

DYNAMITE
32

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



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

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the EYE of the WORLD

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It had been some time now since Moiraine and Lan had taken Padan Fain away for questioning, and Rand was driving himself crazy with curiosity.

What was Fain telling Moiraine? What did he know? Did he know what the Dark One wanted? Or which of them he was truly after? Rand could think of nothing else, and from the looks of Mat and Perrin, they couldn't either.

Loial was at peace studying the stonework of the room, tracing the textures with his fingers.



Lord Agelmar was talking quietly with Nynaeve and Egwene. Agelmar was a good host, adept at making people forget their troubles; several of his stories had Egwene in giggles - and whatever story he had just completed made Nynaeve throw her head back and positively roar with laughter.



BWAAAH
HAH HA
HAA!

Rand jumped at the unexpected sound, and he wasn't the only one; the loud crash of Mat falling out of his leaning chair joined Nynaeve's peals of laughter seconds after they had begun.



BLOOD AND
ASHES! WHAT'S
TAKING HER SO
LONG?

The Lord of Fal Dara looked at Mat disapprovingly--his gaze took in Rand and Perrin without any improvement--but before he could speak any of the thoughts which may have been crossing his mind, Egwene regained his attention...

MY LORD, I THOUGHT LAN WAS A WARDER, BUT YOU CALL HIM DAI SHAN, AND TALK ABOUT A GOLDEN CRANE BANNER, AND SO HAVE OTHER MEN SINCE WE GOT HERE.

SOMETIMES YOU SOUND ALMOST AS IF HE'S A KING.

I REMEMBER ONCE MOIRAIINE CALLED HIM THE LAST LORD OF THE SEVEN TOWERS. WHO IS HE?

LORD OF THE SEVEN TOWERS--AN ANCIENT TITLE, LADY EGWENE. NOT EVEN THE HIGH LORDS OF TEAR HAVE OLDER, THOUGH THE QUEEN OF ANDOR COMES CLOSE.


HE WILL NOT SPEAK OF IT, YET THE STORY IS WELL KNOWN ALONG THE BORDER. HE IS A KING, OR *SHOULD* HAVE BEEN: AL'LAN MANDRAGORAN, LORD OF THE SEVEN TOWERS, LORD OF THE LAKES, CROWNLESS KING OF THE MALKIERI.

WE OF SHIENAR CALL OURSELVES BORDERMEN, BUT FEWER THAN FIFTY YEARS AGO, SHIENAR WAS NOT TRULY OF THE BORDERLANDS. NORTH OF US, AND OF ARAFEL, WAS MALKIER.

THE LANCES OF SHIENAR RODE NORTH, BUT IT WAS MALKIER THAT HELD BACK THE BLIGHT. MALKIER. PEACE FAVOR HER MEMORY, AND THE LIGHT ILLUMINE HER NAME.

LAN IS FROM MALKIER.

YES, LADY EGWENE. HE IS THE SON OF AL'AKIR MANDRAGORAN, LAST CROWNED KING OF THE MALKIERI.



"HOW DID HE BECOME AS HE IS? THE BEGINNING, PERHAPS, WAS LAIN, THE KING'S BROTHER."

"ON A DARE, LAIN MANDRAGORAN LED HIS LANCES THROUGH THE BLIGHT TO THE BLASTED LANDS, PERHAPS TO SHAYOL GHUL ITSELF."

"IT WAS BREYAN, LAIN'S WIFE, WHO HAD MADE THE DARE. THOUGH LAIN AND AL'AKIR WERE AS CLOSE AS BROTHERS COULD BE EVEN AFTER THE ROYAL 'AL' WAS ADDED TO AKIR'S NAME, BREYAN WAS WRACKED WITH JEALOUSY THAT HER HUSBAND WAS NOT THE ONE RAISED TO THE THRONE."

"LAIN WAS ACCLAIMED FOR HIS DEEDS, AND RIGHTFULLY SO, BUT NOT EVEN HE COULD OUTSHINE AL'AKIR."

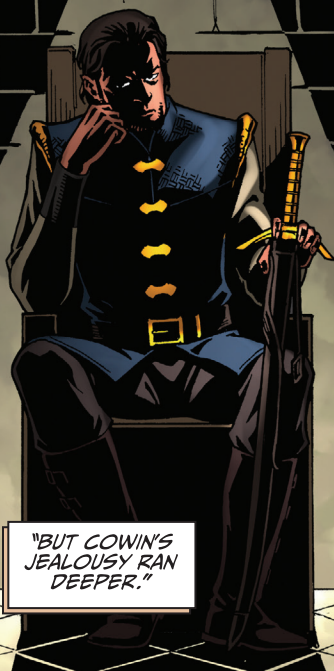
LAIN DIED IN THE BLASTED LANDS WITH MOST OF THOSE WHO FOLLOWED HIM. MEN MALKIER COULD ILL AFFORD TO LOSE, AND BREYAN BLAMED THE KING, SAYING THAT SHAYOL GHUL ITSELF WOULD HAVE FALLEN IF AL'AKIR HAD LED THE REST OF THE MALKIERI NORTH WITH HER HUSBAND."

"FOR REVENGE, BREYAN PLOTTED WITH COWIN GEMALLAN, CALLED COWIN FAIRHEART, TO SEIZE THE THRONE FOR HER SON, ISAM."

"COWIN AND BREYAN MOVED SOLDIERS BACK FROM THE BLIGHT TO SEIZE THE SEVEN TOWERS, STRIPPING THE BORDERFORTS TO BARE GARRISONS."



"FAIRHEART WAS A HERO ALMOST AS WELL LOVED AS AL'AKIR HIMSELF, BUT WHEN THE GREAT LORDS HAD CAST THE RODS FOR KING, ONLY TWO SEPARATED HIM FROM AKIR, AND HE NEVER FORGOT THAT TWO MEN LAYING A DIFFERENT COLOR ON THE CROWNING STONE WOULD HAVE SET HIM ON THE THRONE INSTEAD."



"BUT COWIN'S JEALOUSY RAN DEEPER."

"FAIRHEART THE HERO, WHOSE EXPLOITS IN THE BLIGHT WERE SUNG THROUGHOUT THE BORDERLANDS..."



"...WAS A DARKFRIEND."

"WITH THE BORDERFORTS WEAKENED, TROLLOCS POURED INTO MALKIER LIKE A FLOOD."

"KING AL'AKIR AND LAIN TOGETHER MIGHT HAVE RALLIED THE LAND; THEY HAD DONE SO BEFORE. BUT LAIN'S DOOM IN THE BLASTED LANDS HAD SHAKEN THE PEOPLE, AND THE TROLLOC INVASION BROKE MEN'S SPIRIT AND THEIR WILL TO RESIST."




"OVERWHELMING NUMBERS PUSHED THE MALKIERI BACK INTO THE HEARTLAND."



"BREYAN FLED WITH HER INFANT SON ISAM, AND WAS RUN DOWN BY TROLLOCS AS SHE RODE SOUTH WITH HIM."

"NO ONE KNOWS THEIR FATE OF A CERTAINTY, BUT IT CAN BE GUESSED. I CAN ONLY FIND PITY FOR THE BOY."



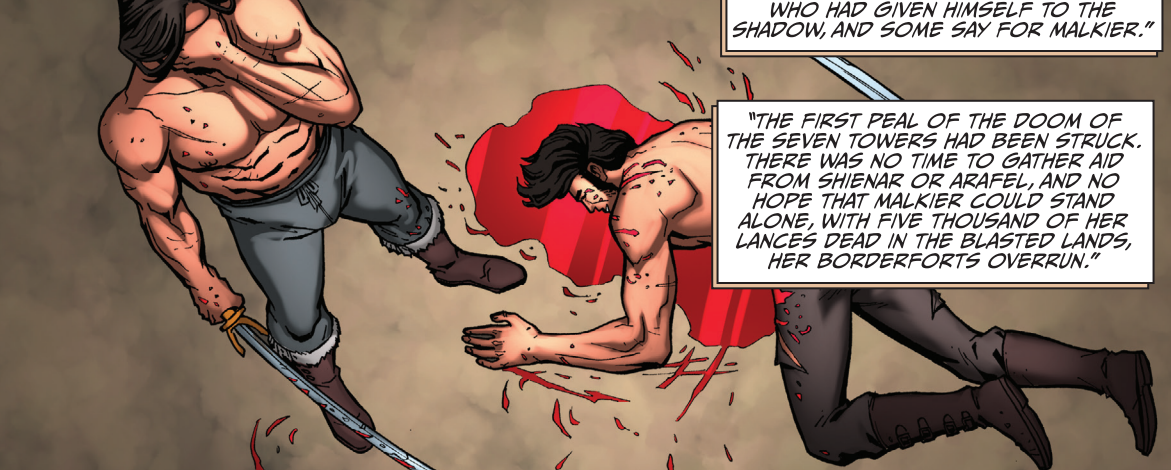
"WHEN COWIN FAIRHEART'S TREACHERY WAS REVEALED AND HE WAS TAKEN BY YOUNG JAIN CHARIN--ALREADY CALLED JAIN FARSTRIDER--TO THE SEVEN TOWERS IN CHAINS, THE GREAT LORDS CALLED FOR HIS HEAD ON A PIKE."

"BUT BECAUSE HE HAD BEEN SECOND ONLY TO AL'AKIR AND LAIN IN THE HEARTS OF THE PEOPLE, THE KING FACED HIM IN SINGLE COMBAT--"

"--AND SLEW HIM."



"AL'AKIR WEPT WHEN HE KILLED COWIN. SOME SAY HE WEPT FOR A FRIEND WHO HAD GIVEN HIMSELF TO THE SHADOW, AND SOME SAY FOR MALKIER."



"THE FIRST PEAL OF THE DOOM OF THE SEVEN TOWERS HAD BEEN STRUCK. THERE WAS NO TIME TO GATHER AID FROM SHIENAR OR ARAFEL, AND NO HOPE THAT MALKIER COULD STAND ALONE, WITH FIVE THOUSAND OF HER LANCES DEAD IN THE BLASTED LANDS, HER BORDERFORTS OVERRUN."

"AL'AKIR AND HIS QUEEN, EL'LEANNA, HAD LAN BROUGHT TO THEM IN HIS CRADLE. INTO HIS HANDS THEY PLACED THE SWORD OF MALKIERI KINGS, THE SWORD HE WEARS TODAY."

"A WEAPON MADE BY AES SEDAI DURING THE WAR OF POWER, THE WAR OF THE SHADOW THAT BROUGHT DOWN THE AGE OF LEGENDS."

"THEY ANOINTED HIS HEAD WITH OIL, NAMING HIM DAI SHAN, A DIADEMED BATTLE LORD, AND CONSECRATED HIM AS THE NEXT KING OF THE MALKIERI, AND IN HIS NAME THEY SWORE THE ANCIENT OATH OF MALKIERI KINGS AND QUEENS."

...TO STAND AGAINST THE SHADOW SO LONG AS IRON IS HARD AND STONE ABIDES. TO DEFEND THE MALKIERI WHILE ONE DROP OF BLOOD REMAINS. TO AVENGE WHAT CANNOT BE DEFENDED.

"EL'LEANNA PLACED A LOCKET AROUND HIS NECK, FOR REMEMBRANCE, AND THE INFANT, WRAPPED IN SWADDLING CLOTHES BY THE QUEEN'S OWN HAND, WAS GIVEN OVER TO TWENTY CHOSEN FROM THE KING'S BODYGUARD."

"THE BEST SWORDSMEN, THE MOST DEADLY FIGHTERS. THEIR COMMAND: TO CARRY THE CHILD TO FAL MORAN."

"ONLY FIVE OF THE BODYGUARDS REACHED FAL MORAN ALIVE, EVERY MAN WOUNDED, BUT THEY HAD THE CHILD UNHARMED, AND FROM THE CRADLE, THEY TAUGHT HIM ALL THEY KNEW."



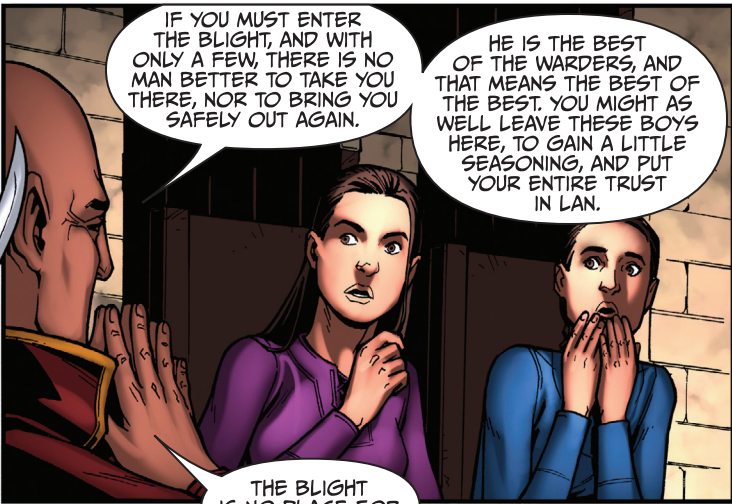
"THEN DID AL'AKIR AND EL'LEANNA
LEAD THE MALKIERI OUT TO FACE
THE SHADOW ONE LAST TIME."

"THERE THEY DIED, AT HEROT'S
CROSSING, AND THE MALKIERI DIED, AND
THE SEVEN TOWERS WERE BROKEN."

"SHIENAR, AND ARAFEL, AND KANDOR MET THE
HALFMEN AND THE TROLLOCS AT THE STAIR OF
JEHAAN AND THREW THEM BACK, BUT NOT AS FAR
AS THEY HAD BEEN. MOST OF MALKIER REMAINED
IN TROLLOC HANDS AND YEAR BY YEAR, MILE BY
MILE, THE BLIGHT HAS SWALLOWED IT."

"BUT LAN SURVIVED. HE LEARNED
WEAPONS AS OTHER CHILDREN LEARN
TOYS, AND THE BLIGHT AS OTHER
CHILDREN THEIR MOTHER'S GARDEN.
THE OATH SWORN OVER HIS CRADLE IS
GRAVEN IN HIS MIND. THERE IS NOTHING
LEFT TO DEFEND, BUT HE CAN AVENGE."


"HE DENIES HIS TITLES, YET IN THE
BORDERLANDS HE IS CALLED THE
UNCROWNED, AND IF HE EVER RAISED
THE GOLDEN CRANE OF MALKIER, AN
ARMY WOULD COME TO FOLLOW."



IF YOU MUST ENTER
THE BLIGHT, AND WITH
ONLY A FEW, THERE IS NO
MAN BETTER TO TAKE YOU
THERE, NOR TO BRING YOU
SAFELY OUT AGAIN.

HE IS THE BEST
OF THE WARDERS, AND
THAT MEANS THE BEST OF
THE BEST. YOU MIGHT AS
WELL LEAVE THESE BOYS
HERE, TO GAIN A LITTLE
SEASONING, AND PUT
YOUR ENTIRE TRUST
IN LAN.

THE BLIGHT
IS NO PLACE FOR
UNTIED BOYS.



Mat opened his mouth, but a look
from Rand silenced him before he
could speak. Mat would have pouted,
but Moiraine appeared in the doorway
and grabbed the attention of the
room, despite her silent entrance.



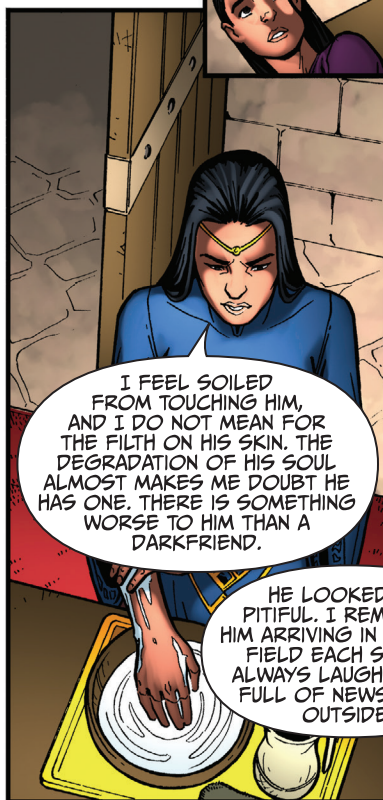
WHAT DID HE SAY?

COUNTRY OAF.

DID YOU LEARN ANYTHING, AES SEDAI, OR IS HE SIMPLY A MADMAN?

HE IS MAD, OR CLOSE TO IT. BUT THERE IS **NOTHING** SIMPLE ABOUT PADAN FAIN.

I SAID HE WAS WORSE THAN VILE, BUT I DID NOT COME CLOSE. I DO NOT BELIEVE I HAVE EVER MET SOMEONE SO ABJECT AND DEBASED, YET AT THE SAME TIME SO FOUL.

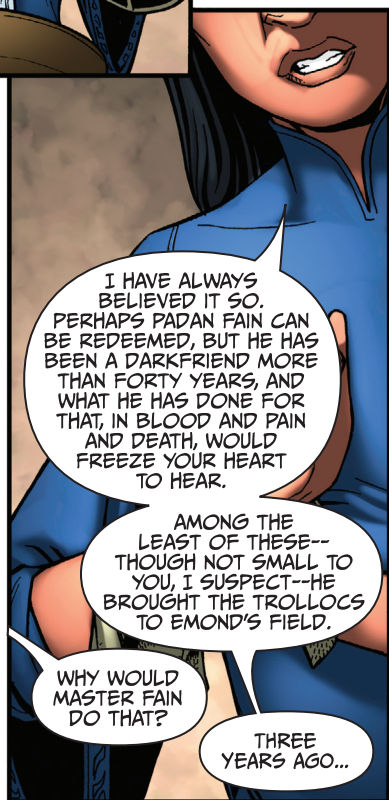


I FEEL SOILED FROM TOUCHING HIM, AND I DO NOT MEAN FOR THE FILTH ON HIS SKIN. THE DEGRADATION OF HIS SOUL ALMOST MAKES ME DOUBT HE HAS ONE. THERE IS SOMETHING WORSE TO HIM THAN A DARKFRIEND.

HE LOOKED SO PITIFUL. I REMEMBER HIM ARRIVING IN EMOND'S FIELD EACH SPRING, ALWAYS LAUGHING AND FULL OF NEWS FROM OUTSIDE.



SURELY THERE'S SOME HOPE FOR HIM? "NO MAN CAN STAND IN THE SHADOW SO LONG THAT HE CANNOT FIND THE LIGHT AGAIN."

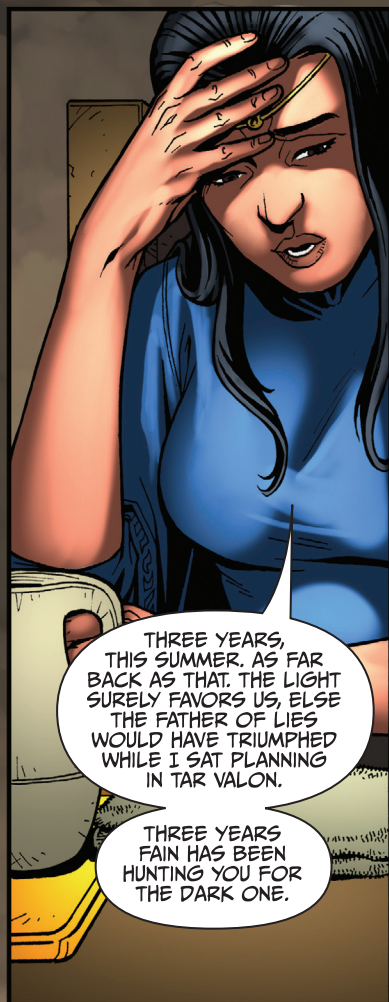


I HAVE ALWAYS BELIEVED IT SO. PERHAPS PADAN FAIN CAN BE REDEEMED, BUT HE HAS BEEN A DARKFRIEND MORE THAN FORTY YEARS, AND WHAT HE HAS DONE FOR THAT, IN BLOOD AND PAIN AND DEATH, WOULD FREEZE YOUR HEART TO HEAR.

AMONG THE LEAST OF THESE-- THOUGH NOT SMALL TO YOU, I SUSPECT--HE BROUGHT THE TROLLOCS TO EMOND'S FIELD.

WHY WOULD MASTER FAIN DO THAT?

THREE YEARS AGO...



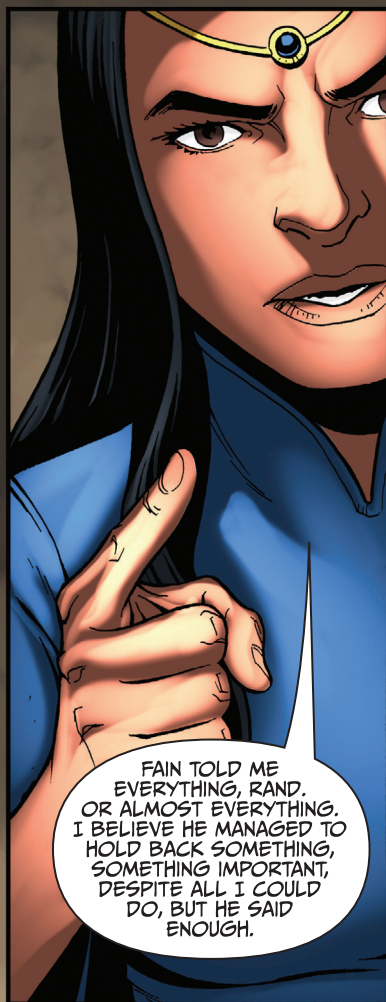
THREE YEARS, THIS SUMMER. AS FAR BACK AS THAT. THE LIGHT SURELY FAVORS US, ELSE THE FATHER OF LIES WOULD HAVE TRIUMPHED WHILE I SAT PLANNING IN TAR VALON.

THREE YEARS FAIN HAS BEEN HUNTING YOU FOR THE DARK ONE.



THAT'S CRAZY!

HE'S COME INTO THE TWO RIVERS EVERY SPRING AS REGULAR AS A CLOCK. THREE YEARS? WE'VE BEEN RIGHT THERE IN FRONT OF HIM, AND HE NEVER LOOKED AT ANY OF US TWICE BEFORE LAST YEAR!



FAIN TOLD ME EVERYTHING, RAND. OR ALMOST EVERYTHING. I BELIEVE HE MANAGED TO HOLD BACK SOMETHING, SOMETHING IMPORTANT, DESPITE ALL I COULD DO, BUT HE SAID ENOUGH.

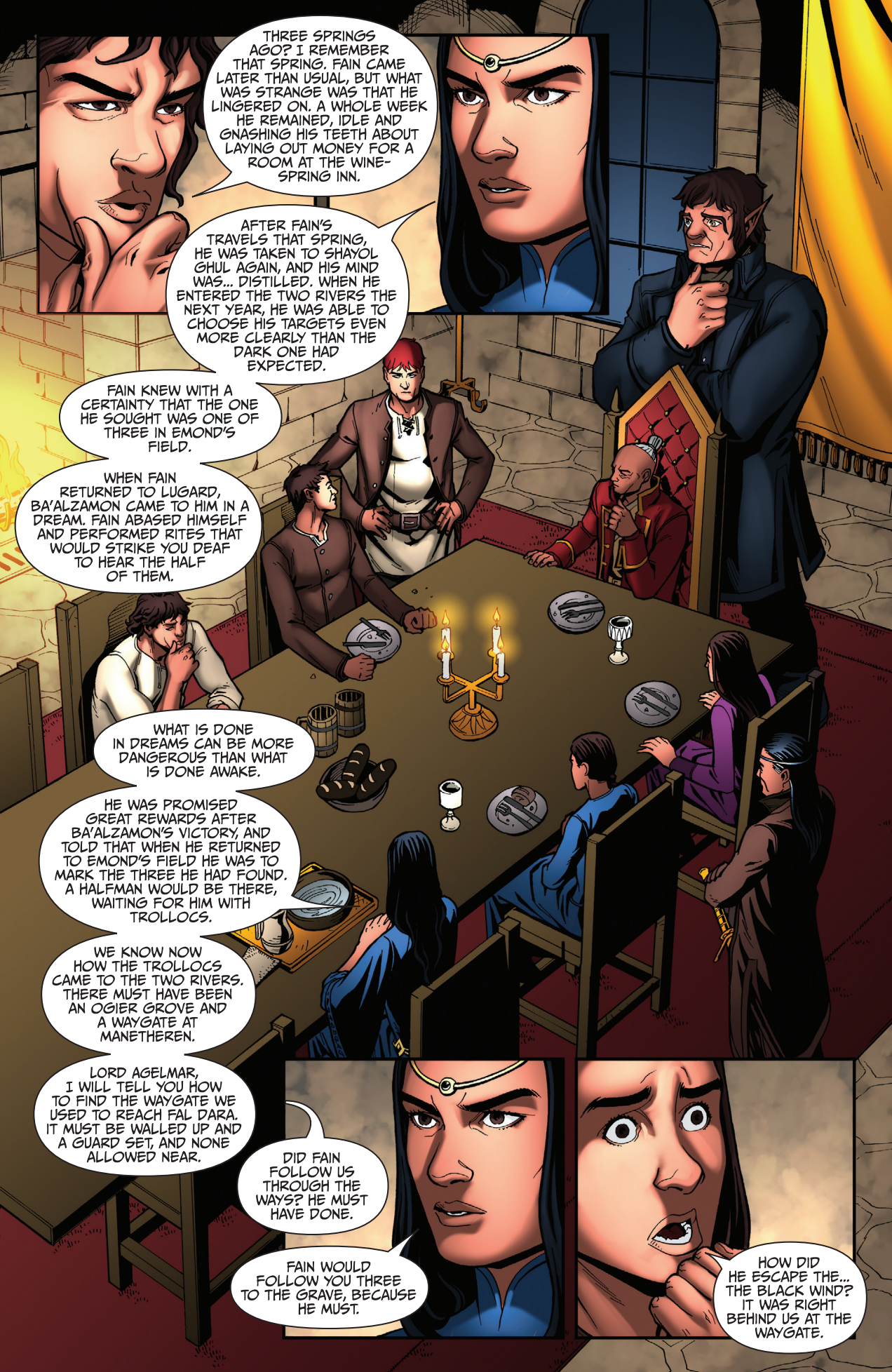


THREE YEARS AGO, A HALFMAN CAME FOR HIM. FAIN WAS TERRIFIED, OF COURSE, BUT IT IS CONSIDERED A GREAT HONOR AMONG DARKFRIENDS TO BE SO SUMMONED.

FAIN BELIEVED HE HAD BEEN CHOSEN FOR GREAT THINGS, AND HE HAD, THOUGH NOT IN THE MANNER HE BELIEVED. HE WAS BROUGHT TO SHAYOL GHUL, WHERE HE MET A MAN WITH EYES OF FIRE... A MAN WHO NAMED HIMSELF BA'ALZAMON.

THE LIGHT PROTECT US.

FAIN SAID HE HAS BEEN MADE THE DARK ONE'S HOUND, AND IN A WAY, HE IS RIGHT. THE FATHER OF LIES SET FAIN TO HUNT, FIRST CHANGING HIM SO HE COULD CARRY OUT THAT HUNT. IT IS THE THINGS DONE TO BRING ABOUT THOSE CHANGES THAT FAIN FEARS TO REMEMBER; HE HATES HIS MASTER FOR THEM AS MUCH AS HE FEARS HIM.



THREE SPRINGS AGO? I REMEMBER THAT SPRING. FAIN CAME LATER THAN USUAL, BUT WHAT WAS STRANGE WAS THAT HE LINGERED ON. A WHOLE WEEK HE REMAINED, IDLE AND GNASHING HIS TEETH ABOUT LAYING OUT MONEY FOR A ROOM AT THE WINE-SPRING INN.

AFTER FAIN'S TRAVELS THAT SPRING, HE WAS TAKEN TO SHAYOL GHUL AGAIN, AND HIS MIND WAS... DISTILLED. WHEN HE ENTERED THE TWO RIVERS THE NEXT YEAR, HE WAS ABLE TO CHOOSE HIS TARGETS EVEN MORE CLEARLY THAN THE DARK ONE HAD EXPECTED.

FAIN KNEW WITH A CERTAINTY THAT THE ONE HE SOUGHT WAS ONE OF THREE IN EMOND'S FIELD.

WHEN FAIN RETURNED TO LUGARD, BA'ALZAMON CAME TO HIM IN A DREAM. FAIN ABASED HIMSELF AND PERFORMED RITES THAT WOULD STRIKE YOU DEAF TO HEAR THE HALF OF THEM.

WHAT IS DONE IN DREAMS CAN BE MORE DANGEROUS THAN WHAT IS DONE AWAKE.

HE WAS PROMISED GREAT REWARDS AFTER BA'ALZAMON'S VICTORY, AND TOLD THAT WHEN HE RETURNED TO EMOND'S FIELD HE WAS TO MARK THE THREE HE HAD FOUND. A HALFMAN WOULD BE THERE, WAITING FOR HIM WITH TROLLOCS.

WE KNOW NOW HOW THE TROLLOCS CAME TO THE TWO RIVERS. THERE MUST HAVE BEEN AN OGIER GROVE AND A WAYGATE AT MANETHEREN.

LORD AGELMAR, I WILL TELL YOU HOW TO FIND THE WAYGATE WE USED TO REACH FAL DARA. IT MUST BE WALLED UP AND A GUARD SET, AND NONE ALLOWED NEAR.

DID FAIN FOLLOW US THROUGH THE WAYS? HE MUST HAVE DONE.

FAIN WOULD FOLLOW YOU THREE TO THE GRAVE, BECAUSE HE MUST.

HOW DID HE ESCAPE THE... THE BLACK WIND? IT WAS RIGHT BEHIND US AT THE WAYGATE.



HE
ESCAPED,
AND HE DID
NOT.

THE BLACK WIND
CAUGHT HIM--AND HE
CLAIMED TO UNDERSTAND THE
VOICES. SOME GREETED HIM AS
LIKE TO THEM; OTHERS FEARED
HIM. NO SOONER DID THE WIND
ENVELOP FAIN THAN
IT FLED.

THERE IS MUCH
YET HIDDEN ABOUT
PADAN FAIN. MUCH I WOULD
LIKE TO LEARN... WHEN I
MENTIONED THE EYE OF THE
WORLD, HE CLAMPED HIS JAWS
SHUT, BUT I FELT SOMETHING
KNOWING BEHIND THE SILENCE.
IF ONLY I HAD THE TIME...
BUT WE CANNOT
WAIT.

AES SEDAI, WITH
STAKES THIS HIGH I BEG
YOU TO MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO
SEE THAT YOU CAN WIN. LEAVE THESE
YOUNG MEN HERE. I SWEAR TO YOU I
CAN FIND THREE EXPERIENCED MEN
WITH NO THOUGHT OF GLORY IN THEIR
HEADS TO REPLACE THEM, GOOD
SWORDSMEN WHO ARE ALMOST
AS HANDY IN THE BLIGHT
AS LAN.

IF WE DID NOT
NEED AT LEAST ONE GOOD
NIGHT'S SLEEP BEFORE FACING
THE BLIGHT, I WOULD RIDE WITHIN
THE HOUR, THOUGH IT MEANT THE
RISK OF FACING A TROLLOC
RAID IN THE DARK.

THEN LET US
GO TO OUR ROOMS.
WE MUST LEAVE WITH
THE SUN. TIME IS
GROWING SHORT.
TOO SHORT.

THEY AREN'T...
YOU ARE NOT RED
AJAH, MOIRAINE SEDAI, BUT
SURELY NOT EVEN
YOU WOULD...

I MUST TAKE
THEM AND NO OTHERS,
LORD AGELMAR. THEY ARE
THE ONES WHO WILL FIGHT
THE BATTLE AT THE END OF
THE WORLD.

THEY ARE TA'VEREN.
THE PATTERN WEAVES ITSELF
AROUND THEM. THE OLD BLOOD
OF MANETHEREN IS STRONG AND
PURE IN ALMOST ALL THESE
YOUNG MEN. CAN YOU DOUBT
THE STRENGTH OF
MANETHEREN'S BLOOD,
LORD AGELMAR?

MANETHEREN.
I WOULD NOT DOUBT
THAT BLOOD.

THE WHEEL BRINGS
STRANGE TIMES. FARM-
BOYS CARRY THE HONOR
OF MANETHEREN INTO THE
BLIGHT, YET IF ANY BLOOD
CAN STRIKE A FELL BLOW
AT THE DARK ONE...

IT SHALL BE
DONE AS YOU WISH,
AES SEDAI.



The next day.

The group left Fal Dara early, escorted to the border of the Blight by Ingtar and a hundred of his men. None of them were happy to let Moiraine's party continue on without their protection.

For at least an hour after they passed the borderpost there was no change in land or forest. The Warder kept them at a hard pace, as fast as a walk as the horses could maintain, but Rand kept wondering when they would reach the Blight.

The hills became a little higher, but the trees, and creepers, and underbrush were no different than what he had seen in Shienar... he was feeling warmer, however. Warm enough to sling his cloak across the pommel of his saddle.

THIS IS THE
BEST WEATHER WE'VE
SEEN ALL YEAR.

IT FEELS
WRONG.



It was damp, Rand realized. The air felt like the Mire in the depths of summer. Only Perrin, still in his coat, was breathing easily. Perrin and the Warder.

Rand noticed a few leaves now, on trees that were not evergreen. He reached out to touch a branch, and stopped with his hand short of the sickly leaves in time to hear Lan say:

I TOLD YOU
NOT TO TOUCH
ANYTHING.



FLOWERS
CAN KILL IN THE
BLIGHT, AND LEAVES
MAIM.

THERE'S A
LITTLE THING CALLED
A STICK THAT LIKES TO
HIDE WHERE THE LEAVES ARE
THICKEST, LOOKING LIKE ITS
NAME, WAITING FOR SOME-
THING TO TOUCH IT. WHEN
SOMETHING DOES,
IT BITES.

NOT POISON.
THE JUICE BEGINS TO
DIGEST THE STICK'S PREY
FOR IT. THE ONLY THING
THAT CAN SAVE YOU IS
TO CUT OFF THE ARM
OR LEG THAT WAS
BITTEN.

BUT A STICK
WON'T BITE UNLESS
YOU TOUCH IT. OTHER
THINGS IN THE
BLIGHT WILL.

THEN
WE'RE IN THE
BLIGHT?

JUST THE
FRINGE.

THE REAL
BLIGHT STILL LIES
AHEAD.

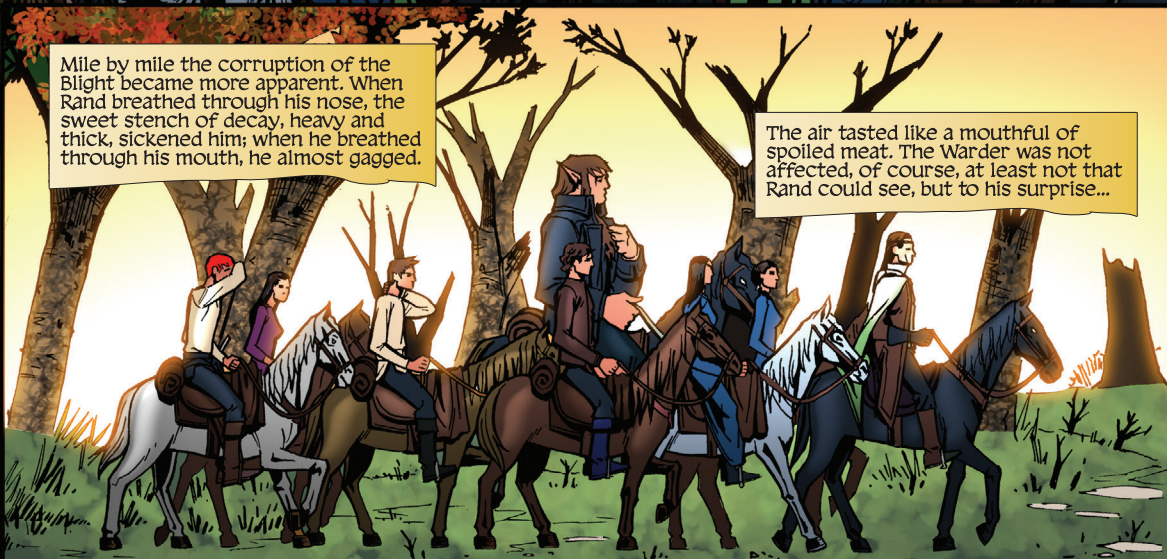
THERE ARE
THINGS IN THE BLIGHT
THAT HUNT BY SOUND, AND
SOME MAY HAVE WANDERED THIS
FAR SOUTH. SOMETIMES THEY
CROSS THE MOUNTAINS
OF DHOOM.

MUCH
WORSE THAN THE
STICKS.

KEEP QUIET
AND KEEP UP IF YOU WANT
TO STAY ALIVE.

Mile by mile the corruption of the
Blight became more apparent. When
Rand breathed through his nose, the
sweet stench of decay, heavy and
thick, sickened him; when he breathed
through his mouth, he almost gagged.

The air tasted like a mouthful of
spoiled meat. The Warder was not
affected, of course, at least not that
Rand could see, but to his surprise...



...neither was Perrin. Or, rather, not in the way the rest of them were.

The big youth glared at the obscene forest through which they rode as he might have at an enemy, or the banner of an enemy. He caressed the axe at his belt as if unaware of what he was doing, and muttered to himself, half growling in a way that made the hair on Rand's neck stir.

Even in the sunlight his eyes glowed golden and fierce.

They continued on in the heat and the stench, neither diminishing, until the sun finally fell toward the horizon.

WE CANNOT REACH THE MOUNTAINS BY NIGHTFALL, AND IT IS DANGEROUS TO MOVE AT NIGHT, EVEN FOR A WARDER ALONE.

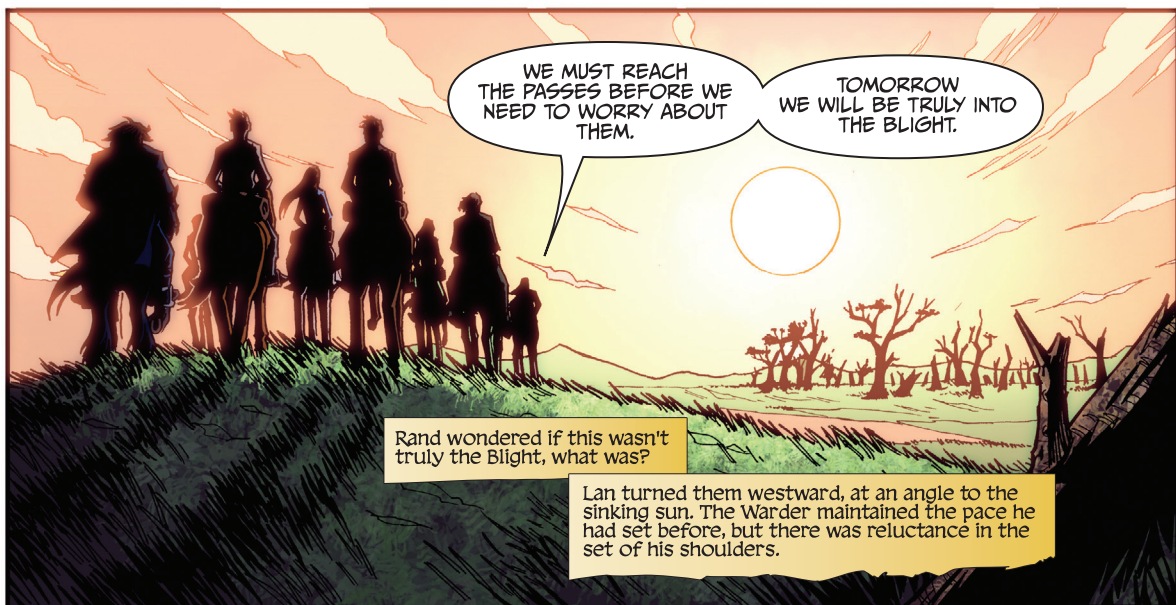
THERE IS A PLACE NOT FAR OFF.. IT WILL BE A GOOD OMEN FOR US TO CAMP THERE.

WE HAVE TO CAMP SOMEWHERE. IT MIGHT AS WELL BE THERE.

THE EYE OF THE WORLD WAS BEYOND THE HIGH PASSES WHEN I FOUND IT. BETTER TO CROSS THE MOUNTAINS OF DHOOM IN FULL DAYLIGHT, AT NOON, WHEN THE DARK ONE'S POWERS IN THIS WORLD ARE AT THEIR WEAKEST.

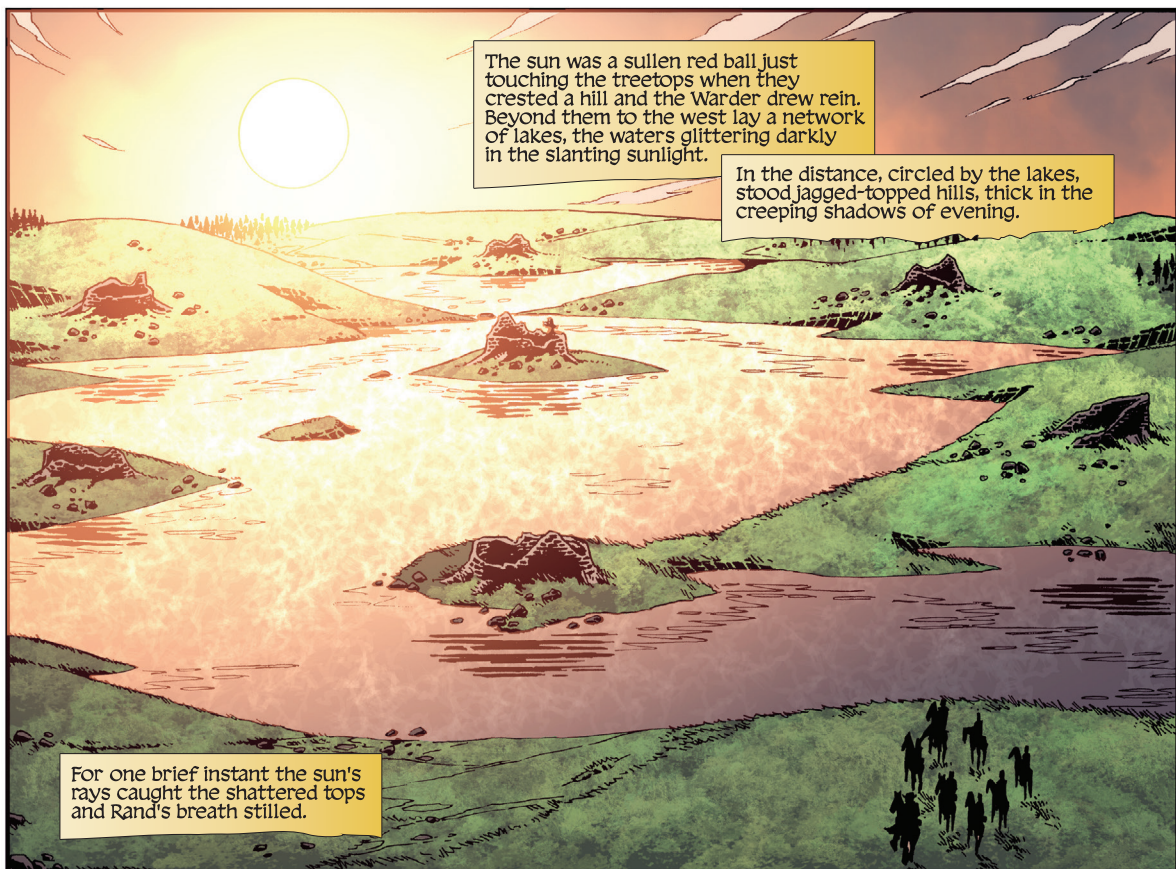
YOU TALK AS IF THE EYE ISN'T ALWAYS IN THE SAME PLACE.

NO TWO AMONG THE OGIER HAVE FOUND IT IN EXACTLY THE SAME PLACE. THE GREEN MAN SEEMS TO BE FOUND WHERE HE IS NEEDED, BUT IT IS ALWAYS BEYOND THE HIGH PASSES, WHICH ARE HAUNTED BY CREATURES OF THE DARK ONE.



Rand wondered if this wasn't truly the Blight, what was?

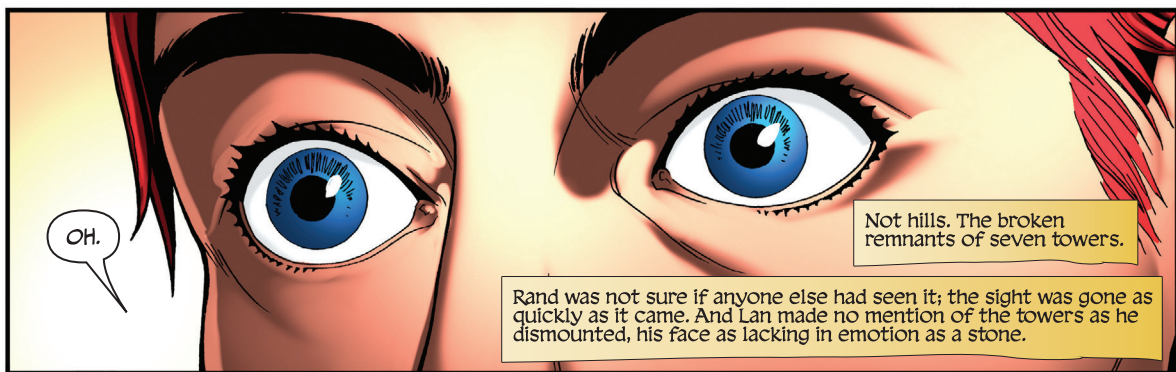
Lan turned them westward, at an angle to the sinking sun. The Warder maintained the pace he had set before, but there was reluctance in the set of his shoulders.



The sun was a sullen red ball just touching the treetops when they crested a hill and the Warder drew rein. Beyond them to the west lay a network of lakes, the waters glittering darkly in the slanting sunlight.

In the distance, circled by the lakes, stood jagged-topped hills, thick in the creeping shadows of evening.

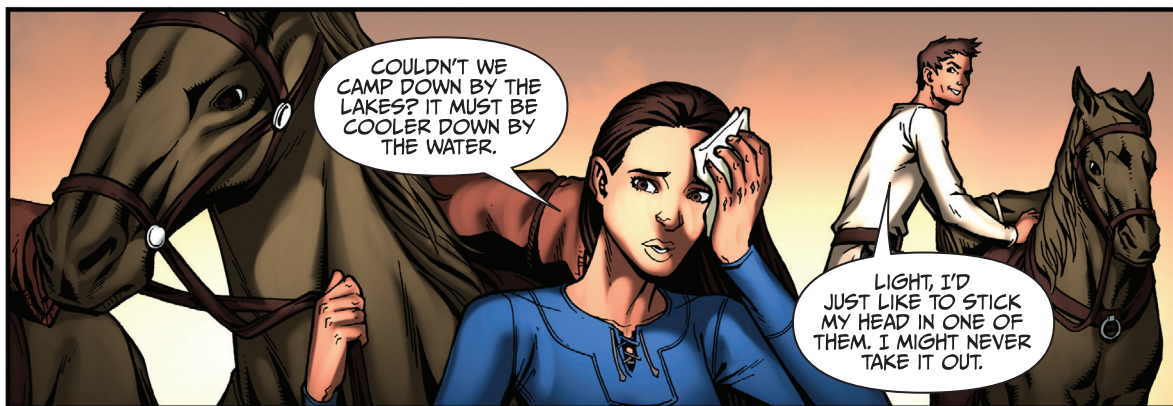
For one brief instant the sun's rays caught the shattered tops and Rand's breath stilled.



OH.

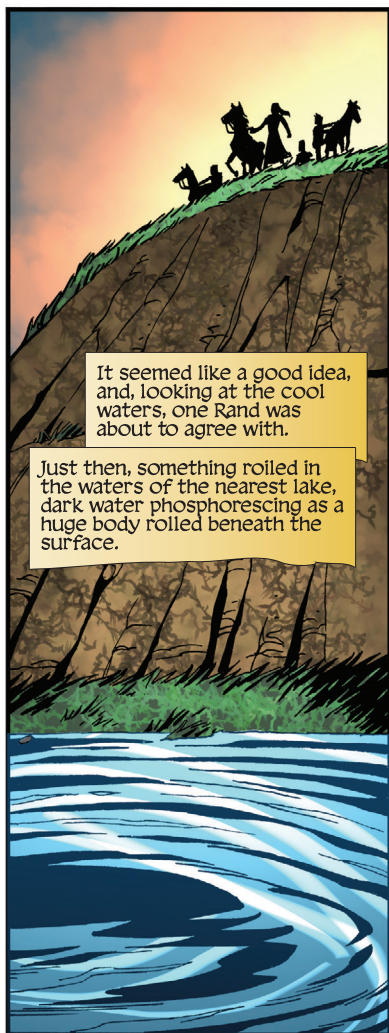
Not hills. The broken remnants of seven towers.

Rand was not sure if anyone else had seen it; the sight was gone as quickly as it came. And Lan made no mention of the towers as he dismounted, his face as lacking in emotion as a stone.



COULDN'T WE
CAMP DOWN BY THE
LAKES? IT MUST BE
COOLER DOWN BY
THE WATER.

LIGHT, I'D
JUST LIKE TO STICK
MY HEAD IN ONE OF
THEM. I MIGHT NEVER
TAKE IT OUT.



It seemed like a good idea,
and, looking at the cool
waters, one Rand was
about to agree with.

Just then, something rolled in
the waters of the nearest lake,
dark water phosphorescing as a
huge body rolled beneath the
surface.



Length on man-thick length sent ripples
spreading, rolling on and on until at last a
tail rose, waving a point like a wasp's stinger
for an instant in the twilight, at least five
spans in the air.

It then slid slowly beneath the
surface and was gone, only the
fading ripples to say it had ever been.



Rand and Perrin exchanged a disbelieving
look. Nothing that big could live in a lake
that size. Nothing...

ON SECOND
THOUGHT... I LIKE IT
RIGHT HERE JUST
FINE.



I WILL SET GUARDING WARDS AROUND THIS HILL.

A TRUE BARRIER WOULD DRAW THE ATTENTION WE DO NOT WANT LIKE FLIES TO HONEY, BUT IF ANY CREATION OF THE DARK ONE OR ANYTHING THAT SERVES THE SHADOW COMES WITHIN A MILE OF US, I WILL KNOW.



I'D BE HAPPIER WITH THE BARRIER, JUST AS LONG AS IT KEPT THAT... THAT THING ON THE OTHER SIDE.

AND HAVE THEM WAITING FOR US WHEN WE LEAVE IN THE MORNING? YOU ARE A FOOL, MATRIM CAUTION.

YES, DO BE QUIET, MAT.

Rand, Mat, and Perrin helped Lan unsaddle and hobble the horses while the others began setting up the camp.

Loial muttered to himself as he set up the Warder's tiny stove, but his thick fingers moved deftly.

Egwene was humming as she filled the tea kettle from a bulging waterbag. Rand no longer wondered why the Warder had insisted on bringing so many full waterskins.



Setting the bay's saddle in line with the others, Rand unfastened his saddlebags and blanketroll from the cantle, turned, and stopped with a tingle of fear.

...The Ogier and the women were gone. So was the stove and all the supplies... the hilltop was empty except for the evening shadows.

WHAT
THE--

BLOOD
AND ASHES!

Rand fumbled for his sword, dimly hearing Mat curse. Perrin had his axe out, his shaggy head swiveling to find the danger.

And from Lan...
nothing.

SHEEPHERDERS.

Unconcernedly the
Warder strode across the
hilltop, and at his third step,
he vanished.



Rand exchanged wide-eyed looks with Mat and Perrin, and soon they were all darting for where the Warder had disappeared.

Abruptly Rand skidded to a halt...



...taking another step when Mat ran into his back and they all went tumbling over. When they all looked up, the others were there, as if they had never been gone.



IT IS A SIMPLE THING. A BENDING, SO ANY EYE LOOKING AT US SEES AROUND US, INSTEAD. WE CANNOT HAVE THE EYES THAT WILL BE OUT THERE SEEING OUR LIGHTS TONIGHT, AND THE BLIGHT IS NO PLACE TO BE IN THE DARK.

MOIRAIN SEDAI SAYS I MIGHT BE ABLE TO DO IT. SHE SAYS I CAN HANDLE ENOUGH OF THE ONE POWER RIGHT NOW.



NOT WITHOUT TRAINING, CHILD. THE SIMPLEST MATTER CONCERNING THE ONE POWER CAN BE DANGEROUS TO THE UNTRAINED, AND THOSE AROUND THEM.



WHEN YOU GO TO TAR VALON, EGWENE, PERHAPS I'LL GO WITH YOU.

PERHAPS THAT WOULD BE BEST, WISDOM.



OH, THAT WILL BE WONDERFUL. AND YOU, RAND. YOU'LL COME TOO, WON'T YOU? AND PERRIN? MAT? YOU TWO WILL COME, WON'T YOU?

EH.



YOU SEE, RAND. WE'LL ALL BE TOGETHER.

ER, AH--DO THEY HAVE SHEEP IN TAR VALON? THAT'S ALL I KNOW, HERDING SHEEP AND GROWING TABAC.

I BELIEVE I CAN FIND SOMETHING FOR YOU TO DO IN TAR VALON. FOR ALL OF YOU. NOT HERDING SHEEP, PERHAPS, BUT SOMETHING YOU WILL FIND INTERESTING.

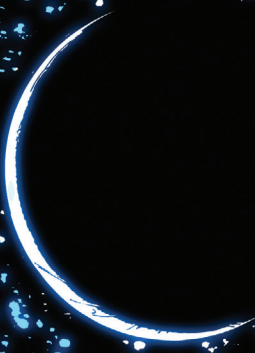


I KNOW, I WILL MAKE YOU MY WARDER, WHEN I'M AES SEDAI. YOU WOULD LIKE BEING A WARDER, WOULDN'T YOU?

MY WARDER?

I'D LIKE BEING YOUR WARDER.

Even as he spoke, Rand remembered Min's words: 'she's not for you, nor you for her.' Why did Min have to tell him that?



Darkness came down heavily, and everyone was tired. Moiraine put something in the oil of the lamps that dispelled the stench of the Blight from the hilltop, but nothing diminished the heat or the thickness of the air, and Rand found sleep impossible because of it, even with the Aes Sedai stretched out not a span away to shield his dreams.



The Warder was still awake, seated not too far away with his sword across his knees, watching the night. To Rand's surprise, so was Nynaeve.

The Wisdom looked at Lan silently for a long time, then poured a cup of tea and brought it to him.



...When he reached out with a murmur of thanks, she did not let go right away.

I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN YOU WOULD BE A KING.

I AM NOT A KING, NYNAEVE. JUST A MAN.



A MAN WITHOUT AS MUCH TO HIS NAME AS EVEN THE MEANEST FARMER'S CROFT.

SOME WOMEN DON'T ASK FOR LAND OR GOLD. JUST THE MAN.

AND THE MAN WHO WOULD ASK HER TO ACCEPT SO LITTLE WOULD NOT BE WORTHY OF HER. YOU ARE A REMARKABLE WOMAN, AS BEAUTIFUL AS THE SUNRISE, AS FIERCE AS A WARRIOR.

YOU ARE A LIONESS, WISDOM.



A WISDOM SELDOM WEDS... BUT IF I GO TO TAR VALON, IT MAY BE THAT I WILL BE SOMETHING OTHER THAN A WISDOM.

AES SEDAI MARRY AS SELDOM AS WISDOMS. FEW MEN CAN LIVE WITH SO MUCH POWER IN A WIFE, DIMMING THEM BY HER RADIANCE WHETHER SHE WISHES TO OR NOT.

SOME MEN ARE STRONG ENOUGH.



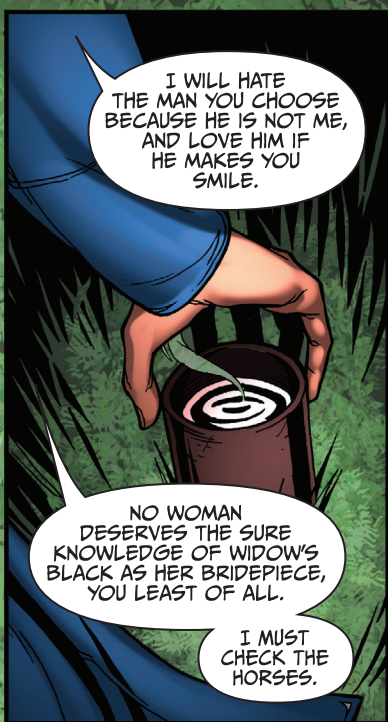
I KNOW ONE SUCH.



ALL I HAVE IS A SWORD, AND A WAR I CANNOT WIN, BUT CAN NEVER STOP FIGHTING.

I'VE TOLD YOU I CARE NOTHING FOR THAT. LIGHT, YOU'VE MADE ME SAY MORE THAN IS PROPER ALREADY--WILL YOU SHAME ME TO THE POINT OF ASKING YOU?

I WILL NEVER SHAME YOU.



I WILL HATE THE MAN YOU CHOOSE BECAUSE HE IS NOT ME, AND LOVE HIM IF HE MAKES YOU SMILE.

NO WOMAN DESERVES THE SURE KNOWLEDGE OF WIDOW'S BLACK AS HER BRIDEPIECE, YOU LEAST OF ALL.

I MUST CHECK THE HORSES.

Nynaeve remained there, kneeling, after Lan had gone.

Sleep or no, Rand closed his eyes then... he did not think the Wisdom would like it if he watched her cry.

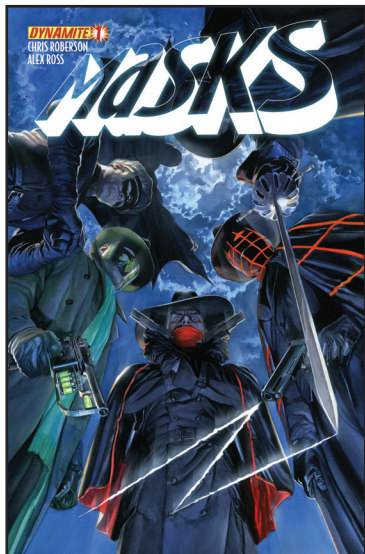


To be continued...

DYNAMITE®

IN THE NEWS - JAN. 2013

BLEEDING COOL, NEWSARAMA, COMIC BOOK RESOURCES, AND COMIC VINE LOVE MASKS!



Masks hit stores this past week and is now a bonafide hit! The Shadow, Green Hornet, Kato, Zorro, The Spider, Miss Fury, The Black Bat and MORE are all featured in Masks, the Dynamite Entertainment cross-over featuring the top pulp heroes of all time. Written by Chris Roberson, the ENTIRE FIRST ISSUE IS PAINTED BY ALEX ROSS!! This is his first full interior work since "Justice" at DC Comics!!! Masks is hitting comic book stores everywhere this November, also featuring covers by Alex Ross, Sean Phillips, Howard Chaykin and Jae Lee!!! Make sure to order Masks #1 of this critically acclaimed series from Dynamite Entertainment!

Check out some great reviews and comments Masks #1 has received!

MASKS #1 (NEWSARAMA.COM): "It belongs on the radio. Which is a real credit to writer Chris Roberson, as it shows he's able to translate the voice of these icons of pulp onto the page. His take on the Shadow is darn near pitch-perfect. The story is outlandish and utterly impossible, meaning it's simply ripe

for these characters. Although Alex Ross' almost Wagnerian approach to these vigilantes is beautiful to behold, his art never lends itself to hyper kinetic action. As a result, many of the fights feel static. Though make no mistake, Ross is never better than when he's drawing the greats, and these players are the indeed the greats. Although \$3.99 is a steep ticket, fans of pulp adventure need this show."

MASKS #1 (COMICBOOKRESOURCES.COM): "I haven't been plugged in to any of the Dynamite pulp hero comic book series and truly only became consciously aware of this series within the month. Given the talent involved, I decided to pick this one up and I am now locked in for "Masks" as long as the creative of "Masks" #1 sticks around. Roberson and Ross have a great, fresh handle on these characters that I'm enthused to keep investigating their world."

MASKS #1 (COMICVINE.COM): "MASKS 1 is a great start and what's even better is that anyone can pick this up and read it. You don't need to be reading GREEN HORNET, THE SHADOW, ZORRO, or THE SPIDER to fully appreciate these characters and this story. I really like the collaboration between Roberson and Ross here. I think they're a perfect fit for this world and story. It was great to see Alex Ross work on interiors again, and I loved his design of the Agents."

MASKS #1 (UNLEASHTHEFANBOY.COM): "Overall, a fantastic start to MASKS. I didn't have a history with the Shadow or Spider, but it didn't stop me from enjoying the story. The writing is quite fine, with Alex Ross's art being a true highlight. This event proves crossovers could be fun and smart without being cliché, I really look forward to the next seven installments."

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Join the conversation on Dynamite Entertainment's twitter page at <http://twitter.com/DynamiteComics>

NEXT ISSUE:



WHEEL OF TIME #33

Moiraine has at last delivered Rand and the others safely to the realm of the Green Man, where the Eye of the World rests and the last battle shall take place. But they are not the only ones who have found this place -- Balthamel and Aginor, two of the Forsaken, have found their way there as well, and now they know precisely who they're looking for. Robert Jordan's epic WHEEL OF TIME continues here!

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To discuss this and more, log onto the Dynamite forums at WWW.DYNAMITE.COM/BOARDS

FEATURED REVIEWS

THE BOYS #72

(UNLEASHTHEFANBOY.COM):

"It certainly pays off... All in all, The Boys has been an excellent run and I'll be sorry to see it go. But it was fun whilst it lasted, and it made the impact it wanted to. Very few titles can say they've done that as well as The Boys."

THE BOYS #72

(IFANBOY.COM):

"All in all, a nice little epilogue. To make things a little less bitter and pretty damn sweet, Darick Robertson returns after almost 30 issues to draw this finale."

THE BOYS #72

(BLUERAVENTCOMICS.COM):

"With every loose end tied up, I can't help but simply be speechless. For this comic series to be so extreme at some points, a nice, simple ending is all a reader could ask for. In the end, the simplicity of this issue really won me over."

EVIL ERNIE #2

(COMICVINE.COM):

"This book contains the amount of violence you would hope for and expect with the character. The killings are varied and you don't feel like you're seeing the same things over and over. Jesse Blaze Snider is crafting a new origin for Ernie and, as a new reader, I'm enjoying seeing how it all unfolds."

RED SONJA #71

(COMICHYPE.COM):

"Classic swords-steel-and-blood high fantasy at its best... Hats off to Trautmann and Salazar!"

DARK SHADOWS / VAMPIRELLA #4

(UNLEASHTHEFANBOY.COM):

"Dark Shadows / Vampirella #4 is by far the best release yet to surface from this zany and entertaining crossover."