Conan hacks his way through fantasy epic

By TODD DAVIS
Staff Writer

Conan hacks! He whacks! He slices! He dices! But instead of using a modern Veg-a-matic, Conan brandishes an ancient broadsword, for he is *Conan the Barbarian*. Directed by John Milius, *Conan* is set in the mythic, brutal, and literally heavy metal age of swords, meat axes and sledgehammers. In this epic movie fantasy, men do battle the old fashioned way with steel slashing flesh and bone.

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Why all the bloody carnage? If Conan had any brain activity in his thick skull, he might give us these three reasons.

• One. Conan is a barbarian. Barbarians must rape, murder and pillage. It's the social thing to do.

• Two. As a career warrior, Conan must come to know the "riddle of steel," which is something like the Force in *Star Wars*. To solve the riddle Conan cleverly decides to crush his enemies or stick, stab, poke and choke his enemies—whatever it takes.

• Three. Here's what really gets Conan's sword swinging: the evil Thulsa Doom and his army of refugees from a Molly Hatchet album cover slaughter Conan's parents and make young Conan a slave. Poor little Conan has such an unhappy childhood.

Aside from the rampaging violence, a curious highlight is Doom as a cult figure. Doom's followers wear robes, carry flowers, and search for total emptiness. Call them Doomies.

The movie's production design creates a believable fantasy land of towering towers, diabolical dungeons, and filthy cities. *Conan* presents the standard special effects of animation, bestial transformation, severed bodies, and blood.

Muscleman Arnold Schwarzenegger plays a convincing Conan with a sense of humor which helps lighten the heavy hacking. Broadway dancer Sandhal Bergman is Conan's tough but beautiful girlfriend, Valeria, who can wreak havoc with the best of them. James Earl "Voice of Darth Vader" Jones is bad guy Thulsa Doom in a Cher wig. Not too scary. Jones should have stuck with the low resonating voice he used in *Star Wars* and left the scary looks to someone else.

Conan The Barbarian is supposed to be the summer's big action-adventure answer to last year's *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

Arnold Schwarzenegger wielding his broadsword as Conan.

The main problem with *Conan* is its lack of speed. The movie lurches and lumbers through most of the action, taking its time and the viewer's. Still, Schwarzenegger and Bergman make a good team and bring energy to their scences. But that's not enough. A movie that lives by the sword dies by the sword and *Conan* survives only as entertainment for those with a little barbarian in their 20th century skulls. Otherwise, *Conan* is dead on arrival.

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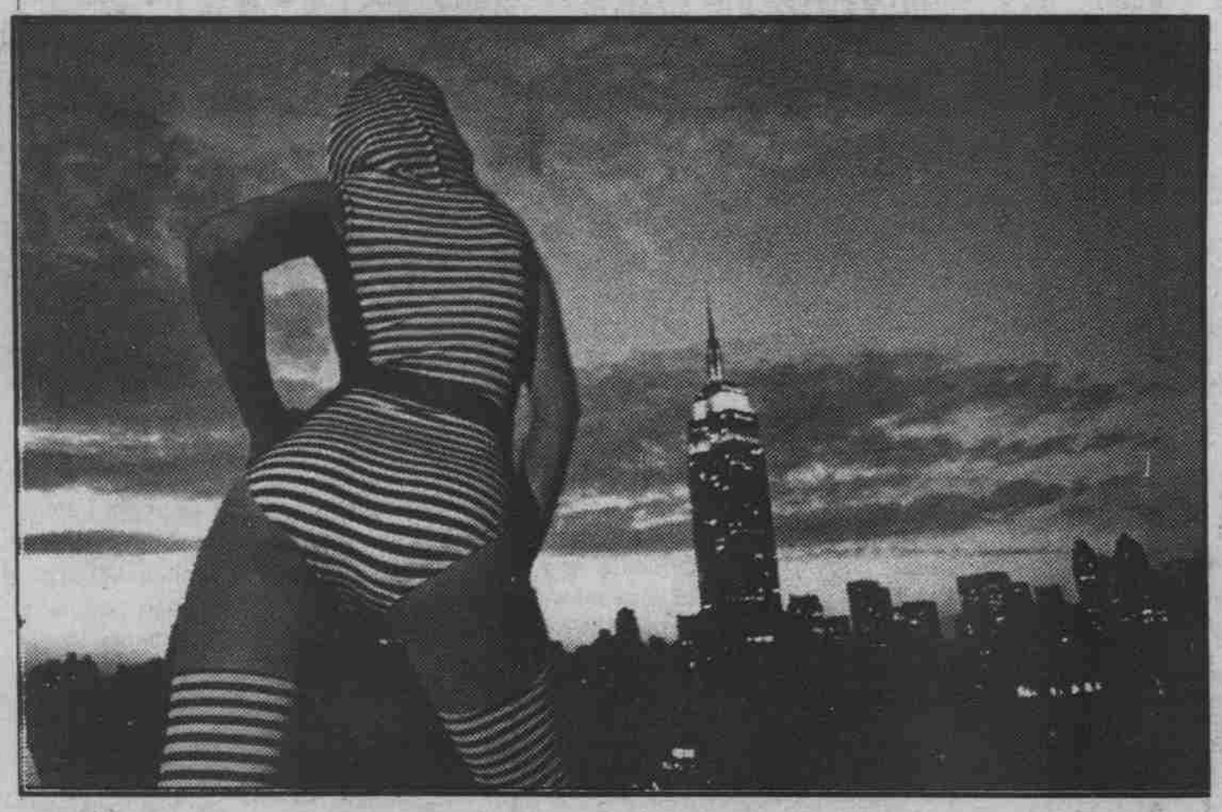

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