

The Hyborian Review

Volume 3, Number 5.

May 31, 1998

Imagine Conan guarding Karl Malone...

Great REH Quotes

From *Return of Skull-face*, copyright 1977 by Fax Collector's Editions for Glenn Lord.

A Howard fragment finished by Richard A. Lupoff. The beginning is pure Howard.

Sir Haldred Taverel sat up in bed, conscious only of a bewildered, crawling horror. He raised his hands to his head, trying to collect his scattered faculties, as a man will do when wakened suddenly out of a deep slumber.

He had dreamed – or was it a dream, that hideous yellow face which had floated before him? Sir Haldred shuddered. The memory of those glaring inhuman eyes and the loose bestial mouth was startlingly vivid. But he could not tell if the memory were that of a dream or ---

He began piecing the fragments of jumbled memory together, the while his eyes wandered about the great room with its costly and somber furnishings. While his eyes sought for stealthy movements among the antique hangings he recalled the events of the last few months...



Reprint info - See page 4.

Marvel Comics: Fourth Time's the End (part 2 of 2) *By Garret Romaine*

Conan and the Lord of the Spiders Conan and the River of Blood

Just as I was trying to wrap up a review of the third Marvel three-part series, the fourth one was published. I hesitated for a microsecond and then made a command decision: wrap up with this issue. Two consecutive whacks at Marvel are enough for me. To have dragged this out any further would have been a bit much for all of us.

All of which is pretty telling -- these series just aren't worth spilling much ink over.

Some may ask, "Why even bother?" It's true that the Marvel comics of today can be disappointing; and looking at the other productions that are in circulation, from other publishing houses, one can only wish Marvel would let go of the bronzed barbarian and let someone else take a whack.

Until then, we're going to get art like this from 'River':



So, lets get going. First, I'll wrap up with an inspection, er discussion, of the female lead in CLOTS (Conan: Lord of the Spiders) Helliana, is a wench that would have totally confused Robert E. Howard.

Then we'll skip around River of Blood enough to understand what went wrong. Hang on...

Women as Objects

The intro scene to the Spider series features Conan with two buxom wenches in his lap. These aren't Hyborian age hags, however. They both wear that high thigh thingie so popular now; these look good in comics, but the reality at the beach is an abundance of cellulite and well, never mind. Let's stay in the fantasy world and forget the rest. The blonde also has Madonna-like cones of carnage out front, the kind with skewers for nipples. Now that's a Hyborian look.

Howard's tavern wenches tended toward the less glamorous side, closer to the underbelly. They were sullen, swollen, and enslaved. So two hard-bodied, dolled up tavern wenches tend to leap out of place. They both look equally vapid; but only one will accept Conan without any coin in his purse, so he goes home with the blonde, into a trap.

Enter Helliana. It's her trap; she's hired the blonde, plus a small army of bushwhackers. If Howard wouldn't have appreciated the glamorous tavern wenches, he would have been even more confused with a wench like Helliana.

Here's a babe with a pierced ear, short hair, and a streetwalker's edge. When finally tracked down and trapped by an enraged Cimmerian, she taunts him thusly:

"Go ahead and kill me. I've been pierced by fouler things than cold steel."

Conan of course objects, for Howard's chivalry is well-known to Roy Thomas, author of this tale.



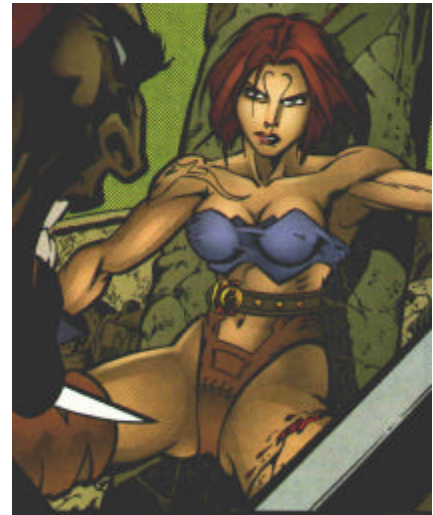
But Helliana won't let it go. She continues her taunting:

"I've knocked about in Zamora's fleshpots since I was ten...and I've never met a man who wouldn't do anything to a female he could get away with."

Where's the Chivalry?

Hmm. Howard, of course, could have pinned his best girlfriend, Novalyne Price, any time he wanted to. Instead, his courtship was an honorable and commendable action. Yet this young lass has a chip on her shoulder slightly smaller than Koth.

Unlike Howardian creations Valeria, Belit, and Dark Agnes, Helliana lives in the past, holding a grudge and burning from within. Belit could command a crew, and Valeria would



travel the world; even Dark Agnes would never dwell on the misfortunes that befell her. Hell, why should any of them regret the day they first ran a sword through an oaf's guts? Yet Helliana still recalls the death of her parents and seems in need of a good 12-step program...

So there's Conan, staring at a wench with a weapon, wondering what he's going to do next. Before he can make a move, she pulls the classic Three Stooges trick of two fingers to the eyes. Nyuk nyuk. He chases after her but ends up with a gold coin from Arenjun depicting the Tower of the Elephant.

Some things to like...

There are some touches to the work here that are worth appreciating. Book Two starts with a tavern fight; Conan wins, but he is recognized. There's a nice blurring effect in one panel where Conan tried to stick two men with one thrust. The sword is purposefully brushed blurry, almost like a hologram. It's a technique used a couple more times, and actually effective. Later, there is a gorgeous dark green page, complete with Conan enmeshed in a giant web. The hues are stunning. Harpagus pays a visit and pumps liquid lotus into Conan's veins. The hues now change to red and orange, as his lotus dreams swarm his brain.

Conan now becomes a lotus victim; he sees all the victims he ever killed, some half skeletal, accusing; and some seemingly alive. Even Belit shows up, looking good at first, a rather '90's rendition of Conan's favorite she-pirate. She, too blames him for her death and all...then there's more blur-a-vision, as part of the dream. Conan is alone, eyes aglow, face grim, trying to shake off the effects of the drug.

A note about the covers in this series -- they're nothing special. But at least they're better than this ungainly Conan from the Usurper series...(see right)



At this point, the comic seems to drop into a series of butt shots, cleavage offerings, and crotch-oramas starring Helliana.

Here's a typical effort: (see below)



I don't mean to dwell on this; rather, I wanted to set up this black & white panel pulled

down from Barry Windsor-Smith's web page:

Last, and Least: River of Blood

With Helliana gone, having dove past Conan into a sheet of flame to supposedly die, dispatching Harpagus to the infernal regions, we are left once again with Roland Greed, er, Green, writing River of Blood.

It's a shoddy tale, in typical Green fashion. A band of alligators communicate with a wizard, who in death passes on the trick to Conan. Accompanied by Valeria, he fights a band of marauding warriors for no real apparent reason.

And, there's plenty of trademark Greenisms. Take the ubiquitous thought bubble: he can't tell us a story without delving into what people think, rather than what they do.



Second, Conan is actually forced to stoop to baby-snatching as Green struggles to fill three issues with the same story.



I can't even imagine Howard dispatching Conan to pick up slaves to man his oars; he was always setting the oarsmen free. Here, he not only stoops to slaving, but kidnapping children. There ought to be a law. But then Roland Green is no Roy Thomas. One wonders just how much Howard this pasticher has read.

The Whole Tired List

With that, the review of these four series ends. Roy Thomas was a bright spot, and confusing as the motivation for Helliana was -- why did she linger in the streets? What did she want from life besides revenge? -- she at least was a person. The depiction of Valeria in 'River' was as one-dimensional as it could be. Credit Thomas' writing for that, or give Green another demerit -- take your pick. I just don't want to talk about it anymore. I probably spent too much time as it is.

Anyway, where did all this come from? What's the pedigree? For those who don't remember all the Marvel titles, let's look at the history of Marvel's meddling with the Conan legend, starting with the information found in April (and now gone) at Marvel Mania: <http://smash.mgz.com>

Comic Books- there have been at least 6 Conan comic books so far...

Savage Tales. A black and white comic, long since dead. Only hit about 7-8 issues with Conan.

Conan The Barbarian. A color small-format comic, long since dead. Reached about 250 issues.

Conan The King. A color small-format comic, long since dead. Twenty, twenty-five issues, tops.

Savage Sword of Conan. A large format black & White comic which began in 1975. Dead since 1995. Hit about 200 issues in its time.

Conan Saga. A large format black & white comic. No original stories, it just reprinted early material from **Savage Sword of Conan**. Stopped publication last year. Hit about 50 issues?

Conan. A color small-format comic. Dead since 1996. May have done 25 issues.

Conan the Savage. A large format black and white comic. Replaced Savage Sword of Conan, seems to be about the same quality and artwork. Dead since 1996. Didn't last long; 20 issues?

Conan the Adventurer. A color small-format comic. Dead since 1995. Ten issues or so.

[These don't include Giant Size, What If? Treasury Editions. They're the main series -- some of which I remember actually looking forward to reading. The titles have had their ups and downs, and lately, mostly downs. The series began with enormous sales (at least by 70s' standards), just to drop during the 80's.

Conan the Barbarian was finally canceled in 1994, after 75 issues. One wonders if a tie-in with the TV series has revived sales; maybe they aren't all that depressing. Figures aren't available, and I'm not about to call Marvel and ask. That's one radar screen I'd just as soon fly below.]

Again, quoting from the web page: "Marvel made Roy Thomas (responsible for the success of the series and writer of the 115 first issues and last 35 of **Conan the Barbarian**, first 60 of **The Savage Sword of Conan**, and of the first 8 of **King Conan**), and the almost unknown Rafael Kayanan, (whose style was pretty similar to that of the first stage of Barry Windsor-Smith, who had made a sequel for Red Nails (titled **Conan and the Gods of the Mountain**), as artist, to try to fill all the holes in the barbarian's life. In **Conan the Adventurer** we saw the origin of the alliance between Conan and the Aesirs, the assault on Vanarium, and many other things we hadn't seen in the previous collection. Unfortunately, it was canceled with issue 14. Curiously, while US sales were dropping, in Europe the opposite was happening."

After **Conan The Adventurer**, canceled by Marvel in June 1995, **Conan** began to be published, a series of not outstanding quality, drawn by Barry Crain and written by the now-famous Larry Hama, who was quite less in shape than he is now in G.I. Joe or Nth Man. Anyway, the series barely reached 20 issues."



Conan, by Barry Windsor-Smith

So, now we're up to date. The four current series didn't leave me looking for more; instead, they drove me back to the dusty pages of old Howard stories that I haven't read in awhile. Until Kayanan releases his vision of Solomon Kane later this year, I won't be dealing with comics for awhile. I keep hearing rumors pointing to Dark Horse as the new publisher of a Conan comic. Now that's exciting. – **GR**

The Hyborian Review is published monthly by Garret Romaine and distributed free via e-mail. Send feedback to: gromaine3@comcast.net. Back issues - <http://www.prosalg.no/~savage/conan/publications>

NEXT Issue: Something...anything...by Robert E. Howard.

finis