

conan the barbarian robert e howard

conan the barbarian robert e howard stands as one of the most iconic and enduring figures in the realm of fantasy literature. Created by the prolific writer Robert E. Howard in the early 20th century, Conan is a character who embodies the rugged, primal spirit of the barbarian archetype. This article delves into the origins, development, and legacy of Conan the Barbarian as envisioned by Howard, exploring the literary context, thematic elements, and cultural impact of this legendary figure. From Howard's unique storytelling style to the lasting influence of Conan in various media, this comprehensive overview highlights why Conan the Barbarian Robert E. Howard remains a cornerstone of fantasy fiction. Below is a detailed table of contents outlining the main sections covered.

- Origins of Conan the Barbarian
- Robert E. Howard's Writing Style and Influence
- The World of Conan: Hyborian Age
- Major Works Featuring Conan
- Character Traits and Themes
- Legacy and Cultural Impact

Origins of Conan the Barbarian

The character of Conan the Barbarian was created by Robert E. Howard during the early 1930s, a period that saw the rise of pulp fiction magazines. Howard introduced Conan in a series of stories published in *Weird Tales* magazine, with the first story, "The Phoenix on the Sword," appearing in 1932. Inspired by a blend of historical warriors, mythological heroes, and the harsh realities of the ancient world, Howard crafted Conan as a formidable figure representing strength, survival, and individualism. The concept of a barbarian hero was a response to contemporary societal norms and literary conventions, offering readers an escapist fantasy grounded in raw power and adventure.

Inspiration Behind the Character

Howard drew inspiration from a wide range of sources including classical mythology, medieval history, and his personal fascination with ancient civilizations. The rugged landscapes of Texas, where Howard lived, also influenced the harsh and untamed settings in which Conan thrived. This mix of influences helped create a uniquely vivid and compelling protagonist whose adventures transcended conventional fantasy tropes of the time.

Initial Reception and Popularity

Upon publication, Conan stories quickly gained popularity among readers of pulp fiction. The character's appeal lay in his raw physical power, cunning intelligence, and complex morality. Over time, Conan the Barbarian Robert E. Howard became a symbol of the heroic fantasy genre, inspiring a devoted fanbase that extended beyond the original magazine publications.

Robert E. Howard's Writing Style and Influence

Robert E. Howard's distinctive writing style was instrumental in shaping the Conan mythos. Known for his vivid descriptions, fast-paced action, and atmospheric settings, Howard's storytelling combined elements of adventure, horror, and fantasy. His prose was direct yet evocative, immersing readers in the brutal and exotic world of Conan the Barbarian.

Literary Techniques

Howard employed a mix of first-person and third-person narrative perspectives to create intimacy and immediacy in his stories. His use of archaic and poetic language added a timeless quality to the tales, while his skillful pacing maintained suspense and engagement. Howard's attention to detail in world-building and character development set a high standard for fantasy writers who followed.

Impact on the Fantasy Genre

The influence of Robert E. Howard on the fantasy genre is profound. He pioneered the sword and sorcery subgenre, characterized by heroic adventures in a mythical past filled with magic and monsters. Howard's success with Conan paved the way for future writers such as Michael Moorcock, Fritz Leiber, and later fantasy creators who built upon the foundations he established.

The World of Conan: Hyborian Age

The setting of the Conan stories, known as the Hyborian Age, is a fictional prehistoric era created by Howard to provide a rich backdrop for his tales. This mythical epoch is positioned between the fall of Atlantis and the rise of known ancient civilizations, allowing Howard creative freedom to invent cultures, geography, and history.

Geography and Cultures

The Hyborian Age features a diverse array of kingdoms, tribes, and city-states, each with distinct customs and political dynamics. From the icy northlands of Cimmeria to the decadent cities of Aquilonia and Stygia, the world is both vast and intricately detailed. This variety provides a dynamic stage for Conan's numerous exploits and conflicts.

Magic and Mythology

Magic in the Hyborian Age is presented as a dangerous and mysterious force, often associated with dark sorcery and ancient gods. Howard's portrayal of magic contrasts with Conan's pragmatic and often skeptical nature, emphasizing physical strength and cunning over supernatural power. This balance contributes to the gritty realism that distinguishes the Conan stories.

Major Works Featuring Conan

Robert E. Howard wrote numerous short stories and novellas featuring Conan the Barbarian. These works were originally published in pulp magazines but have since been compiled into various collections and anthologies. Some of the most notable stories include:

- "The Phoenix on the Sword"
- "The Tower of the Elephant"
- "Queen of the Black Coast"
- "Red Nails"
- "Beyond the Black River"

Story Themes and Plot Elements

The Conan tales often revolve around themes of survival, revenge, exploration, and the clash of civilizations. Howard masterfully blends action and suspense with philosophical undertones about civilization versus barbarism. The plots frequently involve Conan overcoming overwhelming odds through a combination of brute strength, intelligence, and luck.

Character Traits and Themes

Conan the Barbarian Robert E. Howard is characterized by a unique combination of physical prowess, intelligence, and a complex moral code. Unlike many fantasy heroes, Conan is not idealized but portrayed as a pragmatic and sometimes ruthless individual shaped by a harsh environment.

Physical and Mental Attributes

Conan is described as a towering figure with immense muscular strength, agility, and combat skills. Beyond his physical capabilities, he demonstrates keen strategic thinking, adaptability, and a strong will. These traits make him a formidable warrior and leader, capable of navigating both the battlefield and political intrigue.

Core Themes

Several recurring themes define the Conan stories:

- **Barbarism vs. Civilization:** The tension between the untamed barbarian world and the decadence of civilization is central to Conan's narrative.
- **Survival and Self-Reliance:** Conan's journey emphasizes resilience and independence in a hostile world.
- **Fate and Free Will:** While fate influences events, Conan's choices and actions drive his destiny.
- **Honor and Personal Code:** Despite his rough exterior, Conan adheres to a personal sense of honor and loyalty.

Legacy and Cultural Impact

The legacy of Conan the Barbarian Robert E. Howard extends far beyond the original pulp stories. The character has become a cultural icon, inspiring adaptations across multiple media including films, comics, video games, and television series. Howard's creation helped define the sword and sorcery genre and continues to influence fantasy storytelling worldwide.

Adaptations and Media

Notable adaptations of Conan include the 1982 film starring Arnold Schwarzenegger, which brought the character to a mainstream audience, as well as numerous comic book series published by companies such as Marvel and Dark Horse. Video games and role-playing games have further expanded Conan's reach, introducing the barbarian hero to new generations.

Enduring Popularity

The enduring popularity of Conan the Barbarian Robert E. Howard can be attributed to the timeless appeal of his character and the richly imagined world he inhabits. Fans continue to celebrate Howard's work through conventions, fan fiction, and scholarly analysis, ensuring that Conan remains a vital figure in the pantheon of fantasy literature.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who is Robert E. Howard in relation to Conan the Barbarian?

Robert E. Howard is the original creator and author of Conan the Barbarian, a fictional sword and sorcery hero featured in a series of stories starting in the 1930s.

When was Conan the Barbarian first created by Robert E. Howard?

Conan the Barbarian was first created by Robert E. Howard in 1932, with the character debuting in the story "The Phoenix on the Sword."

What genre does Robert E. Howard's Conan the Barbarian belong to?

Conan the Barbarian belongs to the sword and sorcery genre, a subgenre of fantasy characterized by heroic adventures and supernatural elements.

How did Robert E. Howard's writing style influence the Conan the Barbarian stories?

Howard's writing style was fast-paced, vivid, and action-oriented, blending dark fantasy with heroic adventure, which defined the tone and appeal of the Conan stories.

Are the original Conan the Barbarian stories by Robert E. Howard still popular today?

Yes, Robert E. Howard's original Conan stories remain popular and influential, inspiring numerous adaptations in comics, films, games, and new literary works.

What themes are commonly explored in Robert E. Howard's Conan the Barbarian stories?

Common themes include barbarism versus civilization, survival, individualism, heroism, and the supernatural.

Did Robert E. Howard write all the Conan the Barbarian stories himself?

Robert E. Howard wrote the original Conan stories, but after his death, other writers continued the series, expanding the Conan universe.

How has Robert E. Howard's Conan the Barbarian impacted modern fantasy literature?

Howard's Conan helped popularize sword and sorcery as a fantasy subgenre and influenced many modern fantasy authors with its blend of action, dark themes, and heroic characters.

What is the historical and cultural setting of Robert E. Howard's Conan the Barbarian stories?

The stories are set in the fictional Hyborian Age, a prehistoric era created by Howard that blends various cultural elements to form a unique fantasy world.

Where can I read the original Conan the Barbarian stories by Robert E. Howard?

The original stories are available in collections like "The Coming of Conan the Cimmerian" and "The Complete Chronicles of Conan," available in bookstores and online platforms.

Additional Resources

1. *Conan the Barbarian: The Original Stories of Robert E. Howard*

This collection brings together the classic tales written by Robert E. Howard that introduced Conan the Barbarian to the world. It includes iconic stories like "The Phoenix on the Sword" and "The Tower of the Elephant," showcasing Conan's adventures in the mythical Hyborian Age. The book captures Howard's vivid storytelling and richly imagined world, making it a must-read for fans of sword and sorcery.

2. *The Coming of Conan the Cimmerian*

Edited by Patrice Louinet, this volume compiles the earliest Conan stories by Robert E. Howard, some previously unpublished in book form. It traces the development of the character and the setting, providing historical context and authorial notes. Readers gain insight into the formative years of Conan's legend and Howard's creative process.

3. *Conan the Barbarian: The Chronicles of Conan*

This anthology collects a variety of Conan stories by Robert E. Howard, offering a comprehensive look at the barbarian's escapades. The book features tales of battle, magic, and intrigue, highlighting Conan's strength, wit, and unyielding spirit. It serves as an excellent introduction for new readers and a nostalgic trip for longtime fans.

4. *The Savage Tales of Solomon Kane*

While not directly about Conan, this collection features another of Howard's dark and brooding heroes, Solomon Kane, whose adventures share a similar grim and heroic tone. The stories explore themes of justice, vengeance, and supernatural horror, complementing the Conan mythos with a different kind of sword-and-sorcery storytelling. It's an essential read for those interested in Howard's broader literary universe.

5. *Conan of Cimmeria: Volume One (1932-1933)*

The first in a series of volumes edited by Patrice Louinet, this book gathers the earliest Conan stories written during 1932 and 1933. It includes never-before-published drafts and fragments, providing a deep dive into Howard's original vision for Conan. The volume enriches the understanding of the character's origins and the evolution of Howard's style.

6. *Red Nails*

One of Robert E. Howard's most famous Conan stories, "Red Nails" is a dark, intense tale of survival and conflict. Set in a lost city filled with deadly traps and warring factions, Conan navigates treacherous alliances and brutal combat. This story exemplifies Howard's skill at blending action and atmosphere to create memorable sword-and-sorcery fiction.

7. *The Conan Chronicles Volume 1: The People of the Black Circle*

This collection includes some of the most celebrated Conan stories, such as "The Black Stranger" and "The People of the Black Circle." It showcases Conan's adventures across diverse landscapes, from desert kingdoms to

mysterious mountain fortresses. The volume highlights Howard's narrative prowess and the enduring appeal of his barbarian hero.

8. *Conan the Barbarian: The Essential Collection*

A curated selection of Robert E. Howard's best Conan stories, this book offers a balanced mix of action, adventure, and dark fantasy. It provides readers with a concentrated experience of Conan's world, emphasizing his cunning and combat skills. The collection is ideal for both new readers and those looking to revisit classic tales.

9. *Beyond the Black River and Other Stories*

This volume features some of Howard's darker and more psychologically complex Conan stories, including the titular "Beyond the Black River." The tales explore themes of civilization versus barbarism and the harsh realities of the Hyborian Age frontier. It's a compelling read that deepens the mythos surrounding Conan and his world.

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