BRANDON SANDERSON'S
WHITESAND
A COSMERE GRAPHIC NOVEL
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BRANDON SANDERSON'S

WHITE SAND

A COSMERE GRAPHIC NOVEL

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ARS ARCANUM

Glossary . . . 10
Map . . . 11
Astronomy . . . 12
Timekeeping . . . 13
Sand Masters . . . 44
The Kerla . . . 45
Kerzta, Lossand, Religion, and DaiKeen . . . 95
The Professions . . . 143
Assassins & Zinkallin . . . 217
Sand Mastery on Darkside? . . . 267
Sand Mastery, Starmarks Connection? . . . 291
Dayside Food . . . 315
Sand Mastery Test . . . 339
Sand Mastery Observations . . . 367
Zo'Ken . . . 482
Energy of the Unseen World . . . 489

PROLOGUE

Connections . . . 14

PART ONE

Chapter 1: Relentless . . . 46
Chapter 2: Advance . . . 72
Chapter 3: Currencies . . . 96
Chapter 4: Divides . . . 124
Chapter 5: Compromises . . . 144
Chapter 6: Challenges . . . 166

PART TWO

Chapter 7: Honor Bound . . . 192
Chapter 8: My Assassins . . . 218
Chapter 9: The Catch . . . 242
Chapter 10: Rising Challenges . . . 268
Chapter 11: Party Politics . . . 292
Chapter 12: About Turn . . . 316

PART THREE

Chapter 13: Delegate to Accumulate . . . 342
Chapter 14: These Lost Causes . . . 368
Chapter 15: Waves and Ripples . . . 392
Chapter 16: The Cruel Potentials . . . 418
Chapter 17: The Impossible Choice . . . 440
Chapter 18: Time, Like Sand . . . 464

COVER GALLERY

INTRODUCTION

BRANDON SANDERSON

Over twenty years ago, I sat in the back of a bus in South Korea, scribbling the idea for a world in a sketchpad. I was a very different person at that time in my life. I'd never finished writing a book, and the only short stories I'd written had been terribly derivative. But I *did* know that I loved writing. That there was something about the creation, the story, the raw invention of something out of nothing that captivated me. I'd ignored classes the year before in college to spend time on my old DOS computer, pounding out those short stories. Terrible though they were, I was very proud of them.

Now I wanted to do something bigger, something more expansive. Something with a real world to it. Though I didn't have much time during my missionary work in Korea, I toiled hard on this concept that I eventually named *White Sand*.

It began with a single idea. A group crossing a field of white, featureless sand and finding—to their shock—a hand peeking out of the sands. Digging down, they found a person buried in the dune, still alive.

That little spark of an idea is what started my modern writing career. It careened into the envisioning of a world trapped between two stars, one bright and omnipresent, the other tiny and offering a strange light, filtered through some bizarre astronomical phenomena. I drew it out, grew excited, and started writing.

What came out across three years was...well, not very good. Oh, it had ideas, but it's very hard to escape your influences as a new writer. The first draft of *White Sand* was one part *Dune*, one part The Wheel of Time, and one part *Les Misérables*. It had the classic first novel ending—that of no ending at all. I got far enough along that I figured, "Huh. Well, guess I stop here."

But the ideas...many of the ideas in it were genuine Sanderson, the embryos of what would become my calling card in the fantasy genre. Compelling magic, a living setting, and characters who were trapped at the point of friction between worlds. I couldn't leave *White Sand* alone. So, years later, I tried again.

After finishing *Elantris* (my sixth novel), I looked back to *White Sand* and decided to give it another go. This time, I asked myself the questions of a more mature worldbuilder. Could I come up with a desert planet that wasn't just a clone of Arrakis or Tatooine? Could I make it a place of contrasts, with interesting fauna and flora? Could I make the character arcs tie into the plot of the story?

I was successful, for the most part. The book turned out rather well, but I was still unpublished at that time. It would be years before I sold a novel, and by then I was most excited about doing *Mistborn*. Which meant that *White Sand* languished. Time and time again, I'd mention it to people as my best unpublished novel—but there never seemed to be a good opportunity to release it.

That's when Dynamite came to me and asked if—perhaps—I had something unpublished that might make a good original graphic novel.

I can honestly say that working with them on this story has been one of the most fruitful, exciting experiences of my professional life. Rik, the writer chosen to adapt the novel into graphic form, was a pure delight to work with—he helped us smooth out the problems that remained in the book, and streamline it into a format that worked for a graphic novel. The artist, Julius, has brought sand mastery to life in a way that jumps off the page. Of all my magics, this is the most innately visual, and the one that lends itself best to this kind of adaptation.

It is gratifying beyond expression to finally see this story going out to readers. From its humble beginnings in a sketchpad to this magnificent, finished graphic novel, this story has taken quite the journey to reach you. And it is with the utmost pleasure and honor that I at long last present to you *White Sand*. My first novel, in its third incarnation.

FOREWORD

ISAAC STEWART

On a beautiful spring evening in May of 2019, Brandon and I ate dinner outside on the edge of Berlin's Gendarmenmarkt. We had just finished touring Germany for Heyne's edition of *Oathbringer*, and as we ate schnitzel and wurst, the conversation turned from the delicious German food to a favorite topic at Dragonsteel—the Cosmere.

As we talked, we realized Khriss's story wasn't over yet. *White Sand* is really only a prologue to the rest of her tale. If we wanted to continue her journey—whether in comics or prose—we needed to provide a stronger Cosmere-reinforced foundation for her in the graphic novel. This omnibus allows us the chance to do that, adding more of Khriss's story, as well as making adjustments to the rest of the pages based on reader feedback we've received over the years.

Rik, Rich, Joseph, and the Dynamite team put together a great graphic novel for the original releases. We stand on their shoulders with this updated omnibus and hope that you will enjoy the new material as much as you enjoyed the original. I'm honored to be the first to welcome you back again to the world of Taldain.

Glossary

Aisha!
An exclamation. "Sand!" or "Sand Lord!"

A'Kar
High Priest and leader of the Ker'reen faith.

a'keldar, pl. a'keldarin
Great sand wolf. Cousin to keldar, pl. keldarin.

ashawen
Dark, pungent Kerztian spice.

DaiKeen
Family group Ker'reen members join and afterward wear its symbol on their foreheads.

DelRak Naisha, pl. DelRakin
Deep sandling that hides underneath the sand until prey steps on it.

deep sand
Dangerous areas of Dayside where sandlings can grow to massive sizes and dorim vines are too far below the sand to be used for water.

the Diem
Profession of the sand masters; also the building complex they live in.

DoKall
Substance that can make sandling carapace water resistant over time.

dorim vines
Water-filled vines found beneath Kerla sands.

KaDo and Kamo
Rare Kerztian herbs and spices.

KaRak, pl. KaRakin
Extremely large deep sandling hunted for sport.

Karshad
Language of the Ker'reen priests.

KelThrain
Main bridge that spans the distance between Kezare proper and the kelzin district.

Kelzi, pl. Kelzin
Member of Lossand's upper class.

Ker Kedasha
Tent city, capital of Kerzta.

the KerKor
Ker'reen holy document.

Kerla
Dayside expanse where life and water can be found thriving beneath the sand.

Ker'Naisha
Kerztian for "Sand Lord."

Ker'reen
State religion of Kerzta, focusing on a strict adherence to the Sand Lord and his laws.

Kerzta
Largest and most technologically advanced nation on Dayside.

Kerztian
Relating to the nation of Kerzta or those whose heritage originates from there.

Kezare
Captial city of Lossand.

Kli, pl. Klin
Title granted by the Ker'reen church and passed from parent to child.

lak
Stone coins used on Dayside.

Lonsha
Kerztian word for a person from Darkside.

Lonzare
District of Kezare built by Darksiders and Lossandins in partnership.

Lossand
Second largest Dayside nation.

Los'seen
Lenient Lossandin philosophy of honoring the Sand Lord.

Lraezare
Port city in the south of Lossand.

Napthani flame
Expensive and hard-to-obtain explosive substance.

Nor'Tallon
Capital city of Tallon.

overmaster
When a sand master dehydrates too much; leads to burning out their ability to master sand.

overburn
When a sand master feeds the last water and life in their body to the sand in exchange for one last powerful burst of sand mastery. Very dangerous.

qido, pl. qidoin
Curled, horn-like canteen.

Reven
King of Seevis

Rim Kingdoms
Nations beyond Dayside's northwest mountains.

Ry'DoAli
Kerztian for "The Vein of Cursed Waters." River that runs through the middle of Lossand.

Ry'Kensha
"Cursed one." Kerztian word for sand master.

Senior Trackt
Like a head constable or police captain. Often addressed as "Senior."

shalrim
Plant whose fibers can be woven into soft cloth.

Taisha, pl. Taishin
A member of Lossand's governing body, the Taishin Council.

terha, pl. terhan
Sandling larger and faster than a tonk. Favored mount of warriors. Terhan shells are impossible to dissolve in water if doused monthly with DoKall.

terken, adjective
Impervious to sand mastery.

tonk, pl. tonks
Dayside beast of burden.

trackt
A constable of Lossand.

traid'ka
Kerztian word suggesting good fortune.

ZaiDon
Soft, flexible jerky made from sandlings and eaten with most Dayside meals.

zensha
Kerztian word for traitor.

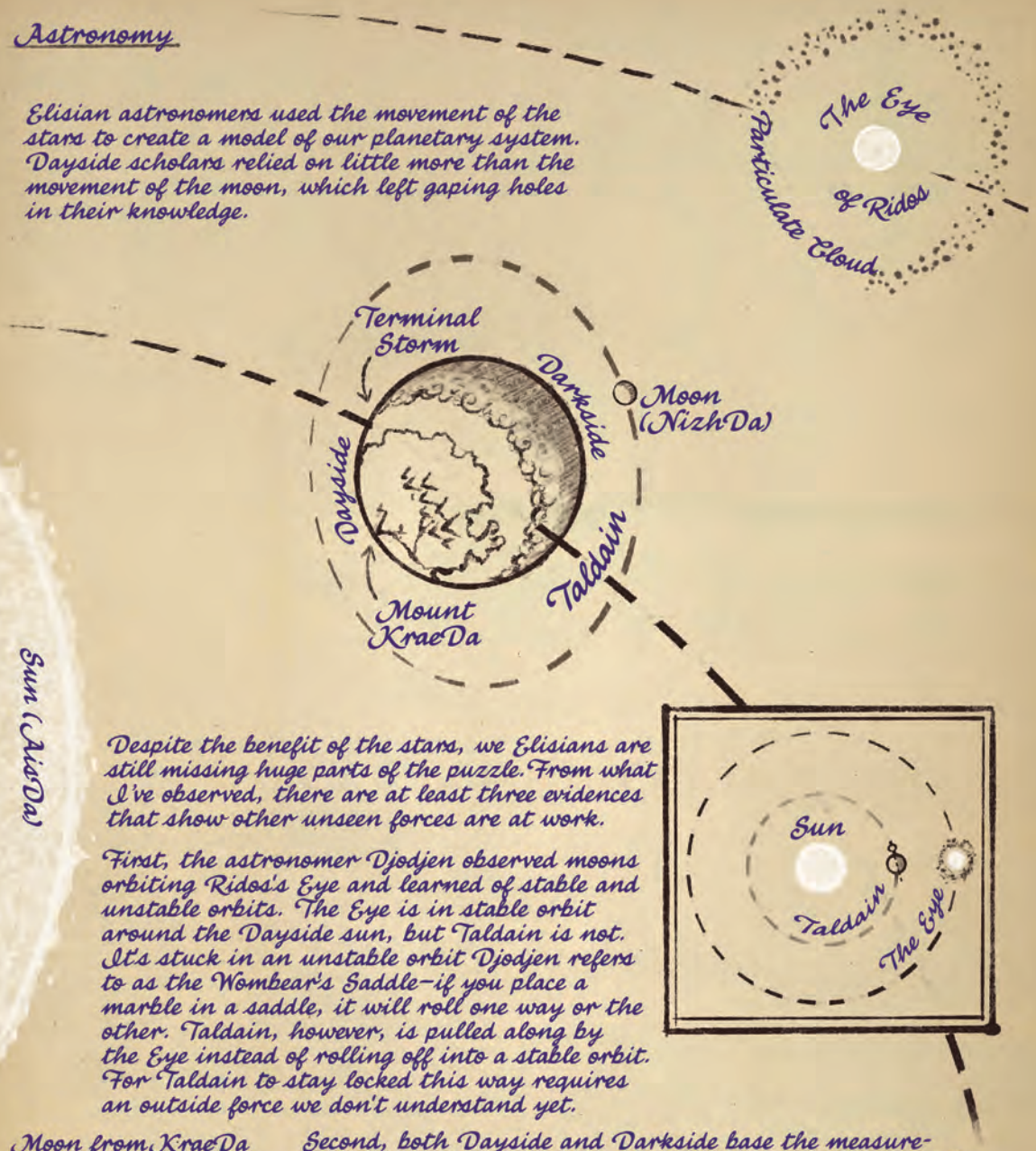
zinkall, pl. zinkallin
Pneumatic dart guns used on Dayside.

Zo'Ken
Sand master game of target practice.

DAYSIDE
NORTHERN BORDER OCEAN
DEEP SAND
DENKA
Dosha-Har'Ken
Esh'Ker'Losh
Reveln
SEEVIS
KERZT
TALLON
KracDa
Nor'Tallon
Ker Kedasha
Nor'Tallon
Kezare
DEEP SAND
Ry'Do'AIR
Lraezare
LOSSAND
SOUTHERN BORDER OCEAN

Astronomy

Elisian astronomers used the movement of the stars to create a model of our planetary system. Dayside scholars relied on little more than the movement of the moon, which left gaping holes in their knowledge.



Despite the benefit of the stars, we Elisians are still missing huge parts of the puzzle. From what I've observed, there are at least three evidences that show other unseen forces are at work.

First, the astronomer Djodjen observed moons orbiting Ridos's Eye and learned of stable and unstable orbits. The Eye is in stable orbit around the Dayside sun, but Taldain is not. It's stuck in an unstable orbit Djodjen refers to as the Wombear's Saddle—if you place a marble in a saddle, it will roll one way or the other. Taldain, however, is pulled along by the Eye instead of rolling off into a stable orbit. For Taldain to stay locked this way requires an outside force we don't understand yet.

Moon from KraeDa on Dayside

Opposite view of Moon from Darkside

Second, both Dayside and Darkside base the measurement of one "day" upon the orbital period of the moon. The particulate cloud that envelops the Eye on Darkside pulses once every seven days, to the second. Is it a coincidence that the time between pulses and seven of the moon's orbital periods match up exactly? It's almost as if it was engineered this way.

Third, Djodjen's observations of the moons orbiting the Eye demonstrate the peculiarity of the orbit of Taldain's moon. As Taldain orbits the sun, the moon's orbit should gradually change, and yet it does not. Like clockwork, the moon is in the same place in the sky at First Hour in Kezare, for example, no matter the day, month, or year.

Taldain's astronomical arrangement seems completely normal to one who has lived with it their whole life. Yet I cannot discount what these anomalies imply. More observation is needed.

Timekeeping

Even though Dayside and Darkside both call the same duration of time a "day," their accounting of minutes and hours differ.

Dayside divides one day cycle into fifteen 90-minute hours. A Darkside day is twenty-four 60-minute hours. In other words, a 90-minute Dayside hour equals 96 Darkside minutes.

Dayside Hour	Taishin Standard Time	Darkside Time
1st	Past bedtime	Midnight
2nd		1:36 AM
3rd		3:12
4th		4:48
5th	Ker'reen morning prayers	6:24
6th	Standard work day starts	8:00
7th		9:36
8th		11:12
9th	Midday meal	12:48 PM
10th		2:24
11th		4:00
12th	Standard work day ends	5:36
13th		7:12
14th	Ker'reen evening prayers	8:48
15th	Standard sleep time begins	10:24

Elisian Clock

Dayside Clock

Moon hand tells the hour. Other hand tells the minute.

It's important to note that these hours shift depending on several things, including which nation or even neighborhood one lives in, sometimes depending upon one's Profession, or even upon local moonrise and moonset. But in general, Taishin Standard Time is becoming more common, even within the nation of Kerzta, which is often reticent to adopt anything of Lossandin origin.

Coinage

1/2 lak		1 gray lak - granite
1 lak		1 blue lak - blue and white marble.
5 lak		1 green lak - jade
10 lak		1 red lak - tiger's-eye, or red jasper and black hematite
20 lak		1 white lak - white marble
50 lak		1 gold lak - amber (or sometimes other gold-colored stones)
100 lak		1 silver lak - hematite, a rare Dayside stone

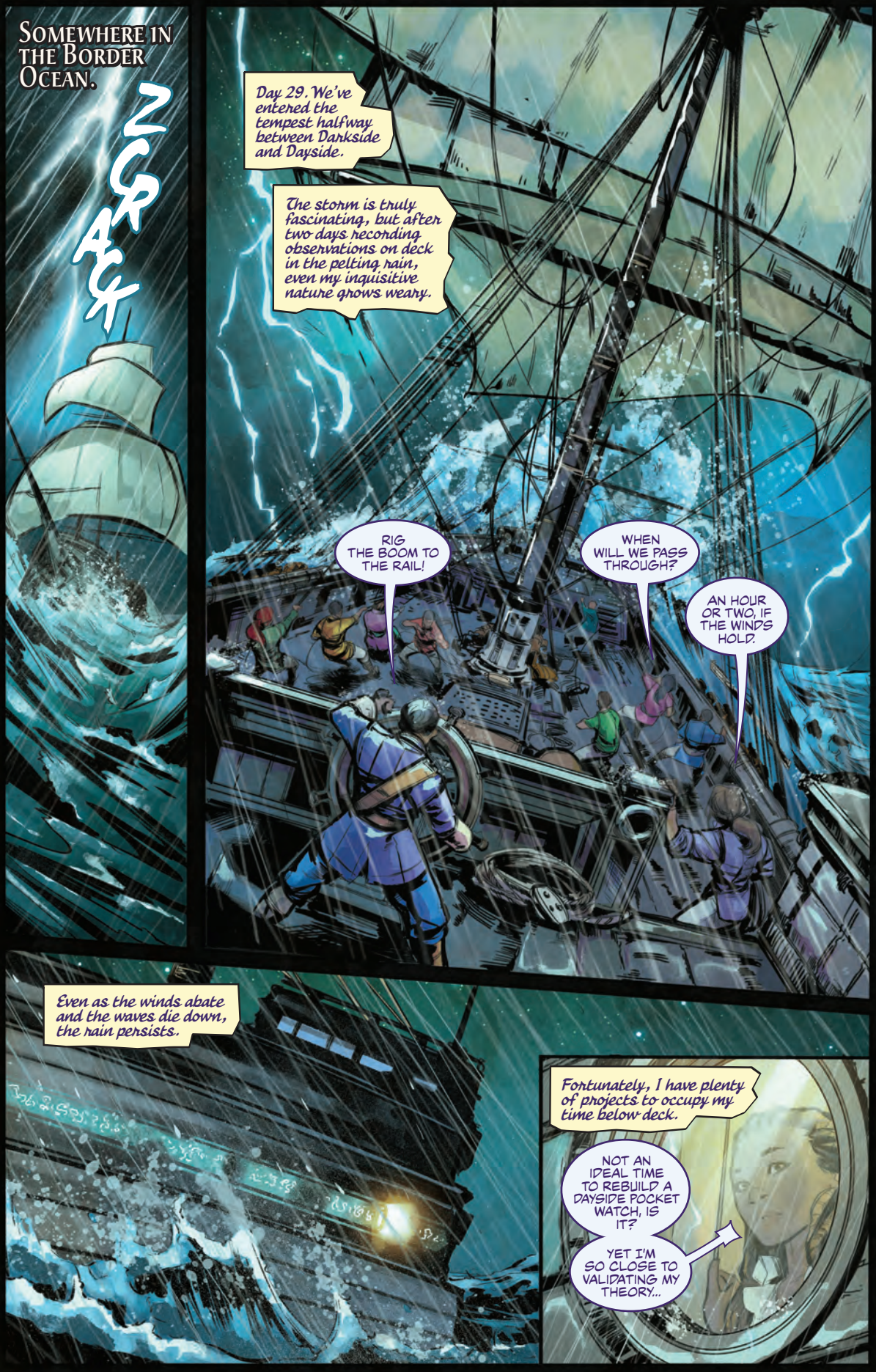
Dayside coinage systems are not based upon precious metals, like in Elis and the Dynasty, where Crowns and Dynars are used respectively, but upon rare and valuable semi-precious gemstones which are sliced into round "coins" called lak.

Lak are used in all Dayside nations, to a varying degree. The Rim Kingdoms' economies rely almost exclusively on them, while the closer to Kerzta one gets, the more bartering for goods is accepted, even if lak is preferred.

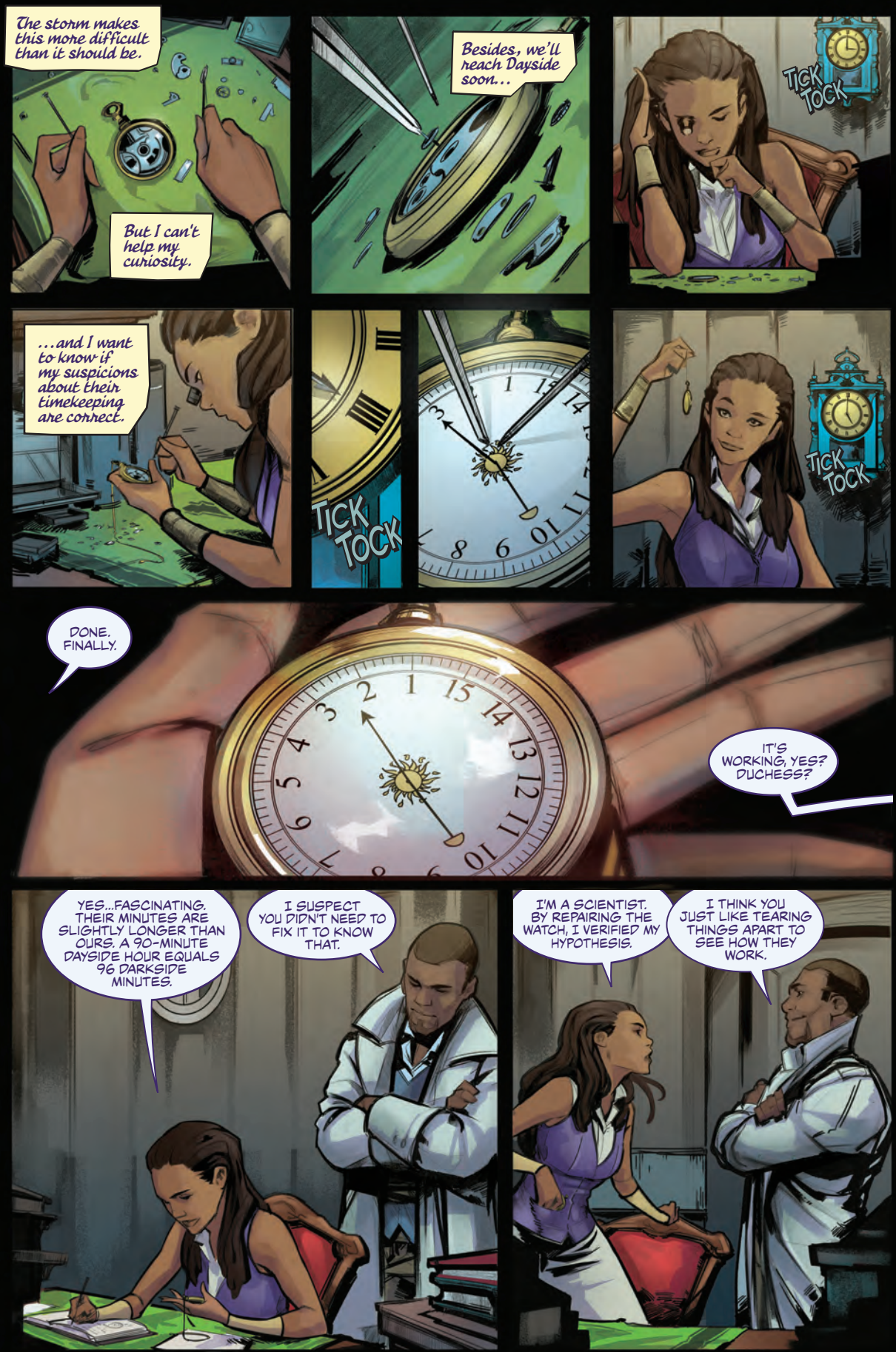
I've had to get used to the Daysider habit of referring to lak by their color. If a color is not stated, then the speaker means blue lak.

The salary of a well-paid mid- to upper-class craftsperson is about 250 lak a day, which equates to 50 green lak, or 25 red lak. Metal and stone are valuable in the Kerla, where the ground lies buried under a hundred feet of sand. Both materials are much less rare now, mostly because of trading between Kerztians and Lossandins, but a small sack of steel can still turn a healthy profit.

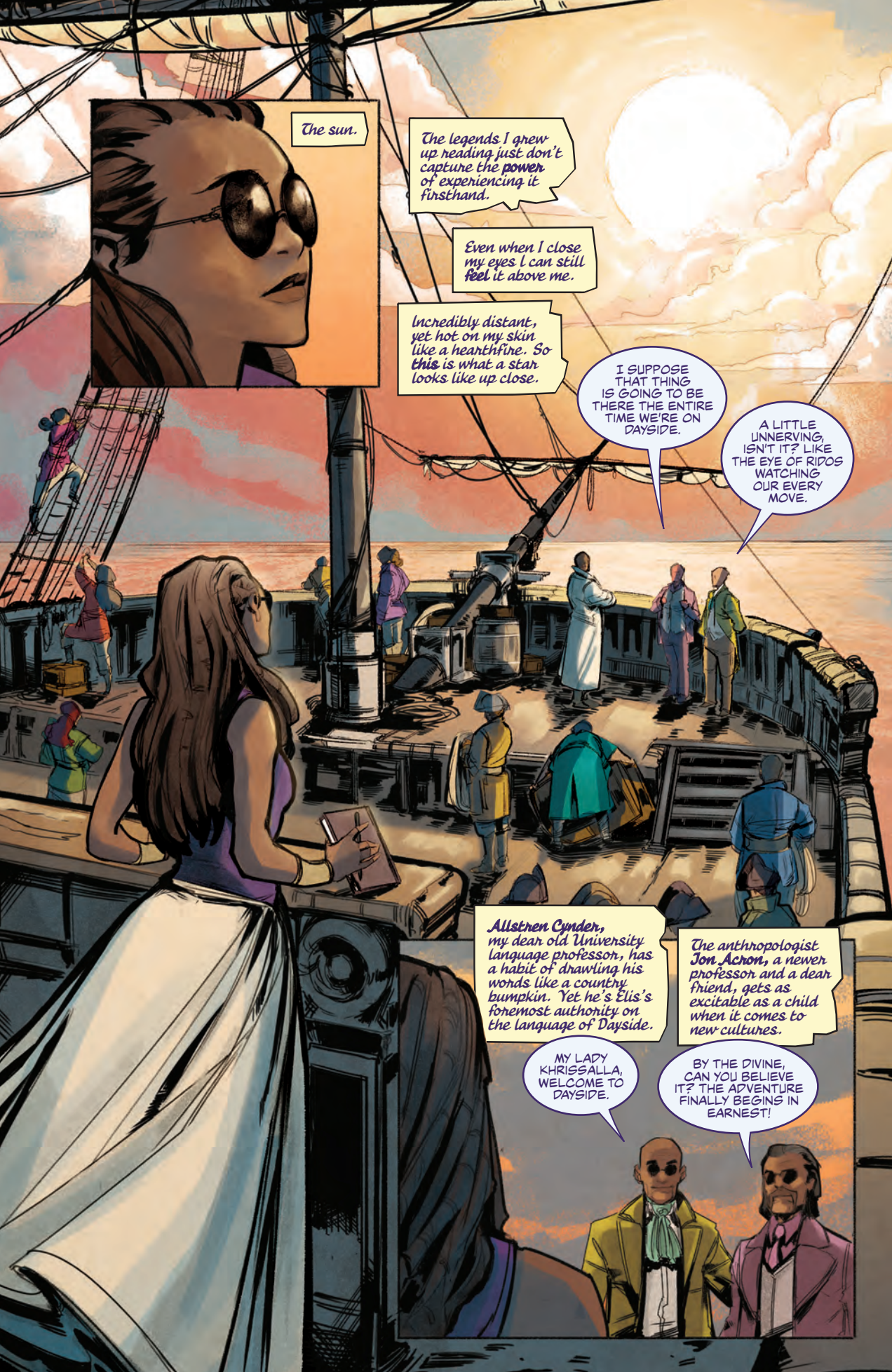
PROLOGUE
CONNECTIONS

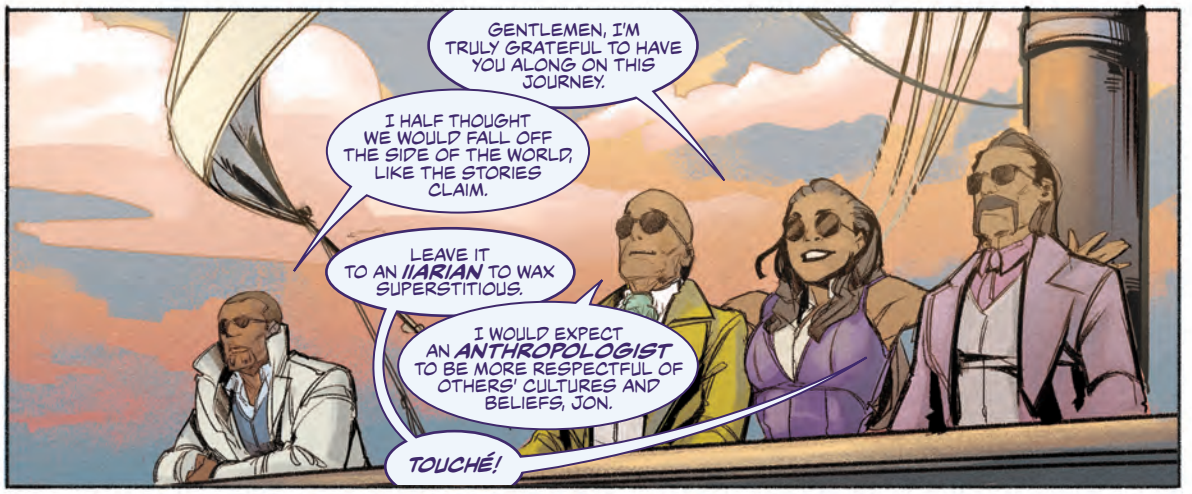

Somewhere in the Border Ocean.
ZRAK
Day 29. We've entered the tempest halfway between Darkside and Dayside.
The storm is truly fascinating, but after two days recording observations on deck in the pelting rain, even my inquisitive nature grows weary.
RIG THE BOOM TO THE RAIL!
WHEN WILL WE PASS THROUGH?
AN HOUR OR TWO, IF THE WINDS HOLD.
Even as the winds abate and the waves die down, the rain persists.
Fortunately, I have plenty of projects to occupy my time below deck.
NOT AN IDEAL TIME TO REBUILD A DAYSIDE POCKET WATCH, IS IT?
YET I'M SO CLOSE TO VALIDATING MY THEORY...

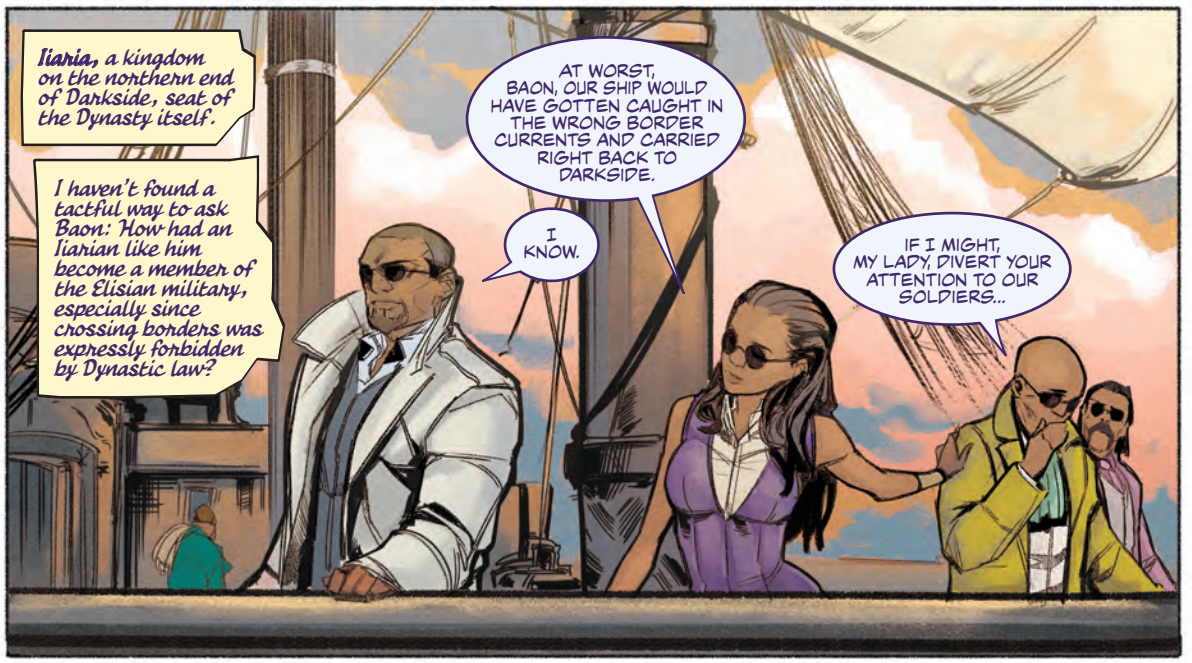
CLICK
GIVE ME A MOMENT, AND I'LL INFORM THE WINDS AND THE WAVES THAT THE DUCHESS KHRISSALLA IS INCONVENIENCED.
YES.
WAS THAT A JOKE, BAON?
IT'S JUST THAT YOUR TONE OF VOICE DIDN'T CHANGE. IF YOU WANT TO TELL JOKES, YOU NEED TO WORK ON YOUR DELIVERY.
DO I STRIKE YOU AS A FUNNY PERSON, DUCHESS?
...NO.
THEN I WILL KEEP MY TONE OF VOICE THE WAY IT IS.
WELL, IT WOULDN'T KILL YOU TO LIGHTEN UP A LITTLE, WOULD IT?
NO, I AM NOT THE ONE IT WOULD KILL. BUT REMEMBER, I WAS HIRED TO PROTECT YOU, NOT ENTERTAIN YOU.
I WILL DO MY JOB, AND YOU WILL FIDDLE WITH LITTLE BITS OF METAL. GO ON.
TICK TOCK


The storm makes this more difficult than it should be.
But I can't help my curiosity.
Besides, we'll reach Dayside soon...
TICK TOCK
...and I want to know if my suspicions about their timekeeping are correct.
TICK TOCK
TICK TOCK
DONE. FINALLY.
IT'S WORKING, YES? DUCHESS?
YES...FASCINATING. THEIR MINUTES ARE SLIGHTLY LONGER THAN OURS. A 90-MINUTE DAYSIDE HOUR EQUALS 96 DARKSIDE MINUTES.
I SUSPECT YOU DIDN'T NEED TO FIX IT TO KNOW THAT.
I'M A SCIENTIST. BY REPAIRING THE WATCH, I VERIFIED MY HYPOTHESIS.
I THINK YOU JUST LIKE TEARING THINGS APART TO SEE HOW THEY WORK.

SHELLA, HOW LONG DID THAT TAKE? DO YOU THINK WE'RE OUT OF THE STORM?
YOU CAN CHECK AS EASILY AS I.
SHELLA!
BY THE DIVINE...
THAT'S BRIGHT.
THE SUN OFTEN IS.
LET'S GET ON DECK FOR A CLOSER LOOK.
BUT NOT TOO CLOSELY, I HOPE.
FOR THE RECORD, BAON, YOU'RE DOING GREAT AT NOT STRIKING ME AS A FUNNY PERSON.

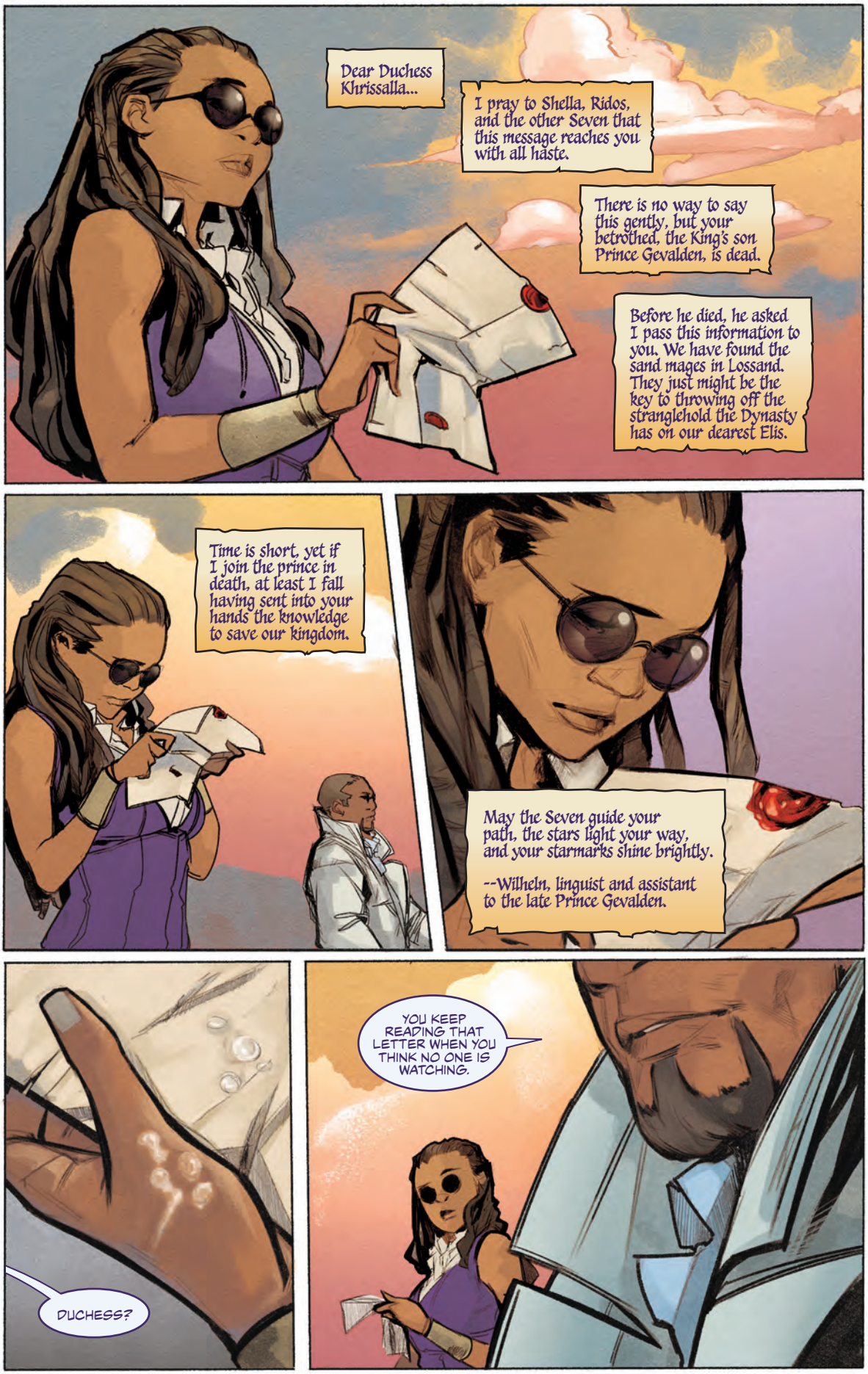

The sun.
The legends I grew up reading just don't capture the power of experiencing it firsthand.
Even when I close my eyes I can still feel it above me.
Incredibly distant, yet hot on my skin like a hearthfire. So this is what a star looks like up close.
I SUPPOSE THAT THING IS GOING TO BE THERE THE ENTIRE TIME WE'RE ON DAYSIDE.
A LITTLE UNNERVING, ISN'T IT? LIKE THE EYE OF RIDOS WATCHING OUR EVERY MOVE.
Allstren Cynder, my dear old University language professor, has a habit of drawling his words like a country bumpkin. Yet he's Elis's foremost authority on the language of Dayside.
The anthropologist Jon Acron, a newer professor and a dear friend, gets as excitable as a child when it comes to new cultures.
MY LADY KHRISSALLA, WELCOME TO DAYSIDE.
BY THE DIVINE, CAN YOU BELIEVE IT? THE ADVENTURE FINALLY BEGINS IN EARNEST!

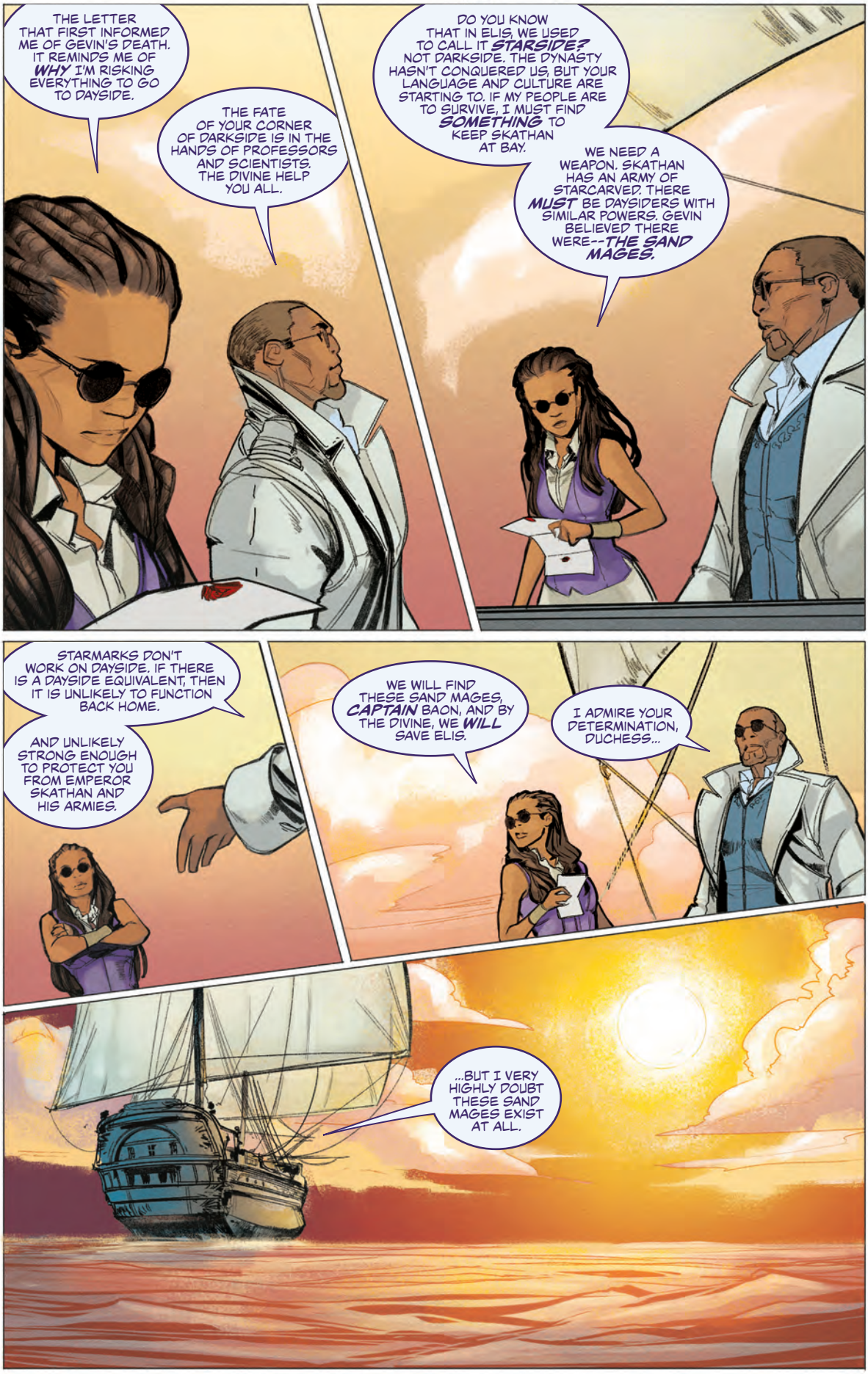

GENTLEMEN, I'M TRULY GRATEFUL TO HAVE YOU ALONG ON THIS JOURNEY.
I HALF THOUGHT WE WOULD FALL OFF THE SIDE OF THE WORLD, LIKE THE STORIES CLAIM.
LEAVE IT TO AN IIARIAN TO WAX SUPERSTITIOUS.
I WOULD EXPECT AN ANTHROPOLOGIST TO BE MORE RESPECTFUL OF OTHERS' CULTURES AND BELIEFS, JON.
TOUCHÉ!

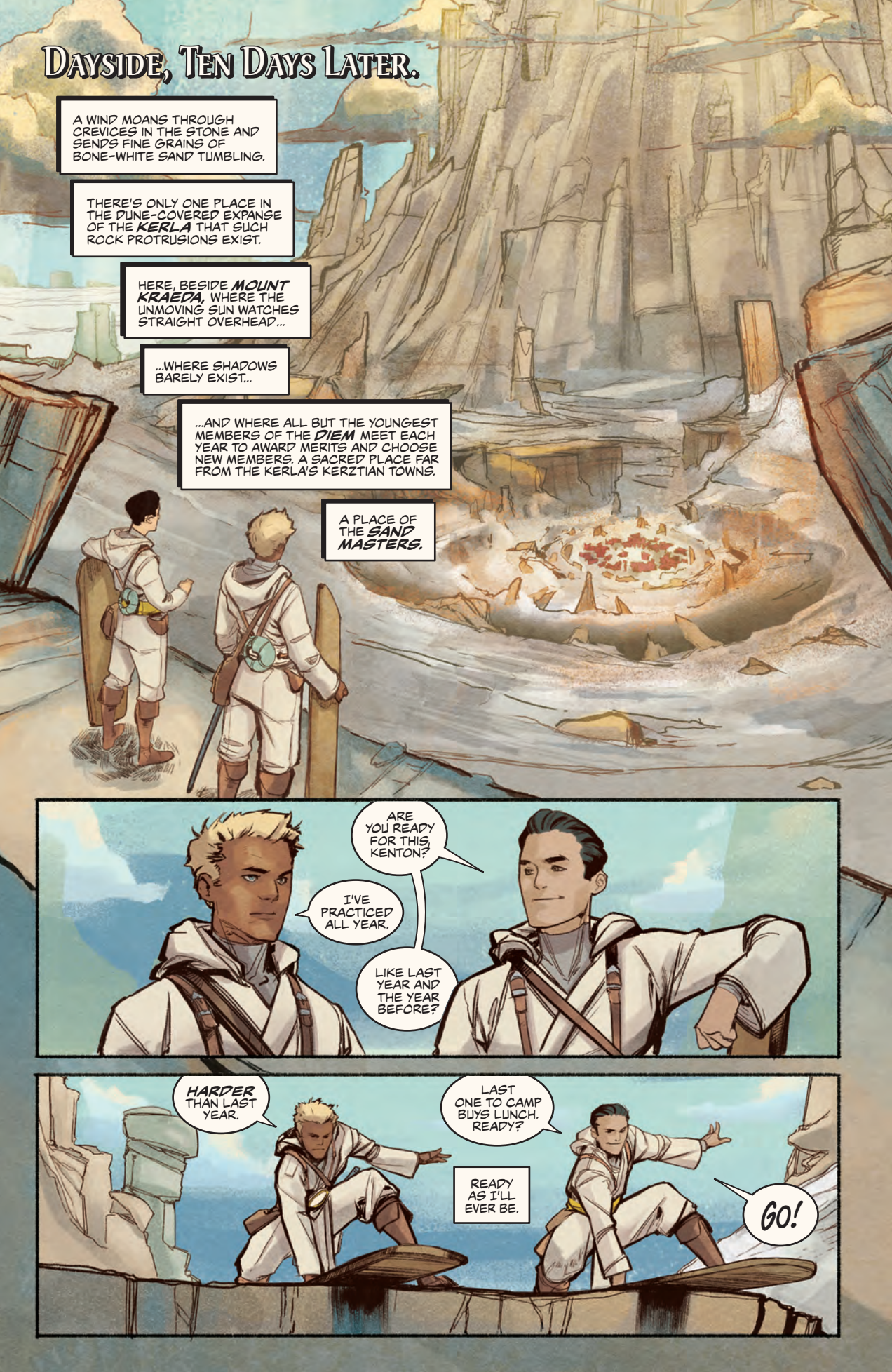

Iiaria, a kingdom on the northern end of Darkside, seat of the Dynasty itself.
I haven't found a tactful way to ask Baon: How had an Iiarian like him become a member of the Elisian military, especially since crossing borders was expressly forbidden by Dynastic law?
AT WORST, BAON, OUR SHIP WOULD HAVE GOTTEN CAUGHT IN THE WRONG BORDER CURRENTS AND CARRIED RIGHT BACK TO DARKSIDE.
I KNOW.
IF I MIGHT, MY LADY, DIVERT YOUR ATTENTION TO OUR SOLDIERS...

...THEY SEEM TO HAVE DISCOVERED A COUPLE OF PISTOLS.
YOU WERE ORDERED TO KEEP THOSE HIDDEN.
WHAT DOES IT MATTER? DAYSIDERS WON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT THEY ARE.
PUT IT AWAY, SOLDIER.

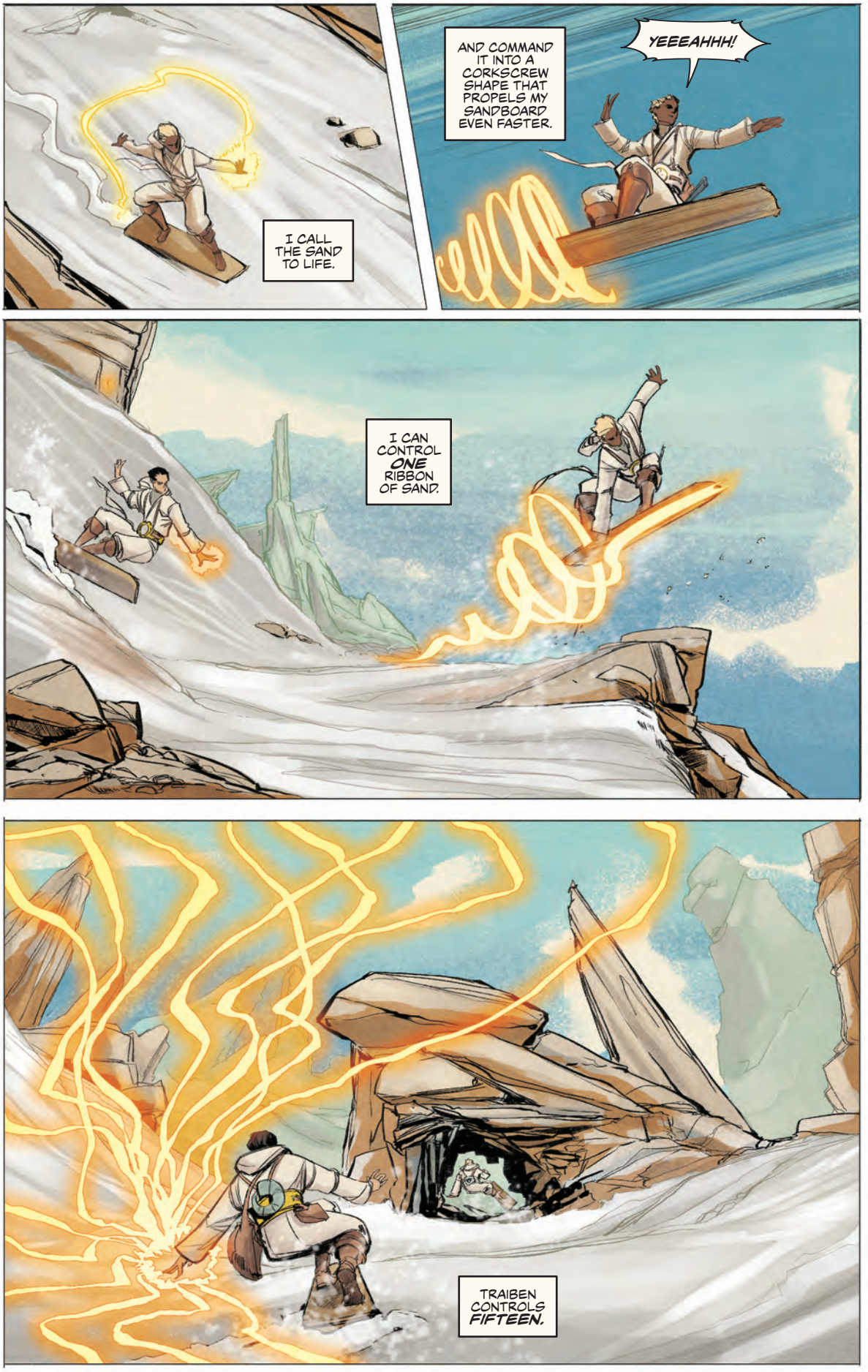
WHATEVER YOU SAY, CAPTAIN.
I THOUGHT I ORDERED YOU TO LEAVE THE GUNS BEHIND.
YOU DID.
AND?
I IGNORED YOU.
WE ARE TRAVELING TO AN UNKNOWN CONTINENT, DUCHESS. DID YOU REALLY EXPECT YOUR SOLDIERS TO GIVE UP THE ONLY ADVANTAGE WE HAVE?
UNLESS THE DAYSIDERS HAVE DEVELOPED GUNPOWDER ON THEIR OWN, GETTING HOLD OF ONE OF OUR PISTOLS WILL DO THEM LITTLE GOOD.
THAT MAKES SENSE. THANK YOU, BAON.
BUT...
ARE YOU GOING TO IGNORE ALL OF MY ORDERS?
NO.
ONLY THE STUPID ONES.
JUST KEEP AN EYE ON THOSE THREE. THE IDEA OF FIREARMS IN FLENNID'S HANDS MAKES ME NERVOUS.
ON THAT WE AGREE.
I DOUBT WE'LL EVEN NEED THE GUNS.
YOU'RE OPTIMISTIC. THAT'S GOOD. YOU'RE PAYING ME TO BE THE OPPOSITE, HOWEVER.
VERY WELL, DUCHESS.
THANK YOU, BAON...
MAY I HAVE A MOMENT TO MYSELF?


Dear Duchess Khrissalla...
I pray to Shella, Ridos, and the other Seven that this message reaches you with all haste.
There is no way to say this gently, but your betrothed, the King's son Prince Gevalden, is dead.
Before he died, he asked I pass this information to you. We have found the sand mages in Lossand. They just might be the key to throwing off the stranglehold the Dynasty has on our dearest Elis.
Time is short, yet if I join the prince in death, at least I fall having sent into your hands the knowledge to save our kingdom.
May the Seven guide your path, the stars light your way, and your starmarks shine brightly.
--Wilhelm, linguist and assistant to the late Prince Gevalden.
DUCHESS?
YOU KEEP READING THAT LETTER WHEN YOU THINK NO ONE IS WATCHING.


THE LETTER THAT FIRST INFORMED ME OF GEVIN'S DEATH. IT REMINDS ME OF WHY I'M RISKING EVERYTHING TO GO TO DAYSIDE.
THE FATE OF YOUR CORNER OF DARKSIDE IS IN THE HANDS OF PROFESSORS AND SCIENTISTS. THE DIVINE HELP YOU ALL.
DO YOU KNOW THAT IN ELIS, WE USED TO CALL IT STARSIDE? NOT DARKSIDE. THE DYNASTY HASN'T CONQUERED US, BUT YOUR LANGUAGE AND CULTURE ARE STARTING TO. IF MY PEOPLE ARE TO SURVIVE, I MUST FIND SOMETHING TO KEEP SKATHAN AT BAY.
WE NEED A WEAPON. SKATHAN HAS AN ARMY OF STARCARVED. THERE MUST BE DAYSIDERS WITH SIMILAR POWERS. GEVIN BELIEVED THERE WERE--THE SAND MAGES.
STARMARKS DON'T WORK ON DAYSIDE. IF THERE IS A DAYSIDE EQUIVALENT, THEN IT IS UNLIKELY TO FUNCTION BACK HOME.
AND UNLIKELY STRONG ENOUGH TO PROTECT YOU FROM EMPEROR SKATHAN AND HIS ARMIES.
WE WILL FIND THESE SAND MAGES, CAPTAIN BAON, AND BY THE DIVINE, WE WILL SAVE ELIS.
I ADMIRE YOUR DETERMINATION, DUCHESS...
...BUT I VERY HIGHLY DOUBT THESE SAND MAGES EXIST AT ALL.

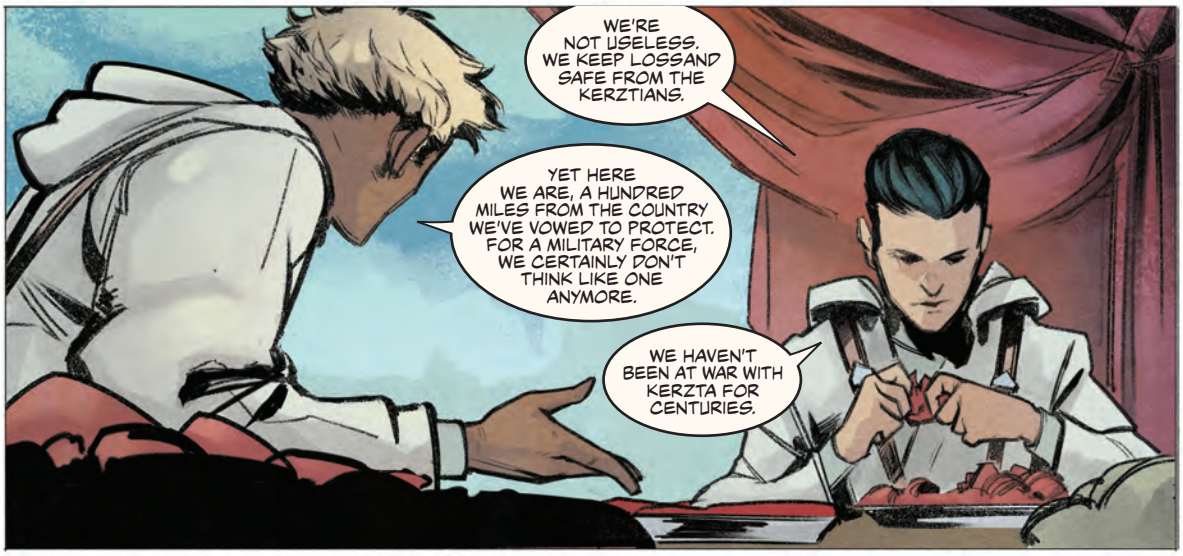

DAYSIDE, TEN DAYS LATER.
A WIND MOANS THROUGH CREVICES IN THE STONE AND SENDS FINE GRAINS OF BONE-WHITE SAND TUMBLING.
THERE'S ONLY ONE PLACE IN THE DUNE-COVERED EXPANSE OF THE KERLA THAT SUCH ROCK PROTRUSIONS EXIST.
HERE, BESIDE MOUNT KRAEDA, WHERE THE UNMOVING SUN WATCHES STRAIGHT OVERHEAD...
...WHERE SHADOWS BARELY EXIST...
...AND WHERE ALL BUT THE YOUNGEST MEMBERS OF THE DIEM MEET EACH YEAR TO AWARD MERITS AND CHOOSE NEW MEMBERS. A SACRED PLACE FAR FROM THE KERLA'S KERZTIAN TOWNS.
A PLACE OF THE SAND MASTERS.
ARE YOU READY FOR THIS, KENTON?
I'VE PRACTICED ALL YEAR.
LIKE LAST YEAR AND THE YEAR BEFORE?
HARDER THAN LAST YEAR.
LAST ONE TO CAMP BUYS LUNCH. READY?
READY AS I'LL EVER BE.
GO!

THE PASSING GRAINS OF SAND FLOW AROUND MY FINGERS.
I REACH OUT WITH MY MIND.
AND FORM A CONNECTION.


I CALL THE SAND TO LIFE.
AND COMMAND IT INTO A CORKSCREW SHAPE THAT PROPELS MY SANDBOARD EVEN FASTER.
YEEEAHHH!
I CAN CONTROL ONE RIBBON OF SAND.
TRAIBEN CONTROLS FIFTEEN.

SO, WHILE I'VE REACHED AN UNMATCHED DEGREE OF FINESSE...
...MASTRELLS LIKE TRAIBEN HAVE MORE RAW POWER.
WHICH IS WHY I OWE HIM LUNCH... AGAIN.
AND WHY MY FATHER--LEADER OF THE SAND MASTERS--REFUSES TO ADVANCE ME TO THE HIGHEST RANK IN THE DIEM--MASTRELL.

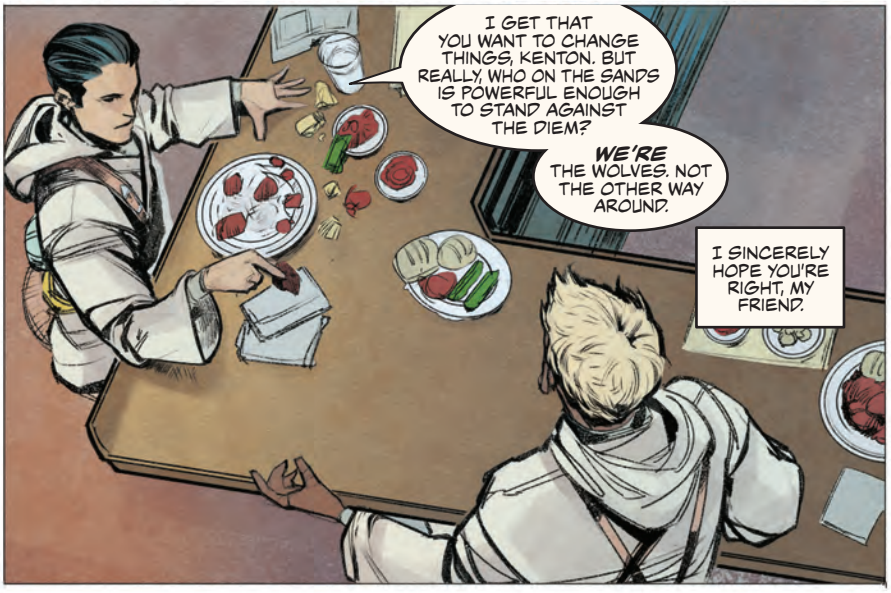
BUT I'VE GOT A PLAN THAT JUST MIGHT CHANGE HIS MIND.
AISHA, KENTON! YOU CAN'T RUN THE MASTRELL'S PATH!
IT'S THE ONLY THING THAT MIGHT CONVINCE THE LORD MASTRELL TO ADVANCE ME.
UNDERMASTRELL ELORIN HAS ALREADY AGREED TO ACCEPT MY PETITION.
THE PATH ISN'T SOME KER'REEN QUEST TO SHOW THE SAND LORD YOUR INDEPENDENCE. IT HAPPENS IN TRUE DESERT. NO WATER. POCKETS OF DEEP SAND...YOU JUST DON'T HAVE ENOUGH POWER.
...
THE PROBLEM WITH POWER IS THAT SOMEONE MORE POWERFUL ALWAYS COMES ALONG.
OH, SAND LORD, HERE WE GO AGAIN...
LOOK AT US! WE'RE A BUNCH OF BUMS TAKING A YEARLY PICNIC IN THE DESERT TO SHOW OFF CHEAP TRICKS AND THEN REWARD EACH OTHER FOR IT.


WE'RE NOT USELESS. WE KEEP LOSSAND SAFE FROM THE KERZTIANS.
YET HERE WE ARE, A HUNDRED MILES FROM THE COUNTRY WE'VE VOWED TO PROTECT. FOR A MILITARY FORCE, WE CERTAINLY DON'T THINK LIKE ONE ANYMORE.
WE HAVEN'T BEEN AT WAR WITH KERZTA FOR CENTURIES.

YOU'RE RIGHT, MY FRIEND. NONE OF US WOULD EVEN KNOW WHAT TO *DO* IN A BATTLE.
YOU REMEMBER MY FAMILY'S OLD SAND FOX?
SCOOCH? YEAH, SHE WAS A GOOD OLD GUARD FOX. WHATEVER HAPPENED TO HER?

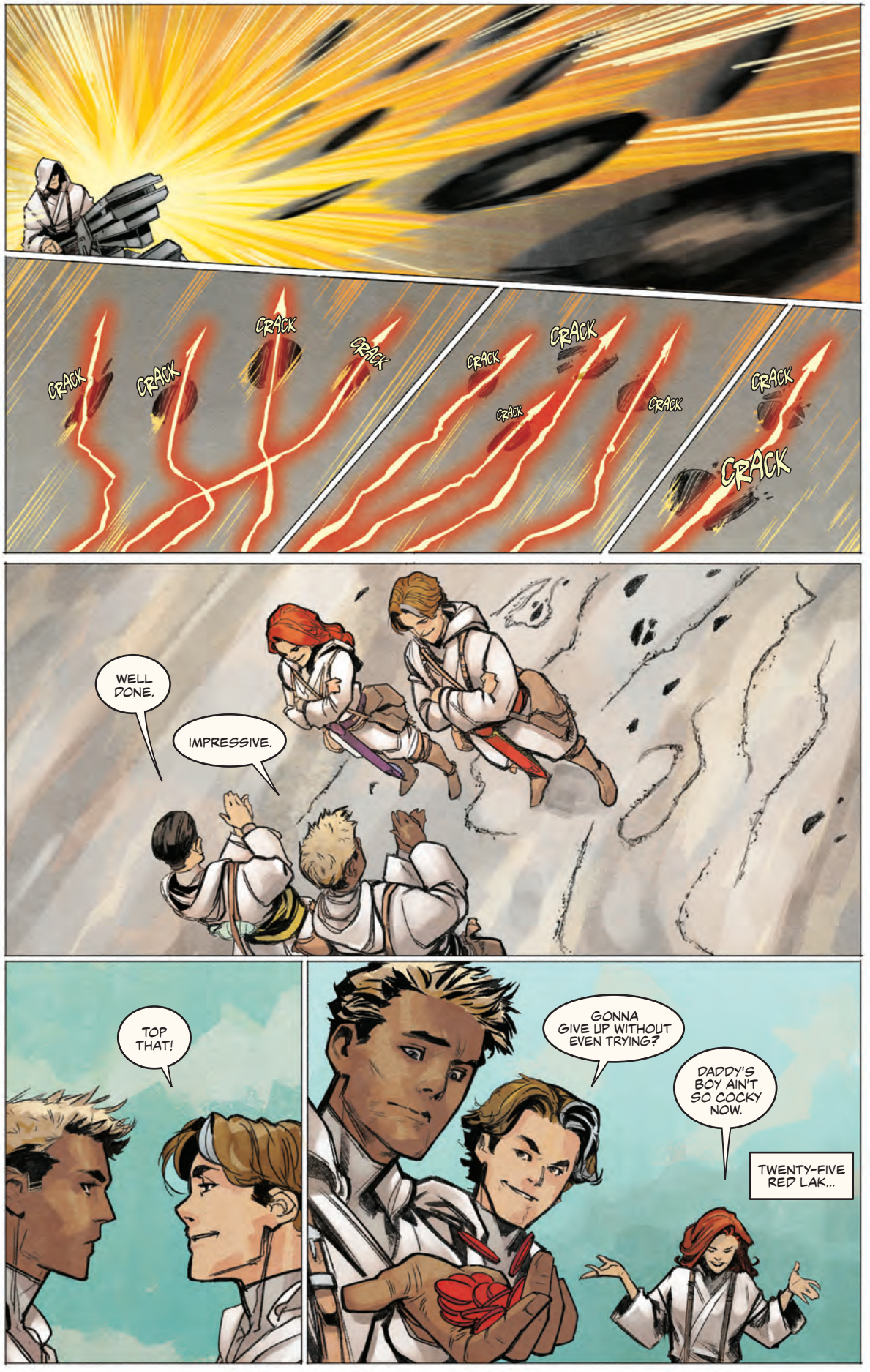
GOT FAT AND LAZY. SHE COULD BARELY WALK AROUND THE HOUSE, LET ALONE PROTECT IT.
ONE MORNING I FOUND HER IN AN ALLEY, DEAD. LOST A FIGHT WITH AN ***A'KELDAR.*** SHE WAS TORN TO PIECES.

A SAND WOLF IN THE CITY? THAT NEVER HAPPENS.


I GET THAT YOU WANT TO CHANGE THINGS, KENTON. BUT REALLY, WHO ON THE SANDS IS POWERFUL ENOUGH TO STAND AGAINST THE DIEM?
WE'RE THE WOLVES. NOT THE OTHER WAY AROUND.
I SINCERELY HOPE YOU'RE RIGHT, MY FRIEND.

HEY, LONGSHA!
UGGH. IT'S SOME OF DRILE'S CRONIES.
YOU GONNA LET THEM CALL YOU THAT?
WELL, I AM HALF DARKSIDER. AT LEAST IT'S ACCURATE.
HEY THERE, LESTRELL YEEDEN. UNDERLESTRELL MORIL. HOW THE SANDS ARE YOU?
YOUR RUNT FRIEND, ACOLENT DIRIN, CLAIMS YOUR SAND RIBBON IS THE FASTEST IN THE DIEM.
IT'S FUNNY, THOUGH. SOME OF US DON'T BELIEVE IT.
GO BACK TO DRILE, YOU TONKS.
NO, IT'S OKAY, TRAIBEN.
WHAT DO YOU WANT, YEEDEN?
SIMPLE. TWENTY-FIVE RED LAK SAYS YOU CAN'T BEAT ME AT ZO'KEN.
TWENTY-FIVE RED LAK--ONE DAY'S WAGES FOR THE HIGHER PROFESSIONS. A LARGE WAGER. IT'S NOT THE STONE COINS THAT INTEREST ME, THOUGH. IT'S THE CHALLENGE.
YOU'RE ON.
WAIT A SEC. WHAT WAS IT YOU SAID ABOUT BUMS AND CHEAP TRICKS?
:GRUMBLE: CAN'T PASS UP A CHANCE TO SHOW OFF.

TELL ME, YEEDEN. HOW MANY RIBBONS DO YOU CONTROL?
AISHA. NO WONDER YOU'RE A LESTRELL.
NINE.
DON'T PATRONIZE HIM, LONSHA.
BEFORE YOU PICK YOUR NUMBER OF TARGETS, IT WOULD BE UNFAIR NOT TO WARN YOU THAT EVEN THOUGH I AM THE JOKE OF THE DIEM...
...I CAN DO MORE WITH ONE RIBBON THAN ANY MASTRELL CAN DO WITH TWENTY.
SURE HE CAN.
NINE TARGETS, SANDFACE, AND HURRY IT UP.
SERIOUSLY? ONLY ONE TARGET FOR EACH RIBBON?
YOU'RE JUST TRYING TO MAKE ME OVERDO IT AND TRIP UP.
JUST SAYING...
FINE!
MAKE IT TEN TARGETS.
READY?
PULL!


CRACK
CRACK
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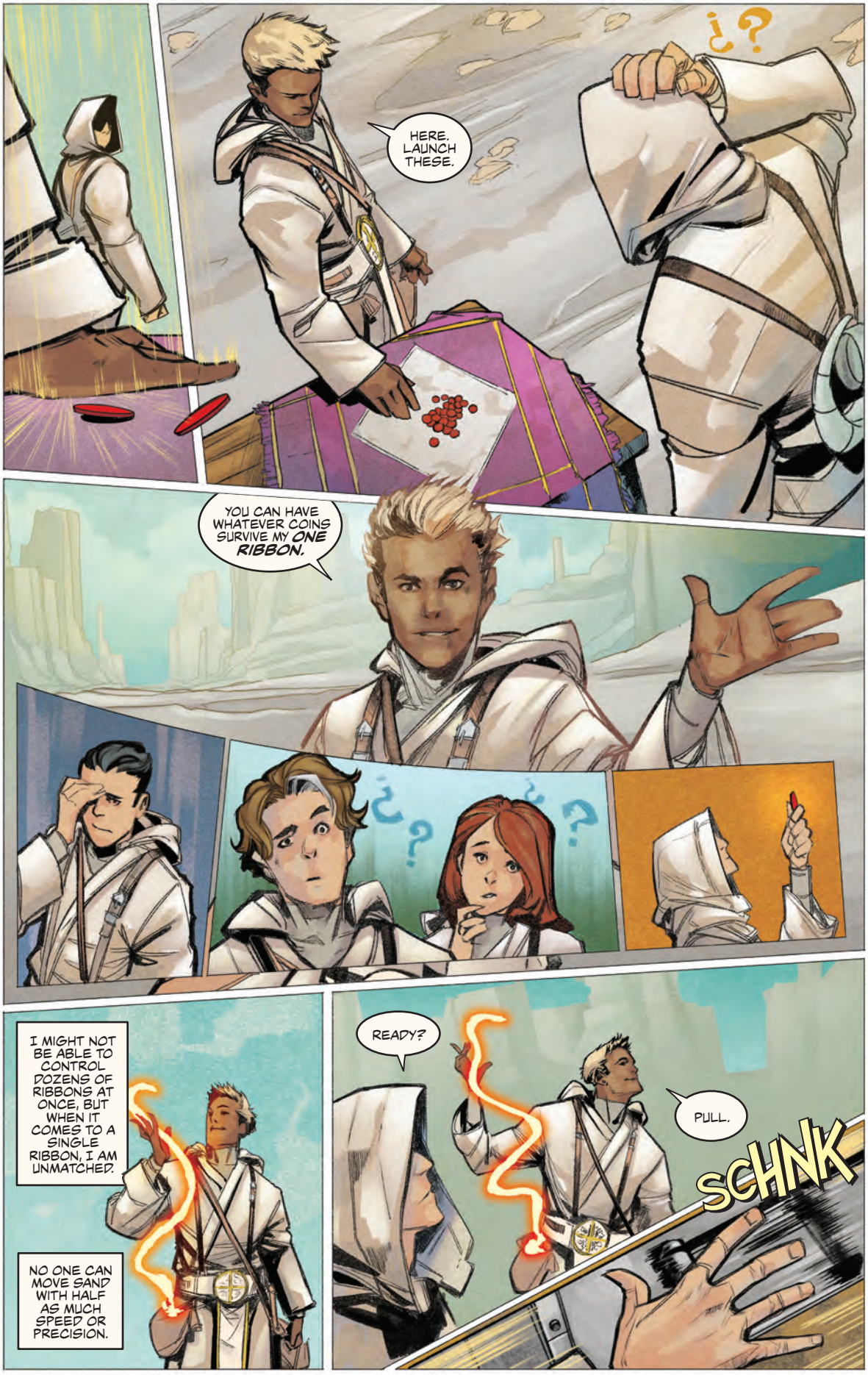
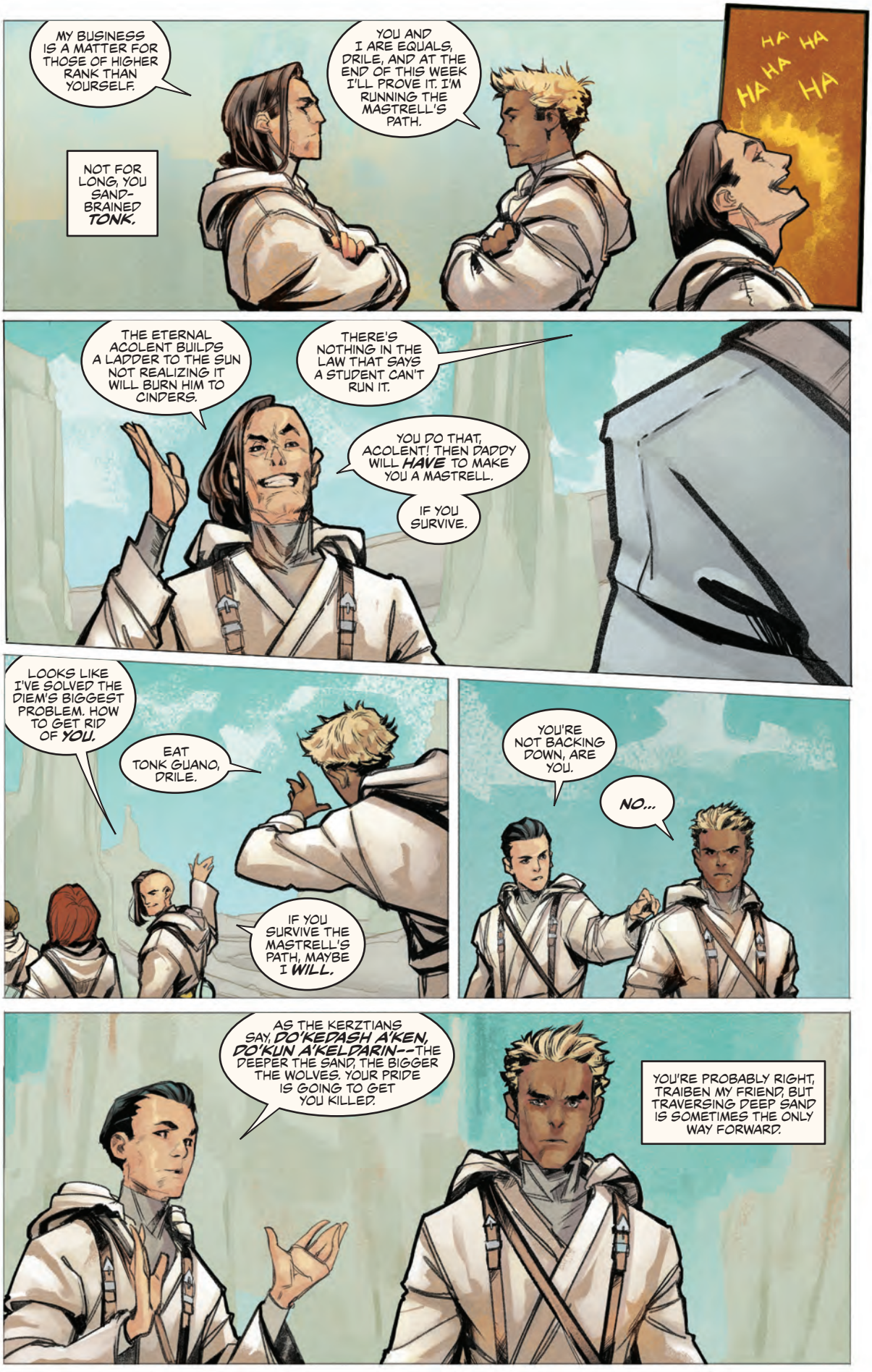
CRACK
WELL DONE.
IMPRESSIVE.
TOP THAT!
GONNA GIVE UP WITHOUT EVEN TRYING?
DADDY'S BOY AIN'T SO COCKY NOW.
TWENTY-FIVE RED LAK...

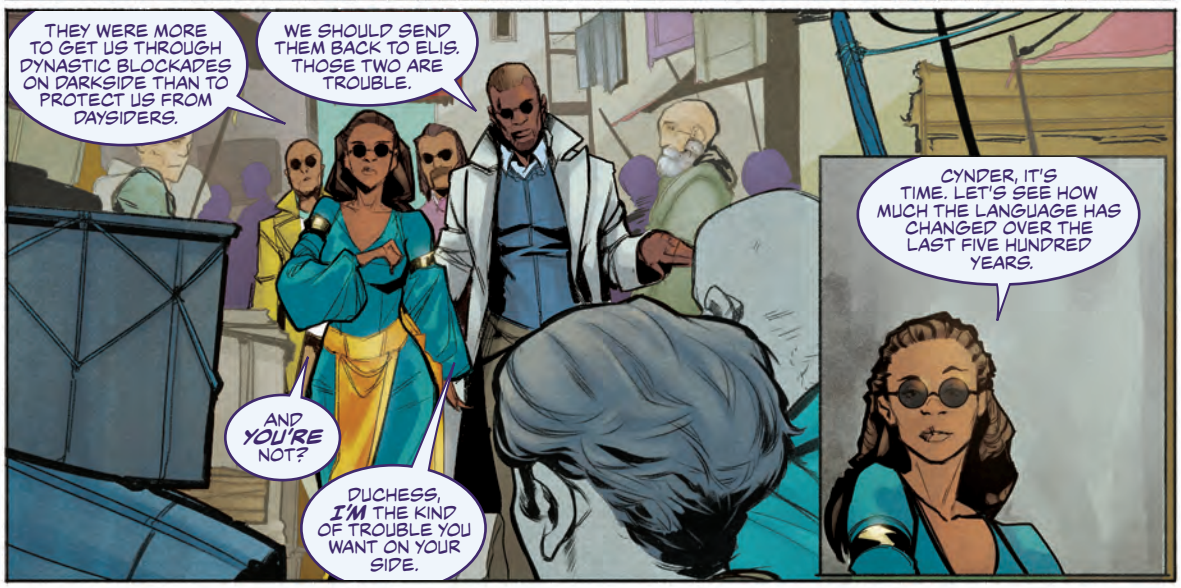

HERE. LAUNCH THESE.
¿?
YOU CAN HAVE WHATEVER COINS SURVIVE MY ONE RIBBON.
¿?
¿?
I MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO CONTROL DOZENS OF RIBBONS AT ONCE, BUT WHEN IT COMES TO A SINGLE RIBBON, I AM UNMATCHED.
NO ONE CAN MOVE SAND WITH HALF AS MUCH SPEED OR PRECISION.
READY?
PULL.
SCHNK

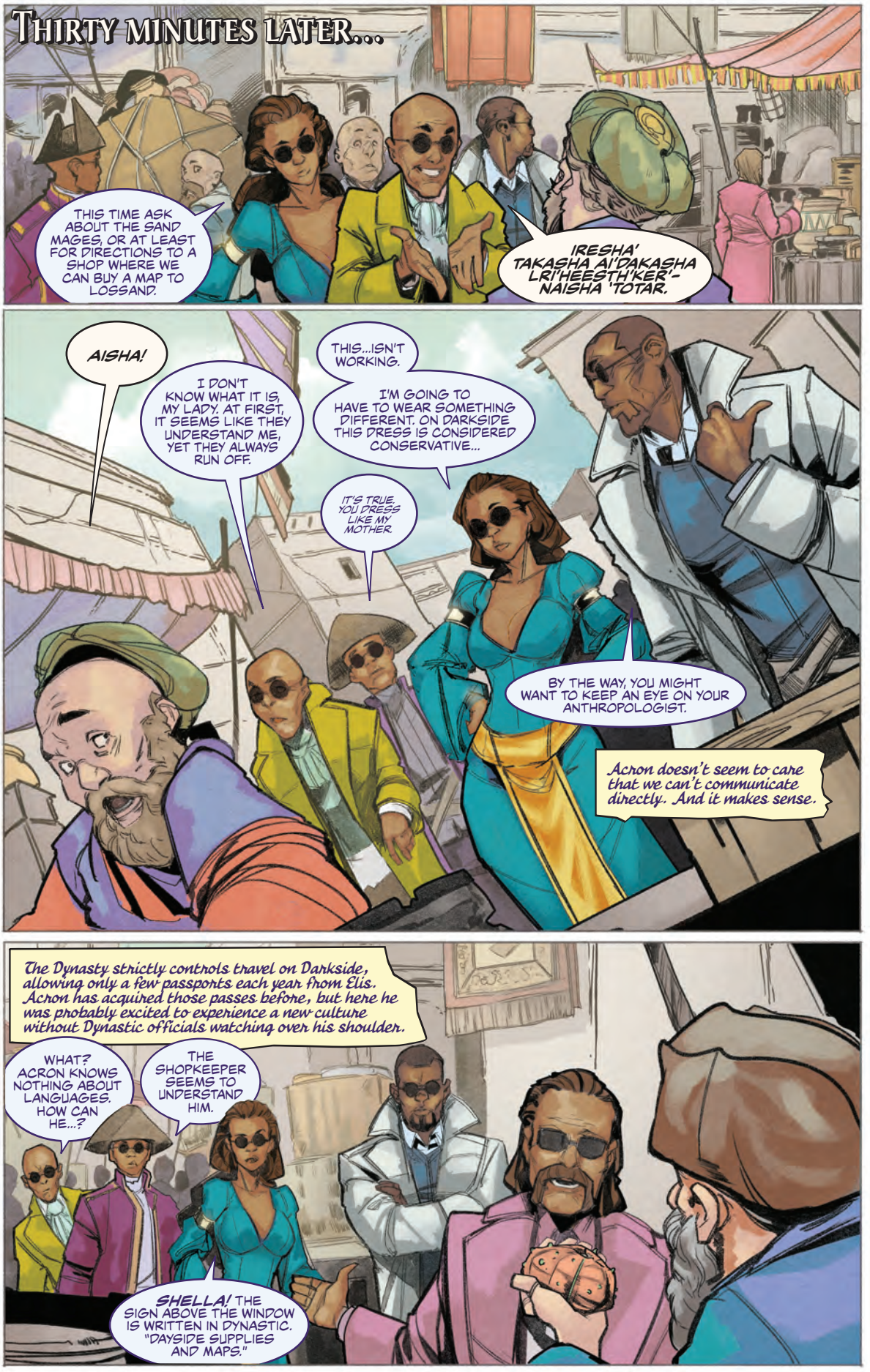
CONCENTRATE.
MY CONSCIOUSNESS CONNECTS WITH THE SAND, AND I DIRECT THE FLOW.
THE WATER FROM ONE'S BODY FUELS SAND MASTERY. THE MORE YOU MASTER, THE MORE YOU DEHYDRATE. BUT HERE'S SOMETHING THE MASTRELLS WON'T TELL YOU.
COMMANDING ONE SMALL RIBBON TAKES MERELY A TRICKLE.
CRACK

ENOUGH WITH YOUR PARLOR TRICKS, ACOLENT KENTON.
YOUR CIRCUS ACT WILL NEVER GET YOU WHAT YOU WANT.
GO AWAY, DRILE.
YOU'RE BACK!
YOU KNOW BETTER THAN TO SPAR WITH ACOLENTS, LESTRELL YEEDEN.
APOLOGIES, MASTRELL DRILE.
WAS YOUR JOURNEY SUCCESSFUL?
YOU'LL KNOW SOON ENOUGH, UNDERLESTRELL. CHANGE IS ON THE WIND, AND THE DIEM WILL ADAPT OR FALL.
DRILE SEEMS SO SURE OF HIMSELF. WHAT IS HE PLANNING?
YES, HOW ***WERE*** YOUR TRAVELS, DRILE?
...


MY BUSINESS IS A MATTER FOR THOSE OF HIGHER RANK THAN YOURSELF.
YOU AND I ARE EQUALS, DRILE, AND AT THE END OF THIS WEEK I'LL PROVE IT. I'M RUNNING THE MASTRELL'S PATH.
HA HA HA HA HA
NOT FOR LONG, YOU SAND-BRAINED TONK.
THE ETERNAL ACOLENT BUILDS A LADDER TO THE SUN NOT REALIZING IT WILL BURN HIM TO CINDERS.
THERE'S NOTHING IN THE LAW THAT SAYS A STUDENT CAN'T RUN IT.
YOU DO THAT, ACOLENT! THEN DADDY WILL HAVE TO MAKE YOU A MASTRELL.
IF YOU SURVIVE.
LOOKS LIKE I'VE SOLVED THE DIEM'S BIGGEST PROBLEM. HOW TO GET RID OF YOU.
EAT TONK GUANO, DRILE.
IF YOU SURVIVE THE MASTRELL'S PATH, MAYBE I WILL.
YOU'RE NOT BACKING DOWN, ARE YOU.
NO...
AS THE KERZTIANS SAY, DO'KEDASH A'KEN, DO'KUN A'KELDARIN--THE DEEPER THE SAND, THE BIGGER THE WOLVES. YOUR PRIDE IS GOING TO GET YOU KILLED.
YOU'RE PROBABLY RIGHT, TRAIBEN MY FRIEND, BUT TRAVERSING DEEP SAND IS SOMETIMES THE ONLY WAY FORWARD.

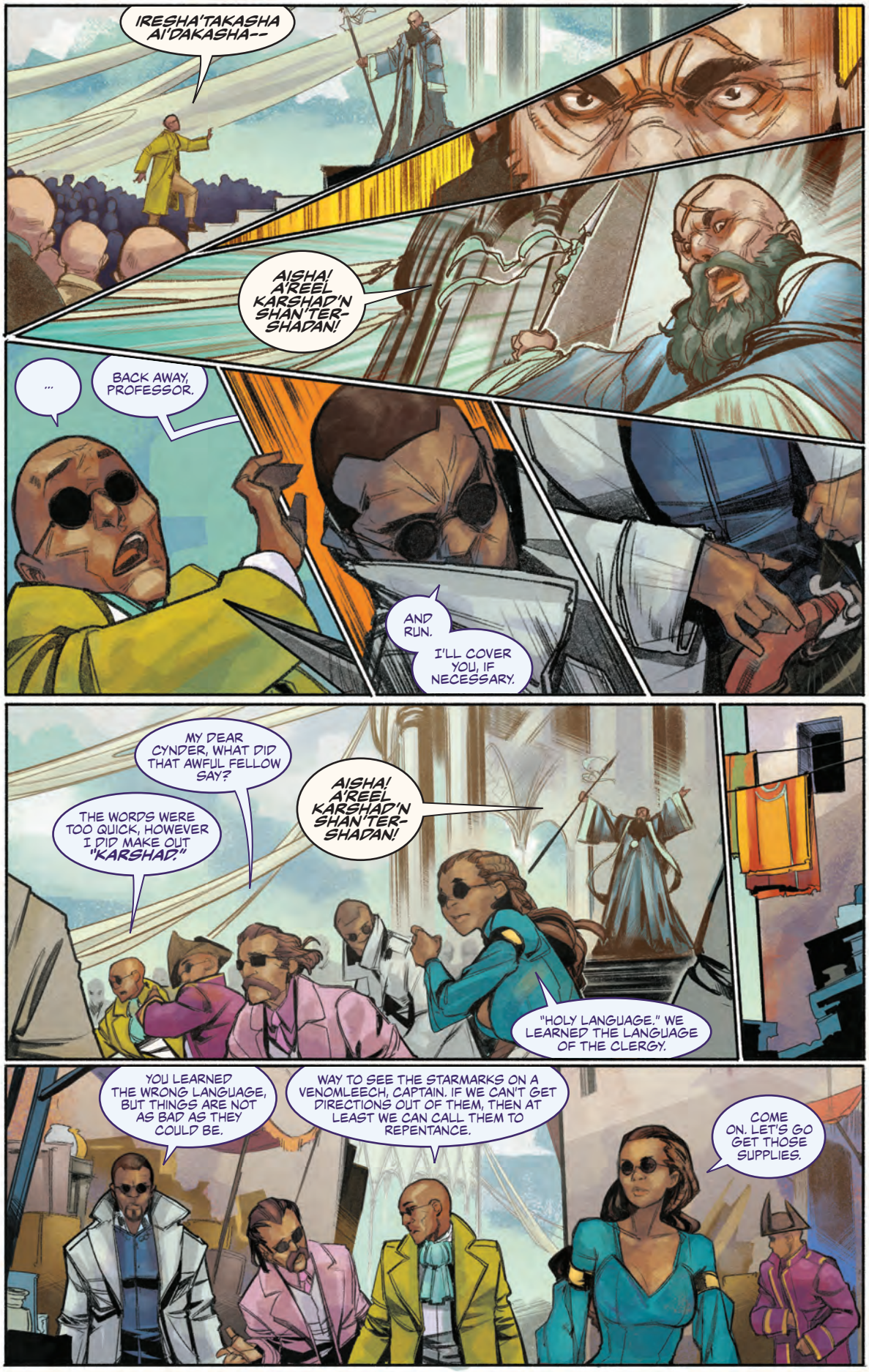
Day 39. We've docked at the Dayside port of Dosha-Har'Ken.
PRIVATE TORTH, PLEASE GUARD OUR LUGGAGE. BAON, FLENNID, AND THE PROFESSORS, COME WITH ME TO FIND SUPPLIES.
YOUR HYPOTHESIS IS CORRECT, JON ACRON. THERE IS LITTLE EVIDENCE OF ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY.
POOR SOULS...THE COLORS HERE ARE SO...DRAB. AND THEY'RE STILL IN THE SWORD AGE.
SWORDS... WE MAY HAVE PISTOLS, BUT HOW WILL WE FARE IF THINGS GET VIOLENT?
NOT WELL, I'D SAY. YOUR SOLDIERS WILL BE USELESS IN A FIGHT, PISTOLS OR NO PISTOLS.
Baon's right. The Elisian military isn't known for its martial prowess. We remain independent from the Dynasty through clever politics, superior technology, and the fact that our country is so small no one wanted to conquer it. Until recently.


THEY WERE MORE TO GET US THROUGH DYNASTIC BLOCKADES ON DARKSIDE THAN TO PROTECT US FROM DAYSIDERS.
WE SHOULD SEND THEM BACK TO ELIS. THOSE TWO ARE TROUBLE.
AND YOU'RE NOT?
DUCHESS, I'M THE KIND OF TROUBLE YOU WANT ON YOUR SIDE.
CYNDER, IT'S TIME. LET'S SEE HOW MUCH THE LANGUAGE HAS CHANGED OVER THE LAST FIVE HUNDRED YEARS.


THIRTY MINUTES LATER...
THIS TIME ASK ABOUT THE SAND MAGES, OR AT LEAST FOR DIRECTIONS TO A SHOP WHERE WE CAN BUY A MAP TO LOSSAND.
IRESHA' TAKASHA AI'DAKASHA LRI'HEESTH'KER'-NAISHA 'TOTAR.
AISHA!
I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT IS, MY LADY. AT FIRST, IT SEEMS LIKE THEY UNDERSTAND ME, YET THEY ALWAYS RUN OFF.
THIS...ISN'T WORKING.
I'M GOING TO HAVE TO WEAR SOMETHING DIFFERENT. ON DARKSIDE THIS DRESS IS CONSIDERED CONSERVATIVE...
IT'S TRUE. YOU DRESS LIKE MY MOTHER.
BY THE WAY, YOU MIGHT WANT TO KEEP AN EYE ON YOUR ANTHROPOLOGIST.
Acron doesn't seem to care that we can't communicate directly. And it makes sense.
The Dynasty strictly controls travel on Darkside, allowing only a few passports each year from Elis. Acron has acquired those passes before, but here he was probably excited to experience a new culture without Dynastic officials watching over his shoulder.
WHAT? ACRON KNOWS NOTHING ABOUT LANGUAGES. HOW CAN HE...?
THE SHOPKEEPER SEEMS TO UNDERSTAND HIM.
SHELLA! THE SIGN ABOVE THE WINDOW IS WRITTEN IN DYNASTIC. "DAYSIDE SUPPLIES AND MAPS."

AHOY, MORE DARKSIDE GOOD FRIENDS! YOU WANT SUPPLIES, OKAY FRIEND?
HE SPEAKS DYNASTIC... HOW?
I DON'T KNOW. HE JUST STARTED TALKING TO ME. AMAZING, ISN'T IT?
GOOD DYNASTIC, YES FRIEND? DARKSIDER COME MUCH, ESCAPE DYNASTY. VERY BAD. MUCH EXCITING. NEED MUCH SUPPLIES, YES FRIEND?
HAVING MUCH GOOD TONKS HERE FOR PACK YOUR STUFF ACROSS KERLA, YES FRIEND? AND...
HAVE GREAT LARGE DEAL FOR YOU. ONE TIME ONLY. BEST GUIDE ON SANDS, MY NEPHEW DAAZK.
AHOY!
WAIT A SECOND. MUCH DARKSIDERS. HOW MANY?
ONE, MAYBE TWO SHIP ONE WEEK.
SHELLA! THOSE BLOCKADES ARE SUPPOSED TO BE IMPERVIOUS. THE DYNASTY DOESN'T EVEN LET ITS SUBJECTS TRAVEL FROM ONE PROVINCE TO ANOTHER! THERE'S NO WAY THEY LET THAT MANY SHIPS ESCAPE.
WE GOT THROUGH. AND IT WASN'T VERY HARD.
WE LOST TWO MEN! CAPTAIN DERAL AND HIS LIEUTENANT WERE WELL-TRAINED WARRIORS.
THEY WEREN'T KILLED BY THE BLOCKADE. WE LOST THEM SNEAKING OUT OF ELIS AND CROSSING DYNASTIC LANDS TO REACH THE OCEAN. ONCE WE WERE ON THE WATERS, WE BARELY EVEN SAW ANOTHER SHIP.
KER'NAI-SHA'TO-TAR'KER-SHA!

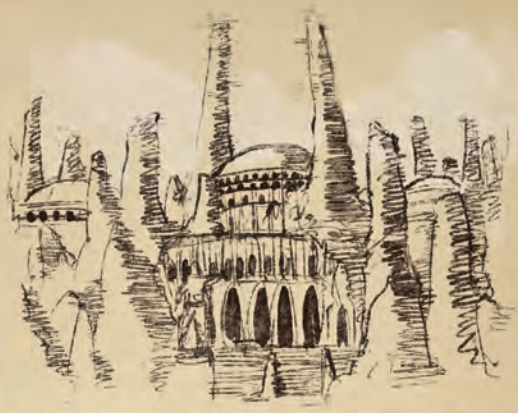
KER'NAI-SHA'TO-TAR'KER-SHA!
WAIT. DO YOU HEAR THAT?
WE'LL BE BACK!
KER'NAI-SHA'TO-TAR'KER-SHA!
KER'NAISHA'TO-TAR'KERSHA!
The pronunciation is odd, but that's the most pervasive phrase in the Daysider books I've studied.
KER'NAISHA'TO-TAR'KERSHA!
"MAY THE SAND LORD BLESS US."
YES! THAT'S IT!
:AHEM.: EXCUSE ME, GOOD SIR!


IRESHA'TAKASHA AI'DAKASHA--
AISHA! A'REEL KARSHAD'N SHAN'TER-SHADAN!
...
BACK AWAY, PROFESSOR.
AND RUN.
I'LL COVER YOU, IF NECESSARY.
MY DEAR CYNDER, WHAT DID THAT AWFUL FELLOW SAY?
THE WORDS WERE TOO QUICK, HOWEVER I DID MAKE OUT "KARSHAD."
AISHA! A'REEL KARSHAD'N SHAN'TER-SHADAN!
"HOLY LANGUAGE," WE LEARNED THE LANGUAGE OF THE CLERGY.
YOU LEARNED THE WRONG LANGUAGE, BUT THINGS ARE NOT AS BAD AS THEY COULD BE.
WAY TO SEE THE STARMARKS ON A VENOMLEECH, CAPTAIN. IF WE CAN'T GET DIRECTIONS OUT OF THEM, THEN AT LEAST WE CAN CALL THEM TO REPENTANCE.
COME ON. LET'S GO GET THOSE SUPPLIES.

PART ONE

Sand Masters

The nation of Lossand has eight main Professions, which act something like guilds, one of which is the Profession of the sand masters, also called the Diem. "The Diem" not only refers to the sand master Profession and to the body of sand masters as a whole but also to the complex of buildings that stands as the Profession's headquarters.

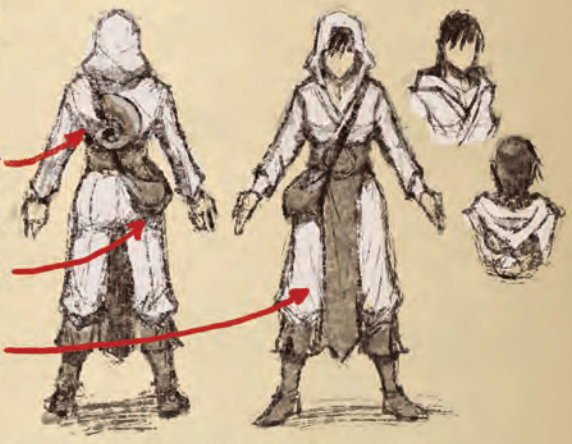


The Diem is located on the Ry'Do-Ali's west bank, outside of the main districts of Kezare, primarily found on the main island around which the river splits.

Once a year, the Diem gathers at a secluded location at the base of Mount KraeDa to award ranks and participate in contests to show off skill and power in sand mastery.

Sand Master Robes

Made from shalrim, a plant that grows underneath the sand. One of the main things Lossandins trade for with the Kerztians.



Qido

A curled, horn-like canteen. Water fuels their art, so sand masters have water on them at all times.

Sand Bag

For carrying freshly-charged sand.

Sash

Color of a sand master's sash indicates their rank within the Diem.

Two sash colors are outside the sand master ranks. Recruits seeking acceptance into the Diem wear brown robes and sashes. Acolents wear the white robes of a sand master, but their sashes are also white, indicating that they have not accepted a rank yet in the Diem.

Once a sand master is awarded a rank, it is impossible to move to a higher rank. Once a sand master in training–called an acolent–has stopped being able to add more ribbons under their control, it is thought that they have reached the extent of their powers and can apply for rank. Here's a table of sand master ranks along with roughly how many ribbons are usually controlled by a sand master of that rank.

Rank	Sash Color	Ribbons
Underfen	gray	1-3
Fen	green	2-5
Diemfen	blue	4-7
Underlestrell	purple	6-10
Lestrell	red	9-12
Undermastrell	orange	11-14
Mastrell	gold	15 or greater

The Kerla

By Darksider standards, the Kerla is a desert, as there appears to be little water and vegetation. The Kerla, however, is less like a desert and more like a lake of sand. The water, vegetation, and fauna reside beneath the surface in their own ecosystem.

A desert to a Daysider is a place where there are no dorim vines and little life beneath the surface of the sand. Lossand is considered such, with its shallow sand, lack of dorim vines, and its outcroppings of rocks. The plants are stumpy and short, there is little livestock, and in order to live, humans are constrained to the land along the rivers. In the "desert" a person's autonomy is restricted to this one area, whereas on the Kerla, if someone knows its rules, they may live where they wish.

Deep sand differs from the Kerla in that the water table is much farther down. If the Kerla is a lake of sand, then deep sand is the ocean. It is calm on the surface, but beneath it is teeming with life. The dorim vines are so deep that human life cannot find them, and the depth of the sand allows for the fauna to grow much larger.

Sandlings

Sandlings don't seem to need water. In fact, it's toxic to them, melting their carapaces. They've evolved a way to eat sand and bleed gas. Sometimes when this gas-blood reacts with air—which often carries a little moisture in it, even in the desert—the gas-blood can coalesce into something of a gooey liquid.

How the sand provides any kind of sustenance equivalent to the human need for water is anyone's guess. I must research this when I've more time to experiment.

Some Types and Sizes of Sandlings
(plural forms I've chosen to use in parentheses)

keldar(in) & a'keldar(in)

tonk(s)

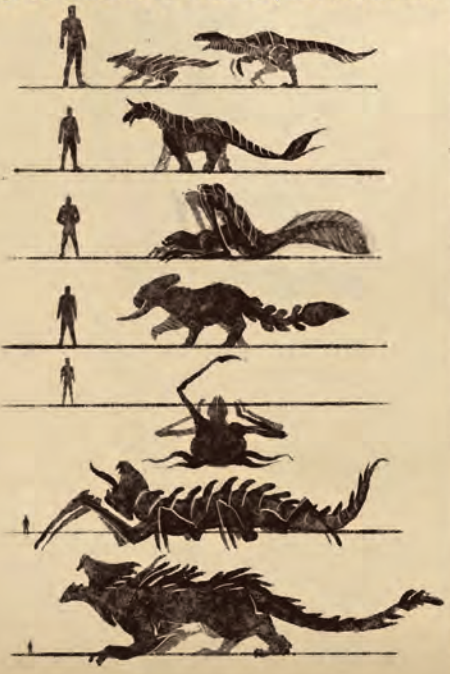
rezal(in)

terha(n)

DelRak(in)

Marken(s)

KaRak(in)

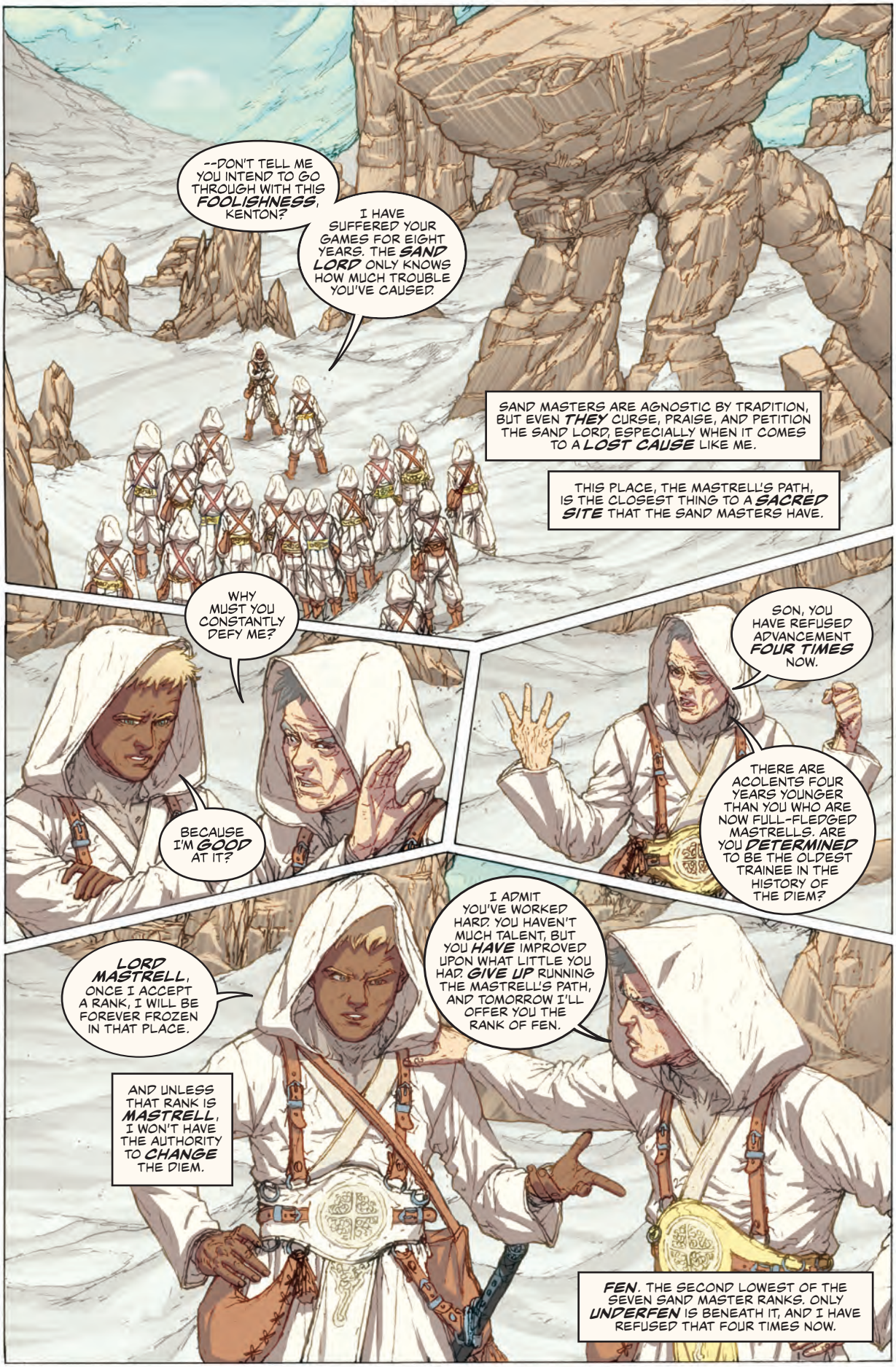


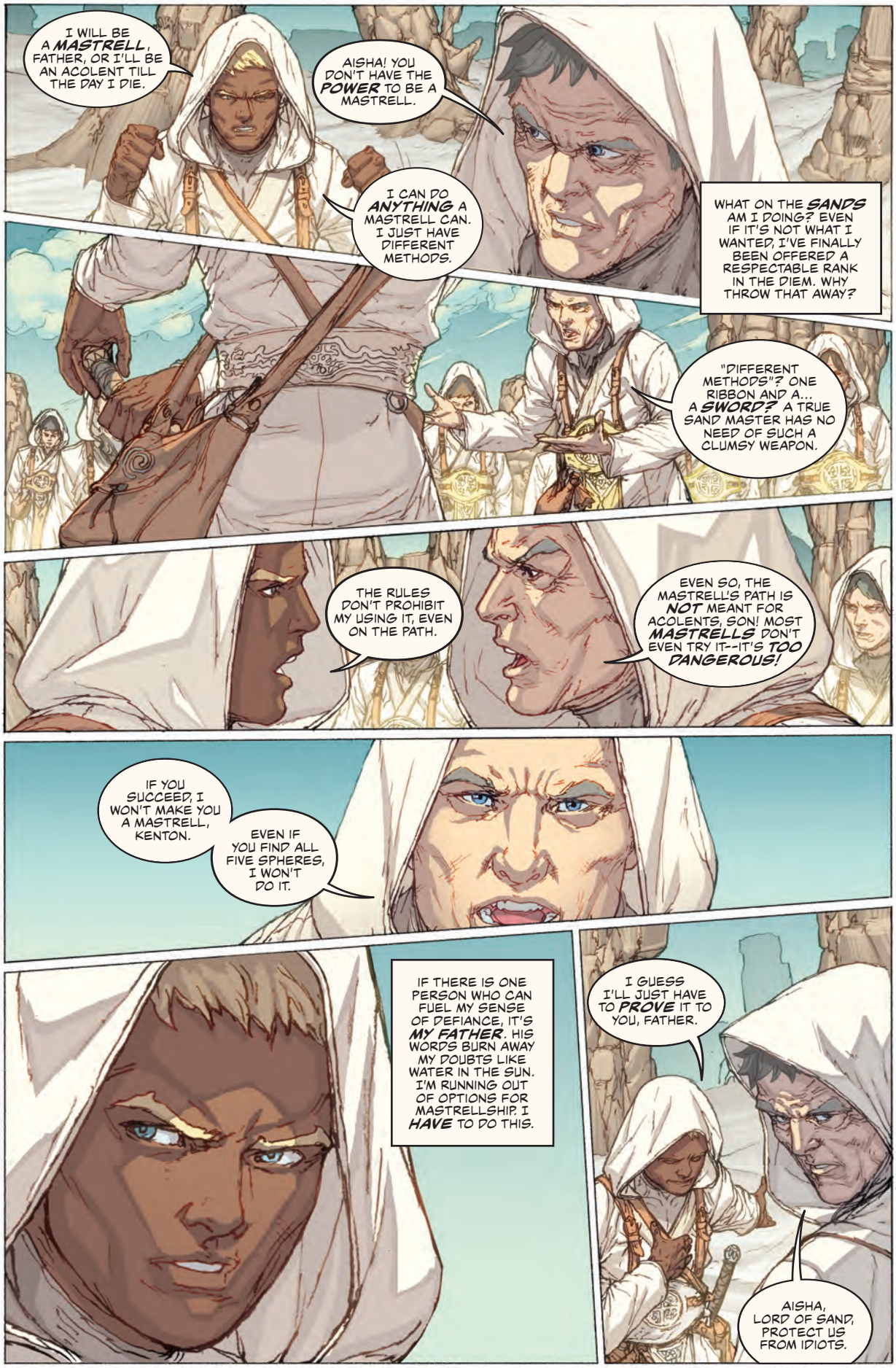
Riding a Tonk

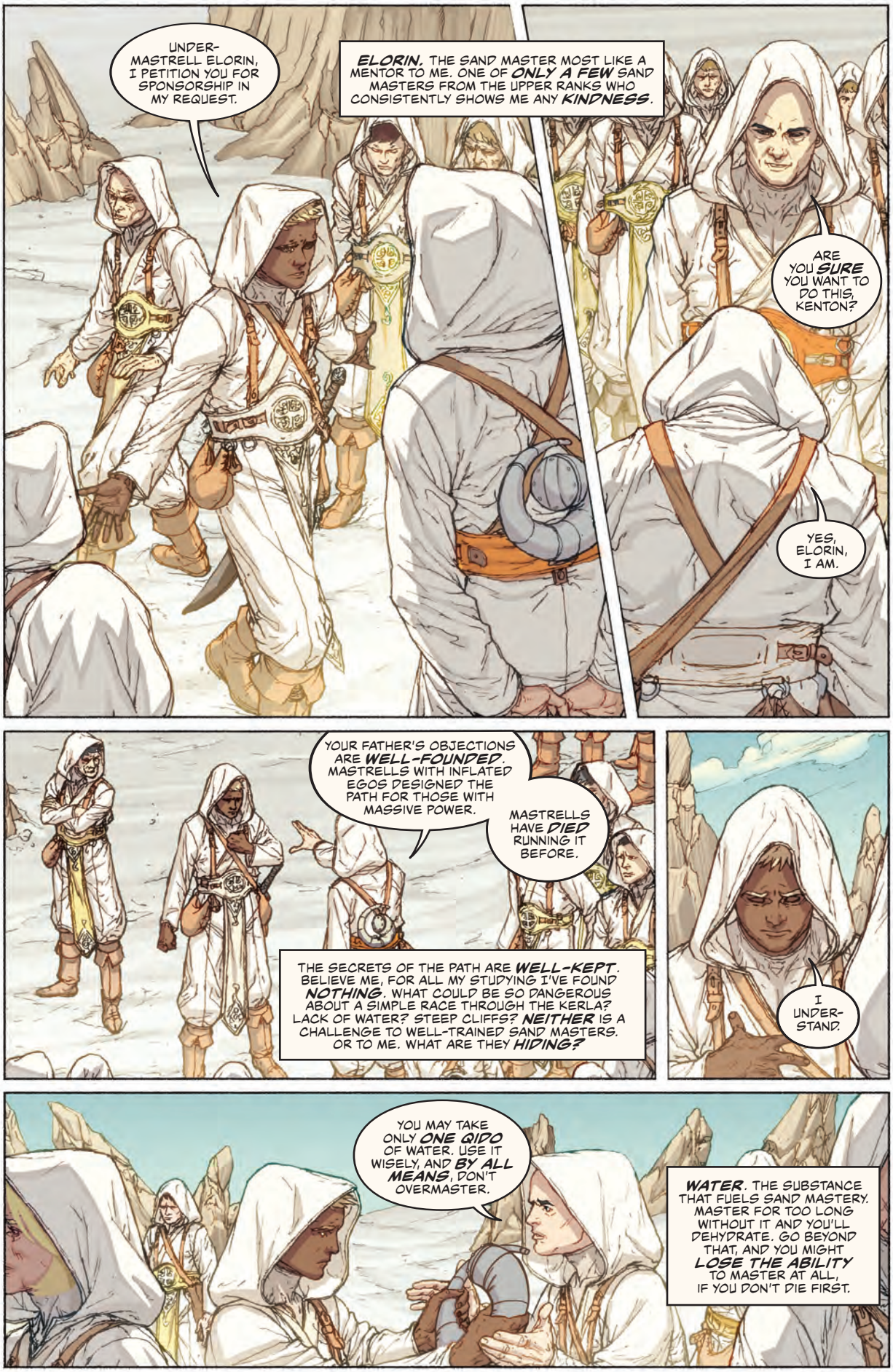
Tonks are beasts of burden that give off a faint sulfurous smell. To steer one, use the riding mallet to tap the tonk's carapace just below the neck on the right or left to turn. The harder you tap, the sharper the turn. If you tap it farther up, near the head, it will speed up. Tap the carapace back near the saddle to slow it down. One hard tap in this location will signal the tonk to stop.

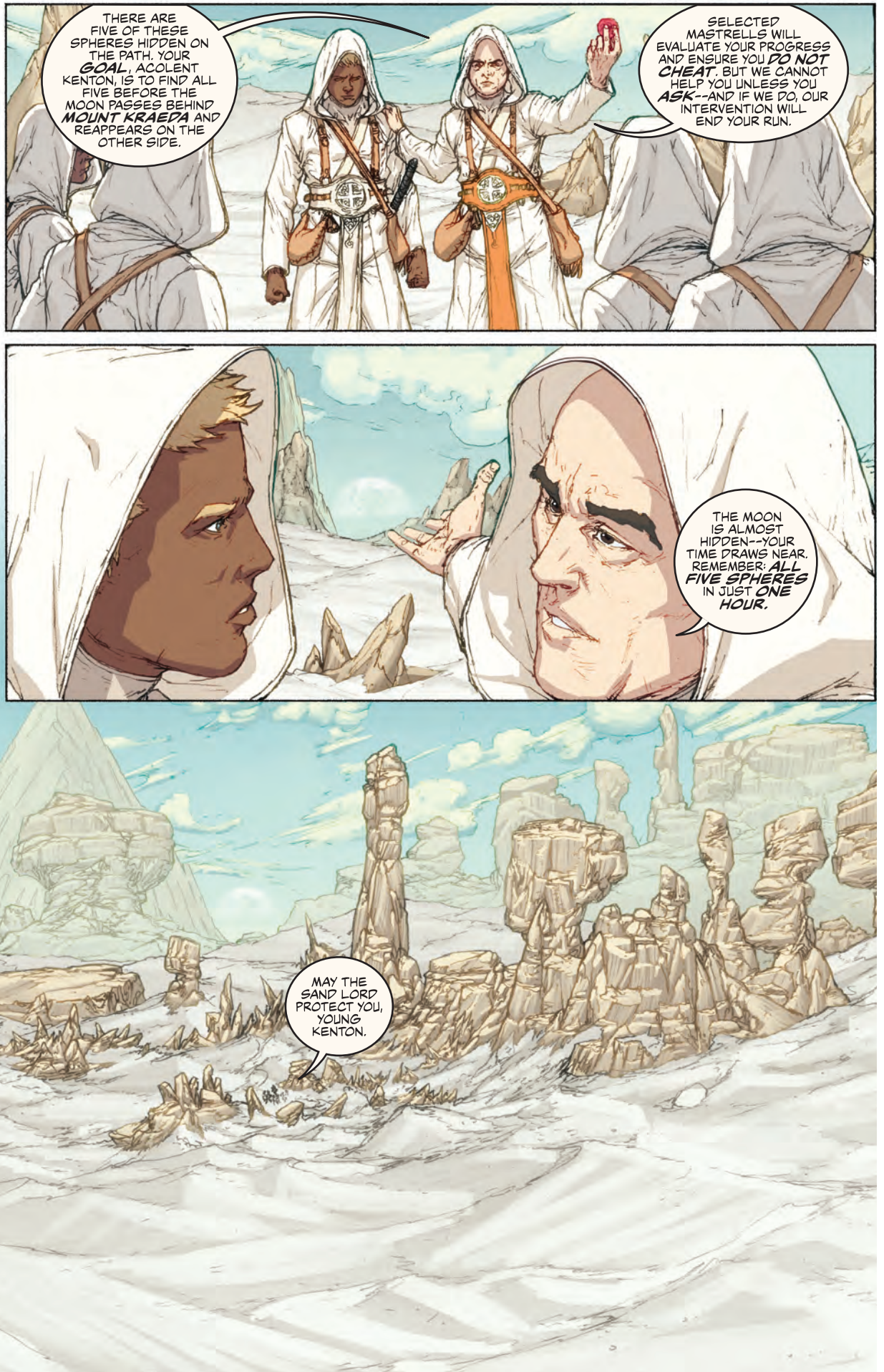
When a tonk is spooked, it will burrow into the sand until only the tips of its carapace are visible. Tap the unburied horns to signal to the tonk that it is safe to unbury itself.

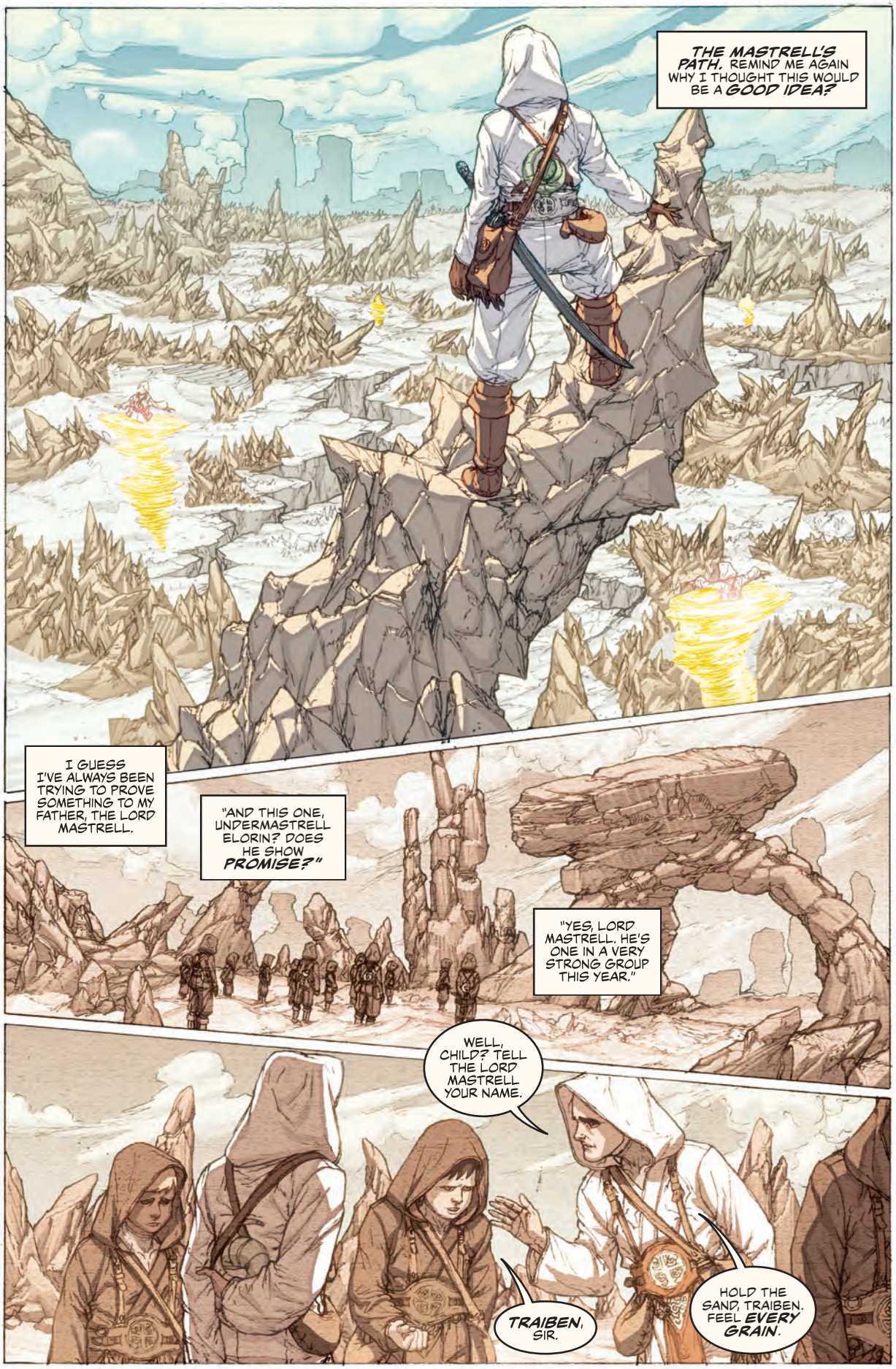
CHAPTER 1
RELENTLESS


--DON'T TELL ME YOU INTEND TO GO THROUGH WITH THIS FOOLISHNESS, KENTON?
I HAVE SUFFERED YOUR GAMES FOR EIGHT YEARS. THE SAND LORD ONLY KNOWS HOW MUCH TROUBLE YOU'VE CAUSED.
SAND MASTERS ARE AGNOSTIC BY TRADITION, BUT EVEN THEY CURSE, PRAISE, AND PETITION THE SAND LORD, ESPECIALLY WHEN IT COMES TO A LOST CAUSE LIKE ME.
THIS PLACE, THE MASTRELL'S PATH, IS THE CLOSEST THING TO A SACRED SITE THAT THE SAND MASTERS HAVE.
WHY MUST YOU CONSTANTLY DEFY ME?
BECAUSE I'M GOOD AT IT?
SON, YOU HAVE REFUSED ADVANCEMENT FOUR TIMES NOW.
THERE ARE ACOLENTS FOUR YEARS YOUNGER THAN YOU WHO ARE NOW FULL-FLEDGED MASTRELLS. ARE YOU DETERMINED TO BE THE OLDEST TRAINEE IN THE HISTORY OF THE DIEM?
LORD MASTRELL, ONCE I ACCEPT A RANK, I WILL BE FOREVER FROZEN IN THAT PLACE.
I ADMIT YOU'VE WORKED HARD. YOU HAVEN'T MUCH TALENT, BUT YOU HAVE IMPROVED UPON WHAT LITTLE YOU HAD. GIVE UP RUNNING THE MASTRELL'S PATH, AND TOMORROW I'LL OFFER YOU THE RANK OF FEN.
AND UNLESS THAT RANK IS MASTRELL, I WON'T HAVE THE AUTHORITY TO CHANGE THE DIEM.
FEN. THE SECOND LOWEST OF THE SEVEN SAND MASTER RANKS. ONLY UNDERFEN IS BENEATH IT, AND I HAVE REFUSED THAT FOUR TIMES NOW.

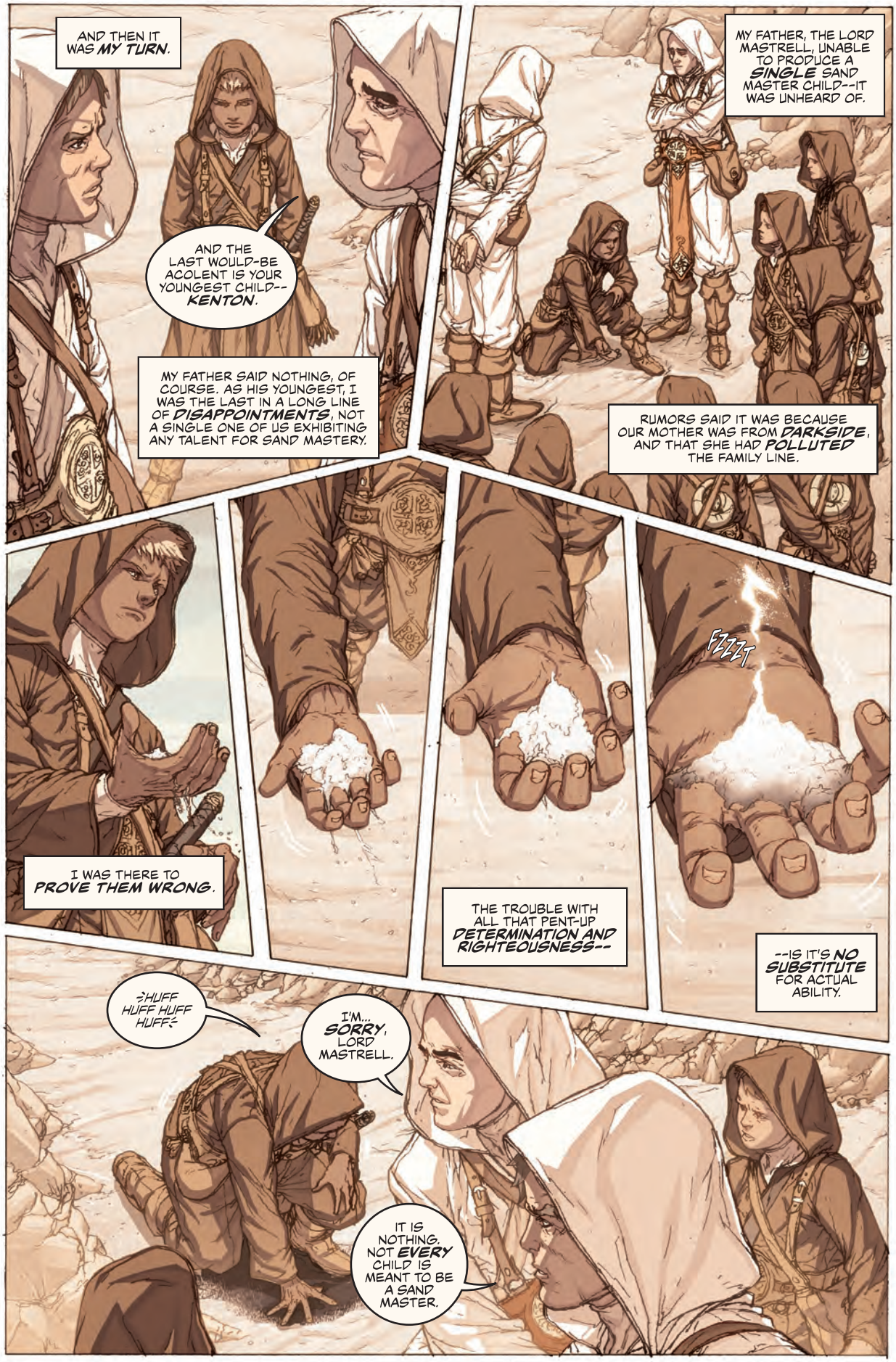

I WILL BE A MASTRELL, FATHER, OR I'LL BE AN ACOLENT TILL THE DAY I DIE.
AISHA! YOU DON'T HAVE THE POWER TO BE A MASTRELL.
I CAN DO ANYTHING A MASTRELL CAN. I JUST HAVE DIFFERENT METHODS.
WHAT ON THE SANDS AM I DOING? EVEN IF IT'S NOT WHAT I WANTED, I'VE FINALLY BEEN OFFERED A RESPECTABLE RANK IN THE DIEM. WHY THROW THAT AWAY?
"DIFFERENT METHODS"? ONE RIBBON AND A... A SWORD? A TRUE SAND MASTER HAS NO NEED OF SUCH A CLUMSY WEAPON.
THE RULES DON'T PROHIBIT MY USING IT, EVEN ON THE PATH.
EVEN SO, THE MASTRELL'S PATH IS NOT MEANT FOR ACOLENTS, SON! MOST MASTRELLS DON'T EVEN TRY IT--IT'S TOO DANGEROUS!
IF YOU SUCCEED, I WON'T MAKE YOU A MASTRELL, KENTON.
EVEN IF YOU FIND ALL FIVE SPHERES, I WON'T DO IT.
IF THERE IS ONE PERSON WHO CAN FUEL MY SENSE OF DEFIANCE, IT'S MY FATHER. HIS WORDS BURN AWAY MY DOUBTS LIKE WATER IN THE SUN. I'M RUNNING OUT OF OPTIONS FOR MASTRELLSHIP. I HAVE TO DO THIS.
I GUESS I'LL JUST HAVE TO PROVE IT TO YOU, FATHER.
AISHA, LORD OF SAND, PROTECT US FROM IDIOTS.


UNDER-MASTRELL ELORIN, I PETITION YOU FOR SPONSORSHIP IN MY REQUEST.
ELORIN, THE SAND MASTER MOST LIKE A MENTOR TO ME. ONE OF ONLY A FEW SAND MASTERS FROM THE UPPER RANKS WHO CONSISTENTLY SHOWS ME ANY KINDNESS.
ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT TO DO THIS, KENTON?
YES, ELORIN, I AM.
YOUR FATHER'S OBJECTIONS ARE WELL-FOUNDED. MASTRELLS WITH INFLATED EGOS DESIGNED THE PATH FOR THOSE WITH MASSIVE POWER.
MASTRELLS HAVE DIED RUNNING IT BEFORE.
THE SECRETS OF THE PATH ARE WELL-KEPT. BELIEVE ME, FOR ALL MY STUDYING I'VE FOUND NOTHING. WHAT COULD BE SO DANGEROUS ABOUT A SIMPLE RACE THROUGH THE KERLA? LACK OF WATER? STEEP CLIFFS? NEITHER IS A CHALLENGE TO WELL-TRAINED SAND MASTERS. OR TO ME. WHAT ARE THEY HIDING?
I UNDER-STAND.
YOU MAY TAKE ONLY ONE QIDO OF WATER. USE IT WISELY, AND BY ALL MEANS, DON'T OVERMASTER.
WATER. THE SUBSTANCE THAT FUELS SAND MASTERY. MASTER FOR TOO LONG WITHOUT IT AND YOU'LL DEHYDRATE. GO BEYOND THAT, AND YOU MIGHT LOSE THE ABILITY TO MASTER AT ALL, IF YOU DON'T DIE FIRST.


THERE ARE FIVE OF THESE SPHERES HIDDEN ON THE PATH. YOUR GOAL, ACOLENT KENTON, IS TO FIND ALL FIVE BEFORE THE MOON PASSES BEHIND MOUNT KRAEDA AND REAPPEARS ON THE OTHER SIDE.
SELECTED MASTRELLS WILL EVALUATE YOUR PROGRESS AND ENSURE YOU DO NOT CHEAT. BUT WE CANNOT HELP YOU UNLESS YOU ASK--AND IF WE DO, OUR INTERVENTION WILL END YOUR RUN.
THE MOON IS ALMOST HIDDEN--YOUR TIME DRAWS NEAR. REMEMBER: ALL FIVE SPHERES IN JUST ONE HOUR.
MAY THE SAND LORD PROTECT YOU, YOUNG KENTON.

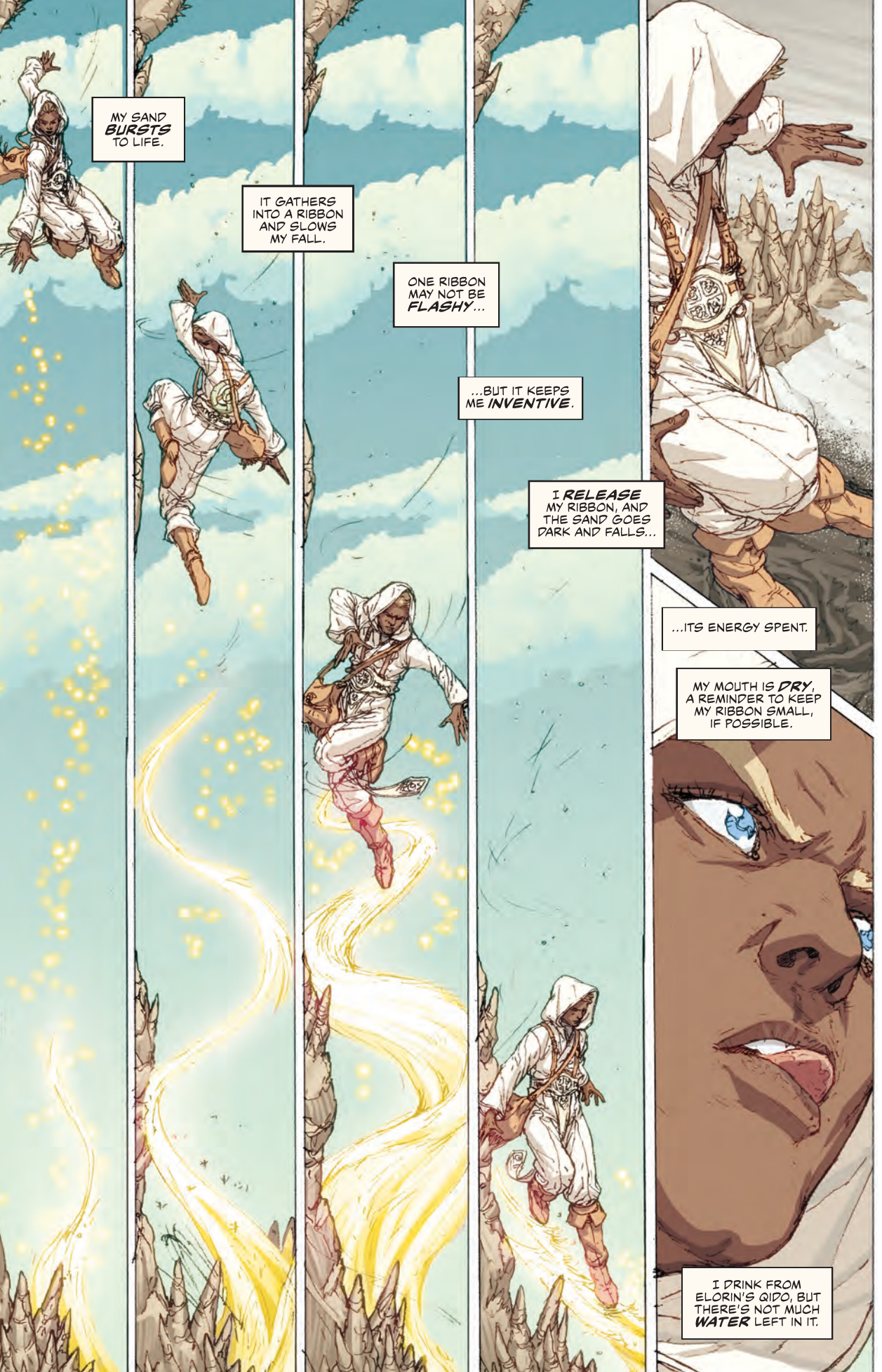

THE MASTRELL'S PATH. REMIND ME AGAIN WHY I THOUGHT THIS WOULD BE A GOOD IDEA?
I GUESS I'VE ALWAYS BEEN TRYING TO PROVE SOMETHING TO MY FATHER, THE LORD MASTRELL.
"AND THIS ONE, UNDERMASTRELL ELORIN? DOES HE SHOW PROMISE?"
"YES, LORD MASTRELL. HE'S ONE IN A VERY STRONG GROUP THIS YEAR."
WELL, CHILD? TELL THE LORD MASTRELL YOUR NAME.
TRAIBEN, SIR.
HOLD THE SAND, TRAIBEN. FEEL EVERY GRAIN.

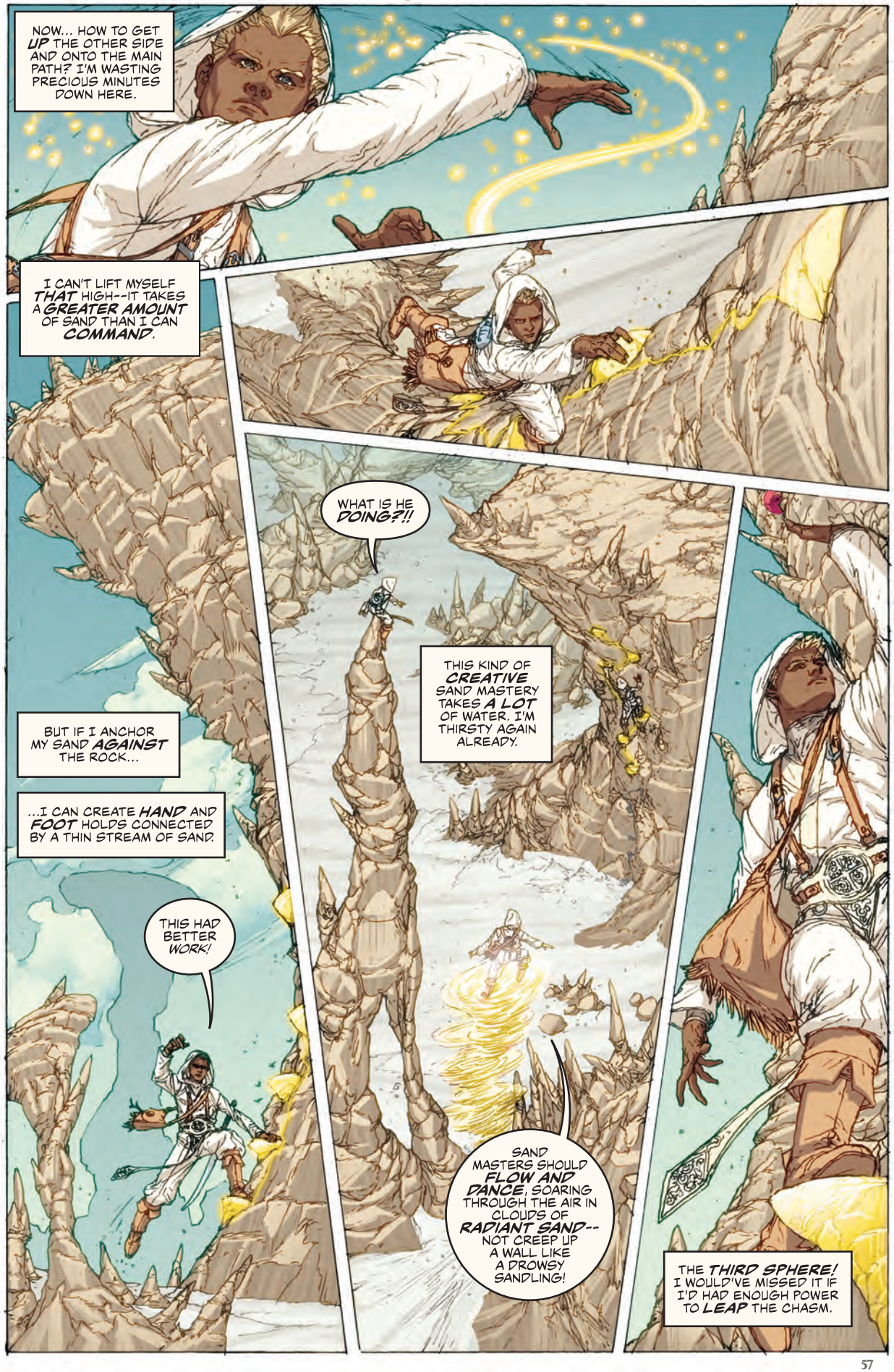
CALL OUT TO IT IN YOUR MIND, AS IF IT WERE AN OLD FRIEND.
OFFER IT TO DRINK OF THE WATER IN YOUR BODY. THEN BRING THE SAND TO LIFE.
:NNGHFF!:
A GOOD START.
THE LORD MASTRELL WILL FIND A PLACE FOR YOU IN THE DIEM WHERE YOU WILL LEARN PROPER MASTERY OF SAND.
AND SO IT WENT, EACH WOULD-BE ACOLENT TESTED FOR THEIR ABILITY TO MASTER SAND.
SOME WEAK.
SOME STRONG.
VOOM
A REMARKABLE DISPLAY. I HAVEN'T SEEN ONE SO POWERFUL IN YEARS. WHO IS THAT?
DRILE, SON OF MASTRELL RILE.
HMMM. A PROFITABLE CATCH THEN, IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE.

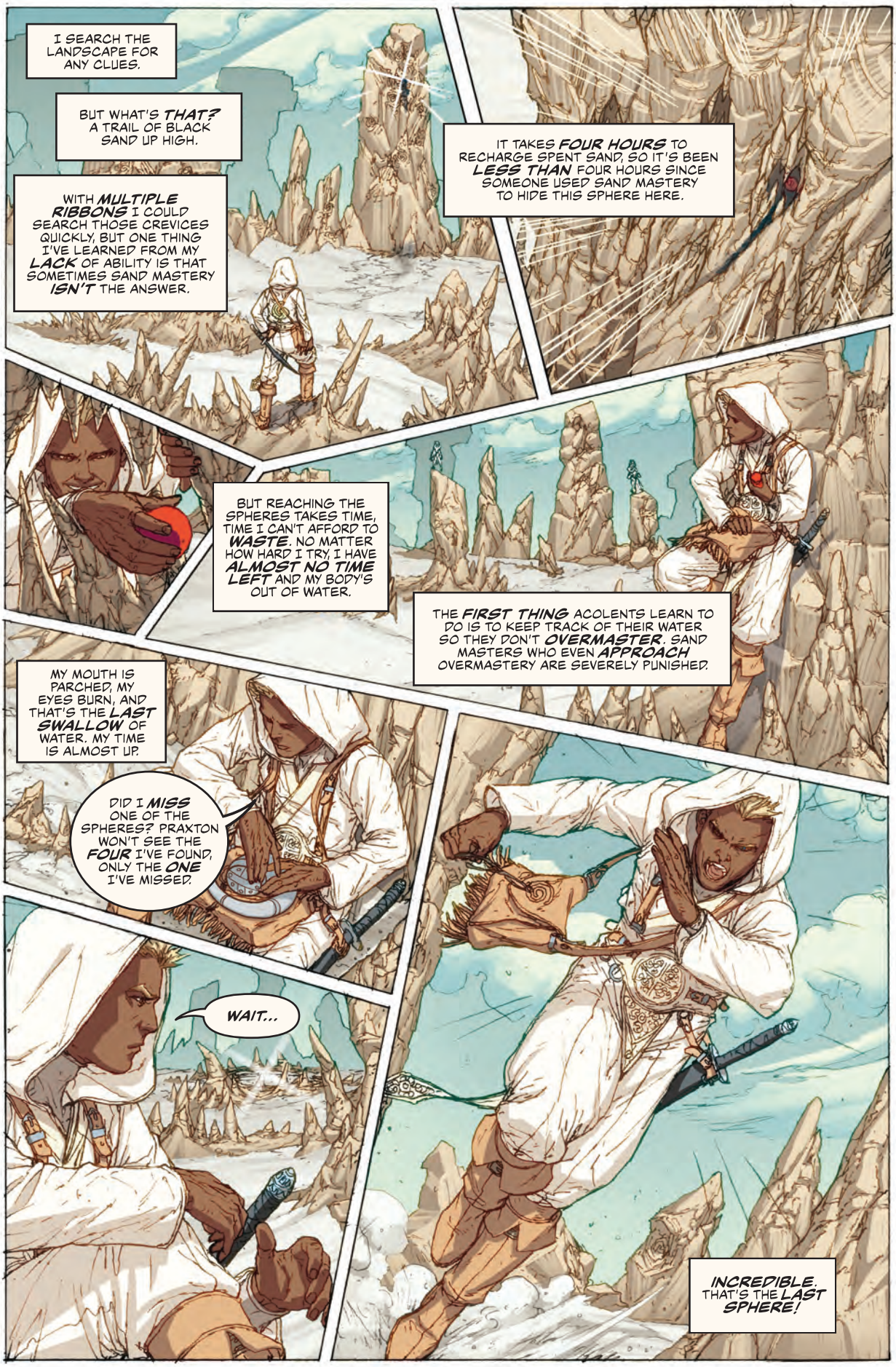

AND THEN IT WAS MY TURN.
AND THE LAST WOULD-BE ACOLENT IS YOUR YOUNGEST CHILD--KENTON.
MY FATHER SAID NOTHING, OF COURSE. AS HIS YOUNGEST, I WAS THE LAST IN A LONG LINE OF DISAPPOINTMENTS, NOT A SINGLE ONE OF US EXHIBITING ANY TALENT FOR SAND MASTERY.
MY FATHER, THE LORD MASTRELL, UNABLE TO PRODUCE A SINGLE SAND MASTER CHILD--IT WAS UNHEARD OF.
RUMORS SAID IT WAS BECAUSE OUR MOTHER WAS FROM DARKSIDE, AND THAT SHE HAD POLLUTED THE FAMILY LINE.
FZZZT
I WAS THERE TO PROVE THEM WRONG.
THE TROUBLE WITH ALL THAT PENT-UP DETERMINATION AND RIGHTEOUSNESS--
--IS IT'S NO SUBSTITUTE FOR ACTUAL ABILITY.
=HUFF HUFF HUFF HUFF=
I'M... SORRY, LORD MASTRELL.
IT IS NOTHING. NOT EVERY CHILD IS MEANT TO BE A SAND MASTER.

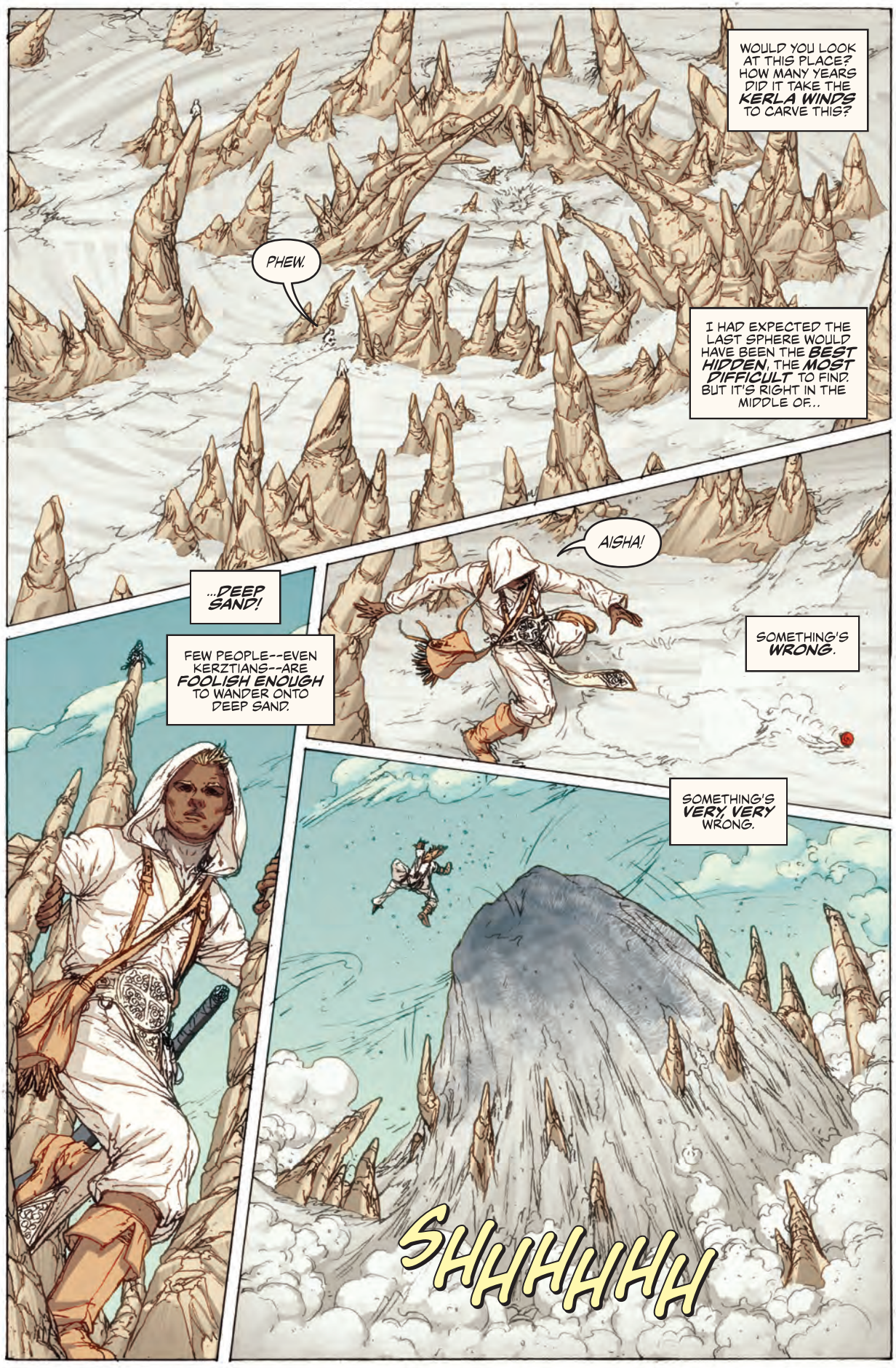
TAKE THEM AWAY. THOSE WHO HAVE ANY SKILL MAY ENTER THE DIEM; THE REST WILL CHOOSE ANOTHER PROFESSION.
I WILL BE A SAND MASTER!
YOU HAVE NO TALENT FOR SAND MASTERY, SON. GO HOME.
YOU SAW.
THE LAW SAYS I HAVE ENOUGH!
YOU'VE STUDIED THE LAW, HAVE YOU, SON? THEN YOU KNOW THAT, AS LORD MASTRELL, I AM THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN GRANT ADVANCEMENT IN THE DIEM--
YOU WOULD NOT FIND IT EASY IN THE DIEM, SON.
--AND THAT IT IS I WHO MUST GIVE HIS APPROVAL BEFORE ANY SAND MASTER CAN BE ASSIGNED A RANK.
FOR EVERY RANK BUT THE FIRST!
BUT YOU MAY JOIN IF THAT IS YOUR DESIRE.
HE WAS RIGHT. LIFE IN THE DIEM HAD BEEN DIFFICULT FOR AN ACOLENT WITH NO POWER.

TO SAND MASTERS, POWER IS EVERYTHING. THEIR SOLUTION TO ANY PROBLEM IS TO THROW A DOZEN RIBBONS AT IT AND HOPE IT GOES AWAY.
TODAY I WILL PROVE THERE IS A BETTER WAY.
ALREADY I'VE FOUND TWO SPHERES.
OKAY, BIG DROP. BIGGER THAN I WAS EXPECTING, BUT THIS IS THE PATH ALL RIGHT--MARKER FLAG CONFIRMS IT. SO NOW THE REAL TEST BEGINS.
A MORE POWERFUL SAND MASTER COULD PROPEL THEMSELF THROUGH THE AIR ON A STREAM OF SAND.
I DON'T HAVE THAT OPTION.
SO, INSTEAD, I JUMP OFF THE CLIFF...
...AND FOCUS ON THE SAND IN MY FIST.


MY SAND BURSTS TO LIFE.
IT GATHERS INTO A RIBBON AND SLOWS MY FALL.
ONE RIBBON MAY NOT BE FLASHY...
...BUT IT KEEPS ME INVENTIVE.
I RELEASE MY RIBBON, AND THE SAND GOES DARK AND FALLS...
...ITS ENERGY SPENT.
MY MOUTH IS DRY, A REMINDER TO KEEP MY RIBBON SMALL, IF POSSIBLE.
I DRINK FROM ELORIN'S QIDO, BUT THERE'S NOT MUCH WATER LEFT IN IT.


NOW... HOW TO GET UP THE OTHER SIDE AND ONTO THE MAIN PATH? I'M WASTING PRECIOUS MINUTES DOWN HERE.
I CAN'T LIFT MYSELF THAT HIGH--IT TAKES A GREATER AMOUNT OF SAND THAN I CAN COMMAND.
WHAT IS HE DOING?!!
THIS KIND OF CREATIVE SAND MASTERY TAKES A LOT OF WATER. I'M THIRSTY AGAIN ALREADY.
BUT IF I ANCHOR MY SAND AGAINST THE ROCK...
...I CAN CREATE HAND AND FOOT HOLDS CONNECTED BY A THIN STREAM OF SAND.
THIS HAD BETTER WORK!
SAND MASTERS SHOULD FLOW AND DANCE, SOARING THROUGH THE AIR IN CLOUDS OF RADIANT SAND-- NOT CREEP UP A WALL LIKE A DROWSY SANDLING!
THE THIRD SPHERE! I WOULD'VE MISSED IT IF I'D HAD ENOUGH POWER TO LEAP THE CHASM.

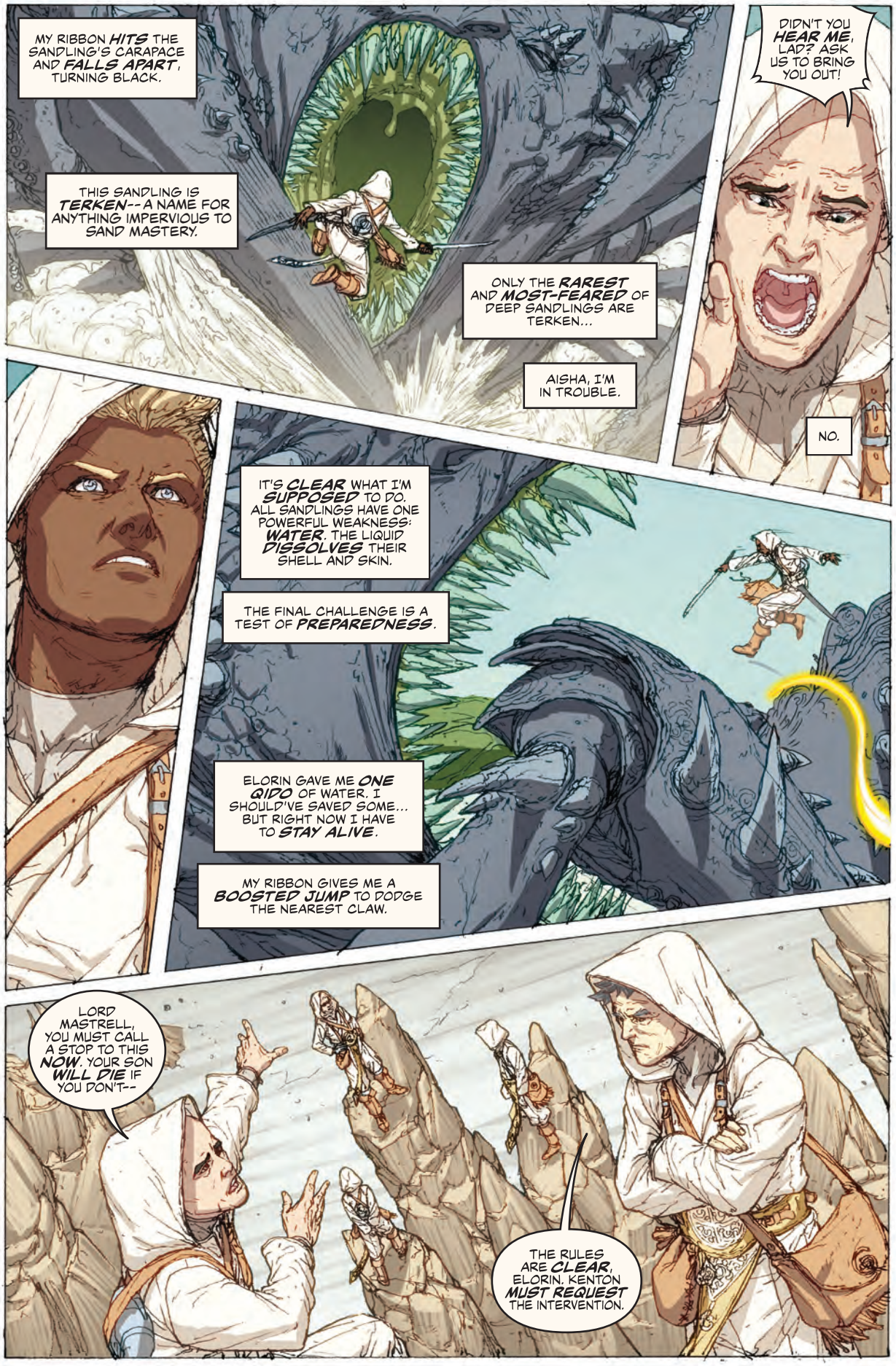

I SEARCH THE LANDSCAPE FOR ANY CLUES.
BUT WHAT'S THAT? A TRAIL OF BLACK SAND UP HIGH.
WITH MULTIPLE RIBBONS I COULD SEARCH THOSE CREVICES QUICKLY, BUT ONE THING I'VE LEARNED FROM MY LACK OF ABILITY IS THAT SOMETIMES SAND MASTERY ISN'T THE ANSWER.
IT TAKES FOUR HOURS TO RECHARGE SPENT SAND, SO IT'S BEEN LESS THAN FOUR HOURS SINCE SOMEONE USED SAND MASTERY TO HIDE THIS SPHERE HERE.
BUT REACHING THE SPHERES TAKES TIME, TIME I CAN'T AFFORD TO WASTE. NO MATTER HOW HARD I TRY, I HAVE ALMOST NO TIME LEFT AND MY BODY'S OUT OF WATER.
THE FIRST THING ACOLENTS LEARN TO DO IS TO KEEP TRACK OF THEIR WATER SO THEY DON'T OVERMASTER. SAND MASTERS WHO EVEN APPROACH OVERMASTERY ARE SEVERELY PUNISHED.
MY MOUTH IS PARCHED, MY EYES BURN, AND THAT'S THE LAST SWALLOW OF WATER. MY TIME IS ALMOST UP.
DID I MISS ONE OF THE SPHERES? PRAXTON WON'T SEE THE FOUR I'VE FOUND, ONLY THE ONE I'VE MISSED.
WAIT...
INCREDIBLE. THAT'S THE LAST SPHERE!

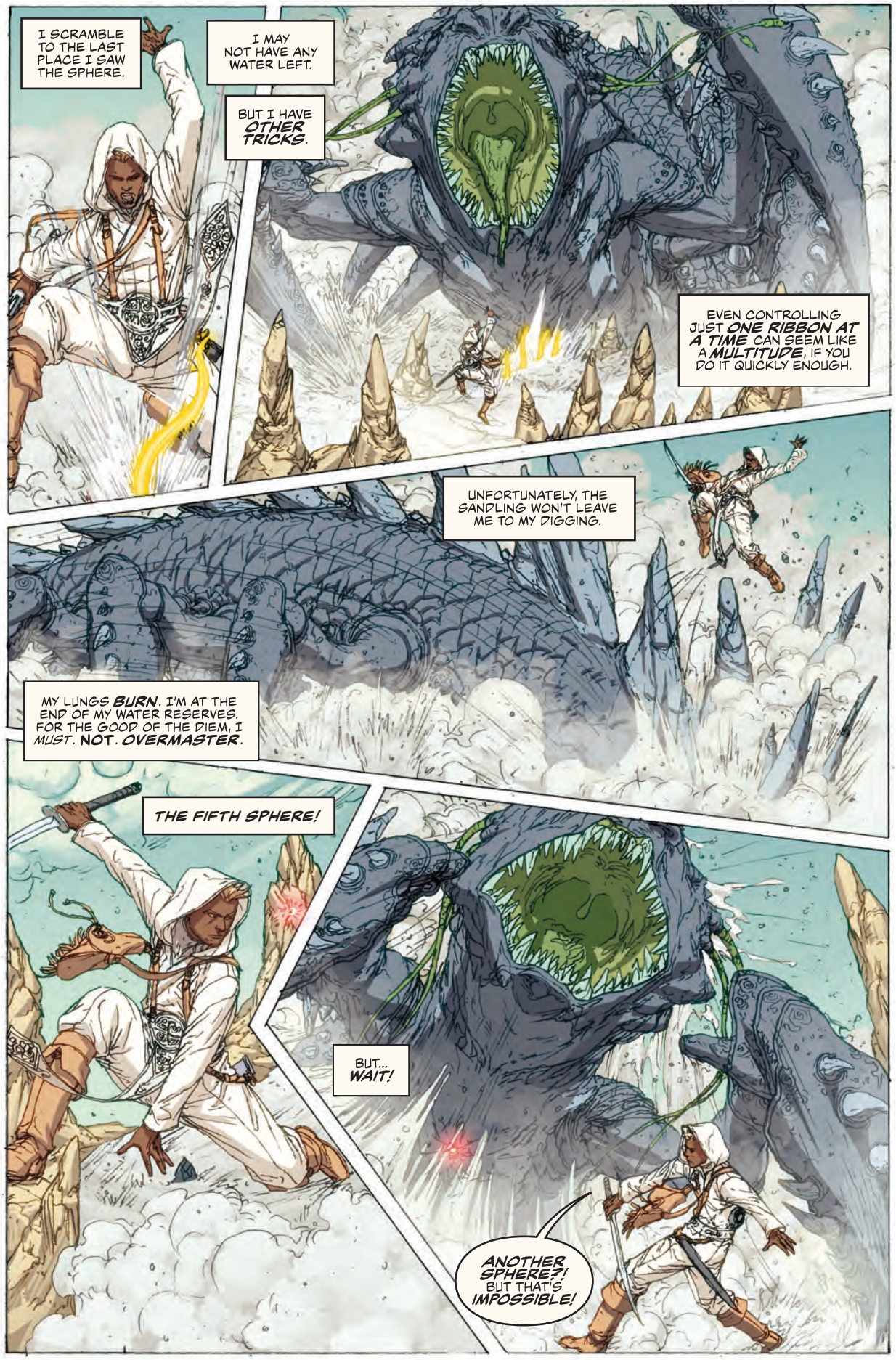

WOULD YOU LOOK AT THIS PLACE? HOW MANY YEARS DID IT TAKE THE KERLA WINDS TO CARVE THIS?
PHEW.
I HAD EXPECTED THE LAST SPHERE WOULD HAVE BEEN THE BEST HIDDEN, THE MOST DIFFICULT TO FIND. BUT IT'S RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF...
AISHA!
...DEEP SAND!
SOMETHING'S WRONG.
FEW PEOPLE--EVEN KERZTIANS--ARE FOOLISH ENOUGH TO WANDER ONTO DEEP SAND.
SOMETHING'S VERY, VERY WRONG.
SHHHHHH

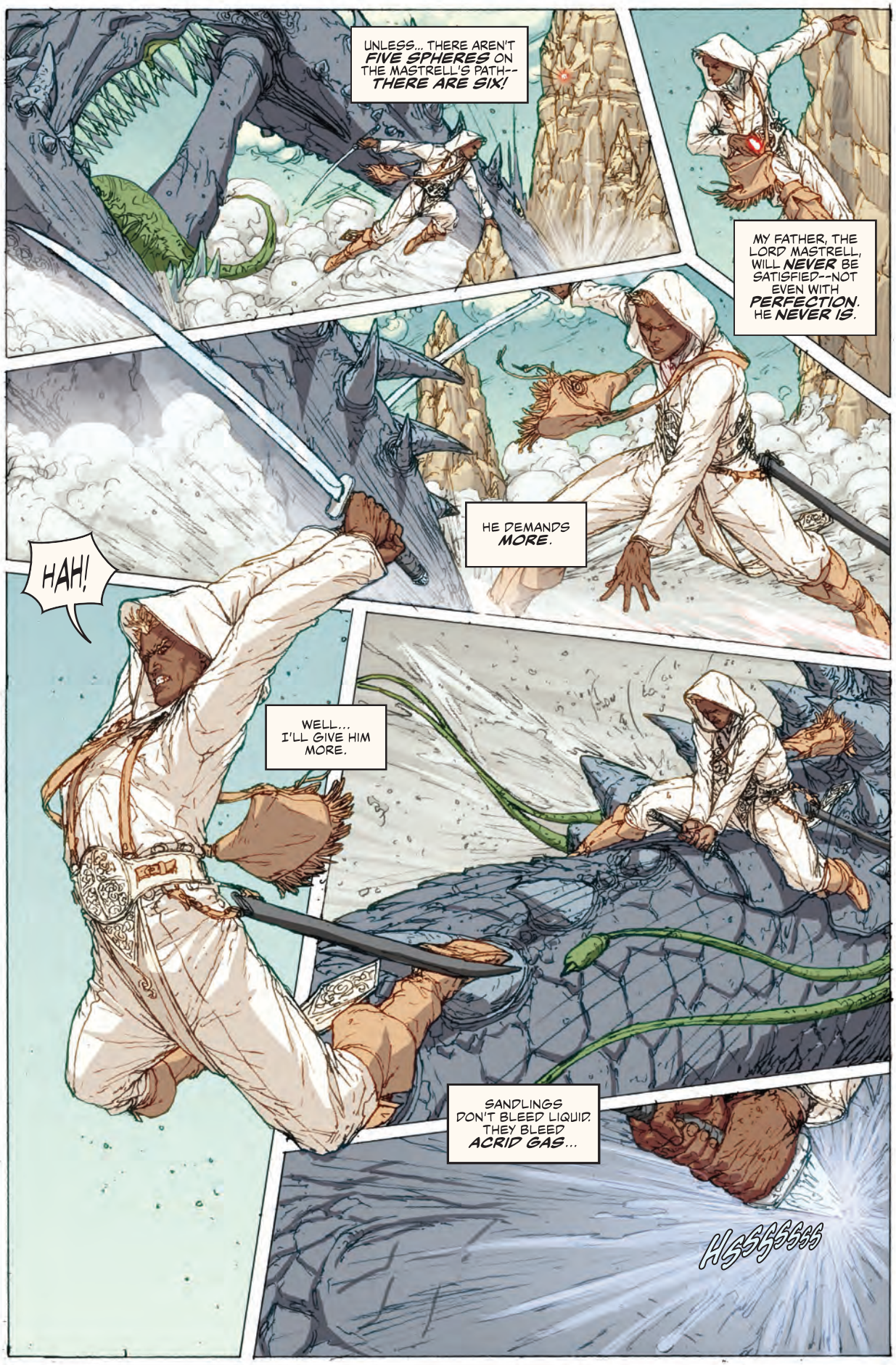
A DEEP SANDLING!
...PREDATORS THAT MOVE THROUGH SAND AS IF IT WERE WATER. THEY'RE FAST AND NEARLY INDESTRUCTABLE, LIVING IN DEEP SAND AND ONLY EMERGING TO HUNT.

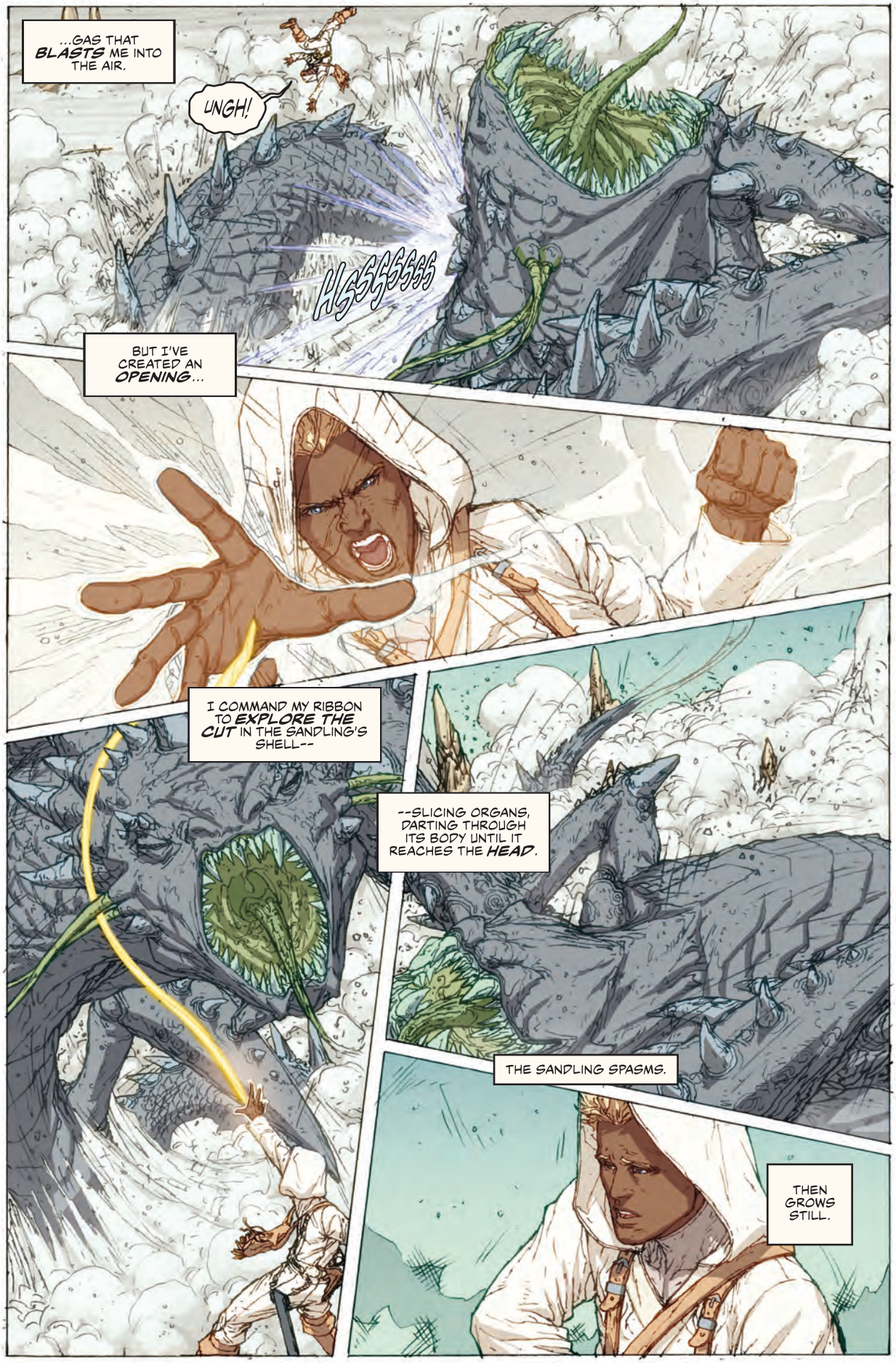
THEY DON'T REALLY SEE-- THEY FEEL. THE KERZTIANS BELIEVE THAT THEY EVEN SPEAK TO THE SAND.
BUT THIS IS NO DEEP SANDLING I'VE EVER HEARD OF.

I'M SUDDENLY THANKFUL FOR THE HOURS I SPENT SPARRING WITH SOLDIERS FROM THE TOWER.
THAT TRAINING IS ALL THAT'S KEEPING ME ALIVE.
CLANG
KENTON! WE CANNOT INTERCEDE UNLESS YOU ASK!
I MAY NOT BE ABLE TO CONTROL DOZENS OF LINES AT ONCE, BUT WHEN IT COMES TO A SINGLE RIBBON--
--I'M UNMATCHED IN SPEED AND PRECISION.

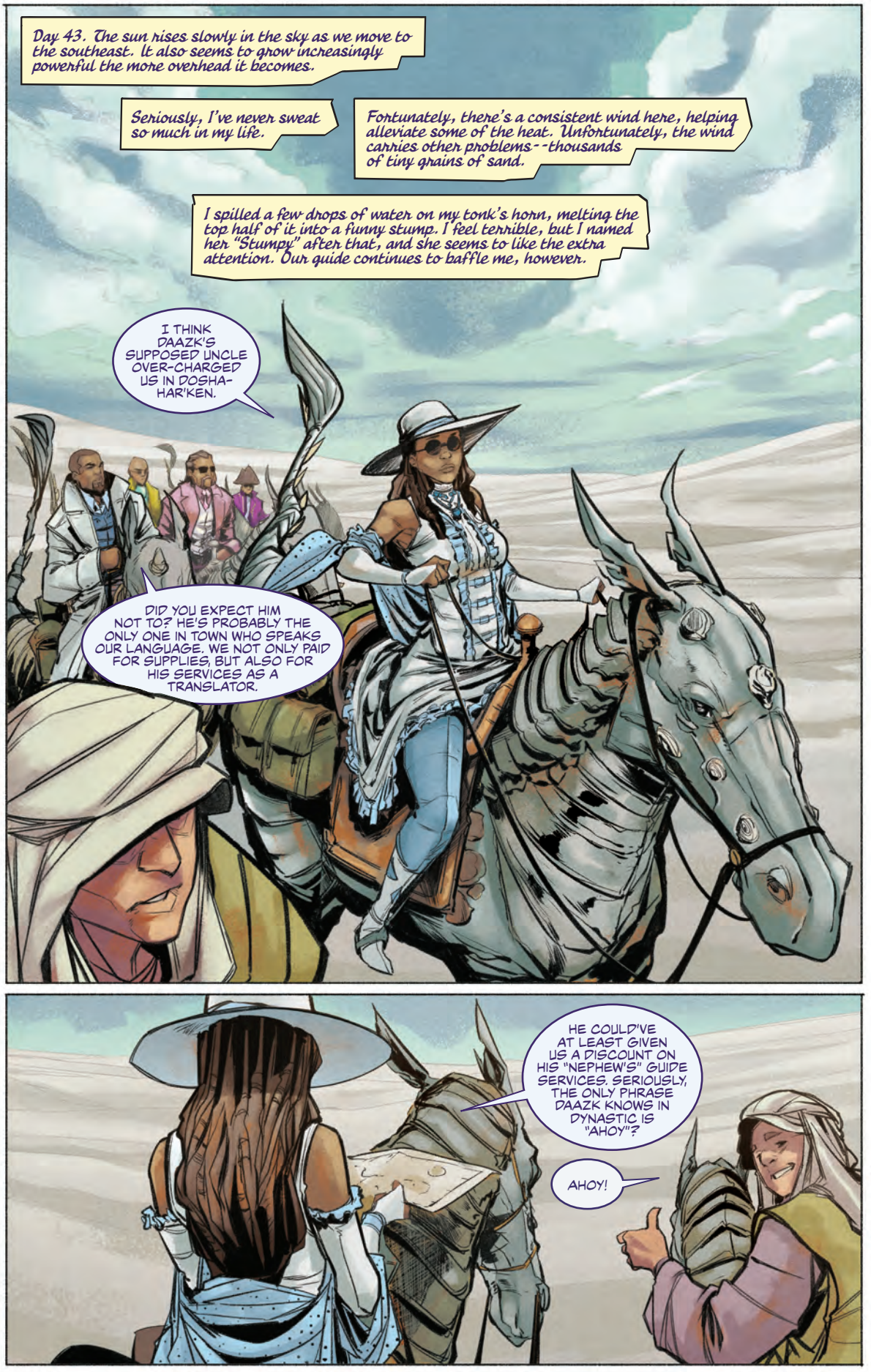

MY RIBBON HITS THE SANDLING'S CARAPACE AND FALLS APART, TURNING BLACK.
THIS SANDLING IS TERKEN-- A NAME FOR ANYTHING IMPERVIOUS TO SAND MASTERY.
ONLY THE RAREST AND MOST-FEARED OF DEEP SANDLINGS ARE TERKEN...
AISHA, I'M IN TROUBLE.
DIDN'T YOU HEAR ME, LAD? ASK US TO BRING YOU OUT!
NO.
IT'S CLEAR WHAT I'M SUPPOSED TO DO. ALL SANDLINGS HAVE ONE POWERFUL WEAKNESS: WATER. THE LIQUID DISSOLVES THEIR SHELL AND SKIN.
THE FINAL CHALLENGE IS A TEST OF PREPAREDNESS.
ELORIN GAVE ME ONE QIDO OF WATER. I SHOULD'VE SAVED SOME... BUT RIGHT NOW I HAVE TO STAY ALIVE.
MY RIBBON GIVES ME A BOOSTED JUMP TO DODGE THE NEAREST CLAW.
LORD MASTRELL, YOU MUST CALL A STOP TO THIS NOW. YOUR SON WILL DIE IF YOU DON'T--
THE RULES ARE CLEAR, ELORIN. KENTON MUST REQUEST THE INTERVENTION.

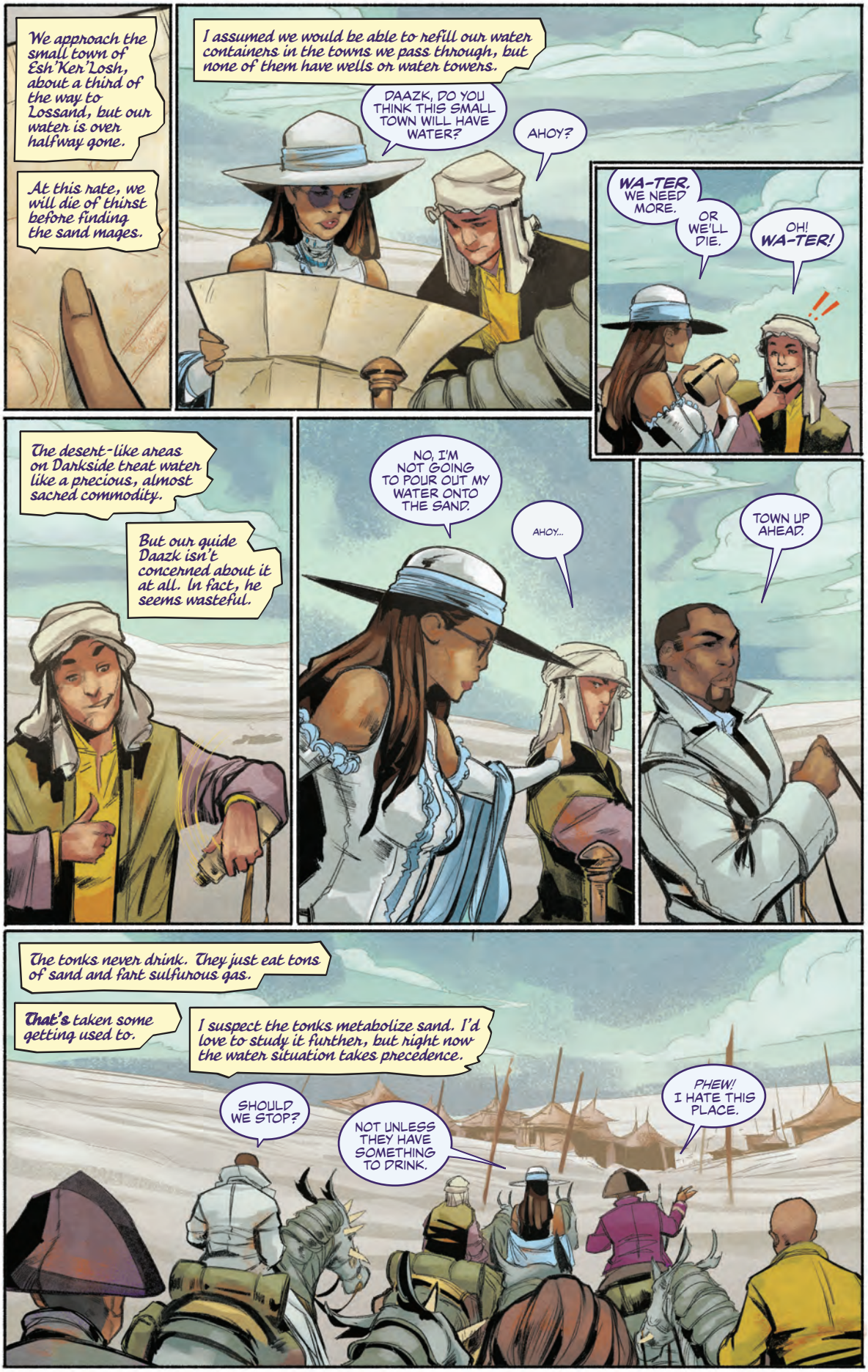

I SCRAMBLE TO THE LAST PLACE I SAW THE SPHERE.
I MAY NOT HAVE ANY WATER LEFT.
BUT I HAVE *OTHER TRICKS*.
EVEN CONTROLLING JUST *ONE RIBBON AT A TIME* CAN SEEM LIKE A *MULTITUDE*, IF YOU DO IT QUICKLY ENOUGH.
UNFORTUNATELY, THE SANDLING WON'T LEAVE ME TO MY DIGGING.
MY LUNGS *BURN*. I'M AT THE END OF MY WATER RESERVES. FOR THE GOOD OF THE DIEM, I *MUST*. **NOT**. *OVERMASTER*.
THE FIFTH SPHERE!
BUT... *WAIT!*
ANOTHER SPHERE?! BUT THAT'S *IMPOSSIBLE!*


UNLESS... THERE AREN'T FIVE SPHERES ON THE MASTRELL'S PATH-- THERE ARE SIX!
MY FATHER, THE LORD MASTRELL, WILL NEVER BE SATISFIED--NOT EVEN WITH PERFECTION. HE NEVER IS.
HE DEMANDS MORE.
HAH!
WELL... I'LL GIVE HIM MORE.
SANDLINGS DON'T BLEED LIQUID. THEY BLEED ACRID GAS...
HSSSSSSSS

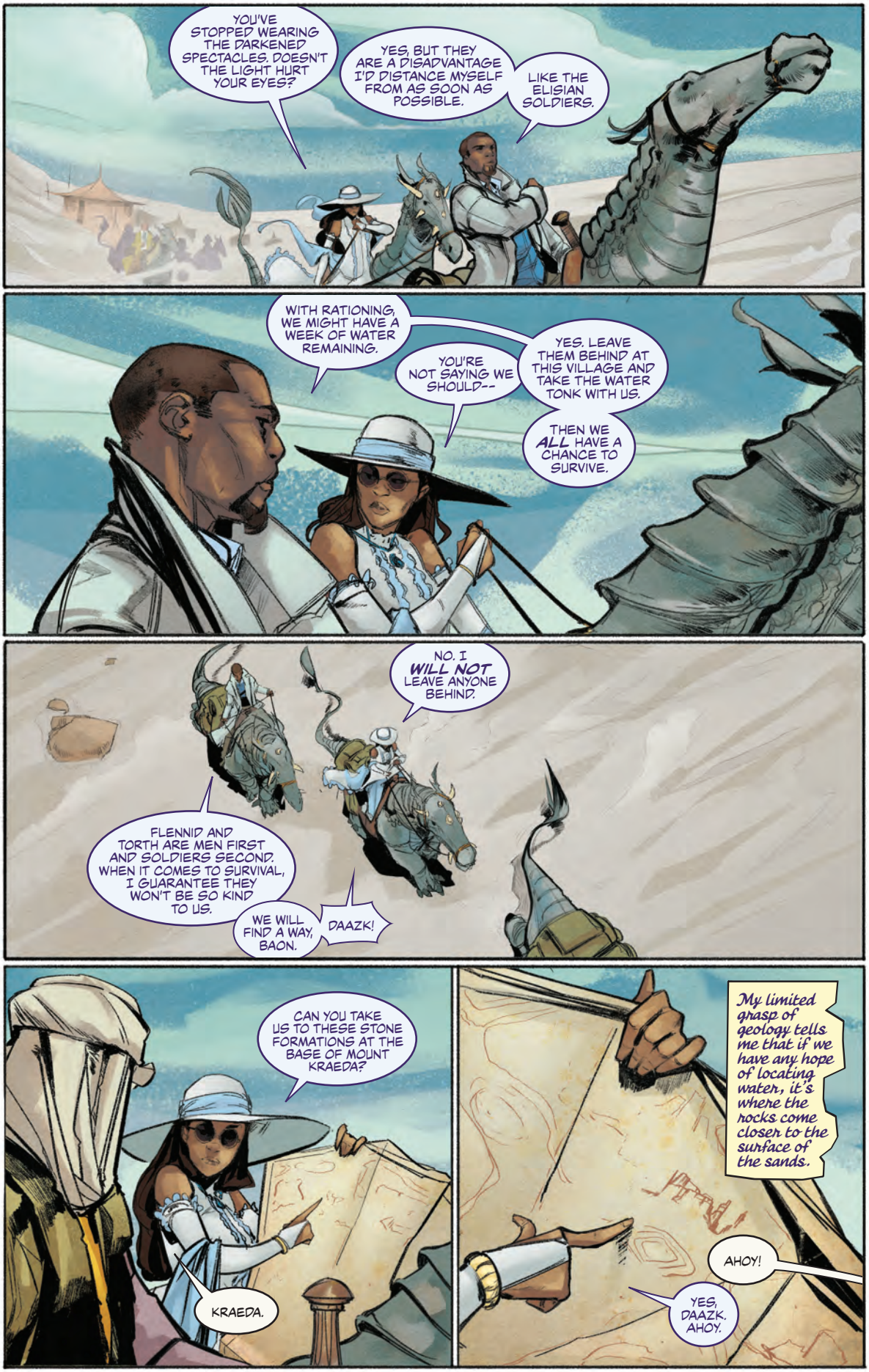

...GAS THAT BLASTS ME INTO THE AIR.
UNGH!
HSSSSSSSS
BUT I'VE CREATED AN OPENING...
I COMMAND MY RIBBON TO EXPLORE THE CUT IN THE SANDLING'S SHELL--
--SLICING ORGANS, DARTING THROUGH ITS BODY UNTIL IT REACHES THE HEAD.
THE SANDLING SPASMS.
THEN GROWS STILL.

MY TIME IS ALMOST UP TOO, BUT I HAVE TO FINISH THIS.
SIX SPHERES! IT'S IMPOSSIBLE!
I LAID FIVE. WHERE DID THE SIXTH COME FROM?
WATER! BRING THE LAD WATER!
FWUMP
THE DIEM WILL TALK ABOUT THIS FOR YEARS, A FEAT CERTAINLY WORTHY OF MASTRELLSHIP.
WE SHALL SEE...

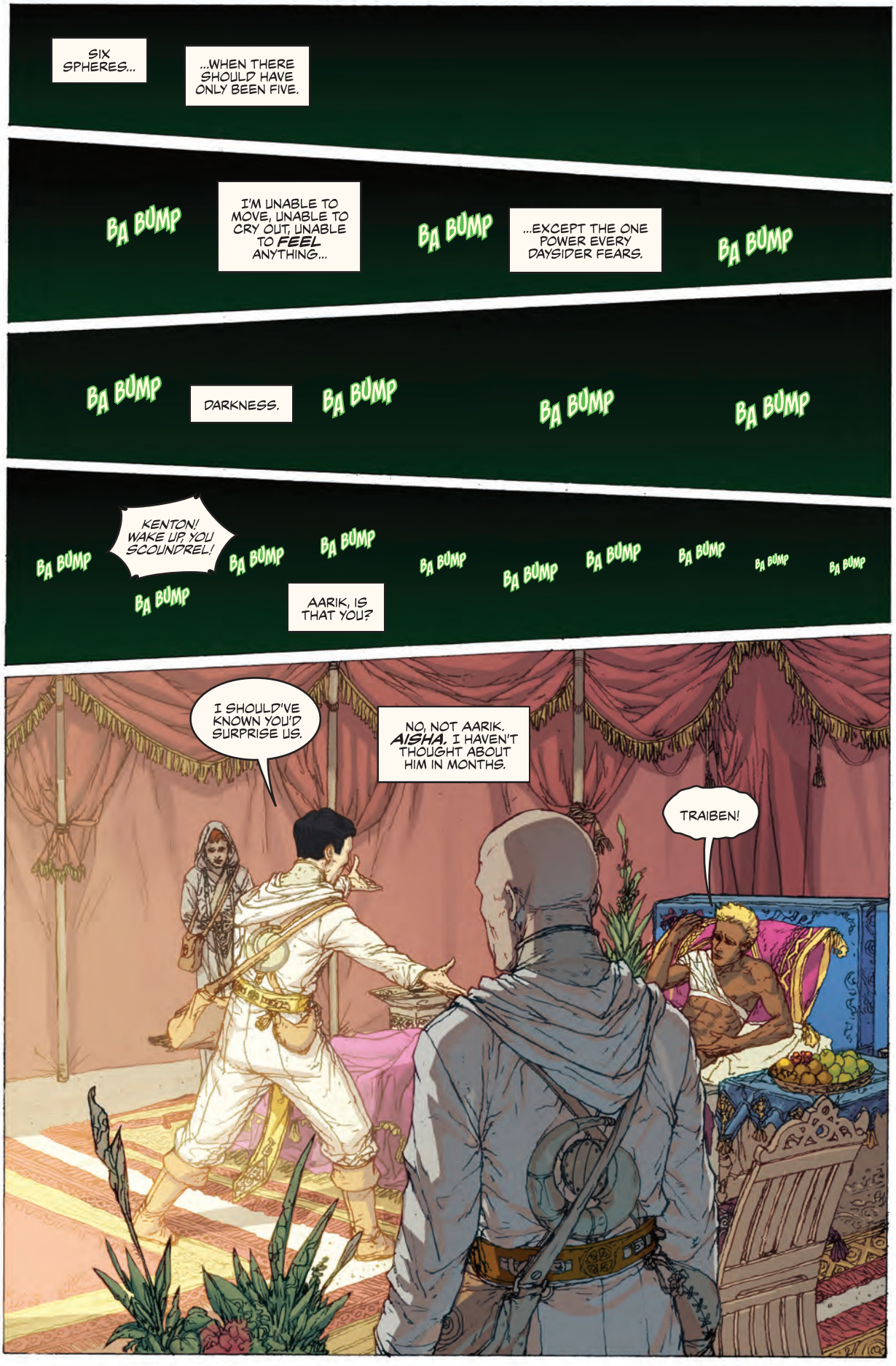

Day 43. The sun rises slowly in the sky as we move to the southeast. It also seems to grow increasingly powerful the more overhead it becomes.
Seriously, I've never sweat so much in my life.
Fortunately, there's a consistent wind here, helping alleviate some of the heat. Unfortunately, the wind carries other problems--thousands of tiny grains of sand.
I spilled a few drops of water on my tonk's horn, melting the top half of it into a funny stump. I feel terrible, but I named her "Stumpy" after that, and she seems to like the extra attention. Our guide continues to baffle me, however.
I THINK DAAZK'S SUPPOSED UNCLE OVER-CHARGED US IN DOSHA-HAR'KEN.
DID YOU EXPECT HIM NOT TO? HE'S PROBABLY THE ONLY ONE IN TOWN WHO SPEAKS OUR LANGUAGE. WE NOT ONLY PAID FOR SUPPLIES, BUT ALSO FOR HIS SERVICES AS A TRANSLATOR.
HE COULD'VE AT LEAST GIVEN US A DISCOUNT ON HIS "NEPHEW'S" GUIDE SERVICES. SERIOUSLY, THE ONLY PHRASE DAAZK KNOWS IN DYNASTIC IS "AHOY"?
AHOY!

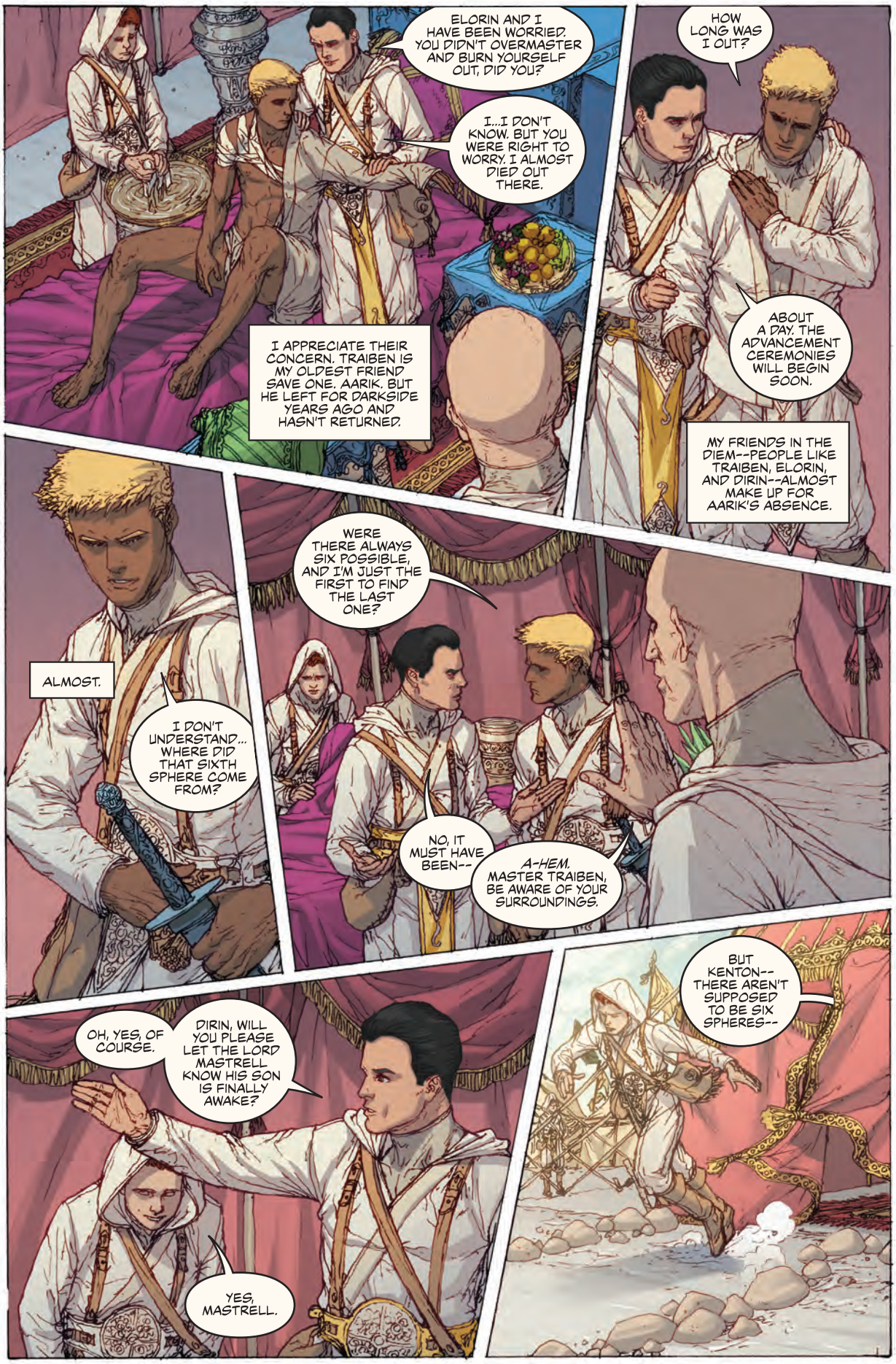

We approach the small town of Esh'Ker'Losh, about a third of the way to Lossand, but our water is over halfway gone.
At this rate, we will die of thirst before finding the sand mages.
I assumed we would be able to refill our water containers in the towns we pass through, but none of them have wells or water towers.
DAAZK, DO YOU THINK THIS SMALL TOWN WILL HAVE WATER?
AHOY?
WA-TER. WE NEED MORE.
OR WE'LL DIE.
OH! WA-TER!
The desert-like areas on Darkside treat water like a precious, almost sacred commodity.
But our guide Daazk isn't concerned about it at all. In fact, he seems wasteful.
NO, I'M NOT GOING TO POUR OUT MY WATER ONTO THE SAND.
AHOY...
TOWN UP AHEAD.
The tonks never drink. They just eat tons of sand and fart sulfurous gas.
That's taken some getting used to.
I suspect the tonks metabolize sand. I'd love to study it further, but right now the water situation takes precedence.
SHOULD WE STOP?
NOT UNLESS THEY HAVE SOMETHING TO DRINK.
PHEW! I HATE THIS PLACE.

THIS VILLAGE SEEMS TO BE PERHAPS TWELVE HUNDRED YEARS BEHIND ELIS. NO RUNNING WATER, NO CARRIAGES, NO THEATER! HOW QUAINT!
YES...
...HOW QUAINT.
PMPF PMPF
CROSSBOWS, MAYBE?
PNEUMATIC CROSSBOWS. DART GUNS.
THEY CAN'T POSSIBLY HAVE THAT LEVEL OF TECHNOLOGY.
YET THEY DO. HOW FASCINATING!
PRIVATE, STAY ALERT!
WHAT ARE THEY GUARDING?
A SOURCE OF WATER, PERHAPS.
DON'T LET FLENNID HEAR YOU.
HE'S READY TO FIGHT THEM FOR NO REASON AT ALL.

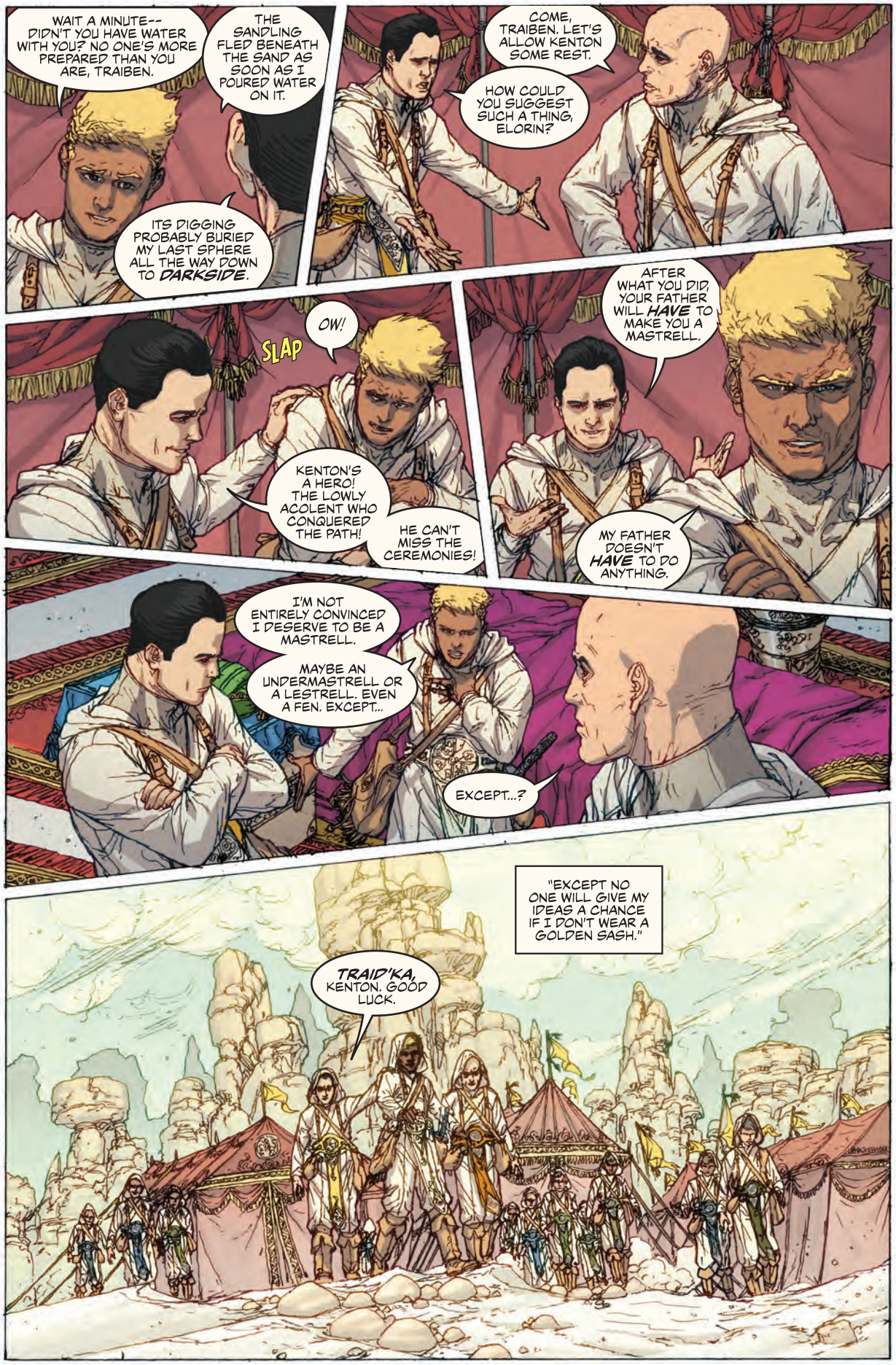

YOU'VE STOPPED WEARING THE DARKENED SPECTACLES. DOESN'T THE LIGHT HURT YOUR EYES?
YES, BUT THEY ARE A DISADVANTAGE I'D DISTANCE MYSELF FROM AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.
LIKE THE ELISIAN SOLDIERS.
WITH RATIONING, WE MIGHT HAVE A WEEK OF WATER REMAINING.
YOU'RE NOT SAYING WE SHOULD--
YES. LEAVE THEM BEHIND AT THIS VILLAGE AND TAKE THE WATER TONK WITH US.
THEN WE ALL HAVE A CHANCE TO SURVIVE.
NO. I WILL NOT LEAVE ANYONE BEHIND.
FLENNID AND TORTH ARE MEN FIRST AND SOLDIERS SECOND. WHEN IT COMES TO SURVIVAL, I GUARANTEE THEY WON'T BE SO KIND TO US.
WE WILL FIND A WAY, BAON.
DAAZK!
CAN YOU TAKE US TO THESE STONE FORMATIONS AT THE BASE OF MOUNT KRAEDA?
KRAEDA.
My limited grasp of geology tells me that if we have any hope of locating water, it's where the rocks come closer to the surface of the sands.
AHOY!
YES, DAAZK. AHOY.

CHAPTER 2
ADVANCE


SIX SPHERES...
...WHEN THERE SHOULD HAVE ONLY BEEN FIVE.
BA BUMP
I'M UNABLE TO MOVE, UNABLE TO CRY OUT, UNABLE TO FEEL ANYTHING...
BA BUMP
...EXCEPT THE ONE POWER EVERY DAYSIDER FEARS.
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
DARKNESS.
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
KENTON! WAKE UP, YOU SCOUNDREL!
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
AARIK, IS THAT YOU?
I SHOULD'VE KNOWN YOU'D SURPRISE US.
NO, NOT AARIK. AISHA. I HAVEN'T THOUGHT ABOUT HIM IN MONTHS.
TRAIBEN!

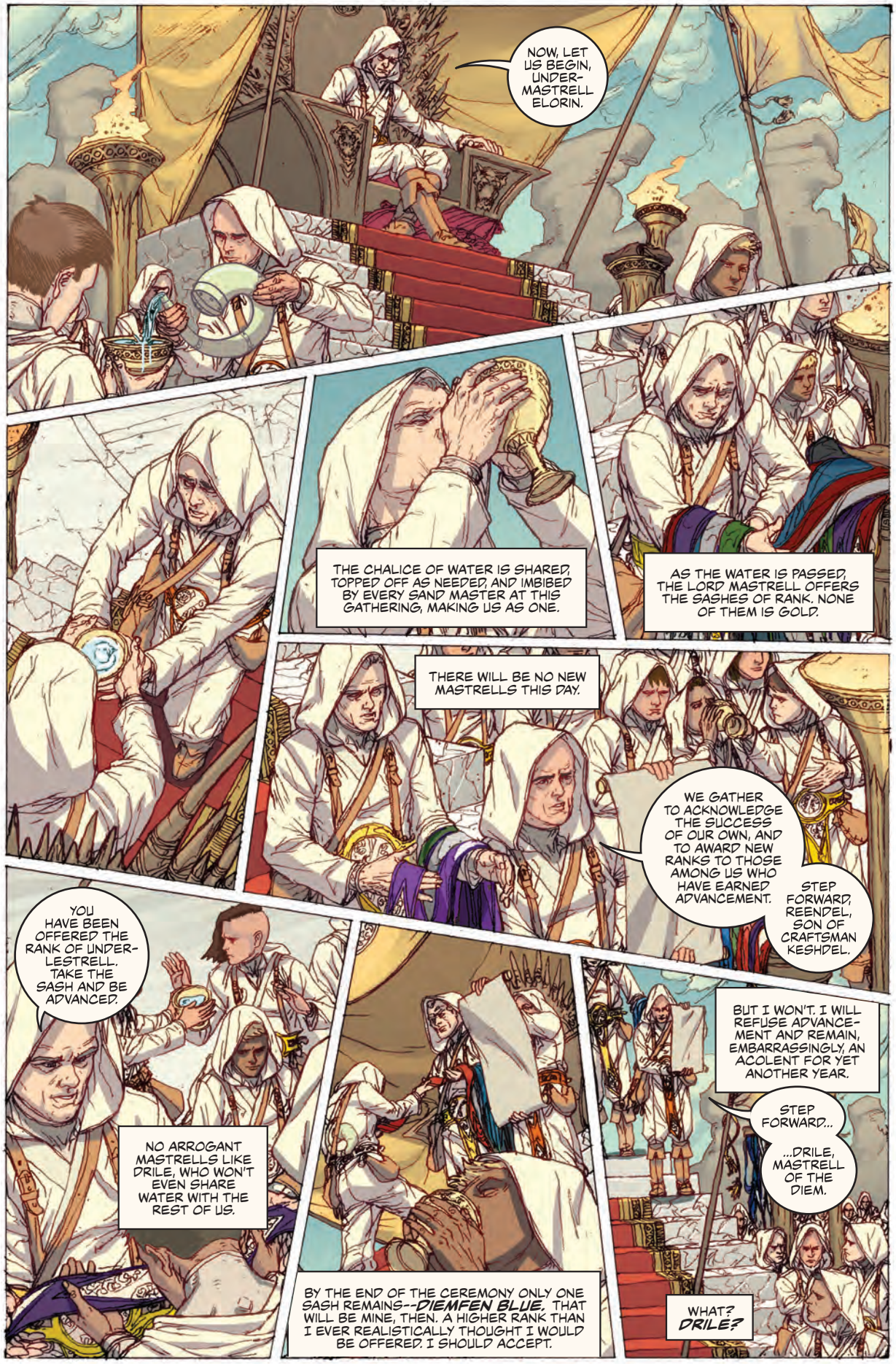

ELORIN AND I HAVE BEEN WORRIED. YOU DIDN'T OVERMASTER AND BURN YOURSELF OUT, DID YOU?
I...I DON'T KNOW. BUT YOU WERE RIGHT TO WORRY. I ALMOST DIED OUT THERE.
I APPRECIATE THEIR CONCERN. TRAIBEN IS MY OLDEST FRIEND SAVE ONE. AARIK. BUT HE LEFT FOR DARKSIDE YEARS AGO AND HASN'T RETURNED.
HOW LONG WAS I OUT?
ABOUT A DAY. THE ADVANCEMENT CEREMONIES WILL BEGIN SOON.
MY FRIENDS IN THE DIEM--PEOPLE LIKE TRAIBEN, ELORIN, AND DIRIN--ALMOST MAKE UP FOR AARIK'S ABSENCE.
WERE THERE ALWAYS SIX POSSIBLE, AND I'M JUST THE FIRST TO FIND THE LAST ONE?
ALMOST.
I DON'T UNDERSTAND... WHERE DID THAT SIXTH SPHERE COME FROM?
NO, IT MUST HAVE BEEN--
A-HEM. MASTER TRAIBEN, BE AWARE OF YOUR SURROUNDINGS.
BUT KENTON--THERE AREN'T SUPPOSED TO BE SIX SPHERES--
OH, YES, OF COURSE.
DIRIN, WILL YOU PLEASE LET THE LORD MASTRELL KNOW HIS SON IS FINALLY AWAKE?
YES, MASTRELL.

--THE ONE YOU FOUND MUST HAVE GOTTEN LEFT BEHIND FOLLOWING SOMEONE ELSE'S RUN.
FOR ALL WE KNOW, IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN MY SPHERE. I ONLY FOUND THREE WHEN I DID MY RUN.
ONLY THREE? YOU NEVER FAIL AT ANYTHING, TRAIBEN.
THE OTHER MASTRELLS THINK I'M A FAILURE FOR ASSOCIATING WITH YOU.
BUT I DON'T SEE IT THAT WAY.
I SEE YOU'VE STILL GOT YOUR POWERS. SPEAKING OF WHICH, THERE'S SOMETHING YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT BEING A MASTRELL.
NEVER WEAR THE GOLDEN SASH WITH GREEN ROBES? GOT IT.
LET'S CHAT ONCE YOU'VE GOT YOUR GOLDEN SASH.
YOUR FATHER IS RATHER PERTURBED WITH YOU, YOUNG KENTON.
"YOU WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO SLAY THE DEEP SANDLING THAT GOT TRAPPED THERE SO LONG AGO. IT'S BEEN CENTRAL TO THE PATH FOR CENTURIES."
BUT NOW IT'S GONE, AND THE PATH IS RUINED FOREVER.
GOOD RIDDANCE. WHEN THAT THING BURST FROM THE SAND I NEARLY DIED FROM THE SHOCK.

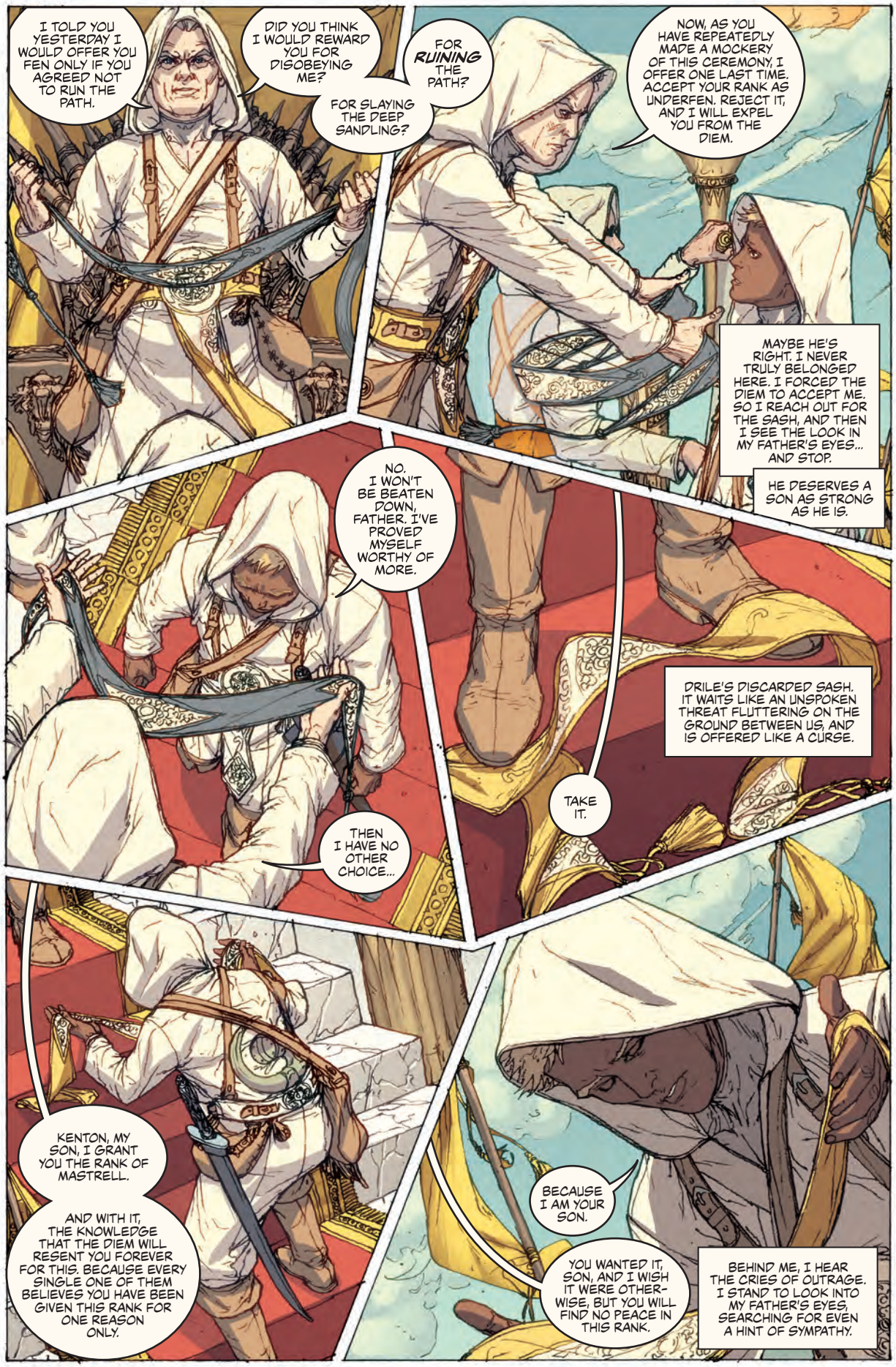

WAIT A MINUTE-- DIDN'T YOU HAVE WATER WITH YOU? NO ONE'S MORE PREPARED THAN YOU ARE, TRAIBEN.
THE SANDLING FLED BENEATH THE SAND AS SOON AS I POURED WATER ON IT.
ITS DIGGING PROBABLY BURIED MY LAST SPHERE ALL THE WAY DOWN TO DARKSIDE.
COME, TRAIBEN. LET'S ALLOW KENTON SOME REST.
HOW COULD YOU SUGGEST SUCH A THING, ELORIN?
SLAP
OW!
KENTON'S A HERO! THE LOWLY ACOLENT WHO CONQUERED THE PATH!
HE CAN'T MISS THE CEREMONIES!
AFTER WHAT YOU DID, YOUR FATHER WILL HAVE TO MAKE YOU A MASTRELL.
MY FATHER DOESN'T HAVE TO DO ANYTHING.
I'M NOT ENTIRELY CONVINCED I DESERVE TO BE A MASTRELL.
MAYBE AN UNDERMASTRELL OR A LESTRELL. EVEN A FEN. EXCEPT...
EXCEPT...?
"EXCEPT NO ONE WILL GIVE MY IDEAS A CHANCE IF I DON'T WEAR A GOLDEN SASH."
TRAID'KA, KENTON. GOOD LUCK.

ALMOST ALL OF THE DIEM IS HERE TO WITNESS THE LORD MASTRELL ASSIGN RANKS TO THE NEWEST MEMBERS.
TODAY, THE CAMP IS ABUZZ WITH THE NEWS OF MY SUCCESS ON THE PATH. THAT, AND SOMETHING ELSE.

PSST, KENTON. DID YOU HEAR THE RUMORS ABOUT DRILE?
THEY CAUGHT HIM TRYING TO SELL THE USE OF HIS POWERS.
FIRST GOOD IDEA DRILE'S EVER HAD. SAND MASTERY COULD BE PUT TO BETTER USE THAN THIS.
NOT TO HELP PEOPLE. DRILE GATHERED A GROUP OF SAND MASTERS TO HIRE OUT AS MERCENARIES.
NO... RICH EMPLOYERS WOULD USE US TO FIGHT THEIR BATTLES FOR THEM, AGAINST OTHER SAND MASTERS. THAT WOULD SPLINTER THE DIEM.
DO YOU THINK THEY'LL KICK DRILE OUT?
MAYBE...IF IT WOULD HELP THE DIEM STAY UNITED.
:SIGH.: DRILE, DRILE, DRILE. WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?
LORD MASTRELL, THE DIEM RELIES TOO MUCH ON THE GENEROSITY OF THE OTHER PROFESSIONS.
WITH ALL DUE RESPECT, MY LORD, IT'S TIME WE EARNED OUR KEEP.
HMF. DEBATABLE. TAKE YOUR PLACE WITH THE OTHER MASTRELLS, DRILE.

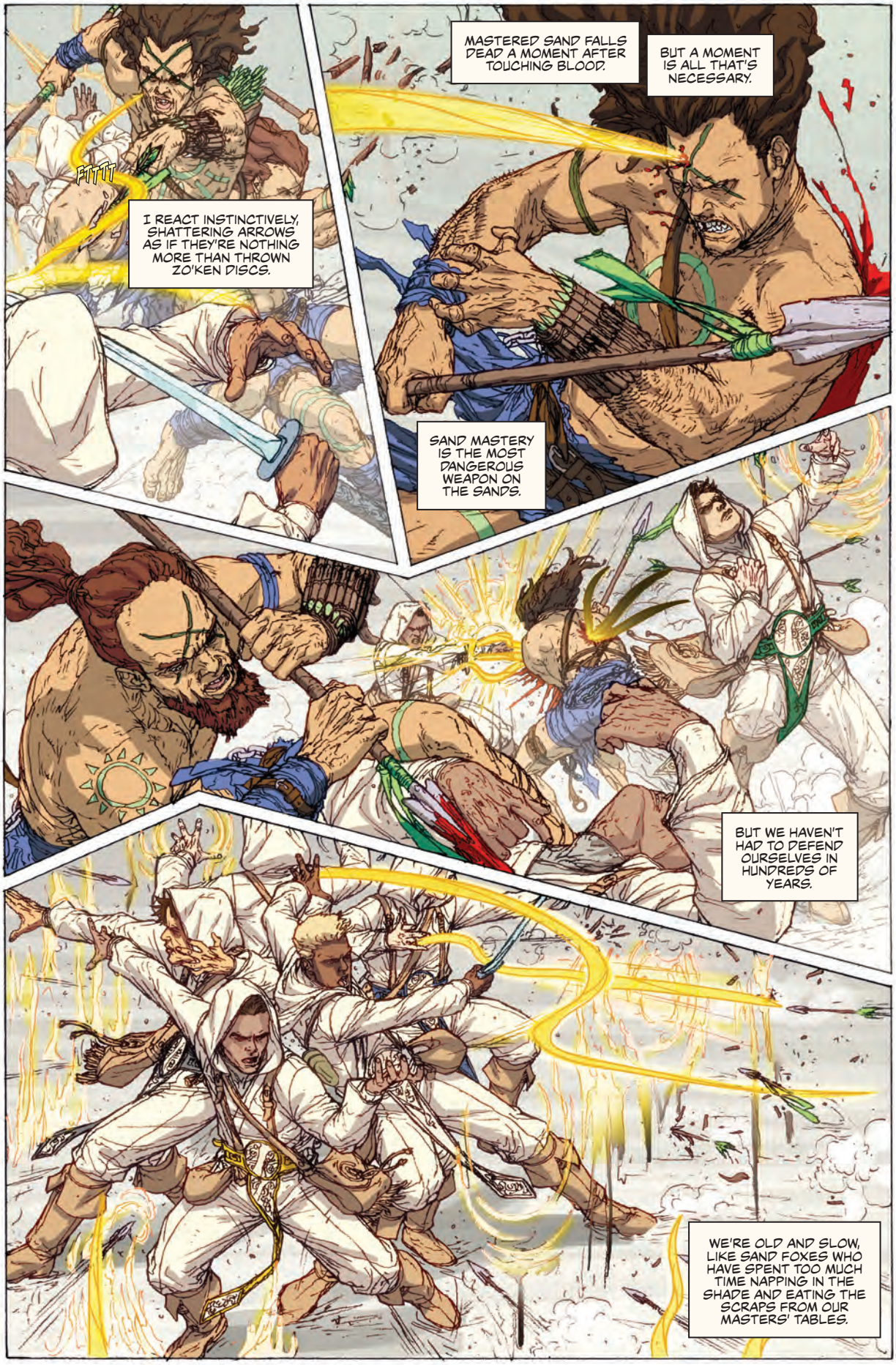

NOW, LET US BEGIN, UNDER-MASTRELL ELORIN.
THE CHALICE OF WATER IS SHARED, TOPPED OFF AS NEEDED, AND IMBIBED BY EVERY SAND MASTER AT THIS GATHERING, MAKING US AS ONE.
AS THE WATER IS PASSED, THE LORD MASTRELL OFFERS THE SASHES OF RANK. NONE OF THEM IS GOLD.
THERE WILL BE NO NEW MASTRELLS THIS DAY.
WE GATHER TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE SUCCESS OF OUR OWN, AND TO AWARD NEW RANKS TO THOSE AMONG US WHO HAVE EARNED ADVANCEMENT.
STEP FORWARD, REENDEL, SON OF CRAFTSMAN KESHDEL.
YOU HAVE BEEN OFFERED THE RANK OF UNDER-LESTRELL. TAKE THE SASH AND BE ADVANCED.
NO ARROGANT MASTRELLS LIKE DRILE, WHO WON'T EVEN SHARE WATER WITH THE REST OF US.
BUT I WON'T. I WILL REFUSE ADVANCE-MENT AND REMAIN, EMBARRASSINGLY, AN ACOLENT FOR YET ANOTHER YEAR.
STEP FORWARD...
...DRILE, MASTRELL OF THE DIEM.
BY THE END OF THE CEREMONY ONLY ONE SASH REMAINS--DIEMFEN BLUE, THAT WILL BE MINE, THEN. A HIGHER RANK THAN I EVER REALISTICALLY THOUGHT I WOULD BE OFFERED. I SHOULD ACCEPT.
WHAT? DRILE?

DRILE, I OFFER YOU THE RANK OF DIEMFEN. TAKE THE SASH AND BE UNADVANCED.
THIS IS UNHEARD OF. NEVER IN ALL THE HISTORY OF THE DIEM HAS A SAND MASTER BEEN UNADVANCED.
I DON'T TRUST YOU, DRILE.
IF I EXPEL YOU, I DOUBT YOU WOULD OBEY DIEM LAW AND STOP USING YOUR POWERS. THIS WAY I CAN STILL KEEP AN EYE ON YOU.
TAKE THE SASH, AND GO JOIN YOUR RANK, DIEMFEN DRILE.
AND WITH THAT, MY FATHER HUMILIATES THE ONE MAN IN THE WHOLE OF THE DIEM WHO MIGHT ONE DAY STAND AGAINST HIM.
KENTON, SON OF PRAXTON-- STEP FORWARD.
THIS IS WHAT MAKES LORD PRAXTON A LEADER--HIS SHEER WILLPOWER. THE ONE THING I INHERITED FROM HIM...
...WHEN WHAT HE REALLY WANTED ME TO INHERIT WAS HIS STRENGTH IN SAND MASTERY.
I SEE THE SASH APPEAR LIKE A TAUNT. IT'S GRAY, LOWER EVEN THAN THE RANK OF FEN HE OFFERED ME JUST YESTERDAY.
IT SEEMS THAT DRILE ISN'T THE ONLY ONE MY FATHER PLANS TO HUMILIATE.

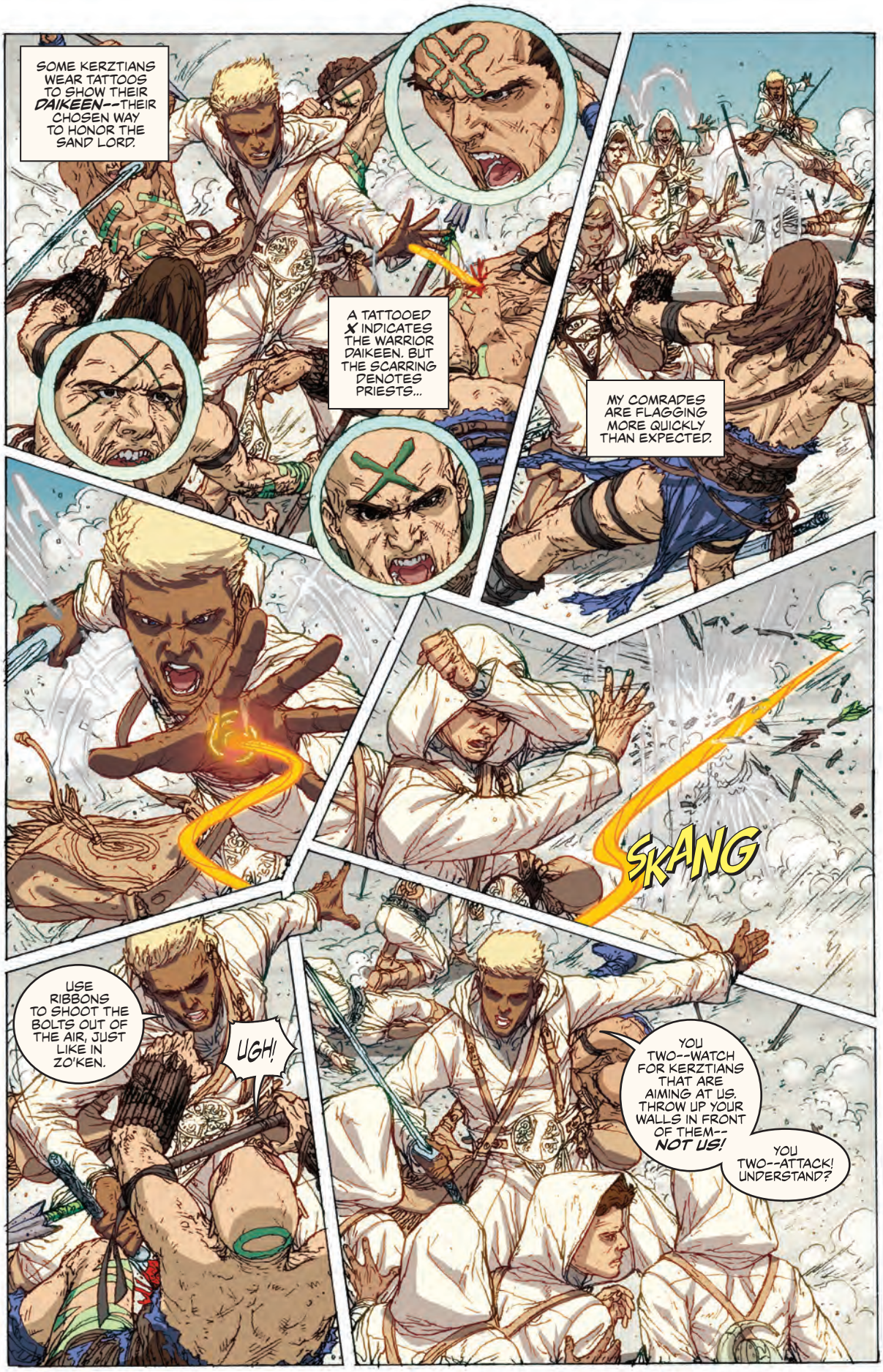

I TOLD YOU YESTERDAY I WOULD OFFER YOU FEN ONLY IF YOU AGREED NOT TO RUN THE PATH.
DID YOU THINK I WOULD REWARD YOU FOR DISOBEYING ME?
FOR SLAYING THE DEEP SANDLING?
FOR RUINING THE PATH?
NOW, AS YOU HAVE REPEATEDLY MADE A MOCKERY OF THIS CEREMONY, I OFFER ONE LAST TIME. ACCEPT YOUR RANK AS UNDERFEN. REJECT IT, AND I WILL EXPEL YOU FROM THE DIEM.
MAYBE HE'S RIGHT. I NEVER TRULY BELONGED HERE. I FORCED THE DIEM TO ACCEPT ME. SO I REACH OUT FOR THE SASH, AND THEN I SEE THE LOOK IN MY FATHER'S EYES... AND STOP.
HE DESERVES A SON AS STRONG AS HE IS.
NO. I WON'T BE BEATEN DOWN, FATHER. I'VE PROVED MYSELF WORTHY OF MORE.
DRILE'S DISCARDED SASH. IT WAITS LIKE AN UNSPOKEN THREAT FLUTTERING ON THE GROUND BETWEEN US, AND IS OFFERED LIKE A CURSE.
TAKE IT.
THEN I HAVE NO OTHER CHOICE...
KENTON, MY SON, I GRANT YOU THE RANK OF MASTRELL.
AND WITH IT, THE KNOWLEDGE THAT THE DIEM WILL RESENT YOU FOREVER FOR THIS. BECAUSE EVERY SINGLE ONE OF THEM BELIEVES YOU HAVE BEEN GIVEN THIS RANK FOR ONE REASON ONLY.
BECAUSE I AM YOUR SON.
YOU WANTED IT, SON, AND I WISH IT WERE OTHERWISE, BUT YOU WILL FIND NO PEACE IN THIS RANK.
BEHIND ME, I HEAR THE CRIES OF OUTRAGE. I STAND TO LOOK INTO MY FATHER'S EYES, SEARCHING FOR EVEN A HINT OF SYMPATHY.

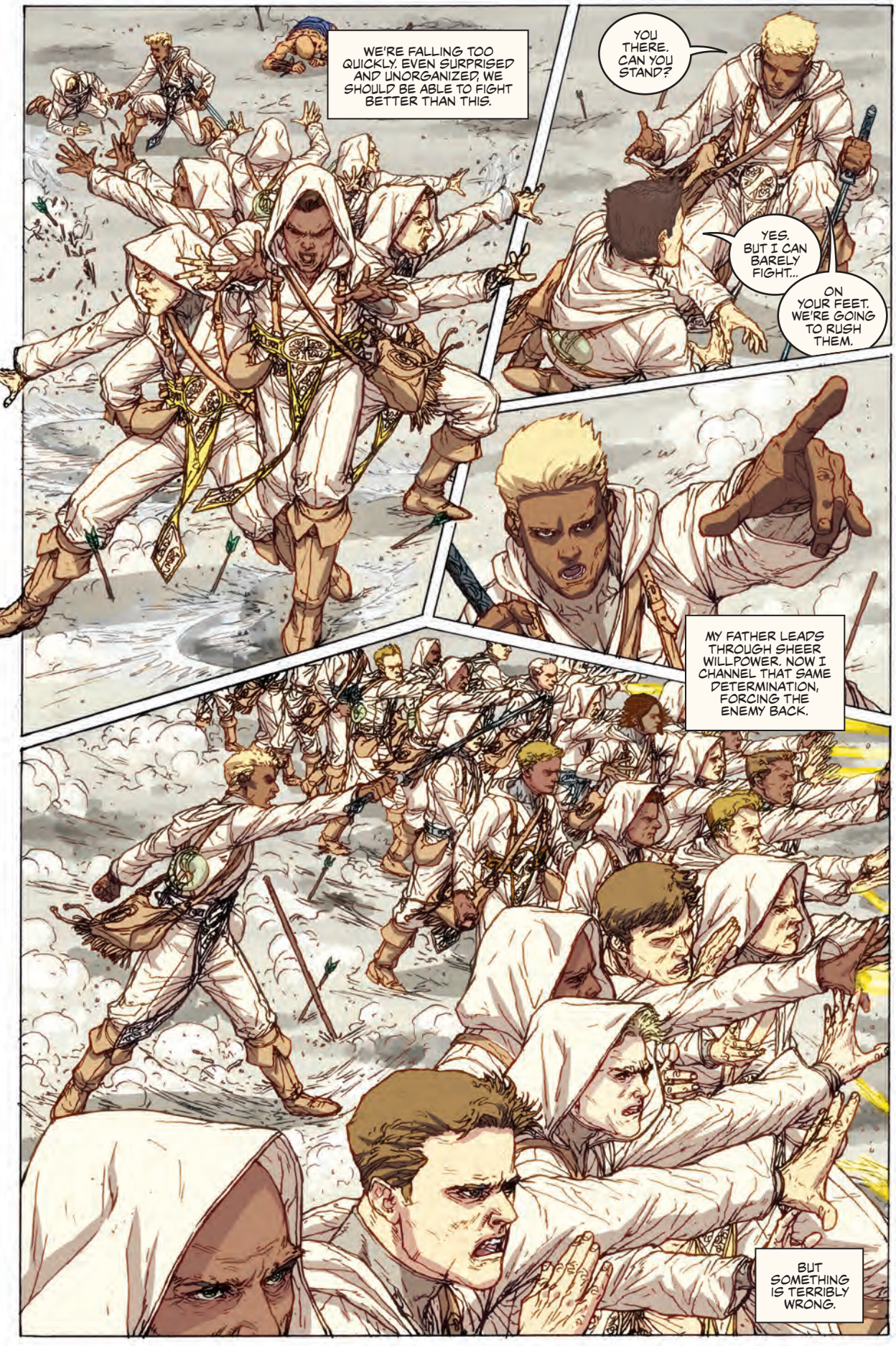
--GASP!
FATHER? WHAT IS IT?
OH, LORD OF SANDS...
NO!
KERZTIANS!
WE'RE UNDER ATTACK!

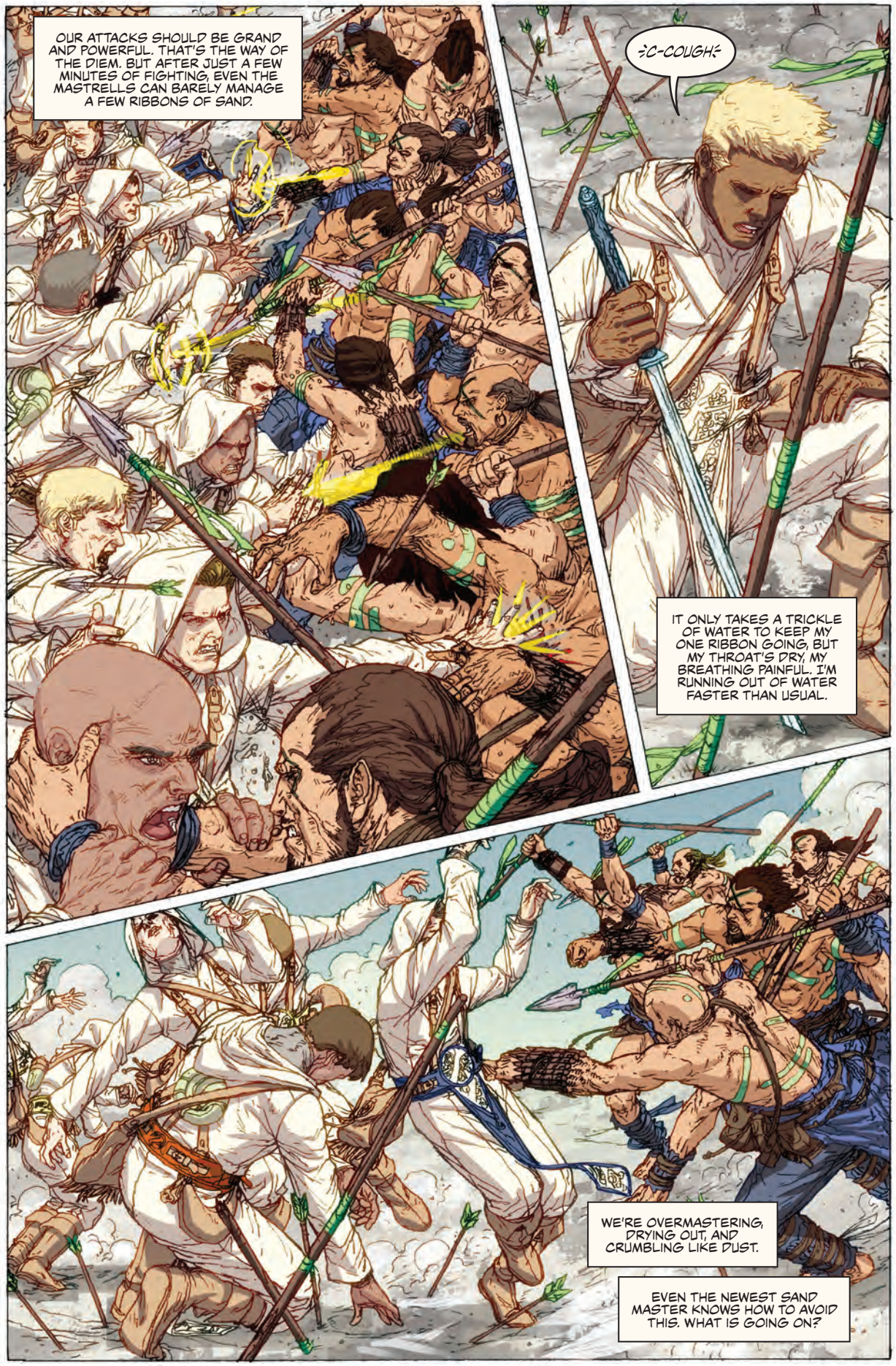
IT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE.
THERE HASN'T BEEN WAR BETWEEN LOSSAND AND KERZTA IN CENTURIES. THEY THINK SAND MASTERY IS UNHOLY, TRUE, BUT THEY ALSO FEAR IT MORE THAN ANY DAYSIDER FEARS DARKNESS.
WHAT ON THE SANDS COULD CONVINCE THEM TO ATTACK SO MANY OF US AT ONCE?


FTTT
I REACT INSTINCTIVELY, SHATTERING ARROWS AS IF THEY'RE NOTHING MORE THAN THROWN ZO'KEN DISCS.
MASTERED SAND FALLS DEAD A MOMENT AFTER TOUCHING BLOOD.
BUT A MOMENT IS ALL THAT'S NECESSARY.
SAND MASTERY IS THE MOST DANGEROUS WEAPON ON THE SANDS.
BUT WE HAVEN'T HAD TO DEFEND OURSELVES IN HUNDREDS OF YEARS.
WE'RE OLD AND SLOW, LIKE SAND FOXES WHO HAVE SPENT TOO MUCH TIME NAPPING IN THE SHADE AND EATING THE SCRAPS FROM OUR MASTERS' TABLES.

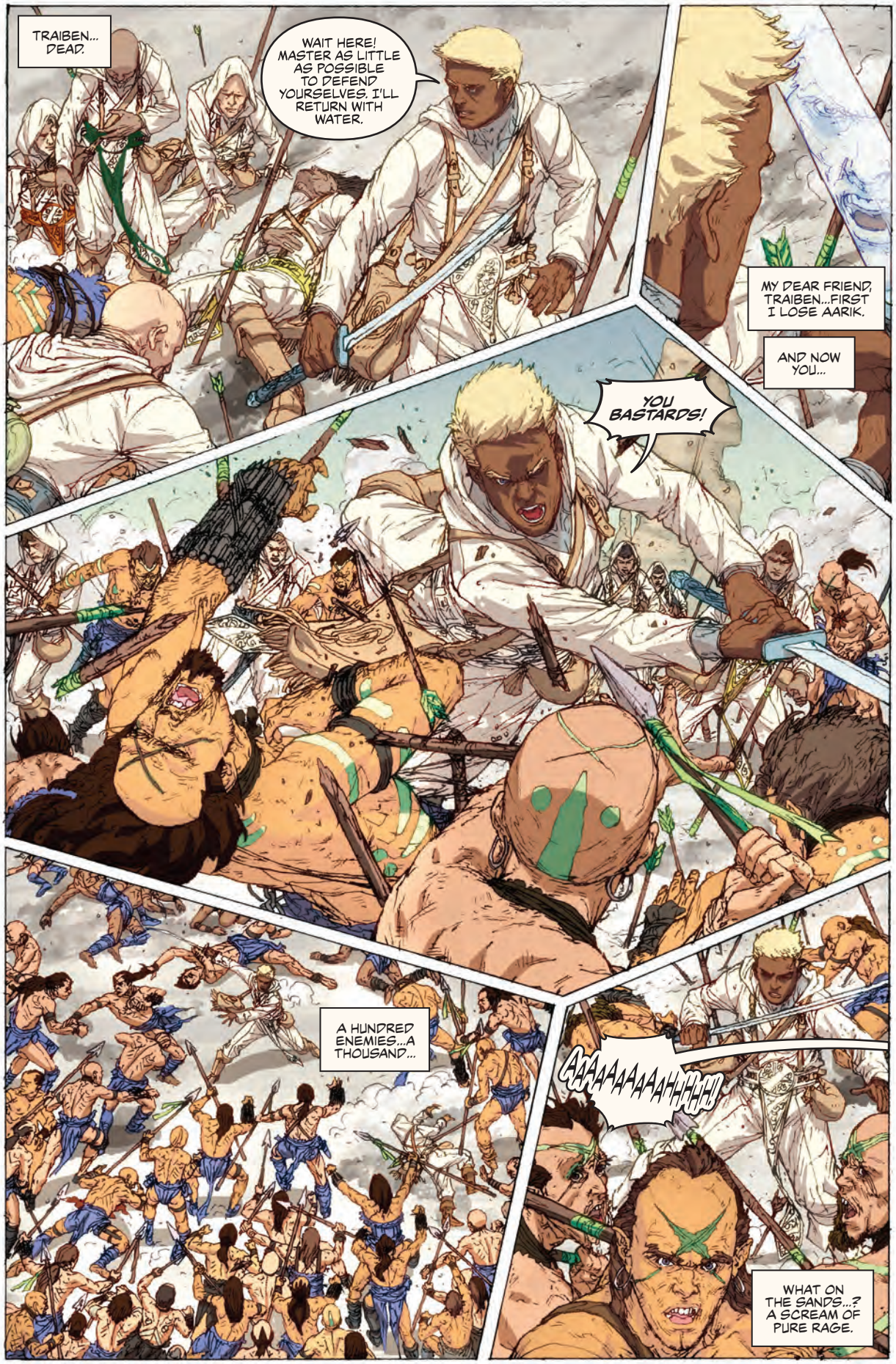
AND NOW WE'VE LET AN A'KELDAR CORNER US IN A BACK ALLEY.
WE'RE BEING TORN TO PIECES.
YOUR SAND CAN'T SAVE YOU NOW, RY'KENSHA FILTH.
TELL ME! WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?
WHO SENT YOU?
SOMETHING'S NOT RIGHT HERE...


SOME KERZTIANS WEAR TATTOOS TO SHOW THEIR DAIKEEN--THEIR CHOSEN WAY TO HONOR THE SAND LORD.
A TATTOOED X INDICATES THE WARRIOR DAIKEEN. BUT THE SCARRING DENOTES PRIESTS...
MY COMRADES ARE FLAGGING MORE QUICKLY THAN EXPECTED.
SKANG
USE RIBBONS TO SHOOT THE BOLTS OUT OF THE AIR, JUST LIKE IN ZO'KEN.
UGH!
YOU TWO--WATCH FOR KERZTIANS THAT ARE AIMING AT US. THROW UP YOUR WALLS IN FRONT OF THEM-- NOT US!
YOU TWO--ATTACK! UNDERSTAND?


WE'RE FALLING TOO QUICKLY. EVEN SURPRISED AND UNORGANIZED, WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO FIGHT BETTER THAN THIS.
YOU THERE. CAN YOU STAND?
YES. BUT I CAN BARELY FIGHT...
ON YOUR FEET. WE'RE GOING TO RUSH THEM.
MY FATHER LEADS THROUGH SHEER WILLPOWER. NOW I CHANNEL THAT SAME DETERMINATION, FORCING THE ENEMY BACK.
BUT SOMETHING IS TERRIBLY WRONG.


OUR ATTACKS SHOULD BE GRAND AND POWERFUL. THAT'S THE WAY OF THE DIEM. BUT AFTER JUST A FEW MINUTES OF FIGHTING, EVEN THE MASTRELLS CAN BARELY MANAGE A FEW RIBBONS OF SAND.
=C-COUGH=
IT ONLY TAKES A TRICKLE OF WATER TO KEEP MY ONE RIBBON GOING, BUT MY THROAT'S DRY, MY BREATHING PAINFUL. I'M RUNNING OUT OF WATER FASTER THAN USUAL.
WE'RE OVERMASTERING, DRYING OUT, AND CRUMBLING LIKE DUST.
EVEN THE NEWEST SAND MASTER KNOWS HOW TO AVOID THIS. WHAT IS GOING ON?

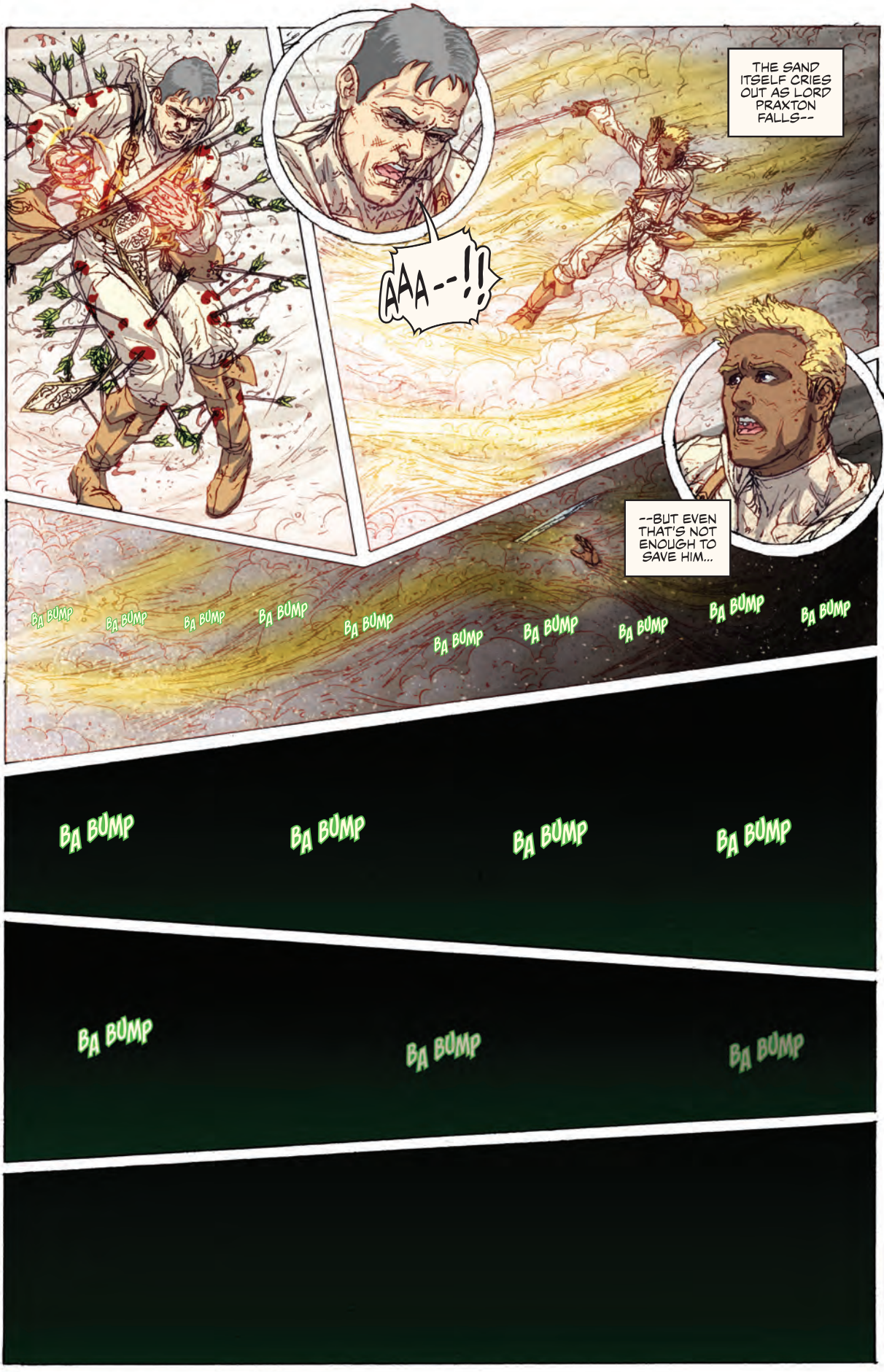
TRAIBEN! NO!
I WAS WRONG, KENTON. WE'RE NOT THE WOLVES.
BUT YOU...YOU WERE ALWAYS MORE OF A SAND MASTER THAN ANY OF US... MY FRIEND.
NO!
OH, SAND LORD...
...HE'S GONE.
AISHA... STAY WITH ME, TRAIBEN.


TRAIBEN... DEAD.
WAIT HERE! MASTER AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE TO DEFEND YOURSELVES. I'LL RETURN WITH WATER.
MY DEAR FRIEND, TRAIBEN...FIRST I LOSE AARIK.
AND NOW YOU...
YOU BASTARDS!
A HUNDRED ENEMIES...A THOUSAND...
AAAAAAAAAHHHH!
WHAT ON THE SANDS...? A SCREAM OF PURE RAGE.

AAAAAAAAAHHHH!!!
IT ECHOES LIKE THE DEATH CRY OF SOME TERRIBLY WRONGED GOD.
AAAAAAAHHH!!
AAAAAAAAAAAAHHHH!!
AAAAAAAAAAHH!!
--A VENGEFUL GOD, DISAPPOINTED IN ALL THAT HE SEES--

--WHOSE ONLY RECOURSE IS TO WIPE THE SLATE CLEAN AND START AFRESH.

AND FOR A MOMENT I SWEAR HE DID IT TO PROTECT ME.


THE SAND ITSELF CRIES OUT AS LORD PRAXTON FALLS--
AAA--!!
--BUT EVEN THAT'S NOT ENOUGH TO SAVE HIM...
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP

Kerzta, Lossand, Religion, and DaiKeen

Anciently, two siblings–Lossa and her brother Kerzt–both claimed to have been visited by the Sand Lord. The result of the visitations is up for debate.

Kerztians say Lossa had been cursed with sand mastery, and Kerzt, in his righteousness, tried to kill her to end this affront to the Sand Lord. Lossandins argue that Lossa had been blessed with the Sand Lord's own power, and Kerzt tried to kill her out of jealousy, so she fled into the desert, eventually founding the nation of Lossand.

Over the following centuries the Kerztians, for the most part, remained ethnically pure, while the Lossandins mixed with the peoples of the Rim Kingdoms.

Traditional representation of Kerzt and Lossa

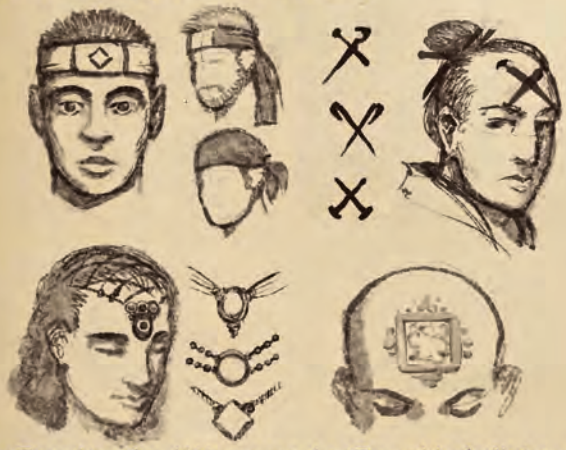
Ker'reen and Los'seen

It is generally assumed that all ethnic Kerztians also follow the Ker'reen religion, led by their High Priest, the A'kar. The Lossandin form of Sand Lord worship–Los'seen–is more a philosophy than a belief system, and in fact many Lossandins are agnostic when it comes to religion. A Lossandin who desires organized religion must, in most cases, convert to Ker'reen, where their heritage has traditionally cast them as second-class members.

Conversely, those of Kerztian heritage who live in Lossand are sometimes stereotyped as being less orthodox in their Ker'reen beliefs than those who live in Kerzta.

DaiKeen

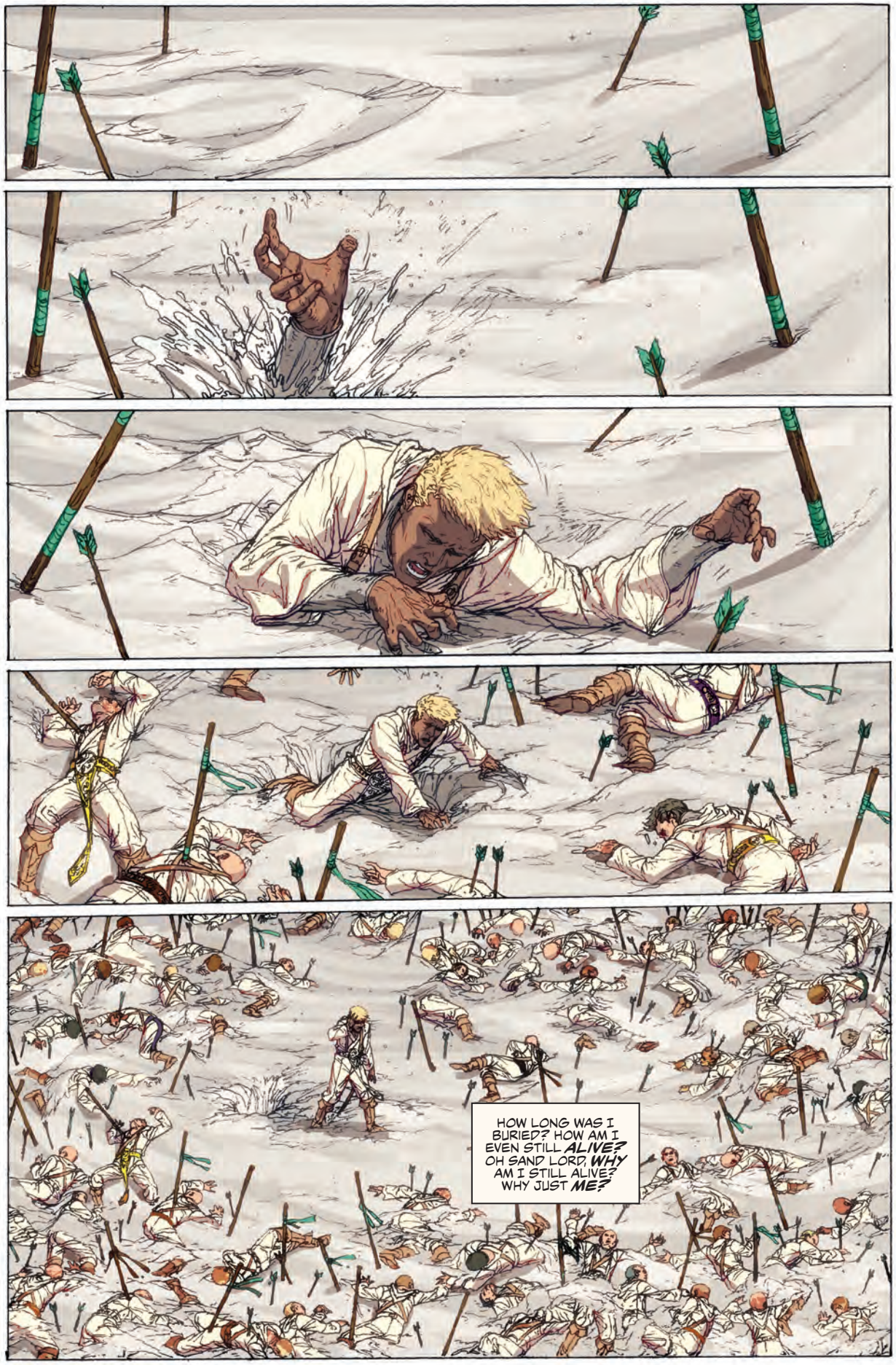
Every Ker'reen follower wears a symbol on their forehead–either as a tattoo, jewelry, or headband–to mark their DaiKeen, which is like a family clan that one can choose to be adopted into. Members of Ker'reen owe their first loyalty to their DaiKeen, even above loyalty to their nation.



Some DaiKeen Symbols

Despite the differences in Dayside belief systems–which all ultimately worship the sun, the sand, or their avatars–one thing is hard to deny: the sun is the source of all power on Dayside. I suspect there's a connection between it, the sandlings, and their ability to subsist without water.

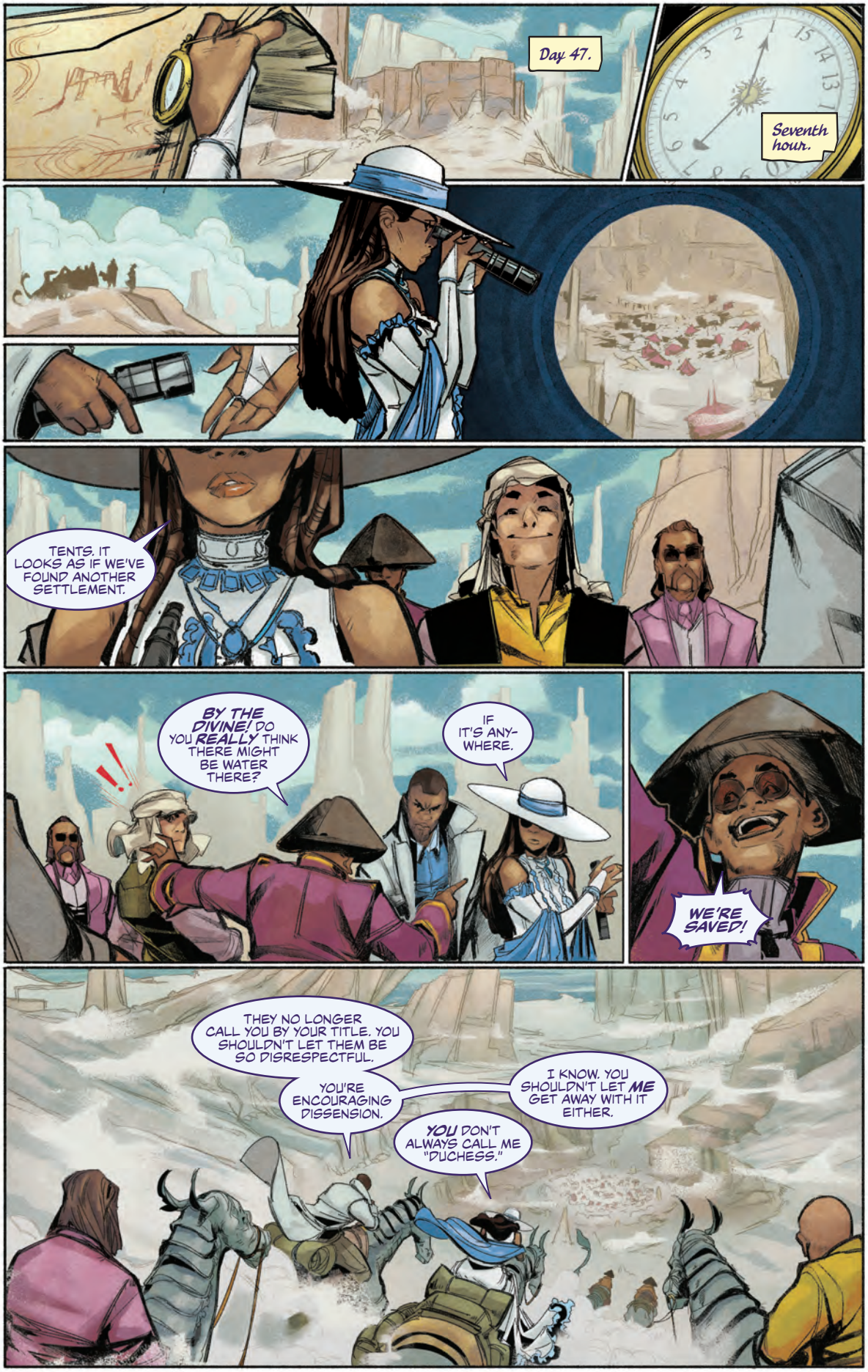
CURRENCIES


HOW LONG WAS I BURIED? HOW AM I EVEN STILL ALIVE? OH SAND LORD, WHY AM I STILL ALIVE? WHY JUST ME?

MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS... ALL DEAD.
FATHER, ELORIN... TRAIBEN DIED IN MY ARMS. OH SAND LORD, NO!

WE WERE ALL DRYING UP SO FAST. CAN I STILL MASTER SAND? GOT TO GET OUT OF THE BLISTERING SUN... CAN TEST MY SAND MASTERY LATER.

BUT FIRST...
...JUST A SHORT...
...REST...

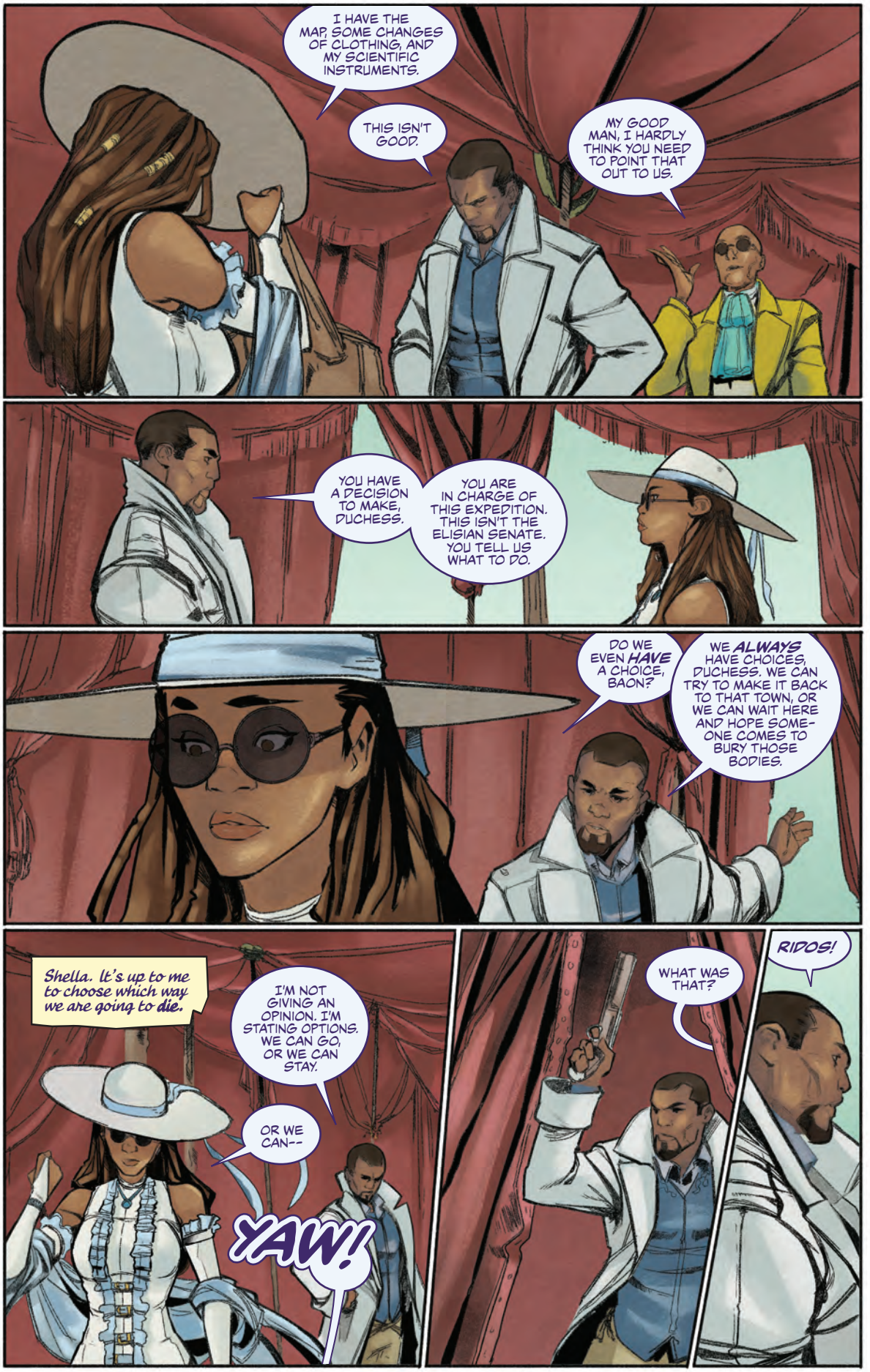

Day 47.
Seventh hour.
TENTS. IT LOOKS AS IF WE'VE FOUND ANOTHER SETTLEMENT.
BY THE DIVINE! DO YOU REALLY THINK THERE MIGHT BE WATER THERE?
IF IT'S ANY-WHERE.
WE'RE SAVED!
THEY NO LONGER CALL YOU BY YOUR TITLE. YOU SHOULDN'T LET THEM BE SO DISRESPECTFUL.
YOU'RE ENCOURAGING DISSENSION.
I KNOW. YOU SHOULDN'T LET ME GET AWAY WITH IT EITHER.
YOU DON'T ALWAYS CALL ME "DUCHESS."

WHAT IS HE WHINING ABOUT NOW?
I'LL CALM HIM DOWN.
MY DEAR MAN, DON'T SHOOT HIM...
WHAT THE STARS IS GOING ON, BAON?
PUT THAT AWAY.
YOU WERE WRONG! NO WATER. NO WATER AT ALL! JUST ALL THESE...
...BODIES!
Oh, Shella Divine.

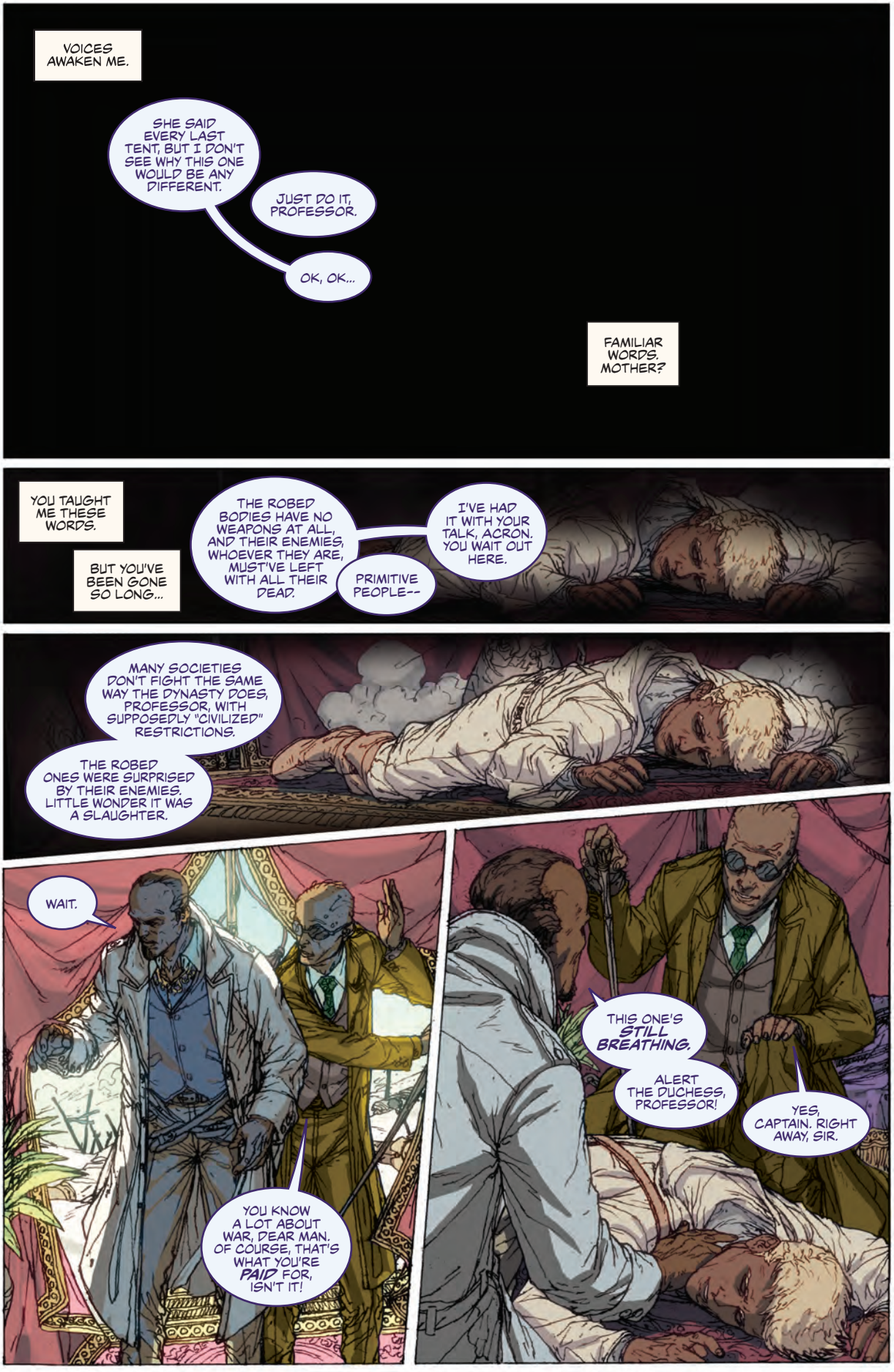
WE FOUND THIS. MAYBE THE GUIDE KNOWS WHAT TO MAKE OF IT.
OH, RIDOS... DEAD BODIES.
AISHA...
RY'KENSHA!
RY'KENSHA!
HUNDREDS OF DEAD BODIES.
AGGHHH!
KA-TOOM

OH, RIDOS.
NO!
YOU ARE AN IDIOT!
I...I THOUGHT HE'D LED US INTO A TRAP.

YOU TWO, RETRIEVE DAAZK'S BODY AND BRING IT TO THE NEAREST TENT.
DUCHESS, COME WITH ME.
WE HAVE THREE PISTOLS. MY TWO, AND THE ONE I TOOK FROM FLENNID. WE HAVE TEN CHARGES, PLUS THE FOUR LOADED IN MY PISTOLS. IN OUR SITUATION, HOWEVER, WEAPONS WILL DO US NO GOOD.
WE BARELY HAVE ENOUGH WATER LEFT ON THE WATER TONK TO FILL OUR CANTEENS... ONE. MORE. TIME.

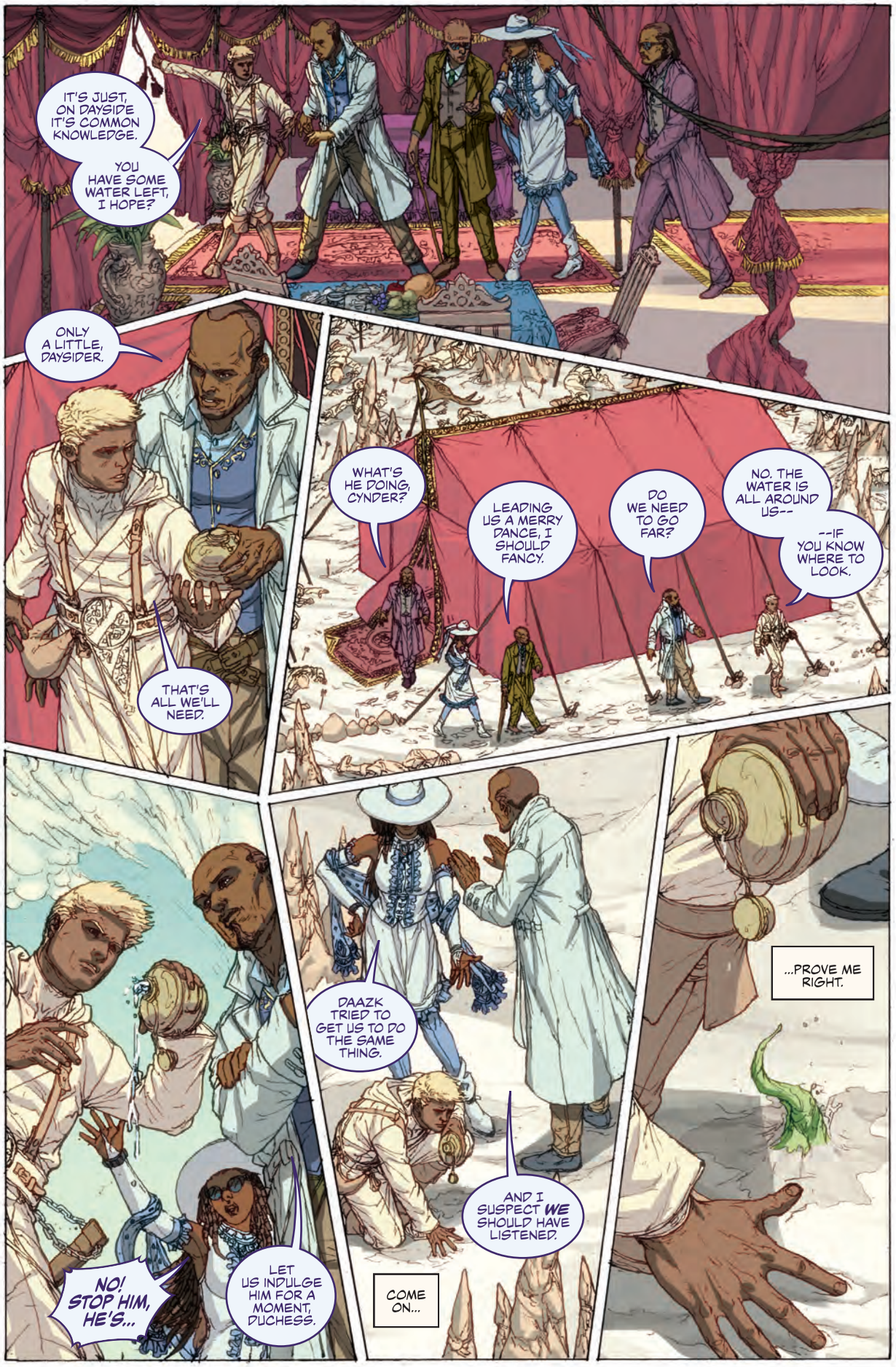

I HAVE THE MAP, SOME CHANGES OF CLOTHING, AND MY SCIENTIFIC INSTRUMENTS.
THIS ISN'T GOOD.
MY GOOD MAN, I HARDLY THINK YOU NEED TO POINT THAT OUT TO US.
YOU HAVE A DECISION TO MAKE, DUCHESS.
YOU ARE IN CHARGE OF THIS EXPEDITION. THIS ISN'T THE ELISIAN SENATE. YOU TELL US WHAT TO DO.
DO WE EVEN HAVE A CHOICE, BAON?
WE ALWAYS HAVE CHOICES, DUCHESS. WE CAN TRY TO MAKE IT BACK TO THAT TOWN, OR WE CAN WAIT HERE AND HOPE SOMEONE COMES TO BURY THOSE BODIES.
Shella. It's up to me to choose which way we are going to die.
I'M NOT GIVING AN OPINION. I'M STATING OPTIONS. WE CAN GO, OR WE CAN STAY.
OR WE CAN--
YAW!
WHAT WAS THAT?
RIDOS!

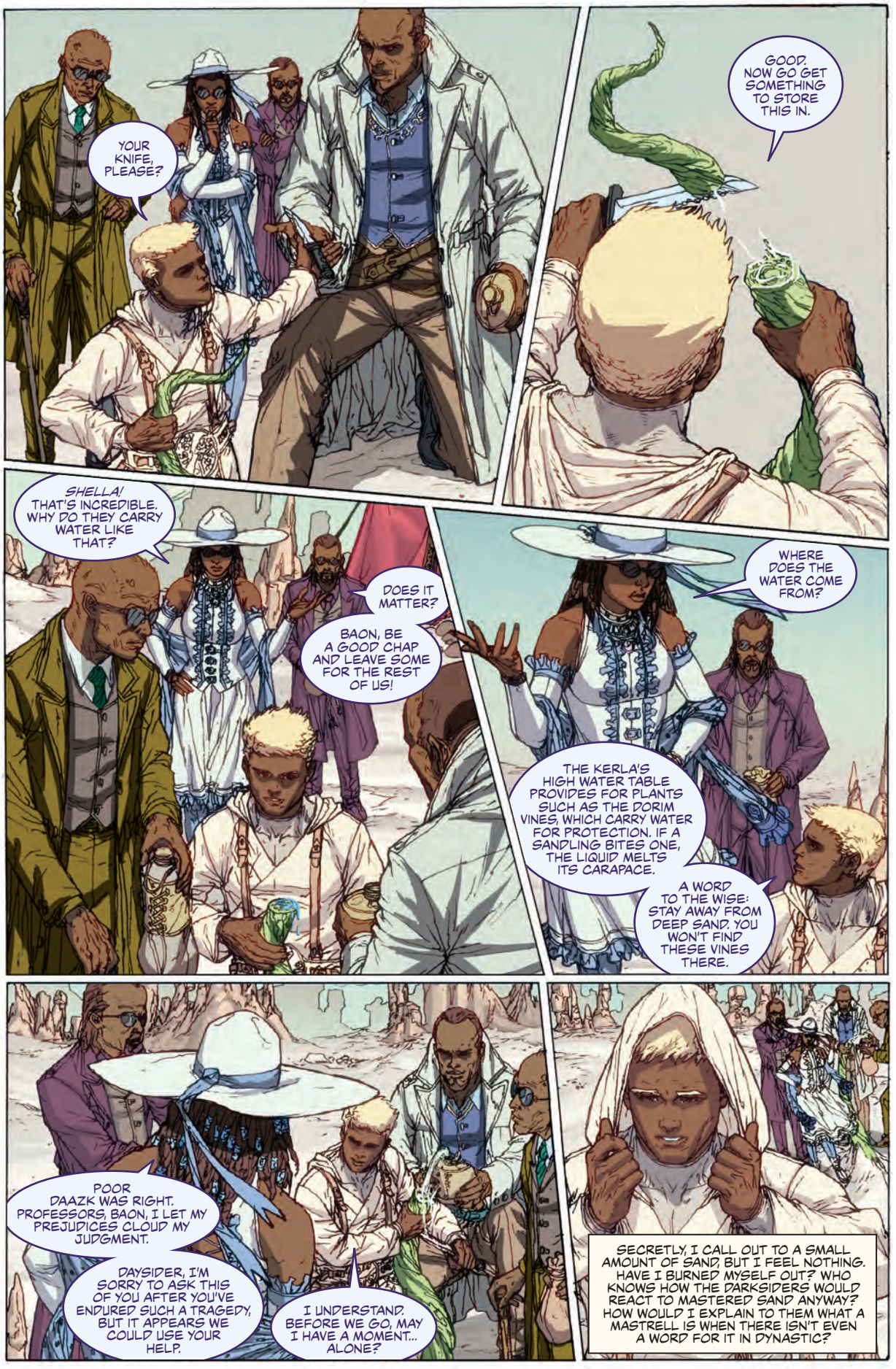
RIDE! RIDE!
THEY'RE OUT OF RANGE. I LET MY ANGER BLIND ME.
I'M SORRY.
AT LEAST THEY LEFT OUR TONKS.
YOU WERE RIGHT, BAON. WE SHOULD'VE LEFT THE SOLDIERS IN THE LAST TOWN.
IT LOOKS LIKE YOUR DECISION WAS MADE FOR YOU.
BAON...
...I'M SORRY.
I AM GOING SCOUTING.
THESE ROCK FORMATIONS APPEAR TO EXTEND BACK FOR A DISTANCE--PERHAPS YOUR ORIGINAL INSTINCT IS CORRECT AND I'LL FIND A NATURAL SPRING.
He doesn't sound very optimistic.
PROFESSORS, LET'S CHECK EVERY LAST TENT. IT WOULD BE TERRIBLY IRONIC IF WE DIE HERE WHEN THE NEXT TENT OVER HOLDS OUR MEANS OF SALVATION.
Oh, stars above, I haven't just doomed us. I've left all of Elis to the ravages of the Dynasty. Shella save us all.

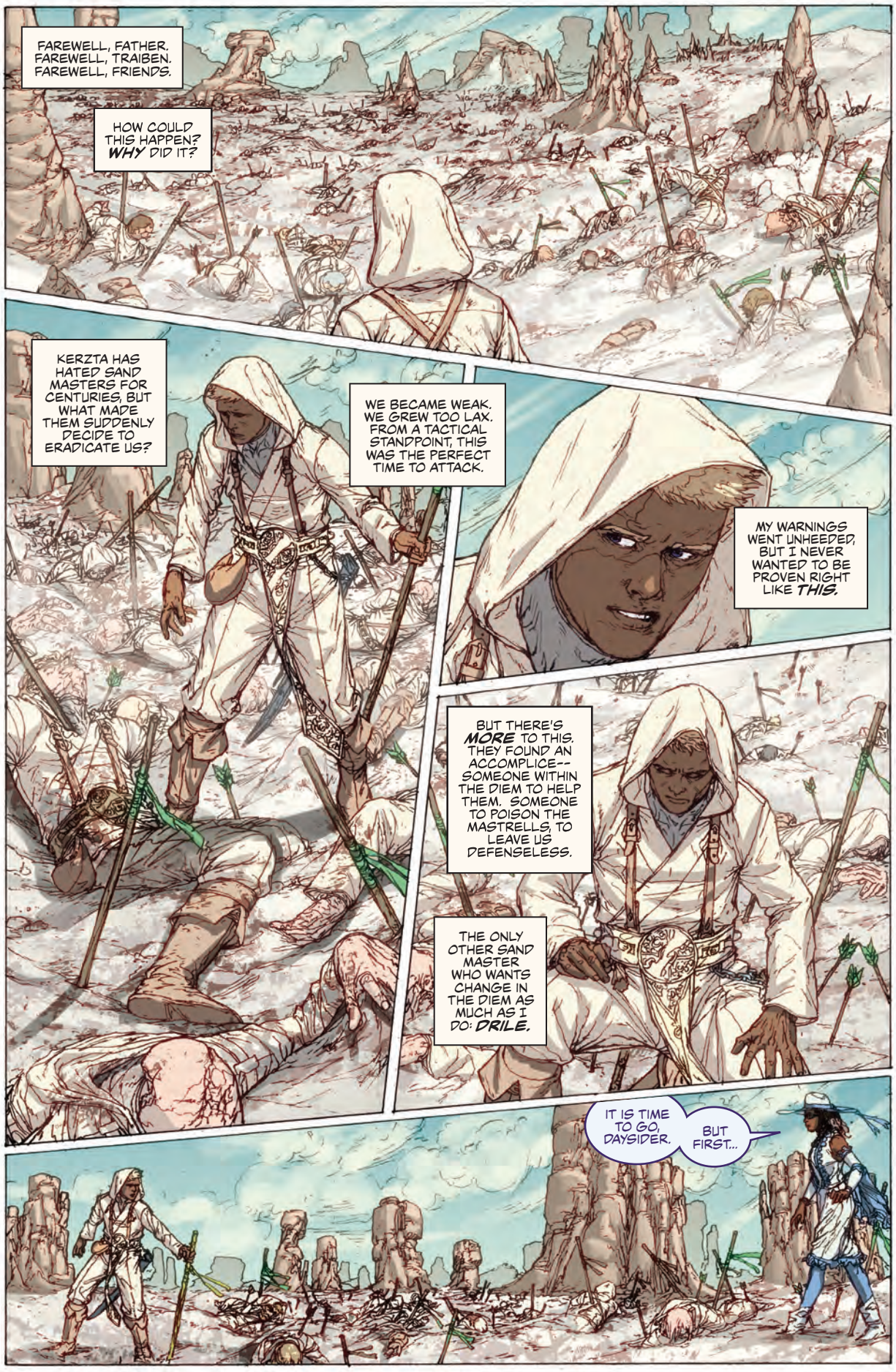

VOICES AWAKEN ME.
SHE SAID EVERY LAST TENT, BUT I DON'T SEE WHY THIS ONE WOULD BE ANY DIFFERENT.
JUST DO IT, PROFESSOR.
OK, OK...
FAMILIAR WORDS. MOTHER?
YOU TAUGHT ME THESE WORDS.
BUT YOU'VE BEEN GONE SO LONG...
THE ROBED BODIES HAVE NO WEAPONS AT ALL, AND THEIR ENEMIES, WHOEVER THEY ARE, MUST'VE LEFT WITH ALL THEIR DEAD.
PRIMITIVE PEOPLE--
I'VE HAD IT WITH YOUR TALK, ACRON. YOU WAIT OUT HERE.
MANY SOCIETIES DON'T FIGHT THE SAME WAY THE DYNASTY DOES, PROFESSOR, WITH SUPPOSEDLY "CIVILIZED" RESTRICTIONS.
THE ROBED ONES WERE SURPRISED BY THEIR ENEMIES. LITTLE WONDER IT WAS A SLAUGHTER.
WAIT.
YOU KNOW A LOT ABOUT WAR, DEAR MAN. OF COURSE, THAT'S WHAT YOU'RE PAID FOR, ISN'T IT!
THIS ONE'S STILL BREATHING.
ALERT THE DUCHESS, PROFESSOR!
YES, CAPTAIN. RIGHT AWAY, SIR.

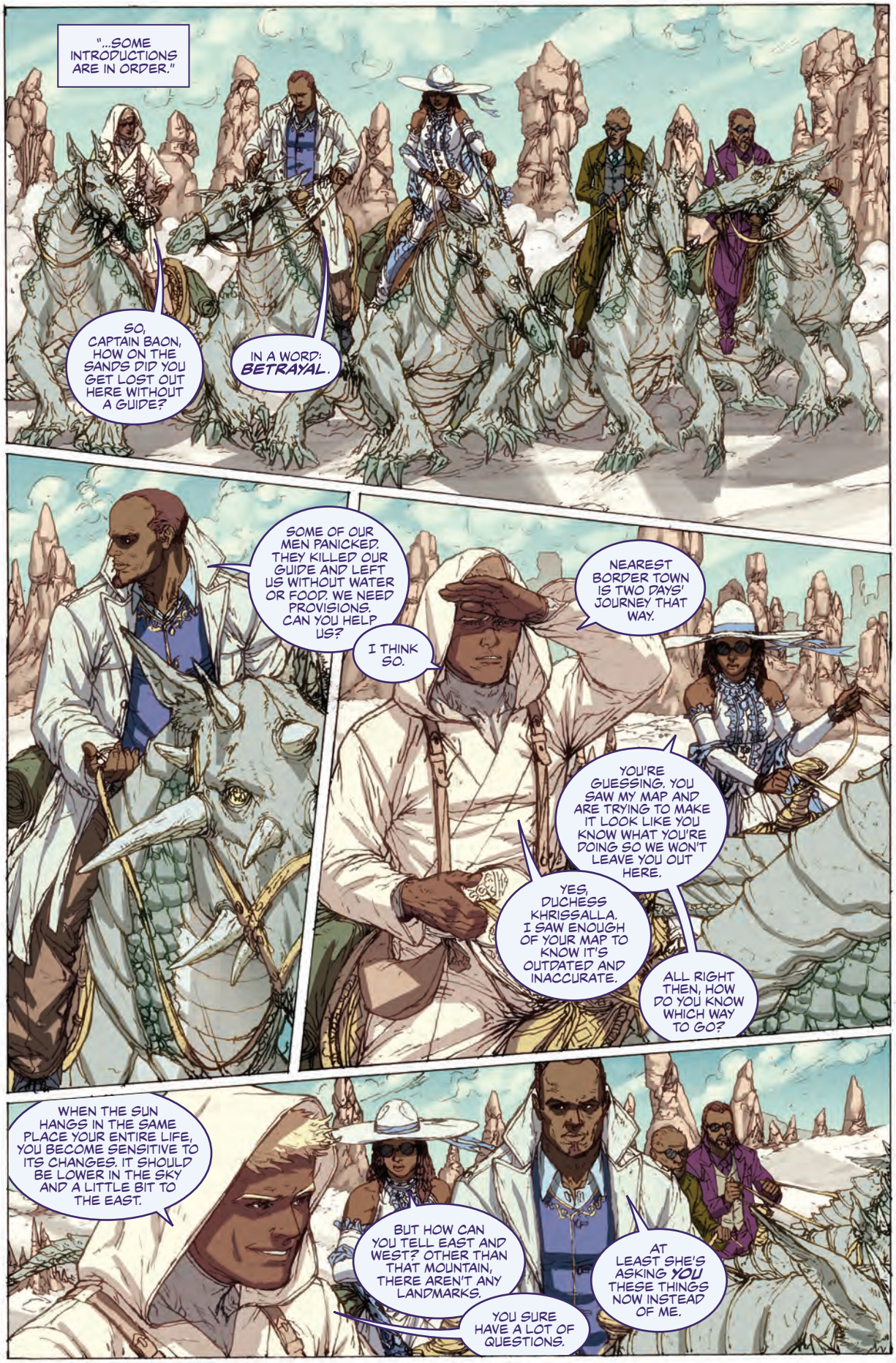
COME ON, MAN. UP YOU GET.
TH-THANKS.
MOTHER'S NATIVE TONGUE COMES BACK TO ME ALMOST BY INSTINCT.
WE'VE TRAVELED A LONG WAY, BUT WE'RE... LET'S CALL IT LOST. DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME?
NO? I SEE YOU'VE HAD A SHOCK. WHAT HAPPENED OUT THERE?
BUT I'M VERY MUCH OUT OF PRACTICE. MY DYNASTIC IS ADMITTEDLY A BIT RUSTY.
IT LOOKS LIKE A MASSACRE. DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME, DAYSIDER?
BUT WHY WOULD ANYONE FROM THE DYNASTY BE WAY OUT HERE?
THIS WAY, DUCHESS.
THANK SHELLA ONE OF THEM IS STILL ALIVE! HOW IS HE DOING?

HE'S WEAK AND DEHYDRATED, BUT HE'LL LIVE.
PERHAPS HE CAN LEAD US TO WATER IF WE CAN SOMEHOW EXPLAIN OUR DILEMMA TO HIM.
YOU'RE THE LINGUIST, CYNDER. MAYBE TRY SOME OF THAT PRIEST TALK ON HIM.
I DON'T THINK THAT WILL BE NECESSARY.
ISN'T THAT RIGHT, DAYSIDER?
EARLIER, YOU THANKED ME IN DYNASTIC. SO, WILL YOU HELP US FIND WATER OR NOT?
WAIT A MINUTE. WHERE DID YOU LEARN DYNASTIC?
HOW CAN YOU BE OUT OF WATER WHEN YOU AREN'T EVEN IN THE DESERT YET?
ONE TOPIC AT A TIME, DUCHESS.
I DON'T UNDERSTAND, DAYSIDER. LOOK OUTSIDE. I SEE SUN AND SAND. IF THIS ISN'T THE DESERT, THEN WHERE'S THE WATER?
ALL AROUND US. I MEAN... NO ONE TOLD YOU?


IT'S JUST, ON DAYSIDE IT'S COMMON KNOWLEDGE.
YOU HAVE SOME WATER LEFT, I HOPE?
ONLY A LITTLE, DAYSIDER.
THAT'S ALL WE'LL NEED.
WHAT'S HE DOING, CYNDER?
LEADING US A MERRY DANCE, I SHOULD FANCY.
DO WE NEED TO GO FAR?
NO. THE WATER IS ALL AROUND US--
--IF YOU KNOW WHERE TO LOOK.
NO! STOP HIM, HE'S...
LET US INDULGE HIM FOR A MOMENT, DUCHESS.
DAAZK TRIED TO GET US TO DO THE SAME THING.
AND I SUSPECT WE SHOULD HAVE LISTENED.
COME ON...
...PROVE ME RIGHT.


YOUR KNIFE, PLEASE?
GOOD. NOW GO GET SOMETHING TO STORE THIS IN.
SHELLA! THAT'S INCREDIBLE. WHY DO THEY CARRY WATER LIKE THAT?
DOES IT MATTER?
BAON, BE A GOOD CHAP AND LEAVE SOME FOR THE REST OF US!
WHERE DOES THE WATER COME FROM?
THE KERLA'S HIGH WATER TABLE PROVIDES FOR PLANTS SUCH AS THE DORIM VINES, WHICH CARRY WATER FOR PROTECTION. IF A SANDLING BITES ONE, THE LIQUID MELTS ITS CARAPACE.
A WORD TO THE WISE: STAY AWAY FROM DEEP SAND. YOU WON'T FIND THESE VINES THERE.
POOR DAAZK WAS RIGHT. PROFESSORS, BAON, I LET MY PREJUDICES CLOUD MY JUDGMENT.
DAYSIDER, I'M SORRY TO ASK THIS OF YOU AFTER YOU'VE ENDURED SUCH A TRAGEDY, BUT IT APPEARS WE COULD USE YOUR HELP.
I UNDERSTAND. BEFORE WE GO, MAY I HAVE A MOMENT... ALONE?
SECRETLY, I CALL OUT TO A SMALL AMOUNT OF SAND, BUT I FEEL NOTHING. HAVE I BURNED MYSELF OUT? WHO KNOWS HOW THE DARKSIDERS WOULD REACT TO MASTERED SAND ANYWAY? HOW WOULD I EXPLAIN TO THEM WHAT A MASTRELL IS WHEN THERE ISN'T EVEN A WORD FOR IT IN DYNASTIC?

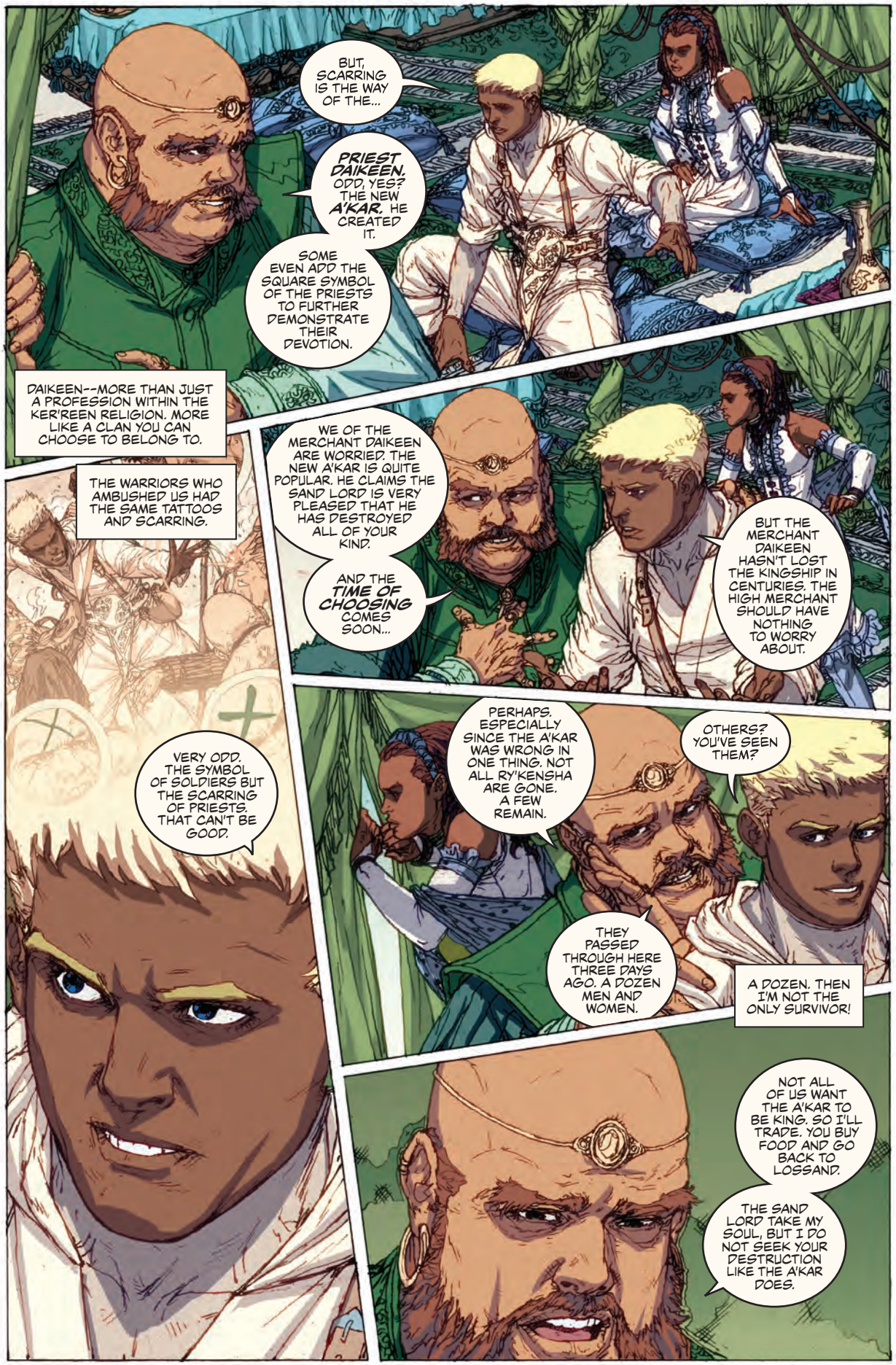

FAREWELL, FATHER. FAREWELL, TRAIBEN. FAREWELL, FRIENDS.
HOW COULD THIS HAPPEN? WHY DID IT?
KERZTA HAS HATED SAND MASTERS FOR CENTURIES, BUT WHAT MADE THEM SUDDENLY DECIDE TO ERADICATE US?
WE BECAME WEAK. WE GREW TOO LAX. FROM A TACTICAL STANDPOINT, THIS WAS THE PERFECT TIME TO ATTACK.
MY WARNINGS WENT UNHEEDED, BUT I NEVER WANTED TO BE PROVEN RIGHT LIKE THIS.
BUT THERE'S MORE TO THIS. THEY FOUND AN ACCOMPLICE-- SOMEONE WITHIN THE DIEM TO HELP THEM. SOMEONE TO POISON THE MASTRELLS, TO LEAVE US DEFENSELESS.
THE ONLY OTHER SAND MASTER WHO WANTS CHANGE IN THE DIEM AS MUCH AS I DO: DRILE.
IT IS TIME TO GO, DAYSIDER.
BUT FIRST...


"...SOME INTRODUCTIONS ARE IN ORDER."
SO, CAPTAIN BAON, HOW ON THE SANDS DID YOU GET LOST OUT HERE WITHOUT A GUIDE?
IN A WORD: BETRAYAL.
SOME OF OUR MEN PANICKED. THEY KILLED OUR GUIDE AND LEFT US WITHOUT WATER OR FOOD. WE NEED PROVISIONS. CAN YOU HELP US?
I THINK SO.
NEAREST BORDER TOWN IS TWO DAYS' JOURNEY THAT WAY.
YOU'RE GUESSING. YOU SAW MY MAP AND ARE TRYING TO MAKE IT LOOK LIKE YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING SO WE WON'T LEAVE YOU OUT HERE.
YES, DUCHESS KHRISSALLA. I SAW ENOUGH OF YOUR MAP TO KNOW IT'S OUTDATED AND INACCURATE.
ALL RIGHT THEN, HOW DO YOU KNOW WHICH WAY TO GO?
WHEN THE SUN HANGS IN THE SAME PLACE YOUR ENTIRE LIFE, YOU BECOME SENSITIVE TO ITS CHANGES. IT SHOULD BE LOWER IN THE SKY AND A LITTLE BIT TO THE EAST.
BUT HOW CAN YOU TELL EAST AND WEST? OTHER THAN THAT MOUNTAIN, THERE AREN'T ANY LANDMARKS.
YOU SURE HAVE A LOT OF QUESTIONS.
AT LEAST SHE'S ASKING YOU THESE THINGS NOW INSTEAD OF ME.

NO, IT'S FINE. QUESTIONS ARE GOOD. FOR EXAMPLE, WHAT BRINGS A DARKSIDE DUCHESS, HER BODYGUARD, AND TWO CRUSTY PROFESSORS TO DAYSIDE?
WE SEEK AID FROM THE SAND MAGES. HAVE YOU HEARD OF THEM?
THE WHO--?
MAGES? A DYNASTIC WORD I'M UNFAMILIAR WITH. IT SOUNDS RELATED TO THEIR WORD FOR ROYALTY, THOUGH. KINGS AND QUEENS.
THE SAND MAGES. THEY RULE LOSSAND.
THAT MAKES SENSE. THE RULERS OF LOSSAND COULD PRESUMABLY BE CALLED SAND KINGS AND QUEENS.
YOU MUST MEAN THE TAISHIN COUNCIL.
POSSIBLY...
I DON'T KNOW IF I CAN TRUST YOU. WHAT ARE YOU HIDING, DAYSIDER? YOU STILL HAVEN'T TOLD US WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR ENCAMPMENT.
SAME THING THAT STRANDED YOU. BETRAYAL.
AND I DON'T THINK YOU HAVE MUCH OF A CHOICE BUT TO TRUST ME, UNLESS YOUR TONK KNOWS MORE THAN IT'S LETTING ON.
VERY WELL, KENTON. THESE TAISHIN...CAN YOU GET US AN AUDIENCE WITH THEM?
I CAN GET YOU TO LOSSAND. WHETHER THE TAISHIN WILL GRANT YOU AN AUDIENCE IS UP TO THEM.
THEN LEAD ON, DAYSIDER. IF WE'RE TWO DAYS FROM PROVISIONS, THEN MY STOMACH TELLS ME WE'D BETTER STAY FOCUSED.

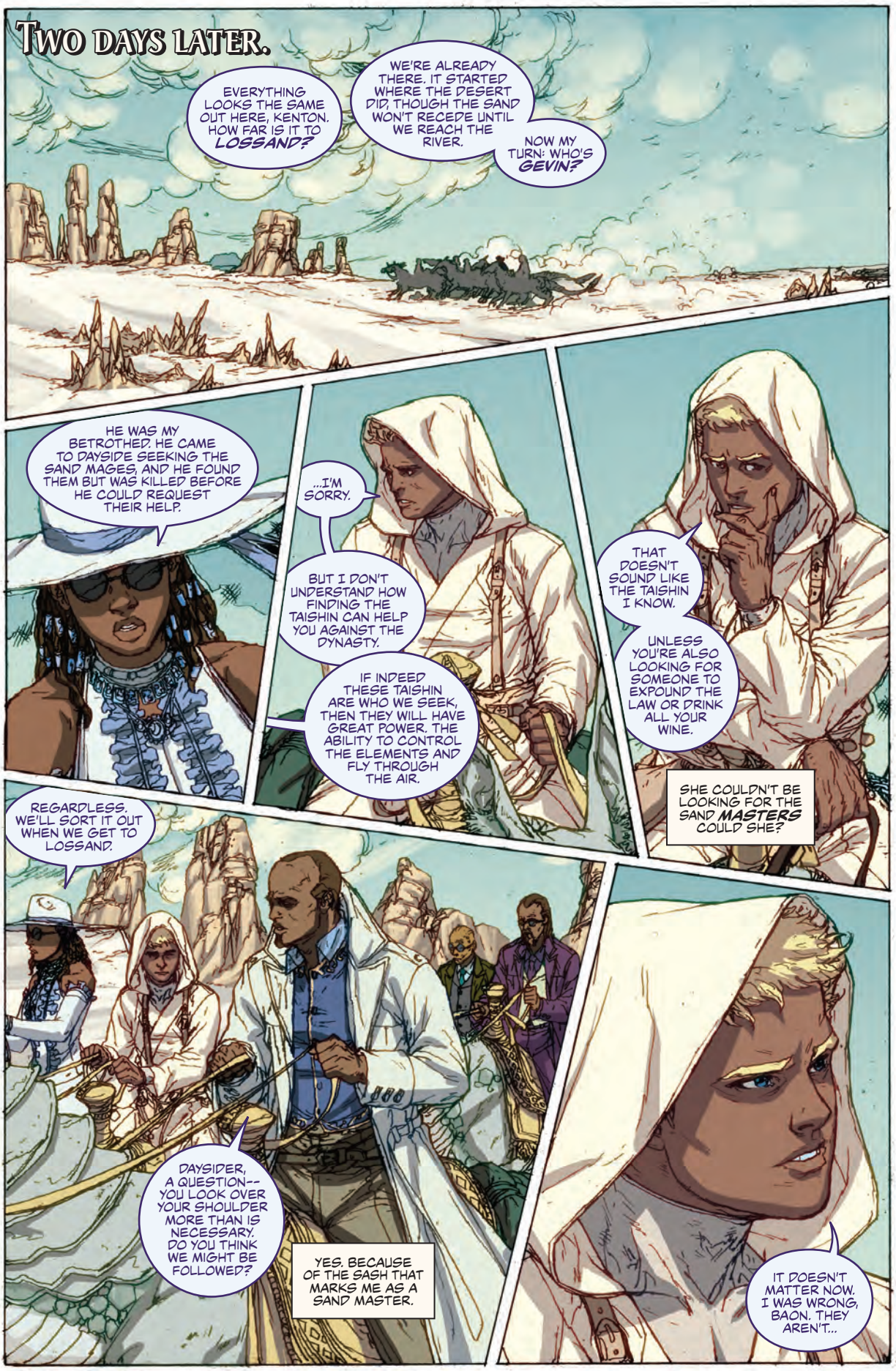
TWO DAYS LATER.
HA! FOR THIS? BEST DEAL ON THE SAND! YOU WANT KERZTIAN COIN OR LOSSANDIN?
EITHER COINAGE IS FINE. WE'RE JUST GOING TO SPEND IT ON SUPPLIES.
PROVISIONS? THEN SEE MY COUSIN. I'LL GIVE YOU SANDS GOOD DEAL ON THIS JEWELRY IF YOU BUY FROM HIM.
THERE'S NOT MUCH USE IN SCRAPS OF METAL LIKE THIS. MUST BE MELTED DOWN, YES? I'LL GIVE YOU FORTY LAK.
FORTY LAK? ARE YOU KIDDING ME?
I'M NOT A MERCHANT, BUT I KNOW METAL AND STONE ARE WORTH MORE THAN THAT OUT HERE.
PERHAPS...
WHAT'S HE SAYING? I CAN'T FOLLOW A WORD. FOR ALL I KNOW, YOU'RE ARRANGING TO SELL US AS SERVANTS INSTEAD OF JUST SELLING MY JEWELRY.
TRUST ME, KHRISSALLA. I'VE GOT THIS IN HAND.

BUT YOU'RE LUCKY I'LL EVEN TRADE WITH YOUR KIND.
OTHERS IN TOWN MIGHT NOT BE SO OPEN-MINDED, YES?
AISHA. HE RECOGNIZES THE SAND MASTER ROBES. NOT LIKE I HAD ANYTHING ELSE TO CHANGE INTO...
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, FRIEND? YOU'VE NEVER REFUSED TO TRADE WITH MY KIND BEFORE.
TIMES CHANGE. NOW IS NOT A GOOD TIME TO BE FRIENDS WITH RY'KENSHA. YOU UNDERSTAND?
FINE. I'LL TAKE FORTY. BUT I WANT INFORMATION. WHAT'S CHANGED? WHY DID KERZTIAN WARRIORS DECIDE TO ATTACK THE SAND MASTERS?
WHAT'S GOING ON, KENTON? SOME OF US ARE ABOUT TO DIE OF HUNGER.
CHOOSE YOUR WORDS CAREFULLY, EEDSHA. EARS ARE EVERY-WHERE. COME--
--YOU SEE?
DOES HE WANT US TO LEAVE?
NOT YET. HE'S SHOWING ME SOMETHING. I'LL TELL YOU ABOUT IT LATER. I PROMISE.
"YOU SEE THAT, FRIEND? THEY ARE SOLDIERS--***WARRIOR DAIKEEN.*** LOOK AT THEIR HEADS. NOT ONLY TATTOOED, BUT ***SCARRED*** AS WELL."

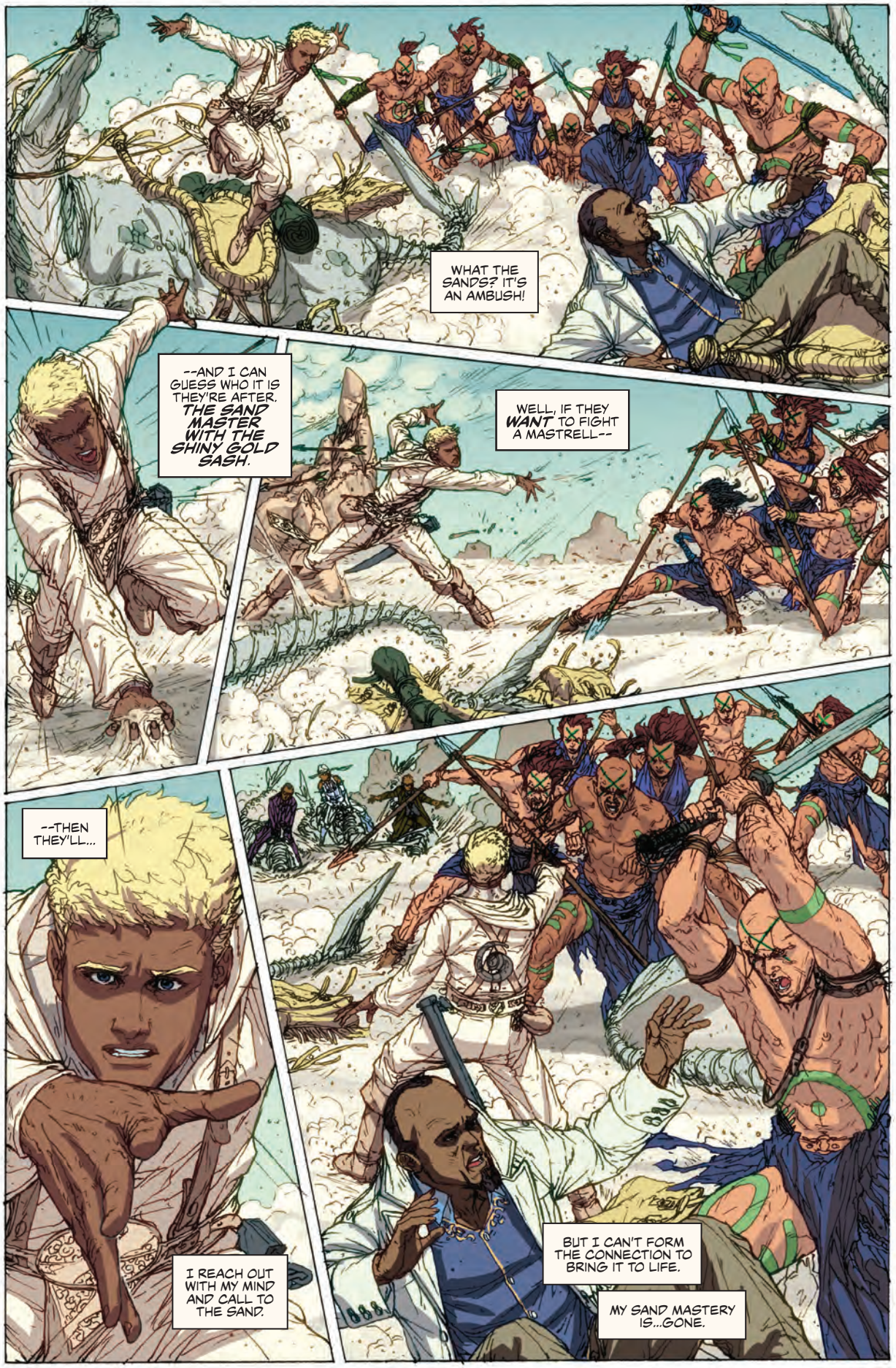

BUT, SCARRING IS THE WAY OF THE...
PRIEST DAIKEEN, ODD, YES? THE NEW A'KAR. HE CREATED IT.
SOME EVEN ADD THE SQUARE SYMBOL OF THE PRIESTS TO FURTHER DEMONSTRATE THEIR DEVOTION.
DAIKEEN--MORE THAN JUST A PROFESSION WITHIN THE KER'REEN RELIGION. MORE LIKE A CLAN YOU CAN CHOOSE TO BELONG TO.
WE OF THE MERCHANT DAIKEEN ARE WORRIED. THE NEW A'KAR IS QUITE POPULAR. HE CLAIMS THE SAND LORD IS VERY PLEASED THAT HE HAS DESTROYED ALL OF YOUR KIND.
AND THE TIME OF CHOOSING COMES SOON...
BUT THE MERCHANT DAIKEEN HASN'T LOST THE KINGSHIP IN CENTURIES. THE HIGH MERCHANT SHOULD HAVE NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT.
THE WARRIORS WHO AMBUSHED US HAD THE SAME TATTOOS AND SCARRING.
VERY ODD. THE SYMBOL OF SOLDIERS BUT THE SCARRING OF PRIESTS. THAT CAN'T BE GOOD.
PERHAPS. ESPECIALLY SINCE THE A'KAR WAS WRONG IN ONE THING. NOT ALL RY'KENSHA ARE GONE. A FEW REMAIN.
OTHERS? YOU'VE SEEN THEM?
THEY PASSED THROUGH HERE THREE DAYS AGO. A DOZEN MEN AND WOMEN.
A DOZEN. THEN I'M NOT THE ONLY SURVIVOR!
NOT ALL OF US WANT THE A'KAR TO BE KING. SO I'LL TRADE. YOU BUY FOOD AND GO BACK TO LOSSAND.
THE SAND LORD TAKE MY SOUL, BUT I DO NOT SEEK YOUR DESTRUCTION LIKE THE A'KAR DOES.

WE HAVEN'T EATEN IN TWO DAYS, AND YOU WERE IN THERE TALKING POLITICS?
YES, KERZTIAN POLITICS. NOW I UNDERSTAND A LITTLE MORE WHY MY PEOPLE WERE ATTACKED.
OKAY... WHAT DID YOU LEARN?
IT'S... COMPLICATED. TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO, THE KERZTIANS AND THE LOSSANDINS STOPPED FIGHTING FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HISTORY.
WHY WERE YOU FIGHTING?
DID THEY WANT YOUR LAND?
HARDLY. THE KERZTIANS CALL LOSSAND THE "CURSED LAND." IT'S CONSIDERED DESERT BECAUSE THERE ARE NO DORIM VINES.
THEN WHY FIGHT?
LONG AGO, TWO SIBLINGS-- KERZT AND LOSSA-- HAD A FALLING OUT OVER HOW TO WORSHIP THE SAND LORD.
TODAY THAT SCHISM ECHOES THROUGH THE NATIONS THEY FOUNDED. THE HARD-NOSED KERZTIAN KER'REEN AND THE MORE LAID BACK LOSSANDIN LOS'EEN. EVEN LOSSANDIN IS JUST A DIALECT OF THE KERZTIAN LANGUAGE. WE'RE ALL TECHNICALLY COUSINS, BUT KERZTA DOESN'T SEE IT THAT WAY.
TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO, THE A'KAR-- THE HIGH PRIEST--LOST THE KINGSHIP, AND THE HIGH MERCHANT WAS CROWNED INSTEAD. BEST THING THAT COULD'VE HAPPENED. WARS STOPPED. TRADE THRIVED.
SOON KERZTA WILL CHOOSE A NEW KING, AND IT'S STARTING TO LOOK LIKE THE A'KAR COULD WIN.
THAT SOUNDS... BAD.
YOU HAVE NO IDEA, KHRISS. THIS SPARK COULD FAN DAYSIDE INTO AN ALL-OUT WAR.

WHAT DID YOU JUST CALL ME?
KHRISS, YOU KNOW, A NICKNAME? I THOUGHT IT WAS PRETTY OBVIOUS.
GEVIN USED TO CALL ME THAT.
WHO'S GEVIN--?
HEY!
AND IN LESS THAN A SECOND...
AISHA!
...EVERYTHING CHANGES.
KENTON, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
WE'D BETTER GO.
WHAT'S WRONG? WHAT IS IT?
JUST GO, KHRISS. RIGHT NOW.
"GRAB BAON AND THE OTHERS. LET'S GET THE SANDS OUT OF HERE."


TWO DAYS LATER.
EVERYTHING LOOKS THE SAME OUT HERE, KENTON. HOW FAR IS IT TO LOSSAND?
WE'RE ALREADY THERE. IT STARTED WHERE THE DESERT DID, THOUGH THE SAND WON'T RECEDE UNTIL WE REACH THE RIVER.
NOW MY TURN: WHO'S GEVIN?
HE WAS MY BETROTHED. HE CAME TO DAYSIDE SEEKING THE SAND MAGES, AND HE FOUND THEM BUT WAS KILLED BEFORE HE COULD REQUEST THEIR HELP.
...I'M SORRY.
BUT I DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW FINDING THE TAISHIN CAN HELP YOU AGAINST THE DYNASTY.
IF INDEED THESE TAISHIN ARE WHO WE SEEK, THEN THEY WILL HAVE GREAT POWER. THE ABILITY TO CONTROL THE ELEMENTS AND FLY THROUGH THE AIR.
THAT DOESN'T SOUND LIKE THE TAISHIN I KNOW.
UNLESS YOU'RE ALSO LOOKING FOR SOMEONE TO EXPOUND THE LAW OR DRINK ALL YOUR WINE.
SHE COULDN'T BE LOOKING FOR THE SAND MASTERS COULD SHE?
REGARDLESS, WE'LL SORT IT OUT WHEN WE GET TO LOSSAND.
DAYSIDER, A QUESTION-- YOU LOOK OVER YOUR SHOULDER MORE THAN IS NECESSARY. DO YOU THINK WE MIGHT BE FOLLOWED?
YES. BECAUSE OF THE SASH THAT MARKS ME AS A SAND MASTER.
IT DOESN'T MATTER NOW. I WAS WRONG, BAON. THEY AREN'T...

YEAARRGH!
TSSSSHHH


WHAT THE SANDS? IT'S AN AMBUSH!
--AND I CAN GUESS WHO IT IS THEY'RE AFTER. THE SAND MASTER WITH THE SHINY GOLD SASH.
WELL, IF THEY WANT TO FIGHT A MASTRELL--
--THEN THEY'LL...
I REACH OUT WITH MY MIND AND CALL TO THE SAND.
BUT I CAN'T FORM THE CONNECTION TO BRING IT TO LIFE.
MY SAND MASTERY IS...GONE.

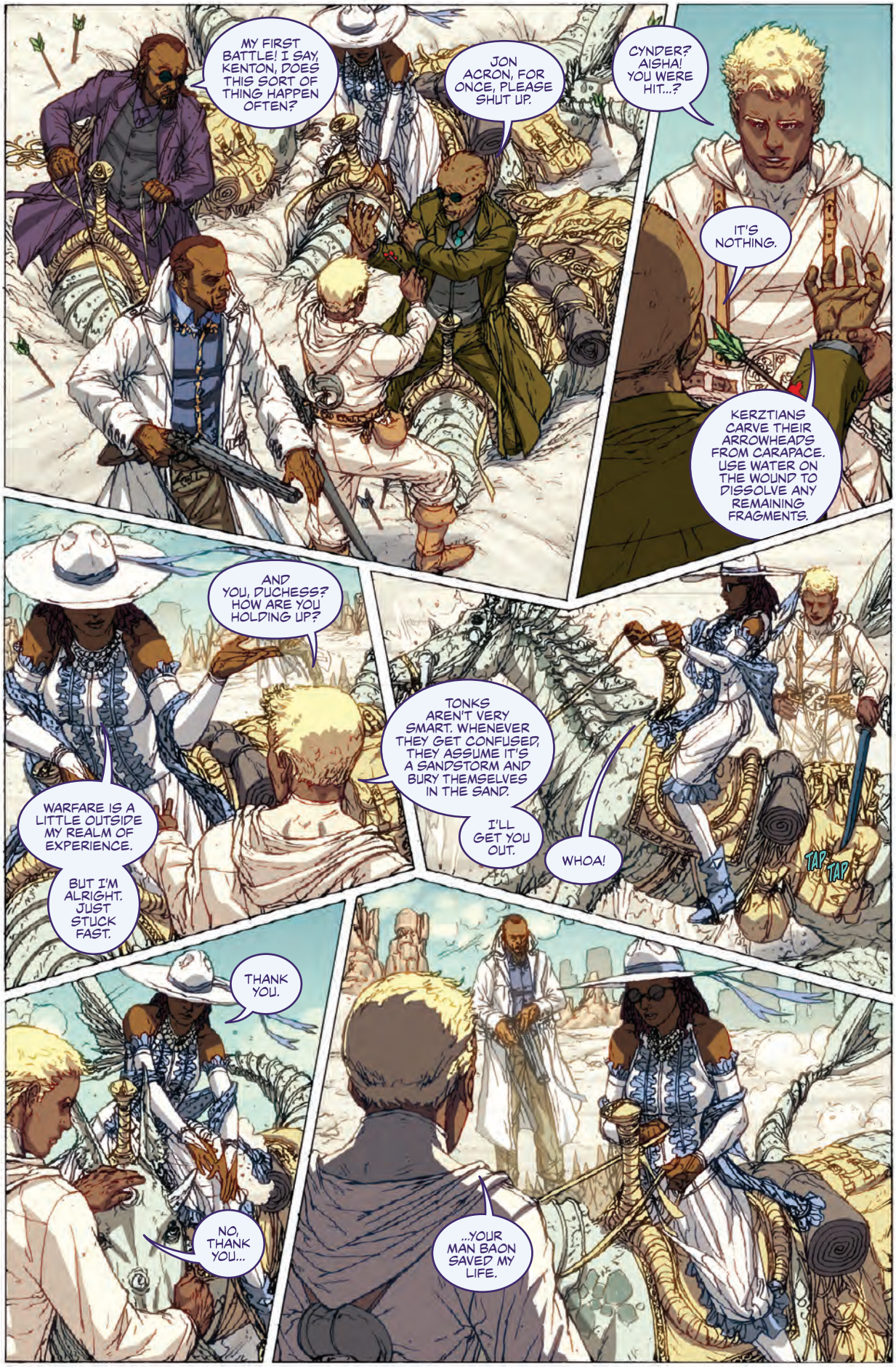
CHAPTER 4
DIVIDES

EVEN STRIPPED OF SAND MASTERY, I'M NOT DEFENSELESS.
KRAK
OH, SHELLA, WE'RE STUCK.
WE'RE OUTMATCHED, BUT IT'S NOT LIKE I CAN RUN AND LEAVE THE DUCHESS AND HER CREW BURIED PARTWAY IN THE SAND LIKE THIS.

THE KERZTIANS HAVE ALWAYS CONDEMNED SAND MASTERY, BUT THEY'VE NEVER BEEN BOLD ENOUGH TO ATTACK SAND MASTERS.
UNTIL NOW. THE A'KAR MUST HAVE REALLY RILED THEM UP.
COME TO LIFE.
PLEASE!
FA-TOOOM
WHA? WHAT JUST HAPPENED?
MY SAND MASTERY IS STILL GONE, BUT I WASN'T EXPECTING THAT. WHATEVER THAT WAS.

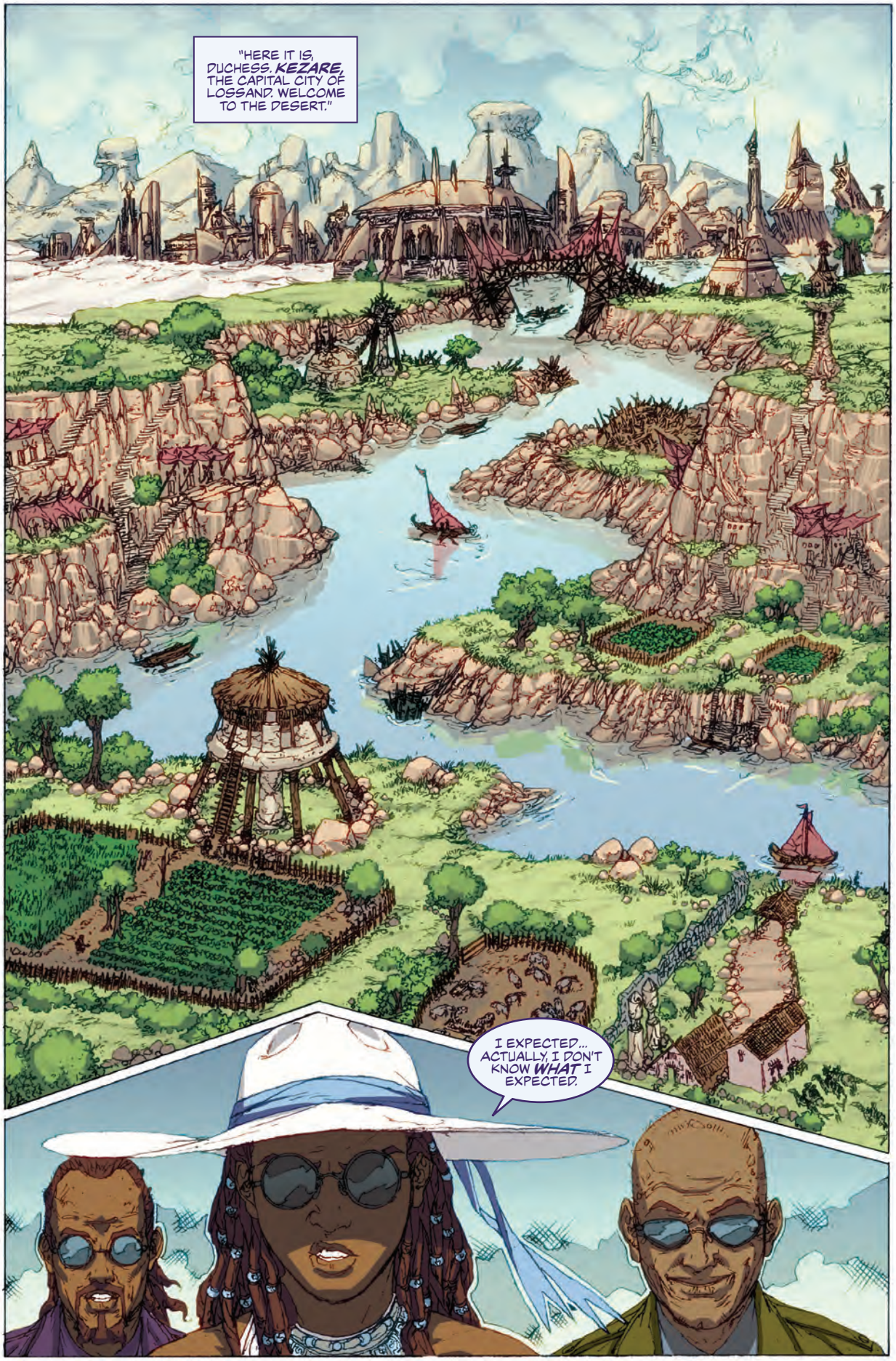
BAON...?
FA-TOOOM
THEY'RE LEAVING.
THEN THEY ARE WISE. ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, DAYSIDER?

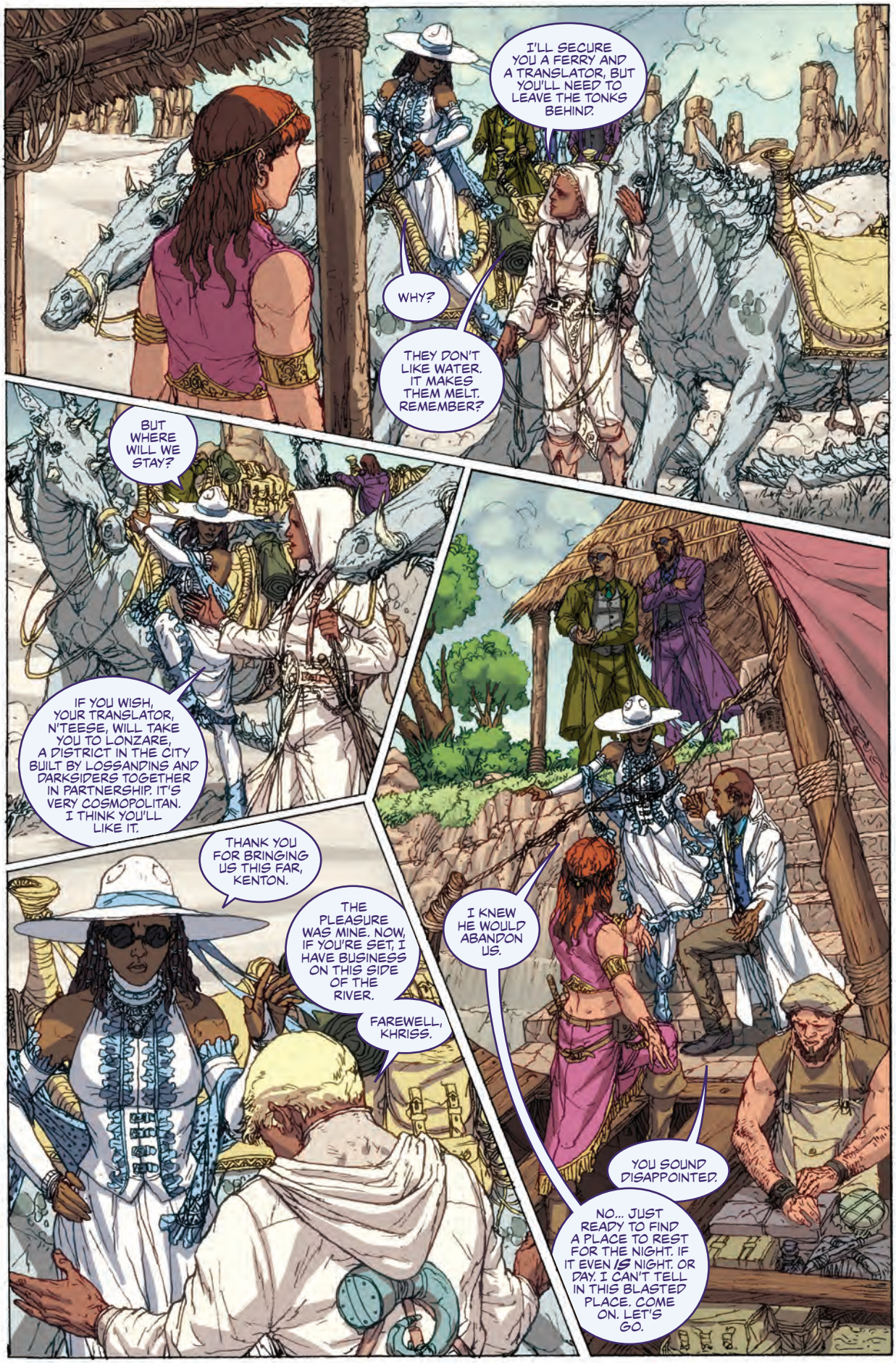
...KENTON?
I'M FINE.
BUT I AM NOT FINE. I OVERMASTERED WHEN THE KERZTIANS FIRST ATTACKED THE DIEM, AND NOW...
...I'VE BURNT MYSELF OUT.
RECOGNIZE HIM?
NO, BUT I'VE SEEN OTHERS DRESSED LIKE THIS. IT'S STRANGE, THOUGH. USUALLY, KERZTIAN ARMOR IS QUITE SOPHISTICATED.
YET HE WEARS VERY LITTLE. AND WHAT OF THE SCAR AND TATTOO?
THE TATTOOED "X" MARKS MEMBERS OF THE WARRIOR DAIKEEN.
THE SCARRING AND THE SQUARE SAY THEY BELONG TO THE PRIESTS.
SAND LORD HELP US... WARRIOR-PRIESTS.
SO, WHY DO THEY WANT TO KILL YOU, DAYSIDER?
FOR SOMETHING I USED TO BE.
WE SHOULD GO, BAON.
YOU'RE WORRIED THEY'LL BE BACK?
KER'REEN FOLLOWERS BELIEVE THEIR DEAD MUST BE BURIED IN DEEP SAND, OTHERWISE THEIR SPIRITS WILL BE FOREVER CURSED TO WANDER THE KERLA.
SO YES, BAON. THEY'LL BE BACK.

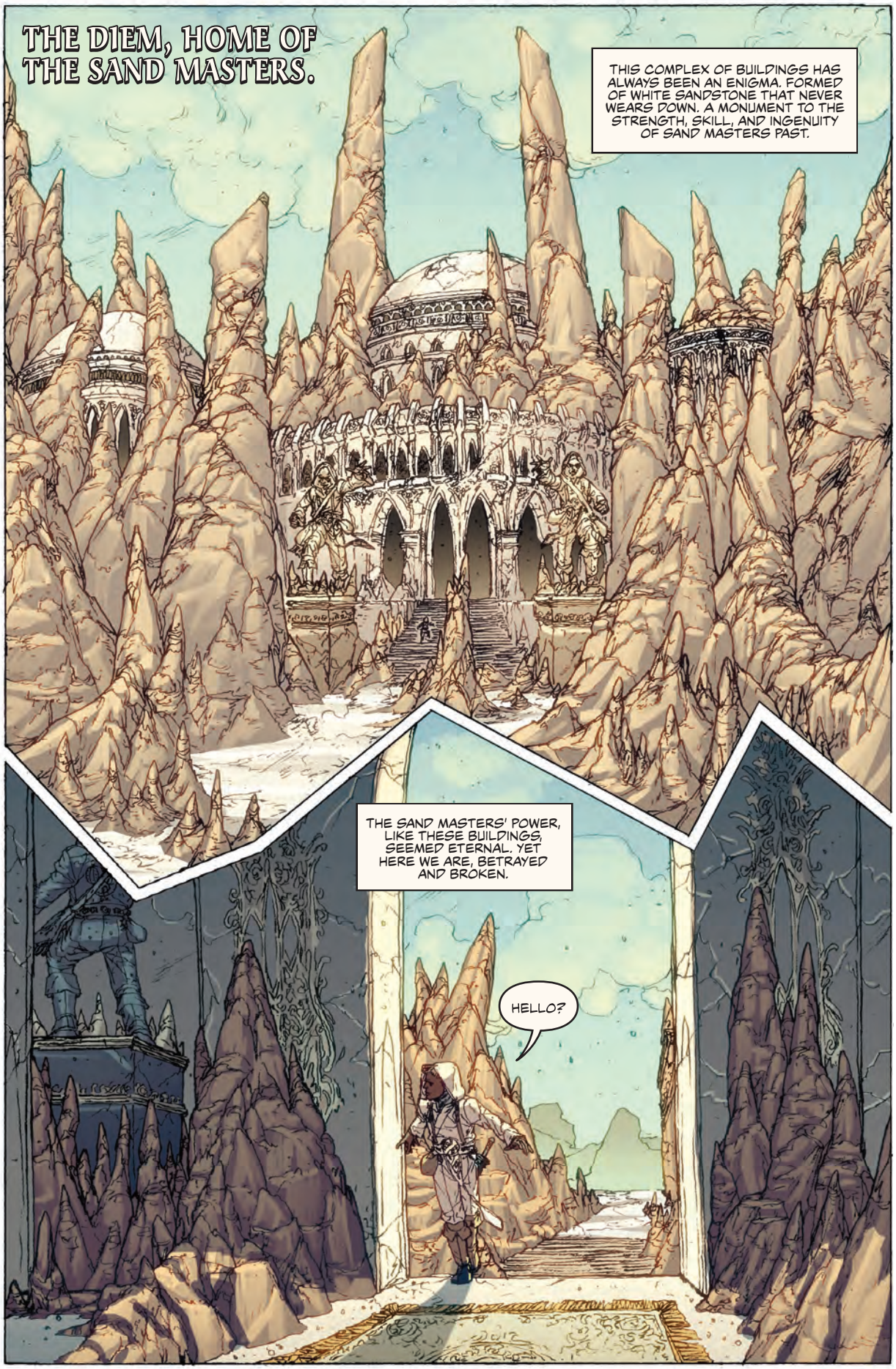

MY FIRST BATTLE! I SAY, KENTON, DOES THIS SORT OF THING HAPPEN OFTEN?
JON ACRON, FOR ONCE, PLEASE SHUT UP.
CYNDER? AISHA! YOU WERE HIT...?
IT'S NOTHING.
KERZTIANS CARVE THEIR ARROWHEADS FROM CARAPACE. USE WATER ON THE WOUND TO DISSOLVE ANY REMAINING FRAGMENTS.
AND YOU, DUCHESS? HOW ARE YOU HOLDING UP?
TONKS AREN'T VERY SMART. WHENEVER THEY GET CONFUSED, THEY ASSUME IT'S A SANDSTORM AND BURY THEMSELVES IN THE SAND.
I'LL GET YOU OUT.
WHOA!
TAP TAP
WARFARE IS A LITTLE OUTSIDE MY REALM OF EXPERIENCE.
BUT I'M ALRIGHT. JUST STUCK FAST.
THANK YOU.
NO, THANK YOU...
...YOUR MAN BAON SAVED MY LIFE.

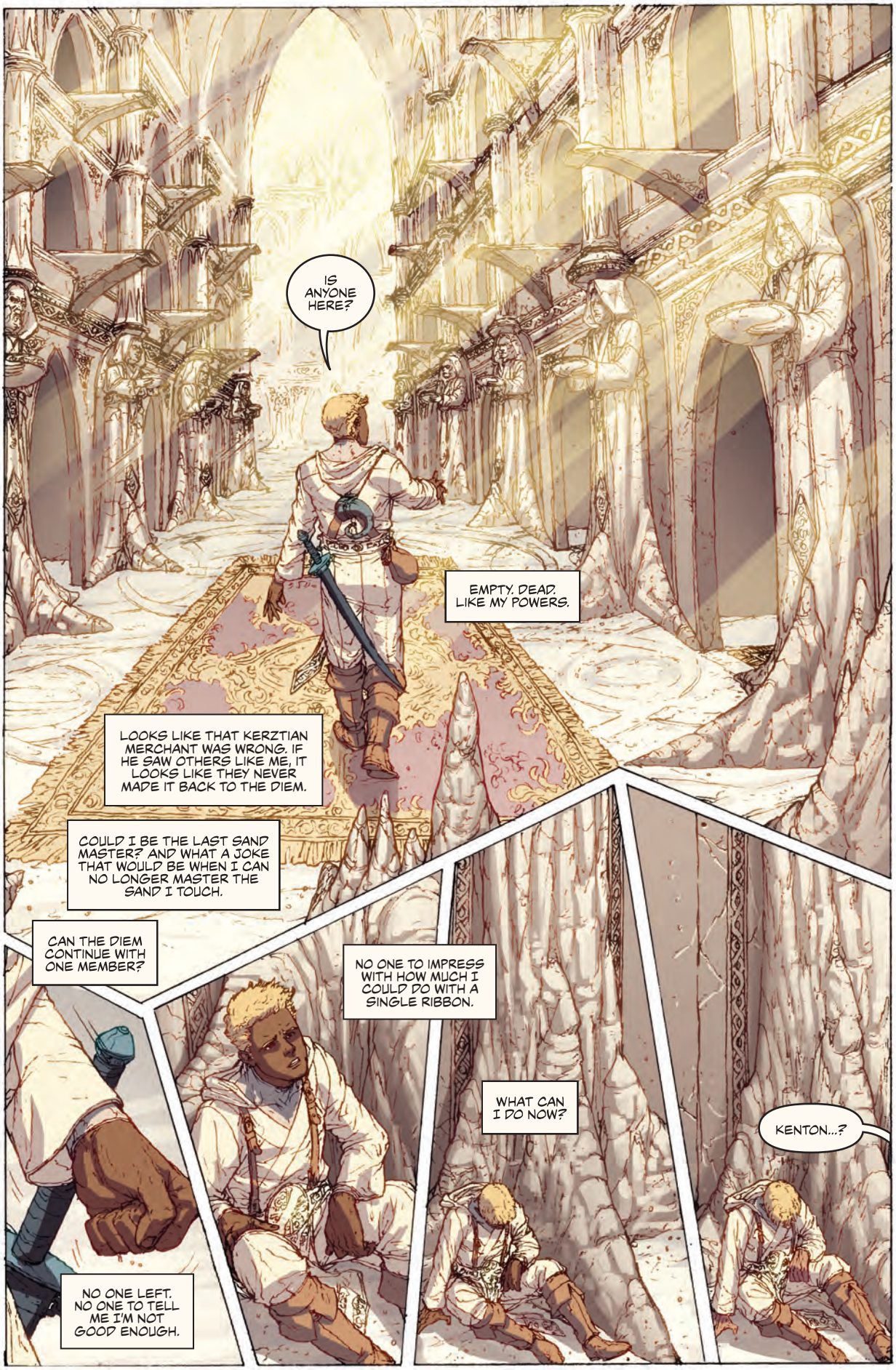
THE WEAPON IS CALLED A PISTOL, IN CASE YOU WERE WONDERING.
DOES IT USE AIR PRESSURE?
NO. AN EXPLOSIVE CALLED GUNPOWDER.
WE'VE HAD THEM FOR LESS THAN A CENTURY ON DARKSIDE, AND EVEN THEN, MOSTLY IN ELIS. THE DYNASTY IS QUITE PROFICIENT AT KEEPING TECHNOLOGY FROM SPREADING FARTHER THAN THEY WANT IT TO.
SKATHAN, THE CURRENT EMPEROR, KNOWS HOW DANGEROUS A LITTLE KNOWLEDGE CAN BE.
THIS GUNPOWDER MUST BE POWERFUL. HOW MANY TIMES CAN IT BE USED?
JUST ONCE, BUT BAON'S PISTOLS HAVE TWO BARRELS.
THEN HE WAS BLUFFING? HE COULDN'T HAVE KILLED THAT THIRD KERZTIAN?
NOT UNLESS HE PULLED OUT HIS OTHER PISTOL.
NOW...WHAT IS GOING ON, KENTON? IT'S OBVIOUS THOSE KERZTIANS WERE AFTER YOU. THEY CONSIDERED YOU SO DANGEROUS THAT THEY SENT ONE SOLDIER AGAINST BAON, BUT THEY SENT SIX AGAINST YOU.
WHAT ARE YOU HIDING?
THOSE KERZTIANS KILLED MY FATHER AND FRIENDS.
I RESPECTFULLY ASK THAT YOU ALLOW ME SOME PRIVACY.
TOO HARSH? MAYBE. BUT I'M HEADING BACK TO AN EMPTY DIEM, AND I DON'T KNOW WHAT COMES AFTER THAT.

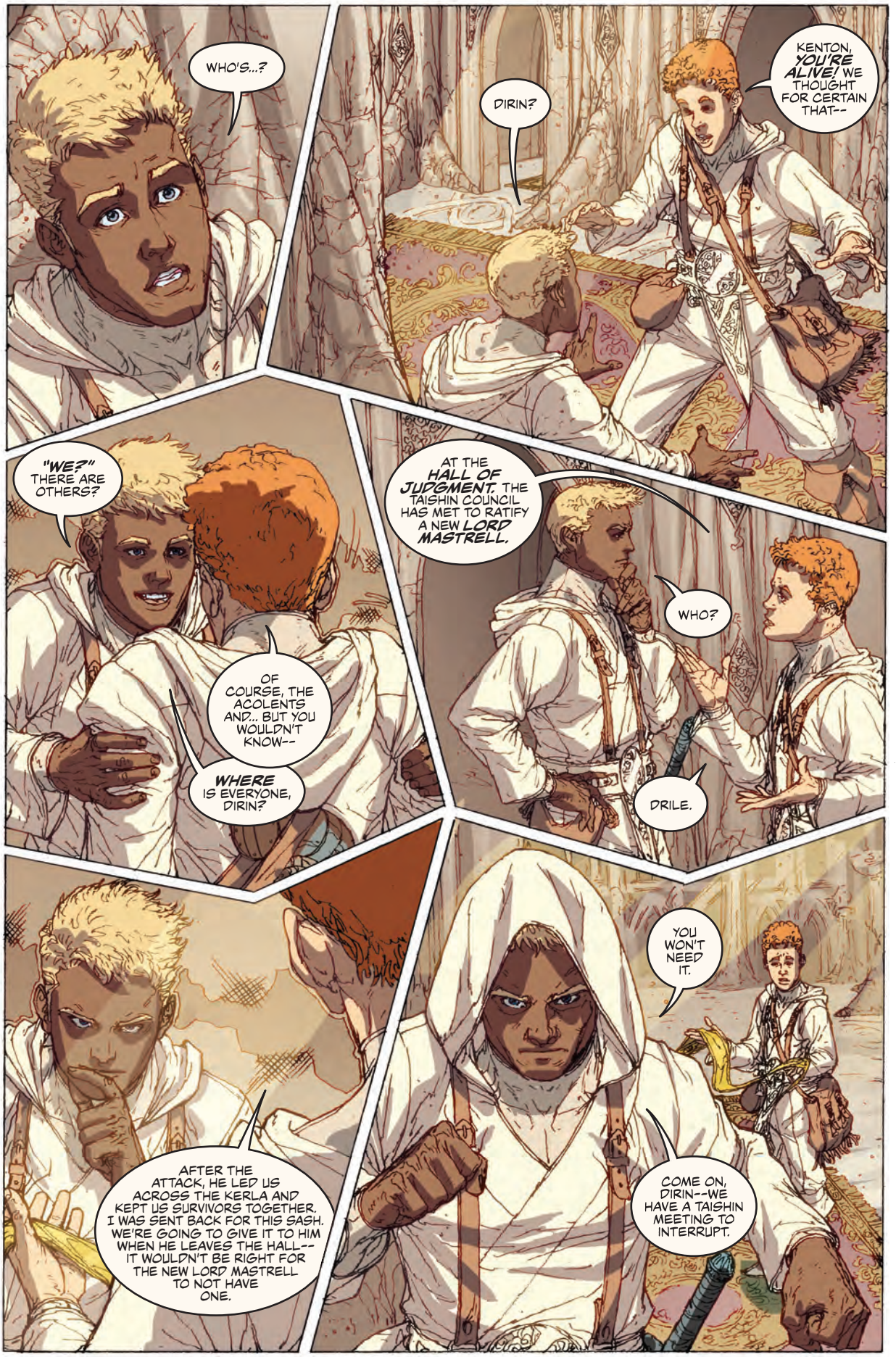
TIME PASSES AND THE SUN IS ALMOST IN ITS FAMILIAR SPOT IN THE SKY. WE'RE ALMOST HOME.
IT'S AN INTERESTING DEVICE, THIS ZINKALL. DO YOU THINK THE KERZTIANS MIGHT ATTACK US AGAIN?
IF WE DIDN'T NEED YOU TO GUIDE US, IT WOULD BE SMART OF US TO LEAVE YOU BEHIND...JUST IN CASE.
THEY SHOULDN'T ATTACK AGAIN. WE'RE TOO CLOSE TO THE RY'DOALI-- THE "CURSED WATERS," AS THEY CALL IT.
THE CURSED WATERS? IS IT SAFE?
IT'S JUST A RIVER, BUT KERZTIAN NATIONALS BELIEVE SO MUCH WATER IN ONE PLACE MUST BE UNHOLY. THERE AREN'T ANY DORIM VINES, AND WELLS ARE UNRELIABLE, SO OUR SOCIETY CAN'T STRAY FAR FROM ITS BANKS. WE'LL BE THERE SOON.
HOW LONG, DO YOU THINK?
BY THE STARS, THERE IT IS. JUST OVER THE NEXT SET OF DUNES. WE'RE ALMOST THERE.


"HERE IT IS, DUCHESS. KEZARE, THE CAPITAL CITY OF LOSSAND. WELCOME TO THE DESERT."
I EXPECTED... ACTUALLY, I DON'T KNOW WHAT I EXPECTED.

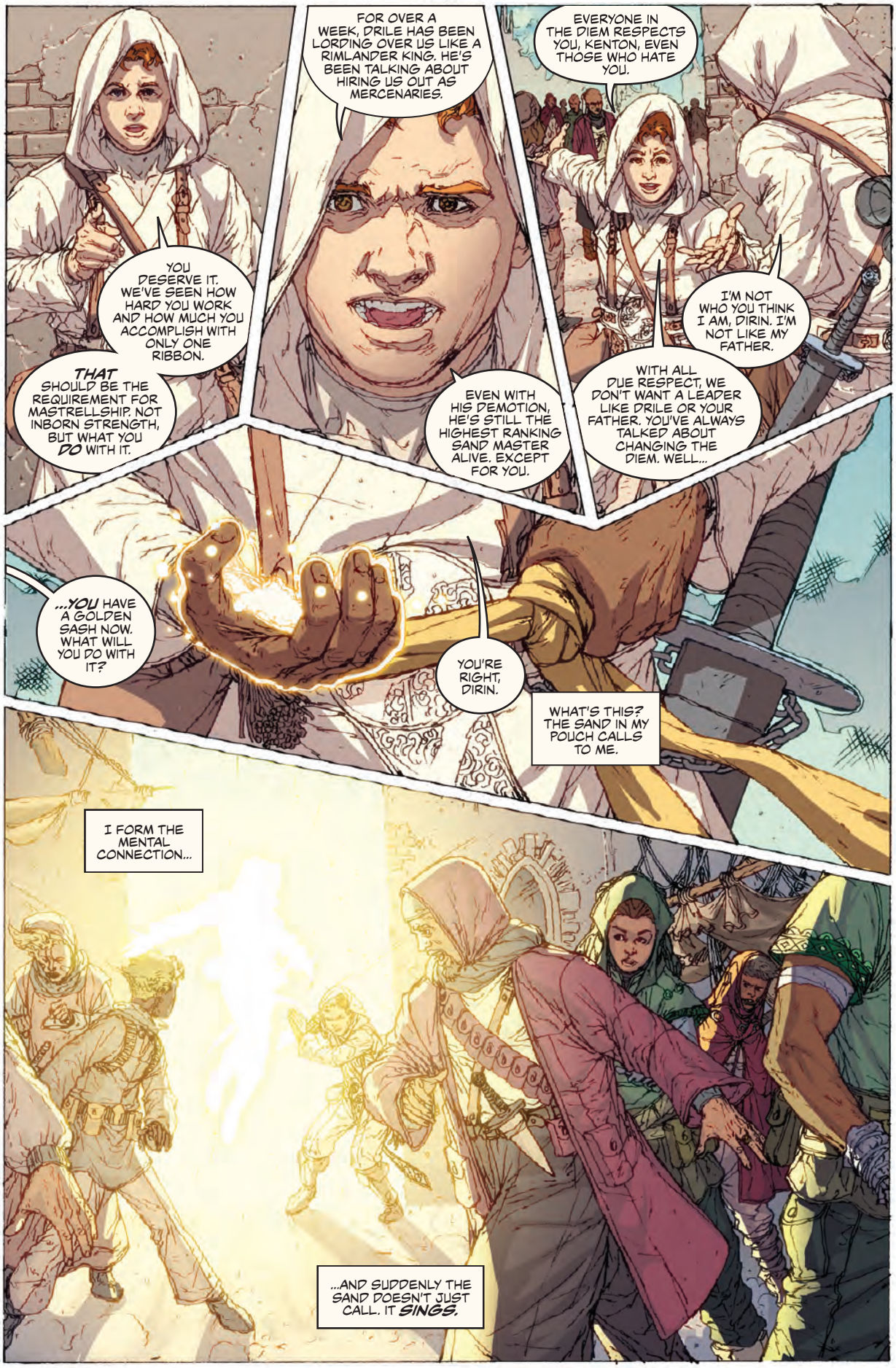

I'LL SECURE YOU A FERRY AND A TRANSLATOR, BUT YOU'LL NEED TO LEAVE THE TONKS BEHIND.
WHY?
THEY DON'T LIKE WATER. IT MAKES THEM MELT. REMEMBER?
BUT WHERE WILL WE STAY?
IF YOU WISH, YOUR TRANSLATOR, N'TEESE, WILL TAKE YOU TO LONZARE, A DISTRICT IN THE CITY BUILT BY LOSSANDINS AND DARKSIDERS TOGETHER IN PARTNERSHIP. IT'S VERY COSMOPOLITAN. I THINK YOU'LL LIKE IT.
THANK YOU FOR BRINGING US THIS FAR, KENTON.
THE PLEASURE WAS MINE. NOW, IF YOU'RE SET, I HAVE BUSINESS ON THIS SIDE OF THE RIVER.
FAREWELL, KHRISS.
I KNEW HE WOULD ABANDON US.
YOU SOUND DISAPPOINTED.
NO... JUST READY TO FIND A PLACE TO REST FOR THE NIGHT. IF IT EVEN *IS* NIGHT. OR DAY. I CAN'T TELL IN THIS BLASTED PLACE. COME ON. LET'S GO.


THE DIEM, HOME OF THE SAND MASTERS.
THIS COMPLEX OF BUILDINGS HAS ALWAYS BEEN AN ENIGMA. FORMED OF WHITE SANDSTONE THAT NEVER WEARS DOWN. A MONUMENT TO THE STRENGTH, SKILL, AND INGENUITY OF SAND MASTERS PAST.
THE SAND MASTERS' POWER, LIKE THESE BUILDINGS, SEEMED ETERNAL. YET HERE WE ARE, BETRAYED AND BROKEN.
HELLO?


IS ANYONE HERE?
EMPTY. DEAD. LIKE MY POWERS.
LOOKS LIKE THAT KERZTIAN MERCHANT WAS WRONG. IF HE SAW OTHERS LIKE ME, IT LOOKS LIKE THEY NEVER MADE IT BACK TO THE DIEM.
COULD I BE THE LAST SAND MASTER? AND WHAT A JOKE THAT WOULD BE WHEN I CAN NO LONGER MASTER THE SAND I TOUCH.
CAN THE DIEM CONTINUE WITH ONE MEMBER?
NO ONE TO IMPRESS WITH HOW MUCH I COULD DO WITH A SINGLE RIBBON.
WHAT CAN I DO NOW?
KENTON...?
NO ONE LEFT. NO ONE TO TELL ME I'M NOT GOOD ENOUGH.

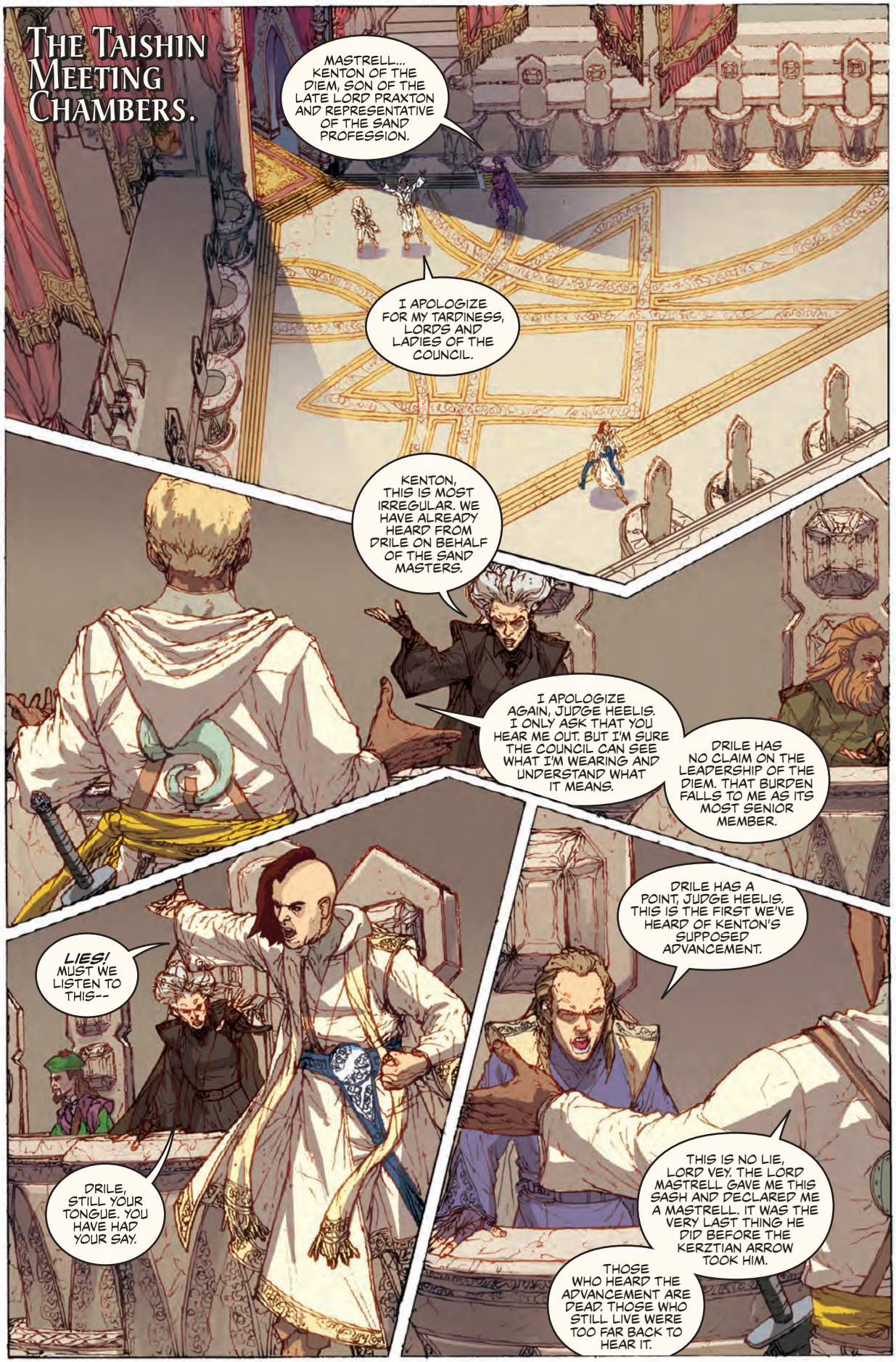

WHO'S...?
DIRIN?
KENTON, YOU'RE ALIVE! WE THOUGHT FOR CERTAIN THAT--
"WE?" THERE ARE OTHERS?
OF COURSE, THE ACOLENTS AND... BUT YOU WOULDN'T KNOW--
WHERE IS EVERYONE, DIRIN?
AT THE HALL OF JUDGMENT, THE TAISHIN COUNCIL HAS MET TO RATIFY A NEW LORD MASTRELL.
WHO?
DRILE.
AFTER THE ATTACK, HE LED US ACROSS THE KERLA AND KEPT US SURVIVORS TOGETHER. I WAS SENT BACK FOR THIS SASH. WE'RE GOING TO GIVE IT TO HIM WHEN HE LEAVES THE HALL-- IT WOULDN'T BE RIGHT FOR THE NEW LORD MASTRELL TO NOT HAVE ONE.
YOU WON'T NEED IT.
COME ON, DIRIN--WE HAVE A TAISHIN MEETING TO INTERRUPT.

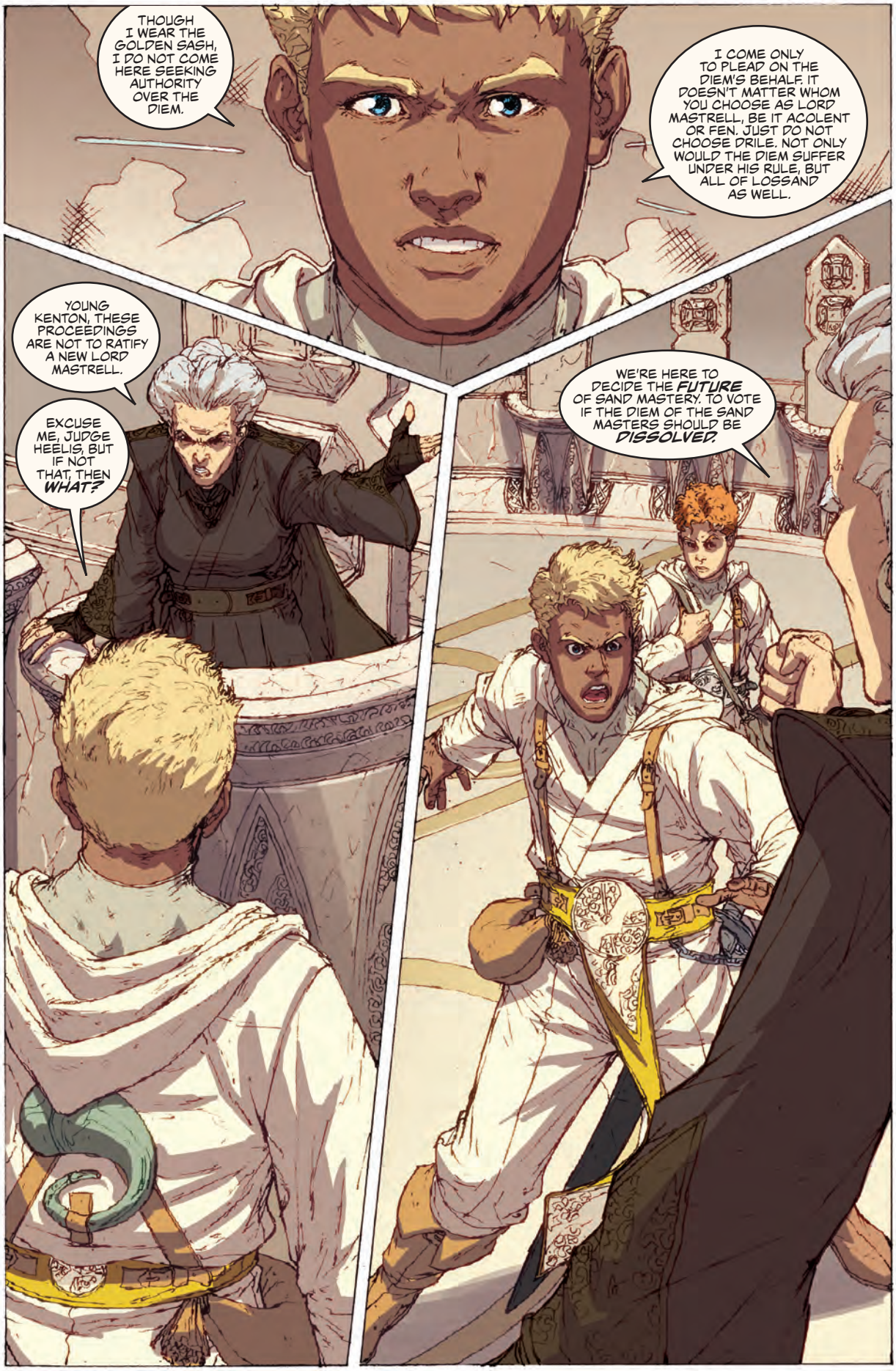
OUTSIDE THE HALL OF JUDGMENT.
NONE OF THE MASTRELLS SURVIVED, EXCEPT DRILE, WHO ISN'T QUITE A MASTRELL ANYMORE.
HOW DID YOU SURVIVE, DIRIN?
THE KERZTIANS MOSTLY IGNORED THE ACOLENTS-- OVER HALF OF US SURVIVED. BUT THE HIGHER RANKS...
I'M SORRY ABOUT THE LORD MASTRELL... ABOUT YOUR FATHER.
THE KERZTIANS KNEW WHICH SASH COLORS TO TARGET. BUT THEY MISSED ONE.
WHERE DID YOU GET THAT? I DIDN'T SEE THE LORD MASTRELL ASSIGN--
HE GAVE ME THIS SASH RIGHT BEFORE THE ATTACK BUT BEFORE HE COULD ANNOUNCE IT TO THE DIEM.


YOU DESERVE IT. WE'VE SEEN HOW HARD YOU WORK AND HOW MUCH YOU ACCOMPLISH WITH ONLY ONE RIBBON.
THAT SHOULD BE THE REQUIREMENT FOR MASTRELLSHIP. NOT INBORN STRENGTH, BUT WHAT YOU DO WITH IT.
FOR OVER A WEEK, DRILE HAS BEEN LORDING OVER US LIKE A RIMLANDER KING. HE'S BEEN TALKING ABOUT HIRING US OUT AS MERCENARIES.
EVEN WITH HIS DEMOTION, HE'S STILL THE HIGHEST RANKING SAND MASTER ALIVE. EXCEPT FOR YOU.
EVERYONE IN THE DIEM RESPECTS YOU, KENTON, EVEN THOSE WHO HATE YOU.
I'M NOT WHO YOU THINK I AM, DIRIN. I'M NOT LIKE MY FATHER.
WITH ALL DUE RESPECT, WE DON'T WANT A LEADER LIKE DRILE OR YOUR FATHER. YOU'VE ALWAYS TALKED ABOUT CHANGING THE DIEM. WELL...
...YOU HAVE A GOLDEN SASH NOW. WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH IT?
YOU'RE RIGHT, DIRIN.
WHAT'S THIS? THE SAND IN MY POUCH CALLS TO ME.
I FORM THE MENTAL CONNECTION...
...AND SUDDENLY THE SAND DOESN'T JUST CALL. IT SINGS.

I CAN'T EXPLAIN IT.
MY POWERS HAVE RETURNED.
I *FEEL* SAND MASTERY RETURN LIKE A CHILDHOOD SONG I THOUGHT I'D FORGOTTEN.
AND THE SAND IS BEAUTIFUL-- *ALIVE.*

THREE RIBBONS, KENTON. HOW...?
I DON'T KNOW. I THOUGHT I'D BURNED MYSELF OUT.
BUT I WAS WRONG.
DRILE'S IN THERE RIGHT NOW, PETITIONING TO BE OFFICIALLY RECOGNIZED AS THE LORD MASTRELL.
HE'S THE ONLY ONE THE TAISHIN LET IN. THE REST OF US ARE IN THE SQUARES, AWAITING WORD.
THREE RIBBONS. IT SHOULDN'T BE POSSIBLE.
MAY I HELP YOU?
ANNOUNCE MY ARRIVAL TO THE CHAMBER.
I CAN'T INTERRUPT WHILE MASTRELL DRILE HAS THE FLOOR.
THEN YOU CAN ANNOUNCE ME AFTER I ARRIVE.


The Taishin Meeting Chambers.
Mastrell... Kenton of the Diem, son of the late Lord Praxton and representative of the Sand Profession.
I apologize for my tardiness, lords and ladies of the council.
Kenton, this is most irregular. We have already heard from Drile on behalf of the Sand Masters.
I apologize again, judge Heelis. I only ask that you hear me out. But I'm sure the council can see what I'm wearing and understand what it means.
Drile has no claim on the leadership of the Diem. That burden falls to me as its most senior member.
Drile has a point, judge Heelis. This is the first we've heard of Kenton's supposed advancement.
This is no lie, Lord Vey. The Lord Mastrell gave me this sash and declared me a Mastrell. It was the very last thing he did before the Kerztian arrow took him.
Those who heard the advancement are dead. Those who still live were too far back to hear it.
Lies! Must we listen to this--
Drile, still your tongue. You have had your say.


THOUGH I WEAR THE GOLDEN SASH, I DO NOT COME HERE SEEKING AUTHORITY OVER THE DIEM.
I COME ONLY TO PLEAD ON THE DIEM'S BEHALF. IT DOESN'T MATTER WHOM YOU CHOOSE AS LORD MASTRELL, BE IT ACOLENT OR FEN. JUST DO NOT CHOOSE DRILE. NOT ONLY WOULD THE DIEM SUFFER UNDER HIS RULE, BUT ALL OF LOSSAND AS WELL.
YOUNG KENTON, THESE PROCEEDINGS ARE NOT TO RATIFY A NEW LORD MASTRELL.
EXCUSE ME, JUDGE HEELIS, BUT IF NOT THAT, THEN *WHAT?*
WE'RE HERE TO DECIDE THE *FUTURE* OF SAND MASTERY. TO VOTE IF THE DIEM OF THE SAND MASTERS SHOULD BE *DISSOLVED.*

The Professions

The Taishin are the rulers of Lossand, and the country is governed by their council, which consists of eight Taisha, Lords and Ladies, who are the heads of the eight recognized Professions. Each Taisha represents a portion of the people of Lossand. Though each Profession has a headquarters, they also have chapters in other major towns and cities throughout the country.

The Diem of the Sand Masters

Leader: Lord Mastrell * Headquarters: The Diem
Sand Mastery

The Hall of Judges, Trackts, and Scribes

Leader: High Judge * Headquarters: The Hall of Judgment
Writing, Law, Keeping the Peace

The Guild of Merchants

Leader: Lord Merchant * Headquarters: The Golden Market
Moneychangers, Lenders, and Merchants

The Tower of Soldiers

Leader: Lord General * Headquarters: The Tower Garrison
Lossand's Military

The Company of Masons

Leader: Lady Mason * Headquarters: The Mason Headquarters
Stone Masons, Builders, Miners; some overlap with the Artisans

The Field of Farmers

Leader: The Lord Farmer * Headquarters: The Farmers Congress
Those who own the land (Kelzin) and those who work it

The Draft of Artisans

Leader: The Lord Artisan * Headquarters: The Artisan Central Studio
Artisans and Craftspersons

The Helm of Shipowners

Leader: The Lord Admiral * Headquarters: Helm's Rest
Despite the use of "Admiral," not military, but mercantile in purpose
Closely related to the Merchants, with whom they often feud
Governed by the Shipowners' Circle

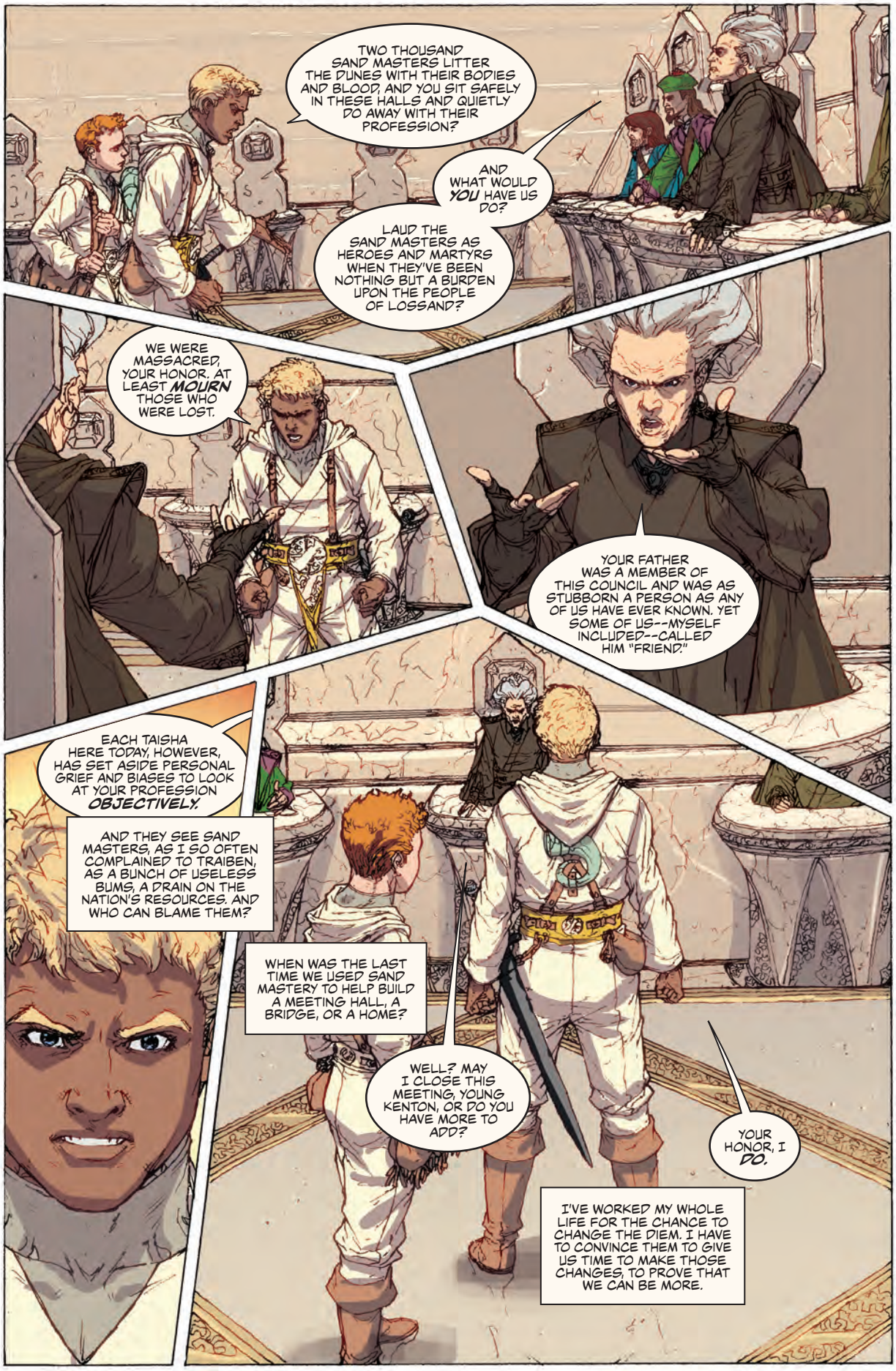
Some of these have sub-professions, especially within the Draft of Artisans, which encompasses everything from carpentry and cobblery to medicine and painting.

The leader of the Taishin Council is often referred to by their title, preceded by the honorific "High." Currently, the High Judge leads the Council, but if the leader was a Merchant, then they would be called the High Merchant, and so forth.

There is an unofficial ninth Taisha, the Lord Beggar, whose power is only recognized because of the amount of influence he has among the working class and poor of Lossand's people. Since he is technically not a Taisha, he gets no vote on the Council.

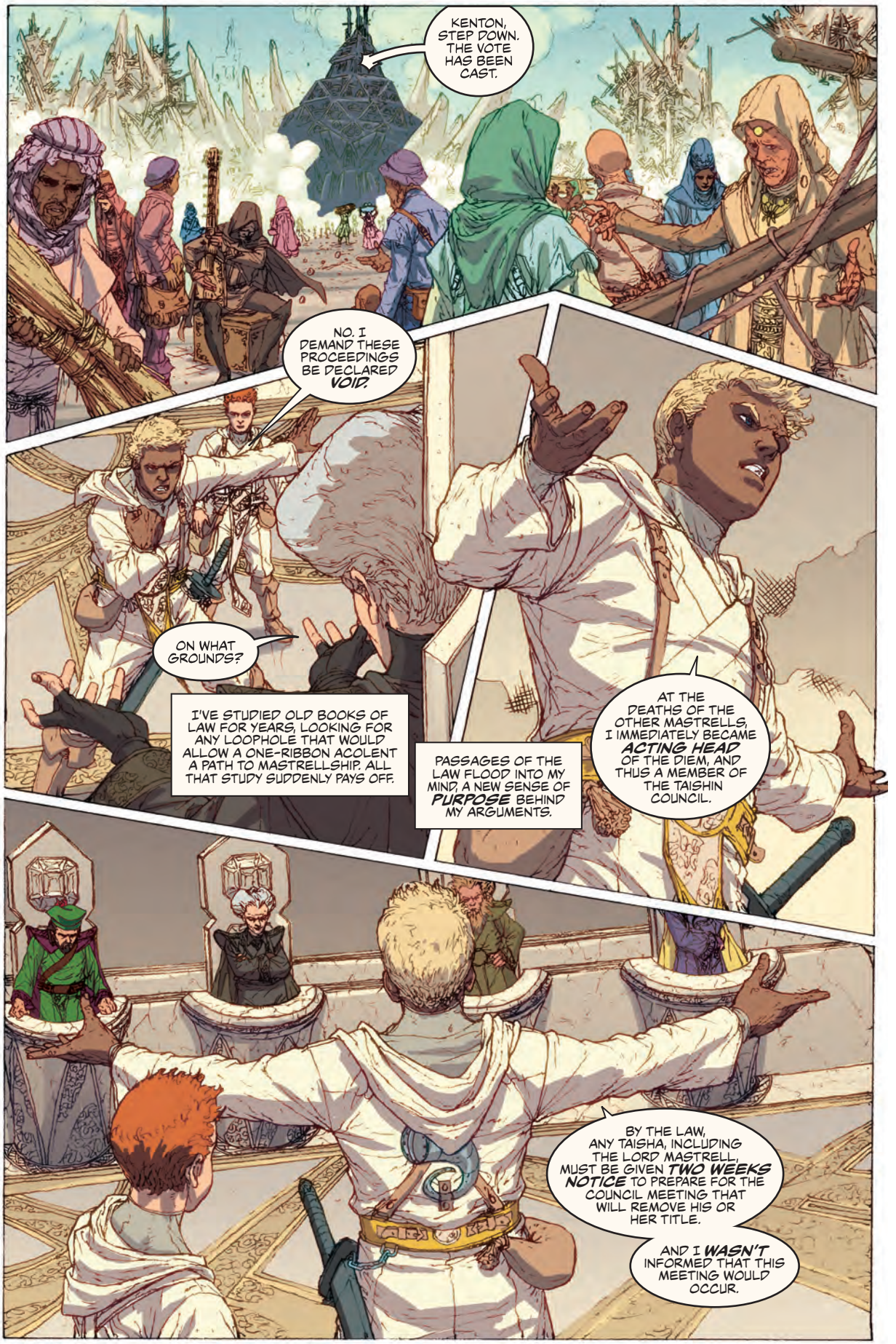
In Lossand, there is an upper class called the Kelzin (singular: Kelzi). This group comprises influencial Profession members, public officials, wealthy land and ship-owners, and some merchants and soldiers. Among the Kerztians, there are the Klin (singular: Kli), a title granted by the theocracy of the Ker'reen church and passed from parent to child, much like noble titles among the Darkside nations.

CHAPTER 5
COMPROMISES


TWO THOUSAND SAND MASTERS LITTER THE DUNES WITH THEIR BODIES AND BLOOD, AND YOU SIT SAFELY IN THESE HALLS AND QUIETLY DO AWAY WITH THEIR PROFESSION?
AND WHAT WOULD *YOU* HAVE US DO?
LAUD THE SAND MASTERS AS HEROES AND MARTYRS WHEN THEY'VE BEEN NOTHING BUT A BURDEN UPON THE PEOPLE OF LOSSAND?
WE WERE MASSACRED, YOUR HONOR. AT LEAST *MOURN* THOSE WHO WERE LOST.
YOUR FATHER WAS A MEMBER OF THIS COUNCIL AND WAS AS STUBBORN A PERSON AS ANY OF US HAVE EVER KNOWN. YET SOME OF US--MYSELF INCLUDED--CALLED HIM "FRIEND."
EACH TAISHA HERE TODAY, HOWEVER, HAS SET ASIDE PERSONAL GRIEF AND BIASES TO LOOK AT YOUR PROFESSION *OBJECTIVELY.*
AND THEY SEE SAND MASTERS, AS I SO OFTEN COMPLAINED TO TRAIBEN, AS A BUNCH OF USELESS BUMS, A DRAIN ON THE NATION'S RESOURCES. AND WHO CAN BLAME THEM?
WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME WE USED SAND MASTERY TO HELP BUILD A MEETING HALL, A BRIDGE, OR A HOME?
WELL? MAY I CLOSE THIS MEETING, YOUNG KENTON, OR DO YOU HAVE MORE TO ADD?
YOUR HONOR, I *DO.*
I'VE WORKED MY WHOLE LIFE FOR THE CHANCE TO CHANGE THE DIEM. I HAVE TO CONVINCE THEM TO GIVE US TIME TO MAKE THOSE CHANGES, TO PROVE THAT WE CAN BE MORE.

I'M THE FIRST TO ADMIT THAT THE DIEM HAS GROWN LAZY, COMPLACENT, AND ARROGANT.
NOT TO MENTION EXPENSIVE! WE'VE HAD TO FUND YOUR FRIVOLOUS ESCAPADES FOR COUNTLESS DECADES, AND STILL YOU RY'KENSHA GIVE NOTHING IN RETURN!
AND THE FACT REMAINS, ONE OF THE VERY FORCES WE TRUSTED TO PROTECT US FAILED TO PROTECT THEMSELVES.
WITH KERZTA RATTLING THEIR SABERS JUST ACROSS THE BORDER, THE FUNDS WITH WHICH LOSSAND SUPPORTS THE SAND MASTERS ARE BETTER DIRECTED TOWARD THE TOWER PROFESSION AND ITS SOLDIERS.
THERE ARE PROBLEMS WITH MY PROFESSION, YES, BUT THIS IS A COWARDLY WAY TO HANDLE THE DIEM, ABANDONING THEM IN THEIR DARKEST DAY.
NOW IS THE TIME TO DEFEND THE DIEM, JUDGE HEELIS.
DISSOLVING OUR PROFESSION WON'T GET RID OF US. IT WILL JUST FRACTURE US, AND WITHOUT THE DIEM AND ITS LAWS TO BIND US, MANY WILL SELL THEIR POWERS TO THE HIGHEST BIDDERS.
MERCENARY BANDS OF SAND MASTERS WILL FIGHT EACH OTHER, AND THE SANDS WILL RUN BLACK WITH THE BLOOD OF CITIZEN AND SAND MASTER ALIKE.
WE SHOULD EXILE THE LOT OF YOU AND FORBID YOU TO PRACTICE YOUR UNHOLY ART.
WHAT ARE YOU SUGGESTING, LORD VEY?
HUNTING SAND MASTERS LIKE DEEP SANDLINGS? TURNING LOSSAND INTO A NATION OF FEAR AND PREJUDICE?
SAND MASTERY IS NOT SPONTANEOUS, LORD VEY. WITHOUT TESTING THE POPULACE FOR IT, WITHIN A GENERATION, THERE WILL BE NO SAND MASTERS.

AND YOU'RE IGNORING SOMETHING VITAL. IF KERZTA MOUNTED SUCH AN ATTACK AGAINST SAND MASTERS, THE SUPPOSED FIRST LINE OF LOSSAND'S DEFENSES, COULD THERE BE A LARGER ATTACK COMING?
LORD GENERAL, WHAT SAY YOU?
I'LL PUT THE TOWER'S SOLDIERS ON HIGH ALERT, ESPECIALLY IF THE A'KAR TAKES THE KINGSHIP.
MY LORDS AND LADIES, SHOULD WE THROW AWAY A TOOL SIMPLY BECAUSE IT HAS BEEN MISUSED IN THE PAST?
NOW, WHEN THE SAND MASTERS ARE WEAKENED, IS THE TIME TO CHANGE US FOR THE BETTER--NOT TO BURY US DEEP IN THE SANDS.
IN THE VERY LEAST, GIVE US THE CHANCE TO CHANGE, TO PROVE OUR WORTH BEFORE CASTING US ASIDE.
AH, IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT THE MONEY. IT'S ABOUT THE POWER. THEY FEAR WHAT THEY CANNOT CONTROL.
YOUNG KENTON, IF A SKILL--EVEN ONE AS POWERFUL AS SAND MASTERY--GIVES THE PEOPLE NO BENEFIT, IS IT WORTH THE TROUBLE OF ITS UPKEEP?
TO SAY NOTHING OF ITS DANGER.
YOU ARGUE WELL, YOUNG KENTON, BUT I FEAR YOUR WORDS COME TOO LATE. IT IS TIME FOR THE TAISHIN TO VOTE.
MY FELLOW TAISHIN, HOW DO YOU VOTE ON THE MATTER OF DISSOLVING THE DIEM OF THE SAND MASTERS?
LORD GENERAL, WE'LL BEGIN WITH YOU.
DISSOLVE.
DISSOLVE.
DISSOLVE.
DISSOLVE.
DISSOLVE THEIR UNHOLY PROFESSION.
LORD VEY VOTED TO DISSOLVE, SO I VOTE THE OPPOSITE--RETAIN THE DIEM.
WHICH LEAVES ONLY YOU, JUDGE HEELIS.
I VOTE TO DISSOLVE AS WELL.
THIS IS FAR FROM THE FIRST TIME I'VE FELT THE SICKNESS OF FAILURE, BUT TODAY I FEEL THE WEIGHT OF SOMETHING ELSE--THE UNNOTICED REWARD OF MY STRUGGLE FOR MASTRELLSHIP: RESPONSIBILITY.
NOT ONLY HAVE I LET DOWN WHAT REMAINS OF THE DIEM, I'VE ALSO LET DOWN THE MEMORY OF TRAIBEN AND MY FATHER.
I DO NOT ACCEPT THAT.
NO.

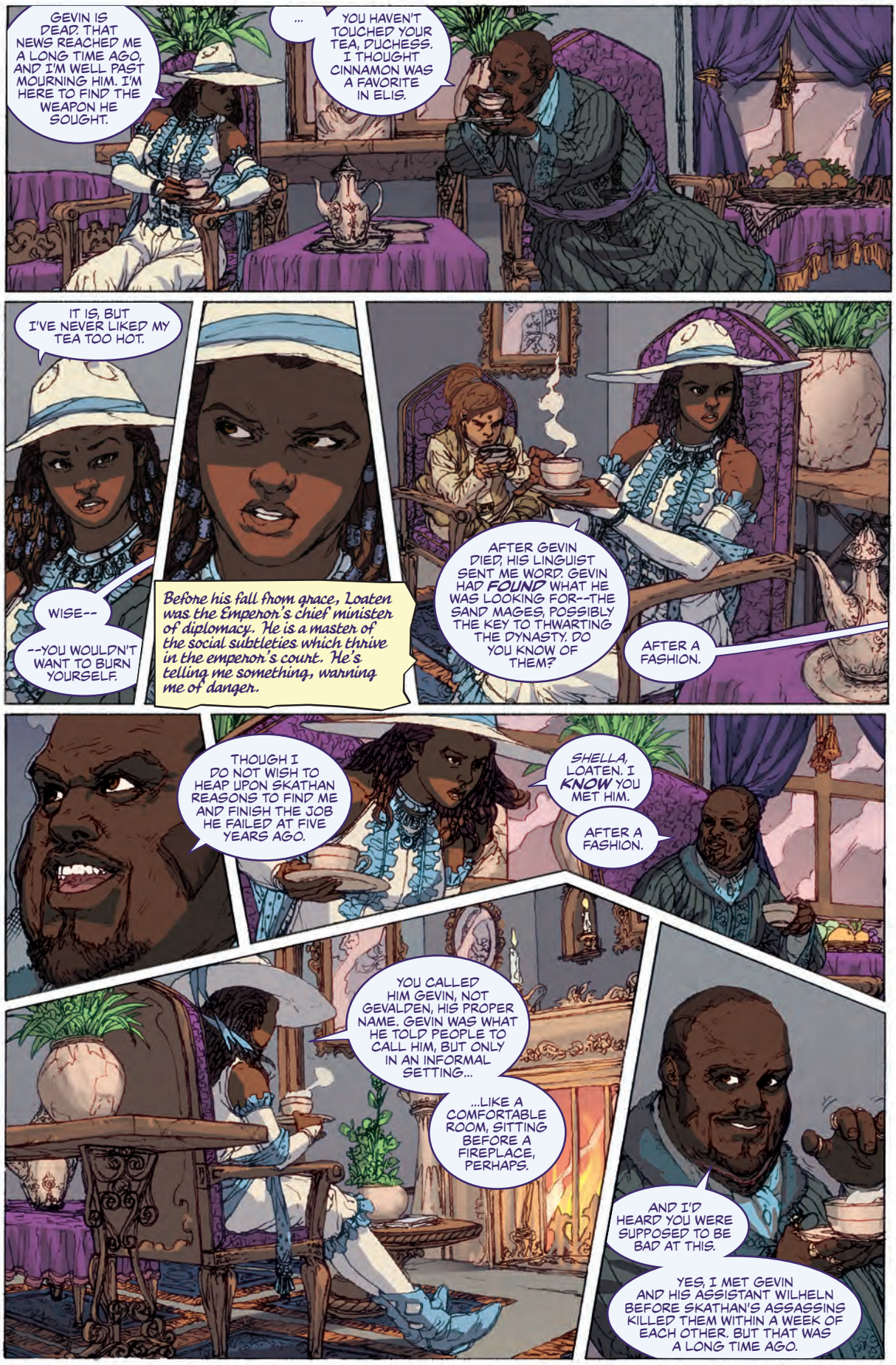

KENTON, STEP DOWN. THE VOTE HAS BEEN CAST.
NO. I DEMAND THESE PROCEEDINGS BE DECLARED VOID.
ON WHAT GROUNDS?
I'VE STUDIED OLD BOOKS OF LAW FOR YEARS, LOOKING FOR ANY LOOPHOLE THAT WOULD ALLOW A ONE-RIBBON ACOLENT A PATH TO MASTRELLSHIP. ALL THAT STUDY SUDDENLY PAYS OFF.
PASSAGES OF THE LAW FLOOD INTO MY MIND, A NEW SENSE OF PURPOSE BEHIND MY ARGUMENTS.
AT THE DEATHS OF THE OTHER MASTRELLS, I IMMEDIATELY BECAME ACTING HEAD OF THE DIEM, AND THUS A MEMBER OF THE TAISHIN COUNCIL.
BY THE LAW, ANY TAISHA, INCLUDING THE LORD MASTRELL, MUST BE GIVEN TWO WEEKS NOTICE TO PREPARE FOR THE COUNCIL MEETING THAT WILL REMOVE HIS OR HER TITLE.
AND I WASN'T INFORMED THAT THIS MEETING WOULD OCCUR.

HEELIS, TELL THIS BOY HE IS MISTAKEN AND LET US BE DONE.
NO...
...YOUNG KENTON IS RIGHT. WE ACTED TOO HASTILY. AS HIGH JUDGE, I MUST DECLARE THE PROCEEDINGS OF THIS COUNCIL VOID.
BUT KENTON, I AM HEREBY GIVING YOU FORMAL NOTICE. IN TWO WEEKS THIS COUNCIL WILL MEET AGAIN TO DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT TO DISSOLVE THE DIEM.
BY THE LAWS OF THE COUNCIL, YOU WILL NEED A UNANIMOUS VOTE TO OVERTURN THE PRELIMINARY DECISION REACHED HERE TODAY, AND I SUSPECT THE VOTES WILL NOT MAGICALLY CHANGE DURING THE WAIT.
FURTHERMORE, SINCE YOUR MASTRELLSHIP IS IN DOUBT, YOU ARE CONSIDERED ONLY THE ACTING LORD MASTRELL.
WHICH, BY LAW, MEANS YOU DO NOT GET A VOTE.
YOU HAVE TWO WEEKS. UNLESS YOU CAN CONVINCE EVERY TAISHA HERE TO VOTE IN FAVOR OF THE DIEM, YOUR PROFESSION WILL BE DISSOLVED.

THE LONZARE DISTRICT IS SOMETHING DIFFERENT. WHERE DAYSIDE AND DARKSIDE MEET AND BECOME ONE. COME!
THIS WHOLE CITY IS WELL PLACED. HARD TO ATTACK. EASY TO DEFEND.
AND ALSO QUITE CONGESTED.
IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE GEVIN CAME HERE TO FIND HELP.
THIS WAY, PLEASE.
I WILL GO FIRST, DUCHESS.
WELCOME TO LONZARE!
INCREDIBLE! THE ARCHITECTURE IS LOSSANDIN, BUT THE LANTERNS ARE DARKSIDER, FROM TIAOC, TO BE PRECISE.
THIS PLACE SHOULD NOT EXIST.
THE DYNASTY WANTS US TO THINK IT DOESN'T. THEY DON'T WANT US TO KNOW THERE'S THIS MUCH TRAFFIC BETWEEN CONTINENTS.
I WONDER IF THEY HAVE A MIXED LANGUAGE. A LOSSANDIN-DYNASTIC HYBRID. THAT WOULD BE EXCITING NOW, WOULDN'T IT?
DOZENS OF DAYSIDE AND DARKSIDE CULTURES COMING TOGETHER TO CREATE SOMETHING NEW...
N'TEESE, WE'RE SEEKING INFORMATION ON A FRIEND OF OURS WHO VISITED KEZARE A WHILE BACK. WE NEED TO TALK TO SOMEONE WHO KEEPS TRACK OF NEW ARRIVALS.
I CAN ARRANGE--
--COST TEN LAK. PLEASE FOLLOW.

THE ONE YOU NEED IS THIS WAY.
THOSE FLOWERS ARE NATIVE TO NIMMYN. DO YOU SEE, CYNDER? THEY MUST'VE BEEN IMPORTED SPECIFICALLY FOR THIS PART OF KEZARE.
FASCINATING!
HERE. WAIT.
TEN LAK! *SHELLA.* THIS BETTER BE WORTH IT.
AH, HERE THEY ARE ALREADY.
YOU MAY ENTER.
SEE, DUCHESS-- TEN LAK WELL SPENT.
ONLY YOU, M'LADY. THE OTHERS WAIT OUTSIDE.
IT'S ALRIGHT, BAON. I'LL BE FINE.
GOOD EVENING, SIR.
AH, THIS MUST BE OUR MISSING ELISIAN DUCHESS.

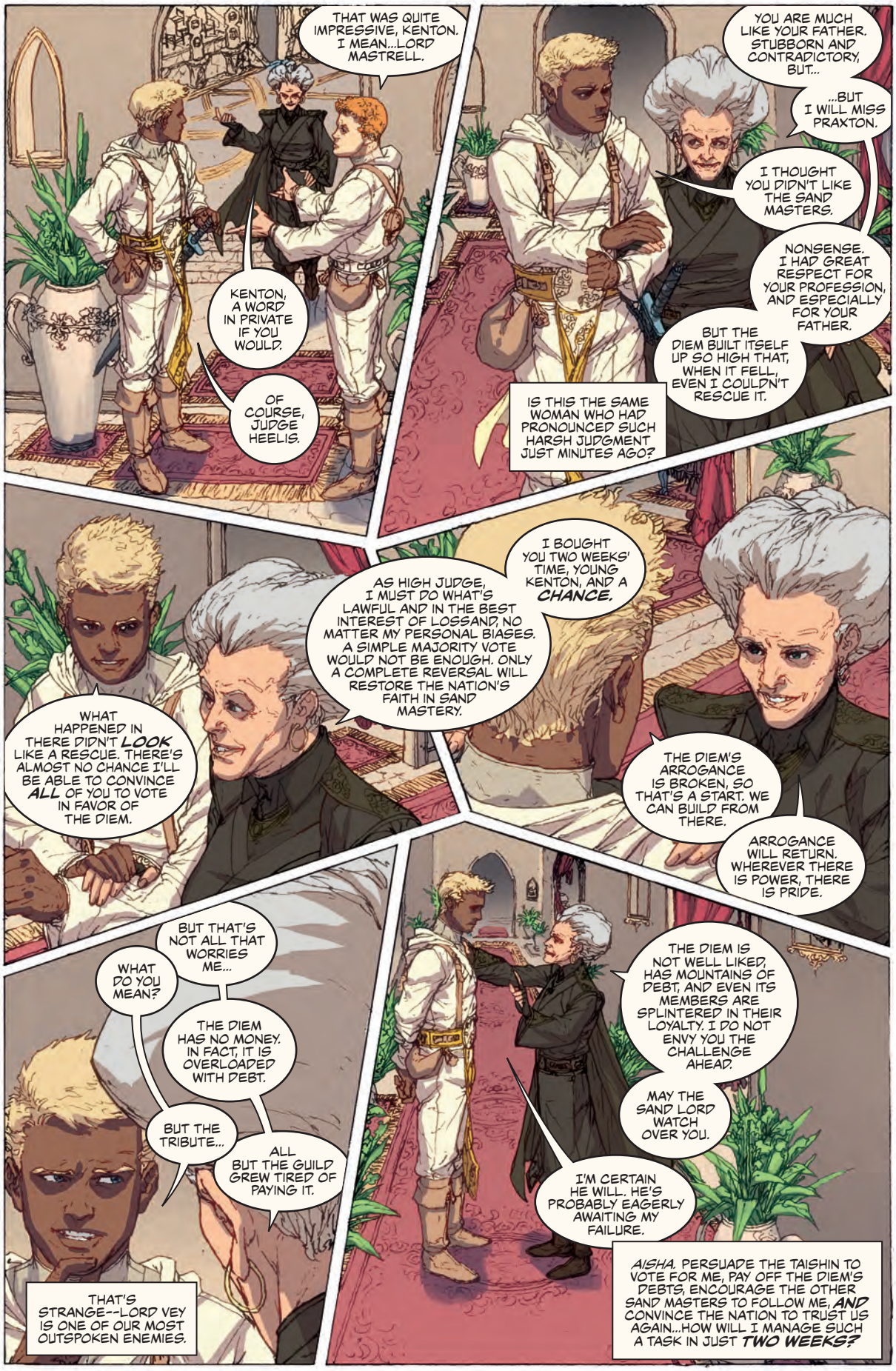
I AM PLEASED TO SEE YOU SURVIVED THE TRIP UNHARMED.
YOU... KNOW ME?
OF YOU, MY DEAR--OF YOU. THOUGH WE EXPECTED YOU DAYS AGO.
He has a very unusual scar on his neck. The only person I've heard of with such a scar is...
YOU! YOU'RE LOATEN.
SO I'M OFTEN ACCUSED. AND, OF COURSE, I CAN'T DENY IT.
YOU'RE INFAMOUS ON DARKSIDE, YOU KNOW. TRAITOR TO THE DYNASTY, EXECUTED--OR SO WE'RE TOLD--FOR TRYING TO MURDER EMPEROR SKATHAN HIMSELF.
IS THAT WHAT THEY'RE SAYING.
BUT HOW DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM?
WE ARE NOT COMPLETELY ISOLATED FROM DARKSIDE. INFORMATION HAS A WAY OF FINDING US.
MY EXPEDITION IS SUPPOSED TO BE SECRET.
LITTLE IS SECRET FROM THE DYNASTY, DEAR DUCHESS, ESPECIALLY THE DOINGS OF ITS ENEMIES.
YOU WANT NEWS OF GEVIN, I ASSUME.

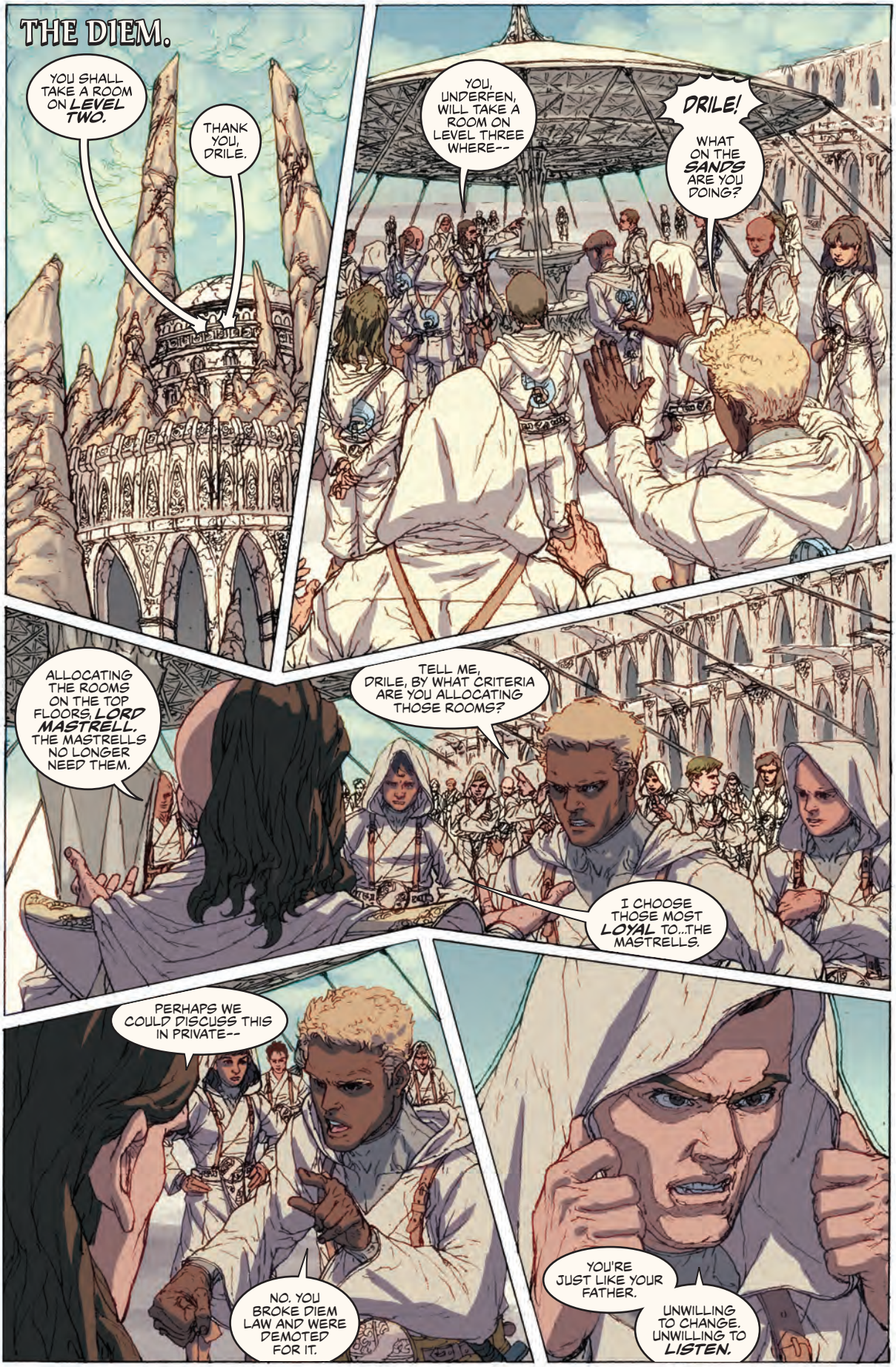

GEVIN IS DEAD. THAT NEWS REACHED ME A LONG TIME AGO, AND I'M WELL PAST MOURNING HIM. I'M HERE TO FIND THE WEAPON HE SOUGHT.
...
YOU HAVEN'T TOUCHED YOUR TEA, DUCHESS. I THOUGHT CINNAMON WAS A FAVORITE IN ELIS.
IT IS, BUT I'VE NEVER LIKED MY TEA TOO HOT.
WISE--
--YOU WOULDN'T WANT TO BURN YOURSELF.
Before his fall from grace, Loaten was the Emperor's chief minister of diplomacy. He is a master of the social subtleties which thrive in the emperor's court. He's telling me something, warning me of danger.
AFTER GEVIN DIED, HIS LINGUIST SENT ME WORD. GEVIN HAD FOUND WHAT HE WAS LOOKING FOR--THE SAND MAGES, POSSIBLY THE KEY TO THWARTING THE DYNASTY. DO YOU KNOW OF THEM?
AFTER A FASHION.
THOUGH I DO NOT WISH TO HEAP UPON SKATHAN REASONS TO FIND ME AND FINISH THE JOB HE FAILED AT FIVE YEARS AGO.
SHELLA, LOATEN. I KNOW YOU MET HIM.
AFTER A FASHION.
YOU CALLED HIM GEVIN, NOT GEVALDEN, HIS PROPER NAME. GEVIN WAS WHAT HE TOLD PEOPLE TO CALL HIM, BUT ONLY IN AN INFORMAL SETTING...
...LIKE A COMFORTABLE ROOM, SITTING BEFORE A FIREPLACE, PERHAPS.
AND I'D HEARD YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO BE BAD AT THIS.
YES, I MET GEVIN AND HIS ASSISTANT WILHELN BEFORE SKATHAN'S ASSASSINS KILLED THEM WITHIN A WEEK OF EACH OTHER. BUT THAT WAS A LONG TIME AGO.

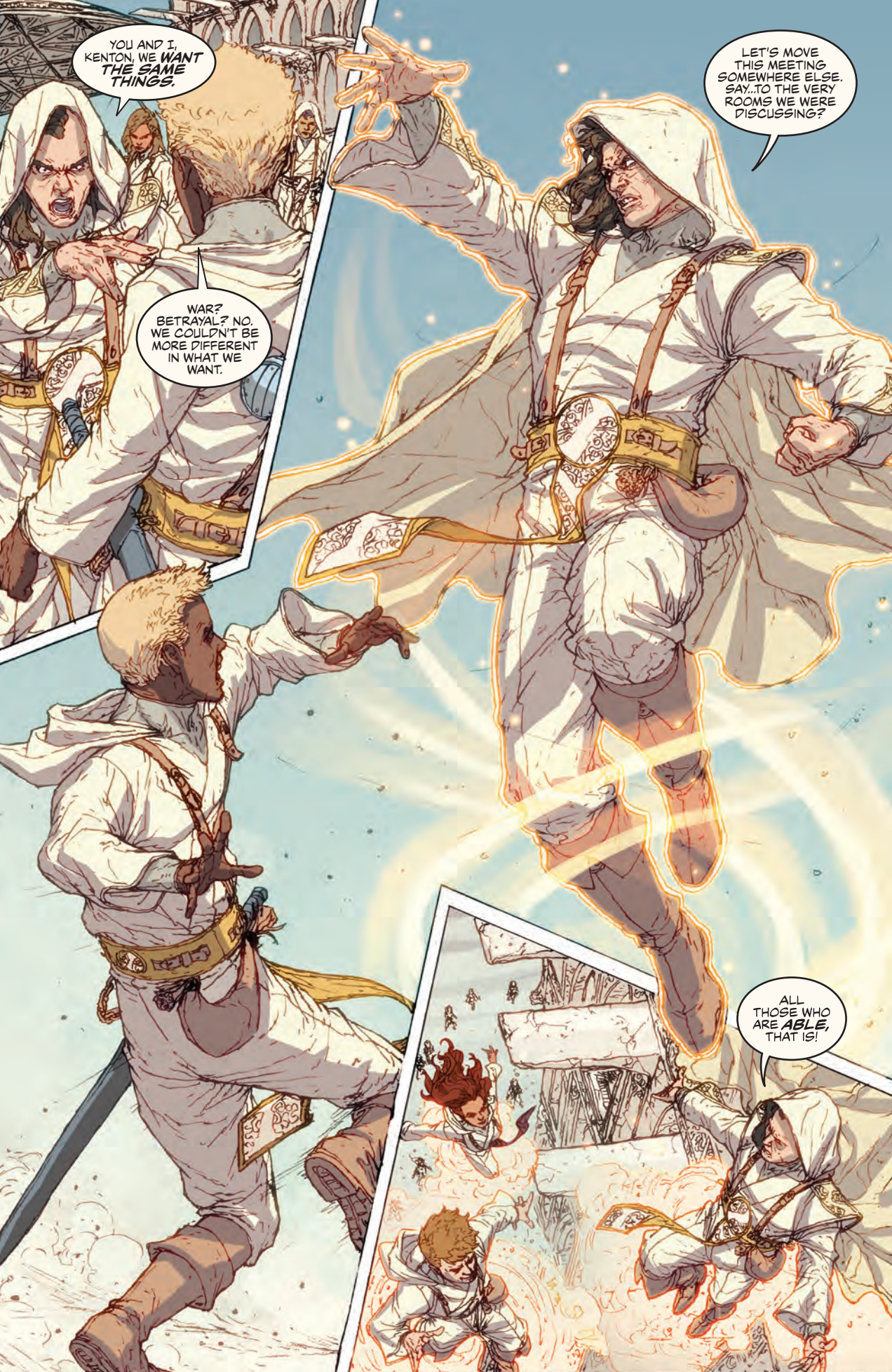
What aren't you telling me, Loaten? Tea that's too hot. Talk of assassins.
THOSE WHO KILLED GEVIN AND WILHELN WOULD CERTAINLY BE REQUIRED TO KILL ME SHOULD I FIND THIS WEAPON. DON'T YOU THINK?
CAN I TRUST YOU TO KEEP THE REASON FOR MY EXPEDITION SECRET?
...
AFTER A FASHION...
THAT'S COMFORTING.
OH, DO NOT BE DESPONDENT, MY DEAR--I AM NOT HEARTLESS.
I WILL ASSIGN ONE OF MY BEST PEOPLE TO AID YOU--
--N'TEESE.
TO SPY ON ME, YOU MEAN.
N'Teese's horrible Dayside accent leaves in an instant, replaced by a perfect Iiarian accent to match Loaten's.
I'M NO SPY, LADY. I'M AN INDEPENDENT BUSINESSWOMAN.
AND YOU'RE BAD FOR BUSINESS, LOATEN.
SHE'S... DARKSIDER?
N'TEESE IS A CHILD OF THIS PART OF THE CITY--A LONZARIN--NOT COMPLETELY OF DARKSIDE OR DAYSIDE.
SHE'S AN ABSOLUTE MARVEL AT LANGUAGES.
IT'S UP TO YOU IF YOU'D LIKE TO CONTINUE WITH US, N'TEESE. WE'LL PAY FOR YOUR SERVICES, OF COURSE.
:GASP:
WHO IS THE WOMAN?
A VISITOR FROM DARKSIDE, NILTO, MY FRIEND. A RATHER IMPORTANT PERSON. A RULER ON HER SIDE OF THE WORLD.
HMF. GET RID OF HER.

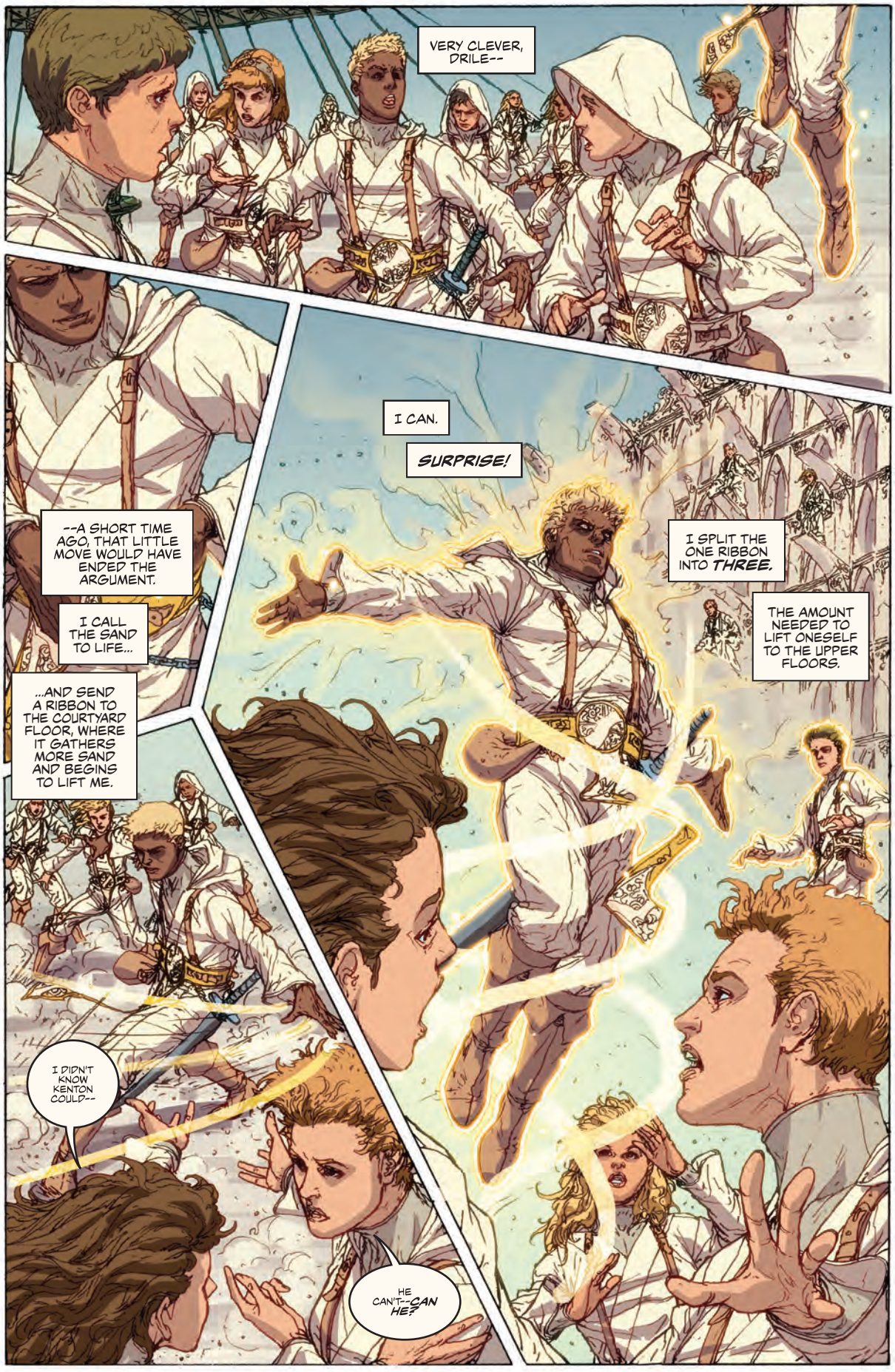
WHO IS THAT? WHAT DID HE SAY?
NILTO IS THE LORD BEGGAR, DEAR DUCHESS. HE'S A RATHER IMPATIENT MAN, THOUGH MANY PEOPLE SUFFER HIM BECAUSE HE IS AN UNOFFICIAL TAISHA.
I'VE HEARD OF THEM. THE TAISHIN... RULERS OF LOSSAND. IN THAT CASE, MAYBE HE CAN HELP ME.
I HIGHLY DOUBT THAT, MY DEAR.
HE WANTS YOU TO LEAVE.
WELL? GET RID OF HER. NOW.
I'M AFRAID THE LORD BEGGAR IS A DIFFICULT MAN TO REFUSE. BUT I BELIEVE OUR CONVERSATION WAS AT AN END ANYWAY, WASN'T IT?
IT WAS, AND I THANK YOU.
N'TEESE?
DUCHESS...
...IS THAT WHO I THINK IT IS?
LOATEN? HE--

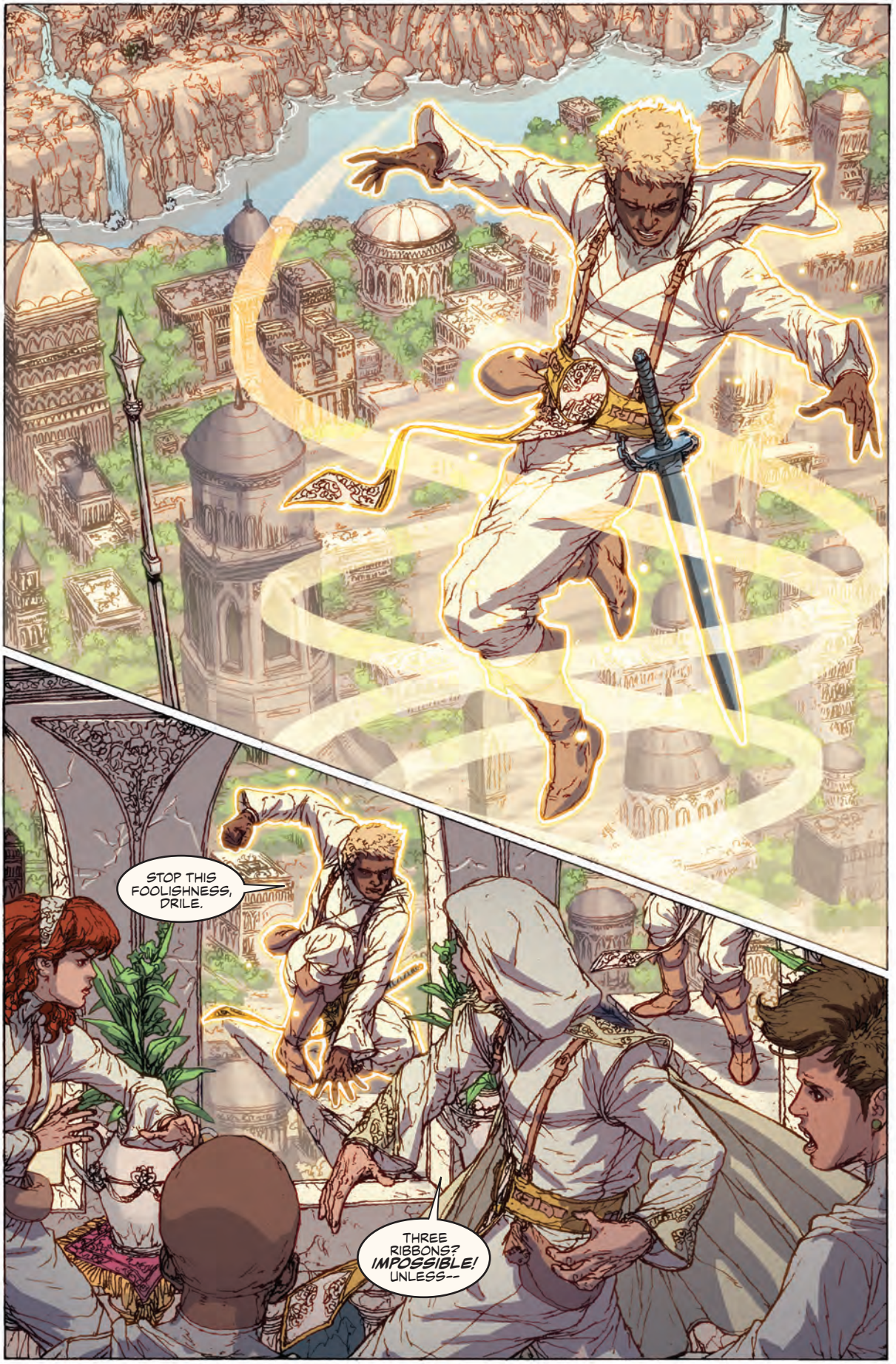
THAT MAN IS DANGEROUS.
What the stars? I've never seen Baon so emotional.
I KNOW, BAON. PUT THE GUN AWAY.
PLEASE.
LET'S GO. BEFORE I DECIDE TO KILL HIM.
YEP. LEAVING SOUNDS LIKE A GOOD IDEA.
Something's off about the way those guards are standing.
As if they aren't just reaching for their swords...
...but for something more.


THAT WAS QUITE IMPRESSIVE, KENTON. I MEAN...LORD MASTRELL.
KENTON, A WORD IN PRIVATE IF YOU WOULD.
OF COURSE, JUDGE HEELIS.
YOU ARE MUCH LIKE YOUR FATHER. STUBBORN AND CONTRADICTORY, BUT...
...BUT I WILL MISS PRAXTON.
I THOUGHT YOU DIDN'T LIKE THE SAND MASTERS.
NONSENSE. I HAD GREAT RESPECT FOR YOUR PROFESSION, AND ESPECIALLY FOR YOUR FATHER.
BUT THE DIEM BUILT ITSELF UP SO HIGH THAT, WHEN IT FELL, EVEN I COULDN'T RESCUE IT.
IS THIS THE SAME WOMAN WHO HAD PRONOUNCED SUCH HARSH JUDGMENT JUST MINUTES AGO?
I BOUGHT YOU TWO WEEKS' TIME, YOUNG KENTON, AND A CHANCE.
AS HIGH JUDGE, I MUST DO WHAT'S LAWFUL AND IN THE BEST INTEREST OF LOSSAND, NO MATTER MY PERSONAL BIASES. A SIMPLE MAJORITY VOTE WOULD NOT BE ENOUGH. ONLY A COMPLETE REVERSAL WILL RESTORE THE NATION'S FAITH IN SAND MASTERY.
WHAT HAPPENED IN THERE DIDN'T LOOK LIKE A RESCUE. THERE'S ALMOST NO CHANCE I'LL BE ABLE TO CONVINCE ALL OF YOU TO VOTE IN FAVOR OF THE DIEM.
THE DIEM'S ARROGANCE IS BROKEN, SO THAT'S A START. WE CAN BUILD FROM THERE.
ARROGANCE WILL RETURN. WHEREVER THERE IS POWER, THERE IS PRIDE.
THE DIEM IS NOT WELL LIKED, HAS MOUNTAINS OF DEBT, AND EVEN ITS MEMBERS ARE SPLINTERED IN THEIR LOYALTY. I DO NOT ENVY YOU THE CHALLENGE AHEAD.
MAY THE SAND LORD WATCH OVER YOU.
I'M CERTAIN HE WILL. HE'S PROBABLY EAGERLY AWAITING MY FAILURE.
AISHA. PERSUADE THE TAISHIN TO VOTE FOR ME, PAY OFF THE DIEM'S DEBTS, ENCOURAGE THE OTHER SAND MASTERS TO FOLLOW ME, AND CONVINCE THE NATION TO TRUST US AGAIN...HOW WILL I MANAGE SUCH A TASK IN JUST TWO WEEKS?
BUT THAT'S NOT ALL THAT WORRIES ME...
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
THE DIEM HAS NO MONEY. IN FACT, IT IS OVERLOADED WITH DEBT.
BUT THE TRIBUTE...
ALL BUT THE GUILD GREW TIRED OF PAYING IT.
THAT'S STRANGE--LORD VEY IS ONE OF OUR MOST OUTSPOKEN ENEMIES.

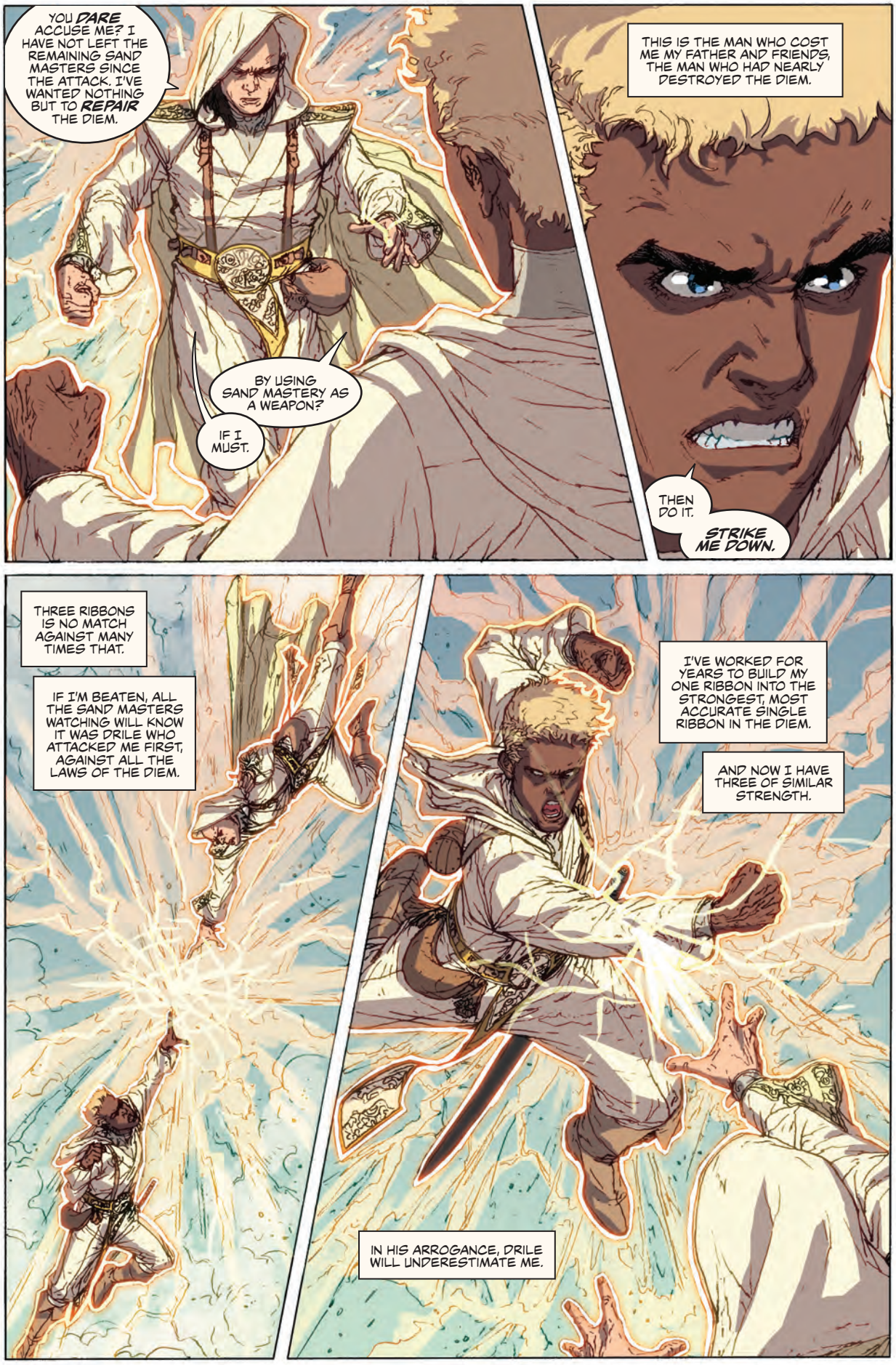

THE DIEM.
YOU SHALL TAKE A ROOM ON LEVEL TWO.
THANK YOU, DRILE.
YOU, UNDERFEN, WILL TAKE A ROOM ON LEVEL THREE WHERE--
DRILE!
WHAT ON THE SANDS ARE YOU DOING?
ALLOCATING THE ROOMS ON THE TOP FLOORS, LORD MASTRELL, THE MASTRELLS NO LONGER NEED THEM.
TELL ME, DRILE, BY WHAT CRITERIA ARE YOU ALLOCATING THOSE ROOMS?
I CHOOSE THOSE MOST LOYAL TO...THE MASTRELLS.
PERHAPS WE COULD DISCUSS THIS IN PRIVATE--
NO. YOU BROKE DIEM LAW AND WERE DEMOTED FOR IT.
YOU'RE JUST LIKE YOUR FATHER.
UNWILLING TO CHANGE. UNWILLING TO LISTEN.


YOU AND I, KENTON, WE WANT THE SAME THINGS.
WAR? BETRAYAL? NO. WE COULDN'T BE MORE DIFFERENT IN WHAT WE WANT.
LET'S MOVE THIS MEETING SOMEWHERE ELSE. SAY...TO THE VERY ROOMS WE WERE DISCUSSING?
ALL THOSE WHO ARE ABLE, THAT IS!


VERY CLEVER, DRILE--
--A SHORT TIME AGO, THAT LITTLE MOVE WOULD HAVE ENDED THE ARGUMENT.
I CALL THE SAND TO LIFE...
...AND SEND A RIBBON TO THE COURTYARD FLOOR, WHERE IT GATHERS MORE SAND AND BEGINS TO LIFT ME.
I CAN.
SURPRISE!
I SPLIT THE ONE RIBBON INTO THREE.
THE AMOUNT NEEDED TO LIFT ONESELF TO THE UPPER FLOORS.
I DIDN'T KNOW KENTON COULD--
HE CAN'T--CAN HE?


STOP THIS FOOLISHNESS, DRILE.
THREE RIBBONS? *IMPOSSIBLE!* UNLESS--

GET OUT OF MY FATHER'S ROOM.
AND WHY SHOULD I OBEY A TRAITOR LIKE YOU?
WAIT... TRAITOR...?
TELL US WHY YOU CAME BACK DAYS AFTER WE DID, KENTON. WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?
DID THE KERZTIANS TREAT YOU NICELY WHEN YOU COLLECTED YOUR PAYMENT FOR BETRAYING US?
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
WE ALL KNOW SOMEONE BETRAYED THE DIEM, KENTON--
SOMEONE BENT SO MUCH ON ACHIEVING MASTRELLSHIP THAT HE WOULD EVEN DESTROY THE DIEM TO GET IT.
LET GO OF THE SAND. WE ARE SAND MASTERS. WE DO NOT MASTER AGAINST EACH OTHER.
YET THE LAW IS QUITE CLEAR ABOUT TRAITORS.
THERE'S ONLY ONE TRAITOR HERE, DRILE. AND IT ISN'T ME.


YOU DARE ACCUSE ME? I HAVE NOT LEFT THE REMAINING SAND MASTERS SINCE THE ATTACK. I'VE WANTED NOTHING BUT TO REPAIR THE DIEM.
BY USING SAND MASTERY AS A WEAPON?
IF I MUST.
THIS IS THE MAN WHO COST ME MY FATHER AND FRIENDS, THE MAN WHO HAD NEARLY DESTROYED THE DIEM.
THEN DO IT.
STRIKE ME DOWN.
THREE RIBBONS IS NO MATCH AGAINST MANY TIMES THAT.
IF I'M BEATEN, ALL THE SAND MASTERS WATCHING WILL KNOW IT WAS DRILE WHO ATTACKED ME FIRST, AGAINST ALL THE LAWS OF THE DIEM.
I'VE WORKED FOR YEARS TO BUILD MY ONE RIBBON INTO THE STRONGEST, MOST ACCURATE SINGLE RIBBON IN THE DIEM.
AND NOW I HAVE THREE OF SIMILAR STRENGTH.
IN HIS ARROGANCE, DRILE WILL UNDERESTIMATE ME.

BUT JUST THIS ONCE.
HE WON'T LET IT HAPPEN LIKE THIS AGAIN.
LEAVE THE GOLDEN SASH BEHIND, DRILE. YOU ARE HEREBY ASSIGNED ROOMS ON THE BOTTOM FLOOR, ALONG WITH ALL YOUR FOLLOWERS.
I...I *AM* JUST LIKE MY FATHER. HOW MANY TIMES HAD I COME TO THE LORD MASTRELL AND ASKED LEGITIMATE QUESTIONS ONLY TO BE TURNED AWAY BY A SHOW OF POWER?
BUT *NO,* DRILE DESERVES HIS FATE--HE'S A *TRAITOR,* AFTER ALL-- BUT WHY DOES SOMETHING FEEL SO...*WRONG?*

CHAPTER 6
CHALLENGES

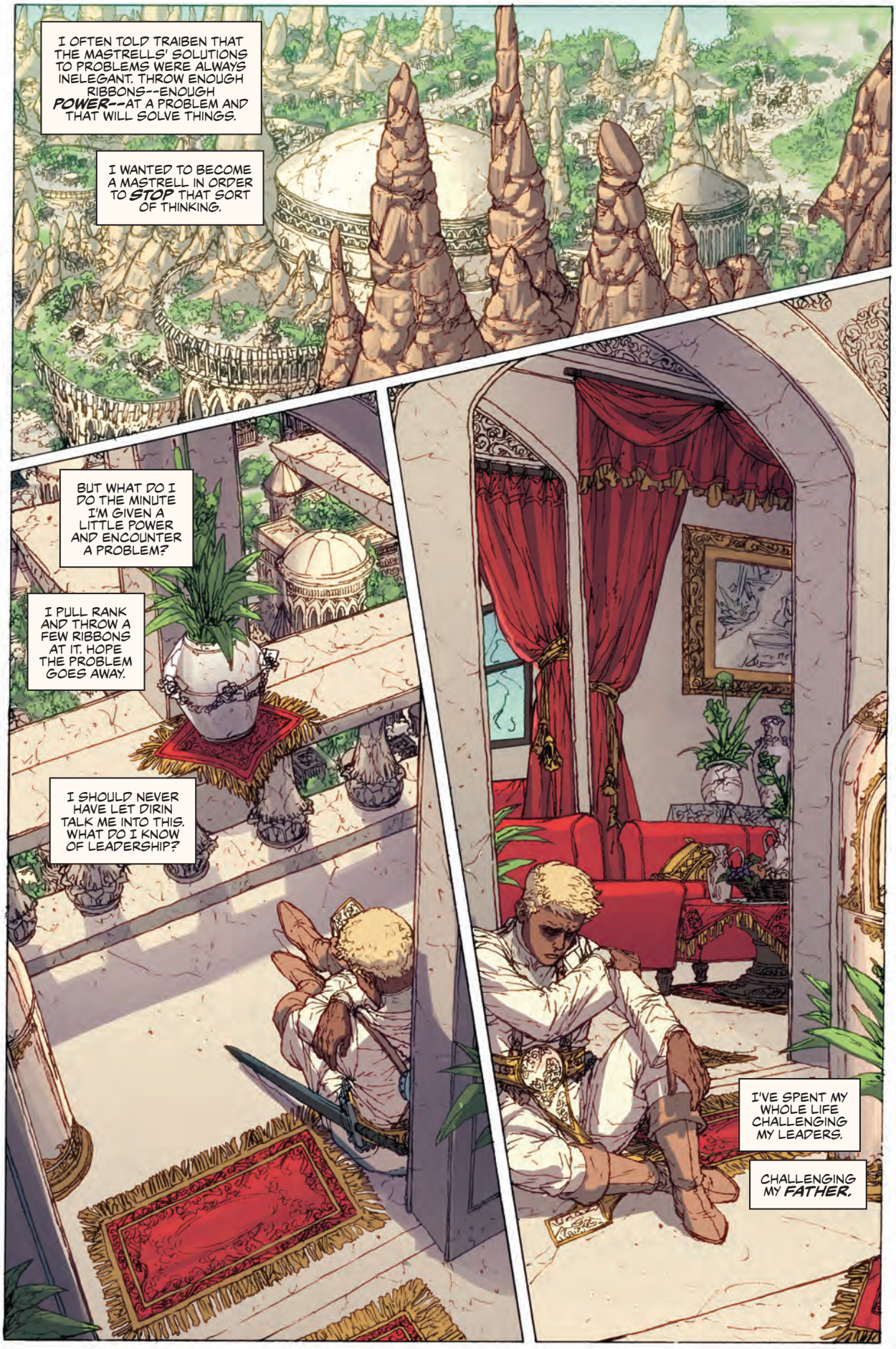
WE ALL HAVE SECRETS. EVEN TRACKTS--THOSE OF US SWORN TO UPHOLD THE LAW.
SENIOR TRACKT AIS, MA'AM, SHAREZAN ISN'T HERE!
OUR INTEL MUST'VE BEEN WRONG. WAIT A SECOND. WHAT'S THAT?
A HIDDEN DOOR?
YES, MA'AM. WE FOUND IT BEHIND THE CUPBOARD.
WELL OPEN IT, TRACKT TAIN. LET'S SEE WHAT SHAREZAN WAS HIDING.
MOST SECRETS AREN'T FOUND IN HIDDEN ROOMS.
GREAT SAND LORD, WHO IS THAT?
I RECOGNIZE HIM...LORD TORKEL, IS THAT YOU?
MOST SECRETS ARE FOUND IN THE DARK CHAMBERS OF OUR HEARTS.
WE'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR YOU FOR MONTHS. WHAT HAPPENED?
LOKMLEN--SHAREZAN'S SECOND IN COMMAND--KIDNAPPED ME. MY FAMILY TOO.
THEY'RE... DEAD.
I'M SORRY...
BUT WE WILL FIND LOKMLEN, AND SHAREZAN TOO IF WE CAN, AND BRING THEM BOTH TO JUSTICE.
MY HEART... THAT'S WHERE MY SECRET FESTERS.

MY ASSOCIATES SEE ME AS THE PINNACLE OF CONTROL, THE IDEAL TRACKT, BALANCING JUSTICE AND MERCY.
BUT INSIDE, I'M A SANDSTORM. WHEN I SEE INJUSTICE, WITH ONE HAND I REACH OUT TO COMFORT THE VICTIMIZED.
WITH THE OTHER, I REACH FOR A WEAPON...
...TO BECOME JUSTICE.
EACH DAY, I HOLD BACK THE MONSTER INSIDE ME.
AND PRAY TO THE SAND LORD FOR STRENGTH TO CAGE MY WRATH.
WHAT CAN YOU TELL US, TORKEL?
I NEVER GOT TO SEE SHAREZAN...
...BUT LOKMLEN LEFT JUST MOMENTS BEFORE YOU ARRIVED.
WE'VE JUST RECEIVED WORD. LOKMLEN WAS JUST SPOTTED FLEEING TOWARD PORTSIDE MARKET.
GATHER REINFORCEMENTS, TAIN. SHAREZAN MIGHT HAVE ESCAPED, BUT LOKMLEN WON'T BE SO LUCKY.
SAND LORD, HELP ME. JUSTICE AND JUDGMENT ARE NOT MINE. THEY BELONG TO YOU. GIVE ME STRENGTH TO STAY MY HAND.
GRANT ME STRENGTH TO CALM MY RAGE.

PORTSIDE MARKET.
THE CROWDS SLOW DOWN LOKMLEN.
THEY PART LIKE LOOSE SAND BEFORE A TRACKT ON THE CHASE.
MOVE! GET OUT OF THE WAY! OFFICIAL BUSINESS!
SURRENDER, LOKMLEN. THERE'S NOWHERE LEFT TO RUN.
THERE'S ALWAYS SOMEWHERE TO RUN, AIS, YOU FILTHY ZENSHA.
ZENSHA--TRAITOR. MANY KER'REEN FOLLOWERS BELIEVE I CANNOT SERVE LOSSANDIN LAW AND THE SAND LORD.
I WILL SEE YOU DEAD, WHETHER BY ZINKALL ARROW OR ON THE END OF A SWORD, TRAITOR AIS!
SAND LORD GIVE ME STRENGTH TO MAINTAIN CONTROL.
THEY ARE WRONG.
SO LONG AS THE LAW IS FAIR TO BOTH KERZTIAN AND LOSSANDIN, KER'REEN AND LOS'SEEN ALIKE, THEN THERE IS NO HYPOCRISY.
HAVEN'T YOU LOST ENOUGH TRACKTS TODAY? YOUR RAID WAS A BLOODBATH!
BEING A TRACKT ALLOWS ME TO SERVE THE SAND LORD'S LAW.
BEING A TRACKT ALLOWS ME TO CHANNEL MY ANGER.
CLANG
YOU TORTURED LORD TORKEL. YOU MURDERED HIS FAMILY AND SIX OF MY TRACKTS.

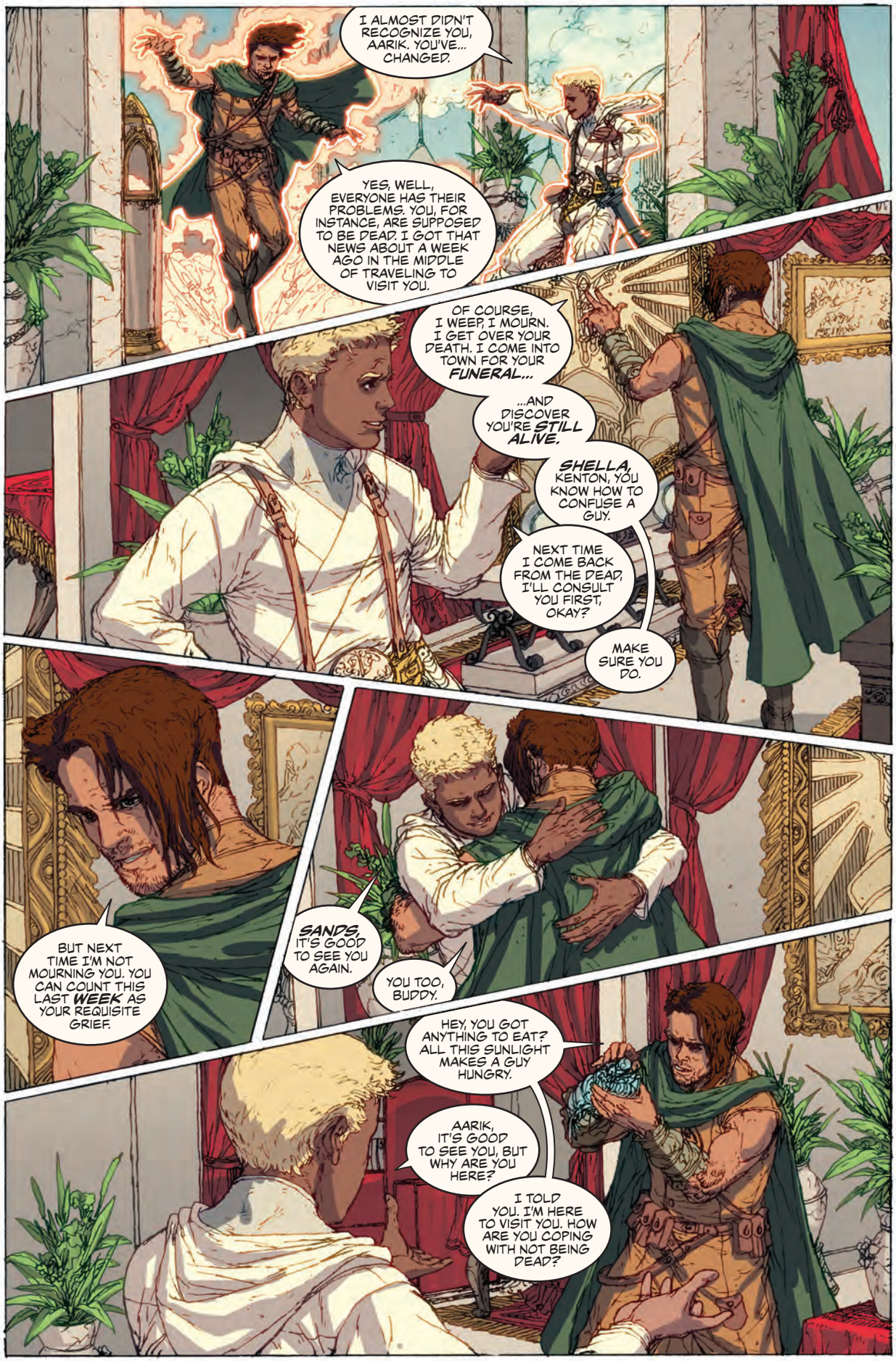
ARGHHHH!
NOW TELL ME, WHERE IS YOUR MASTER. WHERE IS SHAREZAN?
CAPTURE ME. TORTURE ME. DO AS YOU LIKE, BUT I WILL NEVER BETRAY HIM.
I LET THE RAGE CONSUME ME.
YOU COULD LEARN FROM MY LOYALTY. SEE? YOUR BETRAYAL MAKES YOU WEAK.
I SERVE JUSTICE, LOKMLEN, AND JUSTICE BELONGS ONLY TO THE SAND LORD.
HE'S WRONG. IT'S MY SECRET THAT MAKES ME WEAK.
FOOL! YOU'RE A TRAITOR TO YOUR PEOPLE AND TO YOUR RELIGION.
CLANG
UGH!
I ALWAYS KNEW THIS DAY WOULD COME, WHEN MY SECRET FINALLY KILLS ME.
WHEN I PUT MORE TRUST IN BATTLE FURY THAN IN THE SAND LORD.
NO!
EVERYONE THINKS YOU'RE SO RATIONAL, SO COMPOSED. BUT GET YOU ALONE IN A BACK ALLEY, AND THE TRUTH COMES FREE.
YOU'RE WEAK AND OUT OF CONTROL.
ON SOME LEVEL, I KNOW HE'S RIGHT.
YOU ARE AN AFFRONT TO THE SAND LORD, AND SO I GIVE YOU NOW TO HIS JUDGMENT.
I'M A HYPOCRITE WHO DESERVES TO DIE.
UM, EXCUSE ME?

I'M A STRONG PROPONENT OF HUMILIATING TRACKTS AND OTHERS IN AUTHORITY, BUT KILLING THEM IS A BIT EXTREME.
WHU...?
IF YOU WISH TO FIGHT ME, STRANGER, THEN I ACCEPT YOUR CHALLENGE.
HERE! TAKE THE TRACKT'S SWORD AND FACE ME!
...
THANKS, BUT NO.
I WON'T BE NEEDING A SWORD.
THE NEWCOMER DROPS MY SWORD AND CASUALLY DODGES LOKMLEN'S FIRST BLOW.
I WATCH AS THE STRANGER USES LOKMLEN'S RAGE AND MOMENTUM AGAINST HIM...
...AS IF THE SAND LORD IS SHOWING ME A NEW PATH, ONE WITHOUT ALL THE ANGER.
ARGH!
STOMP
AARIK'S FIRST RULE OF COMBAT-- ALWAYS GO FOR THE TOES.
DON'T MOVE, LOKMLEN.
THANK THE SAND LORD I'M STILL ALIVE! BUT FOR WHAT PURPOSE?

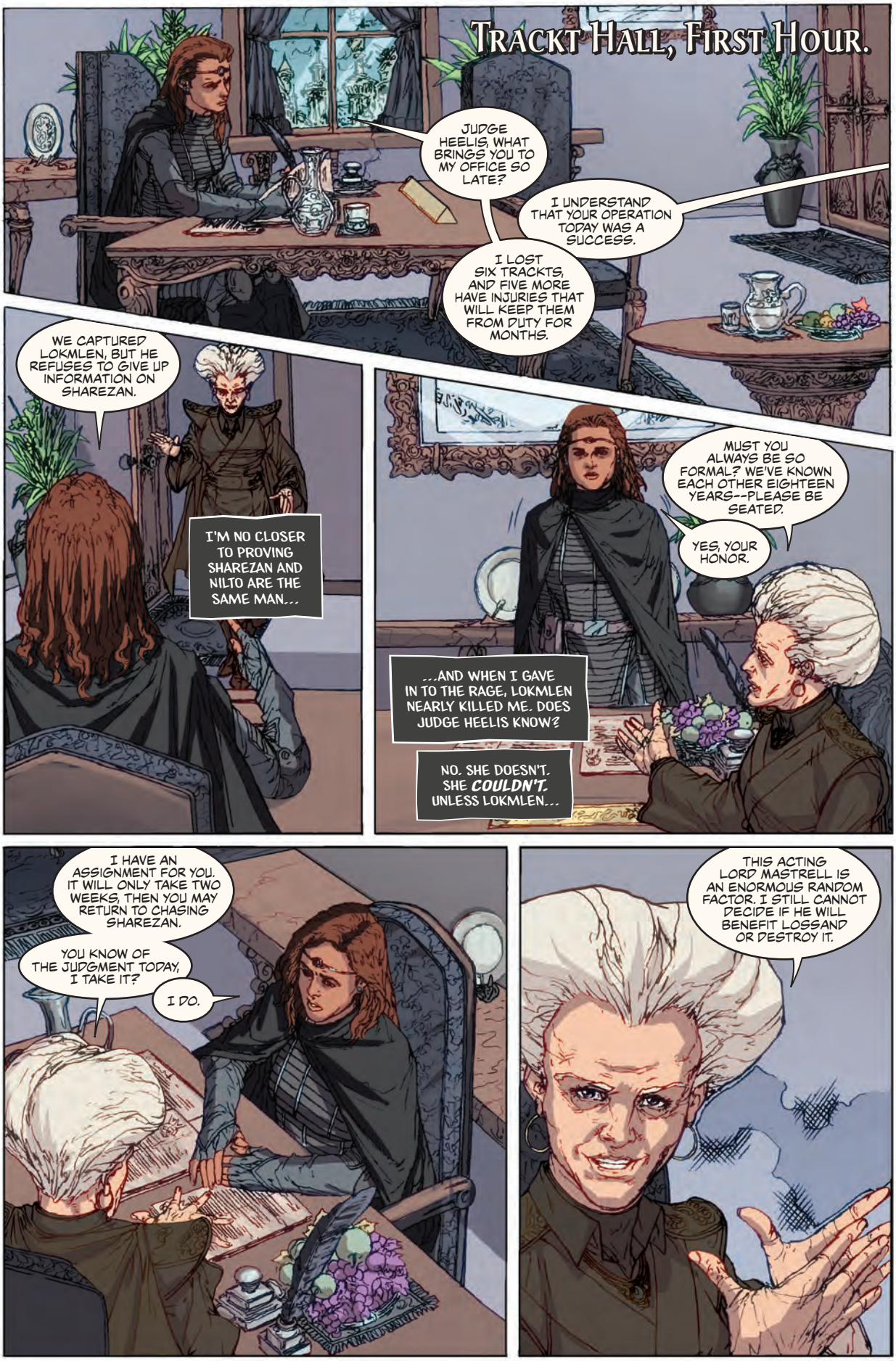

I OFTEN TOLD TRAIBEN THAT THE MASTRELLS' SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS WERE ALWAYS INELEGANT. THROW ENOUGH RIBBONS--ENOUGH POWER--AT A PROBLEM AND THAT WILL SOLVE THINGS.
I WANTED TO BECOME A MASTRELL IN ORDER TO STOP THAT SORT OF THINKING.
BUT WHAT DO I DO THE MINUTE I'M GIVEN A LITTLE POWER AND ENCOUNTER A PROBLEM?
I PULL RANK AND THROW A FEW RIBBONS AT IT. HOPE THE PROBLEM GOES AWAY.
I SHOULD NEVER HAVE LET DIRIN TALK ME INTO THIS. WHAT DO I KNOW OF LEADERSHIP?
I'VE SPENT MY WHOLE LIFE CHALLENGING MY LEADERS.
CHALLENGING MY FATHER.

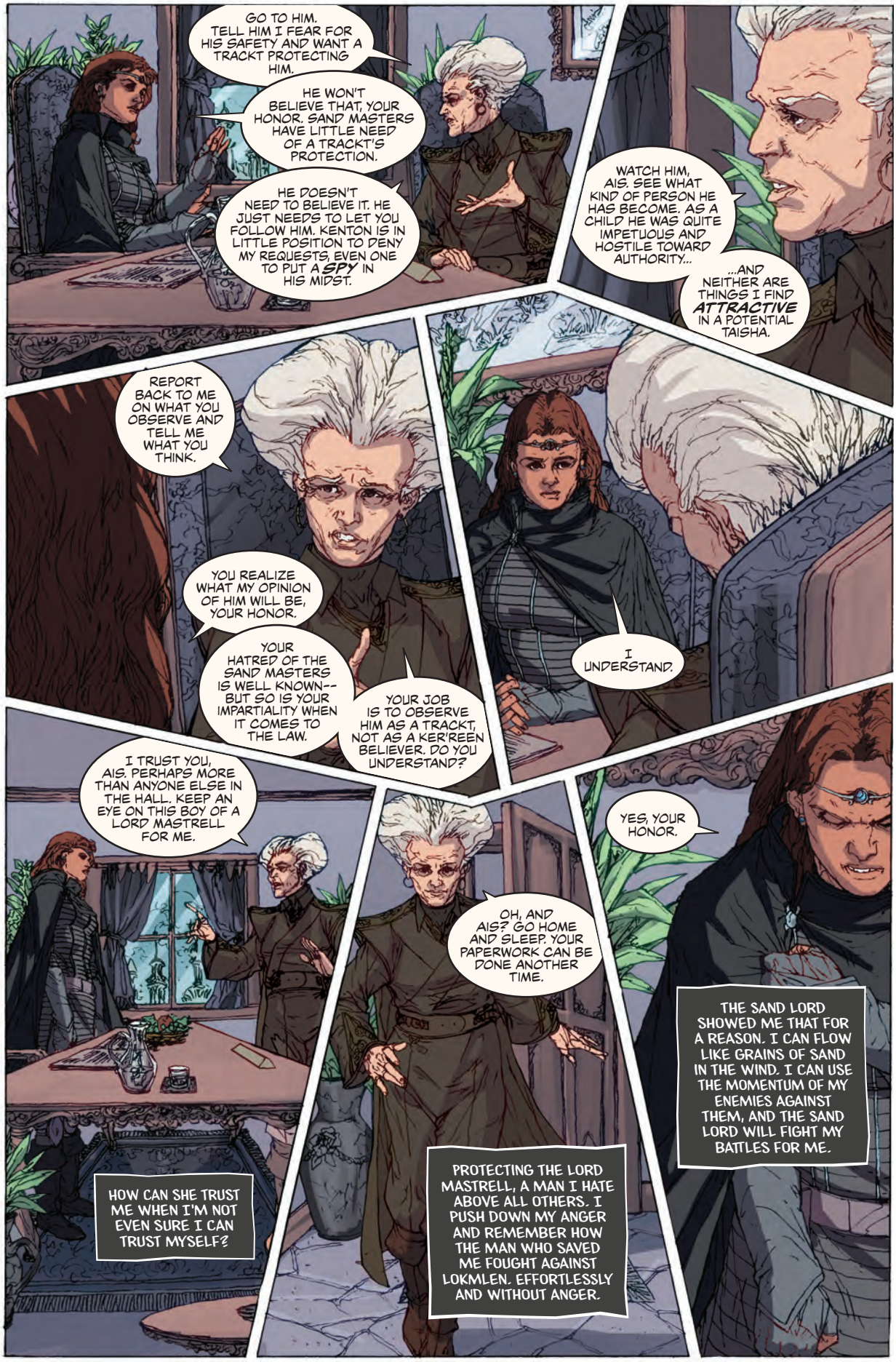
AND NOW I DEFAULT TO SOLVING PROBLEMS *HIS* WAY.
EVER CRITICAL INSTEAD OF SUPPORTIVE.
YOU WOULD NOT FIND IT EASY IN THE DIEM, SON.
BUT YOU MAY JOIN IF THAT IS YOUR DESIRE.
RAISING MY VOICE INSTEAD OF LISTENING.
THOUGH I WISH, BY THE SANDS, THAT YOU WOULD *SEE REASON!*
THESE ARE MY FATHER'S CHAMBERS. THIS IS MY FATHER'S LIFE. I AM HIS SON.
BUT I DON'T HAVE TO LEAD LIKE HE DID.
WELL-- WHERE IS HE?

CAN ANYONE HERE FIND THAT SCOUNDREL FOR ME?
WHO...?
HOW? IT SEEMS YOU BLASTED SAND MASTERS STILL DON'T BELIEVE IN STAIRS.
I'LL BRING YOU UP.
AARIK? WHAT ON THE SANDS ARE YOU DOING HERE?
YELLING MYSELF RAW, IT SEEMS. ARE YOUR CHAMBERS SO FAR FROM THE GROUND THAT IT'S HARD TO HEAR THE FACELESS MASSES, OR ARE YOU JUST IGNORING ME?
AARIK! COME ON UP!

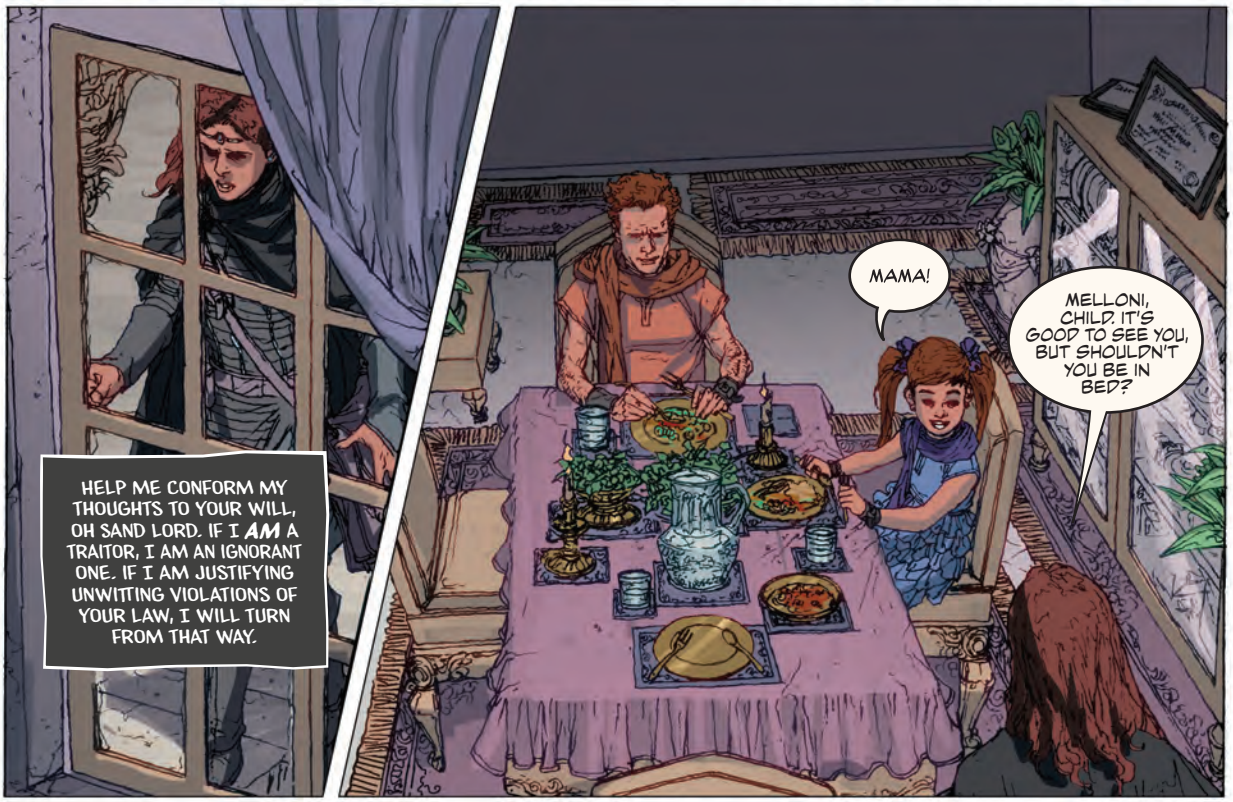

I ALMOST DIDN'T RECOGNIZE YOU, AARIK. YOU'VE... CHANGED.
YES, WELL, EVERYONE HAS THEIR PROBLEMS. YOU, FOR INSTANCE, ARE SUPPOSED TO BE DEAD. I GOT THAT NEWS ABOUT A WEEK AGO IN THE MIDDLE OF TRAVELING TO VISIT YOU.
OF COURSE, I WEEP, I MOURN. I GET OVER YOUR DEATH. I COME INTO TOWN FOR YOUR FUNERAL...
...AND DISCOVER YOU'RE STILL ALIVE.
SHELLA, KENTON, YOU KNOW HOW TO CONFUSE A GUY.
NEXT TIME I COME BACK FROM THE DEAD, I'LL CONSULT YOU FIRST, OKAY?
MAKE SURE YOU DO.
BUT NEXT TIME I'M NOT MOURNING YOU. YOU CAN COUNT THIS LAST WEEK AS YOUR REQUISITE GRIEF.
SANDS, IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN.
YOU TOO, BUDDY.
HEY, YOU GOT ANYTHING TO EAT? ALL THIS SUNLIGHT MAKES A GUY HUNGRY.
AARIK, IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU, BUT WHY ARE YOU HERE?
I TOLD YOU. I'M HERE TO VISIT YOU. HOW ARE YOU COPING WITH NOT BEING DEAD?

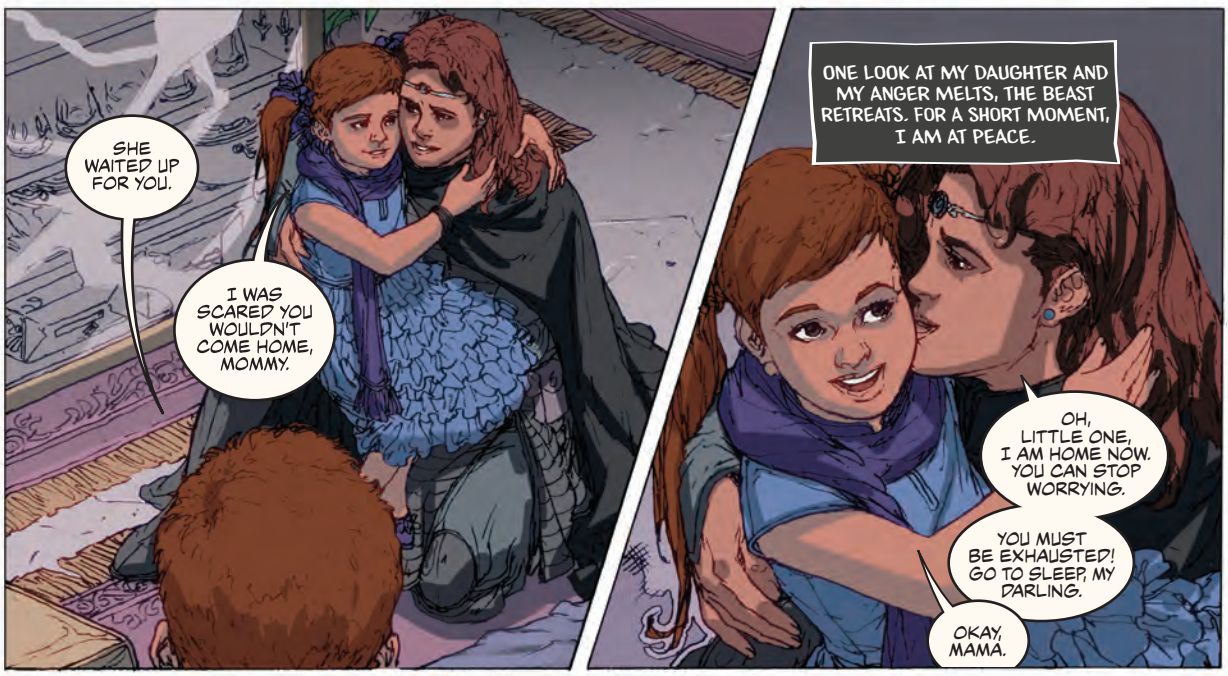
YOU DIDN'T CROSS THE BORDER OCEAN JUST TO SEE ME. WHAT ABOUT YOUR FATHER?
LORD RAAGENT? THE HIGH AND MIGHTY GENERAL OF LOSSAND? HE DISOWNED ME, REMEMBER?
SO, NOW THAT YOU'RE RICH AND POWERFUL, ARE YOU GOING TO TAKE ME IN? I COULD USE A RICH PATRON--THEY'RE MUCH BETTER THAN GETTING A JOB.
YOU CAN STAY IF YOU WANT, BUT I DON'T THINK I'LL BE ABLE TO PROVIDE YOU WITH A HOME FOR LONG.
SO I HEARD. TWO WEEKS, EH?
TWO WEEKS TO CONVINCE ALL SEVEN TAISHIN THAT THE DIEM CAN UNITE RESPONSIBLY BEHIND ONE LEADER AND BE BENEFICIAL TO THE PEOPLE OF LOSSAND.
THAT'S IT? SOUNDS EASY.
YOU KNOW, YOU'VE CHANGED TOO. YOU'VE GROWN... SOMBER.
I WATCHED MY FRIENDS AND FATHER DIE, AARIK. I HAVE TO KEEP PUSHING THOUGHTS OF THEM AWAY SO I CAN FOCUS ON SAVING THE DIEM.
SEE, THAT'S YOUR PROBLEM. YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE ACCEPTED THE POSITION OF LORD MASTRELL TO BEGIN WITH.
AARIK'S FIRST RULE OF LIFE--AVOID RESPONSIBILITY LIKE DEEP SAND.
A LITTLE LATE FOR THAT.
LOOK ON THE BRIGHT SIDE.
EVEN IF YOU FAIL, AT LEAST WE'LL SPEND THE NEXT TWO WEEKS LIVING LIKE KINGS! SO--
--WHEN DO WE EAT?

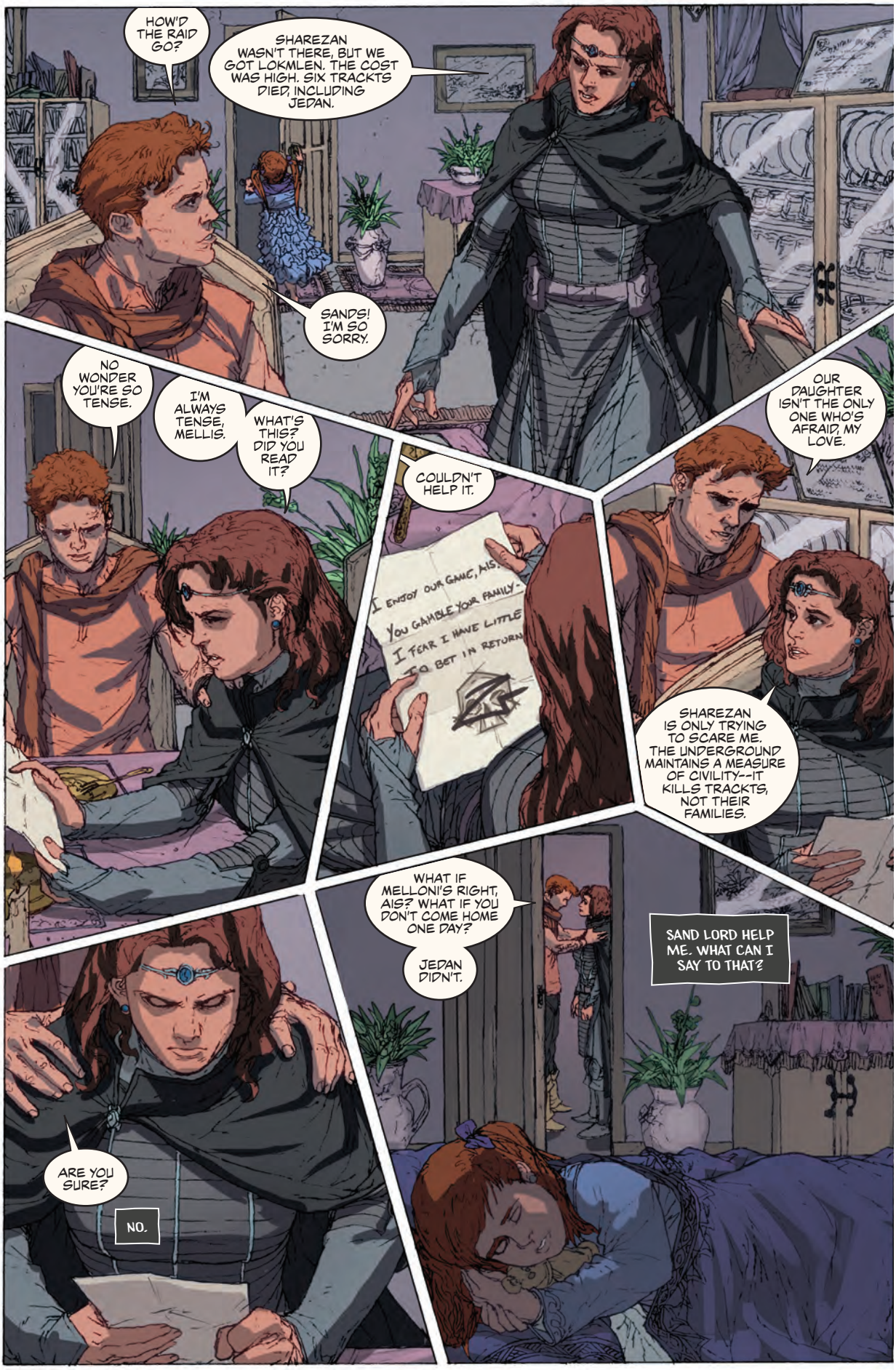

TRACKT HALL, FIRST HOUR.
JUDGE HEELIS, WHAT BRINGS YOU TO MY OFFICE SO LATE?
I UNDERSTAND THAT YOUR OPERATION TODAY WAS A SUCCESS.
I LOST SIX TRACKTS, AND FIVE MORE HAVE INJURIES THAT WILL KEEP THEM FROM DUTY FOR MONTHS.
WE CAPTURED LOKMLEN, BUT HE REFUSES TO GIVE UP INFORMATION ON SHAREZAN.
I'M NO CLOSER TO PROVING SHAREZAN AND NILTO ARE THE SAME MAN...
MUST YOU ALWAYS BE SO FORMAL? WE'VE KNOWN EACH OTHER EIGHTEEN YEARS--PLEASE BE SEATED.
YES, YOUR HONOR.
...AND WHEN I GAVE IN TO THE RAGE, LOKMLEN NEARLY KILLED ME. DOES JUDGE HEELIS KNOW?
NO. SHE DOESN'T. SHE *COULDN'T.* UNLESS LOKMLEN...
I HAVE AN ASSIGNMENT FOR YOU. IT WILL ONLY TAKE TWO WEEKS, THEN YOU MAY RETURN TO CHASING SHAREZAN.
YOU KNOW OF THE JUDGMENT TODAY, I TAKE IT?
I DO.
THIS ACTING LORD MASTRELL IS AN ENORMOUS RANDOM FACTOR. I STILL CANNOT DECIDE IF HE WILL BENEFIT LOSSAND OR DESTROY IT.

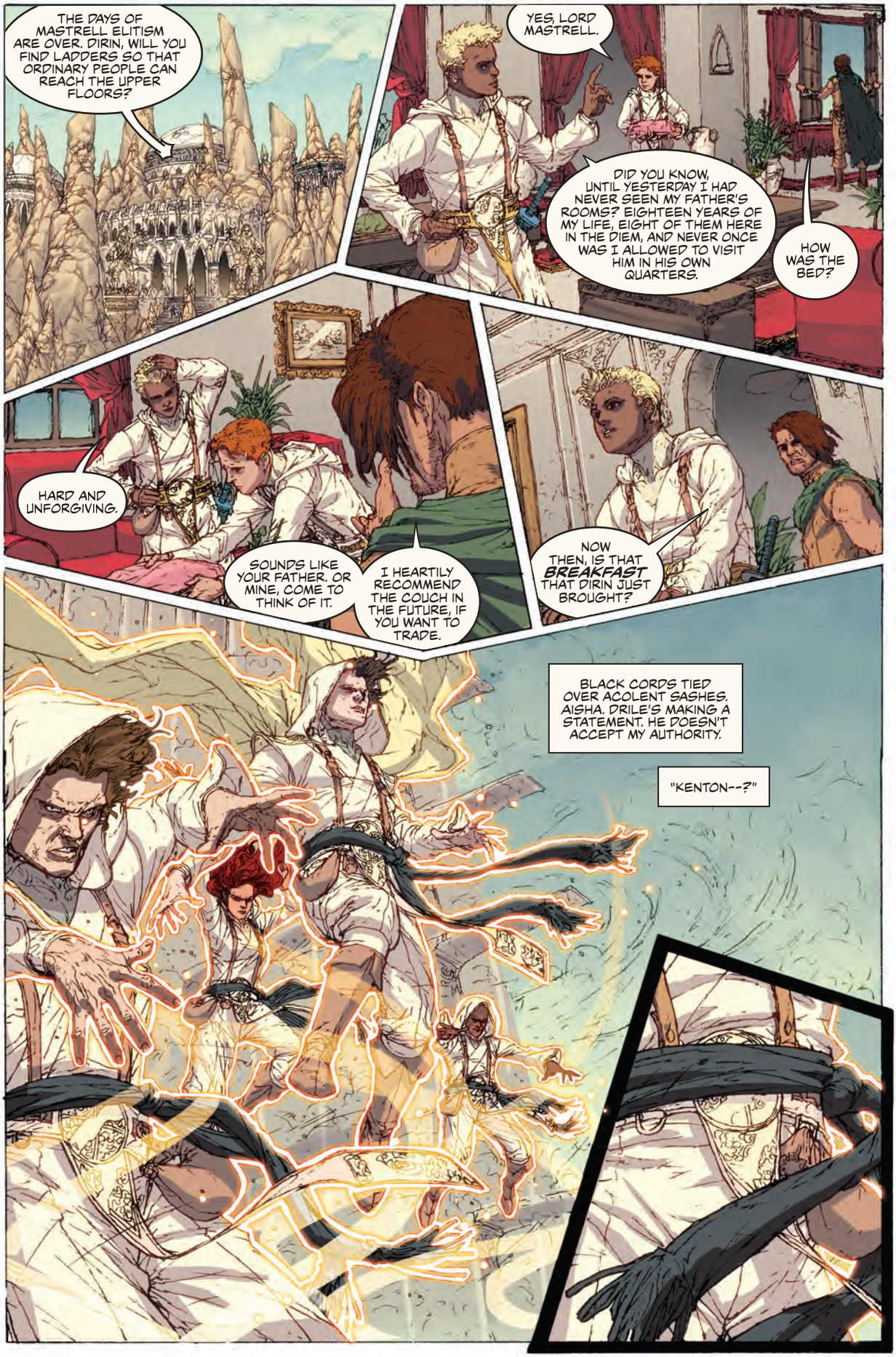

GO TO HIM. TELL HIM I FEAR FOR HIS SAFETY AND WANT A TRACKT PROTECTING HIM.
HE WON'T BELIEVE THAT, YOUR HONOR. SAND MASTERS HAVE LITTLE NEED OF A TRACKT'S PROTECTION.
HE DOESN'T NEED TO BELIEVE IT. HE JUST NEEDS TO LET YOU FOLLOW HIM. KENTON IS IN LITTLE POSITION TO DENY MY REQUESTS, EVEN ONE TO PUT A SPY IN HIS MIDST.
WATCH HIM, AIS. SEE WHAT KIND OF PERSON HE HAS BECOME. AS A CHILD HE WAS QUITE IMPETUOUS AND HOSTILE TOWARD AUTHORITY...
...AND NEITHER ARE THINGS I FIND ATTRACTIVE IN A POTENTIAL TAISHA.
REPORT BACK TO ME ON WHAT YOU OBSERVE AND TELL ME WHAT YOU THINK.
YOU REALIZE WHAT MY OPINION OF HIM WILL BE, YOUR HONOR.
YOUR HATRED OF THE SAND MASTERS IS WELL KNOWN-- BUT SO IS YOUR IMPARTIALITY WHEN IT COMES TO THE LAW.
YOUR JOB IS TO OBSERVE HIM AS A TRACKT, NOT AS A KER'REEN BELIEVER. DO YOU UNDERSTAND?
I UNDERSTAND.
I TRUST YOU, AIS. PERHAPS MORE THAN ANYONE ELSE IN THE HALL. KEEP AN EYE ON THIS BOY OF A LORD MASTRELL FOR ME.
HOW CAN SHE TRUST ME WHEN I'M NOT EVEN SURE I CAN TRUST MYSELF?
OH, AND AIS? GO HOME AND SLEEP. YOUR PAPERWORK CAN BE DONE ANOTHER TIME.
PROTECTING THE LORD MASTRELL, A MAN I HATE ABOVE ALL OTHERS. I PUSH DOWN MY ANGER AND REMEMBER HOW THE MAN WHO SAVED ME FOUGHT AGAINST LOKMLEN. EFFORTLESSLY AND WITHOUT ANGER.
YES, YOUR HONOR.
THE SAND LORD SHOWED ME THAT FOR A REASON. I CAN FLOW LIKE GRAINS OF SAND IN THE WIND. I CAN USE THE MOMENTUM OF MY ENEMIES AGAINST THEM, AND THE SAND LORD WILL FIGHT MY BATTLES FOR ME.

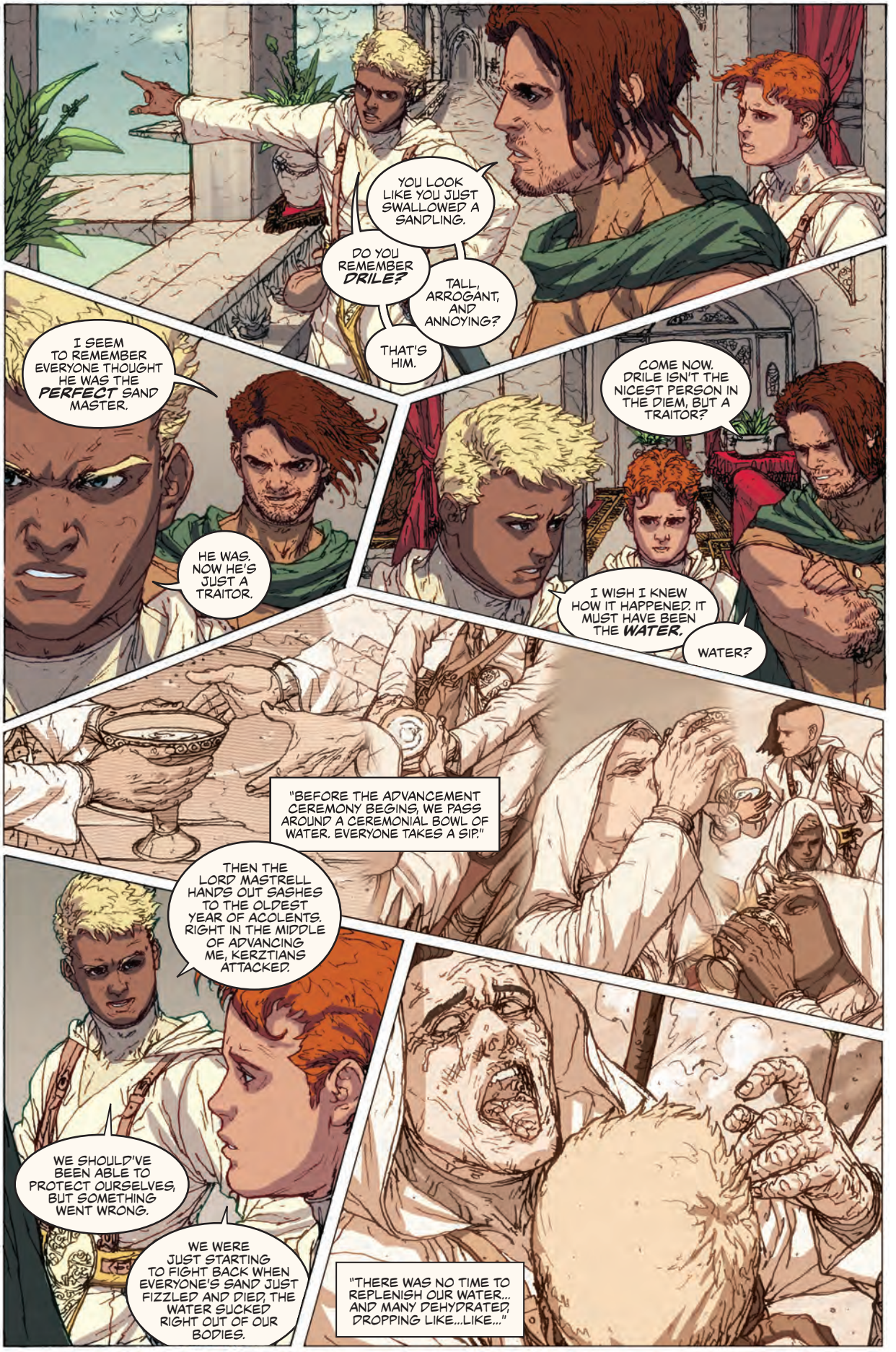
I HEAD HOME, DARK THOUGHTS ON MY MIND. ANGER RISES IN ME WITH EACH STEP. CURSE THE SAND MASTERS, AND CURSE THEIR NEW CHILD LEADER. I CAN'T LOSE TWO WEEKS ON THE SHAREZAN CASE.
STOP. I TAKE A DEEP BREATH AND CHANNEL THE ADVERSITY. SAND LORD, LET THIS ANGER FLOW THROUGH ME. PLEASE, HELP ME CALM THE BEAST INSIDE.


HELP ME CONFORM MY THOUGHTS TO YOUR WILL, OH SAND LORD. IF I AM A TRAITOR, I AM AN IGNORANT ONE. IF I AM JUSTIFYING UNWITTING VIOLATIONS OF YOUR LAW, I WILL TURN FROM THAT WAY.
MAMA!
MELLONI, CHILD. IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU, BUT SHOULDN'T YOU BE IN BED?


SHE WAITED UP FOR YOU.
I WAS SCARED YOU WOULDN'T COME HOME, MOMMY.
ONE LOOK AT MY DAUGHTER AND MY ANGER MELTS, THE BEAST RETREATS. FOR A SHORT MOMENT, I AM AT PEACE.
OH, LITTLE ONE, I AM HOME NOW. YOU CAN STOP WORRYING.
YOU MUST BE EXHAUSTED! GO TO SLEEP, MY DARLING.
OKAY, MAMA.


HOW'D THE RAID GO?
SHAREZAN WASN'T THERE, BUT WE GOT LOKMLEN. THE COST WAS HIGH. SIX TRACKTS DIED, INCLUDING JEDAN.
SANDS! I'M SO SORRY.
NO WONDER YOU'RE SO TENSE.
I'M ALWAYS TENSE, MELLIS.
WHAT'S THIS? DID YOU READ IT?
COULDN'T HELP IT.
I ENJOY OUR GAME, AIS.
YOU GAMBLE YOUR FAMILY-
I FEAR I HAVE LITTLE
TO BET IN RETURN
OUR DAUGHTER ISN'T THE ONLY ONE WHO'S AFRAID, MY LOVE.
SHAREZAN IS ONLY TRYING TO SCARE ME. THE UNDERGROUND MAINTAINS A MEASURE OF CIVILITY--IT KILLS TRACKTS, NOT THEIR FAMILIES.
WHAT IF MELLONI'S RIGHT, AIS? WHAT IF YOU DON'T COME HOME ONE DAY?
JEDAN DIDN'T.
SAND LORD HELP ME. WHAT CAN I SAY TO THAT?
ARE YOU SURE?
NO.

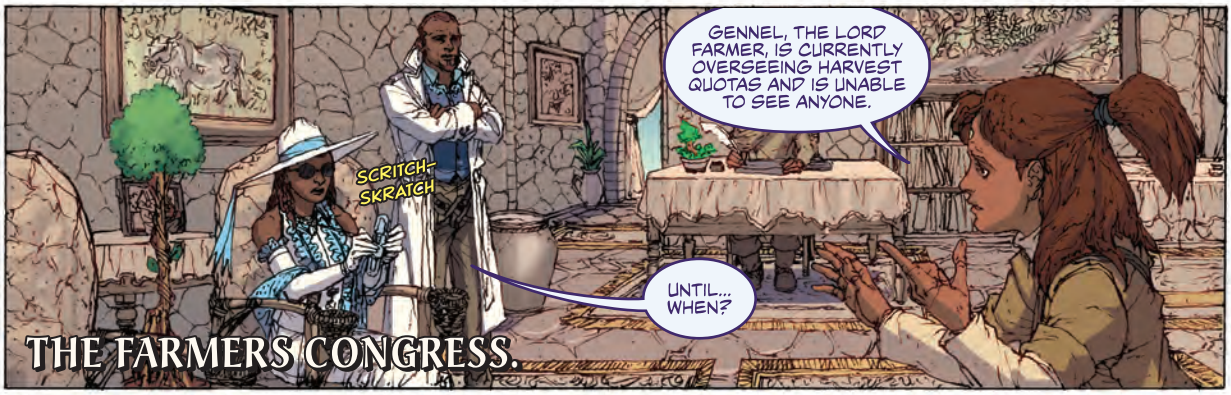

THE DAYS OF MASTRELL ELITISM ARE OVER. DIRIN, WILL YOU FIND LADDERS SO THAT ORDINARY PEOPLE CAN REACH THE UPPER FLOORS?
YES, LORD MASTRELL.
DID YOU KNOW, UNTIL YESTERDAY I HAD NEVER SEEN MY FATHER'S ROOMS? EIGHTEEN YEARS OF MY LIFE, EIGHT OF THEM HERE IN THE DIEM, AND NEVER ONCE WAS I ALLOWED TO VISIT HIM IN HIS OWN QUARTERS.
HOW WAS THE BED?
HARD AND UNFORGIVING.
SOUNDS LIKE YOUR FATHER. OR MINE, COME TO THINK OF IT.
I HEARTILY RECOMMEND THE COUCH IN THE FUTURE, IF YOU WANT TO TRADE.
NOW THEN, IS THAT BREAKFAST THAT DIRIN JUST BROUGHT?
BLACK CORDS TIED OVER ACOLENT SASHES. AISHA. DRILE'S MAKING A STATEMENT. HE DOESN'T ACCEPT MY AUTHORITY.
"KENTON--?"

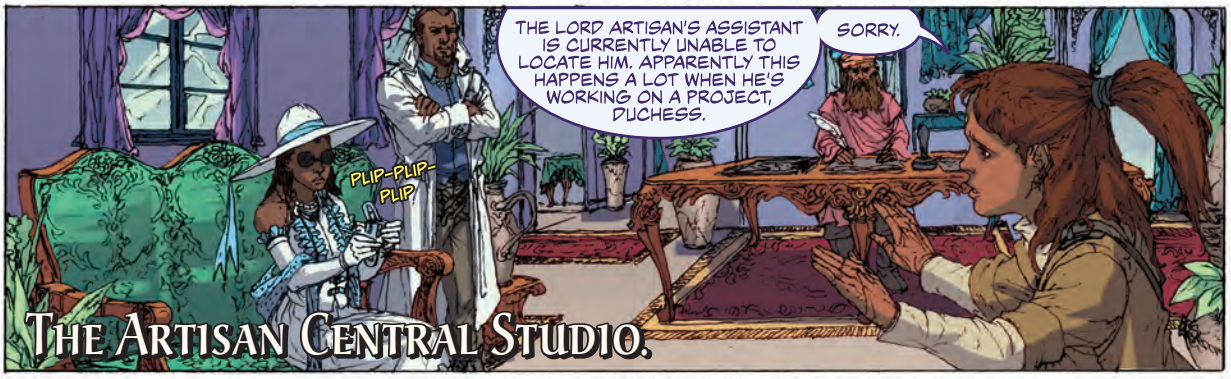

YOU LOOK LIKE YOU JUST SWALLOWED A SANDLING.
DO YOU REMEMBER DRILE?
TALL, ARROGANT, AND ANNOYING?
THAT'S HIM.
I SEEM TO REMEMBER EVERYONE THOUGHT HE WAS THE PERFECT SAND MASTER.
HE WAS. NOW HE'S JUST A TRAITOR.
COME NOW. DRILE ISN'T THE NICEST PERSON IN THE DIEM, BUT A TRAITOR?
I WISH I KNEW HOW IT HAPPENED. IT MUST HAVE BEEN THE WATER.
WATER?
"BEFORE THE ADVANCEMENT CEREMONY BEGINS, WE PASS AROUND A CEREMONIAL BOWL OF WATER. EVERYONE TAKES A SIP."
THEN THE LORD MASTRELL HANDS OUT SASHES TO THE OLDEST YEAR OF ACOLENTS. RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF ADVANCING ME, KERZTIANS ATTACKED.
WE SHOULD'VE BEEN ABLE TO PROTECT OURSELVES, BUT SOMETHING WENT WRONG.
WE WERE JUST STARTING TO FIGHT BACK WHEN EVERYONE'S SAND JUST FIZZLED AND DIED, THE WATER SUCKED RIGHT OUT OF OUR BODIES.
"THERE WAS NO TIME TO REPLENISH OUR WATER... AND MANY DEHYDRATED, DROPPING LIKE...LIKE..."

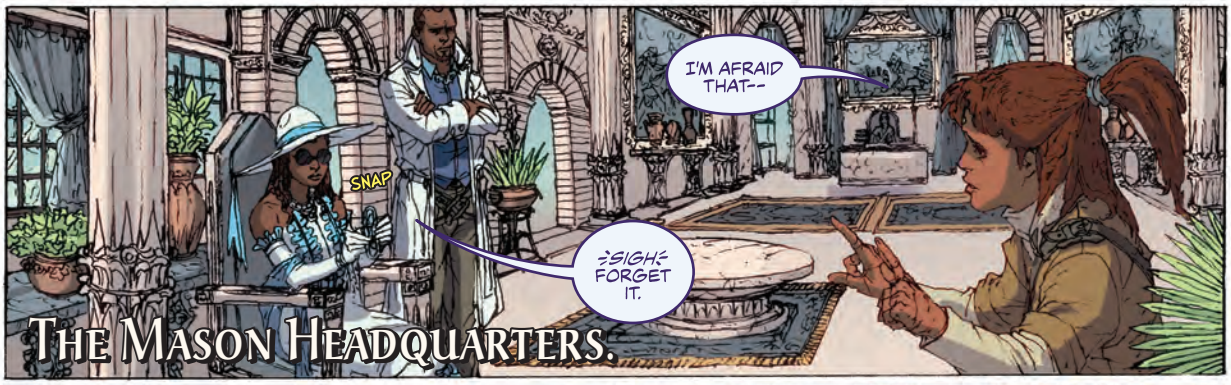
...SPENT SAND.
WHEN THE CEREMONIAL WATER CAME TO DRILE, HE REFUSED TO DRINK.
HE KNEW HE WAS GOING TO BE ON TRIAL THAT DAY--IN FACT, MY FATHER REVOKED HIS MASTRELLSHIP.
DRILE MUST'VE MADE A DEAL WITH THE KERZTIANS AND POISONED US, THEN THEY COULD ATTACK US WHILE OUR SAND MASTERY WAS WEAK.
WAIT A MINUTE, HOW BIG WAS THIS BOWL OF WATER? WEREN'T THERE HUNDREDS OF SAND MASTERS AT YOUR CEREMONY?
THEN THE POISON WOULD HAVE BEEN GONE AFTER THE FIRST ROUND.
WE REFILLED IT AS IT MOVED ALONG.
MAYBE HE ONLY NEEDED TO POISON THE MASTRELLS...
OKAY...I KNOW IT'S NOT A PERFECT THEORY, BUT EVERYTHING POINTS TO DRILE.
NOT ONLY DIDN'T HE DRINK, BUT HE SURVIVED.
AH YES-- HOW COULD HE HAVE BEEN SO STUPID AS TO LIVE?
BE CAREFUL, KENTON--A KEZARAN PUZZLE CAN BE PIECED TOGETHER IN MORE THAN ONE WAY...

Day 54. Sixth Hour. While the inn we stayed at was less than adequate, thank the Divine it was the first time in weeks I'd slept in a bed.
"GOOD MORNING, DUCHESS... AT LEAST, THERE ARE MORE PEOPLE ON THE STREET NOW, SO I ASSUME IT IS MORNING."
"WHAT IS OUR PLAN FOR TODAY?"
WE GO TO THE TOP. IF THERE ARE SAND MAGES HERE, THEN SURELY LOSSAND'S LEADERS KNOW OF THEM. BOTH KENTON AND LOATEN MENTIONED THE TAISHIN.
THE TAISHIN ARE THE EIGHT LEADERS OF LOSSAND'S PROFESSIONS. SOME ARE MORE POWERFUL THAN OTHERS. SOME ARE MORE...APPROACHABLE THAN OTHERS.
OH SHELLA.
MUST'VE PACKED IT TOO FULL. NOW THE LOCK'S ALL KNACKERED.
I'LL TAKE A LOOK AT IT.
THOUGH WHY YOU NEED SUCH A COMPLEX LOCK FOR YOUR CLOTHES IS BEYOND ME.
ACRON LET ME BORROW IT. HE'S GOT ALL SORTS OF THEM.
N'TEESE, WILL YOU TAKE BAON AND ME TO THESE TAISHIN? THE PROFESSORS WILL STAY BEHIND AND FIND US MORE SUITABLE LIVING ARRANGEMENTS.

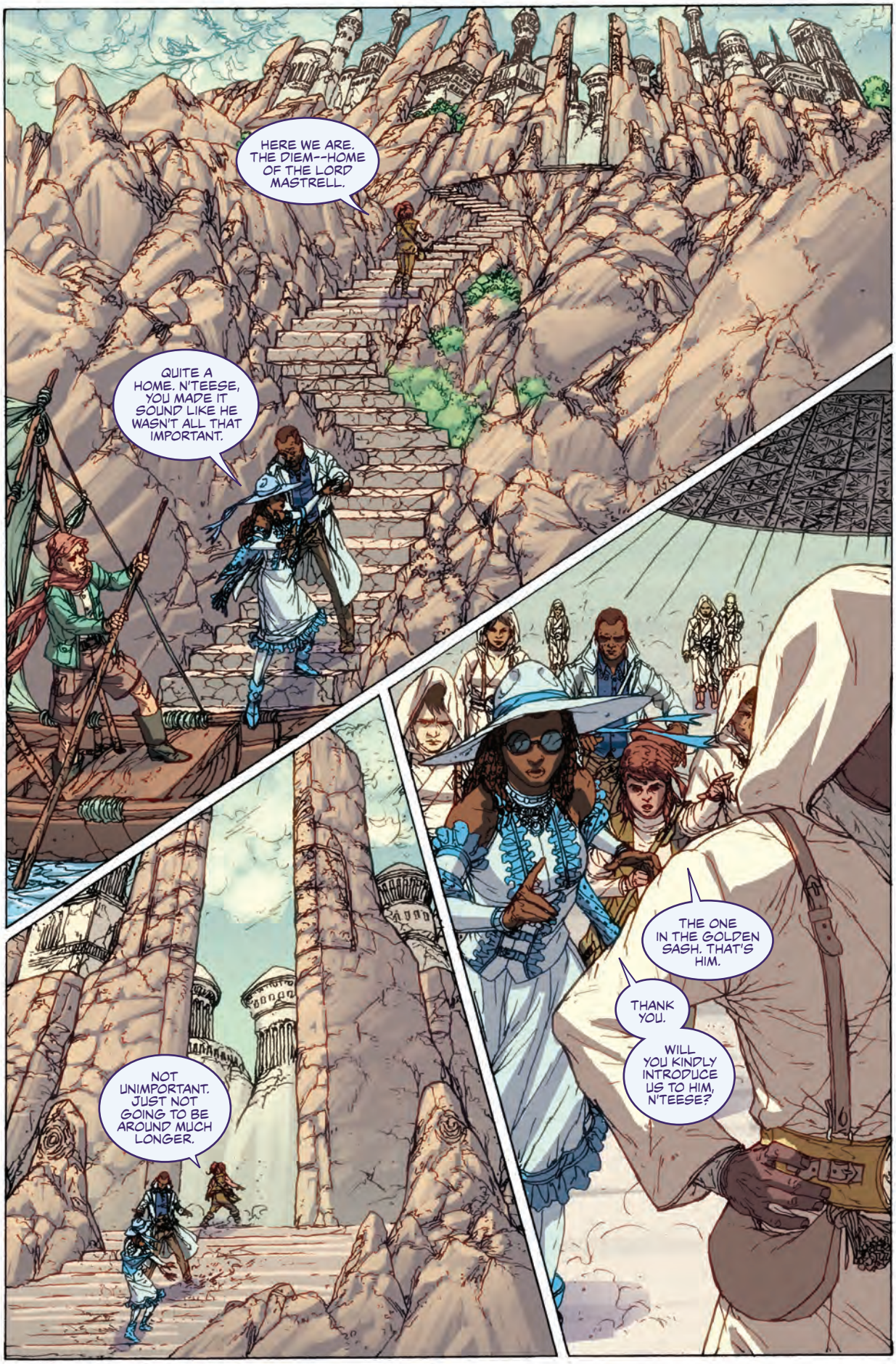
THE HALL OF JUDGMENT.
CLICK-CLICK
THEY SAY IT WILL BE A SHORT WAIT--
GOOD.
--AND THAT THE HIGH JUDGE WILL SEE YOU IN THREE WEEKS' TIME.
SKRITCH-SKRITCH
THEY SAID THAT THE LORD GENERAL JUST LEFT ON A HUNTING TRIP AND WILL BE GONE FOR THE NEXT TWELVE DAYS.
TWELVE... DAYS?
THE TOWER GARRISON.
HELM'S REST.
CLICK-CLICK
THE LORD ADMIRAL IS ON INSPECTION DUTIES, WHICH IS CODE FOR "HE'S PASSED OUT SOMEWHERE FROM DRINKING TOO MUCH."
THEN LET US BOOK AN APPOINTMENT FOR A LATER TIME.
UNFORTUNATELY, HIS BOOKING OFFICER IS ALSO ON INSPECTION DUTIES.
CLACK-CLICK
THE LORD MERCHANT WILL SEE YOU IMMEDIATELY... AS SOON AS YOU PAY THE 2,000 LAK PROCESSING FEE.
TWO THOU--?!
THE GOLDEN MARKET OF THE GUILD.


SCRITCH-SKRATCH
GENNEL, THE LORD FARMER, IS CURRENTLY OVERSEEING HARVEST QUOTAS AND IS UNABLE TO SEE ANYONE.
UNTIL... WHEN?
THE FARMERS CONGRESS.

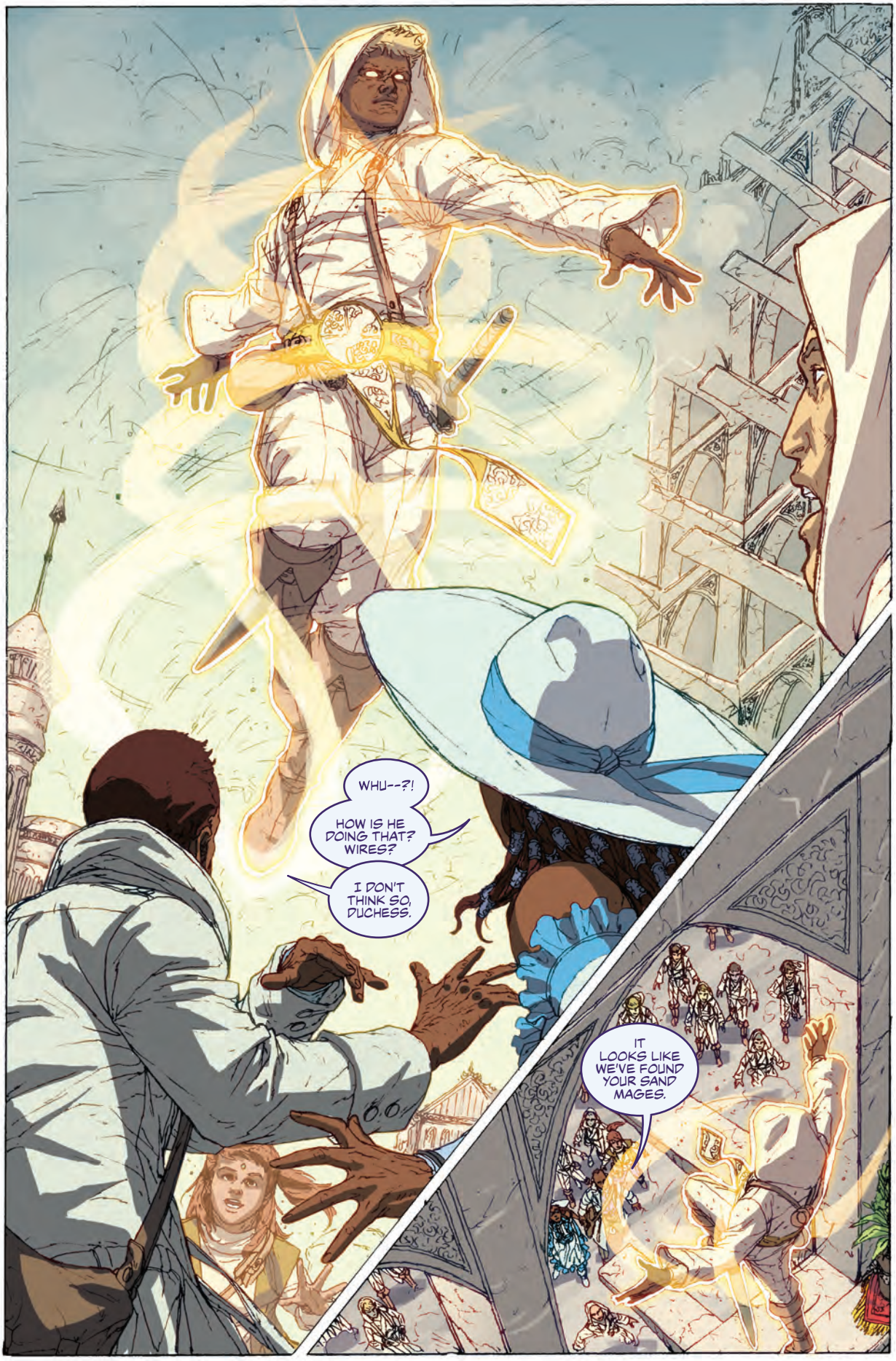

PLIP-PLIP-PLIP
THE LORD ARTISAN'S ASSISTANT IS CURRENTLY UNABLE TO LOCATE HIM. APPARENTLY THIS HAPPENS A LOT WHEN HE'S WORKING ON A PROJECT, DUCHESS.
SORRY.
THE ARTISAN CENTRAL STUDIO.


SNAP
I'M AFRAID THAT--
:SIGH: FORGET IT.
THE MASON HEADQUARTERS.

MY STARS, DUCHESS, YOU FIXED IT!
YOUR LOCK IS THE ONLY THING I'VE FIXED TODAY. WE COULDN'T GET A SINGLE ONE OF THESE TAISHIN TO EVEN SPEAK TO US.
YOU SAID THERE WERE EIGHT TAISHIN, N'TEESE. WE HAVE TRIED SEVEN--WHO IS THE EIGHTH?
THE LORD MASTRELL?
MASTRELL?
IT'S HARD TO EXPLAIN IN DYNASTIC. THEY ARE HOLY MEN AND WOMEN, EXCEPT NOT HOLY. THEY HAVE A NEW LEADER, AND I DO NOT THINK HE WILL BE AROUND MUCH LONGER.
SOMETIMES NEW LEADERS ARE MORE FLEXIBLE THAN ESTABLISHED ONES.
N'TEESE, WE HAVE ONE LAST STOP FOR TODAY. WILL YOU TAKE US TO THIS LORD MASTRELL?


HERE WE ARE. THE DIEM--HOME OF THE LORD MASTRELL.
QUITE A HOME. N'TEESE, YOU MADE IT SOUND LIKE HE WASN'T ALL THAT IMPORTANT.
NOT UNIMPORTANT. JUST NOT GOING TO BE AROUND MUCH LONGER.
THE ONE IN THE GOLDEN SASH. THAT'S HIM.
THANK YOU.
WILL YOU KINDLY INTRODUCE US TO HIM, N'TEESE?

KENTON...?
YOU?
HELLO, DUCHESS. HOW HAVE YOU BEEN?
I...YOU... SHELLA!
YOU LIED TO ME.
YOU TALKED ABOUT THESE TAISHIN AS IF YOU WEREN'T ONE OF THEM, AND HERE YOU ARE, THE RUDDY LORD MASTRELL, WHATEVER THE STARS THAT IS.
THE TITLE IS RATHER NEW, KHRISSALLA.
STILL! EVEN AFTER I SAVED YOUR LIFE, YOU KEPT THIS FROM US. THAT YOU'RE A... MASTRELL, WHICH IS... WHAT? SOME KIND OF MONK?
WE TRUSTED YOU. DOES THAT MEAN SO LITTLE TO YOU?
:SIGH: I DON'T HAVE TIME RIGHT NOW TO BE SCOLDED LIKE A CHILD.


WHU--?!
HOW IS HE DOING THAT? WIRES?
I DON'T THINK SO, DUCHESS.
IT LOOKS LIKE WE'VE FOUND YOUR SAND MAGES.

PART TWO

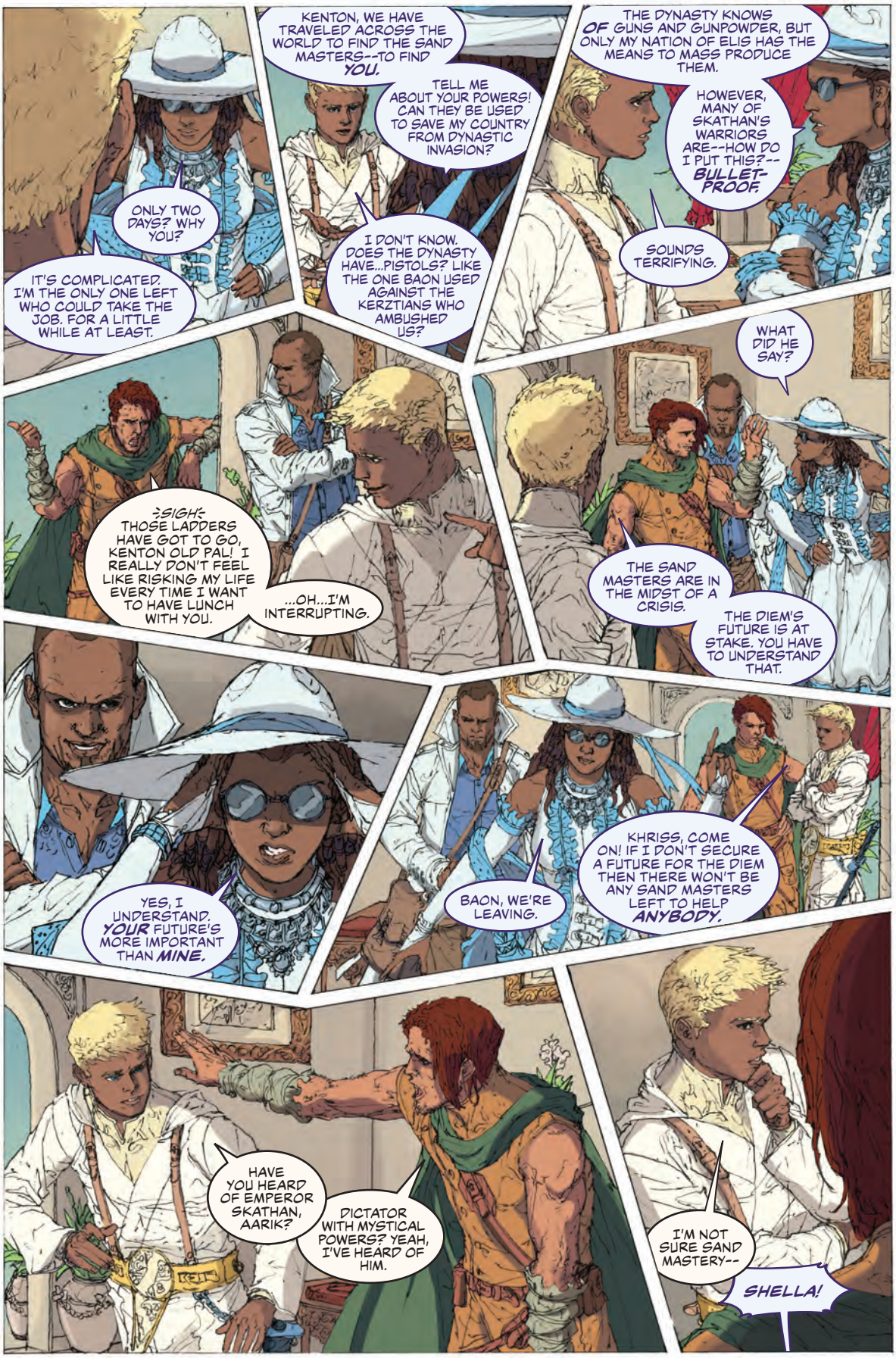
CHAPTER 7
HONOR BOUND

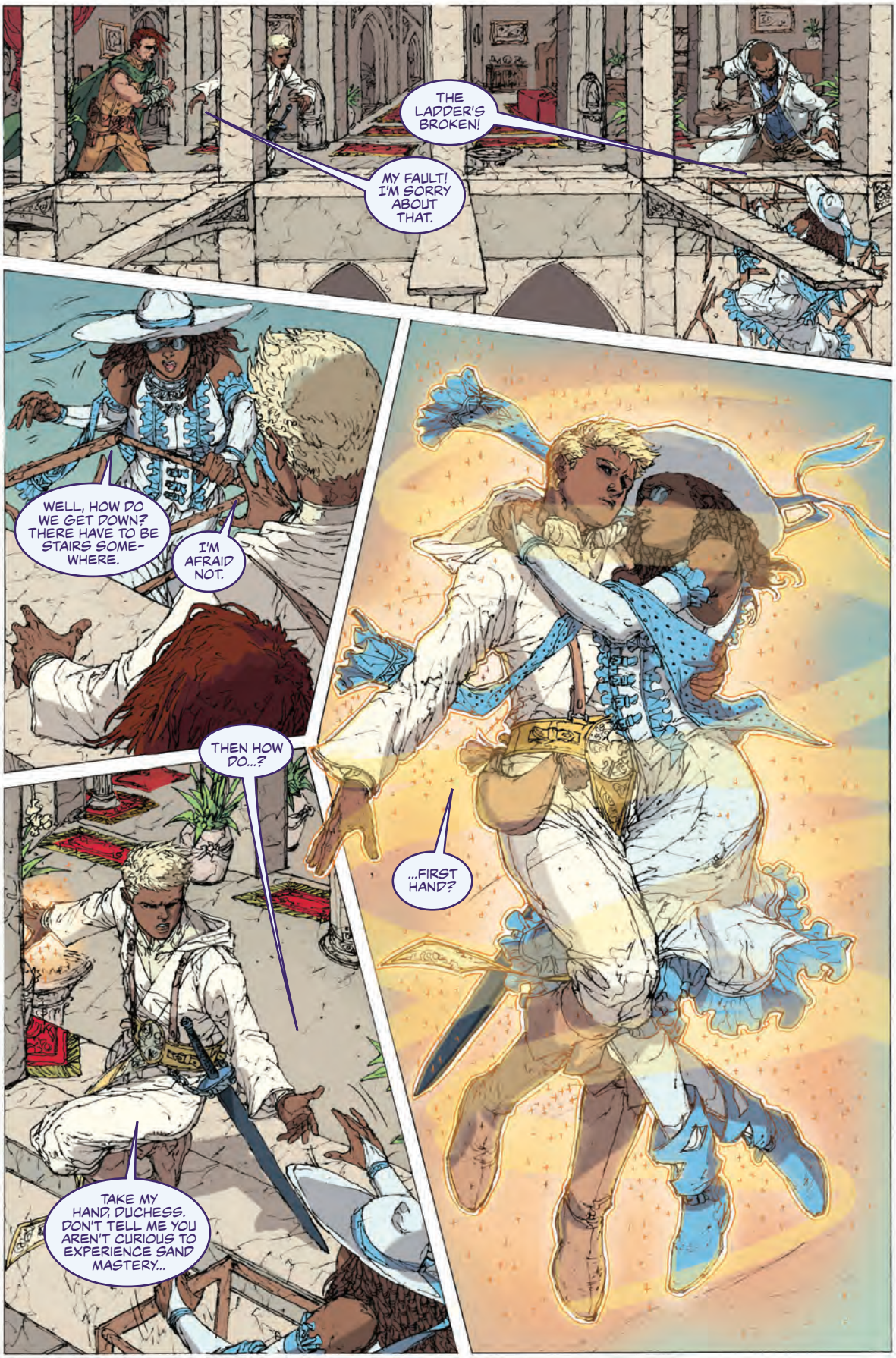
A week on the sands and we were traveling with a sand mage that whole time!
FIFTY-FOUR DAYS OVER SEA AND SAND TO FIND THESE MAGES...
...AND NOW THAT WE'VE MET THEIR LEADER, I AM NOT LETTING HIM OUT OF MY SIGHT.
DUCHESS?
--AT ALL TIMES.
DUCHESS, PLEASE. I AM SUPPOSED TO ACCOMPANY YOU--
HEY, WHAT'S ALL THE NOISE ABOUT?
WAIT!
WE NEED TO TALK, KENTON.

YOU'RE A SAND MAGE!
SLAP
OUCH!

THAT'S TALKING?
AND THERE'S THAT WORD AGAIN. WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY "MAGE"?
A WIZARD OR A SORCERER. SOMEONE WITH MYSTICAL POWER.
SAND MASTERY ISN'T SOME KIND OF PARTY TRICK.
WIZARDS AND MAGICIANS ARE CHARLATANS WHO PREY UPON THE FOOLISH. I AM A SAND MASTER.
LOOK, I KNOW YOU'RE UPSET--
--MAYBE A DRINK WOULD COOL YOU DOWN.

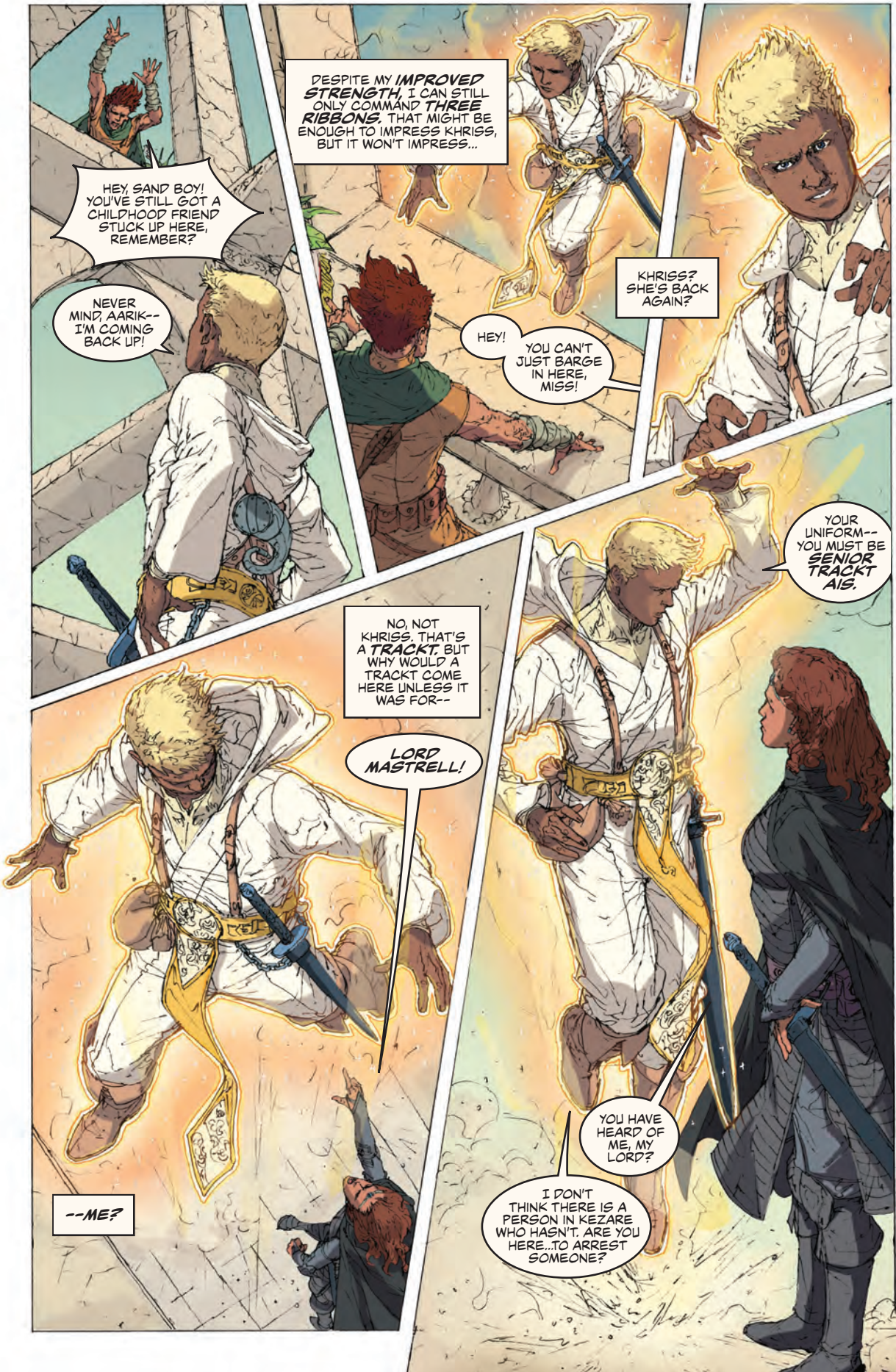
WHERE IS THE STRING?
WHAT STRING?
THE STRING YOU'RE USING TO HOLD IT UP--?
PLEASE DON'T TOUCH THE SAND LIKE THAT...
...IT'S VERY DISTRACTING.
SORRY.
I KNEW WE WOULD FIND THEM.
DAYSIDE MAGIC IS REAL.
MMMM, I KEEP TELLING YOU, IT ISN'T MAGIC--IT'S SAND MASTERY.
YOU STILL LIED TO US. YOU IMPLIED YOU WEREN'T ANYONE IMPORTANT.
WHEN YOU FOUND ME, I WASN'T.
I'VE ONLY HAD THE JOB OF LORD MASTRELL FOR TWO DAYS NOW.

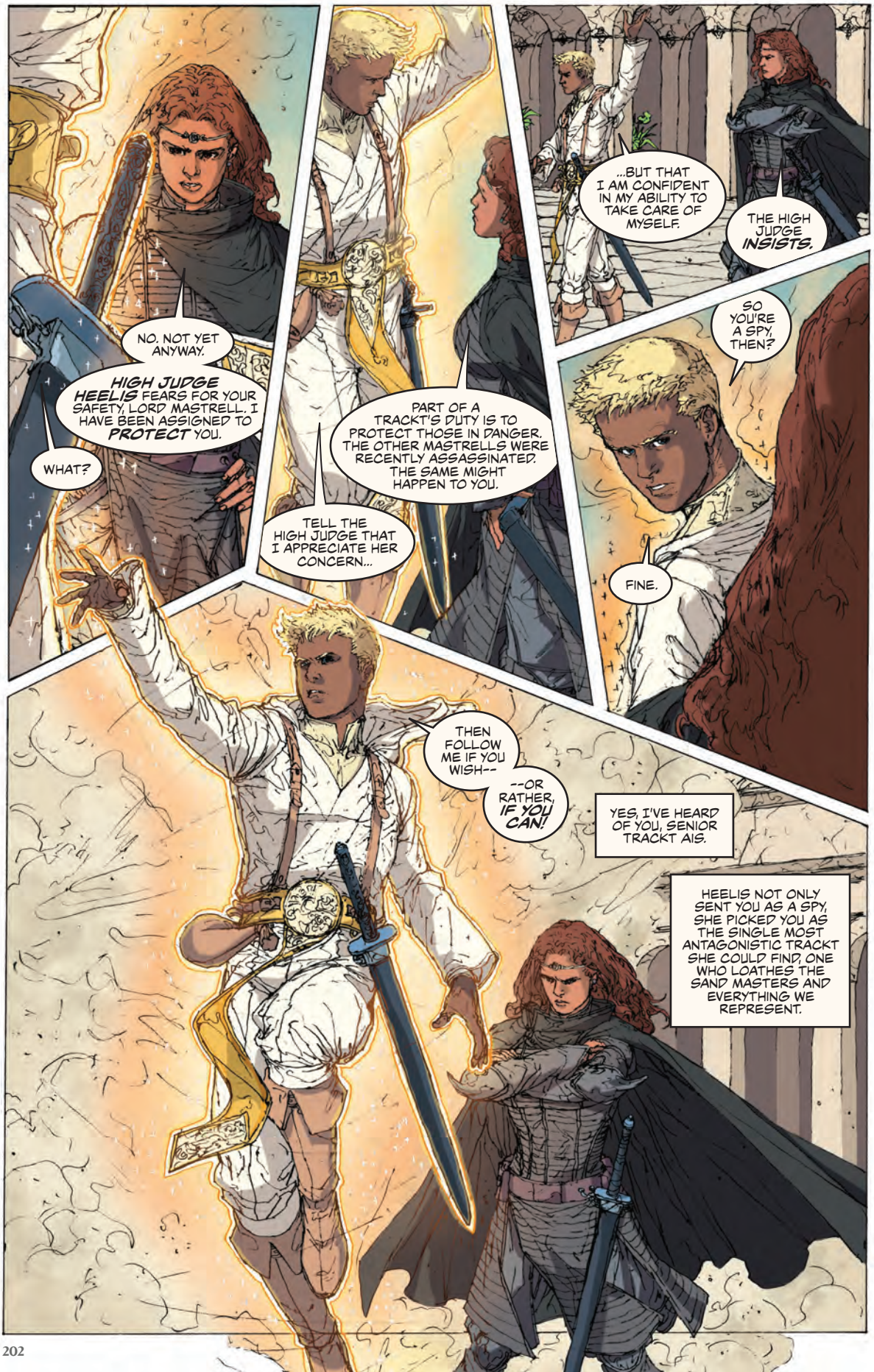

ONLY TWO DAYS? WHY YOU?
IT'S COMPLICATED. I'M THE ONLY ONE LEFT WHO COULD TAKE THE JOB. FOR A LITTLE WHILE AT LEAST.
KENTON, WE HAVE TRAVELED ACROSS THE WORLD TO FIND THE SAND MASTERS--TO FIND YOU.
TELL ME ABOUT YOUR POWERS! CAN THEY BE USED TO SAVE MY COUNTRY FROM DYNASTIC INVASION?
I DON'T KNOW. DOES THE DYNASTY HAVE...PISTOLS? LIKE THE ONE BAON USED AGAINST THE KERZTIANS WHO AMBUSHED US?
THE DYNASTY KNOWS OF GUNS AND GUNPOWDER, BUT ONLY MY NATION OF ELIS HAS THE MEANS TO MASS PRODUCE THEM.
HOWEVER, MANY OF SKATHAN'S WARRIORS ARE--HOW DO I PUT THIS?--BULLET-PROOF.
SOUNDS TERRIFYING.
-SIGH- THOSE LADDERS HAVE GOT TO GO, KENTON OLD PAL! I REALLY DON'T FEEL LIKE RISKING MY LIFE EVERY TIME I WANT TO HAVE LUNCH WITH YOU.
...OH...I'M INTERRUPTING.
WHAT DID HE SAY?
THE SAND MASTERS ARE IN THE MIDST OF A CRISIS.
THE DIEM'S FUTURE IS AT STAKE. YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND THAT.
YES, I UNDERSTAND. YOUR FUTURE'S MORE IMPORTANT THAN MINE.
BAON, WE'RE LEAVING.
KHRISS, COME ON! IF I DON'T SECURE A FUTURE FOR THE DIEM THEN THERE WON'T BE ANY SAND MASTERS LEFT TO HELP ANYBODY.
HAVE YOU HEARD OF EMPEROR SKATHAN, AARIK?
DICTATOR WITH MYSTICAL POWERS? YEAH, I'VE HEARD OF HIM.
I'M NOT SURE SAND MASTERY--
SHELLA!

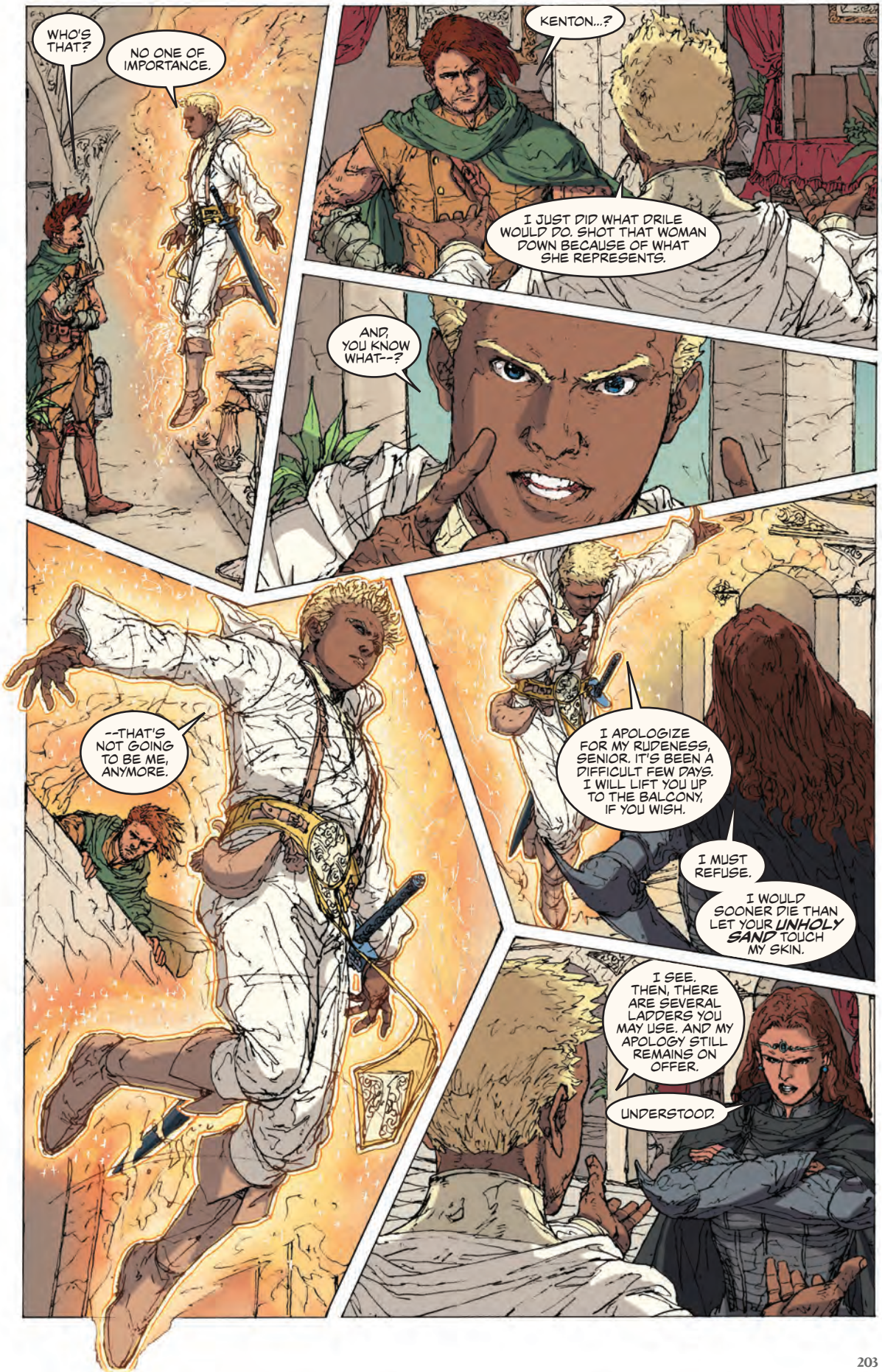

THE LADDER'S BROKEN!
MY FAULT! I'M SORRY ABOUT THAT.
WELL, HOW DO WE GET DOWN? THERE HAVE TO BE STAIRS SOMEWHERE.
I'M AFRAID NOT.
THEN HOW DO...?
TAKE MY HAND, DUCHESS. DON'T TELL ME YOU AREN'T CURIOUS TO EXPERIENCE SAND MASTERY...
...FIRST HAND?

OH SHELLA, KENTON. DON'T DROP ME.
AND NOW FOR BAON.
WAIT A MINUTE! YOU COULD HAVE JUST DROPPED ME DOWN BY MYSELF-- YOU DIDN'T NEED TO CARRY ME?
I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE MORE FUN TO--

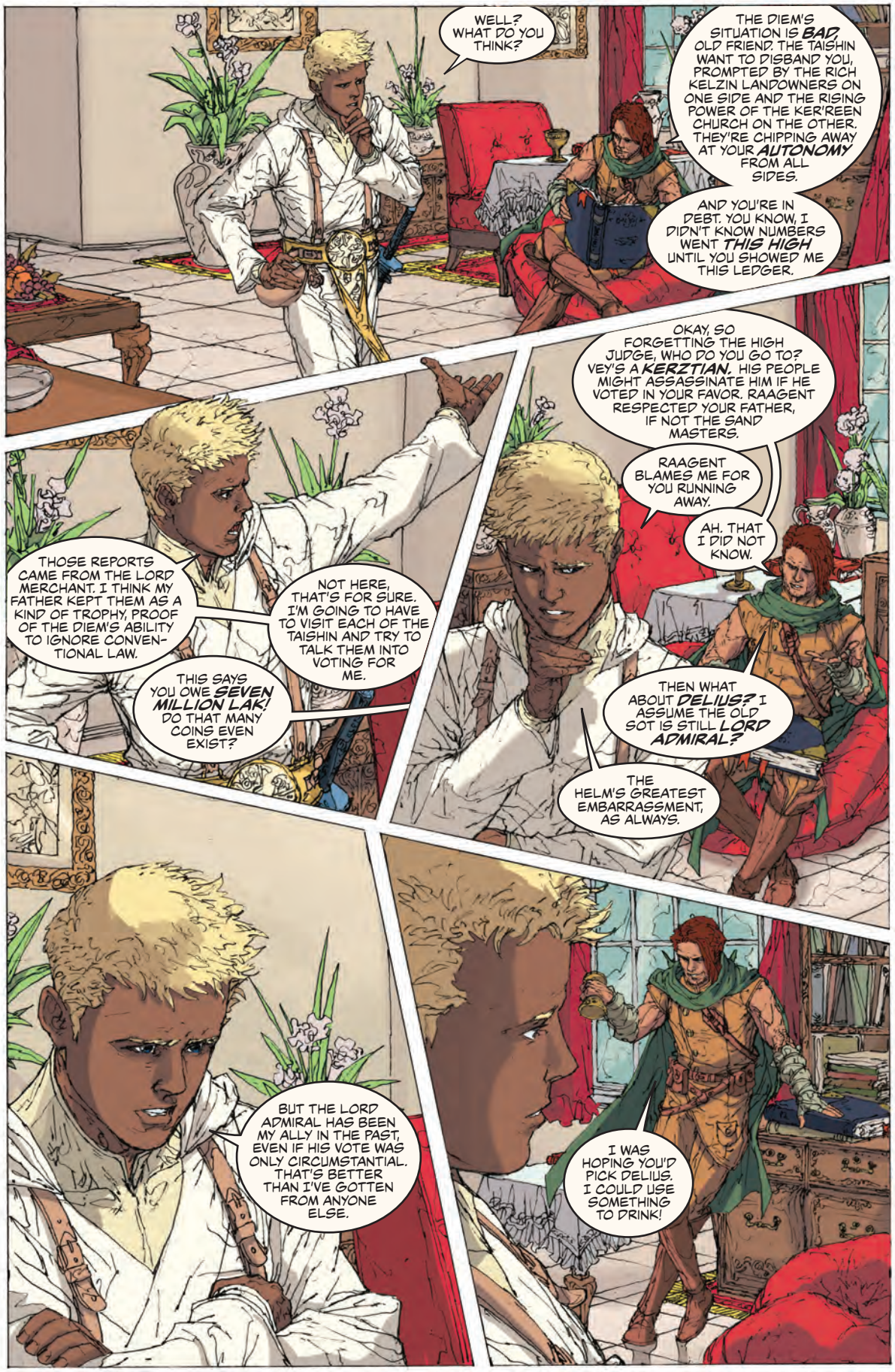
--TO...
...UH...
...YOU KNOW WHAT? YOU ARE COMPLETELY RIGHT. I SHOULD'VE JUST DROPPED YOU.
YOU'RE A BOY PLAYING GAMES!
BAON, N'TEESE-- LET'S GO.
I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT MAN! WE SAVED HIS LIFE, TRAVELED HALFWAY ACROSS THE KERLA WITH HIM, AND STILL HE HID WHO HE WAS.
I WOULD HAVE DONE THE SAME. HIS KIND WERE MASSACRED, AND HE WAS ALONE. I'M DISAPPOINTED I WAS UNABLE TO MAKE THE CONNECTION.
HOW? THERE'S NOTHING REMARKABLE ABOUT HIM--HE DIDN'T STRIKE ME AS ANYONE IMPORTANT.
SOMEDAY, DUCHESS, YOU WILL NEED TO LEARN HOW TO JUDGE PEOPLE, AND NOT FACES OR TITLES.
SOMEDAY YOUR GOOD ADVICE MIGHT RUB OFF ON ME, BAON.
BUT RIGHT NOW I JUST NEED TO GET AWAY FROM HERE.


HEY, SAND BOY! YOU'VE STILL GOT A CHILDHOOD FRIEND STUCK UP HERE, REMEMBER?
NEVER MIND, AARIK-- I'M COMING BACK UP!
DESPITE MY IMPROVED STRENGTH, I CAN STILL ONLY COMMAND THREE RIBBONS. THAT MIGHT BE ENOUGH TO IMPRESS KHRISS, BUT IT WON'T IMPRESS...
HEY!
YOU CAN'T JUST BARGE IN HERE, MISS!
KHRISS? SHE'S BACK AGAIN?
YOUR UNIFORM-- YOU MUST BE SENIOR TRACKT AIS.
NO, NOT KHRISS. THAT'S A TRACKT. BUT WHY WOULD A TRACKT COME HERE UNLESS IT WAS FOR--
LORD MASTRELL!
--ME?
YOU HAVE HEARD OF ME, MY LORD?
I DON'T THINK THERE IS A PERSON IN KEZARE WHO HASN'T. ARE YOU HERE...TO ARREST SOMEONE?


WHAT?
NO. NOT YET ANYWAY.
HIGH JUDGE HEELIS FEARS FOR YOUR SAFETY, LORD MASTRELL. I HAVE BEEN ASSIGNED TO PROTECT YOU.
TELL THE HIGH JUDGE THAT I APPRECIATE HER CONCERN...
PART OF A TRACKT'S DUTY IS TO PROTECT THOSE IN DANGER. THE OTHER MASTRELLS WERE RECENTLY ASSASSINATED. THE SAME MIGHT HAPPEN TO YOU.
...BUT THAT I AM CONFIDENT IN MY ABILITY TO TAKE CARE OF MYSELF.
THE HIGH JUDGE INSISTS.
SO YOU'RE A SPY, THEN?
FINE.
THEN FOLLOW ME IF YOU WISH--
--OR RATHER, IF YOU CAN!
YES, I'VE HEARD OF YOU, SENIOR TRACKT AIS.
HEELIS NOT ONLY SENT YOU AS A SPY, SHE PICKED YOU AS THE SINGLE MOST ANTAGONISTIC TRACKT SHE COULD FIND, ONE WHO LOATHES THE SAND MASTERS AND EVERYTHING WE REPRESENT.

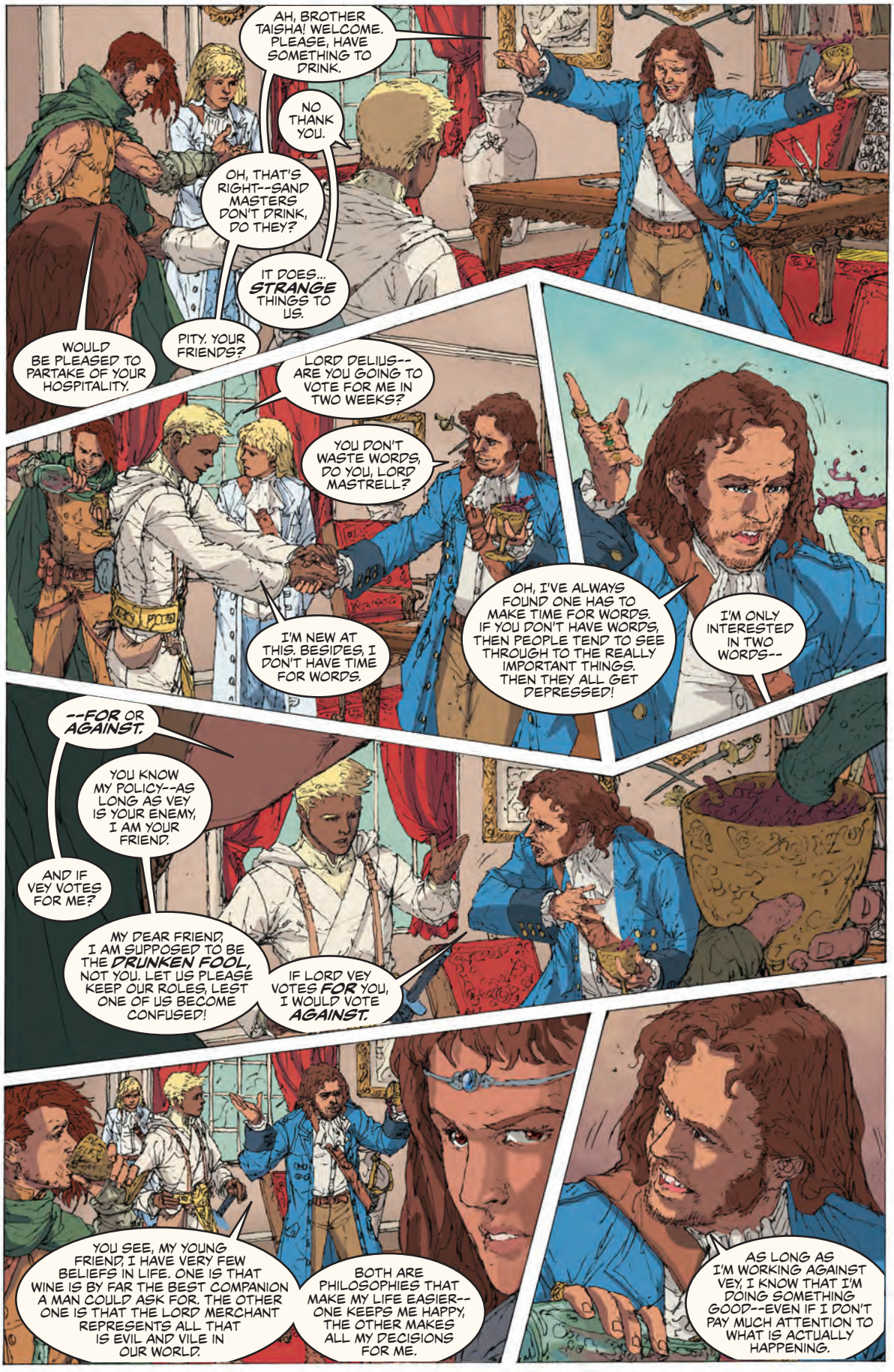

WHO'S THAT?
NO ONE OF IMPORTANCE.
KENTON...?
I JUST DID WHAT DRILE WOULD DO. SHOT THAT WOMAN DOWN BECAUSE OF WHAT SHE REPRESENTS.
AND, YOU KNOW WHAT--?
--THAT'S NOT GOING TO BE ME, ANYMORE.
I APOLOGIZE FOR MY RUDENESS, SENIOR. IT'S BEEN A DIFFICULT FEW DAYS. I WILL LIFT YOU UP TO THE BALCONY, IF YOU WISH.
I MUST REFUSE.
I WOULD SOONER DIE THAN LET YOUR UNHOLY SAND TOUCH MY SKIN.
I SEE. THEN, THERE ARE SEVERAL LADDERS YOU MAY USE. AND MY APOLOGY STILL REMAINS ON OFFER.
UNDERSTOOD.

Day 55. The sand mages--the sand masters--are real, but they're infuriating. It's hard to tell if they'll be any help against the Dynasty at all.
And it seems they have problems of their own...
ARGH! THAT KENTON IS...IS...
...NOT WHAT I EXPECTED!
ALL THE POWERFUL SAND MASTERS WERE KILLED. WORD IS KENTON IS QUITE WEAK, YET IT STILL FALLS ON HIS SHOULDERS TO SAVE THE DIEM.
It's possible Gevin met with the former leaders of the Diem, the ones we found dead on the sands. If that's the case, it's impossible to know the results of that meeting since only the young and inexperienced sand masters remain.
We're at square one with the Diem, which might not be so bad...
THEN THE DIEM'S DOOMED. KENTON HAS ALL THE DIPLOMACY OF THOSE BLASTED DORIM VINES HE SHOWED US.
THE ONES THAT MELT THE SHELL OFF ANY CRITTER THAT EATS THEM?
EXACTLY, PROFESSOR! THE SAND MASTERS ARE DOOMED.
PERHAPS, PERHAPS NOT. IT SOUNDS LIKE WHAT THEY NEED, DUCHESS--
--IS A SKILLED DIPLOMAT ON THEIR SIDE.
PROFESSOR CYNDER, NOW THAT IS AN EXCELLENT SUGGESTION...


WELL? WHAT DO YOU THINK?
THE DIEM'S SITUATION IS BAD, OLD FRIEND. THE TAISHIN WANT TO DISBAND YOU, PROMPTED BY THE RICH KELZIN LANDOWNERS ON ONE SIDE AND THE RISING POWER OF THE KER'REEN CHURCH ON THE OTHER. THEY'RE CHIPPING AWAY AT YOUR AUTONOMY FROM ALL SIDES.
AND YOU'RE IN DEBT. YOU KNOW, I DIDN'T KNOW NUMBERS WENT THIS HIGH UNTIL YOU SHOWED ME THIS LEDGER.
OKAY, SO FORGETTING THE HIGH JUDGE, WHO DO YOU GO TO? VEY'S A KERZTIAN. HIS PEOPLE MIGHT ASSASSINATE HIM IF HE VOTED IN YOUR FAVOR. RAAGENT RESPECTED YOUR FATHER, IF NOT THE SAND MASTERS.
RAAGENT BLAMES ME FOR YOU RUNNING AWAY.
AH. THAT I DID NOT KNOW.
THOSE REPORTS CAME FROM THE LORD MERCHANT. I THINK MY FATHER KEPT THEM AS A KIND OF TROPHY, PROOF OF THE DIEM'S ABILITY TO IGNORE CONVENTIONAL LAW.
NOT HERE, THAT'S FOR SURE. I'M GOING TO HAVE TO VISIT EACH OF THE TAISHIN AND TRY TO TALK THEM INTO VOTING FOR ME.
THIS SAYS YOU OWE SEVEN MILLION LAK! DO THAT MANY COINS EVEN EXIST?
THEN WHAT ABOUT DELIUS? I ASSUME THE OLD SOT IS STILL LORD ADMIRAL?
THE HELM'S GREATEST EMBARRASSMENT, AS ALWAYS.
BUT THE LORD ADMIRAL HAS BEEN MY ALLY IN THE PAST, EVEN IF HIS VOTE WAS ONLY CIRCUMSTANTIAL. THAT'S BETTER THAN I'VE GOTTEN FROM ANYONE ELSE.
I WAS HOPING YOU'D PICK DELIUS. I COULD USE SOMETHING TO DRINK!

THE LORD ADMIRAL'S.
LOOK OUT BELOW!
HAH-HAH-HAH! THE WAY THOSE LITTLE PEOPLE SCURRY OUT OF THE PATH OF CHEAP WINE, STILL, IT'S PROBABLY MORE THAN THEY COULD AFFORD WITH A YEAR'S WAGES!
I'M SORRY, I FORGOT-- ARE YOU STILL HERE?
WE HAVEN'T HAD OUR AUDIENCE YET, LORD ADMIRAL.
WELL, WHAT DID YOU WANT?
WE BRING A REQUEST FROM THE CIRCLE. THEY WERE HOPING TO CONVINCE YOU TO CURB YOUR DRINKING.
CURB MY DRINKING? WHY, HOW WOULD I SPEND MY TIME?
THERE ARE MANY OTHER THINGS YOU COULD TRY, MY LORD. BALLS, PLAYS, BOAT RACES...
BORING, BORING, AND BORING!
NO, I SHALL FACE THIS WORLD DRUNK, OR I SHAN'T FACE IT AT ALL. THANK YOU FOR THE SUGGESTION, BUT SINCE I JUDGE IT TO BE INANE, I SHALL IGNORE IT.
STEWARD, DO YOU THINK WE COULD KNOCK DOWN A FEW BUILDINGS TO MAKE THIS VIEW MORE PICTURESQUE?
MMM, PERHAPS, MY LORD.
FIND YOUR WAY OUT, DOUBTLESS TO A PLAY OR BALL RACE OR... BOAT SOMETHING.
YES, LORD ADMIRAL.

THE LORD ADMIRAL IS BECOMING AN EMBARRASS-MENT!
THERE'S NO BECOMING ABOUT IT--HE'S...
SHH! NO NEED TO ADVERTIZE IT.
THEY SHOULD HAVE BOWED TO YOU. YOU'RE THE LORD MASTRELL.
THEY LOOKED PREOCCUPIED.
YOU MEAN INFURIATED.
A LITTLE LIKE YOUR CHEERY NEW SHADOW.
I FEEL LIKE SHE'S WATCHING ME ALMOST AS MUCH AS SHE'S WATCHING YOU.
OH, HER?
AARIK, THIS IS AIS, JUDGE HEELIS'S SPY.
HELLO AGAIN.
THANK YOU. WE'VE ALREADY MET.
MY LORD WILL SEE YOU NOW, LORD MASTRELL.
YOU KNOW, BUDDY, SELLING THIS PLACE COULD PAY YOUR DEBTS WITH SOME LEFT OVER.
THIS IS NOT THE TIME, AARIK.


AH, BROTHER TAISHA! WELCOME. PLEASE, HAVE SOMETHING TO DRINK.
NO THANK YOU.
OH, THAT'S RIGHT--SAND MASTERS DON'T DRINK, DO THEY?
IT DOES... STRANGE THINGS TO US.
WOULD BE PLEASED TO PARTAKE OF YOUR HOSPITALITY.
PITY. YOUR FRIENDS?
LORD DELIUS--ARE YOU GOING TO VOTE FOR ME IN TWO WEEKS?
YOU DON'T WASTE WORDS, DO YOU, LORD MASTRELL?
I'M NEW AT THIS. BESIDES, I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR WORDS.
OH, I'VE ALWAYS FOUND ONE HAS TO MAKE TIME FOR WORDS. IF YOU DON'T HAVE WORDS, THEN PEOPLE TEND TO SEE THROUGH TO THE REALLY IMPORTANT THINGS. THEN THEY ALL GET DEPRESSED!
I'M ONLY INTERESTED IN TWO WORDS--
--FOR OR AGAINST.
YOU KNOW MY POLICY--AS LONG AS VEY IS YOUR ENEMY, I AM YOUR FRIEND.
AND IF VEY VOTES FOR ME?
MY DEAR FRIEND, I AM SUPPOSED TO BE THE DRUNKEN FOOL, NOT YOU. LET US PLEASE KEEP OUR ROLES, LEST ONE OF US BECOME CONFUSED!
IF LORD VEY VOTES FOR YOU, I WOULD VOTE AGAINST.
YOU SEE, MY YOUNG FRIEND, I HAVE VERY FEW BELIEFS IN LIFE. ONE IS THAT WINE IS BY FAR THE BEST COMPANION A MAN COULD ASK FOR. THE OTHER ONE IS THAT THE LORD MERCHANT REPRESENTS ALL THAT IS EVIL AND VILE IN OUR WORLD.
BOTH ARE PHILOSOPHIES THAT MAKE MY LIFE EASIER--ONE KEEPS ME HAPPY, THE OTHER MAKES ALL MY DECISIONS FOR ME.
AS LONG AS I'M WORKING AGAINST VEY, I KNOW THAT I'M DOING SOMETHING GOOD--EVEN IF I DON'T PAY MUCH ATTENTION TO WHAT IS ACTUALLY HAPPENING.

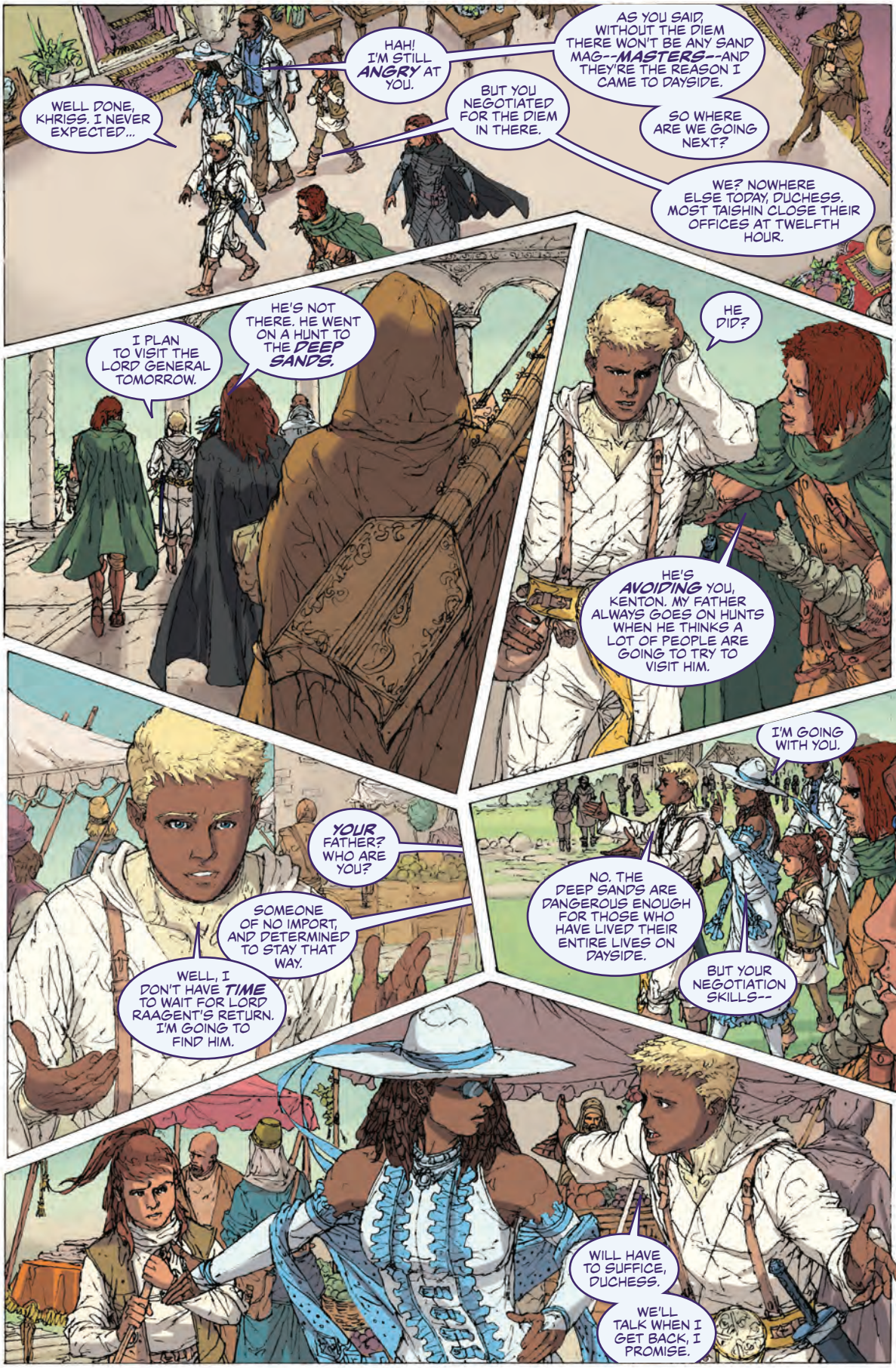
LORD ADMIRAL, MY CAUSE IS JUST.
HONESTLY, I'D RATHER NOT HAVE TO THINK ABOUT IT.
AND ANYWAY, IT WOULD TAKE MORE LAK THAN STONE CAN MAKE TO CONVINCE VEY TO VOTE FOR YOU.
HOLLOW SUPPORT CAN BE WORSE THAN NO SUPPORT AT ALL, DELIUS.
YOU'RE TENSE, YOUNG MAN, PROBABLY DUE TO A LIFETIME WITHOUT DRINK.
I DOUBT I AM THE ONE YOU NEED TO BE ARGUING WITH.
:SIGH: THANK YOU FOR SEEING ME, MY LORD. I'LL BE LEAVING NOW.
AND A GOOD DAY TO YOU, MY LORD. CHIN CHIN!
MAY I OFFER A MORE REALISTIC PERSPECTIVE THAN YOUR OPTIMISTIC FRIEND HERE?
YOU KNOW THAT YOUR TASK IS FUTILE, RY'KENSHA. EVEN THOSE WHO VOTE FOR YOU DON'T REALLY SUPPORT YOU. IT IS THE SAND LORD'S JUDGMENT.
YEAH, WELL, FUTILE TASKS ARE THE ONES I'M BEST AT.
THAT MAN STILL APPRECIATES HIS WINE, I SEE.
I WAS HOPING HE WOULD APPRECIATE MORE THAN THAT. MAYBE I'VE BEEN KIDDING MYSELF ALL THIS TIME.
KENTON, YOU SHOULDN'T LOSE HOPE YET.

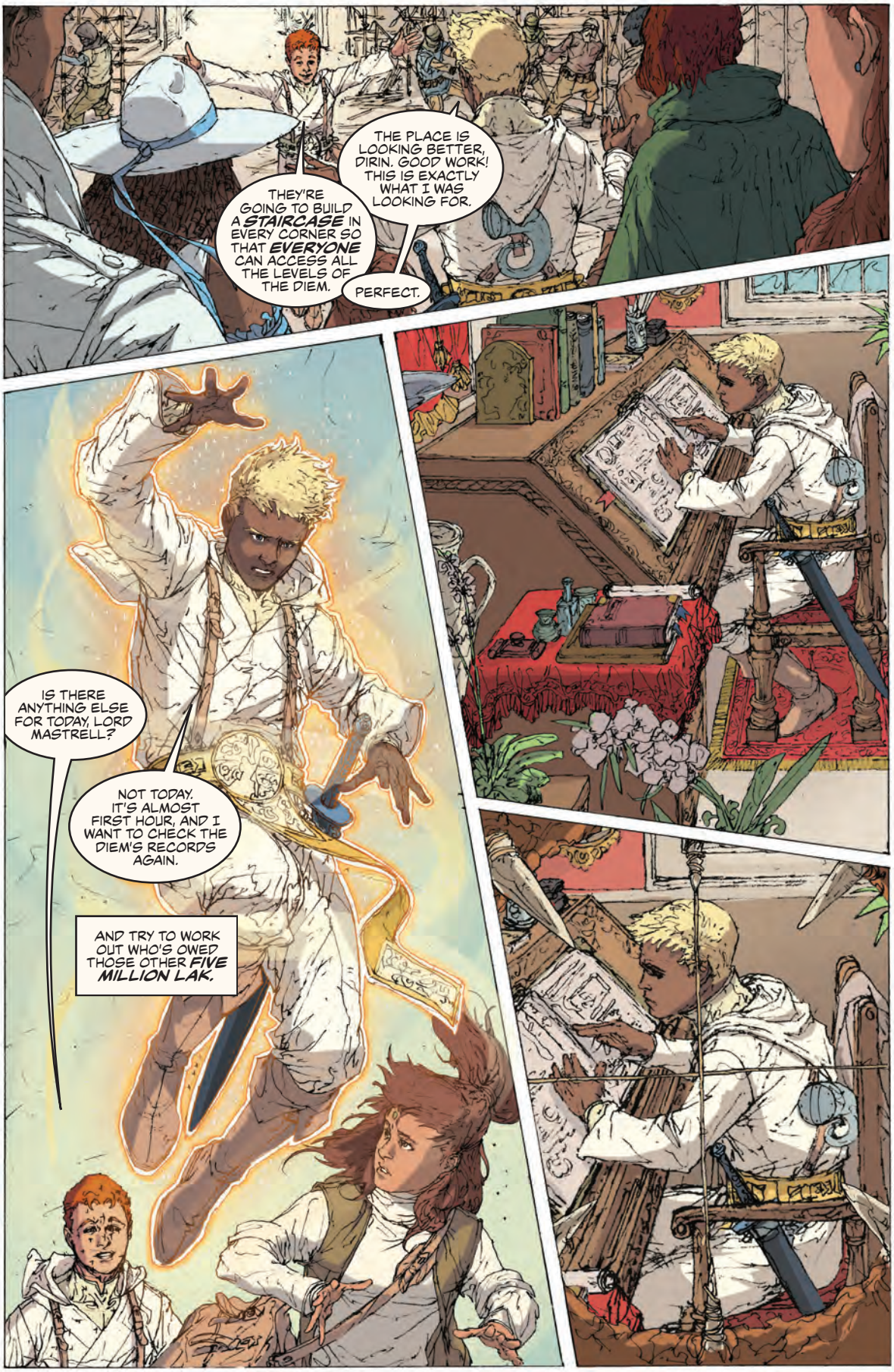
THAT BOY NEEDS TO LEARN THAT EVERY CONVERSATION DOESN'T HAVE TO BE AN ARGUMENT.
STEWARD-- WHAT OPINION WOULD YOU SAY THE KELZIN HAVE OF THE MASTRELLS?
THEY HATE THEM. MANY KELZIN ARE KERZTIAN, AND THOSE WHO AREN'T ARE USUALLY KER'REEN.
BESIDES, IT IS THE NATURE OF THE WEALTHY TO HATE ANYONE MORE INFLUENTIAL THAN THEMSELVES.
QUITE.

"STILL, I WONDER WHERE HE'LL LAND NEXT."
YOU'RE LATE!
I'M LATE?! WHAT ARE YOU EVEN DOING HERE, KHRISSALLA?!
ISN'T THAT OBVIOUS? I'M WAITING FOR YOU.
YOU ARE?! KHRISS, I HAVE MY OWN WORRIES RIGHT NOW--I HAVE TO SEE THE LORD ARTISAN ABOUT A TRICKY SITUATION--
--WHICH I'VE BEEN WAITING HERE SINCE ELEVENTH HOUR TO HELP YOU WITH. HENCE, YOU'RE LATE.
LORD MASTRELL, WE ARE HONORED TO RECEIVE YOU AT THIS TIME.
THE LORD ARTISAN WILL SEE YOU IMMEDIATELY.
KHRISS, I GOTTA RUN.
I SAID I'M HERE TO HELP YOU, KENTON...
...SO TELL HIM I'M WITH YOU!
...
OKAY, BUT TRY TO RESTRICT YOURSELF TO A DOZEN OR TWO QUESTIONS-- THE LORD ARTISAN IS A BUSY MAN.
LORD MASTRELL, YOU TRAVEL WITH A LARGE GROUP.
I'VE FOUND MY COMPANY HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY POPULAR SINCE WE LAST SAW ONE ANOTHER, LORD ARTISAN.
YOU'LL FIND SUCH IS THE NORM FOR THOSE IN OUR POSITION. HOW CAN I HELP YOU?
I NEED YOUR VOTE, LORD RITE.

THE DIEM HAS BEEN TREATED UNFAIRLY AND NOW ITS OPPONENTS ARE TAKING ADVANTAGE OF ITS WEAKNESS.
MY ONLY CONCERN IS FOR THOSE WHO HAVE ELECTED ME, AND IT IS IN THEIR INTEREST THAT I VOTED AGAINST YOU.
THE NEW A'KAR IS CALLING FOR BLOOD. I'VE TRAINED WITH THE TOWER SOLDIERS.
I CAN BRING THAT MARTIAL PROWESS TO THE DIEM TO TRANSFORM US INTO THE ELITE GUARD WE WERE ALWAYS MEANT TO BE.
I DON'T KNOW ABOUT THE A'KAR AND HIS WARRIOR-PRIESTS, BUT I DO WORRY ABOUT A BIGGER THREAT TO LOSSAND'S AUTONOMY.
THE SAND MASTERS ARE WITHOUT LAW, KENTON. THEIR MASTRELLS TAKE WITHOUT NEED AND GIVE NOTHING BACK. THEY OFFER NO GOODS AND PERFORM NO SERVICE. I CANNOT, WITH GOOD CONSCIENCE, ALLOW THAT TO CONTINUE.
MY LORD, WHAT YOU SAY--
KENTON, ASK WHAT KIND OF RECOMPENSE WOULD HE NEED TO FORGIVE YOUR TRESPASS?
AND SO, KENTON TRANSLATES...
LEDGERS HAVE BEEN KEPT OF WHAT THE DIEM OWES MY PROFESSION, MISS. BUT IT ISN'T WHAT'S OWED--IT'S THE POSSIBILITY OF FUTURE THEFT THAT WORRIES ME.
AND WHAT IF THE THEFTS STOPPED? WHAT IF THE DIEM PAID BACK ITS DEBTS?
I DON'T SEE HOW. THE ONLY MONEY THE DIEM HAS IS GIFTED FROM THE OTHER PROFESSIONS.
BUT CAN YOU IGNORE THAT SAND MASTERY IS A WONDROUS TOOL?
UNFORTUNATELY, ITS PRACTITIONERS HAVE SQUANDERED ITS POTENTIAL.
THAT CAN CHANGE. YOU YOURSELF SAID THE FUTURE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE PAST.
IS THERE NO WAY THAT THE SAND MASTERS COULD BE OF USE TO YOUR MEMBERS? ON A PERCENTAGE BASIS PERHAPS, TO PROVIDE AN INCENTIVE FOR THEM TO COOPERATE.

SOME SAND MASTERS CAN LIFT MORE THAN TEN PEOPLE AND DRILL THROUGH STONE WITH THEIR RIBBONS. THOSE SORTS OF ABILITIES COULD BE EXTREMELY USEFUL TO MANY OF THE PROFESSIONS AND SUB-PROFESSIONS.
THE PROPOSAL WHICH YOUR ASSOCIATE PRESENTS HAS MERIT, LORD MASTRELL. YOU SHOULD HAVE PUT THIS FORWARD SOONER.
IT IS A... RELATIVELY NEW PROPOSAL, LORD ARTISAN.
BUT THE OFFER IS THERE, IF YOU WOULD CONSIDER IT.
I ACCEPT.
PROVIDED THAT THE DIEM CAN PAY BACK ITS DEBTS AS A SIGN OF GOOD FAITH.
SEVEN MILLION LAK IS UNFORTUNATELY BEYOND--
SEVEN MILLION? I DON'T KNOW WHERE YOUR INFORMATION COMES FROM, LORD MASTRELL--
--BUT OUR RECORDS SAY YOU OWE ONE AND A HALF MILLION, AND TO THE LORD FARMER AND THE FIELDS ANOTHER HALF MILLION.
THEN YOU'LL GET YOUR LAK, MY LORD.
I HAVE OFTEN WONDERED WHAT OUR TWO PROFESSIONS COULD ACCOMPLISH WORKING TOGETHER. OVER THE YEARS, I'VE OFFERED THE DIEM MANY PROPOSALS SIMILAR TO OUR AGREEMENT BUT WAS ALWAYS REJECTED.
THANK YOU FOR YOUR VISIT, LORD MASTRELL.
I'M ENCOURAGED BY HIS WORDS, BUT ALSO PERPLEXED BY HIS RECORDS. IF THE ARTISANS AND THE FIELDS OWN TWO MILLION OF OUR DEBT, THEN TO WHOM DOES THE DIEM OWE THE OTHER FIVE MILLION?


WELL DONE, KHRISS. I NEVER EXPECTED...
HAH! I'M STILL ANGRY AT YOU.
BUT YOU NEGOTIATED FOR THE DIEM IN THERE.
AS YOU SAID, WITHOUT THE DIEM THERE WON'T BE ANY SAND MAG--MASTERS--AND THEY'RE THE REASON I CAME TO DAYSIDE.
SO WHERE ARE WE GOING NEXT?
WE? NOWHERE ELSE TODAY, DUCHESS. MOST TAISHIN CLOSE THEIR OFFICES AT TWELFTH HOUR.
I PLAN TO VISIT THE LORD GENERAL TOMORROW.
HE'S NOT THERE. HE WENT ON A HUNT TO THE DEEP SANDS.
HE DID?
HE'S AVOIDING YOU, KENTON. MY FATHER ALWAYS GOES ON HUNTS WHEN HE THINKS A LOT OF PEOPLE ARE GOING TO TRY TO VISIT HIM.
I'M GOING WITH YOU.
NO. THE DEEP SANDS ARE DANGEROUS ENOUGH FOR THOSE WHO HAVE LIVED THEIR ENTIRE LIVES ON DAYSIDE.
BUT YOUR NEGOTIATION SKILLS--
YOUR FATHER? WHO ARE YOU?
SOMEONE OF NO IMPORT, AND DETERMINED TO STAY THAT WAY.
WELL, I DON'T HAVE TIME TO WAIT FOR LORD RAAGENT'S RETURN. I'M GOING TO FIND HIM.
WILL HAVE TO SUFFICE, DUCHESS.
WE'LL TALK WHEN I GET BACK, I PROMISE.


THEY'RE GOING TO BUILD A STAIRCASE IN EVERY CORNER SO THAT EVERYONE CAN ACCESS ALL THE LEVELS OF THE DIEM.
THE PLACE IS LOOKING BETTER, DIRIN. GOOD WORK! THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT I WAS LOOKING FOR.
PERFECT.
IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE FOR TODAY, LORD MASTRELL?
NOT TODAY. IT'S ALMOST FIRST HOUR, AND I WANT TO CHECK THE DIEM'S RECORDS AGAIN.
AND TRY TO WORK OUT WHO'S OWED THOSE OTHER FIVE MILLION LAK.

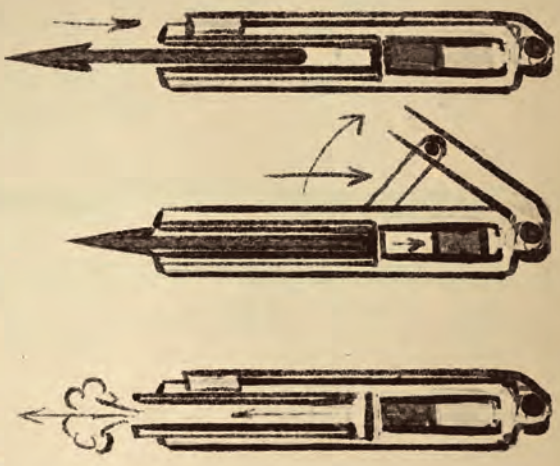
Assassins

Interestingly, in Kerzta, using assassins is allowed, as directed by the A'kar, for certain instances under Ker'reen law. There are even Dai Keen markings that publicly designate assassins, an announcement that would get one incarcerated or worse on Darkside, where assassination is done in the shadows and is certainly not socially acceptable, though for some reason dueling still is.

On Dayside, sending assassins is more of a personal declaration of war by an individual, family, or Dai Keen against another. The Sand Lord's will is apparently made known when either the target or the leader of the assassins is killed, ending the vendetta for at least one year.

Zinkallin

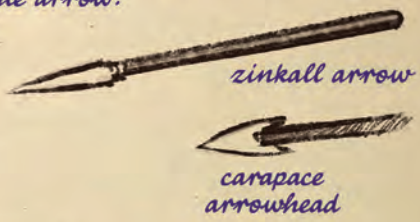
Most assassins, warriors, soldiers, and trackts I've seen on Dayside carry zinkallin, which seem to be the preferred method of duels, battles, and self-defense, unless one is a sand master, in which case they just form knifelike ribbons or projectiles out of sand and command them toward their enemies at breakneck speed. (We must find a way to bring sand mastery to Elis.)

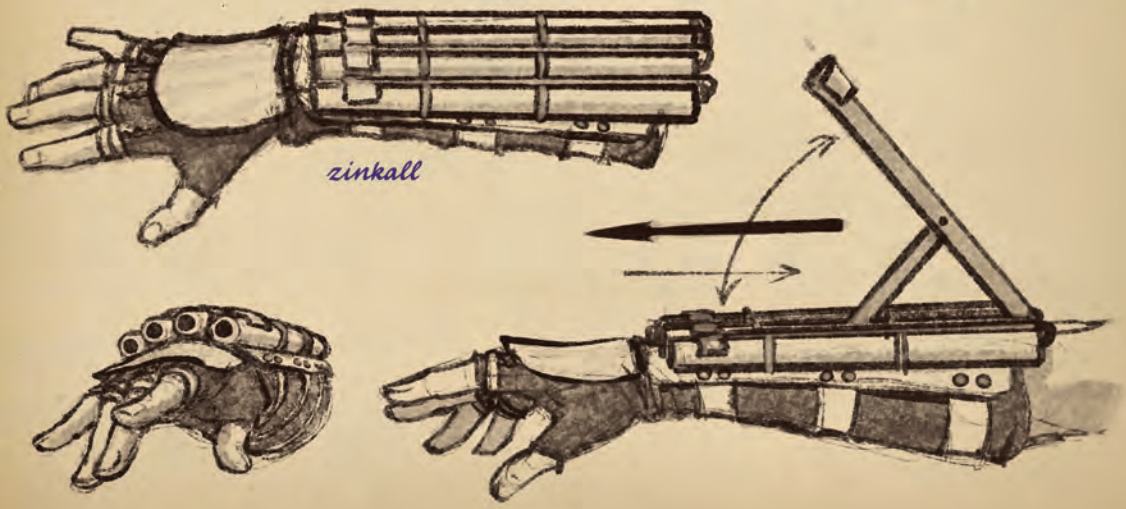


Zinkallin, while innovative, still lack the power of guns, or even of a standard crossbow. What they lose in power, however, they make up for in convenience to carry and ease of use.

Though they shoot arrows, zinkallin aren't used in exactly the same way as bows are. Zinkallin are generally for short range combat, to wound an opponent before engaging them with a sword. The best Kerztian warriors, however, are good enough shots to incapacitate or kill with a single arrow.

Arrows are loaded in front, and then the mechanism is pumped, making it ready to fire. With a flick of the wrist, air pressure is released, along with an arrow, which is somewhere in size between a dart and a full Darkside bolt.





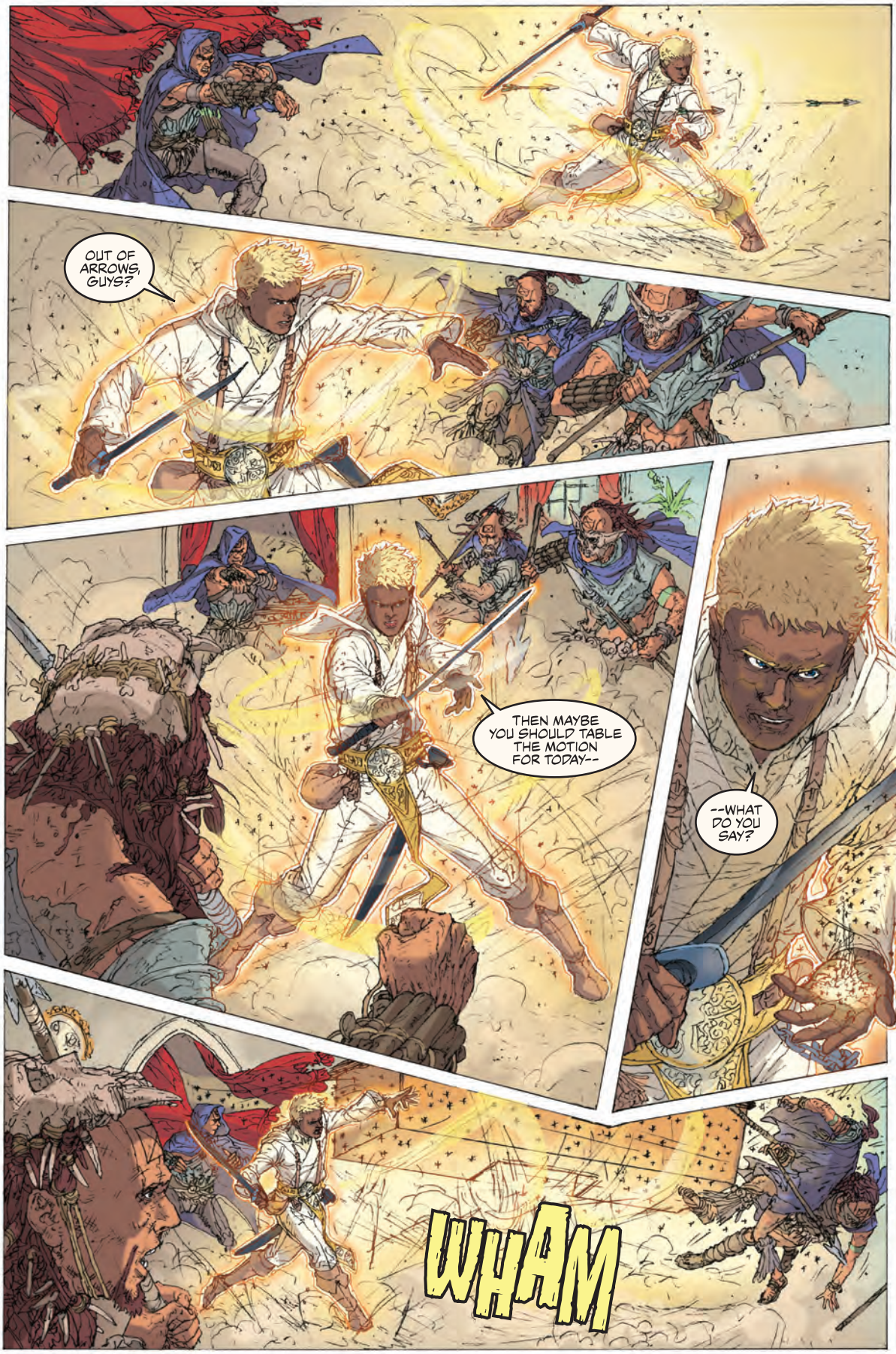
CHAPTER 8
MY ASSASSINS

PFF--
WHO--?
FFFT
THUD
OKAY, HERE'S SOMEONE WHO HATES PAPERWORK AS MUCH AS I DO!
FFFT
FFFT
FFFT
THUD
THUD
THUD

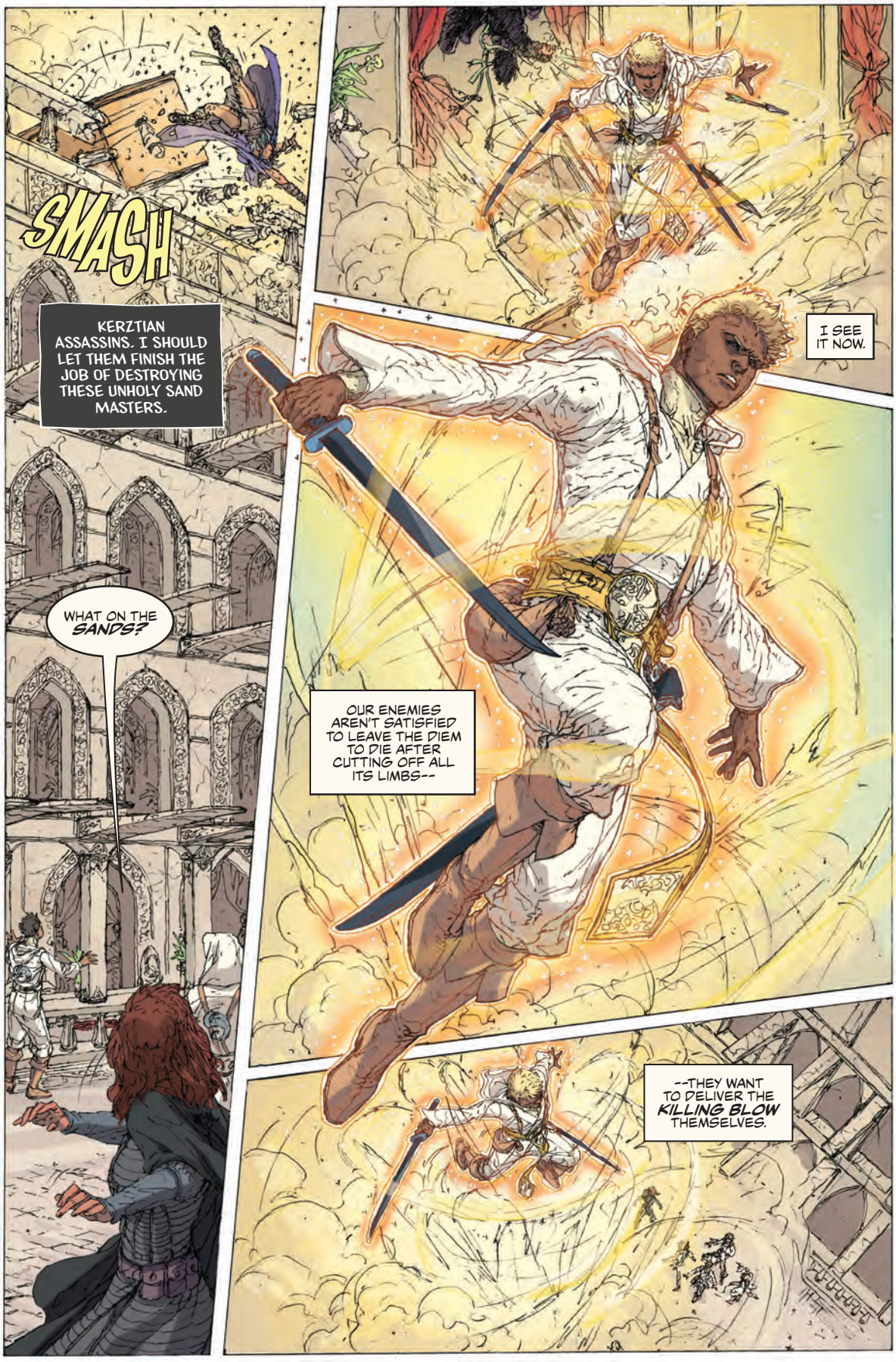
MY SAND BURSTS TO LIFE WITH A FLASH.
SHHHHHHH
I SEND THE RIBBON DIRECTLY TOWARD THE ASSASSIN'S CHEST.
WHAT THE--?!
FFFT
THE SAND TURNS BLACK AND SPRAYS OFF MY OPPONENT'S ARMOR LIKE WATER SPLASHING AGAINST A STONE WALL.
THEY'RE...TERKEN! IMPERVIOUS TO SAND MASTERY!
SO, I CAN'T TOUCH THESE ASSASSINS DIRECTLY WITH SAND MASTERY... GOT TO THINK QUICK.

THEY THINK THEY HAVE ME TRAPPED, BUT THE ROOM'S TOO SMALL FOR A GROUP ATTACK. WHICH MAKES IT...
CLANG
...ONE ON ONE!
DID YOU HEAR SOMETHING?
PROBABLY JUST KENTON TRYING TO FIGURE OUT HIS FATHER'S FILING SYSTEM.
GOOD LUCK WITH THAT!
WHERE--?!
SLASH
GUNNNGH!

THUD
THUD
FFFT
FFFT
AISHA!
THUD
I DODGE AND THROW UP A RIBBON OF SAND TO CATCH THE ARROW--
AISHA! SOME OF THE ARROWS ARE TERKEN TOO!
SAND MASTERY WON'T STOP THEM. I'VE GOT TO RELY ON MY REFLEXES AND DODGE!

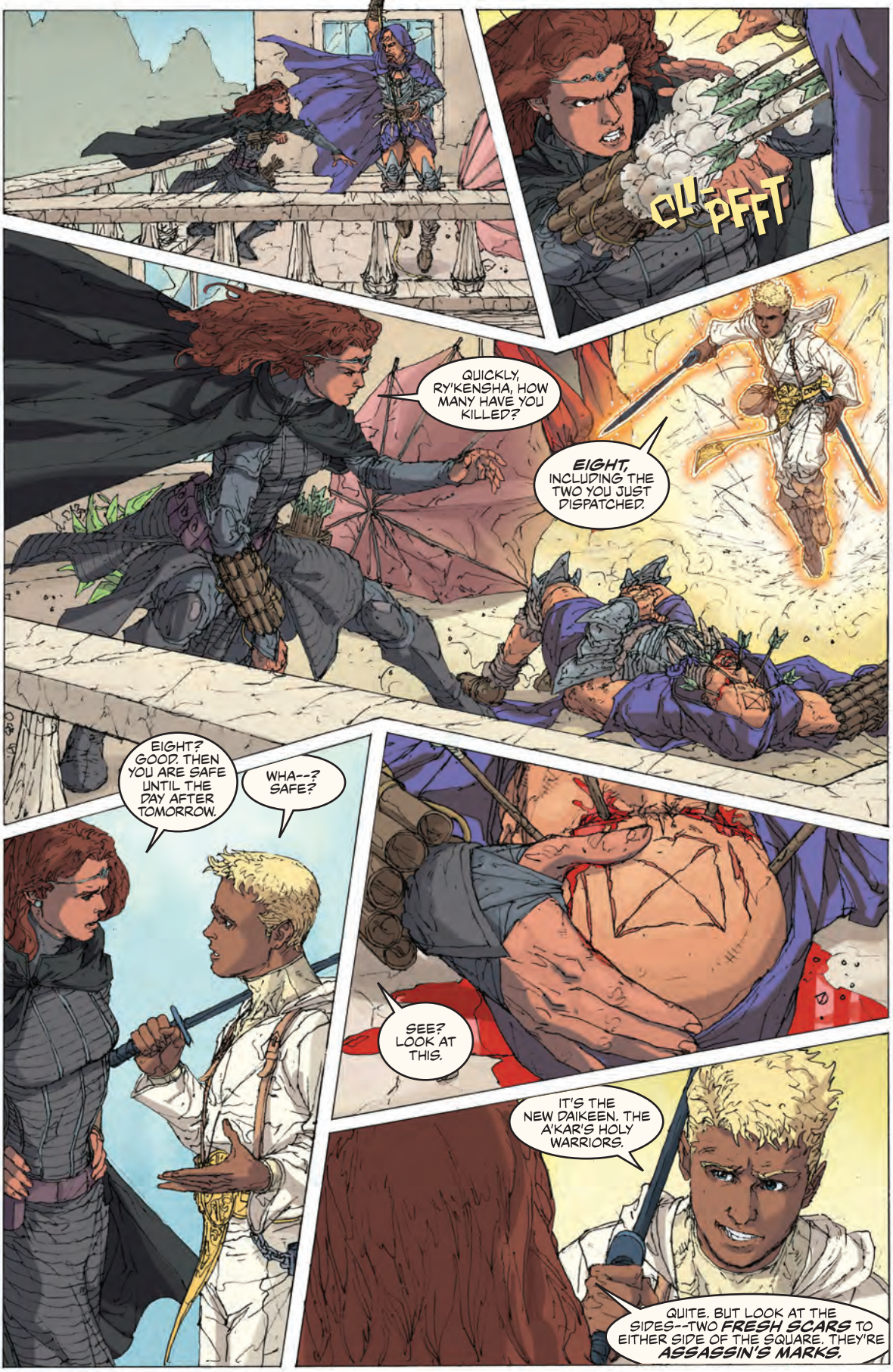

OUT OF ARROWS, GUYS?
THEN MAYBE YOU SHOULD TABLE THE MOTION FOR TODAY--
--WHAT DO YOU SAY?
WHAM

I GUESS THEY TOLD YOU THAT YOU'D BE IMPERVIOUS TO SAND.
BUT THEY DIDN'T TELL YOU THAT SAND DOESN'T HAVE TO TOUCH YOU--
THUD
--TO BE DEADLY!
UNGH!
CRUNCH

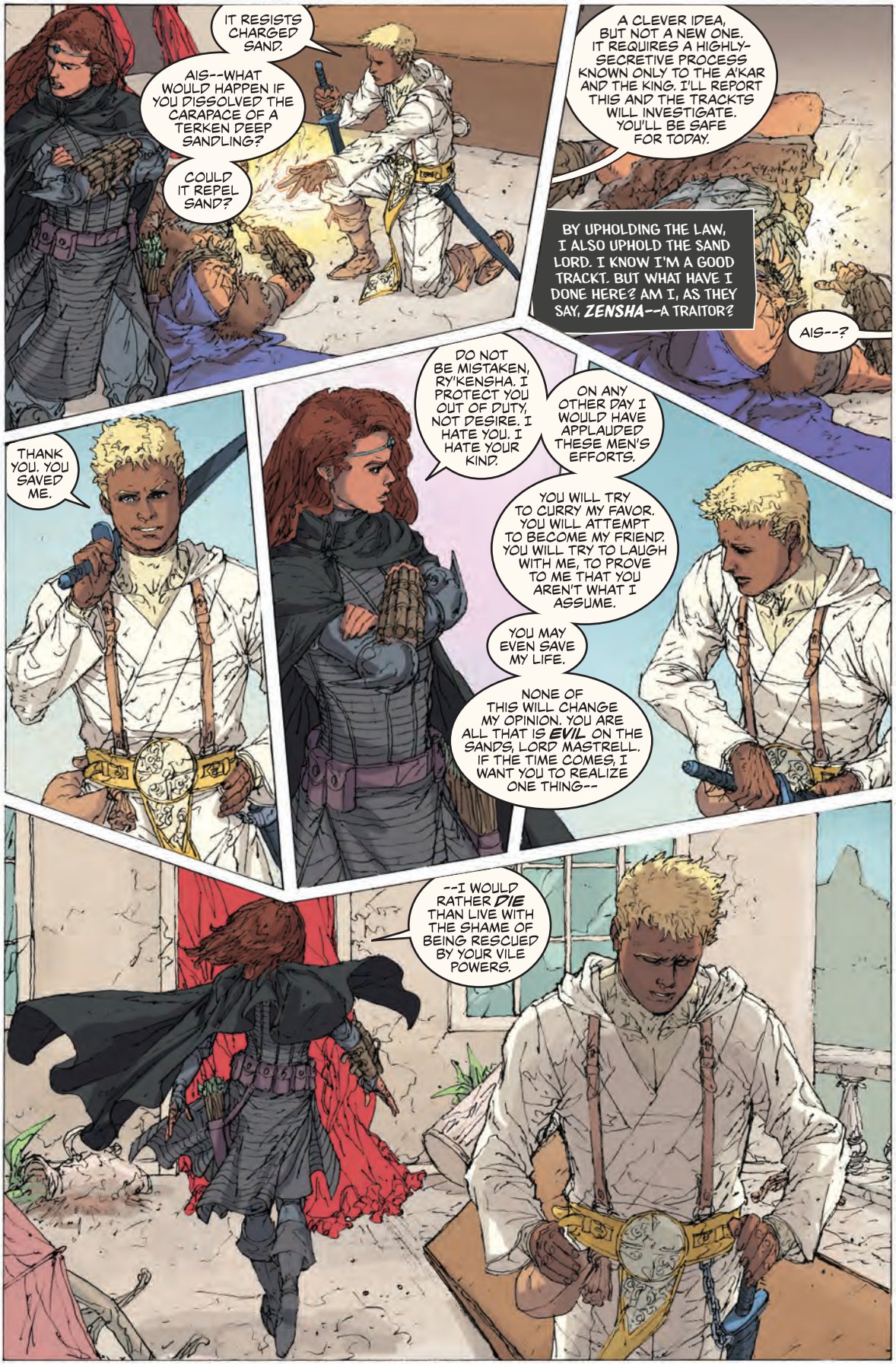

SMASH
KERZTIAN ASSASSINS. I SHOULD LET THEM FINISH THE JOB OF DESTROYING THESE UNHOLY SAND MASTERS.
WHAT ON THE SANDS?
I SEE IT NOW.
OUR ENEMIES AREN'T SATISFIED TO LEAVE THE DIEM TO DIE AFTER CUTTING OFF ALL ITS LIMBS--
--THEY WANT TO DELIVER THE KILLING BLOW THEMSELVES.

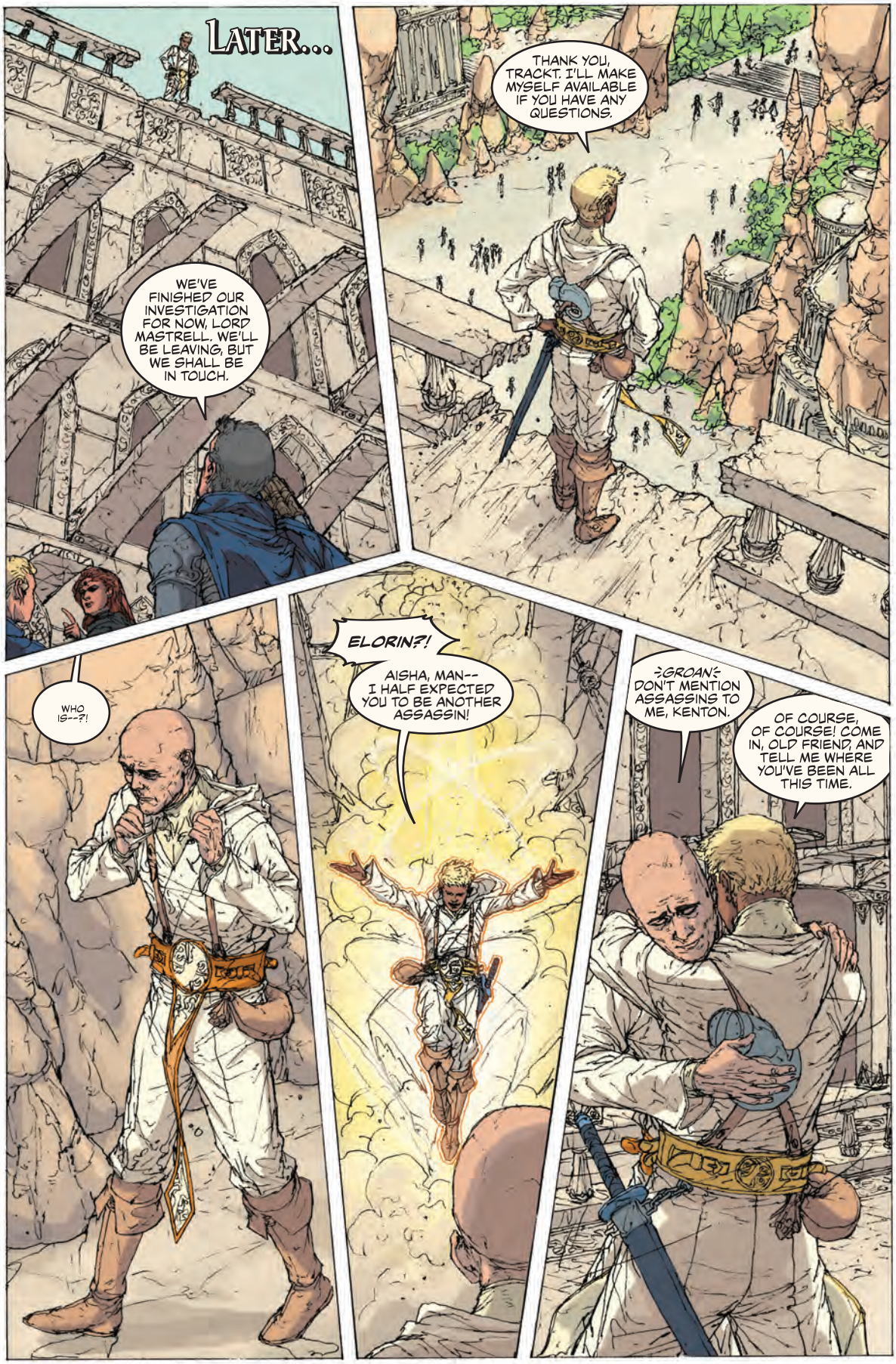
SANDS! MUST I CHOOSE BETWEEN MY KERZTIAN BROTHERS AND SISTERS AND UPHOLDING THE LAW?
TOO LATE. I ALREADY CHOSE WHEN I AGREED TO JUDGE HEELIS'S REQUEST...
I'M COMING, LORD MASTRELL!
HE'S ABOVE US!
YEARGHHHH!

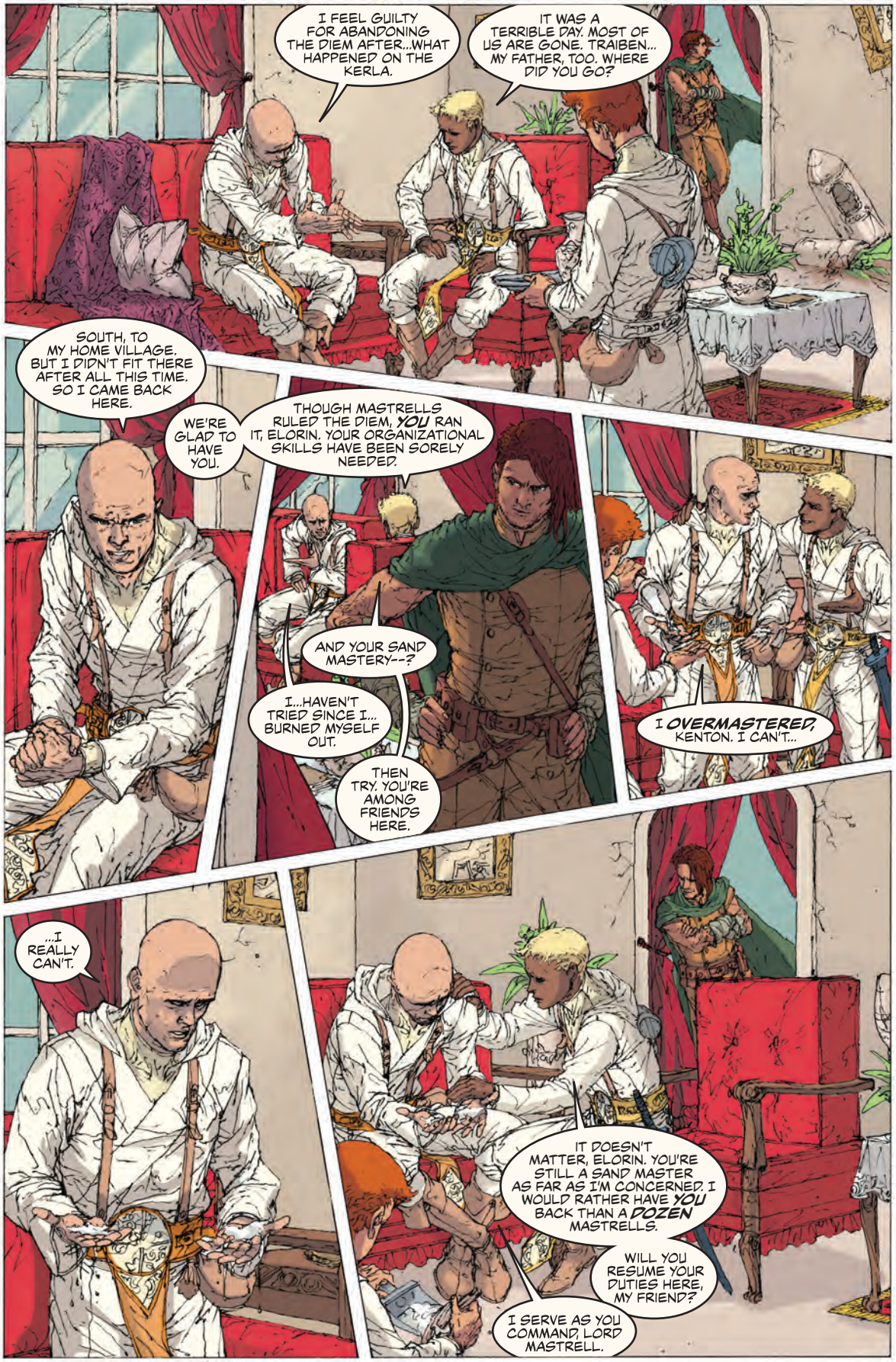
TWO AGAINST ONE. AND THEY'RE TOO FAR FOR ME TO REACH. GOING TO HAVE TO...
...DODGE...?
WHU--?!
SLICE
ARRRGHHHH!
AHHHHHHH!
PROTECTING SAND MASTERS AGAINST MY FELLOW KERZTIANS--MY SENSE OF SELF-LOATHING ALMOST OVERWHELMS ME.
BUT I AM ABLE TO QUELL THE BEAST WITHIN. IF BARELY. MY MIND IS CLEAR AND MY MOVEMENTS CALCULATED AND PRECISE.


CU-PFFT
QUICKLY, RY'KENSHA, HOW MANY HAVE YOU KILLED?
EIGHT, INCLUDING THE TWO YOU JUST DISPATCHED.
EIGHT? GOOD. THEN YOU ARE SAFE UNTIL THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW.
WHA--? SAFE?
SEE? LOOK AT THIS.
IT'S THE NEW DAIKEEN. THE A'KAR'S HOLY WARRIORS.
QUITE. BUT LOOK AT THE SIDES--TWO FRESH SCARS TO EITHER SIDE OF THE SQUARE. THEY'RE ASSASSIN'S MARKS.

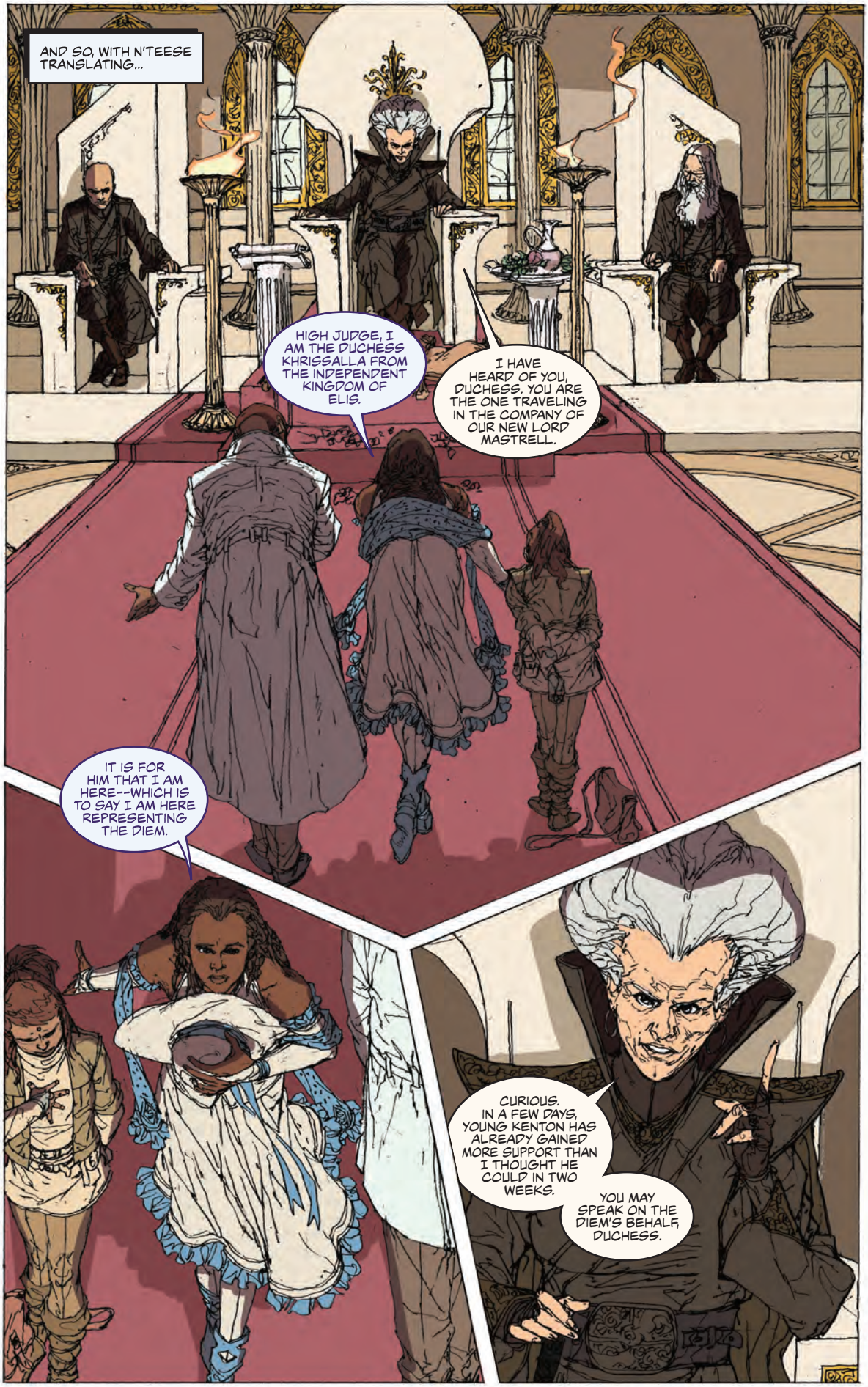
IT MEANS THAT YOU'VE BEEN TARGETED AS AN ENEMY OF THE KERZTIAN PEOPLE. OR AT LEAST THE ENEMY OF THE A'KAR.
BUT ALL SAND MASTERS ARE THE KERZTIANS' ENEMIES, AREN'T THEY?
THIS IS DIFFERENT. THE A'KAR HAS GIVEN A SPECIFIC FAMILY THE TASK OF KILLING YOU. IT IS A FORMAL CHARGE.
THEY MAY SEND UP TO EIGHT WARRIORS EVERY OTHER DAY UNTIL THEY SUCCEED...
...OR UNTIL YOU KILL THEIR LEADER. DEFEAT HIM AND ASSASSINS CAN'T BE SENT AGAINST YOU FOR ONE YEAR.
BUT WHO'S THEIR LEADER?
USUALLY IT'S THE FAMILY HEAD, THOUGH NOT NECESSARILY. IF THE A'KAR GIVES THE TASK TO A MEMBER OF A FAMILY WITH FEW WARRIORS, HE COULD ASSIGN A DIFFERENT FAMILY TO HELP.
BUT THE ASSASSINS' LEADER WILL PERSONALLY DIRECT THE ATTACKS, SO THEY WILL BE CLOSE--IN KEZARE SOMEWHERE.
AND LOOK AT THIS. DISSOLVED CARAPACE.
THE WARRIORS ARE SMEARED WITH IT, AS ARE THEIR WEAPONS AND ARMOR.
MAY I TEST...
DO NOT TOUCH ME WITH THAT ABOMINATION!
APOLOGIES.

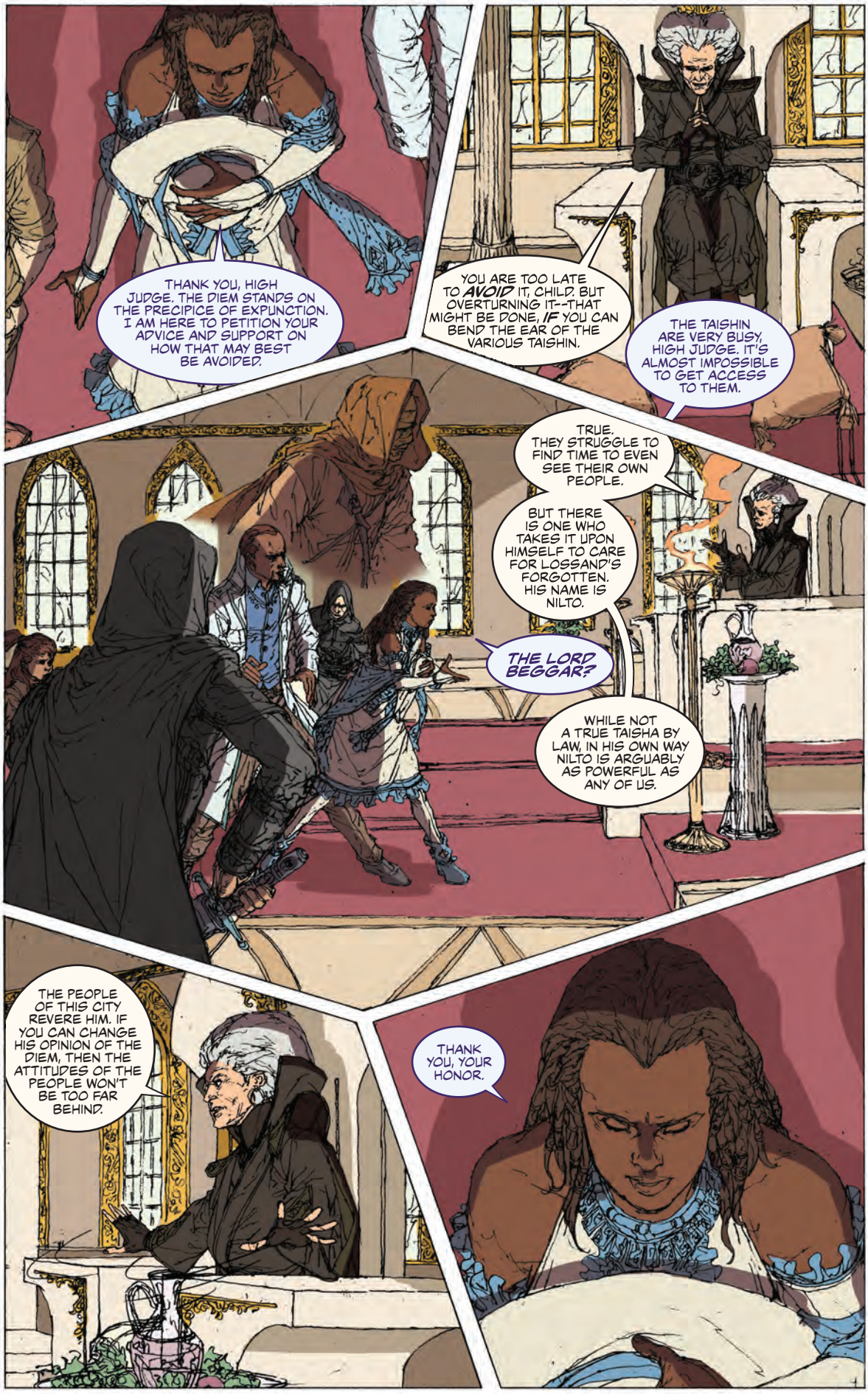

IT RESISTS CHARGED SAND.
AIS--WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF YOU DISSOLVED THE CARAPACE OF A TERKEN DEEP SANDLING?
COULD IT REPEL SAND?
A CLEVER IDEA, BUT NOT A NEW ONE. IT REQUIRES A HIGHLY-SECRETIVE PROCESS KNOWN ONLY TO THE A'KAR AND THE KING. I'LL REPORT THIS AND THE TRACKTS WILL INVESTIGATE. YOU'LL BE SAFE FOR TODAY.
BY UPHOLDING THE LAW, I ALSO UPHOLD THE SAND LORD. I KNOW I'M A GOOD TRACKT. BUT WHAT HAVE I DONE HERE? AM I, AS THEY SAY, ZENSHA--A TRAITOR?
AIS--?
THANK YOU. YOU SAVED ME.
DO NOT BE MISTAKEN, RY'KENSHA. I PROTECT YOU OUT OF DUTY, NOT DESIRE. I HATE YOU. I HATE YOUR KIND.
ON ANY OTHER DAY I WOULD HAVE APPLAUDED THESE MEN'S EFFORTS.
YOU WILL TRY TO CURRY MY FAVOR. YOU WILL ATTEMPT TO BECOME MY FRIEND. YOU WILL TRY TO LAUGH WITH ME, TO PROVE TO ME THAT YOU AREN'T WHAT I ASSUME.
YOU MAY EVEN SAVE MY LIFE.
NONE OF THIS WILL CHANGE MY OPINION. YOU ARE ALL THAT IS EVIL ON THE SANDS, LORD MASTRELL. IF THE TIME COMES, I WANT YOU TO REALIZE ONE THING--
--I WOULD RATHER DIE THAN LIVE WITH THE SHAME OF BEING RESCUED BY YOUR VILE POWERS.


LATER...
WE'VE FINISHED OUR INVESTIGATION FOR NOW, LORD MASTRELL. WE'LL BE LEAVING, BUT WE SHALL BE IN TOUCH.
THANK YOU, TRACKT. I'LL MAKE MYSELF AVAILABLE IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS.
WHO IS--?!
ELORIN?!
AISHA, MAN-- I HALF EXPECTED YOU TO BE ANOTHER ASSASSIN!
=GROAN= DON'T MENTION ASSASSINS TO ME, KENTON.
OF COURSE, OF COURSE! COME IN, OLD FRIEND, AND TELL ME WHERE YOU'VE BEEN ALL THIS TIME.

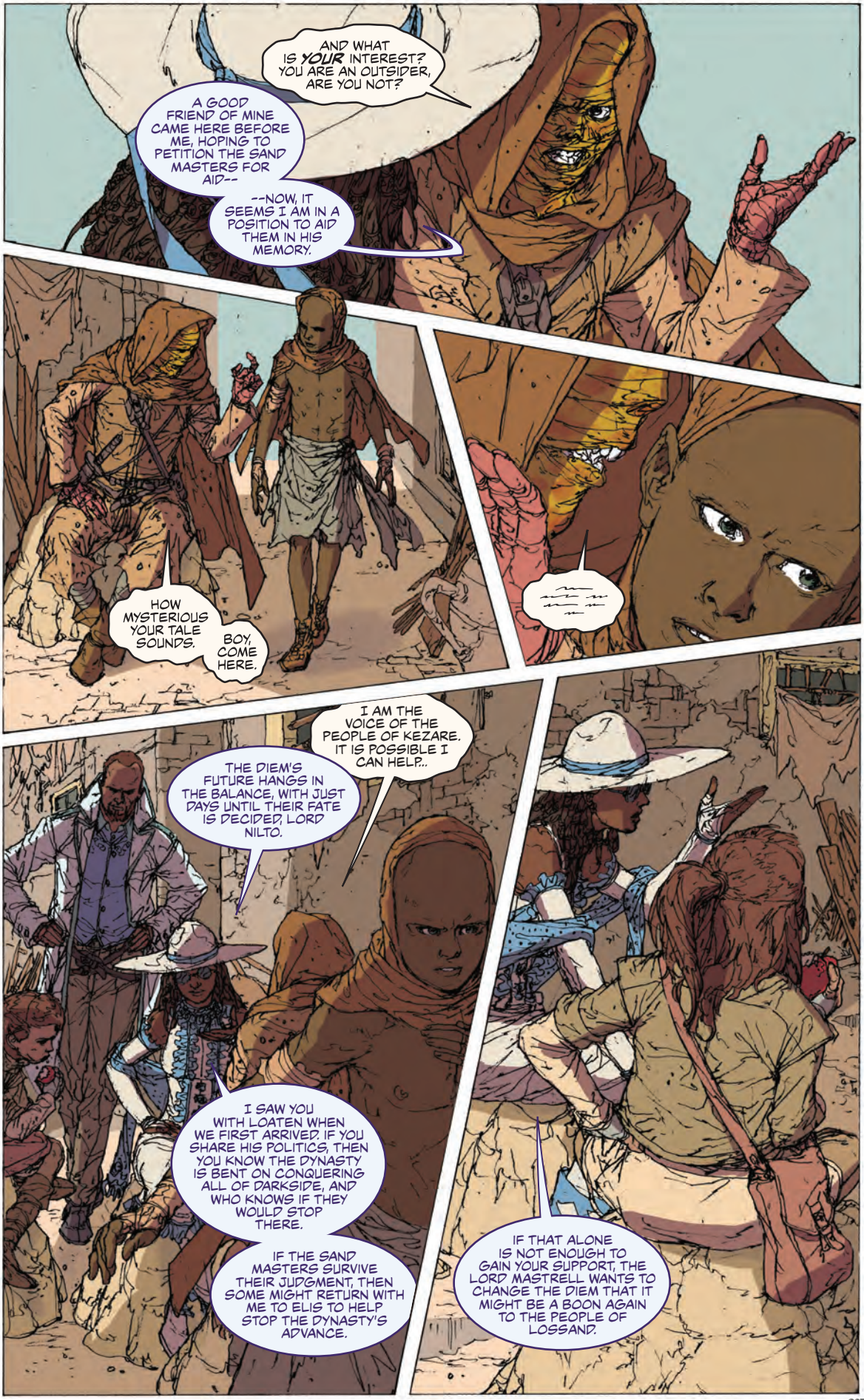

I FEEL GUILTY FOR ABANDONING THE DIEM AFTER...WHAT HAPPENED ON THE KERLA.
IT WAS A TERRIBLE DAY. MOST OF US ARE GONE. TRAIBEN... MY FATHER, TOO. WHERE DID YOU GO?
SOUTH, TO MY HOME VILLAGE. BUT I DIDN'T FIT THERE AFTER ALL THIS TIME. SO I CAME BACK HERE.
WE'RE GLAD TO HAVE YOU.
THOUGH MASTRELLS RULED THE DIEM, YOU RAN IT, ELORIN. YOUR ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS HAVE BEEN SORELY NEEDED.
AND YOUR SAND MASTERY--?
I...HAVEN'T TRIED SINCE I... BURNED MYSELF OUT.
THEN TRY. YOU'RE AMONG FRIENDS HERE.
I OVERMASTERED, KENTON. I CAN'T...
...I REALLY CAN'T.
IT DOESN'T MATTER, ELORIN. YOU'RE STILL A SAND MASTER AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED. I WOULD RATHER HAVE YOU BACK THAN A DOZEN MASTRELLS.
WILL YOU RESUME YOUR DUTIES HERE, MY FRIEND?
I SERVE AS YOU COMMAND, LORD MASTRELL.

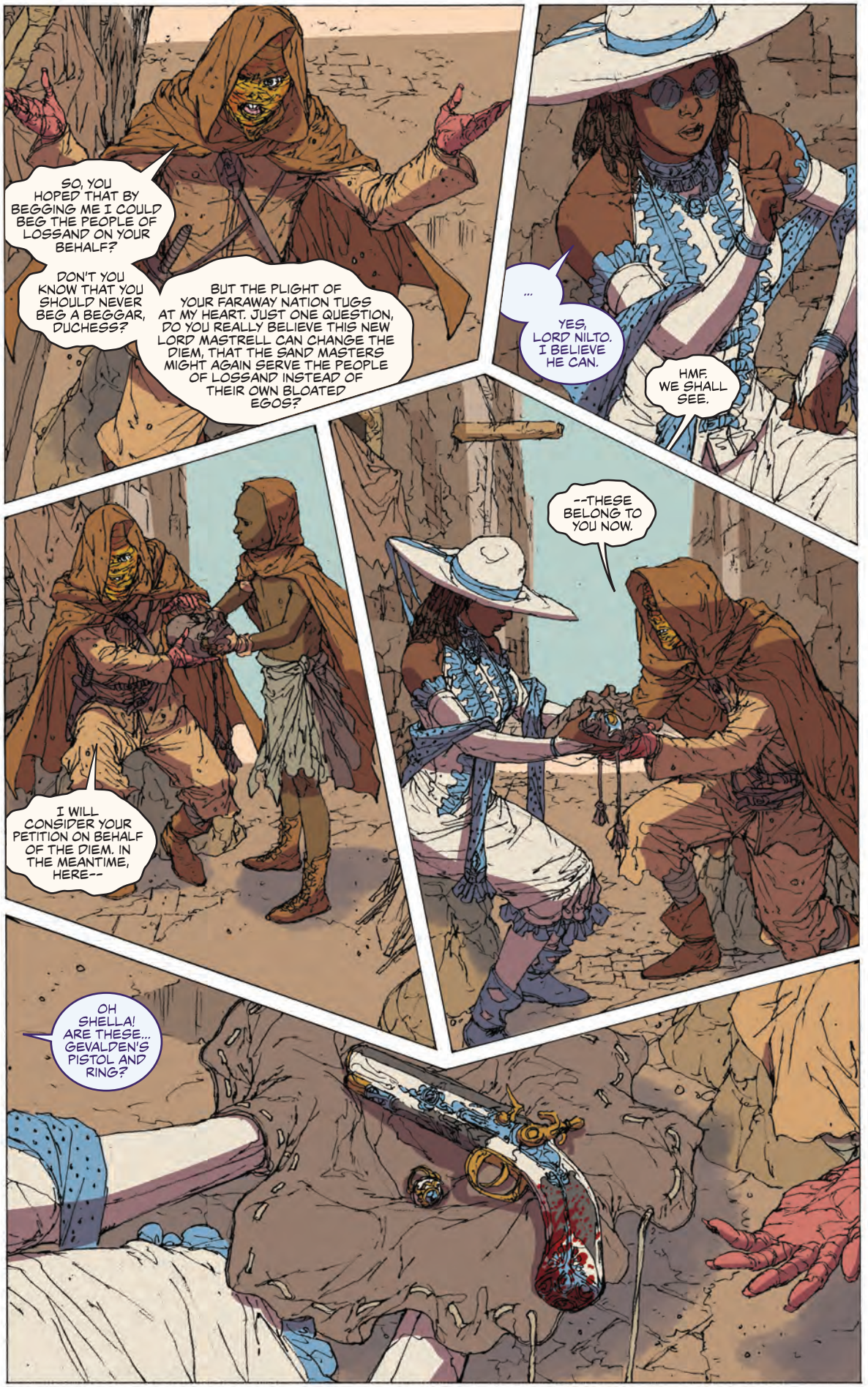
Day 56, Sixth Hour. The Hall of Judgment.
N'TEESE, WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT SAND MASTERY?
THAT IT IS THE PROVINCE OF THE SAND MASTERS.
BUT HOW DOES IT WORK? IF I'M TO REPRESENT THE DIEM I SHOULD KNOW.
CAN THEY CONTROL OTHER OBJECTS MADE OF SAND OR JUST SAND? IF IT'S JUST SAND, WHY?
ALL WORK REQUIRES ENERGY-- SO WHERE DOES THE POWER TO LIFT THE SAND INTO THE AIR COME FROM? HOW MUCH SAND CAN A MASTER LIFT AND FOR HOW LONG?
DUCHESS, IF YOU ARE HAVING DOUBTS ABOUT REPRESENTING LORD KENTON HERE--
NO. IT'S JUST...
PERHAPS I'LL TRY BEING NICER TO KENTON. MAYBE HE'LL BECOME BAFFLED ENOUGH THAT HE'LL LET ME IN ON HIS SECRETS.
HMF. YOU'RE WEIRD.
DUCHESS KHRISSALLA AND PARTY? THE HIGH JUDGE WILL SEE YOU NOW.
HE SAYS THE HIGH JUDGE IS READY TO SEE YOU.

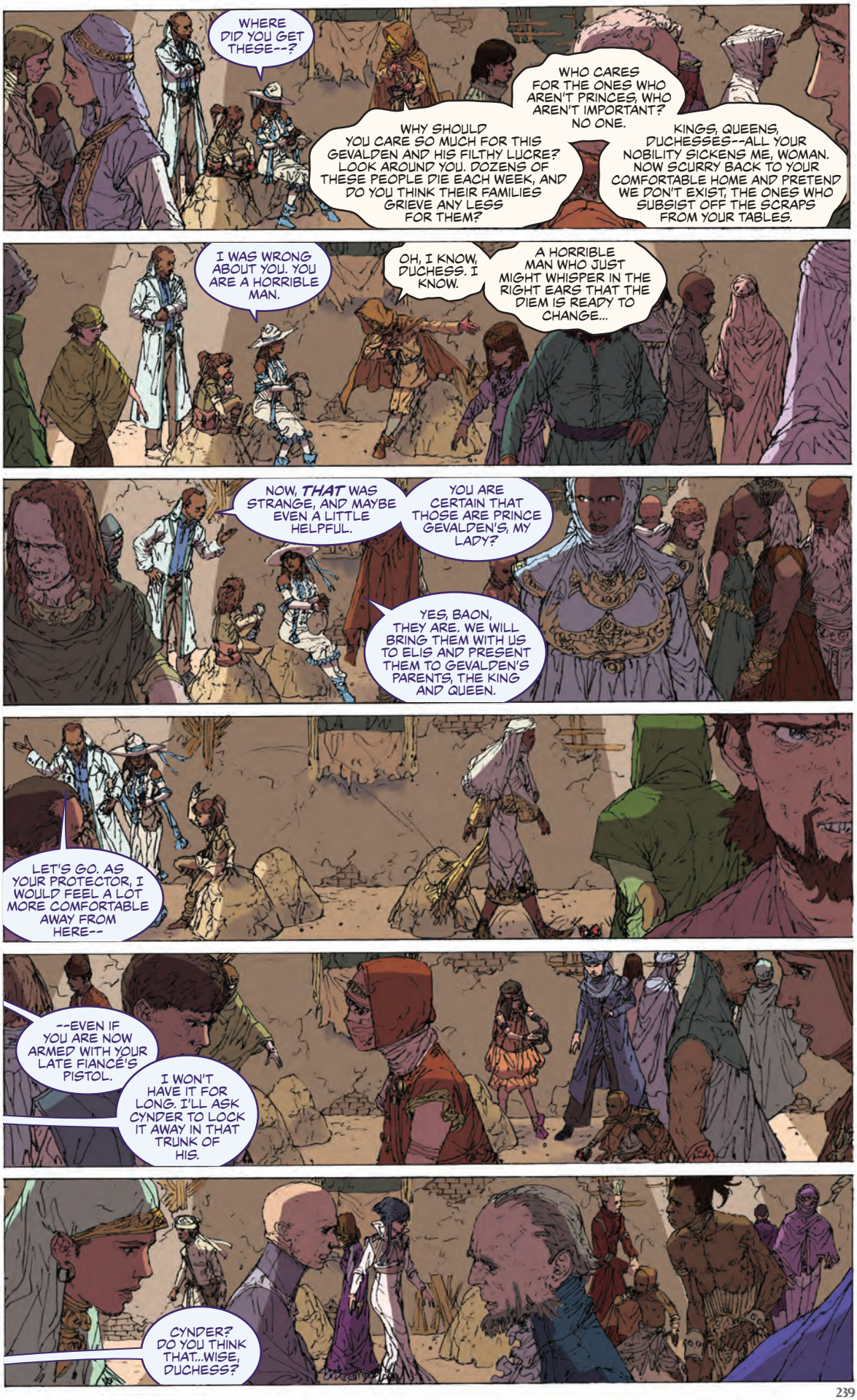

AND SO, WITH N'TEESE TRANSLATING...
HIGH JUDGE, I AM THE DUCHESS KHRISSALLA FROM THE INDEPENDENT KINGDOM OF ELIS.
I HAVE HEARD OF YOU, DUCHESS. YOU ARE THE ONE TRAVELING IN THE COMPANY OF OUR NEW LORD MASTRELL.
IT IS FOR HIM THAT I AM HERE--WHICH IS TO SAY I AM HERE REPRESENTING THE DIEM.
CURIOUS. IN A FEW DAYS, YOUNG KENTON HAS ALREADY GAINED MORE SUPPORT THAN I THOUGHT HE COULD IN TWO WEEKS.
YOU MAY SPEAK ON THE DIEM'S BEHALF, DUCHESS.

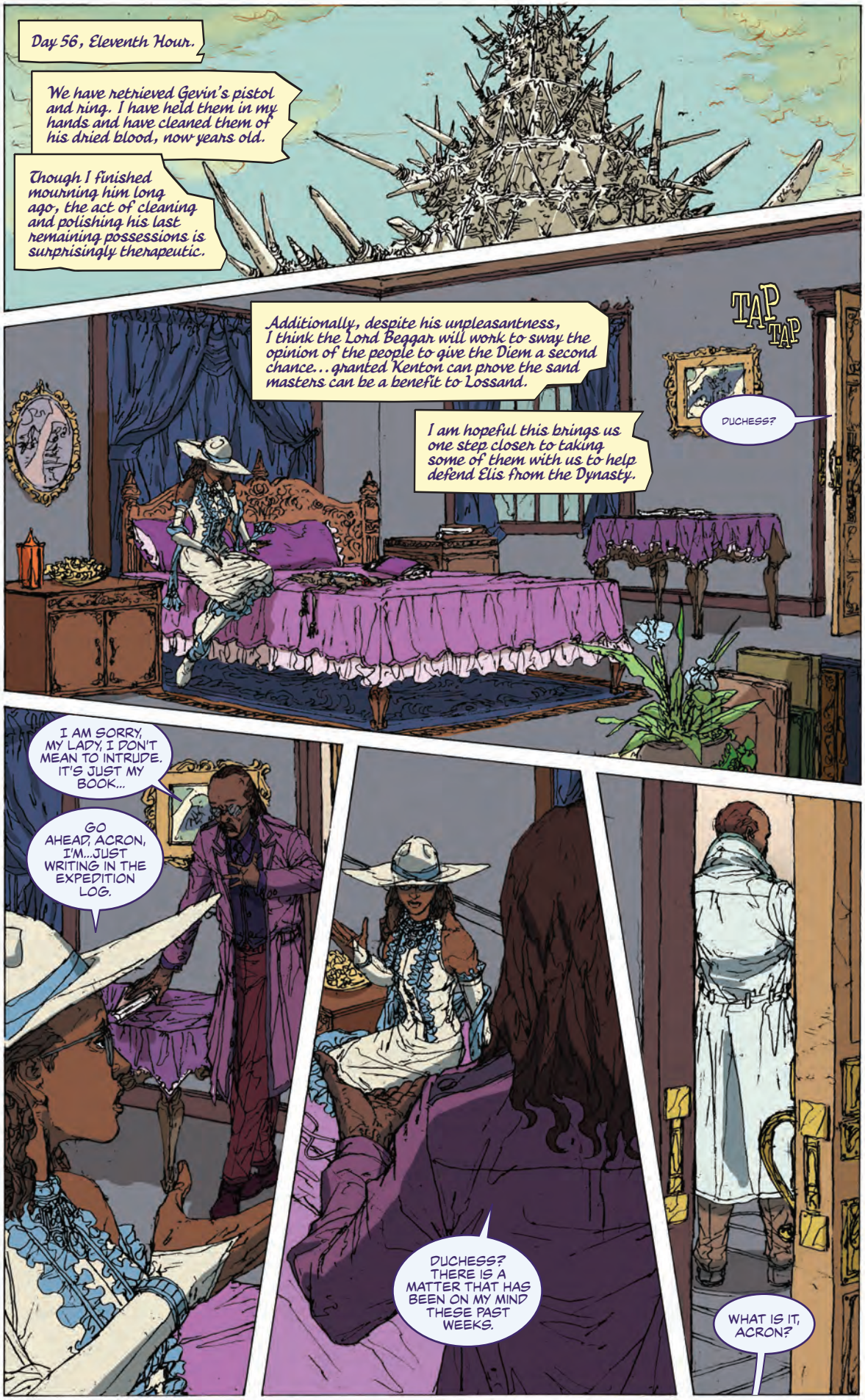

THANK YOU, HIGH JUDGE. THE DIEM STANDS ON THE PRECIPICE OF EXPUNCTION. I AM HERE TO PETITION YOUR ADVICE AND SUPPORT ON HOW THAT MAY BEST BE AVOIDED.
YOU ARE TOO LATE TO *AVOID* IT, CHILD. BUT OVERTURNING IT--THAT MIGHT BE DONE, *IF* YOU CAN BEND THE EAR OF THE VARIOUS TAISHIN.
THE TAISHIN ARE VERY BUSY, HIGH JUDGE. IT'S ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO GET ACCESS TO THEM.
TRUE. THEY STRUGGLE TO FIND TIME TO EVEN SEE THEIR OWN PEOPLE.
BUT THERE IS ONE WHO TAKES IT UPON HIMSELF TO CARE FOR LOSSAND'S FORGOTTEN. HIS NAME IS NILTO.
THE LORD BEGGAR?
WHILE NOT A TRUE TAISHA BY LAW, IN HIS OWN WAY NILTO IS ARGUABLY AS POWERFUL AS ANY OF US.
THE PEOPLE OF THIS CITY REVERE HIM. IF YOU CAN CHANGE HIS OPINION OF THE DIEM, THEN THE ATTITUDES OF THE PEOPLE WON'T BE TOO FAR BEHIND.
THANK YOU, YOUR HONOR.

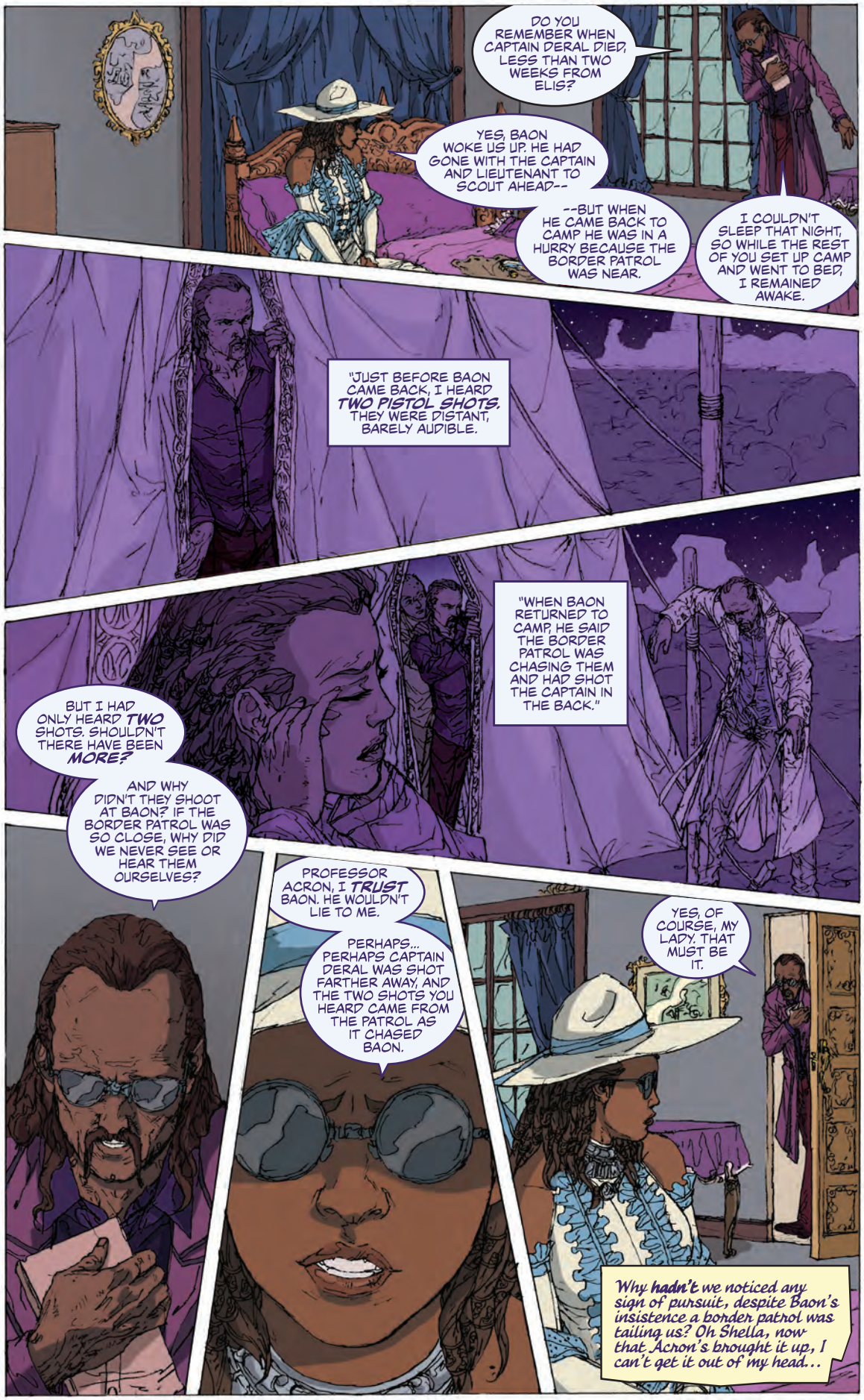
HERE. TAKE IT. AND NOT JUST FOR THE CHILDREN. YOU MUST EAT TOO, MY FRIEND.
LORD NILTO? THIS IS...
YES, TELL HER I KNOW WHO SHE IS.
THE WOMAN OF ELIS.
AND N'TEESE TRANSLATES.
YOUR TRANSLATOR REQUESTED AN AUDIENCE. WELL, THIS IS MY OFFICE.
HERE?
YES, IF YOU WANT TO SPEAK WITH ME.
NOW, WHY ARE YOU BOTHERING ME?
JUDGE HEELIS INDICATED THAT YOU MIGHT BE ABLE TO HELP ME. THE PEOPLE OF THIS CITY SEEM TO RESPECT YOU, THEY LOOK AT YOU FOR HEALING AND HOPE.
IF YOU SUPPORT THE SAND MASTERS, SO WILL MANY OF THE PEOPLE OF THIS CITY.


AND WHAT IS YOUR INTEREST? YOU ARE AN OUTSIDER, ARE YOU NOT?
A GOOD FRIEND OF MINE CAME HERE BEFORE ME, HOPING TO PETITION THE SAND MASTERS FOR AID--
--NOW, IT SEEMS I AM IN A POSITION TO AID THEM IN HIS MEMORY.
HOW MYSTERIOUS YOUR TALE SOUNDS.
BOY, COME HERE.
I AM THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE OF KEZARE. IT IS POSSIBLE I CAN HELP...
THE DIEM'S FUTURE HANGS IN THE BALANCE, WITH JUST DAYS UNTIL THEIR FATE IS DECIDED, LORD NILTO.
I SAW YOU WITH LOATEN WHEN WE FIRST ARRIVED. IF YOU SHARE HIS POLITICS, THEN YOU KNOW THE DYNASTY IS BENT ON CONQUERING ALL OF DARKSIDE, AND WHO KNOWS IF THEY WOULD STOP THERE.
IF THE SAND MASTERS SURVIVE THEIR JUDGMENT, THEN SOME MIGHT RETURN WITH ME TO ELIS TO HELP STOP THE DYNASTY'S ADVANCE.
IF THAT ALONE IS NOT ENOUGH TO GAIN YOUR SUPPORT, THE LORD MASTRELL WANTS TO CHANGE THE DIEM THAT IT MIGHT BE A BOON AGAIN TO THE PEOPLE OF LOSSAND.


SO, YOU HOPED THAT BY BEGGING ME I COULD BEG THE PEOPLE OF LOSSAND ON YOUR BEHALF?
DON'T YOU KNOW THAT YOU SHOULD NEVER BEG A BEGGAR, DUCHESS?
BUT THE PLIGHT OF YOUR FARAWAY NATION TUGS AT MY HEART. JUST ONE QUESTION, DO YOU REALLY BELIEVE THIS NEW LORD MASTRELL CAN CHANGE THE DIEM, THAT THE SAND MASTERS MIGHT AGAIN SERVE THE PEOPLE OF LOSSAND INSTEAD OF THEIR OWN BLOATED EGOS?
...
YES, LORD NILTO. I BELIEVE HE CAN.
HMF. WE SHALL SEE.
I WILL CONSIDER YOUR PETITION ON BEHALF OF THE DIEM. IN THE MEANTIME, HERE--
--THESE BELONG TO YOU NOW.
OH SHELLA! ARE THESE... GEVALDEN'S PISTOL AND RING?


WHERE DID YOU GET THESE--?
WHY SHOULD YOU CARE SO MUCH FOR THIS GEVALDEN AND HIS FILTHY LUCRE? LOOK AROUND YOU. DOZENS OF THESE PEOPLE DIE EACH WEEK, AND DO YOU THINK THEIR FAMILIES GRIEVE ANY LESS FOR THEM?
WHO CARES FOR THE ONES WHO AREN'T PRINCES, WHO AREN'T IMPORTANT? NO ONE.
KINGS, QUEENS, DUCHESSES--ALL YOUR NOBILITY SICKENS ME, WOMAN. NOW SCURRY BACK TO YOUR COMFORTABLE HOME AND PRETEND WE DON'T EXIST, THE ONES WHO SUBSIST OFF THE SCRAPS FROM YOUR TABLES.
I WAS WRONG ABOUT YOU. YOU ARE A HORRIBLE MAN.
OH, I KNOW, DUCHESS. I KNOW.
A HORRIBLE MAN WHO JUST MIGHT WHISPER IN THE RIGHT EARS THAT THE DIEM IS READY TO CHANGE...
NOW, THAT WAS STRANGE, AND MAYBE EVEN A LITTLE HELPFUL.
YOU ARE CERTAIN THAT THOSE ARE PRINCE GEVALDEN'S, MY LADY?
YES, BAON, THEY ARE. WE WILL BRING THEM WITH US TO ELIS AND PRESENT THEM TO GEVALDEN'S PARENTS, THE KING AND QUEEN.
LET'S GO. AS YOUR PROTECTOR, I WOULD FEEL A LOT MORE COMFORTABLE AWAY FROM HERE--
--EVEN IF YOU ARE NOW ARMED WITH YOUR LATE FIANCÉ'S PISTOL.
I WON'T HAVE IT FOR LONG. I'LL ASK CYNDER TO LOCK IT AWAY IN THAT TRUNK OF HIS.
CYNDER? DO YOU THINK THAT...WISE, DUCHESS?


Day 56, Eleventh Hour.
We have retrieved Gevin's pistol and ring. I have held them in my hands and have cleaned them of his dried blood, now years old.
Though I finished mourning him long ago, the act of cleaning and polishing his last remaining possessions is surprisingly therapeutic.
Additionally, despite his unpleasantness, I think the Lord Beggar will work to sway the opinion of the people to give the Diem a second chance... granted Kenton can prove the sand masters can be a benefit to Lossand.
I am hopeful this brings us one step closer to taking some of them with us to help defend Elis from the Dynasty.
TAP TAP
DUCHESS?
I AM SORRY, MY LADY, I DON'T MEAN TO INTRUDE. IT'S JUST MY BOOK...
GO AHEAD, ACRON, I'M...JUST WRITING IN THE EXPEDITION LOG.
DUCHESS? THERE IS A MATTER THAT HAS BEEN ON MY MIND THESE PAST WEEKS.
WHAT IS IT, ACRON?


DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN CAPTAIN DERAL DIED, LESS THAN TWO WEEKS FROM ELIS?
YES, BAON WOKE US UP. HE HAD GONE WITH THE CAPTAIN AND LIEUTENANT TO SCOUT AHEAD--
--BUT WHEN HE CAME BACK TO CAMP HE WAS IN A HURRY BECAUSE THE BORDER PATROL WAS NEAR.
I COULDN'T SLEEP THAT NIGHT, SO WHILE THE REST OF YOU SET UP CAMP AND WENT TO BED, I REMAINED AWAKE.
"JUST BEFORE BAON CAME BACK, I HEARD TWO PISTOL SHOTS, THEY WERE DISTANT, BARELY AUDIBLE.
"WHEN BAON RETURNED TO CAMP, HE SAID THE BORDER PATROL WAS CHASING THEM AND HAD SHOT THE CAPTAIN IN THE BACK."
BUT I HAD ONLY HEARD TWO SHOTS. SHOULDN'T THERE HAVE BEEN MORE?
AND WHY DIDN'T THEY SHOOT AT BAON? IF THE BORDER PATROL WAS SO CLOSE, WHY DID WE NEVER SEE OR HEAR THEM OURSELVES?
PROFESSOR ACRON, I TRUST BAON. HE WOULDN'T LIE TO ME.
PERHAPS... PERHAPS CAPTAIN DERAL WAS SHOT FARTHER AWAY, AND THE TWO SHOTS YOU HEARD CAME FROM THE PATROL AS IT CHASED BAON.
YES, OF COURSE, MY LADY. THAT MUST BE IT.
Why hadn't we noticed any sign of pursuit, despite Baon's insistence a border patrol was tailing us? Oh Shella, now that Acron's brought it up, I can't get it out of my head...

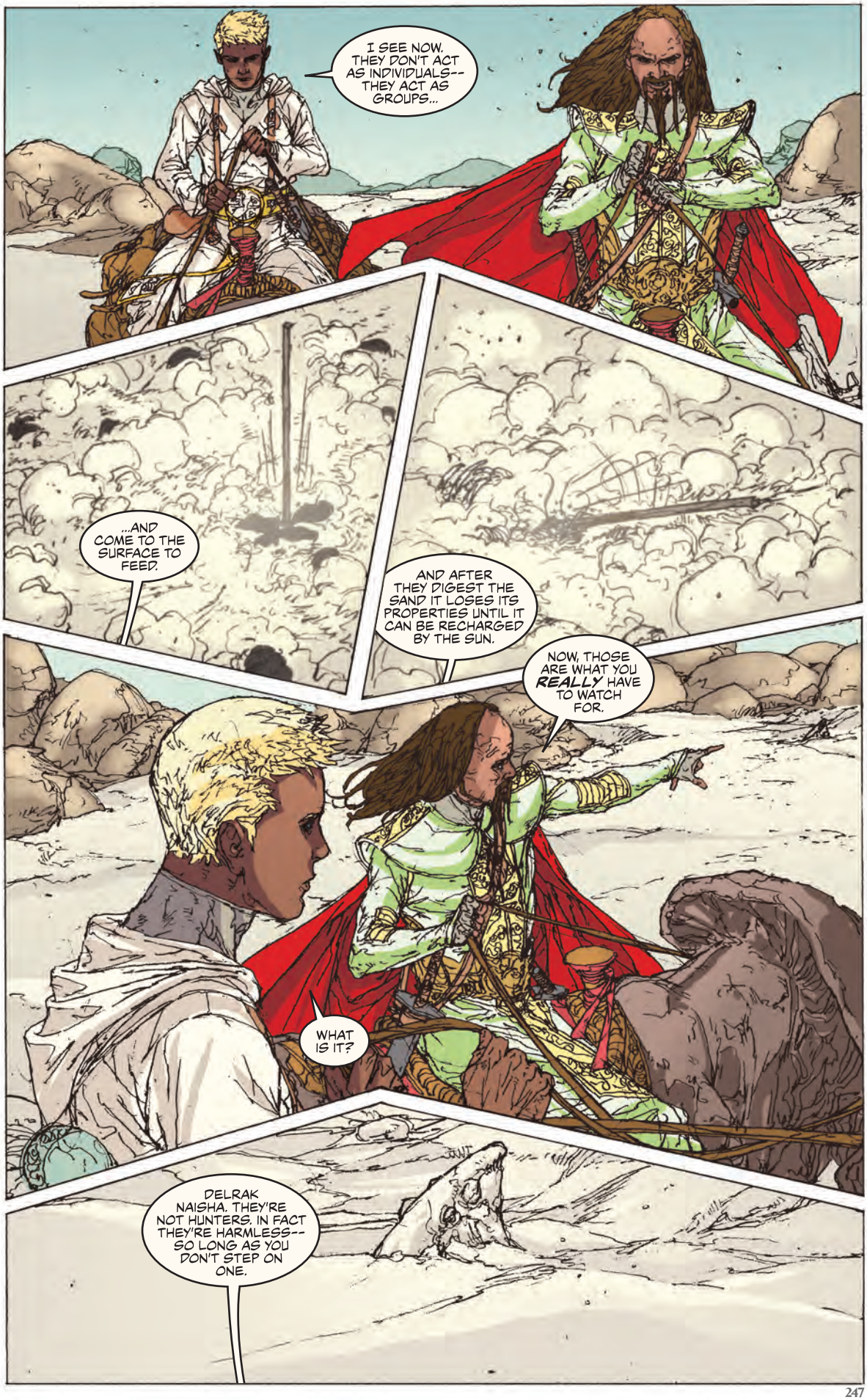
THE CATCH

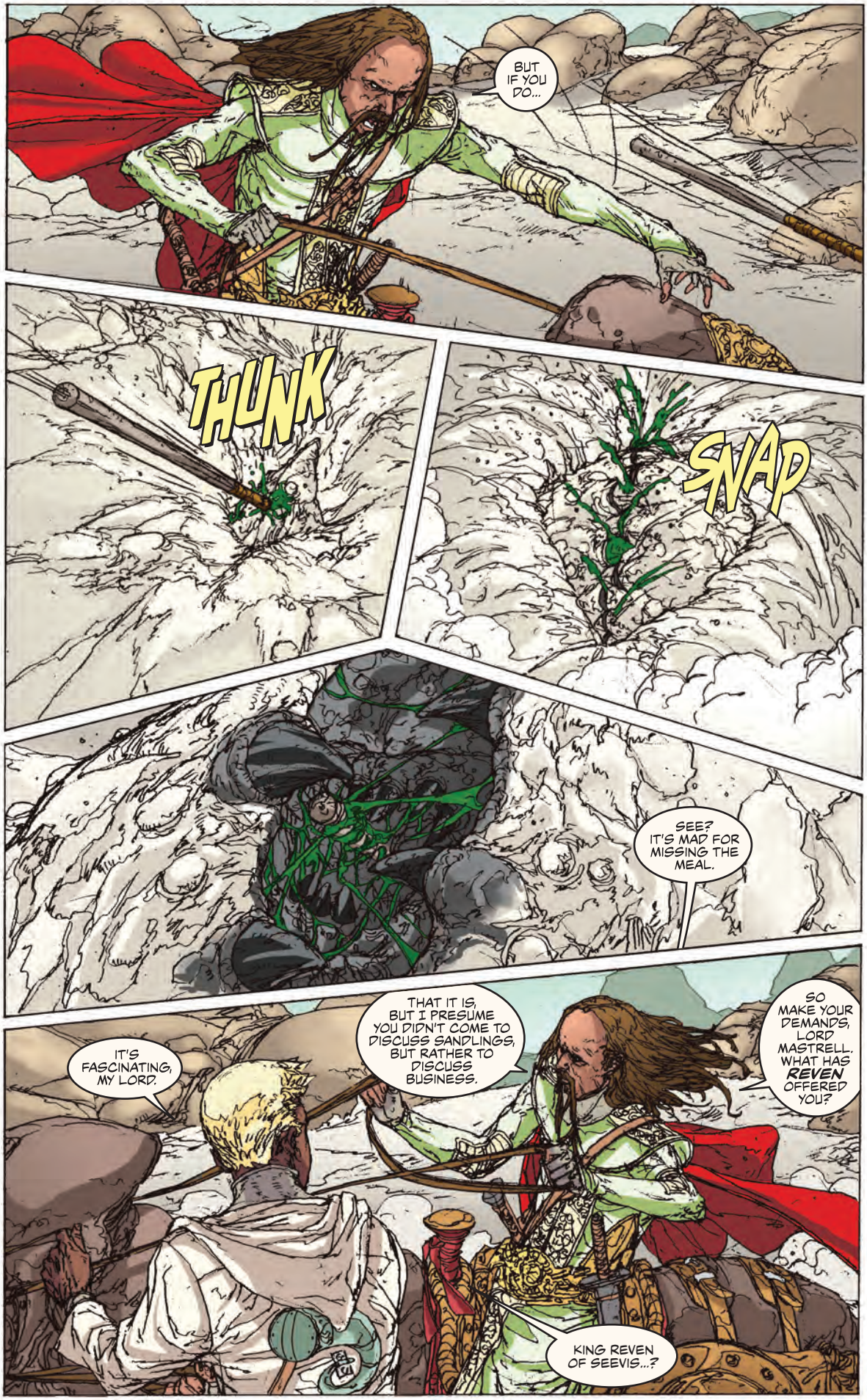
LORD MASTRELL! YOU SURPRISE ME--
--COMING OUT SO FAR TO MEET LIKE THIS.
I APOLOGIZE FOR INTERRUPTING YOUR VACATION, LORD RAAGENT.
I APPRECIATE THE SENTIMENT.
PLEASE, TAKE A SEAT.
THE DEEP SAND IS QUITE A TRIP FROM LOSSAND, LORD MASTRELL. I AM IMPRESSED BY YOUR DEDICATION IN FINDING ME.
THANK YOU, LORD GENERAL.

IT PROMISES TO BE A FRUITFUL HUNT. ALREADY WE'VE MADE SEVERAL CATCHES.
HAVE YOU EVER WATCHED A DEEP SAND HUNT BEFORE?
NO, MY LORD.
COME, LORD MASTRELL!
ARE YOU STILL SPARRING WITH THE TOWER'S SOLDIERS, OR HAVE YOU GROWN OUT OF THAT?
YOU MUST RECTIFY THAT. IT'S AN EXPERIENCE UNLIKE ANY OTHER.
THAT'S NOT REALLY WHY--
I'VE ALWAYS FOUND THEIR TRAINING HELPFUL. A WISE MAN MAKES CERTAIN HE'S NEVER TRAPPED IN BATTLE WITH ONLY A SINGLE OPTION OF ATTACK.
A TRUE STATEMENT, LORD KENTON. ADDITIONAL SKILLS CAN BE OF MUCH SERVICE TO A MAN--

--ESPECIALLY WHEN HE FINDS HIMSELF IN NEED OF CHANGING PROFESSIONS.
ACTUALLY, LORD RAAGENT, THAT IS WHY I CAME TO FIND Y--
LOOK THERE! THEY'VE FOUND SOMETHING.
WE SHOULD CONTINUE THIS DISCUSSION. WOULD YOU CARE TO JOIN ME?
ME?
YOU CAME ALL THIS WAY--YOU MIGHT AS WELL SEE WHAT A HUNT IS ALL ABOUT.
I'VE NEVER RIDDEN A TERHA BEFORE, MY LORD.
TRUST ME, THEY'RE TOUGH. FROM INFANCY, WE DOUSE THEIR BODIES WITH DOKALL, MAKING THE SHELL IMPOSSIBLE TO DISSOLVE.
YOU'VE NOT BEEN OUT HERE BEFORE SO I SHOULD WARN YOU--THE STORIES AREN'T EXACTLY ACCURATE WHEN IT COMES TO DEEP SANDLINGS.
OH, THEY'RE BIG...
YOU MEAN DEEP SANDLINGS AREN'T AS LARGE AS PEOPLE THINK?

...BUT WITH NO DORIM VINES OUT HERE, SANDLINGS ARE ALLOWED TO GROW-- JUST NOT ALWAYS IN THE WAY EVERYONE ASSUMES.
WHAT... WHAT AM I LOOKING AT?
IT'S AS IF THE SAND IS ALIVE!
HAH! I WARNED YOU, LORD MASTRELL!
WHEN PEOPLE VISIT THE DEEP SANDS, THEY SEE THE SAND AGITATE AROUND THEM, REMEMBER THE STORIES, AND ASSUME THEY'RE GOING TO BE ATTACKED.
SO THEY RUN! THEY NEVER REALIZE THAT WHAT THEY'RE SEEING ISN'T A SINGLE MONSTER...
THUNK
...BUT THOUSANDS OF TINY ONES.

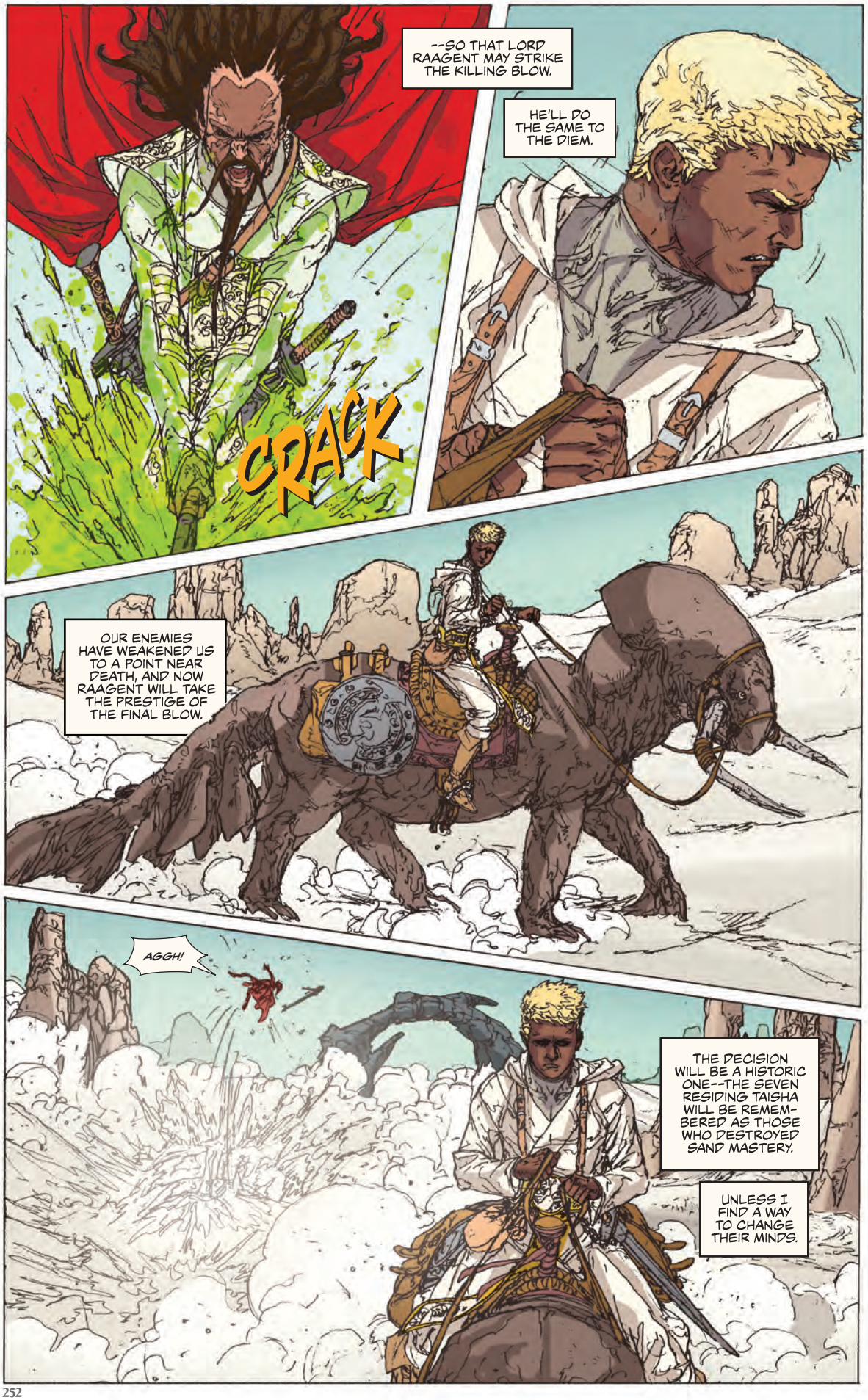

I SEE NOW. THEY DON'T ACT AS INDIVIDUALS-- THEY ACT AS GROUPS...
...AND COME TO THE SURFACE TO FEED.
AND AFTER THEY DIGEST THE SAND IT LOSES ITS PROPERTIES UNTIL IT CAN BE RECHARGED BY THE SUN.
NOW, THOSE ARE WHAT YOU REALLY HAVE TO WATCH FOR.
WHAT IS IT?
DELRAK NAISHA. THEY'RE NOT HUNTERS. IN FACT THEY'RE HARMLESS-- SO LONG AS YOU DON'T STEP ON ONE.


BUT IF YOU DO...
THUNK
SNAP
SEE? IT'S MAD FOR MISSING THE MEAL.
IT'S FASCINATING, MY LORD.
THAT IT IS, BUT I PRESUME YOU DIDN'T COME TO DISCUSS SANDLINGS, BUT RATHER TO DISCUSS BUSINESS.
SO MAKE YOUR DEMANDS, LORD MASTRELL. WHAT HAS REVEN OFFERED YOU?
KING REVEN OF SEEVIS...?

YES. YOUR MOVE SURPRISED ME, BUT I ACKNOWLEDGE ITS BRILLIANCE.
WE HOPED TO TAKE CARE OF THE MASTRELLS BEFORE ANY OF THE OTHER COUNTRIES KNEW WHAT WE WERE DOING AND MIGHT TRY TO INFLUENCE YOU.
THE REST OF THE CITY DIDN'T EVEN KNOW ABOUT OUR PLANS TO DISSOLVE THE DIEM. BUT YOUR TWO WEEK "STAY OF EXECUTION" HAS RUINED THAT.
SO, TELL ME, LORD MASTRELL--
--HOW MUCH WILL IT COST ME TO HIRE YOU?
YOU WANT TO HIRE THE SAND MASTERS?
WELL, NOT ALL OF YOU, OF COURSE.
THAT WOULD DEFEAT THE PURPOSE OF DESTROYING THE DIEM. JUST ENOUGH THAT EVERYONE KNOWS THE TOWER HAS THE POWER OF SAND MASTERY.
TRUST ME, I WILL PAY YOU MORE THAN THE RIM KINGDOMS.
YOU WORK TO DESTROY US BECAUSE WE'VE GROWN TOO POWERFUL, THEN YOU SEEK TO SEIZE THAT POWER FOR YOURSELF?
ALL POLITICS IS FOUNDED IN HYPOCRISY, KENTON.
DO NOT LET OUR PERSONAL DIFFERENCES DESTROY YOUR CHANCES--OUR ARRANGEMENT WOULD BE OF MUTUAL BENEFIT.
THE REPORTS YOU HEARD OF MASTRELLS DEALING WITH THE RIM KINGDOMS INVOLVED ANOTHER SAND MASTER, NOT MYSELF. I INTEND TO SAVE THE DIEM.
AND OUR CONVERSATION HERE HAS PROVEN WE CAN GET ALONG IF WE WANT TO, AT LEAST. WE DON'T NEED TO BE ENEMIES.
SURELY WE CAN COME TO SOME ARRANGEMENT.
I ALREADY OFFERED YOU ONE, BOY. THE SAND MASTERS HAVE OUTLIVED THEIR USEFULNESS. EITHER YOU JOIN ME OR YOU LOSE YOURSELVES COMPLETELY.

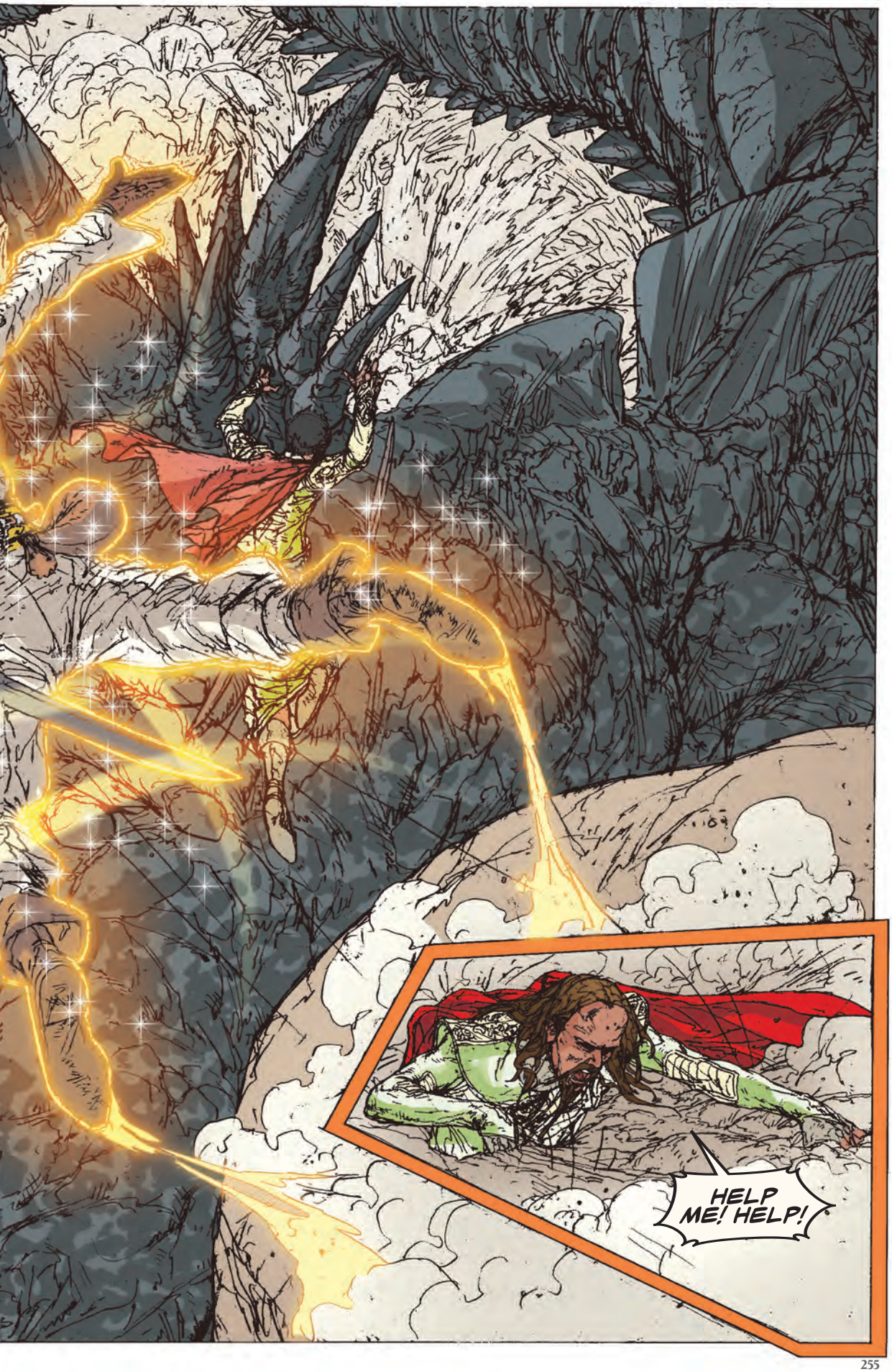
LORD RAAGENT, YOU SAY THAT SAND MASTERY HAS OUTLIVED ITS USEFULNESS, BUT AT THE SAME TIME YOU SCHEME TO MAKE IT YOUR OWN. YOU KNOW ITS POWER, AND YOU'RE AFRAID OF IT.
ALL YOU WANT IS WHAT'S BEST FOR YOURSELF, NOT LOSSAND.
HOW DARE YOU! I CARE NOTHING FOR SAND MASTERY'S POWER--IT HAS NONE! SURE, MAYBE YOU CAN THROW SAND AT PEOPLE, BUT WHAT GOOD IS THAT IN BATTLE?
YOU ARE NOTHING MORE THAN STREET CHARLATANS. I WANT YOUR PRESTIGE, BOY. YOUR NAME!
HOWEVER, I'VE CHANGED MY MIND. I'D RATHER SEE YOU DESTROYED--
--THAN HAVE YOU ANYWHERE NEAR THE TOWER!
GEE-UP!
:SIGH: I'M GOING TO HAVE TO COME UP WITH BETTER ARGUMENTS.

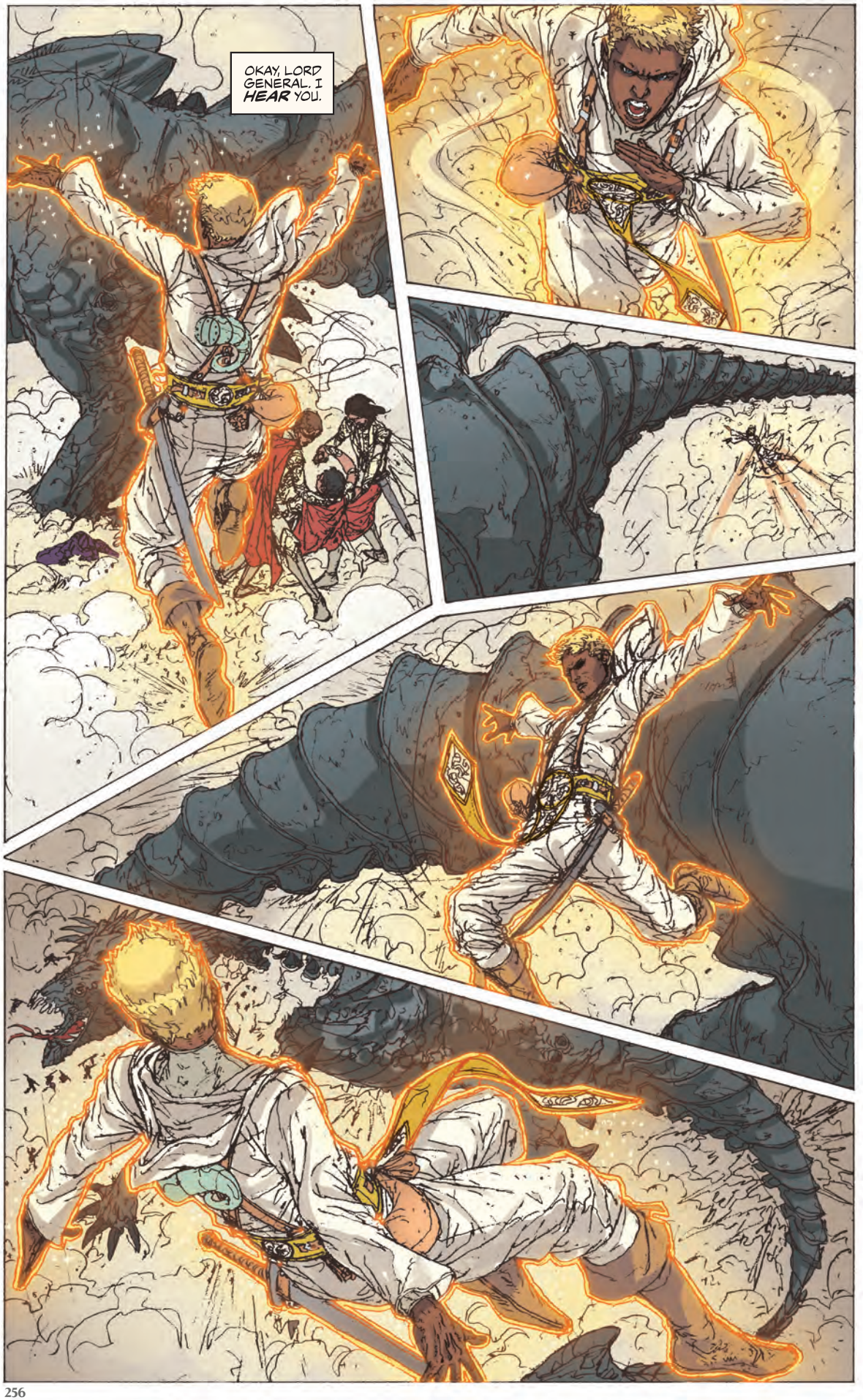
LORD RAAGENT'S PRIZE IS A KARAK, IF I'M NOT MISTAKEN.
HIS MEN HAVE TAUNTED AND TOYED WITH IT, LEFT IT WOUNDED AND HELPLESS--


--SO THAT LORD RAAGENT MAY STRIKE THE KILLING BLOW.
HE'LL DO THE SAME TO THE DIEM.
CRACK
OUR ENEMIES HAVE WEAKENED US TO A POINT NEAR DEATH, AND NOW RAAGENT WILL TAKE THE PRESTIGE OF THE FINAL BLOW.
AGGH!
THE DECISION WILL BE A HISTORIC ONE--THE SEVEN RESIDING TAISHA WILL BE REMEMBERED AS THOSE WHO DESTROYED SAND MASTERY.
UNLESS I FIND A WAY TO CHANGE THEIR MINDS.

WHAT TH--?!
THUMP
WHAT HAPPENED? ARE YOU--?
THE BEAST..WAS A BABY, NOW.. ITS MOTHER IS HERE.
LORD RAAGENT?
LORD RAAGENT!

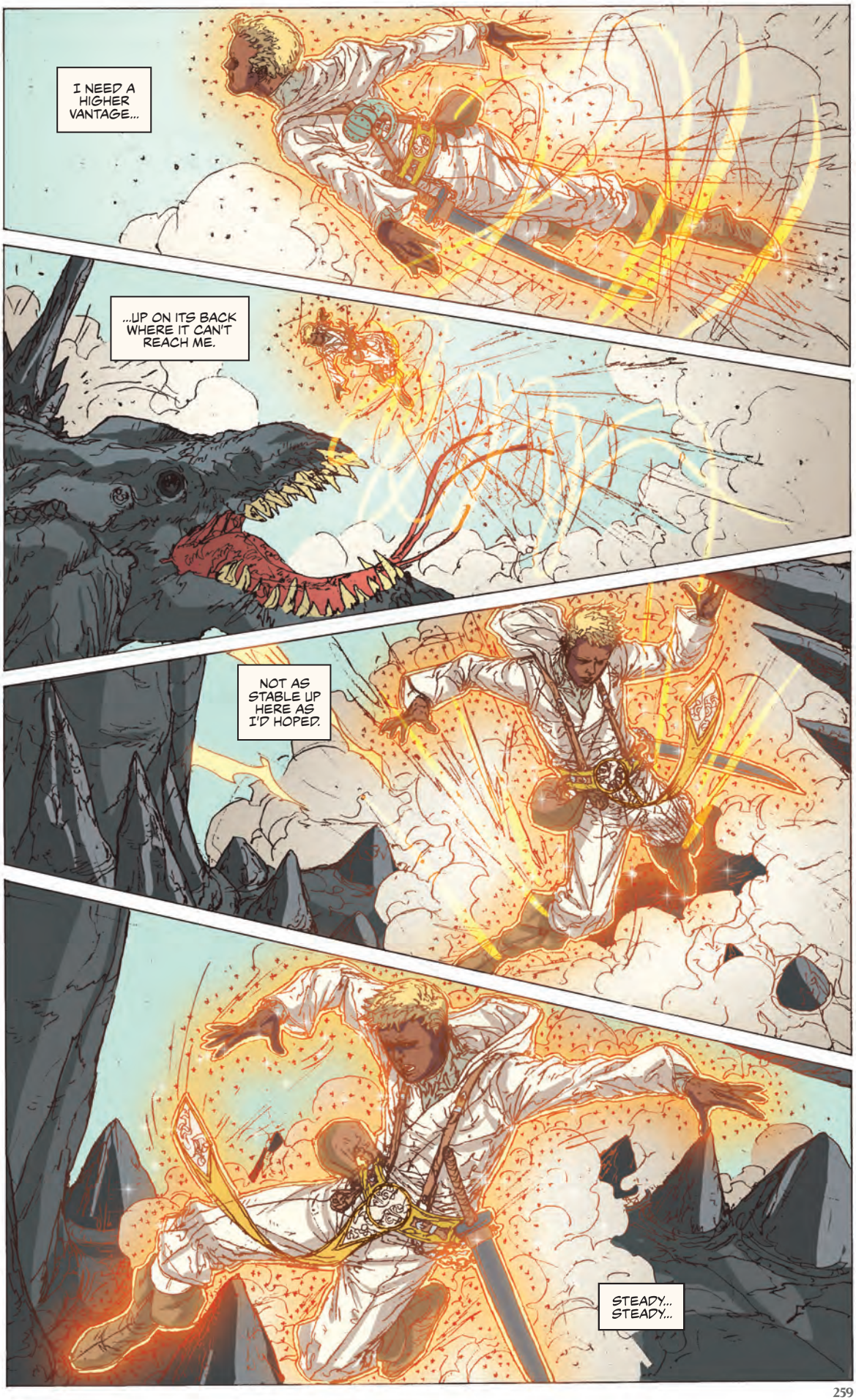
THOSE SOLDIERS ARE IN MORTAL DANGER. I HAVE TO HELP!

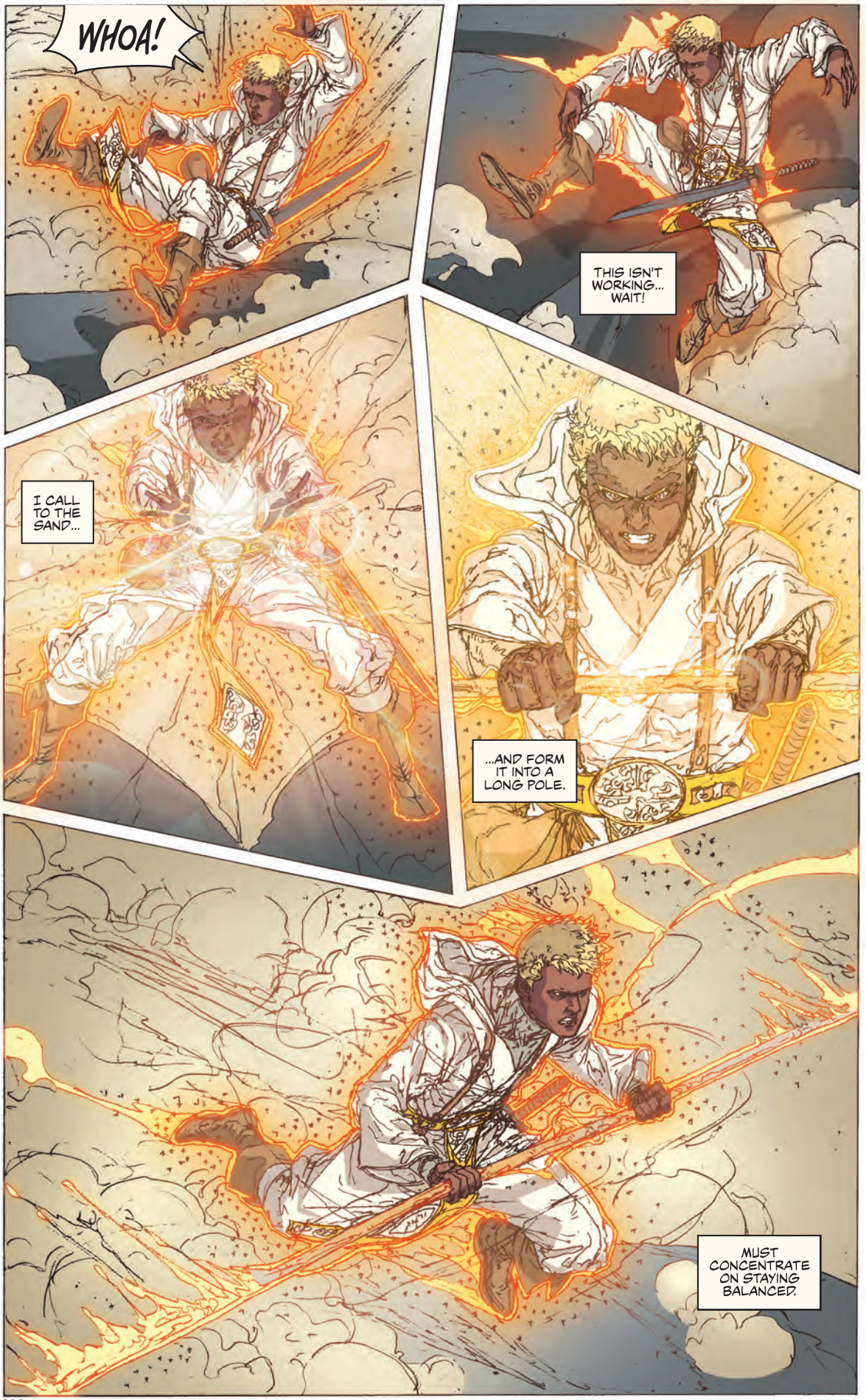

HELP ME! HELP!

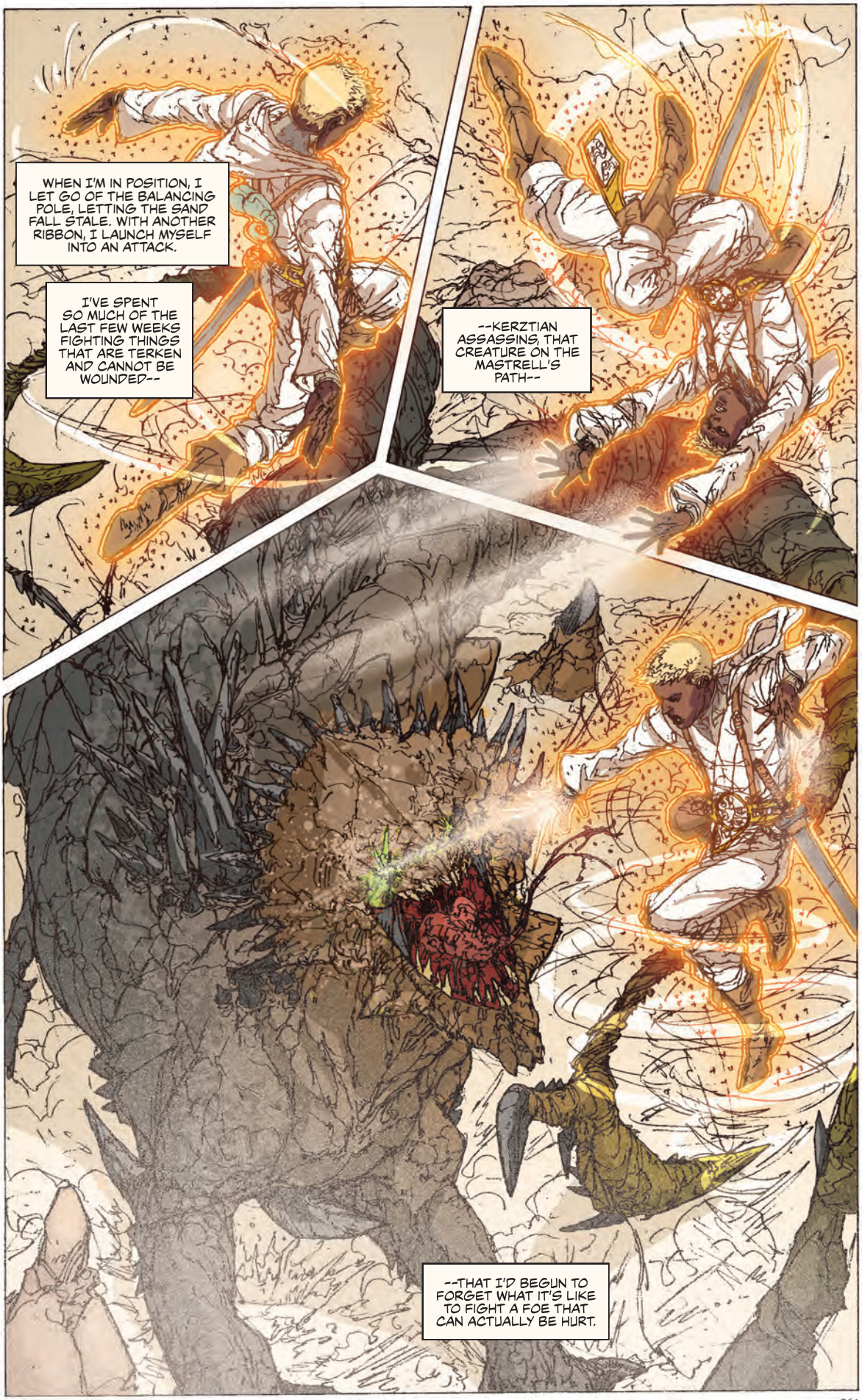

OKAY, LORD GENERAL, I *HEAR* YOU.

AN INSTANT PROMOTION FOR ANY SOLDIER--
--WHO GETS ME OUT OF HERE!
I DON'T NEED A PROMOTION.
I NEED AN ALLY AMONG THE TAISHIN.
TOOOM
YAAAHHHH!

:HUFF-PUFF: LORD MASTRELL, YOU MUST GET US OUT OF HERE RIGHT NOW!
LOOKS LIKE MORE HELP HAS ARRIVED.
WHAT IN THE SANDS...?!
YOU LOOK LIKE YOU COULD USE A RIDE--
--FATHER!
AARIK? I DIDN'T THINK YOU'D FOLLOWED US.
KENTON'S MY FRIEND, AND HE'S APT TO GET IN TROUBLE IF I LEAVE HIS SIDE FOR TOO LONG.
NOW HANG ON!
ALRIGHT THEN. JUST THE TWO OF US NOW.


I NEED A HIGHER VANTAGE...
...UP ON ITS BACK WHERE IT CAN'T REACH ME.
NOT AS STABLE UP HERE AS I'D HOPED.
STEADY... STEADY...

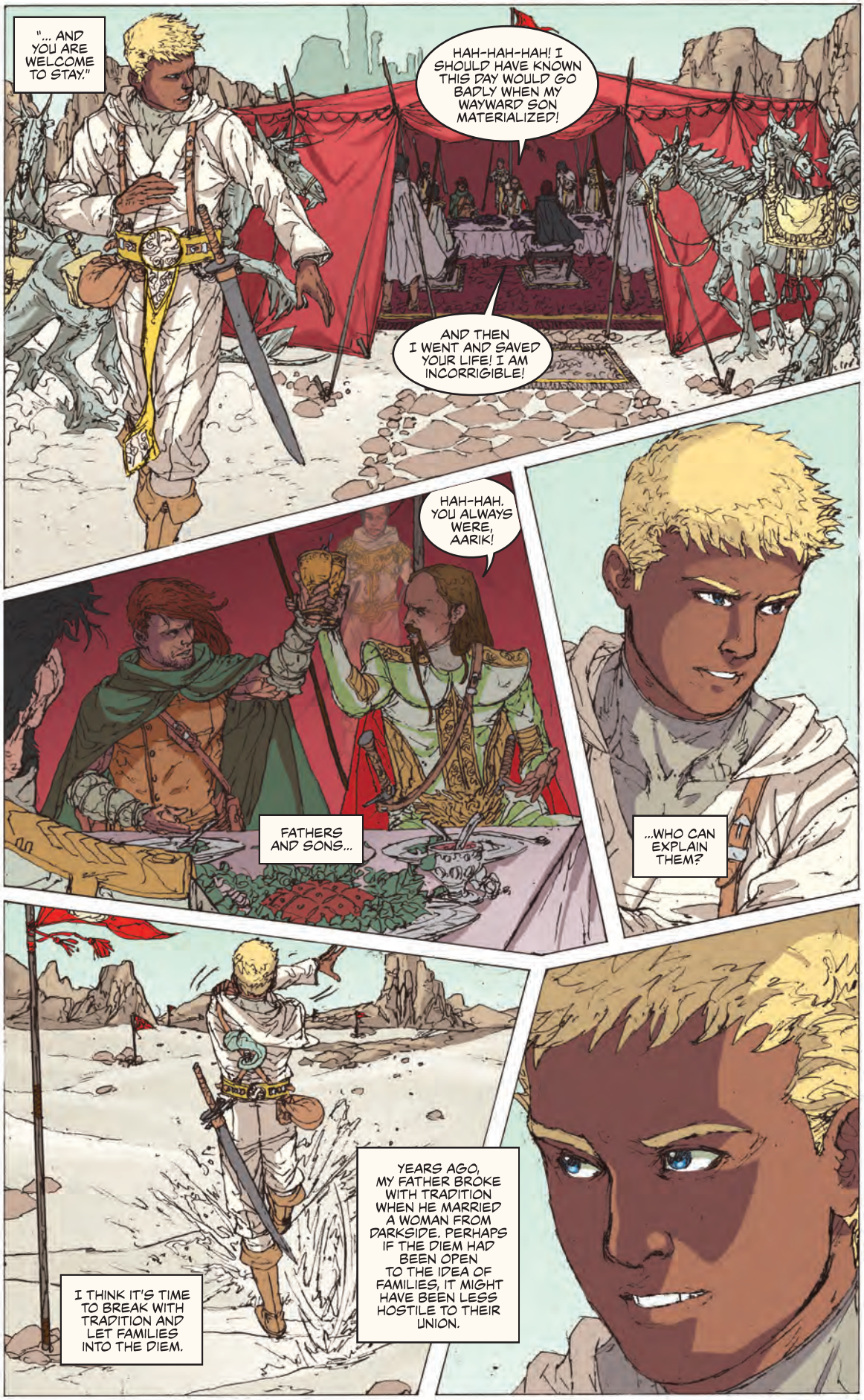

WHOA!
THIS ISN'T WORKING... WAIT!
I CALL TO THE SAND...
...AND FORM IT INTO A LONG POLE.
MUST CONCENTRATE ON STAYING BALANCED.


WHEN I'M IN POSITION, I LET GO OF THE BALANCING POLE, LETTING THE SAND FALL STALE. WITH ANOTHER RIBBON, I LAUNCH MYSELF INTO AN ATTACK.
I'VE SPENT SO MUCH OF THE LAST FEW WEEKS FIGHTING THINGS THAT ARE TERKEN AND CANNOT BE WOUNDED--
--KERZTIAN ASSASSINS, THAT CREATURE ON THE MASTRELL'S PATH--
--THAT I'D BEGUN TO FORGET WHAT IT'S LIKE TO FIGHT A FOE THAT CAN ACTUALLY BE HURT.

THUMP
INCREDIBLE.
AND I'M CONSIDERED ONE OF THE WEAK ONES.

HAPPY TO SEE ME WOUNDED, BOY? YOU WERE JUST WAITING FOR SOMETHING LIKE THIS TO HAPPEN, I'M SURE.
PERHAPS. YOU IMPLIED THAT SAND MASTERY WAS USELESS. I THINK YOU NOW HAVE AMPLE EVIDENCE OTHERWISE.
YOUR HELP WASN'T REQUESTED.
AND IF I HADN'T BEEN THERE TODAY? MORE THAN TWELVE OF YOUR MEN WOULD HAVE DIED--AND YOU'D HAVE BEEN AMONG THEM.
GO AHEAD, SAND MASTER --GLOAT.
THIS ISN'T GLOATING, SANDS, MAN, YOUR HEAD IS AS THICK AS CARAPACE!
HAH-HAH-HAH! YOU'RE LIKE YOUR FATHER! HE WAS THE ONLY ONE WHO EVER HAD THE NERVE TO SPEAK TO ME LIKE THAT.
I CAN SEE THAT IF SOMETHING LIKE THIS HAPPENS AGAIN, YOU ARE PREPARED.
I COULD ASSIGN TWO DOZEN SAND MASTERS TO YOU THE MOMENT THE DIEM IS REINSTATED. YOURS TO DO WITH AS YOU WISH.

YOU WANTED SAND MASTERY'S PRESTIGE, BUT I'M OFFERING YOU SOMETHING FAR BETTER. ACCESS TO THE TRUE POWER OF THE DIEM.
THAT, PLUS THE VOW THAT THE SAND MASTERS WILL NO LONGER TAKE WHAT DOES NOT BELONG TO THEM--IN EXCHANGE FOR YOUR VOTE.
HMMM. WHAT KIND OF SAND MASTERS? I DON'T WANT YOU JUST SENDING ME ALL YOUR REJECTS.
AT LEAST ONE MASTRELL--
--WITH SUPPORTING MEMBERS, ONE OR MORE OF EACH RANK.
DONE.
THANK YOU.
BOY, I JUST SAW YOU CUT THE HEAD OFF OF A SEVENTY-FOOT TALL MONSTER! I DON'T CARE WHAT I HAVE TO DO, THAT ISN'T THE KIND OF POWER WE CAN AFFORD TO CUT FREE.
AS LONG AS THERE'S A DIEM PROFESSION, THERE WILL BE RULES TO BIND YOU. IT OCCURS TO ME THAT MAYBE THE DIEM WAS ALWAYS INTENDED TO KEEP THE SAND MASTERS IN CHECK.
PERHAPS IT WAS. BUT NOW, AARIK AND I SHALL BID YOU GOOD DAY, LORD GENERAL.
WAIT! HAVE YOU BOYS EATEN? MY COOKS WILL BE FIXING DINNER SHORTLY...


"... AND YOU ARE WELCOME TO STAY."
HAH-HAH-HAH! I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN THIS DAY WOULD GO BADLY WHEN MY WAYWARD SON MATERIALIZED!
AND THEN I WENT AND SAVED YOUR LIFE! I AM INCORRIGIBLE!
HAH-HAH. YOU ALWAYS WERE, AARIK!
FATHERS AND SONS...
...WHO CAN EXPLAIN THEM?
I THINK IT'S TIME TO BREAK WITH TRADITION AND LET FAMILIES INTO THE DIEM.
YEARS AGO, MY FATHER BROKE WITH TRADITION WHEN HE MARRIED A WOMAN FROM DARKSIDE. PERHAPS IF THE DIEM HAD BEEN OPEN TO THE IDEA OF FAMILIES, IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN LESS HOSTILE TO THEIR UNION.

WHO--?
OOF!

Sand Mastery on Darkside?

If we can help Kenton save the Diem, he has promised the help of the sand masters in our fight against the Dynasty. But several questions remain.

Can sand mastery be used on Darkside? It could be as inaccessible on Darkside as our starmarks are on Dayside.

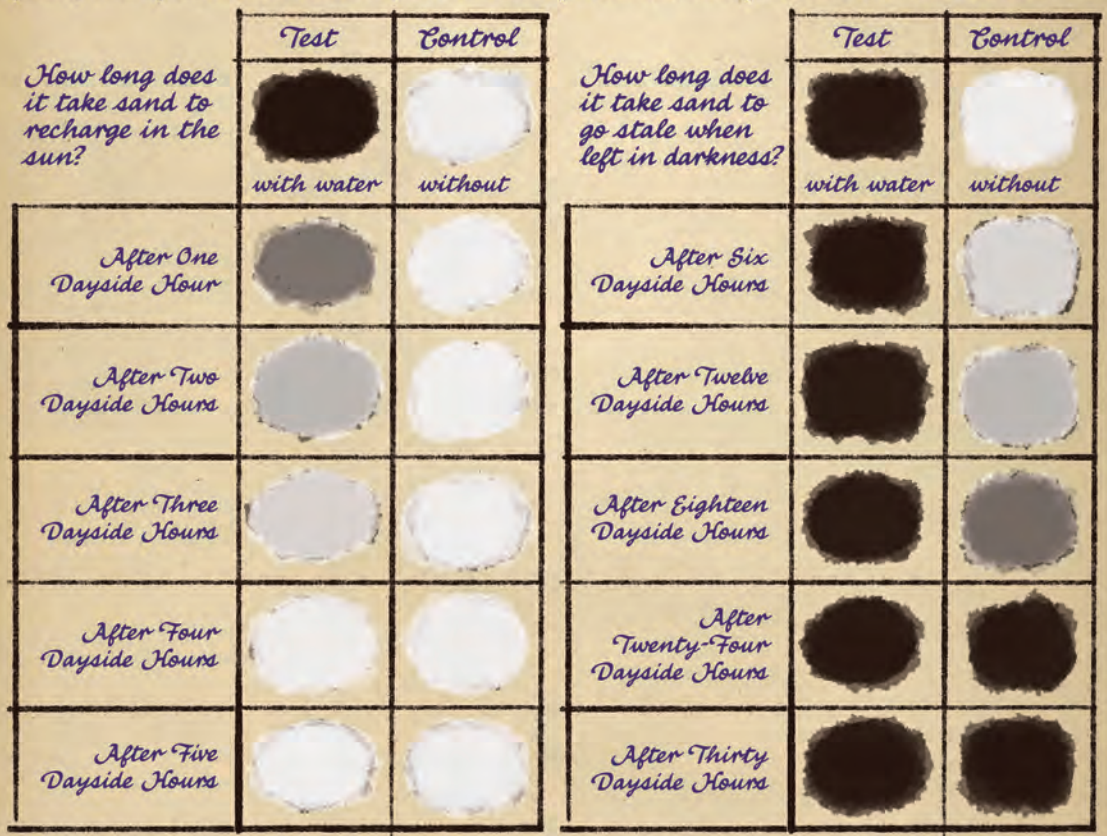
But if sand mastery can be used, then there are even more questions. Can Elisian soldiers be taught to use it, or will it be limited only to the sand masters Kenton sends? How effective will it be against Skathan's armies? Can a knifelike ribbon of sand cut through the protection of one of his warded elites in a way that bullets cannot?

I want to observe and study sand mastery more closely, but Kenton puts off my admittedly-prying questions about his art, citing that some secrets are only for members of the Diem to know.

I'm not sure Kenton—or anyone on Dayside—realizes how powerful the Dynasty is. If Elis falls, Skathan will turn his sights to Dayside, which has nowhere near the naval prowess or military technology of the Dynasty, even considering that a Starcarved army can't use their powers without access to the Eye of Ridos.

Experimentation

My options for observation and experimentation right now are limited, but so far I've determined that white sand turns black when liquid touches it or after it's used in sand mastery. I wonder if it can be recharged, similar to how starmarks rely on Darkside's weekly pulse. The obvious analog on Dayside is the sun. I've placed four piles of sand on ceramic plates, leaving two in sunlight and two in darkness.



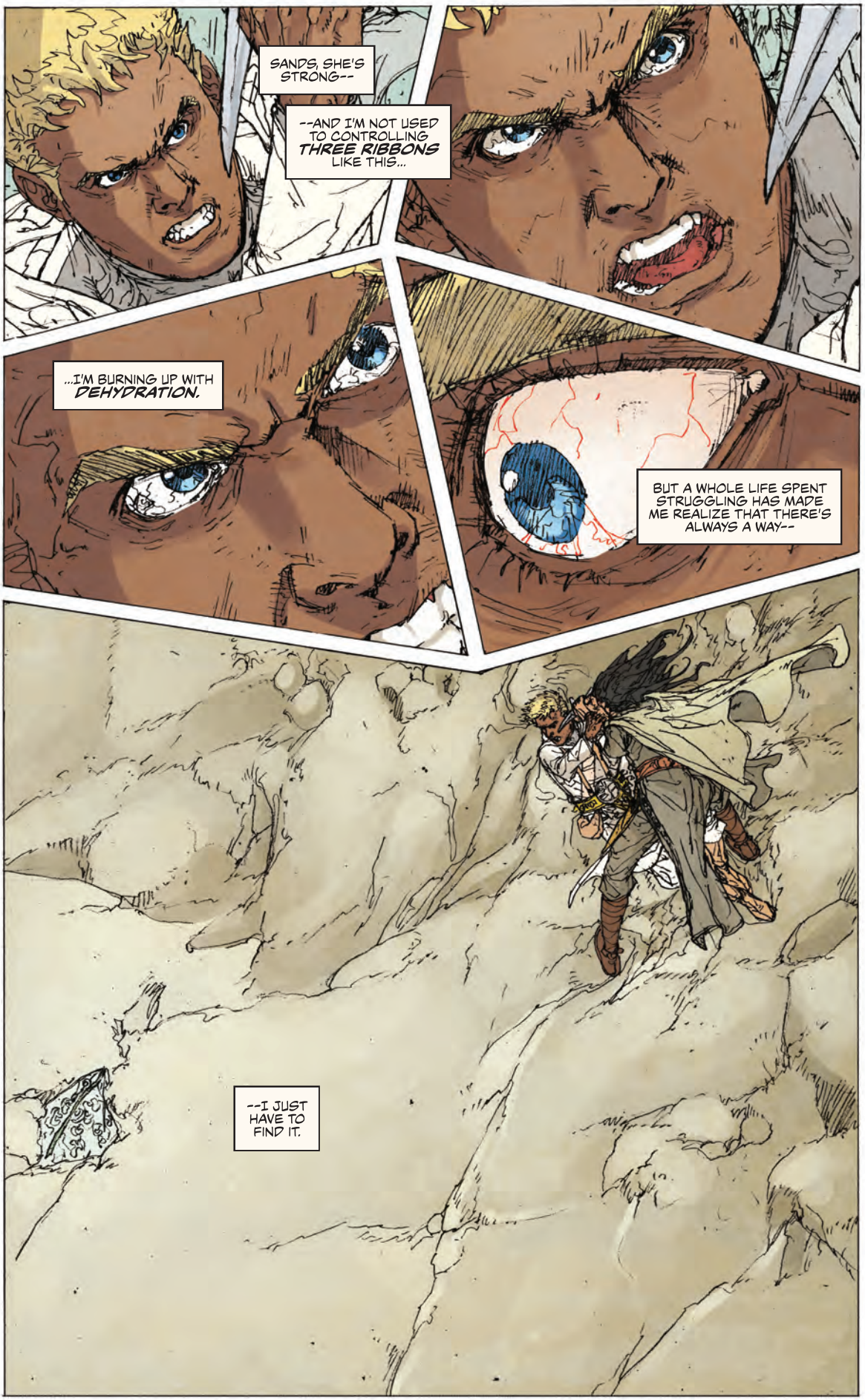
After four hours, the black sand left in the sun turns white. The white sand left in darkness turns black after twenty-four hours. There is no discernable change in the control groups. Do the results differ if I use oil instead of water?

CHAPTER 10
RISING CHALLENGES

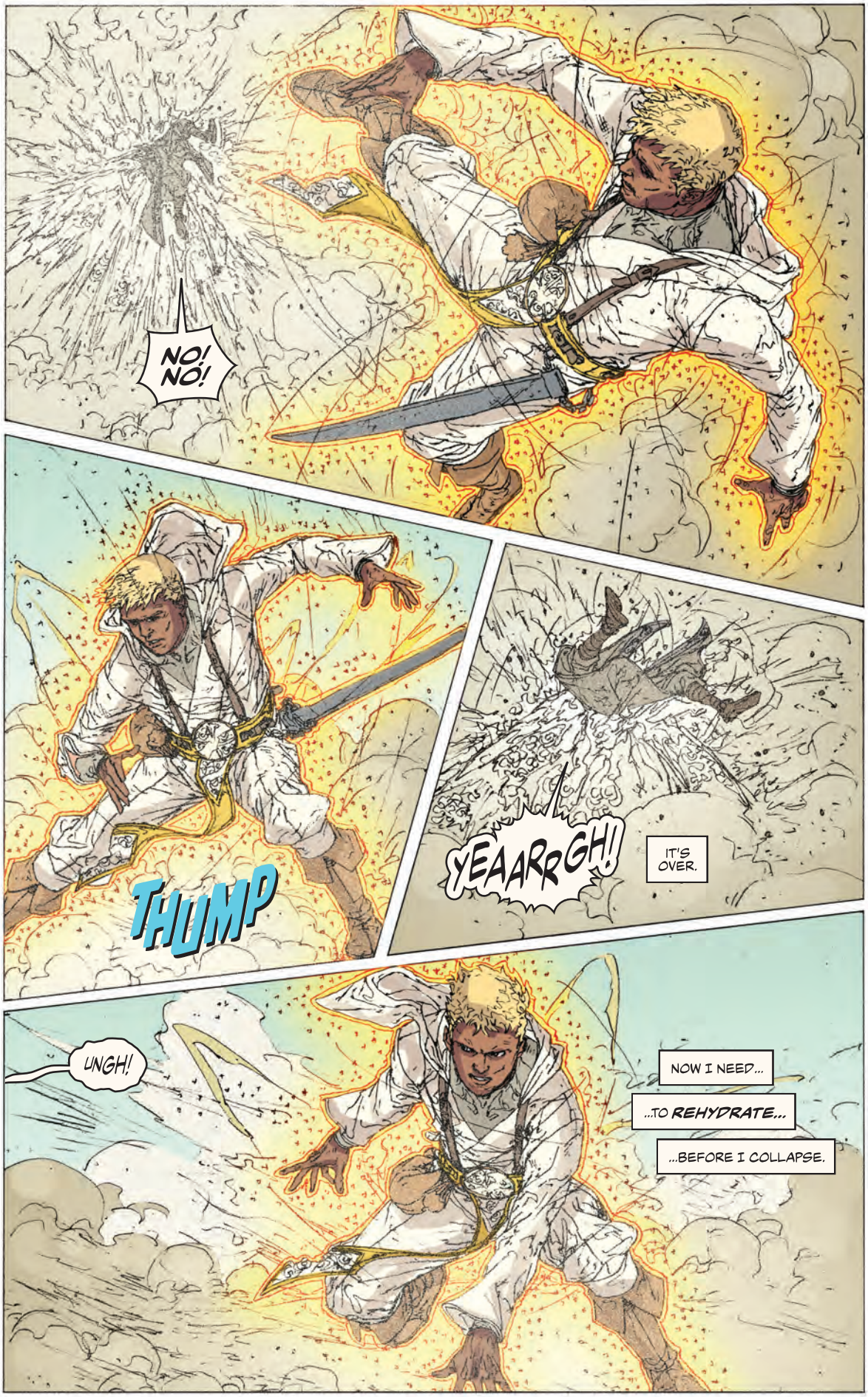
AISHA! MY SWORD'S GONE!
NNNNGGGG!
WHAM
WHAT WAS IT AIS SAID? THAT THOSE LOYAL TO THE A'KAR WOULD KEEP SENDING ASSASSINS UNTIL...

...I'M DEAD.
INCREDIBLE! SHE'S GREASED HERSELF IN TERKEN OIL-- SUFFICIENT TO NEGATE MY SAND.

THIS WOMAN KNOWS HOW TO FIGHT SAND MASTERS!


SANDS, SHE'S STRONG--
--AND I'M NOT USED TO CONTROLLING THREE RIBBONS LIKE THIS...
...I'M BURNING UP WITH DEHYDRATION.
BUT A WHOLE LIFE SPENT STRUGGLING HAS MADE ME REALIZE THAT THERE'S ALWAYS A WAY--
--I JUST HAVE TO FIND IT.

YOU'RE FINISHED, RY'KENSHA!
LORD RAAGENT SAID THE DELRAKIN ARE HARMLESS--
--UNTIL YOU STEP ON ONE.
NO!


NO! NO!
THUMP
YEAARRGH!
IT'S OVER.
UNGH!
NOW I NEED...
...TO REHYDRATE...
...BEFORE I COLLAPSE.

HOW DID THAT ASSASSIN FIND YOU OUT HERE, KENTON?
I FIGURE THEY MUST HAVE SOMEBODY WATCHING THE DIEM.
AND WHERE WERE YOU, AIS? I THOUGHT YOU WERE MY FRIEND'S BODYGUARD!
IF IT WAS THE SAND LORD'S WILL, I WOULD HAVE BEEN THERE.
I...JUST CANNOT ARGUE WITH THAT LOGIC. IT'S...MIND-BLOWING.
BUT TO TRACK SOMEONE ACROSS THE KERLA LIKE THAT...!
YOUR ENEMIES ARE NOTHING IF NOT AMBITIOUS.
THERE IS ONE THING HOWEVER-- IT LOOKS LIKE AIS WAS RIGHT ABOUT THE TIMING.
THE ASSASSIN WAITED UNTIL FIRST HOUR, OFFICIALLY PUTTING US INTO THE NEXT DAY BEFORE SHE ATTACKED.
BUT ANYWAY, AARIK, HOW'S YOUR FATHER?
STILL ANGRY WITH ME, BUT HE PROBABLY ALWAYS WILL BE.
HE STILL WON'T ACCEPT THE IDEA THAT I'M NOT GOING TO BECOME LORD GENERAL AFTER HIM--
--WOULD YOU BELIEVE THAT HE EVEN TRIED TO GIVE ME A SWORD?
HE PROBABLY NOTICED YOU DON'T CARRY ONE THESE DAYS.

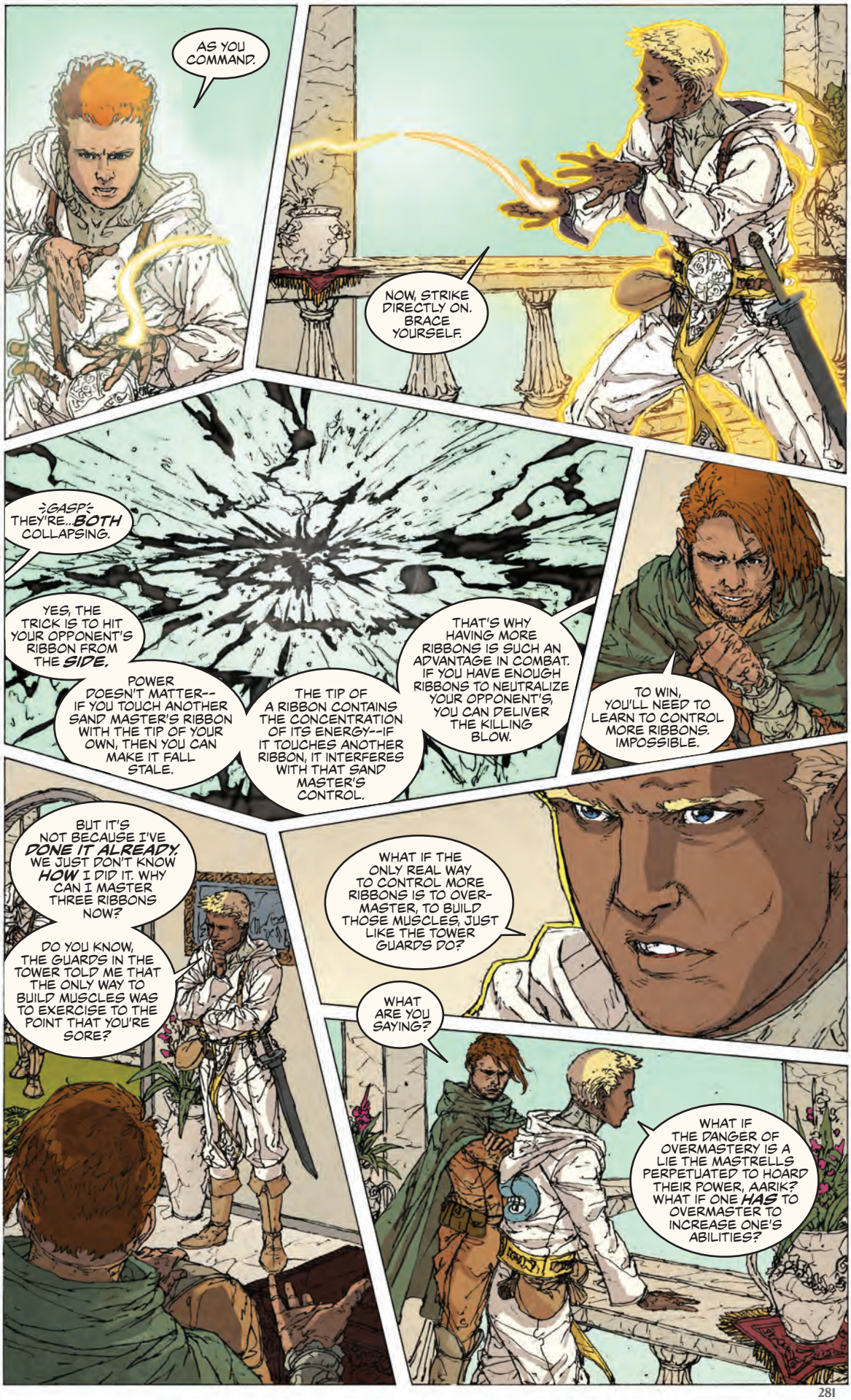
THE DIEM.
ASK YOURSELVES--
--WHERE IS OUR FRESH-FACED LORD MASTRELL NOW?
I'LL TELL YOU WHERE--HE'S OUT MAKING PLANS FOR HIMSELF, TO KEEP HIMSELF SAFE.
WE NEED TO DO THE SAME, MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS. IN A LITTLE OVER A WEEK, THE DIEM WILL BE NO MORE.
WHAT WILL WE DO? WHERE WILL WE GO? WHO WILL PROTECT US?
I'VE MADE PLANS FOR US ALREADY. I HAVE PROMISES--PROMISES OF WEALTH AND PROTECTION!
DRILE, YOU ARE IN VIOLATION OF MY EXPRESS ORDERS!
...
LORD MASTRELL... WELCOME BACK.
THIS HAS TO STOP NOW, DRILE. THE DIEM HAS SUFFERED ENOUGH OF YOUR PARANOIA.

OH? AND HOW DOES THE DIEM INTEND TO STOP IT?
YOU AND I OBVIOUSLY HAVE A PROBLEM.
OBVIOUSLY.
THEN WE NEED TO SETTLE IT.
I DON'T SEE HOW.
THERE WAS A WAY, ONCE. MANY YEARS AGO, OUR CONFERENCE AREA WAS CALLED BY ANOTHER NAME...
THUS--DRILE OF THE DIEM, I CHALLENGE YOU TO COMBAT, ONE-ON-ONE, IN THE DUELING PIT.
YOU ARE A FOOL.
I'LL CUT YOU APART IN SECONDS. WE BOTH KNOW IT.
THEN I WON'T DESERVE TO BE LORD MASTRELL, WILL I?
WE'LL DUEL IN TEN DAYS, RIGHT AFTER THE COUNCIL MAKES ITS DECISION.
BECAUSE I AM GOING TO SAVE THE DIEM--AND IF YOU KILL ME AFTERWARDS, THEN THE DIEM CAN BE YOURS.
I ACCEPT, BUT ON ONE CONDITION--THAT WE FIGHT BEFORE THE COUNCIL MAKES ITS DECISION--
--THAT WAY YOU'LL NEVER GET INSTATED AS THE REAL LORD MASTRELL.
IF THAT'S THE ONLY WAY TO SILENCE YOUR LIES--

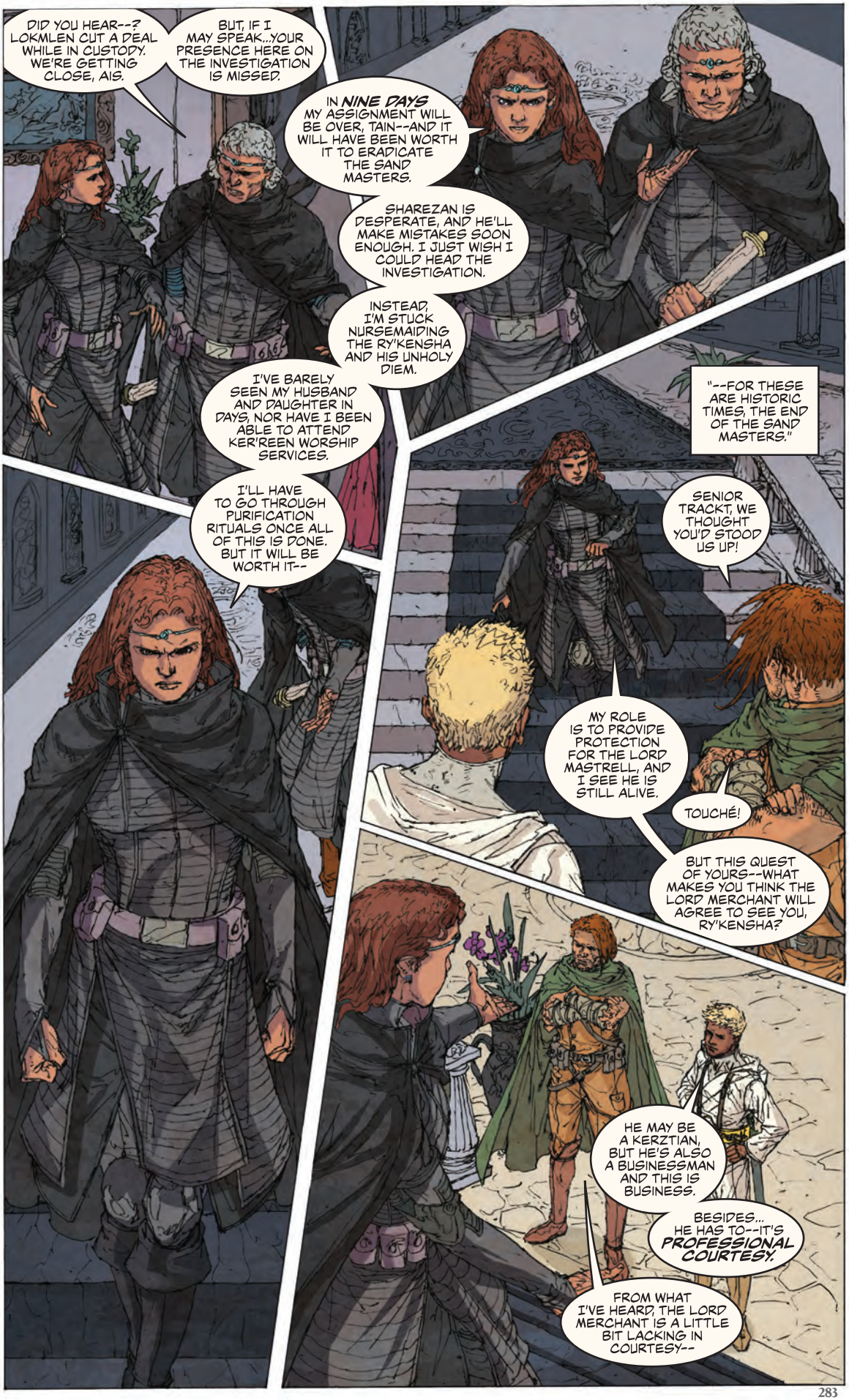
"--THEN SO BE IT."
GREAT SAND LORD, MAN! I'M SUPPOSED TO BE THE INSANE ONE! WHAT WERE YOU THINKING?
THAT A DIEM WITH DRILE IN CHARGE IS BETTER THAN NO DIEM, AARIK.
YOUR FATHER IS RIGHT--THE DIEM KEEPS THE SAND MASTERS IN CHECK.
SHOULD HE WIN, DRILE WILL MAKE A HORRIBLE LORD MASTRELL. BUT OTHERS WILL FOLLOW. BETTER PEOPLE.
IF I CAN CHANGE THE DIEM'S CHARTER SO SAND MASTERS WILL EARN THEIR KEEP, NOT EVEN DRILE WILL BE ABLE TO REPEAL IT.
KENTON, YOU ARE THE MOST NOBLE IDIOT I HAVE EVER KNOWN. DRILE WILL KILL YOU, PLAIN AND SIMPLE!
HE CONTROLS TWENTY-FIVE RIBBONS TO YOUR THREE. HE'LL OVERPOWER YOU IN AN INSTANT.
I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT THAT. PERHAPS THERE IS A WAY TO BEAT DRILE.
OF COURSE, LORD MASTRELL.
DIRIN, WOULD YOU HELP IN AN EXPERIMENT?

I NEED YOU TO CREATE A SAND RIBBON FOR ME.
THAT'S IT. LET IT FLOW FROM YOU.
GOOD. YOU'RE DOING WELL.
NOW HOLD IT STEADY.
STEADY.
AS SOON AS THE TIP OF MY RIBBON TOUCHES DIRIN'S FROM THE SIDE...
UNGH!
...DIRIN'S RIBBON FALLS STALE, WHILE MY RIBBON REMAINS ALIVE.
I'M SORRY, LORD MASTRELL. I COULDN'T MAINTAIN IT ONCE YOUR RIBBON TOUCHED.
IT'S ALL RIGHT. NOW, YOU TRY ME.
LORD MASTRELL, I DON'T THINK I CAN...
JUST TRY.

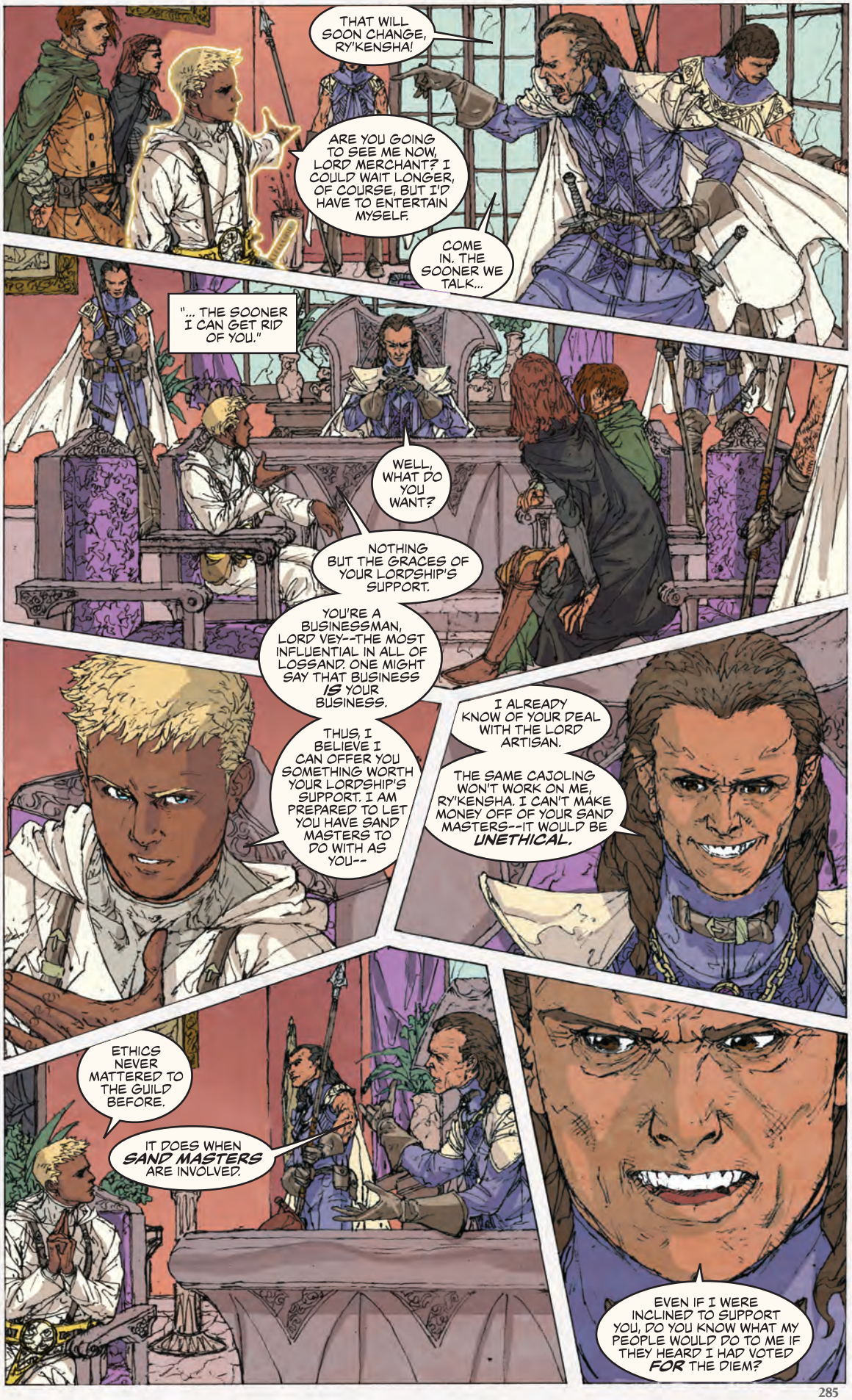
AS YOU ASK.
I WANT YOU TO BRING YOUR RIBBON TOWARDS MINE, DIRIN...
...AND STRIKE MINE FROM THE SIDE.
GOOD.
BUT YOUR RIBBON COLLAPSED WHILE MINE IS STILL ALIVE.
EXACTLY.
NOW ONE MORE TIME, DIRIN.


AS YOU COMMAND.
NOW, STRIKE DIRECTLY ON. BRACE YOURSELF.
>GASP< THEY'RE...BOTH COLLAPSING.
YES, THE TRICK IS TO HIT YOUR OPPONENT'S RIBBON FROM THE SIDE.
POWER DOESN'T MATTER-- IF YOU TOUCH ANOTHER SAND MASTER'S RIBBON WITH THE TIP OF YOUR OWN, THEN YOU CAN MAKE IT FALL STALE.
THE TIP OF A RIBBON CONTAINS THE CONCENTRATION OF ITS ENERGY--IF IT TOUCHES ANOTHER RIBBON, IT INTERFERES WITH THAT SAND MASTER'S CONTROL.
THAT'S WHY HAVING MORE RIBBONS IS SUCH AN ADVANTAGE IN COMBAT. IF YOU HAVE ENOUGH RIBBONS TO NEUTRALIZE YOUR OPPONENT'S, YOU CAN DELIVER THE KILLING BLOW.
TO WIN, YOU'LL NEED TO LEARN TO CONTROL MORE RIBBONS. IMPOSSIBLE.
BUT IT'S NOT BECAUSE I'VE DONE IT ALREADY. WE JUST DON'T KNOW HOW I DID IT. WHY CAN I MASTER THREE RIBBONS NOW?
DO YOU KNOW, THE GUARDS IN THE TOWER TOLD ME THAT THE ONLY WAY TO BUILD MUSCLES WAS TO EXERCISE TO THE POINT THAT YOU'RE SORE?
WHAT IF THE ONLY REAL WAY TO CONTROL MORE RIBBONS IS TO OVER-MASTER, TO BUILD THOSE MUSCLES, JUST LIKE THE TOWER GUARDS DO?
WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?
WHAT IF THE DANGER OF OVERMASTERY IS A LIE THE MASTRELLS PERPETUATED TO HOARD THEIR POWER, AARIK? WHAT IF ONE HAS TO OVERMASTER TO INCREASE ONE'S ABILITIES?

A BRIEF RESPITE FROM THE RY'KENSHA GIVES ME TIME TO DIRECT MY NEXT MOVE AGAINST SHAREZAN, NILTO'S SECRET IDENTITY.
YOU WILL STRIKE AT THE BOAT RACES, TAIN.
SHOULD WE WAIT FOR YOU, MA'AM?
ALAS, MY CURRENT ASSIGNMENT KEEPS ME AWAY FROM MY DUTIES HERE. AND THIS CANNOT WAIT.
I'M DISTRACTED, THOUGH, MY THOUGHTS DRIFTING TO THE LORD MASTRELL. HIS OPTIMISM MAKES HIM HARD TO HATE. IF ONLY HE WEREN'T A SAND MASTER, THEN I MIGHT FIND IT EASIER TO SUPPORT HIM.
I CAGE THE RISING ANGER AND FOCUS ON SHAREZAN...
THIS IS OUR BEST CHANCE TO CUT INTO NILTO'S PROFITS. THE BOOKKEEPERS SHOW A HUGE INFLUX OF MONEY OVER THE LAST MONTH.
YOU THINK NILTO'S MANIPULATING THE RACES? BUT HOW? THERE'S NO PATTERN.
LOOK AGAIN. THE OUTSIDE RACE LANES WIN MORE THAN THE INSIDE ONES. IT DOESN'T MATTER WHICH BOATS ARE IN THOSE LANES, THEY TEND TO BEAT THE ODDS.
NILTO'S TOO SMART TO RIG THE RACES TO FAVOR A SINGLE BOAT, BUT BY WORKING CERTAIN LANES HE CAN STEADILY MAKE MONEY.
VERY DEVIOUS. WE'LL SET UP OBSERVATION.


DID YOU HEAR--? LOKMLEN CUT A DEAL WHILE IN CUSTODY. WE'RE GETTING CLOSE, AIS.
BUT, IF I MAY SPEAK...YOUR PRESENCE HERE ON THE INVESTIGATION IS MISSED.
IN NINE DAYS MY ASSIGNMENT WILL BE OVER, TAIN--AND IT WILL HAVE BEEN WORTH IT TO ERADICATE THE SAND MASTERS.
SHAREZAN IS DESPERATE, AND HE'LL MAKE MISTAKES SOON ENOUGH. I JUST WISH I COULD HEAD THE INVESTIGATION.
INSTEAD, I'M STUCK NURSEMAIDING THE RY'KENSHA AND HIS UNHOLY DIEM.
I'VE BARELY SEEN MY HUSBAND AND DAUGHTER IN DAYS, NOR HAVE I BEEN ABLE TO ATTEND KER'REEN WORSHIP SERVICES.
I'LL HAVE TO GO THROUGH PURIFICATION RITUALS ONCE ALL OF THIS IS DONE. BUT IT WILL BE WORTH IT--
"--FOR THESE ARE HISTORIC TIMES, THE END OF THE SAND MASTERS."
SENIOR TRACKT, WE THOUGHT YOU'D STOOD US UP!
MY ROLE IS TO PROVIDE PROTECTION FOR THE LORD MASTRELL, AND I SEE HE IS STILL ALIVE.
TOUCHÉ!
BUT THIS QUEST OF YOURS--WHAT MAKES YOU THINK THE LORD MERCHANT WILL AGREE TO SEE YOU, RY'KENSHA?
HE MAY BE A KERZTIAN, BUT HE'S ALSO A BUSINESSMAN AND THIS IS BUSINESS.
BESIDES... HE HAS TO--IT'S PROFESSIONAL COURTESY.
FROM WHAT I'VE HEARD, THE LORD MERCHANT IS A LITTLE BIT LACKING IN COURTESY--

"--PROFESSIONAL OR OTHERWISE."
:SIGH:
THEY SAID IT WOULD BE A FEW MINUTES.
THAT WAS TWO HOURS AGO. OR DIDN'T YOU CATCH MY SIGH?
MAYBE I CAN FIND A WAY TO PASS THE TIME.
HEH. YOU WOULDN'T!
ARE YOU DOUBTING MY THRESHOLD FOR BOREDOM, OLD FRIEND?
HAH-HAH-HAH, NOT ME!
EEK!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!
HOW DARE YOU PRACTICE YOUR UNHOLY ART IN MY OFFICES!
THERE IS NO LAW AGAINST SAND MASTERY, LORD MERCHANT.


THAT WILL SOON CHANGE, RY'KENSHA!
ARE YOU GOING TO SEE ME NOW, LORD MERCHANT? I COULD WAIT LONGER, OF COURSE, BUT I'D HAVE TO ENTERTAIN MYSELF.
COME IN. THE SOONER WE TALK...
"... THE SOONER I CAN GET RID OF YOU."
WELL, WHAT DO YOU WANT?
NOTHING BUT THE GRACES OF YOUR LORDSHIP'S SUPPORT.
YOU'RE A BUSINESSMAN, LORD VEY--THE MOST INFLUENTIAL IN ALL OF LOSSAND. ONE MIGHT SAY THAT BUSINESS *IS* YOUR BUSINESS.
THUS, I BELIEVE I CAN OFFER YOU SOMETHING WORTH YOUR LORDSHIP'S SUPPORT. I AM PREPARED TO LET YOU HAVE SAND MASTERS TO DO WITH AS YOU--
I ALREADY KNOW OF YOUR DEAL WITH THE LORD ARTISAN.
THE SAME CAJOLING WON'T WORK ON ME, RY'KENSHA. I CAN'T MAKE MONEY OFF OF YOUR SAND MASTERS--IT WOULD BE ***UNETHICAL.***
ETHICS NEVER MATTERED TO THE GUILD BEFORE.
IT DOES WHEN ***SAND MASTERS*** ARE INVOLVED.
EVEN IF I WERE INCLINED TO SUPPORT YOU, DO YOU KNOW WHAT MY PEOPLE WOULD DO TO ME IF THEY HEARD I HAD VOTED ***FOR*** THE DIEM?

TELL ME, TRACKT-- HAVE YOU EVER REGRETTED *YOUR* BETRAYAL OF YOUR PEOPLE?
NOW YOU TRAVEL WITH A SAND MASTER. AS IF YOUR SOUL WEREN'T ALREADY FORFEIT, YOU HAVE TO MAKE ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN TO EARN THE SAND LORD'S WRATH.
YOU ARE A DISGRACE! YOUR SOUL WILL WANDER THE SANDS, EXILED FROM THE SAND LORD.
YOU ARE NO BETTER THAN THEY. IN FACT, YOU ARE WORSE--YOU ARE ONE OF US, BUT A TRAITOR.
THAT IS ENOUGH, VEY!
KENTON...
WHAT'S THIS? YOU THREATEN ME IN MY OWN CHAMBERS?
YOU INSULT THE WOMAN I BRING AS A GUEST? AN HONORED AND WIDELY-RESPECTED MEMBER OF THE HALL?
I HATE YOU.
GOOD. YOU'RE TRUE TO YOUR RELIGION. NOW, BE TRUE TO YOUR *PROFESSION--*
--WHAT WILL IT COST ME TO *BUY* YOUR VOTE?

I WOULD SELL MY VERY SOUL FIRST!
N-NOW-- G-G-GET OUT!
I'LL BET VEY'S STILL SHAKING WITH FEAR.
YOU'VE GROWN EVIL SINCE I LAST KNEW YOU, AARIK.
I DOUBT THERE IS A LOSSANDIN ON DAYSIDE WHO WOULDN'T FIND THE PROSPECT OF VEY'S DISCOMFORT AMUSING. HALF OF THEM PROBABLY OWE HIM MONEY.
NEVER DO THAT AGAIN.
DO WHAT?
DEFEND ME.
HMF! IF IT'S ANY CONSOLATION, SENIOR, I DOUBT THAT CONVERSATION COULD HAVE ENDED ANY OTHER WAY.
REGARDLESS, NO MATTER WHAT YOU THINK, NO MATTER WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE, I DON'T WANT YOUR HELP.
I CAN'T WIN WITH YOU, CAN I?
I THOUGHT THAT WAS OBVIOUS.
CHIN UP, KENTON. THINGS WILL LOOK BRIGHTER ONCE WE'RE...

"... BACK AT THE DIEM."
LORD MASTRELL, THIS MESSENGER JUST ARRIVED FOR YOU.
WHAT IS YOUR MESSAGE, SIR? LET ME SEE.
IT'S AN INVITATION FROM THE LORD ADMIRAL. HE'S THROWING A BALL... IN MY HONOR!
FROM DELIUS? I'D BETTER BE INVITED!
IT...DOESN'T MENTION YOU. IT SAYS I SHOULD BRING MY "DARKSIDE BEAUTY" IF YOU CAN BELIEVE THAT!
WELL, SHE IS PRETTY.
NOT THE POINT.
TELL ME, SIR, DID YOU BRING ANOTHER MESSAGE? THIS WAS LEFT EARLIER BUT ITS ORIGIN IS A MYSTERY.
IT WAS NOT ME, SIR.
WHERE DID THAT COME FROM?
IT WAS FOUND AT THE GATES OF THE DIEM. CAN YOU MAKE SENSE OF IT, SENIOR?
YES, IT IS A MESSAGE FOR ME.
HE MUST HAVE KNOWN IT WOULD GET TO ME SOMEHOW.
HE? WHO?
SCRUNCH
IT...RELATES TO ANOTHER INVESTIGATION. NOTHING TO CONCERN YOU, RY'KENSHA. BE ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS.

Day 59. Ninth hour. We've finally found suitable accommodations, and it's, thankfully, time for lunch.
DUCHESS, YOU HAVE A VISITOR.
YOU!
HELLO, KHRISSALLA. HOW HAVE YOU BEEN?
I WAS ABOUT TO EAT.
DON'T LET ME STOP YOU.
YOU SEEM... TALLER. WHAT ODD SHOES!
THEY'RE CALLED HEELS. MOST WOMEN WEAR THEM ON DARKSIDE.
WHY?
I DON'T KNOW. TO LOOK TALLER.
BUT TELL ME--WHAT PROGRESS HAVE YOU MADE?
NOT MUCH. EIGHT DAYS LEFT, AND ONLY ONE TAISHA HAS PROMISED TO VOTE FOR ME.
THE REST RANGE FROM UNDECIDED TO DOWNRIGHT HOSTILE.
WELL, WHILE YOU WERE OUT PLAYING IN DEEP SAND, I MET WITH THE LORD BEGGAR.
NOT TO MENTION TRYING TO GET ON THE GOOD SIDE OF THE POPULACE.
AND?
WE'VE COME TO AN ARRANGEMENT.

PROVE THE DIEM CAN BENEFIT THE PEOPLE, AND THE LORD BEGGAR WILL SWAY THEIR OPINION.
AISHA! YOU'VE BEEN BUSY. I DON'T KNOW HOW TO THANK YOU.
IF THE DIEM SURVIVES, JUST KEEP YOUR PROMISE TO SEND SAND MASTERS BACK WITH ME.
DUCHESS, YOU HAVE MY WORD.
HERE, I CAME HERE TO SHOW YOU THIS. THE LORD ADMIRAL IS THROWING A BALL.
HE ASKED ME TO ATTEND, AND REQUESTED THAT YOU COME ALONG. YOU CLEARLY MADE AN IMPRESSION ON HIM.
CLEARLY. IT SEEMS THAT YOU'RE MAKING PROGRESS AFTER ALL.
MAYBE...
THE COMPROMISE YOU BROKERED WITH THE LORD ARTISAN IS MEANINGLESS UNLESS I CAN FIND A WAY TO PAY WHAT THE DIEM OWES HIM.
DON'T THE SAND MASTERS HAVE ANY MONEY?
...THEN WHERE HAVE THEY STASHED IT?
NO...
HEELIS TOLD ME THAT THE GUILD STILL PRESENTS THE TRIBUTE TO THE DIEM, LIKE THEY HAVE DONE FOR DECADES, AT TWENTY-FIVE THOUSAND LAK EACH QUARTER.
DIDN'T YOU TELL ME THAT SAND MASTERS NEVER PAID FOR ANYTHING?
SO, IF THE SAND MASTERS NEVER USED THE TRIBUTE BECAUSE THEY DIDN'T NEED IT...

Sand Mastery, Starmarks Connection?

What few books on sand mastery I've found in Kezare categorize it as a mystical art, its secrets closely guarded, but from my experience, even elements of the unseen can be studied and observed like other natural phenomena.

Take the color of the glow of sand mastery. Manuscripts and carvings show sand ribbons glowing yellow or orange, attempts by artists to show something undepictable with paint alone. Indeed, observed in pure daylight, sand mastery does appear a yellowish white, but a closer examination shows that it shimmers like mother of pearl, iridescent colors shifting and sliding across the mastered sand. This effect is much more prominent in darkness, something of a rarity here on Dayside. Since sand mastery rarely happens in darkness, not many have recorded observing this effect.

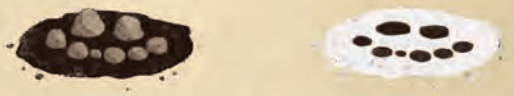
I can almost make out every color of starmark shifting in there. Could it be possible that the light given off by sand mastery is a composite of all colors of starmarks? If I can get hold of a prism, I might be able to verify this observation and study it further. This connection gives me hope that while the sun may charge white sand on Dayside, there might be another way to charge it back in Elis.

Further Sand-Sun Experiments

I've built upon my earlier observations of the sun's effect on white sand and found something that might be related to the unseen forces I've mentioned in earlier entries.

I placed black sand in the sun, covering half of it. After four hours, the covered portion remains black while the portion open to the sun turns white again.

If I create a pattern with stones and remove them four hours later, the pattern remains.



I've read about the Dayside phenomenon that prisoners sometimes experience in dark dungeons when only pinpricks of direct sunlight can get through, so I placed a box over an area of black sand and created a tiny hole in the top to let in a small amount of light. After a four hours, I removed the box and found this:

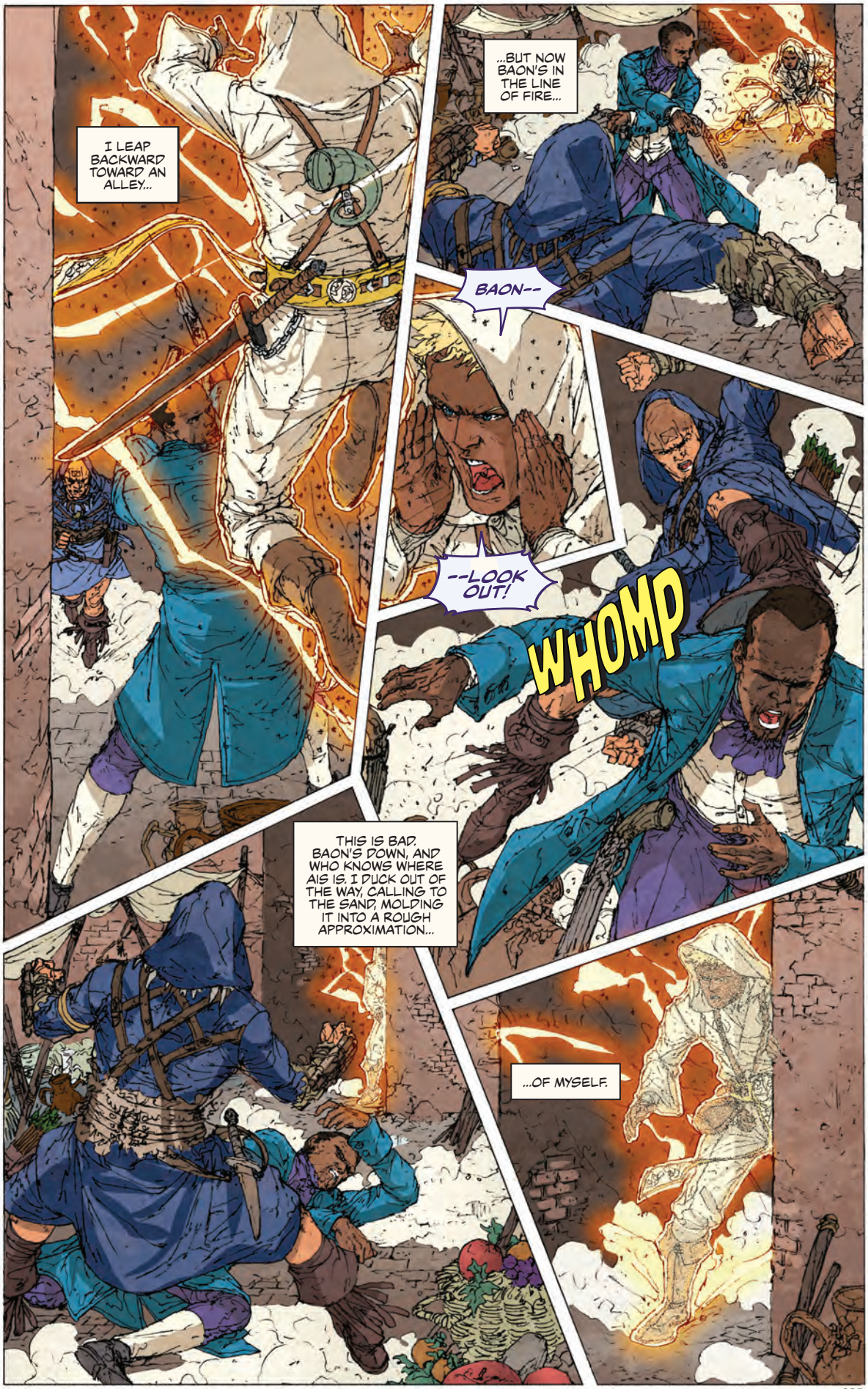
A perfect representation (mirrored) of the top of my building looking up from the pinhole with a face in the sky. This won't defeat Skathan, but it must be studied more. And what is that face? Humans seem to see things in clouds, but this is a bit unsettling.

What I need is more access to sand masters willing to demonstrate their abilities. This will help me know specifically how sand mastery can be used as a weapon against Skathan and will also help me understand exactly how sand mastery works. There must be connections between the anomalies I've found with the planet, starmarks, and sand mastery. Just like an ecosystem is connected, intertwined, and symbiotic, could the underlying power that keeps our planet in orbit also be the underlying power that fuels—dare I call it this?—magical elements that seem outside the order of nature?

CHAPTER II
PARTY POLITICS

KENTON, WE'RE IN THE MIDDLE OF LUNCH! WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING?
YOU'RE RIGHT! DECADES OF TRIBUTE MONEY HAS TO BE SOMEWHERE. I THINK I KNOW WHERE TO LOOK.
I DON'T UNDERSTAND. HOW CAN YOU BE IN DEBT--
UNGH!
LOOK WHERE YOU'RE...
...GOING.
WHO ARE YOU TALKING TO, DUCHESS?
LOOK AROUND, KENTON. SOMETHING'S NOT RIGHT.
STAY ALERT. IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE...

...THE LAST ATTACK!
FFFT
FFFT
FFFT
FFFT
FFFT
FFFT
MORE ASSASSINS! THIS IS GETTING OLD VERY QUICKLY!
SHELLA! SPEAK DYNASTIC, KENTON!
MAY I SUGGEST YOU WORRY ABOUT THE LANGUAGE BARRIER LATER, DUCHESS?
THE RY'KENSHA WENT THIS WA--
FFFT
--AARRRGH!


I LEAP BACKWARD TOWARD AN ALLEY...
...BUT NOW BAON'S IN THE LINE OF FIRE...
BAON--
--LOOK OUT!
WHOMP
THIS IS BAD. BAON'S DOWN, AND WHO KNOWS WHERE AIS IS. I DUCK OUT OF THE WAY, CALLING TO THE SAND, MOLDING IT INTO A ROUGH APPROXIMATION...
...OF MYSELF.

FFFT
FFFT
TSSSSHHH
CLANG
YOU GUYS FORGOT THE FIRST RULE OF FIGHTING SAND MASTERS--
CLANG
--ALWAYS KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE SAND.
FZZZZZ
AISHA! THIS GUY'S LEARNING QUICKER THAN I'D HOPED.

SO, WHAT NOW, RY'KENSHA?
I'M GOING TO DO SOMETHING YOU MAY FIND HERETICAL.
YOUR VERY EXISTENCE IS HERETICAL!
KHRISS CALLED BAONI'S WEAPONS... PISTOLS.
WE CAN DISCUSS THAT ONCE WE GET OUT OF THIS MESS, DEAL?
I DIRECT MY RIBBONS TO PICK UP THE PISTOLS.
WHY BOTHER? WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU COULD POSSIBLY SAY TO ME THAT WOULD CHANGE WHAT IS RIGHT FROM WHAT IS WRONG?

GOOD POINT!
MY RIBBONS CARRY THE PISTOLS BEHIND MY ENEMIES, AND THEN THEY SLIP AROUND THE TRIGGERS. THIS IS HOW THEY WORK, RIGHT?
UNGH!
YEARGH!
KA-BOOM
KA-BOOM
FFFT
YEARGH!
YOU CAUGHT ME UNAWARES LAST TIME, ASSASSIN.
LET ME RETURN THE FAVOR.
SPLLLTT!

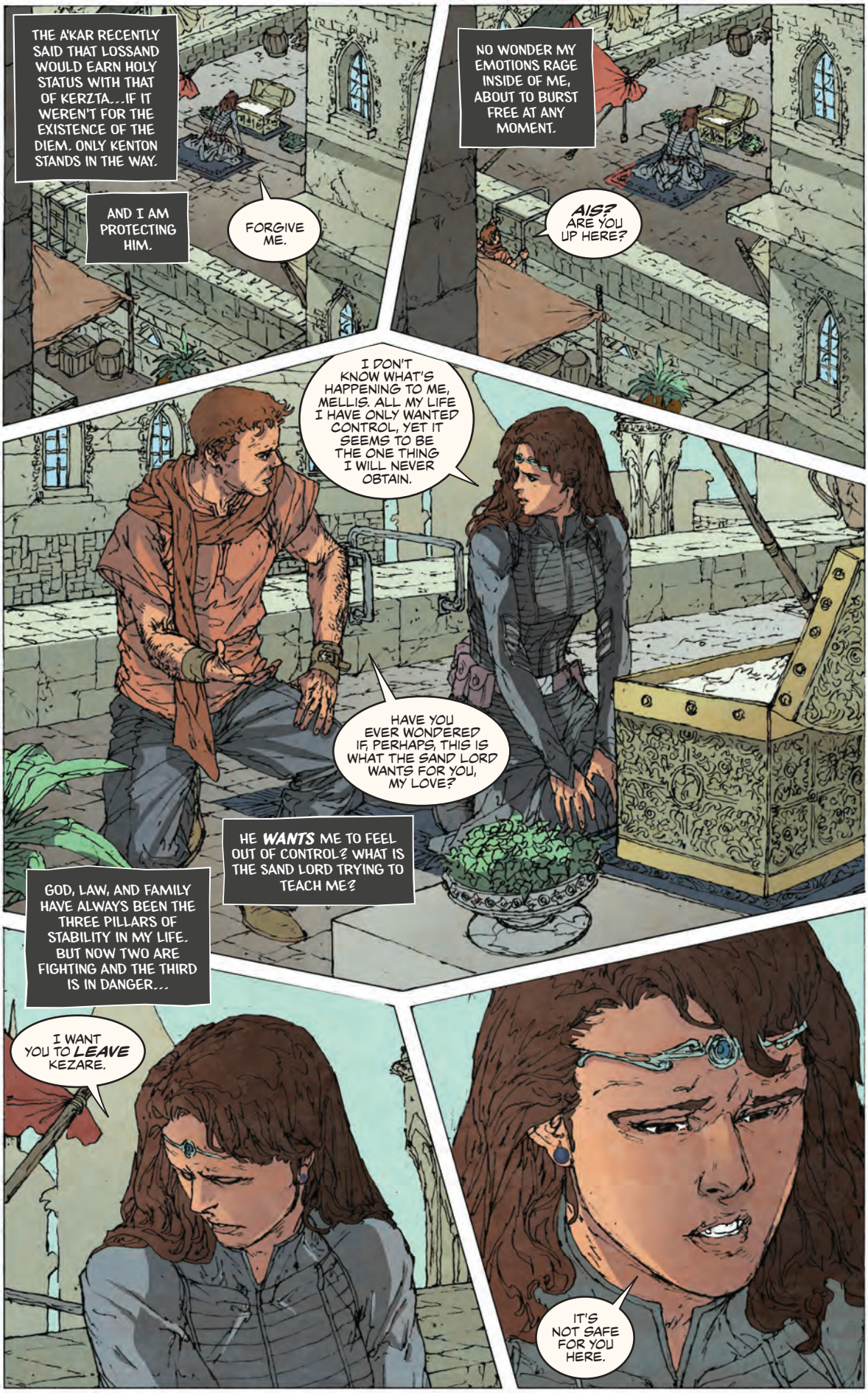
SEE? THIS SCARRING IS FRESH.
THE KER'REEN HIGH PRIEST HAS A CONTRACT ON MY LIFE BUT THIS IS THE FIRST LOSSANDIN WHO'S TRIED TO KILL ME.
THE A'KAR RECENTLY PROMISED TO LET LOSSANDIN BELIEVERS BE ADOPTED INTO KERZTIAN FAMILIES IF THEY DEDICATE THEMSELVES ONLY TO HIM.
I HAD ASSUMED THAT RUMOR TO BE FALSE UNTIL NOW.
SO, I'M NOT ONLY BEING HUNTED BY THE MOST AVID A'KAR IN RECENT HISTORY, BUT ALSO THE MOST OPEN-MINDED ONE?
THIS NEW A'KAR IS DIFFERENT. HE HAS STRANGE IDEAS AND HE'S DETERMINED TO WIN THE CHOOSING.
IF HE LETS LOSSANDINS JOIN, THEN HIS DAIKEEN WILL GROW FASTER, GIVING HIM MORE POWER. RIGHT NOW, YOU'RE THE ONLY THING STANDING IN HIS WAY.
HE TOLD THE KERZTIAN PEOPLE THAT HE HAD DESTROYED THE MASTRELLS, BUT THEN YOU CAME BACK. YOUR CONTINUED EXISTENCE MAKES HIM LOOK LIKE A FOOL AND A LIAR.
NO WONDER HE WANTS ME DEAD.
HOW COME EVERY TIME I GO SOMEWHERE WITH YOU, I ALMOST GET KILLED?
IT'S TIME YOU COME CLEAN, DAYSIDER. WHY DOES EVERYONE WANT YOU DEAD?
YOU'RE RIGHT, KHRISSALLA. YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS HAVE THROWN IN YOUR LOT WITH ME, SO...I DO OWE YOU A PROPER EXPLANATION--

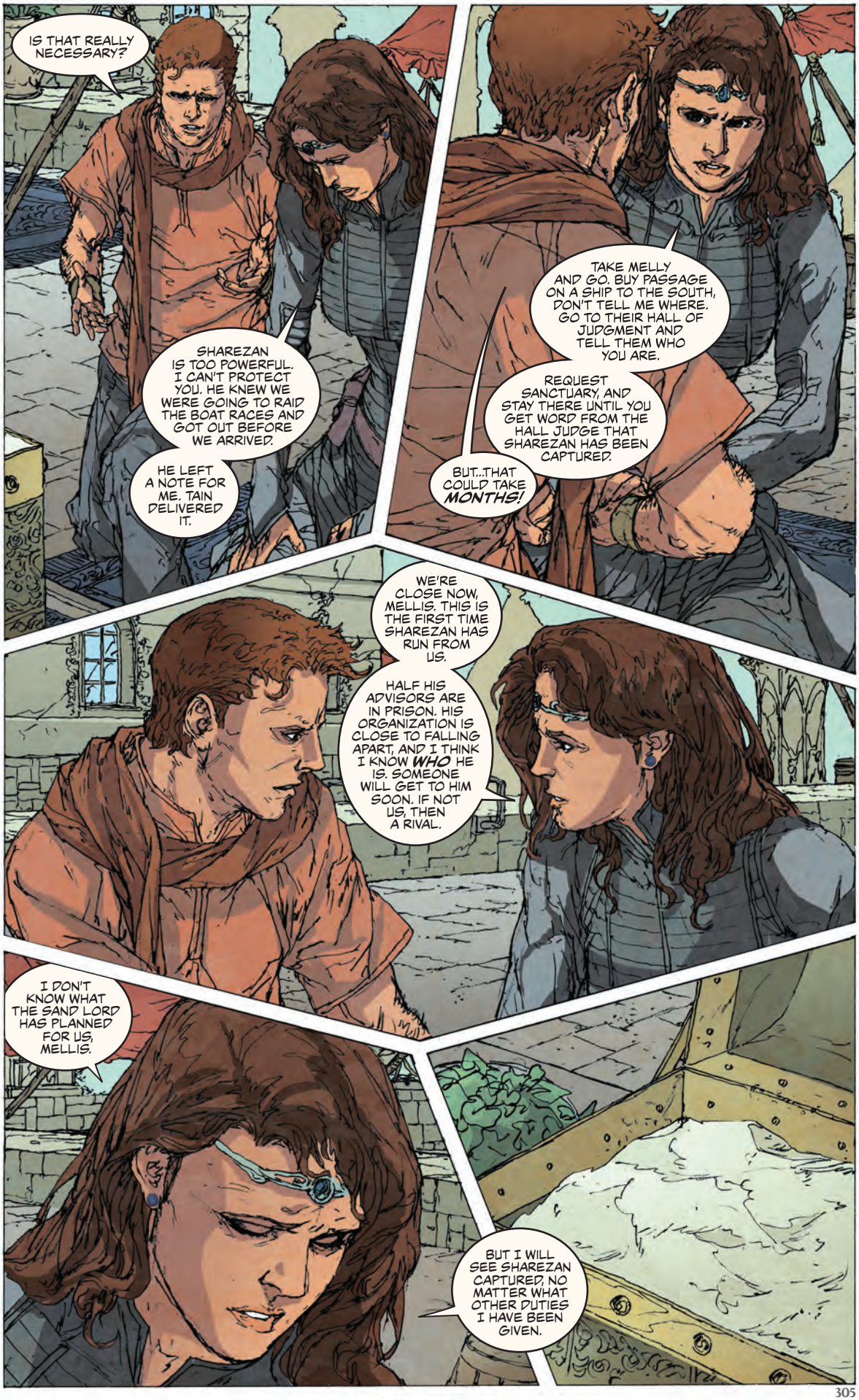
"--BEFORE ONE OF US GETS KILLED."
MY MOTHER WAS A DARKSIDER AND MY FATHER WAS A MASTRELL. SOME IN THE DIEM SAID THAT WAS WHY HIS CHILDREN SHOWED NO TALENT FOR SAND MASTERY--BECAUSE OF HER. I WANTED SO MUCH TO JOIN THE DIEM AND PROVE THEM WRONG.
I GOT ACCEPTED ON A TECHNICALITY, AND I STRUGGLED TO DO WHAT THE OTHER STUDENTS FOUND EASY. SO INSTEAD, I SPENT HOURS HONING MY SKILLS UNTIL I COULD DO THINGS NO OTHER SAND MASTER COULD--BUT THEY WERE SMALL THINGS, JUST TRICKS REALLY.
I WANTED SO BADLY TO IMPRESS MY FATHER, I THINK AT SOME POINT THAT DESIRE BECAME A COMPULSION.
I STILL HADN'T MADE PEACE WITH HIM, AND THEN HE WAS KILLED.
WE WERE AMBUSHED OUT ON THE KERLA SANDS. IT WAS A SETUP. I STILL DON'T KNOW HOW OR WHY.
MY FATHER, MY FRIENDS... ALMOST EVERYONE DIED, KHRISS.
WE DIDN'T HAVE THE POWER TO STOP IT. AND FOR A WHILE, I WASN'T SURE I HAD ANY POWER AT ALL.
YOU MEAN WHEN WE MET? YOU THOUGHT YOU'D LOST YOUR POWERS?
YEAH, I REALLY DID. BUT MAYBE I'D OVERMASTERED OR...I DON'T KNOW. IT'S ALL SO MESSED UP.
WHAT I KNOW FOR SURE IS I HAVE TO SOMEHOW FIX THE DIEM. WE'VE BEEN TOO REMOTE, DIDN'T NOTICE ALL THE FACTIONS RALLYING AGAINST US.
AND NOW THE NEW A'KAR IS DRUMMING UP HATE FOR US AMONG KER'REEN FOLLOWERS... WELL, I'M RUNNING OUT OF FRIENDS, KHRISS.
I'M YOUR FRIEND, KENTON--

"--WE'LL FIGURE IT OUT."
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, YOU ALREADY KNEW THE MASTRELLS LEFT BEHIND MONEY?
WELL, SURELY YOU EXPECTED ME TO CHECK THE ROOM OVER BEFORE I PUT MY STUFF HERE!
I FOUND THIS ON THE FIRST DAY--A HIDDEN DRAWER, SEE?
CLICK
WORTH ABOUT EIGHT HUNDRED LAK, I'D GUESS.
NOT AS MUCH AS I'D EXPECT, NOT IF IT'S BEEN ACCRUING FOR YEARS.
MAYBE THE OTHER ROOMS HAVE MORE.
KHRISS, BAON--WILL YOU CHECK THE ROOMS ON THE OPPOSITE BALCONY?
LET'S CHECK. AARIK, YOU WORK THIS SIDE AND MOVE RIGHT. I'LL GO LEFT.
YOU HEARD HIM, BAON. LET'S GET MOVING.
AS YOUR PROTECTOR, I INSIST YOU LET ME DO THIS.

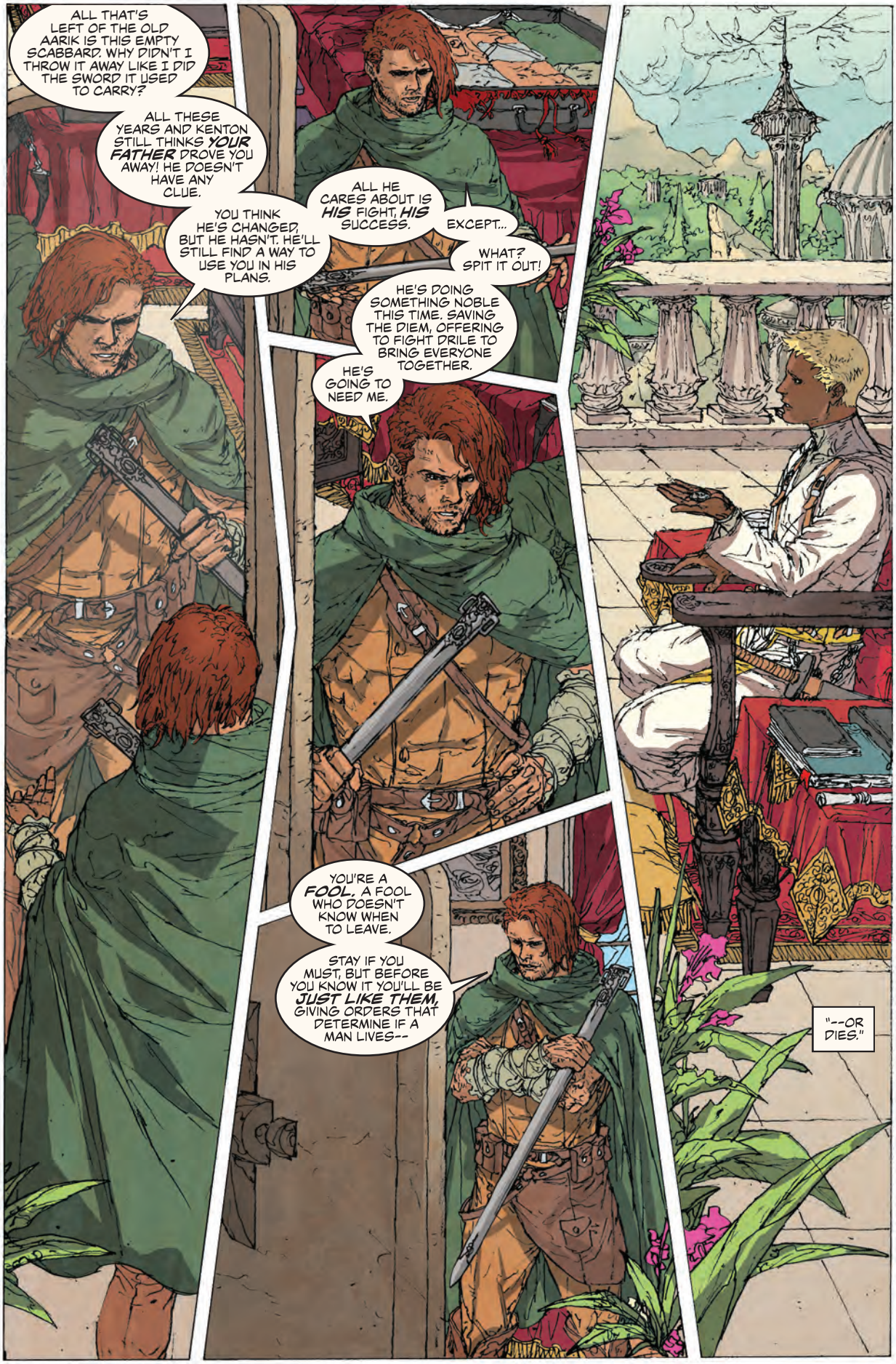
CLICK
STAY BACK, DUCHESS--IT COULD BE BOOBY-TRAPPED.
I MAINTAIN MY OBJECTION TO THIS...
NOTED.
IT'S ONLY ABOUT FIVE THOUSAND LAK, KENTON.
THAT'S A FAR CRY FROM THE FIVE MILLION WE OWE.
We've hit a dead end now, so it's back to our accommodations to regroup.
IT APPEARS THAT THE DIEM HAS QUITE A FEW HOLES IT NEEDS TO DIG ITSELF OUT OF, DUCHESS. IT COULD BE A LOST CAUSE.
BUT SAND MASTERY ISN'T, BAON. TODAY WE SAW HOW KENTON USED IT AGAINST THOSE ASSASSINS. THAT KIND OF POWER WOULD BE VERY USEFUL IF SKATHAN DECIDES TO ATTACK ELIS.
SO WHERE'S THE REST OF THE TRIBUTE MONEY GONE?
Sand mastery might not be the answer to Kenton's problems. But it might be the solution to mine. Time to do what I'm best at. Taking things apart to see how they work.

FIFTH HOUR, WHEN MOST OF THIS PART OF KEZARE STILL SLEEPS. MY CONTROL IS SLIPPING, AND I SEEK PEACE...
SAND LORD WATCH OVER ME.
...THE ONLY WAY I KNOW HOW.
THE WORLD SEEMS TO GROW SILENT AND, FOR A MOMENT, I'M ALONE BEFORE THE SAND LORD.
SAND LORD BLESS ME.
SAND LORD GUIDE ME IN ALL THAT I DO.
FORGIVE ME THIS DAY, AS MY DUTIES FORCE ME TO ADOPT THE ROLE OF THE RY'KENSHA'S PROTECTOR, CONTRARY TO YOUR TEACHINGS.
FORGIVE ME THIS DAY, AS MY DUTIES HAVE FORCED ME TO KILL MEN WHOSE MOTIVATIONS I APPLAUD.


THE A'KAR RECENTLY SAID THAT LOSSAND WOULD EARN HOLY STATUS WITH THAT OF KERZTA...IF IT WEREN'T FOR THE EXISTENCE OF THE DIEM. ONLY KENTON STANDS IN THE WAY.
AND I AM PROTECTING HIM.
FORGIVE ME.
NO WONDER MY EMOTIONS RAGE INSIDE OF ME, ABOUT TO BURST FREE AT ANY MOMENT.
AIS? ARE YOU UP HERE?
I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ME, MELLIS. ALL MY LIFE I HAVE ONLY WANTED CONTROL, YET IT SEEMS TO BE THE ONE THING I WILL NEVER OBTAIN.
HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED IF, PERHAPS, THIS IS WHAT THE SAND LORD WANTS FOR YOU, MY LOVE?
HE WANTS ME TO FEEL OUT OF CONTROL? WHAT IS THE SAND LORD TRYING TO TEACH ME?
GOD, LAW, AND FAMILY HAVE ALWAYS BEEN THE THREE PILLARS OF STABILITY IN MY LIFE. BUT NOW TWO ARE FIGHTING AND THE THIRD IS IN DANGER...
I WANT YOU TO LEAVE KEZARE.
IT'S NOT SAFE FOR YOU HERE.


IS THAT REALLY NECESSARY?
SHAREZAN IS TOO POWERFUL. I CAN'T PROTECT YOU. HE KNEW WE WERE GOING TO RAID THE BOAT RACES AND GOT OUT BEFORE WE ARRIVED.
HE LEFT A NOTE FOR ME. TAIN DELIVERED IT.
TAKE MELLY AND GO. BUY PASSAGE ON A SHIP TO THE SOUTH, DON'T TELL ME WHERE. GO TO THEIR HALL OF JUDGMENT AND TELL THEM WHO YOU ARE.
REQUEST SANCTUARY, AND STAY THERE UNTIL YOU GET WORD FROM THE HALL JUDGE THAT SHAREZAN HAS BEEN CAPTURED.
BUT..THAT COULD TAKE MONTHS!
WE'RE CLOSE NOW, MELLIS. THIS IS THE FIRST TIME SHAREZAN HAS RUN FROM US.
HALF HIS ADVISORS ARE IN PRISON. HIS ORGANIZATION IS CLOSE TO FALLING APART, AND I THINK I KNOW WHO HE IS. SOMEONE WILL GET TO HIM SOON. IF NOT US, THEN A RIVAL.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE SAND LORD HAS PLANNED FOR US, MELLIS.
BUT I WILL SEE SHAREZAN CAPTURED, NO MATTER WHAT OTHER DUTIES I HAVE BEEN GIVEN.

YOU'RE DOING THE RIGHT THING IN LEAVING.
YOU'RE NOT ABANDONING HIM.
HE DOESN'T EVEN NEED YOU, REALLY.
"KENTON PROBABLY DOESN'T EVEN REMEMBER GIVING IT TO YOU."
THE SWORD'S TOO VALUABLE! I CAN'T ACCEPT THIS, KENTON.
YOU SPOKE WITH YOUR FATHER, YOU DID WHAT YOU CAME HERE TO DO. NOW IT'S TIME TO GET MOVING AGAIN.
YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DON'T KEEP MOVING, DON'T YOU?
--KEEP PACKING.
...
OH, COME NOW, AARIK. NOT THIS.
YES YOU CAN, AARIK. ONE DAY SOON, YOU'LL BE LORD GENERAL AND I'LL BE LORD MASTRELL! THINK OF WHAT WE'LL DO!


ALL THAT'S LEFT OF THE OLD AARIK IS THIS EMPTY SCABBARD. WHY DIDN'T I THROW IT AWAY LIKE I DID THE SWORD IT USED TO CARRY?
ALL THESE YEARS AND KENTON STILL THINKS YOUR FATHER DROVE YOU AWAY! HE DOESN'T HAVE ANY CLUE.
YOU THINK HE'S CHANGED, BUT HE HASN'T. HE'LL STILL FIND A WAY TO USE YOU IN HIS PLANS.
ALL HE CARES ABOUT IS HIS FIGHT, HIS SUCCESS.
EXCEPT...
WHAT? SPIT IT OUT!
HE'S DOING SOMETHING NOBLE THIS TIME. SAVING THE DIEM, OFFERING TO FIGHT DRILE TO BRING EVERYONE TOGETHER.
HE'S GOING TO NEED ME.
YOU'RE A FOOL, A FOOL WHO DOESN'T KNOW WHEN TO LEAVE.
STAY IF YOU MUST, BUT BEFORE YOU KNOW IT YOU'LL BE JUST LIKE THEM, GIVING ORDERS THAT DETERMINE IF A MAN LIVES--
"--OR DIES."

I SEE YOU'VE REDECORATED YOUR BEDROOM, DUCHESS.
TAKE A LOOK AT THIS AND TELL ME WHAT YOU SEE.
I WOULD SAY A PIECE OF CARAPACE.
RIGHT. NOW LET ME REPLACE IT WITH A SECOND ONE. NOW WHAT DO YOU SEE?
THE SAME, MY LADY.
NO, THIS SECOND ONE ISN'T CARAPACE, CYNDER. IT'S SAND.
NOW, LOOK AT THIS AND TELL ME WHAT YOU SEE.
HMMM. DAYSIDE SAND.
DAYSIDE SAND THAT HAS HAD WATER POURED ON IT.
THIS THIRD IS DARKSIDE SAND.

RIGHT EXCEPT FOR THE LAST ONE. THIS ISN'T REGULAR OLD DARKSIDE SAND. IT'S DAYSIDE SAND THAT HAS BEEN EATEN BY A SANDLING AND EXCRETED.
SANDLING FECES?
KIND OF--
"SAND WHICH HAS PASSED THROUGH A SANDLING'S GULLET LOOKS JUST LIKE TAN DARKSIDE SAND."
THE DIFFERENCE IN DAYSIDE SAND'S COLOR DOESN'T COME FROM ITS COMPOSITION BUT FROM SOMETHING THAT COVERS IT.
A KIND OF VERY THIN BUT RESILIENT FILM THAT GROWS ON THE SAND AND TURNS BLACK IF WATER TOUCHES IT. IF A SANDLING EATS THE SAND, HOWEVER...
...THE FILM GETS DIGESTED. I HAD WONDERED HOW ALL THESE SANDLINGS SURVIVED BY EATING SAND.
LICHEN GROWS ALL OVER THE PLACE ON DARKSIDE. MAYBE THIS IS THE SAME SORT OF THING, ONLY A DAYSIDE VERSION.
THAT WOULD MAKE IT A LIVING CREATURE, AND LIVING CREATURES NEED WATER TO SURVIVE.
SANDLINGS DON'T SEEM TO NEED WATER, SO IT'S LIKELY THIS LICHEN DOESN'T EITHER. MAYBE THE SAND GROWS THE LICHEN LIKE A PROTECTIVE CARAPACE.
HOWEVER, IT DOESN'T ACT LIKE CARAPACE. IT DOESN'T MELT WHEN YOU POUR WATER ON IT--
--WATCH CLOSELY.
THE SAND RELEASES LIGHT WHEN WATER TOUCHES IT.

THE SAME MOTHER-OF-PEARL COLOR OF LIGHT GIVEN OFF BY SAND THAT A SAND MASTER IS CONTROLLING.
WHAT'S MORE, WHEN A SAND MASTER IS DONE USING SAND, IT TURNS BLACK, JUST LIKE THIS HAS.
BUT WHAT DOES IT MEAN?
I DON'T KNOW, BUT IT IS ENCOURAGING. WE CAN TAKE THIS SAND BACK TO ELIS WITH US. WE CAN GROW THE LICHEN ON OUR OWN SAND AND USE IT LIKE THE SAND MASTERS DO.
I INTEND TO FIND OUT HOW THIS WORKS, CYNDER, AND WHEN WE BRING IT BACK TO ELIS WE'LL HAVE A WEAPON SKATHAN HAS NEVER HEARD OF!
A WORTHY GOAL. MAY THE DIVINE WATCH OVER YOU, MY LADY.
THANK YOU.
BAON, A MOMENT IF YOU WOULD?
YOU'RE FROM IIARIA AND YOU SAID YOU'D SEEN SKATHAN. IS IT TRUE WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT HIM? ABOUT HIS... ABILITIES?
YOU MEAN HIS MAGIC?
I'M STARTING TO REALIZE THAT WHAT WE CALL MAGIC IS MORE REAL THAN I GAVE IT CREDIT.
I HAVE SEEN THE EMPEROR DO THINGS IMPOSSIBLE FOR A NORMAL MAN.
DUCHESS, WHEN I WAS A YOUNG BOY, SKATHAN LOOKED LIKE A MAN IN HIS MID-TWENTIES. HE LOOKED EXACTLY THE SAME WHEN I LEFT IIARIA.
THE HISTORIES SAY HE IS HUNDREDS OF YEARS OLD, AND I BELIEVE THEM.

DESPITE YOUR PESSIMISM, YOU ALWAYS BELIEVED WE WOULD FIND THE SAND MASTERS, DIDN'T YOU?
I HAD MY SUSPICIONS, YES. NOW, I'LL LEAVE YOU TO PREPARE FOR LORD DELIUS'S BALL.
THANK YOU.
Now, why do I feel like you're not telling me everything, Baon?
Thirteenth hour.
YOU CLEAN UP QUITE WELL, LORD MASTRELL.
THANK YOU, DUCHESS...
...AND MAY I SAY, YOUR CHOICE OF DRESSES IS...UNCONVENTIONAL.
NO DANCING THEN?
DANCING? WHY? MOST OF THE PEOPLE HERE WILL ALREADY BE MARRIED.
YOU'RE LUCKY MY STARMARKS DON'T SHOW ON DAYSIDE...SO TELL ME, WHAT CAN I EXPECT FROM THE ADMIRAL'S PARTY?
HONESTLY, I DON'T KNOW. I'D EXPECT A LOT OF KELZIN TRYING TO WORK OUT BUSINESS DEALS. PARTIES ARE REALLY JUST AN EXCUSE FOR BUSINESS.
ANNOUNCING-- LORD MASTRELL OF THE DIEM, AND THE DUCHESS KHRISSALLA OF ELIS.

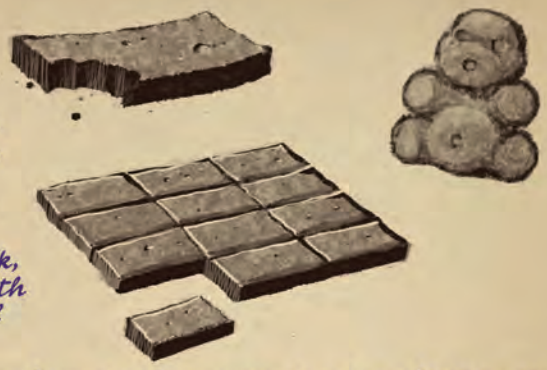
YOUR ATTENDANTS WILL NEED TO WAIT IN THE SERVANT'S TENT, LORD MASTRELL.
SURE.
NO, I SHALL BE ATTENDING INSTEAD OF JUDGE HEELIS, WHO REGRETS THAT SHE IS UNABLE TO ATTEND.
I APOLOGIZE, MY LADY--
--I HAD NOT REALIZED.
I HARDLY NOTICE THE HERALD'S MISSTEP AS I SEE A FAMILIAR TWISTED FACE LEAVING THE PARTY...
APOLOGY ACCEPTED.
...NILTO?
WHAT WERE YOU UP TO?
LORD MASTRELL! I'D FEARED YOU WOULDN'T COME!
KHRISS, THIS IS DELIUS, THE LORD ADMIRAL. IT'S HIS PARTY, HE INVITED US.
WHAT AN INTERESTING CHOICE OF CLOTHING--MUCH MORE FASHIONABLE THAN...WHATEVER IT WAS YOU WORE BEFORE.

NOW THEN--I HAVE AN ANNOUNCEMENT TO MAKE!
I HAVE CALLED THIS GATHERING FOR A SPECIFIC PURPOSE--OR RATHER, A SPECIFIC PERSON. I WISHH... WISHH TO PRONOUNCE MY FORMAL...SUPPORT OF THE LORD MASTRELL IN THE UPCOMING VOTE.
LET THE HELM BE THE FIRST TO EXTEND OUR HAND TO OUR SAND MASTER FRIENDS IN THEIR TIME OF NEED!
THUMP

THAT IS THE LORD ADMIRAL?
DELIUS. THE ONLY MAN IN LOSSAND WHO COULD COLLAPSE DRUNK BEFORE THE PARTY EVEN BEGINS!
DELIUS ALWAYS VOTES IN OPPOSITION TO THE REST OF THE COUNCIL, ESPECIALLY THE LORD MERCHANT.
JUST A FEW DAYS AGO HE TOLD ME HE WOULD FOLLOW THAT EXACT PATTERN, VOTING FOR ME ONLY IF LORD VEY VOTED AGAINST.
I WONDER WHAT MADE HIM CHANGE HIS MIND.
WHATEVER IT WAS, I GET THE IMPRESSION THE KELZIN DON'T LIKE IT!
BIG SURPRISE.
COME ON, WE SHOULD MINGLE.
WE SHOULD?
IT'S WHAT ONE DOES AT THESE THINGS, KENTON. DON'T YOU KNOW ANYTHING?
HEY! ARE YOU... YOU'RE NOT ACTUALLY ENJOYING YOURSELF, ARE YOU?
DO YOU KNOW, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A LONG WHILE--
--I REALLY THINK I AM!

Dayside Food

ZaiDon



A type of soft, flexible jerky eaten with every Dayside meal. It's made by using water to melt sandlings (big or small), carapace and all, into a greenish-brown paste that is seasoned and spiced as it dries in the sun. Some varieties are thick, others thin, and they melt in your mouth as you chew them, a sensation I'm still not accustomed to.

Note: Some sandlings taste better than others, in flavors ranging from buttery to gamy and wild.

Second note: avoid ZaiDon spiced with a pungent black powder called ashawen. It's a favored Kerztian spice, but I find it nearly inedible.

Vegetables

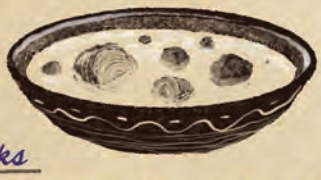
Most vegetables, especially in the Kerla, are grown beneath the surface of the sand. A farm might look like a camp of shepherds guarding a sand dune.

Bread

Made from the stunted grains that grow in the sandy soil on the banks of the Ry'Do Ali. Varieties include rectangular pieces of flat bread called klam to bread cakes both sweet and savory.

Sauces

ZaiDon, bread, and vegetables are often eaten with a variety of sauces, dips, chutneys, and tapenades. Some of these are extremely good, like the creamy one that tastes sweet and a little garlicky. Others are made with ashawen and other peppery Kerztian spices, which I avoid as much as I can.



Soups

Served cold—almost chilled—which I must admit is refreshing, considering Dayside's constant heat. Add ZaiDon to thicken it up. Often filled with large chunks of fresh or pickled vegetables.

Drinks

Water is the drink of choice on Dayside and is readily available along the Ry'Do Ali or wherever dorim vines grow.

Originally from Darkside, grapes don't grow well in extreme heat, have to be watered constantly, and need portable shade tarps that are put in place every time the vines look too wilted. There are a few vineyards that produce the grapes and raisins used in wines and desserts, but even these are small and berrylike compared to the succulent fare I'm accustomed to. (I joked with Kenton that Darkside grows grapes and Dayside grows raisins. He wasn't amused.)

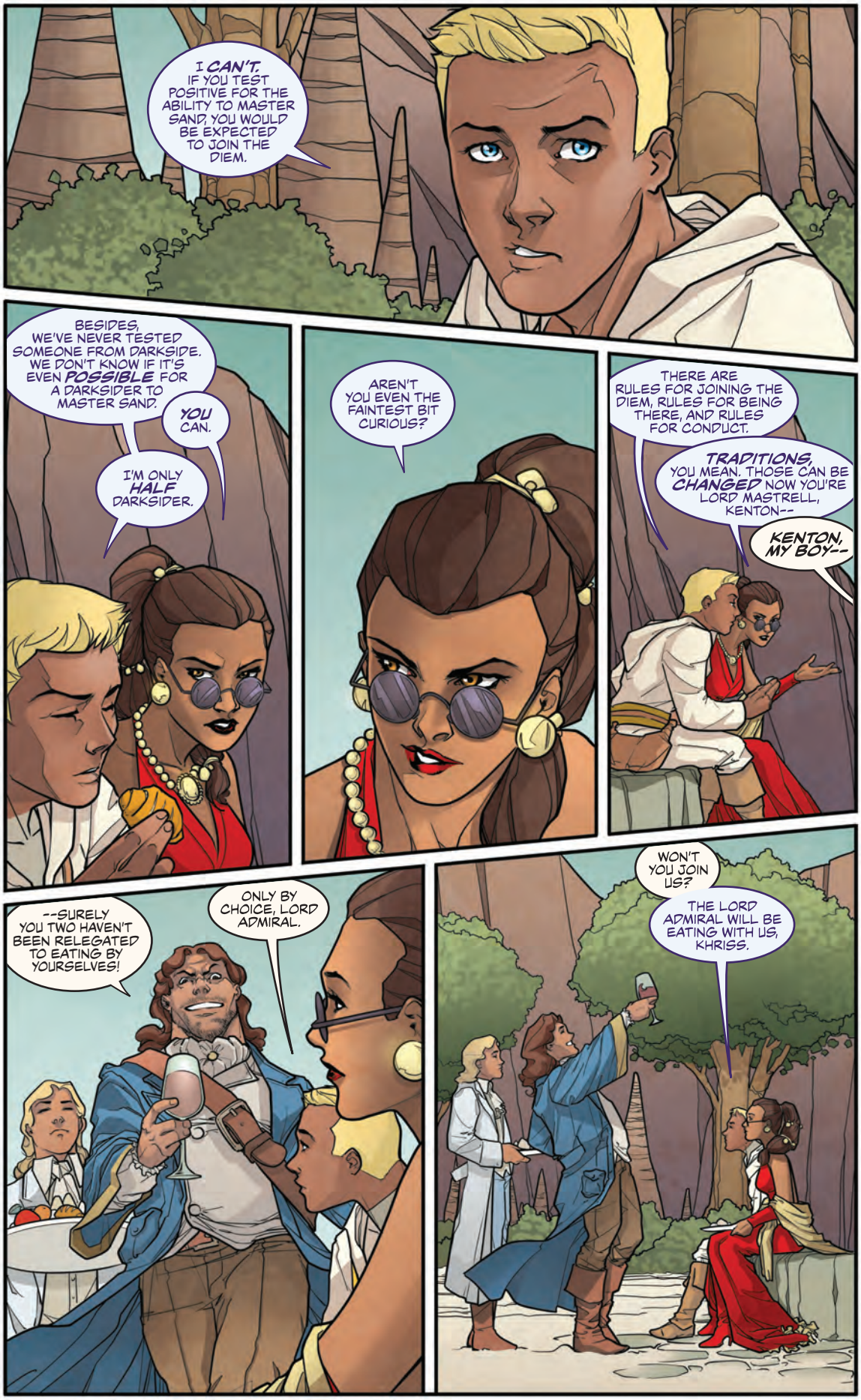
Dayside wine is expensive and hard to find. Detha, an effervescent drink from southern Lossand, is mild and refreshing.

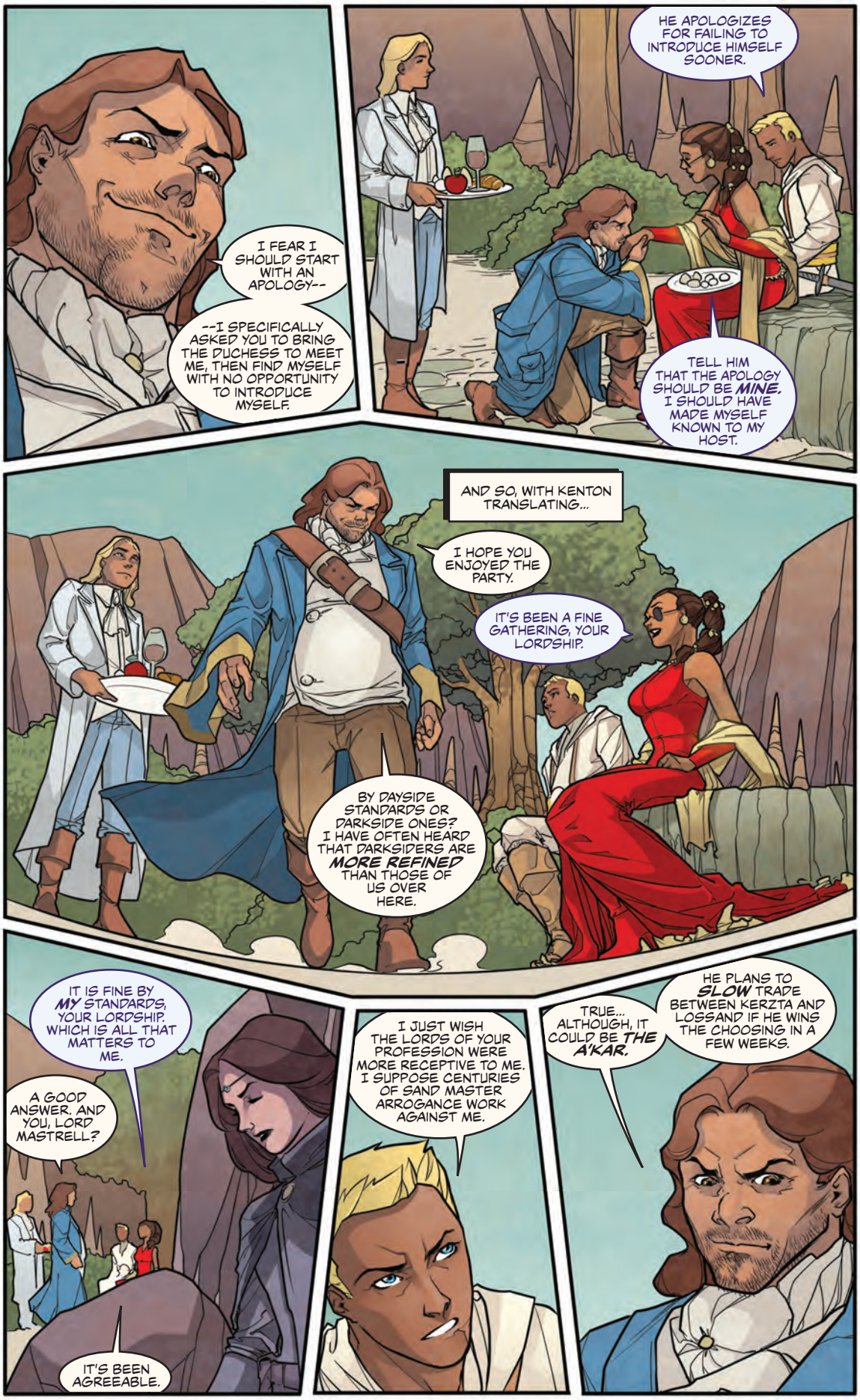
Utensils

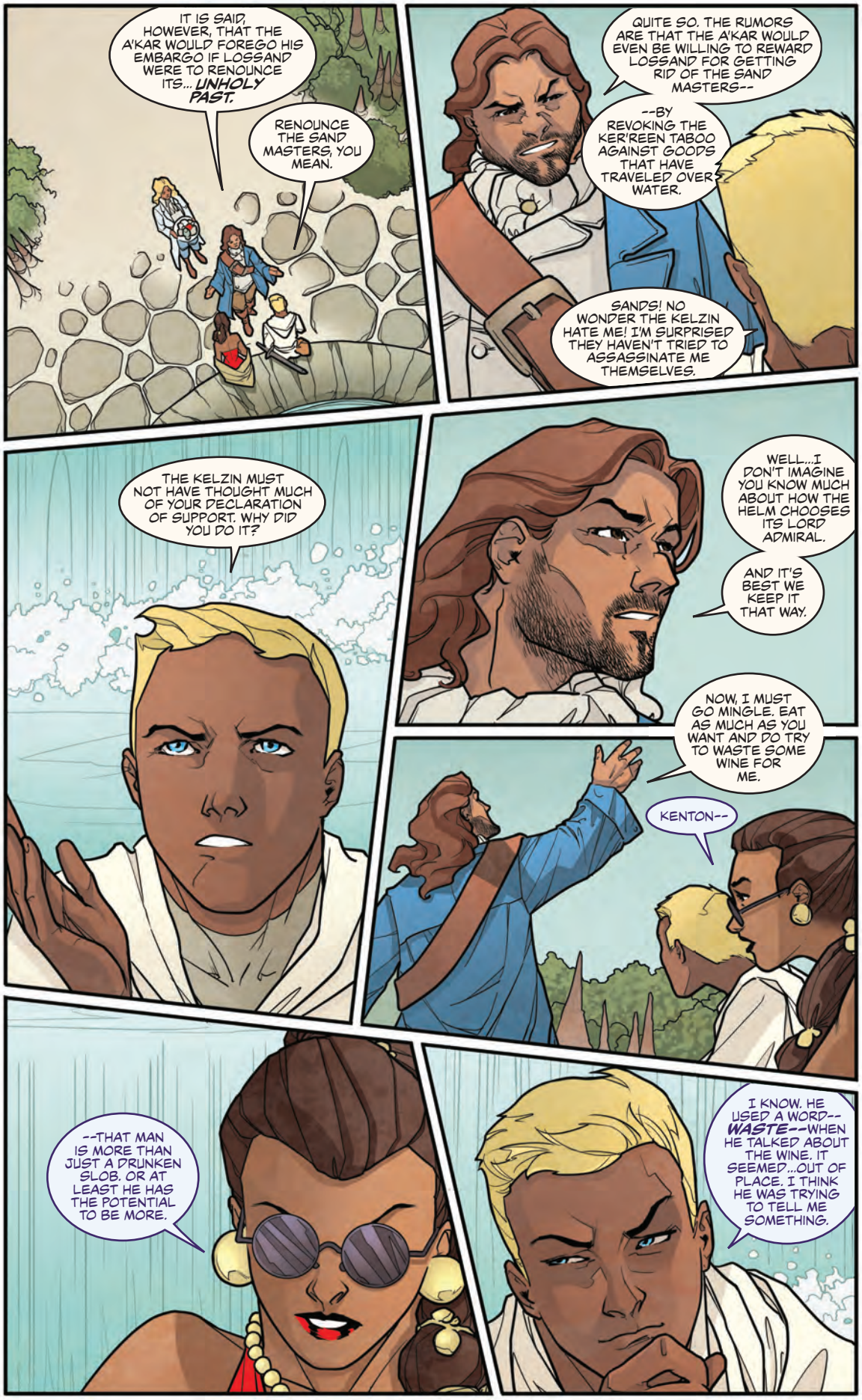
Bowls, plates, cups, and utensils cannot be made from untreated carapace, otherwise they would melt. Most dinnerware, as you might expect in a land with no dearth of sand, is made from glass, pottery, or in rare cases, crystal.

ABOUT TURN

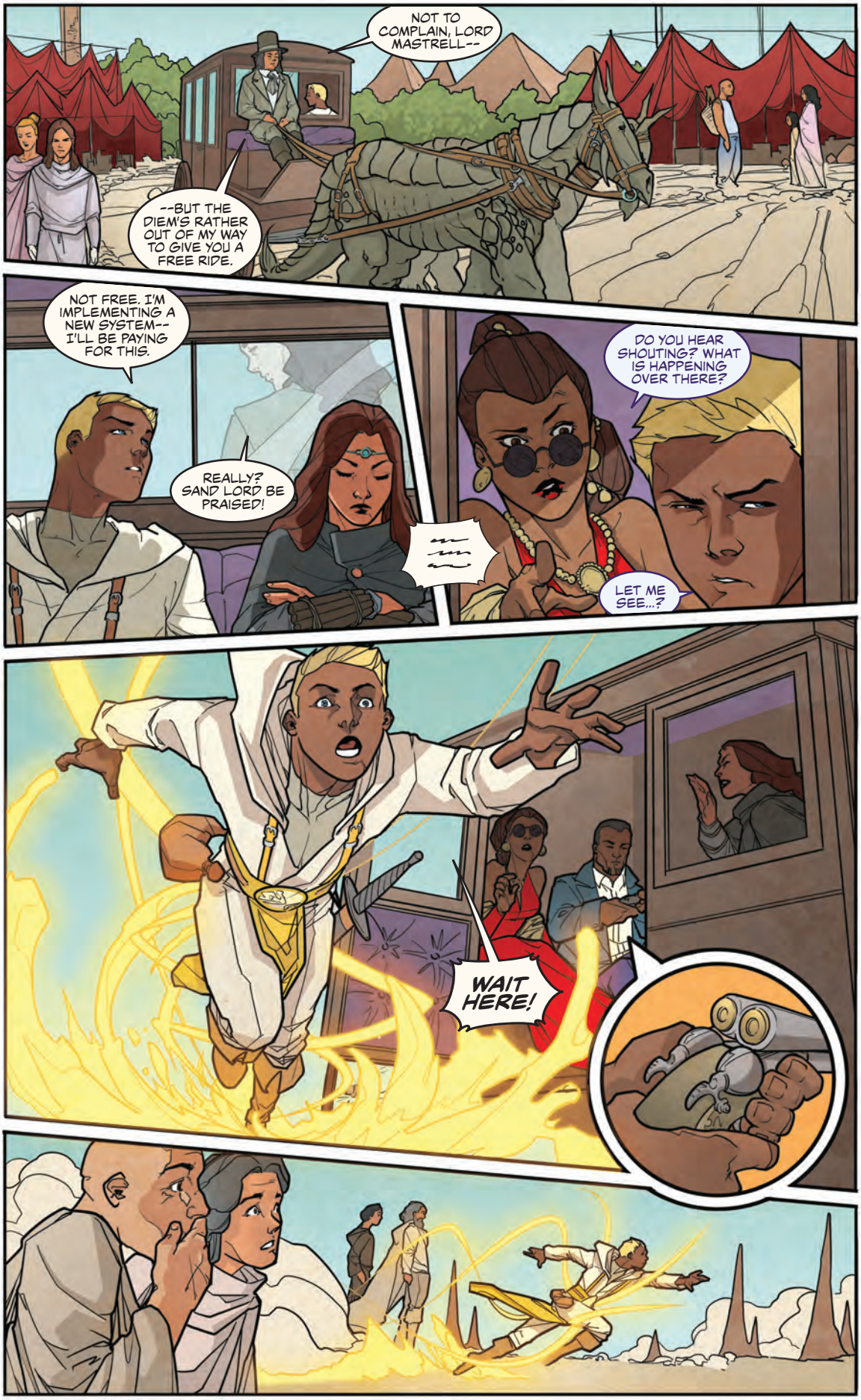
I THINK YOU'RE A HIT WITH THE OTHER GUESTS.
NOT ME, YOU. THE WEALTHY KELZIN JUST ENDURE ME.
WELL, AT LEAST THEY'RE POLITE ABOUT IT.
HOPEFULLY I'VE HELPED THEM SEE HOW THE DIEM COULD BRING PROSPERITY TO LOSSAND. IN MY EXPERIENCE, NOBLES DO LIKE PROSPERITY.
HAHAHAH! THAT'S BEEN MY EXPERIENCE, TOO.
I FORGOT TO SAY EARLIER-- I LIKE THE GOLD ACCENTS ON YOUR DRESS.
WELL, I FIGURED IT WOULD BE BEST TO PUT ON A UNITED FRONT SINCE MY DELEGATION IS SUPPORTING THE CONTINUANCE OF THE SAND MASTER PROFESSION.
SPEAKING OF WHICH--
--HOW DOES SAND MASTERY WORK? CAN YOU SHOW ME?

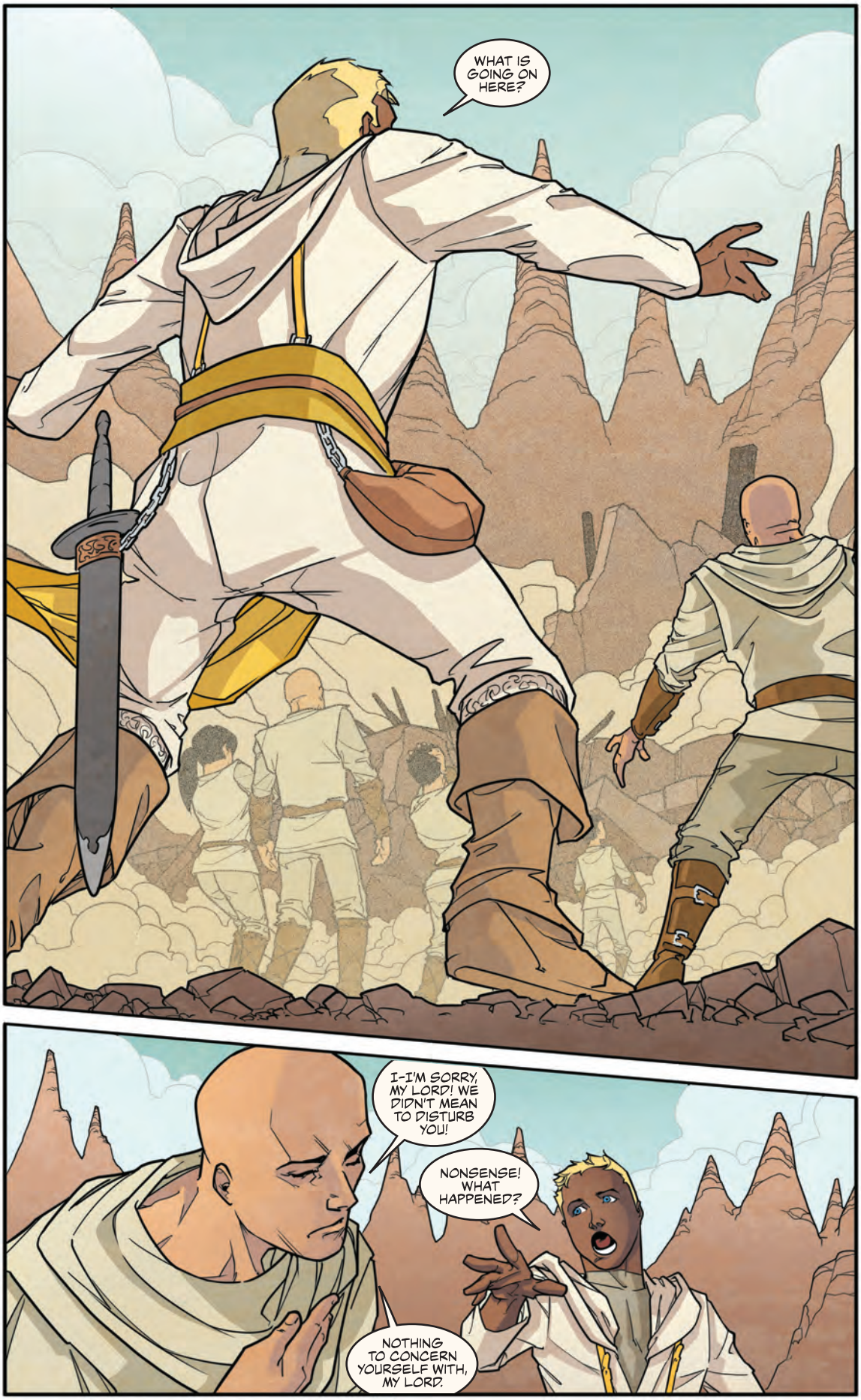

I CAN'T. IF YOU TEST POSITIVE FOR THE ABILITY TO MASTER SAND, YOU WOULD BE EXPECTED TO JOIN THE DIEM.
BESIDES, WE'VE NEVER TESTED SOMEONE FROM DARKSIDE. WE DON'T KNOW IF IT'S EVEN POSSIBLE FOR A DARKSIDER TO MASTER SAND.
YOU CAN.
I'M ONLY HALF DARKSIDER.
AREN'T YOU EVEN THE FAINTEST BIT CURIOUS?
THERE ARE RULES FOR JOINING THE DIEM, RULES FOR BEING THERE, AND RULES FOR CONDUCT.
TRADITIONS, YOU MEAN. THOSE CAN BE CHANGED NOW YOU'RE LORD MASTRELL, KENTON--
KENTON, MY BOY--
--SURELY YOU TWO HAVEN'T BEEN RELEGATED TO EATING BY YOURSELVES!
ONLY BY CHOICE, LORD ADMIRAL.
WON'T YOU JOIN US?
THE LORD ADMIRAL WILL BE EATING WITH US, KHRISS.

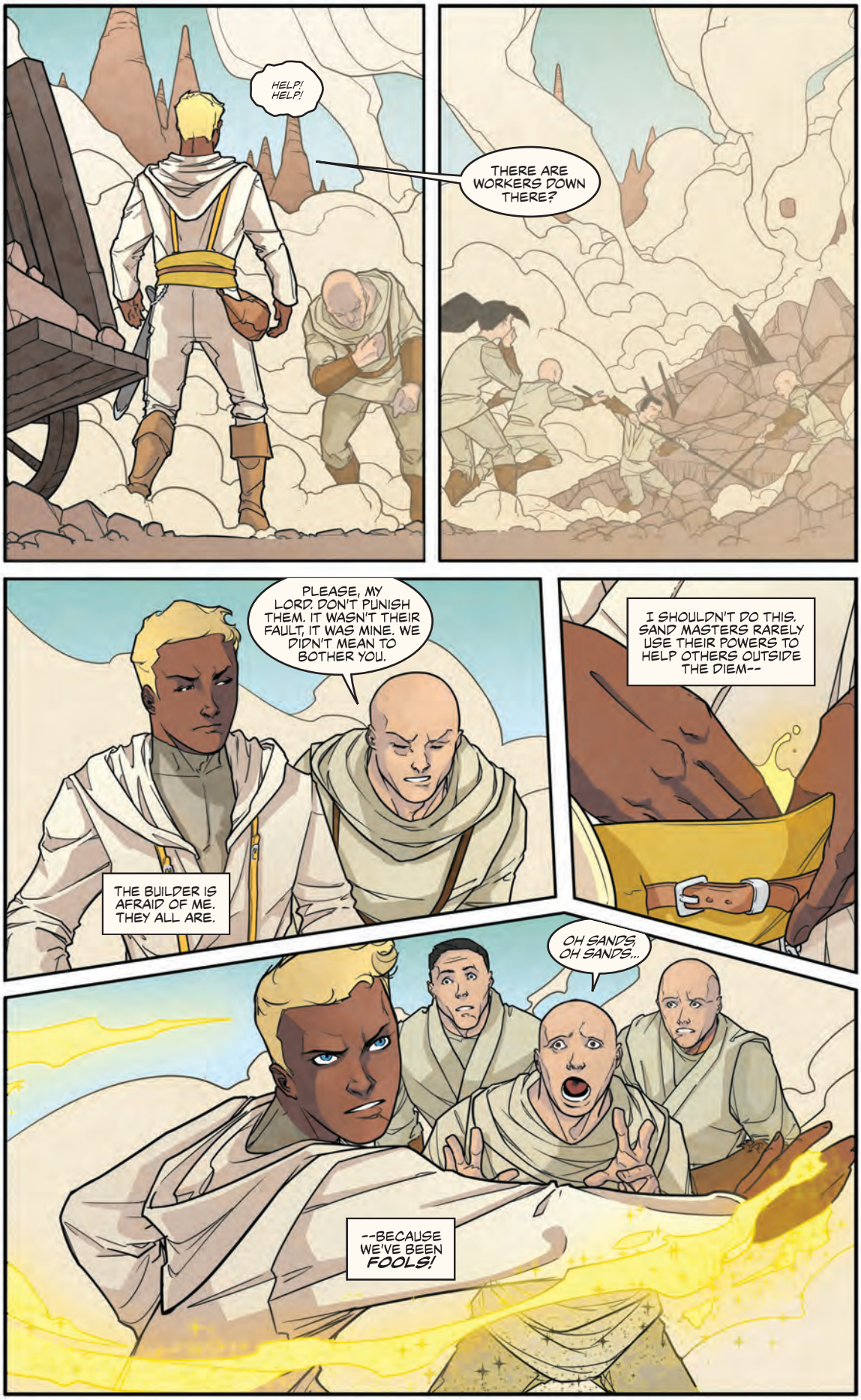

I FEAR I SHOULD START WITH AN APOLOGY--
--I SPECIFICALLY ASKED YOU TO BRING THE DUCHESS TO MEET ME, THEN FIND MYSELF WITH NO OPPORTUNITY TO INTRODUCE MYSELF.
HE APOLOGIZES FOR FAILING TO INTRODUCE HIMSELF SOONER.
TELL HIM THAT THE APOLOGY SHOULD BE MINE. I SHOULD HAVE MADE MYSELF KNOWN TO MY HOST.
AND SO, WITH KENTON TRANSLATING...
I HOPE YOU ENJOYED THE PARTY.
IT'S BEEN A FINE GATHERING, YOUR LORDSHIP.
BY DAYSIDE STANDARDS OR DARKSIDE ONES? I HAVE OFTEN HEARD THAT DARKSIDERS ARE MORE REFINED THAN THOSE OF US OVER HERE.
IT IS FINE BY MY STANDARDS, YOUR LORDSHIP. WHICH IS ALL THAT MATTERS TO ME.
A GOOD ANSWER. AND YOU, LORD MASTRELL?
IT'S BEEN AGREEABLE.
I JUST WISH THE LORDS OF YOUR PROFESSION WERE MORE RECEPTIVE TO ME. I SUPPOSE CENTURIES OF SAND MASTER ARROGANCE WORK AGAINST ME.
TRUE... ALTHOUGH, IT COULD BE THE A'KAR.
HE PLANS TO SLOW TRADE BETWEEN KERZTA AND LOSSAND IF HE WINS THE CHOOSING IN A FEW WEEKS.


IT IS SAID, HOWEVER, THAT THE A'KAR WOULD FOREGO HIS EMBARGO IF LOSSAND WERE TO RENOUNCE ITS... UNHOLY PAST.
RENOUNCE THE SAND MASTERS, YOU MEAN.
QUITE SO. THE RUMORS ARE THAT THE A'KAR WOULD EVEN BE WILLING TO REWARD LOSSAND FOR GETTING RID OF THE SAND MASTERS--
--BY REVOKING THE KER'REEN TABOO AGAINST GOODS THAT HAVE TRAVELED OVER WATER.
SANDS! NO WONDER THE KELZIN HATE ME! I'M SURPRISED THEY HAVEN'T TRIED TO ASSASSINATE ME THEMSELVES.
THE KELZIN MUST NOT HAVE THOUGHT MUCH OF YOUR DECLARATION OF SUPPORT. WHY DID YOU DO IT?
WELL...I DON'T IMAGINE YOU KNOW MUCH ABOUT HOW THE HELM CHOOSES ITS LORD ADMIRAL.
AND IT'S BEST WE KEEP IT THAT WAY.
NOW, I MUST GO MINGLE. EAT AS MUCH AS YOU WANT AND DO TRY TO WASTE SOME WINE FOR ME.
KENTON--
--THAT MAN IS MORE THAN JUST A DRUNKEN SLOB. OR AT LEAST HE HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BE MORE.
I KNOW. HE USED A WORD-- WASTE--WHEN HE TALKED ABOUT THE WINE. IT SEEMED...OUT OF PLACE. I THINK HE WAS TRYING TO TELL ME SOMETHING.

SO...WE WERE TALKING ABOUT MY LEARNING SAND MASTERY.
HAH! NICE TRY, DUCHESS.
WHAT ARE YOU SO AFRAID OF? WHAT DO YOU THINK I'D DO?
NOT LISTENING, NOT GOING TO TELL YOU!
IS THAT NILTO?
IT IS. MAYBE HE ARRIVED LATE.
DID YOUR COMPANION SAY NILTO? I SAW HIM AT THE BEGINNING. HE SLIPPED OUT JUST AFTER WE ARRIVED, AND REAPPEARED A FEW MINUTES AGO.
PROBABLY HATES SAND MASTERS. IT'S A COMMON SENTIMENT AMONG THE PEOPLE HE REPRESENTS.
YOU SAID YOU'VE COME TO AN AGREEMENT WITH HIM, KHRISS. SHOULD WE SAY HELLO?
NO... LET'S JUST GO.


NOT TO COMPLAIN, LORD MASTRELL--
--BUT THE DIEM'S RATHER OUT OF MY WAY TO GIVE YOU A FREE RIDE.
NOT FREE. I'M IMPLEMENTING A NEW SYSTEM-- I'LL BE PAYING FOR THIS.
REALLY? SAND LORD BE PRAISED!
DO YOU HEAR SHOUTING? WHAT IS HAPPENING OVER THERE?
LET ME SEE...?
WAIT HERE!


WHAT IS GOING ON HERE?
I-I'M SORRY, MY LORD! WE DIDN'T MEAN TO DISTURB YOU!
NONSENSE! WHAT HAPPENED?
NOTHING TO CONCERN YOURSELF WITH, MY LORD.


HELP! HELP!
THERE ARE WORKERS DOWN THERE?
PLEASE, MY LORD. DON'T PUNISH THEM. IT WASN'T THEIR FAULT, IT WAS MINE. WE DIDN'T MEAN TO BOTHER YOU.
THE BUILDER IS AFRAID OF ME. THEY ALL ARE.
I SHOULDN'T DO THIS. SAND MASTERS RARELY USE THEIR POWERS TO HELP OTHERS OUTSIDE THE DIEM--
OH SANDS, OH SANDS...
--BECAUSE WE'VE BEEN FOOLS!

PLEASE DON'T HURT US!
MY RIBBONS CAN ONLY TAKE SO MUCH WEIGHT, ONLY HANDLE SO MUCH STRESS...
...BUT TODAY--

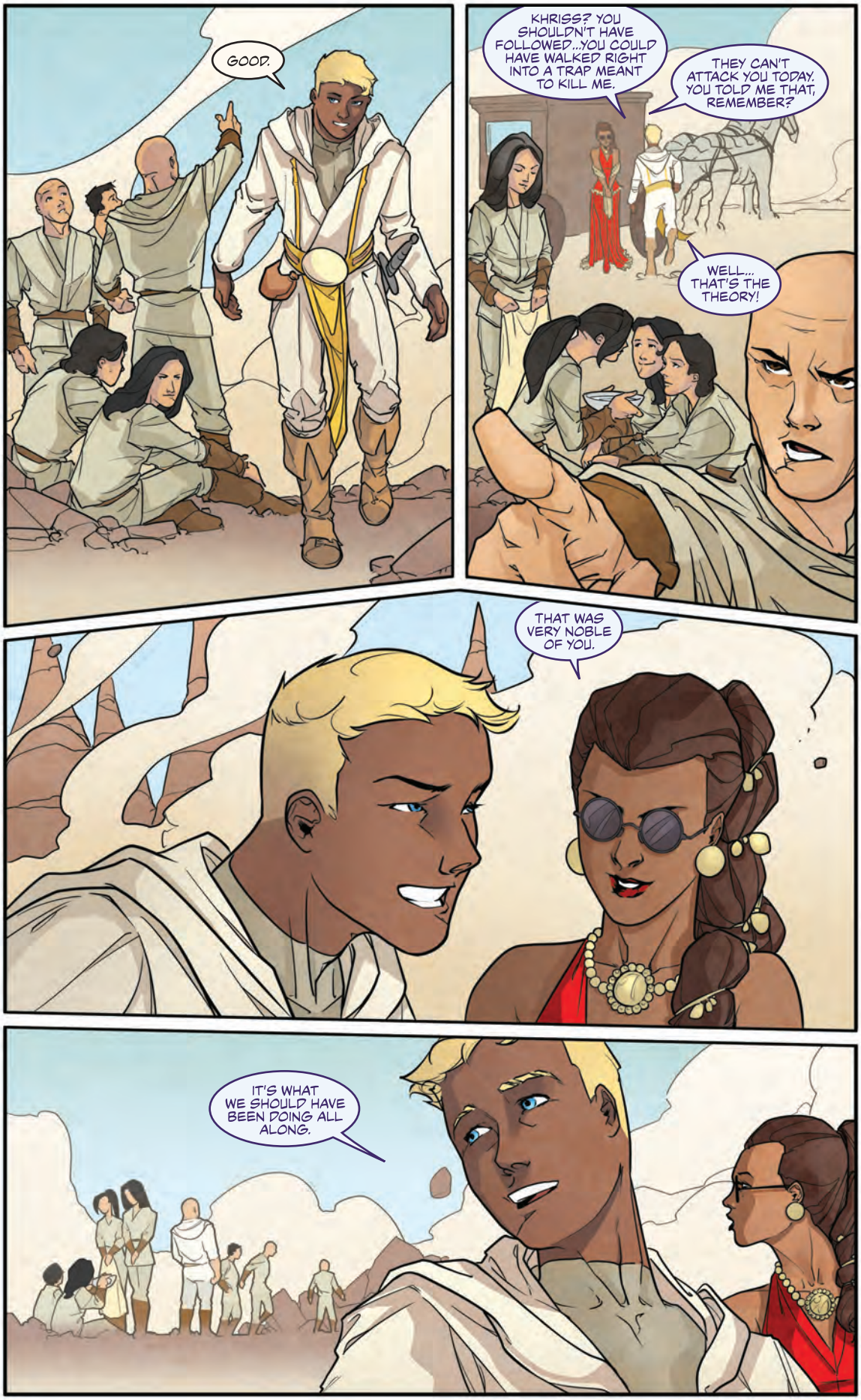
--IT HAS TO BE ENOUGH!
CREEEEE

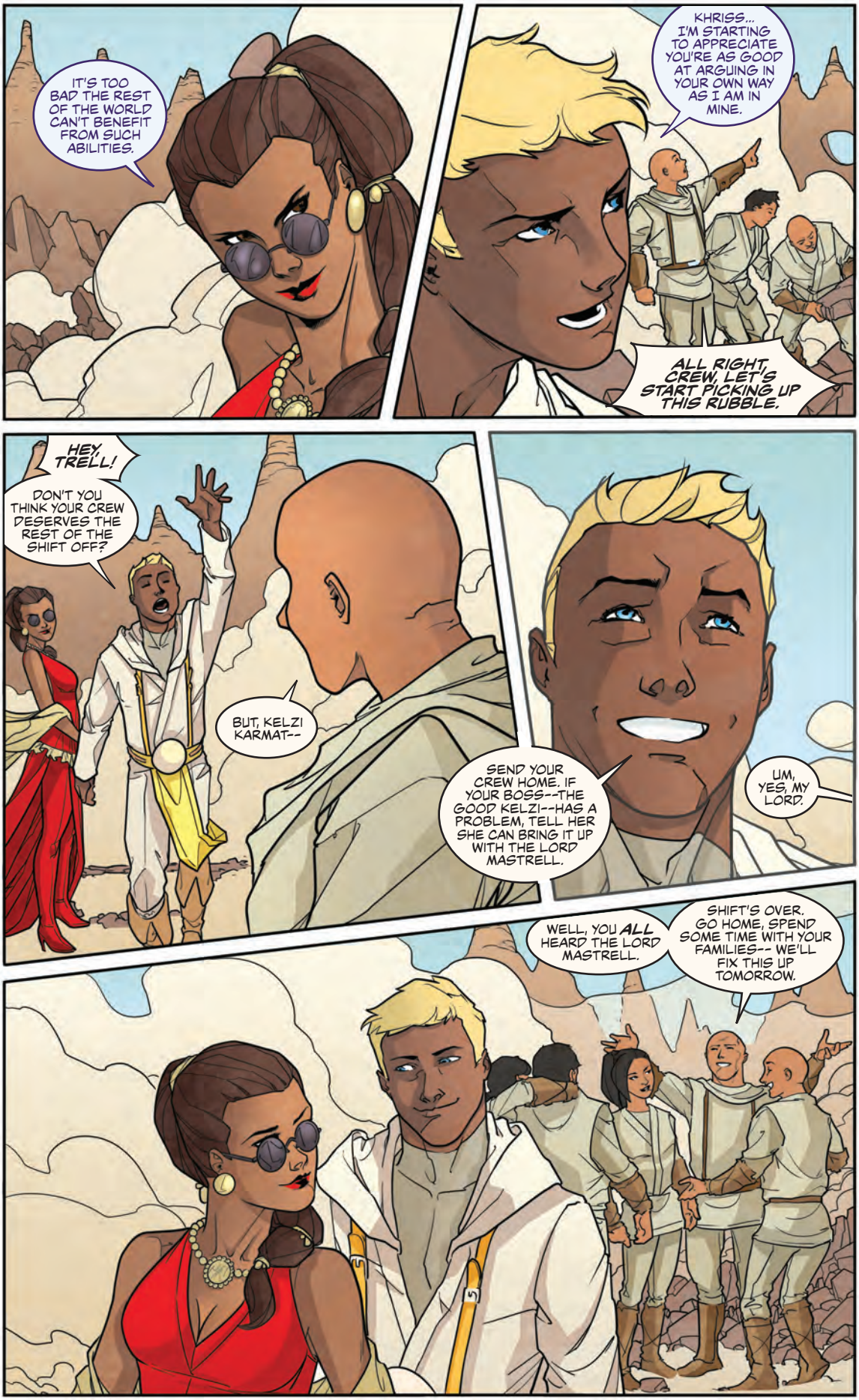
AAAK

THANK THE SAND LORD!
SAND LORD BE PRAISED!
I'M DEHYDRATED.
UNGH!

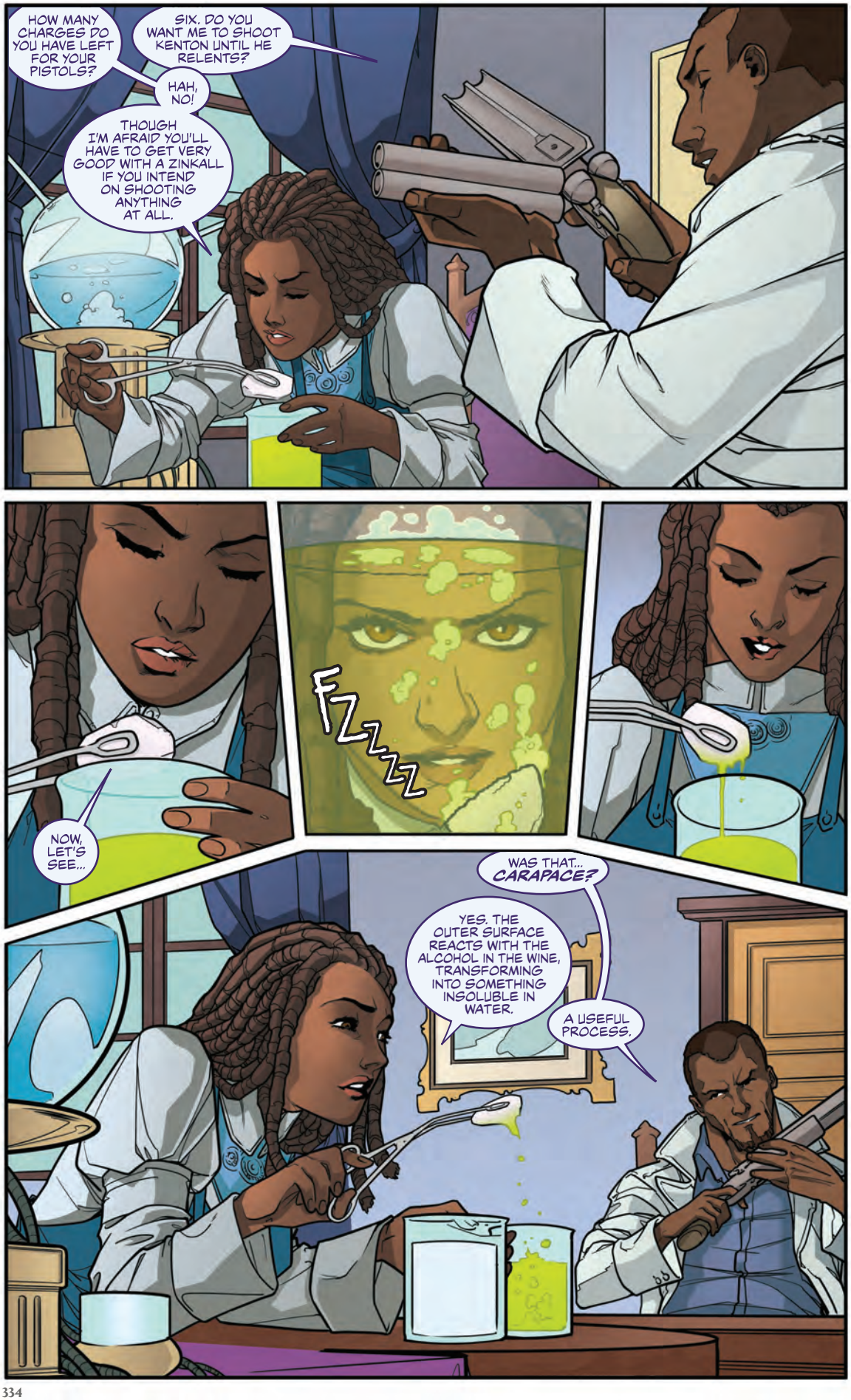
I CAN FEEL MYSELF DRYING OUT INSIDE.
I EXTENDED MYSELF--
--DANGEROUSLY SO--
--FOR PEOPLE WHO FEAR ME.
MY LORD...
...THANK YOU.

WHAT IS YOUR NAME, MAN?
TRELL, SIR.
ALL RIGHT, TRELL. NEXT TIME YOU HAVE A PROBLEM LIKE THIS, SEND FOR A SAND MASTER IMMEDIATELY.
YES, MY LORD.


GOOD.
KHRISS? YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE FOLLOWED...YOU COULD HAVE WALKED RIGHT INTO A TRAP MEANT TO KILL ME.
THEY CAN'T ATTACK YOU TODAY. YOU TOLD ME THAT, REMEMBER?
WELL... THAT'S THE THEORY!
THAT WAS VERY NOBLE OF YOU.
IT'S WHAT WE SHOULD HAVE BEEN DOING ALL ALONG.


IT'S TOO BAD THE REST OF THE WORLD CAN'T BENEFIT FROM SUCH ABILITIES.
KHRISS... I'M STARTING TO APPRECIATE YOU'RE AS GOOD AT ARGUING IN YOUR OWN WAY AS I AM IN MINE.
ALL RIGHT, CREW, LET'S START PICKING UP THIS RUBBLE.
HEY, TRELL!
DON'T YOU THINK YOUR CREW DESERVES THE REST OF THE SHIFT OFF?
BUT, KELZI KARMAT--
SEND YOUR CREW HOME. IF YOUR BOSS--THE GOOD KELZI--HAS A PROBLEM, TELL HER SHE CAN BRING IT UP WITH THE LORD MASTRELL.
UM, YES, MY LORD.
WELL, YOU ALL HEARD THE LORD MASTRELL.
SHIFT'S OVER. GO HOME, SPEND SOME TIME WITH YOUR FAMILIES-- WE'LL FIX THIS UP TOMORROW.

Day 61.
SO IT'S IMPOSSIBLE, DUCHESS?
IT'S A FACT, BAON. YOU NEED SALTPETER TO MAKE GUNPOWDER. I COULD PROBABLY MAKE SOME, IF WE HAD THE TIME--
--BUT I INTEND TO HEAD BACK TO DARKSIDE AS SOON AS I KNOW THE SECRET TO SAND MASTERY.
ALTHOUGH RIGHT NOW KENTON'S BEING NEEDLESSLY OBSTRUCTIVE, AND THE WRETCHED LANGUAGE BARRIER MEANS I CAN'T EASILY TALK WITH THE OTHER SAND MASTERS.


HOW MANY CHARGES DO YOU HAVE LEFT FOR YOUR PISTOLS?
SIX. DO YOU WANT ME TO SHOOT KENTON UNTIL HE RELENTS?
HAH, NO!
THOUGH I'M AFRAID YOU'LL HAVE TO GET VERY GOOD WITH A ZINKALL IF YOU INTEND ON SHOOTING ANYTHING AT ALL.
NOW, LET'S SEE...
FZZZZZ
WAS THAT... CARAPACE?
YES. THE OUTER SURFACE REACTS WITH THE ALCOHOL IN THE WINE, TRANSFORMING INTO SOMETHING INSOLUBLE IN WATER.
A USEFUL PROCESS.

...
BAON, WHERE DID YOU GET YOUR PISTOLS?
I..., ACQUIRED THEM.
BAON, THOSE ARE ELISIAN OFFICERS' PISTOLS. WHERE DID YOU GET THEM?
I DON'T THINK YOU WANT TO KNOW.
THEY'RE OFFICERS' PISTOLS LIKE CAPTAIN DERAL AND HIS LIEUTENANT WOULD HAVE CARRIED-- THE TWO MEN WHO WERE KILLED THAT NIGHT WHEN YOU WERE OFF SCOUTING.
BAON-- DID YOU KILL CAPTAIN DERAL?
YES.
WERE YOU SENT TO ELIS BY THE DYNASTY?
YES.

OH, SHELLA! THEY SENT YOU TO STOP ME IF I FOUND THE SAND MASTERS, DIDN'T THEY?
I'M NOT SURE "STOP" IS STRONG ENOUGH OF A WORD...
WE'RE BACK WITH SOME SALTPE--WHAT THE STARS IS GOING ON HERE?
BY THE DIVINE-- :GASP:
KSSH
BAON! ARE YOU THREATENING THE DUCHESS? PUT AWAY THAT PISTOL, PLEASE!
SO THE DEVIL-TIGER FINALLY SHOWS HIS TRUE STAR-MARKS...

THAT'S IT, THEN. GOOD DAY, DUCHESS.
HE COULD HAVE KILLED ME, YET ALL THIS TIME, HE WAITED. WHY WOULD HE DO THAT? WHY WOULD HE WAIT?
BAON WAS ALWAYS AN INSCRUTABLE FELLOW. SO, WHAT NOW, DUCHESS?
I'm close to understanding sand mastery. With Baon gone, it's time to accelerate my research. Oh stars, I hope this doesn't look too desperate.
...
I THINK I NEED TO GO TALK...
"...TO KENTON."

I HEAR YOU CAUSED QUITE THE COMMOTION IN TOWN YESTERDAY, KENTON MY FRIEND.
THEY'RE SAYING YOU'RE GOING INTO THE CONSTRUCTION BUSINESS.
YOU SHOULD PROBABLY SAY SOMETHING OFFICIAL, YOU KNOW.
YOU'RE RIGHT.
WELL... NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT AND ALL THAT...
BY NOW YOU'VE DOUBTLESS ALL HEARD ABOUT WHAT I DID IN TOWN YESTERDAY. TIMES ARE CHANGING FOR US HERE AT THE DIEM, AND WE NEED TO CHANGE WITH THEM OR RUN THE RISK OF BEING MADE IRRELEVANT.
WE'RE NO LONGER GOING TO HIDE BEHIND OUR SECRETIVE WORLD OF RULES AND TRADITIONS--
--THE SAND MASTERS ARE GOING OUT THERE TO SERVE THE...
THOOM
...PEOPLE...?
LORD MASTRELL--
--I'VE DECIDED!
I'M READY TO BECOME A SAND MASTER!

Sand Mastery Test

Mystery surrounds the test for sand mastery, but in actuality it's quite mundane. In most cases, the Diem tests children between the ages of eight and twelve.

The recruit holds a handful of sand as a proctor encourages the recruit to concentrate, to feel every grain of sand they hold, to call out to it in their mind and offer it to drink in the water of their body. If the sand comes to life, the recruit becomes an acolent in the Diem, and the strength of the sand's reaction is usually a good indicator of how powerful a sand master the acolent might become.

Acolents who learn to control fifteen or more ribbons are watched closely and mentored by a mastrell. When an acolent has reached their full potential, meaning they stop being able to control increasingly more ribbons through the course of their development, they are allowed to petition for a rank inside the Diem. It is no surprise that those privately mentored by mastrells are usually granted that same rank.

There are no spontaneous sand masters, and only a sand master can administer the test. It's as if one has to be introduced to the power by one who already holds it, then the power itself chooses who to unlock and to what degree. This is well-documented in the Diem's records and reminds me of how the Starcarved are discovered.

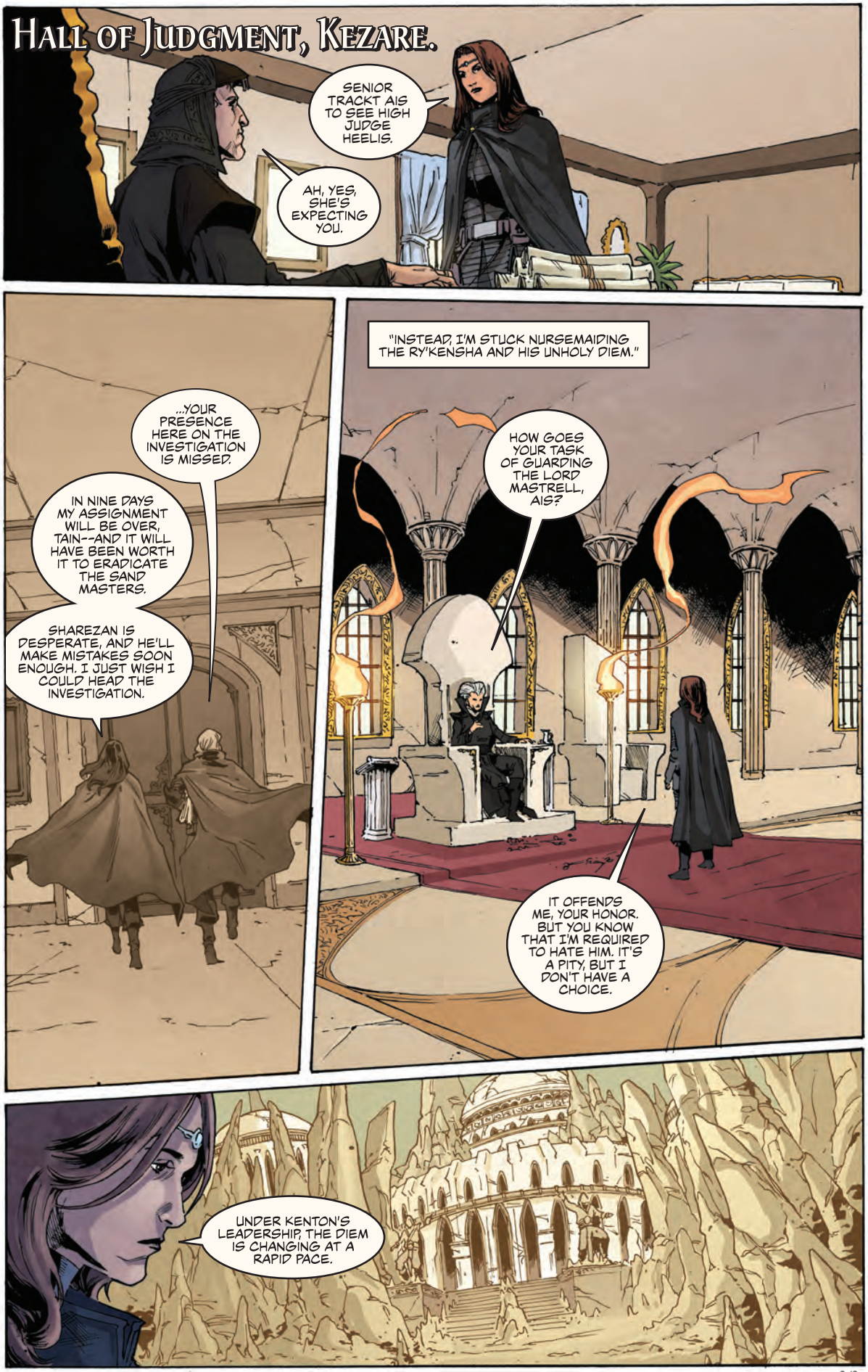
This knowledge makes the Kerztian massacre of the sand masters all the more terrifying, for if they had killed every known sand master, then theoretically, the ability would have disappeared from the sands entirely.

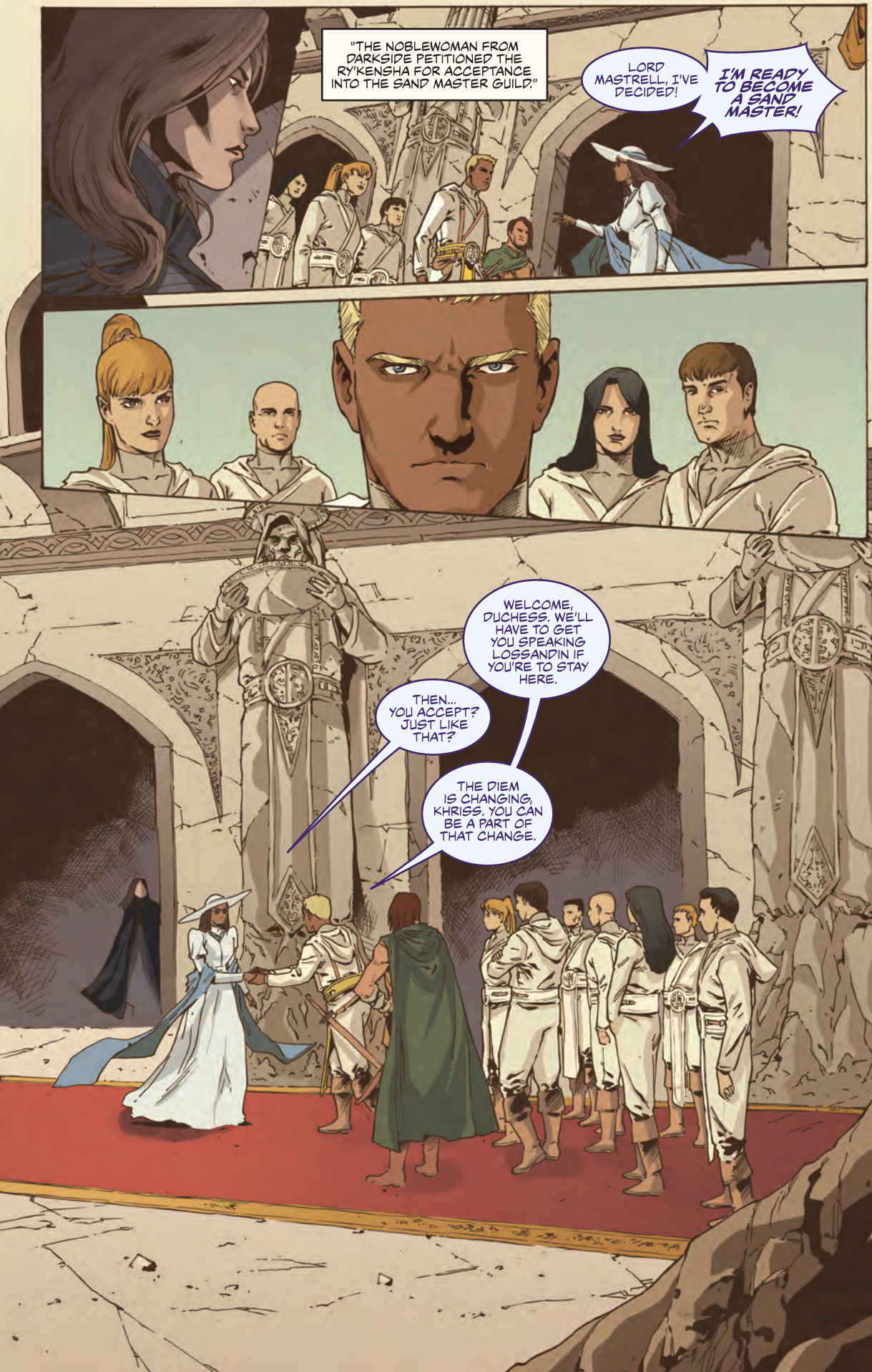
Occasionally, a sand master has been expelled from the Diem. Rather than allow them to leave and potentially find and train other sand masters—thus creating a rival to the Diem—these sand masters are required to be indentured to the Diem, incarcerated, or placed on strict parole. If they are considered dangerous enough, there is a process by which the ability to master sand can be burned out of them, but as often as not, the process kills the individual.

Any sand master who goes rogue is hunted down by an elite group within the Diem, about which Kenton has been his usual tight-lipped self.

PART THREE

CHAPTER 13
DELEGATE TO ACCUMULATE


Hall of Judgment, Kezare.
Senior Trackt Ais to see High Judge Heelis.
Ah, yes, she's expecting you.
"Instead, I'm stuck nursemaiding the Ry'Kensha and his unholy diem."
How goes your task of guarding the Lord Mastrell, Ais?
It offends me, your honor. But you know that I'm required to hate him. It's a pity, but I don't have a choice.
...your presence here on the investigation is missed.
In nine days my assignment will be over, Tain--and it will have been worth it to eradicate the Sand Masters.
Sharezan is desperate, and he'll make mistakes soon enough. I just wish I could head the investigation.
Under Kenton's leadership, the Diem is changing at a rapid pace.

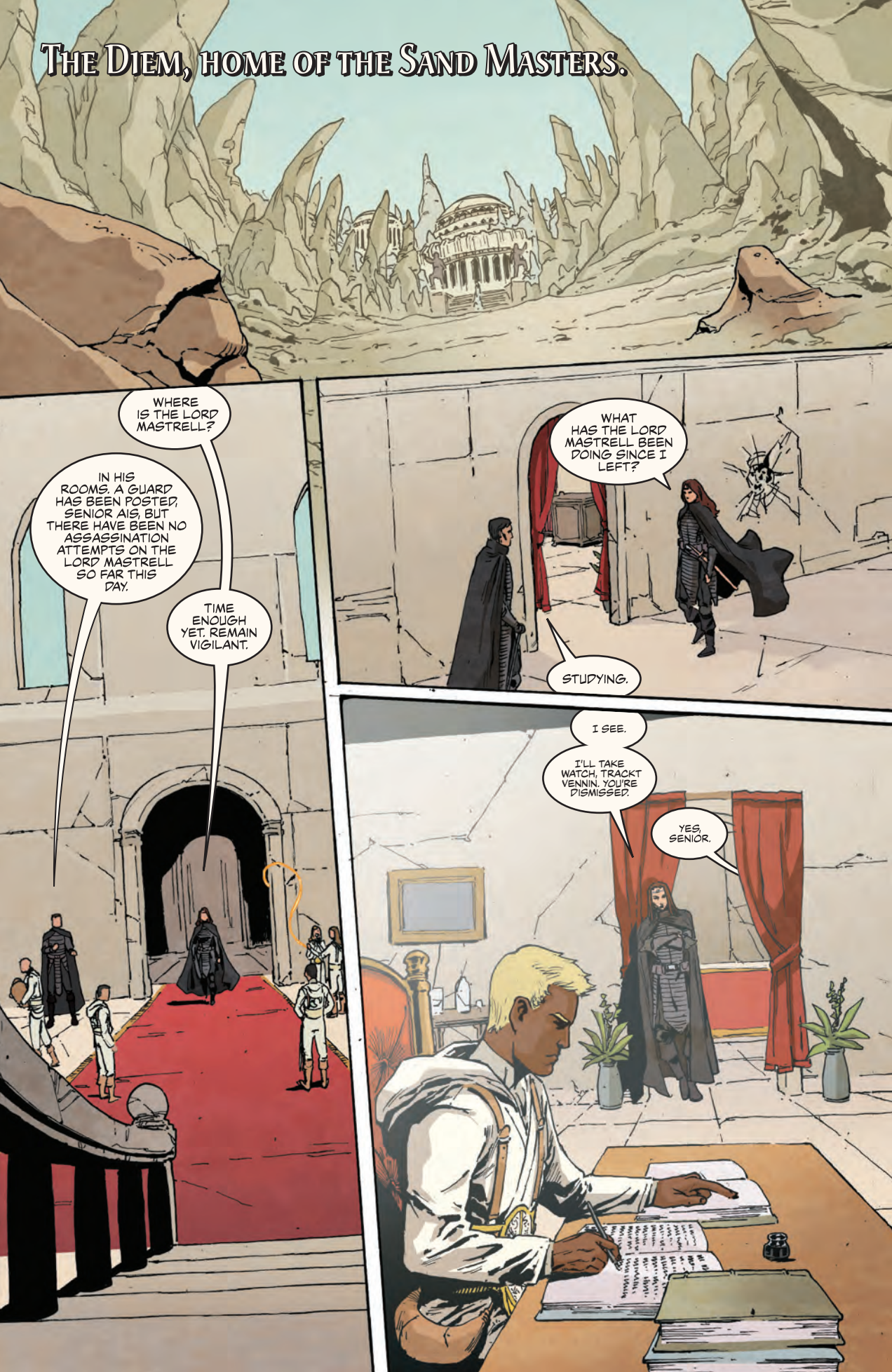

"THE NOBLEWOMAN FROM DARKSIDE PETITIONED THE RY'KENSHA FOR ACCEPTANCE INTO THE SAND MASTER GUILD."
LORD MASTRELL, I'VE DECIDED!
I'M READY TO BECOME A SAND MASTER!
WELCOME, DUCHESS. WE'LL HAVE TO GET YOU SPEAKING LOSSAN'IN IF YOU'RE TO STAY HERE.
THEN... YOU ACCEPT? JUST LIKE THAT?
THE DIEM IS CHANGING, KHRISS. YOU CAN BE A PART OF THAT CHANGE.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN...?
WE NEED NEW MEMBERS AND NEW IDEAS. YOUR BEING HERE IS THE START OF THAT.
DIRIN, WE MUST FIND OUR HONORED GUEST A ROOM--FOR HER AND HER COMPANIONS.
I'LL GET ON IT ***RIGHT AWAY,*** LORD MASTRELL.
WHY WOULD THE LORD MASTRELL TEST A DARKSIDER? EVERYONE KNOWS THEY CAN'T MASTER.
THE LORD MASTRELL IS HALF DARKSIDER HIMSELF. IT'S THE REASON HE CAN ONLY CONTROL A FEW RIBBONS...
SO, YOU BELIEVE OUR LORD MASTRELL IS BECOMING MORE OPEN TO CHANGE?
HE IS EITHER ***MATURING*** OR HE'S THRASHING AROUND LIKE A MAN SINKING IN DEEP SAND. I DARE NOT SPECULATE WHICH.
BUT MY POSTING AS HIS GUARD LEAVES ME UNCOMFORTABLE, YOUR HONOR.
IF ONE DIES NOBLY FOR AN EVIL CAUSE, ARE THEY A MISGUIDED HERO--

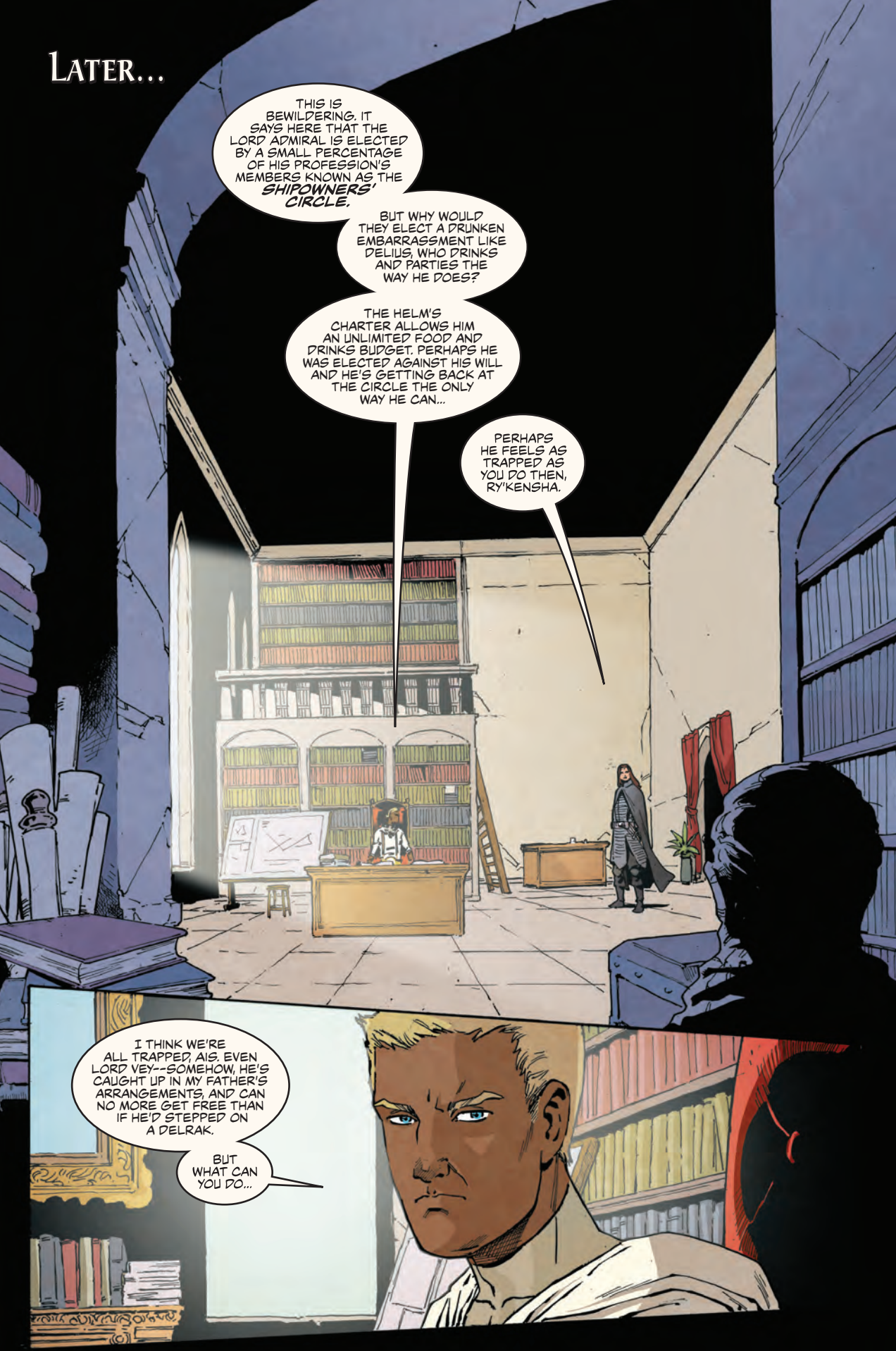
--OR A SINNER OF THE WORST KIND BECAUSE THEY TRIED TO MAKE THAT EVIL SEEM GOOD?
I ONLY JUDGE LAW, AIS, NOT MORALITY.
SPEAKING OF SUCH, HOW GOES THE INVESTIGATION INTO SHAREZAN?
THOUGH HIS TRUE IDENTITY REMAINS UNCONFIRMED, THE CRIME LORD'S REACH IS ABOMINABLY COMPREHENSIVE. ONLY YESTERDAY...
...ANOTHER OF HIS FOUL DENS WAS RAIDED.
"SHAREZAN PROFITS FROM THE MISERY OF OTHERS. BUT OUR ACTIONS ARE SOWING DISSENSION WITHIN HIS RANKS. WE'VE HEARD THAT ONE OF HIS MAIN ALLIES IS LOOKING TO SPLIT WITH HIS ORGANIZATION."
WE'RE PUTTING WORD OUT THAT WE'LL OFFER THEM SANCTUARY FOR THEIR INFORMATION.
THEN WE'LL HAVE HIM, WHOEVER HE IS.
BUT FOR NOW, INVESTIGATIONS ARE ONGOING, I PRESUME?

"MY BEST MAN, TAIN, IS LEADING THE OPERATION IN MY ABSENCE, YOUR HONOR. HE'LL KEEP THE PRESSURE ON."
DOWN HERE, TAIN, SIR.
STREET SLIME KNOWN AS TARN THE TONK. WORKED FOR SHAREZAN.
HUH. LOOKS LIKE A TONK HIT HIM.

SKULL'S CAVED IN FROM BEHIND. ANY WITNESSES?
WE'RE INTERVIEWING, SIR, BUT...YOU KNOW THESE STREET HUSTLERS.
YES. USING THE SHADOWS TO HIDE IN PLAIN SIGHT.
HMM, WHAT'S--?
A NOTE--
I WARNED YOU
--FROM SHAREZAN.
I IMAGINE THAT SENIOR TRACKT AIS WILL WANT TO SEE THAT.
I AGREE. BUT SHE'LL BE ON HER WAY BACK TO THE DIEM BY NOW...

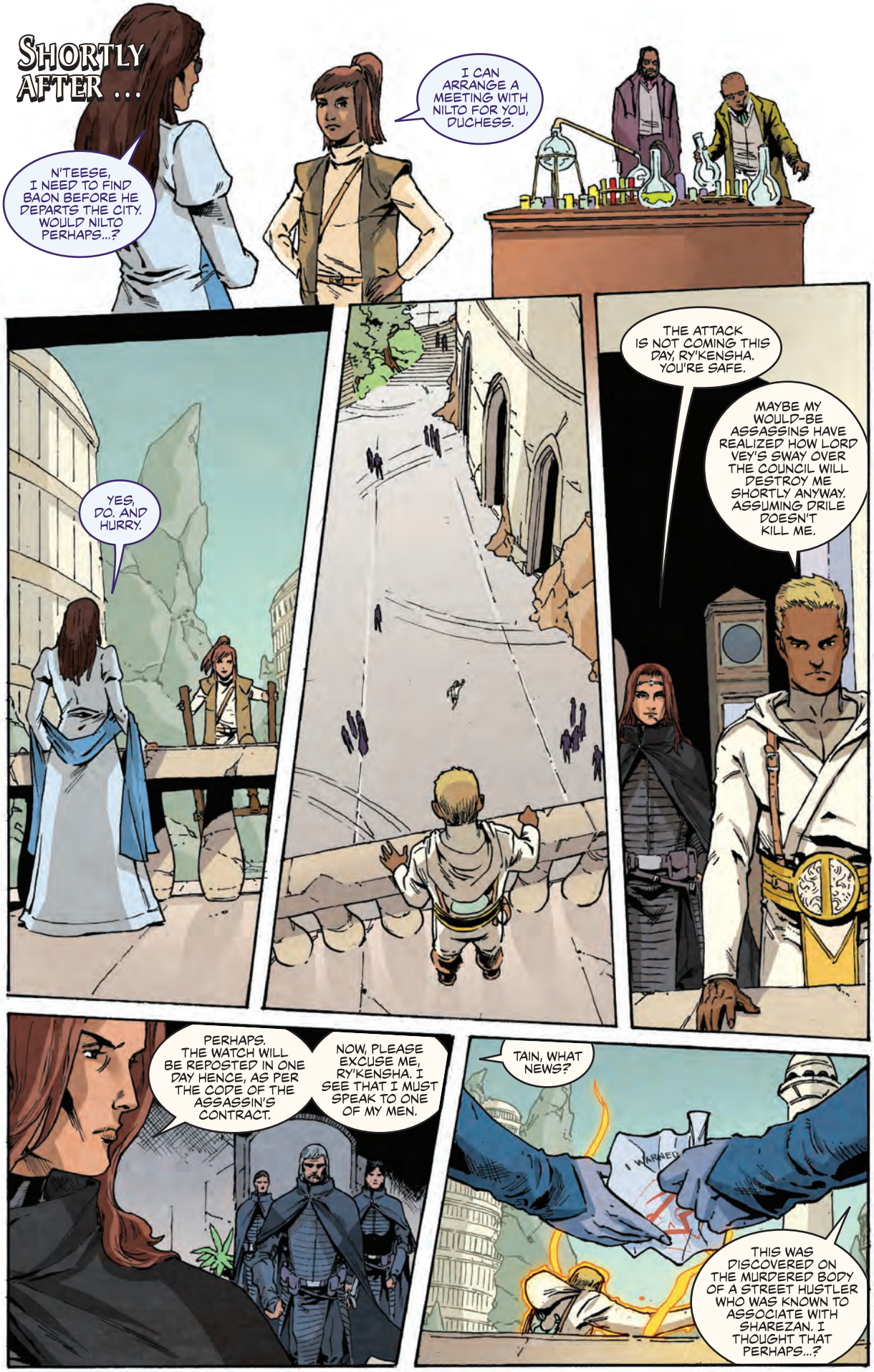

The Diem, home of the Sand Masters.
Where is the Lord Mastrell?
In his rooms. A guard has been posted, senior Ais, but there have been no assassination attempts on the Lord Mastrell so far this day.
Time enough yet. Remain vigilant.
What has the Lord Mastrell been doing since I left?
Studying.
I see.
I'll take watch, Trackt Vennin. You're dismissed.
Yes, senior.

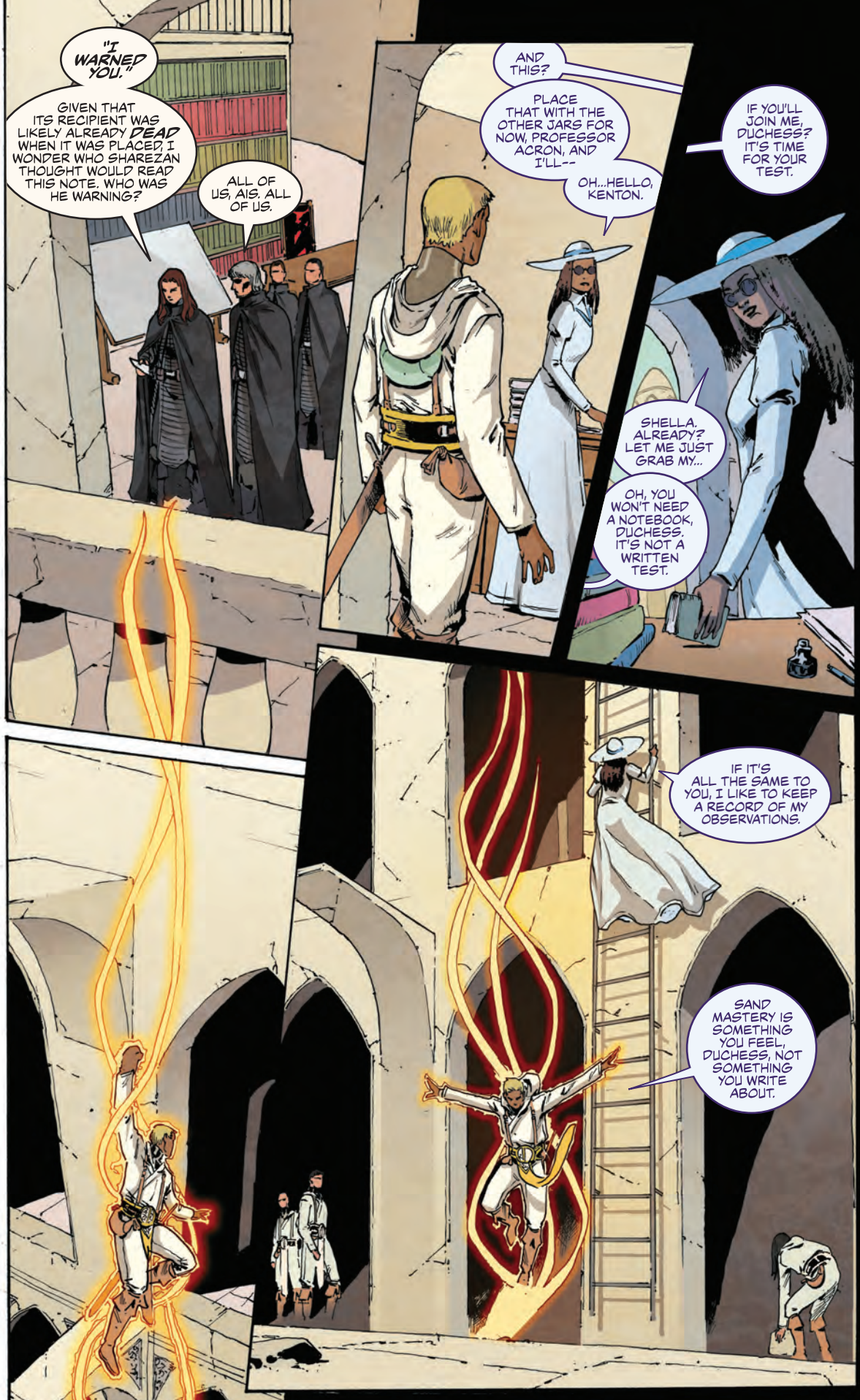
YOU HAVE THE DETERMINATION OF A BETTER MAN, RY'KENSHA, DESPITE THE ENORMITY OF YOUR TASK. COULD IT BE THAT I HAVE MISJUDGED YOU?
CAN YOU HAVE NOBILITY EVEN IF YOUR EFFORTS ARE NOT APPLIED TO A NOBLE CAUSE?
AIS? I DIDN'T HEAR YOU COME IN.
THEN YOU SURELY WOULDN'T HAVE HEARD AN ASSASSIN, RY'KENSHA.
WHICH IS WHY YOU HAVE THE SAND LORD TO THANK THAT I AM HERE, WHETHER YOU DESERVE HIS BLESSINGS OR NOT.
I FEEL TRAPPED, AIS. I'VE VISITED ALL THE TAISHIN THAT I CAN. ALL THAT'S LEFT IS TO READ EVERYTHING I CAN ABOUT THEM.
KNOWING YOUR ENEMY IS A PLAN THAT CAN PAY DIVIDENDS.
I'M NOT SURE THAT THEY'RE MY ENEMIES. MORE... OBSTACLES.
LORD VEY, HOWEVER, IS PROVING TO BE A GREATER OBSTACLE THAN MOST.
MY FATHER'S LIBRARY CONTAINS THE CHARTERS OF THE DIEM, INCORPORATING EVERY AMENDMENT, AS WELL AS THE CHARTERS FOR THE OTHER PROFESSIONS AND FOR THE TAISHIN.
IF THERE IS A WAY TO OUTWIT THE MERCHANT LORD VEY--OR TO BUY HIS VOTE--IT HAS TO BE HERE.

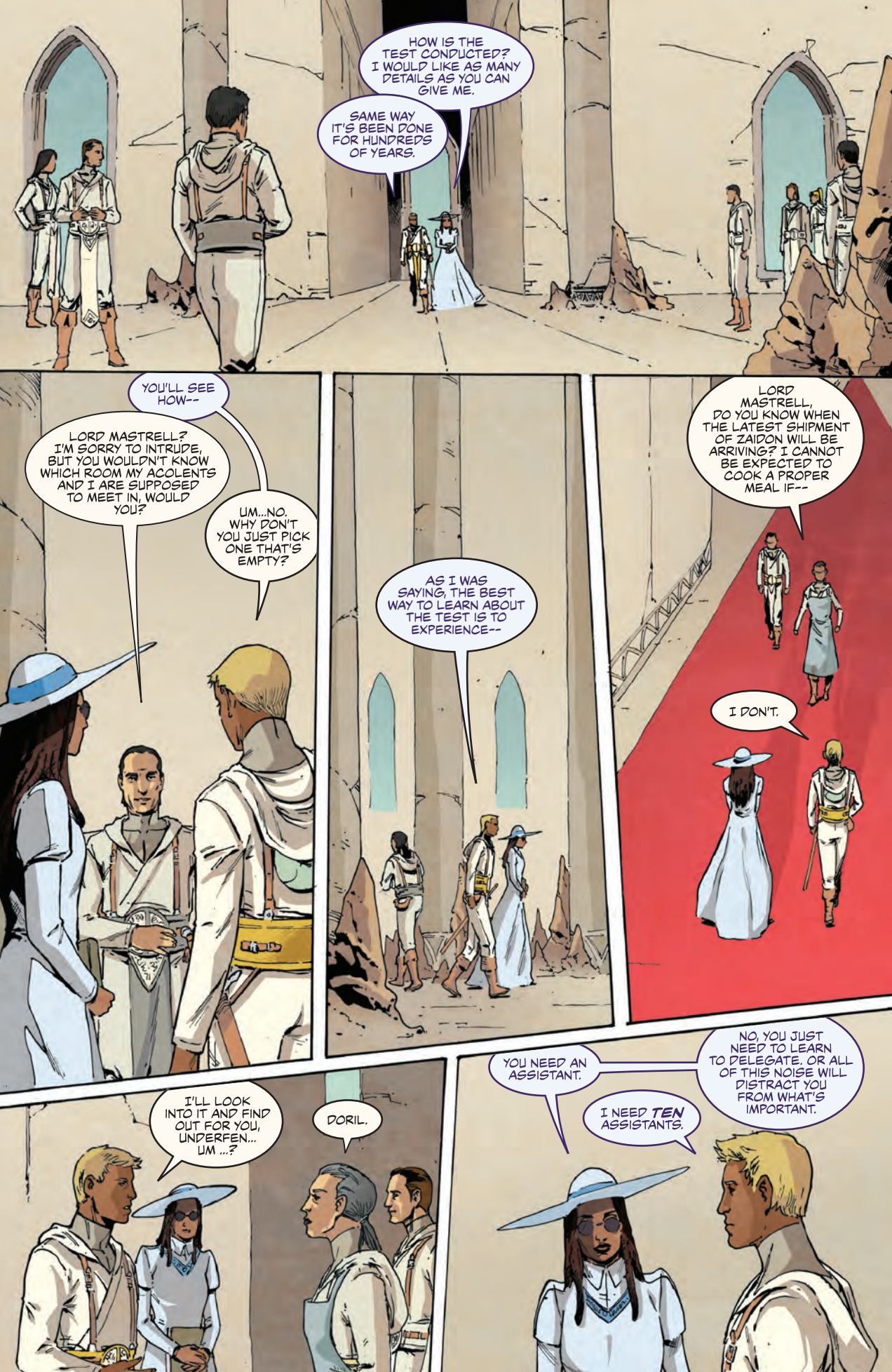

Later...
THIS IS BEWILDERING. IT SAYS HERE THAT THE LORD ADMIRAL IS ELECTED BY A SMALL PERCENTAGE OF HIS PROFESSION'S MEMBERS KNOWN AS THE SHIPOWNERS' CIRCLE.
BUT WHY WOULD THEY ELECT A DRUNKEN EMBARRASSMENT LIKE DELIUS, WHO DRINKS AND PARTIES THE WAY HE DOES?
THE HELM'S CHARTER ALLOWS HIM AN UNLIMITED FOOD AND DRINKS BUDGET. PERHAPS HE WAS ELECTED AGAINST HIS WILL AND HE'S GETTING BACK AT THE CIRCLE THE ONLY WAY HE CAN...
PERHAPS HE FEELS AS TRAPPED AS YOU DO THEN, RY'KENSHA.
I THINK WE'RE ALL TRAPPED, AIS. EVEN LORD VEY--SOMEHOW, HE'S CAUGHT UP IN MY FATHER'S ARRANGEMENTS, AND CAN NO MORE GET FREE THAN IF HE'D STEPPED ON A DELRAK.
BUT WHAT CAN YOU DO...

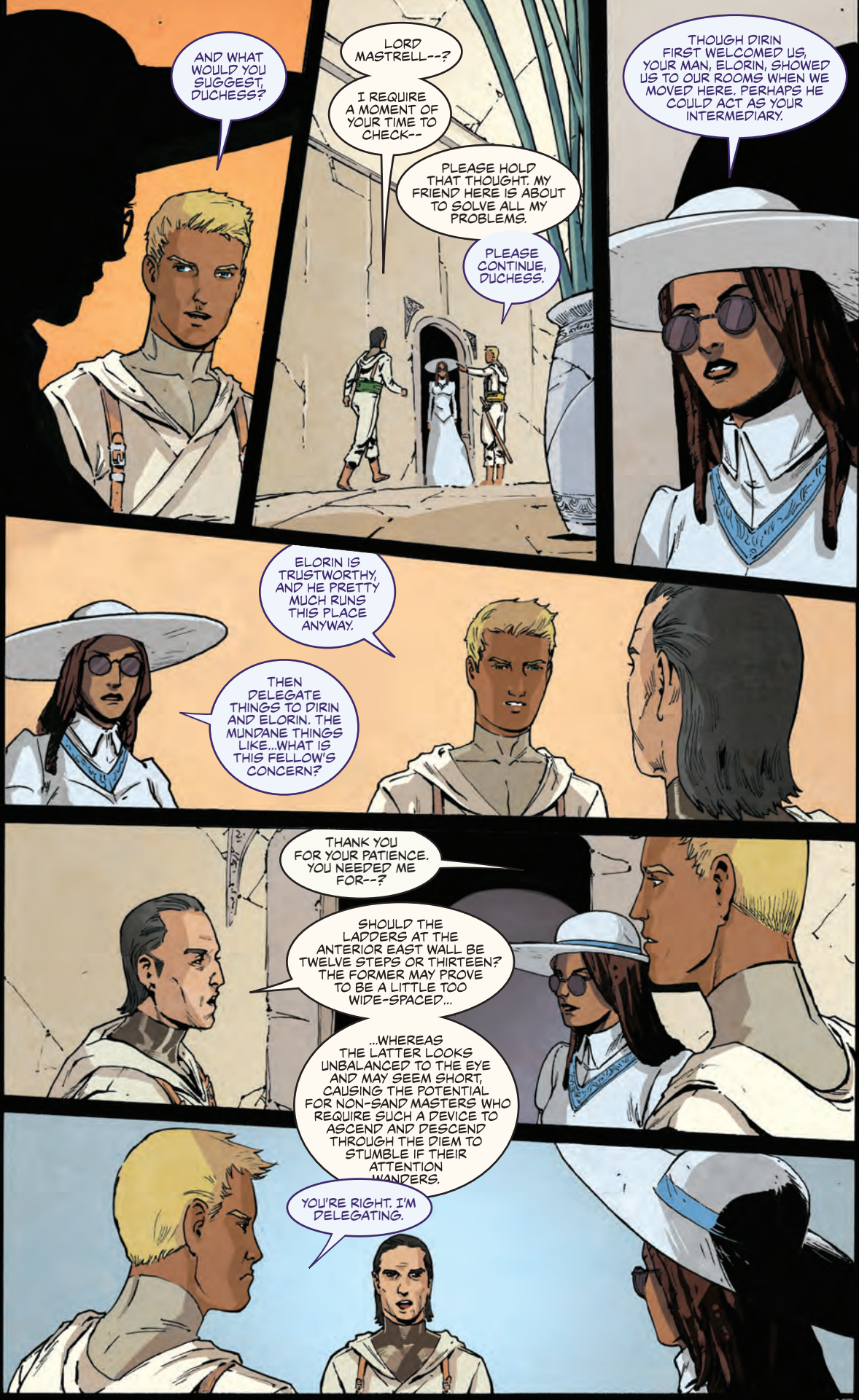
"...WHEN YOU FINALLY REALIZE YOU'RE LOCKED IN A CAGE...?"
ARE YOU SURE WE WANT TO BE HERE, DUCHESS? I FEEL DECIDEDLY UNWELCOME.
WE'VE BEEN INVITED, PROFESSOR ACRON. THINK OF IT AS A CHANCE TO EXPERIENCE A FOREIGN CULTURE FIRSTHAND.
IT IS PRETTY FOREIGN. ALL OPEN TO THE ELEMENTS, DID YOU NOTICE?
MOST UNCIVILIZED!
DUCHESS KHRISSALLA. I AM ELORIN, AND I HAVE BEEN ASKED TO SHOW YOU TO YOUR ROOMS.
THE DUCHESS DOES NOT SPEAK LOSSANDIN, ELORIN. PROCEED AND I'LL TRANSLATE.
THESE ROOMS SHOULD BE SUFFICIENT FOR YOUR PARTY FOR AS LONG AS YOU CHOOSE TO STAY.
ELORIN SAYS THESE ARE TO BE YOUR ROOMS FOR AS LONG AS YOU CHOOSE TO STAY.
BIT ON THE RUDIMENTARY SIDE, AREN'T THEY?
PRESENTING US WITH ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY TO EXPERIENCE THE LOCAL CULTURE, I'M QUITE SURE.
PLEASE, PROFESSORS, REMEMBER YOUR MANNERS.

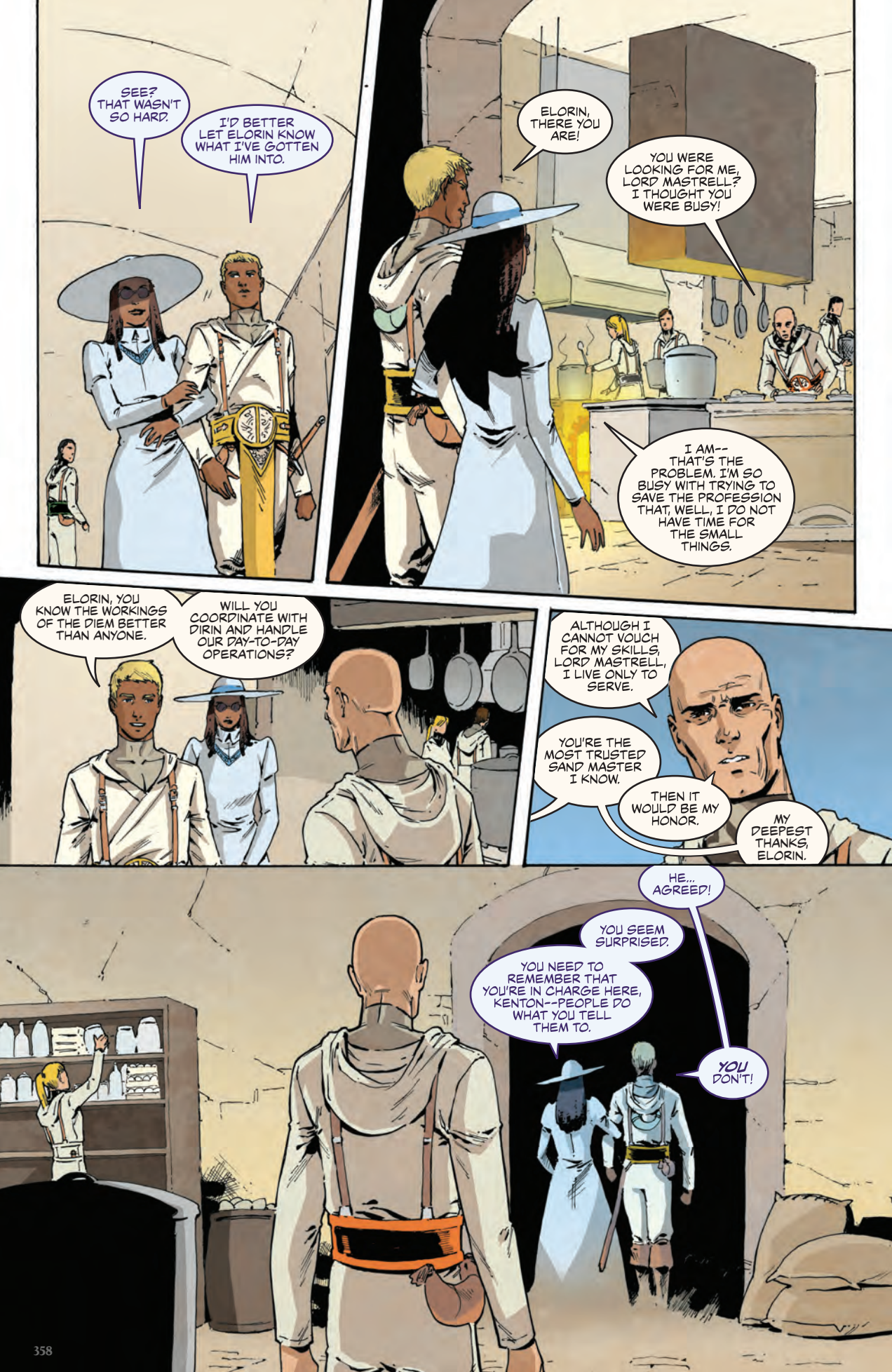
ACRON, BE CAREFUL!
THAT CASE CONTAINS MY MOBILE LAB!
I'M NO BAON, MY LADY. I'M ILL-EQUIPPED FOR SUCH HEAVY PHYSICAL LABOR.
BAON WAS CERTAINLY THAT. IT'S STILL PECULIAR TO THINK THAT HE WAS HERE ON THE ORDERS OF SKATHAN TO BETRAY US.
YES, HE SEEMED SO ...LOYAL.
BY THAT RECKONING, DUCHESS, I SUPPOSE ANY ONE OF US COULD BE HERE TO BETRAY YOU.
BUT LET'S NOT DWELL ON THAT, CYNDER.
PERHAPS THERE WAS MORE TO BAON'S MOTIVATIONS THAN WE REALIZED. SURELY HE DESERVES A CHANCE TO EXPLAIN HIMSELF.
WELL, AREN'T YOU THE MAGNANIMOUS ONE TODAY, JON?
STILL, DUCHESS, I WOULD FEEL BETTER IF YOU HAD A BODY-GUARD.
THEN PERHAPS, PROFESSOR CYNDER, YOU WOULD BE SO KIND AS TO ACCOMPANY ME--
--WITH THIS.
TH-THAT'S PRINCE GEVALDEN'S PISTOL! BUT IT'S USELESS--THAT SCOUNDREL BAON TOOK ALL THE CHARGES!
IF YOU RECALL, WE STILL HAVE SOME SALTPETER, PROFESSOR.


SHORTLY AFTER ...
N'TEESE, I NEED TO FIND BAON BEFORE HE DEPARTS THE CITY. WOULD NILTO PERHAPS...?
I CAN ARRANGE A MEETING WITH NILTO FOR YOU, DUCHESS.
YES, DO. AND HURRY.
THE ATTACK IS NOT COMING THIS DAY, RY'KENSHA. YOU'RE SAFE.
MAYBE MY WOULD-BE ASSASSINS HAVE REALIZED HOW LORD VEY'S SWAY OVER THE COUNCIL WILL DESTROY ME SHORTLY ANYWAY. ASSUMING DRILE DOESN'T KILL ME.
PERHAPS. THE WATCH WILL BE REPOSTED IN ONE DAY HENCE, AS PER THE CODE OF THE ASSASSIN'S CONTRACT.
NOW, PLEASE EXCUSE ME, RY'KENSHA. I SEE THAT I MUST SPEAK TO ONE OF MY MEN.
TAIN, WHAT NEWS?
WARNED
THIS WAS DISCOVERED ON THE MURDERED BODY OF A STREET HUSTLER WHO WAS KNOWN TO ASSOCIATE WITH SHAREZAN. I THOUGHT THAT PERHAPS...?


"I WARNED YOU."
GIVEN THAT ITS RECIPIENT WAS LIKELY ALREADY DEAD WHEN IT WAS PLACED, I WONDER WHO SHAREZAN THOUGHT WOULD READ THIS NOTE. WHO WAS HE WARNING?
ALL OF US, AIS. ALL OF US.
AND THIS?
PLACE THAT WITH THE OTHER JARS FOR NOW, PROFESSOR ACRON, AND I'LL--
OH...HELLO, KENTON.
IF YOU'LL JOIN ME, DUCHESS? IT'S TIME FOR YOUR TEST.
SHELLA. ALREADY? LET ME JUST GRAB MY...
OH, YOU WON'T NEED A NOTEBOOK, DUCHESS. IT'S NOT A WRITTEN TEST.
IF IT'S ALL THE SAME TO YOU, I LIKE TO KEEP A RECORD OF MY OBSERVATIONS.
SAND MASTERY IS SOMETHING YOU FEEL, DUCHESS, NOT SOMETHING YOU WRITE ABOUT.


HOW IS THE TEST CONDUCTED? I WOULD LIKE AS MANY DETAILS AS YOU CAN GIVE ME.
SAME WAY IT'S BEEN DONE FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS.
YOU'LL SEE HOW--
LORD MASTRELL? I'M SORRY TO INTRUDE, BUT YOU WOULDN'T KNOW WHICH ROOM MY ACOLENTS AND I ARE SUPPOSED TO MEET IN, WOULD YOU?
UM...NO. WHY DON'T YOU JUST PICK ONE THAT'S EMPTY?
AS I WAS SAYING, THE BEST WAY TO LEARN ABOUT THE TEST IS TO EXPERIENCE--
LORD MASTRELL, DO YOU KNOW WHEN THE LATEST SHIPMENT OF ZAIDON WILL BE ARRIVING? I CANNOT BE EXPECTED TO COOK A PROPER MEAL IF--
I DON'T.
I'LL LOOK INTO IT AND FIND OUT FOR YOU, UNDERFEN... UM ...?
DORIL.
YOU NEED AN ASSISTANT.
NO, YOU JUST NEED TO LEARN TO DELEGATE. OR ALL OF THIS NOISE WILL DISTRACT YOU FROM WHAT'S IMPORTANT.
I NEED TEN ASSISTANTS.

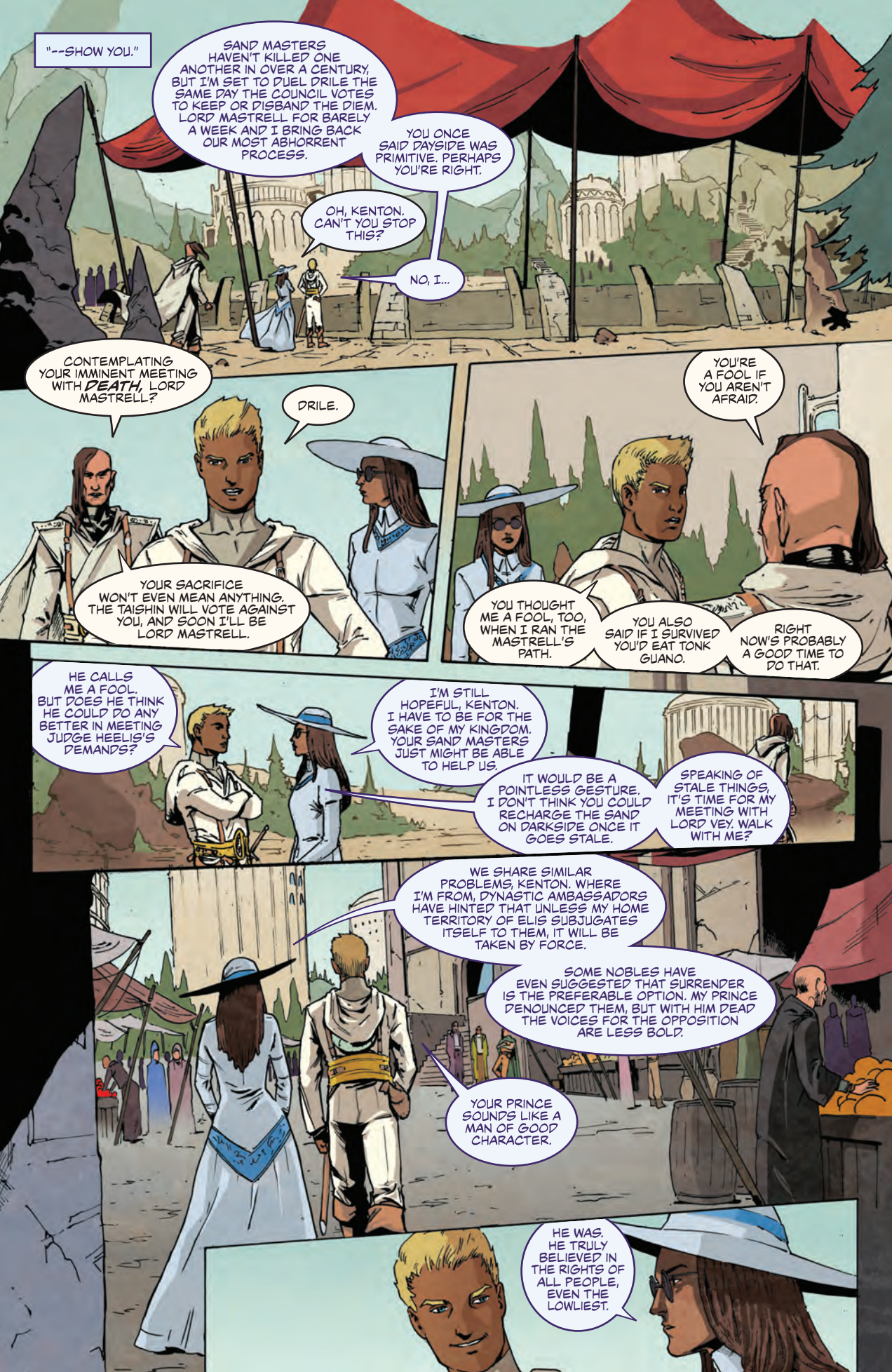

AND WHAT WOULD YOU SUGGEST, DUCHESS?
LORD MASTRELL--?
I REQUIRE A MOMENT OF YOUR TIME TO CHECK--
PLEASE HOLD THAT THOUGHT. MY FRIEND HERE IS ABOUT TO SOLVE ALL MY PROBLEMS.
PLEASE CONTINUE, DUCHESS.
THOUGH DIRIN FIRST WELCOMED US, YOUR MAN, ELORIN, SHOWED US TO OUR ROOMS WHEN WE MOVED HERE. PERHAPS HE COULD ACT AS YOUR INTERMEDIARY.
ELORIN IS TRUSTWORTHY, AND HE PRETTY MUCH RUNS THIS PLACE ANYWAY.
THEN DELEGATE THINGS TO DIRIN AND ELORIN. THE MUNDANE THINGS LIKE...WHAT IS THIS FELLOW'S CONCERN?
THANK YOU FOR YOUR PATIENCE. YOU NEEDED ME FOR--?
SHOULD THE LADDERS AT THE ANTERIOR EAST WALL BE TWELVE STEPS OR THIRTEEN? THE FORMER MAY PROVE TO BE A LITTLE TOO WIDE-SPACED...
...WHEREAS THE LATTER LOOKS UNBALANCED TO THE EYE AND MAY SEEM SHORT, CAUSING THE POTENTIAL FOR NON-SAND MASTERS WHO REQUIRE SUCH A DEVICE TO ASCEND AND DESCEND THROUGH THE DIEM TO STUMBLE IF THEIR ATTENTION WANDERS.
YOU'RE RIGHT. I'M DELEGATING.


SEE? THAT WASN'T SO HARD.
I'D BETTER LET ELORIN KNOW WHAT I'VE GOTTEN HIM INTO.
ELORIN, THERE YOU ARE!
YOU WERE LOOKING FOR ME, LORD MASTRELL? I THOUGHT YOU WERE BUSY!
I AM-- THAT'S THE PROBLEM. I'M SO BUSY WITH TRYING TO SAVE THE PROFESSION THAT, WELL, I DO NOT HAVE TIME FOR THE SMALL THINGS.
ELORIN, YOU KNOW THE WORKINGS OF THE DIEM BETTER THAN ANYONE.
WILL YOU COORDINATE WITH DIRIN AND HANDLE OUR DAY-TO-DAY OPERATIONS?
ALTHOUGH I CANNOT VOUCH FOR MY SKILLS, LORD MASTRELL, I LIVE ONLY TO SERVE.
YOU'RE THE MOST TRUSTED SAND MASTER I KNOW.
THEN IT WOULD BE MY HONOR.
MY DEEPEST THANKS, ELORIN.
HE... AGREED!
YOU SEEM SURPRISED.
YOU NEED TO REMEMBER THAT YOU'RE IN CHARGE HERE, KENTON--PEOPLE DO WHAT YOU TELL THEM TO.
YOU DON'T!

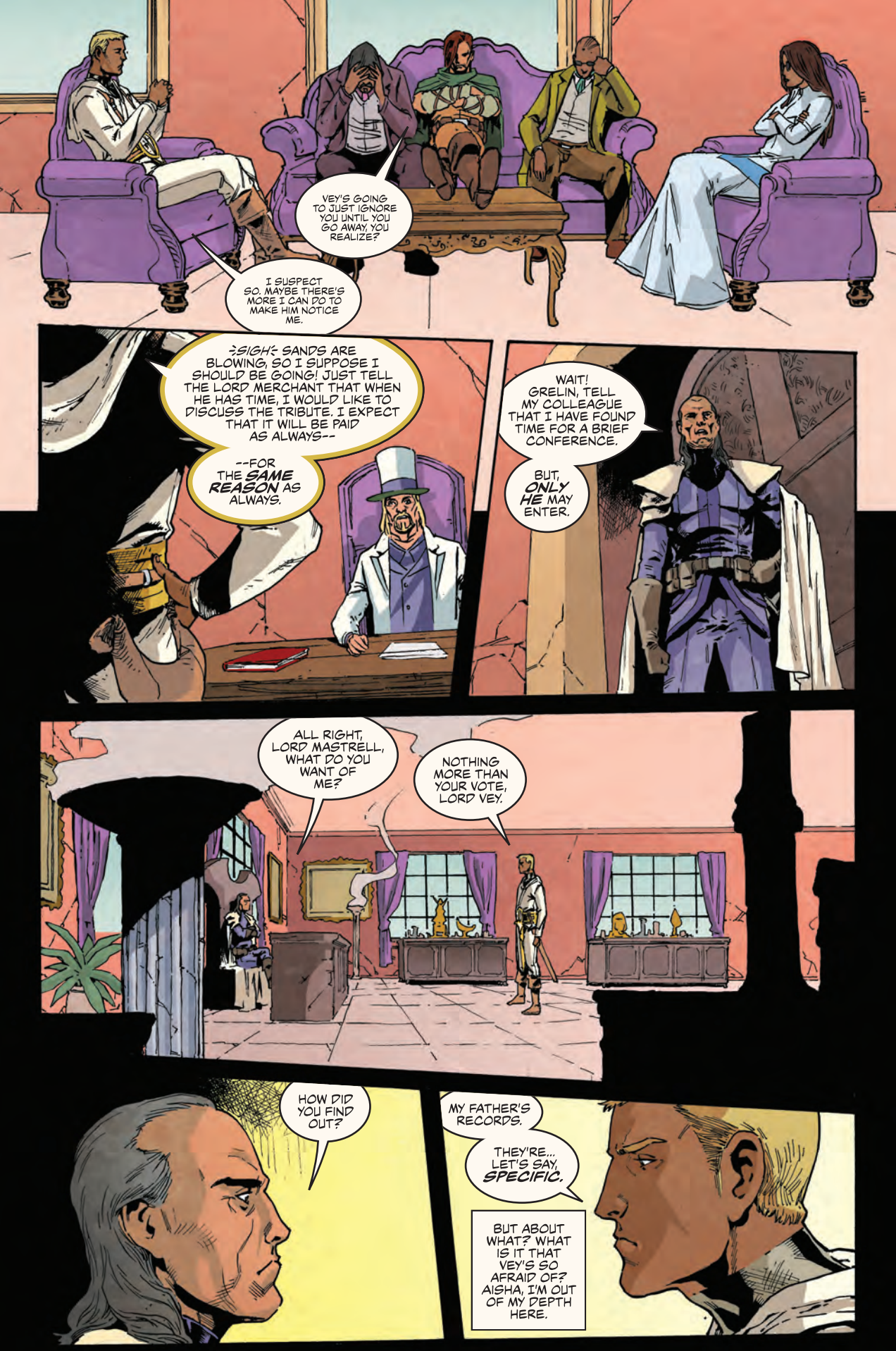
AH, LORD MASTRELL, AS I WAS SAYING...WOULD YOU BE ABLE TO PROVIDE--?
ELORIN HAS BEEN PERSONALLY ASSIGNED TO ANSWER ALL YOUR QUERIES.
PLEASE ASK HIM.
THANK YOU, LORD MASTRELL.
NOW LET'S GET OUT OF HERE BEFORE--
WELL DONE, LORD MASTRELL.
"--ELORIN CHANGES HIS MIND."
I'M SURPRISED THAT YOUR BODYGUARD ISN'T ACCOMPANYING YOU, DUCHESS. WHERE IS BAON?
HE'S...NOT TRAVELING WITH ME ANYMORE. IT TURNS OUT HE WAS A SPY.
THAT... COMES AS A SURPRISE. HE WAS SO--
--SO BAON.
BUT LET'S NOT DISCUSS HIM. YOU PROMISED TO TEACH ME.

I PROMISED TO TEST YOU, KHRISS.
THIS IS THE WAY ALL SAND MASTERS ARE TESTED TO SEE IF THEY CAN BE TRAINED. IT BEGINS WITH THE SAND.
CONCENTRATE. FEEL EVERY GRAIN OF SAND.
CALL TO IT WITH YOUR MIND.
IT CALLS BACK, AND THE TWO OF YOU CONNECT.
HOW DO YOU...?
IT COMES TO LIFE, AND YOU COMMAND IT AS YOU WISH.
YOUR TURN.

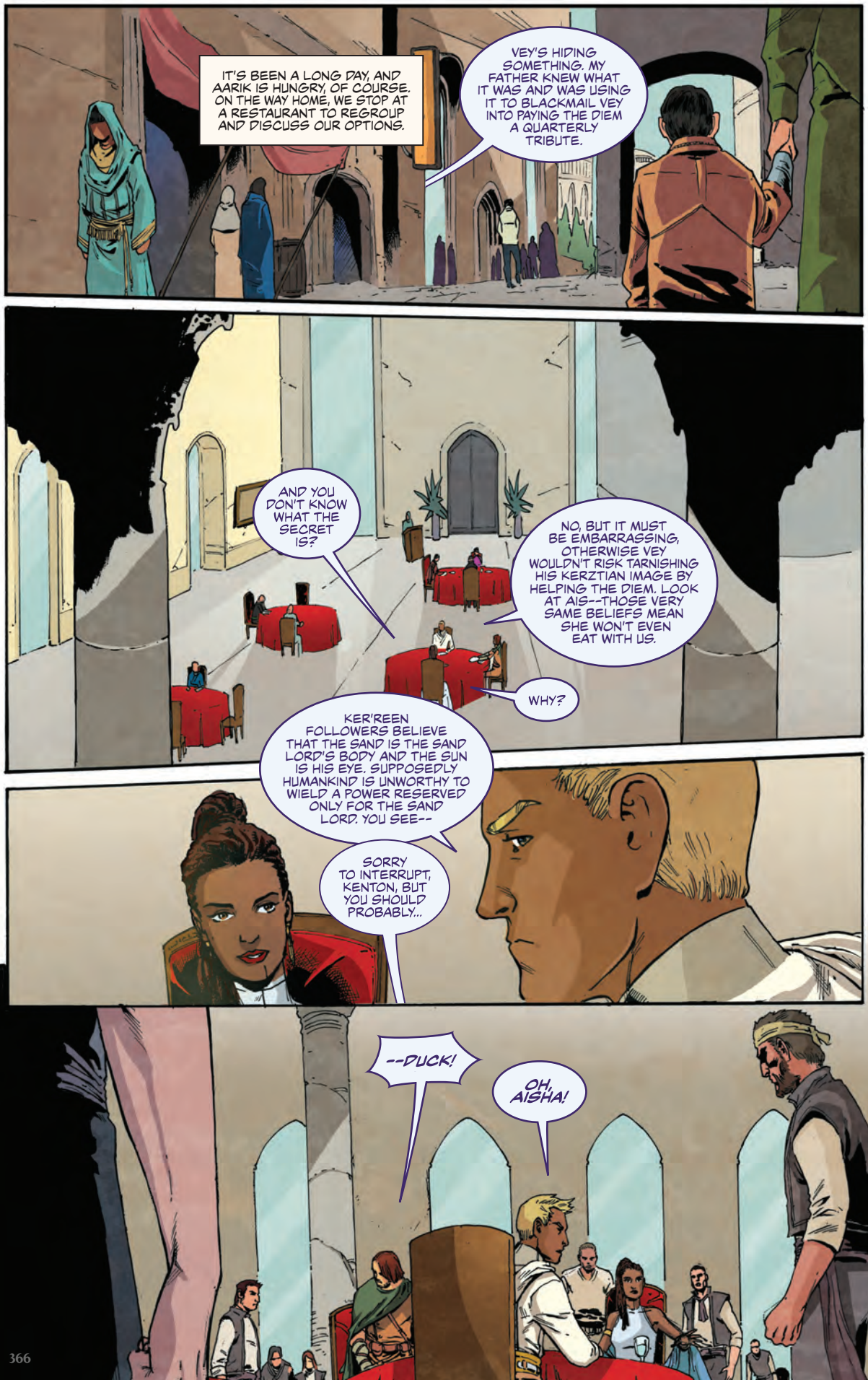
TAKE THE SAND, FEEL ITS GRAINS.
THEN YOU SPEAK TO IT, FROM DEEP WITHIN, LIKE PROJECTING YOUR VOICE WHEN YOU MAKE A SPEECH IN A LARGE ROOM.
OFFER IT TO DRINK OF YOUR BODY'S WATER.
NNGH.
NOTHING. I CAN'T DO IT.
AREN'T YOU DISAPPOINTED?
RELIEVED, ACTUALLY. IF I WERE TO BECOME A SAND MASTER...WELL, THERE ARE SO MANY THINGS IN MY LIFE THAT I WOULD HAVE TO GIVE UP...
BUT YOU'RE UPSET, I CAN TELL. DID YOU REALLY WANT ME TO--?
MY MOTHER WAS A DARKSIDER, KHRISS. MANY HERE AT THE DIEM BELIEVE THAT'S WHY MY OWN CONTROL HAS BEEN SO...SO LIMITED. I'D HOPED THAT THIS--THAT YOU-- WOULD PROVE THEM WRONG.
HOWEVER, NONE OF THIS WILL MATTER IF I CAN'T SURVIVE THE NEXT FEW DAYS. LET ME--


"--SHOW YOU."
SAND MASTERS HAVEN'T KILLED ONE ANOTHER IN OVER A CENTURY, BUT I'M SET TO DUEL DRILE THE SAME DAY THE COUNCIL VOTES TO KEEP OR DISBAND THE DIEM. LORD MASTRELL FOR BARELY A WEEK AND I BRING BACK OUR MOST ABHORRENT PROCESS.
YOU ONCE SAID DAYSIDE WAS PRIMITIVE. PERHAPS YOU'RE RIGHT.
OH, KENTON. CAN'T YOU STOP THIS?
NO, I...
CONTEMPLATING YOUR IMMINENT MEETING WITH DEATH, LORD MASTRELL?
DRILE.
YOUR SACRIFICE WON'T EVEN MEAN ANYTHING. THE TAISHIN WILL VOTE AGAINST YOU, AND SOON I'LL BE LORD MASTRELL.
YOU'RE A FOOL IF YOU AREN'T AFRAID.
YOU THOUGHT ME A FOOL, TOO, WHEN I RAN THE MASTRELL'S PATH.
YOU ALSO SAID IF I SURVIVED YOU'D EAT TONK GUANO.
RIGHT NOW'S PROBABLY A GOOD TIME TO DO THAT.
HE CALLS ME A FOOL. BUT DOES HE THINK HE COULD DO ANY BETTER IN MEETING JUDGE HEELIS'S DEMANDS?
I'M STILL HOPEFUL, KENTON. I HAVE TO BE FOR THE SAKE OF MY KINGDOM. YOUR SAND MASTERS JUST MIGHT BE ABLE TO HELP US.
IT WOULD BE A POINTLESS GESTURE. I DON'T THINK YOU COULD RECHARGE THE SAND ON DARKSIDE ONCE IT GOES STALE.
SPEAKING OF STALE THINGS, IT'S TIME FOR MY MEETING WITH LORD VEY. WALK WITH ME?
WE SHARE SIMILAR PROBLEMS, KENTON. WHERE I'M FROM, DYNASTIC AMBASSADORS HAVE HINTED THAT UNLESS MY HOME TERRITORY OF ELIS SUBJUGATES ITSELF TO THEM, IT WILL BE TAKEN BY FORCE.
SOME NOBLES HAVE EVEN SUGGESTED THAT SURRENDER IS THE PREFERABLE OPTION. MY PRINCE DENOUNCED THEM, BUT WITH HIM DEAD THE VOICES FOR THE OPPOSITION ARE LESS BOLD.
YOUR PRINCE SOUNDS LIKE A MAN OF GOOD CHARACTER.
HE WAS. HE TRULY BELIEVED IN THE RIGHTS OF ALL PEOPLE, EVEN THE LOWLIEST.

WELL, YOU'RE ABOUT TO MEET A MAN WHO HAS NO TIME FOR PEOPLE BENEATH HIM--THE MERCHANT LORD VEY.
YOU DON'T LIKE HIM, I TAKE IT?
YOU'RE THE TACTFUL ONE, KHRISSALLA. I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT I'M GOING TO SAY TO HIM.
HIS GUILD HAS PAID THEIR TRIBUTE TO THE DIEM FOR ALL THESE YEARS, BUT VEY WOULD NEVER DO THAT UNLESS HE HAD A REASON. IT'S LIKE HE'S AFRAID OF SOMETHING.
YES?
TELL THE LORD MERCHANT THAT THE LORD MASTRELL WISHES A FEW MOMENTS TO MAKE AMENDS BETWEEN US, SINCE OUR LAST MEETING ENDED ABRUPTLY.
I WILL SEE THAT HE GETS THE MESSAGE, LORD MASTRELL.
YOU HEAR THAT, AARIK? HE'LL SEE THAT LORD VEY GETS MY MESSAGE.
YES, I HEARD. DO YOU THINK HE INTENDS TO DO SO TODAY, OR IS IT A LESS FORMAL ARRANGEMENT?
DEFINITELY LESS FORMAL.


VEY'S GOING TO JUST IGNORE YOU UNTIL YOU GO AWAY, YOU REALIZE?
I SUSPECT SO. MAYBE THERE'S MORE I CAN DO TO MAKE HIM NOTICE ME.
:SIGH: SANDS ARE BLOWING, SO I SUPPOSE I SHOULD BE GOING! JUST TELL THE LORD MERCHANT THAT WHEN HE HAS TIME, I WOULD LIKE TO DISCUSS THE TRIBUTE. I EXPECT THAT IT WILL BE PAID AS ALWAYS--
--FOR THE SAME REASON AS ALWAYS.
WAIT! GRELIN, TELL MY COLLEAGUE THAT I HAVE FOUND TIME FOR A BRIEF CONFERENCE.
BUT, ONLY HE MAY ENTER.
ALL RIGHT, LORD MASTRELL, WHAT DO YOU WANT OF ME?
NOTHING MORE THAN YOUR VOTE, LORD VEY.
HOW DID YOU FIND OUT?
MY FATHER'S RECORDS.
THEY'RE... LET'S SAY, SPECIFIC.
BUT ABOUT WHAT? WHAT IS IT THAT VEY'S SO AFRAID OF? AISHA, I'M OUT OF MY DEPTH HERE.

I JUST HOPE VEY DOESN'T REALIZE IT.
WILL THIS CURSE NEVER LEAVE ME?
IT COULD. NO ONE NEED EVER KNOW, LORD MERCHANT. GIVE ME YOUR VOTE AND I WILL TAKE YOUR SECRET TO THE FUNERAL PYRE.
BUT IF YOU DON'T, I SHALL PROCLAIM YOUR SECRET TO ALL OF LOSSAND!
AND WHAT SECRET WOULD THAT BE, LORD MASTRELL?
SANDS! I WAS SO CLOSE!
THE SECRET WE BOTH KNOW.
HEH. HEH-HEH-HEH.
WELL, I HAVE NOTHING TO HIDE FROM LOSSAND, LORD MASTRELL. FEEL FREE TO TELL THE PEOPLE WHATEVER YOU WANT.
BE WARNED, HOWEVER, THAT THE HALL WILL REQUIRE PROOF OF YOUR ASSERTIONS.
I'LL FIND YOUR SECRET, VEY. GIVE ME YOUR VOTE AND I'LL BURY IT IN DEEPEST SAND. YOU WILL NOT RECEIVE SUCH A LENIENT OFFER IF YOU MAKE ME SEARCH FOR IT FIRST.
BLACKMAIL, LORD MASTRELL? IS THAT THE BEST YOUR WASHED-UP PROFESSION HAS TO OFFER?
HIS WORDS STING. I SHOULDN'T TAKE ADVANTAGE OF SOMEONE, EVEN IF IT IS TO SAVE THE DIEM.


IT'S BEEN A LONG DAY, AND AARIK IS HUNGRY, OF COURSE. ON THE WAY HOME, WE STOP AT A RESTAURANT TO REGROUP AND DISCUSS OUR OPTIONS.
VEY'S HIDING SOMETHING. MY FATHER KNEW WHAT IT WAS AND WAS USING IT TO BLACKMAIL VEY INTO PAYING THE DIEM A QUARTERLY TRIBUTE.
AND YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT THE SECRET IS?
NO, BUT IT MUST BE EMBARRASSING, OTHERWISE VEY WOULDN'T RISK TARNISHING HIS KERZTIAN IMAGE BY HELPING THE DIEM. LOOK AT AIS--THOSE VERY SAME BELIEFS MEAN SHE WON'T EVEN EAT WITH US.
WHY?
KER'REEN FOLLOWERS BELIEVE THAT THE SAND IS THE SAND LORD'S BODY AND THE SUN IS HIS EYE. SUPPOSEDLY HUMANKIND IS UNWORTHY TO WIELD A POWER RESERVED ONLY FOR THE SAND LORD. YOU SEE--
SORRY TO INTERRUPT, KENTON, BUT YOU SHOULD PROBABLY...
--DUCK!
OH, AISHA!

Sand Mastery Observations

A part of me is disappointed I didn't pass the test for sand mastery, but mostly I'm relieved. I'm not very likely to swear fealty to the Diem over my loyalty to Elis. (Honestly, I'd go back to Darkside whether the Lord Mastrell allowed me to or not. Then Kenton could send his secret sand masters to neutralize me. I'm a little sad to not be able to study them firsthand.)

Living temporarily in the Diem has given me a chance to observe sand masters during their daily training and practice regimens. If a supposedly weak sand master such as Kenton can create a decoy of himself out of sand, as I saw him do during one of the assassination attempts, then think of all the things sand masters are capable of if they get creative. (Now that Kenton can control more than one ribbon, I hope he doesn't lose the ingenuity only one ribbon forced upon him.)

Based on my observations, even one ribbon can do many things:

* Launch a sand master into the air
* Slice things like a razor
* Propel a sand master forward
* Create decoys from sand
* Slip into cracks in stone and expand
* Lift items several times heavier than the sand master
* Throw up a protective shield
* Deactivate other ribbons if touched head on or from the side
* There's no end to the possibilities

If ribbons can be razor sharp, then can sand masters fight with living sand on their arms as whips or blades, similar to how some of the Starcarved fight?

If one ribbon can launch a sand master, many can carry them higher. Then why don't we see more of this type of thing?

If ribbons can create a decoy and be used as shields, can they also be used like this, similar to the Starcarved who are impervious to our bullets?

CHAPTER 14
THESE LOST CAUSES

ASSASSINS! GET DOWN!
KILL HIM!
YOU WOULD THINK THEY'D HAVE THE DECENCY NOT TO INTERRUPT LUNCH.

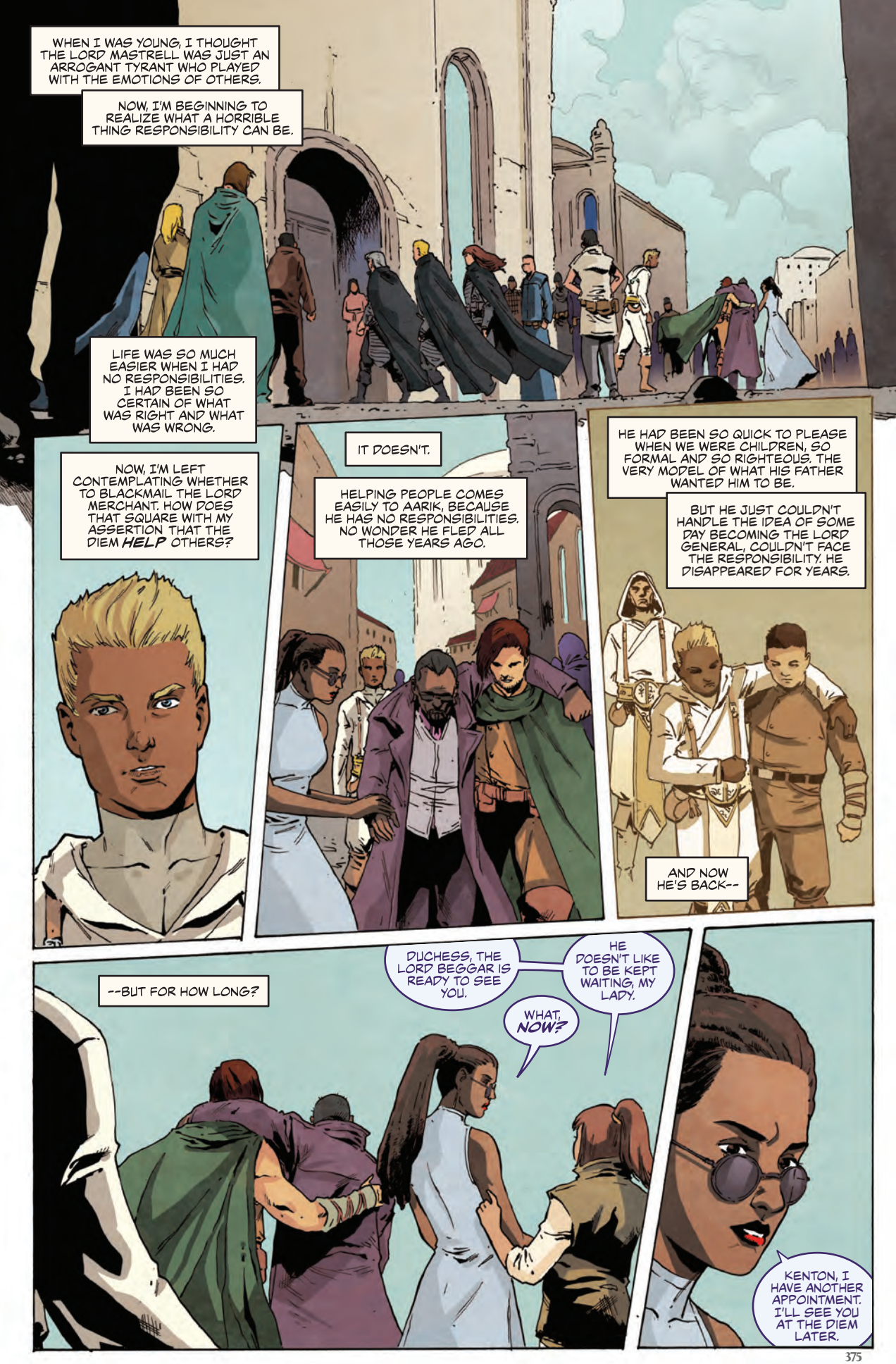
HOW MANY THIS TIME, AIS?
I COUNT SEVEN.
MAKE THAT FIVE.
THREE!
AARIK, DON'T YOU THINK WE SHOULD--?
HELP? KENTON CAN TAKE CARE OF HIMSELF. WEREN'T YOU HERE FOR THE CONVERSATION A FEW MINUTES AGO? KILLING HUNDREDS OF MEN WITH SAND AND ALL THAT.
BUT THESE ONES ARE...SAND PROOF.
HE CAN STILL TAKE CARE OF HIMSELF.
SORRY, I MUST GET THIS.
FFFT
AARIK, YOU CAUGHT IT! HOW'D YOU--?
HAND-EYE COORDINATION. NOTHING TO IT.

AND HERE'S THE VERY MAN I'M LOOKING FOR.
WAITER--
--WILL YOU BRING ME SOME MORE ZAIDON? THESE ARE...
...DELICIOUS.
NO! AARIK, HE'S GOT A--!
IF THIS IS YOUR USUAL SERVICE, I'M AFRAID I WON'T BE RECOMMENDING THIS VENUE TO MY FRIENDS.

WHACK
THAT'S IT--
--DEFINITELY NOT RECOMMENDING THIS PLACE.
KENTON!
SHOW'S OVER, LORD MASTRELL! ONE MORE MOVE...
--AND I'LL PUT AN ARROW IN HER HEAD!

FA-TOOOM
BAON...?
NO, DUCHESS. IT'S...
ACRON? WHAT ARE YOU DOING WITH THAT? I GAVE IT TO PROFESSOR CYNDER.
YES, FOR SAFEKEEPING. WHICH IS TO SAY, YOUR SAFEKEEPING.
BUT CYNDER CAN BE SUCH A CACK-HANDED OAF THAT I THOUGHT IT BEST IF I... BRING IT.

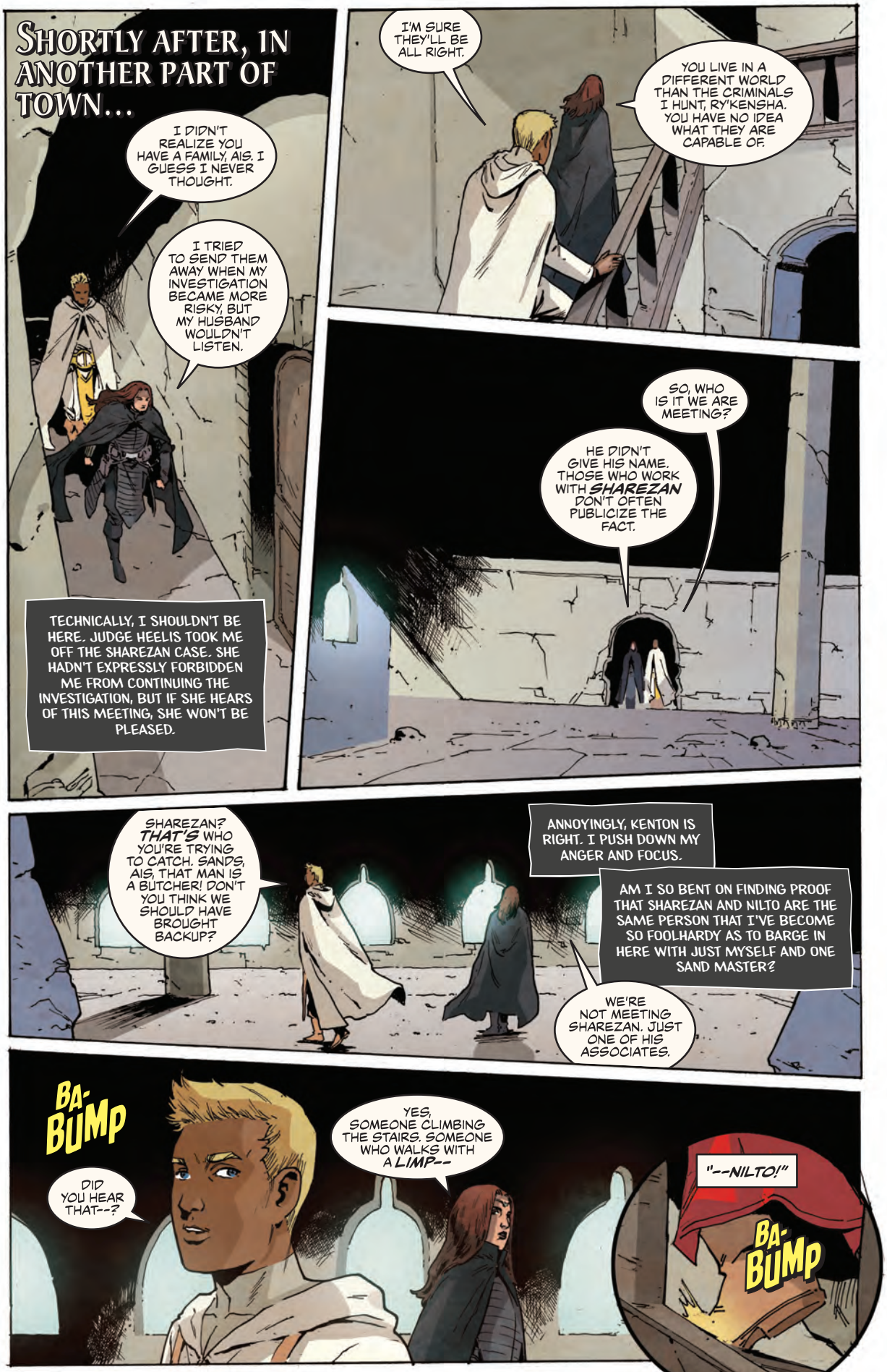
IT'S RATHER... LOUDER THAN I EXPECTED, HOWEVER.
IT'S OKAY, PROFESSOR ACRON. YOU DID GOOD HERE. YOU SAVED MY LIFE.
I DID THIS. I'M THE ONE WHO PUT HER IN DANGER.
BUT THESE ASSASSINS ARE GETTING SNEAKIER. THIS ONE HASN'T EVEN MARKED HIS FOREHEAD.
AND YOU TOLD ME THEY WOULDN'T ATTACK TODAY, AIS.
IT'S OKAY, PROFESSOR, YOU DID FINE.
THEY SHOULDN'T HAVE. AT LEAST NOT BY REGULAR INTERPRETATION OF THE KERKOR.
ACCORDING TO THE KERKOR, THE ASSASSINS CAN ATTACK ON ODD NUMBERED DAYS BY THE KERZTIAN CALENDAR. IF THEY'VE SKIPPED A DAY, THEY SHOULD WAIT ANOTHER DAY.
WELL, THEY OBVIOUSLY DIDN'T.
I CAN'T BELIEVE ANYONE WOULD IGNORE THE STIPULATIONS INTENTIONALLY. WHOEVER THE A'KAR'S ASSIGNED TO PERFORM THIS ASSASSINATION MUST NOT HAVE READ THE KERKOR CLOSELY.
THANK YOU FOR HELP, AIS.
GO ON WITHOUT ME, RY'KENSHA, AND PERHAPS I CAN DISCOVER SOME CLUE AS TO WHO IS ORGANIZING THESE ATTACKS.
AND PERHAPS I CAN HAVE A MOMENT TO INVESTIGATE THE RESULTS OF THE WEAPON THE DARKSIDER USED ON YOU, ASSASSIN.
IT'S LIKE NAPTHANI FLAME BUT PORTABLE ENOUGH TO FIT INSIDE ACRON'S METAL TUBE. WAIT--WHAT'S THIS?
AN ANONYMOUS NOTE. "MEET ME AT ELEVENTH HOUR IN THE SAME WAREHOUSE WHERE YOU APPREHENDED LOKMLEN'S GANG. I'LL GIVE INFORMATION ON SHAREZAN IN EXCHANGE FOR PROTECTION FROM HIM."
WELL, THEN. THIS IS A GIFT FROM THE SAND LORD HIMSELF...


WHEN I WAS YOUNG, I THOUGHT THE LORD MASTRELL WAS JUST AN ARROGANT TYRANT WHO PLAYED WITH THE EMOTIONS OF OTHERS.
NOW, I'M BEGINNING TO REALIZE WHAT A HORRIBLE THING RESPONSIBILITY CAN BE.
LIFE WAS SO MUCH EASIER WHEN I HAD NO RESPONSIBILITIES. I HAD BEEN SO CERTAIN OF WHAT WAS RIGHT AND WHAT WAS WRONG.
NOW, I'M LEFT CONTEMPLATING WHETHER TO BLACKMAIL THE LORD MERCHANT. HOW DOES THAT SQUARE WITH MY ASSERTION THAT THE DIEM HELP OTHERS?
IT DOESN'T.
HELPING PEOPLE COMES EASILY TO AARIK, BECAUSE HE HAS NO RESPONSIBILITIES. NO WONDER HE FLED ALL THOSE YEARS AGO.
HE HAD BEEN SO QUICK TO PLEASE WHEN WE WERE CHILDREN, SO FORMAL AND SO RIGHTEOUS. THE VERY MODEL OF WHAT HIS FATHER WANTED HIM TO BE.
BUT HE JUST COULDN'T HANDLE THE IDEA OF SOME DAY BECOMING THE LORD GENERAL, COULDN'T FACE THE RESPONSIBILITY. HE DISAPPEARED FOR YEARS.
AND NOW HE'S BACK--
--BUT FOR HOW LONG?
DUCHESS, THE LORD BEGGAR IS READY TO SEE YOU.
HE DOESN'T LIKE TO BE KEPT WAITING, MY LADY.
WHAT, NOW?
KENTON, I HAVE ANOTHER APPOINTMENT. I'LL SEE YOU AT THE DIEM LATER.

PLEASE EXCUSE ME, I M-MUST GO, AS WELL. THE DUCHESS IS RELYING ON ME TO PR-PR-PROTECT HER.
WELL, HE CERTAINLY RECOVERED QUICKLY.
KHRISS SURE KNOWS HOW TO INSTILL LOYALTY IN HER PEOPLE. IF ONLY I COULD LEARN HOW SHE DOES IT, PERHAPS I COULD PERSUADE DRILE'S FOLLOWERS TO JOIN ME.
EVEN THEN, DO YOU THINK HE'D BACK DOWN?
THEN MAYBE I WOULDN'T HAVE TO FIGHT HIM.
NOT AT ALL. HE WON'T STOP UNTIL...
"...UNTIL I'M DEAD."
WHAT DO YOU WISH OF ME, WOMAN?
THE LORD NILTO ASKS WHAT YOU DESIRE, DUCHESS.
N'TEESE, WILL YOU TELL LORD NILTO THAT A...FRIEND OF MINE HAS DISAPPEARED, AND I WOULD LIKE TO FIND HIM, IF POSSIBLE.
A LARGE DARKSIDER, WHO WEARS A LONG, LIGHT BLUE COAT.
I CAN PAY.
THIS MAN'S IMPORTANT TO YOU, KHRISS? A LOVER?
NO. LIKE I SAID: A FRIEND.

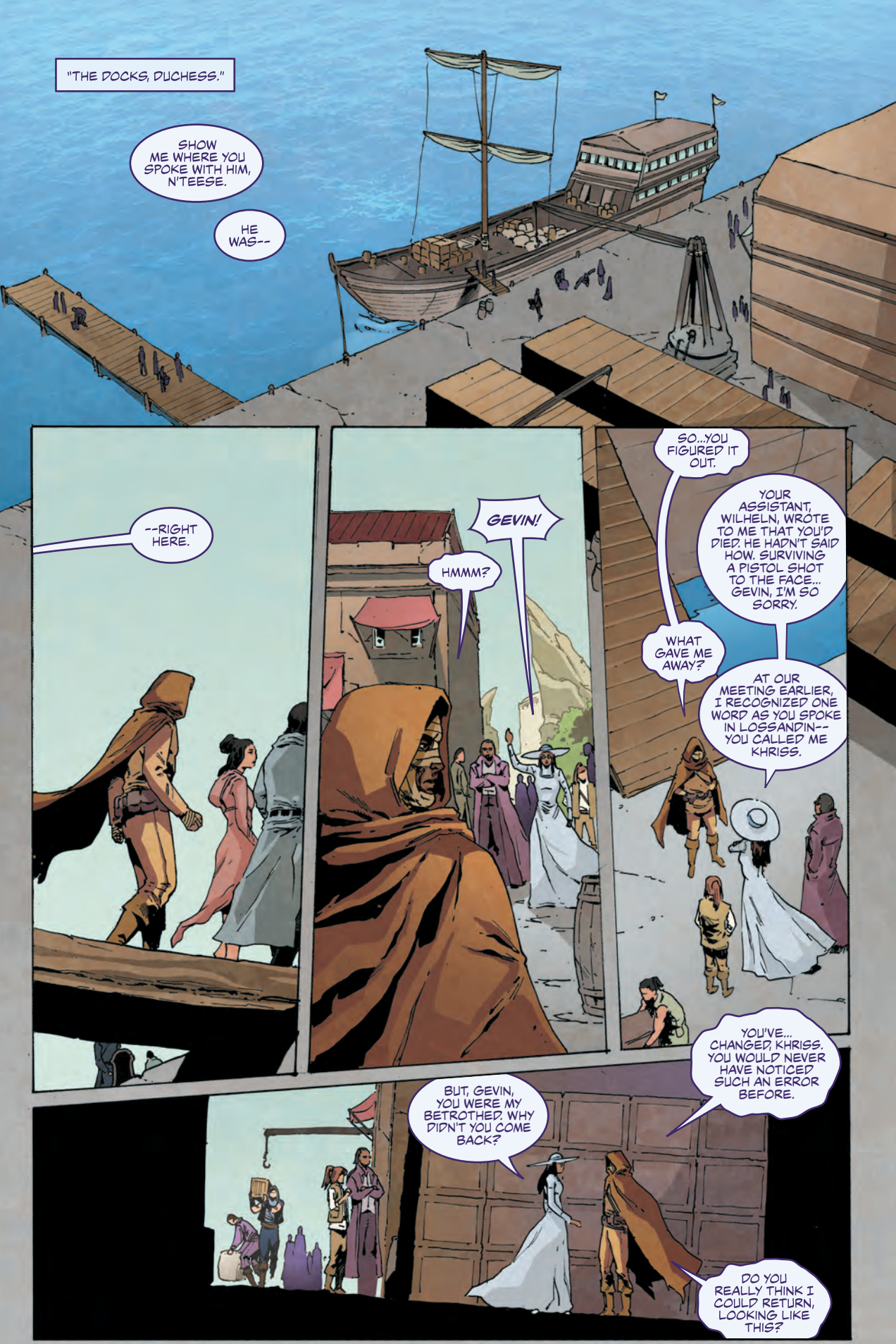
MY TIME IS VALUABLE. DO YOU KNOW HOW BUSY MY DAYS ARE? HOW MANY PEOPLE I CARE FOR? AND YOU THINK I HAVE TIME TO SEARCH FOR YOUR RUNAWAY BODYGUARD?
PLEASE, LORD NILTO. IF YOUR PEOPLE COULD SIMPLY LOOK OUT FOR HIM AND LET YOU KNOW SHOULD THEY SEE HIM...
TRANSLATOR, TELL THE DUCHESS TO KEEP HER MONEY HANDY. IF I HEAR ANYTHING--
--I'LL EXPECT A REWARD.
:HUFF-PUFF: THERE YOU ARE, DUCHESS. QUITE A DAY WE'RE HAVING, NO?
LATER, AT THE DIEM...
MAYBE I'VE BEEN TOO CAUTIOUS. IF THERE'S A WAY THROUGH OVERMASTERY TO INCREASE MY POWER SO I CAN DEFEAT DRILE, I SHOULD EXPLORE IT.
BUT I COULD END UP BURNING MYSELF OUT. AND THEN WHAT?
RY'KENSHA? I'M SORRY TO INTRUDE ON YOUR THOUGHTS, BUT I MUST LEAVE EARLY TODAY. I HAVE PRESSING HALL DUTIES.
HALL DUTIES?
I AM CLOSE TO CATCHING A CRIMINAL. TODAY I HAVE A MEETING WITH ONE OF HIS FORMER ASSOCIATES.
SOUNDS INTERESTING. PERHAPS I CAN HELP.
YOUR PRESENCE WON'T BE NECESSARY.

AS YOU WISH, AIS. WHILE YOU'RE GONE, I MAY GO AND SPEAK WITH ONE OF THE TAISHIN. THE LORD FARMER, I THINK.
HOW ARE YOU SUPPOSED TO SPY ON ME IF I GO WITHOUT YOU?
HMF. ALL RIGHT. YOU MAY COME WITH ME.
BUT WE WILL STOP AT MY HOME FIRST.
AND YOU WILL NOT EMBARRASS ME.
AIS'S HOME.
WHAT WE'RE DOING COULD BE DANGEROUS. I MUST LEAVE A NOTE FOR MY FAMILY SO THEY KNOW WHERE I AM.
YOU LIVE HERE? I MEAN, IT'S... NICE.
SANDS. WHY DID I AGREE TO BRING THIS FOOL OF A MASTRELL ALONG?
YOU ARE NOT WELCOME INSIDE, RY'KENSHA.
WAIT. AND DO NOT DRAW ATTENTION TO YOURSELF BY DOING ANYTHING HERETICAL.
NOW, WHY WOULD I DO THAT?


SHORTLY AFTER, IN ANOTHER PART OF TOWN...
I DIDN'T REALIZE YOU HAVE A FAMILY, AIS. I GUESS I NEVER THOUGHT.
I TRIED TO SEND THEM AWAY WHEN MY INVESTIGATION BECAME MORE RISKY, BUT MY HUSBAND WOULDN'T LISTEN.
TECHNICALLY, I SHOULDN'T BE HERE. JUDGE HEELIS TOOK ME OFF THE SHAREZAN CASE. SHE HADN'T EXPRESSLY FORBIDDEN ME FROM CONTINUING THE INVESTIGATION, BUT IF SHE HEARS OF THIS MEETING, SHE WON'T BE PLEASED.
I'M SURE THEY'LL BE ALL RIGHT.
YOU LIVE IN A DIFFERENT WORLD THAN THE CRIMINALS I HUNT, RY'KENSHA. YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT THEY ARE CAPABLE OF.
SO, WHO IS IT WE ARE MEETING?
HE DIDN'T GIVE HIS NAME. THOSE WHO WORK WITH SHAREZAN DON'T OFTEN PUBLICIZE THE FACT.
SHAREZAN? THAT'S WHO YOU'RE TRYING TO CATCH. SANDS, AIS, THAT MAN IS A BUTCHER! DON'T YOU THINK WE SHOULD HAVE BROUGHT BACKUP?
ANNOYINGLY, KENTON IS RIGHT. I PUSH DOWN MY ANGER AND FOCUS.
AM I SO BENT ON FINDING PROOF THAT SHAREZAN AND NILTO ARE THE SAME PERSON THAT I'VE BECOME SO FOOLHARDY AS TO BARGE IN HERE WITH JUST MYSELF AND ONE SAND MASTER?
WE'RE NOT MEETING SHAREZAN. JUST ONE OF HIS ASSOCIATES.
BA-BUMP
DID YOU HEAR THAT--?
YES, SOMEONE CLIMBING THE STAIRS. SOMEONE WHO WALKS WITH A LIMP--
"--NILTO!"
BA-BUMP

SANDS, RY'KENSHA! IT'S A TRAP!
BUT HOW CAN YOU...?
RUN!
BA-BOOM
THE BUILDING WAS RIGGED WITH NAPTHANI FLAME.
THAT STUFF IS RARE AND EXPENSIVE. SOMEONE MUST REALLY WANT YOU DEAD.
I GUESS YOU AND I HAVE MORE IN COMMON THAN WE THOUGHT.

NILTO MUST HAVE CAUGHT OUR INFORMANT, DISCOVERED HIS PLAN TO MEET WITH US, AND USED THE INFORMATION TO SET A TRAP.
AS USUAL, SHAREZAN--NILTO!--IS JUST ONE STEP AHEAD OF ME. ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY LOST.
LATER...
NILTO SENT A MESSAGE THAT HE'S NOT GOING TO LOOK FOR BAON AFTER ALL. INSTEAD, THE LORD BEGGAR WILL BE LEAVING KEZARE FOR A WHILE.
NILTO HAS BEEN LESS THAN HONEST WITH US. WHERE WAS HE WHEN HE GAVE YOU THIS, N'TEESE?


"THE DOCKS, DUCHESS."
SHOW ME WHERE YOU SPOKE WITH HIM, N'TEESE.
HE WAS--
--RIGHT HERE.
GEVIN!
HMMM?
SO...YOU FIGURED IT OUT.
YOUR ASSISTANT, WILHELN, WROTE TO ME THAT YOU'D DIED. HE HADN'T SAID HOW. SURVIVING A PISTOL SHOT TO THE FACE... GEVIN, I'M SO SORRY.
WHAT GAVE ME AWAY?
AT OUR MEETING EARLIER, I RECOGNIZED ONE WORD AS YOU SPOKE IN LOSSANDIN-- YOU CALLED ME KHRISS.
YOU'VE... CHANGED, KHRISS. YOU WOULD NEVER HAVE NOTICED SUCH AN ERROR BEFORE.
BUT, GEVIN, YOU WERE MY BETROTHED. WHY DIDN'T YOU COME BACK?
DO YOU REALLY THINK I COULD RETURN, LOOKING LIKE THIS?

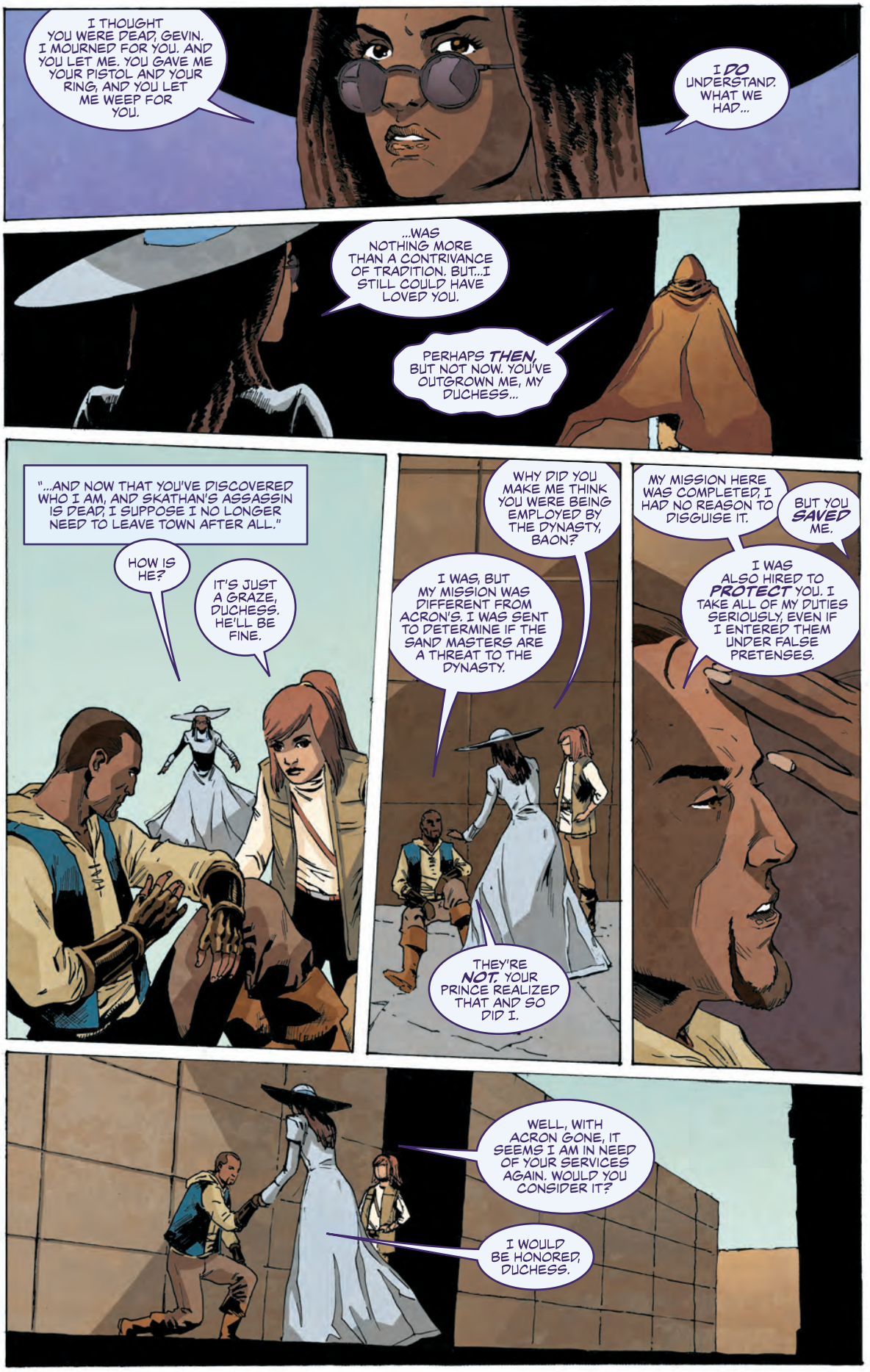
BUT WHAT ABOUT YOUR DUTY?
TO A COUNTRY THAT DIDN'T WANT TO BE SAVED? NO, MY DUTY IS HERE NOW. ELIS'S ELITE WERE JUST WAITING TO BE RID OF ME SO THEY COULD CRAWL TO SKATHAN AND ACCEPT HIS RULE.
SKATHAN HAS SO MANY AGENTS, AND HE'S THOROUGH. I HAD TO STAY DEAD. IF THEY KNEW I'D LIVED...
ARE YOU FINISHED?
IT SEEMS THAT I AM.
ACRON, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
COMPLETING MY MISSION HERE.
SKATHAN'S ASSASSINS ARE EXTREMELY WELL-TRAINED, KHRISS.
AND THIS ONE SEEMS TO HAVE ACQUIRED MY OLD PISTOL...
BUT NOW THAT YOU KNOW WHO I AM, ASSASSIN, YOU MUST ALSO KNOW THAT I AM NO THREAT TO THE DYNASTY.
AND YOU NEVER WILL B--UNNNGH!
WHAM
WHO--?

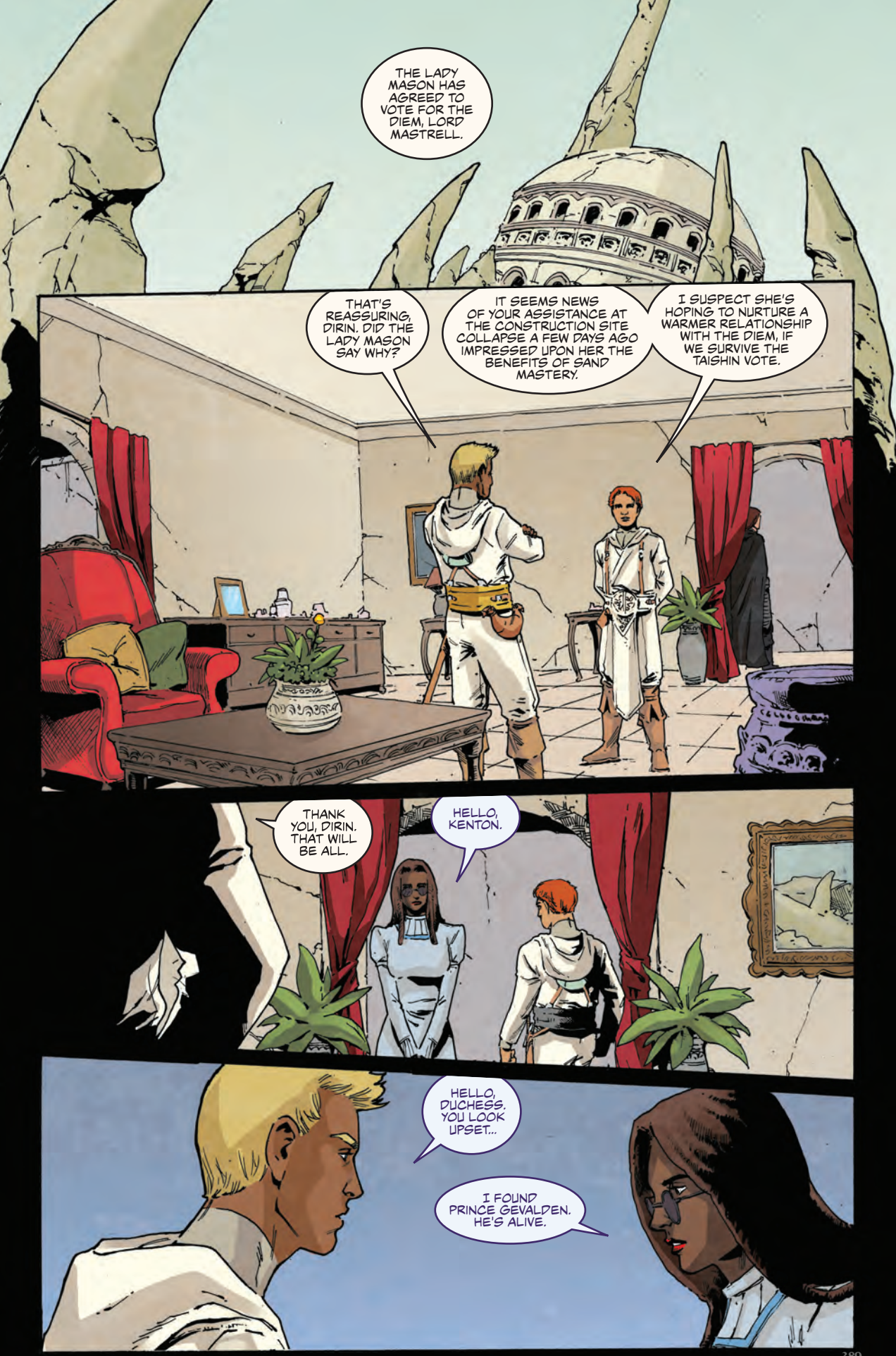
BAON!
FUNNY, I'D ALMOST CONVINCED MYSELF THAT CYNDER WOULD BE THE ONE.
YOU KNEW?
I SUSPECTED, DUCHESS. SKATHÁN NEVER TRUSTS SOLDIERS TO DO AS THEY'RE TOLD-- HE ALWAYS SENDS BACKUP.
THANK YOU, BAON. YOU SAVED--
FA-TOOOM
BAON!
UNGH!

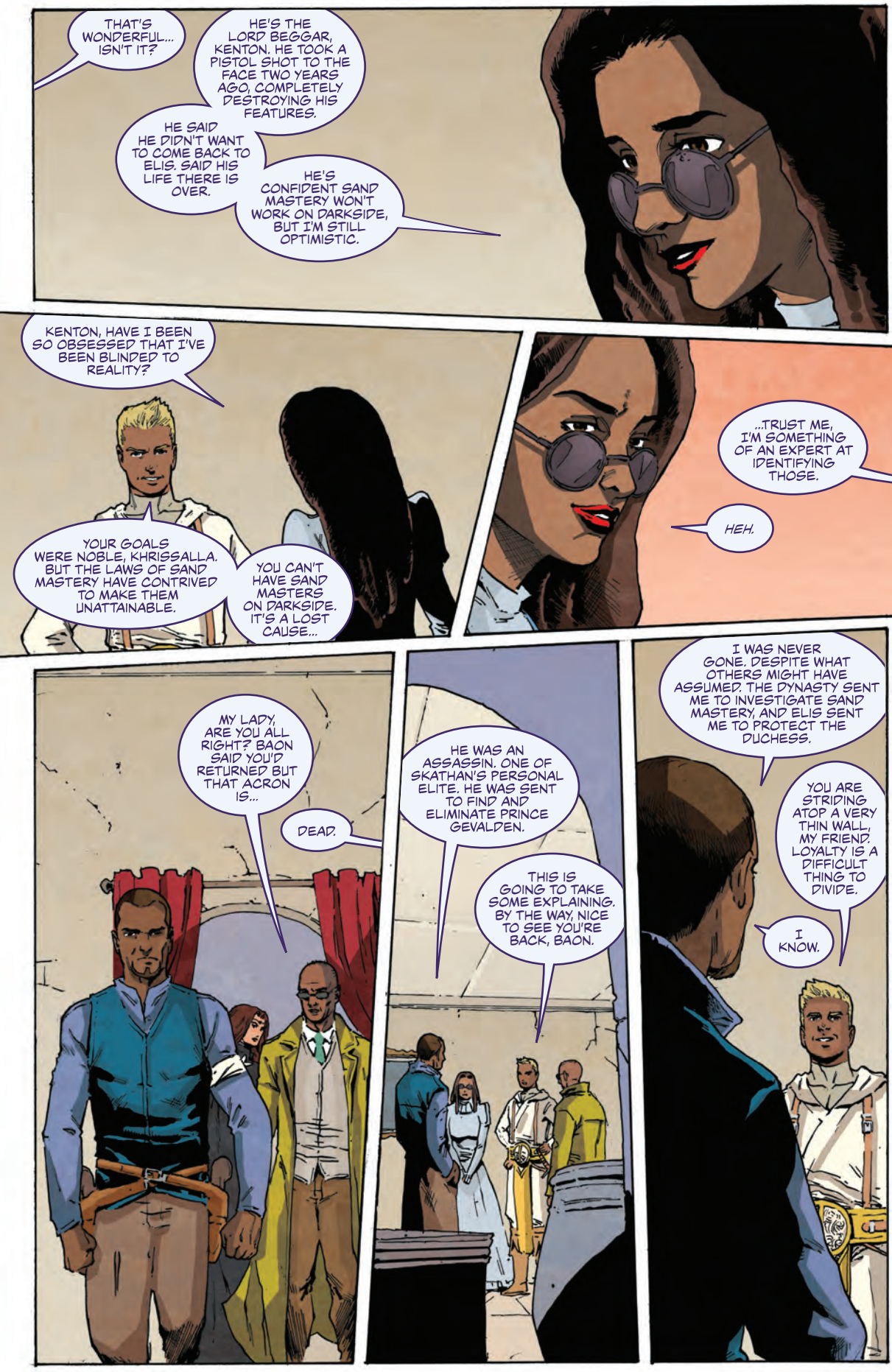
HE STILL HAS ONE SHOT LEFT! RUN IF YOU WANT TO LIVE, WOMAN!
WHICH WAY DID YOU GO, YOU BLASTED FREAK?
HMMM...?

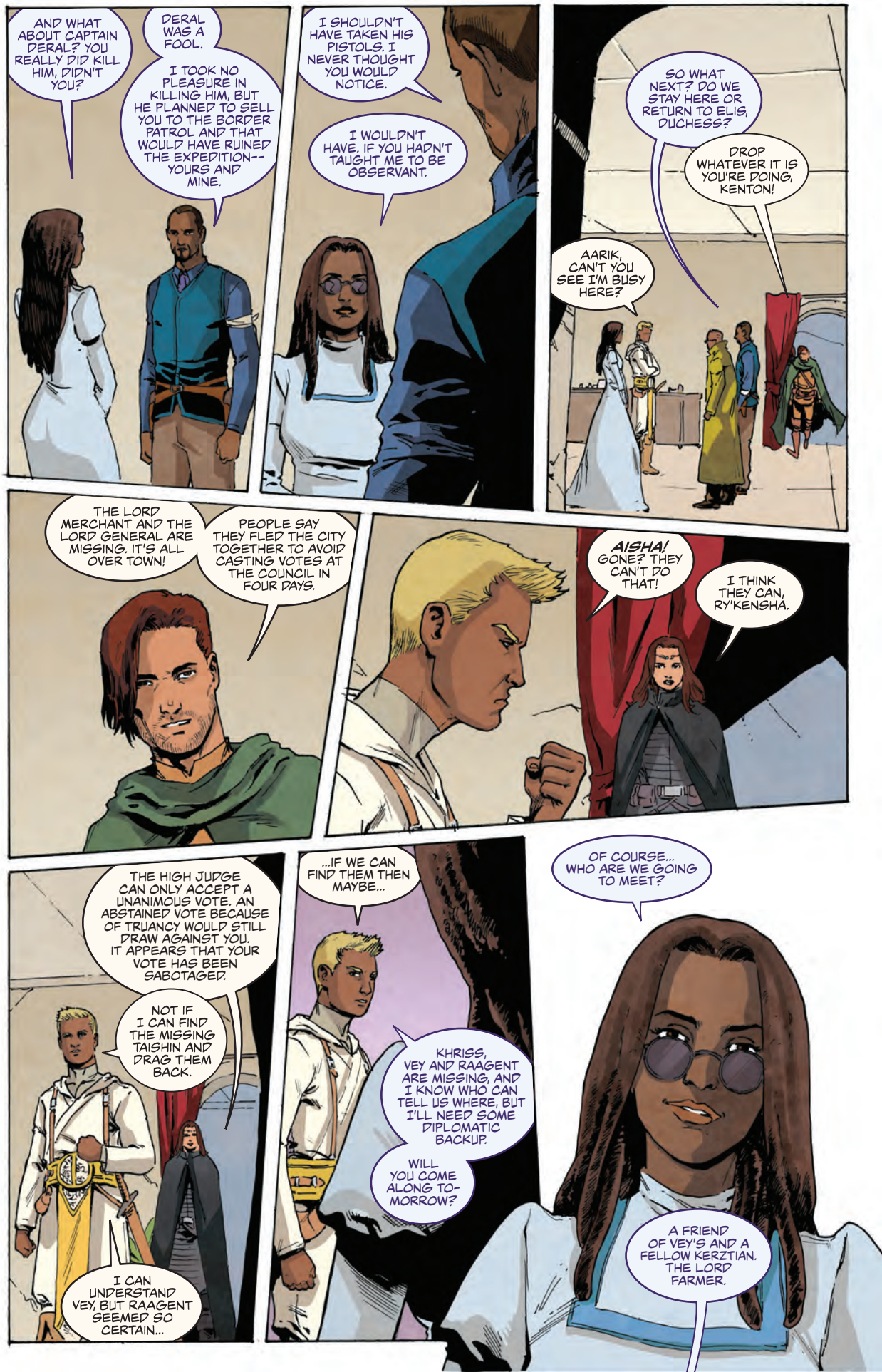
=NFFF=
NOW, WHERE ARE YOU...?
CLANG
BLUUUGGHH!
ACRON WAS ONE OF MY UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS... AND A FRIEND.

I TRUSTED HIM. NO--I TRUSTED PROFESSOR ACRON. I DIDN'T REALLY KNOW HIM PERSONALLY BEYOND THAT. BAON WAS RIGHT--I'M TAKEN IN BY TITLES RATHER THAN JUDGING THE PERSON.
YOU SAVED ME, KHRISS. AFTER EVERYTHING I SAID...YOU SAVED ME.
BECAUSE I STILL BELIEVE IN YOU, GEVIN. YOU AND THE SAND MAGES--THEY'RE REAL, YOU MUST KNOW THAT NOW.
BUT I HAVE TO GO. MY BODYGUARD NEEDS ME.
HOW IRONIC.
RETURN TO ELIS WITH ME. YOU'LL BE SAFE NOW.
SAFE? YOU LED THIS ASSASSIN RIGHT TO ME.
THIS IS WHY I COULDN'T TELL YOU OR ANYONE ELSE WHERE I WAS. SAND MASTERS CAN'T HELP ELIS, KHRISS--THEY CAN NEVER RECHARGE THEIR SAND WITHOUT DAYLIGHT.
THEN COME BACK TO HELP SAVE OUR COUNTRY.
I CAN'T. MY PLACE IS HERE NOW. AFTER WHAT HAPPENED TO ME, THIS FACE... I COULD NEVER GO BACK.
I NO LONGER HAVE A ROLE IN ELIS, A COUNTRY TOO AFRAID TO BE SAVED.
BUT YOU DO. YOU'RE STRONG, KHRISS, STRONGER THAN I EVER SUSPECTED.
THEN WHAT WILL YOU DO?
I WILL CONTINUE TO HELP PEOPLE WHO NEED ME, RIGHT HERE, ON DAYSIDE. PEOPLE WHO WANT WHAT I HAVE TO GIVE.
A PATH I CHOOSE--NOT ONE DICTATED BY ROYAL COURTS AND ARRANGED MARRIAGES. SURELY YOU UNDERSTAND.


I THOUGHT YOU WERE DEAD, GEVIN. I MOURNED FOR YOU. AND YOU LET ME. YOU GAVE ME YOUR PISTOL AND YOUR RING, AND YOU LET ME WEEP FOR YOU.
I DO UNDERSTAND. WHAT WE HAD...
...WAS NOTHING MORE THAN A CONTRIVANCE OF TRADITION. BUT...I STILL COULD HAVE LOVED YOU.
PERHAPS THEN, BUT NOT NOW. YOU'VE OUTGROWN ME, MY DUCHESS...
"...AND NOW THAT YOU'VE DISCOVERED WHO I AM, AND SKATHAN'S ASSASSIN IS DEAD, I SUPPOSE I NO LONGER NEED TO LEAVE TOWN AFTER ALL."
HOW IS HE?
IT'S JUST A GRAZE, DUCHESS. HE'LL BE FINE.
WHY DID YOU MAKE ME THINK YOU WERE BEING EMPLOYED BY THE DYNASTY, BAON?
I WAS, BUT MY MISSION WAS DIFFERENT FROM ACRON'S. I WAS SENT TO DETERMINE IF THE SAND MASTERS ARE A THREAT TO THE DYNASTY.
THEY'RE NOT. YOUR PRINCE REALIZED THAT AND SO DID I.
MY MISSION HERE WAS COMPLETED, I HAD NO REASON TO DISGUISE IT.
BUT YOU SAVED ME.
I WAS ALSO HIRED TO PROTECT YOU. I TAKE ALL OF MY DUTIES SERIOUSLY, EVEN IF I ENTERED THEM UNDER FALSE PRETENSES.
WELL, WITH ACRON GONE, IT SEEMS I AM IN NEED OF YOUR SERVICES AGAIN. WOULD YOU CONSIDER IT?
I WOULD BE HONORED, DUCHESS.


THE LADY MASON HAS AGREED TO VOTE FOR THE DIEM, LORD MASTRELL.
THAT'S REASSURING, DIRIN. DID THE LADY MASON SAY WHY?
IT SEEMS NEWS OF YOUR ASSISTANCE AT THE CONSTRUCTION SITE COLLAPSE A FEW DAYS AGO IMPRESSED UPON HER THE BENEFITS OF SAND MASTERY.
I SUSPECT SHE'S HOPING TO NURTURE A WARMER RELATIONSHIP WITH THE DIEM, IF WE SURVIVE THE TAISHIN VOTE.
THANK YOU, DIRIN. THAT WILL BE ALL.
HELLO, KENTON.
HELLO, DUCHESS. YOU LOOK UPSET...
I FOUND PRINCE GEVALDEN. HE'S ALIVE.


THAT'S WONDERFUL... ISN'T IT?
HE'S THE LORD BEGGAR, KENTON. HE TOOK A PISTOL SHOT TO THE FACE TWO YEARS AGO, COMPLETELY DESTROYING HIS FEATURES.
HE SAID HE DIDN'T WANT TO COME BACK TO ELIS. SAID HIS LIFE THERE IS OVER.
HE'S CONFIDENT SAND MASTERY WON'T WORK ON DARKSIDE, BUT I'M STILL OPTIMISTIC.
KENTON, HAVE I BEEN SO OBSESSED THAT I'VE BEEN BLINDED TO REALITY?
YOUR GOALS WERE NOBLE, KHRISSALLA. BUT THE LAWS OF SAND MASTERY HAVE CONTRIVED TO MAKE THEM UNATTAINABLE.
YOU CAN'T HAVE SAND MASTERS ON DARKSIDE. IT'S A LOST CAUSE...
...TRUST ME, I'M SOMETHING OF AN EXPERT AT IDENTIFYING THOSE.
HEH.
MY LADY, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? BAON SAID YOU'D RETURNED BUT THAT ACRON IS...
DEAD.
HE WAS AN ASSASSIN. ONE OF SKATHAN'S PERSONAL ELITE. HE WAS SENT TO FIND AND ELIMINATE PRINCE GEVALDEN.
THIS IS GOING TO TAKE SOME EXPLAINING. BY THE WAY, NICE TO SEE YOU'RE BACK, BAON.
I WAS NEVER GONE. DESPITE WHAT OTHERS MIGHT HAVE ASSUMED. THE DYNASTY SENT ME TO INVESTIGATE SAND MASTERY, AND ELIS SENT ME TO PROTECT THE DUCHESS.
YOU ARE STRIDING ATOP A VERY THIN WALL, MY FRIEND. LOYALTY IS A DIFFICULT THING TO DIVIDE.
I KNOW.


AND WHAT ABOUT CAPTAIN DERAL? YOU REALLY DID KILL HIM, DIDN'T YOU?
DERAL WAS A FOOL.
I TOOK NO PLEASURE IN KILLING HIM, BUT HE PLANNED TO SELL YOU TO THE BORDER PATROL AND THAT WOULD HAVE RUINED THE EXPEDITION-- YOURS AND MINE.
I SHOULDN'T HAVE TAKEN HIS PISTOLS. I NEVER THOUGHT YOU WOULD NOTICE.
I WOULDN'T HAVE. IF YOU HADN'T TAUGHT ME TO BE OBSERVANT.
SO WHAT NEXT? DO WE STAY HERE OR RETURN TO ELIS, DUCHESS?
DROP WHATEVER IT IS YOU'RE DOING, KENTON!
AARIK, CAN'T YOU SEE I'M BUSY HERE?
THE LORD MERCHANT AND THE LORD GENERAL ARE MISSING. IT'S ALL OVER TOWN!
PEOPLE SAY THEY FLED THE CITY TOGETHER TO AVOID CASTING VOTES AT THE COUNCIL IN FOUR DAYS.
AISHA! GONE? THEY CAN'T DO THAT!
I THINK THEY CAN, RY'KENSHA.
THE HIGH JUDGE CAN ONLY ACCEPT A UNANIMOUS VOTE. AN ABSTAINED VOTE BECAUSE OF TRUANCY WOULD STILL DRAW AGAINST YOU. IT APPEARS THAT YOUR VOTE HAS BEEN SABOTAGED.
NOT IF I CAN FIND THE MISSING TAISHIN AND DRAG THEM BACK.
I CAN UNDERSTAND VEY, BUT RAAGENT SEEMED SO CERTAIN...
...IF WE CAN FIND THEM THEN MAYBE...
KHRISS, VEY AND RAAGENT ARE MISSING, AND I KNOW WHO CAN TELL US WHERE, BUT I'LL NEED SOME DIPLOMATIC BACKUP.
WILL YOU COME ALONG TO-MORROW?
OF COURSE... WHO ARE WE GOING TO MEET?
A FRIEND OF VEY'S AND A FELLOW KERZTIAN. THE LORD FARMER.

WAVES AND RIPPLES

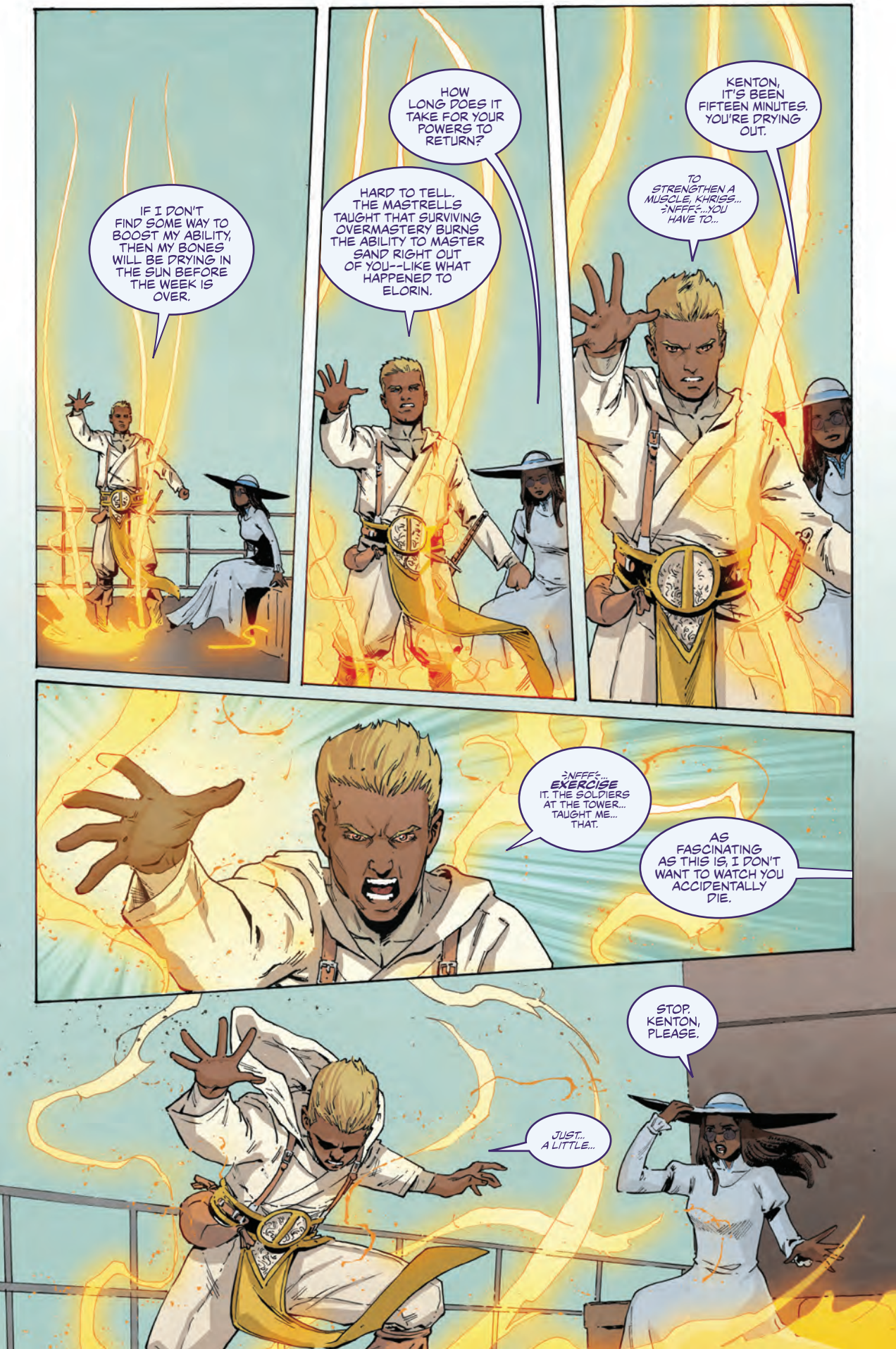
THE LORD FARMER'S PRIVATE RESIDENCE.
PLEASE, LORD MASTRELL, I KNOW I HID FROM YOU WHEN I HEARD YOU COMING, BUT THERE'S NO NEED FOR THIS...
I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR YOUR GAMES, LORD FARMER. TELL ME WHERE VEY IS, OR I'LL TURN MY SAND ON YOU INSTEAD OF YOUR ASSISTANT HERE.
WELL, THIS DISPLAY IS DEFINITELY GOING TO ENCOURAGE PEOPLE NOT TO BE SCARED OF SAND MASTERY!
VEY MADE ME PROMISE NOT TO TELL. PLEASE DON'T MAKE ME TELL. I DON'T WANT TO BE PART OF THIS.
OH, SAND LORD PROTECT ME.
VEY WILL BE VERY ANGRY IF I TELL. CAN'T YOU ASK SOMEONE ELSE? OH, PLEASE DON'T KILL ME!
THIS ISN'T RIGHT.
THE LORD FARMER AND HIS FELLOW KERZTIANS FEAR THE SAND, DESPITE ITS BEAUTY. I SHOULDN'T BE USING SAND MASTERY LIKE THIS.
THIS IS EXACTLY THE SORT OF THING THAT GOT THE DIEM INTO TROUBLE IN THE FIRST PLACE.
I'M SORRY FOR SUCH A DIRECT APPROACH, LORD FARMER. I WON'T FORCE YOU TO TELL ME.
BUT I WILL ASK. FOR THE GOOD OF LOSSAND, PLEASE TELL ME WHERE VEY IS. I JUST WANT TO TALK TO HIM.
UM... I CAN'T TELL YOU.
FINE. THEN I'LL FIND ANOTHER WAY. GOOD DAY TO YOU, LORD FARMER.
OH, KENTON, I DON'T UNDERSTAND ALL THE WORDS YOU'RE SPEAKING BUT I CAN RECOGNIZE A MAN--

"--WHO IS RUNNING OUT OF OPTIONS."
GEVIN?
DON'T CALL ME THAT! DO YOU WANT THE ENTIRE DYNASTY TO COME SEARCHING ME OUT?
I DON'T ANSWER TO YOU, GEVIN. AS SOON AS I RETURN TO ELIS, I WILL TELL YOUR PARENTS PRECISELY WHERE YOU ARE AND WHAT YOU ARE DOING HERE.
YOU ARE A FOOL, WOMAN. YOU REALLY WANT ME DEAD, DON'T YOU?
YOU THINK I WOULDN'T KILL YOU TO PROTECT MY OWN LIFE?
WHAT IS IT YOU WANT, KHRISS?
I NEED TO KNOW WHERE THE LORD MERCHANT IS HIDING. THE LORD FARMER KNOWS, AND YOU KNOW THE LORD FARMER. BRING ME THIS INFORMATION IN THE NEXT HOUR, GEVIN.
IN AN HOUR?! YOU CAN'T BE SERIOUS!
WHAT WE ONCE HAD IS OVER, GEVIN, AND I NO LONGER FEEL ANY LOYALTY TO YOU. DO THIS FOR ME, AND I'LL PROMISE MY SILENCE. YOU'LL BE ABLE TO STAY HERE, SAFE IN YOUR NEW LIFE.
HMM. YOU'VE GROWN, KHRISS. A DUCHESS NOW IN MORE THAN JUST NAME.
I GUESS I DON'T HAVE ANYONE HOLDING ME BACK ANY-MORE.
NOW GET MOVING. ONE HOUR!

A LITTLE OVER AN HOUR LATER...
IT'S IMPOSSIBLE! LORD VEY COULD BE ANYWHERE.
MY SOURCES SAY HE'S HIDING IN LRAEZARE.
I HAVE MY SOURCES, KENTON. SO, WHERE IS THIS LRAEZARE AND HOW DO WE GET THERE?
AMAZING WORK, KHRISS! HOW DID YOU...?
IT'S A THREE-DAY ROUND TRIP WHICH MEANS IT'LL BE TIGHT...
"...AND WE'LL NEED A SHIP."
YOU CAN'T HAVE PASSAGE. THERE AREN'T ANY PLACES AVAILABLE.
WHAT? DOZENS OF SHIPS LEAVE THIS DOCK EVERY DAY.
AND YOU'RE TELLING ME NONE OF THEM ARE TRAVELING TO LRAEZARE, ONE OF THE LARGEST PORTS SOUTH OF KEZARE?
NO, I'M TELLING YOU--AS THE DOCKMASTER HERE--THAT THERE ARE NO PLACES FOR YOU, LORD MASTRELL.
OF COURSE, YOU'RE WELCOME TO CHARTER A SHIP, BUT...
...LAST I HEARD, YOU DON'T HAVE MUCH MONEY, AND AS I RECALL, MASTRELLS CAN'T COMMANDEER SHIPS, SO--
WHY, HELLO THERE, DOCKMASTER NAIMEER, LORD VEY'S FAVORITE NEPHEW!

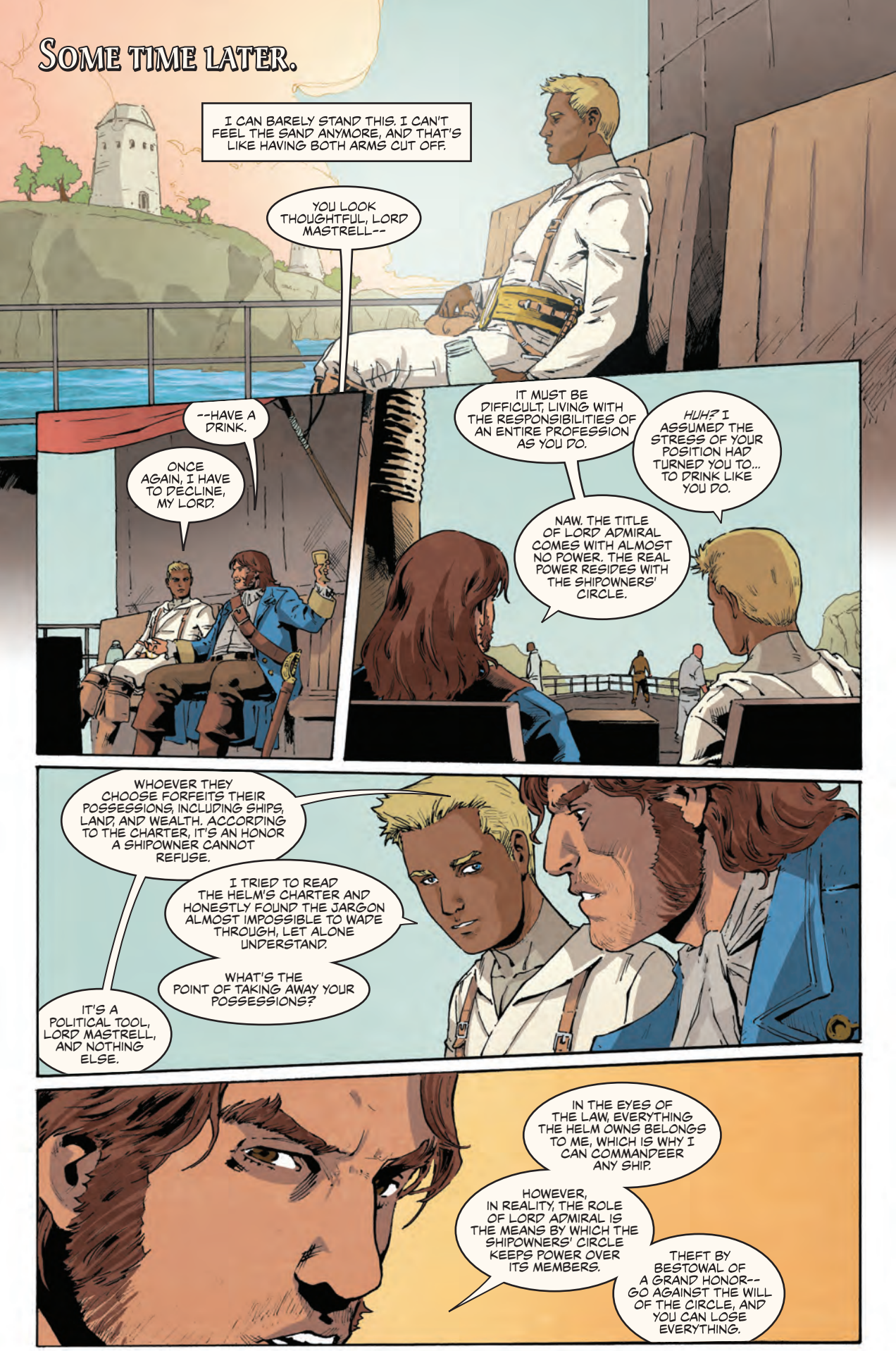
LORD ADMIRAL, WHAT BRINGS YOU HERE?
I'M GOING ON A TRIP! TO THE SOUTH. I FEEL THE SUDDEN URGE TO VISIT THE SHIPOWNERS' CIRCLE, HEADQUARTERED IN LRAEZARE OF ALL PLACES!
DOCKMASTER NAIMEER HERE CAN ARRANGE A SHIP AND CREW... SAY THAT ONE AT PIER THREE. WARN THE CAPTAIN WE'LL BE LEAVING IN AN HOUR.
B-BUT...
THE CIRCLE WILL COMPENSATE FOR ANY LOSSES. NOW JUMP TO IT.
WOULD YOU JOIN ME, LORD MASTRELL? IT WOULD BE A DELIGHTFUL TRIP.
YES, I WOULD LOVE TO JOIN YOU. LRAEZARE IS...EXACTLY WHERE WE NEED TO GO.
WELL, THAT IS A REMARKABLE COINCIDENCE, LORD MASTRELL!
REMARKABLE INDEED. JUST WHAT IS YOUR GAME HERE, LORD DELIUS?
YOU LOOK WORRIED, LORD MASTRELL. YOU'D FIND EVERYTHING LOOKS BETTER WITH A DRINK. PERHAPS YOU'VE CHANGED YOUR MIND...?
I MUST REFUSE, LORD ADMIRAL. SAND MASTERY AND ALCOHOL DO NOT MIX.
WHAT A TERRIBLE SHAME.
IS DELIUS REALLY DRUNK OR IS IT AN ACT? HE'S DEFINITELY DRINKING THAT WINE. SO WHAT IS IT THEN?
HOW RELIABLE AN ALLY ARE YOU, LORD DELIUS?

SOME TIME LATER.
DO YOU KNOW, THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I'VE FELT SAFE FROM ASSASSINS SINCE MY FATHER WAS KILLED?
EVEN THE PEOPLE YOU TRUST MOST CAN BETRAY YOU, KENTON.
YES, THEY CAN. I'M SORRY ABOUT GEVIN.
WE...WELL, WE REACHED AN UNDER-STANDING.
THAT'S GOOD.
WHILE WE'RE SAFE, I WANT TO TRY OVERMASTERING. I'LL INTENTIONALLY HOLD ONTO SAND LONGER THAN I SHOULD, FEEDING THE SAND MOST OF THE WATER FROM MY BODY.
ISN'T THAT DANGEROUS?
WHAT IF IT'S A COINCIDENTAL CORRELATION? WHAT IF OVERMASTERY AND YOUR GAINING POWERS HAPPENED AT THE SAME TIME BUT ARE COMPLETELY UNRELATED?
I HAVE TO TAKE THAT CHANCE, KHRISS. I CAN'T DEFEAT DRILE WITH ONLY THREE RIBBONS--HE CONTROLS TWENTY-FIVE. HE'LL KILL ME IN A MATTER OF MINUTES.
PROBABLY. WHEN YOU FOUND ME NEARLY DEAD IN THE KERLA, BACK WHEN WE FIRST MET, I WAS SICK PRIMARILY BECAUSE I HAD OVER-MASTERED.
BEFORE THAT, I COULD ONLY CONTROL ONE RIBBON. AFTER I RECOVERED, I COULD MASTER THREE.


IF I DON'T FIND SOME WAY TO BOOST MY ABILITY, THEN MY BONES WILL BE DRYING IN THE SUN BEFORE THE WEEK IS OVER.
HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE FOR YOUR POWERS TO RETURN?
HARD TO TELL. THE MASTRELLS TAUGHT THAT SURVIVING OVERMASTERY BURNS THE ABILITY TO MASTER SAND RIGHT OUT OF YOU--LIKE WHAT HAPPENED TO ELORIN.
KENTON, IT'S BEEN FIFTEEN MINUTES. YOU'RE DRYING OUT.
TO STRENGTHEN A MUSCLE, KHRISS... =NFFF=...YOU HAVE TO...
=NFFF=... EXERCISE IT. THE SOLDIERS AT THE TOWER... TAUGHT ME... THAT.
AS FASCINATING AS THIS IS, I DON'T WANT TO WATCH YOU ACCIDENTALLY DIE.
STOP. KENTON, PLEASE.
JUST... A LITTLE...

KENTON!
...MORE...
SHELLA DIVINE!
KENTON!
NO...WAKE UP. DON'T DIE, KENTON. WAKE UP. BREATHE!

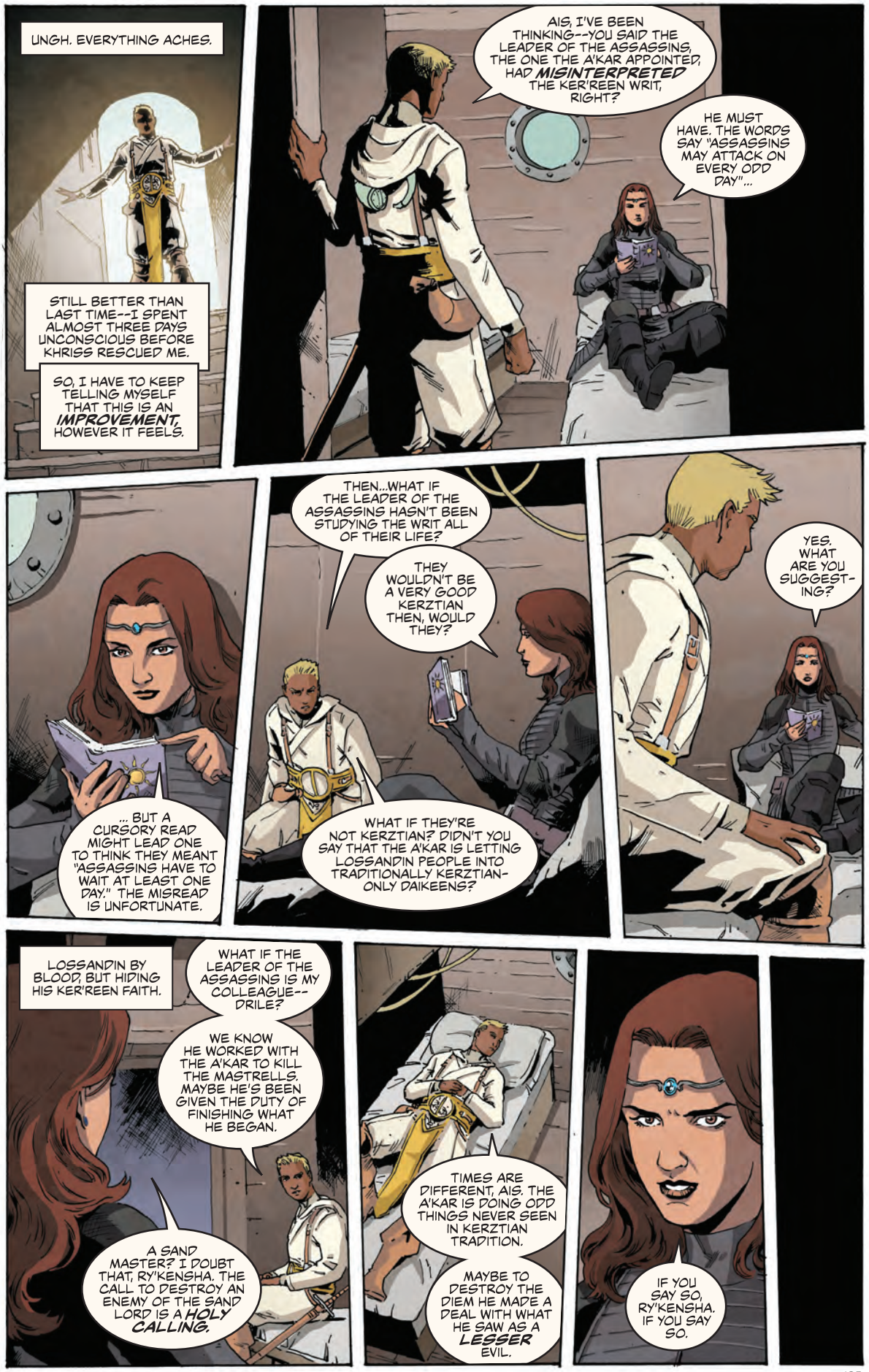
MY LADY! WHAT IS WRONG WITH--
KENTON? WHAT'S HAPPENED TO HIM?!
HIS HEART ISN'T BEATING!
KENTON, LISTEN TO ME...THE DIEM NEEDS YOU!
:GASP:
I'M SORRY FOR FRIGHTENING YOU...BUT, WOULD YOU KINDLY STOP SHOUTING, DUCHESS?
KENTON, THAT WAS THE MOST IDIOTIC THING I HAVE EVER SEEN ANYONE DO.
I BELIEVE YOU.
WELL, IT LOOKS LIKE THIS TIME I WON'T HAVE TO SPEND THREE DAYS UNCONSCIOUS. THAT'S SOMETHING AT LEAST.


SOME TIME LATER.
I CAN BARELY STAND THIS. I CAN'T FEEL THE SAND ANYMORE, AND THAT'S LIKE HAVING BOTH ARMS CUT OFF.
YOU LOOK THOUGHTFUL, LORD MASTRELL--
--HAVE A DRINK.
ONCE AGAIN, I HAVE TO DECLINE, MY LORD.
IT MUST BE DIFFICULT, LIVING WITH THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF AN ENTIRE PROFESSION AS YOU DO.
HUH? I ASSUMED THE STRESS OF YOUR POSITION HAD TURNED YOU TO... TO DRINK LIKE YOU DO.
NAW. THE TITLE OF LORD ADMIRAL COMES WITH ALMOST NO POWER. THE REAL POWER RESIDES WITH THE SHIPOWNERS' CIRCLE.
WHOEVER THEY CHOOSE FORFEITS THEIR POSSESSIONS, INCLUDING SHIPS, LAND, AND WEALTH. ACCORDING TO THE CHARTER, IT'S AN HONOR A SHIPOWNER CANNOT REFUSE.
I TRIED TO READ THE HELM'S CHARTER AND HONESTLY FOUND THE JARGON ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO WADE THROUGH, LET ALONE UNDERSTAND.
WHAT'S THE POINT OF TAKING AWAY YOUR POSSESSIONS?
IT'S A POLITICAL TOOL, LORD MASTRELL, AND NOTHING ELSE.
IN THE EYES OF THE LAW, EVERYTHING THE HELM OWNS BELONGS TO ME, WHICH IS WHY I CAN COMMANDEER ANY SHIP.
HOWEVER, IN REALITY, THE ROLE OF LORD ADMIRAL IS THE MEANS BY WHICH THE SHIPOWNERS' CIRCLE KEEPS POWER OVER ITS MEMBERS.
THEFT BY BESTOWAL OF A GRAND HONOR-- GO AGAINST THE WILL OF THE CIRCLE, AND YOU CAN LOSE EVERYTHING.

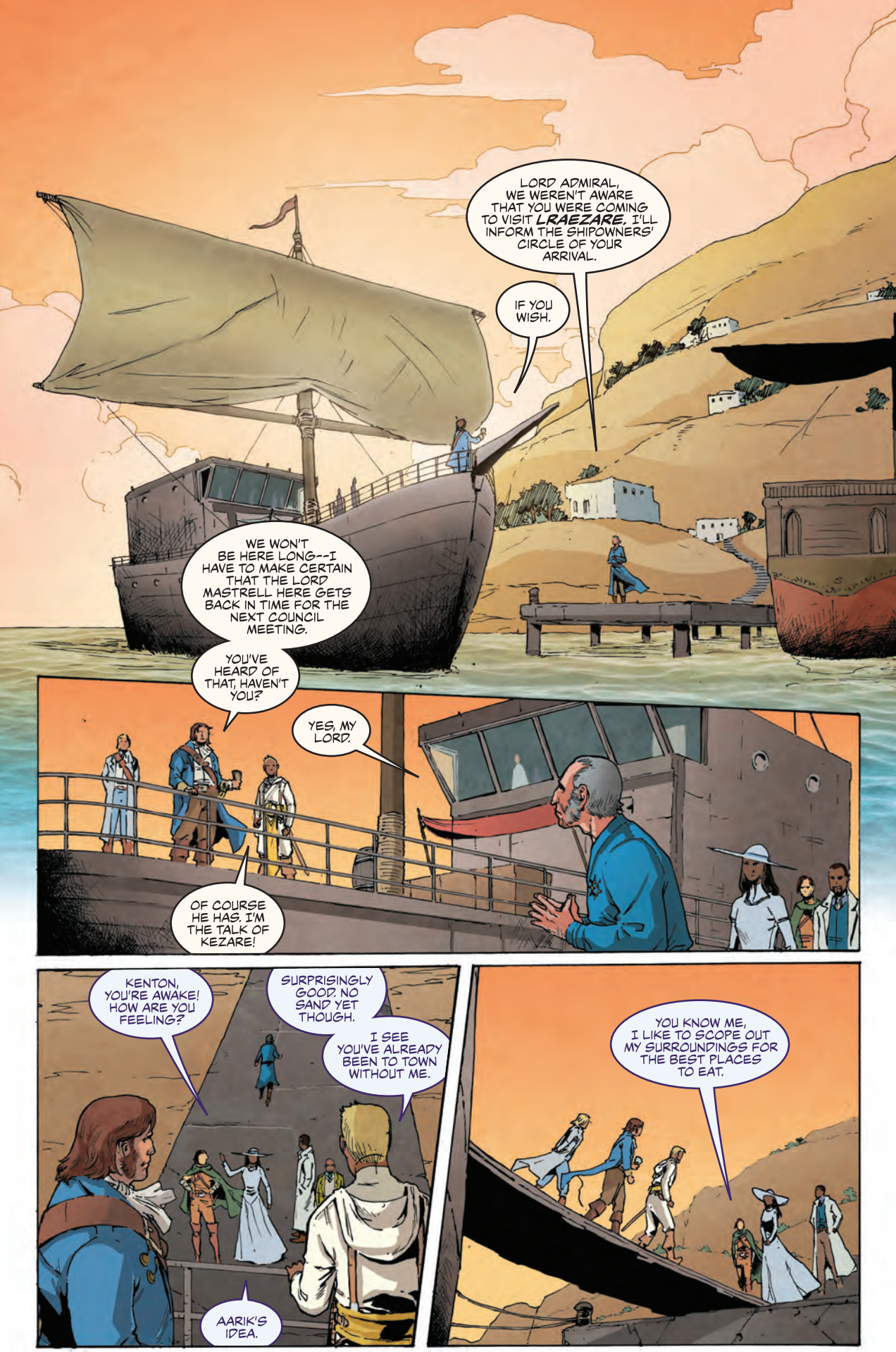
AND WHAT DID YOU DO TO RECEIVE SUCH A DUBIOUS HONOR, IF I MAY ASK?
I WAS TOO SUCCESSFUL. IN THE EYES OF ONE'S PEERS, SUCCESS IS ONE OF THE WORST SINS.
I WASN'T ALWAYS A MEMBER OF THE HELM. BEFORE YOU WERE BORN, I WAS A MEMBER OF THE GUILD.
"I WAS YOUNG AND VERY SUCCESSFUL. ALL I NEEDED WAS ONE LAST DEAL--TWENTY THOUSAND MORE LAK--AND I WOULD HAVE HAD ENOUGH RICHES TO BECOME LORD MERCHANT.
"A FRIEND SUGGESTED WE FINANCE A NEW LAKSTONE MINE IN THE SOUTHEAST. I PUT MY ENTIRE FORTUNE INTO THE ENDEAVOR."
AND YOU LOST IT?
IT WAS TAKEN FROM ME. I SPENT MY FORTUNE OUTFITTING THOSE MINES, BUT AFTER FIVE YEARS I WAS BROKE. I WAS FORCED TO SELL THE MINE TO MY PARTNER AND OLDEST FRIEND.
"ONE WEEK LATER, MY FRIEND--THE ONE WHO HAD TOLD ME ABOUT THE MINE AND ULTIMATELY PURCHASED IT FROM ME--HIT A SEAM OF LAKSTONE.
"IT MADE HIM, AND HE BECAME LORD MERCHANT INSTEAD OF ME."

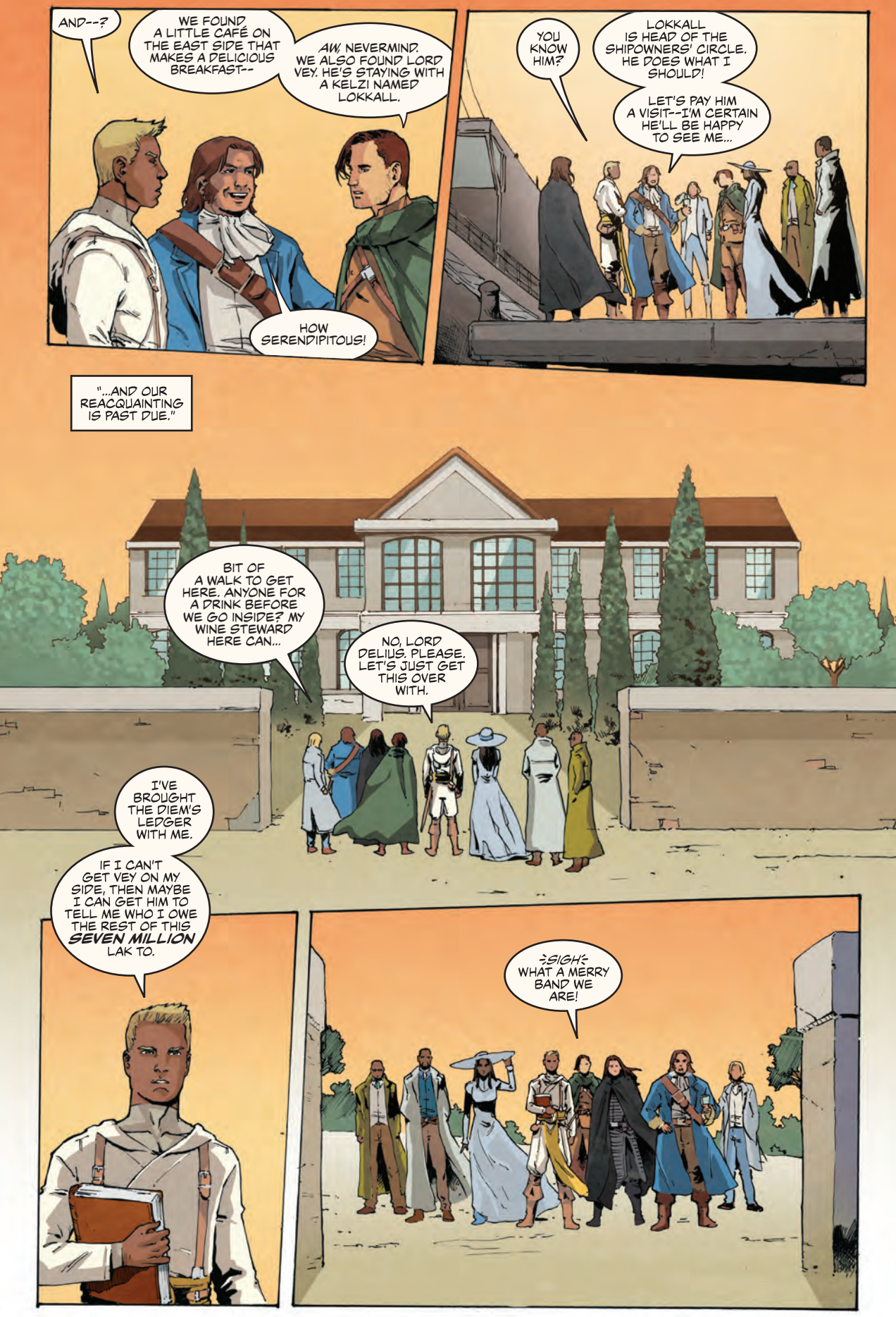
VEY?
YES. I QUIT THE GUILD IN DISGUST, WENT TO THE HELM TO REBUILD MY CAREER AND MY FORTUNE.
WITHIN A DECADE I HAD A FLEET OF MERCANTILE SHIPS TO RIVAL ANY ON DAYSIDE. UNFORTUNATELY, IN DOING SO I PAID LITTLE ATTENTION TO THE SHIPOWNERS' CIRCLE.
AND THEY TOOK IT ALL AWAY?
YES, I'D COMMITTED THE SAME SIN TWICE--THE SIN OF SUCCESS.
THIS WORLD HAS GIVEN ME LITTLE TO BELIEVE IN, LORD MASTRELL. THOSE I THOUGHT WERE MY FRIENDS BETRAYED ME.
THE PROFESSION I ASSUMED WOULD PROTECT ME INSTEAD RIPPED MY LIFE AWAY IN RETURN FOR THIS FOOLISH MOCKERY. A LESSON FOR YOU, PERHAPS?
I'M... SORRY. NO WONDER YOU...
BECAME A SOT? THERE IS LITTLE LEFT FOR ME. DO YOU KNOW HOW MUCH A BOTTLE OF WINE COSTS?
NO, I'VE ... NEVER GIVEN IT ANY THOUGHT.
WITH THE GROWING OF GRAPES IN THE SOUTH, THE FERMENTATION, THE BOTTLING, AND THE SUBSEQUENT TRANSPORTATION--SAY, ANYWHERE BETWEEN ONE HUNDRED LAK ON THE CHEAP END, TO WELL OVER A THOUSAND LAK FOR THE BEST VINTAGES.
AND I, LORD MASTRELL, DO NOT DRINK CHEAP WINE.
THE CHARTER ONLY GIVES ME THREE THINGS--A SHIP WHEN I NEED IT, A HOUSE TO LIVE IN, AND WHATEVER I WANT TO EAT AND DRINK.
I HAD MILLIONS OF LAK WORTH OF SHIPS, AND THEY TOOK EVERYTHING FROM ME, KENTON.
--I INTEND TO MAKE THEM PAY FOR EVERY LAST COIN. A SHAME YOU CAN'T JOIN ME.
SO HIS DRUNKENNESS ISN'T TO WIPE AWAY HIS SORROWS. IT'S FOR REVENGE.

ALL ON YOUR OWN, AARIK?
KENTON'S NOT GOOD COMPANY JUST NOW, DUCHESS. HE SHOULD NEVER HAVE GOTTEN HIMSELF INTO THIS.
THE OVERMAS-TERY?
BECOMING LORD MASTRELL.
RESPONSIBILITY KILLS. IT SUCKS THE SOUL OUT OF A MAN AND LEAVES HIM A POOR IMITATION OF WHAT HE COULD HAVE BEEN.
SOMEONE HAS TO TAKE THE RESPONSIBILITY.
I JUST THANK THE SANDS IT ISN'T ME. AFTER THE DIEM WAS AMBUSHED, KENTON COULD'VE LEFT IT ALL BEHIND TO BEGIN A NEW LIFE FREE OF...OF ALL *THIS*, THEN HE WOULDN'T BE IN THIS POSITION.
LEADERSHIP IS MORE THAN TITLES AND GIVING ORDERS, AARIK.
NOTHING IS WORTH THE EXPECTATIONS, THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR OTHER MEN'S DEATHS, TO KILL SO THAT OTHERS DO NOT HAVE TO. *NOTHING.*
IT DESTROYS A MAN UNTIL HE ESCAPES. I DID. MAYBE KENTON WILL, TOO.
EXCUSE ME.

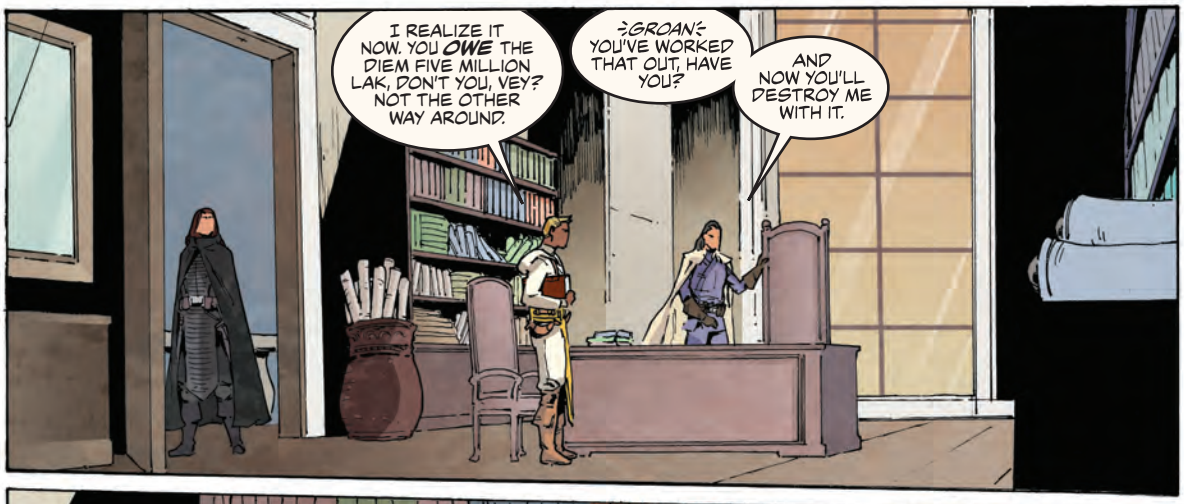

UNGH. EVERYTHING ACHES.
STILL BETTER THAN LAST TIME--I SPENT ALMOST THREE DAYS UNCONSCIOUS BEFORE KHRISS RESCUED ME.
SO, I HAVE TO KEEP TELLING MYSELF THAT THIS IS AN IMPROVEMENT, HOWEVER IT FEELS.
AIS, I'VE BEEN THINKING--YOU SAID THE LEADER OF THE ASSASSINS, THE ONE THE A'KAR APPOINTED, HAD MISINTERPRETED THE KER'REEN WRIT, RIGHT?
HE MUST HAVE. THE WORDS SAY "ASSASSINS MAY ATTACK ON EVERY ODD DAY"...
... BUT A CURSORY READ MIGHT LEAD ONE TO THINK THEY MEANT "ASSASSINS HAVE TO WAIT AT LEAST ONE DAY." THE MISREAD IS UNFORTUNATE.
THEN...WHAT IF THE LEADER OF THE ASSASSINS HASN'T BEEN STUDYING THE WRIT ALL OF THEIR LIFE?
THEY WOULDN'T BE A VERY GOOD KERZTIAN THEN, WOULD THEY?
WHAT IF THEY'RE NOT KERZTIAN? DIDN'T YOU SAY THAT THE A'KAR IS LETTING LOSSANDIN PEOPLE INTO TRADITIONALLY KERZTIAN-ONLY DAIKEENS?
YES. WHAT ARE YOU SUGGESTING?
LOSSANDIN BY BLOOD, BUT HIDING HIS KER'REEN FAITH.
WHAT IF THE LEADER OF THE ASSASSINS IS MY COLLEAGUE--DRILE?
WE KNOW HE WORKED WITH THE A'KAR TO KILL THE MASTRELLS. MAYBE HE'S BEEN GIVEN THE DUTY OF FINISHING WHAT HE BEGAN.
A SAND MASTER? I DOUBT THAT, RY'KENSHA. THE CALL TO DESTROY AN ENEMY OF THE SAND LORD IS A HOLY CALLING.
TIMES ARE DIFFERENT, AIS. THE A'KAR IS DOING ODD THINGS NEVER SEEN IN KERZTIAN TRADITION.
MAYBE TO DESTROY THE DIEM HE MADE A DEAL WITH WHAT HE SAW AS A LESSER EVIL.
IF YOU SAY SO, RY'KENSHA. IF YOU SAY SO.

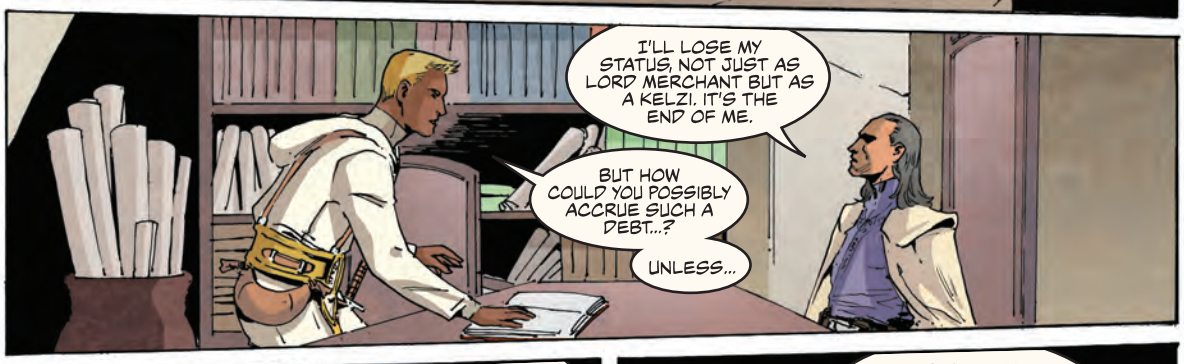
NOTHING.
BUT I SUPPOSE THAT WAS THE POINT. JUST HOPE I GET SOMETHING BACK BEFORE THE FIGHT WITH DRILE.


LORD ADMIRAL, WE WEREN'T AWARE THAT YOU WERE COMING TO VISIT LRAEZARE, I'LL INFORM THE SHIPOWNERS' CIRCLE OF YOUR ARRIVAL.
IF YOU WISH.
WE WON'T BE HERE LONG--I HAVE TO MAKE CERTAIN THAT THE LORD MASTRELL HERE GETS BACK IN TIME FOR THE NEXT COUNCIL MEETING.
YOU'VE HEARD OF THAT, HAVEN'T YOU?
YES, MY LORD.
OF COURSE HE HAS. I'M THE TALK OF KEZARE!
KENTON, YOU'RE AWAKE! HOW ARE YOU FEELING?
SURPRISINGLY GOOD. NO SAND YET THOUGH.
I SEE YOU'VE ALREADY BEEN TO TOWN WITHOUT ME.
AARIK'S IDEA.
YOU KNOW ME, I LIKE TO SCOPE OUT MY SURROUNDINGS FOR THE BEST PLACES TO EAT.


AND--?
WE FOUND A LITTLE CAFÉ ON THE EAST SIDE THAT MAKES A DELICIOUS BREAKFAST--
AW, NEVERMIND. WE ALSO FOUND LORD VEY. HE'S STAYING WITH A KELZI NAMED LOKKALL.
HOW SERENDIPITOUS!
YOU KNOW HIM?
LOKKALL IS HEAD OF THE SHIPOWNERS' CIRCLE. HE DOES WHAT I SHOULD!
LET'S PAY HIM A VISIT--I'M CERTAIN HE'LL BE HAPPY TO SEE ME...
"...AND OUR REACQUAINTING IS PAST DUE."
BIT OF A WALK TO GET HERE. ANYONE FOR A DRINK BEFORE WE GO INSIDE? MY WINE STEWARD HERE CAN...
NO, LORD DELIUS. PLEASE. LET'S JUST GET THIS OVER WITH.
I'VE BROUGHT THE DIEM'S LEDGER WITH ME.
IF I CAN'T GET VEY ON MY SIDE, THEN MAYBE I CAN GET HIM TO TELL ME WHO I OWE THE REST OF THIS SEVEN MILLION LAK TO.
:SIGH: WHAT A MERRY BAND WE ARE!

WELCOME, LORD ADMIRAL. YOUR VISIT IS... UNEXPECTED.
I EXIST TO MAKE YOUR LIFE EXCITING, LOKKALL!
YOU'RE DRUNK.
LUBRICATION FOR THE MIND--YOU SHOULD TRY IT. NOW, TELL ME--WHERE IS OUR DEAR FRIEND THE LORD MERCHANT?
WHY WOULD I KNOW WHERE HE IS?
THIS IS LUDICROUS. LET'S TRY THIS...
LORD VEY--I KNOW YOU'RE HERE! IF YOU DON'T WANT TO VOTE FOR ME, THAT IS YOUR CHOICE, BUT YOU NEEDN'T RUN. SURELY YOU HAVE MORE DIGNITY THAN THAT.
I'LL JUST TAKE THIS LEDGER I FOUND IN MY FATHER'S OFFICE, THE ONE THAT LISTS THE FIVE MILLION LAK...
...AND TURN IT OVER TO THE HIGH JUDGE!
NO!
I'M HERE, LORD MASTRELL. LET'S TALK--BUT... PRIVATELY. NO MORE SHOUTING.
TRYING TO LEAVE ME BEHIND, LORD MASTRELL?
NO, AIS, YOU SHOULD HEAR THIS. COME ON.


I REALIZE IT NOW. YOU OWE THE DIEM FIVE MILLION LAK, DON'T YOU, VEY? NOT THE OTHER WAY AROUND.
:GROAN: YOU'VE WORKED THAT OUT, HAVE YOU?
AND NOW YOU'LL DESTROY ME WITH IT.


I'LL LOSE MY STATUS, NOT JUST AS LORD MERCHANT BUT AS A KELZI. IT'S THE END OF ME.
BUT HOW COULD YOU POSSIBLY ACCRUE SUCH A DEBT...?
UNLESS...

THE LORD MERCHANT ACQUIRES ALL THE WEALTH OF HIS PREDECESSOR. DOES THAT MEAN HE ACQUIRES ALL OF THE FORMER LORD MERCHANT'S DEBTS TOO?
YES.
SO, LET'S SAY A LONG TIME AGO, A LORD MASTRELL REALIZES THAT SINCE MASTRELLS DON'T NEED TO PAY FOR ANYTHING, THE DIEM CAN EXIST WITH VERY LITTLE INCOME.
HE DECIDES TO TAKE THE TRIBUTE MONEY FROM THE OTHER PROFESSIONS AND OPEN A HIGH-INTEREST SAVINGS ACCOUNT WITH THE LORD MERCHANT.
LORD MERCHANT HENNIN, TO BE EXACT. AN IDIOT WHO ACQUIRED THE POSITION AFTER INHERITING TWO SEPARATE FORTUNES AND NO BUSINESS SENSE.
HE ACCEPTED THE LORD MASTRELL'S SAVINGS ACCOUNT BUT TOOK THE INITIAL PRINCIPAL AND SQUANDERED IT ON BAD INVESTMENTS, YET HE STILL OWED THE LORD MASTRELL THE MONEY FROM THE SQUANDERED BANK ACCOUNT...PLUS INTEREST.
WHEN THE NEXT LORD MERCHANT OBTAINED THE POSITION, HE DISCOVERED A VAST AMOUNT WAS NOW OWED TO THE LORD MASTRELL.
THE ACCRUED INTEREST WAS MONUMENTAL, AND SINCE HENNIN HAD LOST MOST OF HIS FORTUNE, THE NEW LORD MERCHANT DIDN'T ACQUIRE ANY OF THE MAN'S MONEY--ONLY HIS DEBTS.

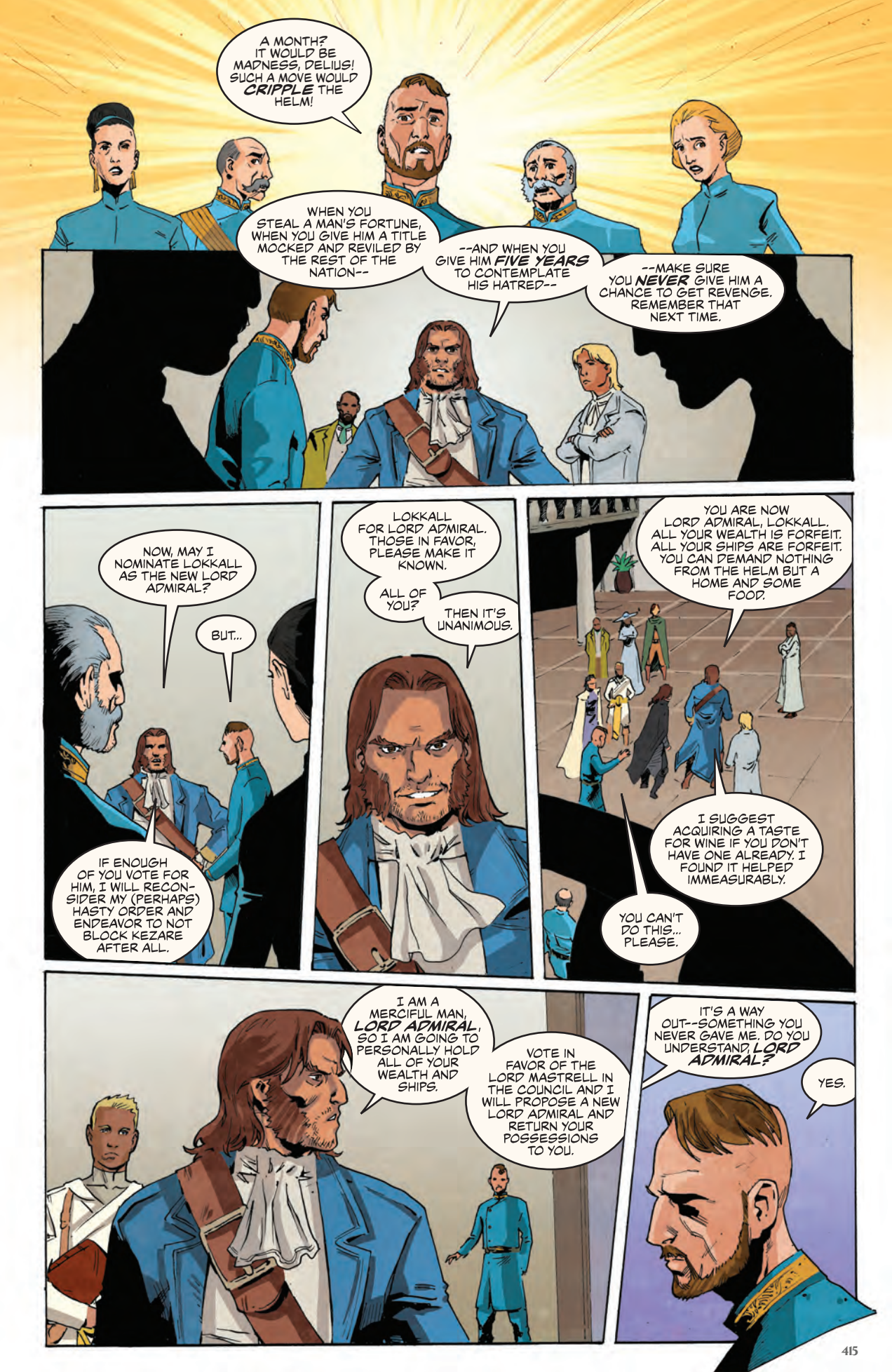
IN THE CENTURY SINCE, THE INTEREST HAS CONTINUED TO ACCRUE UNTIL NO LORD MERCHANT COULD EVER PAY IT.
FORTUNATELY, THE LORD MASTRELL WAS WILLING TO KEEP THE ACCOUNT PRIVATE, SO LONG AS THE LORD MERCHANT CONTINUED TO PAY THE TRIBUTE.

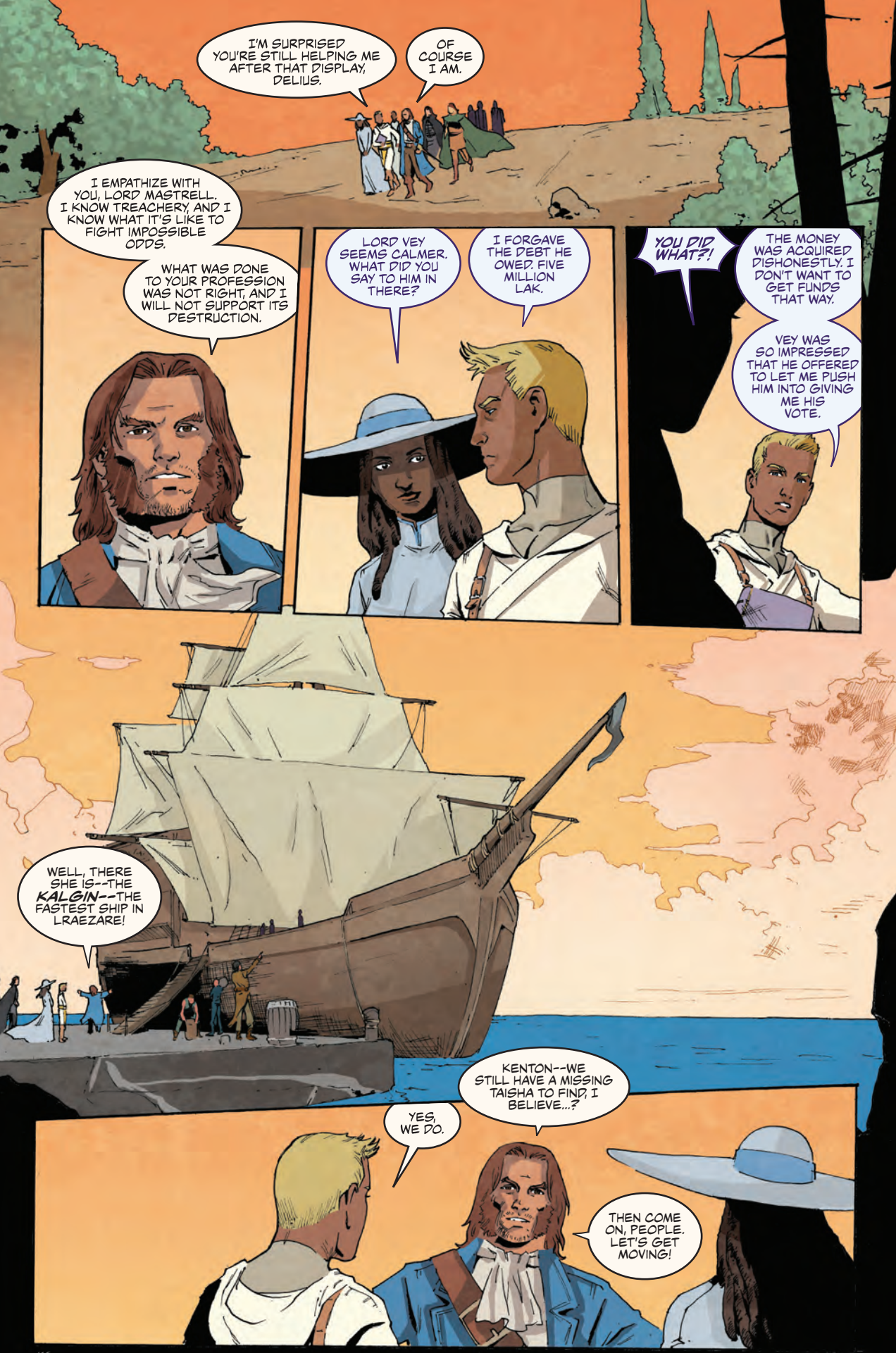
THUS, EACH QUARTER, THE LORD MERCHANT CONTINUES TO SEND THE TRIBUTE...
...WHICH THE LORD MASTRELL DEPOSITS INTO THE SAVINGS ACCOUNT, WHICH CONTINUES TO ACCRUE MORE INTEREST, ADDING TO THE BLASTED DEBT.
AND NOW THE DEBT IS YOURS. BUT SOMEONE ELSE MUST KNOW ABOUT IT...OR IT WOULD SIMPLY BE ONE TAISHA'S WORD AGAINST ANOTHER.
HIGH JUDGE HEELIS KNOWS. DECADES AGO, HER PREDECESSOR RULED THE DEBT SHOULD BE PAID IN FULL SHOULD THE LORD MASTRELL EVER DEMAND PAYMENT.
YOU KNEW ALL ALONG, JUDGE HEELIS. YOU GAVE ME A SEEMINGLY IMPOSSIBLE TASK, KNOWING ALL THE TIME THAT THERE WAS A WAY TO GET BEYOND IT.
PITIFUL.
WELL, YOU HAVE SUCCEEDED, RY'KENSHA. YOU'VE BEATEN ME.
YOU CAN CONTINUE A CENTURY-LONG TRADITION OF BLACKMAIL AS OTHERS HAVE DONE BEFORE YOU. YOU HAVE MY VOTE, JUST KEEP THIS DEBT SILENT.
LORD VEY, I'VE SPENT WEEKS PROMISING THAT THE DIEM WOULD CHANGE. I DON'T WANT YOUR VOTE, I WANT YOUR SUPPORT. THE TWO ARE NOT THE SAME.
THE DIEM SHOULD NEVER HAVE ASKED FOR TRIBUTES FROM THE OTHER PROFESSIONS TO BEGIN WITH, LET ALONE USED IT AS A WAY TO EXTORT THE LORD MERCHANT. THE DEBT IS FOOLISHNESS-- CONSIDER IT FORGIVEN.
WH--? WAIT... WHAT ARE YOUR DEMANDS?
NONE. VOTE AS YOUR CONSCIENCE REQUIRES.
THIS IS PREPOSTEROUS. YOU MUST WANT SOMETHING!
YES. I WANT A LOAN FROM THE GUILD-- NOT YOU--TO PAY OFF THE DIEM'S DEBTS.

WE'LL PAY BACK THE MONEY WITH THE WAGES WE EARN BY WORKING WITH THE ARTISANS AND THE OTHER PROFESSIONS.
OF COURSE, THE INTEREST ON WHAT YOU LOAN US WILL MAKE THE GUILD A HANDSOME SUM.
AND...I DON'T HAVE TO VOTE FOR YOU?
NO.
BUT, IF I DON'T, THEN I WON'T MAKE ANY MONEY OFF THE LOAN! SO IT IS A THREAT!
NO... IT...NEVER MIND.
I ACCEPT YOUR PROPOSITION, LORD MASTRELL. YOU ARE A CRUEL BARGAINER. I WILL CURSE YOUR NAME IN FRONT OF THE OTHER MERCHANTS...
...RIGHT UP TO THE MOMENT I VOTE FOR YOU.
I WILL, HOWEVER, PRAY FOR YOUR SOUL. THE SAND LORD IS KNOWN TO BE LENIENT WITH THOSE WHO ARE MERCIFUL THEMSELVES. I TRUST YOU HAVE ARRANGED PASSAGE BACK TO KEZARE?
WE LEAVE AS SOON AS WE PICK UP THE LORD GENERAL.
RAAGENT? OH, IS HE HERE TOO...?
DIDN'T HE COME WITH YOU?
NO, LORD MASTRELL.
SANDS. THEN WHERE IS HE?

REST ASSURED THAT WE WON'T OUTSTAY OUR WELCOME, LOKKALL. ONCE THE LORD MASTRELL HAS COMPLETED HIS BUSINESS, WE SHALL DEPART.
YOU WILL FIND THAT A DIFFICULT TASK WITHOUT A SHIP.
THIS COUNCIL HAD...LET'S SAY, "NEED" OF YOUR VESSEL. THE CAPTAIN SET SAIL FOR KEZARE FIFTEEN MINUTES AGO. YOU'LL FIND YOUR POSSESSIONS SITTING ON THE DOCKS.
WHAT A CHILDISH MOVE! WE'LL SIMPLY COMMANDEER ANOTHER BOAT. ONE BENEFIT OF MY POSITION IS THAT I CAN TAKE MY PICK, YOU KNOW?
THIS ONE SEEMS :BURP: A BIT SMALL THOUGH.
BUMP
NOT ANYMORE, DELIUS. BY UNANIMOUS VOTE, THE SHIPOWNERS' CIRCLE HEREBY STRIPS YOU OF YOUR TITLE AS LORD ADMIRAL.
YOUR DRUNKENNESS HAS BEEN AN EMBARRASSMENT TO THE HELM FOR LONG ENOUGH, DELIUS, YOUR LIFESTYLE EXORBITANT.
HOWEVER, IT WAS YOUR SUPPORT OF THIS SAND MASTER, ENEMY OF THE HELM, THAT WAS THE FINAL GRAIN OF SAND. CONSIDER YOURSELF RELEASED.

I'M... RELEASED? NOW? AFTER ALL THIS TIME...?
YES. THUS YOU AND THE SAND MASTER ARE LEFT...
...WITHOUT A MEANS OF TRANSPORTA-TION!
AISHA! WILL THIS NEVER STOP? EVERY TIME I TURN MY BACK, A NEW ENEMY STANDS REVEALED.
WINE STEWARD, DO YOU HAVE THE...AH... DOCUMENTS?
RIGHT HERE, LORD... I MEAN, DELIUS.
ANNNND...THERE! NOW THEY'RE SIGNED AND LEGAL.
WHAT IS THIS NOW, YOU DRUNKEN OAF? MORE WINE REQUESTS? PLEASE! YOU'RE MERELY EMBARRASSING YOURSELF.
TRACKT AIS, IN YOUR CAPACITY AS A LEGAL FUNCTIONARY WOULD YOU PLEASE CHECK THESE OVER FOR ME?
OF COURSE. I CAN CONFIRM THAT THEY'RE IN ORDER.
IN ORDER OF WHAT? WHAT IS THIS ALL ABOUT? MORE OF HIS DRUNKENNESS, NO DOUBT!
THESE ARE DEEDS TO A FLEET OF SHIPS. TWELVE OF WHICH ARE, I BELIEVE, DOCKED IN LRAEZARE RIGHT NOW.
AS LORD ADMIRAL I WAS FORBIDDEN TO OWN PROPERTY BUT THE CHARTER DOESN'T PROHIBIT MY SERVANTS FROM OWNING ANYTHING.
EVEN IF THAT "SERVANT" IS MY OWN SON.
SON, PLEASE SEND OUR WHOLE FLEET NORTH AND ADVISE THE CAPTAINS TO MONOPOLIZE ACCESS TO THE PORT OF KEZARE FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE-- A MONTH, SAY.
OF COURSE, FATHER.


A MONTH? IT WOULD BE MADNESS, DELIUS! SUCH A MOVE WOULD CRIPPLE THE HELM!
WHEN YOU STEAL A MAN'S FORTUNE, WHEN YOU GIVE HIM A TITLE MOCKED AND REVILED BY THE REST OF THE NATION--
--AND WHEN YOU GIVE HIM FIVE YEARS TO CONTEMPLATE HIS HATRED--
--MAKE SURE YOU NEVER GIVE HIM A CHANCE TO GET REVENGE. REMEMBER THAT NEXT TIME.
NOW, MAY I NOMINATE LOKKALL AS THE NEW LORD ADMIRAL?
BUT...
IF ENOUGH OF YOU VOTE FOR HIM, I WILL RECONSIDER MY (PERHAPS) HASTY ORDER AND ENDEAVOR TO NOT BLOCK KEZARE AFTER ALL.
LOKKALL FOR LORD ADMIRAL. THOSE IN FAVOR, PLEASE MAKE IT KNOWN.
ALL OF YOU?
THEN IT'S UNANIMOUS.
YOU ARE NOW LORD ADMIRAL, LOKKALL. ALL YOUR WEALTH IS FORFEIT. ALL YOUR SHIPS ARE FORFEIT. YOU CAN DEMAND NOTHING FROM THE HELM BUT A HOME AND SOME FOOD.
I SUGGEST ACQUIRING A TASTE FOR WINE IF YOU DON'T HAVE ONE ALREADY. I FOUND IT HELPED IMMEASURABLY.
YOU CAN'T DO THIS... PLEASE.
I AM A MERCIFUL MAN, LORD ADMIRAL, SO I AM GOING TO PERSONALLY HOLD ALL OF YOUR WEALTH AND SHIPS.
VOTE IN FAVOR OF THE LORD MASTRELL IN THE COUNCIL AND I WILL PROPOSE A NEW LORD ADMIRAL AND RETURN YOUR POSSESSIONS TO YOU.
IT'S A WAY OUT--SOMETHING YOU NEVER GAVE ME. DO YOU UNDERSTAND, LORD ADMIRAL?
YES.


I'M SURPRISED YOU'RE STILL HELPING ME AFTER THAT DISPLAY, DELIUS.
OF COURSE I AM.
I EMPATHIZE WITH YOU, LORD MASTRELL. I KNOW TREACHERY, AND I KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO FIGHT IMPOSSIBLE ODDS.
WHAT WAS DONE TO YOUR PROFESSION WAS NOT RIGHT, AND I WILL NOT SUPPORT ITS DESTRUCTION.
LORD VEY SEEMS CALMER. WHAT DID YOU SAY TO HIM IN THERE?
I FORGAVE THE DEBT HE OWED. FIVE MILLION LAK.
YOU DID WHAT?!
THE MONEY WAS ACQUIRED DISHONESTLY. I DON'T WANT TO GET FUNDS THAT WAY.
VEY WAS SO IMPRESSED THAT HE OFFERED TO LET ME PUSH HIM INTO GIVING ME HIS VOTE.
WELL, THERE SHE IS--THE KALGIN--THE FASTEST SHIP IN LRAEZARE!
KENTON--WE STILL HAVE A MISSING TAISHA TO FIND, I BELIEVE...?
YES, WE DO.
THEN COME ON, PEOPLE. LET'S GET MOVING!

CHAPTER 16
THE CRUEL POTENTIALS

Passage to Kezare.
And we're being boarded! Of course we are, because...
...why would things go smoothly NOW?
Assassins! Everyone--
--get below decks!

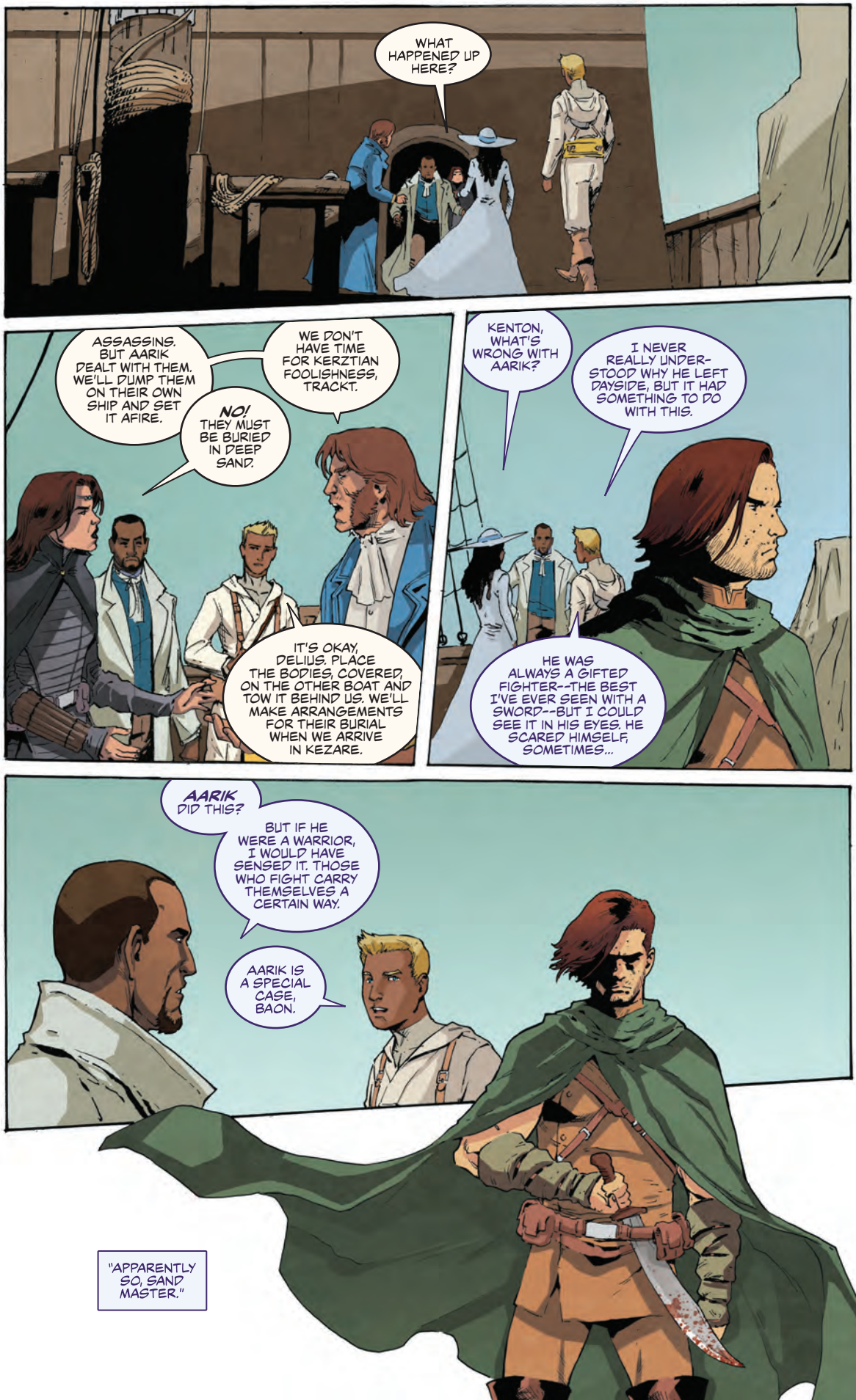
SOMETHING'S HAPPENING OUT THERE. THAT BARGE HAS PULLED TOO CLOSE.
THUD
UNGH!
SOMEONE'S JAMMED THE BLASTED DOOR!
SANDS! I DON'T SPEAK DARKSIDER. LET ME GIVE IT A GO.
THUD THUD
HURRY!
WHERE ARE AIS AND BAON?
I CAN'T FIGHT ALL THESE ASSASSINS ON MY OWN, NOT WITH MY SAND MASTERY GONE.
NYARGH!
OH, SANDS!
WHAT'S THE BOY DOING? WHY DOESN'T HE USE HIS POWERS?
KENTON IS...HOW DO YOU SAY IT? RESTING? NO, NO--

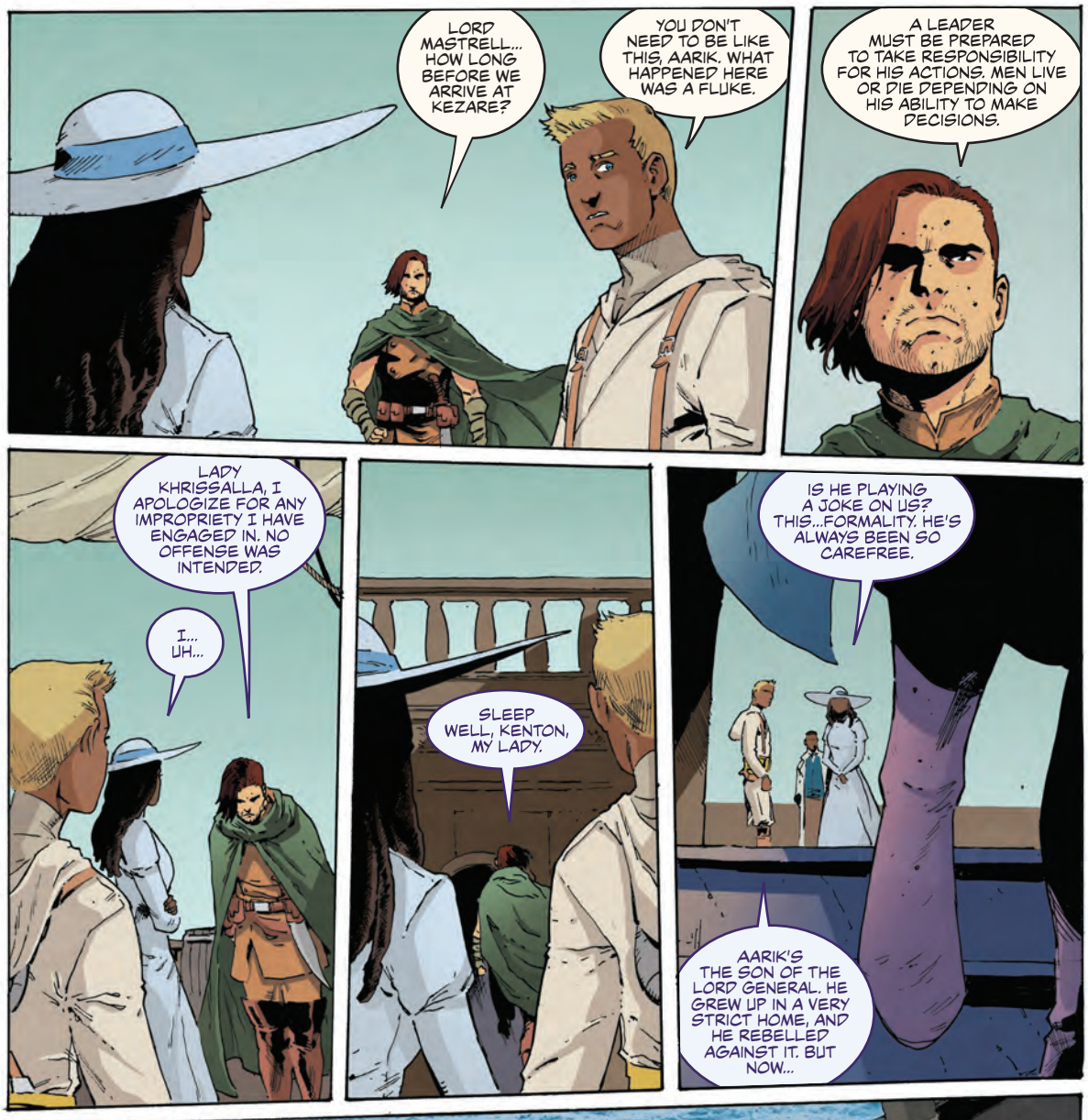
"...RECOVERING."
WITHOUT HIS SAND, KENTON'S IN SERIOUS DANGER. WE HAVE TO...
WHAT'S THAT, DUCHESS? I DON'T UNDERSTAND DARKSIDER.
CAN YOU HEAR ME, AARIK?
IF SOMEONE DOESN'T HELP KENTON, THEN I'LL HAVE TO.
I DON'T DOUBT YOUR BRAVE INTENTIONS, DUCHESS, BUT I WON'T JUST STAND BY AND LET YOU BE KILLED.
LET GO OF ME, DELIUS. IF I DON'T HELP, WHO WILL?
IT'S YOUR OWN FAULT, AARIK...
...YOU SHOULD NEVER HAVE COME BACK.
I THOUGHT OVERMASTERING WHILE ON THE WATERS WAS THE SAFEST TIME TO DO SO. OF COURSE, THE ASSASSINS WOULD BE ABLE TO FIND ME. I'M A FOOL FOR LEAVING MYSELF VULNERABLE LIKE THIS.

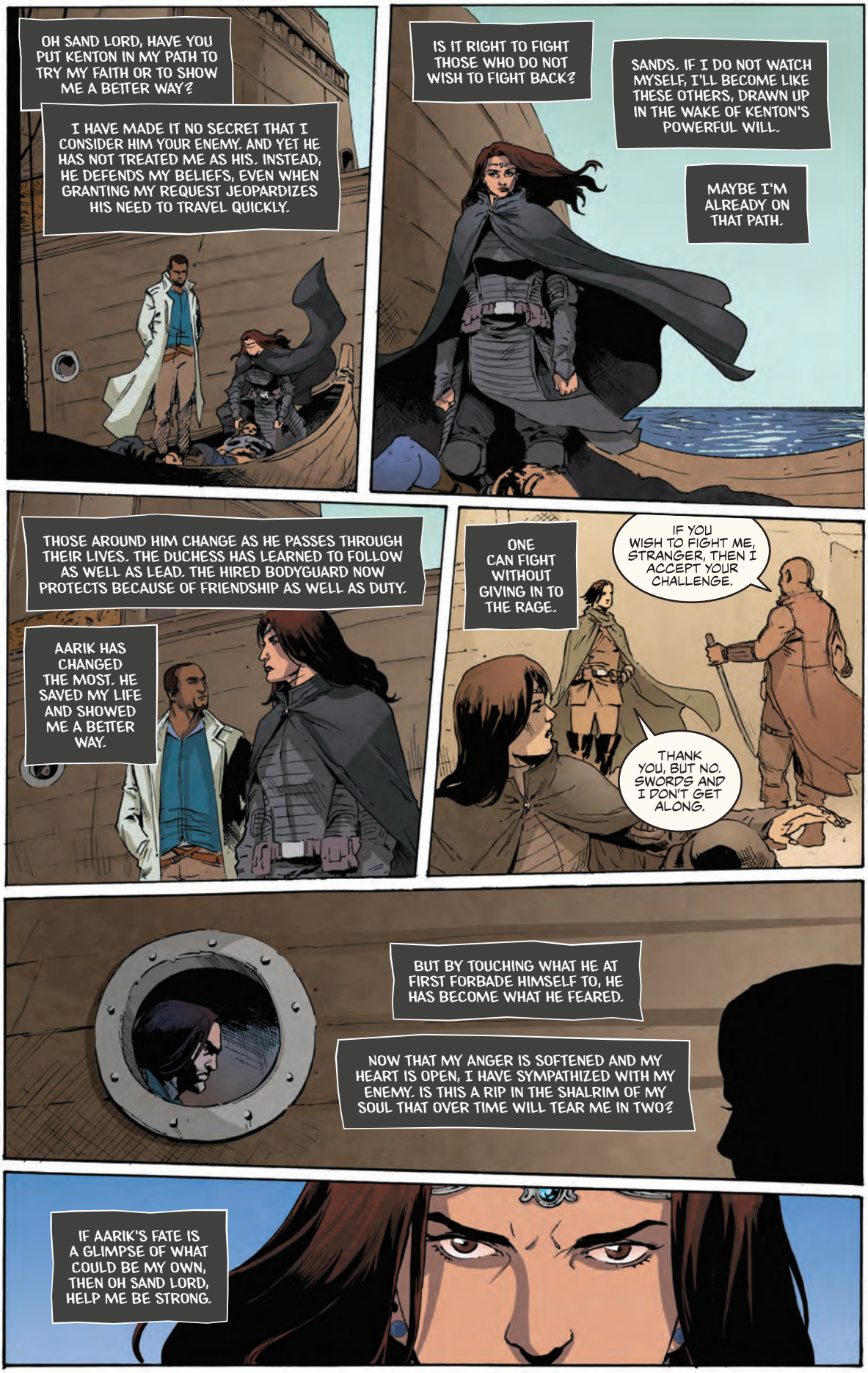
A FOOL WHO'S ABOUT TO DIE.
UNGH!
HNGH!
YEARGH!
THUNK
AARIK...?

WHAT IS THIS? AARIK'S COME TO SAVE MY LIFE.
BUT IT'S A DIFFERENT AARIK FROM THE ONE I KNOW.
NO MORE THE CAREFREE WANDERER.
THIS MAN-- THIS AARIK-- IS A TOWER-TRAINED WARRIOR...

--A DEATH-BRINGER.
AND IT MAY BE HIS OWN SOUL THAT'S BEEN THE FIRST CASUALTY.
AARIK, I...I... THANK YOU. YOU SAVED ME.
...AARIK?

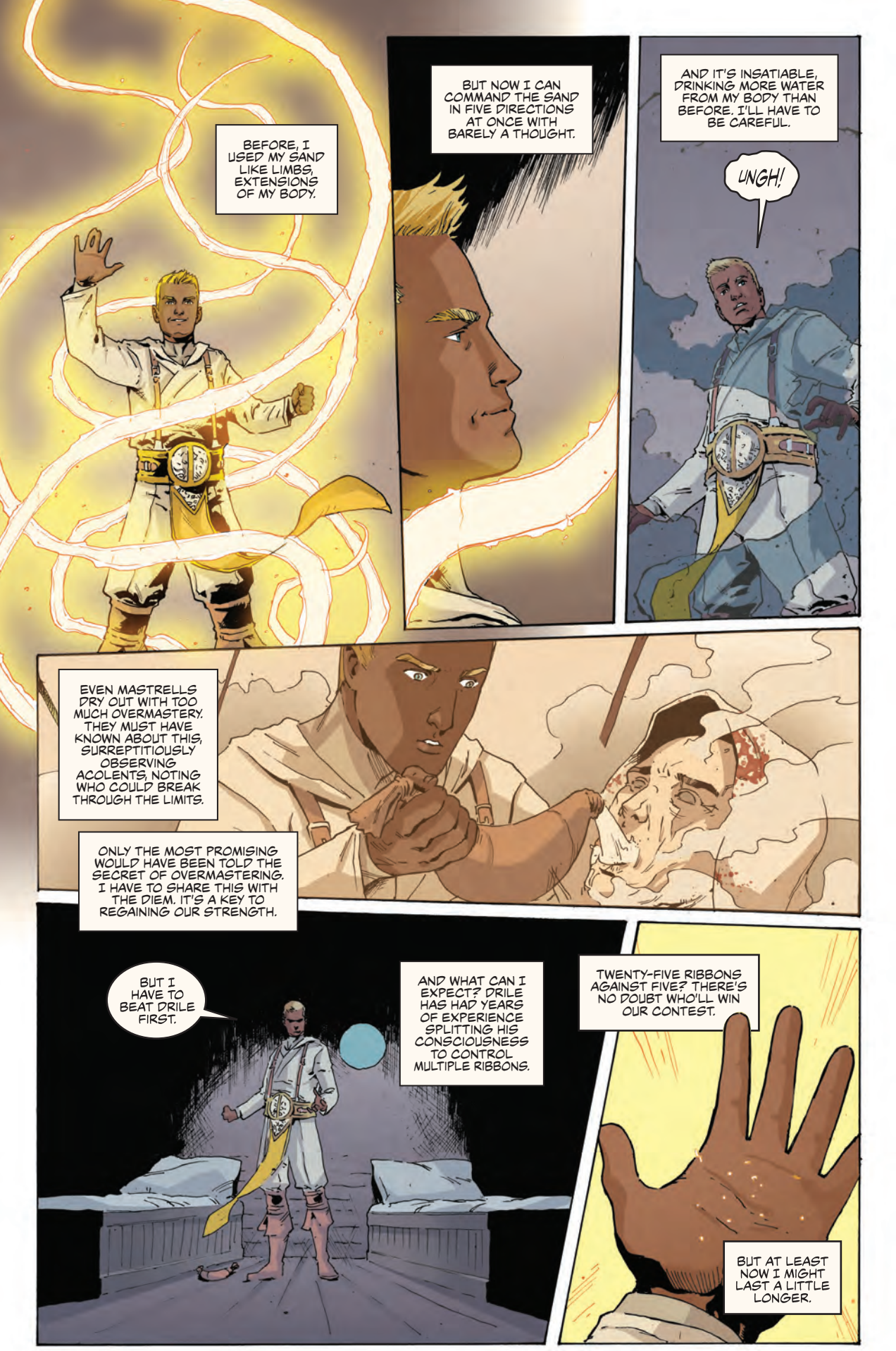

WHAT HAPPENED UP HERE?
ASSASSINS. BUT AARIK DEALT WITH THEM. WE'LL DUMP THEM ON THEIR OWN SHIP AND SET IT AFIRE.
WE DON'T HAVE TIME FOR KERZTIAN FOOLISHNESS, TRACKT.
NO! THEY MUST BE BURIED IN DEEP SAND.
IT'S OKAY, DELIUS. PLACE THE BODIES, COVERED, ON THE OTHER BOAT AND TOW IT BEHIND US. WE'LL MAKE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THEIR BURIAL WHEN WE ARRIVE IN KEZARE.
KENTON, WHAT'S WRONG WITH AARIK?
I NEVER REALLY UNDERSTOOD WHY HE LEFT DAYSIDE, BUT IT HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH THIS.
HE WAS ALWAYS A GIFTED FIGHTER--THE BEST I'VE EVER SEEN WITH A SWORD--BUT I COULD SEE IT IN HIS EYES. HE SCARED HIMSELF, SOMETIMES...
AARIK DID THIS?
BUT IF HE WERE A WARRIOR, I WOULD HAVE SENSED IT. THOSE WHO FIGHT CARRY THEMSELVES A CERTAIN WAY.
AARIK IS A SPECIAL CASE, BAON.
"APPARENTLY SO, SAND MASTER."


LORD MASTRELL... HOW LONG BEFORE WE ARRIVE AT KEZARE?
YOU DON'T NEED TO BE LIKE THIS, AARIK. WHAT HAPPENED HERE WAS A FLUKE.
A LEADER MUST BE PREPARED TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR HIS ACTIONS. MEN LIVE OR DIE DEPENDING ON HIS ABILITY TO MAKE DECISIONS.
LADY KHRISSALLA, I APOLOGIZE FOR ANY IMPROPRIETY I HAVE ENGAGED IN. NO OFFENSE WAS INTENDED.
I... UH...
SLEEP WELL, KENTON, MY LADY.
IS HE PLAYING A JOKE ON US? THIS...FORMALITY. HE'S ALWAYS BEEN SO CAREFREE.
AARIK'S THE SON OF THE LORD GENERAL. HE GREW UP IN A VERY STRICT HOME, AND HE REBELLED AGAINST IT. BUT NOW...
"...I THINK HE'S GIVEN UP ON HIMSELF."


OH SAND LORD, HAVE YOU PUT KENTON IN MY PATH TO TRY MY FAITH OR TO SHOW ME A BETTER WAY?
I HAVE MADE IT NO SECRET THAT I CONSIDER HIM YOUR ENEMY. AND YET HE HAS NOT TREATED ME AS HIS. INSTEAD, HE DEFENDS MY BELIEFS, EVEN WHEN GRANTING MY REQUEST JEOPARDIZES HIS NEED TO TRAVEL QUICKLY.
IS IT RIGHT TO FIGHT THOSE WHO DO NOT WISH TO FIGHT BACK?
SANDS. IF I DO NOT WATCH MYSELF, I'LL BECOME LIKE THESE OTHERS, DRAWN UP IN THE WAKE OF KENTON'S POWERFUL WILL.
MAYBE I'M ALREADY ON THAT PATH.
THOSE AROUND HIM CHANGE AS HE PASSES THROUGH THEIR LIVES. THE DUCHESS HAS LEARNED TO FOLLOW AS WELL AS LEAD. THE HIRED BODYGUARD NOW PROTECTS BECAUSE OF FRIENDSHIP AS WELL AS DUTY.
AARIK HAS CHANGED THE MOST. HE SAVED MY LIFE AND SHOWED ME A BETTER WAY.
ONE CAN FIGHT WITHOUT GIVING IN TO THE RAGE.
IF YOU WISH TO FIGHT ME, STRANGER, THEN I ACCEPT YOUR CHALLENGE.
THANK YOU, BUT NO. SWORDS AND I DON'T GET ALONG.
BUT BY TOUCHING WHAT HE AT FIRST FORBADE HIMSELF TO, HE HAS BECOME WHAT HE FEARED.
NOW THAT MY ANGER IS SOFTENED AND MY HEART IS OPEN, I HAVE SYMPATHIZED WITH MY ENEMY. IS THIS A RIP IN THE SHALRIM OF MY SOUL THAT OVER TIME WILL TEAR ME IN TWO?
IF AARIK'S FATE IS A GLIMPSE OF WHAT COULD BE MY OWN, THEN OH SAND LORD, HELP ME BE STRONG.

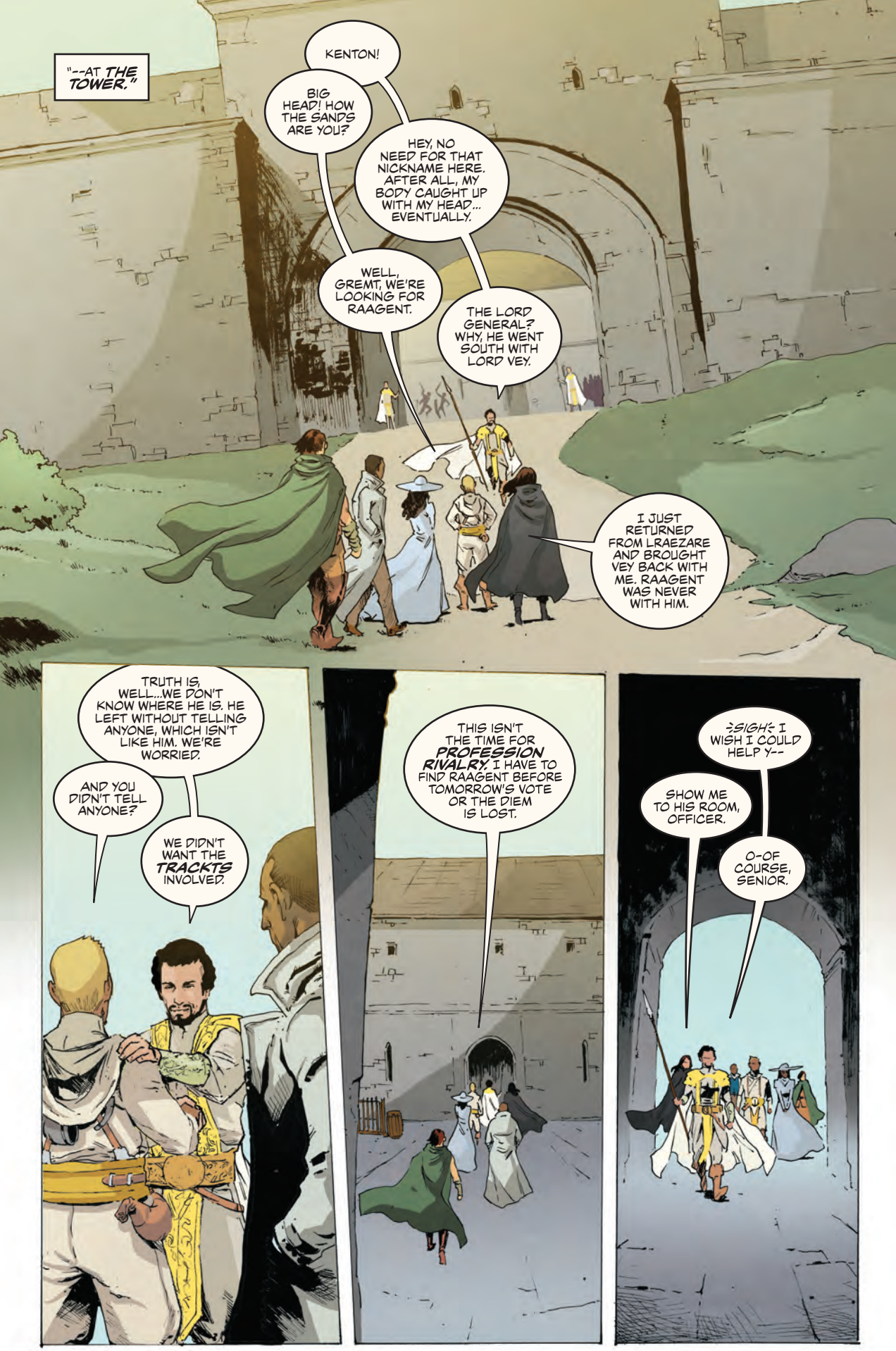
YES!
SO, I WAS RIGHT ALL ALONG. OVERMASTERY DOESN'T BURN AWAY ONE'S POWERS...

...IT MAKES THEM STRONGER.
FIVE RIBBONS!
OTHER SAND MASTERS SPOKE OF THE RAW POWER, THE HEIGHTENING OF THE SENSES, THE EXPANSION OF THE MIND THAT COMES WITH CONTROLLING SO MANY RIBBONS.
NOW...NOW I UNDERSTAND!


BEFORE, I USED MY SAND LIKE LIMBS, EXTENSIONS OF MY BODY.
BUT NOW I CAN COMMAND THE SAND IN FIVE DIRECTIONS AT ONCE WITH BARELY A THOUGHT.
AND IT'S INSATIABLE, DRINKING MORE WATER FROM MY BODY THAN BEFORE. I'LL HAVE TO BE CAREFUL.
UNGH!
EVEN MASTRELLS DRY OUT WITH TOO MUCH OVERMASTERY. THEY MUST HAVE KNOWN ABOUT THIS, SURREPTITIOUSLY OBSERVING ACOLENTS, NOTING WHO COULD BREAK THROUGH THE LIMITS.
ONLY THE MOST PROMISING WOULD HAVE BEEN TOLD THE SECRET OF OVERMASTERING. I HAVE TO SHARE THIS WITH THE DIEM. IT'S A KEY TO REGAINING OUR STRENGTH.
BUT I HAVE TO BEAT DRILE FIRST.
AND WHAT CAN I EXPECT? DRILE HAS HAD YEARS OF EXPERIENCE SPLITTING HIS CONSCIOUSNESS TO CONTROL MULTIPLE RIBBONS.
TWENTY-FIVE RIBBONS AGAINST FIVE? THERE'S NO DOUBT WHO'LL WIN OUR CONTEST.
BUT AT LEAST NOW I MIGHT LAST A LITTLE LONGER.

ARRIVAL IN KEZARE...
BAON'S A GIFTED SAILOR. WE COULDN'T HAVE MANAGED WITHOUT HIM.
HE TELLS ME HE WAS TRAINED IN MANY DISCIPLINES.
I SEE. YOU SEEM IN A GOOD MOOD TODAY, LORD MASTRELL, IF YOU DON'T MIND MY SAYING.
PERHAPS I'M JUST GLAD TO BE HOME.
BUT I SEE THE DUCHESS HAS FINALLY STIRRED. EXCUSE ME.
WELL?
WELL WHAT?
DO YOU HAVE YOUR SAND BACK? YOU'VE TESTED YOURSELF. I KNOW YOU HAVE.
WELL, HAVEN'T YOU?

I HAVE.
OH, KENTON. THIS IS WONDERFUL. YOU WERE RIGHT THEN, ABOUT...
OVERMASTERING? YES. I WAS RIGHT.
THEN YOU HAVE A CHANCE.
NOT IF I DON'T FIND THE LORD GENERAL FOR THE VOTE, AND HE COULD BE ANYWHERE IN KEZARE RIGHT NOW.
I DON'T THINK YOU HAVE TO FIND THE LORD GENERAL.
HEY--!
LET AN EXPERT DO IT.
I CAN'T SPEAK LOSSANDIN, KENTON. TELL THE TRACKT THAT WE NEED HER SKILLS TO FIND THE LORD GENERAL.
AH...UM... THE DUCHESS KHRISSALLA SAYS THAT WE NEED YOUR SKILLS TO FIND THE LORD GENERAL, AIS. IF YOU CAN POSSIBLY...?
I AM ONLY HERE TO OBSERVE YOU, LORD MASTRELL, AND--PERHAPS--PROTECT YOU. I AM NOT HERE TO HELP YOU.
SHE WON'T HELP. SHE'S ONLY HERE TO OBSERVE ME AND...
OH, YOU... PEOPLE!
THERE'S A MISSING TAISHA! REMIND HER THAT IT'S HER DUTY TO FIND HIM, HER ASSIGNMENT BE DAMNED.
TELL HER THAT HE COULD BE IN DANGER.
THE LORD GENERAL... COULD BE IN DANGER. DUCHESS KHRISSALLA BELIEVES THAT, AS A TRACKT, YOU SHOULD PRIORITIZE HIS WELL-BEING OVER MINE.
HMMM. HER POINT IS WELL-REASONED. SO THEN, LET US START--


"--AT THE TOWER."
KENTON!
BIG HEAD! HOW THE SANDS ARE YOU?
HEY, NO NEED FOR THAT NICKNAME HERE. AFTER ALL, MY BODY CAUGHT UP WITH MY HEAD... EVENTUALLY.
WELL, GREMT, WE'RE LOOKING FOR RAAGENT.
THE LORD GENERAL? WHY, HE WENT SOUTH WITH LORD VEY.
I JUST RETURNED FROM LRAEZARE AND BROUGHT VEY BACK WITH ME. RAAGENT WAS NEVER WITH HIM.
TRUTH IS, WELL...WE DON'T KNOW WHERE HE IS. HE LEFT WITHOUT TELLING ANYONE, WHICH ISN'T LIKE HIM. WE'RE WORRIED.
AND YOU DIDN'T TELL ANYONE?
WE DIDN'T WANT THE TRACKTS INVOLVED.
THIS ISN'T THE TIME FOR PROFESSION RIVALRY. I HAVE TO FIND RAAGENT BEFORE TOMORROW'S VOTE OR THE DIEM IS LOST.
:SIGH: I WISH I COULD HELP Y--
SHOW ME TO HIS ROOM, OFFICER.
O-OF COURSE, SENIOR.

HE WAS IN HERE, RESTING FROM HIS WOUNDS.
WOUNDS? AH, YES--
"--THE SANDLING."
HE DIDN'T LIKE TO BE BEDRIDDEN, KENTON...
...SO HE WAS CONSTANTLY HOBBLING AROUND THE TOWER. THE SERVANTS COULDN'T KEEP HIM IN HIS CHAMBERS.
SEVERAL DAYS AGO, HE WANDERED CLEAR TO PORTSIDE, SO WE TRIPLED HIS GUARD. HE HATED THAT, OF COURSE.
HMM.

AIS, IS THERE SOME-THING--?
DARK SPOTS ON THE FLOOR. HERE, AND AGAIN HERE.
WHAT IS IT? SPENT SAND? WAS SOMEONE USING SAND MASTERY...?
NO. NOT SAND. BLOOD.
WHOEVER LEFT THE BLOOD TOOK CARE TO CLEAN THE FLOOR WELL. CAREFULLY... PROFESSIONALLY.
BUT THEY MISSED UNDER THE BED. WITH ALL THE GUARDS AROUND, THEY WOULDN'T HAVE HAD MUCH TIME.
WHY IS THERE NO SHEET ON THE MATTRESS? THE LORD GENERAL USED ONE, I ASSUME.
UH, YES. HE LIKED THE FEEL OF SHALRIM--THE LORD GENERAL PREFERRED IT OVER OTHER MATERIALS.
SHALRIM'S SOFT BUT ALSO STRONG. SOMEONE COULD HAVE USED THE SHEET TO BIND OR TRANSPORT HIM.
BUT THEY WOULDN'T HAVE GOTTEN HIM OUT OF THE TOWER. TOO MANY GUARDS. WHICH MEANS THE LORD GENERAL IS STILL HERE.
PROBABLY SOMEWHERE FEW PEOPLE, EVEN GUARDS, LIKE TO GO. SOMEWHERE HIDDEN. SOMEWHERE... DARK.
TELL ME, DOES THE TOWER HAVE A BASEMENT?

NOT A BASEMENT, REALLY. MORE A CHILLING CELLAR FOR THE LORD GENERAL'S WINE. IT'S NOT USED VERY OFTEN...
TAKE ME THERE.
IT GETS VERY DARK.
IT WOULD.
AIS IS NERVOUS. LIKE ALL DAYSIDERS, SHE DOESN'T LIKE THE DARK.
KHRISS AND BAON ARE THE ONLY ONES OF US WHO DON'T FEEL AN INSTINCTIVE FEAR OF DARKNESS.
I'LL CREATE MORE LIGHT SO WE CAN ALL...

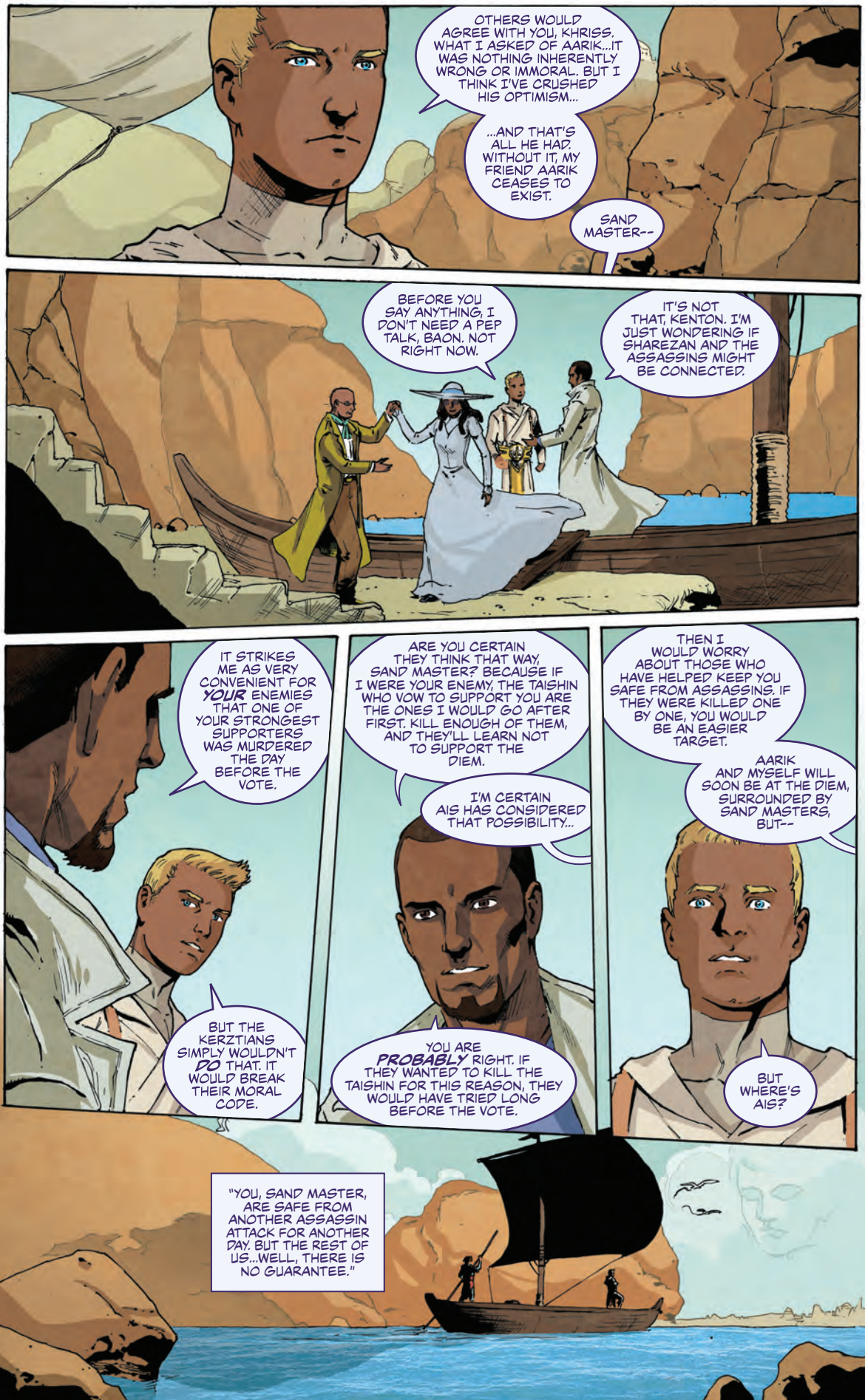
LORD GENERAL!
THAT'S RAAGENT. BUT WHAT'S WRONG WITH HIS EYES?
THE EYELIDS HAVE BEEN CUT OFF.
SEE THE RESIDUE ON HIS LIPS? HE WAS DRUGGED AS WELL. KAMO, A KERZTIAN HERB USED TO HEIGHTEN EMOTIONS--OR, IN THIS CASE, FEARS.
THEY TIED HIM WITH HIS OWN BED SHEET HERE, IN THE DARKNESS, AND CUT OFF HIS EYELIDS SO HE COULDN'T HIDE FROM THE HORRORS HIS MIND CONJURED AS THE CANDLES BURNED OUT.
NO ONE WOULD HAVE HEARD HIS SCREAMING DOWN HERE.
I'VE SEEN CRUEL MURDERS LIKE THIS BEFORE...IT'S GOT ALL THE HALLMARKS OF SHAREZAN'S WORK.

EVEN IF HE HAD GOT FREE, HIS LEG WOULD HAVE MADE IT DIFFICULT TO CLIMB THE STAIRS, BROKEN AS IT WAS WHEN HE WAS FIGHTING THAT SANDLING ON THE DEEP SANDS.
WHICH MEANS HE... WOULD HAVE WALKED WITH A LIMP...
BUT WHAT POSSIBLE REASON WOULD SHAREZAN HAVE FOR KILLING RAAGENT?
USUALLY, SHAREZAN RESERVES SUCH HORRIBLE PUNISHMENTS FOR...
FOR THOSE WHO BETRAY HIM.
SANDS! IT WASN'T SHAREZAN WE HEARD LIMPING UP THE STAIRS THAT DAY IN THE WAREHOUSE.
"IT WAS LORD RAAGENT, WHO MUST'VE BEEN PART OF SHAREZAN'S NETWORK."
BA-BUMP
"RAAGENT WANTED TO GET OUT AND WROTE THAT NOTE I FOUND, HOPING THE TRACKTS COULD HELP HIM ESCAPE THE HOLD SHAREZAN HAD ON HIM. BUT THE NOTE MUST'VE BEEN INTERCEPTED BY SHAREZAN AND LEFT ON THE ASSASSIN."
"SHAREZAN TRIED TO TRAP ME AND RAAGENT IN THE EXPLOSION. BUT WHEN WE ALL ESCAPED, SHAREZAN MADE OTHER PLANS FOR RAAGENT--"
BA-BUMP
--AND I WAS UNABLE TO SAVE HIM.
IF ONLY HE HAD FOUND ANOTHER CHANCE TO CONTACT US.
INSTEAD LORD RAAGENT, RESPECTED MEMBER OF THE TAISHIN--AND MY ONLY WITNESS AGAINST SHAREZAN--

--IS DEAD.
WHAT KIND OF PERSON IS CAPABLE OF SUCH AN ATROCITY?
SHAREZAN.
NOT HIS PEOPLE, BUT HIM. HE DID THIS.
POOR AARIK. TO SEE HIS FATHER LIKE THIS.
A WARRIOR'S BURDEN IS TO CARRY THE PAIN OF OTHERS, DUCHESS, AS WELL AS HIS OWN.
AARIK... MY FRIEND. MY OLDEST FRIEND. I'M SORRY. I'M SO SORRY. I CAME TO FIND YOUR FATHER, BUT I NEVER EXPECTED...
I KNOW WHAT YOU WANT TO ASK ME, KENTON, BUT PLEASE DON'T.
I HAVE TO. YOU KNOW I HAVE TO.
I HATE THAT IT'S HERE, RIGHT NOW, WITH WHAT'S JUST HAPPENED, BUT...
AARIK, WILL YOU TAKE YOUR FATHER'S POSITION AND BECOME LORD GENERAL, SO YOU CAN VOTE FOR THE DIEM TOMORROW?
YES.

CHAPTER 17
THE IMPOSSIBLE CHOICE

PASSAGE TO THE DIEM.
I'VE DONE A VERY BAD THING.
KENTON, YOU'RE VERY QUIET.
I'VE DESTROYED MY FRIEND--AARIK. WHY DIDN'T ANYONE EVER WARN ME THE PRICE I WOULD HAVE TO PAY FOR BEING LORD MASTRELL?
LEADERSHIP IS A BURDEN, KENTON. IT WASN'T AN EASY CHOICE, BUT YOU MADE THE RIGHT DECISION FOR THE DIEM.


OTHERS WOULD AGREE WITH YOU, KHRISS. WHAT I ASKED OF AARIK...IT WAS NOTHING INHERENTLY WRONG OR IMMORAL. BUT I THINK I'VE CRUSHED HIS OPTIMISM...
...AND THAT'S ALL HE HAD. WITHOUT IT, MY FRIEND AARIK CEASES TO EXIST.
SAND MASTER--
BEFORE YOU SAY ANYTHING, I DON'T NEED A PEP TALK, BAON. NOT RIGHT NOW.
IT'S NOT THAT, KENTON. I'M JUST WONDERING IF SHAREZAN AND THE ASSASSINS MIGHT BE CONNECTED.
IT STRIKES ME AS VERY CONVENIENT FOR YOUR ENEMIES THAT ONE OF YOUR STRONGEST SUPPORTERS WAS MURDERED THE DAY BEFORE THE VOTE.
BUT THE KERZTIANS SIMPLY WOULDN'T DO THAT. IT WOULD BREAK THEIR MORAL CODE.
ARE YOU CERTAIN THEY THINK THAT WAY, SAND MASTER? BECAUSE IF I WERE YOUR ENEMY, THE TAISHIN WHO VOW TO SUPPORT YOU ARE THE ONES I WOULD GO AFTER FIRST. KILL ENOUGH OF THEM, AND THEY'LL LEARN NOT TO SUPPORT THE DIEM.
I'M CERTAIN AIS HAS CONSIDERED THAT POSSIBILITY...
YOU ARE PROBABLY RIGHT. IF THEY WANTED TO KILL THE TAISHIN FOR THIS REASON, THEY WOULD HAVE TRIED LONG BEFORE THE VOTE.
THEN I WOULD WORRY ABOUT THOSE WHO HAVE HELPED KEEP YOU SAFE FROM ASSASSINS. IF THEY WERE KILLED ONE BY ONE, YOU WOULD BE AN EASIER TARGET.
AARIK AND MYSELF WILL SOON BE AT THE DIEM, SURROUNDED BY SAND MASTERS, BUT--
BUT WHERE'S AIS?
"YOU, SAND MASTER, ARE SAFE FROM ANOTHER ASSASSIN ATTACK FOR ANOTHER DAY. BUT THE REST OF US...WELL, THERE IS NO GUARANTEE."

HALL OF JUDGMENT.
THANK YOU FOR YOUR REPORT, AIS...
...I'LL ASSIGN A TEAM IMMEDIATELY TO INVESTIGATE POOR LORD RAAGENT'S DEATH FULLY. YOU NEED NOT CONCERN YOURSELF WITH THAT.
INSTEAD, PLEASE GET BACK TO YOUR DUTIES PROTECTING THE LORD MASTRELL.
AS YOU WISH, YOUR HONOR.
I SHALL CONTINUE TO WASTE MY TIME GUARDING THE RY'KENSHA, INSTEAD OF LEADING AN ACTUAL INVESTIGATION.
AIS! I'M GLAD I CAUGHT YOU.
THERE'S GOOD NEWS! WE'VE FOUND SHAREZAN. I ORGANIZED THE RAID MYSELF IN YOUR ABSENCE. WOULD YOU JOIN US?
FINALLY, SOME GENUINE GOOD NEWS. OF COURSE I WILL JOIN YOU.
I'VE LOADED YOUR ZINKALL FOR YOU. WE MUST HURRY.
I WISH I'D BEEN HERE TO ORGANIZE THIS, BUT I AM IMPRESSED WITH YOUR THOROUGHNESS, TAIN. HOW DID YOU TRACK DOWN THE ELUSIVE BASTARD?

"IT WAS LOKMLEN--THE MAN YOU CAUGHT TWO WEEKS AGO. HE FINALLY BROKE DOWN AND TOLD US THE LOCATION OF SHAREZAN'S SAFE HOUSE."
AND THERE IT IS.
NONDESCRIPT AND HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT. HOW TYPICAL OF SHAREZAN.
MY SQUAD IS IN HERE ALREADY, MA'AM.
SHINKLE
TAIN, UP THERE! WE'VE BEEN BETRAYED.
YES, YOU HAVE.

YOU...SOLD YOURSELF TO THEM...?
NO, ACTUALLY.
THEN...WHAT? YOU--! YOU'RE HIM? YOU'RE SHAREZAN?
WHAT BETTER COVER FOR A CRIMINAL, AIS, THAN AS A TRACKT?
THIS IDENTITY HAS SERVED ME WELL OVER THE YEARS, TO REMAIN A STEP AHEAD OF THE AUTHORITIES.
ADMITTEDLY, SOMETIMES YOU MOVED TOO QUICKLY EVEN FOR ME TO DO ANYTHING. YOU REALLY DO HAVE AN ENERGETIC MIND, AIS.
I ALWAYS THOUGHT SHAREZAN WOULD TURN OUT TO BE NILTO, THE LORD BEGGAR.
AND I FED YOU EVIDENCE TO KEEP YOU BELIEVING THAT FALLACY. GIVEN MORE TIME, I WOULD HAVE EVENTUALLY FRAMED NILTO FOR MY CRIMES.
EVEN THOUGH I HAD INFILTRATED YOUR TRUST, I STILL FOUND IT DIFFICULT TO STAY AHEAD OF YOU.
YOU HAVE SLOWLY CHIPPED AWAY AT MY EMPIRE. AND NOW I BARELY HAVE ANYTHING LEFT.

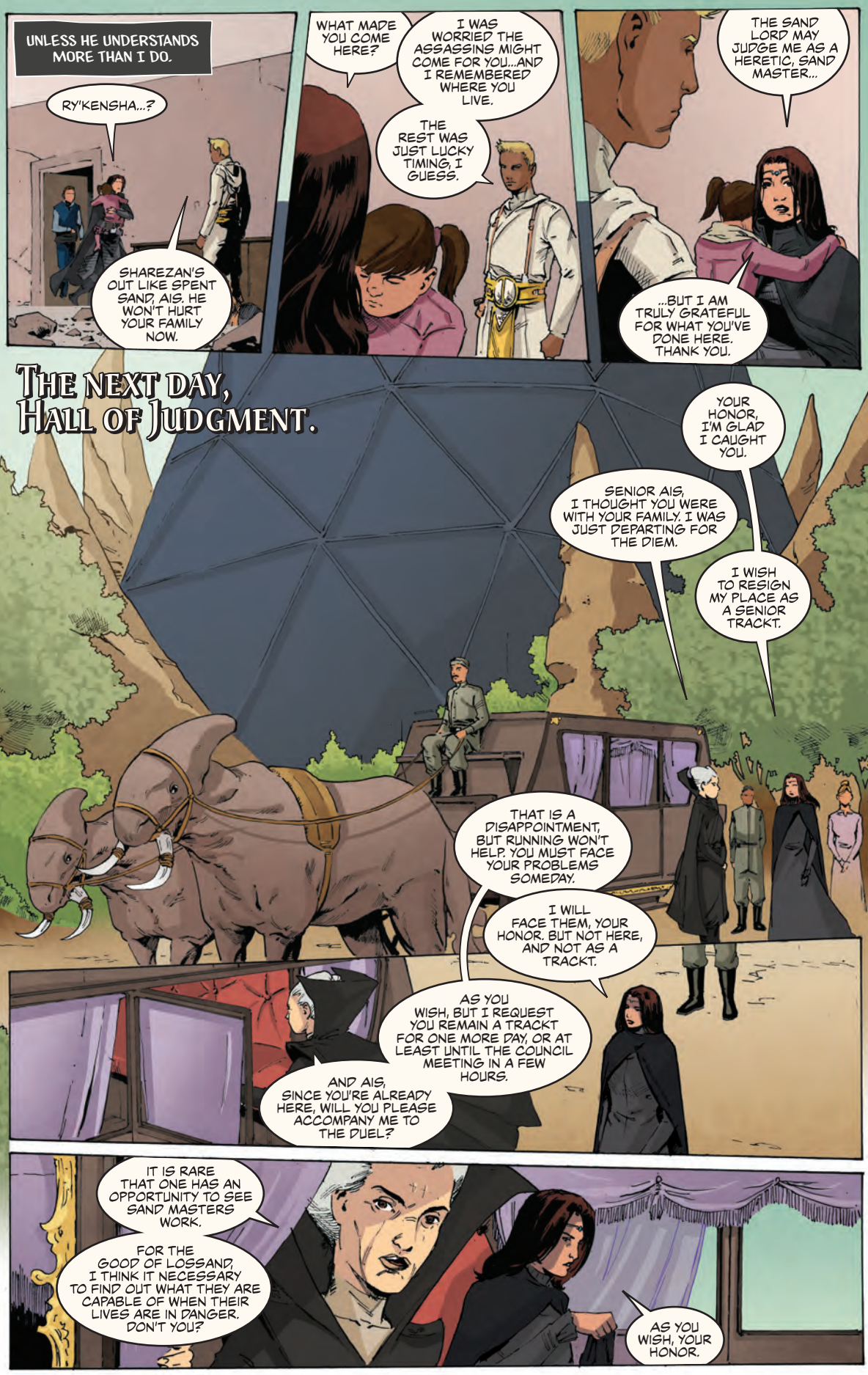
AND NOW IT'S NOTHING AT ALL!
FFFT
WHAT--?
HNN. NEVER ACCEPT A WEAPON FROM SOMEONE YOU DON'T TRUST, AIS.
OH, BUT YOU DID TRUST ME, DIDN'T YOU? IF ONLY NILTO HAD HANDED YOU THE WEAPON, HMM?
AND NOW FOR OUR PROJECT. THANKS TO YOU, MY OPERATION IS FATALLY COMPROMISED, SO I SHALL BE TAKING SOME TIME OFF. BUT BEFORE I DO I WISH TO INDULGE A HOBBY OF MINE.
I'M FASCINATED WITH EXPLORING PEOPLE'S WEAKNESSES AND FINDING THEIR BREAKING POINTS. POOR LORD RAAGENT, FOR EXAMPLE, HAS ALWAYS HAD A HORRIBLE FEAR OF DARKNESS. HE WAS EVEN WORSE THAN THE REST OF US.
AS FOR YOU, IT'S EASY. THE ENTIRE HALL OF JUDGMENT KNOWS YOUR SECRET, HOW YOU KEEP YOUR EMOTIONS WOUND SO TIGHTLY THAT WHEN THEY COME OUT, THEY EXPLODE.
WHAT THE OTHER TRACKTS DON'T KNOW IS WHAT MAKES YOU SO UNSTABLE. BUT I DO. I HAVE A KNACK FOR THESE THINGS, YOU SEE.
IT'S THE CONFLICT RAGING INSIDE OF YOU.
ARE YOU A TRACKT OR A KERZTIAN? A BELIEVER OR A SINNER? A COLD-HEARTED WARRIOR, OR A LOVING MOTHER? LET'S FIND OUT.
MY ASSOCIATE HERE, LOKMLEN, HAS SET UP A FIRETRAP IN AN ORPHANAGE--THE ONE WHERE YOU WERE RAISED, IN FACT.
ORPHANS MAKE SUCH HEART-WRENCHING VICTIMS, SO INNOCENT YET NO ONE TO MOURN THEM.
OR WOULD YOU PRIORITIZE SAVING SOMEONE WITH AN EVEN MORE PERSONAL CONNECTION?
DUTY OR FAMILY, AIS? CHOOSE QUICKLY--MY MEN WILL LET YOU LEAVE HERE IN ONE MINUTE...
...BUT REGRETTABLY YOU WON'T HAVE TIME TO SAVE BOTH.
DUTY?
OR FAMILY?

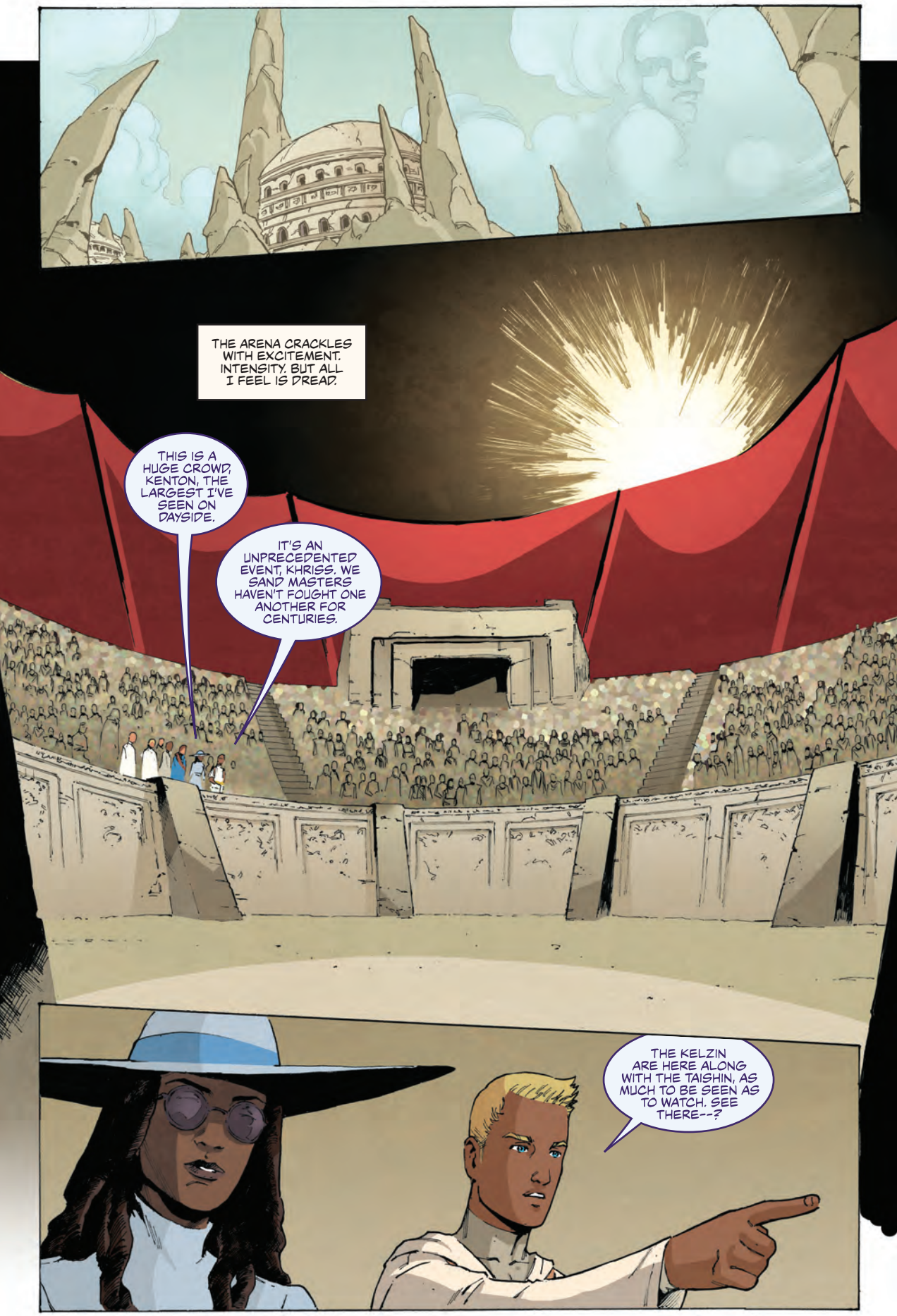
MINUTE'S UP, TRACKT. BE ON YOUR WAY.
DUTY? OR FAMILY? IF I WASTE ANY MORE TIME, ALL OF THEM WILL DIE.
:GASP:
:GASP:
:GASP:
SANDS, WHERE AM I? AND WHERE ARE THE TRACKTS? THEY SHOULD BE PATROLLING.
OUT OF MY WAY, PLEASE. :GASP: PLEASE!
DUTY OR FAMILY? I NEED TO FIND HELP. I NEED...
...HELP. YES!
YOU, OFFICER!
SENIOR AIS? ARE YOU WOUNDED--? WHAT'S--?
NO!
THE ORPHANAGE... :GASP: ON THE EAST SIDE. :GASP: NEXT TO THE... :GASP:...THE SANDLING PENS. IT'S IN DANGER. LOOK FOR...:GASP:... A FIRETRAP.
YOUR BREATHING IS ERRATIC, SENIOR, AND I THINK...
YES, SENIOR TRACKT AIS, RIGHT AWAY!
JUST GO!
WHAT HAVE I DONE? HAVE I MADE MY CHOICE AND CONDEMNED MY FAMILY? SAND LORD...HELP ME.

I HAVE TO LET GO. ALL CONTROL, ALL OF MY AUTONOMY, I GIVE TO YOU, SAND LORD, THE ONLY ONE WITH TOTAL CONTROL.
NO. :GASP: I'M TOO LATE.
I WILL ACCEPT YOUR JUDGMENT, FOR IT IS JUST.
WHOMP
THOUGH, SAND LORD HELP ME, I DON'T WANT TO SEE...
TAIN--?
...BUT I MUST.
WHAM

WELL, ASSASSIN? DO YOU WANT MORE?
KENTON! NO! MY FAMILY IS HERE. MY DAUGHTER...
THEY'RE SAFE. THIS ASSASSIN WAS ABOUT TO KILL THEM!

BECAUSE OF ME. HE CALLS HIMSELF SHAREZAN.
NO...
SHAREZAN...? THE CRIME BOSS? I'LL SNAP HIS NECK.
...HE HAS TO FACE JUSTICE. PROPER JUSTICE, NOT THIS.
MELLIS?
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? IS MELLONI?
WE'RE FINE. JUST... BRUISES BUT WE'RE ALIVE.
MOM?
OH SAND LORD, KER'NAISHA. YOUR NAME BE PRAISED... THANK YOU.
MOMMY'S HERE, IT'S OKAY NOW. IT'S OKAY.
SANDS, MELLIS! I TOLD YOU IT WASN'T SAFE HERE. I BEGGED YOU TO LEAVE.
I SHOULD HAVE LISTENED, AIS...
...SAND LORD BE THANKED YOUR FRIEND ARRIVED IN TIME.
MY FRIEND? HOW COULD MY HUSBAND MISUNDERSTAND SO MUCH?


UNLESS HE UNDERSTANDS MORE THAN I DO.
RY'KENSHA...?
SHAREZAN'S OUT LIKE SPENT SAND, AIS. HE WON'T HURT YOUR FAMILY NOW.
WHAT MADE YOU COME HERE?
I WAS WORRIED THE ASSASSINS MIGHT COME FOR YOU...AND I REMEMBERED WHERE YOU LIVE.
THE REST WAS JUST LUCKY TIMING, I GUESS.
THE SAND LORD MAY JUDGE ME AS A HERETIC, SAND MASTER...
...BUT I AM TRULY GRATEFUL FOR WHAT YOU'VE DONE HERE. THANK YOU.
THE NEXT DAY, HALL OF JUDGMENT.
YOUR HONOR, I'M GLAD I CAUGHT YOU.
SENIOR AIS, I THOUGHT YOU WERE WITH YOUR FAMILY. I WAS JUST DEPARTING FOR THE DIEM.
I WISH TO RESIGN MY PLACE AS A SENIOR TRACKT.
THAT IS A DISAPPOINTMENT, BUT RUNNING WON'T HELP. YOU MUST FACE YOUR PROBLEMS SOMEDAY.
I WILL FACE THEM, YOUR HONOR. BUT NOT HERE, AND NOT AS A TRACKT.
AS YOU WISH, BUT I REQUEST YOU REMAIN A TRACKT FOR ONE MORE DAY, OR AT LEAST UNTIL THE COUNCIL MEETING IN A FEW HOURS.
AND AIS, SINCE YOU'RE ALREADY HERE, WILL YOU PLEASE ACCOMPANY ME TO THE DUEL?
IT IS RARE THAT ONE HAS AN OPPORTUNITY TO SEE SAND MASTERS WORK.
FOR THE GOOD OF LOSSAND, I THINK IT NECESSARY TO FIND OUT WHAT THEY ARE CAPABLE OF WHEN THEIR LIVES ARE IN DANGER. DON'T YOU?
AS YOU WISH, YOUR HONOR.

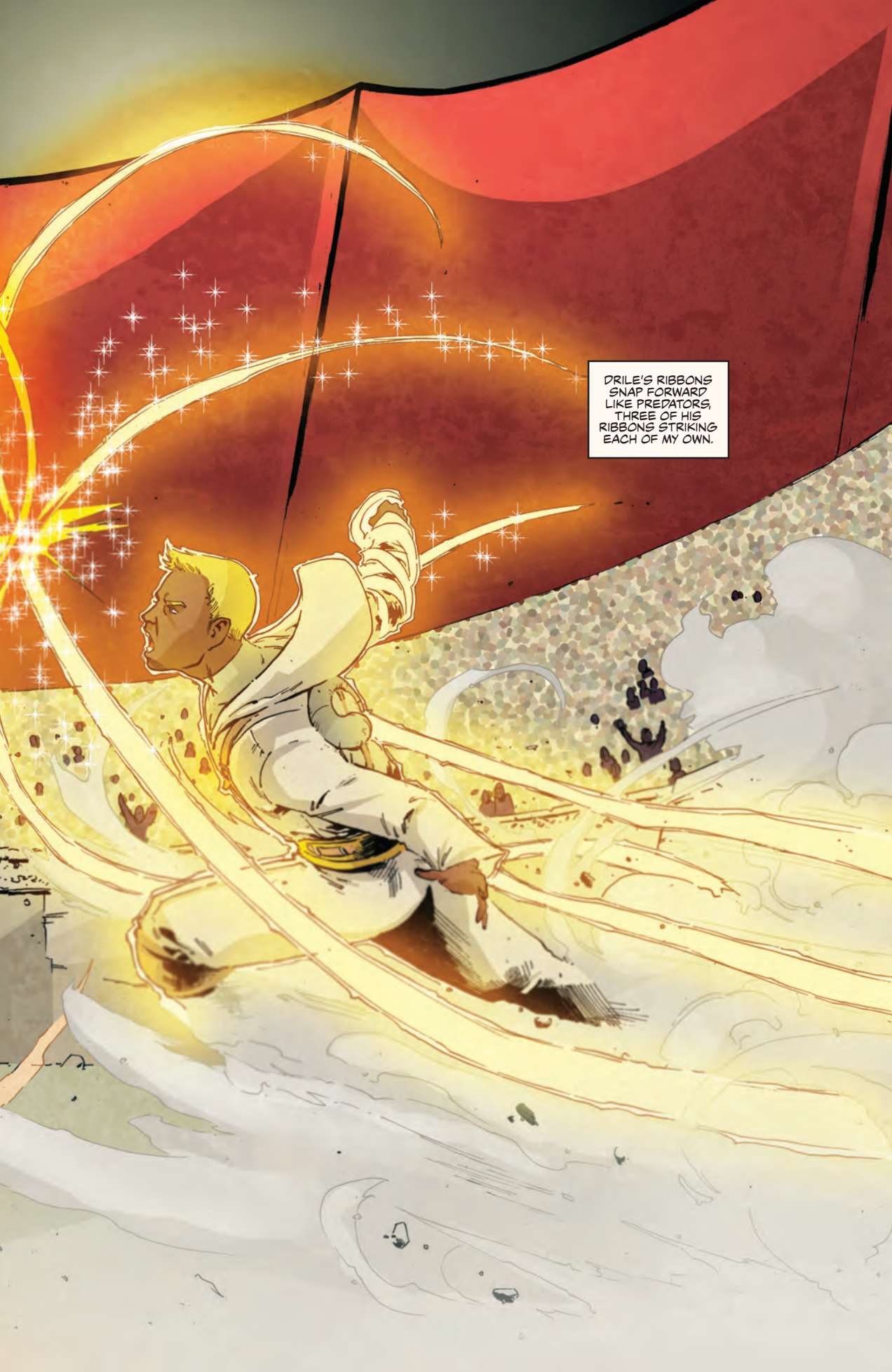

THE ARENA CRACKLES WITH EXCITEMENT. INTENSITY. BUT ALL I FEEL IS DREAD.
THIS IS A HUGE CROWD, KENTON, THE LARGEST I'VE SEEN ON DAYSIDE.
IT'S AN UNPRECEDENTED EVENT, KHRISS. WE SAND MASTERS HAVEN'T FOUGHT ONE ANOTHER FOR CENTURIES.
THE KELZIN ARE HERE ALONG WITH THE TAISHIN, AS MUCH TO BE SEEN AS TO WATCH. SEE THERE--?

"YOU'VE MET THE NEWLY-INSTALLED LORD ADMIRAL LOKKALL."
"AND A VERY SMUG LOOKING DELIUS BESIDE HIM, YOU'LL NOTICE!"
"AND OUR FRIEND, THE ALWAYS-PLEASANT LORD VEY."
"I'VE ALSO MET THE LORD FARMER BRIEFLY, UNDER LESS-THAN-IDEAL CIRCUMSTANCES, KENTON."
"YES, I'M SORRY ABOUT THAT."
"THEN, NEXT TO HIM IS THE LORD ARTISAN..."
"...FOLLOWED BY HIGH JUDGE HEELIS, THE CHAIR OF THE COUNCIL."
"WE'VE MET."
"BESIDE HER, THE LADY MASON, WHO REPRESENTS LOSSAND'S BUILDERS."
"AND AARIK."
"WHO IS BARELY RECOGNIZABLE, KENTON. WHAT'S HAPPENED TO HIM? HIS CLOTHES--?"
"HE'S WEARING THE UNIFORM OF THE LORD GENERAL, CONFIRMING WHAT I THOUGHT--THAT THE AARIK I KNEW IS GONE.
"HE'S ASSUMED THAT POSITION TO SUPPORT ME, SO IT'S IRONIC THAT HIS FIRST OFFICIAL ENGAGEMENT IS HERE..."
"...TO WATCH ME DIE."
"KENTON, YOU CAN'T MEAN THAT. THAT...SHELLA! IS THAT DRILE?"
YES. I HAVE TO GO.
KENTON... THERE'S AN ELISIAN MARINERS' SAYING: "THE BRIGHTEST STARS AREN'T ALWAYS THE MOST USEFUL."
UH...THANK YOU. I'LL KEEP THAT IN MIND. GOODBYE, KHRISS. IT'S BEEN AN HONOR KNOWING YOU.

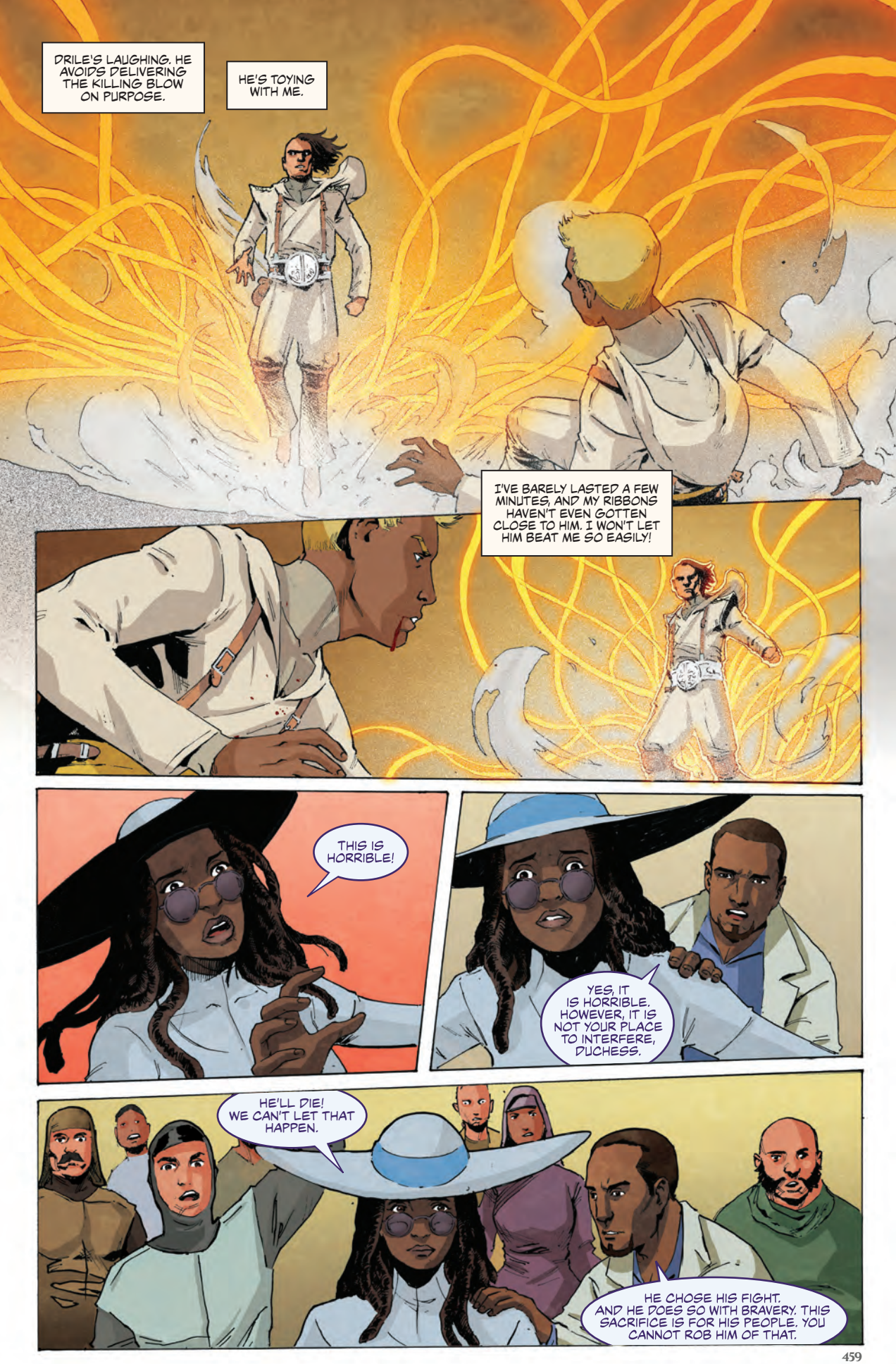
"MY LORDS AND LADIES TAISHIN, PEOPLE OF LOSSAND..."
"...YOU HAVE COME TO WITNESS A VERY SERIOUS EVENT."
TWO SAND MASTERS, UNABLE TO RESOLVE THEIR DIFFERENCES...
...HAVE COME TO FACE ONE ANOTHER IN SINGLE COMBAT.
"MAY WE BE WITNESSES TO THE VICTOR..."
"...AND MOURNERS FOR THE LOSER."

"AND MAY WE AVOID THIS DAY IN THE FUTURE. SAND MASTERS, YOU MAY BEGIN."
I SEE YOU'VE DISCOVERED A FEW THINGS. IS THAT FIVE RIBBONS, I COUNT? VERY IMPRESSIVE.
YES, I'VE BEEN IMPROVING IN A NUMBER OF WAYS.
SHHHHHH
DRILE'S TWENTY-FIVE RIBBONS SHRED THROUGH MY FIVE, WHICH DROP TO THE GROUND IN PILES OF BLACK SAND.
TSSSSHHH
A BREATH LATER I BARELY DODGE OUT OF THE WAY.
NNNGH!

I EXPAND MY MIND, COMMANDING MY RIBBONS FORWARD IN AN ALL-OUT ATTACK.


DRILE'S RIBBONS SNAP FORWARD LIKE PREDATORS, THREE OF HIS RIBBONS STRIKING EACH OF MY OWN.

MY EYES ALREADY BEGIN TO BURN. IS IT BECAUSE I'M NOT USED TO CONTROLLING FIVE RIBBONS? I'M DRYING OUT TOO FAST.
TSSSSHHH
YEARGH!
WHUMP
THIS IS HOPELESS.
>GASP<
HE'S DOWN!
IS HE DEAD?


DRILE'S LAUGHING. HE AVOIDS DELIVERING THE KILLING BLOW ON PURPOSE.
HE'S TOYING WITH ME.
I'VE BARELY LASTED A FEW MINUTES, AND MY RIBBONS HAVEN'T EVEN GOTTEN CLOSE TO HIM. I WON'T LET HIM BEAT ME SO EASILY!
THIS IS HORRIBLE!
YES, IT IS HORRIBLE. HOWEVER, IT IS NOT YOUR PLACE TO INTERFERE, DUCHESS.
HE'LL DIE! WE CAN'T LET THAT HAPPEN.
HE CHOSE HIS FIGHT. AND HE DOES SO WITH BRAVERY. THIS SACRIFICE IS FOR HIS PEOPLE. YOU CANNOT ROB HIM OF THAT.

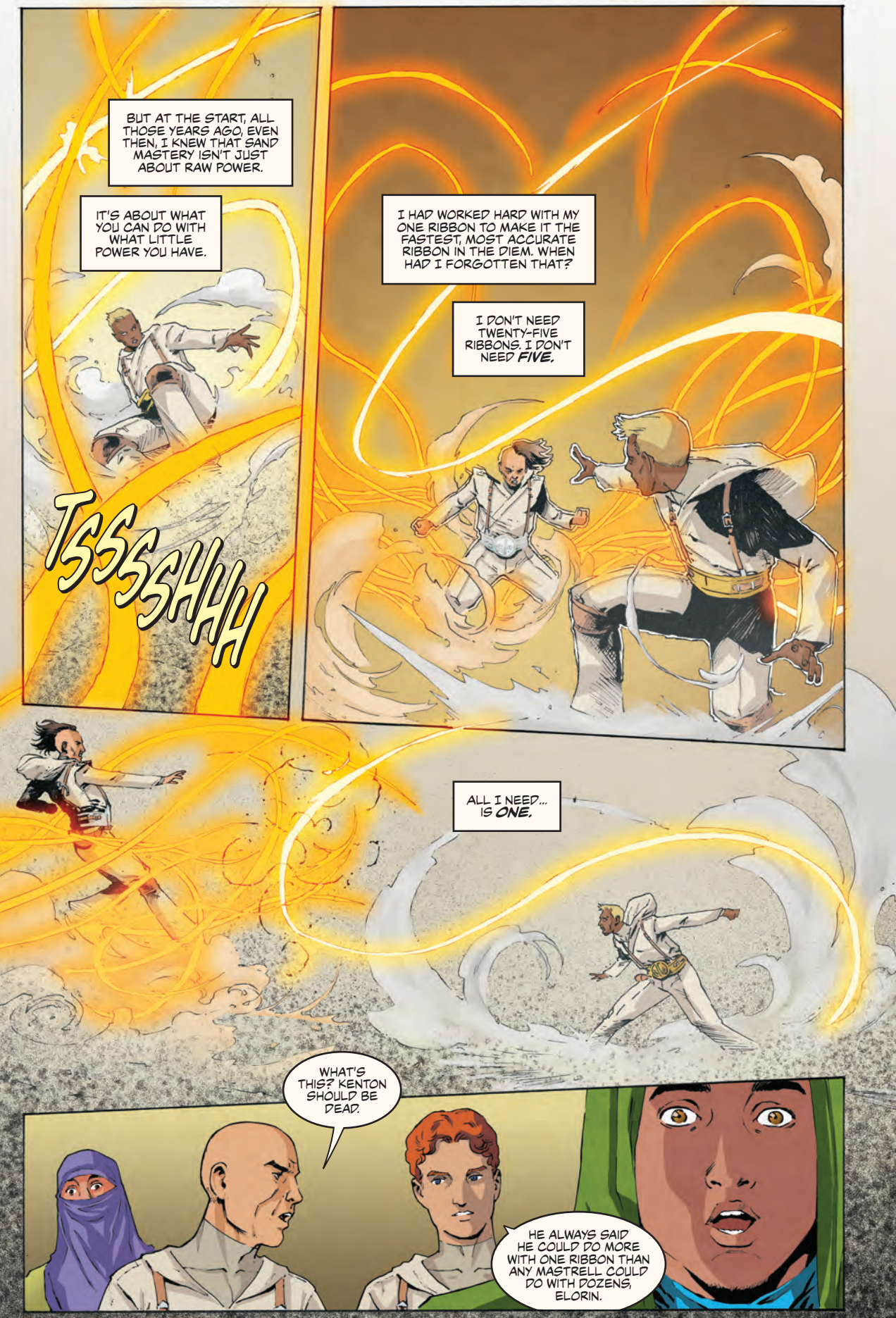
MY EYES ARE BURNING. I'M DRYING OUT, MY WHOLE BODY EXPENDING MOISTURE WITH EVERY ATTACK.
THIS IS HOW SAND MASTERS FIGHT. IN PAIN. DEHYDRATING SECOND BY SECOND. THE AGONY OF SAND MANIPULATION.
BUT THIS CEASED BEING A FIGHT MINUTES AGO.

NOW--
--IT'S AN EXECUTION.
IT'S IRONIC, KENTON. WE'VE BEEN FIGHTING FOR THE SAME THING THESE LAST FEW WEEKS.
CHANGE.

BUT YOU'RE TOO DAMN MUCH LIKE YOUR FATHER, TOO PROUD TO LISTEN.
JUST STOP IT.
STOP TALKING--
--AND FINISH ME.

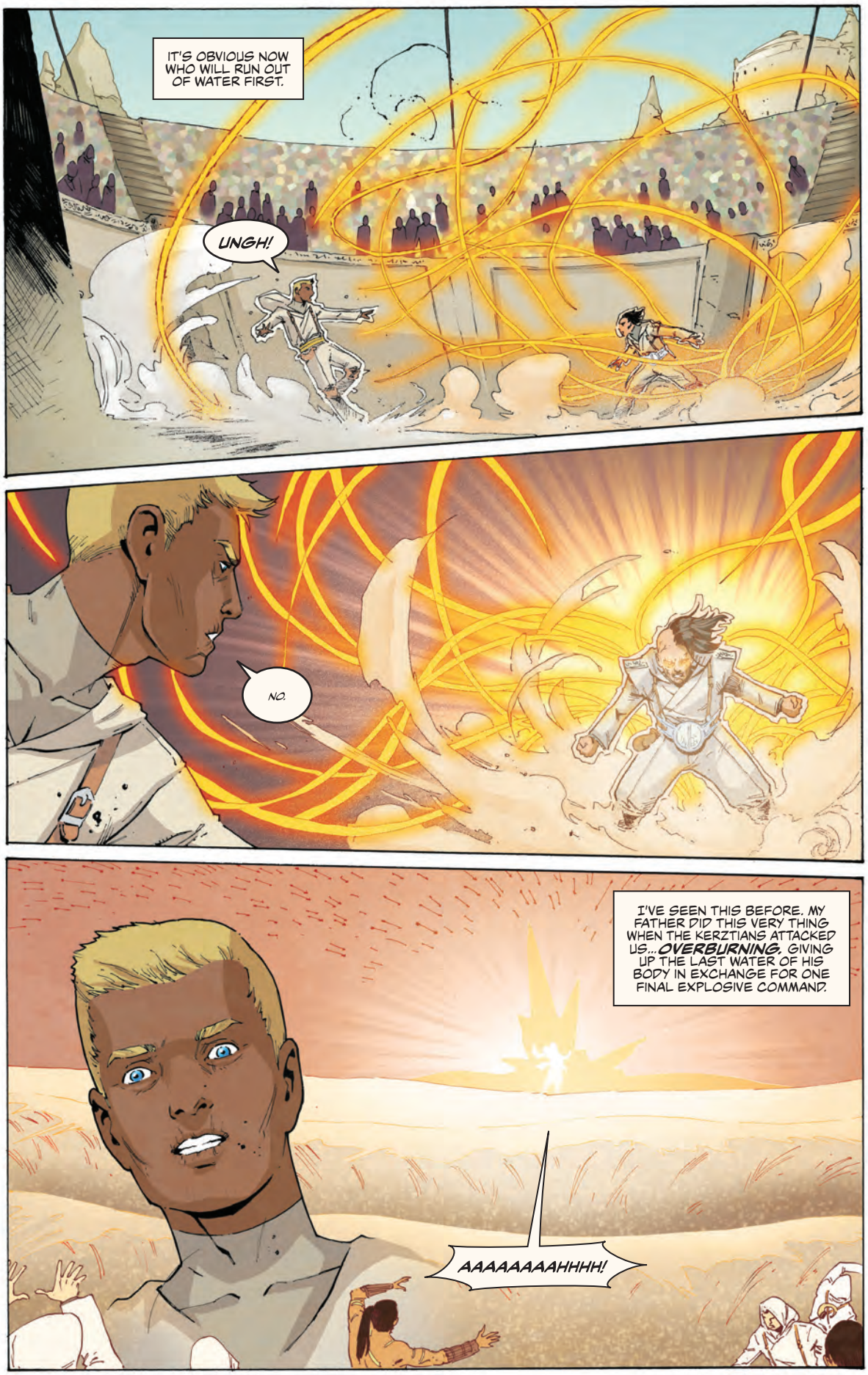
CHAPTER 18
TIME, LIKE SAND...

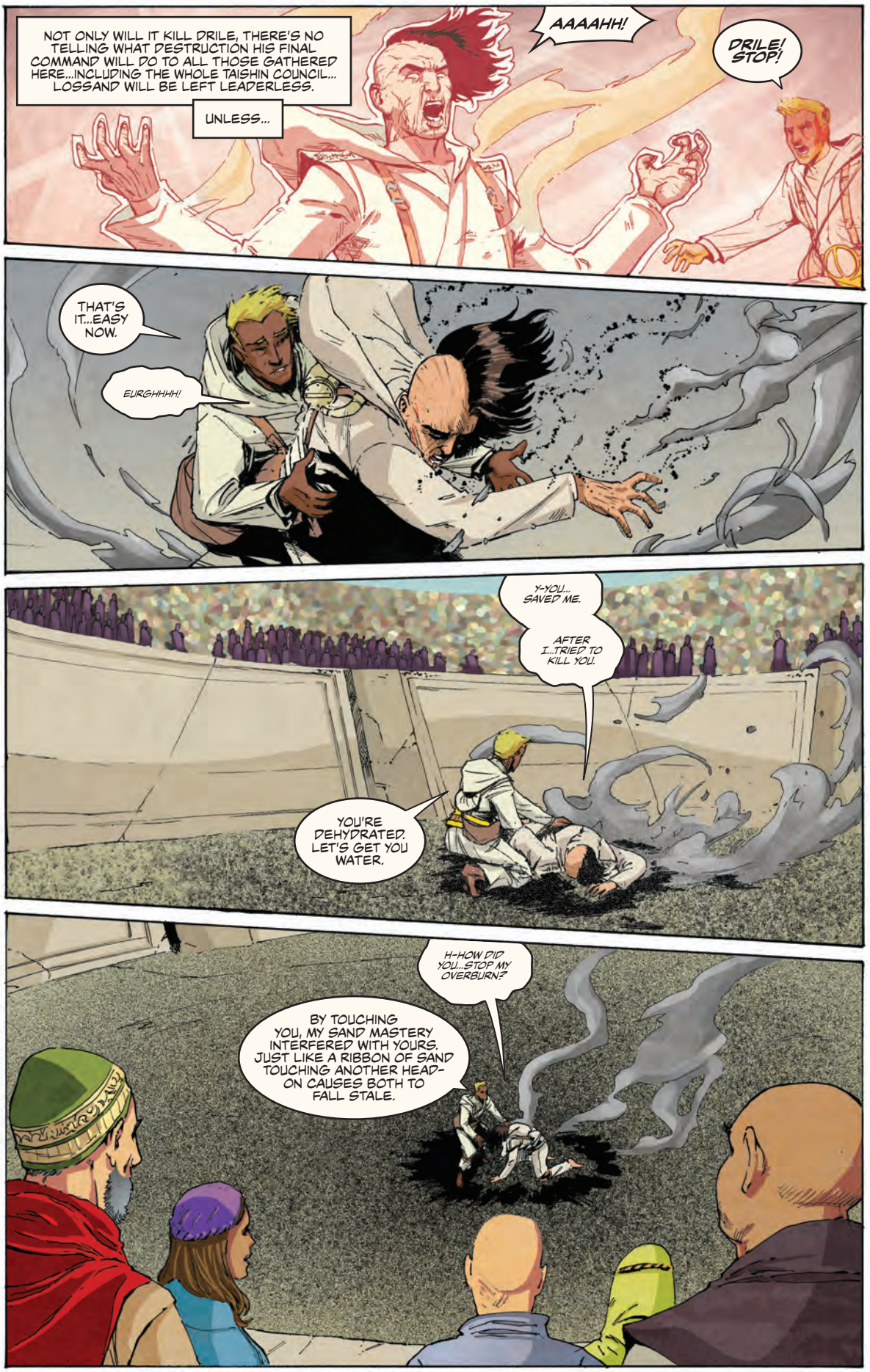
WHAT'S THIS? A DREAM?
YOU WERE RIGHT, FATHER. I NEVER BELONGED IN THE DIEM.
YOU ARE A SAND MASTER! AS GOOD AS ANY OTHER.
YOU'RE WRONG. DRILE JUST BEAT ME BECAUSE HE'S MORE POWERFUL THAN ME.
NO. DRILE DIDN'T BEAT YOU BECAUSE HE'S BETTER THAN YOU OR BECAUSE HE HAS MORE RIBBONS.
HE BEAT YOU BECAUSE YOU TRIED TO BECOME SOMETHING YOU'RE NOT.
MY FATHER PRAXTON NEVER TOLD ME THAT. THIS ISN'T A MEMORY. THIS IS SOMETHING ELSE. WORDS WELLING UP FROM DEEP INSIDE ME...
...SHOWING ME THE OPTIMISTIC BOY I HAD ONCE BEEN. THAT BOY HAD BELIEVED IN SOMETHING...
...THAT EVEN A SAND MASTER WITH ONE RIBBON COULD BE AS GOOD AS A MASTRELL WITH MANY.


BUT AT THE START, ALL THOSE YEARS AGO, EVEN THEN, I KNEW THAT SAND MASTERY ISN'T JUST ABOUT RAW POWER.
IT'S ABOUT WHAT YOU CAN DO WITH WHAT LITTLE POWER YOU HAVE.
TSSSSHHH
I HAD WORKED HARD WITH MY ONE RIBBON TO MAKE IT THE FASTEST, MOST ACCURATE RIBBON IN THE DIEM. WHEN HAD I FORGOTTEN THAT?
I DON'T NEED TWENTY-FIVE RIBBONS. I DON'T NEED FIVE.
ALL I NEED... IS ONE.
WHAT'S THIS? KENTON SHOULD BE DEAD.
HE ALWAYS SAID HE COULD DO MORE WITH ONE RIBBON THAN ANY MASTRELL COULD DO WITH DOZENS, ELORIN.

I COMMAND THE SAND, AND IT CALLS BACK TO ME. ONE SINGULAR, BEAUTIFUL NOTE.
UNGH!
IMPOSSIBLE.
I WILL NOT BE BEATEN BY YOUR ONE RIBBON!

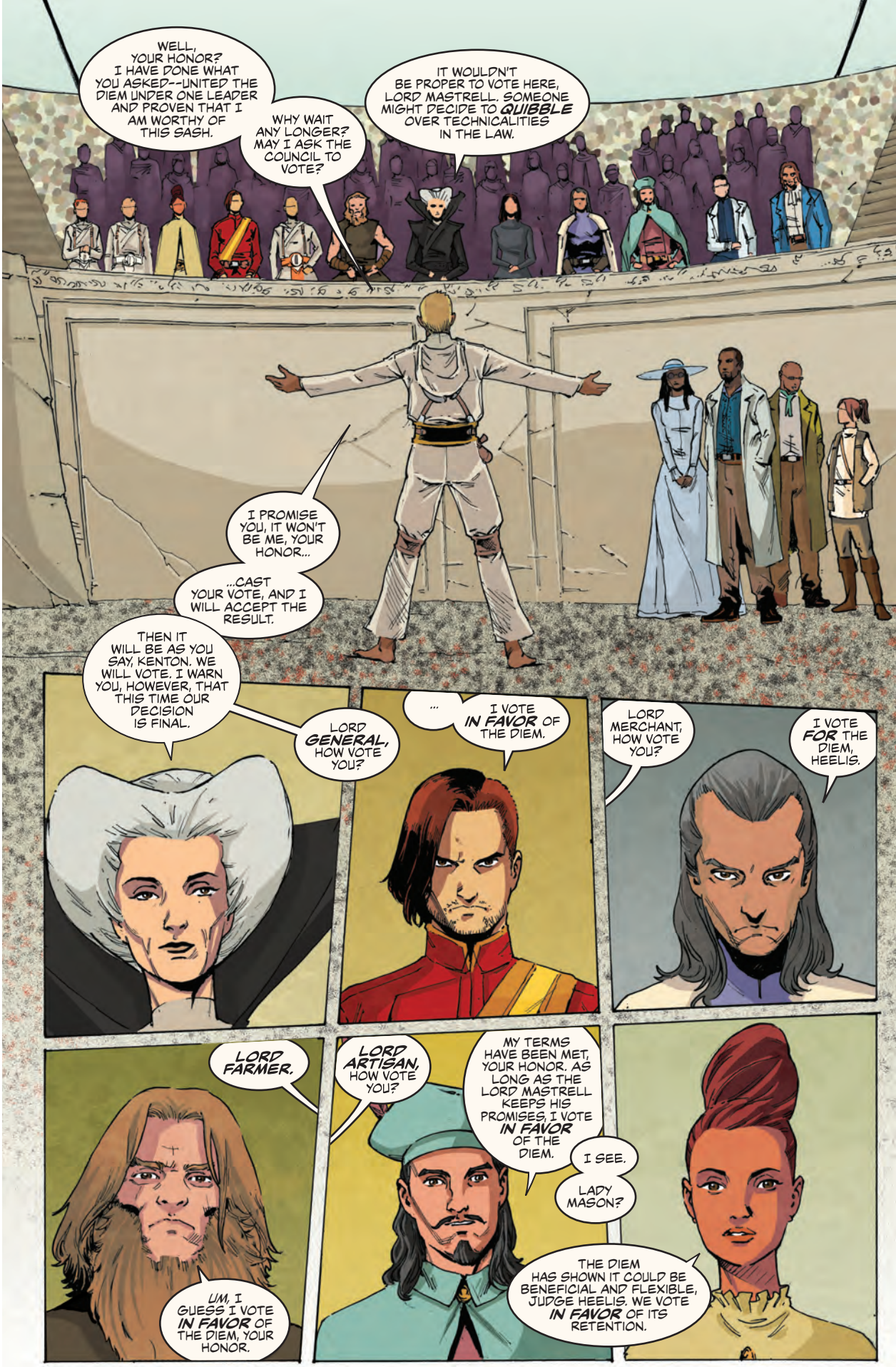
OH DRILE. NOW THAT I UNDERSTAND, THIS IS JUST ZO'KEN TO ME.
ONE RIBBON TAKES A MERE TRICKLE OF WATER. I CAN DEFEND AGAINST YOUR RIBBONS ALMOST INDEFINITELY.

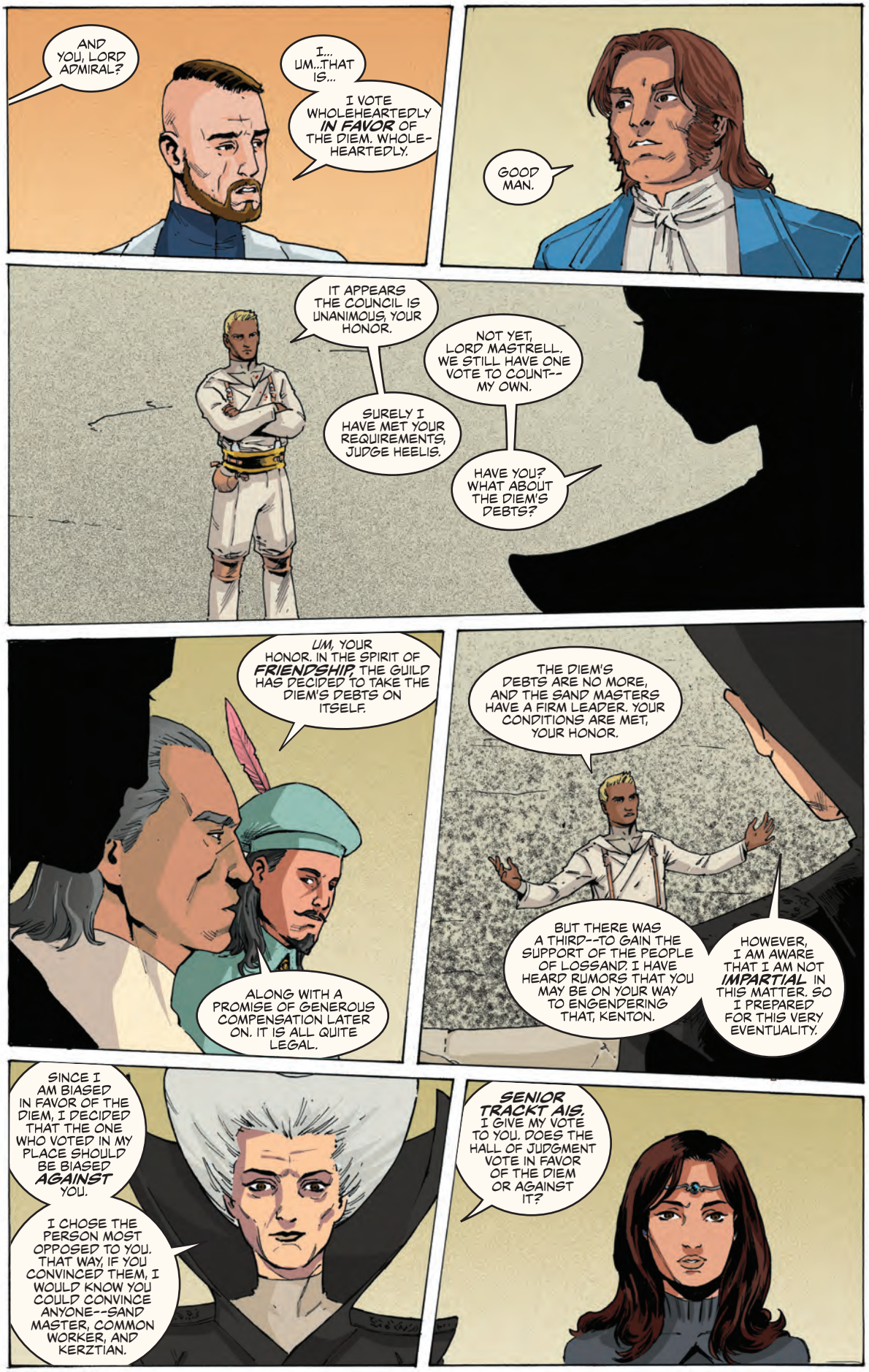

IT'S OBVIOUS NOW WHO WILL RUN OUT OF WATER FIRST.
UNGH!
NO.
I'VE SEEN THIS BEFORE. MY FATHER DID THIS VERY THING WHEN THE KERZTIANS ATTACKED US... OVERBURNING, GIVING UP THE LAST WATER OF HIS BODY IN EXCHANGE FOR ONE FINAL EXPLOSIVE COMMAND.
AAAAAAAAHHHH!


NOT ONLY WILL IT KILL DRILE, THERE'S NO TELLING WHAT DESTRUCTION HIS FINAL COMMAND WILL DO TO ALL THOSE GATHERED HERE...INCLUDING THE WHOLE TAISHIN COUNCIL... LOSSAND WILL BE LEFT LEADERLESS.
UNLESS...
AAAAHH!
DRILE! STOP!
THAT'S IT...EASY NOW.
EURGHHHH!
Y-YOU... SAVED ME.
AFTER I...TRIED TO KILL YOU.
YOU'RE DEHYDRATED. LET'S GET YOU WATER.
H-HOW DID YOU...STOP MY OVERBURN?
BY TOUCHING YOU, MY SAND MASTERY INTERFERED WITH YOURS. JUST LIKE A RIBBON OF SAND TOUCHING ANOTHER HEAD-ON CAUSES BOTH TO FALL STALE.

YOU YOURSELF SAID WE HAVE THE SAME GOALS. WELL, I'M READY TO LISTEN.
WHAT DO YOU SAY? LET'S WORK THIS OUT, YOUR FOLLOWERS AND MINE...
...TOGETHER.

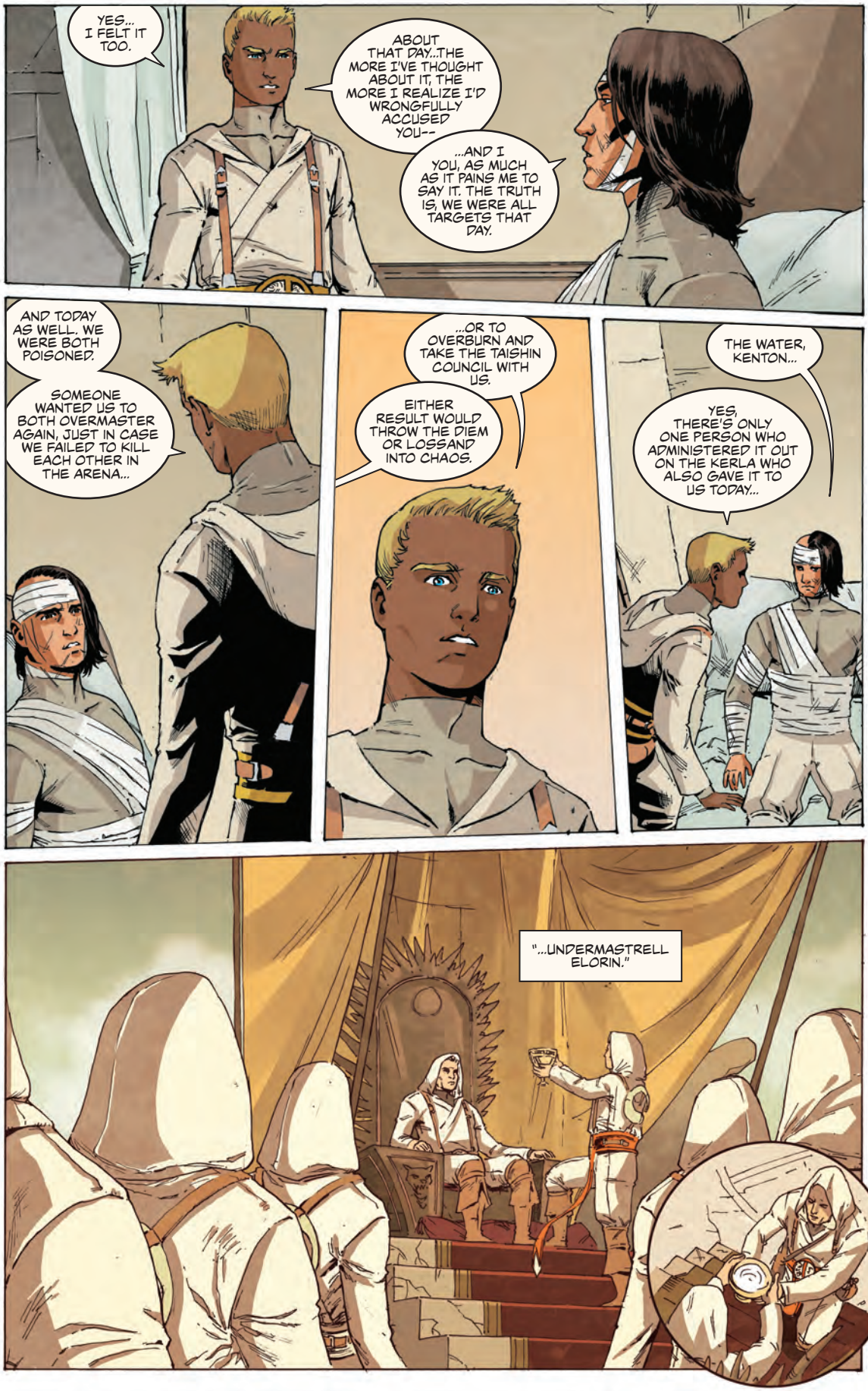
KENTON, YOU WON! YOU WON!
SURPRISING, ISN'T IT? BUT HERE COMES DRILE. HOW IS HE?
INCREDIBLY DEHYDRATED, LORD MASTRELL.
OF COURSE HE IS. HE CAME THIS CLOSE TO OVER-BURNING...
BUT IT HAPPENED MUCH FASTER THAN USUAL...
YOU'RE RIGHT. WE'VE SEEN THIS BEFORE. LET ME KNOW WHEN HE WAKES UP AGAIN.
YOU LOOK WORRIED. DON'T BE. YOU WON.
NOT YET.
THERE'S STILL ONE BATTLE LEFT-- THE TAISHIN VOTE.


WELL, YOUR HONOR? I HAVE DONE WHAT YOU ASKED--UNITED THE DIEM UNDER ONE LEADER AND PROVEN THAT I AM WORTHY OF THIS SASH.
WHY WAIT ANY LONGER? MAY I ASK THE COUNCIL TO VOTE?
IT WOULDN'T BE PROPER TO VOTE HERE, LORD MASTRELL. SOMEONE MIGHT DECIDE TO QUIBBLE OVER TECHNICALITIES IN THE LAW.
I PROMISE YOU, IT WON'T BE ME, YOUR HONOR...
...CAST YOUR VOTE, AND I WILL ACCEPT THE RESULT.
THEN IT WILL BE AS YOU SAY, KENTON. WE WILL VOTE. I WARN YOU, HOWEVER, THAT THIS TIME OUR DECISION IS FINAL.
LORD GENERAL, HOW VOTE YOU?
...
I VOTE IN FAVOR OF THE DIEM.
LORD MERCHANT, HOW VOTE YOU?
I VOTE FOR THE DIEM, HEELIS.
LORD FARMER,
UM, I GUESS I VOTE IN FAVOR OF THE DIEM, YOUR HONOR.
LORD ARTISAN, HOW VOTE YOU?
MY TERMS HAVE BEEN MET, YOUR HONOR. AS LONG AS THE LORD MASTRELL KEEPS HIS PROMISES, I VOTE IN FAVOR OF THE DIEM.
I SEE.
LADY MASON?
THE DIEM HAS SHOWN IT COULD BE BENEFICIAL AND FLEXIBLE, JUDGE HEELIS. WE VOTE IN FAVOR OF ITS RETENTION.


AND YOU, LORD ADMIRAL?
I... UM...THAT IS...
I VOTE WHOLEHEARTEDLY ***IN FAVOR*** OF THE DIEM. WHOLE-HEARTEDLY.
GOOD MAN.
IT APPEARS THE COUNCIL IS UNANIMOUS, YOUR HONOR.
SURELY I HAVE MET YOUR REQUIREMENTS, JUDGE HEELIS.
NOT YET, LORD MASTRELL. WE STILL HAVE ONE VOTE TO COUNT-- MY OWN.
HAVE YOU? WHAT ABOUT THE DIEM'S DEBTS?
UM, YOUR HONOR. IN THE SPIRIT OF ***FRIENDSHIP***, THE GUILD HAS DECIDED TO TAKE THE DIEM'S DEBTS ON ITSELF.
ALONG WITH A PROMISE OF GENEROUS COMPENSATION LATER ON. IT IS ALL QUITE LEGAL.
THE DIEM'S DEBTS ARE NO MORE, AND THE SAND MASTERS HAVE A FIRM LEADER. YOUR CONDITIONS ARE MET, YOUR HONOR.
BUT THERE WAS A THIRD--TO GAIN THE SUPPORT OF THE PEOPLE OF LOSSAND. I HAVE HEARD RUMORS THAT YOU MAY BE ON YOUR WAY TO ENGENDERING THAT, KENTON.
HOWEVER, I AM AWARE THAT I AM NOT ***IMPARTIAL*** IN THIS MATTER. SO I PREPARED FOR THIS VERY EVENTUALITY.
SINCE I AM BIASED IN FAVOR OF THE DIEM, I DECIDED THAT THE ONE WHO VOTED IN MY PLACE SHOULD BE BIASED ***AGAINST*** YOU.
I CHOSE THE PERSON MOST OPPOSED TO YOU. THAT WAY, IF YOU CONVINCED THEM, I WOULD KNOW YOU COULD CONVINCE ANYONE--SAND MASTER, COMMON WORKER, AND KERZTIAN.
SENIOR TRACKT AIS. I GIVE MY VOTE TO YOU. DOES THE HALL OF JUDGMENT VOTE IN FAVOR OF THE DIEM OR AGAINST IT?

KENTON IS THE MAN WHOSE VERY EXISTENCE DEFILES THE SAND LORD. WHOSE BLASPHEMIES ARE GREATER THAN ANY OTHER ON THE SANDS.
I WOULD RATHER DIE THAN LIVE WITH THE SHAME OF BEING RESCUED BY YOUR VILE POWERS.
AND THIS IS THE MAN...
...WHO SAVED MY FAMILY'S LIVES.
WE'RE FINE. JUST... BRUISES, BUT WE'RE ALIVE.
MOM?
MOMMY'S HERE, IT'S OKAY NOW. IT'S OKAY.
AFTER ALL THIS TIME, MY PEOPLE HAVE A CHANCE TO DESTROY THE DIEM.
IN THE END, I HAVE TO REMAIN TRUE TO THE SAND LORD...
...DON'T I?
I ONCE OBSERVED THAT YOU WOULD TRY TO BEFRIEND ME, LORD MASTRELL, TO CURRY MY FAVOR, THAT PERHAPS YOU WOULD EVEN SAVE MY LIFE--
--AND THAT IT STILL WOULD NOT BLIND ME TO YOUR EVIL.
BUT YOU SAVED SOMETHING MORE IMPORTANT THAN THAT, AND DID SO RESPECTING MY TERMS. IT HURTS BUT...
...I VOTE IN FAVOR OF THE DIEM.
IT APPEARS I HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO REINSTATE THE DIEM. I RATIFY YOU AS LORD MASTRELL, KENTON.
CONGRATULATIONS.
OH, KENTON... N'TEESE TOLD US! WE DID IT!
WE SAVED THE DIEM!
YESTERDAY I BETRAYED MY FAMILY. TODAY I HAVE BETRAYED MY GOD.
WHAT IS LEFT FOR ME NOW?

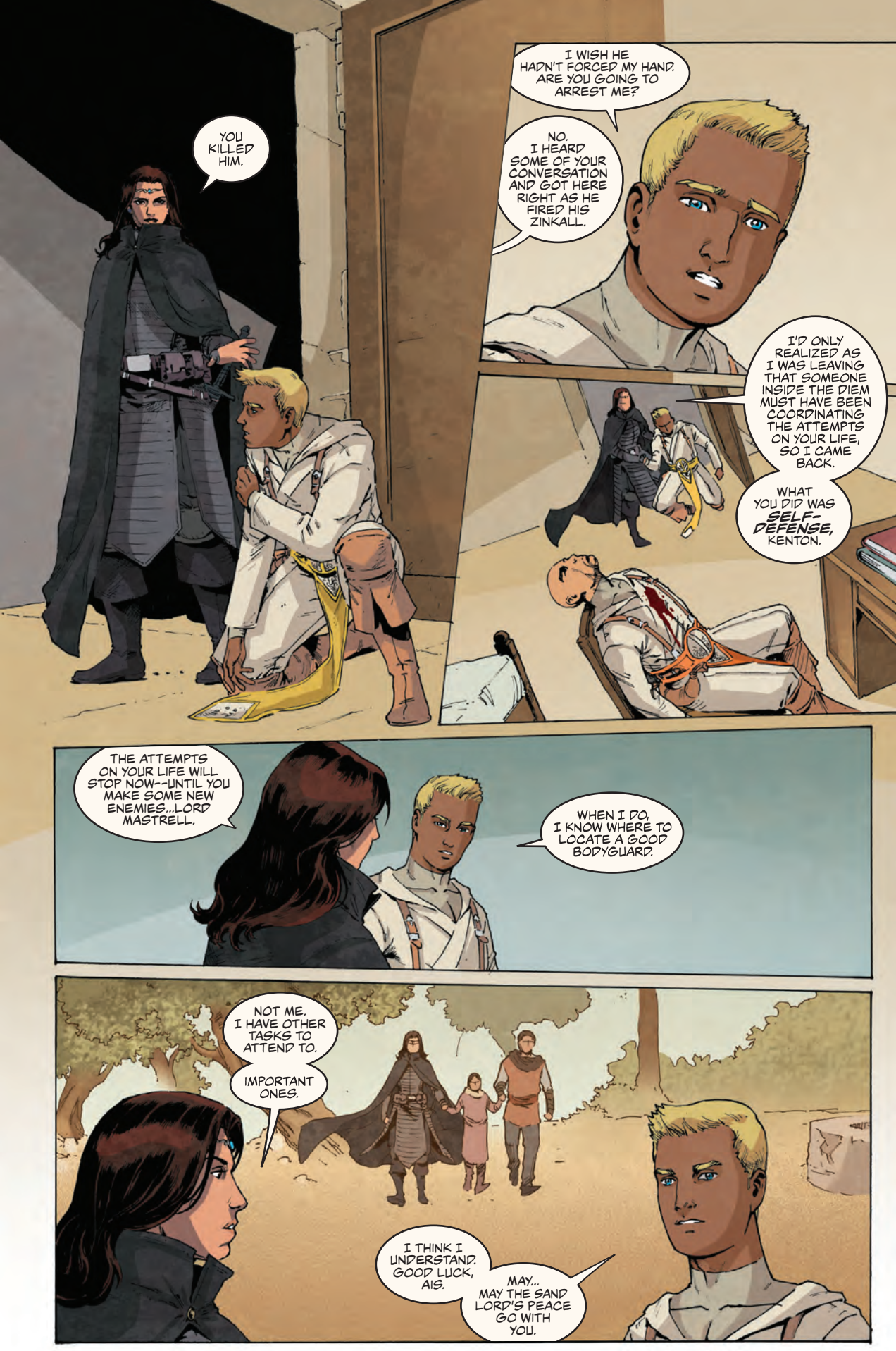
LORD MASTRELL? I'VE JUST BEEN INFORMED THAT DRILE HAS ASKED TO SPEAK TO YOU.
HE'S AWAKE THEN? THANK GOOD-NESS.
DRILE LOOKS TERRIBLE. IS THIS REALLY HOW WE SHOULD BE USING SAND MASTERY?
DRILE? HOW ARE YOU FEELING?
I JUST HEARD THE NEWS, KENTON, AND I'M GLAD THE DIEM WILL CONTINUE...EVEN IF IT HAS TO BE YOU LEADING IT.
YOU HAD THE RIGHT IDEA, DRILE, ABOUT CHARGING FOR OUR SERVICES. IT MAKES US ACCOUNTABLE. I WANT TO USE THAT WHEN WE GO FORWARD.
YOU, WHAT? YOU LIKE MY IDEA? I COULD HELP. WHEN I'M... STRONGER.
THOUGH WE'LL NEED TO BE JUDICIOUS IN HOW WE USE SAND MASTERY IN THE EMPLOY OF OTHERS.
AFTER TODAY, I CAN SEE WHY.
THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE. IN THE ARENA, I DEHYDRATED TOO QUICKLY, LIKE HOW OUR FRIENDS DRIED UP WHEN THE KERZTIANS ATTACKED US OUT ON THE KERLA.


YES... I FELT IT TOO.
ABOUT THAT DAY...THE MORE I'VE THOUGHT ABOUT IT, THE MORE I REALIZE I'D WRONGFULLY ACCUSED YOU--
...AND I YOU, AS MUCH AS IT PAINS ME TO SAY IT. THE TRUTH IS, WE WERE ALL TARGETS THAT DAY.
AND TODAY AS WELL. WE WERE BOTH POISONED.
SOMEONE WANTED US TO BOTH OVERMASTER AGAIN, JUST IN CASE WE FAILED TO KILL EACH OTHER IN THE ARENA...
...OR TO OVERBURN AND TAKE THE TAISHIN COUNCIL WITH US.
EITHER RESULT WOULD THROW THE DIEM OR LOSSAND INTO CHAOS.
THE WATER, KENTON...
YES, THERE'S ONLY ONE PERSON WHO ADMINISTERED IT OUT ON THE KERLA WHO ALSO GAVE IT TO US TODAY...
"...UNDERMASTRELL ELORIN."

HELLO, ELORIN.
HELLO, LORD MASTRELL.
I WANT TO KNOW HOW YOU SURVIVED THE ATTACK ALMOST A MONTH AGO.
BECAUSE THE KERZTIANS DIDN'T *WANT* TO KILL ME.
YOUR DUTY AS LORD MASTRELL'S ASSISTANT WAS TO PREPARE THE WATER FOR THE CEREMONY. YOU POISONED IT, DIDN'T YOU?
TO WEAKEN EVERYONE BEFORE THE ATTACK.
NOT THE WATER, THE *BOWL*. THAT WAY EVERY TIME NEW WATER WAS POURED IN, IT RECEIVED THE TAINT AS WELL.
IT'S CALLED *KADO*, A RARE KERZTIAN SPICE THAT ACCELERATES DEHYDRATION AND MAKES PEOPLE ACT MORE RASHLY, MORE LIKELY TO DO THINGS LIKE *OVERBURN*.
AND ALL THIS TIME, YOU'VE BEEN WATCHING ME AND DIRECTING THE ASSASSINS MEANT TO KILL ME.
WHY, ELORIN? WHY BETRAY THE DIEM?

"THE SAND LORD APPEARED TO ME. WHEN YOUR GOD COMMANDS, LORD MASTRELL, YOU LISTEN."
YOUR... GOD? SANDS! WHEN DID YOU CONVERT?
SIX MONTHS AGO--WHEN I RESIGNED MY POST AS HEAD OF ACOLENTS.
THE KER'REEN FAITH IS TRUE, KENTON.
I WOULD HAVE QUIT THE DIEM, BUT THE A'KAR COMMANDED ME TO CONTINUE HERE.
BUT I COULDN'T USE MY POWERS WHEN I KNEW THEY WERE EVIL. SO I JUST STOPPED. I LET EVERYONE ASSUME I'D OVERMASTERED AND BURNED MYSELF OUT.
OH, ELORIN. YOU'VE MADE THINGS VERY DIFFICULT FOR ME.
WELL, THEN, I SHALL MAKE THEM EASIER FOR YOU, LORD MASTRELL. YOU SEE, THE REQUIRED TIME HAS PASSED...
...AND I AM ALLOWED TO TRY AGAIN TODAY.
THIS ARROW IS COATED WITH TERKEN OIL--YOUR SAND WON'T BE ABLE TO STOP IT.
DON'T DO THIS, ELORIN.
KILL ME. I AM READY TO GO.

FFFT
UNGH!
OH... ELORIN. I'M SO SORRY.


YOU KILLED HIM.
I WISH HE HADN'T FORCED MY HAND. ARE YOU GOING TO ARREST ME?
NO. I HEARD SOME OF YOUR CONVERSATION AND GOT HERE RIGHT AS HE FIRED HIS ZINKALL.
I'D ONLY REALIZED AS I WAS LEAVING THAT SOMEONE INSIDE THE DIEM MUST HAVE BEEN COORDINATING THE ATTEMPTS ON YOUR LIFE, SO I CAME BACK.
WHAT YOU DID WAS SELF-DEFENSE, KENTON.
THE ATTEMPTS ON YOUR LIFE WILL STOP NOW--UNTIL YOU MAKE SOME NEW ENEMIES...LORD MASTRELL.
WHEN I DO, I KNOW WHERE TO LOCATE A GOOD BODYGUARD.
NOT ME. I HAVE OTHER TASKS TO ATTEND TO.
IMPORTANT ONES.
I THINK I UNDERSTAND. GOOD LUCK, AIS.
MAY... MAY THE SAND LORD'S PEACE GO WITH YOU.

Zo'Ken

Though Kenton has been reticent to share too much about sand mastery, there is one thing he has taught me. Sand mastery is not about how many ribbons one can control. It is an art where accuracy can sometimes beat brute force.

Indeed, a sand master might wield over twenty ribbons, but unless it's done with finesse and accuracy–both gained from years of arduous practice–then they're just moving large amounts of sand. This type of sand mastery doesn't last long before it exhausts the body's water supply.

If kept up for too long, an accomplished sand master under extreme duress can push themselves far beyond overmastery into what the Diem calls overburning. This comes when the sand master feeds the sand the last drops of water from their body and then gives up their lifeforce to the sand in exchange for one final explosive command.

On the other hand, one small razor-sharp ribbon is quick and focused, and only takes a trickle of water from a sand master's body.

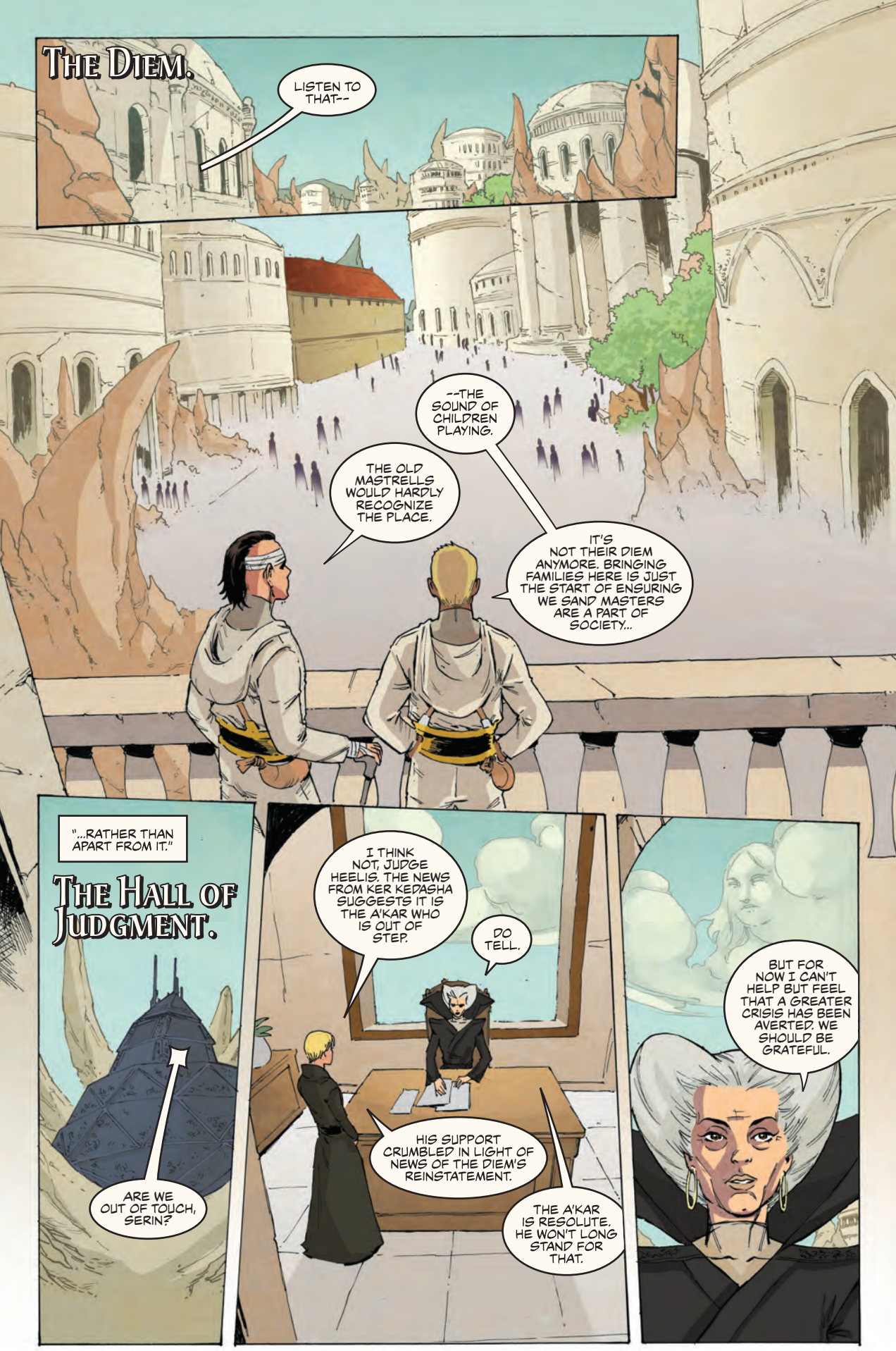
There is a time for brute force, and there's a time for finesse. A time for the largest war hammer, and a time for the most delicate of paintbrushes. The trick is knowing when to use each. True sand mastery, then, is more about deliberate action, forming a bond with the sand and communicating with it, listening to its subtleties, and guiding it forward. Similar to teaching young children, the best results come from friendly coaxing rather than shows of force.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the sand master sport of Zo'Ken. The secret, Kenton says, is to concentrate all effort and power into one swift ribbon.

TWO WEEKS LATER...
THIS IS GOODBYE, I SUPPOSE. UNLESS YOU'VE CHANGED YOUR MIND.
I'D LOVE TO, BUT YOU KNOW I HAVE RESPONSIBILITIES HERE, DUCHESS.
I'M GLAD YOU'VE FOUND A FUTURE WORTH PURSUING, KENTON. EVERY LEADER NEEDS THAT.
WHAT ABOUT YOU?

I HAVE THE BARRELS OF SAND TO TAKE BACK TO ELIS.
IF THERE'S A WAY TO CHARGE THE SAND ON DARKSIDE, I'LL FIND IT, AND WITH ANY LUCK, YOUR SAND MASTERS WILL HELP SAVE ELIS FROM THE DYNASTY.
TAKE CARE OF THEM--AND REMEMBER, THEY'RE ONLY ON LOAN.
MAYBE I'LL VISIT IN PERSON TO BRING THEM BACK. I'VE ONLY EVER KNOWN DAYSIDE. I'D LIKE TO SEE THE LAND WHERE MY MOTHER GREW UP.
I PROMISE A BETTER WELCOME THAN YOU GAVE ME, "SAND MAGE."
"I'D LIKE THAT."
IT'S FUNNY-- I NEVER WOULD HAVE EXPECTED KENTON TO CHOOSE DRILE AS DIEM SECOND AFTER EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENED BETWEEN THEM.
IT'S GOOD TO HAVE SOMEONE AT YOUR SIDE WHO DISAGREES WITH YOU, DUCHESS. IT MAKES YOU WORK HARDER TO BE SURE YOU ARE RIGHT--
--AND TO QUESTION WHEN YOU ARE WRONG.
I CAN'T HELP THINKING I SHOULD HAVE GONE WITH HER AND MADE THE CONNECTION TO MY FAMILY.
IT'S STILL HARD FOR ME TO ADMIT, BUT WE NEED YOU HERE.
I DON'T KNOW. I'M GOOD FOR A FIGHT, DRILE, BUT I KNOW MY WEAKNESSES. WHEN THERE'S NO CRISIS, I'M HARDLY WORTH THE GOLD IN MY SASH.

BE WITH ME, SAND LORD. GIVE ME YOUR STRENGTH...
...FOR ALL THAT IS TO COME.
AIS, MY LOVE. WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
I NEED ANSWERS, MELLIS. MY PRAYERS YIELD NOTHING.
I INTEND TO VISIT KER KEDASHA, THE CAPITAL ITSELF. THE A'KAR IS THE HOLIEST ONE ON THE SANDS. MAYBE HE CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS.
YOU NEED TO TAKE CARE OF MELLY, HUSBAND. I NEED TO DO THIS ON MY OWN.
NO, THAT IS WHERE YOU ARE WRONG. YOU DON'T EVER NEED TO DO ANYTHING ALONE.
IF YOU'RE GOING TO KER KEDASHA, THEN SO ARE WE.
WE'LL MANAGE, SOMEHOW.
LOSSANDINS ARE NOT TREATED WELL IN THE CAPITAL.
SAND LORD, WHATEVER ANSWERS YOU KEEP TO YOURSELF, YOU HAVE BLESSED ME WITH A FAMILY I DON'T DESERVE.


The Diem.
LISTEN TO THAT--
--THE SOUND OF CHILDREN PLAYING.
THE OLD MASTRELLS WOULD HARDLY RECOGNIZE THE PLACE.
IT'S NOT THEIR DIEM ANYMORE. BRINGING FAMILIES HERE IS JUST THE START OF ENSURING WE SAND MASTERS ARE A PART OF SOCIETY...
"...RATHER THAN APART FROM IT."
The Hall of Judgment.
ARE WE OUT OF TOUCH, SERIN?
I THINK NOT, JUDGE HEELIS. THE NEWS FROM KER KEDASHA SUGGESTS IT IS THE A'KAR WHO IS OUT OF STEP.
DO TELL.
HIS SUPPORT CRUMBLED IN LIGHT OF NEWS OF THE DIEM'S REINSTATEMENT.
THE A'KAR IS RESOLUTE. HE WON'T LONG STAND FOR THAT.
BUT FOR NOW I CAN'T HELP BUT FEEL THAT A GREATER CRISIS HAS BEEN AVERTED. WE SHOULD BE GRATEFUL.

Epilogue.
Passage to Darkside.
DOES ONE CRUSH A FLY WITH A MOUNTAIN? OR PIERCE THE DRAGON WITH A DART?
THE TIDE OF BATTLE IS OFTEN TURNED, NOT BY THE LARGE, THE MIGHTY, OR QUICK, BUT BY THOSE WHO THROUGH THEIR PATIENCE HAVE EARNED--
CLEVERNESS, INTELLIGENCE, AND WIT.
KENTON SAID TO FEEL EVERY GRAIN. REACH OUT TO THEM AND MAKE A CONNECTION.
READY TO GIVE IT A TRY, BAON?
WOULD IT MAKE A DIFFERENCE IF I SAID NO, DUCHESS?
IT'S JUST A TEST. THERE'S NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT.

FA-TOOOM
BAON?
ARE YOU...ALL RIGHT?
...
MERELY SURPRISED, DUCHESS.
MERELY SURPRISED.

Energy of the Unseen World

Kenton has made good on his part of the bargain. I am not only carrying barrels of white sand to Elis–as much of it as I can stow in the ship I've chartered–but I'm also bringing a small group of sand masters, including Drile's sister, and I pray that the results of this expedition will bear fruit against the Dynasty.

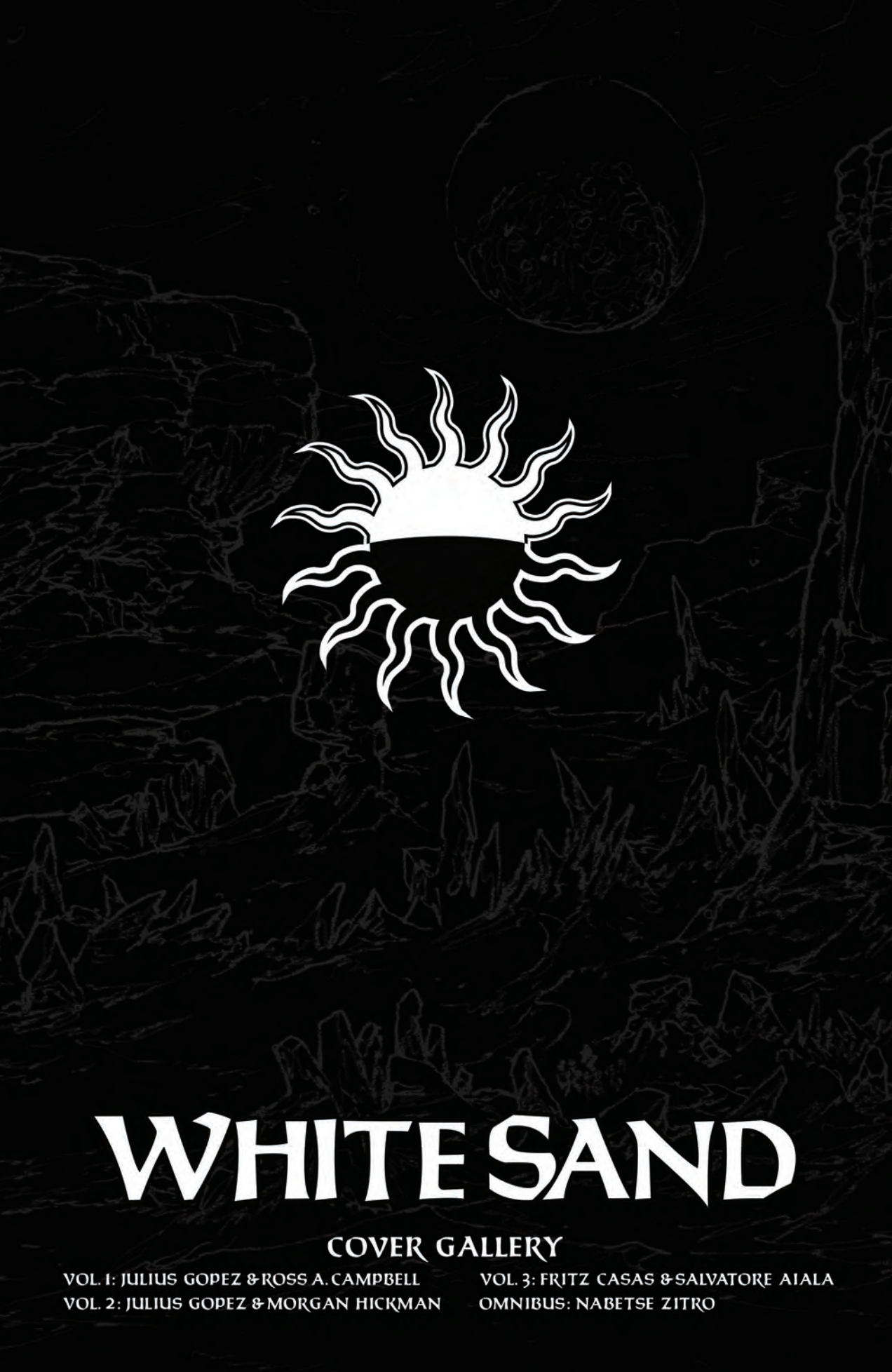
I believe the lichen that lives on the sand and makes it white in the sun can be grown, in the right conditions, on regular Darkside sand, so my cargo of so many barrels of white sand, which will have turned black by the time I return, might be overkill. So long as the ship sails in daylight, though, I will take advantage of researching and recharging the sand as much as possible, especially while I have a whole group of sand masters to work with.

The more I study sand mastery, the more I see connections to the Starcarved of Darkside. The sun invests some kind of power into the lichen on the sand, similar to how the particulate cloud sends out a weekly pulse that invests power into our starmarks, even if only some few chosen seem to be able to access that power.

I knew very quickly upon arriving on Dayside that the sun doesn't charge our starmarks, so by this logic, I don't think white sand will charge in Darkside's weekly pulse. But still, the similarities are striking. I believe sand mastery and starmarks might be different keys to accessing the same power.

Considering the connections between the two sides of our planet, I wonder if there's a corresponding curiosity on Darkside like the face I found in the pinhole image experiment. Since then, I've seen the ethereal face in heat waves, clouds, in the eddies of water on the river, and in the ripples of sand across dunes. I'm not the only one who has experienced this. It seems this phenomenon is often documented on Dayside.

These anomalies–faces in the clouds, investiture of power, the world of the Unseen–these all pull at me like nothing else I've studied. I already have dozens of experiments planned and designs for specialized instruments to aid me in my exploration, but those notes can wait for tomorrow. Until then, I plan to remain on deck as much as possible. Soon we will enter the terminal storm, and I want to spend my remaining time on Dayside in the warmth and light of a star.



WHITE SAND

COVER GALLERY

VOL. 1: JULIUS GOPEZ & ROSS A. CAMPBELL
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VOL. 3: FRITZ CASAS & SALVATORE AIALA
OMNIBUS: NABETSE ZITRO

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Jan.20,2017

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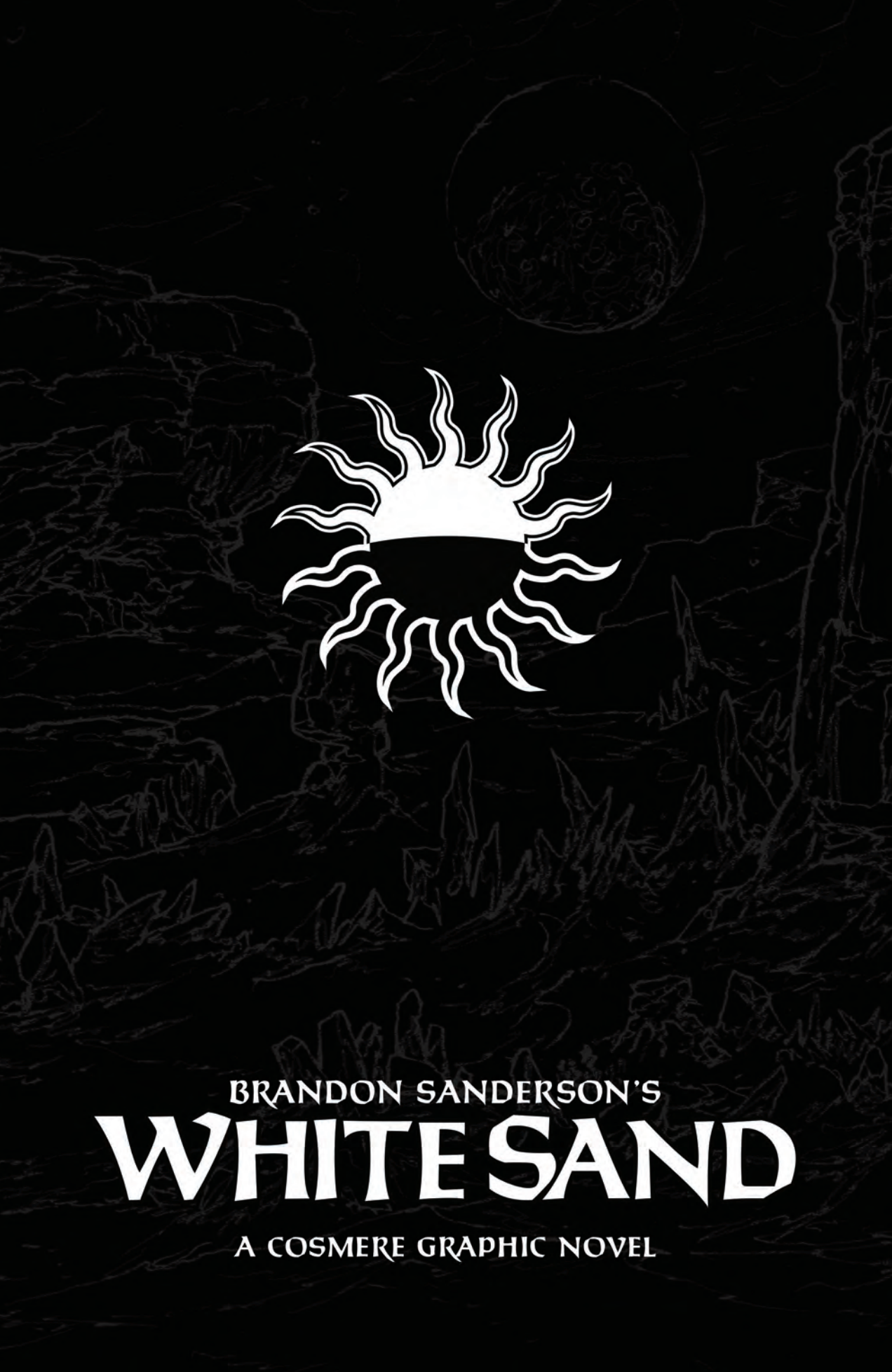

BRANDON SANDERSON'S

WHITE SAND

A COSMERE GRAPHIC NOVEL

WHITE SAND

FROM THE COSMERE UNIVERSE OF MISTBORN AND THE STORMLIGHT ARCHIVE

On the planet of Taldain, sand masters harness arcane powers to manipulate sand in spectacular ways. But when they are slaughtered in a sinister conspiracy, the weakest of their number, Kenton, believes he is the only survivor. With enemies closing in on all sides, Kenton forges an unlikely partnership with Khriss—a mysterious traveler with secrets of her own.

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