



Elak of Atlantis

Henry Kuttner

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Explore the origins of Sword & Sorcery with Henry Kuttner's *Elak of Atlantis*! Published in *Weird Tales* to satisfy fans of Conan the Barbarian in the wake of Robert E. Howard's death, the four long stories depict a brutal world of flashing swords and primal magic, touched by a hint of Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos. Never collected in a mass market edition since their publication in the late 1930s, these exciting tales helped to establish a genre and are a critical part of any fantasy library. Included as a bonus are Kuttner's two Prince Raynor stories from 1939's *Strange Tales*. With seminal, thrilling adventure tales from one of the most important writers in science-fiction and fantasy, *Elak of Atlantis* is not to be missed!

Elak of Atlantis Details

Date : Published December 11th 2007 by Paizo Inc. (first published 1985)

ISBN : 9781601250469

Author : Henry Kuttner

Format : Paperback 221 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Heroic Fantasy, Sword and Sorcery, Fiction, Short Stories, Pulp

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From Reader Review Elak of Atlantis for online ebook

Lee Broderick says

Henry Kuttner was primarily a sci-fi writer and my ignorance of him can be laid firmly at that door. This book though contains a collection of his sword & sorcery tales which were apparently published to fill a Conan-shaped void in *Weird Tales* following Robert E. Howard's demise.

Kuttner's chief hero is the titular Elak who, wiry and wielding a rapier, does not conform to that physical shape. Assisted by his boon companion Lycon, the influence on Fritz Leiber is plain - the duo drink, womanise, steal and, most significantly, joke their way through their adventures. I also feel that the tales influenced others in more subtle ways - the slightly built prince in self-exile foreshadows Michael Moorcock's Elric, the integration of Lovecraftian horror would later be carried out by many but none more so than Karl Edward Wagner when he wrote his Kane adventures, and his depiction of Atlantis hints at Pat Mills's Tír nan Óg, where Ukko could be said to be an amped up Lycon, stripped of his bravery and fighting skills.

Whilst Kuttner was writing the Elak stories for *Weird Tales*, he also wrote his two Prince Raynor pieces for *Strange Stories*. I had to look that up. I really thought that these were two earlier pieces when I was reading them. The Elak adventures can sometimes appear rushed. It's perhaps a problem of the pulp format, rather than of the writer's, that can sometimes force too many events into too few words. The best writers overcome this though and Kuttner comes close to doing so in his Elak pieces. He fails miserably with Prince Raynor though and I'm forced to wonder why - did he just care less? About his character? Or about the publication venue?

Prince Raynor is physically similar to Elak but more priggish and less rounded. The stories clunk along with little regard for narrative development and, most uncomfortably for this 21st century reader, there's an undeniable racist component. Like Elak, Prince Raynor has a companion. Rather than a drinking buddy though, this character (whose name I can't remember, twelve hours after finishing the book, itself a damning fact) is a servant, described as a big ugly Nubian, who constantly says 'Thankyou Master' whenever Raynor saves him (curiously, this courtesy is never returned - the thanks, not the act) and is referred to at least once by another character when talking to Raynor as 'your black'. There are other examples, not related to that character, which (like his name) I've now forgotten.

Overall, the Elak stories, at least, are something that fans of swords and sorcery and of pulp fiction will probably still enjoy - eighty years after publication!

Gregory D. says

I know Kuttner from his Mythos fiction and his fine collaborations with his talented wife, Fantasy Grandmaster C L Moore, so I was curious to see how his early pulp fantasy, written in the years just after Robert E. Howard's death held up to the years.

Not well.

Although there are glimpses of fine prose and ideas, the Elak stories have thin characters, unconvincing

locales, rushed plots and just generally are forgettable. The collection is getting three stars only because of the two "bonus" tales of Prince Raynor, which, while still flawed, are far more evocative.

A disappointment to be certain.

Djordje says

OCENA: ★★★★ 3.5/5

Radnja: ★★★★ 4

Okruženje: ★★★★ 3.5

Pripovedanje: ★★★★ 3.5

UTISAK - Tipi?an pulp-fiction u duhu Hauarda sa primesama Lavkrafta. Vidi se da je pisac imao uzore u obojici. Sadrži ukupno 6 pri?a, 4 o Elaku iz Atlantisa i 2 od princa Rejnoru, s tim što je Elak više "Konanovski" junak i same pri?e su za nijansu interesantne (plus ga prati ve?ito pijan lopov Lycon).

Derek says

The Diversion Books ebook does not feature the Prince Raynor stories, instead holding them for a separate 64 page, \$3 download, which on a cost-density basis seems a dubious proposition. The Gateway books edition may contain both Elak and Raynor, but isn't available to me, to the US, or something.

I've come to expect immersion in this style of work, and it's jarring when the author has other ideas, or hasn't thought it through enough to have any ideas. Kuttner prefaces chapters with biblical quotes and modern poetry, and at one point describes a weapon "slicing through chain mail like cardboard."

Kuttner laces the stories with Lovecraftian-style imagery, from an otherworldly planar experience in "Thunder in the Dawn" to the spawn of Dagon in "The Spawn of Dagon". It is only in "Dragon Moon" that it gains real power: the conception of Karkora, the Pallid One (view spoiler) invokes cosmic horror and menace without being a Cthulhu imitation or an add-on member of the Old Ones Club.

I'm curious if his Iod stories likewise takes the Mythos in new and interesting directions.

Dantegideon says

The writing improves a lot towards the end of the book.

S.E. Lindberg says

Kuttner's Elak and Raynor - A "Must Read" for Leiber, Lovecraft, Smith, and Howard fans

Context: The Father of Sword & Sorcery Robert E. Howard dies 1936, and the Weird Tales market needs

weird adventures. By 1938, Henry Kuttner stepped up, in part, with his Elak and Raynor characters. These have been reprinted in Elak of Atlantis. Kuttner is later known to have produced many tales, especially with his wife C.L. Moore, who partnered with Kuttner after these stories were published. Kuttner also corresponded with contemporary masters H.P. Lovecraft and Clark Ashton Smith, and he did an admirable job of mixing “Cthulu-esque mythos” with “Conan-esque” adventure (and even Hyperborean lands, like Atlantis with Picts).

Elak is no Clonan: In the 1960’s many authors tried to extend Howard’s legacy with Clonans. Kothar, Brak, and Thongor were shallow clones of the original (i.e. they were all loners, all wielded broadswords, hailed from a northern cold climate, hated magic, wore loincloths, etc.). Elak was designed to follow the original Conan, yet was different. Elak had a companion (Lycon), used a rapier, wore clothes, and had a royal history which he shrugged off. Elak’s tales are firmly “Sword & Sorcery” but he is no clonan.

Kuttner’s Formula:

- (1) Have a companion (Elak has the drunk Lycon; Raynor has the loyal Nubian Eblik)
- (2) Rescue a new lady (worth dying for, but not worth having in the next episode)
- (3) Have 2 antagonists (one wizard and one swordsman) with separate story lines that intersect only with the hero’s journey
- (4) Seamlessly pay homage to Lovecraft, Howard, and Smith, in a unique way.

Trippy Cyclopean Pulp Style and amoral Hero: The style is uber-paced (expected of pulp style adventure), which rockets forward so fast it almost derails. Even in these short stories, expect *multiple, separately-motivated antagonists*-- this double density approach makes the pace ridiculously fast. The first story “Thunder in the Dawn” Northern European inspired fantasy, and the druid Dalan is more powerful and has a mission to save Atlantis; contrasting, Elak, steals a wife, runs away from his royal duties, and is less powerful than the Druid. I felt myself more attached to Dalan, who thankfully appears in a later episode (“Dragon Moon”).

A strength of Kuttner is his poetic sidebars echoing Clark Ashton Smith’s cadence (reflecting on Kuttner’s other work like The Book of Iod: Ten Tales of the Mythos, he had the ability to echo Lord Dunsany’s style too). Below is an example from “Thunder in the Dawn”:

Elak stood up, bracing himself. He stared in sheer astonishment.

It was no earthly landscape which he saw. Obscure color-patterns, shifting and dancing strangely, weaved in the cool air all about him... Yet the weird pattern was not only on the pale clay-colored plain on which he stood, but rather all about him in the air. He stood alone in a fantastic weave of somber shadows.

Colorless shadows, dancing. Or were they colorless? He did not know, nor was he ever to know, the color of the grotesque weavings that laced him in a web of magic, for while mind told him that he saw colors, his eyes denied it.

Partners and humor: Elak’s drunken side-kick Lycon was comedic and as loyal as a fellow thief could be. It seems very conceivable that the 1970’s duo Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser of Lankhmar by Fritz Leiber were inspired by this. Elak and Lycon are murderous thieves and their choices make them hard to like: In the second story, “Spawn of Dagon” (yes that’s a shout-out to Lovecraft), they murder innocent guards, accept payment from suspicious evil doers to kill another wizard without question. So they routinely steal and kill

without qualm, and when they are trying to save a maiden from distress it usually is for money. Yet the journey is solidly entertaining. A great mash-up of horror and adventure.

Phil says

The four stories contained in this book were entertaining, but a mixed bag.

The two longest stories, "Thunder in the Dawn" and "Dragon Moon" felt a bit unfocused, with extended, almost psychedelic interludes that reminded me of C. L. Moore's (Kuttner's wife) "Black God's Kiss." Unfortunately, this aspect of Kuttner's stories compare unfavorably to Moore's.

"The Spawn of Dagon" was the shortest story in the book, but also the most interesting. Elak and his erstwhile companion the perpetually drunk Lycon accept what appears to be a relatively straightforward mission to assassinate a sorcerer. Without giving too much away, there's an interesting twist towards the end and the two heroes find themselves in a tense situation. While Robert E. Howard's "The Tower of the Elephant" is my usual go-to, this would also be a good example of a story to introduce Sword & Sorcery to someone unfamiliar with the subgenre.

While the afore-mentioned Lycon and an ugly, rotund druid named Dalan captured my interest, Elak himself was a bit bland as a character. He's of a royal bloodline, with no interest in ruling. There are hints that he had a falling out with his father, but it wasn't expanded upon. His weapon of choice is a rapier, which is an uncommon choice for a Sword & Sorcery hero. Apart from that, Lycon and Dalan seemed more vividly rendered than the titular hero.

While I don't feel like I wasted my time with this book, the bulk of the stories were fairly forgettable. Moore's Jirel of Joiry was a lot more compelling than her husband's creation.

Charles says

Elak of Atlantis, by Henry Kuttner. Planet Stories, 2007, with an introduction by Joe Lansdale.

This anthology of some of Henry Kuttner's early work contains the four Elak of Atlantis stories that he wrote, plus two Prince Raynor tales. The Elak stories are: in order of first publication in *Weird Tales*, "Thunder in the Dawn," "Spawn of Dagon," "Beyond the Phoenix," and "Dragon Moon." The Raynor tales are: "Cursed be the City," and "The Citadel of Darkness." All these fall firmly into the genre of Sword & Sorcery, and they fit well together in this anthology because the characters of Raynor and Elak are quite similar. In fact, Elak just seems to me like an Older Raynor.

From what I had read previously to actually perusing these stories, Kuttner's Elak tales were written in part to capitalize on the success of Robert E. Howard's Sword & Sorcery works, particularly Conan. There is some clear influence there it seems to me, but these certainly aren't pastiches of Conan, like the Brak stories of John Jakes. Both Elak and Raynor are far more cultured characters than Conan. Both are from the nobility. Elak certainly has some roguish elements to his character, especially where women are concerned, but neither Elak nor Raynor would be considered a loner like Conan. Each has a boon companion that travels always with them.

In fact, I see more influence on these stories from H. P. Lovecraft than from Howard. All the pieces in this book have clear “elder god” elements, and when I looked up Kuttner on Wikipedia I found that he was a big fan of Lovecraft and was considered part of the “Lovecraft circle.” That’s how he ended up meeting his future wife and collaborator, C. L. Moore, although the Elak and Raynor stories were written prior that joining.

The nice thing about the Elak tales is that they combine the eldritch elements from Lovecraft with the more action based adventure work of Howard. This makes for a fine pairing of elements, in my opinion. Kuttner could also pull this off prose-wise. Although I didn’t find his writing as beautiful or as dramatic as either Howard or Lovecraft, there were some very nice turns of phrase and the mood of the prose fit well with the stories. Here’s one of the nicer phrasings: “Piercingly sweet, throbbing almost articulately, a harpstring murmured through the gloom.”

All in all, I liked these stories pretty well. I understand that Adrian Cole has written a story or two with the Elak character, though I’ve not read them. These were entitled “Blood of the Moon God,” which appeared in Strange Tales, Vol. 4. No. 3., and “Witch Queen of Doom Island.” More can be found on this at Cole’s website.

Links below:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Kuttner...

<http://www.adriancscole.com/shortstories>...

Ignacio Senao f says

Muy a lo Conan, y no es para menos, pues se empleo como sustituto tras la muerte de Robert en la famosa revista que publicaba sus relatos.

Tiene las imperfecciones del pulp de aquellos tiempos: mucho descontrol y desorden en la narración. Y sus cosas positivas: acción, sangre, monstruos, aventuras... Siempre ganara lo positivo, por ello merece la pena.

Recomendado para todos aquellos que no le gusta tomarse un kit kat en su vida.

Rubén Lorenzo says

Las aventuras de Elak de la Atlántida son solventes, con la cantidad justa de acción y fantasía. La narración es rápida y engancha de principio a fin. No tiene la intensidad ni la poesía de Howard, pero Henry Kuttner es un digno sucesor, su narración es vivaz y adictiva.

Me habría gustado que hubiese más relatos del personaje, el libro se me ha quedado corto con sus doscientas páginas justas. Supongo que eso habla bien de la saga.

Recomendado para amantes de la fantasía heroica y de las aventuras repletas de acción.

Ekel Adolf says

The stories in this volume originally were published in *Weird Tales* between 1938 and 1940. At first glance, Kuttner's *Elak* appears to be an unfortunate rip-off of Howard's *Kull of Atlantis*. (One can STRONGLY assume an Howard influence here) Is there any other reason or imaginable explanation why it should feature races like Picts or gods called Bal-Yagoth (sic)? The names and world background seems to have same issues in general, for example Elak of Atlantis is also fighting vikings and a villain called Elf...

However, after overcoming the first unintentionally funny details, the reader finds out that *Elak* is quite well written and the stories have a somehow "modern" vibe to it, not unlike the kind of heroic and epic fantasy (re-)established a generation later. As such, *Elak of Atlantis* is quite an impressive and surely entertaining experience.

Aurora Filippi says

Le quattro storie di ELAK raccolte nel volume ci presentano Atlantide con i suoi territori e città. La prima e l'ultima storia riguardano da vicino Elak, il suo passato, sebbene non troppo approfondito, e la sua famiglia. Sono state scritte a distanza di anni e l'ultima sembra quasi non ricordare la prima, sebbene gli eventi descritti siano piuttosto importanti. Le due centrali sono classiche avventure dove Elak ha a che fare con nemici che deve sconfiggere, sempre affiancato dal fedele compagno ubriacone. [...]

Recensione completata

Sandy says

When budding author Henry Kuttner wrote a fan letter to the already established "Weird Tales" favorite C.L. Moore in 1936, little did he know that the object of his admiration was a woman...a woman who, four years later, would become his wife, and with whom a collaboration would begin that was ultimately recognized as one of the sturdiest pillars of the Golden Age of Sci-Fi. Such a melding of talents was Henry and Catherine Lucille's, it has been said, that if one of the two stopped writing to go to the bathroom, the other could seamlessly continue the story in progress. Together, the pair wrote hundreds of short stories, in addition to a good dozen novels and novellas, often behind a bewildering plethora of pen names. Planet Stories' release of "Elak of Atlantis" allows us to see Kuttner in his formative writing years, a solo author just beginning to find his voice. The four Elak stories all originally appeared in the classic pulp magazine "Weird Tales," in part to fill the sword-and-sorcery void created when Robert E. Howard--the creator of Conan the Barbarian, King Kull, Bran Mak Morn and Solomon Kane--committed suicide in 1936. The Elak tales are somewhat crudely written, in the best pulp style, often show the weaknesses of a tyro writer, and are a tad repetitious, but are nevertheless fast moving, exciting, pleasingly violent and endlessly imaginative. Each packs quite a bit of story into its brief length, unfortunately features sketchy descriptions and ambiguous turns of phrase, highlights bloody battle sequences and fantastic magic, and is a genuine hoot to read.

In the first, "Thunder in the Dawn" (from the May/June '38 issue of "Weird Tales"), Elak and his fat, drunken companion, Lycon, go to Elak's half-brother's--King Orander's--assistance to save the northernmost Atlantean kingdom of Cyrena from Viking hordes and the evil wizard known as Elf. Into this longest of Elak tales Kuttner throws a vicious tribe of Pikhts, several battle scenes, a gruesome crucifixion, a faun-girl, and several visits to other dimensions. In "The Spawn of Dagon" (July '38), Elak and Lycon are hired to kill a wizard named Zend, and do battle with a horde of the fishlike children of Dagon. This brief tale gives the reader some definite clues as to Atlantis' ultimate fate, and is indebted to Howard's initial King Kull story from 1929, "The Shadow Kingdom," as well as to H.P. Lovecraft's "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" (1936). (Kuttner was a huge fan of Lovecraft and his Cthulhu Mythos.) It is a short but gripping tale. In "Beyond the Phoenix" (October '38), Elak and Lycon venture into yet another magical dimension to avenge the killing of the king of Sarhaddon, a western Atlantean kingdom where the duo had been doing mercenary work in the palace. Possibly the most way-out of the quartet, this story tells of warring gods, Assurah and Baal-Yagoth, with Elak caught most uncomfortably in the middle. Finally, there is "Dragon Moon" (January '41), a sequel to "Thunder in the Dawn." Here again, the Druid priest Dalan enlists Elak and Lycon's aid to defend the northern kingdom of Cyrena. Now, a mysterious, soul-sucking force known as Karkora is turning kings into zombies; Orander has chosen suicide in preference, and the realm is in chaos. This terrific tale is easily the best of the bunch, and features an exciting slave galley escape (perhaps inspired by a similar scene in the great Errol Flynn movie from 1940, "The Sea Hawk"), a titanic battle between the forces of Cyrena and Kiriath (with the barbarous Amenalks thrown in for good measure), and even a touching ending of sorts, entailing both sacrifice and an ascension to the throne. In all, no great literature, but surely red-blooded, pulpy fun!

To fill out the volume, and as a special treat, this Planet Stories edition gives us the only two Prince Raynor stories that Kuttner ever wrote. Raynor, it seems, was a young blonde lad who lived in the prehistoric kingdom of Sardopolis, in what is now the Gobi Desert. (A blond Mongolian? Now that IS a fantasy!) In the first tale, "Cursed Be the City" (from the April '39 issue of "Strange Stories," a competitor of "Weird Tales" whose short-lived run only extended to 13 issues), Raynor and his Nubian sidekick, Eblik, seek to avenge his father's--King Chalem's--death, unwittingly releasing the destructive nature god Pan. Fans of the great Algernon Blackwood might find this story to their liking. And in this tale's direct sequel, "The Citadel of Darkness" (from the August '39 issue of "Strange Stories"), which picks up days later, Raynor and Eblik go up against a ruffian named Baron Malric and his retainers, as well as the wizard Ghiar, to rescue the warrior maiden Delphia, whom they had encountered in the initial story. This latter tale is even better than the first, and makes excellent use of its prehistoric-zodiac structure. The reader will surely wish that Kuttner had continued on with more tales of both Elak and Raynor, as Moore had previously done with Northwest Smith and Jirel of Joiry. Kuttner's rapidly developing skills as a writer, abetted by his collaboration with Moore, could only have served his characters all the better. But the team was to soon become more of a science fiction powerhouse, to the field of sword and sorcery's eternal loss.

One further word as to this Planet Stories volume itself. Although I am grateful to the publisher for making these superrare tales available to the public, and although the book comes with a nicely written and enthusiastic intro from author Joe R. Lansdale, in addition to a helpful map of the Atlantean continent, the book remains something of a mess. It contains more typographical errors than any one book should ever be permitted to have, especially when it sports a cover price of \$13 for a paperback. It is painfully obvious that the book was never proofread. I have seen some of these tales in facsimile "Weird Tales" editions and can thus say that these many typos were NOT in the original pulp magazines. And the book even incorrectly gives "Weird Tales" as the source for the Raynor stories on the copyright page! Thus, Planet Stories is to be both thanked for its decision to release these stories as well as scorned for the sloppiness with which it has brought them to light. Even the lesser works of Henry Kuttner deserve the utmost care in their presentation. I can only hope that the other Planet Stories editions are in better shape than "Elak of Atlantis"....

Jeral Rivarola says

La edición es excelente. Pocas erratas. Las historias no son gran cosa. A diferencia de Howard, aquí no hay fuerza narrativa, los personajes son poco definidos y planos. Howard creía en lo que escribía. Aquí todo parece un escenario de cartón piedra y el mundo se extiende sólo dos metros más allá de lo que ves.

Martin says

Sword and sorcery in Atlantis. Some perfectly entertaining stuff. Playful too. Kuttner adds a touch of humor to these tales of dark gods, sorcerers, would be conquerors and deposed royalty. He uses Lovecraft a bit much maybe, or is it that others have used it a bit much since then? For my money I think he's the better writer of the marriage (C.L. Moore), at least for fun sword and sorcery. As with all Planet Stories releases (well, maybe not all the Gygax): recommended.
