

CONAN: A REBELLION OF GHOSTS

PART I

After waging a bloody campaign against Strabonus, ruler of Koth, Conan and his Free Companions wander to the steppes west of the Vilayet Sea. There, they collide with the outlaw Kozaki horde, who have been looting the outposts of Turan, the wealthiest city west of Khitai. Conan's raiders join their ranks and an uneasy alliances is formed, tenuously led by a tyrannical Hyrkanian called Rakmartok.

— Freely Adapted from "An Expanded Outline of Conan's Career", by Scott Reed

PAGE ONE

SPLASH: Bird's-eye view. Sunset. Storm clouds are piled on the horizon, drawing closer. The Kozak horde, a hundred outlaw raiders, slowly approach the precipice of a deep gorge in the dense jungle. At the gorge's center is a gigantic, ancient temple, half-overgrown with wild vegetation. It is a dark, foreboding place. At the edge of the gorge stands a massive,

badly weathered and cracked lion statue. Its hind section is obscured by vegetation.

CAPTION: The Kozak horde have lost their way.

CAPTION: Here, in the uncharted swath of a dank jungle, at the edges of the Vilayet Sea and the sun-tortured Steppes of Turan, a madness has taken root in their outlaw leader..

PAGE TWO

PANEL 1: Rakmartok, a powerfully built Hyrkanian, sits on his steed, ahead of his war-weary soldiers of fortune, looking down into the valley. His eyes are intense and bloodshot.

CAPTION: ...**Rakmartok the Broken**, as he is now secretly called by the men who follow him in quiet acquiescence. It is a new moniker, bestowed behind his back, at a Chieftain reduced to a single-minded obsession: A woman from his past.

CAPTION: A woman lost to him, but soon to be re-united.

CAPTION: Or so he believes.

PANEL 2: The horde stops at the edge of the gorge, awaiting orders. Rakmartok stares down at the ruins below, mesmerized by the sight.

RAKMARTOK: Look yonder, you sons of nameless dogs! I told you I would find her! I told you...

PANEL 3: From the rear of the battalion, a powerful horse and rider emerges from the ranks, slowly making their way between the soldiers. A streak of lightning flashes in the gathering dusk. The soldiers turn to look at the approaching rider, slightly awed.

RAKMARTOK (OFF-PANEL): ...and you doubted me. You asked me, 'Rakmartok, courageous hetman of the Kozaki, why do we stray from the path of pillaging the abundant outposts of Turan? Why do you lead us into these uncharted jungles? Why do you speak of lost love in this merciless landscape?' Now, you will **know**. Now, you will **see**.

PANEL 4: Side-view of the approaching rider. We can only see the horses legs stamping the dirt and the riders thickly muscled legs straddling the war-horse. This, of course, is Conan. In

addition to a loin cloth, light chain mail and heavy boots, his broadsword is slung next to his hip, along with a thick belt where an empty leather wine sack is attached.

RAKMARTOK: This nameless citadel is where **she** waits for me.

RAKMARTOK: **And I shall reclaim her.**

PANEL 5 (LARGE): Conan, his back facing us, approaches Raktartok on horseback. Raktartok turns to face Conan, outraged. It has started to drizzle. Another lightning flashes.

CONAN: And at what cost, madman? I'll not give up my life for your idiotic pursuits. Nor will my Free Companions, who joined your Kozak in good faith. If it's the soft embrace of a woman, you'll find them willing enough in Turan, for a handful of baubles.

RAKMARTOK: 'Joined' in good faith? Dolt! Your starved cutthroats were **absorbed** into my ranks. And I have no interest in some common wench. Have a care with your tongue, barbarian..

PAGE THREE

PANEL 1: Close-up of Rakmartok, an insane, enraged look in his eye. Spittle flies from his lips as he bellows at Conan.

RAKMARTOK: ...lest I carve you into a **mute!**

PANEL 2: Conan suddenly gallops toward Rakmartok, sliding his broad sword from its sheathe, a deadly look in his eyes.

CONAN: Silence a hill-born Cimmerian? Try it and I'll carve you into a devil's henchman!

CAPTION: For days, Conan has watched and waited for the Kozak hetman to return to form, to set the horde back on the path of plunder. But the giant Cimmerian, already well-known for his prowess in warfare...

PANEL 3 (large): Conan dives from his horse toward Rakmartok, his sword slashing down at him in berserker fury. Rakmartok blocks Conan's sword thrust with his cutlass, while the force of Conan's attack knocks Rakmartok off his horse.

CAPTION: ...is also known for having zero patience for fools.

PANEL 4: Conan has Rakmartok pinned to the ground with one hand clutched around his neck and his other hand with a raised sword. Rakmartok's hand is likewise wrapped around Conan's neck, his free hand moving his sword to block Conan's blade.

CONAN: Have you forgotten? We have a Turanian swarm at our heels! Two hundred strong, with siege weapons that can slay every one of us at five hundred yards!

PANEL 5: Rakmartok barely avoids Conan's sword thrust as he releases Conan's neck and rolls out from under the Cimmerian. Behind them, the soldiers gather to watch, awestruck by the sudden violence.

CONAN: And you would give them the high ground here! Only a fool would lead his men into this deathtrap!

PAGE FOUR

PANEL 1: Birds-eye view. Both men now on their feet, swords at the ready, circling each other, panther-like. It is raining harder now. The ancient citadel can be seen deep in the gorge below. The soldiers watch the fight in stunned silence.

CONAN: You were a formidable opponent, and mayhap a worthy hetman before this buffoonery. But you cannot best me, now. Not in your addled state.

CONAN: Leave with your life, or without it.

PANEL 2: Mid-shot of Conan, pointing his sword at Rakmartok. Lightning flares behind him.

CONAN: I'm taking command of the Kozak.

PANEL 3: Rakmartok stands at the edge of the gorge. He reaches into his tunic with one hand.

RAKMARTOK: Heh. You think you have choices to impart, like gifts from the gods.

PANEL 4: Same view, panning in on Rakmartok. He lifts a vial half-filled with green liquid from his tunic.

RAKMARTOK: It is **you**, cur, who have no choices left. This vial. I found it in the jungle. It was as if it had been placed before me by the gods.

CONAN: You would threaten me with poison that you have no chance of administering?

CONAN: For that, I may have to kill you outright. On principle alone.

PANEL 5: Rakmartok spills the liquid, emptying it on the ground.

RAKMARTOK: This isn't the poison.

RAKMARTOK: This is the **antidote**.

PANEL 6: Conan takes a step forward, wary now, his sword aimed at Rakmartok. Rakmartok smiles wickedly as he throws the glass vial to the ground, shattering it.

CONAN: I've been poisoned before. And by worse concoctions.

RAKMARTOK: Which is why I didn't even attempt to slip it into your wine over these last several days. But your Free Companions? They are a thirsty, indiscriminate lot.

PANEL 7: Conan extends his sword at Rakmartok, pushing him toward the lip of the gorge. Rakmartok smiles.

RAKMARTOK: I knew that this day would come. That you would challenge my command. You're too ambitious to remain a foot soldier. And you're right, Conan. I can't best you by sword or by fist.

CONAN: What. Have you **done**.

PAGE FIVE

PANEL 1: Conan's sword is poised at Rakmartok's neck, pushing him closer to the precipice. Rakmartok stares down at the blade, sweating but still smiling crazily. Behind them, the soldiers watch, concerned. Another lightning flash.

RAKMARTOK: Blackmail, of course. Kill me here, and your men **die**. The poison will take them in two days' time, but that is ample enough for them to help me explore the citadel below.

CONAN: Explore? More likely, we'll have to hack our way through whatever men or monsters bar our entry.

RAKMARTOK: A cynical, but reasonable view. Fear not, savage. There is more antidote hidden in the ruins. When my quest is fulfilled, I will reveal its location. I will spare their lives. I will even forgive **this** insolence.

PANEL 2: Conan glances back at his soldiers, who stand in silence, contemplating their fates. It is raining hard now. Another lightning flashes.

RAKMARTOK: Ah, you're thinking you'll simply slay me afterwards. I've considered that, too.

PANEL 3: Close-up of Rakmartok, a sinister expression.

RAKMARTOK: I hope you try it. By then, with my beloved by my side, I will have more power at my command than you could possibly comprehend.

PANEL 4: Close-up of Rakmartok.

RAKMARTOK: But first things first. For the next forty-eight hours, the Kozak are still mine to command.

PANEL 5: Conan, brooding in barely contained rage, realizes that he has no choice but to follow Rakmartok.

RAKMARTOK: As are you.

PAGE SIX

SPLASH: Cut to: Birds-eye view. Interior citadel. Heavy, 30-foot tall double doors are slowly pushed open by Kozak soldiers, revealing a dark, vast and elaborately designed foyer. In the extreme foreground, jewel-encrusted columns glimmer in the darkness. Rakmartok strides confidently inside, holding a torch. The floor is etched in a giant bas-relief carving of a lion, standing in a majestic pose. Most of the lion's body is obscured by dust or worn away. This is a visual cue for later in the story. Conan warily follows, sword drawn.

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PAGE SEVEN

PANEL 1: Conan and the Kozak peer up at the columns. The raiders eyes grow wide at the site of the treasure twinkling down at them. Conan looks at the gems, glowering.

SOLDIER 1: Aie! There is treasure here to plunder, Conan!

SOLDIER 2 (muttering): Though we may soon be too stricken to spend it...

CONAN: Aye.

CONAN: Get out your picks and have at it.

PANEL 2: Conan stalks toward Rakmartok, who is exploring the chamber with his torch.

CONAN: I'll attend to something else that needs split open.

PANEL 3: Across the vast chamber, Rakmartok raises his torch along the wall, illuminating a massive, bas-relief sculpture of a lion's face, its jaws open wide in a soundless roar. Its mouth reveals a dark opening large enough for a man to walk through.

RAKMARTOK: Everything here...it's exactly as I envisioned. Isn't that incredible?

CONAN: It's incredible that you can be so **blind**. You speak of a woman you haven't seen in years, who you say awaits you in this dusty ruin. You ramble about gaining powers beyond human kin. You are a marionette guided by strings. Something unnatural has drawn you here.

CONAN: This place. It has the air of ill intent.

RAKMARTOK: Ha! You, the mighty Conan, afraid?

CONAN: I fear nothing that bleeds...

PANEL 4: Conan crouches and touches the floor, running his finger across a gigantic lion paw print in the dust. The print spans nearly 2 feet.

CONAN: ...because I have tangled with forces that **don't**, and can attest to their terrors. Against the spawns of wizards and their ilk, a man has only a blade and the whim of the gods to protect him.

CONAN: A sword cannot slay what isn't flesh and bone...

PANEL 5: Conan looks up at Rakmartok, grim.

CONAN: ...and my god, Crom, does not answer prayers.

CONAN: There is a predator here.

PAGE EIGHT

PANEL 1: Rakmartok peers into the darkness within the lion's mouth. His torch light can't seem to pierce the depths.

RAKMARTOK: Of course there is. Lion imagery. Giant paw prints in the dust...

PANEL 2: Same view, Rakmartok turns to look down at Conan, who still crouches, sword ready. In the darkness of the gaping lions mouth there are now two glimmering eyes, twinkling in the black. The reader should think this is a lion, about to pounce.

RAKMARTOK: ...it is as I dreamt. This is the power I alluded to. We will soon be met by the most majestic, graceful beast of all...

PANEL 3: Same view. A thick, gooey spider web shoots out from the depths of the lion sculptured mouth, dousing Rakmartok's torch. Rakmartok looks at the torch, stunned.

RAKMARTOK: ...imbued with the will of a god--

PANEL 4 (LARGE): A huge, hideous spider crawls from the open mouth of the lion sculpture—a nightmarish scene as the spider legs, each ending in a long talon, clutch the sides of the lions mouth as it emerges. Rakmartok whirls in horror and surprise toward the monster, letting go of the torch and reaching for his sheathed cutlass. Conan raises his sword and charges toward it.

RAKMARTOK (small): oh

PAGE NINE

PANEL 1: The spider stabs Rakmartok in the leg with one claw, sinking deep and sprouting a fountain of blood. Rakmartok stabs at the creature, slicing into its dark, hairy flesh, causing a spurt of green blood.

CAPTION: In this split second before certain doom, the Hyrkanian leader has a rare moment of clarity:

CAPTION: All this time. **He had been wrong.**

PANEL 2: Conan slashes his broadsword at the monster, cleaving one of its legs in an explosion of green blood as it shoots a thick, gooey strand of web at Conan, barely missing him.

CAPTION: Wrong about heeding the strange, disembodied whispers that urged him to poison his own soldiers, throw caution to the four winds and come to this nameless city.

PANEL 3: The Kozak charge toward the horror across the foyer, fearful but determined. They aren't close enough yet to engage the monster.

CAPTION: Wrong about entering into a pact with invisible forces promising the return of his beloved, and the possession of unfathomable power.

SOLDIER 3: Poison be damned, dog-brothers! We at least shall die on our **feet** this day!

PANEL 4: Same view. The chamber suddenly shakes, as a flaming boulder crashes to the floor in front of them, blocking their charge.

SFX: SKRRSSSHH!

PANEL 5: The boulder turns over as it lands, revealed as the head of the giant lion statue that had stood at the edge of the gorge. The Kozak are stunned at the sight.

CAPTION: Wrong about **everything**.

PAGE TEN

PANEL 1: Cut to: Exterior. At the lip of the gorge, several hundred Turanian soldiers gather, preparing to fire down at the citadel. Rain and lightning fill the sky. A large catapult is being prepared to fire down another payload of rocks, gathered from the broken lion statue. Dust rises from a gaping hole in the citadel wall, where the catapult has just fired a projectile.

CAPTION: And it is far too late to make it **right**.

CAPTION: Rakmartok is not the only one driven by obsession. The brutal Turanian despot, Yazdegerd, has grown desperate to be rid of these masterless devils, bringing to bear his full military might. This time, Turan's iron fist would do more than batter the Kozak away from their borders.

PANEL 2 (LARGE): POV looking down at the catapult. The soldiers prepare to fire the catapult, loaded with large boulders and drenched in thick black oil. The captain lights the boulders with a torch while shouting a command to his men. Lightning flashes in the sky.

CAPTION: This time, it will crush them.

CAPTAIN: **FIRRE!!**

PANEL 3: The catapult arm slams forward, launching the projectile at the citadel.

PANEL 4: POV the projectile, rocketing down toward the citadel roof like a meteor.

PANEL 5 (LARGE): Cut to: worms-eye view of Conan, who lunges to stab at the spider. Above him, the ceiling of the chamber explodes.

SFX: CHOOOMMMM!

PAGE ELEVEN

PANEL 1: The fiery payload smashes to the floor in front of Conan as he impales his broadsword into the back of the spider. Rakmartok is pinned under the spider, slashing up at the creature but missing it. The ancient stone floor is splitting from the impact of the boulder.

SFX: KRRRSSSHHH!

PANEL 2: Conan looks down at his sword in surprise, as hundreds of prematurely birthed spiders, some as tiny as ants, spill out of the gaping wound in the creature's belly and crawl up his sword.

PANEL 3: Close-up of the floor splitting apart beneath their feet.

PANEL 4: Rakmartok scrambles out from under the spider as it writhes and thrashes in its death throes. Hundreds of baby spiders pile out of the creature. Arrows fly from off-panel, piercing the giant spider's hairy flesh. A grisly sight.

PANEL 5: Several of the Kozak fire arrows into the monster as they back away from the collapsing floor.

PANEL 6: Conan staggers back, releasing his sword now that it is over-run with spiders and swarming toward his hand. The floor is splitting, collapsing under them.

PANEL 7: The floor is collapsing further, like a slowly opening trap door, causing the dying spider to slide down like a deadly boulder toward Conan and Rakmartok. They both turn, half sliding and running away from the monster. The Kozak arrows fly, but miss their mark now, slamming into the collapsing stone floor. Hundreds of spiders continue to spill out and speed toward Conan and Rakmartok.

PAGE TWELVE

PANEL 1: Conan pulls a knife from his boot and slashes up at the baby spiders as they stream toward him, slicing several in half, but it's clearly a futile effort.

PANEL 2: The giant spider tumbles toward the two, closer now. Rakmartok reaches out and grabs a jagged outcropping of stone wall, stopping his sliding descent.

PANEL 3: Below Conan, the floor gapes wide, revealing darkness. The giant spider now falling headlong toward him. Several baby spiders land on his shoulder and chest.

PANEL 4: Conan, his knife held in his teeth, lunges toward the opposite side of the widening chasm as the monster falls past him into the depths, barely missing him.

PANEL 5: Conan lands hard on the opposite side, clutching with one hand a lion sculpted torch holder attached to the splintering stone wall. Bits of stone fly from his impact. It is literally raining baby spiders now, several land on Conan.

PANEL 6: Conan slashes at the falling spiders with his knife as one of the spiders falls on his face.

PANEL 7: Conan bites down on the spider as it crawls over his mouth, causing an explosion of green goo.

PANEL 8: Conan spits out the dead spider as the torch holder is cracking under his weight.

PAGE THIRTEEN

PANEL 1: Rakmartok looks up the collapsing wall that he is clinging to, seeing the drove of spiders speeding down toward him.

PANEL 2: He looks at the opposite wall, the same one that Conan had leapt for, frantically calculating its distance as he sheathes his cutlass.

PANEL 3: Rakmartok leaps for it but is stopped mid-way by his cape, entangled in another lion-sculpted torch holder.

PANEL 4: Rakmartok slams back against the wall, and now hangs helplessly. The spiders are descending upon him.

PANEL 5: Conan looks up toward Rakmartok.

PANEL 6: Rakmartok is completely covered in spiders as he thrashes, panic-stricken.

PANEL 7: Hundreds of spiders weigh Rakmartok down further. He is totally covered in them, obscuring his face completely. His cape tears from their weight.

PANEL 8: Same view, his cape rips apart from the weight of the spiders.

PAGE FOURTEEN

PANEL 1: Conan, barely hanging from the torch holder, watches in grim revulsion as Rakmartok falls past him, still writhing in agony.

PANEL 2: Looking up, he sees hundreds of spiders swarming down the wall toward him. Conan is facing a similar fate.

PANEL 3: Conan peers down into the depths, weighing his options. Several more spiders drop onto his shoulders and head.

PANEL 4: The swarm of spiders reaches Conan, crawling over him just as it did Rakmartok. Conan slashes at them, but it is futile.

PANEL 5: The smaller spiders crawl into his nostrils and mouth. Conan is, for the first time in his life, panicked. This looks like a genuine end for him.

PANEL 6: The torch holder crumbles in his grasp.

PANEL 7: Conan falls into the depths, completely covered in spiders.

PAGE FIFTEEN

PANEL 1: Cut to: Rakmartok falling in the darkness, slams against a jagged break in the wall, snapping his spine.

SFX: KNCH

PANEL 2: Rakmartok falls, tumbling into the black as the spiders swarm over him, biting him.

PANEL 3: Rakmartok smashes into an outcropping of broken stone, falling headfirst. An explosion of blood as his head slams into stone.

SFX: KNNKK

PANEL 4: Rakmartok lands on a narrow stone bridge in a bloody heap.

PANEL 5: Same view, he lies unmoving, bleeding. The spiders, in unison, suddenly crawl away from him.

PANEL 6: Same view, the spiders scurry away, leaving Rakmartok broken, bleeding and presumably dead.

PAGE NINETEEN

PANEL 1: Cut to: Close-up of a Kozak soldier frantically prying one of the gems loose from the stone column. His companions flood past him to escape, while the citadel crumbles around him. He seems oblivious to the chaos.

SOLDIER: By Ishtar's teats! I'll not leave empty handed!

PANEL 2: The soldier lifts the gem free, gazing at it with a wide eyed expression. An almost cartoonish level of greed. His fellow Kozak rush past him in a flurry of activity as the citadel crumbles around him.

SOLDIER: Got you! And what a beauty you are! You'll fetch a hefty **price**...

PANEL 3: Same view. An arrow suddenly impales the soldier's skull against the pillar. He drops the gem.

SOLDIER: A hefty price indee-

SFX: THUK

PANEL 4: Panning back. The impaled soldier still visible in the background, but the focus is now on the horde. The Kozak are met with a rain of arrows as they open the entrance doors. Arrows from outside instantly impale the first dozen soldiers who attempt to leave. This is a merciless slaughter.

PANEL 5: The soldiers pile out of the citadel as arrows rain down on them. Many killed instantly, while those with shields climb over their dead companions, frantic to escape the bombardment.

PANEL 6: POV medium-shot looking up at the long line of Turan soldiers standing in unison at the edge of the gorge. Lightning

flares behind them as rain pounds the jungle terrain. The Turan soldiers stand in unison, relentlessly firing arrows down at the Kozak.

PAGE TWENTY

PANEL 1: Conan falling into blackness.

PANEL 2: Close-up of Conan's skin as hundreds of baby spiders bite him, swarming over him.

PANEL 3: Close-up of Conan's hand, covered in spiders and swelling spider bites, still gripping his knife, slashing wildly as spiders swarm over.

CAPTION: Conan feels the weight of steel in his hand. For once, it brings no comfort.

CAPTION: Instead, the **spirit** of steel whispers to him. For the first time.

CONAN (CAPTION): For the **last** time.

CAPTION(STEEL CAPTION BOX STYLING): *You were born in battle.*

CAPTION(STEEL CAPTION BOX STYLING): *I was with you then, at the beginning.*

CAPTION(STEEL CAPTION BOX STYLING): *I am with you **now**..*

PANEL 4: Longshot of Conan falling in the black. A tiny, insignificant shape in the void.

CAPTION(STEEL CAPTION BOX STYLING): *...at your **end**.*

PANEL 5: Longshot of Conan, falling in the black.

CAPTION(STEEL CAPTION BOX STYLING): *My clarion call once rang in your ears, like the tolling of Ymir's frozen bell. An alarm, displaced past the horizon.*

CAPTION(STEEL CAPTION BOX STYLING): *It's reverberations both wondrous and terrible..*

PANEL 6: Hundreds of baby spiders fall with Conan, sparkling like black gems in the dark.

CAPTION(STEEL CAPTION BOX STYLING): *...it cut through the walls of your mother's womb, a vibration that galvanized your newly birthed senses.*

CAPTION(STEEL CAPTION BOX STYLING): *Changing you forever.*

CAPTION(STEEL CAPTION BOX STYLING): *A declaration of destiny...*

PANEL 7: Conan's face partially visible as the spiders swarm over him. His skin is swelling up from countless spider bites.

CAPTION(STEEL CAPTION BOX STYLING): *...**that sound was the clash of swords.***

PAGE TWENTY-ONE

PANEL 1: Close-up of Conan's hand, gripping the knife. Spiders all over it, biting his ruined flesh.

CAPTION(STEEL CAPTION BOX STYLING): *You did not know it then, but you do now.*

CAPTION(STEEL CAPTION BOX STYLING): *Steel is not the only tool of survival, sharpened in conquest, wielded alike by thieves and kings, sojourns and seekers.*

PANEL 2: Close-up of Conan's eyes rolling up. He is going into shock. Spiders crawl over his face.

CAPTION(STEEL CAPTION BOX STYLING): *All this time. You didn't realize.*

PANEL 3: Close-up of Conan's hand, releasing his grip on the knife hilt.

CAPTION(STEEL CAPTION BOX STYLING): **Steel** *must be wielded by more than strength and skill.*

CAPTION(STEEL CAPTION BOX STYLING): **Instincts**, Conan.

CAPTION(STEEL CAPTION BOX STYLING): **Steel** *demands your total obedience to instincts.*

PANEL 4: POV Conan, watching the knife tumble past him as he falls.

CAPTION(STEEL CAPTION BOX STYLING): But *you are now lost*...

CAPTION (STEEL): ...because you have lost your grasp on **both**.

PANEL 5: Same view. The knife dwindling in the darkness as he falls away from it.

CAPTION: Somewhere, Conan senses Him.

CAPTION: **Crom**.

CAPTION: The merciless, brooding god peers down from a stonehewed throne...

PANEL 6: Same view. The knife tumbling in the black.

CAPTION: ...and offers **nothing**.

PANEL 7: The knife, smaller in the distance.

CAPTION: Nothing, but a pitiless acceptance of another doomed, Cimmerian warrior...

PANEL 8: The knife glimmers, star-like, unrecognizable.

CAPTION: ...worthy to join his eternal ranks.

PANEL 9: The knife is absorbed in the darkness. A solid black panel.

PAGE TWENTY-TWO

PANEL 1 (SMALL): Solid black panel.

PANEL 2 (MEDIUM): Solid black panel.

PANEL 3 (LARGE): Solid black panel.

CAPTION: END PART I