

Onion Tops

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Long Road to Cross Plains

So, this is "The Wait List." It's fitting that I should end up here; my entire experience as a fan of REH has been one long wait: waiting for new editions, waiting for rare items to appear on ebay, waiting for the mail.

I'm not sure which came first, the Conan comics or the Ace paperbacks, but I became a Conan fan in the mid 70s. There wasn't a great selection of fantasy books at the Marysville, California Waldenbooks, so Conan was followed by Kull who was followed by (groan) Stephen King. If Waldenbooks ever stocked more REH than what I had, I was never aware of it. And I was there every weekend.

My family moved around a lot in the late 70s, but everywhere we ended up, out came my shiny collection of Conan paperbacks and comics. Even as a young man, I carried those treasures around with me wherever I lived. I still have that original set of 12. They're a little yellowed and a little creased, but they are the foundation.

I unloaded the books in Seattle, for a while, but Boeing laid me off and I packed them back up. Five years and a college degree later, I unpacked

them again in my Lancaster, California home.

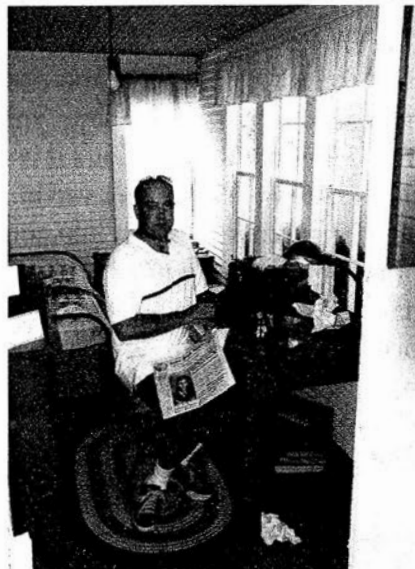
It was 1999. I'd missed a lot.

In 2002, I stumbled across the Baen edition of Bran Mak Morn stories at the local Barnes & Noble. I thought, "Huh, never heard of this character." But remembering the Conan collection, I bought the book, and my waiting began.

I tore through the Baen book. I went back for the other six volumes. Imagine my surprise when, for the first time in my life, I was unable to order a book that I wanted. "What do you mean 'out of print'?" The only ones I could get were *Cormac Mac Art* and *Beyond the Borders*.

The collector in me reared his ugly head; I visited every bookstore in the Antelope Valley. Nothing. I took a trip "Down Below" (Los Angeles) still nothing. I was frantic. Then, a math teacher at my school told me about abebooks.com. I bought *Kull* and *Trails in Darkness*. I thought I bought *Solomon Kane* and *Eons of the Night*, but a short email a few days later informed me that the listings were out of date. More Waiting. And then -- ebay.

I won a ratty, ex-library



copy of *Eons of the Night* for a ridiculous price. I paid more than \$50.00 for the Solomon Kane volume, but, at last, I was done. I had it all.

But wait, what were all of these other books and magazines? What was a *Fantasy Crossroads*? I did a Yahoo! search and discovered Howardworks. My wallet was doomed. I compiled a list of the publications that I would need in order to complete the prose collection. I had a lot of success with online book sellers. I watched ebay like a hawk. I joined the inner circle. I'm still waiting.

I read *One Who Walked Alone*, *Dark Valley Destiny*, *Selected Letters I & II*; I visited Cross Plains this summer. I've read every issue of *The Dark Man* and *Cromlech* and *The Cimmerian* and *Two-Gun Rac*. I've read *The Dark Barbarian*

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The Howard Review Reviewed

After nearly ten years, Dennis McHaney's *The Howard Review* is back. The first incarnation of *The Howard Review* #12 was available to download from McHaney's yahoo group, which can be accessed at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/The_Howard_Review/, and it is still there – sometimes. At least three other versions have been available for purchase at www.lulu.com, including a half-priced black and white version. Newer versions have cleaned up the few typos that appeared in the original document. I downloaded my copy of THR #12, burned up a color cartridge and 60 sheets of high-gloss, super white paper, and had the works bound at Kinkos.

What makes this publication so appealing is the generous use of color, including eight full-page scans of various pulp covers, including THR's J. Allen St. John cover, which was borrowed from the winter 1932 issue of *Oriental Stories*. Add to these colorized scans of most, if not all, of the interior art that accompanied all of Robert E. Howard's fiction that appeared in *Oriental Stories/The Magic Carpet Magazine* and others. There are also many sketches by famed REH artist Roy G. Krenkel and color scans of several vintage paperback books. For quantity and quality of art and color, THR beats all comers.

Fred Blosser's contribution, "Black Queen, Red Heart," is a clever comparison of the Donald Grant version of "The Moon of Skulls" with the restored Baen version. Blosser effectively shows how Grant's bowdlerization substantially altered Howard's text. By removing all clues of Nakari's "blackness," Blosser argues, Grant gutted the story of "Howard's first fully realized exploration of the themes of racial domination, social decadence, and tabooed interracial sexual attraction." Blosser's argument is convincing and entertaining.

"In the Tradition of," by Charles Gramlich, is an examination of paperback books in which "Howard's influence was indicated on the covers." While not exactly required reading, this list of book titles and quotations does reveal the extent to which Howard's name was used to market various titles, some of dubious distinction.

McHaney's "Letters from Mom" is a tease. This all too brief examination of letters from REH's mother to various magazines leaves the reader wanting more. A more thorough exploration of Hester Howard's epistolary efforts, if such a thing is possible, would be a welcome addition to any of McHaney's future efforts.

The *piece de resistance* of THR #12 is McHaney's "Oriental Stories, The Magic Carpet Magazine, and the Souk." This twenty-page journey through the life of a pulp magazine includes color covers, interior art, and advertisements: all related to Robert E. Howard, of course. Also included are all references to REH that were made in the letters column, the readers' choices for most popular stories, and interesting tidbits about the history of *Oriental Stories* and *The Magic Carpet Magazine*. This feature is quite a treat for fans of pulp magazines who can't afford to buy them.

Oh yeah, there's also some Howard fiction and poetry. It would have been nice if some fiction from *Oriental Stories* or *The Magic Carpet Magazine* would have been included, "The Voice of Eilil" comes to mind as it is the only story from either of the magazines that is not currently in print, but instead we get "Black Talons" and "The Tomb's Secret," both of which are available in Wildside Press's *Graveyard Rats & Others*. Several poems, all of which appear in *Always Comes Evening*, round out the magazine, including a facsimile reproduction of "Always Comes Evening" from the Canadian pulp, *Uncanny Tales*.

While some may be tempted to purchase the \$8.95 black and white version of the mag, which includes three Krenkle sketches that are not available in the color product, my money is on the \$17.50 version. Never, to the best of my knowledge, have the words of Robert E. Howard been surrounded by so much color. Hopefully future issues of THR will reprint items from past issues. "Thoroughbreds" and "Lives and Crimes of Notable Artists," are two items that are much more difficult to acquire than the "Weird Menace" stories presented this time around.

Robert E. Howard: A collector's nightmare

The lack of a comprehensive collection of Robert E. Howard's fiction is frustrating. Once an author captures a reader's imagination that reader will often seek out more of the author's works. This is not a problem if the author is Shakespeare, whose complete works have been available for centuries, but what does the new Howard fan have to do to collect all of Howard's prose? And once that new fan sees what is available, will he even want to?

The new fan walks into his local Barnes and Noble and discovers Howard by accident. There are no posters, no prominent displays, just three or four attractive trade paperbacks on a lower shelf beside other attractive trade paperbacks. He pulls *The Coming of Conan the Cimmerian* off the shelf. Maybe he's seen the Dark Horse comic; maybe he's seen the movie on TBS; for whatever reason, the future of Robert E. Howard is now in the hands of Conan the barbarian.

Let's assume that New Fan likes Conan, who wouldn't? He returns to B & N. There was another book, wasn't there? And even though New Fan usually buys regular paperbacks for under \$10, he springs for *The Savage Tales of Solomon Kane*. Now what? Now nothing -- unless REH has ignited the word lust in New Fan.

Even a casual fan will go to the help desk and ask about other books. The helpful clerk will inform New Fan that there is a new Conan book due in November, and that there are several other titles that would have to be ordered.

"What's the price?" New Fan asks.

"Between \$35 and \$40," the clerk answers.

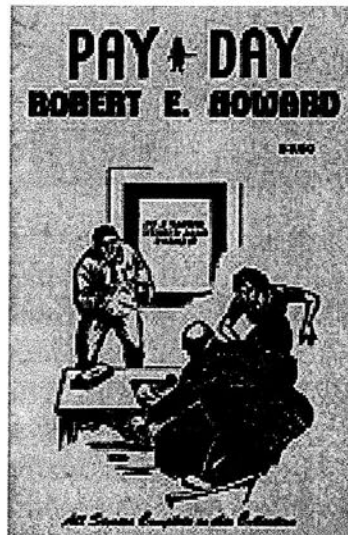
Let's assume that New Fan has a job and a strong enough interest to order one of the

Wildside Press books. I asked two of my high school English classes which of the WP titles they would pick based only on the title. It was almost a tie between *The Complete Action Stories* and *Graveyard Rats and Others*. Now the future of REH rests in the hands of one or two of his most under-appreciated genres: his humorous westerns or his detective fiction. Don't get me wrong, I like the detective fiction and am fond of the humorous westerns, but I read them *last*. New Fan has to be a pretty eclectic reader to continue on his path to Howard Nirvana.

The dedicated fan haunts used bookstores. But it is rare to find anything other than a few of the Ace Conan books. New Fan is finished without the internet. Even a halfhearted search on the net will uncover a plethora of reasonably priced used paperbacks by Howard. Berkley, Zebra, Ace, and others are all available for \$10, give or take. If New Fan finds eBay, Howard fanzines and other items of interest will be-

come available, often for an inflated price.

The internet also opens up a can of worms. New Fan will, undoubtedly, run across one of the many web pages that list Howard's works. Now the hunt begins; now the wallet comes out. Where does New Fan get copies of *The "New" Howard Reader*? Of any of the Cryptic Publications? What follows is a list of publications that contain works that are in desperate need of reprinting. These items have only appeared once or twice in publications that are almost impossible to find, for any price. The impending release of the Bison Books Robert E. Howard Collection will, hopefully, shorten this list, but at the time of this writing, I am unaware of the contents of those volumes.



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Collector's Nightmare Continued

These are the publications and stories that cause Howard collectors to convulse. Most of these stories have only been printed in the listed publication, a few appeared in the pulps:

Fantasy Crossroads Special Edition #1 (Stygian Isle Press): "Fists of the Revolution"

Fantasy Crossroads #4/5 (Stygian Isle Press): "Man with the Mystery Mitts"

Fantasy Crossroads #7 (Stygian Isle Press): "College Socks"

The Dark Man #2

(Necronomicon Press): "Bill Smalley and the Power of the Human Eye"

The Dark Man #3

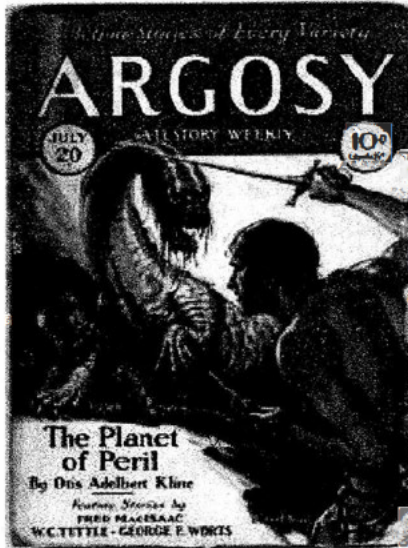
(Necronomicon Press): "What the Nation Owes the South"

Crypt of Cthulhu #39 (Cryptic): "The Voice of Doom"

Report on a Writing Man (Necronomicon Press): "Under the Great Tiger"

The Howard Review #2 (McHaney): "The Riot at Bucksnot" and the untitled story that begins "I had just hung . . ."

The Howard Review #11 (McHaney): "Thoroughbreds" and "Lives and Crimes of No -



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and I'm working on *The Barbaric Triumph*. But what I'm really doing is waiting, waiting for a real biography and the complete poetry and the collected letters.

During my begging and pleading for hard to find REH, I learned that, from time to time, unpublished REH appeared in the pages of REHupa. "No, no," the collector says, "that just won't do."

So, as long as I've got to wait for "pure texts," I might as well join in on the conversation. I'm a 37 year old high school English teacher with a wife who thinks I'm crazy. I don't know what I'll have to add, but I'm happy to be here. Even if it is only to wait.

table Artists"

The Shadow of the Beast (Hamilton): "The Tomb of the Dragon"

Writer of the Dark (Dark Carneval): "The Ghost with the Silk Hat"

The following publications contain more than a few hard to find REH stories.

Bran Mak Morn: A Play and Others (Cryptic)

Two-Fisted Detective #1 (Cryptic)

The Adventures of Lal Singh (Cryptic)

Pay Day (Cryptic)

The Coming of El Borak (Cryptic)

Lewd Tales (Cryptic)

North of Khyber (Cryptic)

The Sonora Kid (Cryptic)

The "New" Howard Reader #s 1 - 7 (Marek)

Bits and pieces of the above are available in publications like *Two Gun Raconteur*, *Crypt of Cthulhu*, and *The Howard Collector*, but you'll get more bang for your buck with any of the above.

And, finally, for those of you who thought you wouldn't have to buy a pulp . . .

Argosy All-Story Weekly, 20 July 1929

(Munsey): "Crowd Horror"

And don't even get me started on the poetry. I'll have to save my pennies and hope I can afford *Wandering Star's* collection.

WANTED

The Right Hook, Vols 2 & 3
Any letters not appearing in
Runes of Ahrh Eih Eche,
Selected Letters Vol. 1 & 2, or
The "New" Howard Readers

Photo of Robert E. Howard's *Pay Day* was found on the internet, all other material Copyright © 2004 by Rob Roehm for Roehm's Room Press. This edition was produced for REHupa #190.