

CONAN: A REBELLION OF GHOSTS

PART II

(This work is an unproduced spec script by Scott Reed. View the animated cover art and Part I at beyondforwardcomics.com)

In a blind obsession to reunite with his beloved, the Kozak Chieftain Rakmartok leads Conan and his renegade horde to an ancient citadel...and into a deadly trap. There, they are suddenly attacked by the Turanian army, sent by the despot King Yazdegerd to crush the marauders once and for all. As the mysterious fortress crumbles beneath the Turanian onslaught and a poison threatens the lives of Conan's comrades, an even worse horror is awakened, swarming over Conan and Rakmartok and hurtling the two men into the deep, unknown depths of the citadel.

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

PAGE ONE

PANEL 1: Conan is falling into a black void. Hundreds of spiders cover his body, devouring him completely. His skeleton is partially visible. A grisly sight.

CAPTION: Conan is dying.

PANEL 2: Conan looks at his hands as he falls. Spiders crawling over his skin, biting him and tearing into his flesh.

CAPTION: He will not accept the truth of it. He will not surrender.

CAPTION: **He will never surrender.**

CAPTION: Even though he knows it is futile to fight...

PANEL 3: Suddenly, a spider explodes from inside the palm of his hand.

CAPTION: ...against an enemy from **within**.

PANEL 4: Conan squashes the spider in his hand, fighting to his last breath as other tiny spiders erupt from under his skin.

CAPTION: These creatures have infiltrated not only his body, but his **mind**. The union is agonizing, beyond the pale of these mortal wounds. Worse than any pain he has ever experienced...

CAPTION: ...and Conan's experience of pain is **vast**, inflicted upon him by men, monsters, demons and demi-gods alike.

PANEL 5: Conan, free-falling, is turning to look down at something below him, off-panel. He has a shocked expression.

CAPTION: **This** pain, however...it is beyond the known experience of Man. And yet, this hellish symbiosis brings something even more unexpected than unfathomable agony.

PAGE TWO

PANEL 1 (LARGE): Longshot of Conan, hovering like a skydiver over an ancient city. There is a slight warped effect to the art in this sequence and the coloring should denote a dream-like experience.

CAPTION: It brings a **revelation**.

CAPTION: Conan knows this place. **Yezud**. A village in the city-state of Zamora. Of course, he thinks. These creatures are depicting their ancestral home.

CAPTION: **The cult of the spider-god Zath.**

PANEL 2: Conan falls toward a gigantic temple designed in the shape of a spider. He glowers, enraged but helpless.

CAPTION: Conan is dimly aware that what he witnesses now is a vision, fueled by the venom destroying his body, linking his dying thoughts to the bestial collective memories of the spiders.

CAPTION: He mutters a curse in a ragged, weakened voice that he does not recognize. This, he decides, with barbaric rage, is not a warrior's death.

PANEL 3: Same view, closer. Conan, ever stoic, braces himself. Blood spatters on his face. We know that off-panel, terrible things are happening to his body.

CAPTION: The spiders know this, too, as their death-bond deepens within Conan's infiltrated brain.

PANEL 4: Same view, closer. In his eyes, the reflection of a large spider, dripping with blood as it rises before him.

CAPTION: His anger vanishes. His identity is reduced to nothing more than an abstract concept. Like the desperate mantra of a madman, he repeatedly recalls his own name.

CAPTION: **Conan.** An untamed anomaly apart from the strange, dark civilizations of Hyboria, ancestor of a thousand generations of red-handed barbarians, wandering from his gray hills of Cimmeria to plunder and careen into violent conquest.

PANEL 5: Same view, closer.

CAPTION: **Conan.** Master of the straight blades of the West, the curved blades of the East, the double-curved Ilbarsi knives and leaf-shaped broadswords of Shem. Thief, buccaneer, chieftain and corsair. The most terrible slayer of man, beast and unspeakable spawns of necromancy.

PANEL 6: Same view, closer.

CAPTION: Here, at his end, he is none of those things.

PANEL 7: Same view, closer.

CAPTION: Here, he is only a man, helpless in his fate.

CAPTION: All he can do now is watch.

PAGE THREE

PANEL 1: Cut to: A cathedral-sized, dim-lit chamber inside the Zath temple. It is filled with disciples who silently watch a priest approach the dais where their leader, his features obscured by a hooded robe, stands before the congregation. The same dream-like style to this scene, so it's visually connected with the previous scene.

PRIEST: **You are not the satrap of Zath!**

PANEL 2: The priest dramatically jabs a finger at the leader, enraged as he approaches the dais.

PRIEST: **You are no vassalage of his holy voice! You are an imposter!**

PANEL 3: The priest walks up the steps toward the hooded figure, who remains motionless.

PRIEST: I have learned of your true identity. **Lothal!** Formless terror once summoned from the black gulfs of abysmal realms! A reprobate among demons, loosed upon the world by careless crystallomancy, by unnamed dealers of defiled magics!

PANEL 4: The priest approaches the leader, who remains unmoved by this dramatic confrontation. The disciples gather, grim-faced, behind the priest.

PRIEST: Lothal is ever vying for power, you see. He means to assert himself in the pantheon of true gods. His disembodied form has seeped into our temple like a shadow into the souls of anyone that shares his evil propensities, until reaching the pinnacle of our faith. He intends to usurp Zath Himself!

PANEL 5: The leader lowers his hood, revealing a human face unnaturally twisted by demonic possession. Green mist wafts from his eyes.

LOTHAL (WEIRD BALLOON STYLE): And what will you do to circumvent my plans, human fool? I can only be imprisoned within immortal flesh. And in accordance with the spell of the long-dead master who summoned me, I cannot be slain unless by the hand of an old enemy.

LOTHAL (WEIRD BALLOON STYLE): Tell me, in your bravado, how do you reckon with the rules of that ancient incantation?

PANEL 6: Close-up of the priest, focused on casting a spell, as he raises his hands in an elaborate gesture. Red mist flows from his fingertips.

PRIEST: With careful planning.

PAGE FOUR

SPLASH: The dream sequence is over. Conan lurches upright, suddenly awake, propped up on the lap of a beautiful harem girl. Conan is in terrible shape, though not nearly as bad as in his dream; he is a mass of bleeding spider bites, swollen into pus-filled, red welts all over his body. His skin is caked with dried human and spider blood, and he is bruised and gashed from his fall. The worst of it is a deep laceration that stretches across his left arm, with bits of stone embedded in his torn skin. This wound is crudely wrapped in a make-shift bandage, taken from a torn piece of the woman's garment. His knife lies on the floor nearby.

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PAGE FIVE

PANEL 1: Conan lurches away from the woman, with the look of a wounded lion. Arodi backs away from Conan, realizing that this barbarian could instantly turn on her. They are in a large, dim lit chamber. The giant spider Conan had fought in the previous issue lies dead, smashed to a pulp from the fall. A deep pool of blood surrounds it. Hundreds of baby spiders feed upon the spider. Behind it, a sheet of water cascades, obscuring whatever lies beyond.

ARODI: I have saved your life. The spider's blood I administered to you...it is an antidote to their venom.

PANEL 2: Conan wipes the blood from his lips with the back of his arm, wary, his eyes locked on her as he crouches to retrieve his knife.

ARODI: I was spirited to this place somehow, by what devilry I do not know. I am...**was** a courtesan to a slave trader, in Hyrkania. I am called Arodi.

PANEL 3: Conan looks down at his body, watching in surprise as the spider bites magically glow and fade away. Arodi in the background, watching him.

ARODI: The antidote won't heal the injuries from your fall, though. For that, you can thank **me**. I stopped you from bleeding to death. When I appeared here...everything shook and crumbled. The ceiling opened and you fell into that web above. I watched as you cut yourself down from it. And then you collapsed, where you lay unmoved for a full day.

PANEL 4: Same view of Conan, the spider bites are gone.

ARODI: Please. Can you tell me why I'm here?

PAGE SIX

PANEL 1: Conan sheathes his knife in his boot as he crouches next to the pool of blood.

CONAN: Do you know a man called Rakmartok?

PANEL 2: Conan lifts an empty wine sack from his belt as he studies the pool of blood. Arodi looks away from Conan, absorbed by a dark memory.

ARODI: Yes.

ARODI: I was his consort, but it was more akin to a prisoner. He...tortured me.

ARODI: Who are you? And what does that snake have to do with **this** mystery?

PANEL 3: Conan dips the wine sack into the pool of blood.

CONAN: I am Conan of Cimmeria, a mercenary with the Kozak horde. Your former lover was my Chieftain, before this debacle. The fool led us here under the influence of dark sorcery and poisoned my Free Companions as leverage to do his bidding. I must get this antidote to them before they succumb to the poison.

CONAN: I have no time to solve mysteries.

PANEL 4: Conan walks around the giant spider as he attaches the filled wine sack to his belt. He scrutinizes the monster with mild disgust as the baby spiders devour it, seemingly oblivious to his presence. The spiders are growing at a supernatural rate as they devour their mother. Arodi stands behind him, her arms crossed in concern and apprehension.

CONAN: The fact that you're here means that Rakmartok has achieved his goal, at least in part. He was a babbling madman when we arrived. Ranting of power beyond reckoning...and of reuniting with his 'beloved'.

CONAN: And then I was hurtled into hell, or so it seemed. I dreamt of a demon named Lothal, in the temple of the spider god Zath. The connection to this horror should be clear, yet I can't fathom it.

ARODI: Rakmartok summoned me here...? He thinks that I am...his **lost love?**

CONAN: He no doubt disregards the pain he inflicted upon you. Cowards such as Rakmartok, who would commit cruelty upon a woman, often do.

PANEL 5: Arodi approaches Conan as he pulls his knife from his boot while crouching to study the spiders.

CONAN: How did you know the blood was an antidote?

ARODI: Your dream was no mere fantasy. These spiders are from Yezud. The mother, it is branded with the mark of Zath. I hear many stories in the harems and bawdy houses, told by drunkards. But this one happened to be true.

PANEL 6: POV Conan. He points his knife blade at the brand. The baby spiders continue to tear through its flesh.

CONAN: I dealt with giant spiders in Yezud, in my younger days as a thief. But we are many leagues from there, and the priests of Zath are an insular sect. This makes no sense...and we have no time to make sense of it. 'Ere long, these spawns will be as large as their mother. And once they've finished feasting on **her**, they'll turn their appetites toward **us**.

CONAN: What lies beyond the waterfall?

PAGE SEVEN

PANEL 1: They stand before the waterfall, gazing up it. They appear small, insignificant against the massive sheet of water.

ARODI: I know not. More horrors and death, I presume.

PANEL 2: Same view.

CONAN: You'll not face either alone, that much I can promise. You have my thanks, Arodi. I owe you my life. As for what's past this chamber...

CONAN: ...I yet live and breathe, with a blade in hand..

PANEL 3: Conan looks down at Arodi with the hint of a grim smile. His steel blue eyes are a shocking contrast against his bloody, primordial features.

CONAN: ...to inflict my **own** brand of horror and death.

CAPTION: Arodi is shocked by her sudden, base desire for the blood-soaked barbarian, spurred by a mixture of thrill and fear at the shocking intelligence lurking behind his steel-blue gaze.

PANEL 4: Same view. Conan extends his hand toward Arodi.

CAPTION: It is an alien sensation to her, from a lifetime of objectified slavery at the hands of brutal men like Rakmartok. But she knows that this rare savage from the far hills of northern lands..

PANEL 5: Arodi looks at Conan's extended hand, hesitant.

CAPTION: ...is also capable of furious violence, described in detail by his countless battle scars.

CAPTION: Despite that fact, or perhaps because of it, she senses in him a primitive kind of honor.

CAPTION: But trust is a fleeting, untouchable concept to her.

PANEL 6: She pulls her hand away from him, warily.

CAPTION: A concept beyond her reach.

PAGE EIGHT

PANEL 1: POV Conan, walking through the waterfall, his vision obscured by the wall of rushing water.

CAPTION: Conan does not ponder such things. Survival is foremost on his mind, now. The water prompts the Cimmerian to new alertness, as though it were another antidote cleansing his torn flesh.

PANEL 2: View of Conan's face, dripping with water as he is now fully immersed in the waterfall.

CAPTION: The cascade also reminds him of the recent calamity that had unfolded far above this forgotten chamber. This is rainwater, Conan knows. Which means that outside, the storm still rages. Perhaps, Conan speculates, war still rages there, too.

CAPTION: If so, he knows that the odds are stacked against his Kozak horde. When he had fallen into this mess, they had been hopelessly outnumbered, with the invading Turanian forces perched on the high ground of the jungle gorge, firing down at them a seemingly endless volley of ballistics.

PANEL 3: Conan peers up, letting the water gush over his face, washing away the blood and grime.

CAPTION: To add to the catastrophe, his Free Companions had been poisoned by their mad Kozak chieftain.

CAPTION: To fight outmatched, and hindered by deadly sickness...

CAPTION: Conan leaves the thought unfinished.

PANEL 4: Conan glances back at Arodi, in step behind him, half obscured by the water.

CAPTION: There are more immediate dangers to ponder.

CAPTION: **Arodi**. She appears ghost-like amid the streaming water. Her body a vision of ethereal, near-impossible beauty.

PANEL 5: Close-up of Arodi, half obscured in the waterfall.

CAPTION: Conan briefly imagines how she might feel, willingly in his crushing embrace. But the thought brings something else. An undefined, yet instinctive warning in the back of his mind.

PANEL 6: POV Conan, watching Arodi approach him in the waterfall. She looks up at him, her expression unreadable.

CAPTION: Take nothing here at face value.

PAGE NINE

PANEL 1: Conan and Arodi emerge from the other side of the waterfall, shocked by what they see lying before them. At their feet lies Rakmartok, a bleeding, almost unrecognizable heap on a narrow stone bridge. His shoulder bone juts through his skin. One leg is broken, snapped like a twig. His skull is fractured. Blood is congealed in a blackened pool around his body. He has the same degree of spider bites, cuts and abrasions that Conan had.

PANEL 2: Conan crouches to scrutinize the corpse. Arodi, wide-eyed, can barely form words at this grisly discovery.

ARODI (WAVERING): Is that. Is that—

CONAN: Rakmartok. Aye. And dead as a Stygian crypt keeper. With this miscreant dispatched, our chances of escape have just improved. His obsessions are ended here.

LOTHAL (WEIRD WORD BALLOON OFF-PANEL AND ABOVE): Some obsessions **never** die, Conan of Cimmeria...

PANEL 3: Arodi looks up at something off-panel, her eyes widening in terror.

PANEL 4: A shadow falls over Conan as he whirls toward the source of the strange voice from above. He is shocked by what he sees.

CONAN: **Crom..!**

PANEL 5: Birds-eye view. We can't get a clear view of this monster yet as it flies high above Conan, other than it is huge. Conan is poised to attack, his knife raised. Arodi peers up at the monster, frozen in terror.

LOTHAL (WEIRD BALLOON STYLE): **Crom?**

LOTHAL (WEIRD BALLOON STYLE): How...pathetic. You would invoke his name, a dismal god who would bring only doom and misfortune to those who seek his intervention?

PANEL 6: Extreme close-up of Lothal's lion mouth, revealing long, sharpened teeth.

LOTHAL (WEIRD BALLOON STYLE): Or do you utter his name not as invocation, but as a curse, when faced with the unknown?

LOTHAL (WEIRD BALLOON STYLE): This vessel I am forced to inhabit is the immortal Manticore, beast of unnatural amalgam bridging the dreaded forces from pre-cataclysm with the deep, darkest places of nightmare lunacy.

PANEL 7: The monster is flapping its wings, descending closer, it's details still murky. Its eyes burn supernaturally as two red pinpoints.

LOTHAL (WEIRD BALLOON STYLE): Witness my presence...

PAGE TEN

SPLASH: Full reveal of Lothal as it descends to attack Conan and Arodi. Conan steps protectively in front of Arodi while assuming a defensive stance with his knife raised, peering up at the monster. A classic Conan action scene composition, but it would be nice if we can get a new angle. Lothal is a lion/dragon amalgam, ancient and majestic. Its front section is a lion, it's hind legs dragon-like. He should be highly detailed and 'mythological looking', evoking a sense of a weird, forgotten era. Think ancient Chinese dragon designs.

LOTHAL (WEIRD BALLOON STYLE): ...**and despair.**

PAGE ELEVEN

PANEL 1: The creature swoops in for the kill. Conan plants his knife in the creature's snout as he grabs hold of its face with his free hand. Blood gushes from the monster's mouth.

SFX: SHUNNKKK

LOTHAL (WEIRD BALLOON STYLE): YESSSS...

LOTHAL (WEIRD BALLOON STYLE): Finally! An opponent worthy of the Manticore. Slash at me, savage! For I am **Lothal**, once summoned by dark liturgy to possess the minds of evil men.

PANEL 2: As the monster flies, it slashes at Conan with a huge, taloned paw.

LOTHAL (WEIRD BALLOON STYLE): I would have you slay me outright, without resistance. But this creature I inhabit...I cannot control its ancient instincts. In other words, barbarian..

LOTHAL (WEIRD BALLOON STYLE): ...you'll have to try harder.

PANEL 3: Conan slashes at the monster with his knife as he grapples with the creature.

CONAN: You seek death? Cease your blathering and I'll deliver it for you!

LOTHAL(WEIRD BALLOON STYLE): HAHAAHAAA...You have a dark sense of humor, Conan. What a dichotomy you are. Ah, of course I know **you**, as Rakmartok's thoughts are known to **me**.

PANEL 4: The creature reaches up and clutches Conan.

LOTHAL(WEIRD BALLOON STYLE): Like him, you are so predictable.

PANEL 5: Worms-eye view of Arodi. She backs away toward the waterfall. In the foreground lies Rakmartok's corpse.

LOTHAL(WEIRD BALLOON STYLE): So easily manipulated...

PANEL 6: Conan thrusts the blade of his knife deep into the monster's neck, causing it to contort in agony.

LOTHAL(WEIRD BALLOON STYLE): ...into giving me...

PANEL 7: Close-up of Rakmartok rising up like a zombie, glaring at Arodi as backs away.

RAKMARTOK (LOTHAL'S WEIRD BALLOON STYLE): ...**what I want.**

PAGE TWELVE

PANEL 1: Arodi suddenly stops, looking down to see several spiders emerge from the waterfall. They are larger than they were a moment ago, now standing two feet high.

RAKMARTOK (OFF-PANEL, WAVERING BALLOON STYLE): I love you, Arodi.

PANEL 2: She looks behind her at Rakmartok as he staggers toward her. He looks crazed, his face twisting in the same unnatural way as the Zath leader in the dream sequence.

RAKMARTOK (WAVERING BALLOON STYLE): Lothal promised me...promised me he'd bring you before me. So that I can tell you...the things I did to you...it won't be that way now...

PANEL 3: Cut to: Conan hangs on to the writhing monster, still in flight as he withdraws his bloody blade to slash at it again.

LOTHAL(WEIRD BALLOON STYLE): Those cursed priests of Zath were thorough in their studies...

PANEL 5: Conan stabs the creature again.

LOTHAL(WEIRD BALLOON STYLE): They learned of --agggh--the ancient spell that had brought me to this world. They eventually discovered a creature that was not only immortal, but whose old enemies were long since extinct.

PANEL 6: Conan rears his knife back to slash at the creature.

CONAN: So, it is true, then. You can only be killed by the hand of an old enemy...

PANEL 7: Cut to: Arodi, paralyzed in fear as Rakmartok lurches toward her, a lumbering, bloody heap.

RAKMARTOK(LOTHAL'S WEIRD BALLOON STYLE): Yes. The priests ensnared me with their own grotesque arts and brought my spirit here, trapping me within the Manticore. They left a garrison of Zath spiders as guardians, to prevent my escape. The priests planned to return here someday, whereupon they would truly be my

'old enemies', and therefore capable of banishing me from this mortal plane. Their long-view strategy was a stroke of genius.

PAGE THIRTEEN

PANEL 1: Conan stabs the monster as it flies toward the wall.

LOTHAL(LOTHAL'S WEIRD BALLOON STYLE, OFF-PANEL): But their plan was fundamentally flawed. In the long years of waiting, the spiders forgot their allegiance to the priests. No longer sentries, they instead formed an impenetrable barrier.

PANEL 2: Conan pulls his knife from the creature, raising it up to stab at it again. The Manticore, badly wounded, slams into the wall, nearly crushing Conan.

LOTHAL(WEIRD BALLOON STYLE, OFF-PANEL): The priests couldn't reach me, and the years passed without incident. I was doomed to immortal imprisonment...

PANEL : Close-up of Rakmartok, smiling at Arodi. Super creepy.

RAKMARTOK(LOTHAL'S WEIRD BALLOON STYLE): ..Until your Kozak horde wandered into this land. Until Rakmartok took my bait. I

commanded the spiders leave him a vial of the poison and antidote, coercing him into secretly administering it to your Free Companions. I used my influence to heighten his obsessions for Arodi and grant him a reunion with his lost love, in exchange for a symbiotic existence with me.

RAKMARTOK(WAVERING BALLOON STYLE): Now, Arodi...we are re-united.

RAKMARTOK(WAVERING BALLOON STYLE): **Nothing will ever separate us again.**

PANEL 4: Rakmartok staggers toward her. The spiders gather around her.

RAKMARTOK (WAVERING BALLOON STYLE): I love you, even though you stole it all didn't you--stole my wealth. Stole my heart--

PANEL 5: Arodi, backing toward the waterfall and spiders, suddenly enraged. She pulls up the sleeve of her shirt, revealing old, jagged scars.

ARODI: **Bastard!** I took what I **had** to take, so I could pay for my escape from your seraglio! And you didn't **have** a heart to steal! I **still** wear the scars of your cruelty!

PAGE FOURTEEN

PANEL 1: Cut to: With his knife in his teeth, Conan grapples with all of his remaining strength to pull the Manticore's mouth open as they fall. The Manticore is bleeding badly, mortally wounded.

LOTHAL (WEIRD BALLOON STYLE): YESSSSS! SHOW ME THE FULL SCOPE OF YOUR SAVAGRY! TEAR THIS IMMORTAL FLESH APAAAR-ghhahahhhaggg-

SFX: kkkkkrrrraaa-

PANEL 2 (LARGE): Conan rips the Manticore's jaw apart in a bloody display of raw power as they slam against the wall again, splintering it in a cascade of dust and stone. They have turned upside down; Conan is now under the monster.

SFX: ---AAAAAAKKKKKK!

PANEL 3 (LARGE): Breaking their fall with the collision against the wall, they crash to the ground together, the creature on top of Conan, seemingly crushing him.

SFX: CHOOOM!

PANEL 4: The monster is dead. Blood spreads from beneath it in a widening pool. Is it Conan's blood?

PAGE FIFTEEN

PANEL 1: Close-up of the Manticore's eyes, glazing over as it dies.

PANEL 2: Same view. A weird mist flows from its dead eyes.

PANEL 3: Rakmartok turns to look behind him, at the mist flowing toward him from the body of the Manticore.

PANEL 4: The mist envelops Rakmartok, who looks alarmed at what is happening to him.

RAKMARTOK: At last.

PANEL 5: Rakmartok attempts to embrace Arodi, as she instinctively backs away from him.

RAKMARTOK: You are mine!

PANEL 6: Rakmartok's arms pass through her, as though she was a ghost. Which she is. Both appear stunned at this revelation.

PAGE SIXTEEN

PANEL 1: Cut to: The Manticore appears to twitch and shudder strangely, as though coming back to life.

PANEL 2: Cut to: Rakmartok's hand passes through Arodi again as she recoils in horror.

PANEL 3: The mist flows into Rakmartok's eyes, signifying a union with Lothal.

PANEL 4: Arodi, with a shocked expression, looks down at her chest where Rakmartok had passed his hand through. Her chest is translucent, ghost-like. Rakmartok is enraged.

ARODI: I...I remember. The night I fled from your seraglio... I never escaped. I fell from the parapet and into the river. I...

RAKMARTOK: Died. All this time. All the years that I searched for you. You were dead. Lothal! You promised you would bring her to me!

PANEL 5: Close-up of Rakmartok, enraged.

RAKMARTOK: Liar! You cannot—you will not—

LOTHAL (LOTHAL'S WEIRD BALLOON STYLE, OVERLAPPING RAKMARTOK'S BALLOON): Silence, dog. I kept my word. I brought what is left of her. A shadow of her soul. A memory, snatched from the ether. It's all that's left of the harlot.

PANEL 6: Cut to: Something is bulging from within the Manticore, rippling from within its lifeless corpse.

PAGE SEVENTEEN

PANEL 1 (LARGE): Conan's blood-drenched knife, clenched in his fist, suddenly erupts from within the Manticore. Conan has slashed his way through the creature.

SFX: KRRIP

PANEL 2: Conan, exhausted and battered, climbs out of the gory innards of the creature.

PANEL 3: Lothal/Raktarmok whirls to see Conan spilling out of the creature.

RAKMARTOK(LOTHAL'S WEIRD BALLOON STYLE): A dramatic display of endurance, Conan. But you've served your purpose. Your work is done.

PANEL 4: Conan, too weary to do anything but slide to the ground next to the creature, still clutching his knife.

RAKMARTOK(LOTHAL'S WEIRD BALLOON STYLE): You slew the spider queen, clearing my path from this hellhole. You slew the Manticore, freeing me from its immortal prison.

PANEL 5: Rakmartok/Lothal staggers toward Conan, sliding his cutlass from its sheathe. Conan lies on his back, his knife arm outstretched against the floor. He looks up at Rakmartok, seething with anger, but helpless. Beyond, Arodi watches, terrified.

RAKMARTOK(LOTHAL'S WEIRD BALLOON STYLE): Though his body is broken, my innate power will keep the fool Rakmartok's spirit bonded with me long enough to reach civilization...where I will find a more suitable host to begin my conquests.

RAKMARTOK(LOTHAL'S WEIRD BALLOON STYLE): First, revenge upon every living soul in Yezud. I shall crush those priests and their spider-god. The streets will flow with their blood. Then, I will unleash my powers upon the followers of Mitra and Set. With the combined resources of those sects, all of humankind will grovel at my feet.

LOTHAL: Playthings for my amusement.

LOTHAL: Slaves to my every whim.

PANEL 6: Same view, Rakmartok/Lothal lurches closer to Conan.

RAKMARTOK(LOTHAL'S WEIRD BALLOON STYLE): A pity that I cannot possess a superior physical specimen such as you, to use as the figurehead of my new Empire. Consider the irony of it...a brooding savage, seated upon a king's throne! Ha! But it is folly. Your adherence to a crude, barbarian code of honor makes you unsusceptible to my daemonic temptations. You are less than worthless to me, now.

PANEL 7: Rakmartok/Lothal raises his cutlass over Conan, about to deliver the killing stroke.

LOTHAL: Call to your heathen god, Conan. Will he give you salvation?

PANEL 7: Conan grips the hilt of his knife.

CONAN: No. He already gave me what I need.

PANEL 8: Conan suddenly slides his knife across the floor, toward Arodi.

CONAN: And what **she** needs.

PAGE EIGHTEEN

PANEL 1: The knife stops at Arodi's feet.

PANEL 2: Arodi picks up the knife and charges at Rakmartok in one quick motion. She looks insane with rage.

PANEL 3 (LARGE): Arodi plunges the knife into Rakmarktok's chest, pushing the blade to the hilt.

SKX: SHNKK!

PAGE NINETEEN

PANEL 1: Rakmartok/Lothal looks down, shocked to see the knife hilt jutting from his chest.

RAKMARTOK (LOTHAL'S WEIRD BALLOON STYLE): **NO! You're just a ghost! You can't-**

ARODI (OFF-PANEL): I **can**.

ARODI (OFF-PANEL): I **did**.

PANEL 2: Rakmartok/Lothal crumples to his knees, still staring at the knife hilt in surprise.

ARODI: We're all just spirits, now. You, me and Rakmartok. I was Rakmartok's oldest enemy. And now that you've claimed his body as yours...

PANEL 3: Rakmartok/Lothal collapses to the floor, dead. Arodi stands over him. Conan, with great effort, gets to his feet, his eyes locked on Rakmartok's corpse.

ARODI: ...I can kill you both.

PANEL 4: The weird mist swirls around Rakmartok in an array of blinding light. Conan and Arodi step back, wincing from the intensity of the light.

PANEL 5 (LARGE): The swirling mist around Rakmartok's corpse explodes in a supernatural firework display that lights up the chamber, throwing Conan off his feet and into the air. In the explosion, Rakmartok and Lothal's ghostly form can be seen, both twisted and distorted in agony and rage. Lothal has a Cthulhuesque appearance.

SFX: SHA-KOOOOOOMMM!

PAGE TWENTY

PANEL 1: White panel.

PANEL 2: White panel.

PANEL 3: White mist is clearing, revealing Conan, staggering into view.

ARODI (OFF-PANEL): They're...gone? Finally, truly gone?

PANEL 4: Conan approaches Arodi. They are seen more clearly now, though there is still a fog-like mist that fills the chamber.

CONAN: Aye. A dramatic exit, no less. Like many devils I've encountered...

PANEL 5: Side view of Conan and Arodi, facing each other. Arodi reaches up to caress Conan's face. Her fingers don't quite touch his skin.

CONAN: ...they rarely die with a whimper.

PAGE TWENTY-ONE

PANEL 1: Conan looks at her forearm, revealing the old scars.

CONAN: You've had your revenge. But these old scars from Rakmartok...

ARODI: You thought they should disappear, too? What a poetic notion, Conan. Scars are reminders of things that **shouldn't** disappear.

ARODI: Or be forgotten.

CONAN: I have no voice nor ear for the poetic, Arodi. And I don't pretend to understand the workings of spells, either. Only what they can do to the living.

PANEL 2: Arodi lifts Conan's knife to him.

ARODI: And to the dead?

PANEL 3: Arodi smiles and releases her grip on the knife. She is fading away.

ARODI: Trust your **instincts**, Conan.

PANEL 4: Close-up of Arodi, smiling up at Conan as she fades away.

ARODI: What do they tell you?

PANEL 5: Same view. Arodi passionately kisses Conan as she fades away. Conan, unable to touch her ghostly form, simply receives the kiss with a kind of reverence.

PANEL 6: The knife lands on the floor. Arodi is gone.

PAGE TWENTY-TWO

PANEL 1: Conan reaches down to pick up the knife.

PANEL 2: Conan picks up Rakmartok's cutlass.

PANEL 3: He looks at the weapons in his hands, considering her words.

PANEL 4: POV behind Conan. He turns to look toward the waterfall, brooding. He holds Rakmartok's cutlass in one hand and his knife in the other.

PANEL 5 (LARGE): Cut to: the other side of the waterfall. POV the spiders, larger now. With a barbarian rage, Conan crashes through the waterfall, charging at the spiders with a battle cry. The wine sack of spider blood dangling from his belt can be seen in this angle. It is a visual cue to remind readers of his objective to save the Kozak. Conan appears here as an untamed savage from immemorial myth, larger than life and scary as hell. It's easy to see that these monsters don't stand a chance against him.

CAPTION (INCLUDES A BROADSWORD ICON DESIGN): FIN