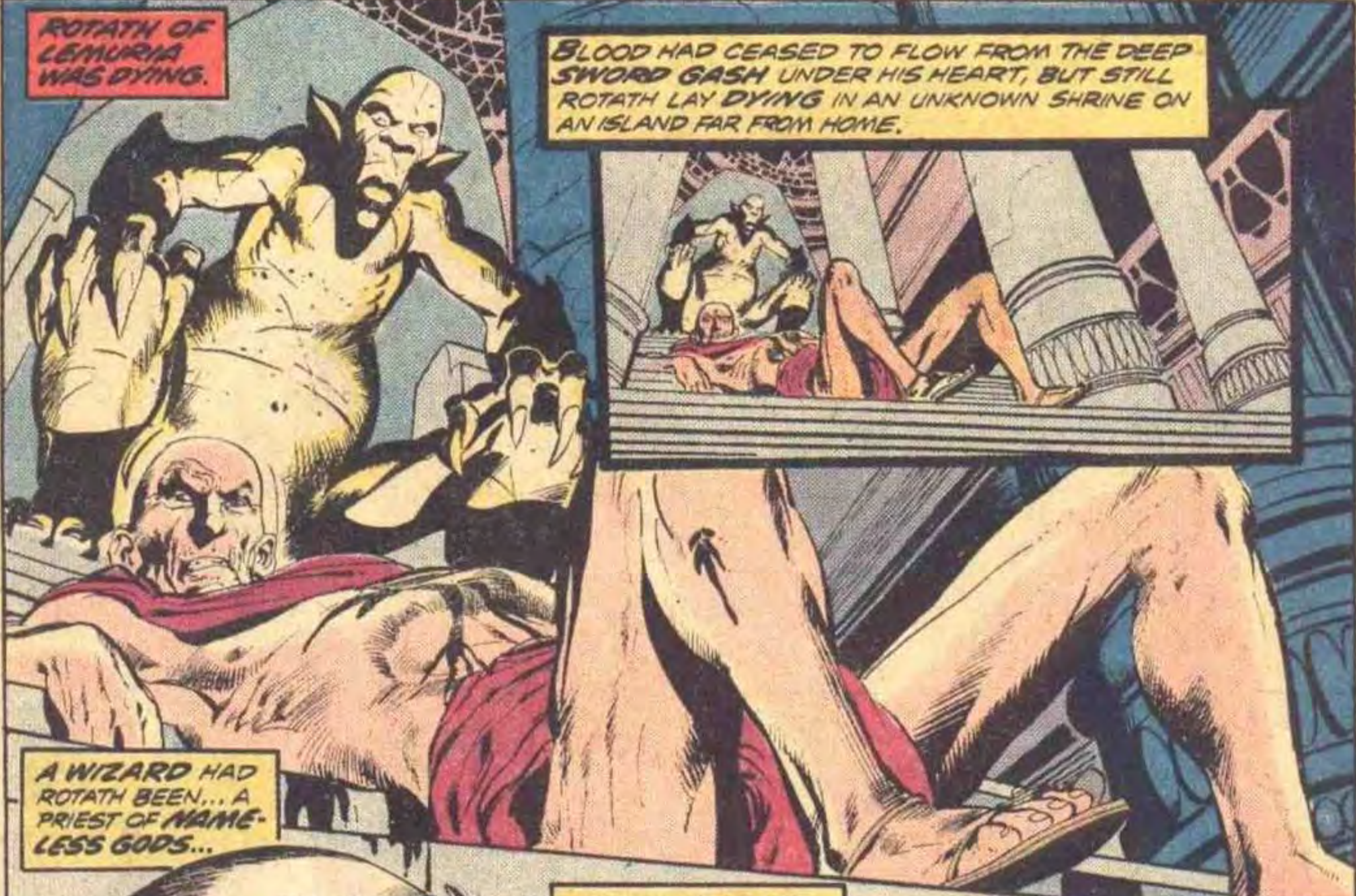


**ROTATH OF LEMURIA WAS DYING.**

BLOOD HAD CEASED TO FLOW FROM THE DEEP SWORD GASH UNDER HIS HEART, BUT STILL ROTATH LAY DYING IN AN UNKNOWN SHRINE ON AN ISLAND FAR FROM HOME.



A WIZARD HAD ROTATH BEEN... A PRIEST OF NAMELESS GODS...

AND NOW, AS HE LAY DYING, HE USED HIS FADING BREATH TO CALL DOWN BLASPHEMOUS CURSES ON HIS BETRAYERS!



CURSES ON THE FAITHLESS KING OF LEMURIA, ASFODEL II, WHO HAD FEARED HIM... AND WHO HAD SENT AN EXILED SAVAGE TO SLAY HIM, FAR FROM THE TEMPLE WHERE HIS POWERS WERE GREATEST.

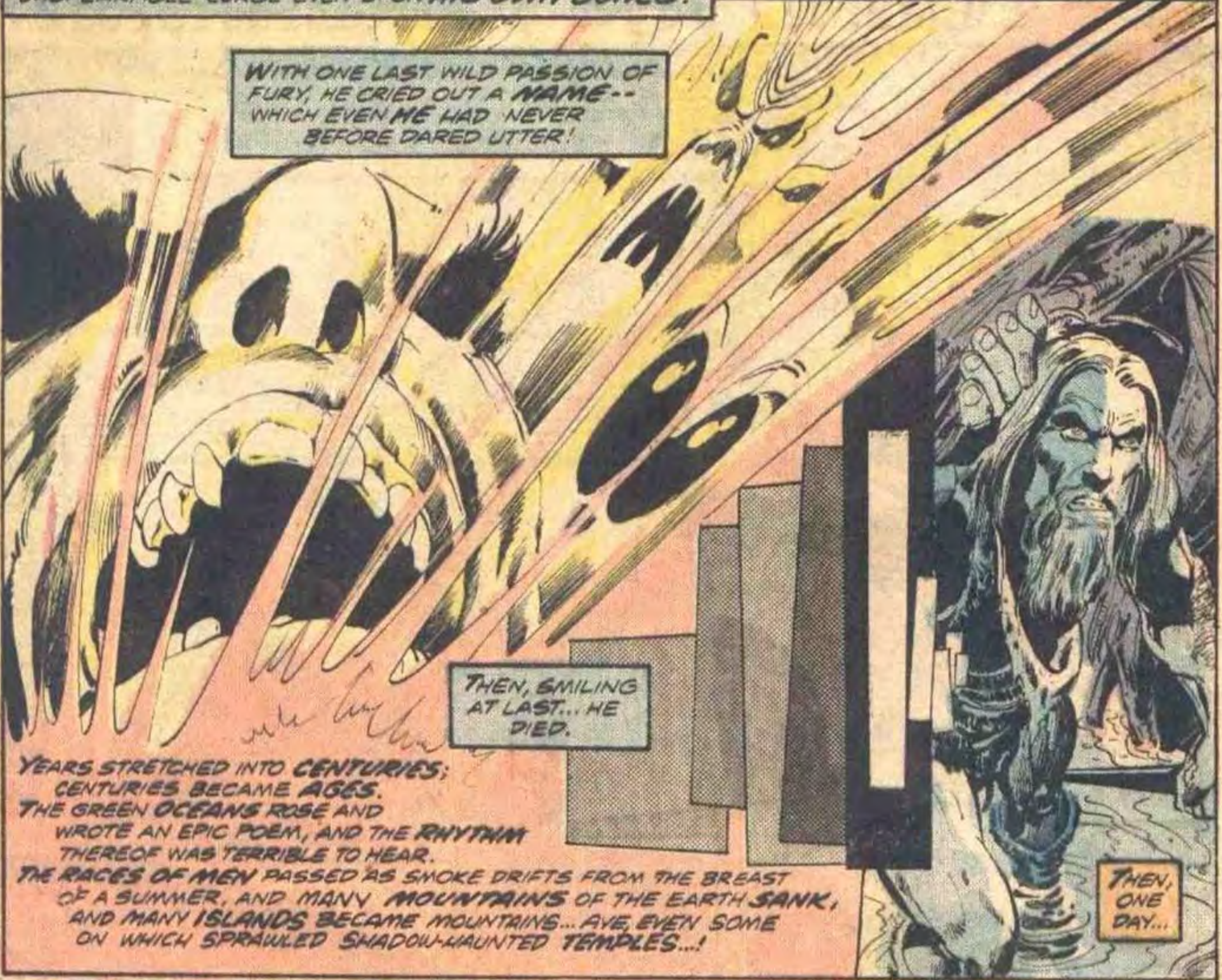
CURSES ON HIS OWN FLESH, WHICH HAD FALLEN EASY PREY TO A KEEN BLADE, A SINEWY HAND.

AND CURSES, MOST OF ALL, ON THE MAN WHO HAD DEALT THE DEATH-BLOW... **KULL! KULL THE ATLANTEAN! KULL THE DESTROYER!**



**ROTATH FEARED DEATH-- AND, FEARING, HIS BLASPHEMIES ROSE LOUDER, AS HE PLACED AN UNSPEAKABLE CURSE EVEN UPON HIS OWN BONES!**

WITH ONE LAST WILD PASSION OF FURY, HE CRIED OUT A NAME-- WHICH EVEN HE HAD NEVER BEFORE DARED UTTER!



THEN, SMILING AT LAST... HE DIED.

THEN, ONE DAY...

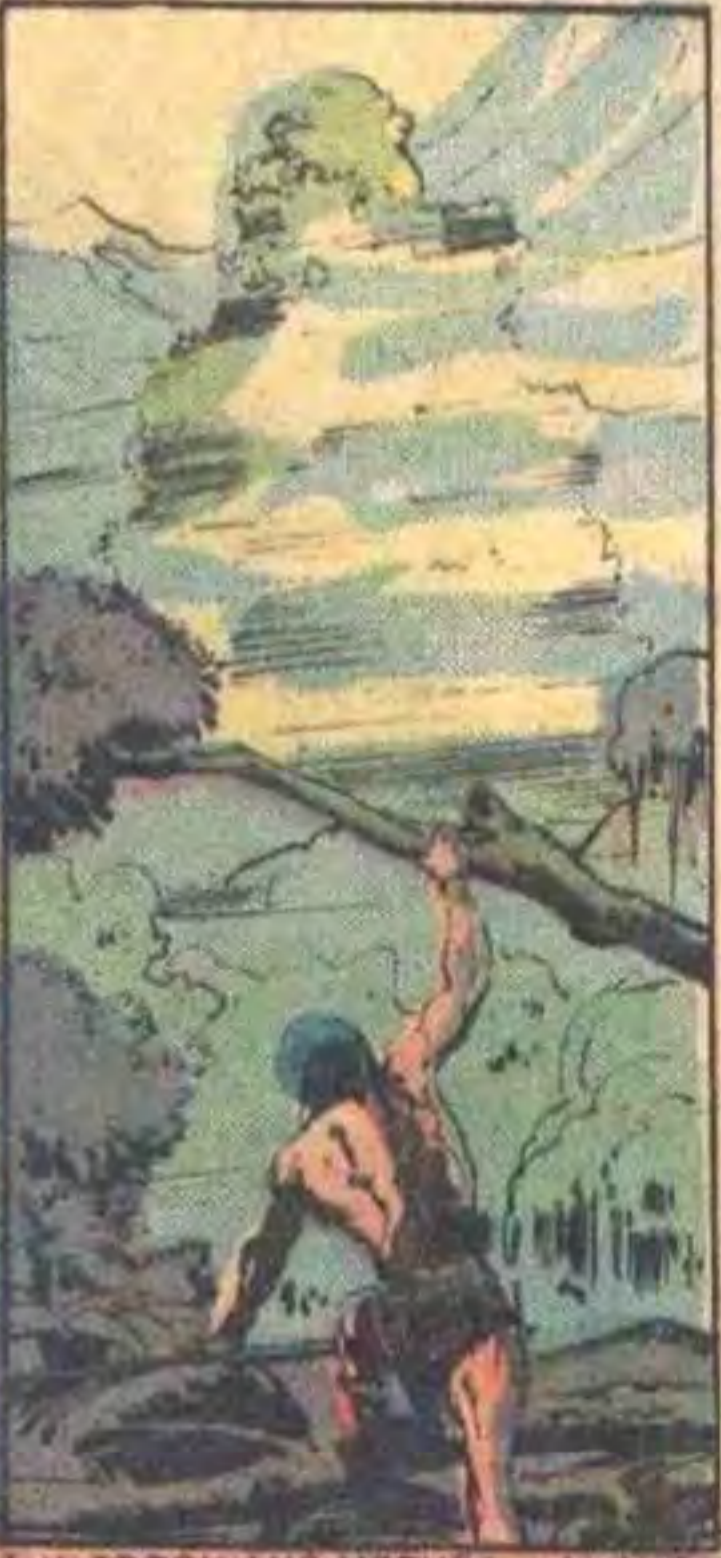
YEARS STRETCHED INTO CENTURIES; CENTURIES BECAME AGES. THE GREEN OCEANS ROSE AND WROTE AN EPIC POEM, AND THE RHYTHM THEREOF WAS TERRIBLE TO HEAR. THE RACES OF MEN PASSED AS SMOKE DRIFTS FROM THE BREAST OF A SUMMER, AND MANY MOUNTAINS OF THE EARTH SANK, AND MANY ISLANDS BECAME MOUNTAINS... AYE, EVEN SOME ON WHICH SPRAWLED SHADOW-HAUNTED TEMPLES...!

... A MAN STARED AT A SUMMIT, A TRAVELER FROM LOST LANDS... AND HE WONDERED AT ITS MIST-SHROUDED TOP.

CREEPERS TUGGED AT HIS SHOULDERS, MUD PULLED FITFULLY AT HIS SANDALLED FEET... YET HE CLIMBED ON.

AT LAST HE STOOD UPON SMOOTH STONES, WHICH ONCE HAD VANISHED BENEATH THE SEA.

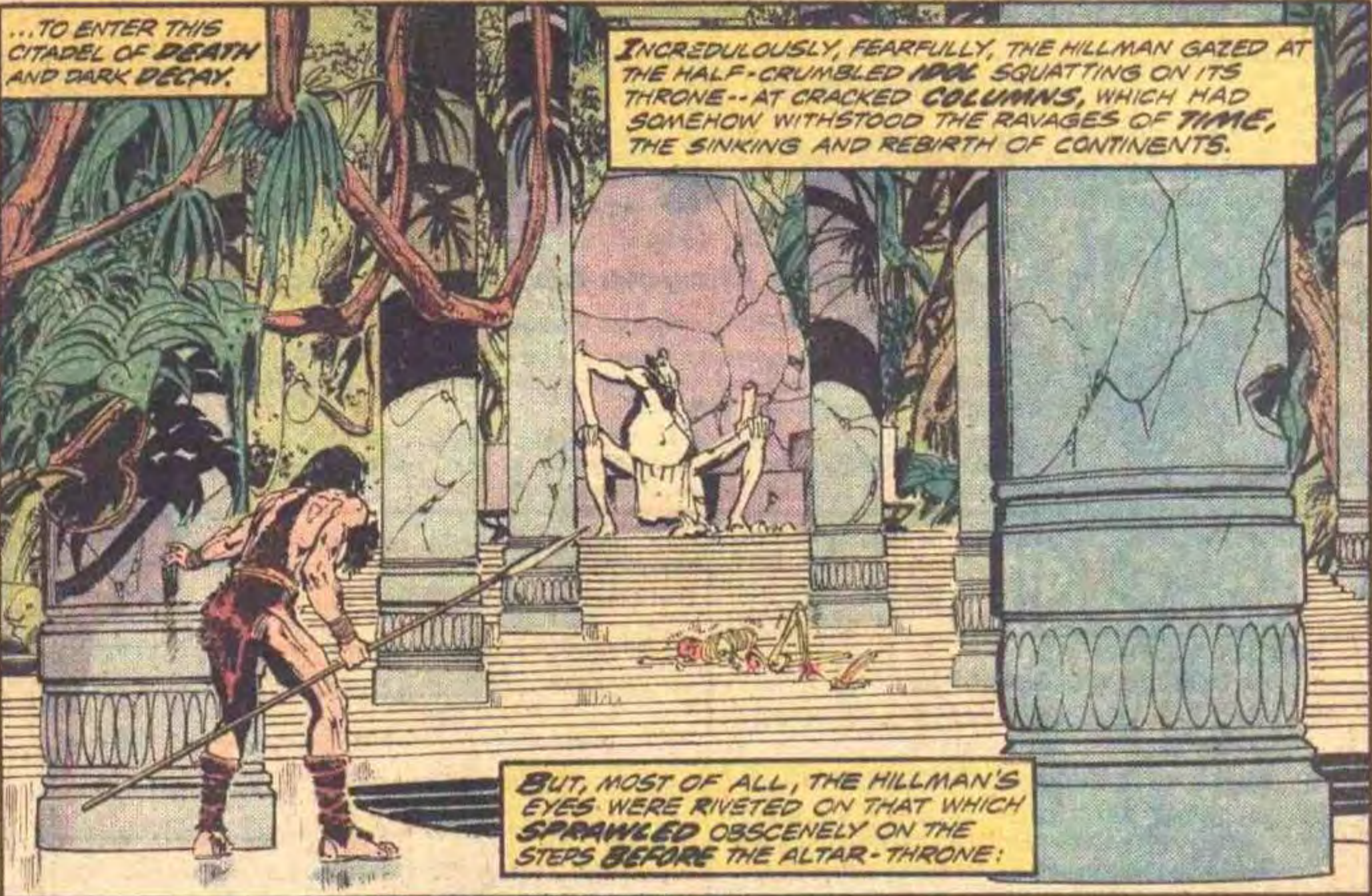
PERHAPS HE SENSED, IN THAT FROZEN INSTANT, THAT HE WAS THE FIRST MAN IN **FOURSCORE CENTURIES...**





...TO ENTER THIS CITADEL OF DEATH AND DARK DECAY.

INCREDULOUSLY, FEARFULLY, THE HILLMAN GAZED AT THE HALF-CRUMBLED IDOL SQUATTING ON ITS THRONE-- AT CRACKED COLUMNS, WHICH HAD SOMEHOW WITHSTOOD THE RAVAGES OF TIME, THE SINKING AND REBIRTH OF CONTINENTS.



BUT, MOST OF ALL, THE HILLMAN'S EYES WERE RIVETED ON THAT WHICH SPRAWLED OBSCENELY ON THE STEPS BEFORE THE ALTAR-THRONE:

A HUMAN SKELETON...



...WITH BONES WHICH GLEAMED LIKE SOLID GOLD!

THE HILLMAN'S TRIBE WAS IN REBELLION AGAINST FAR-AWAY AGHRAPUR... AND GOLD WOULD BUY WEAPONS FROM SYMPATHETIC HYRKAN- IANS.



UNABLE TO BELIEVE HIS GOOD FORTUNE, HE CAUTIOUSLY CAME CLOSER.



HE REACHED OUT... SLOWLY, TENTATIVELY.

AT LAST, HE LAID HIS HAND UPON THE GOLDEN SKULL...

...AND A SUDDEN, DEATHLY SHRIEK BROKE THE STILLNESS--AS FLESH FLOWED FROM ONE SET OF BONES TO ANOTHER--AND NEW LIFE WAS TRADED FOR OLD.



AFTERWARD, ALL WAS SILENCE ONCE MORE IN THE TEMPLE OF THE NAMELESS GODS.



LONG MONTHS HAVE PASSED, SINCE THAT HORROR-STREAKED DAWN. THE HALF-HEARTED REBELLION OF THE TURANIAN HILL-TRIBES HAS STRANGELY STIFFENED ITS BACK-- EVEN AS TURAN'S PRINCE YEZDIGERD IS BUSY CONQUERING MYRKANIAN CITY-STATES ACROSS THE INLAND SEA.

BUT, THERE ARE OTHER THINGS THAN EMPIRE-BUILDING WHICH CONCERN KING YILDIZ, FATHER TO YEZDIGERD AND WEARER OF THE TURANIAN CROWN, AND IT IS SUCH A THING WHICH HAS SENT SEVERAL-SCORE OF AGHRAPUR'S FINEST INTO THE WIND-WHIPPED NORTHERN WASTES, WHERE LURKS--

# THE CURSE OF THE GOLDEN SKULL!

I TELL YOU, CAPTAIN, I JUST DON'T LIKE IT!

I KNOW THESE HILL-DOGS! I FOUGHT THEM MONTHS AGO, AND BARELY ESCAPED WITH MY HIDE.

IT'S NOT THEIR WAY TO LEAVE A PASS LIKE THIS UNGUARDED.

I STILL SAY WE SHOULD HAVE SENT SCOUTS UP AHEAD--!

NONSENSE! YOU'RE A GOOD SOLDIER, CIMMERIAN-- BUT, LIKE ALL BARBARIANS, TOO SUPERSTITIOUS.

NO HILLMAN IN HIS RIGHT MIND WOULD DARE MOLEST A HAND-PICKED TROOP OF TURANIAN CAVALRY!



ROY THOMAS  
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LETTERER

INSPIRED BY THE  
SHORT STORY BY  
ROBERT E. HOWARD  
CREATOR OF CONAN

JUNA IS THE CREATION OF  
L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP AND  
LIN CARTER AND IS USED BY  
THEIR KIND PERMISSION





**AAIEE**

NO HILL MAN IN HIS RIGHT MIND, DID YOU SAY, CAPTAIN?

THEN LOOK TO YOUR SWORD--

-- FOR, THE MADMEN ARE UPON US!



**KILL THE INVADERS! LET NONE SURVIVE!**



INSTANTLY, THE VERY BOULDERS SEEM TO COME ALIVE--

-- AS, FROM BEHIND EACH, THERE SPRINGS A MOUNTED HILLMAN, WEAPON IN HAND!

AT LAST, CAPTAIN KIRIBOR KNOWS WHY THAT EARLIER CAVALRY TROUP FAILED TO REPORT BACK TO ASHRAPUR.



BUT, AS FOR CONAN--



-- HE IS A CREATURE OF THE MOMENT--



-- STRIKING AT EVERY SWARTHY SAVAGE WHO COMES WITHIN ARM'S LENGTH OF HIM--

-- MARVELING AT THE HILLMEN'S FIERCENESS, THEIR CONFIDENCE IN ATTACKING WELL-ARMED FOES--

-- WONDERING AT THE METAL WHICH HAS LARGELY REPLACED THE SHAGGY FURS THEY WORE, LESS THAN A YEAR BEFORE.



WAR, LIKE LOVE, IS STRANGE: A MAN MAY SEEM A HERO TO HIS COMRADES, FOR SLAYING ANOTHER MAN. YET, HE IS NOTHING BUT A MURDERER...



...TO THE BROTHER OF THE SLAIN!

BUT IF WAR IS STRANGE, IT IS ALSO CRUEL--



A BLIND GOD'S JEST...



...PLAYED ON A HUMAN-KIND GROWN DEAF.

NO NEED TO THANK JUMA THE BLACK, CIMMERIAN.

AFTER ALL, WE'RE ALL BROTHERS, AREN'T WE...



...UNDER THE SKIN?



BUT, THE REST OF YOU LILY-WHITES-- LOOK HOW YOUR CAPTAIN'S FIGHTING! DO ANY OF YOU DARE DO LESS?

LET'S GO JOIN HIM, KUSHITE!

ANOTHER STRANGENESS: THAT, ONE MOMENT, A MAN MAY STAND AT THE VERY CENTER OF LIFE'S SILVERY STAGE...



...THE NEXT, BE A THING FIT ONLY FOR THE FATTENING OF SCAVENGERS...



...AND NO HELP AT ALL TO THAT WHICH HE DIED TO PROTECT.





THEIR CAPTAIN  
FALLEN NOW, THE  
TURANIANS LOSE  
HEART-- FALL EASY  
PREY TO BLOOD-MAD  
HILLMEN...



...TILL CONAN IS CUT  
OFF AND ALONE,  
AMID A PACK OF  
RAVENING WOLVES.



FOR AN INSTANT...



HE  
BURSTS  
FREE.

...HE  
CONQUERS!



BUT,  
DISASTER  
CAN STRIKE  
FROM  
MANY  
SIDES...



...AS HUMAN CENTAUR  
SUDDENLY BECOMES BUT  
WOUNDED STEED AND  
FALLEN BARBARIAN.



STUNNED,  
CONAN  
REACHES  
OUT...



...AND HELP  
IS THERE!

A FAMILIAR  
VOICE...



...A FAMILIAR VOICE:

I COULDN'T RUN OFF  
AND LEAVE YOU,  
CIMMERIAN. WE'RE THE  
ONLY MEN  
IN THIS  
WHOLE  
OUTFIT!



WHAT'S LEFT  
OF IT, YOU  
MEAN.

WE'RE THE  
ONLY ONES  
NOT FLED--



AND CROM  
TAKE ME IF  
I'M NOT  
STARTING  
TO SEE THE  
WISDOM OF  
THEIR  
COURSE!

DOUBTLESS THE GIANT BLACK  
MAKES A PITHY ANSWER...



BUT WHO'S TO  
HEAR IT...

...WHEN ONLY HIS  
OWN WAR-HELM  
SAVES CONAN FROM  
A SPLINTERED  
SKULL?



HE'LL BE  
GRATEFUL  
TO IT, NO  
DOUBT,  
WHEN HE  
WAKENS...

BUT BY  
THEN,  
THEY'LL  
BE  
FAR  
APART.





FIRST, THE STAR IS THERE...



THEN, ANOTHER STAR... AND ANOTHER...

FINALLY, A PULSING OF CONCENTRIC CIRCLES...

...RADIATING OUTWARD, UNTIL THEY FORM...



... SOMETHING. A MAN.



SO-- AWAKE AT LAST, EH? GOOD.



IF YOU HADN'T COME TO YOUR SENSES BEFORE WE MOVED OUT, I'D HAVE HAD TO CARRY YOU!

HUH? ALL SLAIN THEN, EXCEPT US TWO?

AND OUR CHARGE! THEY SPARED US TWO TO DO SLAVE LABOR-- BECAUSE OF OUR SIZE!

NO MORE TALKING, OUTLANDER DOGS-- TILL WE REACH THE VALLEY OF THE SUN!

ALL RIGHT, MEN OF THE HILLS-- THE TIME IS COME TO DEPART!

LET THE SNOW-VULTURES MINISTER TO OUR DEAD--



--AND THE GREY WOLVES TEND TO OUR WOUNDED!



TALKING IS FORBIDDEN. BUT, PERHAPS IT IS A MERCY, AFTER ALL.

FOR, THE SUSPICION WITH WHICH WHITE MAN VIEWS BLACK -- AND VICE VERSA -- IS NOT A THING OF RECENT VINTAGE.

MORE'S THE PITY.



UNSPEAKING, THE GIANT BLACK SNIVERS IN THE HIGH COLD WINDS WHICH ARE MOTHER'S MILK TO CONAN...



...AND ONLY THE FLIMSY DRAPERY OF HER HORSE-DRAWN PAVILION SHIELDS ONE WHOM TWO-SCORE TURANIANS DIED TO PROTECT:

THE PRINCESS YOLINGA...



...YOUNG DAUGHTER OF YEZZDIGERD, GRAND-DAUGHTER OF KING YILDIZ...

...AND, OF LATE, A SHELTERED STUDENT AT THE NORTHERN CONVENT OF THE SACRED HEART OF TARIM.



NORTHWARD THEY MARCH. YET, STRANGELY, CONAN'S WELL-HONED SENSES CAN TELL THAT, HOUR BY HOUR, IT IS GETTING...



...WARMER...

... AS THEY WIND RELENTLESSLY DOWN STEEP, MIST-ENCIRCLED SLOPES...



...TO COME AT LAST TO A STARTLINGLY VERDANT VALLEY... AND A WAITING VESSEL.

AND CONAN'S SKIN CRAWLS...

...NOT MERELY WITH THE OPPRESSIVE HEAT WHICH IS SO ALIEN TO HIM, BUT WITH A GROWING SENSE OF IMMINENT DANGER.

STILL, WORDS--LIKE SHROUDS--MAY COVER THINGS WE DO NOT WISH TO SEE.



YOU SEEM CALM AS A CAT ABOUT IT ALL, BLACK MAN.

WHY NOT, PALE MAN?

THIS IS MY KIND OF COUNTRY NOW.

NO TALKING!

A HARSH WORD FROM AN ARMED GUARD MAY, INDEED, SILENCE KUSHITE AND CIMMERIAN.

BUT NOT THE BIRDS...

...OR SHAFTS OF GOLDEN SUN, WHICH MAKE THEIR OWN STILL MUSIC.



THEN, SUDDENLY...

LOOK OUT! UNICORN!!

CROM!

NEW TO JUNGLEWAYS, CONAN HAS NEVER BEFORE SEEN A MONSTER SUCH AS THIS...

...AND HE FREEZES FEAR-STRUCK IN HIS TRACKS, AS SURELY AS IF IT WERE A WINGED MAN-BAT OR A MAMMOTH, MANY-LEGGED SPIDER!





BUT, LUCKILY FOR CONAN--

--JUMA DOES NOT!

YOU'RE A SUPERSTITIOUS FOOL, WHITE MAN!

IT'S JUST A HALF-BLIND UNICORN, SUCH AS WALK MY HOME-LAND.



NOTHING TO BE AFRAID OF-- IF YOUR EYES ARE BETTER THAN HIS.

WHAT? STILL WIDE-EYED?

YET, IT IS NO UNICORN AT WHICH CONAN NOW GAPE...

... BUT AN EVEN LARGER, REPTILIAN MONSTROSITY-- WHICH POUNCES ABRUPTLY FROM OUT OF NOWHERE--



-- TO PROVE THAT EVERY KIND OF CREATURE IS BUT FODDER FOR SOMETHING ELSE.



APPLES OF DERKETA! WHAT KIND OF DEMON-SPAWN WAS THAT??



YOU WERE TOLD-- NO TALKING!!

NOT SO BRAVE, EH, KUSHITE-- WHEN IT'S YOUR OWN DARK UNKNOWN STARES YOU IN THE FACE?

STILL, THANKS FOR THE NUDGE.

SOON AFTER, THE PROCESSION HALTS AT LAST...



... BEFORE A JUTTING SILVERY CITADEL, STANDING AMID A CITY OLD AS TIME.

I HEARD A TORTURED CAPTIVE SPEAK OF SUCH A PLACE, LONG WEEKS AGO!



HE TOLD A LEGEND OF HOW A NEW LEADER HAD COME AMONG THE HILLMEN-- CIVILIZED THEM--

-- LED THEM TO A TOWERED CITY, AS IF HE ALONE KNEW WHERE IT HAD LAIN WAITING!

THERE'S AS MUCH TRUTH IN LEGENDS, I'VE FOUND, AS IN MEN'S MOST SACRED VOWS.

STILL, THERE'S NO DOOR AT THE BOTTOM OF THE TOWER.



IT MUST BE NOTHING BUT A HOLLOW SHELL.

YOU THINK SO, DOG?

MORE, SOMETIMES.

NOTHING CAN WITHSTAND THE HOWL OF THE BANSHEE-- NOT EVEN CAPTAIN AMERICA!





THEN STEP INTO YONDER GLEAMING BUBBLE-- AND GROW WISE.

YOU'LL PAY FOR THIS! MY GRANDSIRE YILDIZ WILL--

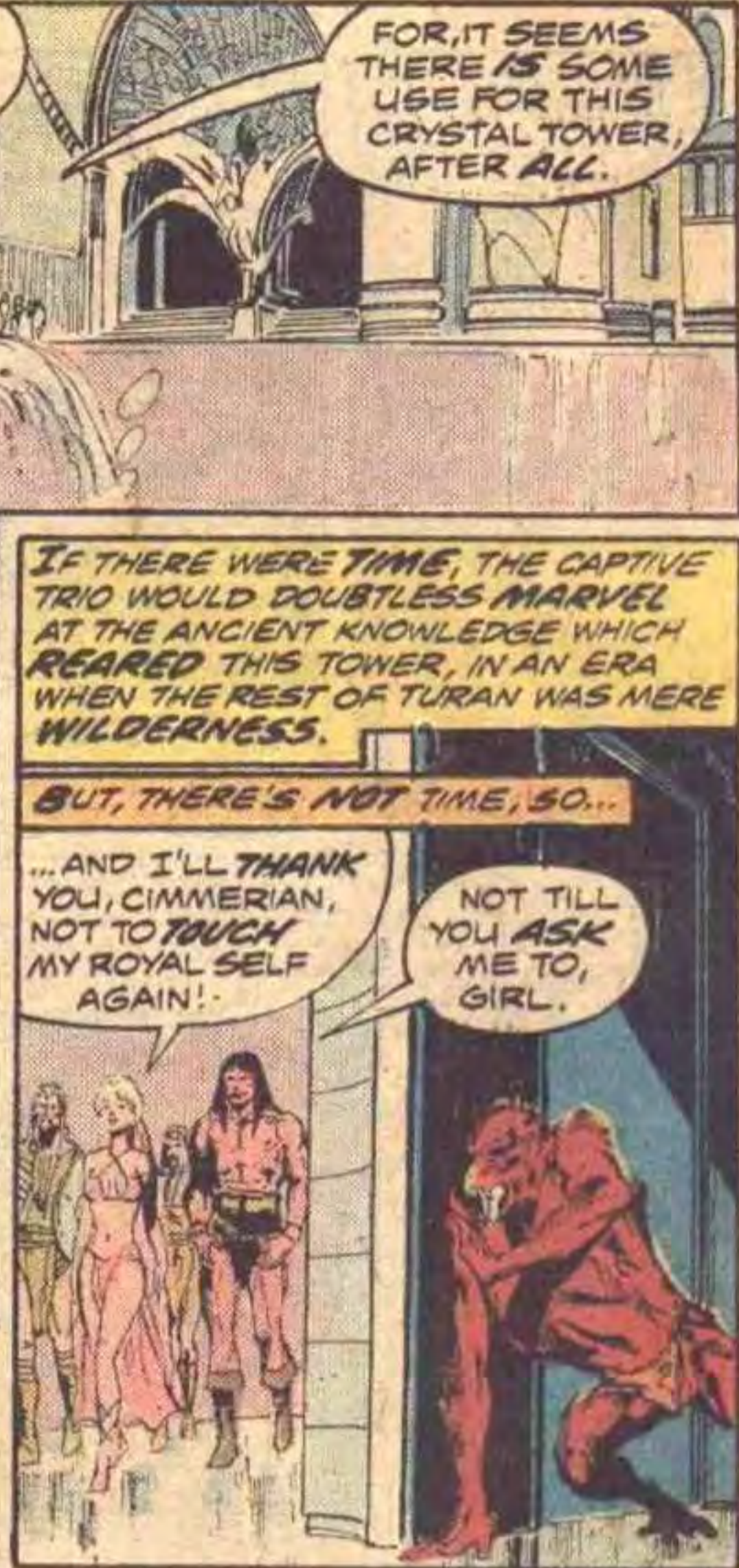


EASY, PRINCESS. YOU'RE A GENTLE, SOFT CREATURE-- AND THESE HILL-MEN ARE A HARDENED LOT--

OOOHHH



--SO JUST RELAX, AND ENJOY THE RIDE.



FOR, IT SEEMS THERE IS SOME USE FOR THIS CRYSTAL TOWER, AFTER ALL.

IF THERE WERE TIME, THE CAPTIVE TRIO WOULD DOUBTLESS MARVEL AT THE ANCIENT KNOWLEDGE WHICH REARED THIS TOWER, IN AN ERA WHEN THE REST OF TURAN WAS MERE WILDERNESS.

BUT, THERE'S NOT TIME, SO...

...AND I'LL THANK YOU, CIMMERIAN, NOT TO TOUCH MY ROYAL SELF AGAIN!

NOT TILL YOU ASK ME TO, GIRL.



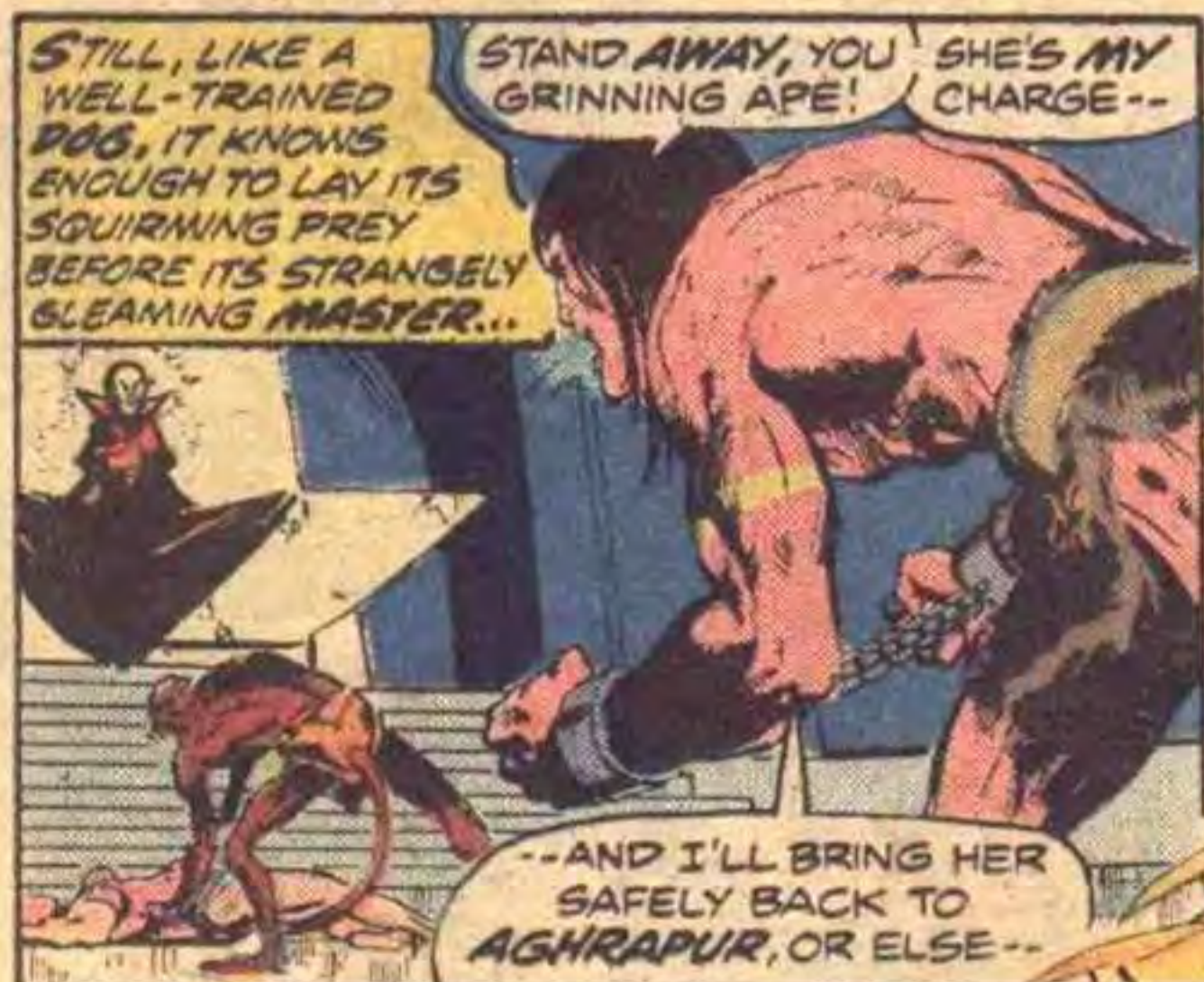
AJUJO, CONAN-- BUT SOMEONE ELSE IS LESS IMPRESSED BY THE LADY'S COMMANDS!



SKREEE SKREEEE

CROM!

THE THING MIGHT HAVE BEEN HUMAN ONCE, OR ELSE IS NO MORE THAN THE MISBORN OFFSPRING OF MAN AND BABOON. THERE IS NO WAY TO KNOW.



STILL, LIKE A WELL-TRAINED DOG, IT KNOWS ENOUGH TO LAY ITS SQUIRMING PREY BEFORE ITS STRANGELY GLEAMING MASTER...

STAND AWAY, YOU GRINNING APE! SHE'S MY CHARGE--

--AND I'LL BRING HER SAFELY BACK TO AGHRAPUR, OR ELSE--



SILENCE, BARBARIAN! YOUR VOICE REMINDS ME OF ANOTHER SAVAGE, FROM LONG AGO-- ONE I'VE REASON ENOUGH TO REMEMBER WITH LOATHING.

ALL THE MORE REASON WHY NONE OF YOU WILL EVER LEAVE THIS TOWER AGAIN!

FOR THE PRINCESS YOLINDA SHALL BE THE CHAIN THAT BINDS TO ME THE THRONE OF TURAN, WHEN SHE BECOMES FIRST MY BRIDE--

-- THEN THE MOTHER OF MY GOLD-SKINNED SON!





BUT NOW... ANAXOR, MY PET...

ANOTHER UNKNOWN: WHETHER THE BABOON-LIKE MONSTER COMPREHENDS HIS MASTER'S SOFT-SPOKEN WORDS... OR WHETHER IT SIMPLY CHOOSES THIS INSTANT TO BEGIN TO STALK THE BARBARIAN...



...BARING FANGS WHICH NEVER GREW SO SHARP EATING BERRIES AND HERBS.



YOU'VE PLAYED WITH YOUR FOOD LONG ENOUGH, ANAXOR.

STRIKE NOW! KILL!!



A HALF-HUMAN SNARL, THRU CURLED LIPS... A FLEXING OF CORDED, HAIRY MUSCLES... THEN A SUDDEN LEAP!

BUT, CONAN IS FAR MORE AGILE THAN HIS MIGHTY FRAME BETRAYS, AND SO AVOIDS THOSE WILDLY-FLAILING CLAWS...



...TO DROP MAN-FORGED CHAINS ABOUT A WIND-PIPE WHICH STILL, AFTER ALL, MUST BREATHE!

THE BEAST-THING IS STRONGER THAN A MAN-- EVEN A GREAT-THEWED CIMMERIAN-- AS IT WOULD DOUBTLESS PROVE--



--IF IT HAD BUT A FEW MORE MOMENTS OF LIFE!



ALL RIGHT, YOU BUMPKINS DRESSED UP LIKE WARRIORS--

NOW, LET'S SEE IF YOU HAVE ANY MORE WAR-SKILLS THAN DID THIS DEAD MONKEY HERE!

SEIZE HIM! SLAY HIM!



FOR THE HONOR OF YOUR DIVINE SOVEREIGN!

FOR THE HONOR OF ROTATH THE ALL-CONQUERING!



CONAN'S BIRTHPLACE WAS A RAGING BATTLEFIELD.

THUS, HIS ONLY ANSWER TO THE HILLMEN'S EERIE NEW MONARCH IS SLASHED IN BOLD LETTERS OF BLOOD-- WITH FREE-SWINGING CHAINS FOR THEIR SYLLUS.

BARBARIAN! YOU WILL CEASE THIS SLAUGHTER OF MY BEST WARRIORS--



--AND YOU WILL CEASE IT AT ONCE--



OR, BY THE TALONS OF THE APE LORDS-- TURANIAN HEIRESS OR NO--

--I'LL SLICE THE PRINCESS YOLINDA'S LOVELY THROAT!

YOU DEVIL--!



FOR ONCE, PALE-SKIN, YOU'RE RIGHT AS TROPICAL RAINS!

THAT GOLD-FLESHED DOG IS A DEVIL--AND HE'S CASTING SPELLS OVER YOU!

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT??



WHY, NOTHING, CIMMERIAN--



--ONLY THIS!!

AIEE



YOU BLACK-HEARTED FIEND! I DON'T CARE A HOUND'S TOOTH ABOUT THE GIRL-- BUT SHE WAS IN OUR CARE!

BY CROM, I'LL FLAY YOUR EBON HIDE, AND NAIL IT TO--

NOT SO FAST! IT WASN'T THE PRINCESS I SPEARED--



--BUT ROTATH'S MONKEY-- ALREADY DEAD!



I UNDERESTIMATED YOU, BLACK MAN--

--AND DIDN'T BOTHER MESMERIZING YOU--





--AN ERROR I WON'T MAKE AGAIN!

YOU'LL GET NO CHANCE-- IF WE TWO KEEP FAR ENOUGH APART!

NO! HE'S NOT TRYING TO BEWITCH US THIS TIME. HE'S THROWING SOMETHING HE HAD UP HIS SLEEVES--

--SOMETHING-- THAT MAKES THE EYES-- GROW HEAVY--!



EVEN IN LEMURIAN TIMES...

...A SORCERER NEEDED TO KNOW THE SECRET OF HERB-DIPPED DARTS.



THE LAST THING CONAN'S GLAZED EYES SEE IS YOLINDA...

...DAUGHTER OF A MAN WHO HAS SWORN TO KILL HIM...

...YET SO PITIFULLY, APPEALINGLY HELPLESS.



STILL, AS IT TURNS OUT...

...HARDLY MORE SO THAN CONAN AND JUMA THEMSELVES!



EYES OPEN BEFORE EARS HEAR...



BUT, SOME THINGS ARE CLEAR ENOUGH:

WORK, SLAVES-- OR DIE!!

AND, WITH OUR MASTER'S BLESSING, I CARE LITTLE WHICH IT BE!



LET'S SKIP MERCIFULLY OVER SEVERAL DAYS OF BACK-BREAKING SEEMINGLY ENDLESS TOIL IN NEAR-DARKNESS...

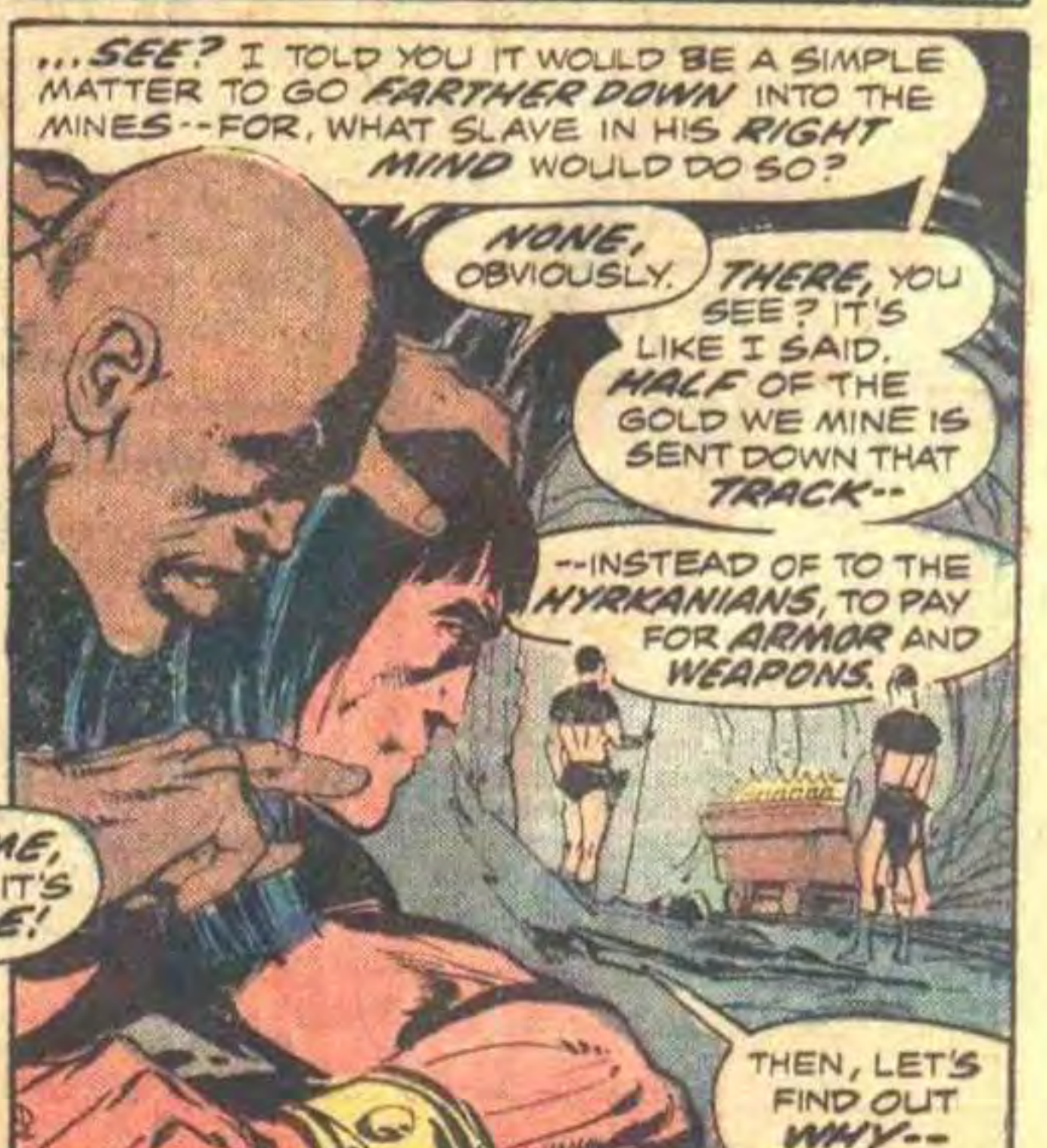
...IN MINES WHICH PRODUCE EVEN MORE GOLD THAN SEEMS TO SEE THE LIGHT OF DAY ABOVE.



BUT, ERE LONG...

THE GUARDS ARE BORED WITH US BY NOW, CONAN. AND PERHAPS WE'VE BOTH LEARNED THAT SKINS HAVE NO COLOR IN A WORLD OF SHADOWS.

COME, THEN, IT'S TIME!



...SEE? I TOLD YOU IT WOULD BE A SIMPLE MATTER TO GO FARTHER DOWN INTO THE MINES--FOR, WHAT SLAVE IN HIS RIGHT MIND WOULD DO SO?

NONE, OBVIOUSLY.

THERE, YOU SEE? IT'S LIKE I SAID. HALF OF THE GOLD WE MINE IS SENT DOWN THAT TRACK--

--INSTEAD OF TO THE HYRKANIANS, TO PAY FOR ARMOR AND WEAPONS.

THEN, LET'S FIND OUT WHY--



"--AND IF NOTHING ELSE, WE MAY DISCOVER A WAY OUT OF THIS HELLHOLE!"



OPPORTUNITY NEED HARDLY RAP TWICE FOR THIS DESPERATE, STRANGELY-MATCHED PAIR.



ONCE ONLY-- AND THEY STRIKE!

MANHOOD OF AJUJO! HERE COME THE SLAIN ONE'S COMRADES, BACK FROM GUZZLING A SECRET JUG OF WINE!

THEN LET'S SEE IF WE LIKE WHAT LIES AHEAD BETTER THAN WHAT'S BEHIND.



HERE WE GO!



HOLD YOUR SPEAR!

BUT--THEY'RE ESCAPING, INTO THE ZONE FORBIDDEN US TO ENTER, BY THE MASTER HIM-SELF!

TRUE ENOUGH...



...AND THOSE TWO WILL SOON FIND, I'LL WAGER, JUST WHY IT WAS FORBIDDEN!



INTO NIGH-STYGIAN BLACKNESS ROLLS THE CART... AND TWO BARBARIANS EXPECT EACH MOMENT TO BE SLAMMED TO THEIR DEATHS AGAINST A WALL OF SOLID ROCK.

BUT, THEY DO NOT EXPECT--



--WHAT REALLY OCCURS:

A SUDDEN, BONE-JARRING STOP--

A HURLING INTO EERIE LUMINES-CENCE BESIDE A SUBTERRANEAN STREAM--



--AND, SECONDS LATER, A SPINE-CHILLING HISS THAT THEY HAVE HEARD BEFORE.

SSHS

MITRA! THIS CAVERN MUST BE THE FEEDING-PLACE OF DRAGONS!

AYE! THAT'S THE VERY ONE THAT GOBBLED UP THE UNICORN--

--OR ELSE HIS BROTHER!



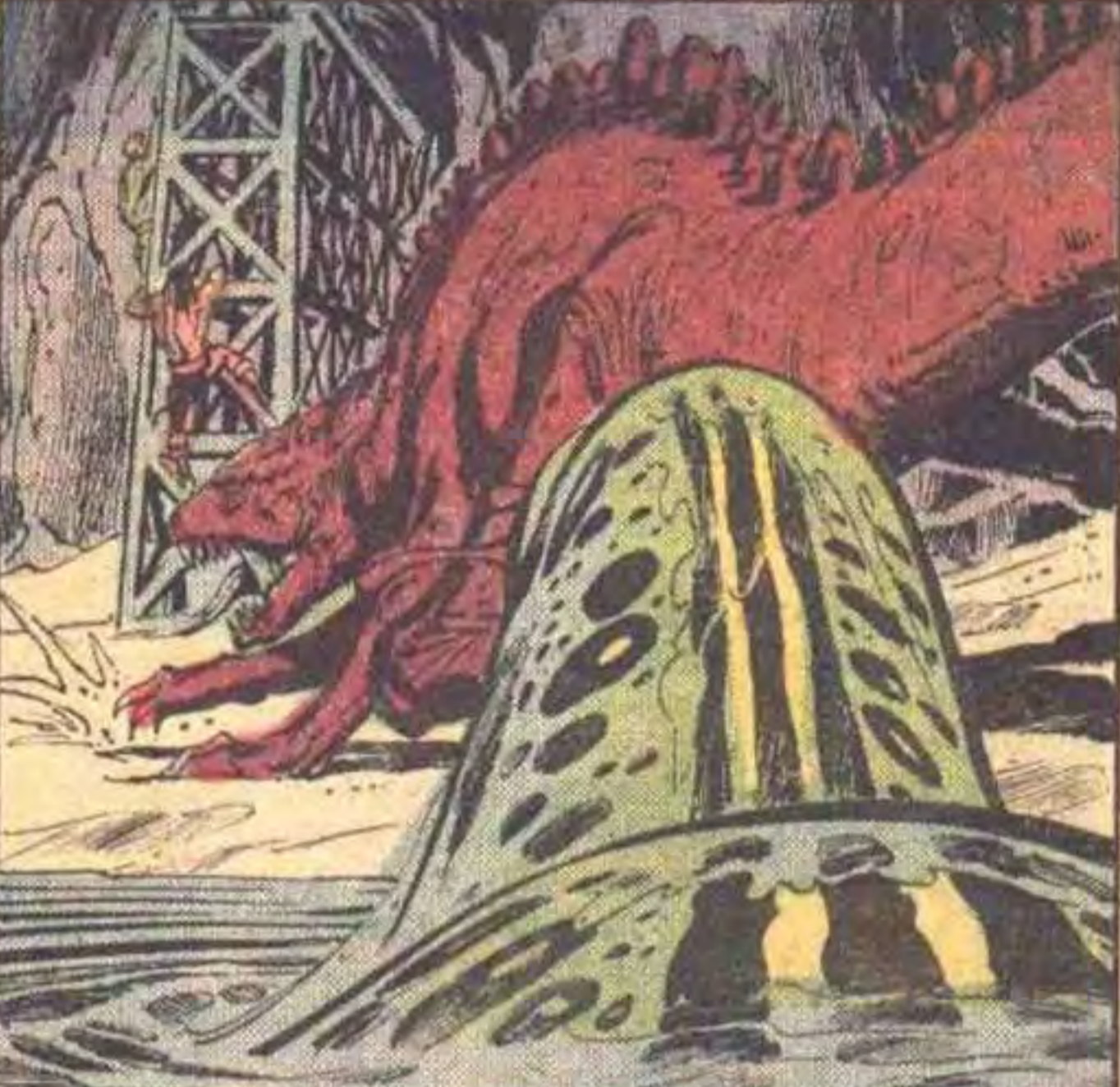
FORGET HIS FAMILY-- JUST RUN!

WE'LL NEVER SCALE THOSE BOARDS IN TIME!

AND TRUE IT IS, THAT ONE DRAGON-STRIDE EQUALS TEN OF THEIR OWN...



**BUT SIZE, AFTER ALL, IS MERELY RELATIVE...**



**WITH A SINGLE SHIMMERING MOTION, IT POUNCES... NAY, ROLLS... UPON THE FEARFULLY SHRIEKING REPTILE, WHICH NOW IS NO LONGER STALKER...**



**...BUT PREY.**

**AND AT THAT MOMENT, SOMETHING ARISES FROM OUT THE UNDERGROUND STREAM... SOMETHING WHICH QUIVERS LIKE AN OBSCENE MOUNTAIN OF LOATHSOME, SLIME-WET TISSUE.**

**THEN, THE THING BEGINS TO... FEED.**



**CROM'S DEVILS! IT'S SOME KIND OF GIANT SLUG!**

**THE MEAL IT'S MAKING OUT OF THE DRAGON OUGHT TO KEEP IT BUSY FOR A WHILE!**

**MEN ARE STRANGE CREATURES. IF THEY CAN TURN A PROFIT ON THE CLIFF'S-EDGE OF DOOM, THEY'LL WORK AT IT... PERHAPS AN INSTANT TOO LONG!**

**... GOLD JUST LYING HERE FOR THE TAKING. SO, WHY NOT?**



**JUMA...!**

**SAY NO MORE, CIMMERIAN!**



**SUDDENLY SPOTTING AN OFFSHOOT OF THE HILLMEN'S TUNNELS, COVAN AND JUMA RUSH THAT WAY...**

**...AND FEAR FOLLOWS HARD UPON THEIR HEELS!**

**AJUJO! WASN'T THE DRAGON ENOUGH FOR THAT THING'S GULLET?**

**YOU'D THINK SO! IT'S ENOUGH TO MAKE A MAN WONDER...**





...AS LONG AS HE CAN WONDER WHILE HE FLEES!

AT FIRST, SEEING THE ESCAPED BARBARIANS RUSHING BACK TOWARD THEM, THE TUNNEL GUARDS CAN SCARCELY BELIEVE THEIR GOOD FORTUNE.



BUT, MOMENTS LATER, AS A CYCLOPEAN, LIVING MASS MOVES INTO VIEW, AMID SOUNDS OF SLITHERING AND SLUSHING...



...THEY SIMPLY CANNOT BELIEVE.

THE DEVIL! THE DEVIL OF THE PITS!



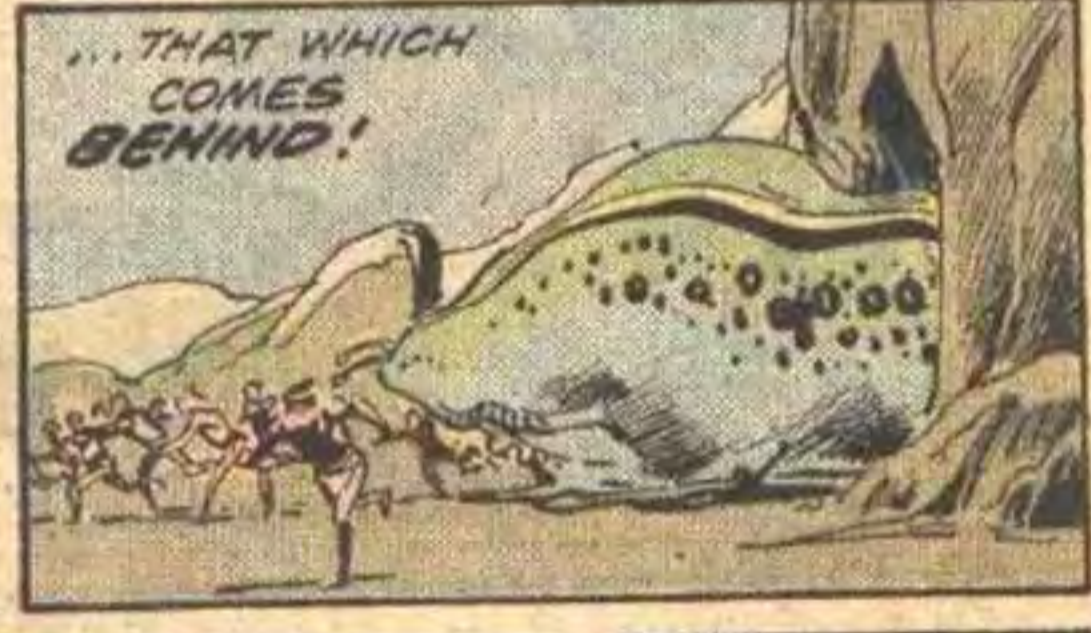
THE MIDDAY SUN BURNS EYES WHICH ARE LONG UNUSED TO GLARE OF SUN.



BUT, NEITHER BARBARIAN NOR HILLMAN DARE TURN TO FACE...



...THAT WHICH COMES BEHIND!



FAVORS OF ISHTAR! WHY DOES THAT SLUG-THING KEEP PURSUING US, WHICHEVER WAY WE TURN?

AYE! YOU'D THINK THERE'D BE HILLMEN ENOUGH TO ACT AS DESSERT..



--AND RIVERS OF BLOOD TO WASH THE DRAGON-TASTE OUT OF ITS MOUTH!

MAYBE IT LIKE DARK MEAT!

WHAT SAY YOU TO THAT, HEY?



I SAY-- IT LOOKS AS IF WE STUMBLERD INTO A WEDDING CEREMONY: ROTATH, ABOUT TO MAKE A BRIDE OUT OF OUR LITTLE PRINCESS!

WELL, HE'LL HAVE MORE GUESTS AT THIS FOUNTAIN-SIDE WEDDING THAN HE INVITED.

JUST THEN, ROTATH TURNS--



...TURNS TO SEE--





--IT!  
NO! NO!!  
THIS CANNOT  
BE!

I  
SATISFIED  
ITS CRAVINGS  
--FED IT  
WHAT IT  
WANTED.

WHY DID  
IT COME  
HERE??



NO ANSWER-- AS THE SLUG  
MERELY SLOSHES EVER CLOSER  
TO THE FOUNTAIN'S EDGE, JUST  
BEHIND A PANTING CONAN.

YOU BROUGHT  
THAT DEVIL HERE,  
BARBARIAN.

SO YOU CAN  
FACE IT HERE,  
WHILE THE GIRL  
AND I ARE  
SAFE..



...HIGH  
WITHIN THE  
UPPER  
LEVELS OF  
MY CITADEL!

FOR A  
MOMENT,  
CONAN  
FEELS THE  
NEAR-  
NESS OF  
DEATH..



BUT,  
THEN...

... AS THE SLUG  
GROPE'S UPWARD,  
TAKING ITS UN-  
MIND OFF HIM  
FOR THE FIRST  
TIME SINCE THE  
CHASE BEGAN...

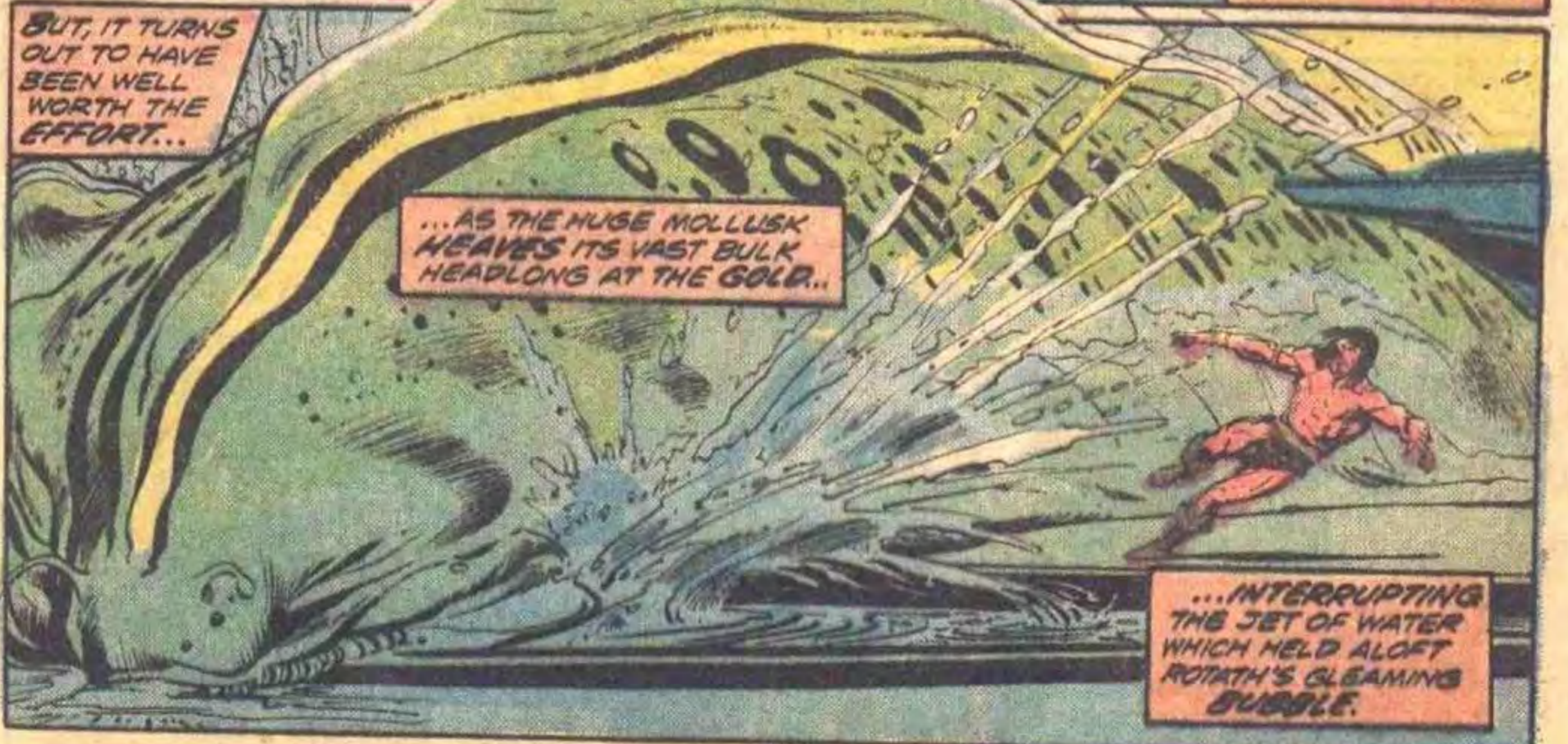
... CONAN  
SUDDENLY  
SENSES  
WHY!



HERE, UGLY! IT'S GOLD  
YOU WANT-- I SEE THAT  
NOW-- WHETHER IN LEATHER  
BAGS, OR THE SCRAWNY  
CARCASSES OF  
WIZARDS.

WELL, YOU  
CAN'T REACH  
THE WIZARD  
NOW, SO HOW  
ABOUT--THESE!?

IT'S NO EASY  
THING TO HURL GREAT  
SACKS OF GOLD  
ORE ACROSS A  
GREAT FOUNTAIN...



BUT, IT TURNS  
OUT TO HAVE  
BEEN WELL  
WORTH THE  
EFFORT...

... AS THE HUGE MOLLUSK  
HEAVES ITS VAST BULK  
HEADLONG AT THE GOLD..

... INTERRUPTING  
THE JET OF WATER  
WHICH HELD ALOFT  
ROTATH'S GLEAMING  
BUBBLE.



EVEN FABLED LEMURIAN SORCERY, THEN, WILL NOT HOLD UP WHAT MUST COME DOWN...



...AND HARD...

...THOUGH THE SOFT, FLABBY BACK OF THE SLUG IS THERE TO BREAK THE SPHERE'S DESCENT.



ANTENNAE A-QUIVER NOW, THE MONSTER TURNS TOWARD THE BRIGHT BALL...

...AND TOWARD THE GOLD-GLEAMING CREATURE IT DISGORGES.



THAT THING WANTS MY GOLD FLESH! BUT I'LL FLEE! I'LL--

YET, AS IT TURNS OUT...



IT WAS NOT GOLD FLESH THE GREAT SLUG WANTED, AFTER ALL...



BUT RATHER, THAT...



...WHICH LAY...



...WITHIN.



THEN, IT SHAMBLES OFF, SATIATED.



MY FATHER WILL REJOICE. STILL, ROTATH WOULD NEVER HAVE USED ME-- FOR I'D HAVE KILLED MYSELF WITH THIS DAGGER, RIGHT AFTER THE WEDDING!

TO A TURANIAN PRINCESS, AFTER ALL, THERE ARE SOME FATES THAT ARE WORSE THAN DEATH.

AND OTHERS FAR BETTER, EH, JUMA?

SO THEY SAY, CIMMERIAN... SO THEY SAY!



FOR, THE BONES OF WIZARDS ARE EVEN HEADIER FARE THAN THE BODIES OF FULL-GROWN DRAGONS.

NEXT: NIGHT-LURKER!