

The Howard Collector

Spring 1967

9



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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

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EDITORIAL NOTES

Harold Preece's memoir, "The Last Celt", which was slated to appear in this issue, has been delayed due to previous writing commitments. Hopefully, it will appear in the next issue.

T. C. Smith writes concerning "The Shadow of Doom", which appeared in the last issue: "(It) is based on an actual incident which occurred about fifty years ago. Bob was in San Antonio at the time, and the beheading received special treatment from the press, and wide discussion among the people. It made a real impression on Bob, and he referred to the grisly murder several times during the course of our acquaintance."

The fiction index addenda does not include previously indexed items that have since appeared only in Howard collections. Amateur journals are denoted by the abbreviation "aj."

I was fortunate enough to locate, last year, the bulk of the long lost Howard files. This includes a number of unpublished items, some of which appear in this issue. The unpublished fragment was among these papers; it is impossible to definitely determine whether this is an unfinished story or whether the remaining portion has been lost.

Conan fans will be pleased to learn that several previously unpublished Conan stories were found: "Wolves Beyond the Border", "The Snout in the Dark", "The Hall of the Dead", "The Hand of Nergal" and "The Vale of Lost Women". Only the latter was finished; L. Sprague de Camp has completed the first three titles, while Lin Carter has finished "The Hand of Nergal." "The Hall of the Dead" has been accepted by The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, while "The Vale of Lost Women" will appear in Magazine of Horror. All titles will appear in the Lancer Conan series in due course.

The Lancer Conan series is appearing after almost a two-year delay. The first volume, CONAN THE ADVENTURER (The People of the Black Circle, The Slithering Shadow, Drums of Tombalku, The Pool of the Black One) is now out, while CONAN THE WARRIOR (Red Nails, Jewels of Gwahlur, Beyond the Black River) will have appeared by the time you read this. The novel, CONAN THE CONQUEROR, will appear early this year. Other titles will appear as soon as legal entanglements can be cleared away on certain of the titles.

A volume of Wade Wellman's verse, NOVEMBER WIND, will appear either in February or March of this year from the Golden Quill Press (Frankestown, New Hampshire, \$4.00). The poems that have appeared in THE HOWARD COLLECTOR will be included. Orders should be placed in February.

LETTER:

E. HOFFMAN PRICE to
FRANCIS T. LANEY
dated July 22, 1944

I have the clippings from the Cross Plains paper which state unequivocally that REH died from a self-inflicted pistol wound, and that the probable motive was the knowledge that his mother's illness was fatal, and beyond any hope; and that for three days and nights he had been sitting up, until he got the doctor's decision in terms which overwhelmed any possible hope. He stepped out of the back door -- I picture it all; I remember the gate through which he must have gone to get to his Chevvie, which was probably parked alongside the fence, his father's car being in the garage -- took the pistol from the side pocket -- another thing I picture, as I saw him draw that very pistol on one occasion when we were driving across the open country and he suspected an ambush. It is all too clear and sharp a reconstruction.

It was an automatic; whether a Colt or a Savage I do not remember. It is my impression that it was a .32, but whatever it was, it was big enough. I do know positively that it could not have been heavier than a .38, and, somehow, I always come back to the feeling that it was a .32, even though I did not have any occasion to heft the weapon or even scrutinize it. I think my familiarity with pistols makes my guess passably sound.

The bullet went in the right side of the head, coming out the left. His vitality was such that some hours passed before it was certain he would die. Not knowing the precise

trace of the bullet, and being aware of the tricks played by bullets directed with suicidal intent, I am not able to state whether his surviving for some hours after the shot is or is not remarkable; yet I do feel justified in hazarding the guess that uncommon vitality was necessary to stave off the shock, and for such a period resist a fatal wound.

... REH at the age of 30 had that same dismay and despair that one might expect of a child who has lost his mother. When I was a kid, very young, I remember my feelings when my mother was seriously ill and her survival was doubtful. Forty years later, on the event of her 75th birthday, I tried hard to consider realistically that despite her good health and good spirits she could not have many more years to go. But today I consider the inevitable with an entirely different emotional flavor; twenty years ago, when I was younger than REH, I'd have considered her death in somewhat the way I would today, or five years hence. As a child there was that natural feeling of dependency -- and also, shrinking from strangers, most of whom I felt were enemies -- so that my mother's death then would have delivered me into the hands of the Philistines! More than mere bereavement, there was plenty of self-centered fear of unpleasant possibilities, grim certainties -- a terrifying world in which I'd have not an ally.

Now it seems to me that REH, big and grown up and rugged and bluff as he was, had carried with him from early childhood a lot of the state of mind I have tried to describe; and with his growing up, he had also acquired a lot of grown-up grimness, a lack of which would have made his act impossible.

While a 5-year-old would be terrified of a world devoid of a mother's emotional and spiritual sustenance, to say nothing of her material support and attention, he'd finally adjust himself; he simply would not have the means of escape, or, if he had, he'd lack the brute courage to use the means on himself. But REH had, in a way of speaking,

the 5-year-old's crying need for escape, and the grown man's stern resolution. He was a strange blend of the rugged, the grim, and the highly emotional, the sensitive, and the super-sensitive.

I have often wondered if Dr. Howard -- a physician, and a very wise and experienced man, as is inevitable from having practiced medicine for 40 years -- has seen it in that light, and has asked himself, in his loneliness and bereavement, if there could have been any forestalling or warding off the tragedy, had Robert found stronger interests away from home. He has never, in any of his many letters, suggested this possibility; but while affable and cordial, and inclined to reveal his thoughts to one whom he considers one of Robert's foremost friends, Dr. Howard has also a realist's full knowledge of the futility and unmanliness of speaking in terms of "it might have been otherwise". A man of his fortitude and courage may even within himself think such thoughts, but he'll rarely if ever utter them.

One is not to assume that Robert was a stay-at-home. He got around quite a bit. Yet spiritually, rather than in the flesh, he was, as I see it, a stay-at-home -- too closely linked, for his age, to his parents, and especially to his mother; though he had a great esteem and affection for his father, and a solicitude whose sincerity was beautiful to note. He told me, many a time, how he had to "look after" his parents; whereas my impression was that Dr. Howard, then about 65, was quite capable of looking after himself in all financial and material ways. Dr. Howard was a man of intense vitality and strong personality. Only recently has his health begun to fail. I do not know how active his practice was at the time I met him; he was what's called a "country doctor", a rugged and sturdy type that is today all too rare. But while these "country doctors" rarely become affluent, they rarely lack the proper comforts of life, the modest requirements of their station. So, I felt that something other than material consideration of his parents'

welfare was behind Robert's statements.

Manifestly, his suicide wasn't an act tending toward his surviving parent's welfare! With all affection and respect, I repeat what is my conviction: that it was the act of a 5-year-old's emotion driving a grown and rugged man accustomed to firearms and violence; and that while mere absences from home would not have changed his emotional set-up, the normal keen interests which inevitably make most of us finally see home as a pleasant memory rather than as that without which there is no use living, would have saved REH....

THE CURSE OF THE GOLDEN SKULL

BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

Rotath of Lemuria was dying. Blood had ceased to flow from the deep sword gash under his heart, but the pulse in his temple hammered like kettle drums.

Rotath lay on a marble floor. Granite columns rose about him and a silver idol stared with ruby eyes at the man who lay at his feet. The bases of the columns were carved with curious monsters; above the shrine sounded a vague whispering. The trees which hemmed in and hid that mysterious fane spread long waving branches above it, and these branches were vibrant with leaves that rustled in the wind. From time to time, great black roses scattered their dusky petals down.

Rotath lay dying and he used his fading breath in calling down curses on his slayers -- on the faithless king who had betrayed him, and on that barbarian chief, Kull of Atlantis, who dealt him the death blow.

Acolyte of the nameless gods, and dying in an unknown shrine on the leafy summit of Lemuria's highest mountain -- Rotath's eyes smouldered with a terrible cold fire. A pageant of glory and splendor passed before his mind's eye. The acclaim of worshippers, the roar of silver trumpets, the whispering shadows of mighty and mystic temples where great wings swept unseen -- then the intrigues, the onslaught of the invaders -- death!

Rotath cursed the king of Lemuria -- the king to whom he had taught fearful and ancient mysteries and forgotten

abominations. Fool that he had been to reveal his powers to a weakling, who, having learned to fear him, had turned to foreign kings for aid.

How strange it seemed, that he, Rotath of the Moonstone and the Asphodel, sorcerer and magician, should be gasping out his breath on the marble floor, a victim to that most material of all threats -- a keen pointed sword in a sinewy hand.

Rotath cursed the limitations of the flesh. He felt his brain crumbling and he cursed all the men of all the worlds. He cursed them by Hotath and Helgor, by Ra and Ka and Valka.

He cursed all men living and dead, and all the generations unborn for a million centuries to come, naming Vramma and Jaggta-noga and Kamma and Kulthas. He cursed humanity by the fane of the Black Gods, the tracks of the Serpent Ones, the talons of the Ape Lords, and the iron bound books of Shuma Gorath.

He cursed goodness and virtue and light, speaking the names of gods forgotten even by the priests of Lemuria. He invoked the dark monstrous shadows of the elder worlds, and of those black suns which lurk forever behind the stars.

He felt the shades gather about him. He was going fast. And closing about him in an ever nearing ring, he sensed the tiger taloned devils who awaited his coming. He saw their bodies of solid jet and the great red caverns of their eyes. Behind hovered the white shadows of they who had died upon his altars, in horrid torment. Like mist in the moonlight they floated, great luminous eyes fixed on him in sad accusation, a never ending host.

Rotath feared, and fearing, his curses rose louder, his blasphemies grew more terrible. With one last wild passion of fury, he placed a curse on his own bones, that they might bring death and horror to the sons of men. But even as he spoke, he knew that years and ages would pass and his bones turn to dust in that forgotten shrine before

any man's foot disturbed its silence. So he mustered his fast waning powers for one last invocation to the dread beings he had served, one last feat of magic. He uttered a blood-freezing formula, naming a terrible name.

And soon he felt mighty elemental powers set in motion. He felt his bones growing hard and brittle. A coldness transcending earthly coldness passed over him and he lay still. The leaves whispered and the silver god laughed with cold gemmed eyes.

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Years stretched into centuries, centuries became ages. The green oceans rose and wrote an epic poem in emerald and the rhythm thereof was terrible. Thrones toppled and the silver trumpets fell silent forever. The races of men passed as smoke drifts from the breast of a summer. The roaring jade green seas engulfed the lands and all mountains sank, even the highest mountain of Lemuria.

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A man thrust aside the trailing vines and stared. A heavy beard masked his face and mire slimed his boots. Above and about him hung the thick tropic jungle in breathless and exotic brooding. Orchids flamed and breathed about him.

Wonder was in his wide eyes. He gazed between shattered granite columns upon a crumbling marble floor. Vines twined thickly, like green serpents, among these columns and trailed their sinuous lengths across the floor.

A curious idol, long fallen from a broken pedestal, lay upon the floor and stared up with red, unblinking eyes. The man noted the character of this corroded thing and a strong shudder shook him. He glanced unbelievably again at the other thing which lay on the marble floor, and shrugged his shoulders.

He entered the shrine. He gazed at the carvings on the bases of the sullen columns, wondering at their unholy and indescribable appearance. Over all the scent of the orchids hung like a heavy fog.

This small, rankly grown, swampy island was once the pinnacle of a great mountain, mused the man, and he wondered what strange people had reared up this fane -- and left that monstrous thing lying before the fallen idol. He thought of the fame which his discoveries should bring him -- of the acclaim of mighty universities and powerful scientific societies.

He bent above the skeleton on the floor, noting the inhumanly long finger bones, the curious formation of the feet, the deep cavern-like eye sockets, the jutting frontal bone, the general appearance of the great domed skull, which differed so horribly from mankind as he knew it.

What long dead artisan had shaped the thing with such incredible skill? He bent closer, noting the rounded ball-and-sockets of the joints, the slight depressions on flat surfaces where muscles had been attached. And he started as the stupendous truth was borne upon him.

This was no work of human art -- that skeleton had once been clothed in flesh and had walked and spoken and lived. And this was impossible, his reeling brain told him, for the bones were of solid gold.

The orchids nodded in the shadows of the trees. The shrine lay in purple and black shade. The man brooded above the bones and wondered. How could he know of an elder world sorcery great enough to serve undying hate, by lending that hate a concrete substance, impervious to

Time's destructions?

The man laid his hand on the golden skull. A sudden deathly shriek broke the silence. The man in the shrine reeled up, screaming, took a single staggering step and then fell headlong, to lie with writhing limbs on the vine-crossed marble floor.

The orchids showered down on him in a sensuous rain and his blind, clutching hands tore them into exotic fragments as he died. Silence fell and an adder crawled sluggishly from within the golden skull.

THE DAY THAT I DIE

BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

The day that I die shall the sky be clear
 And the east sea-wind blow free,
Sweeping along with its rover's song
 To bear my soul to sea.

They will carry me out of the bamboo hut
 To the driftwood piled on the lea,
And ye that name me in after years,
 This shall ye say of me:

That I followed the road of the restless gull,
 As free as a vagrant breeze,
That I bared my breast to the winds' unrest
 And the wrath of the driving seas.

That I loved the song of the thrumming spars
 And the lift of the plunging prow,
But I could not bide in the seaport towns
 And I could not follow the plow.

For ever the wind came out of the east
 To beckon me on and on;
The sunset's lure was my paramour
 And I loved each rose-pale dawn.

That I lived to a straight and simple creed
The whole of my worldly span,
And white or black or yellow, I dealt
Foursquare with my fellow man.

That I drained Life's cup to its blood red lees
And it thrilled my every vein,
But I did not frown when I laid it down
To lift it never again.

That ever my spirit turned my steps
To the naked morning lands,
And I came to rest on an unknown isle --
Jade cliffs and silver sands.

And I breathed my last with a simple tribe,
A people savage and free,
And they gave my body unto the fire
And my soul to the reinless sea.

STRANGER IN THE TWILIGHT

BY WADE WELLMAN

Darkest youth on a brilliant stage,
Flags with their bands and bars unfurled,
Wisdom and fear on a dusty page,
What are thoughts in a Godless world?

Who is he in the gleaming light,
That patch of light in the crushing dark,
Whose voice rings out in the starless night,
Where dread alone stands cold and stark?

He is nothing -- a lad in the maze of fear,
With eyes looking down at the twisted trail;
Only a moment to shed his tear,
And to murmur his hopes in the awesome gale.

-- October 28, 1959

A SONNET OF GOOD CHEER

BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

Fling wide the portals, rose-lipped dawn has come

To kiss our drowsy visions into life;

Let me arise, a-lust for love and strife

To follow far some distant, pulsing drum.

Upon my vibrant soul-chords passions strum;

With hot, red, leaping blood my veins are rife.

Gods, let me take the universe to wife!

Ere Death, the cold accountant, close my sum.

Then as I spake, methought fierce laughter came

Across the dying hills where sunrise shot;

"Fool, fool, you came unbidden to this game,

"And Death that takes you hence shall ask you not.

"From life, this and only this, may you claim;

"Living, to die, and dying, be forgot."

TO R. E. H.

BY L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

A fool you were, my friend. You should have stayed
Around to see the figments of your mind
Enacted on a vaster stage, designed
To show man's antique follies still displayed

In all their gaudy glory. Serpent-men,
In guise of godlike Aryan heroes cloaked,
By Xaltotun's new avatar evoked,
Exterminate whole tribes and sects. And then

The Stygians and the sons of Shem renew
Their ancient hate. The Stygian ruler - swart,
Gigantic, hawk-faced - flings a dam athwart
The river Styx. The Zaporoskans hew

His stone; they deify a bearded seer
Whose bloody cultus has enslaved Khitai.
The Vendhyans starve; the Kushites rage and die.
Men plot for power, and the thin veneer

Of culture cracks, and seething through the slits
Boil passions old. In man-made caverns lurk
Sagacious, glass-eyed wizards, hard at work
On dreadful spells to smash the globe to bits.

And therefore, Bob, I think you went amiss
To seek Hyboria under other skies than this.

-- August 12, 1966

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LETTER:

ROBERT E. HOWARD to
FARNSWORTH WRIGHT,
dated May 6, 1935

Dear Mr. Wright:

I always hate to write a letter like this, but dire necessity forces me. It is, in short, an urgent plea for money. It is nothing new for me to need money, but the present circumstances are different from those in which I generally found myself in the past.

My expenses for the past months have been great. My mother was forced to have her gall bladder removed, a very serious operation, especially for a woman of her age and state of health. She has been almost an invalid for years. She was in a hospital at Temple for a month, during which time I stayed with her, and was not able to do any writing at all during that time. But for the professional discount on the operation, my father being a physician, I do not know how we would have been able to meet the expenses. As it was they were great, considering the hospital expenses, special nurses, etc., and my own expenses, though I cut these as closely as I could by staying in the cheapest rooming house I could find and skipping meals with such regularity that I lost fifteen pounds during that month. We have been at home for over a month, but my mother is far from recovered. An abscess developed in the operation wound, which necessitated her staying for several days in a hospital at Coleman, and it is still necessary to take her there, a distance of some thirty miles, every few days in

order to have her wound dressed and cleansed, as my father does not have the proper facilities for this. Meanwhile, the expenses go on, naturally, for we are forced to hire a woman to do the cooking and such of the house-work as I am unable to do. Whether my mother ever recovers or not possibly depends on the kind of care and attention I am able to give her, and that in turn depends on the money I am able to earn.

And that brings me to the matter at hand. For some time now I have been receiving a check regularly each month from Weird Tales - half checks, it is true, but by practicing the most rigid economy I have managed to keep my head above the water; that I was able to do so was largely because of, not the size but the regularity of the checks. I came to depend upon them and to expect them, as I felt justified in so doing. But this month, at a very time when I need money so desperately bad, I did not receive a check. Somehow, some way, my family and I have struggled along this far, but if you cut off my monthly checks now, I don't know what in God's name we'll do.

Costs of living have gone up; this part of the country has suffered bitterly through drouth and dust-storms. My father is an old man and most of his patients are poverty-stricken hill people who seldom have anything but farm produce to pay him. This year they may not even have that. Poverty is no new tale to me. I've gnawed crusts all my life. But the hardships I've suffered in the past may be picnics to what confronts me if Weird Tales discontinues my monthly checks.

I do not feel that my request is unreasonable. As you know, it has been six months since "The People of the Black Circle" (the story the check for which is now due me) appeared in Weird Tales. Weird Tales owes me over eight hundred dollars for stories already published and supposed to be paid for on publication - enough to pay all my debts and get me back on my feet again if I could

receive it all at once. Perhaps this is impossible. I have no wish to be unreasonable; I know times are hard for everybody. But I don't believe I am being unreasonable in asking you to pay me a check each month until the accounts are squared. Honestly, at the rate we're going now, I'll be an old man before I get paid up! And my need for money now is urgent.

Of course, I sell to other magazines from time to time, but these sales are uncertain; to make markets regularly requires much time and effort, and for years most of my time and effort has been devoted to the stories I have written for *Weird Tales*. I may not - may never be a great writer, but no writer ever worked with more earnest sincerity than I have worked on the tales that have appeared in *Weird Tales*. I have grown up in the magazine, so to speak, and it is as much a part of my life as are my hands and arms. But to a poor man the money he makes is his life's blood, and of late when I write of Conan's adventures I have to struggle against the disheartening reflection that if the story is accepted, it may be years before I get paid for it.

This is a statement of my case, spoken in the only way I know how to speak, that is to say frankly. I trust that my bluntness has given no offense. Necessity drives me. A monthly check from *Weird Tales* may well mean for me the difference between a life that is at least endurable - and God alone knows what.

Cordially,

Robert E. Howard

UNTITLED FRAGMENT

BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

Beneath the glare of the sun, etched in the hot blue sky, native laborers sweated and toiled. The scene was a cameo of desolation -- blue sky, amber sand stretching to the skyline in all directions, barely relieved by a fringe of palm trees that marked an oasis in the near distance. The men were like brown ants in that empty sun-washed immensity, pecking away at a queer grey dome half hidden in the sands. Their employers aided with directions and ready hands.

Allison was square-built and black bearded; Brill was tall, wiry, with a ginger-hued moustache and cold blue eyes. Both had the hard bronzed look of men who had spent most of their lives in the outlands.

Allison knocked out the ashes from his pipe on his boot heel.

"Well, how about it?"

"You mean that fool bet?" Brill looked at him in surprise. "Do you mean it?"

"I do. I'll lay you my best six-shooter against your saddle that we don't find an Egyptian in this tomb."

"What do you expect to find?" asked Brill quizzically, "A local shaykh? Or maybe a Hyksos king? I'll admit it's different from anything of the sort I've ever seen before, but we know from its appearance of age that it antedates Turkish and Semitic control of Egypt -- it's bound to go back further than the Hyksos, even. And before them, who

was in Egypt?"

"I reckon we'll know after we've looted this tomb," answered Allison, with a certain grimness in his manner.

Brill laughed. "You mean to tell me you think there was a race here before the Egyptians, civilized enough to build such a tomb as this? I suppose you think they built the pyramids!"

"They did," was the imperturbable reply.

Brill laughed. "Now you're trying to pull my leg."

Allison looked at him curiously. "Did you ever read the 'Unausprechlichen Kulten'?"

"What the devil's that?"

"A book called 'Nameless Cults', by a crazy German named Von Junzt -- at least they said he was crazy. Among other things he wrote of an age which he swore he had discovered -- an age undreamed of by moderns -- a sort of historical blind spot. He called it the Hyborian Age. We have guessed what came before, and we know what came after, but that age itself has been a blank space -- no legends, no chronicles, just a few scattered names that came to be applied in other senses.

"It's our lack of knowledge about this age that upsets our calculations and makes us put down Atlantis as a myth. This is what Von Junzt says: That when Atlantis, Lemuria and other nations of that age were destroyed by a violent cataclysm -- except for scattered remnants here and there -- the continent now known as Africa, was untouched, though connected with the other continent. A tribe of savages fled to the arctic circle to escape the volcanoes, and eventually evolved into a race known as Hyborians. These reached a high stage of civilization and dominated the western part of the world, all except this particular part. A pre-Cataclysmic race lived here, known as Stygians. It was from them that the Grecian legend of Stygia arose; the Nile was the Styx of the fables. The Hyborians were never able to invade Stygia, and at last they themselves were destroyed by

waves of barbarians from the north -- our own ancestors. In Stygia the ruling classes were pure-blooded, but the lower classes were mixed - Stygian, Semitic and Hyborian blood.

"In the southward drift of the barbarians, a tribe of red-haired Nordics fought their way south and overthrew the ancient Stygian regime. They destroyed or drove out the pure-blooded Stygians, and set themselves up as a ruling caste, eventually being absorbed by their subjects; from these adventurers and the mixed mongrel lower classes came the Egyptians. It was the Stygians who built the pyramids and the Sphinx. And if I'm not mistaken, one of them lies in this pile of masonry."

Brill laughed incredulously.

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SENTIMENT

BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

Sophisticates prate glibly of sentimentality in words of scorn and disgust. They sicken me.

When a man makes mock in small words of a heart torn from a bosom by the iron plowshare of fate, and held up to freeze in the light of the merciless stars -- no matter what the cause -- that man is either making a pitiful and sorry attempt to hide a wounded soul, or else he has never walked the road of thorns hand in hand with old Dame Sorrow and her daughter Agony. He is a cheap caricature of humanity. His soul is smaller than mustard seed, and his soul would yet engulf his brain. Poor and doubly poor, the man who from a thinness of blood and a lack of virility, boasts of sophistication.

LETTER:

ROBERT E. HOWARD to
HAROLD PREECE,
postmarked September 5, 1928

Salaam:

Yes, I like the idea of Eldorado - we do need an organ as you say and I think that would fill the bill nicely. I like the title, it's great.

Clyde came over here and spent a few days. Not much to write about - I have little entertainment to offer and we spent most of the time in idle conversation. Our usual procedure is to drive or walk some miles out on the highway or some country road late at night and there sit and converse, varying this with strolls up and down in the vicinity, while our conversation ranges from metazoa to dinosaurs, and from prize fights to ancient religions. Some times we talk this way until three or four o'clock in the morning, sometimes until dawn. Quite often we stay up all night. This time rain interfered with our program to a large extent. We talk better, both our brains work better at night out under the stars. Both the sun and being indoors seem to hamper our thoughts. There must be a real reason for this - thoughts soar like birds and a roof will hinder their flights. Otherwise a man's thoughts may fly up and perch on the god-faced moon. Though really, words and thoughts are so futile and such a waste - had I my life to live over again I would deal not with words but with actions - but I have followed this road too far.

One day, following another custom we walked out on the highway, with no program in view, no idea or especial wish. Whoever gave us a ride, we would accompany and we would ride with who ever asked us, man or woman. This

time we were taken up by a friend of ours, a most interesting man, who was in his younger days a rover and a wanderer, a detective, a tramp, and other things better left unmentioned. Now close to the age of forty, he is struggling to overcome a lack of education and become a writer. A strong, powerful man, fearless, ruthless and unpolished. With him was a young school teacher, a genial, harum-scarum young fellow, as far from the accepted idea of school teachers as might be. They asked us where we were going and upon our response of anywhere, they resigned themselves to our company.

They did not say where they were going nor did we ask them, for it is usually much more pleasant not to know or care, so long as the blue sky is over you, green fields racing on each side and carefree company to talk to. We went all over the country and finally arrived at Coleman, a town some thirty miles west of Cross Plains. We spent some time at a bootleg joint just outside the outskirts of the town, both going there and returning thence.

There I saw an old man, some eighty years of age, worth thousands of dollars, but dressed in dirty old clothes and gloriously drunk. I've known him for years - a good hearted harmless old fellow who was one of the first settlers of this country and who has probably not drawn a sober breath for forty years. I bought him a bottle of beer, for he had spent all the money he had with him and he was still singing my praises when I left. A strange character - a kind hearted old sot with the mind of a child, though he was a shrewd man of business in his time. In all the years he has drunk, the effect has been nearly always the same, as far as I can see, producing a vague and not-to-be-understood but nonetheless jubilant feeling of fellowship, inducing loud laughter and leaping and prancing and vague maunderings - never an uncanny uplift, a sense of clarified vision beyond mortal eyes, a sense of omnipotence combined with impotency, of vision and futility - how different is the effect

of alcohol upon two men - the thinker and the non-thinker. Yet not long ago the old man tried to commit suicide.

I notice this much - Truett or Clyde, together or alone, quite often are taken up by girls, but that the dames usually pass me up, even if they know me - and pass us all up when I am with the crowd. I suppose that there is something forbidding about my appearance, which is usually unshaven and careless and God knows I was never accused of beauty.

Since writing the above I went, Sunday, to Cisco, a town some forty miles north of Cross Plains, and saw John Gilbert in "The Cossacks". God, what a picture. I take back all the anathemas I have ever hurled at John Gilbert. The picture was very accurate, as near as I could judge and because that wild, fierce race always had a peculiar appeal to me, I have devoted some study to their manners and customs. Living only to fight and drink, knowing nothing else! I wish to God I had been born in some such environment and grown up, knowing nothing else, wishing nothing else, knowing not even how to read or write.

At the dam at Cisco, the largest of its kind in the world, we stopped awhile and watched the bathers and I mentally compared them with those I have seen at Corpus Christi and other like places. Skinny, stooped, or burdened with great folds of tallow which is much worse. But at Cisco - God, what a race of glorious young pagans is growing up in this country. Even the young boys and girls were splendidly built; the girls with fine flowing lines of young womanhood, the boys deep chested and finely muscled. I saw not one man, woman or child who was underdeveloped or much over-developed. Certainly West Texas is the cradle of a coming race of giants.

So I looked on them and revelled in their perfection until it came upon me like a cold wind that these people were purely material, non-thinkers - sworn foes to such dreamers as myself. And for awhile as I saw their evident

strength and self confidence, I hated them as the weak must ever hate the strong, as I thought how these splendid swine could by virtue of their physical prowess, trample the dreams of the dreamers and bend the dreamers themselves to their selfish and materialistic will. Then, Hell, my self confidence came back and it came to me that I saw no man whose ribs I could not crush, whose skull I could not shatter with one blow of my clenched hand - whose thoughtless, handsome face I could not batter.

So, diablo, I am a victim and a creature of whims, for now my mood sends me to the ocean bottom of despair and self-humiliation, and then carries me up to heights I cannot really hope to attain - first I feel too inferior to men, then far too superior.

But there is to me nothing more utterly soul destroying than a dreamer being crushed beneath the brazen heel of physical superiority.

Life loves life to live. So we must create our own delusions to live so if superiority is one of them, eh bein, what the Hell ever that means - that much bueno.

Today at town I saw the hang-over of some old and lascivious custom - a girl had a birthday and her girl and boy friends pounced upon her and indulged in a spanking debauch. I have never been able to find just how that custom originated, but have an idea its roots lie in the old superstition that spanking a woman or whipping her with a switch makes her bear children oftener and easier.

But to return to the fine bodied young barbarians I saw at the Cisco lake - I despise their mentalities but I envy their physiques. I was never finely built, though always strong. As a young boy I was gaunt, spare and wiry, with lean hard and unbeautiful limbs. As a young man I am simply ponderous and bulky. I frankly envy these youths their trim, tapering figures, their smoothly muscled bodies, smaller than mine mostly, but much better formed. Ho hum. Dreams and shadows of dreams. Answer soon.

SKULLS OVER JUDAH

BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

Oh, who comes down the mountain, a stalking oak at morning -
The trail is wild by Gherith, and Carmel's crags are high!
His eyes are grim as iron, that break the people's scorning -
Oh, who comes down from Carmel to blast and prophesy?

Alike his hairy girdle, his hardened limbs are hairy;
Beneath his locks entangled flames cold his icy eye.
The people fall before him but naught shall make him tarry -
Oh, who comes down from Carmel to bid a king to die?

The fury of the desert goes in the wind before him;
He locks within his bosom the thunders of the sky.
The sages of the ages have flung their mantles o'er him -
Oh, who comes down from Carmel to break the thrones on high?

The word goes out of Israel to shake the world at dawning.
Oh, chariots of Judah, the crimson kings must die!
The hungry ravens gather and Hell's abyss is yawning.
Elijah comes from Carmel along the morning sky!

ADDENDA: FICTION INDEX

PATRICK ERVIN

Alleys of Treachery

The Howard Collector (aj), Summer 1966

Ringtailed Tornado, A

see "Texas John Alden"

Texas John Alden

Original title: "A Ringtailed Tornado"

Masked Rider Western, May 1944

Hopalong Cassidy's Western Magazine, Fall 1950

Top Western Fiction Annual, 1952

THE PRIDE OF BEAR CREEK

Under original title

ROBERT E. HOWARD

After the Game

The Yellow Jacket, October 27, 1926

Aha! Or the Mystery of the Queen's Necklace

The Tattler (aj), March 1, 1923

The Howard Collector (aj), Summer 1963

Black Stone, The

SLEEP NO MORE, edited by August Derleth, Armed Services Edition, 1944; Panther Books Ltd., London, 1964, 1966

Cairn on the Headland, The

THE MACABRE READER, edited by Donald A. Wollheim, Digit Books, (Brown Watson Ltd.) London, nd

Cupid vs. Pollux

The Yellow Jacket, February 10, 1927

The Howard Collector (aj), Winter 1965

Curse of the Golden Skull, The

The Howard Collector (aj), Spring 1967

Epistle From Saul, An

Originally entitled "Weekly Short Story"; tentative title by Glenn Lord.

The Yellow Jacket, November 3, 1926

For the Love of Barbara Allen

Originally untitled; titled by Glenn Lord.

The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, August 1966

Grey God Passes, The

DARK MIND, DARK HEART, edited by August Derleth, Mayflower Books Ltd., London, 1963

King of the Forgotten People

see "Valley of the Lost"

Knife, Bullet and Noose

The Howard Collector (aj), Spring 1965

Last White Man, The

Synopsis of an unfinished story.

The Howard Collector (aj), Summer 1964

People of the Black Circle, The

Fantastic, January 1967

Pigeons From Hell

WEIRD TALES, edited by Leo Margulies, Pyramid Books, New York, 1964

Rattle of Bones

Magazine of Horror, November 1965

Sea Curse

The Howard Collector (aj), Summer 1963

Shadows in the Moonlight

SWORDS AND SORCERY, edited by L. Sprague de Camp, Pyramid Books, New York, 1963

Shadows in Zamboula

THE SPELL OF SEVEN, edited by L. Sprague de Camp, Pyramid Books, New York, 1965

Sheik, The

The Tattler (aj), March 15, 1923

Skulls in the Stars

Magazine of Horror, June 1965

Sleeping Beauty

The Yellow Jacket, October 27, 1926

Spear and Fang

The Howard Collector (aj), Winter 1965

Thessalians, The

The Yellow Jacket, January 13, 1927

The Howard Collector (aj), Spring 1965

Unhand Me, Villain

The Tattler (aj), February 15, 1923

Untitled Fragment

"Beneath the glare of the sun. . . "

The Howard Collector (aj), Spring 1967

Valley of the Lost

Original title: "King of the Forgotten People". This was believed to be the same as the story announced in the final, January 1933, issue of Strange Tales as "The Valley of the Lost"; a supposition later found to be in error.

Magazine of Horror, Summer 1966

Valley of the Worm, The

WORLDS OF WEIRD, edited by Leo Margulies, Pyramid Books, New York, 1965

Ye College Days

The Yellow Jacket, January 20, 1927

ROBERT E. HOWARD and L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

Drums of Tombalku

A posthumous collaboration; de Camp edited and completed the story, of which the Howard portion consisted of about half the text and a complete synopsis, both untitled.

CONAN THE ADVENTURER

ROBERT E. HOWARD and JOHN POCSIK

Blue Flame of Vengeance, The

A posthumous collaboration; Pocsik rewrote the original adventure story to add a weird element.

OVER THE EDGE, edited by August Derleth, Arkham House, Sauk City, Wisconsin, 1964

JOHN TAVEREL

Apparition in the Prize Ring, The

Original title: "The Spirit of Tom Molyneaux"

Ghost Stories, April 1929

Shadow of Doom, The

The Howard Collector (aj), Summer 1966

Spirit of Tom Molyneaux, The

see "The Apparition in the Prize Ring"

THE PRIDE OF BEAR CREEK

by

ROBERT E. HOWARD

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