SUMMARY

One of the ship’s crewmen was roleplaying as Conan the Barbarian when the holodeck malfunctioned. With the safeties off and the program refusing to shut down, it’s up to the senior officers to don furs, hoist iron weapons, and rescue their crewman from the wicked sorcerer Yara’s talled tower—before Yara can complete his blood ritual.

SPECIAL NOTES

Hacking the Holodeck

Inside the holodeck, players can hack the program for cool effects. Spend a bennie to gain the use of any Savage Worlds Deluxe power (besides Healing) for the duration of the ‘scene’, with Knowledge (Computers) as the casting skill. The casting roll is penalized by half the power’s listed PP (round down). Failing a roll, or rolling 1 on the skill die, causes the intended power to backfire entertainingly/painfully. Bennies can also be spent to materialize items and call the exit, both of which require a Knowledge (Computers) –2 check.

Story Background

REQUIRES: Players’ ship must have a holodeck.

When a plasma storm hit the ship, the holodeck character Yara briefly melded with the ship’s sensors, granting him visions of life outside the holodeck. Yara knows that “Conan” is from beyond his world, and he’s conducting a blood ritual to grant himself further visions from this “trans-cosmic realm.”

I use the name “Conan” to refer to the imperilled crewman. Use someone your players care about.

INTRO: COME BACK LATER

The plasma storm knocked your ship out of warp and damaged all major systems. You had to work a double shift to get everything back in order, and now you’re determined to have some fun. Heading down to Holodeck 1 for your scheduled slot, you are soon disappointed to find a program already running inside. You check the user’s name.

If they attempt to contact “Conan,” they’ll hear his moans of pain, accompanied by rattling chains. Then a voice begins to chant softly: “\’hagh sygn\’wahl goka bluj ro\’ niyaat...” This will continue for hours, with “Conan’s” moans growing fainter until he dies. A Knowledge (Computers) check reveals...

- The holodeck safeties have malfunctioned
- The holodeck won’t respond to commands
- The program will terminate when the story ends.
- The program’s title is encrypted for privacy, but Knowledge (Computers) –2 reveals it’s an adaptation of ‘The Tower of the Elephant’ by Robert E. Howard.

ZAMORA, THE CITY OF THIEVES

Upon entering the holodeck, have the trope’s leader roll Agility to avoid a pitcher of sour-smelling wine hurled at his head. Welcome to The Maui, a seedy district in the belly of Zamora, the City of Thieves. They begin in a riotous, torch-lit tavern.
A stranger calling himself Conan the Cimmerian passed through The Maul last night. He was overheard whispering with a local thief about “the elephant’s heart,” then he killed the thief in a brawl and disappeared.

Speaking to a thief, fence, or cultist, the officers can discover that The Elephant’s Heart is a jewel owned by Yara, the most powerful sorcerer-priest in Zamora. His tower is in the Priests District of the city, and even the King is afraid of his power.

Streetwise -2: Servants are sometimes seen carting bodies to a ditch outside the tower’s walls. They’re drained of blood, with bite marks and webs still clinging to them.

Also in The Maul is a merchant, Bakafa, a cunning boy who will sell the players iron weapons, thick hides and ringmail, and so forth. Where the would-be adventurers get money to trade is up to them.

HYBORIAN GARDENS

Yara’s estate is walled, and each gate is held by 1d6 undead guards (as ‘Zombie’ in Savage Worlds Deluxe, but armed with short swords and bows). Inside the wall is a garden of thick foliage from all over Hyboria. The corpse of a lioness may be spotted in this jungle: “Conan” came this way. At the centre of the garden is Yara’s obsidian tower, a ten-storey spire.

- 1 Lion per player hides in the foliage, ready to pounce (stats in Savage Worlds Deluxe).
- 6 Stone Gargoyles patrol the skies. (As ‘Zombie’, plus Flying d6 and armed with spears and slings)

The tower has no discernible entrance, but a balcony can be spotted near its peak, ten storeys up.

Split the climb into 3 Athletics tests. Climbers will suffer -2 to the skill roll without proper equipment.

If a player wonders how “Conan” ascended the tower, she can roll Notice to find his coal-black rope still dangling from the balcony railing. +2 to Athletics, and falls will be treated as Bumps & Bruises.

Each round, have the climb’s leader roll Stealth vs. the Gargoyles’ Notice. Gargoyles will attack, knock climbers down, and generally harass them.

KALANTIA’S HUNTING GROUNDS

On the balcony, the cool wind and awesome view of Zamora at night restore a level of Fatigue.

After catching their breath, the adventurers can push past a heavy curtain into the tower’s damp labyrinth of tight corridors, rooms, and stairwells.

Dramatic Task: Navigating to Yara’s chambers:

- Notice or Tracking (all checks at -2, as usual).
- 5 Successes are needed to find Yara’s ritual chamber (see ‘The Tower of the Elephant’, below).
- There is no round limit, but the longer they take, the harder “Conan’s” rescue will be later.

Kalantia, a giant spider, hunts these corridors. Each round, she strikes from doorways, cellars, rafters, etc. in hit-and-run attacks.

Treasure: A Raise on Notice/Tracking also discovers a storeroom filled with gems, ivory statuettes, rugs, and gleaming weapons.

A spider the size of a draft horse. Her thick hide has been recently gashed from a battle with “Conan”.

Attributes: Agi d10, Sm d4(A), Sp d6, Str d12+2, V d8
Skills: Athletics d12+2, Fighting d10, Intimidation d10 Notice d8, Shooting d10, Stealth d12
Pace: 8; Parry: 6; Toughness: 6+4=10 (thick hide)

Special Abilities:

- Bite: Str+d6: POISON: If wounded, roll Vig (-4) or suffer a level of Fatigue!
- Web: Casts from her thorax (Shooting) and affects 2 victims. If hit, victims are entangled and all actions are at -4 until the web is broken (Toughness 7).
- Hardy

THE TOWER OF THE ELEPHANT

You emerge into Yara’s ritual chamber, a vaulted dome centered around a stone altar. Incense burns and lanterns cast wild shadows. To one side, a deceased humanoid creature with the oversized head of an elephant lies manacled to the floor. But that’s not all. Dangling above the altar, chained up by his wrists and gagged, is “Conan.” His blood drips onto a fisting-sized ruby sitting on the altar, while a dark wraith of a man stands behind the gemstone, fingers bent, chanting in a low voice. His scowl deepens at your approach, and an army of skeletons clatter out from their recesses.

Yara is defended by at least 4d10 Skeletons (stats in Savage Worlds Deluxe), and perhaps some other creatures—use your discretion. Yara himself is absorbed in the ritual, and will not fight.

If the players navigated the tower’s corridors in 4 or fewer turns, they burst in with Surprise and have 6 rounds before “Conan” dies. If they needed 6 or more turns, Yara’s minions are ready: they have Surprise, and the players have only 4 rounds to rescue “Conan.” If they needed exactly 5 turns, neither side has Surprise, and “Conan” will die after 5 rounds.

If the players do anything that demonstrates beyond a doubt that they’re from the “trans-cosmic realm,” Yara may stand down (see below).

YARA

Cruelty and a quest for power define his existence; there is no hell that would not welcome him.

Attributes: Agi d6, Sm d12+2, Sp d10, Str d10, V d10
Parry: 6; Toughness: 7+6=13 (mage armor)

If you need more stats, use ‘Lich’ in Savage Worlds Deluxe, except Yara is not undead.

THE TRANS-COSMIC REALM

If Yara is incapacitated, his army defeated, or he realizes the officers hail from “the trans-cosmic realm,” he’ll throw himself at their feet and beg to become their servant in this world, in exchange for “Conan.” He lusts for magic, secrets, and immortality.

To end the program, the heroes can kill Yara or trap his soul inside the Heart of the Elephant (by dripping the elephant creature’s blood on it). Or, they can take Yara’s offer and leave the program running for him to become god-emperor over all Hyboria, and a permanent fixture of the holodeck.