

## Eye on Washington by John Grauerholz, M.D.

### Conan meets another barbarian

*As grotesque physiques and enraged force replace the models of physical fitness of the 1950s, steroid usage grows.*

**O**n May 1, President George Bush hosted bodybuilder Arnold Schwarzenegger at the White House. Arnold, who is to anabolic steroids what Dolly Parton is to injectable silicon, rose to cinematic stardom in the movie "Pumping Iron," and went on to star in "Conan the Barbarian" and its sequels, followed by roles as "The Destroyer" and "The Terminator."

George is apparently still trying to shed his wimp image, especially in light of his limp-wristed responses to communist brutality in China and Lithuania. After all, no one could accuse Conan the Barbarian of carrying an umbrella. Besides, George proved he could be as brutal as they come in his little urban renewal exercise in Panama City. Of course there are carpers who say this proves that George is both a bully and a coward.

So George is proving his machismo by pumping iron with Arnold, who, by the way, has been appointed head of the President's physical fitness commission. This is an interesting commentary on the state of the nation.

In the old days it was the practice to appoint an athlete, such as a track man or a baseball player, as the national symbol of physical fitness. The Rev. Bob Richards, an Olympic champion pole vaulter, known as the "vaulting vicar," is one such who comes to mind. Another was the baseball player Stan Musial. These men were highly skilled, stronger than average, but hardly exemplary of massive size or brute strength. Both off and on the playing field, they projected an impression of being at least civilized gentlemen. This was be-

cause the impression cohered with reality.

Now Arnold is huge and quite strong, but not as strong as other less decorative men his size. This is because strength is not the primary goal of his weight training, but the development of large, shapely, and well-defined muscles—in other words, appearance. He looks strong in a certain homoerotic way, but he is a beauty contestant.

The criteria for judging so-called male beauty have undergone a change over the last two decades. In the late 1950s, Steve Reeves, the Arnold Schwarzenegger of his day, starred in a series of movies based on the exploits of the ancient Greek hero Hercules. Reeves was 6' 2" tall and weighed 225 lbs. when he competed in physique contests. For movies, however, he would reduce to 205 lbs., since it was felt that the magnification of a cinemascope screen would make him appear grotesque at his contest bodyweight.

Arnold, if anything, was heavier in his movie roles than when he competed. Yesterday's grotesqueness is today's standard of beauty, or whatever. Another example is 6' 4", 275 lb. Lou Ferrigno, who runs around in green paint and a purple rage as the Incredible Hulk. The Hulk is the alter ego of an enraged wimp, who transforms into a green meany when sand is kicked in his face.

Arnold embodies the "aura of strength" the way our military embodies the "aura of power." Undoubtedly, he could beat the tar out of the average person just as the U.S. military beat the tar out of the big, bad Panamani-

ans. A more interesting question is how he would fare against a trained martial artist of equal physical endowments, in a real fight—an opponent analogous, shall we say, to the Soviet military.

The common denominator of Arnold's characteristic roles, is the amoral application of brute force and rage to problems that confront him. His enemies are supposedly evil, but their evil appears to consist of possessing civilization and intelligence. For example, the villain in "Conan the Barbarian" is played by the talented and literate actor James Earl Jones. Thus the savage, Conan, is pitted against the merciless wiles of thought and quasi-literate speech.

Arnold claims not to have used steroids, and I suspect he is telling the truth. He had the genetic potential to develop a massive physique and applied considerable physical and, yes, mental effort to the task. Unfortunately, he has become a "role model," and those who seek to emulate him are willing to accept the risks he declined.

Studies showing that 5% of high school students use anabolic steroids indicate the extent of the problem. Even if Arnold doesn't use steroids and polemicizes against their use, he is emblematic of what one hopes to attain by using them. All the professional football players who tell kids not to use drugs cannot change the fact that drug use is rampant in professional athletics.

Contrary to some of the characters he portrays, Arnold is not stupid. He accomplished what he set out to, and obtained the rewards of that accomplishment—money, fame, and a marriage into the Kennedy clan via Maria Shriver. As opposed to his more working class colleague, Ferrigno, Arnold is the "yuppie Hulk." Now we know the true identity of the enraged wimp.