

The Hyborian Review

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Welcome to all the newcomers...

Great REH Quotes



From *The God in the Bowl: Space Science Fiction*, September 1952.

Arus saw a tall, powerfully-built youth, naked but for a loincloth and sandals strapped high about his ankles. His skin was burned brown as by the suns of the wastelands, and Arus glanced nervously at his broad shoulders, massive chest, and heavy arms. A single look at the moody, broad-browed features told the watchman that the man was no Nemedian. From under a mop of unruly black hair smoldered a pair of dangerous blue eyes. A long sword hung in a leather scabbard from his girdle.

Arus felt his skin crawl...

[then later on in the story...]

Conan stood in the great corridor alone, save for the three corpses on the floor. The barbarian shifted his grip on his sword and strode into the chamber. It was hung with rich silken tapestries. Silken cushions and couches lay strewn about in careless profusion, and over a heavy gilded screen a Face looked at the Cimmerian.

Conan stared in wonder at the cold, classic beauty of that countenance, whose like he had never seen among the sons of men. Neither weakness, or mercy, nor cruelty, nor kindness, nor any other human emotion showed in those features. They might have been the marble mask of a god, carved by a master hand, except for the unmistakable sign of life in them--life cold and strange, such as the Cimmerian had never known and could not understand. He thought fleetingly of the marble perfection of the body concealed by the screen; it must be perfect, he thought, since the face was so inhumanly beautiful.

But he could see only the finely-molden head, which swayed from side to side. The full lips opened and spoke a single word, in a rich, vibrant tone like the golden chimes that ring in the jungle-lost temples of Khitai. It was an unknown tongue, forgotten before the kingdoms of man arose, but Conan knew what it meant: "Come!"

And the Cimmerian came, with a desperate leap and humming slash of his sword...

'StoryTeller' by Barry Windsor-Smith Might Rekindle A Flame!

Issue one of StoryTeller was a beauty, an absolute masterpiece by perhaps the greatest comic artist who ever graced a barbarian's blade with blood. Smith's efforts on Conan the Barbarian 1-24 were the stuff of legend, topped off by what many consider the most perfect comic ever penned, *The Song of Red Sonja*.

Here, Smith introduces three new stories: The Freebooters, ParadoxMan, and Young Gods. This 40-page, oversize edition is one for the ages.

In *The Freebooters*, a wimpish youth searches out Axus, a strange, bully of a thief who resembles Conan, complete with horned helmet, but for an amazing girth. Fat and somewhat disagreeable, Axus manages to best a foe in combat and, while sitting on his head, er, breaks wind. Not your average super-hero...

ParadoxMan is a young Rod Stewart look-alike who rides a time-traveling motorcycle. He lands in a time with both dinosaurs and aliens. They zap his forehead, he passes out, and on to the final story.

Young Gods is reminiscent of Marvel's old Dr. Strange stories, and I'm racking my brain to remember if Smith did the Doc. The backgrounds are full of colored spheres, as the Young Gods are preparing for a big wedding. Here we get Smith's best rendition of a woman since Red Sonja, but only that first face is effective. The rest of the tale features well-drawn males, in Smith's classic 'Art Nouveau' fashion, but the women are misshapen and the proportions are wrong. And the dialogue suffers in places: "This whole 'Weddings of the World' schtick is making me nutz!" wails one Brooklynesque babe.

Still, there are beautiful pages of artwork here: rich, luxuriant jungles; intricately detailed city scenes; and fabulous backgrounds. The artwork alone makes this well worth the ride. One can't help but wonder, however, if Smith would be able to convince Dark Horse to take on the Conan stories, with the writing essentially in place, so he can spend more time on the art.

Ok, ok, so we're biased!

Page 4: Web Sites; more on the REH UPA

Page 4: Top Eight Howard Stories (his choices!)

Book Review

by Garret H. Romaine

Conan and the Grim Grey God

Author: Sean A. Moore

Tor, 1996; 204 pages.



Cover Art: Doug Beckman

This is only Moore's third addition to the Conan legend. In January 1994, Moore's first Conan tale, *Conan the Hunter* saw print. It was a tale of

bewitched jewelry and, like *The Fugitive*, Conan had to find the real killers to save his own hide. In January, 1996 Moore published *Conan and the Shaman's Curse* (refer to *Review #3*, where *Shaman's Curse* was ably reviewed by David Romaine). Both books showed early promise. In *Conan the Hunter*, Moore was just getting started. *Shaman's Curse* was filled with better sorcery, but the plot was not very intricate and wasn't as well populated as *Grim Grey God*. In its defense, *Curse* had the very Howardesque battle to the death of an ancient race, and a good climbing scene. What it lacked was wining and wenching...

A Simple Recipe

Like most Tor authors, Moore gives us all the right ingredients for a good tale: wizards, women, and treasure are leading staples. Not just any wizard, either: he dredges up Thoth-Amon, whom Conan had already bested earlier in his career. And to oppose the Stygian snake worshiper, Moore brings back Mitra's own Caranthes, a good mage in a pinch. The woman is Jade, a shadowy empress of the world's thieves, spies, and assassins, who is known in every city by a different name. Like Red Sonja, Jade cannot give herself to a man, yet she soon falls for the mighty Cimmerian. Add to the mix a legendary treasure buried three thousand years beneath the desert, one rich enough to interest Set and Mitra, and the story is underway.

Homage to Howard

Perhaps it is because of a building confidence, but Moore does a good job of cementing earlier historical accounts of Conan and weaving them into his current yarn. Guess which classic tale Conan is referring to here:

"...as a youth, I abided for a time in Nemedi. There was an occasion when a foppish fool of a Numalian hired me to borrow a certain object from a nobleman – without telling that nobleman, mind you. When the blasted watchman caught me at my work, my neck nearly made its way into a Nemedian noose. Whilst making my escape, I spoiled a plot of Thoth-Amon's and slew a minion spawned in Set's blackest breeding pit."

Sounds like *God in the Bowl*, does it not? (See page 1 - ed.)

Moore also reminds us of the legend of Taurus, the master thief a young Conan accompanied on a journey long ago. This one is definitely easier.

"My... father obtained it from a Nemedian thief, who put a clever forgery in its place. *Before* the temple was burned."

"Impossible! No thief lives. Even I ... well, no man could enter the place. Four thousand hillmen perished before even one had eyes upon the temple's interior."

Kylanna [*later known as Svitri, then Jade*] shook her head. "No, not impossible – not for Taurus of Nemedi. Though he may no longer live; in this you may speak truly. He disappeared, years hence, but he procured the tiara ere he vanished."

"Taurus! I met him long ago, in Shadizar...but he did not disappear. The bite of a devil-spider sent him to Hell."

Tower of the Elephant, of course. Remember their meeting: "By Bel, god of thieves!" hissed Taurus. "I had thought only myself had courage to attempt *that* poaching. These Zamorians call themselves thieves -- bah! Conan, I like your grit. I never shared an adventure with anyone; but, by Bel, we'll attempt this together if you're willing."

In another ode to Conan tales of yore, Moore recalls an obscure cult of stranglers. Conan finds himself engaged in a wrist-wrestling bout with a massively-shouldered lout whose accent reminds him of someone...

"Blue-eyes no beat Valeg," came the first guttural words from the crooked mouth.

Conan frowned as he recognized a peculiar, yet familiar, Kosalan accent, mangled though it was. Where had he heard it before? The memory eluded him as he struggled. Veins stood out in purple relief on his temples, and sweat poured anew from his forehead when he recalled an encounter from years past and surmised the nature of Valeg's inhuman musculature. In a hidden temple of Zamboula, the Cimmerian had fought Baal-Pteor, a Kosalan who had called himself a strangler of Yota-pong. In that barbaric and evil land, where men worshipped the bloodthirsty demon-god Yajur, priests trained youths to slay men by strangulation. In the bare hands of their executioners, sacrificial victims by the thousands had had their heads brutally twisted - *nay*, torn - from their shoulders.

A Tasteful Love Scene

Moore's Conan is no longer chaste and sober; he guzzles wine in Chapter 1. And later, Conan and Svitri (not yet known as Jade) spend a night in the baths to break the celibacy of the saddle.

Admiring her sleek form for what had to be the twentieth time that day, Conan grinned. He was not

so fatigued or preoccupied to miss how the striped velvet clung to her curves...

Svitri inhaled deeply and sighed, closing the curtain behind them. With little modesty, she turned her back to Conan, casually unbuttoned her tunic, and shrugged it off. She looked over her shoulder as she unlaced her breeks, smiling as if at some private jest. "For too long have I gone without a proper bath myself," she said, stepping out of her low boots, sliding the leather leggings down her shapely legs and kneeling to set them aside. She slide languorously into the water until her full breasts were barely submerged.

Conan quickly kicked away his sandals and doffed his dusty rags. Laughing loudly and lustily, he jumped into the basin with a splash before Sivitri willingly came into his arms.

Complications Within Enigmas

So rich is this plot that it would take pages to unfold the entire thing. Or, if you prefer, to sort out who will die first and who will die worst. For the author does an excellent job weaving in and out of the tale. Moore can't just reveal a broken spire from the rolling sand dunes of the desert. It has to be guarded by a death-spell. Superiors can't just send people out to do their bidding; they have to be governed by death spells. He uses sorcery to plague all sent to capture the giant pearl carved into a solemn gray god. First, Jade, empress of the thieving guilds, sends forth master assassin Toj to trail Conan, perhaps to slay him just as the Cimmerian emerges with the gem from Nithia, the Brass City. But to bind Toj to her, she first gives him an ensorcelled dagger - The Red Asp - then infects him with the *kalb* queen beetle, a nasty little insect that will burrow along his bones to feast on his heart. When he returns with the gem, Jade will kill the beetle - and not before.

Toj is a stronger character than Conan has met in many years. Conan knows nothing of the wasting sickness that protects Nithia; once the Cimmerian blunders out of the temple with the gem, Toj plans to kill him, steal the trophy, then race back to Jade and bargain for his life. Toj thus has need to protect Conan not once but several times, and not just with easily retrieved daggers, but also with his razor-sharp *shaken*, which Toj, a master recycler as well, repeatedly hacks from his dead victims to reclaim.

Toj is able to shadow Conan more than once, until he finally is forced to reveal himself, spinning some fanciful lie to justify being there. Conan marvels at the stealth of the man. "A woodland-born Pictish scout could not have surprised him so," thinks the Cimmerian.

A Wizard and his Ring

Yet Toj was just a warmup; the headliner opponent in this story is, of course, the Stygian wizard Thoth-Amon. If you needed a description of the chief snake-worshipper, Moore offers this:

Here was the same giant of a man, his skin the rich brown of mahogany. His only garment was a robe of white linen that stretched across his broad shoulders and swept the tops of his sandaled feet.

Thoth-Amon is convinced to hand over The Black Ring to Tevek, a novice wizard with delusions of grandeur. The ring will aid in most black arts, cutting the time needed to conjure up demons to minutes instead of months. Thoth could go himself to Nithia - indeed, he is interested, as the secrets buried there would enable him to stamp out Mitra from the face of the earth. But the Grim Grey God is protected against any who have sworn to Set, as Thoth has, so Tevek, who is unbound by such an oath, must go instead. Thus he slips on the massive hammered copper ring that Thoth-Amon bestows upon him:

It wound itself about his finger and clasped its tail in its jaws, then again became an inanimate ring. Immediately he felt its power infuse him; his vision blurred as the Black Ring hurled its dark energy at his body and mind in overpowering waves.

That's some jewelry! Just to make sure the ring gets back to him, Thoth-Amon conjures up a burning candle - woe to Tevek if it goes out.

The Stygian stretched out his arms and spread them apart. In the air between his palms, the ghostly image of a white candle appeared. A thin, black flame sputtered from its wick. "The Taper of Death - nay, it cannot be!" shouted Tevek in outrage...

For true Howardophiles and other long-time followers of Conan, using the name "The Grim Grey God" might seem an irritant. Who can forget the hard-to-find Conan The Barbarian #3, with its small distribution? (Marvel was afraid Conan was going to fail!) The Grim Grey God was Borri, who sent forth the choosers of the slain, and who perished when his last follower died. But in this story, the name refers to a massive pearl carved into a loathsome shape:

According to legend, the god had been artfully carved from a dull, silvery pearl twice the size of a man's head. Upon the marble floor it squatted toadlike...

Indeed, this remarkable chunk of gemstone is reputed to have many names: The Dark Pearl of Atlantis, the Ashen Bane of Kull, the Grim Grey God. But for old time Howard scholars, the story "The Cairn on the Headland" is the story of the ultimate Grim Grey God.

Battle Royal Between Good and Evil

The final battle at Nithia is a whirl of action. We have Caranthes, the good wizard representing Mitra; Thoth-Amon, representing Set; Conan and Svitri, now revealed as Jade; Toj is there, with the beetle gnawing toward his heart; and Tevek is there, wearing the ring and rushing against the Taper of Death. Tevek is able to reanimate anyone who died in horror; unfortunately he brings to life Dhurkan Blackblade, brother of Xaltotun some two thousand years ago. Thoth-Amon then throws at Conan countless skeletal warriors trying to block the Cimmerian from entering the temple.

Like well-drilled soldiers, they advanced in a formation, flanking him, offering no weak point to attack.

"Erlik blast your foul soul, Stygian!" Conan shouted. "Send a thousand of your mindless minions against me, and I'll still spit on your bloodied corpse ere the sun rises!"

With that, he filled the desert air with the hair-raising Cimmerian war cry, and threw himself into the thick of the advancing army...He rode upon a carousel of carnage..."

All in all, Moore has done an excellent job of reminding us why we enjoy reading Conan. He blends in the classic pieces of a well-told tale, with references to legends of yesteryear. His dialogue appears genuine, and his characters are alive. Like Howard, he tosses in alliterations with well-timed regularity. Moore has shown an ability to learn and grow, and I for one eagerly await his next effort.

Especially if there is another Beckman cover. Tor has yet to release their schedule for 1997, despite a nag or two from me, but one can only hope that Moore is penciled in somewhere...

- GR

Move over Schindler; Howard's List

From a query Howard sent to Denis Archer, listing eight "representative" stories as of June 1933:

1. Wings in the Night (Kane)
2. The Tower of the Elephant (Conan)
3. Kings of the Night (Kull)
4. The House of Arabu (Pyrrhas)
5. The Valley of the Lost (Texas)
6. The Scarlet Citadel (Conan)
7. The Horror from the Mound (Texas)
8. The Children of the Night (Brits)

When You Just Can't Get Enough...

I mentioned the REH UPA briefly in an earlier edition, but left out a few details. For those who can't get enough of "talkin' 'bout Bob," REHupa may be just the place. Further information can be obtained from the current leader:

Morgan Holmes (e-mail: mholmes939@aol.com)
10011 W. Main Rd.
North East, PA 16428

Web Wars, Round 4

It wouldn't be fair to mention Conan web sites without tossing in a plug for one of my favorite bookmarks: Mike Kane's most excellent page: <http://members.icanect.net/~mikekane/index.htm>
Best part of Mike's effort: the Ken Kelley .JPGs.

Send feedback to: gromaine3@comcast.net Try <http://www.intercom.no/~savage/conan/publications/menu.html> for reprints.

NEXT Issue: Another golden oldie, *Conan the Rebel*, by Poul Anderson; and if luck holds, a review of the upcoming movie about Robert E. Howard: *The Whole Wide World*.

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