

THE HALL OF THE DEAD

(Synopsis)

A Conan Story

by Robert E. Howard

A squad of Zamorian soldiers, led by the officer Nestor, a Gunderman mercenary, were marching down a narrow gorge, in pursuit of a thief, Conan the Cimmerian, whose thefts from rich merchants and nobles had infuriated the government of the nearest Zamorian city.

Conan had left the city and been followed into the mountains. The walls of the gorge were steep and the gorge floor grown thickly with high rich grass.

Striding through this grass at the head of his men, Nestor tripped over something and fell heavily. It was a rawhide rope stretched there by Conan, and it tripped a spring-pole which started a sudden avalanche that overwhelmed all the soldiers except Nestor, who escaped, bruised, and with his armor scratched and dented.

Enraged, he followed the trail alone, and emerging into an upland plateau, came into the deserted city of the ancients, where he met Conan. He instantly attacked the Cimmerian, who, after a desperate battle, knocked him senseless with a sword-stroke on his helmet, and went on into the deserted city, thinking him dead.

Nestor recovered and followed the Cimmerian. Conan, meanwhile, had entered the city, clambering over the walls, the gates being locked, and had encountered the monstrous being which haunted the city. This he slew by casting great blocks of stone upon it from an elevation, and then descending and hacking it to pieces with his sword.

He had made his way to the great palace which was hewn out of a single monstrous hill of stone in the center of the city. He was seeking an entrance, when Nestor came upon him again, sword in hand, having followed him over the wall. Conan disgustingly advised him to aid him in securing the vast fabulous treasure instead of fighting.

After some argument the Gunderman agreed, and they made their way into the palace, eventually coming to the great treasure chamber, where warriors of a by-gone age lay about in life-like positions.

The companions made up packages of gold and precious stones, and threw dice to decide which should take a set of perfectly matched uncanny gems which adorned an altar, on which lay a jade serpent, apparently a god. Conan won the toss, and gave all the gold and the other jewels to Nestor.

He himself swept up the altar-gems and the jade serpent - but when he lifted it off the altar, the ancient warriors came terrifically to life, and a terrible battle ensued, in which the thieves barely managed to escape with their lives. Hewing their way out of the palace, they were followed by the giant warriors who, upon coming into the sunlight, crumpled into dust. A terrific earthquake shook down the deserted city, and the companions were separated. Conan made his way back to the city, and entering a tavern, where his light-of-love was guzzling wine, spilled the jewels out on the ale-splashed table, in the Maul. To his amazement, they had turned to green dust. He then prepared to examine the jade serpent, who was still in the leather sack. The girl lifted the

sack and dropped it with a scream, swearing that something moved inside it. At this instant a magistrate entered with a number of soldiers and arrested Conan, who set his back to a wall, and drew his sword. Before the soldiers could close in, the magistrate thrust his hand into the sack. Nestor had regained the city, with the coins which had not crumpled, and drunk, had told of the exploit. They had sought to arrest him, but drunk though he was, he had cut his way through and escaped. Now as the magistrate thrust his fat hand into the sack, he shrieked and jerked it forth, a living serpent fast to his fingers. The turmoil which followed gave Conan and the girl an opportunity to escape.

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