

The Hyborian Review

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Soon available in Spanish as well as Japanese...well, ok Spain and Japan

Great REH Quotes

From *Queen of the Black Coast*: Weird Tales, May, 1934.
Copyright 1934 Popular Fiction.

“Look at me, Conan!” She threw wide her arms. “I am Bêlit, queen of the Black Coast. O tiger of the North, you are cold as the snowy mountains which bred you. Take me and crush me with your fierce love! Go with me to the ends of the earth and the ends of the sea! I am queen by fire and steel and slaughter – be thou my king!”

His eyes swept the bloodstained ranks, seeking expressions of wrath or jealousy. He saw none. The fury was gone from the ebon faces. He realized that to these men Bêlit was more than a woman: a goddess whose will was unquestioned. He glanced at the *Argus*, wallowing in the crimson sea-wash, heeling far over, her decks awash, held up by the grappling irons. He glanced at the blue-fringed shore, at the far green hazes of the ocean, at the vibrant figure which stood before him; and his barbaric soul stirred within him. To quest these shining blue realms with that white-skinned young tiger-cat – to love, laugh, wander, and pillage –

“I’ll sail with you,” he grunted, shaking the red drops from his blade.

“Ho, N’Yaga!” her voice twanged like a bowstring. “Fetch herbs and dress your master’s wounds! The rest of you bring aboard the plunder and cast off.”

...As they moved out over the glassy blue deep, Bêlit came to the poop. Her eyes were burning like those of a she-panther in the dark as she tore off her ornaments, her sandals, and her silken girdle and cast them at his feet. Rising on tiptoe, arms stretched upward, a quivering line of naked white, she cried to the desperate horde: “Wolves of the blue sea, behold ye now the dance – the mating dance of Bêlit, whose fathers were kings of Asgalun!”

And she danced, like the spin of a desert whirlwind, like the leaping of a quenchless flame, like the urge of creation and the urge of death. Her white feet spurned the bloodstained deck, and dying men forgot death...

Page 4: Another Howard periodical

No surprise: Marvel Comics Enters Chapter 11 Bankruptcy

Go ahead and smirk, because you have the right.

Marvel Comics filed for bankruptcy protection Dec. 27; the official reasons were “debt and a clash of corporate executives.” But true believers know better: it was greed and idiocy that did in the former publishing Kingpin.

Marvel’s downfall supposedly began when the comic and trading card boom of the late ‘80s and 90s began to wane and competition increased. But couldn’t part of the problem have been the lunacy of creating ever more characters, diluting the cast of artists and storytellers, and foisting off worse and worse editions on collectors? If you need any evidence, pull out the last 50 issues of Conan the Barbarian and look for excellence in there. It’s a thin search.

Further complicating Marvel’s plight was the intrigue pitting Marvel owner Ronald Perelman (boo! hiss!) against bondholder Carl Icahn, both renowned takeover artists. Marvel’s stock was once a superhero in its own right; it climbed 16-fold past \$34 a share in less than three years since 1991. The stock sells for a little more than \$2 per share now. And Icahn blames Perelman for it.

Perelman’s plan to get out of bankruptcy court includes some iffy ideas: Marvel Studios’ development of television and film properties, Marvel Mania theme restaurants and Marvel Interactive software.

The worst part is you don’t know whether to wish them well. Maybe if Ron Perelman were somehow to slide back to the fleshpots of Shadizar and fall under a deep lotus dream, Marvel might get back to where it once was.

Book Review

by Garret H. Romaine

Conan the Rebel

Author: Poul Anderson

Bantam; 1980 208 pages. Cover Art: Lou Feck
(Cover shown on page 2 is not Feck’s work)

Poul Anderson has won so many awards for his writing in the science fiction arena that our Hyborian World should feel honored he has graced us with this



entry into the Nemedian Chronicles. His strengths are in wordcraft, in storyline, in subtext and context, and they are on full display here. Even by the time *Conan the Rebel* was published in 1980, Anderson had already won five Hugo awards and two Nebula awards.



From inside the jacket of this Bantam tale, #6 in the series, Anderson is described as ‘prolific’, and was a 33-year veteran of his craft by then. An honors graduate with a degree in physics, the writer in him won out and he made his living with words since that time. He is prolific, but he is also problematic. And therein lies this tale.

Conan The

Vocabulary Builder

If there is one over-arching problem with *Conan the Rebel*, it is the level of the wordsmithing. I used to fancy myself with a large vocabulary, usually never caught off guard by Robert E. Howard’s use of words such as eldritch or unctuous. But Anderson is in a league by himself.

He doesn’t just send skeletal warriors pouring from a cave. No, “they pullulated forth like maggots.” Howard loathed the lowly necromancer; Anderson calls them ‘puissant.’ Hussies and teases are ‘jill-flirts’ and I am still looking up some of the following: weregild, quagga, destrier, scryed, bollards, eidolon, roweled, morion...

I found these: cicatriced (marked), cerements (shrouds), and manumit (liberate).

Well, you get the picture. When a tribal leader leers at Conan and hopes there “might be a minikin of loot” you can’t assume Anderson just made up a word to mean ‘little bit’. ‘Cause there’s doubt. A minikin of loot might purchase a kingdom, or a night’s sport with a doxy. Either way, it sure ain’t in my spellchecker...

Worse, the characters actually use these words in dialogue, and it slows things considerably. A traitorous spy spins a web with words such as these: “Stygians make examples of contumacious underlings.” For my money, the Conan from *Rogues in the House* would have seized this man by his gilded lapels and told him to talk right, or risk a balled fist in the face.

If someone informed King Conan “I am in his entourage as an amanuensis,” the fop might have been tossed into a dark and lonely dungeon.

Anderson offers up a ship that “glimmered on low, lapping waves and lateen sail”, which is good alliteration and good pacing, but it stops the reader from plunging through at anything like a fast, sustained speed. A buzzing in his ear caused Conan to reach up; we are told he “squatted the mosquito.” At first I suspected an editing error or a typo, but with this author, who can be sure? I mean, check out how he spells his first name, and tell me how you pronounce it?

The Rescue of Jehanen

The gist of the story is this: Conan seeks to rescue Bêlit’s long lost brother Jehanen from Stygian masters, and ends up as the wielder of the mighty Ax of Varanghi, as forecast 500 years ago to lead the Taians to freedom. He becomes the symbol then of Mitra, the Blessed Sun, against the sinister snake-worshippers of Set.

Short aside: every time the Stygian plotters and wizards were forced to use the name of Mitra in a sentence, they hissed – “sss”. I just wish there was a suitable counter-curse for Set!

The plot is an excellent one, and matches Conan with Falco, a limp-wristed Ophirian aristocrat; Daris, a fine warrior-princess from Taia, and the scarred, broken Jehanan. The Cimmerian leads this band from Khemi, on the Black Coast, up the River Styx to Luxur, then further yet to Pteion to fetch the Ax and vanquish the King of Stygia in a final bloody battle.

Those who’ve read *Queen of the Black Coast* will recall that Conan’s steamy romance with the usually topless she-pirate occupied a matter of very little time, most of which was well chronicled by Howard. Since a journey up and down the Styx would entail thousands of miles and months of time, Anderson fits *Conan the Rebel* into the Chronicles by inventing an enchanted metallic wingboat, capable of over 50 miles per hour.

Bring On The Temptress!

The main female lead in this tale is Nehekba, a stunning Stygian woman who serves Derketa, the goddess of lust and love. Conan marks her beauty in their first meeting:

...his gaze ranged up and down and around her. Never had he seen a woman more beautiful, and few to match this one. Well-nigh transparent, her gown floated and sheened above a form whose slenderness somehow made it all the more voluptuous. Her face was a perfection of the Stygian racial type. Amber skin and ebon hair were lustrous in the candlelight.

But Nehekba is a crafty witch, and Conan sees in her plans for him a lengthy stay in a spidery web. Intent on returning to Bêlit in as short a time as possible, Conan finds it necessary to apply bondage and discipline to the woman when she enters his room late one night:

Having rendered her immobile, he rose, and for a moment regarded her nearly nude body. A sigh gusted from him. "What a waste," he said. "How tempted I was to have my sport with you first. But you are a witch. I dared not risk you somehow binding my spirit here, away from Bêlit."

Conan the Prude

Daris, the young Taian princess, presents a similar problem for Conan. His love for Bêlit suddenly turns him into a monogamous barbarian, rare in that world and rare in his life. He could resist the charms of Nehekba due to his long-chronicled fear of wizardry in general. But Daris grows to worship the resourceful Cimmerian, as he rescues her from imprisonment and certain death more than once. After one such harrowing rescue, Daris cannot abide being alone with Conan any longer.

She lifted her eyes to his and breathed, "Conan, here at the gates of Hell you give me heart." Passionately, defiantly, before the altar of Set, they kissed. But when at last she said in her ardor, "Oh, beloved, I am yours, take me --" he drew back. She stared at him. "I mean it," she avowed shakenly. "I love you, Conan." "And I am more than fond of you," he answered. "Too fond to make you my mate when I shall leave you as soon as may be for Bêlit." "She would understand!" Conan smiled sadly, wryly. "All too well would she understand, and upbraid me for such treachery to a battle comrade. Be my sister, Daris, and I will be honored."

It is one thing to stiff-arm a young princess, but quite another to put off the lust in a daughter of Derketa. Later in the story, Nehekba reappears. Conan has run a gauntlet of horrors to fetch the sacred Ax from its storage spot.

Now, dripping blood from a score of wounds, tired and enchanted, he blinks as the Stygian witch

reappears before him. And from the look in her face, her intent seems clear to the lust-crazed Conan.

"Ungarb yourself," she murmured as he quenched his thirst. "I long to care for you."

Her fingers aided him to remove his ragged outer garments. While he drew off the hauberk and its underpadding, she knelt to remove his boots. Together they stripped away what was left, and he stood before her naked.

Lust burned high and red in him. Her eyes widened in surprised admiration. He gripped her by her arms. "Ishtar," he bellowed. "Get rid of that feathered thing - at once!"

"Conan, you hurt me," she wailed. He let go. She touched the places he had seized. "What bruises I shall have." She smiled, fluttered her lashes, blew him a kiss. "I will bear them as badges of honor, from the mightiest man on earth."

"Undress," he said out of a thick throat.

"Oh, I yearn for you," she avowed melodiously.

"But you are hurt, beloved. Let me wash you, anoint and bandage you, that you may feel no more pain or tiredness. Then we will go to our joy." "As you wish," he yielded, and sat down. Still he kept the Ax in reach.

She wetted a cloth and scrubbed him, slow, sensual strokes that brought delicious ease even while they raised desire further yet. Her free fingers combed through his mane.

Alas, it's a trick. Once she has sponged off enough blood to use on a fetish doll, the witch disappears, only to spring on Conan during the climactic finale.

Field Research For Future Kingship

Anderson does a credible job pulling together the final battle. I would have liked more peasants in this supposed slave revolt; the author could have done more with a theme he developed earlier when he sent Conan through the oppressed Stygian countryside:

"Why do they live like this?" Conan wondered.

"What do they get from their lives but toil -- for the good of their overlords, not themselves -- and want and an overseer's lash across their backs if they flag?"

"It is the only life they know," Otanis replied.

"But can they not even imagine something better?"

The only life I knew as a boy was that of my barbarian homeland. It was a paradise set beside this, but nonetheless it grew wearisome to me, and I started out to see the greater world beyond."

Conan reflected. "Oh, a single man or a single family who tried to run away from here would doubtless come to grief. But if enough of them gathered together, sworn to be free or else dead, they could cast that monstrous load of the state off themselves."

Otanis was shocked. "Why, that would bring the end of civilization!"
"So it would," Conan agreed cheerfully.
"The heritage of the ages--learning, art, refinement--abolished for the sake of--those beasts of burden?"
"I have been in many civilized realms, and it is true they had much to offer; but always the price was having a state, and always that price was too high."

Anderson has finally captured the essence of Howard's Conan the Cimmerian. Here was a youth (perhaps like Howard?) who could not abide by the tame, predictable future he saw before him in his tiny northern village. Conan yearned to see the world, to roll the dice in life, to live free or die. The further he traveled and witnessed the depredations of his fellow man in the name of civilization, the less Conan liked of it. And all of his travels and experiences will make him a formidable king of his own someday.

But first, the final battle:

It did not fall to the lot of Conan that he slew King Mentuphera, or to that of Ruma that he claimed General Shaut. Those Stygians went down in the ruck, and only the gods knew what warriors took them. Conan was satisfied to slay right and left, and have a crowned head borne before him for a sign, and see the Stygians break.

Falco by now has learned what everyone else around him knew. Senufer, the Stygian noblewoman who had befriended him, was actually Conan's nemesis Nehekba. Indeed, she was also the same dark-haired woman who had bedeviled Jehanan. Conan had the right of it when he observed, "It doesn't make sense that this gaol should simply happen to be crawling with lust-crazed brunettes."

To avenge Jehanan, who falls in battle, Conan and Bêlit torch the entire Stygian navy as it lays in the Khemi harbor. As they sail north, Falco compliments Conan and tells him he will always have a friend in Ophir.

"Thanks," replied Conan. "That may be useful someday-- as may my friendships in Taia should I ever want to cross the Stygian realm by myself."

Who knows what years unborn may bring? Death on a heath or life on a throne or anything in between; no matter now."

Thus ends *Conan the Rebel* – looking to the future. Yet Anderson had no future with Conan. He has since written prolifically for Tor, Bantam, Baen, and many others. A recent outing, *The Stars Are Also Fire* has been called one of the finest science fiction books ever written. So, given all that, another encounter with Conan the Cimmerian might be an exciting affair. But with Anderson's success now, it probably will never happen. - GR



When You Still Can't Get Enough...

According to a blurb I dug up, Necronomicon Press publishes "The Dark Man", a small magazine edited by Robert E. Howard scholar Rusty Burke. I haven't seen one yet, but this magazine is said to contain information essential for anyone interested in collecting the original un-edited Conan and other REH stories.

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NEXT Issue: A tale from his youth, *Conan the Valorous* by John Maddox Roberts; and if luck holds, a review of the upcoming movie about Robert E. Howard: *The Whole Wide World*.

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