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64
JULY

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CONAN

THE BARBARIAN

**FIENDS
OF THE FEATHERED
SERPENT!**



"Know, O prince, that between the years when the oceans drank Atlantis and the gloaming cities, and the rise of the sons of Arya, there was an Age undreamed of, when shining kingdoms lay spread across the world like blue mantles beneath the stars. Hither came Conan, the Cimmerian, black-haired, sullen-eyed, sword in hand, a thief, a reaver, a slayer, with gigantic melancholies and gigantic mirth, to tread the jeweled thrones of the Earth under his sandaled feet."

—The Necromancer Chronicles

Stan Lee PRESENTS: CONAN THE BARBARIAN™

SOMEONE SAVAGE THIS WAY COMES!

LET HIM THEN BEWARE, LEST HE LEARN TO HIS SORROW--

THE SECRET OF SKULL RIVER!

THE OLD MAN IS BLIND, EVEN FROM A DISTANCE, CONAN CAN SEE THAT.

BUT SIGHTED MEN, TOO, MAY BE BLIND IN THEIR WAY.

APOLOGIA:
DUE TO PERSONAL CONSIDERATIONS, OUR COVER MAN WHO USUALLY AT THE LAST MINUTE MOMENT TO DELIVER OUR COVER-FEATURED STORY ON TIME FOR THIS ISSUE, THIS MONTH OUR USUAL VIRTUE OF NECESSITY, WE'RE TAKING THIS OPPORTUNITY TO RE-PRESENT A TALE NEVER BEFORE PRINTED IN COLOR, AND WHICH ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN JAMBAE TALES #3.

(P.S.: FOR YOU CHRONOLOGY BUFFS, THIS WHOLE EPIC OCCURS BETWEEN THE EVENTS RECORDED IN CONAN #100-103.) --H.T.

JOY THOMAS & JIM STARLIN & ALAN BROWN
WRITER ARTISTS

FEATURING THE HERO FREELY ADAPTED FROM
A STORY BY ROBERT E. HOWARD PLANT BY JOHN JAMES

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AYO, OLD MAN! YOU'VE NO-THING TO FEAR FROM ME.

I BUT NEED SOME DIRECTIONS... PREFERABLY, THE WAY TO THE NEAREST WATER.



BUT, YOU'D DO BETTER TO STRIKE OFF MY HEAD, AND LEAVE IT LAUGHING BLACKLY IN THE DUST.



SO, YOU'D HAVE ME THINK YOU SOME SORT OF SEER, EH?

JUST POINT ME TO WATER, AND SPARE ME YOUR VAGUE PROPHECIES.

IN YONDER VALLEY LIES A SMALL RIVER, THAT MEN CALL SKULL...



BUT, BETTER TO POUR POISON IN YOUR OWN WINE-CUP THAN TO DRINK FROM A RIVER WITH SUCH A NAME.



LOOK, I'VE TOLD YOU-- I'M THIRSTY, AND THAT'S THAT!

CROM, BUT IT'S A FAR RIDE FROM TURAN TO THE CITY OF SHADIZAR!



IT'S A FAR SHORTER HAUL, MY ROUGH-VOICED FRIEND...



FROM THE GREEN CLAD GARDENS OF EARTH...



... TO THE TEEVING SHORES OF DUSKY DEATH.

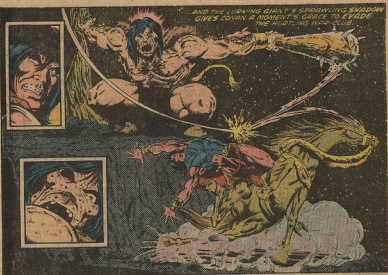
CONAN RIDES ON, THINKING IN HIS OWN WAY WHAT ANOTHER WILL SAY, NEARLY 12 MILLENNIA HENCE:



IT IS THE EASIEST THING IN THE WORLD FOR A MAN TO LOOK AS IF HE HAD A GREAT SECRET IN HIM.



STILL, EVEN A TOPPLED SUNDIAL GIVES THE PROPER HOUR AT LEAST ONCE IN A SUNSPLOSHED DAY.





AFTER THAT ENCOUNTER WITH A MAN WHO DWARFED ANY THAT HE HAS EVER KNOWN OR SEEN, CONAN TRULY NEEDS A DRINK...OF WATER, OR WHATEVER.

BUT, WITHOUT A STEED, THE JOURNEY IS LONGER THAN IT SEEMED...

AND STONE-RAKED WOUNDS HAVE TIME TO BLEED...

...BEFORE HE COMES AT LAST TO THE VALLEY BEYOND.



BY THE TIME HE REACHES THE STREAM WHICH SCARCELY DESERVES THE NAME OF RIVER, CONAN HAS QUITE FORGOTTEN ITS NAME AND ITS LEGEND.

THE WATER FEELS GOOD TO HIS SCALP AND SKIN, AND HE MAKES READY TO DRINK DEEP...

...WHEN HE IS RUDELY REMINDED OF AN OLD MAN'S DARK WARNING.



...BY THE GRIM, GAUNT IMAGE OF
WIDE-GRINNING DEATH, LEERING
BACK AT HIM FROM OUT THE
SULLEN WATERS...

...WATERS WHICH,
HE SUDDENLY,
DIZZILY NOTICES...

...ARE
STRANGELY...

...DARK!

YOU...

...ARE...

...AWAKE!
THAT IS
GOOD.

THEN, THE HERBS OF HEALING
CAN EFFECT A CURE, PROVIDING
ONE IS IN THE **EARLY STAGES**.
AND THAT ONE'S **BODY IS**
STRONG.

I GUESS...MY BODY'S
STRONG ENOUGH...FOR
WHATEVER YOU'RE **TALK-**
ING ABOUT, GIRL.

WHAT
ARE YOU
TALKING
ABOUT,
BY THE
WAY?

AND WHO THE
DEVIL **ARE**
YOU?

I AM
NARA...

AND THESE
ARE THE
ELDERS
OF THIS
VILLAGE...

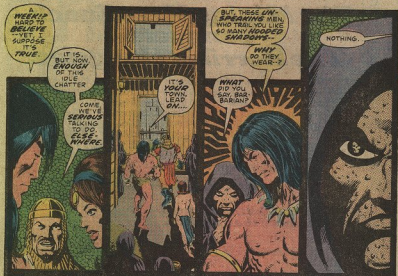
...AS WELL AS MY
FATHER **THURIBOLD**,
WHO IS ALSO ITS
LORD MAYOR.

I'M GLAD TO SEE
SOMEONE IN
CHARGE OF THIS
PLACE... IF ONLY
SO I CAN COM-
PLAIN OF THE
WATER!

BUT, WHY A WHOLE
DELEGATION...TO
WELCOME ONE LONE
AND AILING WANDER-
ER WHO'S **SLEPT**
AWAY A DAY?

WE'VE OTHER THINGS
THAN YOUR **HEALTH**
IN MIND, OUTLANDER...
THOUGH OF COURSE
WE ARE **GLAD** YOU
HAVE RECOVERED.

AND IT'S
A **WEEK** YOU'VE
SLEPT THE DEEP
SLEEP...**NOT** A
MERE DAY.



"THERE IS A CASTLE NOT FAR
UP-RIVER, WHERE DWELLS ONE
HE'D SOONER SEE DEAD THAN
LIVING..."



"HIS NAME IS SOPHOS, A
POWERFUL MAN...AND ONE
WITH GREED TO MATCH HIS
POWER."



"TOO GREED BUT FAR-RANGING
ARE HIS TRAVELS, AND LAST
TIME HE BROUGHT HOME A
SOUVENIR--A WIZARD, KNOWN AS
ONE ANAKIMANDER BY NAME,
OF UNKNOWN ORIGIN AND UN-
KNOWABLE PURPOSE..."



"...SAVE ONLY THAT HE WORKS
NIGHT AND DAY IN THE CASTLE
KEEP, PORING OVER UNHOLY
BREWES AND DOING DARK WORK
FOR HIS MASTER, SOPHOS."



"THE FIRST WE KNEW OF IT,
STRANGE PATHS BEGAN TO
EMERGE FROM THE CASTLE...
THE LOSTUSOME RESIDUE
OF HIS NOXIOUS BREWS."



"...AND FLOWED DOWNSTREAM,
TO PASS THIS VILLAGE WHICH
SLUMBERED, UNAWARE."



"NOTING BUT A SLIGHT
CHANGE IN COLOR, WE
DRANK OF IT...FOR WHAT
OTHER WATER HAVE WE?"

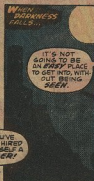


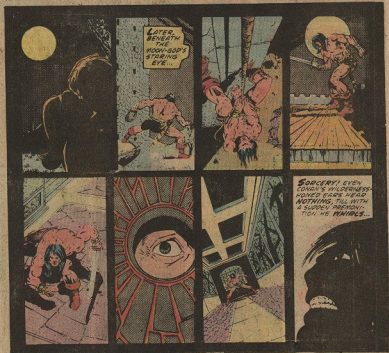
"...AND IT CHANGED US...TRANS-
FORMED US UTTERLY, ALMOST
OVERNIGHT..."



"...INTO POOD, SCURVY CREATURES
WHICH NIDE FROM THE LIGHT
OF DAY..."



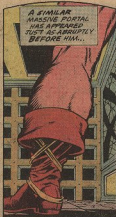




...TO FIND A GREAT
WOOD-AND-METAL
DOOR HAS COVERED
INTO PLACE BEHIND
HIM, SO SILENTLY
HE NEVER
HEARD
IT.



A SIMILAR
MASSIVE PORTAL
HAS APPEARED
JUST AS ABRUPTLY
BEFORE HIM...



...LEAVING THE NORTH-
BORN BARBARIAN
ALONE AND WOLF-
LIKE AMONG A
CASTLE FULL OF
IMAGINED
FOES...



...WHO SWIFTLY
BLAZES INTO
REALITY!



I KNOW NOT WHO
YOU ARE, INTRUDER
...NOR DO I CARE
OVERMUCH.

I AM SOPHOS...AND, IN
THIS CASTLE, NO FOOT
FALLS BUT THAT I AM
WARNED OF IT BY THE
MANY-EARED WALLS.

YOU'VE
NOTHING TO SAY
FOR YOURSELF, EH?



THAT AT LEAST IS A
RELIEF, AFTER SO MANY
WHIMPERING FOOLS
THE
VILLAGERS
HAVE SENT
TO ME.

NOW,
I MUST
LEAVE
YOU.

BUT, BEING A
GRACIOUS
HOST, IN
MY WAY...



...I SHALL
NOT
LEAVE
YOU...



...UNATTENDER



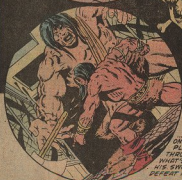
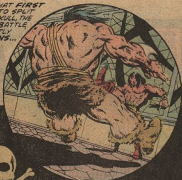
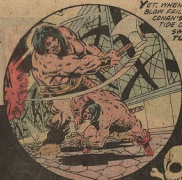
EVEN AS THAT GAIN,
GARGANTUAN
FORM COMES
LUMBERING DOWN
THE NOW-OPEN
CORRIDOR, CONAN
BLANCHES WITH
DISBELIEF AND
HORROR.

SURELY THERE CANNOT
BE TWO IN ALL THE
WORLD LIKE THE GIANT
HANUMAN, WHO FELL
TO AN INEVITABLE
DOOM OVER A CLIFF-
SIDE, NOT TOO MANY
LEAGUES DISTANT.



YET, EITHER THERE ARE
TWO SUCH--OR ELSE IT IS
A TITANICALLY TOWERING
GHOST WHICH NOW SWINGS
A MIGHTY EXECUTIONER'S
AXE TO CLEAVE HIS ONLY
BROADSWORD IN HALF--!

YET, WHEN THAT FIRST
BLOW FAILS TO SPLIT
CONAN'S SKULL, THE
TIDE OF BATTLE
SWIFTLY
TURNS...



...TILL ONE WELL-
PLACED
THRUST OF
WHAT'S LEFT OF
HIS SWORD TURNS
DEFEAT INTO VICTORY!

YOUR REACH IS
LONG, GIANT--
OR GHOST
OF GIANT--

BUT, I'M
BETTING I
CAN GET PAST
THOSE APE-
LIKE ARMS.

...AND LEARN IF THERE'S
A HEART BENEATH ALL
THAT QUIVERING
BULK.

THEN--DO IT,
BARBARIAN!
DO IT!!

ANYTHING IS BET-
TER TO GRANDALL--THAN
WHAT GRANDALL IS!



THEN--IT'S TRUE--
WHAT GRANDALL HAS
FEARED FOR SO LONG.

FUNNY, SEEM SO
LONG AGO--GRANDALL
AND HANUMAN WERE
PEOPLE LIKE ANYBODY
ELSE--BROTHERS
HUNTING IN
FOREST.

THEY CAUGHT US--
BROUGHT US HERE--
MADE US DRINK--
SOMETHING THAT
MADE US BIG.

IT GETS HARDER
ALL THE TIME--FOR
GRANDALL TO
REMEMBER.

BUT GRANDALL
THINKS THIS--GRANDALL
WILL HELP YOU!

AND
MAYBE...
YOURSELF.

THEY
LIED TO YOU,
YOU'LL DIE
SOON--AS
YOU LIVE--
IN MISERY!



THIS IS THE
LIQUID SOPHOS--
ALL I HAVE BEEN
ABLE TO DISTILL

IF IT HAD THE DESIRED
EFFECT ON THIS GAR-
GANTUAN IDOL, WHICH
I HAD CARRIED
HERE ALL THE
WAY FROM
TARANTIA...



IT WILL
BE QUITE
ENOUGH!



WELL,
SOPHOS?

IT MAKES THE
BREW GLOW
BRIGHT AND
GOLDEN. BUT--
THE IDOL--?



WATCH, MY DEAR PATRON,
SEE HOW THE FUMES RISE,
GLEAMING, FROM THE VAT!



SEE HOW
IT HIDES THE
STATUE FROM VIEW,
AS IF TO KEEP ITS
GREAT SECRET AS
LONG AS POSSIBLE
FROM THE PRYING
EYES OF MEN!



AND
NOW, IT
CLEARS...

...LEAVING YOU A
VERY RICH MAN,
FRIEND SOPHOS!



THUS! YOU'VE NO MORE NEED TO *STAY* HERE, AND HOSTILE PEASANTS WE'VE TURNED INTO *DIM* PARODIES OF HUMANKIND.

THE TORCH-LIT CITIES ARE OURS NOW, FOR THAT IDOL IS NOW COMPOSED OF *SOLID GOLD*. ENOUGH TO--

WHAT ARE YOU STARING AT, SOPHOS?

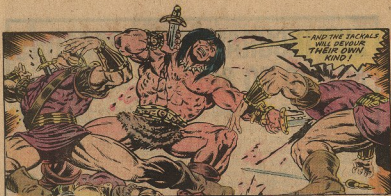
LOOK BEHIND YOU, MAN!

BY ALL THE GODS AT ONCE! I THOUGHT *BARBARIC* HAD DISPOSED OF YOU FOR *GOOD*!

YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW MY NAME...

YET YOU TRIED TO HAVE ME *KILLED*. MY CORPSE TOSSED ON A DUNGPILE FOR THE *VULTURES* TO RELISH!

WELL, BY CROM-- THE *QUEEN* WILL EAT WELL, COME THE DAWN--



--AND THE JACKALS
WILL DEVOUR
THEIR OWN
KIND!

DON'T SLAY THEM
ALL, OUTLANDER!
I AM SLOWER
THAN YOU, BUT
STILL--

GRANDALL COMES!
GRANDALL
COMES!

ONE OF
THE GIANTS!
HE'S TURNED
AGAINST--

AAAA

YOU BOUGHT MEN'S
LOYALTY, SOPHOC...AND
IT STAYED BOUGHT
JUST AS LONG AS
IT TOOK FOR THE
ODDS TO CHANGE

WAIT, MAN! WE'VE
NO NEED TO DO
BATTLE--NONE!

YOU'VE
SEEN GOLD
MADE HERE
THIS NIGHT.

I CAN
MAKE YOU
A RICH MAN
--A KING,
ALMOST!



A DREAM
TOLD ME ONCE
I'D BE A KING.
BEFORE I
DIED.

BUT, FROM TAKE
ME, I'LL WIN THAT
CROWN, NOT BUY
IT WITH TARNISHED
GOLD.

SO, NO
USE TRYING
TO PURCHASE
ME, SOONER.

I'VE
ALREADY GOT
A JOB!

WIZARDS, TOO, MAY
STOOP TO MEANER
WEAPONS THAN DARK
SORCERY...



BUT, IF THEY'RE NOT
SO PRACTICED AT
THEM AS THEY
MIGHT BE...



...THEY'LL FIND THEY
HAD MORE PROFITABLY
STAYED MUMBLING
OVER THEIR DUSTY
SCROLLS.



THERE IS NO SIGN,
NOW, OF LIFE IN ALL
THE CHAMBER, OR
BEYOND IT.



DEAD THE
NOBLE-MAN
WHO SHOULD
HAVE RESTED
CONTENT
WITH HIS
LOT...



A CASTLE FULL OF
DEAD MEN...



...AND ONLY ONE
WORTH THE
MOURNING.



