BRANDON SANDERSON



RIK HOSKIN • DYNAMITE • JULIUS GOPEZ

A CRUCIAL, UNPUBLISHED CHAPTER IN BRANDON SANDERSON'S SPRAWLING COSMERE UNIVERSE!



"MY FAVORITE ASPECT OF SANDERSON'S WORLD IS JUST HOW FANTASTIC IT IS"-109

RATED
T+
SUGGESTED FOR TEENS AND UP
FANTASY


WHITESAND



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DAYSIDE
NORTHERN BORDER OCEAN
DEEP SAND
DENKA
Revan
SEEVIS
THE KERLA
KraeDa
NOR' TALLON
Nor'Tallon R.
TALLON
DEEP SAND
KERZTA
Ker'Kedasha
Kezare
LOSSAND
Lraezare
SOUTHERN BORDER OCEAN

Over twenty years ago, I sat in the back of a bus in South Korea, scribbling in a sketchpad the idea for a world. 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.

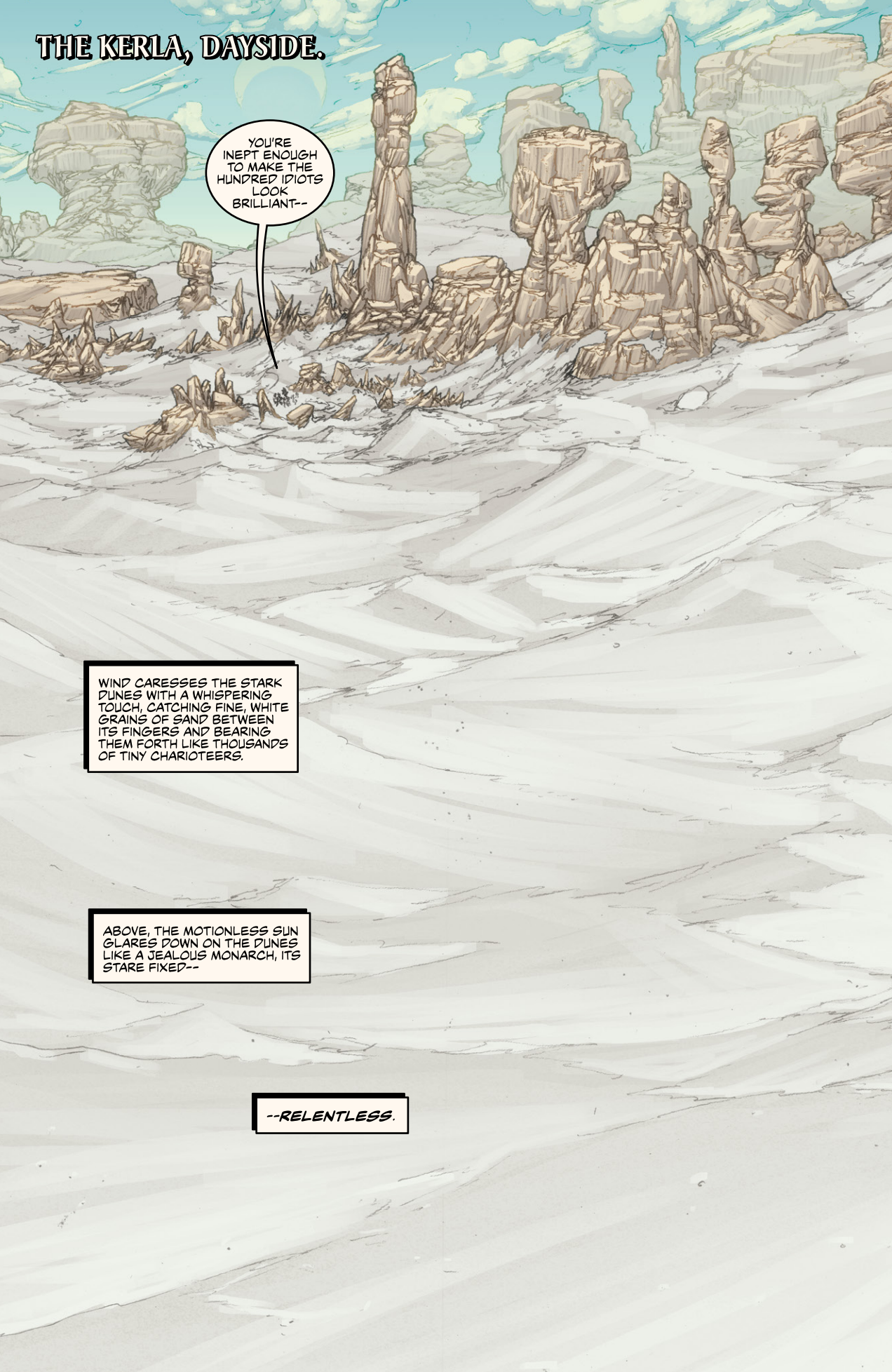
That's when Dynamite came to me and asked if—perhaps—I had something unpublished that might make a good original graphic novel.

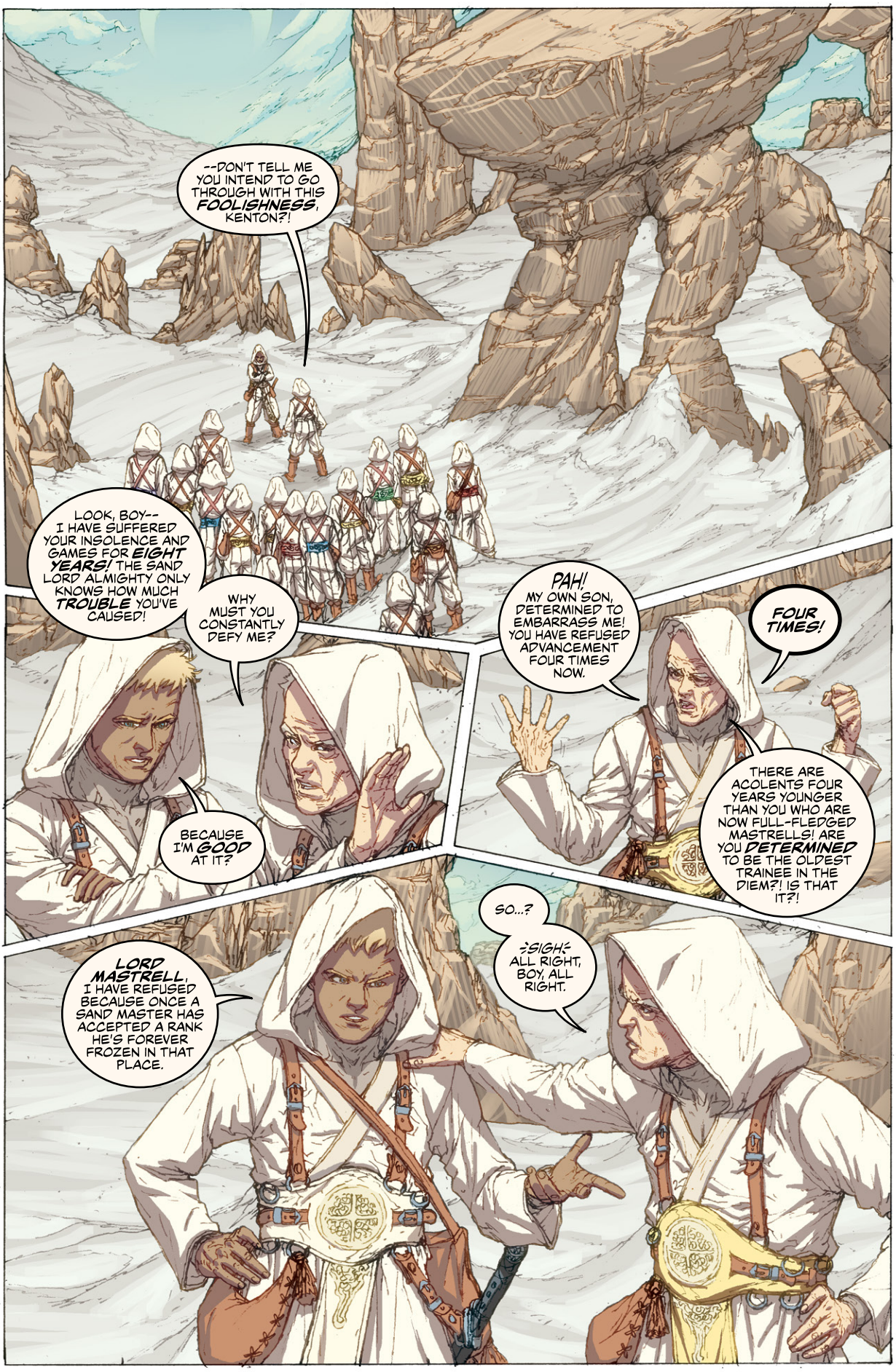
I can honestly say that working with them on this story has been one of the most fruitful, exciting experiences of my professional life. Rik, the writer chosen to adapt the novel into graphic form, was a pure delight to work with—he helped us smooth out the problems that remained in the book, and streamline 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.

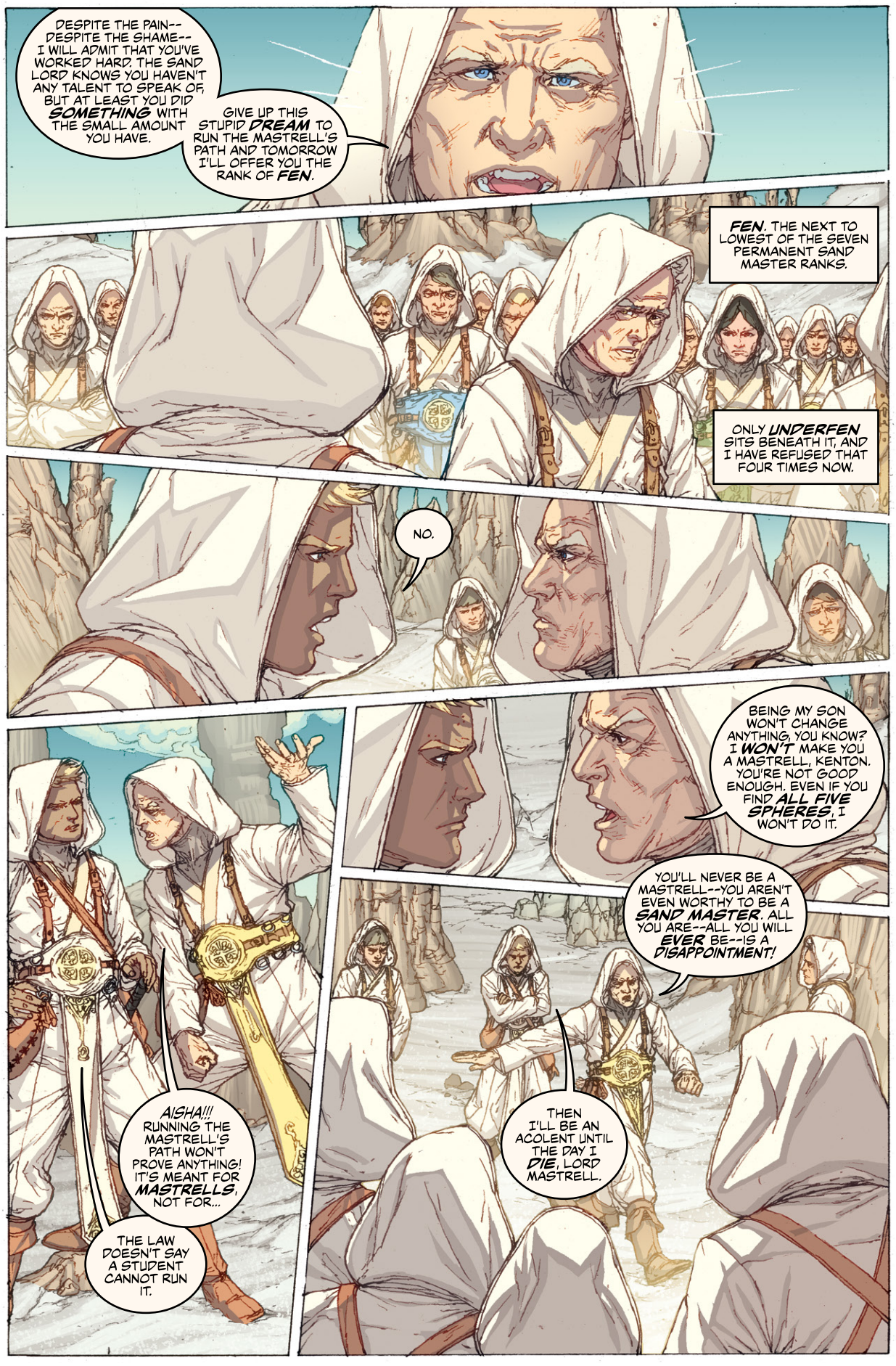
It is gratifying beyond expression to finally see this story going out to readers. From its humble beginnings in a sketchpad to this magnificent, finished graphic novel, this story has taken quite the journey to reach you. And it is with the utmost pleasure and honor that I at long last present to you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

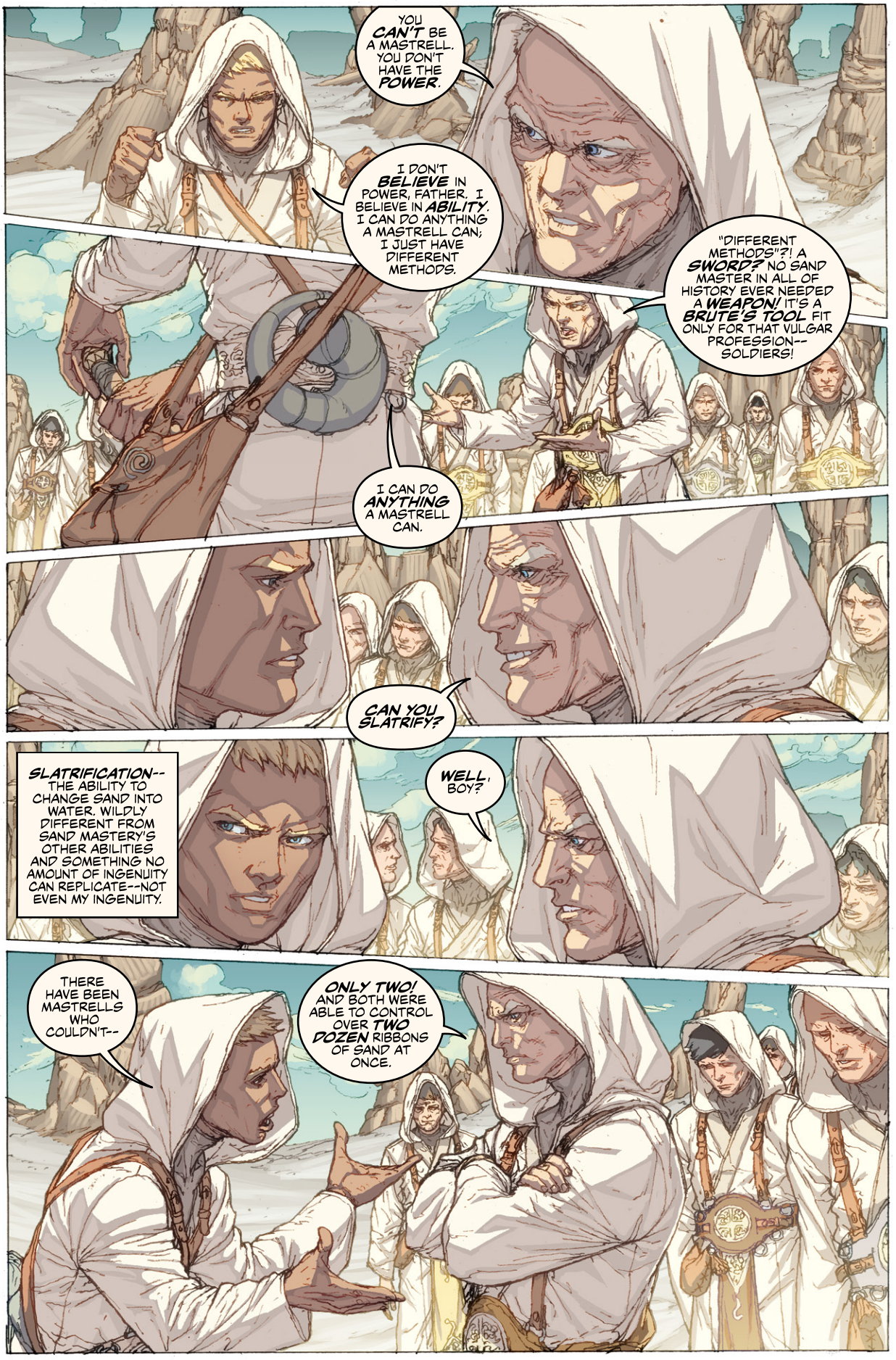
Brandon Sanderson

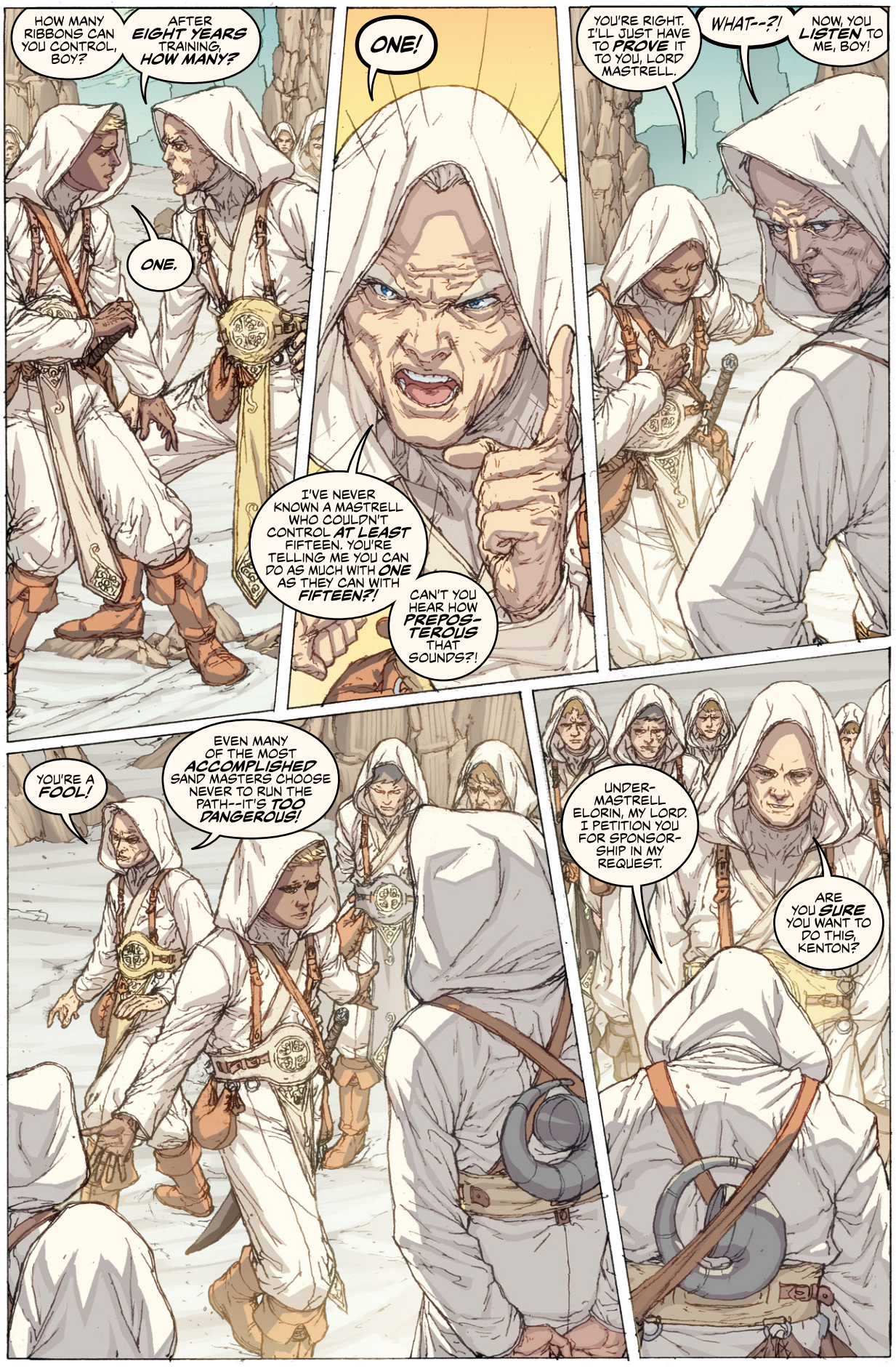

CHAPTER 1
RELENTLESS

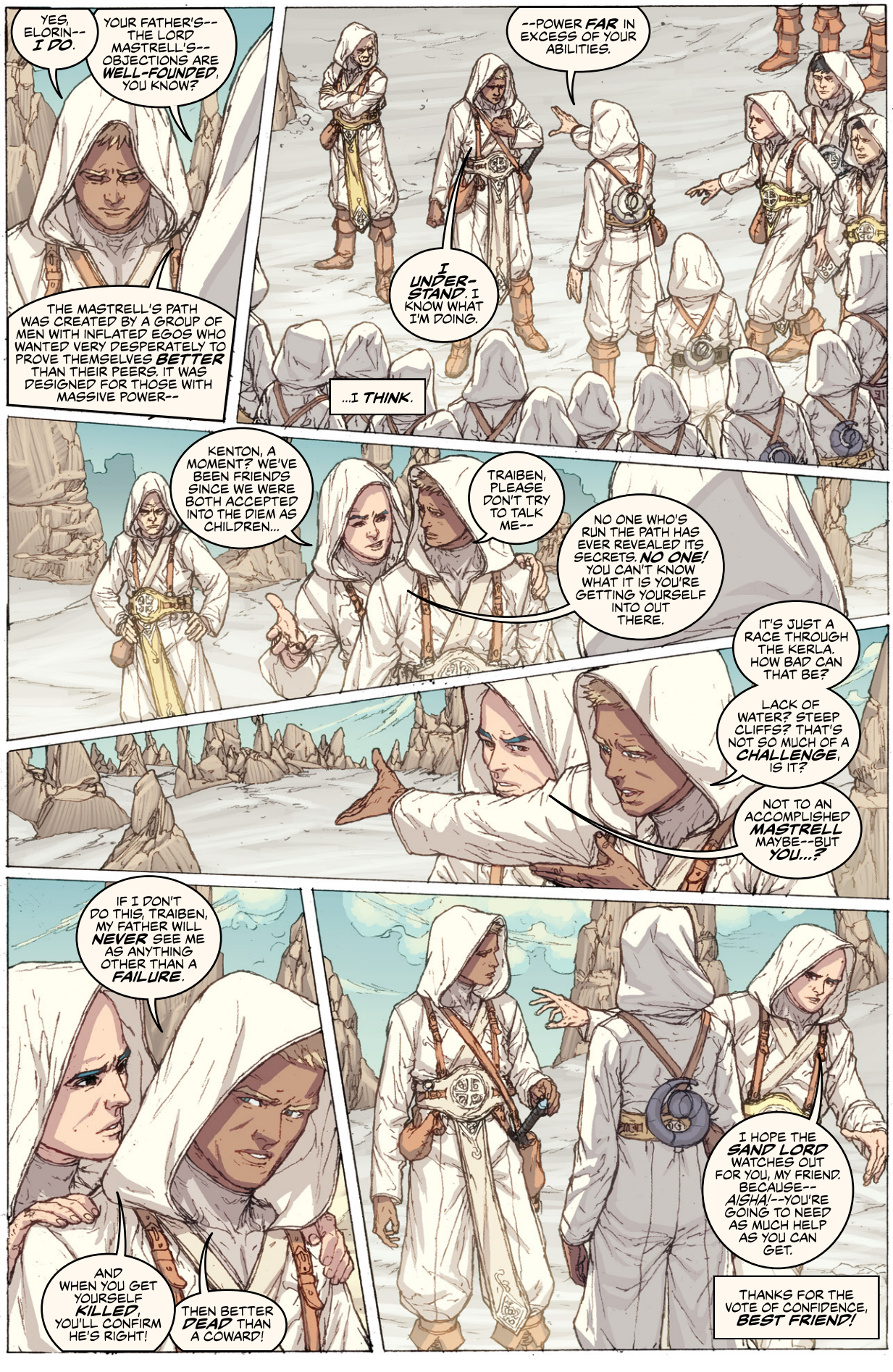

THE KERLA, DAYSIDE.
YOU'RE INEPT ENOUGH TO MAKE THE HUNDRED IDIOTS LOOK BRILLIANT--
WIND CARESSES THE STARK DUNES WITH A WHISPERING TOUCH, CATCHING FINE, WHITE GRAINS OF SAND BETWEEN ITS FINGERS AND BEARING THEM FORTH LIKE THOUSANDS OF TINY CHARIOTEERS.
ABOVE, THE MOTIONLESS SUN GLARES DOWN ON THE DUNES LIKE A JEALOUS MONARCH, ITS STARE FIXED--
--RELENTLESS.

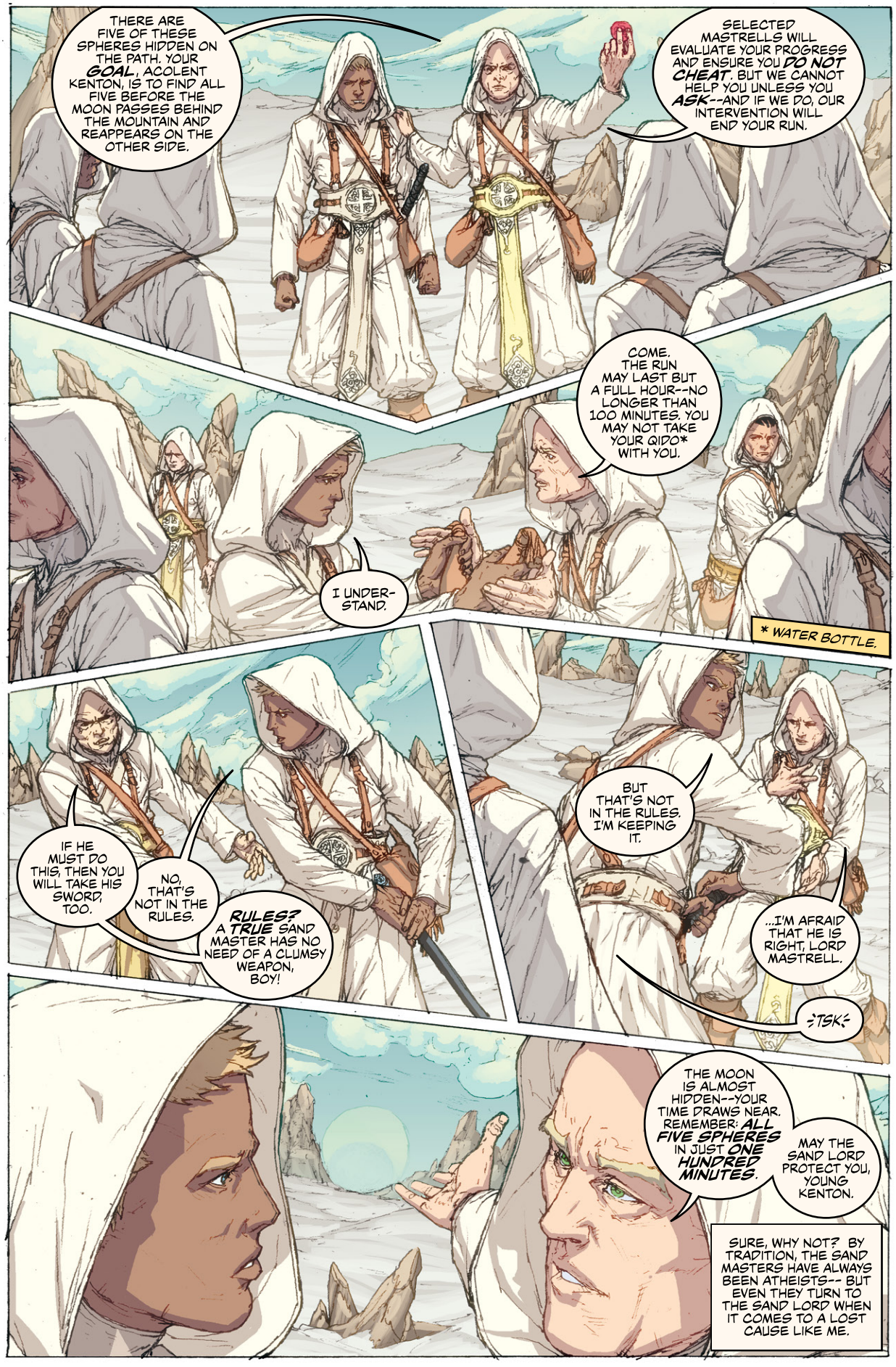

--DON'T TELL ME YOU INTEND TO GO THROUGH WITH THIS FOOLISHNESS, KENTON?!
LOOK, BOY-- I HAVE SUFFERED YOUR INSOLENCE AND GAMES FOR EIGHT YEARS! THE SAND LORD ALMIGHTY ONLY KNOWS HOW MUCH TROUBLE YOU'VE CAUSED!
WHY MUST YOU CONSTANTLY DEFY ME?
PAH! MY OWN SON, DETERMINED TO EMBARRASS ME! YOU HAVE REFUSED ADVANCEMENT FOUR TIMES NOW.
FOUR TIMES!
THERE ARE ACOLENTS FOUR YEARS YOUNGER THAN YOU WHO ARE NOW FULL-FLEDGED MASTRELLS! ARE YOU DETERMINED TO BE THE OLDEST TRAINEE IN THE DIEM?! IS THAT IT?!
BECAUSE I'M GOOD AT IT?
LORD MASTRELL, I HAVE REFUSED BECAUSE ONCE A SAND MASTER HAS ACCEPTED A RANK HE'S FOREVER FROZEN IN THAT PLACE.
SO...?
-SIGH- ALL RIGHT, BOY, ALL RIGHT.

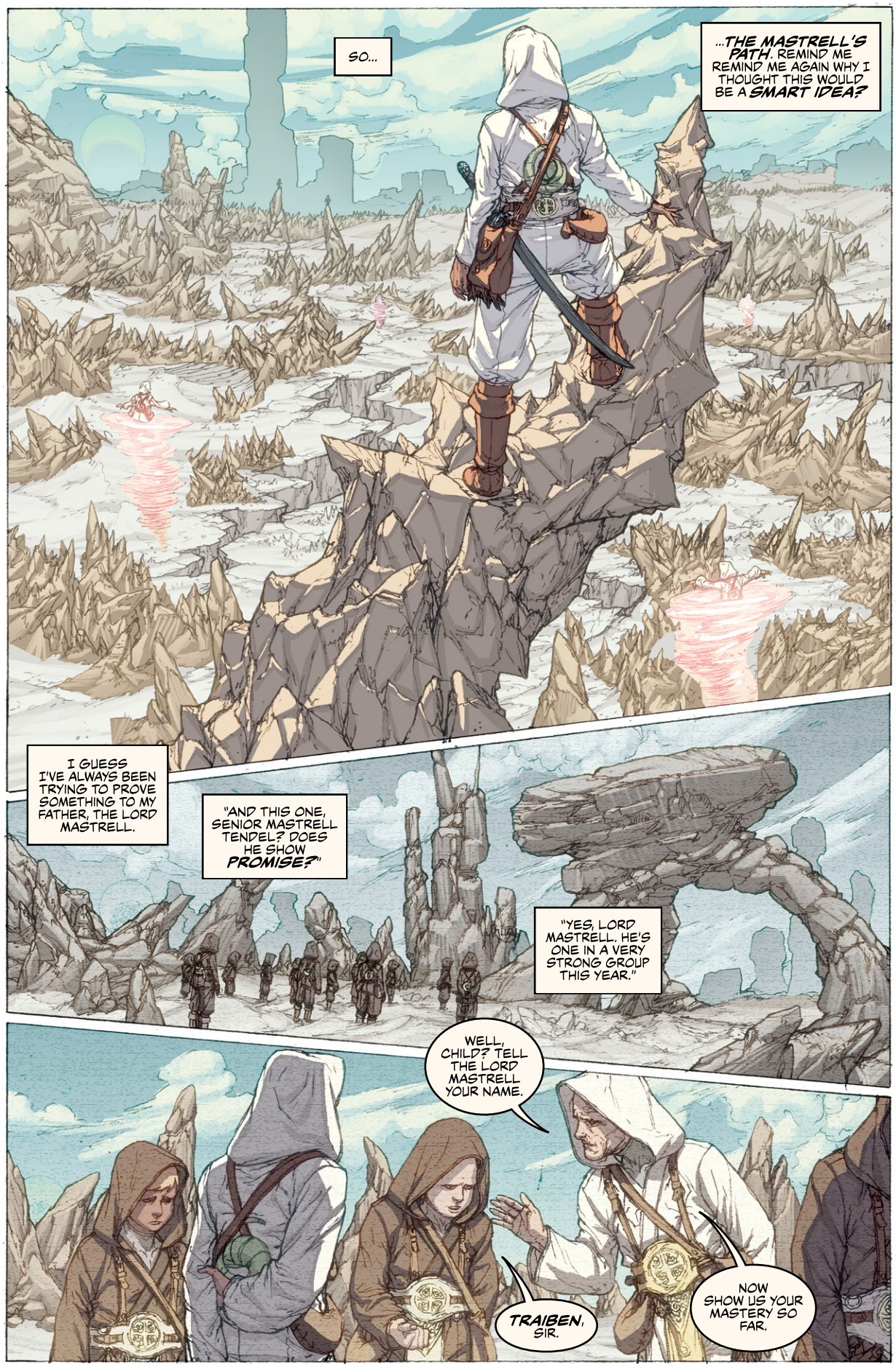

DESPITE THE PAIN--DESPITE THE SHAME--I WILL ADMIT THAT YOU'VE WORKED HARD. THE SAND LORD KNOWS YOU HAVEN'T ANY TALENT TO SPEAK OF, BUT AT LEAST YOU DID SOMETHING WITH THE SMALL AMOUNT YOU HAVE.
GIVE UP THIS STUPID DREAM TO RUN THE MASTRELL'S PATH AND TOMORROW I'LL OFFER YOU THE RANK OF FEN.
FEN. THE NEXT TO LOWEST OF THE SEVEN PERMANENT SAND MASTER RANKS.
ONLY UNDERFEN SITS BENEATH IT, AND I HAVE REFUSED THAT FOUR TIMES NOW.
NO.
BEING MY SON WON'T CHANGE ANYTHING, YOU KNOW? I WON'T MAKE YOU A MASTRELL, KENTON. YOU'RE NOT GOOD ENOUGH. EVEN IF YOU FIND ALL FIVE SPHERES, I WON'T DO IT.
YOU'LL NEVER BE A MASTRELL--YOU AREN'T EVEN WORTHY TO BE A SAND MASTER. ALL YOU ARE--ALL YOU WILL EVER BE--IS A DISAPPOINTMENT!
AISHA!!! RUNNING THE MASTRELL'S PATH WON'T PROVE ANYTHING! IT'S MEANT FOR MASTRELLS, NOT FOR...
THE LAW DOESN'T SAY A STUDENT CANNOT RUN IT.
THEN I'LL BE AN ACOLENT UNTIL THE DAY I DIE, LORD MASTRELL.

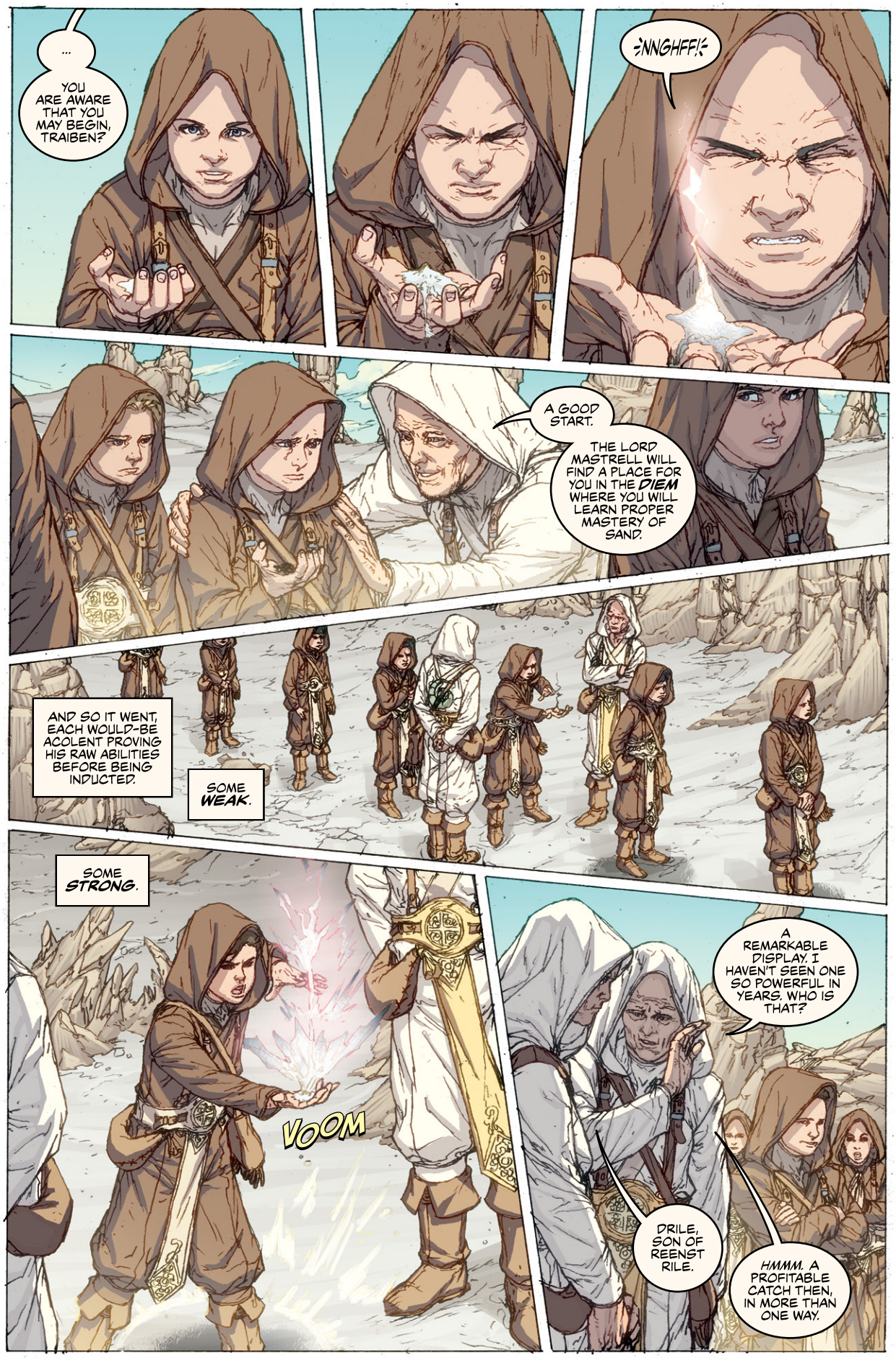

YOU CAN'T BE A MASTRELL. YOU DON'T HAVE THE POWER.
I DON'T BELIEVE IN POWER, FATHER. I BELIEVE IN ABILITY. I CAN DO ANYTHING A MASTRELL CAN; I JUST HAVE DIFFERENT METHODS.
"DIFFERENT METHODS"?! A SWORD? NO SAND MASTER IN ALL OF HISTORY EVER NEEDED A WEAPON! IT'S A BRUTE'S TOOL FIT ONLY FOR THAT VULGAR PROFESSION--SOLDIERS!
I CAN DO ANYTHING A MASTRELL CAN.
CAN YOU SLATRIFY?
SLATRIFICATION--THE ABILITY TO CHANGE SAND INTO WATER. WILDLY DIFFERENT FROM SAND MASTERY'S OTHER ABILITIES AND SOMETHING NO AMOUNT OF INGENUITY CAN REPLICATE--NOT EVEN MY INGENUITY.
WELL, BOY?
THERE HAVE BEEN MASTRELLS WHO COULDN'T--
ONLY TWO! AND BOTH WERE ABLE TO CONTROL OVER TWO DOZEN RIBBONS OF SAND AT ONCE.

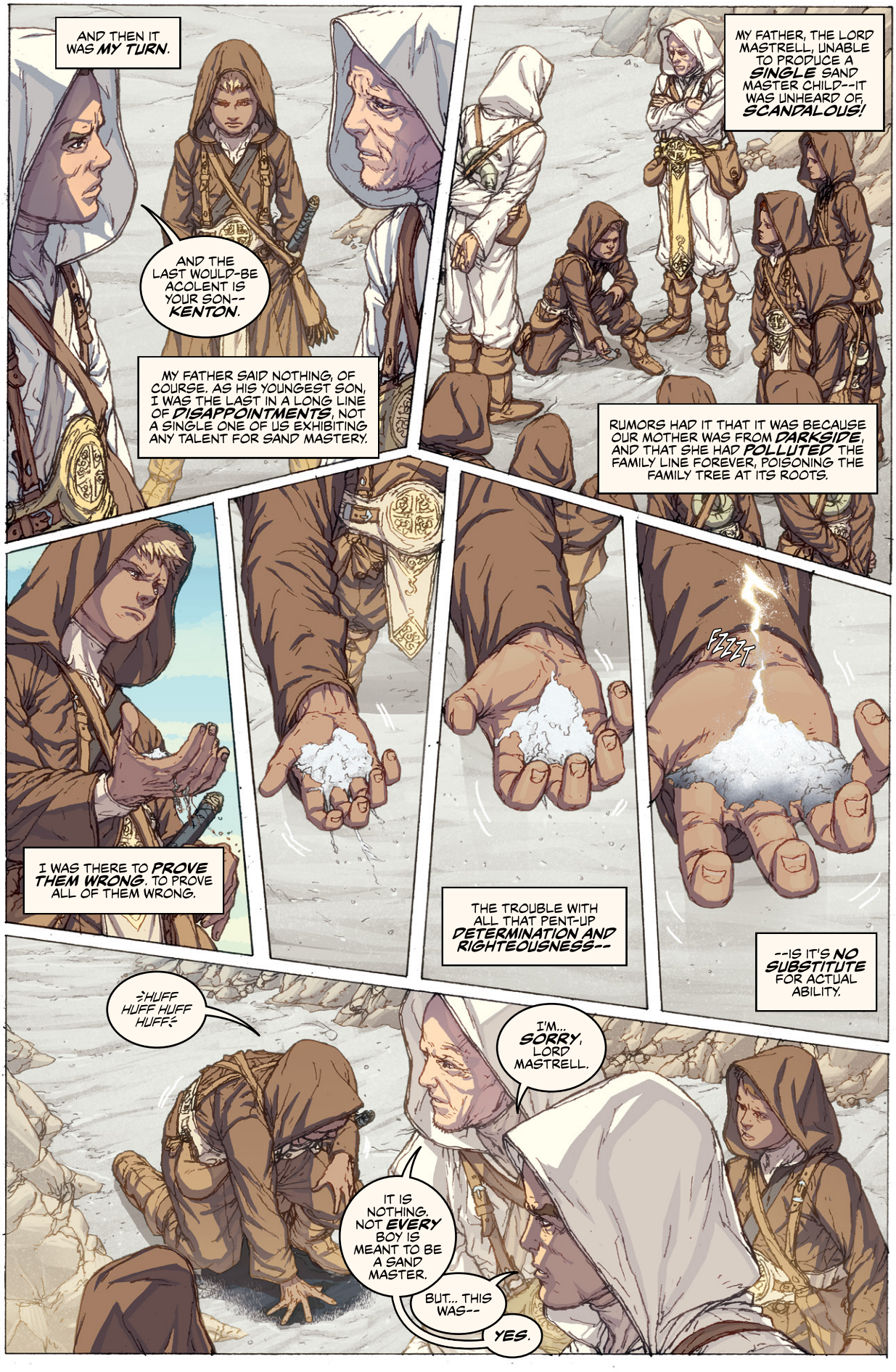

HOW MANY RIBBONS CAN YOU CONTROL, BOY?
AFTER EIGHT YEARS TRAINING, HOW MANY?
ONE.
ONE!
I'VE NEVER KNOWN A MASTRELL WHO COULDN'T CONTROL AT LEAST FIFTEEN. YOU'RE TELLING ME YOU CAN DO AS MUCH WITH ONE AS THEY CAN WITH FIFTEEN?!
CAN'T YOU HEAR HOW PREPOS-TEROUS THAT SOUNDS?!
YOU'RE RIGHT. I'LL JUST HAVE TO PROVE IT TO YOU, LORD MASTRELL.
WHAT--?!
NOW, YOU LISTEN TO ME, BOY!
YOU'RE A FOOL!
EVEN MANY OF THE MOST ACCOMPLISHED SAND MASTERS CHOOSE NEVER TO RUN THE PATH--IT'S TOO DANGEROUS!
UNDER-MASTRELL ELORIN, MY LORD. I PETITION YOU FOR SPONSOR-SHIP IN MY REQUEST.
ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT TO DO THIS, KENTON?


YES, ELORIN-- I DO.
YOUR FATHER'S-- THE LORD MASTRELL'S-- OBJECTIONS ARE WELL-FOUNDED, YOU KNOW?
THE MASTRELL'S PATH WAS CREATED BY A GROUP OF MEN WITH INFLATED EGOS WHO WANTED VERY DESPERATELY TO PROVE THEMSELVES BETTER THAN THEIR PEERS. IT WAS DESIGNED FOR THOSE WITH MASSIVE POWER--
--POWER FAR IN EXCESS OF YOUR ABILITIES.
I UNDERSTAND. I KNOW WHAT I'M DOING.
...I THINK.
KENTON, A MOMENT? WE'VE BEEN FRIENDS SINCE WE WERE BOTH ACCEPTED INTO THE DIEM AS CHILDREN...
TRAIBEN, PLEASE DON'T TRY TO TALK ME--
NO ONE WHO'S RUN THE PATH HAS EVER REVEALED ITS SECRETS. NO ONE! YOU CAN'T KNOW WHAT IT IS YOU'RE GETTING YOURSELF INTO OUT THERE.
IT'S JUST A RACE THROUGH THE KERLA. HOW BAD CAN THAT BE?
LACK OF WATER? STEEP CLIFFS? THAT'S NOT SO MUCH OF A CHALLENGE, IS IT?
NOT TO AN ACCOMPLISHED MASTRELL MAYBE--BUT YOU...?
IF I DON'T DO THIS, TRAIBEN, MY FATHER WILL NEVER SEE ME AS ANYTHING OTHER THAN A FAILURE.
AND WHEN YOU GET YOURSELF KILLED, YOU'LL CONFIRM HE'S RIGHT!
THEN BETTER DEAD THAN A COWARD!
I HOPE THE SAND LORD WATCHES OUT FOR YOU, MY FRIEND. BECAUSE-- AISHA!--YOU'RE GOING TO NEED AS MUCH HELP AS YOU CAN GET.
THANKS FOR THE VOTE OF CONFIDENCE, BEST FRIEND!

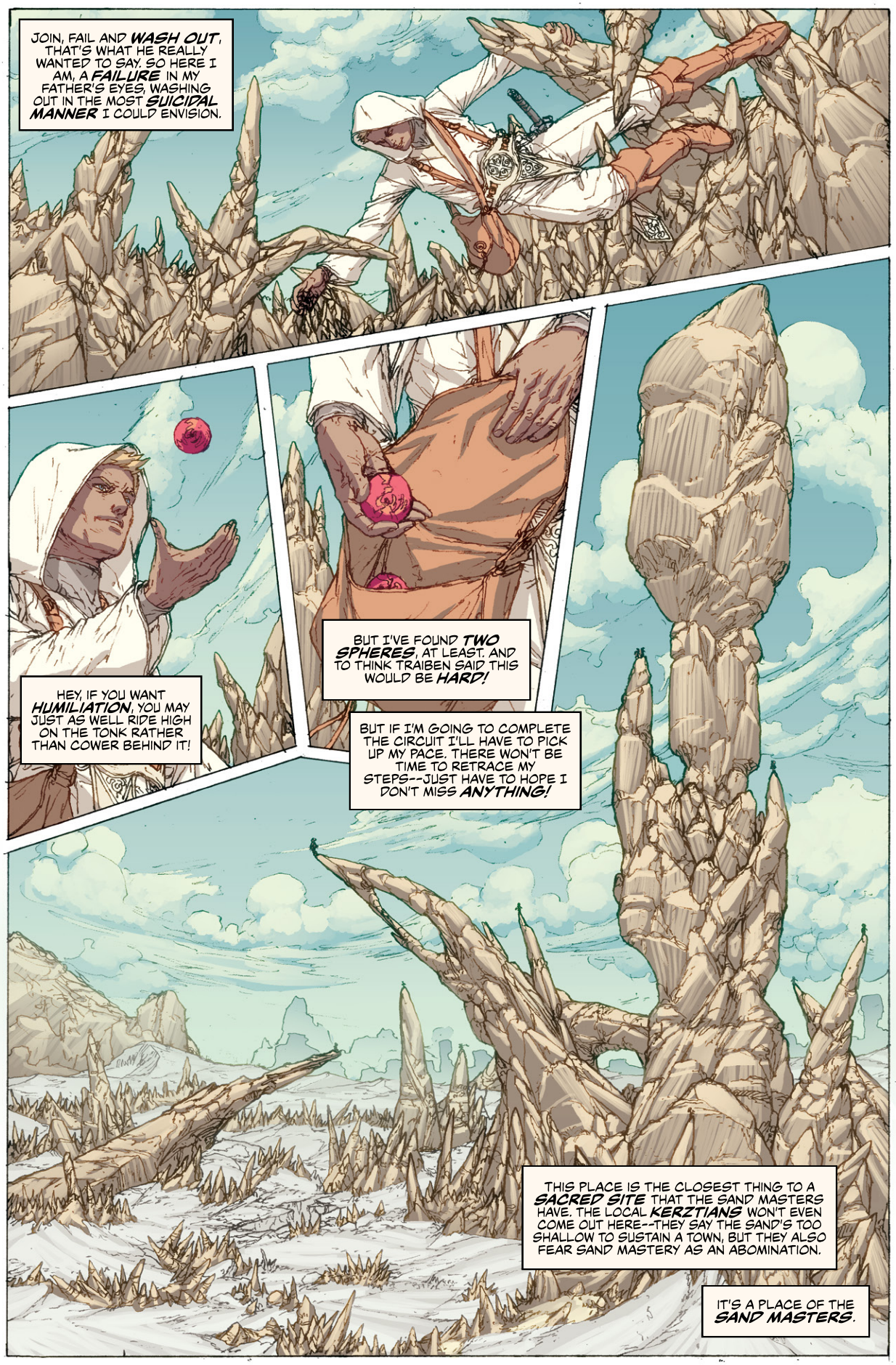

THERE ARE FIVE OF THESE SPHERES HIDDEN ON THE PATH. YOUR GOAL, ACOLENT KENTON, IS TO FIND ALL FIVE BEFORE THE MOON PASSES BEHIND THE MOUNTAIN AND REAPPEARS ON THE OTHER SIDE.
SELECTED MASTRELLS WILL EVALUATE YOUR PROGRESS AND ENSURE YOU DO NOT CHEAT. BUT WE CANNOT HELP YOU UNLESS YOU ASK--AND IF WE DO, OUR INTERVENTION WILL END YOUR RUN.
COME. THE RUN MAY LAST BUT A FULL HOUR--NO LONGER THAN 100 MINUTES. YOU MAY NOT TAKE YOUR QIDO* WITH YOU.
I UNDER-STAND.
* WATER BOTTLE.
IF HE MUST DO THIS, THEN YOU WILL TAKE HIS SWORD, TOO.
NO, THAT'S NOT IN THE RULES.
RULES? A TRUE SAND MASTER HAS NO NEED OF A CLUMSY WEAPON, BOY!
BUT THAT'S NOT IN THE RULES. I'M KEEPING IT.
...I'M AFRAID THAT HE IS RIGHT, LORD MASTRELL.
:TSK:
THE MOON IS ALMOST HIDDEN--YOUR TIME DRAWS NEAR. REMEMBER: ALL FIVE SPHERES IN JUST ONE HUNDRED MINUTES.
MAY THE SAND LORD PROTECT YOU, YOUNG KENTON.
SURE, WHY NOT? BY TRADITION, THE SAND MASTERS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN ATHEISTS-- BUT EVEN THEY TURN TO THE SAND LORD WHEN IT COMES TO A LOST CAUSE LIKE ME.


SO...
...THE MASTRELL'S PATH. REMIND ME REMIND ME AGAIN WHY I THOUGHT THIS WOULD BE A SMART IDEA?
I GUESS I'VE ALWAYS BEEN TRYING TO PROVE SOMETHING TO MY FATHER, THE LORD MASTRELL.
"AND THIS ONE, SENIOR MASTRELL TENDEL? 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.
NOW SHOW US YOUR MASTERY SO FAR.

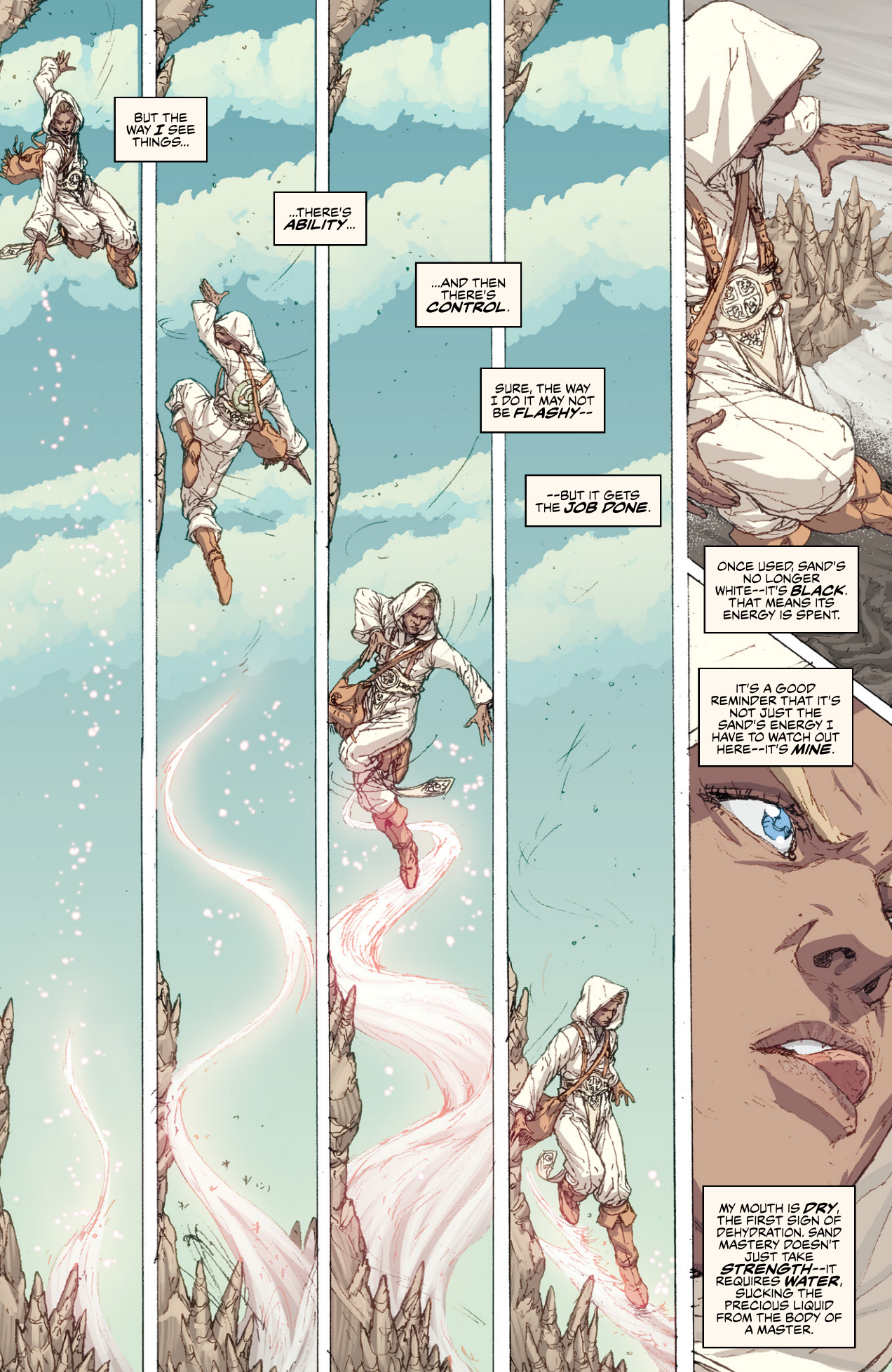

...
YOU ARE AWARE THAT YOU MAY BEGIN, TRAIBEN?
:NNGHFF!:
A GOOD START.
THE LORD MASTRELL WILL FIND A PLACE FOR YOU IN THE DIEM WHERE YOU WILL LEARN PROPER MASTERY OF SAND.
AND SO IT WENT, EACH WOULD-BE ACOLENT PROVING HIS RAW ABILITIES BEFORE BEING INDUCTED.
SOME WEAK.
SOME STRONG.
VOOM
A REMARKABLE DISPLAY. I HAVEN'T SEEN ONE SO POWERFUL IN YEARS. WHO IS THAT?
DRILE, SON OF REENST RILE.
HMMM. A PROFITABLE CATCH THEN, IN MORE THAN ONE WAY.

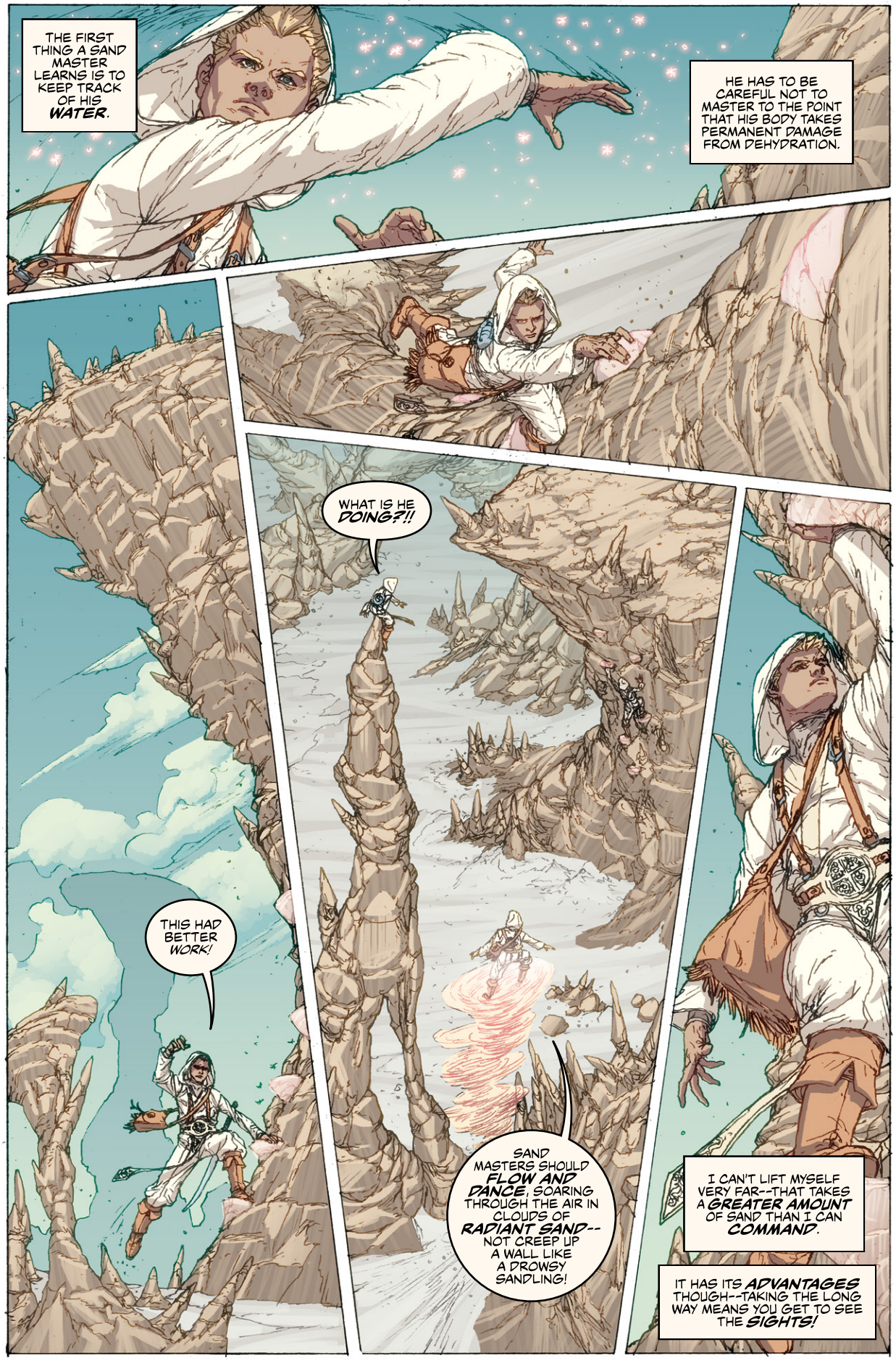

AND THEN IT WAS MY TURN.
AND THE LAST WOULD-BE ACOLENT IS YOUR SON-- KENTON.
MY FATHER SAID NOTHING, OF COURSE. AS HIS YOUNGEST SON, I WAS THE LAST IN A LONG LINE OF DISAPPOINTMENTS, NOT A SINGLE ONE OF US EXHIBITING ANY TALENT FOR SAND MASTERY.
MY FATHER, THE LORD MASTRELL, UNABLE TO PRODUCE A SINGLE SAND MASTER CHILD--IT WAS UNHEARD OF, SCANDALOUS!
RUMORS HAD IT THAT IT WAS BECAUSE OUR MOTHER WAS FROM DARKSIDE, AND THAT SHE HAD POLLUTED THE FAMILY LINE FOREVER, POISONING THE FAMILY TREE AT ITS ROOTS.
I WAS THERE TO PROVE THEM WRONG. TO PROVE ALL OF THEM WRONG.
FZZZT
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 BOY IS MEANT TO BE A SAND MASTER.
BUT... THIS WAS--
YES.

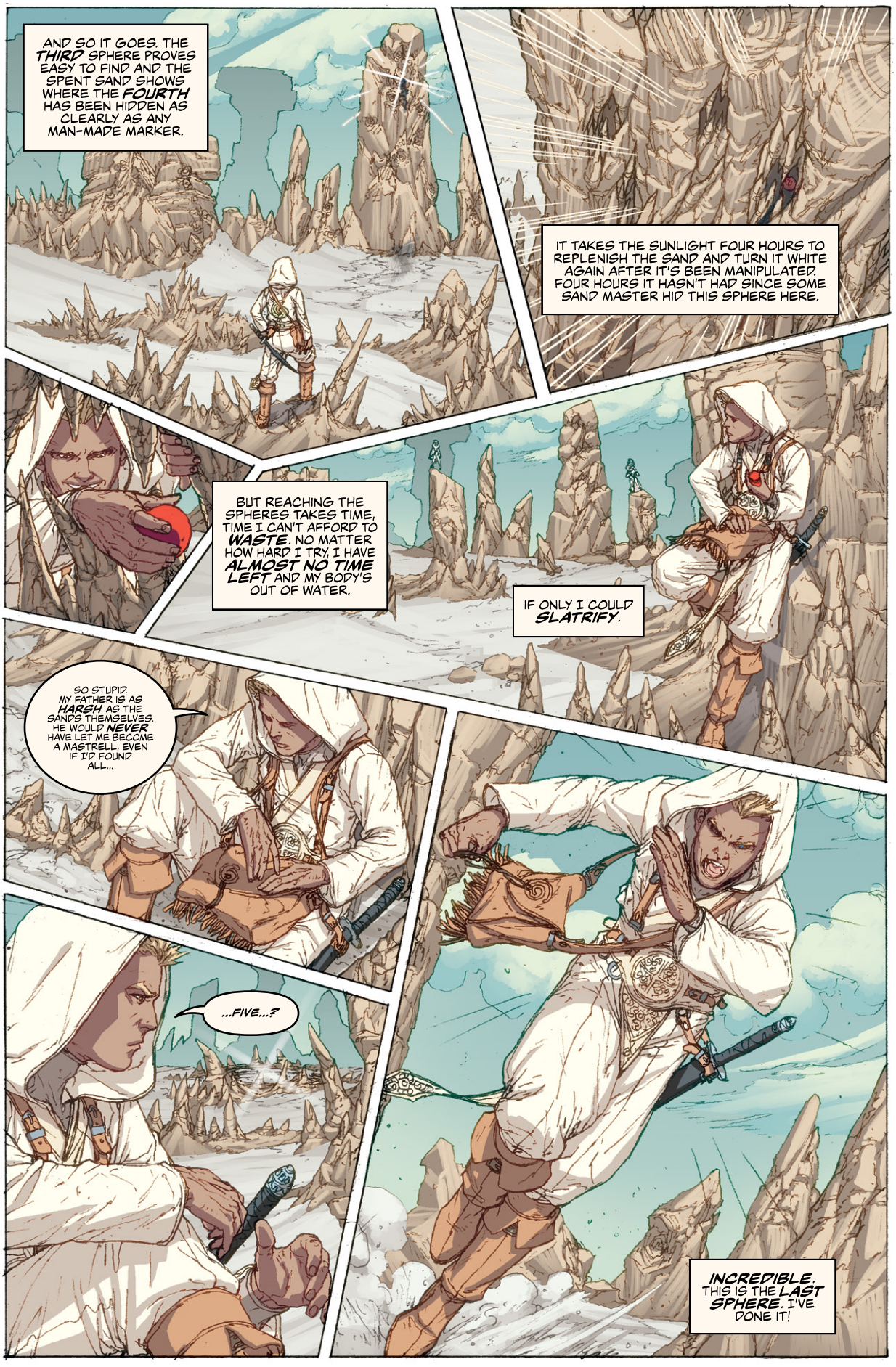

TAKE THEM AWAY. THOSE WHO HAVE ANY SKILL MAY ENTER THE DIEM; THE REST WILL CHOOSE ANOTHER PROFESSION.
I WILL BE A SAND MASTER! AS IS MY RIGHT!
YOU HAVE NO TALENT FOR SAND MASTERY, BOY! GO HOME.
YOU SAW.
THE LAW SAYS I HAVE ENOUGH!
YOU'VE STUDIED THE LAW, HAVE YOU, BOY? THEN YOU KNOW THAT, AS LORD MASTRELL, I AM THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN GRANT ADVANCEMENT IN THE DIEM--
YOU WOULD NOT FIND IT EASY IN THE DIEM, BOY.
BUT YOU MAY JOIN IF THAT IS YOUR DESIRE.
JOIN AND FAIL-- THAT'S WHAT HE MEANT.
--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!

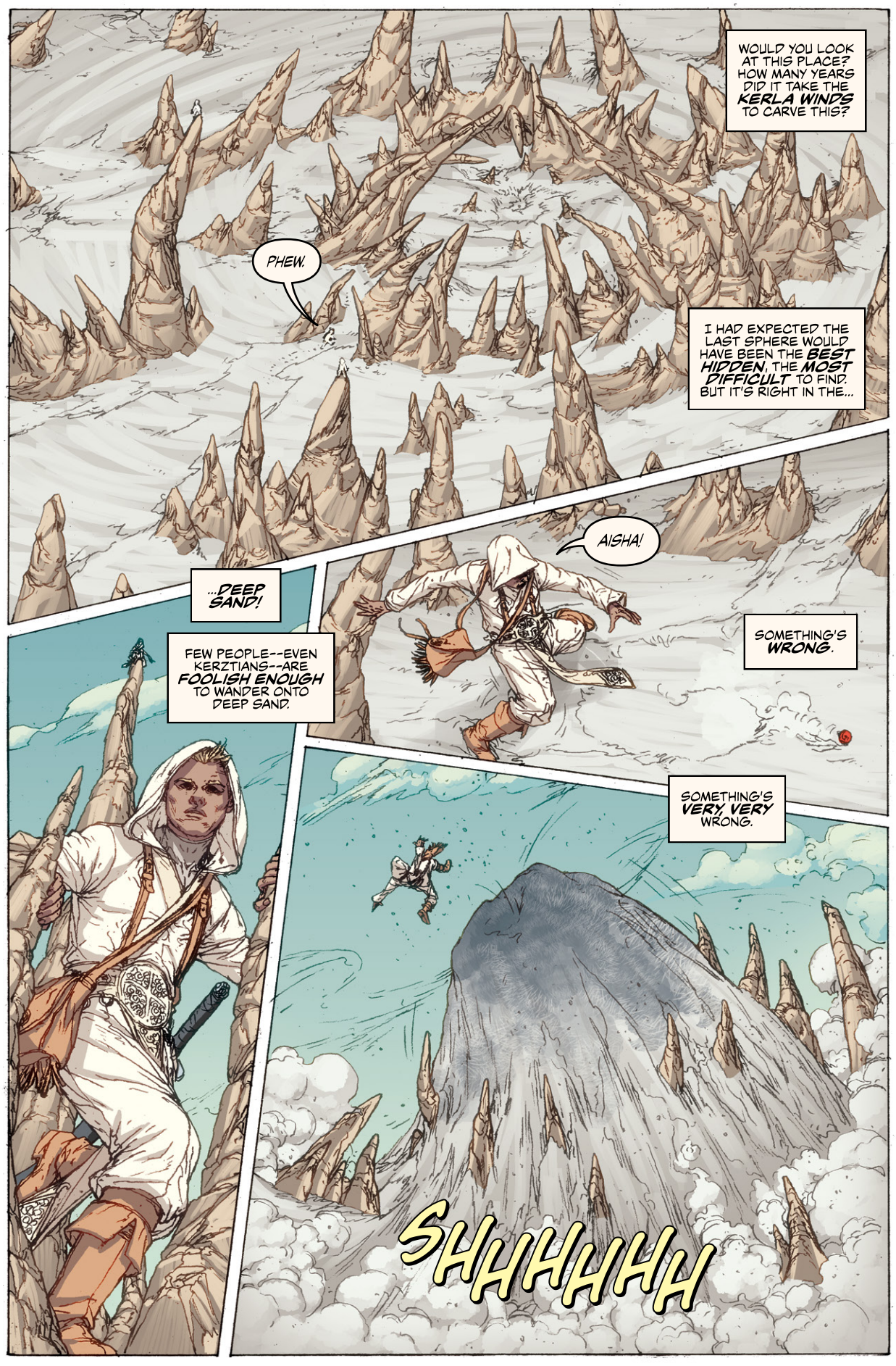

JOIN, FAIL AND WASH OUT, THAT'S WHAT HE REALLY WANTED TO SAY. SO HERE I AM, A FAILURE IN MY FATHER'S EYES, WASHING OUT IN THE MOST SUICIDAL MANNER I COULD ENVISION.
HEY, IF YOU WANT HUMILIATION, YOU MAY JUST AS WELL RIDE HIGH ON THE TONK RATHER THAN COWER BEHIND IT!
BUT I'VE FOUND TWO SPHERES, AT LEAST. AND TO THINK TRAIBEN SAID THIS WOULD BE HARD!
BUT IF I'M GOING TO COMPLETE THE CIRCUIT I'LL HAVE TO PICK UP MY PACE. THERE WON'T BE TIME TO RETRACE MY STEPS--JUST HAVE TO HOPE I DON'T MISS ANYTHING!
THIS PLACE IS THE CLOSEST THING TO A SACRED SITE THAT THE SAND MASTERS HAVE. THE LOCAL KERZTIANS WON'T EVEN COME OUT HERE--THEY SAY THE SAND'S TOO SHALLOW TO SUSTAIN A TOWN, BUT THEY ALSO FEAR SAND MASTERY AS AN ABOMINATION.
IT'S A PLACE OF THE SAND MASTERS.


NEW STUDENTS ARE ASSIGNED THEIR POSITION BASED ON THEIR ABILITY.
MY PALTRY ABILITY PLUNGED ME TO A SOCIAL POSITION AT THE BOTTOM OF A CHASM TWICE AS DEEP AS THIS ONE.
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.
TO SAND MASTERS, POWER IS EVERYTHING. I LEARNED THAT YOUNG, AS SOON AS I WAS INDUCTED INTO THE DIEM.


BUT THE WAY I SEE THINGS...
...THERE'S ABILITY...
...AND THEN THERE'S CONTROL.
SURE, THE WAY I DO IT MAY NOT BE FLASHY--
--BUT IT GETS THE JOB DONE.
ONCE USED, SAND'S NO LONGER WHITE--IT'S BLACK. THAT MEANS ITS ENERGY IS SPENT.
IT'S A GOOD REMINDER THAT IT'S NOT JUST THE SAND'S ENERGY I HAVE TO WATCH OUT HERE--IT'S MINE.
MY MOUTH IS DRY, THE FIRST SIGN OF DEHYDRATION. SAND MASTERY DOESN'T JUST TAKE STRENGTH--IT REQUIRES WATER, SUCKING THE PRECIOUS LIQUID FROM THE BODY OF A MASTER.


THE FIRST THING A SAND MASTER LEARNS IS TO KEEP TRACK OF HIS WATER.
HE HAS TO BE CAREFUL NOT TO MASTER TO THE POINT THAT HIS BODY TAKES PERMANENT DAMAGE FROM DEHYDRATION.
WHAT IS HE DOING?!!
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!
I CAN'T LIFT MYSELF VERY FAR--THAT TAKES A GREATER AMOUNT OF SAND THAN I CAN COMMAND.
IT HAS ITS ADVANTAGES THOUGH--TAKING THE LONG WAY MEANS YOU GET TO SEE THE SIGHTS!

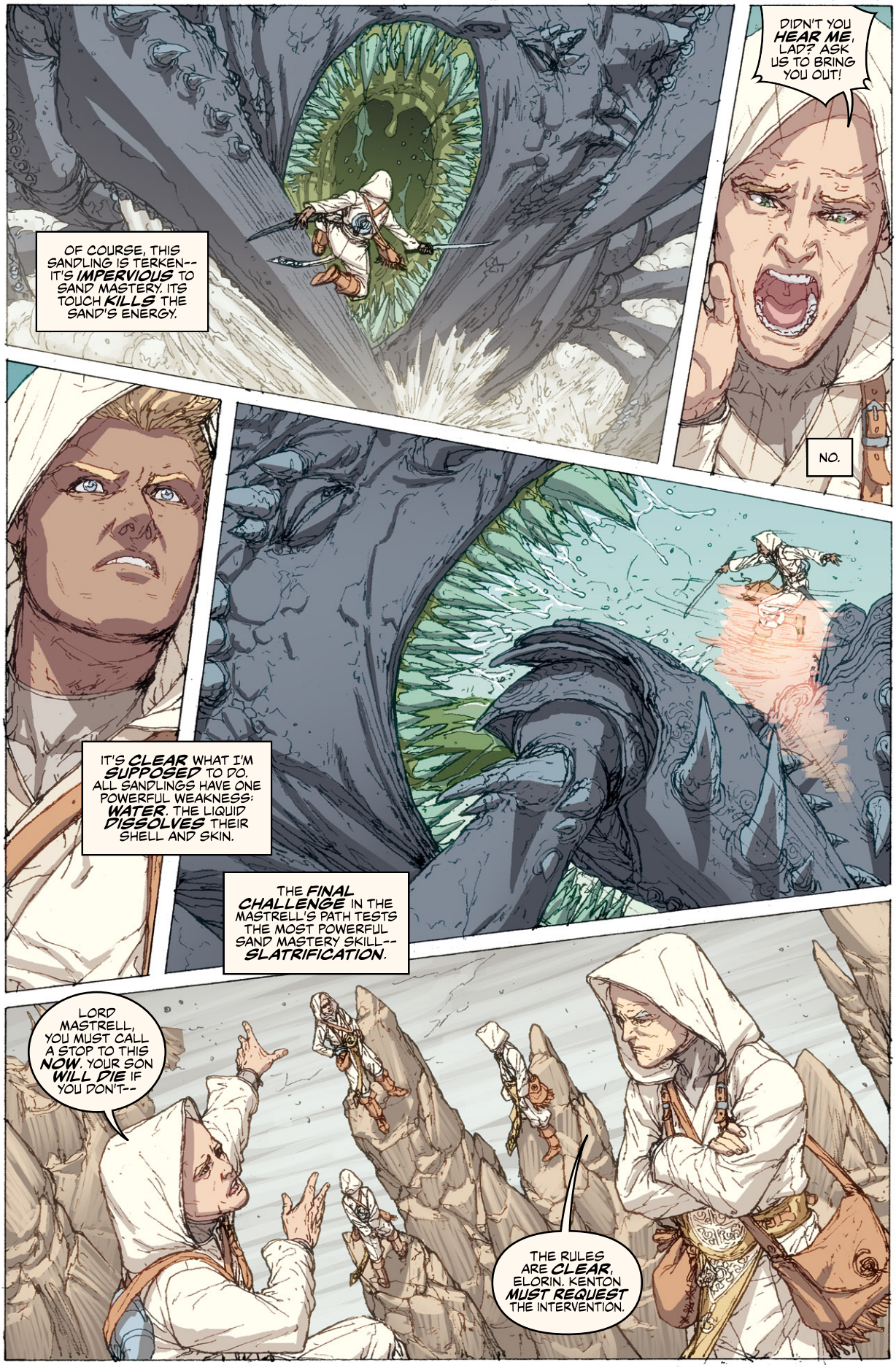

AND SO IT GOES. THE THIRD SPHERE PROVES EASY TO FIND AND THE SPENT SAND SHOWS WHERE THE FOURTH HAS BEEN HIDDEN AS CLEARLY AS ANY MAN-MADE MARKER.
IT TAKES THE SUNLIGHT FOUR HOURS TO REPLENISH THE SAND AND TURN IT WHITE AGAIN AFTER IT'S BEEN MANIPULATED. FOUR HOURS IT HASN'T HAD SINCE SOME SAND MASTER HID 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.
IF ONLY I COULD SLATRIFY.
SO STUPID. MY FATHER IS AS HARSH AS THE SANDS THEMSELVES. HE WOULD NEVER HAVE LET ME BECOME A MASTRELL, EVEN IF I'D FOUND ALL...
...FIVE...?
INCREDIBLE. THIS IS THE LAST SPHERE. I'VE DONE IT!

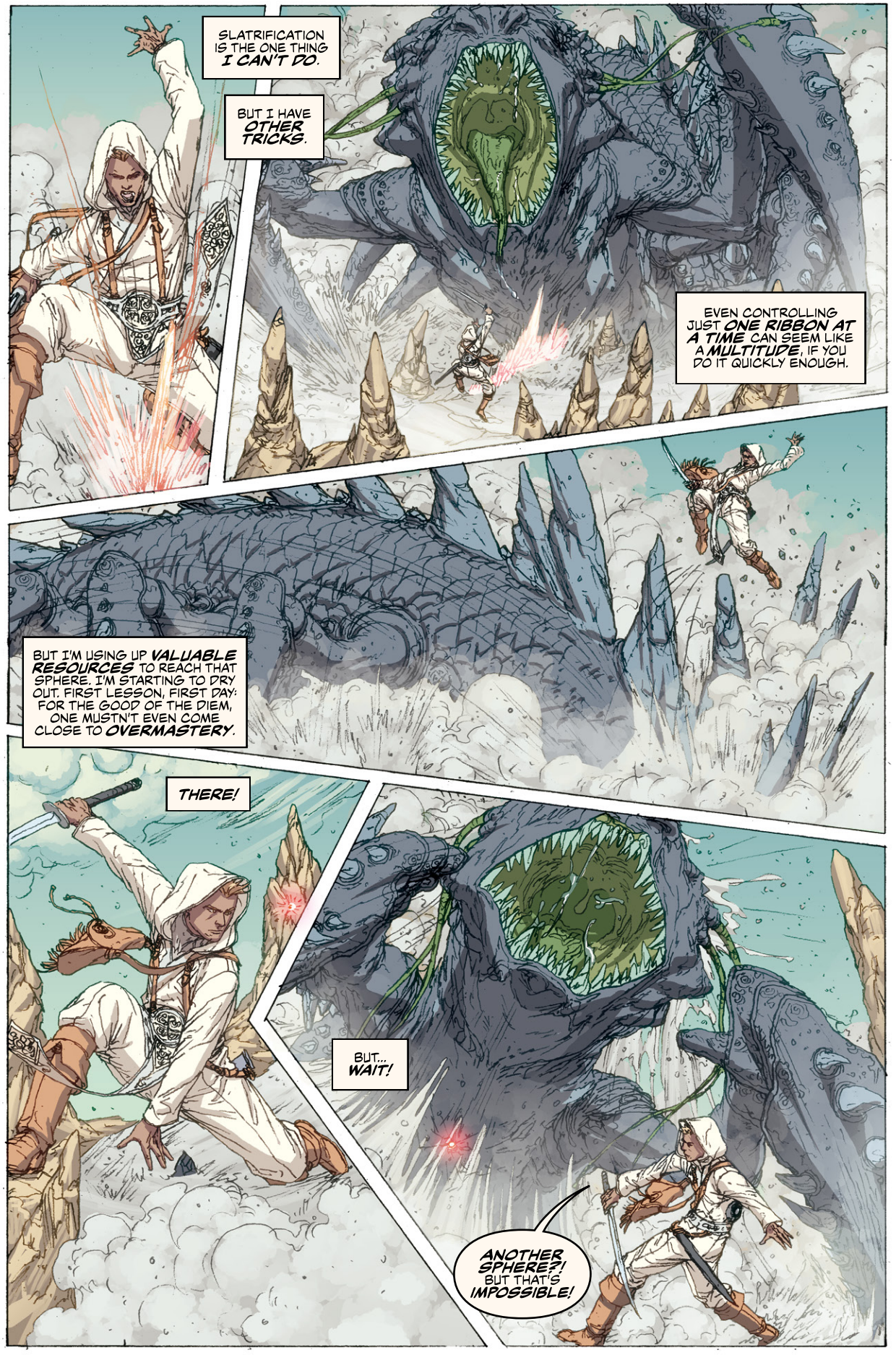

WOULD YOU LOOK AT THIS PLACE? HOW MANY YEARS DID IT TAKE THE KERLA WINDS TO CARVE THIS?
PHEW.
I HAD EXPECTED THE LAST SPHERE WOULD HAVE BEEN THE BEST HIDDEN, THE MOST DIFFICULT TO FIND. BUT IT'S RIGHT IN THE...
AISHA!
...DEEP SAND!
SOMETHING'S WRONG.
FEW PEOPLE--EVEN KERZTIANS--ARE FOOLISH ENOUGH TO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

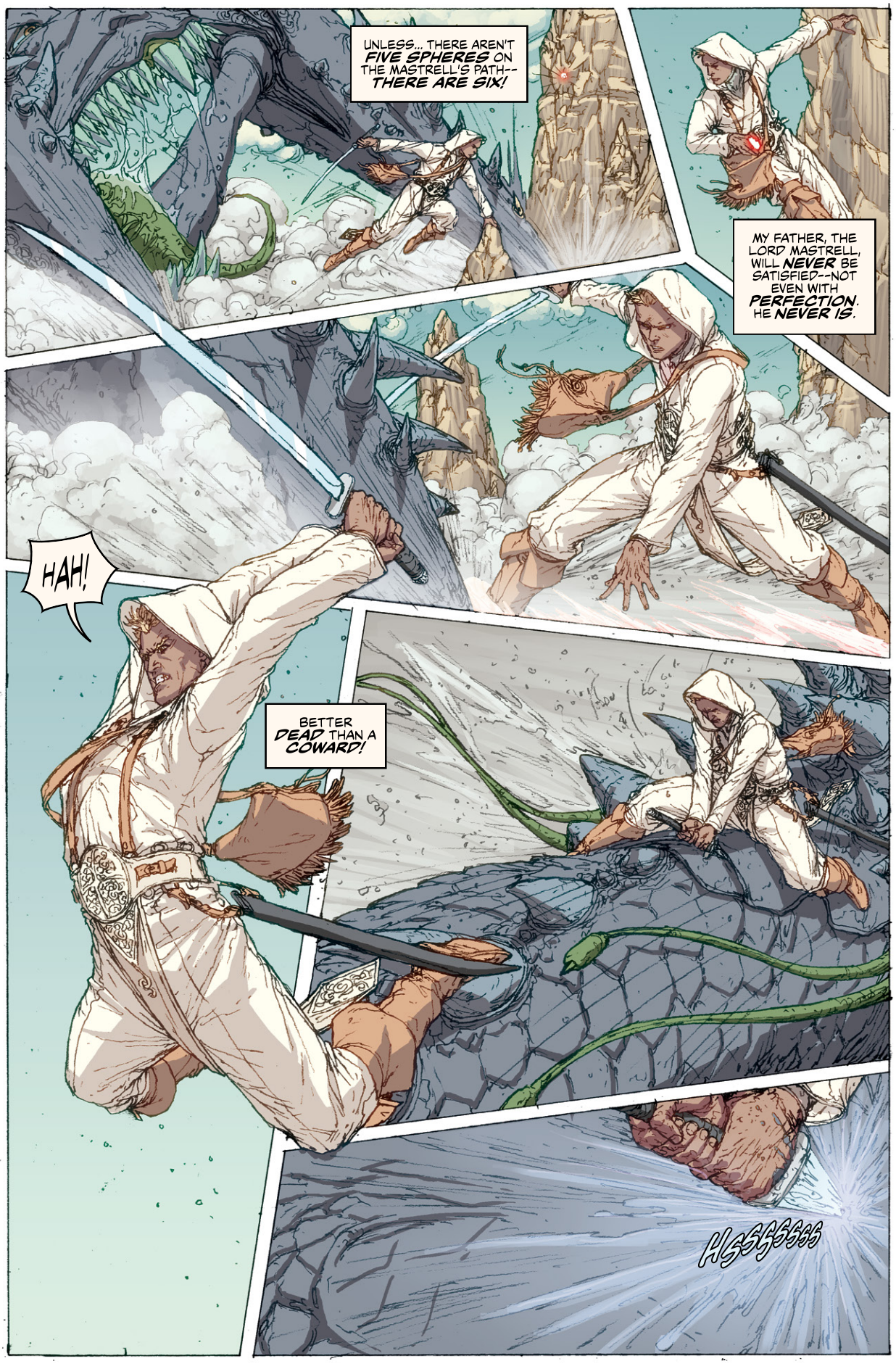

NOW I REMEMBER WHY KERZTIANS DON'T VENTURE ONTO DEEP SAND!
BECAUSE OF THESE THINGS-- ***SANDLINGS***. PREDATORS WHO GLIDE EFFORTLESSLY THROUGH SAND. THEY'RE FAST AND ***NEAR INDESTRUCTIBLE***, LIVING IN THE DEEP SAND AND ONLY EMERGING TO ***HUNT***.

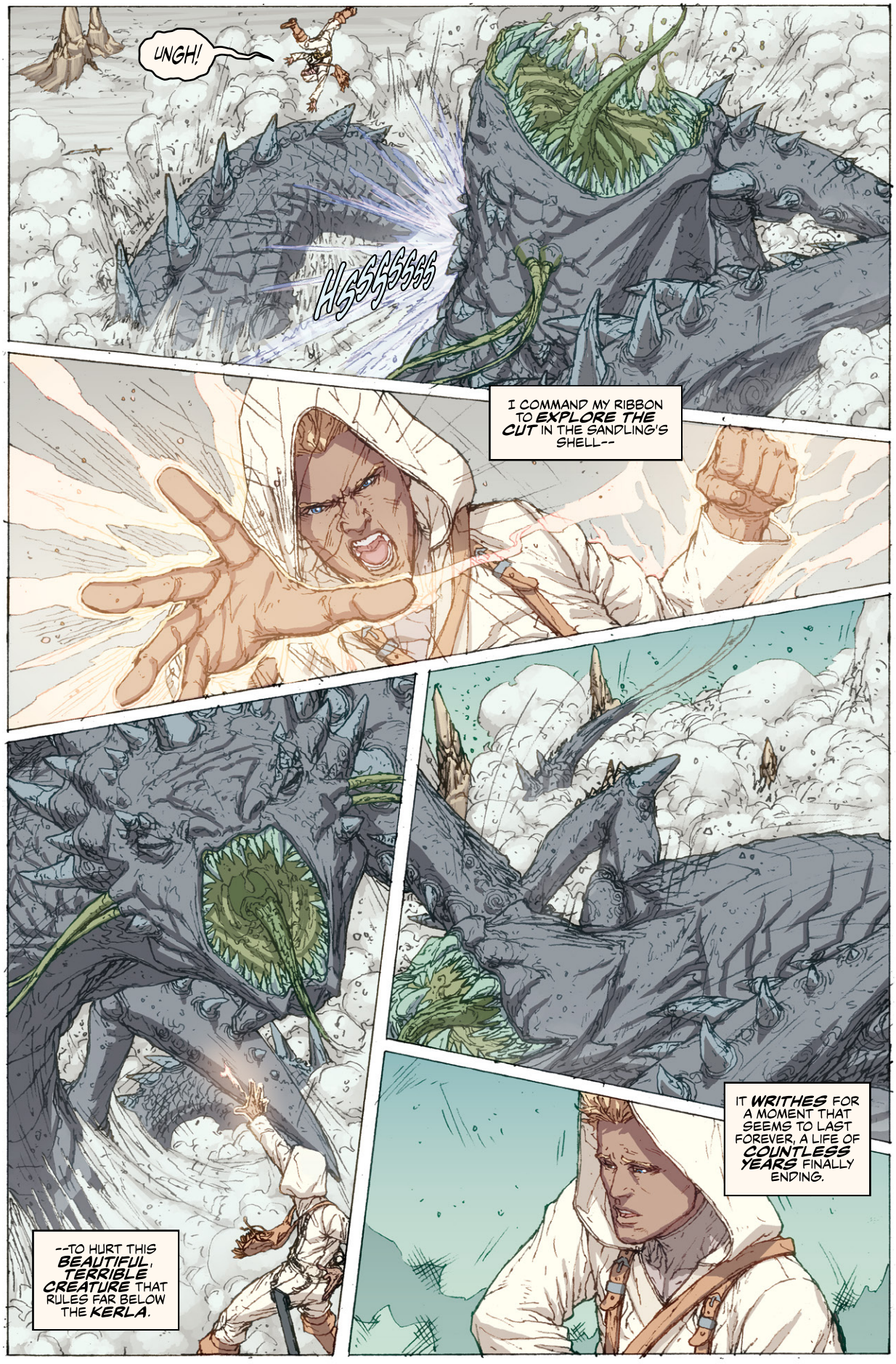

THEY DON'T REALLY SEE-- THEY FEEL. THE KERZTIANS BELIEVE THAT THEY EVEN SPEAK TO THE SAND.


I'M SUDDENLY THANKFUL FOR ALL THE HOURS I SPENT SPARRING WITH SOLDIERS FROM THE TOWER. DAYS HONING REFLEXES ARE ALL THAT'S KEPT ME ALIVE FOR THE PAST FIVE SECONDS.
LET'S SEE IF I CAN LAST FIVE MORE!
AMBITIOUS GOAL, IT SEEMS.
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.


OF COURSE, THIS SANDLING IS TERKEN-- IT'S IMPERVIOUS TO SAND MASTERY. ITS TOUCH KILLS THE SAND'S ENERGY.
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 IN THE MASTRELL'S PATH TESTS THE MOST POWERFUL SAND MASTERY SKILL-- SLATRIFICATION.
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.

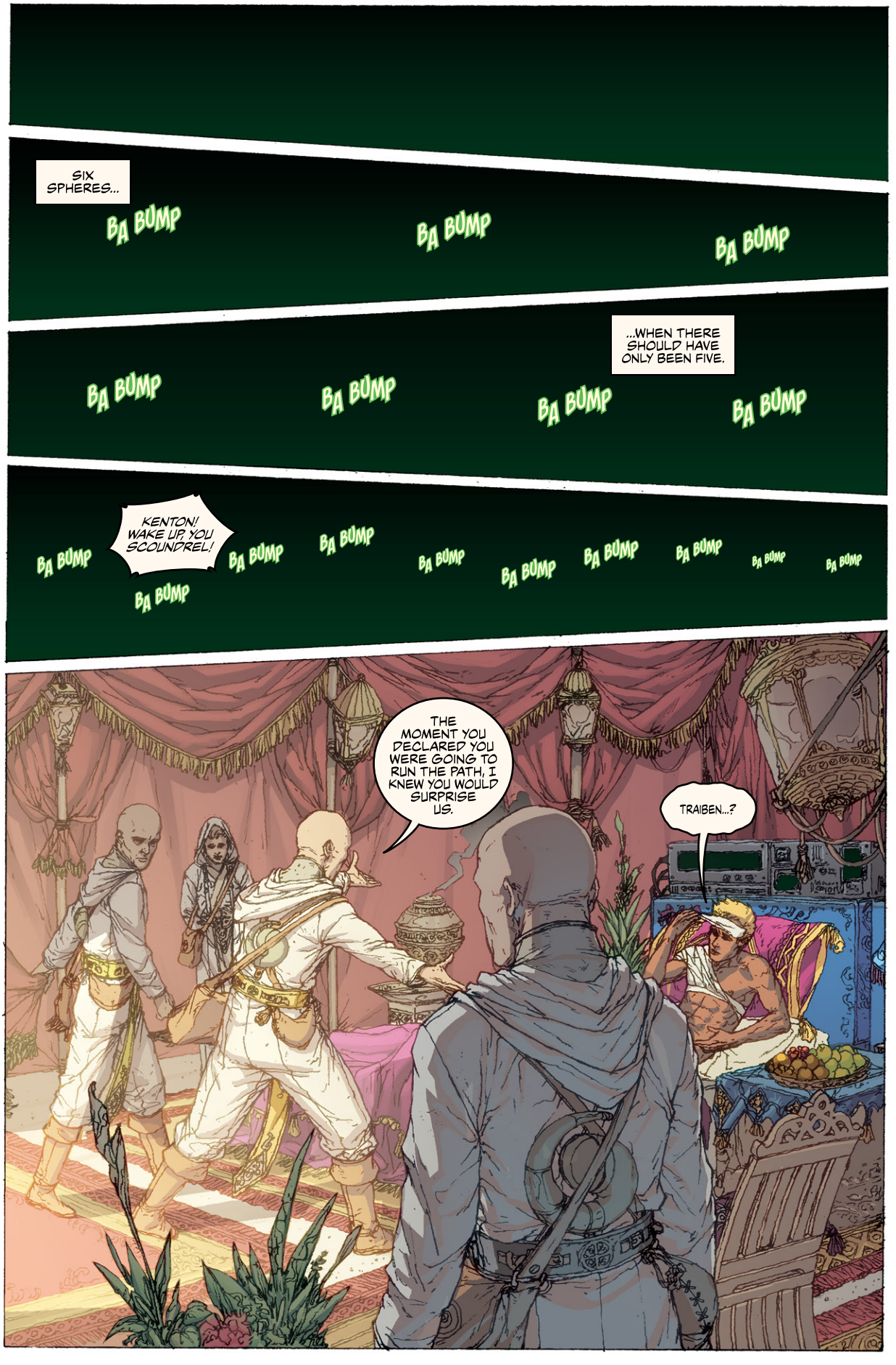

SLATRIFICATION IS THE ONE THING I CAN'T DO.
BUT I HAVE OTHER TRICKS.
EVEN CONTROLLING JUST ONE RIBBON AT A TIME CAN SEEM LIKE A MULTITUDE, IF YOU DO IT QUICKLY ENOUGH.
BUT I'M USING UP VALUABLE RESOURCES TO REACH THAT SPHERE. I'M STARTING TO DRY OUT. FIRST LESSON, FIRST DAY: FOR THE GOOD OF THE DIEM, ONE MUSTN'T EVEN COME CLOSE TO OVERMASTERY.
THERE!
BUT... WAIT!
ANOTHER SPHERE?! BUT THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE!

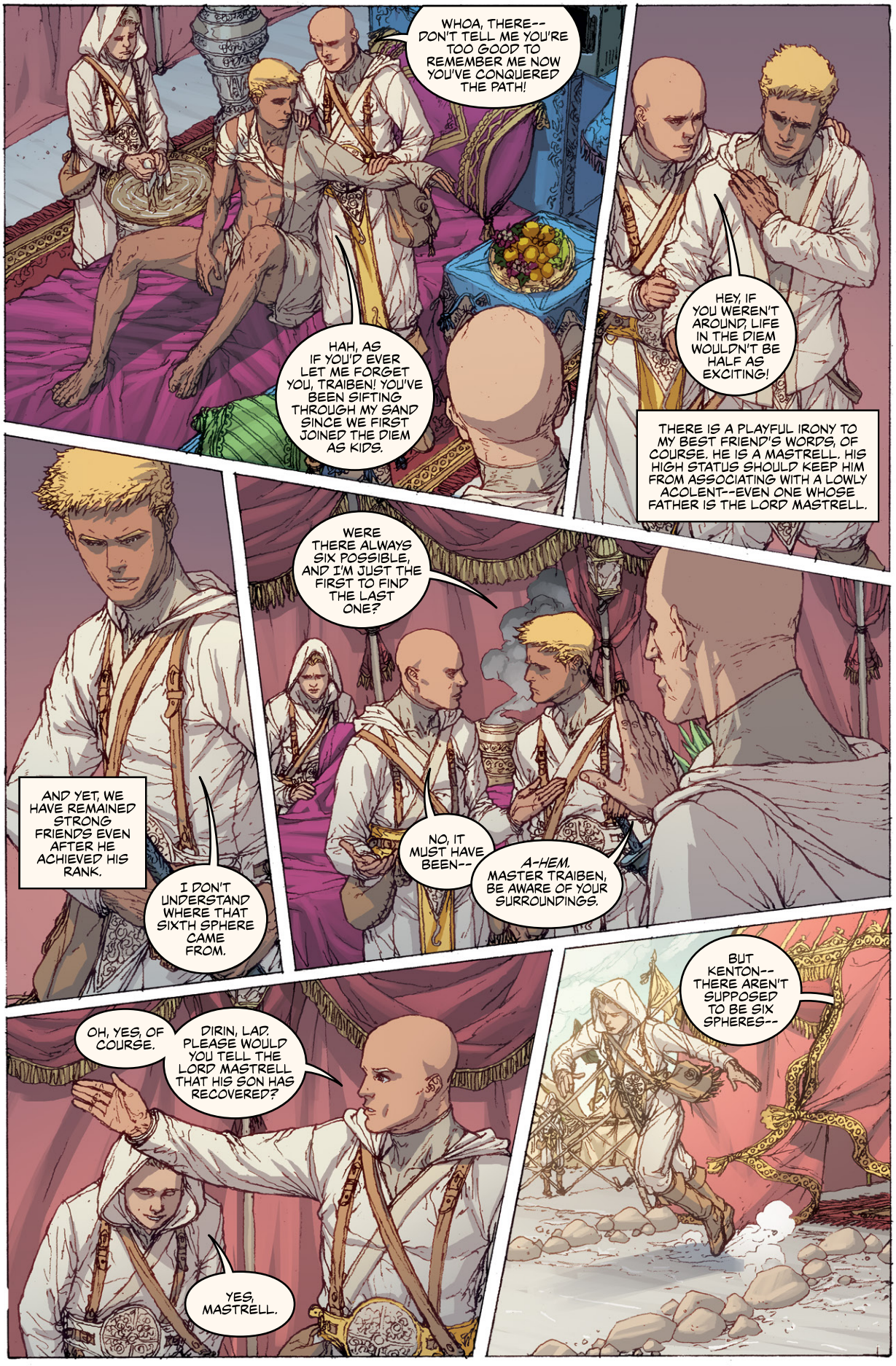

UNLESS... THERE AREN'T FIVE SPHERES ON THE MASTRELL'S PATH-- THERE ARE SIX!
MY FATHER, THE LORD MASTRELL, WILL NEVER BE SATISFIED--NOT EVEN WITH PERFECTION. HE NEVER IS.
HAH!
BETTER DEAD THAN A COWARD!
HSSSSSSS

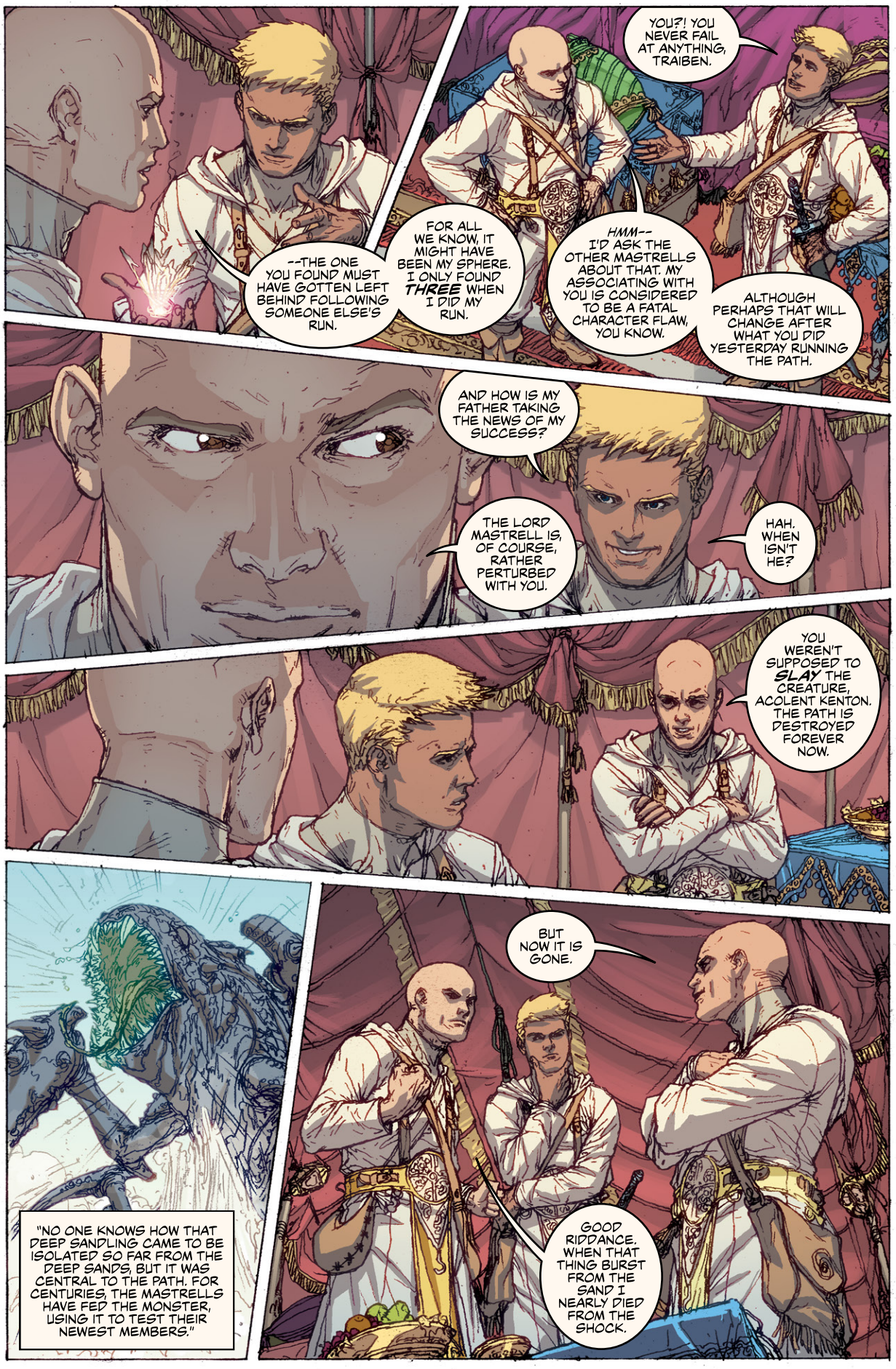

UNGH!
KSSSSSSSS
I COMMAND MY RIBBON TO EXPLORE THE CUT IN THE SANDLING'S SHELL--
--TO HURT THIS BEAUTIFUL, TERRIBLE CREATURE THAT RULES FAR BELOW THE KERLA.
IT WRITHES FOR A MOMENT THAT SEEMS TO LAST FOREVER, A LIFE OF COUNTLESS YEARS FINALLY ENDING.

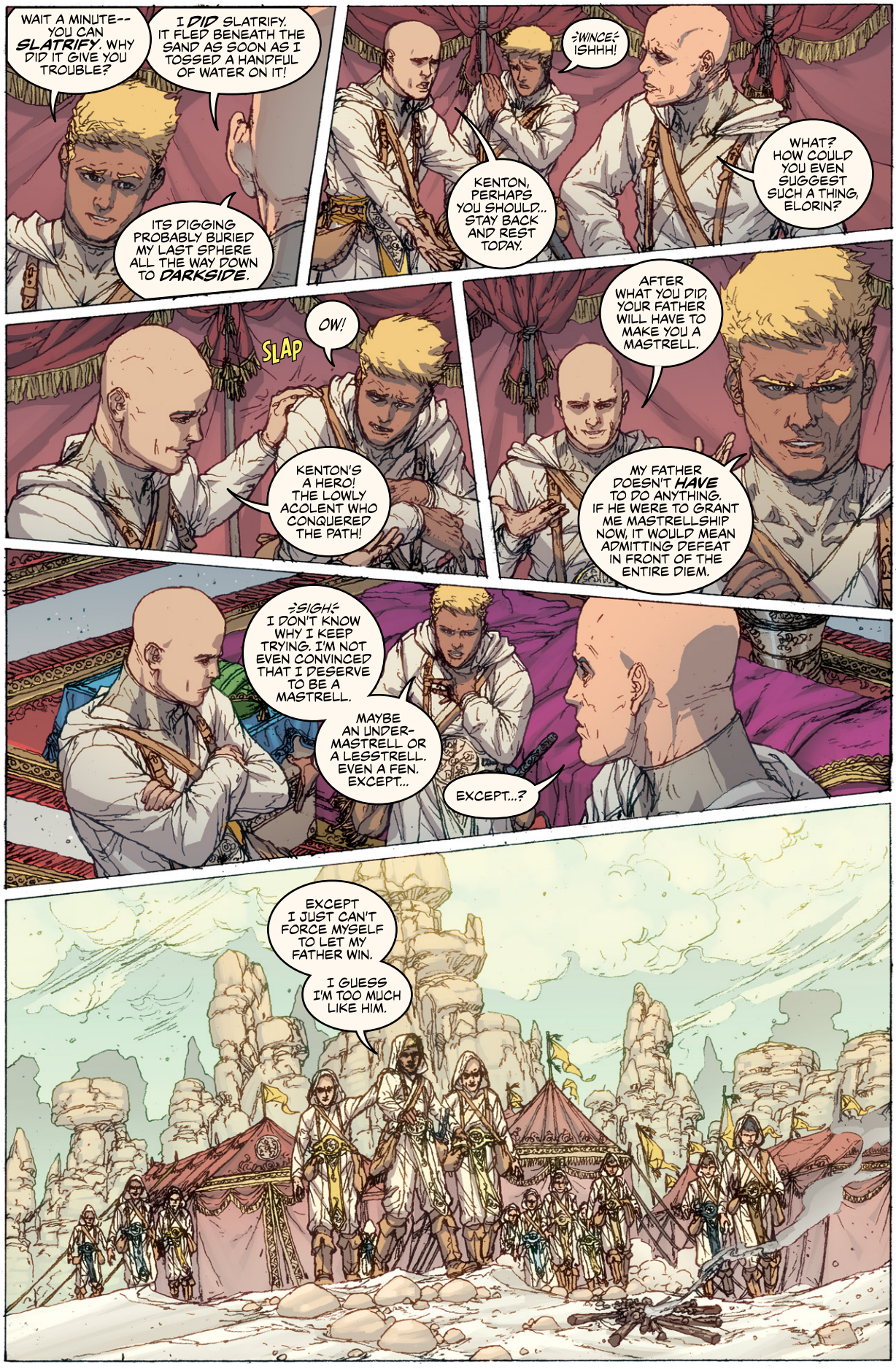

MY TIME IS ALMOST UP TOO, BUT I HAVE TO FINISH THIS.
SIX SPHERES! IT'S IMPOSSIBLE!
I LAID FIVE. WHERE DID THE SIXTH COME FROM?
WATER! BRING THE LAD WATER!
FWUMP
HE'S PUSHED HIMSELF TO THE EXTREME--THANK THE SAND LORD HE SURVIVED. YOU MUST BE PROUD OF YOUR SON, LORD MASTRELL.
MUST I?


CHAPTER 2
ADVANCE

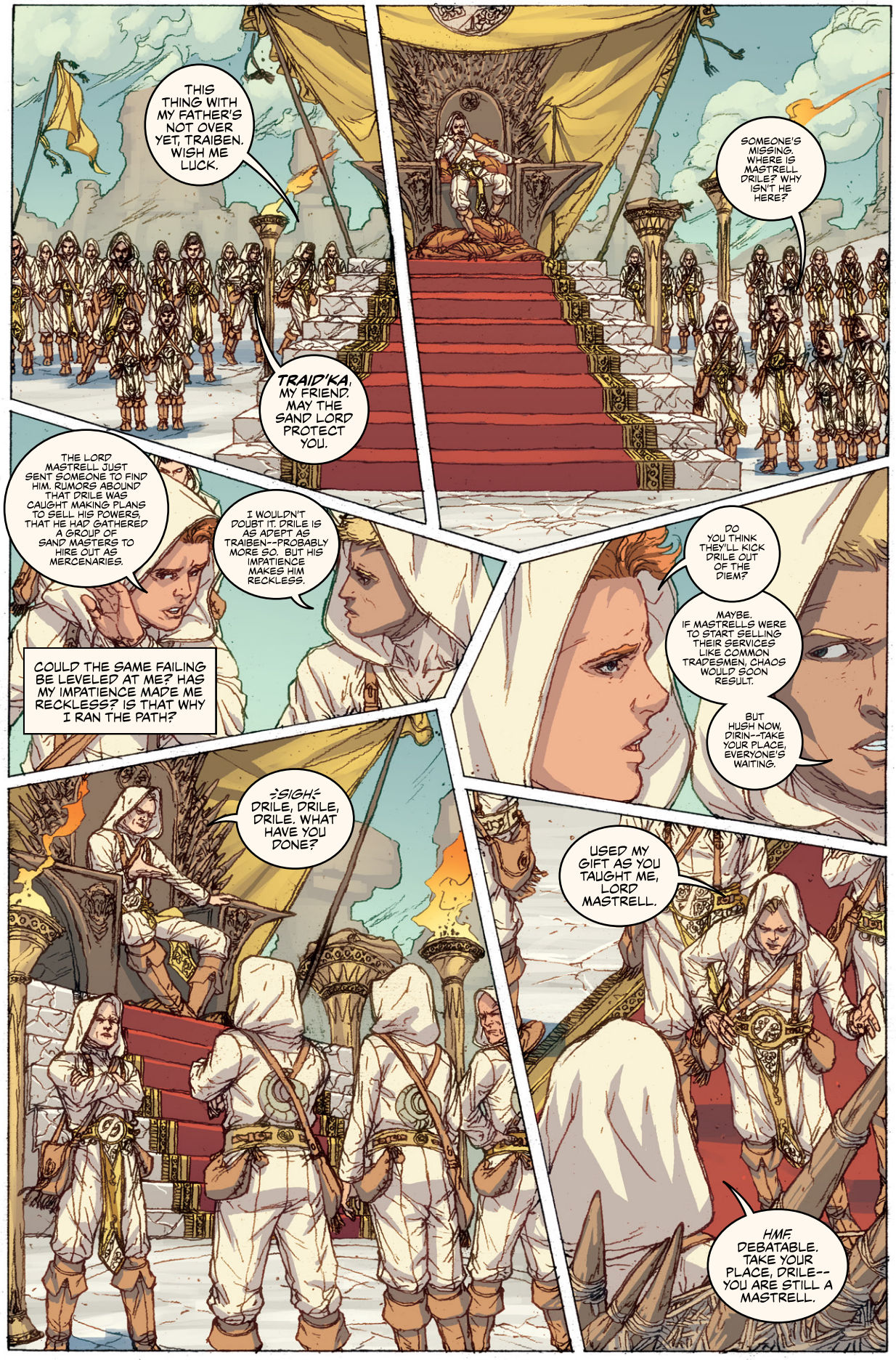

SIX SPHERES...
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
...WHEN THERE SHOULD HAVE ONLY BEEN FIVE.
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
KENTON! WAKE UP, YOU SCOUNDREL!
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
THE MOMENT YOU DECLARED YOU WERE GOING TO RUN THE PATH, I KNEW YOU WOULD SURPRISE US.
TRAIBEN...?


WHOA, THERE-- DON'T TELL ME YOU'RE TOO GOOD TO REMEMBER ME NOW YOU'VE CONQUERED THE PATH!
HAH, AS IF YOU'D EVER LET ME FORGET YOU, TRAIBEN! YOU'VE BEEN SIFTING THROUGH MY SAND SINCE WE FIRST JOINED THE DIEM AS KIDS.
HEY, IF YOU WEREN'T AROUND, LIFE IN THE DIEM WOULDN'T BE HALF AS EXCITING!
THERE IS A PLAYFUL IRONY TO MY BEST FRIEND'S WORDS, OF COURSE. HE IS A MASTRELL. HIS HIGH STATUS SHOULD KEEP HIM FROM ASSOCIATING WITH A LOWLY ACOLENT--EVEN ONE WHOSE FATHER IS THE LORD MASTRELL.
WERE THERE ALWAYS SIX POSSIBLE, AND I'M JUST THE FIRST TO FIND THE LAST ONE?
AND YET, WE HAVE REMAINED STRONG FRIENDS EVEN AFTER HE ACHIEVED HIS RANK.
I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHERE THAT SIXTH SPHERE CAME FROM.
NO, IT MUST HAVE BEEN--
A-HEM. MASTER TRAIBEN, BE AWARE OF YOUR SURROUNDINGS.
OH, YES, OF COURSE.
DIRIN, LAD. PLEASE WOULD YOU TELL THE LORD MASTRELL THAT HIS SON HAS RECOVERED?
YES, MASTRELL.
BUT KENTON-- THERE AREN'T SUPPOSED TO BE SIX SPHERES--


--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.
YOU?! YOU NEVER FAIL AT ANYTHING, TRAIBEN.
HMM-- I'D ASK THE OTHER MASTRELLS ABOUT THAT. MY ASSOCIATING WITH YOU IS CONSIDERED TO BE A FATAL CHARACTER FLAW, YOU KNOW.
ALTHOUGH PERHAPS THAT WILL CHANGE AFTER WHAT YOU DID YESTERDAY RUNNING THE PATH.
AND HOW IS MY FATHER TAKING THE NEWS OF MY SUCCESS?
THE LORD MASTRELL IS, OF COURSE, RATHER PERTURBED WITH YOU.
HAH. WHEN ISN'T HE?
YOU WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO SLAY THE CREATURE, ACOLENT KENTON. THE PATH IS DESTROYED FOREVER NOW.
"NO ONE KNOWS HOW THAT DEEP SANDLING CAME TO BE ISOLATED SO FAR FROM THE DEEP SANDS, BUT IT WAS CENTRAL TO THE PATH. FOR CENTURIES, THE MASTRELLS HAVE FED THE MONSTER, USING IT TO TEST THEIR NEWEST MEMBERS."
BUT NOW IT IS GONE.
GOOD RIDDANCE. WHEN THAT THING BURST FROM THE SAND I NEARLY DIED FROM THE SHOCK.

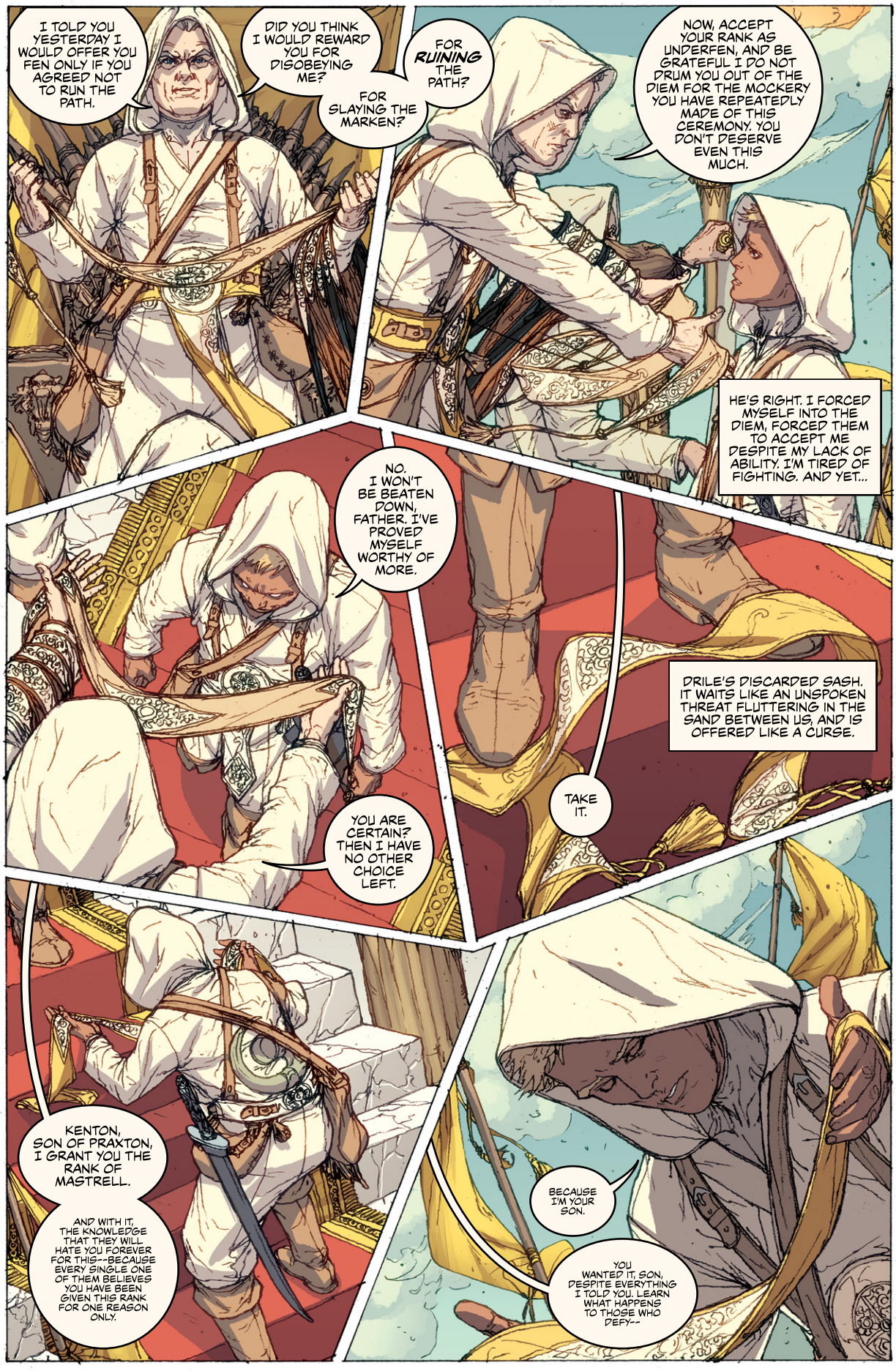

WAIT A MINUTE-- YOU CAN SLATRIFY. WHY DID IT GIVE YOU TROUBLE?
I DID SLATRIFY. IT FLED BENEATH THE SAND AS SOON AS I TOSSED A HANDFUL OF WATER ON IT!
ITS DIGGING PROBABLY BURIED MY LAST SPHERE ALL THE WAY DOWN TO DARKSIDE.
:WINCE: ISHHH!
KENTON, PERHAPS YOU SHOULD... STAY BACK AND REST TODAY.
WHAT? HOW COULD YOU EVEN SUGGEST SUCH A THING, ELORIN?
SLAP
OW!
KENTON'S A HERO! THE LOWLY ACOLENT WHO CONQUERED THE PATH!
AFTER WHAT YOU DID, YOUR FATHER WILL HAVE TO MAKE YOU A MASTRELL.
MY FATHER DOESN'T HAVE TO DO ANYTHING. IF HE WERE TO GRANT ME MASTRELLSHIP NOW, IT WOULD MEAN ADMITTING DEFEAT IN FRONT OF THE ENTIRE DIEM.
:SIGH: I DON'T KNOW WHY I KEEP TRYING. I'M NOT EVEN CONVINCED THAT I DESERVE TO BE A MASTRELL.
MAYBE AN UNDER-MASTRELL OR A LESSTRELL. EVEN A FEN. EXCEPT...
EXCEPT...?
EXCEPT I JUST CAN'T FORCE MYSELF TO LET MY FATHER WIN.
I GUESS I'M TOO MUCH LIKE HIM.


THE CEREMONIES ARE ALWAYS HELD IN THE SAME PLACE. ALMOST EVERYONE ATTENDS TO WITNESS THOSE WHO WILL ACHIEVE RANK.
TODAY, THE RANKS ARE ABUZZ WITH NEWS OF MY SUCCESS. THAT AND SOMETHING ELSE.

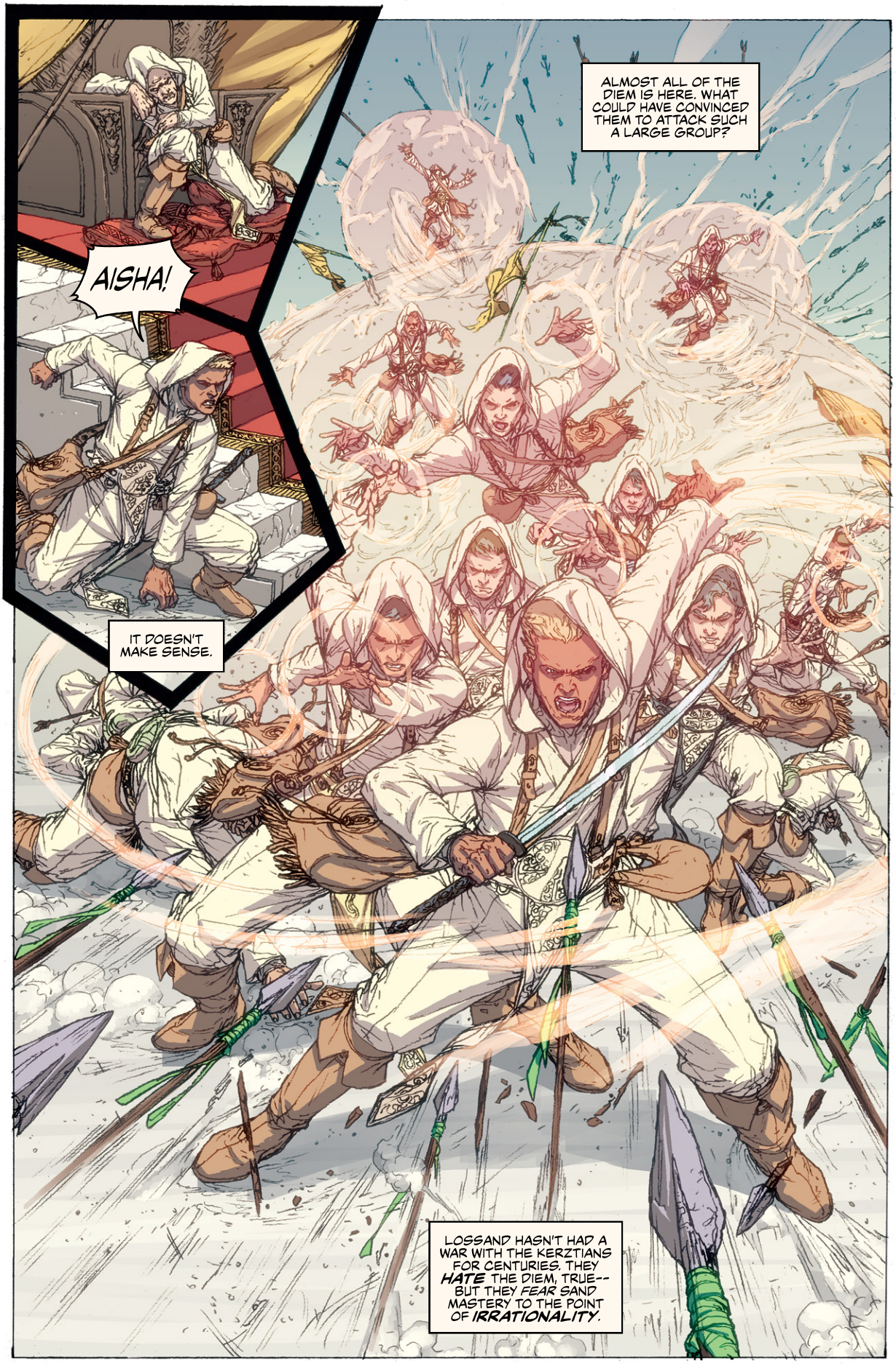

THIS THING WITH MY FATHER'S NOT OVER YET, TRAIBEN. WISH ME LUCK.
TRAID'KA, MY FRIEND. MAY THE SAND LORD PROTECT YOU.
SOMEONE'S MISSING. WHERE IS MASTRELL DRILE? WHY ISN'T HE HERE?
THE LORD MASTRELL JUST SENT SOMEONE TO FIND HIM. RUMORS ABOUND THAT DRILE WAS CAUGHT MAKING PLANS TO SELL HIS POWERS, THAT HE HAD GATHERED A GROUP OF SAND MASTERS TO HIRE OUT AS MERCENARIES.
I WOULDN'T DOUBT IT. DRILE IS AS ADEPT AS TRAIBEN--PROBABLY MORE SO. BUT HIS IMPATIENCE MAKES HIM RECKLESS.
COULD THE SAME FAILING BE LEVELED AT ME? HAS MY IMPATIENCE MADE ME RECKLESS? IS THAT WHY I RAN THE PATH?
DO YOU THINK THEY'LL KICK DRILE OUT OF THE DIEM?
MAYBE. IF MASTRELLS WERE TO START SELLING THEIR SERVICES LIKE COMMON TRADESMEN, CHAOS WOULD SOON RESULT.
BUT HUSH NOW, DIRIN--TAKE YOUR PLACE, EVERYONE'S WAITING.
:SIGH: DRILE, DRILE, DRILE. WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?
USED MY GIFT AS YOU TAUGHT ME, LORD MASTRELL.
HMF. DEBATABLE. TAKE YOUR PLACE, DRILE--YOU ARE STILL A MASTRELL.

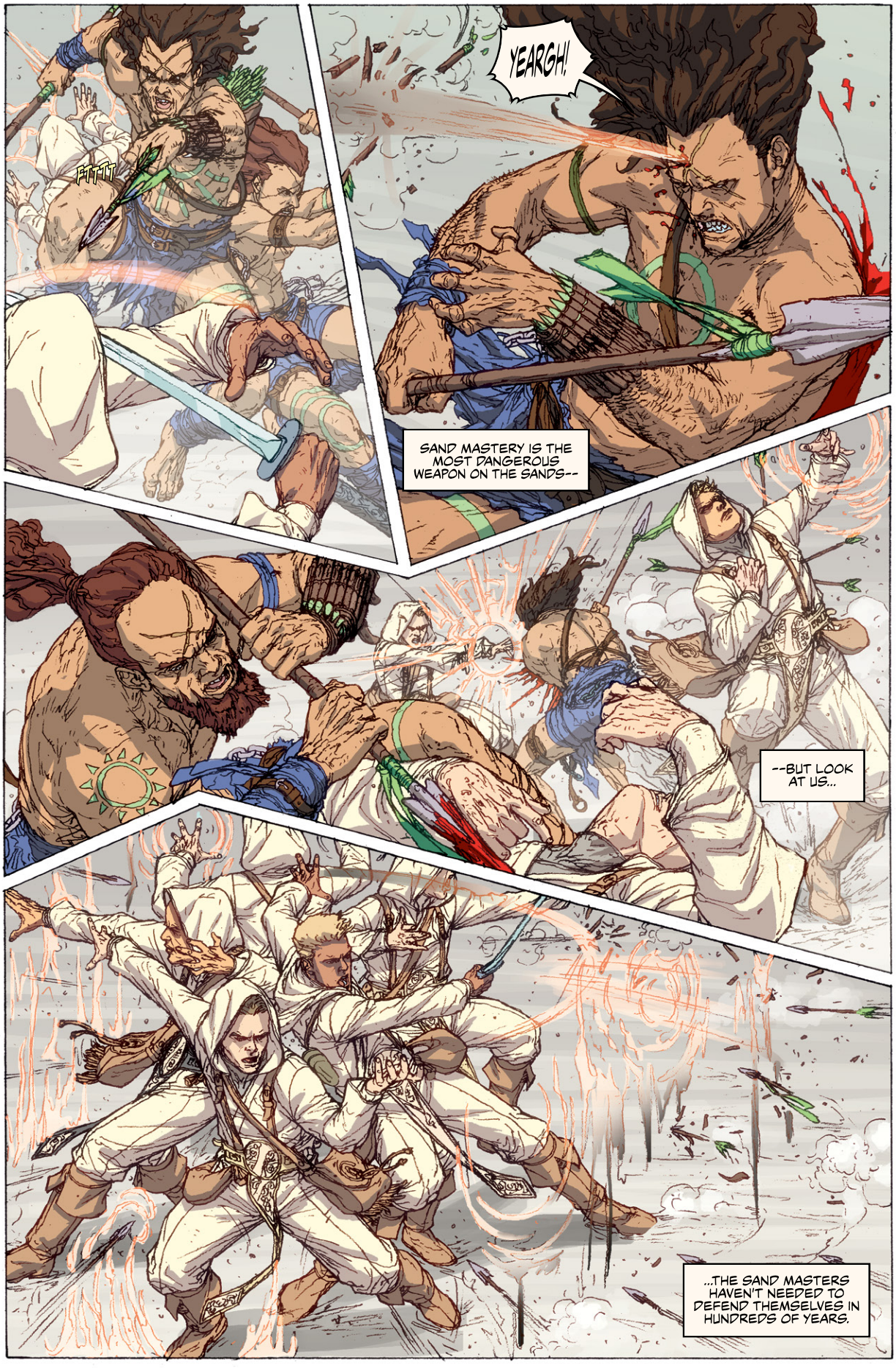

NOW, LET US BEGIN, UNDER-MASTRELL ELORIN.
THE BOWL IS SHARED, TOPPED OFF AS NEEDED, IMBIBED BY EVERY SAND MASTER AT THIS GATHERING, MAKING US AS ONE.
WE GATHER THIS DAY TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE SUCCESS OF OUR OWN, AND TO AWARD NEW RANKS TO THOSE AMONG US WHO HAVE EARNED ADVANCEMENT.
STEP FORWARD, REENDEL, SON OF CRAFTSMAN KESHDEL.
YOU HAVE BEEN OFFERED THE RANK OF UNDER-LESSTRELL. TAKE THE SASH AND BE ADVANCED.
I'M TOLD THAT THEY ARE AN AVERAGE GROUP THIS YEAR. NO MASTRELLS OR UNDERMASTRELLS. NO ARROGANCE LIKE DRILE'S --WHO WON'T EVEN SHARE WATER NOW. PERHAPS THE OLD MASTERS HAVE FINALLY FOUND A WAY TO STOP INSTILLING THAT IN THEIR CHARGES.
BY THE END OF THE CEREMONY ONLY ONE SASH REMAINS--DIEMFEN BROWN. THAT WILL BE MINE, THEN. DESPITE STANDING UP TO MY FATHER AND EVERYTHING I DID ON THE PATH, THE ADVANCE IS MINOR.
BUT I WILL ACCEPT IT WITH GOOD GRACE. I'M TIRED OF CLASHING WITH MY FATHER.
STEP FORWARD...
...DRILE, MASTRELL OF THE DIEM.
WHAT?!! DRILE!!!

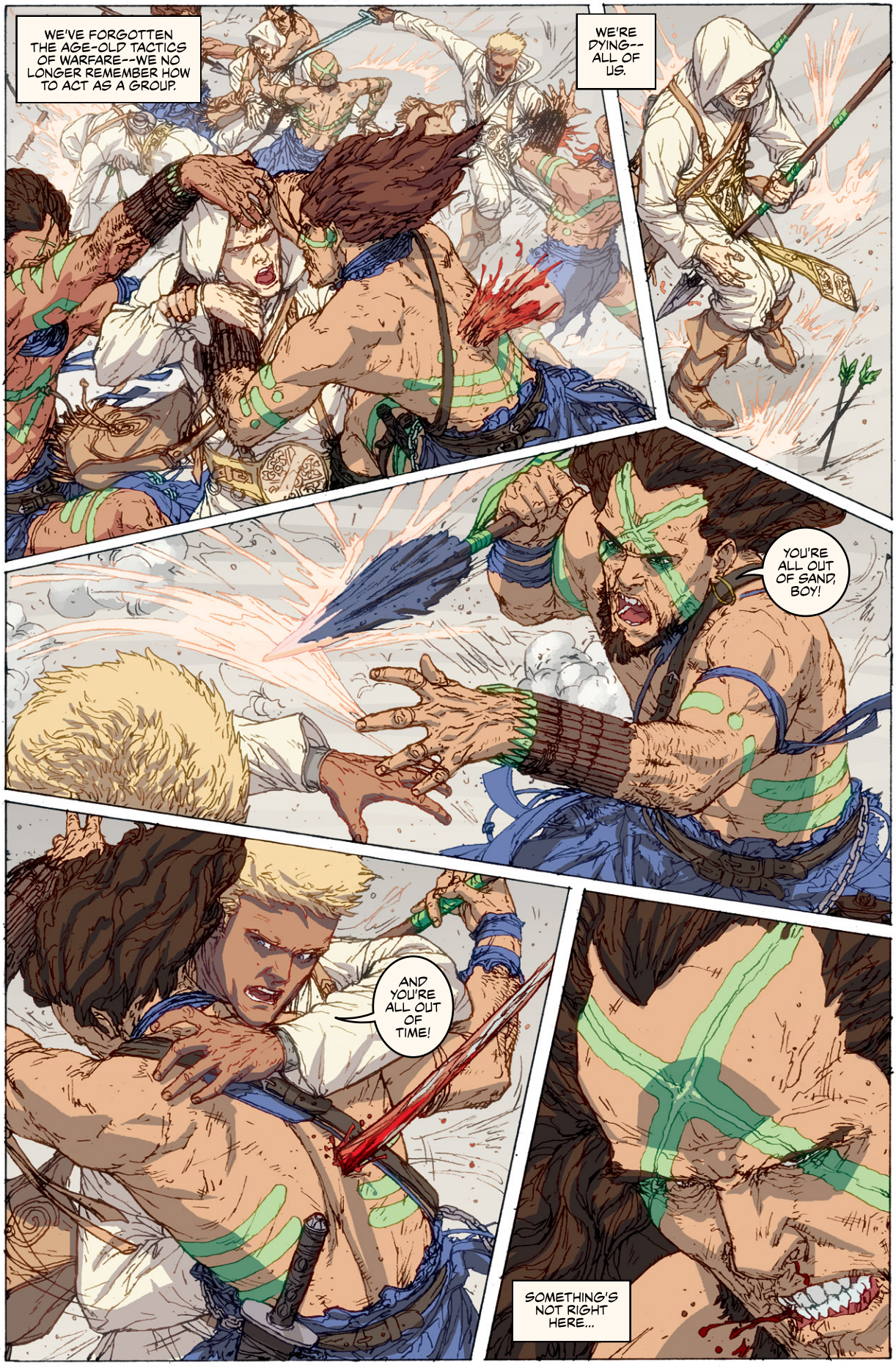

DRILE, YOU ARE OFFERED THE RANK OF DIEMFEN. TAKE THE SASH AND BE UNADVANCED.
THIS IS UNHEARD OF. NEVER IN ALL THE HISTORY OF THE DIEM HAS A SAND MASTER BEEN UNADVANCED. NEVER.
WHAT IS THIS? YOU SEEK TO INSULT ME, LORD MASTRELL.
I DON'T TRUST YOU, DRILE. IF I EXPELLED YOU FOR WHAT YOU TRIED, I DOUBT THAT YOU WOULD OBEY THE LAW AND REFRAIN FROM USING YOUR POWERS.
THIS WAY I CAN STILL KEEP AN EYE ON YOU. NOW--
--ACCEPT THE 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 WERE HIS SAND POWERS.
I SEE THE SASH APPEAR LIKE A TAUNT. IT IS CREAM COLORED--LOWER EVEN THAN THE RANK OF FEN HE OFFERED TO ME JUST YESTERDAY.
IT SEEMS THAT DRILE IS NOT THE ONLY ONE HE PLANS TO HUMILIATE THIS DAY.


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 MARKEN?
FOR RUINING THE PATH?
NOW, ACCEPT YOUR RANK AS UNDERFEN, AND BE GRATEFUL I DO NOT DRUM YOU OUT OF THE DIEM FOR THE MOCKERY YOU HAVE REPEATEDLY MADE OF THIS CEREMONY. YOU DON'T DESERVE EVEN THIS MUCH.
HE'S RIGHT. I FORCED MYSELF INTO THE DIEM, FORCED THEM TO ACCEPT ME DESPITE MY LACK OF ABILITY. I'M TIRED OF FIGHTING. AND YET...
NO. I WON'T BE BEATEN DOWN, FATHER. I'VE PROVED MYSELF WORTHY OF MORE.
YOU ARE CERTAIN? THEN I HAVE NO OTHER CHOICE LEFT.
DRILE'S DISCARDED SASH. IT WAITS LIKE AN UNSPOKEN THREAT FLUTTERING IN THE SAND BETWEEN US, AND IS OFFERED LIKE A CURSE.
TAKE IT.
KENTON, SON OF PRAXTON, I GRANT YOU THE RANK OF MASTRELL.
AND WITH IT, THE KNOWLEDGE THAT THEY WILL HATE YOU FOREVER FOR THIS--BECAUSE EVERY SINGLE ONE OF THEM BELIEVES YOU HAVE BEEN GIVEN THIS RANK FOR ONE REASON ONLY.
BECAUSE I'M YOUR SON.
YOU WANTED IT, SON, DESPITE EVERYTHING I TOLD YOU. LEARN WHAT HAPPENS TO THOSE WHO DEFY--

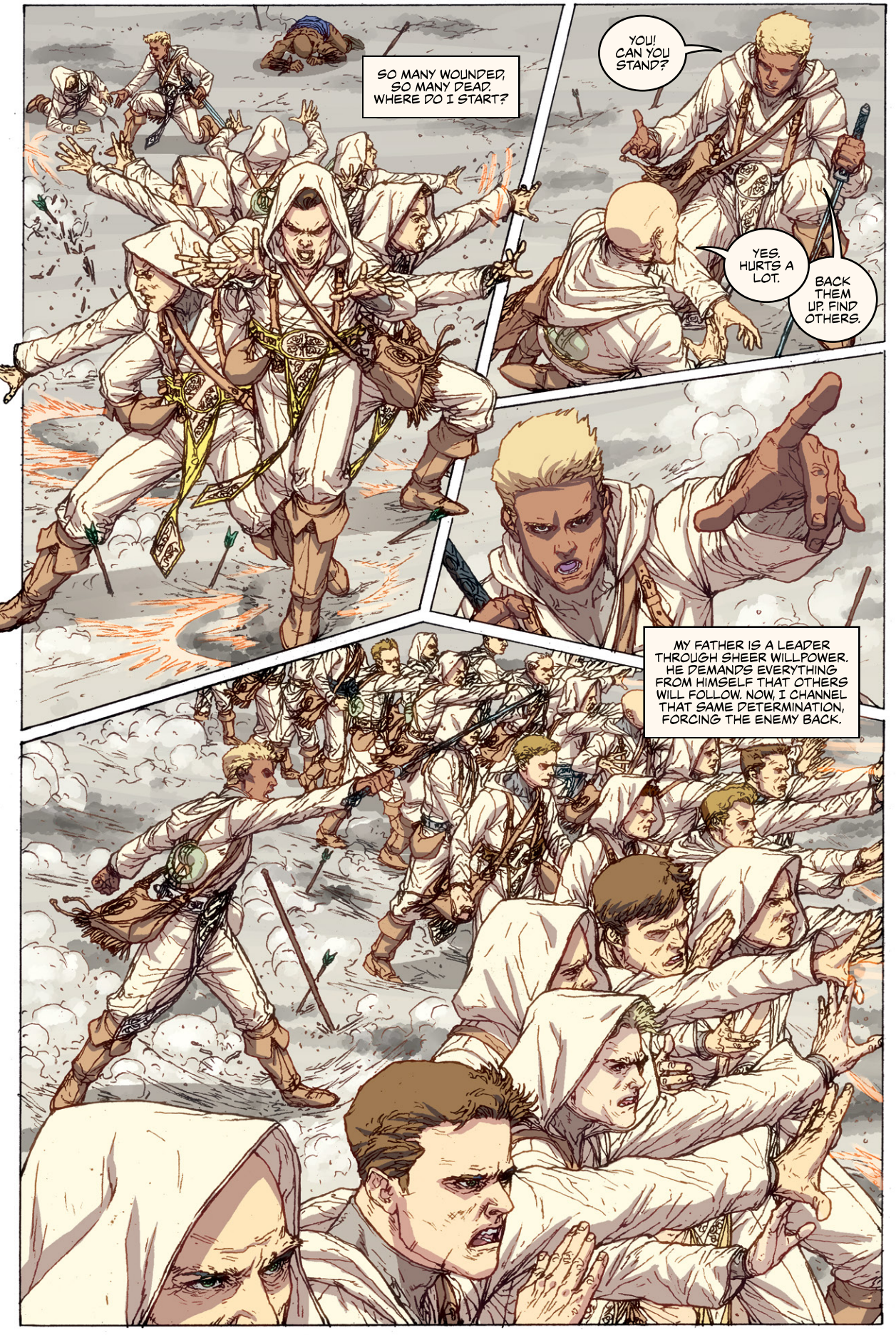

--GASP!
KERZTIANS!
WE'RE UNDER ATTACK!
FATHER? WHAT IS--?
NO!

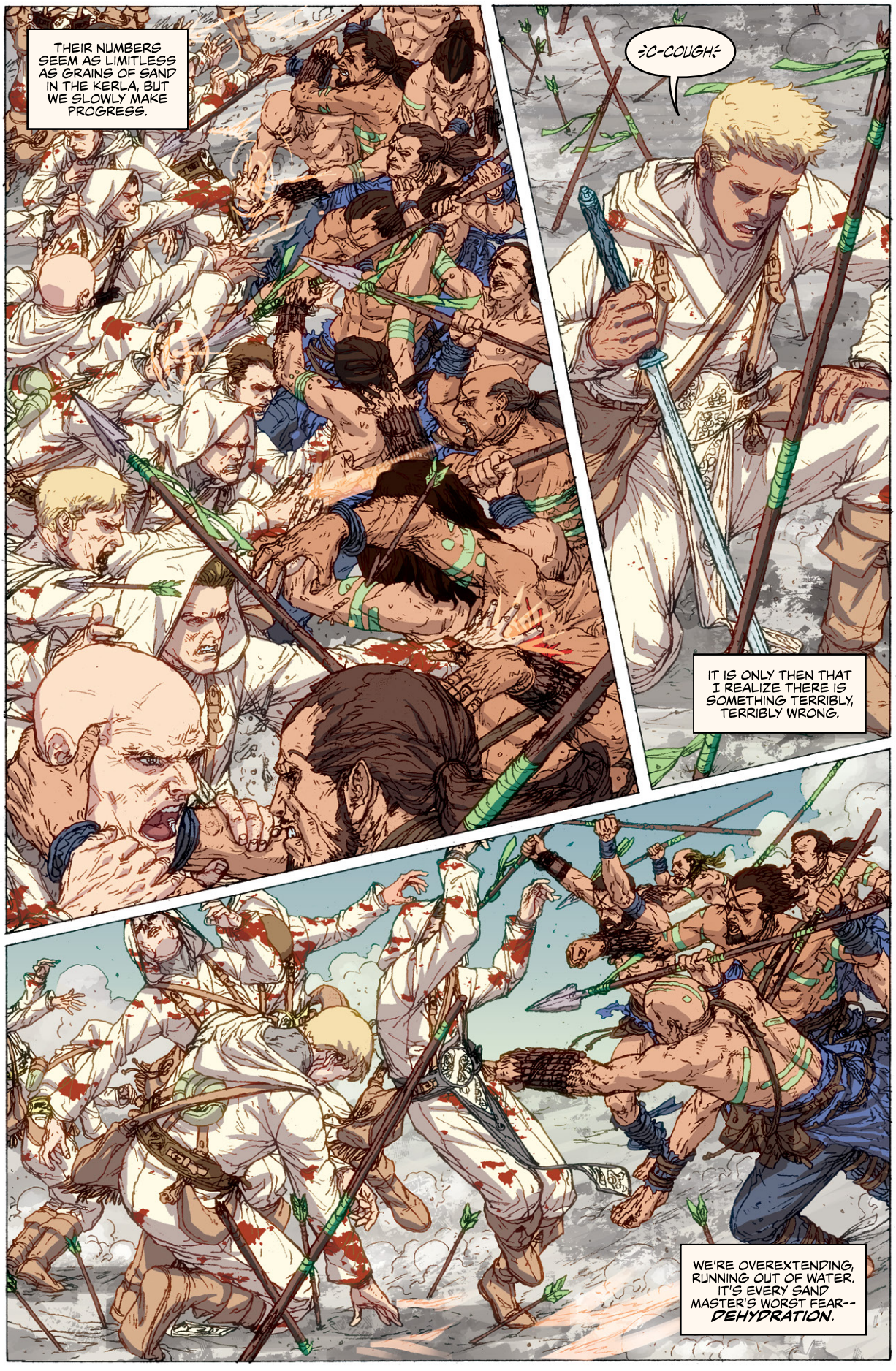

AISHA!
IT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE.
ALMOST ALL OF THE DIEM IS HERE. WHAT COULD HAVE CONVINCED THEM TO ATTACK SUCH A LARGE GROUP?
LOSSAND HASN'T HAD A WAR WITH THE KERZTIANS FOR CENTURIES. THEY *HATE* THE DIEM, TRUE-- BUT THEY *FEAR* SAND MASTERY TO THE POINT OF *IRRATIONALITY*.

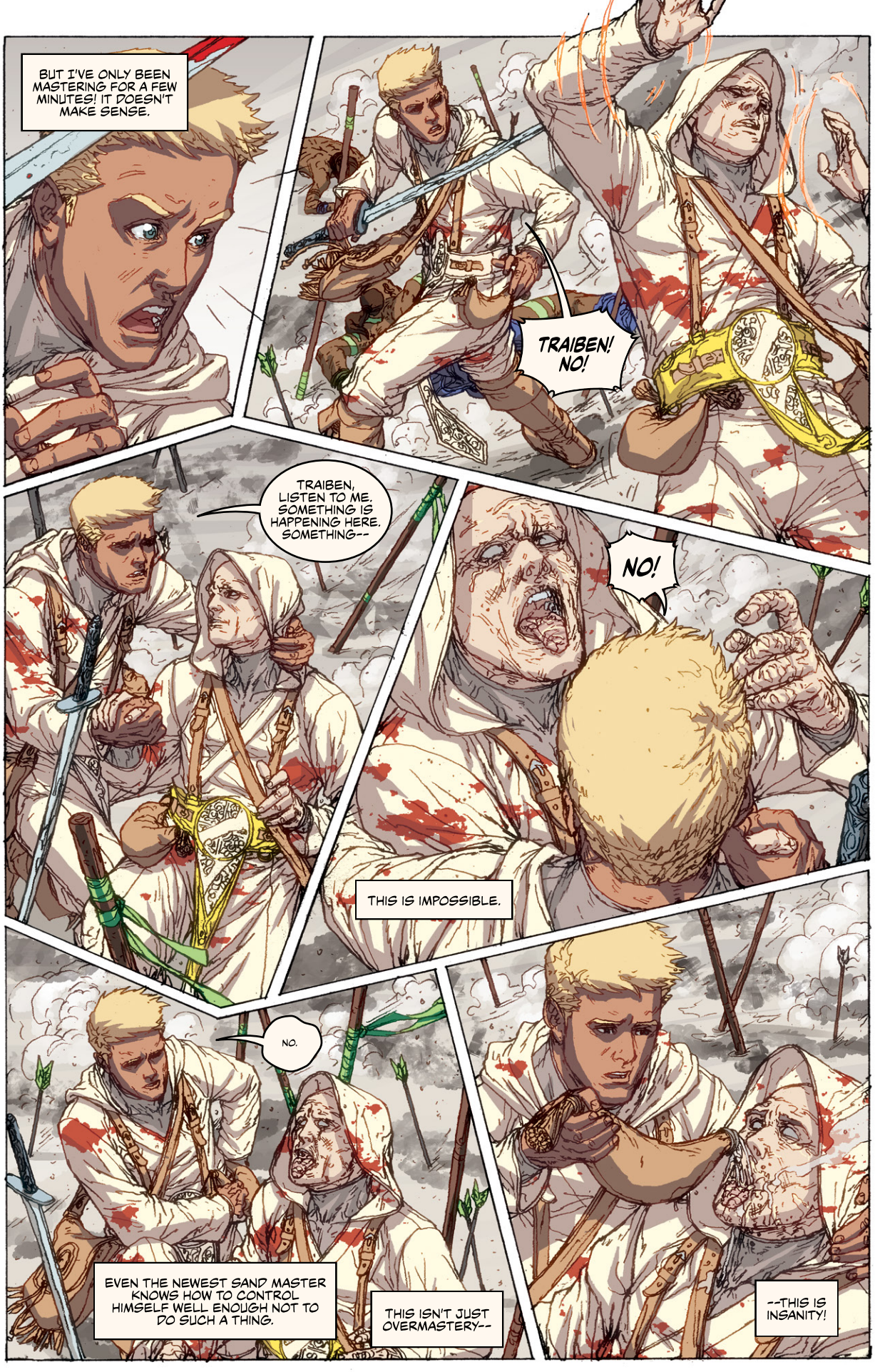

FTTTT
YEARGH!
SAND MASTERY IS THE MOST DANGEROUS WEAPON ON THE SANDS--
--BUT LOOK AT US...
...THE SAND MASTERS HAVEN'T NEEDED TO DEFEND THEMSELVES IN HUNDREDS OF YEARS.

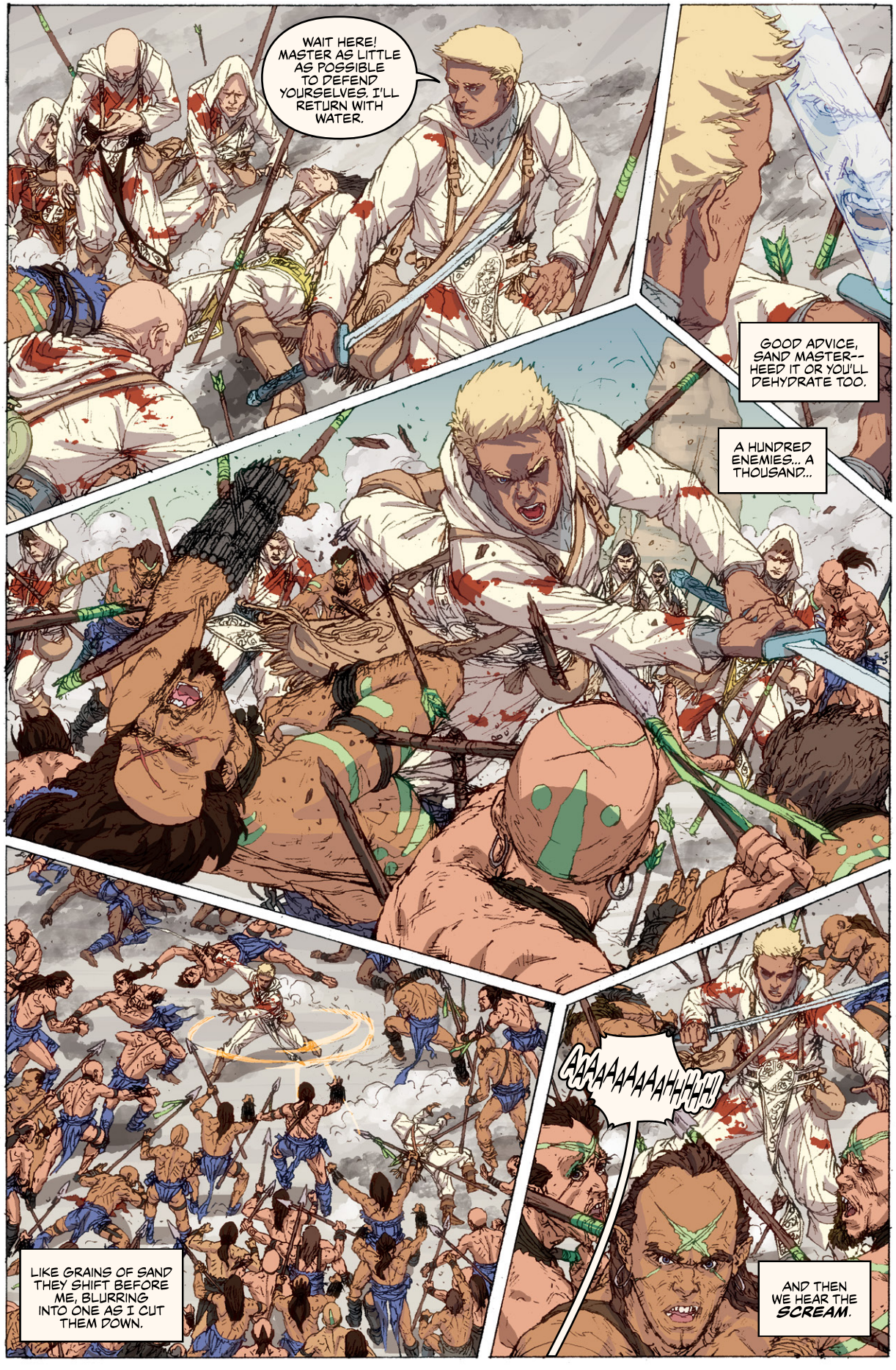

WE'VE FORGOTTEN THE AGE-OLD TACTICS OF WARFARE--WE NO LONGER REMEMBER HOW TO ACT AS A GROUP.
WE'RE DYING--ALL OF US.
YOU'RE ALL OUT OF SAND, BOY!
AND YOU'RE ALL OUT OF TIME!
SOMETHING'S NOT RIGHT HERE...


SOME KERZTIANS WEAR RITUAL SCARS ON THEIR FOREHEADS BUT NOT ALL. WHY...?
NO! NOT LIKE THAT!
SKANG
USE RIBBONS, NOT WALLS! DON'T LEAVE YOURSELVES VULNERABLE.
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?


SO MANY WOUNDED, SO MANY DEAD. WHERE DO I START?
YOU! CAN YOU STAND?
YES. HURTS A LOT.
BACK THEM UP. FIND OTHERS.
MY FATHER IS A LEADER THROUGH SHEER WILLPOWER. HE DEMANDS EVERYTHING FROM HIMSELF THAT OTHERS WILL FOLLOW. NOW, I CHANNEL THAT SAME DETERMINATION, FORCING THE ENEMY BACK.


THEIR NUMBERS SEEM AS LIMITLESS AS GRAINS OF SAND IN THE KERLA, BUT WE SLOWLY MAKE PROGRESS.
:C-COUGH:
IT IS ONLY THEN THAT I REALIZE THERE IS SOMETHING TERRIBLY, TERRIBLY WRONG.
WE'RE OVEREXTENDING, RUNNING OUT OF WATER. IT'S EVERY SAND MASTER'S WORST FEAR-- DEHYDRATION.

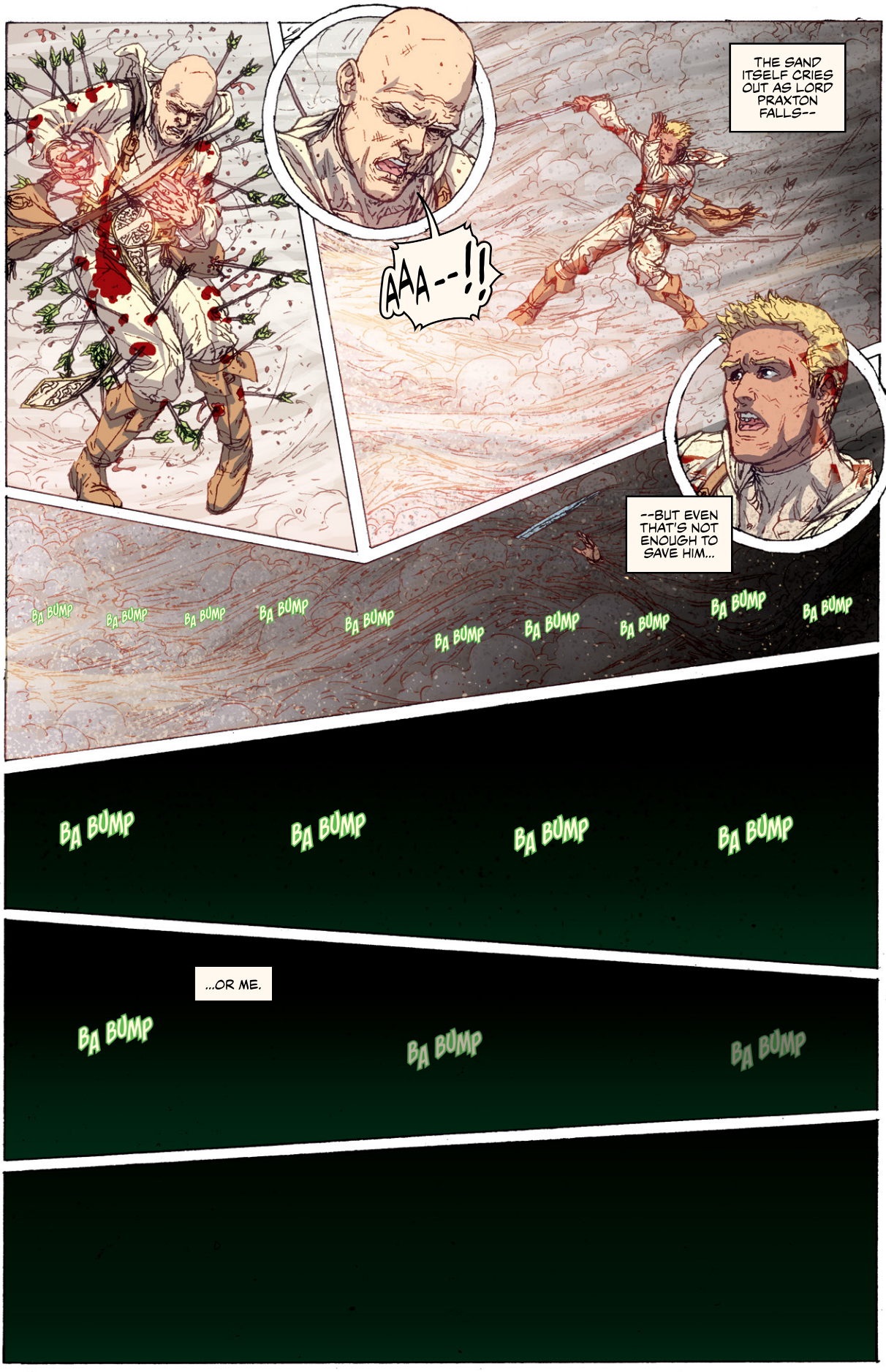

BUT I'VE ONLY BEEN MASTERING FOR A FEW MINUTES! IT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE.
TRAIBEN! NO!
TRAIBEN, LISTEN TO ME. SOMETHING IS HAPPENING HERE. SOMETHING--
NO!
THIS IS IMPOSSIBLE.
NO.
EVEN THE NEWEST SAND MASTER KNOWS HOW TO CONTROL HIMSELF WELL ENOUGH NOT TO DO SUCH A THING.
THIS ISN'T JUST OVERMASTERY--
--THIS IS INSANITY!


WAIT HERE! MASTER AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE TO DEFEND YOURSELVES. I'LL RETURN WITH WATER.
GOOD ADVICE, SAND MASTER-- HEED IT OR YOU'LL DEHYDRATE TOO.
A HUNDRED ENEMIES... A THOUSAND...
LIKE GRAINS OF SAND THEY SHIFT BEFORE ME, BLURRING INTO ONE AS I CUT THEM DOWN.
AAAAAAAAAHHHH!
AND THEN WE HEAR THE SCREAM.


AAAAAAAAAAHHHH!
IT ECHOES ACROSS THE WHOLE OF THE KERLA LIKE THE DEATH CRY OF SOME TERRIBLY WRONGED GOD.
AAAAAAAAHHHH!
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHH!
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHH!
--A VENGEFUL GOD, DISAPPOINTED IN ALL THAT HE SEES--

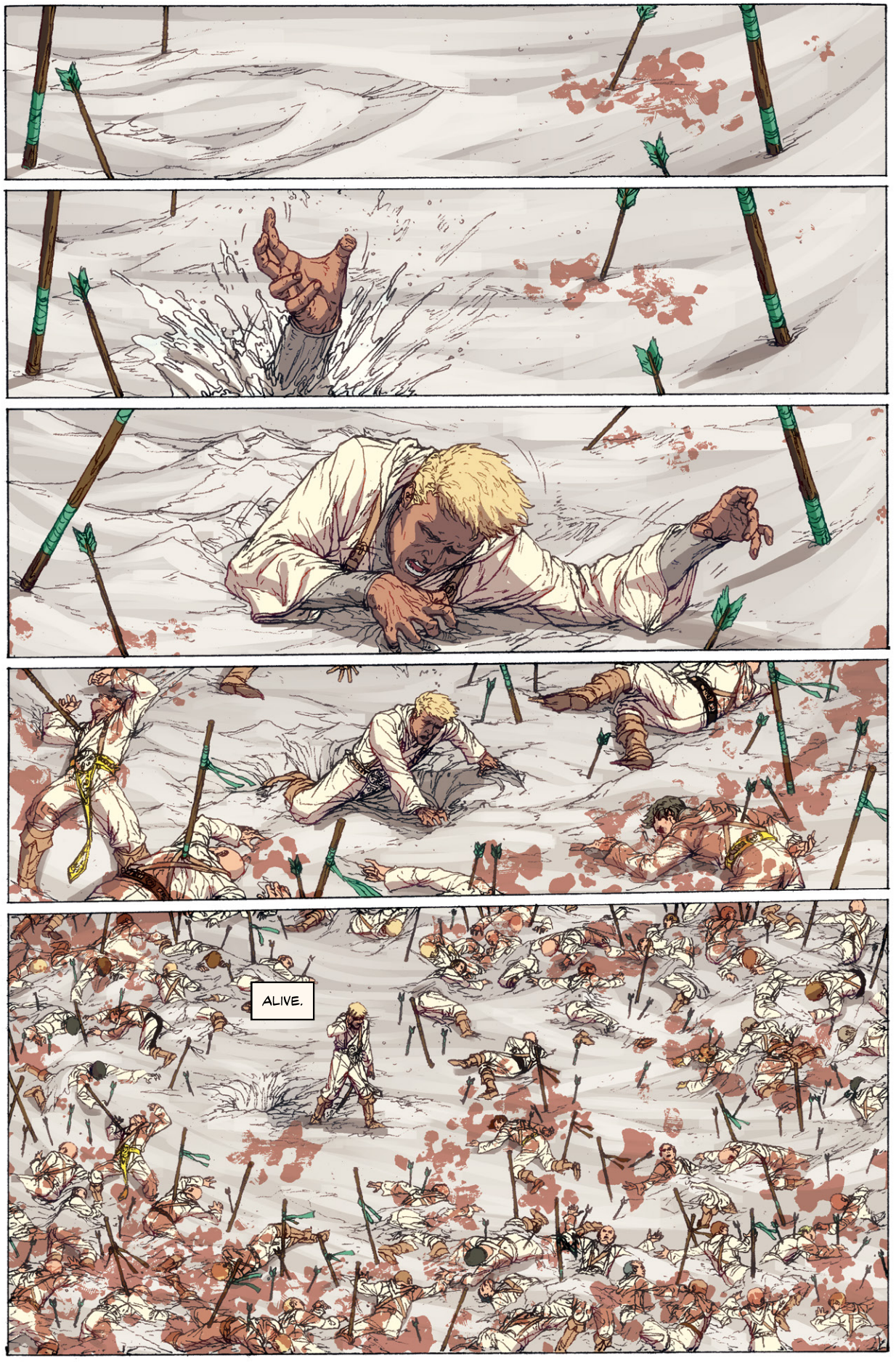

--WHOSE ONLY RECOURSE IS TO WIPE THE SLATE CLEAN AND START AFRESH.

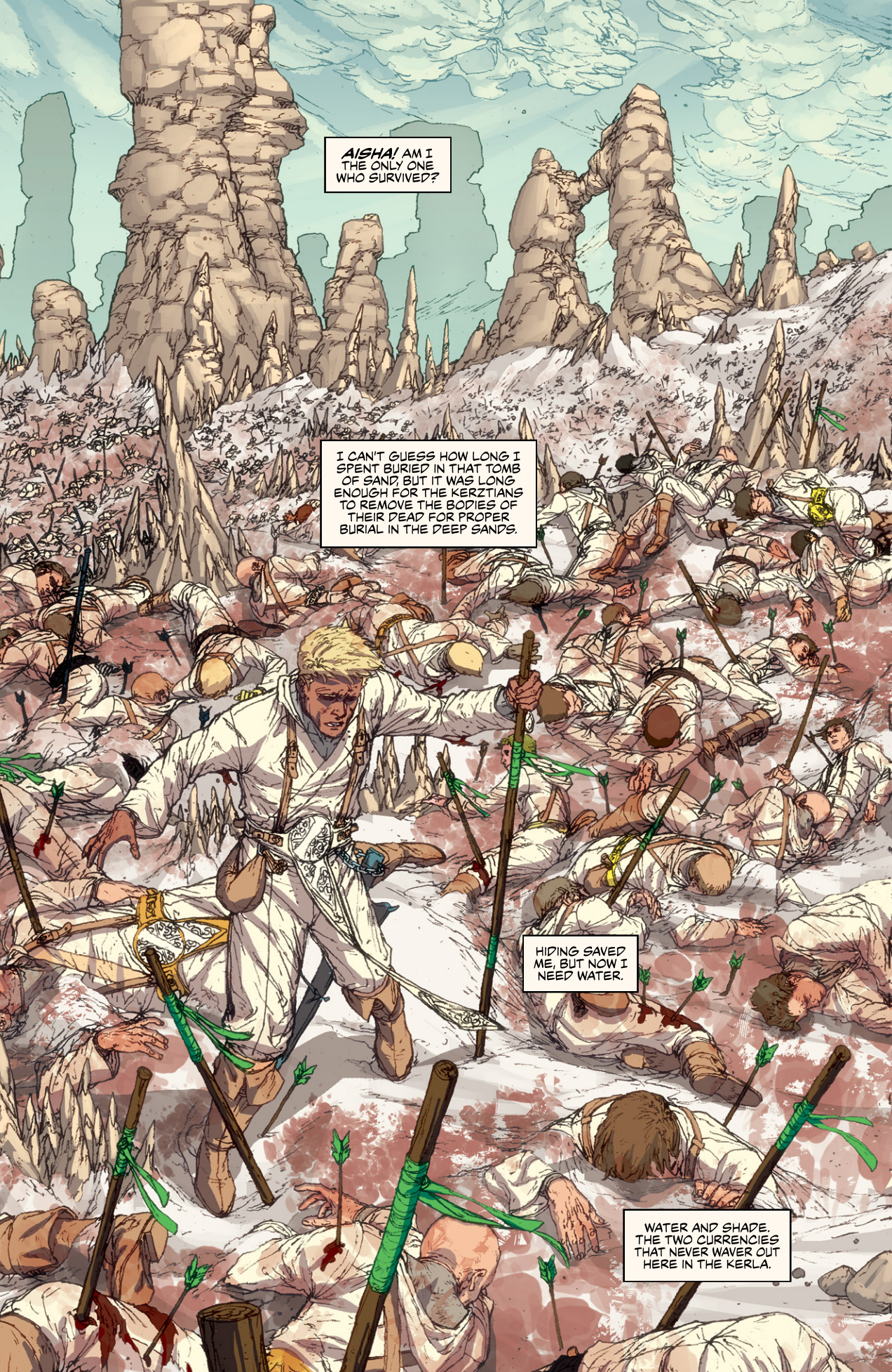

AND FOR A MOMENT I WOULD SWEAR HE DID THIS TO PROTECT ME.


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
...OR ME.
BA BUMP
BA BUMP
BA BUMP

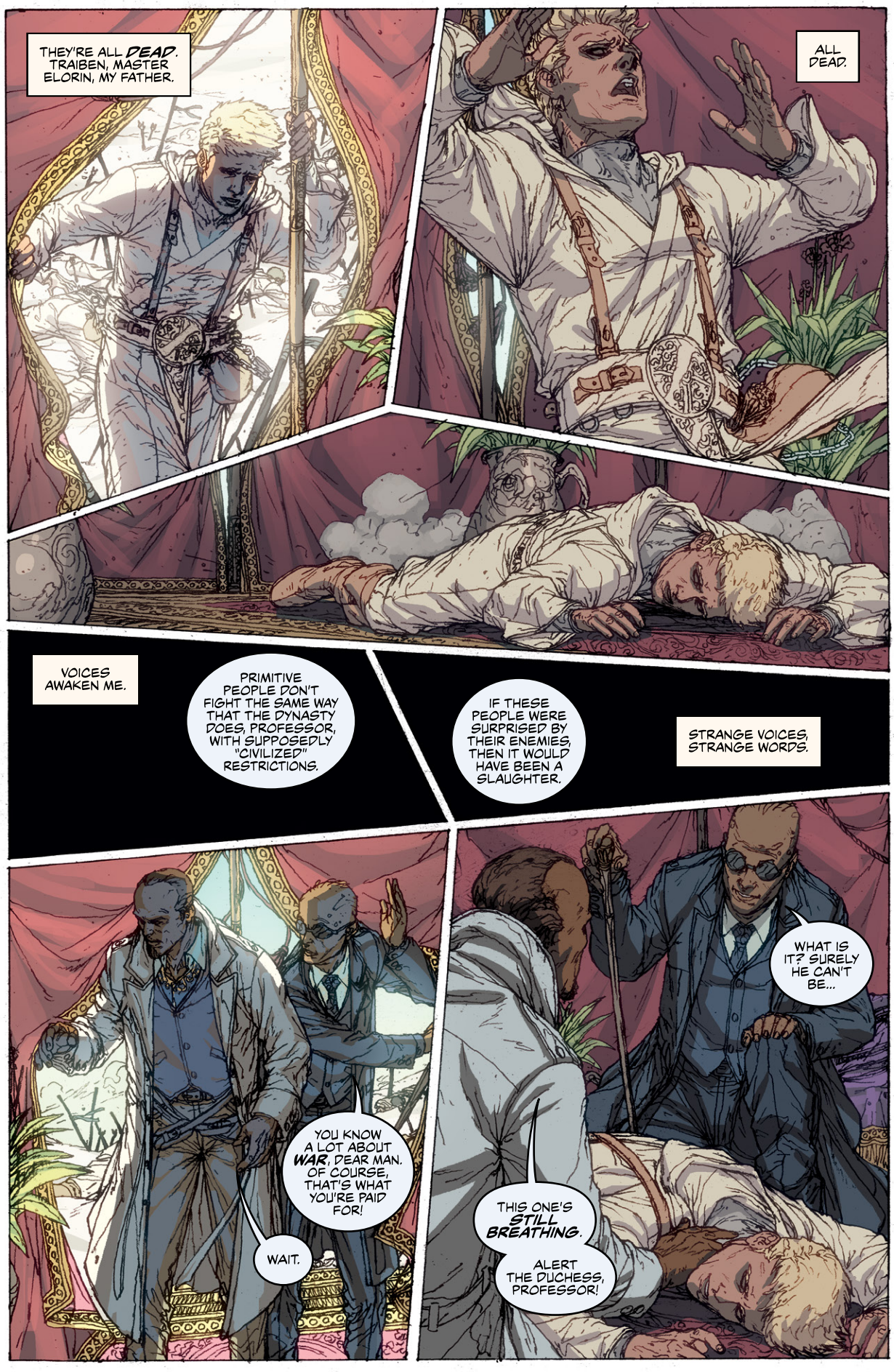

CHAPTER
3
CURRENCIES

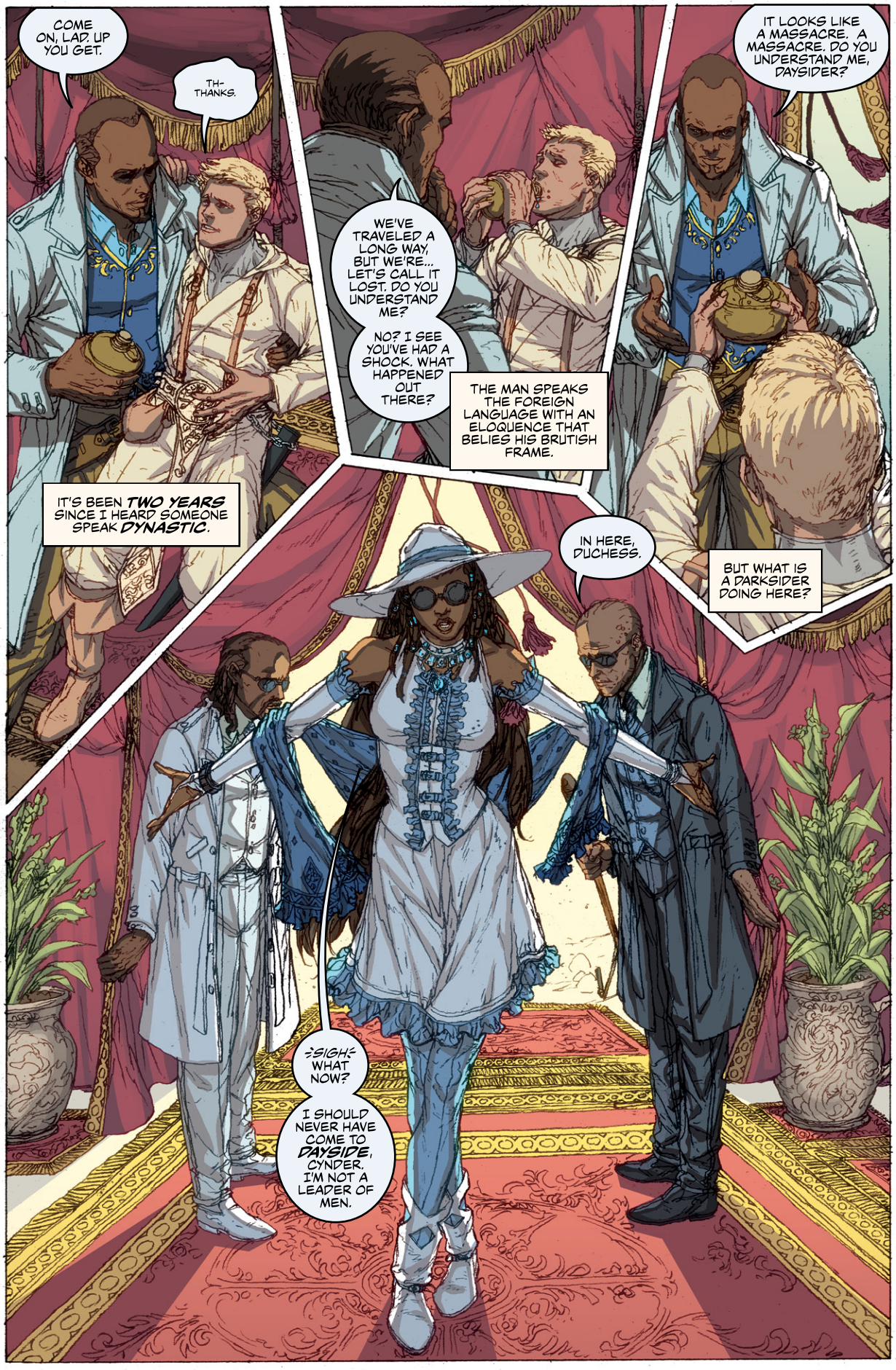


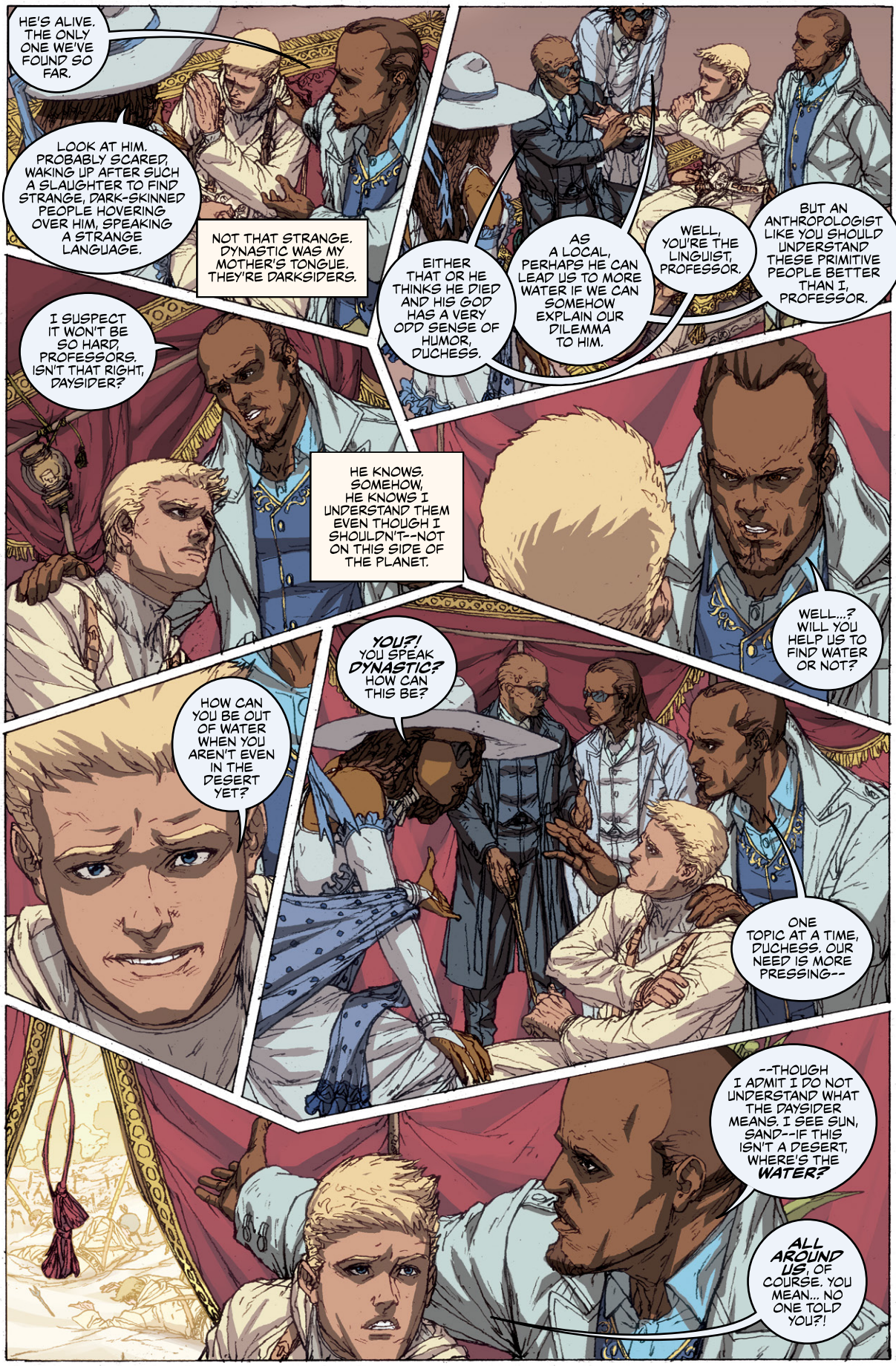

ALIVE.

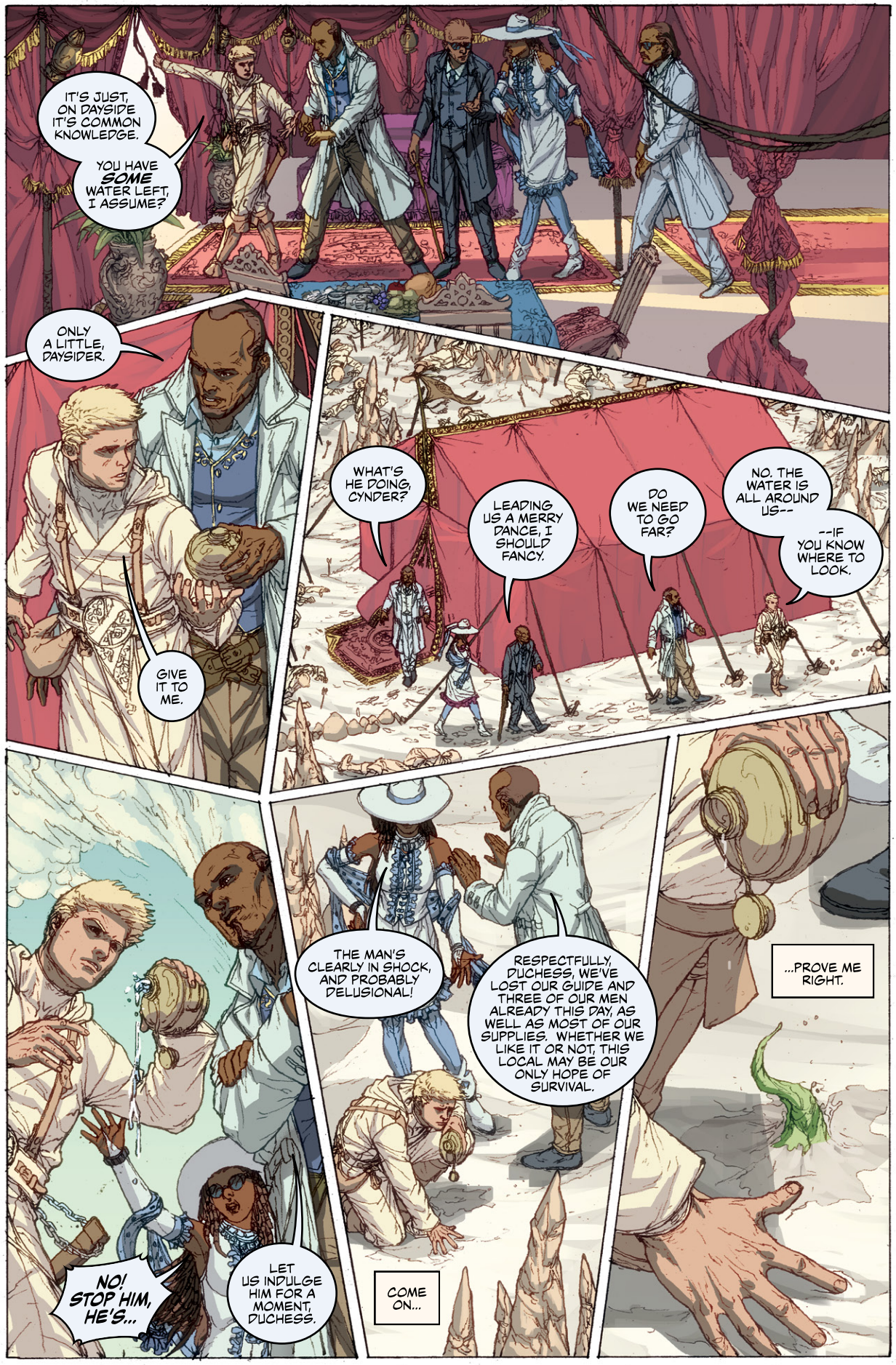

AISHA! AM I THE ONLY ONE WHO SURVIVED?
I CAN'T GUESS HOW LONG I SPENT BURIED IN THAT TOMB OF SAND, BUT IT WAS LONG ENOUGH FOR THE KERZTIANS TO REMOVE THE BODIES OF THEIR DEAD FOR PROPER BURIAL IN THE DEEP SANDS.
HIDING SAVED ME, BUT NOW I NEED WATER.
WATER AND SHADE. THE TWO CURRENCIES THAT NEVER WAVER OUT HERE IN THE KERLA.

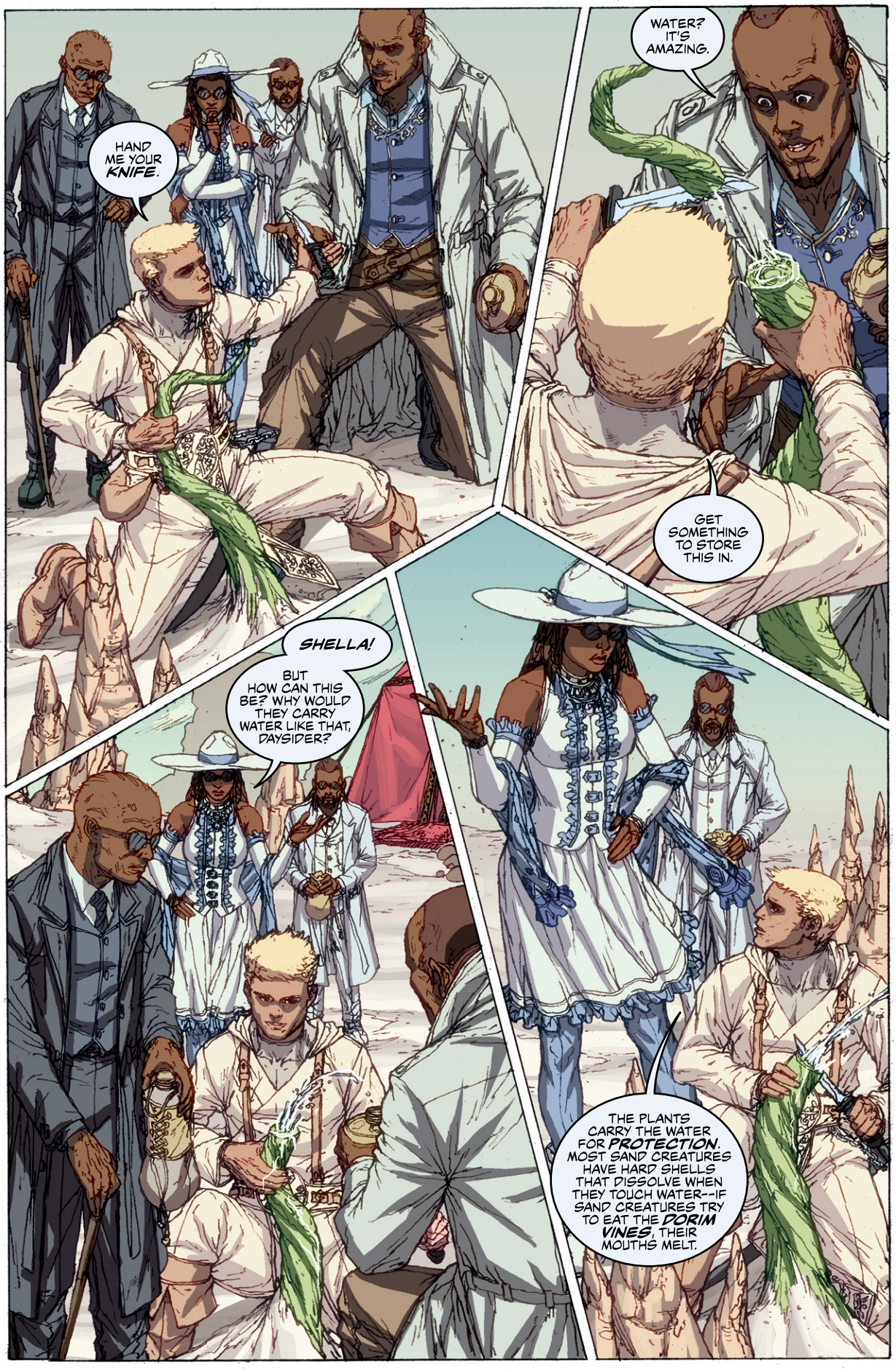


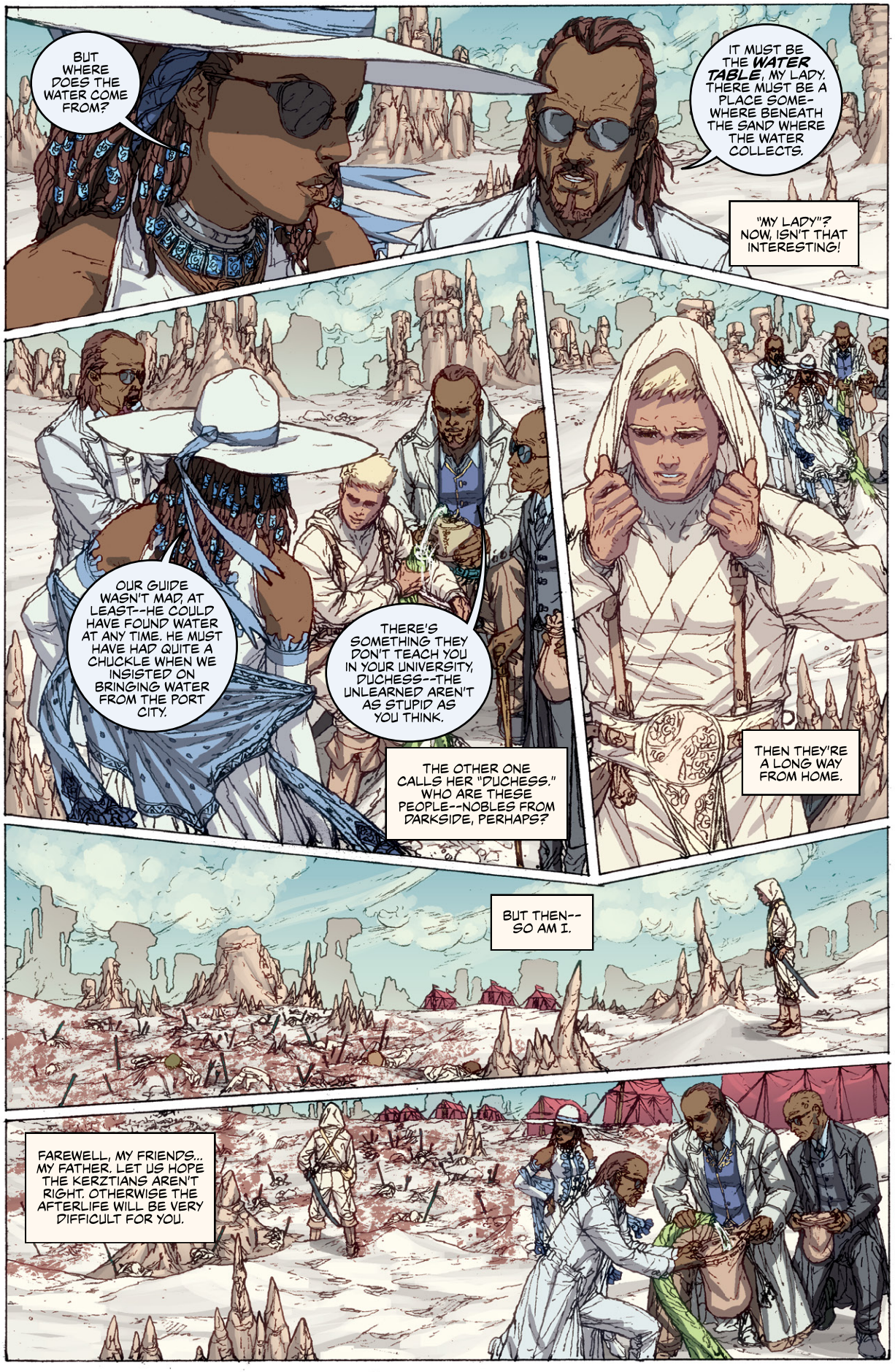

THEY'RE ALL DEAD. TRAIBEN, MASTER ELORIN, MY FATHER.
ALL DEAD.
VOICES AWAKEN ME.
PRIMITIVE PEOPLE DON'T FIGHT THE SAME WAY THAT THE DYNASTY DOES, PROFESSOR, WITH SUPPOSEDLY "CIVILIZED" RESTRICTIONS.
IF THESE PEOPLE WERE SURPRISED BY THEIR ENEMIES, THEN IT WOULD HAVE BEEN A SLAUGHTER.
STRANGE VOICES, STRANGE WORDS.
YOU KNOW A LOT ABOUT WAR, DEAR MAN. OF COURSE, THAT'S WHAT YOU'RE PAID FOR!
WAIT.
WHAT IS IT? SURELY HE CAN'T BE...
THIS ONE'S STILL BREATHING.
ALERT THE DUCHESS, PROFESSOR!

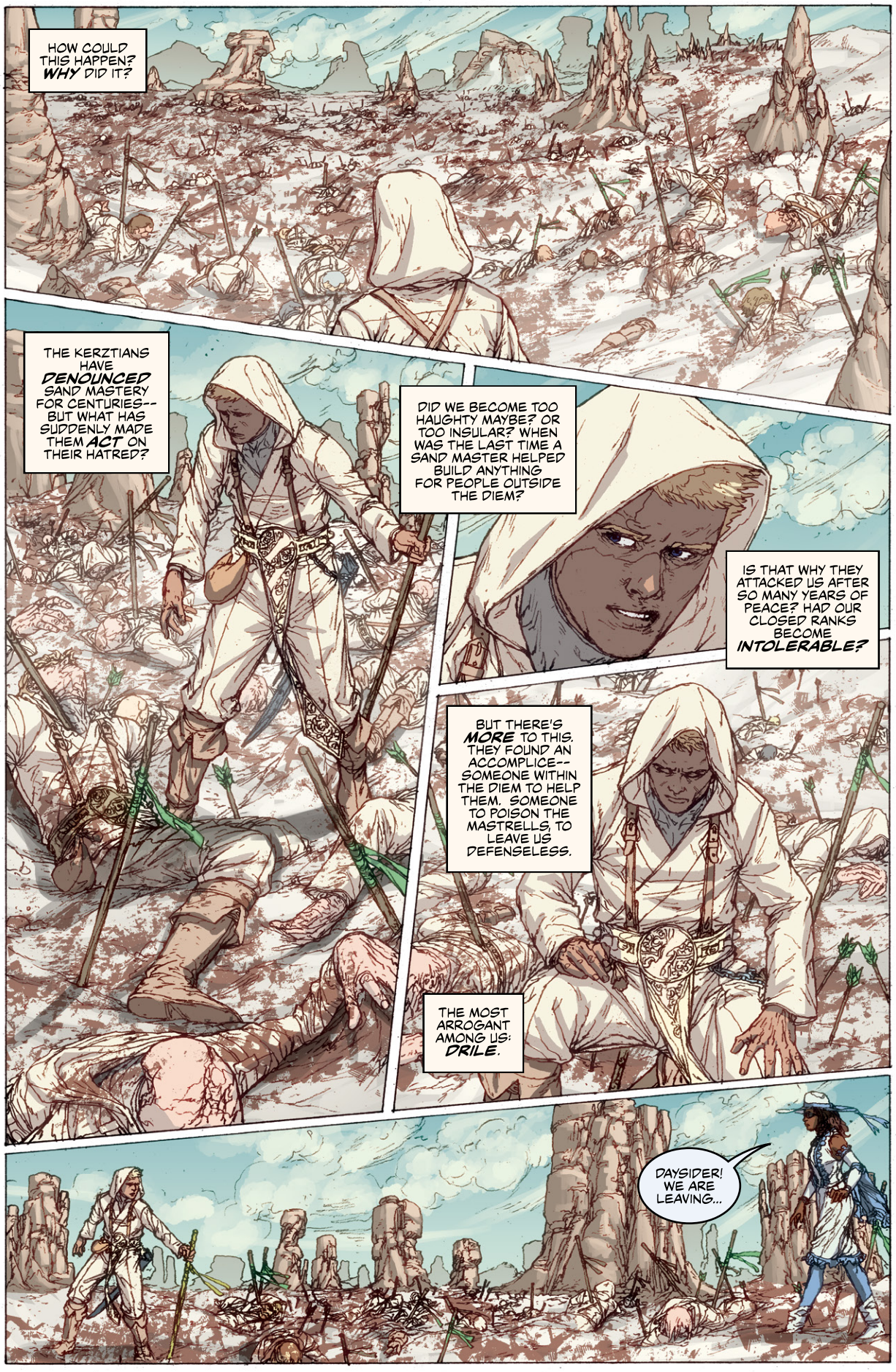

COME ON, LAD. UP YOU GET.
TH-THANKS.
IT'S BEEN TWO YEARS SINCE I HEARD SOMEONE SPEAK DYNASTIC.
WE'VE TRAVELED A LONG WAY, BUT WE'RE... LET'S CALL IT LOST. DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME?
NO? I SEE YOU'VE HAD A SHOCK. WHAT HAPPENED OUT THERE?
THE MAN SPEAKS THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE WITH AN ELOQUENCE THAT BELIES HIS BRITISH FRAME.
IT LOOKS LIKE A MASSACRE. A MASSACRE. DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME, DAYSIDER?
BUT WHAT IS A DARKSIDER DOING HERE?
IN HERE, DUCHESS.
:SIGH: WHAT NOW?
I SHOULD NEVER HAVE COME TO DAYSIDE, CYNDER. I'M NOT A LEADER OF MEN.


HE'S ALIVE. THE ONLY ONE WE'VE FOUND SO FAR.
LOOK AT HIM. PROBABLY SCARED, WAKING UP AFTER SUCH A SLAUGHTER TO FIND STRANGE, DARK-SKINNED PEOPLE HOVERING OVER HIM, SPEAKING A STRANGE LANGUAGE.
NOT THAT STRANGE. DYNASTIC WAS MY MOTHER'S TONGUE. THEY'RE DARKSIDERS.
EITHER THAT OR HE THINKS HE DIED AND HIS GOD HAS A VERY ODD SENSE OF HUMOR, DUCHESS.
AS A LOCAL, PERHAPS HE CAN LEAD US TO MORE WATER IF WE CAN SOMEHOW EXPLAIN OUR DILEMMA TO HIM.
WELL, YOU'RE THE LINGUIST, PROFESSOR.
BUT AN ANTHROPOLOGIST LIKE YOU SHOULD UNDERSTAND THESE PRIMITIVE PEOPLE BETTER THAN I, PROFESSOR.
I SUSPECT IT WON'T BE SO HARD, PROFESSORS. ISN'T THAT RIGHT, DAYSIDER?
HE KNOWS. SOMEHOW, HE KNOWS I UNDERSTAND THEM EVEN THOUGH I SHOULDN'T--NOT ON THIS SIDE OF THE PLANET.
WELL...? WILL YOU HELP US TO FIND WATER OR NOT?
YOU?! YOU SPEAK DYNASTIC? HOW CAN THIS BE?
HOW CAN YOU BE OUT OF WATER WHEN YOU AREN'T EVEN IN THE DESERT YET?
ONE TOPIC AT A TIME, DUCHESS. OUR NEED IS MORE PRESSING--
--THOUGH I ADMIT I DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT THE DAYSIDER MEANS. I SEE SUN, SAND--IF THIS ISN'T A DESERT, WHERE'S THE WATER?
ALL AROUND US, OF COURSE. YOU MEAN... NO ONE TOLD YOU?!


IT'S JUST, ON DAYSIDE IT'S COMMON KNOWLEDGE.
YOU HAVE SOME WATER LEFT, I ASSUME?
ONLY A LITTLE, DAYSIDER.
GIVE IT TO ME.
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.
THE MAN'S CLEARLY IN SHOCK, AND PROBABLY DELUSIONAL!
RESPECTFULLY, DUCHESS, WE'VE LOST OUR GUIDE AND THREE OF OUR MEN ALREADY THIS DAY, AS WELL AS MOST OF OUR SUPPLIES. WHETHER WE LIKE IT OR NOT, THIS LOCAL MAY BE OUR ONLY HOPE OF SURVIVAL.
COME ON...
...PROVE ME RIGHT.

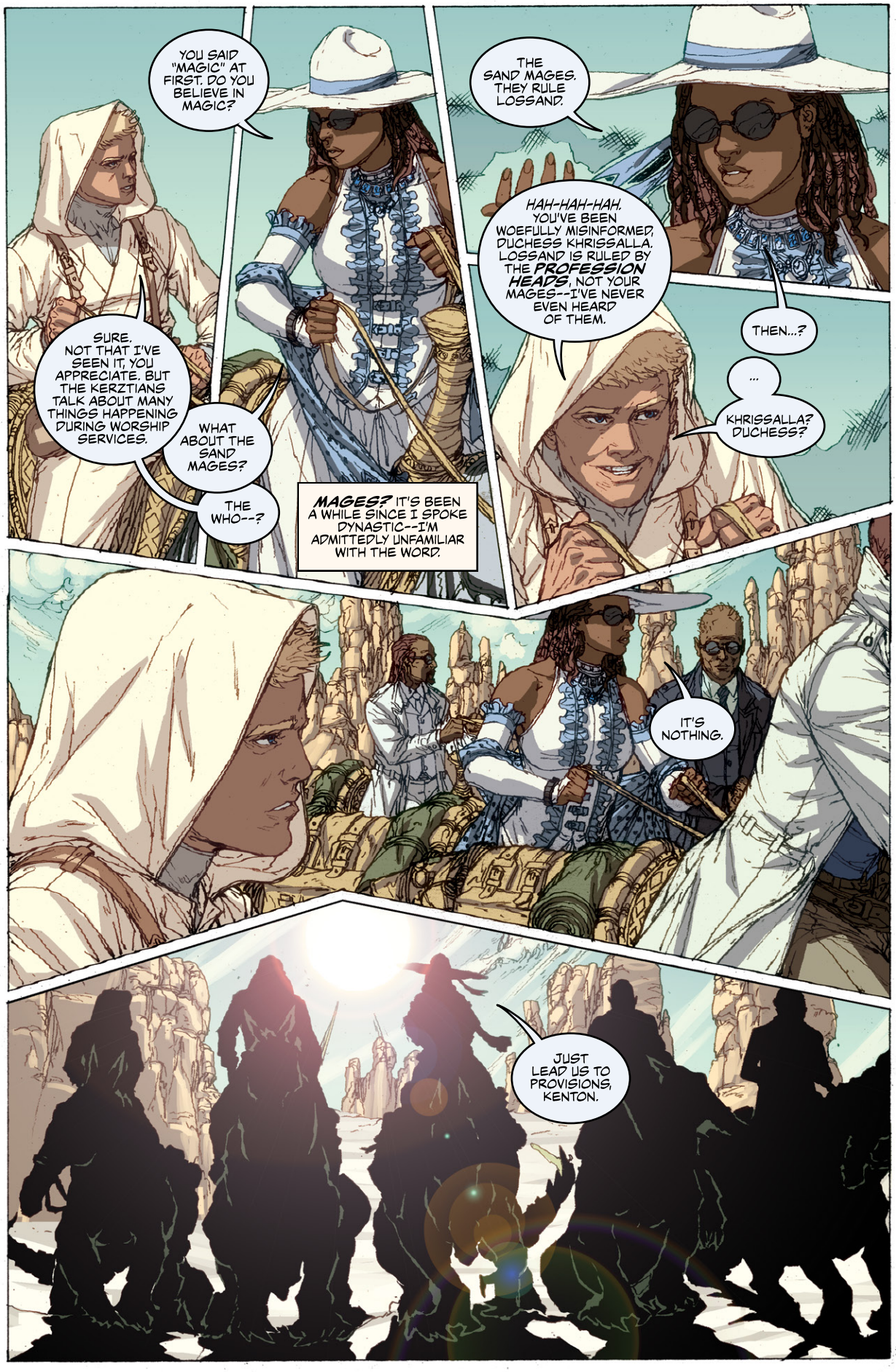

HAND ME YOUR KNIFE.
WATER? IT'S AMAZING.
GET SOMETHING TO STORE THIS IN.
SHELLA!
BUT HOW CAN THIS BE? WHY WOULD THEY CARRY WATER LIKE THAT, DAYSIDER?
THE PLANTS CARRY THE WATER FOR PROTECTION. MOST SAND CREATURES HAVE HARD SHELLS THAT DISSOLVE WHEN THEY TOUCH WATER--IF SAND CREATURES TRY TO EAT THE DORIM VINES, THEIR MOUTHS MELT.

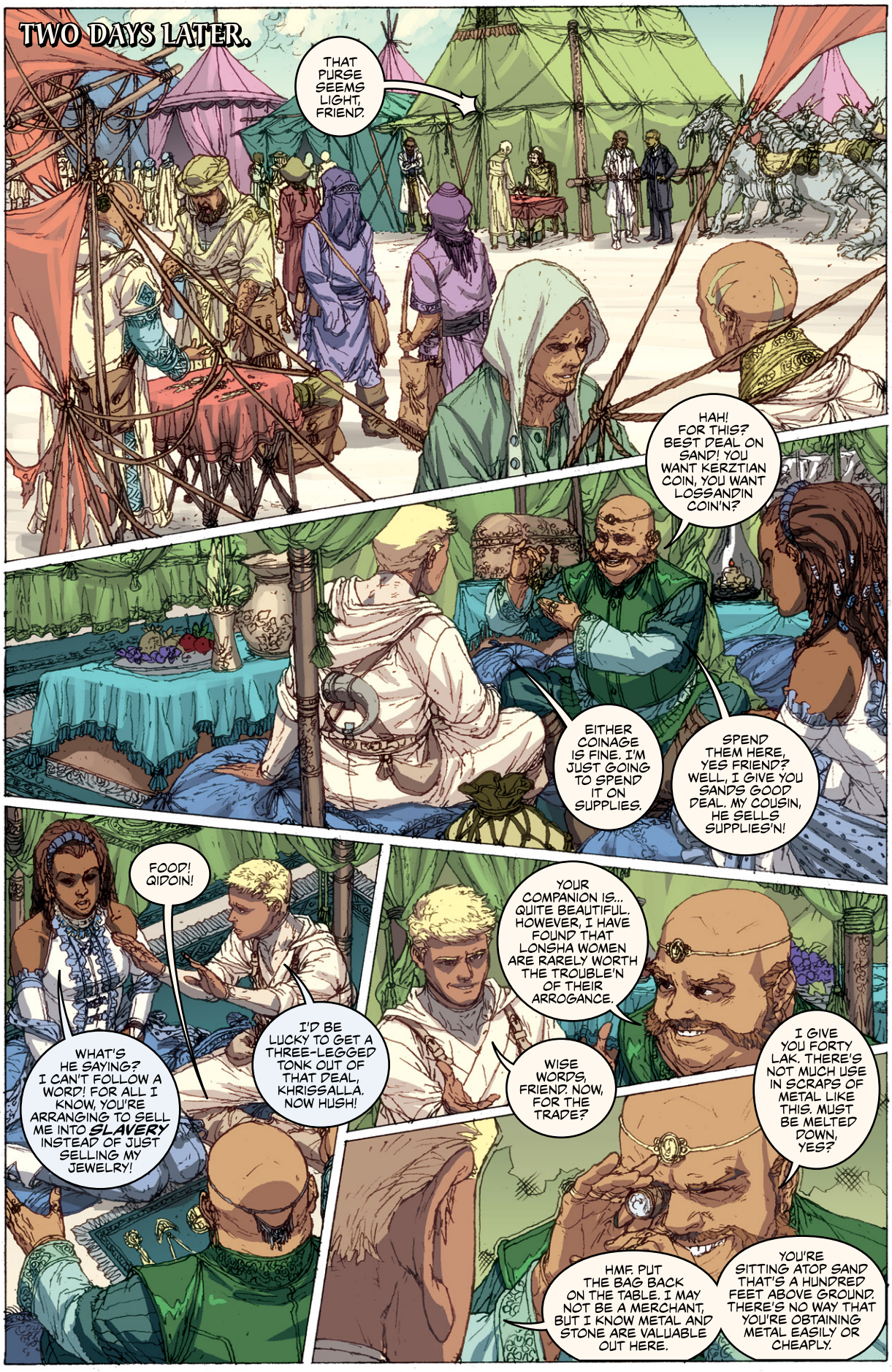

BUT WHERE DOES THE WATER COME FROM?
IT MUST BE THE WATER TABLE, MY LADY. THERE MUST BE A PLACE SOMEWHERE BENEATH THE SAND WHERE THE WATER COLLECTS.
"MY LADY"? NOW, ISN'T THAT INTERESTING!
OUR GUIDE WASN'T MAD, AT LEAST--HE COULD HAVE FOUND WATER AT ANY TIME. HE MUST HAVE HAD QUITE A CHUCKLE WHEN WE INSISTED ON BRINGING WATER FROM THE PORT CITY.
THERE'S SOMETHING THEY DON'T TEACH YOU IN YOUR UNIVERSITY, DUCHESS--THE UNLEARNED AREN'T AS STUPID AS YOU THINK.
THE OTHER ONE CALLS HER "DUCHESS." WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE--NOBLES FROM DARKSIDE, PERHAPS?
THEN THEY'RE A LONG WAY FROM HOME.
BUT THEN-- SO AM I.
FAREWELL, MY FRIENDS... MY FATHER. LET US HOPE THE KERZTIANS AREN'T RIGHT. OTHERWISE THE AFTERLIFE WILL BE VERY DIFFICULT FOR YOU.


HOW COULD THIS HAPPEN? WHY DID IT?
THE KERZTIANS HAVE DENOUNCED SAND MASTERY FOR CENTURIES-- BUT WHAT HAS SUDDENLY MADE THEM ACT ON THEIR HATRED?
DID WE BECOME TOO HAUGHTY MAYBE? OR TOO INSULAR? WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME A SAND MASTER HELPED BUILD ANYTHING FOR PEOPLE OUTSIDE THE DIEM?
IS THAT WHY THEY ATTACKED US AFTER SO MANY YEARS OF PEACE? HAD OUR CLOSED RANKS BECOME INTOLERABLE?
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 MOST ARROGANT AMONG US: DRILE.
DAYSIDER! WE ARE LEAVING...

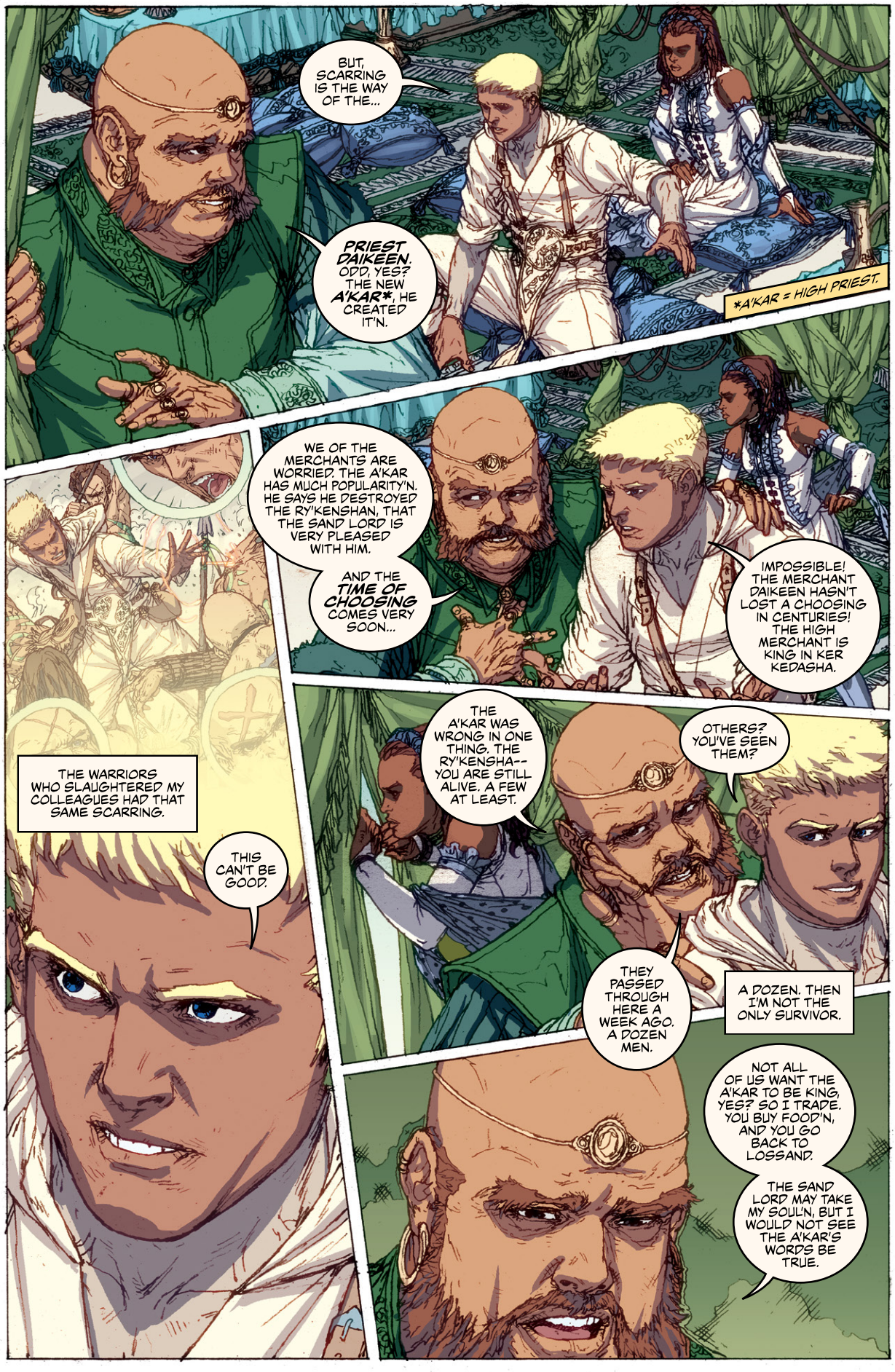

"...BUT PERHAPS YOU WOULD JOIN US SINCE WE ARE SHORT A GUIDE IN THESE TREACHEROUS LANDS."
SO, HOW ON THE SANDS DID YOU GET LOST OUT HERE WITHOUT A GUIDE?
IN A WORD: BETRAYAL.
SOME OF OUR MEN BECAME CONCERNED WE WERE HERE ON A FOOL'S ERRAND AND SO THEY LEFT US, THOUGH NOT WITHOUT SOME FIERCE DISCUSSION. OUR GUIDE DIED DURING SAID DISCUSSION.
SOME DISCUSSION!
BUT YOU'RE A LONG WAY FROM HOME. WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO DAYSIDE?
LEARNING. OURS IS A SCIENTIFIC EXPEDITION.
THEN LET ME TEACH YOU SOME THINGS.
HERE ON DAYSIDE THE SUN IS KING. KER'REEN PHILOSOPHY, THE RELIGION OF KERZTIANS, CALLS THE SUN THE MANIFESTATION OF THE SAND LORD, THE SOURCE OF MAN'S AUTONOMY AND INDEPENDENCE.
AND YOU?
EVEN DAYSIDERS WHO DON'T WORSHIP THE SUN FEEL SOME SPIRITUAL BOND WITH IT.

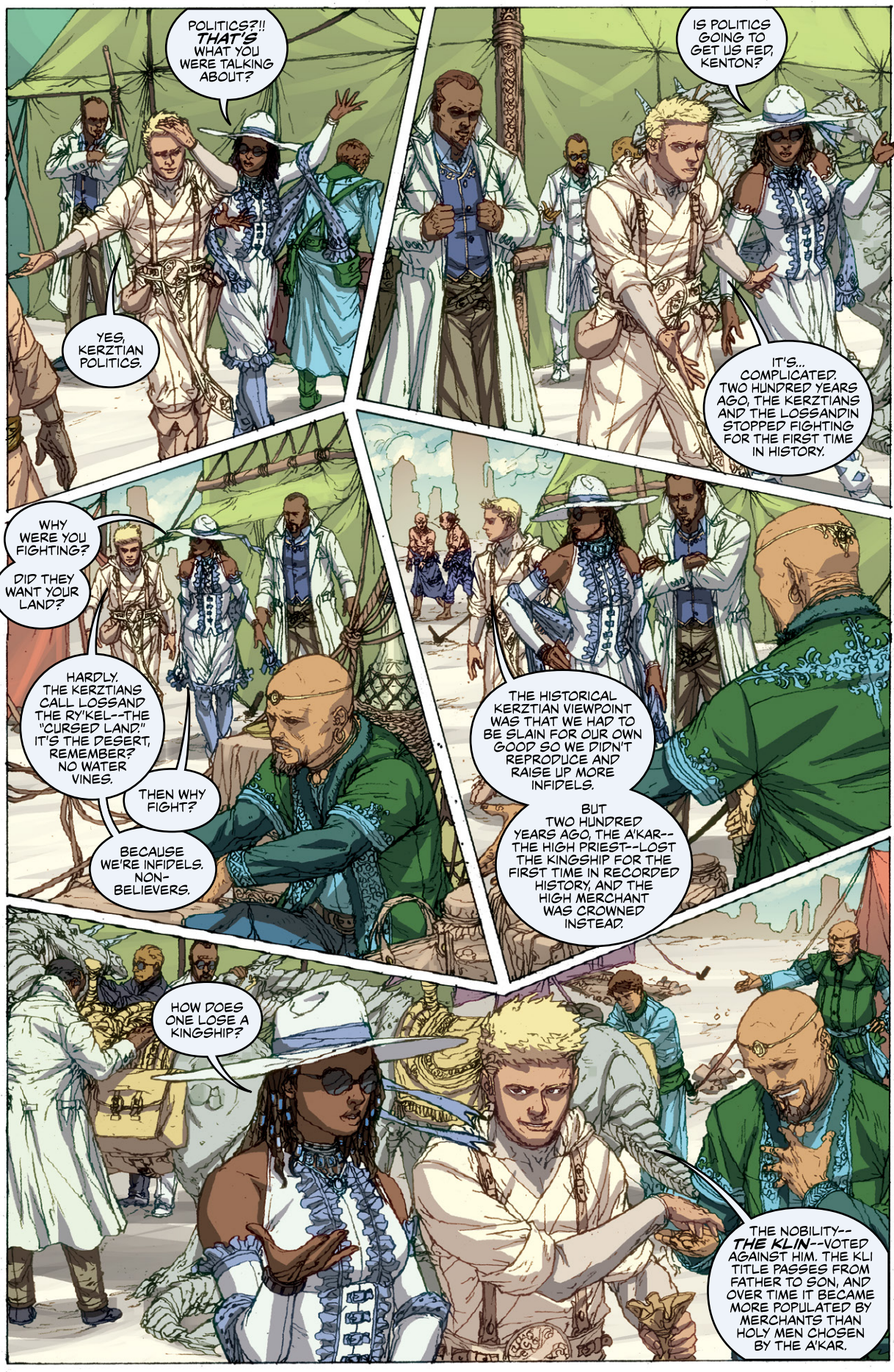

THAT'S TO BE EXPECTED. THE SUN PLAYS SUCH A CRUCIAL ROLE HERE ON DAYSIDE.
...I'M AN ANTHROPOLOGIST, YOU SEE. PROFESSOR JON ACRON. AND THIS IS PROFESSOR CYNDER, BY THE BY.
BY THE BY--?
PLEASED TO MEET YOU, PROFESSORS. I'M KENTON.
AND THIS HERE IS THE DUCHESS KHRISSALLA.
BAON.
HONORED.
WE NEED PROVISIONS--FOOD FOR OURSELVES AND THE RIDING TONKS. HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW THIS AREA, KENTON? HOW FAR IS IT TO THE NEAREST TOWN?
TWO DAYS JOURNEY. THIS WAY.
ARE YOU SURE? EVERYTHING LOOKS THE SAME OUT HERE.
MAGIC!
WHEN THE SUN HANGS IN THE EXACT SAME SPOT FOR YOUR ENTIRE LIFE, YOU BECOME SENSITIVE TO ITS CHANGES. ON DAYSIDE YOU NEVER NEED A MAP TO GUIDE YOU HOME--ONLY THE SUN.

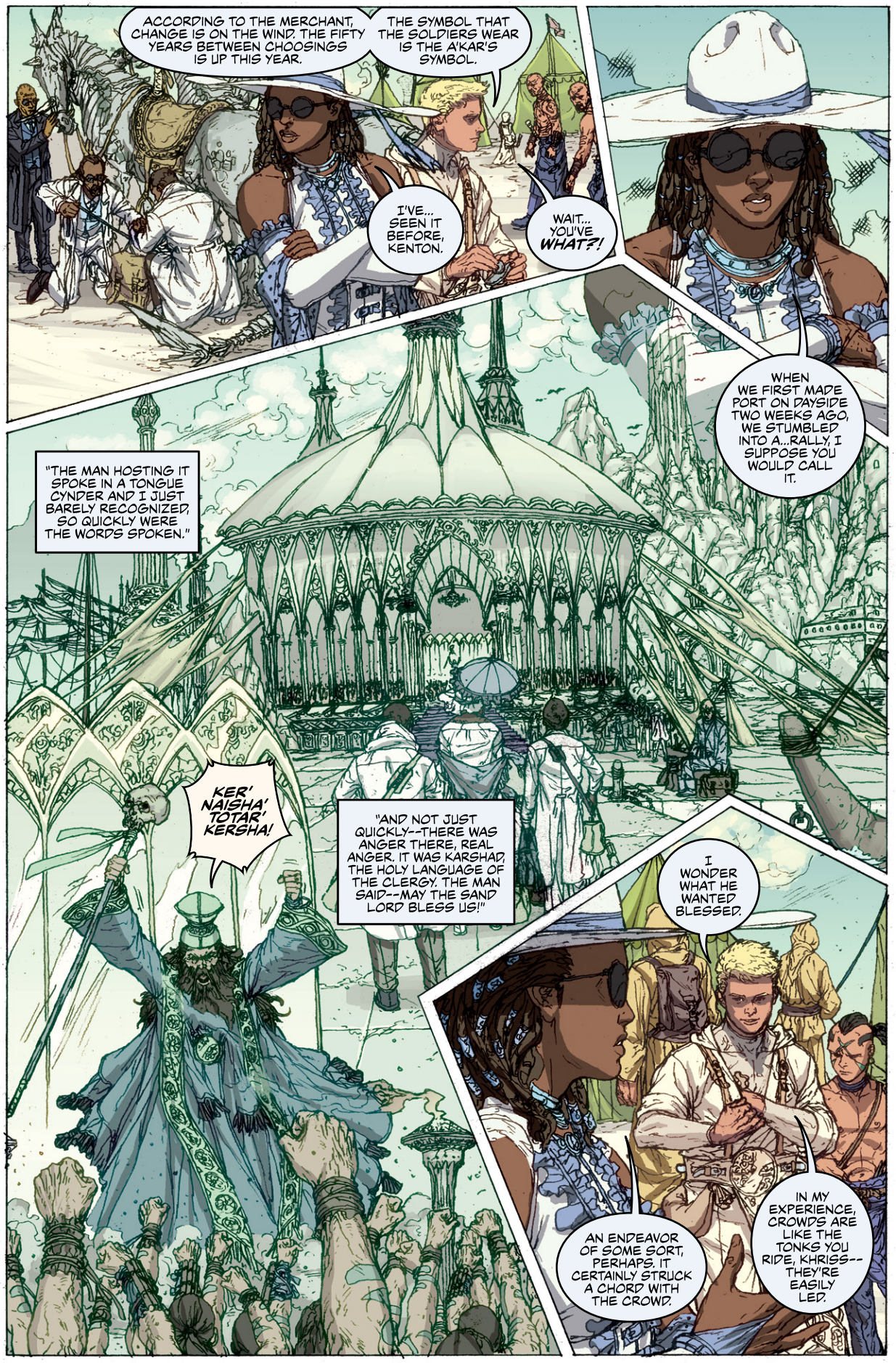

YOU SAID "MAGIC" AT FIRST. DO YOU BELIEVE IN MAGIC?
SURE. NOT THAT I'VE SEEN IT, YOU APPRECIATE. BUT THE KERZTIANS TALK ABOUT MANY THINGS HAPPENING DURING WORSHIP SERVICES.
WHAT ABOUT THE SAND MAGES?
THE WHO--?
MAGES? IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE I SPOKE DYNASTIC--I'M ADMITTEDLY UNFAMILIAR WITH THE WORD.
THE SAND MAGES. THEY RULE LOSSAND.
HAH-HAH-HAH. YOU'VE BEEN WOEFULLY MISINFORMED, DUCHESS KHRISSALLA. LOSSAND IS RULED BY THE PROFESSION HEADS, NOT YOUR MAGES--I'VE NEVER EVEN HEARD OF THEM.
THEN...?
...
KHRISSALLA? DUCHESS?
IT'S NOTHING.
JUST LEAD US TO PROVISIONS, KENTON.

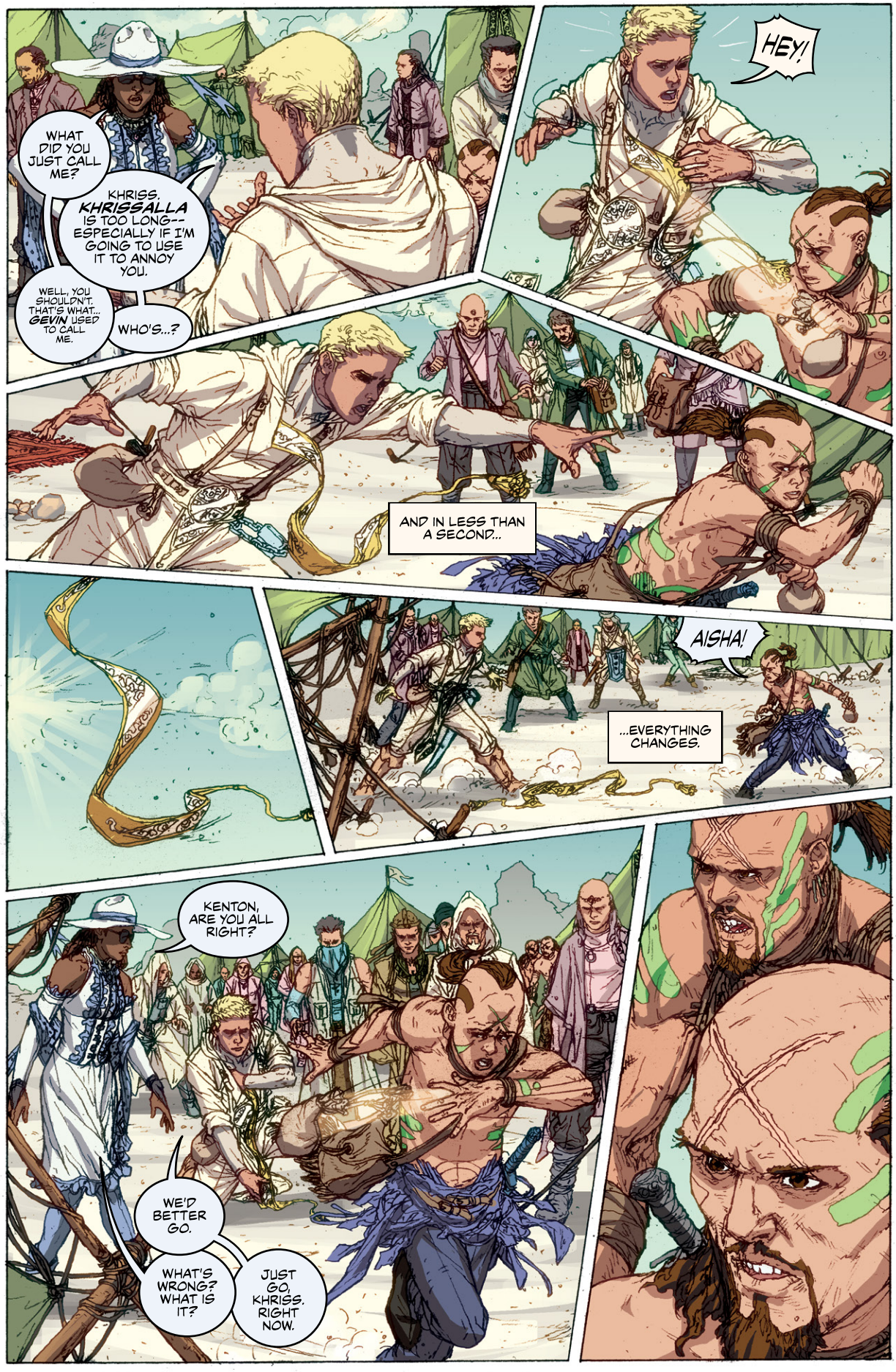

TWO DAYS LATER.
THAT PURSE SEEMS LIGHT, FRIEND.
HAH! FOR THIS? BEST DEAL ON SAND! YOU WANT KERZTIAN COIN, YOU WANT LOSSANDIN COIN'N?
EITHER COINAGE IS FINE. I'M JUST GOING TO SPEND IT ON SUPPLIES.
SPEND THEM HERE, YES FRIEND? WELL, I GIVE YOU SANDS GOOD DEAL. MY COUSIN, HE SELLS SUPPLIES'N!
FOOD! QIDOIN!
WHAT'S HE SAYING? I CAN'T FOLLOW A WORD! FOR ALL I KNOW, YOU'RE ARRANGING TO SELL ME INTO SLAVERY INSTEAD OF JUST SELLING MY JEWELRY!
I'D BE LUCKY TO GET A THREE-LEGGED TONK OUT OF THAT DEAL, KHRISSALLA. NOW HUSH!
YOUR COMPANION IS... QUITE BEAUTIFUL. HOWEVER, I HAVE FOUND THAT LONSHA WOMEN ARE RARELY WORTH THE TROUBLE'N OF THEIR ARROGANCE.
WISE WORDS, FRIEND. NOW, FOR THE TRADE?
I GIVE YOU FORTY LAK. THERE'S NOT MUCH USE IN SCRAPS OF METAL LIKE THIS. MUST BE MELTED DOWN, YES?
HMF. PUT THE BAG BACK ON THE TABLE. I MAY NOT BE A MERCHANT, BUT I KNOW METAL AND STONE ARE VALUABLE OUT HERE.
YOU'RE SITTING ATOP SAND THAT'S A HUNDRED FEET ABOVE GROUND. THERE'S NO WAY THAT YOU'RE OBTAINING METAL EASILY OR CHEAPLY.

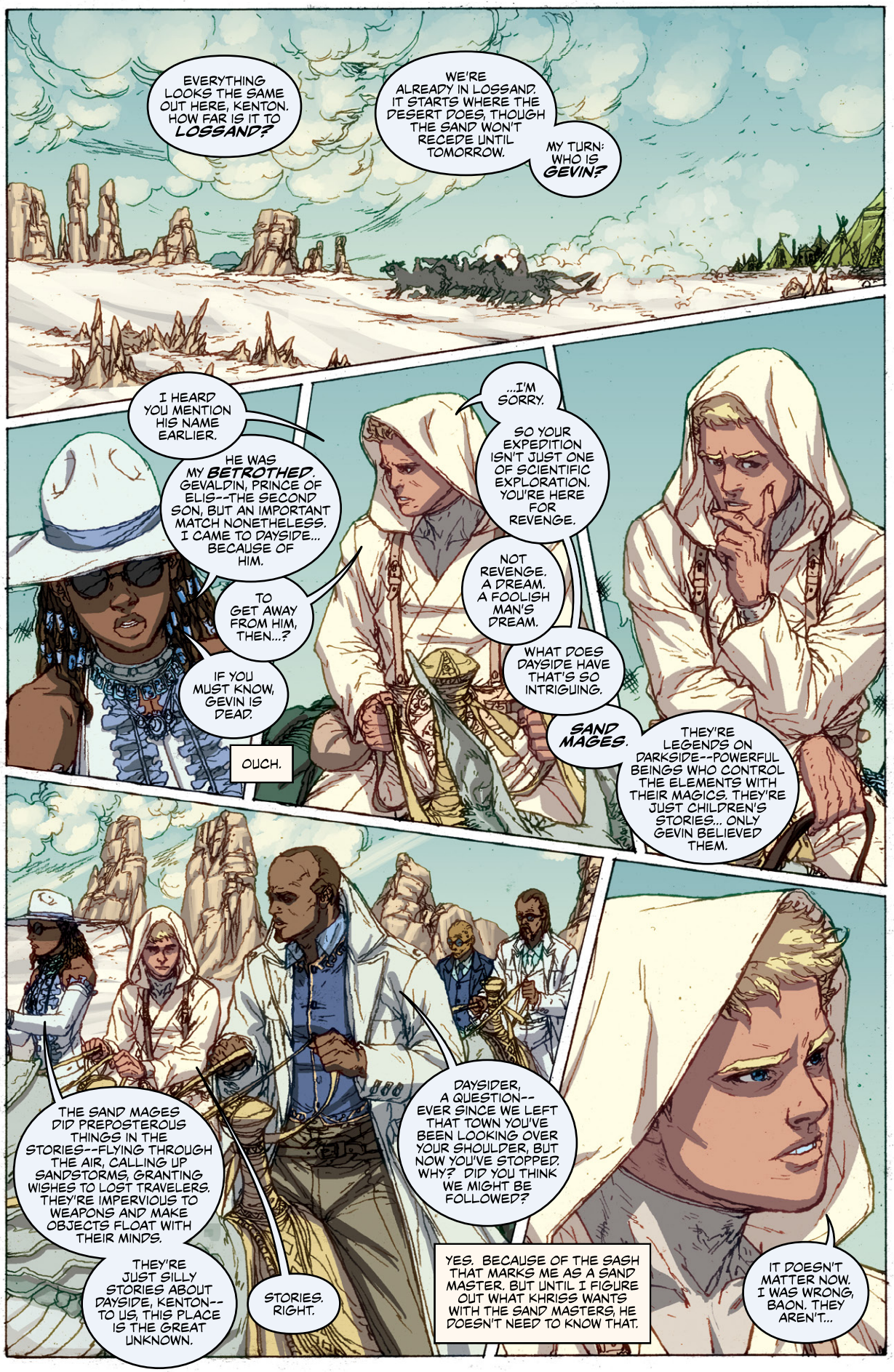

PERHAPS, BUT... YOU LUCKY I TRADE WITH YOU. YOUR KIND...
OTHERS IN TOWN... MAYBE NOT SO OPEN-MINDED, YES?
SIFT THAT SAND, FRIEND-- WHAT DO YOU MEAN? YOU'VE NEVER REFUSED TO TRADE WITH MY KIND BEFORE.
AISHA! HE KNOWS I'M A SAND MASTER. CHANGING MY ROBE WASN'T ENOUGH TO CONFUSE HIM.
TIMES CHANGE. IT IS NOT A GOOD TIME NOW TO BE FRIENDS WITH RY'KENSHA, YOU UNDERSTAND?
I'LL TAKE FORTY, BUT I WANT SOMETHING ELSE AS WELL-- INFORMATION.
WHAT'S CHANGED? WHY DID KERZTIAN WARRIORS SUDDENLY DECIDE THEY COULD ATTACK A GROUP OF SAND MASTERS?
CHOOSE YOUR WORDS CAREFULLY, EEDSHA. EARS ARE EVERY-WHERE'N. COME--
--YOU SEE?
WHAT'S GOING ON?
NOT NOW, DUCHESS.
"YOU SEE THAT, FRIEND? THEY ARE SOLDIERS-- WARRIOR DAIKEEN. LOOK AT THEIR HEADS. NOT TATTOOED BUT SCARRED, YOU SEE?"


BUT, SCARRING IS THE WAY OF THE...
PRIEST DAIKEEN. ODD, YES? THE NEW A'KAR*, HE CREATED IT'N.
*A'KAR = HIGH PRIEST.
WE OF THE MERCHANTS ARE WORRIED. THE A'KAR HAS MUCH POPULARITY'N. HE SAYS HE DESTROYED THE RY'KENSHAN, THAT THE SAND LORD IS VERY PLEASED WITH HIM.
AND THE TIME OF CHOOSING COMES VERY SOON...
IMPOSSIBLE! THE MERCHANT DAIKEEN HASN'T LOST A CHOOSING IN CENTURIES! THE HIGH MERCHANT IS KING IN KER KEDASHA.
THE WARRIORS WHO SLAUGHTERED MY COLLEAGUES HAD THAT SAME SCARRING.
THIS CAN'T BE GOOD.
THE A'KAR WAS WRONG IN ONE THING. THE RY'KENSHA-- YOU ARE STILL ALIVE. A FEW AT LEAST.
OTHERS? YOU'VE SEEN THEM?
THEY PASSED THROUGH HERE A WEEK AGO. A DOZEN MEN.
A DOZEN. THEN I'M NOT THE ONLY SURVIVOR.
NOT ALL OF US WANT THE A'KAR TO BE KING, YES? SO I TRADE. YOU BUY FOOD'N, AND YOU GO BACK TO LOSSAND.
THE SAND LORD MAY TAKE MY SOUL'N, BUT I WOULD NOT SEE THE A'KAR'S WORDS BE TRUE.

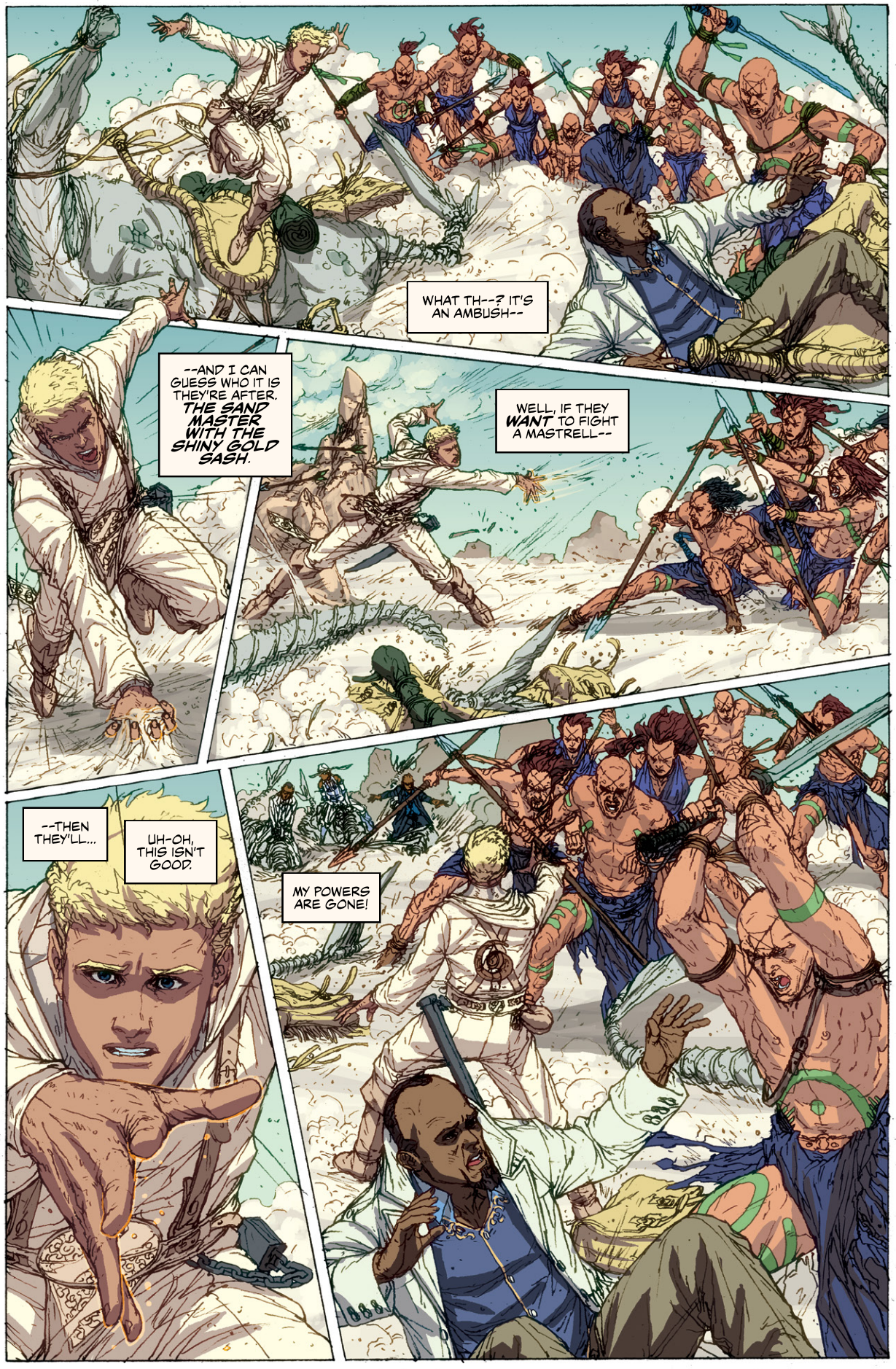

POLITICS?!! THAT'S WHAT YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT?
YES, KERZTIAN POLITICS.
IS POLITICS GOING TO GET US FED, KENTON?
IT'S... COMPLICATED. TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO, THE KERZTIANS AND THE LOSSAND'IN STOPPED FIGHTING FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HISTORY.
WHY WERE YOU FIGHTING?
DID THEY WANT YOUR LAND?
HARDLY. THE KERZTIANS CALL LOSSAND THE RY'KEL--THE "CURSED LAND." IT'S THE DESERT, REMEMBER? NO WATER VINES.
THEN WHY FIGHT?
BECAUSE WE'RE INFIDELS. NON-BELIEVERS.
THE HISTORICAL KERZTIAN VIEWPOINT WAS THAT WE HAD TO BE SLAIN FOR OUR OWN GOOD SO WE DIDN'T REPRODUCE AND RAISE UP MORE INFIDELS.
BUT TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO, THE A'KAR--THE HIGH PRIEST--LOST THE KINGSHIP FOR THE FIRST TIME IN RECORDED HISTORY, AND THE HIGH MERCHANT WAS CROWNED INSTEAD.
HOW DOES ONE LOSE A KINGSHIP?
THE NOBILITY--THE KLIN--VOTED AGAINST HIM. THE KLI TITLE PASSES FROM FATHER TO SON, AND OVER TIME IT BECAME MORE POPULATED BY MERCHANTS THAN HOLY MEN CHOSEN BY THE A'KAR.


ACCORDING TO THE MERCHANT, CHANGE IS ON THE WIND. THE FIFTY YEARS BETWEEN CHOOSINGS IS UP THIS YEAR.
THE SYMBOL THAT THE SOLDIERS WEAR IS THE A'KAR'S SYMBOL.
I'VE... SEEN IT BEFORE, KENTON.
WAIT... YOU'VE WHAT?!
WHEN WE FIRST MADE PORT ON DAYSIDE TWO WEEKS AGO, WE STUMBLED INTO A...RALLY, I SUPPOSE YOU WOULD CALL IT.
"THE MAN HOSTING IT SPOKE IN A TONGUE CYNDER AND I JUST BARELY RECOGNIZED, SO QUICKLY WERE THE WORDS SPOKEN."
KER' NAISHA' TOTAR' KERSHA!
"AND NOT JUST QUICKLY--THERE WAS ANGER THERE, REAL ANGER. IT WAS KARSHAD, THE HOLY LANGUAGE OF THE CLERGY. THE MAN SAID--MAY THE SAND LORD BLESS US!"
I WONDER WHAT HE WANTED BLESSED.
AN ENDEAVOR OF SOME SORT, PERHAPS. IT CERTAINLY STRUCK A CHORD WITH THE CROWD.
IN MY EXPERIENCE, CROWDS ARE LIKE THE TONKS YOU RIDE, KHRISS--THEY'RE EASILY LED.


WHAT DID YOU JUST CALL ME?
KHRISS. KHRISSALLA IS TOO LONG-- ESPECIALLY IF I'M GOING TO USE IT TO ANNOY YOU.
WELL, YOU SHOULDN'T. THAT'S WHAT... GEVIN USED TO CALL ME.
WHO'S...?
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.


EVERYTHING LOOKS THE SAME OUT HERE, KENTON. HOW FAR IS IT TO LOSSAND?
WE'RE ALREADY IN LOSSAND. IT STARTS WHERE THE DESERT DOES, THOUGH THE SAND WON'T RECEDE UNTIL TOMORROW.
MY TURN: WHO IS GEVIN?
I HEARD YOU MENTION HIS NAME EARLIER.
HE WAS MY BETROTHED. GEVALDIN, PRINCE OF ELIS--THE SECOND SON, BUT AN IMPORTANT MATCH NONETHELESS. I CAME TO DAYSIDE... BECAUSE OF HIM.
TO GET AWAY FROM HIM, THEN...?
IF YOU MUST KNOW, GEVIN IS DEAD.
OUCH.
...I'M SORRY.
SO YOUR EXPEDITION ISN'T JUST ONE OF SCIENTIFIC EXPLORATION. YOU'RE HERE FOR REVENGE.
NOT REVENGE. A DREAM. A FOOLISH MAN'S DREAM.
WHAT DOES DAYSIDE HAVE THAT'S SO INTRIGUING.
SAND MAGES.
THEY'RE LEGENDS ON DARKSIDE--POWERFUL BEINGS WHO CONTROL THE ELEMENTS WITH THEIR MAGICS. THEY'RE JUST CHILDREN'S STORIES... ONLY GEVIN BELIEVED THEM.
THE SAND MAGES DID PREPOSTEROUS THINGS IN THE STORIES--FLYING THROUGH THE AIR, CALLING UP SANDSTORMS, GRANTING WISHES TO LOST TRAVELERS. THEY'RE IMPERVIOUS TO WEAPONS AND MAKE OBJECTS FLOAT WITH THEIR MINDS.
THEY'RE JUST SILLY STORIES ABOUT DAYSIDE, KENTON--TO US, THIS PLACE IS THE GREAT UNKNOWN.
STORIES. RIGHT.
DAYSIDER, A QUESTION--EVER SINCE WE LEFT THAT TOWN YOU'VE BEEN LOOKING OVER YOUR SHOULDER, BUT NOW YOU'VE STOPPED. WHY? DID YOU THINK WE MIGHT BE FOLLOWED?
YES. BECAUSE OF THE SASH THAT MARKS ME AS A SAND MASTER. BUT UNTIL I FIGURE OUT WHAT KHRISS WANTS WITH THE SAND MASTERS, HE DOESN'T NEED TO KNOW THAT.
IT DOESN'T MATTER NOW. I WAS WRONG, BAON. THEY AREN'T...


YEAARRGH!
TSSSSHHH


WHAT TH--? 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...
UH-OH, THIS ISN'T GOOD.
MY POWERS ARE GONE!

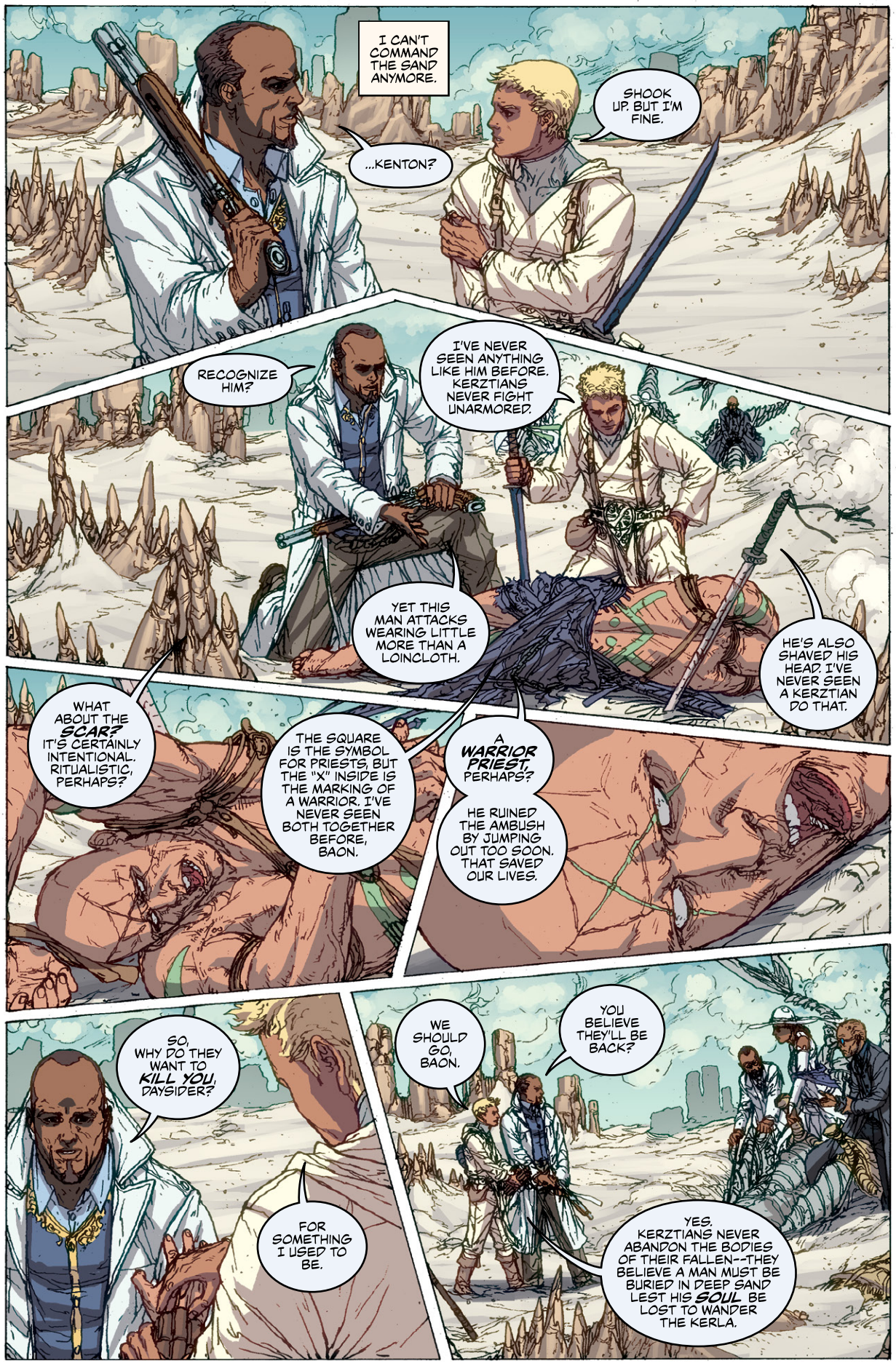

CHAPTER
4
DIVIDES

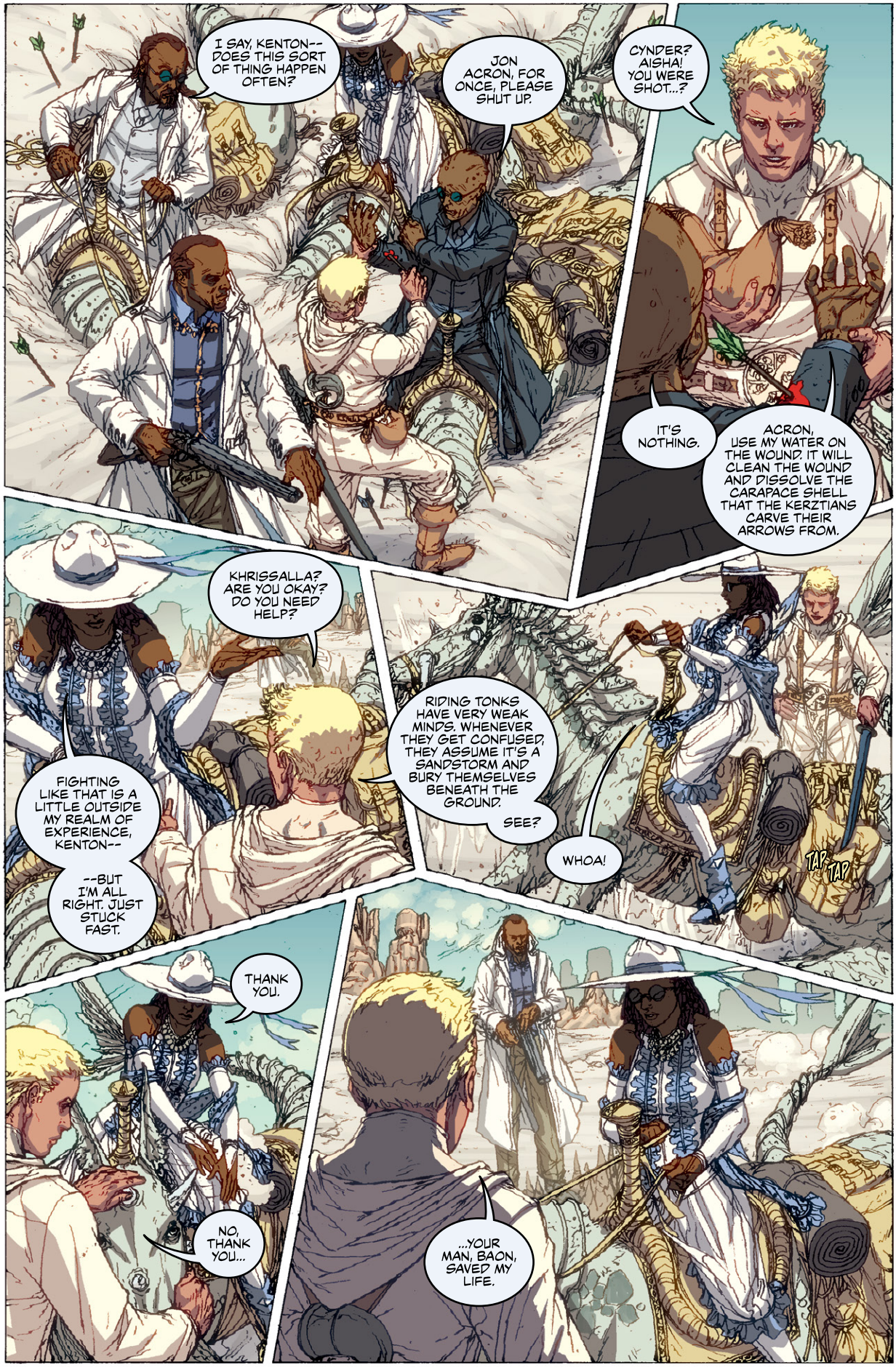

EVEN STRIPPED OF MY SAND POWERS, I'M NOT DEFENSELESS.
KRAK
KENTON! LOOK OUT!


YEARS OF TRAINING WITH THE TOWER'S WARRIORS HAVE MADE MY RESPONSES SECOND NATURE.
SO LET'S FINISH THIS QUICKLY.
FWPP
YEARGH!
OH SHELLA, OH SHELLA, OH SHELLA!
YOUCH!
THE DUCHESS AND HER PEOPLE THINK WE'RE SAVAGES ON THIS SIDE OF THE WORLD. SEEING THIS SORRY DISPLAY, I CAN APPRECIATE THEIR VIEWPOINT.


BUT THE KERZTIAN WARRIORS ARE AFTER ME. THEY'VE ALWAYS *FEARED* THE SAND MASTERS--THEY'VE NEVER BEEN SO BOLD UP UNTIL NOW.
THE *A'KAR* MUST HAVE REALLY RILED THEM UP TO MAKE THEM ATTACK LIKE THIS.
COME TO LIFE.
PLEASE!
FA-TOOOM
WHAT...? DID I... DO?

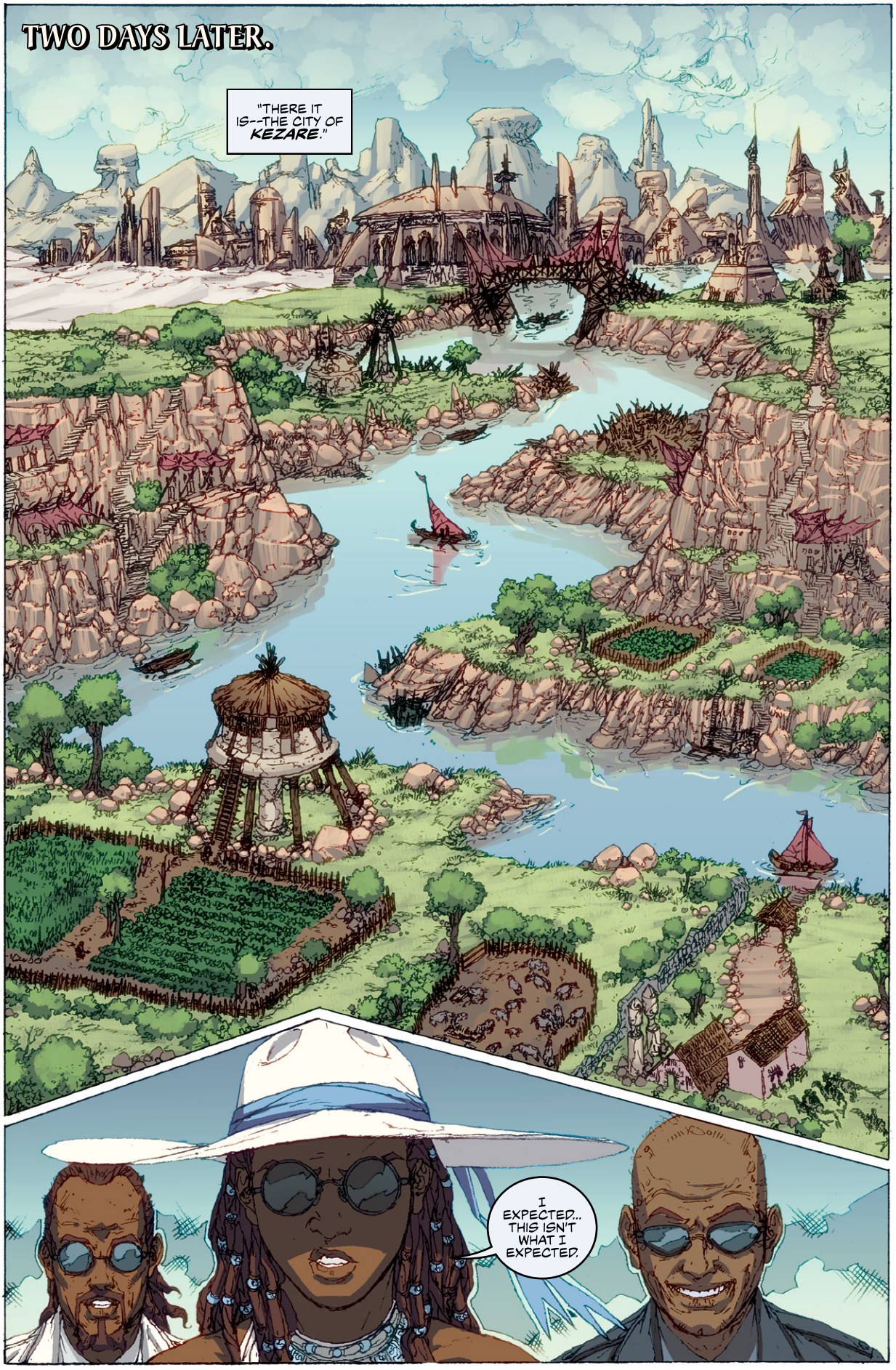

BAON...?
FA-TOOOM
THEY'RE LEAVING.
THEN THEY ARE WISE. ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, DAYSIDER?


I CAN'T COMMAND THE SAND ANYMORE.
...KENTON?
SHOOK UP. BUT I'M FINE.
RECOGNIZE HIM?
I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE HIM BEFORE. KERZTIANS NEVER FIGHT UNARMORED.
YET THIS MAN ATTACKS WEARING LITTLE MORE THAN A LOINCLOTH.
HE'S ALSO SHAVED HIS HEAD. I'VE NEVER SEEN A KERZTIAN DO THAT.
WHAT ABOUT THE SCAR? IT'S CERTAINLY INTENTIONAL. RITUALISTIC, PERHAPS?
THE SQUARE IS THE SYMBOL FOR PRIESTS, BUT THE "X" INSIDE IS THE MARKING OF A WARRIOR. I'VE NEVER SEEN BOTH TOGETHER BEFORE, BAON.
A WARRIOR PRIEST, PERHAPS?
HE RUINED THE AMBUSH BY JUMPING OUT TOO SOON. THAT SAVED OUR LIVES.
SO, WHY DO THEY WANT TO KILL YOU, DAYSIDER?
FOR SOMETHING I USED TO BE.
WE SHOULD GO, BAON.
YOU BELIEVE THEY'LL BE BACK?
YES. KERZTIANS NEVER ABANDON THE BODIES OF THEIR FALLEN--THEY BELIEVE A MAN MUST BE BURIED IN DEEP SAND LEST HIS SOUL BE LOST TO WANDER THE KERLA.


I SAY, KENTON-- DOES THIS SORT OF THING HAPPEN OFTEN?
JON ACRON, FOR ONCE, PLEASE SHUT UP.
CYNDER? AISHA! YOU WERE SHOT...?
IT'S NOTHING.
ACRON, USE MY WATER ON THE WOUND. IT WILL CLEAN THE WOUND AND DISSOLVE THE CARAPACE SHELL THAT THE KERZTIANS CARVE THEIR ARROWS FROM.
KHRISSALLA? ARE YOU OKAY? DO YOU NEED HELP?
FIGHTING LIKE THAT IS A LITTLE OUTSIDE MY REALM OF EXPERIENCE, KENTON--
--BUT I'M ALL RIGHT. JUST STUCK FAST.
RIDING TONKS HAVE VERY WEAK MINDS. WHENEVER THEY GET CONFUSED, THEY ASSUME IT'S A SANDSTORM AND BURY THEMSELVES BENEATH THE GROUND.
SEE?
WHOA!
TAP TAP
THANK YOU.
NO, THANK YOU...
...YOUR MAN, BAON, SAVED MY LIFE.


THE WEAPON IS CALLED A PISTOL. IF YOU WERE WONDERING.
DOES IT USE AIR PRESSURE?
NO, IT RELIES ON A TYPE OF EXPLOSIVE CALLED GUNPOWDER.
THIS GUNPOWDER MUST BE POWERFUL, TO CUT THROUGH SANDLING CARAPACE ARMOR. HOW MANY TIMES CAN IT BE USED?
THEY'RE RELATIVELY NEW TO DARKSIDE, LESS THAN A CENTURY OLD. ONLY A FEW OF THE NATIONS HAVE THEM-- THE DYNASTY IS VERY PROFICIENT AT KEEPING NEW TECHNOLOGY FROM SPREADING THROUGH ITS PROVINCES.
SKATHAN, THE CURRENT MONARCH OF THE DYNASTY, KNOWS HOW DANGEROUS A LITTLE KNOWLEDGE CAN BE.
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? THOSE KERZTIANS ATTACKED US JUST TO GET TO YOU, DIDN'T THEY? AND THEY CONSIDERED YOU SO DANGEROUS THAT THEY ONLY SENT ONE OF THEIR MEN AGAINST BAON, BUT THEY SENT SIX AGAINST YOU.
WHAT ARE YOU HIDING?
WELL, CERTAINLY NOT THE FACT THAT YOU ANNOY ME, DEAR KHRISSALLA OF DARKSIDE.
I--
BY THE SANDS, HOW COULD I BE SO CRUEL? HAVE I SPENT SO LONG FIGHTING AUTHORITY THAT I DON'T KNOW HOW TO STOP?


TIME PASSES, BUT THE SUN NEVER WAVERS.
IT'S AN INTERESTING DEVICE THIS ZINKALLIN, KENTON. MECHANICALLY SIMPLE, IT OPERATES ALONG SIMILAR PRINCIPLES TO OUR PISTOLS.
HERE.
DO I TRULY ANNOY YOU SO?
NO. I'M SORRY, I SHOULDN'T HAVE SAID THAT.
HMF! WE DESERVE AN EXPLANATION OF SOME SORT THEN. DO YOU THINK THEY MIGHT ATTACK US AGAIN?
NO, WE'RE TOO CLOSE TO LOSSAND'IN CIVILIZATION NOW. THEY ARE OPPOSED TO LOSSAND ON RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLES.
I THOUGHT YOU SAID THAT THE WARS WERE OVER.
I THOUGHT THEY WERE.

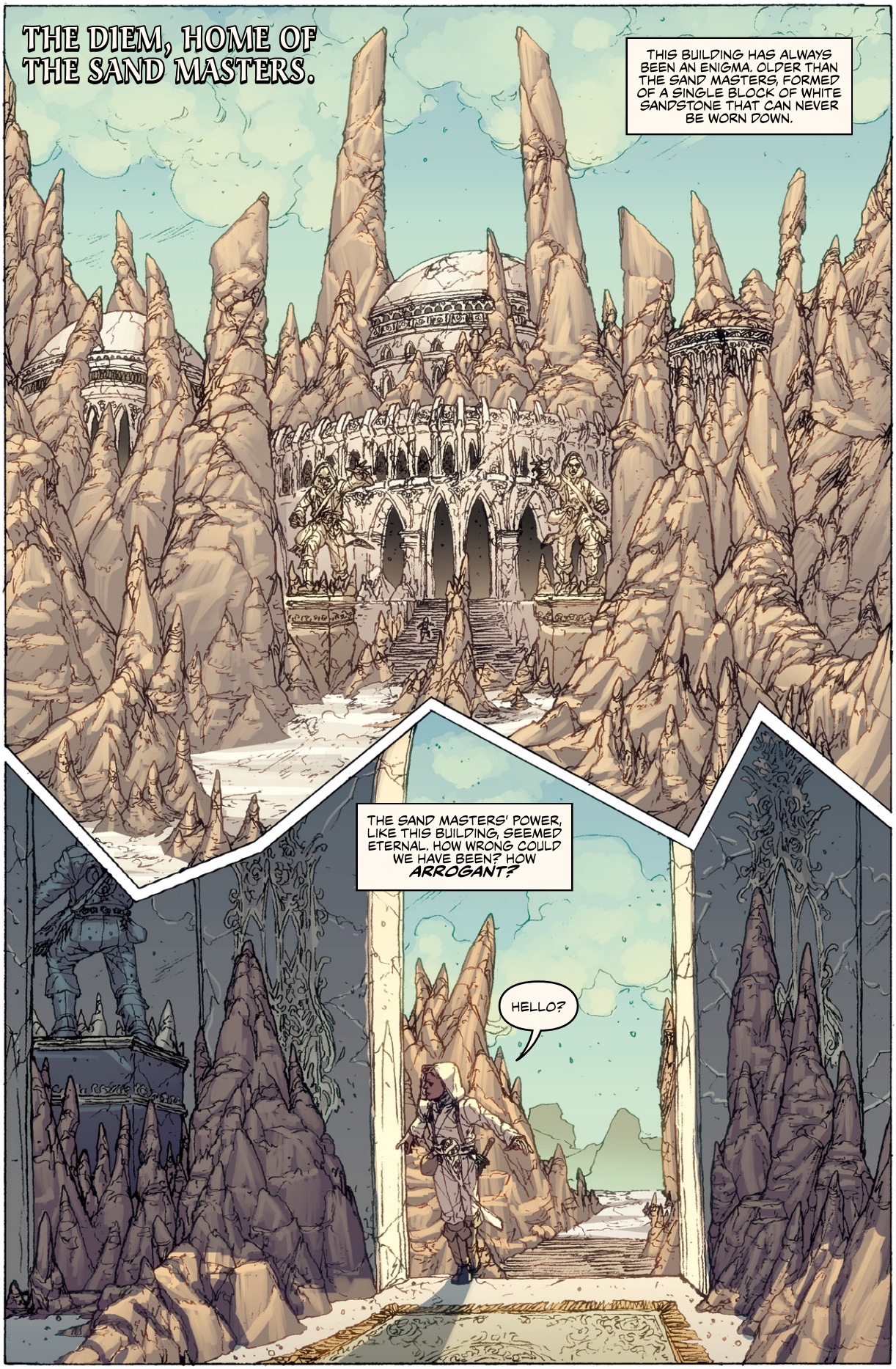

TWO DAYS LATER.
"THERE IT IS--THE CITY OF KEZARE."
I EXPECTED... THIS ISN'T WHAT I EXPECTED.

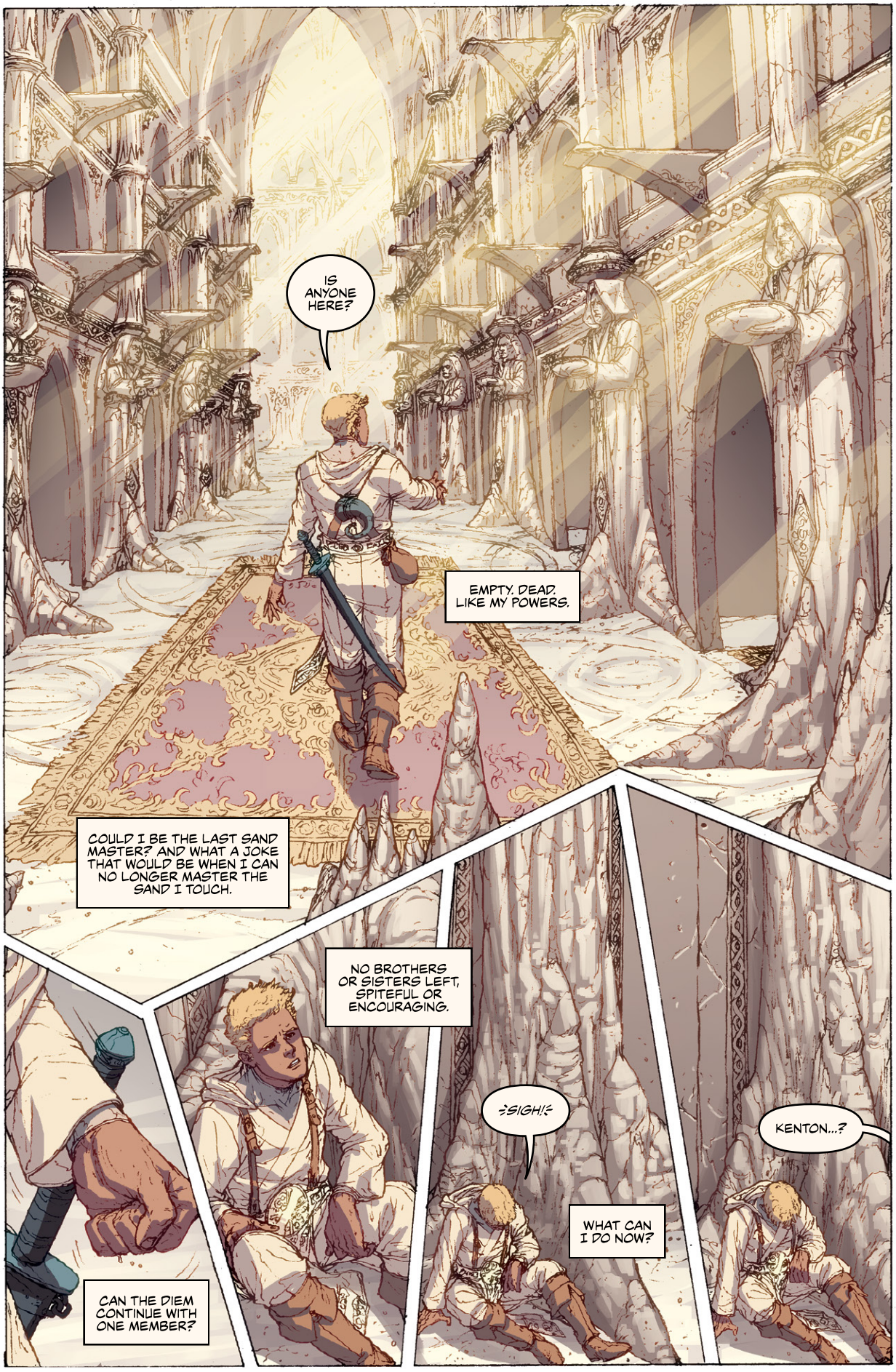

I'LL SECURE YOU A RIDE AND SOMEONE TO GET YOU TO LONZARE, THE DARKSIDER SECTION OF THE CITY. BUT YOU'LL NEED TO LEAVE THE TONKS BEHIND.
WHY?
BECAUSE THEY DON'T LIKE WATER AND WON'T CROSS IT.
THEN HOW WILL WE GET AROUND IN THE CITY?
YOU WALK. OR I SUPPOSE YOU CAN HIRE A CARRIAGE IF YOU MUST.
I WONDER WHAT KIND OF A CITY IT WILL BE, PROFESSOR.
THE KIND WHERE MEN OF LEARNING GET SHOT AT BY SAVAGES, I WOULD HAZARD, JON.
NOW REMEMBER, MY ESTEEMED FRIEND--A TRUE MAN OF LEARNING RETAINS AN OPEN MIND!
WHICH MEANS, I AM AFRAID, THAT THIS IS FAREWELL, KHRISSALLA. I HAVE... THINGS I NEED TO ATTEND TO.
GOODBYE, KENTON. IT HAS BEEN... AN EDUCATION.

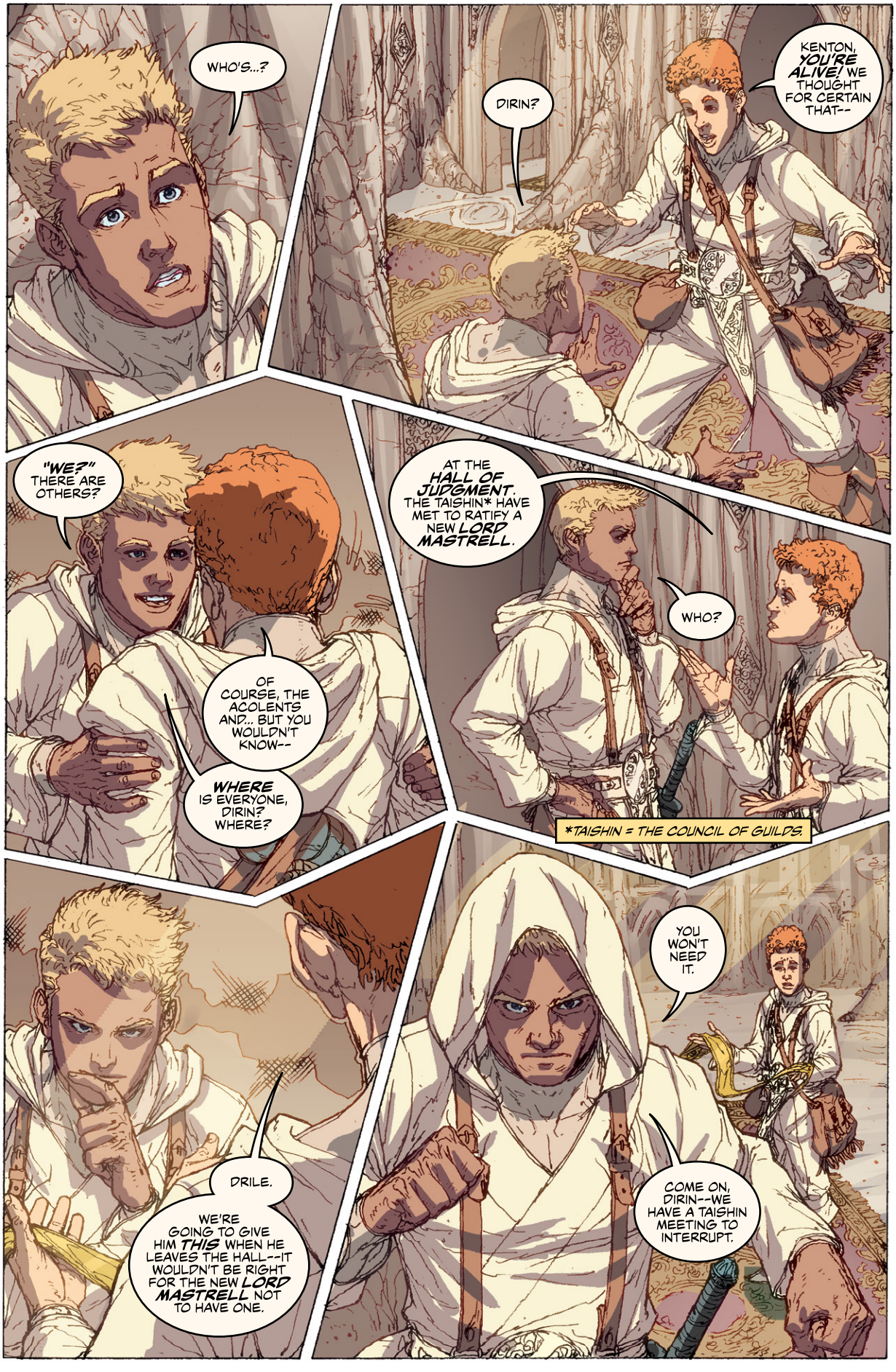

PORTSIDE MARKET, CENTRAL KEZARE.
A TRACKT!
WHO'S SHE CHASING? CAN YOU SEE?
MOVE! GET OUT OF THE WAY! OFFICIAL BUSINESS!
SURRENDER, LOKMLEN. THERE'S NOWHERE LEFT TO RUN.
THERE'S ALWAYS SOMEWHERE TO RUN, AIS, YOU FILTHY ZENSHA*.
TSCHINK
*ZENSHA = "TRAITOR," USED AS AN ETHNIC SLUR.
HAVEN'T YOU LOST ENOUGH MEN TODAY? YOUR RAID WAS A BLOOD-BATH!
CLANG
YOU'VE MURDERED THREE TRACKTS! DO YOU THINK I WOULD TURN A BLIND EYE TO THAT? DO YOU THINK ANY TRACKT WOULD?
NOW, TELL ME WHERE YOUR MASTER IS. WHO ARE YOU WORKING FOR? WHERE IS SHAREZAN?


YEARGHHHH!
FFFT
YOU ENFORCE A LAW THAT FAVORS GOD'S ETERNAL ADVERSARIES, ZENSHA! AND YOU ARE WEAK!
I'VE MET CHILDREN WITH MORE SKILL, TRACKT AIS. THIS IS WHAT YOU BETRAYED YOUR PEOPLE TO BECOME?
I SERVE ONLY JUSTICE, LOKMLEN, AND JUSTICE BELONGS TO THE SAND LORD.
FOOL, YOU'RE A TRAITOR TO YOUR PEOPLE! A NAÏVE TRAITOR WHO CAN'T TELL WHICH WAY THE DESERT WIND IS BLOWING.
CLANG
UGH!
A TRAITOR TO YOUR HERITAGE, TO YOUR PEOPLE, TO THEIR FUTURE!
NO!
WEAK AND OUT OF CONTROL, FIGHTING FOR AUTHORITIES AND LAWS THAT ARE AN ABOMINATION TO GOD HIMSELF.
ARGH!
YOU ARE A DISGRACE, TRACKT AIS. I GIVE YOU NOW TO THE SAND LORD'S JUDGMENT.
UM, EXCUSE ME?

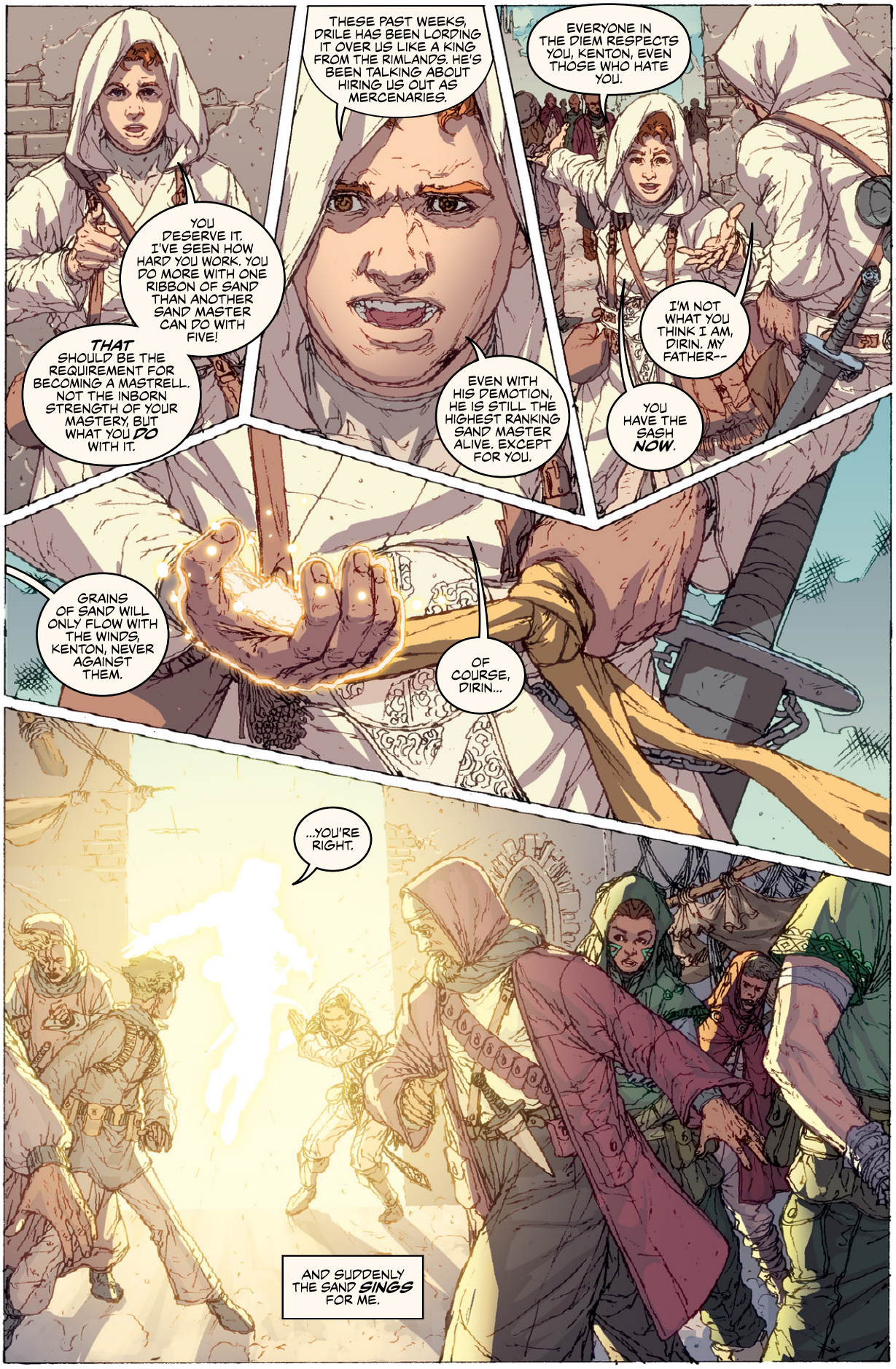

BUT DON'T YOU THINK THE POOR LADY HAS HAD ENOUGH FOR ONE DAY?
I'M A STRONG PROPONENT OF HUMILIATING TRACKTS AND OTHERS IN AUTHORITY, BUT KILLING THEM IS A BIT EXTREME.
WHU...?
IF YOU WISH TO FIGHT ME, STRANGER, THEN I ACCEPT YOUR CHALLENGE.
THANK YOU, BUT NO. SWORDS AND I DON'T GET ALONG VERY WELL TOGETHER.
I DON'T THINK YOU HAVE MUCH CHOICE! HAH!
ARGH!
STOMP
AARIK'S FIRST RULE OF COMBAT-- ALWAYS GO FOR THE TOES.
DO NOT MOVE, THIEF. ZENSHA OR NOT, I CAN ASSURE YOU THAT I WILL NOT HESITATE TO KILL YOU! UNDERSTAND?

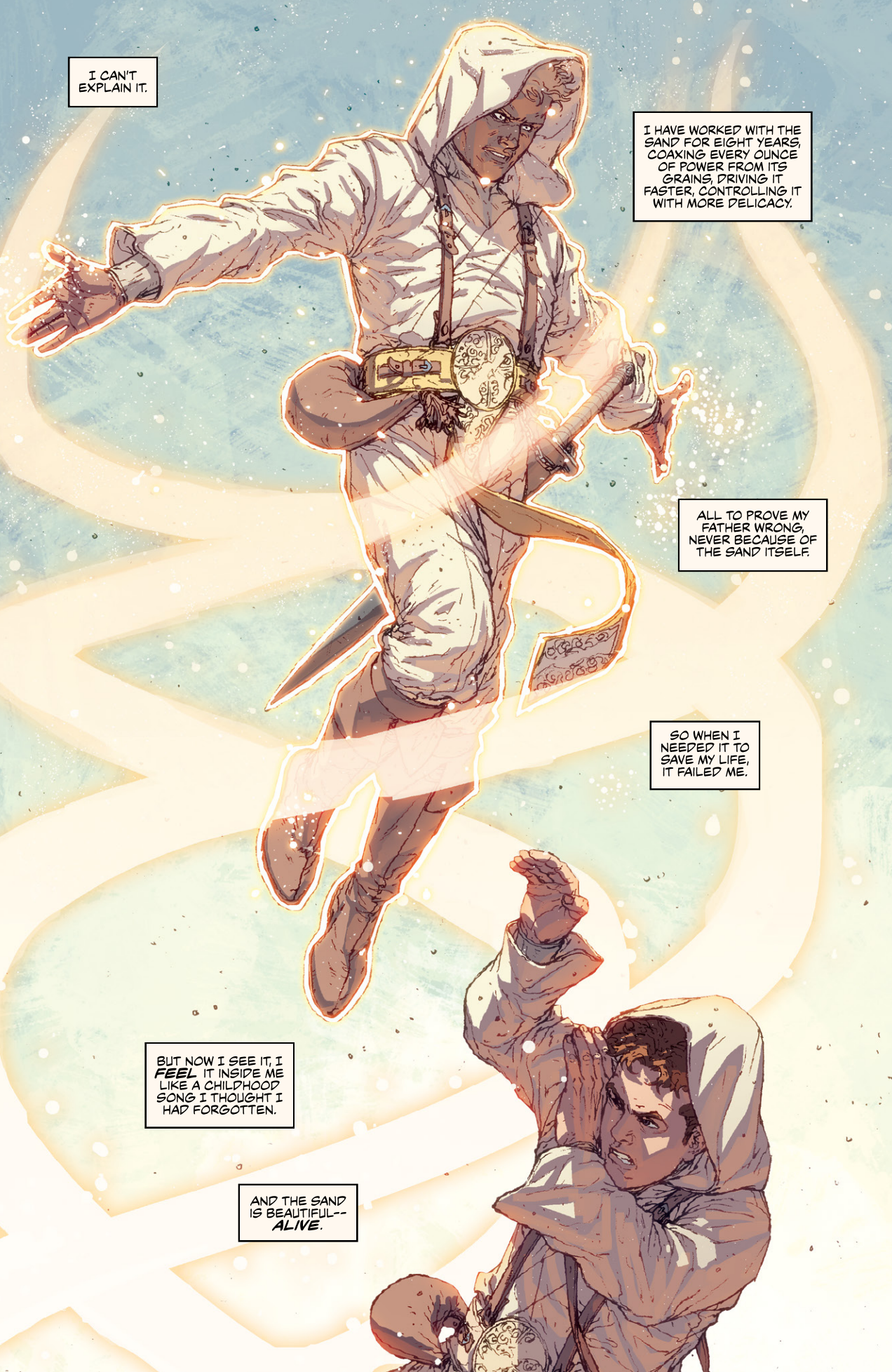

THE DIEM, HOME OF THE SAND MASTERS.
THIS BUILDING HAS ALWAYS BEEN AN ENIGMA. OLDER THAN THE SAND MASTERS, FORMED OF A SINGLE BLOCK OF WHITE SANDSTONE THAT CAN NEVER BE WORN DOWN.
THE SAND MASTERS' POWER, LIKE THIS BUILDING, SEEMED ETERNAL. HOW WRONG COULD WE HAVE BEEN? HOW ARROGANT?
HELLO?


IS ANYONE HERE?
EMPTY. DEAD. LIKE MY POWERS.
COULD I BE THE LAST SAND MASTER? AND WHAT A JOKE THAT WOULD BE WHEN I CAN NO LONGER MASTER THE SAND I TOUCH.
NO BROTHERS OR SISTERS LEFT, SPITEFUL OR ENCOURAGING.
CAN THE DIEM CONTINUE WITH ONE MEMBER?
=SIGH!=
WHAT CAN I DO NOW?
KENTON...?

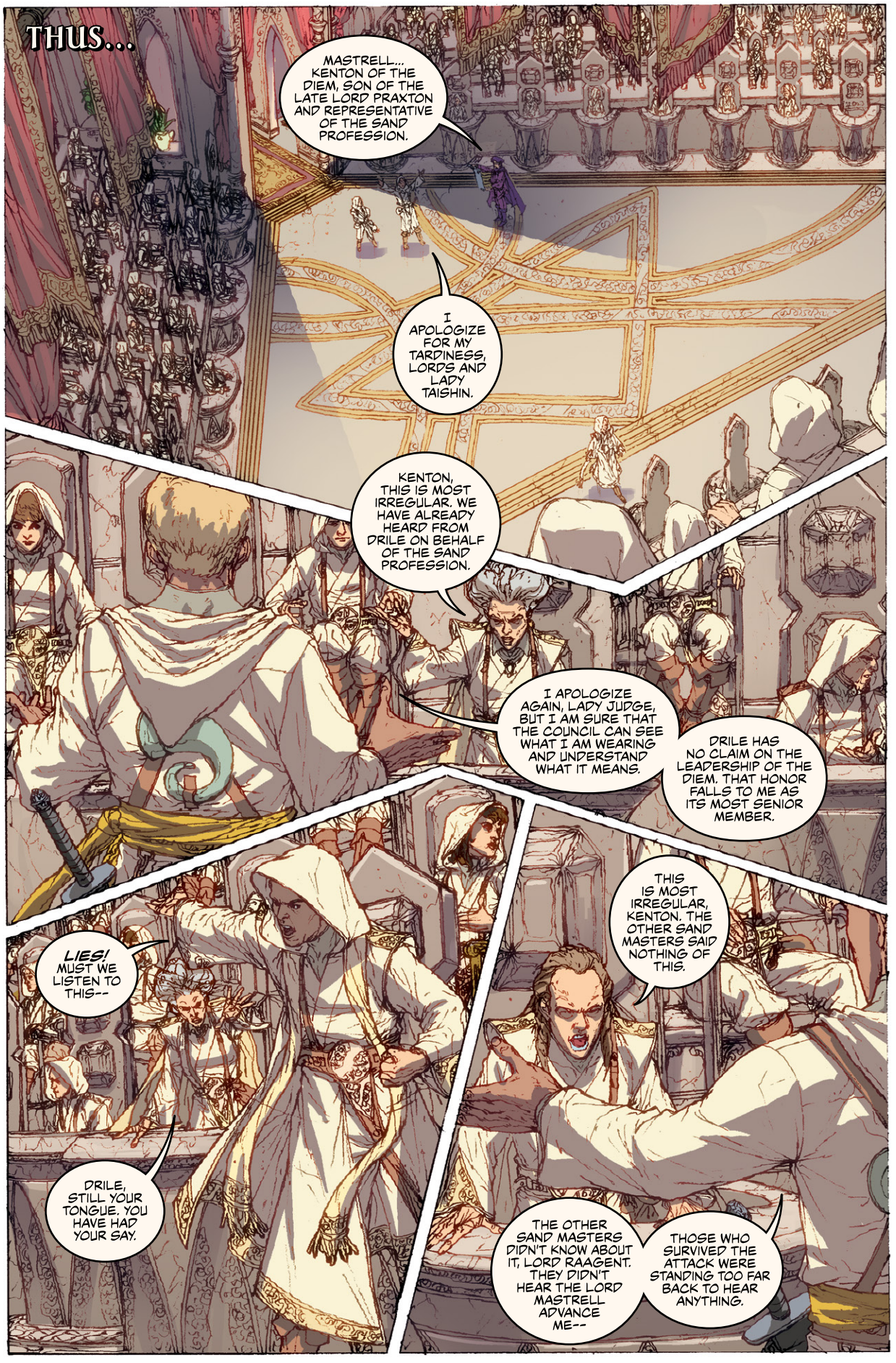

WHO'S...?
DIRIN?
KENTON, YOU'RE ALIVE! WE THOUGHT FOR CERTAIN THAT--
"WE?" THERE ARE OTHERS?
OF COURSE, THE ACOLENTS AND... BUT YOU WOULDN'T KNOW--
WHERE IS EVERYONE, DIRIN? WHERE?
AT THE HALL OF JUDGMENT. THE TAISHIN* HAVE MET TO RATIFY A NEW LORD MASTRELL.
WHO?
*TAISHIN = THE COUNCIL OF GUILDS.
YOU WON'T NEED IT.
COME ON, DIRIN--WE HAVE A TAISHIN MEETING TO INTERRUPT.
DRILE.
WE'RE GOING TO GIVE HIM THIS WHEN HE LEAVES THE HALL--IT WOULDN'T BE RIGHT FOR THE NEW LORD MASTRELL NOT TO HAVE ONE.

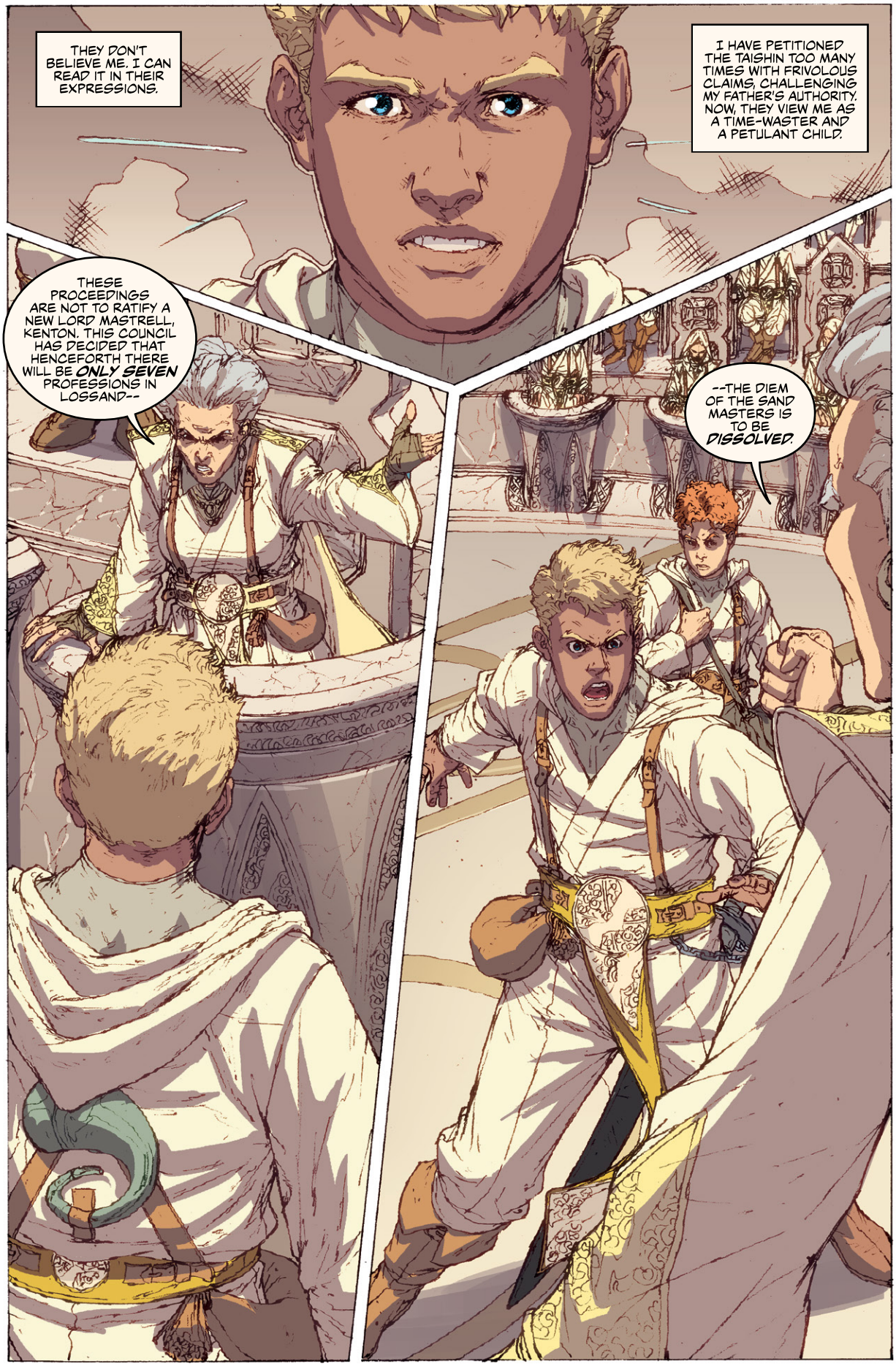

SHORTLY, OUTSIDE THE HALL OF JUDGMENT.
SO, IF NONE OF THE MASTRELLS SURVIVED, THEN HOW DID YOU SURVIVE, DIRIN?
THE KERZTIANS MOSTLY IGNORED THE ACOLENTS, KENTON--OVER HALF OF US SURVIVED. BUT THE HIGHER RANKS...
I'M SORRY ABOUT THE LORD MASTRELL... ABOUT YOUR FATHER.
THE KERZTIANS KNEW WHICH SASH COLORS TO TARGET. BUT THEY MISSED ONE.
WHERE DID YOU GET THAT? I DIDN'T SEE THE LORD MASTRELL ASSIGN--
HE DID, BUT MY FATHER GAVE IT TO ME OUT OF SPITE, NOT BECAUSE HE THOUGHT I SHOULD BE A MASTRELL.


YOU DESERVE IT. I'VE SEEN HOW HARD YOU WORK. YOU DO MORE WITH ONE RIBBON OF SAND THAN ANOTHER SAND MASTER CAN DO WITH FIVE!
THESE PAST WEEKS, DRILE HAS BEEN LORDING IT OVER US LIKE A KING FROM THE RIMLANDS. HE'S BEEN TALKING ABOUT HIRING US OUT AS MERCENARIES.
EVERYONE IN THE DIEM RESPECTS YOU, KENTON, EVEN THOSE WHO HATE YOU.
THAT SHOULD BE THE REQUIREMENT FOR BECOMING A MASTRELL. NOT THE INBORN STRENGTH OF YOUR MASTERY, BUT WHAT YOU DO WITH IT.
EVEN WITH HIS DEMOTION, HE IS STILL THE HIGHEST RANKING SAND MASTER ALIVE. EXCEPT FOR YOU.
I'M NOT WHAT YOU THINK I AM, DIRIN. MY FATHER--
YOU HAVE THE SASH NOW.
GRAINS OF SAND WILL ONLY FLOW WITH THE WINDS, KENTON, NEVER AGAINST THEM.
OF COURSE, DIRIN...
...YOU'RE RIGHT.
AND SUDDENLY THE SAND SINGS FOR ME.


I CAN'T EXPLAIN IT.
I HAVE WORKED WITH THE SAND FOR EIGHT YEARS, COAXING EVERY OUNCE OF POWER FROM ITS GRAINS, DRIVING IT FASTER, CONTROLLING IT WITH MORE DELICACY.
ALL TO PROVE MY FATHER WRONG, NEVER BECAUSE OF THE SAND ITSELF.
SO WHEN I NEEDED IT TO SAVE MY LIFE, IT FAILED ME.
BUT NOW I SEE IT, I FEEL IT INSIDE ME LIKE A CHILDHOOD SONG I THOUGHT I HAD FORGOTTEN.
AND THE SAND IS BEAUTIFUL-- ALIVE.


THREE RIBBONS, KENTON! CAN YOU DO THAT? I DIDN'T THINK YOU--
NOR DID I, BUT I WAS WRONG.
DRILE'S IN THERE, RIGHT NOW, KENTON--NO DOUBT PETITIONING TO BE OFFICIALLY ASSIGNED THE ROLE OF LORD MASTRELL.
WHAT DO YOU PLAN TO DO?
IT'S TIME I BECAME A SAND MASTER.
MAY I HELP YOU, YOUNG... MAN?
ANNOUNCE MY ARRIVAL TO THE CHAMBER.
I CAN'T INTERRUPT. BUT MASTRELL DRILE HAS THE FLOOR.
THEN YOU CAN ANNOUNCE ME AFTER I ARRIVE.


THUS...
MASTRELL... KENTON OF THE DIEM, SON OF THE LATE LORD PRAXTON AND REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SAND PROFESSION.
I APOLOGIZE FOR MY TARDINESS, LORDS AND LADY TAISHIN.
KENTON, THIS IS MOST IRREGULAR. WE HAVE ALREADY HEARD FROM DRILE ON BEHALF OF THE SAND PROFESSION.
I APOLOGIZE AGAIN, LADY JUDGE, BUT I AM SURE THAT THE COUNCIL CAN SEE WHAT I AM WEARING AND UNDERSTAND WHAT IT MEANS.
DRILE HAS NO CLAIM ON THE LEADERSHIP OF THE DIEM. THAT HONOR FALLS TO ME AS ITS MOST SENIOR MEMBER.
LIES! MUST WE LISTEN TO THIS--
DRILE, STILL YOUR TONGUE. YOU HAVE HAD YOUR SAY.
THIS IS MOST IRREGULAR, KENTON. THE OTHER SAND MASTERS SAID NOTHING OF THIS.
THE OTHER SAND MASTERS DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT IT, LORD RAAGENT. THEY DIDN'T HEAR THE LORD MASTRELL ADVANCE ME--
THOSE WHO SURVIVED THE ATTACK WERE STANDING TOO FAR BACK TO HEAR ANYTHING.

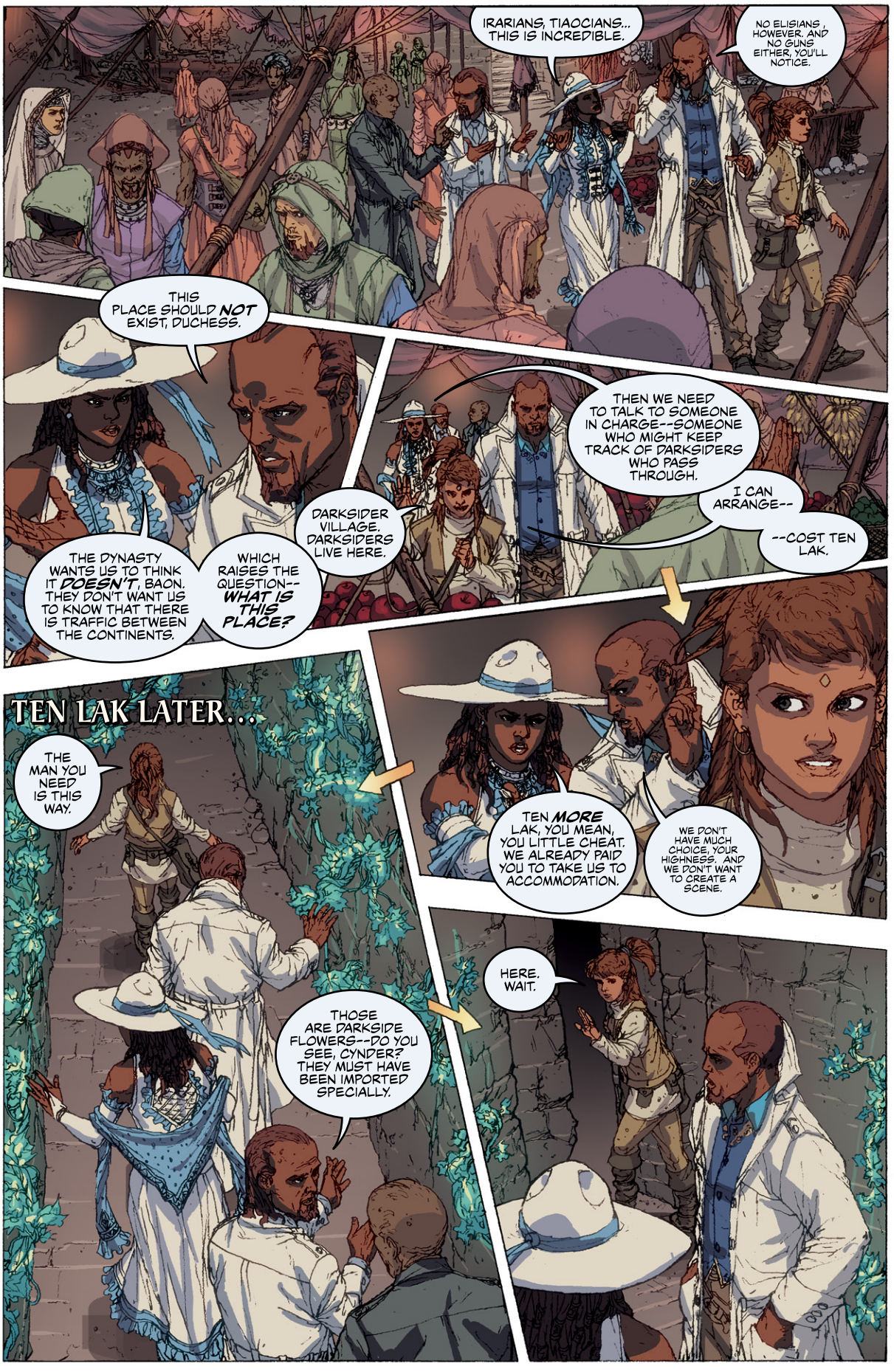

THEY DON'T BELIEVE ME. I CAN READ IT IN THEIR EXPRESSIONS.
I HAVE PETITIONED THE TAISHIN TOO MANY TIMES WITH FRIVOLOUS CLAIMS, CHALLENGING MY FATHER'S AUTHORITY. NOW, THEY VIEW ME AS A TIME-WASTER AND A PETULANT CHILD.
THESE PROCEEDINGS ARE NOT TO RATIFY A NEW LORD MASTRELL, KENTON. THIS COUNCIL HAS DECIDED THAT HENCEFORTH THERE WILL BE ONLY SEVEN PROFESSIONS IN LOSSAND--
--THE DIEM OF THE SAND MASTERS IS TO BE DISSOLVED.


CHAPTER
5
COMPROMISES

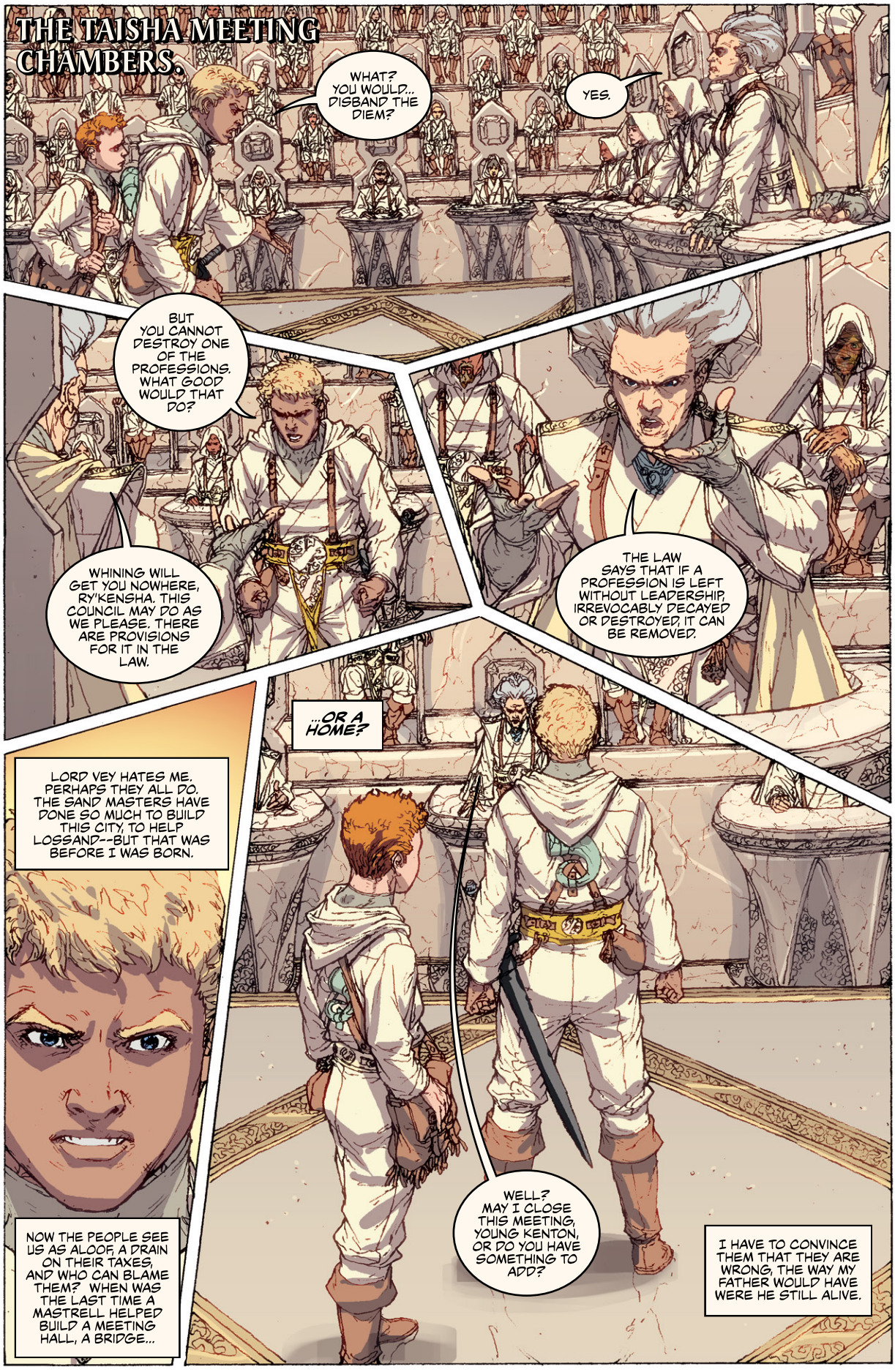

ELSEWHERE.
MA'AM! I THINK YOU'LL WANT TO SEE THIS!
WHAT IS THAT? A DOOR?
IT WAS HIDDEN BEHIND THE CUPBOARD, MA'AM.
WELL? OPEN IT! LET'S SEE WHAT LOKMLEN WAS--
--HIDING--?!
GREAT SAND LORD! WHO IS THAT?!
YOU, MAN--WHAT IS YOUR NAME? WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
TORKEL. WILL YOU... PLEASE WILL YOU... KILL ME NOW?
NO, FRIEND. I AM SENIOR TRACKT AIS AND THESE ARE MY MEN. WE'RE HERE TO HELP YOU.

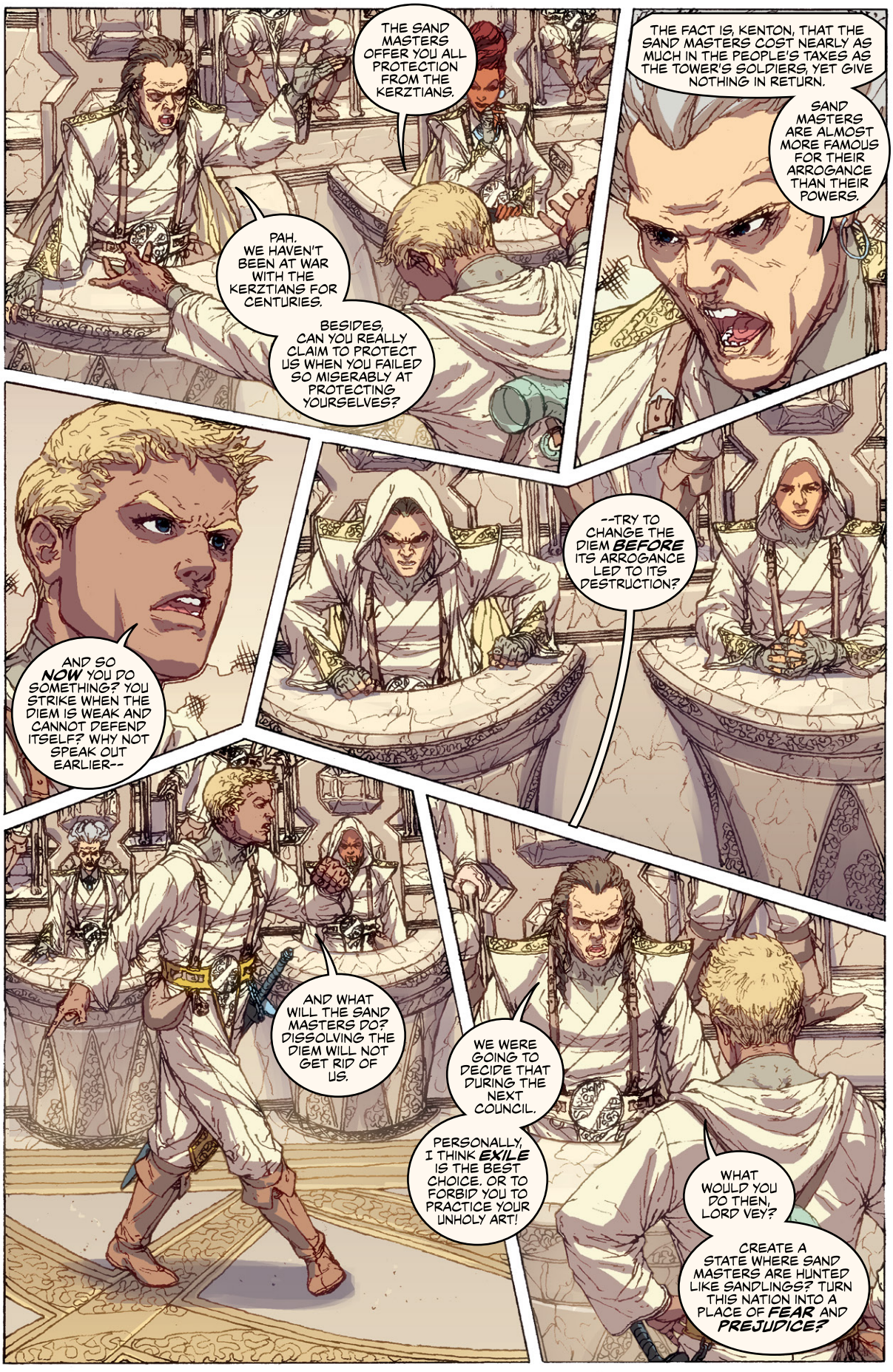

"TORKEL"? WHERE DO I KNOW THAT NAME FROM?
HE WAS AN ADVISOR TO THE LORD MERCHANT. WENT MISSING IN A BOATING ACCIDENT LAST YEAR ALONG WITH HIS FAMILY.
YOU WERE PRESUMED DEAD, TORKEL. YOU'RE A VERY LUCKY MAN.
LUCKIER THAN HIS FAMILY ANYWAY.
WHO DID THIS TO YOU, TORKEL?
SH-SHAREZAN. HE... WE HAD AN ARRANGEMENT. UNTIL...
MA'AM, I'VE CALLED THE HEALER.
GOOD.
UNTIL--?
I JUST WANTED... TO WALK AWAY... WITH... MY DIGNITY. BUT NO ONE... MAY WALK AWAY... FROM SHAREZAN.
I WILL FIND YOU, SHAREZEN. OR SHOULD I SAY: NILTO. BY THE SAND LORD, I WILL CATCH YOU.

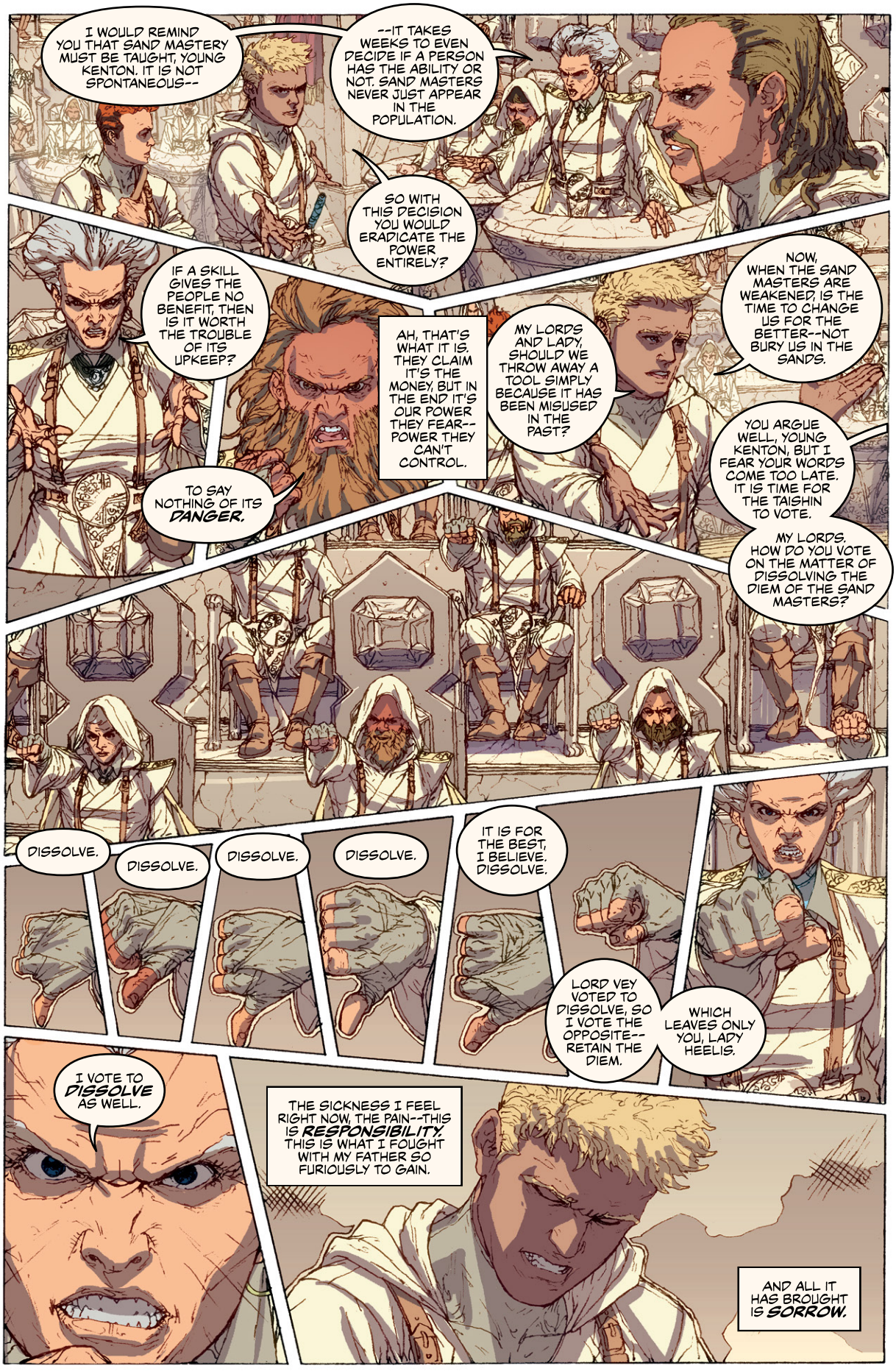

ELSEWHERE, KEZARE...
:GASP: IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE THAT SUCH A HIDEOUS CITY WAS MY LATE GEVIN'S DESTINATION. IT'S SO OVER-CROWDED.
THE CITY IS WELL PLACED, DUCHESS--HARD TO ATTACK, EASY TO DEFEND. NO WONDER IT THRIVES.
THIS WAY, PLEASE.
I SHOULD GO FIRST, DUCHESS.
AMAZING. IT'S AS THOUGH DARKSIDE HAS BEEN RECREATED HERE--ON DAYSIDE! A FULLY-FUNCTIONING LINGUISTIC ENCLAVE.
AHEM-- YOU MEAN A CULTURAL ENCLAVE, CYNDER.
OH, WE'RE NOT GOING TO HAVE THIS DISCUSSION AGAIN ARE WE, JON?
THEY'RE MAINTAINING CULTURE FIRST--LANGUAGE IS ONLY A BY-PRODUCT.
YES, WELL, I'M THE LINGUIST, WHICH MEANS I GET TO NAME IT.

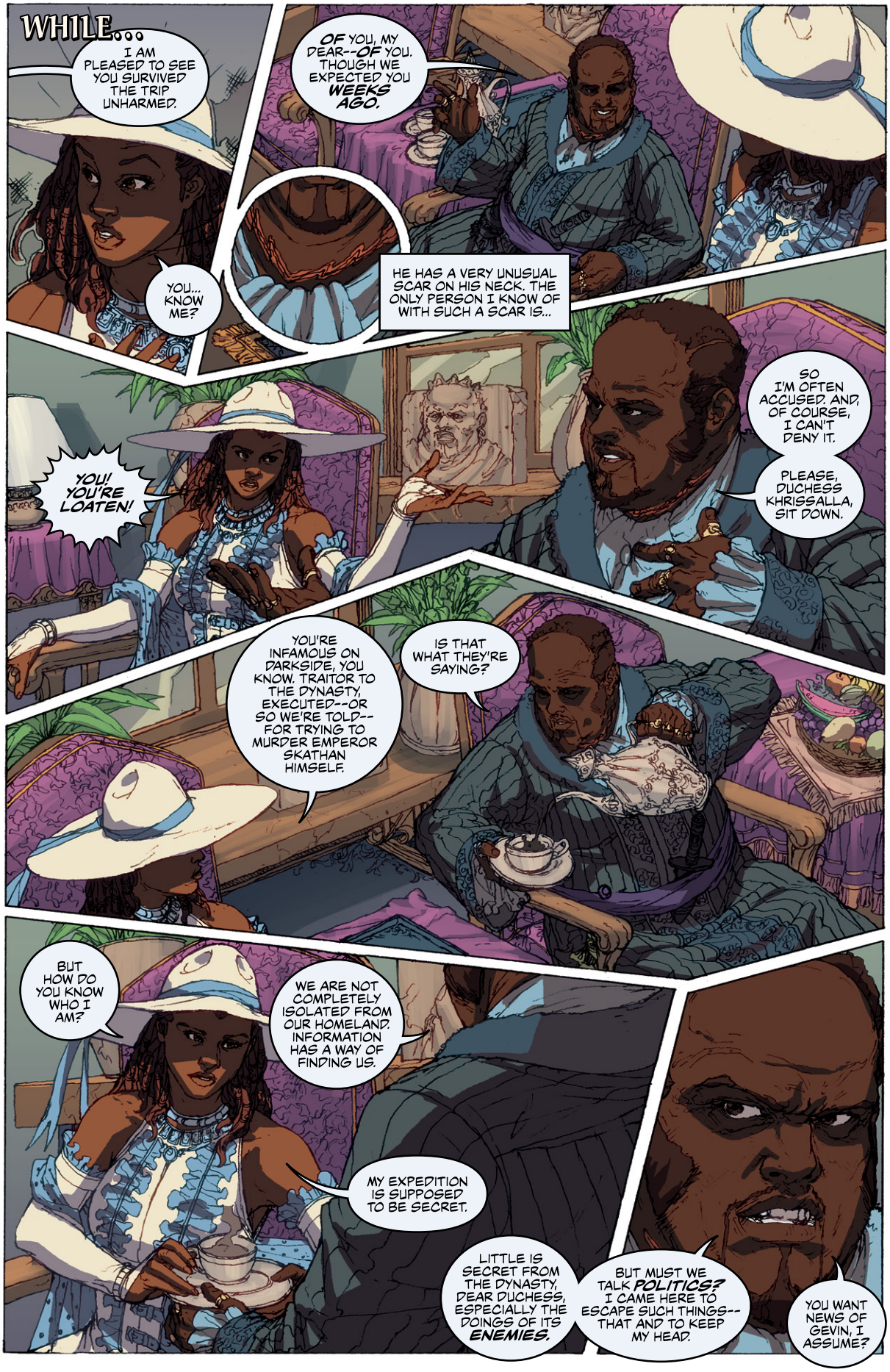

IRARIANS, TIAOCIANS... THIS IS INCREDIBLE.
NO ELISIANS, HOWEVER, AND NO GUNS EITHER, YOU'LL NOTICE.
THIS PLACE SHOULD NOT EXIST, DUCHESS.
THEN WE NEED TO TALK TO SOMEONE IN CHARGE--SOMEONE WHO MIGHT KEEP TRACK OF DARKSIDERS WHO PASS THROUGH.
I CAN ARRANGE--
--COST TEN LAK.
DARKSIDER VILLAGE. DARKSIDERS LIVE HERE.
THE DYNASTY WANTS US TO THINK IT DOESN'T, BAON. THEY DON'T WANT US TO KNOW THAT THERE IS TRAFFIC BETWEEN THE CONTINENTS.
WHICH RAISES THE QUESTION--WHAT IS THIS PLACE?
TEN LAK LATER...
THE MAN YOU NEED IS THIS WAY.
TEN MORE LAK, YOU MEAN, YOU LITTLE CHEAT. WE ALREADY PAID YOU TO TAKE US TO ACCOMMODATION.
WE DON'T HAVE MUCH CHOICE, YOUR HIGHNESS. AND WE DON'T WANT TO CREATE A SCENE.
HERE. WAIT.
THOSE ARE DARKSIDE FLOWERS--DO YOU SEE, CYNDER? THEY MUST HAVE BEEN IMPORTED SPECIALLY.

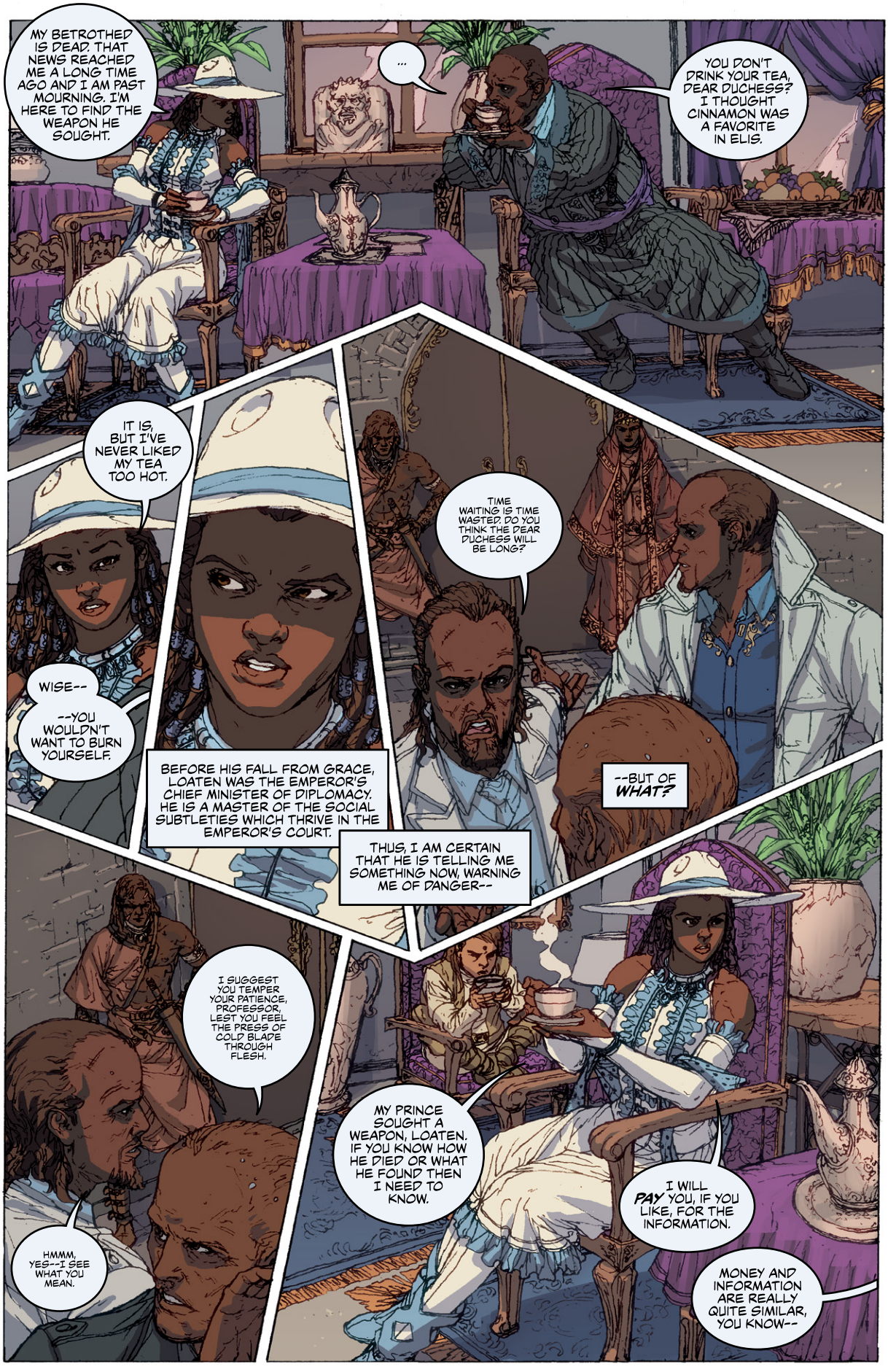

SIGH! I DIDN'T CROSS THE OCEAN TO VISIT DARKSIDE. WE ALREADY CAME FROM THERE.
THE OUTSIDE IS MUCH MORE INTERESTING. LOOK AT THIS TRINKET I PICKED UP ON ONE OF THOSE STALLS OUT THERE.
BUT THIS ISN'T DARKSIDE, JON. IT'S A NEW CULTURE, ONE IN THE PROCESS OF BLENDING.
I WOULDN'T BE SURPRISED TO FIND A CONTACT LANGUAGE DEVELOPING--A PIDGIN BETWEEN DYNASTIC AND LOSSANDIN.
YOU MAY ENTER.
SEE, DUCHESS-- TEN LAK WELL SPENT.
ONLY YOU.
IT'S ALL RIGHT, BAON. I'LL BE FINE.
AH, THIS MUST BE OUR MISSING ELISIAN DUCHESS!
:GASP: WHO--?!

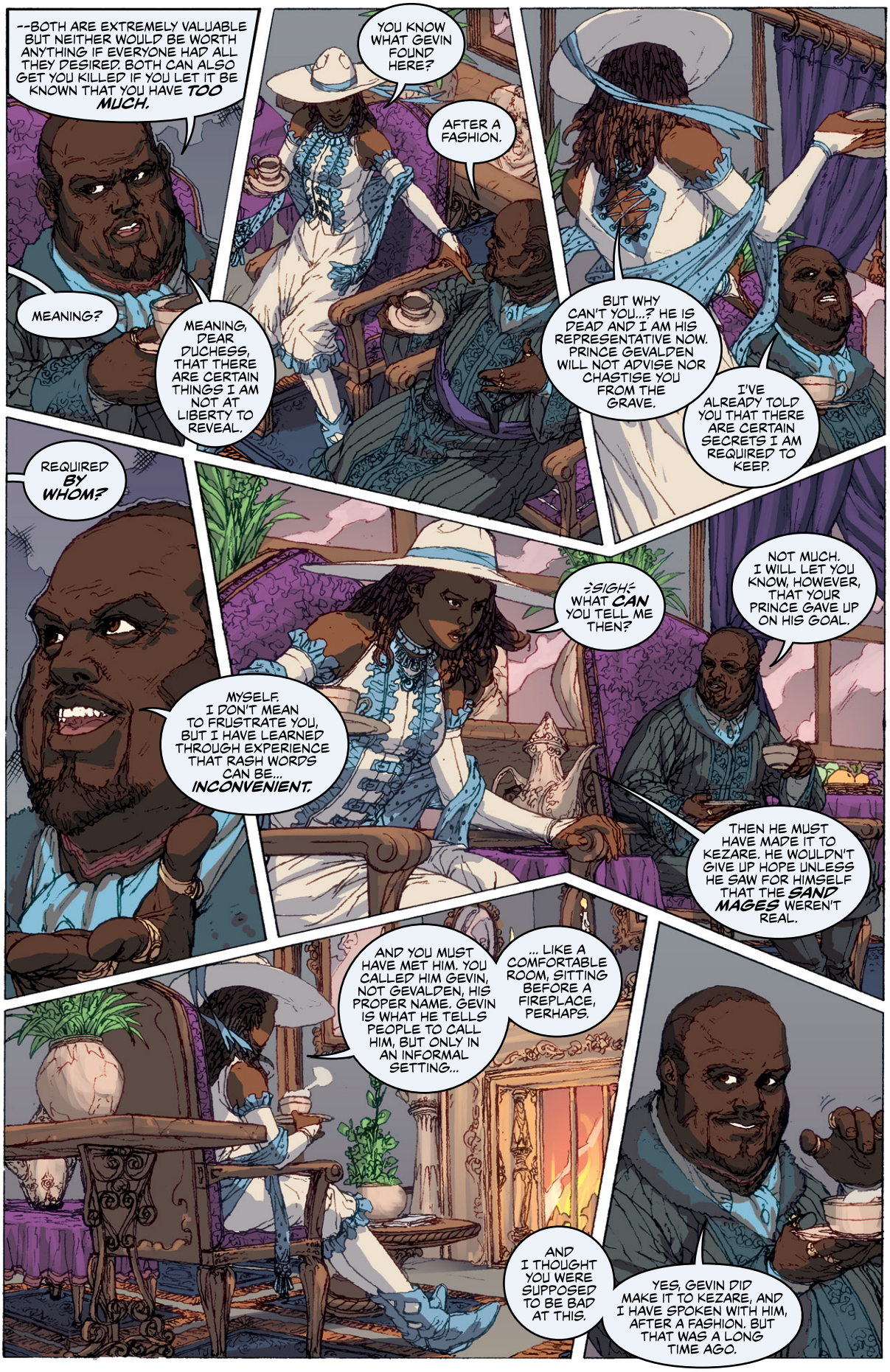

THE TAISHA MEETING CHAMBERS.
WHAT? YOU WOULD... DISBAND THE DIEM?
YES.
BUT YOU CANNOT DESTROY ONE OF THE PROFESSIONS. WHAT GOOD WOULD THAT DO?
WHINING WILL GET YOU NOWHERE, RY'KENSHA. THIS COUNCIL MAY DO AS WE PLEASE. THERE ARE PROVISIONS FOR IT IN THE LAW.
THE LAW SAYS THAT IF A PROFESSION IS LEFT WITHOUT LEADERSHIP, IRREVOCABLY DECAYED OR DESTROYED, IT CAN BE REMOVED.
...OR A HOME?
LORD VEY HATES ME. PERHAPS THEY ALL DO. THE SAND MASTERS HAVE DONE SO MUCH TO BUILD THIS CITY, TO HELP LOSSAND--BUT THAT WAS BEFORE I WAS BORN.
NOW THE PEOPLE SEE US AS ALOOF, A DRAIN ON THEIR TAXES, AND WHO CAN BLAME THEM? WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME A MASTRELL HELPED BUILD A MEETING HALL, A BRIDGE...
WELL? MAY I CLOSE THIS MEETING, YOUNG KENTON, OR DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO ADD?
I HAVE TO CONVINCE THEM THAT THEY ARE WRONG, THE WAY MY FATHER WOULD HAVE WERE HE STILL ALIVE.


THE SAND MASTERS OFFER YOU ALL PROTECTION FROM THE KERZTIANS.
PAH. WE HAVEN'T BEEN AT WAR WITH THE KERZTIANS FOR CENTURIES.
BESIDES, CAN YOU REALLY CLAIM TO PROTECT US WHEN YOU FAILED SO MISERABLY AT PROTECTING YOURSELVES?
THE FACT IS, KENTON, THAT THE SAND MASTERS COST NEARLY AS MUCH IN THE PEOPLE'S TAXES AS THE TOWER'S SOLDIERS, YET GIVE NOTHING IN RETURN.
SAND MASTERS ARE ALMOST MORE FAMOUS FOR THEIR ARROGANCE THAN THEIR POWERS.
--TRY TO CHANGE THE DIEM BEFORE ITS ARROGANCE LED TO ITS DESTRUCTION?
AND SO NOW YOU DO SOMETHING? YOU STRIKE WHEN THE DIEM IS WEAK AND CANNOT DEFEND ITSELF? WHY NOT SPEAK OUT EARLIER--
AND WHAT WILL THE SAND MASTERS DO? DISSOLVING THE DIEM WILL NOT GET RID OF US.
WE WERE GOING TO DECIDE THAT DURING THE NEXT COUNCIL.
PERSONALLY, I THINK EXILE IS THE BEST CHOICE. OR TO FORBID YOU TO PRACTICE YOUR UNHOLY ART!
WHAT WOULD YOU DO THEN, LORD VEY?
CREATE A STATE WHERE SAND MASTERS ARE HUNTED LIKE SANDLINGS? TURN THIS NATION INTO A PLACE OF FEAR AND PREJUDICE?


I WOULD REMIND YOU THAT SAND MASTERY MUST BE TAUGHT, YOUNG KENTON. IT IS NOT SPONTANEOUS--
--IT TAKES WEEKS TO EVEN DECIDE IF A PERSON HAS THE ABILITY OR NOT. SAND MASTERS NEVER JUST APPEAR IN THE POPULATION.
SO WITH THIS DECISION YOU WOULD ERADICATE THE POWER ENTIRELY?
IF A SKILL GIVES THE PEOPLE NO BENEFIT, THEN IS IT WORTH THE TROUBLE OF ITS UPKEEP?
AH, THAT'S WHAT IT IS. THEY CLAIM IT'S THE MONEY, BUT IN THE END IT'S OUR POWER THEY FEAR--POWER THEY CAN'T CONTROL.
MY LORDS AND LADY, 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 BURY US IN THE SANDS.
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 LORDS. HOW DO YOU VOTE ON THE MATTER OF DISSOLVING THE DIEM OF THE SAND MASTERS?
DISSOLVE.
DISSOLVE.
DISSOLVE.
DISSOLVE.
IT IS FOR THE BEST, I BELIEVE. DISSOLVE.
LORD VEY VOTED TO DISSOLVE, SO I VOTE THE OPPOSITE--RETAIN THE DIEM.
WHICH LEAVES ONLY YOU, LADY HEELIS.
I VOTE TO DISSOLVE AS WELL.
THE SICKNESS I FEEL RIGHT NOW, THE PAIN--THIS IS RESPONSIBILITY. THIS IS WHAT I FOUGHT WITH MY FATHER SO FURIOUSLY TO GAIN.
AND ALL IT HAS BROUGHT IS SORROW.


WHILE...
I AM PLEASED TO SEE YOU SURVIVED THE TRIP UNHARMED.
OF YOU, MY DEAR--OF YOU. THOUGH WE EXPECTED YOU WEEKS AGO.
YOU... KNOW ME?
HE HAS A VERY UNUSUAL SCAR ON HIS NECK. THE ONLY PERSON I KNOW OF WITH SUCH A SCAR IS...
SO I'M OFTEN ACCUSED. AND, OF COURSE, I CAN'T DENY IT.
PLEASE, DUCHESS KHRISSALLA, SIT DOWN.
YOU! YOU'RE LOATEN!
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 OUR HOMELAND. 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.
BUT MUST WE TALK POLITICS? I CAME HERE TO ESCAPE SUCH THINGS--THAT AND TO KEEP MY HEAD.
YOU WANT NEWS OF GEVIN, I ASSUME?

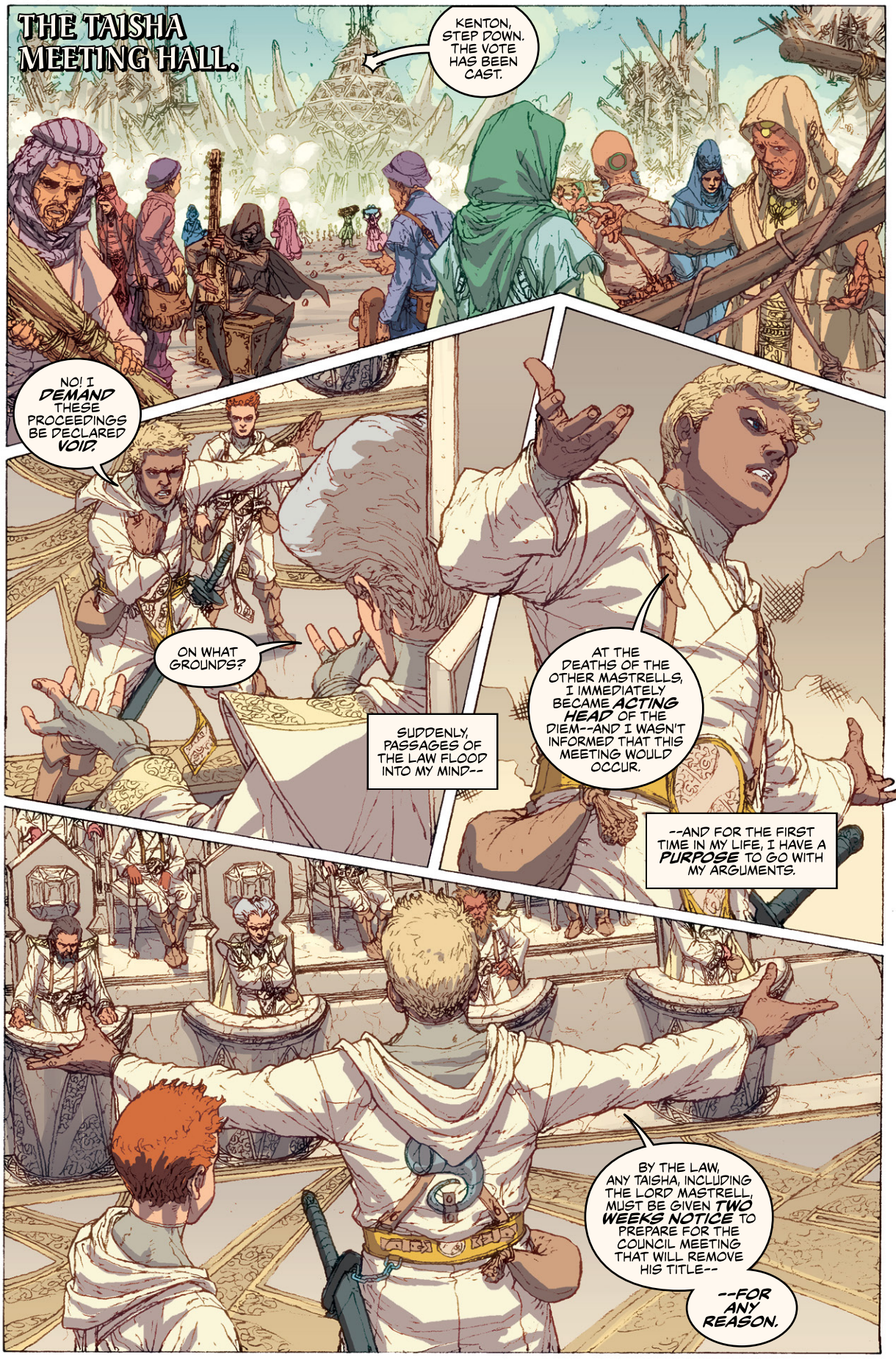

MY BETROTHED IS DEAD. THAT NEWS REACHED ME A LONG TIME AGO AND I AM PAST MOURNING. I'M HERE TO FIND THE WEAPON HE SOUGHT.
...
YOU DON'T DRINK YOUR TEA, DEAR DUCHESS? I THOUGHT CINNAMON WAS A FAVORITE IN ELIS.
IT IS, BUT I'VE NEVER LIKED MY TEA TOO HOT.
TIME WAITING IS TIME WASTED. DO YOU THINK THE DEAR DUCHESS WILL BE LONG?
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.
--BUT OF *WHAT?*
THUS, I AM CERTAIN THAT HE IS TELLING ME SOMETHING NOW, WARNING ME OF DANGER--
I SUGGEST YOU TEMPER YOUR PATIENCE, PROFESSOR, LEST YOU FEEL THE PRESS OF COLD BLADE THROUGH FLESH.
MY PRINCE SOUGHT A WEAPON, LOATEN. IF YOU KNOW HOW HE DIED OR WHAT HE FOUND THEN I NEED TO KNOW.
I WILL *PAY* YOU, IF YOU LIKE, FOR THE INFORMATION.
HMMM, YES--I SEE WHAT YOU MEAN.
MONEY AND INFORMATION ARE REALLY QUITE SIMILAR, YOU KNOW--

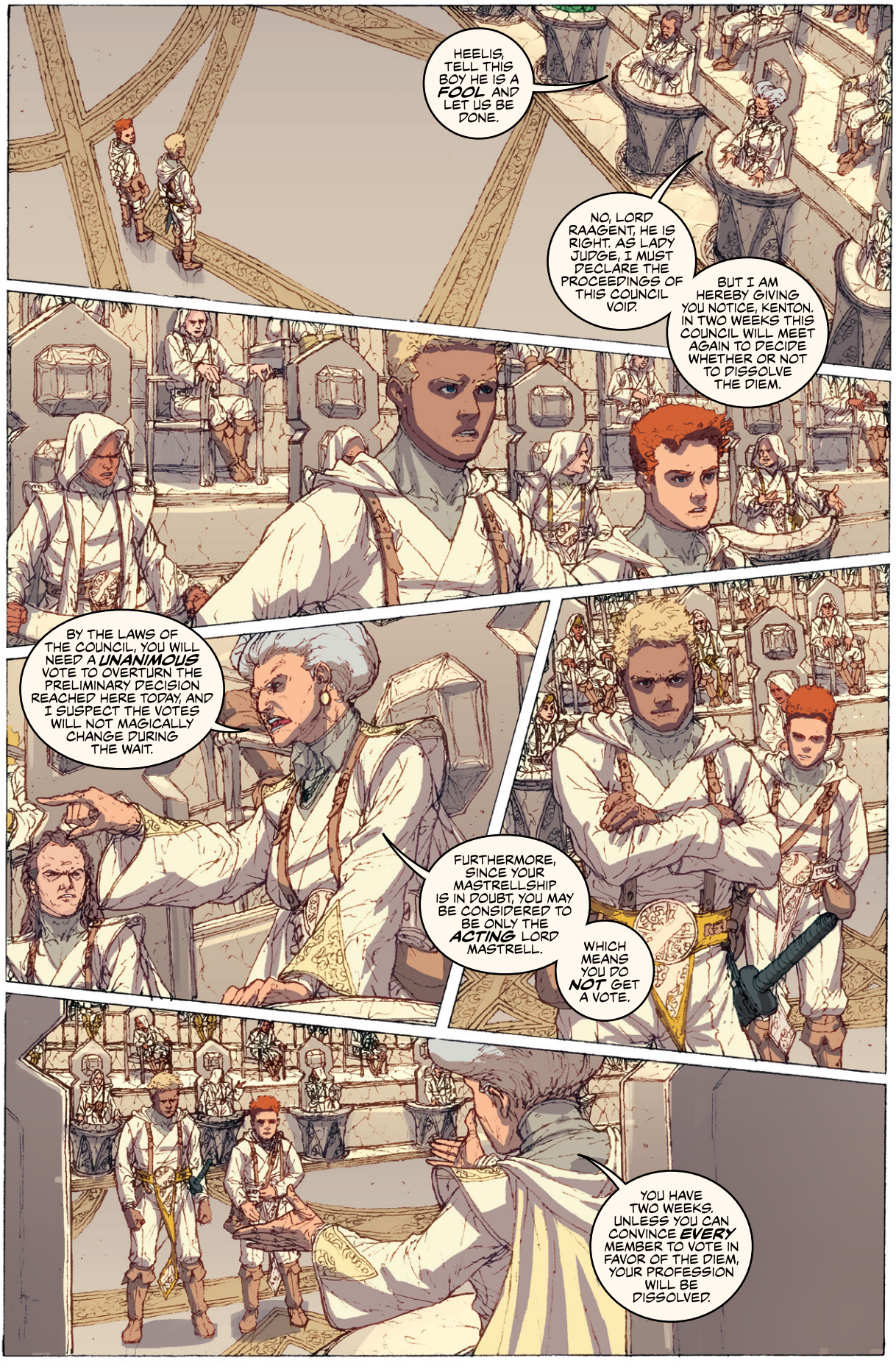

--BOTH ARE EXTREMELY VALUABLE BUT NEITHER WOULD BE WORTH ANYTHING IF EVERYONE HAD ALL THEY DESIRED. BOTH CAN ALSO GET YOU KILLED IF YOU LET IT BE KNOWN THAT YOU HAVE TOO MUCH.
YOU KNOW WHAT GEVIN FOUND HERE?
AFTER A FASHION.
MEANING?
MEANING, DEAR DUCHESS, THAT THERE ARE CERTAIN THINGS I AM NOT AT LIBERTY TO REVEAL.
BUT WHY CAN'T YOU...? HE IS DEAD AND I AM HIS REPRESENTATIVE NOW. PRINCE GEVALDEN WILL NOT ADVISE NOR CHASTISE YOU FROM THE GRAVE.
I'VE ALREADY TOLD YOU THAT THERE ARE CERTAIN SECRETS I AM REQUIRED TO KEEP.
REQUIRED BY WHOM?
MYSELF. I DON'T MEAN TO FRUSTRATE YOU, BUT I HAVE LEARNED THROUGH EXPERIENCE THAT RASH WORDS CAN BE... INCONVENIENT.
-SIGH- WHAT CAN YOU TELL ME THEN?
NOT MUCH. I WILL LET YOU KNOW, HOWEVER, THAT YOUR PRINCE GAVE UP ON HIS GOAL.
THEN HE MUST HAVE MADE IT TO KEZARE. HE WOULDN'T GIVE UP HOPE UNLESS HE SAW FOR HIMSELF THAT THE SAND MAGES WEREN'T REAL.
AND YOU MUST HAVE MET HIM. YOU CALLED HIM GEVIN, NOT GEVALDEN, HIS PROPER NAME. GEVIN IS WHAT HE TELLS PEOPLE TO CALL HIM, BUT ONLY IN AN INFORMAL SETTING...
... LIKE A COMFORTABLE ROOM, SITTING BEFORE A FIREPLACE, PERHAPS.
AND I THOUGHT YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO BE BAD AT THIS.
YES, GEVIN DID MAKE IT TO KEZARE, AND I HAVE SPOKEN WITH HIM, AFTER A FASHION. BUT THAT WAS A LONG TIME AGO.

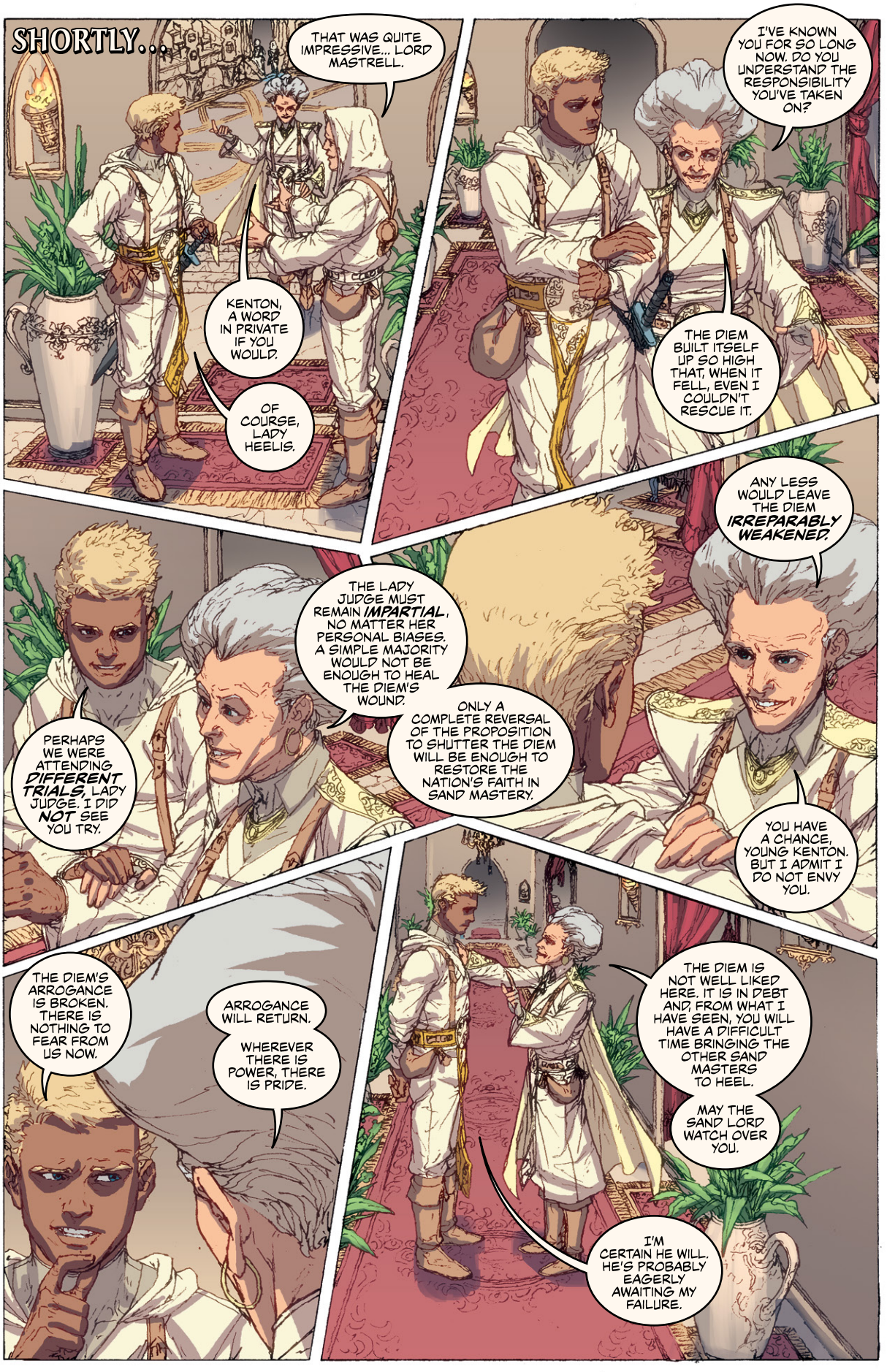

AND HOW DID HE DIE? AT LEAST TELL ME THAT.
I TOLD YOU, DEAR DUCHESS, I'M NOT AT LIBERTY TO DISCUSS THAT. DO NOT BE DESPONDENT, MY DEAR--I AM NOT A HEARTLESS MAN.
SEEING YOU ARE RELATIVELY INEXPERIENCED WITH DAYSIDE, I WILL ASSIGN ONE OF MY BEST PEOPLE TO AID YOU--
--N'TEESE.
OH NO, I'M NOT GOING TO LEAD THESE FOOLS AROUND THE CITY, LOATEN.
SHE'S A DARKSIDER? I THOUGHT SHE WAS JUST AN URCHIN GUIDE.
TO BE FRANK, WE'RE NOT SURE WHAT N'TEESE IS. SHE CLAIMS TO BE HALF DARKSIDER, HALF KERZTIAN AND HALF LOSSANDIN...
CREAK
--THOUGH SHE OBVIOUSLY NEVER CLAIMS TO BE GOOD AT MATHEMATICS.
YOU'RE BAD FOR BUSINESS, LOATEN.
:GASP:
A VISITOR FROM DARKSIDE, NILTO, MY FRIEND. A RATHER IMPORTANT PERSON. A RULER ON HER SIDE OF THE WORLD.
WHO IS THE WOMAN?
HMF. GET RID OF HER.

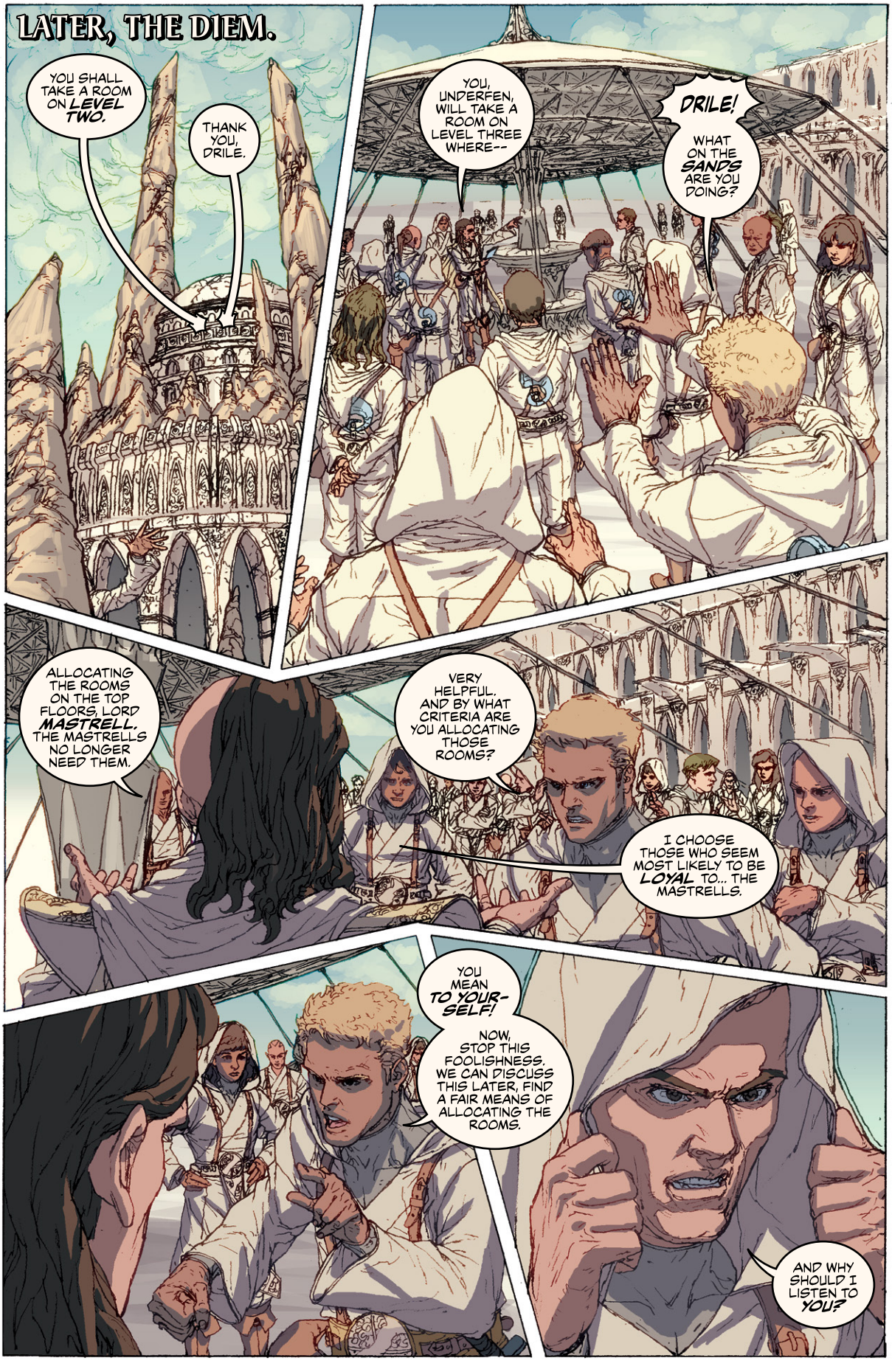

YOU'LL FORGIVE NILTO'S LACK OF TACT, DEAR DUCHESS. HE IS A RATHER IMPATIENT MAN, THOUGH MANY PEOPLE SUFFER HIM. PROBABLY BECAUSE HE IS A TAISHA.
TAISHA?
THE TAISHIN ARE THE RULERS OF LOSSAND, MY DEAR. THERE IS ONE AT THE HEAD OF EACH PROFESSION, AND IT IS THEIR COUNCIL THAT GOVERNS THE COUNTRY, JUST AS EMPEROR SKATHAN GOVERNS DARKSIDE.
I'M AFRAID THE LORD BEGGAR IS A DIFFICULT MAN TO REFUSE, DEAR DUCHESS. BUT I BELIEVE OUR CONVERSATION WAS AT AN END ANYWAY, WASN'T IT?
IT WAS, AND I THANK YOU.
N'TEESE?
BEAUTY ISN'T A REQUIREMENT FOR THE JOB.
NOW, GET RID OF HER.
DUCHESS...
... IS THAT WHO I THINK IT IS?
LOATEN? HE--

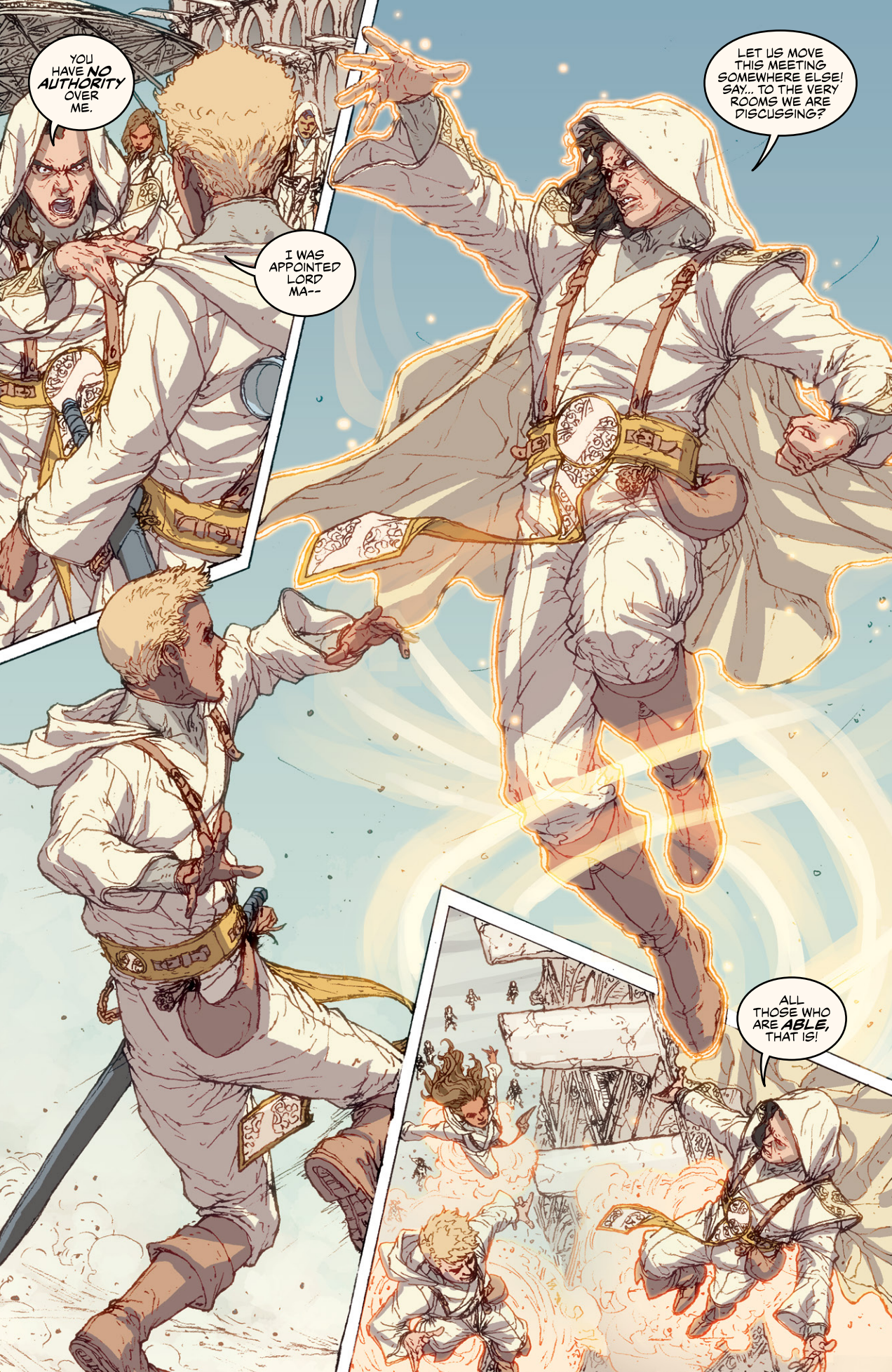

THAT MAN IS A TRAITOR!
CLICK
I KNOW, BAON. PUT THE GUN AWAY.
PLEASE.
LET'S GO. BEFORE I DECIDE TO KILL HIM.
THAT SOUNDS LIKE A GOOD IDEA.
NOW THEN, IS ANYONE ELSE HUNGRY? I'M RAVENOUS AND SIMPLY CANNOT WAIT TO SAMPLE THE LOCAL DELICACIES!

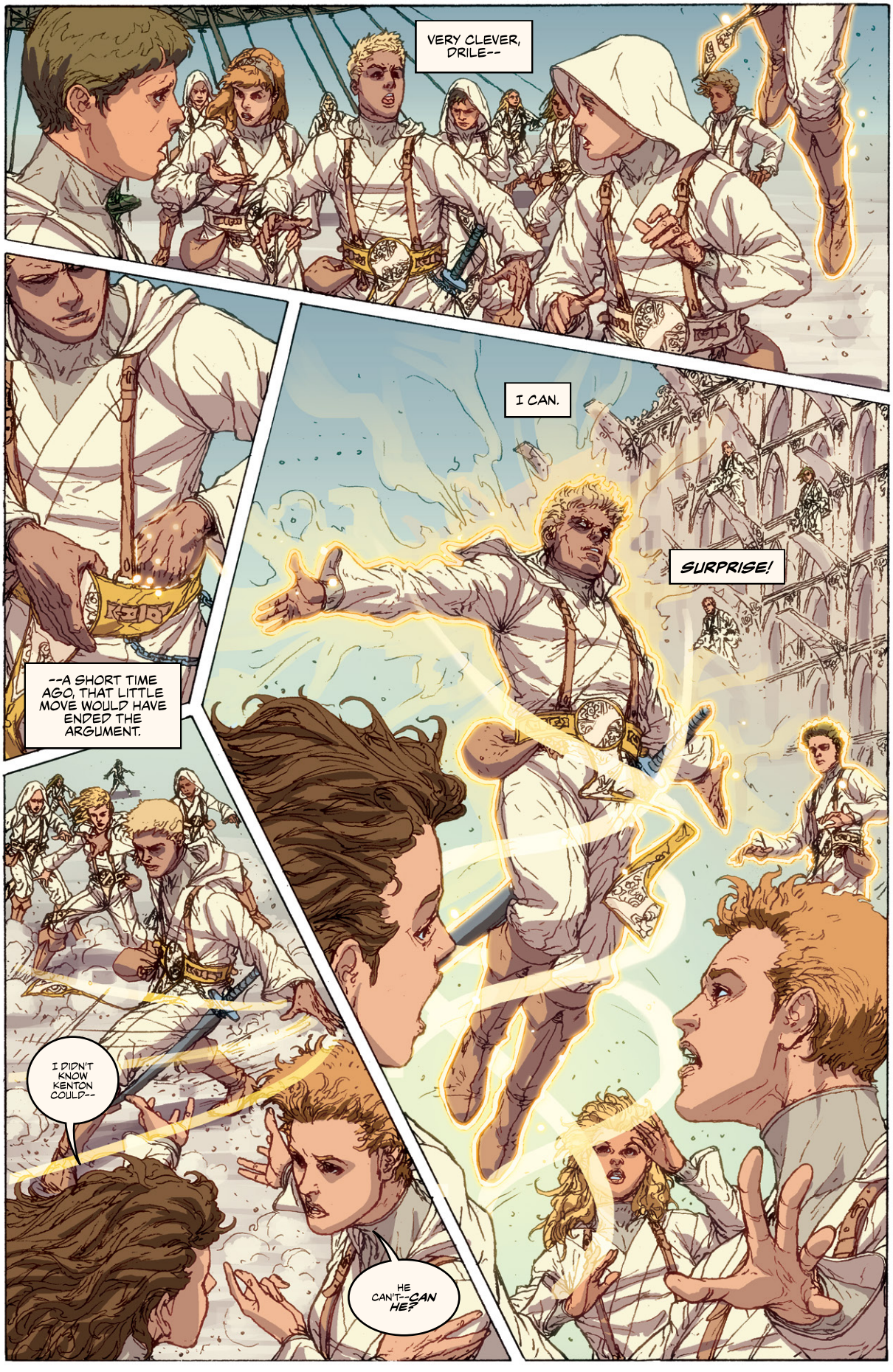

THE TAISHA MEETING HALL.
KENTON, STEP DOWN. THE VOTE HAS BEEN CAST.
NO! I DEMAND THESE PROCEEDINGS BE DECLARED VOID.
ON WHAT GROUNDS?
SUDDENLY, PASSAGES OF THE LAW FLOOD INTO MY MIND--
AT THE DEATHS OF THE OTHER MASTRELLS, I IMMEDIATELY BECAME ACTING HEAD OF THE DIEM--AND I WASN'T INFORMED THAT THIS MEETING WOULD OCCUR.
--AND FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE, I HAVE A PURPOSE TO GO WITH MY ARGUMENTS.
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 TITLE--
--FOR ANY REASON.

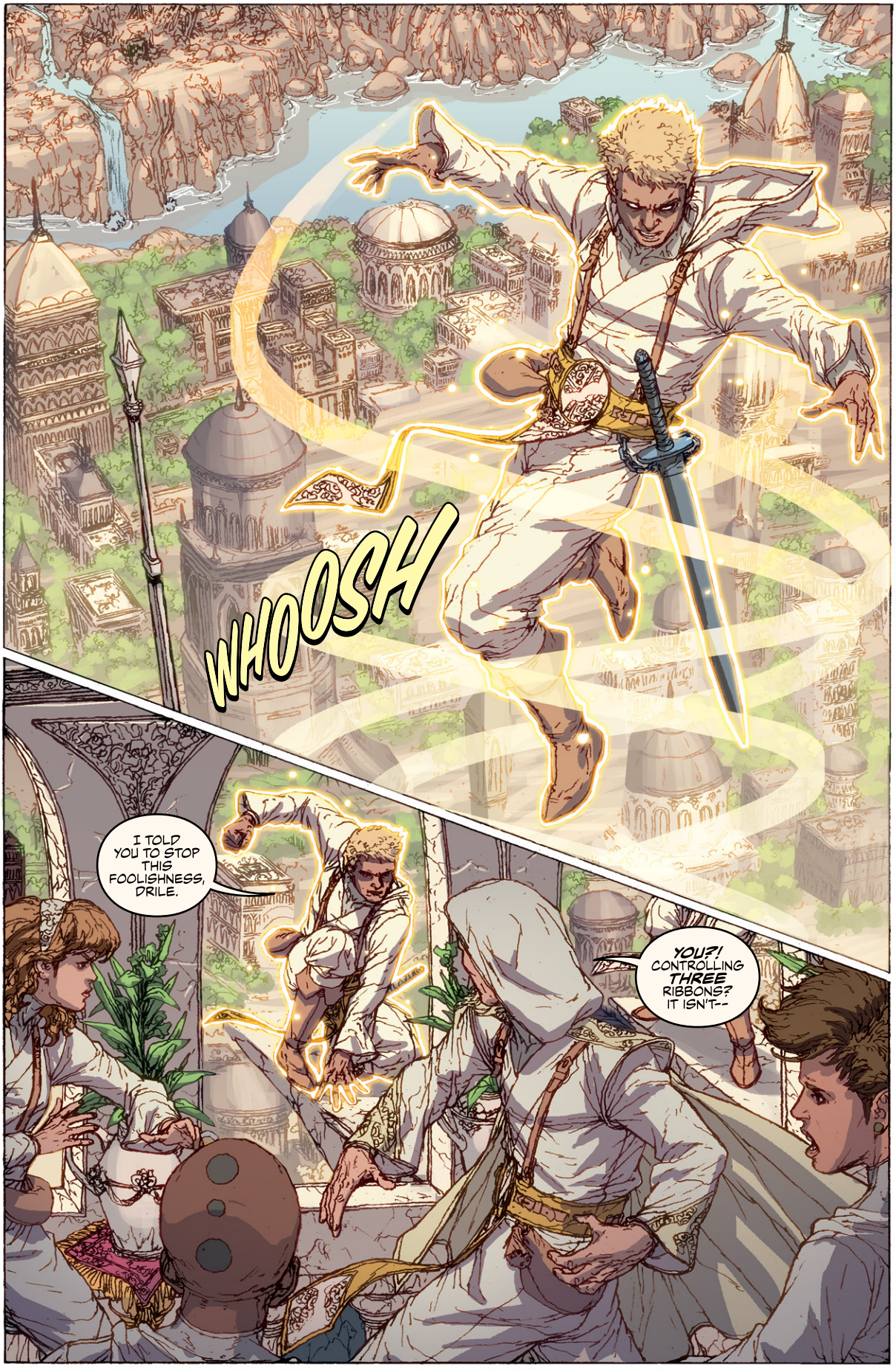

HEELIS, TELL THIS BOY HE IS A FOOL AND LET US BE DONE.
NO, LORD RAAGENT, HE IS RIGHT. AS LADY JUDGE, I MUST DECLARE THE PROCEEDINGS OF THIS COUNCIL VOID.
BUT I AM HEREBY GIVING YOU NOTICE, KENTON. IN TWO WEEKS THIS COUNCIL WILL MEET AGAIN TO DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT TO DISSOLVE THE DIEM.
BY THE LAWS OF 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 MAY BE CONSIDERED TO BE ONLY THE ACTING LORD MASTRELL.
WHICH MEANS YOU DO NOT GET A VOTE.
YOU HAVE TWO WEEKS. UNLESS YOU CAN CONVINCE EVERY MEMBER TO VOTE IN FAVOR OF THE DIEM, YOUR PROFESSION WILL BE DISSOLVED.

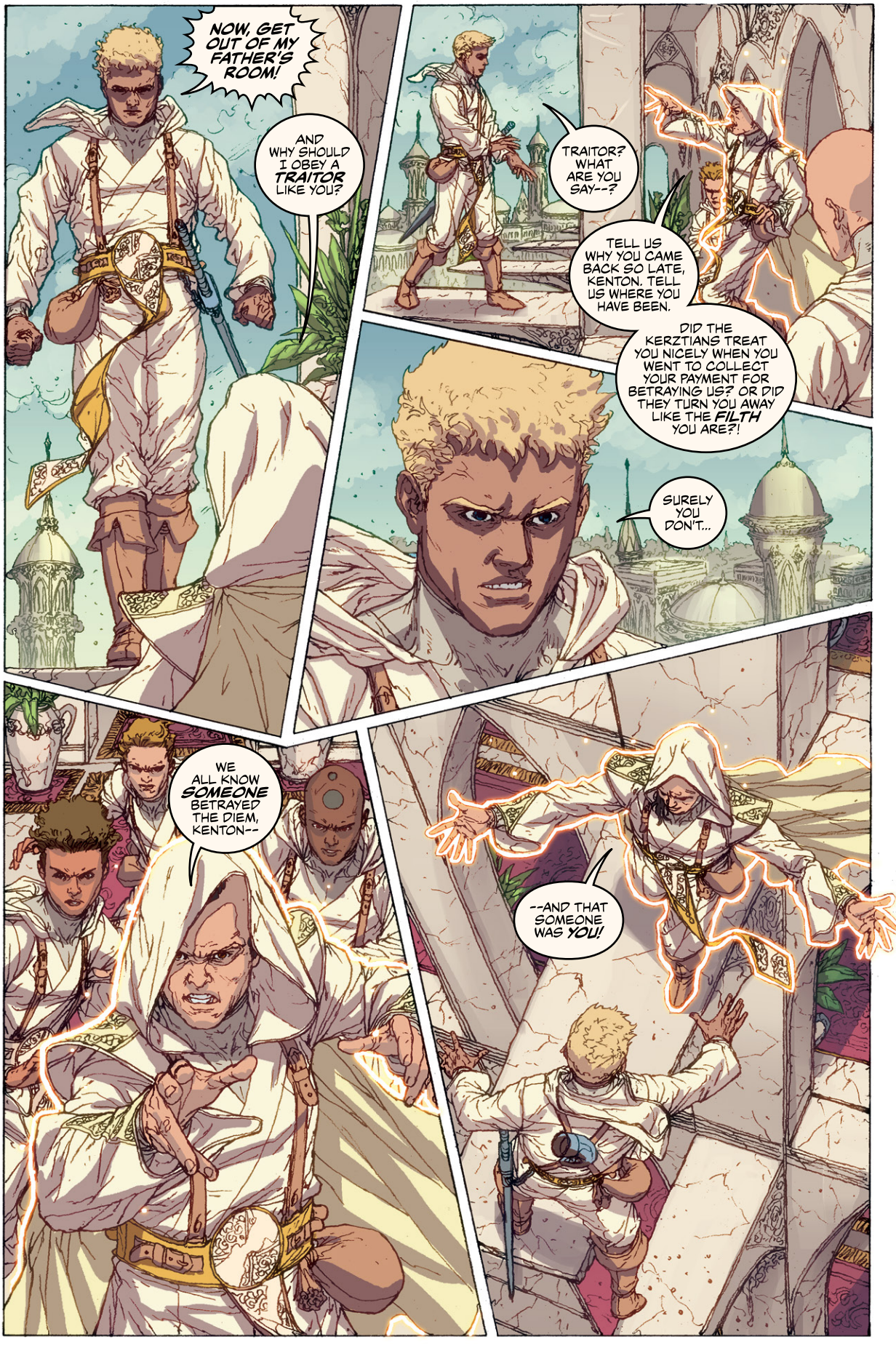

SHORTLY...
THAT WAS QUITE IMPRESSIVE... LORD MASTRELL.
KENTON, A WORD IN PRIVATE IF YOU WOULD.
OF COURSE, LADY HEELIS.
I'VE KNOWN YOU FOR SO LONG NOW. DO YOU UNDERSTAND THE RESPONSIBILITY YOU'VE TAKEN ON?
THE DIEM BUILT ITSELF UP SO HIGH THAT, WHEN IT FELL, EVEN I COULDN'T RESCUE IT.
ANY LESS WOULD LEAVE THE DIEM IRREPARABLY WEAKENED.
THE LADY JUDGE MUST REMAIN IMPARTIAL, NO MATTER HER PERSONAL BIASES. A SIMPLE MAJORITY WOULD NOT BE ENOUGH TO HEAL THE DIEM'S WOUND.
ONLY A COMPLETE REVERSAL OF THE PROPOSITION TO SHUTTER THE DIEM WILL BE ENOUGH TO RESTORE THE NATION'S FAITH IN SAND MASTERY.
PERHAPS WE WERE ATTENDING DIFFERENT TRIALS, LADY JUDGE. I DID NOT SEE YOU TRY.
YOU HAVE A CHANCE, YOUNG KENTON. BUT I ADMIT I DO NOT ENVY YOU.
THE DIEM'S ARROGANCE IS BROKEN. THERE IS NOTHING TO FEAR FROM US NOW.
ARROGANCE WILL RETURN.
WHEREVER THERE IS POWER, THERE IS PRIDE.
THE DIEM IS NOT WELL LIKED HERE. IT IS IN DEBT AND, FROM WHAT I HAVE SEEN, YOU WILL HAVE A DIFFICULT TIME BRINGING THE OTHER SAND MASTERS TO HEEL.
MAY THE SAND LORD WATCH OVER YOU.
I'M CERTAIN HE WILL. HE'S PROBABLY EAGERLY AWAITING MY FAILURE.


LATER, 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.
VERY HELPFUL. AND BY WHAT CRITERIA ARE YOU ALLOCATING THOSE ROOMS?
I CHOOSE THOSE WHO SEEM MOST LIKELY TO BE LOYAL TO... THE MASTRELLS.
YOU MEAN TO YOURSELF!
NOW, STOP THIS FOOLISHNESS, WE CAN DISCUSS THIS LATER, FIND A FAIR MEANS OF ALLOCATING THE ROOMS.
AND WHY SHOULD I LISTEN TO YOU?

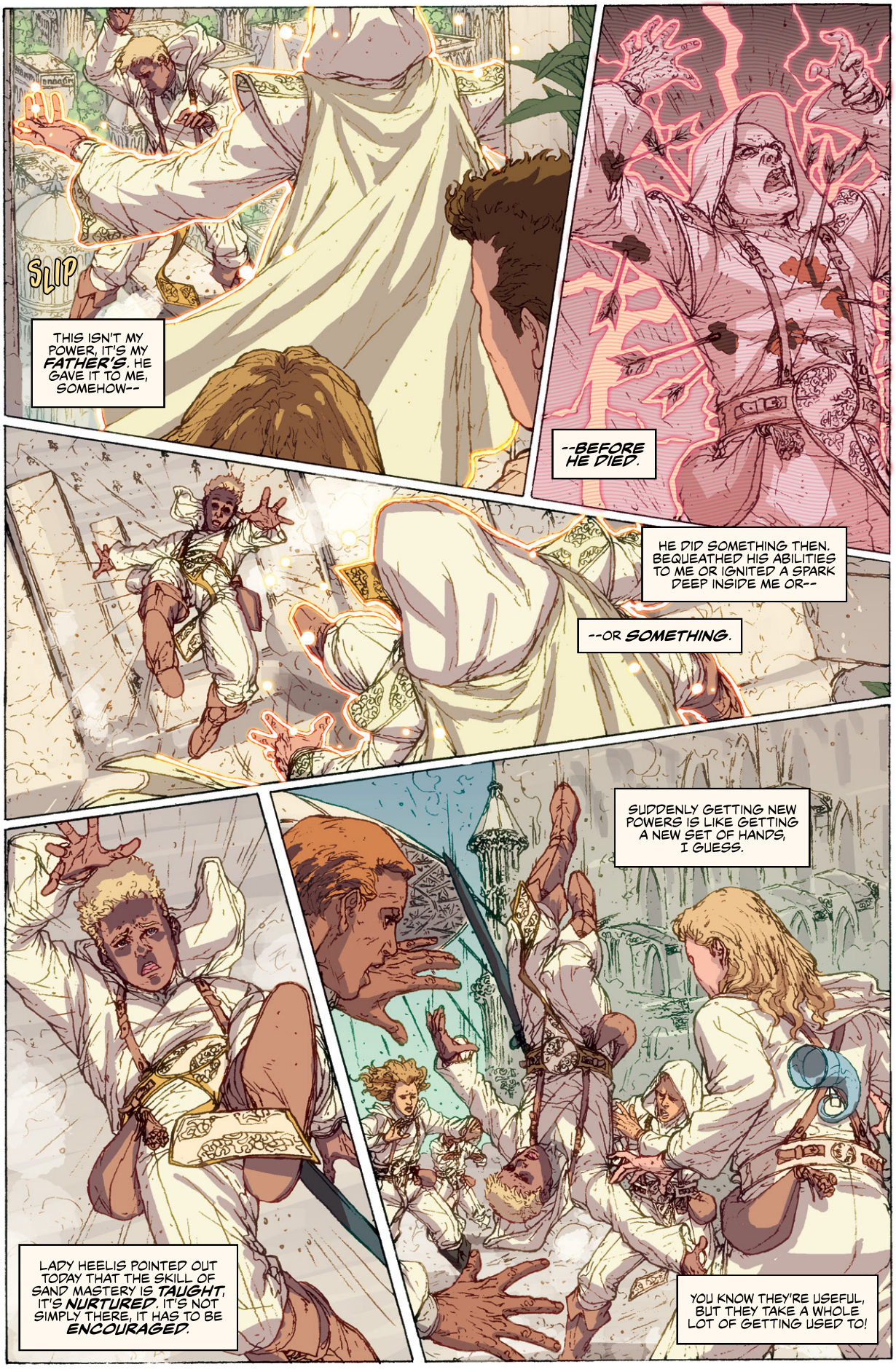

YOU HAVE NO AUTHORITY OVER ME.
I WAS APPOINTED LORD MA--
LET US MOVE THIS MEETING SOMEWHERE ELSE! SAY... TO THE VERY ROOMS WE ARE DISCUSSING?
ALL THOSE WHO ARE ABLE, THAT IS!


VERY CLEVER, DRILE--
I CAN.
SURPRISE!
--A SHORT TIME AGO, THAT LITTLE MOVE WOULD HAVE ENDED THE ARGUMENT.
I DIDN'T KNOW KENTON COULD--
HE CAN'T--CAN HE?

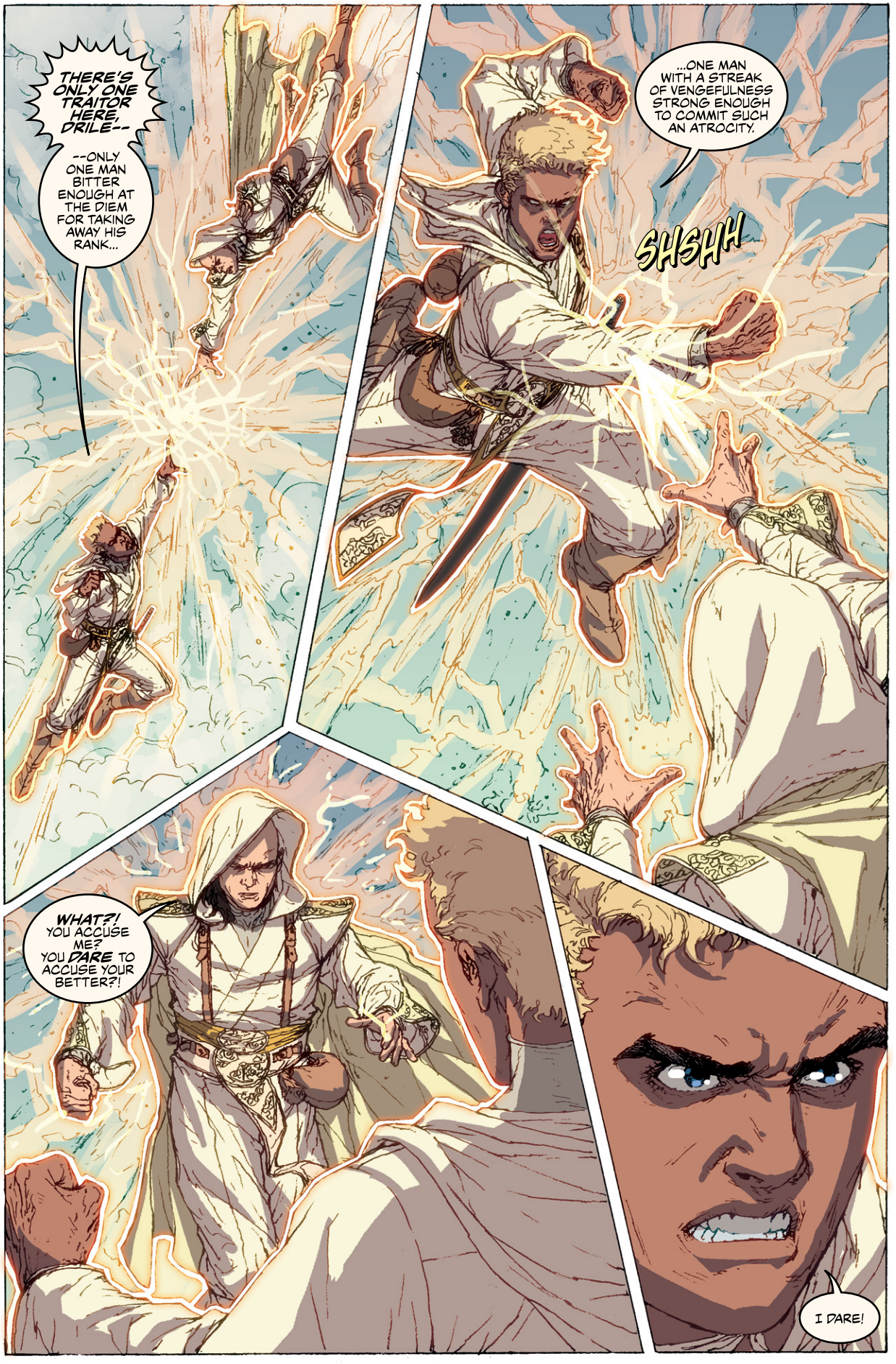

WHOOSH
I TOLD YOU TO STOP THIS FOOLISHNESS, DRILE.
YOU?! CONTROLLING THREE RIBBONS? IT ISN'T--


NOW, GET OUT OF MY FATHER'S ROOM!
AND WHY SHOULD I OBEY A TRAITOR LIKE YOU?
TRAITOR? WHAT ARE YOU SAY--?
TELL US WHY YOU CAME BACK SO LATE, KENTON. TELL US WHERE YOU HAVE BEEN.
DID THE KERZTIANS TREAT YOU NICELY WHEN YOU WENT TO COLLECT YOUR PAYMENT FOR BETRAYING US? OR DID THEY TURN YOU AWAY LIKE THE FILTH YOU ARE?!
SURELY YOU DON'T...
WE ALL KNOW SOMEONE BETRAYED THE DIEM, KENTON--
--AND THAT SOMEONE WAS YOU!


CHAPTER
6
CHALLENGES


SLIP
THIS ISN'T MY POWER, IT'S MY FATHER'S. HE GAVE IT TO ME, SOMEHOW--
--BEFORE HE DIED.
HE DID SOMETHING THEN. BEQUEATHED HIS ABILITIES TO ME OR IGNITED A SPARK DEEP INSIDE ME OR--
--OR SOMETHING.
SUDDENLY GETTING NEW POWERS IS LIKE GETTING A NEW SET OF HANDS, I GUESS.
LADY HEELIS POINTED OUT TODAY THAT THE SKILL OF SAND MASTERY IS TAUGHT, IT'S NURTURED. IT'S NOT SIMPLY THERE, IT HAS TO BE ENCOURAGED.
YOU KNOW THEY'RE USEFUL, BUT THEY TAKE A WHOLE LOT OF GETTING USED TO!

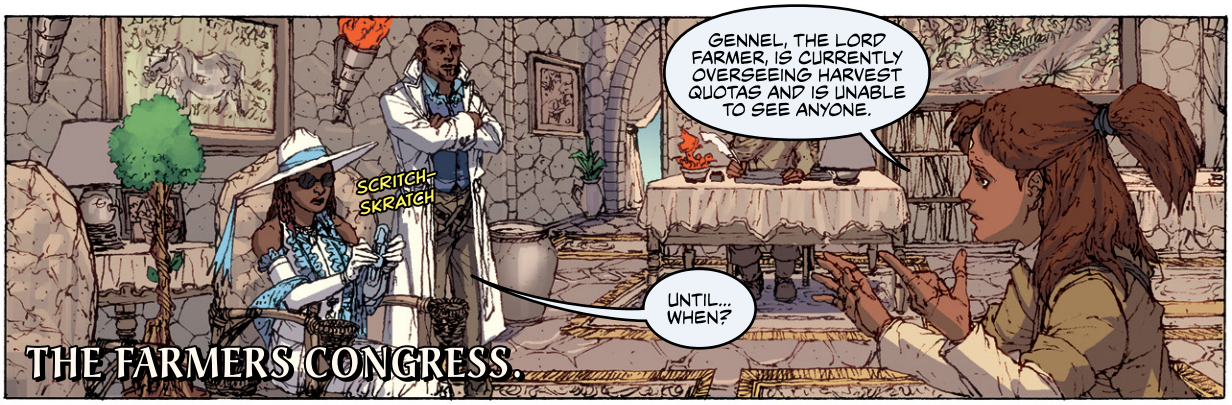

WELL, FATHER? ARE YOU SATISFIED?

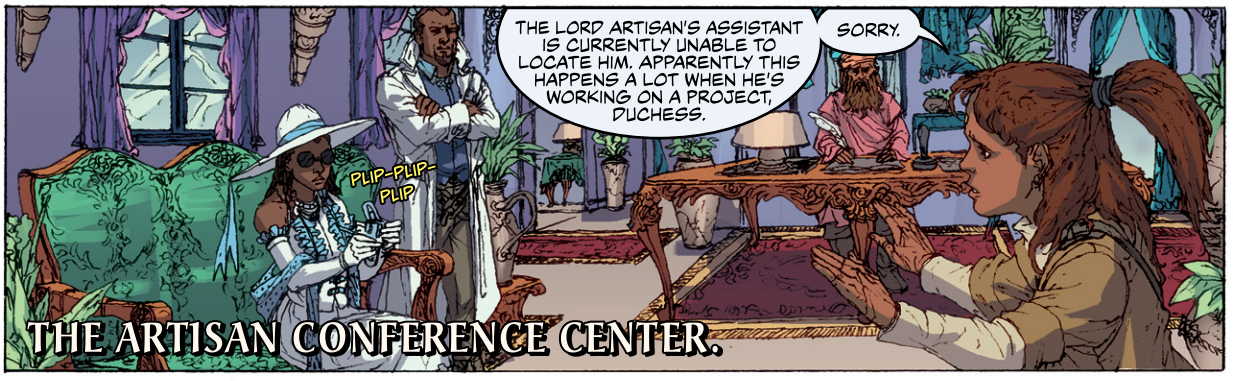

THERE'S ONLY ONE TRAITOR HERE, DRILE--
--ONLY ONE MAN BITTER ENOUGH AT THE DIEM FOR TAKING AWAY HIS RANK...
...ONE MAN WITH A STREAK OF VENGEFULNESS STRONG ENOUGH TO COMMIT SUCH AN ATROCITY.
SHSHH
WHAT?! YOU ACCUSE ME? YOU DARE TO ACCUSE YOUR BETTER?!
I DARE!

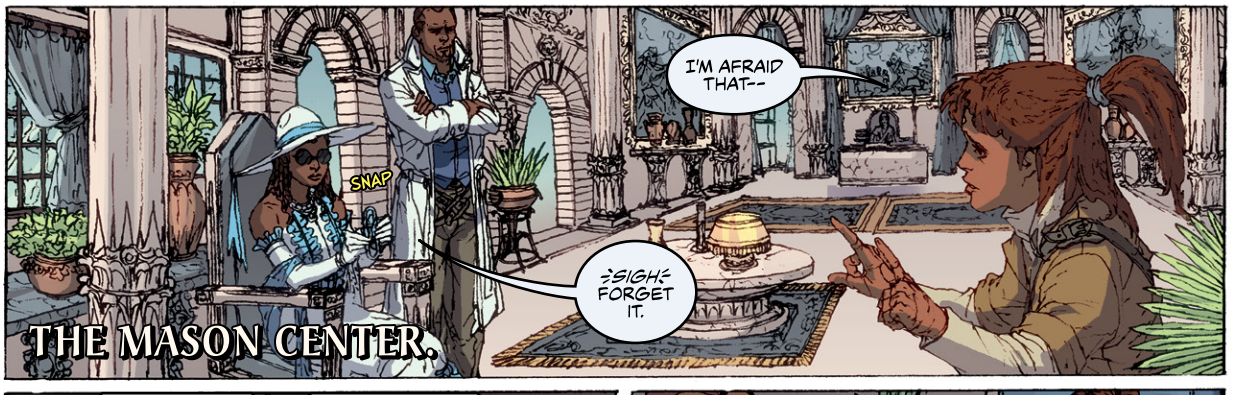

WHAM
WHAM
WHAM
STAY OUT OF MY FATHER'S ROOMS.
AND TAKE OFF THE SASH. OTHERWISE I'LL REPORT YOU TO THE TAISHA FOR VIOLATING THE DIEM'S CHARTER.


MEANWHILE, IN THE DARKSIDER QUARTER.
"SO, WHAT NOW, DUCHESS?"
GEVIN'S QUEST ENDED HERE. LOATEN SAID AS MUCH.
SO WE SHALL GO TO THE TOP. IF THE PRINCE REALLY DID COME TO LOSSAND THEN HE WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN ABLE TO RESIST INTRODUCING HIMSELF TO THE LOCAL NOBILITY. THE...
...TYSHOO...?
YOU MEAN TAISHA. THERE ARE EIGHT LEADERS OF THE DAYSIDE PROFESSIONS. SOME ARE MORE APPROACHABLE THAN OTHERS.
OH... SHELLA!
SHELLA!
SHELLA!
SHELLA!
BLASTED CASE. THE LOCK MUST HAVE GOT KNOCKED.
I'LL TAKE A LOOK AT IT, ALTHOUGH WHY YOU NEEDED SUCH A COMPLEX LOCK FOR SUCH DOWDY CLOTHES IS BEYOND ME.
N'TEESE, YOU WILL ARRANGE MEETINGS WITH THESE PROFESSION LEADERS FOR US.
I'LL TRY.

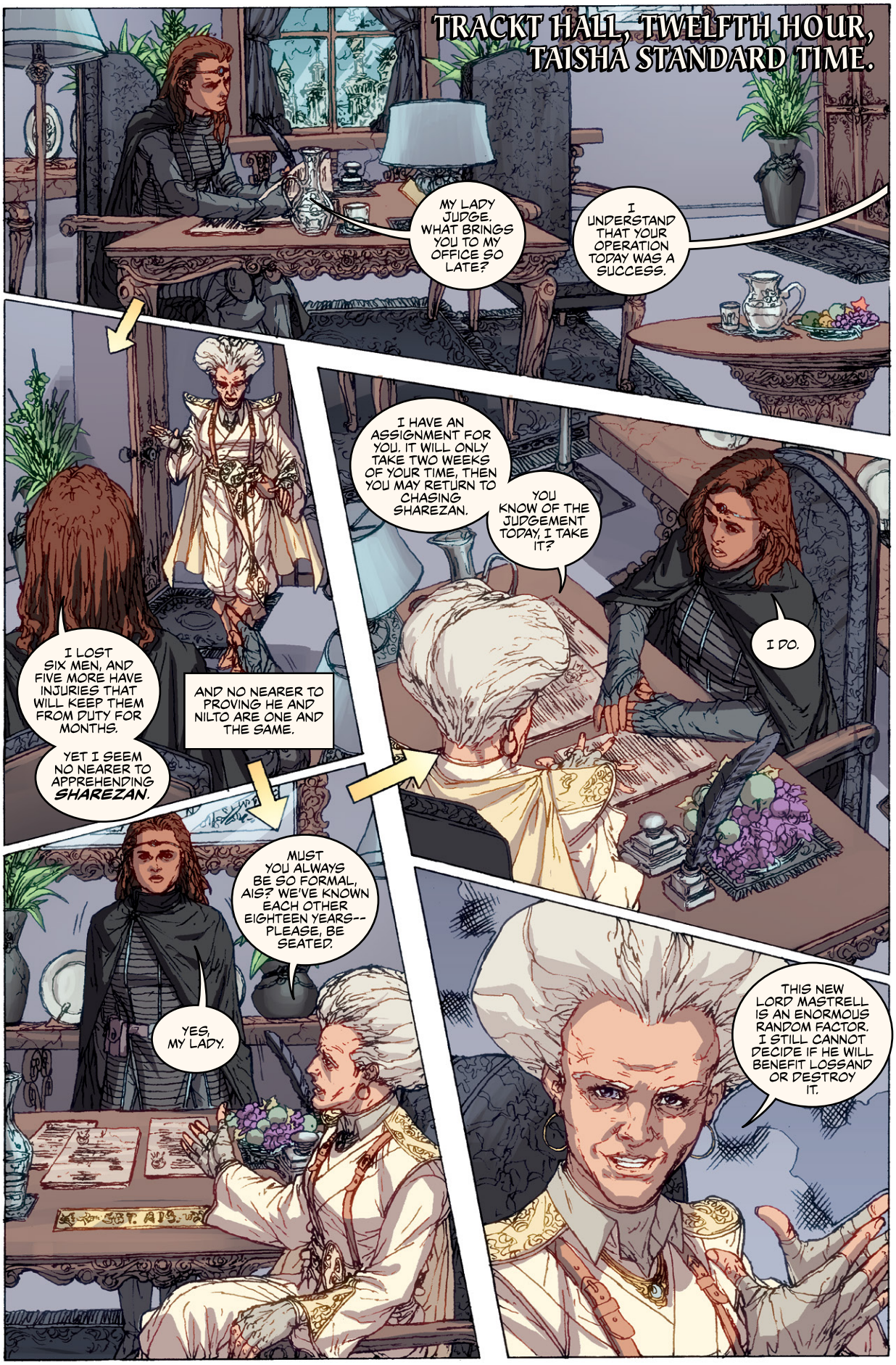

SHORTLY, THE HALL OF JUDGEMENT.
CLICK-CLICK
HE SAYS IT WILL BE A SHORT WAIT--
GOOD.
--AND THAT THE LADY JUDGE WILL SEE YOU IN THREE WEEKS TIME.
TOWER BARRACKS.
SKRITCH-SKRITCH
THEY SAID THAT THE LORD GENERAL IS CURRENTLY ENGAGED IN A HUNTING TRIP AND WILL BE UNAVAILABLE FOR THE NEXT TWELVE DAYS.
TWELVE... DAYS?!
HELM'S REST.
CLICK-CLICK
THE LORD ADMIRAL IS ON INSPECTION DUTIES AND UNAVAILABLE WITHOUT A BOOKING.
THEN WE SHALL BOOK.
UM... HIS BOOKING OFFICER IS ALSO ON INSPECTION DUTIES.
THE GOLDEN MARKET OF THE GUILD.
CLACK-CLICK
THE LORD MERCHANT WILL SEE YOU IMMEDIATELY. JUST AS SOON AS YOU PAY THE 2,000 LAK PROCESSING FEE.
TWO THOU--?!

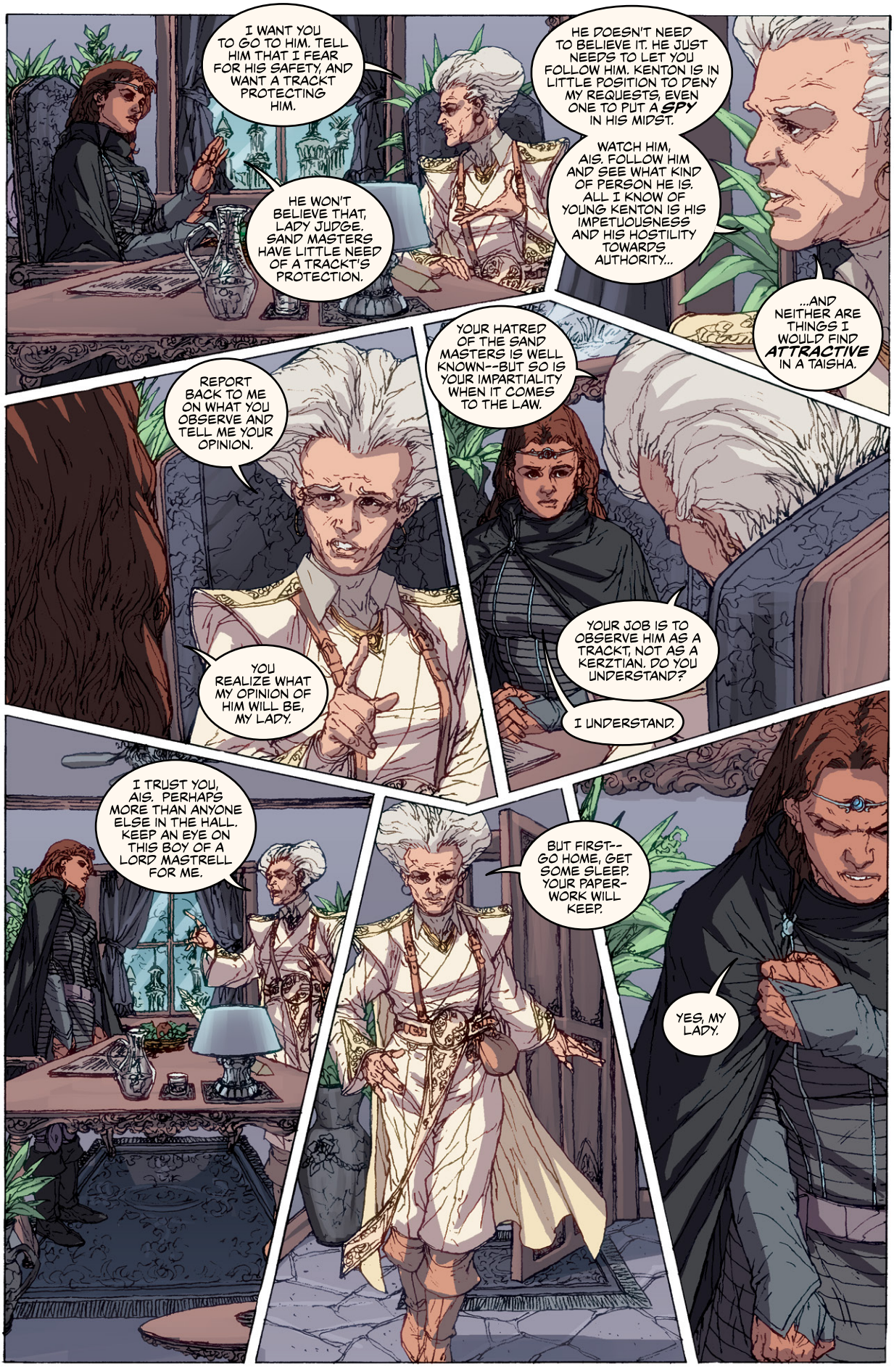

GENNEL, THE LORD FARMER, IS CURRENTLY OVERSEEING HARVEST QUOTAS AND IS UNABLE TO SEE ANYONE.
SCRITCH-SKRATCH
UNTIL... WHEN?
THE FARMERS CONGRESS.

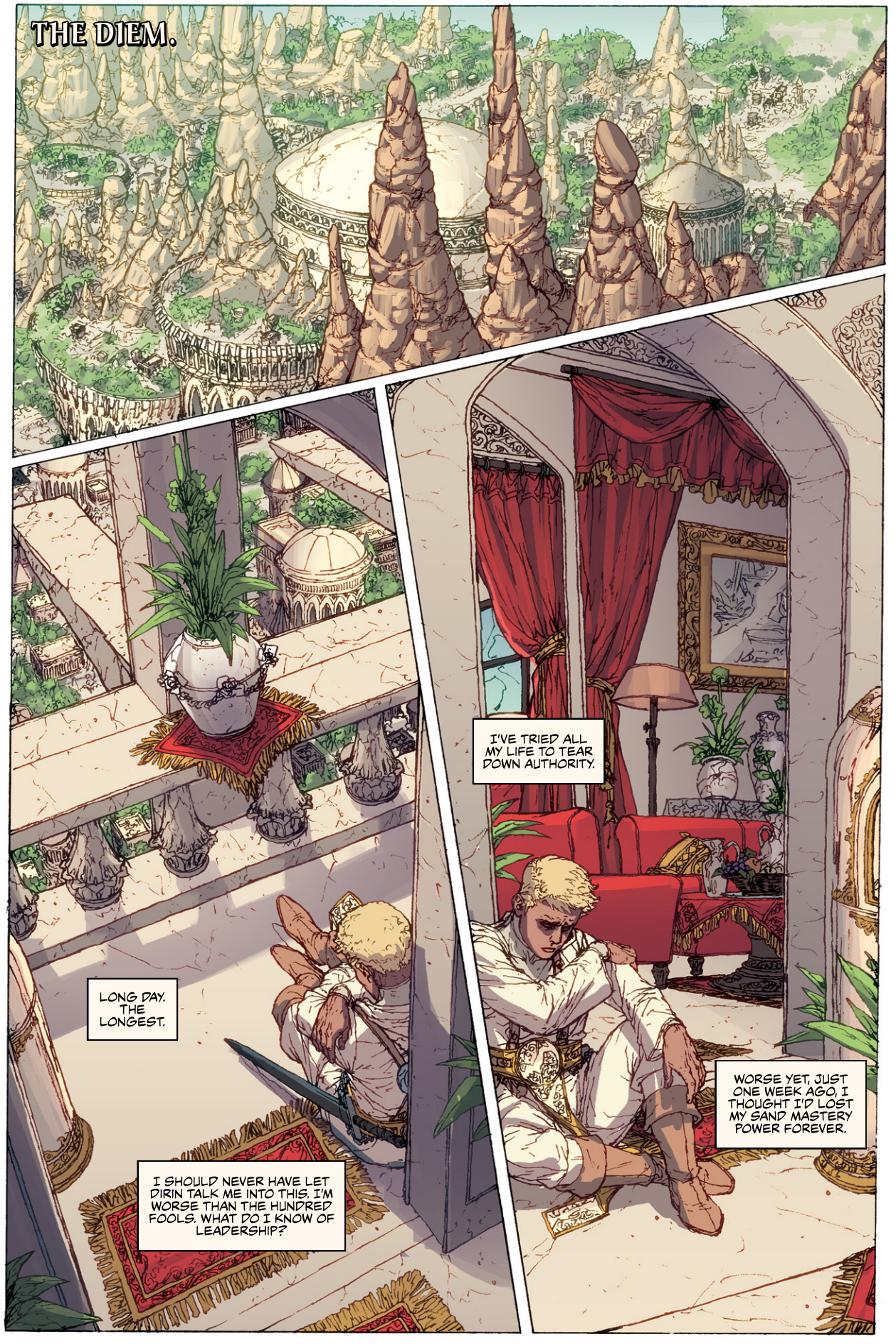

THE LORD ARTISAN'S ASSISTANT IS CURRENTLY UNABLE TO LOCATE HIM. APPARENTLY THIS HAPPENS A LOT WHEN HE'S WORKING ON A PROJECT, DUCHESS.
SORRY.
PLIP-PLIP-PLIP
THE ARTISAN CONFERENCE CENTER.


I'M AFRAID THAT--
SNAP
=SIGH= FORGET IT.
THE MASON CENTER.


MY GOODNESS, DUCHESS, YOU FIXED IT!
YOUR LOCK IS THE ONLY THING I HAVE FIXED TODAY, PROFESSOR CYNDER. WE COULDN'T GET A SINGLE ONE OF THESE TAISHA TO EVEN SPEAK TO US.
YOU SAID THERE WERE EIGHT PROFESSIONS, N'TEESE. WE HAVE TRIED SEVEN--WHERE WOULD WE FIND THE EIGHTH? WHAT DO THEY DO?
THE... MASTRELLS? WELL, IT'S HARD TO EXPLAIN IN DYNASTIC. THEY'RE LIKE HOLY MEN, EXCEPT NOT HOLY.
VERY ENLIGHTENING, I'M SURE.
WE MUST TRY.
N'TEESE, YOU WILL TAKE US TO THE LORD.. MASTRELL FIRST THING TOMORROW.
AS YOU WISH, DUCHESS. BUT I DON'T RATE YOUR CHANCES. RUMOR SAYS THE PROFESSION IS ABOUT TO BE DISSOLVED.

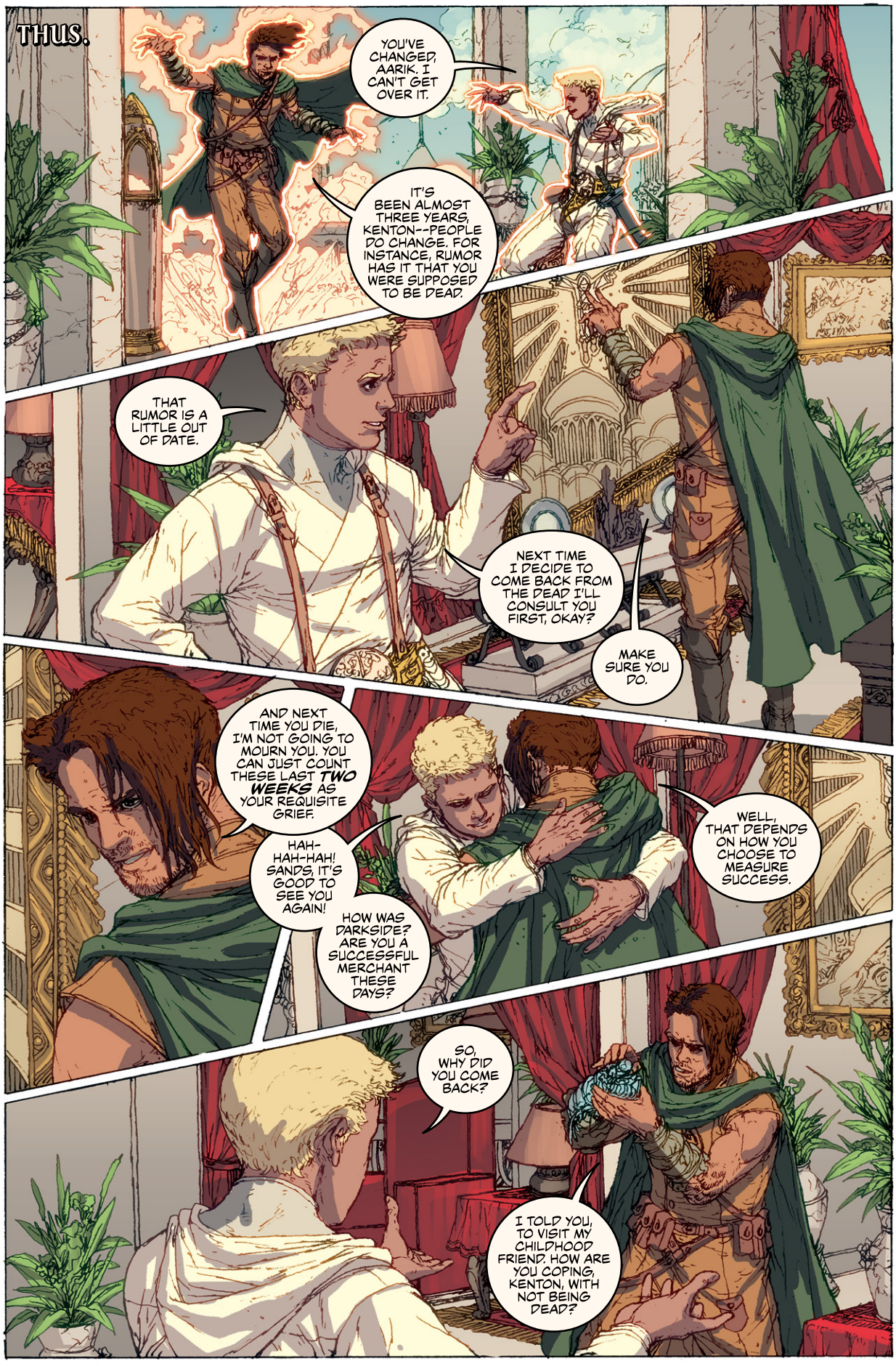

TRACKT HALL, TWELFTH HOUR, TAISHA STANDARD TIME.
MY LADY JUDGE. WHAT BRINGS YOU TO MY OFFICE SO LATE?
I UNDERSTAND THAT YOUR OPERATION TODAY WAS A SUCCESS.
I HAVE AN ASSIGNMENT FOR YOU. IT WILL ONLY TAKE TWO WEEKS OF YOUR TIME, THEN YOU MAY RETURN TO CHASING SHAREZAN.
YOU KNOW OF THE JUDGEMENT TODAY, I TAKE IT?
I DO.
I LOST SIX MEN, AND FIVE MORE HAVE INJURIES THAT WILL KEEP THEM FROM DUTY FOR MONTHS.
YET I SEEM NO NEARER TO APPREHENDING SHAREZAN.
AND NO NEARER TO PROVING HE AND NILTO ARE ONE AND THE SAME.
MUST YOU ALWAYS BE SO FORMAL, AIS? WE'VE KNOWN EACH OTHER EIGHTEEN YEARS-- PLEASE, BE SEATED.
YES, MY LADY.
THIS NEW LORD MASTRELL IS AN ENORMOUS RANDOM FACTOR. I STILL CANNOT DECIDE IF HE WILL BENEFIT LOSSAND OR DESTROY IT.


I WANT YOU TO GO TO HIM. TELL HIM THAT I FEAR FOR HIS SAFETY, AND WANT A TRACKT PROTECTING HIM.
HE WON'T BELIEVE THAT, LADY JUDGE. 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. FOLLOW HIM AND SEE WHAT KIND OF PERSON HE IS. ALL I KNOW OF YOUNG KENTON IS HIS IMPETUOUSNESS AND HIS HOSTILITY TOWARDS AUTHORITY...
...AND NEITHER ARE THINGS I WOULD FIND ATTRACTIVE IN A TAISHA.
REPORT BACK TO ME ON WHAT YOU OBSERVE AND TELL ME YOUR OPINION.
YOU REALIZE WHAT MY OPINION OF HIM WILL BE, MY LADY.
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 KERZTIAN. 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.
BUT FIRST-- GO HOME, GET SOME SLEEP. YOUR PAPER-WORK WILL KEEP.
YES, MY LADY.

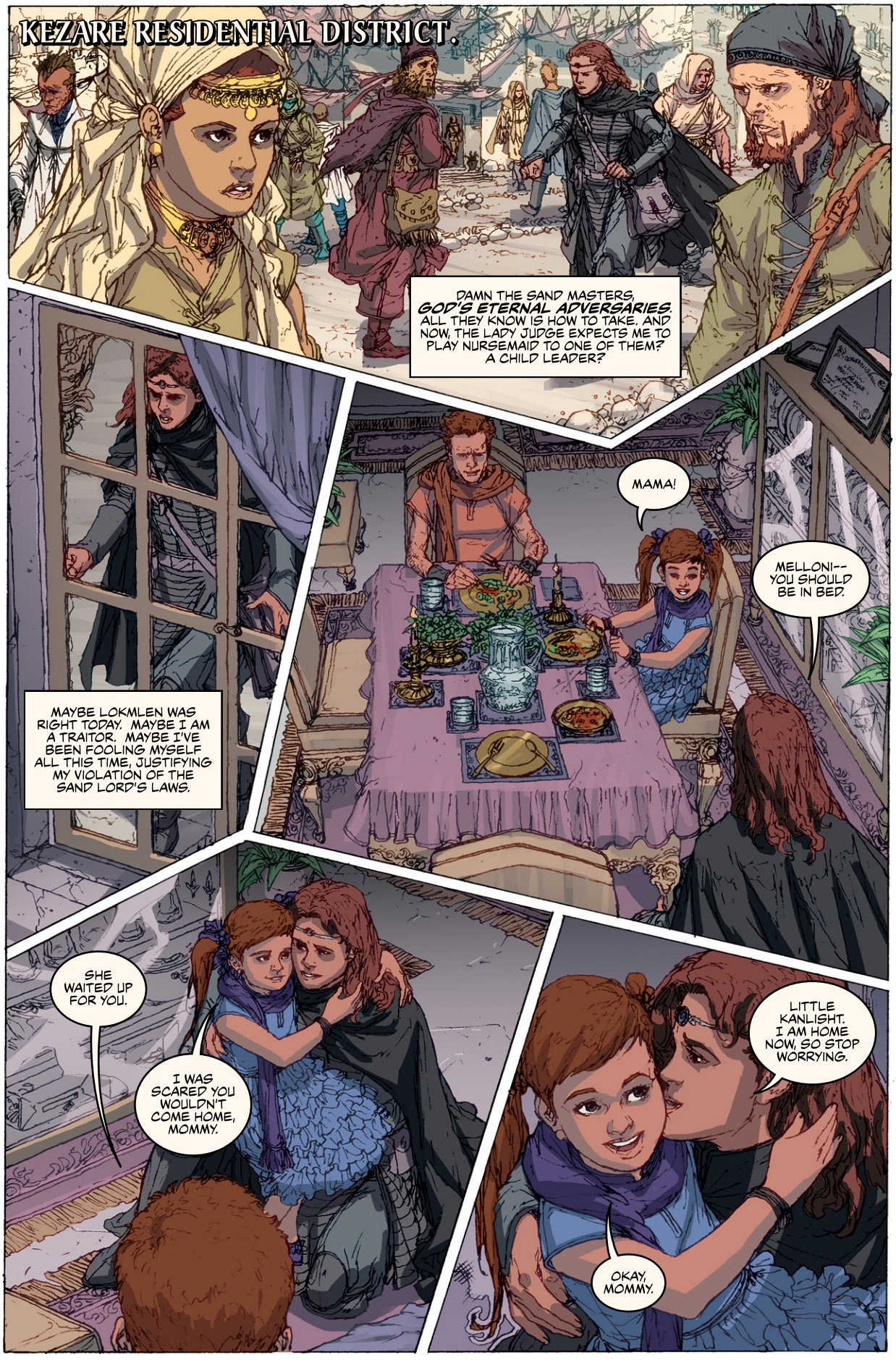

THE DIEM.
I'VE TRIED ALL MY LIFE TO TEAR DOWN AUTHORITY.
WORSE YET, JUST ONE WEEK AGO, I THOUGHT I'D LOST MY SAND MASTERY POWER FOREVER.
LONG DAY. THE LONGEST.
I SHOULD NEVER HAVE LET DIRIN TALK ME INTO THIS. I'M WORSE THAN THE HUNDRED FOOLS. WHAT DO I KNOW OF LEADERSHIP?

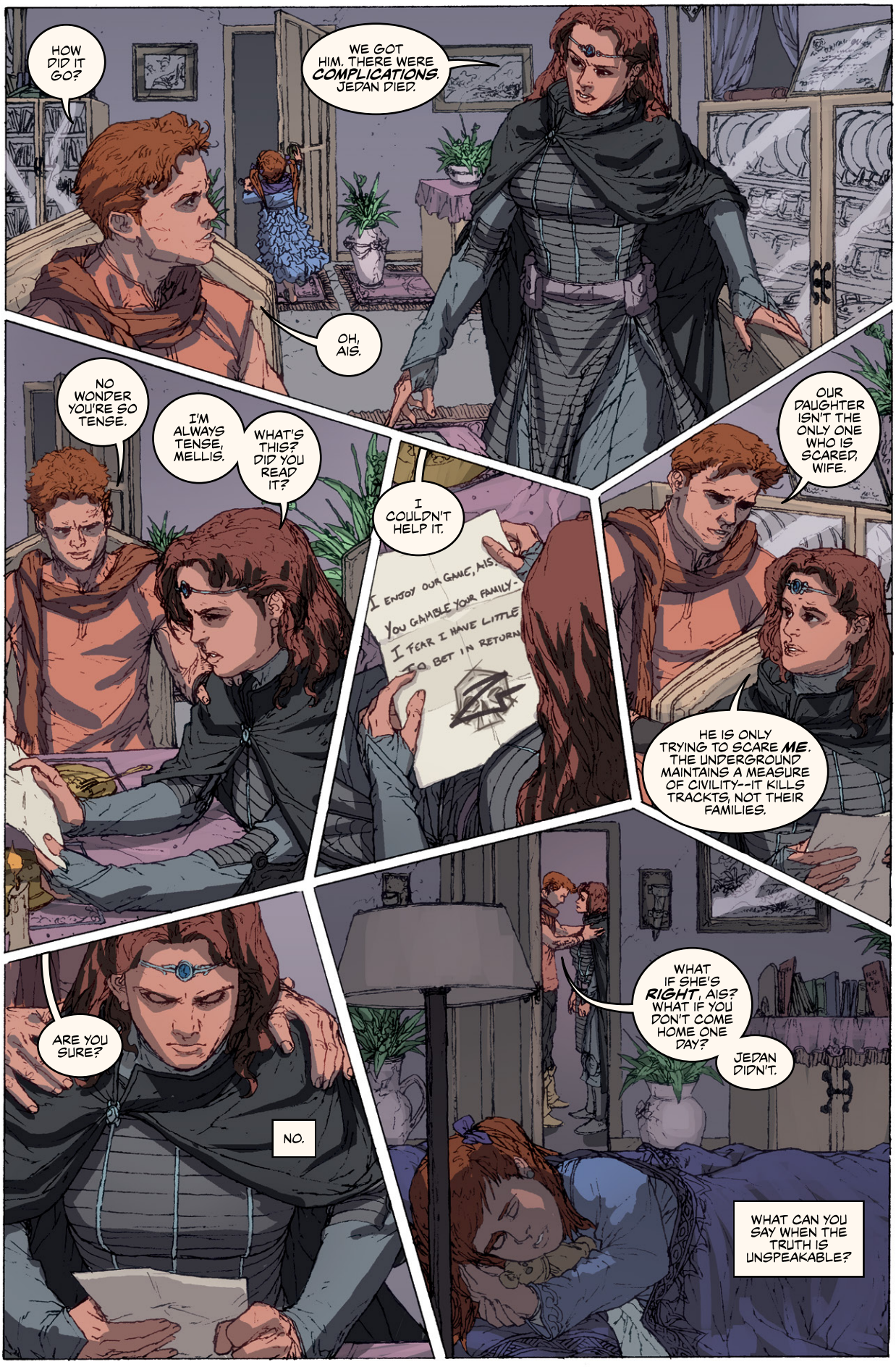

WOULD THAT REALLY HAVE BEEN SUCH A BAD THING?
YOU WOULD NOT FIND IT EASY IN THE DIEM, BOY.
BUT YOU MAY JOIN IF THAT IS YOUR DESIRE.
THOUGH I WISH, BY SANDS, THAT YOU WOULD SEE REASON!
SEE REASON? THESE ARE MY FATHER'S CHAMBERS, THIS IS MY FATHER'S LIFE. I DON'T BELONG HERE.
I HAVE NEVER BELONGED HERE.
WELL-- WHERE IS HE?

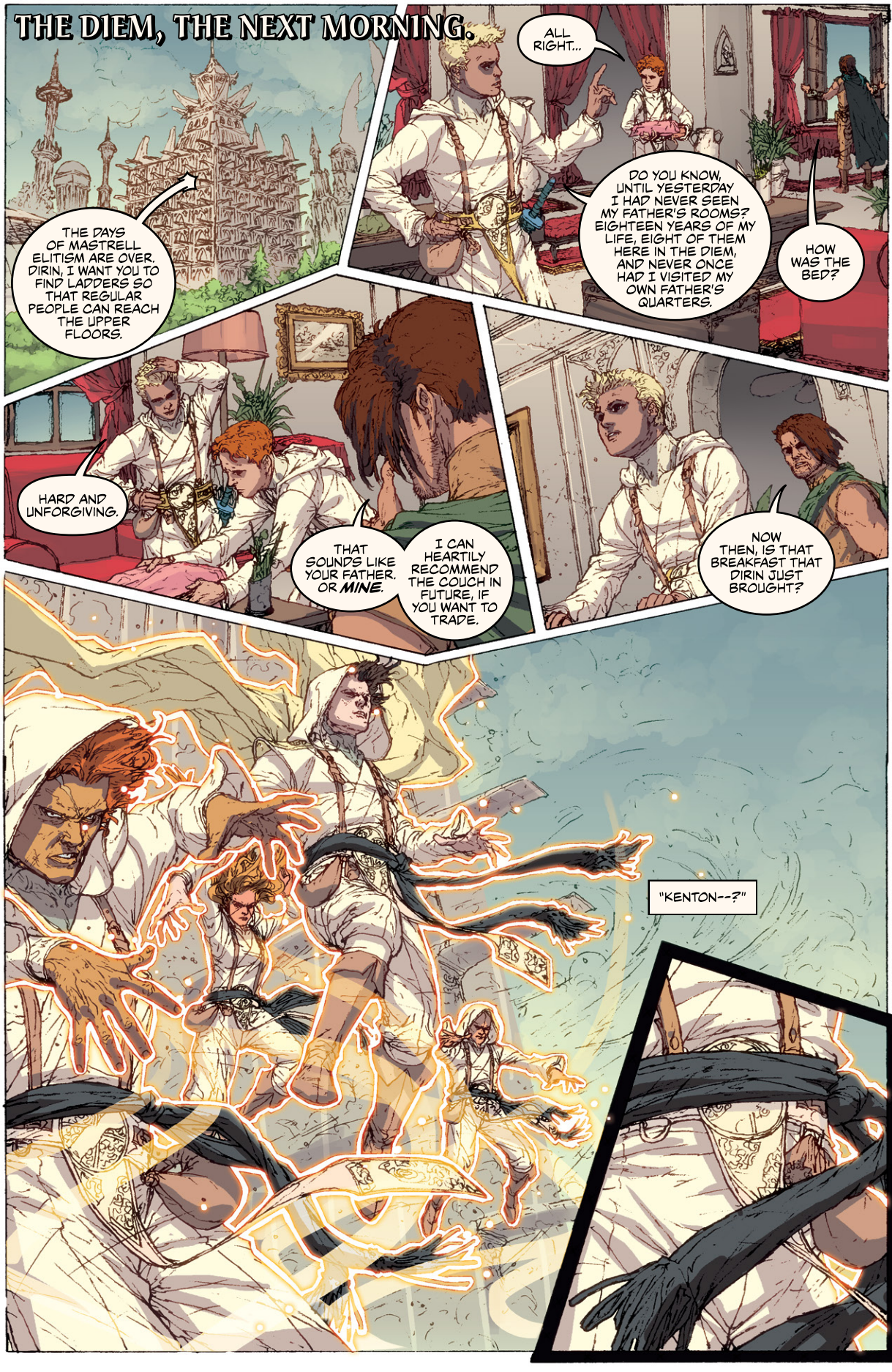

CAN ANYONE HERE FIND THAT SCOUNDREL FOR ME?
WHO...?
YOU BLASTED SAND MASTERS STILL DON'T BELIEVE IN STAIRS THEN?
AARIK? WHAT ON THE SANDS ARE YOU DOING HERE?
YELLING MYSELF RAW, IT SEEMS. HAS THE HIGH ALTITUDE OF YOUR CHAMBERS MADE YOU DEAF?
I...
I'LL BRING YOU UP.

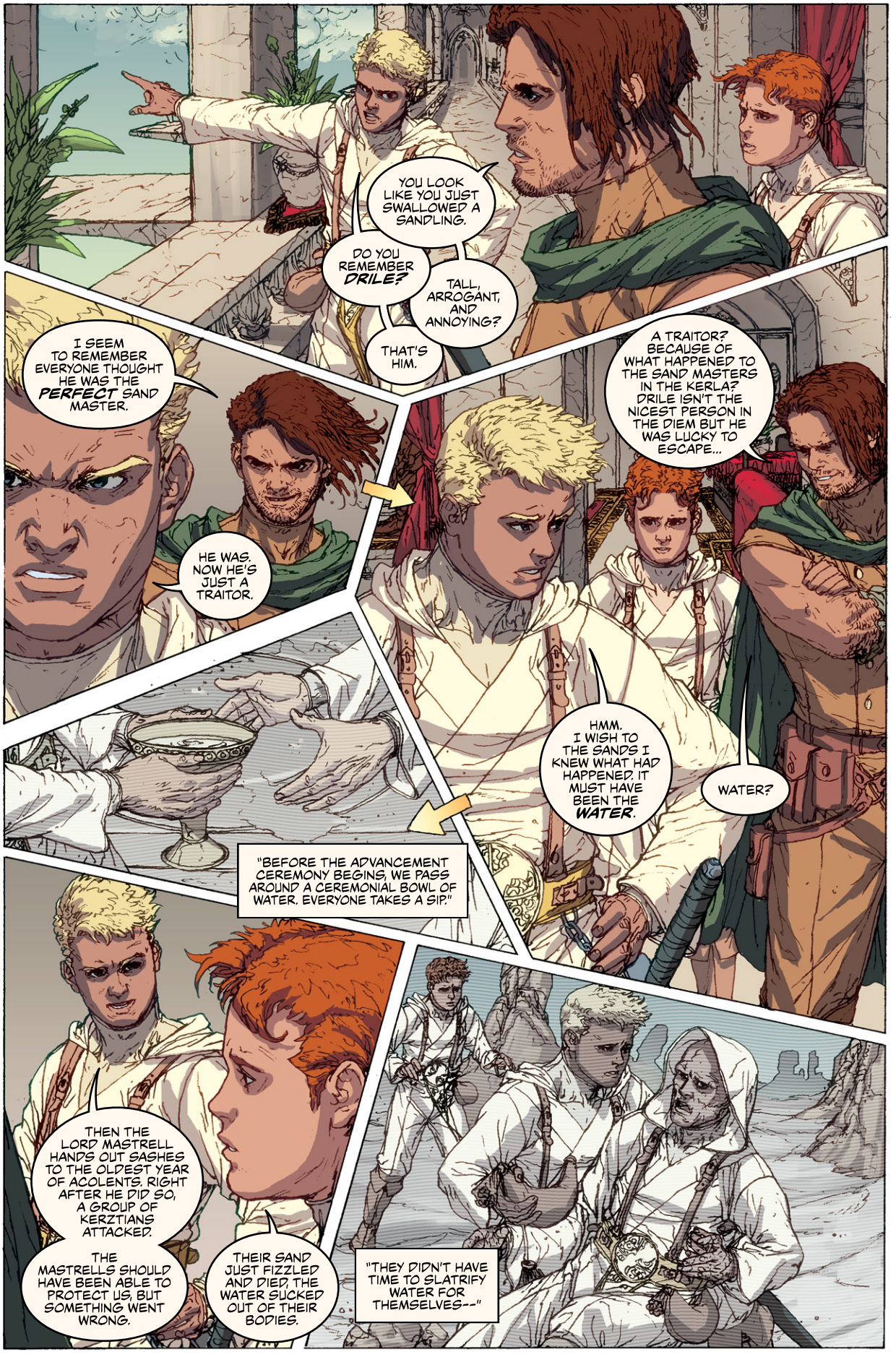

THUS.
YOU'VE CHANGED, AARIK. I CAN'T GET OVER IT.
IT'S BEEN ALMOST THREE YEARS, KENTON--PEOPLE DO CHANGE. FOR INSTANCE, RUMOR HAS IT THAT YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO BE DEAD.
THAT RUMOR IS A LITTLE OUT OF DATE.
NEXT TIME I DECIDE TO COME BACK FROM THE DEAD I'LL CONSULT YOU FIRST, OKAY?
MAKE SURE YOU DO.
AND NEXT TIME YOU DIE, I'M NOT GOING TO MOURN YOU. YOU CAN JUST COUNT THESE LAST TWO WEEKS AS YOUR REQUISITE GRIEF.
HAH-HAH-HAH! SANDS, IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN!
HOW WAS DARKSIDE? ARE YOU A SUCCESSFUL MERCHANT THESE DAYS?
WELL, THAT DEPENDS ON HOW YOU CHOOSE TO MEASURE SUCCESS.
SO, WHY DID YOU COME BACK?
I TOLD YOU, TO VISIT MY CHILDHOOD FRIEND. HOW ARE YOU COPING, KENTON, WITH NOT BEING DEAD?

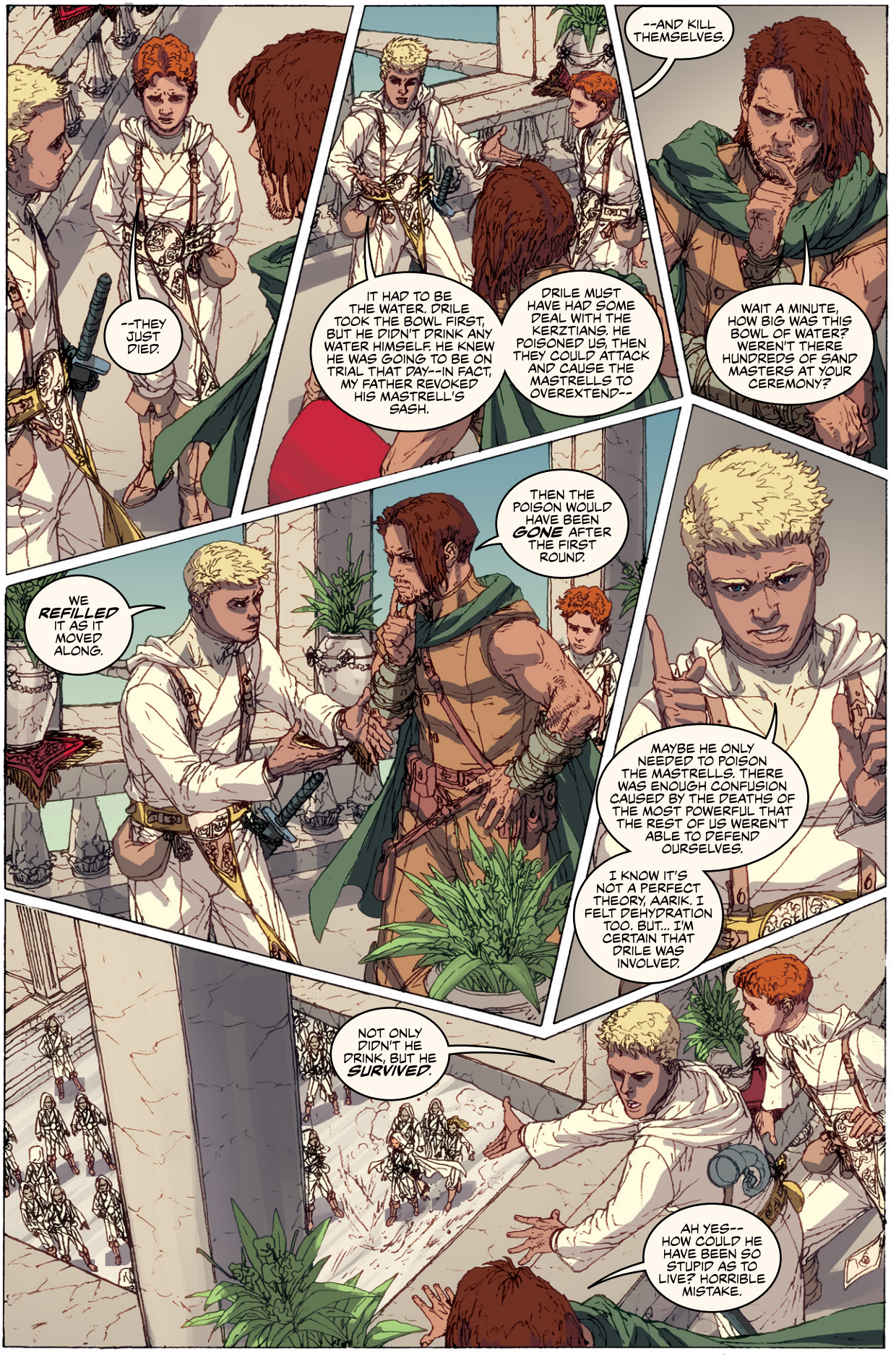

YOU DID NOT CROSS THE BORDER OCEAN JUST TO SEE ME. WHAT ABOUT YOUR FATHER?
LORD RAAGENT? HE DISOWNED ME, REMEMBER?
SO, NOW THAT YOU'RE RICH AND POWERFUL, ARE YOU GOING TO TAKE ME IN? I COULD USE A RICH PATRON--THEY'RE MUCH BETTER THAN GETTING A JOB.
YES. SOMEONE SET UP THE SAND MASTERS OUT IN THE KERLA, ONE OF OUR OWN. AND NOW THIS.
YOU MAKE IT SOUND PREMEDITATED.
YOU CAN STAY IF YOU WANT, AARIK, BUT I DON'T THINK I'LL BE ABLE TO PROVIDE YOU WITH A HOME FOR LONG.
SO I HEARD. TWO WEEKS, EH?
DO YOU KNOW WHO SET YOU UP?
I HAVE MY SUSPICIONS. NOTHING I CAN PROVE--YET.
FOR NOW, I'M LEFT WITH TWO WEEKS TO CONVINCE ALL SEVEN TAISHIN THAT THE DIEM CAN BE RESPONSIBLY SOLIDIFIED BEHIND ONE LEADER.
I GUESS THERE'S NOTHING TO DO BUT MAKE THE BEST OF IT THEN! SO--
--WHEN DO WE EAT?

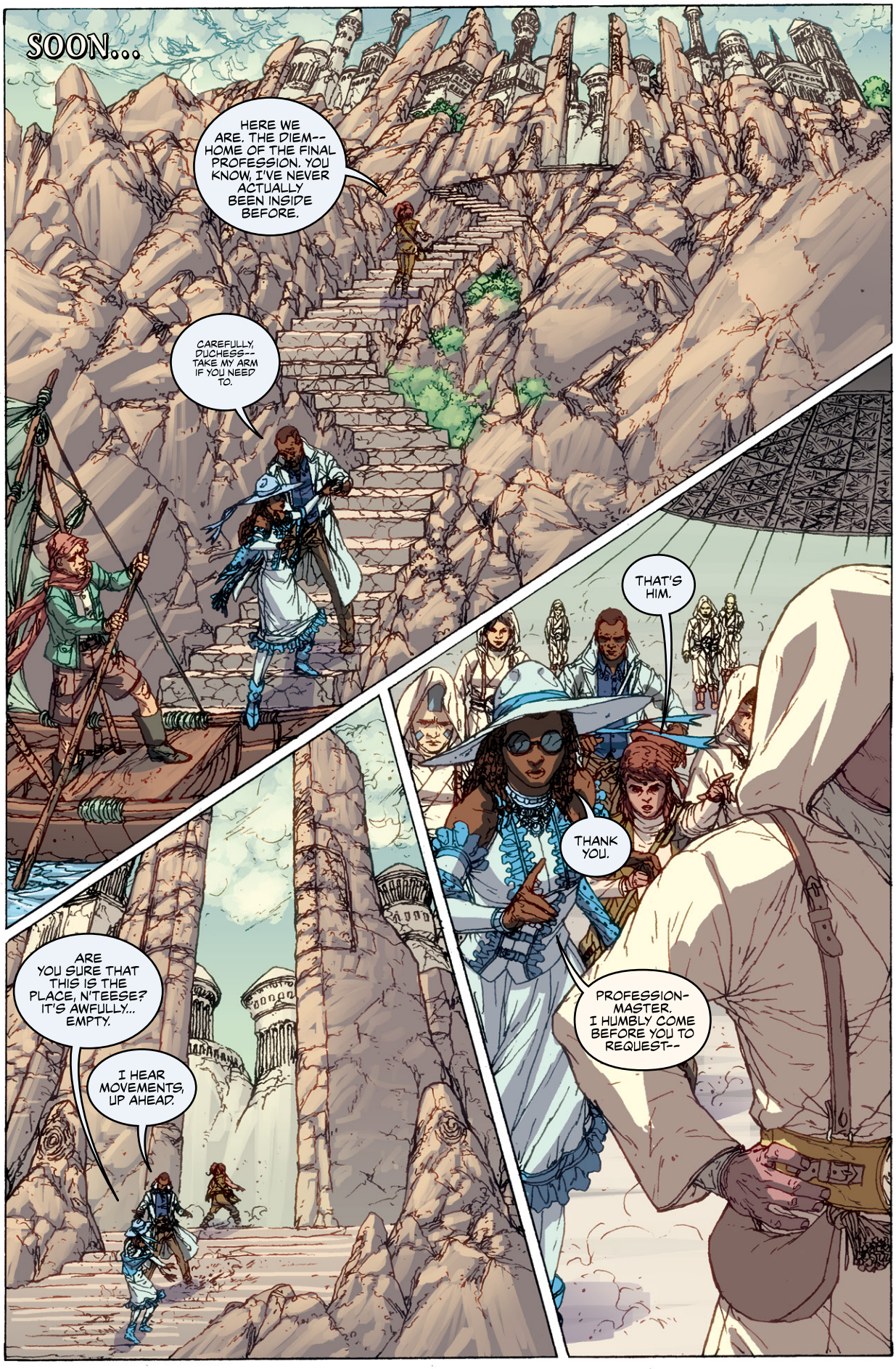

KEZARE RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT.
DAMN THE SAND MASTERS, GOD'S ETERNAL ADVERSARIES. ALL THEY KNOW IS HOW TO TAKE. AND NOW, THE LADY JUDGE EXPECTS ME TO PLAY NURSEMAID TO ONE OF THEM? A CHILD LEADER?
MAMA!
MELLONI-- YOU SHOULD BE IN BED.
MAYBE LOKMLEN WAS RIGHT TODAY. MAYBE I AM A TRAITOR. MAYBE I'VE BEEN FOOLING MYSELF ALL THIS TIME, JUSTIFYING MY VIOLATION OF THE SAND LORD'S LAWS.
SHE WAITED UP FOR YOU.
I WAS SCARED YOU WOULDN'T COME HOME, MOMMY.
LITTLE KANLISHT. I AM HOME NOW, SO STOP WORRYING.
OKAY, MOMMY.


HOW DID IT GO?
WE GOT HIM. THERE WERE COMPLICATIONS. JEDAN DIED.
OH, AIS.
NO WONDER YOU'RE SO TENSE.
I'M ALWAYS TENSE, MELLIS.
WHAT'S THIS? DID YOU READ IT?
I 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 IS SCARED, WIFE.
HE IS ONLY TRYING TO SCARE ME. THE UNDERGROUND MAINTAINS A MEASURE OF CIVILITY--IT KILLS TRACKTS, NOT THEIR FAMILIES.
ARE YOU SURE?
NO.
WHAT IF SHE'S RIGHT, AIS? WHAT IF YOU DON'T COME HOME ONE DAY?
JEDAN DIDN'T.
WHAT CAN YOU SAY WHEN THE TRUTH IS UNSPEAKABLE?

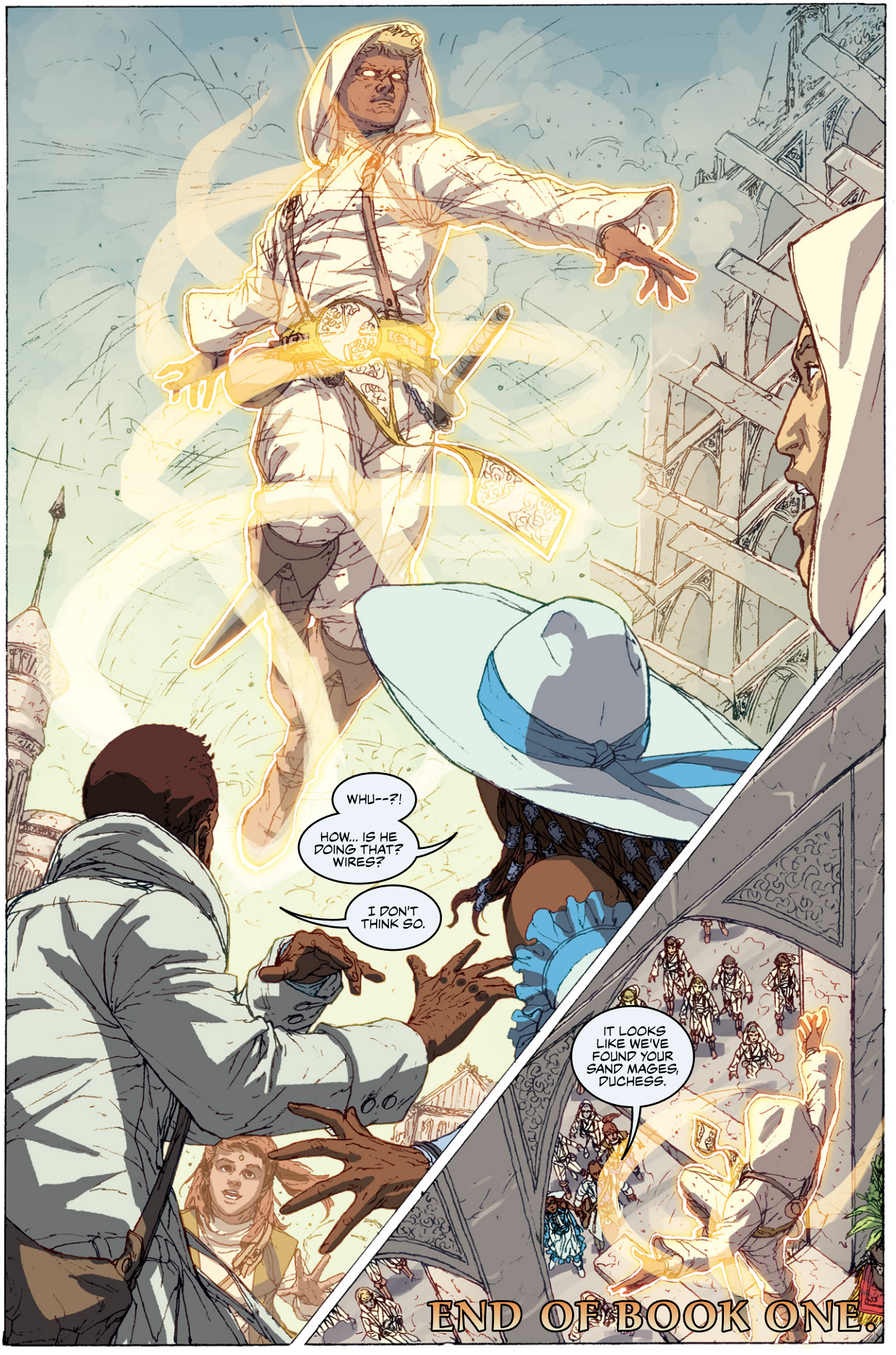

THE DIEM, THE NEXT MORNING.
THE DAYS OF MASTRELL ELITISM ARE OVER. DIRIN, I WANT YOU TO FIND LADDERS SO THAT REGULAR PEOPLE CAN REACH THE UPPER FLOORS.
ALL RIGHT...
DO YOU KNOW, UNTIL YESTERDAY I HAD NEVER SEEN MY FATHER'S ROOMS? EIGHTEEN YEARS OF MY LIFE, EIGHT OF THEM HERE IN THE DIEM, AND NEVER ONCE HAD I VISITED MY OWN FATHER'S QUARTERS.
HOW WAS THE BED?
HARD AND UNFORGIVING.
THAT SOUNDS LIKE YOUR FATHER. OR MINE.
I CAN HEARTILY RECOMMEND THE COUCH IN FUTURE, IF YOU WANT TO TRADE.
NOW THEN, IS THAT BREAKFAST THAT DIRIN JUST BROUGHT?
"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.
A TRAITOR? BECAUSE OF WHAT HAPPENED TO THE SAND MASTERS IN THE KERLA? DRILE ISN'T THE NICEST PERSON IN THE DIEM BUT HE WAS LUCKY TO ESCAPE...
HMM. I WISH TO THE SANDS I KNEW WHAT HAD 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 AFTER HE DID SO, A GROUP OF KERZTIANS ATTACKED.
THE MASTRELLS SHOULD HAVE BEEN ABLE TO PROTECT US, BUT SOMETHING WENT WRONG.
THEIR SAND JUST FIZZLED AND DIED, THE WATER SUCKED OUT OF THEIR BODIES.
"THEY DIDN'T HAVE TIME TO SLATRIFY WATER FOR THEMSELVES--"


--THEY JUST DIED.
IT HAD TO BE THE WATER. DRILE TOOK THE BOWL FIRST, BUT HE DIDN'T DRINK ANY WATER HIMSELF. HE KNEW HE WAS GOING TO BE ON TRIAL THAT DAY--IN FACT, MY FATHER REVOKED HIS MASTRELL'S SASH.
DRILE MUST HAVE HAD SOME DEAL WITH THE KERZTIANS. HE POISONED US, THEN THEY COULD ATTACK AND CAUSE THE MASTRELLS TO OVEREXTEND--
--AND KILL THEMSELVES.
WAIT A MINUTE, HOW BIG WAS THIS BOWL OF WATER? WEREN'T THERE HUNDREDS OF SAND MASTERS AT YOUR CEREMONY?
WE REFILLED IT AS IT MOVED ALONG.
THEN THE POISON WOULD HAVE BEEN GONE AFTER THE FIRST ROUND.
MAYBE HE ONLY NEEDED TO POISON THE MASTRELLS. THERE WAS ENOUGH CONFUSION CAUSED BY THE DEATHS OF THE MOST POWERFUL THAT THE REST OF US WEREN'T ABLE TO DEFEND OURSELVES.
I KNOW IT'S NOT A PERFECT THEORY, AARIK. I FELT DEHYDRATION TOO. BUT... I'M CERTAIN THAT DRILE WAS INVOLVED.
NOT ONLY DIDN'T HE DRINK, BUT HE SURVIVED.
AH YES-- HOW COULD HE HAVE BEEN SO STUPID AS TO LIVE? HORRIBLE MISTAKE.


SOON...
HERE WE ARE. THE DIEM-- HOME OF THE FINAL PROFESSION. YOU KNOW, I'VE NEVER ACTUALLY BEEN INSIDE BEFORE.
CAREFULLY, DUCHESS-- TAKE MY ARM IF YOU NEED TO.
THAT'S HIM.
THANK YOU.
PROFESSION-MASTER. I HUMBLY COME BEFORE YOU TO REQUEST--
ARE YOU SURE THAT THIS IS THE PLACE, N'TEESE? IT'S AWFULLY... EMPTY.
I HEAR MOVEMENTS, UP AHEAD.


YOU!
HELLO, KHRISSALLA. HOW HAVE YOU BEEN?
I... YOU... SHELLA!
YOU LIED TO ME!
WELL, YOU DIDN'T EVER ACTUALLY ASK ME IF I WAS A SAND MASTER.
HOW DARE YOU! AFTER I SAVED YOUR LIFE! AFTER I LET YOU TRAVEL IN MY PRESENCE!
YOU... LIAR!
:SIGH: I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR THIS RIGHT NOW.


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

THE MAKING OF WHITE SAND:



DESIGNS AND TURNAROUNDS

BY JULIUS GOPEZ



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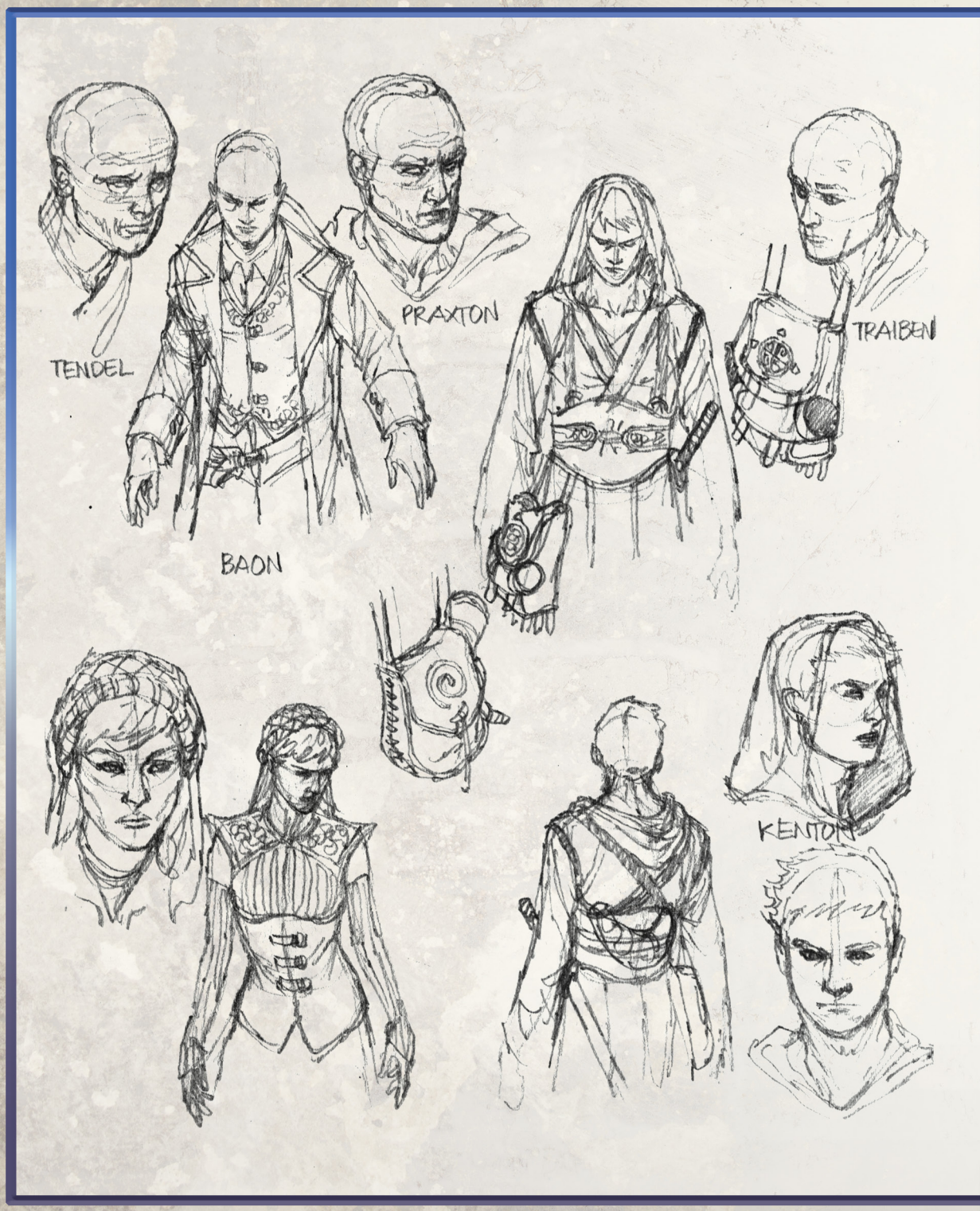

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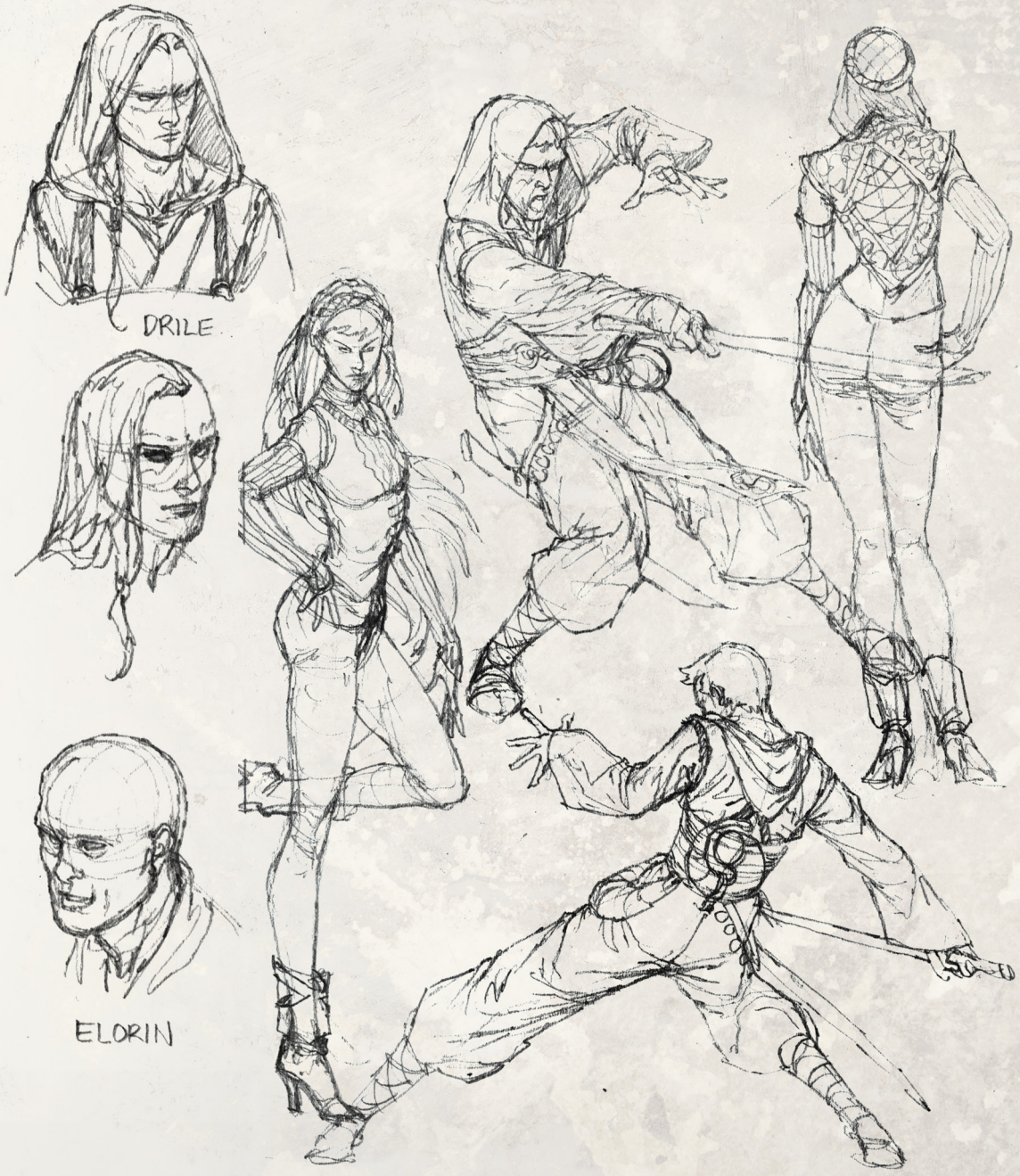

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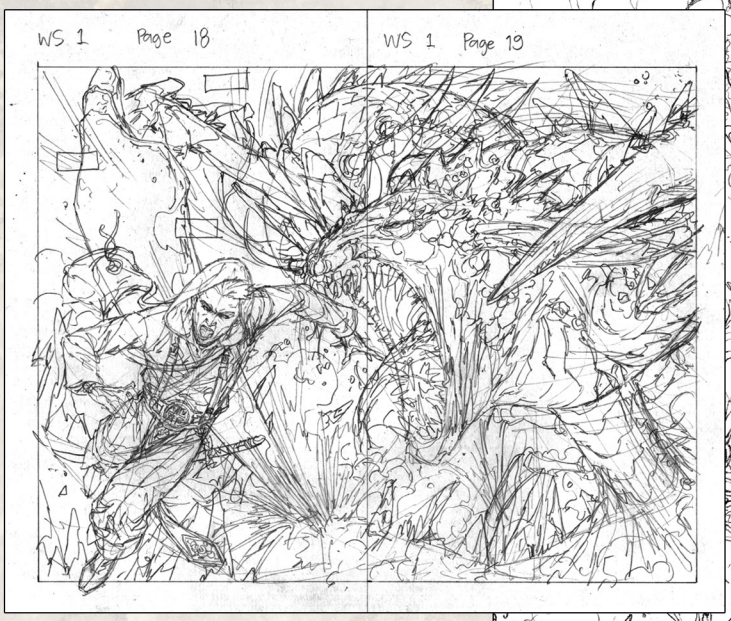



FROM LAYOUTS TO FINAL ART

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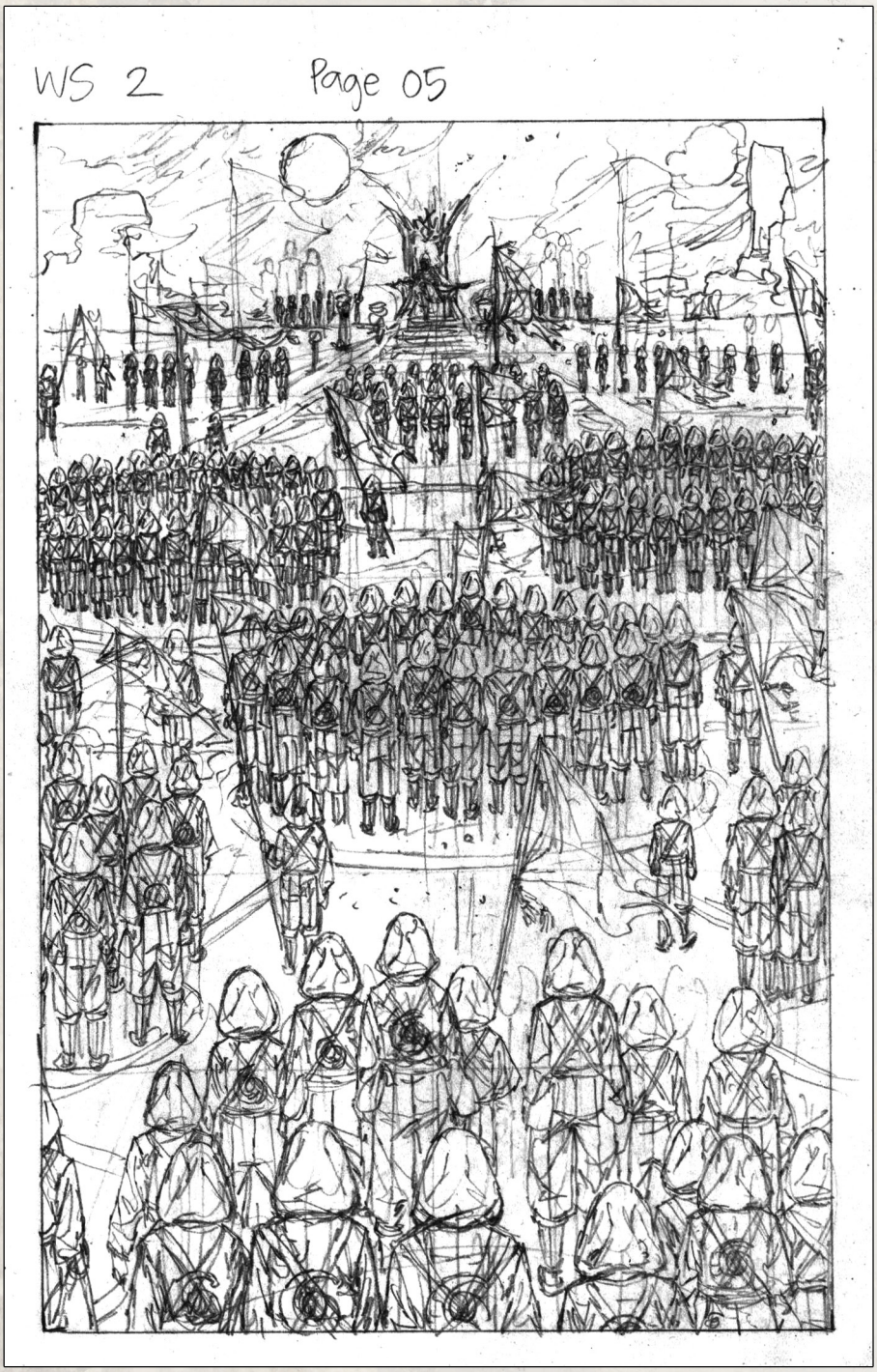

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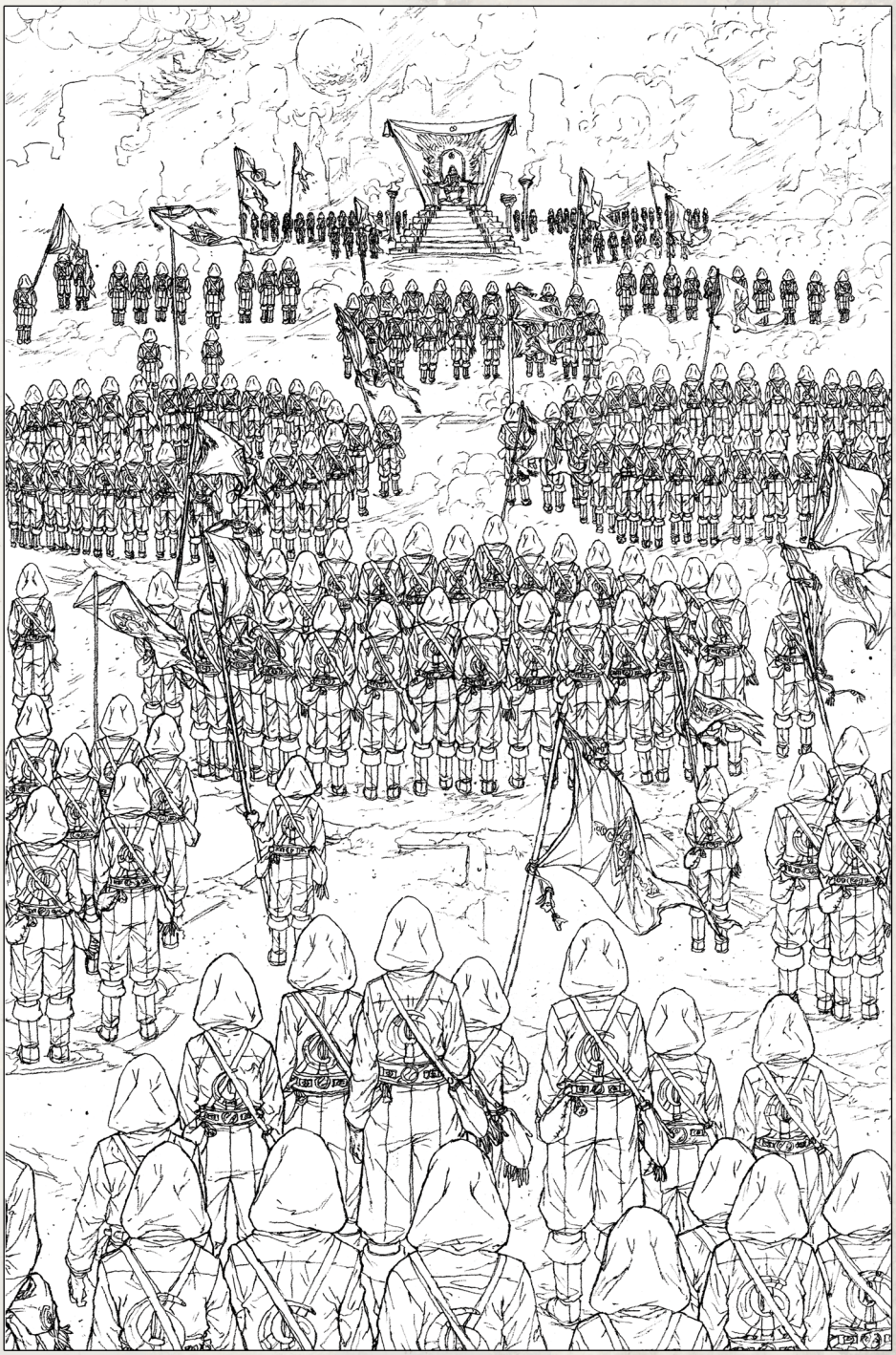

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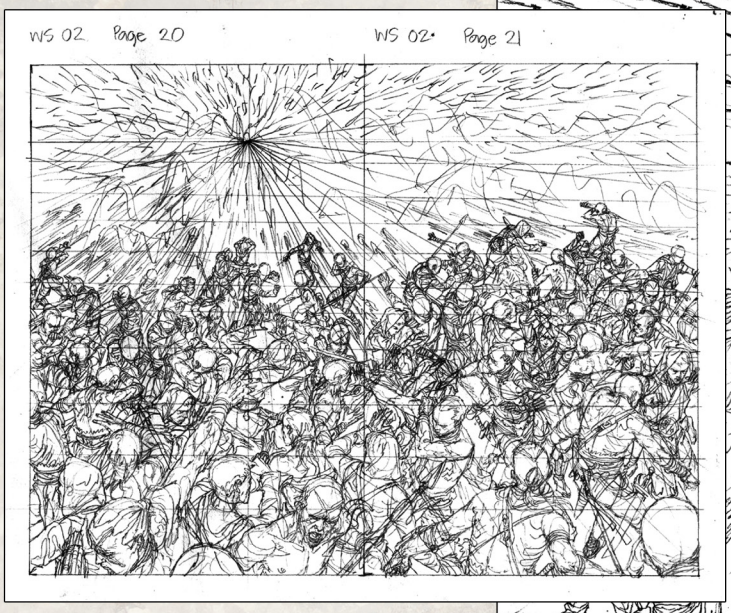



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