

PEON

NUMBER THIRTY-FIVE

VOLUME EIGHT NUMBER TWO

M A Y 1 9 5 5

Published on an irregular schedule--with at least four issues per year--time, money, the Navy, and wife willing by

CHARLES LEE RIDDLE, PNCA, USN
108 Dunham Street
Norwich Connecticut

Exchanges with other fanzines welcomed and are solicited.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: 20¢ per issue; six issues for one dollar. Outside of the dollar area, subscriptions at the rate of 1/-6d for each single issue; or 6/- for 6 issues should be sent to K.F.Slater, 22, Broad St., Syston, Leics., England.

*Publishing
Fandom's Best
for 8 Years*

I N D E X

Harlan Ellison:

NIGHT VIGIL 3

Rog Phillips:

CHRIST!! AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY 8

T. E. Watkins:

KAN KAN KABITZER 15

Terry Carr:

FANTASTUFF 18

Henry Moskowitz:

ACCURACY AND SIMPLE FACT 21

Robert Bloch:

CREDO FOR FANTASY WRITERS 25

Stuart M. Boland:

FRAGMENT 27

Jim Harmon:

HARMONY 29

Erik Fennel:

WHAT? YOU READ PLANET? 31

Jack Cordes:

OUR HERO 32

Dave Mason:

THE DEATH OF CONAN 33

PEDN NOTES . . . 2

COVER BY EMSH

THE DEATH OF CONAN

DAVE MASON

The sea wind sang in the masts, and the black water of the harbor was flecked with white. The darkness of the coming night slid swiftly down on the city of Akkad.

Lights sprang up here and there, and the great bronze fire baskets at the principal street corners burst into flames. There were warm lights and much sound in the tavern on the quay, and drunken seamen reeled toward it, attracted as moths are, to a lamp.

Within, a long pine board and a floor of tanbark; a busy host and busier serving-maids, carrying the wine and the brown ale, dodging the occasional flung cup, and counting the clinking coins.

The soldier in the battered cuirass planted an enormous hairy foot on the table, drained his horn, and said loudly, "Conan! Va Hai, Conan! There was a man to fight!"

He belched loudly.

"I sacked Stygia's black cities with him. I rode behind him when he lived, and I was with him when he died. A man, that Conan!"

"You saw him die?" The fat man in the purple robe of a city merchant leaned closer. "How was that?"

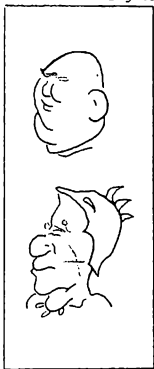
"He had been King in Aquilonia....many years." The soldier spat into the tanbark. "Another would have grown soft with the good wine and the fat living. Not Conan."

"But you saw him die." The fat man signaled for more ale.

"There came many barbarians." The soldier said. "Hairy ones, not fearing any god or any man. Conan put on his armor once more. He called together the lancers...but few we were. Very few. Most were boys who'd never held pike nor shield, so safe was Aquilonia while Conan held its throne.

"And we went forth to the North, to seek the barbarians. We found them, a mighty horde of them, skin-clad, with their yaks and their tents, and their horrible short knives...

"All day we fought them, in the pine woods of the Northern Mountains.



All day, falling and slaying, and falling again....and in the end we won. But at the last, we found the King Conan, beneath a pile of the slain, his sword through the heart of the chief of the barbarians."

The soldier lifted his horn and shouted a great oath in an unknown tongue. Then his eyes fell upon the shapeliest of the serving-maids.

"Enough of ancient quarrels." he grunted, and at the maid, "Say, pretty one...would you have a quiet spot upstairs where a man might take you with a bottle or two?"

After the soldier had disappeared, the fat man in the robe of the merchant caste turned to his bench mate.

"I could not call such a one liar to his face." he said apologetically. "But he was...at least mistaken."

The other was a very old man, his face lined and scarlet pitted from drink, his rheumy old eyes half-blind, bent over the table and drooling into a bowl of the cheapest wine.

The old man cackled unintelligibly, and the merchant continued...

"I saw Conan die, myself. He died in his great palace in the city, not in warfare. He had grown too old and wise for war by then...and too wealthy. He died surrounded by his weeping wives and by generations of sons...and his funeral rites! Such magnificence! He was buried in a marble tomb that had cost a million and a half pieces of gold, buried with seventy slain slaves at his feet..."

"You saw?" The old man peered at the merchant.

"Ah, indeed. I was in the oil and wine business...caravans of the best oil of Palmyra to burn in the lamps at the wake. Shiploads of wine.. and gold, in heaps like dung."

The merchant shook his head, his small, squinting eyes lit with the wonder of it. He took another swallow of wine.

It was too much for him. His head fell forward on the bench, and the old man came swiftly to life. His wrinkled old fingers slipped slyly through the merchant's purse, and then he rose to his feet.

Shaking and hobbling, he scuttled to the door like an ancient spider, his claws clutching the stolen gold. He vanished into the windy night, muttering.

The moon had risen, and the night birds cried strangely above the black water. The cables of the ships tied to the quay groaned, and the old man laughed loudly into the wind.

A black figure rose from behind a stone bulkhead, and crept toward the old man.

"Hail, friend," the old man said. "Gold have I. And a strong palace, with lancers to guard it and a hundred wives within..."

"A dark night to be talking about gold." Amthas the thief said softly.

"A dark night...but for me, the night came long years ago." The old man cackled softly. "They slew Conan in battle. They slew him in his great bed...But Conan lives. Lives, and can drink any fat merchant or damned deserter under the table."

The knife flashed, and the old man sank to the cobbles.

"Good night, Conan." said Amthas the thief.

