

DYNAMITE
24

Robert Jordan's the **WHEEL** of **TIME**



the **EYE** of the **WORLD**

ROBERT JORDAN, CHUCK DIXON & ANDIE TONG



Robert Jordan's the **WHEEL** of **TIME**

the **EYE** of the **WORLD**

written by
ROBERT JORDAN

script by
CHUCK DIXON

art by
ANDIE TONG

colors by
NICOLAS CHAPUIS

letters by
BILL TORTOLINI

cover by
ANDIE TONG

original series edits by
ERNST DABEL & RICH YOUNG

thematic consultants:
**BOB KLUTTZ, MARIA SIMONS
& ALAN ROMANCZUK**

consultation:
ERNST DABEL & LES DABEL

special thanks to:
**HARRIET MCDUGAL, NAT SOBEL,
ADIA WRIGHT, TOM DOHERTY,
MELISSA ANN SINGER & STEVEN PADNICK**

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Rand and Mat walked until just past the village of Carysford, when Mat finally refused to go any further.

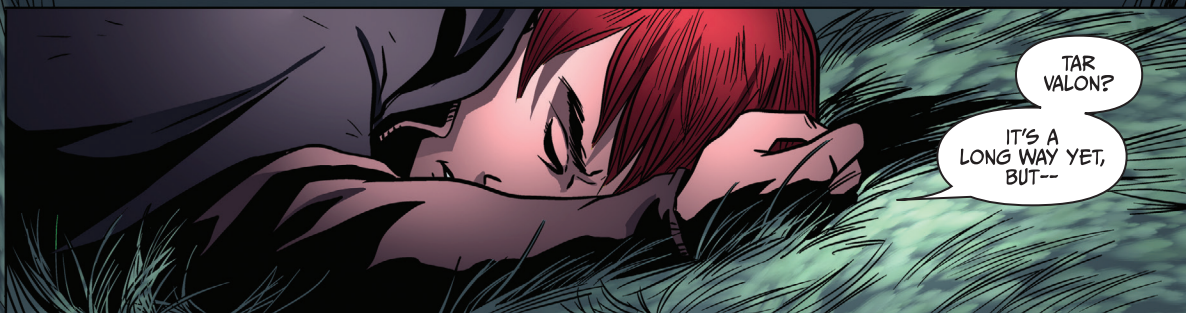
So they hopped a fence and burrowed into a haystack for the night.

Rand had lost count of how many haystacks he had slept in since Whitebridge. Heroes in the stories never had to sleep in haystacks, or under hedges. But it was not easy to pretend, anymore, that he was a hero in a story, even for a little while.

RAND?



RAND,
DO YOU THINK
WE'LL MAKE
IT?

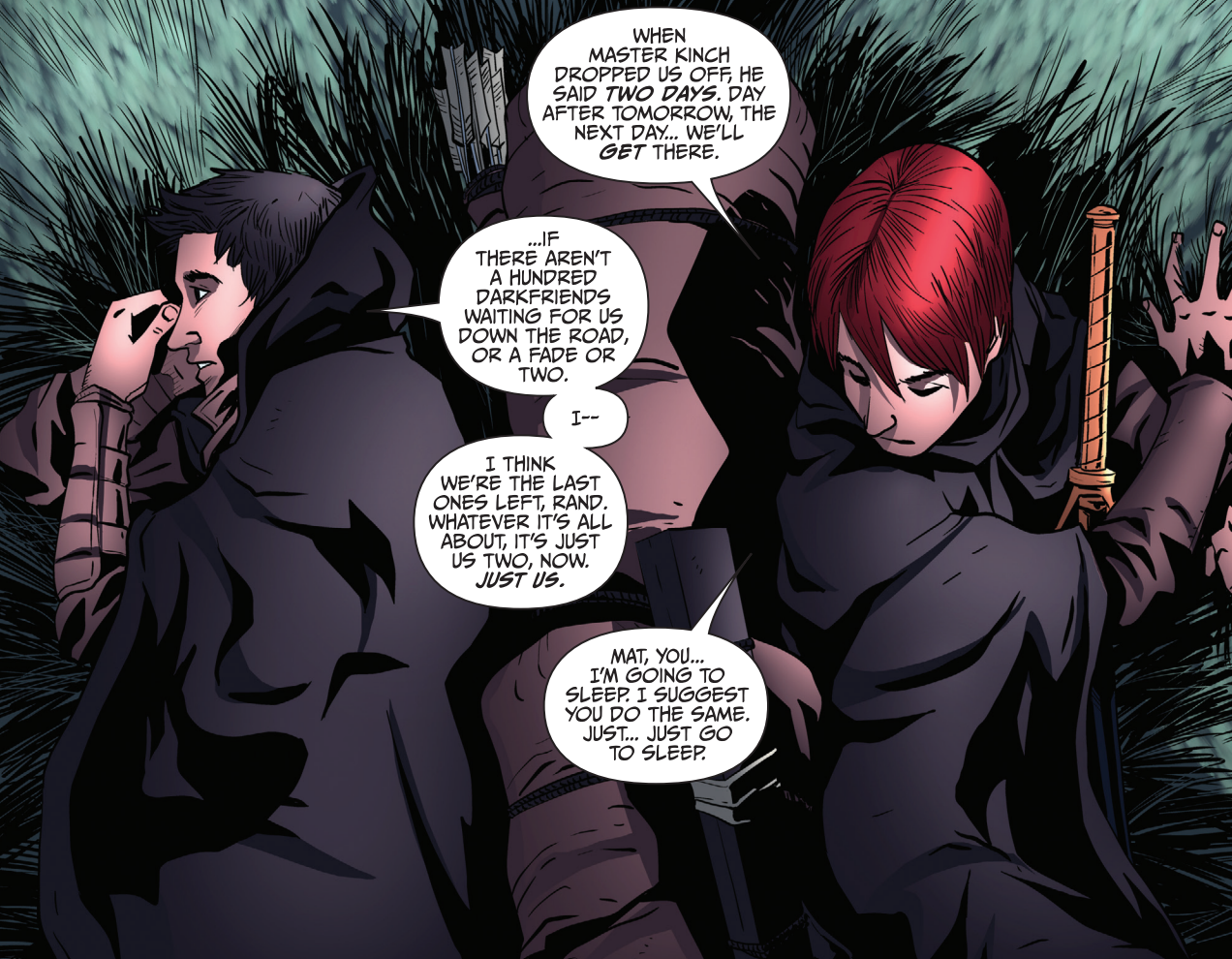


TAR
VALON?

IT'S A
LONG WAY YET,
BUT--



CAEMLYN.
DO YOU THINK
WE'LL MAKE IT TO
CAEMLYN?



WHEN
MASTER KINCH
DROPPED US OFF, HE
SAID *TWO DAYS*. DAY
AFTER TOMORROW, THE
NEXT DAY... WE'LL
GET THERE.

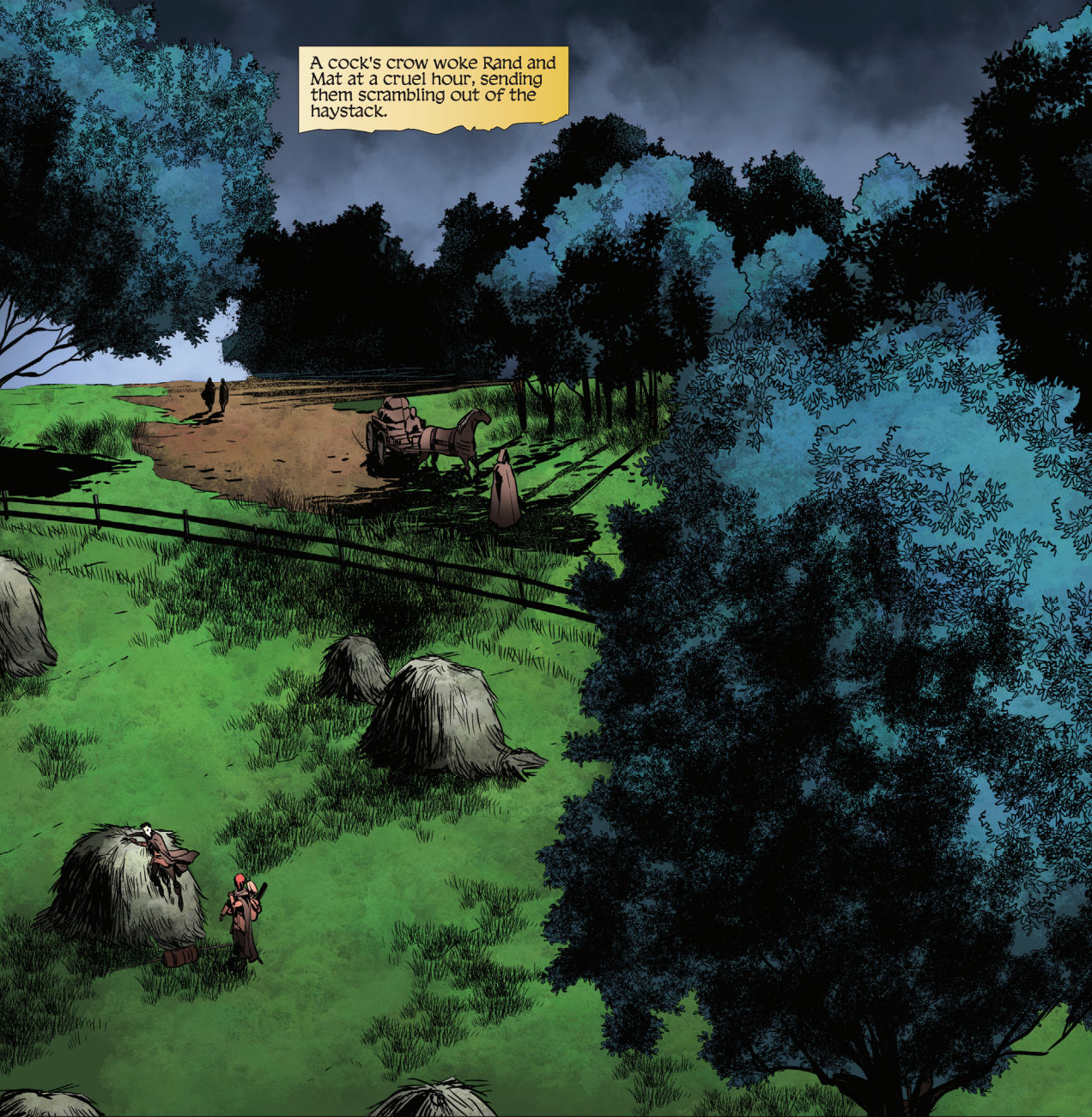
...IF
THERE AREN'T
A HUNDRED
DARKFRIENDS
WAITING FOR US
DOWN THE ROAD,
OR A FADE OR TWO.

I--

I THINK
WE'RE THE LAST
ONES LEFT, RAND.
WHATEVER IT'S ALL
ABOUT, IT'S JUST
US TWO, NOW.
JUST US.

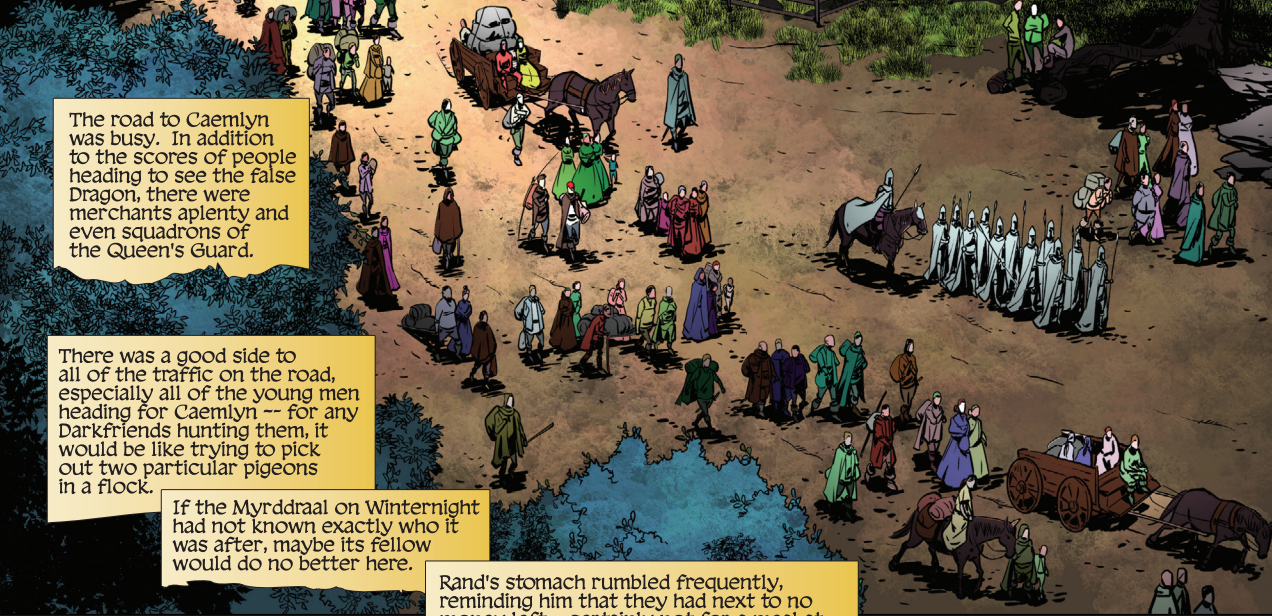
MAT, YOU...
I'M GOING TO
SLEEP. I SUGGEST
YOU DO THE SAME.
JUST... JUST GO
TO SLEEP.

A cock's crow woke Rand and Mat at a cruel hour, sending them scrambling out of the haystack.



YOU THINK
WE MIGHT GET
SOMETHING TO
EAT TODAY?

WE CAN THINK
ABOUT THAT WHEN
WE'RE ON THE
ROAD.




The road to Caemlyn was busy. In addition to the scores of people heading to see the false Dragon, there were merchants aplenty and even squadrons of the Queen's Guard.

There was a good side to all of the traffic on the road, especially all of the young men heading for Caemlyn -- for any Darkfriends hunting them, it would be like trying to pick out two particular pigeons in a flock.

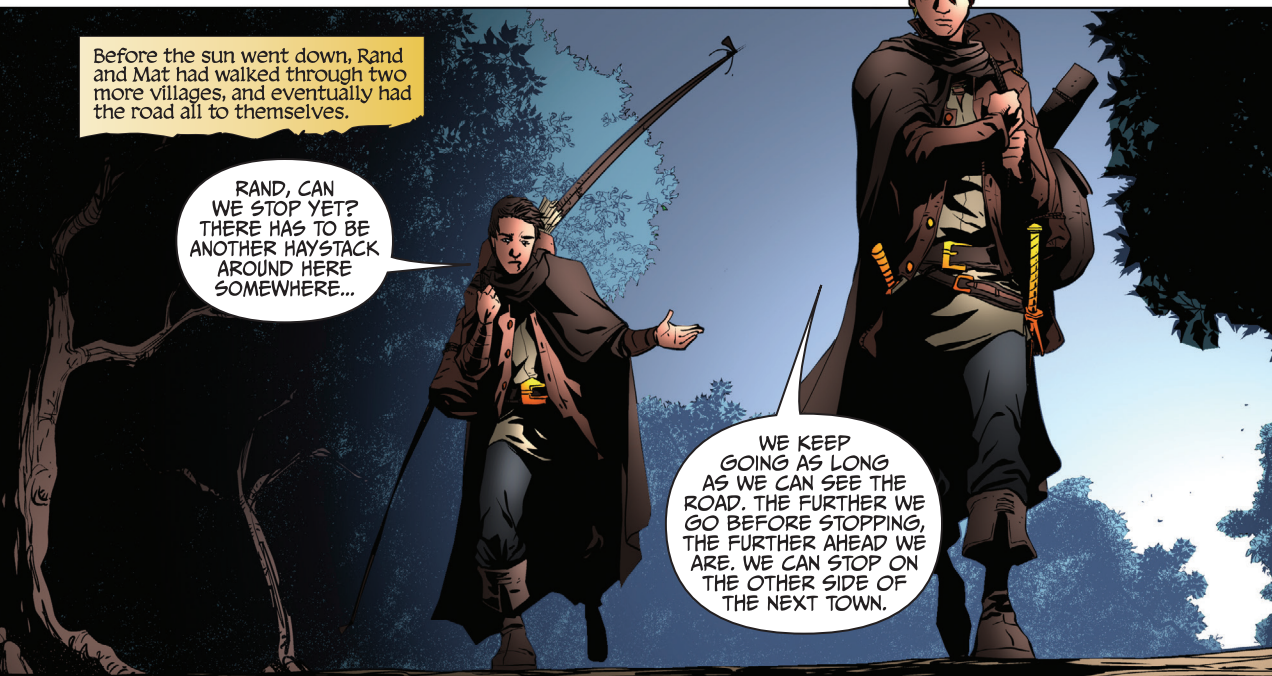
If the Myrddraal on Winternight had not known exactly who it was after, maybe its fellow would do no better here.

Rand's stomach rumbled frequently, reminding him that they had next to no money left - certainly not for a meal at the prices charged this close to Caemlyn.

He looked regretfully at a farm they were passing; a man was patrolling the edge of the property with dogs, looking like he wanted nothing more than to let them loose.



Not every farm had the dogs out, but no one was offering jobs to travelers. And with no jobs, there was no food.



Before the sun went down, Rand and Mat had walked through two more villages, and eventually had the road all to themselves.

RAND, CAN WE STOP YET? THERE HAS TO BE ANOTHER HAYSTACK AROUND HERE SOMEWHERE...

WE KEEP GOING AS LONG AS WE CAN SEE THE ROAD. THE FURTHER WE GO BEFORE STOPPING, THE FURTHER AHEAD WE ARE. WE CAN STOP ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE NEXT TOWN.

OH COME ON, CAN'T WE STOP *NOW*? OR DO YOU WANT TO FIND THE INN AND HANG OUT A SIGN FOR THE DARKFRIENDS?

...OR A FADE?

THE OTHER SIDE OF TOWN. ANOTHER MILE, THAT'S ALL.

ALL?? I'M NOT WALKING ANOTHER SPAN!

Rand's legs felt like fire, but he made himself take a step, and then another. It did not get any easier, but he kept on.


It was late enough for the streets of the village to be empty, though most houses had a light on in at least one window.

The inn in the middle of town was brightly lit, surrounded by a golden pool that pushed back the darkness. Music and laughter drifted from the building.


Two men stood at the far end of the inn, at the very edge of the light. Something about them made Rand uneasy -- he could not put his finger on why.

WHEW! FINALLY. I THOUGHT WE'D NEVER--


SHH.



Rand watched the two men talk until, eventually, the one who was wrapped in darkness turned away, and the nervous fellow started back into the light.

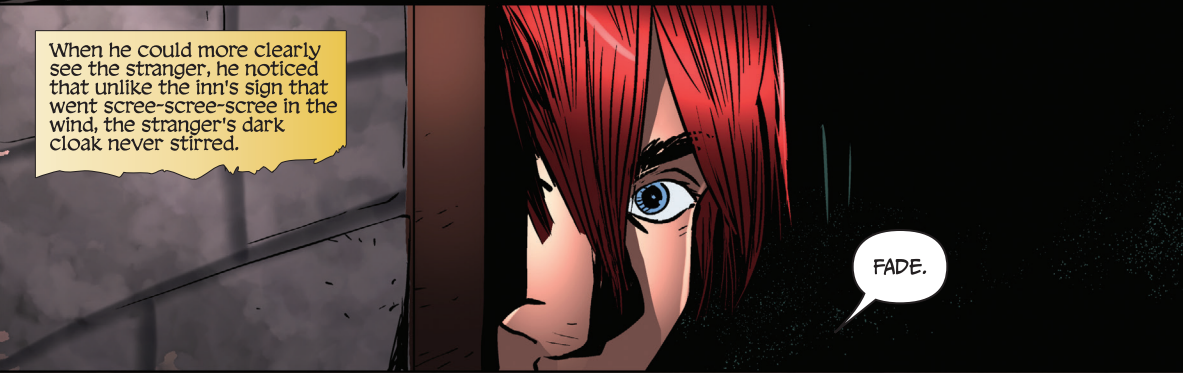


Despite the chill, Rand saw the man mopping his face with the long apron he wore, as if he were drenched in sweat.



Still prickling, Rand watched the other shape moving off in the night. He did not know why, but his uneasiness seemed to follow that one, a vague tingling in the back of his neck as if he realized something was sneaking up on him.

Rand began to think he was getting as foolish as Mat until the form slipped by the edge of the light from a window... and Rand's skin crawled.



When he could more clearly see the stranger, he noticed that unlike the inn's sign that went scree-scree-scree in the wind, the stranger's dark cloak never stirred.

FADE.



WHERE?!?
MMPH!

SHH.
SPEAK
SOFTLY.

IT'S GONE
NOW, I THINK.
I HOPE.



STRANGE
FRIENDS YOU'VE GOT,
RAIMUN HOLDWIN.
STRANGE FRIENDS IN
THE DARK FOR AN
INNKEEPER.



AND WHAT
DO YOU KNOW
BY THAT, ALMEN
BUNT?



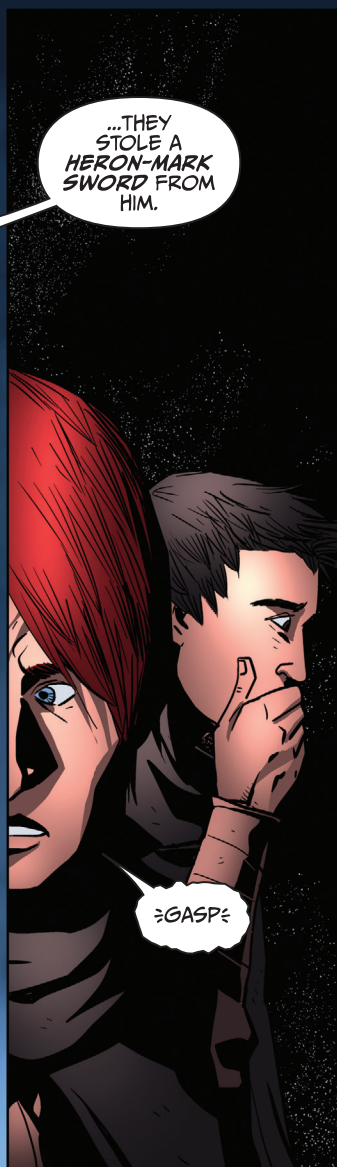
JUST WHAT I SAID,
HOLDWIN. STRANGE
FRIENDS. HE'S NOT
FROM AROUND
HERE, IS HE?

LOT OF ODD FOLK
COMING THROUGH
THE LAST FEW WEEKS.
AWFUL LOT OF
ODD FOLK.



I KNOW A LOT OF MEN; EVEN MEN FROM *CAEMLYN*. NOT LIKE YOU, COOPED UP ALONE OUT ON THAT FARM OF YOURS.

HE'S FROM FOUR KINGS. LOOKING FOR A COUPLE OF *THIEVES*. YOUNG MEN...



...THEY STOLE A *HERON-MARK SWORD* FROM HIM.

≡GASP≡



A *HERON-MARK SWORD*! NO WONDER HE WANTS IT BACK.

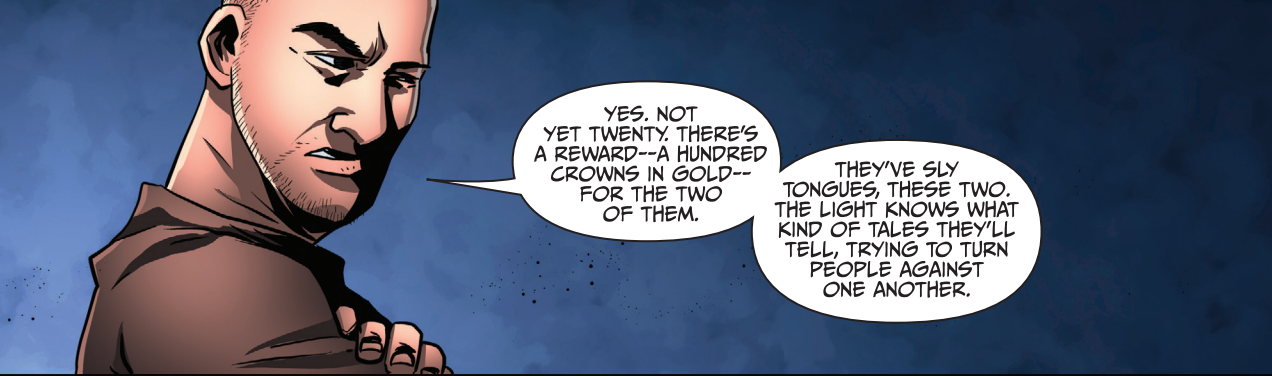
YES, AND *THEM*, TOO. MY FRIEND'S A RICH MAN, A... A *MERCHANT*, AND THEY'VE BEEN STIRRING UP TROUBLE WITH THE MEN WHO WORK FOR HIM. TELLING WILD STORIES AND GETTING PEOPLE UPSET.

THEY'RE *DARKFRIENDS*, AND FOLLOWERS OF *LOGAIN*, TOO.



DARKFRIENDS AND FOLLOWERS OF THE FALSE DRAGON? AND TELLING WILD STORIES TOO? GETTING UP TO A LOT FOR YOUNG FELLOWS.

YOU *DID* SAY THEY WERE YOUNG?

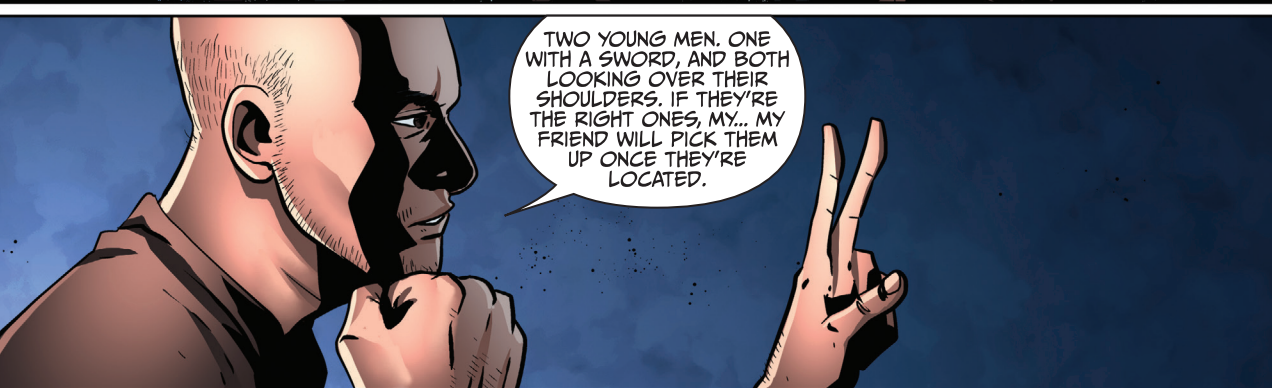


YES. NOT YET TWENTY. THERE'S A REWARD--A HUNDRED CROWNS IN GOLD--FOR THE TWO OF THEM.

THEY'VE SLY TONGUES, THESE TWO. THE LIGHT KNOWS WHAT KIND OF TALES THEY'LL TELL, TRYING TO TURN PEOPLE AGAINST ONE ANOTHER.



...AND DANGEROUS, TOO, EVEN IF THEY DON'T LOOK IT. VICIOUS. BEST YOU STAY CLEAR IF YOU THINK YOU SEE THEM.



TWO YOUNG MEN. ONE WITH A SWORD, AND BOTH LOOKING OVER THEIR SHOULDERS. IF THEY'RE THE RIGHT ONES, MY... MY FRIEND WILL PICK THEM UP ONCE THEY'RE LOCATED.



YOU SOUND ALMOST AS IF YOU KNOW THEM TO LOOK AT.



I'LL KNOW THEM WHEN I SEE THEM.

JUST DON'T TRY TO TAKE THEM YOURSELF. NO NEED FOR ANYONE TO GET HURT. COME TELL ME IF YOU SEE THEM. MY... FRIEND WILL DEAL WITH THEM.

A HUNDRED CROWNS FOR THE TWO, BUT HE WANTS THE PAIR.



I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHY I'M TELLING YOU--YOU'RE STILL FIXED ON THAT FOOL PLAN OF YOURS, I SEE.

NOT SUCH A FOOL PLAN.



THERE MIGHT NOT BE ANOTHER FALSE DRAGON TO SEE BEFORE I DIE--LIGHT SEND IT SO! AND I'M TOO OLD TO EAT SOME MERCHANT'S DUST ALL THE WAY TO CAEMLYN.

THIS WAY I'LL HAVE THE ROAD TO MYSELF, AND I'LL BE IN CAEMLYN BRIGHT AND EARLY TOMORROW.



TO YOURSELF? YOU CAN NEVER TELL WHAT MIGHT BE OUT IN THE NIGHT, ALMEN BUNT. ALL ALONE ON THE ROAD, IN THE DARK...

EVEN IF SOMEBODY HEARS YOU SCREAM, THERE'S NO ONE WILL UNBAR A DOOR TO HELP. NOT *THESE DAYS*, BUNT. NOT YOUR NEAREST NEIGHBOR.



IF THE QUEEN'S GUARDS CAN'T KEEP THE ROAD SAFE THIS CLOSE TO CAEMLYN, THEN WE'RE NONE OF US SAFE EVEN IN OUR OWN BEDS.

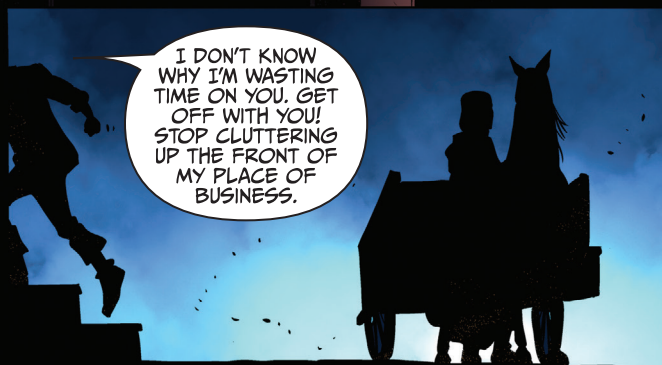
IF YOU ASK ME, ONE THING THE GUARDS COULD DO TO MAKE SURE THE ROADS ARE SAFE WOULD BE CLAP THAT FRIEND OF YOURS IN IRONS. SNEAKING AROUND IN THE DARK, AFRAID TO LET ANYBODY GET A GOOD LOOK AT HIM...

...CAN'T TELL *ME* HE'S NOT UP TO NO GOOD.



AFRAID!

YOU
OLD FOOL,
IF YOU ONLY
KNEW--



I DON'T KNOW
WHY I'M WASTING
TIME ON YOU. GET
OFF WITH YOU!
STOP CLUTTERING
UP THE FRONT OF
MY PLACE OF
BUSINESS.



HE'S GOING
TO CAEMLYN, MAT.
ARE YOU THINKING
WHAT I AM?



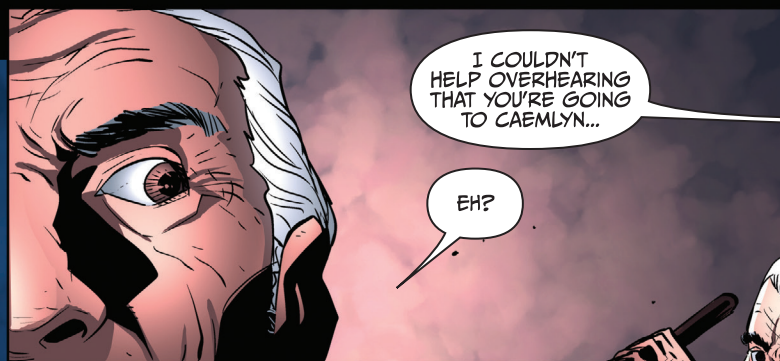
ARE YOU
CRAZY, RAND?
HE'LL RECOGNIZE
US FOR SURE!!



YOU'D
RATHER STAY
HERE? WITH
A FADE
AROUND?

HOW FAR
DO YOU THINK
WE'LL GET ON
FOOT BEFORE IT
FINDS US?

Rand tried not to think of how far they would get in a cart if it found them. He trotted up the road, carefully holding his cloak shut so the sword was hidden; the wind and cold were excuse enough for that.



I COULDN'T
HELP OVERHEARING
THAT YOU'RE GOING
TO CAEMLYN...

EH?

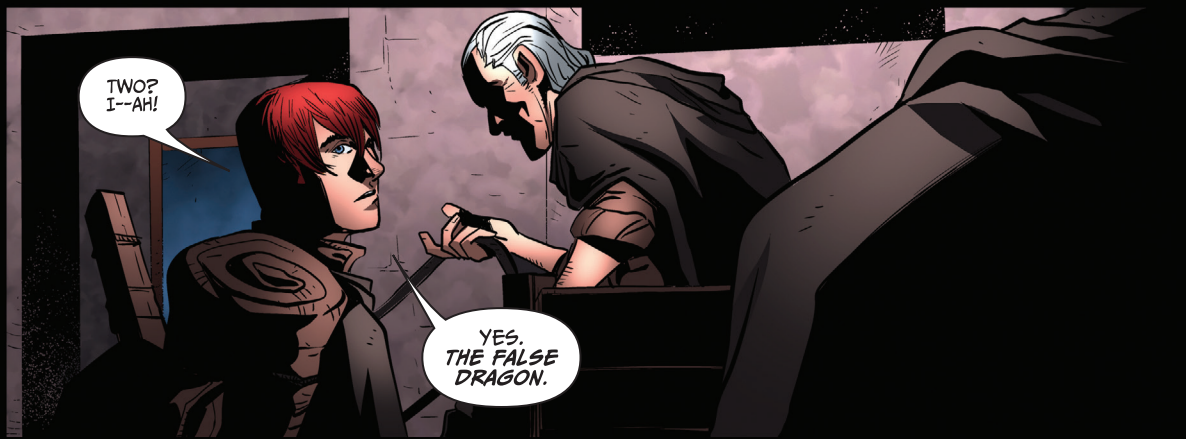


HYAH!



OH.

SO YOU TWO
ARE GOING TO
CAEMLYN. TO SEE
THE DRAGON,
EH?



TWO?
I--AH!

YES.
THE FALSE
DRAGON.



OF COURSE,
OF COURSE.

WELL IF YOU
WANT A RIDE, GET
IN. I'VE WASTED
ENOUGH TIME.

The village faded quickly into the night at the pace Bunt set.



It was all Rand could do to fight the lulling creak of the wheels. Mat clearly had the same problem, stifling more than one yawn with his fist before staring back out into the darkened countryside.



It could be out there anywhere.




SO... YOU TWO EVER BEEN TO CAEMLYN BEFORE?






HEH.

DON'T SUPPOSE
YOU HAVE. WELL, WAIT
TILL YOU SEE IT. THE
GREATEST CITY IN
THE WORLD!



OH, I'VE HEARD ALL
ABOUT ILLIAN AND EBOU
DAR AND TEAR AND ALL--THERE'S
ALWAYS SOME FOOL THINKS A THING
IS BIGGER AND BETTER JUST
BECAUSE IT'S OFF SOMEWHERE
OVER THE HORIZON--BUT FOR MY
MONEY, CAEMLYN IS THE
GRANDEST
THERE IS.




COULDN'T BE
GRANDER. NO, IT
COULDN'T.

UNLESS
MAYBE QUEEN
MORGASE, THE LIGHT
ILLUMINATE HER, GOT
RID OF THAT WITCH
FROM TAR VALON.



YOU
MEAN AN AES
SEDAI?



WHAT *ELSE*
WOULD I MEAN?
SITTING THERE IN
THE PALACE LIKE
A *SPIDER*.

I'M A GOOD
QUEEN'S MAN--NEVER
SAY I'M NOT--BUT IT JUST
ISN'T RIGHT. I'M NOT ONE
OF THOSE SAYING
ELAIDA'S GOT TOO MUCH
INFLUENCE OVER THE
QUEEN. NOT ME.


AND AS FOR
THE FOOLS WHO
CLAIM ELAIDA'S REALLY
THE QUEEN IN ALL
BUT NAME...

PULL!

THAT
FOR *THEM*.
MORGASE IS NO
PUPPET TO DANCE
FOR ANY TAR
VALON WITCH.


Another Aes Sedai.

When Moiraine got to Caemlyn,
she might well go to a sister
Aes Sedai. If the worst
happened, this *Elaida* might
help them reach Tar Valon.



I'M A GOOD
QUEEN'S MAN,
LIKE I SAID, BUT EVEN
FOOLS SAY SOME-
THING WORTHWHILE
NOW AND AGAIN.

EVEN A
BLIND PIG
FINDS AN ACORN
SOMETIMES.



THERE'S GOT TO
BE SOME CHANGES.
THIS *WEATHER*, THE
CROPS FAILING, COWS
DRYING UP, CALVES AND
LAMBS BORN DEAD,
OR WITH TWO
HEADS.

BLOODY
RAVENS DON'T
EVEN WAIT FOR
THINGS TO
DIE.


PEOPLE ARE
SCARED. THEY WANT
SOMEBODY TO *BLAME*.
DRAGON'S FANG TURNING
UP ON PEOPLE'S DOORS.
THINGS CREEPING ABOUT
IN THE MIDDLE OF THE
NIGHT. BARNS GETTING
BURNED.

FELLOWS
AROUND LIKE
THAT *FRIEND*
OF HOLDWIN,
SCARING
PEOPLE.



THE
QUEEN'S GOT
TO DO SOMETHING
BEFORE IT'S TOO
LATE. YOU SEE
THAT, DON'T
YOU?

MM.




From what Almen Bunt was saying, Rand thought it sounded as if he and Mat had been even luckier than he'd first thought to find this old man and his cart.

They might not have gotten further than the last village if they'd waited for daylight.



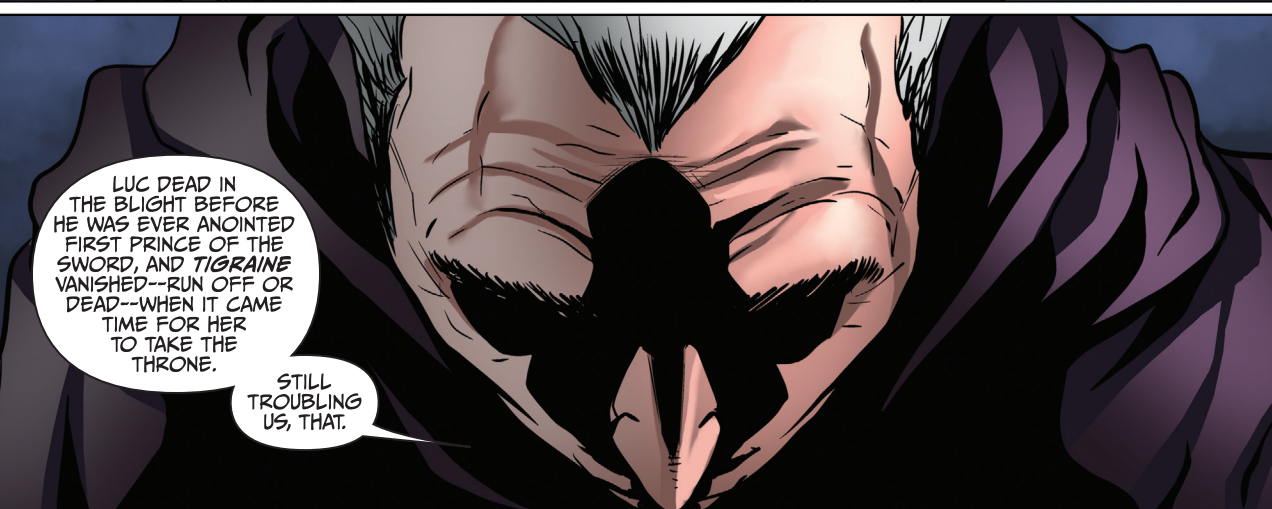
RIGHT.
I'M A GOOD QUEEN'S
MAN, AND I'LL STAND
AGAINST ANY WHO TRY
TO HARM HER, BUT
I'M RIGHT.

YOU TAKE THE
LADY ELAYNE AND
THE LORD GAWYN, NOW.
THERE'S A CHANGE
WOULDN'T HARM ANYTHING,
AND MIGHT DO SOME
GOOD.



SURE, I KNOW
WE'VE ALWAYS
DONE IT THAT WAY
IN ANDOR. SEND THE
DAUGHTER-HEIR OFF TO
TAR VALON TO STUDY WITH
THE AES SEDAI, AND THE
ELDEST SON OFF TO
STUDY WITH THE
WARDERS.

I BELIEVE IN
TRADITION, I DO,
BUT LOOK WHAT
IT GOT US LAST
TIME.



LUC DEAD IN
THE BLIGHT BEFORE
HE WAS EVER ANOINTED
FIRST PRINCE OF THE
SWORD, AND *TIGRAINE*
VANISHED--RUN OFF OR
DEAD--WHEN IT CAME
TIME FOR HER
TO TAKE THE
THRONE.

STILL
TROUBLING
US, THAT.

THERE'S SOME SAYING SHE'S STILL ALIVE, YOU KNOW, THAT MORGASE ISN'T THE RIGHTFUL QUEEN. BLOODY FOOLS.

I REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED. REMEMBER LIKE IT WAS YESTERDAY...


Rand fought the sleep his body cried out for, but the rhythmic creak and sway of the cart lulled him and he floated off on the drone of Bunt's voice.

Rand dreamed of Tam. They were at the big oak table in the farmhouse, drinking tea while Tam told him about Prince-Consorts, and Daughter-Heirs, and the Dragonwall, and black-veiled Aielmen.

Suddenly, Rand was in the Westwood, pulling the makeshift litter through the moon-bright night.

When he looked over his shoulder, it was Thom on the litter, not his father.

THE QUEEN IS WED TO THE LAND, BUT THE DRAGON, THE DRAGON IS ONE WITH THE LAND, AND THE LAND IS ONE WITH THE DRAGON.



Further back, Rand saw a Fade coming, black cloak undisturbed by the wind, horse ghosting silently through the trees.

The Fade pulled on a fistful of tethers as it rode...

Each tether ran back to the bound wrists of one of those who ran behind the soundless hooves their faces blank with despair.

Mat, Perrin, and Egwene.

NOT HER! THE LIGHT BLAST YOU, IT'S ME YOU WANT, NOT HER!

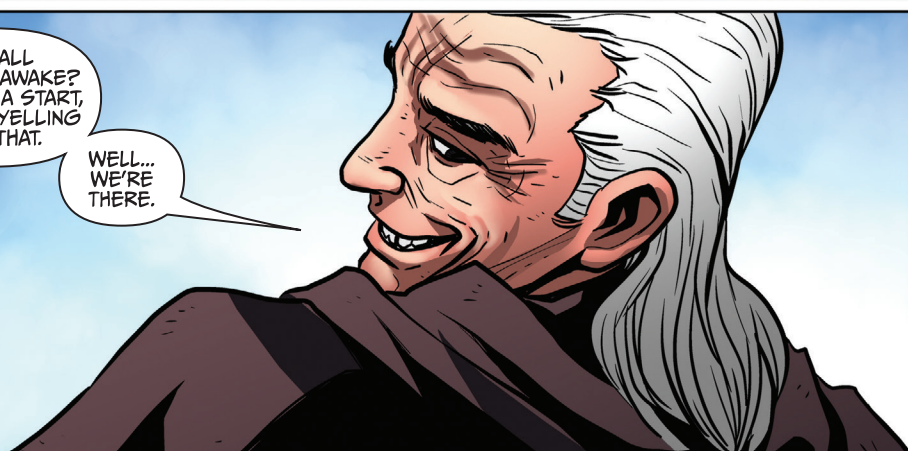
The Halfman gestured, and flames consumed Egwene, flesh crisping to ash and crumbling.

THE DRAGON IS ONE WITH THE LAND, AND THE LAND IS ONE WITH THE DRAGON.



YOU ALL
THE WAY AWAKE?
GAVE ME A START,
YOU DID, YELLING
LIKE THAT.

WELL...
WE'RE
THERE.





CAEMLYN,
THE GRANDEST
CITY IN THE
WORLD!

To be continued...