

AFTER THE LAST RUST-COLORED GLOW OF SUNSET, NO ONE MAY ENTER OR LEAVE THE TEEMING CITY-STATE CALLED PAH-DISHAH. THE PROCLAMATIONS OF KING GHANNIF ARE QUITE CLEAR ON THIS POINT.

YET, THE GREAT GATES SWING WIDE THIS NIGHT AND AN ARMORED, SCARLET-TRESSED GODDESS RIDES SLOWLY, PROUDLY OUT OF THIS HYRKANIAN POLIS.

NO MAN KNOWS THE PLACE OF HER BIRTH, NOR WHERE SHE LEARNED TO WIELD A SWORD TO SHAME MANY A MALE. THEY KNOW ONLY THAT SHE IS CALLED THE SHE-DEVIL OF THE HYRKANIAN STEPPES. THAT, AND...

...RED SONJA! GOING OUT ON ANOTHER SECRET MISSION FOR HIS MAJESTY, ARE YOU, RED SONJA?

SAVE YOUR BREATH, AMIR!

IT'S CLEAR SHE'S NOT IN A TALKING MOOD TONIGHT!

RED SONJA

Featuring the swordswoman created by ROBERT E. HOWARD



HMMFF! A HOUSEFUL OF BRATS, AND A HUSBAND TO BEAT HER ONCE A WEEK-- THAT'S WHAT SUCH A WOMAN NEEDS!

AND YOU'RE THE ONE TO SUPPLY HER, AMIR?

WHY NOT, PRAY TELL?



YOU'VE MUCH TO LEARN, LURHAN. RED SONJA'S MADE A VOW THAT NO MAN EVER SHALL TOUCH HER, SAVE ONE WHO'S DEFEATED HER IN BATTLE.

AND IT BEGINS TO LOOK AS IF, AT THAT RATE, SHE'LL BE A MAIDEN WHEN SHE DIES!



PERHAPS THE WARRIOR-MAIDEN HEARS THESE HOARSE WHISPERS... PERHAPS NOT. YET, AS SHE RIDES AT MEASURED PACE PAST THE OUTBUILDINGS JUST BEYOND THE CITY WALLS, SHE IS REMEMBERING...



...REMEMBERING A DAY NOW SEVERAL MONTHS GONE, WHEN SHE STOOD BEFORE KING GHANNIF AND HIS ALBINO BODY-GUARD, TROLUS...

YOU UNDERSTAND THEN?

PAH-DISHAH MUST PRETEND TO BE HONORING ITS COMMITMENT TO HELP OUR SISTER-STATE MAKKALET AGAINST THE TURANIAN HORDES WHICH BEGIEGE HER...

BUT IN REALITY, YOU WISH ME TO STEAL BACK THE SERPENT-TIARA WHICH WAS PART OF YOUR DAUGHTER'S DOWRY!



WE'LL HAVE NO TALK OF STEALING! IT WAS A... CLERICAL ERROR WHICH INCLUDED THE TIARA IN THE DOWRY WHEN MELISSANDRA MARRIED... WHATEVER-HIS-NAME-IS.

BRING IT BACK, AND YOU'LL HAVE THE MOST PRECIOUS GIFT IT IS WITHIN MY KINGLY POWER TO BESTOW!

FAIL ME IN THIS, AND--



I AM RED SONJA, O CHOSEN OF TARIM.

I DO NOT KNOW HOW TO FAIL!



AND SO, CLAD IN SHIRT OF SILVERY MAIL, RED SONJA HAD LED THE CITY'S PAID MERCENARIES WESTWARD, TO DEFEND POOR, DOOMED MAKKALET AGAINST THE ARMIES OF YEZDIGERD, CROWN PRINCE OF TURAN.

NOT FOR HER WERE THOUGHTS OF THE EASTWARD TREAD OF AN EMPIRE, OR OF MIGHTY FORCES SET IN MOTION BY PLAYFUL GODS.

SHE MERELY OBEYED ORDERS... AND SHE FOUGHT FOR PAY.

AFTER A DECENT TIME SPENT IN DEFENSE OF MAKKALET, SHE HAD TRICKED A NORTHERN BARBARIAN NAMED **CONAN** INTO HELPING INVADE THE CITY'S **TREASURE TOWER**, WHERE SHE FOUND THE COVETED **SERPENT-TIARA**.



TOO LATE, HOWEVER, SHE SPOKE THE ARCHAIC WORDS "**KA NAMA KAA LAJERAMA**," WHICH WOULD HAVE KEPT IT A TIARA--AND SO, IT TRANSFORMED AT HER TOUCH INTO A WRITHING **DRAGON-THING** INSTEAD.



SHE'LL NEVER KNOW WHETHER THE HARD-PITCHED BATTLE WHICH FOLLOWED WAS **REAL**, OR WHETHER IT WAS A **PHANTASM OF DREAM** WHICH SHE AND THE SAVAGE CIMMERIAN FOUGHT THERE IN THOSE GOLD-CLUTTERED CHAMBERS...



YET, AT LENGTH, TWIN POWERS OF **SWORD** AND **SORcery** BESTED IT--AND IT SHRANK ONCE MORE INTO WHAT IT HAD BEEN: A BEJEWELED **TIARA**, WHICH SHE IN TURN ESCAPED WITH, LEAVING HER BARBARIAN ALLY **SULLEN** AND **BETRAYED** IN THE DUST.

STRANGE, THOUGH, HOW IN THE DAYS SINCE THEN, SHE'S NOT FORGOTTEN THE SUN-BRONZED, BLACK-MANED **CONAN**.

NO, NOT **QUITE**.

STILL, SOME HOURS AGONE, SHE STOOD ALONE AMID THE GUARDSMEN OF KING GHANNIF...HER MANNER HAUGHTY, HER BEARING PROUD.

...I RESTORE THIS TIARA TO YOU, O BLESSED OF HEAVEN AND CLAIM MY JUST REWARD.

A REWARD YOU SHALL HAVE, MY DEAR GONJA...

...PRECISELY AS I HAVE PROMISED IT TO YOU.



NOW, CHOSEN ONE?

NOW, GOOD TROLUS.

GUARDS! SEIZE THE WENCH-- GENTLY, BUT FIRMLY!



YOU HEARD THE KING! SEIZE HER!



...NOT IF YOU SEND ALL HYRKANIA AGAINST ME!

HAH! A KNEE IN THE GUT FOR YOU, DOG--AND RELAY MY MESSAGE TO YOUR KING!



ERLIK TAKE YOUR LYING SOUL! SO THIS IS HOW YOU REPAY A LOYAL SOLDIER?

WELL, YOU'LL NOT TAKE RED SONJA PRISONER...

WE--WE HAVE HER, BLESSED ONE!

BUT, SHE IS TRULY AS THEY SAY--A SHE-DEVIL!

I WAS COUNTING ON IT!

A WELCOME CHANGE FROM ALL THE SPINELESS, SPIRITLESS, WENCHES...



...CURRENTLY IN MY HAREM!



HAREM!?! GODS TAKE ME, I SHOULD HAVE SUSPECTED SUCH A TRICK--FROM ONE WHO'D STEAL FROM HIS OWN FLESH AND BLOOD!



--WHICH YOU WERE WILLING ENOUGH TO DO FOR ME, FOR A SOLDIER'S RATIONS AND AN UNSPECIFIED REWARD.

BUT, TROLLUS-- I SEE YOU LUST AFTER THE WARRIOR-WENCH FULLY AS MUCH AS I DO!

PERHAPS.



THEN YOU SHALL HAVE VISITING PRIVILEGES WITH HER... BY AND BY. YOU HAVE MY WORD.

THE WORD OF A LIAR!

I KEPT MY WORD, WOMAN-- TO THE LETTER!



I VOWED TO GIVE YOU THE MOST PRECIOUS GIFT IT LAY WITHIN MY KINGLY POWER TO BESTOW... AND SO I SHALL...!

YOU SIMPLY FAILED TO COMPREHEND THAT THE PROFFERED GIFT WAS... MYSELF!

BUT, I WEARY OF FEMINE CONVERSATION. TAKE HER AWAY AND HAVE HER SCRUBBED. I'LL NOT HAVE HER SMELLING OF THE ROAD WHEN I COME TO HER...

...THIS VERY EVENING!



NO WARRIOR EVER LASTED LONG WHO DID NOT KNOW WHEN TO SURRENDER. AND SO, RED SONJA SUDDENLY BECAME QUITE DOCILE...

YOU ARE WISE TO ACT THUS. THE KING WOULD RATHER HAVE YOU WITHOUT WHIP-WELTS ON YOUR BACK!

WOMEN! BATHE HER!



I BEG OF YOU-- DO NOT FIGHT US. WE DO ONLY AS WE ARE COMMANDED...!

WHICH IS HOW I GOT INTO THIS MESS IN THE FIRST PLACE.

GO CROON TO YOUR FELLOW STEERS, EUNUCH!

STILL, YOU'RE RIGHT! IT WOULD DO NO GOOD TO SEND YOU SPRAWLING...





...IN HERE, GIRL. YOUR LORD AND MASTER AWAITS.

HE CERTAINLY DOES. WHY, WE'VE GROWN ABSOLUTELY FAMISHED FOR HER PRESENCE, HAVEN'T WE, TROLUS?

YES, MAJESTY.

YOU SEE, TROLUS? I TOLD YOU THAT, ARMOR OR NOT, RED SONJA'S PROPER PLACE WAS NEVER IN THE FORE-FRONT OF MEN'S BATTLES...

...BUT IN A KING'S BOUDOIR.

AND YOU WERE RIGHT, AS EVER, MAJESTY.



MY APPEARANCE, THEN, IS PLEASING TO YOU, O BLESSED OF TARIM?

A THOUSAND SCRIBES, SCRATCHING AWAY FROM THE DAY LEMURIA SANK TILL THIS, COULD NOT HAVE PHRASED IT MORE PRECISELY.

AND NOW, MY LITTLE CHIPMUNK...

BUT, O KING. WHAT OF YOUR MAN TROLUS?



COULD YOU NOT SEND HIM AWAY, THAT WE MIGHT HAVE A BIT OF... PRIVACY?

OH NO...MOST INDUBITABLY NOT. HE IS MY BODYGUARD, AND MOST TRUSTED BOSOM COMPANION.

HE IS NEVER OUT OF MY SIGHT, NOR I OF HIS... ISN'T THAT RIGHT, GOOD TROLUS?

NEVER, MAJESTY.



AS YOU WISH, O WISEST OF OWLS.

BUT, WHAT'S THIS I'VE UNCOVERED? A DAGGER OF SOME SORT--AND RUBY-STUDDED--BUT SO SMALL!?

I KEEP IT FOR... LESSER CEREMONIAL OCCASIONS.

WHAT THE DEVIL?? GIVE THAT BACK TO ME, GIRL--NOW!

WHY, SURELY YOU DO NOT FEAR SUCH A TOY... A MERE PLAYTHING!

YOU ARE TOO MODEST, CHOSEN ONE.



EH? WHY, NO, MY CHILD. I MERELY FEARED... THAT YOU WOULD TAKE YOUR OWN LIFE, RATHER THAN COMPROMISE YOUR FAR-FAMED VIRTUE!

WHY THEN, YOU SHALL HAVE IT, O BLESSED OF TARIM...

STILL, I WOULD PREFER IT... BACK IN ITS SHEATH.



No! IN THE NAME OF ERLIK AND ISHTAR--



...AND I'LL SHEATHE IT WHERE IT WILL DO THE MOST GOOD!

MAJESTY!!



YOU'VE--SLAIN HIM! THE KING OF ALL PAH-DISHAH... IS DEAD!!

SURELY THE GODS WILL STRIKE YOU DEAD FOR THIS FOUL BLASPHEMY!

IT DOESN'T LOOK TO ME AS IF THE GODS GIVE A GOOD DAMN ABOUT THAT MISERABLE PIG'S LIFE.

NOW, WHY DON'T YOU JUST SHOW ME A WAY OUT OF THIS MANY-SPLENDORED HELLHOLE, AND THEN WE'LL --



HMMMM. NO, I DON'T GUESS WE WILL, AT THAT!

MURDERESS! REGICIDE!

WHEN I GET FINISHED, WHAT'S LEFT OF YOU WILL BE TURNED OVER TO THE PALACE TORTURERS!



DO YOU HEAR ME, WANTON?



I HEAR YOU, ALBINO!



LUCKILY, THIS LONE GUARD DIDN'T-- FOR HE WAS DOZING OUTSIDE THE ROYAL BOUDOIR!

BELLS OF HELL! PUT AWAY THAT SWORD, WOMAN, BEFORE YOU--



DOG! I WAS HANDLING A BLADE WHEN I WAS KNEE-HIGH TO YOUR HAUBERK!



WHILE I HAVE BEEN BRED TO NOTHING BUT THE SWORD-- SINCE I WAS BORN!

BY ERLIK, YOUR HARLOT'S HEAD WILL HANG HIGH FROM THE PALACE GATE, COME MORNING!

TROLUS-- LISTEN TO ME--!



GHANNIF TREATED YOU LIKE HORSE-DUNG LEFT ON THE STABLE FLOOR. WHY NOW SEEK TO AVENGE HIM?

IT'S MYSELF I'LL AVENGE-- MYSELF, AND THE EASY LIFE YOU'VE COST ME!

AVENGE HIM? WHY, I CARED NOT A WHIT FOR THAT OVERSTUFFED ROYAL SAUSAGE!



WHO AM I? WHAT IS TROLUS, WITHOUT THE KING TO GUARD AND FRET OVER?

JUST ANOTHER STRONG BACK AND A BROAD SWORD... ONE AMONG HUNDREDS IN EMBATTLED HYRKANIA.



I'VE YOUTH NOW... BUT I'LL GROW OLD... MY SWORD-HAND WILL LOSE ITS SKILL!

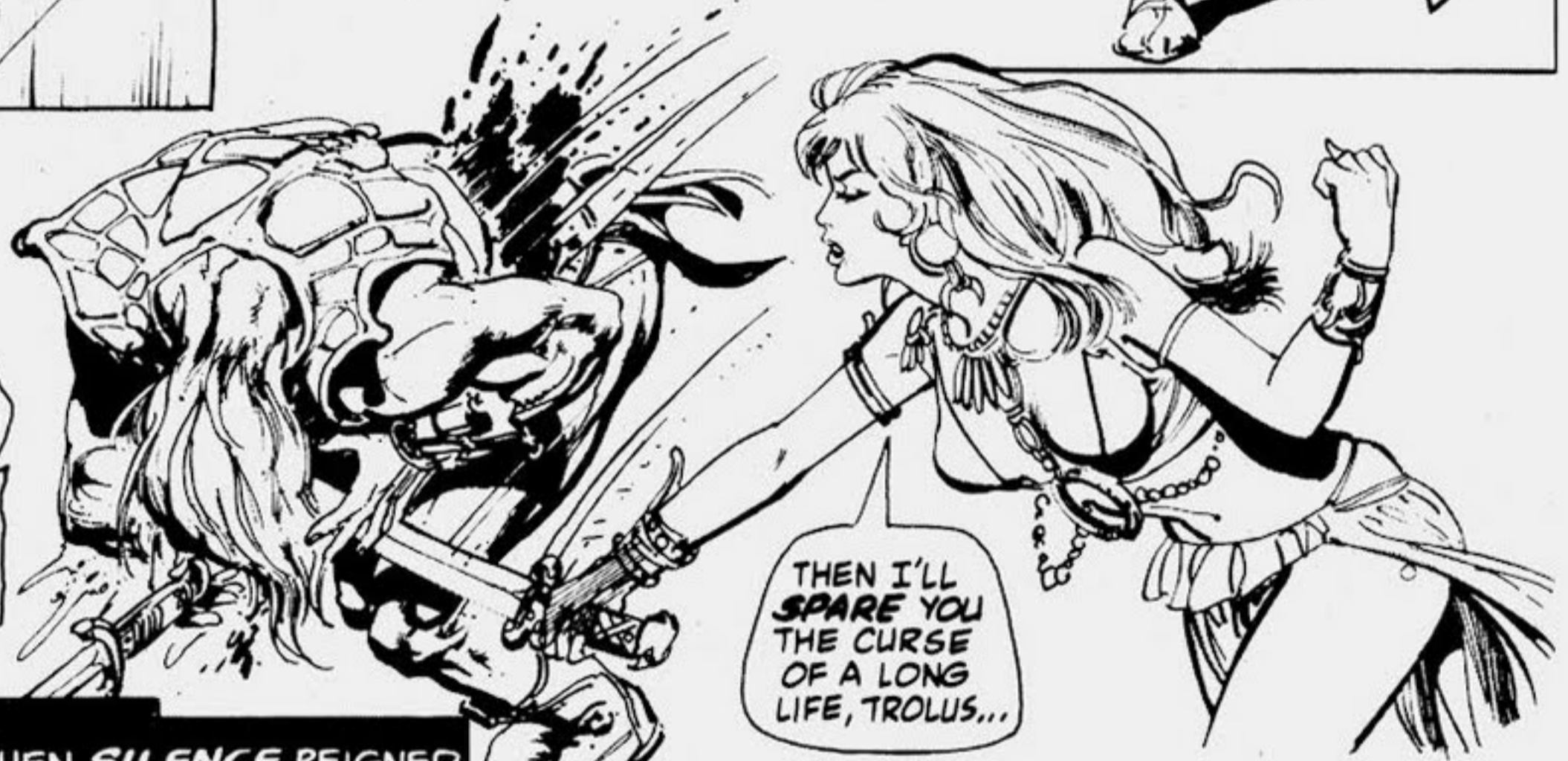


AND THEN I'LL BE NOTHING!

A PENNILESS, PENSION-LESS, TOOTHLESS BEGGAR!

AND ALL BECAUSE OF YOU!

YAWG



THEN I'LL SPARE YOU THE CURSE OF A LONG LIFE, TROLUS...



... AND YOU CAN TELL THE SHADES IN HELL WHETHER YOU MADE THE RIGHT CHOICE... OR THE WRONG!

THEN SILENCE REIGNED AGAIN, UNOPPOSED, IN A PALACE WHERE MONARCH AND MINIONS LAY DEAD.

IT WAS A SIMPLE THING ENOUGH FOR RED SONJA TO FIND HER ARMOR, AND DON IT ONCE MORE... THEN PAST UN-CHALLENGED FROM BOTH PALACE AND CITY...



ALREADY NOW THE MEMORIES FADE IN SONJA'S MIND. FOR, WHAT'S PAST IS PAST, THOUGH IT BE A MOMENT OR AN AGE AGONE...



... AND THE WESTWARD RIDE WILL BE LONG AND DANGEROUS IN A NIGHT THAT HAS ONLY JUST BEGUN...!

