, and in so doing makes most of the population thoroughly miserable. Gastel Etzwane, the hero, is born in Canton Bastern, which is ruled by an aristocracy of junkie "priests" called Chilites. When not spaced out on a narcotic that gives them sexual ecstasies, they regard women as "unclean", and tyrannize over their subjects. (After all, someone has to do the work while these super-hippies enjoy their trances.)

Shant is ruled, sort of, by a distant monarch called the Anome, or Faceless Man. No one knows his identity, and he keeps track of the people of Shant by means of torcs which all must put on at maturity. If the Anome presses the proper button, or anyone tries to remove his torc, it explodes. This happens only rarely, but it may be done for any violation of whatever the law is in the criminal's canton.

Vance's symbolism seems unclear here. Does he regard the torcs as appropriate defenses against lawlessness, or as evidence of the tyranny which must necessarily grow out of an anarchy like Shant's? He does not regard the immense power of the Anome as a good idea, and yet into the mouth of an Earthman named Ifness he puts an irrefutable argument against the oft-heard dichotomy between "human rights" and "property rights":

*Property and life are not incommensurable, when property is measured in*



terms of human toil. Essentially property is life; it is that proportion of life which an individual has expended to gain the property. When a thief steals property, he steals life. Each act of pillage therefore becomes a small murder.

The "hippie heaven" works out about as you might expect. Since "people are free to do what they want with their own lives", a system of indentures barely distinguishable from slavery develops. Since "sexual freedom" exists, Canton Bastern forces women into ritual prostitution; Etzwane's mother is such a one. The garishly bright clothing of the contemporary hippie has evolved into an elaborate color symbolism compared to which medieval heraldry is as simple as a traffic light. "Nonviolence and peace" means that the people of Shant must, by order of the Anome, not resist the depredations of the barbarous Roguskhoi.

The Roguskhoi are a symbolism eminently clear in these books. They are only male, and propagate their kind by raping human females who thereafter bear only Roguskhoi males. They are larger and stronger than men, red in color, and bear metal scimitars from some unknown source, making them virtually irresistible on this metal-poor world. They eat anything, including human flesh, and are genetically engineered human beings comparable to the Basics' slaves in *THE DRAGON MASTERS*.

When an unusually ferocious Roguskhoi outbreak kills Etzwane's mother and sister, he tries to get the Anome to take some action. To his horror he finds that the Anome is another "nonviolence and peace" believer. The Anome advises ignoring these menaces. Etzwane finds out his identity -- he is a vapid aristocrat, far removed from the pleas of the common people to do something about the Roguskhoi. (How vigorously this recalls the last decade of American history!) "Ignore them and they'll go away," is the attitude of the Faceless Man.

In *THE BRAVE FREE MEN*, Etzwane shoves the old Anome to one side and takes direction of matters. He drafts the men of Shant into a militia and then stiffens it with a standing army from which this book takes its name. New weapons are developed -- the weapons technology of a metal-poor planet is considered in great detail in the book, by contrast with novelists who assume infinite supplies of the weapons with which their heroes do battle. Etzwane faces the problem which is now being faced in this country: How is an effective fighting force to be made out of a passive people, unused to arms and infected with the suicidal virus of pacifism?

Fortunately, the Anome is virtually the only authority upon Shant, and his name is used to get things done. The torcs help too, although Etzwane finds that he must use a device of Ifness to remove his own, those of his principal lieutenants, and of the Brave Free Men. Apparently the torc system is not going to survive the war against the Roguskhoi; besides, the electronics technicians who make them have been diverted to war production.

The defeat of the Roguskhoi raises new questions which are probably left for a third book. Where did they come from -- the Shantites' old enemies in Palasedra? Earth? Or some new menace from outside human space?

Jack Vance poses some very pertinent questions in this book, and he poses them in a way that cannot be avoided. Who are those savage red rapists, the Roguskhoi? The vaguely Russian name drives the issue home so that those who wish to ignore it, cannot. The supine reaction of the Anome and his minions reflects the equally supine attitude in contemporary America. Surveying his task, Etzwane finds:

A pacifist sect, the Aglustids, whose members wore only garments fashioned from their own hair, which they argued to be natural, organic, and deleterious to no other living organism... The Aglustids argued that the Roguskhoi, more fecund than man, produced more life and were hence to be preferred. They called for passive resistance to "the Anome's war".



"If the Anome wants war, let the Anome fight," was their slogan, and wearing their garments of matted hair they paraded through the streets ... chanting and wailing.

Yet another group actually worships the Roguskhoi. Etzwane is disgusted but is unwilling to push the buttons for their torcs. He finds no solution but to ignore them; this, in effect, is what our own rulers have done to their real-life avatars.

Vance fans have already seen these issues faced in *THE DRAGON MASTERS*, which prefers the violent resistance of the Banbeck clan chiefs to the supine pacifism of the Sacerdotes. Vance is a member of that patriotic group of science-fiction writers who hurled a defiance into the teeth of the pacifists by endorsing American policy in Vietnam in the famous *Galaxy* advertisement of June 1968. Now he has laid the issues out so obviously that they cannot be answered, and probably will not be.

Vance's Anome invites comparison with Heinlein's Star in *GLORY ROAD*. Like the Empress of Twenty Universes, the Faceless Man has absolute power, exercised very leniently. ("The answer to most problems was: *Don't do anything.*") Yet, as both Etzwane and Oscar Gordon learn, there are times when something *has* to be done, usually by a highly competent fighting man.

Vance has a more practical approach to matters than Heinlein does. Heinlein has quite definite ideas about how he would like things to be run, or not-run. They reach their highest development in the anarchistic society of *THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS* and in Lazarus Long's aphorisms in *TIME ENOUGH FOR LOVE*. But how do you get there from here? Heinlein isn't interested; Vance is. To take one example, Heinlein, though a dedicated supporter of the American war effort in Vietnam, is opposed to the draft. Vance's Etzwane compels Shant to form a militia against the Roguskhoi; it's the only way the job can be done. Let the future generations whose safety this compulsion assured have the discussions over the ethics of compulsion.

Nor can we just sit aside and watch, even as readers of Vance's books. In the Durane books, as in his *EMPHYRIO*, the Historical Institute on Earth sends a man to observe passively the planet. But this man, Ifness, is compelled by the barbarities of the Roguskhoi and the drug-culture of the Chilites to abandon his policy of non-interference, set fire to the fields where the drug grows, tell Etzwane how to remove torcs, and persuade him to take charge of the war effort.

Vance puts the issue to us, as his plot puts it to Ifness. The Roguskhoi of our planet are on the rampage, while we try to ignore them in hopes that they will go away. The men who ought to be fighting them off are drugging themselves with the terrestrial equivalent of the Chilites' *galga*. All problems are referred to the indefinite benevolence of a "faceless man", a "they" who ought to "do something about it".

To be fair, we are not quite as badly off as the people of Shant. If we are not as passive as they, our leader is not as passive as the Anome. A beginning has been made. America's Aglustids no longer march through the streets; since 1969 they have found this a hazardous sort of amusement. A hand as firm as Etzwane's is now on the steering wheel. Heads have been taken, not by pressing torc buttons, but by reminding officials for whom it is that they are supposed to be working. Brave Free Men have not only halted the Roguskhoi, but begun to push them back. We can no longer indulge Ifness' luxury of passive observation.

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#### LIMERICKS::

Conan said to his tired concubine,  
"This last hour has truly been fine;  
I would ask you to stay  
Till the coming of day,  
But the others are waiting in line."

-- Jeff Koob

::LIMERICKS

A noble-born lady of Croydon  
Was such a promiscuous hoyden,  
Her arms showed a cony,  
A lingam, a yoni,  
And the motto: *Kraft-Ebbing durch Freuden.*  
-- John Brunner

Do the fantasy tales we hold dear  
Come from past -- or from far future year?  
Does Cimmerian Crom  
Or the hydrogen bomb  
Make a dragon a monster to fear?  
-- John Boardman

Now, Thongor and Fafhrd and Brak  
Each thought himself king of the pack;  
But Conan said, "Stop!  
My ancient grand-pop  
Could eat you all up for a snack!"  
-- Paul Ganley



A BREATH OF HEATHER TANGLES WITH THE GORSE -  
THE GREAT ROUND BOULDERS, ETCHED WITH FRETTED SCRUB,  
KNIFE VELVET TAPESTRIES ACROSS THE MOVELESS PLAIN :  
AFAR AGAINST THE SLOPE OF MIST AND HILL  
A CLOUD OF HERON WHEEL VOICELESS TO THEIR COURSE.

GONE NOW TO AMBER AND TO GOLD THE VANISH'D SUN  
CUTS SENTINELS FROM PEAK AND DISTANT CRAG -  
PALADINS OF LIGHT REBORN FROM HIDDEN TARN :  
AND OVER ALL THAT UPLAND VALLEY, LOST TO TIME,  
THE SILENT CASTELAINS OF NIGHT MOVE FORTH AS ONE.

THROWN BACK AS ECHO FROM SOME CLIFFSIDE HIGH  
A MAMMOTH CRIES HIS CHALLENGE TO THE NIGHT :  
SOFT FROM TAWNY SLUMBER, THE SILKEN CLAWS EXTEND,  
THE SABRES FLASH FAREWELL TO DAY - AND, 'ROUSED AT LAST,  
HIS SPLENDID HEAD UPLIFTS TO CARVE ITS MAJESTY AGAINST THE SKY!

-R.G.K- (MAY-1973)

# the Conans of Albion

©1974

by L Sprague  
de Camp  
illos by Harry  
Douthwaite

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

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

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

Gildas is best known as the ultimate source of the Arthurian legend cycle. Although he does not mention Arthur, he does tell how the British king Vortigern ("Guthrigern") invited in the Saxons to defend the Britons from other barbarian invaders; how the Saxons turned on their employer and wasted the land; how a noble Romano-Briton, Ambrosius Aurelianus, rallied the Britons and defeated the Saxons; and how the war continued for another half-century until, about +500, the Britons won a great victory at Badon Hill, location unknown. This section takes only one of Gildas's 86 pages.

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

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

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

Following Gildas, Bede's *HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND*, in the early +VIII, introduces the Saxon chiefs Hengist and Horsa, said to have commanded the host imported by the British king "Vurtigern". About +800, Nennius's *HISTORY OF THE BRITONS* repeated Gildas about Ambrosius Aurelianus and Bede (or Bæda) about Hengist and Horsa. Nennius also added a hero of his own: Arthur, Ambrosius's successor as leader of the British armies against the Saxons. Unfortunately, Nennius's work is such a mass of miracles and anachronisms that it is hard to take seriously. Hence the endless argument as to whether Arthur really existed or was merely a transmogrified Celtic god to whom the real deeds of some real man and the fictional exploits of various gods and mythical heroes were attributed.







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

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

Be that as it may, Geoffrey used many sources. Besides Nennius, he exploited English chronicles, French

romances, Greek myths, Jewish legends, Welsh traditions, Irish myths, peasant fairy tales, and his own exuberant imagination. The resulting mélange touches on known history here and there, mainly in the period of Roman rule in Britain. Otherwise it is almost as fictional as Howard's Hyborean Age, to which it bears a suspicious resemblance.

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

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

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

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

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

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

9. ... Some, therefore, advised him to bestow his daughter with the kingdom upon some noble Roman, to the end that they might enjoy a firmer peace. Others were of the opinion that Conan Meriadoc, his nephew, ought to be preferred to the throne, and the daughter married to some prince of another kingdom with a dowry in money. While these

things were in agitation among them, there came Caradoc, duke of Cornwall, and gave his advice to invite over Maximian the senator, and to bestow the lady with the kingdom upon him, which would be a means of securing to them a lasting peace.

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

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

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

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

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

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

# # # # #

## Conan & the 11,000 Virgins

by John Boardman  
illos by Harry Douthwaite  
and Roy G Krenkel

In +383 the legions of the Roman province of Britannia assembled and proclaimed a Spaniard named Maximus as Emperor. The last time they had tried this was in +306, and the Emperor had gone on to fame and fortune as Constantine I. Maximus appears to have been very popular in Britain; he had taken a wife from the



native nobility, and the soldiers preferred him to the unwarlike incumbent, Gratian.

In line with the adage, *Aut Caesar aut nihil*, the next order of business for Maximus was a march on Rome. He took a large body of soldiery over to the continent with him, and settled many of them in the part of Gaul called Armorica. In the troubled centuries that followed, so many other Britons followed them to Armorica that the region was called "Little Britain", or, modernly, Brittany. The language is so little changed that Welsh tourists have found they can easily converse with the Breton population.

Maximus was at first successful in his ambitions. He bought off the Roman governor of Lyons, who delivered Gratian into the usurper's hands. Gratian's brother and co-Emperor, Valentinian II, tried to buy off Maximus with everything west of the Alps, but by now Maximus was willing to settle for nothing less than Rome itself. Valentinian nervously sent his brother-in-law Theodosius to slap down the usurper. This he did, and in +338 Maximus was beheaded at Aquileia, Italy. Shortly afterwards Valentinian was strangled by a mercenary commander who was lieutenant to Theodosius, who thus wound up with all the marbles.

That left the big British settlement in Armorica -- 130,000 according to one ancient source. Maximus had put them under the rule of a nephew of Octavius of Gwent, who then had a more or less titular primacy over the other British kinglets, and who had married his daughter off to Maximus. This nephew bore a name which will undoubtedly bring a grin to every fantasy reader: he was Conan Meriadoc.

(This raises the image of a hobbit, flourishing an undersized sword and carrying off a woman under one arm.)

According to that 12th-Century liar, Geoffrey of Monmouth, "the Gauls and Aquitanians did sore harass Conan and the Armorican Britons ... which Conan withstood, repaying slaughter with slaughter and right manfully defending the country committed unto him." He then sent back to Britain for a wife, Ursula the daughter of Dionotus, King of Cornwall.

Ursula sailed for Brittany with 11,000 noble and 60,000 commoner women, to be brides for Conan's captains and soldiers. The ships with the noblewomen miscarried at sea; and they eventually fetched up at Cologne, where they were allegedly all murdered by the Huns. This tragedy, if it ever happened, gave rise to the popular medieval legend of St Ursula and the 11,000 virgins. More probably, though, it arose from a mistranslation of the Latin words, "SS. Ursula et Undecimilla, virgines" -- commas not being much used in those days.

"Conanus" (for such is Geoffrey's Latin) seems to be a form of the Welsh name Cynan. It was a common name in both Wales and Brittany. The first Meriadoc of note was a Breton saint who flourished in the early ninth Century, though a region of northern Wales is called by this name.

The fourth King of Brittany in the line from Conan was Aldreen, another common Breton





name. By his time the legions had been withdrawn from Britannia, and the island's Christian Romano-British population was being raided by Picts from the north and Irish pirates from the west -- possibly including the semi-legendary Niall of the Nine Hostages. The British kinglets, who upon Roman departure had assumed the titles and authorities of their pre-Roman ancestors, were at a loss to defend their new realms. The long, peaceful centuries of Roman rule had not developed the human material out of which good soldiers are made. Accordingly, the Britons appealed to Aldreen for help.

Aldreen sent over his brother Constantine with a sizable body of troops. (This Constantine is sometimes confused in legend with the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great, proclaimed in York in +306, or with a usurper who took the title of Constantine III, and who led the last legions out of Britannia in +407 in pursuit of this claim.) At this point history fades out utterly, and we have only late and unreliable legends to go on. According to them, Constantine of Brittany made some headway against the pagans and then died, leaving three sons: a monk named Constans, and two boys named Emrys and Uther.

King's eldest sons were not likely to be put into monasteries in the Middle Ages



unless they were a bit simple. This was probably the case with Constans, who was crowned as the puppet of an intriguer named Vortigern. Vortigern, finding his fellow-Britons unwilling to support him, called in some mercenaries from north-western Germany, generally if inaccurately called 'Saxons'.

Then followed the long war between Britons (Welsh) and Saxons (including Angles and Jutes) for control of the land called Loegria by the former and England by the latter. When Emrys and Uther came to manhood, then successively served as kings, under the Latinized titles of Ambrosius and Utherus.

Uther is, of course, famous as the father of King Arthur. (It may simply be that the Welsh words *Arthur mab uthr* should not be read as "Arthur son of Uther" but simply "Arthur the Terrible".) Surprisingly, the name "Amra" is associated with Arthur, and in one of the oldest references to this enigmatic figure. In the early ninth Century, an English monk named Nennius wrote a chronicle which is our principal source for whatever historical information there may be about Arthur. In an appendix to this chronicle, Nennius states that in Herfordshire stands the tomb of Arthur's son Amr. "When men come to measure the length of the mound, they find it sometimes six feet, sometimes nine, sometimes twelve, and sometimes fifteen. Whatever length you find it at one time, you will find it different at another, and I myself have proved this to be true."

More noteworthy even than this remarkable property, which raises intriguing speculations in this era of quantum mechanics, is the additional information provided by Nennius -- that Arthur killed and buried Amr with his own hands. Kings will sometimes order the deaths of their own sons, as did David or Herod. But for the king to kill his son with his own hands argues a sacrifice. The historic Arthur is often portrayed at odds with the Christian clergy, and he may have been given to pagan ceremonies such as this one. There are precedents for a king or commander to sacrifice a child for victory: witness Jephthah's daughter (Judges 11: 30-40), Mesha's son (2 Kings 3: 27), or Agamemnon's sacrifice of his daughter Iphigenia to secure victory against Troy.

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# Conan the

by Charles Hoffman  
illos by Roy G Krenkel

# Existentialist



It is not uncommon for an author to speak through his creations. Everyone has some sort of implicit philosophy, and this is especially true of the artist, who is naturally more in touch with his inner self and with his ideas than the average person. Far from being a pulp hack, Robert E Howard was able to inject some of his philosophical beliefs into even his most imaginative piece of escapist fantasy. What he did not do was grasp a huge, heavy club labeled "symbolism" and beat the reader over the head with it. Howard was more subtle than that, but his philosophy is fairly easy to see. Many authors' ideas sneak unconsciously into their work, but Howard's are especially worthy of mention because of their consistency. Howard had no formal

training in philosophy, so there are bound to be some lapses in logic. Taking this into account, however, Howard's overall philosophy hangs together pretty well.

The most remarkable thing about the philosophy of Robert E Howard is that it closely parallels the basics of a philosophy that has just come into its own during the last two decades: existentialism. It is certain that this article will come under fire from factions, because the 1960's, "existentialist" became an often-used, little-understood catch phrase. There were existentialist painters and existentialist sculptors, existentialist actors and existentialist critics, existentialist songwriters and existentialist singers to sing their existentialist songs. Some will feel that this article is of that sort, but I would beg their indulgence for a few pages since I believe I can show that Howard was indeed an unconscious existentialist. The idea is not all that far-fetched, as many eminent philosophers believe we are now living during the peak of an "existential era" that had its beginnings with Dostoevsky.

The first part of this article will consist of a brief explanation of existentialism. The remainder will be an attempt to illustrate these ideas with dialogue and incidents from some of Howard's stories, thereby showing Howard's existentialist philosophy. It is generally agreed that Howard felt some kinship with his major characters, particularly Conan. Therefore we may assume that their thoughts, when expressed, approximate Howard's own in most instances. It is indeed curious that Conan -- the grim and silent barbarian -- turned out to be the most effective mouthpiece through which Howard could voice his ideas. Also, though most writers who write about existentialism do so better than Howard (they are, after all, consciously concerned with the matter), Conan is to me the near perfect existential hero.

Existentialism first began to be noticed in America shortly following the translation of Jean-Paul Sartre's mammoth essay *BEING AND NOTHINGNESS* from the original French. Sartre defines existentialism as the philosophy that "existence precedes essence". Obviously, this definition is in need of some clarification.

A thing's "essence" is what it is; its intrinsic nature or purpose. It is what that thing does exclusively or does best. A knife's purpose is to cut or pierce. It may con-

ceivably be used to prop open a window, but this is not its specific purpose and other things may prop up a window better.<sup>1</sup> The knife's creator made the knife with a particular purpose already in mind -- a purpose that existed before the knife itself. Essence is prior to existence in all things -- except man. Man is viewed as being without purpose and free to determine his own essential nature.<sup>2</sup>

Although some have managed to reconcile existentialism with the existence of God, it is mainly an atheistic philosophy. For a thing to be created for a purpose requires a creator, and vice versa. To the existentialist, man is not acting out a rôle in the play of the cosmos with some ultimate end in view. For ages, philosophers have asked what man's true purpose is; but for the existentialist the very question is irrelevant because man has no purpose. All of humanity's pathetic struggling will ultimately come to naught as the universe spins on madly. This aspect of meaninglessness that Camus called "the absurdity of existence" is why many people violently reject existentialism. They can accept suffering and tragedy as long as there is some reason for it, but to suggest that it is all for nothing is to negate everything they have been brought up believing and the earth begins to shake beneath their feet. Those who decry existentialism as being overly gloomy or morbid fail to realize that individual lives can be meaningful even if the world is not; and, moreover, each person is free to give his life whatever meaning he chooses. Still, I cannot help but wonder if Robert E Howard's suicide was not, at least in part, a flight from meaninglessness.<sup>3</sup>

Existentialism also denies the concept of "human nature". While it is true that man is influenced by certain age-old instincts and drives, each individual can *freely choose* whether to, for example, kill or show mercy. To fall back on the excuse that certain actions "are human nature" is an act of what Sartre would call "bad faith". Furthermore, each individual person, in deciding his own essential nature, helps to determine that of humanity as well. In other words, mankind's actions will determine "human nature", not the other way around.

An individual's essential nature is not complete until that person is dead. Only then is it possible to say what sort of man he was. This is because the living person has not yet completed the actions which will determine his essence. A man may be courageous for thirty years, but this is no guarantee of his actions tomorrow. A single act of cowardice or panic can alter the total picture of his life and completely change the significance of his entire past.

There are many examples of this in Howard's fantasy stories. If Conan had been slain around the time of, say, "The People of the Black Circle", he would have been a considerably different person than that which we know. The past is not dead, but is ever-changing. His exploits at the age of twenty would have different meanings to the thirty year old Conan and the fifty year old Conan. Each would have different memories of the same events. Kull gives some thought to this matter in "The Shadow Kingdom":

And what,  
mused Kull,  
were the realities of  
life? ... Was  
it the real

C the Exist



Kull who sat upon the throne or was it the real Kull who had scaled the hills of Atlantis, harried the far isles of the sunset, and laughed upon the green roaring tides of the Atlantean sea? How could a man be so many different men in a lifetime? For Kull knew that there were many Kulls and he wondered which was the real Kull.

So it is with each of us. Is our present self the end result that we have been progressing towards through all our past selves, or merely one more link in a chain that has not yet ended? Or perhaps our present self is an anti-climax to some aspect of our past that will come to dominate our essence when it is viewed after our death.

There is also ample evidence of Howard's absurd view of existence in his tales. One of the best in this respect is "Queen of the Black Coast". This story is particularly notable because Conan (after a long period of silence, of course) actually talks at some length about his personal philosophy. Howard may have been in a particularly contemplative mood when he wrote this story, but more important is the fact that Conan's conversation with Bêlit does not seem out of character. Its inclusion in the story seems both natural and fitting, the mark of a skilled writer:

*"There is no hope here or hereafter in the cult of my people," answered Conan. "In this world men struggle and suffer vainly, finding pleasure only in the bright madness of battle; dying, their souls enter a gray, misty realm of clouds and icy winds, to wander cheerlessly throughout eternity."*

It is also true that Conan says, "He who denies [the gods] is as blind as he who trusts them too deeply." But what interests me more is what Conan says about his own gods:

*"Their chief is Crom. He dwells on a great mountain. What use to call on him? Little he cares if men live or die. Better to be silent than to call his attention to you; he will send you dooms, not fortune! He is grim and loveless, but at birth he breathes power to strive and slay into a man's soul. What else shall men ask of the gods?"*

It seems to me that Howard would model the deity of Conan, his *magnum opus*, after his own beliefs. I know nothing about Howard's religious upbringing, but as an adult he seems to have been persuaded by agnostic or deist beliefs.

At this point the reader may well ask what the significance of Howard's philosophy is, other than being fairly interesting to readers of *Amra*. Obviously, the student of existentialism would do better to read the novels and plays of Camus or Sartre, or the non-fictional works of Jaspers, Heidegger, and Simone de Beauvoir. Howard was a giant of fantasy and adventure, not philosophy.

However, Robert E Howard's existentialist philosophy should be important to his readers because of the unique flavor it gives his work. All of his successors in the genre of sword and sorcery seem unaware of existentialism on both the conscious and unconscious levels, whereas Howard's existentialist approach to his subject matter is a small but extremely significant part of his appeal.





Most sword and sorcery series are chronicles of the hero fulfilling his "noble destiny". In all of Howard's Conan stories, Conan creates his own. When Conan becomes king he is not acting out a rôle already planned for him. Rather, he seizes the opportunity to *make himself* a king, just as he became a pirate captain and a tribal chieftain. Moreover, other barbarian heroes' exploits take place within the context of their "noble destiny" or special mission, which usually requires the hero to battle some awesome evil force that *he alone* can conquer. Contemporary s&s writers seem to think that having their hero chosen by the powers-that-be to destroy the depraved minions of the Black God Whatsizname will place the story on a more epic or "cosmic" scale. Personally, I would rather read of Conan trying to get his hands on a chest full of gold.



That whole business of the Good Gods versus the Bad Gods has become a standard sword and sorcery plot, even though Howard himself seldom used it. Some authors have taken this idea a step further by having their characters fulfill key rôles in various supernatural battles that are part of an eternal war between the personified forces of Law and Chaos. The author automatically assumes that the legions of Law are the good guys, but I'll bet that if he ever got involved in such a fracas, Conan -- "absurd" existentialist hero that he is -- would surely side with Chaos! Triumphant, he could do whatever the hell he wanted to rather than keep to his place in a nice orderly universe.

Perhaps all this is why the de Camp -- Carter Conan stories, good as they are, don't seem to be about the same character. Both of these men are fine writers, but it is Robert E Howard's existential style, in addition of course to his natural story-telling ability, that makes him number one in my book.

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<sup>1</sup> [This is similar to Scithers's Principle of Specific Use, which is based on an independent line of reasoning. The Principle is that the usefulness (ease of use, effectiveness, efficiency, etc.) of a tool to an intended use varies inversely with the number of different uses for which the tool is intended. For example, a Swiss Army knife is not as good -- by quite a margin -- as a one-purpose screwdriver for screwing, not as good as a penknife for sharpening quill pens, and so on. Even the familiar claw hammer is a two-purpose tool, and the claws occasionally get in the way when hammering in close work.]

<sup>2</sup> [Scithers's Principle of Specific Use does not apply to people; a good man with a scythe is more likely than not to be good at sowing and threshing as well. It may not apply to large, high-speed digital computers either, raising some interesting theological speculations.]

<sup>3</sup> The absurdity of human life and its relation to suicide is the subject of Albert Camus's essay, *THE MYTH OF SISYPHUS*.

# # # # #

ABOUT ADDRESSES & THE CHANGES THEREOF: It's this way, O horde of Hyborians -- we file our Amraaddresses in numerical order by ZIP code, because the Post Office insists on our giving them issues of Amra ordered that way. Therefore, hence, & consequently, the easiest way for us to find your old address card is if you tell us your old ZIP number when you relocate your lair. So, do it!

# Swackles:

ON UNARMORED AGILITY  
by Sp/5 Joe Mike Hurst

I think I have discovered why wandering heroes are so seldom armored. To judge from a nylon flak jacket and steel helmet, an armored man had better be prepared to consume quarts of water per hour. It is not nearly so much the weight as the dehydration that exhausts you. It is easier to carry rifle and rucksack all day than wear body armor for a few hours.

C Battery 1st Battalion 6th Field Artillery 1st Cavalry Division  
Ft Hood TX 76545

## ON ROLAND GREEN'S BOOK, *WANDOR'S RIDE*:

by Gerald Harp

I for one was quite impressed after buying *WANDOR'S RIDE* despite the cover featuring a young damsel who looks as if she came out of *Harper's*. The political development reminded me of Pratt's *WELL OF THE UNICORN*, but with more individual action scenes. It's too bad that someone didn't include a map of the area. Green doesn't have the flair for his dialog that Andrew Offutt has, or the warmth of character that Katherine Kurtz displays, but still he is a very welcome addition to the ranks.

3424 Pellinore Pl  
Annandale VA 22003

& by George W Price

Roland Green is the outgoing Seneschal of the Middle Kingdom of the Society for Creative Anachronism. He is by education a military historian, whence the emphasis on "diplomacy and warfare" in his book. Sequels (at least three or four) are planned.

1439 West Northshore  
Chicago IL 60626

## ON STRNAD'S PSYCHOANALYSIS OF CONAN

by Jim Cawthorn

Don't know which is the funniest -- Strnad's analysis of Conan, or the rebuttals. Maybe all new editions of *STORMBRINGER* should be re-titled *GAYSWORD*?

10 Oxford Gardens  
London W 10 6 NG

& by Jan Strnad

About the article: you're right in saying that I wouldn't write it quite the same now as I did way back then; I could do a much better job of it now, having had much experience at essay writing at school. In fact, I've developed my talents for BS to the point where I need practically



no knowledge whatever of my material to compose a good essay on it. I have at least read several volumes of Conan's adventures and done some rudimentary reading on Freud, but even that would hardly be necessary anymore. ...

I'll have to disagree with Jon Harvey: a character's life is not dictated by the writer. I've talked with many authors, and I've had the experience several times myself, and the frequent result is that, somewhere along the line, the characters take over, become something often much different from what the author intended when he first sat down at the typewriter. [There was some Editorial Meddling on this point, in that we insisted that the analysis might proceed on the basis that Conan was to be treated as himself, or as a reflection of REH's personality, but not both in the same article.] ... Jeff's quote from Melanie is great. And surely he's kidding if he expects me to walk up to Conan and say he's a fag. I do value my life. ...

To be debunked by Dr Wertham is a pleasure. Of course he's entirely right in this matter: the article was "a composite cliché of Freudian terminology." Address withheld by request

#### ON LOVECRAFTY INSPECTION:

by L Sprague de Camp

My book *LOVECRAFT* has passed inspection and is supposed to be published some time next summer.

278 Horthope Ln  
Villanova PA 19085

#### ON THE HARPPPLAYING HERO:

by Poul Anderson

The hero who, cast bound into a snakepit, where he kept himself alive by playing a harp with his toes till one unappreciative serpent bit him anyway; was Gunnar in the *VOLSUNGASAGA*. He was a brother of Gudrun, widow of Sigurd Fafnir's-Bane; and the king who so treated him was her second husband Atli, a legendary version of Attila.

A very fine twentieth-century recounting of part of the story is Robinson Jeffers's long poem, "At the Birth of an Age". In fact, S & S fans can find quite a bit in this man's works.

Elsewhere Sprague suggests King Harald Hardrede as an exception to the rule that civilized men wander further and have wilder adventures than barbarians. Actually, Harald probably rates as at least marginally civilized. He may or may not have been literate himself. (I'd guess that, for his own good, he learned to read Greek while in Constantinople.) But Norway being Christian by the time of his maturity, it included a literate class. It also had towns, if not cities on a scale comparable to London or Novgorod, and indeed Harald personally founded Oslo.

If you want a clear-cut example of a barbarian who got around on a fabulous scale, how about Genghis Khan? [But it's kind of cheating to travel with one's entire culture, horde and all, with one, isn't it??]

3 Las Palomas  
Orinda CA 94563

#### ON TIGERISH GRACE AND OTHER BLOODTHIRSTINESSES:

by Valdis A Augstkalns [note spelling: we goofed in Amra v2#60. Sorry.]

E Hoffman Price's elegant disquisition on Tigerish Grace had me nodding agreement for a while. I began my (former) formal military days with the tankers (before moving on to nastier stuff) and have always had affection and respect for a .45. Such a small hole entering and such a massive crater at the exit. A competent marksman should hit two out of three at 100 yards unless the target's a midget if he has a decent weapon. And even a clod



