

Black Tears

By Wesley Connally

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This series of 12 adventures that I created are all based on Robert E. Howard's Conan short stories. Almost all of the text boxes for you, the DM, to read are taken directly from Howard's own writing. This provides a great atmosphere for your players. You may warn them that some are lengthy, but just sit back, relax, and allow the text to paint the world for them. This will enrich their experience. I have modified Howard's text to represent plural adventurers and rewrote all text for the present tense. I had to add a few dialogue boxes of my own writing to fill in important roleplaying gaps in the original story lines.

All adventures are written for D&D 2nd edition, but could easily be adapted to more modern versions. I highly recommend my other handouts and rules to create a more full Conan-World experience.

Levels: 6-8

Reputation: 2 Turan, 10 Conan (Country Reputation is based on a 1-5 scale from barely known (1) to heroic status (5). For every 5 points of Adventure Reputation the characters earn, based on a successful adventure, their score for the Country Reputation in the country where the adventure takes place, goes up by 1. Reputation will affect NPC reaction rolls, prices, jealousies, women etc.)

Adventure Summary

The party finds themselves in the employ of none other than the mighty Conan himself! After a tangle with a band of King Yezdigerd's men, the party soon find themselves stranded in a desert. After almost dying, they come across an ancient but alive city whereupon they help destroy an ancient curse.

To capture the spirit of the Conan world, I offer a "Babe-In-Distress bonus (BID)." As there is almost always a BID in the stories and thus these adventures, I have the characters "compete" for her favor. If you wish to do this, when the characters first meet the BID, have characters average their Comeliness and Charisma scores. Then have them roll a d20. The one who comes closest *without going over* their averaged score has struck the fancy of the BID for whatever reason ("he's not the best looking, but he has kind eyes"). He then becomes responsible to oversee her safety. If the adventure is completed and she is still alive with only a few nicks, that character is awarded a 10% experience point bonus, not to mention her undying gratitude in the bedroom. Of course, this process apply to female player characters as well. The BID perhaps is intimidated by men and seeks the safety of female protection, or perhaps the BID "just swings that way..."

Fate and circumstance has you employed in a renegade band that harasses the Turanian borders of your former employer, King Yildez's successor, King Yezdigerd. King Yezdigerd has responded swiftly to the raids by dispatching strong forces to stop your band. But you have confidence not only in your own martial prowess, but of your leader, the mighty Conan of Cimmeria.

Part One: The Jaws of the Trap

Riding into a narrow gully, your watchful eyes seek any enemy that might be crawling between desert rock and desert wall. Just as nightmares sometimes come true, a hail of arrows, accompanied by an exclamation “Slay the dogs!” breaks the tension of your slow but watchful march.

“Up the slopes and at them!” It is the voice of Conan. An instant later, the giant form of the Cimmerian himself charges up the steep slope on a huge, fiery stallion.

Ask characters what they do.

[Turanian Soldier (AC:6 HD:2 hp:12 Mv:12 Th:16 D:d6 SA: SD: Sz:6 XP:65) Will fire bows twice before engaging in melee.]

Astonished, the Turanian warriors let bows slacken as they stare. Clawing and scrambling up the steep slopes of the sides of the pass, out of the dust-clouded floor of the defile, comes a howling mob of frenzied Zuagirs, afoot and mounted, straight at them. In an instant you come roaring over the crest, swords flashing, cursing and shrieking bloodthirsty war cries.

After the battle...

Conan fixes the wilted lordling with a scornful glance, not unmixed with sardonic humor.

“So, Boghra, we meet again! He growls.

The amir blinks with disbelief. “You!” he gasps.

Conan chuckles. You have heard how a decade before, as a wandering young vagabond, the Cimmerian had served as a mercenary of Turan. He had to leave the service rather hurriedly, so much so that he had failed to settle a gambling wager with the same amir who stands astonished before him now.

Conan rakes him with narrowing eyes. “You were awaiting us here, weren't you?” he growls. “How much did you pay Vardanes?” Conan demanded suddenly. You easily recognize Vardanes' name as one who has ridden with Conan since at least as long as you joined his desert riders. Earlier in the day, he had volunteered to ride ahead to watch for ambushes.

“Two hundred silver shekels...” the Turanian mumbles.

“A princely bribe, eh? That smiling rogue—like every Zamorian, treacherous to the bottom of his rotten black heart! He's never forgiven me for unseating Olgerd. Nay, berate yourself not, Boghra. You did not betray your military secrets; I tricked you out of them. You can ride back to Aghrapur with your soldierly honor intact.”

Boghra lifts his head with astonishment. “You will let me live?” he croaks.

Conan nods. "Why not? I still owe you a bag of gold from that old wager, so let me settle the debt this way. But next time, Boghra, have a care how you set traps for wolves. Sometimes you catch a tiger!"

Two days of hard riding through the red sands of Shan-e-Sorkh, and still you have not caught up with the traitor. Thirsty for the sight of Vardanes' blood, Conan presses you hard. The cruel code of the desert demands the Death of the Five Stakes for the man who betrays his comrades, and Conan is determined to see the Zamorian pay that price.

On the evening of the second day, you make camp in the shelter of a hillock of parched sandstone, which thrusts up from the rust-colored sands like the stump of some ruined ancient tower. Your face, burnt almost black by the desert sun, is lined with fatigue. You stallion pants at the edge of exhaustion, slobbering through frothy lips as you set the water bag to the animal's muzzle.

You see Gomer, the unwritten spokesman for the Zuagir, approach Conan. They seem to exchange words, and seems as though Gomer is, respectfully perhaps, arguing with the huge Cimmerian. "This—this is the Makan-e-Mordan! Gomer bursts out.

"I know. I've heard of this "Place of Ghosts" before. So what? Are you afraid of old crones' fables?"

Gomer looks unhappy. "They are not just fables, Conan. You are no Zuagir; you do not know this land and its terrors, as do we who have long dwelt in the wilderness. For thousands of years, this land has been a cursed and haunted place, and with every hour that we ride, we go deeper into this evil land. The men fear to tell you, but they are half mad with terror."

Conan concludes the argument with "Tell you comrades to beware. My wrath is stronger than all the ghosts that ever died!"

Allow players to react how they wish. If they do not intervene Gomer will drug Conan's wine later in the evening, as well as the PCs (they are untrustworthy of foreigners).

Experience: 400 if they mill the camp for morale status and report to Conan; 600 if they carefully watch Gomer and catch him drugging the wine.

Part Two: Invisible Death

If the characters are drugged, read the following.

Desert Day 1

When you awake, the sun is high. Heat waves shimmer across the barren sands. The air is hot and still and dry, as if the heavens are an inverted brazen bowl heated to incandescence.

Otherwise, the characters have intervened and smelled out the mutiny. Conan will not press until a mutiny occurs and will only take volunteers (PCs)

The sun hangs forever in a sky of burning brass. It blazes down like a fiery eye in the brow of some colossal cyclops, gazing upon the tiny, slow-moving figures that trudge across the baking surface of

the crimson sands. You begin to discard everything that is not necessary. It takes forever for the afternoon sun to glide down the vast, empty curve of the sky, to die on the flaming funeral pyre of the west. Then purple evening steals on shadowy wings across the vault of the heavens, and a trace of blessed coolness creeps across the dunes, with soft shadows and a light breeze.

Each day characters lose d8 CON, +1 for each 20 lbs of equipment; Horses have a 35% chance today, 55% chance tomorrow of dying. Emphasize that they must walk their horses much of the time. Allow characters with Survival to roll checks to reduce CON loss to d8-3 to a minimum of one.

When you blink awake, you find the sun already high and another hot day before you. It is agony to rise. Every muscle throbs as if tiny needles have been thrust deep into your tissues. Soon, you lose track of time, but still the tireless engine of your will drives you on, step after staggering step. Your mind wanders away into shadowy bypaths of delusion. But still you hold three thoughts before you: to follow the trail of hoof prints, to save water stringently, and to stay on your feet. If once you fall, you know you would be unable to rise again, at least without the assistance of your comrades who are struggling to save their own strength.

Desert Day 2

Another day passes with similar checks as above. Experience: 500 for desert travel and another 500 for any who successfully used Survival.

Finally, as you lurch to the crest of yet another row of dunes, you look down and see a lush green valley, dotted with clumps of emerald-green date palms. Amid this fertile vale lays a small, walled city of stone. Bulging domes and squat guard towers rise above a stuccoed wall, wherein is set a great gate whose polished bronzen hinges redly reflect the sun. A city in this scorching waste? A lush valley of cool, green trees and soft lawns and limped lotus pools, in the heart of this bleak wilderness? Impossible!

As your mind tries to comprehend that you may have found salvation in the desert hell, your body releases its struggle to fight on, and you and your comrades collapse to the ground, as your blurred vision makes out a cluster of figures running out from the city walls presumably to greet you.

Characters can make a CON save to stay conscious.

Part Three: The Curse of Ahklat

For those who did not pass the CON check, read the following:

You rouse slowly, but this time it is different. You awake easily, with a blissful sensation of repletion and comfort. Silken pillows lay beneath your head. Thick awnings with tasseled fringes keeps the sun from your body, which is clean and naked save for a fresh loincloth of white linen.

For a few moments, you believe that this is what the afterlife is like. Beside your silken couch lays a silver ewer, filled with fresh, clear water. Moments later, you lift your dripping face from the ewer and know that whatever physical paradise you are in, it is real and physical. You drink deeply.

You hear the tinkle of a warrior's harness behind you. The musical sounds, however, comes from no warrior but from a slim, fawn-eyed girl who has just entered the tent and stands staring. Dark,

shining hair falls unbound to her waist, and tiny silver bells thread through these tresses.

You take in the girl in one swift glance: young, scarcely more than a child, slim and lovely, with a pale body that gleams enticingly through gauzy veils. Jewels glisten on her slim, white hands. From the golden bangles on her brow and the look of her large, dark eyes, you guess her to be of some folk akin to the Shemites.

She introduces herself as Zillah, the daughter of Enosh, and tells you that the others are waiting for him. She leads him to a lavish tent where many of his comrades are talking, eating and drinking.

Zillah is the BID. Roll for the BID at this time.

When everyone has regained consciousness, Enosh summons you. He is pouring over a wrinkled, time-faded scroll in a high-backed chair of black wood, as Zillah conducts you into his presence. This part of the tent is hung with dark purple cloth; thick carpets muffle the tread of your feet. Enosh rises and greets you. He is a tall, elderly man, lean but straight. His pate is covered with a headdress of snowy linen, his face is lined with age and creased with thought, and his dark eyes are weary with ancient sorrow.

After pleasantries and introductions are made, the old man begins a tale: "I am sure you have many questions. Please allow an old man to tell a tale which will answer many of your inquiries. Ages ago, a wily sorcerer of this land of Akhlat conceived of a plot against the ancient dynasty that had ruled in this place since the fall of Atlantis," he said slowly. "With cunning words, he made the people think their monarch—a weak and self-indulgent man—was their foe, and the people rose and trampled the foolish king into the mire. Setting himself up as a priest and prophet of the Unknown Gods, the sorcerer pretended to divine inspiration. He averred that one of the gods would soon descend to earth to rule over Akhlat the Holy—as it was called—in person."

Conan snorted. "You Akhlatim, it seems, are no less gullible than the other nations I have seen."

The old man smiled wearily. "It is always easy to believe what one wishes to be true. But the plan of this black sorcerer was more terrible than any could dream. With vile and nameless rites, he conjured into this plane of existence a demoness from Outside, to serve as goddess to the people. Retaining his sorcerous control over this being he presented himself as the interpreter of her divine will. Struck with awe, the people of Akhlat soon groaned beneath a tyranny far worse than that which they had suffered from the old dynasty.

"In time the sorcerer lost control over the demoniac Thing he had summoned down from Beyond, and it destroyed him and ruled in his place bringing hellish minions to her, and she rules to this very day," Enosh concludes softly.

Allow characters to ask questions: where is Vardanes, how long ago was this, why don't you just leave, why don't you rush in by the score and cut her to pieces and burn her remains, where is this goddess, what is the extent and form of her power and the like. If they are having trouble coming up with appropriate questions, have Conan interject a question.

How Long Ago Was This?

More years have passed than can be counted.

Where is Vardanes?

As you know he arrived before you. The council has decreed that he should be fed to the Demoness. They prepare him as we speak.

Why Don't You Slay This Thing?

She is invulnerable, unkillable. Her flesh is composed of matter drawn to her and held together by the goddess's unconquerable will. An arrow or a sword could but wound that flesh: it is a trifling matter for her to repair the injury. And the life force she drinks from others, leaving them dry husks, gives her a terrible store of inner strength from which to remold her flesh anew.

“Burn the thing,” Conan growls. “Burn the palace down about her head, or cut her into little pieces for the flames of a bonfire to devour!”

“No. She shields herself with dark powers of hellish magic. Her weapon transfixes into paralysis all she looks upon. As many as a hundred warriors have crept into the Black Temple, determined to end this grim tyranny. Naught was left of them but a living forest of motionless men, who served in turn as human banquets for the insatiable monster.

Why Don't You Just Leave?

We cannot leave the land, for the power of the goddess holds us within narrow bounds beyond which we cannot stray. I am afraid that you too are trapped in Akhlat by the same power.

How is it that she has not drained every last human being?

In truth, very few of us are left; she consumes us and our beasts faster than their natural increase can make up the loss. For ages, the demoness sated her lust with the minute life force of growing things, sparing the people. When the land became a waste, she fed first upon our flocks and then from our slaves and finally from the Akhlatim themselves. Soon, we shall be gone, and Akhlat will be one vast city of death.

What of these minions?

Evil demonettes that hide in the shadows. What they feed on, we do not know. And what purpose they serve, whether it is to entertain the demoness, or some other more horrid purpose we know not.

Her Power?

The secret of her power is such that she leaches the life force from living creatures. All this land about us was once green and fair, lush with date palms along the streams and grassy hills whereon fat herds pastured. Our young go to slake the dark thirst of the goddess, as do the beasts of the flocks. She feeds daily. Each day she chooses a victim, and each day they dwindle and lessen.

When characters are done with questioning.

Enosh partly unrolls a scroll and points to lines of writing of an archaic language: “That in the fullness of time, when our end is near, the Unknown Gods, whom our ancestors turned away from to worship the demoness, would relent of their wrath and send a liberator and a small host of comrades who, together, will overthrow the goddess and destroy her evil power.” We believe that you are those liberators.

After they agree to help.

Part Four: The Halls of Medea

You have come by secret underground ways which Enosh showed you. You emerge from a hidden portal in the wall of this vast, gloomy hall. You remember his last words before wishing you the blessings of the Unknown Gods: “We have only recently discovered this ancient passage, built by our ancestors. For generations, we did not have access to this area of the Black Temple and thus its existence faded from memory. Perhaps you can catch her off-guard with this entry. Be warned though. She may have trapped this back entrance.

After a few paces the party has taken a few paces into the corridor...

Entering the musty corridor, your torches sputter and flicker, as if they sense the danger ahead. After 15 paces, you see in the dim haze where light meets dark, the silhouette of a statue, then another and another. The hallways become littered so that you must wend a weaving path through their midst. You cross several rooms as well, littered with these statues.

The first mystery is the substance of the statues. Whereas the hall itself is built of sleek marble, the statues are made of some dull, lifeless, porous gray stone that you cannot identify. Whatever the stuff is, it is singularly unattractive. It looks like dead wood ash, though hard as dry stone to the touch.

The second mystery is the amazing artistry of the unknown sculptor, whose gifted hands had wrought these marvels of art. They are lifelike and detailed to an incredible degree: every fold of garment of drapery hangs like real cloth; every tiny strand of hair is visible. This astonishing fidelity is carried even to the postures. No heroic groupings, no monumental majesty is visible in these graven images of dull-gray, plaster-like material. They stand in lifelike poses, by the score, the hundred, the thousand. They are scattered here and there with no regard for order. They are carved in the likeness of warriors and nobles, youths and maidens, doddering grandsires and senile hags, blooming children and babes in arms. The one disquieting feature held in common by all is that each figure bares on its stony features an expression of unendurable terror.

Before long, you hear a faint sound from the depths of this dark place. Like the sound of many voices it is, yet so faint that you can make out no words. A weird diapason whispers through this forest of statues: slow, heart-rending sobs, faint, agonized moans; the blurred babble of prayers; croaking laughter; monotonous curses. These sounds seem to come from a thousand throats.

The sounds are of course, coming from the statues. The people who have been turned to statues still have their perceptions and many have gone insane over the years.

The party can progress down the hallway, but a trap of falling stones await those who do not successfully find traps. Save vs Paralyzation or take 3d6 damage. A “1” on a save indicates double damage.

Moving ahead, the party eventually comes to a dead end. As the party approaches, a wall of bolts are fired. Each character has d4+1 bolts fired from a seemingly dead end wall. Each is coated with a potent poison: save d4 CON, each round, 4 saves

[Experience: 300 for disarming each trap; 100 per person for “experiencing” the trap.]

The Wall

The wall has three eyes chiseled into the stone, set in a triangular pattern. All three eyes appear closed.

When an eye is touched, the stone eyelid rises. If the topmost eye is touched, it opens to reveal a black stone which encompasses the entire eye and the one who touched it ages d4X10 years. Then it closes. If any of the other two are touched, those touching must save vs paralyzation or be stunned and unable to move for 10 minutes and lose d6 CON. The key is to touch the bottom two lids at the same time (but they are 7 feet apart). This opens the top lid as well and a secret stone panel opens.

You continue your journey, brushing passed more horrible statues. Then you hear a scream, in Vardanes' well-known voice. Up ahead, perhaps 100', in a torch-lit chamber you see him. Approaching the throne from the shadows from a darkened hall off to its left side, you see a terrible sight. Vardanes stands before the throne, eyes popping and lips working feverishly. Where the Zamorian's feet touch the floor, a gray pallor creeps up them. Before your eyes, the warm flesh whitens. Vardanes strains to walk but cannot. His voice rises in a shriek, while his eyes glare at you with the naked fear of a trapped animal.

The thing on the throne laughs a low, dry cackle. As you silently approach, the dead, withered flesh of her skeletal arms and wrinkled throat swell and become smooth; with every vampiric drought of vital energy that the Gorgon drains from Vardanes' body, her own body becomes imbued with life. She blooms. A soft rondure of hip and thigh stretches the dull cerements. Her woman's breasts swell, straining the thin fabric. She stretches firm, youthful arms. Her moist, crimson mouth opens in another peal of laughter—this time, the musical voluptuous laughter of a full-bodied woman.

After getting closer...

Her face is a mask of inhuman loveliness; her soft moist lips are as full and crimson as ripe fruit. Glossy ebon hair tumbles across shoulders of glowing pearl, to fall in tides of silken night through which thrust the round moons of her breasts. She is beauty incarnate—save for the dark orb between her brows.

Around you, comes a cacophonous sound of muttering and cackling. Out from the shadows, small reddish flying menaces emerge on vespertilian wings. Though no bigger than a one-year-old child, their exaggerated claws and maw reveal that they are more dangerous than their size suggests.

[Imps (4) (AC:1 HD:2 hp:10 Mv:Fl 18" Th:15 D:d4/d4/d6 SA: SD:1/2 damage from normal weapons Sz:S XP:1000)]

These creatures harass the party by swooping in. If they win initiative, they can attack those with melee weapons and swoop out of range before the attacker can counter.

[Medea, Demoness (AC:0 HD:10 hp:80 Mv:12 Th:8 D:d4/d4 SA:life drain d6 CON/round & Paralysis, Mass Suggestion SD:1/4 damage from normal weapons; regenerates 5/round; Sz:6' XP:12000)]

Medea's Powers:

1. Mass Suggestion: Characters must save vs spell at +2 if there are more than 3 being charmed,

(normal save otherwise) or be transfixed by her beauty. This power only works when she has recently fed and is voluptuous. She uses this on anyone approaching or attacking her

2. Mass Paralysis: Save vs paralyzation or be transfixed. Characters who gaze at her, see her lift her eye:

This oval orb is larger than any organ of human vision. It is not divided into pupil, iris, and white; it is all black. Your gaze seems to sink into it and become lost in endless seas of darkness. You stare rapt, forgetting the weapon in your grasp. The eye is as black as the lightless seas of space between the stars. Now you seem to stand at the brink of a black, bottomless well, into which you topple and fall. Down, down through ebon fogs you fall, through a vast, cold abyss of utter darkness. You know that, if you do not soon turn your eyes away, you will be forever lost to this world.

This power is a by-product of its gaze and she need not direct it or concentrate. Anyone gazing at her face is subject to this effect. Characters can get a subsequent save vs Willpower/Wisdom at -3 to turn away and break the spell. Each round they can save but there is a -3 penalty every round cumulative after the first failed Save vs Paralyzation.

3. Constitution Drain: Every round, she can drain d6 CON from one individual. The % of CON drain turns the victim into a similar % of stone, starting with the feet, rooting them in place.

If she is reduced to 0 hp, she falls as if dead. Even if hacked to pieces, they eventually form her back to her beautiful self. Fire, in this case, only triples her healing rate! She is demon born after all!

The only way to kill her, is destroy the eye. Up close it takes a called shot at -3, but a successful hit automatically destroys it. After her eye is destroyed...

She moves not. With her two normal eyes of surpassing beauty, she stares silently at you, her face blank and white. A change sweeps over her. From the ruin of the Gorgon's third eye, dark fluid runs down her face of inhuman perfection. Like black tears, the slow dew falls from the shattered organ.

Then she begins to age. As the dark fluid runs from the riven orb, so the stolen life force of aeons drains from her body. Her skin darkens and roughens into a thousand wrinkles. Withered dewlaps form beneath her chin. Glowing eyes become lusterless and milky. The suburb bosom sags and shrinks. Sleek limbs become scrawny. For a long moment, the dwarfed, withered form of a tiny woman, incredibly senile, totters on the throne. Then flesh rots to papery scraps and mouldering bones. The body collapses, spilling across the pavement in a litter of leathery fragments, which crumble as you watch to a colorless, ashy powder.

Part Five: Epilogue

“Stay with us!” Zillah pleads in her low soft voice. “There will be posts of high honor for men such as you in Akhlat, now that we are freed from the curse.” She uses the plural, but it is obvious that her attention and speech is directed to [the BID winner] in your midst. But other people have gathered as well, including young enamored Akhlatim women, who touch and fondle your clothing as if by touching the fabric you wear imparts some of your adventurous life to them.

Conan grins hardily, sensing something more personal in her voice than the desire of a good citizen to enlist a worthy immigrant in the cause of civic reconstruction. “Nay friends, not for Conan of Cimmeria the tasks of peace. I should too soon become bored, and when boredom strikes, I know of

but few cures: to get drunk, to pick a fight, or to steal a girl. A fine sort of citizen I should make for a city that now seeks peace and quiet to recover its strength! Though I cannot speak for my fellow companions here,” he gestures toward you.

Characters should decide to stay or go at this point.

“Then whither will you go now that the magical barriers are dissolved?” asks Enosh.

Conan shrugs. On the morrow, I think I'll bend my path to the southeast. Somewhere yonder lies the city of Zamboula, to which I have never been. Men say it is a rich city of fleshpots and revelry, where the wine all but flows free in the gutters. I've a mind to taste the joys of Zamboula, to see what excitement it has to offer. My comrades are welcome to join me in my trek westward.” He turns expectantly toward you.

“But you need not leave us a beggar!” Enosh protested. “We owe you much. Let us give you what little gold and silver we have for your labors.”

Conan refuses saying they will need all that is left to start a new city. [Experience: 500 for not accepting a share of treasure.] A night of revelry and partying ensues. Allow players to wench or drinking for points at this time.

In the morning, with a last, brisk farewell, you swing into the saddle and canter up out of the valley. They stand looking after you, Enosh proudly, but Zillah and the other Akhlatim girls with tears on their cheeks. Soon you are out of sight.

If they escape with their lives, award PCs with Xps or if you use a simplified system like I do, this adventure should be worth $\frac{1}{2}$ level for each PC, +/- $\frac{1}{4}$ level based on roleplaying, time to complete adventure (the longer, usually the more XPs).

I also keep track and award the following bonuses, each worth 1/10 of a level:

- Most Damage in a single blow/spell
- Coolest Critical Hit by a PC
- Weirdest/Funniest Happening
- Scribe (one player must write all notes including monsters killed and treasure gained)
- BID if she is alive and relatively unharmed
- Best Idea