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**DARK
HORSE
COMICS**

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CONAN

ROAD OF KINGS



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CONAN

CONAN: ROAD OF KINGS #7 / AUGUST 2011

Based on the work of Conan creator **ROBERT E. HOWARD**

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LETTERS

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& COMICRAFT**

COVER

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CONAN: ROAD OF KINGS

After his short-lived captaincy of a pirate ship on the Vilayet Sea, Conan set out upon the fabled Road of Kings, which winds among the most powerful kingdoms of the Hyborian Age, to deliver the unfortunate Olivia back to her father, the king of Ophir. Following the successful conclusion of that effort, he continued west upon the road, bound for Messantia, capital of Argos . . . because he has heard that war is in the offing between Argos and neighboring Zingara, an ample opportunity for the greatest warrior of the era to sell his sword . . . at least until some better chance comes along . . .

◆ NUMBER **82** IN A SERIES ◆



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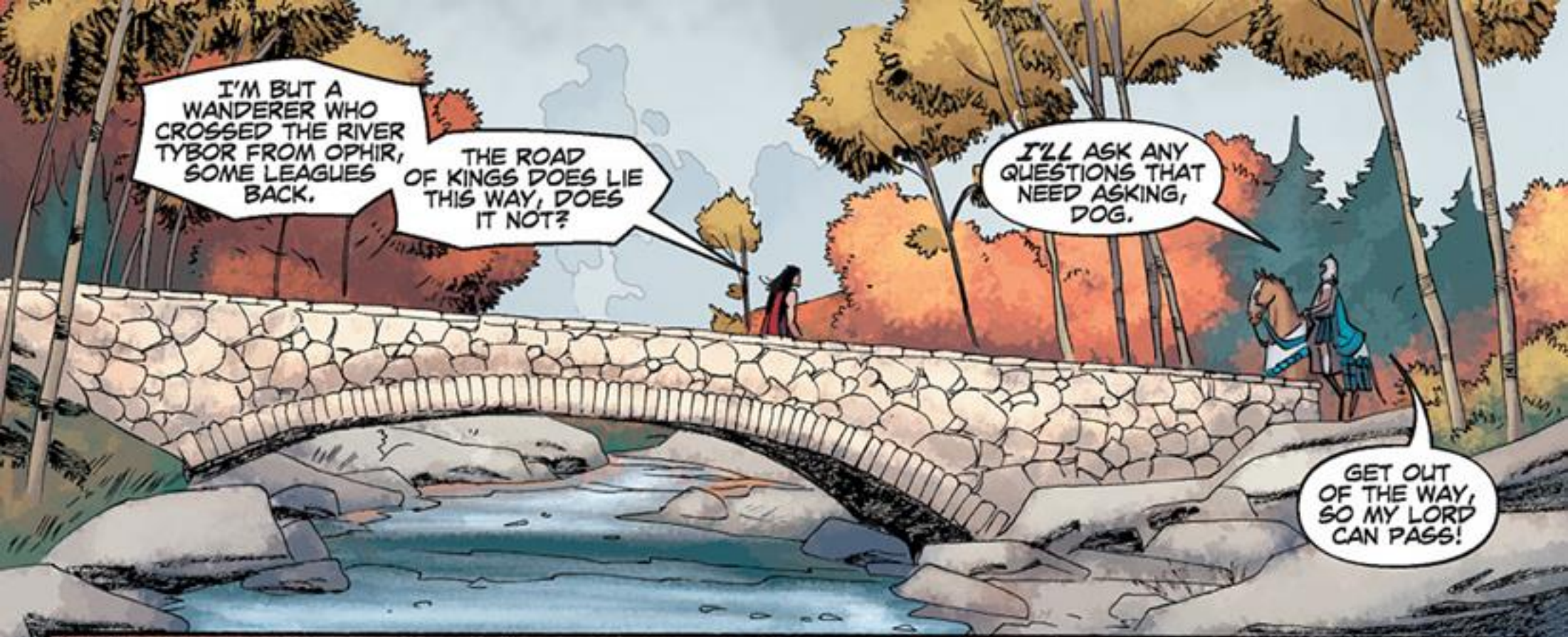


AS MITRA IS MY
WITNESS, PRINCE
ARPELLO...

WITH THIS
DAMNED DROUGHT,
EVERY **STARVELING**
LOWLIFE ON THE
CONTINENT BELIEVES
HE CAN CROSS INTO
AQUILONIA WITH
IMPUNITY!

HALT
AND IDENTIFY
YOURSELF,
OUTLANDER!

Of Princes and Plotters



I'M BUT A WANDERER WHO CROSSED THE RIVER TYBOR FROM OPHIR, SOME LEAGUES BACK.

THE ROAD OF KINGS DOES LIE THIS WAY, DOES IT NOT?

I'LL ASK ANY QUESTIONS THAT NEED ASKING, DOG.

GET OUT OF THE WAY, SO MY LORD CAN PASS!

SINCE, AS ANY FOOL CAN SEE, I'M ALREADY HALFWAY ACROSS, ALL YOU NEED DO IS STAND ASIDE TO LET ME PASS...

...AND I'LL BE OUT OF YOUR WAY, AND ON MINE.



BEHIND THAT BARBAROUS ACCENT, DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND AQUILONIAN?

I SAID MOVE YOUR CARCASS-- NOW!

TO GET OUT OF YOUR PATH...I'D HAVE TO JUMP OFF THE BRIDGE.



THEN JUMP.



I'D RATHER NOT.



YOU DON'T SEEM TO HAVE MADE MUCH OF AN IMPRESSION ON THIS VAGABOND, LT. GARALDI.

I'LL MAKE AN IMPRESSION ON HIS GUTS, MY PRINCE--







YOU
SPAWN OF A
NORTHRON
SLUT--!

I TRUST,
PRINCE--ARPELLO,
I BELIEVE YOUR LACKEY
NAMED YOU--THAT I MAY
COMPLETE MY CROSSING
OF THE BRIDGE?

COME AHEAD,
WAYFARER.

JUST KEEP
YOUR SWORD
SHEATHED.



WHO
ARE YOU, AND
WHERE ARE YOU
BOUND?

I AM CONAN,
A CIMMERIAN.

I'M
HEADED FOR
MESSANTIA,
CAPITAL OF
ARGOS.



I'VE HEARD THAT A BORDER
WAR BETWEEN ARGOS
AND ZINGARA MAY BE IN
THE OFFING...

...AND I'M THINKING
OF HIRING MY SWORD
OUT FOR A TIME.

ALAS,
PELLIA, WHERE
YOU NOW ARE,
DOES NOT ALLOW
TRAVELERS
TO RANDOMLY
TRAVERSE ITS
LANDS.



YET I'M TOLD
PELLIA IS
MERELY A
PROVINCE OF
AQUILONIA...
ONE AMONG
SEVERAL...

...AND
NOT A KINGDOM
UNTO ITSELF.



PELLIA, LIKE
POITAIN IN THE
KINGDOM'S
SOUTH, MOSTLY
GOES ITS OWN
WAY...

...AS LONG
AS IT PAYS
TAXES AND
TRIBUTE TO
THE KING
WHO SITS IN
TARANTIA.







PEASANT--KNOW
THAT YOU ARE IN THE
PRESENCE OF *PRINCE*
ARPELLO.

WHAT...MAY
I DO FOR YOU,
MY PRINCE?

WHAT YOU
SHOULD HAVE
DONE LONG
SINCE--



GIVE ME THE LEVY
OF *CROPS* YOU
OWE ME, FOR THE
WORKING OF
THIS LAND.

MILORD--THE
DROUGHT--
MY YIELD HAS
BEEN SO
POOR--

I'VE
ONLY ENOUGH
FOOD TO FEED MY
OWN FAMILY, AND
THAT NOT WELL.



THEN YOU SHOULD
SLIT THE THROAT OF
ONE OR TWO OF
THOSE BRATS.

THEN YOU'D
HAVE CROPS
ENOUGH LEFT
OVER TO PAY
WHAT YOU
OWE.

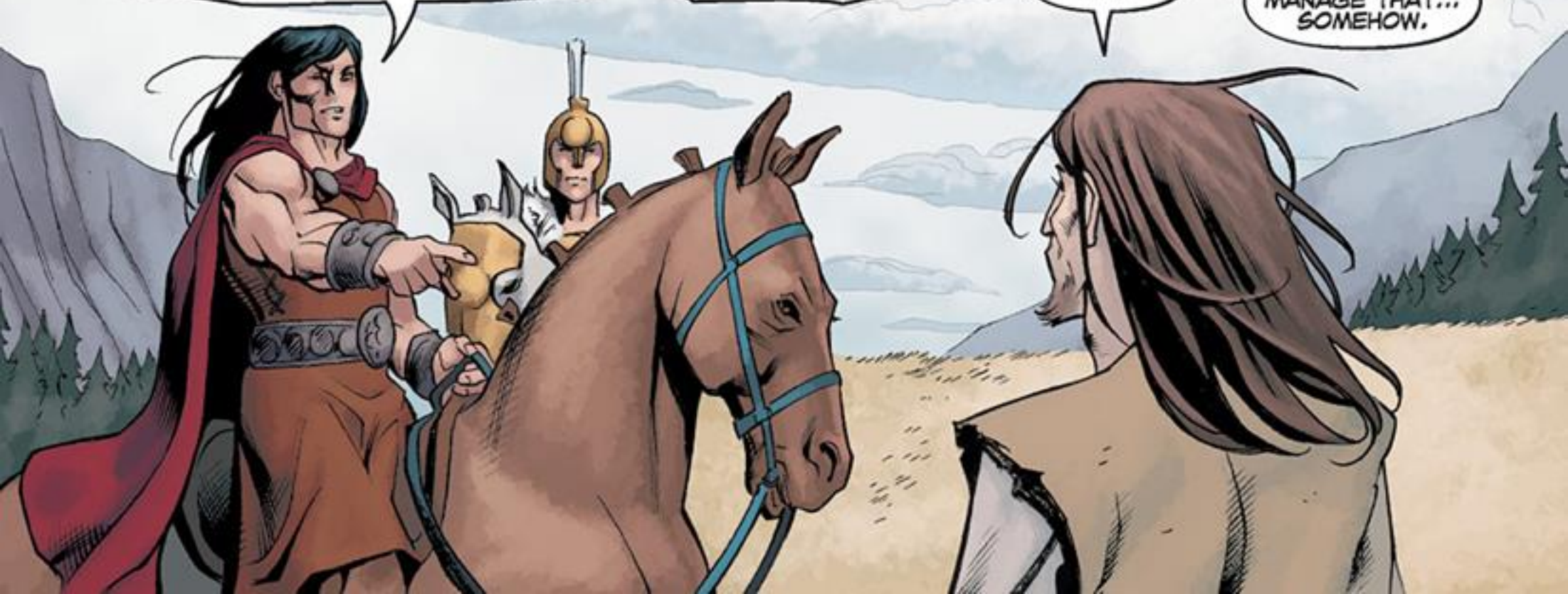
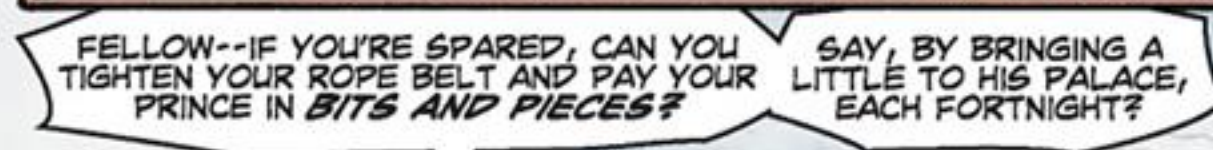
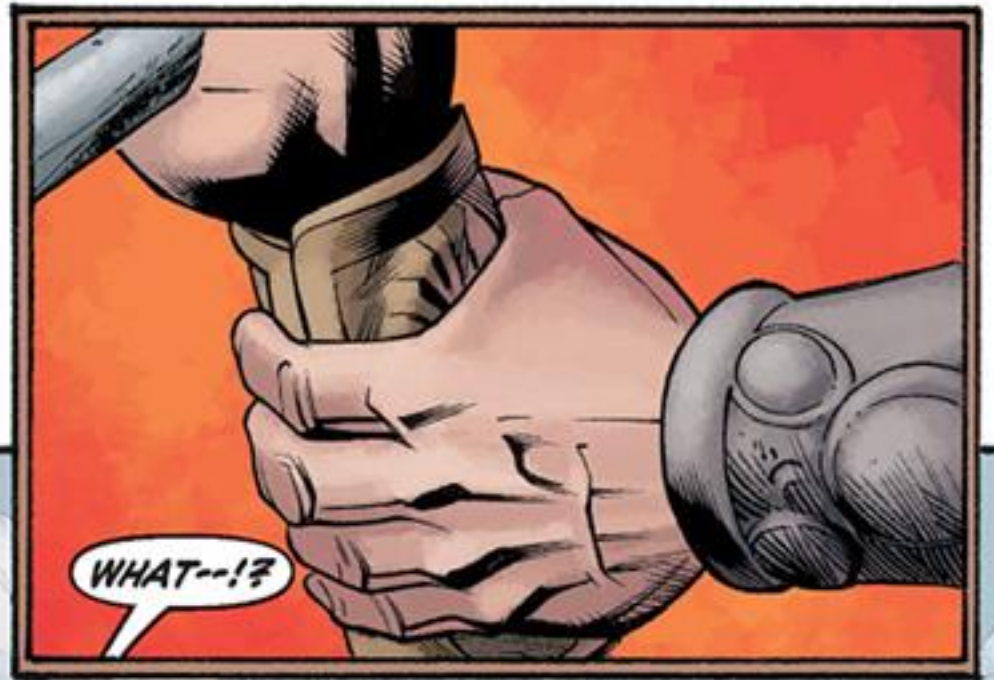


THAT I WILL
NOT DO,
MILORD.

I'M A *FREE*
AQUILONIAN,
NOT A SLAVE...
AND THE *KING'S*
OWN LAW
SAYS--



*THE
KING'S OWN
LAW*?





TWO DAYS' RIDE, AND THE PROUD RAMPARTS
AND PROUDER SPIRES OF **TARANTIA**, QUEEN
CITY OF AQUILONIA, CAME INTO MAJESTIC VIEW.

THIS WAS A CAPITAL IN WHOSE
FAR CORNERS **SHADIZAR THE
WICKED** COULD HAVE CROUCHED
SULKING, AND HARDLY BEEN NOTICED...

...AND IT SUDDENLY BECAME EASY
TO CREDIT TALES OF THE ENVY
WHICH THE COURT IN NEMEDIA'S
BELVERUS FELT FOR THOSE WHO
RULED IN HER SISTER KINGDOM.

CROM...

YOU CAN
CLOSE YOUR
MOUTH NOW,
BARBARIAN.

UNLESS
YOU *WANT* IT
TO BECOME A
SNARE FOR
FLIES.

CONAN WAS
SO STAR-
STRUCK BY
THE SIGHT
THAT HE DID
NOT HEAR
GARALDI'S
WORDS...

...AND SO THE
LIEUTENANT
LIVED A WHILE
LONGER.

THROUGH THE GLEAMING GATES...
DOWN BROAD, TEEMING AVENUES...
ONTO A QUIETER SIDE STREET...

...THE CIMMERIAN BEHELD
THE MARVELOUS SIGHTS
OF THE GREAT CITY...

...AND THEY
BEHELD HIM.

I SWEAR
THEY'RE GROWING
THEM *BIGGER*
IN THE PROVINCES
EVERY YEAR.

HE'D BE
A WHOLE LOT
SMALLER
WHEN *WE* GOT
THROUGH
WITH HIM!

FROM TIME TO TIME, TAVERN
DOORS GAPED OPEN...

...AND SCENTS AND SOUNDS
FROM WITHIN BECKONED TO A
HUNGERING, THIRSTING HILLMAN.

BUT, AWARE OF GARALDI'S HAWKISH
EYES UPON HIM, CONAN KEPT HIS
HORSE'S GAIT STRAIGHT AHEAD.

THEN, AFTER A
SEEMING ETERNITY...

YOUR PRIVATE
DINING CHAMBER STANDS
READY AS ALWAYS,
PRINCE ARPELLO.

THAT'S
WHAT I PAY
YOU FOR,
CUR.

MY LORD...MAY
I BE EXCUSED
FOR A PERSONAL
ERRAND?

ALL RIGHT,
GARALDI...BUT
DON'T BE TOO
LONG.

YOU KNOW
WE'VE THINGS
TO DO TONIGHT
THAT WILL NOT
WAIT.

THE FOOD AND DRINK IN THE EIGHT-POINTED STAR WERE WELL WORTHY OF WHATEVER RETAINER ARPELLO PAID TO HAVE THE PLACE EVER AT HIS MOMENT'S BECK AND CALL.

NOR HAD CONAN ANY DOUBT THAT OTHER ITEMS, AS WELL, WERE ON THE BILL OF FARE.

PERHAPS, HE MUSED, HE WOULD NOT DESERT FOR A DAY OR TWO, AFTER ALL...

SO, GARALD!-- YOU FINALLY DECIDED TO REJOIN US?

AS SOON AS I COULD, MY PRINCE. AND WITH AN APPETITE--

--THAT WILL HAVE TO BE ASSUAGED AT A LATER HOUR.

IT IS TIME WE WERE ABOUT THE NIGHT'S BUSINESS.

YES... MY PRINCE.

AS ARPELLO'S MINIONS AROSE ALMOST IN UNISON, CONAN WAS SUDDENLY AWARE THAT HE WAS THE ONLY MAN PRESENT WHO DID NOT KNOW PRECISELY WHAT "BUSINESS" THE PELLIAN PRINCE WAS TALKING ABOUT.

BUT HE KNEW
IT WOULD BE
IMPRUDENT
TO INQUIRE...



SO HE MERELY RODE WITH THE OTHERS THROUGH
STREETS THAT DREW THEM EVER FURTHER FROM
THE CONCENTRATION OF THE TALLER TOWERS...

...TILL THE RISING MOON SHONE DOWN UPON A
DARKENED EDIFICE CLEARLY BUILT TO HOUSE
SUPPLIES AND WARES, NOT MEN AND WOMEN...



THIS
WAY, MY
PRINCE.

PASSING INSIDE,
CONAN FELT
HE HAD BEEN
IN SUCH A
PLACE BEFORE:



THE HOUSE OF ANTIQUITIES
IN NUMALIA HAD HOUSED MORE
ICONS AND STATUARIES THAN
THIS STRUCTURE, PERHAPS...

...BUT NOT THAT
MANY MORE.

THAT REPOSITORY HAD
BEEN HOME, AS WELL, TO
DEATH IN THE FORM OF
A MAN-HEADED SERPENT.



HE DARED HOPE NONE OF
THESE RELICS WOULD COME
EERILY TO LIFE AND LEAP
SAVAGELY FOR HIS THROAT.



THEY'LL
BE IN THIS INNER
CHAMBER, MY
PRINCE...

...WHERE
NO LIGHT CAN
ESCAPE TO
BETRAY US.

GREETINGS,
PRINCE
ARPELLO.

I HATE TO
BE THE ONE TO
POINT OUT THAT
YOU ARE A WEE
BIT LATE...



PRINCES EXIST TO
BE *WAITED* UPON,
PRIEST J'HONN...
IN ONE WAY OR
ANOTHER.

SO YOU
ARE ALL
HERE.

GOOD.

I HAD HALF
SUSPECTED THAT
PERHAPS ONE OR MORE
OF YOU MIGHT HAVE
LOST *STOMACH*
FOR OUR HOLY
ENTERPRISE.



HOW "*HOLY*" IT IS WILL BE SEEN,
ARPELLO...WHEN WE LEARN IF
GREAT *MITRA* WILL BATHE US
IN THE DIVINE LIGHT OF
SUCCESS...

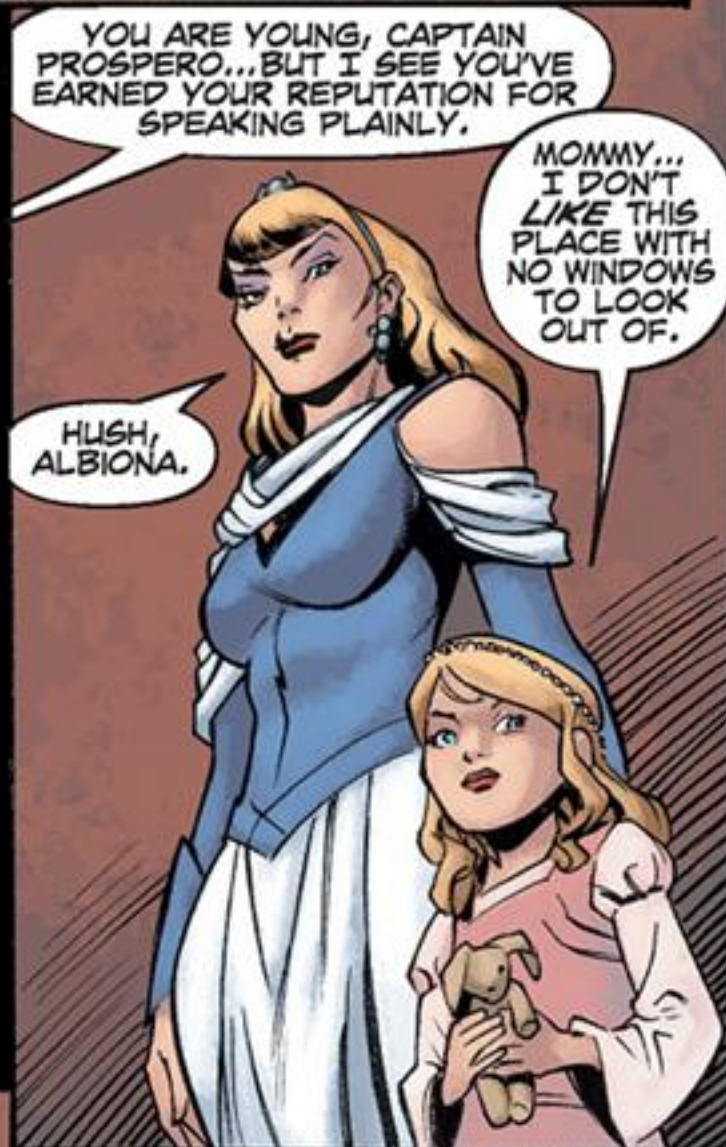
...OR HURL
US SHRIEKING
INTO THE *LOWER
DARKNESS*, FROM
WHICH EVEN HIS
FAITHFUL *PRIEST'S*
VOICE WILL NEVER
REACH HIM.



YOU RELY TOO
MUCH UPON
THE *GODS*,
J'HONN.

COUNT
TROCERO SENT
ME HERE WITH
THESE MEN TO
FIND OUT IF HE'S
CAST HIS LOT
WISELY...

...OR IF
HE IS ROLLING
BONES THAT HAVE
BEEN WEIGHTED
AGAINST HIM
BY THE DEVIL.



YOU ARE YOUNG, CAPTAIN
PROSPERO...BUT I SEE YOU'VE
EARNED YOUR REPUTATION FOR
SPEAKING PLAINLY.

HUSH,
ALBIONA.

MOMMY...
I DON'T
LIKE THIS
PLACE WITH
NO WINDOWS
TO LOOK
OUT OF.



YOU
BROUGHT YOUR
CHILD WITH YOU,
THELITIS?

WE PLAY NO
GAMES HERE
TONIGHT.



THERE
WAS NO ONE
ON MY ESTATES
THAT I COULD
TRUST TO LEAVE
HER WITH,
ARPELLO...

...NOT
SINCE KING
DEUCALION
HAD MY NOBLE
HUSBAND
EXECUTED ON
CHARGES AS
FALSE AS A
WANTON'S
SMILE.



VERY WELL, WOMAN. WHAT'S DONE IS DONE.

WE MUST PROCEED WITH THE MATTERS AT HAND.

TAGNAN, I MUST GO OUTSIDE AND RELIEVE MYSELF.

STAND HERE WITH YOUR BACK TO THE CLOSED DOOR TILL I RETURN AND GIVE THE PASSWORD.

Aye, Lt. Garaldi.



LET US NOT MINCE WORDS.

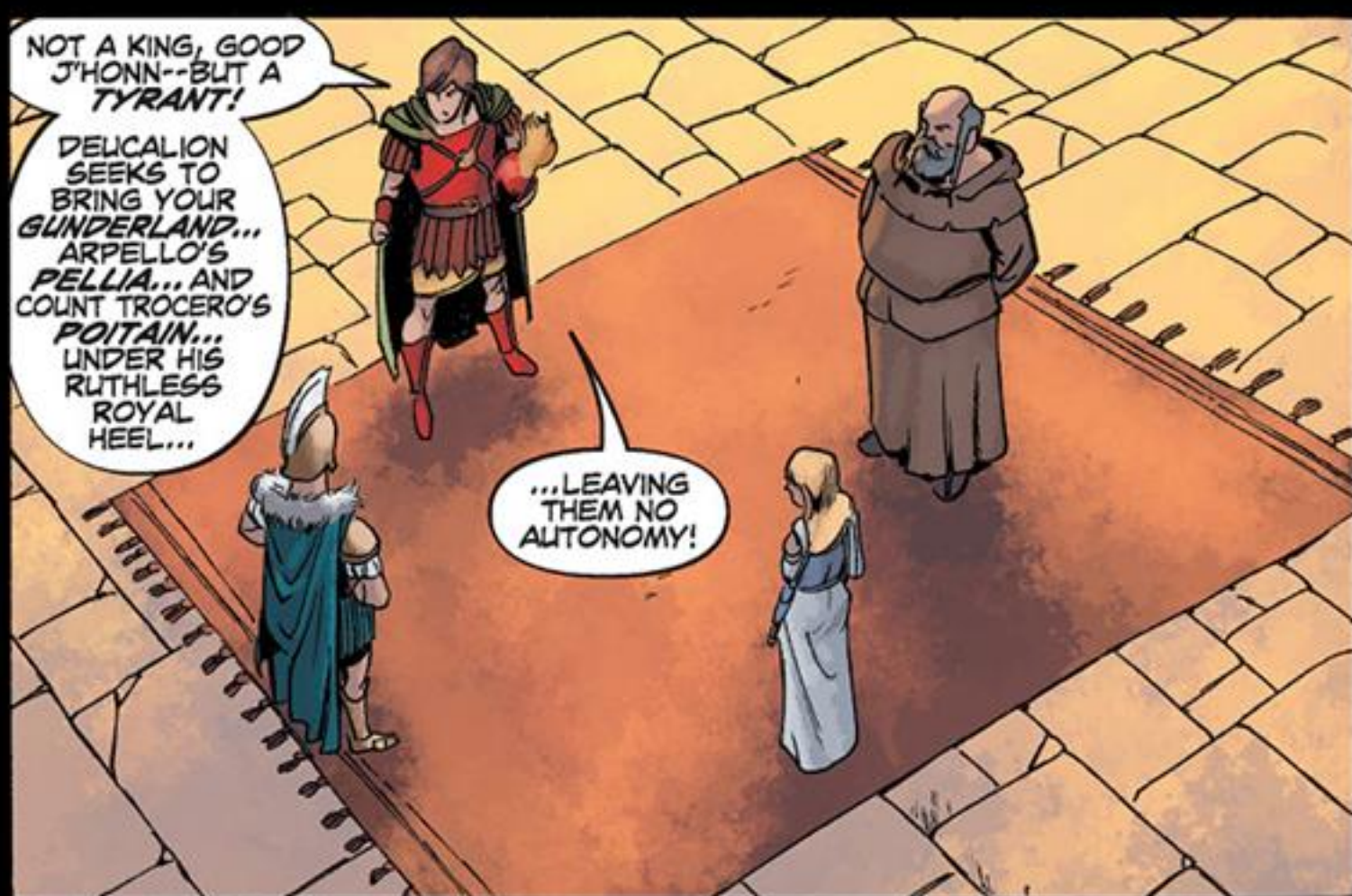
THE **SHORTER** THIS CONCLAVE, THE SAFER... CONSIDERING ITS PURPOSE.

INDEED, PRINCE ARPELLO.

EVEN IN THE LESS METROPOLITAN HINTERLANDS OF GUNDERLAND, IT'S DANGEROUS WORK--



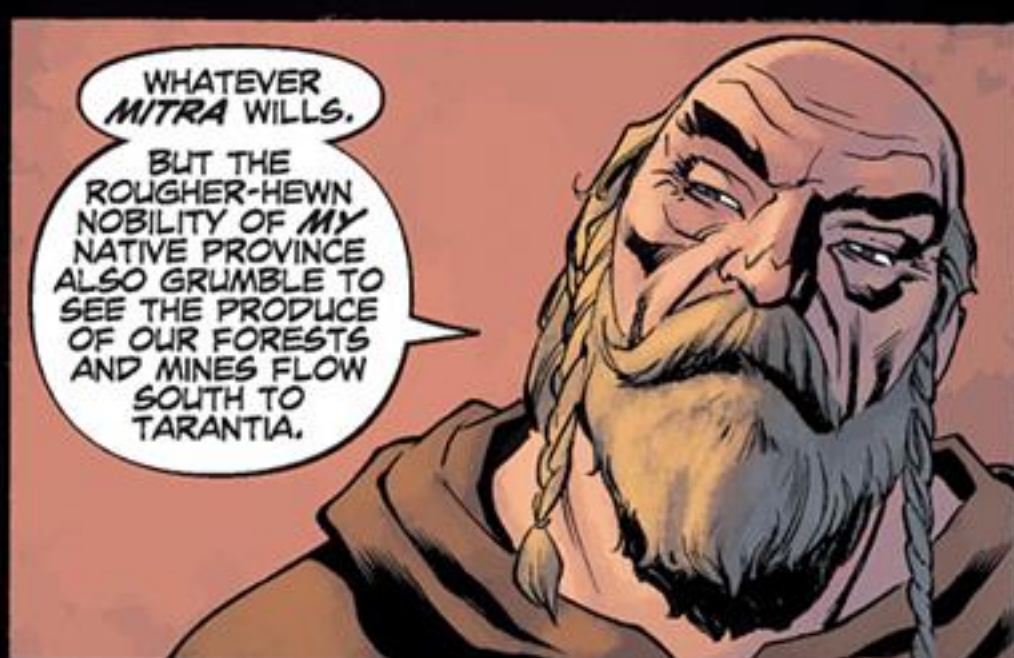
--TO SEEK TO OVERTHROW A KING!



NOT A KING, GOOD J'HONN--BUT A TYRANT!

DELUCALION SEEKS TO BRING YOUR GUNDERLAND... ARPELLO'S PELLIA... AND COUNT TROCERO'S POITAIN... UNDER HIS RUTHLESS ROYAL HEEL...

...LEAVING THEM NO AUTONOMY!



SO THIS, CONAN PONDERED, WAS THE CLUSTER OF NIGHT PLOTTERS IN WHOSE COMPANY HE FOUND HIMSELF.

SLY ARPELLO SOUGHT OTHERS TO DO HIS FIGHTING FOR HIM--DESPITE THE FACT THAT THE CIMMERIAN HAD HEARD ONE OF HIS LACKEYS WHISPER THAT HE WAS ALREADY CALLED "THE BUTCHER OF PELLIA."

J'HONN, LIKE OTHER PRIESTS HE'D KNOWN, MIXED PERHAPS SINCERE DEVOUTNESS WITH A PRACTICAL STREAK THAT USED RELIGION AS A MASK FOR POLITICAL MOTIVES.

PROSPERO SEEMED EVERY INCH THE NOBLE SOLDIER, READY TO MARCH INTO HELL IF AN OVERLORD HE RESPECTED SHOULD DEMAND IT.

AND THELITIS WOULD STOP AT LITTLE--IF THAT--TO GAIN THE VENGEANCE SHE SAW AS JUSTICE.

CLEARLY, THE LITTLE GIRL--WHATEVER HER NAME WAS--WAS THE ONLY INNOCENT ONE IN THE CHAMBER.







DEUCALION'S
ELITE GUARD!

HOW
DID THEY
KNOW--?



THAT ONE'S
ARPELLO--HE'S THE
RINGLEADER!



GARALDI--YOU
BETRAYED
ME!?

YOU
MEN--TO
ME!



AND
ABRUPTLY,
ALL WAS
CHAOS.

J'HONN WIELDED AN IRON BALL
MACE--FOR PRIESTS WERE NOT
SUPPOSED TO SHED BLOOD.

BUT IT DID, ALL THE SAME.

PROSPERO, NOT SURPRISINGLY,
WAS THE FIRST TO DRAW
SCARLET WITH A SWORD...



BUT CONAN WAS ONLY
A HEARTBEAT BEHIND.

HE HAD NO HOUND IN
THIS FIGHT, BUT HE KNEW
THAT TO THE INTRUDERS
HE WORE ARPELLO'S BRAND--
SO HE LIVED OR DIED
WITH THE CONSPIRATORS.

HE PREFERRED
TO LIVE.



VISIONS FLASHED FLEETING
BEFORE HIS EYES...SCENES LIT
BY LIGHTNING AT MIDNIGHT:

FIRST THELITIS CRADLING HER CHILD, AS IF THOSE WHITE
ARMS COULD SHIELD EITHER FROM A THRUSTING SWORD...



...THEN GARALDI CUTTING DOWN
A PELLIAN WITH WHOM, AN HOUR
BEFORE, HE'D SHARED A RIBALD JOKE.

AND SUDDENLY, ABOVE EVERYTHING
ELSE IN THIS MAD WORLD--

--CONAN WANTED TO
SHEATHE HIS BLADE
IN GARALDI'S GUTS!



BUT SEVERAL OF
DEUCALION'S ELITE
BARR'D HIS WAY--



--SO THEY WOULD
HAVE TO DIE FIRST!

PRINCE ARPELLO, MEANWHILE, HAD HIS OWN STRATEGY...

OVER HERE!

LADY THELITIS-- HURRY!

I MIGHT HAVE KNOWN YOU'D HAVE A BOLTHOLE, PELLIAN.

BUNNY...

ALBIONA--

GRAB MY HAND!

LET ME GO, ARPELLO!

I NEED YOU, NOT YOUR BRAT!

OUT OF HIS EYE'S CORNER, CONAN SAW THAT PROSPERO WOULD NOT MAKE FOR THE TRAPDOOR--

AARRRR

--UNTIL THE LAST OF HIS POITANIANS FELL.

WHAT OF THE REST OF YOUR MEN, ARPELLO?

THEY'RE DYING TO PROTECT ME.

THAT'S WHAT THEY WERE HERE FOR.

AS HE HEARD THE TRAPDOOR BAR SLIDE INTO PLACE BELOW--

--CONAN KNEW IT WAS TIME FOR THE LAST MAN STANDING TO FLEE--

--AND THE DOOR TO ESCAPE LAY MOMENTARILY UNGUARD.



THOUGH NOT PERHAPS
AS EASY TO PASS THROUGH
AS HE MIGHT HAVE THOUGHT.

WHEN
THE *SHE-DOG*
FLEES--



--DO
NOT NEGLECT
TO SLAY HER
WHELP!




NO!



COME ON,
GIRL--




IT'S TIME WE
WERE *AWAY* FROM THIS
SLAUGHTERHOUSE!



AS IT HAPPENED, A TRIO
MORE OF DEUCALION'S FINEST
LOUNGED JUST OUTSIDE.

THE CLAMOR INSIDE HAVING
DIED DOWN, THEY HAD
ALLOWED THEMSELVES
TO RELAX THEIR GUARD.

FOR TWO OF THEM, AT
LEAST, IT WOULD BE THEIR
FINAL MISJUDGMENT.



THEN CONAN WAS OFF
INTO THE MOON-SHOT
NIGHT BEYOND--

--AND PERHAPS
HE SENSED, EVEN
AS HE RAN--

--THAT HE WAS CARRYING A
HEAVIER BURDEN THAN EVER
HE HAD LIFTED BEFORE.



NEXT:
THE HORROR
BENEATH THE
STONES



... And we're back. Welcome to Act II of Conan's adventures on the fabled Road of Kings. Our *Island* vacation was a blast, but it's great to be back in the company of familiar faces Roy Thomas, Mike Hawthorne, John Lucas, and Dan Jackson! Also joining us for this leg of the journey is new cover artist Aleksi Briclot, whom you may recognize from *Spawn*, *Avengers* both *New* and *Mighty*, and Dark Horse's *Hellgate: London*. As you can already tell from this issue, Aleksi is continuing outgoing cover artist Doug Wheatley's standard of creating the most striking images on the stands.

Of course, also new to the series are editor Dave Marshall and I, your faithful assistant editor. We dipped our toes in the Conan waters helping to finish up *Island of No Return* and have now picked up the torch for the second half of *Road of Kings*. Dave and I are honored to ride along with Roy, Mike, John, Dan, and Aleksi, and we're excited to take part in the great comics tradition that is Conan.

Your turn:

Dear Dark Horse,

Just finished *Conan: Road of Kings* #4, and Roy is knocking it out of the park on this story. Is he lined up for another

Conan Dark Horse yarn? Perhaps some stories featuring my all-time favorite she-pirate, Bêlit (hint, hint)? The cover by Doug Wheatley pretty much set the tone for the story, and I must second Captain Nathaniel Jaime's comments from the letter page of issue #4 about the cover actually depicting a scene from inside the comic. I like when this actually happens. I am sure it is much easier to do for an adaptation from a prose story since all parties involved know ahead of time what is going to happen. I always like it when the "good" guy has to team up with the "bad" guy to work together for a cause such as saving their own skin, so it was neat to see Conan and the creepy Gamesh fight the castle guards in order to escape. Mike Hawthorne's artwork is growing on me. At first I thought it to be too "cartoony" for my liking, but this issue (with all the blood and violence) really shook things up artwise, and I am eagerly anticipating issue #5. Keep up the great Conan work, Dark Horse!

David Gehring
Kenosha, WI

Thanks, David! I'm glad people are coming around to Mike's style. It's definitely a departure from what's come before, but so well suited to the action-heavy story Roy's been spinning. We can't thank Doug enough

THE ADVENTURES OF TWO-GUN BOB

CISCO, TEXAS. CA. APRIL 1929.

I saw Lili Damita for the first time yesterday in a show at Cisco -- Thornton Wilder's muck put in movies. My God, this Damita girl is a white hot flame. She dances like a fanflare of sunfire blown before the wind -- no, like a burning flame of moon-mist under the stars -- Hell -- see her for yourself. Some things can't be described. They have to be seen.



TRUE STORIES FROM THE LIFE OF ROBERT E. HOWARD

BY JIM & RUTH KEEGAN

Evelyn Brent; Fay Wray; Lilyan Tashman; Florence Vidor; Louise Brooks; Baclanova; Lili Damita -- boy, go no further! When that blonde French whirlwind goes into action, all others take a back seat. It's time to batten down the hatches, reef all sails, and stand by to cut the masts if necessary.



The Bridge of San Luis Rey -- let me tell you, confidentially, that's why the bridge fell. Get me. Yes! She walked across and scorched the damned ropes.



Source: REH letters to T. C. Smith, ca. April 1929, and Harold Preece, ca. Sept. 1929—*The Collected Letters of Robert E. Howard, Volume One*. REHFP, 2007.

for his amazing covers on the first half of the series, and hopefully Aleksis's already winning you over. As for Bêlit, we're in it for the long haul, and we aim to include everything (hint, hint).

Dear Dark Horse,

Conan: Road of Kings #4 was another excellent story by Thomas, Hawthorne, and Gorder! This chapter was particularly bloody, and one started to feel concerned about Conan's safety in the torture chamber. Excellent action in barbaric fashion! Looking forward to more!

Doug Butler
Champaign, IL

So are we, Doug! Part of the fun of this series is how quickly Roy's running through different threats, environments, and even genres as Conan continues his travels, learning a lot of the skills he'll need in future tales. Which means lots of action and plenty of blood!

Wow, *Conan: Island of No Return* #1 was great! Bart Sears is perfect for Conan; I hope you guys lock him in

for more issues. The scenario that Ron Marz came up with is looking pretty good as well. The sisters are interesting and mysterious. The way they looked at each other when Conan went to sleep . . . it wasn't good. I'm thinking they won't have Conan's best interests in mind once they get hold of the treasure . . .

Keep up the great work, and please continue to get top-notch creators like Sears and Marz on Conan. With all these great creators, it's a great time to be a Conan fan.

Jason Aiken

Glad you enjoyed the first half of Ron and Bart's *Conan* yarn, Jason! Let us know how the conclusion hits you. As for continuing to get top-notch creators, that's one of the pleasures of working with a character like Conan. So many of comics' best and brightest love him that finding great talent to write and draw his adventures is a snap.

Next time, the Cimmerian as you've never seen him—*Conan the Babysitter*?! Oh, and Zombies.

—Brendan Wright

ON SALE IN THIRTY!—CONAN: ROAD OF KINGS #8

