

The Howard Collector

Summer 1964



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

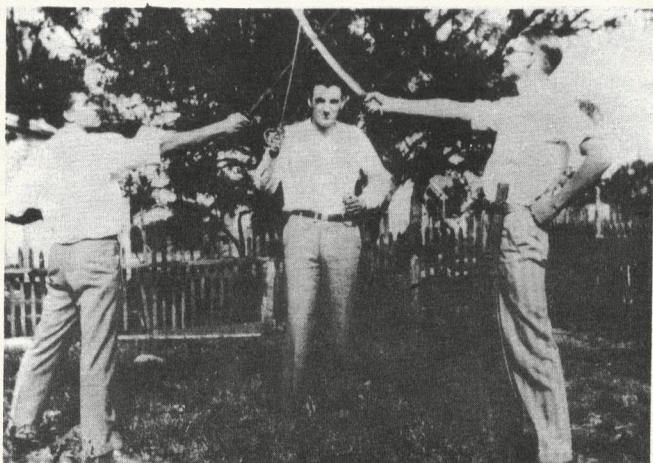
A Biographical Sketch of Robert E. Howard from *Fantasy Magazine*, July 1935.

A Dawn in Flanders from *The Junto*, no date.

Belshazzar, Timur-Lang from a letter to Harold Preece, no date.

Letter (E. Hoffman Price) from *The Acolyte*, Fall 1945.

Kelly the Conjure-Man, The Last White Man, John Ringold from the original mss.



Robert E. Howard - Truett Vinson - Tevis Clyde Smith

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EDITORIAL NOTES

The material in the article "Kelly the Conjure-Man" was the basis for Howard's weird tale "Black Canaan". "The Last White Man" is the only known example of Howard's outlining technique although the unpublished "The House of Om" is begun and then diminishes into outline. "John Ringold" is about the western badman more popularly known as Johnny Ringo; it is generally held that John Ringold (or Ringgold) was his real name.

E. Hoffmann Price's letter refers to an article by Stuart M. Boland ("Interlude With Lovecraft", The Acolyte, Summer 1945) but suffers little for the lack of that article for referral.

The "Character-Continuity Series Index" in the third issue of THE HOWARD COLLECTOR lists "Turlogh O'Brien & Athelstane the Dane"; this should read "Saxon" instead of "Dane".

As of mid-February only fifty-three copies of the Howard verse collection ALWAYS COMES EVENING remained in stock with the publisher. The last unpublished Solomon Kane story "The Blue Flame of Vengeance" will appear in the Arkham House anthology OVER THE EDGE sometime this year. The story has been revised by John Pocsik to introduce a supernatural element into an otherwise "straight" adventure story.

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF ROBERT E. HOWARD

BY ALVIN EARL PERRY

Conan! Solomon Kane! King Kull! These names mean action — adventure romance — to thousands of fantasy fans throughout America; they are the heroes of adult fairy tales (rather gory ones it must be admitted) penned by he who is perhaps the greatest "actionist" writing fantasy today — Robert E. Howard!

This much-read author is a Texan. He was born January 22nd, 1906, in the small village of Peaster, some forty-five miles west of Fort Worth, and still resides in the Lone Star State, though further west.

At the age of fifteen, the future creator of Conan began writing with the intention of devoting his life to it; but it wasn't until the Fall of 1924, while attending Howard Payne College at Brownwood, that he made a sale. The tale was "Spear and Fang", bought by Weird Tales for the princely sum of \$16. It was very short and dealt with the imagined prehistoric struggles of the Neanderthal men and the Cro-Magnon.

Physically, Mr. Howard is a remarkable man. He stands almost six feet, is a decided brunette but for his blue eyes, rather heavily built, has a 45

inch chest, is 17 inches about the neck and perhaps 37 at the belt. And, he says "no one ever accused me of being handsome". He admires E. Hoffman Price immensely, calling him "a talented writer and a splendid gentleman".

Jack London is this Texan's favorite writer; and he prefers tequila to brandy, beef to pork, and likes his eggs fried hard. Jack Benny and Gracie Allen are his air idols, while Lionel Barrymore and Edna May Oliver hold his attentions in the movies. His sole ambition is to be a successful author, and he enjoyed writing "The Shadow Kingdom" better than any other tale.

Though he claims to have lead an ordinary life, when it is realized that he has been everywhere of interest in the vast Southwest, plus a large portion of Old Mexico and has witnessed the settlement of the Plains country, the development of the Rio Grande territory, and the Central West Texas oil booms, one easily sees the modesty of the statement.

As to his fictional characters, we'll let Mr. Howard speak for himself. He says: "The first character I ever created was Francis Xavier Gordon, El Borak, the hero of 'The Daughter of Erlik Khan' (Top-Notch), etc. I don't remember his genesis. He came to life in my mind when I was about ten years old. The next was Bran Mak Morn,

the Pictish king ('The Kings of the Night', etc., Weird Tales). He was the result of my discovery of the Pictish race, when reading some historical works in a public library in New Orleans at the age of thirteen. Physically he bore a striking resemblance to El Borak. Solomon Kane ('Red Shadows', etc., Weird Tales) I created when I was in high school, at the age of about sixteen, but, like the others I have mentioned, several years passed before I put him on paper. He was probably the result of an admiration for a certain type of cold, steely-nerved duellist that existed in the sixteenth century. King Kull differed from these others in that he was put on paper the moment he was created, whereas they existed in my mind years before I tried to put them in stories. In fact, he first appeared as only a minor character in a story which was never accepted. At least, he was intended to be a minor character, but I had not gone far before he was dominating the yarn. Conan simply grew up in my mind a few years ago when I was stopping in a little border town on the lower Rio Grande. I did not create him by any conscious process. He simply stalked full grown out of oblivion and set me at work recording the saga of his adventures. It was much the same, though to a lesser extent, with Sailor Steve Costigan (Fight Story Magazine, Action Stories, Jack Dempsey's Fight Magazine, etc.),

Kid Allison (Sport Stories) and Breckenridge Elkins (Action Stories).

The distinctive style of writing developed by Mr. Howard — swashbuckling, raw, magnificently bloody — is utterly off the trail and has proven consistently popular with Weird Tales readers. Those who have never perused one of his Conan yarns, should do so; they will never regret it.



Robust singer, the night is a dark shrouded skull
Of memories which sweep back to Conan and Kull.
Bard of sagas wild, pluck once more your magic lyre,
Enchant us with those tales of necromantic fire —
Runes torn from the black empire of your haunted mind,
Tell us of those dim lands from whence a pilgrim blind,

Ensorcelled, seeks a chalice fair he cannot find.
Ride your steed of death along some Stygian coast,
Valhalla ne'er shall know the presence of your ghost,
In other realms of splendor rare your spirit dwells.
Night cannot pall the magic of your mighty spells.

How strongly blow the winds of time's forgetfulness.
Oliphants of doom may sound, and though dark shadows press,
We, your acolytes, shall keep bright your genius flame
And, with fires of glory burning around your name,
Remember will — brave Conan not alone shall keep
Deathless your poignant memories from eternal sleep.

-- Walter Shedlofsky

LETTER:

Robert E. Howard to
Clark Ashton Smith,
dated July 23, 1935

Dear Mr. Smith:

I'm ashamed of my long delay in answering your letter, but assure you it was from no lack of interest. Since writing you last a number of things have combined to interfere with my correspondence: a month I was forced to spend in East Texas, during time I did no writing of any kind; a journey to Santa Fe, New Mexico; and a number of shorter trips to various points in West Texas, and the necessity of catching up on my fiction work which accumulated during the time spent on these trips, all caused me to get away behind on my letter-writing.

But I have, as always, followed your work in Weird Tales. I very much enjoyed "The Dark Eidolon", "The Last Hieroglyph", "The Flower Women", and the splendid poem: "Dominion". I am not exaggerating when I say that I do not consider that I ever read a finer poem than that. I'd give my trigger-finger for the ability to make words flame and burn as you do.

I've been concentrating on adventure stuff recently, trying to break into that field permanently. I've made a start, with yarns published in Action, Thrilling Adventures, and Top-Notch; got a couple of cover designs in a row with Top-Notch and am toiling manfully to become a regular contributor. Sent a three-part serial to Wright yesterday: "Red Nails", which I devoutly hope he'll like. A Conan yarn, and the grimmest, bloodiest and most merciless story of the series so far. Too much raw meat, maybe, but I merely portrayed what I honestly believe would be the reactions of certain types of people in the situations on which the plot of the story hung. It may sound fantastic to link the term "realism" with Conan; but as a matter of fact - his supernatural adventures aside - he is the most realistic character I ever evolved. He is simply a combination of a number of men I have known, and I think that's why he seemed to step full-grown into my consciousness when I wrote the first yarn of the series. Some mechanism in my sub-consciousness took the dominant characteristics of various prize-fighters, gunmen, bootleggers, oil field bullies, gamblers, and honest workmen I had come in contact with, and combining them all, produced the amalgamation I call Conan the Cimmerian.

Lovecraft tells you are doing some impressive work in carving, using dinosaur bone; I envy you

your splendid variety of talents - artist, poet,
author, and now sculptor.

With best wishes.

Cordially,

Robert E. Howard



LETTER:

Robert E. Howard to
August Derleth,
dated May 9, 1936

Dear August:

I am indeed sorry to learn of the deaths in your family. Death to the old is inevitable, and yet somehow I often feel that it is a greater tragedy than death to the young. When a man dies young he misses much suffering, but the old have only life as a possession and somehow to me the tearing of a pitiful remnant from weak old fingers is more tragic than the looting of a life in its full rich prime. I don't want to live to be old. I want to die when my time comes, quickly and suddenly, in the full tide of my strength and health.

Thanks very much for "Retreat to Nature". You've put into words, vividly and powerfully, what I've tried to say in my stumbling way several times - to derision of various would-be sophisticates. I'm going to keep your article handy and brandish it in their faces next time instead of busting them over the head with a branding iron as I contemplated. It always gave me hydrophobia to see

some smart-aleck gibing: "Defeatism!" whenever he sees somebody doing something that he, personally, doesn't care to do. I'll admit I seldom commune with nature; about the only time I ever stroll through the woods is when I'm looking for a snort of moonshine liquor. Though I was raised in the country my ignorance of trees, animals, etc., is annoying even to me. But I heartily admit a kinship with the primitive, and I have only respect for lovers and interpreters of nature. To hell with the psychologists and city-bred psychoanalists and all the other freaks spawned by our rotting civilization. They've lived between concrete and shingles so long they've forgot their origin. They ought to get out before sun-up and walk through the grass barefooted some morning, just for an unfamiliar experience. I once wrote a rhyme in which I tried to express my resentment:

You have built a world of paper and wood,
Culture and cult and lies;
Has the cobra altered beneath his hood,
Or the fire in the tiger's eyes?

You have turned from valley and hill and flood,
You have set yourselves apart,
Forgetting the earth that feeds the blood
And the talon that finds the heart.

You boast you have stilled the lustful call
Of the black ancestral ape,
But Life, the tigress that bore you all,
Has never changed her shape.

And a strange shape comes to your faery mead,
With a fixed black simian frown,
But you will not know and you will not heed
Till your towers come tumbling down.

I've forgotten the rest of it, which is doubtless as well. Glad to hear of all your sales, and book publishings. I haven't written a weird story for nearly a year, though I've been contemplating one dealing with Coronado's expedition on the Staked Plains in 1541. A good theme if I can develop it.

I enjoyed your "Lesandro's Familiar" a lot. It was the best yarn in an issue otherwise not remarkable. I did like Smith's poem, and Kramer's. Ignore my forthcoming "Black Canaan". It started out as a good yarn, laid in the real Canaan, which lies between Tulip Creek and the Ouachita River in southwestern Arkansas, the homeland of the Howards, but I cut so much of the guts out of it, in response to editorial requirements, that in its published form it won't resemble the original theme, woven about the mysterious form of Kelly the Conjurman, who was a real character, back in the

seventies - an ebon giant with copper rings in his ears and a gift of magic who came from and vanished into nowhere one dark night when the owls hooted in the cypresses and the wind moaned among the negro cabins.

Thanks for the photograph. I like it. You wear a sort of grimly humorous fighting smile, as if you had just knocked a critic through a brick wall. I'm retaliating by enclosing my latest snapshot.

Cordially,

Bob

P.S. You ought to see the mint bed just west of the kitchen window, I believe it makes the best juleps in the world. My method of making mint juleps is unconventional, but they satisfy me, and I'm not trying to please anybody else, as I once profanely told a Kentuckian who criticized my technique. I find a bit of crushed mint in whiskey sours and certain kinds of high-balls adds a great deal to the taste.

KELLY THE CONJURE - MAN

BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

There are strange tales told when the full moon shines
Of voodoo nights when the ghost-things ran —
But the strangest figure among the pines
Was Kelly the conjure-man.

About seventy-five miles north-east of the great Smackover oil field of Arkansas lies a densely wooded country of pinelands and rivers, rich in folklore and tradition. Here, in the early 1850's came a sturdy race of Scotch-Irish pioneers pushing back the frontier and hewing homes in the tangled wilderness.

Among the many picturesque characters of those early days, one figure stands out, sharply, yet dimly limned against a background of dark legendry and horrific fable -- the sinister figure of Kelly, the black conjurer.

Son of a Congo ju-ju man, legend whispered, Kelly, born a slave, exercised in his day unfathomable power among the darkest of the Ouachita pinelands. Where he came from is not exactly known;

he drifted into the country shortly after the Civil War and mystery was attendant on his coming as upon all his actions.

Kelly did little work with his hands, and he did not mingle overmuch with his kind. They came to him; he never came to them. His cabin stood on the banks of Tulip Creek, a dark, serpent-like stream winding through the deep overhanging shadows of the pines, and there Kelly lived apart in dark and silent majesty.

A fine figure of barbaric manhood he was, perhaps six foot in height, mighty shouldered, supple like a great black panther. He always wore a vivid red flannel shirt, and great gold rings in his ears and nose heightened the bizarre and fantastic imagery of his appearance. He had little to say to white men or black. Silently, like an uncrowned king of dark Africa he stalked along the roads, looming like a dark inscrutable wizard among the pinelands. His eyes were deep, murky, far-seeing, and his skin was black as tropical night. The very aura of the jungle hung about him and people feared him, perhaps sensing something sinister, something abysmal that lurked in the black waters of his soul and peered through his murky eyes.

He was, indeed, incongruous in his environments. He belonged in another age -- another land -- another setting. He belonged in the haunted shad-

ows of a fetish hut, lapped by the monstrous, brutish slumber of ancient Africa.

Kelly the "conjer man" they called him, and to his cabin on lonely Tulip Creek came the black people on mysterious errands. Furtively they stole like shadows through the sombre blackness of the pinelands but what went on in that dim cabin no white man ever knew.

Kelly was a professed dealer in charms, and a dispeller of "conjers". The black folk came to him to have spells lifted from their souls where enemies had placed them by curses and incantations. More, he was a healer -- at least he claimed to heal the black people of their diseases. Tuberculosis was rare among white people in that locality, but negroes were subject to its ravages, and these victims Kelly professed to heal. His methods were unique; he burnt snake bones to powder and sifted the powder in an incision made in the victim's arm by means of a lancet made from an old razor. It is a matter of doubt whether anyone was ever healed by these methods -- in fact, there is reason to believe the results were appallingly the opposite.

Perhaps Kelly did not himself believe he could combat tuberculosis in this manner; perhaps it was but a ruse to get the victim in his power; this is but a supposition, but primitive peoples have strange ways of bringing their fellows under their sway.

Among some tribes it is but necessary to procure a lock of hair, a finger nail, a drop of blood, over which to utter certain incantations and perform certain rituals. Then, in the mind of the spell-weaver, and in the mind of the victim as well, the latter is completely under control. And there is the magic of molding a figure of the intended victim from clay. Pins stuck in this figure cause the human model to die agonizingly; place the clay figure in a stream, and as the water dissolves it, the human victim withers and fades away into slow dissolution. All these things are solemn truths in the minds of the voodooists.

Be that as it may, Kelly soon began to exercise unusual powers over the darkies of the locality. From a dispeller of "conjers" he became, it would seem, a weaver of spells himself. Negroes began to go violently insane, and rumor laid their obsessions at Kelly's door. Whether the cause of their insanity was physical or mental was not known, but that their minds were affected by some uncanny thing was well evident. They were obsessed by the horrible belief that their stomachs were full of living snakes, created by the spell of some master-conjurer, and at the mention of this nameless wizard, suspicion turned to Kelly. Was it hypnosis, some obscure malady or maddening drug, or the action of sheer fear? No white man knew, yet the

victims were indisputably mad.

In every community of whites and blacks, at least in the South, a deep, dark current flows forever, out of sight of the whites who but dimly suspect its existence. A dark current of colored folks' thoughts, deeds, ambitions and aspirations, like a river flowing unseen through the jungle. No white man ever knew why Kelly -- if Kelly it were -- drove black men and black women mad. What was the secret of grim power, what the secret of his dark ambitions, no white man ever knew.

And Kelly never spoke of them, certainly; he went his way, silent, brooding, darkly majestic, that satanic something growing in his shadowy eyes until he seemed to look on white people as if they too were blind mewling puppets in the hollow of his black hand.

Then, in the late '70's, Kelly vanished. The word is to be taken literally. His cabin on Tulip Creek stood empty, the slab door sagging open on the wooden hinges, and he was seen no more, stalking like a dark ghost through the pinelands. Perhaps the colored people knew, but they never spoke. He had come in mystery, in mystery he lived, and in mystery he went and no man knew the road of his going. At least no man ever admitted that he knew. Perhaps the gloomy waters knew. Perhaps Kelly's victims turned on him at last. That

lonely cabin in the black shadows of the moaning pines might have known a grisly midnight crime; the dusky waters of Tulip Creek might have received a form that splashed soggily and silently sank.

Or perhaps the conjure-man merely went his mysterious way in the night for reasons of his own, and on some other river pursued his fantastic career. None knows. Mystery hangs over his coming and his going, like a cloud impenetrable as night among the piney-woods, than which there is no blacker darkness this side Oblivion.

But even today his shadow haunts the long dim river-reaches and when the wind drones through the black pines under the stars, the old black people will tell you it is the spirit of the conjure-man whispering to the dead in the black shadows of the pinelands.

NIGHT SKY

BY TEVIS CLYDE SMITH

On such a night as this, once, you and I
Rode to the sea, and watched the green waves leap;
While up above, within a crumbling sky,
We saw the faces of the ancients peep
From grey and purple clouds that rolled on high
All huddled close together in a heap:
We heard the rolling sound of many a sigh,
And saw the once dead bodies from them creep.

So lovely fabled Helen came and stood
Beside a giant horse of carven wood,
And Nero played upon his favored lyre
While all of Rome became ablaze with fire,
And Salome stroked John the Baptist's head
While looking on the body that was dead.

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THE LAST WHITE MAN

BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

The man shivered in the coolness of the early morning. He shifted his body to relieve the pressure on his elbows.

Cautiously he peered up over the great boulder in front of him, and down the mountain side. Fire twinkled there and the man cursed. An obscene song floated up to him and his curses deepened. The song was in a rich, guttural voice.

The man was a wonder, physically. Over six feet in height, his chest and shoulders were those of a giant. Weighing far over two hundred pounds, he yet gave the impression of sinuous speed. His face was sullen, savage, almost primitive, small black eyes glittering through tangled strands of sandy hair. In one hand he clutched a rifle. A curved scimitar of surprising proportions lay beside him.

He was a splendid example of a wonderful race. A race which reached physical perfection, sank to the depths of degeneracy and then regained the heights just before their fall. He was the last.

He was thinking as he lay there, watching the camps of his enemies.

What heights his race had reached before luxu-

ries, idleness and pleasures had sapped their might; had made of them a race of degenerate weaklings. He cursed beneath his breath.

There had been an age when his race had ruled the world. Their cities dotted the fertile plains. Their ships had furrowed the seas, bringing back the wealth of every land. Their armies had gone forth conquering and subjugating.

None could stand before them in the more peaceful sports. Their athletes defeated all others with ease. They were all giants, physically and mentally.

Then the decadence set in. It had been first noticeable in the sports and athletics. Fewer and fewer of the race had gained fame in the great games. More and more men of other races seized the prizes.

The ruling race forgot the art of war, forgot all except the search for newer pleasures, and in so doing, they descended to the depths of degeneracy.

Always some new strong race sprang up then, the man reflected, thinking of the hazy legends of the ancients, of great empires known as Greece, Rome, Nineveh, Sumeria.

And a new, strong race had risen. A race whose people had been enslaved for ages.

They were a mighty, a prolific race. First

they overran their own continent. Rebellions swept Africa. The negroes pushed the Arab races to the north and the Arabs and Europeans slew each other, until from Cape Town to Tangiers, and from Kimberly to Suez only black men ruled.

The whites should have seen that they could not stand before them. The black race doubles itself in forty years, the brown in sixty, the white in eighty. And the white race was exhausted by dissipation; birth rate almost ceased. Moreover, the race was decimated by fierce wars, wherein white man fought white man.

The whites had taught sanitation to the negroes, and had stopped massacres and tribal wars. The growth of the black race was uninterrupted.

In the almost incessant wars between the white nations, black men were pressed into service, taught the arts of war and then sent to their native lands -- to teach others how the white man fought.

They were a strong, young race. Their day was yet to come. All they lacked was a leader.

And a leader had risen. A mixed-breed Arab, whose ambition was without measure, whose genius was Satanic.

He welded them into one great mass, gave them white man's weapons, furnished by Americans and Europeans who would have as quickly and readily sold their own sisters' souls if the price were high

enough.

He led them to the slaughter. At first the white race held its own.

But not for long. The blacks were physical giants, mighty fighting organisms, whose highest wish was slaughter and plunder.

That century long warfare! The man thrilled with a savage pride as he reviewed the wonderful battle the whites gave, overwhelmed as they were with odds of a hundred to one.

If Asia had stood firm -- but Asia did not stand. Whirlwinds of revolt swept from Kamchatca to Stamboul.

Japan called upon the East to strike for liberty and loot and put herself at their head. Like a pack of tigers the East rose and Japan herself, unable to stem the tide she had loosed, was the first to go down.

The Orientals allied themselves with the negroes to slaughter the hated whites. Only the Sikhs and Ghurkas in India and the Shans in Burma stood firm.

Spain, Portugal, Italy, the Balkans were overwhelmed with one rush. The black hordes, spread out, until the tips of that vast army reached from Gibraltar to Siam.

They swept over Europe like a wave. In America a savage struggle was going on, for her black

inhabitants, who numbered nearly half of her entire population, had risen.

Then over the ocean came the invaders from Africa. In less than ten years, the fight had changed from a war between two great nations, to a hunting down and slaughtering of scattered remnants of the great nation which once had ruled the world. Not with ease was this accomplished. The hunted life brought back the primitive might of the race and those who survived became giants, such as the man who crouched among the boulders and cursed.

Once the white race was scattered, the blacks turned upon their Oriental allies and slaughtered them. The Orientals always warred among themselves and had no unity, whereas the black were held together by the hand of their Arab ruler.

The Sikhs, the Ghurkas and the Shans had fallen with the whites. The Ghurkas withstood the negroes longest, for with the fall of British rule, they had retreated to their Nepal hills and there they held the blacks at bay for a hundred years.

In the hills north of the Khyber, too, a long fierce battle was waged, and the Afghans, fierce and war-like as the blacks, held out longer than any other Asian race.

Followed years of slaughter and fleeing. All over the world, small bands of whites and Orientals fled, fought, stole into the camps of their con-

querors to slay and burn, fled, fought, and were slaughtered, fighting and slaying to the last.

The last man reviewed the history and deep curses slipped from between his bearded lips.

Over a hundred years had passed since the first of the black horde swept up out of the Congo. A hundred years of battle, slaughter, pillage and rapine.

Now, over all the world, which the rising sun would soon light, to send the blacks bounding up the mountain, he was the only white man.

A world of black men. No white men, no brown or yellow men. No mulattoes. The women of the other races had slain themselves ere they could bear the children of the hated ravishers.

One white man in all the world.

And, he reflected, it would not be many years before the jackal and the wolf would wander unchecked. For sixty-five years the Satanic Arab emperor had held the blacks together but when he was murdered, they fell into wars and even now a thousand small chiefs were fighting for ascendancy. The last white man laughed with savage, unholy glee.

The black race was doomed. They were destroyers, not builders. When they slew the white men, progress ceased. The blacks reverted to savagery. They did not even know the art of making

weapons. They had destroyed and could not rebuild. And they were going back to bestial savagery, and to a slaughtering of one another which even their animal-like rate of birth could not control.

It was dawning. The last white man looked about him; gathered his weapons. The rush would soon come.

And soon it came. A fierce shout, a chorus of yells, a glitter of spears, a firing of ancient rifles, and the black devils came leaping up the mountain-slope.

Unable to make weapons themselves, the negroes had in truth gone back to the ways of their remote ancestors.

They were not the ebony giants who had smashed the armies of Europe, America and the Orient. Even as the whites had degenerated so had the blacks.

The white man grinned savagely, shoved the muzzle of his rifle forward, and began firing. He had not many cartridges, but he wasted not one. Again and again his single rifle broke the rush and sent the remaining blacks scurrying for cover.

But the rush came when the white man stood up and hurled his empty weapon at the attackers. For a moment they halted, staring silently, fearfully, at the silent, savage white giant who faced them, great scimitar held aloft.

No five of them were a match for him; but there

were thousands. They came with a rush, leaping over and across the boulders, spears flashing.

And the white man leaped to meet them, great blade swishing among the thrusting spears, hewing through limbs and bodies, smiting off heads.

They gave back before him and for an instant he stood free. There, ringed about by his foes, he stood, the last white man, bleeding from a hundred spear-thrusts, his fallen enemies piled about him in a thigh-deep heap.

A moment he stood, drawn to his full great height, eyes fixed on the far-away skies, scimitar raised high above his head as if in salute to the spirits of the great ones he saw there -- then a hundred spears whirled through the air.

The sun that rose above the mighty mountain shone upon a world of one race.

A DAWN IN FLANDERS

BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

I can recall a quiet sky once more,
And splintered trees carved black against the dawn,
And guns whose melted steel forgot their roar,
And walls that sagged, their rafters being gone.
The dead lay silent where the hill sides sloped;
Blackened and charred, they slumbered heap on heap.
And in the dawn the living stirred and groped
As men that waken from a frozen sleep.

TIMUR-LANG

BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

The warm wind blows through the waving grain --
Where are the glories of Tamerlane?
The nations stood up, ripe and tall --
He was the sickle that reaped them all.
But the sickle shatters and leaves no trace --
And the grain grows green on the desert's face.

JOHN RINGOLD

BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

There was a land of which he never spoke.

 A girl, perhaps, but no one knew her name,

 And few there were who knew from whence he came

For from his past he never raised the cloak.

No word he spake except to sneer or joke,

 Or, deep in drink, to curse men, life and Fate;

 Often his fierce black eyes, Hell-hot with hate,

Gleamed wolf-like through the shifting powder smoke.

His trail lay through saloon and gambling hall,

 Lone, sombre devil in a barren land.

 Perhaps, when drunk, he dreamed of mansions old,

 Ballrooms and women, proud and fair as gold --

Trail's-end, upon the strangest stage of all,

 The sun, a lone mesquite tree and the sand.

LETTER:

E. HOFFMAN PRICE

To THE ACOLYTE, 1945

Stuart Boland in re. Lovecraft has something worth reading. Boland is quite some traveller. I once spent a number of enjoyable hours looking over his photos and listening to his reminiscences of far off places. One of these days I hope to repeat the meeting. But since, despite gas going off ration, I am compelled to sit tight for some months, I would like to offer a few sidelights on Robert E. Howard and H. P. Lovecraft, described as "immortals, each with his stupendous understanding of life, creation, and the universe. . . "

Those who met either REH or HPL in person could not help but be charmed by their personalities; and their reader-reaction is well known. Still, I don't believe either had a "stupendous understanding of life". With all affection and respect, I don't believe that either of the two had got beyond the juvenile viewpoint.

R. E. Howard did travel around a lot. So did HPL. Reading some pages, single spaced typing, of the letters Howard wrote Lovecraft makes it clear that he met raw life in oil boom towns, in cow towns, and in travel about Texas. He was a big,

solid hunk of man, able and willing to play a spectacular part in any brawl which might be forced upon him. While the things he met couldn't put a dent in his athletic body, they were too much for his sensitive spirit; he saw much more than he could understand or interpret, and these things drove him to create worlds of imagination in which there were greater brawls than any Texas oil boom could offer. Like so many weird story writers, he was an exaggerated escapist, and his exit in 1936 surely indicates that he had, alas, entirely missed the point and meaning of life. Because of Robert's stupendous misunderstanding of life, his father spent the final eight years of his life alone, with ill health and grief as his only company. And to be anticlimatic, I invite a careful reading of Howard's weird (or any other) fiction. Note the naif touches in the passages wherein the author interprets and expounds; and see that the writer, however broad and thorough his studies had been, and however rugged his contacts with life, was nevertheless a very small boy who had not yet won any understanding of life. I grant that his power of observation was keen, unusual, shrewd -- as witness his humorous western stories -- and that his mind was brilliant. But I repeat, he'd not interpreted what he'd seen and learned; in place of a philosophy, he had only emotional expressions.

HPL, though Howard's very opposite in so many respects, was another who, despite his impressive intellect and amazing erudition, didn't know the first thing about life. He looked back to antiquity, wished he were in the noble 18th Century, and made a virtue of his ignorance of life about him. Granted, his descriptive and expository pages prove him a keen observer of things and people -- but again, he wouldn't or couldn't interpret, hence he created fantastic realms for himself to inhabit. He restricted himself largely to the company of the "scholarly", the "literary", the "learned". While a warm and human and lovable personality, he nevertheless was at home with only that one type of person -- persons who approximated his own intellectual and literary aspirations.

His short-lived and entirely inadequate marriage indicates that he couldn't have known anything about life. For him, women simply didn't exist except as occasional names in a story or as creatures of whom a scientist took scientific cognizance as natural phenomena. In this respect, Robert E. Howard was far more a standard model, yet only in comparison with Lovecraft. REH did, I infer, have feminine friends. One phoned during my visit in Cross Plains. Robert's mother told the lady that Robert was not in; actually he was in his office, within easy call. Add this to the exaggerated filial

piety which led to his suicide on learning that his mother's illness would be fatal, and you get the picture: maternal apron strings keeping a basically solid and salty fellow from meeting and understanding life.

Academically, HPL was broad, deep and versatile; but with respect to life and living, his first thirty sheltered years kept him from any of the laboratory exercises required for an understanding of life. He was an un-realist whom circumstances permitted to remain unrealistic. His philosophy was selectively deduced from books, not from living. His life was so specialized in its outlook and contacts that he could not in the ordinary sense of the term have known anything about life.

With all respect and friendliness, I submit the above in objection to Boland's enthusiastic appraisal of two men I greatly admired, and whose company I enjoyed, and whose absence I mourn even to this day: life is richer for having known them, yet it is impossible for my high regard to becloud the issue so badly as to let me admit that they had any "stupendous understanding of life". I do however concede, had they lived longer, they might well have had that understanding; with his emergence from seclusion, HPL was broadening, and REH, despite maternal apron strings, was getting around to see things, so that surely in an-

other dozen years he would have emerged from his realms of fantastic wonder and met the equally wonderful realm of actuality on all sides of him, and known its meaning. Or at least, accepted the riddles, instead of seeking escape.

BELSHAZZAR

BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

Slow through the streets of Babylon he went,
The naked harlots knelt and shrank aside;
The canopy above him swayed and bent:
"Way for the king of kings!" the herald cried.
-- And in the crowd a lean and ragged Mede
Thumbed a knife edge, and grinning, turned aside.



Howard as a child.

All fled — all done, so lift me on the pyre;
The Feast is over and the lamps expire.

