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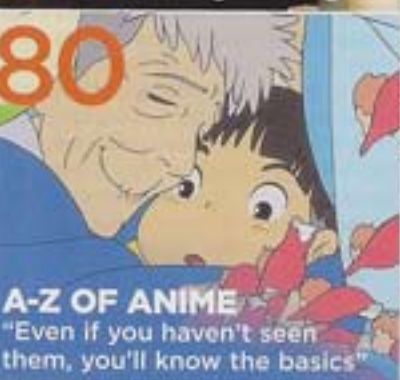
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"Chuck will always return to the Buy More"





CITIZEN KANE

It's no picnic being Solomon Kane, Robert E Howard's grumpy Puritan warrior, James Purefoy tells Nick Setchfield

Some actors suffer for their art. James Purefoy was crucified. "The crucifixion scene was just deeply, deeply unpleasant to shoot," he grimaces, recalling the day he gave it some serious Jesus on the set of *Solomon Kane*. "Forty foot in the air, thick rain, incredibly cold and very little in the way of clothes. But it gives a kind of visceral quality to the film, I think."

As Purefoy tells it, such hardship was perfect inspiration for his turn as the perma-scowling, devil-slaying Puritan avenger. The creation of pulp master Robert E Howard, Kane stalks the 17th century on a mission to cleanse the world of evil, atoning for a life of sin and plunder on the high seas. Purefoy may well have wondered if he was atoning for the odd sin or two himself – more known for roles that mine his suave but rugged charm (he's been in the frame for James Bond and Simon Templar), the Kane shoot found him besieged by athlete's foot, sword-happy stuntmen, a director with a monsoon fetish and a personal fitness regime that should, by rights, have conferred sainthood.

"I lost 24 to 25 pounds, simply

because I had a trainer, Stefan, who was ex-Romanian special forces. He lived with me for two months. He'd kick me out of bed at six o'clock in the morning, we'd do two hours in the gym, then we'd do four hours swordfighting, then four hours on a horse and then we'd go back to the gym to do cardio for the last two hours of the day. And then he'd feed me a dog biscuit and I'd be allowed to go to bed..."

Solomon Kane's very much a cult character. Were you familiar with him?

I wasn't familiar with him at all. I knew about the obvious Robert E Howard characters like Conan and Kull and Bran Mak Morn, but I didn't know Kane at all. Howard was a writer whose characters I could never see myself playing, because I always imagined them to be gigantic, musclebound Schwarzenegger types. So I was rather delighted to find this slightly gaunt 17th century Puritan Englishman!

Did you go back and read the short stories?

Oh yeah. When Mike [Bassett, director] asked me to do it I spent the first month >>



Never moon a Millwall fan...

reading everything that Robert E Howard had ever written – short stories, letters, the lot. I watched films about him. I was trying to get inside that world and inside that strange man from Texas, who never left Texas, and lived with his mother, and yet was able to conjure up worlds that were so alien to where he came from. He's a very impressive pulp writer. And then my second month was spent researching Puritans and, bizarrely, Puritans in my own family. One of my ancestors was the right-hand man to Oliver Cromwell. It was fascinating.

How faithful is the film to the original stories?

I'd say it's faithful to Solomon Kane the character. It's an origin story. Howard never told us where he came from – there are hints in some of the poems and the stories, but he never gave us an origin story. He wasn't really into that. But the producer wanted an origin story and Mike went along with that. Mike is very assiduous in terms of wanting to keep the fanbase onside, so he's done it incredibly sympathetically – everything in the film can be justified somewhere in the stories. Most of the stories are actually very short, they're often only two or four pages long – they're weird tales, essentially, and a lot of them aren't really suitable for a full-length feature adaptation. But I gather from meeting some of the people who are the big Robert E Howard fanbase that they're very happy with the way Solomon is in the movie, and that this is a world that RE Howard would approve of. Grim. A grim world and a grim character. There's not much sense of humour there.

As Kane is such a dark and driven character did you feel you had to bring different shades to him?

I was enormously helped by Mike's origin story, in a way, because yes, on the surface, he can seem very taciturn and grim and not have a lot to say. But because the audience has seen what he's gone through, they all know that there is conflict at work here, and that he is a man who is desperately trying to escape from something and go towards something else. That's one



Jason Flemyng's Malachi is the villain of the movie.



Twisted firestarter: a masked Malachi goes on the prowl.

of the things that attracted me about the character, just from reading the script – just how far that journey was, how big that journey was. The character starts out as this avaricious, greedy, vain, selfish and egotistical buccancer, and then slowly but surely the things that happen to him over the next 90 minutes focus him into becoming a man much more at ease with himself, about what he's been put on this Earth to do.

As an actor, were you looking to bring in lighter touches? You allow yourself a smile when you first put on that hat...

That might be the only smile in the whole film! And I think that was done under great pressure from Mike. "Will you just give us a smile – please!" "Mike," I said, "I don't think he smiles much – even with a new hat!" He might grimace a little. There might be a flicker of a smile. But I can't see him really smiling that much. The Puritans weren't exactly great partiers.

"I researched Puritans – one of my ancestors was right-hand man to Oliver Cromwell"

They were not people who cracked jokes. It seemed to be anti-faith if you did that, if you had too much of a good time. If you're singing or dancing or drinking or doing any of those things then you're not praying and you're not thinking about God.

That's a really un-21st century hero, isn't it?

Well, yeah, but it kinda depends where you come from in the 21st century. There are people up in the mountains in Afghanistan who might not agree with you...

Were there concerns by the studio that he was a little too joyless?





Somerset born James Purefoy plays Robert E Howard's taciturn Puritan.



"The Phantom... of the Opera is there - inside your mind..."



Former Borg Queen Alice Krige has a tough time in ye olde England.

completely seriously. Let's see how immersed we can get in this world."

It looked like a grim and gruelling shoot...

I knew it was going to be that kind of world. Mike said to me, "Are you prepared for this? Because it's going to be a tough shoot. We're shooting it in Prague. During the winter. You know that, don't you?" And I went, "Yeah... yeah... okay. No, it's fine." "Oh, and there's going to be a lot of rain..." Well, he didn't tell me there was going to be 60,000 litres a day! And that we'd reach temperatures of minus ten on a regular basis! Those clothes obviously aren't made of goretex, they're leather and cotton and they suck water up like a sponge. Often I would do a scene and then go and sit down for five minutes while they reloaded the camera - by the time they were ready to shoot again my costume would have frozen to my body. They would then have to go and get a kettle and a hairdryer and defrost me to send me back on set again. It was tough,

I don't think there were, actually. I'm very aware of what our target audience is and it's people who like entering quite a grim world like that. I guess our target audience is 14 to 15-year-old boys, and certainly the ones we've shown it to love that world, they love the fact that we take it very seriously. When I was watching those '80s movies like *Krull* and *Conan* and *Beastmaster* and *Hawk The Slayer*, I never felt that there was much at stake because the lead characters were often cocking an eyebrow and doing a wink to the audience and giving a little pithy remark in the face of unbelievable danger. And you just think, "You're just too cool for school, aren't you?" Because when faced with the undead you'd be a bit alarmed, wouldn't you? I often found myself being pulled out of the film, pulled out of the world that they'd set up, by the vanity and the egos of the actors involved, who wanted to look cooler than they should have done. What we wanted to do was anchor it in a world where we could say, "Let's just see what happens if we take it



Slashed foreheads, pierced cheeks and smashed cartilage all occurred in production.

because it was mostly outside and Mike does have a fetish for extreme rain and extreme mud. He likes that texture that it gives to the image.

Did you suffer from trenchfoot at any point?

Oh, I don't even want to go into what happened... but I had foul, foul, smelling feet, athlete's foot and god knows what else. I had quite a lot of injuries: I had a nine-stitch cut put into my forehead by a stuntman with a sword, I shattered my cartilage during a stunt, I stabbed a stuntman in the face - the sword went through his cheek and I could feel the blade on his tongue.

So what gets you through that kind of hardship? Does it feed into the character?

I think it feeds into the character, yes. But also Mike and I were very close - I think he's a really good filmmaker, and the world he's created - on not a huge amount of money by any means - is a fully immersive one. I believe it. It's set in a time when witches were considered to be real, and women were being burned at the stake and put into ponds on ducking stools up and down the land. So we're playing with that kind of superstition that happened back then. And I think what got me through it was Mike. We'd do a take, I'd scuttle over to the monitors, we'd talk about it, chip away at it a bit more, go back, do it again, go back, do it again... it was just a very close relationship. We had a really good time making it. It was very collaborative, possibly the most collaborative experience I've had on a film.

Michael Bassett has spoken of a potential trilogy of Solomon Kane films. What sort of stories would you like to tell?

I think one of the things that we've achieved with this is that by the end of this first film we've keyed it up with the character knowing what he is and what his job is, what he's on Earth to do. He's been given a job by God and by hell he's going to do it. So he gallops out of the first film ready to gallop into the second one. A lot of the stories take place in Africa, where he meets a character called N'longa, and he gets hold of a thing called the juju staff, which is a big stick with jewels on the end of it and a big head that has magic powers. Mike has already told me that he wants a sequence with one of those rope bridges - he wants lions at either end, me in the middle, and he wants the lions to be on fire! [laughs]

So no rain, then?

No, just blistering heat. He's not going to go somewhere that's just mildly Africa-hot. He's going to go to the hottest place that he can find in Africa. And he'll have a lot of fans around him, and he'll keep me outside, burning. In the big cape and the hat, and three or four layers of clothing... **SFX**

Solomon Kane is out on 19 February.

James Purefoy as Kane, in his treasure-looting days.



SOLOMON KANE

Onward Christian soldier

15 • 103 mins • 10 February

Director: Michael J Bassett

Cast: James Purefoy, Jason Flemyng,

Pete Postlethwaite, Alice Krige, Max Von Sydow

★★★★

Meet Solomon Kane, a man whose grim pursuit of the moral high ground leaves Batman looking like Miley Cyrus.

A hawkish supernatural avenger, Kane was the creation of Robert E Howard, the troubled pulp master whose tales of Conan, Kull and Bran Mak Morn traded in the kind of brutish, sinewy thrills you'd naturally expect from a man still living at home with his mother. But whereas Conan's lusty barbarian adventuring was a perfect fit for cinema – a wish-fulfilment fantasy for every hormone-addled teenage boy,

as well as a starmaking vehicle for the future Governor of California – Kane is an altogether different proposition; a scowling, joyless puritan driven by the word of God. Not the most 21st century of heroes, you must admit.

Naturally, you fear the worst. Would Hollywood demand that Kane's pitiless demeanour be softened for modern audiences? Would the trademark scowl be

swapped for a smirk? Might a quick, frisky shag sneak in between all that candlelit Bible study? Relax, ye faithful. Michael J Bassett's movie preserves Howard's hero in all his dark, god-fearing glory. As Kane, James Purefoy only appears to crack a single smile in the entire film. And when it arrives it's like a thousand suns coming out.

Howard never gave us an origin tale, so Bassett is compelled to build a backstory. An impressively staged intro



Sporty Spice long regretted getting so many tats.

finds us in North Africa, 1600, "a time of witchcraft and sorcery". As British ships assault a city, Kane is introduced as a brigand and a bastard, relishing every opportunity to sink some tempered steel into the locals. There's a dark *Raiders* vibe to this sequence, positioning Kane as the shadow-side of Indiana Jones, looting ancient occult treasures for his own ends. It's here that he encounters the Devil's Reaper, a shroud-wrapped demon who informs him that Satan wants his soul for a plaything.

Renouncing his wicked, wicked ways, Kane returns home to a strange, winter-bleak England. Here the movie walks similar terrain to such classic British horrors as *Witchfinder*



"Right, who put that whoopee cushion there?"

DNA SCAN

- ▶ Perfect Purefoy – 45%
- ▶ Mud and rain – 40%
- ▶ *Witchfinder* General – 10%
- ▶ *Transformers* – 4%
- ▶ Max Von Sydow! – 1%





KANING IT

Howard's Hero: The Essential Facts

Weird Tales



Kane first appeared in the story "Red Shadows", published in the August 1928 issue of pulp magazine *Weird Tales*. In it, Kane avenges the death of a girl at the hands of a villain named Le Loup, following a trail to Africa.

Robert E Howard wrote nine complete Kane tales. There are also three poems and four fragments of incomplete tales.

Kane's arsenal includes a dagger, a rapier, a pair of flintlock pistols and a musket. He also occasionally wields the unimaginably ancient Staff of Solomon - older than the world itself.

Kane came to Marvel Comics in the '70s on the heels of their popular strip version of Howard's Conan The Barbarian. He currently stars in a *Dark Horse* series.



General and Blood On Satan's Claw - a landscape alive with the sense of supernatural forces gathering beneath the frost and the empty fields. We're haunted by dreamily inexplicable images of bird-masked mourners at a funeral; we see corpses hang from gibbets, carrion for the crows. It's a world that quietly hisses with superstition. The location work is one of the movie's great strengths, in fact, though you're in serious danger of contracting trenchfoot from the relentless rain and mud (a startling crucifixion scene is almost as gruelling to watch as it must have been to shoot).

Purefoy is excellent, shifting his performance as the born-again Kane embarks on a search

for redemption. There's a sense of huge faultlines coiling within him and this makes for a genuinely intriguing hero dynamic - waylaid by bandits, Kane is at first reluctant to fight, ignoring a family's cries of

A strong debut for a fantasy icon

"Solomon! Do something!" But soon he's away, stabbing and despatching, caught up in a quest for a kidnapped girl and matched against a magician named Malachi, a horsebacked sorcerer with a nice line in Vaderesque throat squeezes.

It's a shame that the film stumbles at the very end. Kane's final battle finds him facing what looks suspiciously like a Satanic Transformer. It's a clashingly mainstream touch, the kind of "boss level" climax that bedevils every superhero movie these days, puncturing the movie's careful atmosphere of pre-Enlightenment dread. There are better scares to be found in the opening scene, as Kane encounters swirling black mirror-wraiths, demonic beasts that feel torn from the text of a Robert E Howard tale.

If there's a sequel it promises to take Kane to the demon-haunted Africa that regularly featured in the original stories. For now, though, this is a strong screen debut for a compelling fantasy icon. Purists may quibble at certain liberties taken but this proves an effective slice of occult high adventure, a sombre swashbuckler that pays its pulp source material a flinty, tight-lipped respect. Even Kane himself might crack a faint smile of satisfaction, if you can imagine him in such a heathen den of decadence as your local Odeon. **Nick Setchfield**

1 Solomon Kane's rights were optioned back in 1997. In 2006, Highlander's Christopher Lambert was apparently offered the leading role.

MIND PROBE



MICHAEL J BASSETT
Director of *Solomon Kane*



Why haven't we seen a Kane movie before?

>> I think the producers managed to get the rights 13 years ago, actually. They'd had five scripts written before I became involved. And they were generally very big budget things - dealing with the African adventures - but the producers decided that they wanted an origin tale, which was something Robert E Howard never really explored in his writing.

Do you see him as a comic book character?

>> He's a literary character, not a comic book character. He was co-opted into the comic book world, which is great. We have reapers from hell, ghouls, monsters, fire demons and there's an evil sorcerer at the end of it. So it falls beautifully into that sword 'n' sorcery tradition, but it takes it very seriously - it's not glib, it's not ironic.

So are you a big fan?

>> I was a fan of the character, but I wasn't steeped in Solomon Kane mythology, I wasn't a Howard scholar. But I knew enough to think there was a chink of light in there to get an origin story out of it. So I proposed an idea. They wanted a script which they then wanted to give to another director. I thought, "Well, no way is that going to happen!"

How much did it cost?

>> I'm not going to talk about the budget. It's about the budget of James Cameron's catering on *Avatar*!

Did a lot of that go on the special effects?

>> My special effect is James Purefoy. If I can't put my fire demon on, I'm going to go back to him. The story remains pure. It's a modestly budgeted film that looks like a big budget one.

Were you worried when Purefoy got hit by a sword on the set?

>> Well, he got up immediately. But there's an incredible hush on a film set when your lead actor goes down with a sword. He's gushing blood. Two thoughts go through my head - not necessarily in the right order. One: oh my god, is James okay? Two: oh my god, is my movie okay? Seconds later, he's like, "No, we can carry on." Luckily, it was just concussion... **Jonathan Croker**