

## THE LIFE AND TIMES OF STEVE HARRISON by Rick Lai

### 1. Scattered Clues to a Man's Life

Among the pulp heroes created by Robert E. Howard (1906-36) is Steve Harrison, a police detective who combated malevolent cults in a modern metropolis. The entire series consisted of nine complete stories ("The Black Moon," "Fangs of Gold," "Graveyard Rats," "The House of Suspicion," "Lord of the Dead," "Names in the Black Book," "The Silver Heel," "Teeth of Doom" (also called "The Tomb's Secret") and "The Voice of Death"), a fragment ("The Mystery of Tannernoe Lodge") later completed by Fred Blosser, and an untitled synopsis. Only four of these stories saw print in the author's lifetime. By 1986, all of Harrison's exploits had been published in one form or another. This present article is an effort to recreate the career of Howard's fictional sleuth.

The publishing history of these stories is a labyrinth that might even have stumped Steve Harrison. Howard was able to sell five of his Harrison stories to the pulps. "Fangs of Gold" (originally entitled "People of the Serpent") was featured in *Strange Detective Stories* (February 1934). The same issue featured "Teeth of Doom" in a radically altered form. Wishing to obscure the fact that two stories about the same hero were being printed together, the editor re-titled the story "The Tomb's Secret," and attributed it to Howard's pseudonym of Patrick Ervin. Furthermore, the editor changed Steve Harrison's name to Brock Rollins in the text. "Graveyard Rats" appeared in *Thrilling Mystery* (February 1936). "Lord of the Dead" under the title of "Dead Man's Doom" had been scheduled for the March 1934 issue of *Strange Detective Stories*, but the magazine folded. In a weird twist of fate, its sequel, "Names in the Black Book," was published in *Super Detective Stories* (May 1934). Since both stories featured a recurring master criminal, Erlik Khan, the 1934 readers of "Names in the Black Book" must have wondered how this archfiend originated.

A revival of interest in Steve Harrison began with the paperback explosion of Howard's fiction in the 1970's. *The Second Book of Robert E. Howard* (Zebra Books, 1976) included "The House of Suspicion." "Lord of the Dead" finally saw print in paperback collection of Howard's fiction, *Skull-Face* (Berkley, 1978). The same volume reprinted "Names in the Black Book." Harrison's battles with Erlik Khan were transformed into a trilogy when Fred Blosser completed Howard's "The Mystery of Tannernoe Lodge" and inserted the mastermind into the story. Together with the other battles between Harrison and his nemesis, the posthumous collaboration was included in a handsome hardcover collection, *Lord of the Dead* (Donald M. Grant, 1981).

The rest of the Harrison opus was made available to the public through the services of Robert M. Price's Cryptic Publications, a small press publisher of chapbooks. *Bran Mak Morn: A Play and Others* (1983) included "The Black Moon." *Two-Fisted Detective Stories* (May 1984) featured "The Silver Heel," "The Voice of Death" and the untitled synopsis.

The original version of "Teeth of Doom" was published in a most unusual collection of Howard's fiction. Thomas Kovacs, a Swiss fan of Howard's works, gathered together tales and poems of the author for *Writer of the Dark* (Dark Carnival Press, 1986), a limited edition (500 copies) printed in Zurich. Besides "Teeth of Doom," the volume also contained "Graveyard Rats." *Graveyard Rats and Others* (Wildside

Press, 2003) collected among other tales the title story plus “Fangs of Gold,” “The Tomb’s Secret” (the Brock Rollins version), and “Names in the Black Book.” The same Harrison tales can also be found in *The Exotic Writings of Robert E. Howard* (Girasol Collectables, 2006).

Besides Harrison’s own adventures, there are other tales by Robert E. Howard that have bearing on the man-hunter’s life. Most of Harrison’s investigations concern River Street, an Asian neighborhood in an unidentified American city. Howard’s “Guests of the Hoodoo Room,” published in *Shudder Stories #1* (Cryptic Publications, June 1984) and *The “New” Howard Reader #4* (January 1999), depicts a similar River Street, but the hero is private eye Butch Cronin. A character from the same story is named Joan Wiltshaw. Howard’s untitled synopsis for a Steve Harrison story prominently mentions a Joan Wiltshaw. Joan’s maiden name is Wiltshaw in “Guests of the Hoodoo Room,” but it is the married name of the Joan from the untitled synopsis. Khoda Khan is coincidentally the name of an Afghan warrior in “Names in the Black Book” and Howard’s tales of Francis X. Gordon, an American adventurer in Arabia and Afghanistan. Richard Brent is the name of a scholar familiar with Asian cults in both “Lord of the Dead” and a non-series tale, “Black Hound of Death” (*Weird Tales*, November 1936). The latter story is most readily available in Howard’s *Trails in Darkness* (Baen, 1996).

A further connection between the Steve Harrison saga and another Howard hero was formulated by science fiction writer Richard A. Lupoff. Before Erlik Khan, Howard created the evil genius Kathulos in “Skull-Face” (serialized in *Weird Tales*, starting October 1929). Howard had started to write a sequel, “Taverel Manor,” but never finished it. Lupoff completed “Taverel Manor.” The sequel was originally published as *The Return of Skull-Face* (FAX Collector’s Editions, 1977). “Taverel Manor” together with the original “Skull-Face” was in the 1978 *Skull-Face* paperback collection. One of the characters in the unfinished “Taverel Manor” was merely identified as Joan. Lupoff decided to make her Joan La Tour, a recurring character in Harrison’s clashes with Erlik Khan.

“Dope War of the Black Tong,” is a pastiche involving Steve Harrison with Anton Zarnak, an occult detective created by Lin Carter. The story was written by Robert M. Price. The pastiche first appeared in the revised edition of Edward P. Berglund’s anthology, *The Disciples of Cthulhu* (Chaosium, 1996). The story was later reprinted in *Lin Carter’s Anton Zarnak: Supernatural Sleuth* (2002), an anthology edited by Price. Besides writing Zarnak stories himself, Price invited other authors such as C. J. Henderson to contribute their own tales of the supernatural investigator. Zarnak lived in River Street from the Steve Harrison series. However, an area of controversy has been raised by Carter’s placement of River Street in New York.

There is evidence in Howard’s works that place River Street in a West Coast metropolis. References to Sacramento, Seattle and the Barbary Coast placed the River Street of “Guests of the Hoodoo Room” on the West Coast. I recognize that “Guests of the Hoodoo Room” is a non-Harrison story, but “The Silver Heel” confirmed the West Coast location. “The Silver Heel” had an unemployed reporter seeking work in Harrison’s city. The reporter’s previous address of San Francisco implied the West Coast as the milieu of Harrison’s exploits.

New York was distinctly mentioned as a separate place from the River Street metropolis in “The Silver Heel.” Where did Lin Carter get the idea that River Street was in New York? The answer is in Fred Blosser’s completion of “The Mystery of Tannernoe Lodge” fragment. There are no references to New York in the original Howard fragment as published in *The Howard Reader #8* (August 2003, formerly *The “New” Howard Reader*). When Blosser completed the story, Harrison found these entries in a notebook: “Adam Garfield arriv. New York, Sept , 1925” followed by “A. G., seen River St., Apr. 1934.”

The notebook’s statements inserted by Blosser can be interpreted in two different ways. The first interpretation is that Garfield arrived in New York where River Street exists. The second interpretation is based on the fact that Garfield had been overseas before his presence in New York. Garfield could have entered the United States in New York during 1925, and then made his way to the West Coast to take up residence in River Street by 1934. Lin Carter apparently made the first interpretation. Robert M. Price became aware of the contradictory evidence and began to feature Zarnak and River Street in a West Coast location in “The Soul of the Devil-Bought,” a story that first appeared in *The Xothic Legend Cycle: The Complete Mythos Fiction of Lin Carter* (Chaosium, 1997) and reprinted in *Lin Carter’s Anton Zarnak: Supernatural Sleuth*.

The only faint suggestion of a New York locale for River Street in Howard’s writings lies in “Black Hound of Death.” In that story, Richard Brent moved from New York to the southern United States. If one assumes that this Richard Brent is the same person as his namesake in “Lord of the Dead,” then the New York reference could point to River Street being in that city. On the other hand, Brent could have moved from the West Coast to New York to the South.

As the Zarnak series has progressed in the hands of Price and other writers, the occult detective has shuttled back and forth between the East and West Coast residences with the anomaly of River Street existing in two different places. For the purposes of this article, River Street shall exist solely on the West Coast. Price’s “Dope War of the Black Tong” shall transpire there in my analysis.

There are additions made to Harrison’s past by Price in “Dope War of the Black Tong.” It was remarked that the detective had visited the South Seas and East Asia years before coming to River Street. Although Howard never made such an assertion, this addition by Price does explain convincingly how Harrison gained his expertise in combating Asian cultists. The only background for Harrison suggested by Howard was that the character was a detective in Texas before coming to River Street. Neither “Graveyard Rats” nor “The House of Suspicion” has any River Street references. “The House of Suspicion” was set in an unnamed southern state where Harrison was working as a detective. “Graveyard Rats” had references that clearly indicated this state as Texas. The story mentioned Tonkawa Indians, a tribe indigenous to Texas. “Graveyard Rats” took place in the fictional town of Lost Knob, also the setting for Howard’s untitled synopsis of a Harrison story. The town of Lost Knob also played a prominent role in “Old Garfield’s Heart” (*Weird Tales*, December 1933) (1), and “Wild Water” from *The Vultures of Whaepton* (Zebra, 1975). “Old Garfield’s Heart” squarely puts Lost Knob in Texas (2). The most likely explanation to reconcile Harrison’s Texas exploits with his River Street years is that the detective moved to the West Coast from Texas.

Robert M. Price depicted Harrison as the owner of a Private Investigator's license. Howard never identified Harrison as a .P. I. in any of his stories. Harrison acted as an autonomous arm of the local police. Howard only described Harrison as a "detective" and never added "private" as an adjective. This view of Harrison as "a plainclothes cop" is correctly presented by Marc Cerasini and Charles Hoffman in their introduction to *Two-Fisted Detective Stories*. Possibly Harrison's methods became controversial. He could have been forced to resign from the police and become a private eye.

There are connections to other Howard's characters in "Dope War of the Black Tong." It is implied that Harrison was descended from Howard's Puritan adventurer, Solomon Kane. There was also a reference to the prior death of John Grimlan, a character from Howard's "Dig Me No Grave" (*Weird Tales*, February 1937) (3). "Dig Me No Grave" is part of a series involving the occult investigators Kirowan and Conrad. Linking "Dig Me No Grave" to Steve Harrison's River Street implies that Kirowan and Conrad lived for a while on the West Coast. Other stories in the Kirowan and Conrad series had them residing in the state of New York (4) and the South (5).

## II. The Career of Steve Harrison

In the late 1890's, Stephen Harrison was born somewhere in the southern United States. As a young man, Harrison spent considerable time with the local black community. From his African-American friends, Harrison heard legends about voodoo and graveyard rats. Harrison grew to fear these rodents who were described as "demons."

By the 1920's, Harrison had grown in to a man into a tall muscular man with hammer-like fists. His height was overshadowed by his massive deep chest. Thick black hair, a low broad forehead, an aggressive jaw and heavy long arms gave the impression of a man of action. In contrast, his cold blue eyes suggested a perceptive intelligence.

Around 1921-24, Harrison traveled extensively in the South Seas and East Asia. It is not known in what capacity Harrison made this journey. Most likely, he was a sailor who visited the ports of the Far East. During this period, he saw some horrific sights. On one occasion, he witnessed the rite of *rolang* in which a mystic adept resurrected a corpse. In the course of his adventures, he also both fought against and alongside Sikhs.

Returning to the United States, Harrison became a police detective in a city in Texas. Oddly enough, his adventures often carried him away from his urban beat. One such case, "Graveyard Rats," occurred in 1926.

In the hills of Texas, the small town of Lost Knob was disturbed by murder. Joel Middleton had been cheated out of his property by John Wilkinson. In retaliation, Middleton put a bullet into John's skull. Somehow Peter Wilkinson, John's brother, persuaded Harrison to come to Lost Knob in order to apprehend Middleton. Soon more murders erupted in Lost Knob. Instead of Middleton, the killer now bore the appearance of Wolf Hunter, a Tonkawa Indian chief slain long ago by the Wilkinsons' grandfather. A grotesque incident involving the decapitation of John Wilkinson's corpse led Harrison to the local graveyard and a horde of ravenous rats. There Harrison had to overcome his childhood fear of the rodents in order to foil a vicious murderer.

The Wilkinsons had a neighbor named Jim Allison. This neighbor could be the same person as James Allison, the hero of Robert E. Howard's series about reincarnation.

From “Marchers of Valhalla” (6), we know that Allison was a Texan with a wooden leg. Jim Allison of “Graveyard Rats” may have possessed a similar handicap because his gait is described as “stumbling.”

One year after “Graveyard Rats,” Harrison arrested Edward Stark for the brutal murder of his fiancée. Besides Harrison, the only other witness to this crime was Richard Stanton. A week before Stark’s trial, Stanton disappeared. Receiving a note from an anonymous informant about Stanton’s whereabouts, Harrison went to Storley Manor, a decaying mansion in the Texas countryside. “The House of Suspicion” told of an ingenious trap set for Harrison and Stanton by one of Stark’s relatives (7).

Returning to the city from Storley Manor, Harrison became involved in another murder mystery that took him into the hills of Texas. Little is known about this case except that Harrison solved it with the assistance of a woman, Joan Wiltshaw. Due to his friendship with Joan, Steve’s career would embark on a completely different path.

Just prior to her arrival in Texas, Joan had lived in a city on the West Coast. Her father was a steamship magnate. Desiring to coerce the millionaire into using his vessels for the smuggling of drugs and illegal immigrants, an Asian cult abducted Joan (8). Howard’s “Guests of the Hoodoo Room” related how Joan was rescued by Butch Cronin, an ex-policeman turned private eye.

Joan’s captors committed cannibalistic atrocities in River Street, the city’s Oriental section. Once a prominent waterfront area, River Street devolved into a slum where poor Asians were crowded into abandoned warehouses. Following the Wiltshaw kidnapping, wealthy citizens led by Joan’s father petitioned the police department to take strong measures against the rampant crime in River Street.

Hoping to forget her ordeal in River Street, Joan decided to visit relatives in Lost Knob, Texas. As a result of Joan’s assistance in the unrecorded murder investigation, Harrison promised her help if ever she needed it. Soon after her encounter with Harrison, Joan fell in love with her cousin, Brax Wiltshaw. Marrying Brax, Joan became a permanent resident of Lost Knob.

One year after meeting Joan, Harrison received an urgent plea from her. Brax had been wrongly arrested for murder. Because the local authorities in Lost Knob were convinced of Brax’s guilt, Harrison was refused permission by his superiors to investigate. Always a man of his word, the only way that Harrison could fulfill his promise was to resign as a police detective.

Harrison’s willingness to sacrifice his career for Joan raises the question of whether he was in love with her. Harrison might have approached this case with mixed feelings. If Brax was executed for murder, then Joan would be free to marry Harrison. Despite such potential complications, Harrison did clear Brax of the murder charges. The bare details of Harrison’s investigation can be found in an untitled plot synopsis by Robert E. Howard.

Grateful for Harrison’s intervention, Joan offered to help him find a new job. Back in the city where her father lived, crime remained unchecked in River Street. Joan’s father pressured the police to reappoint Butch Cronin to clear up River Street. Hoolihan, the police chief, balked at such a suggestion. Cronin was viewed as an unsavory character by the entire force. Neither would Cronin have anything to do with Hoolihan and the “dumb way” in which he ran the police. Joan recommended Harrison

to her father. Seeking to appease the influential Wiltshaw, Hoolihan agreed to hire Harrison.

Although Hoolihan, a big bear-like ruddy man, had his share of problems with Harrison's independent streak, the police chief grew to respect his new employee because he always produced results. While on a case, Harrison had a habit of disappearing for days, weeks, even months. Not believing in paperwork, Harrison frequently supplied Hoolihan with only a laconic explanation of the River Street cases. While appreciating Harrison's merits as an enforcer in the worst district of the city, Hoolihan was known to complain bitterly about his employee's arrogance. The other man on the force praised the new recruit's toughness. They dubbed him "Iron Man" Harrison.

By the time of "The Silver Heel," Harrison had been in River Street for two years. He had established quite a reputation by this time. One character described Harrison as a "combination of detective, unofficial judge, police court, state militia and what-not." Despite Harrison's formidable presence on River Street, murders were so common there that most of the city's newspapers didn't bother to report them. To the inhabitants of River Street, Harrison was "the inexplicable man who enforced his race's inexplicable laws." Even though Harrison remained an enigma to the denizens of River Street, they all grew to respect his Colt .45.

Somehow Harrison supplied Hoolihan with the fingerprints of several River Street residents who had no police record. It was a closely guarded secret how Harrison achieved this feat. No one else knew how these fingerprints were obtained. Harrison had informants among the curio dealers in River Street. Perhaps they secretly gave Harrison the prints of everyone who patronized their shops.

"The Silver Heel" concerned a series of slayings connected to the Dragon's Heart, a great jewel of the Ming dynasty. In the course of his investigation, Harrison trusted Weng, one of the informants among the curio dealers, with an important mission. The trust was misplaced because Weng betrayed Harrison to Ti Woon, a shadowy tong leader in River Street.

A far more reliable ally among the curio dealers was Wang Yun. Harrison had seen many unusual pets in River Street. They ran the range of Persian cats to white peacocks, but the most extraordinary was Wang Yun's King Cobra. In "The Black Moon," Wang Yun died when someone substituted another snake.

Harrison was outraged by Wang Yun's death. The curio dealer had always been a "square-shooter" and a friend. Although it was not mentioned, Harrison was probably contrasting Wang Yun's loyalty with Weng's betrayal. When the killer was captured, the motive for the murder was revealed to be the dealer's ownership of the Black Moon, one of the royal treasures of China. Wang Yun had gained possession of the pearl as a Chinese soldier defending Korea in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95.

By 1931, the time of "Teeth of Doom," Harrison had become accustomed to the convoluted machinations of River Street. He now had accumulated "experience gained from years of puzzling through the devious and often grisly mysteries of River Street." His knowledge would be tested in a mystery that would affect the destiny of China.

During 1911, the insurrection against the Manchu dynasty had permitted Yuen Chin, a mandarin in northern China to establish himself as a warlord. Yuen hired three young American chemists to make a poison gas for him. The Americans felt no initial guilt about the development of the deadly gas. They thought that Yuen would only use

the gas to make himself master of Inner Mongolia. They soon concluded that their invention could enable Yuen to conquer the world. Anyone familiar with the difficulties of utilizing poison gas in World War I would doubt the universal threat posed by the Americans' discovery. However, inventors have been known to overrate their own inventions.

Rather than destroy their work, the chemists thought it better to preserve their formula in case the United States ever needed such a weapon. The Americans engaged in a ridiculous scheme to hide the secret of their creation. So asinine was their plan that it makes one wonder if the chemists' minds had become unhinged by all the strange vapors in their laboratory. They wrote the formula on paper leaving out the three most important chemical symbols. Each of the Americans had one of their teeth removed by a Chinese dentist. A gold tooth on which was carved one of the missing symbols was placed in each of their mouths.

The establishment of a new constitutional republic in 1912 meant the doom of Yuen's ambitions. Yuen was executed in Peking (Beijing). The American trio left China. Circumstances compelled them to leave the incomplete formula inside a Chinese temple.

Yah Lai, a bandit of Inner Mongolia, was seeking in 1931 to establish himself as a warlord who could dominate China. Please note that the family name of this nefarious individual was Yah rather than Lai (hence no relation to the author of this article). Yah's grandfather had been the dentist who had installed the Americans' gold teeth. Gaining possession of the incomplete formula left in the temple, Yah needed the teeth to manufacture the gas.

Yah formed an alliance with Yarghouz Barolass, the leader of the American branch of the Sons of Erlik, a Mongolian secret society. Erlik, or Erlik Khan, is a Mongolian demon-god who appears in various incarnations in the works of Robert E. Howard. Besides being the deity revered by Yarghouz's cult, Erlik Khan was also the name of a master criminal in the Harrison series.

The American chemists settled in the city that contained River Street. The Sons of Erlik intended to murder the chemists and steal the gold teeth from their corpses. Harrison learned of Yarghouz's scheme from Joey Glick, a drug addict turned informant. After telling Harrison of the murder plot, Glick died from a poison cigarette made by the Sons of Erlik.

In the showdown with Yarghouz, Harrison's life was saved by an enigmatic mandarin. The rescuer claimed to be an emissary of "Fang Yin, Lord of Peking." Asserting that his master harbored no military ambitions of his own, the envoy from Peking left one of the gold teeth in Harrison's custody after killing Yarghouz. Fang Yin could not be a warlord because Peking was firmly under the control of the nationalist government of Chiang Kai-shek. Most likely, Fang Yin was a tong leader who dominated the Peking underworld.

"Teeth of Doom" neglected to mention Yah Lai's final fate. He ordered his army to march from Inner Mongolia to Manchuria. Unfortunately for Yah Lai, Japan also decided to invade Manchuria. Yah Lai's forces were quickly decimated by the efficient Japanese army.

Harrison wondered if Yah's allies, the Sons of Erlik Khan, could be connected to an ominous name that drifted along the alleys of River Street. Starting in 1930, Harrison

had heard rumors of someone or something called Erlik Khan. The detective began to associate the name with apparently unconnected crimes, but his fellow police officers dismissed these suspicions as paranoid fantasies. The existence of the Sons of Erlik led Harrison to believe that Erlik Khan was the name of a similar secret society.

Rather than unravel the mystery of Erlik Khan, Harrison decided it was time to take a vacation. For three years, he had been involved in tong wars and hatchet murders. His theories about Erlik Khan had been met with derision by his peers. Maybe his colleagues were right about his sanity becoming unhinged by the endless violence that plagued River Street. Harrison felt the need to clear his mind through rest and relaxation.

The sleuth took his vacation in a suburban community. Regardless of the change of setting, mayhem continued to dog Harrison's heels. As told in "The Voice of Death," Harrison stumbled upon a bizarre plot to drive a man insane with a hidden phonograph.

Back in River Street, Harrison again became involved in weird events linked to the words "Erlik Khan." Inside a sealed room, he found the shriveled corpse of a Hindu. Choking fumes came from a bowl besides the dead man. Some powder inside the bowl had ignited to unleash a smoke that had fatally mummified the Hindu.

It would be a woman who would spark the series of events that would lead Harrison to Erlik Khan. Born and raised in the United States, Joan La Tour, a beautiful Eurasian, had been involved with the secret societies of River Street. Seeking to escape from a life of crime, Joan had immigrated to England in 1930. There she became engaged to Harry Harper, a young Englishman. Their romance was threatened due to the intervention of a criminal more formidable than any Joan had met in River Street.

Harry's sister was engaged to Sir Haldred Taverel. As told in "Taverel Manor" by Robert E. Howard and Richard A. Lupoff, Taverel was abducted by Kathulos, a super-criminal who professed to be a resurrected sorcerer from Atlantis. Three years earlier, an American named Stephen Costigan had foiled the plans of Kathulos for world domination (see Howard's "Skull-Face") (9). Along with Costigan, Harry and Joan became entrapped in the clutches of Kathulos.

"Taverel Manor" apparently ended happily. Kathulos had failed in his evil designs, and the Harper siblings were planning their respective marriages. Most readers of "Taverel Manor" are probably of the opinion that it took place after Joan's exploits with Harrison. If that were true, then it would be logical that she married Harry. The nuptials of Joan and Harry are a chronological impossibility.

"Taverel Manor" definitely happened in 1930. The text referred to "the dozen years since the battle of Argonne." The battle happened in 1918. Joan's last appearance in the Harrison saga is in "Names in the Black Book." In that story, Harrison recognized a poisoned cigarette. The plainclothes detective had "seen one puff of the stuff knock a man stone dead." Harrison was obviously remembering the death of Joey Glick in "Teeth of Doom," a story whose events could only have happened in 1931.

Yah Lai would not be the greatest threat to the stability of China if the conquest of Manchuria (1931-33) was transpiring. Therefore, the story could not have occurred after the initiation of the Japanese invasion in September 1931. Yuen Chin had been a warlord in China twenty years ago. The earliest period during which Yuen could have pursued his ambitions would be the Chinese revolution of 1911-12. Thus, the events of "Teeth of Doom" could not belong to a year before 1931.

The reason for the cancellation of the wedding between Joan and Harry is not known. Probably Joan had not confided in her fiancé about her past association with the criminals of River Street. Somehow Harry discovered the truth. Due to his recent ordeal with fanatical Orientals employed by Kathulos, Harry reacted angrily to these revelations by terminating the engagement. Feeling that she would never escape her past, Joan returned to River Street.

Josef La Tour, Joan's brother, was a blackmailer who knew the secrets of many important figures of River Street. In 1932, Josef was in Osman Pasha's gambling den in River Street. When Harrison led a raid on the establishment, Osman Pasha took advantage of the confusion by fatally shooting Josef.

Under the mistaken assumption that Harrison had slain her brother, Joan sought the detective's life in "Lord of the Dead." Through the utilization of a rare drug, the Smoke of Shaitan, Joan mesmerized Ali ibn Suleyman, a Druse, into viewing Harrison as the reincarnation of an enemy. The Druse pursued Harrison with a murderous frenzy.

The Smoke of Shaitan was derived from the Black Lotus. The flower was the same Black Lotus that appeared in the tales of Robert E. Howard's Conan of Cimmeria. Wizards of Conan's time used the Black Lotus as both a narcotic and a poison. According to "The Tower of the Elephant," the Black Lotus was native to "the lost jungle of Khitai, where only the yellow-skulled priests of Yun dwell." Since Khitai was the equivalent of China in Conan's age, it does not seem surprising that modern Asian cults would have accessed to it. In "The Slithering Shadow" (also known as "Xuthal of the Dusk"), Conan also encountered the Lotus in Kush (corresponding to part of Africa). Conan saw the Black Lotus in Xuthal, a city in Kush settled by yellow-skinned refugees from the East. The inhabitants of Xuthal must be Khitans who took the Black Lotus with them on their trek to Kush.

Joan La Tour had made a serious miscalculation in designating Ali ibn Suleyman as an instrument of her vengeance. The Druse was a henchman of a more formidable schemer to whom Joan was a subordinate. Joan owed allegiance to the sinister individual who hid behind the name of Erlik Khan (translated into English as "Lord of the Dead"). Besides being a direct descendant of Genghis Khan, the mastermind had been the leader of a lamasery located in Inner Mongolia. There the malefactor had tried to carve out an empire. Local opposition was had forced the megalomaniac to relocate to the United States. Beginning with the secret societies of River Street, Erlik Khan had hoped to erect a crime syndicate inside America.

Erlik Khan was almost certainly an alias derived from the satanic deity of Inner Mongolia. The Sons of Erlik led by Yarghouz Barolass were likely minions of the human Erlik Khan. Both Yarghouz and Erlik Khan used the same brand of poisoned cigarettes, and their agents demonstrated expertise as telephone wiretappers. If the warlord Yah Lai had conquered China, then Erlik Khan would have been the hidden power behind the throne,

Harrison's pursuit of Ali ibn Suleyman caused him to become a prisoner in the underground dungeons of Erlik Khan. Punished for utilizing Ali in her own schemes without permission, Joan was a fellow captive. Learning the truth about Josef's death, Joan joined the sleuth in the struggle against Erlik Khan. Escaping their captivity, Steve and Joan witnessed the apparent death of Erlik Khan. Rebelling against his master, Ali's sword crashed against the skull of a man believed to be Erlik Khan. Ali died from

wounds inflicted by Erlik Khan's other underlings. The destruction of Erlik Khan's headquarters in a fire prevented the recovery of the archfelon's body.

As a result of the fighting in "Lord of the Dead," Harrison sustained a facial injury from the knife wielded by one of Erlik Khan's assassins. The wound left a thin scar from his temple to his jaw. Supposedly Erlik Khan only suffered an injury from Ali's blade. The diabolical genius appeared to be a tall man clad in a black robe and hood. A steel cap worn on Erlik Khan's skull beneath the hood allegedly blunted the impact of Ali's weapon.

In "Lord of the Dead," Harrison had a new informant among the curio dealers of River Street. His name was Woon Sun. From his prior experiences with Weng and Wang Yun, Harrison acted shrewdly in his dealings with Woon. Harrison suspected Woon of being a double-crosser like Weng. Such suspicions were justified because Woon's master was Erlik Khan. Because Wang Yun had a secret past, Harrison wondered about Woon's prior life in China. The detective soon realized that the curio shop was just a blind. Woon must have accumulated a pile of money before coming to River Street. By discovering Josef La Tour's notebook full of blackmail information, Harrison learned that Woon had stolen the funds of a secret society based in Canton (10).

Another man with a secret past was Richard Brent, a scholar who lived in River Street. Brent's house was described in "Lord of the Dead" as the decaying neighborhood's "one lone bulwark of respectability." In addition to being an expert on Asian cults, Brent could handle a shotgun with great expertise.

The scholar supplied Harrison with much information on the religious beliefs of the Druses in "Lord of the Dead." Richard Brent was far less forthcoming when it came to the practices of Erlik cultists from Inner Mongolia. In 1928, Brent and another American, Adam Grimm, had conducted an expedition into the mountains of Inner Mongolia (mentioned in "Black Hound of Death"). The expedition was attacked by monks who worshipped the god Erlik in the accursed city of Yahlgan. Everyone else in the expedition was slain with the exceptions of the two Americans. A small camel was the sole survivor of the beasts that had transported the expedition. The animal could only support the weight of one man. Knocking Grimm unconscious, Brent rode the camel to safety. He assumed that Grimm was tortured to death slowly by the cultists.

Ashamed of his disgraceful conduct, Brent never confided his experiences in Inner Mongolia to Harrison. When Harrison later told the scholar about his meeting with Erlik Khan, Brent wondered if the mastermind had been the enigmatic head lama of Yahlgan in 1928. If Erlik Khan was the ruler of Yahlgan, then the malevolent genius may have tortured Grimm. In his death throes, Grimm surely would have cursed the name of Richard Brent. The supposed demise of Erlik Khan caused Brent to feel that the secret of his unspeakable betrayal was safe.

The denizens of Yahlgan were practitioners of the art of plastic surgery. This fact suggests that two other masterminds from Howard's works owed their allegiance to Erlik Khan. "The House of Om" is a detailed synopsis for an unwritten non-series story (11). The synopsis cited an earlier expedition to Inner Mongolia reminiscent of the ill-fated Brent-Grimm mission. John Stark and Joel Bainbridge, American adventurers, had gone into Inner Mongolia to plunder a fortune in jewels from ancient temple (12). Stark had been captured by the guardians of the temple, priests of Erlik. Abandoning Stark, Bainbridge absconded with the jewels. Bainbridge assumed that the priests would

crucify Stark. Instead, Stark was admitted into the Erlik cult. After dwelling among Erlik's acolytes, Stark under the alias of Om rose to a position of leadership in the cult. Returning to the United States after ten years, Om sought to seize control of an American city by using the cultists' plastic surgery to replace prominent citizens like Joel Bainbridge. Om died from a gunshot wound,. He claimed to be the ruler of the Erlik cult, but he probably was secretly an underling of Harrison's nemesis, the personage called Erlik Khan. The priests who captured John Stark must have been residents of Yahlgan. Perhaps the Brent-Grimm expedition from "Black Hound of Death" was actually undertaken to ascertain whether John Stark was still alive (13)

Richard A. Lupoff once speculated that Erlik Khan was a minion of Kathulos (14). Actually an argument could be made that the opposite was the case. Kathulos was supposedly a mummy that had come to life after being found in the Atlantic Ocean. Kathulos presented himself as an Atlantean sorcerer, but he never displayed any of the horrible powers displayed by the necromancers combated by Robert E. Howard's King Kull, a former resident of Atlantis. In fact, the methods of Kathulos closely resembled those of Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu. No one actually witnessed the mummy's resurrection. The mummy and its casket did disappear from a reputedly locked room aboard a ship. The body of a murdered archeologist was found inside the locked room. We only have the word of the ship's captain that the room was truly locked. The Erlik cult could have stolen the mummy (15). They could have bribed the captain to kill the archeologist and then create the illusion of a locked room murder. A member of the cult then could have been altered through plastic surgery to resemble the mummy and assume the identity of Kathulos.

John Gordon, a British agent on the trail of Kathulos, dismissed the premise that his nemesis was a charlatan. Gordon had seen Kathulos make his skin become shriveled and hard like a mummy in order to hide in a curio shop. However, Erlik Khan owned a gas that killed people by turning them into mummies. A modified version of this gas could have caused a subject to temporarily assume the aspects of a mummy.

A connection between Kathulos and Erlik Khan would explain how Joan La Tour was drawn back to River Street from England. Recognizing Joan's role in helping to defeat Kathulos, Erlik Khan arranged for her fiancé to be informed about her scandalous past. When Joan's engagement was broken, Erlik Khan took a further ironic revenge by recruiting her as an operative.

Weeks after "Lord of the Dead," Harrison uncovered evidence of Erlik Khan's survival in "The Mystery of Tannernoe Lodge." The muscular sleuth had learned the motive for Josef La Tour's murder. La Tour had been planning to blackmail Adam Garfield. Ten years earlier, Garfield and a group of Lebanese bandits had stolen the Orontes ruby from a Maronite monastery in Lebanon.. Escaping with the ruby, Garfield betrayed his confederates to the local authorities. Eventually breaking out of prison, the bandits came to America in search of Garfield, who had settled in River Street under the name of Absalom Tannernoe. Aware of Tannernoe's true identity, La Tour threatened to inform the bandits unless he was paid twenty thousand dollars. Garfield responded by hiring Osman to kill La Tour.

Working from clues in La Tour's notebook, Harrison followed the trail to Garfield. Battling Garfield, Osman and the Lebanese bandits, Harrison recovered the ruby. At the conclusion of the case, the detective heard a bizarre confession from a dying

member of the Lebanese bandits. The brigand disclosed his intention to betray his comrades if they had recovered the ruby. This intended treason would result in the ruby being turned over to the bandit's true master, Erlik Khan (alive and well in River Street). Harrison mistakenly dismissed the Lebanese thief's confession as a drug addict's hallucination. The sleuth still believed Erlik Khan to be dead.

Erlik Khan's interest in the ruby stemmed from its occult significance. In ancient times, the gem had adorned the scepter of Rammon, "the greatest wizard, save perhaps one other, of prehistoric Stygia." In Howard's Conan stories, Stygia was an ancient kingdom that evolved into Egypt. Rammon is briefly mentioned in Howard's "The Phoenix on the Sword," the first story published about Conan. The other Stygian sorcerer whose powers rivaled Rammon was Thoth-Ammon from the same tale. The Stygian ruby fell into the hands of a wealthy Greek merchant in the early days of Christianity. The merchant donated it to the Church when he was converted by Paul of Taurus. Due to its ancient origin, certain cults in the Middle East valued the jewel highly. By owning this ruby, Erlik Khan hoped to gain control of these cults (16).

Left unfinished at Howard's death, "The Mystery of Tannernoe Lodge" was completed by Fred Blosser, who inserted a reference to "Apr. 1934" into Josef La Tour's diary. This reference would place the events of both "Lord of the Dead" and "The Mystery of Tannernoe Lodge" in 1934. On the other hand, "Names in the Black Book" was set one year after "Lord of the Dead." "Names in the Black Book" was published in the spring of 1934. Placing "Lord of the Dead" in 1934 would throw "Names in the Black Book" into 1935, the year after it was published. The general rule of chronologies of fictional characters is not to place the stories after their publication. Therefore, the 1934 reference by Fred Blosser is ignored in favor of 1932. I have similarly shifted Garfield's theft of the ruby (ten years before Harrison's involvement) from 1924 to 1922, and adjusted Garfield's arrival in New York from 1925 to 1923.

Events would cause the displacement of two River Street residents to the southern United States during 1932-33. When Harrison related the dead bandit's claims to Richard Brent, the scholar did not discount the possibility of Erlik Khan's survival. If the satanic genius survived, the secret of Richard Brent's behavior in Inner Mongolia could be revealed. Rather than risk exposure in River Street, Brent moved to New York.

The scholar soon learned that he had more to fear than just Erlik Khan. Adam Grimm was not dead. Instead of killing him, the monks of Yahlgan had altered him with their hellish plastic surgery. The monks had transformed Grimm into a monster with the face of a hound. Somehow Grimm had returned to the United States. Now he was seeking Brent's life. Erlik Khan probably arranged the transportation of Grimm to the United States. Not only would Grimm punish Brent for aiding Harrison, but the disfigured madman might even kill the detective if his help was requested by the endangered scholar. Brent must have tried to contact Harrison, but the sleuth was nowhere to be found.

Harrison had embarked on a manhunt of his own. The quarry was Woon Shang who had murdered an elderly Chinese resident of River Street with a meat cleaver. Woon had stolen ten thousand dollars from his victim. Unless Harrison recovered the loot, the murdered man's young granddaughter would be condemned to a life of poverty. Starting in 1932, Harrison chased Woon halfway across the United States. By the time the chase concluded in "Fangs of Gold," it was 1933. Woon took refuge among voodoo cultists in a

swamp of the southern United States. Recovering the money, Harrison saw Woon perish in the jaws of an alligator.

It was in during Harrison's absence that Om led a group of Erlik cultists in an abortive attempt to take over an American city. The name of this metropolis was not mentioned in Howard's outline for "The House of Om." Possibly it was the same city that contained River Street. Erlik Khan could have ordered Om's onslaught in order to take advantage of Harrison's absence (17).

After being chased by Grimm across the country for more than a month, Brent went to the southern United States in 1932 for the purpose of locating Harrison. Unable to find the detective, Brent decided to cover his tracks by settling in an obscure pine forest. Although Brent later learned that Harrison had returned to River Street, the scholar made no effort to contact his friend. Brent was fearful that either Erlik Khan or Grimm would intercept any messages dispatched to River Street. Brent had been settled in his southern sanctuary for about six months when the events of "Black Hound of Death" unfolded. Grimm finally tracked down the man whose cowardice had condemned him to a loathsome fate. Although Grimm was fatally wounded by several bullets, he tore open Brent's throat before dying.

Unlike the late Richard Brent, Harrison stubbornly maintained that Erlik Khan was dead. Joan La Tour convinced Harrison of the truth in "Names in the Black Book." A series of unsolved murders rocked River Street in 1933. Joan found a book containing not only the victims' names but her own and Harrison's. She recognized the handwriting as Erlik Khan's.

In addition to Joan, Harrison had two new allies against Erlik Khan. Since the death of Joey Glick in "Teeth of Doom," Harrison had recruited another drug addict as an informer. Remarkably, this addict had the similar name of Johnny Kleck. Like Glick before him, Kleck died in Harrison's service. The agents of Erlik Khan crucified the informer.

The other new ally was far more durable. He was Khoda Khan, an Afghan warrior who had aided another of Howard's heroes, Francis Xavier Gordon, in the early 1900's. Three months before "Names in the Black Book," Khoda knifed a Chinese inhabitant of River Street. The exact motive for Khoda's action seemed to be related to some manner of blood feud. Wanted for attempted murder, Khoda luckily befriended Joan La Tour. Because Joan hid him from the police, Khoda joined her and Harrison against Erlik Khan. It was Khoda who seemingly slew the sinister cloaked figure with an Afghan blade. Again recovery of the criminal's body was impossible. This time an explosion wrecked the vicious schemer's base. In recognition of Khoda's invaluable assistance, Harrison did not turn the Afghan over to the authorities.

When Hoolihan learned of Harrison's act of clemency towards Khoda Khan, he angrily fired Harrison. The dismissed policeman now became a Private Investigator. In 1938, Harrison became entangled in the case presented by Robert M. Price as "Dope War of the Black Tong" (18). The Black Lotus was being peddled as a drug in River Street by members of the Tcho-Tcho people, an obscure group of Burmese natives initially depicted in August Derleth and Mark Schorer's "The Lair of the Star-Spawn" (19). With the death of Richard Brent, Harrison had to appeal to a different scholar for assistance. This man was the enigmatic Anton Zarnak.

A history of the Black Lotus was given by Anton Zarnak. The scholar's history was somewhat contradictory to the implied past of the Black Lotus in Howard's Conan tales. Howard had the Lotus originating in Khitai (China) and making its way to the forerunners of the African nations. According to Zarnak, the Black Lotus came into existence in Stygia (the equivalent of Egypt in Conan's era) (20). Later the flower made its way to the East. Zarnak cited as his source *The Black Rituals of Koth-Seraphis*, a book of black magic. Since Koth-Seraphis was a Stygian sorcerer (21), it isn't surprising that he would claim the Black Lotus as the creation of his own nation. Koth-Seraphis must have wanted to rob the Khitan priests of Yun of the credit for the cultivation of the Black Lotus.

There is an intriguing parallel between Richard Brent and Anton Zarnak. Brent journeyed from the West Coast to New York. According to the Zarnak stories written by C. J. Henderson, the occult detective lived in New York during the 1920's. The West Coast stories with Zarnak so far only happen in the 1930's and later decades. Perhaps Zarnak learned of River Street from Brent during his brief relocation to New York. Zarnak could then have decided to investigate River Street for himself.

It was the ultimate aim of the Tcho-Tcho people to summon the monstrous god Zhar into our world. Armed with the magic staff of a Puritan ancestor, Steve Harrison was able to exorcise the demonic entity. Harrison's known exploits ended with this victory. It is not known if he continued his adventures in River Street. The fate of Anton Zarnak was somewhat ambiguous in "Dope War of the Black Tong," but he clearly survived. Other stories set in later eras have him functioning in London, New York and the West Coast. Zarnak would inevitably replace Harrison as the guardian against the horrors of River Street.

## CHRONOLOGY

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|--------------|---|
| 1894-95      | Wang Yun steals the Black Moon in Korea during the Sino-Japanese War.   |
| Early 1900's | Khoda Khan participates in Francis Xavier Gordon's exploits in Afghanistan.   |
| 1911         | Three Americans develop a poison gas for Yuen Chin in China.  |
| 1912         | The execution of Yuen Chin. The three chemists return to the United States.   |
| 1921-24      | Harrison visits the South Seas and East Asia.   |
| 1922         | Adam Garfield steals the Orontes ruby in Lebanon. John Stark is captured by the Erlik cult in Inner Mongolia.         |
| 1923         | Garfield arrives in New York.   |
| 1926         | Steve Harrison, a city detective in Texas, investigates the Wilkinson murders in Lost Knob, Texas ("Graveyard Rats"). |

- 1927 Steve Harrison meets Kathulos (“Skull-Face”). Harrison arrests Edward Stark for murder. Harrison and the only other witness to Stark’s crime are lured into a trap (“The House of Suspicion”). Joan Wiltshaw is rescued from a River Street cult by Butch Cronin (“Guests of the Hoodoo Room”). In the hills of Texas, Joan helps Harrison solve a murder.
- 1928 Joan Wiltshaw marries her cousin, Brax Wiltshaw, of Lost Knob, Texas. In order to clear Brax of murder charges, Harrison resigns as a Texas policeman. Harrison proves Brax was framed (the untitled synopsis).  
With the help of Joan’s father, Harrison becomes responsible for policing River Street. Richard Brent and Adam Grimm make an ill-fated expedition to Inner Mongolia.
- 1929 Local opposition forces Erlik Khan to flee Inner Mongolia.
- 1930 Joan La Tour breaks her ties to River Street by settling in England. Engaged to Harry Harper, Joan becomes involved in Costigan’s second battle with Kathulos (“Taverel Manor”). The failure of Joan’s engagement results in her return to River Street. Harrison solves the Dragon’s Heart slayings (“The Silver Heel”) and Wang Yun’s murder (“The Black Moon”). The first rumors of Erlik Khan spread in River Street.
- 1931 Yah Lai launches an insurrection against the Chinese government. The Sons of Erlik seek the formula for Yuen Chin’s poison gas, but are foiled by Harrison and Fang Yin’s envoy (“Teeth of Doom”). Yah Lai’s army is destroyed in Manchuria by the Japanese invasion (September). Harrison takes a vacation (“The Voice of Death”).
- 1932 Josef La Tour, Joan’s brother, is murdered during Harrison’s raid on Osman Pasha’s gambling joint (circa April). Assisted by Joan and Richard Brent, Harrison defeats Erlik Khan (“Lord of the Dead”). Harrison recovers the Orontes ruby (“The Mystery of Tannernoe Lodge”). Brent leaves River Street to settle in New York. Harrison begins his manhunt for Woon Shang across the South. Adam Grimm forces Brent to flee from New York. John Stark (alias Om) fails to secure control of an American city (“The House of Om”).
- 1933 Harrison finds Woon Shang in a swamp inhabited by voodoo worshippers (“Fangs of Gold”). Deaths of Brent and Grimm (“Black Hound of Death”). Harrison, Joan La Tour and Khoda Khan unite against Erlik Khan (“Names in the Black Book”). For permitting Khoda Khan’s escape, Harrison loses his police commission. He becomes a Private Investigator.

1938 Harrison and Anton Zanak battle the Tcho-Tcho people (“Dope War of the Black Tong”).

## NOTES

1. “Old Garfield’s Heart” was reprinted in these Howard collections: *The Dark Man and Others* (Arkham House, 1963), *Pigeons from Hell* (Zebra, 1976), *Cthulhu: the Mythos and Other Kindred Horrors* (Baen, 1987), *The Black Stranger and Other American Tales* (Bison Books, 2005), and *The Valley of the Worm* (Wildside Press, 2006).
2. Howard’s “For the Love of Barbara Allen” also must be set in Lost Knob even though the name of the town is never mentioned. Both “Old Garfield’s Heart” and “For the Love of Barbara Allen” feature a character named Doc Blaine. “For the Love of Barbara Allen” can be found in *The Second Book of Robert E. Howard* (Zebra, 1976), *Marchers of Valhalla* (Berkley, 1978), and *Trails in Darkness* (Baen, 1996).
3. “Dig Me No Grave” can be found in *The Dark Man and Others*, *Pigeons from Hell*, *Cthulhu: the Mythos and Other Kindred Horrors*, *Beyond the Borders* (Baen, 1996) and *Nameless Cults* (Chaosium, 2001) and *the Weird Writings of Robert E. Howard: Volume 1* (Girasol Collectables, 2006).
4. The New York setting was in “The House in the Oaks,” a fragment completed by August Derleth. The original fragment was published as “The House” in *The Howard Reader #8* (August 2003). Derleth’s completion can be found in *Black Canaan* (Berkley, 1978) and *Nameless Cults*. Conrad’s first name is John in “Dig Me No Grave,” but it is James in “The House in the Oaks.” In a completion of another Howard fragment, “Dagon Manor,” C. J. Henderson rectified this discrepancy by creating two Conrad brothers. “Dagon Manor” can be found in *Shudder Stories #4* (Cryptic Publications, March 1986).
5. A reference to a “plantation” in “The Jade God,” a fragment found in *The “New” Howard Reader #3* (November 1998), placed Kirowan and Conrad in the South.
6. “Marchers of Valhalla” can be found in *Marchers of Valhalla*, *Eons of the Night* (Baen, 1996) and *The Black Stranger and Other American Tales*.
7. In “The House of Suspicion,” Harrison finds a 1916 photograph of Edward Storley (alias Stark) as “a mere boy in knee pants.” Also in the picture was Edward’s older brother. Both are “young men.” Edward’s sibling had grey hair by the time of “The House of Suspicion.” The older brother had to be at least forty in this story. Since I assign “The House of Suspicion” to 1927, Edward’s sibling would have to be around thirty in 1916. Howard’s reference to Edward being “a mere boy” may make some readers believe that the future murderer wasn’t even a teenager in 1916. However, Howard had been known to use the term “boy” rather loosely. “The Hand of Obeah,” published in *Crypt of Cthulhu #16* (Cryptic Publications, 1983) and *The “New” Howard Reader #3*, had as its narrator a “boy” named Steve. The youngster noted that his best friend’s “kid sister was only fifteen.” Young Steve must be at least sixteen. Therefore, Edward could be at least sixteen in 1916. Accepting Edward as being that age in 1916, I would say his brother was thirty in the photo. The discrepancy between the ages

- could be explained in various ways. For example, perhaps the Storley brothers had different mothers. In case anyone is wondering whether Steve from “The Hand of Obeah” could be Steve Harrison or Stephen Costigan of “Skull-Face,” it is doubtful because the young Steve was described as “not large.”
8. The cult was supposedly controlled by “an alien country that wants this country debauched and ruined.” Possible candidates for the role of this foreign master were the Soviet Union and Imperial Japan.
  9. I place the events of “Skull-Face” in 1927. The story was published in 1929. Normally I would have placed Costigan’s adventures one year earlier, but the conclusion of the tale asserts that months have passed since the defeat of Kathulos.
  10. The Cantonese society could be the Yo Than tong that appeared in Robert E; Howard’s “The Sign of the Snake” (*Action Stories*, June 1931). The story was reprinted in *The Complete Action Stories* (2001).
  11. “The House of Om” can be found in *Shudder Stories #2* (Cryptic Publications, December 1984) and *The “New” Howard Reader #1* (June 1998).
  12. Perhaps this was the same temple in Inner Mongolia where the three American chemists from “Teeth of Doom” hid their poison gas formula.
  13. John Stark could not be a relative of Edward Stark from “The House of Suspicion.” Edward’s real surname was Storley. Ironically, Edward had a brother named John Storley.
  14. See Lupoff’s introduction to the 1978 *Skull-Face* paperback.
  15. In “Skull-Face,” Baron Rokoff, a Russian working for the British War Office, returned from Mongolia, with important information about Kathulos. When Rokoff was murdered by the agents of Kathulos, this secret intelligence was lost. Rokoff could have unearthed that Kathulos was really an agent of the Erlik cult.
  16. The premise of Howard’s *The Hour of the Dragon* (also published as *Conan the Conqueror*) is that mystical jewels can be used to revive dead sorcerers. If my theory about the priests of Yahlgan having hidden the mummy of Kathulos is correct, then Erlik Khan may have really coveted the Orontes ruby in order to attempt the genuine resurrection of the Altantean mage.
  17. Om (alias John Stark) may have been appointed Yarghouz’s replacement as the leader of the American branch of the Sons of Erlik by Erlik Khan.
  18. The year of 1938 is derived from Matthew Baughn’s Anton Zarnak chronology. Price’s story cited the earlier death of John Grimlan in Howard’s “Dig Me No Grave,” a story set in March 1930. The amount of time between Grimlan’s death and the events of “Dope War of the Black Tong” was unstated. Therefore, it is feasible that eight years transpired between Grimlan’s demise and the Zarnak story.
  19. “The Lair of the Star-Spawn” has been reprinted in a collection of all the Derleth-Schorer collaborations, *Colonel Markesan and Less Pleasant People* (Arkham House, 1966), and in *Tales of the Lovecraft Mythos* (Fedogan and Bremer, 1992), an anthology edited by Robert M. Price. The story also can be found inside *In Lovecraft’s Shadow: the Cthulhu Mythos Stories of August Derleth* (Mycroft and Moran, 1998).

20. Howard's Black Lotus appears to be the same plant described by Robert Bloch in "Black Lotus" (*Unusual Stories*, Winter 1935). According to Bloch, the Black Lotus once grew on the Nile River (formerly the Styx River of Stygia in Howard's Conan tales). The Khitan refugees must have brought the Black Lotus to Stygia as well as Kush. "Black Lotus" was reprinted in two anthologies, L. Sprague de Camp's *The Fantastic Swordsmen* (1967) and Lin Carter's *Realms of Wizardry* (1976).
21. Koth-Seraphis figured in other stories by Robert M. Price. In "Black Eons," the continuation of one of Robert E. Howard's fragments in *Nameless Cults*, Koth-Seraphis died during the final days of Stygia as a nation. In "The Burrower Beneath" from *The Book of Eibon* (Chaosium, 2002), Koth-Seraphis was contradictorily portrayed as a wizard from Acheron, Stygia's sister kingdom. "The Burrower Beneath" was presented as an excerpt from the book written by Eibon, the mage created by Clark Ashton Smith. *The Black Rituals of Koth-Seraphis* was consulted by Eibon in Price's tale. I don't wish to engage in a prolonged discussion of the chronology of the respective ancient civilizations of Conan and Eibon, but most people would probably place Eibon's before Conan's. In fact, Lin Carter's "The Utmost Abomination" in the same volume had Eibon living between the ages of King Kull and Conan. I suspect Price was pulling the leg of his readers by having Eibon consult the tome of Koth-Seraphis. In his fiction and articles, Price treats the imaginary books of the Cthulhu Mythos with the perspective that a serious religious scholar brings to an analysis of the Bible or the Koran. Price has speculated that anachronistic passages were inserted into the *Necronomicon*, H. P. Lovecraft's book of sorcery, by later translators. "The Burrower Beneath" was probably meant to be a deliberately anachronistic passage inserted by a translator into Eibon's book.