

BY CROW,  
IF I AM SANE,  
I'M OUT OF PLACE  
HERE, BECAUSE  
THESE PEOPLE ARE  
ALL MANIACS.

WE STAGGER  
IN FROM THE DESERT,  
DYING OF THIRST AND  
HUNGER, AND WE COME  
UPON A DEAD MAN WHO  
TRIES TO STAB ME  
IN THE BACK.

WE ENTER A  
PALACE RICH AND  
LUXURIANT, YET  
APPARENTLY EMPTY.  
WE FIND A MEAL  
SET, BUT WITH NO  
FEASTERS.

THEN  
WE SEE A  
SHADOW  
DEVOUR A  
SLEEPING  
MAN--



WELL?

WELL  
WHAT?

I WAS JUST  
WAITING FOR YOU  
TO RUN THROUGH THE  
ROOMS HOWLING LIKE A  
WILD WOMAN. THE MAN  
I TOLD ABOUT THE  
SHADOW DID.

THAT WAS  
THE SCREAMS  
I HEARD,  
THEN.

WELL, TO EVERY  
MAN HIS FATE, AND  
IT'S FOOLISH TO SQUEAL  
LIKE A RAT IN A TRAP.  
WHEN THOG WANTS  
ME, HE WILL COME  
FOR ME.

WHO IS  
THOG?





SIT DOWN ON THAT DIVAN AND I WILL TELL YOU. BUT FIRST TELL ME YOUR NAMES.

I AM CONAN, A CIMMERIAN, AND THIS IS NATALA, A DAUGHTER OF BRYTHUNIA. WE ARE REFUGEES OF AN ARMY DESTROYED ON THE BORDERS OF KUSH.



BUT I AM NOT DESIROUS OF SITTING DOWN, WHERE BLACK SHADOWS MIGHT STEAL UP ON MY BACK.



BE AT EASE. IF THOG WISHES YOU, HE WILL TAKE YOU, WHEREVER YOU ARE.

THAT MAN YOU MENTIONED, WHO SCREAMED AND RAN-DID YOU NOT HEAR HIM GIVE ONE GREAT CRY, AND THEN FALL SILENT?

IN HIS FRENZY, HE MUST HAVE RUN FULL INTO THAT WHICH HE SOUGHT TO ESCAPE. NO MAN CAN AVOID HIS FATE.



WHAT IS THIS PLACE, AND WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE?

THIS CITY IS CALLED XUTHAL! IT IS VERY ANCIENT.

IT IS BUILT OVER AN OASIS, WHICH THE FOUNDERS OF XUTHAL FOUND IN THEIR WANDERINGS.




THEY CAME FROM THE EAST, SO LONG AGO THAT NOT EVEN THEIR DESCENDANTS REMEMBER THE AGE.

SURELY THERE ARE NOT MANY OF THEM; THESE PALACES SEEM EMPTY.



NO...



"...AND YET *MORE* THAN YOU MIGHT THINK, THE CITY IS REALLY ONE GREAT *PALACE*, WITH EVERY BUILDING INSIDE THE WALLS CLOSELY CONNECTED WITH THE OTHERS.



"YOU MIGHT WALK AMONG THESE CHAMBERS FOR HOURS AND SEE NO ONE. AT OTHER TIMES, YOU WOULD MEET *HUNDREDS* OF THE INHABITANTS."

"HOW IS THAT?"



"MUCH OF THE TIME THESE PEOPLE LIE IN SLEEP, THEIR *DREAM* LIFE IS AS IMPORTANT--AND TO THEM AS *REAL*--AS THEIR WAKING LIFE.


"YOU HAVE HEARD OF *THE BLACK LOTUS*?"

"IN CERTAIN PITS OF THE CITY IT GROWS."





"THROUGH THE AGES THEY HAVE CULTIVATED IT, UNTIL, INSTEAD OF DEATH, ITS JUICE INDUCES DREAMS, GORGEOUS AND FANTASTIC.



"IN THESE DREAMS THEY SPEND MOST OF THEIR TIME. THEIR LIVES ARE VAGUE, ERRATIC, AND WITHOUT PLAN.

"THEY DREAM, THEY WAKE, DRINK, LOVE, EAT, AND DREAM AGAIN.

"THEY SELDOM FINISH ANYTHING THEY BEGIN, BUT LEAVE IT HALF-COMPLETED AND SINK BACK AGAIN INTO THE SLUMBER OF THE BLACK LOTUS.

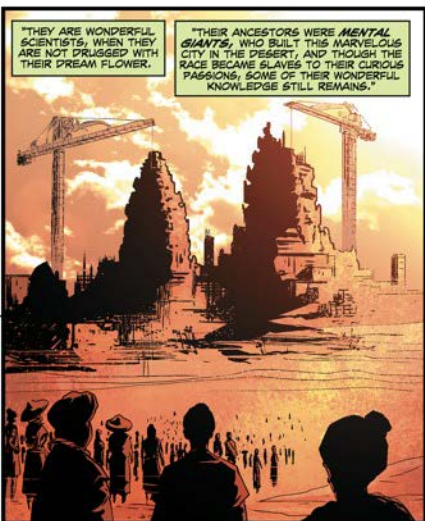
"THAT MEAL YOU FOUND-- DOUBTLESS ONE AWOKE, FELT THE URGE OF HUNGER, PREPARED THE MEAL FOR HIMSELF, THEN FORGOT ABOUT IT AND WANDERED AWAY TO DREAM AGAIN."



WHERE DO THEY GET THEIR **FOOD**?

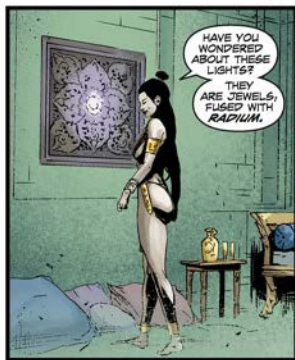
I SAW NO FIELDS OR VINEYARDS OUTSIDE THE CITY. HAVE THEY ORCHARDS AND CATTLE PENS WITHIN THE WALLS?

THEY MANUFACTURE THEIR OWN FOOD OUT OF THE PRIMAL ELEMENTS.



"THEY ARE WONDERFUL SCIENTISTS, WHEN THEY ARE NOT DRUGGED WITH THEIR DREAM FLOWER.

"THEIR ANCESTORS WERE **MENTAL GIANTS**, WHO BUILT THIS MARVELOUS CITY IN THE DESERT, AND THOUGH THE RACE BECAME SLAVES TO THEIR CURIOUS PASSIONS, SOME OF THEIR WONDERFUL KNOWLEDGE STILL REMAINS."

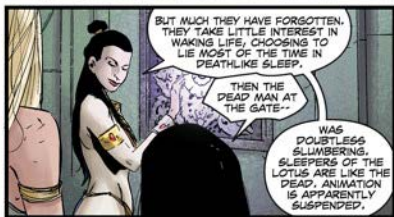


HAVE YOU WONDERED ABOUT THESE LIGHTS?

THEY ARE JEWELS, FUSED WITH **RADIUM**.



YOU RUB THEM WITH YOUR THUMB TO MAKE THEM GLOW, AND RUB THEM AGAIN, THE OPPOSITE WAY, TO EXTINGUISH THEM. THAT IS BUT A SINGLE EXAMPLE OF THEIR SCIENCE.



BUT MUCH THEY HAVE FORGOTTEN. THEY TAKE LITTLE INTEREST IN WAKING LIFE, CHOOSING TO LIE MOST OF THE TIME IN DEATHLIKE SLEEP.

THEN THE DEAD MAN AT THE GATE--

WAS DOUBTLESS SLUMBERING. SLEEPERS OF THE LOTUS ARE LIKE THE DEAD. ANIMATION IS APPARENTLY SUSPENDED.

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO DETECT THE SLIGHTEST SIGN OF LIFE.

WHAT OF THE THING THAT STOLE THROUGH THE CHAMBERS AND CARRIED AWAY THE MAN ON THE Dais?



A woman with long black hair, wearing a black headscarf and ornate gold and silver jewelry, including a wide collar and armlets. She is looking upwards with a serious expression. The background is a dark, stylized architectural structure with large, curved, black elements.

THAT WAS  
THOG, THE ANCIENT,  
THE GOD OF XUTHAL,  
WHO DWELLS IN THE  
SUNKEN DOME IN  
THE CENTER OF  
THE CITY.

HE HAS  
ALWAYS DWELT  
IN XUTHAL.

WHETHER HE  
CAME HERE WITH THE  
ANCIENT FOUNDERS,  
OR WAS HERE WHEN  
THEY BUILT THE CITY,  
NONE KNOWS.

BUT  
THE PEOPLE  
OF XUTHAL  
WORSHIP  
HIM.

MOSTLY HE  
SLEEPS BELOW THE CITY,  
BUT SOMETIMES AT IRREGULAR  
INTERVALS HE GROWS HUNGRY,  
AND THEN HE STEALS THROUGH  
THE SECRET CORRIDORS AND  
THE DIM-LIT CHAMBERS,  
SEEKING PREY.

THEN  
NONE IS  
SAFE.