

The Bloody Crown of Conan Study Guide

The Bloody Crown of Conan by Robert E. Howard

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The People of the Black Circle: I, Death Strikes a King; II, A Barbarian from the Hills: III, Khemsa Uses Magic; IV, An Encounter in the Pass; V, The Black Stallion

The People of the Black Circle: I, Death Strikes a King; II, A Barbarian from the Hills: III, Khemsa Uses Magic; IV, An Encounter in the Pass; V, The Black Stallion Summary

The Bloody Crown of Conan by Robert E. Howard focuses on Conan, a frightening barbarian, who saves women and conquers lands from evil forces. He uses his brute strength and warfare to fight evil and take back his kingdom.

In "I, Death Strikes a King," the King of Vendhya lies dying. Slave girls surround the ill king, Bhunda Chand, as does his beloved sister, Devi Yasmina. She is very upset and feels helpless. The old noble tells Devi that the king has been poisoned, but Devi refuses to believe it because he always has servants taste and inspect his food. The king calls out for his sister.

In another part of the city, a man comments that the dirge, or funeral song, has already been sounded, but the king is not dead. He asks why it took months for these people to kill the king. Another man, Khemsa, answers that a person cannot override sorcery and the cosmos. Khemsa explains the King cut off a lock of black hair for the princess to remember him by. This lock of hair was stolen. A substitute lock of hair took its place, but the princess did not realize the difference. Khemsa refers to the Black Seers, which are his masters and who are all-powerful, evil magicians.

Meanwhile, the king says he has been cursed by wizards who draw his soul from his body. He begs Devi to kill him. She says she cannot, but he commands her to kill him. She puts a dagger into his breast and kills her brother.

In "II, A Barbarian from the Hills," Chunder Shan, the governor of Peshkhauri, sits in his chamber as he writes. He reads his words, but hears horses' hooves outside. The letter he writes is to the old noble of Vendhya. In it, he writes he has carried out the king's instructions. The instructions were to have seven tribesmen in a well-guarded prison. Chunder Shan sent word for their chief to come bargain for their release. The chief said: unless his tribesmen are freed, he will burn Peshkhauri and kill Chunder Shan. The chief is quite capable of doing this.



A woman named Devi comes unannounced to Chunder Shan's palace. He says it is dangerous of her to ride this way because Peshkhauri is a dangerous place where barbarians rape and murder. He threatened to hang the seven tribesmen tomorrow, but their chief has not responded. Devi says her brother was killed by magic, by the Black Seers of Mount Yimsha. He says they are black devils who inhabit the hills and everyone is terrified of them. Devi swears to kill them, but she must find men who know the way to Mount Yimsha. Chunder Shan says tribes fear the Black Seers. Devi asks if Conan fears them, and he answers that Conan does not fear anything. He warns Devi that he cannot predict Conan's actions. She wants Conan to come for his men and the heads of the Black Seers to be ransom.

Chunder Shan escorts Devi to her chamber and returns to his own chamber. Conan enters through the window. They discuss Conan's seven tribesmen. Conan says he has offered gold, but Chunder Shan says he has enough gold. Conan injures him and threatens to kill him and lead a raid on Peshkhauri. He goes to Devi's chamber and takes her away in the night. The governor lies injured and screams there has been an abduction.

In "III, Khemsa Uses Magic," Devi's maid, Gitara, leaves the palace and goes to see Khemsa. She tells him Conan stole Devi, but Khemsa has no emotion. Gitara warns him not to tell anyone, and he agrees, saying he will not disobey his masters, the Black Seers, who taught him black magic. She says to destroy the seven tribesmen so Chunder Shan cannot use them to get back at Devi. Then they can go to the mountains and take Devi because no one can fight against Khemsa's sorcery. They can trick everyone and sell off Devi, so they can have extreme wealth and become queen and king of an empire. She says she loves him and he agrees to her plan. Khemsa and Gitara ride the fastest horse to Afghulistan.

In "IV, An Encounter in the Pass," Conan holds Devi as they race on his horse. She feels like a commoner, thrown across his saddle. She screams out in fury, calling him a dog, but he holds her tightly. He takes her to Afghulistan. She warns everyone will come after him, but he laughs. They gallop through the darkness.

Conan kills a man who tries to attack him. The man is one of Yar Afzal's men; Yar Afzal is a friend of Conan's and chief of the Wazuli tribe. They go back to Yar Afzal's village while Devi sleeps in Conan's arms as he gallops through the mountains.

In "V, The Black Stallion," Devi wakes up in a hut. Conan says he will keep her until his seven men are returned to him. She must write a letter to the governor, which angers her. Conan and Yar Afzal get in a verbal fight and Conan threatens and kills him. Conan fights against all of Yar Afzal's men. Devi is happy that Conan lives, but asks her why she cares if he lives. They go through a secret door and escape the Wazulis (tribesmen of Yar Afzal).



The People of the Black Circle: I, Death Strikes a King; II, A Barbarian from the Hills: III, Khemsa Uses Magic; IV, An Encounter in the Pass; V, The Black Stallion Analysis

Conan represents an outsider in this region. He does not look like the other people. Instead, he has blazing, blue eyes and the Western features of a white man. He is enormous in stature and muscular strength. Unlike those around him, he is not afraid of anything. He is not even afraid of the evil Black Seers. Conan is a fearless warrior who takes exactly what he wants (i.e. Devi). Thus, Conan represents an annexing nation, or an entity that takes control over the people and land wherever he goes. In the truest sense, Conan is a barbarian, even more barbaric than the normal barbarians of his day. He does not have a sense of right or wrong, and he kills at will without a guilty thought, thus he represents a brutal force or powerful country overtaking a smaller one. In other words, Conan is a state unto himself. He is more than a person, he is a force.

Devi is the strong, female character. Though women of this time were demure and stayed out of politics and affairs of men, Devi immerses herself in the middle of a political battle. Thus, Devi symbolizes a futuristic woman or a modern-day woman with feminist ideals. She seems out of place in this time period. Her feminist strength matches Conan's masculine strength. This foreshadows that the pair may join forces to have a complete strength of character. As Conan does not cower in fear, neither does Devi. She shows courage and strength in all situations, even when she is up against the formidable Conan.

The idea of black magic commonly occurs in fantasy. As with most fantasy books, black magic sets the stage for good vs. evil. Good must prevail over evil, and the same is happening here. However, there are many evil characters in this story, so the lines drawn between good and evil are skewed. For example, Conan is a heroic figure, but he is not necessarily good or evil. He kills because he has to and he avenges his tribesmen the only way he knows how: by threatening to kill the governor. Khemsa is neither good nor evil. He is in a lower position in society. He and Gitara will use his sorcery to achieve fortune, so they can live happily in wealth and not be servants anymore. That is not an evil thought, but more a pragmatic one for this time period of a caste system. Therefore, evil is not clearly defined in this story. Instead, evil can be the very worst of society, such as the black magic of the Black Seers, or evil can be pragmatic to save oneself or move to a higher position in life.



The People of the Black Circle: VI, The Mountain of the Black Seers; VII, On to Yimsha; VIII, Yasmina Knows Stark Terror; IX, The Castle of the Wizards; X, Yasmina and Conan

The People of the Black Circle: VI, The Mountain of the Black Seers; VII, On to Yimsha; VIII, Yasmina Knows Stark Terror; IX, The Castle of the Wizards; X, Yasmina and Conan Summary

In "VI, The Mountain of the Black Seers," Conan says they will go to Afghulistan. The Wazulis are after him. They see Khemsa and Gitara, whom Devi recognizes and thinks the servant girl has come to her aid. Conan says that when the Wazulis tried to kill him, it seemed like they were instructed from a voice from above. Conan says Devi needs new clothes because hers are in tatters. They see a village girl. She undresses and gives her clothes to Devi and Conan gives the girl a gold coin. As Devi steps out from dressing behind a rock, Conan is instantly attracted to her. He says she looked aloof in her royal clothing, but now she is extremely beautiful as a hill girl. He does not give Devi's tattered garments to the girl because people are looking for them and she may be mistaken for Devi and killed. They continue along to Afghulistan.

Conan says they can go to the Mountain of the Black Seers. He is not afraid, but warns Devi it is not a place for normal humans. They come across Khemsa and he tries to hypnotize Conan, but this does not work. Conan cannot be hypnotized because he comes from the West. Khemsa strikes Conan, which causes Conan to fall. Devi sees Gitara, but realizes she has turned bad. The Black Seers, four spirits in black robes, appear. Conan feels his blood turn cold. Gitara falls over a cliff while Khemsa disappears in an avalanche. The Black Seers steal Devi.

In "VII, On to Yimsha," while Conan rides on to find Devi, he hears voices of his people, the Afghulis. They tell him the seven tribesmen are dead. They try to kill him with arrows, but Conan rides off. He sees Khemsa, who tells Conan to get Devi. As Khemsa dies, he gives Conan his magic girdle. Conan meets up with Kerim Shah, leader of the Turanian tribe, who demands to know where Devi is, so Conan tells him the truth. They decide to join forces to find her.

In "VIII, Yasmina Knows Stark Terror," Devi is imprisoned in a room in the Black Seers' castle. The Master of Yimsha says she is weak and filled with hatred. Devi says he killed her brother, the king, but the Master will not explain why he killed him. She says



she will never yield to him, but he says she will yield through fear and pain. The Master creates a light, which turns into a glowing ball and grows bigger. It then turns into evil plant stems that reach out to a frightened Devi. She becomes immersed in a nightmare where she is a slave, bleeding and beaten. Cities burst into flames. She feels child birth and other agonies of a woman. Finally, she wakes up to another Black Seer sitting next to her and faints.

In "IX, The Castle of the Wizards," Conan and Kerim Shah are at the Seers' castle. They leave their horses and trudge up the mountain. As they start to walk up, a dog comes out of nowhere and attacks them. A hawk swoops down, but Kerim Shah kills it. Other attacks come in the form of lightning, thunder and wooly things running towards them. Kerim Shah shoots arrows and kills a Seer protector. They go into the tower and stand at the moat. Conan follows the golden vein as they float down the water and continue to fight ongoing attacks. Conan enters the castle, but serpents lunge at him. Men die beside him, but not Conan. He breaks the crystal ball, conjuring the Master to appear, but he will not tell Conan where Devi is and disappears.

Conan fights a serpent monster, stabbing it and the monster relents. He catches Devi in his arms and they leave. Conan says the Master chose to kill her, rather than let her be rescued. As they leave the castle, she cannot look at the corpses.

In "X, Yasmina and Conan," they leave the castle. Conan says Khemsa gave him the magic girdle before he died, which will help fight several spells. Conan says they will see the Master again and then ride back to Afghulistan, but Devi says he is a wanted man. She is the queen of Vendhya and she will grant him amnesty because he saved her life and partly avenged her brother's death. Conan wants to keep her, but she protests. He desires her very much, yet she wants to return to her kingdom. Three thousand horsemen, Turanians, ride through the land. Conan gets nervous, realizing they are probably here to take Devi and kill him. Thousands of riders from Vendhya come as well. Devi takes Conan's horse and rides to the Vendhya warriors. A vulture swoops down, about to kill Devi, but Conan lunges at it and saves her. They agree to part ways, but Conan will return to her with thousands of tribesmen. They leave each other in friendship.

The People of the Black Circle: VI, The Mountain of the Black Seers; VII, On to Yimsha; VIII, Yasmina Knows Stark Terror; IX, The Castle of the Wizards; X, Yasmina and Conan Analysis

The reader begins to see Conan's fear and nervousness. He is described as fearless, but here the reader sees that Conan grows scared when Devi might be taken away from him. He does not seem to fear his own death. Therefore, Conan has begun to fall in love with Devi. His motivations change from protecting himself to protecting her. For example, he goes to the Black Seers' castle to save her and kills a vulture for her. Conan is a caring character. He is not all barbarian. He is a man who cares deeply. He



seems to have an affinity for women in particular as he tells Devi he does not kill women unless he has to. He also protects the hill girl by not giving her Devi's clothes. This shows another side of Conan's personality. It represents that he, like all human beings, is multi-layered. He is neither good nor bad. Conan is a person with flaws and strengths. His incredible athletic abilities serve him well for his time period and mask his soft side. But in the end, he is a mortal, just like the other characters in this story.

There is a lot of sexual tension throughout the story between Conan and Devi. As seen throughout the Conan series, sexual tension is at the forefront of the writing. Conan looks at Devi with lust, especially when she changes into the hill girl's clothing. The women are topless, or near topless, exposing their breasts openly to the men. The women characters are beautiful and alluring. When Devi says she will find a way to reward Conan, he takes it as a sexual reward and growls happily. Interspersed within the text are illustrations. Most of them depict Devi, a beautiful, young and bare-chested woman whom the hulking Conan protects. He carries her in his arms, and through the writing, the reader sees the sexual tension between them. At one point, Conan even spans Devi and she seems to like it. Though they do not engage in any sort of sexual act, the idea of sex lingers on every page. This foreshadows that the next story may delve into sexual conquest more and Conan may develop a sexual relationship with a woman whom he encounters.



The Hour of the Dragon: I, O Sleeper, Awake!; II, A Black Wind Blows; III, The Cliffs Reel; IV, From What Hell Have You Crawled?; V, The Hunter of the Pits

The Hour of the Dragon: I, O Sleeper, Awake!; II, A Black Wind Blows; III, The Cliffs Reel; IV, From What Hell Have You Crawled?; V, The Hunter of the Pits Summary

In "I, O Sleeper, Awake!", four men stand around a sarcophagus, or stone coffin, in a dark chamber. The man at the foot of the coffin moves his candle as if he writes a mystic symbol in midair. There is a mummy case. A man lays a jewel on the mummy, asking for the Heart of Ahriman. A man comes out of the sarcophagus. He is Xaltotun, a high priest. He was dead, but the four men bring him back to life. They raise him from the coffin and set him down. The priest who poisoned him kept all his organs intact while mummifying him. Xaltotun says he found the Heart of Ahriman, but it was stolen from him again. It has been 3000 years since he lived. The four men wish to use Xaltotun to conquer Aquilonia, the kingdom of Conan. They need him because he understands the Heart of Ahriman's dark secrets. They are sorcerers, but Xaltotun is most powerful.

Xaltotun says to the men it is a world he does not know. But they want him to help change it, so they have complete power. They strive to overthrow Conan, who is all-powerful. The people are loyal to Conan. Thus, he is unconquerable.

In "II, A Black Wind Blows," King Tarascus declares an old truce void. He will invade Aquilonia because he believes this land is rightfully his. The king moves 50,000 men westward to fight. The war wages on all night. Conan is awakened, but he has dreamed of his past as a swordsman and pirate. Veiled, shadowy figures had mocked him in his dreams. Conan falls and he is paralyzed. He cannot talk except to say there is a thing in the corner, a specter, but no one else sees it. The specter he sees is Xaltotun. He grabs Conan's wrist and burns fingerprints into him. Conan and his men agree not to talk about this incident. One of his men goes to fetch another warrior to replace Conan in battle.

In "III, The Cliffs Reel," the Aquilonians line up to fight. No one knows it is not Conan who rides at the head of the army. Meanwhile, life comes back to Conan slowly, who speaks and starts to move. Aquilonians are being killed off quickly. The peaks crumble and the cliffs fall. People begin to chant that the king, Conan, is dead. Conan's men push him up until he can stand by himself. He waits for the King of Nemedra, who



mistakenly thinks he will surrender. Instead, Conan jumps out of the tent and attacks the King of Nemedra. Xaltotun appears and throws a glowing sphere at Conan, who cuts it with his sword. This knocks Conan unconscious. Xaltotun says for them to let people believe Conan died in a fall over the cliffs. He says to spare Conan.

In "IV, From What Hell Have You Crawled?", Conan lies unconscious in Xaltotun's chariot. Xaltotun tells people that Conan is dead. Conan slips in and out of consciousness. He awakens fully and sees a beautiful, male face which belongs to Xaltotun. He introduces himself to Conan. He tells Conan everyone thinks he is dead. He does not want to kill Conan, but to return him to his post of ruler of Aquilonia. But Conan must be obedient to Xaltotun. Conan will not do it. He is afraid because of Xaltotun's black magical powers. Xaltotun says he can utilize Conan for his own plans, which is why he does not kill him. Four, gigantic black men enter, lift Conan and bring him to a dungeon. They lock him in chains. He remains shackled and powerless.

In "V, The Haunter of the Pits," Conan does not move because of the weight of the chains. Xaltotun promises not to hurt him. Conan believes him because he knows Xaltotun wants him for his master plan. He lies helplessly by the broken bones of an animal. He does not get upset or curse. A beautiful young girl comes to his cell and gives Conan the keys to his shackles. He thinks it is a trick. But she makes the guards drunk. The girl says she saw Conan years ago and fell in love with him. She says King Tarascus has returned and wants Conan dead, so he must leave quickly. He starts to mention Xaltotun, but she says not to because demons are summoned by hearing their names. Conan is still not one hundred percent sure this is not a trick, but he believes the girl. She gives him a dagger and shows him the way out. As he leaves, a gray ape runs after him. Conan meets it face to face, stabbing the ape to death and watching it die.

The Hour of the Dragon: I, O Sleeper, Awake!; II, A Black Wind Blows; III, The Cliffs Reel; IV, From What Hell Have You Crawled?; V, The Haunter of the Pits

Analysis

The power of Conan is tested. Conan is not the most powerful figure anymore. His competition is Xaltotun, who does not have the brute strength of Conan, but he has the black magical skills. This represents the idea of the mind being stronger than the sword. It is Xaltotun's intelligence and skills that make him more powerful than Conan. Conan only has his physical strength, which does not matter in a situation of powerful, black magic. Therefore, Conan must find another way to survive. Conan's motivations now turn to surviving, instead of maintaining his power. It is here that the reader sees Conan as weak. He is paralyzed. He cannot move or speak, and at the end of V, he is in shackles and helpless. Interestingly enough, it is a young woman who saves him. Thus, Conan must rely on someone else to bring back his power. As he leaves the dungeon, his power begins to return as he slays the ape. He watches it die, and as he does, the reader sees the formidable Conan returning as well as his strength.



The girl who saves Conan symbolizes the strength of a woman. She is fearless. She gets the guards drunk and steals the keys, despite the fact that she may be executed for this action. Her love for Conan drives her. This is in direct opposition to Conan's motivations of blood thirst and revenge. As with Devi in the story before, the female character's motivations stem from feelings of love and caring. Perhaps the author is trying to say that love is not only the ultimate motivator, but also the ultimate power over the human race. It is not blood thirst that saves Conan, it is love.

The gray ape symbolizes another power trying to overtake Conan. Much like Conan, the ape is ruthless and a fierce barbarian with brute strength. He lacks the intelligence of a human, but he smells and sees his prey and runs after it, much like Conan. He tries to kill Conan, but it is through this fight that Conan's power comes back. Once it is restored, he kills the ape. The ape's death represents the restoration of Conan's power and foreshadows obstacles that may come later, but Conan will overcome all of them.



The Hour of the Dragon: VI, The Thrust of a Knife; VII, The Rending of the Veil; VIII, Dying Embers; IX, Is it the King or his Ghost?; X, A Coin from Acheron

The Hour of the Dragon: VI, The Thrust of a Knife; VII, The Rending of the Veil; VIII, Dying Embers; IX, Is it the King or his Ghost?; X, A Coin from Acheron Summary

In "VI, The Thrust of a Knife," Conan takes the knife out of the slain ape. Zenobia, the girl who helped him escape, meets up with him. She leads him through a passage to the outside of the palace. She says for Conan to wait here, but he feels she is setting him up in a trap. She says she is not and leaves. Conan follows his instincts and goes off on his own. He finds King Tarascus speaking about how Xaltotun was brought back to life by sorcery. The room is dimly lit. Conan comes out of hiding and attacks King Tarascus. He does not kill him, but injures him. Conan escapes and finds Zenobia who leads him into a room. He says he wants to take her with him and she is happy. But she makes him go alone for his safety. They embrace, kiss passionately and have sex. Conan leaves, but promises to come back for Zenobia one day.

Conan jumps over the palace wall. Xaltotun and Orastes, the black magician who brought Xaltotun back to life, speak about the black magic that will keep Conan down, but a guard comes back from the dungeon and reports that Conan is not there. The King demands a search for Conan; he does not realize it had been Conan who attacked him because the room was dimly lit. Meanwhile, Conan kills his enemies and takes their clothing to wear.

In "VII, The Rending of the Veil," Conan rides a white horse that Zenobia selected. He rides as fast as he can for hours and hours until he reaches the prairies. An evil bird follows him. He rides into Nemedian territory. The soldiers are confused because he wears a Nemedian jacket, but speaks with an Aquilonian accent. He kills the soldiers. He meets a woman sorcerer, who conjures up smoke and shows Conan his knights filing out of the gates. Valerius is now king of Aquilonia because Conan sees his coronation. He sleeps and wakes up. He thanks the woman oracle for her help and then rides westward, unbothered by soldiers.

In "VIII, Dying Embers," Conan rides in the countryside of Tarantia. A servant appears and is happy to see that Conan is alive and has returned. They reach a house and Conan finally eats a large meal. The servant says they submitted to Valerius to save their own lives. Valerius levies high taxes. Conan has no heir to the throne and the



army is in shambles. The people are left to answer to Valerius. Conan realizes the woman oracle spoke the truth. Valerius is king and he fills his court with Nemedians. He is a bad king who does not protect his subjects. Conan says they will take back Tarantia. But the servant says Conan fell by sorcery and that is the most powerful thing. He tells Conan that Countess Albiona will die by beheading tonight because she refused to be Valerius' mistress. Conan says he will save Albiona, knowing it is a suicide mission. He asks the servant to provide traveler's clothes so he can go in disguise.

In "IX, Is it the King or his Ghost?", Conan walks through Tarantia unrecognized in his disguise. He walks to the tower and meets the executioner. Conan sees Albiona and attacks the executioner. Others try to fight Conan and grab Albiona, but they realize who Conan is. He wounds and kills the men and grabs Albiona. He runs, trying to find his way out of the tower.

In "X, A Coin from Acheron," Conan and Albiona end up in the temple of Asura. They meet a priest. He will protect Conan because Conan had been great leader to the people when he sat on the throne. Conan asks to eat. He devours his food. The priest tells Conan sorcery is against him and explains about Xaltotun. He shows Conan a coin with Xaltotun's likeness and Conan realizes that is the man he saw. It is true; Xaltotun has risen from the dead. The priest says the Heart of Ahriman is in Xaltotun's possession and he will protect it to make sure it is not stolen from him again. The power of darkness cannot withstand the Heart. Xaltotun stole it to keep from his enemies because they can use it against him. Conan realizes he must go on a solo mission to capture the Heart.

Meanwhile, Valerius goes to the chamber where the men have been slain by Conan. A dying man tells him Conan lives. Valerius commands soldiers to find Conan and Albiona and kill them both on the spot. Valerius appoints the four Khitans to find and destroy Conan.

The Hour of the Dragon: VI, The Thrust of a Knife; VII, The Rending of the Veil; VIII, Dying Embers; IX, Is it the King or his Ghost?; X, A Coin from Acheron

Analysis

Conan realizes that his power is under siege. It is black magic that is stronger than him, and even the people of his country know this now. Conan's motivations turn to finding the source of the black magic and destroying it. However, Conan must face his own realization that he is not as powerful as he originally thought he was. He can kill and maim easily, but one thing he cannot do is fight black magic. Conan comes to the realization that black magic is more powerful than him, and to overcome this fatal challenge, he must counter it. This symbolizes a new beginning or new strength in Conan. He lives his life as a barbarian, but now he must use his mind as well to defeat evil. In this new beginning, Conan is not only a brute, but a man who uses a sort of intellect and cleverness to defeat black magic. He is now a more cerebral character.



Conan and Zenobia consummate their relationship, or in other words, have sex. Up until this point, there is much sexual tension between Conan and the female characters. Here, the sexual tension comes to a peak as the two have sex. However, the author does not describe the sexual scene in detail, only stating that they have rough, passionate sex. As the book continues, Conan encounters another female, Countess Albiona, and the sexual tension continues between them as Conan carries Albiona in his strong, masculine arms. He admires her body, beautiful face and flowing, golden hair. Again, he is in the position of being the savior or the hero. The sexual tension continues to build once again as he saves Albiona. Thus, sexual tension is cyclic throughout the book.

The Heart of Ahriman symbolizes the thing that Conan does not have, but he desperately needs, especially to fight evil. Symbolically, it is a heart, which signifies emotion and love. These are two things Conan seems to be missing. He is sexually attracted to women and has loyalty toward his citizens, but he does not love them. Once he obtains the Heart, he will become in touch with his emotional side to help save his kingdom. Thus, Conan must literally and figuratively find his heart.



The Hour of the Dragon: XI, Swords of the South; XII, The Fang of the Dragon; XIII A Ghost Out of the Past; XIV, The Black Hand of Set; XV, The Return of the Corsair

The Hour of the Dragon: XI, Swords of the South; XII, The Fang of the Dragon; XIII A Ghost Out of the Past; XIV, The Black Hand of Set; XV, The Return of the Corsair Summary

In "XI, Swords of the South," Conan is on a boat, around the Poitain mountains. He says a man should be waiting for him with horses, but he does not see anyone. A man comes and gives Conan a horse. Conan and Albiona ride until they see knights, who question Conan. He takes off his helmet so they can see his dark mane and realize it is their king. They scream in joy. Conan goes to the castle of Count Trocero. He and Trocero ride in a fine carriage and Trocero declares Conan the king of Poitain. Trocero talks of building an empire together, but Conan is more interested in killing the Nemedians and taking back what is rightfully his. Conan says he must find the Heart of Ahriman. A spy comes and tells them that the jewel Heart is now in the hands of a merchant named Zorathus, who wants to reach Messantia to find a buyer for the jewel Heart. Perhaps he wants to sell it to the Stygia, or evil people. Conan says he can reach Zorathus by himself on horseback.

In "XII, The Fang of the Dragon," Conan rides a great, black stallion, a gift from Trocero. He feels confident again and his old swagger is back. He feels he can carve out a kingdom all by himself. He feels like his old self, Conan the barbarian.

Valbroso, another barbarian, rides with his men. He comes up on Conan and questions him. He offers to help Conan and says he knows the tricks of the region. Conan falls in line with Valbroso and rides with him. Conan thinks he sounds like Zorathus, even though he has never met him. He says Zorathus has an iron chest and it is his treasure box. Valbroso brings Conan to Zorathus, who recognizes Conan and believes he himself is dead. Conan says neither of them is dead. Zorathus explains how to open the elaborate box. As Valbroso reaches in the box for the jewel Heart, his hand gets cut on the venom of a black Stygian scorpion. Valbroso is paralyzed. Beloso, another man, hits Conan and he goes down. Beloso escapes with the jewel Heart and Conan rides after him. He reaches him, but Beloso hits Conan hard. He loses consciousness and wakes up on the side of the road.



In "XIII, A Ghost out of the Past," Conan crosses a border, but does not see Beloso. He goes into the strange land of Zingara and rides into Messantia. He finds it strange he can ride through the streets freely when the town is used to dealing with rough people who come from the seas. Conan asks for Publio, a merchant. Publio recognizes Conan. Conan and Publio know each other from the past as corsairs, or pirates, who worked the seas. Publio grew very rich, and now he is a respectable man in society. Publio, like many others, thought Conan was dead. Conan asks if Publio knows of Beloso, but he does not. He sends out his agents to find Beloso for Conan.

In "XIV, The Black Hand of Set," Publio says Beloso has been located. He had tried to sell the jewel yesterday, but to no avail. Conan thanks Publio and leaves on his horse. He steals into a place of Stygians, or evil people, who pursue and capture Conan. Meanwhile, four Khitans, or evil sorcerers, come into Publio's home and ask for Conan. He lies and says he does not know about Conan. Scared, Publio confesses that Conan has gone to find Beloso. A man comes to the door and confirms that they captured Conan. The four Khitans now know that Publio lied to them. He is terrified. They know Conan lives and is now on a ship southward. They make Publio give them a ship.

In "XV, The Return of the Corsair," Conan commands a ship. The oarsmen are all black men. The captain speaks nastily to Conan and Conan kills him. The ship is now in his full command. The sailors realize Conan has returned. Another group tries to overtake the ship, but Conan and his brood fight and win. Conan heads toward Stygia.

The Hour of the Dragon: XI, Swords of the South; XII, The Fang of the Dragon; XIII A Ghost Out of the Past; XIV, The Black Hand of Set; XV, The Return of the Corsair Analysis

The quest for the jewel Heart is on. As said before, the Heart symbolizes Conan's love and emotion, two things he is missing. He now goes on a quest for the Heart to obtain these things. The Heart is more than a jewel for Conan; it is a jewel that can fight against evil. Thus, love and emotion can fight evil, but brute strength cannot. Conan begins a self-journey to find this love and emotion to help conquer evil. His motivations change to finding the Heart at any cost, and therefore, find his emotional side as well. Conan also begins to feel like himself again. He feels confident and cocky. He is back to the old Conan the barbarian, yet he has learned. He learns that brute strength does not always win a battle. In fact, his strength can be conquered. Now that he goes on a quest for the Heart, he will be a complete person once he finds it. He will be a man of brute strength and of emotion, thus he will be able to fight evil fully.

The reader receives a glimpse into Conan's past. He was a pirate with Publio. Publio represents the man Conan could have become. Publio is rich from his pirating days. He was once a fearless pirate, but now he has grown soft. He is concerned with his image in society. He is in direct opposition to Conan, who does not care about riches or his image. Conan focuses solely on survival and fighting battles and that is what motivates



him. Publio's character has already taken a self-journey and grown as a man and as a person. But Conan is still in the same place emotionally as when he was a pirate. Conan has not developed as a character the way Publio has.

Taking the adventure to the sea symbolizes Conan returning to his pirating roots. Pirating is a ruthless profession. This foreshadows that Conan may need to conjure the ruthlessness of the old days in order to fight an evil force. The sea brings forth even more brutality in Conan and will perhaps help him in battle against the Stygians.



The Hour of the Dragon: XVI, Black-Walled Khemi; XVII, He has Slain the Sacred Son of Set!; XVIII, I am the Woman Who Never Died; XIX, In the Hall of the Dead; (Note: There is no Chapter XX)

The Hour of the Dragon: XVI, Black-Walled Khemi; XVII, He has Slain the Sacred Son of Set!; XVIII, I am the Woman Who Never Died; XIX, In the Hall of the Dead; (Note: There is no Chapter XX) Summary

In "XVI, Black-Walled Khemi," Conan races on the ship toward Stygia, which borders the River Styx. Khemi is Stygia's largest port and its most important city. Conan recognizes Khemi. He hid there in his pirate days. The Stygians are a powerful and merciful race. They are dark, evil people who partake in black magic. Conan meets a fisherman who is terrified of him. He says a priest returned from a voyage yesterday in Messantia. He cannot tell Conan anything about why he was in Messantia because he does not know. He says there is a thief named Thutothmes. Conan takes the fisherman's boat by himself and rows ashore to find the thief.

In "XVII, He has Slain the Sacred Son of Set!", Conan seems like an ordinary fisherman rowing into Stygia. He can pass for a Stygian with his dark features and tall build. Conan knows he cannot keep up his disguise for much longer. Conan finds the architecture of Stygia overpowering and oppressive. He leaves the boat and goes ashore to walk the streets. A great serpent takes over the streets and everyone falls to their knees. Instead, Conan takes out a knife and kills the serpent. People get angry and say he has killed the Son of Set. They chant to kill him. Conan runs as rocks are thrown at him. He opens a glowing door, but the chamber is empty. He enters the temple of a Stygian god. Conan takes a Stygian mask and wears it as a disguise as he follows a group of masked figures in line. The group begins to speak and someone says the word Thutothmes, the thief Conan is looking for.

In "XVIII, I am the Woman Who Never Died," Conan realizes one of the masked men is Thutothmes. He keeps with the group. They reach a pyramid as the masked priests disappear down a corridor. Conan crushes the skull of a suspicious Stygian. He comes to a fork in the corridor and a beautiful, dark-haired and ivory-skinned woman stands in one direction. She realizes Conan is not a priest or a Stygian. He commands her not to



she says not to worry. Conan says he is looking for Thutothmes. She says she will lead Conan to him. He thinks this may be a trick, but he goes anyway. She leads him into a chamber and Conan believes it is a trap. He recognizes her; she is Akivasha, a princess who can never grow old or die due to immortality. She begs Conan to have sex with her and lunges at him. She says he is a fool for resisting her because she will keep him in darkness and drink his blood. She is a vampire. He runs away, but he realizes pursuers are after him.

In "XIX, In the Hall of the Dead," Conan moves in the direction of light, but in a cautious manner. He goes into tunnel after tunnel, hearing voices. He stands on a gallery that looks down on a great hall with ten priests kneeling in front of an altar. On the altar is a mummy atop a coffin. They pray and chant of the Heart of Ahriman's power. It is actually an incantation or spell. They speak of Thutothmes and awakening the power of the Heart. Thutothmes comes in. The priests say they follow Conan, but Thutothmes says Conan is not here. They say he lies and that Conan is in the temple. The priests and Thutothmes fight and he kills three priests. Conan comes out of hiding and kills Thutothmes.

The jewel burns on the mummy's breast. The Khitan says he avenges Valerius. He will return to Aquilonia with the Heart of Ahriman and the heart of Conan. The mummy named Thothmekri gives Conan the jewel Heart and leads him out of the temple. Conan leaves the temple, sees his ship, swims to it and goes aboard. He commands the crew to sail to the nearest port of Zingara.

The Hour of the Dragon: XVI, Black-Walled Khemi; XVII, He has Slain the Sacred Son of Set!; XVIII, I am the Woman Who Never Died; XIX, In the Hall of the Dead; (Note: There is no Chapter XX) Analysis

The Stygians represent the darkest of the human race. They are human, but they are purely evil. In their temple are the most evil things on Earth, such as a vampire, bewitching spells, and black magic priests. The Stygians are in direct opposition to Conan. Although Conan is not purely good, he is not evil and he does have loyalty and friendship. When Conan finally grabs the Heart, he finally realizes a part of himself. He now has the emotion he needs to fight the evils of the world. As the Heart glows in his hand, it guides him through the dark tunnels of the Stygian temple. This symbolizes that emotion and love will lead a person through the darkness into the light. Emotion and love conquer all, even for Conan the barbarian.

Akivasha is another strong, female character. She helps Conan out of a bad situation like Devi and Zenobia, but Akivasha's motivations are not of love, like the other two women. She is motivated by blood thirst and hunger. She is also sexually motivated by Conan. Thus, she represents the raw masculinity of a feminine figure. Akivasha wants Conan not out of love, but out of pure lust and to serve for self purposes of hunger. She literally needs Conan's blood to stay alive and quench her thirst. It is not Conan's heart

that interests her; it is simply his body that she needs. Thus, she is a more masculine figure and closer to Conan's counterpart in this way.



The Hour of the Dragon: XXI, Out of the Dust Shall Acheron Arise; XXII, Drums of Peril; XXIII, The Road to Acheron

The Hour of the Dragon: XXI, Out of the Dust Shall Acheron Arise; XXII, Drums of Peril; XXIII, The Road to Acheron Summary

In "XXI, Out of the Dust Shall Acheron Arise," winter passes in Aquilonia. Valerius begins to go mad. He crushes the rich and the poor with taxes and keeps soldiers and mercenaries for himself. Nemedians will make him abdicate the throne if he tries to consolidate his kingdom. He lives in debauchery and does not care about life. Amalric, another ruler, wishes to crush Aquilonia into submission. He wishes to obtain the crown of Nemedias from Tarascus. Valerius intends to ruin Aquilonia so not even Amalric can rebuild it. Valerius longs for the day Aquilonia is in ruins and Amalric and Tarascus fight over Nemedias and have a civil war that destroys it. Valerius rapes and pillages and does not care about his people or land. Rumors spread throughout the land that there is a revolution. Amalric sends for Tarascus, who comes with an army. They discuss the uprising with Orastes, the black magician. He thinks they played too much with black magic by awakening Xaltotun and abusing the Heart of Ahriman. He thinks the evil kingdom of Acheron has returned. Orastes says Xaltotun will restore Acheron and they must steal the Heart to use against Xaltotun.

Xaltotun walks into the room and kills Orastes. Amalric tells him the Aquilonians revolt in the west. They foolishly believe Conan is alive and will lead them. They are desperate under Valerius' rule. Amalric believes this is a trick—that people try to convince him Conan is alive. A note comes from Conan saying to Xaltotun he will return to his kingdom and kill Xaltotun. Amalric thinks it is a forgery, but Xaltotun says it is real. It is unmistakably Conan's signature. Amalric says this is uncharacteristic of Conan to announce his coming. Usually he strikes without warning. Xaltotun says to them Conan knows Xaltotun is the real master. He announces they must crush Conan when he comes.

In "XXII, Drums of Peril," confirmation of war comes. Ten-thousand tribesmen from different lands march for Conan. Amalric and Tarascus move with 25,000 men. Their desire is to meet and kill Conan. They position themselves strategically to meet Conan. Thousands upon thousands of men join Conan in his revolution. Amalric, Xaltotun and Valerius think Conan delays the battle to amass more soldiers. They believe they should cut Conan off at the pass before his army gets too big. Xaltotun says he will put a spell on them, causing a flood, and crush Conan.



Amalric, Tarascus and Xaltotun go to sleep. They wake to find there has been no flood. Xaltotun's great flood is supposed to have halted Conan's efforts to cross the river. Amalric knows Xaltotun's sorcery fails. Conan's army advances and is now as strong as theirs. They have a choice: to wait and attack Conan or attack him at dawn. Xaltotun says they should do the latter. Xaltotun is confident of his sorcery. But Amalric senses that Xaltotun's power is gone. They walk to meet Conan and find a man who promises to lead the way. They tell him he will die if he betrays them. But the man says he can be trusted.

Amalric, Xaltotun and Valerius ride on to the battle. They hear Conan's drum. The man leads them into a trap. They are surrounded by Conan's army. The man is loyal to Conan and does not want Valerius as his leader anymore. Valerius murdered his sons. This is revenge for the man. Valerius kills the man.

In "XXIII, The Road to Acheron," the three leaders are surrounded by Conan's army. The fighting begins. Everyone fights the best way they can. Xaltotun tries his sorcery, but it does not work. People call him out on his sorcery and Xaltotun is visibly shaken. Valerius dies in battle. Xaltotun finds out the Heart of Ahriman is in Conan's possession and that is why his black magic does not work. Xaltotun commits suicide. Amalric and Tarascus realize Xaltotun's sorcery does not work. Amalric is killed. Conan talks with Tarascus. Conan demands Aquilonia to be returned to him. Tarascus will be his hostage. He asks about his ransom. Conan says Zenobia will be Tarascus' ransom. She will be queen of Aquilonia.

The Hour of the Dragon: XXI, Out of the Dust Shall Acheron Arise; XXII, Drums of Peril; XXIII, The Road to Acheron Analysis

Valerius represents the opposite of Conan as a leader. He does not care about his kingdom or the people in it. He gives up when challenged and resorts to debauchery. On the other hand, Conan is a very motivated leader who uses his leadership abilities to motivate the people around him. He is a strong figure and a barbarian suited for battle. He has defined goals and works toward them, even if he is in an impossible situation. Conan represents motivation, ambition and strength. Valerius represents laziness, sloth and weakness. Because of these traits, Valerius does not form a bond with his people. They hate him and choose to turn on him and follow Conan. This shows Conan as a great leader, despite his brutality. He is a respected figure, although a feared one, but in this time period, Conan does make a good political leader.

Xaltotun's fleeting power symbolizes the diminishing power of evil. The Heart continues to fight Xaltotun's black magic and all evil. This power cannot last because it is not something that sustains or is lasting. As with Valerius, the evilness of rape and pillaging does not motivate the people. They want a lasting leadership, one of strength and goodness. They see Conan as their fearless leader and he represents the goodness of leadership in this time period. Thus, they decide to side with good, not evil, as they side

with Conan. The power of evil diminishes more as they choose Conan and move toward a better situation politically, economically and socially for the kingdom of Aquilonia.

This story is named The Hour of the Dragon, yet no dragon is mentioned. This is a reference to an evil power. Historically, the dragon represents an evil power in fantasy books. A character must slay the dragon to have goodness restored. Once Conan's army advances and wins, the dragon is finally dead and the kingdom can return to its rightful owner. The hour of the dragon comes to an end and a new hour begins—an hour that will represent a happier time.



A Witch Shall Be Born: I, The Blood-Red Crescent; II, The Tree of Death

A Witch Shall Be Born: I, The Blood-Red Crescent; II, The Tree of Death Summary

In "I, The Blood-Red Crescent," Tamaris, Queen of Khauran, lies asleep in her chamber. She wakes up and sees a human head, which is the exact replica of her own head. She thinks she is bewitched. The head has a body attached and it is a woman identical to her. The woman says she is Tamaris' sister, but Tamaris believes her twin sister died at birth. The sister's name is Salome. She has a witch's mark on her chest, a red-blood crescent. Salome explains every century a witch is born and when she is, the people usually kill her. When Salome was born, the people took her to the desert to die, but she lived instead. A magician took her in and taught her black magic. Salome returns to take what is rightfully hers. Salome believes the kingdom is hers and Tamaris is shocked. Salome knows that Tamaris refused Constantius' marriage proposal. He is a bad man who organizes murder. He is confined to the south tower.

Constantius enters the chamber. He is instantly attracted to Tamaris in her nearly naked state. Salome says she sent Constantius to Khauran while she entered the city. The guards assumed she was Tamaris returning from a nightly, sexual escapade. Tamaris is furious because she maintains her virtue and virginity. Salome orders Constantius to take Tamaris to a cell and imprison her.

In "II, The Tree of Death," Valerius, a young soldier, cannot believe that Tamaris has turned against her kingdom. It is uncharacteristic of her. He believes she must have gone crazy. He is an injured soldier, struck down by the Shemites. He does not understand how Tamaris let invaders attack the city. Salome, posing as Tamaris, made a speech saying Constantius commands the soldiers. Valerius says Conan killed a Shemite. The people do not know who to fight against. A hundred men had dragged Conan off.

Meanwhile, Constantius crucifies Conan on a wooden cross made of a tree. He wants the vultures to eat Conan's flesh and vital organs. Conan suffers on the cross. He is in great pain. A vulture lunges for him, but he bites down on it. The other vultures fly away, scared of Conan. Four horsemen watch Conan with disbelief of his self-defense. They cut him down. Conan's hands and feet are swollen and badly wounded from the crucifixion. The horsemen and a nearly unconscious Conan ride through the desert back to their camp.



A Witch Shall Be Born: I, The Blood-Red Crescent; II, The Tree of Death Analysis

Tamaris and Salome represent the duality of good vs. evil. Both were born of the same mother, in the same womb, but have come out of the womb in opposition. Tamaris is a kind-hearted, virginal woman who loves her citizens and her kingdom. She is a kind ruler. On the contrary, Salome is an evil witch who has been cursed from birth. She is wicked, mean and only wants possession of the kingdom to suit her own needs. The sisters represent a power struggle for good vs. evil. To win the struggle, they need an outside force. This force is Conan, who like in the other stories, restores the balance between good and evil, so good can win.

Conan is literally and symbolically a Christ-like figure in this story. He is nailed to the cross, like Christ. However, unlike Christ, he does not submit to the crucifixion for the good of the people; instead, Conan is merely held captive. Conan also fights to get off the cross as he defends himself against the vulture. He shows brute strength and animalistic impulses as he fights to live. Though he is crucified like Christ, he is not Christ-like in his actions. Conan wants to live, fight and get revenge against his captors.



A Witch Shall Be Born: III, A Letter to Nemedra; IV, Wolves of the Desert

A Witch Shall Be Born: III, A Letter to Nemedra; IV, Wolves of the Desert Summary

In "III, A Letter to Nemedra," seven months have passed since Tamaris' imprisonment. Astreas writes a letter to his friend and fellow philosopher Alcemides describing the situation in Khauran. Salome has not married Constantius. The kingdom is in shambles. Taxation hurts the people. Salome strips farms while merchants walk around in rags. Astreas writes that he does not exaggerate these conditions. Khauran is an agricultural community. There are farmers of mixed white and aboriginal race. They rely on the land's fertile soil, but now Tamaris (who is really Salome) has ruined everything. The people of Khauran are helpless. The prettiest daughters are taken and given to Constantius. Men are inhumane and ferocious. Many have been slaughtered. There are rumors that Conan has started an army of his own and he amasses men to fight. The people believe Tamaris is possessed by a demon. She institutes human sacrifice, which has killed at least 500 women, children and men. She has a monster in her temple. It smells and devours shrieking humans.

Valerius believes that a witch who looks identical to Tamaris rules Khauran. Valerius swears that he will find the real queen if she lives. He disappears.

Meanwhile, Salome visits Tamaris in the cell. Tamaris is still beautiful and her body is supple and alluring. She wears rags and is naked. Tamaris says she does not fear Salome and that Salome should kill her. Salome tells Tamaris she killed one of Tamaris' subjects and shows her his head. Tamaris is distraught. A deaf beggar hears Tamaris' voice and realizes she is imprisoned.

In "IV, Wolves of the Desert," Conan talks with Olgerd, the outlaw chief. Conan says he must leave with his army in order to settle the score against Constantius. Conan says Olgerd promised to help him fight, but Olgerd says Khauran is now too strong. Conan wants to fight in a week. He says he will bring Constantius out to the plain. Conan reveals he has 3000 men waiting for him. He will train them. These men flee from the tyranny of Constantius. Olgerd gets angry, saying Conan undermines his power. Conan says he is stronger and the men will fight with him. Olgerd attacks Conan out of anger, but Conan injures him. Conan sends a defeated Olgerd away then goes outside and commands his army as he says, "Aie, you dogs, sharpen your ears and listen! Gather around here. I have a tale to tell you" (A Witch Shall Be Born, IV, Wolves of the Desert, p. 287).



A Witch Shall Be Born: III, A Letter to Nemedra; IV, Wolves of the Desert Analysis

Khauran is an agriculturally-rich kingdom. Its livelihood depends on the land; however, Salome takes away the riches of the land and hoards them for herself. Khauran represents a young country that has promise and a future. When Salome takes away this future, she literally strips Khauran of any promise and goodness it has left. She causes havoc and chaos. People are so confused; they cannot make a profit or understand how to do so. Therefore, Khauran represents a fallen country. It has been annexed by a dictating force and its countrymen are not sure it can ever recover.

Despite the fact that Tamaris has been locked in a cell for seven months, she is still beautiful. Her body is supple and alluring. In the illustration, she has large breasts and her body weight appears normal. Her sexuality is still intact, even if her emotional state is not. This shows how important sexuality and beauty are throughout the Conan stories. Everything else can be taken away or lost, but a woman's beauty still remains. It is what keeps her alluring and sensual and provides sexual tension between her and her male captors and rescuers, such as Constantius and Conan.



A Witch Shall Be Born: V, The Voice from the Crystal; VI, The Vulture's Wings

A Witch Shall Be Born: V, The Voice from the Crystal; VI, The Vulture's Wings Summary

In "V, The Voice from the Crystal," a speaker meets with men in the town and exclaims that Conan was right, Tamaris is alive. The speaker is the deaf beggar. He is not really a deaf beggar, but poses to be one in order to find out about Tamaris. He tells the people that Salome is the ruling witch. Tamaris is imprisoned. He says they must rescue Tamaris while Conan wages war. Constantius does not want a long siege, so he will march with his warriors to the plain. He will want to kill Conan's troops instantly, thus he will not leave many warriors in the city. The prison will not be guarded, so they can rush in and take Tamaris. Then they will speak to Conan and beg him to spare this city. The beggar says Tamaris appeals to Conan and this will help convince him.

Constantius is ready to fight. He wants to leave for the plain before nightfall. He is confident his army can fight Conan and all his men. He says once they have done so, there will be a party in the city square. He wants to impale Conan on the palace steps. Salome is fine with Constantius' plan and orders a subject to ride with him and report on the battle via her crystal ball. The people of Khauran meet. They are afraid of victory because it means more of Salome's rule. But they do not know what to expect from Conan. No one has heard a word from him.

Via her crystal ball, the subject tells Salome that the battle does not go well for them. Death is all around them. They charge Conan and his men, but Conan has too many warriors, who ride in full armor on horses and kill quickly. Salome says Constantius is defeated and Conan will be at her gates in an hour. Salome and her servant run down to Tamaris' cell to make sure Tamaris will never be queen again. As she reaches there, a guard has been brutally killed. Salome shrinks away.

In "VI, The Vulture's Wings," Tamaris wakes up to find not Salome, but Valerius in her cell. He says Conan fights Constantius in the plain and they must leave quickly. He carries her, but she is torn from his arms. He is hit and falls to the ground. A woman comes out and helps him, saying Salome wants to give Tamaris to the devil. Tamaris is in the temple. Valerius runs and sees a naked Tamaris in a subject's arms. Valerius yells that Tamaris is the real queen. The captain yells Valerius is wrong, the real Tamaris is an impostor. The people do not believe the captain. They attack and kill Salome. A monster comes into the temple. It is a monster that Salome summoned. Conan and his men come riding in. They shoot arrows at the monster and it dies. Conan comes up to Tamaris, who has fainted. She asks him to help her repay the citizens of her kingdom. He says he has Constantius. Conan says he is chief of the Zuagirs. Valerius should be captain of Khauran. The Shemites should still live in Khauran. Conan leaves.



He goes to the plain where he has Constantius crucified. Conan motions for the vultures to eat him as Constantius cries out in fear and horror.

A Witch Shall Be Born: V, The Voice from the Crystal; VI, The Vulture's Wings Analysis

The vulture represents an evil force. It is just a bird, but in fantasy books or novels, the vulture represents the ultimate form of death. A corpse is not needed to attract the vulture. The vulture simply comes into a scene when death is wanted or summoned. With Conan, the vulture rips off a piece of his chin, but that is as far as the bird gets. Conan fights off the vulture by biting down hard on it and scaring off the rest of the vultures. Once again, Conan fights evil with his strength. To a weaker person, the vulture is impending death, such as in Constantius' case. He does not have the strength or fortitude of Conan. He cannot fight off such an evil force. Though he embraces evil, once he is confronted with more powerful evil, it is too much for him. Constantius will die at the mercy of the vultures.

Conan completes his self-journey in this story. He has his strength to help him fight against evil, but he also uses his mind. When he is crucified, he thinks of attacking the bird himself, a strategy not employed by anyone else. Even the outlaw chief is impressed. When he confronts the outlaw chief, Conan already has 3000 men in place waiting to fight with him. He seems to be one step ahead of his enemies at all times. Conan learns that it takes more than strength for warfare. It takes strategy and a certain intelligence to truly conquer evil. He employs both these methods, combined with his strength, and he is the unbeatable Conan the barbarian.



Characters

Conan appears in *The Bloody Crown of Conan*

Conan is a fearless barbarian. He resides over many kingdoms and acquires kingdoms as he goes. Everyone is scared of Conan due to his reputation. Conan will kill and maim if someone talks badly to him or upsets him in any way. He will also kill if someone has done wrong by him. He also has a loyal side. People who help him are rewarded, such as Zenobia, a slave girl who helps him escape imprisonment. He makes her his queen at the end of the story. Conan's loyalty also causes him to kill anyone who is disloyal to either him or his kinsmen. Part of Conan's personality is that he is a brutal warrior with brute strength. He is almost a giant. He has a hulking stature and huge, bulging muscles. He does not look like the Eastern people; he is from the West. He has tan skin, blue eyes and a mane of dark hair. His looks combined with his brute strength allow him to overpower people by just looking at them. They tremble in fear of him.

Conan also has a powerful presence with females. Women are instantly attracted to him. He holds them against his body and they feel his muscles. When in Conan's presence, they are instantly sexually attracted to his masculinity. One woman even has sex within five minutes of knowing Conan. The sexual energy between Conan and the female characters creates a noticeable sexual tension.

Conan is a great strategist at war. He uses his mind to strategize how to put together an army and train it. He strategizes how to attack the enemy and take them by surprise. When faced with an impossible situation, Conan always finds his way out of it through strategy and strength. He does not give up, especially when he must fight evil. The reader only sees Conan at a low when he is shackled and imprisoned, but once he is free, he is back to the old, fearless Conan.

Devi Yasmina appears in *The People of the Black Circle*

Devi Yasmina is the King of Vendhya's sister. She loves her brother, the king, Bunda Chand, very much. She is heartsick when she must kill him because he is dying and in pain. She is a strong, female character who chooses to avenge her brother's death. She involves herself in political matters of Vendhya and takes to the road to find her brother's killers, the Black Seers. Devi does not fear the Black Seers, even though she knows of their evil power. What motivates Devi is love for her brother. His strength comes from this love. Devi is known as a good princess, but when it comes to avenging her brother, she has a masculine energy that guides her along on her journey.

As Conan steals Devi, the reader sees a different side of her. She is weak at first, kicking and screaming for him to let go. But then she turns strong again, threatening the almighty Conan. Finally, Devi turns into a sexual object. Conan is sexually attracted to



her when she changes into scantily-clad hill girl clothes. She becomes a weaker female as he carries her all over the land on his horse. Devi is also loyal. Even though Conan has kidnapped her, she sees that Conan avenges her brother for her. She promises to reward him somehow. Devi shows appreciation toward Conan for all the good deeds he has done for her family. Thus, Devi is forgiving and appreciative of those who help her in times of crisis.

Bunda Chan appears in The People of the Black Circle

Bunda Chan is the King of Vendhya and Devi's brother. The Black Seers curse him and slowly cause him to die. Devi kills him because he asks her to.

Chunder Shan appears in The People of the Black Circle

Chunder Shan is the governor of Peshkhauri. Devi secretly goes to his palace for help to find the Black Seers.

Black Seers of Mount Yimsha appears in The People of the Black Circle

Black Seers of Mount Yimsha are the evil sorcerers who put a curse on Bunda Chan, causing him to die. They are witches of the worst kind. They live in a castle protected by evil things.

Yar Afzal appears in The People of the Black Circle

Yar Afzal is Conan's friend and chief of the Wazulis. He and Conan get in a fight and Conan kills him.

Khemsa appears in The People of the Black Circle

Khemsa is a man who is taught black magic by the Black Seers. He has magical powers. He agrees to use these powers to take down everyone and start his own kingdom with Gitara, Devi's servant girl.

Gitara appears in The People of the Black Circle

Gitara is Devi's servant girl. She convinces Khemsa, her lover, to use his black magic to defeat everyone so they can be rich and rule a kingdom.



Xaltotun appears in The Hour of the Dragon

Xaltotun is a dead man who is brought back to life. He is mummified, but his organs are intact. He steals the Heart of Ahriman to preserve his black magical powers. He lived 3000 years ago and has more power than anyone. He even is able to bring down Conan with his black magic.

Orastes appears in The Hour of the Dragon

Orastes is a man who delves in black magic. He restores Xaltotun.

Zenobia appears in The Hour of the Dragon

Zenobia is a slave girl who gets the prison guards drunk and steals their keys to unshackle Conan. She helps Conan escape because she loves him. Conan is grateful and he makes her his queen at the end of the story.

Valerius appears in The Hour of the Dragon

Valerius is the new king of Aquilonia, the kingdom stolen from Conan. He is a horrible king who rapes and pillages and does not care about his kingdom. The people hate him.

Taramis appears in A Witch Shall Be Born

Taramis is queen of Khauran. She is a noble and generous queen. Her evil twin sister, Salome, imprisons her for seven months.

Salome appears in A Witch Shall Be Born

Salome is Taramis' evil twin sister. She is a witch with the identifying mark of a red crescent on her chest. She imprisons Taramis and rules Khauran in an evil way.

Constantius appears in A Witch Shall Be Born

Constantius is Salome's chosen captain. He commands the army. He is a bad person who does not care about the kingdom. He only cares about himself and having sex with pretty girls. He goes to fight Conan and his army, but loses.



Objects/Places

Wazam appears in The People of the Black Circle

A wazam is a nobleman who has grown old in the royal court.

Vendhya appears in The People of the Black Circle

Vendhya is the kingdom of Devi Yasmina and her deceased brother, Bunda Chan.

Afghulistan appears in The People of the Black Circle

Afghulistan is Conan's kingdom. Conan rules this kingdom and has great loyalty to it.

Dais appears in The People of the Black Circle

A dais is a throne.

Sarcophagus appears in The Hour of the Dragon

A sarcophagus is a stone coffin.

Chain mail appears in The Hour of the Dragon

Chain mail is the full body armor barbarians and warriors wore to protect themselves. Chain mail is made of iron rings sewn into fabric or leather.

Heart of Ahriman appears in The Hour of the Dragon

The Heart of Ahriman is a jewel that fights against evil. Anyone who has it can protect themselves against black magic.

Acolyte appears in The Hour of the Dragon

An acolyte is an attendant at the altar in a public worship service in a temple, church, or other religious building.



Necromancy appears in The Hour of the Dragon

Necromancy is the black magic of a sorcerer who conjures the dead and communicates with them.

Stygia appears in The Hour of the Dragon

Stygia is the evil city that is bordered by the River Styx. Its architecture is overpowering and oppressive. The people are evil sorcerers who engage in black magic.

Khauran appears in A Witch Shall Be Born

Khauran is the kingdom ruled by Taramis the queen. It is an agriculturally-rich land where the inhabitants have a comfortable life due to farming. The people are peaceful and when the evil Salome takes over, they are helpless.



Themes

Good vs. Evil

One major theme of this book is good vs. evil. The good is represented by the people of the kingdom. Often, a leader, queen or king, is good and treats the people well. In turn, the people are loyal to their leaders. They are motivated by good purposes; for example, the people of Khauran are peaceful and enjoy farming. Their leader, Tamaris, does right by them and rules with a kind hand. Conan also works for the good, since he fights against evil. He is not all good, since he kills and maims, but he does so with a rightful purpose. Conan is a good barbarian who roams the land fighting against dictatorship and unlawful annexation. On the good side, everyone works for purposes of right.

On the evil side, there is much wrongdoing. The killing does not come with mercy. Evil people hoard and engage in debauchery. Evil leaders do not care about their kingdom or its people. They are selfish by nature and want everything to themselves. In these stories, it is a constant struggle between good and evil, or black magic. Conan uses his brute strength and warfare strategies to overcome evil, but sometimes he cannot. For instance, Xaltotun renders Conan powerless. Conan literally cannot move because he is under Xaltotun's spell. Conan is in a struggle to not let evil overcome him. The kingdoms are also in a struggle as well. The people do not want evil to overtake their land and way of life, thus they must fight against it. It is a constant struggle to preserve good and kill evil.

Women as Sexual Objects

One major theme in this book is women as sexual objects. All of the female characters have sexual qualities. Conan notices these qualities and admires them, though he only acts on his attraction once in the book. The females are all captive, waiting for a night in shining armor to rescue them. Conan often carries these women in his arms. When he does, he sees their flowing hair, beautiful features such as an aquiline nose, ample breasts and sensual body. All of the women are mostly topless. They either wear a thin cloth that is see through over their breasts or they wear breast plates that do not cover much. The women all have large breasts. This is depicted in the accompanying illustrations as well. The women are drawn with enlarged breasts, thin waists and thin stomachs.

Conan is especially attracted to servant girl beauty. He has sex with one female, Zenobia, a servant girl. He is instantly attracted to Devi when she changes into the outfit of a hill girl. She comes out from dressing behind a rock and he remarks on how much more beautiful she is. Though these women have other characteristics such as bravery and strength, it is their sexual beauty that defines them. Even Salome, who is evil, is sexually alluring. She is skinny, but she has large breasts and a beautiful body. It is the



same with the vampire; she is also sexual. The female characters of this book are all sexual objects, especially to Conan.

Sexual Tension

One major theme throughout all of the stories is sexual tension. No matter what story, the reader cannot get away from the sexual tension of Conan and his female counterparts. In the first story, Conan kidnaps Devi. She is nearly bare-chested. He takes her up in his arms and rides with her throughout the land. He holds her like a lover as he rides. Their skin touches—his muscles against her soft skin. When Devi changes into the hill girl outfit, the sexual tension rises as Conan remarks on his attraction to her. He even spansks her and she likes it. The sexual tension continues as he must hold her while riding. She promises to reward him at the end and he growls with pleasure, thinking it will be a sexual reward.

The sexual tension continues with every woman he encounters. Yet he does not act on his desires. Instead, he continues to view the women with desire, but continue on his way. It is only with Zenobia, the servant girl, that the sexual tension come to a peak and they have sex. All the author writes about the sex is that it is violent. Since the author does not provide a long, description of their intercourse, the tension continues to build. Conan meets other women, including a vampire woman and evil Salome. Each of them has tempting womanly characteristics, which Conan notes. He is a man who lusts after these women, but he stays on his course, toward his goal. Thus, the sexual tension carries on to the last story when Conan meets Taramis as she lies naked on the altar and they talk. Conan, and the reader, cannot escape the sexual tension while he is in the presence of women.



Style

Point of View

The Bloody Crown of Conan is told from a third person point of view. The point of view allows the reader to look at Conan from an outside perspective. One can see his hulking stature and gigantic muscles. A reader views him as a brutal barbarian with a frightening presence. It is the third person point of view that allows the reader to get this perspective. This view allows for Conan to be discussed in a non-biased way. He is not without morals, yet he is brutal. He is Conan. One can view him as a two-dimensional person: a person who thinks, but also a person who acts. The view also provides a scenic description of Conan's struggles and Conan in battle. For example, in the final battle scenes, the reader sees from an outsider perspective, thus giving a wide scope of how each battle plays out. The reader can see Conan fight, but also how his enemies plan to attack him and their strategies.

The third person point of view helps describe the land and the kingdoms from a wide scope. The reader sees how Stygia, for example, is evil, overpowering and oppressive. It is not a nice place to visit. The land is described as Conan rides through the plains, mountains and deserts. The third person point of view does become closer when Conan is in serious trouble. When he is imprisoned, the reader feels his sadness, defeat and the pain of his shackles. When Conan is crucified, the reader feels the pain of the stakes in his hands and feet. He bites down on a vulture and this is felt too. But besides these closeup glances, the third person view is omniscient.

Setting

The setting of The Bloody Crown of Conan takes places in various places. In the first story, The People of the Black Circle, Conan rides through the plains with Devi. He rides on the open land, racing his horse across the grass. But then he encounters the castle of the Black Seers. It is up on a mountain and it is foreboding. As he goes up the mountain, many traps are set and evil things try to stop him. As he enters the castle, the evilness continues with a sinister, dark interior. In the second story, "The Hour of the Dragon," Conan also races across the plains with his horse. He ventures to Stygia, an evil land, which is bordered by the River Styx. Stygia is overpowering and oppressive. The architecture and the people are dark and wicked. He then takes to water and decides to return to his pirating roots and commands a ship. As a commander, he navigates the high seas, out on the open water. He docks in a sea port city and stays with his old pirating friend, who has a house full of riches. When Conan is imprisoned, his cell is dark and dank and it is only shackles that keep him company.

In the last story, "A Witch Shall Be Born," the land of Khauran is an agricultural haven and has peaceful inhabitants. But it is turned upside down by evil. Taramis and Salome live in a beautiful palace, but Taramis is a prisoner in a lone cell. Conan starts his



journey in the desert, where he is crucified. The desert vultures swoop down on him. In the ending scene, Conan ends at the temple, where Taramis lies on the altar.

The settings can also be seen via the illustrations interspersed throughout each story. The illustrations are not elaborate, but in a cartoon-like fashion, they show how some of the settings look according to the author.

Language and Meaning

The language of *The Bloody Crown of Conan* is formal because it displays the language of the time period. The language is not modern. The way the characters speak and the way the author writes the text is in older English form. The characters speak in different languages, although the reader reads the book in English. The English comes across as ancient, of Biblical times or times of the Barbarians. Occasionally a modern expression will be thrown in, such as "rich as hell" or something along those lines. But the author keeps to the language of the time period. The language conveys formality in the structure of the barbarian world. Everyone speaks in a formal manner. Even Conan sounds formal. He sounds brutish at times, but he also sounds like the royal characters too.

There is no swearing; it is only mentioned that Conan curses. The language holds steady throughout each story. Being injured or in battle does not hinder the language in any way. The language is not without rules as the author writes in a grammatically perfect way. The sentences follow grammar rules and complex rules of literature. Difficult vocabulary is interspersed throughout the stories.

Within the language, the author writes in a sexually tense way. He evokes sexual tension, not only as a theme of the story, but also in the way he writes. Many passages are laced with sexual innuendos or pacing in which the reader feels the sexual tension. It is not quite an erotic novel, as Howard's earlier works of Conan where there are many erotic scenes, but the sexual tension is in the language and conveys the meaning of sexual desire.

Structure

This book is comprised of three separate stories: "The People of the Black Circle," "The Hour of the Dragon" and "A Witch Shall Be Born." Each story is divided into chapters. Each chapter has a name, which displays the overall theme for the individual chapter. Chapter length varies from six pages to approximately 12 pages long. Each chapter has a roman numeral. The chapters have short paragraphs that either give much description of place or do not. Days can pass in the stories, since they focus on the action. Traveling scenes occur, but only when there is action. Months can also pass in the stories. There is no structure to how time passes.



The plots of the stories are complicated and it takes the reader a while to connect the dots. The Bloody Crown of Conan is about Conan, a frightening barbarian, who saves kingdoms and their people from the destruction of evil.

The book's pace is normal and moves moderately. It is neither fast-paced nor slow. It is the right speed for an advanced, modern day reader. It is a difficult read with many words of difficult vocabulary interspersed throughout the story. The plot engrosses the reader into this world of barbarians and good vs. evil. The stories move in linear fashion without Conan having memories. Back story is virtually nonexistent. The book is a difficult read, but entertains as a whole for those who like the fantasy genre.



Quotes

"Come forth, you old war-dog. I've slain one of your men." The People of the Black Circle, IV, An Encounter in the Pass, p. 24

"These men were more like wolves." The People of the Black Circle, IV, An Encounter in the Pass, p. 24

"It is a map of a world I do not know." The Hour of the Dragon, I, O Sleeper, Awake!, p. 88

"The year of the Dragon had birth in war and pestilence and unrest." The Hour of the Dragon, II, A Black Wind Blows, p. 91

"The King is dead! Flee! Flee! The king is dead!" The Hour of the Dragon, III, The Cliffs Reel, p. 101

"I have no royal blood. I am a barbarian and the son of a blacksmith." The Hour of the Dragon, III, The Cliffs Reel, p. 102

"Conan recognized the grim finality of his position." The Hour of the Dragon, VII, The Reading of the Veil, p. 133

"Is death worse than oppression, slavery and ultimate destruction?" The Hour of the Dragon, VII, Dying Embers, p. 146

"King Conan, you are a king without a kingdom." The Hour of the Dragon, VII, Dying Embers, p. 146

"My enemies have killed me a hundred times by rumors." The Hour of the Dragon, XII, A Ghost out of the Past, p. 186

"The hour of the Dragon had passed." The Hour of the Dragon, XXIII, The Road to Acheron, p. 252

"Aie, you dogs, sharpen your ears and listen! Gather around here. I have a tale to tell you." A Witch Shall Be Born, IV, Wolves of the Desert, p. 287



Topics for Discussion

How does black magic play a role in this book? What purpose does it serve? Is all black magic bad or used for bad purposes? Can you think of an example where black magic is not used for a bad purpose?

How is sexuality portrayed throughout these stories? Who is the sexual object? How is sexual tension written by the author? What literary devices does the author use to employ sexual tension?

Are any male characters shown as sexual objects? Is Conan a sexual object or is he merely a brute? How does Conan show his sexuality toward women?

Are the female characters in these stories strong or weak? Which characters are the strongest and which are the weakest and why? How does a woman show strength in this time period? Is it any different from women of today?

When does Conan show weakness? How does he show this weakness? Does Conan's weakness make him a more realistic character or does it ruin the fantasy of Conan as all-powerful?

How does beauty play a role in these stories? Who is considered beautiful and who is not? Does beauty help or hurt the characters in any way? Who do you consider the most beautiful character and why?

There are many illustrations to accompany the text. Do these illustrations help you as a reader or ruin the story for you? Why do you think the author chose to have illustrations? Do the illustrations depict the images you have in your mind of the characters and places?