

Sand Roughs

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Rarely Anything New

I don't buy too many new authors these days. I'm still reading ERB, REH, HPL, CAS, de Camp, and Carter stuff I haven't read. Some other authors to finish up include: Chester Himes, George Cuomo, Eric Ambler, Phil Farmer, and Jack London.

I have finished the complete works of Jim Thompson, Ian Fleming, Donald Goines, Robert Cormier, Richard Yates, and Raymond Carver.

All the above writers are dead, of course.

I was keeping up with some living writers for a brief while. I liked Bret Easton Ellis for a while but got tired of him. Same with Chuck Pahlaniuk. Sara Gran and Daniel Woodrell are still authors to buy. I had a fondness for S. E. Hinton's first four novels but have bought some of her more recent stuff and was disappointed.

Jared Diamond and Noam Chomsky are some living non-fiction writers who I will buy from time to time.

But all in all nothing much from live writers. Mostly filling up my shelves with stuff I should have read when I younger by the dead: Hemingway, Tennessee Williams, Vonnegut, Phillip K. Dick, and various one-time classics.

I really should be reading Black Gate, various S&S web sites, perusing the fantasy shelves at B&N and looking for new writers who'll thrill me. But it ain't gonna happen.

I still buy some pastiches of Fleming, Howard, and Burroughs when I see them. Putting me even further behind in any attempt to read completely original new works. My most recent read was an ERB knock-off called "Tarzan Presley."

I consider this a new original work. This was no mere pastiche. But a real literary attempt to try to cross-examine two very popular American creations. The author is a New Zealander named Nigel Cox.

As far as I know, the singer Ray Stevens was the first to combine Tarzan and Elvis Presley in his hit single "Gitarzan." This book is more ambitious than that but just as odd and amusing.

Cox boldly states Tarzan was born in New Zealand and adopted by gorillas. Tarzan's New Zealand jungle fictionally has not only the gorillas but also giant cave weta. Wetas are a plump hand-sized grasshopper type insect unique to New Zealand. In ERB lost civilization mode the weta here are cow-sized and will attack and eat the gorillas.

Mostly everything stays true to ERB in quite a few ways. Tarzan is nursed and raised by Kala. The gorilla leader bullies him. He finds the cabin, but instead of learning to read, learns to sing. The cabin here has a windmill power source and a working radio.

Jane is a bug researcher and discovers Tarzan. Tarzan and Jane have heaps of sex and she observes the Giant Cave Weta and eventually brings Tarzan back to civilization.

Tarzan is a big handsome muscleman and can sing like the dickens. He eventually goes to Memphis and cuts records at Sun Studios under the direction of Sam Phillips.

The novel really does a change here and becomes the Elvis story. The Presley's adopts Tarzan. Their son Elvis died in a truck accident and Mrs. Presley teaches Tarzan some of the rudiments of Christianity.

Tarzan Presley being the natural savage never really takes to religion but is every much the respectful southern gentlemen that Elvis was. He just likes sex, drugs, food, and rock n' roll too much.

The author had carried me along about halfway through the novel. He has a short quick natural style. You don't really question the unbelievable narrative and accept the combined stories of the fictional Tarzan and the real life Elvis without too much quibble.

In the first half, the author pretty much told the story, with only a little commentary, and then with a lot of poignancy. By the second half, the author overreaches and there is too much poignancy. It is still artful but it seems to be trying too hard. Clearly the author is a fan of both Tarzan and Elvis and sees some connection with both characters in their quest to be human.

We see the downfall of Tarzan Presley, as we all know it: too many bacon cheeseburgers, too many pills, too many bad movies, and too little good music.

It makes sense, a person raised by Gorillas could succumb to all that excess without realizing the harm. Surrounded by enablers who are neither all good nor all bad, it all just happened.

The last third of the book covers Tarzan Presley after his supposed death and the book remains poignant but loses whatever interesting narrative it had from combining the lives of Tarzan and Elvis and becomes its own thing that is not completely satisfying.

Nevertheless, I'm glad I read it. It was both old and new. I like that.