



# BUSTED RIBS AND BROKEN ENGLISH

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## Fun on the Range

There is no denying that Howard's Heroic Fantasy is his most popular. Conan, Kull, and their breed have been adapted into comics, served as the basis for several movies, and inspired seemingly countless pastiches. After that, his horror has received modest attention and inclusion in various anthologies.

But only those who have been inspired to dig deeper (or just been lucky by grabbing a random REH paperback) have discovered the wealth and depth of the author's range and versatility. His historical adventures, westerns, and boxing tales all have strong core followings.

I have a special attraction for Howard's humorous westerns. These larger than life tales have an amazing vitality and power. The combination of intense action and broad slapstick carries the stories like a runaway freight train toward the inevitable conflagration.

Howard created three characters in this milieu: Breckinridge Elkins of Bear Creek Nevada, Buckner J. Grimes of Knife River Texas, and Pike Bearfield of Wolf Mountain Texas. Breck was certainly the original creation. While both Pike and Buckner have some discriminating characteristics (both in character and in story structure), they were essentially Breck clones created to sell to different markets.

The Elkins stories comprise the bulk of Howard's humorous western output, and they have all seen print in relatively clean editions. Here's a

breakdown of the Elkins stories:

"Mountain Man"

*Action Stories*, March-April 1934

Reworked for *A Gent From Bear Creek* (1937)

"Guns of the Mountains"

*Action Stories*, May-June 1934

Reworked for *A Gent From Bear Creek* (1937)

"The Scalp Hunter"

*Action Stories*, August 1934

Reworked for *A Gent From Bear Creek* (1937)

"A Gent from Bear Creek"

*Action Stories*, October 1934

Reworked for *A Gent From Bear Creek* (1937)

"The Road to Bear Creek"

*Action Stories*, December 1934

Reworked for *A Gent From Bear Creek* (1937)

"The Haunted Mountain"

*Action Stories*, February 1935

Reworked for *A Gent From Bear Creek* (1937)

"War on Bear Creek"

*Action Stories*, April 1935

Reworked for *A Gent From Bear Creek* (1937)

"The Feud Buster"

*Action Stories*, June 1935

Reworked for *A Gent From Bear Creek* (1937)

"The Peaceful Pilgrim"

Reworked for *Action Stories*, August 1935 (as  
"Cupid from Bear Creek")

Reworked for *A Gent From Bear Creek* (1937)  
(as "Cupid from Bear Creek")

*The Summit County Journal*, February 16, 23;  
March 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, 1968 (7-part serial)

"The Riot at Cougar Paw"

*Action Stories*, October 1935

"The Apache Mountain War"

*Action Stories*, December 1935

“Weary Pilgrims on the Road”  
*Action Stories*, February 1936 (as “Pilgrims to the Pecos”)

“Pistol Politics”  
*Action Stories*, April 1936

“Evil Deeds at Red Cougar”  
*Action Stories*, June 1936  
**Note:** Not listed in the series index in *The Last Celt*.

“Gents on the Rampage”  
*Action Stories*, August 1936 (as “High Horse Rampage”)

“Gents in Buckskin”  
*Action Stories*, September 1936 (as “No Cowherders Wanted”)  
**Note:** Not listed in the series index in *The Last Celt*.

“Politics at Lonesome Lizard”  
*Action Stories*, October 1936 (as “The Conquerin' Hero of the Humboldts[sic]”)

“Educate or Bust”  
*Action Stories*, January 1937  
 Reworked for *A Gent From Bear Creek* (1937) (as “Sharp's Gun Serenade”)

“Striped Shirts and Busted Hearts”  
*A Gent From Bear Creek* (1937)

“Meet Cap'n Kidd”  
*A Gent From Bear Creek* (1937)

“When Bear Creek Came to Chawed Ear”  
*A Gent From Bear Creek* (1937)

“Mayhem and Taxes”  
*The Summit County Journal*, September 8, 15, 22, 29, 1967 (4-part serial)  
**Note:** This appears to be unfinished, but is not listed as such in *The Last Celt*.

“A Elkins Never Surrenders”  
 Reworked as a Bearfield Elston story for *Star Western*, September 1936 (as “A Elston to the Rescue”)  
*The Summit County Journal*, January 12, 19, 26, February 2, 9 1968 (5-part serial)

That's 23 stories, if you don't count reworks and rewrites. Quite an output! There's quite a falloff to the runner-up, Pike Bearfield:

“A Gent from the Pecos”  
*Argosy*, October 3 1936  
 “Gents on the Lynch”

*Argosy*, October 17 1936  
 “The Riot at Bucksnot”  
*Argosy*, October 31 1936  
 “While Smoke Rolled”  
 Reworked as a Breckinridge Elkins story for *Double-Action Western*, December 1956  
 “The Diablos Trail”  
*Bran Mak Morn: A Play and others* (1983)

5 stories there. Then the final character (if you ignore the Bearfield Elston rewrite noted above) Buckner J. Grimes:

“Knife-River Prodigal”  
 Cowboy Stories, July 1937  
 “A Man-Eating Jeopard”  
 Cowboy Stories, June 1936  
 “A Ringtailed Tornado”  
 Reworked as a Breckinridge Elkins story for *Masked Rider Western*, May 1944 (as “Texas John Alden”)

And 3 makes a total tally of 31 humorous westerns. That's quite impressive. That's more stories than the entire Conan series (although Conan certainly has a higher word count with much longer stories on average).

The Elkins stories are not too hard to track down without breaking the bank. You can locate Grant editions of *A Gent From Bear Creek*, *The Pride of Bear Creek*, and *Mayhem on Bear Creek* for about \$25-35 or so. And the Zebra paperback of *Gent* can be found for under a 10-spot. The true oddity of the bunch is the Ace paperback combining all three books entitled *Heroes of Bear Creek*. The uncommon book is hard to find for under \$75.

Unfortunately the other two series have not been treated as kindly by publishers. No collections have ever been done leaving you to track down original magazine appearances, scattered anthologies, or small press chapbooks. Worse yet, a couple of the stories have never been printed in their original form, having been reworked into “more commercial” Elkins tales. Here's to the first publisher to take the bull by the horns and give these stories their due!