

The Hyborian Review

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Keep those e-mails coming...

Great REH Quotes

From *The Cairn on the Headland*, by Robert E. Howard, published in 1932 in *Strange Tales* magazine.

When the Gael and the Norse fought in Ireland in 1014, the Christians broke the back of the Odin-worshipping Vikings to end the Dark Ages. Buried in a tomb built that day is evil incarnate, in the form of the Gray God Odin himself. On the day those stones are disturbed, James O'Brien has nothing but a golden cross...

As I plucked from my garment the ancient cross, I felt the play of gigantic unseen forces in the air about me. I was but a pawn in the game – merely the hand that held the relic of holiness, that was the symbol of the powers opposed forever against the fiends of darkness. As I held it high, from it shot a single shaft of white light, unbearably pure, unbearably white, as if all the awesome forces of Light were combined in the symbol and loosed in one concentrated arrow of wrath against the monster of darkness. And with a hideous shriek the demon reeled back, shriveling before my eyes. Then with a great rush of vulture-like wings, he soared into the stars, dwindling, dwindling among the play of the flaming fires and the lights of the haunted skies, fleeing back into the dark limbo which gave him birth, God only knows how many grisly eons ago.

A Conan TV Show ?

James Van Hise, author of the 'zine "Blasts from the Past" provided the following information in the October 1996 REH UPA: In April 1996 Keller Entertainment in Los Angeles announced a deal worth \$5 million to produce a weekly Conan television series for the syndication market.

The actor who is slated to play the title role is a friend of Arnold Schwarzenegger's named Rolf Muller. At present Keller has a two-hour pilot script written by Steve Hayes, the head of project development, but nothing has been filmed yet. A presentation for CONAN will be made at the October 1996 MIPCON gathering in France where the financial backing will be arranged. Remember, CONAN will not premiere until 1998. The producers will use writers who have a flair for the genre, and 20 episodes should follow.

Regarding which version of Conan the TV series will use (considering how far afield the animated version was), Hayes explains, "The version will be a hybrid of Arnold's interpretation and the Milius interpretation in the first CONAN; that and what we absorbed after reading the books. We then made a bible of our own, which I wrote, and out of that bible will come the way we want to go. But it's too early to give concrete answers on all of that."

Page 4: Kull & Howard Movies

Book Review

by Garret H. Romaine

Conan: The Road of Kings
Author: Karl Edward Wagner
Bantam, 1979; Ace, 1987. 209 pages.

Karl Edward Wagner was a practicing psychiatrist and medical doctor before he became a full-time writer. The result for the reader is barely noticeable: a bit more mental posturing than is usual in a Conan story, perhaps; Wagner dives more deeply into motives, thoughts, suspicions and analysis than Howard would.



And, occasionally, the MD bursts through. In one swordfight in this book, "...the thin blade impaled the thick muscles that framed shoulder and axilla." Anatomically correct, that!

But in general, Wagner writes a good tale. He is, remember, the same Karl Edward Wagner who wrote the accompanying Howard notes in *Hour of the Dragon*. Allowed access to many Howard letters to and from publishers, editors, fans and the faithful, Wagner not only knows Conan, he knows all the Howard characters (esp. Kane).

Technically, *The Road of Kings* is a pastiche. However, I'd like to make a brief point about the whole concept of the pastiche. According to Webster's online dictionary, the definition of a pastiche is as follows:

pas.tiche \pa-'ste-sh, pa:-\ n [F, fr. It **pasticcio**]
1: a literary, artistic, or musical work that imitates the style of previous work

Notice there is no pejorative context here. A pastiche is simply an imitation. There's nothing wrong with publishers enlisting new writers to keep a publishing tradition alive. Conan has received more ink from the writers that followed Howard than he ever received while *The Great One* was alive. Indeed, following the publishing mess that *Hour of the Dragon* fell into, what with the British rights owner going bankrupt, Howard was moving further into western writing at the time of his death. One can only wonder how many Conan stories Howard had left in him.

Another Fighting Introduction

The opening to *The Road of Kings* is classic: Conan kills an arrogant officer in a fair fight, yet is arrested and sentenced to hang for that act. Soon, Conan finds himself plucked from the hangman's noose by high-minded rebels who seek to overthrow their Zingaran despot, Rimanendo. So, tis to be another rebellion!

Rebellion is a common enough theme in the Cimmerian's life; he has allied himself with outlaws and rebels more than once. But the situation here demands more than simple rebellion. These plotters seek revolution as well, with altruistic principles of representative democracy to adhere to. The Cimmerian rises to command the rebel army, but in a predictable



twist, Conan's friend Mordermi becomes but a pawn for the wizard to use, and Conan must seize the crown twice in the same story. Toss in a legion of undead warriors, some pretty lasses, and a beautiful druid, and all the elements are there for another modern tale that adds to the legend.

The Flight of the Falcon

The rebels have good intentions, but in order to turn their dreams from debate society to legislative action, they need money. Thus, a fantastic robbery scheme is hatched. First, the plotters drop in on the King's costume ball and take up positions. Then, the beautiful Sandokazi is marched in to the party, dressed as a falcon, (fan-dancer style), tethered to her brother. All attendees, including the reader, start leaning forward as Wagner unfolds an incredibly erotic passage. He starts with this teaser: "Sandokazi lured and tempted with too-brief glimpses of her supple dancer's figure beneath the fluttering streamers of her feathered cloak."

Finally, she began her dance, slowly at first, then building speed. "For a moment Sandokazi seemed to hang suspended in midair, her lithe figure completely naked as her feathered wings bore her on high...So swift were her movements that the wreaths of white and umber feathers swirled all about her like living wings-one instant revealing a blur of white breast or tanned thigh, in an other heartbeat molding close to her figure in a second skin...At last, as the frenetic music reached a crescendo, Sandokazi once again leapt high into the air, arms outspread, pirouetting in midair. Her cloak of feathers spun straight out from her shoulders, disclosing her entire figure in nude perfection, as she seemed to take flight above the polished floor..."

After her bow, the thievery starts, as Sandokazi's twin brother, Santiddio, demands payment from the rich party-goers. A hubbub breaks out, but he is in control. "Softly, my lords!" Santiddio warned, drawing his rapier. "It's only your gold and jewels we want, not your lives!"

After their brazen act, there is finally loot aplenty to quarrel over. Now the wizard Callidios conjures his way into their group. Conan's fear and loathing toward wizards and sorcerers becomes apparent with this short speech:

"He's a Stygian sorcerer, and he'll seem less subtle when he's shorter by a head," Conan spat. "Kill him now, or we'll all live to regret it."

This is straight out of Howard and *Rogues in the House*, where Conan and Murilo meet up with the Red Priest, Nabonidus, in the caverns beneath the wizard's home.

"They say in the Maze his heart is black, so his blood must be black, too..." Obviously, Conan would like to gut him and find out.

Of course, his hand is stayed, to the eventual ruin of most then in the room.

Fantasy 101- Scare Thy Reader Well

When Callidios raises a legion of 1,000 obsidian warriors who are guarding the tomb of a long-dead king, the horror is almost missing. True, he has them marching out of the sea, encircled by strands of kelp and greenery, impervious to swords or spears. But the horror is muted and tame. Perhaps it is because the Final Guard were merely men, turned to stone yet undead. They don't spit fire, can't weave spells, and lack fantastic, ghoulish forms. All they do is fight until told to stop. Maybe that is why they don't rate very highly in the Horror Hall of Fame.

So much more might have been done with these mute giants. And, to his credit, Wagner leaves out gargantuan insects or incongruous dinosaurs. But sword-wielding statues? Turning a foe to dust or robbing their soul works better than just hacking away. You may recall when Howard indirectly gave us his insight into all this:

A voodoo sacrifice can be described in such a dull manner as to take all the real fantasy out of it, and leave it merely a sordid murder. I will admit that few writers of fiction touch the true heights of horror -- most of their stuff is too concrete, given too much earthly shape and dimension. But in such tales as Poe's *Fall of the House of Usher*, Machen's *Black Seal* and Lovecraft's *Call of Cthulhu* -- the three master horror-tales, to my mind--the reader is borne into dark and *outer* realms of imagination."

- from *The Children of the Night*, copyright © 1931 by Popular Fiction Publishing Company, for *Weird Tales*, April-May, 1931.

It feels logical that Howard might have advised against antagonists such as the Final Guard, based on their far too "earthly shape and dimension." Savage butchery aside, the Guard did not push the imagination enough.

Yet Wagner redeems himself throughout the book. For example, what heroic tale would fail to include a bloodied protagonist, proving that he has been tempered in the flames of battle?

Here is Conan's last battle with Mordermi, a man who was once a friend:

Dashed half senseless, Mordermi was hurled to the floor. Standing over him, Conan contemptuously withdrew the broken rapier blade from his shoulder muscles and threw it across the room.

"So much for your gentleman's toy," he growled. "I could have finished you with a score of your stickpins in my hide!"

Mordermi's face was a bloody ruin, his nerve broken. "You swore you wouldn't kill me," he cringed. The Cimmerian, blood pouring from his shoulder, eyes murderous with rage, was not a reassuring sight.

"I won't kill you," Conan sneered. "Why would I have only fought to disarm you, if I didn't keep my word? I'm a man of honor, Mordermi -- you said it yourself."

The roar of the mob shook the palace now. Conan could hear the smash of glass, the crash of doors being forced from the floor below. In a moment the mob would be surging through the palace. Conan had seen that before, too. He threw open the windows of Mordermi's chamber. A dozen feet below, hundreds of angry faces looked up at him. Rocks pelted through the aperture. The mob was in a bloodthirsty mood. They wanted vengeance after the Final Guard's reign of fear.

Conan hauled Mordermi to his feet, dragged him to the window. The mob saw movement there, and began to surge forward.

"Conan, what are you doing! You promised not to kill me!"

"I'm not going to kill you," Conan repeated.

"You said you would plead your case to the people. Well, I'm going to let you."

Thrusting the frenzied king through the window, Conan dropped him to the waiting mob below. The screams that lasted for some time afterward reassured the Cimmerian that the short fall had not killed Mordermi.

Barbarian vs. nobleman – when will those fops learn? Wagner had even inserted a quick sword fight between the two near the beginning of his tale, neatly presaging the final battle.

The Bantam edition of this book, which is not the cover seen on page two here, also featured embedded artwork. Small, quick sketches are dotted throughout the book. Perhaps Bantam was afraid that most of its readers were unweaned comic enthusiasts. Too bad, because with writers like Wagner, they needed more copy and less art.

- GHR

Kull Movie Plot Based on The Shadow Kingdom, plus Conan

This e-mail was out on the Web on the Universal Studios site, and seemed worth passing on.

From: (MoonDragon) 6 Oct 1996 07:25:58

Greetings,

A while back I read Shauna's post of the plot of the movie, Kull the Conqueror. I retired to my library for some research and came up with the following.

While the initial portions of the plot are from the Kull series of short stories by R. E. Howard, the majority of the plot is from the Conan series. The Shadow Kingdom, a Kull story, is used to establish Kull as the protagonist of the story. It also introduces the supporting character of Brule and defines the relationship of the serpent people to Humankind. There may also be some elements from Exile of Atlantis, a depiction of a brief incident from Kull's youth, but this is hard to confirm.

The remainder of the plot seems to draw most heavily on Conan the Conqueror, with some possible draws on Conan the Usurper. The principle departure from these sources is the gender of the resurrected character. I recommend these two books, along with the rest in the series to any interested parties.

It was a matter of speculation circa Conan the Destroyer that Ms. Delaurentis wanted to continue the series. Mr. Schwarzenegger chose to demur on repeating the character. With the character of Conan so inextricably linked to his persona and a number of look alike productions in the sword and sorcery genre glutting the market, no new projects were undertaken.

My own speculation is that the renewed interest in fantasy has inspired Ms. Delaurentis to reopen the chapter. By transforming the principle character from Conan to Kull, the series can continue to exploit the volumes of source material available from the Conan series while avoiding the tedious but inevitable comparisons of Mr. Sorbo / Mr. Schwarzenegger as the barbarian king.

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Howard Movie Now Screening; Critics Seem to Approve So Far



The upcoming general release of *The Whole Wide World* will be a puzzle for many Howard fans – no battle scenes full of armies and heroes; no Byzantine plots against aging despots. The story involves the

(unrequited?) love affair between Howard and a local author/ teacher, a young Novalyne Price Ellis. She was an attractive but feisty young flower, and she had a bittersweet, romantic and turbulent relationship with REH.

Price's intense desire to become a writer initially drew her to Howard. Their brief two year relationship met with many obstacles, including Howard's offbeat eccentric ways. But theirs was quite the romance while it was alive; passionate, intellectually stimulating, and always challenging. What female character would REH



have introduced based on her? Bêlit, Valeria, or Zenobia, perhaps? The movie stars Renee Zellweger (*Jerry Maguire*, *Empire*) as Price and Vincent D'Onfrio (*Full Metal Jacket*, *Blood Brothers*, *Strange Days*) as Howard.

Who Wins Word Wide Web Wars?

One issue, I'm stuck on Staale's page. Next month, I've bookmarked the Japanese REH Fan Club site. This month, it's Aguaman's effort, especially with all his pointers to the upcoming screen action. Try <http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/6570/conan.html> for a real good time. And hey, keep it up, all of you. After all, who wins this war? We all do!

Send feedback to: gromaine3@comcast.net

NEXT Issue: *Conan and the Grim Grey God* (Sean Moore/Tor; October, 1996)

Also: StoryTeller: The new comic from Barry Windsor-Smith at Dark Horse. Will they pick up Conan as well?

FINIS