

BUSTED RIBS AND BROKEN ENGLISH

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Introduction

Let me introduce myself. I have been a Robert E. Howard fan since about 1974. I was a teen at the time and spent the years until 1980 spending all of my paper route money (and eventually Burger King money) on REH books, comics, fanzines, art portfolios, you name it. I did spare a few dollars for other fantasy and science fiction authors, as well as keeping up with the Bantam Doc Savage reprints, but REH was my main mania. Looking at what it would cost to build a similar collection now, I am quite happy that I spent what I did.

One pleasant memory of this period is the (brief) correspondence I had with Glenn Lord. I wrote him a couple of letters and he was very gracious in patiently answering the questions of an obviously young fan.

Like many fans and collectors, college interrupted my happy existence. Then came marriage and children and various other diversions. It was only in 1995 that Howard started to insinuate himself in my consciousness once again. The combination of discovering the Baen volumes and finally bringing my boxes of books home from my parent's house stoked the long smoldering mania into full flame once again.

I have been trying to make up for the lost time. Luckily (in some ways) the 1980's was a much slower decade for Howard publishing, at least in English, than the one which preceded it. I have been able to acquire much of what I missed.

One interesting side effect of this history is that I have missed most of the "pastiche mania" which has been going on. Sure, I read the de Camp/Carter/Nyberg Conan stories in the 70's, and I do count a handful of the Zebra published Cormac Mac Art and Bran Mak Morn pastiches among my collection, but compared to the 80's and 90's output this is virtually nothing. I'm not sure what this means, but I hope that it will give me a somewhat different perspective in whatever debates I decide to jump into.

Also, I did not see either of the Conan films until a few years ago. This was a conscious decision as I was unable to picture any actor doing justice to the character. In hindsight, while neither film is up to my high standards, they are not actually bad. If you ignore that the character on the screen is supposed to be Howard's Conan, the films are even moderately entertaining in a mindless "Beastmaster" sort of way.

In contrast, I made the same decision with the George Pal Doc Savage film and did not see it for many years. Neither Conan film even comes close to the truly abysmal wretchedness of this film. Strangely, to my eye the lead actor in the Doc film, Ron Ely, does a far more credible job in portraying his character than Arnold does as Conan. The supporting cast is totally amateurish, however. And the soundtrack... Can you picture Conan riding across the screen while a chorus sang, to the tune of a Sousa march, "Have no fear, the Cimmerian is here!"?

I'm really more of a fan than a scholar, but I'm not

a blind fan. Like any author, Howard had his masterpieces and his garbage. I appreciate good scholarship, but don't seem to have the eye for subtlety that it really requires. Some of the influences and parallels that I see read into Howard's works truly boggle my mind. Not that I always agree with them, mind you, but a good argument is a good argument no matter what my opinion of the final conclusion.

As for REHupa, I have been aware of it for more than twenty years, but only lately have I felt that I have enough to offer to be as much a producer as a consumer. I do sort of get the feeling that I'm joining in a conversation that's been going on without me for twenty-five years, so I may not be too prolific initially, but I'm sure I'll get into the flow before too long.

Now on with the show...

Breckinridge's Picks

Imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery, but parody can't be far behind and is a lot more fun.

As a minor fan of H. P. Lovecraft and a major fan of P. G. Wodehouse, I was immediately roped in by the title (and the cover illustration) of P. H. Cannon's *Scream for Jeeves* when I came across it at Necronomicon Press' web site. I just bought the book and hope to get to it very soon. I plan to read a Lovecraft collection, a Jeeves novel, and the Cannon book in rapid sequence.

Howard has also been the subject of parody. I'm aware of three humorous stories obviously based on Conan:

- "The Barbarian" by Poul Anderson (*The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, May 1956)
- "Colon the Conqueror" by John Boardman (*Fantastic Universe*, May 1958)
- "The Black Sorcerer of the Black Castle" by Andrew J. Offutt (*Cosmic Laughter*)

I don't know if the first two were ever reprinted, but "Black" was subsequently issued in a chap-

book by Hall Publications. All three are fairly short but well worth reading.

Here are is a brief quote from each to give you the flavor:

- "The Barbarian": "Yahoo!" howled the warrior. "I yam Cronkheit duh Strong, Cronkheit duh Bold, Cronkheit what slew a mammot' single-handed an' made hissself chief o' duh Centaurs, an' dis's muh night! C'mere!"
- "Colon the Conqueror": Colon swept the fainting form of the damsel into his steel-banded arms and embraced her. She fell instantly limp, all the bones in her torso mangled.
- "The Black Sorcerer of the Black Castle": Kimon went on, paying little heed to the six-long wounds in his chest; they were relatively inconsequential and would heal in a month or three, besides the trickling blood warmed his bare flesh.

I recommend trying to find the Offutt tale in the Hall edition. It contains very interesting background information by Offutt as well as a glossary notable for the entry:

- Reh initials of a much-copied writer of note; dead he is but his work lives on to line the pockets of others.

Given Conan's comic success, it is also natural that this field would also sprout some laughs. Two stick out in my mind:

Groo by Sergio Aragonés

Cerebus the Aardvark by Dave Sim

Cerebus in particular parodied many familiar S&S figures in its early days. Issue one parodies Conan in his young thief days. The beginning of two is very reminiscent of "The Frost Giant's Daughter". Three introduces Red Sophia. But it is beginning with issue four that Sim really starts to hit his stride. In successive issues, we are introduced to Elrod the Albino (and his blade, Seersucker) and Bran Mac Muffin.

The first 25 issues of *Cerebus* have been collected into a phonebook sized paperback entitled *Cerebus* (ISBN 0-919359-08-6). I recommend it highly to any REH or S&S fan.

Kerosene for the fire...

I've recently been "browsing" L. Sprague de Camp's autobiography *Time & Chance* from Donald M. Grant. I say browsing as I have found it a very good book to pick up and read ten or so random pages at a time. I have always found Mr. de Camp's writing style very easy reading.

While cataloging some of my Howard fanzines recently, I was struck by what seems to be two very different accounts of Mr. de Camp's initial exposure to Robert E. Howard.

Amra, Vol. 2, No. 62 (October 1974), page 25 (part of the *Scrolls* review section, in a review of *Worms of the Earth* from Donald M. Grant):

"Kings of the Night" was the first Howard story I ever read, when it appeared in *Weird Tales* in 1930. One passage that stuck in my mind, long before I had any notion of who Howard was, was the sentence in which a Roman officer, slain by Kull, is dragged with his "foot caught in the stirrup" (pp 114f). Of course, I later learned that there were no stirrups at the time of the story — at least, not in western Europe, whatever the Huns or the Chinese or the Sarmatians were up to.

Time & Chance (1996), page 216:

I narrowly missed an opportunity to discover Howard's work in 1930. Fresh out of college, I picked up a copy of the November *Weird Tales* and glanced inside. I found I was looking at Howard's story "Kings of the Night," about a battle in Roman Britain. The first sentence that caught my eye was: "The oncoming Romans shouted vengefully and quickened their pace as the frightened horse raced by, a ghastly travesty of a man, foot caught in the stirrup, trailing beneath the pounding hoofs."

Even in those far-off salad days, I knew that Roman cavalry had no stirrups, which

had not yet been invented. Ha, I said, this fellow doesn't know what he's talking about! And I put the magazine back on its rack. Had I gone on to read the story, who knows what might have resulted?

It's certainly possible that this is just the differing recollections of a man after twenty-two years. I know that my memories of events change with time. I'll not try to read things into this which may not be there, but I would be very interested in hearing people's reaction to this as well as any comment Mr. de Camp would like to offer.

Coming Attractions

I have several items I have been working on for future issues.

- A list of all of the Howard "posthumous collaborations" with as much information as available regarding the history of the tale and the extent of the collaboration.
- "99½% Pure" — An article on the peculiar beast known as the "Purist".
- "Cimmeria on \$5 a Day or How to Collect Howard (and Conan in Particular) Without Going Broke"

I also hope to create a nice masthead for this 'zine. I have an artist friend whom I haven't been in contact with for some time. This seems like the perfect opportunity to look him up and give him some business.

Several people are independently working on Howard bibliographies. There is effort underway to try to minimize duplication of effort, but due to differing goals of the individuals involved it appears that there may be multiple works produced. I hope to have more information to offer soon.

"Come on, let's git goin'. I yearns to find a more quiet and secluded spot than this here'n."

Breckinridge Elkins