

KING CONAN,
CROWN OF IRON

JOHN MILIUS
MAY 24, 2001

irazetta © 01



MISTS--Dark stygian mists. Moving through them as if floating, rising. The great vault of darkness and mists open below to infinity or something worse.

WIZARD (O.S.)

I chronicle my Lord--Conan, barbarian, thief, warrior, king. The world grows old around me but little changes. Man is born of chaos, his plight is struggle. A fight to breathe, a fight to live, then to conquer--And for what? Can he conquer time or even himself.

A solitary wind swirls up through the darkness like a spirit. The mists turn and dissipate and reform in its passage.

WIZARD (O.S.)

Man dies and his bones turn to dust!
Only stories remain spoken by such
as I.

A light distant, but rushing closer, flickering, rising, a fire--contained but burning from nowhere.

WIZARD (O.S.)

Sit on the ground with me. Let the fire warm you and I will sing of greed, deceit, lust and power. Ha! But that is not all. I sing of loyalty honor and love. Yes, love for that is what makes men foolish or great. You may choose.

DISSOLVE TO:

THE FIRE--Defines itself--on the ground--frozen ground--a few meager logs shielded by stones. Now a figure is silhouetted crouching by the fire. It is CONAN. He wears a sword on his back. He is disheveled and bearded, covered in furs. The dark sun now cracks over the horizon, lighting his face.

TITLE: IN THE NORTHERN LAND OF THE PICTS

The landscape is bare--tundra and rock, occasional Caledonian pines--strange trees, primordial and solitary. A wind has blown away the mist. Conan warms himself as best he can. It is a scene from man's beginning.

CUT TO:

CONAN--Walking through the tall bare trunks of a forest, again the strange Caledonian trees. Snow and frost covers the hard ground. The land is without remorse of any kind, and yet he hears something--soft--feminine. A woman's laughter.

There ahead, in the swirls of ground fog, a veil? A white arm gracefully beckoning, then gone.

Conan rushes forward, his beard frosted and white with ice. He sees:

IN THE ROCKY MISTS--The sensuous outline of a WOMAN--swaying and moving away from him, her hair flowing in slow motion. Again her laugh--this time inviting and seductive.

Conan clammers over the rocks, his fingers frozen and blue. He comes upon her. She sways above him, holding onto a twisted trunk. Now he can see her. Her face is white as the snow, her lips blue as are her eyes and lashes. But her hair is long and reddish. She is at one and the same time deathly and carnal.

DAUGHTER OF THE SNOWS

Do you want me?

She draws back away behind the trees. He climbs up and follows.

DAUGHTER OF THE SNOWS

Some say I am the Frost Giant's
Daughter.

She stops and lets him get closer. She wears little but gauze, and her form twists towards him. She reaches out and takes his hand. Her touch is ice yet it burns. She caresses his face, leaving a mark of frost.

DAUGHTER OF THE SNOWS

You are one I could love. But
first you must fight my brothers.

And she turns as two huge white-bearded MEN--clad in frosted armor and skin as white as death appear. Each bears an axe. They come at Conan in a rolling sinuous pace almost flying. He has no choice but to draw his blade--parry a blow--Clang--ice flies. He comes round and slashes through one's spine and comes down overhand through the other's shoulder plate. Both scream like thunder and go down in a cloud of snow.

CONAN--Standing in the frost--bloody sword in hand. The Woman



lays back on a rock beckoning him. He goes to her.

BLUE FIRE--Emanating from logs. Conan crouches by them, his fur cloak around the girl.

DAUGHTER OF THE SNOWS

You must go now. You have conquered cold and desolation, but this is the land of the Ice Worm, and here he is King.

CONAN

Then I will kill him too.

DAUGHTER OF THE SNOWS

No, I have given you my love.
Now you must repay me.

He hears a keening sound. She shakes in terror, pulls away from him and though he tries to grab her, she is gone. Suddenly he sees her behind a tree.

CONAN

What do you want?

DAUGHTER OF THE SNOWS

Bring me the jewels of an Empire.
Bring these and I will give you
your son.

The keening is louder. Something trembles under the ground. Conan looks down--when he looks back, she is in the fog between the trees--then nothing. The keening stops. The frost melts and the ground is sure under his feet. The sun breaks through the mists across his face.

DISSOLVE TO:

An enormous dark blue wave--rising up in a roiling sea--dark torn clouds overhead--wind ripping spume from its crest. We rise with it and at its top bursts free a dragon-prowed longship. Thirty oars per side. The craft crashes through the crest and rides down at us. Standing on the prow is Conan, his hair blowing in the wind, ice on his armor. Behind him are two warriors with steel skull masks for faces.

4

WIZARD (O.S.)

He went west to the sea and became a pirate! His life was pillage and rapine! And then, one day on the eastern border of Civilization--

CUT TO:

AQUILONIAN TRIBUNE--GAIUS METALLUS--Magnificent in his golden armor, standing atop a stone palisade, the steel clad Aquilonian infantry forming a shield wall below. Beyond them where a gate is built are hundreds of barbarians--Picts, Turans, Gundermen, Cimmerians, Aesir, Vanir, and yes, Conan, resplendent in his furs and chain mail, his great sword on his back.

METALLUS

Greetings from Emperor Tisus. He, the Senate and People of Aquilonia offer you gold, glory and Aquilonian citizenship if you will fight for us.

CLOSE CONAN--He considers the question. This is the great machine of Civilization. This is the height and grandeur of man's achievement. He is a Cimmerian, a barbarian, an animal who is struggling through this world by force of will and arms. Is there something to lose?

METALLUS

Who will come with me to the East where the cities are paved in turquoise and evil tyrants drink from goblets made of rubies. A new dawn comes, who will stand with the Emperor in its light and bear the golden eagles? Who? You?

CLOSE CONAN--He raises his right hand.

CONAN

I, Conan will come with you.

METALLUS

Why?

CONAN

Because I was born on a battlefield and the first sound I heard was a scream!

The others cheer, raise their hands, cry "Me too!" "Take Me!"
"I will go!" "Why not?" --etc.

MONTAGE--Helmets of iron crudely resembling one another are passed to the huge barbarians. Along with these are leather armor and shields. Swords and spears are of the same style and length.

METALLUS

You will learn to be as one link
a chain. Every link the same and
strong. This is how civilized men
make war.

CLOSE METALLUS--Walking down the line of shields--pushing one over--slapping another with the flat of his axe.

METALLUS

Look how you pull to the left
because your right is exposed.

Sure enough they do.

METALLUS

That is because you do not trust
your comrade's shields to defend
you!

He stops at Conan.

METALLUS

This is how we beat you! This is
how we take your lands and enslave
your women! Because you are not
a chain. The Line is weak--What
are you Barbarian?

CONAN

I am Cimmerian, Tribune.

METALLUS

And you, next to him?

A short stocky KILLER--

KILLER

I am a Pict.

METALLUS

Wrong!

He smashes them back with his ax and separates them--stands in between.

METALLUS

You are a dead Cimmerian and you are a dead Pict.

He grabs the Pict's shield, pulls it across Conan's front.

METALLUS

Now--I cannot get you. Now you are Soldiers--a Line. The Line is sacred, a brotherhood. It is what sets us apart as much as art, writing, music. More! Because we are larger than anyone. Stronger than anyone. This is Culture! This is Strength. This is Empire! Belong to it!

CUT TO:

THE LINE--Advancing in war. Arrows thud into the shields--spears of the second and third row poise over the first rows of shoulders. Conan is in the first row. Hairy, mutant looking Asian forest-men charge screaming--wielding cudgels and hideous axes and swords. They slam into the shields--Conan bears their shock.

METALLUS (O.S.)

Pila!

The spears savagely stab at the hapless savages.

METALLUS (O.S.)

Spatha!

Conan lashes out with his sword in a quick measured stroke that cleaves through a collarbone. Bodies slump against the shields.

METALLUS (O.S.)

Advance three steps--Spatha again!

Another stroke--into a thigh--screaming and blood spattering Conan's helmet.

CUT TO:



TABLE--Set in a steaming slaughter field--hands grasp at heaven. Faces gape in horror. The table is almost on a mound of bodies. Metallus sits in an ivory chair. His maroon cape about him, his golden armor tarnished and spattered with gore. Jewels, gold and weapons are piled up. One by one, the mercenary barbarians come and are paid. Conan takes his.

METALLUS

Conan?

He looks up at Metallus.

METALLUS

That is your name? The men admire you. It is a gift from the gods.

CONAN

I know, Tribune Lord.

METALLUS

I think you shall be a leader amongst men.

CONAN

Whatever is your wish Tribune Lord.

METALLUS

Take two shares--

He pushes it across the table.

METALLUS

Now you carry the Standard.

CLOSE CONAN--Marching behind the Line--carrying the Legion Standard--a BLACK WOLF'S HEAD. A lion's jaw is over his helmet.

CONAN

Hold steady. Straighten the Line!

Cavalry thunders at them. The spears are up straight.

CONAN

Spike it!

The spears come down, Metallus at Conan's back.

METALLUS

At the run--Advance.

They howl and charge--all breaking away before them. Conan reaches out with his shield and stops a javelin from hitting Metallus.

DISSOLVE TO:

CLOSE METALLUS--In tent. He places a chain of gold around Conan's neck.

METALLUS

Now my friend, the Legion is yours.
Keep the Line! Straight and true.

They embrace.

CONAN

I will keep it as you would--Where do you go now! Are you leaving us?

METALLUS

No--I will not be far from your side. Perhaps you wondered why I commanded you--Barbarians, instead of Imperial Troops?

CONAN

It has only occurred to me that you commanded well, Lord Tribune.

METALLUS

I was sent here because no one else would take this job. You see I am an orphan--a ward of Aquilonia, my blood is common.

Then he looks off almost dreamlike.

METALLUS

Because of you, Conan and the Line, this Legion is now a legend and I-- I am to ride the Public Horse.
I am to be a Consul of Aquilonia.

He takes Conan's hand, grasps it.

METALLUS

These years have been the finest
of my life.

CUT TO:

A WALLED CITY--Burning under siege--in the midst of battle below,
Conan on horseback. The whole of an auxiliary battalion of
infantry is spread out before him. Smoke and fires obscure the
advance. Drums beat slowly. A RIDER thunders up.

RIDER

Lord Consul Metallus presents his
compliments Lord Conan, and asks
that you join in expanding a breach
of the southern wall.

Conan looks to his left.

A DRILLED CORPS OF AQUILONIAN INFANTRY--A Legion--ten thousand
strong, glitter amidst the smoke. Their uniforms, armor and
standards are far more resplendent than Conan's mercenaries.
Metallus, on a white horse, holds out his fist. Conan holds out
his.

CONAN

Thank the Consul for his graciousness.
We are attacking now.

RIDER

Lord Consul Metallus wishes to add--
no quarter.

CONAN

None.

Drums beat a pounding hypnotic tempo. The battalion advances.

CUT TO:

RUINED TEMPLE--A ruined smoldering city below. Beautiful dark
skinned girls attend to Conan and Metallus, who are swimming in a
marble bath. Other officers loll about being fed or watching a
ritual dance. Still others walk in a garden with tawny long
haired temptresses.

METALLUS

What will you do with your spoils
Conan?



CONAN

Keep them Sire, like any man.

METALLUS

For what? I give mine away. Luxury, wealth only weakens resolve. I am Aquilonian and she is rich enough for all of us.

CONAN

I have a son.

Metallus looks at him.

METALLUS

You sly bastard. You've been keeping a mistress on campaign.

CONAN

No--long ago--too many years. In the north, Pictland. The Daughter of the Snows. She told me to come back with the jewels from an Empire and she would give me my son.

METALLUS

You have what she asked for. Take leave tomorrow. What was the boy like?

CONAN

I've never seen him.

CUT TO:

PICTLAND--CONAN--Alone on horseback--dressed as an Aquilonian officer. He wanders the fens.

CUT TO:

CONAN--Leading his horse through the Caledonian forest. He hears laughter. He stops.

CUT TO:

CONAN--Crouching by a fire--the light of it glinting off his gold and steel armor, his finely shaved face. He is a far cry from what he was. He looks up. She sways out of the mist. All grows

frosty and white around him. He feels the frost on his armor. She leads a three year old CHILD.

DAUGHTER OF THE SNOWS
You have taken long.

CONAN
It took some time.

He opens a polished chest of ebony, and out spill jewels of unimaginable size and brilliance. She gasps almost sexually. The boy pulls free and goes and picks up an enormous emerald as big as an egg.

DAUGHTER OF THE SNOWS
I have never seen such as these.

CONAN
I have.

He touches the enormous glowing stone around his own neck. "The Eye of the Serpent".

DAUGHTER OF THE SNOWS
What about that one?

CONAN
It is mine.

DAUGHTER OF THE SNOWS
If so, the boy is mine. How much do you want him?

Conan looks at the boy. He looks at Conan, his eyes glow like coals. Conan rips off the stone--hands it to her, takes the boy's hand. He comes to him.

CONAN
It is only a stone.

DAUGHTER OF THE SNOWS
The boy is not yours. He will never be. You may take him, but it is the Ice Worm's seed that grew in me. You only served him that night as I wished. He is the son of the Ice Worm.

CONAN

So be it. Enjoy your prattle.
Crom is *my* witness and the boy
is mine.

Conan takes the boy into his arms--turns and leaves.

CUT TO:

CLOSE BOY--Sitting on a shield, boots tramp by in the mud. Two huge men bearing kettle drums ride camels towering over him. He looks up at them innocently. Suddenly a rough faced ZINGARAN CENTURION leans down.

CENTURION

Who will care for him?

CONAN (O.S.)

The Zingaran Legion will be his
Fatherland--Look!

Suddenly boots of wrapped fur are in front of him. A sword is drawn. The little boy looks up and sees Conan, his father, a plumed helmet of bronze on his head. He cuts some wild flowers from over the boy's head. He drops them on the ground. All the while a deep cadence resounds as troops and wagons move past in the mud. The boy looks at the flowers in the mud--he starts to lean for them--Thwock! The sword quivers, stuck point first next to them. The boy grabs for it.

CONAN

Easy lad--You'll cut yourself.

He guides his hands to the hilt.

VOICE (O.S.)

Just because he reaches for a
gladius doesn't mean he will be
a warrior, Lord Captain.

CONAN

He is my son. Pick him up--
let us go.

He grabs him up.

VOICE (O.S.)

What will you call him?

CONAN

I will call him Kon.

CUT TO:

NIGHT--PICTISH FRONTIER--Kon, about five, runs from a wooden structure in a frontier fort. Arrows of flame arc through the night. Buglers blow on huge horns. Drums pound. Everywhere soldiers run to positions on the wall.

SOLDIER

Picts! Hundreds of them.

An AQUILONIAN TRIBUNE runs by.

TRIBUNE

The east wall! They've come through the gate!

Kon looks to see: Horsemen leap over a line of Aquilonian infantry. Hairy, dark furred men swarm over the wall shooting arrows, waving hatchets and swords. The Tribune screams and falls to the ground gurgling before the boy. The horsemen hach and hew in the darkness. Women run by screaming--a man has his hair on fire. Suddenly--Conan is there--his powerful form towering over the child.

CONAN

Kon! Get behind me.

He jams a shield in the ground.

CONAN

Zingarans! Line on me!

The Legionnaires rush to assemble.

CONAN

Across--

He waves his sword--the Line assembles across to the wall, shield after shield.

CONAN

Second Line--Pila!

The spearmen rush forward, their points up into the night. An Aquilonian Centurion and his squad fall back.



1877. G. P. 132.

CONAN

I have told you how we win. This
is what happens when you lose.

AQUILONIAN CAMP--Troops assembled--standards shining. A misty
rain falling. An AQUILONIAN GENERAL and his entourage approach
Conan and his Zingaran Legionnaires.

GENERAL

--When our finest Cohorts had broken
into fear and panic of the Pict
onslaught--You Zingarans held like
steel and saved us all. You have
more than courage. You have middle
of the night courage. For this I
honor you. Lord Conan accept this
wreath of reeds.

He is handed a crude crown of reeds--knotted together into a
band.

GENERAL

Of the earth--it will perish
like man. Also like man--one
reed can be broken.

He snaps off an end.

GENERAL

But woven together, they cannot.

He places it on Conan's head. Kon looks up from his side.

CUT TO:

KON--Older now, about seven, riding on a chariot behind his
father in a parade through the streets of a great city. Millions
of flower petals fall on them. Strange painted figures dance
with flutes before them. Troops follow behind. Central in the
chariot is Metallus, clad in shining golden armor and plumes of
red. He holds his hands out to the crowds.

CROWDS

Hail Metallus--Imperator! Metallus
of Kush--Of Pictland. Hail Imperator--
and his Generals! Imperator!

Conan turns and looks behind as does Kon. The line of troops

extends down past great public buildings--vast parks, temple and the city, bathed in the setting rays of the sun, extends hills down to a great river where its walls stand.

TITLE: TARANTIA--CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

CUT TO:

CONAN--Standing on one of these hills. A soft wind blows his loose silk tunic. He wears the reed crown, his son at his side.

CONAN

They say the gods live here.

KON

I thought they lived in the mountains?

CONAN

Our god does. He sits on a cliff in the cold and watches.

KON

Can he see us here?

CONAN

Even here where the wind is warm and the smells of food and spice--where men wear silk and brocade and women wear little or nothing. Yes, he watches us in places like this.

He turns to Kon, kneels down.

CONAN

Remember how I showed you my father's sword?

KON

Yes.

CONAN

It was not my father's. I broke my father's sword with mine. He told me to trust steel, not men, women, animals. I trust nothing but my will and instinct. Trust no one Boy--not any of this.

He gestures.

CONAN

If gods live here--they are treacherous and dark. Trust no one but the wind and the cold night sky. Make them your friends and you won't need this. You won't need me.

KON

I'll always need you father.

Tears fill his eyes.

CONAN

No--someday you must break my sword. Now let us go and eat their beeves and pigs and watch their women dance for us.

He turns and leaves as the sun sets behind the hills of Tarantia.

CUT TO:

GIRLS--Cuman slaves of exquisite form and grace, their bold sensuous walk proclaiming carnality and arrogance. They bring food to Metallus and Conan, who listens to a poet, who sings of great battles while other girls play harps and lyres.

METALLUS

You're lost in thought--I've never seen you that way.

CONAN

Why not?

METALLUS

You are one of direct action, only biding your time between instinct and the next. I often wish I were like you.

CONAN

What makes us different?

METALLUS

I am a civilized man. Though I crushed the Revolt of Shem and

conquered holy cities of Stygia,
I did it for Aquilonia. I have
given myself to her. You are
still a free man.

CONAN

Isn't that what we desire?

METALLUS

No--only a barbarian needs freedom.
A civilized man, a refined and finished
man seeks power, and power can only
come through something larger than
you. An idea, a religion. An army
or a--State.

CONAN

I'm not sure I need power.

METALLUS

You already have it, and so you've
already compromised.

CONAN

Are you so sure?

Metallus smiles.

METALLUS

Emperor Tisus thinks so, and so do
I. We want you to become something
greater than yourself.

Conan looks at him.

CONAN

I'm a simple soldier. You taught
me that. A link in a chain.

METALLUS

No--that's how you started--No you've
become the chain itself, the other
links bind you in place. Now the
links are bigger--stronger, and you
are linked to Her, like me. You
can go nowhere--you can only become
something more.

Conan doesn't answer.

METALLUS

You must become a King.

Conan laughs, beckons a slave girl, she kneels down, offers wine.

CONAN

What is your name girl, and where are you from?

GIRL

I am Tamra from the Cuman.

CONAN

I love Cuman women. He says I must be a King.

He turns to Metallus.

METALLUS

The Emperor's wish.

He rubs her oiled thigh--she pours wine down his throat.

CONAN

King of what?

METALLUS

King of Zingara. You lead their Legion. You are a hero there already. They would accept a Cimmerian King.

CONAN

Who says?

Metallus slams his fist down on a plate. The girl pulls back spilling wine.

METALLUS

I say so! Emperor Tisus says so. Aquilonia says so.

He smiles and takes the girl's hand--leads it back to Conan. She runs her hands through his hair--over his shoulders.

METALLUS

Show him paradise for an evening.

She pulls him back. He takes her to him.

METALLUS

I give her to you, King Conan.

He gets up and is led away by others.

CUT TO:

TEMPLE OF MITRA--The Pontifexs pass a golden laurel wreath through the sacred fires of Mitra. Then they are brought before the EMPEROR TISUS, an old warrior himself, a man once of the Line. He nods and the Pontifexs go forth to Conan, who kneels below. Behind him stands Metallus in the purple robes of the Consular. Behind further, are Conan's Zingaran Lieutenants, the great Black Zingaran Wolf's Head Standard billowing before the distant Forum Tarantia and the marble city behind. Heralds blow on twenty foot horns, and a hundred women and young boys sing a chorus.

CLOSE CONAN--The crown is placed on his head.

PONTIFEX MAXIMUS

Your honor is your loyalty and that is all you own.

CONAN

Agreed.

CUT TO:

CONAN--In a chariot at the city gates, an escort of Aquilonian cavalry surrounding his small contingent of Zingarans. Beyond, stern-faced axe bearing Aquilonian Lictors, who will walk at his side. Metallus rides up on a white horse.

CONAN

Where is my son?

METALLUS

He's staying here--with me.

Before Conan can react, Metallus leans in, puts his iron hand over Conan's wrist.

METALLUS

It is the Emperor's wish.

CONAN

You don't trust me? Do you?

METALLUS

We trust this arrangement. It is an old and trusted custom. He will be raised as you never could. Masters from Argos will teach him verse and philosophy. History will walk with him to his training at the Academy of War. He will be hardened and tempered like a blade, sharpened and honed to serve Aquilonia and the cause of civilization. He will be great. Greater than you. Someday he will ride the Public Horse.

Conan glares at him.

CONAN

There is always a price isn't there?

METALLUS

You should know that.

CONAN

Where is he?

METALLUS

Would you deny him greatness?

CONAN

No--I just want to see him.

Metallus points to the wall. There held by an Aquilonian officer is Kon, tears rolling down his cheeks. Conan and the boy lock eyes and then the trumpets sound and his chariot pulls away.

CUT TO:

TITLE: MESSANTIA, CAPITAL CITY OF ZINGARA

CONAN--HIS ESCORT--Ride through the gates of the city. People line the streets and stare at him, but his welcome is cold and artificial. He looks around at their faces. He has seen conquered faces before, but now it is he who feels vanquished and lonely. He rides towards a cold and foreboding fortress that is

his palace on a jutting butte, overlooking the city shrouded in mist.

THRONE--Huge and golden with lion claw feet, lion faces on the armrests. Conan walks towards it in a great dark hall. The men and women of Zingaran nobility line a carpet to his destination. He walks slowly, tentatively. A huge BLACK-ASIAN WARRIOR in armor waits at the throne with a crown on a pillow. The crown is silver, encrusted with glittering gems. The Black Warrior has a noble face, strong and serene. Conan looks to him, since he knows no one else.

CONAN

Who are you? What do you do?

MAN

I am Michael--I am protector of the throne.

CONAN

Why? I have loyal troops--men who have faced death with me. Are you sent by the Emperor?

Conan grabs his wrist--the man is made of black polished iron.

CONAN

Tell me the truth Michael--always the truth.

He looks right back at Conan.

MICHAEL

I serve no man--not you, not the Emperor of Aquilonia. I serve Zingara, if you serve her, my King, then I am a man you can trust.

Conan sits on the throne and takes off his golden Aquilonian laurel and places it on the pillow from which Michael has taken the crown of Zingara, which he places on Conan's head. Conan sits back in the throne.

CUT TO:

THE TWO MEN--Looking across a swift and wide river to primitive huts on the other side. Fires burn in the dusk, and candles light every room on the crowded waterfront. But on the other



1875-1876

side of the river there is only darkness and the impenetrable forests.

MICHAES

We are only the width of this,
the Black River from the Picts.

Conan holds out his hand.

CONAN

And to the east another river, the
Thunder. Beyond it, Aquilonia--
Caught in the middle--Zingara, so
small, yet--

MICHAES

So important--that is why we must
remain strong by ourselves. Both
civilization and barbarity want
us--need us.

CONAN

The forests--I too came from them.

MICHAES

Beyond this river, men are beasts.
They will never be civilized, and
they will never be conquered.

Conan stares at the forest beyond the Black River.

CONAN

For years I defended those beyond
the other river against all that
lives in that forest--beasts--man
or magic.

MICHAES

That is why you are here. You know
the Picts--You know both rivers, but
when it is dark without a moon--

Conan looks at him.

CONAN

Which do I drink from?

He looks back across.

CONAN

One day we will make peace with them.

MICHAES

They are barbarians.

CONAN

So am I.

MICHAES

The Emperor will not like that.

CONAN

I am a King here.

MICHAES

Then I am your servant.

CUT TO:

CONAN--MICHAES--Standing in a great lit cave where men in teams buck at the earth with picks. Ore is carted away.

MICHAES

Iron--The Aquilonians say it is worth more than gold.

CONAN

And they are right--With iron, one can take gold.

CUT TO:

HUGE CRUDE SMELTER--Burning in the night, melting the iron ore and refining it from rock. Great cauldrons are moved by sweat covered men--red hot molten magma pours forth sparking and smoking down earthen molds and troughs. Conan and Michael watch from a cliff lit by the orange glow.

GREAT BELLOWS--Manned by ten or twenty men--rise and fall--blasting through fires across bars of iron which are red hot, taken with tongs and pounded by huge hairy men--steelmakers.

BLACKSMITHS--Pound out armor plate, plow blades, axe heads, spear points and sword blades.

CONAN IN FURS--Walking past rows of huts where artisans craft

swords, daggers, axes and plate armor--all of it of the finest quality, with deep blued finishes or radiant mirror like surfaces. Conan looks at his reflection in a helmet.

MICHAES

We are the arms makers to the Aquilonian Empire. The quality of our weapons of steel is renowned.

CUT TO:

SNOWY RIVER--Somewhere on the Nemedian border of Aquilonia stands a long series of temple-like structures and barracks.

TITLE: ACADEMIA MARTIUS AQUILONIA

YOUNG BOYS--Are lined up in the shallows of the slow river--thin ice is cracked around their bare legs. They wear dirty loin cloths and nothing else. Many are shivering uncontrollably. Kon is one of them, but he does not shiver. His eyes are low flames, but his face is frozen. An INSTRUCTOR in furs walks down the line.

INSTRUCTOR

This is the School of Will. Are you cold? Cold is an idea. Forget it!

He comes to a tall HANDSOME BLONDE KID, older than Kon.

INSTRUCTOR

Look at the Emperor's son. He shivers like the rest of you. Are you cold Tisus Alba Fortunae?

FORTUNAS

No Instructor.

INSTRUCTOR

Then why do you shiver? Purge these thoughts! Will!

He comes to Kon.

INSTRUCTOR

Look at the barbarian.

He grabs Kon by the hair, harshly.

INSTRUCTOR

He doesn't shiver because cold
doesn't enter his thinking.

He pulls him out.

INSTRUCTOR

You get dressed Cimmerian. The
rest of you think about it.

CUT TO:

FORTUNAS--He is dressed in his uniform, a crude fur tunic like
the other boys. He backhands Kon across his face so that he
falls to the snow.

FORTUNAS

Little savage. You will shiver
if I do. You think you're better
than an Aquilonian?

KON

No my Prince.

FORTUNAS

Good, you can clean my latrine
and warm it for me in the morning.

KON--Cleaning the upperclassman's latrine. His gaze is inward

KON (V.O.)

Dear Father--they hate me here--
how can I live? Why have you
left me--

CLOSE FORTUNAS--BARRACKS--Holding the letter. Kon before him.

FORTUNAS

Don't like it here? Cadet Prefect!

A huge boy, FELEXIO, steps forward.

FELEXIO

Yes Prince Fortunas.

FORTUNAS

Bring all his letters to me.

FELEXIO

Yes--Prince Fortunas.

FORTUNAS

Dismissed barbarian.

Kon leaves. When he is gone, Fortunas crumples the parchment and rips it up.

CUT TO:

CONAN--Alone on the throne in a darkened hall. He writes.

CONAN (V.O.)

Dear Son, I've made a mistake. I am a fool. I should never have let them take you--I should have died that day. Now I pay. I would give all the jewels and honor--

CONAN--Resplendent--riding in state through the streets of Messantia, the Zingaran Capital. The people cheer him by rote. He is flanked by Aquilonian Guards.

CONAN--Inspecting a river fort where his beloved Legion has fought a battle against the Picts. Prisoners, animals, weapons and severed heads are displayed. Conan hangs decorations around the necks of sturdy soldiers.

CONAN (V.O.)

--For a chance to see you, to speak to you.

CUT TO:

METALLUS--Reading the letter Conan has written. He is at the Academia Martius. He watches the boys train with staffs and shields.

CONAN (V.O.)

Every day I beg them to return you to me. I would trade this throne to hear your voice again. Forgive me.

A white-bearded SCHOLAR leans to Metallus.

SCHOLAR

Which is he?



janetta

METALLUS

The savage boy--Kon.

SCHOLAR

He is strong of body and will.
The others know it. They hate
him but it is good for them.

He puts the letter in an oil lamp where the parchment quickly
burns.

METALLUS

But, tell him I was here.

CUT TO:

FIELD--Where they train with long staffs--padded at either end
like a Marine's pugil stick, except they are as long as the
spears of the phalanx. Felexio and Fortunas spar--Fortunas
charges and disarms Felexio and beats him to the ground despite
the other's speed and size. Fortunas is an immensely talented
fighter, a golden boy.

FORTUNAS

Now you Clivus and the Zingaran
Prince--Kon.

CLIVUS is nervous, as he is only a toady to his patrician
friends, and Kon is growing more solid and formidable. He hefts
the staff with cold precision and awaits the spoiled Aquilonian.

FORTUNAS

Engage!

Clivus thrusts and Kon parries, tying up the shaft moving, coming
round with the butt, he slams Clivus in the head, shortens his
grip and spears him in the face. Clivus rolls on the ground
crying.

FORTUNAS

Excellent--but you've insulted an
Aquilonian patrician. We can't
allow that.

CUT TO:

KON--Being held by Felexio while Fortunas beats him--slapping--

punching--round house kicks.

FORTUNAS

I don't like doing this Kon. Do you understand?

Kon can barely breathe.

KON

Yes, Upperclassman.

Fortunas rubs his hands.

FORTUNAS

Good--You, Clivus--Continue.

Clivus rushes in to punch and kick Kon.

CUT TO:

FELEXIO--Beating Kon with the pugil stick while others watch. Kon takes the heavy blows--bloody but unmoving--deeper and deeper into his soul.

FELEXIO

You will never strike an Aquilonian again.

DISSOLVE TO:

KON--Sitting under a tree, with others, wearing togas. It is spring. A TEACHER stands before him. Kon is fourteen.

TEACHER

--And when Ruta Numantio charged at the Battle of Galba, what was his mistake?

STUDENT

But Numantio won and slaughtered the Iragans. His whole career was made in that hour.

TEACHER

Wrong! He disobeyed. He outran his position.

Prince Fortunas stands.

FORTUNAS

There are times when one is so well trained and motivated, when a man needs a higher standard and knows he can attain it. Then victory is his and he must take it. Numantio's charge at Galba was what built what we are.

TEACHER

But Fortunas--it was impetuous.

FORTUNAS

Yes, but it was successful. We must learn to take the initiative-- if we are able.

Kon stands. Fortunas looks at him. Kon is as big as Fortunas now and built heavier, like his father. His face has become mysterious--stoic. The Teacher nods to him.

KON

Numantio is a hero to every boy. I adore him, but Numantio broke the Line at Galba. The Line is sacred.

TEACHER

He is right--and so are you Prince Fortunas. But Kon is not a patrician, he must think like a soldier.

Fortunas smiles at Kon.

FORTUNAS

How can I reach the glory I aspire to, without comrades like Kon. I salute you Cimmerian.

His eyes are cold--he holds the smile and sits.

CUT TO:

LETTERS--Scrolls being passed out by Fortunas. The boys take them.

FORTUNAS

Albinus--Cletus--Clodio--Drusius--

Marcellio--Zeutha.

He is done. Kon stands there.

KON

Nothing Prince? Not even from
Gaius Metallus?

FORTUNAS

No--I'm sorry Kon. Come dine with
me tonight. You admire Metallus
don't you?

They walk away, down marble pillared halls.

FORTUNAS

Someday perhaps you will ride the
Public Horse and be a Senator. It's
not impossible.

CUT TO:

CONAN--OLDER--Walking through the temple with the priests of each religion conferring blessings upon him. He wears ridiculous robes, and is embarrassed by the whole thing, aside from feeling guilty in Crom's gaze.

CONAN (V.O.)

Son, have you learned of the
ways of man and his many gods?
Crom forgive me--What god do
you pray to? I am well, I have
wealth beyond my needs--

AN ARMORER--Fitting a new breastplate, another handing him an engraved and gold inlaid sword. He tests its balance. He's not impressed with it, and hangs it in a sack with a collection of swords.

CONAN--Walking alone through his palace. He looks tired, and has gained a little weight. He carries a flagon of mead at his side.

CONAN (V.O.)

I've still not heard from you.
Perhaps they do not let you write
me. I've grown used to the silence.
I've all I need.

He looks through gauze curtains into his seraglio, where his concubines are screaming at one another. One slaps another-- pulls her hair.

CONAN (V.O.)

How can I complain? Is it not good to be a King? I am satisfied.

They see him and transfer their anger to him. The lonely Tamra hurls a vase that catches in the curtains. Conan puts up his hand and retreats.

CUT TO:

CONAN--Alone on the throne--the hall empty, a young girl asleep at his feet. He gazes out into the darkness.

CONAN

Crom do you hear me? Why have you left my side? Damn you and the others if you live at all!

He stares ahead.

CONAN (V.O.)

--And so my son, I have decided what is missing. I must find what is lost.

He stands.

CONAN

Michaes!

Footsteps--Michaes stands before him.

CONAN

Summon the Picts--their high Kings, Warlords. I will make peace with them.

MICHAES

But what of the Aquilonians?

CONAN

I am King here.

CUT TO:

DUSK--BLACK RIVER--A royal barge with rows of oars crosses the river, flying the Black Wolf's Head Standard of the Zingaran

Legion. Conan is in its prow--crown on his head. A Centurion calls out cadence and the oars slap rhythmically, otherwise it is silent save the call of a loon.

CUT TO:

CONAN--Walking up the beach to a crude pavilion of stones, furs and canvas lit by torches. Great carpets have been laid down, and a throne of wood and antlers erected, on which sits the Pictish King, ORLOCK MAC MORN. He is surrounded by his favorite warriors, dark and hulking, painted in tattoos with red hair and dark pitiless eyes. These are people who do not like the light of day. Barbarous and sinister, they recognize a kindred spirit in the new Zingaran King. A chair is brought to Conan--he sits. The WIZARD himself now steps forward from the Pictish contingent, clad in robes of fur with Gaelic design.

CLOSE CONAN--He looks at the Wizard--could it be?

CONAN

Where did you get this Wizard?

MAC MORN

You know him?

CONAN

Yes--What do you want?

MAC MORN

Weapons of steel and friendship.

Silence--then Conan nods.

MAC MORN

You would not be afraid?

CONAN

Fear is for other men. I have fought you long enough.

MAC MORN

When you die--we want your heart.

CONAN

And I yours.

MAC MORN

Then we are brothers. Let us sign in blood.

He stands--the Pictish King stands. They reach out open hands and grasp.

CONAN

One other thing--Give me that Wizard. Not that I don't trust you, but as an old and useful custom.

The Wizard looks on apprehensively.

CUT TO:

BARGE--Returning as the sun sets. The Wizard sitting at Conan and Michael's feet.

CONAN

How did you end up with them?

WIZARD

Gambling--it has always been my weakness.

CONAN

--And they did not fry you in oil?

WIZARD

I'm a pretty good Wizard--Remember?

CUT TO:

ROYAL BEDCHAMBER--Conan wishes his concubine out. The Wizard stands clumsily trying to hold an array of bottles and closed ceramic jars.

CONAN

Put them in this chest.

He indicates a wooded chest--opens it, throws out some daggers and helmets.

WIZARD

These are poisons--so you must be careful--the finest of the lands of the East where men are fond of poisons.

DISSOLVE TO:

CONAN--Standing before a wash basin of turquoise. The Wizard pours into a stone cup.

WIZARD

Up to here--no more--every morning for this one.

CONAN

What about the others.

WIZARD

First you must survive this. In a year you'll be hardened to anything. Then we start the others.

Conan takes it, frowns and gags.

CONAN

Already I am sick!

WIZARD

What do you expect? It is poison.

CUT TO:

DANCER--A Nemedian girl dances in a local tavern. She is young and though exotic, she has an air of innocence about her. She moves with natural grace as if she would dance no matter who watched.

Indeed, someone is watching. The boys from the Academy, amongst them Kon, now seventeen. He still has that air of mystery about him, it gives him an older experienced calm. The other boys throw coins at the girl, but she eyes Kon. As she dances closer, their eyes fix, and then:

FORTUNAS

Wench! Over here!

Her head turns as does Kon's. Fortunas is behind them with a handful of coins. He looks at Kon.

FORTUNAS (seductive)

I graduate tomorrow. Come honor me, my flower.

She dances to him, takes the money. He looks into her eyes, then quickly at Kon.

CUT TO:

GRADUATION CEREMONY--Fortunas stands on a podium in firelight. The Masters bow and hand a gladius to a boy in front of him.

PRIEST

Saturnio Strabo--Your sword donated by your father.

STRABO

Thank you Master.

It is handed to him with a scroll. Next, Fortunas mounts the podium in a gold rimmed toga, gold laurel.

MASTER

Tisus Alba Fortunas--Your sword donated by the Senate and the People of Aquilonia.

FORTUNAS

Thank you Master.

MASTER

Congratulations from your father the Emperor.

He bows. Kon looks on from the crowd. ONE of the boys looks at him.

BOY

Next year it's you Kon--and your father is a King.

Kon ignores him, goes deeper into his stoicism.

DISSOLVE TO:

METALLUS--Kneeling before the Emperor, old Tisus, who sits on the ivory throne overlooking the Forum Tarantia. Several SENATORS stand in attendance.

METALLUS

He what?

Tisus stands.

TISUS

He has armed the Picts!

SENATOR

Weapons of steel! We cannot tolerate it.

Metallus slowly rises.

METALLUS

--I was going to ask that his son be returned upon graduation--

TISUS

Never! Make him an instrument of the State.

SENATOR

He should serve as you have.

OTHER SENATOR

We should kill the father--Invade Zingara--the effrontery!

Metallus turns glaring.

METALLUS

Do we want war and disorder? Are we not civilized men. Are we not able to use statecraft--politics. These are what we are famous for. Let me handle Conan.

CUT TO:

CLOSE CONAN--In his royal bedchamber, drinking poison. It goes down easier. He sits down afterwards to get his bearings.

CONAN (V.O.)

It is three years since I've heard about you, son. Every morning I drink poison. My Wizard says it will do me good someday.

CUT TO:

METALLUS--Reclining on a couch overlooking Tarantia--reads Conan's letter.

METALLUS

Ha! You're smart old friend. Clever!

CUT TO:

CONAN--In his chariot with spears attending the Royal Hunt. He drives his chariot up to the trackers who have cornered a lion, being held at bay by ferocious mastiff-like dogs. He draws a



javelin. At that instant, another chariot arrives pluming dust-- Metallus in it with a javelin. Conan leaps down from his.

METALLUS

Careful your Highness.

Conan sees the beast as it leaps atop a rock. It is a saber-toothed cat, maned partially like a lion. Conan looks at it, his weapon ready to cast.

CLOSE SABER-TOOTH--Looks back at him, its eyes yellow and slanted.

CONAN--Lowers his javelin.

CONAN

Pull back the hounds!

The cat seems to know. The dogs are leashed. Conan flicks his head and the cat understands and leaves in a bound.

METALLUS

Why?

CONAN

There are few like him anymore.

He looks at Metallus.

CONAN

So I have displeased them. Did they send you to punish me?

METALLUS

Would they send a friend?

CONAN

Yes.

He climbs back into his chariot--

CONAN

I've brought peace to this part of the world.

METALLUS

Peace is relative--there are many who do not sleep well even if you do.

CONAN

I care not how they sleep.

He replaces the javelin.

METALLUS

For everything there is a balance. You let the lion live so some poor man's cattle must die. You are at peace with the Picts yet Aquilonia is afraid. We are not--

CONAN

Barbarians?

METALLUS

--Unreasonable. We must set the balance right.

CONAN

What would do that?

Metallus turns away, looks at his polished fingernails holding the javelin--sets it back.

METALLUS

The Tenth Frontier Legion.

CONAN

More troops occupying my country. My people will--

METALLUS

Grow rich selling to them. You would hold our Legion like we hold your son. Everyone grows.

CONAN

Tell me of him.

CUT TO:

KON--Standing on the graduation pedestal backlit by great bonfires. The wind blows his hair. At eighteen, it is plain that he will not be a handsome man, but a noble one. He has the bearing of a chieftain, even in his toga. The word "Gravitas" comes to mind.

MASTER

Kon of Zingara--Your sword donated by the Consul Gaius Metallus.

KON

Thank you Master. Is there congratulations from my father?

MASTER

No my son.

Stoic, mysterious, alone--but not aloof, he takes the sword.

CUT TO:

AQUILONIAN MONTAGE--The young men of Aquilonia in parade before the Emperor--Kon is a Centurion in the Twentieth Legion--Bravura.

KON--Walking the battlements of the Stygian wall--Imperial Legionaries on guard against the desert tribes. The wall is endless--blockhouses every half mile--a man every hundred yards with shield and spear. Kon wears a lion skin cape and glittering helmet.

KON

All is well?

LEGIONARY

Yes Centurion Sir. Have you heard about the Emperor's son Fortunus?

KON

No, what?

LEGIONARY

He led a charge that stormed the walls of Jugra in Ghulistan. He was first into the city, he is being given the Civic Crown. Do you think we will be posted there Centurion?

KON

We have a wall to guard here.

LEGIONARY

But nothing happens here.

KON

You are a soldier of the Line--be proud and hold it.

He walks on.

CUT TO:

CONAN--Riding in a chariot, reviewing the Legion. He is getting gray in his hair and beard, and though he's a little paunchier, he's still a formidable figure. At his side are his Aquilonian keepers--the Imperial Cavalry--behind are Michael and the Wizard. He rides up to a delegation of Aquilonians surrounding a covered sedan-chair. He stops.

AQUILONIAN CENTURION
Greetings King Conan. May we present
the new Aquilonian Magistrate?

He turns to the chair.

CENTURION
Your Excellence.

At that, a beautiful hand--graceful and feminine, wearing rich rings, pulls back the shade--a graceful foot, ankle and long leg follow. The curtain parts to reveal an EXQUISITE WOMAN of stern patrician bearing, but still hinting of Aquilonian sensual depravity. She smiles mysteriously at Conan.

CENTURION
Countess Zulieka.

Conan is astonished that they have sent a woman, a beautiful one at that. He dismounts his horse. He is about to reach out his hand--hers is suddenly there for him to take.

CONAN
Excuse me my Countess, but I did
not expect--

ZULIEKA
A woman. Of course not--but the
honor is mine, King.

CUT TO:

THE TWO--Walking back before the troops, followed by their entourages.

ZULIEKA
It is most unfortunate news that
I bear, King. The Emperor is dead.
He is succeeded by his son Tisus
Alba Fortunas.

CONAN

I am sorry--

ZULIEKA

Nonsense! He hated you, and you him. You are lucky to have kept your head all these years. Long live Fortunas--Hero of Ghulistan!

CONAN (shrugs)

Long live him.

ZULIEKA

War has broken out in the East.

CONAN

With whom?

ZULIEKA

The Ghurkhan of Kara Khitai and the Taurans. We must send a peace keeping mission. It will be a hard time for us King Conan.

CONAN

What do you want?

ZULIEKA

Men--the finest you have. A Legion. Your Legion.

Conan looks at her.

CONAN

My Legion? --Why Zingarans?

ZULIEKA

They are the best desert fighters-- and you are at peace--there will be taxes again, but this is the price of peace--prosperity. Culture. The alternative is unthinkable.

CUT TO:

CONAN--On a balcony overlooking the Black River. The lights in windows far below and sparkle off the water. The sound of lutes and tambourines drift on a soft night wind. It blows silken curtains behind him. He wears no crown. Below, far

below, people are reveling in the street, living their lives, struggling, failing, grasping as man always does. He turns, he has a cup--pours poison in it--drinks it down easily.

CONAN

Wizard!

WIZARD

Sire.

He looks over his shoulder to the old Wizard, who bows obsequiously.

CONAN

I am a prisoner of the crown.
This place. I must get out of
here.

He steps in.

CONAN

Disguise me--so that I can go--
down there.

CASTLE GATE--Conan in the rough clothes of a farmer or herdsman, a small crude dagger on his belt. His face is unchanged.

CONAN

No one can see me--who I am?

WIZARD

No one Sire--It is a spell that
will last the night.

He turns and leaves.

WATERFRONT--Conan striding along the rough waterfront area watching merchants sell stinking river fish meat from fly infested butchers and rotting vegetables. Conan drinks in the mess, because even if it's rot--it is life. He sees men arguing, whores beckoning from doorways--gambling dens and ale houses, all awash in filthy humanity. No one notices him. Indeed he has a good Wizard.

CLOSE CONAN--Sitting, listening to fishermen, cargo boatmen, traders. He carries a wooden staff.

TRADER

New taxes--now they have a tax
on wine.

FISHERMAN

I drink ale, to hell with wine. What about the King? What does he say?

TRADER

He's theirs. He wears their leash, drinks their wine.

CUT TO:

CONAN--Walking through a back street--he sees a MAN turning a beeve on a spit--basting it. It looks good, other beeves, veals and pork, hang roasting or smoking along with great sausages. Conan savors the smell and feels for his pouch around his waist. He takes out a golden coin, thinks twice about it and puts it back. He walks up to the BARBEQUE MAN.

CONAN

I'm hungry--I've--I've got no money.

The Barbeque Man looks up--looks him over.

BARBEQUE MAN

How'd you get so big, being so poor?

CONAN

I lost my money--gambling. I come from the Black River and I'm not used to a town. I'll work for a meal.

The Barbeque Man smiles at his honesty.

CUT TO:

PILE OF HEWN LOGS--Ten feet high--hardwood, hickory--an axe is stuck on a stump. Conan looks at the ax. Picks it up, hefts it, looks around. No one is watching, he spins it--catches it, whips it around his body in a sort of kata.

LOG--He raises the blade, slices clean but the pieces are not even. He sets another up.

MONTAGE: Axe blade splitting logs, shaving off sides--sticking as well as splitting--finally cutting evenly without effort.

CONAN--Standing sweating--shirt off, axe in hand. He looks like Conan again. He has lined up five logs, checks to see that no one is watching, and proceeds to go through the logs with short precise strokes often shortening his grip, then slamming the wood

down to break it apart. It is done with rhythm and speed-- obviously a combat drill. The last log leaves a thin piece standing--Conan turns away then whips around in a vicious backhand not looking and splits the piece perfectly. His hands are blistered. There is still most of the pile left.

CUT TO:

CONAN--Gorging himself with brisket and sausage--grease running down his chin, his body aching from good work and his hands rough and scabbed. He belches--lays back to sleep.

DAWN--Conan chopping wood as the dawn sparkles off the river water. The city is asleep and only the sound of his axe carries out over the water. The pile is done.

CONAN--Holding out a bruised hand to the Barbeque Man. He puts two silver coins in it.

BARBEQUE MAN

Took you long enough. But you cut well.

He turns and walks away toward the hill with the castle in the distance. The Barbeque Man watches him and scratches his head.

CUT TO:

CONAN--Asleep in his chamber in sweaty clothes--stretched out on a rug, snoring. The sun is out.

CUT TO:

CONAN--On throne--a delegation of Aquilonians are before him. He seems distracted, and though the Countess Zulieka is speaking, he looks at her strangely.

ZULIEKA

Already we have rumbling of discontent--guarded insults to our soldiers--inferior service and price gouging from certain merchants. We will not tolerate insult.

CONAN

Why not? We all tolerate insult.

He stretches.



ZULIEKA

What do you mean by that, King?

CONAN

I'm sore today--last night I did
a man's work.

ZULIEKA

I'm not interested in tales of
your depravity. These town people
are insubordinate--surly.

CONAN

You look fetching today Countess.

She stops.

CONAN

There--Are you embarrassed? Better.
My people do not like to have their
sons drafted to fight your wars.

ZULIEKA

Your men are good at it.

CONAN

Dying? So that Aquilonian mothers
need not cry?

ZULIEKA

You never hesitated to serve.

He laughs.

CONAN

I had ideals. The chain, the
Sacred Line. Who would not
die for that?

He looks off--wistful.

CONAN

But of course I'm different--

He looks lustfully at her.

CONAN

I am a barbarian.

ZULIEKA

I will send my report.

CONAN

Come back when you can spend more time.

She leaves. Michael steps up.

MICHAES

What has gotten into you Sire? That was most rude. Are you drunk?

He looks to the Wizard.

CONAN

Wizard--I'll go again--tonight.

WIZARD

What did you find there Sire?

CONAN

Work.

He stretches again.

KON--On horseback as the Cavalry burns a Tauran line of refugees moving before him.

KON

Have them fed, but give them no extra. It is not my intention that rebels should fatten on State grain.

CENTURION

It will be a hard winter Tribune.

KON

The better they learn.

He unfolds a parchment, looks at it.

KON (V.O.)

--Again my regrets that I have no word from your father. Perhaps it is best to forget--As always--Metal

NIGHT--BARRACKS--FRONTIER--Kon is walking to his quarters when he is accosted by the SENIOR LEGATE--the Commander of the garrison.

LEGATE

Kon--Come here lad.

He walks over in his resting tunic, carrying his armor and helmet.

LEGATE

I've just received word, Centurion--
You are to leave for Tarantia at
once.

KON

At once Sir?

LEGATE

The Emperor--he has taken an interest
in you.

KON

We were classmates at the Academy Sir.

LEGATE

You've been promoted to the Praetorian.
You are to be one of the Emperor's One
Hundred.

Kon doesn't know whether this is good or bad, considering the source of his promotion.

LEGATE

Are you not pleased? You are
a barbarian. You'll be called
Publius Kon from now on. Keep
it up and you may ride the Public
Horse. That's as far as a man of
your birth can go.

KON (to himself)

Quite an honor Sir.

CUT TO:

NIGHT--TARANTIA--The Via Venuvia, where the palatial homes of the richest patricians overlook the crowded suburb below and the river that snakes through the great city. Metallus walks to a chariot awaiting him. An IMPERIAL GUARD stands ready. He gets

on the chariot and is whisked away.

SUBURA--The streets are narrow and crowded--dark and choked with smoke and trash. The chariot clatters over the cobblestones.

GUARD

Get out of the way! Make room
for the Consul!

People look up--Metallus, strong, eternally distant. The chariot stops by the river.

METALLUS

Here?

GUARD

Yes Consul.

Metallus gets off--walks down a path to an arbor overlooking the river lit by many candles. At a wide place, he sees couches and pillows, a figure reclining upon them. All around in the shadows are guards glinting of steel and bronze. Metallus walks forward to the figure--a man in a purple toga. He bows.

METALLUS

My Emperor.

Young Emperor Tisus Alba Fortunae looks up.

FORTUNAS

You wonder why I brought you here.
To this filthy place? Notice the
air is freshened here from the river.

He claps and two handsome young men appear in ceremonial armor.

FORTUNAS

This is the finest brothel in
Tarantia. A secret.

He indicates with his hand, and the two men select weapons from a female attendant--sword, shield, spear. Fortunae claps again and a BEAUTIFUL DARK-EYED WOMAN glides in and goes to him. Metallus leaps to his feet.

METALLUS

Excuse my impropriety, since I had
no idea--the Empress was present.

She looks at him coldly. She is THEODESIA, from Nemediia, whose beauty is only surpassed by her cunning and ruthless ambition.

THEODESIA

Are you surprised Consul to find a wife at such a place? Perhaps you have heard that my husband found me under these circumstances?

Metallus swallows.

THEODESIA

Have you heard that Consul?

METALLUS

Yes, my Empress.

She smiles seductively.

THEODESIA

Good, you're at least clever enough to be honest when you are unsure.

She looks over and the men begin fighting--this is for real--swift brutal spear thrusts and parries--desperate.

THEODESIA

Do you enjoy watching men fight Consul--I do.

FORTUNAS

Life is a struggle. We do not grow without pain. We do not emerge--become.

METALLUS

We must.

THEODESIA

The same of the State. If Aquilonia is to reach its true place of dominance, it must--fulfill--potentialize.

One of the men thrusts his spear into the other's leg. The man screams in agony and drops his spear, but still screaming, he draws his spatha (sword) and cleaves through the offending shaft. He pulls the point from himself and hacks his opponent's wooden shaft to pieces, advancing and making him draw his sword.

FORTUNAS

One can never be sure of one's
relative position!

He draws an engraved dagger of priceless workmanship--its
heat-blued blade glinting like a diamond.

FORTUNAS

Steel Consul. This is what we
must concern ourselves with.
Responsibility. Prudentia. We
are the heirs to great civilization.
We are responsible to the world for
its art, its culture, its language--

THEODESIA

--And government. Why are we here
if not to govern, to rule.

FORTUNAS

--And today--it is so difficult.
Any nation or tribe can possess
weapons of steel. It is a terrifying
new world.

Metallus sits up.

METALLUS

What do you want Sire?

FORTUNAS

Zingara--

The fight is loud with clangs of blade on shield and desperate
grunting and breathing. The wounded man has pushed the other
back into the shadows. He smashes with his shield, swipes at the
head, knocking off his opponent's helmet. Theodesia gasps,
knotting the fabric of her clothing in a clenched hand. She
stands--steps closer to them. She is breathing fast. Fortunas
ignores her--leans in close to Metallus.

FORTUNAS

One comes to places like this to
buy pleasure. In time one tires
of a favorite. That is why it is
wise to only pay by the night.
Never possess. Let them worry
about their age, beauty, sweetness
of breath and skin. I only pay
by the night.

The wounded man slashes wildly, landing a blow to the other side, which is instantly crimson. They reverse positions. Theodesia kneels closely, a hand clasping her grommet at her breasts. The wounded man slips on the bloody stone surface, enough time for the other to chop down between the shoulder and neck. He pulls his sword away as the other stands straight up screaming in surprise and drops his weapon. He staggers about, holding his neck and goes to his knees moaning and bleeding. Theodesia rushes to the victor, who holds his side with his free hand. She throws herself around him, her wispy costume stained and clinging to her. She kisses him though he gasps for breath. He runs a rough hand over her thigh.

FORTUNAS

But sometimes there is one more valuable, enduring. One that demands possession! Then it is unthinkable for other men to have her. Then it is love, and a man, if he is a man, must have all her favors. If he loves her, he cannot breathe without her!

Fortunas leaps to his feet--rushes at the couple--Theodesia ducks aside as Fortunas thrusts with his dagger. The gladiator avoids it--comes back with an overhand stroke with the spatha. This Fortunas parries easily with the dagger, and traps the fighter's arm with his. He wrenches it expertly, spins and stabs the slayer under his heart where the armor stops. The man cries out, stiffens and falls. Fortunas takes Theodesia by the wrist--pulls her to him. She kisses his hand, arm, neck. He keeps her at bay.

FORTUNAS

I must have Zingara. I must have her and all her favors--iron, mines, smelters, weapons of steel.

THEODESIA

Can we let these things proliferate?

METALLUS

Me? Why me?

FORTUNAS

Because we are in an era of discontinuous change and you are the King's friend.

METALLUS

You don't trust me. This is a test.



THEODESIA

All of life is a test.

They both stare at Metallus.

FORTUNAS

Last month I sent him a gift--
Countess Zulieka. Next month
I shall send him another--his
son.

THEODESIA

Gifts make a slave, like the
whip makes a dog.

CUT TO:

NIGHT--CONAN--THE ROYAL BEDCHAMBER--Conan is drunk, laughing in the distance on his bed. He is carousing with a woman. They can be seen in silhouette--occasionally the light of the torch flashing on their flesh as they writhe on the bed. A wine flagon clangs on the stone floor, the sound of their breathing and gasping filters through across the floor to the doors where Michael stands--he closes them. He has the hint of disgust, more accurately, disappointment on his face. The doors close--we cannot see who it is with Conan--a beautiful woman now atop him swaying and moaning in rising pleasure. As we get closer a flicker of light reveals it is Zulieka, Magistrate to the Emperor.

CLOSE ZULIEKA--Her pleasure is real, uncontained, but behind it is the hint of a deeper agenda, the gasp that hides a smirk of one who is most satisfied with deception.

CUT TO:

CONAN--At his grand table. He is signing a law. Various viziers and clerks fuss about. The Aquilonian contingent, behind a coldly imperious Zulieka, watch from a distance. Michael watches over Conan's shoulder.

CONAN

You've been silent Michael. You do not approve of this tax?

MICHAES

The people have never been taxed on grain before Sire.



207 E. A. 2 S.

Conan whirls around. He goes back to the document.

CONAN

The people are rich, one of the richest provinces of the Empire. Everyone is taxed on grain.

MICHAES

When I was born, we, Zingarans, were not part of an Empire.

CONAN

The world has changed since we were born.

CUT TO:

TROOPS--Marching away under palace walls. They are the Zingaran Legion, they bear the Black Wolf Head's Standard, Conan's standard. They gleam in the late afternoon sun. The kettle drums pound. Conan watches from a balcony used for reviews. He watches the Legion march under the Arch of Mitra, toward the city gates and the road leading east. At his side is Zulieka. He catches himself--looks around at the temptress, whose eyes flash at him.

CONAN

Now, go and send your Emperor word that I have obeyed.

ZULIEKA

You shall be rewarded--tonight I will show you the gates of Paradise.

CONAN

Not tonight. I am tired.

ZULIEKA

You've tired of me?

He doesn't answer.

CLOSE CONAN--BALCONY--Sipping his poison.

CUT TO:

THRONE--He sits alone in the dark, mists swirl around him. He sees the face of his son, looking up to him from behind a shield in a battle, scared--needing him. Then he sees his son, held on the battlements of Tarantia, tears pouring down his face. Then

swaying before him is the Daughter of the Snows, the mother of his child. He stands, reaches for her, but she glides away laughing, and he is holding frost.

DAUGHTER OF THE SNOWS

Your seed did not bear fruit. It is *His* seed.

She laughs and disappears, and Conan is holding his scepter. He is alone in a darkened throne room. A few attendants watch from the door. He throws the scepter down.

CONAN

Guards--Get me the Wizard!

CUT TO:

GRAND CHAMBER OF THE EMPEROR--TARANTIA--Publius Kon Cimmericus, Officer of the Praetorian One Hundred, the Emperor's One Hundred, is surrounded as he walks up the deep purple carpet over the marble floor to the Emperor's curile chair of ivory. The Empress Theodesia is at his side in a similar chair. He salutes and bows.

KON

Publius Kon.

FORTUNAS

Kon! Why we haven't talked since school days. I've followed your career, noted all your decorations. You might call me a fan. Fine record, though you could have used a little combat. But we are all not so lucky. Not like Felexio here.

The huge dangerous Felexio of school days has become a darkly menacing professional who looms behind the throne in black armor.

FORTUNAS

You remember Felexio--Why he's been in one battle or another since he graduated.

He watches Kon's reaction which is none.

FORTUNAS

Always at my side.

KON

I've followed your illustrious career too, My Emperor.

FORTUNAS

So good to watch someone you know evolve--materialize.

KON

My humble gratitude Emperor. I only serve the State.

FORTUNAS

No, you're more. You see, you're not one of us.

Kon's eyes look down.

FORTUNAS

We do this because we are born to it. You serve by choice. I admire you Publius Kon. That is why I am sending you home.

Kon looks up confused.

KON

Home Sire? This is my home.

FORTUNAS

Your father is King of Zingara. We have interests in acquiring Zingara as part of the State. How would he feel about that? Or you?

KON

My father gave me to Aquilonia Sire. The army is my country.

FORTUNAS

Good, then you are to be Military Tribune to Gaius Metallus who will be Prefect. When a transition is complete, the Empress and I will visit and confer Imperium.

THEODESIA

Does this trouble you Publius?
Dealing with your--past. It would
trouble me.

KON

I'm sure I will learn from it
Empress and be a more useful
servant.

THEODESIA

Well stated--you have a beguiling
manner Tribune. See that we talk
sometime.

CUT TO:

AN AXE--Slicing through a log--clap--the pieces fall--another
clap--another piece. Conan stands by the river watching the s
pass below the dark forest on the other side. The axe rests
easily in his hands. He hears the murmur of fishermen below--
occasional words filter up--"Occupation--Grain tax--Bread--
--Sweat--Injustice--Damnable King"

CONAN--Walking through the town feeling the silver coins in hi
hand. He carries a heavy staff which he has carved with
intricate patterns. He comes to a group surrounding a man
wearing an old Legionary tunic. He has one eye, an old vetera
Young people surround him.

VETERAN

I wear my decorations always!

He points to his eye.

VETERAN

Does the King pay my rent or give
the bread I was promised? No!

Conan stops.

CONAN

Why not--the King feeds all veterans.
All men who fought for Zingara.

VETERAN

What about the Shemite Succession
or the Vilyet War? The Aquilonians
call them police actions--not wars.
Well--this happened while I was
policing the Shemites.

CONAN

I served in the Vilyet War--with the King. He was good to me.

He shows his coins.

VETERAN

What unit were you with? I was in the infantry! I don't remember you. I think you're lying.

The others jeer him. Conan glowers but walks away.

CLOSE TWO TOUGHS--Both wearing swords on their backs, poor brigands. They noticed Conan--especially his coins.

CUT TO:

INN--In the crowded subura of the town. Conan goes in. The place is full of Aquilonian soldiers on leave, and the usual pimps and whores, as well as working men looking for a good meal and a drink of ale.

CUT TO:

FLAGON OF MEAD--Placed before Conan with hot sausages and meat. He sits in the corner away from the crowd. He sees a shapely BLONDE WOMAN from behind, serving others. *She reminds him of someone long ago*--she is obviously the proprietor, since people call to her and know her. She directs other girls and young men in the serving. Conan strains to see her face, but there is so much smoke from the cooking pits, and she is in silhouette. He takes his small dagger--cuts a sausage. Flies buzz around him. He grabs out with lightning speed and catches one. He strains to see the woman, but she disappears behind others. He doesn't see the two criminals who've followed him here. He looks at his fist--opens it--the fly crawls on his palm. He blows on it and it flies away.

CONAN--Paying a servant girl with one of his coins that he takes from his pouch. He's placed the staff on the table and doesn't notice that suddenly the two thugs are at either side, seated with him.

THUG

What else you got in that sack Sir?

Conan looks to one first, then the other.

CONAN

Are you hungry?

THUG

I am Gothio, a slayer of men,
and what if I was hungry?

Conan reaches for the knife--they show the blades of their swords, and slide one over Conan's hand.

GOTHIO

Not so fast.

Conan moves his dagger slowly, indicating the sausage.

CONAN

There's plenty.

He lets the dagger drop on the table. A fly buzzes around them. Conan's eyes follow it. They look at him. Conan's hands lashes out so quickly, they don't even react until it's back. His fist is closed. He opens it--a fly--

CONAN

The same one.

He blows--it flies away. They watch--it buzzes around.

CONAN

He won't go away.

Now they are wary--downright scared. The fly buzzes and stops on a thick support behind Gothio's head. He turns his face to see it crawl. They all watch it. Suddenly a blur of Conan's hand and the dagger sinks into the wood where the fly was. It buzzes off. The Tough gasps as the dagger vibrates for a second.

CONAN

Don't worry--I wouldn't even hurt
a fly. I just scared him.

He reaches out, pulls out the knife. The Thugs gasp and flee. Conan cuts the sausage.

CONAN

There was plenty.

CUT TO:



A GIRL takes his flagon to be refilled. She hands it to the Blonde Woman near the barrels. Conan strains to see her. Now the Woman turns and Conan's heart almost stops. His jaw goes slack for the Woman looks exactly as he thought she would. Exactly like Valeria, the only woman he ever loved--dead for over twenty years. The Woman is probably twenty years older than Valeria was, but she is still strong and handsome of feature. Conan is intent on the Woman. She seems to notice and looks at him. The serving Girl comes back.

CONAN

Who is that woman over there?

GIRL

Aeldra? She owns this place.
She takes care of us.

CONAN

Where's her husband?

GIRL

Her husband was a soldier in the
Legion. Killed in the Vilyet War.

CLOSE--He turns away, behind his flagon. Only his eyes furtively look back--he broods behind his mead.

CLOSE AELDRA--Brings a large earthen amphora of wine out and hauls it towards a group in another dimly lit room. Suddenly a strong hand grabs one of the handles. She looks up into the dark face of Conan.

CONAN

It is heavy.

She pulls up her side. They take it toward the room.

AELDRA

I saw you watching me. There are
younger and finer here, and I'm
not for sale.

Conan doesn't say anything. They enter the room--a bunch of working men young and old. A few have their women with them. They surround a TOGATED MAN, big, once powerful, with long gray hair, wild blue eyes. He drinks from a skin. Conan looks Aeldra in the eye.

CONAN

You remind me of someone--

AELDRA

--Long ago--I know. I always
remind men of someone.

They set the amphora on a low table, others grasp it and tip it
to pour wine in many cups. Conan helps.

GRAY-HAIRED MAN

Careful--there's a tax on that wine.

AELDRA

I didn't pay it.

She leaves, looking over her shoulder at Conan, who watches her.

MAN

You fancy Aeldra, Stranger. All
of us do. It'll do no good. Where
are you from?

CONAN

The Black River--the other side.

MAN

Lived with the Picts eh? --That
don't matter. Have you met--our
leader?

CUT TO:

THE GRAY-HAIRED MAN--Eyes fierce with fire looking right at us.

GRAY-HAIRED MAN

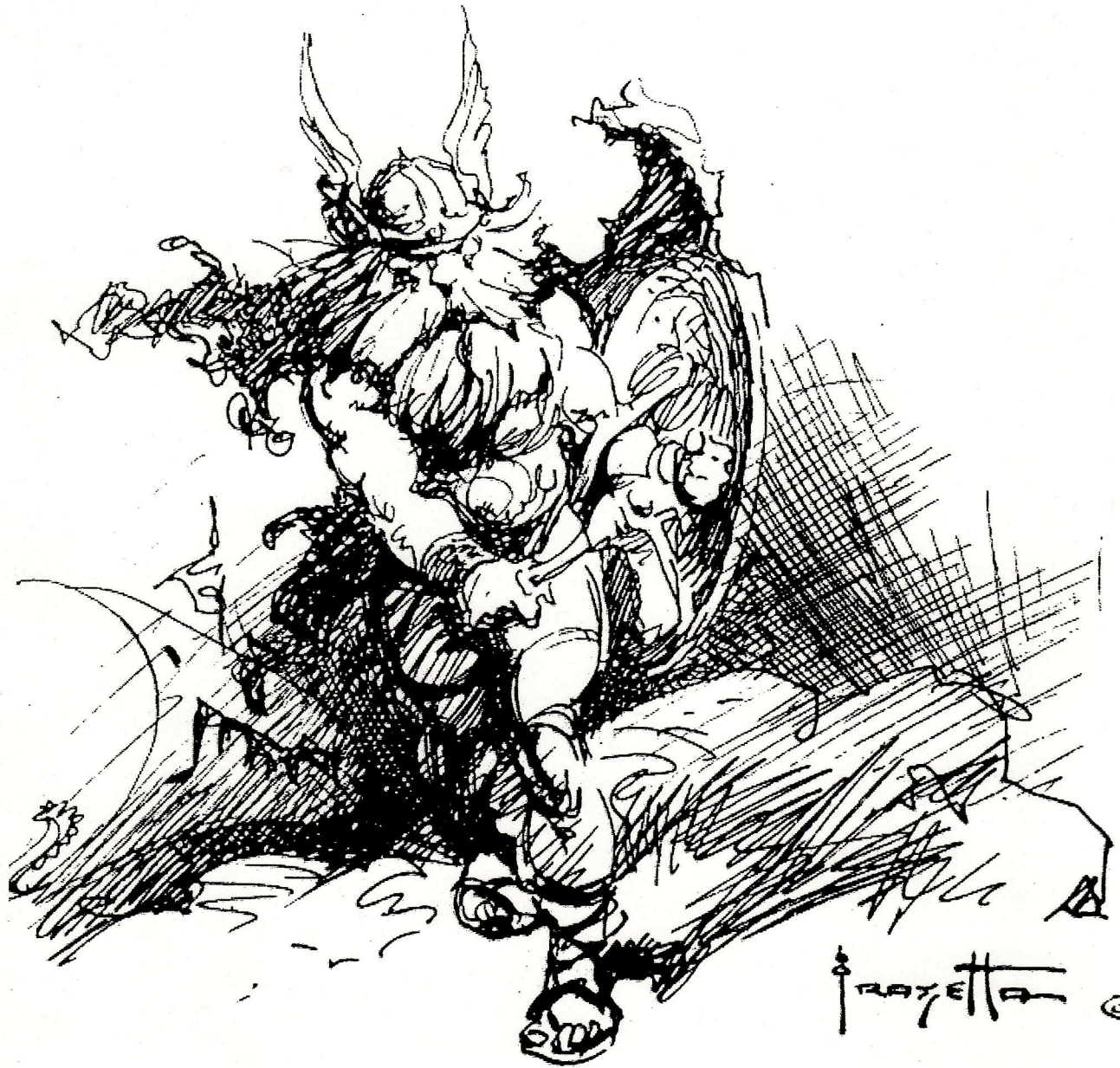
"You lolled in gardens where breezes fanned
The blossom's shivering shard:
But we were bred to the naked land
Where life was bitter and hard
You raped the grapes of their purple soul
For your wine cups brimming high--"

He stops, breathes and drinks his wine.

GRAY-HAIRED MAN

"--We stooped to the dregs of the muddy hole
Bitter sweet with alkali--"

All sit around him transfixed by his ease of delivery.



GRAY-HAIRED MAN

--Trade your freedom for harps and lutes
Discard the sword and the dart;
Then build a prison of satin and gold
And call it Culture and Art--"

Now Conan sits forward and says the lines along with him.

BOTH

--Then lie in the laps of smiling land,
Till its rusts unman and rot them,
And they scorn their blood of the calloused hand
And the fathers who begot them."

All are silent.

CONAN

You must be Herodion?

HERODION

I am--and you?

CONAN

Just a man who admires your songs.
They've kept me company--good company
when I am alone.

HERODION

A poet can be no better paid. Thank
you Sir.

The woman Aeldra looks over the others at Conan, he's more than
just another in this place. He catches her gaze, she turns awa

HERODION

Do you wish to be free to live
a man? To stand instead of kneel?

CONAN

As all men--only more.

HERODION

Then I ask you--Are you willing to
stand alone--even if it means your
death. Even if no one knows?

He looks to all of them.

HERODION

What can one man do. How can one stand against Empire. And what if your act is futile?

He stands up.

HERODION

Meaningless! --Because first it must be one and then another. Until you are all willing to stand alone and fail--There can be no revolution.

He looks around past Conan into all of their eyes.

HERODION

We've talked of plans--schemes--
We've complained of the King--
of the Aquilonian Legions--But
it is no more than my songs.

CONAN

Your songs are as great as men--

HERODION

No! They are just songs. Are you willing to stand, Stranger?

Conan stands up slowly.

CONAN

I'm willing.

HERODION

Why?

CONAN

Because--"My knotted hands still clutch at life
Still like a shoreless sea
My soul beats on in rage and strife
And you cannot shackle me."

Conan reaches his hand out--Herodion takes it.

CUT TO:

CONAN--Alone at a table--brooding over his cup. All the others are gone. It is late--almost morning. A few couples grope in the shadows. A drunk snores on a table. Footsteps: Conan looks up--Aeldra with an amphora of wine.

AELDRA

Maybe I can fill your cup?

CONAN

I drink ale like a man.

AELDRA

You don't look like a man prone
to poetry.

CONAN

Life is strange--

He looks up at her--she sits next to him.

CONAN (soft)

"And I saw as I clawed that evil snake
To slay before I died
Unruly golden hair that tossed
In wild and untamed pride.
Her slim foot pressed the foe-man's chest
His proud head back was thrown
Matching the steel she held on high,
Her eyes in glory shone.
I saw the gleam of her golden hair
And her eyes like the deep gray sea
--And the love in the gaze that sought me out
Barbaric fierce and free--"

She leans closer to him--cannot do otherwise.

AELDRA

What--what happened to her?

CONAN (quiet)

"--Then the darkness fell and the sky as well
And the mists closed over me."

They look deep into each other, but get no closer. She slowly
backs away as does he.

CONAN

It is late--the dawn--

AELDRA

Will you come back?

CONAN

Yes.

CUT TO:

CONAN--STREET--Alone, walking in the shadows towards the distant palace on the hill. The narrow streets are empty. The town sleeps. He moves in the shadows carrying his staff. Suddenly he hears a woman scream. He stops.

STREET--Far ahead. A figure is thrown to the ground. A MAN stands over the figure--kicks at it, light reflects off armor.

MAN

You've insulted me.

The figure is a WOMAN--small compared to the man. She scampers away. He comes after her--closer.

MAN

A Pictish whore!

He kicks her hard in the ribs. She wheezes air--and rolls gasping. Now we see it is an Aquilonian Guard from the occupational Legion. He is drunk. She is young and clad in furs. She gathers herself up--puts her hands up weakly. He looks around to see if anyone watches. No, so he draws his glinting gladius.

WOMAN (gasping)

No--Please--

He leans over her, grabs her dark hair. Suddenly he is pushed back by the end of Conan's staff! He looks up in shock. He sees the figure of a big man in the moonlight, but the man is unarmed no plate steel on him. He grabs the end of the staff, holding it with his left hand.

GUARD

Who are you Varlet!

Conan doesn't answer.

GUARD

You've touched an Aquilonian!

But Conan's eyes glint wolf-like with no understanding. For a second this cruel soldier sees something primordial and frightening--barbarous, as remorseless as nature.

GUARD

Who are you? She's just a Pictish whore.

CONAN

I'm her King.

The Guard now smiles in his superiority over this amateur. He laughs, and with that cuts across the staff with his razor sharp blade. It splinters and a piece falls. Conan whirls it back smashing the Guard's wrist with the heavy end--the gladius flies, sparkling in the moonlight. Before it clatters on the stones, Conan crosses the stroke, shifting the grip, and comes down on his helmet with the carved heavy end. Clunk--it caves in. Another whirl, sliding step, and he jams the sharp splintered end into the underarm devoid of plate armor. A sickening wet sound and then the Guard lets out a gagging scream, kicking his feet, going to his knees as blood courses down his face from under his helmet. Conan withdraws the staff. The Guard clatters face down on the stones. She rushes to him.

GIRL

Quick--someone will come!

She grabs his hand--they run into the shadows of a narrow passage.

CUT TO:

CANDLE--Being lit--other candles reveal a small room hung with furs and strange Pictish symbols. A WITCH sits before a low fire. Conan looks out a fur curtain--the sky is getting light in the east. Conan sits before the old woman, the girl off to the side.

WITCH

My daughter's name is Diera,
she brought the soldier here
so that I could tell his fortune.
We are Picts.

CONAN

What happened?

WITCH

He had none. You'd better go
before it gets light. Someone
will recognize you.

CONAN

You know who I am?

WITCH

Didn't you tell Diera you were
the King?

CONAN

You believe that?

WITCH

Too bad you don't. Go before
it gets light.

Conan gets up--backs to the door and looks out--he goes.

CUT TO:

HERALDS--Blowing horns as the Imperial Guard of the Prefect Gai
Metallus Marula enters. Metallus, his twelve Lictors as well as
Kon and a military escort enter. Michael and others await them

METALLUS

You mean he is drunk, playing with
his whores.

MICHAEL

He wasn't aware of your arrival.
I have sent the Lady Zulieka.

METALLUS

Then let me know when she returns.

CUT TO:

ZULIEKA--Looking distant but attractive. She bears herself as
the countess she is--but slightly disgusted by having to wait
while King Conan splashes water on his face. He turns.

CONAN

Metallus?

ZULIEKA

Yes Sire, and the new Military
Tribune. They wait in your hall.
Further Sire, there has been an
act of rebellion. A soldier of
the Frontier Legion has been slain.

CONAN

Where? When--Did people see it?

ZULIEKA

His body was found this morning.
The new Tribune will conduct an
investigation. He should interest
you.

CONAN

Tribune--What is another Tribune
to me?

Zulieka smiles with sadistic satisfaction.

ZULIEKA

His name is Publius Kon.

Conan whirls about.

CONAN

Kon!

ZULIEKA

Yes, do you know him?

CUT TO:

CONAN--Rushing into the Great Hall wearing only his Zingaran toga. His footsteps echo as he approaches the Aquilonian entourage, now including Metallus, Kon and the darkly menacing Felexio and several huge Praetorians. Conan sees the figure of Kon--standing straight, clad in iron plate and chain mail, his helmet held at his side. It can only be him.

CLOSE KON--His eyes burning like when he was a child but he doesn't move from the "at rest" position. His eyes blink however and he lets out a controlled gasp.

CLOSE METALLUS--Turns and looks at him. He composes himself.

CLOSE CONAN--Eyes on fire, mouth agape, he literally stumbles forward.

MICHAES

Your Highness--Your Crown.

Conan comes face to face with Kon. They stare at each other.

CONAN

Kon--Do you remember what I told
you? Do you--Son--Do you remember
your father?

Kon's eyes flutter.

KON

Always.

Conan lunges forward--throws his arms around his son--but it is like embracing a tree.

CLOSE KON--Using all his discipline and stoic training to keep from showing emotion. Conan's face is stained with tears and can only say "Kon--Kon--". Kon's eyes moisten, but that is all.

METALLUS

Fine figure of a soldier isn't he? One of the Emperor's One Hundred. A Tribune.

Conan lets go--steps back--looks in Kon's eyes, but they are now hardened as is his way.

CONAN

Why? --Why did I never hear from you. Whatever they've done to you, you're still my blood--Barbarian blood!

METALLUS

You'll have much to discuss, but it is unseemly to do so now. There are matters that must be dealt with. You each have your duties.

Conan, awash in emotion, tries to get a hold of himself. He staggers back sits on his throne.

MICHAES

Your crown Sire.

He places it on his head. Conan touches it.

CONAN

I must have forgotten.

KON

They say you gave a lot for it.

This goes to Conan's heart. He sits back wounded, looks to the others.

CONAN

What are the Praetorians doing here?

METALLUS

They are here to make Zingara safe for the Emperor. There is much unrest--instability. Revolution in the wind and terrorism. That we cannot tolerate.

CONAN

And you are here to help me.

METALLUS

I've always been at your side Conan. Michael, bring chairs so that we can discuss a course of action.

DISSOLVE TO:

MESSANTIA--STREET--RIOTS--A wagon filled with amphoras, is attacked by an angry crowd. An Aquilonian merchant tries to defend it. He is swept aside--beaten. The ceramic jugs are broken. Many scoop up the wine and drink it.

AN EFFIGY OF THE EMPEROR--With an Aquilonian helmet is nailed to a cross and set afire--around dance young drunken men and women tearing at each other's clothes, laughing and screaming in anger and lust.

They do not see the far end of the street. Aquilonian Legionaries assemble carrying their heavy shields and pilum. Metallus pulls up in a chariot, looks to Kon, who sits on a horse. He nods.

CLOSE KON--He pulls down an angelic solid silver child mask over his face. That gives him the emotionality of a statue--it is part of a Cavalryman's helmet. He barks commands extending the Line.

KON

On me--Shield width--Tighten it.
Visors down! --Forward!

They march, a drum section follows--beating out cadence. Their spears aloft.

THE CROWD STOPS--Sees a wall of shields coming--hears the drums. Herodion amongst the crowd yells:

HERODION

There! --They've come to put the yoke on you! Now! Now we answer!

He throws a heavy piece of pottery. People emerge from the balconies, roofs--pull up tile--grab potted plants.

LINE--Being pelted from the front--occasionally an arrow thuds into a shield, but the Line closes the distance. Now the heavy objects rain from above, a man falls--another, his helmet rolling under their feet. Kon dismounts--draws his gladius.

KON

Front Rank--Spike it!

The pila come down--points sparkling.

KON

Other ranks--Tortuga!

The shields come up protecting the others--the Line slams into the crowd--soldiers spear people with short brutal thrusts--always advancing. A woman screams--goes down clutching her breast. Men are speared through the face--mouths and eyes being preferred targets. Herodion hurls a cleaver. The crowd breaks and runs, Herodion in their midst. Many are trampled and then speared to death by the soldiers.

CLOSE METALLUS--Watching with satisfaction.

METALLUS

That should quench any flames of revolt. Never question authority.

CUT TO:

METALLUS--Sitting at a table in the center of the street. He is on his ivory chair. People are brought to him for questioning. Behind, stands Kon behind the silver curls of his cupid mask, blood on his sword arm. Bodies are being hauled from the street and stacked in a wagon.

METALLUS

Who found the Centurion?

ZINGARAN WOMAN

We all did when we came out in the morning.

KON

Was he robbed?

MAN

No--He had coins in his pouch.

METALLUS

How do you know?

MAN

I saw the soldiers count it later.

METALLUS

After you took what you thought
wouldn't be noticed?

CLOSE METALLUS--From below--towering over on the ivory chair, an
image of authoritarian rule.

METALLUS

He was murdered!

ANOTHER ANGLE--

METALLUS

Who are the ringleaders? Who
brought you here today?

CLOSER STILL--

METALLUS

What good did it do you?

Metallus standing up--

METALLUS

Do you think we want this?

A MAN--Old, scared, sitting at the table. Metallus leans closer.

METALLUS (quietly)

We know he was with a girl. His
comrades told us. A Pictish whore--
dark hair--small, graceful. Tell us
her name--we will find out anyway
and then we'll remember that you
said nothing.

A WOMAN--Injured, her face wrapped in gauze. She is somebody's
wife, mother. She shivers as Metallus regards her. She looks up
at the serene metal expression of Kon, hands clasped behind his
back, in his silver armor.

METALLUS

We know who the leaders are--
Your husband told us--Write it
down here.

CUT TO:

TWILIGHT--CAMP--On the outskirts of town--below the castle. Here
is camped the Frontier Legion. Tents extend around the base of
the hill behind an earthen guarded wall. Metallus stands outside
a command tent, Kon at his side.

METALLUS

Well we've done a day's work--We've
protected the Imperial Line--another
day.

KON

I sense a bit of cynicism Gaius
Metallus.

METALLUS

Cynicism--me? But I ride the
Public Horse. I'm just tired.
The faces look the same after
all these years. Even this
place--it might well be fifty
others.

KON

But it is not. It is Zingara.

He turns.

METALLUS

Will you see him?

KON

The King?

METALLUS

Your father.

KON

You like him don't you? More
than you would admit.

METALLUS

We fought the Line together. I saved his life. Mitra knows how many time he saved mine. I was the--happiest then--if you could call it that. Ironic. I've had many women. More pleasure than anyone deserves, but I never took a wife. Aquilonia, that bitch, was mistress to all of us. She I serve and love. But a man should be allowed a friend. Don't you think? I suppose it's soft--unprofessional, but when you get older you get tired.

He turns--looks at Kon who walks away.

TENT--KON'S--He unties his heavy breastplate, lets it fall down on his cot. He drinks from a wineskin--sees an ORDERLY standing outside.

KON

Yes--Come in.

ORDERLY

Tribune Sir--a girl wishes to see you. She says you've been looking for her.

KON

A girl?

ORDERLY

Yes Tribune Sir--a Pict.

CUT TO:

DIERA--Pushes the flaps of the tent aside. She has obviously dressed in a Zingaran wrap for the occasion. She is small, but of a lean and curvaceous figure. Her eyes are like dark pools of oil. Kon is seated. He looks her up and down, she knows it.

KON

Be seated.

CUT TO:

KON--Pouring himself a full cup of wine. He looks at the cup then at her. She has curled her legs beneath her on a rug.



KON

You've never seen this man before?

DIERA

No--nor any like him.

KON

What was his most striking feature,
besides being big and strong?

DIERA

The way he moved. I am a Pict.
Our men move differently than
townmen. He moved like that.
The soldier had no chance. It
was done before he struck.

KON

Have you seen him again?

DIERA

No.

KON

Were you afraid of him?

DIERA

No.

KON

Why not?

DIERA

Because you look like he did.
He saved me. In his heart he
was one of--us.

KON

Don't make that assumption of me.

DIERA

Why not? --You do not know your
heart?

Kon smiles. Is she trying to interrogate him? Still, there is something drawing him to her, but she is just a woman.

KON

You said there was something
else he said to the Centurion.
Will you tell me now?

He leans closer, puts his iron hand over her wrist, she slithers to him.

DIERA

I will tell you when I feel it
is right.

She leans against his knees--runs her hand up his arm.

DIERA

My gods would scorn me--for what
I do. Do you have gods?

KON

No--only Aquilonia.

DIERA

A man needs gods--he needs something
he cannot understand.

She rises like a snake to him. He takes her in his arms and kisses her deeply. The cup of wine falls and spills on the floor.

CUT TO:

FIRE--Through the flames of his tent cooking fire we see Kon and Diera writhe on the furs.

CLOSE DIERA--Her head on his chest, breathing in gasps.

KON

Tell me what he said.

DIERA

Why? --He--he said--
(she breathes)
He said he was the King.

CUT TO:

BATTLEMENTS OF THE CASTLE--It is dark, night. Conan sits on a stone like Rodin's Thinker. He stares down at the city where fires flicker and sparkle. A full moon casts its reflection off the waterways.



CONAN

"Shadows and echoes haunt my dreams
With dim and subtle pain
With the faded fire of lost desire,
Like a ghost on a moonlit plain
In the pallid mist of death-like sleep
She comes again to me--"

We see he's not alone. The Wizard sits against a

CONAN

"I see the gleam of her golden hair
And her eyes like the deep gray sea."

He looks at the Wizard.

WIZARD

Did Herodion write that too?

CONAN

No, I did.

The Wizard says nothing for a moment.

WIZARD

You've learned much in the years.

CONAN

I've had the time.

He looks sharply at him.

CONAN

What does it mean? Has she come
back? Would the gods give me another
chance?

WIZARD

It's just a woman that looks like
her. No one comes back--and the
gods--they do not favor you.

CONAN

Yes--my son is proof of that.

WIZARD

Don't blame the gods for it.

CONAN

Not Crom.

He looks up in the sky.

WIZARD

Do you still believe in gods?

CONAN

Yes--not all--but Crom.

WIZARD

Perhaps you've lost him. Drifted far from him.

CONAN

Make a spell so that I can be disguised tonight.

WIZARD

There is no need.

Conan stands.

CONAN

Why not?

WIZARD

You've grown so far from them that they wouldn't know who you are.

Conan looks at him--down at the city and back at the stars.

WIZARD

Maybe Crom doesn't know you either.

CUT TO:

DARK NIGHT--Sentries walk the palisade that surrounds the Aquilonian's cantonment. Metallus snores contently on his cot, oblivious to the drama that the night holds. Beyond is seen Kon walking to the guard gate, draped in his purple cloak, at his side the pretty Diera. A Legionary comes to attention and salutes as he passes. He returns it. The Sentry goes on his way. So, he thinks, the young Tribune is already tasting the delights of these southern lands. He is a man, what would be expected? Kon stops for a moment, Diera reaches out, touches his cloak, his impassive form. He is a soldier again, but she knows more.

DIERA

Tomorrow--

KON

Perhaps.

He watches her go down into the streets that flicker of coal fires and candles.

CUT TO:

DOCKS--A group of rough men assemble, some are armed with daggers and cudgels. A lone figure stands on a small pier. They approach him. He turns to them, he is a huge man of imposing build and shows no fear. He too, wears a cloak, he looks up from its folds. It is Felexio, the slayer.

FELEXIO

Is this all of you?

One of the thugs that accosted Conan in Aeldra's Inn, steps forward.

GOTHIO

I'm Gothio, I've killed men with my hands. You can count on me.

FELEXIO

You don't look impressive.

Gothio signals and a larger group emerge from the shadows. They surround the little pier, weapons silhouetted, yet Felexio is cool to it. He waits, looks them over. At the forefront is Herodion.

HERODION

Are you the Nemedian?

Felexio whistles and oars are heard. Some of the men crouch and ready their crude weapons. Felexio smiles condescendingly at them.

FELEXIO

No need to fear. Trust me.

A boat comes out of the darkness, silhouetted in the moonlight. It is a longboat filled with men. A rope is thrown to Felexio and he pulls it in. Four or five big men leap gracefully to the pier all cloaked in robes, but several are carrying round Nemedian shields. Into the light comes a black cowed figure.

FELEXIO

Gregoria, Bey of Nemedia.

Light shines on the face of Fortunas, the Emperor.

HERODION

Why would a Nemedian Bey want to help Zingarans?

FORTUNAS

The struggle against Aquilonian hegemony and oppression is all mankind's. You must be Herodion?

HERODION

I am.

FORTUNAS

I've marveled at your work for many years. It is an honor Sir.

He reaches, Herodion pulls him to him, embraces him. It is a little too bold but it gives Fortunas the edge.

FORTUNAS

Right now, there are Nemedian Armies massing in the North. Our ships can sail down the Black River and be here in days. Now is the time Brothers.

MAN

We might be trading one dictator for another.

HERODION

You are a strong nation, rival to Aquilonia. We are little people. What will you do if we succeed here?

FORTUNAS

What have you got already? Slavery! No, I can only give you gold and weapons. I can't make you believe me. That you must decide.

GOTHIO

Let's see the color of your gold.

Fortunas turns to him with his wonderful unspoken contempt for such trash.

FORTUNAS

Of course--Felexio--Show them.

A barrel is rolled on the dock--from nowhere Felexio flashes a heavy sword from out of his cloak splitting it open. It rolls across the dock spilling gold coins that leave a glittering trail. Fortunas puts his booted foot up and stops the barrel before it rolls into the water.

Another couple of Praetorians in black robes haul out a rolled rug--let it flop open--glittering swords, axes, plate armor.

HERODION

What is our course of action?

FORTUNAS

The King must die!

He goes and picks a sword from the pile, a brutal blade of the northern realm. He whirls it, then turns it over across his forearm, hilt toward Herodion.

FORTUNAS

We've friends amongst the guards.
Tomorrow night at the low moon.

Herodion takes the sword.

HERODION

The Aquilonians?

FORTUNAS

We'll close the gates. They can do nothing. By dawn you will be King with a Nemedian army sailing down this river to do your bidding.

He leans in close.

FORTUNAS

Are you afraid poet?

HERODION

Death to tyrants!

CUT TO:

CONAN--Alone in Aeldra's inn. He eats from a plate of food and broods over his mead. Her shadow passes over his dark countenance. His eyes find hers as she stands looking down at him.

AELDRA

Who was she?

CONAN

I thought I would never see you again until my death. Then if I'd lived well and never yielded to another's will, then Crom would send you--wearing a winged helmet, you would reach down and take me from the slain.

He offers his cup to her.

CONAN

We would drink sweet mead in the great feasting hall of Crom and warm ourselves by his fire.

She sits next to him, drinks from his flagon.

AELDRA

And then--

CONAN

And then--you would look up--and kiss me-

She does--they embrace, alone in the deserted inn. They hold onto one another increasing in their passion as if this is the only chance they will ever have, as if this has been preordained but will not last.

CUT TO:

DAWN--MESSANTIA--The city is just awakening. The castle darkly looms over it. Camp and cooking fires are lit in the Aquilonian camp.

CUT TO:

WOOD--Being split. Conan enjoys the dawn splitting Aeldra's logs. She looks out at him from building a fire.

CUT TO:

KON--Walking the palisade, checking the guard. He comes upon Metallus who looks out over the town.

KON

Good morning Consul. A spring day.

METALLUS

Something is wrong. I don't know what but I can feel it.

Kon looks out at the river.

METALLUS

It's just a notion, but notions have kept me alive.

He turns to Kon.

METALLUS

There's going to be a rising. If not today, then tonight. Double the guard and put the Second Cohort on alert.

CUT TO:

KING'S BED CHAMBER--Michaes pushes open the door--walks in. one. He is followed by the Wizard.

MICHAES

No one has slept here.

WIZARD

Perhaps the King has a girlfriend.

MICHAES

He could or maybe he just got tired of this place--If he isn't back by noon. I'll notify Metallus.

CUT TO:

HILL--Overlooking the thunder River to the east. Felexio and Praetorians ride out of the forest and look down. Far in the distance, many barges are set on the river. Fortunus rides u a splendid white horse, still cowled in dark robes like the others.

FELEXIO

Someone is going to cross the
river my Emperor?

FORTUNAS

Reinforcements.

FELEXIO

But we have already sufficient
force to crush--

FORTUNAS

Wrong! You can never have enough
force my friend! Victory rides
with the gods and they prefer the
heavy Legions. Force and overwhelming
power are what history is made of.
The War Gods favor the Seventh Legion.

FELEXIO

The Black Seventh. You are taking
no chances Sire.

FORTUNAS

Why should I--By that thought--I feel
it is imperative that the King's son
Publius Kon should not be here to
make any claims on the throne.

FELEXIO

He could be alerted to the assassination
plot and die in the struggle.

FORTUNAS

Yes, as a good Aquilonian soldier--
at the side of his mentor Gaius
Metallus.

FELEXIO

The rider of the Public Horse!
A Consul?

FORTUNAS

He has served too long. He is
loyal to the State but he no longer
compliments the emerging landscape.

He turns his horse.

FORTUNAS

The Empress travels with the Seventh.
By Mitra do I miss her. She is the
wood by which I burn. Tomorrow she
will have a new province.

They ride off the hill.

CUT TO:

METALLUS--With Michael and the Wizard in the King's hall. Kon
walks in.

METALLUS

He could be kidnaped or poisoned.

WIZARD

I don't think so. Not poisoned.
I'm a Wizard. I see things. The
King enjoyed disguising himself
and going amongst his people. He
is comfortable with them. It is
harmless, he will be back soon.

METALLUS

Harmless? While rebels plot!

KON

I have an excellent intelligence
source in the town.

CUT TO:

DUSK--THE BLACK RIVER--Conan by himself walking along the bank.
The waterfront is somewhat quiet. It is a spring evening and the
river itself flows smooth, dark and peaceful. Conan goes to the
edge, picks a rock up and skips it across the surface. He
watches the splash and ripples go by in the current. He is more
at peace than in a long time. Yet his instincts tell him that
peace is not in his future or his past. He throws another stone.

CUT TO:

NIGHT--Kon walks through the narrow streets, only he is not in
uniform. He wears the simple tunic and trousers of a merchant,
but at his side is the ever present gladius. Even dressed this
way people give him a wide berth. Like his father, Kon is always
formidable. His blood shows. He comes to a dwelling, looks at
the sign--knocks.

CUT TO:

KON--Sitting before the old Pictish Witch, Diera serves him wine from an amphora.

DIERA

I told you he would come.

WITCH

My daughter has powers over men,
even strong men like you, Tribune.

KON

If she has power, it is because
I will give it to her willingly.

He reaches out, takes her hair in his fingers. There is a rough worldly way in this, but not without genuine emotion as well.

KON

Now tell me Diera, where can I
find the man who saved you?

DIERA

The King?

KON

Yes.

WITCH

Why?

KON

Because he is a rebel and killed
an Aquilonian.

WITCH

Lies! Do you not think I can't
see the blood in your veins! Why
do you feel an unreasoning lust
for my daughter. You would take
her now and run your hands over
her hips if I were not here!
Admit it!

He braces himself in his stoicism. But she is right.

WITCH

You think I see nothing! I am a
Pict and my daughter is a Pict--
So are you!

He glowers at her.

WITCH

You seek this man--this man who saved my daughter's life so that she could sleep in your bed? This man who risked all because of a Pictish girl--Who took life in an instant? This man is King and he is your father!

She laughs a witch's laugh. Diera goes to him. He puts his arm around her. He thrusts out his other hand and quiets the Witch.

KON

Then you tell me where he is.

She looks right through him.

WITCH

His life is in danger. They wait for him.

Kon stands in anger.

KON

Who! Where!

WITCH

Where he sleeps.

CUT TO:

NIGHT--INN--Conan stands at the door. No one is there. He sees a shadow, turns--it is Aeldra.

CONAN

The others? Where is everyone tonight?

AELDRA

They have gone to kill the King. Herodion, all the young men. The die is cast.

CONAN

How?

AELDRA
Traitors in the castle. Nemedian.
The King dies!

Conan steps to her, grabs her shoulders.

CONAN
Whatever happens tonight, you
remember me as you have known me.

She holds him.

AELDRA
Why--Where are you going?

CONAN
To what I deserve.

He leaves. She wants to cry out after him--she listens to his
footsteps running into the darkness.

CUT TO:

WIZARD--In his chamber lighting a candle.

CONAN
Wizard!

He turns startled.

CONAN
Summon Michael, no one else.
Meet me in the Great Hall.

THRONE--Conan eats from a bronze platter as always. Michael and
the Wizard sit around him. In the distance, glide servant girls
and a few courtiers. The guards stand at doors.

CONAN
They will not come till all
are asleep. There must be no
witnesses, no interference.

He looks at Michael.

CONAN
If you trust me and love Zingara,
you must do as I say.

MICHAES

I do Sire.

CONAN

You must flee now--slip out while no one watches. Take three extra horses--ride to the East and bring back our Legion. Tell them what has happened here!

MICHAES

I'll send a trusted man--two.

CONAN

No--they will only believe you. You must command them. Kill their Aquilonian officers and return by forced march. Whatever you hear, let nothing stop you.

MICHAES

I would die here at your side.

CONAN

I know--but--we'll see who dies.

Conan nods--Michaes gets up and goes. Conan pours some wine, drinks it.

CONAN

Here we are again Wizard. Two against many.

WIZARD

I'm not so young anymore.

CONAN

Then you better conjure up some powers.

He sips.

CONAN

Who gave you this wine?

WIZARD

The Lady Zulieka bought it for you. She asked if you needed anything else.

CONAN

It's filled with spider poison
and has hints of black Lotus.
Light--with no body.

He drinks it down.

CUT TO:

METALLUS--Pulling on armor while Kon stands outside his tent fully armed, carrying a heavy falchion as well as his gladius.

KON

Shall I pick a trusted squad?

METALLUS

No--we would alert the assassins.
We'll use the palace guard when we
get there.

He grabs a spatha, throws his heavy regimental robe around his shoulders. Kon does likewise--they head off towards the moonlit castle.

CUT TO:

STEEP HILL--Leading to the highest wall. About twenty men move along the precarious trail, Herodion leading. He looks up--eight or ten more men in mail and helmets stand up suddenly. Felexio is prominent. He towers above them with a huge sword on his back and a bow in his hands.

FELEXIO

From here we climb.

He looks up--claps his hands. A rope is thrown from a high window.

HERODION

Who are these men?

FELEXIO

Mercenaries--Slayers for hire.
You think we would leave it all
in the hands of you amateurs.

CUT TO:

HALLWAY--Outside the King's chamber.

THE GUARDS--All but two march off. They look around nervously.

CONAN--Watching them through a spyhole in the stone.

CONAN

Only two guards remain. Traitors!
Well it must be time.

He turns to see the Wizard with a spear in some ridiculous ancient helmet.

CONAN

Is that the best you can do?
Hide under the bed!

WIZARD

Thank you Sire.

He goes to do so. Conan throws off his toga revealing a gleaming breastplate and mail tunic. He reaches up where an old war-axe is crossed with a shield and sword on one of the great marble pillars. He takes the shield and axe--thrusts the sword into a potted palm and goes to his bed, lays down.

CUT TO:

NIGHT--HILLS--A Shepherd tends his flock in the pass of pines along the Road of Kings--the paved road from Aquilonia to Zingara and the exotic south. The Shepherd watches as suddenly all his sheep stand at once and start bleating. His dogs steady them but their panic grows and then he hears a rumbling in the ground--a shaking like a distant slow earthquake.

CLOSE SHEPHERD--He rushes about in panic, and now the rumbling is more rhythmic and precise. He looks at his sheep and down the moonlit road that is suddenly dark in the distance--the darkness moving towards him. He too like his sheep runs in panic.

CUT TO:

LOWER GATES--Kon and Metallus walk through saluting the guards and enter the castle.

CUT TO:

HALLWAY--The assassination party passes stealthily, rushing from pillar to pillar. Felexio urges them on--when they have passed, he pulls back a curtain--Fortunas in black armor with an upraised black cupid mask.

FORTUNAS

Now send for Kon and Metallus.

Two Praetorians in state armor go and eight more take up positions guarding the hallway with shield and pilum. Felexio is gone--Fortunas follows.

METALLUS--Climbing up a dark spiral stairway. He looks out a low doorway. Kon follows.

METALLUS

No guards! You are right!

CUT TO:

THE ROAD OF KINGS--Filling with darkness that, as it approaches, glints in the moonlight defining itself into the shapes of shield bearing men--darkly clad--six abreast--marching to a thunderous cadence made only by their booted feet. Ten thousand men--coming down the Road of Kings filling it like an endless throbbing reptile. No drums, no sounds, just the tramp of men, shields on their backs, coming on inexorably.

CUT TO:

CLOSE CONAN--Snoring--stretched out on his bed, a cover thrown over him from which protrudes his bootless feet and legs. He rolls on his side--snores loudly, oblivious to the door that creaks open. A wind goes softly through the room blowing silken curtains across dark figures clutching raised sharp glinting weapons. They creak through a cloud of silk, and approach the marble pillars of the royal bed. A slayer raises a spear--steps gracefully out of the silk.

Conan's hand flashes down and an object flies--clank! A heavy dagger pierces the neck of the man who lets out a horrible long gargling scream. Another rushes forward wielding a heavy cleaving blade--cuts through the brocade hangings and is met by Conan's shield. He rolls off the bed grabbing the sword from the palm. A quick up-thrust under the arm of the assailant--a blade flashes--caves into Conan's cuirass at the ribs. He gasps--hurls the sword at the man and grabs the axe!

CLOSE--FELEXIO--He fires a shaft--Conan ducks behind a pillar--the arrow glances off and into someone's face.

HERODION--Rushes forward sword in hand. A huge man who was a slayer in his youth--he swipes at Conan.



HERODION

Here--take him! Do you run from
me despot!

CLANG!--The blow is parried--Conan backs into the moonlight.
Herodion sees his face.

HERODION

You!

CONAN

Herodion! Don't let this happen.

Herodion charges in, swings a great stroke with both hands.

HERODION

Die Tyrant! Death to Tyrants!

Conan is only able to parry the stroke incompletely--the blade cleaves into his rib cage--bending the plate--Conan gasps in pain, blood spatters out over his hand as he shifts the blade in a whirling motion and cleaves down through Herodion's shoulder to his heart. Blood spews over him as Herodion bellows like a bull going down. Conan wrenches the axe free, spins around chopping another through the stomach and cleaving again in rage. An arm holding a sword pinwheels through the air catching on the silken gold brocade and staining it.

CONAN--Back to the wall, spreads his legs, spins the axe around him in his deadly kata--comes to rest ready. He stares out at them--hardened men, outlaws, mercenaries, soldiers--all are cruel, inured to the thick blood spattered and pooling under their feet. Immune to the cries of pain and gasping of death, they look at Conan--eyes gleaming. He is not like them. He is not from civilization. His ferocity is natural like a bear or tiger and it has no limit. They hesitate.

CONAN

Who dies first?

CUT TO:

ROAD OF KINGS--Now filled with the passing Legion. Its standards are dark bronze--an upraised hand, skull and eagle's wings-- Legion VII Rapacio(Rapacious). It's motto: "Let the Gods Show Mercy". Its men move ahead at the speed of a forced march, faceless in black armor, heads down--points of the pila gleaming in the moonlight. The very ground shakes.



CLOSE SHEPHERD--Crouched by some stone watching the procession from Hell pass. Again--no orders, no drums, as if the Seventh is a machine.

CUT TO:

DOOR--Metallus pushes open a heavy wooden barrier--they emerge onto the outside battlements and all can hear a clang and thunk of a weapon cleaving followed by a scream--more metal sounds and yelling come from a dark stairwell. They rush down it pulling their swords.

CUT TO:

WIZARD--Under the bed, sees feet and legs moving frantically--a body lays in a gleaming pool. Conan's feet are bare--he leaps--Crash! The bed shakes as he bounds over. A man falls in the foreground wearing a helmet that is caved in. The Wizard twists around--booted feet close by, facing Conan's bare feet on the marble floor--they thrust and parry, the clangs heard overhead. The Wizard reaches out and pulls one of the booted feet so that the man slips, going to his knee. Slang! An axe chop and the body falls headlong away--Conan is gone.

CUT TO:

CONAN--His face half soaked in shiny blood from a head wound. His arm gashed and his side leaking red down to his feet. He is gasping for breath, but holds the axe ready--his back to a pillar of black polished granite. He moves around, dark enemies crouching and close around him.

MERCENARY

Take him at once.

OTHER THUG

He is weakening.

CONAN

When the wolf at the top of
the hill is hungry--

One moves--Conan whirls the axe, shortening the grip and traps the blade in the curve of his. He turns it back wrenching the sword from the man's hands, and spins it up and cleaves down through the man's breastplate. A mist of blood hisses from the man's lungs as he sinks to the floor.

CONAN

--The food is always there.

Another two men thrust with lances--driving Conan back--an arrow whistles through his hair. Suddenly a scream from the outer room. A clanging crash. They turn--a body falls shaking. It is Metallus with his small round shield and falchion. He wields it expertly taking out another. Behind him Kon stabs a cloaked figure then beheads him as he bends over.

DOORWAY--FELEXIO--In cowed hood and wrap masking his face, sees that the tide is turning. Several shrouded Praetorians are behind him.

FELEXIO

Withdraw!

They cover themselves and duck back into the shadows.

CLOSE KON--Goes after the closest to Conan. Engages one with the blinding speed of the gladius and cuts him down--parries the other and sidesteps so that he and Conan are at the pillar together, almost back to back. The assassins again hesitate.

KON

Come on!

Conan looks over at him. His son, a bloodied sword flashing in the moonlight by his side. Emotion floods across his face, his eyes are swimming, pain throbbing through him.

CLOSE CONAN--Through the blood and sweat, a tear runs down his cheek. He sees Kon feint at one of the killers, the man's guard comes up, Kon goes under and chops him across the leg and withdraws just as quickly. The victim screams and rolls, twisting in the blood on the stone floor. The others turn and run. Metallus rushes in from the other side--two men drop weapons and bows. Kon pursues the others out into the hall. Conan leans against the pillar, sinking slowly. Metallus is over him.

METALLUS

We've survived again my friend.
Are you wounded badly?

Conan holds the axe up at the hallway.

CONAN

My son.

CUT TO:

KON--Rushing down the hallway oblivious to danger. Suddenly he finds himself alone. A wind blows on the lamps that barely light the darkness, voices are heard in the rooms, women crying, men questioning. Footsteps far away running. Kon relaxes, his neck feels cool, he senses something. The near lamp flickers and goes out.

Suddenly he whirls around ducking, something swishes over his head, a blade! He turns and sees a tall dark robed figure wheeling a halberd (bladed spear) expertly, and coming back for the opposite stroke. He parries with his hand supporting the blade of his gladius--Clang--the gladius is broken--his left hand cut--he rolls--sees spears on the wall across a shield, leaps in and kicks his opponent at the end of his stroke sending him back. He rolls up and grabs a spear, spins away as the halberd blade chops through the shield. Now the two face each other in darkness. They both have staff weapons.

They assume positions, the other countering perfectly. Swath! A stroke cleaves across Kon's armor, cutting his tunic sleeve. He thrusts--Cling! The man is well guarded with black plate. Another feint--an attack, metal clanging--then he closes, reverses his grip and slams his opponent in the head with the wooden butt on the staff. The man staggers back countering with a riposte that cuts Kon's cheek and ear. Kon arches out of the way and spears the man in the face only to have the blade glance off the black cupid mask that is revealed. They stand there for a second. Then the opponent backs into the darkness and cannot be seen.

FOOTSTEPS--Metallus with Royal Guards runs toward him down the hall.

METALLUS

Tribune!

He sees Kon--spear pointed at the darkness.

METALLUS

Where Tribune!

He sees, and a guard grabs a lamp off a wall, rushes forward. The dark corner is lit by the flickering flame. It reveals nothing, save the black shape of a doorway.

CUT TO:

SHEPHERD--Standing as the rumble of footsteps fades away. The sheep run around him bleating. He looks down the road, a thin wispy trail of dust begins to dissipate in the blue moonlight. Soon it will be as if nothing passed this way at all.

CUT TO:

METALLUS--KON--Striding down hallways, weapons brandished, their feet leaving echoes off the stones.

CLOSE KON--He feels his shredded ear. They hear footsteps--boots on the pavement coming up stairs--from the other direction behind them cries of alarm as pages and attendants rush to the King's aide.

METALLUS

Halt! Who are you?

MAN

I'm the cook Sire--Is the King all right?

OTHER MAN

What is this blood on the floor?

KON

The King lives--fetch the royal physician.

A couple of pale GIRLS from the seraglio look around the corner.

GIRL

The Master?

KON

He is alive--go back to your room. He will need you soon enough.

From the other direction come a large force of armed men in dark cloaks. As they emerge from the shadows they see Kon, Metallus, others. They cast back their cloaks revealing Aquilonian armor of the Praetorian Guard. The Emperor's favorite lackey, Clivus, stands mouth agape.

CLIVUS

Consul--How did you get here?

METALLUS

I came in the back way.

CLIVUS

We heard there was an attack on the King? Is he alive?

METALLUS

Very much so. He is not easy to
kill. Lucky we came though--

KON

How did you know?

CLIVUS

A page looked for the guards--there
were none, so we suspected a plot--
We sent for you--

(to Kon)

Tribune. How did you know?

KON

A Witch told me.

He turns and goes back into Conan's chamber as Metallus talks to them. He sees the Wizard binding Conan who sits on his blood spattered chair. Bodies litter the floor. Several physicians rush to him--blood still runs from fresh wounds. He is pale. He turns his head to see Kon.

KON

Father.

Conan smiles.

KON

Are you wounded gravely Sire?

CONAN (to Wizard)

Am I going to die?

WIZARD

Probably not.

CONAN

Then I am still King.

He pulls himself up--barely, and teeters dizzy with pain and loss of blood. He pulls his axe--shiny with crimson, holds it at his waist.

CONAN

I am King! And by this axe I rule!

DISSOLVE TO:

CONAN--Sleeping deliriously wrapped in bandages--soaking in red. He rolls on his bed while the Wizard sits in his chair mashing



opium. Conan's harem try tend to him, rubbing his shoulders, patting his head with cold soaked compresses. The Wizard leaves, goes to the door and sees:

KON--Sitting alone in the hallway in armor. Kon seems to be meditating, but looks up calmly at the Wizard.

KON

He is better?

WIZARD

He will be--

(hears drums)

What is that?

Trumpets sound distantly.

KON

The Emperor and Empress. They are entering the city with the Seventh Legion.

CUT TO:

DRUMS--Pounding slowly on camels--standards--skull eagles, upraised hand--the black brocade cloth banner of the Seventh, Rapacio. At the head, clad in golden muscled cuirass and bare headed, rides Fortunus, a golden wreath on his golden hair. At his side, also in sensuous golden armor, bare-thighed and hair blowing behind her, is Theodesia. She wears a gladius at her side, a band of jeweled gold around her head. A hooded falcon perches on her forearm. Behind in a chariot is the Commander of the Seventh, GENERAL NICOMEDIA SCAURIA CARNIFEXIA (the Butcher). Carnifexia is a woman! Clad in dark bronze armor and plumed helmet with jet-black hair and blue eyes, she is shapely yet brutally strong. As large as a man, she is a totalitarian enforcer, famous for her lack of mercy and sexual enjoyment of conquest and slaughter.

The Legion itself marches to a slow cadence (like today's French Foreign Legion). Each man is over six feet tall and wears bear skin cowls over their helmets. The drums beat and the Legion moves slowly from the shadowed streets into a space of light. The Zingarans watch from buildings and windows and street sides--encouraged to cheer by burly Aquilonian giants walking among them in chain mail.

CLOSE DIERA--HER MOTHER--Watch, her eyes are moist with apprehension.

AELDRA--OTHERS--Watch--the shadows of the standards pass over them. Aeldra looks up at the splendid figure of the Empress, their eyes meet. The Empress's gaze is icy cold and imperious, and turns Aeldra's eyes.

CUT TO:

THRONE HALL--The throne is empty. But the room is filled with Aquilonians and Zingaran court officials. Next to the empty throne on either side are the ivory curule chairs of Imperial authority. Closest to us sits Theodesia--magnificently sculptured and cruel. Fortunus is standing. Behind are Scauria Carnifexia, Felexio and Metallus.

FORTUNAS

For valor and disdain for your own safety. Indeed, loyal dedication to what we live for--holding the Sacred Line. I am pleased Publius Kon.

Now we see Kon, bowing.

FORTUNAS

--Take this small token of the State's gratitude.

Scauria Carnifexia steps forward with a wreath made of bronze.

CARNIFEXIA

The Crown of Bronze for defending the State's interests.

THEODESIA

A brave son--fighting at his father's side. How do you feel Publius Kon?

KON

I would have done the same for any ally. It is my duty my Empress.

She smiles.

KON

It just happened to be my father.

This is unexpected--gives Kon an edge. Theodesia is surprised and smiles at him.

THEODESIA

And how fares the King, Publius?

KON

The King is mending, my Empress.
I'm sure that pleases you.

He bows to her, holding his crown on. He turns and leaves.
Clivus stands.

CLIVUS

Consul Gaius Metallus.

Metallus walks forward passing Kon. Metallus gives him a pleased smile. He walks up to the Emperor and Empress--salutes. Fortunus watches to see Kon gone, then returns the salute.

FORTUNAS

Alas, the worthy Metallus, a man of the highest order. We--we are but the inheritors of civilization. Whereas men like yourself rise to ride the Public Horse. You are its true protectors. There is no honor I can give you Metallus. You have too many already.

He laughs.

THEODESIA

We thought you should know that the Zingaran Legion peacekeeping in Kara Khitai have revolted.

METALLUS

Revolted!

THEODESIA

Yes, mutinied. Killed their officers and any other of ours they could find. By the time authorities reacted they had marched off--disappeared into the desert.

METALLUS

Coming back here no doubt. Part of the plot. Who leads them?

Clivus leans in, Felexio looms over his shoulder.

CLIVUS

Skelas Michaelis.

METALLUS

The Protector of the Crown!

FELEXIO

Exactly! The King's right arm.

METALLUS

We've found a few who fled that night. They've confessed, but they want to see the King.

FORTUNAS

They must be crucified immediately.

METALLUS

But we might learn more from them.

THEODESIA

No, the Emperor is right. Let justice be swift. We know what is happening Here.

CARNIFEXIA

And we know what to do about it.

He looks at the huge bronze-armored Carnifexia whose eyes show the glint of satisfaction. He looks back to Theodesia and Fortunas.

METALLUS

--And the Zingaran Legion my Emperor?

FORTUNAS

Let them come home. I will slaughter them at the city gates. The Empress will enjoy the spectacle.

She takes his hand in hers and leans against him.

THEODESIA

That is all for now Consul.

CUT TO:

AQUILONIAN CANTONMENT--By the gates, a crowd of Zingarans watch in horror as four crosses are erected with men crucified on them. Carnifexia rides below in her chariot giving instructions as the crosses are raised. A fifth cross is still on the ground, where Legionaries nail the feet and hands of the thug, Gothio, who

threatened Conan in the inn not long ago. He screams out in pain with each hammer blow.

The Aquilonians work quickly. The Emperor, in a scarlet and golden robe, watches from a special tent. Theodesia is at his side holding him and watching the executions. Dust raises as a chariot comes down the hill from the castle.

CLOSE CHARIOT--Being driven by none other than Conan the King. He is wrapped in dark blue robes and wears his crown. He pulls up in front of the last cross, confronting Scauria Carnifexia.

CONAN

Who ordered this?

Felexio is suddenly there behind him with a huge blond Nordheimer Legionary.

CARNIFEXIA--An imposing figure, in thick bronze and purple robes looks him up and down.

CARNIFEXIA

Justice! Good Aquilonian--justice!
Reward for virtue--punishment for
wrong! You see King, how quickly
Aquilonia punishes the transgressor?
After all he tried to kill--you.

Conan pulls the chariot close to the man he knew. The eyes wide in recognition. His mouth opens as if to speak but he says nothing.

CARNIFEXIA

He seems to know you.

Conan whirls around.

CONAN

He should. I am his King! Is his
King but a dog, that Aquilonia crucifies
his subjects at will? Is the King too
weak to do his own justice?

CARNIFEXIA

Aquilonia makes no account of her
actions to barbarian Kings.

Conan faces her.

CARNIFEXIA

He will die as the State wishes.

Conan looks at the man's face--now with eyes that are pleading to him. The man moves his lips. Conan leans close.

GOTHIO

Not--this way.

CONAN

No--

He leans back, looks at the menacing Amazon form of Carnifexia, then to Felexio, then down. Suddenly his robe is drawn aside and with a flash of steel he buries a short sword up to the hilt in Gothio's side. Blood runs over his hand, the horses smell it and lurch forward. He pulls the sword out and Gothio lets out a long sigh and his head falls limp and dead. Conan wheels around.

CONAN

He dies as I wish--like a man.

Carnifexia steps forward her hand on her gladius. Conan leans out and slaps her with a powerful back-hand using the flat of his bloodied blade. She recoils but doesn't fall, her sword drawn. Felexio draws too, the soldiers ready spear and shield. Conan wheels his chariot around facing Carnifexia.

CONAN

You want some of it bitch!

(to Felexio)

What about you? I'll show you who rules here!

Suddenly a voice rings out.

VOICE

He rules.

They turn. It is Metallus--walking towards them.

METALLUS

After all it is *his* kingdom.

He stands next to Conan's chariot.

METALLUS

We are just guests here.

He looks up at Conan.

METALLUS

Go back my friend. I will mend
whatever needs mending here--

He stares down Felexio, smiles at Carnifexia.

CONAN

Which river do you drink from
Gaius Metallus?

METALLUS

The one that quenches my thirst.

Conan pulls his matched horses around and thunders off under the
five crosses.

CUT TO:

THEODESIA--Walking with Metallus, she wears a white silken robe,
part of which trails away in the twilight breeze.

THEODESIA

I was especially pleased with your
handling of the King, Consul.

METALLUS

It is what you employ me for Empress.

THEODESIA

--But--He did defy an Imperial Officer.
One of my favorite Generals.

METALLUS

Perhaps we should be tolerant.

THEODESIA

Because Conan is your friend Consul?

METALLUS

Perhaps he should be arrested and
put to death.

Theodesia stops.

METALLUS

But if you decide to do so, remember
that Aquilonian law requires that
Royal blood cannot be spilled except
in battle.

THEODESIA

Suffocation, wrapped in felt and ridden over by horses? Drowning? It is too warm to freeze a man.

METALLUS

My dear Empress you are too imaginative. I recommend poison.

THEODESIA

Why of course, how obvious.

She looks him over differently.

THEODESIA

I thought he was your friend Consul.

METALLUS

I am only a servant of the State my Empress. It is not for me to decide.

CUT TO:

Night--KON--Walking through the streets of Messantia, head bare with the tunic and cloak of an ordinary citizen. He is careful and wishes to see as few as possible. He knocks at the door of the Pictish Witch. It is open. He pushes it. She is sitting by the fire--Diera at her side laying seductively.

WITCH

You could not stay away from her could you?

KON

No.

Diera rushes to him throws her arms around him. He kisses her fiercely, then looks at her mother. His eyes are savage.

WITCH

I'll leave you alone.

She gets up gracefully and is gone into a back room. He looks around not trusting something.

DIERA

I worried. You could have been killed.

He pulls her down by the fire and takes her with a passion that is ancient, racial, beyond his control.

DISSOLVE TO:

KON--Laying by the fire with his breeches on but shirtless. His sword lays at his side and his arm is around Diera. A jug of wine is nearby, and a rabbit roasts on the flickering fire. Kon has dozed off and a shadow passes over him. First Diera's eyes open, she sits up covering herself and awakens Kon who looks up into the face of:

CONAN--Looming over him, the Witch at his side.

KON
How did you find me?

WITCH
I brought him.

Conan kneels over him.

CONAN
Quiet! Listen to what I say.

Kon starts to speak, Conan puts his hand out.

CONAN
They are going to kill me.

KON
Who?

CONAN
You know who. Your masters. The Emperor, Civilization. Aquilonia! They have to! --I defy them--They crush those who defy them!

KON
But you are their--

CONAN
--Friend and ally? You believed that which they taught you about the Sacred Line? The chain that is stronger than any man? Bigger? Greater?

KON

Yes.

CONAN

Well the line is made of trust and faith, not steel. And that is where they lie! They use our faith and trust and we are fools in their eyes. They betray us and it is the worst thing men do. But they will pay.

He grabs Kon's hand and grips it in his fist.

CONAN

Trust Crom and yourself. I once told you that.

KON

I listened!

He puts a crude crown in his hand.

CONAN

This is the true Crown of Zingara not that silly thing I wear. It is made of iron which we take from the ground and hammer with our skill and sweat and make something of. This is the true wealth of man. It is yours if you earn it.

Kon pulls himself up, looks at the crown--it is crude, ancient from the bowels of the earth.

CONAN

You must take the girl and her mother. I've left jewels.

He grabs a sack full of something.

CONAN

You must leave this place--You cannot do anything for me. Go amongst the Picts and they will know what to do.

Kon grabs his other hand.

KON

I'll not leave you father!

CONAN

Men are not great. They are not gods, just men and they fool themselves. They are greedy, lustful and blind--but they know what is right and what is wrong. I was wrong and I can never make that up to you.

Kon takes the crown of iron.

CONAN

There are no great races or peoples. Only the strong and the weak, the false or the true. Being a fool-- You can be so much more than I.

He gets up goes to the door.

CONAN

It's up to you now.

He is gone before Kon can follow, but he jumps up anyway. Diera looks at him, the Witch looks to him. He holds the crown in his hand.

KON (to Witch)

Who was my mother?

WITCH

Some say it was the Daughter of the Snows.

KON

Take me to the Picts.

CUT TO:

WATER--Pouring over marble--cascading down upon Conan, who sits under an artificial waterfall in his baths. Fire pots give off a red hue as they warm the water. A faint steam drifts overhead. Conan is attended to by his concubines who rub his shoulders and dress his wounds with scented oils. Conan looks off down an arcade where gossamer curtains blow in a faint breeze.

He sees a shadow--it grows into a distant sensuous figure of a graceful woman. Conan snaps his fingers. His concubines look to him. He dismisses them with a wave. They scurry off.

Now the figure glides toward him, indeed all silk, and the light reflecting off a smooth oiled thigh or shoulder. The woman is followed by a servant who bears a tray. She moves with a slow walk--stopping tentatively behind the thin curtains. Conan stands and wraps himself in golden cloth.

ZULIEKA

I have not seen you since they tried to take your life.

CONAN

It's been too long.

ZULIEKA

Are you well my lord?

CONAN

Enough.

She enters and lays down on an elevated cushion. She indicates the tray be placed before her.

ZULIEKA

Roast porks and veals to give you sustenance. And wine to forget your pain.

CONAN

We barbarians don't feel pain. But we enjoy wine.

She pours two goblets--the slave leaves. She passes him some meat on a skewer. He takes it and eats it beastly, lets the grease drip down his chin.

ZULIEKA

How does it taste?

He grabs her by her hair twists her head to him and kisses her roughly. She tries to pull away but he kisses her deeply. She gasps, then bites at his neck and pulls away smiling wantonly.

ZULIEKA

You haven't tried the wine.

He looks in her eyes then to the goblet puts it to his lips and drinks it down fully. Then he runs his tongue over his lips.

CONAN

Wine of Shiraz. Full, with hints of cobra venom and a faint taste of almonds. Black nightshade? Smooth with a long finish.

She suddenly has fear in her eyes.

CONAN

Why there is just enough for you.

He grabs her goblet in one vice-like grip and in a lightening stroke, grabs her other hand wrenching her to him.

The two almost naked figures panting and struggling through the drifting mist and gossamer curtains--they arch and roll back into the shadows. She's gasping almost crying out--a gurgling sound, her choking cough--more gurgling--the goblet clinks and rolls across the polished marble trickling wine. Now only their breathing then she lets out a horrific scream. Her legs shining in the light thrash about.

CUT TO:

WIZARD--Running down the hallway.

WIZARD

Help me! Help me! Murder!
The King has been murdered!

People come out of doors--guards, lackeys, Aquilonian courtiers. Felexio is suddenly there in tunic, but holding a sword.

WIZARD

Murder! The King is dying!
He's been poisoned!

Suddenly Metallus is there with Clivus.

METALLUS

Where?

He grabs the Wizard.

WIZARD

In his bath--the Lady Zulieka--
She is poisoned too!

Metallus and the others rush past the Wizard. He turns and sees in the hallway, Carnifexia, without armor, the Emperor and Empress. They whisper to each other.

CUT TO:

BATHS--Zulieka twists in a few final convulsions on the marble, and slides headfirst into the water. Conan is face down and unmoving on the floor. His one hand clutching at a cloth of gold curtains, his other gripping the wine goblet. Wine is pooled around his head. He lays perfectly still while a few bubbles emerge from the water. Metallus rushes in--goes to Conan. Felexio and Clivus stand over.

METALLUS

He's dead--poisoned!

FELEXIO

She appears to have shared his fate--pity.

Metallus looks up at him.

FELEXIO

Such a beautiful woman.

Metallus stands as Fortunus and Theodesia enter--behind them Carnifexia, with several of her most strapping soldiers. Metallus turns to them.

METALLUS

The King is dead.

FORTUNAS

Then I claim sovereignty in the name of the Senate and People of Aquilonia.

THEODESIA

What of his son?

FORTUNAS (To Felexio)

Find him--there must be no complication.

Carnifexia strides forward.

CARNIFEXIA

Obviously a palace plot--his concubines, servants--they are all in on it!

Metallus looks to Theodesia.

THEODESIA

We must find his son.

CARNIFEXIA

Put them all to death, scourge
the disease before it spreads.

At that moment the Wizard rushes in and is seized.

WIZARD

I had nothing to do with it.
I was asleep.

FORTUNAS

I'm afraid we must nullify in
order to achieve balance and
stability.

Metallus leans down next to Conan as the Wizard is dragged away.

METALLUS

Cover him and take him to my
quarter. He was my friend.

FORTUNAS

Yes, he was.

CUT TO:

WOMEN--Scream as the Aquilonian guards bring in Conan's
concubines, binding them and sewing them up in felt shrouds as
they scream and writhe.

CLOSE WIZARD--Twisting as they sew the shroud over his face--

CLOSE METALLUS--Calm, detached, he looks at Conan, who is half
turned over. He reaches down, looks at his face--he seems quite
dead. The Wizard screams.

METALLUS

Take care of him damn you!

The men go to assist with the Wizard, and Metallus thrusts a
dagger inside the shroud and rolls Conan over on it.

METALLUS

Now finish this.

CUT TO:

THE BLACK RIVER--Kon, Diera and her mother are rowed across the moonlit water toward the dark impenetrable forest on the other side. They pass, going downstream, by the royal docks. Torches are seen coming down the pier. The party ducks down and slips by in the current and disappears into the darkness of the river.

CUT TO:

DOCK--Aquilonian Legionaries carry the bundled forms of the felt shrouds over their shoulders, they twist and struggle--the screams of the women muted by the thick fabric. A Priest of Mitra gives invocations followed by others bearing torches and swinging smoking pots. At the end of the pier stands Carnifexia, shapely in her gathered robe, her long black hair blowing in the wind.

CARNIFEXIA

First the women!

One is propped on her feet--Carnifexia pushes her over screaming to plunge into the dark water. One after another are quickly presented and dispatched this way, their screams gone with a splash, a bit of struggle. Carnifexia is caught up in the sheer sadistic rush of it all--finally the Wizard, kicking and thrashing.

CARNIFEXIA

Throw him!

Two burly Seventh Legion killers in Wolf's Heads throw him far into the river.

METALLUS

Now the King.

He grabs his ankles, Felexio the top, and they swing his dead form.

METALLUS

Goodbye comrade.

He is thrown far out and splashes into the moonlight and is gone. Metallus turns and walks away. Felexio follows. Fortunas and Theodesia watch from shore. Only Carnifexia seems to stare out at the blackness of the other side.

CUT TO:

UNDERWATER--FELT--A dagger ripping through--huge hands pull the shroud away--Conan bursts forth, swims after the sinking shroud

nearby--grabs it, rips it with his dagger--pulls the Wizard out by his collar. He swims up dragging the Wizard still half shrouded.

CLOSE CARNIFEXIA--She turns back to the others, who proceed back to the castle.

RIVER--Conan and the Wizard break the surface--Conan holds the Wizard's head up. Both gasp, they've drifted away from the pier but Carnifexia stops--looks back. Conan goes under with the Wizard. She watches a second, seems satisfied then goes on. Conan and the Wizard come up much farther down river.

CLOSE CONAN--WIZARD--Breathing hard.

CONAN

Can you swim?

WIZARD

Not well.

CONAN

Then you'll drown.

WIZARD

The others--the poor women?

CONAN

They never hurt anyone. She'll pay. I swear to Crom she'll pay!

He grabs the Wizard by the collar and starts for the other side.

CUT TO:

THE FOREST--DARK--Shadows that glide like spirits. Kon makes his way through the waist-high ferns dimly lit by light of a filtered moon. A huge flapping thing breaks into flight from a tree overhead. Diera gasps in fright and clutches her mother. They look to Kon and his glinting short sword.

WITCH

Do you believe in magic?

KON

My father once told me, when I was a boy, that all things of this earth can be cut with steel.

WITCH

He is wrong, all things that are
warm and have the blood of life--
But there are things that are cold--

She is interrupted by movement ahead--men. Dark and crouched, they stand out of the ferns. The Witch steps forward and speaks in a strange Gaelic tongue that is not like speech at all, but more like song. It has definite rhythms and meter to the sounds. She is answered by one of the dark men. They move ahead, she follows with Kon and Diera.

CLEARING--They emerge. Two chariots are brought up, their drivers fierce in the moonlight, with red hair tied over their heads. They are bare-chested and covered in blue tatoos that even show in the moonlight. They wear trousers of a Tartan plaid wool, and carry long ornate swords at their waists. Kon is wary

WITCH

Get in.

He does--the Pict looks him over contemptuously, but Kon is probably equally as scary to him. Diera gets in with him, holds him. The Witch climbs in the other chariot, and the driver lashes the horses and they hustle through the forest, the dappling moonlight flickering over Kon and Diera.

FENS--Wide gleaming marshes--the two chariots run across the horizon to:

HILLS--Low, covered in heather and stones--the moon, low in the night sky now, as they make their way.

CUT TO:

CONAN--WIZARD--Warming themselves over a small fire of coals by the side of the river. It is early dawn. Neither have much clothing and shiver in the early chill.

CONAN

Yesterday I was a King.

WIZARD

And today?

CONAN

Cold and hungry. Life is never
disappointing.

CONAN

Crom, I'm still here and I
enjoy your joke.

They hear horses. Conan douses the fire and the two throw themselves into an irrigation ditch and half submerge. Along a nearby road, a patrol of Aquilonian Cavalry thunder past, bearing the Upraised Hand Standard of the Seventh Legion.

CUT TO:

CONAN--WIZARD--Staring at an old plow horse and mule corralled behind a farmer's hut. It is still dawn.

VOICE

You want a horse?

They turn and see a sturdy gray-bearded FARMER--two large Young Men have gotten between them and the road. The old Farmer has a spear. The boys have a mallet and a scythe. Conan looks them up and down.

CONAN

Yes.

FARMER

How you gonna pay for it? You don't even have any shoes--Your Majesty.

Conan stiffens.

CONAN

You know who I am?

FARMER

They say you are dead.

CONAN

Do I look it?

FARMER

Close--and older than I remember.
Crassides--Primus Pilus--Third Cohort.

He comes to attention, the spear straight up.

CRASSIDES

These are my sons--Attention boys!
--The King!

They do likewise, smiling.

CRASSIDES

You don't remember me Sire. Of course I wasn't talking to Generals or Kings in those days, and when you retired us and gave us this land, I was just another soldier.

CONAN

Tell me Crassides, was I a good King?

CRASSIDES

Far as I know Sir. You made us rich and fat. And you were just. A just King, that's always the best King. Damn those bastards for killing you Sire. They say your son is still around though. They're looking for him.

CONAN

To kill him, so they can claim Imperium over Zingara. How do you feel about that Crassides?

CRASSIDES

Legionary Crassides Sire. I feel I would rather die a free man at your side.

CONAN

Do you think others would feel this way? Follow a dead King?

CRASSIDES

My boys--Right boys?

They nod. Conan looks them over--an army? To fight al
Civilization with? Yesterday he was King. He looks up

CONAN

Crom?

CUT T

A STONEHENGE-LIKE TEMPLE--Bare monoliths on a stark rock strewn ridge in the Pictish highlands. It is a dark afternoon and a storm has blown through. The skies are angry gray and black. Kon, wrapped in his cloak, stares out at the bleak landscape. Diera and the Witch take shelter below in the lee of the great stones. He turns, leans down to her.

KON

Is my mother still alive?

WITCH

No!

She pauses--looking away.

WITCH

--And yet--she is with us.

KON

Tell me!

WITCH

She was taken by the Ice Worm.
They gave her to the Ice Worm.
Some say she lives in it still,
like all its victims.

KON

Who? Who did this?

WITCH

Priests--Shamans--long ago--Perhaps
because she slept with your father.
Because she bore you.

KON

How do you know?

WITCH

It was cold for four years--as
if the ice were coming back. We
remembered the ice in our dreams.

She grabs him.

WITCH

The ice is gone--the old race is
gone. Even the Worms of the Earth--
gone. Only the One remains and so
we gave her to him.

KON

You?

WITCH

Yes. I was a Priestess of the Moon.
All men wanted me, but--

She strokes Diera's head. Diera's eyes blaze.

WITCH (distant)

The Snow Giant's daughter was more
than I. She was the most beautiful--
she had the power to blind men with
desire. An so my voice was against
her, and we took her to the Ice Worm's
lair. And I thought she was gone.

Tears roll down her face.

WITCH

I knew you would come back--Your
father would be a King. --My
daughter--all this I saw--I knew
and it came to be. I am--dammed.
The gods will not take me and
give me peace.

Kon leans back against the stone, the wind blows cold across his
face. His soul is chilled.

KON

--Then we are both damned--The
Ice Worm.

WITCH

--She--the Snow Giant's Daughter
said that the spirit of the thing
entered your father and that you
are its son.

KON

You take me to its lair and we shall
see who's son I am.

CUT TO:

NIGHT--Trackless fens and ridges of white rock, damp and cold
with the wind. A huge moon rising throws its light on Kon's
face. He strains to move a huge slab of rock, carved with
ancient runes.

WITCH

What will you do? You cannot
kill it with steel--it is cold--
colder than the great ice.

He reveals steps crudely cut ages before, going into a dark
primeval darkness. He slips down, tucking his gladius in front.
He barely squeezes in.

KON

The helmet--bag.

She hands them to him, he wedges down into the darkness.

CUT TO:

A SPARK--Again, then Kon's face is illuminated by the cloth and
powder he has sprinkled, as the fire lights.

WOOD--Small pieces added--Kon looks over his shoulder. The cave
is rounded, with ridges like the inside of some beast. Ice on
the floor gleams. Kon puts more wood on the fire--it glows. He
takes out a water skin that he uses like a bellows to blow on the
blaze. Then he adds pieces of black anthracite--the coal of the
fens and marshes.

CUT TO:

COALS--Red hot glowing--Kon's sword stuck in them.

CLOSE KON--He looks at the floor--strange shapes carved into it
by something. Piles of bones--cracked and mashed in the corners.
The bones are ground and munched, but parts of skulls and ribs
identify them as human. Kon stirs the coals with his red hot
blade.

CUT TO:

THE BLACK AND RED WOLF HEAD STANDARD OF THE ZINGARAN
LEGION--Marching in the dust along the river bank--they extend
back into a cloud of dust--ten thousand men. They walk like men,
not like the drilled machine of the Aquilonians. But in this is
their strength, for they are coming home to their wives, sons and
daughters in peril. At the vanguard is Michael in armor. He
sees dust ahead.

MICHAEL

Dust, a chariot approaching.
Archers front!

Archers fan out, ready for what comes.

DUST--Out of which trots a mule with Conan astride it, a cape blowing from his shoulders. Behind him trots the plowhorse pulling a crude wagon with the Wizard and Crassides. His sons run alongside carrying scythes.

MICHAES--Grins widely. He cannot believe it.

MICHAES

The King!

Conan pulls up his mule--he wears a ridiculous wide hat of straw.

MICHAES

Hail Sire, I am glad you live.
Where is your crown?

CONAN

I left it in Zingara.

He looks at the men who rush around. Many of these he trained, and all know him from their fathers and uncles. The words "Conan--King Conan--the King lives" are passed in whispers.

CONAN

Will you hear me? I want all of you to know what I say. My crown is in Messantia. They took it from me--Strangers that do not live there. I trusted them and I was wrong. I trusted and I grew soft and rich as well as foolish and weak. I forgot what it is to be a man. I became a King--*Their* King and so in time they took my crown!

He looks around at all the faces.

CONAN

But you still trust me. To you I am still your King, and the Crown, it is not mine to lose. It is yours, I have failed you, Comrades, and so I must go and get it back.

Silence.

MICHAES

Did you hear--the King, your King
is going back to get his crown! Are
there a few amongst you who would
help him? I will.

Voices--hands raised: "I--Yes--I will go."

MICHAES

A few--Who loves their country
and their King?

More men raise their hands.

MICHAES

A few who would march against
those who call themselves our
masters?

More shouting--now the whole Legion is astir.

CENTURION

That Crown of Jewels was not
our Crown!

AQUILIFER

Our Crown is Iron!

CONAN

Will you make me one? Will you
make me a Crown of Iron?

CENTURION

Yes--That is what a King must
wear! Iron!

Screaming--raising of shields, clanking swords against them--
screaming: "Yes! Yes! Crown of Iron!" Ten thousand men as
one: "Yes we will go with you to Zingara! Yes we will be at
your side!"

BELLOWS--FIRE--ARMORERS--Pounding out a round ring of laurels--a
Crown of Iron.

CUT TO:

COALS--Red hot in the darkness. Kon's eyes flash at the sound of
something deep in the darkness. A shrill keening, almost
mournful, emanates. He stands up, pulls his cloak around him as
it has suddenly gotten cold. Frost forms on the ribbed stone

surfaces. The barest light comes from the coals, but a dim flickering appears far in the darkness. Then he sees:

TWO GREENISH EYES--Radiating ahead, swaying from side to side but getting closer. The wall of the almost organic tunnel reflect briefly in the cold light.

KON--Up and walking towards it--frost forming on the walls--ice on the floor of stone.

THE FIRE--Goes out--the coals gone--only a blue cold dimness gives shape.

CUT TO:

WITCH--Throwing runes into the dirt wailing in some ancient tongue, crying and rending her hair--out of her mind. Diera shrinks from her.

CUT TO:

THE TUNNEL--Out of which emerges the Ice Worm--white, slippery as a frozen lake--coiling and thrusting not like a snake, but a giant worm. Its head is smaller than its body--round and white, with the two glowing eyes. It opens its mouth--rows and rows of small sharp teeth. Glistening on its head, between the eyes, is a spear-like horn of gleaming diamond ice. The keening--crying sound is almost like the Witch above. As the Worm comes forward, everything is frozen hard and glasslike around it. Now the whole pale body glows and lights the translucent walls of the cave, as if this is all in some immense dark glacier coming from the bowels of the earth.

KON--Cloaked in his robes--his mouth covered, walks towards it--stops--the creature slides at him, its head lifting.

KON

Crom! Damn you!

The thing seems enraged at the god's name--opens its blue mouth--blows out a frosty stench that freezes on Kon's face.

CLOSE KON--He casts back his robes to reveal his helmet held by its straps--glowing--filled with coals. He pulls his reddened sword from it and back-handedly flings the helmet and its fiery contents into the yawning mouth of the Worm. Coals and glowing metal are quickly gone. A shrieking occurs, the old Worm shakes and convulses, pulls in on itself. The noise takes on an unearthly, almost human intensity. The white skin convulses violently--suddenly the mouth opens and water-like liquid spews



out flooding the floor. Kon leaps on the thing behind the head and plunges his red hot sword into it. Water and red burst forth. It bleeds! He plunges again--this time behind the eyes, then he pulls the blade free and throws himself back.

KON--On the cave floor, watches as the Ice Worm writhes and twists screeching in its death agony. It's bloated belly turns out toward him. He stands and hacks it open--ripping down its length. Bones and water and red fluid thinner than blood gush forth. And something else--bright red and catching the dim light in a sparkle. A huge red stone--The Eye of the Serpent--Kon scrambles for it.

CLOSE--His hand reaches it--

KON--Suddenly he is imbued with a power and determination that is elemental. He kicks the flopping head away--pulls himself up and with his sword he swings at the horn of ice. Clang--he glares in primordial hatred--winds back--swings two handed for all he's worth. Clenge! The horn flies end over end into darkness.

CUT TO:

KON--Emerging from the ground, thrusting up like surfacing from deep water through the narrow passage way. He finds the sky dark with a violent storm. Wind--rain whips across his face. He looks to Diera, who is holding her mother's limp form--the Witch's rain soaked hair hanging down, her face ashen and lifeless. Diera's face is streaming with tears and rain. She howls incantations into the wind. Kon is wrapped in his cloak and soaked, his hair blows and his eyes are dark pools of unspoken emotion and now a strange wisdom, a maturity. He climbs out carrying the horn. Diera sees it and starts screaming, lets her mother go--she cowers away. He puts the horn in his belt and gently picks up the Witch's lifeless body--puts his forehead to her cheek and holds her. Then he stands and reaches for--Diera comes to him. He takes her hand.

CUT TO:

TEMPLE OF MITRA--Throbs to an ancient cadence of drums, the low chant of thousands of voices. Fortunus, Emperor of the Civilized World--ruler of an empire from Zingara to the Vilyet Sea, bows with the exquisite Empress Theodesia before the Pontifex Maximus, who bestows the blessing of Mitra upon them. Behind are the Consuls, Legates, Tribunes and the black mass of the Legions. The storm rages dark and furious here too.

SOLDIERS OF THE FRONTIER LEGION--Clad in golden armor lead a white bull up the granite steps to an altar of purest marble, where a Headsman with an axe waits.

CLOSE THEODESIA--Arching her back and beckoning to the gods of thunder, lighting, darkness and power. The rain runs down her face and arms and breast.

THE AXE MAN--Huge and dark, lifts his ceremonial weapon.

CLOSE THEODESIA--In some realm of passion as lightning illuminate her face and gleaming eyes--the thunder claps.

MARBLE STEPS--Blood running down them.

PONIFEX--LEGION--CROWDS--Bowling and chanting a foreboding chant.

CUT TO:

THE FENS OF PICTLAND--Fires burning in another circle of crude monoliths. A strawman about ten feet high adorned with heather and garlands of flowers buffets in the wind. The storm has broken. Below sits the Pictish King, Orlock Mac Morn on a throne of stone slabs. He is surrounded by his retinue of blue painted and tattooed war-men. Pictish girls dance in a circle around the straw-man as it is set afire. As the flames and smoke leap up, we see the Witch's body, surrounded by Druids, who bear her to a grave on the lonely moor. Kon and Diera watch as women come forth with garlands of flowers and drape them over the dead Priestess.

CUT TO:

ORLOCK MAC MORN--Looking sternly down from his seat.

MAC MORN

Why would I help you? How do
I know you are what you say?

Kon produces the simple round crown of iron that Conan gave him.

MAC MORN

Anyone could make that.

KON

The Priestess--You yourself know
she was once great and--

MAC MORN

She is dead!

He stands up.

KON

What of this!

He pulls from his belt the crystal horn of the Ice Worm. Mac Morn recoils as do the Druids--the women scream out prayers and incantations.

KON

My father said I must break his sword! If the spirit of the Ice Worm was with me then I am free now! And you--you are free of the ancient curse, but while you hesitate our enemies grow stronger!

CUT TO:

MAP--In a splendid tent in the Aquilonian cantonment. Officers and scribes wait for orders. Fortunus sits on an ivory campaign chair, magnificently armored. The Legate commanding the Frontier Legion and Carnifexia wait along with Metallus. Felexio strides in wearing dusty armor and cape.

FELEXIO

They are here--

He points to a position north on the edge of Zingara.

FELEXIO

They are on our side of the Black River.

METALLUS

Their strength?

FELEXIO

One Legion--the Wolf's Head, and what rabble travel with them.

He hesitates.

FORTUNAS

Go on.

FELEXIO

There's rumors that Conan is alive. That he leads them.

FORTUNAS

He can't be! I saw him dead!

He quickly controls himself.

FORTUNAS (calm, confident)

What does it matter if he is. He is no more than a commander of barbarian auxiliaries.

METALLUS

They sometimes take potions, these barbarian Kings, to ward off harm. I'm not superstitious, but I've seen strange things. Maybe he is alive.

CARNIFEXIA

Then I will crush them and bring you his head.

METALLUS

No one can withstand the Seventh Legion, but let us make an example of them.

FORTUNAS

What do you mean?

He points to a tributary of the Black River--a valley leading to Messantia.

METALLUS

They will come up this gorge--try and storm the gates by surprise at night.

FORTUNAS

Why wouldn't they march up the road?

METALLUS

Because I trained Conan to strike fast and with surprise. This is consolidation of force--his only chance.

FORTUNAS

You seem to believe these rumors--of his being alive.

METALLUS

One must discount nothing.

FORTUNAS

Then what would you do Consul?

METALLUS

Let him come this way--only the gates will be held by a Cohort. He will stop there and when the sun comes up, the entire city can watch an Aquilonian Legion--

CARNIFEXIA

The Seventh!

FORTUNAS

--Crush the barbarian revolt.

He walks to the map.

FORTUNAS

The Seventh will be hidden beyond the northern road. We can block him that way and swing around to take him in the flank after he emerges from this ravine of yours, Metallus.

FELEXIO

The Cohort guarding the gates will be important--

METALLUS

I'll take that--

FORTUNAS

No--you'll be with me Consul. I'll need your--sage advise. You take the Cohort, Felexio.

FELEXIO

Thank you my Emperor.

FORTUNAS

--And you my goddess of strife--You will lend me your splendid command?

Carnifexia is angry at being cut out of all the glory, but she keeps her thoughts to herself.

CARNIFEXIA

An honor my Emperor.

CUT TO:

MARSHES--FOG--East of the Zingaran Road. The distant Rabirian Hills loom as a shadow. The rebel army vanguard pushes through the wetlands. A SCOUT sees higher ground ahead, and as it becomes distinct, it is seen that lines of figures in loose groups appear.

SCOUT
Figures--Somebody's ahead!

CENTURION
Infantry to the front in phalanx.

Men rush forward and form a line.

CENTURION
Cavalry and archers forward on
the flank!

The horses have trouble negotiating the swamp. The Centurion can now see that it is a crowd of civilians, just people waving--they spread out and it can be seen that they are townsfolk, farmers, refugees from the harsh Aquilonian oppression. Wagons and carts follow. Men and women rush amongst the troops shaking hands, kissing them. Horses are startled. The Centurions bark out orders keeping the troops in formation. Here and there, a trooper sees a wife or mother, a son or daughter, and starts for them.

CENTURION
Hold your Line!

Conan and Michael ride through the openings in a chariot driven by Crassides, now wearing armor and a helmet.

CRASSIDES
See Sire--I told you.

Suddenly Conan sees something.

CONAN
Over there--to the left!

He sees a tall blonde woman, stately and graceful in her cape.

CRASSIDES
You have an eye for them Sire.

He rides over. The woman, Aeldra, turns to them, she doesn't rush--she stands tall and majestic as they thunder up and stop. Conan looks down at her. She looks into his eyes, glistening with tears. She wears a dagger at her trim waist.

CONAN
How did you know?

AELDRA
I heard rumors.

He reaches for her, pulls her up into the chariot, they embrace. Tears roll down his face. She pulls part of her robe up and wipes his eyes.

AELDRA
It's not right for a King.

CONAN (soft)
She said you would come from the depths of hell to fight at my side.

AELDRA
Then I have.

He kisses her there and then, and the people cheer because it is good to see their King kissing a common woman, one of their own.

CUT TO:

DUSK--METALLUS--FORTUNAS--Watching from the battlements as the Seventh marches out below.

FORTUNAS
The city seems empty, Consul.

METALLUS
They are afraid my Emperor.

FORTUNAS
What have they to fear? We are civilized men. We bring order to chaos. We allow the trader, the the merchant to grow, to flourish. It is only behind the shield and sword that art can bloom--poetry--literature. All are paid for by our arms. Do they fear wealth and power?

METALLUS

Those are things to fear my Lord.

FORTUNAS

They are *deities*. Do you believe in the gods Consul?

METALLUS

When it's appropriate Sire.

FORTUNAS

I don't! The gods are merely entertainment. The *real god* and there is only one--is power. The power of thunder, water, wind, fire. The power of men who are not afraid to use it. --What formation do we break these savages with tomorrow Consul?

METALLUS

The Line with encircling horns.

FORTUNAS

The School solution.

METALLUS

It has served me well Sire.

FORTUNAS

True, it bought you the Crown of Reeds and the Public Horse, but this must be a rout. Total war without quarter. Annihilation.

CUT TO:

NIGHT--THE ZINGARAN ROAD--Lying open under the moon. It fades into the distance, straight, of well cut stones--Conan stands looking down it. To his left begins the ravine--shallow here but stretching to steep tree covered cliffs on either side. Behind Conan are Michael, Crassides, the Wizard--a few chariots. Suddenly several RIDERS gallop up from the rear.

RIDER

Sire--The River!

Conan turns to his right, where flows the Black River in the moonlight. Something is there!

RIDER

Picts Sire! Thousands of them!

Conan can see great barges and canoes crossing towards him. No fires--no sound.

CENTURION

Shall I call to defensive formation?

CONAN

No!

CRASSIDES

But they are Picts Sire!

CONAN

Stand where you are! Weapons
at rest.

CUT TO:

ORLOCK MAC MORN--And others leaping from long canoes, weapons gleaming--dressed for war. With him are Kon and Diera. The Pictish King's men form around him. Mac Morn sees above, on the bluff:

CONAN--Robe flowing in the wind. A silvery crown of iron on his head, an axe and shield over his shoulder. Behind him, the vanguard of his army stand at ease. A horse neighs before an empty chariot. All glow in silver light.

MAC MORN--Walks to him--Kon at his side.

MAC MORN

How many are they?

CONAN

They have three Legions--The Frontier,
Emperor's Standard and--the Seventh.

MAC MORN

The Seventh--the Black Seventh?

CONAN

Thirty thousand men all together.

MAC MORN

That's enough for me.

He looks over at Kon.

MAC MORN

I brought your son along. Thought
you might need him.

Conan looks into Kon's eyes. Kon looks right back at him. They
love each other, but things will never be easy between them.

CONAN

I do.

MICHAES

How can we beat them? They are
Aquilonians--three to one against
us. They are the finest soldiers
the world has ever seen.

CONAN

We don't have to beat them. We
just have to beat one man, the
Emperor. What is his weakness son?

KON

Glory.

CUT TO:

NIGHT--GATES OF MESSANTIA--Riders hurtle towards them. Infantry
run in formation behind. On the gates stand Felexio and other
Legates. The wall is thoroughly manned with archers and anti-
siege devices.

RIDER

They come! They are here!

FELEXIO

Three Cohorts to the front!

Six hundred men in three thick phalanxes run and form the Line in
front of the gates. They hear a throbbing drumming sound--a
cadence.

FELEXIO

Close the gates!

CLOSE LEGIONARIES--They know what this means. They are
expendable. The gates are closed. Fire pots filled with naphtha
and ballistas are loaded on the city wall.

CLOSE THEODESIA--In golden sensuous curved armor and crimson robe. She stands on the battlements, hearing the drumming sound increase. She moves to Felexio's side.

THEODESIA

What is it?

FELEXIO

Why, their footsteps Empress--

(turns)

--Fire pots!

Ballistas fire, hurling pots of naphtha far into the night. They hit and explode in vicious spattering flame, and light a mass of Zingarans infantry. The Zingarans let out a roar and charge the Frontier Cohorts.

THE LINES--Clash together below as the Empress watches. Vicious fighting occurs in the front ranks. Fireworks--pots, flaming hoops, etc. are hurled at the attackers after falling on the hapless Frontier Legionaries. Men whirl about encased in burning armor screaming. Huge rocks are thrown next, taking out sections in the ranks.

CLOSE THEODESIA--Totally absorbed in the fighting.

CUT TO:

CONAN--Standing in the darkness with Michael, Crassides and Kon--watching part of his men in the futile attack. The rest of his Zingarans are in formation hidden by darkness, gleaming in the moonlight.

CONAN

Now they have us exactly where they want.

He turns to Kon.

CONAN

Now it's time for you to go. No matter what happens to us, you must not depart from the plan--Understand?

KON

Understood.

They look at each other, wanting to say something more, but neither one can show his emotion easily. Kon goes. Conan turns to Michael.

CONAN

Allow the vanguard to withdraw
and reassemble!

FIGHTING--Trumpets and drums sound a recall. The Zingarans cover themselves with their shields and retreat into the darkness. The Aquilonians advance several paces after them.

CLOSE--FELEXIO--He sees this.

FELEXIO

Hold--Reform and remain in formation!

The orders are shouted down.

CUT TO:

FORTUNAS--CARNIFEXIA--In war chariots. He gives her a nod, she holds up her hand. It is followed by the Iron Hand Standard of the Seventh. The entire Legion moves forward at the trot--armor black, chinking and clanking as the first light spills over them from the east.

RABIRIAN MOUNTAINS--Darkly silhouetted by a dramatic coming of dawn.

ZINGARAN LEGION--Reformed in the width of the defile, where the ravine comes out. Behind them, the steeply sided slopes and the covered heights.

CONAN--Raises his hand--the Wolf's Head Standard comes up. He looks down the Line--it is straight--precise. Michael is at his post at the far end. He looks out at the distant city walls--smoking, where the engagement was. On a hill on his right, he hears a beating thunder. Suddenly the entire crest comes alive with evenly spaced black figures running. They spill over and out forming into units.

CONAN

Zingarans! Prepare to engage the
Seventh Legion--Rapacio--the Butchers!

As one they pound their shields with their spathas and shout.

CONAN (to himself)

Crom! Again we are here. One thing
I know--You are watching, you old wolf!
The odds are long again, you enjoy that.
If I die--We will meet in Valhalla, I
will eat at your table. And if I live,
you will find other ways to torture me.

He salutes the sky.

CONAN

I hope you enjoy it!

He turns to the foe, which are formed into square Cohorts of black shields. Cavalry and lighter troops spill out to the sides. Behind, are the black chariots of the commanders as the war drums continue--ten thousand darkly armored men moving in perfect synchronization.

CLOSE SEVENTH LEGION--Their black painted shields with a gray mask of a demon. Their faces are covered with cupid masks--polished like obsidian. They advance as the war drums pound out a cadence.

CLOSE CONAN--Raises his axe. Drums sound the Zingaran advance--pila up.

CONAN

Steady the Line--Close your intervals.

They draw closer.

CONAN

Spike it!

The pila come down--the two shield walls rush together and crash. Horrendous but disciplined moving--spearing, thrusting--killing. A Zingaran shrieks and grabs his leg--another turns, blood pulsing from his neck over his comrades. The shields close ranks where they have fallen. An Aquilonian is stabbed in the face--his mask falls--he gags--others just drop like stones. Swords whistle like scythes. Lances rip through shields impaling sometimes two men.

CONAN--Watching the Line--Aquilonian Cavalry plunges in from the side. Conan meets them with Crassides and cleaves a man from his horse--he wades in whirling the axe like he practiced so long ago. Armor is smashed, pieces fly. Conan for a second is raised against the dawn sky hacking and cleaving with mighty strokes--arms and hands fly. Then the attackers are gone or dead. He turns back--sees:

THE SECOND WAVE OF AQUILONIANS--Spilling down the hill and rushing to breaches in the fighting in spiked wedge formations. Over all this, Conan can see Fortunus in his golden armor, the perfect conqueror on his chariot, riding back and forth yelling orders and hurling javelins.

CARNIFEXIA--Behind the first Line, spearing a Zingaran officer through the throat. She sees Michael on his horse--turns her chariot and thunders towards him. Michael sees her coming--braces a lance--she cleaves it aside--swings out and hacks him in the arm with her sword. He drops the lance as she goes by and wheels around.

MICHAEL--His right arm crushed, he sheds his shield and pulls his sword with his left. Two loyal soldiers rush to guard him with their shields. She thunders down on them knocking one aside and cleaving the other through the head. She shakes him from her blade and strikes at Michael. Their steel clangs and sparks. But her hand is stronger. She beats him down to his knees and then buries the blade through his shoulder down to his chest. His eyes go blank--he stands. She rips out the sword in a spray of blood and he falls lifeless under her wheels.

CUT TO:

THE BLACK RIVER--Here the Zingaran civilians have built a barricade of hay bails and are inserting wooden spikes pointing out ten feet. Aeldra, like the other women, have armed themselves with spears, knives and short spikes. Men have wood axes and scythes--anything. They hear the roar of battle from the ravine. Aeldra feels at her neck. She wears the great jewel--The Eye of the Serpent.

WIZARD

What do you feel?

She clutches it.

AELDRA

Danger, fear, love and--hate.
Why? Why did he give this to me?

CUT TO:

CONAN--Seeing the Seventh is prevailing. His own Line faltering--death and dismemberment everywhere.

CONAN

Fall back! Reform! Fall back
to the gorge.

Trumpets blare recall. The Zingarans as one turn their shields and run. The second Line lets them pass--spiking their pila and briefly holding the Aquilonian onslaught.

CLOSE METALLUS--In his chariot, his sword in the air.

METALLUS
Hold the formation!

They start to go.

METALLUS
Hold! Do not break!

Fortunas spurs up to them.

FORTUNAS
Look at their backs. We've beaten
them you old fool! Now is the chance
to destroy them all!

METALLUS
No--Not yet!

ZINGARAN LINE--Running. Conan races back, plants the Standard at
the narrow gorge.

CONAN
Reform on me!

The Line forms--the Aquilonians come at a quick pace, but are
still disciplined. Conan sees they cannot go around him now. He
looks up the steep slopes to the dark woods. Crassides is by his
side--bloodied--his sons protecting him.

CRASSIDES
We cannot hold!

CONAN
I know.

The shock of the Aquilonian Line hitting is like an earthquake.
Men scream and go down in the front ranks. Little groups form
into circles and die where they stand--fighting.

CUT TO:

PALACE WALLS--Theodesia can see it all. Felexio is at her side.

THEODESIA
He is advancing into the gorge.
The Line is--

FELEXIO
Yes, the Line is breaking to
pursue them.

CUT TO:

METALLUS--Even on his chariot with Fortunas. He sees the Zingarans start to break and run. He hears a wailing battle cry and Carnifexia thunders past swinging a mace--running down stragglers.

CARNIFEXIA

Come brothers--To the death!

She is lost in orgiastic slaughter--slamming--rending--riding across the lines, leaning out of her chariot harvesting life.

CLOSE CONAN--Hacks through a shield, killing the man--he wheels and cleaves another through his helmet.

CONAN

Withdraw! --Withdraw to the redoubts!

He turns like the others--running headlong in retreat.

THE SEVENTH LEGION--Surge after them, still held by their Centurions to a fast ragged advance. Everywhere in the Line, they surge and strain at the restraint.

CLOSE FORTUNAS--Behind them Carnifexia beckoning.

CARNIFEXIA

They are running! Kill them all!

METALLUS AT THE EMPEROR'S SIDE--They see over the Cohort's backs, the Zingarans in scattered flight--ahead where the ravine narrows, a Line is forming again--the Wolf's Head Standard flies from a rock. Fortunas turns to Metallus mad with frustration and blood lust.

FORTUNAS

You want it don't you?

METALLUS

What?

FORTUNAS

You want it--for you--for your own glory.

METALLUS

What, my Emperor?

FORTUNAS

Victory!

Metallus glances quickly up at the dark trees above--the steep ravine walls--he glares back at Fortunus.

METALLUS

Alright! --You want a Crown of Reeds! That's where they grow!

He points to the Zingaran last stand.

FORTUNAS

Centurions! Release them! Come with me Aquilonians! Follow my sword!

He whips his horses and charges--the whole Seventh breaks and charges after him--the Cavalry, Carnifexia--all go at the thin line of Zingarans.

CLOSE CONAN--Under the Wolf's Head Standard.

CONAN

Let them pass! Pull back!

They run up into the rocks as the Aquilonians thunder by. Now Conan on a rock hacks down those below who try and get him. His fellow Zingarans form into tight little shield walls to protect themselves. Others run towards the barricades at the river, where the women and old men are. The Aquilonians hotly pursue in a running melee.

CUT TO:

KON--High in the woods. He sees now the terrible rout of his father's Legion. But he also sees what it has done. The Seventh is an undisciplined rabble stretched out in a line of black in the dust below.

CONAN--Looks up.

CONAN

Now! Trumpets!

Trumpets sound a new call. A charge. The Wolf's Head is brought to Conan's side.

TREES--Dark and steep, suddenly fill with thousands of Picts howling and waving steel swords--carrying steel shields, they

hurl themselves down the slope.

CLOSE ORLOCK MAC MORN--Waving his sword. He is first amongst the enemy--cleaving and hewing--blood coursing through the air.

CLOSE CONAN--Descends into the fray.

KON--Riding a horse down the steep slope, engages first one cavalryman then another, from whom he wrestles a lance before gutting him with the gladius.

CIVILIANS--Brace as the chariots of Fortunas and Carnifexia run uncontrolled into the barricade. The vanguard of the screaming Aquilonians catch up to them and a vicious killing ensues. Fortunas hurls javelins then hacks down old men and women as they close around him. His chariot is turned over, but he comes up and hacks his way through to the river's edge.

PICTS--ZINGARANS--Descend upon the Aquilonians, who are attacking the old and the women. The Legionaries are dragged down and killed with mallets and spikes. It is here that the full fury of revolution takes hold.

WOMEN--Hold up bloody helmets.

SOLDIERS--Stab and chop already dead enemies.

CUT TO:

CONAN--Rushing to the river, sees Carnifexia turn her chariot--her sword red with the blood of women and children. She tries to make an escape back through the battle. Conan stands in her way--brings his axe across his chest. She charges screaming like a banshee wheeling her spatha. She seems suspended in time, an image of unearthly demonic evil. Her scream too is distorted and drawn out. As she thunders down on Conan, the old King knows what to do. He has spent a lifetime fighting demons. He feints first to one side, drawing the horses with the flash of his blade, then spins the other way, letting his axe leap out from him in a rounding backhand.

Carnifexia's howl is cut short by Conan's axe crashing through her chariot--shield, and finally her waist above her right hip. Plate armor and blood flies and spatter Conan, who rolls in the dust and comes up to see her sagging in the chariot that runs a circle and back to the river out of control.

CLOSE AELDRA--In the thick of fighting, wielding a spear. She sees the runaway chariot come across the lines of sharpened stakes. The driver sags, holding onto its side. The horses shy

from the pointed stakes and the chariot turns over in a splintering crash.

CARNIFEXIA--Impaled by a splintered stake and bleeding from her cleaved side lands in the mud of the river bank. She is sliding down and grabs at the tufts of grass. She looks up to see Aeldra standing over, a long spear in her hands. Carnifexia cries out in a feminine voice.

CARNIFEXIA

Help me! Please by Mitra, help me!

Aeldra puts the point of the spear against her breastplate and with a little shove pushes her. She slides into the river where, helpless from wounds and the weight of armor, she thrashes as she goes under.

CUT TO:

FORTUNAS--Running along the river bank--further down. He is encountered by one group of rebels, then turns as others surround him. They have scythes and mallets, small spikes and curved knives.

FORTUNAS

Do you know who I am!

MAN

Yes Emperor, we are your subjects.

FORTUNAS

--And you intend me to end this way.
It will cost you dearly.

He grabs a spear-point, pulls the man in--guts him with his gladius and takes the spear.

FORTUNAS

Have you no champion. This is just sport.

Suddenly Kon pushes through and dismounts.

KON

I am their champion. I am their prince and half a Pict--a fitting match for you, Alba Fortunas.

FORTUNAS

Yes, yes Publius Kon. I've been denied my pleasure at hurting you.

KON

I think you denied nothing.

He takes a lance from a man, they square off. It's the same old routine for which he was beaten: thrust--parry--thrust. Fortunas' point glances off Kon's shoulder--Kon spins--changes his grip. Fortunas thrusts like he did that night in Conan's palace--Kon parries, comes up the shaft turning with his own and quickly spears the Emperor in his armpit. He screams like a woman and Kon spears him again through his face. He quivers. Kon pulls back the spear, standing on guard, and Fortunas pitches over headlong down the river bank where he comes to rest--his head in the river trailing crimson.

THE GORGE--Conan walks through--the dead everywhere. The Picts are overwhelming knots of resistance and taking heads. Orlock Mac Morn has two heads, he throws them down as he goes after an Aquilonian officer. Everywhere friend and foe are scattered--all the way back up the gorge. Conan is looking for something. Some of his men see him and walk with him. Soon the Wolf's Head Standard is waving behind him. His face is bloodied--his crown dented by a sword blow. It saved him. Crassides limps at his side, helped by his sons.

CLOSE METALLUS--Laying in the tangle of his broken chariot--an arrow through his neck, a Pictish falchion imbedded in his side. Dead Picts are in a pile under and around him, his gladius broken. He looks up as a shadow comes over him. He sees Conan.

METALLUS

They--they broke the Line, my friend.
--It was--Sacred.

Conan nods.

METALLUS

I never did--I never broke the Line--
A sword--

Conan leans down and puts a Pictish sword in his hand. When he does, a weak laugh emits from Metallus, as if he could get up and fight. He instead raises his sword to the sky.

METALLUS

Now my friend--Now?



Conan plunges his sword two handed through Metallus' chest. faces come close together. Metallus breathes his last breath Conan's, his eyes thanking him--the sword falls from his hand clatters across his armor.

CUT TO:

THEODESIA--Looking down from the battlements of the Palace. sees the figures retreating--the Frontier Legion standing in defense--the dust, smoke, chaos from the gorge. It is plain Seventh Legion is no more and will never return.

FELEXIO

Shall we assemble a relief force
and try and break through, my
Empress?

She looks sharply at him.

THEODESIA

No! Hold the Line here with the
Frontier Legion. The Empresses'
Standard will conduct an orderly
withdrawal across the Thunder
River. The Frontier Legion will
act as rear guard. You may command.

FELEXIO

And the Emperor?

THEODESIA

He wanted martial glory. I hope
he found it.

He looks out sternly.

THEODESIA

He also broke the Sacred Line.
The Line--is what makes us strong.
What separates us from savagery,
Felexio. You understand that.

FELEXIO

I do my Empress.

CUT TO:

THE THUNDER RIVER--On the far side, the Army of Aquilonia--standards, banners, golden armor, drilled disciplined troops. Already they are building palisades and defensive ditches.

Behind them, the Road of Kings that leads to Tarantia, Capital of the World.

ON THIS SIDE--The unwashed masses of the people, their tribes, the clans, the warrior races. Strongly built ragged men and long-haired women--Picts, Zingarans, Cimmerians and other barbarian peoples. They wave weapons and totems in defiance.

The swift and deep Thunder River separates their worlds. King Conan stands on the bank, his arm around the blonde woman Aeldra. Nearby his strong son Kon sits a horse, and the witch Diera looks up at him. The King's Wizard throws a rock in the current, its splash and ripple quickly gone.

CONAN

They live where men thirst for power over others, where they crave the sanctity of scented waters, golden bowls and cloths of silk. They hide their need to enslave behind what they call compassion and humanity--it is a lie! And then we must always be waiting--vigilant in the dark for we know the truth--We are the People, and between our world and theirs is eternal war.

(pause)

"For I would hurl your cities down
And I would break your shrines
And give the site of every town
To thistles and to vines.
For all the works of cultured man
Must fare and fade and fall.
We are the Dark Barbarians
That tower over all."

The Wizard looks up at him--out at the river and throws another stone.

THE END

But there is more--Conan, Kon, Aeldra and Diera must find their destiny in the great struggle to come. This too will be told in "Beneath My Sandaled Feet", the final installment of R.E. Howard's "Conan".



W. H. R. 1882