

CONAN HAD DOZED FOR AN HOUR, MAYBE TWO, AND WOKE UP CURSING HIMSELF.

EVERY TIME HE SLEPT, THE SHIP **DRIFTED** OFF COURSE, PUSHING HIM ANOTHER FEW LEAGUES AWAY FROM SHORE.

AND ANOTHER DAY CLOSER TO **DEATH**.



IT'D BEEN THREE WEEKS SINCE THE **IDOL** DRANK BLOOD AND THE OTHERS DIED SCREAMING.

AND THE STORM FLUNG HIM FARTHER ACROSS THE SOUTHERN SEA THAN ANYONE HE'D EVER KNOWN OR HEARD TALE OF.

EVEN THE SALTIER SAILOR WOULD'VE DIED OR GONE STARK RAVING **MAD** BY NOW. BUT CONAN WAS TOO **BUSY** TO GIVE A DAMN.



BUSY SWEATING AND CURSING, DAY AND NIGHT.

busy *SURVIVING*.

HE REMEMBERED WELL THE WAYS OF THE SAILOR HE'D LEARNED YEARS BEFORE, AS A PIRATE ALONG THE BLACK COAST...

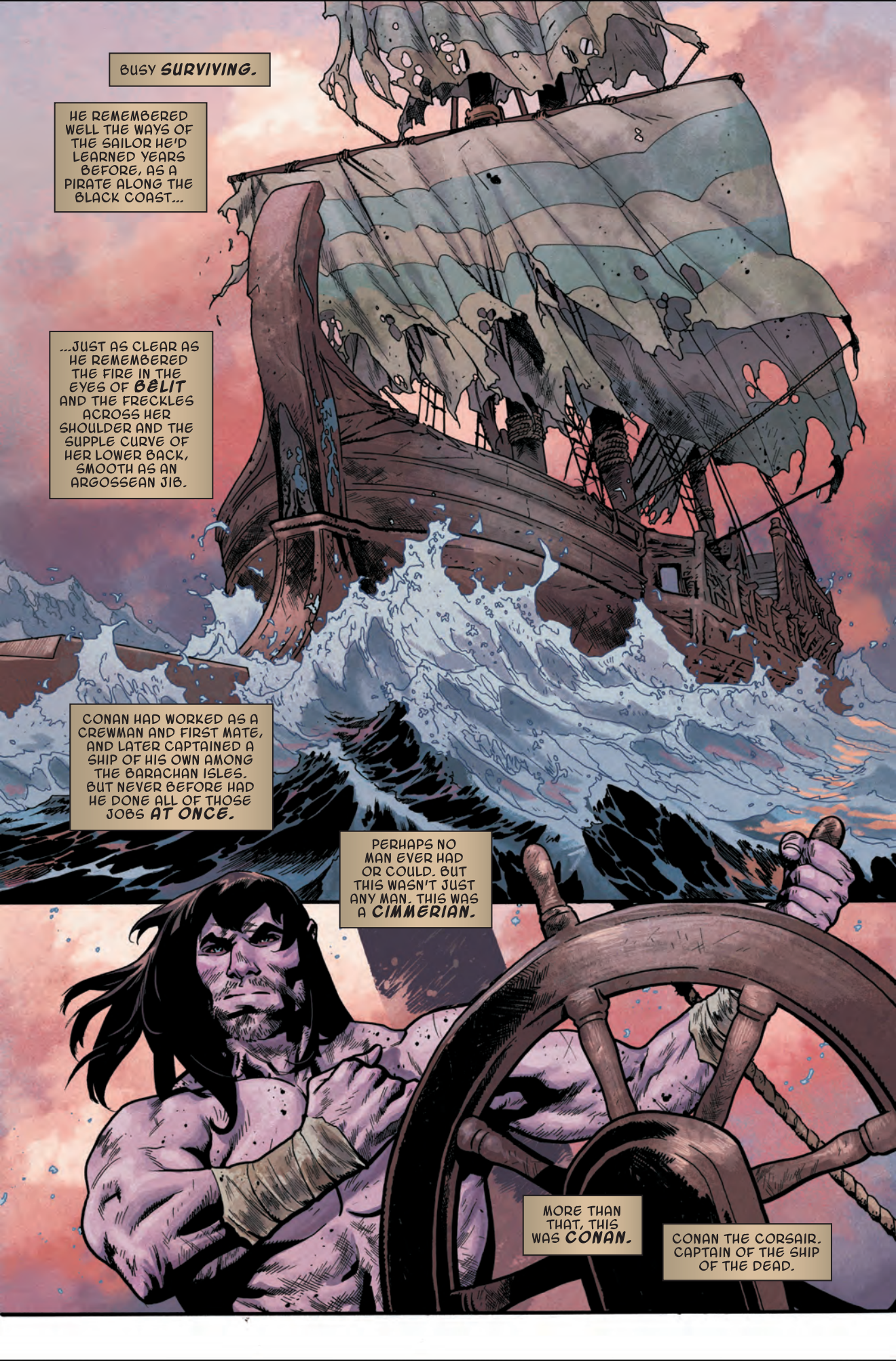
...JUST AS CLEAR AS HE REMEMBERED THE FIRE IN THE EYES OF *BELIT* AND THE FRECKLES ACROSS HER SHOULDER AND THE SUPPLE CURVE OF HER LOWER BACK, SMOOTH AS AN ARGOSSEAN JIB.

CONAN HAD WORKED AS A CREWMAN AND FIRST MATE, AND LATER CAPTAINED A SHIP OF HIS OWN AMONG THE BARACHAN ISLES. BUT NEVER BEFORE HAD HE DONE ALL OF THOSE JOBS AT ONCE.

PERHAPS NO MAN EVER HAD OR COULD. BUT THIS WASN'T JUST ANY MAN. THIS WAS A *CIMMERIAN*.

MORE THAN THAT, THIS WAS *CONAN*.

CONAN THE CORSAIR. CAPTAIN OF THE SHIP OF THE DEAD.



IT'D BEEN THREE DAYS SINCE HE'D EATEN. SINCE HE WAS ABLE TO BRING DOWN A SEABIRD WITH AN ARROW.

SINCE THEN, NO MORE BIRDS, THANKS NO DOUBT TO HIS BOAT'S WITHERING **STENCH**. AND STILL NO SIGHT OF LAND.

THERE WAS PLENTY OF FOOD ROTTING AWAY IN THE SHIP'S STOREHOUSE. BUT HE DARED NOT TOUCH IT.

JUST AS HE WOULDN'T RISK REELING IN SOMETHING FROM THE SEA, NOT FROM THE WATERS AROUND THIS SHIP, NOT AFTER WHAT HE'D SEEN.



CROM'S BLOODY DAMN TEETH, THAT **STINKS**.

THE STENCH FROM BELOW WAS BECOMING MORE UNBEARABLE EVERY DAY.

BUT AS HE'D LEARNED THE HARD WAY, THERE WAS NOTHING HE COULD DO ABOUT THAT EXCEPT ENDURE IT.

ALL THIS DEATH, HE THOUGHT. ALL THIS BLOODY, BRINY RUIN. ALL BECAUSE OF SOME DAMNED WOODEN IDOL.

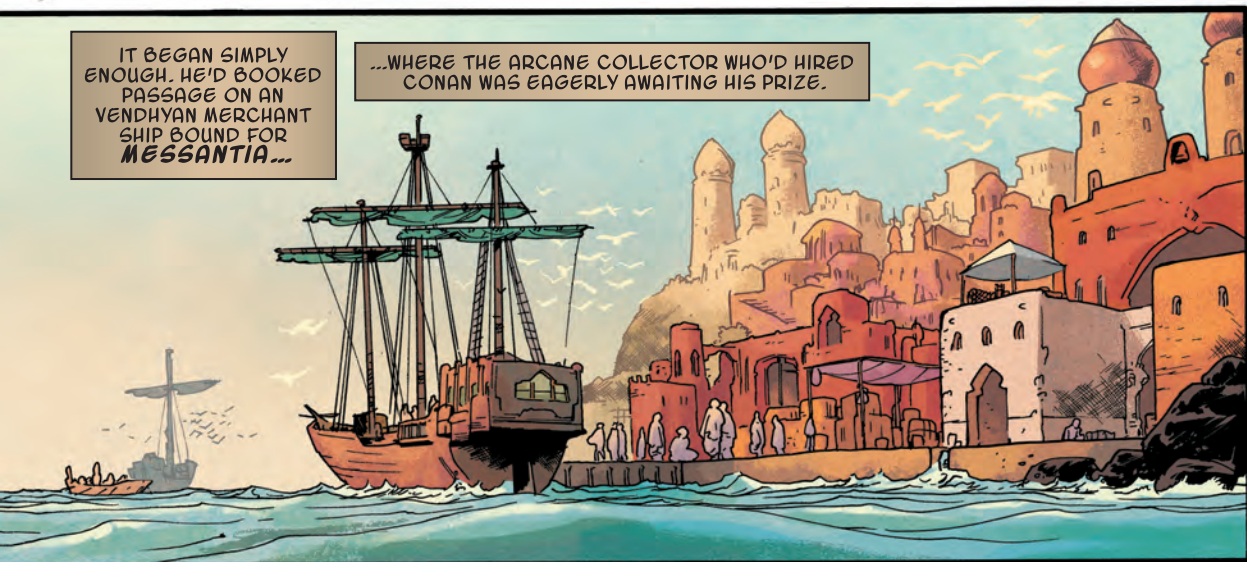
AS THE GODS WERE HIS WITNESS, CONAN SWORE...



...THIS WAS THE **WORST** BOAT TRIP IN THE HISTORY OF SEAFARING.

IT BEGAN SIMPLY ENOUGH. HE'D BOOKED PASSAGE ON AN VENDHYAN MERCHANT SHIP BOUND FOR MESSANTIA...

...WHERE THE ARCAIC COLLECTOR WHO'D HIRED CONAN WAS EAGERLY AWAITING HIS PRIZE.



IT APPEARED TO BE NOTHING MORE THAN A SIMPLE WOODEN IDOL.

BUT GIVEN HOW FIERCELY THE ACOLYTES OF YIMSHA HAD FOUGHT TO KEEP IT, CONAN KNEW IT MUST HAVE GREAT VALUE AND DARK POWER.

HE KEPT IT WRAPPED AT ALL TIMES. EVEN THEN HIS FLESH BURNED WHEN HE TOUCHED IT.

AND WHAT LITTLE HE GLIMPSED OF ITS FIGURE THROUGH THE ANCIENT CLOTH LEFT HIM TOSSING AND TURNING IN HIS SLEEP EACH NIGHT.



ESPECIALLY ONCE THE SHIP REACHED THE BLACK COAST, THE INFAMOUS HAVEN OF BUCCANEERS.

CONAN'S FEARS WERE QUICKLY JUSTIFIED WHEN ONE NIGHT THE DREADED CRY WENT UP FROM THE SHIP'S WATCH...



PIRATES,
HO!

THE VENDHYANS HAD SAILED THIS ROUTE MANY TIMES. AS USUAL, THEY PAID A TRIBUTE TO THE PIRATE CAPTAINS TO BUY SAFE PASSAGE.

THIS TIME, HOWEVER, THEIR MONEY ONLY BOUGHT THEM BLOODSHED.



CONAN HAD HOPED TO TRAVEL FASTEST BY SHIP, BUT IT TURNED OUT THAT WORD OF HIS CARGO HAD TRAVELED EVEN FASTER.

SOMEONE KNEW WHAT HE CARRIED, AND HAD HIRED THE BLOODTHIRSTIEST OF PIRATES TO PROCURE IT.

THERE IT IS!
KILL THIS DOG AND TAKE THE IDOL!

