

# The Hyborian Review

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***The Most 'Howardest' Issue Yet!***

## Great REH Quotes

From *Worms of the Earth*, copyright 1932 by Popular Fiction Publishing Co. for *Weird Tales*, November 1932. I pulled this from my 1963 Lancer printing of *The Dark Man and Others*. *Bran Mak Morn will deal with the devil himself to rid his world of the Roman invaders. Instead, he bargains with Atla, a mystical woman. But her price is high, as she tells him!* What of my blasted and bitter life, I, whom mortal men loathe and fear? I have not known the love of men, the clasp of a strong arm, the sting of human kisses, I, Atla, the were-woman of the moors! What have I known but the lone winds of the fens, the dreary fire of cold sunsets, the whispering of the marsh grasses? -- the faces that blink up at me in the waters of the meres, the foot-pad of night -- things in the gloom, the glimmer of red eyes, the grisly murmur of nameless beings in the night!

"I am half human, at least! Have I not known sorrow and yearning and crying wistfulness, and the dreary ache of loneliness? Give to me, king -- give me your fierce kisses and your hurtful barbarian's embrace. Then in the long dreary years to come I shall not utterly eat out my heart in vain envy of the white-bosomed women of men; for I shall have a memory few of them can boast -- the kisses of a king! One night of love, O king, and I will guide you to the gates of Hell!"

Bran eyed her somberly; he reached forth and gripped her arm in his iron fingers. An involuntary shudder shook him at the feel of her sleek skin. He nodded slowly and, drawing her close to him, forced his head down to meet her lifted lips.

## How's this for a name:

### The Robert E. Howard Newsletter

The first issue of The Robert E. Howard Newsletter (vol. 2 # 1) is scheduled for Jan. 1998. It covers "everything," according to publisher Dennis McHaney. Contact him at: dmchaney@earthlink.com

### Howard Home in Cross Plains Expands Visiting Hours January 1

Starting January 1, 1998, the Howard House Museum will be open regular hours. Billie Ruth Loving (soon to be nominated for sainthood by all Howard aficionados) has volunteered to open the house Friday afternoons from 2pm til 5pm. In an additional effort to increase awareness of the Howard Museum, Project Pride is also putting together a brochure that will be available in every restaurant in Cross Plains. The brochure will give information on the Howard House and phone numbers of individuals who are willing to show the house!

- Special thanks to Ed Waterman

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## Story Review

by Garret Romaine



### The Dark Man

written by Robert E. Howard

Published first in *Weird Tales*, December 1931.

Whenever Howard needed to just write grisly, sword- quenching fighting stories, he must have turned to Black Turlogh. Here was a character, after all, that was tossed in a snowdrift at birth to make sure he was fit to live. In all the Black Turlogh stories, there is never any love interest. Instead, he is surrounded by action scenes, sword play, and considerable fighting.

*The Dark Man* is the definitive Black Turlogh story. As geologists would say in describing rock formations, it is

the type locality, the example others are measured against. Not only is it the best Black Turlogh story by far, it is one of Howard's better efforts, and written while he was at the top of his game. Therefore, we present for your entertainment this issue a thorough investigation into a lesser-known Howard hero, but a first-rate story.

## ***Black Who? Turlogh's Resume'***

Who was Black Turlogh, the outlaw of Clan na O'Brien? Here's Howard's physical description:

...any man or woman whose eyes fell on Turlogh Dubh would look long. Six feet and one inch he stood, and the first impression of slimness faded on closer inspection. He was big but trimly molded; a magnificent sweep of shoulder and depth of chest. Rangy he was, but compact, combining the strength of a bull with the lithe quickness of a panther...and black he was as to hair, and dark of complexion. From under heavy black brows gleamed eyes of a hot volcanic blue. And in his clean-shaven face there was something of the somberness of dark mountains, of the ocean at midnight.

Interesting! He sounds a lot like Conan, does he not? Blue eyes, black hair, bull neck...but Turlogh was destined to languish in obscurity, while Conan will outlive us all. Why?

One theory would have to be that Conan is more commercially endowed. He laughs, for one thing. Characters need some small slice of humanity and humor for the reader to relate to. Not all Howard's heroes were that easy to appreciate, after all. Solomon Kane is dark and moody, Kull has a tough throne to hold, and Bran Mak Morn is fighting Romans all the time. Now comes Turlogh, and while he's a human dynamo with his light Dalcassian axe, he, too is almost less than human when it comes to love and laughter. Only when seen as a prototype that leads to 'Conan the Commercially Successful', does Black Turlogh fit more smoothly into the Howard pantheon.

There are just six Turlogh epics in their suggested chronological order:

- 1) Spears of Clontarf
- 2) The Dark Man
- 3) The Gods of Bal-Sagoth
- 4) The Ballad of King Geraint
- 5) The Dane...fragment
- 6) The Shadow of the Hun fragment

The *Shadow of the Hun* is a disjointed fragment that seems to suggest Turlogh wandered much of the known world as a pirate (again, like Conan). '*Clontarf*' (rewritten into *The Grey God Passes*) has Turlogh only in passing, toward the end and not yet exiled. 'Bal-Sagoth' reunites Turlogh with Athelstane, a man brained by Turlogh in *The Dark Man* but carrying scars only, and no lasting grudge. '*The Dane*' fragment is a good start to a kidnapping tale but very short. '*Ballad*' is an epic tale



known mainly to REHUPAnS, of a mighty battle that sees the death of Athelstane, and Turlogh is the only notable survivor.

## ***Great Writing - Savage and Beautiful***

Like '*Rogues in the House*' and '*Tower of the Elephant*', this story has dozens of passages that sparkle with alliteration. Here's a partial list:

- the surf snarled
- the long leaden combers moaned
- broken the pagan power forever
- A masterless man, whose kin cast him out
- the day was sad and leaden
- the wind moaned and the everlasting monotone ...
- Turlogh swore by the gods that knew not the cross
- There, at the very center of the silent circle
- dying, they had dealt death
- filled him with savage satisfaction
- the strange, endless tides of mankind
- now the skies grew gray
- all the world was a driving white veil
- he saw land loom up
- the play of the Dalcassian axes
- their silver-scaled armor flashing in the moonlight
- fire flashed as the blade shivered
- ran swiftly and silently across the snow
- The Norseman sagged in his slayer's grasp;
- flushed with wine and pride
- the Dark Man looked through the skalli walls
- "count your beads and mutter your mummery"
- the Dalcassian axe flashed
- his golden beard a-bristle with the battle-joy
- the Dalcassian axe licked out like a striking cobra
- "Woe to the foes of Mak Morn!"

In addition, Howard does some nice things with colors here, especially RED. Here are some passages with the word 'red' inside:

Such axes as these had shattered the northern hosts into red defeat  
"A red sea-plowing, eh, my black jewel?"  
"A princess of Erin languishes in grip of a red-bearded reaver"  
A red mist waved across his eyes so that the rolling sea swam crimson all about him.  
And he followed a red trail  
Then up the shore a short distance he saw a strange red huddle of forms  
But her skin was fair as theirs, with a delicate rose tint...  
The hall waved redly before Turlogh's eyes and he fought doggedly for control...  
Now a red wave of combat swept the skalli hall, a shout of strife that shattered tables, smashed the benches, tore the hangings and the trophies from the walls, and stained the floors with a red lake.

About the table where stood the Dark Man, immovable as a mountain, washed the red waves of slaughter... How many red infernos of slaughter and madness have your strange carved eyes gazed upon, Dark Man?

Finally, there are these paragraphs near the end:

“Look,” he cried suddenly, pointing seaward. “The ocean is of blood! See how it swims red in the rising sun. Oh, my people, my people, the blood you have spilt in anger turns the very seas to scarlet! How can you win through?”

“I came in the snow and sleet,” said Turlogh, not understanding at first. “I go as I came.”

The priest shook his head. “It is more than a mortal sea. Your hands are red with blood and you follow a red sea-path, yet the fault is not wholly with you. Almighty god, when will the reign of blood cease?”

Turlogh shook his head. “Not so long as the race lasts.”

Red, then, as the color of blood, is the symbol of success, the vehicle for victory. It is significant as a metaphor for strife, and for battle, but also as a metaphor for the mess men make of things. It is also the glue that binds this story together.

Howard also played with Black, White, and Golden. For Evil was portrayed as Thorfel the Fair, a Golden Boy, who stole the Irish princess to claim as his wife. Good, represented by the color White, was represented by Jerome the priest, as well as the white-bearded ancient Gonar. It was a snow-white veil of concealment that hid Turlogh, guided by The Dark Man statue.

Black, however, was reserved for victory in bloody battle. Turlogh and The Dark Man, plus the small dark warriors who teamed up for the final carnage, were a ferocious assembly. Brogar, the chief of the Picts, calls Turlogh “Friend of the Dark Man,” because the Pictish priest in his dreams saw both were fighting the Viking invaders. The Picts and Turlogh are separated by many levels of civilization, with the Picts using flint arrows and Turlogh relying on the finest steel in the known world. Yet their course is similar, and they both ride the red wave that smashes through the story.

By contrast, the ocean begins the story as gray and leaden, storm-driven and capricious. Not one man in a thousand could have made the journey Turlogh sailed, for overcoming the sea is no child’s play. But soon the ocean calms, giving up in its puny attempt to stop Black Turlogh. Finally, at the end, when Turlogh begins his return voyage bearing the body of Moira, who has taken

a Viking knife to her own heart, the ocean appears red in the dawn before it turns blue at the very end.

It isn’t easy to read a lot into all of this. But Howard must have been conscious of some of his color constructions. He used the words red, crimson, scarlet, rose, and blood interchangeably and often. Both priests were white, demonstrating not only old age but also a certain purity of essence. Whether it was intentional or not, it lends the story a nice feeling of **density**.

### ***A Battle for the Shouting***

If you have a moment, try reading this passage at the top of your lungs:

The storm of battle rocked the mighty hall. The skalli became a shambles where men slipped in pools of blood, and slipping, died. Heads spun grinning from slumping shoulders. Barbed spears tore the heart, still beating, from the gory breast. Brains splashed and clotted the madly driving axes. Daggers lunged upward, ripping bellies and spilling entrails upon the floor. The clash and clangor of steel rose deafeningly. No quarter was asked or given.

That’s about as gory as Howard gets. While it’s a stirring paragraph when read silently, it really comes alive in an oral rendition. Viewers of the movie “The Whole Wide World” will remember the scene where Howard is typing *The Jewels of Gwahlur* at the top of his voice. His stories are even more alive when related loudly, with strong emphasis on action verbs and hard consonants.

### ***Outcasts Anonymous***

Finished during early 1930, *The Dark Man* represents a period in Howard’s life when his heroes were driven from the arms of civilization, forced to fend for themselves. He explored the theme often. Kull was banished by his tribe for the mercy killing of a woman at the stake. Turlogh was exiled, brought down falsely by intrigue and villainy. Dark Agnes ran away from home rather than marry a bloated balloon of a man.

In *The Last Ride*, young Buck Laramie must leave his homelands thanks to a brush with the law. Howard doesn’t just send his heroes on a quest, he boots them bodily out of their comfort zone.

Exile makes for a hardened hero, but for the average reader, it isn’t quite as easy to identify with these iron men. And they so rarely smile, unlike Conan.

### ***Baen’s Subtle Edits***

I’ll confess that I started out intent on copying the quotes in this article from my Baen edition of *Bran Mak Morn*. Mostly because it isn’t falling apart. But on a

lark, I looked closer at the Baen book with my old Lancer edition open. And soon, I had compiled a list of edits that infuriated me

## Changes from Lancer edition to Baen:

I've tried to put the Howard version (as shown in my 1963 edition) in italics, and Baen's version in bold:

changed *scantily sheltered* to **scantily outlined**  
changed *the fierce western land* to **fierce land**  
dropped a comma here and there  
changed axe handle cut from the *heart* of an oak to *head*  
changed a northern *reaver* to **rover**  
changed the open sea *smote it* to **caught it**  
changed his people *booted* him out to **cast** him out  
dropped a phrase: Irish girl captive *in the skalli* of a Norse pirate  
the paragraph starting, "The Gael bent and grasped it" is a mess; it has sentences out of order, and the Baen version is missing this sentence, *For like the little dead men it looked old.*  
Trimmed *his* sail, changed to trimmed **the** sail  
Thorfel's *skalli*, changed to Thorfel's **dwelling**  
*bows* changed to **bow**  
*noted that the trees grew thick close behind the skalli*, changed to **noted the trees behind the skalli**  
nearest the *skalli* changed to nearest the **settlement**  
*the door opened* changed to **a door opened**  
*of the master of the skalli* shortened to **of the master**  
barbaric *whims* changed to **fancies**  
italics are missing from "for Thorfel *was* handsome"  
punctuation problems when viewing Moira  
Athelstane is one *man* among sea-wolves - no italics  
*pityingly* is changed to **pitying**  
*cooled his seething brain* changed to **soothed his brain**  
those in the *skalli*, changed to **hall**  
*eerie* movement changed to **every** movement

Then, at the end, Baen dropped the last paragraph. In their version, the story ends, "The morning winds caught and filled his sail." But there is much more:

"Into the west he raced like a shadow fleeing the dawn. And so passed Turlogh Dubh O'Brien from the sight of the priest Jerome, who stood watching, shading his weary brow with his thin hand, until the boat was but a tiny speck far out on the tossing wastes of the blue ocean.

Unconscionable? Derelict? Incompetent? It isn't clear to me why there is any editing whatsoever. Why bother? Nothing was added, that's for sure. No space was saved. It seems clumsy and somewhat ignorant, to tell the truth. Many have called for Baen to release a complete collection of pure Howard Conan stories, minus the edited versions from de Camp, Carter, and Nyberg. I'd like to be removed from that list.

## Recycled Hero

Athelstane, interestingly enough, is used again in the only other real Black Turlogh story, *The Gods of Bal-Sagoth*. He returns the favor of gashed ribs and a bruised skull to Turlogh during an ocean skirmish some time after the attempted rescue of Moira. Athelstane spares Turlogh's life, and together they wash up on a fantastic island far west of their known world, and make an interesting pair. But that's later...

Howard does his best to get us to like Athelstane. As Turlogh spies the skalli, he mutters that the blonde Saxon giant is "one *man* among wolves." Later, when bawdy jests lead to a man to call out "All Irish are cowards," the yellow giant laughs, "As proved by Clontarf and that scar on your jaw!", a 'gentle thrust' that "brought a roar of rough mirth from the throng."

## Summary

As short stories go, *The Dark Man* is as well-wrought as a Howard story gets. It is tightly scripted, relentlessly forward-driven, and beautifully written. I could have gone on about REH's ability to bring the sea alive, especially noteworthy for a man writing from the remotest rural Texas. Then there was the fisherman, who "haggled like a Saxon" over his boat, then wouldn't accept a gold torc put in place on Turlogh's arm by King Brian himself. Or we could talk about the statue of Bran Mak Morn that watched over all. But this is truly a Turlogh story, a retelling of an epic yarn. Howard painted the concept of heroic rescue with wonderful brushes, including a daring use of colors to keep his themes together. Truly one of his better works, but due to the predominance of his other characters, not well known. - GR

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**The Hyborian Review** is published monthly by Garret Romaine and distributed free via e-mail. Send feedback to: [gromaine3@comcast.net](mailto:gromaine3@comcast.net). Back issues - <http://www.prosalg.no/~savage/conan/publications>

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NEXT Issue: Wright's bane: *The Frost-Giant's Daughter*.

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