

# ALMURIC

**by Robert E. Howard**



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Almuric  
by Robert E. Howard

Written 1934  
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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert E. Howard was born in a small Texan town on January 22nd, 1906, as the only child of the traveling country physician Dr. Isaac Mordecai Howard, and his wife Hester Jane Ervin. During Howard's early years the family moved from one small Texas town to the next, relocating every year or two, until in 1919 they finally settled in the hamlet of Cross Plains, where Dr. Howard would be a well-respected general practitioner — here Howard would spend the rest of his life.

Howard started to write early — from childhood on, he had known that this was what he wanted to do — and he turned into an incredibly prolific author, covering a wide range of action and adventure genres. Howard wrote to earn a living, and since the magazines that bought his stories were paying poorly, he had to make up for this by volume. He was a careful writer, usually writing outlines and several drafts of his stories before he submitted them, but he wrote fast, rarely ran out of ideas (or of older stories to re-use and improve), and above all he was an unremitting worker: *“Writing is pounding out one damn yarn after another, pounding them out whether you want to or not ... the only way I can get anything done is to keep pounding away”* (as quoted by Novalyne Price Ellis, in her biography *One Who Walked Alone*).

Howard pounded away at historical fiction, fantasy, adventure, horror, boxing, western, detective and comedy stories, and also at several hundred poems — though these, he knew, would not be published by the magazines he was writing for.

All this time, Howard's life was troubled. From early age on he suffered from depression, and then he was burdened by the chronic illness of his mother. It was she who in his childhood had installed in

him the love for literature and poetry, and he felt very close to her — when she became bed-ridden, it was he who became her caregiver for many years until her death. His unsteady commercial success as a writer did not mitigate the pain of his depression, and a longstanding on-and-off love affair with the only woman he had ever been closely acquainted with was leading nowhere. On June 11th, 1936, when he was told that his mother would not awake from the coma into which she had fallen, he felt released of his duty to her, walked out to his car, took a gun he had borrowed from the glove box, and shot himself.

## ABOUT THIS EDITION

*Almuric* is Howard's only work that is set on a planet other than Earth. It is clearly influenced by Edgar Rice Burroughs's *A Princess of Mars*, but the characters and style are unmistakably Howard's. It is assumed, though, that Howard left *Almuric* unfinished, and that the final parts have been completed by someone else, based upon a sketchy first draft. As Patrice Louinet puts it, "there is no clear cut point where Howard stops and Writer #2 begins. It's pure Howard up to probably the middle of the novel, then it's still Howard with the caveat that the percentage of pure Howard dwindles as the story moves forward."\* Several writers have been named as possible Writer #2, among them Otto Binder and Farnsworth Wright himself, the editor of *Weird Tales* magazine, where *Almuric* was first published in 1939, three years after Howard's death. Be that as it may, *Almuric* is a true Robert E. Howard story, and definitely worth reading if you enjoy exciting fantasy adventure tales.

*Almuric* has been printed in many different editions. The present edition, while carefully produced, makes no claim of particular authenticity, which, Howard's typescript being lost, would be hard to achieve.

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\* At the present time, though much research has been done by editors like Rusty Burke and Patrice Louinet, a comprehensive literary study of Howard's work is sadly missing. (Louinet has, for instance, written *Hyborian Genesis*, published 2002–2005 in three parts as appendices to the three *Conan* volumes by Del Rey Books, but this deals mainly with Howard's Conan stories.) Information has to be gleaned from various places all over the Internet; the above quote (posted 2007) has been found on <http://www.conan.com/invboard/index.php?showtopic=463&page=5>

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## FOREWORD

It was not my original intention ever to divulge the whereabouts of Esau Cairn, or the mystery surrounding him. My change of mind was brought about by Cairn himself, who retained a perhaps natural and human desire to give his strange story to the world which had disowned him and whose members can now never reach him. What he wishes to tell is his affair. One phase of my part of the transaction I refuse to divulge; I will not make public the means by which I transported Esau Cairn from his native Earth to a planet in a solar system undreamed of by even the wildest astronomical theorists. Nor will I divulge by what means I later achieved communication with him, and heard his story from his own lips, whispering ghostily across the cosmos.

Let me say that it was not premeditated. I stumbled upon the Great Secret quite by accident in the midst of a scientific experiment, and never thought of putting it to any practical use, until that night when Esau Cairn groped his way into my darkened observatory, a hunted man, with the blood of a human being on his hands. It was chance led him there, the blind instinct of the hunted thing to find a den wherein to turn at bay.

Let me state definitely and flatly, that, whatever the appearances against him, Esau Cairn is not, and was never, a criminal. In that specific case he was merely the pawn of a corrupt political machine which turned on him when he realized his position and refused to comply further with its demands. In general, the acts of his life which might suggest a violent and unruly nature simply sprang from his peculiar mental make-up.

Science is at last beginning to perceive that there is sound truth in the popular phrase, “born out of his time.” Certain natures are attuned to certain phases or epochs of history, and these natures, when cast by chance into an age alien to their reactions and emotions, find difficulty in adapting themselves to their surroundings. It is but another example of nature’s inscrutable laws, which sometimes are thrown out of stride by some cosmic friction or rift, and result in havoc to the individual and the mass.

Many men are born outside their century; Esau Cairn was born outside his epoch. Neither a moron nor a low-class primitive, possessing a mind well above the average, he was, nevertheless, distinctly out of place in the modern age. I never knew a man of intelligence so little fitted for adjustment in a machine-made civilization. (Let it be noted that I speak of him in the past tense; Esau Cairn lives, as far as the cosmos is concerned; as far as the Earth is concerned, he is dead, for he will never again set foot upon it.)

He was of a restless mold, impatient of restraint and resentful of authority. Not by any means a bully, he at the same time refused to countenance what he considered to be the slightest infringement on his rights. He was primitive in his passions, with a gusty temper and a courage inferior to none on this planet. His life was a series of repressions. Even in athletic contests he was forced to hold himself in, lest he injure his opponents. Esau Cairn was, in short, a freak — a man whose physical body and mental bent leaned back to the primordial.

Born in the Southwest, of old frontier stock, he came of a race whose characteristics were inclined toward violence, and whose traditions were of war and feud and battle against man and nature. The mountain country in which he spent his boyhood carried out the tradition. Contest — physical contest — was the breath of life to him.



Without it he was unstable and uncertain. Because of his peculiar physical make-up, full enjoyment in a legitimate way, in the ring or on the football field was denied him. His career as a football player was marked by crippling injuries received by men playing against him, and he was branded as an unnecessarily brutal man, who fought to maim his opponents rather than win games. This was unfair. The injuries were simply resultant from the use of his great strength, always so far superior to that of the men opposed to him. Cairn was not a great sluggish lethargic giant as so many powerful men are; he was vibrant with fierce life, ablaze with dynamic energy. Carried away by the lust of combat, he forgot to control his powers, and the result was broken limbs or fractured skulls for his opponents.

It was for this reason that he withdrew from college life, unsatisfied and embittered, and entered the professional ring. Again his fate dogged him. In his training-quarters, before he had had a single match, he almost fatally injured a sparring partner. Instantly the papers pounced upon the incident, and played it up beyond its natural proportions. As a result Cairn's license was revoked.

Bewildered, unsatisfied, he wandered over the world, a restless Hercules, seeking outlet for the immense vitality that surged tumultuously within him, searching vainly for some form of life wild and strenuous enough to satisfy his cravings, born in the dim red days of the world's youth.

Of the final burst of blind passion that banished him for ever from the life wherein he roamed, a stranger, I need say little. It was a nine-days' wonder, and the papers exploited it with screaming headlines. It was an old story — a rotten city government, a crooked political boss, a man chosen, unwittingly on his part, to be used as a tool and serve as a puppet.

Cairn, restless, weary of the monotony of a life for which he was unsuited, was an ideal tool — for a while. But Cairn was neither a criminal nor a fool. He understood their game quicker than they expected, and took a stand surprisingly firm to them, who did not know the real man.

Yet, even so, the result would not have been so violent if the man who had used and ruined Cairn had any real intelligence. Used to grinding men under his feet and seeing them cringe and beg for mercy, Boss Blaine could not understand that he was dealing with a man to whom his power and wealth meant nothing. Yet so schooled was Cairn to iron self-control that it required first a gross insult, then an actual blow on the part of Blaine, to rouse him. Then for the first time in his life, his wild nature blazed into full being. All his thwarted and repressed life surged up behind the clenched fist that broke Blaine's skull like an eggshell and stretched him lifeless on the floor, behind the desk from which he had for years ruled a whole district.

Cairn was no fool. With the red haze of fury fading from his glare, he realized that he could not hope to escape the vengeance of the machine that controlled the city. It was not because of fear that he fled Blaine's house. It was simply because of his primitive instinct to find a more convenient place to turn at bay and fight out his death fight.

So it was that chance led him to my observatory.

He would have left, instantly, not wishing to embroil me in his trouble, but I persuaded him to remain and tell me his story. I had long expected some catastrophe of the sort. That he had repressed himself as long as he did, shows something of his iron character. His nature was as wild and untamed as that of a maned lion.

He had no plan — he simply intended to fortify himself somewhere and fight it out with the police until he was riddled with lead.

I at first agreed with him, seeing no better alternative. I was not so naive as to believe he had any chance in the courts with the evidence that would be presented against him. Then a sudden thought occurred to me, so fantastic and alien, and yet so logical, that I instantly propounded it to my companion. I told him of the Great Secret, and gave him proof of its possibilities.

In short, I urged him to take the chance of a flight through space, rather than meet the certain death that awaited him.

And he agreed. There was no place in the universe which would support human life. But I had looked beyond the knowledge of men, in universes beyond universes. And I chose the only planet I knew on which a human being could exist — the wild, primitive, and strange planet I named Almuric.

Cairn understood the risks and uncertainties as well as I. But he was utterly fearless — and the thing was done. Esau Cairn left the planet of his birth, for a world swimming afar in space, alien, aloof, strange.

## CHAPTER I

The Transition was so swift and brief, that it seemed less than a tick of time lay between the moment I placed myself in Professor Hildebrand's strange machine, and the instant when I found myself standing upright in the clear sunlight that flooded a broad plain. I could not doubt that I had indeed been transported to another world. The landscape was not so grotesque and fantastic as I might have supposed, but it was indisputably alien to anything existing on the Earth.

But before I gave much heed to my surroundings, I examined my own person to learn if I had survived that awful flight without injury. Apparently I had. My various parts functioned with their accustomed vigor. But I was naked. Hildebrand had told me that inorganic substance could not survive the transmutation. Only vibrant, living matter could pass unchanged through the unthinkable gulfs which lie between the planets. I was grateful that I had not fallen into a land of ice and snow. The plain seemed filled with a lazy summerlike heat. The warmth of the sun was pleasant on my bare limbs.

On every side stretched away a vast level plain, thickly grown with short green grass. In the distance this grass attained a greater height, and through it I caught the glint of water. Here and there throughout the plain this phenomenon was repeated, and I traced the meandering course of several rivers, apparently of no great width. Black dots moved through the grass near the rivers, but their nature I could not determine. However, it was quite evident that my lot had not been cast on an uninhabited planet, though I could not guess the nature of the inhabitants. My imagination peopled the distances with nightmare shapes.

It is an awesome sensation to be suddenly hurled from one's native world into a new strange alien sphere. To say that I was not appalled at the prospect, that I did not shrink and shudder in spite of the peaceful quiet of my environs, would be hypocrisy. I, who had never known fear, was transformed into a mass of quivering, cowering nerves, starting at my own shadow. It was that man's utter helplessness was borne in upon me, and my mighty frame and massive thews seemed frail and brittle as the body of a child. How could I pit them against an unknown world? In that instant I would gladly have returned to Earth and the gallows that awaited me, rather than face the nameless terrors with which imagination peopled my new-found world. But I was soon to learn that those thews I now despised were capable of carrying me through greater perils than I dreamed.

A slight sound behind me brought me around to stare amazedly at the first inhabitant of Almuric I was to encounter. And the sight, awesome and menacing as it was, yet drove the ice from my veins and brought back some of my dwindling courage. The tangible and material can never be as grisly as the unknown, however perilous.

At my first startled glance I thought it was a gorilla which stood before me. Even with the thought I realized that it was a man, but such a man as neither I nor any other Earthman had ever looked upon.

He was not much taller than I, but broader and heavier, with a great spread of shoulders, and thick limbs knotted with muscles. He wore a loincloth of some silklike material girdled with a broad belt which supported a long knife in a leather sheath. High-strapped sandals were on his feet. These details I took in at a glance, my attention being instantly fixed in fascination on his face.

Such a countenance it is difficult to imagine or describe. The head was set squarely between the massive shoulders, the neck so squat as

to be scarcely apparent. The jaw was square and powerful, and as the wide thin lips lifted in a snarl, I glimpsed brutal tusk-like teeth. A short bristly beard masked the jaw, set off by fierce, up-curving mustaches. The nose was almost rudimentary, with wide flaring nostrils. The eyes were small, bloodshot, and an icy gray in color. From the thick black brows the forehead, low and receding, sloped back into a tangle of coarse, bushy hair. The ears were small and very close-set.

The mane and beard were very blue-black, and the creature's limbs and body were almost covered with hair of the same hue. He was not, indeed, as hairy as an ape, but he was hairier than any human being I had ever seen.

I instantly realized that the being, hostile or not, was a formidable figure. He fairly emanated strength — hard, raw, brutal power. There was not an ounce of surplus flesh on him. His frame was massive, with heavy bones. His hairy skin rippled with muscles that looked iron-hard. Yet it was not altogether his body that spoke of dangerous power. His look, his carriage, his whole manner reflected a terrible physical might backed by a cruel and implacable mind. As I met the blaze of his bloodshot eyes, I felt a wave of corresponding anger. The stranger's attitude was arrogant and provocative beyond description. I felt my muscles tense and harden instinctively.

But for an instant my resentment was submerged by the amazement with which I heard him speak in perfect English!

“Thak! What manner of man are you?”

His voice was harsh, grating and insulting. There was nothing subdued or restrained about him. Here were the naked primitive instincts and manners, unmodified. Again I felt the old red fury rising in me, but I fought it down.

**End of  
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