

Solomon Kane (DVD 2010) review - David Hodson
Written and directed by Michael J Bassett

The epic movie is a distinct cinematic subgenre capable of encompassing *Gone With The Wind*, *Citizen Kane* and *Ben-Hur*. However, in recent years it has specifically come to signify historical epics: not only *Ben-Hur*, but *The Robe*, *Spartacus* and others less distinguished.

This sea-change occurred with the release of Ridley Scott's *Gladiator*, a throwback to the 1960s "sword and sandal" epics which always seemed to feature Stephen Boyd in some villainous role or other. *Gladiator* was big; it warped Roman history into a juvenile male revenge fantasy and it gave Russell Crowe the role for which he will always be remembered. It was mean, it was moody, it was magnificent.

Unfortunately, where a *Gladiator* goes, several pizza-bloated fanboy geeks are bound to follow. Which brings us neatly to *Solomon Kane*.

Created in the 1920s for *Weird Tales* magazine by Robert E Howard, best-known for *Conan The Barbarian*, Kane was an English puritan adventurer who wandered the world fighting vampires, ghouls, ghosts and the odd human opponent. Historical accuracy was never in the *Weird Tales* remit.

By the time of Howard's death at the age of 30, he was branching out into sports stories, detective stories, westerns and whatever else took his fancy, and could well have become an important American writer had he not blown his brains out in the front seat of his truck in Texas in 1936.

Due to a literary diet high in Marvel Comics, the low-budget-movie fanboy geek, besides having poor hygiene and few social graces, seems unable to accept the fact that life and its events rarely have clear beginnings and ends; that friends fall out but frequently make up, and that lovers may stop loving but seldom "move on".

Because of this psychological deficiency, the makers of *Solomon Kane* provide an origin story for a character that doesn't need an origin. They give us a mess of unresolved pubescent-male "issues" dramatised via battles with demons in a replica late-medieval West Country England; fights with sadistic elder brothers; reconciliation with a previously unloving father only to have to kill him moments later. If Michael J Bassett is actually older than

fifteen, serious psychiatric intervention may be required.

A trite story, poor CGI effects and wooden acting suggest that we're unlikely to see a sequel. In his suicide's grave, Robert E Howard can stop spinning.