

CONAN

Alan Jones interviews Edward R. Pressman, producer of the forthcoming Conan movie.





The long awaited film version of Robert E. Howard's sword and sorcery character **Conan** is finally with us. And no-one is more relieved than its producer, Edward R. Pressman. Pressman, who is responsible for producing Brian De Palma's **(Blood) Sisters** and **Phantom of the Paradise**, surprisingly saw the film late last year at the cinema in Nairobi, "But without music and with long stretches where the film went black. It was a showing to qualify it for tax purposes but even in the form I saw it in, the film did ten times the amount of business in Kenya that **Raiders of the Lost Ark** did". Seeing the Africans turn out in droves must have been a heartening experience for Pressman as the **Conan** project represents nearly eight years of his life.

"It all started when Oliver Stone came to me with the idea of doing a film based on Howard's creation which would star the former Mr. Universe, Arnold Schwarzenegger. He wrote a script that was absolutely brilliant but would have taken 70 million dollars to make". Stone, who directed the cult horror film **Selzore** and, more recently **The Hand** for Pressman, won an Oscar for his screenplay for **Midnight Express** and in the earliest draft of the **Conan** script took into account many of the aspects of the early years of Conan's life and the Howard stories which dealt with this period as well as developing new themes of his own. Almost immediately the problems started and most of the difficulties Pressman has encountered on the project were with clearing the literary rights. Robert E. Howard had created the character for the 1932 'Weird Tales' story **The Phoenix on the Sword** but several other writers have carried on the anti-hero's exploits, like L. Sprague de Camp and Lin Carter and they wanted a slice of the lucrative rights too. This problem was eventually solved by forming a syndicate to represent the various parties. The other problem was with the many shifts in personnel that the project has undergone. "John Milius was always my first choice as director but when he pulled out to direct his pet project **Big Wednesday**, I spoke to Ridley Scott who seemed quite keen to do it but he kept changing his mind". Other directors that have also been linked to the film are Alan Parker, Ralph Bakshi and even John Frankenheimer but when the project stalled once again at Paramount, Milius came back into the picture with what would eventually be a fourth draft







Above: As-yet unseen in Britain, Dino De Laurentiis' Conan movie stars Arnold Schwarzenegger as the Cimmerian warrior. Below: A bizarre reptile woman who appears in the film.

script and, unexpectedly, he also brought with him Dino De Laurentiis with whom he had a prior commitment. "But I wanted to see the film get off the ground as I had been working on it for so long. I was a bit dubious that our original concept might be interfered with but I put my faith in Millius' perseverance and I know for a fact that he has been able to more-or-less do what he has wanted because of Dino's personal family tragedies". What about the rumour though that De Laurentiis was cutting out most of the violence? "Well that isn't quite true. Although one particularly gory head severing scene has been cut, which incidentally didn't look that good anyway, the violence is being cut down rather than being cut out. For example 20 seconds is too much whereas 5 seconds is just right. The only real

problem I noticed when I saw the film is that the story has still yet to be properly told. Enough footage was shot but they just have to get it right in the editing".

The film itself began shooting proper on January 7th 1980 in studios just outside Madrid and apparently utilised 49 sets including a miniature of the city of Shadizar. The director of photography was originally Gil Taylor but he was replaced after a short time by Duke Callaghan, the same photographer who worked on Millius' **Big Wednesday**. In the early days of the project the names of Ray Harryhausen and Jim Danforth were bandied around with reference to the special effects but obviously stop motion animation would have held up the completed film even more. So it was Nick

Alder of **Alien** fame who was employed to come up with the methods of decapitation and the devising of how Thulsa Doom, the evil leader of the Cult of Set, changes into a snake, and how to build the film's most spectacular effect: a 36 foot hydraulic python.

Amid rumours that Schwarzenegger's voice is to be dubbed and that his acting talent leaves a lot to be desired is the burning question—will **Conan** finally be the beginning of the long anticipated sword and sorcery trend? Pressman:—"Well I hope so. So many people have been in two minds about the film but after they have spoken to Millius, who is very eloquent on the matter, they seem to be won around to his way of thinking that it will be a masterpiece. I sincerely hope this is the case as I own the rights to five **Conan** sequels".

