

The Hyborian Review

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We're back with more thoughts on your favorite barbarian.

Great REH Quotes

From *The People of the Black Circle*, by Robert E. Howard, said by Fritz Leiber to be "the best of the Conan stories, and perhaps the pinnacle of Howard's writing. Tightly plotted, pithily poetic, gorgeously ornamented, manned by grand heroes and villains and also by characters torn between good and evil, and above all, brimming with flavor and glory..."

[Conan enters the mansion of Chundar Shan, a governor of Peshkauri, the wild country where Vendhyan plains meet the Himelians.]

The invader was a tall man, at once strong and supple. He was dressed like a hillman, but his dark features and blazing eyes did not match his garb. Chundar Shan had never seen a man like him; he was not an Easterner, but some barbarian from the West. But his aspect was as untamed and formidable as any of the hairy tribesmen who haunt the hills of Ghulistan.

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Book Review: Point/Counterpoint

by David M. Romaine and Garret H. Romaine

Conan and the Emerald Lotus

Author: John C. Hocking (1995)

TOR oversized; 279 pages.

Cover art: Ciruelo Cabral

DMR: By Crom, Mitra, Ishtar, and Bel, I finally got around to contributing to the Saga of Conan, the most infamous barbarian of the Hyborian Age. After researching the dusty archives, and exploring the outer reaches with the help of various lotuses, let me share with you the tale of *Conan and the Emerald Lotus*. At first I was skeptical of this new author and his ability to write a genuine portrait of Conan. But I've got to admit that I was truly impressed and enjoyed reading this book.

GHR: I, too, enjoyed this story. The exuberance of a new writer is always appreciated. [grin]

Movie Talk

Well, it apparently is true - Kull will spring to the silver screen sometime next year. Shooting is tentatively scheduled to start this August on the as-yet unnamed movie, to star Kevin Sorbo of TV's "Hercules" fame. Guess he'll be dyeing his hair black!

Let's just hope this isn't a repeat of Conan the Destroyer.

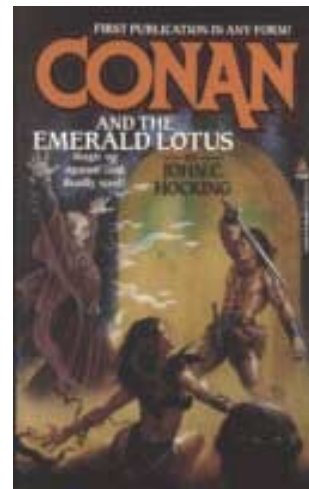
"You come like a thief in the night," commented the governor, recovering some of his composure, although he still remembered that there was no guard within call. Still the hillman could not know that.

"I climbed the bastion," snarled the intruder. "A guard thrust his head over the battlement in time for me to rap it with my knife-hilt."

"You are Conan?"

"Who else? You sent word into the hills that you wished for me to come and parley with you. Well, by Crom, I've come! Keep away from that table or I'll gut you."

See page 4 for more about Kull.



DMR: The story starts out innocently enough, with Conan in a tavern, drinking some good wine, and looking for work.

GHR: Yes, and this is a good start, as cursed too many of the recent Tor offerings have involved precious little wining and wenching.

DMR: Seating the mighty barbarian in a backroads ale house gets things off on a promising thread. Of course it doesn't take him long to get in trouble with a

wizard. Before he knows it, Conan is doing this wizard's errand against his will. And to make things worse he's got to steal from another wizard!

GHR: I thought this was an excellent beginning. All who have perused the Chronicles know of the barbarian's fear of sorcery. To double-entwine him is a nice trick.

DJR: Fortunately for him the other wizard is a beautiful woman (if somewhat aged). Even better, the she-wizard is escorted by her two faithful servants, one of whom is young, very beautiful, and very deadly.

GHR: The other servant is a mute Khitan giant who is very protective and suspicious of the newcomer; there is a bit of sexual tension as well... is the Khitan a paramour? Hard to guess. Conan is eventually able to free himself from the requirement of thievery against the beautiful sorceress and is no longer controlled by the first desperate wizard.

DMR: The big Khitan however, remains suspicious. It is then that Conan learns about his true adversary: The Master of the Emerald Lotus. It seems that this Master and the wizardess and the first wizard are all connected. Conan offers his substantial skills as a guide against the Master Wizard.

GHR: By now things were threatening to get complicated, but the author did a good job of keeping his various threads in motion. The book was getting very hard to put down.

DMR: By Crom, so far I liked this author's style. I judge by entertainment of reading, and authenticity and carrying through with his character profile. When I read this book, I really felt like I was reading a part of Conan's life. Some recent books have been too formulaic, too easy to anticipate, and have not done the required development.

GHR: We better not get into some of the past work. I will say that sometimes I find myself reading for no other reason than because it's new. But trudging on gets depressing, because all is predictable after a few chapters.

DMR: Agreed. Another good twist to this story was the weird zombie that the first wizard created to get Conan and the stash of emerald lotus dust. This zombies' goal (about all he can remember, what with his diminishing memory) is to complete his mission and receive his grateful death so his soul can have

true rest and not be trapped in a dead vessel. An almost Howardian touch!

GHR: What was the name of that zombie?

DMR: I must apologize for the lack of specific names, as the ancient scrolls are best read after midnight, and I suspect the lotus was second rate.

GHR: Did you feel the story bogged down here, or did you have another criticism?

DMR: No, I was satisfied with the pace. As chronicled so many times before, Conan finds himself on another deadly adventure with comely company. Actually, if there is one thing that I have to criticize, it is the LACK of explicate adult encounters with the women. Face it, Conan is a STUD! Conan stories are quality adult entertainment, not rated "G", God forbid.

GHR: If there is one common theme in the recent books, it is Conan as sober and celibate. I thought the worst offender was Carpenter's Lord of the Black River (*as reviewed here last issue – ed.*)

DMR: Exactly. As the party (and I use the term loosely) goes south, Conan reveals his wisdom and skills at romance. For the first time in about two years, there is finally no question when he and the attractive female servant have mutual compassion on a boat on the Styx.

GHR: Not too many steamy details or observations, and all too brief, but that's okay; it's just that this single encounter is the only moment in the whole book when Conan's lust for life is affirmed.

DMR: After the River Styx is crossed, they trade horses for camels and get ambushed. Fortunately, Conan is wise enough to keep a very sharp lookout and has spied a place to retreat to.

GHR: At this point in the story the author continues the tale from the ambusher's point of view.

DMR: This is a clever device, as it shows the reader just what kind of enemy Conan is to deal with, and gives the reader a new take on their favorite barbarian – that as a potential adversary.

GHR: The ambush leader deems this little party of four easy pickings and truly believes that he is lucky. The fool.

DMR: Unfortunately for him he's dealing with Amra, and things don't go as planned. Also this is where the issue of the Emerald Lotus and its addictive powers comes into play. The wizardess was trapped in her addiction, and was trying to diminish her need for the stuff, BUT, this ambush forced her to use it and in the process drain herself. Her troubles are now worse than ever.

GHR: Another '90s touch Howard would never have lingered over – trust me, there is no 12-step program for lotus addiction.

DMR: That's right. Feed them to a snake and get on with it, I say. From here the author changes point of view again, and we see the story from the eyes of the Master Wizard, and learn more of the horrific details about the demonic emerald lotus plant. Supposedly, this is a demon in the form of a plant, that was summoned before Atlantis drowned. It lives on blood, and uses its victims' bodies to form the frame of its own structure.

GHR: I liked the way the plant fed. Truly hair-raising.

DMR: As a reader, my morbid side greatly enjoyed this description of the emerald lotus. For pure inventiveness, I thought it was very original and almost invigorating.

GHR: By now, we've lost sight of Conan for awhile. Must be time for a battle or a demon or something, according to the Holy Law of Super Heroes: One mishap every ten pages...

DMR: Right on cue, Conan and his company encounter a very nasty and ancient trap. It is a demon who uses heat in the desert to lure and consume souls. Of course, Conan manages to overcome the demon with his indomitable will, but just. By Crom, remember Conan's will power!

GHR: I've always admired that trait – his human power which makes him more believable than, say, a Man of Steel.

DMR: Well, he'll need it. Conan and his company are in the deep desert now. Where is an oasis? Well, the ancient maps, and Conan's memory, tell of only one. Of course, this is near the Master Wizard so HE leaves a trap of his own, at the oasis.

GHR: Meanwhile, the unliving but still powerful zombie swiftly creeps up from behind. These are the

elements of most Tor tales – the barbarian finds himself at the middle of a huge web, where numerous forces set in motion long ago finally coalesce. At this point Conan has an undead zombie chasing him, a Master Wizard tracking him, a mute Khitan eyeing him suspiciously, desert raiders, ancient curses, and who knows what else? Unlike some of the Howard stories, where Conan is battling a single, worthy foe, in these modern tales the Cimmerian is frequently battling a Cast of Thousands. Sometimes I miss Thoth Ammon: a worthy villain who could carry the Bad Guy Role all by himself.

DMR: Finally Conan's party comes close enough to make camp and still be undetected (as long as no fire is made). Conan and the Khitan go scouting and find the wizard's stronghold. When they return the two women are gone! At this point I was sure that the zombie had taken or killed them through his unflagging unnatural strength. Instead, Conan and the Khitan ran into him.

GHR: Good writing, eh? By Mitra, if you have that many enemies chasing your hero, use 'em all! At this point, the book wraps up with some good, old-fashioned battles, a few tricks and surprises, and, of course, a victorious Cimmerian. We'll leave you to your own devices to find your personal copy of this chapter from the Nemedian Chronicles.

Next issue: Book Review -- *Conan and the Shaman's Curse*. Plus: a roundup of Conan Web sites we enjoy. And a report on the death of the comics. Send any and all feedback to:
gromaine3@comcast.net

How to Win Playing Virgin's 'Conan the Cimmerian' Computer Game on the PC

An earnest young apprentice asked last month if anyone has any experience with the computer game for IBM PC-compatibles. It just so happened that *The Hyborian Review* was able to locate a noted expert: David Romaine.



Says the pro: It is a good idea to drop things as you go, sort of like dropping bread crumbs in a maze. It is very easy to lose your way, especially in the Underground.

When you meet the undead king, you need the gem amulet that gives you a fireball. Or, if you don't have any other flame, a torch with flint and steel also works. Keep in mind Conan's encounter with the undead king in the movie *Conan the Barbarian* – you need fire!

Many uninitiated acolytes find themselves stuck when confronted by the indestructible metal demon. According to the Hint Book, you should go back down to the jungle ruins where the magnetic iron pyramid is. Being less than intelligent, the demon follows you relentlessly. Being metal, he sticks to magnets. So will all your metallic valuables if you don't drop them first. There is no way to kill this demon – but you can stick him like a bug on flypaper if you can get him near the big magnet.

After that, you're on your way. Keep on the lookout for the freeze amulet. I don't want to give everything away – find it yourself. Because you'll need it to freeze the living statue. In the future, I'll be happy to discuss the CD-ROM version, which had some movie scenes included.

David Romaine

King Kull: The Fabulous Warrior King

[In *Delcardes's Cat*, by Robert E. Howard, Kull is confronted by an undead evil.]

Kull tore the veil away with one motion and recoiled with a gasp. Delcardes screamed and her knees gave way; the councilors pressed backwards, faces white, and the guards released their grasp and shrank away, horror-struck.

The face of the man was a bare white skull, in whose eye sockets flamed livid fire!

"Thulsa Doom! Aye, I guessed as much!" exclaimed Ka-nu.

"Aye, Thulsa Doom, fools," the voice echoed cavernously. "The greatest of all wizards and your eternal foe, Kull of Atlantis. You have won this tilt, but beware, there shall be others."

He burst the bonds on his arms with a single contemptuous gesture and stalked toward the door, the throng giving back before him.

"You are a fool of no discernment, Kull," said he. "Else you had never mistaken me for that other fool, Kuthulos, even with the veil and his garments."

Kull saw that this was so, for though the twain were alike in height and general shape, the flesh of the skull-faced wizard was like that of a man long dead.

The king stood, not fearful like the others, but so amazed at the turn of events that he was speechless. Then even as he sprang forward like a man waking from a dream, Brule charged with the silent ferocity of a tiger, his curved sword gleaming. And like a gleam of light it flashed into the ribs of Thulsa Doom, piercing him through and through, so that the point stood out between his shoulders.

Brule regained his blade with a quick wrench as he leaped back; then, crouching to strike again were it necessary, he halted. Not a drop of blood oozed from the wound in which a living man had been mortal. The skull-faced one laughed.

"Ages ago I died as men did!" he taunted. "Nay, I shall pass to some other sphere when my time comes, not before. I bleed not, for my veins are empty, and I feel only a slight coldness which shall pass when the wound closes, as it is even now closing. Stand back, fool, your master goes; but he shall come again to you, and you shall scream and shrivel and die in that coming. Kull, I salute you."