



"I ENCOUNTERED MAN-EATING DARFARI SLAVES ONCE IN ZAMBOULA, BUT MY FIRST RUN-IN WITH THAT CLAN WAS TEN YEARS AGO.

"I WAS WANDERING THE BLACK LANDS AFTER THE DEATH OF -- A WOMAN I CARED FOR.

"OTHER TRIBES, SUCH AS THE BAMULAS TO THE WEST, CALL THEM THE MOON-EATERS.

"AT EACH FULL MOON, THEY DIG A PIT -- AND THEIR CHIEF POURS CERTAIN OILS INTO IT.

"A FLUNG TORCH...

"... AND SOON, A FIRE BURNS BRIGHTLY.



"THE DARFARI IDENTIFY ITS LIGHT WITH THAT OF THE MOON OVERHEAD.

"THEY BELIEVE THAT, ONCE EACH MONTH, THEY MUST EAT THE MOON.

"BATHED IN THAT GLOW, ANY CAPTIVE, IN THEIR EYES, BECOMES THE EARTHLY ESSENCE OF THE MOON...

"... SO YOU CAN THANK WHATEVER GODS YOU PRAY TO THAT THEY DIDN'T SEIZE ALIVE ANY OF OUR NUMBER...



...OR WE'D ALL BE IN FOR IT!
WHY?

BECAUSE THE DARFARI BELIEVE THAT EATING OF OUTSIDERS' FLESH MAKES THEM IMMUNE TO WEAPONS.

FATHER SET! SO THAT'S THE REASON OUR CARAVANS HAVE AVOIDED LAKE ZUAD FOR GENERATIONS!

SMALL WONDER A GARRISON'S KEPT AT SUKHMET TO KEEP THOSE SAVAGES SOUTH OF OUR BORDER!



STILL THEY'LL GET NO PROCEEDING TO TEST THEIR BELIEFS TONIGHT.

WELL... THEY MIGHT HAVE CARRIED OFF ONE WHO WAS MERELY WOUNDED, CAPTAIN.

WHAT?



OUR CARAVAN-MASTER FELL IN THE INITIAL ASSAULT-- AND WE DIDN'T FIND HIS BODY AFTERWARD.

I ASSUMED THE DARFARI CARRIED IT OFF, TO MAKE A MEAL OF.



PRAY, THEN, THAT HE WAS ALREADY DEAD--

FOR MEN WHO BELIEVE THEY CAN'T BE HARMED MAKE THE MOST FEARLESS OF FOES.



YAWWWWWNN...

I'LL POST AN **EXTRA MAN**, JUST IN CASE.

WOMAN, COME HAVE A **DRINK**, AND WE'LL DISCUSS HOW I CAN **SPONSOR** YOU IN THE **FREE COMPANIONS**.

I'VE AN **IRON RULE**, CAPTAIN. I DRINK ONLY IN **GROUPS--** OR **ALONE**.

WELL, I'M FOR **SLEEP--** THOUGH ALL THIS TALK MAY WELL GIVE ME **NIGHTMARES**.

PLEASANT DREAMS.



NOT SMART TO **ANGER** ONE WHO'LL SOON BE YOUR **SUPERIOR OFFICER**.

IF A WOMAN **MUST LIVE** IN THE WAR CAMPS OF MEN, SHE CAN **EXPECT** SUCH THINGS.

EASY FOR YOU TO SAY! IT'S NOT YOUR SHIRT HE'D SOON BE SLIPPING HIS HAND INTO!

WHY WON'T MEN LET ME LEAD A **MAN'S LIFE**?



THAT'S TOO OBVIOUS TO **ANSWER**.

BUT HOW CAME YOU TO **STYGIA** LET ALONE **HERE**?

YOU **FIRST, CONAN**.

ALL RIGHT, WHY NOT?

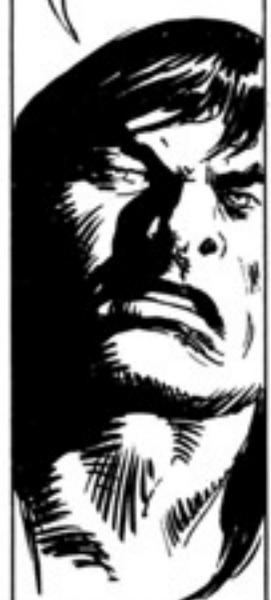


I STAYED WITH THE **BARACHAN PIRATES** FOR A WHILE AFTER YOU LEFT **TORTAGE**.

EVENTUALLY I JOINED THEIR RIVALS, THE **ZINGARAN FREEBOOTERS**.

"BUT, IN TIME, I BECAME A BIT CARELESS WHETHER SHIPS I PLUNDERED HAILED FROM **MESSANTIA--** OR **KORDAVA**.

"IT WAS THE **ZINGARANS** WHO SANK MY **LAST SHIP--** OFF THE SHORES OF **THEM**.





"THAT'S WHY, IN ASGALUN, I JOINED ZARALLO'S **FREE COMPANIONS**.

"**'FREE COMPANIONS'!** THAT NAME SEEMS TO ATTACH ITSELF TO HALF THE MERCENARY BANDS IN THE HYBORIAN KINGDOMS!

"IN MY YOUNGER DAYS, FIRST **AMALRIC THE NEMEDIAN**, THEN I MYSELF, LED A FORCE SO NAMED, WHICH I LATER MERGED WITH--

"**BUT I STRAY FROM THE POINT.**



"ANYWAY, I SAW I'D BEEN **STUNG**, WHEN ZARALLO PROMPTLY MARCHED OUR WHOLE TROOP TO THE **DARFAR BORDER**.



"THE **PAY** WAS POOR-- THE **WINE** WAS SOUR--

"AND THOUGH, WHEN IT COMES TO **WOMEN**, I'VE MADE LOVE HAPPILY TO **ALL THE COLORS OF THE RAINBOW--**

"--THE ONLY FEMALES WHO SHOW UP AT OUR CAMP AT **SUKHMET** HAVE RINGS IN THEIR **NOSES**, AND THEIR **TEETH FILED** LIKE THE **DARFARI--BAH!**



BUT WHY DID YOU TRAVEL ALL THIS WAY TO JOIN ZARALLO?

SUKHMET'S A LONG WAY FROM SALT WATER.

LAST TIME I SAW YOU, YOU WERE SAILING OFF INTO THE SUNSET AS FIRST MATE ON **RED ORTHO'S** GALLEON!

PULL

DON'T MENTION THAT ARGOSSEAN PIG TO ME!



"OH, THINGS WERE FINE AS LONG AS WE WERE LOOTING ZINGARAN MERCHANTMEN AND THE ODD VESSEL FROM SHEM OR STYGIA.



"THIS WAS THE LIFE I'D LONGED FOR, EVER SINCE I WAS A CHILD.

"IT MATTERED LITTLE IF THE PICKINGS WERE SLIM OR SUMPTUOUS.

"I WAS A BARACHAN, AND DETERMINED TO REMAIN ONE!



"I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN ORTHO HAD MEANT MORE, BY THE TERM 'FIRST MATE' THAN I'D WANTED TO BELIEVE.

"AFTER MANY UNSUBTLE HINTS, HE FINALLY MADE IT CRYSTAL CLEAR WHAT HE EXPECTED FROM ME.

"RESISTING THE TEMPTATION TO SKEWER HIM THEN AND THERE, I FENDED HIM OFF A WHILE WITH VAGUE PROMISES.



"AND ONE NIGHT, NEAR THE COAST OF KUSH, I JUMPED SHIP AND SWAM ASHORE.

"OFF ZABHELA, IT WAS.



"THAT KUSHITE CITY, AFTER A RECENT REVOLUTION, WANTED NO PART OF ANY WHITE MERCENARY--LET ALONE A WOMAN!"

"WHEN I SPIED A SHEMITE TRADER IN THE BAZAAR, TRYING TO SWAP A SIZABLE PELLETT FOR AN ORNATE VASE--"

"--I THOUGHT PERHAPS HE COULD USE A BODYGUARD."



"THE KUSHITE MERCHANT WASN'T INTERESTED IN THE PELLETT--"

"--EVEN WHEN TOLD IT WOULD EMIT THICK BLACK SMOKE TO HIDE HIM FROM HIS ENEMIES."



"THE SHEMITE DECLARED HE NEEDED NO PROTECTION, BUT SEEMED TO TAKE A LIKING TO ME."

"IMPETUOUSLY, HE THRUST THE PELLETT INTO MY HAND..."



"...AND TOLD ME THAT SOME ZINGARAN NAMED ZARALLO HAD BROUGHT HIS 'FREE COMPANIES' SOUTH TO GUARD THE DARFAR BORDER, AT SUKHMET."



"NO BETTER EMPLOYMENT OFFERED... SO I JOINED THIS EAST-BOUND CARAVAN."



"BUT, AS I SAID, THE HYSTERICAL CARAVAN-MASTER LED US INTO THE LAKE ZUAD SWAMPS TO AVOID A DESERT STORM..."



"...AND THAT'S WHERE THE DARFARI ATTACKED US!"