

THE LEGEND OF EL BORAK by Rick Lai

1. Tales Told in the East

Best known for his tales of heroic fantasy, Robert E. Howard (1906-36) also wrote contemporary tales of adventure for the pulps. Howard was influenced by Talbot Mundy, a major writer for *Adventure* in the 1920's. Mundy's heroes were American and British adventurers roving around India and the Middle East. Utilizing Mundy's settings, Howard fashioned his own band of protagonists. Among Howard's soldiers of fortune, the most famous is Francis Xavier Gordon.

Howard initially created Gordon in a series of fragments penned in the early 1920's. The author also manufactured a sidekick for Gordon, Steve Allison alias the Sonora Kid. Both Gordon and Allison were conceived as Texas gunmen who came to Asia in the early 1900's. In the Orient, the pair discovered lost cities, priceless treasures and all manners of perils.

Howard endowed Gordon with the Arabic name of El Borak ("the Swift"). It was often implied that Gordon earned this sobriquet in Afghanistan. However, Howard had made a major blunder about the Afghans. As pointed out in *Dark Valley Destiny: The Life of Robert E. Howard* (Bluejay Books, 1983) by L. Sprague de Camp, Catherine de Camp and Jane Whittington Griffin, the Afghans speak Farsi rather than Arabic.

Upon becoming an established pulp writer in the 1930's, Howard revived the characters of Gordon and Allison. Gordon changed very little, but the Sonora Kid was exiled back a generation to the 1870's and the 1880's, the time of the Chisholm Trail. The revised version of the Sonora Kid appeared in two stories, "Knife, Bullet and Noose," and "The Devil's Joker." Howard was unable to sell either of these stories during his lifetime. Both can be found in *The Last Ride* (Berkley, 1978) and *The End of the Trail: Western Stories* (Bison Books, 2005). "Knife, Bullet and Noose" was published by itself in these Howard collections, *The Book of Robert E. Howard* (Zebra, 1976) and *The Howard Collector* (Ace, 1979).

The physical description of the Sonora Kid in these two complete stories is identical with that of his namesake in Howard's early fragments. Chronological references prevent the two Sonora Kids from being the same individual. In order to reconcile the two versions of Steve Allison, the most likely explanation would be that they are father and son.

Unlike the Sonora Kid, Francis X. Gordon was able to break into the pages of the pulps. Five stories were published about El Borak in the 1930's: "The Daughter of Erlik Khan" (*Top-Notch*, December 1934), "Blood of the Gods" (*Top-Notch*, July 1935), "The Country of the Knife" (*Complete Stories*, August 1936) and "Son of the White Wolf" (*Thrilling Adventures*, December 1936). Two complete adventures of El Borak, "Three-Bladed Doom" and "the Lost Valley of Iksander" (also called "Swords of the Hills") remained unpublished for decades.

"Three-Bladed Doom" has a very unusual literary history. Three different versions of this short novel exist. Howard's original version of the novel was approximately 42,000 words. When this novel was rejected partially because of its length, Howard revised the story into a shorter form (24,000 words). Working with both these versions, L Sprague de Camp rewrote Gordon's exploit into "The Flame Knife," an

adventure of Howard's most famous character, Conan of Cimmeria. Names were changed, anachronisms removed and supernatural elements added. First published in *Tales of Conan* (Gnome Press, 1955), the story was reprinted in *Conan the Wanderer* (Lancer books, 1968).

Both of Howard's unaltered versions were made available in the 1970's. The shorter version was published in *REH: Lone Star Fictioneer #4*, a Howard fanzine. This short version was reprinted in *The "New" Howard Reader #7* (2000). The long version was issued as a paperback novel by Zebra Books in 1977.

FAX Collector's Editions collected the other adventures of El Borak in two handsome hardcovers: *The Lost Valley of Iksander* (1974, which included the title story plus "The Daughter of Erlik Khan" and "Hawk of the Hills"), and *Son of the White Wolf* (1977, which featured the title story plus "Blood of the Gods" and "The Country of the Knife"). "Son of the White Wolf" was also reprinted in *The Treasure of Tartary* (Wildside Press, 2004) and *The Exotic Writing of Robert E. Howard* (Girasol Productions, 2006). "The Country of the Knife," "Hawk of the Hills," "The Daughter of Erlik Khan," and "Blood of the Gods" were also published in *Blood of the Gods* (Girasol Collectables, 2005).

"Blood of the Gods" makes reference to "the secret hoard of Shahrazar the Forbidden." Robert E. Howard was alluding to another of his adventure series. Like El Borak, Kirby O'Donnell, was an American in Afghanistan. Two of O'Donnell's exploits "Swords of Shahrazar" (*Top-Notch*, October 1934) and "The Treasures of Tartary" (*Thrilling Adventures*, January 1935) were set in Shahrazar, a fictional city in Turkestan (1). Even though "Swords of Shahrazar" was published first, it is a sequel to the "Treasures of Tartary."

A third tale in the O'Donnell cycle, "The Trail of the Blood-Stained God" was rewritten into "The Blood-Stained God," a Conan story, by L. Sprague de Camp for *Tales of Conan*. "The Blood-Stained God" reappeared in *Conan of Cimmeria* (Lancer Books, 1969). Under the title of "The Curse of the Crimson God," Howard's unaltered version, together with the two other O'Donnell stories, was collected in *Swords of Shahrazar* (FAX Collector's Editions, 1976). A 1978 Berkley paperback with the same title contained two extra stories that did not feature Kirby O'Donnell. Another difference between the hardcover and the paperback is that the former changed the title of the short story "Swords of Shahrazar" to "The Treasure of Shaibar Khan."

A few supporting characters from Gordon's adventures either appear elsewhere in Howard's fiction, or at least have counterparts with the same name and physical attributes. El Borak was often accompanied by two Afghan warriors, Yar Ali Khan and Khoda Khan. "The Fire of Asshurbanipal" (*Weird Tales*, December 1936), a tale that combined Arabian adventure with the supernatural elements of H. P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos, features an Afghan named Yar Ali (2). "Names in the Black Book" (*Super-Detective Stories*, May 1934), which belongs to a mystery series about detective Steve Harrison, includes Khoda Khan among its entourage of characters (3).

Cryptic Publications printed several chapbooks containing previously unavailable fiction by Robert E. Howard in the 1980's. *Bran Mak Morn: A Play and Others* (1983) included "The Hand of the Black Goddess." One of the villains in this tale was named Ditta Ram. A sinister individual with the same name and physical description appeared in the long version of "Three-Bladed Doom." "The Hand of the Black Goddess" is one of

two stories detailing the investigations of two private detectives, Brent Kirby and Butch Gorman. The other tale in the series, "Sons of Hate," was printed by Cryptic Publications in *Two-Fisted Detective Stories* (May 1984),

Cryptic Publications also reprinted Howard's early works that relate directly or indirectly to El Borak. *The Adventures of Lal Singh* (1985) contains three tales about a Sikh warrior who aided Gordon. The first of these stories, "The Tale of the Rajah's Ring," is apparently missing the middle of the narrative. The second, "The Further Adventures of Lal Singh," is just the brief beginning of a story, but the third, "Lal Singh, Oriental Gentleman," is complete.

After collecting the solo efforts of one of Gordon's comrades, Cryptic Publications then published the fragments about the American adventurer himself. An anthology of action stories, *Pulse-Pounding Adventure Stories #1* (December 1986), featured "Intrigue in Kurdistan," an unfinished story about El Borak. The remaining Gordon fragments were collected in chapbooks consisting solely of Howard's works. *The Coming of El Borak* (1987) contained five unfinished narratives: "The Coming of El Borak," "Khoda Khan's Tale," "The Iron Terror," an untitled episode involving Tuareg warriors, and "El Borak" (a short fragment narrated by an unnamed American). *North of Khyber* (1987) included all the joint exploits of El Borak and the Sonora Kid. These included "North of Khyber," "The Land of Mystery," "El Borak" (a longer narrative distinct from its namesake in *The Coming of El Borak*), "The Shunned Castle," and "A Power Among the Islands." Since the long "El Borak" fragment is narrated by Steve Allison, it is possible that he was meant to be the narrator in the shorter "El Borak" fragment. Maybe Howard intended both fragments to be part of a larger work.

Cryptic Publications also issued a collection of Steve Allison's solo adventures, *The Sonora Kid* (1988). Because a number of these fragments were untitled, names were assigned to them based on their respective starting sentences. The assembled fragments were "The West Tower," "Brotherly Advice," "Desert Rendezvous," "Red Curls and Bobbed Hair," "The Sonora Kid—Cowhand," "The Sonora Kid's Winning Hand," "A Blazing Sun in a Blazing Sky," "The Hades Saloon," "The Hot Arizona Sun," "Madge Meraldson," "Steve Allison" and "...The Mountains of Thibet."

In these early works, Howard often used alternate spellings for people and places of the Eastern Hemisphere. Examples are "Thags" (for "Thugs") or "Thibet" (for "Tibet"). However, Howard referred to the Tuaregs, the Saharan Berber people as "Tauregs," a spelling that I have been unable to find in any of the dictionaries available to me.

The Last of the Trunk (The Robert E. Howard Foundation Press, 2007) correlated the last remaining prose fragments by the pulp writer. Two of them involved characters associated with El Borak. An untitled fragment briefly described Yar Ali Khan's failed attempt to slay a bandit chief. "The White Jade Ring" is an intriguing fragment featuring Steve Allison in the Orient. Gordon is an offstage character in this unfinished tale. "The White Jade Ring" is noteworthy for mentioning that Gordon and Alison had an unrecorded adventure in which they had a "war with the Si-Fan." This was a reference to the crime syndicate headed by Dr. Fu Manchu in the novels of Sax Rohmer.

Some of Howard's poetry is connected to the Gordon series. "The Song of Yar Ali Khan" in *The "New" Howard Reader #4* (January 1999) revealed the innermost thoughts of Gordon's Afghan friend. "The Sword of Lal Singh" in *A Rhyme of Salem*

Town and Other Poems (Robert E. Howard Foundation, 2006) concerned Gordon's Indian comrade.

After reading Howard's stories several times, I constructed a probable biography of Francis Xavier Gordon. This article is an attempt to arrange Gordon's exploits in a coherent order. Chronological conclusions were based both historical facts and references within the stories themselves. For example, "Khoda Khan's Tale" cited the events of "The Coming of El Borak." "Khoda Khan's Tale" also mentioned that Johannesburg was under British control. Therefore, "Khoda Khan's Tale" had to have transpired after the conclusion of the Boer War.

In "North of Khyber," there is a newspaper story about the Bolsheviks calling upon the Balkan nations for support. Normally, this reference would lead to the conclusion that "North of Khyber" occurred after the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. On the other hand, references to Steve Allison's age and the political situation in Afghanistan point to "North of Khyber" being set before World War I. Since the Bolshevik Party was in existence since 1903, it could be argued that the newspaper was describing a political position adopted by the Russian radicals before they achieved power.

Portions of my chronological reconstruction include elaborate speculation on my part. For example, I combined references to a Thuggee temple from "El Borak (the long fragment)" and "The Fire of Asshurbanipal" to enlarge upon one of El Borak's unrecorded exploits.

II. An American Gunslinger in Asia.

Francis Xavier Gordon was born in Texas, somewhere near the Mexican border, during 1877. His ancestry was a combination of Highland Scot and Black Irish (4). Most of his early life was spent in El Paso, Texas. He grew up to be a muscular man of medium height. His hair was black. His blazing black eyes reminded men of a wild animal. His lean face was always kept smooth-shaven.

By 1893, Gordon was a gunslinger in the American West even though he was only sixteen years old. For the next two years, he traveled throughout the West. He fought the Yaqui Indians of Mexico. He journeyed through the Bad Lands of the Dakota.

Sometime in 1895, Gordon embarked on the career of a sailor. Exactly what prompted this decision is unknown. But the most likely explanation was that he was branded an outlaw in the United States. Gordon sailed the Seven Seas for the next four years. He witnessed the fighting techniques of the Moro tribes of the southern Philippines. In Indochina, Gordon committed deeds that enraged the French colonial administrators. As a result, Gordon found it extremely dangerous ever to set foot in French territory.

While sailing in the South Seas, the intrepid American earned the nickname of "Wolf" Gordon. One wonders if this sobriquet resulted Gordon reminded his fellow seamen of Wolf Larsen whose 1893 death (5) is described is recorded in Jack London's *The Sea Wolf* (1904). A more famous alias awaited Gordon in the ports of the Arab world.

Gordon demonstrated to a group of Arabs his ability to draw a gun fast from the holster and shoot accurately. The Arabs dubbed him El Borak ("the Swift"). Gordon

would use this alias when even traveling in parts of Asia where Arabic is not the native tongue.

One of the Arab ports visited by Gordon was Tunis, the capital of Tunisia. Since the French controlled this territory, it is likely that Gordon did not advertise his presence to the local authorities. While there, Gordon witnessed a scandalous episode involving an English lieutenant and a married woman. This knowledge would prove useful to Gordon years later in southern Africa.

One of the Arabs befriended by Gordon was Mustapha el Hamid of Oman. We don't know where Mustapha met Gordon during his years as a sailor, but it was not in Oman.

Gordon also passed through ports under the jurisdiction of the Ottoman Empire. These territories included Palestine, Armenia, and certain areas inhabited by Greeks (probably Crete and Macedonia). As a result of witnessing atrocities committed in these territories by Turkish officials, Gordon gained a bitter hatred of the Ottoman Empire. It is even possible that Gordon participated in some manner in the 1897 revolt on Crete.

Not all the ports frequented by Gordon during his years as a sailor were in Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. A few were either in America or Western Europe. In these ports, he frequented museums where he saw the tracks of dinosaurs preserved in rock slabs. He remembered having seen similar fossilized tracks in the Dakotas,

Abandoning his life as a sailor, Gordon landed in India sometime during 1899. In the following year, he met two Indians who played important roles in his life. They were Lal Singh, a Sikh from Lahore, and Yasmeena, a woman of mysterious antecedents.

Prior to meeting Gordon, Lal Singh had a series of adventures where he found himself dealing with various kinds of thieves. In an unrecorded exploit of 1896, the Sikh bested a Rao of Rajputana in a dispute over smuggled jewelry. During 1898, Lal Singh prevented the theft of a ring that his uncle, a goldsmith in Meerut, had fashioned for a rajah (see "The Tale of the Rajah's Ring"). This episode brought Lal Singh into contact with Marendra Mukerji, a skilled swindler. Although they were friendly adversaries in their first meeting, Lal Singh and Marendra soon became partners in a scheme to defraud Parsee merchants in Bombay (see "The Further Adventures of Lal Singh"). While Marendra was engaged in a fraud in Delhi, Lal Singh battled a gang of Thugs (Thags), the fanatical cultists who committed robbery and murder, in Benares (see "Lal Singh, Oriental Gentleman").

When he met Gordon in 1900, Lal Singh had ended his partnership with Marendra Mukerji. Lal Singh befriended Gordon in an unrecorded adventure involving "the wolves of Jagai." Whether Jagai was a person or a place remains a mystery. It is conceivable that "Jagai" is meant to be Jagat (also called Jigat, Dwarka, Dvarka and Dvaravatal), a seaport in western India. Because their bond of friendship was forged in this exploit, Gordon would occasionally send messages to Lal Singh with these words as a form of introduction: "El Borak bids you remember the wolves of Jagai."

El Borak had his first meeting with Yasmeena in Delhi. Her father had been a priest of Erlik Khan, a Mongolian demon-god, in Yolgan, a hidden city in the Afghan mountains. Yolgan had apparently been erected by Mongolian centuries ago. Yasmeena's mother was an Indian woman who belonged to the cult of Thuggee (6). In her early life, Yasmeena cared more for earthly pleasures than for the diabolical religions of her parents. She was attracted to Gordon, but fearful of his fierce nature. Gordon was

involved with Yasmeena for a brief duration. She subsequently drifted into the arms of other men.

In Benares (also known as Varanasi and Banaras), Gordon stumbled upon a group of very ancient books that were in the possession of some Brahmins. The books contained an account of the wanderings of Carthaginian traders in western and central Africa. The Carthaginians discovered Valooze, a lost civilization populated by Caucasians. The strange kingdom was teeming with gold. Some of the traders returned to Carthage where they recorded their experiences in Valooze. When Carthage was destroyed in the Punic Wars, the traders' records passed through various hands before making their way to India.

Gordon became obsessed with discovering Valooze. He determined the approximate location of the fabled land in the Belgian Congo. El Borak ruled out the immediate launching of an expedition due to the realization that he would have to travel across British territory to reach his goal in the Congo.

The Boer War had erupted in 1899. Considering that the British were occupied with conquering the states carved out of Africa by Dutch settlers, any expedition of armed men would have come under immediate scrutiny. Gordon and his men would have run the risk of being mistaken as pro-Boer gunrunners. The prospect of approaching Valooze from the French Congo was ruled out because Gordon did not want to run the risk of being arrested for his earlier action in Indochina. Gordon probably considered traversing German East Africa (modern-day Tanzania), but dismissed the route for reasons unknown.

Rumors of another American adventurer, Kirby O'Donnell, drew Gordon to Afghanistan. O'Donnell had gained fame for a series of unrecorded adventures in the Middle East during the 1890's. O'Donnell was christened El Shirkuh ("the Mountain Lion") by the Arabs. After spending considerable time in Kurdistan, a territory of the Ottoman Empire near the Persian border, O'Donnell was able to pretend to be a native. Having accumulated many enemies, O'Donnell found it expedient to pose as a Kurd named Ali. In 1897, O'Donnell in his Ali guise slew Ivan Kurovitch, a Russian colonel, during a skirmish in Afghanistan. For this deed, the false Kurd took the title of "el Ghazi" ("the Slayer of the Infidel").

As Ali el Gazi in 1898, O'Donnell became embroiled in a search for an ancient golden idol, the Blood-Stained God, in Afghanistan (see "The Curse of the Crimson God"). During this exploit, O'Donnell rescued Yar Muhammad, a Waziri tribesman, from being tortured. Yar Muhammad later repaid the favor by saving O'Donnell's life in the temple of the Blood-Stained God.

A year later, O'Donnell would save Yar Muhammad's life twice. On one occasion, the Irish-American stopped an Afridi blade from penetrating Yar Muhammad's breast. Yar Muhammad later found himself incarcerated in a British jail in Peshawar, the Indian town near the Afghan border. Yar Muhammad would have been hanged if O'Donnell had not rescued him.

Francis X. Gordon thought it might be mutually profitable if he threw in his lot with O'Donnell. Gordon went to Peshawar in 1900 in the hopes of getting a lead on O'Donnell's whereabouts. Hearing a report that O'Donnell had been led into a fatal ambush by a treacherous guide named Yar Akbar, Gordon concluded his fellow American had perished. In actuality, O'Donnell had survived. Under the delusion that El

Shirkuh was no more, El Borak decided to pursue an independent course of action in Afghanistan.

The Afridi inhabitants of Kadar, an Afghan village near the Indian border, would draw Gordon into his first adventure north of the Khyber Pass. Tribesmen from Kadar crossed into India and abducted a British Colonel's daughter, Marion Sommerland. Among the abductors were Yar Ali Khan, Khoda Khan and Yar Hyder. Taking their hostage back to Kadar in order to extort a ransom, the kidnappers soon discovered that their captive was lecherously desired by both the village chieftain, Khumail Khan, and the head mullah (See "The Coming of El Borak").

Arriving in Kadar, Gordon rescued Marion Sommerland. Due to El Borak's actions, Khumail Khan was replaced as chief by a villager named Kulam Khan. Before departing with Marion, Gordon gained Kulam's promise to cease the villagers' raid into India, Gordon also gained the friendship of Yar Ali Khan, Khoda Khan and Yar Hyder. Yar Ali Khan decided to accompany Gordon when the American left Kadar.

Gaining Yar Ali Khan's loyalty was an amazing accomplishment, Yar Ali Khan had previously exhibited a total distrust of outsiders. In "The Song of Yar Ali Khan," the Afghan made this boast:

*All men are the foes of Yar Ali
Excepting Yar Ali's clan.*

Yar Ali Khan was a fierce fighter. He once brazenly attempted to kill Zumal Khan, a bandit chieftain guarded by scores of followers. Yar Ali single-handedly invaded Zumal's stronghold (see an untitled fragment).

For the next two years, Gordon and Yar Ali Khan wandered across Asia. In an Indian jungle, Yar Ali experienced fear when he sensed a python's presence in a cavern. The Afridi witnessed Gordon's mastery over wolves in the Himalayas. Yar Ali would later claim that he and Gordon slew a monstrous dragon in a cavern during this period. However, the veracity of Yar Ali's tale was doubted by Khoda Khan. With the conclusion of the Boer War in May 1902, Gordon seized the opportunity to revive his Valooze project. Returning to Kadar with Yar Ali, Gordon persuaded Khoda Khan and other Afridis to join the expedition (see "Khoda Khan's Tale"). Khoda Khan stated that El Borak was "little more than a youth." The American's age was actually twenty-five.

Gordon also recruited Lal Singh and other residents of countries near Afghanistan to join his private army. All together, El Borak had gathered twenty Asian followers. A schooner took the expedition from India to Portuguese-controlled Mozambique.

Crossing into British territory, Gordon blackmailed an English officer to permit the expedition to pass unmolested. This was the same lieutenant whose scandalous behavior had been witnessed by Gordon years earlier in Tunis. As Gordon approached his goal, he recruited many African natives to join his band.

Reaching the ruins of Valooze, Gordon found temples whose different styles of architecture gave the impression that a different race had built each of them. The older temple was dedicated to snake gods, and the other enshrined an elephant deity. Gordon's plans to explore these temples were hampered by the arrival of a rival expedition commanded by an Arab, Hassan ibn Zaroud.

The existence of the snake temple offers some clue to the identities of the races that inhabited Valooze. A name very similar to Valooze is Valusia. In his tales of Kull of Atlantis, Robert E. Howard wrote of Valusia, an ancient kingdom terrorized by a race of serpent-men. Upon becoming monarch of Valusia, Kull expelled the serpent-men from his kingdom. Perhaps Valooze was an outpost of Valusia from which the serpent-men were driven out. The humans who settled in the land afterwards must have been the devotee of the elephant god, According to "The Tower of the Elephant" from Howard's Conan series, Valusia was visited by aliens from the planet Yag. These aliens looked like winged humanoids with elephant heads. Human were known to worship these beings as gods. The human inhabitants could have been followers of a visitor from Yag.

It is not known how Hassan ibn Zaroud knew about Valooze, but the serpent-men of Valusia were known to at least one other Arab. In the eighth century, Abdul Alhazred wrote about the serpent-men in *Al Azif*, a book of sorcery later translated into Greek as the *Necronomicon*. Although occasionally cited in Howard's stories, the *Necronomicon* played a more important role in the works of H. P. Lovecraft. Perhaps Hassan had found an original Arabic copy of Alhazred's treatise. Inside the manuscript, he could have found references to the location of Valooze.

Gordon failed to retrieve the gold of Valooze. When El Borak and his comrades returned to Afghanistan in 1903, they soon learned that Russia was seeking to entangle the country in a series of intrigues. Tsarist Russia hoped to use Afghanistan as a road through which its armies could conquer India. One of the stratagems directed towards this goal involved the possession of the treasure of Shahrazar, a Turkoman city inside the fringes of the Russian Empire's border with Afghanistan. Even though the Russians had nominally conquered the Turkomans, they had failed to subdue Shahrazar. In the role of Ali el Ghazi, Kirby O'Donnell foiled the Russian plot (see "The Treasures of Tartary and "Swords of Shahrazar.") He also avenged himself upon the deceitful Yar Akbar, and became reunited with the loyal Yar Muhammad. Under his Kurdish alias, O'Donnell apparently settled in Shahrazar.

While El Shirkuh smashed a Russian scheme in Shahrazar, El Borak fought a Russian ally in the hills of Afghanistan. An ambitious chieftain, Afdal Khan, was seeking to overthrow Habibullah Khan, the Amir of Afghanistan. Afdal murdered another chieftain who was a close friend of El Borak. A bloody feud developed between Afdal and Gordon. Armed with Russian rifles, Afdal's forces attack El Borak and his Afridi allies. In the end, Gordon emerged triumphant (see "Hawk of the Hills"),

Due to Gordon's quarrel with Afdal Khan, Habibullah Khan had requested the British authorities in India to mediate a peace between the two sides. Unaware of Afdal's treason, the Amir was solely concerned that the fighting was disrupting an important trade route with Persia (Iran). The British dispatched Geoffrey Willoughby to act as mediator. Willoughby's view of Gordon had initially been unsympathetic, but it altered when Afdal's treachery was exposed.

A persistent falsehood about El Borak in the 1900's was that he was anti-British. Gordon's contempt for pompous officialdom sparked these rumors. In reality, Gordon gained the friendship of numerous important British officials like Willoughby. While the men who really ran India did not always approve of Gordon's methods, they recognized him as an important force for stability inside Afghanistan.

Gordon was surprised to receive a secret communication from Yasmeena in 1904. She had married a prince of Kashmir, but her husband was a brutal wife-beater. Fleeing her spouse, she successfully sought protection from the British. Remembering that her father had been a priest of Erlik Khan in Yolgan, Yasmeena wished to travel to that city in order to study mysticism. She asked Gordon to escort her to the secret citadel in Afghanistan.

Gordon consented on one condition. El Borak had heard stories of secret Thuggee temples in Delhi. Gordon wished to visit them in order to consult ancient manuscripts. If Yasmeena could gain Gordon's admittance to the temples through her Thuggee contacts, the American would escort her to Yolgan.

Yasmeena concurred by introducing El Borak to Juggnara Nath, a Thug of Delhi who was devoted to her. Swearing on Kali, the goddess of the Thugs, and on her consort, Siva the Destroyer, Juggnara promised to arrange Gordon's access to the temples after he returned from Yolgan. Disguised as a Kirghiz from Issik-kul, Gordon brought Yasmeena to Yolgan. Because Yasmeena had a star-shaped birthmark between her breasts, the inhabitants viewed her as the earthly incarnation of Erlik Khan's daughter. Yasmeena found herself revered as a goddess.

Upon returning to Delhi, Gordon contacted Juggnara Nath. Fulfilling his part of the bargain, Juggnara disguised Gordon and Yar Ali Khan as Thugs. The trio then visited the Thuggee temples. In one temple, Gordon found an ancient manuscript. With the assistance of the temple's priest, Gordon translated the book. It told of an Indian treasure buried in the hills of Arabia. Unfortunately, the map revealing the location of the city was torn from the book. The priest mentioned that a Frenchman had stolen the missing page.

Suddenly, Gordon and Yar Ali heard an English cry for help. In another part of the temple, an American named Steve Clarney was about to be sacrificed to Kali. Gordon and Yar Ali rushed to Clarney's rescue. Due to a promise to Yasmeena to maintain Gordon's safety at all costs, Juggnara joined the fight against his co-religionists. As a result, Juggnara would become an outcast among the Thugs. Saving Clarney, Gordon and his allies escaped the Thuggee temple.

Clarney proved a valuable addition to El Borak's crew of adventurers. Prior to his arrival in India, Clarney had fought slave traders in Somaliland. Together with Gordon and Yar Ali, Clarney followed the trail of the Frenchman to Afghanistan. They discovered that the Frenchman had been killed by local bandits. The robbers preserved the map because they believed that it had magical powers. The map was then stolen from the Afghans by Turkomans. Gordon and his allies pursued the quest for the map into Russian-occupied Turkestan.

At this point, Gordon's path diverted from that of his two comrades. El Borak heard reports of an enigmatic Hungarian, Gustav Hunyadi, in Turkestan. While Gordon investigated Hunyadi's activities, Clarney and Yar Ali continued the original mission of searching for the map.

In the beginning, Hunyadi had been employed by the Russians to organize Central Asian tribes for a planned invasion of Afghanistan and India. The Russian strategy was derailed when the Russo-Japanese War (1904-5) erupted. Locked in a war with Japan over Manchuria and soon to be engulfed by internal unrest (the Revolution of 1905), Tsarist Russia had no resources for an invasion of southwest Asia, Hunyadi saw the opportunity for personal power (7). He would organize the Central Asian tribes into his

own private army. Independent of Russia, he would carve his own empire first in Turkestan, and then extend it into Afghanistan and India.

Returning to India in 1905, Gordon alerted the British authorities to the danger posed by Hunyadi. Unfortunately, El Borak's warnings were scoffed at. The British officials thought it ludicrous that a lone Hungarian mercenary would hope to succeed where Russia had failed for decades.

In order to prove his allegations, Gordon went back to Turkestan in the guise of a wandering Afghan. He stole several letters that Hunyadi had dispatched to Central Asian chieftains. Learning of the theft, Hunyadi pursued El Borak to a remote valley populated by the descendants of Greek soldiers from the era of Alexander the Great. There Gordon slew Hunyadi in a sword fight (see "The Lost Valley of Iksander").

Back in India, Gordon surrendered his evidence to the British. Even though Hunyadi was dead, Gordon's action assured that no lieutenant of the Hungarian would revive the scheme of a Central Asian Empire. After rambling around India for a brief time, El Borak was hired by two Englishmen in Peshawar to guide them into Afghanistan.

The Englishmen pretended that they were seeking a comrade that had been captured by brigands. In reality, the Englishmen had intercepted a letter that Yasmeena had sent Gordon from Yolgan. Professing to be disgusted with her life in Yolgan, Yasmeena requested Gordon's aid in arranging her return to Delhi. Yasmeena had found herself in conflict with Yogok, the high priest of Erlik Khan, over the question of human sacrifice. The denizens of Yolgan would never permit her departure because she was viewed as semi-divine.

The Englishmen plotted to abduct Yasmeena and sell her back to her husband, the prince of Kashmir. The prince was offering a large reward for Yasmeena. It was his intention to beat Yasmeena to death with a slipper. Discovering his employers' true motives, Gordon rescued Yasmeena from Yolgan (see "The Daughter of Erlik Khan").

Yasmeena presumably returned to a life of carnal delight in Delhi, but there are dark rumors which circulated among certain Asian cults. According to these accounts, Yasmeena lied to Gordon about her reasons for leaving Yolgan. She supposedly relished the diabolical rites of the Erlik cult. Her conflict with Yogok over human sacrifices concerned the choice of victims rather than the ritual itself. The high priest had been selecting victims who supported Yasmeena's authority over his own.

The Erlik cults of Mongolia were more advanced in their pursuit of demonic wisdom than their counterparts in Afghanistan (8). Yasmeena purportedly established secret contacts with the Mongolian cultists. Like the people of Yolgan, these Erlik worshippers were willing to adore Yasmeena as a goddess. Hoping that the Mongolian cultists would prove more formidable minions than the dwellers of Yolgan, Yasmeena sought to travel to Mongolia. Because the people of Yolgan would never permit her defection to a rival congregation, Yasmeena tricked Gordon into helping her escape. She returned briefly to India only for the purpose of arranging her journey to Mongolia.

In Afghanistan during 1906, Gordon received disturbing news from Kurdistan. In search of the treasure map, Clarney and Yar Ali had traveled all over Turkestan and Persia. Crossing into the Ottoman Empire, the courageous pair was captured by Kurdish bandits. Upon ascertaining that the captives were friends of the famous El Borak, the Kurdish raiders sent a ransom demand to Gordon in Afghanistan. Instead of paying the

extortion, Gordon gathered a host of Afridis including Khoda Khan and Yar Hyder. A few non-Afghans such as Lal Singh and Juggnara Nath joined El Borak's band. El Borak and his formidable posse took the long journey from Afghanistan to Kurdistan.

Nor only did El Borak and his followers liberate Clarney and Yar Ali, but they also looted the Kurdish countryside. While Gordon remained in Kurdistan to direct his bandits, Clarney and Yar Ali departed for Baghdad to follow a clue to the whereabouts of the treasure map. The trail of the map drove them further east to the Persian city of Shiraz where they uncovered evidence that the map was now in Oman.

While in Shiraz, they also heard the legend of a lost city in the Arabian sands. The Arabs called this place Beled-el-Djinn ("City of Devils") while the Turks whispered of it as Kara-Shehr ("the Black City"). A fabulous gem, the Fire of Asshurbanipal, was said to be located in the lost city. The idea struck Clarney that this legendary city might be the one mentioned in the missing map. Possessing vague information about Kara-Shehr's location, Clarney and Yar Ali crossed the Arabian desert hoping that they would stumble upon the lost city before reaching Oman. Miraculously, they found Kara-Shehr. However, Clarney and Yar Ali were shocked to discover that the gem was guarded by a demon allied to Cthulhu, Yog-Sothoth and other pre-human gods mentioned in the *Necronomicon* (see "The Fire of Asshurbanipal").

Not wishing to challenge the jewel's horrific guardian, Clarney and Yar Ali left Kara-Shehr for Oman. They uncovered information that the map was in the possession of El Bahr, one of the most influential men in Oman. Yar Ali went back to Kurdistan to inform Gordon while Clarney remained behind to keep an eye on El Bahr.

When Gordon received the information from Yar Ali, the American adventurer terminated all operations in Kurdistan. The bulk of El Borak's followers returned to Afghanistan under the command of Khoda Khan and Yar Hyder. Together with a small group consisting of Lal Singh, Juggnara Nath and a few other non-Afghans, Gordon went to Oman with Yar Ali Khan.

With Gordon's arrival in Oman, Clarney opted to abandon his participation in the quest for the treasure map. His terrifying experience in Kara-Shehr convinced Clarney that the buried treasures of Arabia were better left undisturbed by mortal man. Clarney even suspected that the treasure map would point to Kara-Shehr. Gordon did not share this view because the passages that he had read from the Thugs' book indicated that the treasure was located in general area far from Kara-Shehr. It was now 1907, and the British government was attracting settlers to the African colony of Rhodesia by easing land purchases there. After a friendly parting with Gordon and his remaining crew, Clarney left Oman to try his luck in Rhodesia.

Gordon learned that El Bahr's rival for influence in Oman was Mustapha el Hamid. This was the same man who had met El Borak during his days as a sailor. Aligning himself with Mustapha, Gordon incurred El Bahr's animosity. Discovering that Gordon sought an object in his collection of rare manuscripts, El Bahr personally moved his library to the British-occupied port of Aden on the Red Sea. El Bahr intended to lure Gordon out of Oman where Mustapha el Hamid was able to protect the American soldier of fortune.

El Borak followed his enemy to Aden. Although Gordon had lost the services of Steve Clarney, he was about to gain the loyal friendship of another American named Steve.

III. Enter the Sonora Kid.

An American known as the Sonora Kid was about to set foot in Aden. There were actually two American gunfighters called the Sonora Kid. Both were named Stephen Angus Allison, but preferred to be called Steve Allison. The first Steve Allison gained fame in the American West during the 1870's and the 1880's. Due to an unrecorded incident in the northwest Mexican state of Sonora, this man earned the nickname of the Sonora Kid. He led cattle drives across the Chisholm Trail (see "Knife, Bullet and Noose"). The first Sonora Kid had a fear of snakes that nearly caused him to become an outlaw (see "The Devil's Joker").

Eventually, the first Sonora Kid settled down to raise a family near the Mexican border. He fathered two sons, Frank and Steve Jr., and three daughters, Marion, Helen and Mildred. After the birth of Steve Jr. in 1887, the family moved to Arizona. When Steve Jr. reached manhood, he adopted his father's alias of the Sonora Kid.

Steve Jr. developed into a wiry man of medium height. His hair was dark, and his long narrow eyes were gray. At the age of seventeen, Steve Jr. sought employment at the Double Z-U Ranch in Arizona during 1904. Steve Jr. was given a job because he proved his boast that he could beat the toughest man on the ranch in a fistfight (see "The Sonora Kid—Cowhand").

At the ranch, Steve Jr. befriended Billy "Drag" Buckner, a cowhand of about the same age. The pair met in 1905. While exploring an Indian pueblo, Steve Jr. and Billy had a chance encounter with a Mexican bandit (see "A Blazing Sun in a Blazing Sky"). On another occasion, Billy met Steve's cousin, Madge Meraldson, at a railway station (see "Madge Meraldson"). Madge was the daughter of the original Sonora Kid's sister and John Meraldson, an Arizona settler. Besides Madge, the Meraldsons had two other children, Teddy and Dorothy. Steve Jr. and Billy once drove into the town where the Meraldsons lived. One of Steve's sisters, Marion, was visiting the Meraldsons. Marion became concerned about Steve's gambling at the local saloon (see "The Sonora Kid's Winning Hand").

Marion's fears were justified. Steve's gambling debts compelled him to become the leader of an outlaw band in 1906. He even prevailed on Billy Buckner to join his gang. After some minor instances of horse-stealing and cattle-rustling, the gang struck it big by robbing the funds of a large mining corporation. Even though it possessed no legal proof, the corporation was aware that the Sonora Kid and Billy Buckner were involved in the theft. Acting on this information, the corporation posted a reward for the duo. A bounty hunter seeking the reward was slain by the Sonora Kid during a gunfight in Buffalotown, Arizona (see "The Hades Saloon").

Legal action by Steve's father forced the corporation to withdraw its reward. However, the mining company hired a relentless private detective named Moriarty to uncover proof of the Sonora Kid's complicity. While Moriarty never found any evidence that would prove the Sonora Kid's guilt, this sleuth ruthlessly pursued Steve and Billy throughout the American West.

This Moriarty could be related to Professor Moriarty, the great master criminal defeated by Sherlock Holmes in 1891. My genealogical researches into the Moriarty clan indicate that the Sonora Kid's nemesis could be the son of the Professor's older brother,

Colonel James Moriarty. It is not inconceivable that a nephew of the Professor immigrated to the United States in order to escape the notoriety surrounding the family name in the British Isles. The Professor's nephew could have become a detective to atone for his uncle's sins.

While eluding Moriarty, Allison and Buckner crossed the path of a group of Sioux Indians. The Sonora Kid had always imagined that the Sioux Indians were generally peaceful, but he was wrong on this occasion. The Indians tried to scalp him.

Realizing that Moriarty's continued attention would prevent them from spending their ill-gotten gains, Allison and Buckner decided to split up. Buckner went to Canada while Allison traveled to the state of Washington. Finding Moriarty still on his trail, Allison joined a ship, the *Aerial*, as a sailor in Seattle.

Sometime in 1907, the *Aerial* was off the port of Aden in the Red Sea. During a fight with the ship's captain, Allison jumped overboard. Swimming ashore, Allison found himself alone and friendless. He soon found himself tangled in El Bahr's machinations to kill Francis Xavier Gordon.

Learning that Allison was a skilled gunfighter, El Bahr hired him to slay Gordon. Since Allison might be reluctant to shoot a fellow American, El Bahr deceived the Sonora Kid into believing that El Borak was a Spaniard. In order to rid Allison of any notion of requesting help from Aden's British administrators, El Bahr misled the geographically ignorant American into believing that Aden was part of Oman (then also known as the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman).

Crossing the path of El Borak in a bazaar, the Sonora Kid challenged him to a gunfight. Before Allison could fire, his gun was shot out of his hand by Gordon. Sparing Allison's life, El Borak revealed his true identity and the extent of El Bahr's treachery to the younger American (see "El Borak," the long fragment).

Now allied with Gordon, Allison joined in the quest for the lost treasure. Recovering the map from El Bahr, Gordon organized his forces for a quick expedition into the desert. El Bahr followed them with several warriors. Gordon and his allies found the buried treasure, defeated El Bahr, and returned to Aden with a fortune. The short fragment entitled "El Borak" is probably a description of a minor skirmish with El Bahr's followers.

To some degree, Gordon was Allison's surrogate brother. The Sonora Kid preferred to address Francis Xavier Gordon as Frank. This was the name of Allison's older brother.

Dividing up the Arabian treasure, Gordon felt that a share should go to Steve Clarney in recognition of the effort that he put into tracing the map. At the same time, Gordon felt the need to return to Oman in order to help Mustapha el Hamid against El Bahr's surviving henchmen. Therefore, Gordon divided his team into two groups. The first group went with him to Oman. The second group led by Yar Ali Khan went to Rhodesia.

The Sonora Kid accompanied Yar Ali to Rhodesia. In addition to participating in the search for Clarney, Allison had an adventure of his own. He prevented a British girl from being raped. Allison was forced to kill the girl's assailant, a white settler of Dutch ancestry. Being a member of a wealthy family, the girl wanted to compensate Allison for his heroism. Declining any monetary reward, Allison remembered that his sister Marion had always wanted to visit England. At Steve's request, the British girl agreed to pay for

Marion's passage to England. Furthermore, Marion would be a guest at the British girl's family estate.

After finding Clarney, Allison and the others returned to Oman. By 1908, political peace had descended on Oman. At Mustapha el Hamid's insistence, The Sultan had appointed an extremely capable new governor who removed all of El Bahr's adherents from positions of power. The governor, Al Wazir, was supposedly an Arab. In reality, he was a Russian nobleman who had been wandering the globe in search of some mystical goal, Al Wazir's true nationality was known to a select few. The real identity of Al Wazir was kept secret because the Sultan was afraid that the British would object to the appointment of a Russian to such an important post. Even though Britain and Russia had settled their differences during 1907 for the purpose of forming an anti-German alliance in Europe, the new allies still retained some suspicions of each other.

Shortly after skillfully reorganizing the government of Oman, Al Wazir unexpectedly tendered his resignation. He announced his intention to meditate in the Arabian desert on the meaning of existence. Virtually all of his wealth was distributed to the poor of Oman. Only one important possession of Al Wazir remained unaccounted for. A mystery surrounded the whereabouts of the Blood of the Gods, Al Wazir's set of perfectly matched rubies.

Al Wazir asked Gordon to take him to an obscure spot in the desert. Together with Yar Ali and the Sonora Kid, Gordon escorted Al Wazir to a place of solitude. Before reaching their destination, the expedition was ambushed by Wahabi tribesmen. The Wahabis are a fundamentalist religious sect which allied itself with the House of Saud in order to carve out the nation of Saudi Arabia in the 1920's.

The Wahabi assault was repelled, but the raiders captured Yar Ali Khan. While Gordon transported Al Wazir to safety, Allison remained behind to successfully rescue Yar Ali. As a sign of gratitude, Yar Ali bestowed a ring on the Sonora Kid. If Allison was ever in Afghanistan, he could display the ring to chieftains such as Khoda Khan and Yar Hyder to gain assistance.

After depositing Al Wazir in his refuge, Gordon rendezvoused with his comrades in the desert. Upon their return to Oman, Allison found a British diplomat with a message from the girl in Rhodesia. The message mentioned that Marion Allison would soon be arriving in England. Planning to surprise his sister, Allison boarded a ship for the British Isles.

The Sonora Kid arrived at the British girl's family estate, an old castle, in the middle of a murder mystery. A male guest had been murdered at a house party attended by Marion. The father of the girl from Rhodesia hired Allison as a private detective to apprehend the killer. Allison discovered that the slayer was not human. The killer was a python that had hidden itself in the castle's dungeon after escaping from a circus. The Sonora Kid slew the reptile. If Allison had inherited his father's fear of snakes, then this adventure would have been extremely harrowing.

Allison rejoined Gordon in Oman sometime during 1909. Prior to the Sonora Kid's return, Gordon had foiled a conspiracy to locate Al Wazir and steal his rubies (see "Blood of the Gods"). As a consequence of this exploit, Al Wazir abandoned his self-imposed exile in the desert. With Al Wazir again advising the Sultan of Oman, Gordon felt the political situation was stable enough for the departure of himself and his companions.

Gordon and his crew went to India. During a tiger-hunting expedition, Gordon and Allison investigated a seemingly deserted fortress in the jungle (see “The Shunned Castle”). Gordon and his entourage then went north to Afghanistan. Feeling homesick, Allison declined to accompany El Borak. The Sonora Kid returned to the United States.

Soon after reaching Afghanistan, Gordon learned of a plot to overthrow Habibullah Khan, the Amir. Calling on Khoda Khan and Yar Hyder, Gordon gathered a force of Afridi warriors that broke the rebellion in the battle of Kalat-i-Ghilzai (9). The Amir had not always been on friendly terms with Gordon. Habibullah had initially viewed Gordon as an outlaw. This attitude had begun to soften in 1903 when Habibullah listened to Geoffrey Willoughby’s impressions of the courageous American. As a result of the victory at Kalat-i-Ghilzai, Gordon found himself a welcome advisor at the Amir’s court.

Upon his arrival in America, the Sonora Kid sought out his family in America, Riding with his sister Helen, Allison had an exploit involving a handsome young stranger (“The Hot Arizona Sun”). Allison also became reacquainted with Billy Buckner who had returned from Canada. Using his share of the Arabian treasure, the Sonora Kid relocated his family and Buckner in New York. Besides his parents and his sisters, the family of Steve’s aunt, the Meraldsons, also participated in the move eastwards. Only the Sonora Kid’s brother elected to remain in Arizona.

Allison and Buckner journeyed to Mexico in 1910. There they found a lost silver mine in the Yucatan peninsula. The outbreak of the Mexican Revolution prevented the processing of their claim. Concluding that Mexico was too hot to hold them, they went to Europe.

Even though now a wealthy man, the Sonora Kid was still attracted by the lure of crime. Allison had read popular account of “gentlemen burglars” such as A. J. Raffles of Britain and Arsene Lupin of France. Desiring a new thrill, Allison convinced Buckner to join him in series of jewel robberies in Germany. Allison probably chose Germany because no great master thief had yet arisen there. Finding themselves guests at a nobleman’s castle, Allison and Buckner were hoping to commit their first burglary. They were diverted from their scheme by the presence of a monstrous ghost (see “The West Tower”).

El Borak was also tempted to commit an illegal act during 1910. Gordon seriously contemplated the commission of a homicide in India. One of Gordon’s close friends had been murdered by Ditta Ram, a corrupt official of Peshawar. Unable to prove Ditta Ram’s guilt, Gordon nearly took the law into his own hands. A top British official dissuaded Gordon from such a course of action. Three years would pass before Gordon could bring Ditta Ram to justice

In the same year of 1910, El Borak arrived in Mongolia. Little is known about his trip except that Gordon and Lal Singh “heard the roar of the ten-foot bronze trumpets that blare in the bare black mountains of forbidden Mongolia, in the hands of the shaven-headed priests of Erlik.” This quote is from the long version of “Three-Bladed Doom.” In the shorter version, Yar Ali Khan rather than Lal Singh is identified as Gordon’s companion in this unrecorded exploit.

Events in Afghanistan would draw El Borak and the Sonora Kid Back together during 1911. Billy Buckner had been fascinated by Allison’s tales of Asia. The Sonora Kid was always boasting how he had made three journeys to the Orient. Allison viewed

his adventures with Gordon as three separate trips because of the sojourns in Rhodesia and England. Eager to see Asia himself, Billy Buckner showed the Sonora Kid a newspaper about an enigmatic mullah stirring up trouble in Afghanistan.

Together with Buckner, Allison took passage on a ship bound for India. The duo was surprised to learn that Moriarty, the detective who had persistently hounded them in the West, was a fellow passenger. Allison and Buckner forced Moriarty to disembark in Lisbon. Arriving in India, the two Americans went north to Afghanistan. There they gained the friendship of Yar Hyder by displaying Yar Ali Khan's ring (see "North of Khyber") Through Yar Hyder, Allison and Buckner were put into contact with El Borak. Acting under Gordon's leadership, Allison and Buckner played important roles in thwarting the mullah from launching a jihad ("holy war") in Afghanistan.

The Sonora Kid stayed in Asia for about a year, but he pursued adventures independent of Gordon. During 1912, Allison visited Yarkand, a town in Sinkiang (Xinjiang). In a duel with scimitars, the Sonora Kid received a wound under the left armpit. He also incurred the hatred of a dangerous woman.

In the same year, El Borak posed as a Kurd named Shirkuh for unknown reasons. Gordon's disguise was rather intriguing because Kirby O'Donnell had not only posed as a Kurd but was also called El Shirkuh. Perhaps Gordon's false identity was a sort of tribute to his American predecessor in Afghanistan.

Before El Borak could shed his Kurdish identity, he was drawn into the machinations of an old enemy. Vladimir Jakrovitch was a Russian who converted to Islam in 1902. His activities over the next ten years had brought him into conflict with Gordon over more than one occasion (10). During 1909, Jakrovitch joined the Black Tigers, an Afghan secret society that had evolved from the elite bodyguard of Genghis Khan. Becoming the order's leader in 1911, Jakrovitch wanted to carve out an Asian Empire in the tradition of Hunyadi. Gordon defeated Jakrovitch's schemes in 1912 (see "The Country of the Knife").

By 1913, Allison and Buckner had returned to New York. The Sonora Kid brought back the scimitars from his Yarkand duel and mounted them on the wall of his apartment. After playing a prominent role in a minor domestic comedy involving his sister Mildred and a red wig (see "Red Curls and Bobbed Hair"), Allison learned the woman from Yarkand was in New York seeking his life (see "Steve Allison").

The unnamed woman from Yarkand was a beauty with black eyes and a dark complexion. This description would fit Yasmeena from "The Daughter of Erlik Khan." If the previously cited rumors about Yasmeena's devilish actions in Mongolia were true, then it is not improbable for her to have been implicated in nefarious enterprises in Sinkiang, Mongolia's neighbor. In fact, Gordon and Lal Singh may have become reacquainted with Yasmeena during their 1910 trip to Mongolia.

The Sonora Kid survived the murderous attentions of the woman from Yarkand. Following that dangerous escapade in New York, Allison took his family on a vacation in Egypt. His sister Helen nearly fell into the clutches of an unscrupulous Arab, but Allison rescued her (see "Desert Rendezvous").

Gordon was also in the Middle East during 1913. The Balkan Wars of 1912-13 pitted the Ottoman Empire against an alliance of Eastern European nations. El Borak had harbored a bitter resentment of the Ottoman Empire since his days as a sailor. With the Ottomans were expending the bulk of their military might in the Balkans, Gordon saw a

ripe opportunity to stir up a rebellion in the Empire's Asian territories. El Borak decided to use the Kurds as his pawns. Despising them for the abduction of Clarney and Yar Ali Khan in 1906, Gordon had no moral qualms about using the Kurds as cannon fodder to achieve his goal of toppling the Ottoman Empire.

When Gordon entered Kurdistan in 1913, the Kurds did not receive him as a friend. However, they still feared the American because of his activities as a bandit years earlier. Although there were some Kurdish leaders responded favorably to Gordon's seditious proposals, others betrayed him to the Ottoman authorities. The Turks imprisoned Gordon in an ancient castle in Kurdistan. Escaping from his cell, Gordon rescued a blonde woman who was also being held prisoner (see "Intrigue in Kurdistan")

Robert E. Howard did not identify the town in which the castle stood. Such a castle is known to exist in Bitlis. This town is connected to Gordon's adventures in a passage from "Three-Bladed Doom." A Kurd, Yusuf ibn Suleiman, made these remarks about Gordon's activities in Kurdistan: "Once I saw you come to the Turks of Bitlis with open hands; but when you closed those hands the streets of Bitlis ran red and the heads of the Lords of Bitlis swung from the saddles of your raiders."

The Kurd must have been exaggerating Gordon's actions in Bitlis. There was an actual raid on Bitlis by Kurds in July 1913. Seven hundred Kurds under the leadership of Sheikh Seid Ali (11) occupied Bitlis. Every Turkish official successfully left the city before the Kurds took control. A week later, the Turks re-conquered the city. Seid Ali fled Bitlis, but was eventually caught and hanged by the Turks.

Therefore, it can be concluded that Gordon must have found a safe haven with Seid Ali after escaping confinement in the castle. Gordon was the hidden strategist behind the Sheikh's brief conquest of Bitlis. The Kurd from "Three-Bladed Doom" misrepresented historical events when he described a massacre of Turkish officials in Bitlis. When the Turks retook Bitlis, Gordon avoided the Sheikh's fate by returning to Afghanistan.

Back at Habibullah Khan's court, Gordon wondered whether a sinister force was responsible for a wave of assassinations throughout Asia. Rumors spread that a mysterious cult, the Hidden Ones, were responsible for the deaths of the Shah of Persia, the Nizam of Hyderabad, and most recently the Sultan of Turkey. The Shah was said to have been killed by an Arab, and the Sultan was allegedly slain by a Kurd named Hasten. A Delhi Moslem who "fired" at the Viceroy of India was also said to be a member of the Hidden Ones.

References to these events were made by Gordon and the Amir of Afghanistan in the opening chapters of "Three-Bladed Doom." Foreign news must have been reaching Afghanistan in a somewhat garbled form. History paints a different picture. The last Shah of Persia to be assassinated up to that time was Nasr-ed-Din. He was killed by a fellow Persian (not an Arab) in 1896. The Nizam of Hyderabad had perished recently (December 1911), but the death of this Indian ruler was attributed to natural causes. There was an attempt to kill Charles Hardinge, the Viceroy of India, in 1912, but he was wounded by a bomb instead of a bullet. Because the Viceroy's assailant was never identified, it could not be said with certainty that he as a Moslem.

The remarks about the Sultan of Turkey are extremely perplexing. Neither of the two men who held that office before World War I was murdered. Abdul-Hamid II was overthrown as Sultan in 1909, and died under house arrest in 1918. His brother and

successor, Mohammed V, died in the same year. In the shorter version of “Three-Bladed Doom,” the remarks about the Sultan were altered by Robert E. Howard to indicate that Hasten the Kurd failed to slay the Sultan (presumably Mohammed V). I can find no reference to Hasten in any historical documents. It could be theorized that the Turkish government withheld news of Hasten’s attempt from the public, but informed other governments because of suspicions surrounding the involvement of the Hidden Ones. Even though no Sultan was slain, it should be noted that Mahmud Shevket, the Prime Minister of Turkey, died from bullets fired by a group of assassins in June 1913. The killers took their orders from a political exile in Paris, but they also could have been allied with the Hidden Ones.

The impression is created by the comments in “Three-Bladed Doom” that all of the assassinations committed by the Hidden Ones were done with a three-bladed knife. None of the historical deaths corresponding to these murders involved a knife. Perhaps such a weapon was discovered on conspirators connected to the murders.

After Habibullah Khan was nearly killed by the knife of the Hidden Ones, El Borak located the headquarters of the monstrous organization in the mountains of Afghanistan. The Hidden Ones were revealed to be a revival of the Assassins (12), the murder cult crushed by the Mongols in the thirteenth century. The leader of the Hidden Ones, Othman el Aziz, professed to be a direct descendant of the man who had founded the original Assassins centuries ago. Othman, a Persian, was old enough to have played a role in the Shah’s death in 1896. Prior to the establishment of a base during Afghanistan in 1909, Othman had been operating out of Kurdistan for an unspecified period of time.

Othman was receiving was receiving financial support from an unidentified group in Europe who wanted the Hidden Ones to subvert British influence in Asia. The liaison between Othman and his European backers were Ivan Konaszevski, a Cossack who had previously tangled with Gordon in an unrecorded exploit (13). Despite his origins, it is unlikely that Konaszevski’s employer was the Tsar. Britain and Russia had settled their differences in Asia during 1907. Since Germany wanted to expand its influence in the Middle East during this period, it would seem more likely that the Cossack was working for the Kaiser. On the other hand, Konaszevski could have been a minion of European crime syndicate similar to the Moriarty organization defeated by Sherlock Holmes (14).

Konaszevski utilized the alias of Bagheela, which means “panther.” This name appears in two other contexts in Gordon’s exploits. In “Khoda Khan’s Tale,” one of Gordon’s allies is an Afghan chieftain called Bagheela Khan. In “The Shunned Castle,” Gordon himself is known as Bagheela in certain parts of India. Possibly Bagheela Khan perished in Gordon’s service and transferred his authority over his Afghan followers to the American in a dying declaration. In order to honor his slain comrade, Gordon adopted the name of Bagheela. Aware of Gordon’s alias, Konaszevski assumed it himself to mock his bitter enemy.

Killing Othman and Konaszevski, Gordon destroyed the power of the Hidden Ones. Gordon also uncovered proof, that Ditta Ram, his old enemy in Peshawar, had been in league with the Hidden Ones. Arriving in Peshawar, Gordon gave his evidence to the British authorities. Ditta Ram was arrested, tried, and sentenced to life imprisonment.

Incarceration came at a bad time for Ditta Ram. He had just learned the location of an ancient treasure. In 1933, Ditta Ram persuaded an unscrupulous American to

arrange a jailbreak in exchange for a share of the treasure. The American cheated Ditta Ram after liberating him from confinement. Presiding over a band of Thugs, Ditta Ram pursued his treacherous partner to the United States. There Ditta Ram perished while combating two American private detectives, Brent Kirby (15) and Butch Gorman (see “The Hand of the Black Goddess”). Two years later, Kirby and Gorman would also become involved in a different case concerning a treasure from the Sudan (16) (see “Sons of Hate”).

When Ditta Ram escaped twenty years after his arrest, El Borak was no place to be found. However, Khoda Khan learned of Ditta Ram’s escape. The man murdered by Ditta Ram in Peshawar had also been Khoda Khan’s friend. Pursuing the miscreant to the United States, Khoda Khan lost the trail of his quarry. A false lead took the Afghan warrior to River Street, the Asian quarter of an American metropolis (17). In River Street during 1933, Khoda Khan aided Steve Harrison, an American detective, against an Oriental mastermind (see “Names in the Black Book”).

In the short version of “Three-Bladed Doom,” the character of Ditta Ram is absent. There are other notable differences from the long version. The Cossack is called Mikhail Ignatieff. The Hidden Ones are the Zurim, an ancient cult that supposedly was the secret power behind the historical Assassins.

After the events of “Three-Bladed Doom,” Gordon remained in Afghanistan for about a year. In early 1914, he received a message from the Sonora Kid. Together with Billy Buckner and a botany student, Allison was organizing an expedition to the Himalayas in search of the Abominable Snowman (see “...the Mountains of Thibet”). Allison asked Gordon if he wished to accompany them, but the older American declined. El Borak did not wish to stray too far away from civilization. He felt something monumental was about to occur in the world.

What Gordon sensed was the impending outbreak of World War I. When war was declared, El Borak realized that it was only a matter of time before Turkey allied itself with Germany. El Borak intended to launch a revolt that would shake the foundations of the Ottoman Empire. Where he had failed with the Kurds, he intended to succeed with the Arabs.

Arriving in Arabia, Gordon went to Mecca to talk to the city’s ruler, Hussein. El Borak remained in Mecca for two years without making any headway in his efforts to persuade Hussein to war against Turkey. The British was also trying to make Hussein take the same course of action. In 1916, Hussein agreed to launch an Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire. The British sent the remarkable T. E. Lawrence to Arabia to organize the Arabs into an effective fighting machine. Gordon offered his services to Lawrence. Reporting directing to Lawrence, Gordon fought alongside the army commanded by Feisal, Hussein’s son. In 1917, El Borak defeated a group of renegade Turks who intended to forge a new empire in the Middle East (see “Son of the White Wolf”). Gordon also met a beautiful British spy, Gloria Willoughby (perhaps a relative of Geoffrey Willoughby from “Hawk of the Hills”).

World War I ended in November 1918. Gordon only stayed briefly in Arabia after the conclusion of peace. By early 1919, he was in Africa where he found himself fighting Arab tribesmen (see the untitled fragment). While in Africa, he chanced upon a lost civilization where dinosaurs still roamed the earth (see “The Land of Mystery”). When Gordon returned to Asia in 1920, he was stunned by the consequences of recent events.

In February 1919, Habibullah Khan had been assassinated by an unknown killer. To this day, no one knows who put a bullet in Habibullah's brain (18). The Soviets accused an alleged British agent. The British suggested that Amanullah Khan, Habibullah's son and successor, was behind the murder. Unlike his father, Amanullah Khan was anti-British. Viewing El Borak as a pawn of the British, Amanullah barred the American adventurer from Afghanistan.

The news from the Middle East was also startling to Gordon. The victorious Allies had reneged on a promise to make Feisal ruler of Syria. The French had driven Feisal out of Damascus in July 1920. Gordon now became secretly involved in a plot to restore Feisal to the throne of Syria. He intended to purchase guns and munitions for Feisal's supporters. Some people learned of Gordon's action and misread his motives. They mistakenly believed that Gordon intended to make himself master of an Arab empire.

Gordon needed capable assistants in his grand enterprise. He summoned Yar Ali Khan, Lal Singh and others who had followed him in years past. Lal Singh had served as a soldier in the British army during the war (19). In 1920, the British wanted him to join the army again in order to serve as part of the forces dispatched to police Iraq in the wake of the mandate granted by the League of Nations. In "The Song of Lal Singh," the Indian warrior refused with these words:

*Why should I sail beyond the sea
To slay the men of Arabee?*

Instead Lal Singh planned to fight for the Arabs in Syria. El Borak also sent a message to the Sonora Kid in New York. Allison was quite willing to join Gordon on the trail of glory. The most exciting thing that he was doing in New York was keeping his sister Mildred from succumbing to the temptations of the Prohibition Era (see "Brotherly Advice").

Gordon met with his comrades in an unknown location. They asked him about his recent exploits in Africa. Gordon responded by telling them the events of "The Land of Mystery." One of Gordon's audience was an Arab named Abul el Kadour. He may be meant to be the same person as Ahmed el Kadour in the long "El Borak" fragment.

Not content with ordinary armaments, El Borak sought new weapons for Feisal's cause. Gordon visited New York during a snowstorm in early 1921 for this purpose. He met the eccentric inventor of a robot soldier. Unfortunately, the robot ran out of control forcing Gordon to destroy it (see "The Iron Terror").

Gordon soon abandoned his efforts to acquire arms for Feisal. During 1921, Feisal made a deal with the British that netted him the throne of Iraq, Syria's neighbor. With stability apparently settling on the Middle East, Gordon looked for adventure in another region of the world.

In 1922, Gordon and Allison found themselves in Hong Kong. Here they soon became embroiled in a conflict between two of the most dangerous secret societies in Asia. On one side were the priests of Erlik whom Gordon had combated in Afghanistan and Mongolia. Opposed to them were the remnants of the Si-Fan, a powerful crime confederation under the leadership of the notorious Dr. Fu Manchu. The Si-Fan had fallen into disarray due the defeats it suffered at the hands of Sir Denis Nayland Smith

before the outbreak of World War I. Nevertheless, the acolytes of Fu Manchu were still dangerous. At one point during their battle with the Si-Fan, minions of Fu Manchu ambushed Allison openly in the street of Hong Kong. Allison fought them off until Gordon arrived to help him. So formidable was Gordon's reputation that the Si-Fan agents quickly dispersed.

Leaving Gordon in Hong Kong, Allison went to Canton with two other Americans, Mr. Marlo and his daughter Editha. There Allison purchased a white jade ring with a large ruby. He arranged to send the ring to Gordon in Hong Kong ("The White Jade Ring").

Having earned the enmity of both the Erlik cult and the Si-Fan, El Borak deemed it prudent to vacate China in 1923. Gordon decided to revisit the South Seas. He convinced the Sonora Kid to accompany him. Allison was surprised that his friend was still remembered as "Wolf" Gordon of the 1890's. In Samoa, Gordon and Allison boarded a schooner where they prevented the rape of an island king's daughter (see "A Power Among the Islands").

Somewhere in the Pacific, the world lost all trace of Francis Xavier Gordon. He had made his name feared throughout Africa and Asia. Maybe he retired on a island paradise with the Sonora Kid. Perhaps El Borak perished in one last great crusade against evil. No one knows what became of the American gunslinger.

CHRONOLOGY

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| 1870's and 1880's | The adventures of the Stephen Angus Allison Sr., the original Sonora Kid ("Knife, Bullet and Noose" and "The Devil's Joker"). |
| 1877 | Birth of Francis Xavier Gordon. |
| 1887 | Birth of Stephen Angus Allison Jr., the second Sonora Kid. |
| 1893-95 | Gordon is a gunslinger in the American West. He fights Yaqui Indians and travels in the Dakotas. |
| 1895-99 | Gordon sails the Seven Seas. In the South Seas, he becomes known as "Wolf" Gordon. He visits the Philippines, Indochina, Tunisia and the Ottoman Empire. The Arabs christen him El Borak ("the Swift"). Gordon views dinosaur fossils in museums. |
| 1896 | Lal Singh bests a Rao of Rajputana in a matter of smuggled jewelry. The Shah of Persia is assassinated by a gent of Othman el Aziz, Lord of the Hidden Ones. |
| 1897 | Disguised as a Kurd named Ali, Kirby O'Donnell kills Ivan Kurovitch in Afghanistan. |
| 1898 | O'Donnell befriends Yar Muhammad ("The Curse of the Crimson God"). Lal Singh meets Marendra Mukerji ("The Tale of the |

- Rajah's Ring"). Lal Singh and Marendra Mukerji swindle Parsee merchants in Bombay ("The Further Adventures of Lal Singh"). Lal Singh fights a gang of Thugs ("Lal Singh, Oriental Gentleman").
- 1899 Kirby O'Donnell saves Yar Muhammad's life on two separate occasions. Gordon arrives in India. Yar Ali Khan tries to kill Zumal Khan (see an untitled fragment).
- 1899-1902 The Boer War rages in southern Africa.
- 1900 Gordon briefly romances Yasmeena. He meets Lal Singh during the adventure of the "Wolves of Jagai" (Jagat?). Gordon discovers a rare book that mentions the lost land of Valooze (Valusia?) in Africa. Kirby O'Donnell is nearly killed in an ambush orchestrated by Yar Akbar. Arriving in Afghanistan, Gordon meets Yar Ali Khan and Khoda Khan ("The Coming of El Borak").
- 1901-2 Yar Ali Khan travels with Gordon throughout Asia. In the Himalayas, Gordon demonstrates a mastery over wolves. According to Yar Ali Khan, he and Gordon slew "a great dragon of the Gobi Desert" during this period (Khoda Khan doubts the veracity of this assertion).
- 1902-3 After the conclusion of the Boer War, Gordon leads an expedition in search of Valooze ("Khoda Khan's Tale").
- 1903 In Turkestan, Kirby O'Donnell is reacquainted with Yar Akbar ("The Treasure of Tartary") and Yar Muhammad ("The Swords of Shahrazar"). Gordon engages in a vendetta against an Afghan chieftain ("Hawk of the Hills"). Yasmeena marries a prince of Kashmir.
- 1904 Gordon guides Yasmeena to Yolgan. Gordon and Yar Ali Khan meet Steve Clarney in a Thuggee temple. Clarney and Yar Ali Khan begin to search for a treasure map while Gordon investigates rumors about Gustav Hunyadi in Turkestan. Steve Allison Jr. gets a job at the Double Z-U ranch ("The Sonora Kid – Cowhand").
- 1905 Steve Jr. meets Billy "Drag" Buckner. They encounter a Mexican bandit. ("A Blazing Sun in the Blazing Sky"). Billy meets Steve's cousin, Madge Meraldson ("Madge Meraldson"). Steve's gambling debts begin to get him into trouble ("The Sonora Kid's Winning Hand"). Gordon foils Hunyadi's plot to build an Asian Empire ("The Lost Valley of Iksander"). With Gordon's aid, Yasmeena flees Yolgan ("The Daughter of Erlik Khan").

- 1906 Steve Jr. becomes the leader of a band of outlaws. The gang robs a mining corporation that retaliates by hiring a detective, Moriarty, to track them. Steve Jr. slays a bounty hunter (“The Hades Saloon”). Gordon leads a group of raiders into Kurdistan. Clarney and Yar Ali Khan discover Kara-Shehr (“The Fire of Asshurbanipal”). Steve Jr. is nearly scalped by Sioux Indians. He becomes a sailor.
- 1907 Gordon arrives in Oman. He meets Steve Jr. in Aden (the long “El Borak” fragment). After a desert skirmish (the “El Borak” short fragment), Gordon and Steve Jr. find treasure in the Arabian desert. Steve rescues a British girl in Rhodesia.
- 1908 Gordon hides Al Wazir in the desert. Steve Jr. saves Yar Ali from Wahabi raiders. Steve Jr. investigates a murder mystery in a English castle.
- 1909 Gordon brings Al Wazir back from the desert (“Blood of the Gods”). Steve Jr. and Gordon investigate a castle in India (“The Shunned Castle”). Back in America, Steve Jr. goes riding with his sister (“The Hot Arizona Sun”). Gordon defeats a rebellion against Habibullah Khan, the Amir of Afghanistan. Vladimir Jakrovitch joins the Black Tigers. The Hidden Ones establish a base in the Afghan mountains. The Allison and Meraldson families move to New York.
- 1910 Steve Jr. and Bill Buckner find a silver mine in Mexico. They attempt to be gentleman burglars in Germany (“The West Tower”). Ditta Ram kills one of Gordon’s friends in Peshawar. Gordon and Lal Singh hear the trumpets of the priests of Erlik in Mongolia.
- 1911 Steve Jr. and Billy Buckner search for Gordon in Afghanistan (“North of Khyber”). Jakrovitch becomes leader of the Black Tigers.
- 1911-13 Asia is rocked by a series of assassinations attributed to the Hidden Ones.
- 1912 Gordon disguises himself as a Kurd. He visits the lair of the Black Tigers (“The Country of the Knife”). Steve Jr. earns the hatred of a mysterious woman (Yasmeena?) in Yarkand.
- 1913 Steve Jr. and his family are involved in a domestic comedy in New York (“Red Curls and Bobbed Hair”). The woman from Yarkand plots vengeance on Steve Jr. (“Steve Allison”). Gordon stirs up

trouble in Kurdistan (“Intrigue in Kurdistan”). He participated in the Kurdish raid on Bitlis. Back in Afghanistan, Gordon destroys the Hidden Ones (“Three-Bladed Doom”). Ditta Ram is sentenced to life imprisonment. The Allison family visits Egypt (“Desert Rendezvous”).

- 1914 Steve Jr. searched for the Abominable Snowman in the Himalayas (...”The Mountains of Thibet”). World War I erupts. Gordon arrives in Mecca.
- 1916 Gordon meets T. E. Lawrence.
- 1917 Gordon battles fanatical Turks (“Son of the White Wolf”).
- 1918 World War I ends.
- 1919 Habibullah Khan is assassinated.
- 1919-20 Gordon has adventures in Africa (the untitled fragment and “The Land of Mystery”).
- 1920 Gordon keeps his sister Mildred out of trouble in New York (“Brotherly Advice”). Feisal is driven out of Syria by the French. Gordon begins to purchase weapons for Feisal’s cause. Gordon tells Steve Jr. and others about “The Land of Mystery.”
- 1921 In New York, Gordon combats a robot (“The Iron Terror”). Feisal becomes King of Iraq.
- 1922 Gordon and Steve Jr. battle the priests of Erlik and the Si-Fan in Hong Kong. In Canton, Steve Jr. buys a ruby ring (“The White Jade Ring”).
- 1923 Gordon and Steve Jr. journey to the South Seas (“A Power Among the Islands”).
- 1933 Escaping from prison, Ditta Ram tangles with Brent Kirby and Butch Gorman (“The Hand of the Black Goddess”). Khoda Khan meets Steve Harrison (“Names in the Black Book”).
- 1935 Kirby and Gorman are involved in a case surrounding a treasure from the Sudan (“Sons of Hate”).

NOTES

1. The name Shahrazar is very similar to Shahazar, a fictional city mentioned in Howard's "The Sowers of Thunders" (*Oriental Stories*, Winter 1932). Shahrazar and Shahazar can't be the same city. The former was in Turkestan and the latter was near the Euphrates (in modern-day Iraq). "The Sowers of Thunder" was reprinted in *The Sowers of Thunder* (Donald M. Grant, 1973), *Gates of Empire and Other Tales of the Crusades* (Wildside Press, 2004), *Lord of Samarcand and Other Adventure Tales of the Old Orient* (Bison Books, 2006) and *The Exotic Writings of Robert E. Howard*.
2. "The Fire of Asshurbanipal" was reprinted in *Skull-Face and Others* (Arkham House, 1946), *Wolfshead* (Lancer Books, 1968), *Cthulhu: the Mythos and Kindred Horrors* (Baen, 1987), *Beyond the Borders* (Baen, 1996) and *Nameless Cults* (Chaosium, 2001). A non-supernatural version of the story also appeared in *Tales of the Lovecraft Mythos* (Fedogan and Bremer, 1992).
3. "Names in the Black Book" was reprinted in *Skull-Face* (Berkley, 1978), *Lord of the Dead* (Donald M. Grant, 1981), *Graveyard Rats and Others* (Wildside Press, 2003) and *The Exotic Writings of Robert E. Howard* (Girasol Collectables, 2006).
4. Francis Xavier Gordon was the son of William L. Gordon, a minor character in Robert E. Howard's "The Dead Remember" (*Argosy*, August 15, 1936). The story has been reprinted in *The Dark Man and Others* (Arkham House, 1963), *Pigeons fro Hell* (Zebra, 1976), *Trails in Darkness* (Baen, 1996), *The End of the Trail: Western Stories*, and *The Exotic Writings of Robert E. Howard*. The connection between the two Gordons was revealed in Mark K. Brown's "The Magnificent Gordons" from Win Scot Eckert's collection of speculative essays, *Myths for the Modern Age* (Monkeybrain Books, 2005). I have since discovered that the full name of Francis X. Gordon's father was William LeFrank Gordon. More popularly known as Frank, he elder Gordon became an enforcer for an American railway company in the 1880's. His final fate was revealed in Sergio Leone's classic film, *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968). William L. Gordon was one of the three sons of Arthur Gordon and Francine Xavier. Arthur Gordon's history was given in Emile Gaboriau's *La Vie Infernale* (1870, available in English as two volumes, *The Count's Millions* and *Baron Trigault's Vengeance*), and my own short story, "The Last Vendetta," available in *Tales of the Shadowmen, Volume 1: The Modern Babylon* (Black Coat Press, 2005). William's brothers were named James and John. James Gordon was the protagonist of "The Dead Remember." The history of John Gordon and his son Louis was given in Sergio Corbucci's western film, *The Great Silence* (1968).
5. In *The Sea Wolf* (chap, 14), Johansen the Swede noted that he last wrote to his mother ten years ago. The year of Johansen's letter was given as 1883. The novel must be set in 1893.
6. Howard does not specifically identify Yasmeena's mother as a Thug. "The Daughter of Erlik Khan" stated the Yasmeena's father left the Erlik cult to romance an Indian woman. In "The House of Om," a synopsis for an unwritten non-series short story, Howard identified Thuggee as an offshoot of Erlik worship. It is logical to assume that the priest of Erlik came into contact with Yasmeena's mother because she was a Thug. "The House of Om" can be found in

- Shudder Stories #2* (Cryptic Publications, December 1984) and *The "New" Howard Reader #1* (June 1998).
7. Hunyadi's ambitions closely resembled those of the historical Baron Roman von Ungern-Sternberg, a Baltic German adventurer who sought to take over Mongolia in 1920-21. Some sources claim that the Baron was part Hungarian.
 8. As told in "The House of Om," the Erlik devotees of Mongolia were expert plastic surgeons. Their horrible use of this art is also demonstrated in Howard's "Black Hound Of Death" (*Weird Tales*, November 1936), reprinted in *Trails in Darkness* (Baen, 1996).
 9. Kalat-i-Ghilzai, also called Kalat and Qalat, is the capital of Zabul province and on the road between Kabul and Kandahar.
 10. Possibly Jakrovitch was a former lieutenant of Gustav Hunyadi from "The Lost Valley of Iksander."
 11. Seid Ali is also known as Said Ali and Selim of Hizan.
 12. The Hidden Ones primarily consisted of the Assassins, but it also had members belonging to the Yezidees of Kurdistan and the Erlik cult of Mongolia.
 13. Like Jakrovitch, Konaszevki could have once worked for Hunyadi.
 14. Konaszevki could have been reporting to Dominick Medina, the criminal mastermind of John Buchan's *The Three Hostages* (1924). Medina had nebulous ties to Central Asia. In 1921, a world-wide crime syndicate led by Medina was smashed by Richard Hannay.
 15. Brent Kirby maybe the detective named Kirby who appeared in Howard's fragment, "The Spell of Damballah." This Kirby was partnered with a man named O'Brien. Perhaps O'Brien was Butch Gorman's predecessor as Brent Kirby's partner. "The Spell of Damballah" appeared in *Revelations from Yuggoth #1* (Cryptic Publications, November 1987) and *The "New" Howard Review #4* (January 1999).
 16. "Sons of Hate" happened fifty years after the fall of Khartoum in 1885.
 17. In River Street, Khoda Khan killed a Chinese resident of unknown reasons. Perhaps the Chinese resident had sold Khoda Khan false information about Ditta Ram's whereabouts.
 18. A clue to the identity of Habibullah's assassin exists in Talbot Mundy's *Jimgrim* (1931). A beautiful female spy named Baltis was supposedly involved in some unrecorded matter called the "the *affaire* Habibullah" (chap. 7). Nominally a French agent, Baltis was really working for Dorje, a notorious master criminal. He was active as early as 1908. Mundy hinted that Dorje detonated an historical explosion that destroyed a large portion of Siberia in June 1908. Mundy incorrectly stated that the event happened in the year of the 1918 armistice (chap. 37). Most scientists theorize that the Siberian 1908 disaster was caused by a comet or a meteor. Dorje could have ordered Habibullah's death. Dorje perished in another explosion. References to the recent arrest of Gandhi in India (chap. 28) squarely put the death of Dorje in 1930.
 19. His war service is alluded to in "The Song of Lal Singh." It is possible that Gordon's friend is the same Lal Sing who briefly appeared under the command of British officers (chap. 5) in Talbot Mundy's *The Winds of the World* (1915), a novel set on the eve of World War I in 1914.