



BUSTED RIBS AND BROKEN ENGLISH

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Editing with a hatchet

A relatively uncommon REH tale is “The Extermination of Yellow Donory”. This was first published in the June 1970 issue of *Zane Grey Western Magazine*. The only other appearance was in the 1978 Berkley volume *The Last Ride*.

There are some reasons for this stories fairly meager publishing record. It is hardly REH at his best, being rather predictable and somewhat forced in tone. It is also, of course, a western, which have historically been reprinted much less often than Howard’s fantasy, horror, and straight adventure works. But it’s still a good tale.

In August of 1998, I picked up a copy of the magazine appearance and did a quick comparison to the book version. I was somewhat surprised to find quite a few differences, but didn’t pursue it further. James Reasoner recently mentioned on the REHInnerCircle mailing list that he had picked up this issue and it sent my fragile memory back to my brief comparison. A more detailed examination showed even more differences than I remembered.

These are not the de Camp-esque comma moves or verb tense changes. These are brutal cuts to large chunks of text. It looks very much like the editor had very strict restraints on the length of story he could use and forced the square peg firmly into the round hole. I do not know whether the editor himself did the cuts or whether it was done by whoever was handling the REH properties at that time, but either way they are painful to see. James is of the opinion

The Extermination of Yellow Donory

by **ROBERT E. HOWARD**



that the publisher was at fault: “knowing what a heavy editorial hand Leo Margulies sometimes had, I’m not surprised that the magazine appearance was heavily edited”.

I’ll not attempt to list all of the changes here. We are fortunate that this is one of the cases where the higher quality text is also the more common one. I’ll just point out a few to get across the basic form of the editing that was done.

The Last Ride:

Maudlin tears gathered in his bleared and reddened eyes as he reached uncertainly for the omi-

nously dark bottle which stood at his elbow. This he shook anxiously, showing some slight relief when a sensuous and throaty gurgle came from within. The relief was brief, however. He drank long and sadly, then began his rambling monologue again, which monologue was becoming rather incoherent.

Zane Grey:

Maudlin tears gathered in his bleared and reddened eyes as he reached uncertainly for the dark bottle which stood at his elbow. He drank long and sadly, then began his rambling monologue again.

Well, that passage was certainly castrated! As James put it when I posted this example: “most of the color is gone from the passage in the magazine version”.

He had no place left to go but down—and he meant to go down in style. But Donory couldn't even bring off his suicide without messing it up!



The Last Ride:

“An’ it ain’t so much me bein’ thataway. Most of the real bad hombres wasn’t so big. Lookit Billy the Kid; no bigger’n what I be. ‘Tain’t tallness and ‘tain’t beef. It’s what ya got in ya, an’ I just ain’t got it. Why’nt I? How’n thunder I know? Lackin’ the necessary heft for fist fightin’ I oughter be a wildcat with knives an’ guns, but knives gimme the creeps an’ the feel of a gat upsets my belly. I should oughta stayed

on the ole man’s ranch up on the Sour Water Range, where folks knowed me an’ where I coulda kept outa their way.

Zane Grey:

“An’ it ain’t so much me bein’ thataway. Most of the real bad hombres wasn’t so big. Lookit Billy the Kid; no bigger’n what I be. ‘Tain’t tallness and ‘tain’t beef. It’s what ya got in ya, an’ I just ain’t got it.

Another flavorless edit.

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ZANE GREY
WESTERN MAGAZINE

NEW BUCK DUANE WESTERN NOVEL.

**LONG TRAIL
TO
NOWHERE**

by ROMER ZANE GREY

The rustlers could get their stolen cattle to their market only through deadly mountains—and their guide was a mysterious, fantastically beautiful girl! Duane knew she was the key to smashing the gang—but didn't bargain for the weird truth about her!

2 to 62

A WESTERN MASTERPIECE

THE GIFT OF COCHISE
LOUIS L'AMOUR 66

TRUE WESTERN FEATURE

THE LAST HIGHWAYMAN
WALTER DALLAS 63

EXCITING SHORT STORIES

RIDE THE NIGHT WIND
WILLIAM HEUMAN 80

LEO MARGULIES, Publisher DECISION
WILLIAM R. COX 88

CYLVIA KLEINMAN, Editorial Director THE POSSE FROM PAYTONVILLE
BILL PRONZINI 97

ROMER GREY, Advisory Editor THE CHILD MAN
ROBERT EDMOND ALTER 106

DR. LOREN GREY, Advisory Editor EXTERMINATION OF YELLOW DONORY
ROBERT E. HOWARD 120

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These examples occur within the first 8 paragraphs. And it just goes on and on... By my estimate, that the story was cut by over 15% (approximately 3925 words down to 3275).

But at least they did a nice job with the little author blurb that accompanies the piece:

Robert E. Howard (1906-1936) was best known in his lifetime for his weird fiction, notably his adventurous stories of Conan the Cimmerian, the barbarian swordsman—who is still read by hundreds of thousands of fans. His first published book, though, was of western stories; and we are proud to present an unusual yarn by this richly varied writer.

So grab your copy of *The Last Ride* and enjoy!