

# The Howard Collector

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# *The Howard Collector*

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Robert E. Howard

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## EDITORIAL NOTES

Due to the former printer's large backlog of work - he is also a publisher and a bookseller - this issue of THE HOWARD COLLECTOR is being printed by a new printer. I would like to extend my thanks to Walter Shedlofsky for his aid in this matter.

"Two Against Tyre" is the only known adventure of Eithriall the Gaul, although it seems very probable that Howard contemplated further adventures, since he left some unresolved elements in the story.

New stories and poems by Howard have been/will be appearing in Magazine of Horror, Coven 13, and Zane Grey's Western Magazine. Recent books by Howard include BRAN MAK MORN ("The Lost Race," "Men of the Shadows," "Kings of the Night," "Fragment," "The Night of the Wolf," and "The Dark Man") from Dell; THE MOON OF SKULLS ("The Moon of Skulls," "Skulls in the Stars," and "The Footfalls Within") from Centaur Press. Two more collections of Solomon Kane stories are due to be paperbacked by Centaur Press this year: THE HAND OF KANE and SOLOMON KANE. These three books are taken from the hardbound volume RED SHADOWS, now out of print; also out of print is the Donald M. Grant edition of A GENT FROM BEAR CREEK. Soon to appear from Grant, if not actually out by this time, is SINGERS IN THE SHADOWS, a slender volume of verse. This will be available only

from the publisher (West Kingston, Rhode Island 02892, \$3.00). Howard unsuccessfully attempted to market this selection in 1928. DARK OF THE MOON, August Derleth's anthology of fantastic and macabre poetry, has been reprinted (Books for Libraries Press, Freeport, New York, \$12.50). It contains thirteen poems by Howard.

F. Lee Baldwin (Box 211, Grangeville, Idaho 83530) has, for sale to the highest bidder, a set of tearsheets of "The Shadow Kingdom" (from Weird Tales) autographed by Howard.



## TWO AGAINST TYRE

BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

Through the flaming riot of color which was the streets of Tyre strode a figure alien and incongruous. There was no lack of foreigners in this, the world's richest capital, where purple-sailed ships brought the wealth of many seas and many lands. Among the native merchants and traders, with their slaves and guards, walked dark-skinned Egyptians, light-fingered thieves from beyond Lebanon, lean wild tribesmen from the south. Bedouins from the great desert, and glittering princes of Damascus, with their swaggering retinues.

But there was a certain kinship evident among all these various peoples, a likeness betokening the Orient in each. The stranger, toward whom all eyes turned as he stalked by, was just as obviously alien to the East.

"He is a Greek," whispered a crimson-robed courtier to a companion whose garb, no less than his wide-legged rolling gait, spoke of the sea. The captain shook his head.

"He is like them, yet unlike; he is of some kindred, but wilder, race - a barbarian from the north."

The man under discussion did resemble certain types still found among the Grecians in that his shock of hair was yellow, his eyes blue, and his

skin white, contrasting to the dark complexions about him. But the hard, almost wolfish, lines of his mighty frame were not Grecian. Here was a man who was akin to the original Hellenes, but who was much nearer the pristine Nordic stem - a man whose life had been spent, not in marble cities or fertile agricultural valleys, but in savage conflict with nature in her wildest form. This fact showed in his strong moody face, in the hard economy of his form - his heavy arms, broad shoulders, and lean loins. He wore an unadorned helmet and a scale-mail corselet, and from a broad gold-buckled girdle hung a long sword and a Gaulish dagger with a double-edged blade, fourteen inches in length, and broad as a man's palm near the hilt - a terrible weapon, one edge slightly convex, the other correspondingly concave.

If the stranger was the object of curiosity, he no less evinced a like emotion in his scrutiny of the city and its inhabitants - a curiosity and wonder so evident that it would have seemed childish except for a certain underlying aspect of potential menace. There was a dangerous individuality about the barbarian which would not be submerged by his wonder at the strange environs among which he found himself.

And strange they were to him, who had never seen such luxury and wealth so carelessly spread out before him. Paved streets were strange to him, and he stared in amazement at the buildings of stone and cedar and marble, decorated with gold, silver, ivory, and precious stones. He blinked his eyes at the glitter which attended the procession of a notable or visiting prince along the streets: the exalted one lolling on silken cushions in a gem-

crusted, silken-canopied litter, borne by slaves clad in silken loincloths, and followed by other slaves waving fly-flaps of ostrich feathers, having jeweled handles - accompanied by soldiers in gilded helmets and bronze hauberks - Syrians, Tyreans, Ammonites, Egyptians, rich merchants from the isle of Kittim. He stared at their garments of the famous Tyrean purple, the dye on which the Phoenician empire had been founded, and by the pursuit of the elements of which, Mesopotamian civilization had spread around the world. By virtue of their apparel, the throngs of nobles and merchants were transformed from prosaic tradesmen, bent on cheating their neighbors, to princes questing from far for the glory of the gods. Their cloaks swung and shimmered in the sun - red as wine, darkly purple as a Syrian night, crimson as the blood of a murdered king.

Through the shifting rainbow colors and the gay-hued maze wandered the yellow-haired barbarian, his cold eyes filled with wonder, apparently unaware of the curious glances that were directed at him, or the bold-eyed stares of dark-tinted women - walking in their sandals along the street, or borne in their canopied litters.

Now down the street came a procession whose wails and howls cut through the din of barter and contention. Hundreds of women ran along, half-naked and with their black hair streaming wildly down their shoulders. As they ran they beat their naked breasts and tore their hair, screaming as with grief too great to be borne in silence. Behind them came men bearing a litter on which lay a still form, covered with flowers. All the merchants and the keepers of stalls turned to look and listen.

Now the curious barbarian understood the cry which the women screamed over and over: "Thammuz is dead!"

The yellow-haired stranger turned to a loiterer who had ceased his contentions with a shopkeeper over the price of a garment, and said, in barbaric Phoenician: "Who is the great chief they are bearing to his long rest?"

The other looked up the street, and then, without replying, opened his mouth to its fullest capacity and bawled: "Thammuz is dead!"

All up and down the street, men and women took up the cry, repeating it over and over, until a hysterical note was apparent, and the wailers began to sway their bodies and rend their garments.

Still puzzled, the tall stranger plucked at the loiterer's sleeve, and repeated his question: "Who is this Thammuz - some great king of the East?"

Angered at the intrusion, the other turned and shouted wrathfully, "Thammuz is dead, fool, Thammuz is dead! Who are you to interrupt my devotions?"

"My name is Eithriall, and I am a Gaul," answered the other, nettled. "As for your devotions, you are doing naught except stand there and bellow 'Thammuz is dead' like a branded bull!"

The Phoenician glared, and then began howling at the top of his voice: "He defames Thammuz! He defames the great god!"

The litter was passing along by the disputants now, and it halted as the bearers, yelling as loudly as they could, nevertheless were attracted by the antics of the worshipper and his words. The litter halted, and scores of dark eyes, not entirely sane, were turned toward the Gaul. A throng was gather-

ing, as it always gathers in Oriental cities; the shout was repeated in high-pitched screams, the wailers weaving and swaying, foam flying from their lips in slobbering ecstasy, as they lashed themselves into religious frenzy. The most level-headed and unemotional race in the world in ordinary moments, the Phoenicians were not free from the frenzied outbursts of emotions common to all Semites in regard to their devotions of the gods.

Now hands settled on dagger hilts and eyes flamed murderously in the direction of the yellow-haired giant, against whom the emotion-drunk loiterer still hurled his accusations.

"He defames Thammuz!" howled the foaming devotee.

A rumbling growl rose from the crowd, and the litter tossed like a boat on a stormy sea. The Gaul laid his hand on his sword, and his blue eyes glinted icily.

"Go your way, people," he growled. "I've said nothing against any god. Go in peace and be cursed to you."

Half heard in the growing clamor, his faulty Phoenician was misunderstood; the crowd only caught the oath. Instantly there rose a savage yell: "He curses Thammuz! Slay the violator!"

They were all around him, and they swarmed on him so quickly that for all his speed, he had not time to draw his sword. Maddened by their own religious frenzy, the crowd swept upon him, overthrowing him. As he went down he dealt a terrible buffet to his foremost attacker - the misguided loiterer - and the man's neck broke like a twig. Frantic heels lashed at him, frenzied fingers clawed at him, daggers flashed wickedly. Their own num-



bers hampered them; blood spurted and howls different from the cries of madness rose, as the hacking blades found unintended marks. Borne down by the mass of their numbers, Eithriall tore out his great dagger, and a scream of agony knifed the din as it sank home. The press gave suddenly before the deadly play of the glittering blade, and Eithriall heaved up, throwing men aside like tenpins, right and left. The wave of battle had washed over the litter; it lay in the dust of the street, and Eithriall grunted in astonishment and disgust as he realized the nature of its burden.

But the maddened worshippers were surging back upon him, blades flashing like the spume of an on-rolling wave. The foremost slashed at him savagely, but Eithriall ducked and swayed, ripping as he rolled, so that the stroke was one with the motion of his body. The attacker shrieked and fell as if his legs had suddenly given way; he was almost cut in half.

Eithriall leaped back from the humming blades, and his great shoulders struck hard against a door, which gave inward, precipitating him backward. Such was the momentum of his leap that he fell sprawling on his back, within the door. So quickly did he rise from his inglorious fall that he seemed to rebound from the floor like a cat - then he stopped short and stood glaring, his dripping dagger gripped in his hand.

The door was shut, and a man was throwing the bolt in place. As the Gaul stared in surprise, this man turned with a laugh and moved toward an opposite door, motioning him to follow. Eithriall complied, walking warily and suspiciously as a wolf. Outside, the mob raved, and the door groaned and

buckled to their impact. Then the stranger led the way into a dark, narrow, winding alley, and up this they went, meeting no one, until the roar of the throng faded to a whisper behind them. Then the man turned aside into a doorway, and they emerged into an inn, where a few men sat cross-legged and argued in the everlasting contentions of the East.

"Well, my friend," said the Gaul's rescuer, "I think that we have thrown the hounds off the scent."

Eithriall looked at him dubiously, and realized a certain kinship. The man was certainly no Phoenician. His features were as straight as the Gaul's own. He was tall and well knit, not much inferior in stature to the giant Gaul. His hair was black, his eyes grey; he appeared to be of early middle-life, and though he wore Eastern apparel and spoke Phoenician with a Semitic accent, Eithriall knew that he had met a descendant of ancestors common to them both: the roving Aryans who peopled the world with light-eyed, fair-haired drifts.

"Who are you?" the Gaul asked bluntly.

"Men call me Ormraxes the Mede," answered the other. "Let us sit here and drink wine; fleeing is thirsty work!"

They sat down at a rough-hewn table, and a servant brought wine. They drank in silence. Eithriall was brooding over the past events, and presently he said, "I need not thank you for barring that door and leading me to safety. By Crom, these folk are all mad. I did but ask what king they bore to his tomb, and they flew at me like wildcats. And there was no corpse in that litter after all - only a wooden image, decorated with gold and jewels, drenched in rancid oil, and decked with flowers. What - "

He started up, drawing his sword, as in a nearby street a clamor broke forth afresh.

"They have forgotten all about you," laughed Ormraxes. "Be at ease."

But Eithriall went to the door and cautiously looked out through a crack. Looking along a winding street, he had a glimpse of another, larger, street; down this the procession was marching, but the nature was greatly changed. The flower-decked image was borne upright on the shoulders of the votaries, and men and women were dancing and singing, shouting with rapture, as extravagant in their joy as they had been in their grief.

Eithriall snorted in disgust.

"Now they howl 'Adonis is living,'" said he. "A short space ago it was 'Thammuz is dead,' and they rent their garments and gashed themselves with daggers. By Crom, Ormraxes, I tell you they are mad!"

The Mede laughed and lifted his goblet.

"All these people go mad during their religious festivals. They are celebrating the resurrection of the god of life, Adonis-Thammuz, who is slain in midsummer by Baal-Moloch, the Sun. They carry the dead image of the god, first; then revive him and hail him as you have seen. This is nothing - you should see the worshippers at Gebal, the holy city of Adonis. There they cut themselves to pieces in their frenzy, and throw themselves down to be trampled into the dust by the throngs."

The Gaul digested this statement for a space, then shook his head in bewilderment and drank hugely. Presently a question occurred to him.

"Why did you risk your life to aid me?"

"I saw you fighting with the mob. There was no

fairness in it - a thousand to one. Besides, there is kinship between us - distant and dim, yet the blood tie is there."

"I have heard of your people," answered Eithriall. "They dwell far to the north, do they not?"

"Beyond the lands of Nairi and the headwaters of the Euphrates," answered Ormraxes. "Slowly they have drifted southward from the steppes; year by year they encroach on the valleys of the Alarodians. Others have drifted singly and in small bands down the Euphrates and the Tigris as mercenary soldiers. This drift has been going on for three or four generations."

"Are you a native, then, of this country?" asked the Gaul.

"Not of Phoenicia. I was born in the valleys of the Nairi, and wandered south as a hunter and mercenary. I came upon a people distantly akin to my tribe on the borders of Ammon, and abode there."

Eithriall made no comment. He knew no more of Ammon than he did of Atlantis. But there was something in his mind, and he gave voice to his thoughts.

"Tell me - in your goings about and your wanderings and your travels throughout the land, have you seen or heard of a man named Shamash?"

Ormraxes shook his head.

"It is an Assyrian name; thus they name one of their gods. But I never saw a man given the bare name, unless modified, such as Ishmi-Shamash, or Shamash-Pileser. What manner of man is he?"

"Of good height - though not so tall as either of us - and strongly-made. His eyes are dark, and his hair is blue-black; likewise his beard, which he curls. His bearing is bold and arrogant; he is like

these Tyreans, yet strangely unlike them, for where they avoid battle, he sought it. Nor were his features much like them, though his nose was hooked and his countenance somewhat of the same cast."

"Truly you have described an Assyrian," said Ormraxes with a laugh. "To the southeast, beyond the Euphrates, there are thousands of men who would answer your description, nor need you go that far, it may be, for there is war in the wind and Shalamanu-ussur, king of Assyria, comes up with his war-chariots to war against the princes of Syria - or so men whisper in the market-places."

"Who is this Shalmaneser?" asked the Gaul, making a jumble of the Semitic pronunciation.

"The greatest king of all the earth, whose empire stretches from the southern valleys of the Nairi to the Sea of the Rising Sun, and from the mountains of Zagros to the tents of the Arabians. Assyria is his, and Karkhemish of the Hittites, Babylonia and the marshes of Chaldea. His fathers, the kings, dwelt aforetime in Asshur and Nineveh, but he has built Kalan to be a royal city and gemmed it with palaces, like jewels set in the hilt of a sword."

Eithriall looked dubiously at his companion; these lapses into sonorous language were Semitic rather than Aryan, but Eithriall realized that the Mede must have spent most of his life among Orientals.

"And the chiefs of Syria," quoth the Gaul, "are they whetting their axes and preparing for the onslaught?"

"So man say," answered the Mede warily.

"I have no gold," muttered the Gaul. "Which of these kings will pay me the most for my sword?"

Ormraxes' eyes glinted, as if it were a remark



for which he had been waiting. He leaned forward, opened his lips to speak - a shout interrupted him. Like a steel spring released, he shot to his feet, and wheeled, sword flashing into his hand.

At the outer door stood a band of soldiers in gleaming armor; with them was a noble in a purple cloak, and a ragged rogue who had slipped out of the inn when the companions entered. This rascal pointed to the Mede and shouted, "It is he! It is Khumri!"

"Quick!" whispered the Mede. "Out the side-door!"

But even as he turned, and Eithriall sprang up to follow him, this door was dashed open and a squad of soldiers poured in. Snarling like a cat, Ormraxes sprang back, and at the order of the purple-clad noble, the soldiers rushed in. The Mede cleft the skull of the foremost, parried a spear, and sprang toward the noble, who retreated, howling for help. The soldiers ringed him, and one, running in, pinned Ormraxes' arms from behind. Eithriall's sword decapitated the fellow and, back to back, the comrades made their stand. But the inn was swarming with soldiers. There was a terrific clashing of steel, yells of wrath and shrieks of pain; then a blasting charge swept the companions apart by sheer force. Eithriall was hurled back against an up-ended table, with a half dozen swords hacking for his life. Dripping blood, he roared, and disembowelled a soldier with a ferocious rip of his sword - then an iron mace crashed thunderingly on his helmet. Reeling, blind, he strove to fight back, but blow after blow rained on his iron-clad head, beating him slowly, relentlessly, to the floor, like the felling of a great tree. Then he knew no more.

Eithriall recovered consciousness slowly. His head ached and throbbed, and his limbs felt stiff. There was a light in his eyes, which he recognized as a candle. He was in a small stone-walled chamber - evidently a cell, he thought - on a couch, and a man was bending over him, dressing his wounds. They did not want him to die so easily, the Gaul thought; they revived him to torture him. He gripped the man by the throat, like a python striking, before the victim realized that he had recovered consciousness. Other men were in the room, but no blows rained on the Gaul, as he expected. Only a hand fell on his shoulder, and a voice cried in Phoenician: "Wait! Wait! Don't slay him! He is a friend! You are among friends!"

The words carried conviction, and Eithriall released his captive, who owed his life only to the fact that the Gaul had not fully recovered his usual powers. The fellow fell to the floor, gasping and gagging, where other men seized him and beat him lustily on the back and poured wine down his throat, so that presently he sat up and regarded his strangler reproachfully. The first speaker tugged at his beard absently and regarded Eithriall meditatively. This man was of medium height, with characteristic Phoenician features, and was clad in crimson robes that denoted either the nobleman or the wealthy merchant.

"Bring food and drink," he ordered, and a slave brought meats and a great flagon of wine. Eithriall, realizing his hunger, gulped down a gigantic amount of the liquor and, seizing a huge joint in both hands, began to wolf down the meat, tearing large morsels off with his teeth which were as strong as those of a bear. He did not ask the why and wherefore of it all;

lean years had taught the barbarian to take food as it came.

"You are a friend of Khumri?" asked the crimson-clad person.

"If you mean the Mede," the Gaul answered between bites, "I never saw him until today, when he doubtless saved my life from a mob. What have you done with him?"

The other shook his head.

"It was not I who took him - I only wish it had been. It was the soldiers of the king of Tyre who seized him. They bore him to the dungeons. You I found lying senseless in the alley behind the inn, where they had thrown you. Perhaps they thought that you were dead. But there you lay on the cobblestones, your sword still gripped in your hands. I had my servants take you up and bring you to my house."

"Why?"

The person did not reply directly.

"Khumri saved your life; do you wish to aid him?"

"A life for a life," quoth the Gaul, smacking his lips over the wine. "He aided me; I will aid him, even to the death."

It was no idle boast. Beyond the frontiers of civilization, obligations were real, and men aided men from dire necessity, until it had become a veritable religion among the barbarians to repay such debts. The crimson-robed one knew this, for he had roved far, and his wanderings had taken him much among the yellow-haired peoples of the west.

"You have lain senseless for hours," he said. "Are you able to run and fight now?"

The Gaul rose and stretched his massive arms, towering above the others.

"I have rested, eaten and drunk," he grunted. "I am no Grecian girl to fall down and die of a tap on the head."

"Bring his sword," ordered the leader, and it was brought. Eithriall thrust it into his scabbard with a grunt of satisfaction, at the same time involuntarily making sure that his great dagger was in place at his girdle. Then he looked inquiringly at the crimson-robed man.

"I am a friend of Khumri," said the man. "My name is Akuros. Now harken to me. It is nearly midnight. I know where Khumri is confined. He is kept in a dungeon not far from the wharfs. In this prison there is an outer set of guards, and an inner guard. I will dispose of the outer guard; they are Philistines, and I will send a man to bribe them to desert their post. But the inner guard is composed of Assyrians, and they can not be bribed. But there will be only three of them, and with cunning you can dispose of them."

"Leave them to me," growled the Gaul. "But where is this dungeon? And having gotten Khumri his liberty, what shall we do then?"

"I will send a man to guide you to the prison," answered Akuros. "If you get Khumri free, the same man will be waiting to guide you to the wharfs where a boat will await you. Tyre is built upon islands, as you know, and you could never get through the gates of the wall which shuts the city from the mainland. I can not aid Khumri openly, but I will do all I can secretly."

In a short time, Eithriall was following a stealthy figure along dark winding alleys. For all his stature, the Gaul made no more noise than a wind whispering through a forest. Only occasionally

enough starlight filtered between the slumbering walls to strike pale gleams from his corselet scales, helmet, or sword. At last they halted in a shadowed alley-mouth, and the guide pointed to a squat stone edifice before which a clump of mailed figures stood, in the light of torches guttering in niches in the stone wall. They were conversing with a man whose features were hidden by a mask; and a small bag, which sagged significantly, passed between them. Then the masked man wrapped his cloak about him and disappeared in the shadows, and the soldiers went quickly and silently in another direction.

"They will not return," murmured Eithriall's guide. "The lord Akuros had them given enough gold to allow them to desert the army. They'll be drunk for weeks. Go quickly, my lord! There are more guards within."

The Gaul glided from the alley and approached the prison, whose iron door was not bolted. He opened it cautiously, staring within. A few torches in niches lighted a bare corridor dimly. It was empty to its turn, but beyond the bend he heard a confused murmur of voices, and saw more light. He went silently down the corridor and halted at the bend. A flight of stone steps went down, and in the lower corridor, he saw three broad-built, powerful figures in helmets and mail - black-bearded men, with cruel, dominant features. He thought of an ancient foe, and his hair bristled as a hound bristles at sight of an enemy. They were gambling on the stone floor, and their words were in a strange tongue. But as he looked, a stocky individual came out of the shadows, and spoke in Phoenician: "In an hour the king's men will come for the prisoner."



"Have you been questioning him?" one of them demanded in the same tongue.

"He's stubborn like all his breed," answered the Tyrean. "Little matter; Shalamanu-ussir will be glad to receive him. What think you the great king's greeting will be to the lord Khumri?"

"He will have him flayed alive," answered the Assyrian, after a judicial pause.

"Well, see to him well. He's shackled hand and foot, but he's a very desert lion. I go to the king."

The Assyrians bent to their game again, and the Phoenician waddled up the stone steps. Eithriall glided back from the bend where the stair began, and flattened himself against the wall, in the shadows. The Phoenician came up around the turn, started down the corridor - just as he was opposite the Gaul, so close that an outstretched hand would have touched him, some instinct caused him to wheel. The light was dim, the shadows ghostly. Perhaps the Phoenician thought he saw a specter. Perhaps the sight of the yellow-haired giant in his gleaming mail froze him for an instant. That instant was enough. Before a sound could come from his gaping mouth, Eithriall's great sword cleft his skull and he fell at the Gaul's feet.

Eithriall sprang back quickly to the angle of the wall. Below him he heard a clatter of falling dice as the Assyrians sprang up, startled. He dared not risk a look, but he heard a muffled babble of contention, then the sound of three men mounting the stair. Looking about desperately, the Gaul saw an iron ring in the wall above his head - doubtless used for the suspension of tortured prisoners. Leaping, he caught it and drew himself up. His groping foot found a slight depression in the wall,

where a bit of the masonry had crumbled, and, digging his toe in, he hung precariously there. The Assyrians had climbed the stair and their language broke out afresh as they stumbled upon the body of the Phoenician, lying in his own blood. Spears ready, they looked all about, but it did not occur to them to look up. One of them started toward the outer entrance, evidently in quest of the outer guard - it was at that moment that Eithriall's foothold gave away.

In such crises, the Gaul's brain worked like lightning. Even as his foot slipped, he released the ring, and as he fell he knew what he meant to do; whereas, the soldiers, taken completely off guard, were caught flat-footed. Eithriall's knee struck between the shoulders of one of them, crushing him to the floor; rebounding with cat-like quickness, the Gaul avoided the wavering clumsy spear-thrust aimed at him by another, who was too amazed to be coordinate. Eithriall's sword hummed and the point tore through the corselet scales, to stand out behind the soldier's shoulders. But the very fury of that stroke almost proved the Gaul's undoing. The other Assyrian, in the flashing instant that had transpired since the barbarian's fall, had recovered his wits, and now ran fiercely at his enemy, spear ready for the death-thrust.

Eithriall tugged savagely at his hilt, but the blade was wedged in the dead man's breastbone, and the charging Assyrian was looming upon him. Releasing the locked sword, Eithriall wheeled, empty-handed, to meet the charge. The driving spear broke on his mail, knocking the wind out of him with an explosive grunt, and the force of the Assyrian's attack dashed him headlong against the Gaul.

Eithriall staggered backward beneath the impact, and felt empty space under his feet. He had been borne back over the stairway, and now, close-clinched, they tumbled down the steps, heels over head, their armor clashing on the stone. In the headlong speed of that descent, there was no time for either to strike a blow or make any plan of action. A flashing, chaotic instant of helpless falling and then Eithriall realized that their descent had ceased, and that the soldier lay motionless beneath him. Dazedly, the Gaul arose, groping instinctively for his helmet which had fallen off. The Assyrian lay still; his neck was broken.

Eithriall found and donned his helmet, then looked about. Cells opened on the corridor, but they were dark; but through a slit in the door of one, toward the other end of the corridor, a light shone dimly. A quick search proved that a bunch of heavy iron keys was fastened to the dead soldier's girdle. With these Eithriall unlocked the door, and saw Khumri the Mede lying on the stone floor, weighted with heavy chains. The Mede was awake - indeed the sound of that fall of mailed men down the stair had almost wakened a dead man.

He grinned as Eithriall entered, but said nothing. The Gaul, after some fumbling, found the keys that unlocked the shackles, and Khumri stood up free, stretching his limbs. His glance questioned the Gaul, who, motioning for silence, led the way up the corridor. At the head of the stair, Eithriall recovered his sword with much tugging and silent swearing, and Khumri took up a spear belonging to the slaughtered guards. They warily left the prison and went to the alley where the Gaul's guide awaited them. He motioned them to follow, and they went

along through a shadowed labyrinth and emerged on an open space. Eithriall heard the lap of waters at hidden piles and saw the starlight on the waves. They were standing on a small wharf.

A boat was drawn up there, the rowers at the oars. Eithriall and Khumri entered the boat, the guide following them, and the rowers pushed off. Behind them the lights of Tyre blended into a sea of myriad dancing sparks. A breeze whispered across the bay. The tang of dawn was in the air. On the mainland ahead of them another light sprang up, and toward it the boatmen rowed.

As they approached, this light was seen to be a torch held in the hand of one of a small group of men standing on the beach, near the water's edge. They had left the city far to the left. The stretch of beach was deserted and bare even of fishing huts.

As the boat was grounded, and Eithriall followed Khumri ashore, he saw that one of the men was Akuros. Behind him his servants held horses.

"My lord," said Akuros to Khumri, "my plan has worked out more perfectly than I had hoped."

"Yes, thanks to this Gaul," laughed the Mede.

"I could not venture to aid you more openly," said the Phoenician. "Even now my life is forfeit if I am not ten times more wary than a fox. But you - you will remember?"

"I will remember," answered Khumri. "The princes of Syria will not move against Tyre after we have scattered the chariots of the Assyrian. And from you, Akuros, will I buy all cedar and lapis-lazuli and precious stones, even as I promised."

"I know that the lord Khumri keeps his word," said Akuros, with a deference Eithriall did not understand. "Here are horses, my lord. I dare not

send an escort, lest I be suspected - "

"We need no escort, good Akuros," broke in Khumri. "And now, we bid you farewell; the dawn is nigh and we have far to ride."

They swung into the saddle and headed eastward. Eithriall, looking back from his saddle, saw afar across the bay, the glittering ocean of lights that was Tyre; and on the shore, limned in the torch-light, the crimson-robed figure of Akuros, hand lifted in salute.



THE RISE OF CONAN  
BY WALTER SHEDLOFSKY

Strong men lie strangled in Hyperborea;  
Asgard's soldiers die impaled by sword-thrust;  
Nemedian wizards fall asleep in red dust -  
Great Conan mocks the grim Hyborean age.  
Unearthly demons succumb to his fierce rage;  
Invincible, he cuts a deep crimson swath  
No king's might can withstand, and when his mad  
    wroth  
Ends, he ascends the throne of Aquilonia.

LETTER: ROBERT E. HOWARD to  
HAROLD PREECE,  
no date.

Salaam:

I've been reading DESTINY BAY and in a way the book's left a bad taste in my mouth. I remember several years ago picking up a magazine with one of those stories in it. I read it avidly for awhile, until - I remember what a distinct shock it was when I suddenly discovered that the characters were a bunch of damned Orangemen. I was not only shocked but astounded. In those days, in my innocence I supposed that, naturally, all Irish writers and men of intellect came from the South - and that the Ulstermen, realizing their low moral and psychic status, made it a point to conceal their shame as much as possible. Such the innocence of youth. Yet here was an Orangeman flouting his shame, and his people's shame, in my very face - blatantly and brazenly announcing his color, and apparently proud of it. I have received many literary shocks. Few have equalled this. I felt vaguely outraged and insulted. I finally took up the reptilian thing and tried to read it, but the zest had gone out of it. Bred in the traditions of Munster and Connaught, or at least a handed-down remnant of those traditions, a violent hatred for all things Orange was as natural to me,

as patriotism and love for the striped flag is to the average American youth, reared with Boy Scout standards.

Well, I know more now and I'm broader-minded. I'm no more like an old Irish acquaintance of mine from Leinster who used to almost have apoplexy at the very slightest mention, even, of Belfast. But still I can't stomach that Orange tint with which the late Byrne besmeared all his works - well, maybe not all. He professed a fine national Irish flavor. And he was a liar when he did.

Well, no good luck can come, talking of the dead, and he did love Ireland, even if all his love centered in the North. Great God, why the old Irish families should side with the English is more than I can see. It's certain, the MacFarlanes can't claim a Norman origin. Either they come of a pure Irish stock root or else their clan heads lie, when they say the family is descended from Parthelon out of Egypt.

But Byrne can't give the native Irish justice. He has to drag in the Scotch or the Normans, or the Phoenicians or God knows who else. In CRUSADE, who did he glorify? Why, the O'Neills - God knows they're as true and fine a pure Irish family as ever lived but he made the hero half Norman and why did he pick the O'Neills? Because they're Ulster stock; maybe the reason why a just God hasn't blasted Ulster long ago. And he can't even give the O'Donnells of Donegal justice. Aborigine, he calls them and all other native Irish families. Oh well - you said he's half d'Arcy, didn't you? I've gotten so I'm suspicious of all Celtic seemings. I expect to find a Fitzpaul or a Fitzgerald lurking under every straightforward Costovan and O'Brien.

Oh well - I've nothing to say against the old Norm-

an-Irish families. But I like to see justice done to the original Irish. No people is perfect. All men are swines, more or less; each race has its scuts and its saints. But - oh well - why should I care? What's Ireland to me, with her troubles or her triumphs - if I went back there, I'd be a stranger in a strange land and no one would own me. What's Ulster to me, or Connaught?

Bah. My ancestors thought little enough of Ireland to leave her - those who weren't deported for sedition. So it's little I'll worry myself about her. America with her mixing of strains gave me an English name for a joke, with just a mite of Norman-English blood, and a little broader strain of Scotch - but mostly I'm South Ireland, thank God, and The Boyne Water puts my teeth on edge in spite of myself.

Truett and Clyde are both gone. Clyde was in Carlsbad, New Mexico, the last time I heard from him. Truett's in Denver. He'll be back some time next week. I don't know when Clyde will get back. He may go clear to China before he comes home.

"The Red Dance" is at the Lyric next week. I want to see it, if I can. I've seen one damned good show since I've been here - "Thunderbolt." George Bancroft was fine. That's the kind of stuff I like - rough, raw, and brutal. Tiger-stuff. All this singing and dancing and ga-ga stuff makes me sick. "The Desert Song" - gah! Pardon me while I vomit. The only part of it that was worth two cents was the comedy Johnny Arthur and Louise Fazenda pulled. "The Queen of the Night Clubs" - more gah! And I glower down the line at the latest hits I've seen: "The Singing Fool" - "Abie's Irish Rose" - oh hell - why enumerate? Theme songs and a bunch of vaudeville swine pirou-

etting over the stage. Give me movie actors - one thing I'll say for the "Irish Rose," it had good actors. But Judas, what a flock of crumbs are flooding the movie world now.

Of the all-talking pictures I've really enjoyed, I can name them quickly: "Thunderbolt" - "In Old Arizona" - "The Letter" - "The Terror." To a lesser extent I enjoyed "Tong War," and of the part talkies I got a big kick out of "The Iron Mask" and "Show Boat." For the rest - gah! Wait - I was forgetting just about the best of them all: "Hearts in Dixie."

Drooling, thin-headed toe ticklers, warbling in their soprano yap, and feather-brained flappers trying to be cute and howling vapid theme songs: hell and a black damnation. Give me a rough, tough, brutal story, quick action, and a gang of hard-boiled hairy-chested eggs: George Bancroft; Matthew Betz; Lionel Barrymore; Vic MacLaglen, who once fought Jack Johnson; Lou Wolheim; Bob Armstrong; Bill Boyd; Ernest Torrence; Ed Lowe; Warner Baxster; Gunboat Smith; Tom Kennedy; Wallace Beery; Tom O'Brien; Carl Dane; Blue Washington; Fred Kohler.

Then if they have to have a heroine, throw in some hard baby with a poker face and a heavyweight punch, that can take it on the chin and hand out punishment too: Evelyn Brent, Fay Wray, Lilian Tashman, Florence Vidor, Louise Brook, Baclanova, Lila Damita - boy, go no further! When that blonde French whirlwind goes into action, all others take a back seat. It's time to batten down the hatches, reef all sails, and stand by to cut the masts if necessary. Once I saw her - once. "The Bridge of San Luis" - let me tell you, confidentially, that's why the bridge fell. Get me. Yes! She walked across and scorched

the damned ropes.

My old gang was over here a day or so ago from Cross Plains. A fair is going on and we took it in. I thought once the shooting was going to start. While we were watching the races from the outside - over the fence - a law came along and one of the bunch asked him a civil question. He wise-cracked and then the fun started. I said very little myself, but the way the rest of the gang razzed him was a caution. Finally he beat it. Wouldn't have taken much to start real trouble. Five of us, there were, all about the same height - about six feet. There was Dock who weighed 165, and Pink and me who weigh (now) about 180 each, having lost weight lately, Red, 192, and Heavy, 225. Maybe the law didn't want trouble or maybe he just didn't care about shooting up a bunch of hicks. Anyway, I was glad when he pulled his freight. I'm peace loving and cautious. Not much to the fair, here.

Well, I've been rambling long enough. Answer when you can.

LETTER: ROBERT E. HOWARD to  
CARL JACOBI,  
circa Summer 1934.

Dear Mr. Jacobi:

Thank you for the kind comments you made about my work. I enjoyed "The Satanic Piano" and look forward to reading more of your work in the near future. Yes, the discontinuing of Strange Detectives knocked me out of a pretty regular market. They had a Steve Harrison novelet yet unpublished when they quit. Of late I haven't been doing much in the detective line. My Costigan series, which formerly appeared in Fight Stories, Action Stories, and (under a pen name) in Magic Carpet, is now running in the new sporting magazine, Jack Dempsey's Fight Magazine. Action Stories is running a series of humorous westerns, concerning Breckinridge Elkins of Bear Creek, Nevada. In September a three-part Conan serial starts in Weird Tales.

You ask me why I do not use Texas settings more in my stories. I really should, since Texas is the only region I know by first hand experience. Three of my yarns in Weird Tales have been laid in Texas: "The Horror From the Mound," "The Man on the Ground" and "Old Garfield's Heart." Sometimes too thorough a knowledge of a subject is a handicap (not that I claim to be an authority on the Southwest, or anything like that; but I was born here and have lived here all my life) for fiction writing.

You ask about San Antonio. It is without question the most interesting and colorful city in Texas, possibly in the entire Southwest, though as a permanent residence I should prefer El Paso. The inhabitants are cosmopolitan, some twenty per cent being Mexican, the rest Anglo-Saxon, Spanish, Italian, and Oriental, the latter mainly Chinese, and the usual percentage of negroes. The Anglo-Saxon element is, of course, dominant, but there are many foreigners of the races I have mentioned. The population is somewhere between two hundred and thirty and two hundred and fifty thousand. Many soldiers are stationed there, at Fort Sam Houston, and there are several famous flying fields there, including Randolph Field "the West Point of the air." The San Antonio River winds through the town under a great number of more or less narrow bridges, with palm trees growing along its grassy banks and adding to the tropical appearance of the city. Fiestas are very popular there, as in any Latin or semi-Latin city, and the celebrated Battle of Flowers is worth seeing, though not so colorful as formerly, since it has been so extensively commercialized - according to the usual Anglo-Saxon custom. The city is built more or less on the original Spanish plan, with narrow winding streets and broad spacious plazas. Sights of interest include, of course, the Alamo, which stands now in the heart of the city; the old missions; the extensive Brackenridge Park with its museum, sunken gardens and luxuriant natural scenery; and the old Spanish governor's palace, since its careful restoration one of the finest examples of the early Spanish occupation and culture of the Southwest.

I recently returned from a trip to the Carlsbad Cavern, New Mexico, the largest - and most fantastic - cave in the world. If you ever visit the South-



west, do not fail to see that. It would be worth your while to go from there to El Paso, following the route my companion and I followed, southwesterly from the cavern. The road traverses one of the most impressive countries this continent can offer as far as vastness and emptiness go. For a hundred and seventy miles it sweeps, almost with a turn, through gigantic stretches of uninhabited desert flanked by huge, barren mountains. The road curves around the foot of Signal Peak, rising nearly ten thousand feet in the burning blue sky - only a foothill of the Rockies, but the highest point in Texas, indeed the highest point between the Rockies and the Atlantic Ocean - a colossal castle of almost solid rock, visible for seventy-five miles across the desert.

Juarez, which lies across the river from El Paso, is interesting if you like Mexican towns. It differs little from other border cities, a tangle of narrow, unpaved dusty streets, 'dobe huts, dingy stores, and saloons and the usual hordes of ragged, barefooted peons. A white man is safe enough if he stays on the main streets and keeps his mouth shut. Personally, I prefer Piedras Negras, which lies across the river from Eagle Pass, and is somewhat cleaner and more progressive. The main charm about those Mexican towns to most people is, of course, the liquor, and El Paso is now just as wide open as anything south of the Rio Grande. Indeed, my friend and I did most of our drinking on this side, finding the liquor better. American beer was only 4.5 percent, but it was riper than the Moctezuma 6.5 we got on that side. Tequila, mescal, pulque and sotol are the favorite Mexican native drinks, but these are not all handled by the better saloons, and a man takes a chance drinking anything in the lower Mexican bars. The

better saloons all handle tequila, and I make it a point to stick to that.

I was much interested to note that you are acquainted with Arthur O. Friel. He has been one of my favorite authors for years. I have not read the book you mention, but it sounds good.

Yes, I noticed the Popular company had bought Adventure, and as you probably have read, they've changed editors again. Corcoran sold a serial to Cosmopolitan and threw up the job to free-lance - probably proving Jack London's assertion that most editors wanted to be writers, secretly or otherwise.

E. Hoffmann Price and his wife stopped by and visited me a few days on their way to California this spring. Delightful people, and Price is a fine writer, to my way of thinking. He's done very well with detective stories.

Best wishes.

Cordially,

Robert E. Howard

## TO CERTAIN ORTHODOX BRETHERN

BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

You say all things were made for you - then prove  
it, on your crowns.

Go curb the tides that break your ships, the floods  
that sink your towns,

Go bid the winds to stay their drought, the rains to  
stay their rust.

Go naked in the northern ice, unscathed in desert  
dust.

Speak to the demon of the frost and bid him bend his  
knee.

Lift up your hand as a ruler should and halt the fall-  
ing tree.

Stand in the charging tiger's path and stop him in  
career;

If all earth creatures are your slaves, what need of  
bow or spear?

Announce your lordship in the face of the serpent's  
fetid breath,

Mayhap he'll sink his scaly coils and sheathe the  
hidden death.

Yea, ye are men and masters all, the rulers of the  
world,

Save when the reeling oceans rise, the earthquake's  
blows are hurled.

Go tell your tale to the bones of those the hippo  
tramped in mire.  
Ashes of those attest your rule, who loosed the god  
of fire.  
There bides no man in all the world may hide the  
leprous curse.  
Yea, ye are men and more than men, Lords of the  
universe.  
This truth your priests and elders rant, with vain  
and haughty breath;  
Let them go forth and prove their worth, aye, chain  
and shackle Death.

## A SONG OF THE LEGIONS

BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

The crystal gong of the silence  
    Shivers in shattered shards;  
And the marble hall re-echoes  
    To the tread of the crested guards.

Fingers pluck at the hangings,  
    White in the purple gloam;  
Midnight lies with the sleepers  
    In the pulsing heart of Rome.

Rosy lips smile in slumber  
    Arms nestle bodies white -  
Rome in her silks and marbles  
    Sleeps through the soft-lipped night.

Echoing down the heather  
    The restless trumpets call,  
Questioning each of the other  
    Down the line of the winding Wall.

Eyes strain hard in the darkness,  
    To the pulse of an echo blown -  
Rome is of gold and iron  
    But a soldier is flesh and bone.

Fires in the hills are burning,  
To the far off throb of a drum;  
Through the ghostly waving heather  
What phantom figures come?

Shadows or painted warriors?  
The death drums never cease.  
Stand to your watches, legion,  
That Rome may sleep in peace.

Beacons burn in the towers,  
Eyes straining hard beside,  
Ears a-tune to the murmur,  
The sigh of each changing tide.

Was that the shrill of a night bird  
Where the waves are grey as steel,  
Or the grind of a muffled oar-lock,  
The wash of a prowling keel?

Driftwood or sword-fanged sea-wolves,  
Not yours is rest or ease;  
Stand to your watches, legion,  
That Rome may sleep in peace.

## REVIEW

CONAN THE CONQUEROR, by Robert E. Howard, edited by L. Sprague de Camp, Lancer Books, 224 pages, 60 cents.

This one long Conan novel (about 70,000 words), first published in 1935 as "The Hour of the Dragon" in four installments in Weird Tales, stands up well on rereading. It opens with a measuredly impressive scene in which King Conan's most powerful Aquilonian and Nemedian enemies employ a ruby of supernatural powers, the Heart of Ahriman, to raise the 3,000-years-dead Xaltotun, a wizard of the pre-Hyborian empire of Python. Xaltotun's spells smash the Aquilonian army and capture the king alive, but one of the employers of the sorcerer, fearing his power and seeking to limit it, secretly orders the Heart thrown into the deep sea. Zenobia, a girl in the harem of the king of Nemedias, helps Conan escape. The long balance of the novel tells of Conan's pursuit of the Heart, and of his eventual return with it to conquer all his enemies, regain the throne of Aquilonia, and make Zenobia his queen.

As befits the climatic novel about King Conan, the tale is told in a more majestic prose and with more of the conventional language of Arthurian romance than most of the stories about Conan's earlier years. The atmosphere is that of the late Middle Ages, the final battle resembling Crecy, with the

Bossonian archers turning the tide. Conan's quest of the magical ruby gives us a rich panorama of the Hyborian Age: Nemedia, Aquilonia, the province of Poitain, Zingara, Argos, and Stygia, which are very roughly equivalent to Germany, France, Provence, Spain, Italy, and Egypt - as confirmed by the excellent map of the Hyborian World, with the map of Europe and adjacent regions superimposed for reference, which has been reprinted in double spread with each of the Lancer Conan volumes, of which this is the third to be published, but chronologically seventh in the series.

The many characters in the story play their roles well and stay within them. None, to my mind, captures the reader's sympathy as does, say, Khemsa, Valeria, or Balthus. The sorcery is not quite as weird and fresh as that of "The People of the Black Circle," but the sorcerers are strongly limned, in particular the four black-robed magicians of Khitai (China, seemingly) with their hollow voices like Khitan temple bells and their staves that become poisonous serpents, and their delightfully understated threats: "Tell us where he (Conan) is before we do you an injury."

The Heart of Ahriman itself inspires some of the book's best poetry: "'The sleeping Night of the World stirred and shook its heavy mane, and there began a throbbing of drums in deep darkness... From death to death it came, riding on a river of human blood. Blood feeds it, blood draws on it. Its power is greatest when there is blood on the hands that grasp it, when it is wrested by slaughter from its holder. Wherever it gleams, blood is spilt and kingdoms totter, and the forces of nature are put in turmoil.'"

The focus of the book is steadily and a little mon-



otonously on Conan, who episodically fights a variety of enemies from grey apes and ghouls to sorcerers and kings in scenes which are not overdone, though they inevitably tend somewhat to repeat duels in the earlier stories. Conan's chief personal conflict is between the responsibility he feels as king of Aquilonia and his urge to return to the life of a carefree rogue, but once at least he feels world weariness and "sickening revulsion" - when he encounters a beautiful Stygian vampire: "The legend of Akivasha was so old, and among the evil tales told of her ran a thread of beauty and idealism, of everlasting youth. To so many dreamers and poets and lovers she was not alone the evil princess of Stygian legend, but the symbol of eternal youth and beauty, shining forever in some far realm of the gods. And this was the hideous reality. This foul perversion ran a sense of a shattered dream of man's idolatry, its glittering gold proved slime and cosmic filth. A wave of futility swept over him, a dim fear of the falseness of all men's dreams and idolatries."

One can lay this beside Howard's words to Harold Preece in his letter of October 20, 1928 (THE HOWARD COLLECTOR, Autumn 1962): "Then (in the Middle Ages) there was pageantry and high illusion and vanity, and the beloved tinsel of glory without which life is not worth living.

"Oh, the gauds and the baubles and the frills and the tinsel! All empty show and the smoke of conceit and arrogance, but what a drab thing life would be without them."

And then one can wonder if such moods were not the strongest prefigurations of his suicide.

--Fritz Leiber

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

