

SAND ROUGHS

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Big Stick Conan by Gary Romeo

I liked *Conan and the Spider God*. I suppose in REH Orthodoxy logic, this makes me a Conantic. It seems the main criticism hurled at the de Camp novel is that he didn't capture Conan's personality correctly. These critics that purport to know how a twenty something year old Conan should react in every instance seem more fanatic, i.e. Conantic, than those of us who enjoyed this version of a less than superhuman Conan and don't overly fret about it.

Telling somebody to NOT enjoy something is assuredly a vain task. I don't enjoy buttermilk but millions do. I could try to berate them with aesthetic or scientific evidence of why they are wrong, but the bottom line is that they enjoy something I don't. Who am I to try to tell others what to enjoy?

Also, there seems to be an infantile leftism afoot in REH Orthodoxy circles. They actually resent the fact that de Camp was financially successful with his involvement with Conan. Rather than recognize that de Camp promoted the genre, REH, and Conan with his ubiquitous anthologies, science fiction convention appearances, fanzine work with his colleagues, and general day to day work; they choose to equate his financial success and hard work with greed and evil.

Rather than recognizing that the multi-million selling Lancer series was a boon for Robert E. Howard's writing overall they bemoan the fact that the success of Conan overwhelms the genius of REH's boxing stories or his funny westerns.

I'm not making this stuff up!

I enjoyed the Lancers, the Marvel Comics, and even the films and TV show to some extent. I once, Conantically, said I could enjoy a comic strip with a stick figure called Conan, who fought with other sticks, on some level. (I admit to some weird thinking here, a stick figure is usually a "hangman" type figure, but for my final joke to work, I have to think of actually "sticks" i.e. small pieces of wood. Conan, naturally, is big wood. I'm sure the ladies would agree.)

So, for what it's worth, here are my examples of good, mediocre, and bad pastiche featuring the "Big Stick Conan."

THE GOOD PASTICHE



Here is the beginning of a decent pastiche. Thak needs Conan's help rescuing his brother from a Hyborian Zoo. The hardcore orthodox fan would complain that Thak was killed off in "Rogues in the House." They would protest that it is wrong to resurrect him, and especially make him a friend of Conan. They would say REH's Conan never had an ape companion. "This is Tarzan, not Conan" I hear them scream. Oh screw that unimaginative thinking! If the author gives a reasonably plausible scenario that resurrects Thak and gives him and Conan a reason to now be allies, I'm happy enough. And, of course, a story line like this would also work as social commentary: how we treat intelligent primates and barbarians against civilization. Definitely REH themes.

THE MEDIOCRE PASTICHE



I think the REH Orthodox fan could have reason to complain here but they would more likely complain about the first scenario. Conan has killed evil sorcerers in REH stories. No new ground is broken here. They would be comfortable with that. However I like mindless violence probably a little more than the next guy and the caption states that the sorcerer was evil. So I feel justice was served. I would like better in a pastiche, of course, but I was entertained a bit. A busty babe could only help.

THE BAD PASTICHE



Now some of the REH Orthodox might like this one as I detect a certain intolerance in them at times. But doing violence to fellow sticks simply because, bundled together they serve as fuel for fire, is definitely wrong. "Vale of Lost Women" aside (even REH could write a clinker, now and then), Conan is usually on the side of outsiders and tolerant of different cultures, especially so in the pastiches. I suppose since hate is often a REH theme some would apologize for this hatefulness and excuse it as a product of the time Conan lived in. But this is just wrong. Conan should never commit a hate crime. This is bad pastiche.

I hope this discussion has been useful and explains us that simply don't hate pastiches.