



Conan of Venarium

Harry Turtledove

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A new Conan adventure--from one of today's most popular writers of fantasy and SF!

For decades, millions of readers have thrilled to the adventures of Conan, the barbarian adventurer invented by Robert E. Howard and further chronicled by other fantasy greats, including such notables as L. Sprague de Camp, Poul Anderson, and Robert Jordan.

Now Harry Turtledove, one of today's most popular writers of fantasy and SF, contributes a novel to the Conan saga--a tale of Conan in his youth, in the year or so before he becomes the wandering adventurer we know from the tales of Howard and others.

On the verge of adulthood, he lives in a Cimmerian hamlet, caring for his ailing mother, working in his father's smithy, and casting his eye on the weaver's daughter next door.

Then war comes: an invasion by the Aquilonian Empire. Conan burns to join the fight, but he's deemed too young. Then, from the border country, comes an unbelievable report: The Aquilonians have smashed the Cimmerian defending forces, and can rule as they please. Soon their heavily garrisoned forts dot the countryside. Their settlers follow after, carving homesteads out of other men's land.

Every Cimmerian longs to drive the intruders out with fire and sword, but they must stay their hands, for the Aquilonians have promised savage reprisals. Then, intolerably, the Aquilonian commander takes a wholly dishonorable interest in the weaver's daughter -- and he's not a man to wait, or even ask permission.

It's not a recipe for a peaceable outcome.

Conan of Venarium Details

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Author : Harry Turtledove

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From Reader Review Conan of Venarium for online ebook

Eric Evans says

The best in the Conan tales after Robert Howard. I was partial to Robert Jordan's Conan until I read this one by Harry Turtledove. Jordan now is in second place. This tale of Conan as a youngster and growing into his barbarian manhood, his kindness/coldness, and most of all the development of his cleverness.

Stuart Dean says

Conan as written by the master of alternative history. Will Conan be met by Swiss from the future offering him an arsenal of Sig Sauer's? Will aliens invade Aquilonia at the heart of their battle with the Picts? Will Conan give up the sword and become a shepherd? The answer is no. The only alternative history here is that the young Conan is master of the bow at the age of twelve, whereas in real life Conan was an indifferent bowman until a much later age.

This is the story of young Conan, aged 12, living the life of a humble barbarian in southern Cimmeria. We see him interact with his father, a tough blacksmith, and his sickly mother. Conan is just coming of age when the Aquilonians invade Cimmeria to stop the interminable barbarian invasions, this time to stay. They come with sufficient force to found the city of Venarium, and Conan is forced to watch as his homeland is settled by southern invaders. Conan learns to build his hatred of the invaders, and slowly develops into the beginnings of the warrior we all know and love.

Turtledove writes Conan as Turtledove, not trying to mimic the style of Howard in any way. As usual, he divides the POV between Conan and choice members of the Aquilonian force, showing how each views the situation. Turtledove always tries to show each side in an unbiased way, unless one side are Nazis. There is far less action than is common in other Conan stories, and most of the novel is used on character development, a tactic totally alien to REH. This style is better suited to Turtledove, as it would probably not have gone well if he had tried to copy REH the way many others have done, notably L. Sprague deCamp.

Rather slow moving for a Conan novel, but an honest attempt to show how Conan the blacksmith's son becomes Conan the Conqueror.

Michael Wormald says

Excellent a convincing prequel to all the Conan stories!

Daniel says

I can't remember when I last read a book or story with the famous 'Conan' as hero. It's been many years, for sure, but there was a time that I greatly enjoyed those books. And so, when I saw this title on a shelf, I was

eager to give it a read. Sadly, I found it sorely lacking.

Turtledove's actual writing style was just fine, though it did lack the excitement that Robert E Howard or even Lin Carter or L. Sprague de Camp manage to put into the stories. But the plotting was dreadful. I'd say that nearly half the book was repeating a couple of sequences (how much Conan liked a certain girl, how much the nasty Aquilonian liked the same girl, how much Conan hated the Aquilonian and wanted him dead, and how it all would lead to trouble). Saying all of this only once would have reduced this to a fifty page book, I think.

And then there were the non-barbarian aspects of the ... well... barbarians. Maybe it was important for us to see the twelve year old Conan behaving like a twelve year. Maybe not, though. Maybe it would be okay to see him as being exceptionally different. But in any case, seeing him playing what is essentially a game of soccer with other boys was totally pointless and to my mind, totally out of character.

I wanted to like this book, but sadly, the best part about it was the chronology of Conan books at the end.

Keith Bell says

As an avid Conan (and REH) reader, I was delighted to find one I hadn't read as it came out after I was married and starting a family. Expected a lot more from Turtledove but was ultimately disappointed. 90% of the story is pretty sophomoric and unremarkable. Only in the last chapter does it mature into something worth reading only to end in a cliché.

Robert Shroud says

I read this book for two reasons. I am a fan of the Conan Sagas, going back to my late teens/early twenties, and I am considering a fantasy novel in the Conan vein. I can't say I am a hardline fan as some are, trashing the book for not living up to the character of the Cimmerian, forged by Robert E. Howard so long ago. However, whatever issues the book did have, I enjoyed the story for what it was, a look into the beginnings of what may have made the legend. Took me back to my younger days, and hours spent greedily consuming stories of the barbarian with the steely blue eyes, and square cut mane.

Jeff Jellels says

“And I will tell you one thing more, no matter how little you care to hear it – no one dies of a broken heart, even if people wish they could. Do you understand that?”

As a kid, I collected quite a few of the old de Camp and Carter editions of the *Conan the Barbarian* stories. The Robert E. Howard originals amazed me, but the further the books stretched beyond him, the less interest I had in reading them. But *Conan of Venarium* was penned by Harry Turtledove, whose alternate history is quite good, so I figured I'd give this one a try. Of course, it is about a *young Conan* ... and I'm always trepidatious about giving backstory to characters who seem better off without that baggage. (Looking at you Anakin, Jimmy Howlett, Legolas the elf!)

Anyhow, this was ... okay. Turtledove is a good writer and the bloodshed of the last third of book definitely felt Conan-esque – but elsewhere, Conan's tribe seemed a bit too 'civilized' and not quite as bull-headed or impetuous as I expected.

And then there are other problems. Main villain -- Stercus -- pretty much a creeper. That's uncomfortable ... but it also doesn't make sense in the context of the story. Modern sensibilities aside, he's creeping on girls who, in the actual middle-ages, probably would have been married in their mid-teens. Plus, even if he is a flat-out "dirty old man," it just doesn't make sense that his troupe of soldiers would turn on him quite so quickly – especially after a successful campaign against a rampaging barbarian horde. After all, these guys are the fantasy equivalent of a conquering Roman legion and, historically, not too well-regarded when it comes to their treatment of women after a lusty conquest. I get the dial back -- but since the whole plot hinges on Stercus's 'proclivities,' it just seems odd.

The book has its structural problems too. There are a lot of side characters, and the dénouement (after the climatic fall of Venarium) goes on ... way ... too ... long. But the worst offender is the grafting of some really misplaced mystical elements into the story. Conan's creator Robert E. Howard blended sorcery and monsters into his Conan tales seamlessly, but here a phantom temple and a sheep-stealing demon seemed shoe-horned into the plot ... which it also seriously derails ... because Conan 'the Boy' pretty effortlessly offs a 40-foot magic snake and a flying demon by chapters 3 and 5 and now we're supposed to be worried about how he'll fare against some lout with garden ho?

I think he's got this.

Nuts ... I'm making things sound worse than they are. *Conan of Venarium* is a fine fantasy book. I mostly enjoyed it and probably would have enjoyed it even more if some of the logical inconsistencies were tightened up. But unless you are diehard Conan fan, Turtledove's other work is a better place to go to really appreciate this author's talents, and I'm not sure that *Conan of Venarium* is anything more than a minor coda to the legendary character.

Mark Lacy says

I don't know why I bothered with this. Reviews online made it sound like it was awful. But the copy I found was in nice condition, and it's been a while since I read a Conan novel, so I thought I'd give it a try. But it was just as awful as the reviews said it was, so I gave up shortly into the book (about 10%). How this caliber of an author could've written (and had published!) something this bad is beyond me.

Ian Thomas says

This book is poorly formatted. Normally I would only give it two stars for that, because as an ebook publisher myself, there is no excuse for a badly-scanned, error-laden book. However, Harry Turtledove's skill with the character of Conan and the richness of those around him bumps this up an additional star. The book is well-paced, right up until what I would call the epilogue (although it isn't labeled as such). Without giving away spoilers, the last dozen or so pages feel like an editorial afterthought that lasts longer than necessary.

All in all, a good addition to the Conanverse.

Soren says

My first Conan book. It was fun to read about the early life of the barbarian. I wonder how accurate this book is to the others that have been written by different authors? It was predictable, but still fun to read. I am anxious to read another of the Conan books, but I think I will turn to the original author of the series.

Michael Brockley says

In the saga of Conan the Cimmerians, the sacking of Venarium represents his emergence upon the Hyborian stage. Harry Turtledove tells a raucous tale filled with battles, barbarian bloodlust and a mite of magic for good measure. In "Conan of Venarium," a disgraced Aquilonian general leads an army into the southern forests of the clannish Cimmerians. Having beaten the initial resistance from the natives, the general establishes an outpost which he calls Venarium. But the presence of the Aquilonians and their allies does not sit well with the defeated but unbowed Cimmerians. Among them is the blacksmith's adolescent man-child, Conan. When the general courts the too-young daughter who has caught Conan's eye, the twelve-year old seethes despite the distractions of attacks from wolf packs and a marauding dragon and the perplexing prophecies of an itinerant seer. When the general kidnaps the girl, Conan seeks revenge, unleashing a revolt that frees just people. By tasting the unsatisfying taste of vengeance, a thief, a reiver, a slayer, a pirate, an adventurer, a commander and a king takes his first steps into sword-and-sorcery legend.

Angus Whittaker says

This book was pretty much as I expected: gripping but terribly written. Harry Turtledove writes like a delinquent 12-year old, and his subject matter being the stuff of video games, this only enforces the impression.

This is the first Conan book I've read - I started with this one because the goodreads Conan chronology instructed me to do so. Hopefully some of the others - especially the originals by Robert E. Howard and the Robert Jordan ones - will be better.

In this book, Conan is only 12-13. This is ridiculous. Turtledove keeps stressing how big and buff he is, and I'm just not believing it. A 12-year old cannot get that buff. This is just a technicality and is beside the point, but what I'm trying to say is that this version of Conan is completely not believable. Sure, maybe Conan looks like his Arnold Schwarzenegger incarnation when he's 25, but not when he's 12. He is also way too angry and brooding. Why does every fantasy hero have to be angry and brooding? It's absurd. It's as if Turtledove really wanted to write about the adult Conan, but wrote about the kid instead, for some unknown reason.

The only reason I gave this book two stars, rather than 1, is because I enjoyed it (despite the vigor with which I have condemned it). It's a light read, and requires very little thinking, in part because the plot, dialogue, and action scenes are all complete junk.

Ken says

Robert Howard never wrote the story of Conan's childhood, or provided the reason why he left Cimmeria and never returned. Harry Turtledove gives us a serviceable version of the young Conan story, complete with requisite giant snake and a demon, but mostly a story of occupation, war, and a view of how both sides see the other in a conflict.

Bob says

This is the only Conan novel by alternate-history maven Harry Turtledove. In William Galen Gray's chronology, it is the first Conan tale, followed by *Legions of the Dead* and *The Thing in the Crypt*.

On the one hand, it is not actually a bad read for a sword (not much sorcery) novel, but it has some real problems with fidelity to Robert E. Howard's Conan. In fact, if you can forget it's supposed to be a Conan prequel, it works okay. However, as a tale of the sword swinging barbarian, it has quite a few holes.

The story takes place before the first of Robert E. Howard's tales, though he did allude to the Aquilonian outpost of Venarium, which was overcome by Conan and his people. Turtledove faces a problem: how to allow the Aquilonians to establish Venarium in Cimmeria and to keep it standing? The Cimmerians of the Conan saga don't come across as meek or submissive. I imagine something akin to Fort Tuscelan's struggle for survival in Howard's *Beyond the Black River*.

For me, Turtledove does not pull it off very well. The way Venarium is founded and the Cimmerian response is not at all what I depict. Regarding Conan's home village, Duthil: it comes across as your standard medieval village. There houses with several rooms, shops, a main street: this does not remotely strike one as a barbarian community. And we're at the root of the problem. An unlikely premise (the way Venarium was established) and an unbelievable depiction of Cimmeria. It's going to be hard to win over a knowledgeable Conan fan after this start.

A Conan tale with what I believe to be a much more realistic portrayal of Howard's vision is John Maddox Roberts' *Conan the Valorous*. Further, the Conan Role Playing Game supplement, *Cimmeria*, presents a more palatable view of the land and how the people lived.

The attitudes of the Cimmerians seem awfully civilized for a nation of, well, you know, barbarians. In fact, again, it seems rather medieval. To his credit, one thing Turtledove does well is incorporate the Aquilonian soldiers into the story. Their scenes give some depth to the tale. This is offset somewhat by the stereotypical bad guy: in this case, Count Stercus. He is about as deep as Snidely Whiplash.

The last chapter shifts to a tongue-in-cheek style, a tone completely out of place with the entire book. It is just about as silly as the chapter titled, "The Temple Out of Time," which does not remotely fit into the story. I haven't read all of the Conan books yet, but this is the first I've come across with no sex. Perhaps not surprising, since he's only 15 at the end of the tale, but it is another uncharacteristic element of the book.

While this seems like a pretty negative review, I didn't mind reading this book: it just isn't an authentic Conan tale. It reminds me of Quinn Fawcett's Mycroft Holmes novels. They were nice Victorian-Era James Bondish books: they just weren't Mycroft Holmes. In case you don't know, Mycroft was Sherlock Holmes'

smarter, older brother and not at all a secret agent type of guy.

But I hoped for a better Conan coming-of-age tale. Since the copyright holders of Conan are inflexible regarding official pastiches (non-Howard tales), it is unlikely anyone will be given permission to tell the Venarium story again. Hopefully an unauthorized attempt will succeed where this one failed.

Joe says

I've held out on reading any Conan books not authored by creator Robert E. Howard, but I loved Turtledove's *Guns of the South* and had to give this one a try. I wasn't disappointed.

No one could possibly match Robert E. Howard's lush and florid style and Turtledove wisely doesn't even try. Instead, he brings something to a Conan tale that Howard never attempted: numerous well-developed, sympathetic characters.

Conan of Venarium is an origin story. Though Howard's stories follow Conan long after he left his native Cimmeria, this novel presents Conan as a teenager living with his parents in the Cimmerian border village of Duthil. An invasion by the kingdom of Aquilonia subjugates Conan's village and sets up military garrisons for the gradual Aquilonian settlement of Cimmeria. Bristling under Aquilonian rule, Conan bides his time as the plot moves toward an inexorable moment of revenge.
