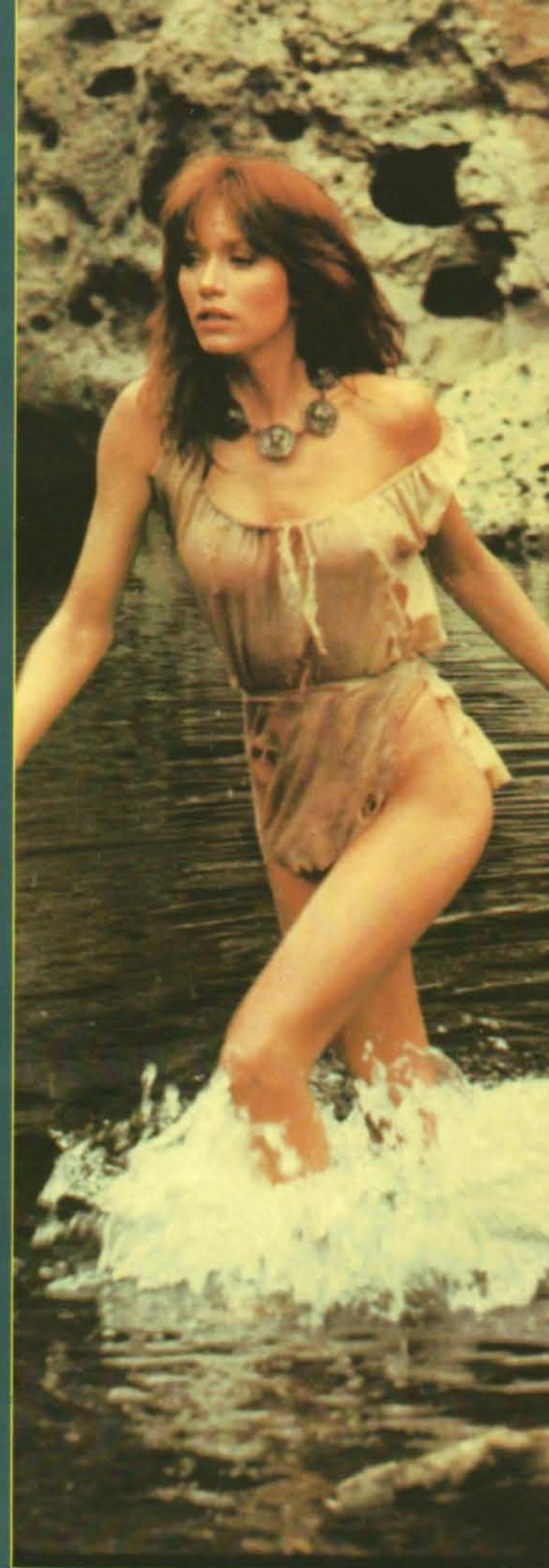


THE BEASTMASTER



Preview by Tony Crowley

Enter the *Conan* rips... Not that the old barbarian need worry his triceps too much over this one. Nor should anyone else. The only reason worth seeing it is that Tanya Roberts flits about in it dressed in next to nothing.

Known in Canada, where the handsome hero hails from, as *Conan The Vegetarian*, this is the PG version of Milius. Or to be more accurate, the Saturday matinee version. That's the Sat. mats of circa 1933, not '83. It's weak. It's wholly ineffective. It's badly acted by people who perform as if expecting to be interrupted by commercials after every other line. It's obtusely directed. And it's really quite a lot of harmless fun – if it's raining outside the cinema, has become part of a quadruple bill and, like me, you happen to think Tanya Roberts is a joy on the eye.

As for the actual storyline, by director Don Coscarelli and his co-producer Paul Pepperman, that it's so muddlesome at the

kick-off, you can almost hear them tearing the scenario in twain and scattering it to the four winds. And you've heard that exact script-tearing sound before. *The Beastmaster*, after all, comes the *Phantasm* team and who could understand *all* of that one?

Their credo appears to be that as soon as the main cyphers are indicated (almost by arrows), who needs a story, anyway. Marc Singer, every tanned inch oiled for better appreciation of his (slim) muscular attributes, is the good guy – Dar. You know that, instantaneously, because he's young and handsome and could be starring here in a commercial for something like Savage cologne – "it cleaves through your sword-wielding underarm sweat problem." Rip Torn is, just as obviously, the rotten old baddy, mad Maax.

Once we have that info programmed into us – it doesn't hurt – we can copy the filmmakers and stop thinking and merely watch what goes down for the next 118 minutes of fights, captures, fights, escapes, battles, fights, and lots of real cute tricks with the

hero's animal pals.

Dar is very Disneyesque, you see. Has this wondrous way with the animal kingdom. He needs to. Most humans suffer exceeding short spans of life in his company. They're always being put to the sword, dagger or axe. That goes for Dar's Mum, too, although in a spurt of opening magical nonsense it is not she but some kind of Dr Doolittle horse-cum-cow that actually gives birth to our hero.

The fast exit of family and friends tends to leave Dar very much on his own. (Or maybe he just has a problem and needs that Savage cologne). Hence the animals. His dog. His eagle – landing on his shoulder is cue for any other humans he meets to fall to their knees in worship. He has a panther, too, and Podo and Riki a pair of most enterprising mongooses. (Mongese?)

Traversing the old mythical mists of time (very well photographed, naturally, by John Alcott, though what Kubrick's man is doing messing around with a piece of dross like this is anyone's guess), our hero picks up John Amos, still looking for his *Roots*, and Charlie's

last Angel, Tanya Roberts. (Oh *that* Tanya!) She takes the obligatory nude swim in the river which proves that director Coscarelli went to a rather late epoch of Saturday matinee serials than Lucas and Spielberg.

Together with the animals, this trio set about bringing down the wicked Maax, his hordes and zombie body guards, from atop their sacrificial altar and bring peace to all except the ice-cream salesgirls springing into action within seconds of the climax. (They're too late. We should have a chance to buy the ices earlier – to throw 'em at the screen and bring back the real Sat mat feeling).

All this, by the way, is happening and remarkably bloodlessly in Aruk. That, more or less, tells it all. What we're watching, if we are watching it, here, is *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Or then again... of *the Lost Cause*. Nice to know Milius' sleep is not being disturbed, though mine is... by Tanya. Her accent and shape, like everyone else's, is far too modernistic for such a medieval movie. Her lines are quite gorgeous, though. The ones her body speaks, that is.

Far left: Rip Torn looks on as Marc Singer tackles a zombie guard in *The Beastmaster*. Left: Ex-Charlie's Angel Tanya Roberts livens up *The Beastmaster* in her role as Kiri.