

Dufaux - Xavier

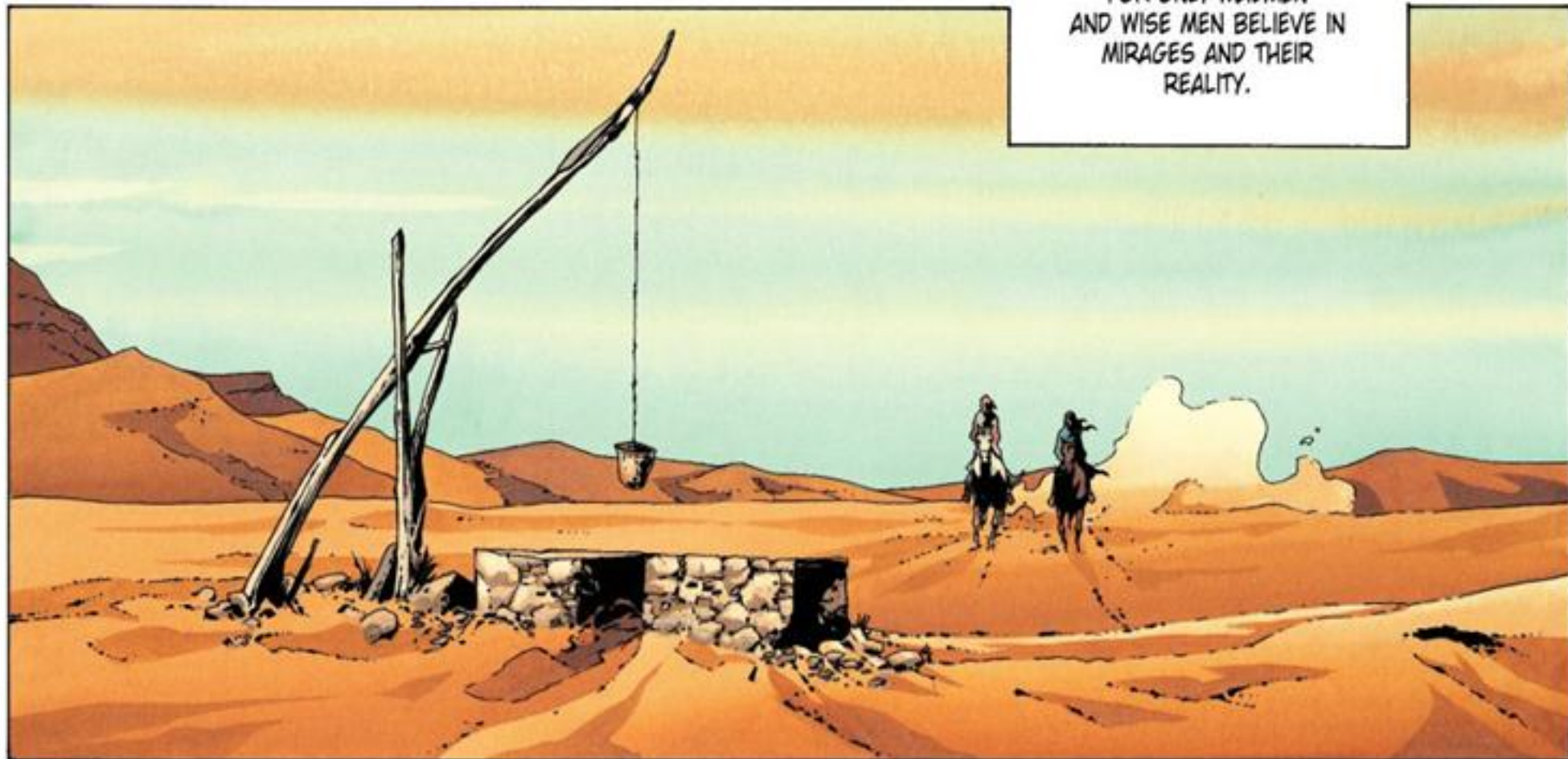
CRUSADE

2 - QA'DJ



IT IS SAID THAT THE SUN THAT
RULES OVER THE SANDS OF IMAN
THE IMPURE CAN RENDER A MAN
CRAZY, OR WISE.

FOR ONLY MADMEN
AND WISE MEN BELIEVE IN
MIRAGES AND THEIR
REALITY.



HEAVENS... IF WE HADN'T FOUND
THIS WELL, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN THE
END OF US. WE HAVEN'T HAD A DROP
TO DRINK IN THREE DAYS.

I MUST
CONFESS I HAD
LOST HOPE.



A PITY THERE
IS NO SHADE FOR
THE HORSES.



!!?



OH, NO!

WHAT?...
WHAT IS IT?





WHAT...
WHAT IS THAT
THING!?

THAT WHEEL WAS
PROBABLY PART OF
A WAR MACHINE.



!! DO...
DO YOU MEAN
THAT...

YES. THE LORD OF THE MACHINES
CAME THROUGH HERE. HE HADN'T
BEEN ON THE MOVE IN A LONG TIME.
THE MIGHT OF HIS ARMS MUST BE
TERRIFYING BY NOW.



THE FACT REMAINS THAT
THIS WATER IS NO LONGER
DRINKABLE. ALL THAT BELONGS
TO THE LORD OF THE MACHINES
IS STEEPED IN PESTILENCE.



THEN WE
ARE TRULY
LOST.

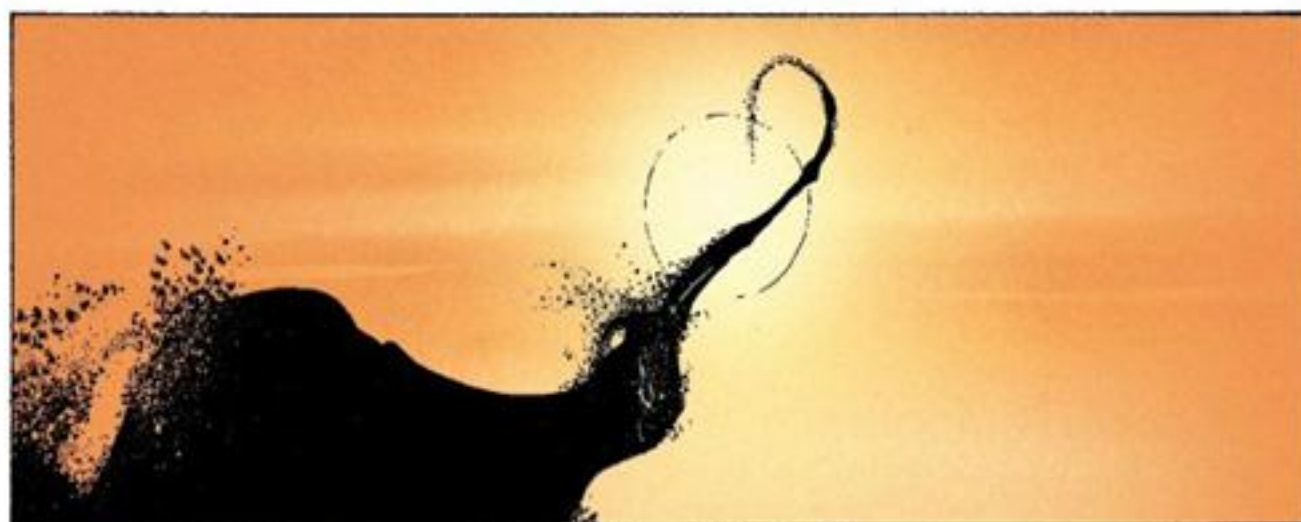
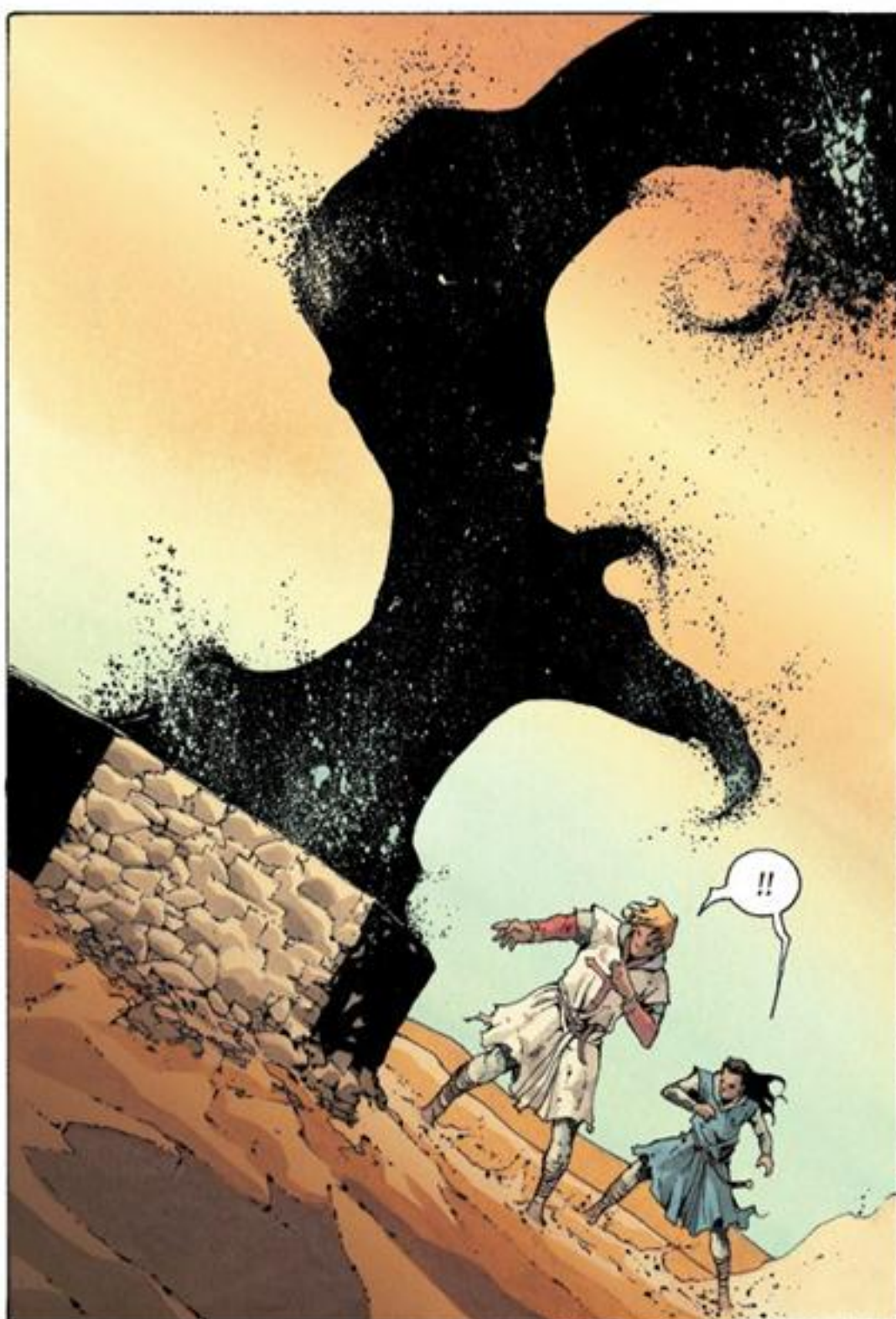


NOT
NECESSARILY.
YOU SHOULDN'T BE
ABANDONING HOPE
SO QUICKLY.

!??



IT IS ALL A QUESTION OF
FAITH. YOU MUST LOOK BEYOND
APPEARANCES. THEY CAN BE SO
DECEIVING, APPEARANCES.





WILL YOU NOT DRINK?...
ARE YOUR WATER SKINS
STILL FULL, THEN?



NO,
WAIT.

EVERYTHING HAS A
PRICE IN THE DESERT.
WHAT IS YOURS, OLD
MAN, FOR THESE TWO
CUPS OF WATER?



YOU ARE DYING OF THIRST,
AND YET YOU RESIST. LIKE YOU
RESISTED DEFEAT AND DISHONOUR.
YOUR WISDOM IS TRUE, GAUTHIER
OF FLANDERS. YOU WILL NOT
DISAPPOINT ME. AND SINCE YOU
SPEAK OF PRICE...



KNOW THAT
I WILL NOT ASK
MUCH OF SUCH A
VALIANT HEART
AS YOURS.



JUST A MIRROR
THAT BELONGS TO
SYRIA OF ARCOS.
SHE WILL NOT BE
ABLE TO REFUSE
YOU ONCE SHE
HEARS THAT
I SAVED YOUR
LIFE.



YOU SEEM
TO KNOW MUCH.
ARE YOU A SAND
DEMON?



I AM LIKE YOU.
I NEED TO QUENCH
MY THIRST WHEN
MY THROAT FEELS
PARCHED.

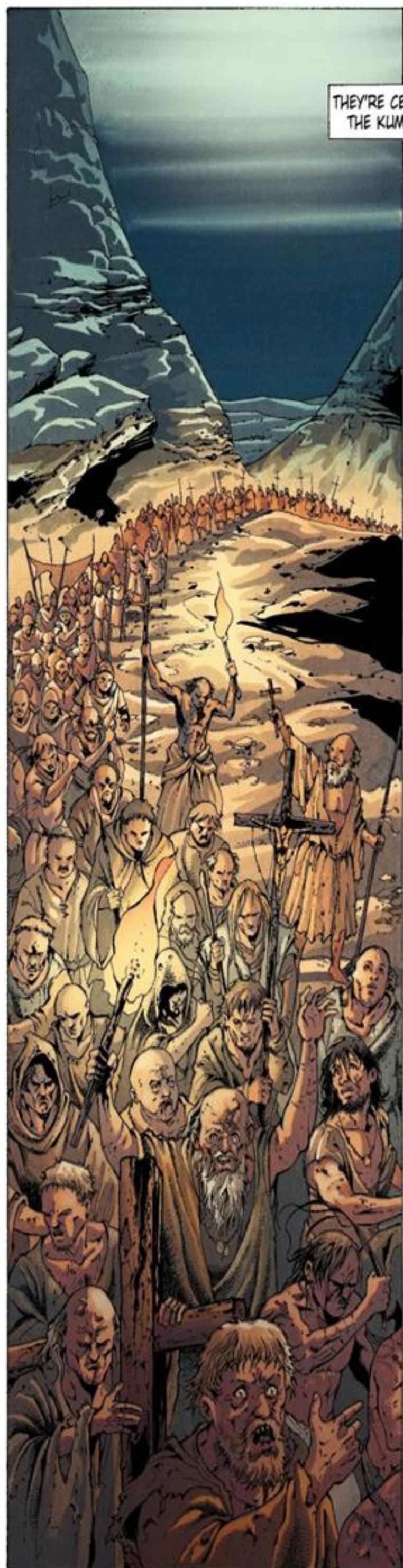
GAUTHIER...
I... I THINK I'M
GOING TO FAINT.



YES.
DEATH
APPROACHES.







THEY'RE CELEBRATING
THE KUM DIRVHA.



BBBOONNGG





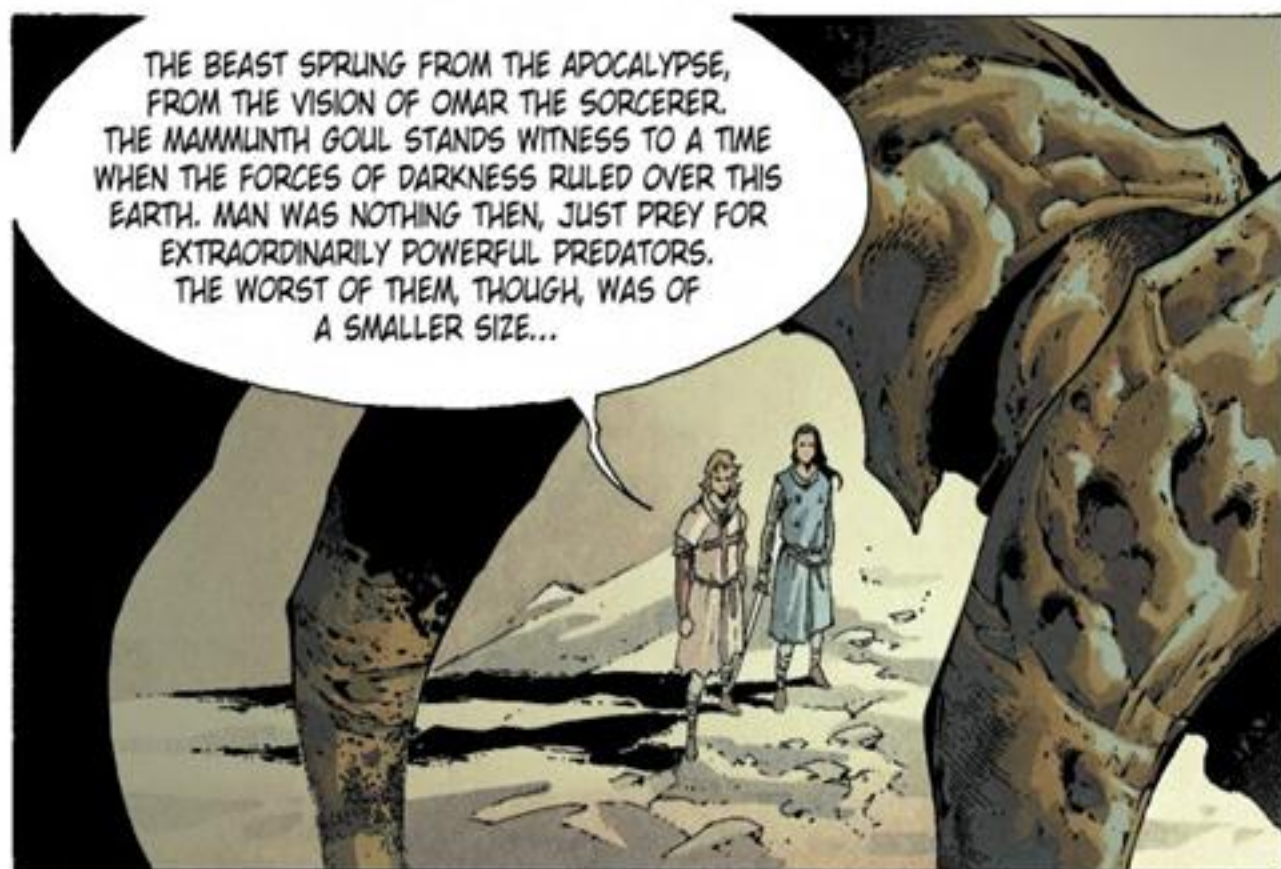


BBOONNGG
BBOONNGG
BBOONNGG









SPEAK FOR YOURSELF! THE CHRISTIAN ARMIES HAVE SUFFERED SERIOUS DEFEATS AT THE HANDS OF ABDUL RAZIM. YOUR LORD, GRÉGOIRE OF ARCOS, PERISHED DURING THE LAST BATTLE. THEY SAY THAT ROBERT OF TARANTO SUCCEEDED HIM—A CHOICE THAT IS NOT TO MY TASTE.

REALLY?... WHO WOULD HAVE BEEN YOURS?

THE MAN STANDING BEFORE ME, GAUTHIER OF FLANDERS.

!!?

I WASN'T EXPECTING TO BE UNMASKED SO QUICKLY, BUT IT'S BETTER THIS WAY, AFTER ALL. YOU, AT LEAST, KNOW WHO YOU'RE ADDRESSING...

DO NOT WORRY; I WILL NOT FAIL ALL MY DUTIES AS A HOST...

I AM NAMED OSARIAS. AS YOU CAN SEE, THE QA'DJ LEFT HIS MARK ON ME!

YOU SURVIVED. THAT IS A LOT ALREADY. YOUR NAME SEEMS FAMILIAR TO ME...

YOU MAY HAVE HEARD IT FROM A WOMAN, SYRIA OF ARCOS. I AM INDEBTED TO HER. SOMETIMES, I TRY TO REPAY IT.

!!

THE AA! HE IS BEHIND ONE OF THE DOORS!





IT IS NOT
A LEGEND, THEN?

NO. AND I CAN PROVE
IT TO YOU IF YOU WISH
TO DEFEAT THE AA.

DEFEATING
THE AA WOULD MEAN
FREEDOM FOR
MY PEOPLE.



WHAT ABOUT
OTTAR BENK?... HE
HOLDS THE POWER OF
LIFE AND DEATH OVER
YOU AND YOURS.

OTTAR BENK WILL
RESTORE OUR
PRIVILEGES TO US
IF WE OFFER HIM
THE AA'S REMAINS.

THAT SUITS ME.
IT IS A FREE PEOPLE
I NEED.

TO FIGHT AGAINST
THE INFIDEL? DO YOU
NOT TRUST ROBERT,
DUKE OF TARANTO, OR
YOUR WIFE ELENORE
OF ARCOS?



ELENORE.
I DISAPPOINTED HER.
SHE DREAMED OF A
GREAT WARRIOR WHO
WOULD LEAD HIS
TROOPS TO VICTORY.
I IMAGINE THAT A MAN
SUCH AS ROBERT WILL
BETTER SUIT HER
EXPECTATIONS.

EXPECTATIONS THAT SEEM
QUITE DIFFERENT FROM THOSE
OF HER SISTER...

OF SYRIA?
YES, I LIKE TO THINK
THAT SHE UNDERSTANDS
THINGS BETTER.



MY FRIEND IS IN LOVE. NOT WITH THE ONE
HE SHOULD BE LOVING, BUT WITH THE ONE
HE IS FORBIDDEN FROM LOVING. THAT IS
WHAT YOU WOULD CALL LOOKING FOR
PLEASURE WITHIN PAIN. BUT I DON'T
JUDGE HIM. EVERY MAN IS ENTITLED
TO HIS OWN TORMENTS.



YOU ACCURSED
BEAST! YOURS ARE
ONLY BEGINNING!

AAAAAYEEEEEE!



NONETHELESS...
YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE
LEFT SYRIA OF ARCOS
ALONE...





DO I NOT DISGUST YOU, THEN?

YOUR SOUL COULD TASTE OF ASH AND I WOULD STILL DIP MY LIPS IN IT.



WHAT NONSENSE IS THIS?... THE DEVIL, MY CHILD, CANNOT TAKE REFUGE AMONG US! WE ARE CHILDREN OF CHRIST, BATHED IN HIS ALL-POWERFUL GOODNESS.



FAR FROM THE DARKNESS THAT YOU DESCRIBED TO ME! ANYWAY, WHERE DID YOU OBTAIN THIS MIRROR?

FROM... A MOST HOLY APPARITION: THE LIGHT OF THE MARTYRS.

!! YOU MOCK ME, MY CHILD! THAT LIGHT ONLY APPEARS TO THE WOUNDED ON THE BATTLEFIELD, JUST BEFORE DEATH COMES UPON THEM.

DEATH CAME NEAR, BUT I MANAGED TO DEFEAT IT. AND THE MIRROR WAS GIVEN TO ME.

THAT... THAT MIRROR IN WHICH THE IMAGE OF THE DEVIL IS REFLECTED... IT MUST BE DESTROYED! IT IS A DEMONIC GIFT THAT COULD CAST DOUBT AMONG THE FAITHFUL!





AND WHAT DID
THE PRELATE
SAY?



HE BELIEVES THAT MY
POOR SISTER HAS LOST HER
MIND. HE ASKED ME TO LOOK
AFTER HER, TO STOP HER FROM
COMMITTING SOME ACT OF FOLLY
THAT WOULD SOW DISORDER AMONG
OUR ARMIES. LASTLY, AND ABOVE
ALL, THERE IS THAT MIRROR THAT
SEEMS TO UPSET HIM
GREATLY.

HE'S NOT THE
ONLY ONE...



I PROMISED THE
PRELATE THE MIRROR.
IN EXCHANGE...

YES?...

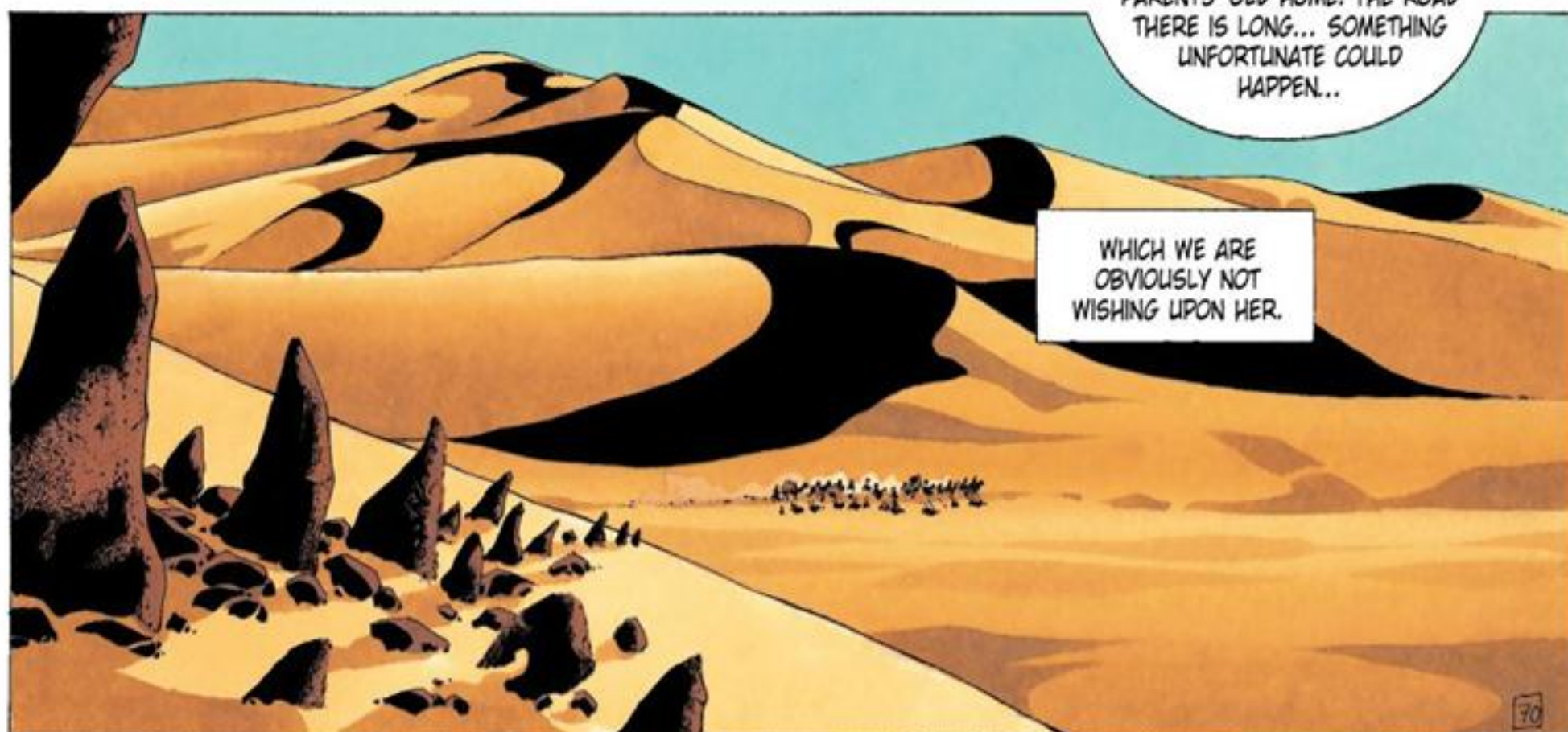


HE LEAVES SYRIA UP TO US.
WE BOTH THINK THAT IT IS
BETTER FOR HER TO GET
AWAY FROM THE COURT
FOR SOME TIME.

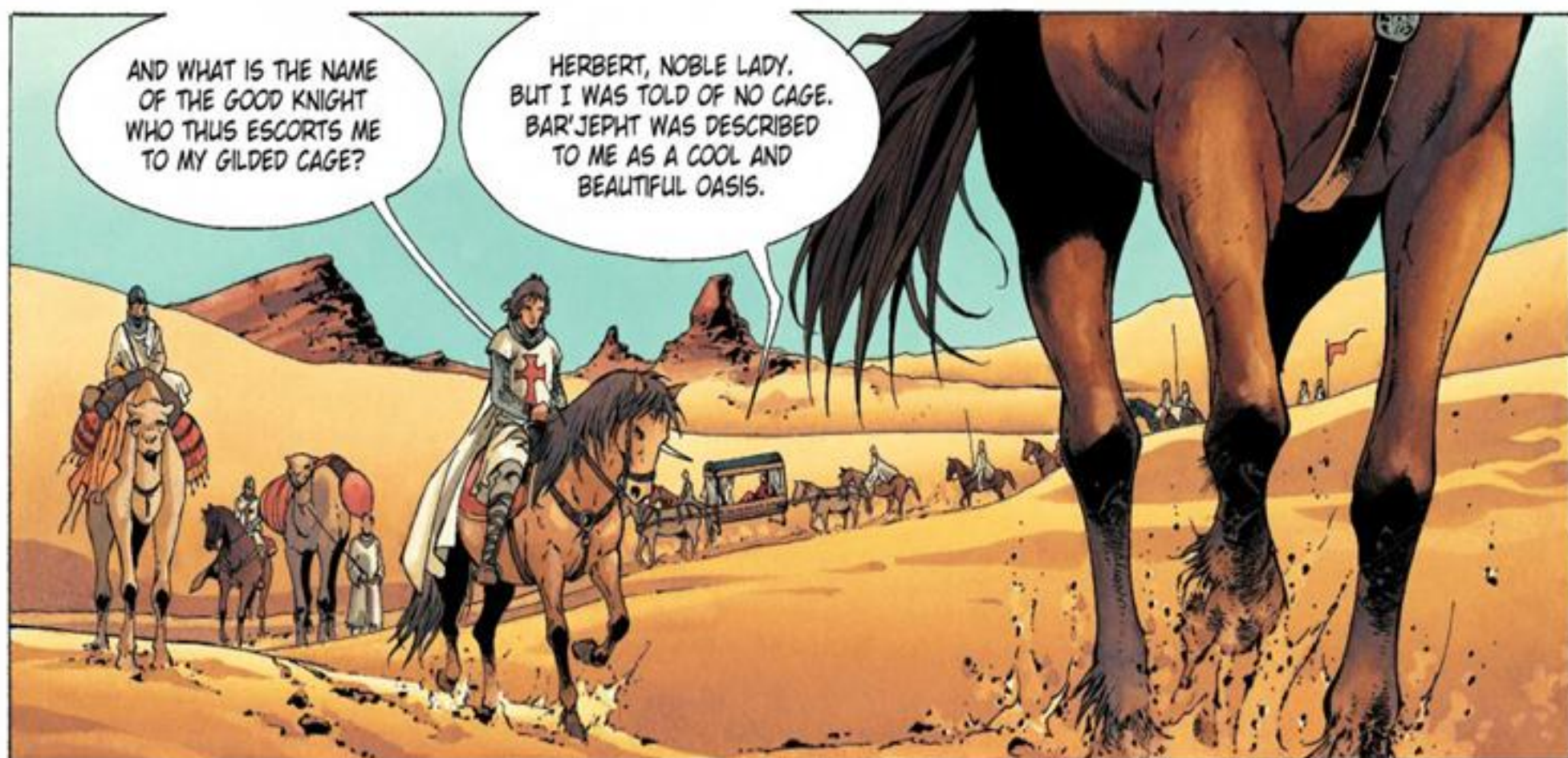


AND WHAT
DO YOU INTEND
TO DO?

I AM HER ELDER.
I ORDERED HER TO
GO TO BAR'JEPHT, TO OUR
PARENTS' OLD HOME. THE ROAD
THERE IS LONG... SOMETHING
UNFORTUNATE COULD
HAPPEN...



WHICH WE ARE
OBVIOUSLY NOT
WISHING UPON HER.



AND WHAT IS THE NAME
OF THE GOOD KNIGHT
WHO THUS ESCORTS ME
TO MY GILDED CAGE?

HERBERT, NOBLE LADY.
BUT I WAS TOLD OF NO CAGE.
BAR'JEPHT WAS DESCRIBED
TO ME AS A COOL AND
BEAUTIFUL OASIS.

AN OASIS SURROUNDED BY ENDLESS SANDS.
WOE BE TO THEM WHO TRY TO ESCAPE IT
ON THEIR OWN. I FEAR I MAY NEVER
SEE THE COURT AGAIN.

BUT I AM TAKING MY MIRROR WITH ME.
BESIDES, GAUTHIER WILL BE WORRIED
AT MY ABSENCE...



OH! WHAT'S
THAT DUST CLOUD
THERE!?



INFIDELS!...
THEY'VE SEEN
US!

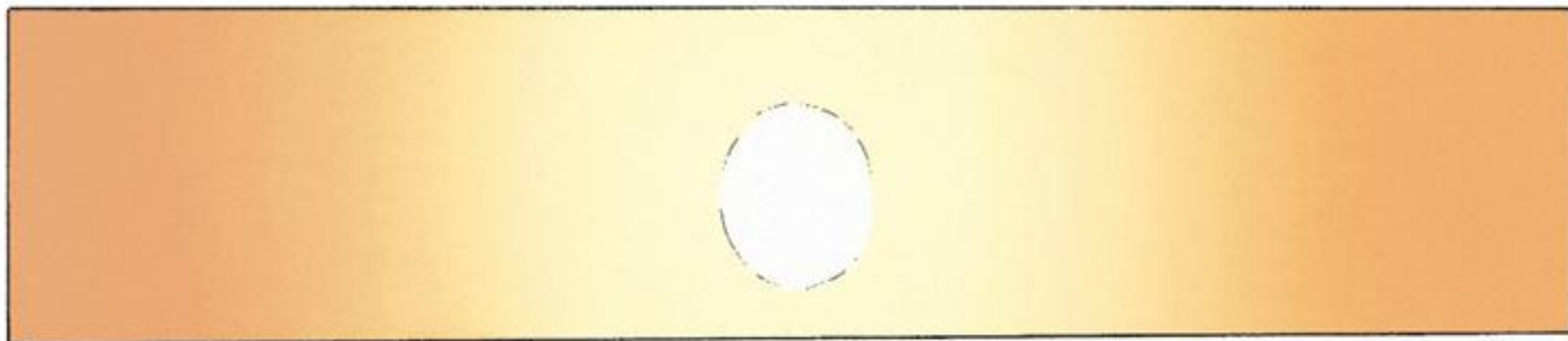
LADY SYRIA, TURN BACK AND GET
AWAY QUICKLY!... BRANT, GIVE
HER ONE OF THE HORSES!











MAYBE THEY SEE IN IT THE
IMAGE OF THEIR IMPENDING
DOOM...

WA...
WATER...

THIS ONE IS
STILL ALIVE!

I... I
RECOGNISED
THEM...

WHO?... YOUR
ATTACKERS?

YES...
THEY... THEY
WERE OF... SAREK
PASHA'S... TRIBE.

CAN HE
SPEAK?

DID... MY MISTRESS...
ESCAPE THEM?

WHAT
MISTRESS?...
WHOM DO YOU
SPEAK OF?

I THINK SO.

SYRIA...
MOST NOBLE LADY...
SYRIA OF ARCOS...



SYRIA OF ARCOS?...
ARE YOU CERTAIN YOU
HEARD RIGHT?

CERTAIN.



I CANNOT BELIEVE THAT ONE OF OUR TRIBES
WOULD HAVE HAD THE AUDACITY TO ABDUCT
A CHRISTIAN PRINCESS. IT IS A BARBARIC
ACT TO ASSAULT A WOMAN THUS.
WE MADE AN AGREEMENT WITH
OUR ENEMIES ON THAT
SUBJECT.

ALAS!
I'M AFRAID IT IS
NOW BROKEN.



NO. IT WILL NOT BE
SAID THAT I, ABDUL RAZIM,
MASTER OF THE CRESCENT
AND THE SANDS, BROKE MY
WORD. WHO IS THIS
SAREK PASHA?

A MERCENARY.
HIS TRIBES HELPED US CONQUER
THE TOWN OF ESQUIRABA. SINCE
THEN, HE'S RETIRED TO HIS LANDS.
HE IS A VIOLENT MAN, DEVOID OF
SCRUPLES, WHO SHOWS LITTLE
RESPECT FOR THE PRECEPTS OF
THE PROPHET MAMUDI.
WHAT'S MORE...



WHAT'S
MORE...?

... HE...
HE IS AFFLICTED
WITH ISIS'S
ILLNESS.

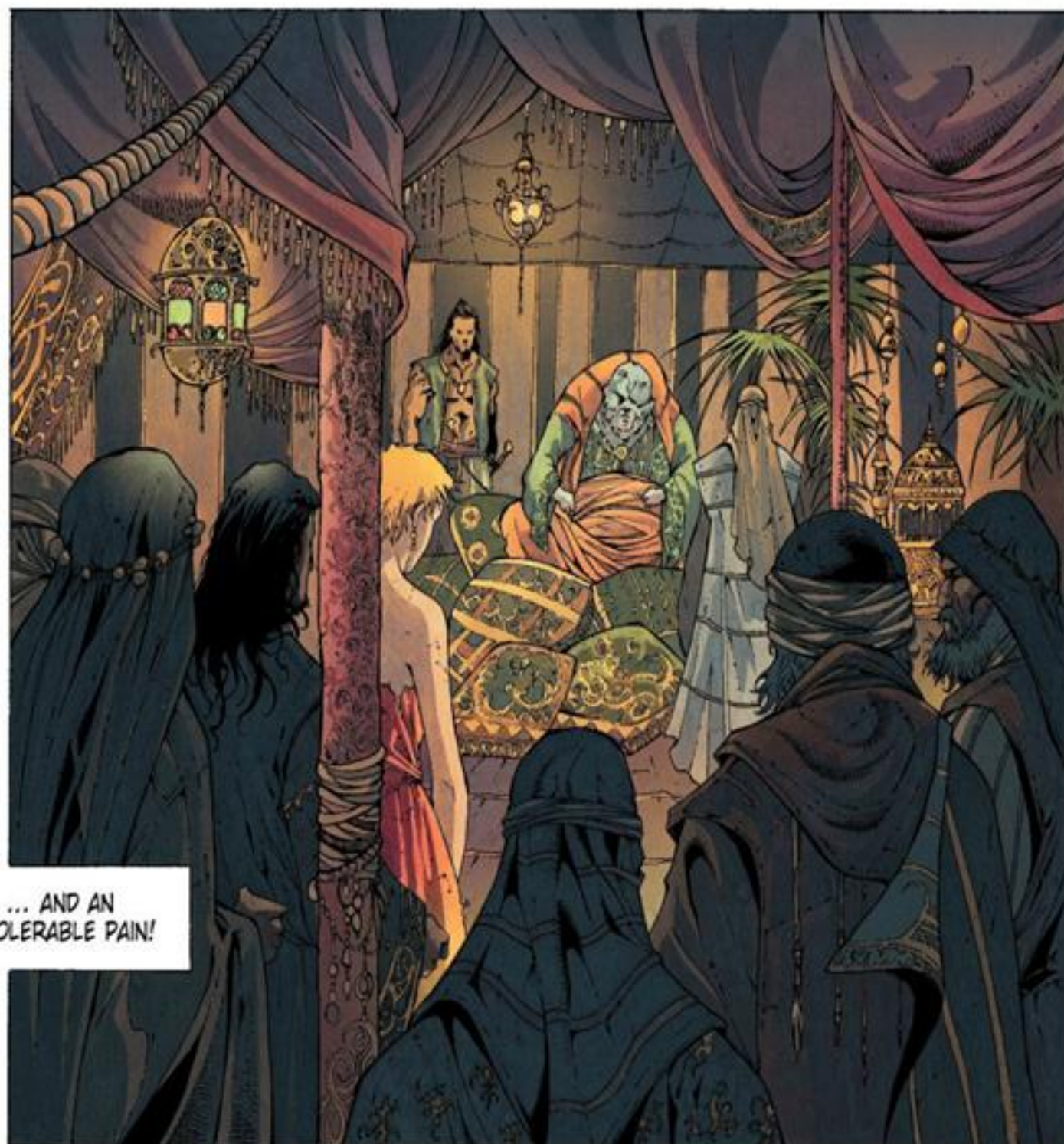


THE CHRISTIAN
PRINCESS RISKS
THE MOST HIDEOUS
OF DEATHS.

SAREK PASHA IS A MONSTER.
HE SEEKS BEAUTY, FOR BEAUTY
IS INSUFFERABLE TO HIM. ALL HE
CAN THINK ABOUT IS CORRUPTING
IT. HIS HAREM IS CRAWLING WITH
BODIES OVERCOME BY ROT AND
DECAY. EACH NEW VICTIM IS A
PLEASURE TO HIM...



... AND AN
INTOLERABLE PAIN!



I ACCEPT HER.
SHE IS BEAUTIFUL.
REMOVE HER DRESS
AND DRAW BACK
HER ARMS.



AAAAHHHHH!



GOOD...
GOOD...



YOU OLD GOAT!
ARE YOU SATISFIED,
NOW?





YOU ARE TOO GENEROUS. A GOAT HAS A SHAPE—WHEREAS I NO LONGER HAVE ONE. I HAVE ENOUGH LEFT TO HONOUR YOU FOR A FEW NIGHTS. AFTERWARDS, I WILL GIVE YOU TO MY MEN—THOSE WHO, LIKE ME, SUFFER IN THEIR FLESH. HOPELESS CRIPPLES OVER WHOM, IN ANOTHER LIFE, YOU WOULDN'T EVEN HAVE CAST A SINGLE LOOK.





THE MIRROR
WAS DELIVERED TO
THE CHRISTIANS.



!?



NO... THIS...
THIS IS NOT I... THIS...
IS NOT MY FACE...



LORD! T... TELL
ME THIS IS NOT
POSSIBLE!!!



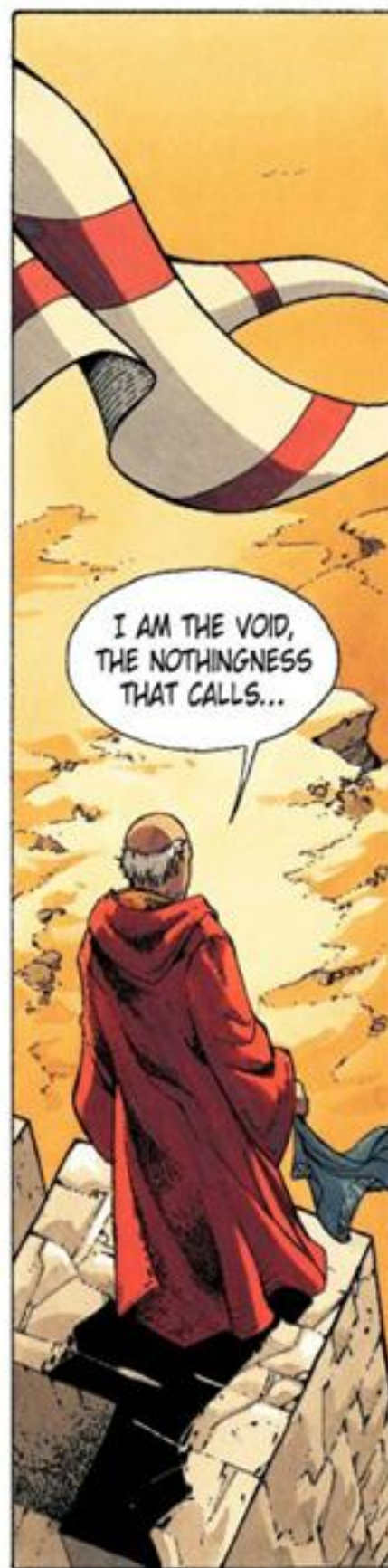
NOT POSSIBLE...
NOT POSSIBLE!!!



THE HOLY LIGHT
HAS LEFT... THE DEVIL
ALONE RULES...



I SAW
THE FACE OF
THE DEMON...





BOOM





THE MASTER OF MACHINES!!!



IS... IS
HE COMING TO
JOIN US... OR
ATTACK US?



I REQUESTED HIS
ASSISTANCE.

YOU?... BUT... BUT
YOU DIDN'T TELL ME!
IT MUST HAVE COST
YOU A FORTUNE!!?



ONE DOES NOT COUNT
WHEN THE STAKES ARE
THE LIBERATION OF THE
MOST HOLY X3.





BEHOLD THIS
ASTROLABE...



... A GIFT FROM THE MASTER
OF MACHINES TO THE
CHRISTIAN LORDS. TO SEAL
THE PACT THAT BINDS US.



FOR THREE MONTHS.
FROM THE FIRST CREAK OF
THE ASTROLABE TO ITS FINAL
REVOLUTION. FOR THIS TIME
GIVEN TO THE CHRISTIANS,
MY MASTER WAS PAID ONE
MILLION DRACHMAS.



ONE MILLION!!!



IF ONLY THAT
WAS ALL!



DAUGHTER OF ARCOS,
THE HONOUR IS YOURS.
START THIS DEVICE OF TIME,
SPACE AND THE GLORIES
TO COME...



AND YOUR
MASTER?

THE DEVICE FIRST.
THEN HE SHALL
SEE YOU.



SO BE IT!

CLACK!!



TWO DAYS! TWO DAYS HE HAS BEEN STAYING UNDER OUR WALLS WITHOUT EVER SHOWING HIS FACE! THE ARROGANCE! IS HE HIDING BECAUSE OF HOW HIDEOUS HE IS!?



YOU WILL SOON KNOW. I HAVE BEEN ORDERED TO TAKE YOU TO HIM.



NO, NOT YOU! HER!

!!



HOLD... SOMETIMES IT IS BETTER TO LET SOME THINGS PASS...

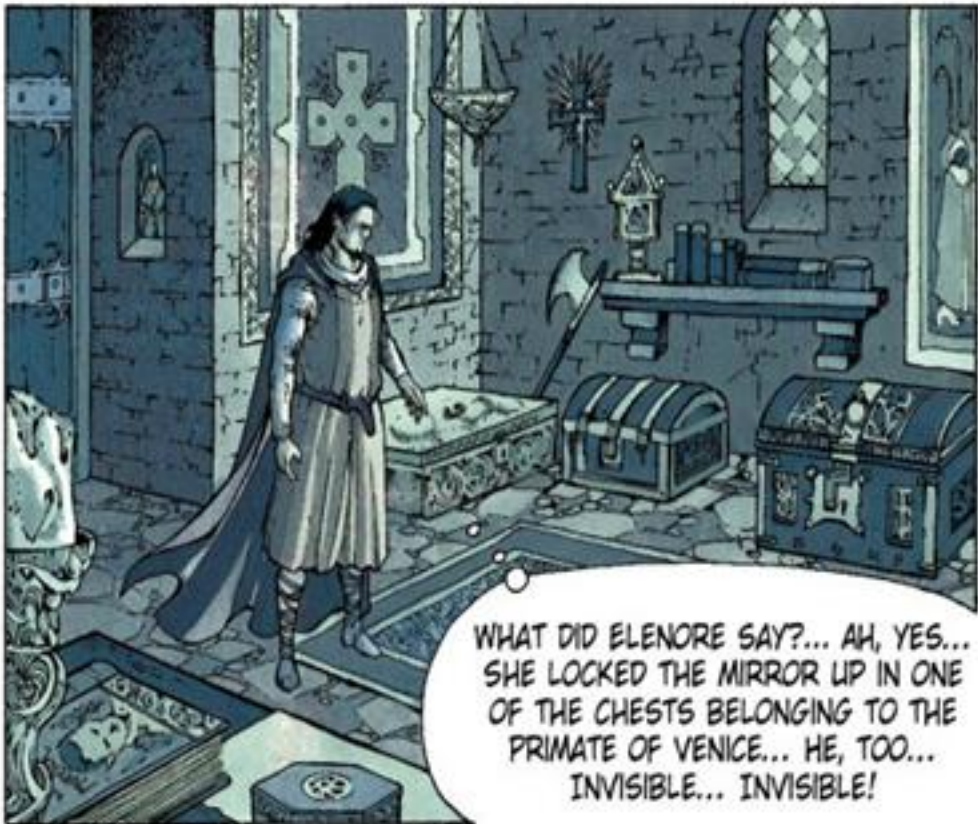
BUT WHY!?!?



BECAUSE THE SIGN THAT REPRESENTS YOU ON THE ASTROLABE HAS VANISHED.



YOUR SOUL NO LONGER BELONGS TO THIS TIME. THE INVISIBLE HAS CLAIMED YOU.













SHE DRANK
THE WINE OF
ABANDON.



SAREK PASHA WILL
BE SATISFIED.



CAN YOU HEAR
ME?

DO YOU
RENOUNCE ALL
SELF WILL?

YES.

YES.



ARE YOU READY
TO RECEIVE YOUR
MASTER?

WILL HE BE ABLE TO
DO WITH YOU AS HE
PLEASES?

YES.

AS HE
PLEASES.



WHEN AND WHERE HE
PLEASES. AS HE WISHES.
I ONLY AWAIT HIM...



MY MASTER...



GOOD.
WHERE CAN
SAREK PASHA
BE?

I DO NOT
KNOW.



HE WAS SUPPOSED TO JOIN US. SOMETHING MUST HAVE KEPT HIM...

YOU ARE UPSETTING MY PLANS. AND I DON'T LIKE TO BE UPSET—EVEN BY YOU...



... POWERFUL SULTAN, MASTER OF THE CRESCENT AND THE SANDS.

I DID NOT COME HERE AS THE MASTER, NOBLE PASHA, BUT RATHER TO OFFER YOU A TRADE.



MAN TO MAN.

HO! HO! HO! IT IS RARE THAT SOMEONE CALLS ME A MAN! I HAD HEARD TALES OF YOUR TALENTS AT DIPLOMACY, POWERFUL SULTAN. I SEE THEY WERE NOT EXAGGERATED.



MAN TO MAN, THEN. WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME?

YOU ARE HOLDING A YOUNG WHITE WOMAN, A CHRISTIAN. I WOULD LIKE TO BUY HER FROM YOU.



BUY HER!... BUT I WILL GLADLY GIVE HER TO YOU.



AS SOON AS I HAVE USED HER AS I SEE FIT.



I WANT HER NOW. FOR THIS.

!!



THE COFFER CONTAINS AN LINGUENT THAT BELONGED TO THE GENIUS KNOWN AS AL-FARZA.



AL-FARZA!!?... THE
HUNCHBACKED
GENIUS!!!



THIS LINGUENT WILL ALLOW YOU
TO STOP THE DISEASE THAT
RAVAGES YOUR BODY.

SO IT IS SAID,
SO IT IS SAID...



A MOST PRECIOUS GIFT, NOBLE
SULTAN. THE YOUNG LADY IS YOURS.
DO WITH HER AS YOU WISH,
AND KNOW THAT THE GRATITUDE
OF SAREK PASHA IS YOURS.
SEND ME A SIGN, ANY SIGN, AND YOU
WILL FIND MY MEN AT YOUR SIDE.



THE LINGUENT
OF AL-FARZA!...
I CANNOT
BELIEVE IT!!!



WE ARE GRATEFUL
FOR IT. GREAT IS THE
VALOUR OF THE
TRIBES THAT SUPPORT
SAREK PASHA.



I DIDN'T KNOW THAT
THIS LINGUENT WAS IN
YOUR POSSESSION...

THERE ARE MANY THINGS
THAT YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT
ME, MY GOOD GOLLO.



AND IT'S
BETTER THAT WAY,
BELIEVE ME.



POWERFUL SULTAN,
HERE IS THE CHRISTIAN
PRINCESS.



AND THIS DAZZLED THE GREAT SULTAN
ABDUL RAZIM, MASTER OF THE CRESCENT
AND THE SANDS.

!!!



TAKE ME,
HANDSOME LORD...
TAKE ME...



... GAUTHIER...
MY SWEET FRIEND...
COME... COME...
I AM YOURS...

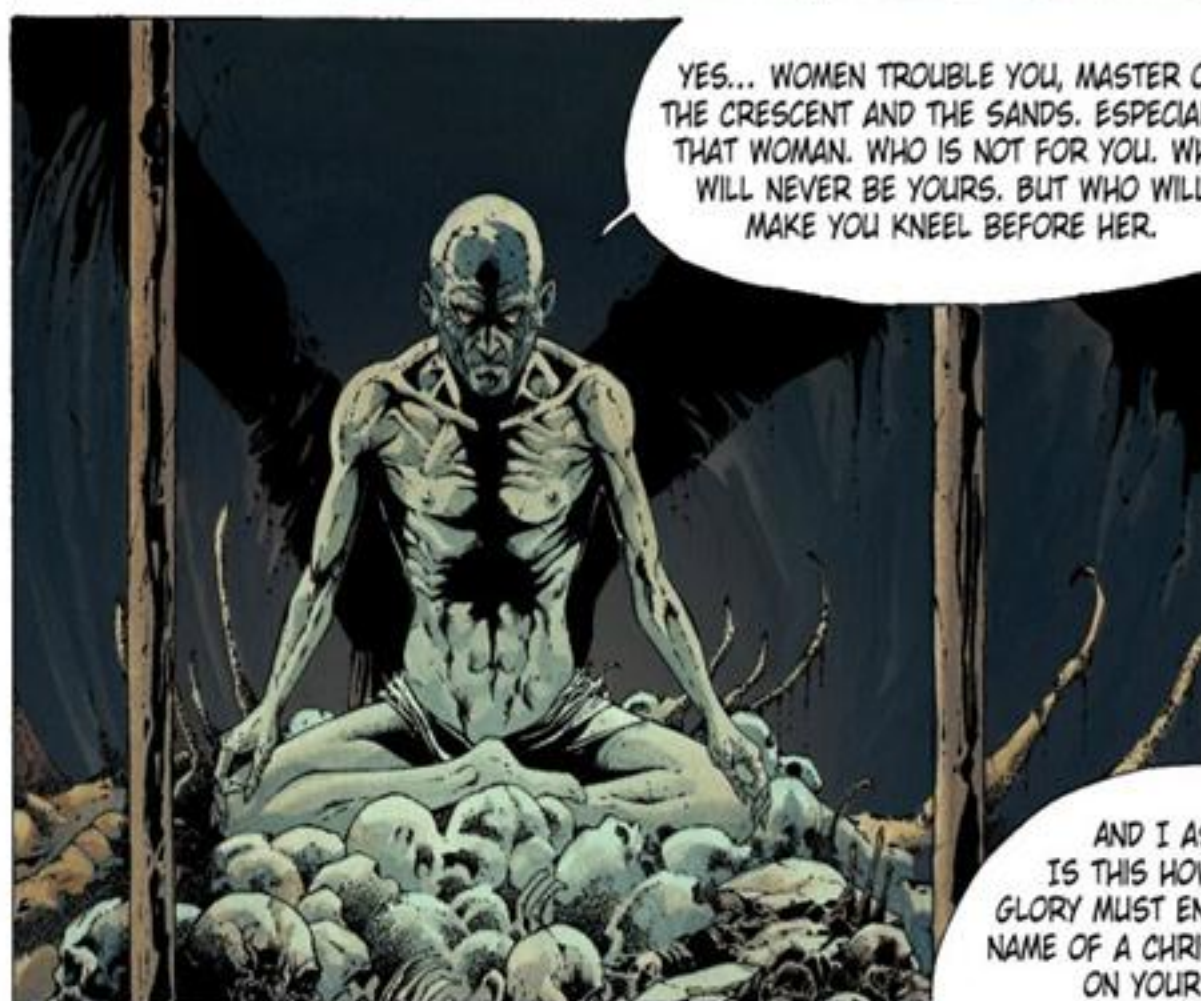


THIS WOMAN
IS DRUGGED!



SHE DRANK THE WINE
OF ABANDON. IT WILL
BE TWO MOONS
BEFORE SHE REGAINS
HER SENSES.

TWO MOONS!



YES... WOMEN TROUBLE YOU, MASTER OF
THE CRESCENT AND THE SANDS. ESPECIALLY
THAT WOMAN. WHO IS NOT FOR YOU. WHO
WILL NEVER BE YOURS. BUT WHO WILL
MAKE YOU KNEEL BEFORE HER.



AND I ASK YOU:
IS THIS HOW SO MUCH
GLORY MUST END?... WITH THE
NAME OF A CHRISTIAN PRINCESS
ON YOUR LIPS...?

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THAT NAME ALREADY FILLS
THE VALIANT HEART OF ONE
WHO IS ALSO READY TO FACE
HIS WORST DEMONS.



STILL RESOLUTE?...
HUNTING THE AA
OFTEN LEADS TO
A PAINFUL END.

IF HE IS THE
ONE I THINK,
I HAVE A CHANCE
OF DEFEATING
HIM.



DON'T TAKE THIS AS BRAGGING
ON MY PART. I AM NO BRAVER
THAN ANY OTHER MAN, BUT THERE
IS IN MY FAMILY A SIN THAT IT IS
UP TO ME TO EXPIATE.



FROM THAT SIN WAS
BORN AN ABOMINATION.
AN ABOMINATION THAT
BEARS A NAME...

THE AA?



THE AA,
YES...



LET US GO.
WE HAVE ONLY
TWO HOURS UNTIL
SUNRISE..



TWO HOURS?

THE AA SEEMS TO
FEAR DAWN. THAT IS
WHEN HE IS THE MOST
VULNERABLE.



ABOVE ALL, NEVER LOOK HIM IN
THE EYE. YOU WOULD LOSE ALL
WILL IMMEDIATELY...







HE PROBABLY IS MY FATHER.

I CAN ANSWER FOR ONE OF THEM. THE KNIGHT WITH THE BROKEN HEAD IS OF FLANDERS.



SOMEONE HAMMERED AWAY AT HIS FACE.

DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHO COULD HAVE DONE THAT?



YES. THE AA.

YOUR COMPANION CARRIES MUCH MYSTERY IN HIM.



OH! HE ACTS LIKE THAT TO MAKE HIMSELF LOOK IMPORTANT. IT WORKS EVERY TIME.



CAREFUL! WE'RE GETTING CLOSE TO AN OSSUARY.



AN OSSUARY!?

YOU WILL UNDERSTAND. LOOK...



WHAT IS LEFT OF THE AA'S VICTIMS.
HE STORES THE BONES IN ALCOVES
DUG INSIDE THE ROCK.



HE IS NOT FAR.
HE'S WATCHING
US...

PERHAPS.
BUT I DO
NOT SEE
ANYTHING.



BALKO, YOU WILL
BRING UP THE REAR.
TAKE A TORCH; I WILL DO
THE SAME. WE'LL USE
THE TWO LIGHTS AS
MARKERS.



WHERE WE ARE GOING,
THERE WILL ONLY BE
DARKNESS.



!!?



CCRRRRRR





THE GRATE!!!!!!

NAKASH! NAKASH!!...
WHAT'S GOING ON!!?...
ANSWER ME!...

TOO LATE!!!!!!



GAU...
GAUTHIER...

I... I DON'T
KNOW!!!

THE AA FORGOT.
SO, THE AA ASKS:
WHERE DOES HIS
NAME COME
FROM?...

REALLY?...
THEN THE AA
KILLS.

. DUFAUX . XAVIER . JJ CRAGNAUD .



THE AA MUST EAT.
THE AA IS ALWAYS HUNGRY.
POOR AA!... WHO
WILL TELL HIM
HIS NAME?...
THE AA FORGOT...

To be continued

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CRUSADE

THE TALE OF A FORGOTTEN CRUSADE,
ERASED FROM HISTORY BECAUSE IT FELL
INTO THE SHADOW OF THE DEVIL.



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