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**The worst movie  
(so far) this year**

"Conan the Barbarian"  
Arnold Schwarzenegger  
CinemaWorld  
Rated R

"Conan the Barbarian" is a shining tribute to Murphy's law. Everything that could possibly go wrong, does.

First, there's the plot. Schwarzenegger is Conan, a hulking gladiator-turned-adventurer bent on revenge after snake-worshiper Thulsa Doom (James Earl Jones) slaughters his parents. He meets up with shapely thief Valeria (Sandahl Bergman) and sly sidekick

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Subotai (Gerry Lopez) and sets off on a number of harrowing adventures. The Big Quest, of course, is to set good King Osric's (Max Von Sydow) daughter free from the evil clutches of Thulsa Doom, who wants her for his own nefarious purposes.

Although it would seem pretty difficult to go wrong with such a familiar, basic plot, writers John Milius and Oliver Stone do. They leave rather large gaps in the story, like why Conan, the most famous gladiator in the land, is suddenly released scot-free by his master. Or why Conan can reach the castle of Thulsa Doom a week before his friends do, despite the fact that they leave at the same time.

If these story jumps are difficult to swallow, try stomaching the dialogue. Most of it is beautifully crafted verse, like "Get them!", "Kill them!" and "After them!" The rest is deep, meaningful expressions of emotion, mostly groans, grunts and death-screams.

The writers do aim for something greater, but fail miserably. The film opens with a line from Nietzsche: "That which doesn't kill us makes us stronger." The writers show us that Thulsa Doom is ultimately responsible for Conan's strength, since he was responsible for submitting Conan to the years of suffering and back-breaking toil that have made him the musclebound fighter he is.

This theme is just too weak - too weak to convince Conan not to finish his quest for revenge, and too weak to convince the audience that "Conan" is anything more than just your basic high-budget, poorly-written adventure flick, trying to take advantage of the success of "Raiders of the Lost Ark."

Schwarzenegger delivers his lines with all the subtle expression and feeling of an orangutan. Bergman, cast as something of a blonde Marion Underwood, tries hard, but doesn't give her character enough oomph to make her motto, "You wanna live forever?" believable. Then there's Jones, who overplays his evil character so much that the snakes that surround him seem likable in comparison.



Conan (Arnold Schwarzenegger) bites the tail of a giant snake in hair-raising scene of "Conan the Barbarian."

In hopes of saving the film the producers hired special effects man Nick Alder, who won an Academy Award for his work on "Alien." Alas, most of the special effects are just plain silly, like a huge cauldron of steaming green soup filled with human hands and heads (Cream of Flesh?), or a battle over Conan's dying body between his friends and the gods of death. Even the bloody battle scenes are poorly done, with the typical spurting blood, decapitations, etc.

And if that wasn't enough, there's the editing. Some scenes seem to stretch on interminably, with no sense of actual time represented. The battle scenes are hopelessly confused, and are actually boring.

This is the Ultimate Sin for adventure pictures. If the viewer isn't kept on the edge of his or her seat, there's always the chance to stop and consider just how silly the whole affair really is. And once you've lost the viewer, it's almost impossible to get him or her back again. "Conan" not only failed to keep me on the edge of my seat, it let me sit way back and just smile at its foolishness. Director John Milius even has the gall to make a Hitchcock-esque appearance as a peddler of the snack "lizard-on-a-stick" right in the middle of the foolishness.

Even some nice background shots of scenic Spain and one cute scene where Conan punches out a camel can't save this loser. "Conan" is quite possibly the worst movie so far this year, so naturally the producers are already planning at least one sequel. Talk about evil villains.

by matt meyer

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