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DAVE
MORIC
DOWNS

#7 \$3.00

CONAN

THE AVENGER

**THE
DAMNED
HORDE**
PART ONE



FRED
VAN LENTE

BRIAN
CHING

MICHAEL
ATIYEH





The desert shimmered
in the heat waves.

Conan the Cimmerian
glared out over the
aching dunes
and shook his
head, blinking.

The sun's glare
had blinded him.





WHY
DID YOU DO
THAT?



He did
not reply.

Endowed with all
the barbarian's
irresponsible love
of life and
instinct to live...



...Gunnar the
Glimmerian yet
knew that he had
reached the end
of his trail.



He had not come to the
limits of his endurance,
but he knew another day
under the merciless sun
in those waterless wastes
would bring him down.



As for the girl, she
had suffered enough.

Better a quick,
painful death stroke
than the lingering
agony that faced her.

Her thirst was
temporarily quenched;
it was a false mercy
to let her suffer
until delirium and
death brought relief.

He and the girl were, as far
as he knew, the sole survivors
of Prince Imnath's army...

...that sad, wailing wail, which,
following her defeated rebel prince
of Koth, swept through the lands of
Koth like a devastating sandstorm...

...and drenched
the valleys of
Otygia with blood.

Osan likened it in
his mind to a great
sorrow, dimpling
gradual, dimpling
gradual, as it raged
westward, to run dry
at last in the sands
of the naked desert.



The bones of his
men:—swords, spears,
swords, broken spears,
cutting in streams
from the Kothic
spires to the dunes
of the wilderness.



He had been greatly content with his own native land before that damned horse absorbed them.

"Aqua's bestards," they used to call it, formerly the king's guard of Shamballa.



These were all men, boys and raised in palaces--in servants' quarters and barracks, but palace nonetheless--and they knew nothing of the outside world.

So when they fled the fall of their city, they threw their lot in with their captain!

The pirate, Aqua the King--the general who stood against the Black Colonias...the master thief of Samora...



...but he was, first and foremost, a barbarian.

Soan had to teach these civilized Emshites how to get a full night's rest on whatever uneven ground their weary bodies collapsed upon...



...why one should never drink water too slowly to see the bottom...



...and how to wot the least bit of marrow from whatever patty game they could spear.

Sea's bastards learned quickly, and with good humor, and soon hated their bastards at a great many things.

For the first time they learned what it was like to have one's own will as one's master, and they flourished in free light.

Though Sea with any sense would fall to notice Conan's own will was yoked to his torturous ambition, in this instance, for plunder.

The tongueless slave girl he had rescued from Shastalia's bastards spoke--

--well, wonderful! A vast hoard of hidden riches! Treasure lies to her sister, Satala...

...who was herself enslaved in one of the mighty city-states of Sea.

SO, THIS IS ANOTHER CITY OF TORGARVA.

A DOZEN TRADE ROUTES CROSS HERE, SO IT HAS MANY MORE WEALTHY CITIZENS THAN A USUAL COUNTRY.

SHOULD WE ENCOUNTER SUCH RESISTANCE ANYWHERE THE MARCH, I PROPOSE SPLITTING INTO SMALL, UNDETECTABLE GROUPS AND LEAVING THROUGH EACH OF THE GATES, CIRCLING BACK HERE UNDER DARK OF NIGHT--

CAN THE MAP STILL BE ACCURATE? IT'S BEEN SEVERAL MONTHS SINCE PUGG WAS RESCUED FROM SLAVE BY LORD THURGOOD'S MAN.

WELL ABOUT THE ACCURACY? I'M NOT SURE, BUT I'LL TRY TO FIND OUT.

--AND TO MAKE SURE PUGG'S MARCH IS STILL WHERE SHE SAID SHE WAS, TALKING TO THE SLAVE MERCHANTS.