

The Hyborian Review

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The barbarians are coming...

Great REH Quotes

From *The Vale of Lost Women*, first published in Magazine of Horror No. 15, Spring, 1967. © Health Knowledge, Inc. *The Ophirean wench Livia has just escaped from a bloody battle between Conan's band and a rival jungle potentate...*

So she came at last to a glade in the midst of the valley, and saw there a great stone, hewn as if by human hands, and adorned with ferns and blossoms and chains of flowers. She stood staring at it, and then there was movement and life about here. Turning, she saw figures stealing from the denser shadows – slender brown women, lithe, naked, with blossoms in their night-black hair. Like creatures of a dream they came about her, and they did not speak. But suddenly terror seized her as she looked into their eyes. Those eyes were luminous, radiant in the starshine; but they were not human eyes. The forms were human but in the souls a strange change had been wrought; a change reflected in their glowing eyes. Fear descended on Livia in a wave. The serpent reared its grisly head in her new-found Paradise.

But she could not flee. The lithe brown women were all about her. One, lovelier than the rest, came silently up to the trembling girl, and enfolded her with supple brown arms. Her breath was scented with the same perfume that stole from the white blossoms that waved in the starshine. Her lips pressed Livia's in a long, terrible kiss. The Ophirean felt coldness running through her veins; her limbs turned brittle; like a white statue of marble she lay in the arms of her captress, incapable of speech or movement.

Zamorian Thieves Strike Web Site...

Stale Gismervik's Web page (and home of *The Hyborian Review*) was sabotaged yet again, this time by Zamorian thieves hired most likely by Stygian wizards. There was a hard-drive theft at ProSalg/InterCom, which is his Internet provider. Due to this and their old, old backup, he has had to rebuild a lot of his pages, including the new discussion board. But it's back now, ready for action.

As Stale says, "May Crom crush their toe-nails, and Set eat their brains..."



Page Four: A new catalog is offered...

Hercules, Xena, and now Conan...

Story Review

by Garret H. Romaine

The Thing in the Crypt

Author: L. Sprague de Camp and Lin Carter
Ace Fantasy; 1967. 14 pages. Cover Art by Frazetta

In 1967, Ace Fantasy published a collection of Conan stories in its first edition – titled simply, *Conan*. The book featured much "value-added" – it contained the famous map of the Hyborian world, tossed in a snip from *The Nemedian Chronicles*, and it contained a six-page introduction penned by de Camp as well as the famous five-page letter from Howard to P. Schuyler Miller and his friend, Dr. John D. Clark. On top of all that was the 13-page essay, *The Hyborian Age, Part 1*. The cover was by Frank Frazetta – Conan with his legs clamped around the ape-monster Thak from *Rogues in the House*.



Whatever its faults, the book had enough power to launch the revival of Conan's stories that lasts today.

First, a disclaimer: I can't hate de Camp. I don't think he's a rogue, a charlatan, a fake, a no-talent hack, or any of the rest of the names hurled at him. I actually don't have much feel for him at all. I know he is alleged to have uttered that pretty much all of Howard's heroes were the same, something I don't agree with and something he may or may not regret.

I suspect his editors told him to clean up some of the discovered manuscripts, and so he did. He wasn't power-crazed, or he wouldn't have shared any of the spotlight with Nyberg or Carter. I don't get the impression de Camp grew too rich from his work with Howard's stuff. Anyway, I needed to get that off my chest, if for no other reason than to give the purist crowd one more case of indigestion...

Seeing as how the story is now the first in lineage, before *The Tower of the Elephant*, let's take a closer look at *Crypt* and see just where the Howard influence was strong enough, and where it seems to vanish.

First, though, I'll recap the story in case you don't feel like double-checking your library. This is the first Conan story in *Conan* – he is running from wolves, trips into a crypt with a long-dead king, removes a great sword from the skeleton on the throne, it comes to life, and he ends up tossing it into a fire in order to escape.

Howard vs. 'Non-Howard'

In his introduction to the Conan paperback that launched the 1960s revival, de Camp writes: "I have also, in collaboration with my colleagues Lin Carter and Bjorn Nyberg, written several pastiches, based upon hints in Howard's notes and letters, to fill gaps in the saga. Two of these are included in the present volume."

By checking the copyright statements, it was simple enough to deduct that *The Thing in the Crypt* and *The City of Skulls* were both new. De Camp had tinkered with *The Hall of the Dead*, and Carter had worked over *The Hand of Nergal*. But *Crypt* and *Skulls* were nearly cut from whole cloth. I would be curious to find out just how much of a "hint" de Camp had for the 34 pages of *The City of Skulls*. Presumably more than he had to go from for *The Thing in the Crypt*, because, after a lengthy italicized introduction, it was only 15 pages in length.

I checked with Rusty Burke (noted Howard scholar and *Hyborian Review* subscriber) before going much further, and Rusty doubted de Camp had much to work with. He suggested checking with Glenn Lord or de Camp, but added that the latter is "very frail." So, if either gentlemen are reading, I'm curious about the origins of *The Thing in the Crypt*. And I wish you had e-mail!

There is one story that *Crypt* is a dead ringer for: *The Castle of Terror*. It's another Carter/de Camp effort, this time from *Conan of Cimmeria*. Just as *The Thing in the Crypt* started with wolves chasing Conan south, this time lions are chasing him north:

A barbarian of barbarians, bred on the bleak hills of distant Cimmeria, the iron endurance and fierce vitality of the wild were his, granting him survival where civilized men, though more learned, more courteous, and more sophisticated than he, would miserably have perished. Although the wanderer had gone afoot for eight days, with no food save the game he had slain with the great Bamula hunting bow slung across his back, the mighty barbarian had nowhere nearly approached the limits of his strength.

More than once as I have run in road races, I've thought of the image spun as Conan jogs through the grasslands. But crossing the plains alone is dangerous:

Some primal instinct of survival alerted him to the presence of peril. He halted and stared about him through the long shadows cast by the setting sun. As the hairs of his nape bristled with the touch of unseen menace, the giant barbarian searched the air with sensitive nostrils and probed the gloom with smoldering eyes. Although he could neither see nor smell anything, the mysterious sense of danger of the wilderness-bred told him that peril was near. He felt the feathery touch of invisible eyes and whirled to glimpse a pair of large orbs, glowing in the gloom... The lions of Kush were on his track, lusting for hot blood and fresh flesh.

C'mon, that ain't bad writing! Some alliteration, some metaphor; true to the image of Conan as an indomitable life force...de Camp and Carter didn't do too badly there. I'm half-inclined to think they had found some snatches of manuscript left over by The Great One!

Conan's journey south was uneventful for a ways, and de Camp thus took time to set the story, borrowing heavily from Howard's published notes. De Camp covers the escape from the slave pens, the flight south, Conan's dreams of cities and soft, high-born women...and even tosses in repeated references the infamous story of Conan's part in the sack of Vanarium. When the table is set, de Camp turns the wolves loose.

Spell Check, Please

Notice, if you will, before we go much further, that the spelling of this seemingly insignificant fly-speck of a mud fort on the frontier is in debate. In Howard's letter to his fans, he writes the fort's name as Vanarium, which makes sense to me, as it is likely close to Vanir territory. To spell it 'Venarium' makes no sense linguistically.

Also, while I'm in my nit-picking grammarian mode, I have another question. I have always seen Hyboria spelled I-A. Yet Hyperborea is spelled E-A. What gives? In the first Kull book printed by Baen last year, the author in front made the mistake of writing Hyborea, and my blood froze for a second, fearful I'd been misspelling Hyboria in the masthead of my newsletter...then I realized that I would have been corrected many times over if I had tried the wrong spelling. I suppose the 'borea' in Hyperborea refers somehow to the aurora borealis or something similar? I know there was a god, Borri, known as the Grim Grey God. Hence the spelling for Hyborians may have something to do with Borri? A future doctoral thesis, perhaps. On with the review.

Chains

As it is, Conan is running, and has twice stopped to make a stand. First, he crushed a pair of wolves with his chain. Then, in a fight on the melting ice of a small river, the boldest of the pack caught the iron links in his teeth and wrenched the weapon from Conan's grip. The lad runs for his life, spots a place to make a stand, and darts between two large rocks.

But in the movie *Conan the Barbarian*, the Schwarzenegger unit is chained at his leg, and has to carry the links with him as he runs from the pack. When he emerges from the crypt, he cuts the chain with a swipe at his right foot, and in the next scene is wearing wolf skins. In an early comic, if I recall, Conan will not remove the chain from his wrist until he has killed a number of Hyperboreans. Three different interpretations!

Howard vs. de Camp

The more you read, and re-read, this story, the more obvious it becomes that Howard didn't write it. How could you figure it isn't Howard? Here's one passage: "Several wolves had fallen in with him—he had a brief impression of a wolf, half immersed, scrabbling frantically with its forepaws at the edge of the ice—but how many had succeeded in scrambling out, and how many had been swept away under the ice by the swift current, he never learned."

Never learned? How about "cared not"? The boy was fighting for his life, against timeless foes of the lone woodsman. There is no pity. There is only the stubborn struggle for life.

It may be that Howard had the advantage because he created, and cared for, his hero. He knew how he wanted his creation to react, almost by instinct. De Camp, on the other hand, had a ton of editing to do, and ultimately published a huge amount of text. But it wasn't a hero he created, and it's clear he struggled occasionally. For, as Mark Twain once observed in Pudd'nHead Wilson, "Nothing so needs reforming as other people's habits." No, wait. "There is no greater urge than the urge to mark up another man's copy." Either one, actually.

The point being, de Camp saw many faults in Howard's text. Wrote de Camp once:

As a writer, Howard had faults as well as virtues. His faults arose mainly from haste. Hence his stories contain many inconsistencies and slipshod carelessnesses. He tended to repeat certain elements in story after story: the combat with a gigantic serpent (Howard said he hated snakes) or man-ape; the vast green stone city built on the

lines of the Pentagon; the flying menace in the form of a winged ape or demon.

Critics have also held against Howard the author's immaturity in human relationships, especially in his heroes' attitude towards women, and the violence of the tales...

Yet, two paragraphs later, de Camp makes good:

What seems like excessive bloodshed and emotional immaturity, however, were normal in the pulp fiction of Howard's time. Writers did not then deem it their duty to endow their heroes with social consciousness, to sympathize with the downtrodden ethnics, to detail the mechanical problems of copulation, and to make it plain that they were on the side of peace, equality, and social welfare....Withal, Howard was a natural storyteller, and this is the *sine qua non* of fiction writing...Whatever their shortcomings, Howard's writings will long be enjoyed for their zest, vigor, furious action, and headlong narrative drive; for his 'purple and golden and crimson universe where anything can happen – except the tedious.'"

[From "Skald in the Post Oaks" *Fantastic Stories*, June 1971, © 1971 Ultimate Publishing Co. and reprinted in *The Spell of Conan*. (1980).]

There were even smaller, more subtle nits to pick as I marked up my copy of *Crypt*. As the chase progressed, de Camp wrote, "Devoid of feeling, his leaden legs moved like pistons." A mistaken sports cliché of the later years, this line has no place in a story set so long ago, when pistons were unknown. Score a micro-nit.

Later, when de Camp has the wolves howling after Conan, "like the scarlet demons of Hell as they track and pull down a doomed soul," there was some good horror and fantasy, but Howard almost always used the color black when talking about such themes, and seemed to save red for his bloodier scenes. But that's my last nit.

What I Liked

On a macro level, there were some great images in *Crypt*. For example, file this under *Conan the Boy Scout*:

From the floor of the antechamber he gathered a fistful of tinder and several stone chips. Back in the inner chamber, he made a pile of the tinder and tried the stones on the iron. After several failures, he found a stone that emitted a bright flash of sparks when struck against the iron... Soon he had a small, smoky fire sputtering...

Then there's this passage as Conan lifts the weapon:

Crom what a sword! With a blade like that...The boy swung the sword, feeling his thews swell with power and his heart beat faster with pride of possession. Gods, what a sword! With such a blade, no destiny was too high for a warrior to aspire to...The boy expanded his chest and boomed out the savage war cry of his folk.

Of course, that woke up the Thing, and the fight was on. "Slash and strike as he would, nothing could even slow the dead thing that that shuffled after him." But once the youth "struck with greater cunning," as it were, and whacked away at the knees, the fight was all but over.

Since mummies that burn really smell, Conan does not take much time to loot the rest of the crypt, which is somewhat non-Howardian. I can't reason that a penniless wanderer would be happy with just a sword, but the authors really want him out of that crypt. In the movie version, he next meets up with the cat-woman, who makes him pay a price similar to what Bran Mak Morn paid in *Worms of the Earth*. In this iteration, even the wolves have fled, the night is young and the stars are out, so he proceeds southward.

I don't know about you, but I've panned for gold a few times, and it takes a lot of work just to get a small flake here and there. Back in the tomb, there was a string of coarse gold nuggets about the cadaver's throat. Those would make a nice grubstake for a traveling bravo. But, perhaps it is his lot to enter Zamora penniless in order for the gods to spur him to The Tower of the Elephant?

- GR

She's No Red Sonja

From the group that is bringing us both *Hercules* and the Giant Lesbo Maneater *Xena*, comes *Conan the Adventurer*. There are reports that the Conan TV series is starting to film in April and will be shown this fall.

Conan is played by ex-Mr.Universe, and Schwarzenegger pal Rolf Moeller. Rumors are that Rolf will also make a cameo in the new *Batman* movie that has Arnold as Mr. Freeze. Guesses are that the Conan TV show will have buxom babes, sword and sorcery, a feeble sidekick, certified bad guys...but probably no recreations of any Howard stories.



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I pulled this from the alt.fantasy.conan newsgroup and thought it was worth passing on. The price sure doesn't seem to be high...

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NEXT Issue: Time for a true Howard story. **Tower of the Elephant** in one month.

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