

The Hyborian Review

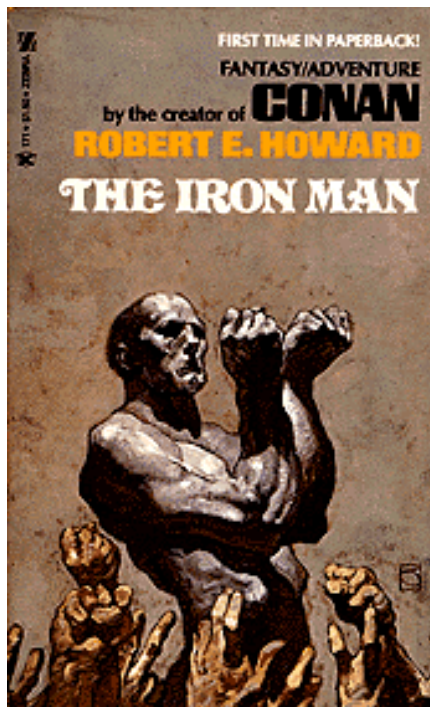
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100 Subscribers and still growing!

Great REH Quotes

From "The Iron Man", a 1976 Zebra book containing the fifth boxing tale penned by Howard for Fight Stories magazine that graced the June 1930 cover.



Italian boxer Monk Barota is having his way with Iron Mike Brennon, but he is about to learn what it means to take on an Iron Man...

At this moment, Barota stepped back, feinted swiftly and shot the right. He was proud of the bone crushing quality of that right hand. He had a clean opening and every ounce of his weight went behind it. The

leather-guarded knuckles backed by spar-like arm and heavy shoulder, crashed flush against Mike's jaw. The impact was plainly heard in every part of the house. A gasp went up, nails sank deep into clenching palms. Mike swayed drunkenly, but he did not fall.

Barota stopped short for a flashing instant - frozen by the realization that he had failed to even floor his man. And in that second Mike swung a wild left and landed for the first time - high on the cheek bone, but Barota went down. Dazed, the Italian rose without a count and Mike tore into him with the ferocity of a tiger that scents the kill. Barota, blinded and dizzy, was in no condition to defend himself, yet Mike missed with both hands until a mine-sweeping right-hander caught his man flush on the temple, and he dropped - not merely out, but senseless.

Worth the Wait - The Whole Wide World

After waiting ten months, I finally was able to rent this classic video at a local Blockbuster. Everybody who has ever read an REH story and enjoyed it has to see this movie. You'll never think of Bob Howard the same way.



Blustering, bombastic, overbearing - that was Howard (as played by Vincent d'Onofrio) on a good day. Crass, infantile, introverted - that was also Howard once in awhile. The man was complex and contrary, ill at ease with others, and utterly devoted to his mother. But for once, we get dialogue taken mostly from Ellis' fine first novel - "One Who Walked Alone." And it's a chance to really get to know Howard, as both a tragic figure and as a damn fine writer.

For those who haven't seen the movie, it is written from the viewpoint of Novalyne Price Ellis, his only true love. Played with gusto by Renee Zellweger (Jerry McGuire) Ellis is a "Texas spitfire" in Howard's words, who couldn't manage to pry Howard away from his mother long enough to realize he had found his one true love. Their on-again, off-again relationship was stormy, chaotic, and full of peaks and valleys. She believed in him, and she loved him once, but he was a handful, and in one finely-played moment, he tells her he can't settle down - the road he walks, he walks alone. Yet by the end of the movie, it is clear he may have regretted that speech.

Now if I can just find the book (it's out of print!)

Comic Dinks - Good News!

Reprint information is also on page 4.

Conan the Adventurer: A Review

by Garret H. Romaine

writing by Roland Green, Roy Thomas and others



Editor's Note: The Kull movie disappeared before I could see it. There isn't much left to say about it, but as a reviewer worried about the body of work he leaves behind, I wanted to get my two cents worth in and join the kicking while the movie was down. I don't know if the passion will still be there when Sorbo hits video, so I'll try again when the video hits.

It hasn't been easy to find much to like about *Conan the Adventurer*. I missed the premiere and week #2, so by the time I caught up, Karela and the Fat Boy were history. I'll just talk mostly about what I know.



Before I start, I want to say that I find it highly interesting that this show ever saw production. I figure that the popularity of *Xena* and *Hercules* must have pushed the Conan Properties (CPI) folks into thinking they could make some good money. As the early death of *Roar* points out, you need a strong

primary character. A recognizable one helps. So the idea of pushing a Cimmerian bad boy on the TV public probably came as a natural.

Still, don't you have to wonder what the motivation of CPI is? They certainly don't seem to care much about Robert E. Howard's vision of the character. In fact, the complaints about the lack of 'purity' in the stories is uniform and loud. But there was never any question of adapting original stories to the tiny screen. Thus, it must be the money...

Whose Conan is it?

As stated, for the Howard purist, there is nearly nothing recognizable about this Conan. First, his younger years have been wholly rewritten, blended to match *Conan the Barbarian* and his enslavement to The Wheel; in this version, his parents were butchered before his young eyes and he was orphaned...well, you know the rest of that abomination. It has little to do with Howard's vision of a young lad struck with wanderlust after looting Vanarium when he was just 15. In fact, it flies in the face of what we learned in *Tower of the Elephant* about Conan's background.

Most of the complaints on the Savage discussion page and the official Conan web site has driven these points home repeatedly.

Even Barry Fletcher, recently banned from the REH mailing list, chimed in with ten good reasons why the show is bad.

Not that anyone seems to be listening. The 22 episodes to broadcast this year will revolve around Conan's goal of killing the wizard Hissar Zul to revenge his parents and free Cimmeria from this awful, awful man.

Which is all pretty putrid. Toss in a dwarf, a mute, and a black, and the ingredients are there for a politically-correct '90s assault on Hyboria. The only thing missing is to make Conan so sensitive he will actually cry on screen – which they then did in episode 2.

Look, if Conan didn't even weep when The Queen of the Black Coast was strangled on her own necklace, nothing – NOTHING – that a TV producer can conjure up should make him start to snuffle. So who's Conan is it? It ain't ours.

I could go on, so I will for awhile. In episode 4, Conan is surrounded by archers intent on feathering his hide. The next thing you know, he's crouching behind a wooden wagon wheel like a sissy. I kept waiting for him to push the wagon over and pull out the axle to start braining folks, but he kept cowering. This ain't my Conan.

So, I'm going to stop right here. There are a million reasons to not like this show. I'll leave this with a small list of the things I liked and then I'll move up to another topic.

Here's what I like about Conan the Adventurer:

- 1) **BATTLE SCENES.** If you close your eyes during some of the better battle scenes, there is a lot of good action sound – clashing swords, flesh smacking flesh, and fair music. And no female screams like we get from *Xena* all the time.

(But don't open your eyes! You'll probably see a very flimsy plastic sword actually bend around a wooden staff. You'll be groaning!)

- 2) **LOTS A FLESH.** There are babes every once in awhile, although not stunningly beautiful. This isn't a Baywatch ripoff. Hyborian women are lean and firm, but not luscious. Perhaps at a later date some of the scenes will shift from dirty, muddy villages to more elaborate palace settings, with some fine palace wenches displayed.

(and, forgive me, but there is a lot of Conan to see. Not to confuse my sexual orientation, but I've grown to appreciate all that muscled splendor. There's a lot of Rolf to see. More on that in a minute.)

- 3) REAL BLOOD. Yep, there's blood. In episode 4, Conan was forced to slice open the guts of a long-time friend who tried to betray him. Oh, the villain wasn't entirely slain – he got back up for one more slice from Rolf's Atlantean blade. Correctly, the original gash grew wider as the traitor advanced. At least they got that right.
- 4) CORRECT TERMINOLOGY. Every once in awhile, you can at be reminded that you are journeying in Hyboria. Mitra, Cimmeria, and other words pop up. Not enough, Crom knows, but some. I like that, and want more. Sure, I want the stories to be adaptations, and not entirely new. But at least there are a few hints once in awhile that this is an approximation of Howard's Conan.

Well, I've already put quite a taint on my budding purist credentials, and I'm probably going to hear if from the true keepers of the flame. They'll argue that, like a pastiche, this TV show should be shunned. And I understand. But again, let me state for the record that my first introduction to Conan was on a monthly basis, courtesy of Roy and the gang at Marvel. I grew up needing a periodic injection of Cimmerian fun. To be able to get a little on a weekly basis is kinda cool. I actually found myself switching away from the Raiders game on Sunday afternoon to catch Rolf. I may be coming down with something.

So, grudgingly, I'll admit that I like enough of the show to tune back in. Burn me, ban me, cut me into snake bait, but I'm entertained by this attempt. I heard on one of the lists lately that Fox is rumored to be picking it up. Does that mean that there will be more marketing, better stories, more listening, and wider distribution? I'd settle for better stories.

Evolution of a Barbarian Body

Let me insert a bit of babble here about Conan's evolution. In watching Rolf flex yet again, I came to the realization that Conan has come a long, long way from his Howardian birth. As many appreciate, every Howard hero had a bit of ol' Bob in him. It's no coincidence that most of his heroes were about his height, about his build, and had his hair color. Howard put himself into his heroes and they were better off for it.

Having said that, I pulled down a *Weird Tales* cover from way back and took a look at the original artist's depiction of Conan. This shot, from *The Devil In Iron*, seems to show a kind of Everyman – well built, but not steroidally enhanced, with a good sword arm but not Herculean in physique.



but he's also put on a few pounds of muscle. He's filling out a bit more. There's a bit of a Charles Atlas look to this depiction. To me, this is the beginning of the long descent into beefcake that culminates with Rolf Moeller today.

Mercifully, there was a detour in the 70s as Barry Windsor-Smith took over the center of the

Cimmerian universe. Smith's Conan was young, dynamic, and well-built. But, reflecting the times, he had a bit of a "hippie" look to him, and I particularly



remember one scene where he tied up his hair in a pony tail before battling a ship of pirates. How would Howard take that? Would it be too sissy? Would he object? I believe he might have.

Still, were I able to argue the point with Howard, I'd try to show that Smith's use of the art nouveau technique actually apes the old *Weird Tales* designs to a great degree. I always felt that this enhanced Smith's work. And Smith's Conan is not a Charles Atlas wannabe. He's lithe and lean

It's my contention that Howard meant for Conan to be just that – big and bad, but a bit of an average, well-built dude. Big and strong, sure, but definitely not lifting weights regularly.

Next up I grabbed a 1953 shot of Conan the Conqueror. He's in armor and grimacing and carrying a babe while menacing some threat –



Sadly, after Smith came The Time of Buscema, and Conan took on a more modern, and chemically created



outlook. Alcala, Chan, Vallejo – to me, they all aped Buscema. The hero in *The Savage Sword of Conan* perpetually featured an overly-muscular beast of a boy who whacked his way through more scenarios that he thought his way through. To me, that was a problem. The over-reliance on brawn and brute force is what gave

Conan the reputation for violence and mayhem. Yet time

and time again, Howard's hero had to use his noggin as much as his sword arm to get out of trouble. Or stay out. The Vallejo shot here, reaching for his sword, to Boris' credit, at least gives Conan the correct dimensions, but he obviously has been lifting something heavier than wine skins on a regular basis.

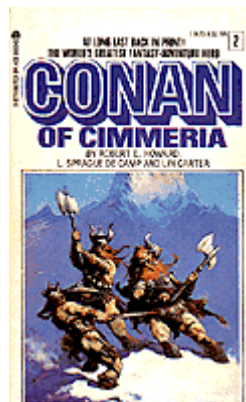


No Conan art collection would be complete without Ken Kelly and Frazetta: here they are in order. Again, the musculature is center stage. Huge, barrel chest, pectorals and thighs completely overdone, and forearms that no blacksmith father could have created. But in the continuum that leads to Rolf, easy to understand. Frazetta's Conan was well-muscled, heroic, and fierce.



Cimmeria showed Frazetta's vision of the barbarian world as

The epic cover of Conan of



a land of mighty men, and Conan stood above them all. I have to remind myself that Howard's Conan was already over six feet tall when just 15 at the sack of Vanarium, and could have expected to grow a wee bit more on a steady diet of buxom blondes and Stygian sorcerers. That's well over Howard's own height, so Conan isn't a perfect of reflection of who Howard was – more like who Howard maybe thought of himself as?

At any rate, we eventually got Arnold Schwarzenegger, and then his buddy Rolf. Mr. Universe specimens each, they've taken the Conan body to places where I wonder if Howard himself would approve? Maybe its conditioning, but I think I've come to expect it, so that Rolf to me actually looks better than Arnold! - GR



Comics Planned that Put Howard First

This came across the REH-Fans mailing list in late October. We've already begun on some [comics] and are also looking for the appropriate talents for several others. Richard Ashford just returned from Europe to do just that, plus attended the huge trade show in Frankfurt where there was interest from several distributors. Presently, "Kings of the Night" and a possible "director's cut" of Smith/Conrad's "Worms of The Earth" adaptation are in the works. Other characters leading the first wave are El Borak, Dark Agnes and Skullface. Of course the magnitude of material plus having enough work to go on a regular publishing schedule means that it will be quite awhile before the books are on stands. The line will have their own distinctive design rarely seen in comics and REH's presence will be dominant unlike adaptations from the past. The first step was to come up with a name for the line and we thought "Cross Plains Comics" presents our intentions for the comics boldly. Many of the contributors have worked on the Marvel books in the past but will now have the luxury of giving the material the attention it deserves free from corporate restrictions.
- Rafael Kayanan

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

NEXT Issue: *Back to Howard – The Dark Man.*

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