

FOUR THOUGHTS

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A series of messages posted to erb-list, a membership email server devoted to the Life and Works of Edgar Rice Burroughs

Black People and Edgar Rice Burroughs

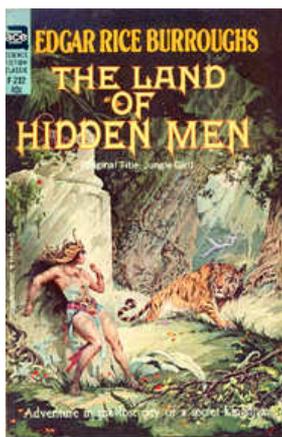
I have a little time so I wanted to write my thoughts on four different subjects.

My first is Black People and ERB. It is sometimes hard to write because you do not want to offend anyone but then I thought we all have the freedom to write on different subjects, to express our thoughts and observations on this site, within reason.

When I was in high school I was very much involved in sports. One of my all time favorite memories was in January of 1964 when I was a member of the school wrestling team. A fellow wrestler on my team was one of my best friends.

Clarence Nixon was his name and he was black.

One day we were traveling to a wrestling match and gave me a book that he said was the best book he ever read in his whole life. The book happened to be *The*



*Land of Hidden Men*¹, the Ace book with the wonderful picture of Foutan and the Tiger by Roy Krenkel.² What a picture! It is still one of my all time favorites. One look at the picture and I couldn't wait to read it.

Clarence never got his book back. I still have it with his name on the inside. I have guilt issues every time I open it and see his name. Someday I will try to find Clarence and give it back to him. The only problem is that every time I put the book back on the shelf I forget about the guilt until the next time I open it.

This book started me looking for every ERB Ace book I could get my hands on. Things were different back then. Money was hard to come by. I worked on a farm and got paid next to nothing. I used to put coin in an envelope and send it to the New York address in the back of the books to get more Ace paperbacks by mail. I remember standing by the mailbox waiting for the mailman to see if a new book had arrived. What amazes me now is the coin was so obvious in the envelope, but it always made it without any problems. I don't think that would happen nowadays. Plus I am sure the weight of the coin was more than the stamp covered.

As an adult I have come to the realization that ERB is not a favorite of Black People. Actually I have not read anything favorable by any Black writer in reference to ERB. Most are turned off by the Tarzan movies without ever reading the books. The ones who do reference the books are very negative.

As I thought back over the years I have wondered why did Clarence love this book so much? I have done a word search and found the word "white" is only used

¹ Ed—As titled for the 5 part *Blue Book Magazine* serial, 1931. Published as *Jungle Girl* by Edgar Rice Burroughs, 1932, ERB, Inc.

² Krenkel, Roy G.—1918-1983

four times in reference to Gordon King. The word “white” is only used 7 times in the entire book. Four times for King, twice for the color of someone’s beard and once for a tiger.

The word “brown” is used ten times. Four times in reference to men and women and once to describe Foutan as having “Brown skin” and once as her having “Brown eyes”. Three other times it is used to describe animal colors. Once it is used to describe King when he had been in the Jungle and after a time his skin was tanned brown.

I had read somewhere that Rider Haggard wrote “Two Fisted Anglo Saxon stories.” I love Rider Haggard stories. I love “Two Fisted Anglo Saxon stories.” I make no apologies for that—I just do.

I remember looking on Bill Hillman’s³ site and seeing a photo of a meeting of ERB fans at someone’s home. There was a black couple there. I wondered if they were fans or just friends of some people who were invited there.

I know Tarzan is popular in just about every culture. I just don’t see Black people anywhere having a love affair with the works of ERB.

However, I can see why Clarence loved *The Land of Hidden Men*.

Gordon King

My second thoughts are concerning the person of Gordon King in the *Land of Hidden Men*.

When I was growing up I was a weirdo in that I was not into baseball as other kids were but I read everything I could about Track and Field. The pivotal moment for

³ erbzine.com

me was in 1956 when I saw the Olympics—from Melbourne Australia—on the little back and white TV in our living room.

The Athletes who captured my imagination at the time were Shot Putter Parry O'Brien and Pole Vaulter Bob Richards. I remember the announcer talking about Parry O'Brien and how he was the one who started facing the back of the circle and turning 180 degrees before releasing the shot. Because of Bob Richards I think I ate more Wheaties than any other kid in my school. They were my heroes at the time. From the time I was in elementary school till after high school I had created every Track and Field event I could on the farm.

When I first read the *The Land of Hidden Men* in High School I was struck by two things. First was the fact that ERB described Gordon King as a "Field and Track man in College". Never have I ever heard or read about it being *Field and Track*, it is always *Track and Field*. No big deal but it did make me raise an eyebrow at the time.

The second thing that struck me: what an athlete Gordon King was! Gordon King was extremely gifted as an athlete and physically. I have been a Cross Country and Track and Field coach for over 30 years, and I can tell you I know of no one like Gordon King. King is one very rare athlete. ERB wrote that King was gifted as a distance runner, winning one or two Marathons, and yet he was also incredible at the Javelin and Discus—throwing to championship distances.

Now these events are just non-compatible when it comes to the make up of the muscles. Olympic distance runners have about 80% slow twitch muscles while great throwers are about 80% fast twitch muscles.

Slow Twitch muscles are (weaker) slower contracting fibers, but very efficient at using oxygen to create

energy without lactic acid buildup. Fast twitch fibers contract very quickly, (making them very strong and explosive), but they also tire out very easily. Generally black athletes from America have an abundance of fast twitch fibers making them great sprinters, boxers, basketball, football players and any other sport that is explosive in nature.

Gordon King had to have what is known as the “Type 2a” muscle fibers. These are Hybrid fibers that are found very infrequently in humans. They have a very high contraction rate—making them very strong and explosive—and yet very energy efficient—therefore making them very resistant to fatigue.

Tarzan had to be the epitome of the Type 2a muscle group, if not the greatest human specimen on the planet endowed with this type of muscle fiber.

Needless to say I feel Gordon King is underrated in the ERB world for the unique human he was and I only wish that someday I could coach an athlete like him.

ERB Art

My third thoughts are concerning ERB Art.

I am around young people every day from elementary to high school. They all know I love the works of ERB. The license plate on my truck is “B TARZAN”. However I have a real problem sometimes trying to introduce the young ones to ERB because of the degree of Nudity usually displayed on the book covers. I have to be very selective in what I show. When I first started reading ERB I never thought about the lack of clothes in the stories. Even the Barsoom stories never made me think about “naked ladies”. It seems that after the artwork of the 60s with the Ace and Balentine books the artwork started to show more boobs and butts. I don’t have a

problem with “Boobs and Butts” in artwork but I would be in serious trouble if I showed artwork of this nature to a child or a teenager. I believe many parents would feel very uncomfortable with any man showing artwork that is on some of the ERB books to anyone under 18.

I know you are saying to yourself, “Well just don’t show it to them then.” I don’t. I guess my point is that sometimes I want to get them some new ERB book that comes out and I can’t because of the artwork. This is especially true with the Barsoom series. I give young readers the old G&D or paperbacks from the 60s but they end up worrying about messing them up because the books are so old.

I am just wishing there were some recent printings with great artwork on the cover that was *not* so lacking in clothing, especially in reference to the female anatomy. I know there are new ERB books out there without people on the covers, but those covers are boring. I just want to give an ERB book where a young one would look at the artwork—and that would spark their interest and imagination to want to open the cover and start to read. For me it was Roy Krenkel, Frank Frazetta and to a lesser degree Robert Abbett. Later I was to discover J. Allen St John, who is my favorite.

I don’t know any adult who is going to give their child an ERB book to read with a boob exposed on the cover. It seems to me that the few times publishers try to market books on the juvenile level written by ERB the artwork is uninspiring. Just my opinion.

UFOs

The fourth thing I wanted to throw out there is my experiences with UFOs. I think that as you start to read this you may think I am a nut case but every word I write

is true. I have never shared this outside of family, and even then selected family because of the ridicule that starts after I begin my story.

My father was born and raised in Shamokin, Pennsylvania. It is in the coal mining area of Pennsylvania. After he was married he moved about 2 hours away to the Amish area of PA. Big difference. From the time I was small I use to spend 2-3 weeks every summer with the Shamokin family.

On July 12th 1961 the US launched a satellite called Tiros 3. The Shamokin family and a neighbor—as well as I—were in the back yard at dusk because it was said that the orbit of Tiros 3 was so low you could see it in the sky. Telescopes and Binoculars were broke out to see it. I remember seeing a little red pin spot in the sky where the satellite was supposed to be. However, within moments my whole world was about to change.

The story I am about to tell is vividly burned into my memory.

We were in the back yard. I was looking skyward to my right and saw low flying lights traveling in our direction at a high rate of speed. I yelled for everyone to look at the lights, and soon the lights were over our heads at tree level—and everyone started yelling and screaming.

What I—and *everyone else*—saw was UFOs⁴ that looked exactly like flying saucers. Like 2 dishes turned on top of each other with a dome on the top. They were radiating a glowing blue light and passed overhead at treetop level, going fast. There were approximately 6-8 of them. Immediately four US Air Force jets screamed over our heads, flying so low you could see the markings on the side of the jets.

⁴ Ed—Shamokin, PA has reported numerous accounts. Four sightings between Jan-Jun 1967 and one each in 2008 and 2009.

I remember what seemed like the whole city yelling and screaming. The family rushed me into the house and told me not to leave. My aunt got on the phone and told my father to come up right away because she thought something terrible was about to happen.

My mother and father drove up that night. I don't believe any grownup slept. I fell asleep on the couch, listening to the grownups talk.

The next morning—I remember so clearly—my father sat at the small kitchen table drinking coffee. With everyone around, he read the newspaper out loud. The headlines were so big on the front page about flying saucers over Shamokin. Dad read that Air Force jets had chased the Flying Saucers from one end of PA to the other, but could not keep up.

After spending time with his family, my Father decided to visit a friend he grew up with, and had served together with in WW2. Dad's friend lived outside of Shamokin, in the mountains covered with very thick forest.

We drove, my parents and my two sisters, to see Dad's friend. We arrived at dark. Dad's friend had a girl my age (10) and a boy (6). We played outside for hours while the men talked inside. Dad's friend was named Johnny and was married to Pat, who was a nurse working the 3-11 shift at the local hospital.

Soon we kids were asked to come in the house. My father said I could stay up and watch Jack Parr. I was very excited and felt grown up. I hadn't been allowed to watch Jack Parr because I usually had to go to bed—while my parents watched him all the time.

Before Jack Parr was over everything went very, *very* bad. What happened next was scarier to me, at my young age, than what I have just written.

There was a long dirt drive from the house to the road. We heard Pat's car racing up to the house at an ex-

cessive rate of speed. Then the car stopped. Pat was hysterically screaming at the top of her lungs. The men ran out. They brought her into the house. She was out of control. All the children were crying. My mother tried to calm us down.

Pat kept screaming that there was a flying saucer by the red barn at the end of the road. She said, driving home, after rounding the turn at the red barn, she saw a flying saucer beside the barn—and just as big. Her car suddenly stopped. She was scared to death. Pat said the UFO did not make a sound, but—as she watched—it just shot up into the sky. At that moment the car started and she drove home as fast as she could.

I have to tell you that Pat *scared* everyone so bad that night. She would *not* calm down, yelling and crying and screaming all night until early morning, when they took her to the hospital. My mother watched all the children.

I never saw Pat again.

As we left to go home, my father stopped at the red barn and we got out, looking around. There was nothing to see. There was nothing abnormal. We went home.

That weekend changed everything. Pat never recovered. She ended up in a mental hospital for the rest of her life. Johnny had to take care of the two kids by himself—and ended up an alcoholic. The daughter had no supervision and ended up pregnant by age fourteen. The son started drinking at a young age. He dropped out of school and never amounted to much.

I remember—years later—going with my father to visit them. Such a sad family! So different from what I remembered.

My family used to spend nights looking at the skies—scanning for UFOs. I would lie for hours after dark, wondering if I would see them again. I saw the

movie “*Invaders From Mars*”⁵ with my family, and was a bit afraid for my Dad to go out alone after dark. My parents and relatives talked about “*War of the Worlds*” on the radio by Orson Wells⁶. I remember all these things so clearly.

One day my parents gave me a set of Ballantine books by Edgar Rice Burroughs about Mars. I read *Princess of Mars* and—from that moment on—I would lay on my back at night—looking for UFOs—and imagining life on Barsoom.

I still do.

⁵ Ed—National Picture Corporation, 1953, starring Helena Carter and Arthur Franz

⁶ Ed—*Mercury Theater on the Air*, October 30, 1938