

THE SAVAGE
SWORD OF
CONAN

OCT. № 15



The SAVAGE SWORD of CONAN™

THE BARBARIAN

ALL-NEW!

THE DEVIL
IN IRON

TERROR ON A TIME-LOST ISLE



PROLOGUE:

HE WAS ONE OF THE PRIMITIVE **YUETSNI** TRIBESMEN WHO LIVE ALONG THE SOUTHERN END OF THE **SEA OF VILAYET**, AND A VIOLENT **STORM** HAD BLOWN HIS FRAIL **FISHING CRAFT** FAR FROM HIS ACCUSTOMED HAUNTS...



WITH A FRENZY, HIS LONG
APISH ARMS WORKED THE
STRAINING **TILLER** AND
PITTED HIS OWN STRENGTH
AGAINST THE STORM'S
BLIND HOWLING **RAGE**...



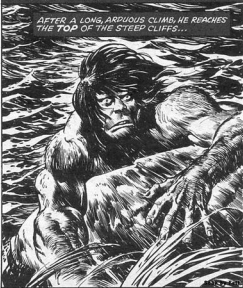
BUT, IN THE END, THE STORM HAD
WRECKED HIS CRAFT ON THE
TOWERING **CLIFFS** OF AN ISLAND,
AND A NIGHT OF FLARING
LIGHTNING AND CRASHING WAVES.

ALL NIGHT HE HAS CLUNG TO THE CLIFFS, AND ONLY **ONCE**
DID HE HEAR A SOUND THAT DROWNED EVEN THE ROARING
WATERS:



IT WAS THE CONCUSSION
OF A **LIGHTNING BOLT**
WHICH SHOOK THE WHOLE
ISLAND, AND WHICH WAS
ACCOMPANIED BY A CAT-
ACLYSMIC **CRASH** WHICH HE
DOUBTED COULD HAVE RESULTED
FROM A MERE SPLINTERED **TREE**.

NOW, IN THE **DAWN**, WITH THE SKY SHINING BLUE AND
CLEAR, AND THE RISING SUN MAKING JEWELS OF THE
DRIPPING LEAVES, HE **CLIMBS** THE CLIFFS A DULL
CURIOSITY DRAWING HIM TO **INVESTIGATE**.



AFTER A LONG, ARDUOUS CLIMB, HE REACHES
THE **TOP** OF THE STEEP CLIFFS...

...TO STAND BEFORE THE DENSE
JUNGLE THAT BORDERS THEM...

...AMID THE GRIM
SOLITUDE WHICH
BROODS OVER THIS
CATELLATED ISLE.

MEN SELDOM
VISIT THIS
UNINHABITED
ISLAND, WHICH
IS CALLED
**KAPUR, THE
FORTIFIED.**
BECAUSE OF
RUINS WHICH
HE KNOWS
MUST LIE
BEYOND THE
TREES.

STILL, HE
IS **NOT**
PREPARED
BY HALF-
REMEMBERED
TALES FOR
WHAT HE SEES
AS THE
FOLIAGE
ABRUPTLY
THINS...

...AND HE SUDDENLY STANDS SURROUNDED BY GREAT **RUINS**--REMNANTS OF SOME
PREHISTORIC KINGDOM, LOST AND FORGOTTEN BEFORE THE CONQUERING **HYBORIANS**
HAD RIDDEN SOUTHWARD, LONG CENTURIES BEFORE.

NONE KNOW WHO
REARED
THOSE NOW-CRUMBLING
COLUMNS AND WALLS.

MOVING CLOSER, THE
FISHERMAN OBSERVES
THE BROKEN **DOME**,
BUILT OF GIGANTIC
BLOCKS OF THE IRONLIKE
GREEN STONE FOUND
ONLY ON THE ISLANDS
OF THE **VILAYET**.

NOTHING **LESS**
THAN A THUNDER-
BOLT COULD HAVE
SPLINTERED
THOSE TON-HEAVY
BLOCKS LIKE SO
MUCH **GLASS**.



SCRAMBLING
OVER THE
DEBRIS, THE
YUETSHI
GRUNTS WITH
SURPRISE
AT THAT
WHICH HE
SEES **INSIDE:**



LISTING FOR
THAT CURIOUS
CRESCENT
DAGGER
WITH JEWELLED
POWELL, THE
YUETSHI MOVES
FORWARD,
FORGETTING
ALL ELSE --



FOR THERE
SURROUNDED BY
STONE DOME AND
BROKEN MASONRY,
LIES A **MAN**
UPON A GREAT
GOLDEN BLOCK--

--A MAN WHO,
IN **LIFE,** MUST
HAVE STOOD
EIGHT FEET
TALL!

THIS VAST RUINED
DOME, THEN, IS
HIS **TOMB.**

BY WHAT **LOST ART**
THE ANCIENTS PRESERVED
THE HUGE BODY IN SUCH
VIVID LIKENESS OF **LIFE,**
KEEPING THE MUSCULAR
LIMBS FULL AND UN-
SHRUNKEN, THE DARK
FLESH VITAL-- THESE
THINGS DO NOT **CONCERN**
THE FISHERMAN.

HE SEES
MERELY--
THE
BLADE!



--AND **THAT IS**
TO PROVE HIS
FINAL, TRAGIC
MISTAKE--

FOR, AS HE LIFTS THE COVETED WEAPON, A STRANGE AND TERRIBLE THING COMES TO PASS:

THE MAN'S LIDS FLARE OPEN, REVEALING GREAT BLACK, MAGNETIC EYES--

--WHOSE ICY STARE STRIKE THE STARTLED FISHERMAN LIKE A PHYSICAL BLOW!

MUSCULAR, DARK HANDS KNOT CONVULSIVELY--

--AND THE MAN ON THE DAI'S HEAVES UP TO A SITTING POSITION!

AS A LEVIATHAN ARM GRASPS HIS SHOULDER, THE YUETSHI SEES NEITHER FRIENDLINESS OR GRATITUDE IN THOSE DARK, GLARING EYES--

--BUT ONLY A FIRE AS ALIEN AND HOSTILE AS THAT WHICH BURNS IN THE EYES OF A TIGER.

THE FISHERMAN'S OWN SAW-EDGED KNIFE SPLINTERS AGAINST THE GIANT'S CORDED ABDOMEN--

--AS AGAINST A STEEL COLUMN--

AND THEN, IN THE GRIP OF THAT GREAT HAND, THE YUETSHI'S THICK NECK BREAKS--

--LIKE A ROTTEN TWIG.



KHAWARIZM: A TURANIAN CITY ON THE SOUTHERN COASTS OF THE INLAND SEA OF VILAYET...



THE DEVIL IN IRON

ADAPTED FROM THE STORY BY ROBERT E. HOWARD, CREATOR OF CONAN



BUT **HOW**
AM I TO
CRUSH THESE
HUMAN
WOLVES,
GHAZNAVI?

IF I FOLLOW THEM INTO THE
STEPPES, I RUN THE RISK OF
EITHER BEING CUT OFF
AND **DESTROYED**--

--OR ELSE
OF HAVING
THEM **ELUDE**
ME ENTIRELY,
AND **BURN**
THE CITY
IN MY
ABSENCE.

OF **LATE**, THEY HAVE
GROWN MORE **DARING**
THAN EVER!

AND YOU
KNOW **WHY**,
MILORD.

YOU
MEAN--?

IT IS THAT BARBARIAN DEVIL
CONAN-- THE NEW **CHIEF**
WHO HAS ARISEN AMONG
THEM, FROM **ERLIK**
KNOWS WHERE!

AYE! HE IS
CRAFTY AS A
MOUNTAIN LION...

"--AND EVEN
WILDER
THAN HIS
FELLOW
KOZAKS!

"WITH HIM AT THEIR
HEAD, THEY CEASE-
LESSLY **RAID** OUR
FRONTIER, RETURNING
TO THE **STEPPES**
WHEN WE RIDE
FORTH TO MEET
THEM.

"LATELY THEY
HAVE EVEN
FORMED AN
ALLIANCE OF
SORTS WITH
THE ACCURSED
VILAYET
PIRATES, MEN
OF MUCH THE
SAME BREED AS
THEMSELVES.

STRANGE! SINCE KING **YILDIZ**'
DEATH, **YEZDIGERD** HAS **EXTENDED**
OUR BORDERS...

...AND MADE
THE **VILAYET**
VIRTUALLY A
TURANIAN
LAKE.

YET, THESE
KOZAKS
PLUCK HIS
BEARD AT
OUR VERY
GATES!

AH, BUT TO
DISPOSE OF
THEIR **LEADER**,
MILORD, WOULD
DEAL THEM A
CRIPPLING
BLOW.

BUT **HOW**, MAN? HE HAS
REPEATEDLY CUT HIS WAY OUT
OF SPOTS THAT SEEMED **CERTAIN**
DEATH FOR HIM.

AND, BE IT BY
ANIMAL INSTINCT
OR **CUNNING**, HE HAS
AVOIDED OR ESCAPED EVERY
TRAP WE'VE SET FOR HIM!

"TOGETHER, THEY **HARRY** THE **COAST**, PREYING
OFF THE **MERCHANT SHIPS** WHICH PLY THE PORTS
OF **TURAN** AND OF **MYRANIA** TO THE EAST.

FOR EVERY MAN OR BEAST, THERE IS A TRAP HE WILL NOT ESCAPE.

HAVE YOU CAPTIVE OCTAVIA FETCHED HERE.

WHEN WE HAVE PARLAYED WITH THE KOZAKS, I HAVE OBSERVED THIS MAN CONAN.

AND?

THE NEMEDIAN GIRL? ALL RIGHT...

EUNUCH--!

SHE AWAITS WITHOUT MILORD.

SO, DEAR COUNSELLOR-- YOU ANTICIPATED MY RESPONSE, EH.

WELL, BRING HER IN, SLAVE!

SHE'S A LOVELY THING, TRUE ENOUGH-- AS BEFITS HER NOBLE UPRISING BEFORE MY RIDERS CARRIED HER OFF.

NOW, GHAZNAVI, YOU OBVIOUSLY HAVE A PLAN IN MIND.

WHAT IS IT?

HE HAS A KEEN RELISH FOR WOMEN AND STRONG DRINK.

WE CANNOT ATTACK THEM THERE-- BUT, THERE IS AN UNINHABITED ISLAND NOT FAR FROM THERE, KNOWN AS XAPUR THE FORTIFIED.

IT'S SHORELINE IS ALL SHEER CLIFFS-- WITH THE ONLY WAY UP OR DOWN A NARROW PATH ON THE WESTERN SIDE.

IF WE COULD TRAP CONAN THERE-- ALONE-- WE COULD HUNT HIM DOWN AT OUR LEISURE, AS MEN HUNT A LION.

AND WHERE DOES THE GIRL COME INTO THIS?

THE BARBARIAN SAW YOUR NEW SLAVE AT OUR LAST HOSTAGE PARLAY WITH THE KOZAKS, AND I COULD SEE THAT HE DESIRED HER GREATLY.

WE WILL SEND A MESSENGER TO HIM UNDER A FLAG OF TRUCE, SAYING SHE HAS VANISHED AND ACCUSING HIM OF STEALING HER.

THEN WE SHALL SEND A SPY TO THE KOZAKS--

--DROPPING HINTS THAT SHE HAS IN REALITY ESCAPED-- AND IS HIDING ON XAPUR!

A DEVILISHLY GOOD PLAN, GHAZNAVI! CONAN WILL GO TO FIND HER-- ALONE-- FOR, WHAT MAN TAKES A BAND OF WARRIORS WITH HIM TO SEEK OUT A WOMAN HE DESIRES? HE--

NO! I WILL NEVER DESCEND TO SUCH SHAME AS BEING BAIT FOR A TRAP!

I AM THE DAUGHTER OF A NEMEDIAN LORD--!

SO YOU WERE, WOMAN--



SOME WEEKS LATER: IN THE **DARKNESS** JUST BEFORE **DAWN**, AN **UNACCOMMODATED SOUND** DISTURBS THE **SOLITUDE** OF THE **REEDY MARSHES** AND **MISTY WATERS** OF THE **COAST.**

IT IS NO **DROWSY WATERFOWL** NOR A **WAKING OTTER** WHICH **STRUGGLES** THRU THOSE **THICK REEDS...**



FOR, **OCTAVIA** WAS **ESCAPED IN EARNEST-- EVERY OUTRAGED FIBRE** OF HER **STILL TINGLING** FROM HER **UNENDURABLE EXPERIENCE...**



...AND OF HER DESPERATE **ESCAPE!**

FOR, MERE HOURS BEFORE, SHE CLIMBED DOWN FROM THE CASTLE OF THE DEADLY NOBLEMAN TO WHOM YENUNGIR AGNA HAD GIVEN HER, ALONG WITH ORDERS TO CARRY OUT HIS EVIL PLAN.



CHANCE LED HER TO A TETHERED HORSE, AND SHE HAD RIDDEN ALL NIGHT...



...TO FIND HERSELF NOW, IN THE WATERY MORASS, SEEKING A HIDING PLACE FROM THE PURSUIT SHE EXPECTS AND FEARS.

IN THE PRE-DAWN LIGHT, SHE SEES AN ISLAND LOOMING DIMLY AHEAD OF HER...



...AND WADES OUT, UNTIL THE LOW WAVES ARE LAPPING ABOUT HER WAIST.

THEN, SHE STRIKES OUT STRONGLY SWIMMING WITH A VIGOR THAT PROMISES UNUSUAL ENDURANCE.

HOW FAR AWAY SEEMS HIS LUXURIOUS MANDIR-HOUSE NOW!

INWARDLY, SHE THANKS MITRA FOR THE LONG HOURS SPENT IN THE POOL HER LORDLY FATHER BUILT FOR HER, YEARS AGO.



FINALLY, REACHING THE ISLE, SHE SEES THAT IT RISES FROM THE WATER IN CASTLELIKE CLIFFS.

AT FIRST, SHE NOTICES NEITHER LEDGE TO STAND ON, NOR PLACE TO CLING.

THEN, SHE SEES IT, HALF HIDDEN IN THE SHADOWS:



AN ANCIENT STAIRWAY, CARVED IN THE STONE CLIFFS, UNTOLD CENTURIES AGO FROM THE WORN LOOK OF THEM!

BY WHAT HAND THEY WERE GRAVEN, SHE NEITHER KNOWS NOR CARES.

PANTING, SHE STARTS UP THEM...



THEN, SUDDENLY, SHE HEARS THE FAINT CLACK OF MUFFLED OARS -- BEHIND HER!

PRESENTLY, IT CEASES... AND SHE CONTINUES HER CLIMB...



...TILL SHE REACHES THE TANGLED, BLACK JUNGLE ABOVE.

IF THE SOUND SHE HEARD WAS HER PURSUERS, THEN PERHAPS SHE CAN HIDE THEREIN.

SHE KNOWS FULL WELL THIS ISLAND MAY BE A PIRATE'S LAIR, LIKE MANY IN THE VILAYET...



YET, EVEN PIRATES WOULD BE PREFERABLE TO JEHUNGIR AGHA AND HIS DEPRAVED COURT.

VAGUELY, SHE REMEMBERS HER FORMER MASTER WITH THE NOZAK CHIEF, DOWAN. SHE ONCE SAW AT A PARLAY.

HIS BURNING GAZE MADE HER BLUSH -- BUT AT LEAST HIS CLEANLY ELEMENTAL FIERCENESS SET HIM ABOVE THE MONSTERS THAT AN OVERLY OPULENT CIVILIZATION CAN PRODUCE!



NOW THE DARKNESS CLOSES FRIGHTENINGLY AROUND HER.

ABRUPTLY, SHE COMES TO A HALT.

AND NOW, SHE FORGETS IT -- AWARE SUDDENLY OF A PRESENCE NEAR HER!

SHE CANNOT SEE --



SOMEWHERE AHEAD OF HER, THERE BEGINS THE RHYTHMICAL BOOMING OF... A DRUM.

IT IS NOT SUCH A SOUND AS SHE WOULD HAVE EXPECTED TO HEAR IN THIS TIME AND PLACE.



YET, SHE KNOWS SOMETHING IS STANDING BESIDE HER IN THE BLACKNESS!

WITHOUT WARNING, A GREAT HUMAN ARM CURVES ABOUT HER WAIST --



SHE THROWS ALL HER SUPPLE YOUNG STRENGTH INTO A WILD LUNGE FOR FREEDOM...

YET, HER UNSEEN CAPTOR CATCHES HER UP LIKE A CHILD...



...AND ALL IN TERRIBLE, SULLEN SILENCE!

THE MAGIC OF KHOSATRAL KHEL

AS THE FIRST TINGE OF DAWN
REDDENS THE SEA, A SMALL BOAT
WITH A SOLITARY OCCUPANT
APPROACHES THE CLIFFS.



THE MUSCLES OF HEAVY
BRONZED ARMS RIPPLE AS
THE MAN PULLS THE OARS WITH
AN ALMOST FELINE EASE OF
MOTION.



PADDLING TO THE WORN STONE STAIRS
AS ONE FAMILIAR WITH HIS ENVIRONS,
HE MOORS THE BOAT...



...AND STRIDES UP
THEM, WITHOUT
HESITATION.



FOR THIS IS CONAN— THE
CIMMERIAN WARRIOR WHO HAD
WANDERED INTO THE ARMED
CAMPS OF THE KOZAKS WITH
NO OTHER POSSESSIONS THAN
HIS WITS AND HIS SWORD—
AND WHO HAD CARVED HIS WAY
TO LEADERSHIP AMONG THEM!

NOW, HE IS KEENLY
ALERT— YET HE HAS
NO SIXTH SENSE
TO WARN HIM OF
IMPENDING, HIDDEN
DANGER.

HE HAS NO ANIMAL INSTINCT TO TELL HIM
THAT MEN ARE WATCHING HIM FROM A COVERT
AMONG THE REEDS OF THE NOT-DISTANT
MAINLAND...

...OR THAT A SHARP-TIPPED ARROW IS AIMED FOR HIS BROAD BACK!



WILL YOU BETRAY US?

DON'T YOU REALIZE HE IS OUT OF RANGE?

ARE WE TO FOLLOW HIM THEN, JEHUNGIR AGHA, AS SOON AS HE IS OUT OF SIGHT, AS WELL?



NO. HE MAY HAVE GUESSED THAT WE LET THE GIRL ESCAPE, SO THAT EVEN SHE WOULD NOT KNOW SHE WAS BEING USED.

HE MAY EVEN HAVE HAD MEN FOLLOWING, SOME DISTANCE BEHIND HIM.

WE WILL WAIT HERE FOR AN HOUR BEFORE GOING TO HUNT HIM DOWN.

DO NOT WORRY. HE IS ON AN ISLE SURROUNDED BY SHEER CLIFFS...



"WHERE CAN HE GO?"

MEANWHILE, THE UNSUSPECTING KOZAK CHIEF PLUNGES INTO THE FOREST HIGH ABOVE...



...HIS BLOOD FIRED BY THOUGHTS OF THE SPLENDID, TAWNY-HAIRED BEAUTY HE HAD ONCE SEEN AT FORT GNORI... AND WHO NOW IS REPUTED TO BE HIDING ON THIS VERY ISLAND!

CONAN HAS BEEN ON KAPUR BEFORE, FOR SECRET CONCLAVES WITH PIRATE CREWS.



SUDDENLY, AHEAD OF HIM RISES SOMETHING THAT HIS REASON TELLS HIM IS NOT POSSIBLE.



A GREAT DARK GREEN WALL, WITH TOWERS REARING BEYOND THE BATTLEMENTS!

CROM!

THE BARBARIAN STANDS PARALYZED WITH SUPERSTITIOUS DREAD-- FOR, LESS THAN A MONTH AGO, ONLY BROKEN RUINS SHOWED AMONG THESE TREES.

WHAT HUMAN HANDS COULD HAVE REARED SUCH A MAMMOTH PILE IN THE FEW WEEKS THAT HAVE ELAPSED?

CONAN WHEELS--NAMELESS TERROR WELLING WITHIN HIM...



HE WILL LEAVE THIS ISLAND--
AYE, WILL QUIT EVEN THE
KOZAKS, AND PUT A
THOUSAND MILES BETWEEN
HIMSELF AND THIS PLACE
OF DEVILS!

FOR AN INSTANT, THE FUTURE FATES OF KINGDOMS THAT HINGE ON THIS BRONZE-SKINNED BARBARIAN HANG IN THE BALANCE.



IT IS A
SMALL THING
THAT TIPS
THE SCALES:



MERELY A SHRED OF
SILK, HANGING ON A
BUSH WHERE IT
CATCHES HIS UNEASY
GLANCE.

EVEN IN HIS FEAR, HE RECOGNIZES THE TANTALIZING PERFUME

THAT FISHERMAN, THEN--WHOM
HE HAD FIRST THOUGHT TO BE A
SPY-- HAD NOT BEEN LYING!



SHE IS HERE,
ON XAPUR!

THEN, HE SEES A SINGLE TRACK OF
A BARE FOOT:



A MAN'S PRINT,
NOT A WOMAN'S--
AND SUNK DEEPER
THAN IS NATURAL!

WHOEVER
MADE
THAT TRACK
WAS CARRY-
ING A
BURDEN--

NO DOUBT
THE GIRL
HE SEEKS!

DESIRE FOR THE GOLDEN-HAIRED
FEMALE VIES WITH A SULKY,
PRIMORDIAL RAGE AT WHOEVER
HAS TAKEN HER.



HIS HUMAN
PASSION FIGHTS
DOWN HIS ULTRA-
HUMAN FEARS...

...AND, DROPPING INTO THE STALKING
CROUCH OF A HUNTING PANTHER, HE
GLIDES NEARER THE WALLS.



AS HE DOES SO,
HE REALIZES
THAT THE WALLS
AND TOWERS
FOLLOW THE
PLAN OF THE
EARLIER RUINS.

IT IS AS IF THE
CRUMBLING RUINS HAD
GROWN BACK INTO
THE STRUCTURES
THEY ONCE WERE!

BUT, THERE IS NO TIME TO THINK OF
SUCH THINGS.



THE GIRL IS IN
THERE, OF THAT,
CONAN IS SUDDENLY
CERTAIN...



...AN HE WILL
BRING HER
OUT!



TEETH GRITTED, HE TROTS WOLF-
LIKE DOWN A NARROW STONE
STAIR WHICH DESCENDS THE
WALL NEAR HIM...



THEN, A SOUND--

THE SHADOW
OF SOMEONE
APPROACHING
IN THE STREET
BELOW--!



THE CIRCUMFERENCE OF
THE WALL IS NOT GREAT--
BUT IT CONTAINS A SURPRIS-
ING NUMBER OF GREEN
STONE BUILDINGS.

THE STREETS WITHIN
CONVERGE LIKE
WHEEL-SPOKES
UPON A LOFTY
EDIFICE WHICH
DOMINATES THE
WHOLE CITY.

THE SILENCE THAT
REIGNS THERE, EVEN
AS THE SUN RISES,
MIGHT BELONG TO
A DEAD AND
DESERTED CITY.



PEERING IN, HE STARES UPON A LARGE
CHAMBER WHOSE WALLS ARE HIDDEN
BY DARK VELVET TAPESTRIES.

THICK RUGS--BENCHES OF
POLISHED EBONY--AN IVORY Dais
HEAPED WITH LUXURIOUS FURS--

A TREASURE
WORTH A
KOZAK'S TIME--
ANOTHER DAY!



AND, BEFORE THE UNKNOWN
PERSON CAN ROUND THE CORNER
AND SEE HIM THERE ON THE
STAIRWAY--

--HE STEPS
LIGHTLY
ACROSS THE
INTERVENING
SPACE...

...TO DROP LIGHTLY
INTO THE ROOM,
EVEN AS HE DRAWS
HIS SWORD.



AN ARCHED DOOR-
WAY BECKONS, AND
HE IS MOVING
SILENTLY TOWARD
IT...

...WHEN SUDDENLY THE HANGING IS
DRAWN ASIDE, AND--



AND WHO
MIGHT YOU
BE?

THE DARK-
HAired GIRL
REGARDS
HIM WITH
LANGUID
EYES, BARELY
STIFLING A
YAWN.



I AM COMAN...A HETMAN AMONG THE KOZAKS, AND YOU--?

I AM YATELI, I MUST
HAVE FEASTED LATE
LAST NIGHT, SINCE
I AM SO SLEEPY
NOW.

YOU ARE
NOT A
DAGONIAN;
I SUPPOSE
YOU ARE A
MERCENARY.

TELL ME,
HAVE YOU
CUT THE
HEADS OFF
MANY
YUETSHI?



WHOA,
GIRL! WHERE
ARE YOU
TAKING--?

WHERE
DO YOU
THINK?



I? I DO NOT WAR ON WATER RATS!

OH, BUT THE YUETSHI
ARE VERY TERRIBLE!
I REMEMBER WHEN
THEY WERE OUR
SLAVES--



BUT THEN, THEY REVOLTED
AND THEY BURNED AND
SLEW--

--AND
ONLY THE MAGIC
OF KHOSATRAL
KHIEL HAS KEPT
THEM FROM THE
WALLS!



I...SEEM TO RECALL...
THEY DID CLIMB THE
WALLS...LAST
NIGHT.

BUT, THAT
CANNOT BE,
CAN IT--FOR
I AM ALIVE.
AND I
THOUGHT
I WAS--

OH, THE
DEVIL
WITH IT!

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, WOMAN?



IT WAS A DREAM; EVEN I FEEL
LIKE A DREAM NOW, BUT I
DON'T CARE.

THERE IS
SOMETHING
I CANNOT
REMEMBER--
AND I GROW
SO SLEEPY
WHEN I TRY
TO THINK...

ANYWAY, IT DOESN'T **MATTER**. DOES IT?

I REMEMBER DREAMING OF WARRIORS **SCALING THE WALLS**--AND OF A NAKED, BLOODSTAINED **YUETSHI** DRIVING HIS **KNIFE** INTO MY BREAST!

OH, HOW IT **HURT!** BUT, IT WAS A **DREAM**--BECAUSE, **SEE--**

--THERE IS NO **SCAR**.

LOVE ME!

LOVE ME.

LOVE ME...

SHE IS **ASLEEP** EVEN AS THEIR LIPS MEET.

YOU SAY THE **YUETSHI** SCALED THE WALLS **LAST NIGHT**? BUT--

I CANNOT **REMEMBER**. EVERYTHING IS SO **DIM** AND **MISTY**...

IT DOESN'T **MATTER**. YOU ARE NO **DREAM**.

LET US **LIVE** WHILE WE CAN. **LOVE ME--!**

IT IS AN **UNNATURAL SLEEP**--SUCH AS **CONAN** HAS SEEN IN THE ADDICTS OF THE **FABLED BLACK LOTUS OF XUTHAL**.

SHE SEEMS TO PARTAKE OF THE **ILLUSION** THAT HAUNTS THIS WHOLE CITY...

THE **GREAT GOLDEN LEOPARD** WHICH FIGURES SO PROMINENTLY IN **HYBORIAN** LEGENDRY--

--BUT WHICH HAS BEEN **EXTINCT** FROM THESE PARTS FOR AT LEAST A **THOUSAND YEARS!**

YET, THIS IS A **LIVING WOMAN** IN HIS ARMS... NOT JUST THE **SHADOW** OF A **DREAM**.

THEN, EVEN AS HE CARRIES HER TO THE FURS OF THE **DAIS**...

...HE REVELS A **GORGEOUS SPOTTED SKIN**--NOT A **CLEVER COPY**, BUT THE SKIN OF AN **ACTUAL BEAST**.

ANOTHER WONDER, THEN! SHAKING HIS HEAD IN **BEWILDERMENT**, **CONAN** GLIDES INTO THE **CORRIDOR** WITHOUT.

HE'D **HEARD** SOMETHING--SOMEONE **ASCENDING** THE **OUTER STAIR** FROM WHICH HE HAD ENTERED THE **BUILDING**!

HE DOES NOT WISH TO MEET ANYONE JUST NOW, UNLESS IT BE A **CERTAIN FAIR-HAIRED SLAVE WENCH**...

YET, AS HE HURRIES
ALONG THE TWISTED
HALLWAY, HE HEARS
A WEIGHTY **THUD**
ON THE FLOOR OF
THE CHAMBER HE
HAS JUST QUITTED.



NO SHAPELY
GIRL, NEMEDIAN
OR OTHER,
EVER MADE
SUCH A SOUND.

HE MOVES
ON...

...TILL SOMETHING ON
THE FLOOR AHEAD
BRINGS HIM TO A HALT:



A MAN, HALF IN, HALF OUT OF A paneled doorway--



--LYING AS IF
STRUCK DOWN
BY SOMETHING
JUST AS HE WAS
EMERGING!

ONLY SLEEP-
ING, THOUGH.
CONAN NOTES--
NOT DEAD.

YET, A SLEEP AS DEEP AS THAT OF
THE GIRL IN THE CHAMBER.



BUT, WHY
SUCH A
PLACE
FOR A
SLUMBER?
WHY--

A SOUND
BEHIND
HIM
AGAIN--!

SOMETHING IS MOVING UP
THE CORRIDOR IN HIS
DIRECTION-- AND THE
GREAT DOOR HE SEES AT
THE FAR END MAY BE
LOCKED!



BEST, THEN,
TO JERK
THE MAN'S
SUPINE
BODY OUT
OF THE
DOORWAY--

--AND STEP THRU, INTO TOTAL
DARKNESS, EVEN AS THE SOUND
OF HIS STALKER'S HEAVY STEP
GROWS STRONGER--



--SHUTTING THE PANEL
BEHIND HIM, TILL A
CLICK TELLS HIM IT IS
LOCKED IN PLACE!



THEN: A
SHUFFLING
TREAD HALTS
JUST OUTSIDE...

SUDDENLY, HE
FEELS THE DOOR
STRAINING--
BENDING IN-
WARD--



--AS IF A
GREAT WEIGHT
WERE BEING
STEADILY BORNE
AGAINST IT!

SOON, THIS
CEASES-- AND
A FAINT CHILL
TRICKLES ALONG
HIS SPINE--



--AS A STRANGE
SLOBBERING
MOUTHING
IS HEARD.

HE BEGINS
BACKING
AWAY...



...WITH HIGH-DISASTROUS RESULTS!

WHAT--?

THE NARROW STAIRCASE LEADS DOWNWARD-- DISAPPEARING INTO INKY BLACKNESS.

FEELING HIS WAY DOWN IN THE DARK, CONAN SOON SENSES HE MUST BE BELOW THE LEVEL OF THE HOUSE...

JUST THEN, THE STEPS CEASE.

ALONG A BLACK, SILENT TUNNEL, CONAN GROPEs, MOMENTARILY DREADING A FALL INTO SOME UNSEEN PIT...

BUT, ERE LONG, HE COMES TO A DOOR.

HE EXPECTS TO FIND IT BOLTED FROM WITHIN...

YET, IT GIVES EASILY TO HIS TOUCH, AND SWINGS SOUNDLESSLY OPEN.

INSIDE IS A DIM-LIT, LOFTY, CIRCULAR ROOM OF ENORMOUS PROPORTIONS-- WITH A GREAT BRONZE-VALVED DOOR OPPOSITE.

BUT, IN BETWEEN--

CROW--!

--THERE, COILED UPON A TALL PILLAR OF COPPER, IS A GIGANTIC SERPENT-- APPARENTLY CARVED OF SOME JADELIKE SUBSTANCE!

OBVIOUSLY, THE GRAVEN SNAKE IS MEANT TO REPRESENT ONE OF THOSE GRIM MONSTERS OF THE MARSH, WHICH IN PAST AGES HAUNTED THE EDGES OF VILAVET'S SOUTHERN SHORES.

BUT, LIKE THE GOLDEN LEOPARD, THEY HAVE BEEN EXTINCT FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS...



FOR, UNDER HIS HAND HE HAD FELT NOT A SMOOTH, BRITTLE SURFACE-- BUT THE YIELDING, FIBROUS MASS OF A LIVING THING!

COLD, SLUGGISH LIFE HAD FLOWED UNDER HIS FINGERS!

FEAR AND REVULSION ALMOST CHOKING HIM, HE BACKS SILENTLY AWAY--



--STILL STARING BACK IN AWFUL FASCINATION AT THE GRISLY, SLUMBERING, UNMOVING THING--

...SEEN NOW ONLY IN RUDE IMAGES, IN MINIATURE, AMONG THE IDOL HUTS OF THE YIETSHI-- OR DESCRIBED IN THE ANCIENT BOOK OF SKELOS.

STILL, JADE-- IF JADE IT BE-- IS A VALUABLE STONE--



AND SO, CONAN REACHES OUT TO LAY A CURIOUS HAND ON THE IMAGE--



--ONLY TO WITHDRAW IT INSTANTLY IN INSTINCTIVE, HORRIFIED REPULSION!



--AS HE RACES TOWARD THE BRONZE DOOR, FEARFUL HE WILL FIND IT LOCKED!



YET, IT TOO OPENS EASILY... AND HE GLIDES THRU, IN TWILIGHT GLOOM.

EVEN AS HE CLOSES IT BEHIND HIM, HE SEES A TAPESTRY NEAR AT HAND...



...HUNG IN SUCH A WAY AS TO SUGGEST SOMETHING BEHIND IT.

ANOTHER STAIRWAY THEN:

THE PLACE IS BECOME A MAZE-- AND HE, A RAT TRAPPED THEREIN!

HE HESITATES BEFORE THE BECKONING STAIRS...



THEN, HE HEARS IT, IN THE LARGER CHAMBER HE HAS JUST LEFT!

THE SAME
HEAVY
SHUFFLING
TREAD HE
HEARD BEFORE!



THAT
DECIDES
HIM.

SOON, EMERGING INTO A TWISTING
CORRIDOR, HE
TAKES THE
FIRST DOOR
HE SEES--



WAS HE FOLLOWED
THRU THE WHOLE
LENGTH OF THE
DARK TUNNEL?



HE RACES UP
THE STAIRS,
HOPING THE
QUIVERING
TAPESTRY
DOES NOT
BETRAY HIS
ROUTE...

--TO FIND HIMSELF
IN A CLOSED ROOM,
WHICH HE IS SURE IS
IN THE GREAT DOMED
EDIFICE IN THE
CENTER OF THE CITY.



SINCE IT'S
HERE HE'S
MOST LIKELY
TO FIND THE
NEMEDIAN
GIRL HE
SEEKS...

...HE'S ABOUT TO
RETRACE HIS STEPS...

...WHEN SUDDENLY HE HEARS A
VOICE WHICH COMES FROM BEHIND
ONE OF THE STONE WALLS:

THERE WAS NO LIFE IN THE
ABYSS, SAVE THAT WHICH
WAS INCORPORATED IN
ME...



AN IGY CHILL
CRAWLS SLOWLY
ALONG CONAN'S SPINE...

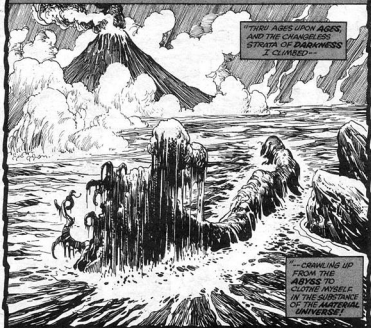
FOR, THOUGH THE TONGUE IS
NEMEDIAN, THE VOICE IS
SOMEHOW... NOT HUMAN.

THERE IS A
TERRIFYING
RESONANCE
ABOUT IT
LIKE A BELL
TOLLING AT
MIDNIGHT.



NOR WAS
THERE
LIGHT,
NOR
MOTION,
NOR ANY
SOUND...

"...ONLY THE URGE BEHIND AND BEYOND LIFE, WHICH GUIDED AND IMPELLED ME ON
MY UPWARD JOURNEY-- BLIND, INSENSATE, INEXORABLE!



"THRU AGES UPON AGES,
AND THE CHANGELESS
STRATA OF DARKNESS
I CLIMBED--

--CRAWLING UP
FROM THE
ABYSS TO
CLOTHE MYSELF
IN THE SUBSTANCE
OF THE MATERIAL
UNIVERSE!

"BUT HUMAN FLESH WAS TOO FRAIL TO HOLD THE TERRIFIC ESSENCE THAT WAS KHOSATRAL KHEL!"

"SO, HE STOOD UP IN THE SHAPE AND ASPECT OF A MAN--"



"BUT HIS FLESH WAS NOT FLESH; NOR THE BONE, BONE; NOR BLOOD, BLOOD."

"HE STALKED THRU THE WORLD LIKE A GOD, FOR NO EARTHLY WEAPON COULD HARM HIM..."

"AND TO HIM, A CENTURY WAS LIKE AN HOUR."



"IN TIME, HE CAME UPON A PRIMITIVE PEOPLE INHABITING THE ISLAND OF DAGONIA..."

"AND IT PLEASED HIM TO GIVE THIS RACE CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION."



"HE BECAME A BLASPHEMY AGAINST ALL NATURE, FOR HE CAUSED TO LIVE A BASIC SUBSTANCE THAT HAD NEVER BEFORE KNOWN THE PULSE AND STIR OF ANIMATE BEING!"

"BY HIS AID, THEY BUILT THE CITY OF DAGONIA..."

"...WHERE THEY ABODE AND WORSHIPPED HIM."



"HIS HOUSE IN DAGONIA WAS CONNECTED WITH EVERY OTHER HOUSE BY TUNNELS THRU WHICH HIS SHAVEN-HEADED PRIESTS BORE VICTIMS FOR THE SACRIFICE."



"YET, AFTER MANY AGES, A BRITISH PEOPLE APPEARED ON THE SHORE, CALLING THEMSELVES YUETSHI."



"AFTER A FIERCE BATTLE THEY WERE DEFEATED BY KHOSATRAL KHEL'S BROTHER."

"AND, FOR NEARLY A GENERATION, THEY DYED ON THE ACRES OF DAGONIA."

"THEN, ONE DAY, THEIR PRIEST-- A STRANGE, GAUNT MAN-- PLUNGED INTO THE WILDERNESS..."



"AND WHEN HE RETURNED, HE BORE A KNIFE FORGED OF A METEOR WHICH HAD FLASHED THRU THE SKY LIKE A FLAMING ARROW AND FALLEN IN A FAR VALLEY..."

"UPON HIS RETURN, THE YUETSU SLAVES ROSE IN REVOLT, AND THEIR SAW-EDGED CRESCENTS CUT DOWN THE MEN OF DAGONIA LIKE SHEEP!"

"FOR BEFORE THAT
UNEARTHLY KNIFE,
THE MAGIC OF
KHOSATRAL KHEL
WAS IMPOTENT!"

"THEN, WHILE CARNAGE
AND SLAUGHTER
BELLOWED THRU THE RED
SMOKE OUTSIDE, THE
GRIMMEST ACT OF THAT
GRIM DRAMA WAS PLAYED
IN THE CRYPTIC DOME,
BETWEEN KHOSATRAL KHEL
AND THE YUETSU PRIEST!"

"FROM THAT DOME,
THE PRIEST
EMERGED ALONE."

"HE HAD NOT SLAIN HIS FOE, WISHING
TO HOLD THE THREAT OF REVIVING
HIM OVER THE HEADS OF HIS OWN
REBELLIOUS SUBJECTS."

"BUT AS AGES
PASSED, DAGONIA
DECLINED...
FALLING INTO
RUIN..."

"...TILL A CHANCE
THUNDERBOLT AND A
FISHERMAN'S CURIOUSITY
LIFTED FROM
THE BREST OF THE GOD
THE MAGIC KNIFE--"

"BUT THE MYSTIC KNIFE
LYING ACROSS THE GIANTS'
CHEST HELD HIM SENSE-
LESS AND UNMOVING..."

"...AND BROKE
THE SPELL
THAT BOUND
HIM!"

"KHOSATRAL KHEL ROSE-- AND
LIVED-- AND RESTORED THE
CITY BY HIS NECROMANCY..."

"BUT, FOLK WHO HAVE TASTED OF DEATH ARE
ONLY PARTLY ALIVE; IN THE DARK CORNERS
OF THEIR SOULS, DEATH STILL LURKS
UNCONQUERED."

"BY NIGHT
THE DAGONIANS
MOVE AND LOVE
AND FEAST AS
IN A DREAM."

"...TO BE ROUSED AGAIN
ONLY BY THE FALL OF
NIGHT, WHICH IS AKIN
TO DEATH..."

"AND THE
FOLK WHICH
HAD BEEN
DUST FOR
AGES MOVED IN
LIFE AGAIN!"

"WITH THE
COMING OF DAY,
THEY SANK INTO A
DEEP SLEEP..."

THE MANY FACES OF DEATH

FOR MORE THAN AN HOUR SINCE CONAN
DISAPPEARED UP THE SEA-STEPS, JEHUNGIR
AGHA AND HIS MEN HAVE WAITED WITH
GROWING IMPATIENCE.

THERE HAS BEEN TIME ENOUGH
FOR HIS KOZAK HENCHMEN
TO ARRIVE, IF THEY WERE
GOING TO.

THUS,
LEAVING HALF
A DOZEN MEN
BEHIND, HE
TAKES THE
REST--TEN
MIGHTY
ARCHERS OF
KHAWARIZM.

LIKE HUNTERS
INVADING THE
RETREAT OF A
LION, THEY STEAL
UPWARD--TOWARD
AN UNGUESSED
DESTINY--!

SILENCE REIGNS IN THE FOREST AS THE TURANIANS STEAL FORWARD UNDER THE TREES.

THEN, WITH A SUDDEN, INCREDULOUS GESTURE, THE AGHA CALLS A HALT--

TARIM!

THE PIRATES HAVE REBUILT THE RUINS!

DOUBTLESS CONAN IS THERE; WE MUST INVESTIGATE THIS.

A FORTIFIED TOWN-- THIS CLOSE TO THE MAINLAND!

COME--!

AND AS THEY CREEP THRU THE TANGLED GROWTH, THE MAN THEY SEEK IS IN PERIL MORE DEADLY THAN THEIR FILIGREED ARROWS.

THE BELLING VOICE HAS CEASED-- AND CONAN KNOWS THAT, THRU YONDER CURTAINED DOOR, A CULMINATING HORROR IS ABOUT TO APPEAR--

THEN, IT COMES: A MONSTROUS FORM-- A FACE WITHOUT WEAKNESS OR MERCY-- EYES LIKE BALLS OF DARK FIRE--

NO WORD IS SPOKEN AS THE COLOSSUS SPREADS HIS GREAT ARMS...

--ONLY TO HEAR HIS SWORD'S KEEN EDGE RING ON THE MIGHTY BODY AS ON AN ANVIL--



AND CONAN KNOWS HE LOOKS UPON KHESSATRAL KHEL, THE ANCIENT FROM THE ABYSS-- THE GOD OF DAGONIA!



CONAN CROUCHES BENEATH THEM FOR A BETTER AIM AT THE GIANT'S UNPROTECTED BELLY--



CROM'S BONES!

--RESONING WITHOUT CUTTING!



THEN,
KHOSATRAL
KNEEL COMES
UPON HIM
IN AN IRRE-
SISTIBLE
SURGE...



THERE IS A FLEETING CONCUSSION
AS THEY MEET HEAD-ON--

--A FIERCE
WRITHING
AND INTER-
TWINING
OF BODIES
AND LIMBS--



--HIS
EVERY
THEN
QUIVER-
ING FROM
VIOLENCE--
AND
FEAR!

FOR, IN THAT INSTANT OF CONTACT, NO HUMAN
FLESH BRUISED HIS -- BUT METAL, ANIMATED
AND SENTIENT--



[IT IS A BODY OF LIVING IRON WHICH OPPOSES HIM!]

NOW, AS THE
COLOSSUS LOOMS
ABOVE THE WARRIOR
THERE IN THE GLOOM--



--CONAN GRASPS A HEAVY BENCH,
SUCH AS FEW MEN COULD EVEN LIFT--

--AND SMASHES IT INTO
SHREDS AND SPLINTERS ON
THE GIANT'S
MIGHTY
BREAST!

[IT DOES
NOT EVEN
SHAKE
HIM ON HIS
BRACED
LEGS.



THEN, HIS FACE LOSES SOMETHING OF ITS HUMAN ASPECT-- A NIMBUS OF FIRE ABOUT HIS AWESOME HEAD--



--AND LIKE A MOVING TOWER, HE COMES ON!

WITH A DESPERATE WRENCH CONAN RIPS A WHOLE SECTION OF TAPESTRY FROM THE NEAREST WALL--



AND, FOR A MOMENT, KHOSATRAL KHEL IS SMOOTHERED AND BLINDED BY A CLINGING WEB WHICH RESISTS HIS STRENGTH--



--AS WOOD OR STEEL COULD NOT HAVE DONE!

IN THAT INSTANT CONAN CATCHES UP HIS SWORD--



--AND RACES OUT INTO THE CORRIDOR!

WITHOUT CHECKING HIS SPEED, HE HURLS HIMSELF THRU THE DOOR OF THE ADJOINING CHAMBER, SLAMS THE HEAVY WOODEN DOOR BEHIND HIM--



--AND SHOOTS THE BOLT!



HE HOPES IT WILL DELAY THE IRON GIANT EVEN FOR A FEW PRECIOUS SECONDS.

JUST THEN, A FAINT WHIMPER BEHIND HIM CATCHES HIS EAR.



you!

IT IS THE NEMEDIAN WENCH FOR WHOM HE HAS DARED SO MUCH-- TOO HELPLESS NOW WITH WIDE-EYED FRIGHT EITHER TO RESIST OR TO AID HIM.



FOR A MOMENT HE ALMOST FORGETS THE HORROR AT HIS HEELS--

--UNTIL A WOOD-RENDING CRASH BEHIND HIM BRINGS HIM TO HIS SENSES--!



OH HELL!

HE'S SPLINTERING THE DOOR, AS IF IT WERE MADE OF PARCHMENT!



COME ON, GIRL. I'VE RISKED A LOT FOR THOSE BLUE EYES AND WHAT GOES WITH THEM--



--AND I'LL NOT LEAVE YOU BEHIND TO THAT DEVIL'S TENDER MERCIES!

ANOTHER FAINT WHIMPER.

RIGHT NOW, THE GIRL SEEMS CAPABLE OF NO OTHER SOUND.

WHERE HE IS GOING, CONAN HAS NO IDEA...



BUT, KHOSATRAL KWEL IS RIGHT ON THEIR NECKS-- SILENT AS A WIND OF DEATH, AND AS SWIFT--

SO, HE TAKES THE FIRST DOOR HE SEES!



SUDDENLY SEEING THAT BOTH BOLT AND DOOR ARE OF SOLID STEEL, HE REALIZES:

THEY MUST BE IN THE GIANT'S OWN CHAMBERS!



NOR ARE THERE ANY OTHER DOORS, NOR ANY WINDOW.

AND ALREADY, THE GREAT METAL DOOR TREMBLES TO THE GIANT'S ASSAULT!

CONAN SHRUGS HIS SHOULDERS. THIS IS THE END OF THE TRAIL.



HE'LL LASH OUT WHEN THE DOOR CAVES IN-- FOR, IT'S HIS NATURE TO WISH TO DIE FIGHTING.

BUT, FOR THE MOMENT... HE IS CALM.

HE EVEN TURNS HIS **BACK** ON THE QUAKING DOOR...

WHAT IS YOUR **NAME**, GIRL?

OCTAVIA, I--

OH, **MITRA**--
WHAT NIGHT
MARE IS
THIS?



TELL ME HOW
YOU **CAME** HERE.

ONE OF THE **DARK-SKINNED** PEOPLE CAUGHT ME IN THE FOREST AND **BROUGHT** ME HERE.



THEY
CARRIED ME
TO-- TO THAT
THING! HE
TOLD ME--
HE SAID--

AT THAT MOMENT, THE POUNDING **INCREASES**--
AND THE DOOR **BULGES INWARD** AS IF FROM
THE IMPACT OF A **BATTERING-RAM**...



THE GODS
HELP ME--
AM I **MAD?**
IS THIS A
DREAM?

NO, IT'S
NO DREAM.
THE **HINGE**
IS GIVING
WAY.

STRANGE
THAT A
DEVIL
HAS TO
BREAK
DOWN A
DOOR LIKE
A COMMON
MAN...



BUT, AFTER ALL,
HIS STRENGTH
ITSELF IS A
DIABOLISM.

NOW,
TELL ME
MORE.

CAN YOU NOT **KILL** HIM?
YOU ARE **STRONG**...

NOT **THAT**
STRONG.

THEN, YOU MUST **DIE** AND I MUST-- OH,
MITRA! HE TOLD ME WHAT HE WAS
GOING TO **DO** TO ME!

KILL ME!
KILL ME
WITH YOUR
SWORD
BEFORE HE
BURSTS
THE DOOR!



NO. BUT, WHILE I FIGHT
HIM, YOU SLIP PAST HIM--
MAKE FOR MY **BOAT** BY
THE SEA-STEPS.

IF YOU CAN GET
OUT OF THE **PALACE**
YOU MAY ESCAPE
HIM **YET**.



THIS SAID
CONAN TURNS
TO WATCH THE
FAST-BUCKLING
DOOR WITH
AN ALMOST
IMPERSONAL
FASCINATION...

...ENVYING
THE MONSTER,
HIS INHUMAN
STRENGTH.

THEN, SUDDENLY--
HE'S **STOPPED**
POUNDING!

OTHER
NOISES--
ON THE
LANDING
OUTSIDE--

THE BEAT
OF **WINGS**--
A MUTTERED
VOICE--!



WH--WHAT'S
HAPPENING?

DAMNED IF I KNOW-- BUT I INTEND TO FIND OUT!

KEEP BACK!



WELL? WHAT IS IT--?

DON'T STOP TO TALK!
COME ON!

THE LANDING IS EMPTY, AND--
LISTEN!

THE CLANG OF A METAL DOOR-- FROM SOMEWHERE FAR BELOW!

I DON'T KNOW IF THE GIANT'S PLOTTING NEW DEVILTIES, OR IF HE WAS SUMMONED AWAY--



-- AND I DON'T MUCH CARE!

HURRY!

WHERE ARE WE GOING--?

FOR THE KNIFE, GIRL--



--THE MAGIC YUETSHI BLADE!

IT'S THE ONLY THING THAT CAN HURT KHOSATRAL KHEL, HE LEFT IT IN THE DOME--



--AND WE'RE GOING TO GET IT.

BUT TO GET THERE, I'VE GOT TO GO THRU THAT DOOR-- AND GET PAST WHAT LIES BEYOND IT.

I'M GOING IN-- AND IF YOU HEAR ME CRY OUT FOR YOU TO GO--



--THEN RUN, AS IF THE DEVIL WERE ON YOUR HEELS--

--WHICH HE PROBABLY WILL BE!



IN THE DIM TWILIGHT,
CONAN'S GAZE BEINGS
THAT GRIM COPPER
PILLAR.

YES, THE SCALY
BRUTE IS STILL
THERE. ITS
LOATHSOME
COILS DRIPPING
OVER THE EDGE
OF THE PEDESTAL.

THE DOOR BEHIND
THE PILLAR, HE
KNOWS, LEADS
INTO THE DOME.

BUT TO
REACH
IT--!

A WIND BLOWING
ACROSS THE GREEN
FLOOR WOULD MAKE
MORE NOISE THAN
THE CIMMERIAN'S
SLINKING FEET.

EYES GLUED ON
THE SLEEPING
REPTILE, HE
REACHES THE DAIS.

...AND STILL
SHUDDERING
MOUNTS AGAIN
THE GLASS
STEPS.

THE
SNAKE
HAS NOT
MOVED.

...AND HE IS REACHING
FOR THE DOOR...

...WHEN
ABRUPTLY--

CONAN! I WANT TO
GO WITH YOU!

--EVEN AS IT BEGINS TO MOVE!

ONNNHHH--!

I'M AFRAID
TO STAY
BACK THERE
ALONE. I--

THEN, FOR THE FIRST TIME
SHE SEES THE OCCUPANT
OF THE PILLAR--

CONAN-- HELP ME--!

A SINGLE
BLOW--



YET, WITH SUCH **BLINDING SPEED** DOES THE SERPENT MOVE, THAT IT WHIPS ABOUT TO **MEET** HIM IN MID-AIR...



...INSTANTLY LAPPING HIS LIMBS AND BODY WITH ITS COILS!

THEN, HE IS WRITHING ON THE FLOOR, WITH FOLD AFTER SLIMY FOLD **KNOTTING** ABOUT HIM--TWISTING, CRUSHING, **KILLING** HIM!



ONE MOMENT, BOTH HIS ARMS ARE **FREE**--

THE MAN'S HALF-CHECKED STROKE **GASHES** THE SCALY TRUNK-- BUT DOES NOT **SEVER** IT.

--THE NEXT ONLY HIS RIGHT AS HIS LEFT ARM IS **WELD** FAST!



HE STRUGGLES VAINLY TO GAIN HIS FOOTING, SO THAT HE CAN STRIKE EVEN A SINGLE **BLOW**--



--ALL THE WHILE KNOWING INSTINCTIVELY THAT ONE MORE BLOW MUST SUFFICE-- OR HE **DIES**!

THEN, WITH A GROANING CONVULSION OF MUSCULAR EXPANSION THAT BULGES HIS VEINS ALMOST TO BURSTING--



--AND TIES HIS MIGHTY THREWS IN QUINERING, TORTURED KNOTS--

--HE HEAVES UP ON HIS FEET, LIFTING ALMOST THE FULL WEIGHT OF THE FORTY-FOOT DEVIL!



AN INSTANT HE REELS ON WIDE-BRACED LEGS, FEELING HIS RIBS CAVING IN ON HIS VITALS, HIS EYES GROWING DARK...

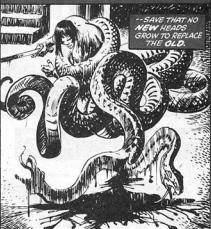
THEN, EVEN AS THE FANGED CONSTRICTOR'S HEAD DARTS FORWARD, HIS SWORD GLEAMS ABOVE HIS HEAD--



--AND IT FALLS, SHEARING THRU THE SCALES AND FLESH AND VERTEBRAE!



THUS DOES THE GREAT SNAKE DIE, SLICED LIKE THE HORRENDOUS HYDRA OF LEGEND--



--SAVE THAT NO NEW HEADS GROW TO REPLACE THE OLD.

SICK, DIZZY, BLOOD OZZING FROM HIS NOSE, CONAN STAGGERS AWAY FROM ITS LASHING, FLOPPING DEATH THROES...



CONAN-- IS IT--?

YOU!

NEXT TIME I TELL YOU TO STAY SOMEWHERE--



--YOU STAY!

HE IS TOO DIZZY TO KNOW, OR CARE, IF SHE FINDS VOICE TO REPLY.



WORDLESS NOW, CONAN LEADS OCTAVIA TO THE
SOUTHWESTERN WALL...

... FINDING, WITH-
OUT DIFFICULTY,
A STONE STAIR
THAT MOUNTS
THE RAMPART.

IN MOMENTS, THEY
REACH THE PARAPET...

... STILL
PURSUED BY
THE SOUND
OF SHOUTS
AND BLOWS.

QUICKLY HE
LOWERS
THE GIRL,
WHO HOLDS
FAST AND
FRIGHTENED
TO THE SOFT
STRONG
CORD.

THERE IS BUT ONE WAY OF ES-
CAPE FROM THE ISLAND, HE KNOWS:

IN THAT DIRECTION THEY RUN SWINGING
WIDE AROUND THE SPOT FROM WHICH
CAME THE CRIES OF HORROR.

OCTAVIA SENSES SOME-
HOW THAT GRIM PERIL
LURKS IN THESE LEAFY
FASTNESSES; HER BREATH
COMES PANTINGLY AND
SHE PRESSES CLOSE TO
HER PROTECTOR.

YET THE
FOREST IS
SILENT
NOW...

AND THEY SEE NO SHAPE OF MENACE, TILL,
EMERGING FROM THE TREES --

-- THEY
SUDDENLY GLIMPSE A
FORLORN
FIGURE
STANDING
ON THE EDGE
OF THE
CLIFFS:

JEHUNGIR
AGHA!

THE SEA-
STEPS
ON THE
WESTERN
CLIFFS!



HE HAS ESCAPED
THE POOM
THAT OVERTOOK
HIS WARRIORS
WHEN THEY
DREW NEAR
THE GATE OF
THE TOWERING,
STRANGELY-
RESTORED
CITY...



...AND AN IRON GIANT STRODE SUDDENLY FROM
THE GATE, TO BATTER AND CRUSH THEM INTO
BITS OF SHREDDED FLESH AND SPLINTERED BONE!

SEEING SWORDS
AND ARROWS
BREAK ON THAT
MANLIKE JUGGER-
NAUT, HE KNEW IT
WAS NO HUMAN
FOE THEY FACED--

AND SO, HE FLED, HIDING IN THE
DEEP WOODS TILL THE SOUNDS
OF SLAUGHTER CEASED.

THEN, HE
CREPT BACK
TO HIS
WAITING
BOATMEN.

BUT THEY HAD HEARD THE SCREAMS--
AND SOON LOOKED UP TO SEE A
BLOOD-SMEARED MONSTER WAVING
GIGANTIC ARMS IN AWFUL TRIUMPH...

THEY HAD
WAITED
NO
LONGER.

STILL, KHOSATRAL KHEL WAS GONE
NOW, DOUBTLESS RETURNED TO
HIS FORTRESS...

REMEMBERING
COMAN'S BOAT
BELOW THE
TURAWAN IS ABOUT
TO DESCEND...

-- WHEN --

SO, JEHUNGIR AGHA... IT'S JUST YOU AND ME NOW, IS IT?

YOU!?

YOU SHOULD
HAVE TRIED
TO TAKE ME
UNAWARES.
YOU WITLESS
BARBARIAN...

AS IT IS-- YOU'VE JUST GIVEN ME A CHANCE TO FULFILL MY MISSION, IN SPITE OF EVERYTHING!

DOG! YOU CAN'T HIT ME!

I WAS NOT BORN TO DIE ON HYRKANIAN STEEL!

AND THAT WAS YOUR LAST ARROW!

THEN IT'S BLADE FOOL! ON GUARD!

THERE IN THE MOONLIGHT, CURVED SWORDS CIRCLE IN GLITTERING ARCS--

--THEN GRIND TOGETHER, ONLY TO SPRING APART AGAIN-- AND CLASH ANEW!

OCTAVIA FINDS THE FURIOUS MOVEMENT SO FAST THAT IT BLURS HER SIGHT AS SHE TRIES TO WATCH--!

EVEN SHE DOES NOT SEE THE FINAL STROKE.

SHE MERELY HEARS ITS CHOPPING IMPACT.

--AND SEES JEHUNGIR FALL, BLOOD SPURTING THRU SUNDERED MAIL.

...WHERE THE CIMMERIAN'S STEEL HAS BITTEN TO HIS SPINE!

JUST THEN-- OCTAVIA SCREAMS!

WHAT THE DEVIL'S
WRONG, GIRL?
HE CAN'T HURT
YOU NOW--!

BUT, HER SCREAM IS NOT CAUSED
BY THE DEATH OF HER FORMER
MASTER...

EE'EE'EE

FOR, WITH A
RESONING CRASH OF
BENDING BOUGHS--

--KHOSATRAL
KHEL IS UPON
THEM!

CROM!

THE GIRL CANNOT
FLEE! A MOANING
CRY ESCAPES HER,
AS HER KNEES GIVE
WAY AND PITCH HER,
GROVELING, TO
THE SWORD!

CROUCHED ABOVE THE AGHA'S BODY, CONAN MAKES NO MOVE TO ESCAPE.

SHIFTING HIS REDDENED SWORD TO HIS LEFT HAND, HE DRAWS THE GREAT HALF-BLADE OF THE YUETSU PRIEST.

KHOSATRAL KHEL IS TOWERING ABOVE HIM, HIS ARMS LIFTED LIKE MAULS--

BUT, AS THE KNIFE CATCHES THE SHEEN OF THE SUN, THE GIANT GIVES BACK SUDDENLY.

AND, RUSHING IN, HE SLASHES WITH THE CRESCENT BLADE-- AND IT DOES NOT SHATTER!

UNDER ITS EDGE, THE DUSKY METAL BODY YIELDS LIKE COMMON FLESH BENEATH A CLEAVER-- AND FROM THE DEEP GASH FLOWS A STRANGE ICHEOR--

TOO LATE!
CONAN'S BLOOD
IS UP...

--AS THE GIANT
CRIES OUT
LIKE THE RING-
ING OF A
GREAT BELL!

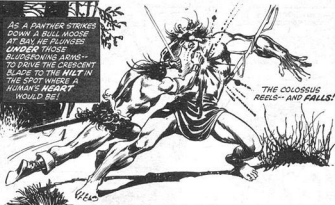
HIS TERRIBLE ARMS FLAIL DOWN, BUT CONAN IS SWIFTER THAN HE-- STRIKING AGAIN AND AGAIN!

WHEELING, HE STAGGERS TOWARD THE FOREST...

THE MONSTER'S CRIES ARE AWFUL TO HEAR-- AS IF METAL WERE GIVEN A TONGUE OF PAIN.

BUT
CONAN,
FIRED TO
BERSERK
FURY,
IS NOT
TO BE
DENIED!

AS A PANTHER STRIKES
DOWN A BULL MOOSE
AT BAY HE PLUNGES
UNDER THOSE
BLUDGEONING ARMS--
TO DRIVE THE CRESCENT
BLADE TO THE HILT IN
THE SPOT WHERE A
HUMAN'S HEART
WOULD BE!



THE COLOSSUS
REELS-- AND FALLS!

IN THE SHAPE OF A MAN HE REELED--
BUT, BENEATH THE BARBARIAN'S
HORRIFIED GAZE--



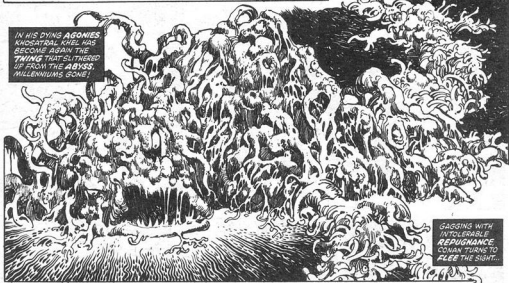
--IT IS NOT THE SHAPE
OF A MAN WHICH STRIKES
THE GROUND!

THE MANLIKE FACE, THE
METAL LIMBS MELT
AND CHANGE...

AND CONAN WHO DID
NOT SHRINK FROM
KHOSATRAL KHEL LIVING,
RECOILS BLENCING FROM
KHOSATRAL KHEL DEAD--
FOR HE HAS WITNESSED A
REVOLTING TRANSMUTATION!



IN HIS DYING AGONIES
KHOSATRAL KHEL HAS
BECOME AGAIN THE
THING THAT SLITHERED
UP FROM THE ABYSS,
MILLENNIUMS GONE!



GAGGING WITH
INTOLERABLE
REPUGNANCE
CONAN TURNS TO
FLEE THE SIGHT...

...TO BE SUDDENLY AWARE THAT THE PINNACLES
OF THE CITY OF DAGONIA HAVE FARED
LIKE SMOKE!

WITH THE PASSING OF THE INHUMAN INTELLECT WHICH
GAVE THEM REBIRTH, THEY HAVE TURNED BACK INTO THE
DUST WHICH THEY HAVE BEEN FOR AGES UNCOUNTED.



AND CONAN LOOKS
AGAIN UPON THE
RUINS OF KAPUR
AS HE REMEMBERS
THEM.

FOR A MOMENT CONAN DIMLY GRASPS SOMETHING OF THE COSMIC TRAGEDY OF THE FITFUL EPHEMERA CALLED MANKIND, AND THE HOODED SHAPES OF DARKNESS THAT PREY UPON IT.

THEN, AS IN A DREAM, HE HEARS HIS NAME CALLED...

CONAN-- WHERE IS HE?

GONE BACK TO HELL WHENCE HE CRAWLED!

WHY DIDN'T YOU FLEE?

I-- I WOULDN'T HAVE DESERTED...!

BESIDES, I HAVE NOWHERE TO GO. THE TURANIANS WOULD ENSLAVE ME AGAIN, AND THE PIRATES WOULD--

WHAT OF THE KOZAKS?

ARE THEY BETTER THAN THE PIRATES?

YOU SEEMED TO THINK SO, IN THE CAMP BY FORT GHORY.

YOU WERE FREE ENOUGH WITH YOUR SMILES THEN.

DO YOU THINK I WAS ENAMORED OF YOU?

OH.

JEHUNGIR AND HIS MAN GHAZNAVI HAD ORDERED ME TO GAIN YOUR ATTENTION!

WELL, NO MATTER, YOU BELONG TO ME NOW.

GIVE ME A KISS.

YOU DARE ASK--?

WHY YOU ALE-GUZZLING, MEAT-GORGING-- BARBARIAN!

I'LL CLAW YOUR EYES OUT IF YOU SO MUCH AS TOUCH ME--!

I'LL--

YOU SEE? IS THAT NOT BETTER THAN THE CITY-BRED DOGS OF TURAN COULD DO?

YOU SHALL JUDGE, GIRL!

CROM HELP ME-- I'LL BURN KHWARIZM FOR A TORCH TO LIGHT YOUR WAY TO MY TENT!

HAHA... PERHAPS BUT DO YOU DEEM YOURSELF AN AGHA'S EQUAL?