GAIL SIMONE • WALTER GEOVANI

"This is a great comic book and it deserves your attention."
–IGN

RED SONJA®

DYNAMITE

1

PRAISE FOR GAIL SIMONE'S RED SONJA

Newsarama
"A strong and promising debut."

Comic Book Resources
"Sword and sorcery adventure done right... Great fun!"

IGN
"This is a great comic book and it deserves your attention."

Comic Vine
"5 stars out of 5."

Comic Book Therapy
"Gail Simone's Red Sonja lives up to the hype."

Comicosity
"A fun, action-packed, violent and humorous adventure."

Unleash The Fanboy
"Absolutely spectacular to behold."

Geeks of Doom
"Comic fans, what are you waiting for?!"

Major Spoilers
"I'm desperate for the next installment."

Comic Book Bin
"Simone's Red Sonja is fiery and aggressive."

Talking Comic Books
"A must buy!"

Destroy The Cyborg
"One of the best first issues I have had the pleasure of reading."

Weekly Comic Book Report
"This title shines in characterization and in the depiction of its setting."

Fandom Post
"The best title Dynamite is publishing right now and I hope that Simone, Geovani, Lucas, and Bowland stay on this for a long time. Recommended."

RED SONJA®

VOLUME ONE: QUEEN OF PLAGUES

written by **GAIL SIMONE**
illustrated by **WALTER GEOVANI**
colored by **ADRIANO LUCAS**
lettered by **SIMON BOWLAND**

series editor **JOSEPH RYBANDT**
collection design by **JASON ULLMEYER**

based on the heroine created by **ROBERT E. HOWARD**

executive editor - Red Sonja **LUKE LIEBERMAN**
in memory of **ARTHUR LIEBERMAN**

DYNAMITE®

Visit us online at **www.DYNAMITE.com**
Follow us on Twitter **@dynamitecomics**
Like us on Facebook **/Dynamitecomics**
Watch us on YouTube **/Dynamitecomics**

Nick Barrucci, CEO / Publisher
Juan Collado, President / COO
Rich Young, Director Business Development
Keith Davidsen, Marketing Manager

Joe Rybandt, Senior Editor
Hannah Gorfinkel, Associate Editor
Josh Green, Traffic Coordinator
Molly Mahan, Assistant Editor

Josh Johnson, Art Director
Jason Ullmeyer, Senior Graphic Designer
Katie Hidalgo, Graphic Designer
Chris Caniano, Production Assistant

ISBN-10: 1-60690-481-7 ISBN-13: 978-1-60690-481-7 First Printing 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

RED SONJA® , VOL. 1: QUEEN OF PLAGUES. This volume collects material originally published in Red Sonja ® volume 2 #1-6. Published by Dynamite Entertainment. 113 Gaither Dr., STE 205, Mt. Laurel, NJ 08054. RED SONJA® and related logos, characters, names, and distinctive likenesses thereof are trademarks of Red Sonja, LLC unless otherwise noted. All Rights Reserved. DYNAMITE, DYNAMITE ENTERTAINMENT and its logo are © & ® 2014 Dynamite. All rights reserved. All names, characters, events, and locales in this publication are entirely fictional. Any resemblance to actual persons (living or dead), events or places, without satiric intent, is coincidental. No portion of this book may be reproduced by any means (digital or print) without the written permission of Dynamite Entertainment except for review purposes. The scanning, uploading and distribution of this book via the Internet or via any other means without the permission of the publisher is illegal and punishable by law. Please purchase only authorized electronic editions, and do not participate in or encourage electronic piracy of copyrighted materials. **Printed in Canada**

For media rights, foreign rights, promotions, licensing, and advertising: marketing@dynamite.com

INTRODUCTION BY GAIL SIMONE

I have a confession to make.

I might actually be a barbarian lover in a superhero lover's clothing.

When I was a kid, I lived on a very remote farm in the boonies. Getting comics was difficult. When we did actually find any, it would be at a garage sale, and the pickings were often slim, and the choices not usually very current.

I had an ever-changing system of prioritizing when we did find comics. Superhero books got purchased first, that was a given. Then, if I was lucky, whatever horror or monster comics, those would get scooped up. Finally, I'd take the humor books, things like Richie Rich, that I'd felt I'd kind of outgrown (I know; fortunately, I rediscovered all those books as an adult).

The stuff that got left where it sat?

Sword and sorcery comics.

I just didn't see the appeal. Big brute-y, smelly guys (I had to assume they were smelly, they most certainly LOOKED smelly), fighting snake-faced-tigers or tiger-faced-snakes, all while some terrified girl wearing tissues looked on, unable to hold herself up properly, it seemed.

Not my thing. No interest. No girls for me to care about, and Conan and his many imitators just seemed like, well, jerks. I just didn't care about barbarians at all.

Until Red Sonja.

I don't know what issue it was, but somehow, because nothing else was available, I found a Frank Thorne-drawn issue of the She-Devil with a Sword.

And that was it. She was smarter, tougher, and faster than her enemies. She didn't care what you thought about her. She did what she wanted. And she had red hair, like me. How could I NOT love her?

From then on, my priority list with comics changed. I bought Conan and Claw and Beowulf and Kull and Ironjaw and Wulf and, well, pretty much everyone who had a sword and a bad attitude. Because I fell so hard for Sonja.

That love has never gone away... when I turned pro as an adult, I kept finding ways to indulge my sword and sorcery passion. I put the All-New Atom in his little barbarian micro-world. I sent Wonder Woman to face Claw and Beowulf and other DC barbarians. Every chance I got, my superheroes ended up with swords and armor and axes.

Because of Sonja.

When Dynamite offered me any book I chose to write, the first name on their list of possibilities was Red Sonja. We never made it to the rest of the list.

I have to thank the incredible art team. Walter Geovani is a magnificent artist, I can give him anything to draw...armies, monsters, funny moments, sad moments, and he makes them sing. He is my sword-brother and I dearly love him, and he's never even yelled at me for asking for army battles three issues in a row.

Similarly, our little band of killers includes the amazing colorist Adriano Lucas, who brings so much emotion to the page, and the wonderful Simon Bowland, our letterer, who is as inventive as they come.

I have to also thank the incredible list of gifted female artists who did the phenomenal covers for this book: all hand chosen, the best in the business.

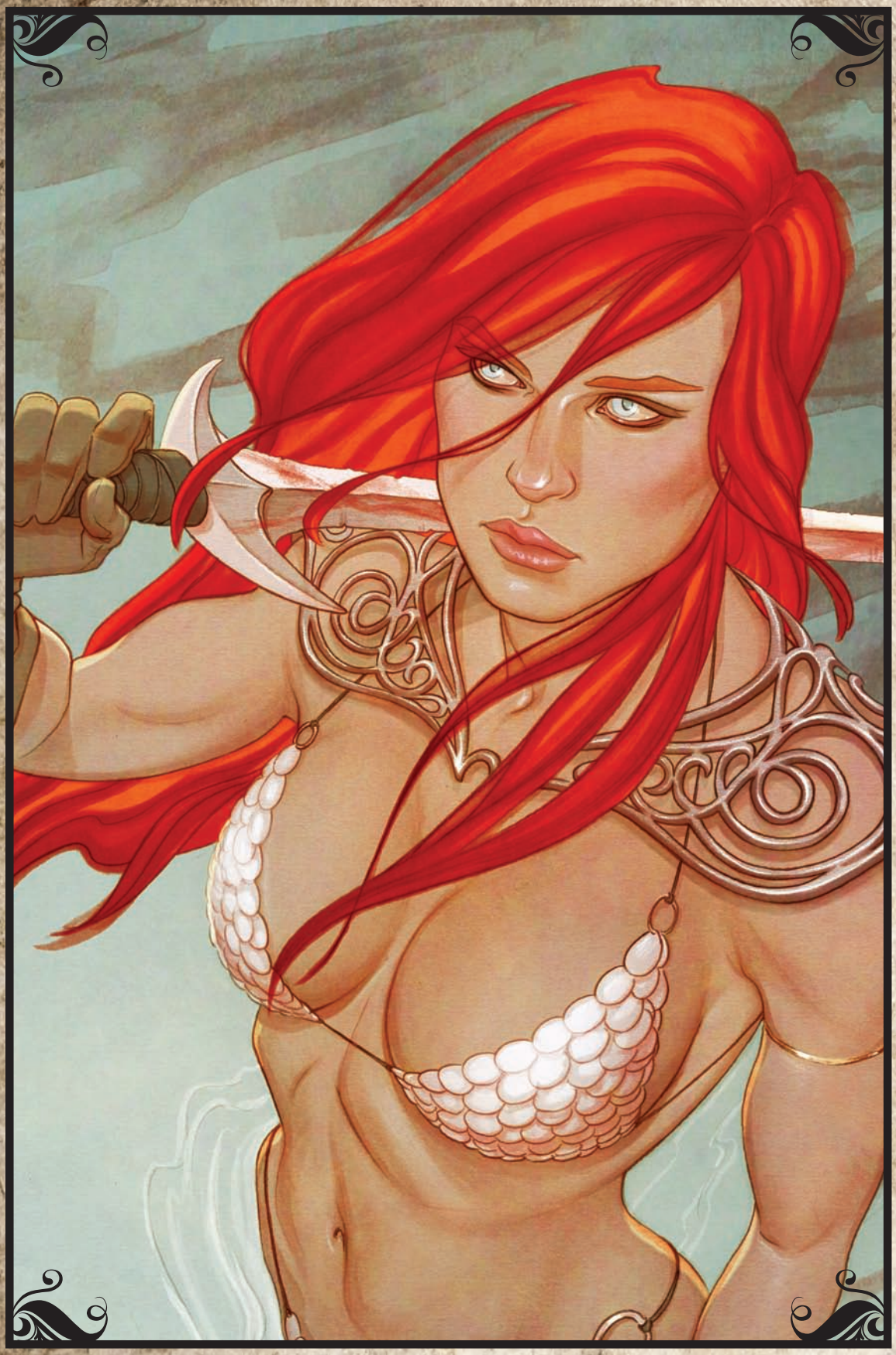
I never thought I'd get to write Red Sonja. I never knew she could be so much fun to write. And finally, I get to scratch that itch good and proper.

I owe her a debt, and we who love the blade pay our debts.

Thanks, Hyrkanian.

Gail Simone

PS. I owe you a beer, Nick Barrucci.



ISSUE ONE
cover by JENNY FRISON

THREE TURNS OF THE SEASON PAST
VICTORY.
VICTORY!

GLORY COMES AT A WET, CRIMSON COST, MY LIEGE.
SORRY, SIRE.
I DOES GO *ON* A BIT AFTER A RED MORN.
IT IS NOT A DAY FOR DIPLOMACY, APOS. BE AT EASE.
WHERE IS THE BUTCHER, THE ZAMORAN KING?
REPORTS FROM THE RANK SEEM...A BIT MUDDY, LORD.
THEY'S SOME WHAT SAY HE FELL IN BATTLE, AND SOME WHAT SAY HE MADE ESCAPE IN THE GARB OF A PATRANIAN, ONE OF OUR DEAD.
THEY AIN'T NO BODY, 'AT'S CERTAIN.
AND MY SON, LIEUTENANT.
WHAT OF TIATH?
PLEASE TELL ME MY SON SHOWED VALOR BEFITTING HIS STATION.
UH.
WELL.
NOT IN THE *TRADITIONAL* SENSE, KING DIMATH.
I HEAR AS HE... THAT HE...
SPEW THE WORDS SO POISONOUS TO YOUR TONGUE, SOLDIER.
HE WERE...
HE WERE HARASSIN' THE *FALLEN,* LORD.

FATHER. FATHER!
PRAISE THE STARS, YOU YET LIVE.
YES. AND WHERE WERE YOU, SON, WHO SHOULD HAVE BEEN AT MY SIDE?
OH! I WAS...
WELL, I WAS COLLECTING HUMORS AND SPECIMENS, FATHER.
I'M SORRY.
TRUER WORDS WERE NEVER UTTERED.
SURVIVORS IN THE KEEP, APOS?
WOMEN, CHILDREN. NO SOLDIERS, NO MEN-AT-ARMS.
WELL, ONLY...
YES?
ONE DAY, I SHALL MAKE YOU PROUD, FATHER.
IT'S THE DUNGEONS, SIR. IT'S...IT AIN'T PLEASANT.
THEY KEPT EIGHTY PRISONERS DOWN HERE, LIKE DOGS IN THE MUD.
WORKED 'EM AS SLAVES ALL DAY, MADE 'EM FIGHT TO THE DEATH AT NIGHT. FOR SPORT.
ONLY TWO STILL STANDING.
THEY AIN'T HUMAN NO MORE, LORD.
TWO SURVIVED THE DUNGEON AND THE ARENA?
LET ME SEE THESE FIERCE MEN.
YES, SIRE.
ONLY, ABOUT THAT...

...THEY AIN'T QUITE *MEN,* SIRE.
DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY *ARE,* EXACTLY.
BUT THEY DEFINITELY AIN'T *MEN.*

BY THE SECRET SCROLLS.
THEY DON'T SEEM TO SPEAK. MAYBE THEY TONGUES IS CUT.
OR MAYBE THEY DON'T RECOLLECT AS TO HOW.
LET ME DISPATCH 'EM, SIRE. KINDEST THING, POOR SOULS.
I CAN'T... I CAN'T BEAR THEIR EYES, LORD.
NO.
GIVE THEM FOOD AND A BATH.
THEN GIVE THEM EACH A HORSE AND FREE PASSAGE AWAY FROM HERE.
WE FOUGHT FOR OUR FREEDOM TODAY.
IT WOULD BE UNJUST, INDEED, TO DENY THAT TO...
...WHOEVER THESE CREATURES USED TO BE.
NM. SYA.
EH?
MY. NAME.
IS. RED SONJA.

THREE TURNS OF THE SEASONS LATER, ON THE CIMMERIAN BORDER...
SHHH.
SHUT UP.
ZZZZZZZZZZZ
DON'T WAKE HER.
TAKE WHAT WE WANT AND GO.
SHE DOESN'T SMELL LIKE A LADY.
SHE BROOKS NO SADDLE?
BAGS ON THE HORSE YET, TEVIUS.
FOOD. GOLD, MAYBE.
TAKE THE FOOD, IF YOU NEED IT.
THE GOLD AS WELL, THERE'S LITTLE ENOUGH.

TRY TO TOUCH MY SWORD, AND YOU DIE.
TRY TO TOUCH *ME,* AND YOU DIE *FINGERLESS.*
THERE ARE *THREE* OF US. AND WE ARE *ARMED.*
AND YOUR SWORD IS STUCK IN THE *DIRT,* GIRL.
TRUE.
BUT I KEEP A THROWING DAGGER UNDER MY PILLOW, ALWAYS.
ARE YOU A GAMBLER, CUTTHROAT?
I THINK YOU ARE A LIAR, GIRL.
IF YOU *HAD* SUCH A BLADE, WHY DID YOU NOT *SLAY* ME, AS I STOLE YOUR GOODS?
BECAUSE I AM *DRUNK,* SCAVENGER.
MY AIM COULD BE *OFF* A BIT.

I MIGHT GET YOUR *BLOOD* ON MY *HORSE.*
I *BELIEVE* HER, MY FRIEND. LET US *LEAVE.*
TEVIUS, WHAT LITTLE LIFE I HAVE LEFT, I DON'T WANT IT TO END *TONIGHT. PLEASE.* WE *GO.*
...
NO.
Well, well, purse-snatch.
Turns out you ARE a wagering man, after all.
Pity.
I WILL RUN FROM A BLADE *NO MORE!*
WE SHALL *SAVE* YOU FROM THESE CRAVEN DOGS, YOUR RADIANT LADYSHIP!
FOR *PATRA* AND FOR *HONOR!*

WONDERFUL. WHOEVER YOU ARE.
COULD YOU RESCUE ME A BIT MORE QUIETLY, PLEASE?
FIRE, SISTER. FIRE!
I...
I CAN'T.
ENOUGH.
YOU THREATEN CHILDREN, YOU LEAVE WITH NOTHING.
I WON'T SAY IT AGAIN.
YOU DON'T FRIGHTEN ME, WITCH WOMAN.
YOU SAID IT YOURSELF.
YES.
YOU'RE DRUNK.

BUT I'M NOT *THAT* DRUNK.
AND WHAT TO DO WITH THE THIRD OF A MATCHED SET OF BUNGLERS, I WONDER?
NO. PLEASE. I'M SICK.
PLEASE HELP ME.
I...*URK.* I...
WHAT IN THE NAME OF THE GODDESS?
RAAKKCC
IT'S THE *PLAGUE,* YOUR RADIANT LADYSHIP.
THE KING BEGS YOU COME. PLEASE.
NO *"KING"* SUMMONS *SONJA,* CHILDREN.
AND YOUR RADIANT LADYSHIP ISN'T QUITE *HERSELF* AT THE MOMENT. RUN *ALONG,* PLEASE.
IT'S KING *DIMATH,* O MAJESTIC BLADE MISTRESS.
HE REQUESTS, NAY, HE *BEGS* YOU COME.

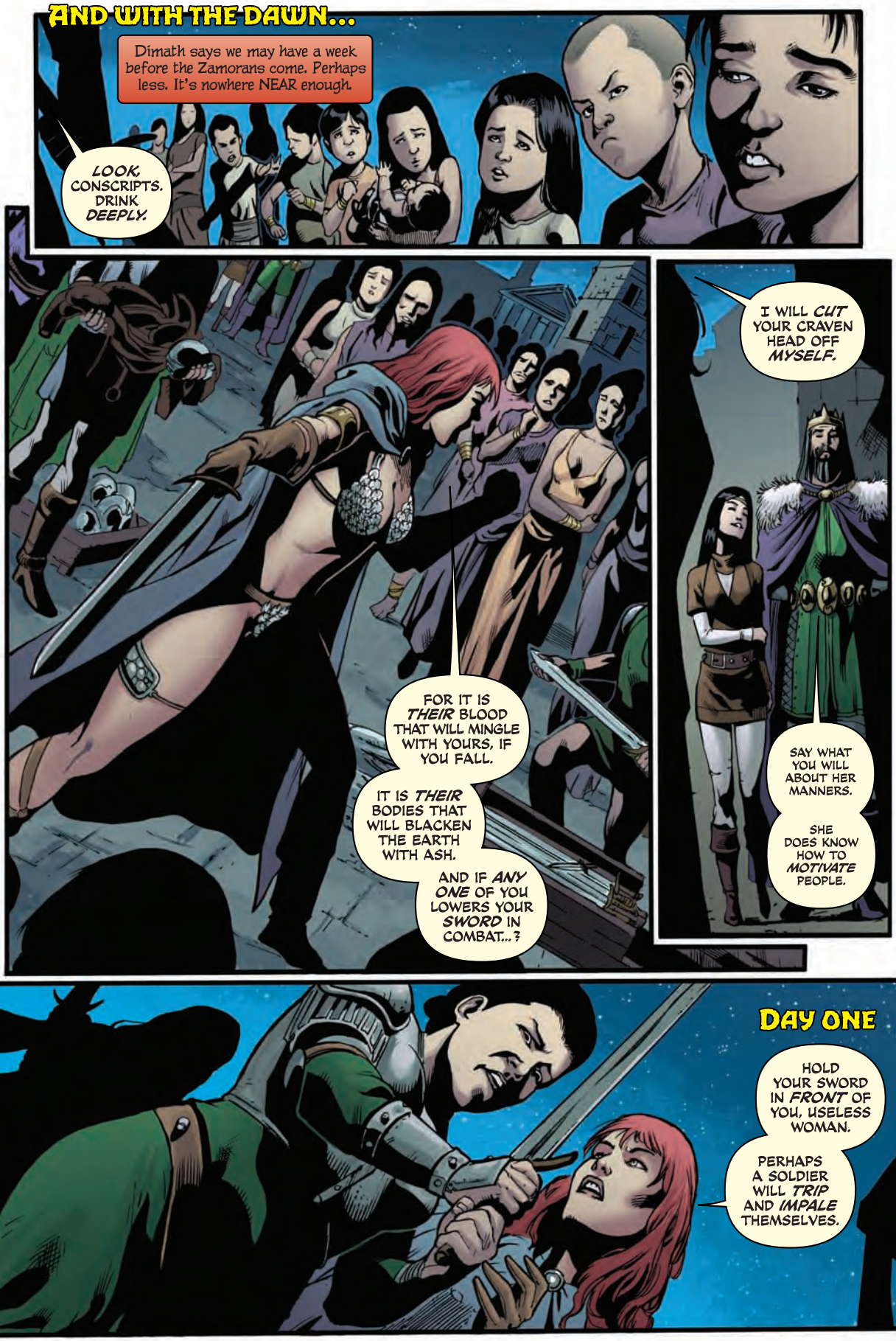
Dimath.
The first King I ever saw show mercy to ANYONE.
DAMN.
BOIL ME A BREW, COURIERS.
THE STEM OF A DERKETA APPLE, CRUSHED FERN BRACKEN, AND ASH FROM THE FIRE.
AT ONCE, OUR GLORIOUS SWORD-PRINCESS!
WILL THIS HELP WITH HER RADIANT LADYSHIP'S HANGOVER?
NO. BUT THE TASTE IS SO REPULSIVE, IT'LL MAKE ME ANGRY ENOUGH TO FORGET.
WASH MY BOOTS IN THE STREAM, WHILE YOU'RE AT IT.
BURN THE BODIES.
AND YOU.
YOU HAVE MY SYMPATHY.
I CAN LEAVE YOU A BLADE, IF YOU... NEED IT.
OR, SONJA CAN PROMISE YOU A PAINLESS END.
LEAVE ME A BLADE. I WILL DO WHAT MUST BE DONE.
YOU DON'T DIE A THIEF. REMEMBER THAT.
YOU DIE A SOLDIER.

YOU NEEDN'T FOLLOW ME, LADIES. I KNOW THE PATH.
UH...
WE'RE NOT COURIERS, O SHE OF THE EXCELLENT CLEAVAGE.
WE'RE YOUR BODYGUARDS.
MY...
ARE YOU QUITE CERTAIN YOU UNDERSTOOD YOUR ORDERS?
OH, YES, RADIANT MISTRESS!
WE'VE SLAIN HUNDREDS WITH THESE BOWS.
DID YOU.
MEN, WERE THEY?
WELL, MORE ALONG THE LINE OF RABBITS.
This bodes unwell.
THEY WERE VERY LARGE RABBITS...
I FOUGHT FOR KING, I FOUGHT FOR LAND.
I FOUGHT FOR BEER, AND MAIDEN'S HAND.
I FOUGHT MY LIFE, BUT NOW I SLEEP.
AND SO I STAND, TO GUARD THE KEEP.
IT'S ALL THE WINE I HAVE LEFT TO GIVE YOU.
YOU TAKE A JOURNEY FURTHER THAN THE LAND WILL ALLOW.
TARIM KEEP YOU.
SOLDIER.

"I LEARNED MY TRADE, BY FIRE AND SKY.
"I CURSED MY BLADE, YET HELD IT HIGH.
"MY FLESH IS RED, MY WOUND IS DEEP.
"AND YET I STAND, TO GUARD THE KEEP."
I owe you my life, Dimath. More importantly...
I owe you my DIGNITY.
I WILL repay you, if I can.
WHY ARE THERE NO GUARDS?
WHERE STANDS THE GARRISON?
I... I FEEL IT'S BEST IF THE KING COUNSELS YOU, MISTRESS.
MY HEART IS NOT BIG ENOUGH. I FEAR.
NIAS, AYLA! WELCOME!
BLESS YOU, MISTRESS. MITRA BLESS YOU.
WHAT NONSENSE IS THIS?
THEY HAVE WAITED FOR YOU, MISTRESS.
THERE IS TO BE A PARTY.

NO.
THIS IS MADNESS.
FORGIVE ME, MISTRESS, I'M SORRY, MISTRESS!
MAKE ME WEAR A FOPPISH GOWN?
I WILL WHEN THE KING WILL!
MISTRESS... MISTRESS...
IT IS...
...THE LAST STATE DINNER OF OUR PEOPLE. IT IS TRADITION.
PLEASE?
IT'S THE MOST BEAUTIFUL THING I'VE EVER SEEN.
YOU LOOK A GODDESS.
WELL.
IT ITCHES.

DIMATH.
YOU WILL NOT KNEEL?
YOU DO NOT CALL ME SIRE?
ON YOUR LAST DAY, I MAY CALL YOU SIRE.
THIS IS NOT YOUR LAST DAY.
YOUR FATHER MUST BE PROUD, SWORD-DAUGHTER.
THE *ZAMORANS* HAVE MARKED US FOR THE *FIRE.*
THE DAY YOU MENTION IS CLOSE AT HAND, SONJA.
"WE HAVE BEEN TOUCHED BY PLAGUE. IT HIT MY ARMY, FIRST.
"EVEN THE VULTURES WOULD NOT TOUCH THEM."
THE ZAMORANS, THEY HAVE A TERRIFYING GENERAL, WHO BROUGHT UNCLEAN ALLIES FROM THE COAST...BEASTS OF THE SEA WHO WALK LIKE MEN.
THEY ATTACK THE CITY-STATES HIT BY THE PLAGUE. THEY SAY THEY DO IT FOR THE GOOD OF ALL.
THEY KILL EVERYONE. THEY BURN *EVERYTHING.*
WE HAVE MOSTLY FARMERS AND CRAFTSMEN.
NO SOLDIERS.
SONJA. I NEED TO ASK YOU TO TEACH THEM.
LET THEM DIE *FIGHTING.*
WILL YOU DO THIS FOR ME?
GATHER EVERY BABE AND CHILD.
BRING THEM TO ME AT DAWN.


AND WITH THE DAWN...
Dimath says we may have a week before the Zamorans come. Perhaps less. It's nowhere NEAR enough.
LOOK, CONSCRIPTS. DRINK DEEPLY.
FOR IT IS THEIR BLOOD THAT WILL MINGLE WITH YOURS, IF YOU FALL.
IT IS THEIR BODIES THAT WILL BLACKEN THE EARTH WITH ASH.
AND IF ANY ONE OF YOU LOWERS YOUR SWORD IN COMBAT...?
I WILL CUT YOUR CRAVEN HEAD OFF MYSELF.
SAY WHAT YOU WILL ABOUT HER MANNERS.
SHE DOES KNOW HOW TO MOTIVATE PEOPLE.
DAY ONE
HOLD YOUR SWORD IN FRONT OF YOU, USELESS WOMAN.
PERHAPS A SOLDIER WILL TRIP AND IMPALE THEMSELVES.

DAY TWO
WE LACK COMPLETE SETS OF ARMOR. IF SEPARATED, LET YOUR COMRADE BE THE SHIELD AT YOUR BACK.
SWORDS *OUT,* FOOLS!
DAY THREE
It's hopeless. Of course it's hopeless.
JUST THINK OF THEM AS *FIERCE RABBITS,* LADIES.
I can teach them tactics. I can't teach them WAR.
DAY FOUR
But they have heart. And they have nowhere else to go.
GOOD.
BETTER.
THEY *APPROACH.*
THE *ZAMORANS* ARE *HERE.*
Too soon.
FAR too soon.

WE HAVE SENT COURIERS TO ALL THE CITY-STATES OF CORINTHIA.
THE SENATORS SAY WE ARE PLAGUE-TOUCHED AND ALREADY LOST.
THERE WILL BE NO REINFORCEMENTS.
I...AM SORRY.
I'VE FAILED YOU.
WE ALL DIE SOMETIME, MY CHILD.
THE SUN ROSE TODAY AND WILL DO SO AGAIN TOMORROW.
WE WERE NEVER MEANT FOR LINGERING IN SICKBEDS, WE TWO.
THEY COME, SIRE!
THEY'RE ALREADY *HERE!*

SO... MANY.
I DIDN'T KNOW THERE'D BE SO *MANY.*
NO.
MORE'S THE PITY.
WELL. ARE YOU MY GENERAL, DAUGHTER OF THE SWORD?
I AM.
SIRE.
THEN *CONDUCT WAR, RED SONJA OF HYRKANIA.*
YES.
I WAS JUST *THINKING* ALONG THOSE VERY LINES.
I can't buy their lives.
But I can buy them TIME.

COME THEN, DOGS, SLAVERS, CONQUERORS OF CHILDREN.
FACE ONE EDUCATED BLADE, IF YOU HAVE THE COURAGE!
SONJA.
HOW I HAVE *WAITED* FOR THIS DAY.
ALL PHALANXES, SPILL GUTS AND SPLIT BONE!
TARIM'S *BLOOD*.
That VOICE.
The terror of the plains, the BUTCHER of all MEN...

...is the woman I called DARK ANNISIA.
My SISTER from the Zamoran SLAVE PIT!