The Slithering Shadow

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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: 8-10

Reputation: 3 Shem 3 Stygia (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 last remnants of an army destroyed, the party finds themselves drifting across a vast desert. On the verge of death, they spy a forgotten city, Xuthal. The inhabitants drown themselves in drugs while a “god” rises from the depths to claim induced victims.

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 applies 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…”

Have characters roll for the BID; the one who wins has taken on a girl, Natala from Shem.
Part One: From Desert to Desolate

The desert shimmers in the heat waves. You stare out over the aching desolation and involuntarily draw the back of your hand over your blackened lips. On your cleancut limbs are evidences of scarcely healed wounds.

You give the girl drowning in the desert sands at your feet the canteen. “Drink till I tell you to stop, Natala,” you command.

She drinks with little panting gasps, and you do not check her. Only when the canteen is empty does she realize that you had deliberately allowed her to drink all of your water supply, little enough that it was.

Tears spring to her eyes. “Oh, [BID winner]” she wails, wringing her hands, “why did you let me drink it all? I did not know—now there is none for you!”


Your fingers close slowly about the hilt of your saber. You know that another day in these waterless waste will bring you and your comrades down. As for the girl, she has suffered enough. Better a quick, painless sword-stroke than the lingering agony that faces you. Her thirst is temporarily quenched; it is a false mercy to let her suffer until delirium and death brings relief. Slowly, you slide the saber from its sheath.

Suddenly you halt, stiffening. Far out on the desert to the south, something glimmers through the heat waves. At first you think it a phantom, one of the mirages which have mocked and maddened you and your companions in that accursed desert. Shading your sun-dazzled eyes, you make out spires and minarets, and gleaming walls. You watch it grimly, waiting for it to fade and vanish. Natala has ceased to sob; she struggles to her knees and follows your gaze. You find comfort that your companions gaze at the same sight.

For all you know, you and your comrades are the sole survivors of Prince Almuric's army, that mad motley horde which, following the defeated rebel prince of Koth, swept through the lands of Shem like a devastating sandstorm and drenched the outlands of Stygia with blood. With a Stygian host on its heels, it had cut its way through the black kingdom of Kush, only to be annihilated on the edge of the southern desert. The bones of its members—mercenaries, outcasts, broken men, outlaws—lay strewn from the Kothic uplands to the dunes of the wilderness.

From that final slaughter, when the Stygians and the Kushites closed in on the trapped remnants, you and your comrades had cut your way clear and fled on camels with the girl. Behind you, the land swarms with your enemies; the only way opened to you was the desert to the south.

The sun is nigh to setting when you halt in front of the massive gate, grateful for the shade. Above you, the walls tower some thirty feet in height, composed of a smooth, greenish substance that shines almost like glass.

When the characters check the gate, they find it unattended and unlocked.
Just inside the gate lies a human body. Beyond it, you see a wide open expanse, like a court, bordered by the arched doorways of houses composed of the same greenish material as the outer walls. These edifices are lofty and imposing, pinnacled with shining domes and minarets. A well lies in the center of the court. There is no sign of life.

The body is warm, but appears dead as if struck down less than an hour ago. After the characters check the body and move on, the swordsman rushes and attacks. He wields a great scimitar. Roll for surprise.

[Xuthian (AC:10 HD:5 hp:50 Mv:12 Th:12 D:d10+2 SA: SD: Sz:6' XP:50)]

Part Two: Inside the City of Xuthal

Natala, who had covered her eyes with her hands at the fight, peeks between her fingers and shakes with fear. “Will the people not kill us because of this?”

[When they decide to investigate further, read on.]

“Oh [BID winner], “Natala wails, snuggling up as close to you as she can. “I'm afraid! This is a city of ghosts and dead men! Let's go back into the desert! Better to die there, than to face these terrors!”

She follows you so close that she steps on your heels, to your irritation. Dusk has fallen, filling the strange city with purple shadows. You enter the open doorway and find yourselves in a wide chamber, the walls of which are hung with velvet tapestries, worked in curious designs. Floor, walls and ceiling are of the green, glassy stone, the walls decorated with gold frieze-work. Furs and satin cushions litter the floor. Several doorways lead into other rooms.

A weird, unreal atmosphere hangs over all. Traversing this dim, silent palace is like an opium dream. Some of the chambers are unlighted, others are bathed in a soft, weird light that seems to emanate from jewels set in the walls in fantastic designs.

[In a room not far away—have party roll a PER check. If they make it, read the following:]

In a room not far from whence you entered, you see a couch. It is still warm from contact with human body. The silk cushion bears the imprint of someone's hips. A faint scent of perfume lingers in the air.

[Still further into the building:]

On a table of polished ebony stands golden vessels, apparently containing food and drink. The room is unoccupied.

“Dare we eat it [BID winner]?” ventures the girl nervously. “The people might come upon us, and---”
The food is harmless and tasty. But characters must make a WIS check or guzzle the water and wine. Failure indicates that they guzzle the liquids and overload their kidneys. (Don’t forget, they were dehydrated almost to the point of death earlier in the day.) Those failing their WIS check must make a CON check or die. Even making their CON check results in a loss of d8+3 CON points potentially affecting both warrior’s hit points and spellcaster’s abilities. NOTE: if any character has the Survival proficiency, he need not make any checks, and of course, he may pass his knowledge on to others.

After the characters have refreshed themselves:

“We have eaten, drunk, and rested,” Natala urges. “Let us leave this place; it is evil. I can feel it.”

You hear a rustling sound in a room down a hallway. There is no light in the room where the noise came from, but it is partially illuminated by the radiance behind you. In the chamber ahead, you make out a man who lays on a raised dais. The soft light bathes him, and you see that he is a counterpart of the man outside in the courtyard, except that his garments are richer, and ornamented with jewels which twinkle in the uncanny light. Again an uncanny sound.

[Natala’s keeper must roll initiative dice against hers for she is about to scream. If she loses, he prevents it. If she wins, she screams before being muffled, and the PCs see the shadow below jerk and pause before receding.]

A shadow creeps across the room with the dead or sleeping man: a huge shapeless black blot. Distorted though it might be, you feel you have never seen a man or beast which casts such a shadow. The shadow engulfs the dais. Slowly, it recedes and once more the dais’ shadow is etched darkly against the wall. But the sleeper is no longer upon it.

[Assuming they enter the room to investigate, read the following.]

The dais stands as you had first seen it except that no bejeweled human lies thereon. Only on its silken covering shines a single drop of blood, like a great crimson gem. Natala gives a low choking cry.

You cross another room but a rustle of a silken hanging brings you about suddenly. Before a curtained alcove stands a man eying you intently.

There is neither surprise, nor hostility in his amber eyes. They are dreamy as a lotus-eater’s. He does not draw the short sword at his side. After a tense moment he speaks, in a far-away detached tone.

[He speaks a dialect of Stygian, so check to see what characters speak it. As long as one character can understand and translate, read on. Otherwise, his words are jibberish and they must react based on his actions and tone.]

His dreamy, sensuous gaze rests on Natala, and he drawls, “Of all my rich visions, this is the strangest! O, girl of the golden locks, from what far dreamland do you come? From Andarra, or Tothra, or Kuth of the star-girdle?”

[He pauses.]
“I have dreamed more gorgeous beauties,” he murmurs; “lithe women with hair dusky as night, and dark eyes of unfathomed mystery. But your skin is white as milk, your eyes are clear as down, and there is about you a freshness and daintiness alluring as joy. Come to my couch, little dream-girl!”

He advances and reaches for her.

He believes that he is in a drug-induced dream, and his intentions are to take her to his room beyond the curtain where he made his appearance and make love to her there. It is most likely that the party will try to stop him, though her annoying personality might make them pause for consideration.

When attempting to stop them, the Xuthian will attempt to banish them from his dream.

Just inside the gate lies a human body. Beyond it, you see a wide open expanse, like a court, bordered by the arched doorways of houses composed of the same greenish material as the outer walls. These edifices are lofty and imposing, pinnacled with shining domes and minarets. A well lies in the center of the court. There is no sign of life.

“Barbarian, I command ye—begone! Fade! Dissipate! Fade! Vanish!”

[A likely scenario is that the PCs convince them that they are real and that this is not a dream. If they mention the black shadow they saw earlier on the dias read the paragraph below.]

“You have seen? You have seen?” the man is shaking like a leaf; his voice cracks on the high-pitched note. The effect of your words on the him are horrifying. With an awful scream the man turns and rushes from the chamber. In his blind haste, he caroms from the side of the door, rights himself, and flees through the adjoining chambers, still screaming at the top of his voice. You hear his frightful screams dwindle in the distance, and echoing as from vaulted roofs. Suddenly one cry, louder than the others, rises and breaks short, followed by black silence.

“It is all a nightmare!” whimpers Natala. “We are dead and damned! We died out on the desert and are in Hell! We are disembodied spirits---”

Thalia the Stygian

[Moving on...]

You traverse but a single chamber. Something or someone approaches. It is a woman who stands there staring at you in wonder. She is tall, lithe, shaped like a goddess, clad in a narrow girdle crusted with jewels. A burnished mass of night-black hair sets off the whiteness of her ivory body. Her dark eyes, shaded by long dusky lashes, are deep with sensuous mystery. You catch your breath at her
beauty, and Natala stares with dilated eyes. You have never seen such a woman; her facial outline is
Stygian, but she is not dusky-skinned like the Stygian women you have known; her limbs are like
alabaster.

[The following is a question and answer session with the most probably flow of dialogue. It is
important to review the following carefully memorizing the information.]

She speaks in the Stygian tongue: “Who are you? What do you in Xuthal? Who is that girl?”

“I am Thalia the Stygian,” she replies “Are you mad, to come here?”

[If they tell about the shadow and sleeping man.]

She shrugs her slim ivory shoulders. “That was the scream I heard then. Well, to every man his fate,
and it's foolish to squeal like a rat in a trap. When Thog wants me, he will come for me.”

[Thog?]

“Sit and I will tell you. That was Thog, the Ancient, the god of Xuthal, who dwells in the sunken
dome in the center of the city. He has always dwelt in Xuthal. Whether he came here with the ancient
founders, or was here when they built the city, none knows. But the people of Xuthal worship him.
Mostly he sleeps below the city, but sometimes at irregular intervals he grows hungry, and then he
steals through the secret corridors and the dim-lit chambers, seeking prey. Then none is safe.”

Natala moans with terror and clasps your neck as if to resist an effort to drag her from her protector's
side.

[About this city?]

“This city is called Xuthal; it is very ancient. It is built over an oasis, which the founders of Xuthal
found in their wanderings. They came from the east, so long ago that not even their descendants
remember the age. The city is really one great palace, with every building inside the walls closely
connected with the others. You might walk among these chambers for hours and see no one. At other
times, you would meet hundreds of the inhabitants.”

[Why are these people so drowsy?]

Much of the time these people lie in sleep. Their dream-life is as important—and to them as real—as
their waking life. You have heard of the black lotus? In certain pits of the city it grows. Through the
ages they have cultivated it, until, instead of death, its juice induces dreams, gorgeous and fantastic.
In these dreams they spend most of their time. Their lives are vague, erratic, and without plan. They
dream, they wake, drink, love, eat, and dream again. They seldom finish anything they begin, but
leave it half completed and sink back again into the slumber of the black lotus. One may awake, feel
the urge of hunger, prepare the meal, then forgot about it and wandered away to dream again.”

[How do they make their food?]

They manufacture their own food out of the primal elements.
[If they comment on people just lying about waiting for Thog]

“It is only occasionally that he is hungry. A god must have his sacrifices. When I was a child in Stygia, the people lived under the shadow of a priest. None ever knew when he or she would be seized and dragged to the altar. What difference whether the priests give a victim to the gods, or the god comes for his own victim? Besides they are fatalists. Not one of the present generation has been out of sight of these walls. There is an oasis a day’s march to the south—I have seen it on old maps their ancestors drew on parchment—but no man of Xuthal has visited it for three generations much less made any attempt to explore the fertile grasslands which the maps show lying another day’s march beyond it. They are a fast-fading race, drowned in lotus-dreams, stimulating their waking hours by means of the golden wine which heals wounds, prolongs life, and invigorates the most sated debauchee.”

“Oh [BID winner] let us flee!” begs Natala hysterically.

[What is a Stygian woman doing here?]

“I came here when a young girl,” she answers, leaning lithely back against the velvet divan and intertwining slender fingers behind her dusky head. “I am the daughter of a king, no common woman, as you can see by my skin, which is as white as that of your little blonde there. I was abducted by a rebel prince, who, with an army of Kushite bowmen, pushed southward into the wilderness, searching for a land he could make his own. He and all his warriors perished in the desert, but one, before he died, placed me on a camel and walked beside it until he dropped and died in his tracks. The beast wandered on, and I finally passed into delirium from thirst and hunger, and awakened in this city. They told me I had been seen from the walls, early in the dawn, lying senseless beside a dead camel. They went forth and brought me in and revived me with their wonderful golden wine. And only the sight of a woman would have led them to have ventured that far from their walls.”

[When finished, Thalia concludes with:]

“But come, I will escort you to a place for you to drink and wash.”

Thalia is a Temptress. She falls for the BID winner head over heels and wishes to make him her king, King of Xuthal. She believes Natala is an impediment to her desires. She will use her spells to try to charm her way to her goals. But she will not want to be confrontational with the group. Her primary plan is to use the secret door by the fountain (see the following section) to take Natala to Thog and let Thog do away with her. If that fails, she will confront the remainder of the party with her own powers.

Thalia escorts them through a maze of rooms until they come to a magic fountain. The water seems to sparkle with flecks of gold. This gold comes from the same source as the magic golden elixir that Thalia alluded to earlier. It has the healing properties equal to a Potion of Cure Serious Wounds (2d8+3). Thalia will encourage them to drink if they look beaten up. Characters can only get the healing benefits but once per 24 hours. Otherwise the water is just tasty.

“Don't you want to wash your face, child?” Thalia asks, “It is stained the dust, and there is dust in
your hair."

[While Natala washes and the PCs drink and heal, she turns to Natala's BID winner and says:]

"Stay here! I will make you king of Xuthal! I will show you all the ancient mysteries!" She embraces you stroking you hair.

Natala looks up and stops short, her lovely red lips parting in a shocked O.

Allow the character to roleplay this awkward scene. Of course the option always exists for him to accept Thalia’s invitation, though it would mean the retiring of his character.

A few moments after the conversation is done, noise, like that of approaching men, catches the party’s attention.

Part Three: The Fighting Begins

You wheel toward the entryway weapon ready A score of figures faces you, yellow men in purple tunics with short swords in their hands. They surge in on you with hostile intent.

[Roll for Initiative]

[After the first round of combat, read the following]
Then behind you sounds a quiet faint scuffling noise, a half-choked gasp. Thalia and Natalia have vanished! A tapestry is settling into place as if it had been lifted from the wall.

The door is very heavy and bolted from the other side. It would be hard indeed to break it, especially while fending off the attackers. After three rounds of combat, read the next textbook which tells of more Xuthians approaching from behind.
It seems that the sounds of combat have awakened other sleeping members. More can be seen from the hallway from whence you came! But you remember a stairway from the room you just passed, and you can make it before the newcomers get to you.

[Assuming the party climbs the stairwell, only two fighters can fight alongside each other.]

As you reach the top, five golden robed figures face you. One draws a sword that sparkles with frost.
[Xuthalian Mages (4) (AC:3 (shield spell) HD:5 hp: 22 Mv:9 Th: 12 D: d6+6 SA: 18/00 ST from drugs, lasts one hour after waking  SD:  Sz:6 XP:250)]

[Xuthalian Mage Leader (4) (AC:3 (shield spell) HD:5 hp: 22 Mv:9 Th: 12 D: d6+9 SA: 18/00 ST from drugs, lasts one hour after waking  SD:  Sz:6  XP:550)]

Mage Abilities: ST: 18/00 (for the next 40 minutes) DX: 12 CON: 10 I: 16 W: 13 Ch: 13 CO: 11 PER: 14 (If you use my Conan Spellcasting Rules, remember these mage’s relatively low CON which could affect their spellcasting after a couple of spells)

The mages have the following spells at their disposal: Magic Missile, Shield, Blink, Light, Shocking Grasp (can be discharged on a successful sword attack), Melf’s Minute Meteors

**Sword of Cold** (leader’s sword): +3; can put out fire including Walls of Fire; provides protection from fire as per spell when drawn; does double damage vs fire-based creatures

While the battle with the mages continues, the Xuthian fighters below continue to press upwards. There seems an unlimited supply of Xuthian fighters….

Part Four: The Meeting with Thog
When the mages either retreat, or are dead, the PCs see the following.

You see a yellow-skinned woman, loaded with jeweled ornaments but otherwise nude staring at you with wide eyes. She reclines on a padded couch with a hand clutching a golden rope. With a swift motion, she jerks it and you plummet into darkness!

[Characters take 3d6 from the fall]

As you clear your head from the fall, you hear the wail of Natala. She is bathed in a red glow from a lamp in the wall. You also see a misshapen head come into view. At least you take it for a head though it is not the member of any sane or normal creature. You see a great toad-like face, the features of which are as dim and unstable as those of a specter seen in a mirror of nightmare. Great pools of light that might be eyes blink at Natala, and she shakes at the cosmic lust reflected there.

You can tell nothing about the creature's body. Its outline seems to waver and alter subtly even as you look at it, yet its substance is apparently solid enough. There is nothing misty or ghostly about it. As it moves you cannot tell whether it walks, wriggles, flies, or creeps. It method of locomotion absolutely beyond your comprehension. The light from the wall lamp did not illumine it as it should have illumined an ordinary creature. Impossible as it seems the being seems almost impervious to the light. You see several writhing tentacles waver in the air.

Thulia, the final player in this nightmare scene, is on the opposite wall her back flat against the stones. She too is bathed in a red glow from a lamp. Her panicked face, spins to meet your gaze. “Come!” she exhorts in a half-yell, half-whisper. “While Thog’s eyes greedily are fixed upon the girl! I will show you the way to freedom and the life of a king!” Her eyes are fixed directly upon [BID winner].

[Thog: (AC:3/1/-1/-3/-5 HD:9 hp:100 Mv:12 Th:7 D:d10 (bite) d5X2 (claws) d6X6 SA: poison SD: Sz:12' wide XP:15,000)]

Thog can attack several creatures at once.

If a tentacle hits, it wraps its victim with a 25% chance for each arm to be pinned. It takes 15 damage to sever such a tentacle. Those hit points do not come off of Thog’s main hit points. Thog will eventually regenerate over the course of weeks his lost tentacles. Once wrapped, the character takes d6 for each tentacle automatically each round. If a tentacle crits, use a d10 for damage (face is wrapped) but do not assign any other critical hit effects.

If a claw hits, character must make a saving throw vs poison every round for ten rounds or lose 1 CON point with each failed save;

If his bite hits, it just hurts.

Thog appearance wavers and altars. The effect of this is a displacement which causes all PCs to miss the first time they attack.
Thog also emits a glowing phosphorous green color when wounded. While making the creature more visible in darkness, it has an otherworldly property of making its displacement more effective. For every 20 points of damage, Thog’s AC drops by 2 until the point it has 20hp or less at which time its AC is -5. All PCs miss the first time they hit due to this displacement.

As Thog begins to take on a lot of damage, it will begin to move back to the open pit (see combat diagram). He begins with his “backside” 12’ from the pit’s edge. At 40 hp, he is 10’ from the edge; at 20 hp, he is 5’ from the edge; at 10hp or less, he falls backwards into the pit. Remember: any characters still caught within his tentacles at that point will be lost forever.

Thog is not above attacking the females; in fact he enjoys their taste very much. Remind the BID winner that he has an obligation to protect Natala. Thulia, on the other hand, may have to fend for herself. After the first round of attacks, she will attempt to move down the hallway out of range of the monster. She will attempt to use suggestion and charm spells on the BID winner (if they did not already succeed at the fountain) and take him away from the battle with Thog, leaving his comrades to their fate. She will escort him out to her room and make love with him.

Thulia as a Temptress (Enchanter) is barred from Invocation/Evocation & Necromancy
S: 10 D: 13 C: 12 I: 17 W: 10 Ch: 16 COM: 20 P: 15

Friends  Alter Self  Hold Person  Emotion  Domination
Burning Hands  ESP  Suggestion  Confusion  Telekinesis
Charm Person  Forget  Haste
Hypnotism  Bind
Instill Desire*
Shield

*Instill Desire creates a strong sexual link between the caster and recipient. Saves are at -2 if the caster’s COM is above 14 and she has the Allure trait. The recipient will not break social conventions to have sex with the caster but will take the first polite opportunity to do so.
Thog’s Death

Thog eerily silent, falls backwards from the edge of a great pit, invisible in the blackness of this dungeon. Its phosphorous glow illuminates the stark nothingness as you see it dwindle smaller and smaller, until its endless fall envelopes it a shroud of emptiness.

Part Five: Egress

If victorious over Thog, and Thulia is still alive, she will most likely be in her chamber with the BID. If somehow, she was unable to charm him, she will pursue her plans by escorting them all out of the dungeon, continuing to try to subtly charm him. She will resort to violence when all else seems lost. She will be distressed if Natala yet lives after the encounter with Thog (she led Natala down to the dungeon to feed her to Thog) and will postpone any defense or excuses, saying “exiting this infernal dungeon is the highest priority. All will be revealed soon enough.” She will believe her only recourse is to summon Xuthians to capture Natala and any who aid her, using extortion to get her way.

Otherwise, characters can stumble along making die rolls until, after a few rounds, they find stairs and a door with a golden bolt. This leads to a room with a fountain, decanter, golden wine, and a window.

The Golden Wine acts as a Heal spell; there are 3-5 doses in the decanter.
The character can exit the window but will have to deal with the 30’ drop to the ground below. If they remember Thulia’s description, the can head to the Oasis “a days march to the south,” and then the greener pastures another day’s march.

Part Six: Epilogue

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 1 level for each PC if Thog was defeated, ½ level otherwise, +/− ¼ 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:

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