

CONAN

*A synopsis of
the ultimate hero's
adventures*

the Barbarian



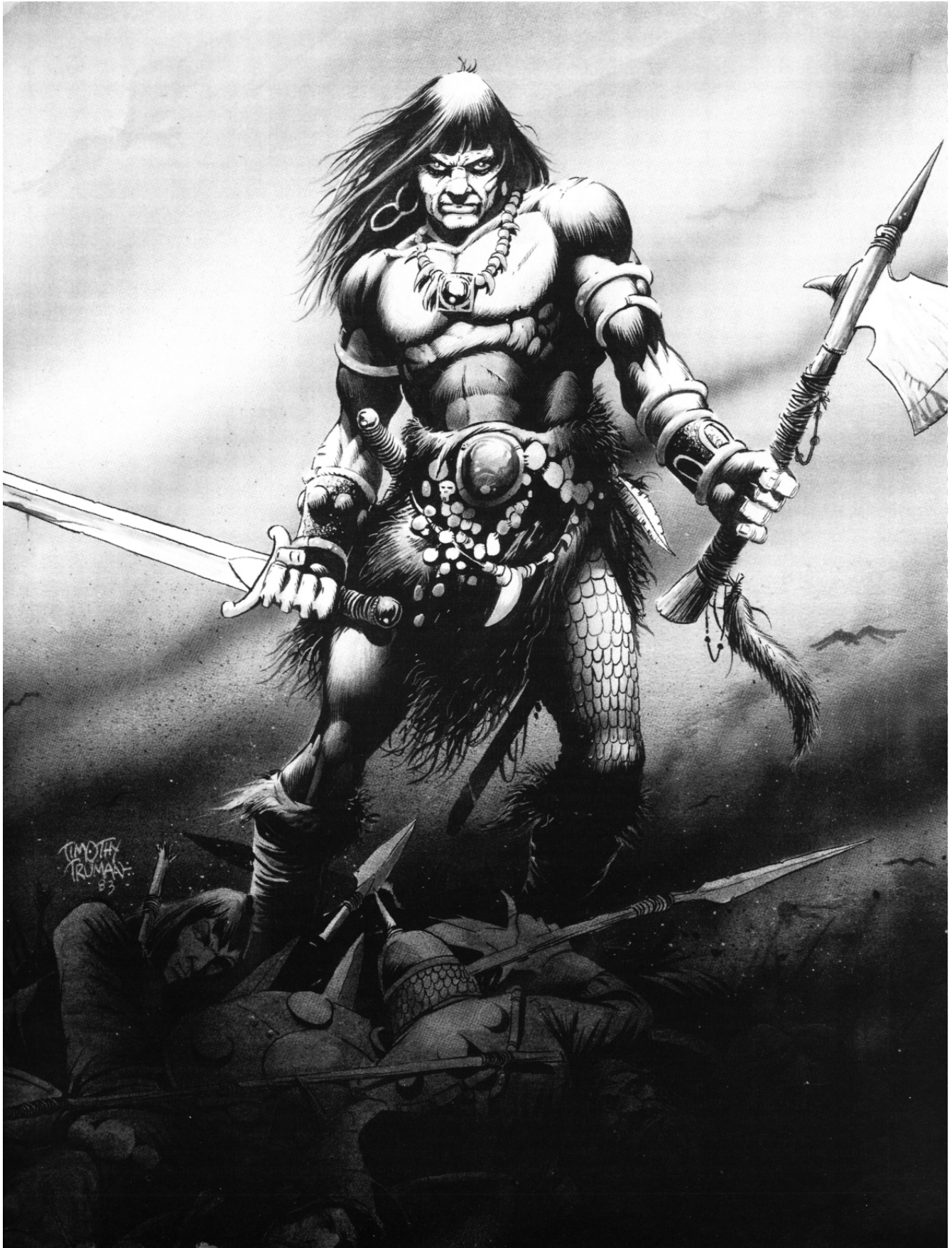
by L. Sprague de Camp

In the realms of adventure, fantasy, and imagination, few heroes can match the exploits of Conan the Barbarian. Created by Robert Ervin Howard in the early 1930s, Conan still grips our sense of bravado many years later — most recently in a feature-length film by Universal Studios.

L. Sprague de Camp, noted sf/fantasy writer, has compiled a synopsis of Conan's adventures for Ares™ Magazine. De Camp is the author or coauthor of more than 95 books, and 400 articles and stories, many of which deal with the Conan myth. De Camp is also no stranger to adventure: He has been chased by a hippopotamus in Uganda, by sea lions in the Galapagos Islands, and has been bitten by a lizard in the jungles of Guatemala. He may well be the ultimate author to present the ultimate hero.

- Editor

Illustration by Timothy Truman



In Robert Howard's Conan stories, before the earliest beginnings of recorded history "... shining kingdoms lay spread across the world like blue mantles beneath the stars — Nemedias, Ophir, Brythunia, Hyperborea, Zamora with its dark-haired women and towers of spider-haunted mystery, Zingara with its chivalry, Koth that bordered on the pastoral lands of Shem, Stygia with its shadow-guarded tombs, Hyrkania whose riders wore steel and silk and gold. . ."

Thus Howard's Hyborian Age, between the destruction of Atlantis and Lemuria and the oldest historical records. Memories of the Hyborian Age exist only as myths and legends. Howard assured his readers that this was a fictional construct, made up as background for stories, and not a serious theory of human prehistory.

In Howard's chronology, the Catastrophe — when "the oceans drank Atlantis and the gleaming cities" — took place about 18,000 B.C. The civilizations of Atlantis, Lemuria and the main or Thurian continent were blotted out; the survivors reverted to savagery.

In time these peoples built new civilizations. By 15,000 B.C. two powerful empires, rife with sinister sorceries, had arisen in the western part of the main continent: Acheron and its southerly neighbor Stygia. The northern barbarians, the Hyborians, overran the civilized lands and destroyed Acheron. On the ruins, the conquerors raised semi-barbarous kingdoms, which grew into mighty nations — Aquilonia, the strongest Hyborian kingdom, resembled medieval France; Zingara, medieval Spain; Sygia, pharaonic Egypt; Shem, a land of quarreling city-states, ancient Syria and Mesopotamia.

The world's map differed much from that which we know. There was no Mediterranean Sea. The prototype of the Nile, the Styx, turned at the site of the Nile's present mouth and flowed west for a thousand miles to the Western Ocean. Most of the bulge of modern western Africa lay beneath the sea.

Land stretched unbroken by the arms of the sea from a coast several hundred miles west of the present British Isles and the coast of France, eastward to the Vilayet Sea, on the site of the present Caspian but not much larger. Nomadic tribes from the steppes east of the Vilayet, the Hyrkansians, swept around the Vilayet to erect the kingdom of Turan (resembling the Ottoman Empire) along the western shores of the sea.

Between Aquilonia and the ocean lay the broad Pictish Wilderness. The Picts resembled American Indians of the eastern woodlands. North of Aquilonia and its neighbors Nemedias and Brythunia were the barbarous lands of Cimmericia, Vanaheim, Asgard, and Hyperborea. South of Stygia rose semi-civilized black kingdoms; beyond these, in the tropical jungles of Kush, barbarous black tribes struggled. Southeast of the Hyborian lands lay Iranistan and Vendhya, corresponding to modern Iran and India. Thousands of miles to the east, beyond the vast Hyrkansian steppes, stood ancient Khitai, the analogue of China.

The northern and western marches of Aquilonia formed a frontier region called the Bossonian marches, inhabited by Aquilonian frontiersmen and by garrisons of soldiery deployed against the Picts on the west and the Cimmericians on the north. As Aquilonia's population grew, settlers invaded the lands of the Picts and the Cimmericians. Sometimes the primitive tribesmen united to drive the invaders back.

One Aquilonian outpost in southern Cimmericia was Venarium. About 10,000 B.C., the Cimmerician clans put aside their feuds to overrun Venarium, forcing the Aquilonians out of the territory.

Conan, the Youth

One of the blood-mad horde that took Venarium is a youth who, though only fifteen and short of his full growth, is already six feet tall and weighs 180 pounds. This is Conan, the son of a Cimmerician blacksmith.

After Venarium, Conan returns to his tribe and for the next year or two occupies himself as a member of a band of AESir, fighting the Vanir and the Hyperboreans. Captured by the latter (*Legions of the Dead*), he endures months of slavery before escap-

ing (*The Thing in the Crypt*).

Instead of trying to return home, Conan plunges southward. At age seventeen he reaches the kingdom of Zamora, home of sinister sorceries. In the city of Arenjun, notorious for its thievery, he pursues the calling of thief. More daring than adroit, he is not very successful. He joins forces with a Nemedian thief, Taurus, to invade the tower of the priest-sorcerer Yara, whom even the king of Zamora fears worse than death (*The Tower of the Elephant*).

Having disposed of the lions that Yara uses as watchdogs, Conan and Taurus scale the tower. On the roof they find a penthouse. Taurus enters but staggers out dying. Inside, Conan meets a spider with a body as large as that of a pig and legs of similar proportion. After a desperate combat, he kills the spider and goes below.

In a chamber he finds an extra-terrestrial being, resembling a man with an elephant's head. The being explains that Yara captured it long ago, blinded it, and has kept it under torture to wring magical secrets from it. The being commands Conan to kill it, cut out its heart, and take the heart and the gem called the Heart of the Elephant down to Yara's chamber. There he shall perform a grisly rite. Awakened from a drugged dream, Yara meets his doom, and Conan flees the crumbling tower.

Conan's next adventure befalls him in the capital of Zamora, Shadizar the Wicked. Becoming more expert at thievery, he visits the nearby ruin of Larsha in search of a rumored treasure (*Hall of the Dead*). Pursued by a squad of soldiers, he traps and destroys all but their officer. Conan and the captain join forces, find the treasure chamber, divide the loot, and then are chased out by the treasure's supernatural guardians. Then, back in Shadizar, each loses his share through misfortune.

Next, Conan tries to steal a noted amulet, the Eye of Erlik, from the wizard Hisarr Zul in Arenjun. The wizard, however, traps him and imprisons his soul in a mirror, to force Conan to do his bidding. His command to Conan is to follow and recover the amulet from the woman Isparana, who has already stolen it.

Soul again recovered, Conan tries paid employment as body-guard to a Khauranian noblewoman. His job takes him to the little border kingdom of Khauran. There he thwarts a plot against the widowed queen. Then, after a sojourn among the nomadic Zuagirs of eastern Shem, he becomes involved in a sorcerers' struggle for the rule of Zamboula, governed by a Turanian satrap.

Soldier and Pirate

Fed up with Zamora (and vice-versa), Conan next wanders westward into Nemedias. In the city of Numalia, a young ne'er-do-well hires him to steal the fabulous diamond goblet of the dealer of antiquities, Kallian Publico. He gets into the dealer's temple-museum to find that the owner has just departed this life under mysterious circumstances (*The God in the Bowl*). While he wrangles with a guard, a squad of police and the city's chief inquisitor also come in.

Kallian had received a large copper cask consigned to a rival magician by the Stygian sorcerer Thoth-Amon. Thinking the cask to hold treasure, Kallian opened it and died. When the police try to seize Conan, he fights them off; then all but he flee the supernatural being the cask contained.

Having made Nemedias too hot for him, Conan shifts his larcenous career to a Corinthian city-state. Here he is betrayed to the police by his mistress. A young nobleman, Murilo, arranges for Conan to escape jail in return for Conan's promise to slay Murilo's enemy, the priest Nabonidus. Conan and Murilo invade Nabonidus' house, where they are trapped in the cellars and Conan fights a giant ape. They find Nabonidus unconscious, having been knocked senseless by the ape. Revived, Nabonidus agrees in return for his life to show them how to get out. But he double-crosses them and only Conan's quickness saves them (*Rogues in the House*).

Conan tires of the starveling life of a thief, especially since he loses his loot or it melts away before he has time to enjoy it. He trudges east to Turan and joins the army. There he serves for two years, learning archery and horsemanship and rises to the rank of

captain. His duties take him on journeys into Hyrkania, whither he is sent with the escort of the Princess Zosara to her affianced husband, a nomad khan. He travels even further east to fabled Khitai, to conclude a treaty between the king of Turan and a minor Khitaian kingdom (*The Curse of the Monolith*). In these journeys he is in conflict with the degenerate god-king of Meru and an amorphous man-eating blob of jelly.

Not even a commission in the Royal Guard of Turan keeps the turbulent Conan out of trouble for long. He falls out with his commander over a woman and slays the officer in self-defense. Fleeing, he hears of an opening for a soldier in the private guard of the cult of the spider-god in Yezud, in northern Zamora. The high priest of Zath is a fanatic, with dreadful plans for eliminating all rival cults and then bringing Zamora under the sway of his own sinister deity — who, Conan learns, is not just a huge black statue of a spider.

When the high priest's plans collapse in blood and fire, rumors of treasure bring Conan back to Zamora. He obtains a map showing the way to a golden, ruby-crusted, man-sized statue of a god in the Kezankian Mountains. Thieves steal the map. While he is tracking them, he is forced to join forces with them against the Kezankian hillmen. He finds the treasure, is betrayed by his surviving partner in crime, and then the statue takes a hand.

Disgusted with civilization, Conan returns home to his bleak northland. He joins his old friends the AESir on a raid into Vanenheim, is the sole survivor of a battle with Vanir, and has a strange encounter with the legendary Atali, daughter of the supernatural frost-giant, Ymir (*The Frost Giant's Daughter*).

Bored with the drab, simple life of the Cimmerian villages, Conan, now in his early twenties, rides back towards the Hyborian kingdoms. He is sure they will provide a market for his sword. Crossing a glacier, he saves a Hyperborean girl from a band of Neanderthals (*The Lair of the Ice Worm*). But then he loses her to the ice worm — a gigantic, white-furred creature with hypnotic powers. After vengeance on the worm, he continues southward and for several years serves the princes of Nemedias, Ophir, and Argos as a *condottiere*.

On Argos his mercenary service is cut short by a typical misunderstanding with the law (*Queen of the Black Coast*). Fleeing the port of Messantia, he boards a trading ship, the *Argus*, bound for the black coasts of Kush. The ship is captured by a galley of black corsairs, commanded by Belit, a Shemitish pirette. All the Argosians are slain. When Conan is cornered against the mast of Belit's *Tigress* and the deck is heaped with corpses, Belit calls off the fight and offers Conan a partnership, both on deck and in her private cabin.

So Conan becomes a pirate. With Belit he raids the black villages of Kush and seizes the ships of the Stygians. Belit has a special grudge against the Stygians, since the Stygian slavers once captured and mutilated her brother. Conan and Belit are drawn into a struggle between the Stygians and a rebellious province, Taia, in the northeast of the country. With Conan's help, the Taiaans secure their independence. Conan and Belit leave the Stygian port of Khemi by the light of a vast conflagration, as Conan burns the Stygian ships and waterfront.

In Conan's never-ending, ever-thwarted pursuit of treasure, an ill fate takes the *Tigress* up the black Zarkheba River to the lost city of an ancient winged race. Here the sole survivor of that race slays Belit. It would have killed Conan, pinned by a column fallen across his legs as a result of an earthquake, did not the spirit of Belit daunt the winged ape long enough for Conan to free himself.

Belit's crew also perish. Conan puts Belit aboard the *Tigress*, heaps her jewels about her, and sets the ship aflame out to sea. Belit was the great love of his life, and he does not follow the sea again for many, many years.

Conan heads inland and becomes the warchief of a native tribe, the Bamulas (*The Vale of Lost Women*). An Ophirean woman, Livia, has been brought as a captive to the chief of another tribe, the Bakalah. Conan and a force of Bamulas visit the Bakalah to discuss a joint attack on a third tribe. During the parley, Conan betrays his host and slaughters the Bakalah. Livia has agreed to

give herself to Conan if he will rescue her, but during the fight she flees to a hidden valley. Here she falls in the grasp of the supernatural. Conan saves her but sends her home, saying she is not rugged enough to be the consort of the war chief of a Kushite tribe.

Then the Bamulas rebel against the rule of a white stranger. Conan flees north. After a narrow escape from a demon in a ruined citadel (*The Castle of Terror*), Conan resumes the trade of mercenary in the army of the kingdom of Kush. (Northerners use "Kush" for any black country; but this kingdom, on the coast of the Western Ocean between Stygia and the jungles, is the one that knows itself by that name.) Kush, whose people are of mixed blood, is ruled by a ferocious queen, Tananda.

Conan is hired when he saves the queen from a hostile mob in the capital city (*The Shout in the Dark*). He becomes Tananda's lover; but relations sour when Conan rescues a white slave, Diana, from the queen, who is about to torture her to learn of a conspiracy. The common folk revolt against the ruling caste, and Conan escapes with Diana.

Conan now takes up his trade of mercenary soldier in the city-states of Shem. He takes part in the upheavals during the death of the mad king, Akhirom of Pelishtia (*Hawks over Shem*).

Conan takes service under Amalric of Nemedias, general for the queen-regent, Yasmela, of the small border kingdom of Khoraja. Conan rises to the rank of captain. Yasmela's brother, King Khossus, is a prisoner in Ophir, and the horde that follows the sorcerer Natohk threatens her borders. When Yasmela begs the oracle of the god Mitra for his advice, she is told to choose the first man she meets in the street as the commander-in-chief. The lot falls on Conan, who though surprised, quickly adapts himself to circumstances. In the battle with the horde, Conan wins the day and the queen (*Black Colossus*).

Conan is taken with Yasmela enough to talk of marriage. But to wed the queen-regent to a foreign barbarian is out of order for the Khorajans. Hoping that her brother, back on his throne, might fix things, Conan sets out with an astrologer and a thief to spring Khossus. He carries his project through despite bandits and the astrologer's treachery.

Khossus, however, proves a well-meaning but pompous young ass, who vetoes Conan's wedding his sister. Anyway, Conan is disenchanted with being "Mister Queen"; so he leaves Khossus on the latter's way home.

The Shaker of Thrones

Now past thirty, Conan takes service with a rebel prince of Koth. But the prince's army is defeated, and Conan gravitates to the steppes between Zamora and Turan. He and other fugitives form a band of freebooters, the kozaki, who harry the borders of neighboring lands. But the Turanian king, Yildiz, sends out an army, which destroys all the kozaki but Conan.

Hiding from pursuers on the shores of the Villayet Sea (*Shadows in the Moonlight*), Conan happens upon a confrontation between the Turanian general and a runaway slave, Olivia, a daughter of the king of Koth. Conan kills the Turanian and makes off with Olivia in a rowboat. Taking shelter on an island, they find a ruined hall with sinister iron statues. The island also harbors a giant carnivorous ape. To further complicate matters, a crew of pirates sails with Conan as captain.

As chief of this mongrel Red Brotherhood, Conan is more than ever a thorn in Yildiz's side. This mild, ineffectual monarch, instead of having his brother Teyaspa strangled in the approved Turanian manner, exiled Teyaspa to a castle in the Colchian Mountains belonging to the bandit Gleg. Yildiz sends General Artaban to destroy the pirates at the mouth of the Zaporoska River.

Surprised, Artaban becomes the pursued instead of the pursuer. He arrives in the neighborhood of Gleg's castle, with Conan in pursuit. In a free-for-all among Turanians, Hyrkanians, Conan's pirates and a horde of hibernating vampires, Prince Teyaspa dies a moment too soon to be hailed as king of Turan. Instead the throne is claimed by the fierce Yezdigerd (*The Road of Eagles*).

Deserted by his pirates, Conan next appears as captain of the Royal Guard of Queen Taramis of Khauran (*A Witch Shall Be Born*), another little border kingdom which Conan had visited years before. Taramis has matured into a lovely woman; but a curse hangs over her family. Every century, a girl witch is born to the dynasty. This time the witch is Taramis' twin sister Salome, who gets control of Khauran and imprisons her sister with the help of the adventurer Constantius.

Conan Crucified

Conan realizes the substitution and fights, but is overwhelmed. Here occurs the most famous scene in the saga. Conan is crucified. As he hangs on the cross, preparing to give up his oversized ghost, a vulture flies down for a peck at his eyes. Conan bites the vulture's head off. You can't ask for a tougher hero than that.

Conan is saved by wandering Zuagirs, with whose help he turns the tables, destroying Salome and her toad-demon. At the end, he leaves Constantius, in his turn, nailed to a cross.

Conan spends nearly two years with the Zuagirs, becoming a chief. When a Zamorian, Vardanes, betrays Conan's band into a Turanian ambush, Conan routs the ambushers and pursues Vardanes (*Black Tears*). At the oasis of Akhlat, he catches up with the traitor, to find that the latter has been turned to stone by the gaze of a gorgon. Conan comes close to the same fate.

Arriving in Zamboula with the reward from the people of Akhlat, Conan quickly dissipates this fortune in a colossal debauch. A week of guzzling, gorging, roistering, whoring, and gaming reduces him to penury (*Shadows in Zamboula*). Zamboula is ruled by a Turanian satrap, Jungir Khan, and his Stygian mistress. The city is also infested by cannibal slaves from Darfar. In the background are the sinister priest Totsrasmek and the fabulous magical jewel, the Star of Khorala, for which the Queen of Ophir has offered a roomful of lustrous gold.

In the ensuing unpleasantness, Conan acquires the Star and rides westward towards Ophir. He aids the Queen Marala to escape from her degenerate husband, King Morantes II. The Star helps save them from Morantes' soldiers (*The Star of Khorala*).

At the end, Marala heads north to Aquilonia, planning to buy an estate, while Conan goes east for another try among the kozaki. Yezdigerd's general sets a trap for Conan on the isle of Xapur (*The Devil in Iron*). Here Conan finds the girl who is supposed to be bait, and also the city's master, Khosratral Kel, a giant of living iron.

Under Conan's command, the kozaki and pirates become such a nuisance that King Yezdigerd pauses in his imperial conquests to crush them. Conan flees south with followers to Iranistan, to take service with Yezdigerd's rival, Kobad Shah (*The Flame Knife*). Falling out with this king, he takes his band, together with one of the king's favorites, Nanaia, to the ancient city of Yanaidar. Here he encounters an old foe, Olgerd Vladislav, and a magus, reviving an ancient cult for world conquest. In the conflict, all the involved forces are routed by the newly-awakened grey ghouls of Yanaidar.

Conan drifts east, reappearing as a chief of the barbarous Himelian hillmen. He is now in his late thirties. King Yezdigerd uses the wizard Khemsa to remove the Vendhyan king from his path. The dead king's sister, the Devi Yasmina, sets out to avenge her brother but becomes Conan's captive (*The People of the Black Circle*). He pursues Khemsa, only to see him slain by the Seers of Yimsha, whom he had also served. Conan rescues Yasmina from the Seers in time to repel the invading Turanians.

When Conan's plan for welding the hill tribes into a single force fails, Conan rides west to take service under Amalric, a rebel prince of Koth. The army is defeated, however, and Conan escapes into the desert with Natala, a girl he has picked up along the way (*The Slithering Shadow*). He comes upon the city of Xuthal, inhabited by a race of living dead and their slithering shadow-god, Thog. When the Stygian woman who rules the city double-crosses Conan once too often, he and Natala escape.

Back in the Hyborian lands, Conan enlists in an army raised by Argos for a war with Stygia. The army is destroyed. Conan is captured by desert riders, who take him to the legendary city of

Tombalku, ruled by two kings representing the two castes (*Drums of Tombalku*). One king, Sakumbe, hails Conan as an old friend from Conan's corsair days and saves him from death by torture. Conan becomes co-king; but the ousted faction attacks. Conan falls afoul of Sakumbe's wizard and has to flee again.

He reaches the coast and joins a ship of the pirates of the Barachan Isles. While serving as a mate on a Barachan ship (*The Black Tower*), he goes to an island where the Stygian wizard Siptah is said to dwell, extorting tribute from seafarers by his control of storms. But Siptah had died, and the island is tenanted by his servant, a bat-man. As usual, Siptah's treasure proves elusive.

Slipping out of a tight spot in the pirate base of Tortage, Conan avoids a cut throat by rowing out to sea. When his boat sinks within sight of a passing ship, he swims to and boards the ship, commanded by a Zingarian buccaneer, Zaporavo (*The Pool of the Black One*). The Cimmerian soon gains the respect of the crew and the enmity of the captain, whose sleek mistress regards Conan with too friendly an eye. On an unknown island, Conan kills Zaporavo but then must cope with a race of supernatural black giants who worship a living pool of water.

For two years, Conan pursues a career as a privateer in the service of the king of Zingara. When the king's daughter, Chabela, is stolen by plotters (*Conan the Buccaneer*), Conan traces her to a tribe of black Amazons in the Kushite jungles, where she serves as a slave. With the help of Juma, a black chieftain whom he had once known as a fellow mercenary, Conan rescues Chabela and thwarts the efforts of his old enemy Thoth-Amon, the Stygian sorcerer, to rule Zingara.

Other Zingaran captains, jealous of the foreigner's rise, trap Conan and sink his ship. He escapes inland and signs up with a band of mercenaries serving the Stygians. He gets bored with duty at the frontier post of Sukhmet, but boredom vanishes when Valeria, a pirette serving in the same detachment, takes drastic action to repel the advances of an officer and flees. Conan follows her to another lost city, Xuchotl (*Red Nails*), inhabited by two feuding clans. Conan sides with one clan but is double-crossed by its leader. The final fracas ends with gore all over and Conan and Valeria the only survivors.

Hearing of the priceless jewels called the "Jewels of Gwahlur," Conan offers his services to the king of Keshan to train his armies for a war against neighboring Punt (*The Teeth of Gwahlur*). But the scheming Shemite Zargheba arrives first at the deserted city of Alkeenon, where the jewels are hidden. Zargheba perishes, leaving the Corinthian slave girl Muriela, whom he had brought along to play the guardian goddess and beguile the native priests. In the end, Conan is forced to choose between letting either Muriela or the chest of jewels fall from a natural stone bridge into the river below. With his usual chivalry, he saves the girl and lets the jewels go.

To salvage something from his latest abortive treasure hunt, Conan takes Muriela east to Punt (*The Ivory Goddess*), where he passes off Muriela to the king and priests as their local goddess, Nebethet. During a standoff in the temple between Conan and Thutmekri, Nebethet herself settles the argument.

The Barbarian King

Conan works his way north to Aquilonia, where he joins the army as a scout on the Pictish frontier (*Beyond the Black River*). In the forests, the wizard Zogar Sag is gathering swamp demons to help the Picts against the Aquilonians. Conan fails to save Fort Tuscelan, but he does warn and save many settlers. Later he beats the Picts at Massacre Meadow (*Moon of Blood*).

Promoted to general, Conan defeats the Picts in a great battle at Velitrium. The jealous King Numedides lures Conan back to Tarantia and has him drugged and thrown into prison; his friends, however, get him out. Back at the frontier, he finds a price on his head. Swimming Thunder River, he sets out across Pictland to the sea once again.

On the way, he finds the cavern containing the treasure of the pirate Triancos but has a close call with the guardian demon. On the coast, others seek the same treasure; Count Valenso, a Zingar-

ian exile, and two gangs of pirates (*The Treasure of Triancos*). Thoth-Amon takes a hand, the Picts attack Valenso's settlement, and Conan is lucky to escape with Valenso's niece.

Now in his early forties, Conan is picked up by a galley carrying friends from Aquilonia, seeking his leadership in a revolt against the degenerate Numedides. Thulandra Thuu, the wizard who controls the mad king, plants a female spy on Conan, who poisons him but underestimates the dose.

Conan recovers and, in a campaign through Aquilonia, invades the capital and confronts Numedides. When the king tries to stab Conan, the Cimmerian strangles him and crowns himself.

Conan finds a king's life no bed of hours. Within a year, plotters plan to kill the barbarian king. Conan might have lost his life to Thoth-Amon's sorcery had not Aquilonia's ancient guardian, the sage Epemitreus, called Conan's soul to him in sleep to furnish him with a magical symbol (*The Phoenix on the Sword*).

No sooner has this disturbance subsided than the king of Ophir begs Conan for help against Strabonus of Koth. Conan comes with 5,000 Aquilonian knights, to find both kings allied against him. The Aquilonians die fighting, and Conan is captured by the wiles of the wizard Tsotha-lanti.

A prisoner in the wizard's scarlet citadel, Conan escapes and releases a fellow prisoner, Tsotha's wizardly rival Pelias. With Pelias' help, Conan gets back to his capital, leads an army against the invading Kothians and Ophireans, and both treacherous kings are slain.

Two years later, sorcery strikes again. Nemedian plotters revivify a long-dead wizard, Zaltotun (*Conan the Conqueror*), with whose help they defeat Conan's army, capture the king, and go on to conquer Aquilonia. Again Conan lands in a dungeon. He escapes with the slave-girl Zenobia.

Returning by stealth to his kingdom, Conan learns that Xaltotun's power lies in a strange jewel, now stolen and on its way south. Conan pursues it as far as Stygia. There, in the bowels of a pyramid, he finds two gangs of priest-magicians fighting for the gem. Conan seizes the jewel, returns to Aquilonia, and destroys his enemies. He makes Zenobia his queen.

For the next dozen years, Conan is busy with domestic affairs. Then Thoth-Amon combines with other sorcerers to extirpate the obstacle to their world-conquering plans that Conan represents. When Conan takes his elder son Conn hunting in Gunderland (*The Witch of the Mists*), the Hyperboreans capture the boy to lure Conan into their clutches. Conan confronts Thoth-Amon in the castle of the witch Louhi, in the crypt beneath the black sphinx of Nebthu in Stygia (*Black Sphinx of Nebthu*), and again in Zambabwe, whose black warriors ride flying reptiles. He finally runs him to earth in the far south, at the citadel of the reptile-men (*Shadows in the Skull*).

For another dozen years, the kingdom runs smoothly. Then it is afflicted with a supernatural plague of red shadows, which carry off Aquilonians. The spirit of Epimetreus tells Conan that he, to save the world, must abdicade in favor of his son Conn and set out across the Western Ocean. Conan, now a gray-bearded widower, is not altogether reluctant.

With an old comrade of his piratical days, he sails westward to the archipelago Antillia, inhabited by descendants of the Atlanteans. The priesthood of the Xotli scour the world for victims to sacrifice to their insatiable demon-god. When that situation has been cleaned up, Conan sails away to the unknown western continents. To what end he finally comes, the legends say not.

After Conan

Five hundred years later, Aquilonia had become an empire, annexing its neighbors. With Aquilonian arrogance came the hatred of the subject peoples. Meanwhile, the Picts were learning how to make weapons and armor of iron.

While Aquilonia waged its perennial war with Nemediia, the Picts overran Aquilonia from the west. Soon after, the Turanians and other Hyrkanians invaded the Hyborian lands from the east, until the scene of Conan's adventures was divided between Picts

and Hyrkanians. Then came the northern barbarians — Cimmerians, AEsir, and Vanir — who poured down into and occupied these lands. Little civilization survived.

Another Catastrophe soon changed the map. The Pictish Wilderness sank beneath the waves, and the lower Styx spread out to become the Mediterranean. The Villayet Sea shrank to the present Caspian, while West Africa arose from the ocean.

After another lapse of several thousand years, the nations known to history began to emerge from the darkness of barbarism. Thus, Egypt was formed from a mixture of the common folk of Stygia and Vanir who conquered the country, while the Gypsies are of mixed Zingarian-Zamorian descent. Other mixtures gave rise to the other peoples of today.

Robert Ervin Howard

Robert Ervin Howard (1906-36) is a tragic figure in American letters, who long after his death became a major influence in fantasy. His father spent his adult life in Texas as a country physician. Robert was born in Peaster, Texas, and during his boyhood, his parents moved repeatedly. In 1919 they bought a house in Cross Plains, at the center of the state, and Robert lived the rest of his life there.

While a boy, Robert Howard resolved to become a writer. Save help from a couple of sympathetic high school teachers, he was entirely self-taught. As a young boy, he was often bullied because of his puny size and bookish disposition. Later, by weight-lifting and exercise, he built himself into a powerful man, 5'11" tall and 180-200 pounds. He became an accomplished boxer and rider, and for awhile he owned his own horse.

Graduating from high school, Howard rejected advice to go to college and instead plunged into writing, for several years without success. He did take non-credit commercial courses at nearby Howard Payne College. He tried a number of jobs but proved unable to hold any for long. Obsessed by hatreds and grudges, he so fiercely resented any correction or discipline that when the boss gave him one order too many or scolded him for some fault, Robert blew up, threatened to beat up the boss, and either quit or was fired.

In 1926, Howard began to sell stories to the pulp magazines. A prolific and versatile writer, he wrote fantasy, Westerns, boxing stories, detective stories, horror tales, stories of historical and oriental adventure, and poetry. By Depression standards, he made a fair living from his writing.

Howard developed a distinctive prose style, using poetic elements such as rhythm, alliteration, and personification. In the late 1920s, he specialized in boxing stories; in the early thirties in fantasy, and in the middle thirties in Westerns, although he wrote stories of all these kinds throughout his career. He began the Conan stories in 1932.

Howard's present revival is due to the Conan stories. Conan is an idealization of what Howard thought he would like to have been: a footloose, hell-raising, irresponsible adventurer, devoted to wine, women and strife. But, save for a powerful physique, a hot temper, and a chivalrous attitude towards women, Howard and Conan had nothing in common. Howard was shy, sensitive, upright, moral, law-abiding, courteous, compassionate, reclusive, introverted, bookish, and (though he denied it) intellectual. He did not attribute such qualities to Conan.

Howard suffered from isolation and from lack of worldly experience, professional contacts, travel outside of Texas, and access to big-city and university libraries. An even greater handicap was his family situation. While he often quarreled with his father - a man of brusque, overbearing manner - his devotion to his mother, which she encouraged, was abnormal. As a boy, he resolved to die when she did. For a year or so in 1934-35, he went with a young schoolteacher, but when she urged him to cut the silver cord, he indignantly rejected the advice. When, after a long illness, his mother was dying of tuberculosis, Howard, age thirty, with a promising career ahead of him, shot himself through the head. ▲