



IBID

JERRY COLLINS

I B I D X X I I I

Prepared for ESOTERIC ORDER OF DAGON by Ben Indick, 428 Sagamore Avenue,
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A page of Natter

This will be an informal issue, as I recover from the big IBID XXII, and think about a big XXV yet to come. I must, first, give credit for the cover, which I find a delight. It is by Jerry Collins, of Georgia, and was graciously given to me by Ned Brooks. Jerry had drawn it for Ned's own zine, IT COMES IN THE MAIL, a grand mail-zine Ned has done for years. Alas, Ned had to fold it at last, and when he was unable to use the cover, he thought of a most appropriate place, the Lovecraft-oriented IBID!! So, I hope the pictured shades of H.P.L. and Robert E. "Two-Gun" Howard will be happy, along with some unidentified spooks. The printing was also done for me by Ned, a more-than-fan friend to me after all these years. I met Ned at Providence in that hallowed First Fantasy Con, and recall with warmth, a witty, gracious, charming person. Thank you, Ned!

You will find herein also an embarrassingly late review of Tom Collins' superb A WINTER WISH, and not all the carping visible last EOD has dimmed its lustre one whit for me! This may be laid to friendship's door, but 'tain't so. The book is excellent and beautiful beyond friendship.

Then, at Chet Williamson's request, a man to whom it is impossible to say "No" (except by occasional irate fan publishers -- I do hope Stu's mad is over!!)

I append a complete list of "official" OZ books. And I must apologize -- I forgot about that WIZARD I had promised and went and donated it to the Oz Convention (ahem, I was awarded a Man of the Year prize therein for this Munchkin area...) However, Chet, I always come up with the bopks, and there shall indeed be one when I have some next! promise!

There is a reprint next, an essay on A. Merritt, and I explain its origins in an afterword. However, since the essay appeared elsewhere first, Joe Mpudry, you need not credit the pages to my total account.

As some of you recall from past IBIDs, if you've scanned them, I am a playwright of sorts. Recently, I returned to my love with more activity, partly because I was unemployed anyway. (My business woes finally hit nadir, as I lost the last of three stores within 14 months, none thru my fault really; however, ce sera,sera, and one continues. I am now reopened in a store and we are looking to get into a merger elsewhere.) Still, to avoid going haywire, I went to the plays with a vengeance. I had already been revising a full length play for children audiences for a local group, and they requested two more from me, 45 minute shows for presentation in schools, on Themes. With full time free, I found that I was indeed able to do what I wanted (often with anguish and frustration -- but it came). Naturally, further revision was and will be in order -- this is for a professional theatre -- and, I might add, while it won't make me wealthy. there will be money -- mostly, tho, it has been for the love of doing it. For one show I returned to lyric writing (yeah, Bernadette, you're not the only poet here!) and several have been scored already. Very cute and my lines needed only mild adaptation. I'm hoping the impetus can maintain even though I'm putting in full working days again, and still want to try screenwriting... We old farts never quite give up the dream -- even when facts seem to SCREAM at us to "Wise up already!"

... all best, friends

Ben Indick

my good friend Tom Collins says I have not yet reviewed

A WINTER WISH

as yet, and, indeed, this is a grievous thing on my part. Hence, to remedy the oversight...

If any of you have as yet been foolish enough to hesitate in purchasing the book, there are still copies remaining, and since it will be a premium book once o/p, I urge you to get your copy promptly. It is, simply, one of the loveliest Lovecraft works yet to appear in print. Further, it is a compilation of extremely readable verse, frequently witty, warm, sometimes touching, in at least one instance -- "Waste Paper", a howling satire on T. S. Eliot--a major contribution to Belles Lettres (although it will without question be ignored by all the denizens of Ivory-covered Academe). Collins does not claim for the collection major stature; it is not akin to the mature fantasiste that HPL was to become as "Fungi From Yuggoth" would be; however, this is an HPL writing in a comfortable, expansive mood for his friends and peers. Wisely, helpfully, the editor has divided the selections into categories -- "Pastorals", "World Affairs", "Satires", "Birthdays", "Fantasy and Horror", etc. He includes essays (brief ones) by HPL and his friend Kleiner on aspects of poetry. There is an Index (my only complaint is that it lacks page numbers, which would have helped.)

And, significantly for lovers and students of HPL there is an Introduction which perhaps only Collins could have done so well. It is based on endless research and trips to Lovecraft's country, as well as enormous research into all the fanzines in which the work initially appeared (call them Amateur Press Journals if you wish). I know personally the weekends when Collins vanished up North, at risk and even loss of job, to trace down material. He makes many surmisals, some of which are not unanimously held, but are presented here with clarity so that a reader may make his or her own conclusions. In transcribing HPL's crinkly, spidery hand, perhaps, as some magnifying-glass carpists complain, he misread a word (even then I challenge this, as the sources may have varied, from holograph mss to mimeo version to more formal printings) but, sitting down to share the company of Mr Lovecraft, I enjoyed it all. I have read much of HPL in my time, but Tom's Introduction offered me some new insights. Quite simply, for its length it is the best introduction to Lovecraft, man and poet, I can think of.

If the limited edition in box is still available, @ \$20, it is a MUST. It is beautiful in a linen-covered box, white, as is the white cloth of the book. A b/w d/w by Stephen Fabian is in an appropriate pastoral motif; the regular edition is \$10. Also to be congratulated is Stuart Schiff, EODian at times, and publisher. I hope Stupublishes many fine books in the future; he will never publish a better or lovelier one.

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1. THE WONDERFUL WIZARD OF OZ (L. Frank Baum) George M. Hill Co., 1900
(Subsequently purchased by Bobbs-Merrill Co., which reprinted it as "The New Wizard of Oz", although it was identical to the first edition, excepting several plates and endpaper designs.
In 1913, the plates were leased to the M. A. Donahue Co. The first edition was illustrated by W. W. Denslow, and his work was retained until the 1944 Bobbs-Merrill with a more modern view of the characters and locale, by Evelyn Coppelman. However, her work lost the flavour of the book, and, with the exception of a 1956 printing illustrated by Dale Ulrey, published by Reilly and Lee, reprints have returned to Denslow's work.)
2. THE MARVELOUS LAND OF OZ (L. Frank Baum) Reilly and Britton, 1904.
Illustrated by John R. Neill. With a 1914 reprint, the title dropped the adjective.
3. OZMA OF OZ (Baum) R&B 1907. Illustrated by Neill.
4. DOROTHY AND THE WIZARD IN OZ (Baum) R&B 1908. Illustrated by Neill.
5. THE ROAD TO OZ (Baum) R&B 1909. Illustrated by Neill.
6. THE EMERALD CITY OF OZ (Baum) R&B 1910. Illustrated by Neill.
7. THE PATCH WORK GIRL OF OZ (Baum) R&B 1913. Illustrated by Neill.
8. TIK-TOK OF OZ (Baum) R&B. Illus. by Neill 1914
9. THE SCARECROW OF OZ (Baum) R&B 1915. Illus. by Neill.
10. RINKITINK IN OZ (Baum) R&B 1916. Illus. by Neill.
11. THE LOST PRINCESS OF OZ (Baum) R&B 1917. Illus. by Neill.
12. THE TIN WOODMAN OF OZ (Baum) R&B 1918. Illus. by Neill.
(In 1955, Reilly and Lee issued a reprint with illustrations by Dale Ulrey. Recent reprints restored Neill's work. This was the last Oz title to be issued in first edition by Reilly and Britton. Thereafter, the newly titled firm of Reilly and Lee took over, with new and reprint titles.)
13. THE MAGIC OF OZ (Baum) Reilly and Lee 1919. Illus. by Neill.
14. GLINDA OF OZ (Baum) R&L 1920. Illus. by Neill.
15. THE ROYAL BOOK OF OZ (Ruth Plumly Thompson) R&L 1921. Illus. by Neill.
(The book states that it was written by Miss Thompson on notes left by Baum, and his name appears on cover and title page as the author. It was, however, entirely the work of Miss Thompson.
Reilly and Lee kept the Baum titles and most Baum successors in print for many years; however, today only the Baum titles are in print. There seem to be no plans to reprint any later titles.)

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16. KABUMPO IN OZ (RPT) R&L 1922. Illus. by Neill.
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21. THE GNOME KING OF OZ (RPT) R&L 1927. Illus. by Neill.
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23. JACK PUMPKINHEAD OF OZ (RPT) R&L 1929. Illus. by Neill.
24. THE YELLOW KNIGHT OF OZ (RPT) R&L 1930. Illus. by Neill.
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(After 19 titles, Ruth Plumly Thompson surrendered the post of "Chief Historian" to others, However, in 1972, the International Wizard of Oz Club would publish privately another title by the energetic lady. See below.)
35. THE SCALAWAGONS OF OZ (JRN) R&L 1941. Illus. by Neill.
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37. THE MAGICAL MIMICS OF OZ (Jack Snow) R&L 1946. Illus. by Frank Kramer.
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39. THE HIDDEN VALLEY OF OZ (Rachel R. Cosgrove) R&L 1951. Illustrated by "Dirk" (Dirk Gringhuis)
40. MERRY GO ROUND IN OZ (Eloise Jarvis McGraw and Lauren McGraw Wagner) R&L 1963 Illustrated by Dick Martin.

ADDENDA

Baum: THE LITTLE WIZARD SERIES, R&B 1913. Six small volumes of short stories especially written for the series, illustrated by Neill. These were issued by R&B in a single volume as LITTLE WIZARD STORIES OF OZ, 1914, and reprinted in later years by the Jell-O Corp. as a giveaway gift and by Rand McNally. They are all long out-of-print now.

THE VISITORS FROM OZ, R&L 1960, illus. by Dick Martin. Loosely adapted from a newspaper series by Baum which had appeared in the first decade as one page combinations of story and picture. The adaptation, which revised the stories to a more brisk modern taste, but lost most of their particular color, was by Jean Kellogg.

Thompson: YANKEE IN OZ, International Wizard of Oz Club 1972. Illus. by Dick Martin. **

Neill: THE OZ TOY BOOK, R&B, 1915, a collection of cutouts by Neill of Oz figures. Reprinted by the Club in 1971.

Snow: WHO'S WHO IN OZ R&L 1954, illus. with reproductions of figures by Neill, Kramer and Dirk.

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Baum, Frank (Joslyn) THE LAUGHING DRAGON OF OZ, Whitman Publ. Co., 1934. Illustrated by Milt Youngren. A "Big Little Book".

Volkov, Alexander: THE WOODEN SOLDIERS OF OZ, Opium Books, 1969. A translation from the Russian, Ill. by L. Vladimirov, trans. by Mary Langford. (Volkov has written some eight other Oz titles, none translated as yet into English.)

Laumer, March: THE GREEN DOLPHIN OF OZ 1978. This title, illustrated, published by Mr. Laumer, is due shortly after this printing. It may contain some material left in fragmentary form by L. Frank Baum.

** In 1976 the Club published another R. P. Thompson title, THE MAGICAL ISLAND OF OZ, illus. by Martin. Written as an independent novel, the author converted it into an Oz title shortly before her death.

Chief source for the Bibliography is BIBLIOGRAPHIA OZIANA, by Greene, Hanff, and Martin, published by the Club, an indispensable aid to collectors, as it describes the various editions and has many photographs.

A. MERRITT

A PERSONAL REAPPRAISAL

BY BEN INDICK

Harry James, the Andrews Sisters, Judy Garland, Mickey Rooney, draftees ("\$21 a day once a month"). 1940. A young fan spends a precious dime in a back issues shop for a coverless pulp magazine. The contents seem to promise wonders, although the authors are all strange to him: The Moon Metal, by Garrett P. Serviss; "Almost Immortal" by Austin Hall; The Conquest of the Moon Pool, by A. Merritt.

The copyright dates indicate they are all reprints, stories at least a quarter century old and even older, but the vivid and intricate illustrations by Virgil Finlay, an artist as yet unknown to the fan, offer a vision of marvels beyond those of such action pulps as he has known -- the intrepid Shadow, the Spider, not to deny G-8 and his World War I flying Aces. Famous Fantastic Mysteries is the name of the pulp, as well as its promise.

At 16, self-conscious, neither able nor willing to be part of the cliques his friends have formed, comfortable at home with close brothers, literature has become his avenue to the world, and fantasy the chosen highway. Wide-eyed with wonder, he reads of Lakla, of Larry O'Keefe, of the dread Shining One. He has entered the world of A. Merritt. What a shock to discover the engrossing story is only the first of six parts, and already six months in print! By the time all six have been found, each part has been read a dozen times and the effervescent bubbles and dots of Finlay explored innumerable times. Love, the author proves, is greater than Fear, and the Shining One is defeated; not so this reader, who anxiously seeks other marvels by the writer.

It is a period when fantastic fiction is to be found primarily on newsstands in the many pulp magazines. None, however, rivals FFM with its prize star, Merritt. And public libraries, after Wells, Haggard, Verne, Balmer and Wylie, seem to offer the uninitiated fan little else. Yet he discovers a copy of Merritt's Dwellers in the Mirage, and reads with excitement and reddened cheeks of the bare-breasted Witch Woman and her equally unclad warrior maidens. However, FFM continues to reprint the stories of his new favorite. When they appear, he hoards them, to savor their pleasures; rarely do they fail to satisfy -- a cornucopia of fantastic imagery.

Benny Goodman, Peggy Lee, Frank Sinatra, the Paramount on Times Square and shrieking bobby-soxers, military service imminent (the \$21 has been increased too). 1943. Nearly all the major works of Merritt have by now been reprinted in FFM, and The Ship of Ishtar is promised. But the sale of the Munsey magazines produces an editorial change, and reprints are prohibited. Writers rejoice, but dismayed fans bewail the loss of an awaited treasure. Unexpectedly, however, a new source of Merritt appears; in the Murder Mystery Monthly series of Avon paperbacks; Seven Footprints to Satan leads it off. A disappointed fan discovers it is not a fantasy. He will wait out many years before Ship appears, as well as military service, new experiences, much traveling, tragedy at home in the loss of a beloved brother. Life intervenes, and the stories, by now all read, slip into the past.

The world has many avenues, and we all travel whichever way we can, by choice or by drift. We win and we lose, and we live. And the

past² is not forgotten, but it is filed away with all the other bills and receipts we accumulate. Bob Dylan, Andrew Wyeth, Beverly Sills, Mars explorations, Jimmy Carter 1976. To reopen that file drawer and reread and reconsider is not a simple matter, for it contains also those many years. Rereading is an examination of one's earlier self, of dreams, hopes, successes and failures. So much, indeed, was the fiction of A. Merritt part of life itself to one reader.

Alexander Merritt's fiction writing career spanned 25 years, during which he was the busy editor of the American Weekly, a Hearst newspaper chain Sunday supplement, wrote eight novels and a dozen short stories. Born in Beverly, N.J., in 1884, Merritt had hoped to study law; inadequate finances turned him to journalism. At 19, he was a reporter for the Philadelphia Inquirer. Here he chanced to see what importantly placed others desired him to forget; he was persuaded to accept a free year in Mexico and Central America, in lieu of money, and the wonders he saw in those exotic climes became integral to his thinking and writing. Folklore and legend would be a lifetime preoccupation. Returning home, his talent brought him a position as night city editor and, in 1912, a position with the far-flung Hearst enterprises. Eventually he became assistant editor and finally full editor of the American Weekly. This was no simple rotogravure section, but a full newspaper-size magazine with varied content. One still recalls its pseudo-scientific articles, as well as its genuine science fiction, such as John Hawkins' "The Ark of Fire," illustrated by an artist Merritt liked, the young Virgil Finlay.

His busy schedule left little enough time for writing fiction but, perhaps to allow his fertile imagination room to roam, Merritt wrote as often as time and energy would allow. If his total accomplishment was relatively small, it was compensated by the fanatical devotion of a legion of readers: All the novels would reach hardcover publication during his lifetime, with one posthumous exception. At least several of the titles remained in print continuously, and there is a resurgence in paperback today.

For one fan, grown older, how does the corpus ## Shades of Tom Roberts! -- j.j.p. ## of the work appear today -- against many other books read, after Tolkien and a new and undreamed of popularity for the work of Lovecraft and Howard, after the sensuality which fascinated Merritt but which he could not freely express has become an accepted part of fiction?

"Through the Dragon Glass," which appeared in Munsey's All-Story Weekly in 1917, was his first published story, and it it was already delineated the type of romantic adventure he would exploit in his later work: a brave hero, a beautiful heroine, in a fantastic world, with an ornate, adjectival prose incorporating references to obscure legends. To lend the story relevance to ourselves, it is narrated within a New York City apartment. This is one of the author's favorite devices; time after time, as in Burn, Witch, Burn; Seven Footprints to Satan; Creep Shadow and The Ship of Ishtar, he compares by inference the reality of New York (and it sparkles for us with the glitter of the photographs of yesteryear, when the city was gay and glamorous) with his fantasy worlds.

As was common in magazine fiction of the day, and as he would often do in later work, Merritt paved the way for a sequel. In this instance, however, it never appeared. The mystery of the world behind the mirror ringed by bejeweled dragons remains untold; still, it is an enchanting bit of Chinoiserie fantasy, indebted to a degree to the works

of Robert W. Chambers, whom Merritt obviously admired, and whose effect would also be felt in "Three Lines of Old French" and Creep, Shadow. The promise of his debut was amply shown in his second story, "The People of the Pit" (1918).

This remarkable horror tale, set in an Alaskan chasm (presaging his much later novel, Dwellers in the Mirage) owes nothing to anyone, and may indeed have influenced the yet professionally unpublished H.P. Lovecraft, an Argosy reader, with its hints of non-human, tentacled, god-like creatures. Fans of the magazine were by now aware of Merritt, but his next story would exceed both others in popularity, and rival that of another comparatively new writer, Edgar Rice Burroughs. "The Moon Pool" (1918) was an instant success, and has remained one of his most popular stories. Quickly enlarged in its novel-length sequel, The Conquest of the Moon Pool, a pattern was set in this neo-Burroughs-Haggard fantastic adventure for much of his later work: a lost race in an exotic, far-away setting; a beautiful heroine and a beautiful villainess, plus an incredible non-human being controlled by the villainess. To one degree or another, this cast of characters would appear generically in The Ship of Ishtar, "The Snake Mother," Dwellers in the Mirage and Creep, Shadow. A supplementary cast of imaginative characters would also appear: frog men, ancient semi-godlike beings, invisible serpents, etc. The debt to Burroughs and his earlier Martian novels is clear, and even the narrative style is similar, the action swinging back and forth from one character to another in continual movement.

Today, the novel is betrayed by its period. One may forgive the dependence of a wholly non-human creature upon a woman; the Shining One seems almost to be a pet of Yolara, just as in a later novel the metal emperor dotes on his human Norhala. (But we have our pets too, dogs and cats, and may be uncertain which of us is the pet!) And we may smile at the stereotypical Irish hero and German villain (in book form, the latter became a Russian as the author expressed his distaste for things Bolshevik!). However, the characterization is shallow and dependent on authorial dictat rather than true development. There is no shading, no growth. Lakla is wholly "good" and Yolara entirely "evil." In the late and post-Victorian sensibility, "evil" was likely to mean power-lust or sexual desire. In this context, true, unselfish Love could finally suffice to weaken an enemy to its destruction -- which is, indeed, the climax of the novel.

If the novel does not have our contemporary hero, with his self-doubts in a hostile universe, there is nevertheless a hint of it -- a hint that is, interestingly, characteristic of many of his climaxes. This is that the villain is not defeated directly by the hero himself; for all his grit and daring, he is more often a bystander at that moment, while other agencies as fantastic as the villain perform the task. Thus, the grieving Silent Ones in The Moon Pool, the ~~ghosts~~ in Dwellers in the Mirage, a short circuit in The Metal Monster, the Snake Mother in The Face in the Abyss, a stubborn doll in Burn, Witch, Burn, the elemental powers of the sea in Creep, Shadow. One wonders at the reluctance of the author, having brought his hero through numerous episodes of personal bravery and danger, to include the final element of the pulp adventure hero. It is as though no man is capable of completely dominating his circumstances, and must ultimately need help. Underlying this, the climaxes often have tragic elements: The hero and the heroine have vanished at the end of The Moon Pool; all the beloved friends of the hero of Dwellers are lost, and he must return home alone; the hero of Ishtar, at the moment of his triumph, is found dead. Even when the protagonist escapes death, the "happy ending" of fairy tales is absent; their experiences have singed the heroes of Creep, Shadow

and "The Woman of the Woods." Thus, if there is depth and development in characterization, it is at the climax, and in the character of the hero alone.

A wistful World War I romance, "Three Lines of Old French," appeared after the Moon Pool stories in 1919, depicting love as salvation from despair, a sentimental balm to those who had suffered loss in the war.

From this, Merritt turned to a difficult new idea in a novel which would surely be his least popular, and which would bedevil him over many years into several rewritings. It must have taken courage for the editor of Argosy, Bob Davis, a knowledgeable man who had developed an all-star stable of writers for a pulp, to print the nearly abstract The Metal Monster in 1920. It is almost wholly expository, with the protagonists witnessing rather than causing the climactic events. Whatever happens directly to them, such as a kidnapping by latter-day descendants of Alexander's Macedonian troops, is incidental, and obviously inserted for the sake of some action. Nevertheless, for a reader willing to forego the author's usual, if beloved, mannerisms, it is a remarkably successful effort to describe an utterly non-human, non-hydrocarbon based form of life. The story opens in an uncharacteristically leisurely manner as Merritt philosophizes for several pages about the possibilities of other forms of life evolving simultaneously with our own. His interest in popular science perhaps led to this theme; indeed, he prided himself on his scientific accuracy (even if it was of the journalistic sort) and he is never loath to stop the action altogether while he discusses, if only in a footnote, a reference to a text or an article which will lend credence to a fantastic event.

Here at least this preoccupation makes for an ultimately rewarding book; Merritt's own detachment is no more harmful than the discursive opening of a Lovecraft story to an admirer of the latter. The confusion which a young reader felt gives way now to admiration at an unusual handling of a novel subject. And, at least, while The Metal Monster retains the human pet female, it eschews the beautiful villainess.

Merritt was quite sensitive to reader response, and if his abstract, science fictional novel received brickbats and cries of dismay, he returned emphatically to the desired style in a novella, "The Face in the Abyss" (1923). Here he revels in the hidden mountains of Peru, with greedy adventurers, a beautiful and exotic heroine from a secret land (which would appear only in the sequel), and even some pint-sized dinosaurs, whose full-sized version Conan Doyle had placed in South America a decade earlier in The Lost World. The heroine is occasionally threatened with that "fate worse than death" so beloved to Burroughs; there are invisible flying serpents which emit "elfin" sounds ("elfin" is to Merritt as "eldritch" is to Lovecraft). The story is no mere romp, however; the elements are very well tied together and lead to a climax which is at the heart of Merritt's basic morality: all must test their moral strength against their baser instincts of greed and lust. Nowhere in his writing is the test more direct than when these men behold the awesome Face, and within it, their own souls. Significantly, none passes the test, although the hero is saved by the all-powerful Snake Mother. Like "The Moon Pool," the story is set up for a sequel; Merritt provided it, but he made his readers wait seven years.

There were intervening stories, which will be discussed later. When The Snake Mother appeared in 1930, it was a full-fledged novel. Apart from the original subsidiary characters, who had long since flowed as golden droplets into the Abyss, the same leads were retained, with

a host of new companions. The story moved directly into the hidden land hinted at previously, with a number of science fiction elements hinted at previously: immortal people who are immortally bored and live in dreams, creatures which have been engineered by men into half-beast and half-human, hints of extraterrestrial origin for the serpent people of whom the Snake Mother herself is the last, mysterious super-machinery and a culture which, in spite of its scientific advancements, is prone to Roman-like entertainments in a vast arena. That science fiction should be part of Merritt is, as has been noted, hardly unusual. Furthermore, it was so obvious that Hugo Gernsback had no qualms about reprinting several of his stories in Amazing Stories.

The Snake Mother is a robust adventure, its elements neatly meshed, and the morality of the novella is fully elaborated in Merritt's superb shadow-villain, the very incarnation of power-lusting evil -- Nimir. The scenes in which Nimir attempts to wheedle the loan of his body from Graydon, the hero, are among the author's finest. In contrast, Adana, the serpent woman, is equally fascinating: she possesses the sweetness of a gentle grandmother, the firmness of a wise schoolmarm and, in spite of her scaly body and a face that may serpentine, a sensuality more affecting than that of the lissome heroine (It should be noted that the latter's ivory body, like those in other Merritt novels and innumerable pulpists of the time, never hides any of its voluptuous curves through the clinging gossamer robes which she and her legion of sisters invariably wore, and the authors all remind us of this fact). A slambang ending is only partially vitiated by pseudo-scientific explanations, and a fine bellicose attitude of the hero toward the outside world he has renounced is regrettably eliminated in the hardcover version (The novella and sequel were published together under the title of the former as The Face in the Abyss).

While readers were impatiently awaiting this sequel, however, the authoring was following with another novel which would later be voted the finest fantasy work in Argosy's history. Its fantasy is as brilliant as the jewels the author continually uses as a metaphor, its episodes dazzlingly creative as John Kenton veers back and forth between the reality of New York and the poetic beauty of a ship suspended in time. 1924. The Ship of Ishtar.

It is a very Burroughsian device for the hero to wish himself backward in space and time to the deck of the ship which, sculpture-like, rests on a block of stone in his apartment. In later Merritt novels, the hero would not traverse Time, but would be identified with previous incarnations; Kenton skips back and forth between our time and the suspended eternity of the ship, often against his will, manipulated by the gods who control its destiny. Here the author is content to ride with sheer fantasy, and one lone "scientific" interruption. Further, as the ship is already immersed in Babylonian mythology, there is an absence of the usual sprinkling of references to legends of other origins. The writing is quasi-poetic with a feeling for the epic: "Said the Phrygian, low..." "Forward they ran..." "Sigurd, Trygg's son, I..." "Kenton, my name..." "Of green upon it there was none..." Daringly, much of the novel is set on the isolated ship on an endless, empty ocean, with a group of well-depicted if one-dimensional characters (having lived thousands of years, they could hardly be expected to change!). In one of his most famous scenes, Merritt counters the threat of a horde of armed soldiers emerging from the scene with a multitude of bubbles, each bearing a beautiful, nude woman; the women embrace the soldiers to their mutual doom. Ultimately, he leaves the ship for action ashore, but his invention is such that the pace never flags. And for once the romance of the lovers, consummated aboard the ship, has the warmth and tenderness of

genuine love ## Kenton and Sharane together in her rosy cabin... sigh. What does Goldstein know about erotic fantasies? -- j.j.p. ##. For many devotees the tale of the precious ship, embedded in its sea of lapis lazuli, is the essence of fantasy itself, and their favorite work in the Merritt canon.

Still biding his time before sequelling the haunting "Face," the author turned in 1927 to straight mystery, and made an Arabian Nights land of New York in Seven Footprints to Satan. Popular in print, it was also a silent film. The writing assumed a crisper quality than had that of his fantasies. The tale owes much to the tradition of Fu Manchu, although the villain, who presumptuously calls himself Satan, is free of any ethnic bias. The conceit of the seven glowing footsteps of Buddha, which offer a challenger either wealth or servitude, is one of Merritt's most intriguing; however, all the characters, without exception, from the Cockney friend of the hero to the pretty sweetheart (the intended mother of Satan's children, naturally) and the astonished hero himself, are cliches. The story, nevertheless, is fun; far-fetched, but no more or less substantial than any mystery-intrigue story of the era.

Returning to fantasy in 1931, Merritt wrote Dwellers in the Mirage, a novel that would rank among his most popular. It exploits not only reincarnation, but an extra-terrestrial monster-god. "The People of the Pit" as a possible influence on Lovecraft has already been mentioned; in 1928, the latter "The Call of Cthulhu," first clear expression of his Mythos, in which potent beings could be summoned by humans who knew the appropriate rituals. Lovecraft uses ancient books as the sources of such hazardous knowledge; Merritt offers no such esoteric titles as the Necronomicon, nor is his Kraken-god Khalk'ru precisely the equivalent of Cthulhu. There are, however, physical if not quite metaphysical similarities: the monster assumes a multi-tentacled form not unlike Lovecraft's, and comes from outer space in response to a summons. In the larger sense, though, it is not a specific personage like the creatures of Lovecraft. In a characteristic aside, Merritt hints that Khalk'ru is an aspect of the Universe itself, the ultimate Chaos which destroys Life, a sort of literal and visible entropy. Moreover, the shape of the being is dictated by the choice of its worshippers. On the other hand, a preliminary letter in Argosy detailed the widespread representations of the Kraken Merritt had seen in his extensive exploring expeditions. Since Merritt and Lovecraft admired each other's work, and were to meet in 1934, one may suspect a debt to the master from Providence. Merritt was to be similarly indebted in his final novel.

Apart from the image of the terrifying Kraken, the novel is not at all Lovecraftian or weird; it is a typical adventure, replete with action, a swaggering if uncertain hero, beautiful women and exotic locales which shift from the far Gobi Desert to a lush valley hidden in a perpetual mirage-like fog in Alaska.

Four decades after its writing, the novel offers a blend of its author's best and worst. The good and evil aspects of the human psyche are again personified in his women. But 15 years after The Moon Pool, his feelings are ambivalent and Lur, the darker vision (if lighter in complexion than the angelic Evalie) is not the cardboard figure of Yorlora. She is real enough we must regret the conventions of the time that prevented his developing her further. Warrior, witch, suspicious and selfish yet generous, her very name betrays the author's attitude toward her. Lur! Beloved Lur! We remember her from all those vanished years, and all she seemed to promise. But if Lur can never grow older, we must. We discover her to be rooted in adventure fantasy of the old tradition, a creation of the pulp thirties, and one can see her; hair

braided in Valkyrie coif, scarlet lips set in a "square" of hatred, "uptilted breast" bare (but was breast ever so unmoving?).

She offers the hero love, and gives it, although in his pride he believes he has taken it; but in this finest, if flawed, of his tragic heroines, how we would like to see Merritt freed of restrictions, to find within her and express the deep hunger and even lonely fear which her stereotyped hunting companions cannot satisfy. Something of this escapes in her pensive love for the haunting Lake of the Ghosts; more is revealed as she lies dying. Lief/Dwayanu, the hero torn between his modern self and a millenia-old incarnation, loving two women, turns to her: "The Witch-Woman looked up at me. Her eyes were soft and her mouth had lost all cruelty. It was tender. She smiled at me. 'I wish you had never come, Yellow-Hair!'" We recall Edward Arlington Robinson's *Tristram* and his two *Isults*, and his passion and despair; such is needed here, rather than facile description and bravado.

Perhaps it is the voracious nature of the reader to demand all; yet a writer can hardly satisfy all tastes, nor can he predict tastes of generations yet to come or readers grown old. Ultimately, and as Merritt often averred, he must write to please himself.

He had also to please his editor. Merritt, who wrote little considering his certain and well-compensated salability, was chagrined when his editor demanded a happy ending to the novel, in opposition to his own conception. He accommodated the wish and the hardcover version, with a slight change of words, followed suit: Lur must die, and something in the hero with her, but Evalie could live -- to follow her lover out of the Mirage... and become a docile housewife?

The final word was the author's. More than a decade later, in the Fantastic Novels magazine reprint, Merritt at last had his own way, and the novel transcended its own weaknesses. The hero must lose both visions of Woman simultaneously; Love dies, but is not forgotten. In his beautiful and memorable final paragraph, Lief/Dwayanu, leaving the hidden land, bitterness in his heart, recalls: "Ai! Dark Evalie of the Little People! Ai! Lur -- Witch-Woman! I see you lying there, smiling with lips grown tender -- the white wolf's head upon your breast! And Dwayanu lives still within me!"

In an abrupt switch, Merritt went a step further in the direct style of Footprints. Burn, Witch, Burn, appearing later in the same year as Dwellers, is nearly unadorned, all those words that are part of the Merritt-lover's vocabulary -- "elfin," "corruscating," "opallescent" -- absent. Narrated by a physician, it is spare and direct, so tightly constructed that he does not have to introduce his villainess until three quarters of the way through the novel. When he does, however, she is unique. Grossly fat, hair growing on her lip, repellent, her personality lurks within her brilliant eyes (all Merritt's characters speak volumes with their eyes!). Madame Mandilip is an unlikely but worthy successor to his gallery of females and, indeed, he hints she could appear ravishingly beautiful if she so wished. The story is a tour de force, marred only by some stage-Irish accents he grants a New York policeman. The book was filmed later as Devil Doll, but Madame Mandilip suffered quite a change when she became Lionel Barrymore! Merritt's own title was used even later for a filmed version of Fritz Leiber's Conjure Wife, an excellent novel with an already excellent title.

There had been several short stories in the intervening years, two written generously for fan publications, subsequently revised and printed in science fiction pulps, "The Drone Man" and "The Rhythm of the Spheres." In 1926, after Argosy had unaccountably rejected it, he sold what he later termed his only "perfect" story, "The Woman of the

Wood," to Weird Tales. It is an excellent tale, somewhat in the pensive, post-war mood of "Three Lines of Old French." His ability in the short story length is considerable, and one may regret that he did not do more such. A somewhat extraneous episode in The Ship of Ishtar, dealing with the King of the Two Deaths, a fascinating character otherwise quite out of the novel's plot, is superb. The author also left several incomplete stories and fragments after his death, two of which, "The Fox Woman" and "The Black Wheel," were later completed as novels by the artist Hannes Bok. The former can stand alone, and was so published by Avon in a paperback collection of all his short stories. But neither is of the quality of his completed work. Always a busy man, finicky about his fiction, Merritt was a man of many hats, and when writing and editing proved trying, he could gladly duck down to a second home in Florida. Here he shared some 20 acres with "pelicans, cranes and herons, porpoises, sharks, cardinals and mocking birds and extremely large and hairy spiders." His favorite hobby was raising bees. Because it was so hard to please himself, he said, he wrote so little. However, to the end he toyed with the idea of "grabbing family and typewriter under arms and migrating to the key and writing again."

Creep, Shadow, his final novel, appeared in 1934. It has a few holdover characters from Burn, Witch, Burn but is otherwise dissimilar in design. It is written in the fuller fantasy style of his earlier work, but is free of the signature trademarks so often present. Like Dwellers, it has a hero aware of a previous existence; but in this case the sense of reincarnation is shared by the evil heroine, the fascinating Dahut, the Demoiselle de Keradel D'Ys, and her father as well! Dahut lacks something of the intensity of Lur, but she is a realistic witch, whether over cocktails in a New York apartment or on a Long Island estate converted to a representation on ancient Ys on the shore of Brittany. At either end of the millennial bridge, Dahut is a credible snarer of the shadows of men. Unlike Lur, she is saddled with an aggressive and ambitious father, and a past in which they, and the hero, mingled tragically; as in Greek drama, they are fated to relive their roles. Merritt employs a Khalk'ru-like Lovecraftian monster-god here too, "The Gatherer in the Cairn," although it would this time seem more susceptible to human ambition, as the father, with its powerful aid, plans to become ruler of Earth. The novel is wittily paced, and White Dahut, "the Shadow's Queen," is a worthy finale to the portrait gallery of women good and evil the author loved.

It is more than half a century since Herndon vanished into the Dragon Glass, but Merritt's work continues to be read. Avon Books advertises "over five million books sold," and Seven Footprints to Satan and Dwellers in the Mirage are back in print with The Ship of Ishtar soon to follow, graced by a cover in which Stephen Fabian must challenge Virgil Finlay. Colliers has reissued The Moon Pool in paperback, and Hyperion Press, in 1974, offered The Metal Monster in hardcover as well as paperback. The rest will surely follow.

We cannot bring back the emotion of a past moment, with all it gave us to dream on: bold women, clinging heroines, daring heroes, scenes of bold fantasy. Rereading, we sense exasperation with over-stylized tricks, cliff-hanging pulp jumps, endless pace-killing references to legends which no longer seem exotically beautiful, scientific references that were dubious even at the time, women whose beauty is as dated as the beauties of Mucha, Gibson and Flagg, or the models who stare coldly from Harper's Bazaar and Vogue; dark, sneering villains, and heroes who were incapable of dealing successfully with their own

period. There is not the dramatic intensity and crushing beauty of a Tolkien, nor the fragmented, grotesque vision of a Peake, nor the cold and epic grandeur of an Eddison.

....And yet, the man who was a boy who wrote a plaintive letter to his beloved A. Merritt, imploring him to do more writing, still treasures his courteous reply hoping he would be able to devote himself to completing two stories, "one of them as probably the best of any." The letter was written April 25, 1943; on August 20 of that same year, Merritt died in Florida, aged 59.

For all his faults, and whatever debts he owed to other writers, he left behind a body of stories unique in fantasy. Ai Evalie! Ai Dahut! Ai Santhu! Ai Adana! Ai Lur! And A. Merritt is still the Lord of Fantasy!

-- Ben Indick

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Note on the foregoing essay...

Several years ago, I was asked to do such an essay by the editors of the then-active fanzine, T.A.D. ("Tension, Apprehension and Dissension",) John J. Pierce and Paul Walker. It was, for its two issues, a fine, articulate, brash, outspoken zine, and promised to be one of the best. I was going to do a series of similar reappraisals, including other old favorites of my youth -- Saxe Rohmer, some mystery writers, westerns, Asimov, Austin Hall, HPL, etc. As things turned out, the zine folded; Paul and John had other things coming up. J.J. became editor of GALAXY, and Paul became his book reviewer and a fictionist as well. (You'll see an occasional insertion in this essay by "j.j.p." -- this was the zine's style, I consider such insertions in any form other than footnotes a discourtesy to the author and the reader, I might add.)

As time dragged by and the zine and essay never appeared -- not unusual in fan circles where I have a piece on the Arthurian legend languishing about 20 months at one faned, and my OZ piece maybe two years elsewhere -- so I used it in the H.P.L. Necronomicon APA, of which several of you are co-members (an a.p.a. which is about to cease, I believe, a pity inasmuch as it has been excellent). This was its first appearance. Much later, I demanded the essay back from Pierce; by now, he had been with GALAXY for some time and the T.A.D. was clearly dead. His GALAXY proved to be an execrable magazine, with altogether poor fiction (except for Paul's work) and incredibly bad artwork (they had let Fabian go and were using fannish art of a quality which none of you would consider using.) Pierce finally resigned, for various reasons. He had committed the essay to stencil and sent that to me -- nine sheets on 4-hole A.B.Dick stencils, whereas I use a 9-hole Gestetner. Hence, when I decided I would like to present the essay to all of you, I had to do the best I could with improperly fitting stencils. The result is, while his typing is better than mine, and certainly with far fewer typos, that the papers are sometimes off-angle, and messy. I regret this, but I was not about to retype it, and I think those of you who are old codgers like myself may enjoy these musings (the result of a complete re-reading of his work) and those who have not read him may feel impelled to try a fine author of yesterday, a contemporary of HPL, who did actually chat in person together.

I never did write the follow-up essays, and no longer plan to. Indeed, the experience with T.A.D. was one of the nails hammered into the coffin of my fanac. I have quite completely dissociated myself with fan activities, and even had to consider my a.p.a. groups in this light. With regret, I have resigned from T.H.L., the Smith/Howard group I helped found -- I just haven't the time. NECRO-APA is apparently defunct... and E.O.D.? Beloved to me since its inception, it has always meant a lot to this antique, and I do hope to remain active. Indeed, I am already planning my 25th anniversary issue. I hope you will all do something special for that one ... bpi

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