

# THE WITCHER<sup>®</sup>

MATTERS OF CONSCIENCE



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BASED ON THE PROSE OF  
**ANDRZEJ SAPKOWSKI**

*The year was 1271. The place - Vergen. The moment - portentous. King Henselt's long siege had finally ended. Life was slowly returning to normal - or as "normal" as it could be in a city where humans, dwarves and elves lived side by side and in harmony, the whole powder keg led by a maiden... And not just any maiden, mind you, but the virgin and heroine Saskia, until recently known as the Dragonslayer, before she was revealed to be a dragon herself. Her true name was Saesenthesis, a name of some beauty. As to her true form... well, none could say, for she was of the rare breed endowed with the gift of polymorphy and could thus change her appearance as easily as others change stockings.*

*As was to be expected, Vergen's residents had mixed feelings when the curtain was lifted on this secret. True, they owed much to the Virgin of Aedirn, but was it enough to swear fealty to a dragon? Many abandoned the city, and those who stayed watched Saskia's every doing the way sheep might eye a wolf clad in wool.*

*As a final dash to this already seething stew, a problem had bubbled up in the nearby bogs. A problem requiring a witcher's attention. And so Geralt of Rivia returned to Upper Aedirn shortly after his final confrontation with the assassin of kings, Letho of Gulet, for the last time. His task now was to hunt down and slay the... well, the beast in the bogs, which went by various names. To the witcher it was a chelonodrake, to the common folk it was a tortodragon, and to the dwarves it was a minge-mawed, armor-plated son of a scabby bitch. Whatever the beast's name, its tale played out thus...*

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The present day...





EIGHTEEN SECONDS FOR FIVE SKINNYMALINKY NEKKERS? WHAT'S THE WORLD COMIN' TO?



OCH, BUT YE KEN THE BLATHER - AGE MAKES EVERYTHIN' HARDER 'CEPT YOUR PRICK.



GO PLOUGH YOURSELF, YARPEN.



I SUPPOSE WHAT REALLY MATTERS IS TO BE LUCKY IN LOVE.



MUCH AS THAT'D TICKLE MY FANCY, I'D RATHER WE GOT LUCKY HUNTIN' THIS MINGE-MOUTHED DRAGOSNAPPER.



SPEAKIN' OF WHICH, JUST WHY'RE WE WADIN' THROUGH MUCK 'STEAD O' TAKIN' A HIGHER AND BREEZIER ROUTE TO OUR DESTINATION...?

TIME'S SHORT. LET'S GO.

One month prior...

INDEED, KIND READER, PERHAPS YOU TOO WERE WONDERING WHY SASKIA DID NOT FLY OFF TO KILL THE BEAST HERSELF. FOR WHAT CHANCE WOULD SOME MEASLY CHELONODRAKE HAVE AGAINST A PUREBRED GOLDEN DRAGON?



ALAS, THE MATTER WAS MORE INTRICATE. TO EXPLAIN, I'D BEST BEGIN SHORTLY AFTER THE SIEGE OF VERGEN, WHEN DWARVEN SCOUTS CHANCED UPON AN ABANDONED SILVER MINE NEAR THE CITY.



THIS WOULD HAVE BEEN THE SOURCE OF ENDLESS CELEBRATION HAD THE SOLE ROUTE TO THE MINE NOT LED THROUGH A RANK BOG. A BOG DENSE WITH THE USUAL SWAMP DENIZENS - DROWNERS, WYVERNS AND OTHER SUCH SPAWN OF THE SCUM.

ROARF GH!!!



SASKIA ADMITTED THE SILVER VEIN WOULD WONDROUSLY BOLSTER VERGEN'S FINANCES. A GROUP OF MINERS WAS THUS ASSIGNED AN ARMED ESCORT AND ORDERED TO MARCH OUT.



NONE SUSPECTED THE SWAMP COULD BE HOME TO SOMETHING MUCH LARGER THAN A DROWNER AND MUCH HUNGRIER FOR DWARVEN FLESH.

THE DWARVES, THOUGH, WERE NOT ABOUT TO LET SOME FEEBLE CHELONODRAKE PISS IN THEIR PORRIDGE.



THEY REGROUPED, EMPTIED THE ARMORY OF ALL THINGS FIT TO HARM ANOTHER (CATAPULTS EXCLUDED) AND RETURNED TO THE SWAMP.

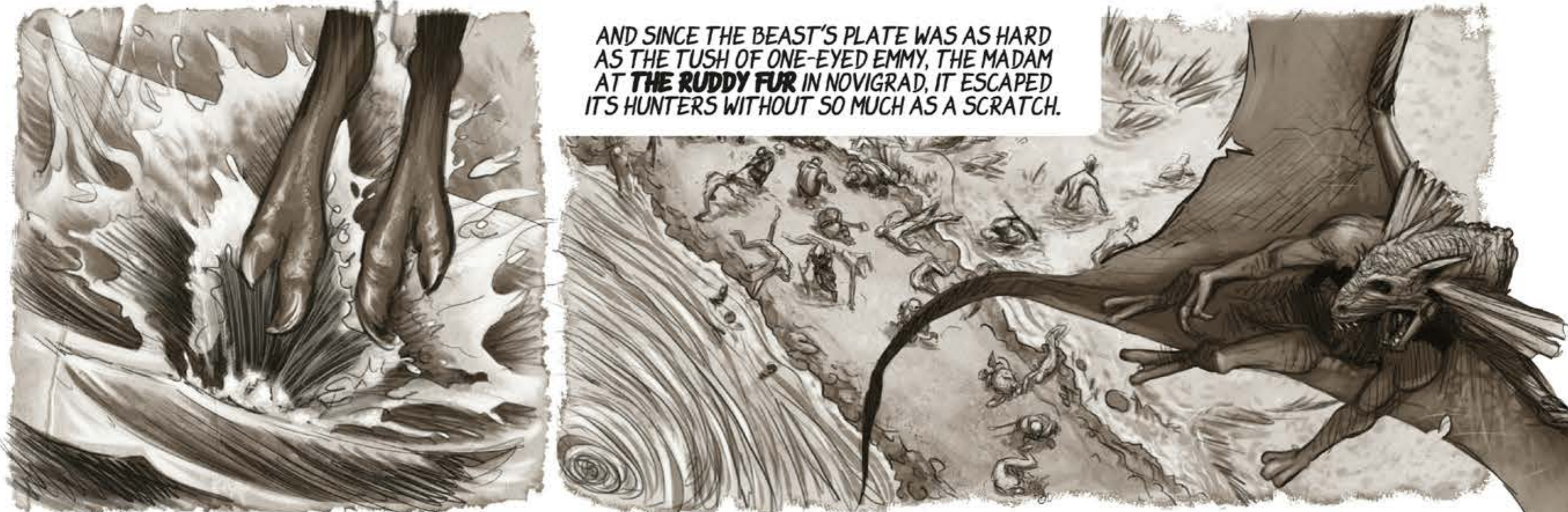


A CERTAIN FRIENDLY DRAGON-MAIDEN PROVIDED SUPPORT FROM THE AIR.



THE FIGHT PROVED BRIEF BUT EPIC. DESPITE THEIR JOINT EFFORTS AND A HEARTY DOSE OF ENTHUSIASM, AT THE CRITICAL MOMENT THE TORTODRAGON TURNED TAIL AND FLED.

AND SINCE THE BEAST'S PLATE WAS AS HARD AS THE TUSH OF ONE-EYED EMMY, THE MADAM AT **THE RUDDY FUR** IN NOVIGRAD, IT ESCAPED ITS HUNTERS WITHOUT SO MUCH AS A SCRATCH.





THEN SOMETHING  
CAME OVER SASKIA...

LATER, SHE EXPLAINED THAT SHE'D LOST CONTROL,  
WAS NOT AWARE WHAT SHE WAS DOING. THE DWARVES  
BELIEVED HER, FOR HAD SHE TRULY MEANT HARM, SHE  
WOULD HAVE REDUCED THEM ALL TO ASH-HEAPS.



THEY COULD ONLY GUESS THE RAMPAGE HAD  
ISSUED SOMEHOW FROM PHILIPPA EILHART'S AND  
SILE DE TANSARVILLE'S EARLIER MEDDLINGS.

DURING THE KINGSLAYING CONSPIRACY, THE TWO  
SORCERESSES HAD TAKEN HOLD OF SASKIA'S  
MIND, TAMPERED WITH IT SO AS TO USE THE  
DRAGON TO THEIR OWN, NEFARIOUS ENDS.

TEARS FLOODED VERGEN'S STREETS.  
SO MANY STRONG AXE ARMS HAD  
FALLEN - A HEAVY BLOW TO THE FREE  
STATE'S ALREADY FRAGILE POPULACE.



COME MORNING, SASKIA, ONCE AGAIN IN HUMAN FORM,  
RETURNED TO THE CITY. SHE GATHERED ALL VERGEN'S  
INHABITANTS IN RHUNDURIN SQUARE AND SWORE BEFORE  
THEM NEVER AGAIN TO TRANSFORM INTO A DRAGON.





YARPEN, YOU KNOW ME. I'M NOT ONE FOR EMPTY PROMISES.



I HAD A LONG WRESTLE WITH MY CONSCIENCE AND NOW KNOW I CANNOT ERR AGAIN.



OCH, YOU AND YER EPIC, DRAGON-SIZED DILEMMAS... AN' HERE I WAS JUST KEEN TO SEE THE WORLD FROM A BIRDIE'S PEEPERS. BLAST, EVEN GERALT'S DONE THAT.



STOP BLETHERIN'. WOULDNAE HURT YE TO SHOW SOME RESPECT FOR YER FALLEN PALS.



T'AIN'T NO FUNERAL PROCESSION, BARCLAY. SIDES, OUR BROTHERS DIED IN BATTLE. A WORTHY DEATH BY ANYONE'S RECKONIN'.

ONE WE'D DO BEST TO HONOR BY TEARIN' THAT BRAIN-PLOUGHED SWAMPSUCKER A NEW ARSEHOLE.

THAT'S THE SPIRIT. SOON AS WAR ENDS - "OI! WE'VE A BEAST! LET THE CRUSADE BEGIN!" KEEP ON LIKE THAT AND OUR NUMBERS'LL DWINDLE RIGHT QUICK. SOON WE'LL BE FEWER THAN THE ELVES.

WHICH IS WHY I WAS, AND STILL AM, AGAINST EXPLORIN' THIS DAMN MINE. VEIN'S TOO CLOSE TO KAEDWEN. KING HENSELT TUCKED TAIL AND RAN, AYE, BUT NOT AFORE HE GAVE US A MIGHTY BRUISIN'. EAGER FOR MORE O' THAT?

HE GAVE ME HIS WORD, BUT I'M NOT NAIVE. SO WE MUST PREPARE - PATCH THE WALLS, BUY ARMS.



ESPECIALLY SINCE IORVETH'S GONE AND TAKEN HIS ELVES WITH HIM. WE CAN NO LONGER COUNT ON THEIR SUPPORT.



WHAT AM I, A TROLL?

SHE MEANT THE ARCHERS, MAEVARIENN.

AH, MY MISTAKE. CARRY ON, THEN



SASKIA, SO EVEN IF HENSELT TRIES AGAIN, YOU WON'T...?



NO, I WON'T.

ARGH, SHAME, THAT. I LOVE THE SMELL OF FRIED KAEDWENIS IN THE MORNIN'.

YARPEN ZIGRIN, A DRAGON LOVER? WHEN'D THAT HAPPEN? REMIND ME, WHO WAS IT LED A BRIGADE OF DRAGONSLAYERS NOT LONG BACK? WHO FELLED OCVIST FROM QUARTZ MOUNTAIN? EH?



I HUNTED THE BEASTS, AYE. BUT I HAD ME A TUSSELE WITH MY OWN CONSCIENCE AND DECIDED TO STOP. 'AT'S MY RIGHT, AS THE SAYIN' GOES ABOUT ELVES AND COWS.



AND YOU, WITCHER, WHAT BRINGS YOU BACK TO VERGEN? CONSCIENCE GET YOU IN A CHOKE-HOLD, TOO?



NO. SOMETIMES A HUNT'S JUST A HUNT, NO MORAL WRENCHING INVOLVED. NOT HERE ON A CRUSADE NOR TO HONOR THE FALLEN. GOT A JOB, THAT'S ALL - SASKIA'LL PAY ME TO KILL THE CHELONODRAKE. SO I'LL DO MY BEST TO DO JUST THAT. WHAT HAPPENS AFTER - NOT MY CONCERN.



DUVVELSHEYSS...

Two weeks prior...

WHEN A SECOND EXPEDITION AGAINST THE TORTODRAGON FAILED, MORALE SANK AND THE GAINS TO BE HAD FROM THE NEW MINE BEGAN TO LOSE THEIR LUSTER. THEN, LIKE A BOLT FROM THE BLUE, A SURPRISE GUEST APPEARED IN TOWN. AND NOT JUST ANY GUEST, BUT A LIVING LEGEND!

A COLONEL OF THE MAHAKAMAN VOLUNTEER ARMY, A HERO OF THE SECOND WAR AGAINST NILFGAARD, A WARRIOR, A POLITICIAN... WITH THAT MANY HORNS TO TOOT, BARCLAY ELS WAS A VERITABLE ONE-DWARF-BAND.



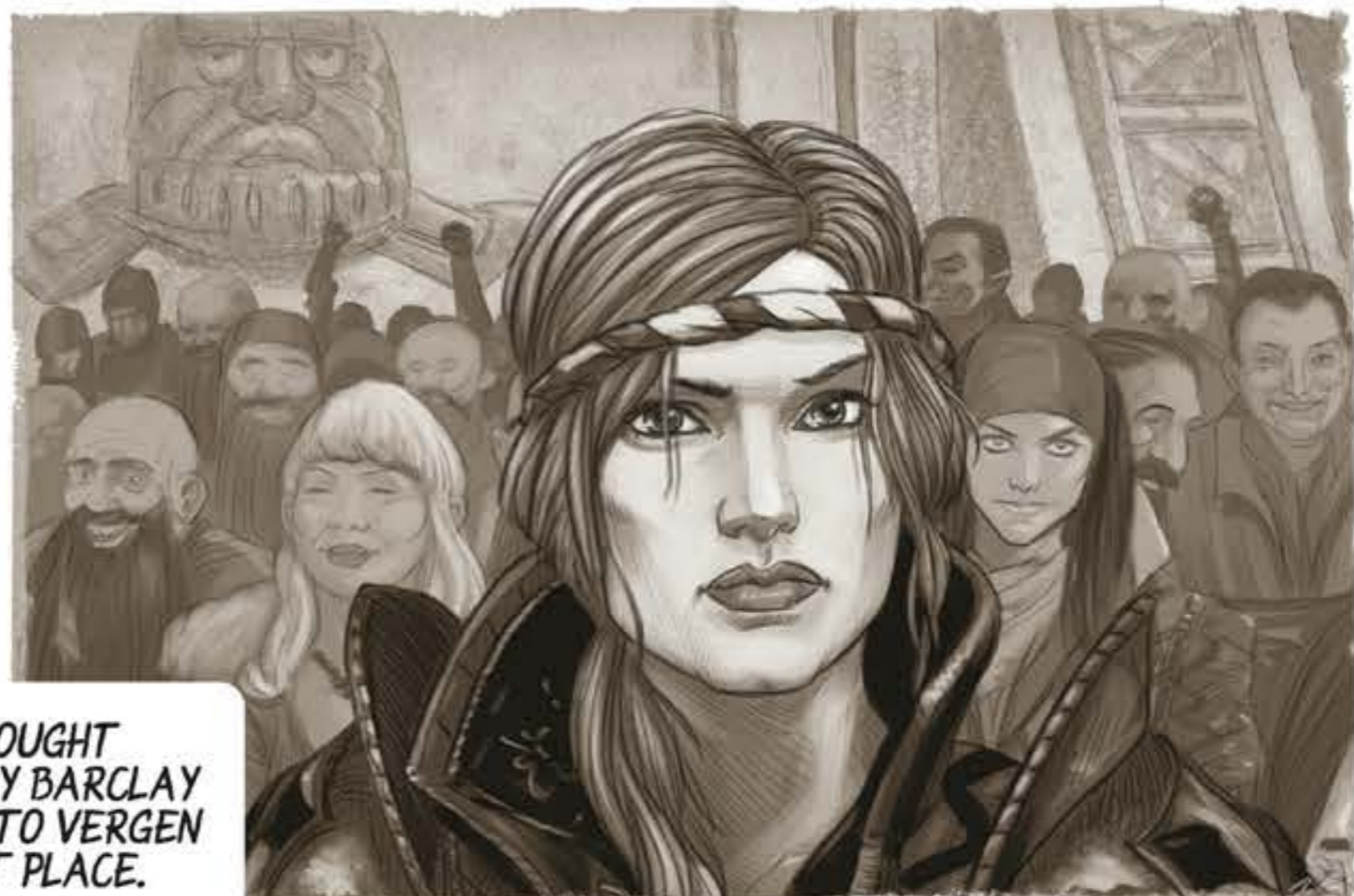
ON THE SPOT YARPEN ZIGRIN OFFERED HIS OLD PAL THE STILL-VACANT POST OF HEADMAN OF VERGEN. "AYES? 'AT'LL BE EVERYONE. NAYS? NONE TO BE SEEN. ABSTAINEEES? DINNAE GIVE A TROLL'S SNEEZE."



YARPEN'S HIGH SPIRITS PROVED INFECTIOUS. "NOW WE'VE A PROPER LEADER, HENSELT CANNAE TOUCH US, NOT EVEN IF HE MUSTERS EVERY MAN, CHILD AND DOG IN HIS REALM."



NO ONE THOUGHT TO WONDER WHY BARCLAY ELS HAD COME TO VERGEN IN THE FIRST PLACE.



The day after Barclay's arrival...

TWELVE LIVES LOST IN ALL...  
WOULDA BEEN FEWER HAD  
SASKIA NOT... BUT SHE'S SWORN  
NOT TO CHANGE AGAIN TILL--

HMPH! A  
DRAGON-WENCH'S  
OATH...

NONE O' THAT, BARCLAY.  
WITH ALL SHE'S DONE FOR  
US, EVERY VERGENI'D LEAP  
THROUGH FIRE FOR HER.

THEN AT LEAST THE FALLEN WERE  
PREPARED... BUT IT DINNAE MATTER!  
RECKON YOUSE MADE ME HEADMAN  
TO GIVE SOME ORDERS.

HERE'S MY FIRST - FORGET  
THE MINE, FORGET THE  
TORTODRAGON. WHOLE THING'S  
NONSENSE, A WASTE OF TIME.

SASKIA  
WONT LIKE  
THAT...

VENTURED HERE FROM MAHAKAM  
TO SEE HOW YOUR DEMOCRACY  
FARES, AND WHAT DO I FIND?  
YOU'RE LETTIN' A DRAGON-WENCH  
RULE YOUSE.

SHE'S NOT JUST  
ANY DRAGON! SHE'S  
GOLDEN! A LEGEND!  
AND A SHAPESHIFTER  
TO BOOT!

SO WHY'S SHE HUMAN, EH? HOW'S THAT MAKE  
HER A CHAMPION O' THE DWARVES? AND AS IF  
HER RECKLESSNESS HADNAE THINNED OUR NUM-  
BERS ENOUGH, SHE LENDS HER OWN MAW TO IT?

OCH, I SEE WAR  
CHANGES MINDS,  
AND HOW.

YE SEE RIGHT, YARPEN. AS THE  
SAYIN' GOES, A DWARF'S NEITHER  
COW NOR ELF - HE'S A RIGHT  
TO CHANGE HIS MIND.

THING IS, THIS HERE'S  
NO MATTER O' POLITICS  
OR PICKIN' A LEADER.

DWARVES AND ELVES  
ALIKE'VE DIED ON THE  
DIKE. WAGER YE'D FIND  
A COW TOO, IF YE WENT  
LOOKIN'.

DINNAE WANT ANY  
MORE VICTIMS, NO MORE  
THINNIN' OF OUR  
RANKS? THEN WE NEED  
A PROFESSIONAL.

JUST  
SO HAPPENS  
I KNOW ONE.

RIGHT, TIME TO SHINE. TO QUOTE MY PAL ZOLTAN CHIVAY - "DEATH TO ALL WHORESONS!"





One week prior...



CAN'T BE DONE.

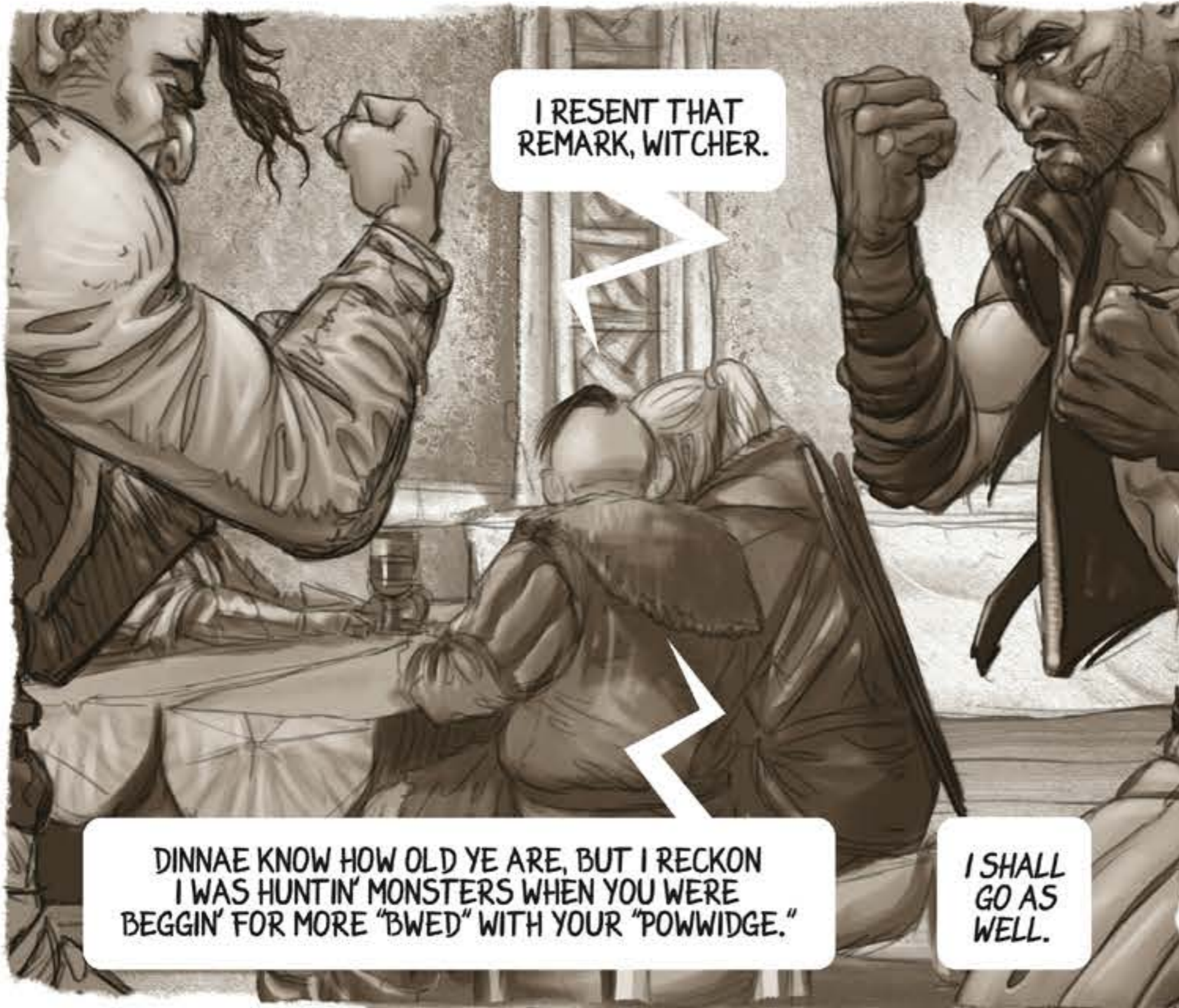
WHY NOT, GERALT? YOUR WITCHER'S CODE, IS THAT THE ISSUE? I'VE HEARD THAT...



NO. BEAST'S TOO BIG, PLAIN AND SIMPLE. FIVE HORSES LONG - NOT YOUR USUAL ARACHAS OR MANTICORE. AND IN THE MIDDLE OF A LAKE? WON'T TAKE THE CONTRACT, THAT'S THAT.

C'MON, GERALT, THINK WE MEAN TO SEND YE AFTER THE CUNTODRAKE ALONE? WE'VE GOT A PLAN...

THANKS, YARPEN, BUT I'D RATHER NOT HAVE OTHERS AROUND WHEN I START SWINGING.



I RESENT THAT REMARK, WITCHER.

DINNAE KNOW HOW OLD YE ARE, BUT I RECKON I WAS HUNTIN' MONSTERS WHEN YOU WERE BEGGIN' FOR MORE "BWED" WITH YOUR "POWWIDGE."

I SHALL GO AS WELL.



DAMMIT, DON'T LIKE THIS. WE'D NEED TO PREPARE, WELL. ANYONE SCOUTED THE AREA?



I'VE HAD WHAT ONE MIGHT CALL A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW.



TO MY NOGGIN, WE'D DO BEST TO LURE THE BEAST OUT O' THE WATER HERE. BANK'S ALL O'RGROWN WITH RUSHES, EASY ENOUGH TO HIDE SOME SNARES.

A SPLENDID PLAN, AS LONG AS YOU REMEMBER THIS TRAP CAN ONLY BUY US A BIT OF TIME.

MAEVARIENN, RIGHT? RECOGNIZE YOU FROM IORVETH'S UNIT. YARPEN SAID YOU HAD AN IDEA, MIGHT KNOW HOW TO IMMOBILIZE THE BEAST'S HEAD.

A MAGE FRIEND TAUGHT ME HOW TO CONTROL THEM. THEY CAN MOVE, GROW TAUGHT...

SEE? THAT'S THE STRENGTH O' NUMBERS! WITH ITS LEGS IN SNARES AND ROPES ROUND ITS HEAD, JUST WHAT CAN THE SCUM-SUCKING DRAKOWHORE DO?



IT WAS NO LIE. NOT LONG AGO I ACQUIRED SOME MAGIC ROPES AT A DECENT PRICE.



MAKE PEACE WITH ITS CONSCIENCE?

FUCKIN' SQUAT, MORE LIKE. THEN WHAM-BAM, THE WITCHER'LL CUT ITS DAMN FOOL HEAD OFF.



YEAH, JUST REMEMBER, THE THING'S A MUTANT OF SOME SORT. SEA CHELONODRAKES DON'T HAVE HORNED PLATE ON THEIR NECKS. AND THIS ONE'S ARMOR IS HALF AN ELL THICK, FROM WHAT YOU SAY.



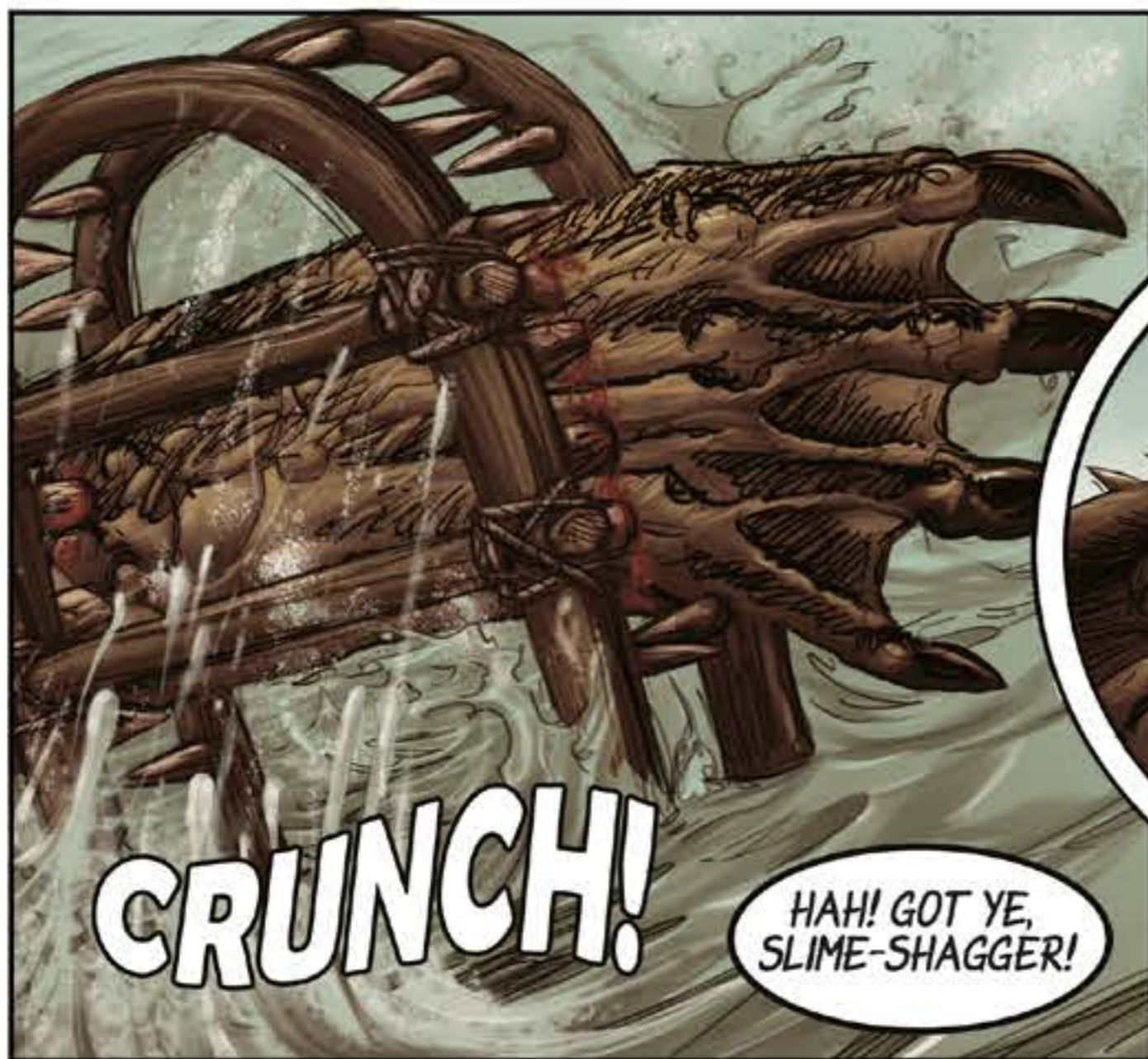
COME, DISPENSE WITH THE MODESTY. THE KAYRAN OF FLOTSAM DIDN'T SLICE ITSELF UP.

GOT LUCKY THERE. AND I HAD A SORCERESS HELPING ME. NO OFFENSE, BUT ALL I'VE GOT NOW ARE YOU AND MY SWORD.

AFRAID THAT JUST WON'T CUT IT. WE NEED ANOTHER IDEA, SOMETHING MORE.

BUT WHAT?







WHAT THE BLAZES  
ARE THE REST OF YOUSE  
WAITIN' FOR?



MAEVARIENN,  
NOW!



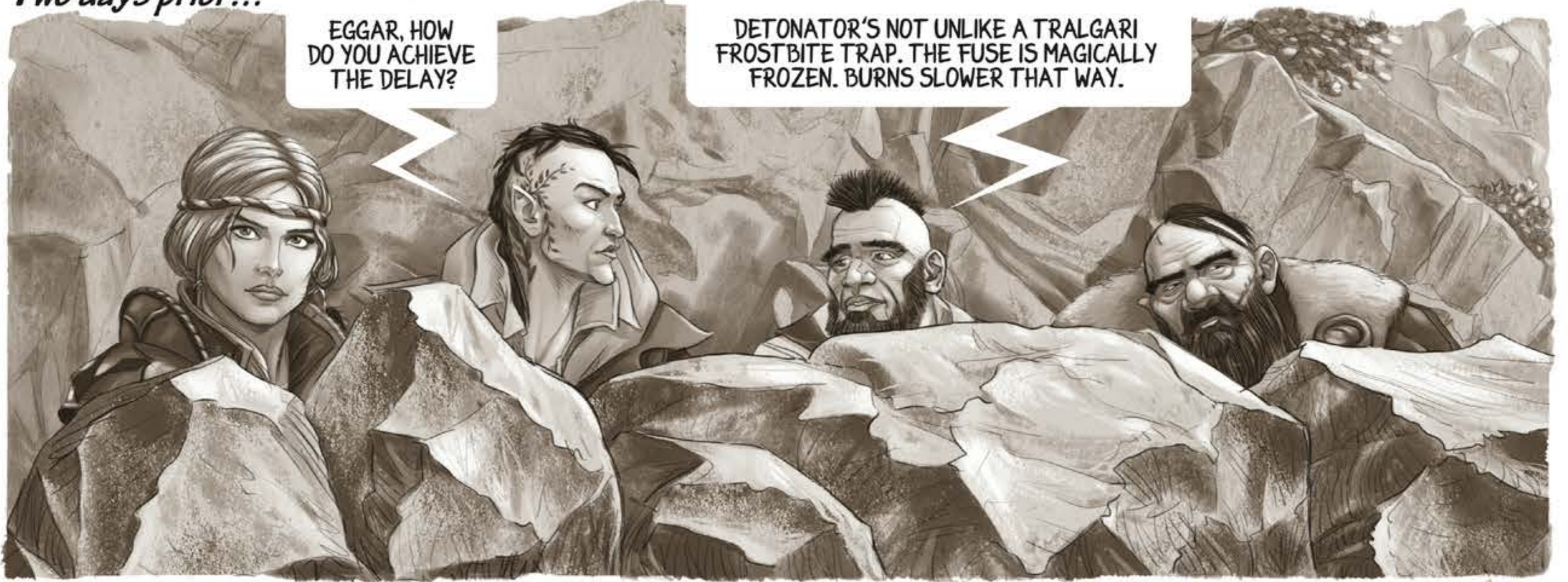
**ROARRGH!!!**



Two days prior...

EGGAR, HOW DO YOU ACHIEVE THE DELAY?

DETONATOR'S NOT UNLIKE A TRALGARI FROSTBITE TRAP. THE FUSE IS MAGICALLY FROZEN. BURNS SLOWER THAT WAY.



SEEMS YOU FROZE THIS ONE A BIT TOO DEE--

KA-BOOM!!!



WHAT'D YE EXPECT? THIS HERE'S AEDIRNIAN GRANITE, HARD AS A RUTTIN' BULLVORE'S KNOB.

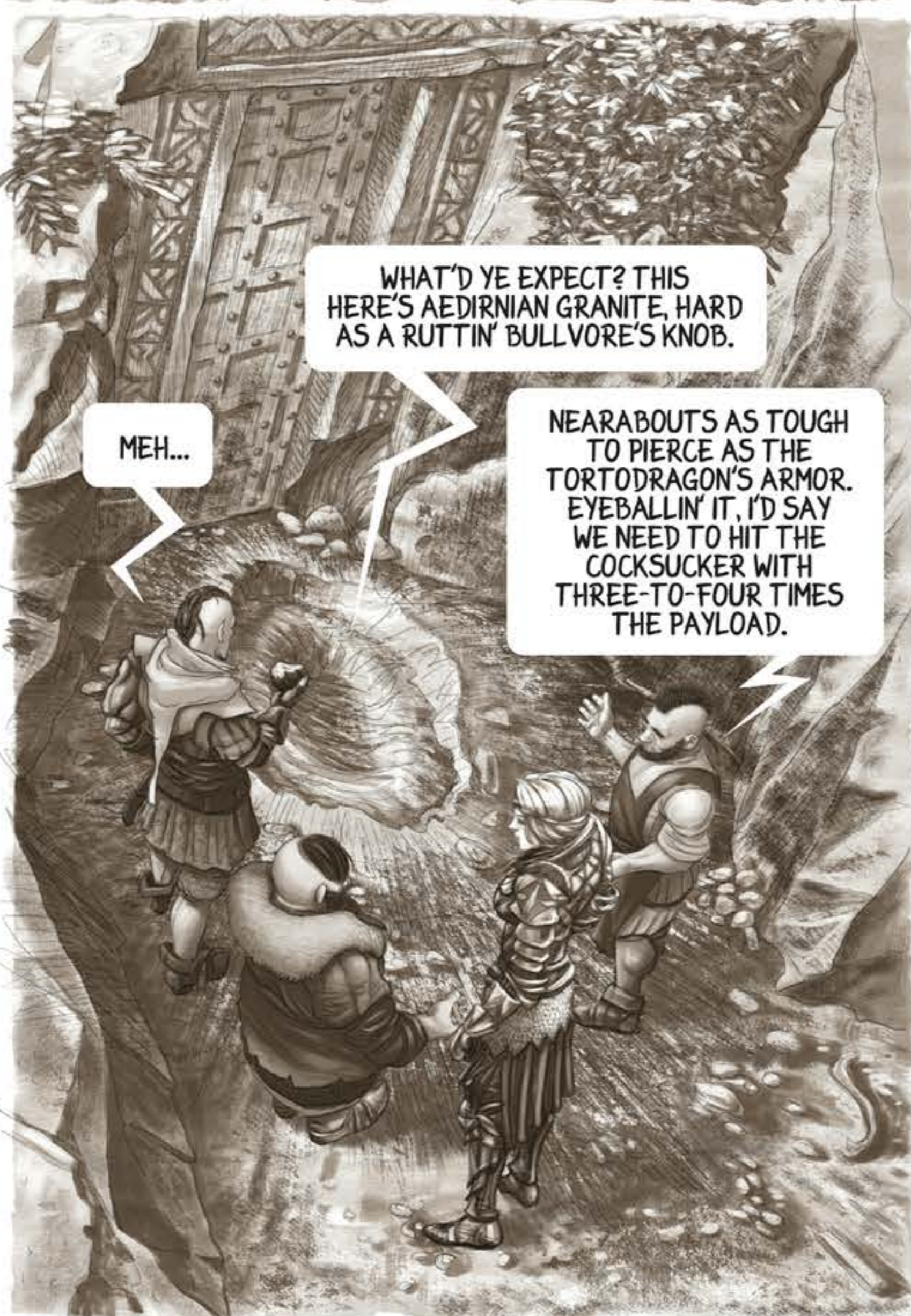
MEH...

NEARABOUTS AS TOUGH TO PIERCE AS THE TORTODRAGON'S ARMOR. EYEBALLIN' IT, I'D SAY WE NEED TO HIT THE COCKSUCKER WITH THREE-TO-FOUR TIMES THE PAYLOAD.

WHERE HAS GERALT GONE?

HE CALLED THIS ANOTHER DAFT SCHEME, DINNAE WANT TO WASTE HIS TIME. SET OFF TO GATHER SOME HERBS. TO PUT IN HIS PIPE, I WAGER.

DON'T LISTEN TO HIM. THE WITCHER WENT TO LOOK FOR INGREDIENTS, TO MAKE SOME ZERRIKANIAN MIX.



THE BUGGER CAN MAKE THAT? WHOA-HO, A TRUE PROFESSIONAL. TORTODRAGON'LL BE MINCEMEAT.

The previous day...

BLOODY TROLLSPIT!  
WHERE'D YE DIG UP  
THAT OGRE?

I WON IT IN A GAME OF GWENT.  
GERALT WISHED TO OUTLINE  
HIS PLAN, I DECIDED TO BE  
HELPFUL. OR WOULD YOU  
RATHER HE DEMONSTRATE  
ON HIMSELF??

THANKS.  
SO, CAN WE  
START?

YES, A STEP AT A TIME. EGGAR,  
YOU'LL USE BOMBS TO DRIVE  
THE TORTODRAGON INTO THE  
SHALLOWS. GERALT AND I WILL  
FIGHT OFF ANY DROWNERS.

ME AND  
MAEVARIENN'LL  
SET THE SNARES.

THE ROPES ARE  
READY. SO STIFF  
YOU WOULD THINK  
THEY'D HAD A  
DOUBLE DOSE OF  
TOUSSAINT FLY.

ONLY NEED TO HOLD  
FOR A MOMENT,  
BUY YOU TIME  
TO ATTACH THE  
EXPLOSIVES.

THEN BOOM! AND THE  
BALLAD OF THE ABOMINABLE  
TORTODRAGON'LL END SO  
ABRUP--

NOT SO FAST, YARPEN.  
STILL GOT TWO UNKNOWNNS  
- THE THICKNESS OF  
THE CARAPACE AND THE  
STRENGTH OF THE  
EXPLOSIVES.

WHAT  
THEN?

AND WE DON'T HAVE  
ENOUGH MIX TO TEST  
IT. WE CAN ONLY  
HOPE A PRECISELY  
PLACED BLAST WILL  
EXPOSE THE BEAST'S  
HEART.

THE REST'LL  
BE MY PROBLEM.

ALL CLEAR? LET'S  
GET SOME SLEEP.  
WE MARCH AT DAWN.

SAESENTHESIS...  
I MEAN, SASKIA  
- WE MUST TALK.

?!

KNOCK  
KNOCK!

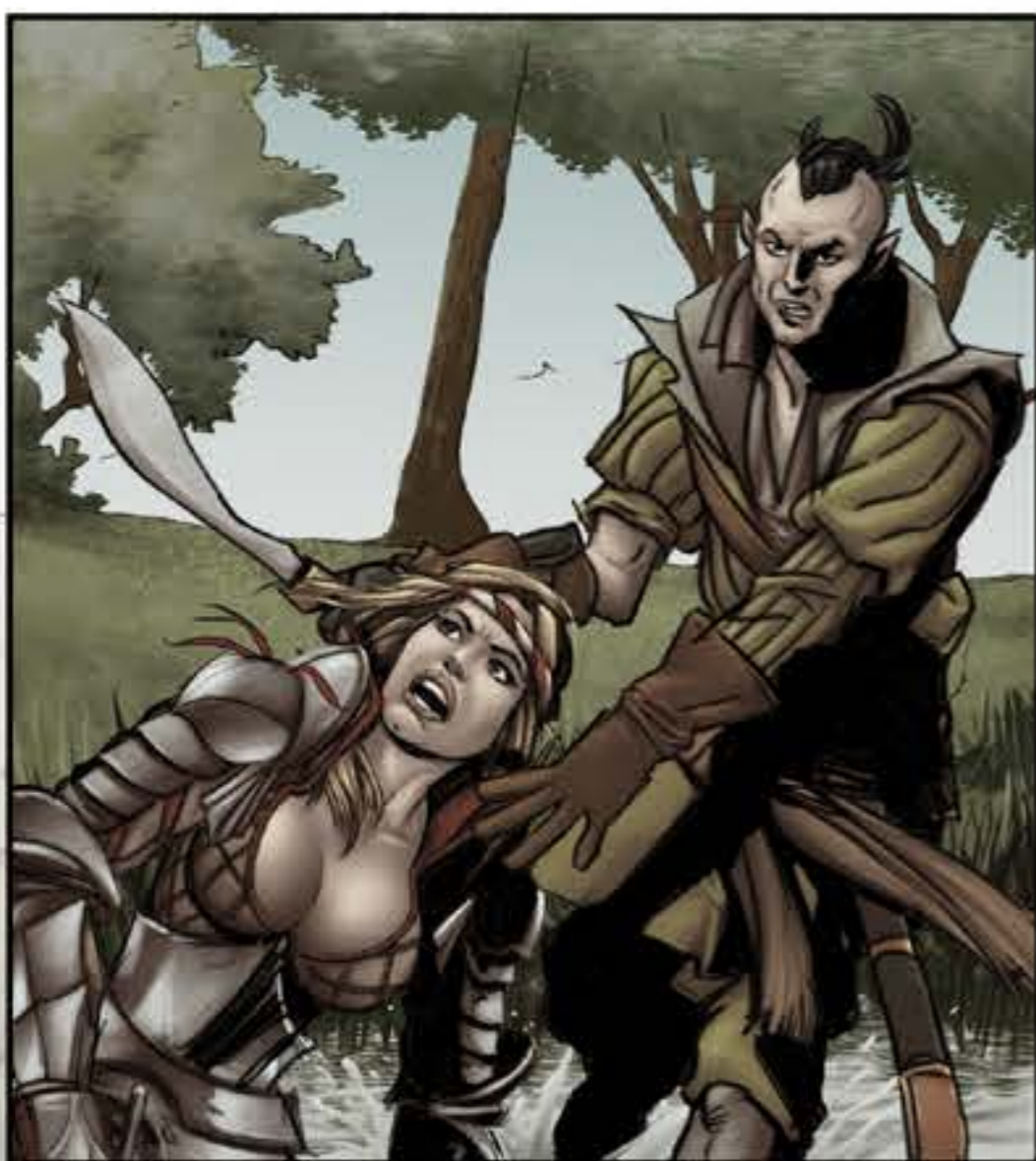
**BANG!!!**



SASKIA,  
WATCH OUT!

TROLLS  
BUGGER ME  
BLIND!

DID YOU SEE  
THE TAIL?

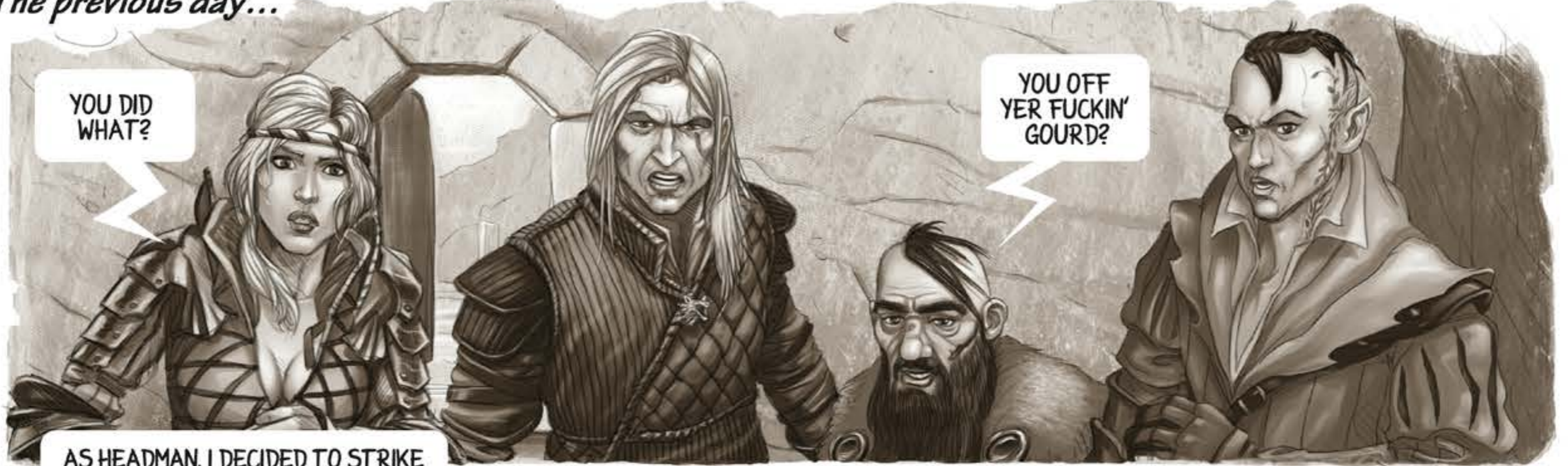


RAAAGH!!!





The previous day...



YOU DID WHAT?

YOU OFF YER FUCKIN' GOURD?

AS HEADMAN, I DECIDED TO STRIKE A TRUCE WITH NILFGAARD. WHEN THEY MARCH THROUGH VERGEN, WE WILL STAND ASIDE, LET THEM PASS.

"AS HEADMAN?" DEAL LIKE THAT TAKES TIME. MUST'VE MADE IT BEFORE YOU WERE APPOINTED.

I'LL KILL THE CUNT! LEMME AT 'IM, FOR FUCK'S SAKE!

LEAVE HIM BE. HE DID WHAT HE THOUGHT BEST.



BUT ARE YOU THAT NAIVE? YOU REALLY BELIEVE THE BLACK ONES WILL MARCH THROUGH AEDIRN AND LET US BE, FORGET WE EXIST?

OH, THEY'LL REMEMBER - SOON AS WORD GETS OUT WE WERE WILLIN' TO TACKLE A CHELONODRAKE FOR SOME MOLDY MINE.

WHAT ABOUT OUR LIBERTY, OUR FIGHT FOR A FREE REALM?



"WHEN BANDITS RAVAGE THE VILLAGE, STAY THE FUCK IN THE PRIVY" - THAT'S WHAT MY GRAN WOULD SAY. THERE'S LITTLE HONOR IN IT, BUT IT WORKS.



YOU KNOW, WHEN WORD OF A VIRGIN DRAGONSLAYER REACHED MAHAKAM, ALL SAID THEY WOULD FOLLOW YOU INTO FIRE.

THING IS, TO MY MIND DWARVES HAVE BEEN DYIN' LONG ENOUGH FOR CAUSES NOT THEIR OWN.

AND SORRY TO BE BLUNT, BUT I HEARD BLATHER APLENTY ABOUT FREEDOM DURIN' THE LAST WAR WITH NILFGAARD. AND IN THE END?

IN THE END YET MORE DWARVES DIED IN A WAR BETWEEN HUMANS. SO I CANNAE ALLOW YOUSE TO GO ON THIS HUNT.





I DO NOT WANT WAR, BARCLAY. I WANT TO GIVE THE DWARVES AN HONORABLE LIFE. AND AN HONORABLE DEATH, IF IT COMES TO THAT. FIGHTING FOR THEIR OWN IDEALS, NOT THOSE OF OTHERS.

"DIED FOR HIS IDEALS" - BONNIE EPITAPH, AYE. BUT WE'LL ALL DIE TO A DWARF, FOR THE CITY'S A RUIN AND OUR NUMBERS TOO SMALL. SO I REPEAT - COME THE INVASION, WE CROSS OUR ARMS. IT'S THE ONLY WAY WE'LL SURVIVE.



ZOLTAN CHIVAY ONCE TOLD ME THERE'S JUST ONE PROBLEM WITH STRADDLING A FENCE - SOONER OR LATER YOUR BALLS START TO ACHE.



NEUTRALITY'S A SAFE OPTION, BUT IT CAN NEVER LAST FOREVER.



MY FATHER TAUGHT ME TO FIGHT FOR MY IDEALS. MORE BLATHER, YOU'LL SAY, BUT HE ALSO TAUGHT ME TOLERANCE, INSTILLED IN ME A LOVE FOR ALL THE RACES.

I'M PREPARED TO DIE DEFENDING THIS CITY AND LAND, AND BELIEVE THE VERGENI WILL FOLLOW ME INTO BATTLE. FOR WHAT GOOD IS A LIFE WITHOUT FREEDOM?

I LOVE YOU. I WILL NOT ABANDON YOU.

I'M NO ORATOR LIKE SASKIA, SO I'LL TELL YOUSE SHORT AND SWEET HOW IT'S GONNA BE.

TOMORROW WE'LL GO AFTER THAT PLOUGHIN' TORTO-PRICK, AND BY THE GODS COME SUNDOWN WE'LL STICK ITS RANK HEAD ON A PIKE ATOP THE MAHAKAMAN GATE. TO SHOW THE WORLD THAT DWARVES MAKE THEIR OWN DECISIONS. GOOD, BAD - DINNAE MATTER. THEIR OWN.



A HERD O' TROLLS PLOUGH WHAT OTHERS SAY. AND IF THE BLACK ONES THINK THEY'LL FIND US HIDIN' IN THE PRIVY AS THEY STROLL BY, THEY'RE IN FOR A HELLUVA SURPRISE.



YOU DINNAE KNOW DIDDLY. BUT ALLOW ME TO JOIN YOUSE. I MIGHT PROVE OF SOME USE. IF YE DIE A HERO'S DEATH ON THE DIKE, THEY'LL MAKE A MARTYR OF YOU RIGHT QUICK. AND SEVEN CENTURIES ON, YE'LL BE A SAINT. TO COMPETE WITH A SAINT - JUST WHAT I PLOUGHIN' NEEDED.



HMM, SEEMS I WASTED MY BREATH.

IN YOUR HEART YOU SENSE WE ARE RIGHT. I KNOW THIS.





SASKIA BROKE HER PROMISE AND TRANSFORMED INTO A DRAGON TO GET BARCLAY TO THE DWARVEN MEDICS FAST. ALAS, IT WASN'T FAST ENOUGH.

THEY CAME IN DROVES TO ATTEND HIS FUNERAL. AFTER ALL, HE WAS A LEGEND.



GERALT CHOSE NOT TO LINGER IN UPPER AEDIRN.

HE DIDN'T WANT YARPEN TO ASK HIM FOR HELP IN DEFENDING THE CITY. HE FEARED HE WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO REFUSE. BUT YARPEN DIDN'T ASK.

AND THOUGH THE HUNT FOR THE CHELONODRAKE HAD ENDED IN TRAGEDY, THE DWARVES WENT AHEAD AND REOPENED THE SILVER MINE.



AFTER ALL, WAR LOOMED.



FEW BLAMED SASKIA FOR THE MISSION'S TRAGIC END. ALL HAD KNOWN THE RISKS INVOLVED.

NONETHELESS, SHE DECIDED TO LEAVE VERGEN.



TOO STRONG. HE SOUGHT TO HELP THEM. THE WAY HE KNEW HOW.

SOUNDS A LOT LIKE YOU. YOU'RE STILL THE PARENT, STILL PROTECTING THEM, YOU KNOW.

...WHY? FOR THEIR OWN GOOD. LIKE PARENTS WHO MUST RELEASE THEIR CHILDREN, LET THEM TAKE THEIR FIRST STEPS ON THEIR OWN.

AS LONG AS I CANNOT TRUST MY MIND, I CANNOT LEAD. AS LONG AS I DON'T TRUST MYSELF, I CAN'T ASK OTHERS TO TRUST ME, TRUST IN THE DECISIONS I MAKE.

YARPEN TRUSTED YOU. COUNTS FOR SOMETHING. MUST.

YES. TO ME, IT COUNTS FOR A GREAT DEAL.

HE TRUSTED YOU ENOUGH NOT TO TELL ANYONE ABOUT BARCLAY'S SECRET PLAN.

BARCLAY WAS RESPECTED, A STATESMAN. AND WITH WAR APPROACHING THE DWARVES MUST REMAIN UNITED. THEY WOULD GAIN NOTHING BY KNOWING THEIR HERO...

BETRAYED THEM?

THIS TIME, FROM KNOWLEDGE THAT COULD HURT THEM, DESTROY THEM, EVEN.

YES. SEEMS I CAN'T STOP CARING.

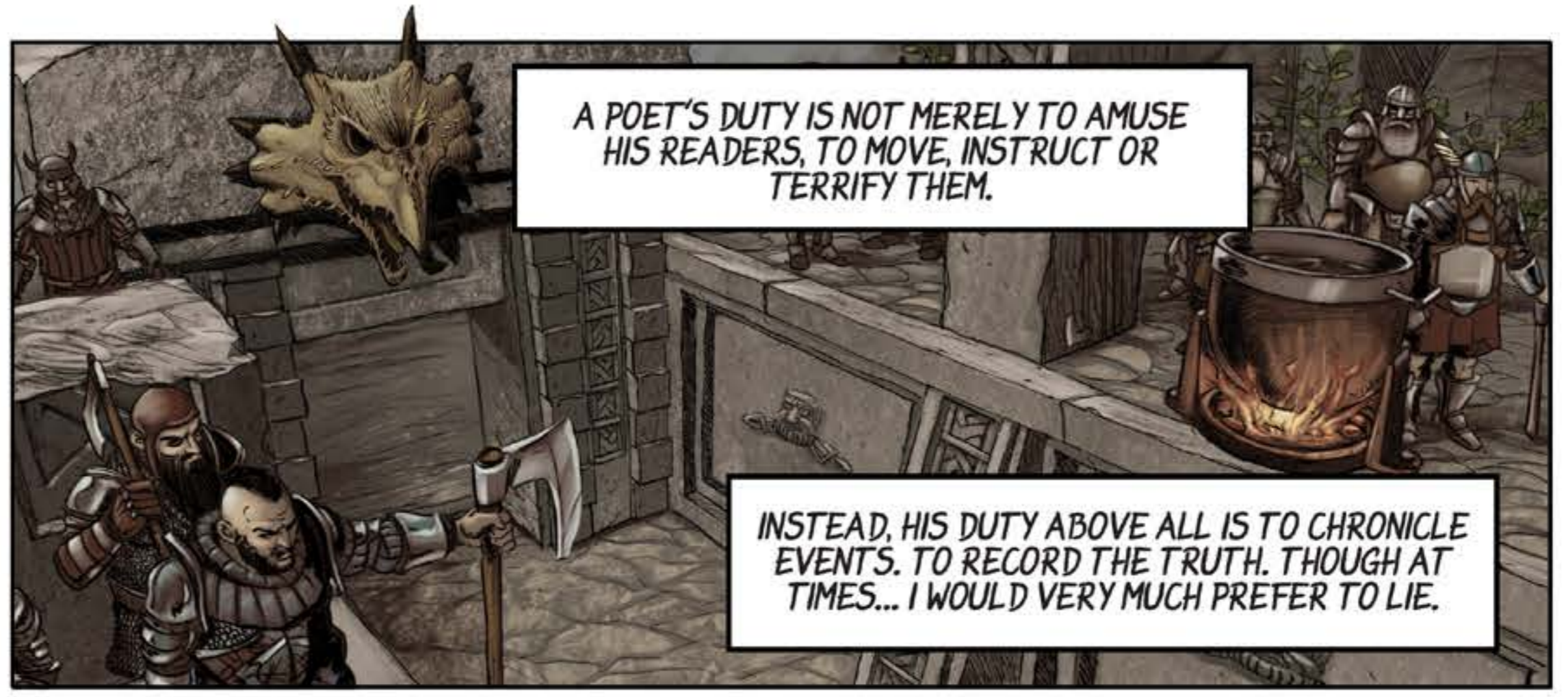
DO YOU THINK... THINK I SHOULD?

IT'S NOT EVERY CHILD THAT'S WILLING TO ASK ITS PARENT FOR HELP.

THANK YOU, WITCHER. FOR WHAT YOU SAID, FOR WHAT YOU DIDN'T SAY. FOR HELPING ME SETTLE A MATTER OF CONSCIENCE.

I SHAN'T FORGET THIS.





A POET'S DUTY IS NOT MERELY TO AMUSE HIS READERS, TO MOVE, INSTRUCT OR TERRIFY THEM.

INSTEAD, HIS DUTY ABOVE ALL IS TO CHRONICLE EVENTS. TO RECORD THE TRUTH. THOUGH AT TIMES... I WOULD VERY MUCH PREFER TO LIE.



I WOULD LIKE TO LIE AND SAY THAT IN THE FACE OF TRAGEDY THE DWARVES REMAINED STRONG AND FIRM. THAT THE DEATH OF BARCLAY ELS AND SASKIA'S DEPARTURE BROUGHT THEM ALL TOGETHER.

I WOULD LIKE TO LIE AND SAY THE DWARVES' VALOR SO IMPRESSED THE BLACK ONES THAT THEY DID VERGEN NO HARM.

I WOULD LIKE TO LIE AND SAY THAT SAESENTHESSIS' RETURN SHIFTED THE COURSE OF BATTLE DRAMATICALLY.



THAT AT THE VERY SIGHT OF HER THE NILFGAARDIANS SCURRIED SOUTH, LEAVING THE VICTORS TO DANCE ON THE GRAVES OF THEIR FOES.



I'D LIKE TO LIE AND SAY VERGEN WAS NOT RAZED IN PUNISHMENT FOR ITS STUBBORN RESISTANCE.

I WOULD LIKE TO LIE AND SAY THAT WITH THE ENEMY HORDES DEFEATED, SASKIA FLEW OFF INTO THE SUNSET.

I WOULD LIKE TO LIE AND SAY GERALT HAD NO REGRETS IN ABANDONING VERGEN AT THIS TRYING HOUR, BECAUSE HE WAS A PROFESSIONAL AND PREFERRED TO REMAIN NEUTRAL.

FINALLY, I WOULD LIKE TO LIE AND SAY GERALT FOUND HIS BELOVED YENNEFER, AND THEY LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER ON A SMALL FARM SOMEWHERE FAR AWAY.



I WOULD LOVE TO TELL YOU ALL THOSE LIES, TO ENTERTAIN, MOVE, INSTRUCT AND TERRIFY.



BUT I'M A POET. AND I HAVE MY DUTIES.



THE END



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