

# LAST STAND

Ronak, the Hawk of the Hills waited QUIETLY in the silent trees surrounding the oasis. Already, the remnants of his followers had become little more than a cloud of dust, vanishing swiftly over the horizon. Hoping against hope, they PRAYED to make the safety of the Bargeer Mountains far to the south. Let them go. Their fate mattered little. They took a gamble and lost...now they had to pay the consequences. The revolt had been a failure. It had almost succeeded. Almost. But somewhere, somehow, something was not right and they had lost.

A sudden thunder of hooves from the East shook Ronak back to the threads of reality. Sound carried well in these barren hills for those who knew how to listen. Ronak could not be sure but thought there would be at least 100 of the elite of King Khazhak's army...what was left of it anyway. They would be here soon and no doubt at their head would be RHizair, a captain in Khazhak's army who had made a special point of bringing back his head.

Let them come. He wasn't going anywhere. He had no regrets. He gambled and lost and...well, he knew the risks were great. Perhaps he should have run with his tail between his legs like the rest of his men. Only a few, so pathetically few, had managed to break out of the slaughter when they had been suprised near Rhad Pass. He, Buckner and Jenslen, two of his best thick-sinewed lietenants, had tried to rally the rabble but it was too late. Two of Khazbak's top units had been totally cut to pieces by the aroused rebels but it had been too late. Hemmed in on three sides by a superior force three time the size and with an element of suprise on their side, had been just too much. Those who could, ran. Somehow Buckner had managed to pull him and a few top troopers from the battle in an attempt to get out before it was too late. NOW they vanished over the horizon with scant hopes of saving their own necks and maybe continuing the battle from the Bargeer Mountains.

He watched them go, still somehow hopeful, still somehow thinking that...

The hooves were louder now, he thought, as the sound brought him back from his thoughts. Let them come! He wasn't going to run! There was no point in it! End it here and now! Thoughts of the triumphant victors returning in glory to the capital city of CenZair flooded his mind. Almost simultaneously he thought of King Khazhak, who deserved today's victory and of all the syncopaths, the fawning syncopaths, who did not. Khazhak had fought hard and won, he at least had Ronak's grudging respect. The others, like Alih Drezzain, hopelessly incompetants in a world of hopeless incompetants, did not. Content with their snail-like minds, slowly grasping what went on around them if it did not relate to a few golden Gliders or court intrigues. Content to wallow in the splendor of the Court...a day-~~XXXX~~ to-day plodding existence. Oh, they had more than he had and would probably live longer than he would live.

He knew that. It didn't matter. He had gambled with a good chance of being many times higher in months than they would ever be in many lifetimes! Yet at the same time, he ran the risk of falling many levels below the lowest of them...if he failed! And he had failed! And some of them had laughed and skalked. Though known more for his brain than his fighting skill Ronak, The Hawk of the Hills was ever a topnotch fighting man in his own right. He'd proven it time and time again and now he was going to prove it for one last time! A chance to go down, fighting to the end in a cause in which he believed! That was all he had ever asked. Who could ask for more.

He could see them now, and realized how much he had underestimated their size. Instead of a mere 100 or so top soldiers, he now was face-to-face with about 300. Khazhak had apparently wanted to make doubly sure than he would NEVER

cause problems again. The body of troops waited a few paces from the oasis, while a small group of 10 or 12 approached the trees he waited beside. Ronak instantly recognized Rhizair and two of his officers, Slarth and Grolon immediately. All three were excellent swordsmen and he had seen their blades hard at work earlier that day. Many a good man had fallen under those blades and as swordsmen, they were as good if not better than Ronak himself. They approached.

"Really didn't think I'd find you here, Ronak. Thought you would have stayed back at the pass and fought it out. I'm really quite suprised."  
He surveyed their bodies. All were covered with blood and gore, though probably each had no more than just minor wounds. Their faces were sweaty and dirt-cked. It had been a busy afternoon.

"You know me. I've never run before, and I don't plan to now.-"

"Then why-"

"Let's get this over with." Ronak grunted. He was getting impatient.

"Your men?"

"Off to fight another day."

"I don't suppose you have any last words. Nor that you would consider surrendering. Despite your actions, Khazhak might be lenient on you, if..."

"Damn it, scumbag! Will you never finish? I didn't stop to listen to speeches!"

With that, Ronak tore into the group of horsemen, his heavy blade swinging in murderous arcs. His very proximity to the rest of the riders made it difficult for them to do much more than get in each others way. Grolon went down with his hands at his sides trying to keep his entrails from falling out of the ever widening rend in his lower abdomen. Two of Rhizair's men fell quickly, one with his right arm loped off, while the other clutched hopelessly at the remnants of a leg. Ronak stayed among them while moving as swiftly as the wind. Two horses had been skewered, falling over and pinning their riders beneath them. Gone was the more familiar cultured Ronak. Fighting Rhizair now was a battle maddened barbarian striking with the speed of lightning leaving dead and dying men in his wake. With the blood lust upon him, there was no stopping Ronak under these conditions and Rhizair knew it. While three or four of his dismounted men, led by Slarth gave battle, Rhizair re back to his 300 horsemen and gave the order to pursue Ronak's fleeing band of compatriots. Calling three archers to his side, Rhizak turned back to finish a somewhat unpleasant task. No use in wasting any more good men on Ronak. He admired his courage, but knew how it was when such men came under the influence of the blood lust. Even now he saw Slarth, lying in a heap and one of the other mens quivering jerking body lying nearby. Two swordsmen still pressed the attack and Ronakbled from a dozen wounds, all of them minor.

"Chasain! Marbain! Stand back!"

However, even as they moved back, Ronak, heedless of all danger, moved between them and in a thirce had cut both down. Whirling quickly he pulled out his dagger and hurled it with unerring accuracy at one of the bowmen, who, though almost notched up, was felled immediately! Realizing the urgency, he hurled his sword at the other archer, felling him also, but not before the archer got off a shot. Ronak's very act of hurling his sword was what saved him, for instead of burrying deep in his heart, merely passed through his left shoulder. The pain was intense and Ronak winced as the momentum of his charge carried him forward, just under the swooping swing of Rhyzair's wicked broadsword. Cursing loudly, Ronak scrambled for one of the horsemen's broadswords, while grasping a handful of sand at the same time. Rising bearly in time, he managed to fend off Rhyzair's latest wicked cut while casting sand in his eyes. Ronak grimaced with infinite pain as he realized the last archer had not been idle. The shaft in his back had not hit anything vital, but a rib felt quite broken and it took greater effort to turn and hurl the broadsword at the archer. That done, only a half blinded Rhyzair remained in fighting shape. Ronak pushed his pain wracked body to pick up another loose broadsword and was just in time to parry a wicked slice from the now dismounted Rhyzair's broadsword. Weak, with his strength almost gone,

Ronak knew he couldn't for more than a couple minutes of extended swordplay. His strength fading by the second, he staked everything on a low sweeping slash at Rhyzair's feet, though leaving himself totally unprotected in the attempt. This would have to be it. Fully expecting a sharp slice in his back momentarily Ronak felt his sword connect with something even as he landed on his pain wracked chest, pushing one arrow completely through and out the back of his left shoulder upon impact. The intensity of the pain of landing was so great that it took all the strength he had remaining to roll away for one last act of defiance. Blood ran down his forehead and his eyes refused to focus as he cursed silently. To die, skewered while half blind, unable to raise even a token defense was too much for Ronak to bear. Tumbling away while clearing his eyes, he managed to rise for one last time and was fully suprised to see no one in sight! He looked around quickly. Rhyzair was some ten feet from him, lying on the ground, both of his legs amputated at the knee. So, his last blind stroke had been luckier than he thought. Rhyzair was still alive, but out of commission. Ronak was amazed that he was still alive. He had taken a great deal of beating and bled from over a dozen swordcuts and two arrow wounds. The battle was not finished yet. He could still swing a sword and back there, back at Rhad pass, were some of the men who had ambushed his army. The battle was not over. Slowly he moved to his horse, deaf to Rhyzair's pleas for aid and he somehow managed to pull himself up in the saddle. Moving slowly, he managed to point his MOUNT in the direction of Rhad Pass. The horse began moving slowly in the direction of the battlefield as Ronak, the Hawk of the Hills tried to clear his mind. Ten or 15 more warriors had died beneath his blade today and more will soon follow. The charger with the drooping figure of Ronak moved slowly away from the oasis, away from his Last Stand.

The above fiction was composed on stencil, when I felt the urge to write something of the sort. There were a few rough places, but when composing on stencil one expects that sort of thing. Overall, I must confess that I was quite pleased with my effort and I hope you are too. If there are no major objections and maybe even a few words of encouragement, I may do a couple of other Ronak stories. Or perhaps collaborate with Bill the Barbarian on one.

Specificly regarding REHupa #12, I must say I was not too impressed with the overall production. Loay, your mimeo must have really been on the blink because I sure had a heck of a time reading your zines. Why you printed on one side of the paper I'll never know, but I guess it was related to your mimeo acting up.

On another note, I'd like to say that I think certain care should go in the assembling and mailing out of REHupa. Bill Whitcomb tells me that his copy of REHupa #12 was missing Eric Carlson's 'Conan at Lancer' and his copy carried the hand scribbled notation 'apazines missing'. Granted a member might not send enough copies, but it seems to me in such a case, members should get complete copies first and people on Speculation (if there are any) should be given the incomplete copies (if there are any). I suppose that Bill can always write to Eric for an extra copy, but I can't help thinking this shouldn't have happened. Hmm... I seem to be running out of space. Till next issue...

BEST *Rich*

TIM: THANKS FOR YOUR WORDS OF SYPATHY ABOUT MY AILMENT. I'M OVER IT NOW, BUT FOR AWHILE THE GOING WAS ROUGH. THERE'S NOTHING QUITE LIKE A SIX WEEK ILLNESS TO MAKE ONE APPRECIATE GOOD HEALTH.