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CONAN

ROAD OF KINGS



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CONAN

CONAN: ROAD OF KINGS #11 / DECEMBER 2011

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

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CONAN: ROAD OF KINGS

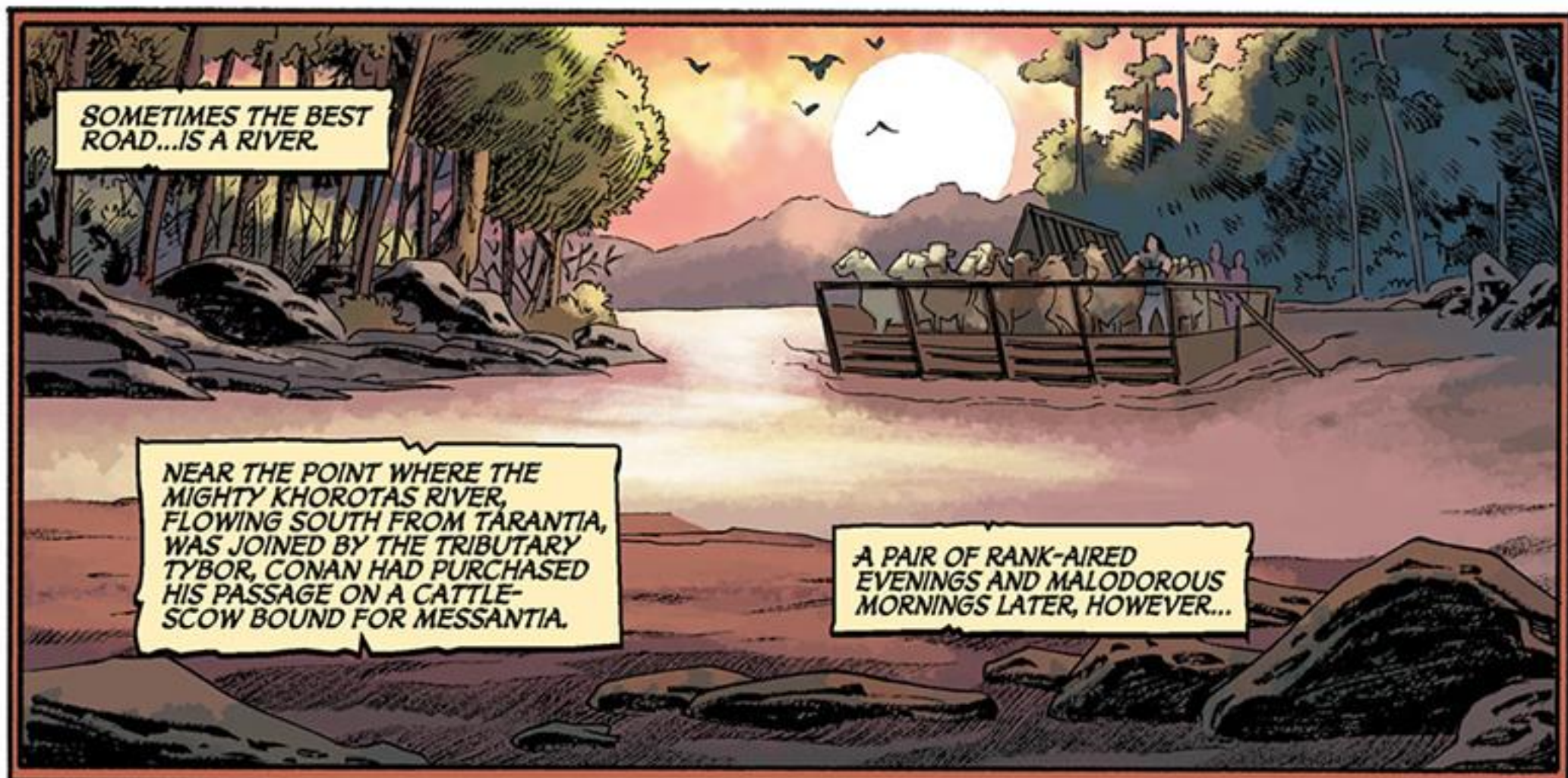
After the pirate ship he captained was sunk in the Vilayet Sea, Conan decided to wander westward along the Road of Kings to Messantia, capital of Argos. After restoring his paramour Olivia to her father, the king of Ophir, the Cimmerian continued along the Road through Aquilonia, where he became briefly embroiled in a plot against that kingdom's tyrannical ruler. When the dust had cleared, Aquilonia had a new king . . . but its royal palace was light a few pounds of gold, which clattered in Conan's stolen saddlebags . . .

◆ NUMBER **86** IN A SERIES ◆



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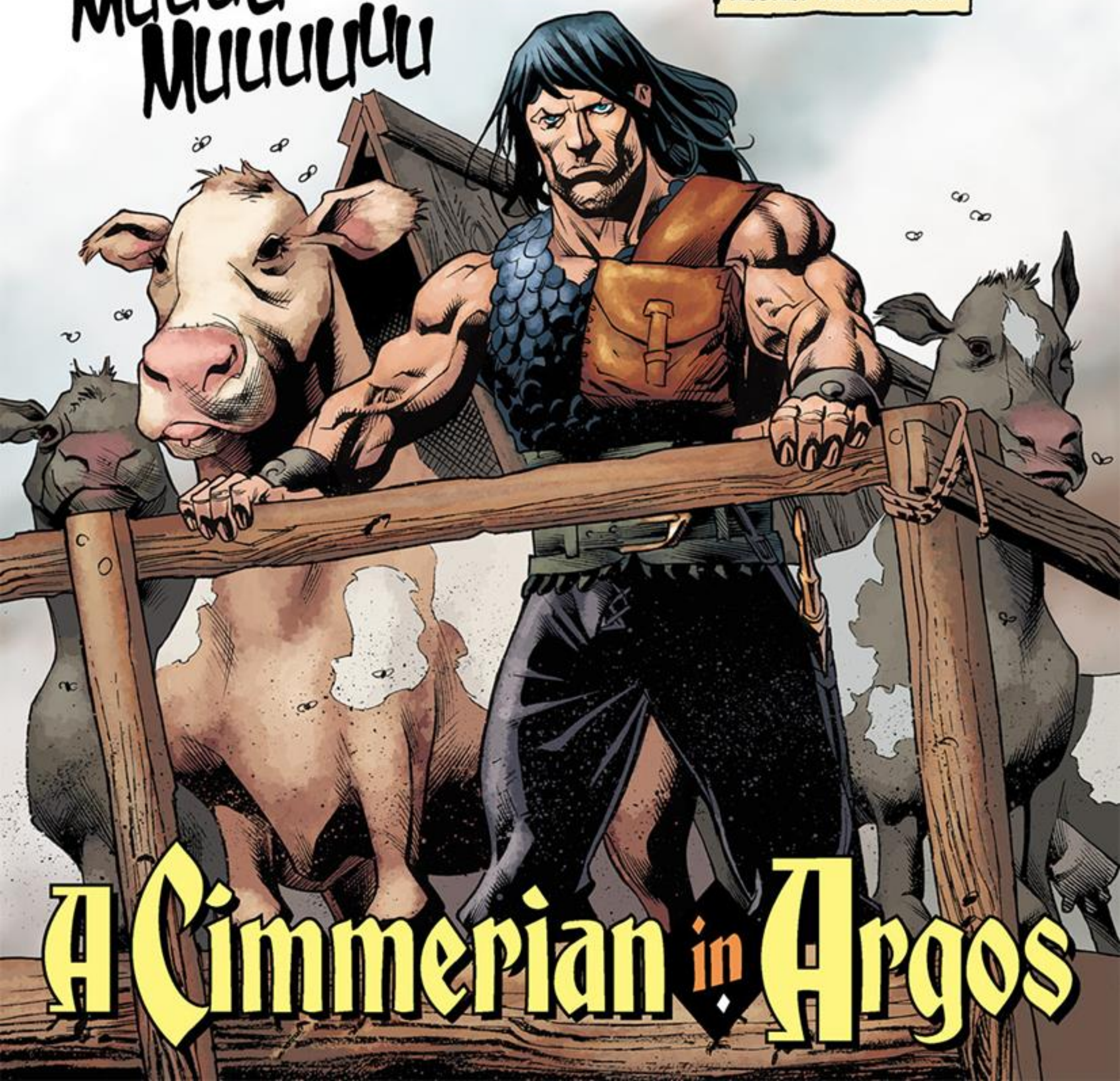
SOMETIMES THE BEST
ROAD...IS A RIVER.

NEAR THE POINT WHERE THE
MIGHTY KHOROTAS RIVER,
FLOWING SOUTH FROM TARANTIA,
WAS JOINED BY THE TRIBUTARY
TYBOR, CONAN HAD PURCHASED
HIS PASSAGE ON A CATTLE-
SCOW BOUND FOR MESSANTIA.

A PAIR OF RANK-AIRED
EVENINGS AND MALODOROUS
MORNINGS LATER, HOWEVER...

MUUUU
MUUUUUUU

...HE WAS BEGINNING TO
REGRET THAT DECISION.



A Cimmerian in Argos

THE VESSEL'S POLE-MEN, INURED TO SUCH PUNGENCIES, HAD OTHER MATTERS ON THEIR VENAL MINDS...

I DON'T LIKE THAT OUTLANDER, WITH HIS FANCY ARMOR AND HIS BARBAROUS ACCENT!

BUT YOU DO LIKE THE LOOK OF THE SADDLEBAGS SLUNG OVER HIS SHOULDER, HEY?

AYE! I HEARD HIM PROMISE OUR SCOW-MASTER SOMETHING GOLD FROM THEM, WHEN WE DOCK AT MESSANTIA.

I'LL WAGER HE DID SOME LOOTING UP IN TARANTIA DURING THE RECENT SIEGE...AND NOW HE'S HOT-FOOTING IT SOUTH TO SET HIMSELF UP IN TRADE IN ARGOS.

EVEN SO, IF YOU WANT TO TRY YOUR LUCK WITH HIM, YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN.

HE'S TOO BIG FOR ME TO TACKLE.

FORGET IT, THEN. I'M NOT TAKING ON A SWORD-WIELDING SAVAGE ALONE...

MY WIFE'S TOO YOUNG TO BE A WIDOW JUST YET.

THE SCOW-DOGS WERE FORTUNATE--FOR THE CIMMERIAN'S KEEN EARS HAD HEARD THEIR SCHEMING EVEN OVER THE CATTLE'S PLANTS.

LOOK LIVELY, YOU LUBBERS!

CONAN WAS SCOWLING AT THE SWARTHY SCOW-MASTER'S BRASH APPROPRIATION OF THE COLORFUL JARGON OF TRUE SEA-DOGS...

...WHEN THE REASON FOR HIS
OUTBURST CAME INTO VIEW
AROUND A BEND IN THE RIVER.

MESSANTIA,
MY SHIPMATES!

SOMEWHERE AHEAD, NOT
FAR BEYOND THE FAR-
FAMED BRIDGE OF THE
SEA'S SORROWS, SPRAWLED
THE MYRIAD DOCKS
WHERE LAY AT ANCHOR
SHIPS THAT PLIED THE
WESTERN OCEAN...

BUT THE BARBARIAN'S
MIND WAS ON ARGOS
ITSELF...AND ON ITS
RESTIVE NEIGHBOR
ZINGARA.

WE WILL SOON
REACH OUR
DESTINATION,
MAN OF THE
NORTH.

SO...
I BELIEVE
YOU *HAVE*
SOMETHING
FOR ME?

BY CROM,
I'D HAVE RIDDEN
INTO ARGOS'S QUEEN
PORT IN *STYLE*,
ON THE BACK OF
A FINE AQUILONIAN
STALLION...

MUUUUUU—MUUUUUUU

...IF NOT
FOR A VIPER'S
BITE NEAR
THE POITANIAN
BORDER.

THAT'S
AS MAY BE.
STILL...



LIPON DOCKING, THE BARBARIAN
EAGERLY TOOK HIS LEAVE OF THE
SOUNDS AND SMELLS OF THE BARGE...

MMUUUU

IT WAS
TASTES
HE NOW
CRAVED.

SEA-MAN,
CAN YOU POINT
ME THE WAY TO
THE TAVERN OF
THE BLACK
STAG?

DOWN THREE
STREETS... YOU
CAN'T MISS IT.

IF YOU SEE ANY
OF THE CREW FROM
MASTER TITO'S ARGUS
IN THERE, REMIND THEM
WE SAIL WITH THE
MORNING TIDE.

AYE--AND
THANKS.

CONAN THREADED
HIS WAY WARILY...

FOR THE DARK, CRAMPED
ALLEYS OF ANY PORT WERE
A GOOD PLACE TO GET
ONE'S PURSE STOLEN,
AND A THROAT SLIT...

...AS SOMEONE NEAR
AT HAND MIGHT WELL
HAVE BEEN LEARNING,
AT THAT VERY MOMENT...

HAND
IT OVER,
DOG!

I TOLD
YOU JACKALS--
I'VE NAUGHT
BUT SWORD AND
PLATE-SHIRT.

WE'LL
HAVE THEM,
THEN!
IN AND
AT HIM,
BOYS!

THE ROBBERY IS NONE
OF CONAN'S CONCERN...
AND THE CORNERED MAN
IS ARMED AND ARMORED...

...SO LET HIM DEFEND HIMSELF, AS BEST HE CAN.

HERE--
I'LL SHOW YOU TWO HOW TO--
YOWRR

IF ONLY I HAD ROOM TO WIELD MY BLADE MORE FREELY--!

PRAISE THE GODS OF THIEVERY YOU DON'T!

GET HIM, LADS--
BEFORE HE CAN RAISE THAT CLEAVER AGAIN!

UHHHH

GOOD! NOW HOLD HIM--
--WHILE I CARVE THAT PLATE-SHIRT OFF HIM, SCALE BY--

KEERAKK



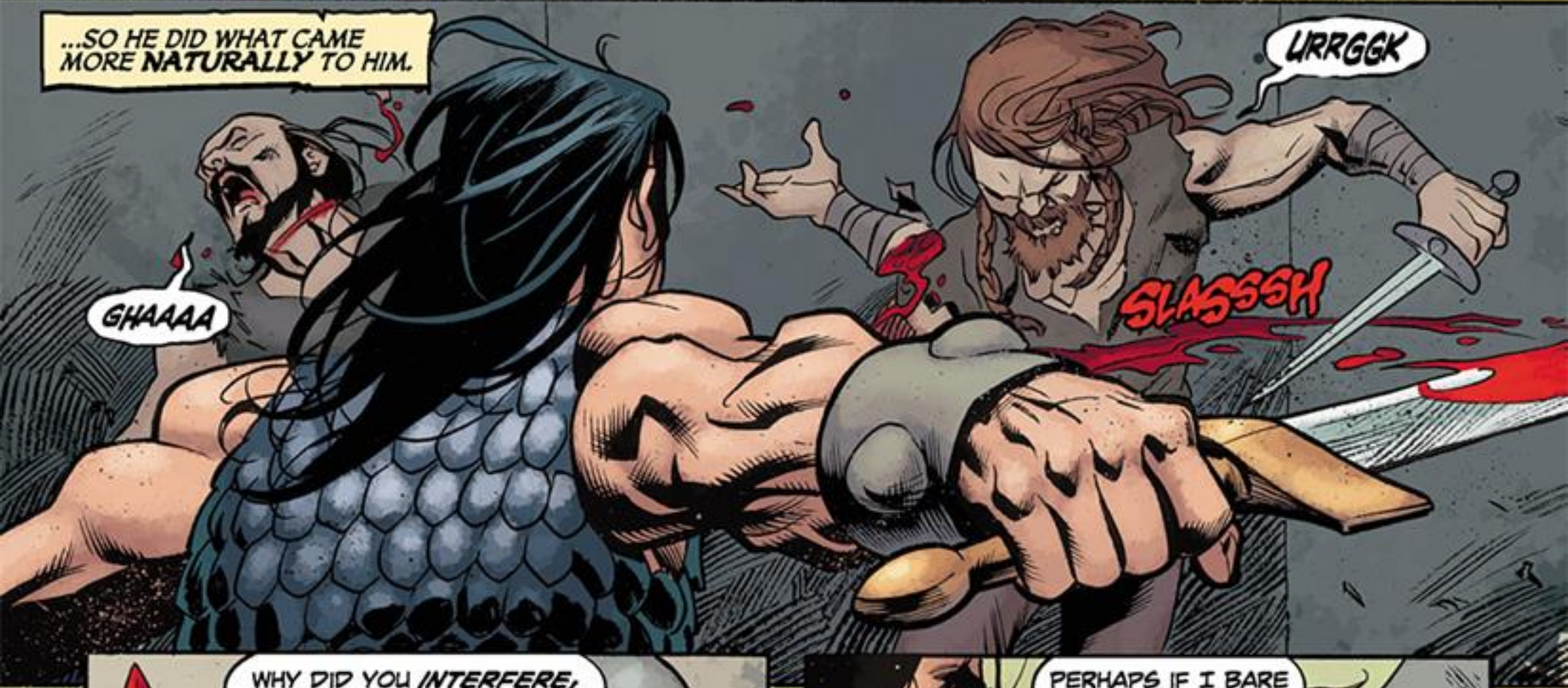
THIS ISN'T YOUR FIGHT, STRANGER.

I DECIDED IT WAS NO FAIR ONE, EITHER.

LOOK AT HIM, MAN! HIS ARMOR WILL FETCH A FEW LYRKA AT PUBLIUS'S, AS WELL!

FOR A FLEETING MOMENT, CONAN CONSIDERED WARNING THE TWO REMAINING ROBBERS OFF.

BUT, ON THE INSTANT, HE REALIZED IT WOULD FALL ON DEAF EARS...



...SO HE DID WHAT CAME MORE NATURALLY TO HIM.

GHAAAA

URRGGK

SLASSSH



WHY DID YOU INTERFERE, CONAN? I HAD THE BATTLE WELL IN HAND.

EH? HOW DID YOU KNOW MY--



PERHAPS IF I BARE MY HEAD LIKE YOURS...

IVANOS!



YOU CORINTHIAN
SEA-HAWK--

I THOUGHT
YOU WERE PUSHING
UP DOLPHINS FROM
THE BOTTOM OF THE
VILAYET, WITH AN
ARROW IN YOUR
BREASTBONE!

I HAD
SIMILAR
THOUGHTS
ABOUT
YOU--

--AFTER I
SAW YOU GO OVER
THE SIDE OF THE
OLIVIA WITH FOUR
TURANIANS CLINGING
TO YOU LIKE
BARNACLES!



IT SEEMS WE
WERE *BOTH*
LUCKY.

BUT
WHAT OF OUR
SHIPMATES?
KRIMSAR,
FOR INSTANCE--OR
THE FAIR *OLIVIA*
HERSELF?



AS IT HAPPENED,
WE THREE WOUND UP
ON SOME *SHORE*
TOGETHER--

AND,
IN TIME, I
RESTORED
OLIVIA TO...HER
FATHER'S
HOUSE.

AND
KRIMSAR,
THAT LOVABLE
ZAMORIAN
WEASEL?



WE TOOK A TURN THIEVING
TOGETHER IN SHADIZAR
THE WICKED...

...BEFORE HE
WAS *MURDERED*...
BY AN ASSASSIN
WITH A SWORD
FOR AN ARM.

KRIMSAR'S
KILLER AND I MET UP
AGAIN IN THE GOLDEN
HILLS OF OPHIR...

AND
YOU'RE *HERE*--
WHICH MEANS
HIS ASSASSIN
NOW PLIES
HIS TRADE
IN *HELL*.



COME. I TAKE
IT YOU WERE ON
YOUR WAY TO THAT
TAVERN I'D TOLD
YOU ABOUT.

WE'LL
DRINK A TOAST
THERE TO POOR
KRIMSAR...

...AND
TO THE OH-SO-
BEAUTIFUL *OLIVIA*,
WHO CERTAINLY
DESERVED TO
ENTERTAIN BETTER
THAN *PIRATES* IN
HER BED.

PRESENT
COMPANY ALWAYS
EXCEPTED, OF
COURSE.

A SHORT WALK LATER...

...SO
THINGS ARE
STILL **TOUGH**
AND GO TWIXT
ARGOS AND
ZINGARA...

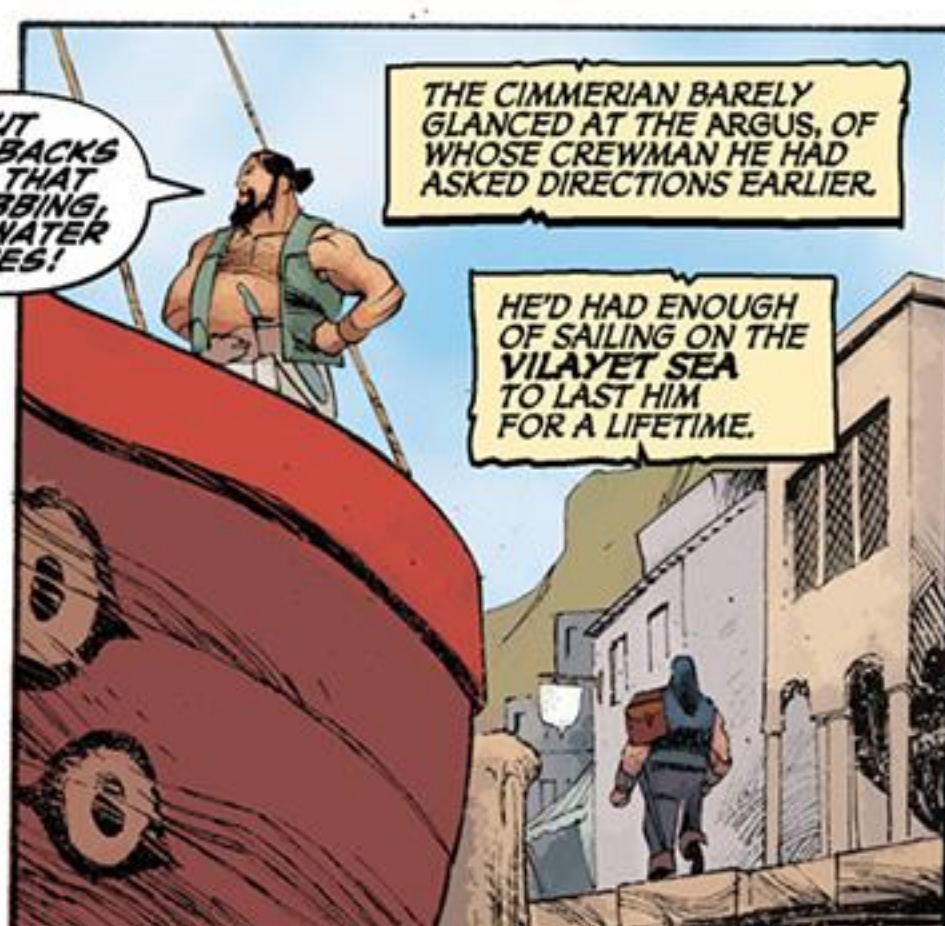
...AND SELL-
SWORDS SUCH
AS YOU AND I
CAN ONLY HOPE
THEY GIVE **WAR**
A CHANCE TO
FLOURISH.

AH...
HERE WE
ARE...

I
THINK YOU'LL
LIKE THIS
PLACE.







AT LENGTH, AS IVANOS HAD SAID, A SIGN THAT BORE NO SYMBOL FLUTTERED SLIGHTLY IN THE BREEZE FROM THE SEA.

A FITTING "NAME," CONAN THOUGHT, FOR A BUSINESS RUN BY A MAN WHO DEALT IN *EVERYTHING*--

--AND IN *NOTHING* THAT COULD BE TRACED TO ITS RIGHTFUL OWNER.

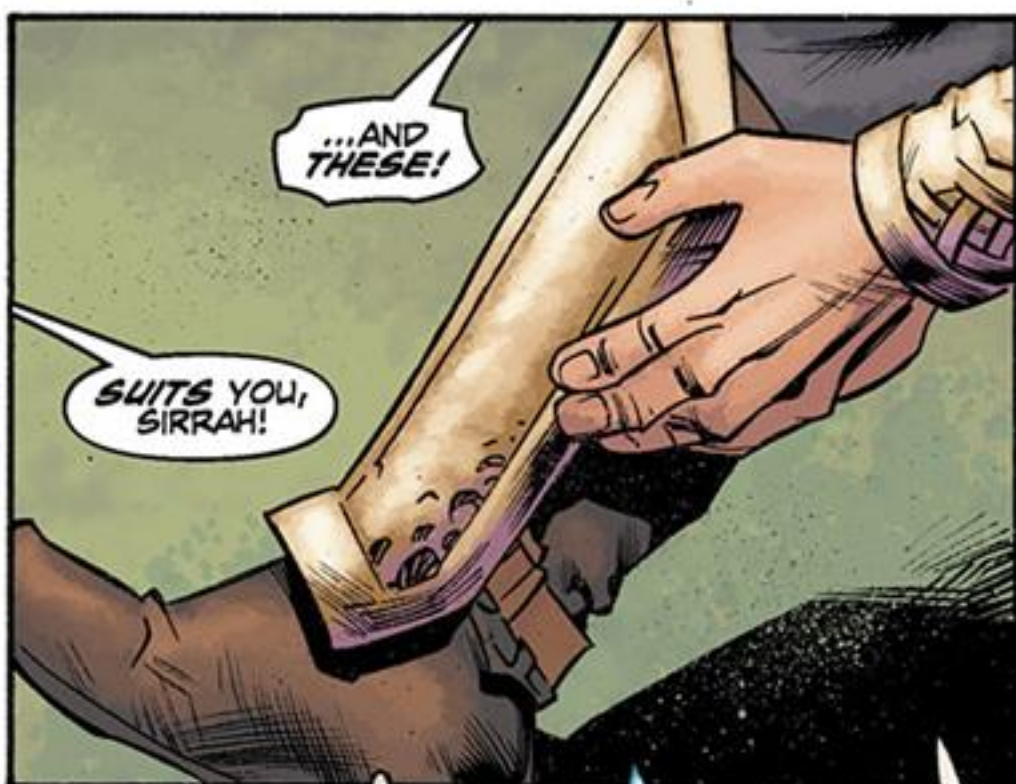
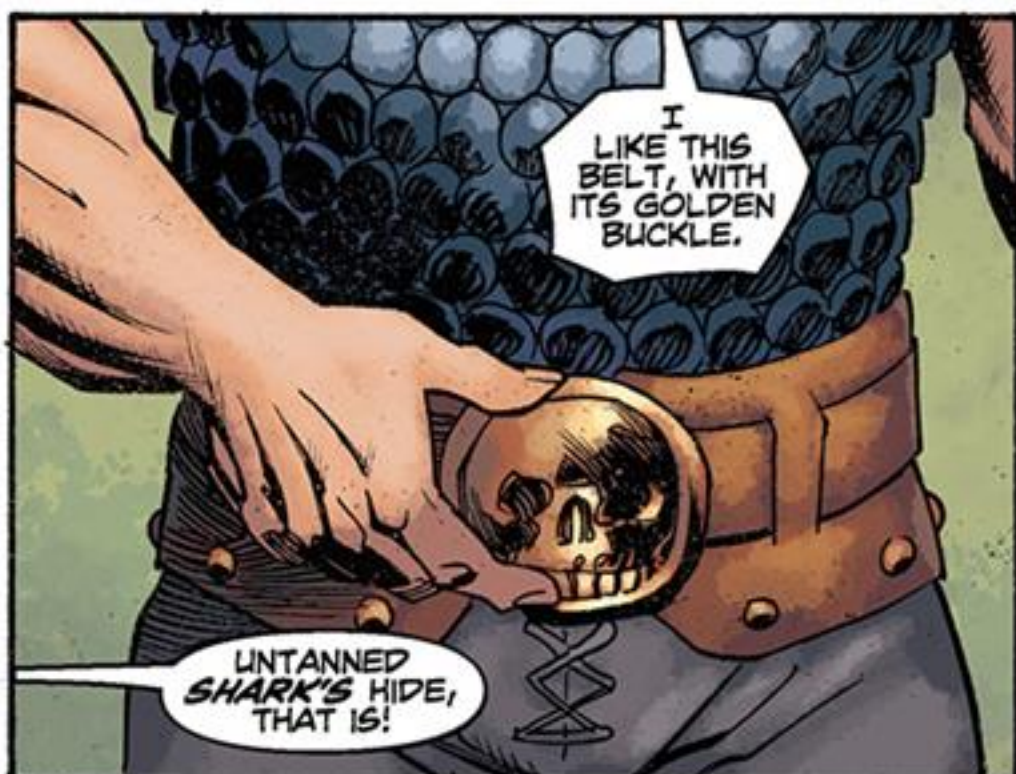
YOU ARE *PUBLIUS*?

I AM.

I'VE HEARD YOUR NAME SPOKEN *TWICE* SINCE I ARRIVED IN TOWN THIS MORNING... ONCE BY A GOOD SOLDIER... ONCE BY A MURDEROUS CUTPURSE.

ONE MUST TRAVEL IN ALL KINDS OF CIRCLES IN A PORT CITY, OUTLANDER.

WHAT DO YOU WANT...?





OH, AND THAT--



--AND I'LL BE ON MY WAY.



OH, YES-- NOTHING LIKE A FINE SCARLET CLOAK TO ADD THE PROPER MARTIAL TOUCH BENEATH THAT WARLIKE HELMET...

YOU THINK TO MOCK ME SLYLY, ARGOSSEAN.

I WOULD ADVISE YOU TO STOP DOING SO.

I ASSURE YOU, YOU MISINTERPRET MY MEANING, GOOD SIR.

NOW, AS TO THE MINOR MATTER OF PAYMENT...



WILL *THIS* COVER EVERYTHING?

WHY, AS A MATTER OF FACT, IT WILL--

--JUST BARELY.





AS IT HAPPENED--HIS OWN BUSINESS FINISHED EARLY-- IVANOS ARRIVED BACK AT THE BLACK STAG JUST AT DUSK.

HO, SHANDI.

IVANOS! A SIGHT FOR EYES WEARY FROM LOOKING ON DRUNKEN SOTS.

YOU MUST BE LOSING YOUR TOUCH, CAPTAIN HERMIAS!

SHUT YOUR TEETH, TORIO!

I COLLECTED A DEBT OWED ME. WHERE WOULD YOU LIKE TO GO WHEN YOU GET OFF WORK?

ANYWHERE BUT **HERE!** THOSE LOUYS HAVE BEEN **DRINKING** SINCE MORNING...

YOU ARROGANT LITTLE SLUT--

SPURNING A CAPTAIN OF THE GUARDS--FOR SOME LOW-LIFE MERCENARY!

LET ME GO!

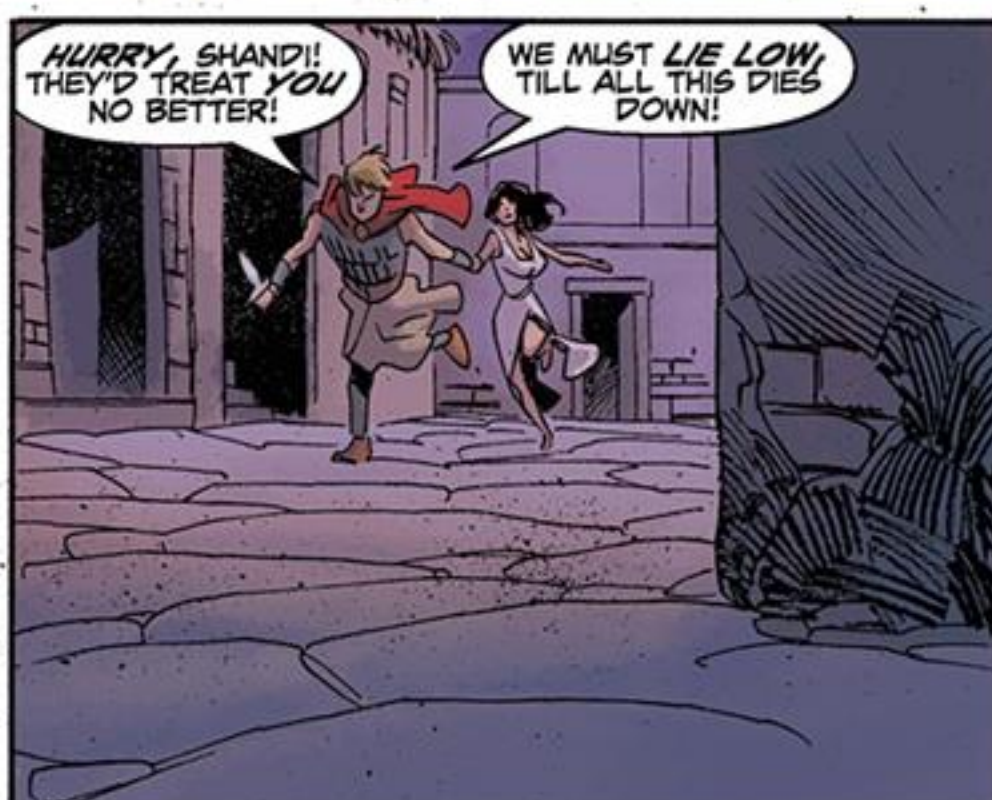
GET YOUR HANDS OFF HER-- NOW!

WHAT MY HANDS DO TO HER HAD BEST BE NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS--

--UNLESS YOU WANT TO WIND UP IN THE KING'S DUNGEON!

COME ON, YOU!

I SAID RELEASE HER--



SO IT WAS THAT, SOON AFTER DARK,
CONAN ARRIVED--HALF-INTOXICATED
AND FULLY IN GOOD HUMOR...

THAT'S
HIM!

THAT'S THE ONE
WHO WAS WITH THE
CORINTHIAN!

IVANOS?
SO WHAT IF
I WAS?

WHERE
IS HE?

COWERING
IN SOME DARK
CORNER OF HELL,
MOST LIKE--EH,
LT. TORIO?

YOUR FRIEND
KILLED CAPTAIN
HERMIAS--SO TELL
US WHERE HE'S RUN TO,
WHILE YOU'VE STILL
GOT A TONGUE IN
YOUR HEAD!

I WOULD
NOT TELL YOU
WHERE IVANOS
WAS, EVEN IF
I KNEW.

THEN WE'LL TAKE YOU
SOMEPLACE QUIET--WHERE
YOU CAN SCREAM OUT HIS
HIDING-PLACE WITH YOUR
FINAL BREATH!

REMOVE
YOUR SWORD--
BELT--SLOWLY--
WITH YOUR LEFT
HAND.

AND WE'LL
TAKE THOSE
SADDLEBAGS
YOU KEEP SO
CLOSE TO YOUR
HEART...



EVEN IN HIS INEBRIATED STATE,
CONAN KNEW IT WAS WISER TO FLEE
THAN TO FIGHT MEN WHO WERE
IN THE EMPLOY OF ARGOS'S KING...



YET, THE ERRANT FATES SEEMED TO
HAVE CONSPIRED AGAINST HIM...



THERE'S THE
MATE TO MY
BRACELET!

OOOPH!
WATCH WHERE
YOU'RE
GOING!

THE ROOM SPUN
BEFORE CONAN'S
EYES LIKE A
DRUNKEN DERVISH.

STILL, HE MADE
TO RETRIEVE HIS
NEW HELMET
BEFORE HE--



THRAAKKK





YOU--
KILLED
HIM!

WOULD THAT
I HAD! HE'S STILL
BREATHING...

HE MUST
HAVE A HEAD
HARDER THAN
A TAXMAN'S
HEART!

HEAR ME!
I AM CONFISCATING
ALL THIS CRIMINAL'S
GOLD IN THE NAME
OF THE KING--

AND ANYONE
WHO TRIES TO
HOLD BACK ENOUGH
TO MAKE A TOOTH
WILL WISH HIS MOTHER
HAD STRANGLED
HIM AT BIRTH!

DO I MAKE
MYSELF--



--CLEAR?

KLK
KLANK
KKK



I CONGRATULATE
YOU ALL, FOR THE
FAITHFUL SUBJECTS
OF HIS MAJESTY
THAT YOU ARE.

NOW GO
BACK TO YOUR
DRINKING.



AS FOR THIS
FOOL BARBARIAN--
HE HAS A DATE WITH
JUDGE MACABRUS IN
THE MORNING--

--AND
DOUBTLESS WITH
THE EXECUTIONER,
COME THE
AFTERNOON!

NEXT: CONAN'S DAY IN COURT



What you have just witnessed is the official last cliffhanger of *Road of Kings*. Next issue is the final chapter in this stage of Dark Horse's *Conan* saga. As our barbarian enters new phases of his life and career, it's good to occasionally shake things up, and so *Road of Kings* comes to an end.

Appropriately, we have a letter this month that touches on exactly that legacy of torchbearers that have guided Robert E. Howard's creation through so many years of comics.

Dear all at Dark Horse,

I've never been much of a comics-letter writer; I've only written once before, and that was to the guys at *Savage Sword of Conan* in the eighties, so this is a big deal for me. Conan has been by my side since I was ten years old (some thirty years ago), and I've collected absolutely everything printed, from REH to Thomas, Buscema to Nord, and it still amazes me. Since getting a doctorate and practicing as a clinical psychologist, my colleagues ask when I'll "grow out" of comics, and I laugh and smile and say, "Maybe one day; who knows?" But I know that

I won't, and seeing the job you are doing with Conan, seeing Roy return, seeing the utterly beautiful covers by Doug Wheatley, I have my answer. Conan is doing what he does best at Dark Horse—fighting monsters and magicians, lifting wenches over one shoulder, grabbing a purse of gold on the fly—and I know that he won't change, so why should we? Conan will remain a barbarian in a civilized world, showing us all that sometimes the simple, direct approach will carry the day. As long as you keep on giving us tales to remind us of a different age, we will follow and cheer, "Bring it on!"

Dr. Mike Lloyd
Cheshire, England

Don't worry, Mike. We intend to continue bringing it for the foreseeable future! You're right that the core of Conan's character is timeless, and his essential appeal has remained unchanged in the eighty years since his creation. At the same time, you mention the long line of storytellers who have embellished his tale and kept the tone of his adventures fresh, a balance that I think has been key to his continued popularity.

THE ADVENTURES OF TWO-GUN BOB™

TRUE STORIES FROM THE
LIFE OF ROBERT E. HOWARD

BY JIM & RUTH KEEGAN

Lord Byron was fond of boxing; Poe was a runner and a swimmer in his youth; Rupert Brooke was fond of diving and hiking; de Castro tells us Bierce was very proud of his skill at knife-throwing; de Castro himself found it necessary to put in a year at muscle-building.

Jack London loved to box, fence and wrestle; Frank Harris was once a prizefighter, and so was Jim Tully; even the superior Mr. Shaw was once a clever boxer.

With the world full of stronger men than I, and smarter men than I, I have no cause for vanity concerning either my ordinary muscles or mediocre mental power.



Source: REH letter to H. P. Lovecraft, March 6, 1933—*The Collected Letters of Robert E. Howard, Volume Three*. Robert E. Howard Foundation Press, 2008.

Which brings me back to the end of *Road of Kings*. We're going to be sad to see this team go their separate ways, but don't worry, Conan fans, because the story continues the very next month in the new *Conan the Barbarian* #1, which will pick up where *Road of Kings* leaves off and will begin the story we're most often asked for, "Queen of the Black Coast." Helmed by writer Brian Wood and artist Becky Cloonan, *Barbarian* is going to take Conan to new levels of intensity, and it hits February 8, so mark your calendars!

In the meantime, we've got a new *King Conan* series, *The Phoenix on the Sword*, debuting next month, with

the team of Tim Truman, Tomás Giorello, and José Villarrubia. And make sure you're right back here in one month, for the blowout conclusion from Roy, Mike, John, and Dan, "Conan's Day in Court"!

Rounding out our package *this* month, we've got this majestic Conan pinup from Karl Moline, of *Buffy* and *Fray* fame, colored by *Road of Kings*'s Dan Jackson. Enjoy!

BWJH

—Brendan



**NEXT ISSUE—ON SALE
JANUARY 18! CONAN:
ROAD OF KINGS #12**



**ON SALE JANUARY 25!
KING CONAN: THE
PHOENIX ON THE
SWORD #1**



**ON SALE FEBRUARY 8!
CONAN THE BARBARIAN
#1**