



Moon of Skulls

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The Moon of Skulls collects Robert E. Howard's fiction and prose published in Weird Tales Magazine from October 1929 to November 1930, plus one from Oriental Stories. These works represent literary stepping-stones to Howard's infamous Cthulhu mythos stories and his most famous character of all - Conan the Cimmerian - and ably demonstrate that each of Howard's stories improved and added to his formidable skills as a master of fantasy and adventure. Continuing the collection of Howard's fiction and poetry in order of publication, Volume Two of The Weird Works of Robert E. Howard picks up where Volume One left off-at one of the most startling and controversial Howard stories of all: Skull-Face, a potent combination of gothic themes and oriental mystique.

Moon of Skulls Details

Date : Published May 24th 2006 by Wildside Press (first published 1968)

ISBN : 9780809510849

Author : Robert E. Howard , Paul Herman (Editor) , Mark Finn (Introduction)

Format : Paperback 192 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Fiction, Adventure, Weird Fiction

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From Reader Review Moon of Skulls for online ebook

Timothy Boyd says

Robert E. Howard is my all time favorite writer, but for many years much of his work was heavily edited. This is another of the heavily edited collections of Robert E. Howard's stories. I am a purist when it comes to a writers works. I know some of these stories are no longer PC but they should be read as Howard wrote them and understood that he wrote in another time period. Don't read this book unless you just can't find any others of Howard's unedited books to read. Message me if you need a list of what is good from this awesome fantasy and action writer.

Michael Sorbello says

The Moon of Skulls was pretty incredible. The gothic imagery, the vague but interesting connections to the stone age in which Conan takes place, and most notably the insane imagery of the Moon itself which held within it the minds of a dead civilization. Kane destroys the moon and all hell breaks loose. The evil civilization having their minds destroyed turn on each other in a frenzy and thousands of wicked cultists tear each other to pieces, creating an earthquake and a river of blood like a scene from the bible.

The imagery and violence in this story was something straight out of Bloodborne.

Phil Syphe says

I downloaded free copies of "Weird Works" Volumes 1, 2, & 4 to read the short stories that were new to me. Transpires that all the unread material were short poems, so I soon got through these books.

I'm no fan of poetry, but Howard's style is palatable. The prose tales in this collection are the main attraction and I recommend them to anyone new to the works of this great writer.

Skoorra says

First of all, Howard is an amazing author who writes heroes from the puritan standpoint as believably and interestingly as from the pagan standpoint. They are all fearless but come from different motivations which he writes so fervently that if you didn't know that Soloman Kane's creator was also the creator of Conan the Barbarian one might assume that author was a true puritan himself. He does not write as an extension of his own beliefs but rather fully embodies the characters. As for Moon of Skulls specifically, I enjoyed many of the elements but I have to say my heart lies with Howard's less civilized heroes. Still, excellently written despite the slight frequency in publishing typos.

Graham says

Wildside Press have made a clever attempt to repackage Robert E. Howard's fiction by releasing it in the

order it was first published. This is the second volume, covering the author's weird fiction in the 1929/1930 period.

This is a slim book and there doesn't seem to be a great deal of substance in it, but that's because half of the volume is taken up with the author's short novel, SKULL-FACE. This is an obvious retread of Sax Rohmer's FU MANCHU stories, complete with racism, a British secret agent hero modelled on Nayland Smith, secret passages, an age-old Oriental villain and plenty of two-fisted action. Howard doesn't seem too comfortable with this kind of story and it stalls sometimes during the 70-odd pages, but I still liked it a lot. The action is as well described as ever and Atlantis born Skull-Face makes for a great villain.

The rest of the collection is divided between poetry and fiction. I've read a few of the author's poems dotted in anthologies here and there and this was the chance for me to read a few more. A SONG OUT OF MIDIAN and BLACK CHANT IMPERIAL are middling but nothing memorable, but DEAD MAN'S HATE and SHADOWS ON THE ROAD are two FANTASTIC efforts and the best this anthology has to offer. Howard's use of imagery is spot on and he conjures up an atmosphere of creeping dread found in the best of his efforts.

There are four other short stories in the collection and two of them, THE MOON OF SKULLS and THE HILLS OF THE DEAD, are Solomon Kane yarns that I'd already read in THE SAVAGE TALES OF SOLOMON KANE, so I skipped them (I remember MOON being average and HILLS being very good).

The other two are minor works. THE FEARSOME TOUCH OF DEATH is a short psychological horror yarn about a guy spending the night with a corpse and THE VOICE OF EL-LIL treads familiar ground in the story of two adventurers finding an undiscovered civilisation in darkest Africa. I don't know about you, but Howard seemed to write dozens of these 'lost kingdom' stories, whether the hero was Conan, Solomon Kane or a stand-alone one, and the familiarity of the storyline is now boring. However, it's a not-bad effort and the description of ancient Asian societies was fun to read.

Derek says

"Skulls in the Stars" is the odd piece of this collection. It was published a year earlier than the next youngest and is a relatively conventional ghost/revenge story, compared to the lost city of "The Moon of Skulls" and the cosmic horror of "The Footfalls Within".

"The Moon of Skulls"--the prize, in my opinion--fits at least conceptually within Howard's Hyborean Age chronology, and is chock-full of prehistorical details. The fact that he visited these themes from several frameworks (with Kull, with Conan, with Bran Mak Morn, and here with Kane) is absolutely fascinating.

Andy says

Overall I enjoyed volume 1 of "Howard's Weird Works" more than this one. It had a lot more variety in it and the stories were shorter so if you didn't really love one, it wasn't long before you had a shot at something else.

This book though only has five stories, and almost half of the book is taken up by "Skull-Face," a 30,000+ word, rambling Yellow Peril type of story. It has some moments but the "weird" elements are at the edges

and it doesn't seem to have a definite direction. Similarly the 20,000+ word "Moon of Skulls" is a bit of an improvement, but is far more focused on adventure than the weird or horrific.

A big problem with this particular volume was that these stories get a bit samey. There's too many stories about ancient tribes who capture people meant for sacrifice to ancient gods.

All appeared in Weird Tales, except for "The Voice of El-Lil", which appeared in Oriental Stories. Poems are longer and better.

Skull-Face 33 - This is one of Howard's longest stories, coming in at 33,000~ words and is bit rambling. It has a Yellow Peril/Fu Manchu flavor, very pulpy. I did like the setting -- opium dens and foggy London streets and it's a mostly nocturnal story with a hard-boiled feel to it as well. Unfortunately it has more elements of a fast-paced crime story than a genuinely "weird" tale. A shellshocked WW1 soldier becomes a slave to opium and is forced into an organization who seeks to take over the world, run by a criminal mastermind more ancient than mankind itself!

Dead Man's Hate - A pretty good poem, longer than most of his earlier ones, about a hanged man seeking out vengeance.

The Fearsome Touch Of Death - A very short story, coming in at 2,000~ words, but very effective. A man sitting up with a corpse has an unnerving suspicion that the corpse is watching him.

A Song Out Of Midian - A mystical poem about a woman offered everything, but she desires home.

Shadows On The Road - One of the better poems here. A traveler recounts his journey to Rome -- not a grand journey or a grand place, but one of decay and horror.

The Moon Of Skulls - Another long story, an exotic Solomon Kane adventure, coming in at about 20,000 words. It's a fast-paced story with a decadent flair which keeps most of it's weird/supernatural elements at the edges. Kane ventures into the jungles of Africa to rescue a girl from being sacrificed by a decaying tribe.

The Hills Of The Dead - This is a bit of an improvement over the previous Kane story, even though it's about a third the length. Supernatural/weird elements are more central here, there's some eerie moments and it's still a fast-paced adventure. Kane confronts a tribe of cave-dwelling vampires.

Black Chant Imperial - Definitely the darkest, grimmest, most violent poem I've read by Howard thus far. Lots of interesting imagery.

The Voice Of El-Lil - This is the one story that wasn't in Weird Tales here, it was in Oriental Stories and I thought it was fairly good. The problem is, it's yet ANOTHER "captured by a long-forgotten civilization" story. A man tells of a wicked ancient tribe who lure, and kill outsiders with a huge gong.

Emmanuel says

4.5 stars.. I'm a fan of Robert E Howard and this is up there with his best. Solomon is such a great character, and yet again Howard writes an interesting story. I especially like how Kane talks, the language he uses and how he invokes the name of God for his strength and fights for good. I urge everyone to read Solomon Kane.

East Bay J says

It's only really dawned on me in recent years just how prolific Robert E. Howard was as a writer. He wrote a *lot*, no joke. When I first discovered Howard through those Ace Conan paperbacks, my interest never strayed too far from Conan. I read some Kull, some Bran Mak Morn, some Solomon Kane but never really explored Howard's writing past that. Getting into some of his other work has been a treat.

Moon Of Skulls collects several "weird works" of Howard's, as the title suggests. Some of these weird works are poems. In his introduction, Mark Finn warns the reader against skipping these because he or she will miss some good writing. I agree. It struck me, reading "Dead Man's Hate" and "Black Chant Imperial" especially, that Howard was not a bad poet. He may not have been a *great* poet but he knew how to use his words.

"The Fearsome Touch Of Death" and "The Voice Of El-Lil" are two general sort of horror tales, the earlier being the better, in my humble opinion. They're good but, included as they are with "The Moon Of Skulls" and "The Hills Of The Dead" (both Solomon Kane stories), as well as "Skull-Face" (which originally appeared in two parts in *Weird Tales*), they get lost in the shuffle.

"Skull-Face" is almost a novella and is full of all sorts of mystery, intrigue, conspiracy and a great plot to destroy civilization. White civilization, as a matter of fact. I suppose, at some point, I'll have to get over the blatant racism (and sexism) of some of these authors from the earlier half of the 20th century. Howard was obviously in possession of a number of bigoted views and his pal, Lovecraft, was a confirmed racist as well. Clark Ashton Smith seems to have been the enlightened one of the bunch, but I don't know that for certain. It doesn't really detract from my enjoyment of their work, but I am unable to ignore it. I suppose, for me, it's similar to The Bad Brains being homophobic, blatantly so, in some cases, yet I still love their music, though anything after *Quickness* is pretty boring in my humble opinion. I suppose Howard and Lovecraft were products of their time but it's still disappointing to realize these talented authors were quite ignorant in many ways.

The two Solomon Kane stories are my favorites from this collection. I find Solomon Kane, as a character, fascinating. The hell bent puritan hunts down and destroys evil with sword and pistol in hand. He's awesome, like an old world Punisher. Kane resonated with me as a kid because he was a righteous, pure hearted avenger who did what it took to right wrongs and destroy evil. Murder and mayhem are all in a day's work for Solomon Kane! I suppose today he would be considered a religious zealot and end up in jail but, in the 17th century, he was your only hope if you were a damsel who'd been kidnapped, changed hands quite a lot and ended up the prisoner of a beautiful yet horrible jungle queen.

This Wildside Press collection is good but I am sold on the Del Rey Howard collections with their excellent essays and thorough scholarship. I can't wait to read the Del Rey Solomon Kane book.

Amx Alamin says

Excelent Story ???

While I understand that you have to be prepared to take that into account when reading stories from this time period, it seemed to dominate the stories more so than in the first collection. There's too much of a focus on evil blacks/asians trying to take over the world for me to just chalk it up entirely to "he was just using the ideas of the time to tell a good story" which is the apology we get in the intro to this collection.

The opening story, Skull-Face, is probably the worst off on the racial scale, featuring a white drug addict who has to stop the evil asian drug-dealer from trying to take over. It also, as the introduction notes, is stuck between horror and action. Howard as a writer tended to do that, but usually one wins out over the other. In this case, the hybrid is stuck, and therefore, I think, stillborn. Howard is better as a writer of shorter fiction. The last story is mediocre, and can be easily skipped.

Which I admit does not leave a lot of this book, but what's in the middle is the Howard I like. I still like the way Howard writes, and I feel he is very underrated as an author because of the ties to the Conan character. The Solomon Kane stories continue to be my favorite, as they have the best plots and Howard really takes the time to let you get to know Kane and why he is out there righting wrongs in the oddest of locations for a Puritan. He is a Warrior-Puritan, and we get to see all the contradictions that this entails. It's when he's looking at society from the outside in, and not when he's looking at oriental conspiracies, that we see Howard the writer really shine. Unfortunately, this grouping is not the best for that. (Library, 2006)

Trebbly's Takes: Still recommended, but there's a higher wince factor in this one.
