

An ENDLESS QUEST® Book #25



the Outlaw

by Roger E.
Moore



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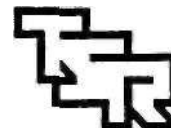
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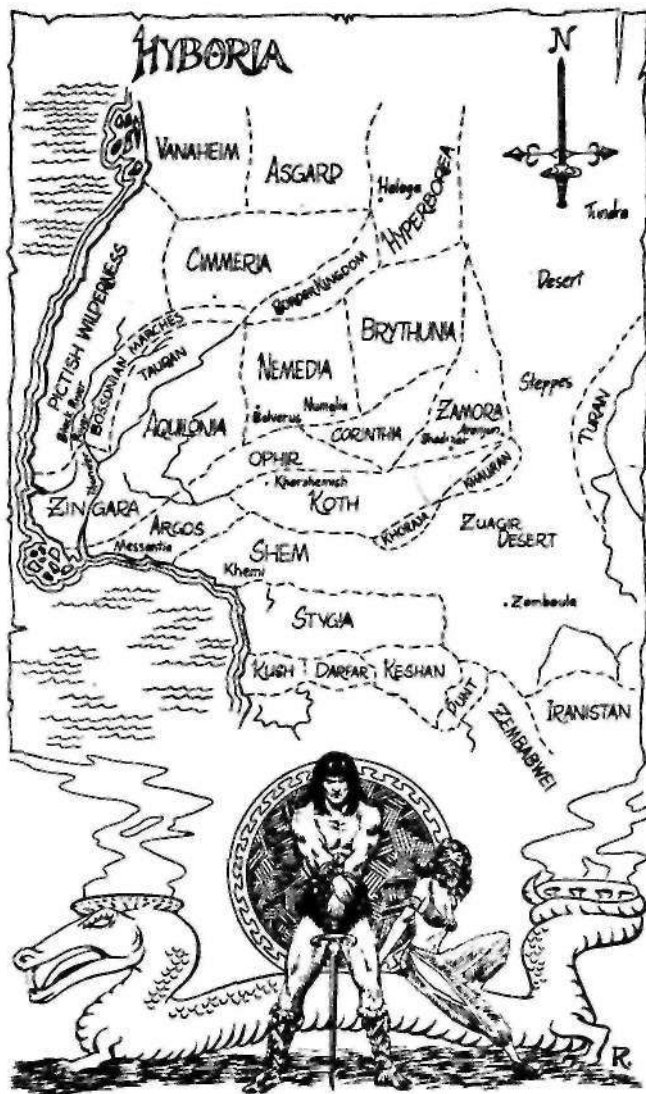
the Outlaw

BY ROGER E. MOORE

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For Marc, John, Tom, Dan, Mike, Bill,
Jeff, Eddy, Gator, and all the others
who hunted for gold with me in Mannheim
I owe you for it.

CONAN THE OUTLAW
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You are running through the snow between the trees of a dense forest. Something is chasing you, but you can't see it. Tree branches whip your skin as your legs weaken.

"Conan," whispers a woman's voice. It drifts like an icy wind through the bare, black trees. "Conan."

Ahead of you is a young woman. Is it Rann? You reach for her, but, when she turns around, it's someone else.

Her face is pale as frozen skin, her lips bright as new-drawn blood. Hellish green eyes burn into yours.

"Vammatar," you whisper in horror.

"You remember me," she says with a lazy smile. "I remember you, too, Conan. My servants and I are coming for you."

She raises her hands. Rotting flesh peels from her arms as her skeletal fingers seize your throat. "We are coming for you, Conan. We are coming for y—"

"NO!"

The dream bursts into a thousand fragments and is gone. You're sitting up in a straw bed in a darkened room, cold sweat running down your face. For a minute you can't remember where you are or how you got there. Someone stirs in the room next to yours, probably awakened when you called out.

You carefully reach down by the bedside and find your sword scabbard. Then slowly your muscles loosen and relax as the memory of where you are returns.



You've been staying for the past week at a farmhouse in northern Brythunia. During the day you do smithy work, mending farm tools for the family who lives there. In return, they've given you a place to eat and sleep. You do good work, and the family is grateful.

But things are changing for the worse. This is the third night in a row that you've had the same nightmare. It means something, and you're afraid you know what it means.

A footstep sounds in the hall outside your door. Your muscles tighten as you slide your broadsword free and wait in silence.

"Conan?" a girl's voice whispers.

Galatia. You put the sword away and swing your feet off the bed. "Come in."

The door creaks open, and candlelight fills the room. Galatia is the oldest daughter of the family. She holds a lamp that illuminates her curly, raven-black hair and simple woolen nightgown.

"Hello," she says with a nervous smile. "Did you have a bad dream?"

You run a hand through your long hair. "It wasn't good," you mutter, reaching for your sandals. "I may as well stay awake now. It will be morning soon."

Galatia watches as you strap up the sandals. She takes in your wild black hair, rippling muscles, and fiery blue eyes.

"Conan," she says suddenly, concern showing on her pretty face, "who are you running from?"

"Who said I was running?" you snap angrily. She swallows at the look on your face but stands her ground.

"You keep looking to the north when you work," she whispers. "You always keep your sword with you. And, when you're asleep, you call for someone named Rann, and you talk about... about the dead...."

For a moment you stare at her and she stares back. Finally, you make the decision you've been wanting to avoid.

"Sit down," you say quietly. "Don't repeat any of this to your family."

Galatia puts the oil lamp on a nearby table and finds a stool. "It's bad, isn't it?" she asks quietly.

You nod, the dark memories flooding back. "It's bad," you tell her.

You are Conan, a barbarian from Cimmeria. Your home is a dark and mountainous land where life is rugged and full of danger, a land where heroes are made.

Two years ago you were a hero. Your tribe I attacked a great fortress, and you played a I major role in its conquest. You were a mighty warrior at age fifteen.

Then your father was killed in a quarrel. You killed the murderer, but his clan vowed to retaliate. Finally, outlawed from your own people, you left Cimmeria, alone.

Asgard is northeast of Cimmeria, a snowy wasteland where a golden-haired people known as the Aesir live. A warrior folk like the Cimmerians, they often ally themselves with your people against their common enemies. For months you roamed Asgard in the company of Aesir raiders, fighting bandits from Vanaheim and slavers from Hyperborea.

Last winter the daughter of the raider chieftain was kidnapped. A band of Witchmen, the slave-taking wizards who ruled Hyperborea, planned to sacrifice her at Haloga, their leader's fortress. You rescued her, but you paid a terrible price.

The leader of the Witchmen is Vammatar the Deathless. For ages her warriors had raided other nations, taking captives to sacrifice to demons. Through it all, Vammatar remained young and beautiful, her evil magic

sustaining her. No other witch was as feared as she.

You crept into Vammatar's fortress and set it on fire, bringing the chieftain's daughter, Rami, to safety. Then Vammatar unleashed the dark forces of magic against you.

Animating the bodies of dead men with her powers, Vammatar sent them to attack you and your fellow raiders. The undead destroyed your force, but, before you were captured, you pulled Vammatar from her horse and helped Rann escape on the Witch-Queen's steed.

As Rann rode into the night, the rotting undead dragged you to the ground. For four months you were prisoner in a slave camp near Vammatar's ruined fortress. Tortured and whipped, beaten and cursed, you waited for a chance to escape, a chance that came only a month ago during a violent thunderstorm.

Grinding your fetters against a rock, you broke free. With only an iron chain as a weapon, you killed your guard and a soldier and fled the slave camp in the pouring rain.

A warrior, an outlaw, and now a runaway slave, you traveled alone, crossing forests, high mountains, and icy rivers. You fought starving wolves to get the little raw meat you ate. Cimmerians do not die easily.

"Where did you get your sword?" Galatia asks, her brown eyes wide.

"From a tomb in the north. I took shelter in it from hungry wolves and found the sword

among a dead chieftain's possessions. The chieftain tried to take the sword back, but I fought him with fire and won it."

Galatia frowns. "I thought you said the chieftain who owned the sword was dead."

"You grin mirthlessly. "He was. I had to destroy his walking mummy."

The girl looks aghast and hastily changes the subject. "Um, well, what will do you now, Conan?"

You shrug as if the future doesn't matter. "I've decided to head south for Zamora. I've seen enough of this part of the world, and, from what I've heard of it, Zamora sounds like my sort of country."

Galatia looks at you in surprise. "Zamora is a land of thieves and bandits!" she exclaims. "They sacrifice men to spider-gods, and they value gems over human lives!"

"That's what I like about it," you say with a smile. "Zamora sounds exciting."

Galatia rolls her eyes and sighs. "You still haven't answered my question," she says. "Who are you running from?"

Your smile fades. This was the part you didn't want to answer. "I believe that dreams can foretell the future. My dreams are warning me that Vammatar is coming to kill me."

The girl pales. "Vammatar?" she says faintly. "The witch is hunting for you?"

You nod, standing to fasten your sword belt around your waist. "It won't be long, either, before she or her henchmen find me. I will

leave at dawn to go south, before it's too late."

Galatia rises unsteadily. "You don't have to go. I could help you fight them...."

You shake your head. "You would not last a minute against Vammatar or her Witchmen. I may not, either."

"Then, what will you do?" she asks.

You consider your options. The farm lies along a trade road leading to the small cities in central Brythunia. This evening a caravan stopped down the road from the farm. Caravans always need guards, and you could join them for the long journey south to Zamora.

Then again, you made it this far without help. Alone, you could outrun most troops and evade capture easily.

The third option is difficult but appeals to you—you could stay at the farm in Brythunia a while longer... but time is running out fast. You might have to flee immediately if Vammatar's forces appear.

Galatia's eyes shine as they look at you. You know she wants you to stay, danger or no.

- 1) If you decide to try your luck with the caravan, go to page 25.
- 2) If you want to travel south by yourself, go to page 31.
- 3) If you would rather stay at the farmhouse another day, turn to page 15.

You square your shoulders, thinking, "A Cimmerian stands and fights when other men flee, and wins when others lose."

"Stand your ground!" you shout to Garvin. "Make these dogs pay!"

You charge into the howling melee around you, your sword splintering one bandit's pike and killing a second man armed with a scimitar. The roar of the fight fills your ears. One after another, bandits appear before you and fall back, disarmed or dying.

Another blast of lightning and thunder bursts across the caravan, killing dozens of men in an instant. The blast sets fire to a wagon near you. Knocking one bandit's weapon away, you seize him and hurl him screaming into the burning cart.

"That man!" shouts a new voice with a strange but familiar accent. "Take that man alive!" You turn to see who called.

Barely sixty feet away is a tall, white-robed horseman. His arms and face are pale and thin, and his amber eyes gleam with an unnatural light. Long strands of white hair blow around his face. His robes have a red stain on them in the shape of a torn human heart.

You recognize him at once as Kullervo. He is a powerful Witchman from Haloga, the fortress where you were enslaved. He is more wicked than a dozen men could hope to be.

Kullervo is pointing right at you. "Seize him!" the Witchman screams.

Without warning, half a dozen brigands



charge at you and desperately try to pull you down. You fight like a madman, driven by your hatred of slavery and capture. They finally succeed in overpowering you, though it costs two men their lives. Six more are needed to hold you down.

The white-robed rider guides his horse over to you, uncaring of the fight raging around him. He smiles coldly.

"Conan," he says with satisfaction, "we've been looking for you."

The fight ends quickly. Demoralized by Kullervo's sorcery and the ferocity of the bandits, the caravan guards surrender or flee. You see no sign of Garvin among the prisoners herded along by the victorious brigands. You hope he escaped.

Bound with ropes and weaponless, you and the other prisoners are led into the hills to a temporary camp several miles from the battleground. The Witchman directs that you be put in a tent by yourself, away from the other prisoners.

Please turn to page 32.

As you decide whether to leave the farm or stay, you look into Galatia's eyes. They plead with you to be with her. Against your better judgment, you find yourself considering just that.

You sigh, knowing this isn't going to bring you anything good. "For a while longer," you say. "I'll stay a while longer."

Galatia's face shines. "You'll be safe here," she promises. "I'll go downstairs and get breakfast started."

She leaves, and you lie down again on your bed. Try as you may, you cannot shake the feeling that danger is near.

That day everything goes along as usual. You finish your blacksmithing chores in the late afternoon and are putting your tools away, when Galatia comes to the barn where you are working. She brings cold water in a pitcher.

"I TOLD you that you were safe here" she says playfully. "Hyperboreans wouldn't come this far just for one man."

You wipe the stinging sweat from your eyes and smile back at her. The smile is an empty one, however. Tension has been building inside you all day for no reason you can figure out.

"That may be," you reply, taking a deep swig from the pitcher, splashing water on your face and chest. "I'm finished for the day. Let's go back to the house."

"We're having that boar you killed for din-

ner tonight," she says as you leave the barn. "I fixed it with, spices that we got from the caravan down the—"

You raise your hand suddenly. Galatia stops talking. You see a band of men approaching the house from far across the plain. Something about them is familiar.

Suddenly you know what it is. The steady, tireless gait, the way they move like puppets on strings—the men are not LIVING men. They are lifeless zombies animated by a Witchman's sorcery. They're almost indestructible. The enemy has found you.

"Run for the house!" you shout. "Bring your family to the barn while I get the horses! Don't stop!"

>

Frightened and confused, Galatia does what you tell her while you throw the barn doors open. Hurriedly you collect the few horses that the family has and bring them out.

The undead monstrosities are closer now. Galatia leads her parents, brothers, and sisters out of the house and hurries them toward you.

"What's going on here?" her father demands. "What are you doing with our horses, boy—stealing them?"

You point to the approaching warriors. "Look, fool!" you shout at him. "Mount up and escape your death!"

Though you don't explain why the warriors are so dangerous, the certainty in your voice and the weird appearance of the oncoming

band carry the message home. Hastily the family mounts the horses, faces tight with fear. No horse is left for you.

"What about YOU?" Galatia asks in home "I'm not leaving you here!"

"I have to stay!" you tell her. "Those men are looking for ME, not you!"

"Then, I'm staying with you!" she shouts back defiantly. "We'll fight them off! I've got a dagger with me to help!"

Daggers are worthless against the undead, but you have no time to explain the danger to her. The monsters are only minutes away.

- 1) If you force Galatia to leave with her family, turn to page 22.
- 2) If you let her stay with you, turn to page 39.



In the late afternoon a long, howling sound reaches your ears. Hungry plains wolves are going for prey somewhere ahead of you. Your pace slows.

You've no desire to come between wolves and their dinner. Changing course, you head to the southeast. Moments later you hear a new sound that changes everything. It's an Aesir battle cry. And it was uttered by a woman!

Instantly you break into a run, heading over a low hill toward the source of the cry. In the distance you hear several wolves snarling and one yelping in pain. Another Aesir cry rings out, edged with desperation but still full of fight.

Reaching the hilltop, you see the fight raging less than a hundred feet away. Four wolves surround an Aesir woman barely older than you are, wearing light armor and a winged helmet. Her attackers have her backed against a dead tree. You draw your sword and fly into the battle.

One chop from your sword kills a surprised wolf immediately. Another wolf leaps at you and throws you to the ground, locking its jaws on your sword arm. Savagely you kick and punch it away long enough to bring up your blade and run the beast through.

The warrior girl lashes but with her sword at a third wolf and slays it. Outnumbered and wounded from an earlier attack, the last wolf flees into the darkness of the hills.

Panting, you clean the blood from your sword on the fur of a downed wolf. "That's three wolves less for farmers to worry about," you say with some relief. "If you were out hunting them, you found them."

"I wasn't hunting for wolves," the woman says. Her voice is very familiar. You look up at her in shock.

"Rann!" you gasp. "Crom's blood, what are you doing in Brythunia?"

With trembling hands, the warrior girl pulls off her winged helmet, releasing a waterfall of golden hair. "I was looking for you, Conan," she says softly....

Late that evening, after moving on a few miles and setting up camp, Rann finishes telling you the story of her search.

After you helped her escape on horseback from the Hyperborean slavers, Rann made it safely home to her people in Asgard. She tried for weeks to persuade her clan to return to Hyperborea and rescue you, but no one would go. "If your father took all his men and failed to return, we could not hope to do better," one chieftain had told her sadly.

Angered, Rann took her brother's slender longsword and set out by herself to look for you. After months of wandering and hiding from Hyperborean patrols and local bandits, she picked up your trail and followed you south into Brythunia.

"It was mad to hope that I would find you, Conan," Rann says. Her face is softly lit by the

flames of your low campfire. "But you risked your life for mine, and an Aesir cannot ignore a debt like that."

You think quietly as the fire crackles. "Now that we've found each other again, what do you want to do next?" you ask her.

Rann looks up at you with clear blue eyes. "Return to Asgard with me," she says. Her chin lifts with pride. "You would be welcome as a warrior among warriors and never have to hunt for your fortune. You would be one of us, an Aesir, and someday we—" She starts to say more, then stops and looks away.

You consider both her words and her silence for a long while. Her idea has some appeal. You want to be known as a great warrior, and there's no doubt that the Aesir would give you a hero's welcome. You wonder what else she has in mind for you.

But a voice inside you whispers that your fortune lies to the south, in Zamora. You want to see the world first, before you settle down.

Besides, if you go north to Asgard, it would make it easier for Vammatar and her people to hunt you down, which would endanger the Aesir, too. South is the only safe direction now. But...

- 1) If you decide to go north with Rann to Asgard, turn to page 37.
- 2) If you want to continue your journey south to Zamora, turn to page 96.

"You've no choice!" You snatch her off her feet and throw her across her horse. "Ride for your lives!" you thunder, slapping the horses hard.

The family flees while Galatia's cries of dismay ring in your ears. Now there's only one problem left—your own escape.

You run for the house, closing the front door behind you: Swiftly you bar all the windows and snatch two oil lamps from the tables. Then you run up the stairs to the second floor.

Waiting at the top of the stairs, you watch the oil in your hands burn unwaveringly. In time you hear shuffling footsteps from outside. Heavy bodies crash against the front door while fingers claw at the outside walls.

The sound of the dead against the house makes your skin crawl with horror. Cold sweat runs down your face and back. You pray that your desperate plan will succeed. If not, you'll join your ancestors on Crom's mountain within minutes.

A leaden thumping sounds below as the undead enter the house. You lift the lamps high and hurl them down the stairs as the first of the stinking, soulless dead stumbles around a corner and into view.

The lamps shatter and spill burning oil across the walls and floor of the lower floor. Heedless of the flames, the walking dead come toward the stairs with measured strides.

Leaving the stairs, you enter a room and bar the door behind you. Grabbing another



burning lamp from a bedside table, you fling it against the door as you head for the open window across the room. Flames lick the walls.

One glance out the window shows that no undead are below. With an easy grace learned from hours of climbing mountains and trees as a boy, you swing out of the window and descend to the ground in a moment. Then you hurry around and jam the front door shut.

Bright flames flicker through the window shutters. You regret having to destroy the farmhouse, but the pursuing undead are now trapped within and will not escape their final, fiery doom.

You turn from the scene and run. Strange cries echo from the flaming house. You run even harder to get away from the sound of the undead.

The next day the burning farm and the remains of the undead pursuers are miles behind you. You hope that Galatia and her family got away safely. Where the undead walk, Vammatar cannot be far behind.

With unwearied strength, you run at a steady pace over the plains and hills toward the south. The hours pass by quickly as you put as much distance as you can between you and Vammatar's legions.

Please turn to page 19.

"A caravan is camped down the road," you tell Galatia. "I'm going to try my luck as a wagon guard for a while. You're safer if I don't stay around here."

Galatia lowers her head. "If you think it best," she says sadly. "At least let me make breakfast for you before you leave."

Later, as the red sun rises, you wave good-bye to the farmhouse and the family. Galatia watches in silence as you go. You look at her for a long moment, then set off for the tents of the caravan camp.

When you come to the edge of the camp, you are hailed by a mounted guard. "Greetings, traveler!" the man calls, with one hand resting on his sword hilt. "You're approaching the camp of Flavius Maginus. Are you passing by or here on business?"

"Business" you reply calmly. "Is this caravan in need of another guard?"

The man looks you over, then turns and points out a tent. "Talk to Flavius about it. You look strong enough. We'll need men with muscles and steel when we reach the southern plains."

Minutes later you conclude a deal with the caravan master. Flavius turns out to be a crafty old trader who talks quickly and smiles much. You don't trust him.

"Agreed, then," he says warmly, shaking your hand. "You'll earn a silver a day as a wagon guard and get one meal in the evening. Glad to have you with us, Conan."

One of the other guards walks with you out of the tent. "Flavius cheated you well that time, barbarian," he says, shaking his head. "Usually he pays two silvers a day."

Your face flushes, though you shrug as if it didn't matter. "I was going south to Zamora, anyway," you tell him. "At least I'll be paid for my travels."

The guard- grins. "That's the spirit! My name's Garvin. You'll find the trip dull until we get near Zamora. Then we'll catch all sorts of trouble from the tribesmen in the Kezankian Mountains. Thieves and raiders, all of them. The Zamorians are no better."

"I can hold my own," you say with quiet assurance. "A sword has been my best friend since I became a man."

"I can believe it," Garvin says. "Look, they're breaking camp now. We've got to help take the tents down."

Within an hour the entire camp is broken down and the tents loaded onto open wagons. Drivers crack their whips, iron-shod hooves clap the ground, and the caravan gets under way. Flavius assigns you to a wagon near the rear of the caravan driven by Garvin. It is loaded with spices and silks.

For hours the caravan winds its way through low hills and endless grasslands as you sit, idly toying with the hilt of your sword. The other guards shout to each other in foreign languages or sing old drinking songs in terrible harmony. No one heeds you.

As you look around in boredom, a glimmer of movement on the northern horizon catches your eye. A thin cloud of dust is rising from behind a hill that the caravan passed only minutes ago.

"Garvin, we're being followed," you say.

Garvin turns to look, shading his eyes. "Ymir's blood," he swears softly. He reins the horses to a halt and stands facing the other wagons and mounted guards. "Riders approaching!" he shouts.

Other guards immediately turn around. "Bandits!" cries one. "They're flying no pennants! They're not with an army!"

You pull your broadsword free of its sheath, its blade gleaming. The mounted guards curse and drag their own weapons out, wheeling their horses about to face the oncoming force of riders.

"You're about to earn your pay, Conan!" Garvin calls out, pulling a mace from under the driver's seat. Both of you jump down from the wagon and prepare for battle.

The bandits hurtle toward you, shouting at the top of their lungs. Dressed in bits of armor and rags, the attackers look like madmen from another world. Their swords whip the air as they collide with the oncoming guards from the caravan.

You watch as horses rear back and men fall screaming into the dust. Dozens of bandits charge through the fighting into the caravan. Two of them head directly for you!

"Good luck, Garvin!" you shout. Then you give a war cry and swing your broadsword, ducking a return blow from the first rider. You knock him dead from his horse, then turn to meet the second rider's charge.

The second bandit tries to lance you with his spear. Dodging aside, you swing your sword overhand and hack the shaft of the spear in half. A caravan guard fires a crossbow, and the bandit falls from his mount, a bolt in his chest.

"Conan! Help me!" Garvin shouts. You hurry to your friend, red battle rage roaring in your veins. If the bandits want a fight, they'll get one!

A dismounted bandit in leather armor snags Garvin's mace with the chain of his morning star as you appear. You dive at the brigand and run him through with your sword before he can free his weapon. The bandit gasps and drops like a stone.

"You got here just in time!" Garvin breathes, pulling his mace free. "Let's move back to the center of the caravan, where we can-"

Abruptly the sky lights up. Lightning flashes in the air near the caravan's center, and thunder hammers at your ears.

The sounds of battle die for a second. Then the bandits shout and attack the caravan guards with new ferocity. You understand all too well what's happening.

"They've got a sorcerer!" you tell Garvin



over the din of battle. "The bandits have a spellcaster fighting for them!"

Garvin's face is white with fear. "The caravan's almost overrun now!" he says in despair. "If they have a wizard, we're finished!"

Another bandit charges, but you sidestep his attack and cut him down with a blow from your sword. You must make a fast decision.

- 1) If you are willing to keep fighting the bandits, turn to page 12.
- 2) If you think it better to escape before you are overwhelmed, turn to page 58.

It isn't an easy decision, but you make your choice. "I'm leaving on my own," you tell Galatia. "Vammatar wants only me, and no one else should be in the way when she comes. Now is the best time to go."

Galatia's face falls, but she nods sadly in agreement. "Wherever you go," she whispers, "remember that I'll miss you." Then she leads you downstairs to the front door.

Hours later the sun rises over the mountains in the east. You are already miles from the farmhouse and moving fast. You carry your sword, a bit of food that Galatia gave you as you left, and little else. You hope it is all you will need.

The pine-forested hills give way to broad plains by midafternoon. You run at a steady pace that eats up the miles with little effort. You hardly dare to rest. For some reason your sixth sense of danger is urging you southward without delay.

Please turn to page 19.

"We have special plans for you, Conan," Kullervo says. Several bandits push you firmly to the ground and tie your wrists to a short stake inside the tent.

"Care to tell me about those plans, or will you leave me guessing?" you retort.

"I can tell you that Vammatar herself led us south to hunt for you," the Witchman says, walking slowly around you. "She remembers you well—too well, I'm afraid. You angered a power far greater than you . . . and now you must suffer for it."

Your muscles strain against the ropes. "I rescued the daughter of an Aesir chief from your clutches," you growl. "Vammatar wanted to torture and sacrifice her."

"Rann, that was the Aesir girl's name," Kullervo says thoughtfully. "She would have made an excellent sacrifice. But you took her from us, burned part of our castle, then threw our queen from her horse and stole it for Rann's escape. When you eluded us, I searched for weeks for your wretched hide. I remember you, too, Conan, all too well."

Without warning, Kullervo kicks you in the side. You painfully gasp for breath.

"I remember you VERY well," he finishes with a smile. He makes a motion, and the guards follow him out of your tent, leaving you and your rage alone.

You wait for night to fall before trying to escape. The stake your hands are bound to was driven deep into the earth, but not so deep that

you can't use your waiting time to loosen it and pull it free. Once you push the stake form the rope around your hands, you easily slip your bonds.

Creeping silently to the tent opening, you peer out. Silhouetted against a campfire is the Witchman, mounted on a horse.

"I'll return before dawn," you hear the Witchman call to a bandit chief. Then he points in your direction. "Keep a close watch on that tent. Iborrow the man inside must be taken alive to our queen."

As he turns to ride off, he calls back, "And make sure that some drunken fool doesn't get into my tent. My things are too valuable for rabble to play with." Then he rides away.

"I'll be alive, all right!" you vow as you sit down by the stake again, making it appear as if you are still tied up. The bandit chief peers in at you. You snarl angrily, and he leaves, satisfied.

"Hyperborean dog!" you mutter as you get up. "No chains or ropes will keep me prisoner again! Conan will remember you!"

Suddenly escape is not enough—now you want revenge as well.

- 1) If you want to follow the Witchman, turn to page 47.
- 2) If you would rather stay in the camp and find Kullervo's tent to see what he has hidden there, turn to page 70.



You stop running and pull your broadsword free. With luck, you might slay the beast and continue your escape.

The vulturelike monster circles overhead. Violet flames dance across its leathery black wings as it flies toward you. Suddenly it folds its wings across its back and hurtles at you like a huge, lethal dart.

You swing your sword at the creature but can't keep it from snatching at you with its claws. A jolt of pain shoots through your hands when the sword touches the vulture's body. Your arms go numb. The blow did not even pierce its body!

The beast hovers over your head, flapping its wings furiously. The numbness in your arms spreads through your body in seconds. You sink helplessly to the ground.

"You won't... take me..." you say through clenched teeth. You try to raise your sword again, but the hilt slips from your fingers. The bird lands beside you, watching you as if guarding its next meal.

Paralyzed from the monster's touch, you can only lie on the ground beside your sword. The vulture utters a harsh, laughing cry that guides a group of bandits to your location. As they arrive, the creature disappears into thin air.

Leading the bandits is the Hyperborean sorcerer. You recognize him as a Witchman named Kullervo. He lived in Haloga, the fortress where you were enslaved only months

before. He is a sorcerer who lives only for the evil he can commit.

A frigid light shines in his eyes when he sees you. You know that he, too, remembers Haloga.

"Take him back to camp unharmed," Kullervo tells the bandits with a smile. "He's an old acquaintance. And soon he'll be a dead one."

Later, when the paralysis has left your limbs, you are taken into a bandit camp several miles from the scene of the caravan battle. You find only a few of the guards from the caravan still alive, and they are firmly imprisoned.

"Take Conan into that tent over there," Kullervo orders. "He's to be kept there by himself."

Please turn to page 32.

Rann's blue eyes lock with yours, and your resolve to head south melts. She risked her life to bring you back to her people, and you cannot just ignore that.

Perhaps your fate does lie in Asgard. You make up your mind at last.

"AH right. Tomorrow we head north," you tell her. "I wouldn't mind living among the Aesir again, though we'll probably have trouble with the Witchmen on the way. We must go with our eyes and ears open."

Rann smiles in contentment, and you both prepare to rest. Despite Rann's cheerfulness, you feel uneasy as you drift off to sleep and cannot say why.

You sleep badly that night. Skeletal fingers reach for you in your dreams.

In the morning, unrefreshed, you set off for the northwest, toward Asgard. You travel quickly and keep under cover of the terrain to avoid being spotted by any of Vammatar's troops or followers.

For two days you encounter no danger. On the third day the sky is clear and cloudless, and the wind is as hot as high summer.

Rann's step has begun to lag as the strain of her long search for you begins to tell on her. Now the fight seems to have gone out of her. "We need some water," she says tiredly.

After a quick scan of the tall grass around you, you point out the location of a stream several miles away. "We can try that one," you tell her. "With any luck, the water should be

fit for drinking—or at worst fit for washing."

The ghost of a smile appears on Rann's lips. "Just getting it on my face would help," she says, swallowing with difficulty. "It's so cursed hot here, not like Asgard."

You look back over the plain—and stop abruptly. Something is wrong, something you cannot pin down. No birds call over the plains ahead. Everything seems unnaturally quiet.

Rann starts off toward the stream, unaware of what you are sensing. You start to catch her arm, but you hesitate and think.

A trap might await you on the open plain, but Rann needs to rest and drink before she can continue on the journey north. If you use caution, you might sneak past anyone lurking in ambush in the tall grass.

On the other hand, your instincts warn you that whatever lies ahead may be very dangerous. Rann is tired and might not hold her own in a fight. Water and rest might have to wait until later.

- 1) If you go ahead with Rann to find the stream, turn to page 65.
- 2) If you want to turn away from the direction you're heading and persuade Rann to go south with you, turn to page 96.

Your choice is clear. Galatia won't leave you, but a girl with a dagger is no match for an undead fighter. Making sure her family escapes safely on their horses, you mount the remaining horse with Galatia.

"We can't fight those men!" you tell her as you kick the horse into a galloping run to the south. "They're a sending from a sorcerer, possibly from Vammatar herself!"

Galatia sputters in disbelief. "Those men are just bandits!" she cries.

You don't bother to answer. The undead are on your trail, so you decide not to endanger Galatia's family by following them. Instead, you ride in the direction of a rocky hill and urge the horse up the slope.

"You once told me there was a cave here!" you shout back to Galatia. "Where is it?"

"Near the hilltop!" she answers. "But I told you it was dangerous! The roof—"

"I know, I know!" Riding around a large rock outcropping, you see the cave entrance just ahead. Quickly you rein in and dismount, then help Galatia down.

"Get up the slope and hide behind the rocks over the cave!" you tell her. "Wait for me there!" You slap the horse on the rump, sending it on its way. As Galatia leaves, you go back around the outcropping and wait for the undead to appear.

Time passes by slowly. You wonder if the undead lost you, but then you hear the sound of sliding pebbles, the tramp of heavy feet.

Then you catch the smell of old carrion. They're almost here.

Several shambling figures appear, climbing over rocks only a hundred feet away. You stand in the open and call to them. "Here I am, you wretched spawn of magic!" you roar. "I'm Conan, the outlaw you're seeking!"

The walking dead pause, staring at you from hollow eyesockets set in rotting faces. Their bony limbs, decaying skin, and overwhelmingly foul stench shake you to the core. But you wait until the zombies come for you before you hurry back to the cave.

You rush up the slope to the rocks over the cave entrance. Galatia sees you as you hurry to her and starts to speak, but you put your hand over her mouth. "Shh!"

Cautiously the two of you peer over the rocks. The undead see the cave and hurry for it, believing that you ran into it to escape them. Galatia gasps, but your hand muffles the sound.

When all of the zombies have entered the cave, you seize one of the rocks in front of you and push it as hard as you can. The huge boulder groans and slides forward, dropping in front of the cave with a crash.

The rockfall starts a small landslide, which you and Galatia help along by hurling other stones down. Soon the cave entrance is completely blocked from view. The dead are buried again.

Galatia tosses a few more rocks after the



landslide ends, then sits down on the ground in exhaustion. "I didn't believe you," she sighs, putting her face in her hands. "I didn't even believe that story you told me about Witch-Queens and slavery."

She drops her hands and looks up. "Now I believe you, Conan. I believe you, and I want to go with you to the south, to Zamora. My family will soon return here, and life will go on just as it has before. I want something different. Take me with you."

For a long time you stare at her and think. The trip will be long and hard, but Galatia looks as if she could take care of herself on the way.

You nod. "Let's leave now, then," you say at last, helping her to her feet. "The more miles we put between us and whoever sent these monsters, the better off we'll be."

Please turn to page 45.

Two days later the trail leads you to an encampment on a hilltop in the wilderness of Brythunia. Numerous tents and pavilions have been pitched among the scattered pine trees. All of the tents bear the red mark of Haloga upon their white fabric.

You watch the camp carefully during the afternoon, noting the coming and going of the black-clothed Witchmen and their ragged slaves. The Witchmen's gaunt, thin-limbed figures bring back many unpleasant memories of the time they held you as a prisoner and slave, the time when you could not call your soul your own.

You feel no fear of Witchmen, only a burning hatred for them and for their queen, Vammatar the Deathless. They caused the death of the young girl who trusted you and who was your friend.

The problem of what you would do with Vammatar if you caught her has bothered you for days. You've always had a feeling that it was very wrong to harm women. Even now, despite your hatred for her, you don't know what punishment Vammatar would merit.

You're distracted by the sight of a slave coming down the hillside toward you. The man is gathering firewood by himself. Witchmen don't worry about sending their slaves alone on errands like this. The slaves know the penalty for trying to escape.

A plan forms in your mind as you watch him come toward you. You might talk to the slave

and try to learn more about the arrangements and people at the camp. Then again, you don't know if you can trust him not to tell. Perhaps you should creep into the camp at night and explore it on your own.

- 1) If you choose to talk with the slave, turn to page 79.
- 2) If you'd rather get into the camp at night, turn to page 64.

For the next twenty-four hours you and Galatia hike through the forested hills toward the southern horizon. The weather is good, and you manage to travel a long distance.

In the afternoon on the day following your escape from the Witchman's magical sending, you leave the hills and start across a wide, grassy plain dotted with trees.

"Look, Conan," says Galatia as you walk, "I bet that row of trees over there lines a stream. Usually, if you follow a stream far enough, you'll find a village or town."

"That might be," you reply. As you speak, the land darkens as when the sun goes behind a cloud. "It would be good not to have to sleep under the trees again."

"I could use a bath, too," she adds, wiping some dirt from her clothes. She looks up at you, wrapping her arms around herself. "I'm getting cold."

You notice that the air has grown quite chilly in the last few minutes. You look up at the sky as you walk.

A large, dark thundercloud covers the sun's face. You turn to look behind you and see that the cloud stretches across the sky to the north and west. You also see something else in the distance.

"Crom's teeth!" you swear in frustration. "We've been discovered!"

Galatia turns to look. "Who's the man in the white robes on the hill? Oh, Conan, is that the Witchman who "

"That's him! Let's go!" Immediately you both break into a hard run, heading for the line of trees Galatia pointed out. When you look back over your shoulder, you see the robed figure on the hill mounting a horse. With him are two other riders.

"Look!" Galatia pants, pointing ahead. "There's a road next to the trees! It must lead to a town somewhere!"

You take another look behind you. The riders have seen you and are giving chase, but it will take them a long time to reach you. You might have enough time to get to a village if there's one close by, but it will be risky.

- 1) If you decide to follow the road to a village, turn to page 75.
- 2) If you want to wait here to fight the Witchman and his men, turn to page 142.

You know that if Kullervo lives, he will be relentless in his pursuit of you. You are certain you must follow him now and get rid of him.

The bandits are celebrating their victory, and many of them are drunk and boisterous, carousing around the campfires. By chance, you see one man waving a sword in the air, bragging that he slew a champion to get it. It's your sword.

Patiently you wait in the shadows between the tents. Soon that particular bandit swaggers close to the darkness where you hide. You slam your fist solidly into his chest, and he drops like a stone, his wind gone.

A moment later you have your sword. In silence, you make your way out of the camp and into the hills toward which you saw Kullervo riding.

An hour later you come upon the Witchman's horse tethered to a tree at the foot of a wooded hill. After making sure Kullervo isn't nearby, you creep around the horse, making sure you don't alarm it. Then you head up the slope toward where you see the eerie flickering light of a campfire.

As you near the hilltop, you look up to see Kullervo, his arms raised high, standing facing the fire, chanting in his guttural tongue. Curious, you crouch in the undergrowth, watching.

A rustling sound comes to your trained ears. A wave of cold blows from where Kullervo is

standing. The hair on your neck prickles. The Witchman is casting a spell.

With a groan, the earth near the sorcerer bulges and then cracks apart. You grip your sword tightly as you see a small white shape reach out of the earth.

It's a skeleton's hand!

A chill of fear runs through you. You've seen the dead animated by witchery before, but your skin still crawls at the sight.

"Arise," Kullervo calls. "Arise, ruler of all the unliving armies."

A second bony arm pushes the earth aside. A war helm pushes through next, revealing a grinning skull beneath it. Soon the skeleton's torso, armored in rusty, broken chain mail, breaks the earth. When the creature has fully risen, you see rotted boots on its feet and a notched scimitar in its hand.

The skeleton sways on its feet as it stands. Its hollow eyesockets are fixed on the watching Witchman.

"Lord of the Undead, you will obey all my commands," Kullervo intones. "You are summoned to do my bidding. Is that not so?"

You see a blood-red light brighten in the skeleton's eyes. It pulses as if reflecting some struggle against the sorcerer's powers. Then the light dies, and the helmeted skull nods.

Kullervo smiles. "Good. You will lead your soldiers against any enemies I point out, and you'll destroy them. My magic is stronger than you are. You will obey me."



Again the skeleton slowly nods.

You realize that the Witchman is so absorbed in his conjuring that he has no idea you are only a dozen yards away. Perhaps you should go after him now.

- 1) If you decide to attack the Witchman right away, while he's absorbed, turn to page 127.
- 2) If you want to watch him a while longer to see what you can discover his plans, turn to page 108.

Early one morning you see a distant column of horsemen approaching from the east. You call Rann's attention to it.

"They're Brythunian cavalry," Rann observes, shading her eyes from the sun. "They're flying a red flag. That means they're an armed patrol of some kind."

"They've seen us, at any rate." You rest your hand on your sword hilt. "Let's hope they have good intentions."

Minutes later the column reaches you and halts. You count thirty horsemen and make no attempt to threaten them. Though you don't fear them, you aren't stupid.

One of the riders urges his horse forward to look you over. He's broad-shouldered and tall, with a craggy face and brown hair. You mark him as the captain of the patrol.

"State your business," the captain demands curtly.

"We're going south to Zamora," you reply calmly. "We offer no harm to anyone."

The man smiles, obviously sure you were no threat to him anyway. "A wise decision," he responds, studying you. "A force of Hyperborean slavers has entered our land in search of prey. Do you know of them?"

"I know that the best Hyperboreans are the dead ones," you say with a dark smile.

The man grins. "My scouts discovered a small encampment of the northern raiders only a few miles from here to the west. We could use some assistance from you, barbar

ian, if you can use some gold for your help."

You glance at Rann, who nods coolly. You look back at the rider. "We could use the excitement, and I've a score to settle with the northern devils. We'll join you."

The rider nods approvingly. "Two more horses!" he calls to the rear of his patrol. He turns back to you. "We'll be there in a few minutes. I hope your sword isn't rusted!"

A short while later you peer from some undergrowth on a hilltop into a wide river valley. In the center of the valley is a small camp, large enough for thirty or forty men, though few are visible. The tents bear the red mark of Haloga castle.

"That's them," breathes the captain of the patrol. He points to the tall, thin men in black clothing below. "Those are the devil-men who invade our lands and enslave our people. They'll regret this excursion."

As the captain signals for a quick talk with his sergeant, you and Rann stare at the enemy camp.

"Where are the Hyperboreans, Conan?" she asks. "I see only a few down there."

"I was thinking the same thing," you answer thoughtfully. "Tents and horses, but so few men. It makes no sense."

You motion the captain over and explain what you notice about the scene. The captain seems unimpressed. "So a few of them are out looking for food or slaves. All the better for us. Let's go for them!"

You look back at the camp, not convinced. The captain isn't going to listen to you, but you wonder if it would be better to go in and scout the camp at closer range.

- 1) If you attack the Hyperborean camp with the captain's men, turn to page 62.
- 2) If you want to scout out the camp first, turn to page 82.

You've fought animated dead men in your time, as well as wild animals and enraged warriors, but this vulturelike monster is something entirely new. You hate to do it, but the only sensible thing to do is to flee.

Without hesitation, you run into the trees. Far above you comes the faint thrumming sound of the beast's leathery wings.

The best you can do for a time is to stay near the trees—the flying beast cannot get at you through the closely knit branches. When you must run across clearings, you dodge from side to side to elude the monster's grasp as it dives at you.

As you run, a rumbling sound reaches your ears, growing louder with each minute. You realize you must be approaching river rapids! Perhaps you have a chance after all!

Abruptly you break from the trees and find yourself on the banks of a thundering river. You look up just in time to see the flying monster, its wings burning with blue and violet flames. It hurtles toward you with claws outstretched.

With lightning reflexes, you leap into the river just as the monster snatches at you. Unable to pull out of its dive in time, the creature crashes into a large rock and bursts into a shower of violet flames and dark smoke.

But the river has you! The thunder of the rapids fills your ears. All you can do is hope and try to keep from swallowing water as the current drags you among the rocks.

A long time later you pull yourself ashore on a sandy riverbank. The pain from slamming into rocks and fighting to stay afloat is almost more than you can bear.

"At least I'm still alive," you think to yourself. Exhausted, you drop your head upon the sand. The world fades away into a deep and dreamless sleep....

The next thing you know, a woman's voice is repeating something over and over. Her voice is familiar and yet strange. "Conan. Please, Conan, wake up!" she says.

Your vision returns slowly. Aching muscles complain as you sit up to see who's with you.

A young woman kneels in the sand beside you, bathing your face with a cloth. Her brown



eyes are warm, but her face is pale and drawn with anxiety.

"Conan," she says, dropping the cloth. "Conan, I can't believe I've found you."

"Galatia," you say hoarsely. "Is that you? How did you...?"

"I followed you," she says simply, pushing the jet-black, curly hair from her face with the back of her hand. "I wanted to go with you to see the world. Life at home no longer offers me anything. I took a horse and came after you."

"A horse?" you ask, sitting up. You try to suppress a groan as you ask, "Where is it?"

Galatia picks up the cloth and cleans a long cut on your arm. "Dead. A bandit chased me and killed my horse with an arrow. I escaped and was wandering by this river when I saw you."

"Where's the bandit now?"

Galatia's lips tighten. "He's dead, too. Father taught me to use a dagger to defend myself. I brought it with me."

You look at her with surprise and new respect. "A warrior is a good companion to have on long trips," you mutter.

Galatia puts down the cloth and helps you get to your feet. "Now that I've found you, I don't have any idea of what to do next," she says. "I saw the bandits attack your caravan, and they're still around in these hills."

"There are more things to worry about than just bandits." You tell her about the Witchman who summoned the vulture creature to catch

you. "I'll have to go south to escape from him. He's one of Vammatar's men, and he's probably after me personally."

"WE'RE going to go south," Galatia says firmly. "I can't go back home, not with sorcerers and raiders about."

You scowl at her, but she doesn't back down. Finally, you give in. "I don't like the idea, but, if you're determined to come along, let's go."

Galatia's face brightens. "I was hoping you'd say that!"

Please turn to page 45.

You grab Garvin's arm. "Let's not throw our lives away! Let's take as many men as we can and escape into the hills!"

Garvin agrees without hesitation and roars out a command. A number of caravan men hear his call and make their way toward you, fighting off their attackers as they come.

With furious strokes of your sword, you chop your way through the bandit mob toward freedom. Rallied by your courage and fighting skill, the men following you shout their defiance and knock the bandits aside.

As you break free of the battle, a flash of crackling light bursts behind you from around the main fighting. It is too far away to worry about now, however.

"Keep moving!" you urge the dozen survivors around you. "Head for higher ground, in case we have to make a stand!"

"What about the sorcerer?" a wounded man gasps as he runs.

"Worry about one thing at a time!" Garvin tells him. "Just keep moving!"

No one speaks as you and the others quickly climb a nearby hill. The raiders and the remains of the caravan are almost a mile behind before you allow the group to stop and rest. None of the bandits are pursuing you, probably because they are eager to get to the treasures on the caravan wagons.

Garvin looks back, shading his eyes. "Conan," he says, "something strange is going on."

You turn around. Near the middle of the ruined caravan, you see a white-robed man dismounting from his horse. His long, pale hair blows in the wind as he looks up the hill toward your party. You recognize the symbols on his robe.

"That man's a Hyperborean sorcerer," you say quietly. "If we don't escape him now, we're finished."

Garvin's face darkens. "Do you mean he's so powerful that not even all of us together can take him on?"

You remember how Queen Vammatar conjured up an army of dead men and destroyed the force of Aesir that you roamed with last year. This man could be just as dangerous.

"With only a dozen men to fight whatever he conjures up, we've got no chance at all," you tell him. You turn to the men with you and shout, "Split up! Run for cover and keep running! Find shelter as best you can! Just get out of here!"

Even as you speak, the sorcerer raises his hands and begins a spell. The men with you see this and run immediately, terrified of what might happen next.

"Good luck, Conan!" shouts Garvin. The two of you set off at once, running deep into a pine forest ahead. Soon you realize that you are alone. Even Garvin has vanished from sight.

You run on across the lonely, forested hills, your sword in the scabbard swinging at your

side. Even at this distance, you don't feel safe from the reach of the sorcerer's evil magic.

It isn't long before you find out that you were right to feel nervous about the sorcerer. A strange, wild cry echoes in the sky over your head. You look up.



"By Crom!" you gasp. Shadowed against the sky is a ghastly creature, a huge, vulturelike monster. Its black, leathery body is surrounded by an aura of pulsing violet light so bright that it hurts your eyes. The creature seems to be tracking you as it flaps its wings in a strong but slow beat.

The monster flies faster than you can run, but you might be able to find shelter from it if you keep moving. However, you are Conan,

and you have an urge to try to fight the creature, even though it has obviously been summoned by evil magic.

- 1) If you stand and fight the flying monster, turn to page 35.
- 2) If you would rather keep moving to try to escape from the beast, turn to page 54.

You've met stubborn men before, and you're sure the captain is one. Arguing about why the Hyperborean camp is undermanned is a waste of time. You shrug in disgust. "Very well," you grumble. "We'll ride in and attack."

The captain orders everyone to mount up. You and Rann ride to the head of the formation and draw your weapons. You've never fought from horseback, but you know you'll learn.

"Ready?" the captain calls to his men. The soldiers raise their weapons in silent reply.

"Ride, then!" the captain roars. "Destroy the slavers!" In unison, the riders shout as they launch their steeds down the hillside.

The black-clad Hyperboreans in the camp below look up in surprise, but they recover quickly. They snatch their weapons and stand ready to defend their camp from attack.

Again, something about the camp bothers you. The lanky northerners seem unafraid and even confident in the face of overwhelming numbers. Something is very wrong here!

"Rann!" you shout. She turns, steering her galloping horse closer. "It's a trap! Follow me!" You rein your horse away from the main body of charging soldiers.

As you escape, the trap springs. A shower of arrows and bolts rains from above upon the charging Brythunian force. Dozens of men fall, screaming in pain. The cavalry assault breaks apart in confusion as the captain himself falls, wounded in the attack.

"Ride as a demon flies!" you roar at Rann,

kicking your horse. You look back and see a horrifying sight.

The trees on the hillside that your patrol rode down are turning into armed men. A sorcerer must have magically camouflaged the Hyperborean warriors. The Hyperboreans send another flight of arrows into the Brythunians, who flee in all directions.

Arrows fall around you and Rann, but none of them strikes you. Within half a minute you are out of reach of the missiles and heading for another part of Brythunia.

"We dare not stop—those devils would slay us in a heartbeat!" you shout at Rann.

"Where can we go?" she shouts back, clinging desperately to the reins.

"We'll go the only place we CAN go!" you tell her. "South!"

You've escaped Vammatar's clutches for now, but you know you aren't free yet. It will be a long ride to Zamora, and anything can happen before you reach the border.

But you set your jaw with determination. No matter what, Conan the outlaw will not die without a fight. The Hyperboreans still have a thing or two to learn about Cimmerian steel and blood.

On thundering steeds, you and Rann disappear into the broad plains of Brythunia, knowing that this isn't yet...

THE END

At the last moment you decide to let the slave pass undisturbed. You recall that Witchmen sometimes encourage their slaves to report contacts with outsiders by rewarding them with better food and treatment. This slave soon finishes collecting wood, and you wait for the fall of night.

When darkness comes and the commotion in the camp has died down for the night, you make your way through the tall grass and bushes to the Hyperborean camp.

A lone sentry stands near a tent on the camp's edge, his sword sheathed and his arms folded across his chest. He never sees you. Your hand clamps across his mouth, and your sword ends his life with ease.

You move through the tents of the camp like the whisper of a shadow, unseen by any man there. After a few minutes you have a good idea of the camp's layout and know which of the tents belongs to Vammatar herself.

You consider your next move. You can either try to kidnap Vammatar or cause havoc in her encampment, sabotaging it as thoroughly as possible. The thought of harming her personally still bothers you, but your two options would get around that.

- 1) If you want to try to kidnap the Witch-Queen from the camp, turn to page 90.
- 2) If destroying her camp sounds like a better idea, turn to page 119.

Rann turns around, noticing that you aren't with her. "Conan, come on!" she says. Her voice is faint from exhaustion. You know she needs water and rest.

After a moment you follow the girl, your hand on your sword hilt. All you can do is try to cross the plain as quickly as possible.

The trip to the stream takes an hour. Rann stumbles along on her own through the tall weeds, arms loose at her sides. You feel tired too, but you've been conditioned to hardship. Rann has not. Your respect for her drive increases, as do your worries for her health and safety.

"Thank Ymir!" Rann breathes as she drops down at the water's edge. You join her, trying to relax. You remind yourself that nothing bad has happened yet.

"The water here is not as pure as it is in Asgard," Rann remarks as she removes her helmet and sword, setting them on the bank. She kneels down and splashes water over her face. "But we could do worse."

You massage your calves to ease the cramps from walking. "Water is water, sweet or foul," you grunt. "It doesn't matter to me what it—"

Something on the ground at your feet catches your eye. It's a human footprint. It isn't yours or Rann's, and it's very fresh. Whoever made it couldn't be more than a few minutes away.

"What were you saying?" Rann asks as she raises her head from the water.



The sound of a twig snapping reaches your ears. It came from your left. Something is moving toward you through the weeds.

"Rann," you whisper, slowly drawing your broadsword. She looks up from the stream. Seeing your expression, she goes for her own weapon.

Suddenly a black-clad shape leaps from the bushes and slams into you. The man has the silky, flaxen hair of a true Hyperborean. His black leather armor bears the red symbol of Haloga.

The man stabs at you with a wickedly long dagger. You catch his hand at the last second, turning the blow aside and falling back into the sand with him on top of you. From the corner of your eye you see another assassin attack Rann.

Twisting, you roll the attacker into the stream and force his head under water. The Hyperborean chokes, dropping his knife and trying to tear away from you. You strike at him with the pommel of your sword and beat him unconscious.

Coming to your feet, you see Rann run her sword through the Hyperborean attacking her. He falls motionless to the sand.

"Are you hurt?" Rann gasps, water still dripping from her face and hair.

"No," you mutter. You examine the man that Rann slew. "They're both from Haloga, Vam-matar's castle. They're manhunters, men who track down escaped slaves."

"Meaning they were hunting for you," Rann says quietly.

You nod and get up from the body. "They must have come from a camp nearby. They don't have enough supplies on them to have come straight from Hyperb—"

"Conan!" Rann screams. She lunges past you with her sword drawn and eyes wide. You dodge aside, your own blade coming up in a flash of light.

The Witchman you thought was unconscious is on his feet. He comes at you in one last attempt to get you with his dagger. Rann blocks him and attacks but misses. Before you can get to him, the Hyperborean thrusts his dagger into Rann's side.

Rann cries out, her face twisted with pain. As she falls, she pulls the dagger from the assassin's grasp. Driven by rage, you drive your sword into the assassin where he stands.

There is nothing you can do for Rann. Her wound is too deep for healing or hope. She clutches your arm weakly.

"Finally," she gasps, "finally, I've repaid my debt. . . . You saved my life, and I can"—her grip tightens as a spasm of pain passes through her—"I can go to Father Ymir with no debts...."

Her pale-blue eyes glimmer faintly. "Conan . . . I wanted you to . . . join me in Asga . . . Asgard, and be my . . . my husb—"

Her fingers tighten for an instant, then gently relax.

You sit beside her as the shadows grow long and disappear into night. Your soul grieves for a lost friend, a lost love, and a lost future. But rage burns in you, as well, and your soul cries for vengeance.

Later, when you've laid Rann to rest where no wolves or grave robbers will find her, you set off with a new purpose. You head north-east, following the trail made by the two slave hunters. Vammatar wanted very much to find you. Now you want to find her first.

The hunter is about to become the hunted.

Please turn to page 43.

As much as you'd like to follow Kullervo and teach him a personal lesson, your curiosity is aroused by his mention of the tent. Perhaps you can find some better way to make the Witchman pay for his crimes.

Your eyes go to the sorcerer's tent. What does he keep there that's so valuable? Is there something in it that can be turned against him?

Silently you creep under the back flap of your tent and dodge from shadow to shadow in the camp. The bandits are celebrating their victory tonight, and many of them are drunk and they have no suspicion that you are moving among them.

"Hey!" a voice calls near you. You freeze, then relax when the voice continues. "Darran! Take these skins of wine to the guards at the sorcerer's tent. They deserve some fun, too!"

"And here," says another laughing voice, "take these weapons we captured and leave them by the supply tent."

"Hey, come on. What am I, a mule?" complains the one called Darran. The others laugh and load him up until he can barely see.

A walking pile of swords and sloshing wine-skins trundles past you, muttering to himself as he trips over tent pegs. No one seems to be watching him.

"Darran!" you whisper as the bandit goes by. He turns, and your fist lands solidly on his jawbone. He drops, unconscious.

"A pity you couldn't handle your wine," you

mutter as you search the pile of weapons. With a sigh of relief, you draw your own broadsword from the tangle, then quickly sound an alarm.

"Now, if I approach the Witchman's tent," you think, "the guards might recognize me. But, if I were disguised ..."

A few minutes later you finish putting on the bandit's shabby clothing. It doesn't fit you well, but that doesn't matter. The other bandits are too drunk and sloppy to notice. Picking up the wineskins, you start looking for Kullervo's tent.

For several minutes you stalk through the camp, past drunken men so busy roaring and shouting exuberantly that they pay no attention to you at all. It doesn't take long to find the Witchman's tent. A white pavilion decorated with red symbols is set apart from the rest of the camp. There appear to be only two guards near it, both sullenly watching the revelry around the campfire.

"Why aren't you celebrating?" you ask as you approach. You hope they don't notice that you aren't one of them.

One guard grunts and spits on the ground. "Are you blind? We have to stand watch over the northern devil's tent tonight."

"No need to be sour about it," you reply. "I was sent over to give you these!" You drop the wineskins in a heap at the guards' feet. "Drink up! Compliments of our leader."

The guards' faces break into grins of sur-

prised delight. "I never thought he'd remember us!" one of them exclaims, reaching down eagerly for a wineskin. "I'm glad to see we weren't forgotten!"

"I didn't forget you," you mutter with a cold smile as the men bend over the leather pouches. You reach out and seize them by their necks as they're bent over. With all your strength, you slam their heads together with a sharp crack. The stunned guards drop to the ground.



You look around and see nothing to show that anyone has noticed. Quickly you grab the guards by their arms and drag them into the Witchman's tent. Making sure that you're alone, you tie them up tightly with a roll of

heavy cord you find on a table near the entrance.

Only a dim lantern lights the inside of the pavilion, as you begin your careful search of the tent and the Witchman's possessions. Several small chests, cots, and tables fill the room. A strange, bitter aroma hangs in the air.

One ornate leather chest appears to be unlocked. You bend over it to open the lid.

"I wouldn't touch those things if I were you," says a familiar voice behind you.

You whirl about, your sword swinging free of its sheath. "Crom's fiery devils!" you whisper harshly. With disbelieving eyes, you see Kullervo standing in a dim corner of the tent. But you saw him leave! He must have returned by magic!

"Thief!" the sorcerer says with a glare. "Whoever you are, you'll die like a jackal for trying to steal from me! Meet your death by magical fire!"

The sorcerer's hands trace an elaborate pattern in the air, and he speaks words that sound alien to human lips. Flickering light begins to shine from his pale fingers.

Your leg muscles tighten automatically to launch you out of the path of the Witchman's spell, but you realize that something about the scene troubles you. The Witchman should have recognized you, and you should have heard him enter the tent.

Then you ask yourself if what you are seeing is real. Kit is real, you'd better get out of there!

But if it isn't, if your instinct to question is right, then you'd better investigate.

- 1) If you want to flee from what you see, turn to page 97.
- 2) If you don't believe what you see and think it's safe to stay, turn to page 129.

"We won't stand much of a chance in the wilderness," you say as you run. "Stay low and go where the road leads."

"What happens if we don't find a town?" Galatia gasps as she hurries to keep up with you.

"What do you think happens?" you ask her. "This was your idea!"

By staying low and running fast, you manage to make the horsemen lose sight of you on the plain. Once you reach the road, you follow it, still staying low, as quickly as you can, hoping a town lies ahead, perhaps a town with a horse.

Finally, you see a curl of smoke ahead, rising behind a distant hillside. "Keep moving!" you urge Galatia. "There's the town you thought we'd find!"

"Finally!" she moans wearily. "I didn't know how long I could keep going!"

The darkness of the brewing thunderstorm increases as you hurry along. You can tell that the storm is not a natural one. It appeared all too quickly. The clouds boil as if stirred by a wizard's hand.

Galatia stumbles. You catch her before she falls, half carrying her the last few hundred yards into the village. The town is small, perhaps having only a few dozen families, but still it might have horses for sale.

Villagers, dressed in the green and brown clothes common to farming people, stop their work to peer at you inquisitively as you enter

the town. You slow down and look back. There's no sign of the Witchman and his followers, though the storm still covers the sky.

You tell Galatia about your plans to look for a horse. "I have a few coins with me," she gasps as she tries to catch her breath. "Let's find out where the stables are."

You turn and address the crowd. "Is there anywhere here we can buy a horse?"

For a moment no one speaks. Finally, a hard-muscled man in work clothes points to one of the buildings. "There's a stable behind the wayfarers' lodge," he says reluctantly.

You nod silently and lead Galatia on to the lodge, glancing up at the darkened sky. The crowd whispers among themselves as they watch you go.

"I guess we made quite an entrance," Galatia says. "They must wonder why we were running like that."

"Let them wonder," you grumble as you enter the lodge. It takes only a few minutes to find the innkeeper and tell him of your need for a horse. He goes to check the stable, leaving the two of you in the entry room of the lodge.

"We'll ride out as soon as we get a good horse," you promise. "Let's hope we don't have to steal one."

The innkeeper returns and Galatia takes over discussion of payment for the horse he offers since she has the money. You go to the doorway and stretch your muscles. All your

senses are alert for danger. The thunderstorm is fading away, a sign that you hope means the riders have gone elsewhere to look for you.

"I'll be back in a moment," Galatia says. "The innkeeper says he wants to show me the horse."

"Make it quick," you tell her as she rounds the corner. You stand outside the inn to wait.

Minutes pass and you begin to grow restless. You are about to go around to the back and urge Galatia to hurry, when you hear a scream from behind the lodge. You draw your broadsword and run around the side of the building.

"My husband!" wails an old woman. "Someone's attacked my husband!"

A small crowd of people is already gathering around a small stable. You hurry over and see the innkeeper, badly wounded, lying in the middle of the crowd. Galatia is not in sight.

You kneel down by the innkeeper and look him over. He is badly hurt, but you think he may survive. You look into his ashen face.

"What happened? Where's the girl who was with you?" you ask hurriedly.

The man grimaces from the pain of his wounds. "Th-three m-m-men," he gasps. "A thin man in white robes and... two other men ... they kidnapped the girl."

The man coughs in pain, and you let him alone. You stand up and look over the crowd, but there is no sign of the Witchman or of Galatia.

You realize that you can either track the Witchman on your own or try to get help from the villagers. The people appear to be suspicious of you, but perhaps they will be willing to try to avenge the wounding of the innkeeper.

- 1) If you want to go after the Witchman and his allies by yourself, turn to page 134.
- 2) If you ask the villagers for help, turn to page 122.

Knowing from your own experience that slaves will do anything to harm those who enslave them, you decide to take the chance. You wait patiently until the slave makes his way within a few yards of where you are hiding. Seeing that you're both out of sight of the camp, you lean forward and hiss at him.

The slave freezes, nearly dropping the wood he's carrying. "Yes?" he asks in a shaking voice.

"I'm not one of those northern devils," you tell him. Slowly he turns in your direction, his face white with fear.

"Tell me about the camp on the hill and how many men are there," you whisper.

The slave shoots a frightened gaze back at the distant hilltop. "I shouldn't even speak with you," he whispers.

"Crom take you!" you say angrily. "I want to get into the camp and find Vammatar! Is she here with her bodyguards?"

After many minutes of talking, you convince the slave to help you out. He quickly sketches a map of the camp in the dirt and points out the location of Vammatar's personal tent and guards.

"You'll be repaid for this," you tell the slave. "After tonight, Vammatar and her men may be in no condition to keep slaves."

"How many more of you are hidden in the trees here?" the man asks hopefully.

You shake your head. "There's just me."

The slave's face falls. "One man against



the Witchmen? You're a fool. But, if you can rid us of the Witch-Queen, you'll be a fool and a hero, too."

"How can I get into camp?" you ask.

The slave shrugs. "Disguise yourself as a slave. There are nearly a hundred of us in the camp. It should work for a while."

You think about it and nod. "See if you can bring me one of the garments that the slaves in camp are wearing, then," you tell him. "I'll be waiting here for you."

Snatching up a last piece of wood, the slave hurries away. You hide again and wait, wondering if the slave will have the courage to return. But an hour later the slave creeps down the hill and hands you a filthy tunic that he had hidden under his own.

"These Hyperborean dogs held me as a slave until two months ago,"

you growl as you put on the tunic. "I remember every day of it, and I swore I'd repay them for it. This will be the day they collect."

You conceal your sword and scabbard in a stack of wood that you quickly gather. Then you and the slave walk up the slope to the camp.

Life in the camp is very much the way you remember it from your time as a slave. You never look Witchmen in the eye, and you keep your head bowed in their presence. Whatever they ask of you, you do immediately and without comment.

As you move through the camp trying to be inconspicuous, you manage to hide the sword where you can find it easily. Then, just after dusk, you make a decision. Either you can start a slave rebellion to allow you to find Vammatar in the confusion or you can slip into her tent and capture her alone.

During the night you find yourself out of sight of both the Hyperboreans and the slaves. You know it's time to act.

- 1) If you start a slave uprising in the camp, turn to page 148.
- 2) If you hunt for Vammatar's tent, turn to page 90.

"Before you ride in," you say, turning to the captain, "I want to scout the camp from a closer range with my friend."

The captain argues, threatens, and then finally agrees in the face of your determination. But he adds, "I want you back within two hours. We ride in after that."

You and Rann set off, creeping down the wooded hillside toward the camp in the valley. Moving quickly and silently, like two hunting cats, you soon reach a point only a few hundred yards from the camp itself.

Motioning Rann to stay where she is, you inch forward from bush to bush. Finally, you stop between two rocks, invisible to anyone who might happen by.

Two Hyperboreans are conversing nearby in their guttural tongue. You can make out most of what they're saying, having learned to speak Hyperborean while enslaved there.

"I like it not," one of them says darkly. His clothing is drenched with sweat. "Coming south into this heat for the sake of one escaped slave is madness. Vammatar is a fool to send us into this land."

"A tongue like that would be torn from your mouth if Vammatar heard," the other man hisses. He scans the horizon, as he shrugs in his sweat-dampened clothes. "I dislike the heat as much as you, but we serve the queen, and we can do nothing more."

"But you agree it is madness to scatter all Haloga's forces south into this accursed

nation!" the first mutters. "I dislike waiting here for anyone to attack us while we broil in our skins."

The other man stretches, his long arms reaching up like a spider's forelegs. "We're safe. If anyone attacks, the men that the sorcerer Surma hid with his spells will cut them to pieces. Enjoy your rest."

The first man looks up at the hillside you just descended. "His magic is still holding. They look just like trees. I hope he doesn't forget to change them back into men."

The other man laughs coldly. "A fine mistake, to leave them deaf and blind as trees forever!" he snorts as you slowly creep back up the hill to collect Rann.

A short while later you tell Rann what you heard. She looks back in shock at the trees on the hillside. "You mean those are really MEN?" she gasps. "They must not have been able to see or hear us, then."

"They won't get the chance to stop us, either," you say with a grin. You spell out your plan to Rann. Then both of you hurry back to the Brythunian patrol.

The captain reluctantly agrees to your plan. "I'm a fool to trust a barbarian," he says, "but I'll go along with it. If you've lied to me, you'll pay for it."

"Fair enough," you snap back. "You'll see if I spoke the truth or a lie."

It takes only minutes to get a fire-making kit from one of the soldiers and carry it down



to the bottom of the hillside. Carefully you start a small blaze in the dry grass, using flint and steel. The fire spreads quickly, and you help it along by scattering burning grass along the base of the hill as you run.

In the distance you hear the shouts of the Hyperborean soldiers as they see what you're doing. The wind fans the leaping flames up the hillside and into the trees.

As the flames engulf them, the trees shriek aloud with human voices, crying out in agony. The leaves shrivel and blacken. The branches curl like a dying man's fingers.

You hear a battle horn sound from one side of the hill. The Brythunian soldiers charge and head for the camp of the northerners. The savage fight that follows costs many good men their lives, but the Hyperboreans are slain to the last man.

After the battle the captain slaps you on the back. "You were right about the magical ambush. Instead of burned tree stumps, my sergeant and I saw dozens of burned skeletons of men on that hillside. They would have killed us with no trouble at all."

He looks to the south. "One Hyperborean escaped, however. He wore white robes, and he fled into those rocky crags. We see no sign of him now, and good riddance."

Rann's eyes widen. "Conan, only the sorcerers of Hyperborea wear white robes," she whispers. "It's the style of their society, the White Hand."

You nod, eyeing the crags. A Witchman is more dangerous than a hundred armed men. Maybe you should track him down before he finds a way to attack you and the Brythunians with his spells.

Then again, you might be drawn into another trap and overpowered by his magic. Staying with the Brythunian soldiers might be best, especially since Rann is with you.

- 1) If you want to forget the Witchman and stay with the Brythunians, turn to page 116.
- 2) If you want to go after the escaped Witchman, turn to page 102.

As you run through the night, you strain to hear how near the river might be. It sounds fairly close, certainly closer to you than the bandit camp is now.

The thought of facing a horde of drunken warriors at this time of night turns your feet toward the right. Dealing with dead men is bad enough without meeting armed live ones as well. You sheath your sword as you run and head for the sound of rushing waters.

Soon you can see the dim shapes of the trees along the banks of the river. But still you hear the creaking and rustling of the dead warriors as they tirelessly pursue you. You must act now!

"By Crom!" you cry. "Let's see if these skeletons can swim as well as they run!"

The ground drops away in front of you. You leap, arms out, diving into the river with your head bowed. The shock of hitting the ice-cold water is like a hammer blow. Your breath is driven from you, but you struggle hard, managing to reach the surface in seconds. The raging current carries you along as you try to see your pursuers.

Ghostly moonlight shines on the skeletal warriors as they leap down the bank into the river. They go to their destruction. The thundering current smashes the unliving warriors, severing the ungodly union of the bones.

Still more of them press on after you, but the surging river whirls the skeletons into submerged rocks, shattering bones and tearing

joints apart. Within moments none are left.

A long while later you pull yourself from the river and lie exhausted on a rocky bank. Unfortunately, it's the same bank where you entered the river minutes ago. The violent current prevented you from reaching the other side. You're almost too tired to care.

Then a sound reaches your ears. You stop breathing to listen. Someone is coming in your direction. New energy flows into your tired muscles, and you lift your head to look around.

It's Kullervo. He's clutching his arm and his torn sleeve is stained with blood, but he grins in dark triumph.

"Avenged!" the white-haired sorcerer breathes. "Vammatar and Haloga are avenged! She will make me rich when I tell her that the accursed outlaw Conan is dead."

You rise to your full height. The Witchman stops short when he sees you standing right in front of him. His face turns even whiter than it was before.

"Co—Co—Conan . . ." he says in a fading whisper. "No! You can't still be alive...."

"You are wrong, Kullervo," you say with a grim smile. "It will not be Vammatar who is avenged tonight."

You slowly raise your sword and step forward. "This is for my caravan and for all the slaves you've ever taken. But most of all, Witchman, this is just for me."

Later you wash yourself in the river, resting for the first time in ages. The cold water

revives your spirits and washes away the evil you've seen and the stains of your last fight. There's one less Witchman to trouble the world. For that you are glad, even if Vammatar herself still lives. Her time will come.

Tonight you'll sleep. Tomorrow you'll head south for Zamora and whatever your fate brings. You've just begun your journeys.

THE END

After a few moments of thought, you know what you have to do. Vammatar's the one you came to find. With her evil presence gone, the peoples of Asgard and Brythunia will rest easier. You must act to make this land safer for everyone.

Like a shadow in the darkness, you slip through the silent camp until you locate Vammatar's tent. Three guards stand by the entrance, but you notice that no one stands behind the tent. You creep in back of it and listen.

From within the tent comes the gentle sound of a woman's deep, regular breathing. "Good," you think. "I hope the witch is a heavy sleeper."

With great care, you cut a slit in the tent with your sword blade. Looking around for guards once again, you creep inside.

A musky scent hangs in the air of the pavilion, the foreign and unnatural odor of sorcerous materials. Small tables next to you hold dozens of jars and flasks full of dried and mummified animal parts and strange plants. Dozens of books, scrolls, and tomes litter the carpeted floor of the room.

Your eyes adjust to the dim lamplight, and you see what you came for. Vammatar is asleep on a pillowed cot near you. Around her neck is a silver chain with a peculiar amulet. Her face is hauntingly beautiful but cold and soulless. Her full red lips are parted as she slumbers, unaware of your presence.

You drop one hand heavily over her mouth and nose. Vammatar's eyes snap open. She struggles for a moment before she sees your sword poised over her head. Slowly she relaxes, her jasper eyes burning into yours.

"Cry out and you'll never speak again," you whisper. "Come with me."

Vammatar nods. Her face is rigid and emotionless, but you can feel the hatred and malevolence boiling inside her. You shrug it off. She deserves no man's pity now.

Sword ready, you release her and help her to her feet. You guide her through the hole in the tent in silence and keep one hand firmly locked on her wrist and your blade at her back, watching her for the slightest sign of treachery.

Getting her out of the camp is difficult, but you do it. Neither of you speaks as you leave the camp behind and set off into the wilderness.

Finally, Vammatar flips her hair back and gives you a venomous look. "What now, Cimmerian?" she snarls. "What will you do with your prize captive now?"

"We're going to the nearest Brythunian town. There I'll turn you over to the people for imprisonment." You still grip her wrist with your free hand. "Very likely they'll want to hang you later. Or perhaps they'll hang you without bothering to imprison you first."

Vammatar stops. "Why don't you save yourself the walk and kill me now?"



"I've got enough reason to," you say in ill humor, "but my people taught me to respect women, even the ones who are evil, like you. Now, WALK!"

Vammatar's face hardens. You can't read what's going through her mind. She angrily starts walking with you again. "At least you could let go of my wrist," she mutters.

A look around reveals that she could not escape, so you release her hand. She rubs her wrist and walks in silence for a minute. Then her foot catches a rock, and she stumbles, falling to the ground.

Vammatar utters a series of words that sound to you like curses. "Come on, witch," you say as you reach for her. "Watch your step when you're-CROM!"

Beautiful Vammatar hurls a handful of sticks at you, uttering a last word. The sticks strike you across the face and chest. As they touch you, they turn into live serpents and fall to the ground.

Fighting from blind instinct, you slash down with your sword and kill the snakes, dodging their poisonous bites.

"Never, never, NEVER let go of a witch!" screams Vammatar in triumph. She clasps the amulet hanging from a chain around her neck and holds it aloft to the starry sky.

"Winds that through the night air roam, hear the words of Vammatar! Bear me to my northern home, and blast this savage with your fire!" she cries aloud.

You lunge for her, but a huge whirlwind of superhot air forms around the witch's body. It harmlessly sweeps her bright hair around her face, but at the same time it scorches your chest, face, arms, and lungs. In agony, you snatch at the Hyperborean queen as the whirling wind lifts her off the ground.

Your fingers close on a bauble hanging from her necklace, snapping it from the chain. Unable to stand in the hurricane of blasting heat, your skin blistering as if burned with flaming coals, you drop to the earth and hide your face in your hands.

A hideous scream echoes through the hills. At the same moment, the fiery wind dies away, and something thumps to earth a dozen yards from you. Carefully you raise your face and look around.

All is silent. You slowly get up, feeling every motion and touch bring pain and a curse from your lips.

Sword and bauble in hand, you stumble toward the place where you heard the thump. There lies Vammatar's body. You stare at it in horrid fascination.

The bauble you pulled from her necklace must have been the amulet she used as a focus for her magical powers. It also must have kept Vammatar young all her ageless life, as men passed away like mayflies around her.

Now you watch as the natural process of aging and decay proceeds unhindered at a monstrously accelerated pace. You have to

turn your eyes away. Vammatar's doom is not a sight you want to remember.

The next morning finds you far from the camp of the Hyperboreans. The light lifts your spirits and eases your dark thoughts. You and all who suffered because of the Witch-Queen of Haloga have been avenged. The way to the south is clear at last.

With your sword, your strength, and a little luck, you go in search of your fate and your future.

THE END

"Rann," you say firmly, "we aren't going north. The Witchmen are going to find our trail, and we can't afford that."

She protests, but you cut her off. "If you want to go north, you can go!" you say harshly. "But Witchmen are waiting for you between here and your homeland. You can't avoid them all. The south is safe. We can return to Asgard later, after the Witchmen have given up."

Rann listens to you with head bowed. She shrugs angrily, though you can tell your words hit home. "South it is," she agrees dejectedly.

You turn away and soon your sense of disquiet eases.

The next few days bring rain and hot sun but no sign of Witchmen. As you progress deeper into Brythunia's interior, your concerns about pursuit fade away. Rann's anger at not returning to her homeland fades as well, and soon she looks forward to whatever adventures lie ahead for you both.

Please turn to page 51.

For a moment you question the reality of the Witchman facing you, but very quickly the danger perceived by your senses tells you to get out of there! You leap to one side as a blossoming streak of fire jumps from the warlock's hands.

With a single, rapid sweep, your sword slashes open a man-sized hole in the side of Kullervo's tent. You jump through, safely escaping the fireball's blast.

You turn to look back. No flames or flashing light can be seen through the rip in the tent's side. All is silence. What happened to the explosion?

"What in the name of ice and fire are you doing?" shouts someone behind you. You turn and see three bandit guardsmen staring at you. They apparently were passing by when you leaped through the tent wall.

"By the gods!" exclaims one of them. "It's that mad barbarian we captured today! He's broken into the Witchman's tent! Guards! Guards!" The guardsmen draw their swords.

Cursing yourself for having believed the illusion in the tent, you turn and flee, knowing that in such close quarters, they'd butcher you in a minute.

"Stop that man!" the bandits behind you yell. You run faster and harder, until the tents, the drunken bandits, and the campfires flash past you in a whirl. A man steps into your path, but you ram him with your shoulder and send him flying back into another warrior.

Unexpectedly, a bandit on horseback appears from between two large tents and blocks your way. The rider pulls on the horse's reins, looking down at you in surprise. He reaches for his longsword.

You don't stop. The horse is your only chance to escape. Giving a Cimmerian war cry, you leap up behind the rider and slam your fist into his head. Stunned, he falls from the saddle die. You snatch up the loose reins.

You know next to nothing about riding a horse, but, if you stay in the camp, you'll die. "GO! GO! GO!" you shout at the horse, kicking it in the ribs.

The horse rears back unexpectedly, and you almost fall off its back. A bandit grabs at your leg. You strike him savagely with your sword, and he falls back with a scream. The horse lands on its feet and takes off.

"Sons of Crom!" you exclaim, hanging for dear life onto both the reins and the horse's mane. "I wish I'd learned to ride these cursed creatures years ago!"

The horse hurtles past a last group of guards at the camp's edge, but they're too intoxicated to try to stop you.

A moment later the horse carries you into the night, the lights of the camp fading behind you. The thunder of hooves on rock and earth ring in your ears.

The red morning sun finds you many miles from the bandit camp. It also finds you without your horse, which tripped and threw



you just before dawn. Fortunately you have nothing worse than bruises. The horse, however, ran off into the hills.

You wash yourself off in a small pond. Deep inside, you are disappointed that you missed the chance to take vengeance on the Witchman for his destruction of your caravan and for his treatment of you. But you shake it off. You have your life and your sword, and you need nothing else.

The sound of footsteps comes to your ears. Instantly you rise from the water's edge and reach for your sword. You wait, tensed and ready to attack.

A figure stumbles through the tall grass and into the small clearing around the pond. It's a young woman with curly black hair, wearing a farm girl's clothes. In her weariness she doesn't see you, but you recognize her with surprise.

"Galatia!" you shout.

The figure whirls about, pulling a long knife from her clothes. When she sees you, she almost drops her weapon.

"Conan!" she cries. "I've searched all night for you! I came after you and saw you get captured and saw you escape and—" She sinks to the ground, exhausted. "You are so hard to keep up with!"

As the two of you rest and talk, it becomes clear that Galatia intends to go with you on your journey south. Nothing you say persuades her otherwise. She no longer feels at

home back on the farm. She, too, wants to seek a new life.

"Have it your way, then," you tell her at last "The Witchman and his raiders may come after us, so we'll have to go as fast as we can. Are you ready?"

Galatia takes a deep breath and nods. "I'm ready. All I want is to go places and seek new and exciting experiences."

"If the Hyperboreans catch up with us," you tell her wryly, "I promise that you'll have enough excitement for a lifetime, but your lifetime might be rather short."

Laughing, the two of you set off for the lands to the south.

Please turn to page 45.

"A Witchman free is bad," you remark somberly, "but a Witchman free who bears a grudge is far worse. I'm going to track down Surma. He's too dangerous to ignore."

The Brythunian captain nods in agreement. "I can send some men with you, about ten or twelve, armed with—"

You shake your head. "I'll go alone. Ten men make too much noise. I don't want to give any warning that I'm coming."

"I'm going, too," Rann says defiantly. "You may need an extra sword for help."

You start to argue with her about it, but she won't be budged. Aesir women can be as stubborn as the snows are cold. The two of you set off after a brief rest, just as the sun begins to set over the hills.

Long after night has fallen, the two of you creep among the rocky crags and cliffs in the moonlight, hunting for signs of the missing wizard. The cool night wind rustles leaves and dust around you. Small bats cross the sky overhead in mystic dances.

You are beginning to think you've lost the mage when you see a pale shape in the distance among the rocks. It's a robed man. Surma the Witchman.

"Shh," you hiss at Rann, pointing in the direction of the figure. She nods and moves silently in your footsteps as you approach the sorcerer on catlike feet.

You can hear Surma murmuring in the darkness. He stands with arms outstretched,

face turned up to the moon. When you get within two dozen yards of him, you make out his words, spoken in the Hyperboreans' rough tongue.

"Shuveegalix!" Surma calls. "You rule us and give us power in return for our gifts of blood! Hear me now! I ask you to steal the soul of the girl that the outlaw Conan holds dear. Steal the soul of Rann!"

Rann gasps and raises her sword. She, too, understands the Witchman's coarse tongue. You hold her back, wanting to find out more about the Witchman's plans.

"Take her spirit in exchange for my promise of an army of men sacrificed to you by my own claws and teeth! I shall take the form of Two-Fangs the Golden Cat and drink their blood in the darkness of the night! All this for you, if you'll steal Rann's soul!"

Grimly you start forward, sword ready. Suddenly your sixth sense makes you stop.

A female voice drifts down from the black sky. The voice hisses like a serpent, alive with its evil.

"Surma," says the voice, "if you truly mean to serve me, then you will slay the two barbarians who even now are almost within striking distance of you." The voice fades and vanishes into nothingness.

The Witchman drops his hands and spins around in your direction. Wild-eyed, he laughs aloud. "Conan! Rann! You almost took me by surprise, but now I have you! You must

die for my patron, Shuveegalix the demon!"

"Not likely, Witchman!" you shout, launching yourself at the sorcerer. Before you can take three steps, Surma utters a word and claps his hands.

Surma's body bends and expands like wet clay. Horrified, you stop and step back, your chest tight with fear. Rann's strangled cry of terror echoes in your ears.

In moments Surma drops to all fours, his white robes turning into bristling fur and his hands and feet into massive lethal paws. The sorcerer's face flattens into a monstrous lion-like head, his eyes forming great slits burning with green light.

His canine teeth lengthen and curve down from his mouth into ivory daggers that gleam with saliva. Rippling muscles roll under the man-beast's fur. His humanity fades and is gone in seconds.

You can never escape from the Witchman now. He's turned himself into a sabre-toothed tiger, the deadliest of all predators. You can only attack.

With a war cry that thunders across the landscape, you throw yourself at the monster in a killing frenzy. Either you or he must die, and you don't mean it to be you.

The giant cat leaps from the rock with a screaming roar that almost shatters your ear drums. Leaning into the blow, you stab at the tiger with your sword and sink the blade



deep into the creature's chest. Razor-sharp claws tear into your left shoulder and arm.

The tiger's weight slams you back into a rock, driving the sword deeper into the animal's vitals. The sabre-tooth turns to bite at you, its six-inch fangs scarring your chest.

With all the effort you can gather, you twist the sword with one hand to wound the monster even more. With your other hand, you try to push the tiger's jaws away. Its hot, foul breath fills your lungs.

You fight with all your strength, but you aren't going to make it. The tiger is too strong, too massive. Its jaws open to catch your face. You thrust hard on the sword one last time—

The tiger stiffens, its claws releasing you. With a choking gasp, the huge head collapses against your chest. The heavily muscled legs give way, and the golden beast falls to the ground, pinning you under its dead weight.

"Conan!" Rann cries. "Conan! Say something! Conan! Conan!" She struggles with the tiger's body but fails to move it.

"Rann," you gasp. The tiger's weight won't crush you, but you're trapped beneath it. "Rann, I'm alive. Get help from the Brythunians! Crom's blood, but that was a fight I don't want to repeat!"

Rann bends down over you, and her cool fingers hold your head. "Conan, I love you," she says and kisses you once. Then she turns and runs back to the cavalry camp.

Her kiss and her words surprise you. This is

a strange time for such things, but Aesir women are headstrong and unpredictable. They do just as they please.

You're exhausted and your wounds are bad, but you decide you won't die yet. Somehow you'll make it. Conan the outlaw has a long way to go before his time is up.

Alone beneath the weight of the dead tiger, you wait for Rann's return and wonder what new adventures the following days will bring.

THE END

It is tempting to charge out and catch the Witchman unprepared, but you don't know enough about the powers of that skeletal general. You quietly wait to hear the sorcerer's plans for his undead army.

Kullervo suppresses a smile. "For years I have waited for the chance to summon the powers of the dead," he tells the apparition. "Now I can command an army such as none have ever seen. Through you, commander, and through the power of this ring, I will rule all of Brythunia and the northern wastes."

He thrusts out his left hand, displaying a ring with a large, pale stone that glistens even in the blackness of the night. "This ring holds the power of rulership over you, commander. It makes me your master forever."

The skeleton before him moves and creaks, attempting to raise its arms toward the ring. It strains until its bones nearly crack apart but then subsides, defeated. You see red flames of hatred for the Witchman dancing in the skeleton's eyes.

So softly that not even a sharp-eared wolf could hear you, you leave your hiding place and creep up toward Kullervo. You scarcely breathe as you move.

You want that ring! You don't want it for yourself—to control an unliving being is a wicked act that no Cimmerian would ever try. But if the ring controls the skeleton, then removing the ring should break the Witchman's hold over it.

In moments you are almost within reach of Kullervo, your sword ready. The man, absorbed in planning his conquest of Brythunia and Asgard, ignores you completely. You ready yourself to spring upon the conjurer and you freeze in terror.

The eyeless skull of the undead commander suddenly turns your way, and it sees you. Two flickering red fires brighten in its empty eyesockets. The sight almost breaks your will to go on with the attack.

"What are you looking at?" the Witchman suddenly asks *the* skeleton. He starts to turn in your direction.

You act without thinking. Like a tiger, you leap upon the sorcerer, throwing him to the ground. He tries to pull a dagger from his belt, but you knock it away into the bushes.

"You don't need this!" you growl, seizing the mage's hand and tearing the ring from his finger. Turning to the skeletal commander, you toss the ring at its feet.

"Here's the ring that bound you!" you shout aloud. "Take it and be free of this warlock's power! You are free!

"No!" Kullervo cries. "You fool! DON'T GIVE HIM THE RING!"

The skeletal warrior stoops and seizes the ring in its dirt-encrusted finger bones. It rises again, the blood-red light in its eyes burning through the darkness. It looks past you at the Witchman and raises a stained, brown finger bone in his direction.



"NOOO!" the Witchman howls madly.

You push Kullervo away and come to your feet, ready to flee for your very life.

The white-haired sorcerer, too, tries to get to his feet, but he stumbles. His screams fill the night as you escape down the hillside.

"AAAIIEEE! LET GO! MAKE THEM LET GO OF ME!" You turn for a moment and see the sorcerer silhouetted against the campfire. Skeletal arms are coming out of the ground and pulling at him. Each second, a new arm rises from the earth and seizes his feet, catches his legs, or pulls on his white robes. The sorcerer screams like a madman.

You run and don't look back again.

Hours later, scratched and torn from your flight, you emerge from the hills at last. Ahead of you is a flat plain that stretches for miles and miles beneath the red morning sun. Tired but not exhausted, you slow your flight to a walk.

The Witchman was a terrible enemy, but his doom gives you little satisfaction. Vammatar still lives, and she might still hunt for you in the months to come. If she does, you'll have to be ready for her.

With that thought, you continue south toward the fabled land of Zamora, where you are certain your fortune lies.

THE END

Every instinct you have tells you that the demon means to lead you into a trap if you follow it. But every instinct also tells you that there is nothing else you can do. Perhaps if you go where the demon asks, you can find a way to force it out of Rann's body and bring her soul back.

You glower at the demon's mocking eyes. "I'll follow you," you say quietly.

Rann smiles in a wicked way. "I thought you would," she says with the demon's voice. "Let's be off, then." She pulls free of your grip and, with you close behind, walks into the night, away from the cavalry's camp.

For hours you travel through wilderness, seeing no trace of humanity. At last the demon-Rann stops and points. "The cave we must enter is there. Follow me closely."

"Lead on, then." You're getting impatient. You've got to find a way to get Rann's spirit back soon.

In minutes you arrive at a low cave entrance. Rann walks on inside. You follow her along a path through the cave, which is lit by hundreds of luminescent mushrooms. The tunnel looks as if it were once used by ancient peoples. Carvings and runes cover the walls.

"This was a tomb, Conan," the demon Shuveegalix says, answering your unspoken question. "It was used by royalty in ages past. They were the same people who built the royal tomb where you found your sword when you escaped from Haloga."

You decide not to ask how the demon knew where your sword came from. "Enough history," you mutter. "You said coming here was the only way to get Rann back into her body."

"I didn't say that," says the demon as Rann steps through a doorway off to the side of the corridor. "I said that you would be able to find Rann."

"What's the difference?" you ask angrily, also entering the room. "When I find her, then I will-"

"You'll find your precious Rann!" snarls the demon in Rann's body. "You'll find her in the afterlife, when you die by the hands of the apparition you see before you! Look at your death, Conan!"

Hastily you snatch your sword from its sheath, but your throat tightens in terror, knowing that the sword is probably useless.

Before you hovers the ghostly form of a giant man with long, pale hair and gleaming eyes. The spirit's face burns with hatred from beyond the grave.

"Know you not this spirit, Conan?" the demon asks. "It's the man whose sword you stole months ago when you entered his tomb! His ghost cried for vengeance, and I decided that he should have it!" Rann turns to the ghost and points to you. "Conan is yours, ghost, as I promised you! Take him!"

The apparition moves forward, arms reaching for your neck. Your sword strikes out but passes through it without stopping. Fingers

marked with the coldness of the grave seize your throat. You can't breathe!

You drop your sword, trying to grasp the ghost's hands but catching nothing. The icy pressure on your throat increases. The ghost forces you back against a wall as you vainly struggle against it.

With a chuckle, the demon settles Rann's body against the opposite wall to watch. "Good-bye, Conan," the demon says softly.

As you feel life and hope die within you, some unknown part of your soul is aroused. You feel your soul detach itself from your body and drift out of your flesh, hovering in the air above you. Your spirit seems to struggle with the attacking ghost, fighting and wrestling against it for your very life.

"It will not help to resist me," the ghost says in a heavy, accented voice. "You stole my sword. You looted my tomb. I tried to stop you by animating my old body, but you destroyed my body with fire. You'll pay the price that all thieves must pay."

"I needed the sword to fight off wolves!" your spirit groans, feeling life slipping away. "If you were I and I were you, you would have done no less. I am living and want to live! You know how fiercely you wanted to live when you were alive centuries ago!"

Strangely, the ghost's grip on your neck seems to loosen. "I remember being alive," the ghost whispers. "I was a king, a descendant of the lords of Atlantis. I wanted to live, and I

fought as you do to stay alive. You are strong, as strong as I was. You, too, might be a king as I was."

A chill passes down your spine. "Release me!" your spirit cries. "I may yet be a king, a general, or a rogue, but I want to live! Let me live as you did! Let me live long before I pass into the nether world... ."

The ghost hesitates, the fire in its eyes waning. Suddenly the hands of death release your neck. Gasping for air, your body drops to the floor beneath your spirit, choking and coughing as air enters its lungs.

The ghost stares at you with a new look, one of respect, "You are as I was," it says. "I cannot kill a man, even an enemy, who has inside him such hunger for life."

The ghost turns and points to the figure of Rann, sitting against the wall of the room. "The demon who possesses that woman wanted me to kill you, but I will help you kill it instead, if you choose. If you wish to leave, then I can bring the woman's soul back and help you escape."

- 1) If you decide to join the warrior ghost and attack the demon, turn to page 153.
- 2) If you want only to escape with Rann, turn to page 132.

You debate the question briefly but decide not to follow the sorcerer. It would be safer to let him go. Besides, he won't survive long in the wilderness by himself.

"Forget about the Witchman," you tell the captain and Rann. Though Rann looks doubtful, the captain nods and leads you both back to the Hyperborean camp, where the Brythunian patrol is settling in.

The cavalry fighters spend the evening relaxing, talking about the day's battle and how it went. The captain praises your actions, and the men hail you as a hero. Late that night you settle down on the ground near where Rann is sleeping and prepare for a well-earned rest.

During the night your sleep is disturbed. You come awake quickly without moving a muscle. Through narrowed eyes, you see Rann getting up from her bedroll, silently and slowly.

You almost whisper to her to ask if she's having trouble sleeping, but you suppress the impulse. Rann's eyes are strangely bright and glassy. Her movements look peculiar, as if she were unused to her arms and legs. She raises a hand to feel her face and hair, then slowly turns in your direction. You give no indication that you are awake.

Suddenly a secret smile crosses Rann's face. She looks down at her side, finds her hunting knife, and pulls it free.

Her next movements are fast. You move

even faster. As the steel blade dives for your heart, you roll aside and fling dirt into Rann's face, blinding her for a second. She growls like an animal and again swipes at you with the dagger.



"Rann, curse it, what are you trying to do?" you ask heatedly. You dodge another strike from the dagger and snap your hand out to catch her wrist. She struggles with surprising strength, but you hold her still. Suddenly she smiles and laughs uncontrollably and carelessly, like a madwoman.

The horrible laugh stops abruptly and Rann looks up at you with alien eyes, her muscles relaxing. "Conan," she says.

Her voice isn't Rann's. It is feminine but

with a lisping, hissing quality. Her words are spoken precisely, in a voice filled with cold venom.

"Rann no longer inhabits this body," she says with a smile. "I am Shuveegalix, a demon conjured by the Witchman you allowed to escape today. I'm also an old friend of Vammatar, and I've taken back something that you stole from her at Haloga—the girl Rann. Her soul is my captive. If you want her spirit back, then you'll do as I ask."

Sweat breaks out on your forehead. A demon has taken Rami's soul! "What do you want of me?" you ask through gritted teeth.

"A journey," the demon's voice says. "Follow me into the hills to where a cavern lies. There you'll discover the means to find your precious Rann again."

You are certain that the demon is sending you into some kind of trap, but maybe you can avoid it somehow and still rescue Rann. On the other hand, maybe you can't. You shudder at the thought of the demon's powerful magic. But you must make up your mind.

- 1) If you can't bring yourself to go with the demon, then turn to page 146.
- 2) If you are willing to go with the demon to try to rescue Rann, turn to page 112.

Getting Vammatar out of the camp could prove more dangerous than helpful. Ruining the encampment and giving the Hyperboreans trouble enough to last a lifetime would be best.

The first target you select is the line of horses tethered to a rope on the edge of camp. The two black-cloaked guards standing near the horses don't hear or see you until you lash out with your sword. With two whirling strokes, you kill them both.

Cutting the rope with a third stroke of your blade, you slap some of the horses on the rump and chase all but one of them away. You leap on the remaining steed just as the Witchmen in the camp realize what's happening.

Sword out, you charge forward into the camp. Soldiers and guards step out of tents and are slain by your flashing broadsword as you ride by.

Seeing a burning torch on a post, you pull it free and hurl it into a barracks tent. In a moment the tent is enveloped in flames. The night echoes with the screams of the Hyperborean slavers and soldiers who find themselves trapped inside.

Chaos reigns in the camp, but you know you won't be able to keep this up for long. There are still too many Witchmen against one lone Cimmerian.

It is then that you see the slaves. A large number of them are on their feet, standing in a clearing next to the main camp. You can't let

them stay here now. The enraged Witchmen will kill them all.

Swiftly you ride for them, cutting down two guards who try to stop you. The slaves surge forward, dragging leg chains behind them. The fastest ones snatch keys from the belts of the guardsmen and unfasten their leg chains.

"Fight for your lives!" you roar, swinging your sword above your head. "Kill the Witchmen! Destroy them all!"

Dozens of slaves shout aloud and charge with you into the camp, waving wooden sticks for clubs and hurling rocks. The fighting becomes savage and bloody as ex-slaves tear into their former masters.

You ride through the thick of the fight, your sword singing through the air, slaying foe after foe. The cries of maddened slaves and desperate Hyperboreans fill your ears. The stench of blood and burning fill your nostrils.

The fight ends long before morning. All of the Witchmen in the camp have been hunted down and slain. All but one.

"The queen escaped," one of the ex-slaves tells you as you survey the destroyed camp. "We burst into her tent and saw her vanish before our eyes. She called for aid from an infernal power, a demon she worshiped, and it stole her away."

You swear angrily, but there's nothing you can do about it. "It's a bad break," you tell the man. "But Brythunia and Asgard are free of her shadow for years to come. Her power was

broken with the loss of her fighting men here! Victory is ours!"

The slaves cheer when they hear your words. Most of them had made it through the battle alive, though many are injured. You plan to do all you can for them and see them to a nearby town for safety.

But deep inside you burns a worrying flame. Vammatar escaped. What will she do next? Will she yet try to track you down and destroy you?

You sigh and push the thought away. Some worries will just have to wait. For now, you have four dozen ragged, wounded followers to attend to. Your journey south to Zamora will have to wait until this adventure reaches ...

THE END

Though speed is important, you doubt if you can rescue Galatia and destroy the Hyperborean sorcerer without help. One man cannot do everything.

Turning to the gathering crowd, you raise your hand to get their attention.

"Listen to me!" you shout. "The men who did this are my enemies! I'm sworn to rescue the girl they've taken! Who will help me track them down?"

"Those men were chasing you," says a short, heavy man wearing a blacksmith's apron and carrying a long sledgehammer. His face is red with anger. "You led them right to our village. If you hadn't come here—"

"Those men are slavers!" you shoot back. "Slavers led by a Hyperborean! Have any of you lost kinsmen to the devils of the north?"

Several faces in the crowd change when you say this. You recognize the looks of anger and pain. "Some of you HAVE lost friends to them, and so have I! We have the chance to avenge those who were stolen from us! Will you fight back and help me?"

The squat blacksmith steps forward toward you, his face hard and tense. You grip your sword and hope you won't have to fight.

"You're a Cimmerian," says the smith. "You're barely out of your boyhood, and you talk big. But we DO fight for our own!" He turns to the crowd. "Who will join the Cimmerian and me against the slavers?"

Half a dozen men shout their willingness

and hurry off to gather weapons and horses. The smith lifts his long sledgehammer and drops it across his shoulder. "We fight for our own," he repeats with a glare.

Minutes later you ride out with the villagers after the Witchman's band. You have trouble holding on to the horse, but soon you thunder alongside the others.

"Look ahead!" one man calls. Gripping the horse's mane, you squint and see a group of three riders several miles ahead of you. White robes flap from one of them. Riding with the sorcerer is Galatia, her arms tied behind her back.

Slowly your band gains on the Hyperborean and his men until you see the kidnappers head toward a small stone farmhouse with a fallen roof. When they reach it, they dismount and hurry into the building.

"Rein in!" the smith by your side says. "Tie up your horses! We'll make it to the building on foot from here. They're trapped now!"

"I have another plan," you tell him. The smith looks at you sharply but doesn't interrupt as you explain it to him.

Finally, he sighs. "The girl's life hangs on your plan, barbarian. Do as you like." He organizes the other men for the attack.

Three sides of the farmhouse have open windows, the shutters having long since rotted away. The men from the village surround the house on those three sides and call out for the Witchman and his men to surrender.

With the silence of a great cat, you check your sword in its scabbard and begin to move through the tall plains grass toward the wall without windows. When you reach it, you check for handholds and footholds. Moments later you begin the climb to the top of the wall.

As you climb, you hear no sounds from inside the building. You yourself make no sound as you pull yourself up to the top of the wall. The roof is missing from your side of the house. You crouch on the wall and look down into the jumbled interior.

The farmhouse has but one room inside it, and the timbers from the fallen roof have decayed and left the interior open. Wild grasses and plants cover the dirt floor of the abandoned house. You see your opponents clearly.

Galatia sits in the corner of the building closest to you. A bandit guards her with a drawn sword. The other bandit and the Witchman are talking on the far side of the building.

Drawing your sword, you leap from the wall like a tiger. The man standing next to Galatia catches the full impact of your feet against his back and is knocked to the ground. The other two men see you and curse but stand back.

"Attack!" you shout to the men waiting outside the walls.

The fallen bandit staggers to his feet, drawing a dagger. Before he can use it, you kill him with a thrust of your sword.

You turn to the Witchman, who raises a fin-

ger in your direction. Mouthing an arcane phrase, he gestures, and your sword suddenly warms in your hand. In seconds it radiates a searing heat that scorches you like a branding iron until you drop it. The sword's blade and hilt glow red in the dirt.

The Witchman raises his hand again. "Now I'll make your own bones roast you from the inside, Cimmerian!" he says.

You charge with a war cry. He mutters a few words—and then staggers forward, his face turning white. A dagger protrudes from his back, hurled by a villager through an open window behind the sorcerer.

The last bandit is attacked by three villagers and quickly slain. Badly wounded, the Witchman raises a finger in your direction and finishes his spell.

A shock runs through you as you slam into the sorcerer and hurl him back. Rivers of live fire fill your bones. You grit your teeth against the terrible agony inside you.

Despite his wound, the Witchman wrestles with unnatural strength. His pale, drawn face carries an evil grin of triumph as you weaken in the spell's tortures.

"You'll die before me," he whispers. "I have won...."

With the last of your strength, you throw the sorcerer off balance. "NO!" you roar, thrusting him back against a wall. He strikes the stonework and gasps—and falls, the dagger driven deep into him by the blow.

The pain in your bones ceases at once. Exhausted, you sink to the ground as men hurry over to help you.

"Conan!" Galatia screams. She appears at your side, her face white with fear. "Conan, are you all right? Your skin is so hot!"

It takes a moment to get your breath. "I'll live," you say as you come to your feet. "He tried to make my bones catch fire, and he came cursed close to doing it."

"You fought like a man," the smith says, giving you an approving look. "I thought you were all talk and no guts. You proved me wrong. You may stay in my house with your friend here until you recover."

You nod heavily. "A rest would do us both some good," you sigh. You leave the building with the villagers and start the trek back to the horses, with Galatia at your side.

Soon you'll have to head south again. Vam-matar won't like hearing that one of her Witchmen was slain. You don't know if Galatia will go south with you, but you'll have some time together now in quiet. After today, you can't say you haven't earned it.

THE END

Everything in you screams NOW! You should attack when the Witchman's had no time to prepare for it.

Taking a deep breath, you pull out your sword and leap from your hiding place. As you run up the hill toward the sorcerer, a branch snaps under your feet.

The Witchman turns. His eyes widen when he sees you.

"KILL HIM!" he screams to the undead.

You hurl yourself at the Hyperborean sorcerer. The blade of your sword tears through his cloak into his shoulder. Kullervo falls with a cry, clutching his arm.

"Kill him!" the Witchman gasps again, and you see the armored skeleton make a gesture.

You raise your sword to finish the sorcerer, but as you do the ground at your feet cracks and bulges. As you feel your stance being unbalanced, you look down. Your blood turns to ice.

All across the hillside, skeletal arms are tearing through the soil. Dirt-stained finger bones appear, clutching dulled and rusted weapons. A ghastly, choking stench of decay fills the air as the partially clad corpses of a legion of soldiers crawl from the earth.

To stay here is to die. You run for your life down the hillside, Kullervo's cries ringing behind you. "Cut him to pieces!" the wounded mage shrieks. "Destroy him and all his allies! I command you!"

A glance behind you confirms that the

Witchman indeed rules the skeletons. And if they are as tireless as the zombies that Vam-matar once conjured up against you, you'll have little chance to escape.

Fighting to maintain your balance as you run, you dodge rocks and shrubs in the dim moonlight. Behind you comes the whispering, rattling sound of the dead men following you.

At first you see nothing to do but run until you drop from exhaustion. You refuse to die so easily, however. Slowly two plans form as you run across the darkened hills.

Kullervo's command to the skeletons was to destroy you AND all your allies. If you can reach the bandit camp, you might get the skeletons to attack the raiders by calling them your allies.

A second choice appears when you hear the sound of a running river to your right. The skeletal warriors might not be able to cross a river without assistance. The Witchman is wounded, and he won't be giving them any help now. Once across the river, you might be safe. At least you'll have a longer lead on your undead pursuers.

The camp is to the left, and the river's to the right. You've got to choose now!

- 1) If you head for the river, turn to page 87.
- 2) If you go toward the bandit camp instead, turn to page 139.

Even though the Witchman's hand's seem to burn with the spell he's about to cast at you, you pay more attention to your instinct to question the scene than to what you're seeing. Rather than flee the tent, you stay and study what you see, trying to convince yourself that the Witchman isn't real. But just in case he is, you hunch down on the floor as you stare at him.

A jet of flames leaps from the wizard's hands. You duck—but you feel no heat from the fire. The Witchman is only an illusion!

With a relieved sigh, you get to your feet and approach the phantom. Now you can see what your instincts only hinted before—Kullervo's shape is not truly solid; you can even see through it. You turn away from the illusion as it mutters in a low voice, casting another "spell."

"That was close," you say to yourself. "This Witchman knows a cursed lot of magic. He must have books and scrolls of magic somewhere around here...." You search until you find a leather-bound object.

It's a tome of some kind, heavily engraved with symbols of demons and magical runes. None of it makes much sense to you, but you know right away what the book must be. Without bothering to open it, you toss the book to the floor and continue searching.

Minutes later, you've uncovered a number of similar books and volumes of arcane lore. Your search also reveals some coins and small

gems that you take for yourself. The less left for Kullervo, the better.

"This isn't quite as good as meeting you face-to-face," you say to the still-mumbling illusion of the Witchman, "but it will do. Enjoy your evening by the fire!"

You pour a flask of lamp oil over the pile of tomes on the floor, then soak a long cloth in lamp oil to serve as a fuse. You put one end of it on the books and stretch the other end toward the tent opening. Then you light the cloth and hurry out of the tent.

No one sees you escape. Everyone has gone to other parts of the camp to celebrate. With a smile of secret pleasure, you leave the camp on foot, still dressed as a bandit.



For a few minutes the sounds around you remain unchanged, but then shouts of alarm come from the bandit camp in the distance. You stop a moment and look back.

A tower of flames leaps into the black sky as Kullervo's tent is consumed. You laugh at the thought of the sorcerer returning from the north at dawn, only to find that the spellbooks and scrolls that gave him his power are now ashes. Vammatar will not be pleased.

"I told you that I would remember you, Hyperborean dog," you say with a grim smile to the camp and the absent Witchman. "Conan never neglects to repay a debt."

With a casual wave of your hand, you turn from the camp and head off into the darkness. Zamora is still beyond the horizon, and you want to be on your way.

THE END

Perhaps the warrior's ghost would be your ally against the demon, but you are more concerned for Rann's safety than for revenge.

"I have to get my friend to safety," your spirit tells the ghost. "Give me time to take her out of this tomb. Keep the demon away from us until we escape."

The ghost smiles a sad and bitter smile. "You are still young," it says, "but someday you'll realize that the greatest dangers must be faced head on and cannot be avoided. Still, I will do as you ask.

"Remember this, though. The demon was sent after you and your friend by a Witchman, a mage who told me that he'd escaped from you this day. You will have to face either the demon or the Witchman who sent it after you. You cannot avoid at least one meeting."

Suddenly you feel your spirit falling toward our body, which falls on its hands and knees on the chamber floor. Your lungs ache as if they were filled with tiny needles, but you can still breathe.

Coming to your feet, you see Rann's body go limp against the far wall and slide to the floor. A red fog envelops her, then fades away into darkness.

"I have forced the demon to leave your friend's body," the warrior ghost's voice says within your mind. "Flee while you can. Remember my warning."

You help Rann from the caverns and into the night air, which seems to revive her. Soon she

can stand on her own, and she walks with you back to the Brythunian cavalry camp.

Along the way, you explain what happened. Rann shivers fearfully. "If I was possessed," she asks, "then, can the demon take my soul again? Where can we go to hide from this thing?"

You look around at the darkened land and wonder the same things. What the ghost said was true. The greatest dangers must be faced and cannot be avoided.

"The demon was sent after you by the sorcerer who escaped from the Hyperborean camp," you tell Rann. "If we don't slay him, we'll be running from him and that demon for the rest of our lives."

She bites her lip anxiously, but she nods agreement. "Then, let's find him and finish this now," she whispers. "I won't be able to sleep until I know I'm safe."

Drawing your swords, you and Rann set off across the moonlit hills on your search. There's no telling how long it will take to find the evil Witchman, but you know that neither of you will be safe until you do. When you do find him, the Witchman—and your troubles—will have reached...

THE END

You decide to hunt for the killers on your own. It's not fair to endanger anyone else, especially when it's really only you the Witchman wants.

Time is of the essence. Pushing through the crowd, you search for traces of the Witchman's passing. It takes but a minute to discover tracks of men and horses near the stable, leading back out to the plains.

With speed and stealth, you follow the tracks, staying low and using the trees and bushes for cover. Before long you hear sounds from ahead of you indicating that riders have stopped their horses and dismounted. You approach carefully, wanting to remain hidden until the last moment.

The buzz of conversation filters through the air as you move soundlessly. You strain to make out what the men are saying.

"Make sure those knots are tight," a voice you recognize as the Witchman's says coldly. "I don't want her to pull free."

"What are you doing?" another voice asks nervously.

"You are not here to question me," the Witchman replies. "You are here to obey. Do exactly what I tell you."

In the silence that follows, you hear someone sharpening a blade on a whetstone. "This knife was sanctified by our ruler, Vammatar the Deathless. She created it to deliver sacrificial blood to the demon we worship, in exchange for certain favors.

"I'm going to deliver the blood of this girl to our patron demon. We'll use her aid to rid the world of a troublesome barbarian youth by the name of Conan. He is destined to know greater pain and torment in the demon's hands than any man could imagine. Prepare to assist me in the ritual."

You move through the last of the tall grass to a clearing. Now you can see the killers clearly. The Witchman, his eyes closed, is holding a long, curved knife in one hand. On either side of him stands a bandit, lightly armored and carrying a sword. Struggling at their feet, bound and gagged, is Galatia.

Without hesitation, you burst into the clearing. The two fighters and the Witchman look up just as your steel broadsword strikes with leopardlike speed and deadliness.

One of the men falls with a scream, run through on your blade. You lash out at the other bandit, who has barely had time to pull his blade free. Though his sword turns your blow aside, the impact knocks the man backward onto the ground.

A shadow of movement seen from the corner of your eye brings you whirling around. The Witchman is about to cut Galatia's throat with his curved knife. You leap at him feet first, and the knife sails off into the grass as you see the second bandit getting to his feet.

"Meddling savage!" the Witchman shrieks, jumping to his feet. He raises both hands and cries out a single word. "Shuveegalex!"

Suddenly the air around you is charged with alien power. You feel the hair on the back of your neck stand on end. "Shuveegalix!" the sorcerer calls again. "Receive your sacrifice!"

A shadow falls across the clearing, as if the sun were dimmed by clouds. Part of the ground sinks and falls as a pit opens up in the earth and slowly widens toward you.

The sight roots you to the ground. There are few things a barbarian fears more than the world of demons and evil wizardry.

The air itself vibrates and becomes a female voice. It hisses slightly as it speaks in a faint, precise tone. "Send me your offering."

"Get him!" the Witchman cries, pointing to you. "Throw him in the demon's pit!"

Turning, you see the second bandit, his face pale, rushing toward you.

You sidestep his charge and slap him across the stomach with the flat of your sword. He staggers into you, letting you heave him back toward the open pit in the earth.

The bandit stumbles, falling into the pit. At the last moment he catches the edge with desperate fingers and screams for help, but the earth breaks loose in his grip, and he disappears from view.

A horrifying scream, as if the man were falling down an endless shaft, gradually fades away, filling the air with dreadful silence as it ends.

"Give me your request," the lisping voice says in the silence that follows.



You roar and charge at the Witchman, your red sword whipping back. The sorcerer's arrogance snaps when he sees you coming. "Save me!" he cries as he stumbles back in terror. "Save me, Shuvegalix!"

The darkness vanishes with a popping sound. Your sword slices through empty air, and you blink in shock. The Witchman has disappeared before your eyes!

"Crom's blood!" you mutter. "He got away from me!" You step back and look. No one is around you but the dead bandit and Galatia.

You untie Galatia and together you start back for the village. For a long time neither of you speaks.

"Conan," Galatia whispers. Her face is white and her hands are clenched. "Who was the woman who spoke?"

"His patron," you say.

"A demon of some kind who rescued him."

"Will the Witchman ever come back for you?" she asks fearfully.

You ignore the question, hoping you never have to answer it. "Let's rest in the village for the night. We don't have to flee now. Tomorrow we'll head south"

Galatia nods and leans close to you as you walk. You put a helping arm around her shoulders.

You step confidently, feeling certain that you've faced the worst that a man can face. Whatever the future will bring, you're sure you can handle it.

THE END

You can tell that the river is closer to you than the bandit camp is, but the thought of leading the skeletons right into the bandit camp appeals to you. Turning the Witchman's summoned servants and his bandit army against each other would be very satisfying. You turn left and run as hard as you can.

"This had better work," you say through gritted teeth. "I'll be drinking mead in Crom's hall of heroes tonight if not!"

The run to the camp is long and dangerous. Several times you stumble over rocks and bushes, losing precious ground to the undead, who chase you on legs that cannot tire. By the time the campfires come into view, you can hear chain links on the dead men's armor rattling together only yards behind.

As you reach the edge of the camp, a man steps from the shadow of a tent. He's supposed to be on guard, but he's more interested in the wineskin in his hand . . . until he sees you. Then he drops the wineskin in surprise and fumbles for his spear.

"Halt!" he shouts in a slurred voice, obviously drunk. "Who goes there?"

"Raise the camp, friend!" you roar. "We're under attack!" You put on a sudden burst of speed and charge past other surprised and sleepy sentries, shouting friendly sounding warnings as you go. You hope the skeletons heard you and now believe the bandits are your allies. If so—

Suddenly the first guard screams aloud in

terror. "Sound the alarm!" he shrieks. "Run for your lives! Undea—" The man's voice is cut off by the sound of swords tearing through armor.

The uproar spreads through the camp like wildfire as the skeletal warriors fall upon the bandits without mercy. Desperate men attack them with spears, swords, and maces, but, for every skeleton that shatters and falls, two more take its place.

An idea comes to you as you run through the confusion of the camp. "The Witchman has betrayed us!" you shout aloud. "The white-haired devil has sent skeleton men to kill us all! Fight for your lives!"

Other panicked bandits take up the cry as they fight the unliving warriors in the night. "The Hyperborean has turned against us!" they cry out. "Kill the northern devil man!" "The Witchman must die!" "Slay the traitor, Kullervo!"

"Keep it up," you mutter. "Give your sorcerer a warm welcome when he comes back to you!" You race around a roaring campfire toward a final group of sentries.

One of the sentries, obviously unsure of what to do, lowers a spear into a position of readiness. "Halt!" he shouts. "You're not one of us! What's going on here?"

"No time to talk!" you shout back, drawing your sword and swinging at him. The blow chops the man's spear in half and knocks him back into two of his fellows. A fourth guard

chases after you, but you quickly lose him as you escape into the night.

You grin in triumph. If any bandits survive this night, they'll be in no shape to take up raiding for months. Vammatar's plans to recapture you are ruined, and her henchman Kullervo will have an unpleasant reception when he returns to the bandits.

You leave the fires and battle cries of the camp far behind. Barbarian, ex-slave, and now destroyer of armies, Conan the outlaw will head for the land of Zamora tomorrow.

You hope Zamora's ready for you.

THE END

The clouds overhead grow dark, and the sunlight fades as you run. You know that the growing darkness is probably magical and that it would probably be easier to hide in a town. But your barbaric pride has never let you run from danger before. Now is not the time to start.

"Head for the riverbank!" you order Galatia. "We'll meet them there!"

"But how?" she asks. "Isn't the man in the robes a wizard?"

"Leave the wizard to me," you tell her. When you reach the thick reeds and trees along the river, you lead Galatia through the growth along the bank. "We'll get behind them to catch them off-guard when they ride up," you say as you hurry along.

Galatia nods, pulling her dagger free as she follows you.

The rumble of thunder echoes across the plains. As the sound slowly fades, you hear hooves drumming up to where you reached the river. Grabbing Galatia's arm, you steer her back toward the plains so that you can circle behind your trackers.

Moving silently through the tall plains grass, you hear the horses pull up and stop at the treeline as you creep in a wide arc behind them. Risking a peek above the grass, you see that the Witchman and his two confederates have dismounted and are looking all along the riverbank, while speaking in hushed tones. The wind carries their words away.

You motion to Galatia. "We're moving in. Are you willing to use your dagger?"

She nods silently, gripping her knife with white knuckles. You turn and start forward, moving carefully.

As you come within a dozen yards of the Witchman's back, he raises his hand and speaks. "The barbarian and the girl have not crossed the river," he says in a flat voice. "My magic tells me so."

The two bandits look at him curiously. "If you're sure of that," says one, "then, maybe you can tell us where they've gone."

A cackling laugh carries across the waving grass. "Of course," the Witchman says. He turns swiftly and points in your direction. "I can sense them both behind us."

Galatia jumps to her feet. Her right hand swings back, then forward with incredible speed, releasing a knife into the air. The Witchman dodges, but the bandit behind him chokes and falls as the girl's dagger thumps into his chest.

You leap to your feet as the wind howls around you. The Witchman doesn't even look at his fallen henchman. With arm raised, he utters a single word, then points his finger at Galatia.

A writhing spear of lightning engulfs Galatia, the double impact of light and explosion blinding and deafening you. The lightning vanishes, and Galatia drops motionless to the ground.

"NO!" you scream in rage. You hurl yourself at the sorcerer.

The Witchman tries to get away from you, raising his arm to summon another lightning bolt. Your sword flashes down like a meteor.

With a gurgling scream, the white-haired wizard falls backward onto the ground, his robes splattered with bright-red droplets. He tries to rise, but your sword descends again and again. Your frenzied mind is filled with a red haze.

The Witchman makes no more sounds. You look up, blue eyes burning like coals from an icy hell. The remaining bandit drops his sword when he sees you and runs in terror.

It takes only a moment to reach him. Then, he, too, is silent.

You run to Galatia's side.

"Conan," she whispers in a voice that is clearly about to die. As you hold her, you feel that her skin is colder than ice.

"Wanted to go on an adventure." You can barely hear her. "Had to get away from home. No one understood. Wanted to go to see... new things. So cold." She looks up at you. "So glad that I... helped you...."

Her eyes lose their light. Her gaze fixes on a place far away. For ages you sit with her as clouds fade from the sky and the warmth of spring fills the plain around you but fails to warm Galatia's body.

That evening you bury her beside the river where no one will disturb her. You leave the



Witchman and his henchmen where they fell, for vultures to pick clean.

In the morning you set off for the north, following the trail of the Witchman and his allies in the direction they came from. You intend to find the main camp from which they rode. It's a good bet that Vammatar came south with these men. You certainly hope so.

Cimmerians say that only blood can wash away blood. You understand the meaning of that phrase all too well. Vammatar and her men will pay for Galatia's death.

Please turn to page 43.

You yearn to have Rann freed from this horror, but you cannot believe that a demon would give you any chance to win. You must find your own solution.

"I think that you will come with me, not I with you," you tell the demon in Rann. "I'm going to take a horse from camp and head for central Brythunia with you. There I will find a priest or wizard who will rid this body of your demonic presence for good!"

Rann's face distorts with pure rage. "Fool barbarian! Do as I say! You have no choice but to follow me!"

"No!" you tell her flatly and seize her wrist.

Rann seems to fight for control. Then she looks up, her eyes ablaze with alien hatred. "Very well. I'll go where you want."

You sigh and relax your hold on her arm the slightest bit. "Good. I'm going to get a horse from the captain of the cavalry, and we'll leave in—"

With the speed of lightning, Rann leaps and swings up both of her feet, kicking against your chest. As you fall back into the rocks, you release her. Free of your grasp, the demon laughs aloud as Rann's body leaps to its feet and races off into the darkness.

"If you won't come with me," the demon cries, "then you'll never see Rann again!" You jump up and set off after the fleeing woman, but within minutes you lose sight of her among the black hills.

In the far distance you can hear the demon's

laughter echoing from the hills. You know you'll never catch her now. Your heart fills with despair, but you refuse to give up hope. Maybe soon you'll catch her and find some way to cast the demon out... but you have no idea how you'll do it.

You chase through the night, following the echo of the laughter as you refuse to believe that this might be ...

THE END

The misery of the slaves in the camp decides the issue. You remember the chains you once wore at night and the burning pain of a whip across your back.

You head for the clearing where the slaves are chained to trees and guarded. In the silence of the night you note where the Hyperborean guards are stationed and make plans to remove them permanently.

The first guard to go is standing by himself when you come from behind and knock him out with your fist. Before you can catch him, he falls with a crash into some bushes and dead tree limbs.

Thinking fast, you mumble a curse aloud in the Hyperborean tongue, blaming a root for making you stumble in the dark. The other Hyperboreans nearby laugh and ignore you, thinking you were the guard himself.

One by one you find the other guards. You move so silently that no one notices what's happening, and soon there are no guards left near the slaves.

At first the slaves are terrified and believe you are going to kill them. Then you explain your plan as you hand out the weapons you took from the guards. A thrill of excitement runs through them as you unlock their chains with the guards' keys. They can taste freedom.

"Do nothing until I signal," you warn. "When the time comes, kill all the Witchmen. Give them no quarter!"

When all is ready, you signal for the slaves to creep toward the main camp. Your senses are heightened and your nerves are alive, ready for battle.

The Witchmen's camp is silent beneath the stars. Sword raised, you give a screaming battle cry. As one, the freed slaves surge forward into the camp. They mob the Hyperborean soldiers they see and cut them to pieces.

The cries of men and women fill the night air. Flames leap from campfires and burning tents. Witchmen on horseback charge into the fray, killing unarmored slaves with sword and spear. Maddened slaves pull the men from their horses and slay them.

In the desperate battle, you have only one goal in mind. Your sword cuts down half a dozen Witchmen before you find Vammatar's tent. Rather than going through the entrance and risking ambush, you slash open the side of the tent and leap through.

In the flickering light of an oil lamp, you see a white-robed woman hastily piling books, papers, and magical devices in the center of the carpeted tent. She turns and gasps when she sees you.

"Vammatar," you whisper through gritted teeth. "I've come for you, witch."

The look of surprise fades from her face, to be replaced by a twisted smile. "You remembered me, Conan," she says, her hands reaching for something behind her. "I've waited for this for a long time."



You lunge forward, intending to catch her and drag her out of the tent. She brings up a dagger with a yellowed blade and stabs for your face.

Fighting reflexes take over. Catching her arm, you kick her feet out from under her and break her hold on the blade. The knife drops to the floor. Vammatar kicks free of your grasp and rolls away. ,

Vammatar's jasper-green eyes burn with her hatred. She comes to her knees and utters an alien word. The dagger flies from the floor and into her hand. You grab at her again, and she whips the blade in an arc around her.

The knife cuts open the skin of your arm. The wound burns as if touched by ice or fire. The blade was poisoned. Jumping out of her reach, you hastily try to suck the poison out before it reaches your bloodstream.

"You have only a minute left to your life, Conan," Vammatar says in triumph. She turns the blade and cuts her own arm, her eyes shining with a bitter light.

"I could not escape, anyway," she says calmly. "The slaves would tear me apart. But I've cheated them, and I'll see you die before me. You are mine in the end, Conan of Cimmeria."

The cold numbness in your arm is spreading rapidly to your shoulders. You cannot feel your arms now. Vammatar suddenly sways, clutching herself and blinking her eyes.

"By the White Hand," she mutters, "I hope

that I... can yet see you... die before me—"

She falls forward onto the tent floor. You sink to your knees, still fighting the dreadful heaviness in your limbs. Your consciousness slowly fades....

"Is he still breathing?" someone shouts. You try to move, but your arms won't respond. Are you dead already?

"Careful, he's coming around."

"What kind of poison was it?"

"Keep back from him! Move the witch's body over and give me that water!"

Something wet and cold splashes over your face. You choke, and a crowd of people nearby cheers. "He's alive! The barbarian's alive! Praise the gods!"

You open your eyes and see the bearded face of one of the slaves before you.

"Welcome back, barbarian," he says. "If you had not sucked most of the poisoned blood from your wound, I would not be saying that."

Was it your iron constitution that saved you, or was it luck? It matters not. Vammatar and her Witchmen are slain, the slaves are free men, and you will live to see another day. Conan could not ask for more.

THE END

"We should join and fight the demon together," your spirit tells the warrior ghost. "Shuveegalix used you to get me. It is an enemy to both of us."

You see the warrior ghost smile. "Good," he says. "Enter your body again. I shall join you there."

Your spirit sinks toward the floor—and suddenly you are racked with coughing. Your neck and lungs burn as if scorched by fire. You're alive! You pick up your sword and stagger to your feet again. The ghost is no longer in the room.

Rann's body stiffens when the demon inside her sees that you still live. "By the powers below," it hisses, "what kind of man are you to defeat a ghost? Did you slay it?"

You feel strange, as if a cold chill had passed through your body and suddenly turned hot as a summer wind. The warrior's ghost has joined you. New energy fills your body and soul. It's time to fight!

"Demon!" you roar at Rann. "Coward! Child of darkness! I challenge you to meet me face-to-face! You hide in a girl's body. Let's see the real Shuveegalix! Face me!"

Rann stares at you with cold, empty eyes and speaks in brittle tones. "No mortal calls Shuveegalix a coward. I grant your wish, you worthless human jackal."

Then Rann's body goes limp, like a puppet whose strings have been cut. She slides down the wall to the stone floor.

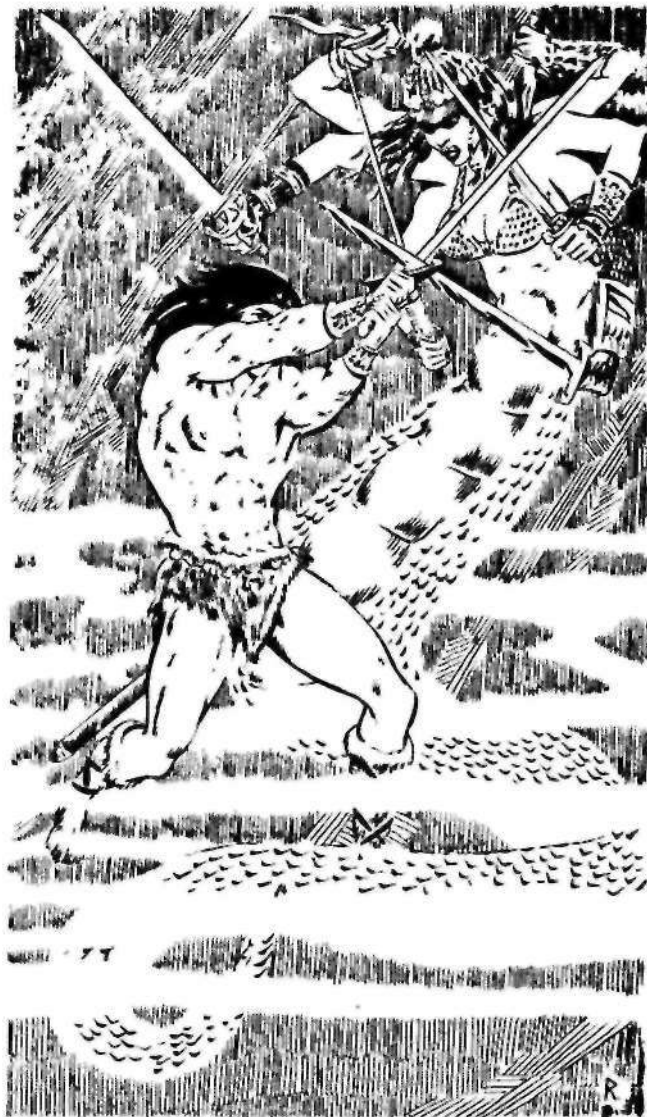
In the center of the chamber floor a pool of white light ripples into being. A blood-red mist billows from it, stinking of sulfur and burned ash. A sudden flash of heat from the erupting pool is followed by bone-chilling waves of cold. You stand against the blasts and wait for the demon to appear.

With a hiss like that of a giant viper, a monster bursts from the pool. Weapons flash in each of its six arms, the glittering steel mirrored in its soulless, inhuman eyes. Its beautiful and feminine face is framed by the silver skulls woven into its jet-black hair. Its dark-red lips pull back to show white fangs.

"You wanted to meet Shuveegalix," hisses the monster as its snakelike lower body writhes in the pool of light and red mist. "I am here, and I'll lick your blood from the floor when this fight is over."

The serpent demon lashes out with all six weapons at once. Unearthly energy roars in your veins as the warrior spirit within you guides your movements. Steel rings against steel as you block the demon's attacks with pantherlike speed.

The demon presses you tirelessly, wielding the swords and daggers it holds with alien mastery and skill. Guided by your barbaric instincts and the ghost's ancient skills at swordsmanship, your broadsword turns aside a dozen blows in the space of a heartbeat. Sparks flash and sword metal shrieks in the desperate battle.



"You fight like a seasoned warrior, not like the boy you are!" the demon shrieks, trying to strike the sword from your hand but failing. "What sort of mortal are you?"

"I am Conan!" you roar back. "Conan of Cimmeria, your destroyer!"

With a sudden new strength you bring your sword up and slam it into one of the demon's blades, shattering the blade into useless shards of silver-gray metal. Stunned, the demon strikes out at your head. You duck the blows and drive your sword under its flailing arms, plunging it deep into its pale, serpentine abdomen.

The demon screams in agony, the cry ringing in your ears. Two of the demons' arms drop weapons and clutch at the wound as the creature retreats, gasping in pain.

Sensing that victory is near, you lunge at the monster again—but it dodges the blow. Eyes full of terror and hatred, the demon throws its weapons at you and sinks hurriedly back into the pool of light.

The white, rippling pool vanishes into nothingness. Slowly the stinking red mist fades away, as well, and the burial chamber falls spent and dark.

"We have won," the spirit inside you says with quiet pride. "The demon will not die of its wound, but it will never return to threaten you or your comrades. It will stay forever in the black world it inhabits."

You shake yourself and look across the

chamber. Rann's body stirs. She blinks her eyes, looking around in confusion.

"Conan?" she asks weakly, her voice once again that of your friend. "Where am I? What's been happening?"

"Your companion is free of the demon, and I must leave you, as well," says the spirit. "It has been good to have a body again, but I am no longer of this world. You are welcome to my sword, Cimmerian."

"Thank you," you reply softly. The ghost leaves your body and is gone. A great tiredness fills your muscles and bones, as if you had fought for a year without resting.

Gently you help Rann to her feet and lead her from the cavern tombs. She leans her head against your shoulder as you walk into the open night air. You draw her close to you, knowing that the future for you both will be safer—at least for a little while.

THE END