





FROM THE JOURNALS OF PRAMIS THE SCRIBE...

OLD WAS THE KING--HIS GOLDEN CROWN RESTING UPON A MANE OF SILVER AND GRAY--YET, LIKE SOME GREAT, ANCIENT OAK, HIS BACK REMAINED UNBENT AND UNBROKEN BY THE RIGORS OF TIME.



COUNCILOR PUBLIUS OF NEMEDIA HAD TASKED ME WITH CHRONICLING THE STORY OF THE LIFE AND RULE OF KING CONAN OF AQUILONIA.

ALAS, HAD HE BEEN WITH US THAT NIGHT IN THE TOMB OF THE KING'S BELOVED, DEAD ZENOBIA, HE WOULD HAVE SEEN--AS DID I--THAT UPON KING CONAN'S SCARRED FLESH WAS WRITTEN THE TRUE RECORD OF HIS DAYS.

THROUGHOUT THE LONG NIGHT, THE KING HAD TOLD ME THE FIRST HALF OF HIS TALE...OF THE TIME MEN CALLED THE "HOUR OF THE DRAGON"...

HOW FOUR TRAITOROUS NOBLES HAD USED THE CURSED HEART OF AHRIMAN TO SUMMON THE SORCERER XALTOTUN FROM THE HALLS OF DEATH.

HOW THE WIZARD THEN CALLED UPON THE FORCES OF DARKNESS TO CRUSH CONAN'S ARMY AT VALKIA AND CHAINED THE KING IN THE DUNGEONS OF NEMEDIA.

HE TOLD ME OF HIS RESCUE BY THE BRAVE HAREM SLAVE ZENOBIA, AND HOW HE PLEDGED TO RETURN SOMEDAY TO FREE HER.



HE SPOKE OF HIS DAYS AS A FUGITIVE, AND OF THE WITCH ZELATA--WHO WARNED HIM THAT TO REGAIN HIS THRONE, HE MUST FIRST SEEK THE "HEART OF HIS KINGDOM"...

...AND FINALLY, OF HOW HE LEARNED OF THE HEART OF AHRIMAN--THE KEY TO VANQUISHING THE UNDEAD XALTOTUN--AND HOW, WHEN THE GEM WAS WITHIN HIS GRASP, IT WAS STOLEN BY THE THIEF BELOSO.



DAWN.  
DAMN YOU, PRAMIS. YOU'VE HAD ME PRATTLING ALL NIGHT.



WE WERE NEVER MARRIED, YOU KNOW--ZENOBIA AND I.

TO YOUR SUBJECTS, IT MATTERED NOT, MY LORD. ALL REVERE AND REMEMBER HER AS YOUR QUEEN.



AYE. THEIR QUEEN AND MINE SHE TRULY WAS--THOUGH NOT IN THE EYES OF AQUILONIAN LAW.

IT WAS I WHO MADE THAT DECISION. FOR WHAT FOOL WOULD DAWN HIS OWN SONS WITH THE CURSE OF A CROWN?



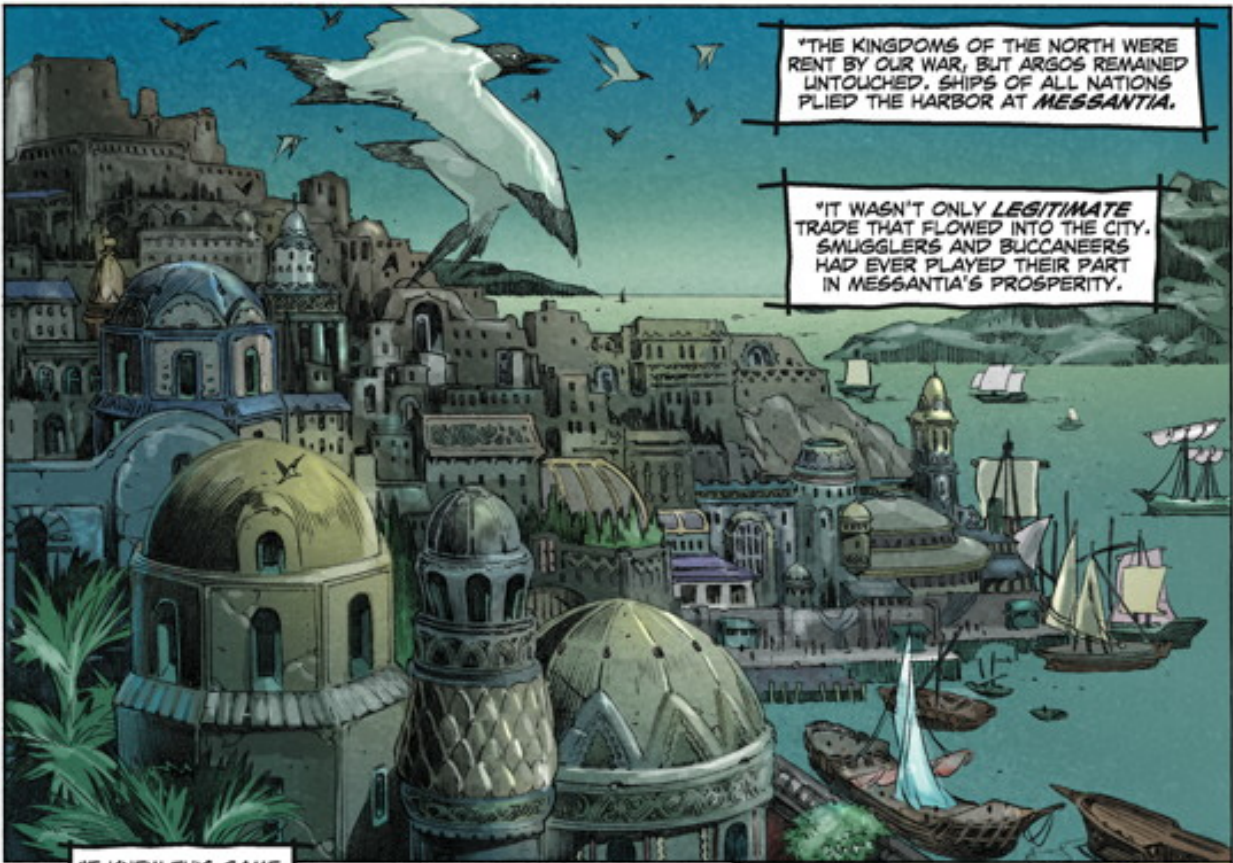
KINGSHIP HAS ITS TREASURES, PRAMIS, AND BY THE DEVIL, I'VE REAPED THEM ALL. YET I PROMISE YOU, A CURSE IT IS.



A MAN MUST EARN THE RIGHT TO LEAD, NOT BE BORN TO IT. BANDITS... CORSAIRS...MY OWN CIMMERIANS...WE KNOW THIS TO BE TRUE.

PERHAPS THAT'S WHY THE Highborn FEAR US SO.

IT WAS A THING I REMINDED MYSELF MANY TIMES, THOSE YEARS AGO, ON THE ANCIENT ROAD FROM POITAIN TO THE SEA.



"THE KINGDOMS OF THE NORTH WERE RENT BY OUR WAR, BUT ARGOS REMAINED UNTOUCHED. SHIPS OF ALL NATIONS PLIED THE HARBOR AT MESSANTIA.

"IT WASN'T ONLY LEGITIMATE TRADE THAT FLOWED INTO THE CITY. SMUGGLERS AND BUCCANEERS HAD EVER PLAYED THEIR PART IN MESSANTIA'S PROSPERITY.



"I KNEW THIS GAME AND ITS PLAYERS ONLY TOO WELL.



"AFTER ALL, I HADN'T ALWAYS BEEN A KING."



AH!  
SWEET GODS!





TRUE ENOUGH. BUT HOW MANY DARED TRADE WITH THE **BLACK CORSAIRS**?

FOR MITRA'S SAKE, MAN, BE SILENT!



PROSPERITY'S SOFTENED YOU, PUBLIO. YOU RISKED MUCH BACK THEN, STRUGGLING IN YOUR LITTLE SHOP, BUYING GOODS FROM EVERY CUTTHROAT WHO SAILED INTO PORT.

WELL, YOU CAN'T THROW ME OFF LIKE AN OLD CLOAK! OLD FRIENDSHIPS AREN'T SO EASILY FORGOTTEN.



YOU'RE MAD, COMING HERE! FEW IN THIS CITY KNOW THAT CONAN THE KING WAS ONCE AMRA THE **BUCCANEER!**

EVEN SO, WORD HAS COME TO US OF AQUILONIA'S FALL--AND OF ITS RULER'S **DEATH!**



MY ENEMIES HAVE KILLED ME A HUNDRED TIMES WITH **RUMORS**. YET HERE I SIT, GUZZLING THE WINE OF KYROS.