

The Hyborian Review

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Late again?

Great REH Quotes

From *Sword Woman*, copyright 1975 by The Nemedian Chronicles for *REH: Lone Star Fictioneer*.

The priest appears, ready to try to marry off young Agnes to a buffoon named Francois..

At the sight of [the priest] I ceased my struggles like one struck motionless, and my captors released me and drew back; and so I stood facing him for an instant, almost crouching, glaring unspeaking. "Kiss her, lad!" bellowed some drunken lout; and then as a taut spring snaps, I jerked the dagger from my bosom and sprang at Francois. My act was too quick for those slow-witted clowns even to comprehend, much less prevent. My dagger was sheathed in his pig's heart before he realized I had struck, and I yelped with made glee to see the stupid expression of incredulous surprise and pain flood his red countenance, as I tore the dagger free and he fell, gurgling like a stuck pig, and spouting blood between his clawing fingers -- to which clung petals from his bridal chain.

Additional Scenes in CTB?

We talked last issue about additional scenes in the laser disc version of *The Whole Wide World*. Just for the record, there are additional scenes in some cuts of *Conan the Barbarian* as well.

- 1) An additional scene of young Conan encountering the Pict - reportedly a bit of wrestling with the young Cimmerian
 - 2) Extended footage when Conan & Subotai first encounter Sandahl Bergman, and she identifies herself as "Valeria, queen of thieves." In the released version, she is never mentioned by name!
 - 3) When Conan returned to kill Thulsa Doom, the princess he rescued was seen helping him to sneak in.
 - 4) The final scene with Conan & Subotai when they parted, asking each other "Where will you go now?"
- The question now is: are these scenes on the new DVD version of the movie?

More from Barry Windsor-Smith - p. 4

Reprint info - See page 4.

Story Review: Kull the Barbarian, The Warrior King, Kull the Conqueror, King of Kings

By Garret Romaine

Swords of the Purple Kingdom

Written by Robert E. Howard

Published in *Kull*, Bantam, 1978.

Pick a name, any name. Kull has lots of 'em. I chose to return to this moody barbarian for a number of reasons. I still haven't reviewed (much less seen) the Kull movie with Kevin Sorbo. I've read the book by Sean Moore based on the screenplay, but I haven't reviewed it, either.

In short, I have a Kull backlog to get to. But I wanted to explore one of the lesser told tales -- so I skipped over acknowledged classics such as *The Mirrors of Tuzun Thune* and *The Shadow Kingdom*, both published during Howard's lifetime.

Likewise, I put off posthumously published works such as *The King and the Oak* (1939) and *The Striking of the Gong*, (1976).

The main reason I chose a lesser-known story is that I wanted to see how much magic Howard packed into a supposedly second-tier effort. There weren't all that many secondary Kull stories to choose from; *Delcarde's Cat* is infamous for its mention of Thulsa Doom, and *By This Axe I Rule!* is widely known, if for no other reason than most Howard acolytes understand it was a precursor to *The Phoenix on the Sword*.

So, 'Purple Kingdom' won. It's the last full Kull story written by Howard, and mainly lacks a

supernatural element. Here's the gist: a young aristocrat, saddled by debts, steals a royal ring and tricks Kull into departing the castle for a rendezvous with assassins. They kidnap Kull amidst the ruins of an evil estate, but the barbarian proves harder to kill than they reckoned.

First, some background on Kull. There are 11 known stories, written between 1926 and 1930, plus two fragments. Kull started as a minor character in *Exile of Atlantis*, but Howard soon found that the Atlantean was dominating the tale, and he adjusted accordingly. "King Kull differed from these others in that he was put on paper the moment he was created, whereas they existed in my mind years before I tried to put them in stories. In fact, he first appeared as only a minor character in a story which was never accepted. At least, he was intended to be a minor character, but I had not gone far before he was dominating the yarn." (*The Last Celt*, p. 66).

Here's the list of Kull stories in chronological order -- in other words, in the order Howard wrote them:

- 1) Exile of Atlantis (late 1925, or early 1926)
- 2) The Shadow Kingdom (completed mid 1927)
- 3) The Mirrors of Tuzun Thune (late 1927)
- 4) Delcardes' Cat (early 1928)
- 5) The Skull of Silence (early 1928)
- 6) The Striking of the Gong (late 1928)
- 7) The Altar and the Scorpion (late 1928)
- 8) By This Axe I Rule (early to mid 1929)
- 9) Swords of the Purple Kingdom (mid 1929)**
- 10) "untitled" (Three men sat at a table...) (mid 1929)
- 11) The Kings of the Night (Feb or March 1930) (special thanks to Patrice Louinet, who posted this chronology to REH-Fans).

A Foolish Fan's Babbling

I took my reading from the old Bantam paperback (pictured below), and I should first offer up a few words about what I consider an awful foreward by Andrew Offut. Signed by 'a fan', Offut gushes thusly: "The guy breathes in these pages. Kull ate and drank and cursed, lost his head and his temper, and I know dam' well he belched." Strange, but that's never the Kull I picture.

For one thing, Kull never wines and wenches as Conan later would. Kull broods and paces and gazes into a mirror for days on end, but I never see him groggy. It isn't clear to me what Offut had in mind here. Toss in the fact that Kull had never taken a wife (and it isn't all that plain that he'd ever, er, come close...) and I fail to see that Kull was any kind of Joe Six Pack.

Instead, Kull was peculiarly cerebral. For example, he's entranced by the idea of a parallel dimension in *The Mirrors of Tuzun Thune*. "Tell me, wizard," he said, sitting before the mirror, eyes fixed intently upon his image, "how can I pass yon door? For of a truth, I am not sure that that is the real world and this is the shadow; at least, that which I see must exist in some form."

I don't see Conan doing much more than crushing the glass with a broadsword, frankly. But Kull was ever the shackled King, bound to his throne and tradition, to where he chafed under the weight.

In *The Shadow Kingdom*, where Kull escapes death with the aid of Brule the Spearslayer, there is a feast given by the Picts. While Kull sits idly and watches the wine get guzzled amidst games of skill and strength, the Pictish counselor gorges himself and keeps his wine glass filled by a comely lass.

Conan would have taken part in the games, won them easily, drawn blood from Brule (whom Kull was not quite friends with at this point) and then washed it all away with a ferocious pull from an aleskin. Perhaps I have it wrong, but I see a

vast difference between Kull and Conan, with Conan the more manly man and Kull a bit brooding and standoffish, if that's a word.



All of which is why I see more of Howard in the character of Conan than I do in Kull. Howard provides Kull with a stately charm, a fancier way of speech, and a higher degree of formality. He's kind of a stiff, actually; no time for women, a little too close to Brule...Howard in his introspective mood, the Loner, trapped by responsibility. Conan tosses these shackles aside, but Kull cannot.

Another Tale of Two Lovers

Like "By this Axe.." this story opens amidst intrigue. Kull can smell it in the air, and feel it in the wind. A nobleman's spies verify his plight: he is marked for murder yet again. Thus begins another installment of Howard's long-running version of "Uneasy Rests the Crown."

Yet before the streets run with blood, Howard injects a storyline nearer to Romeo and Juliet than any of his other work. But Howard will make this a happier ending than the Shakespearean tragedy. Young Nalissa, a budding blossom of nobility, pleads with Kull to tell her father to let her marry young Dalgar of Farsun. She sits on his lap, cries on his breast, and bats her dark eyes to such an extent that Kull realizes some day, when she fully understands her powers over weaker men, that she can be a force in the palace. But on this day, he is not about to comply. Her father is a friend, and he'll not interfere in the man's household.

Events continue to unfold in a direct and rapid manner. Howard's famed pacing is in fine form in this story. From a beginning loaded with foreshadowing, Howard cranks up what is as close to a detective yarn as any Kull story will get. He drops clues about the conspiracy, and manages to do so without appearing clumsy.

Dressed as a beggar, Tu has been wandering the streets to perchance overhear details of the plotting usurpers. Waylaid, Tu's royal ring is stolen, and used to seal the envelope that is sent to Kull. Locked in his room, Kull hears a tapping at the window and is soon answering what he believes to be a distress call to rescue Tu, his counselor, held hostage in The Accursed Gardens.

It is there in the Gardens that the night will climax. The Verulian assassins capture and bind Kull, and in the bargain, they stumble upon Nalissa, who is meeting Dalgar at midnight in that very grove in

order to run away together. The kidnapers are smart enough to look for a young bravo in the area, but soon the leader of the band, The Masked One, will be meeting them to kill Kull and hand the throne to foreign interests.

Howard rejects a chance to inject more sorcery in the final battle, depending on blood and gore alone. He pulls off The Battle of the Stairs nicely - - Kull slays man after man, with Dalgar protecting his flanks, while Nalissa trembles. But there could have been that one more element to elevate the tale higher. He even left himself an easy entry by setting up the evil of the place where the battle occurs:

"These Gardens had once been the pleasure resort and country estate of a nobleman, but tales of grim debauches and ghastly rites of devil worship began to get abroad; and finally the people, maddened by the regular disappearance of their children, had descended on the Gardens in a frenzied mob and hanged the prince to his own portals. Combing the gardens, the people had found foul things, and in a flood of repulsion and horror had partially destroyed the mansion..."

Howard even puts Nalissa ill at ease, fearing spooky sounds and furtive rustles in the underbrush. During the final battle, Howard could easily have reared forth a demon from those rites of yesteryear -- say, splash a bit of blood on a secret rune, or fill a depression in the stone -- and truly the story would have taken another leap upward as the King, already weary from strife and loss of blood, battles with even greater stakes at hand. I guess I'm thinking of the Horn of Dagoth from *Conan the Destroyer*, which could cost me support for my argument, but I still think the story needed more of the supernatural to turn the corner. Like "By this Axe..", it needed a bit of a boost.

The Masked One turns out to be...well, let me leave some of the story untold for any who have yet to whet their whistle. It does make for an interesting ending, if not particularly twisted, at least poignant. It was ever thus for Howard -- he may start with a common outline -- assassins seek the head of the King -- but he wraps it up in an interesting (and bloody) cloak.

Back to the Writing

Howard starts this story with one of the better opening paragraphs:

A sinister quiet lay like a shroud over the ancient city of Valusia. The heat waves danced from roof to shining roof and shimmered against the smooth marble walls. The purple towers and golden spires were softened in the faint haze. No ringing hoofs on the wide paved streets broke the drowsy silence, and the few pedestrians who appeared did what they had to do hastily and vanished indoors again. The city seemed like a realm of ghosts.

After an obligatory scene-setting, where Howard resets the Kull legend for new readers and affirms that citizens need something to complain about, the writer engages in more good, strong writing. First, he dips into his repertoire of young women to paint this picture:

She was only some nineteen years of age; and clad in the costly but scanty fashion of Valusian noble ladies, she presented a ravishing picture, the beauty of which even the barbarian king could appreciate. Her skin was a marvelous white, due partly to many baths in milk and wine, but mainly to a heritage of loveliness. Her cheeks were tinted naturally with a delicate pink, and her lips were full and red. Under delicate black brows brooded a pair of deep soft eyes, dark as mystery, and the whole picture was set off by a mass of curly black hair which was partly confined by a slim golden band.

Interestingly, Howard ignores the youthful curve of her hips and her breasts, not quite dropping into the "sex sells" mantra he blew away Novalyne Price with.

It's as though Kull is a bit of a prude, and hence, Howard will write the story from a prudish perspective. He wouldn't make that mistake with Valeria and Belit once the Conan series starts...

There are other passages of marvelous phrase; here's a favorite:

The quiet of the day had merged almost imperceptibly into the quiet of the night. The moon had not yet risen, and the small silver stars gave little light, as if their radiance was strangled by the heat which still rose from the earth.

Summary

Last issue, I gave Kull an 88% on the degree of Howardness, and pulled Conan up to 92%. There was perhaps more whimsy than detective work in that assessment, but it was a good starting point. What I see more clearly now is the different phases of Howard that are displayed. Howard's complexity is conveyed in his characters, and only those who don't know him would opine that they are all the same. We who know better see them on a continuum, but even that goes only so far. Howard went through periods just like many writers. He never seemed to grow tired of writing up a character as much as he went dry. Characters came and went, emerged and dissolved; yet even today, some few live on. Kull continues, thanks to the power with which he sprung forth. – **GR**

Barry Windsor-Smith -- Still the same

Found this out on the web: "Firstly, STORYTELLER has not been canceled," said BWS' representative. "Barry put its publication on hiatus when it became increasingly apparent that DARK HORSE Comics had failed to live up to its promises to aggressively promote it in the direct market and especially in the outer markets that the book was created to appeal to. After expending almost all their promotion efforts on the first issue, strictly in the direct market, and against Barry's emphatic advice not to do so, they effectively stopped promoting it at all...The result was, that while STORYTELLER was a critical success ...it lost increasing amounts of money... Barry will now be publishing STORYTELLER #10-12 in June, July, and August of 1998, through DHC to fulfill his obligation with them, then resuming publishing somewhere else as soon as possible." For full story:

<http://smash.mgz.com/newsarama/newsarma120597.htm>

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NEXT Issue: Sean Moore's obituary.

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