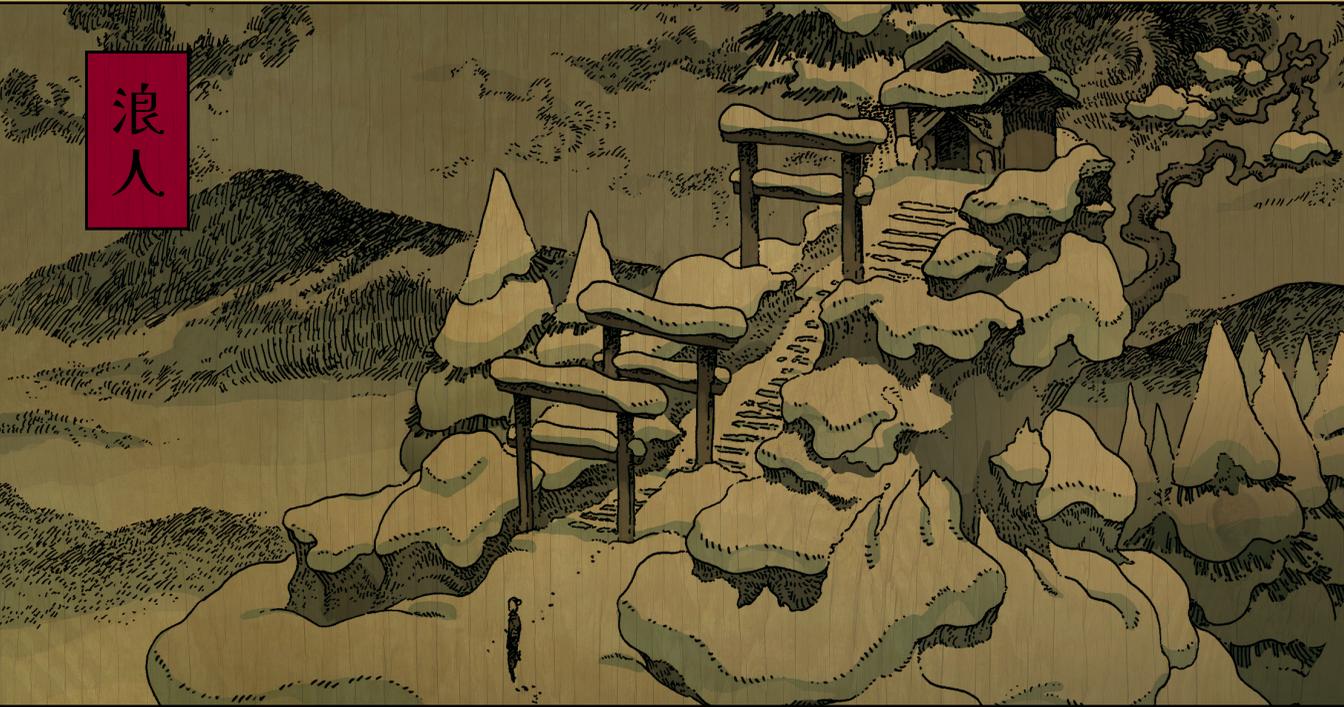




THE WITCHER® RONIN

浪人



AN ORIGINAL MANGA SET IN THE WORLD OF THE WITCHER!

In a new world inspired by Edo-period Japan, Geralt is faced with difficult moral choices while battling a variety of *yōkai* and *oni*, creatures inspired by Japanese myths. Each encounter drops a clue in his desperate search for a mysterious apparition known as the Lady of Snow, *yuki onna*, for she is the key to the one Geralt seeks, but finding her won't be easy...



PRESIDENT AND PUBLISHER

Mike Richardson

COLLECTION EDITOR

Judy Khuu

COLLECTION ASSISTANT EDITOR

Rose Weitz

COLLECTION DESIGNER

May Hijikuro

DIGITAL ART TECHNICIAN

Allyson Haller

CD PROJEKT RED EDITORIAL

Bartosz Szybor

Special thanks to **CD Projekt Red**, including: **Michał Nowakowski**, SVP OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
• **Adam Badowski**, HEAD OF STUDIO • **Marcin Blacha**, STORY DIRECTOR • **Satoru Homma**,
JAPAN COUNTRY MANAGER

Neil Hankerson EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT • **Tom Weddle** CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER • **Dale LaFountain** CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER • **Tim Wiesch** VICE PRESIDENT OF LICENSING • **Matt Parkinson** VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETING • **Vanessa Todd-Holmes** VICE PRESIDENT OF PRODUCTION AND SCHEDULING • **Mark Bernardi** VICE PRESIDENT OF BOOK TRADE AND DIGITAL SALES • **Randy Lahman** VICE PRESIDENT OF PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT • **Ken Lizzi** GENERAL COUNSEL • **Dave Marshall** EDITOR IN CHIEF • **Davey Estrada** EDITORIAL DIRECTOR • **Chris Warner** SENIOR BOOKS EDITOR • **Cary Grazzini** DIRECTOR OF SPECIALTY PROJECTS • **Lia Ribacchi** ART DIRECTOR • **Matt Dryer** DIRECTOR OF DIGITAL ART AND PREPRESS • **Michael Gombos** SENIOR DIRECTOR OF LICENSED PUBLICATIONS • **Kari Yadro** DIRECTOR OF CUSTOM PROGRAMS • **Kari Torson** DIRECTOR OF INTERNATIONAL LICENSING



Published by Dark Horse Manga
A division of Dark Horse Comics LLC
10956 SE Main Street, Milwaukie, OR 97222

DarkHorse.com

To find a comics shop in your area, visit comicsshoplocator.com

First edition: October 2022

Ebook ISBN 978-1-50673-351-7 | Trade Paperback ISBN 978-1-50673-350-0

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Printed in China



THE WITCHER: RONIN

The Witcher © 2022 CD Projekt S.A. All rights reserved. CD PROJEKT®, The Witcher® are registered trademarks of CD PROJEKT Capital Group. The Witcher game © CD PROJEKT S.A. Developed by CD PROJEKT S.A. All rights reserved. The Witcher game is based on the prose of Andrzej Sapkowski. All other copyrights and trademarks are the property of their respective owners. Dark Horse Manga™ is a trademark of Dark Horse Comics LLC. All rights reserved. No portion of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the express written permission of Dark Horse Comics LLC. Names, characters, places, and incidents featured in this publication either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons (living or dead), events, institutions, or locales, without satiric intent, is coincidental.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Jaki, Rafal, writer. | Hataya, artist. | Bidikar, Aditya, letterer:

Title: The Witcher : ronin / writer, Rafal Jaki ; artist, Hataya ; colors,

Hataya ; letters, Aditya Bidikar.

Description: Milwaukie, OR : Dark Horse Manga, 2022.

Identifiers: LCCN 2022011820 (print) | LCCN 2022011821 (ebook) | ISBN

9781506733500 (trade paperback) | ISBN 9781506733517 (ebook)

Subjects: LCGFT: Fantasy comics. | Graphic novels.

Classification: LCC PN6728W5887 J35 2022 (print) | LCC PN6728W5887

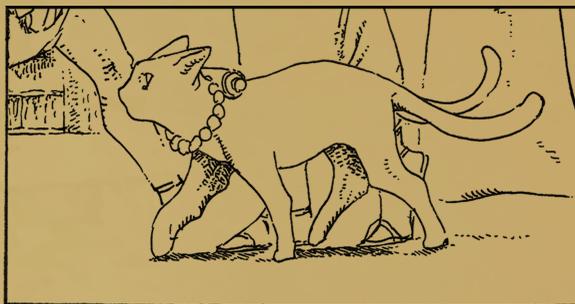
(ebook) | DDC 741.5/973--dc23/eng/20220506

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2022011820>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2022011821>

Nekomata 猫又 (Forked Cat)

Legend has it that cats begin to develop unnatural powers as they grow older: Eventually, they turn into *yōkai*. Their tail splits in two, becoming forked, and the cat becomes a *nekomata*. These monstrous cats are stronger and more intelligent than normal cats. They begin to dance about comically on their hind legs and wrap cloth around their heads as if imitating humans. If they were ever mistreated by their owners, they will remember it and take revenge once they become powerful enough.



Nekomata are attracted to death. Their keen noses can smell decomposing flesh from far away. It was important to keep cats away from funerals so they couldn't steal the bodies of the dead to eat—or worse, reanimate them. *Nekomata* can control corpses like marionettes, using their paws and tails to make them walk about. They can also summon spirits of the deceased and may haunt their owners with apparitions of their lost relatives.

Nekomata can take on a human appearance. They like to transform into people and cause mischief. Some of them devour their owners and then transform into them, taking their place as head of the household. *Nekomata* can even ignite the tips of their two tails for use as torches. They use them to cause fires and burn down homes, or even entire villages.

According to superstition, if a cat's tail didn't fork, it wouldn't transform into a *yōkai*. So, to prevent any risk of long-lived cats becoming *nekomata*, the custom of cropping kittens' tails short was developed.

In the comic:

Geralt visits a cat shrine to ask for help. Later he is aided by a *nekomata* when he fights Eredin in the snow. But why would a traditionally evil creature like a *nekomata* offer help to a stranger?

Note the object around the cat's neck. It looks like a collar, but it is actually a *juzu*—a string of prayer beads used by priests and monks to keep track of how many times they have recited a prayer. If this were an evil cat, it would not be wearing a *juzu*. Instead, this cat must have come from the shrine.

Also note its fur: the coloring resembles a *maneki neko*, a different type of cat spirit which is especially lucky. *Maneki neko* represent good fortune, long life, and protection from evil. Perhaps this cat was a *maneki neko* before its tail split in two.

Yukinko 雪ん子 (Snow Child)

A favorite trick *yōkai* like to pull is to appear as a helpless mother on the road and beg passing travelers for help. The mother carries a bundled-up baby in her arms, but she needs to put it down to perform some task or another. She asks the traveler to carry her baby briefly for her. After she places the baby in the unsuspecting traveler's arms, it turns out to be a rock. The rock rapidly expands, turning into a massive boulder and crushing the traveler to death. The *yōkai* can then feast upon the remains.

Yukinko are a northern variation of this trick. They are found only in snowy areas. They look like little children made of ice and snow. *Yukinko* work in concert with *yuki onna* to trap their victims. The *yuki onna* poses as a new mother trapped in a snowbank by the side of the road. She begs a passing stranger to hold her baby for a moment so she can free herself. The baby, of course, is actually a *yukinko*. Once the *yukinko* is nestled in the person's arms, it quickly grows larger and heavier. It becomes a mountain of snow, burying the poor human and pinning them down. The victim quickly freezes to death.

If the traveler suspects it might be a trap and refuses to carry the mother's baby, the *yuki onna* and *yukinko* have a plan B. They simply push the traveler off a cliff into a snow-filled valley, where they freeze to death.

In the comic:

The *yukinko* call out to Geralt and beg him for help, pretending to be children lost in the blizzard—a predictable tactic. When Geralt investigates, they spring their trap. These bestial spirits are so monstrous that their deception breaks down immediately. Fortunately for Geralt, they are no match for him, and he makes quick work of them.

The *yukinko* in this story look different from the traditional depiction. Instead of appearing like human children, they look closer to wild dogs with childlike faces. But their tricky behavior is the same as humanoid *yukinko*, and they indeed seem to be working in cooperation with a *yuki onna*.



Yamanba 山姥 (Mountain Hag)

Mountains are dangerous places; extreme weather, unstable footing, wild animals, and bandits are just some of the perils travelers have to deal with. But nothing in the mountains is quite so dangerous as the wicked *yamanba*.

Yamanba are cruel witches who live deep in the mountains, far away from civilization. They make their homes in caves or dilapidated old shacks, using magic to make them look like rich manors or cozy inns with sturdy walls and a warm fire. Then they disguise themselves as beautiful ladies or kind-looking grandmothers. It's the ideal trap for a weary traveler looking for a place to relax.

Once they've enticed a traveler to stay, a *yamanba* will treat them with the greatest hospitality. Warm food, a cozy fire, a bath, and flirty conversation are given. This is a tactic to make their prey lower their guard. Once their guest has drifted off to sleep, the *yamanba* transforms back into her horrible self. She then brutally murders her victim—carving knives are a favorite instrument. She devours their flesh and leaves the rest to rot among the bones of countless past victims.

The greatest defense against a *yamanba* is to never lower your guard. Trickery is their greatest strength, so if you can avoid being deceived by their illusions and keep a watchful eye, you might just have a chance to escape!

In the comic:

Just as a heavy snowstorm bears down upon Geralt, he receives a stroke of luck which seems too good to be true. He stumbles upon a luxurious inn with a resplendent hot spring. It is run by a beautiful, single innkeeper who begs him to stay and offers him every hospitality. And there are no other guests, so he can receive all her attention. Unfortunately, too good to be true is exactly what it is.

Luckily for Geralt, he never let his guard completely down. If he had actually been asleep when the *yamanba* revealed her true form, he might have wound up as just another dried skeleton on the floor of the *yamanba*'s kitchen.



Sarugami 猿神 (Monkey God)

In ancient times, monkeys were associated with the sun god because they were most active at sunrise and sunset. Farmers, whose days also begin and end with the rising and falling of the sun, worshiped them as divine animals—the first *sarugami*. However, as advances in agriculture allowed more and more people to take up professions other than farming, these monkey cults began to fade. Eventually, the popularity of monkey cults had dwindled so much that they were all but a memory; the *sarugami*, no longer revered or worshiped, transformed into *yōkai*.

At first glance, *sarugami* appear to be simply bigger monkeys. But *sarugami* are far stronger and far more clever than ordinary monkeys. The older one gets, the wiser and more powerful it becomes. The biggest ones rule over tribes of smaller monkeys, some over one hundred strong. Unfortunately, *sarugami* are rarely beneficent toward humankind.

Ordinary monkeys are seen as mischievous or tricky, destroying farms by digging up fields and raiding crops. *Sarugami*, on the other hand, are outright wicked. Instead of crops, they kidnap and eat humans. The worst among them demand regular sacrifices of young women from nearby villages as tributes. Refusal means the destruction of the village and its farms.

In the comic:

Geralt relaxes in a hot spring to unwind while the only other guests are wild monkeys. In fact, wild monkeys do love to bathe in natural hot springs just like humans, especially in snowy areas. However, these monkeys have an evil master: a *sarugami*.

This *sarugami* has struck a deal with a *yamanba* who lives nearby. The *yamanba* drugs and lures travelers out to the hot springs, where the *sarugami* and its tribe murder them. They can then all feast upon the corpses. This kind of cooperation showcases the *sarugami*'s cunning as well as its strength. Why hunt when you can have a witch bring your food to you?



Yuki Onna 雪女 (Snow Woman)

People who live in snowy lands must be careful of one of winter's most fearsome hunters. *Yuki onna* are spirits who feed upon the life force of human beings. They look like beautiful human women, with features sharp as ice, eternal youth, and cold, piercing eyes. *Yuki onna* usually wear thin white kimono—clothing that is woefully inadequate for traveling in the snow. This should tip off any observer to the fact that they are *yōkai*; however, *yuki onna* are so bewitching that their victims usually overlook these incongruities.

Yuki onna employ many hunting tactics. Some target lone woodcutters and travelers passing through the snowy mountains. They creep into their huts at night and blow icy breath onto them, freezing them solid. Some hide by the road and push people off cliffs into snowy valleys. Some travel through villages and snatch up naughty children who stray outside at night. And some lure their prey in, enticing them to venture out into the ice and snow where the *yuki onna* can strike. *Yuki onna* prefer strong, virile young men because they are easy to seduce and so full of energy. But sometimes it is easier to snatch up a child and spirit it away into the mountains. Such children might be transformed into snow spirits themselves, such as *yukinko*.

Although dangerous, *yuki onna* are not necessarily malevolent. When they seduce people, it is not always out of a desire to hurt them. *Yuki onna* can genuinely fall in love. There are tales of *yuki onna* marrying human men and even raising families with them. But these are never happy stories; inevitably they end in tragedy. When family members or neighbors learn of a *yōkai* living in their midst, the *yuki onna* must flee back into the mountains for safety. Even if her supernatural nature is never discovered, a well-meaning husband might insist she take a hot bath, causing her to melt away into nothing more than a few shards of ice floating in a lukewarm tub.

In the comic:

Geralt spends most of the story chasing after a *yuki onna*—a very cruel one at that. She seems more interested in taunting Geralt than in seducing him and devouring his life force. She kidnapped his daughter, but for what purposes? Children who go missing in snowstorms sometimes reappear later as *yōkai*. Maybe the *yuki onna* wants to transform her into a snow spirit.

It's no surprise Geralt always seems to be one step behind the *yuki onna*. She is a powerful and resourceful *yōkai*. As fast as Geralt pursues, a *yuki onna* can move more quickly in the snow than any person. Every time Geralt seems close to catching her, she slips away. She can fight, she can vanish if need be, and she has many *yōkai* allies to whom she can call for aid.



Tengu 天狗 (Heavenly Dog)

When ancient people watched meteors shoot across the sky and explode, they thought they saw dogs descending from heaven to bring calamity to earth. These creatures were dubbed *tengu* (“heavenly dogs”). *Tengu* have red skin and dog-like faces with long noses. Their fingers and toes end in sharp talons, and they have wings like hawks or crows. Part bird, part dog, part human, these fallen spirits made their homes deep in the mountains and preyed upon travelers.

Tengu are considered by some to be gods of the skies and the mountains they inhabit. They are considered by others to be demons. There is a grain of truth in both viewpoints.

Some *tengu* are honorable paragons of martial discipline. They resemble *yamabushi*—ascetic mountain-dwelling monks who practice the esoteric religion of Shugendō. They wear monks’ garb and spend their days meditating and studying in isolation on remote mountaintops. They are keepers of ancient wisdom and mystical secrets, as well as experts in swordplay and martial arts. They are willing to share their knowledge with humans who demonstrate worthiness, but they inflict fierce retribution upon the unworthy.

On the other hand, many *tengu* are neither wise nor disciplined. Humans who are irredeemably wicked go to neither heaven nor hell but transform into *tengu* instead. These *tengu* are savage, depraved monsters. Short in stature and more bird-like in appearance, they delight in tormenting people. They mislead travelers on the roads. They kidnap children and tie them to the tops of tall trees. They force-feed feces to their victims to drive them insane. They especially enjoy punishing corrupt monks. They coerce them into committing debauchery and other mortal sins, damning them to become *tengu* as well.

In the comic:

How does Geralt know whether this is an honorable *tengu* or a wicked *tengu*?

This *tengu* carries a strange-looking tool. It is a *hauchiwa*—a magical fan made of feathers which only powerful *tengu* possess. With it, a *tengu* can fly freely; teleport; divide its body; change forms; control wind, rain, and fire; manipulate human hearts; and break through delusions.

The fact that this *tengu* carries a *hauchiwa* is the first clue. Most *tengu* don’t possess the discipline or knowledge to use such a powerful magical tool. And the fact that it only seems to bother Tasuke serves as another clue to Geralt that there was something wrong with the logger’s story. The *tengu* didn’t come to torment people visiting the graveyard; it came to punish Tasuke for his sins.



Tatsu 龍 (Dragon)

Every lake, river, and ocean is home to a guardian water spirit called a *tatsu*. *Tatsu* are the incarnations of bodies of water. They act as tutelary deities of the lakes, rivers, and oceans which they inhabit. They appear as majestic giant serpents, with long, twisting bodies covered in scales and patches of hair. They usually have four limbs ending in sharp claws. Their heads are decorated with horns and beards. *Tatsu* can also appear in many different forms—such as snakes, fish, eels, even humans. Their magnificence and ferocity represent both the life-giving powers and the destructive potential of water.

Tatsu are revered as gods by farmers and fishers, who rely on water for their livelihood. *Tatsu* who are pleased by their worshipers gladly share their water's bounty. They might even bestow wisdom or grant wishes to those who venerate them. On the other hand, *tatsu* are savage to those who do not properly respect them, or who overfish or poison bodies of water. Angry *tatsu* inflict water-related disasters such as floods, droughts, and storms. Prayers and sacrifices of food and sake are regularly offered to *tatsu* for stable rains, bountiful catches, and protection from disasters. During severe times, even humans—usually young women—might be sacrificed to appease a particularly vengeful *tatsu*.

Many places have local legends about interactions between villagers and *tatsu* living in nearby lakes or rivers. Stories of lords offering up their daughters in marriage to *tatsu*, kind *tatsu* blessing barren couples with children, and *tatsu* disguised as humans pursuing romance with men and women are common. These legends highlight the complex relationship mankind has with water—powerful and destructive, yet vital to life.

In the comic:

When the *kappa* lead Geralt to a cave in the swamp, he notices something strange: hanging over the cave entrance is a *shimenawa*. These decorative ropes mark the boundaries of sacred places. So Geralt enters the cave confident that no evil spirits lurk within. And he is not surprised to discover a great *tatsu* living within.

This *tatsu* is not merely the swamp's guardian; it is the spirit of the swamp itself. It is a holy creature which has blessed the village with clean water for generations. If the swamp is destroyed, the *tatsu* will cease to exist. By building a dam the villagers are not only threatening the spirits who live in the swamp, they are committing sacrilege.

They claim that “monsters” are attacking them, but it is actually the villagers who are destroying the home of a sacred beast.



Kappa 河童 (River Child)

Rivers can be dangerous places, not in the least because they are home to *kappa*: green-skinned reptilian water spirits the size of children. They have shells and beaks like turtles. Their limbs are rubbery and flexible, with webbed hands and feet. On top of their heads is a dish-like indentation which must be filled with water for the *kappa* to survive. Their favorite foods are cucumbers and human innards.

Kappa love playing games and causing mischief. They are excellent swimmers and are skilled at shogi and sumo wrestling. They are knowledgeable about medicine and possess miraculous healing magic. *Kappa* have a strong sense of honor. They never break promises and never forget good deeds. And they expect the same from humans. If you perform a favor for a *kappa*, it will always remember your kindness. If you break a promise to a *kappa*, you will make an enemy for life.

For their small size, *kappa* are deceptively strong. They love playing pranks like tripping people and horses, then pulling them into rivers. But *kappa* are not all fun and games; they can be deadly too. “Beware of *kappa*” signs are often posted near lakes and rivers. Offerings of cucumbers—a *kappa*’s favorite food—are left on the banks to keep them happy. One *kappa* is more than strong enough to hold an adult human underwater and drown them. They use their flexible arms to reach up through their victim’s anus and tear out the internal organs—a *kappa*’s second-favorite food.

The surest way to defeat a *kappa* is to use its sense of honor against it. If you bow, the *kappa* will match your bow. Bow low enough, and when the *kappa* bows back, the water will spill out from the dish on its head. While the dish remains full, a *kappa* possesses superhuman strength. But if it ever empties, their strength vanishes, and they can be overpowered. Thus defeated, a *kappa* will agree to perform a favor in return for sparing its life.

In the comic:

When Geralt learns that *kappa* are killing villagers, he is rightfully surprised. He knows *kappa*, while dangerous, are not inherently violent. They flee from him instead of putting up a fight, and they tug at his feet playfully instead of attacking him when he enters their swamp. Something must have driven them to kill.

Kappa are social creatures, but they tend to rank low on the social ladder. They often serve as underlings of more powerful spirits—in this case, the guardian of the swamp. These *kappa* are not enemies of the villagers. They are just doing their master’s bidding and protecting their home.





Bestiary

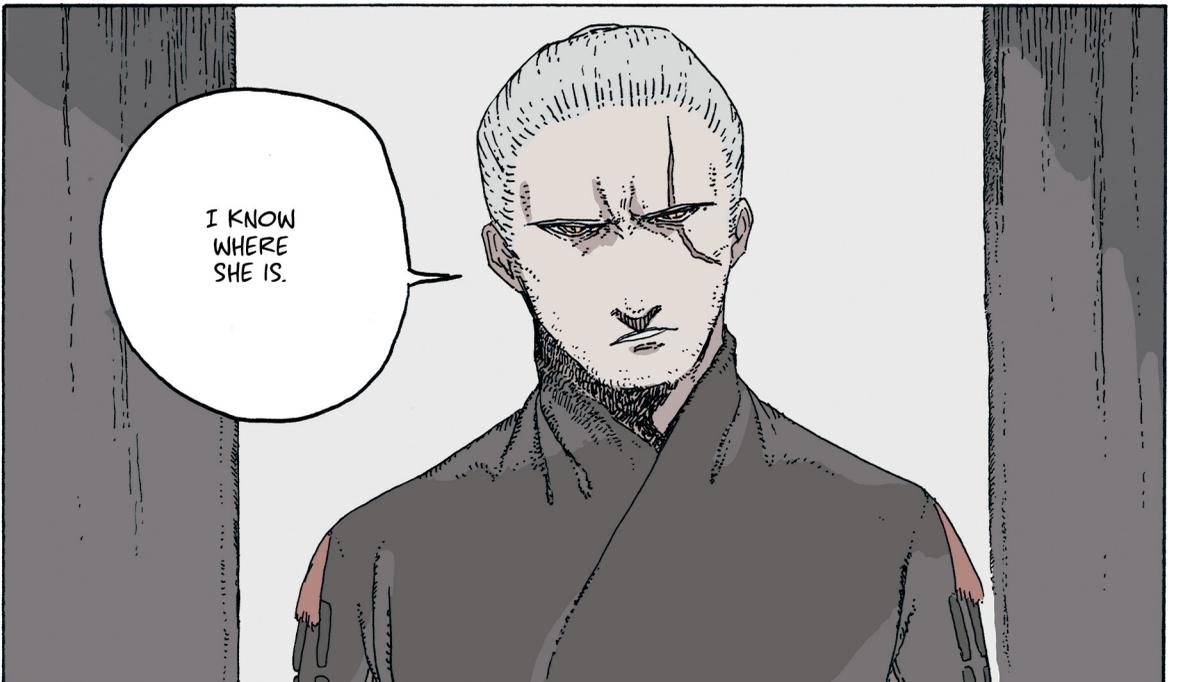
By Matthew Meyer

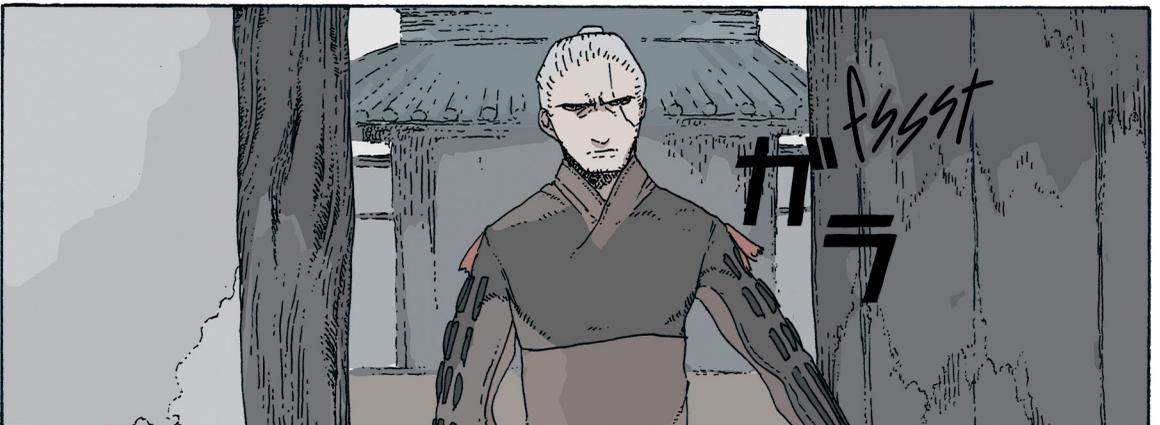
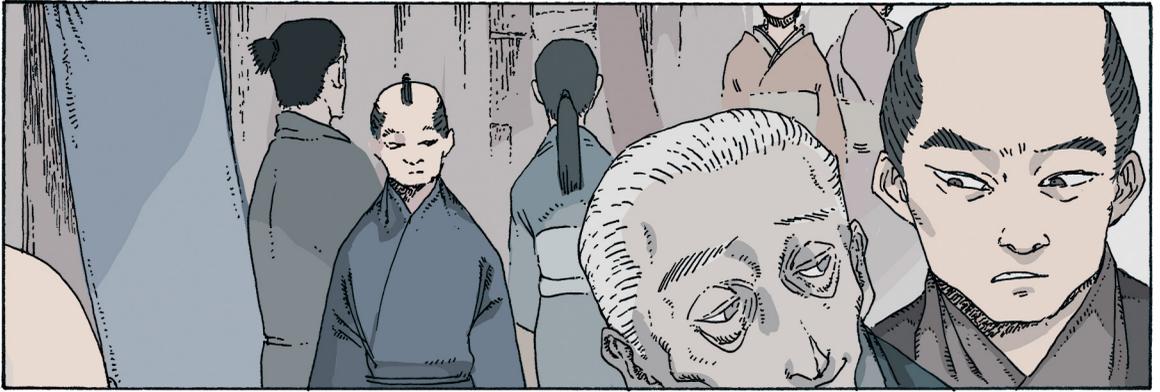
Matthew Meyer, also known as the Yokai Guy on social media, is an American artist living in Japan. He is the creator of Yokai.com and the publisher of four books in his *yōkai* encyclopedia series, and has been translating and illustrating Japanese folklore for over a decade. His work has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Smithsonian Magazine*, the *Japan Times*, the *Asahi Shimbun*, and on NHK and Fuji TV.

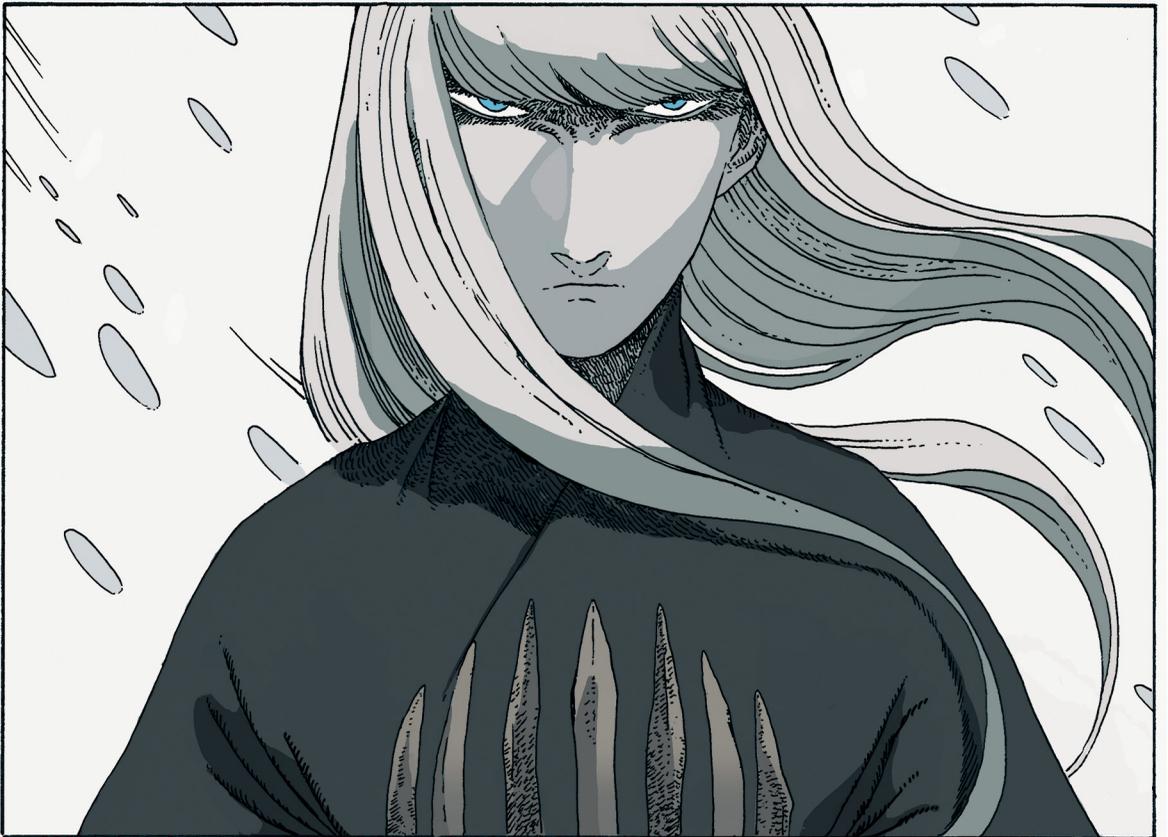
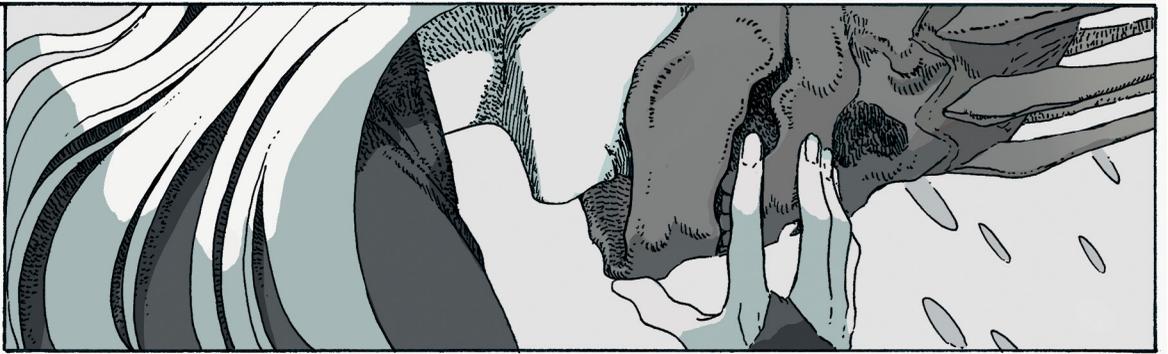


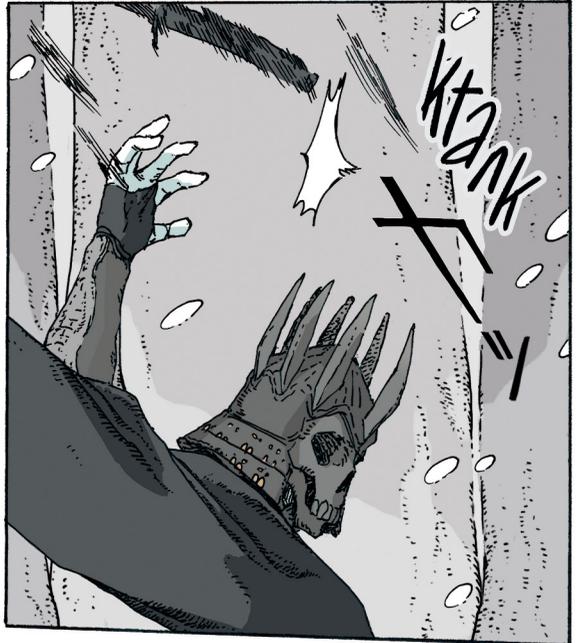
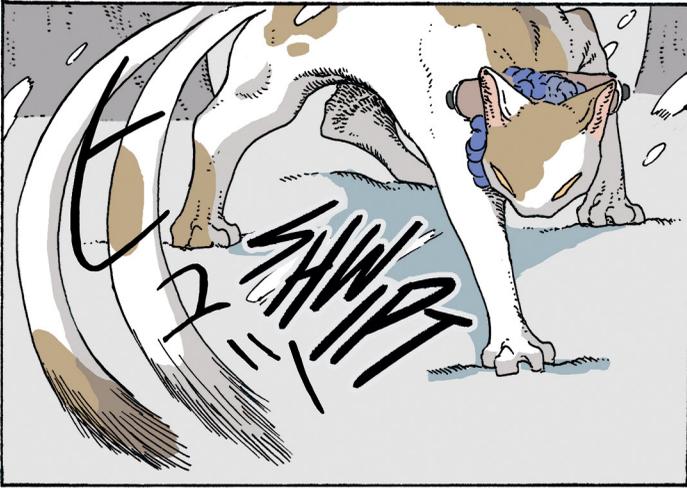


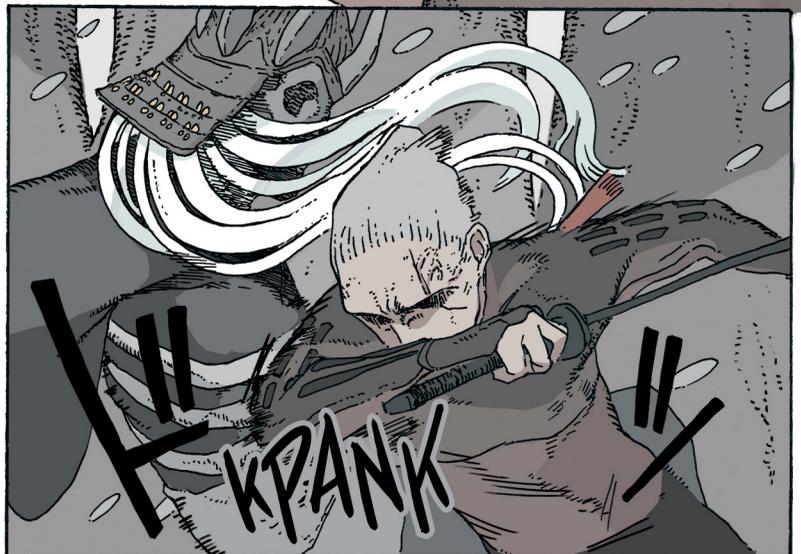
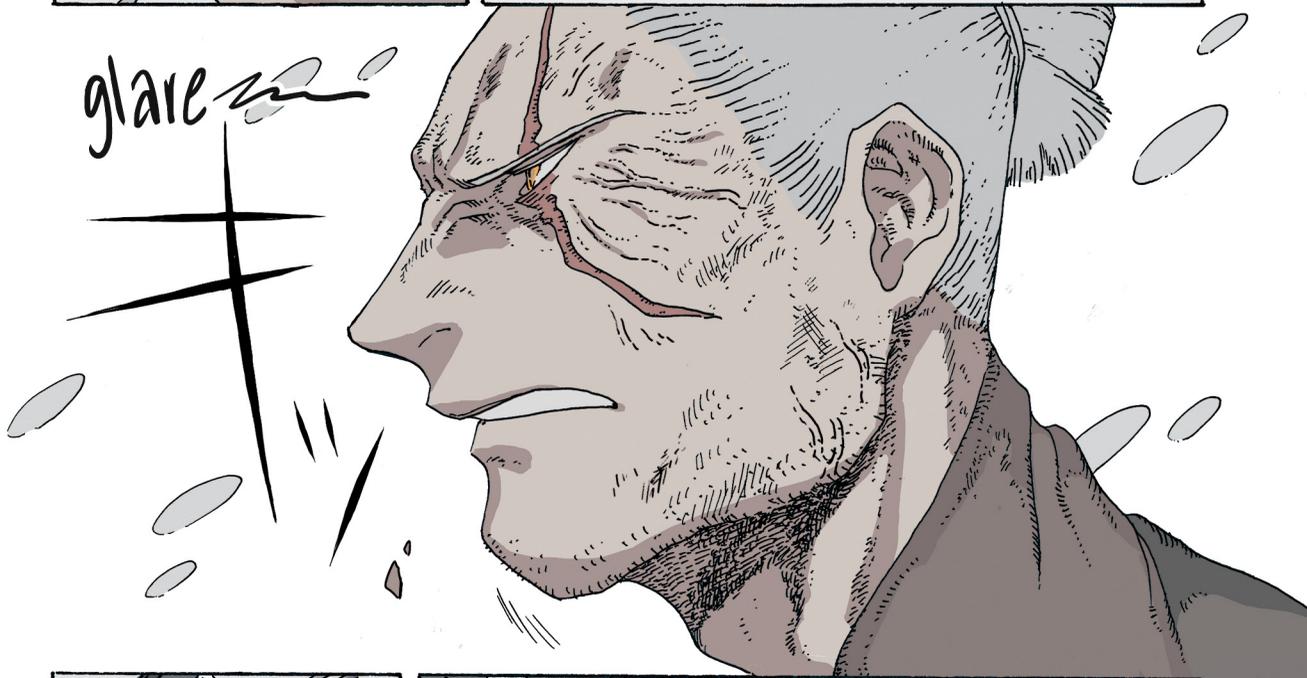
End of Volume 1.

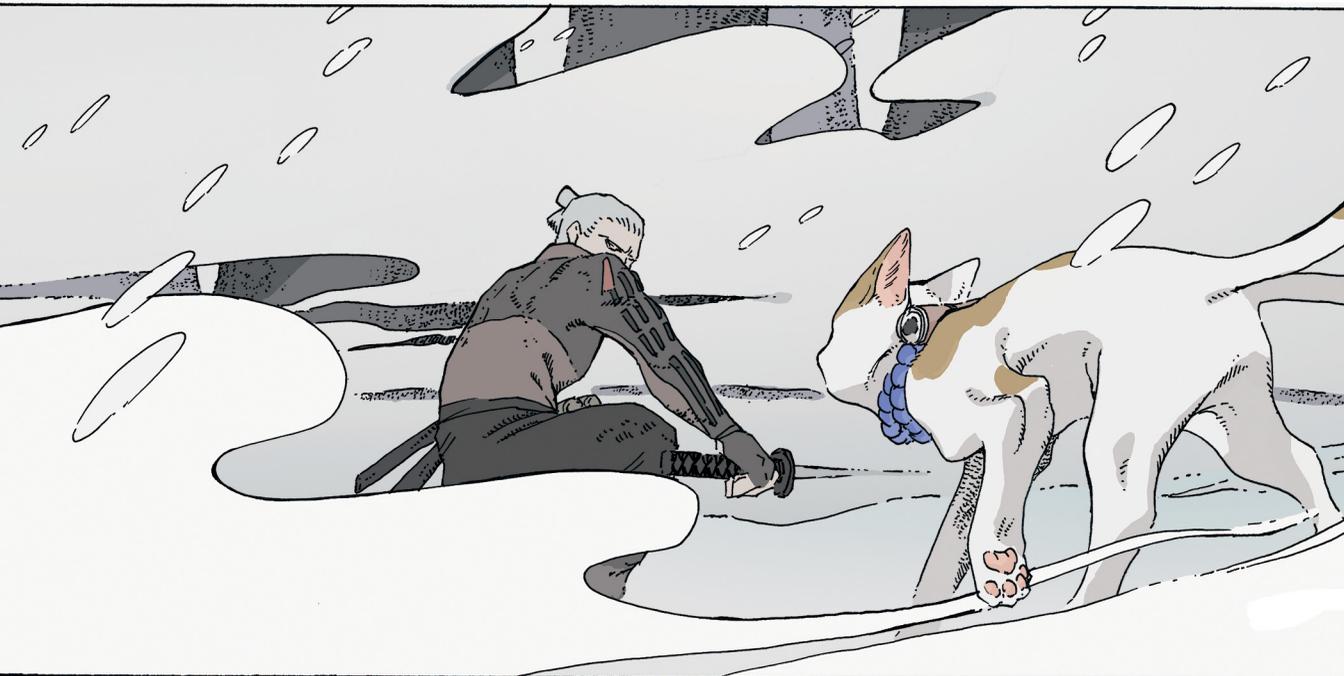
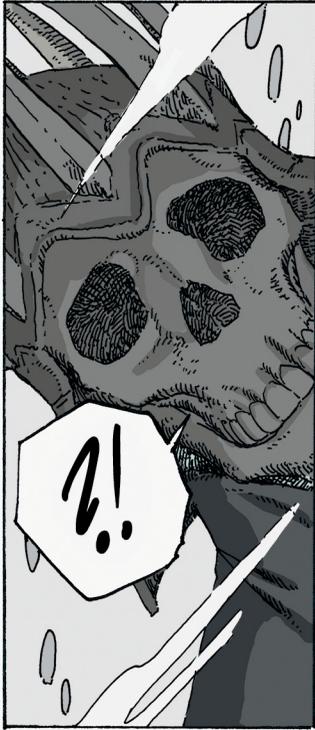
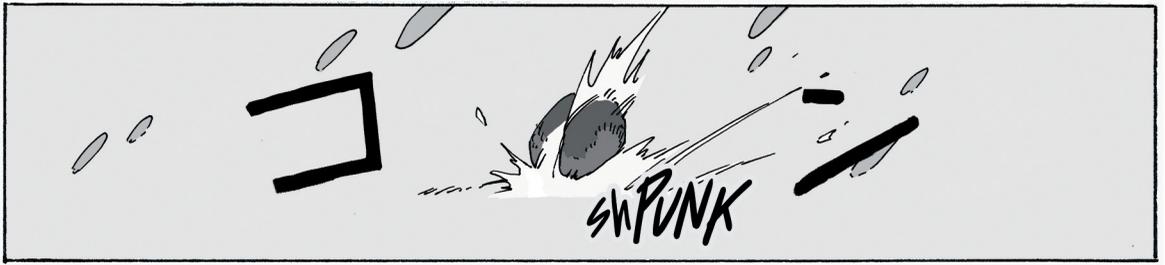


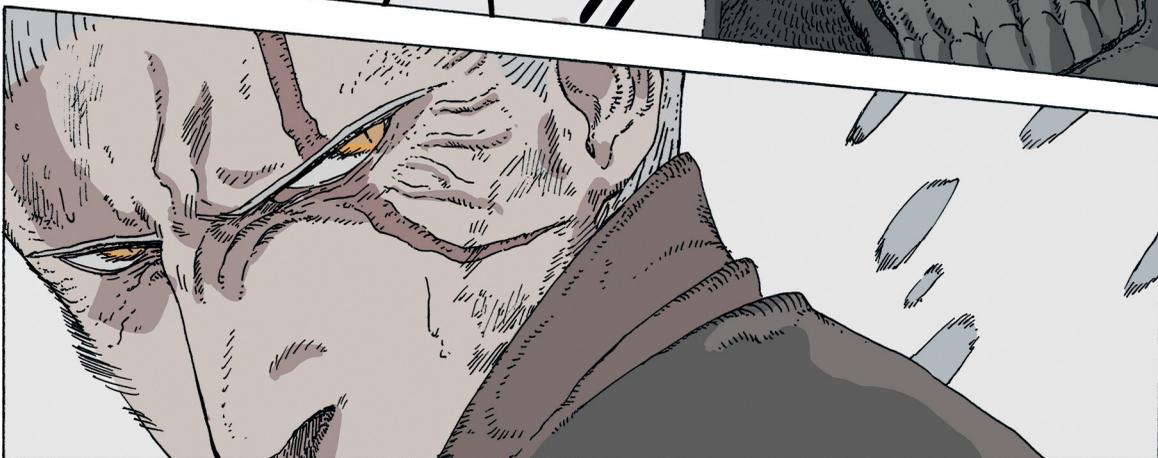
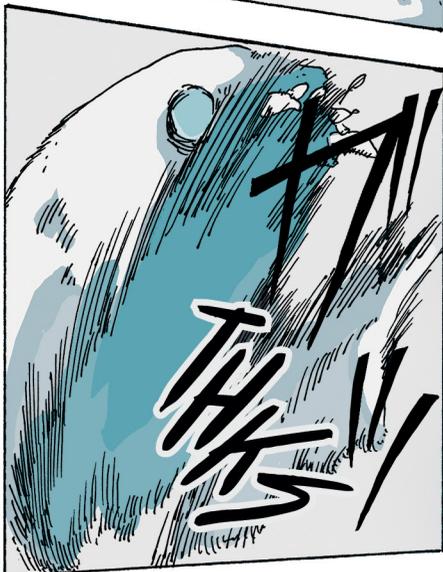


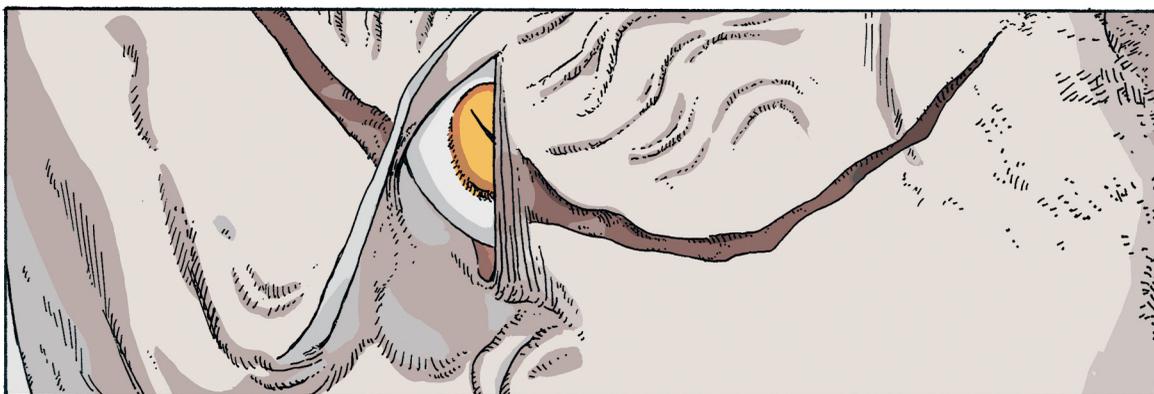
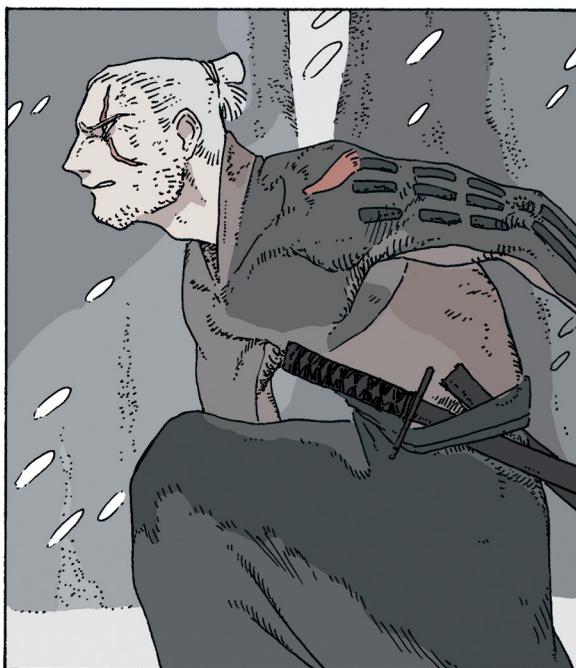
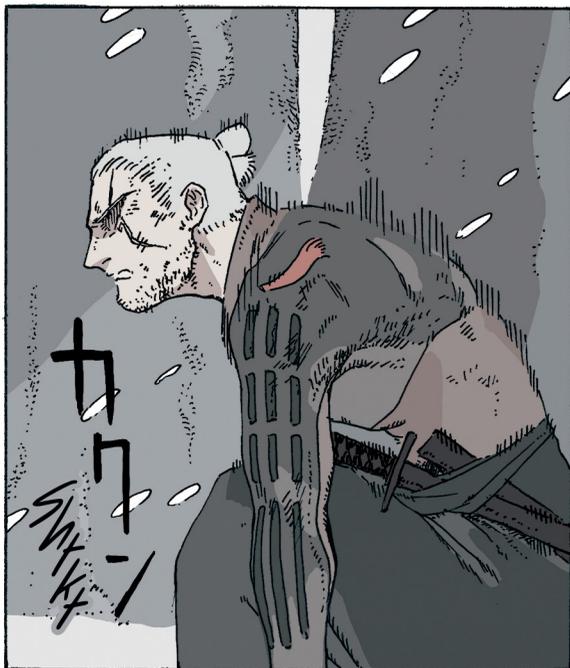
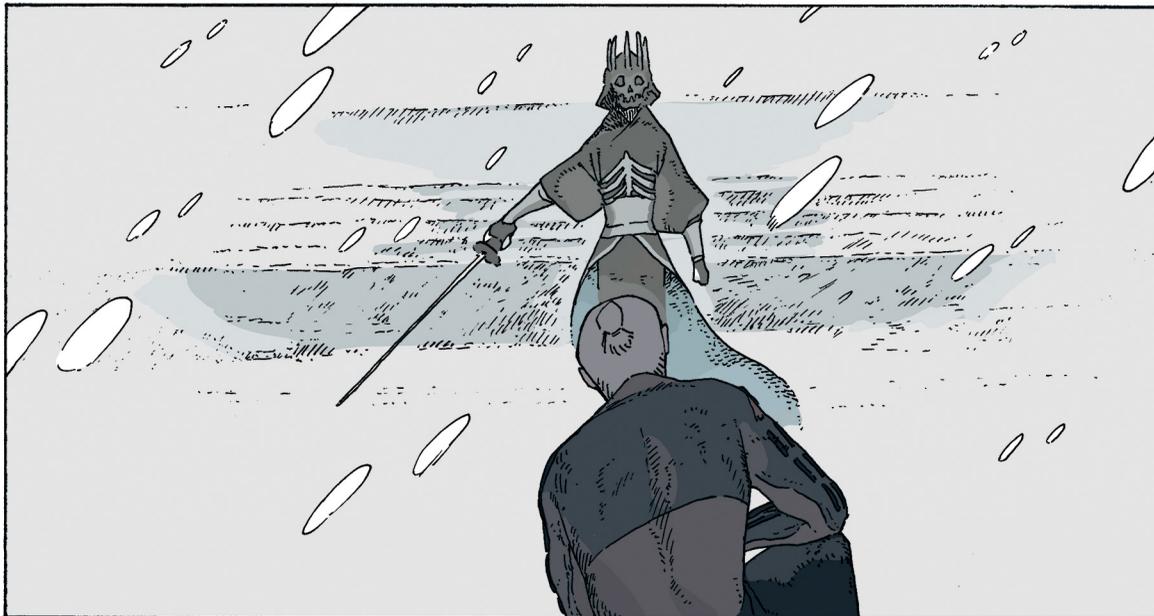


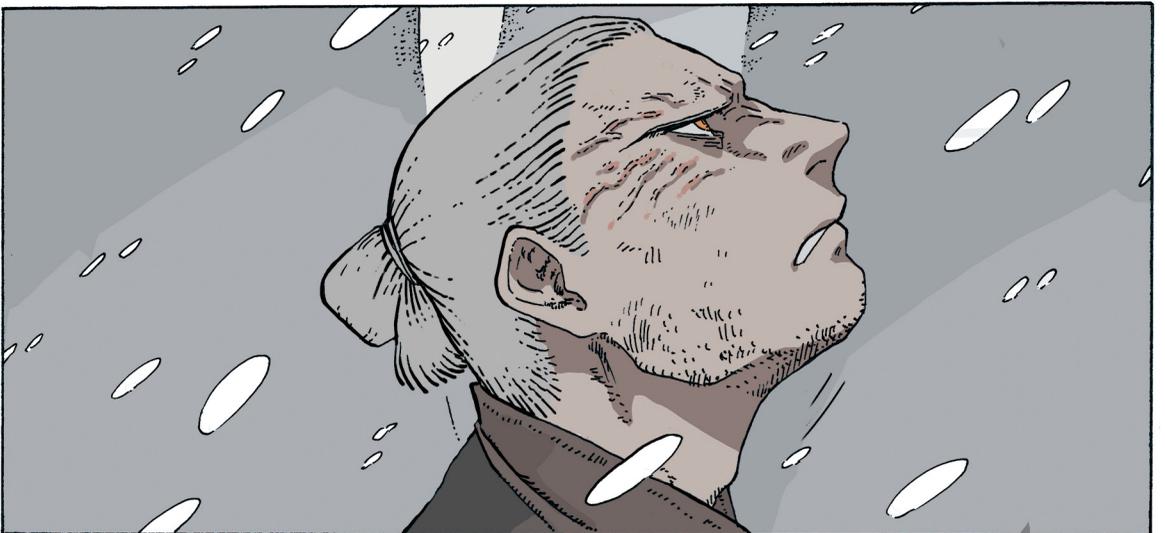
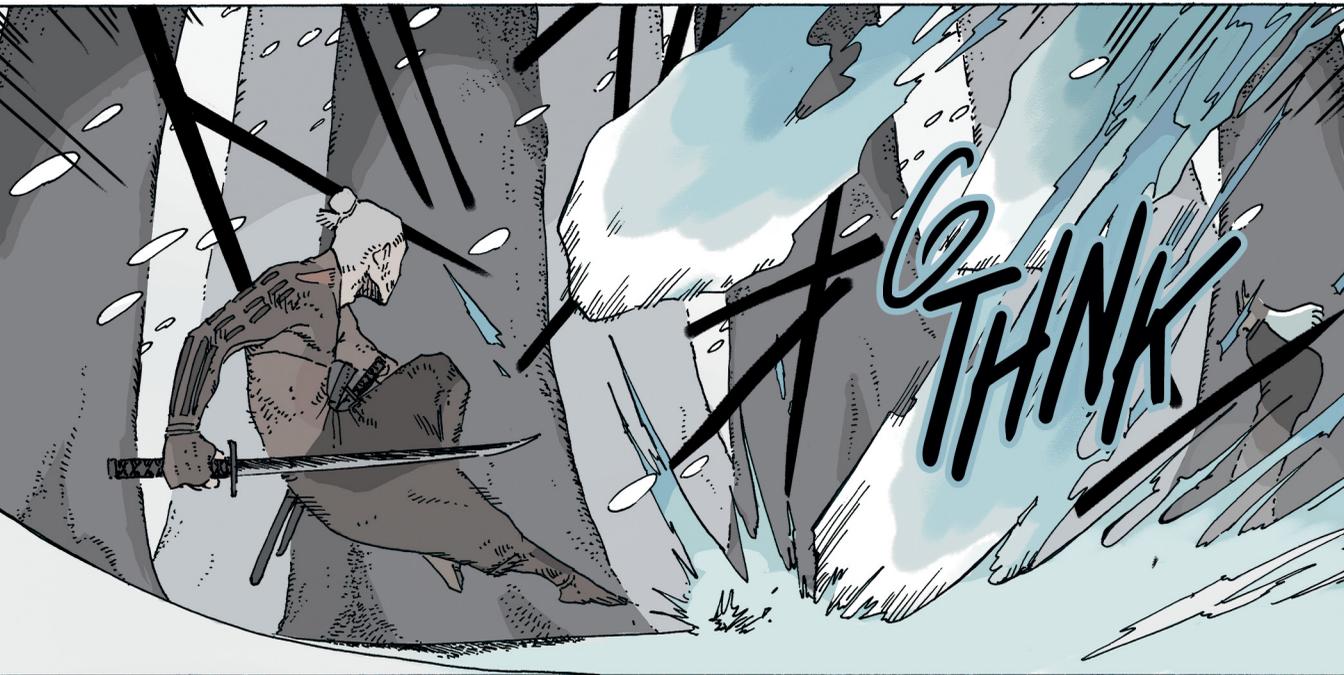


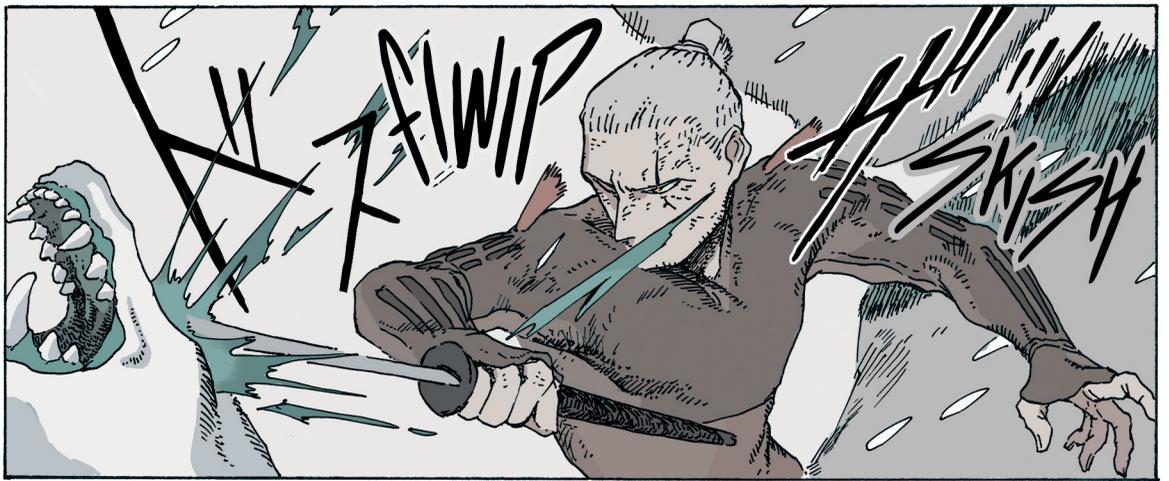


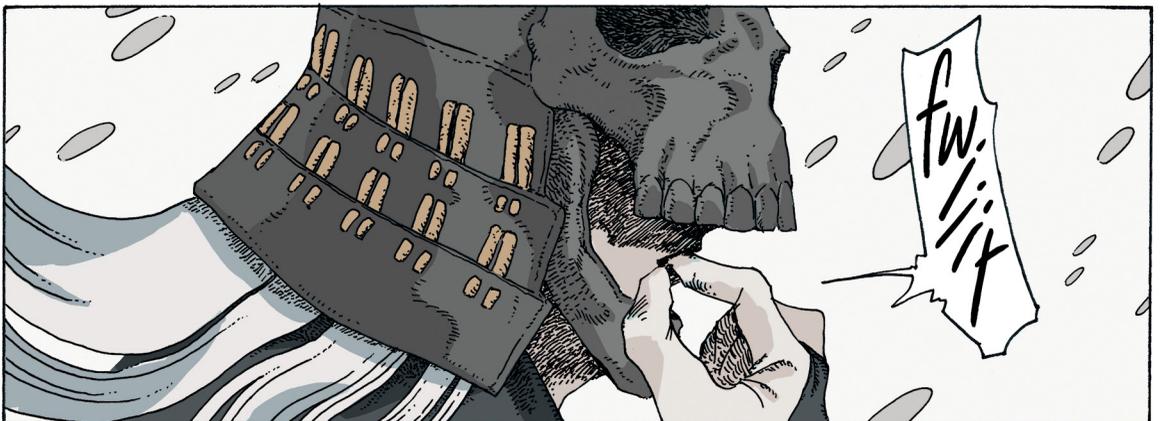
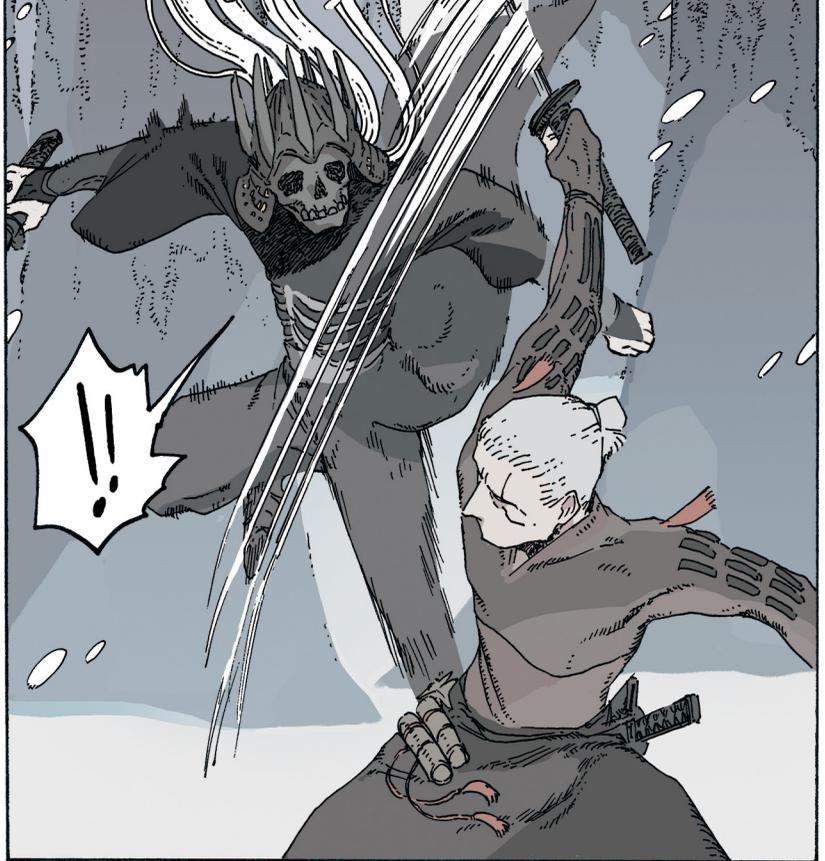


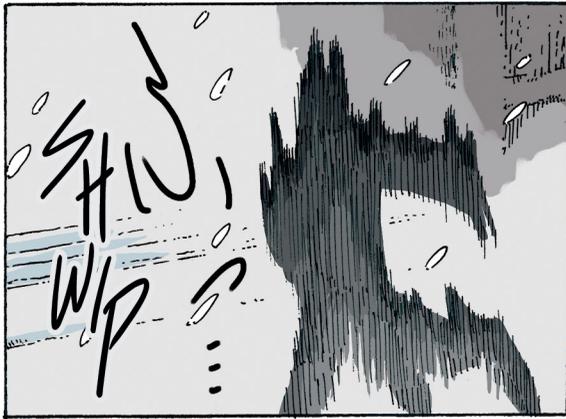


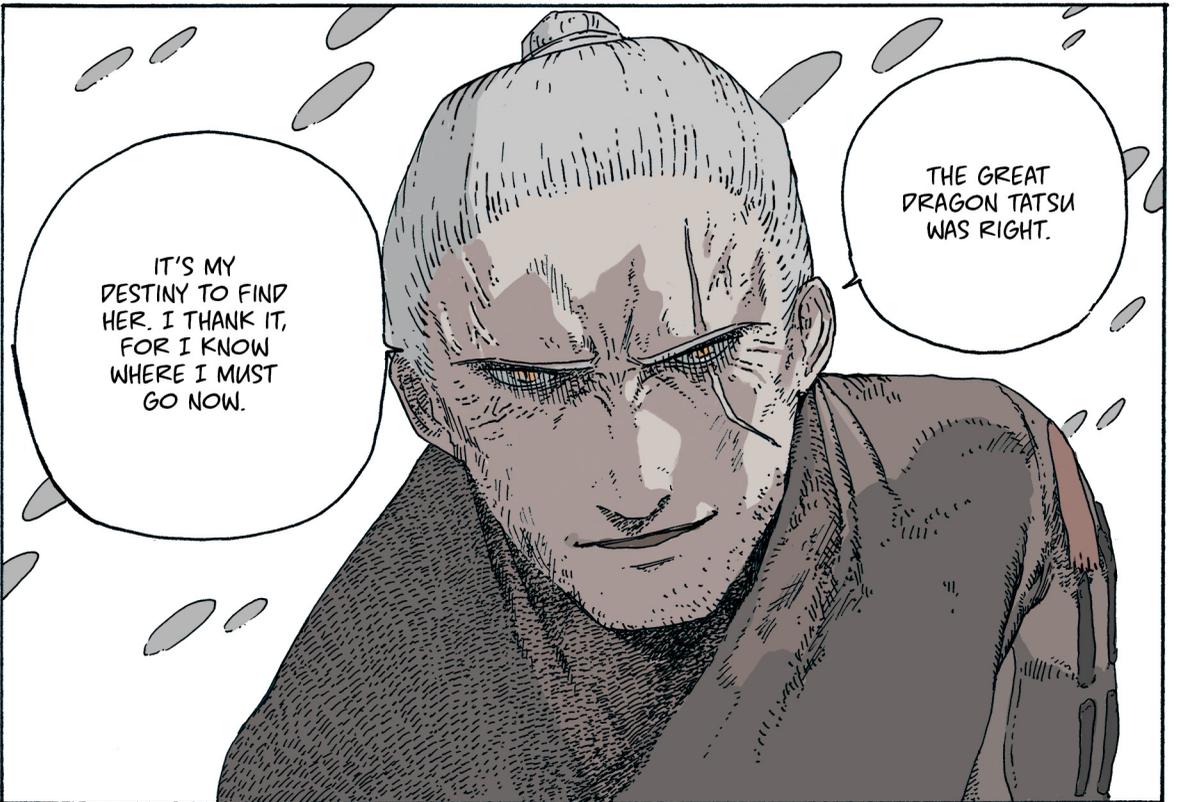


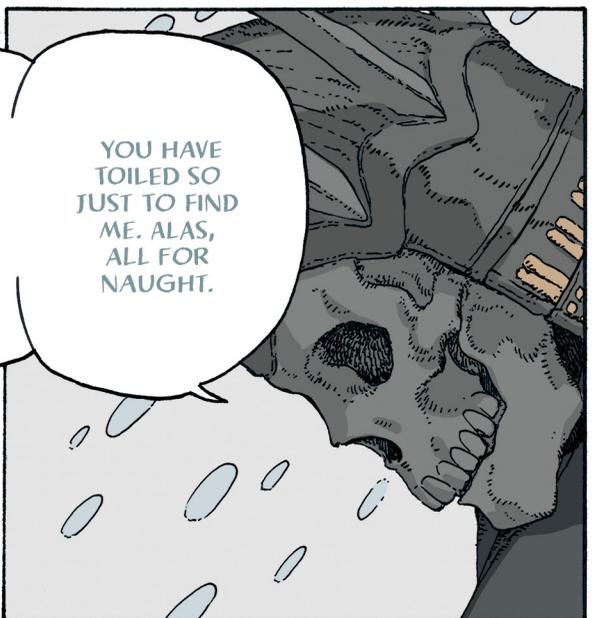
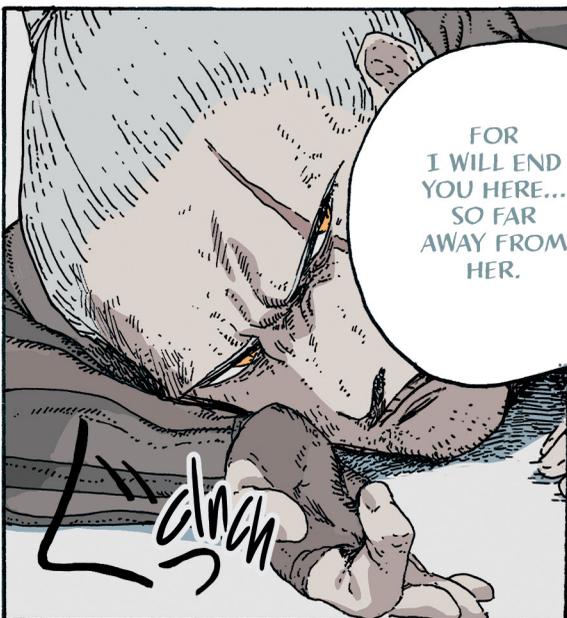
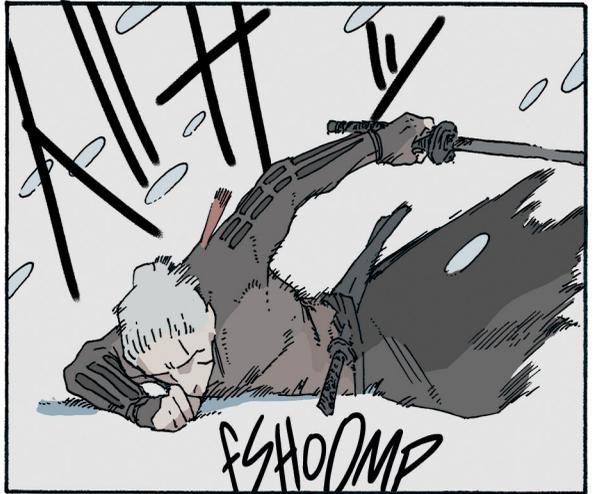


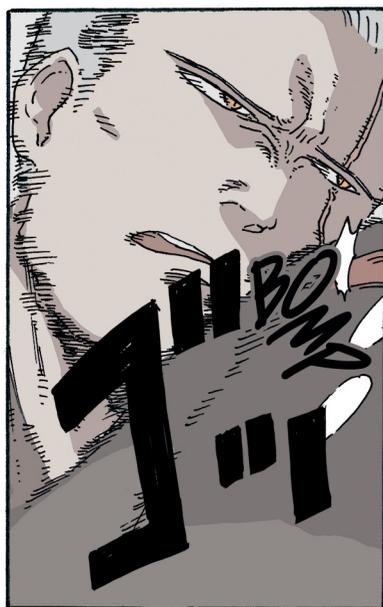


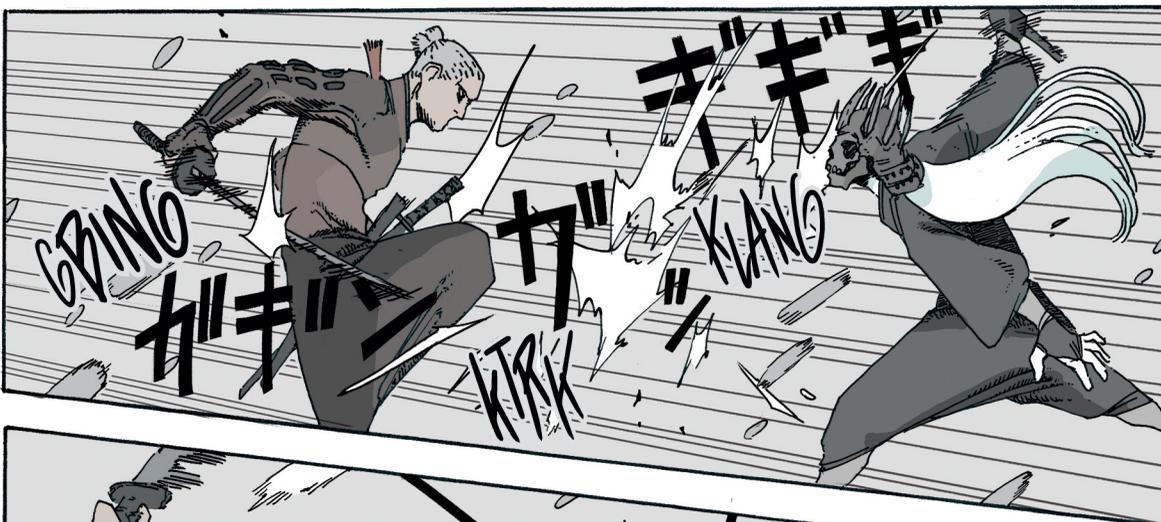


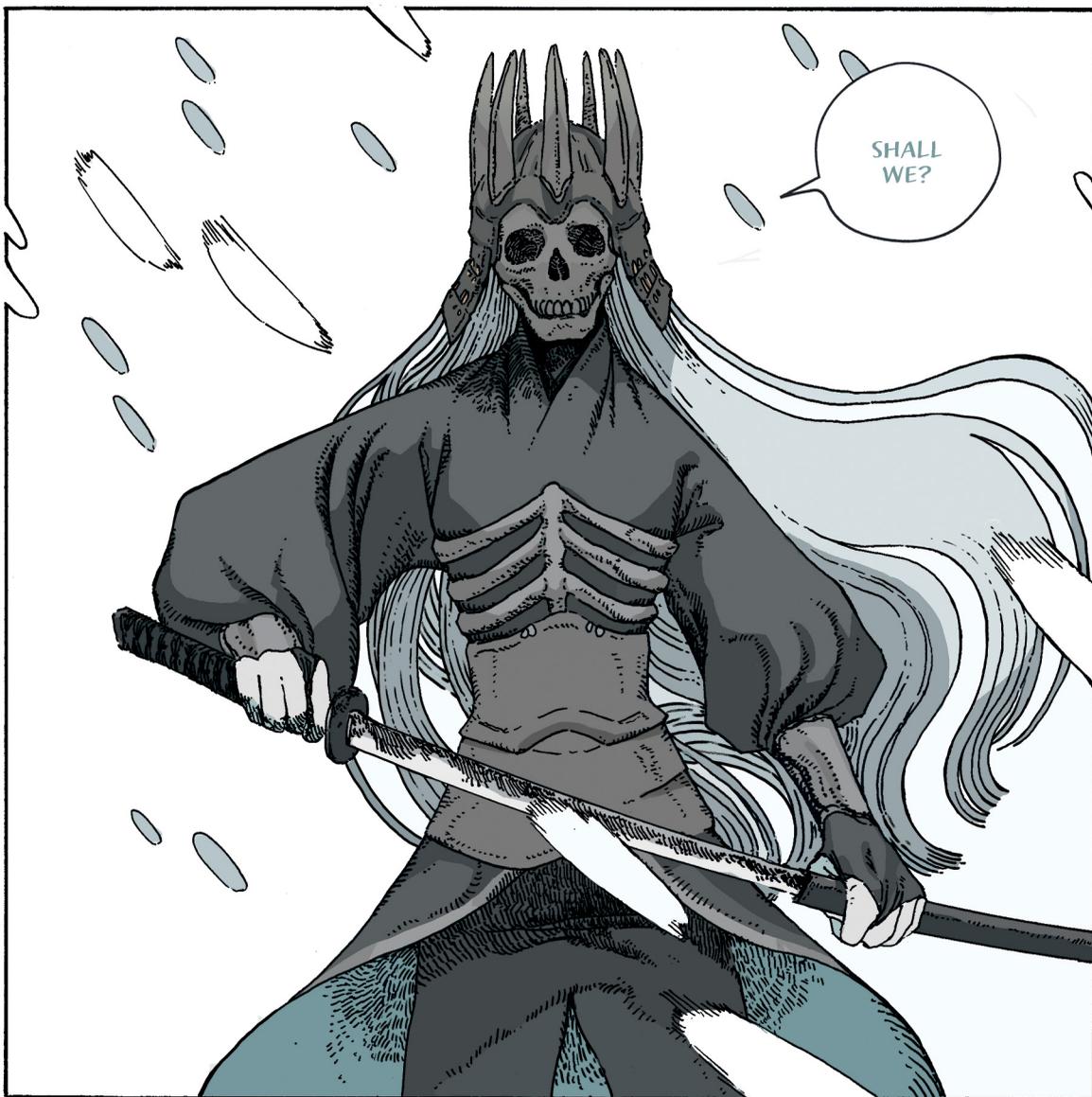
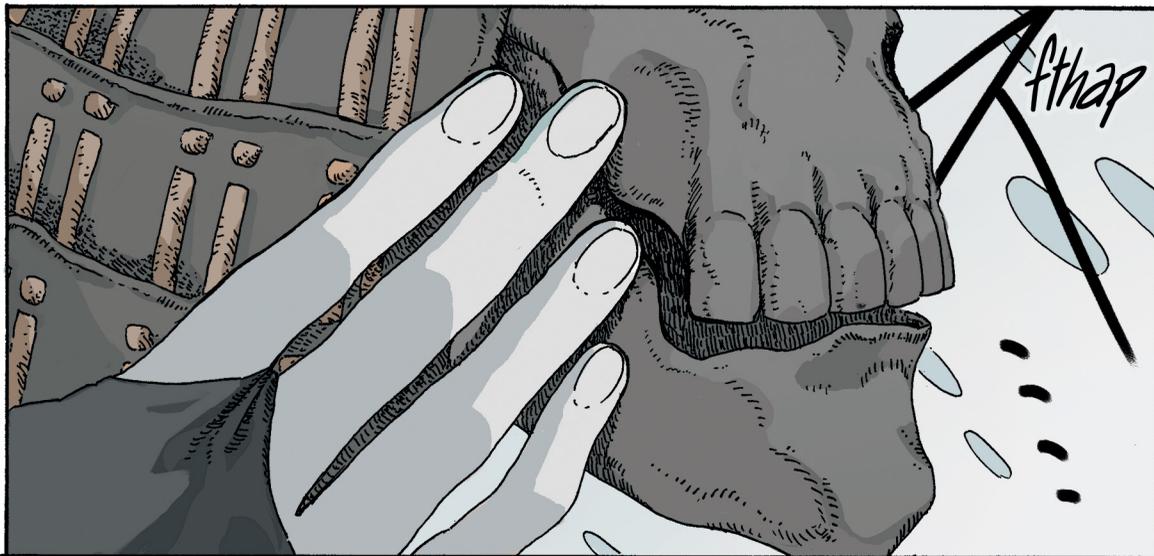


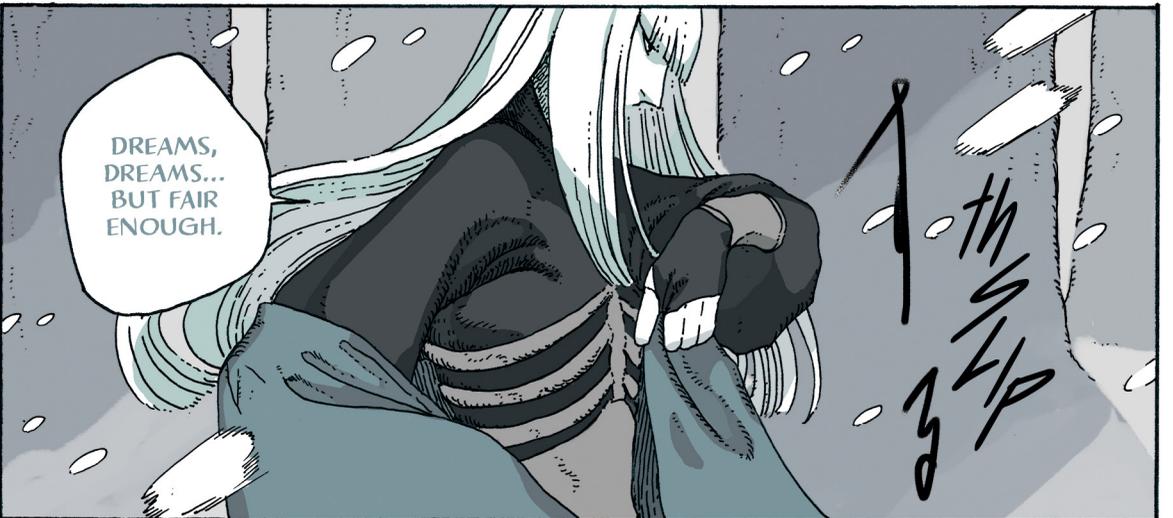
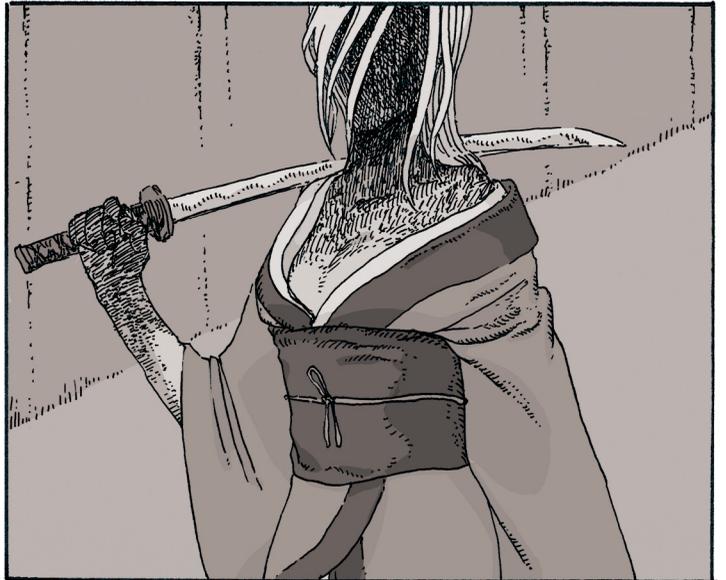


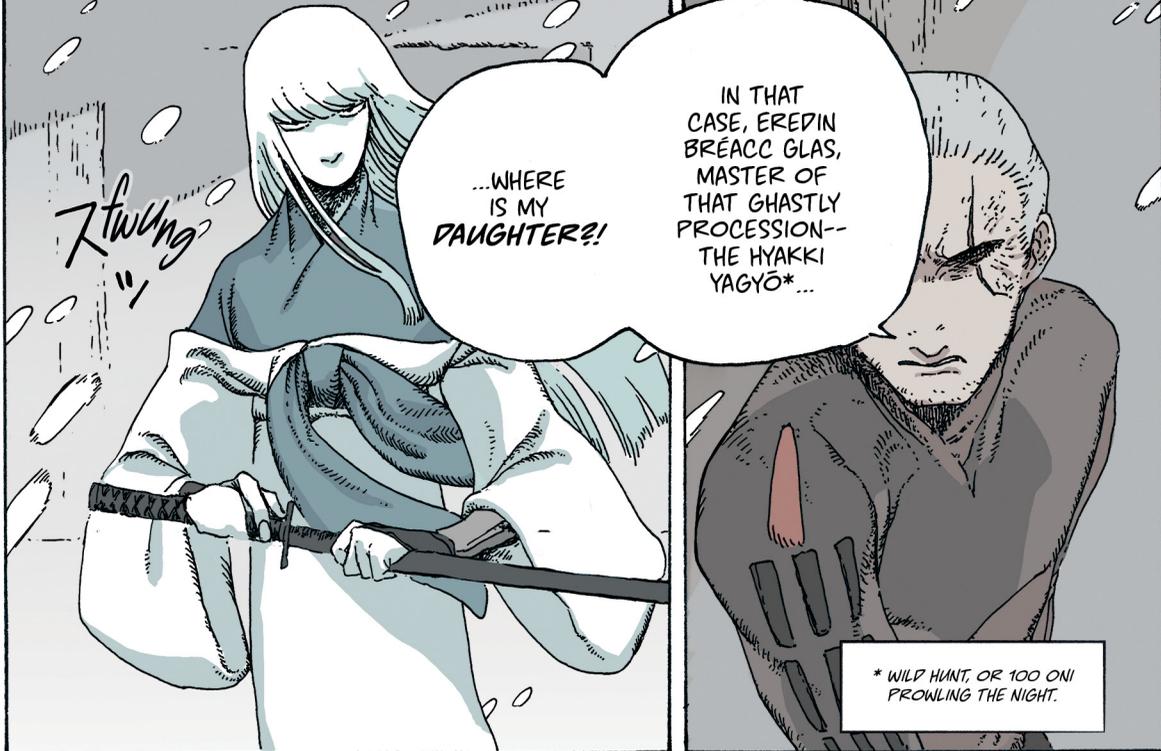








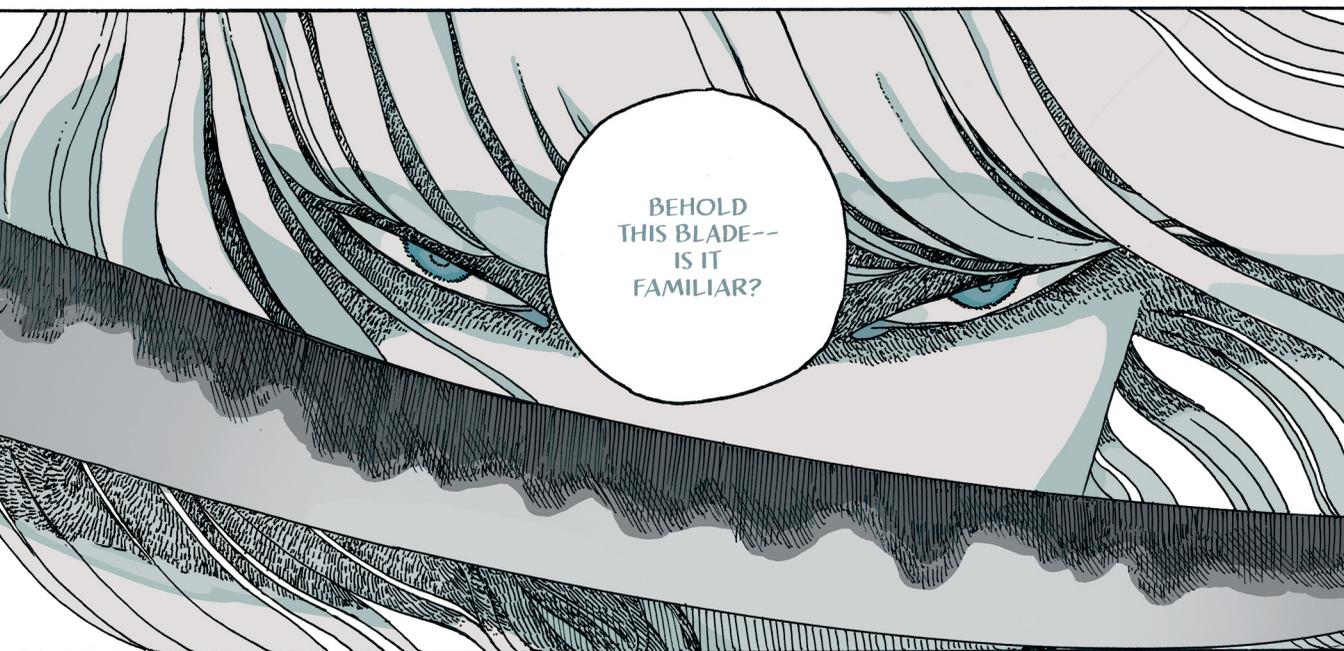




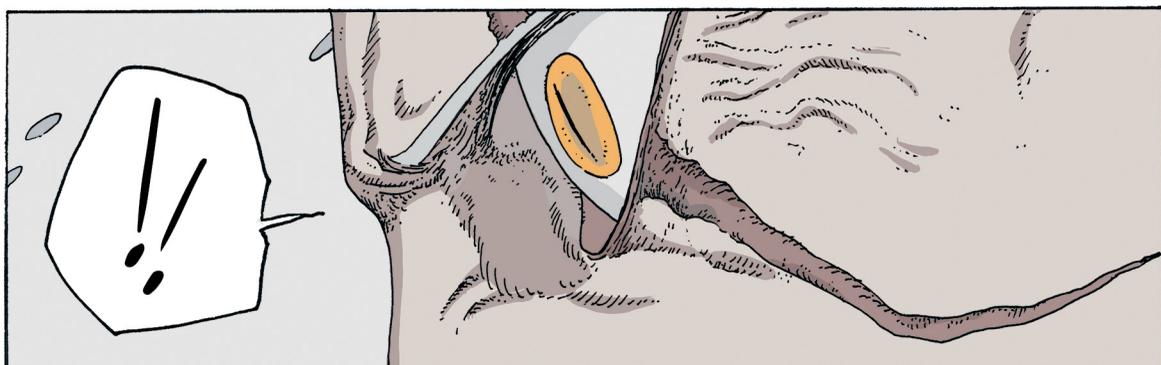
...WHERE
IS MY
DAUGHTER?!

IN THAT
CASE, EREDIN
BRÉACC GLAS,
MASTER OF
THAT GHASTLY
PROCESSION--
THE HYAKKI
YAGYO*...

* WILD HUNT, OR 100 ONI
PROWLING THE NIGHT.



BEHOLD
THIS BLADE--
IS IT
FAMILIAR?



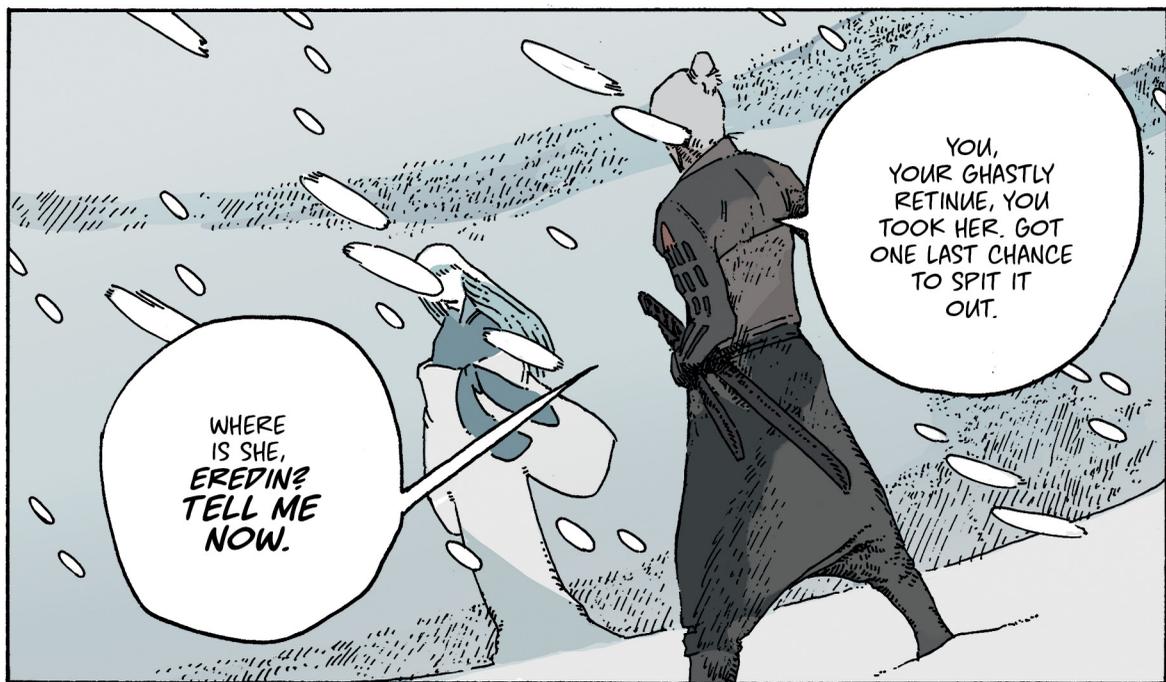
!!



DO YOU REALLY NOT KNOW? *TSK TSK* SUCH A TWISTED THING...DESTINY. I DO NOT HAVE HER.



WHERE IS SHE?!



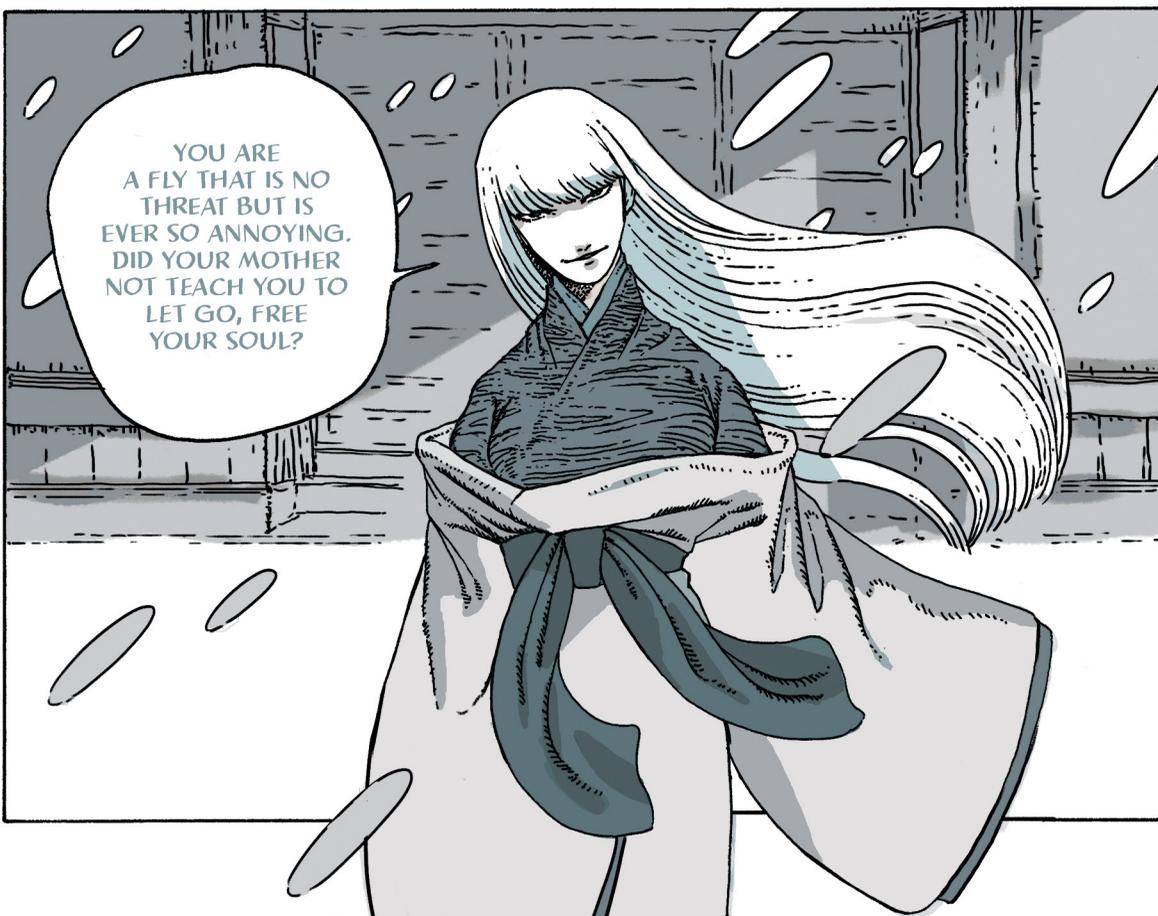
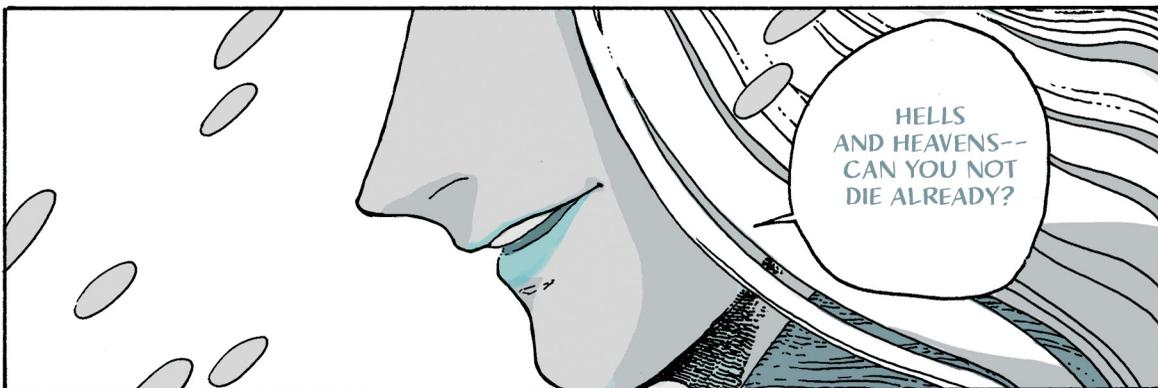
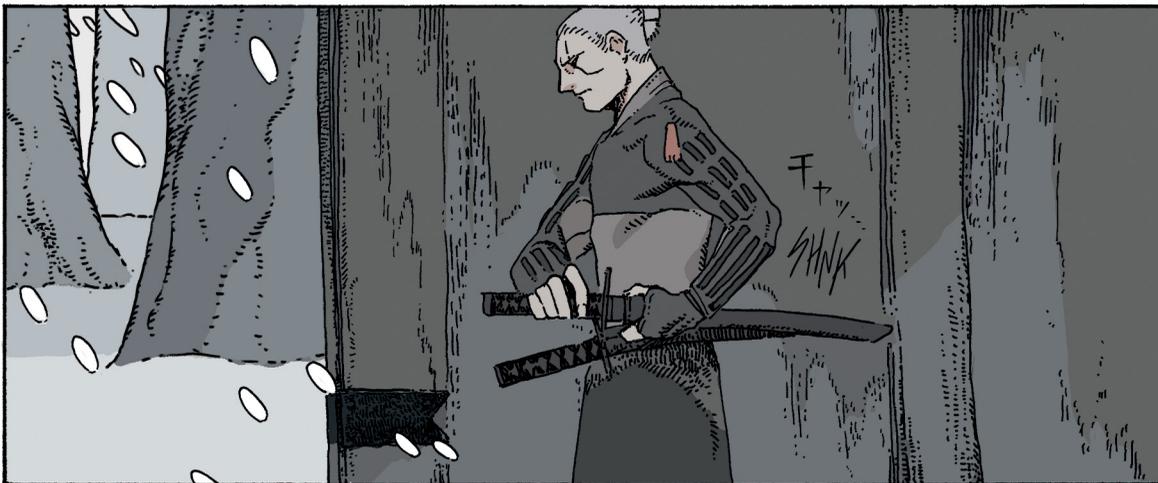
WHERE IS SHE, EREDIN? TELL ME NOW.

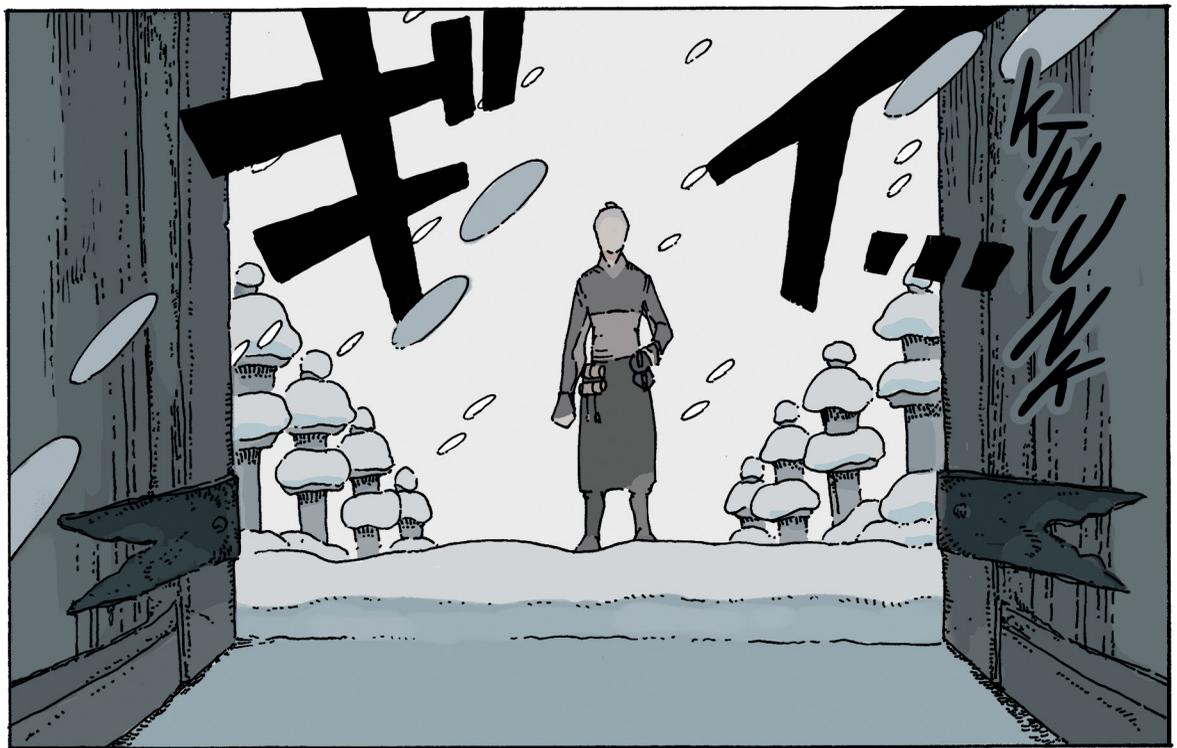
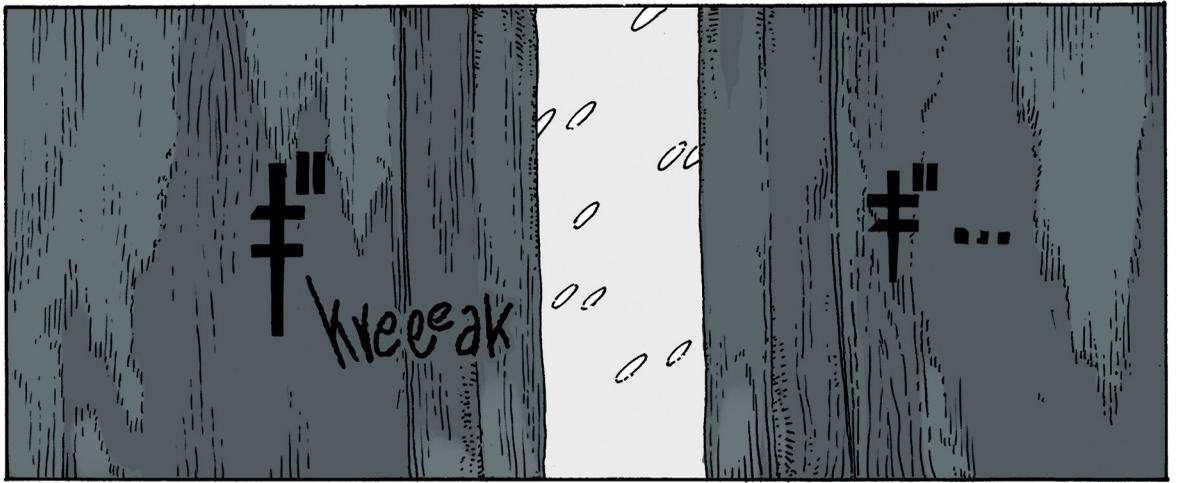
YOU, YOUR GHASTLY RETINUE, YOU TOOK HER. GOT ONE LAST CHANCE TO SPIT IT OUT.

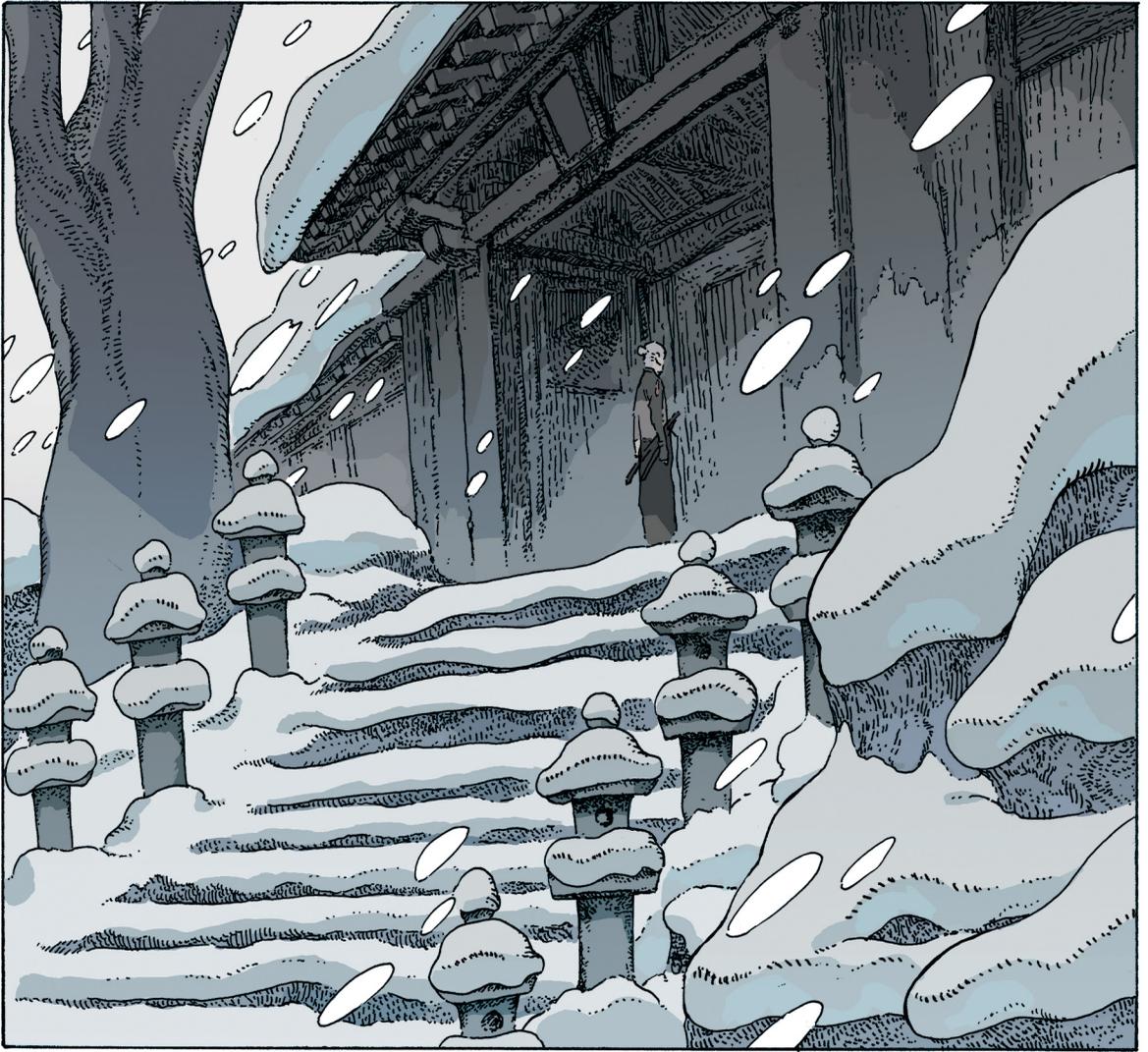


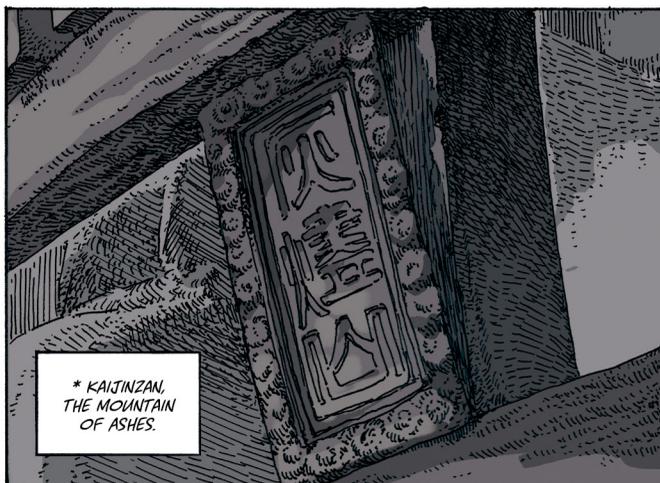
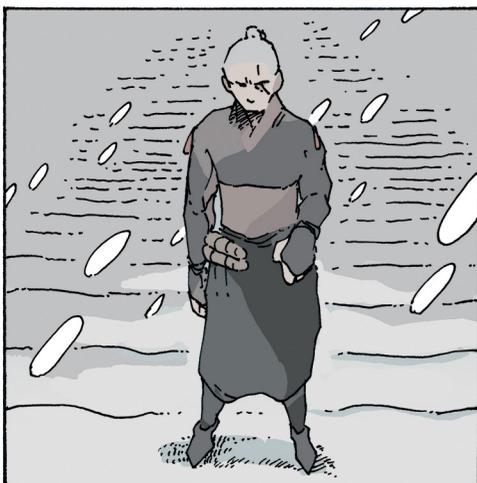
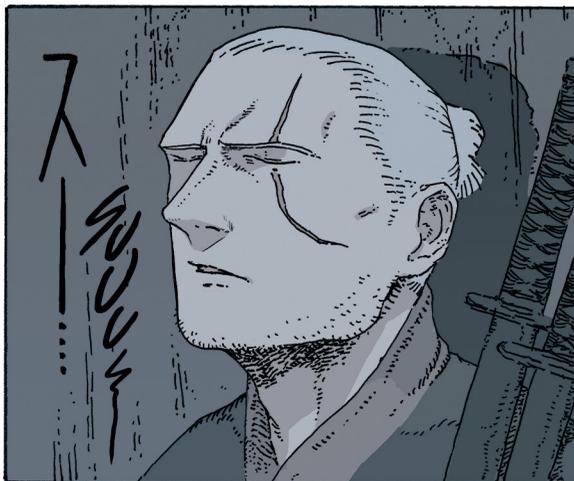
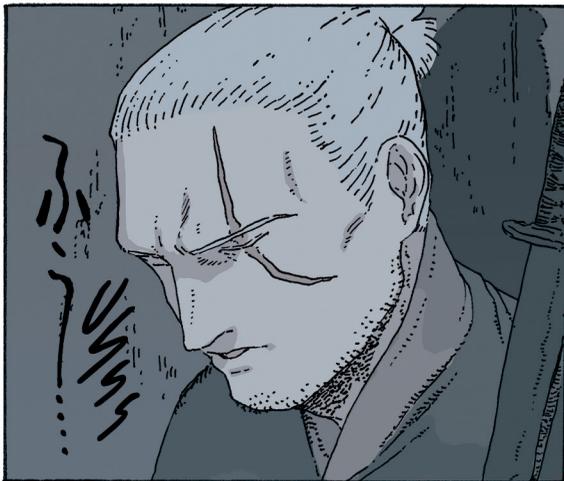
WE MUST KNOW ONE ANOTHER BETTER BEFORE YOU CALL ME BY MY FIRST NAME.

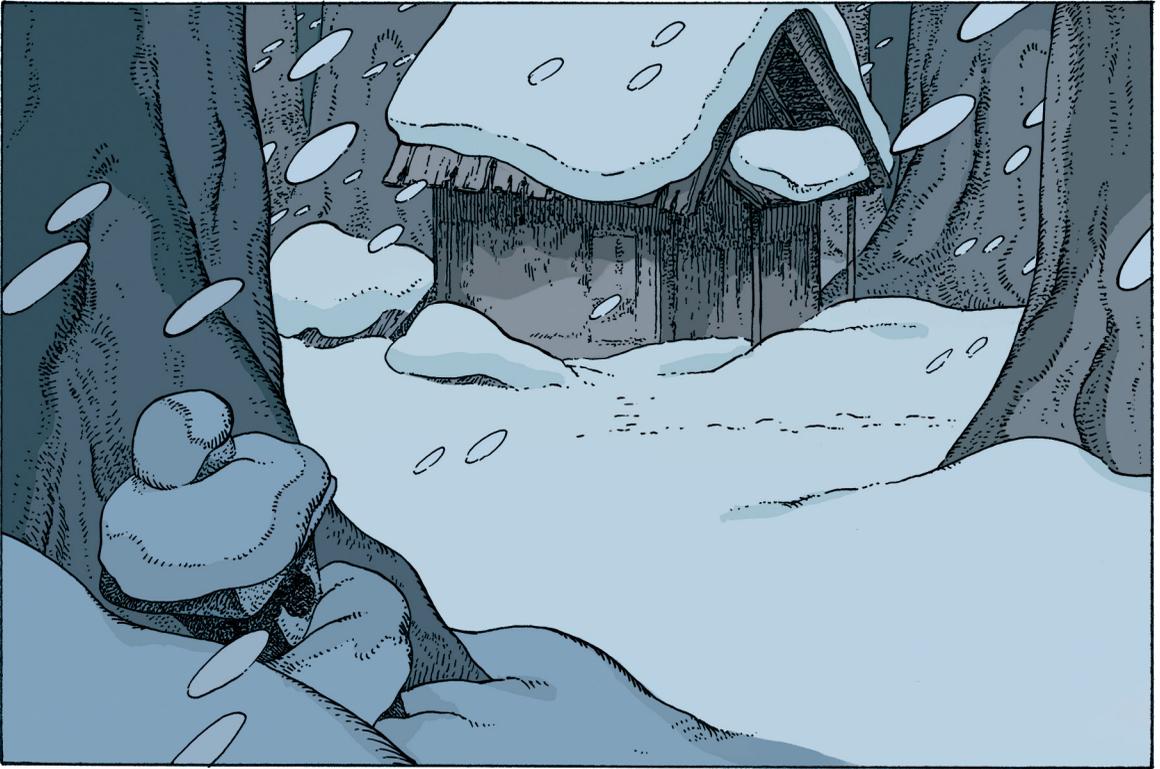
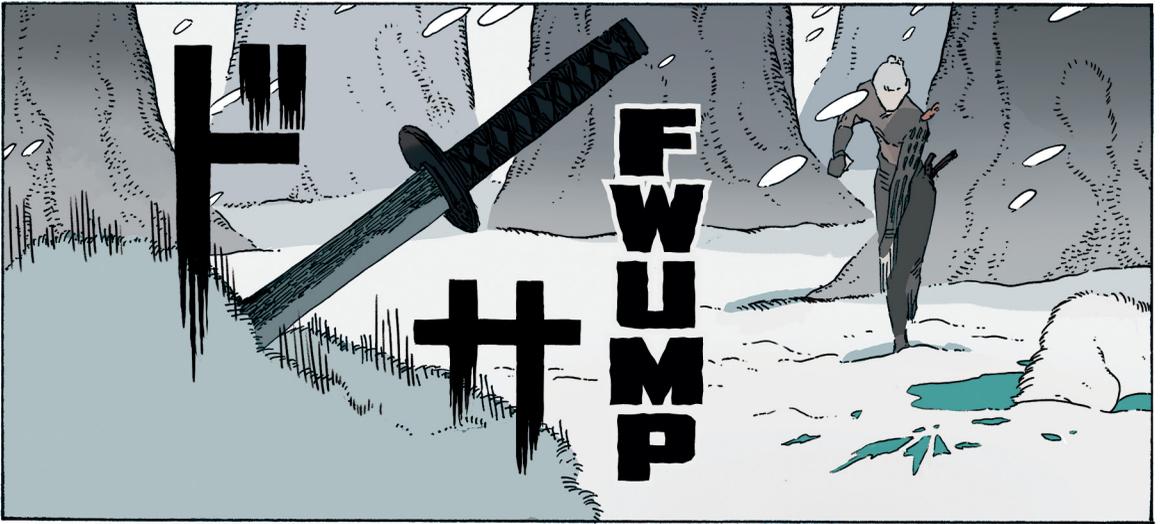
HASTY FAMILIARITY, MUTANT. SOMETHING I DESPISE.

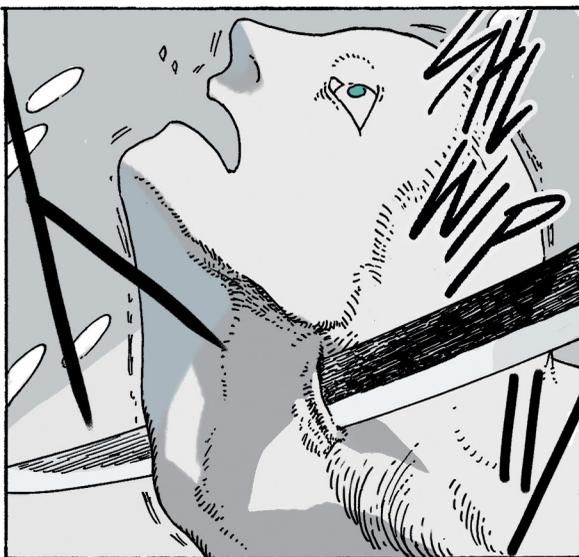
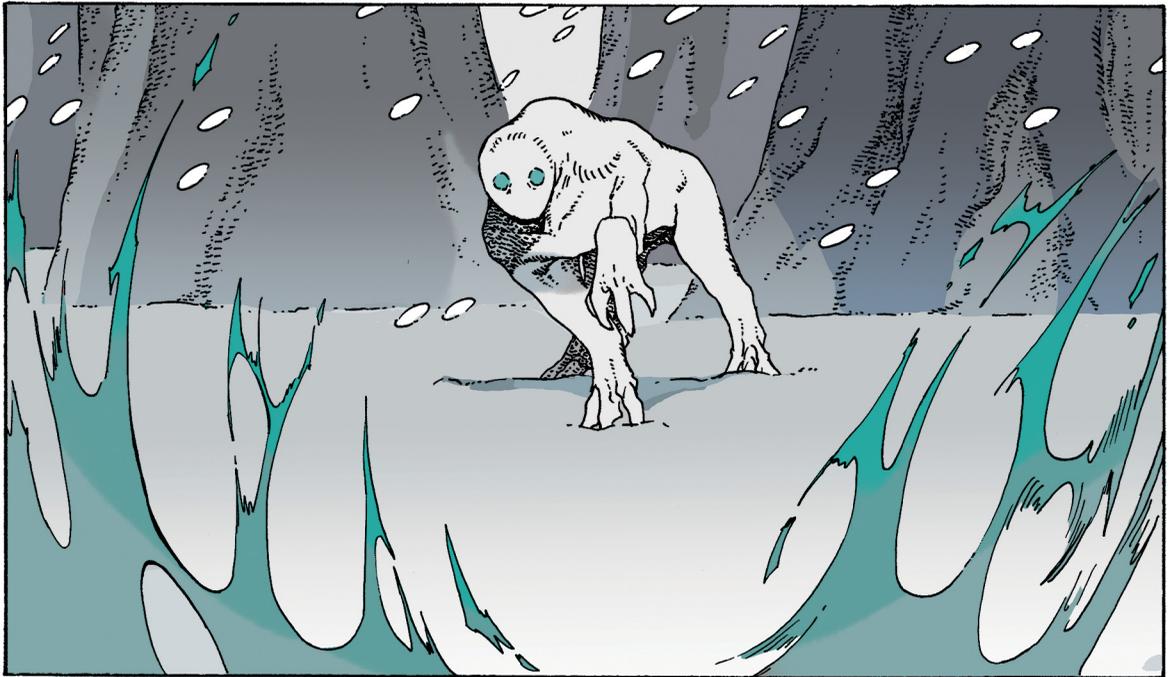
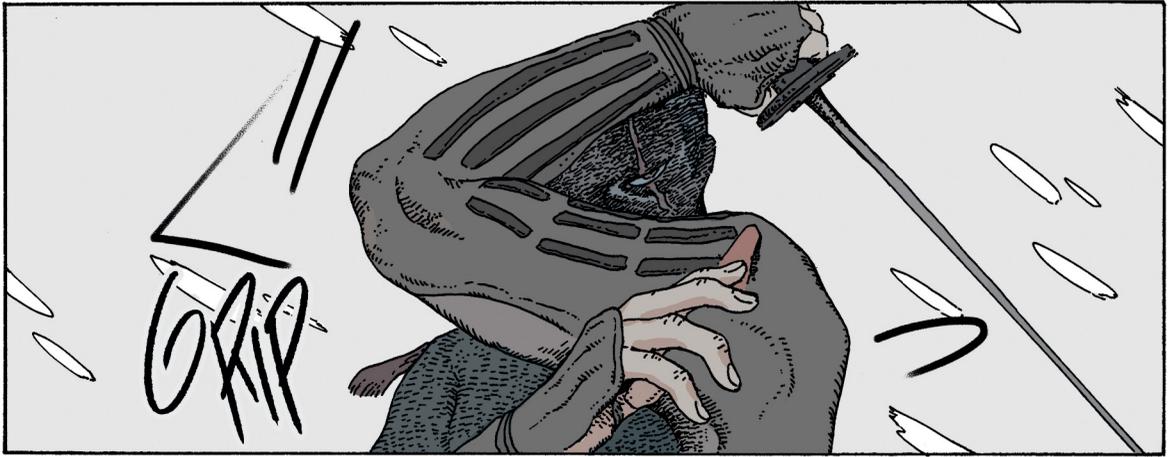




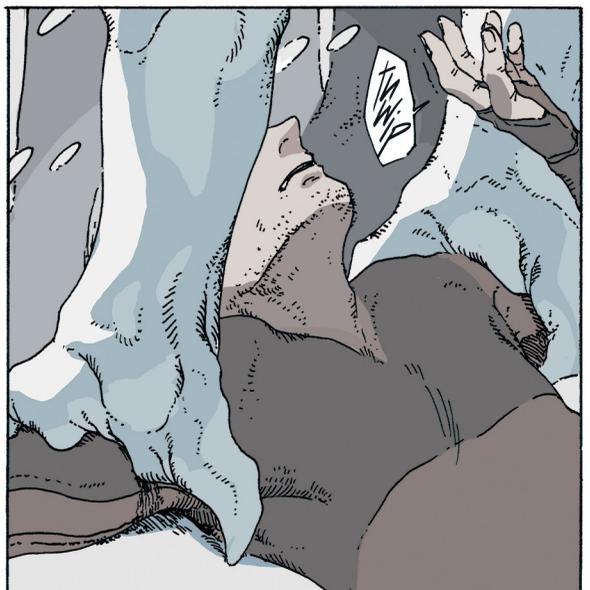
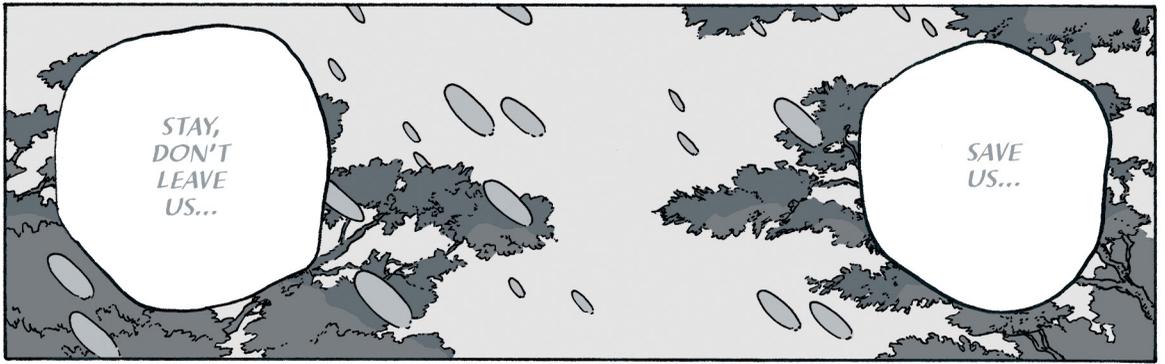


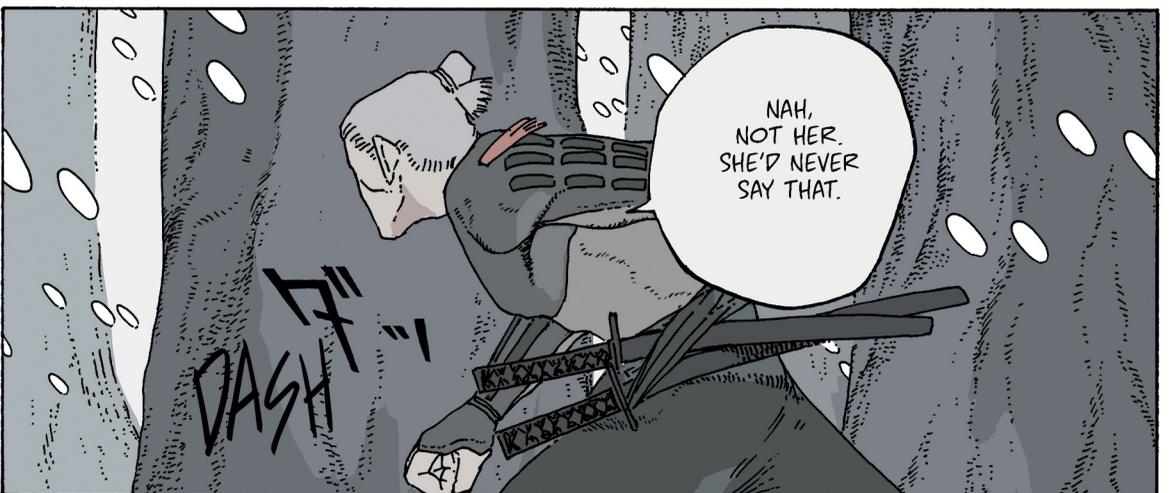
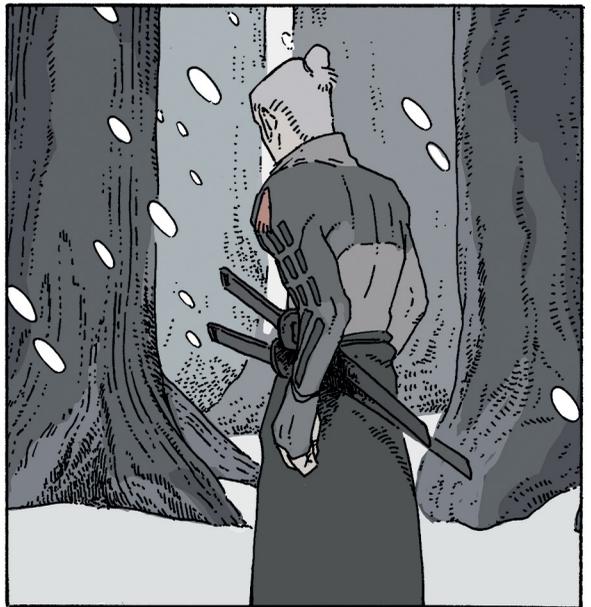


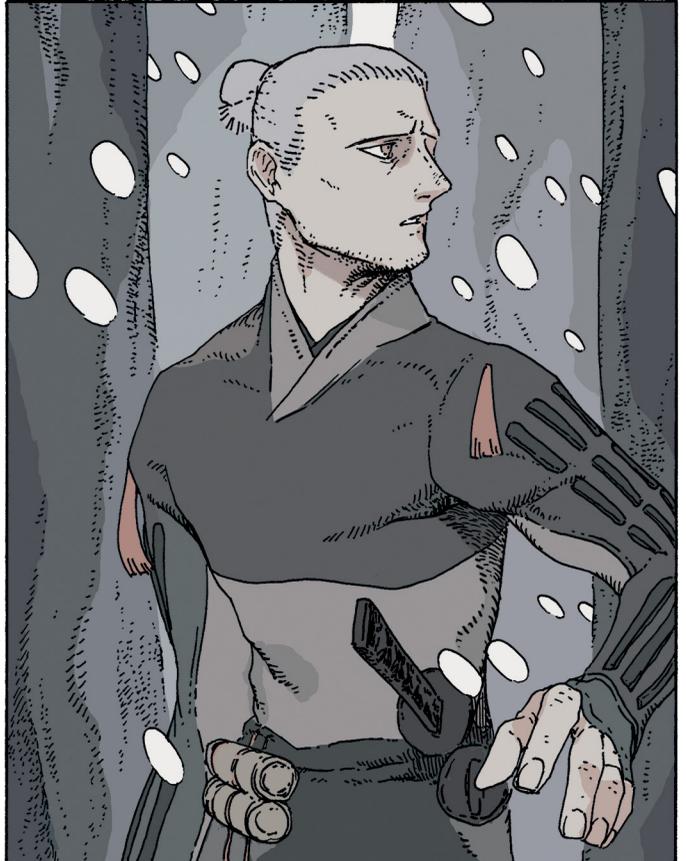
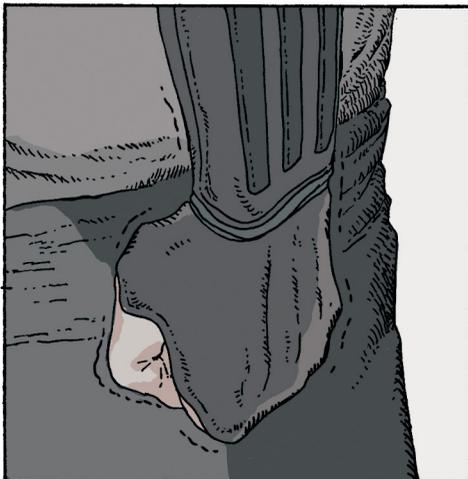
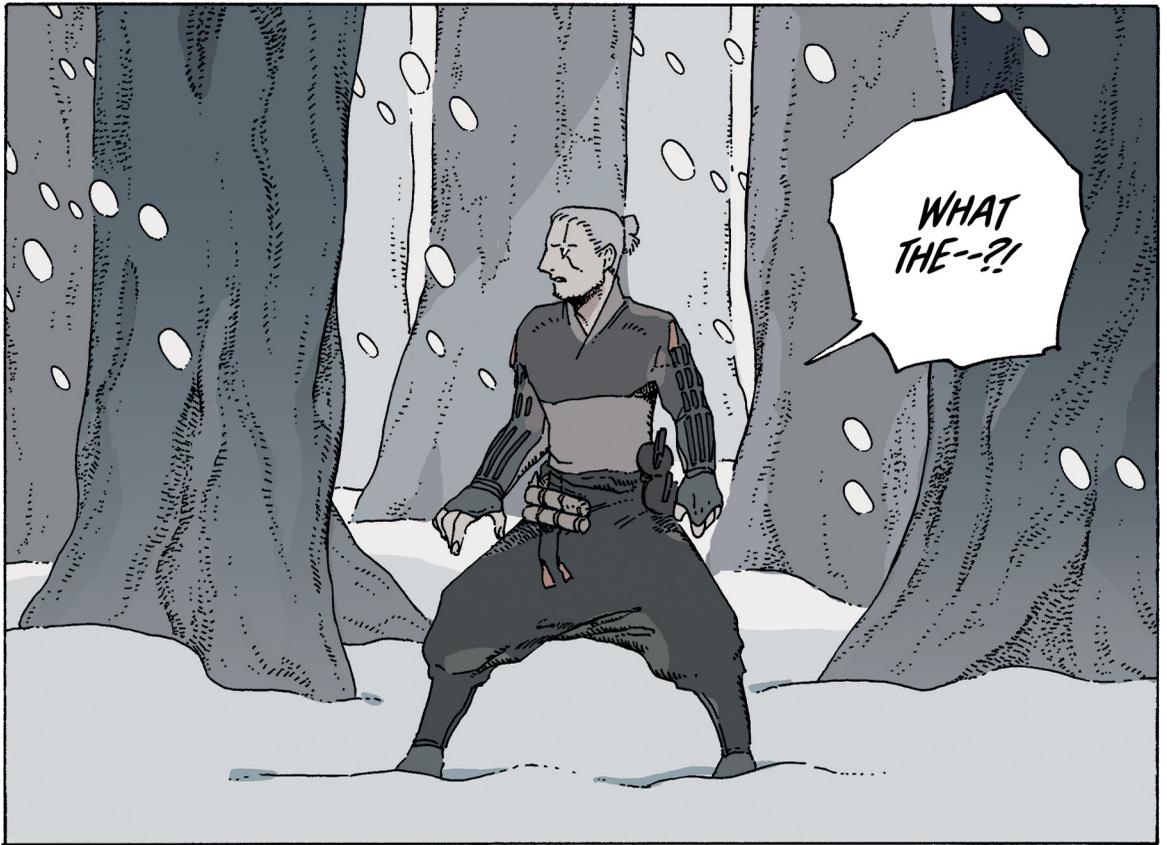


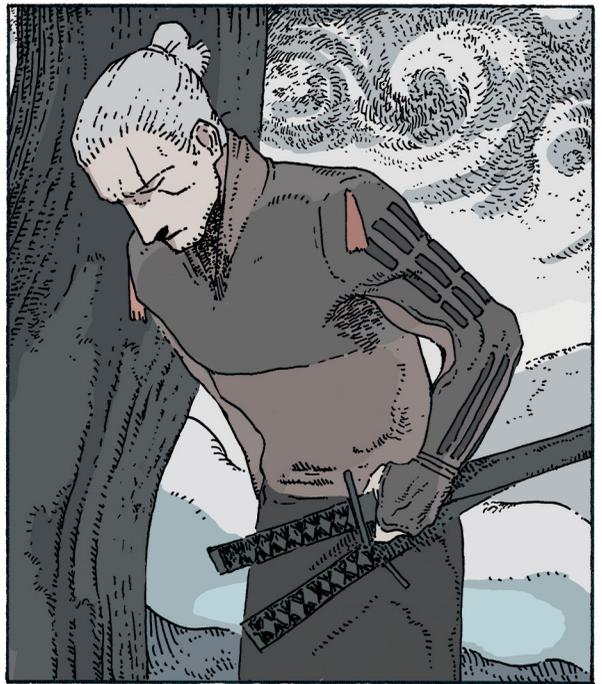
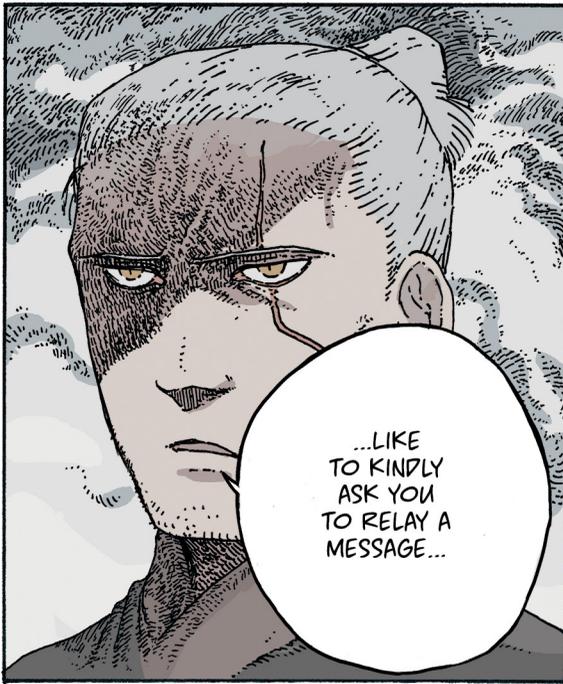


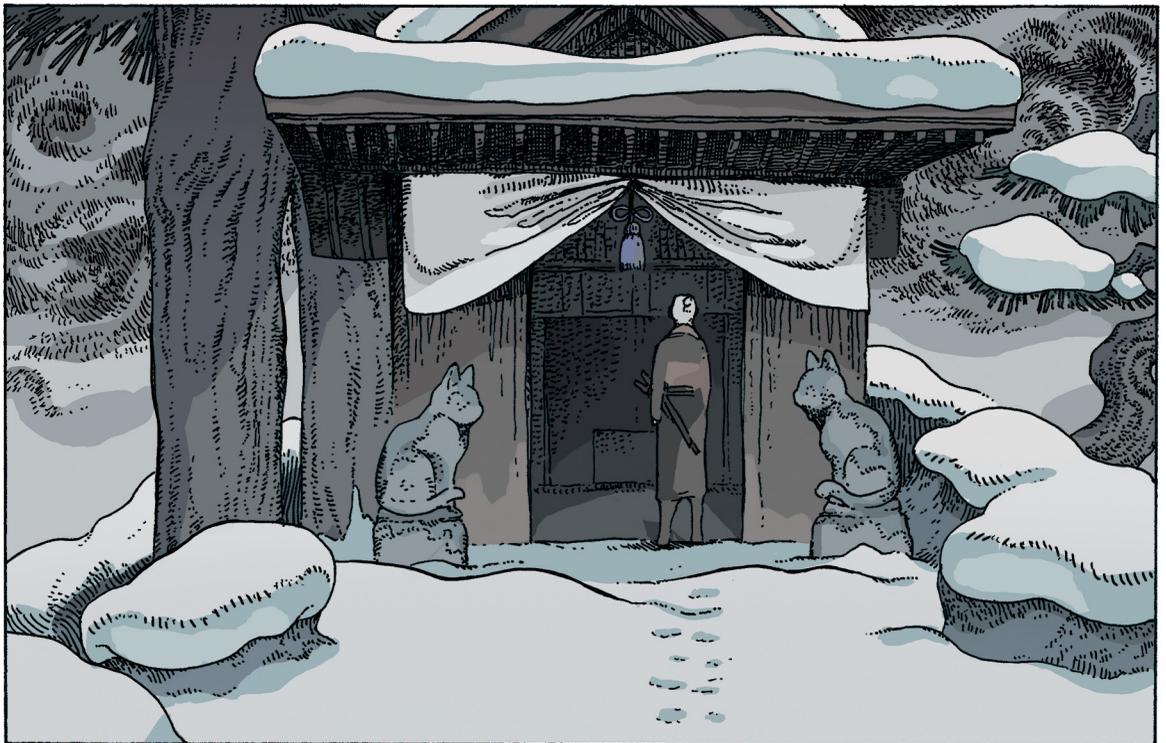


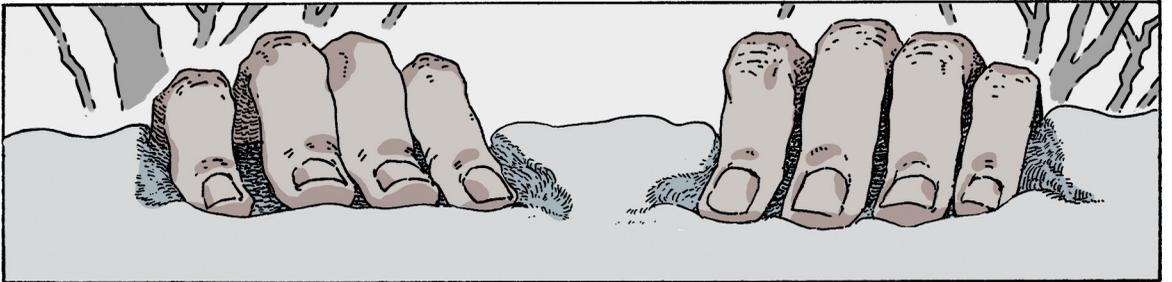




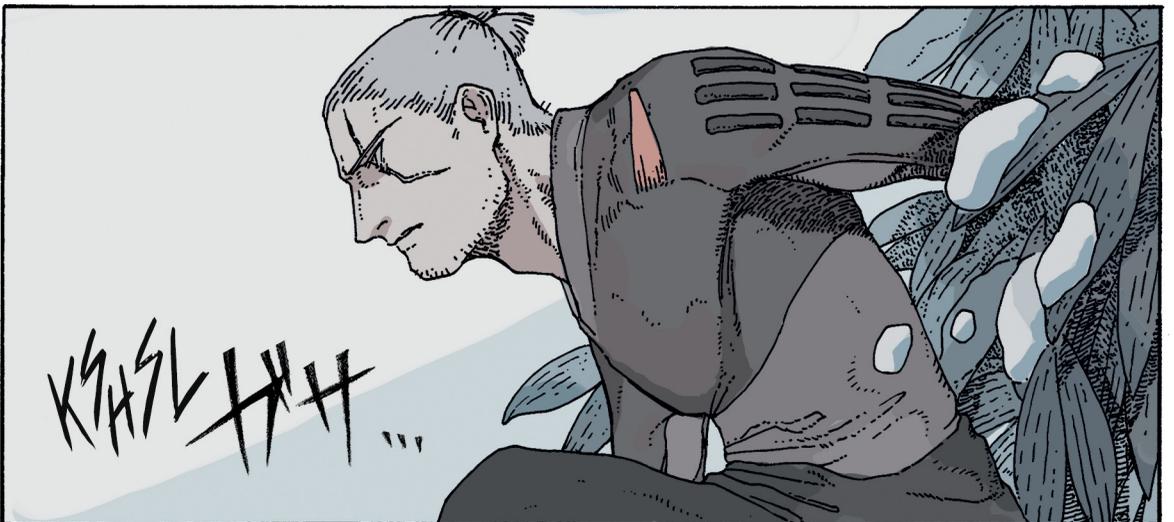










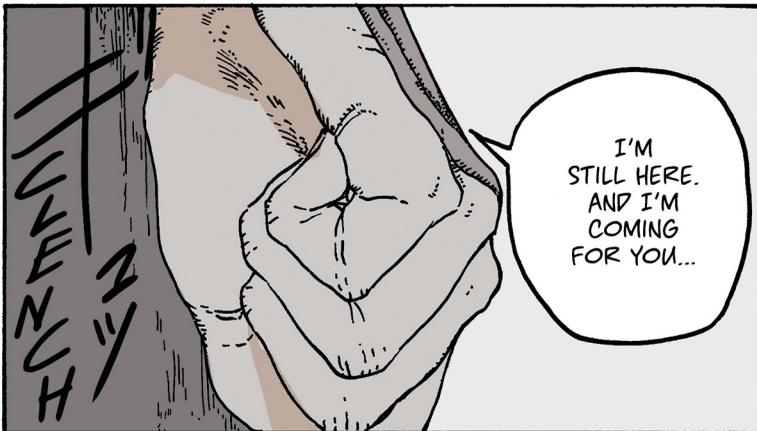




Chapter 4



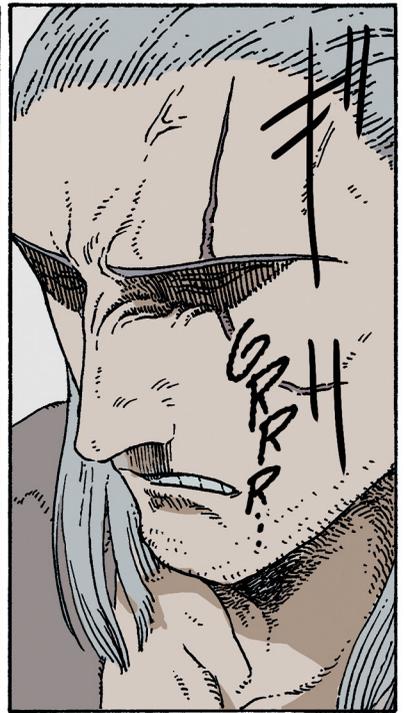
* KAIJINZAN, THE MOUNTAIN OF ASHES.

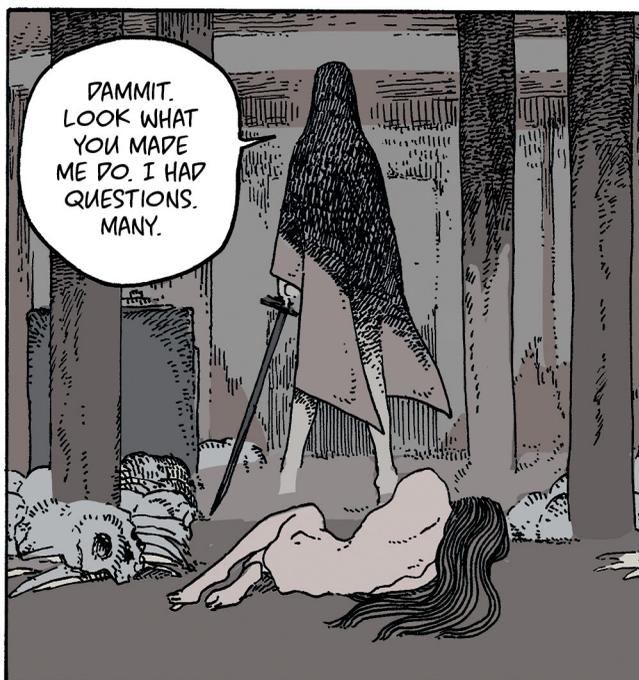


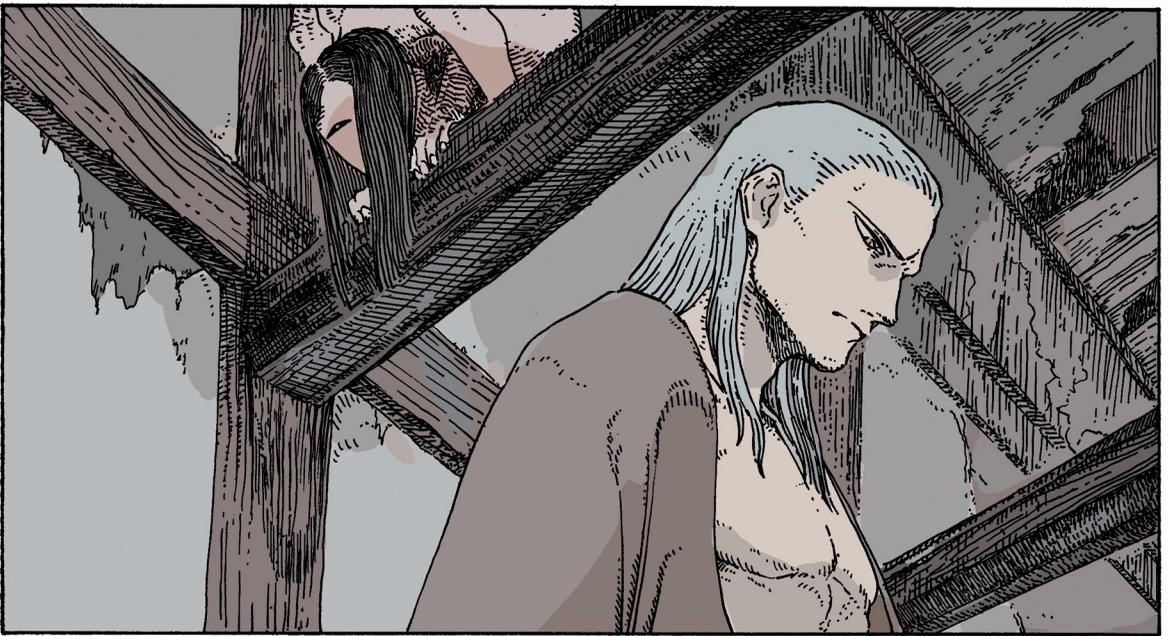
I'M STILL HERE. AND I'M COMING FOR YOU...

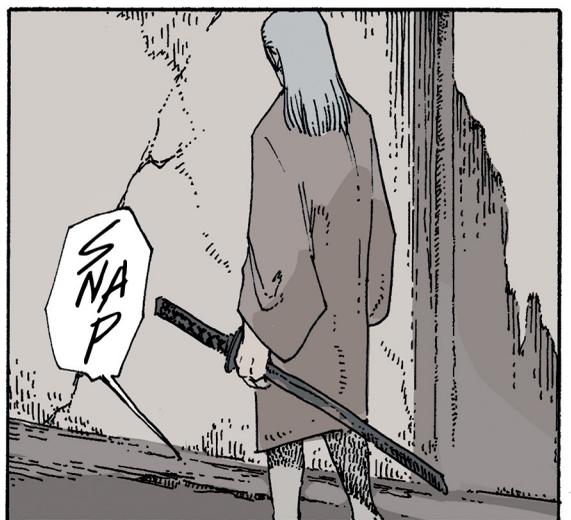
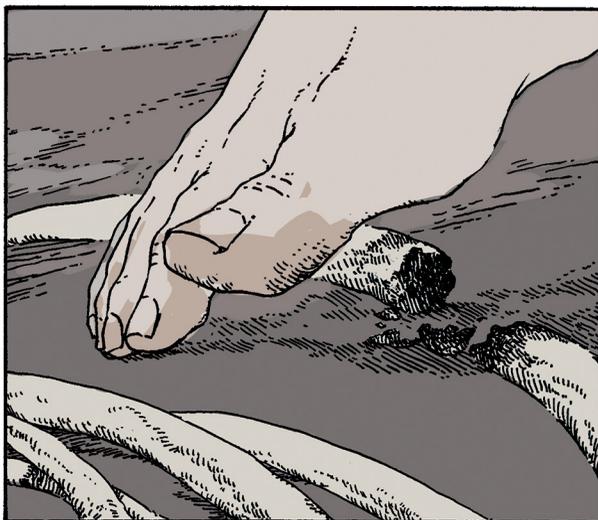
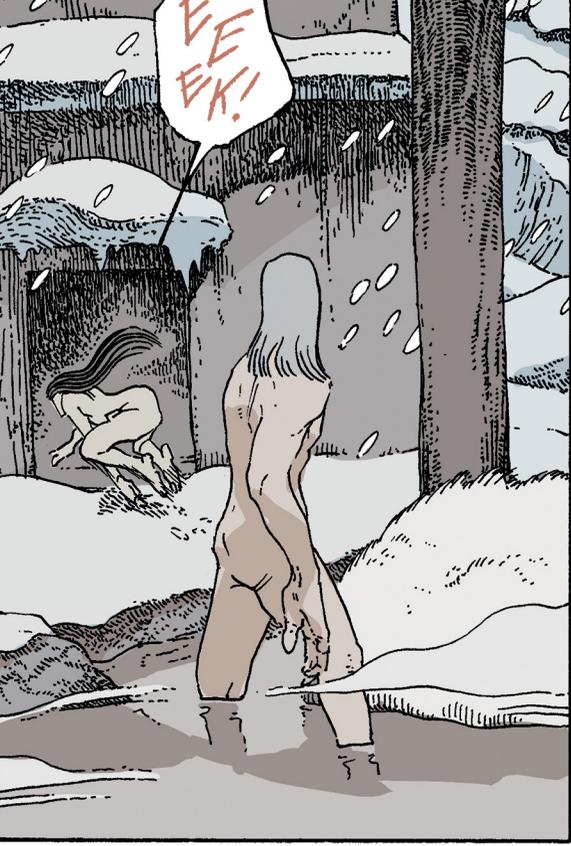


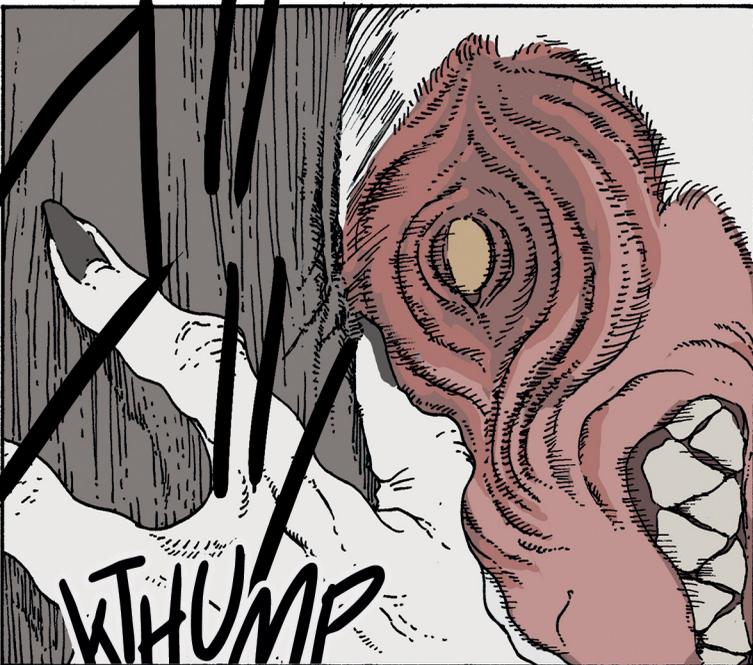
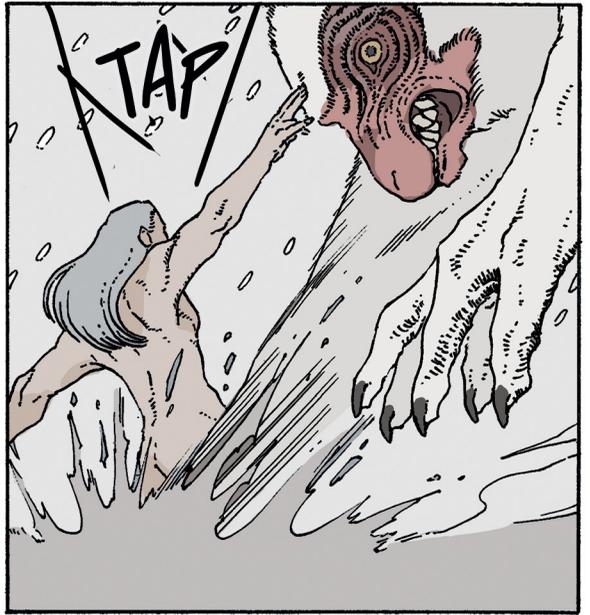


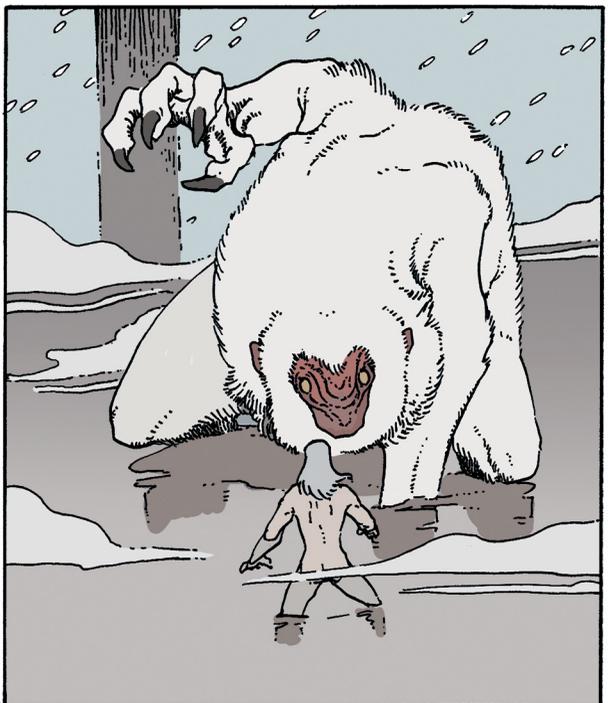
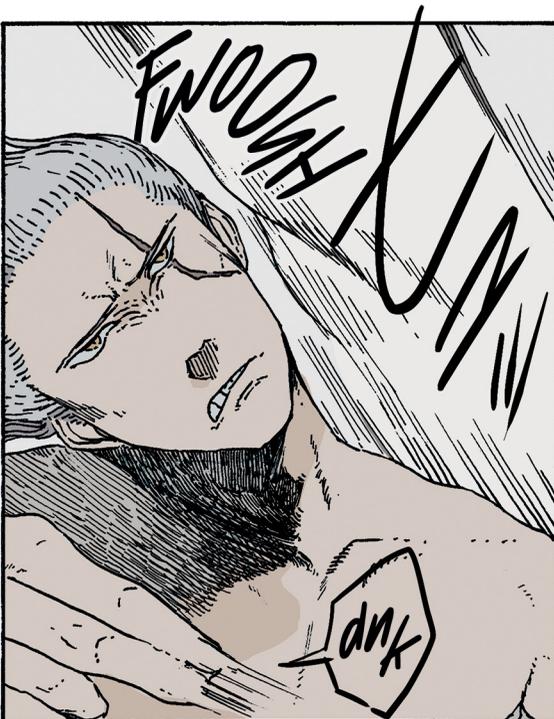
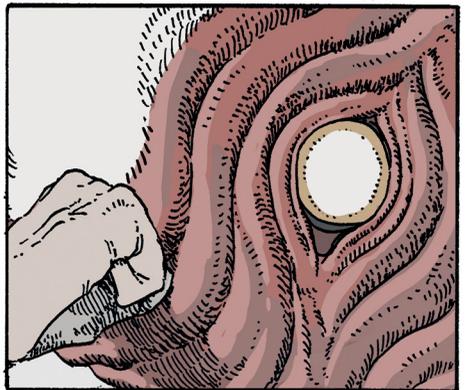
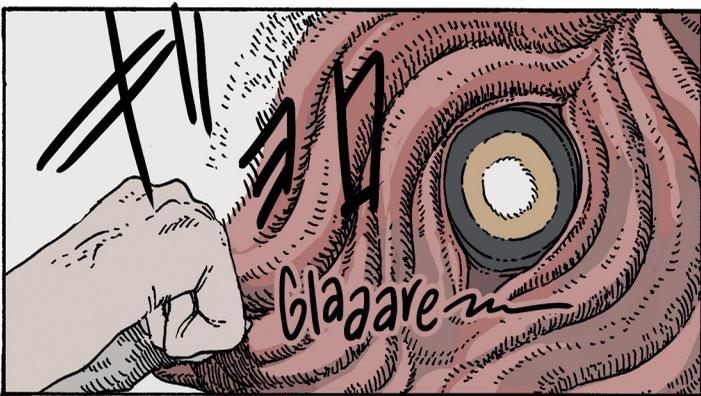
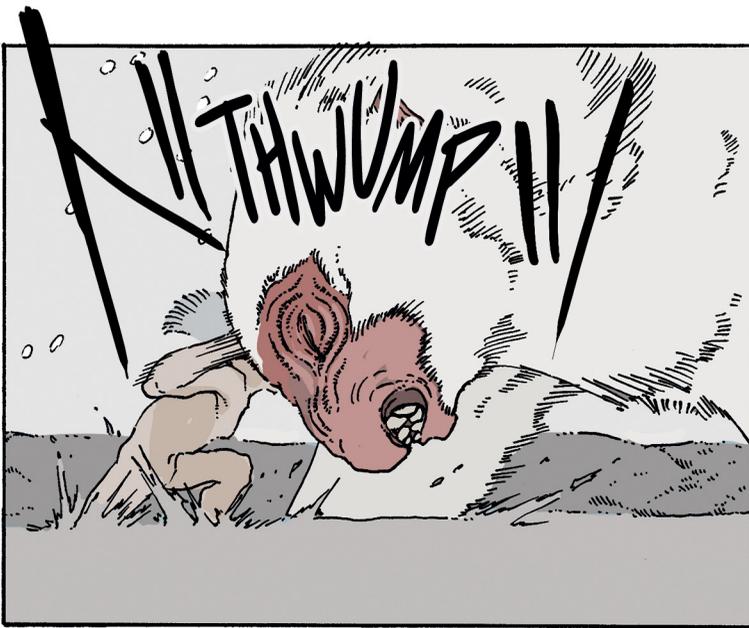


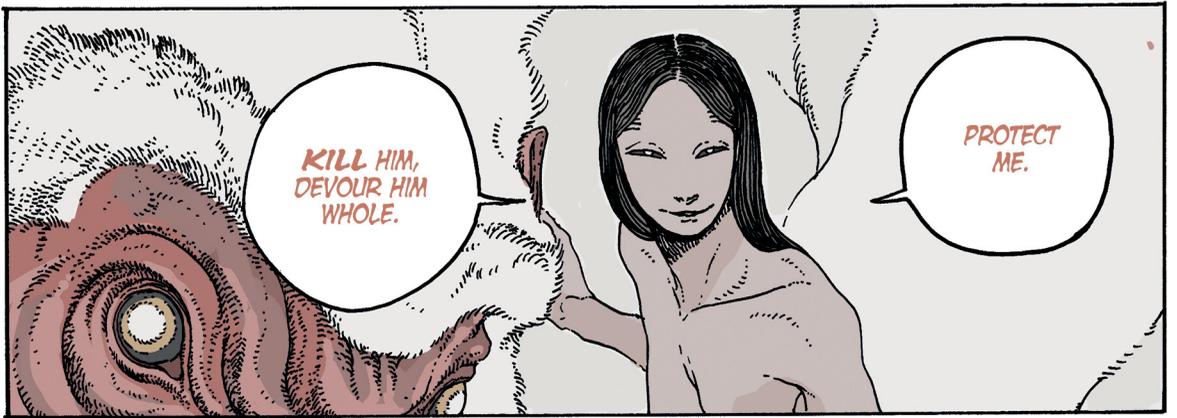
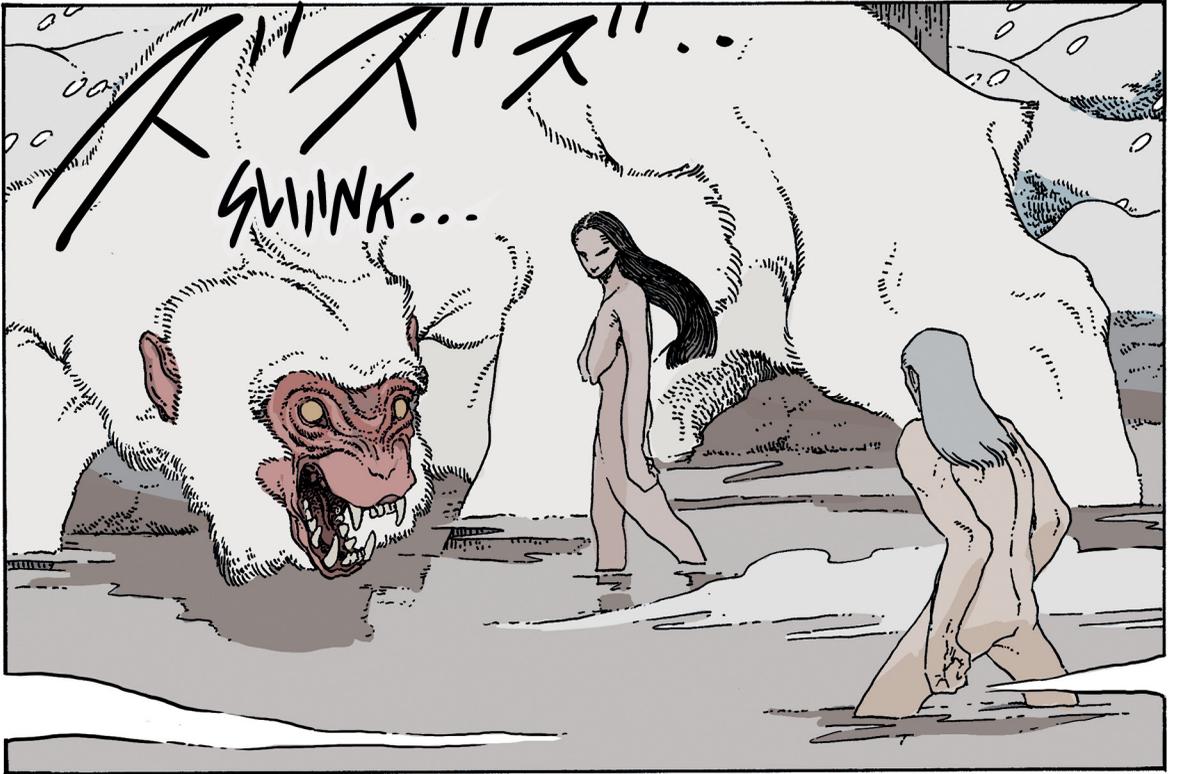














AFTER ALL THE KINDNESS I SHOWED YOU...

CREEP..



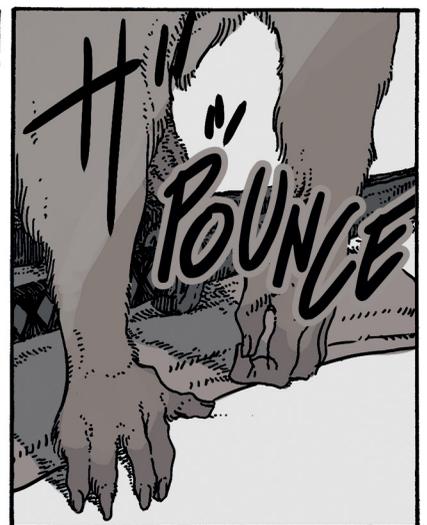
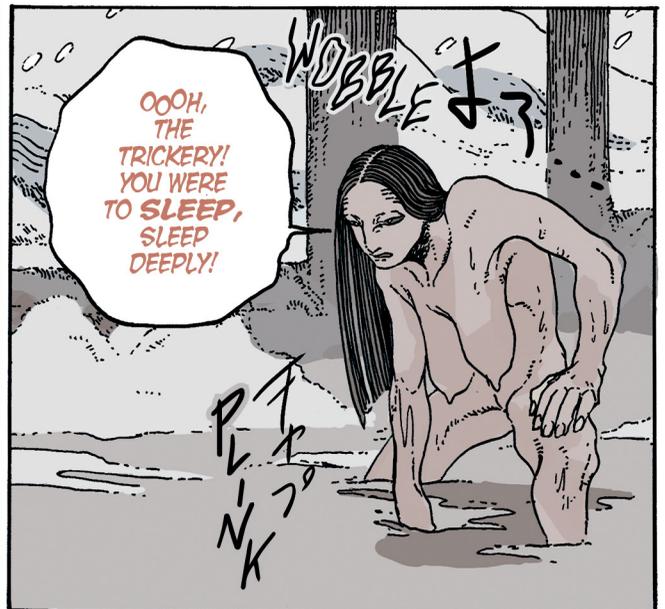
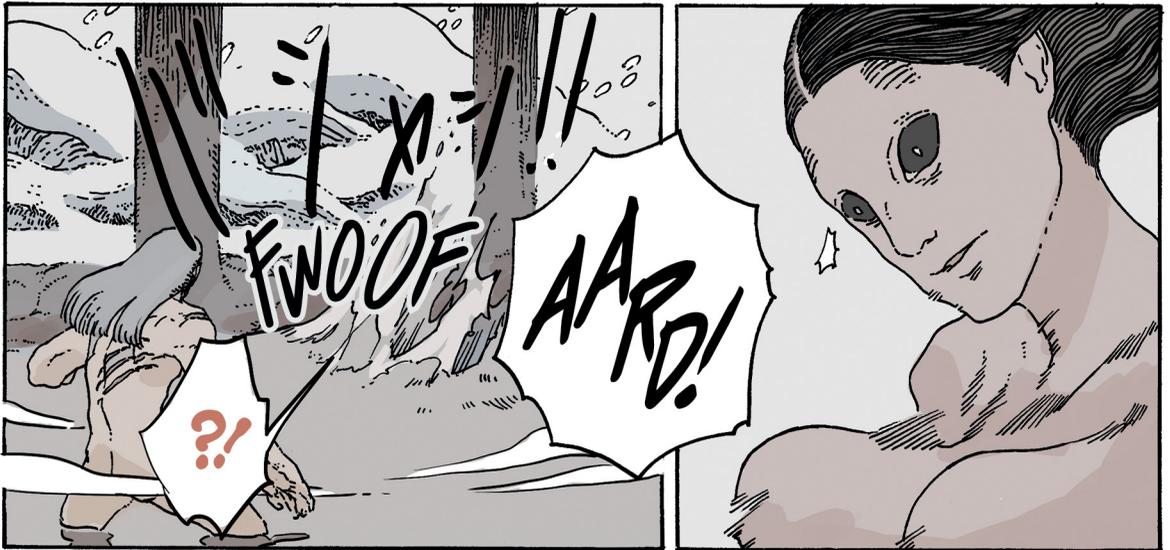
NOW BE A GOOD LAD AND DIEEEEE!

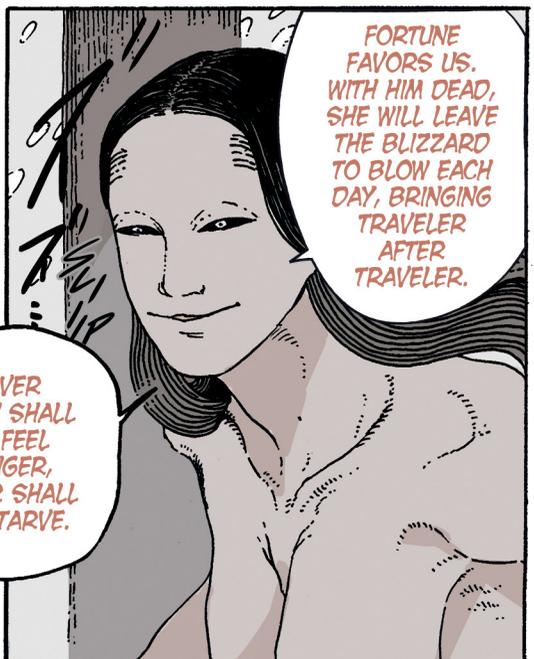
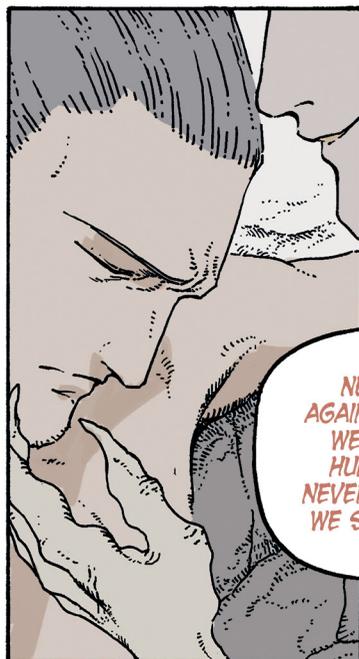
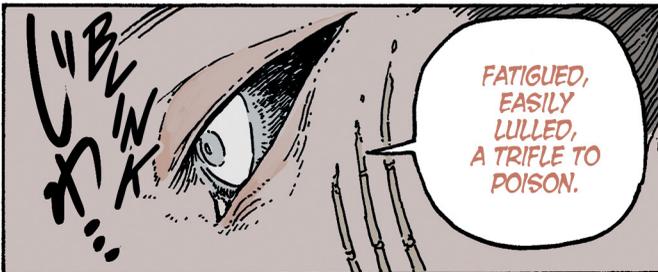


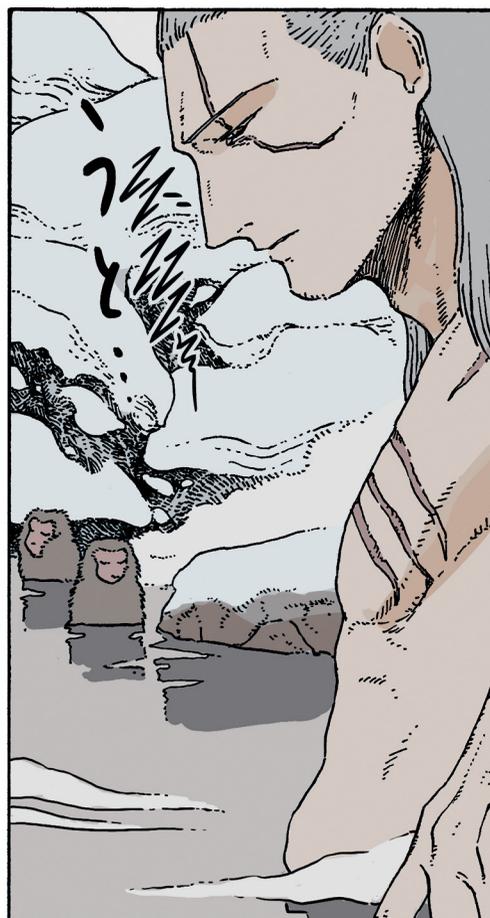
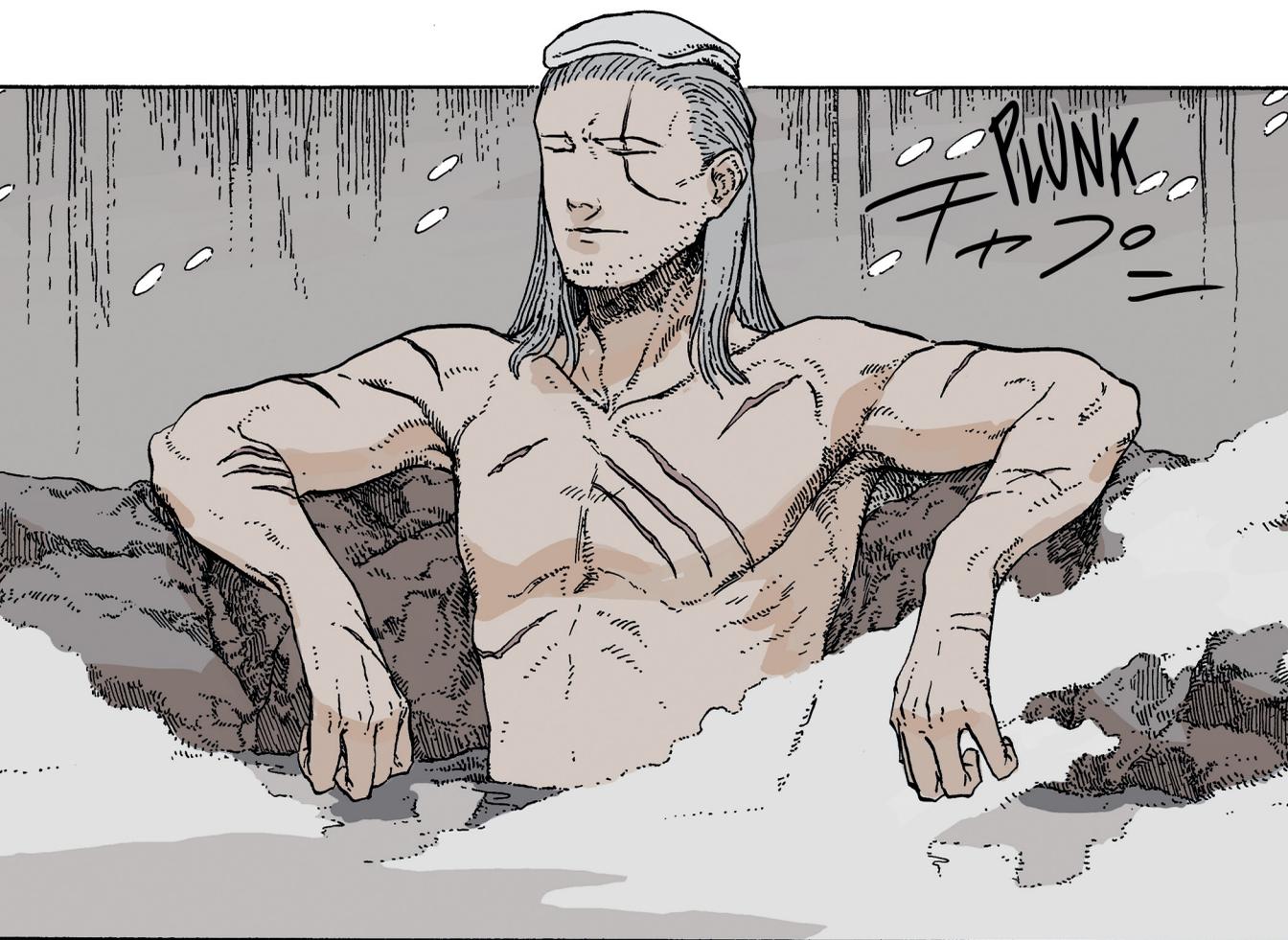
WOOOM

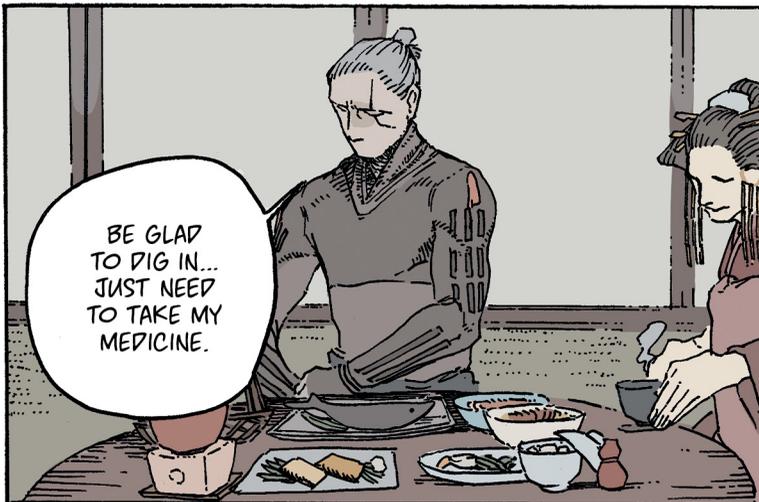


SHA
SHA
SHA

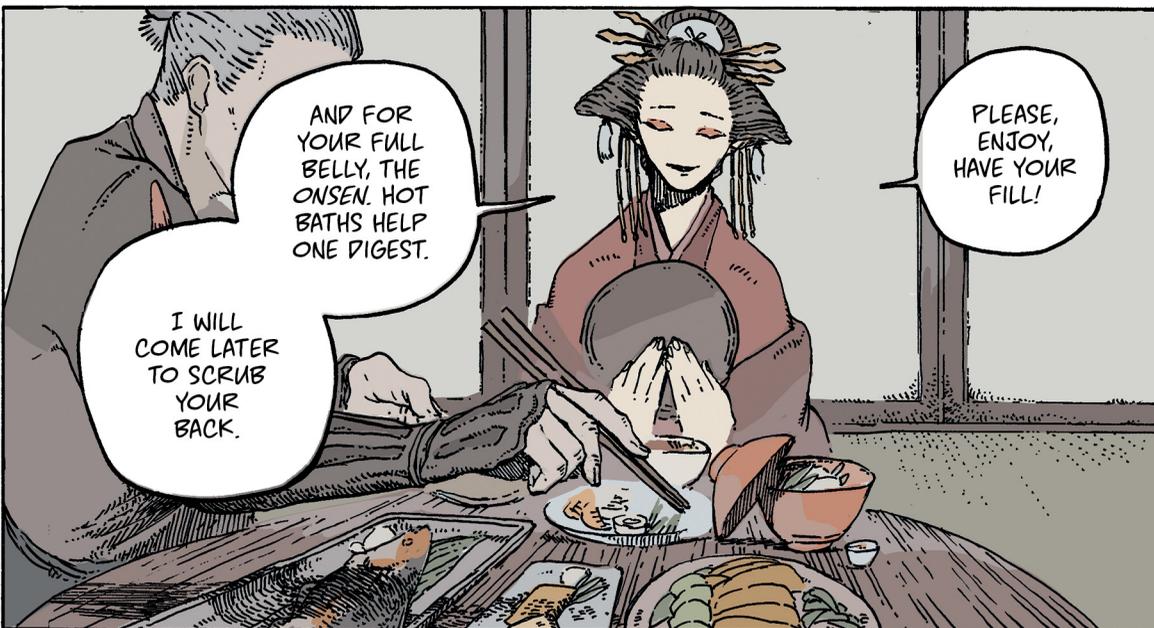








BE GLAD TO DIG IN... JUST NEED TO TAKE MY MEDICINE.



AND FOR YOUR FULL BELLY, THE ONSEN. HOT BATHS HELP ONE DIGEST.

PLEASE, ENJOY, HAVE YOUR FILL!

I WILL COME LATER TO SCRUB YOUR BACK.

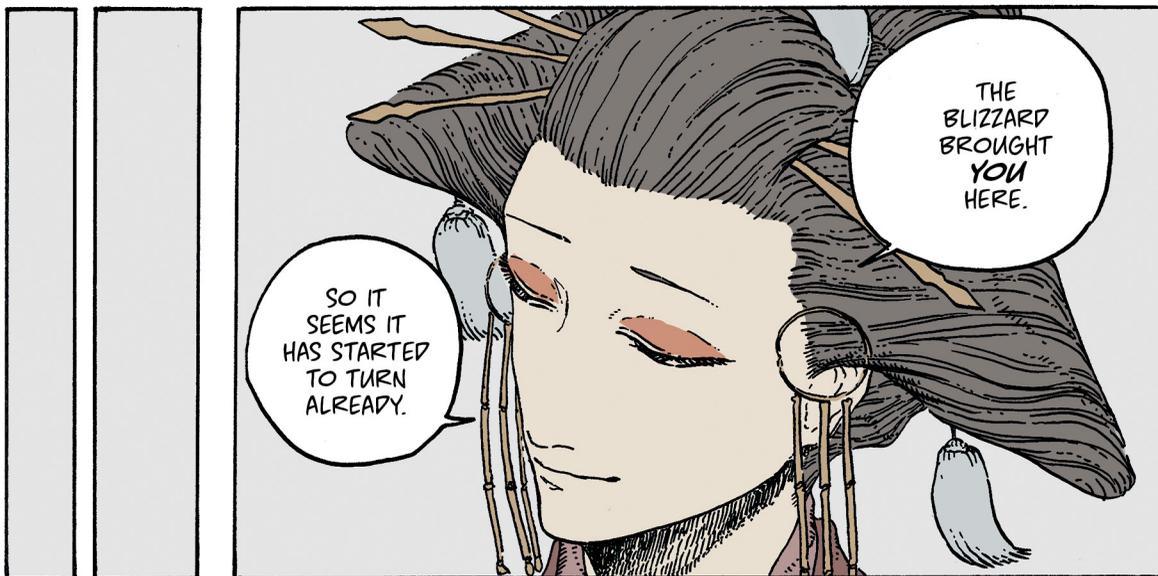


10
7
4



ONCE YOU'VE SLAIN THE MONSTER, I TRUST MY LUCK WILL TURN.

INN SEEMS TO BE IN GOOD SHAPE, VERY GOOD.

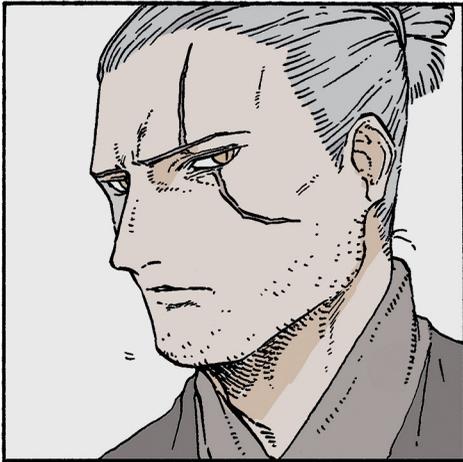


SO IT SEEMS IT HAS STARTED TO TURN ALREADY.

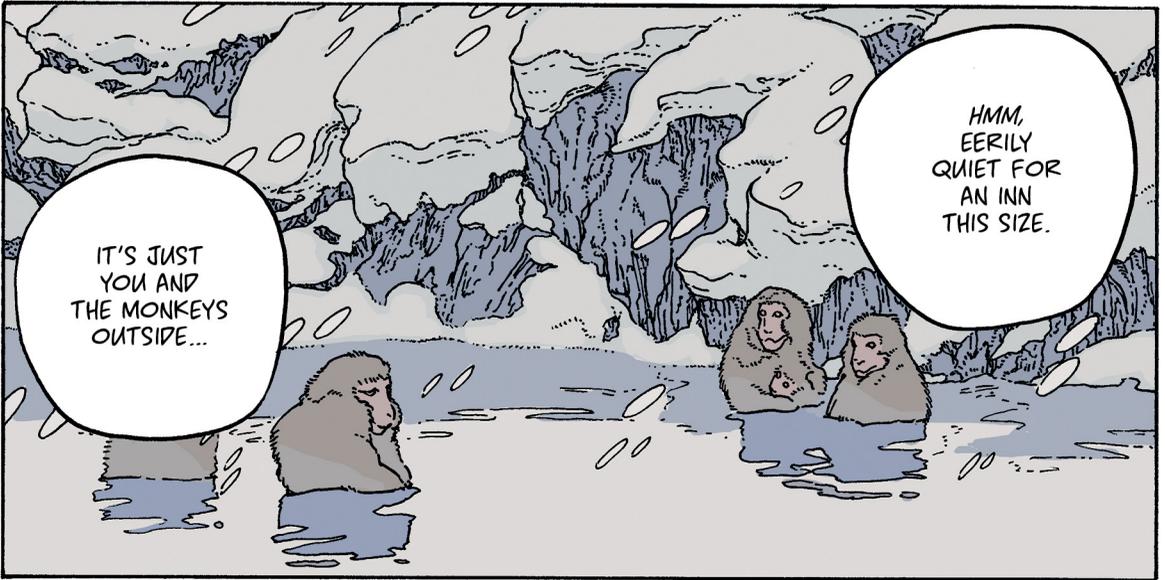
THE BLIZZARD BROUGHT YOU HERE.



ABUNDANT, APPETIZING... THANK YOU.



YOU MUST BUILD YOUR STRENGTH SHOULD YOU HAVE TO FIGHT. I INSIST.

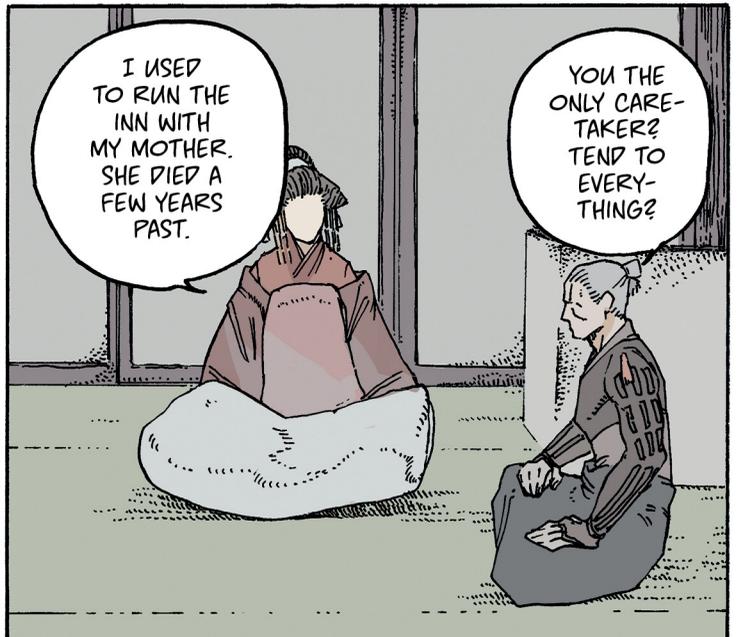


IT'S JUST YOU AND THE MONKEYS OUTSIDE...

HMM, EERILY QUIET FOR AN INN THIS SIZE.



IT IS HARD TO DO IT ALL ALONE, TO FEED MYSELF, EVEN. BUT I DO MY BEST AND MANAGE.



I USED TO RUN THE INN WITH MY MOTHER. SHE DIED A FEW YEARS PAST.

YOU THE ONLY CARE-TAKER? TEND TO EVERY-THING?



I SHALL PAY YOU TO STAY, STRIKE THE FILTH DOWN SHOULD IT SHOW ITSELF AGAIN. MY LIFE, MY LIVELIHOOD, I SENSE THEY'RE IN DANGER.

DON'T GO. THE BLIZZARD BLOWS ON, IN FULL FORCE.

I HAVE COIN.



I'LL LEAVE ONCE THE BLIZZARD'S PASSED.

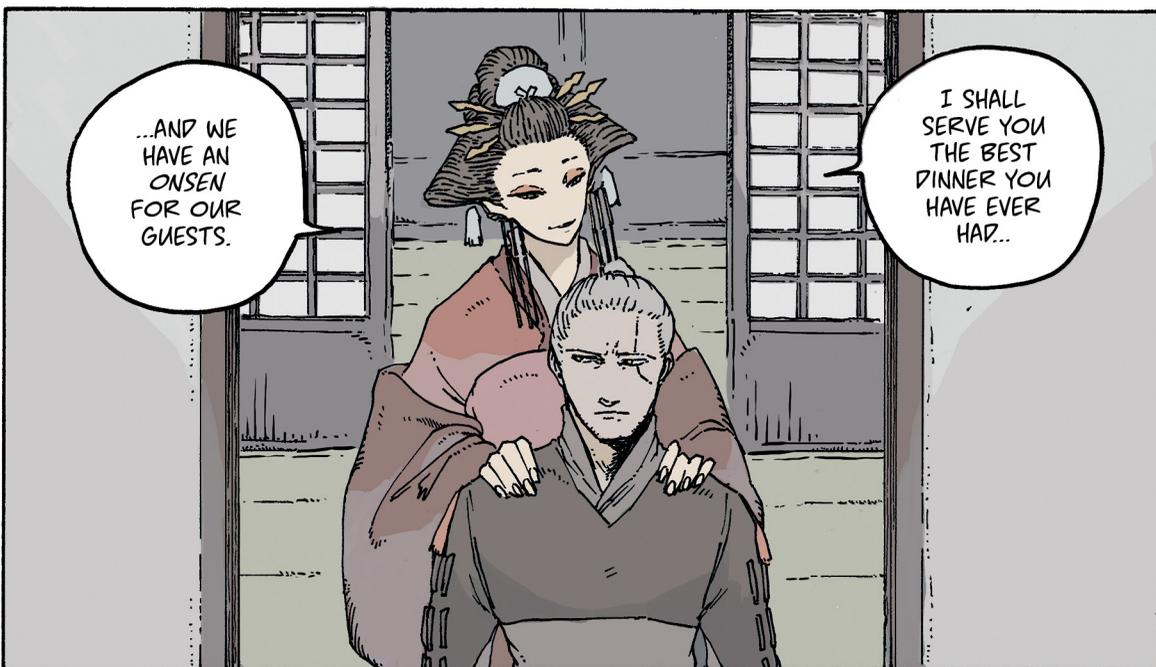
NOW, THE BEAST, YOUR MISSING GUEST--TELL ME ABOUT 'IM.

FIRST, I MUST REWARD YOU FOR YOUR KINDNESS. YOU MUST LET ME.



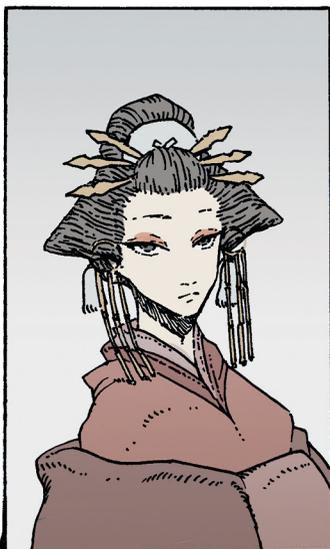
FINE. SO BE IT.

HM, CAN'T OUTFIGHT THE STORM... AND I'VE SLEPT ON THE TRAIL A WHILE NOW.

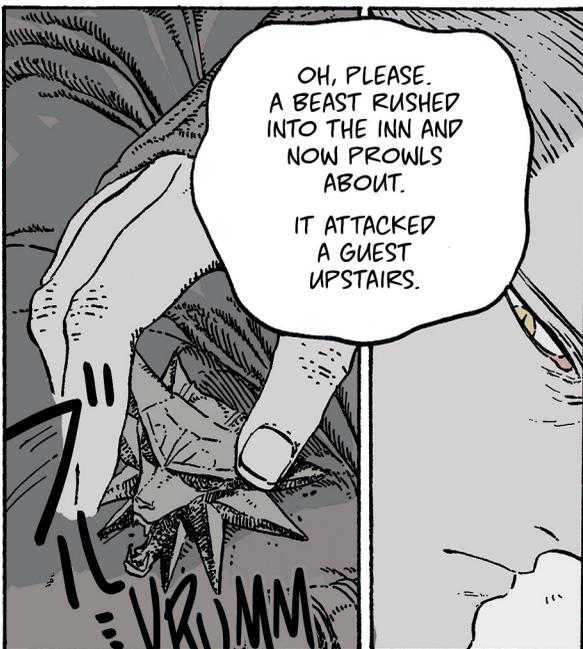


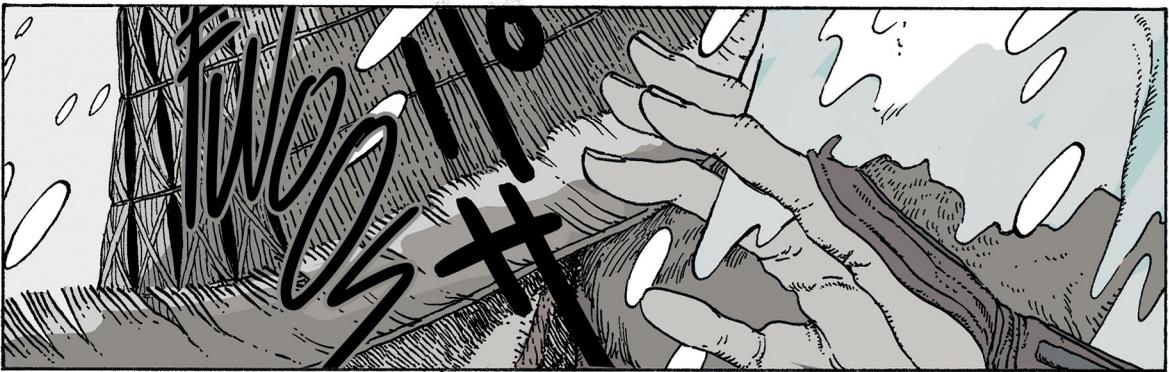
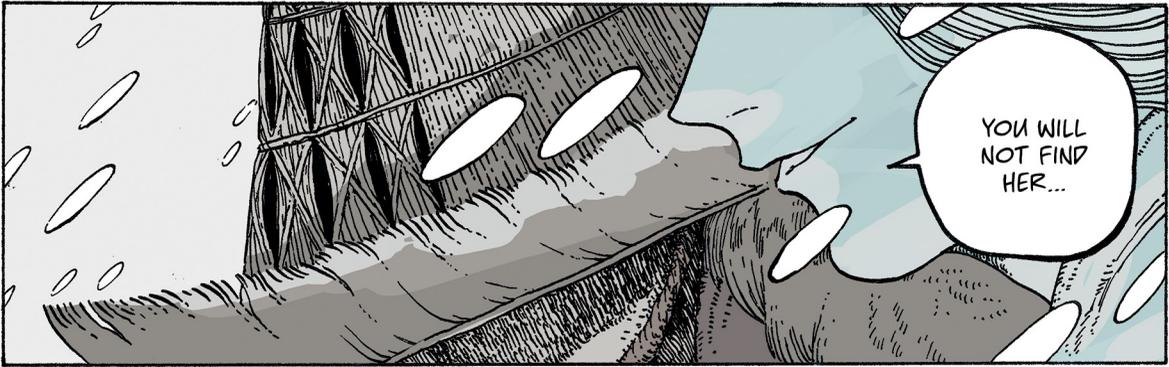
...AND WE HAVE AN ONSEN FOR OUR GUESTS.

I SHALL SERVE YOU THE BEST DINNER YOU HAVE EVER HAD...







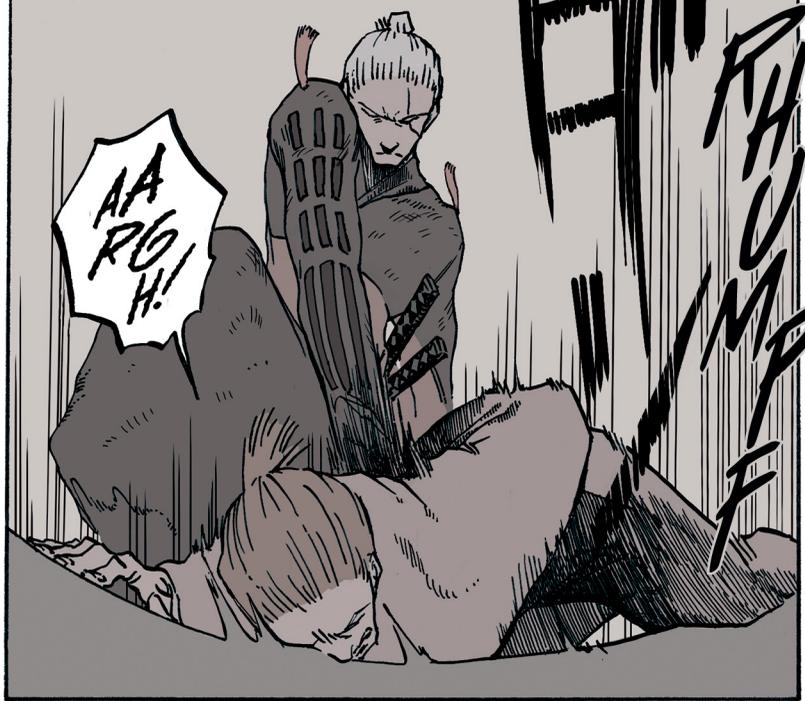




Chapter 3

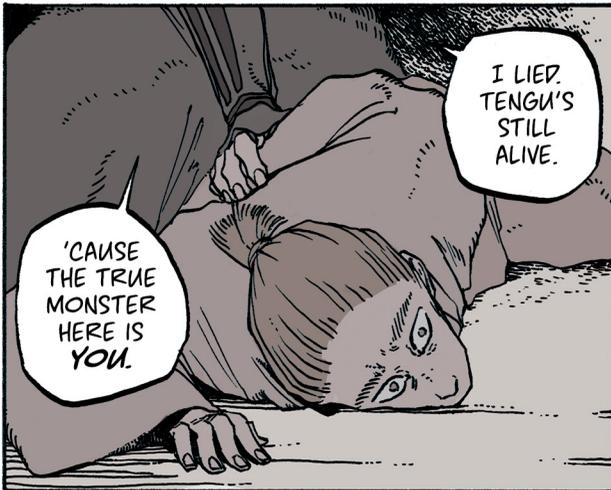


WOULDA THREATENED ME A FEW DAYS AGO, I'D HAVE CUT YOU DOWN IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE.



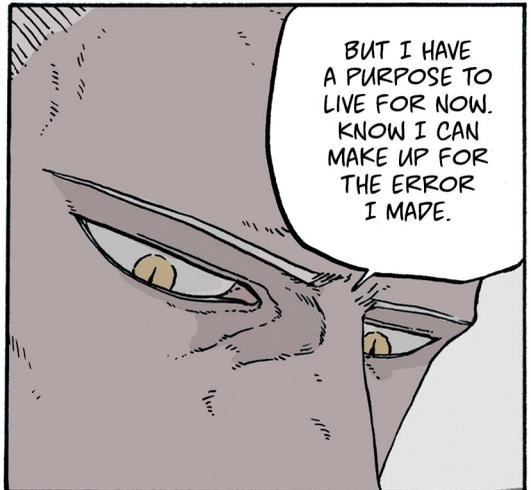
AA RGH!

FHUMP
F

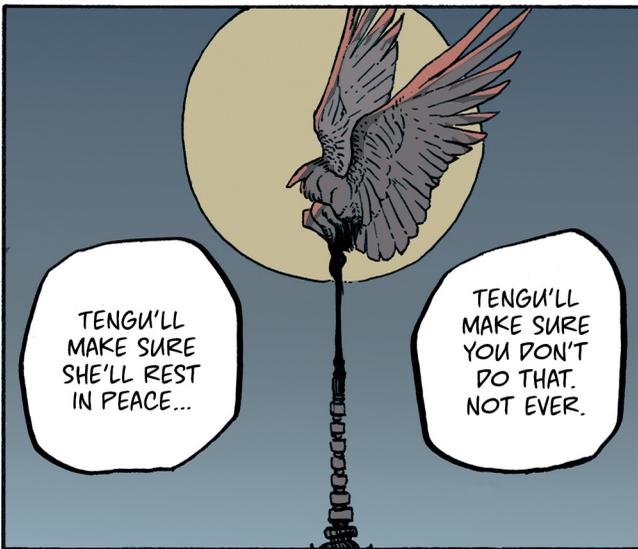


'CAUSE THE TRUE MONSTER HERE IS YOU.

I LIED. TENGU'S STILL ALIVE.

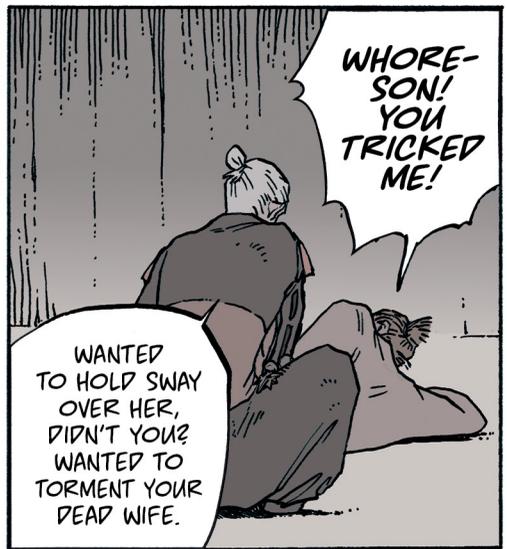


BUT I HAVE A PURPOSE TO LIVE FOR NOW. KNOW I CAN MAKE UP FOR THE ERROR I MADE.



TENGU'LL MAKE SURE SHE'LL REST IN PEACE...

TENGU'LL MAKE SURE YOU DON'T DO THAT. NOT EVER.

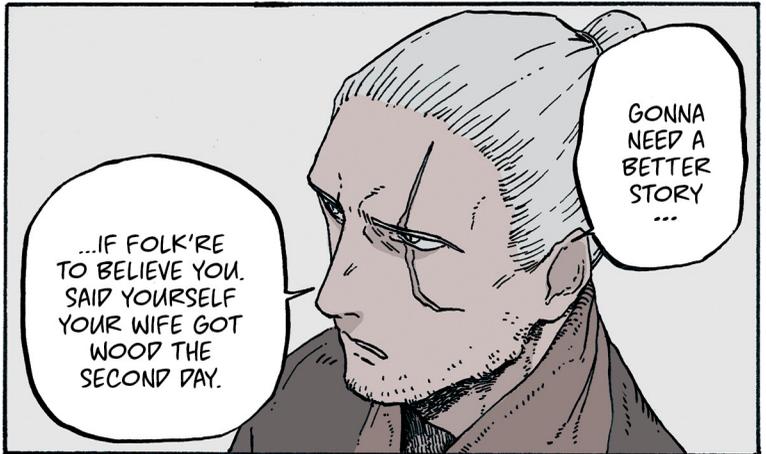


WHORE-SON! YOU TRICKED ME!

WANTED TO HOLD SWAY OVER HER, DIDN'T YOU? WANTED TO TORTURE YOUR DEAD WIFE.

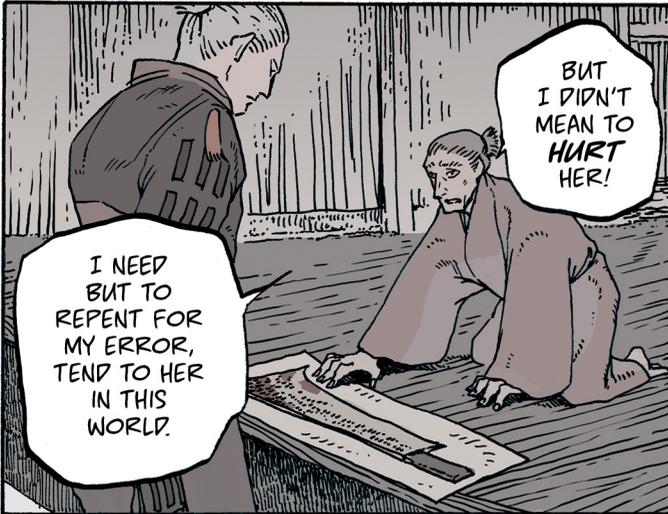


WHAT'S IT TO YOU, **FREAK** ?!



...IF FOLK'RE TO BELIEVE YOU. SAID YOURSELF YOUR WIFE GOT WOOD THE SECOND DAY.

GONNA NEED A BETTER STORY ...



I NEED BUT TO REPENT FOR MY ERROR, TEND TO HER IN THIS WORLD.

BUT I DIDN'T MEAN TO HURT HER!



SHE FOLLOWED ME! JUDGED ME! ACCUSED ME!



I'LL GUT YOU LIKE I DID THAT UNGRATEFUL BITCH.

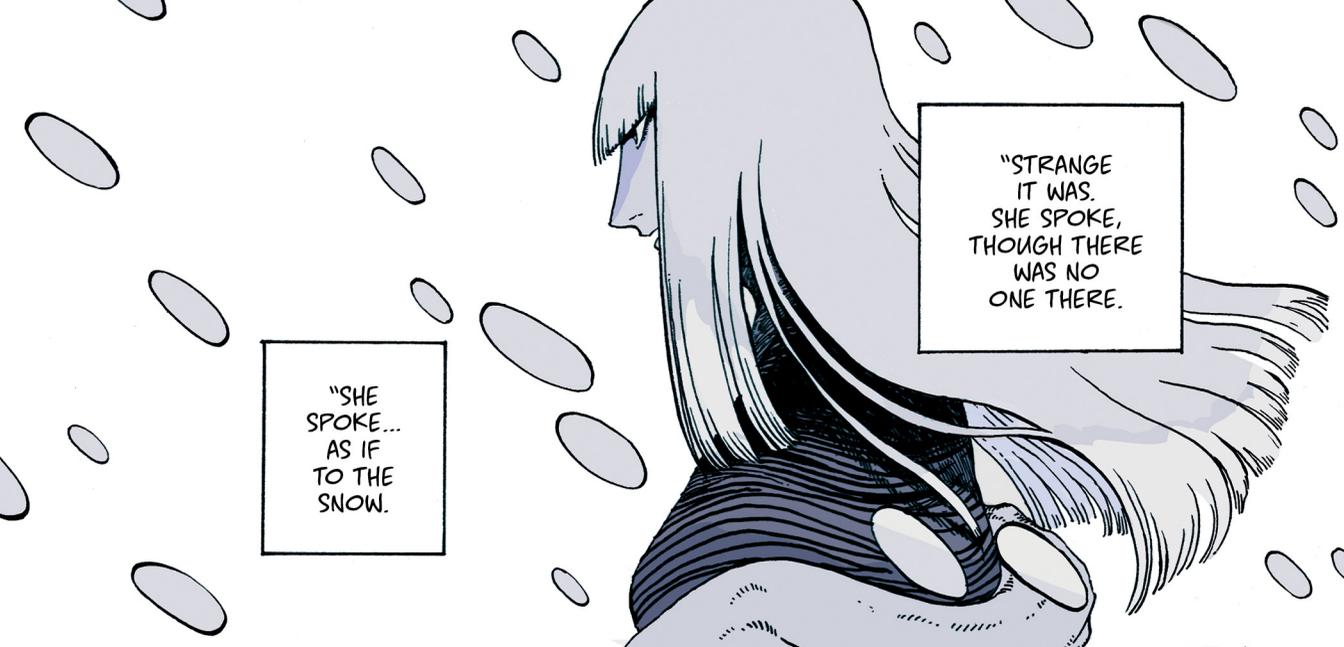


SHUT YOUR MOUTH! YOU **FUCK!**



NOTHING YOU SAY CAN EASE YOUR GUILT.

CAN ONLY SAVE THOSE WHO'RE STILL ALIVE...



"SHE SPOKE... AS IF TO THE SNOW."

"STRANGE IT WAS. SHE SPOKE, THOUGH THERE WAS NO ONE THERE."



"THE STORM ROSE, THE SNOW BLEW ABOUT, FURIOUS. AND SHE DISAPPEARED AGAIN."

"I CAUGHT BUT A FEW WORDS-- 'RED INN ON THE WEST TRACK,' 'THE SPRING BIRD.'"



I TOLD YOU! I FAILED TO BRING WOOD HOME FOR DAYS. I'M TO BLAME, I'VE NO DOUBT.



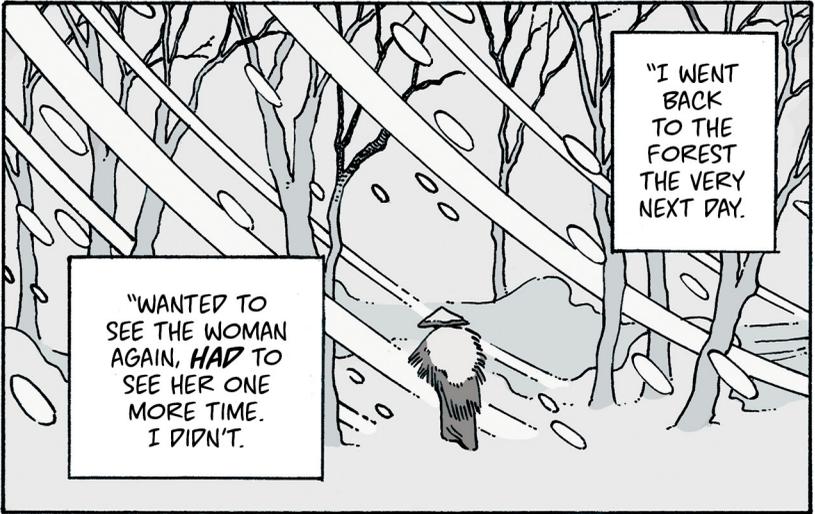
YOUR WIFE DIED FROM THE COLD? DOESN'T ADD UP.



I RETURNED HOME TO FIND MY WIFE LIFELESS. THE COLD PROVED TOO MUCH, SHE COULDN'T TAKE IT, EXPIRED.

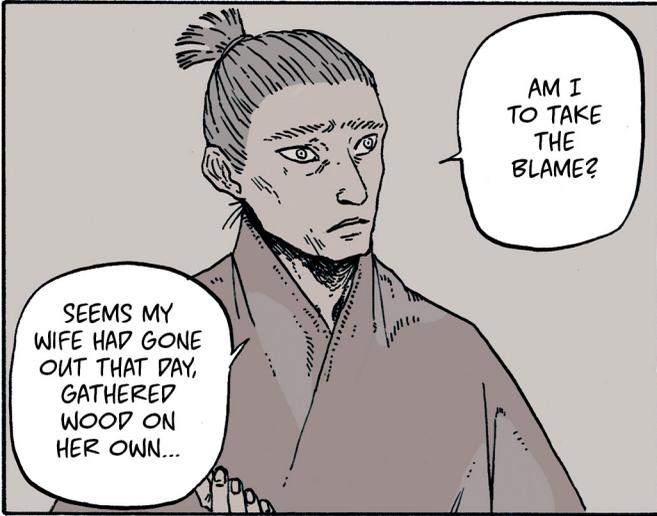
IT WAS MY FAULT, THAT WAS MY DOING.

"I RETURNED HOME MANY HOURS LATER, AGAIN WITH NO WOOD..."



"I WENT BACK TO THE FOREST THE VERY NEXT DAY."

"WANTED TO SEE THE WOMAN AGAIN, HAD TO SEE HER ONE MORE TIME. I DIDN'T."

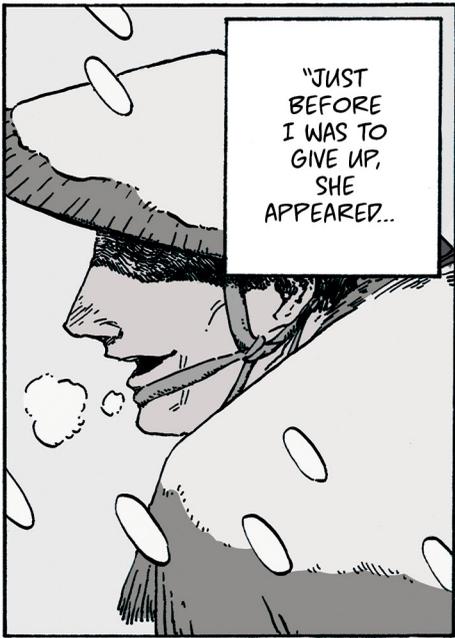


SEEMS MY WIFE HAD GONE OUT THAT DAY, GATHERED WOOD ON HER OWN...

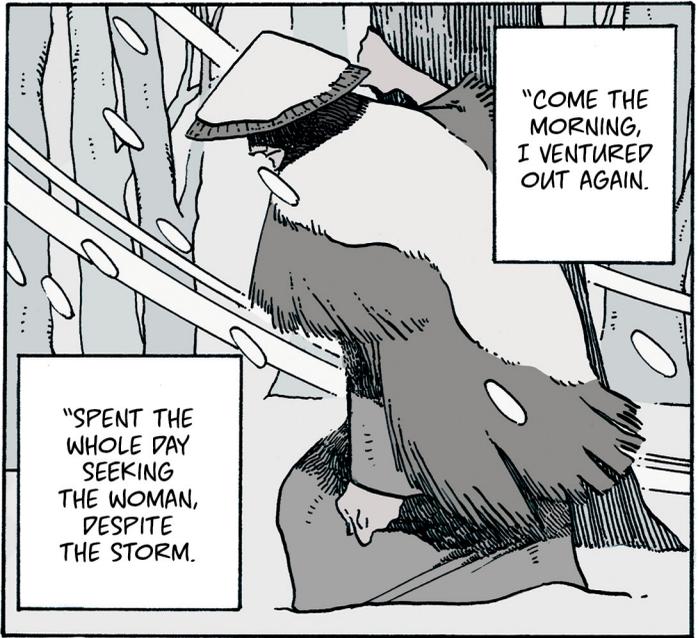
AM I TO TAKE THE BLAME?



I WORKED HAAARD TO PUT FOOD ON THE TABLE, PROVIDE US WITH SHELTER.

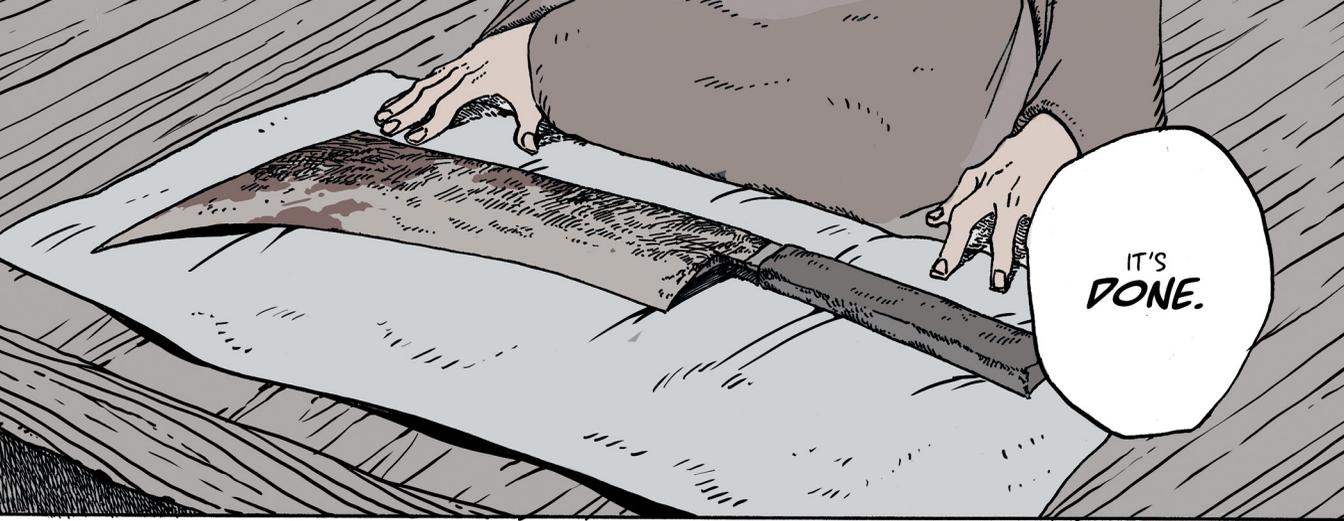


"JUST BEFORE I WAS TO GIVE UP, SHE APPEARED..."



"COME THE MORNING, I VENTURED OUT AGAIN."

"SPENT THE WHOLE DAY SEEKING THE WOMAN, DESPITE THE STORM."



IT'S
DONE.

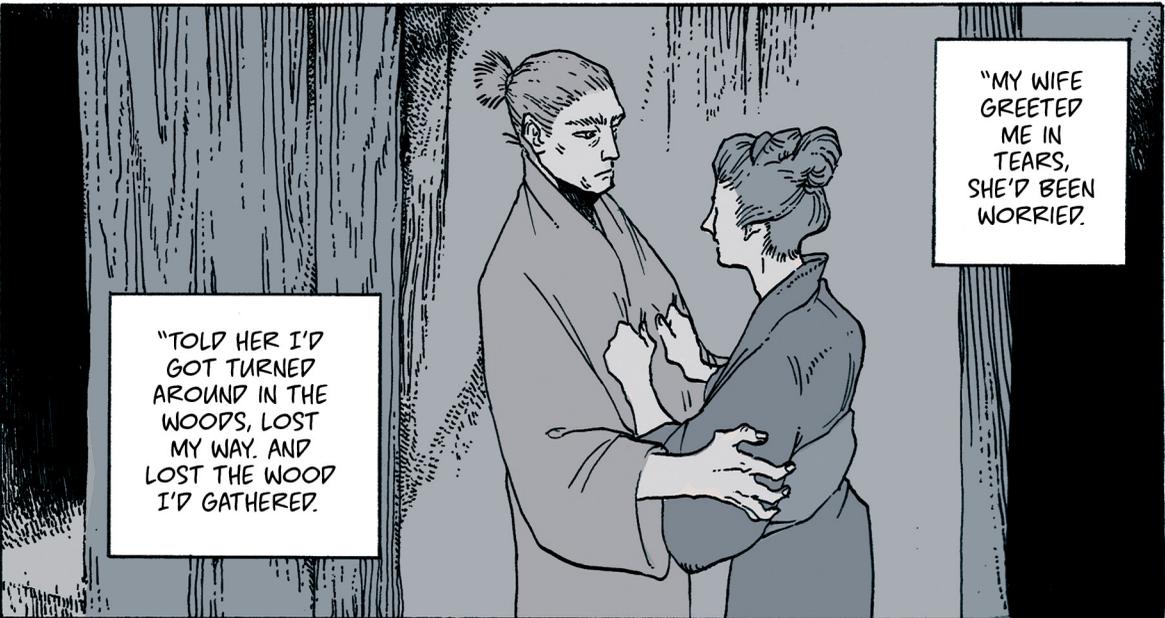


I WALKED
DEEP INTO THE
WOODS IN SEARCH
OF THAT BEAUTY.
THE DEEPER I WENT,
THE WILDER THE
BLIZZARD RAGED.
I TURNED BACK.



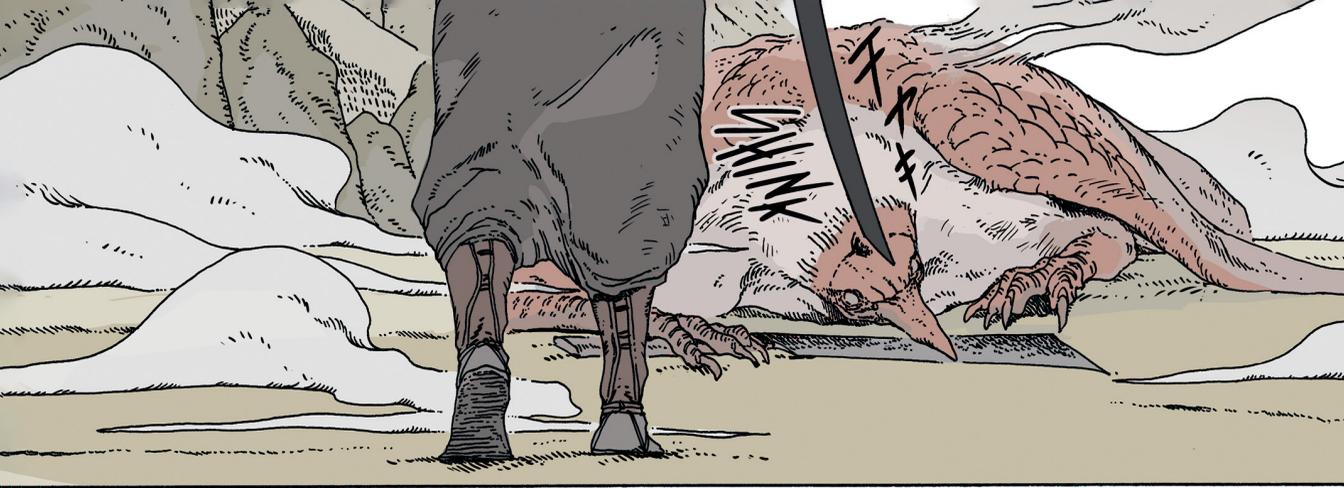
V-
VERY
WELL

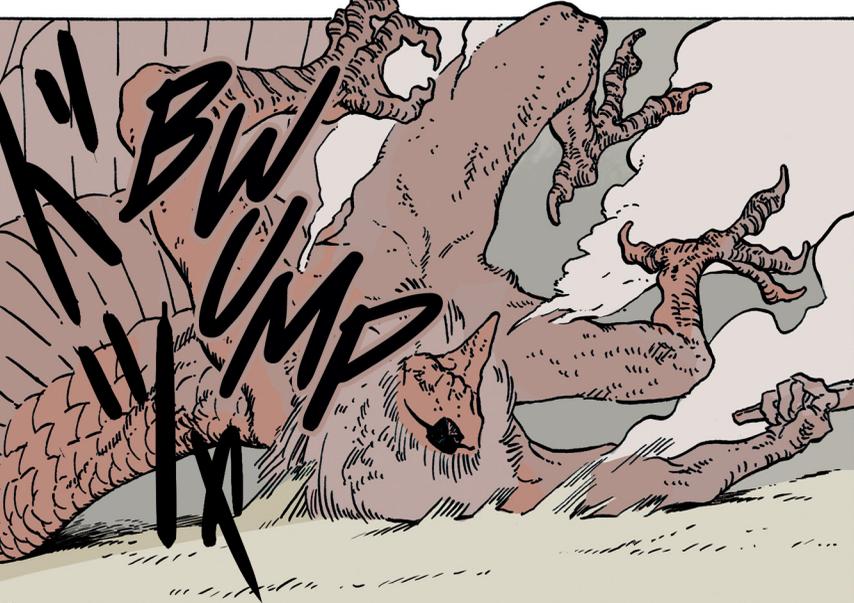
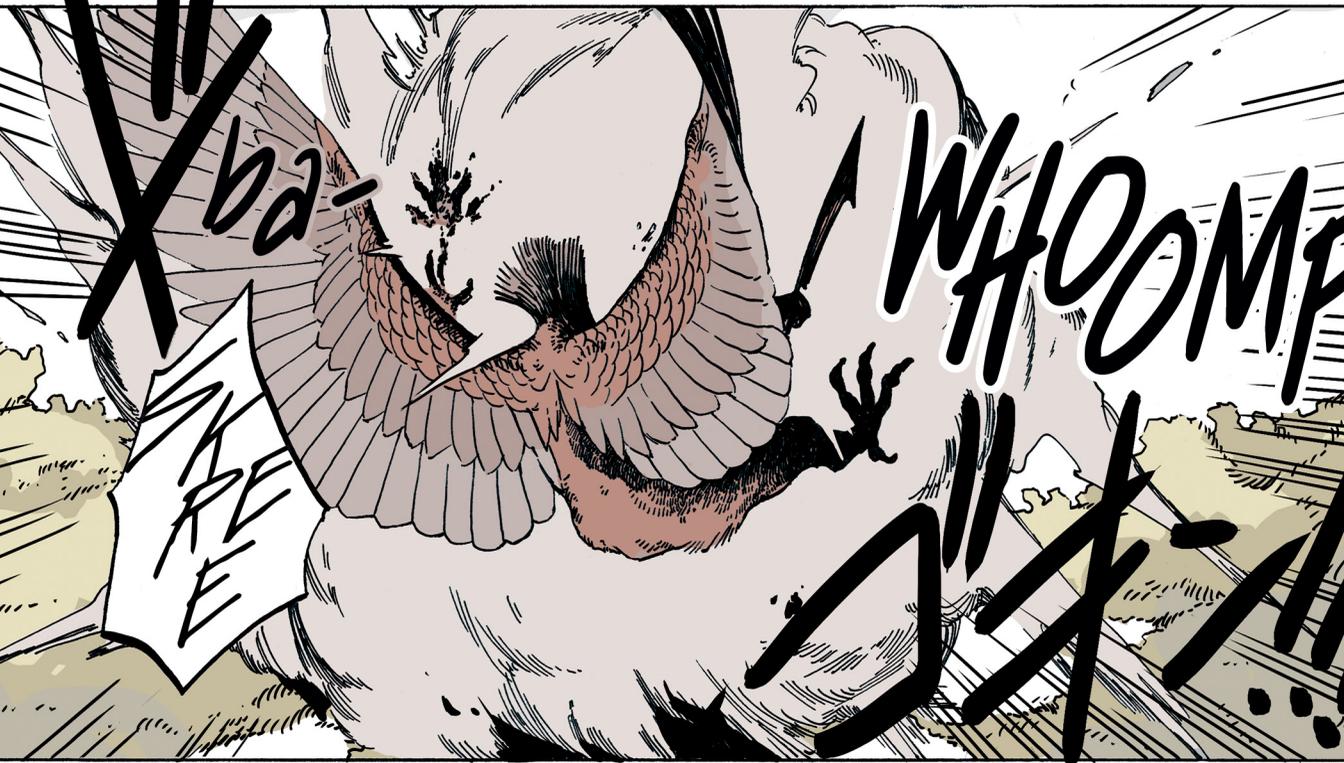
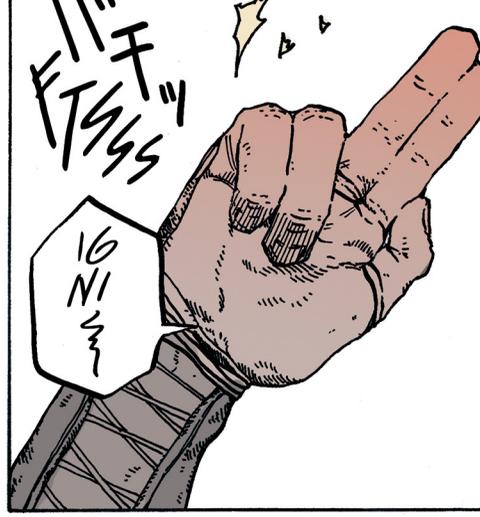
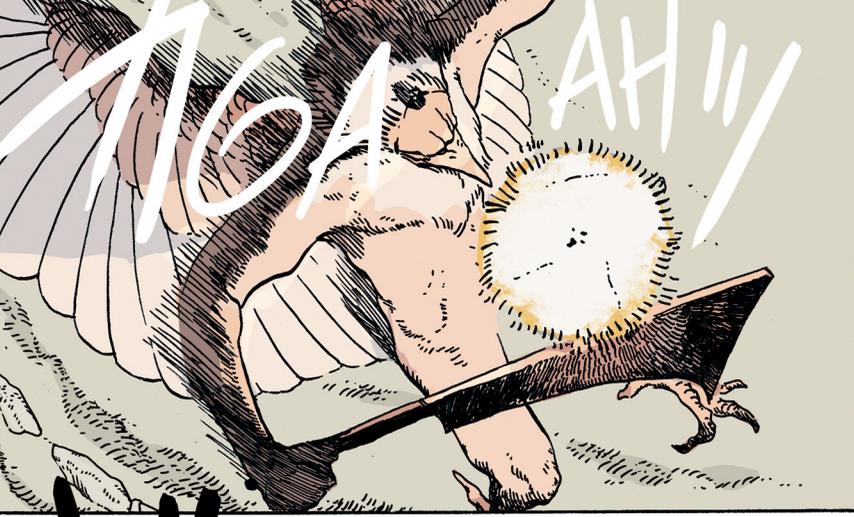
HAD A LONG,
HARD DAY.
SO YOU TALK
NOW. FAST.

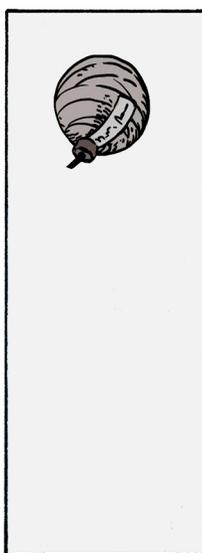
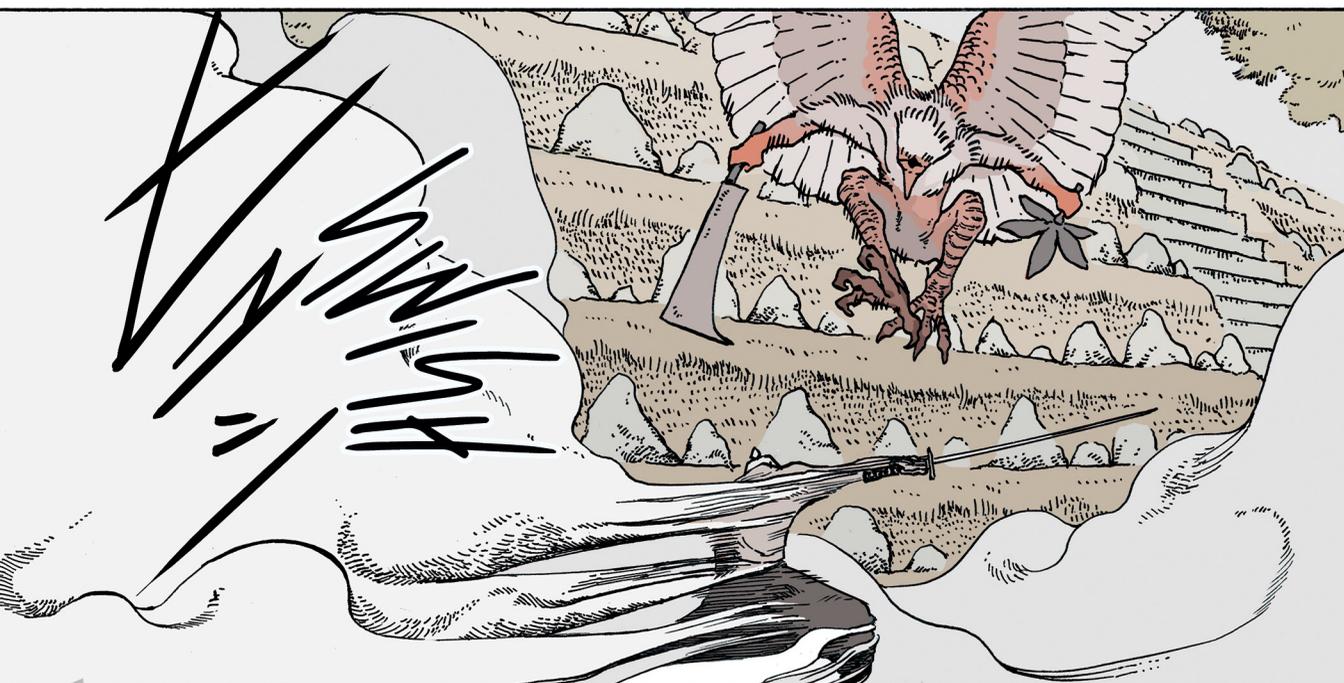
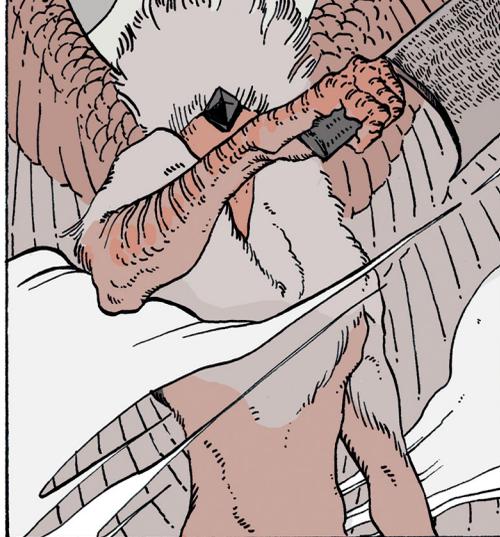
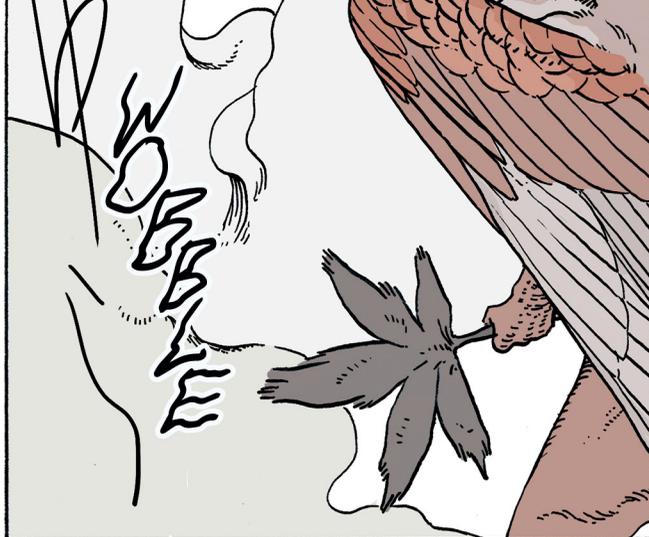


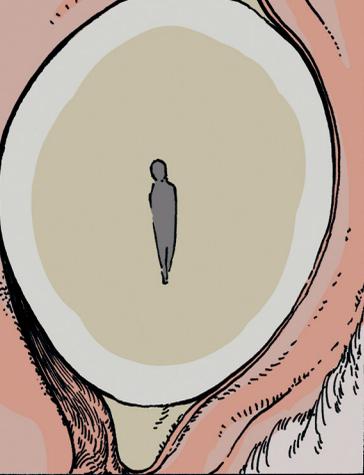
"TOLD HER I'D
GOT TURNED
AROUND IN THE
WOODS, LOST
MY WAY, AND
LOST THE WOOD
I'D GATHERED.

"MY WIFE
GREETED
ME IN
TEARS,
SHE'D BEEN
WORRIED.



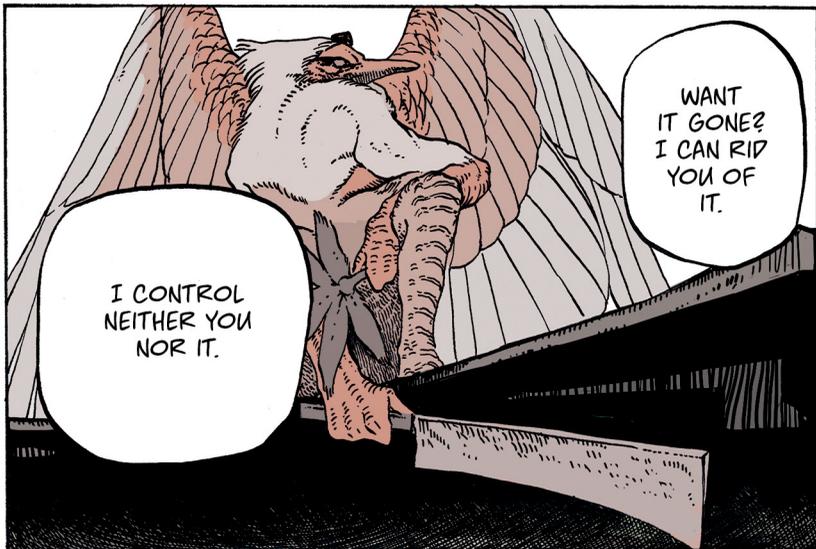








EH.
TASUKE THE
LOGGER--
KNOW
HIM?



I CONTROL
NEITHER YOU
NOR IT.

WANT
IT GONE?
I CAN RID
YOU OF
IT.

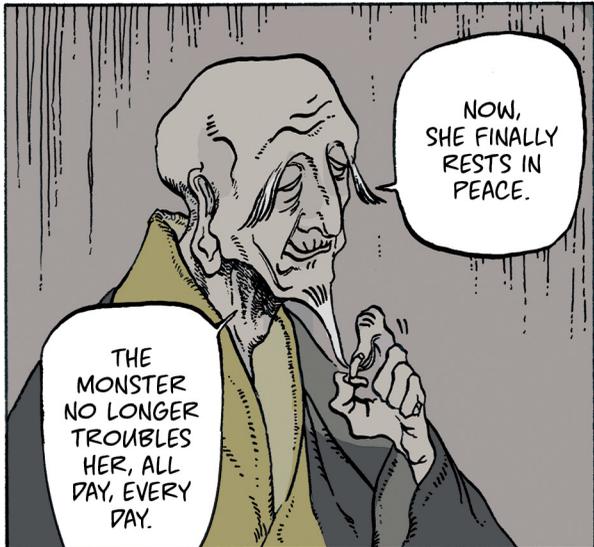


BEFORE THE
TENGU ARRIVED,
HE WOULD COME
TO VISIT HIS
WIFE'S GRAVE.
INCESSANTLY.

I DO,
YES.

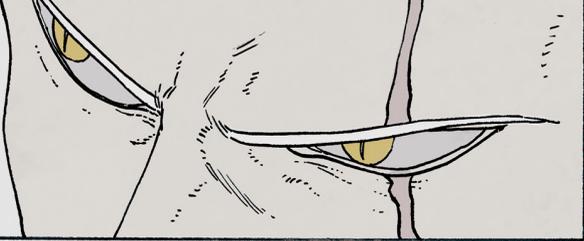


WISH
ME LUCK.



NOW,
SHE FINALLY
RESTS IN
PEACE.

THE
MONSTER
NO LONGER
TROUBLES
HER, ALL
DAY, EVERY
DAY.

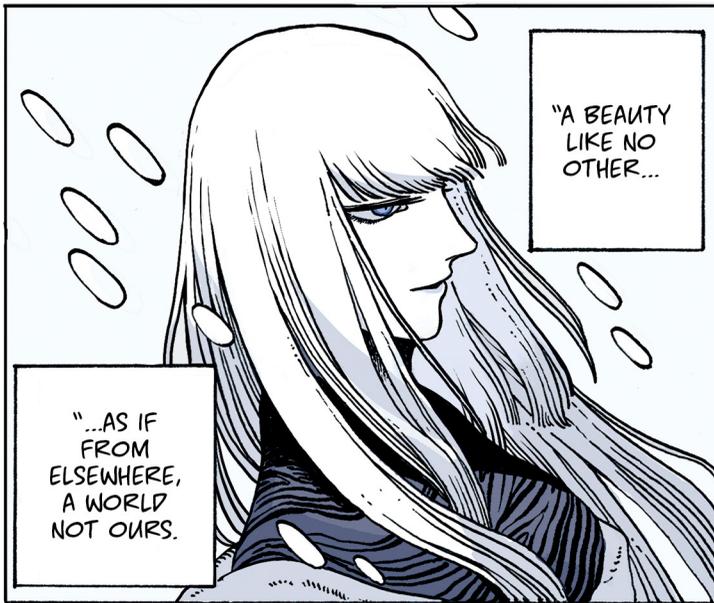


I THINK
IT ENJOYS
THE BREEZE
UP THERE.



THE
TENGU
DOES NOT
ATTACK
IF LEFT
ALONE.

CV
NH
F
P
#



"A BEAUTY
LIKE NO
OTHER..."

"...AS IF
FROM
ELSEWHERE,
A WORLD
NOT OURS."



"TILL ONE
WINTER,
MIDST A
SNOWSTORM,
I SAW...HER."



"SO I WENT
FORTH TO
FIND HER."

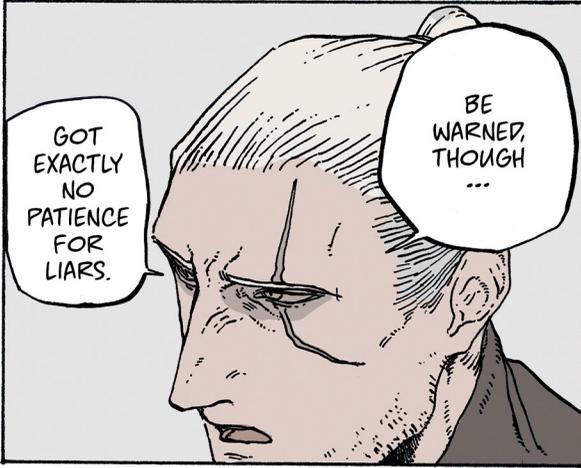
"I COULDN'T
HELP BUT STARE...
THEN, SHE
DISAPPEARED.
I THOUGHT HER
LOST IN THE
DRIVING SNOW."



'T WAS NOT MY
AIM TO SPEAK
OF THE SNOW
WOMAN.
NO, YOU DO YOUR
PART FIRST, THEN
I'LL TELL YOU
THE WHOLE OF
MY TALE.



OH! ETSK,
TSKE... YOU LET
ME TALK,
ALMOST DREW
IT AAALL
OUT.



GOT EXACTLY NO PATIENCE FOR LIARS.

BE WARNED, THOUGH ...



~~F~~ GLENCH

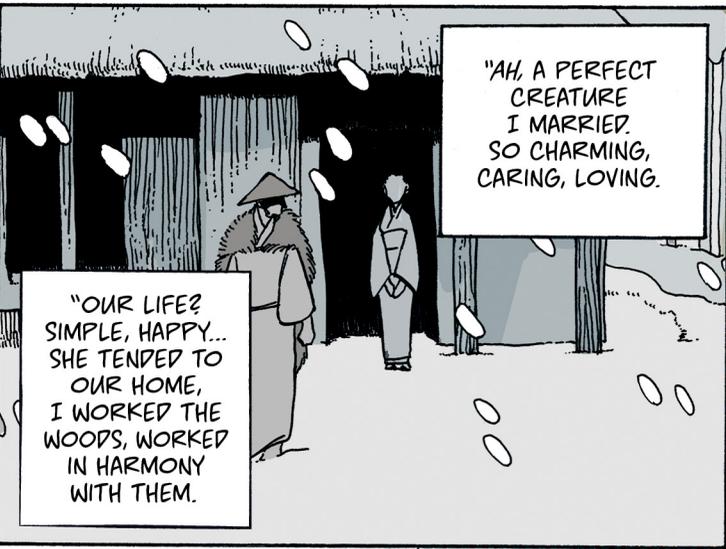
GOTTA FIND HER. FINE, I'LL DO WHAT YOU ASK.



DEAL!



KILL ME IF YOU SO PLEASE, BUT I'LL NOT TALK. NO, NOT TILL YOU FIND A WAY TO LET ME BE WITH MY WIFE.



"OUR LIFE? SIMPLE, HAPPY... SHE TENDED TO OUR HOME, I WORKED THE WOODS, WORKED IN HARMONY WITH THEM.

"AH, A PERFECT CREATURE I MARRIED. SO CHARMING, CARING, LOVING.



BUT FIRST PROVE YOU'VE GOT A STORY. YOUR WIFE-- WHAT HAPPENED TO HER?

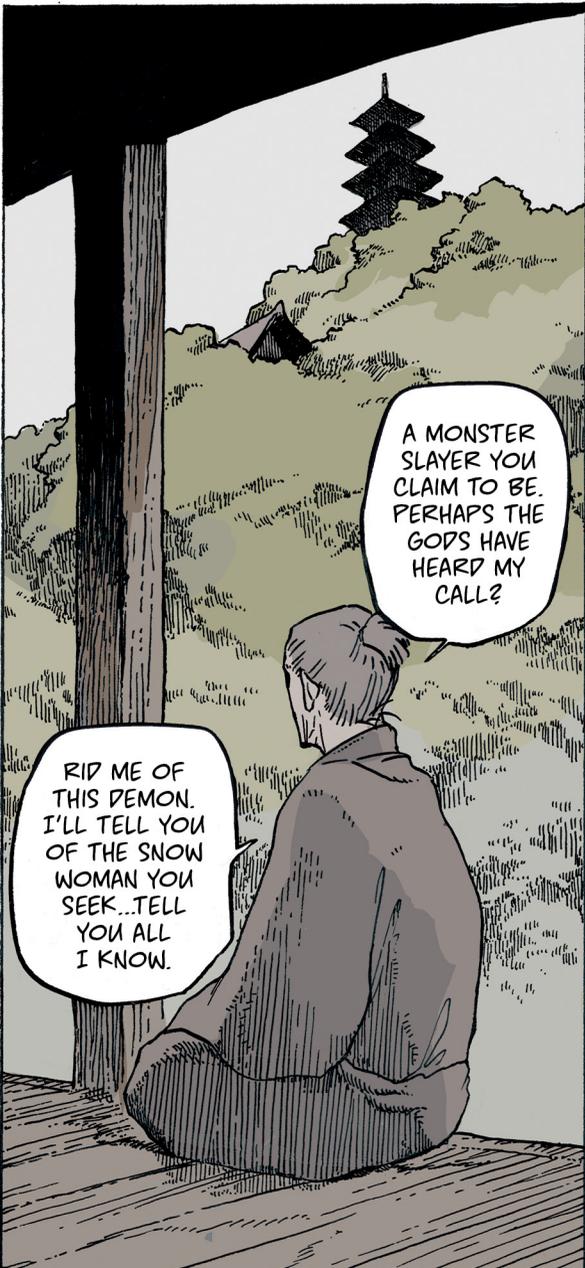


WELL, TELL ME WHAT YOU KNOW. CAN YOU?

WASN'T LONG AGO I'D HAVE PRESSED YOU FOR INFORMATION ABOUT HER. PRETTY DAMN HARD. BUT...



OH, 'T WAS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL THING I HAD EVER SEEN.



A MONSTER SLAYER YOU CLAIM TO BE. PERHAPS THE GODS HAVE HEARD MY CALL?

RID ME OF THIS DEMON. I'LL TELL YOU OF THE SNOW WOMAN YOU SEEK...TELL YOU ALL I KNOW.



HELP'S WHAT YOU WANT. IT JUST SO HAPPENS, HELP'S WHAT I NEED, TOO. FIRST.



ATOP THE MOUNTAIN, NEAR ITS PEAK, LIES A CEMETERY.



AN' THERE, TOO, LIES MY BELOVED WIFE. BUT I CANNOT TEND TO HER GRAVE. FOR AN EVIL TENGU PROWL'S THERE.

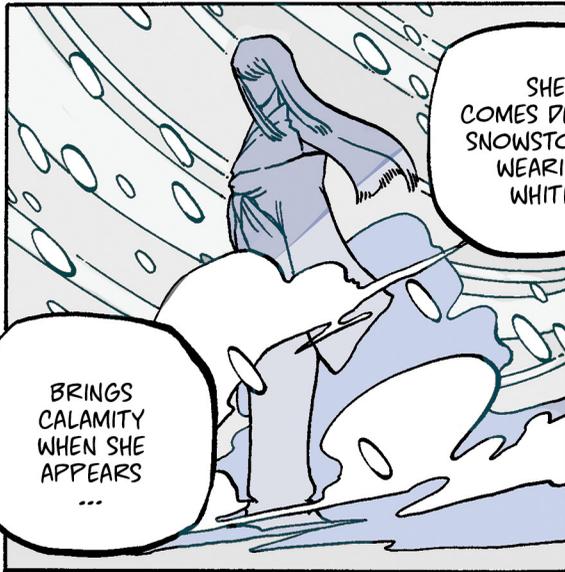


LOOKING FOR A WOMAN...

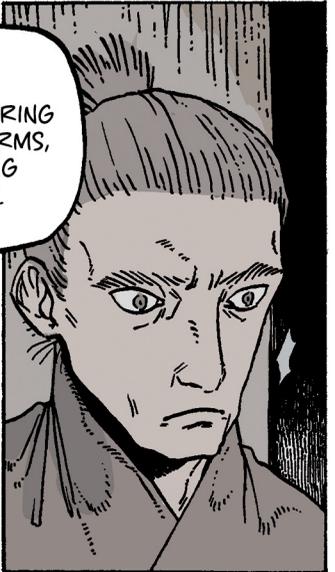
I'M GERALT--
RONIN AND
MONSTER
SLAYER.

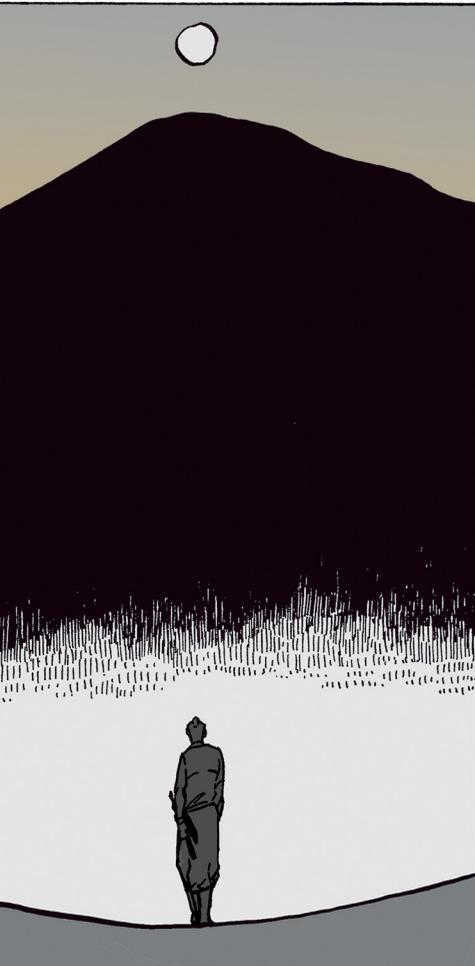
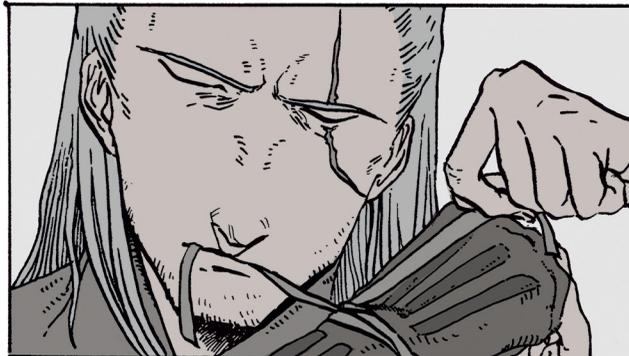
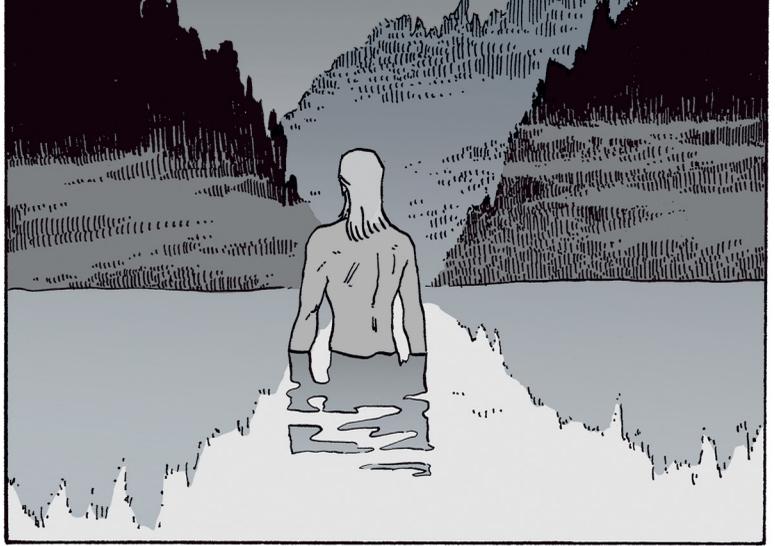


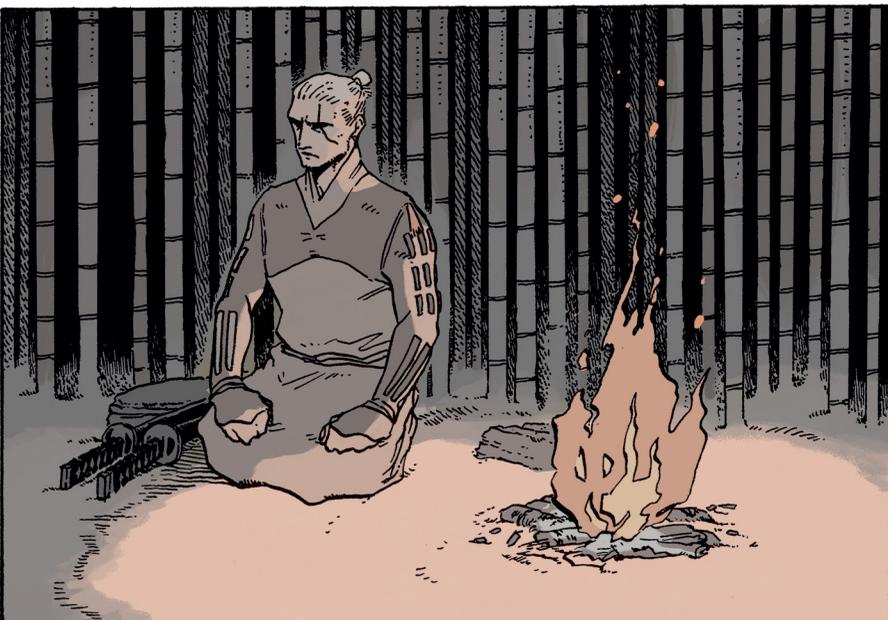
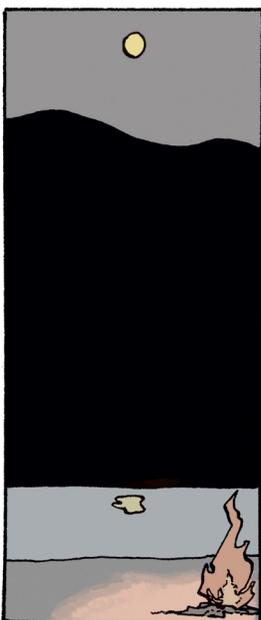
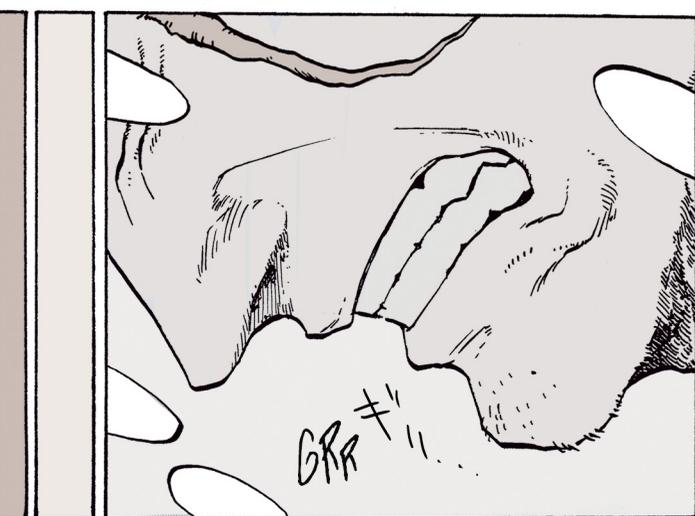
BRINGS
CALAMITY
WHEN SHE
APPEARS
...

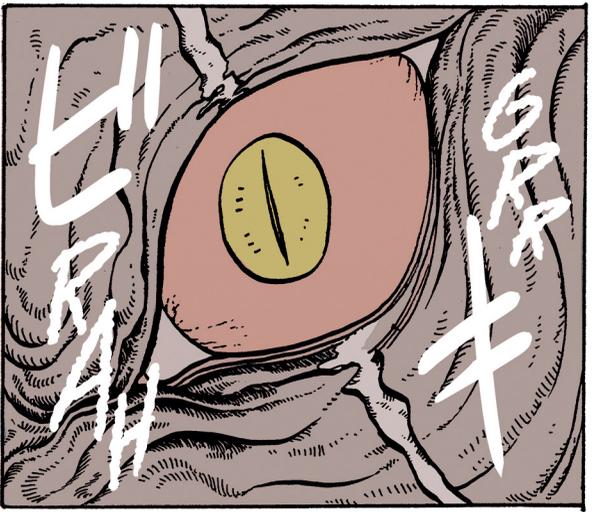
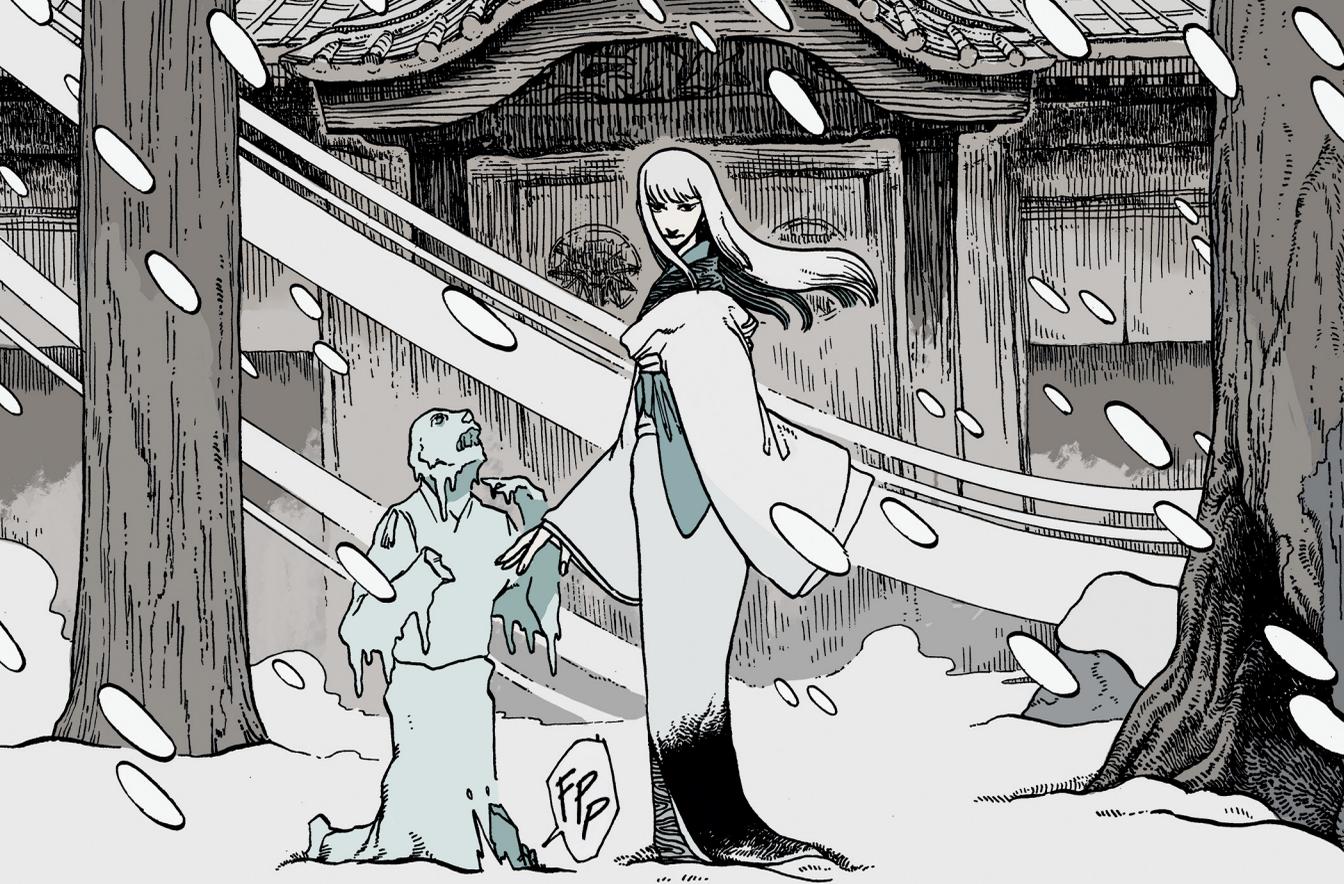


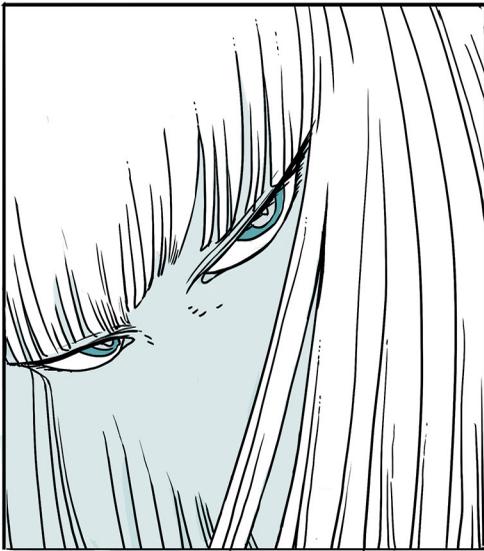
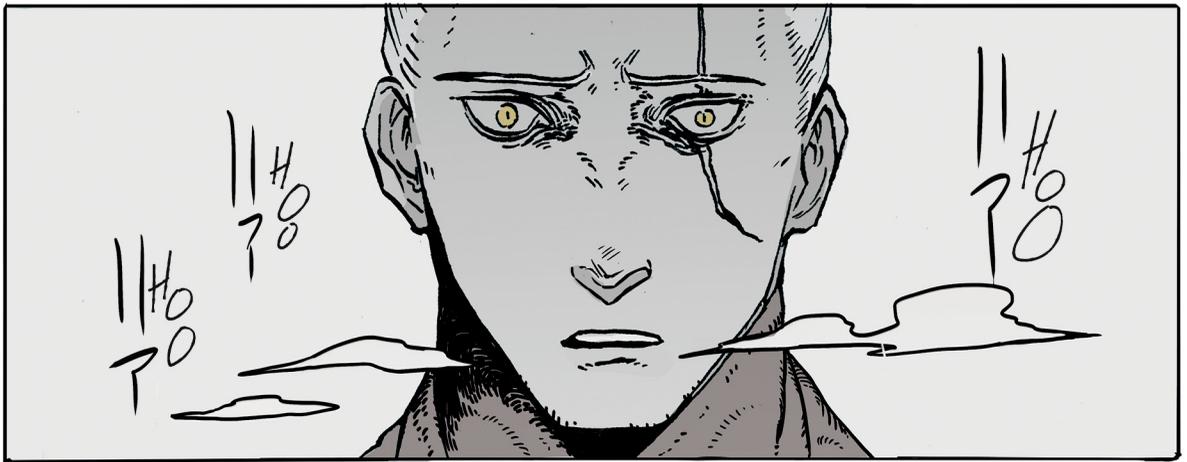
SHE
COMES DURING
SNOWSTORMS,
WEARING
WHITE.







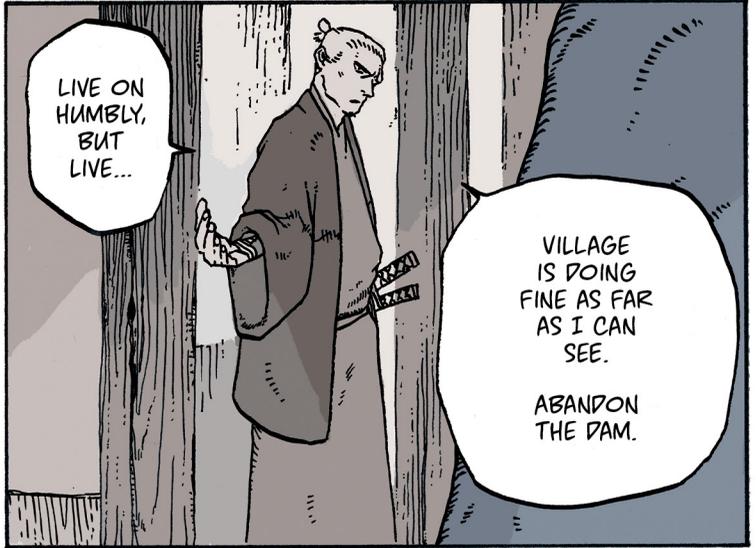
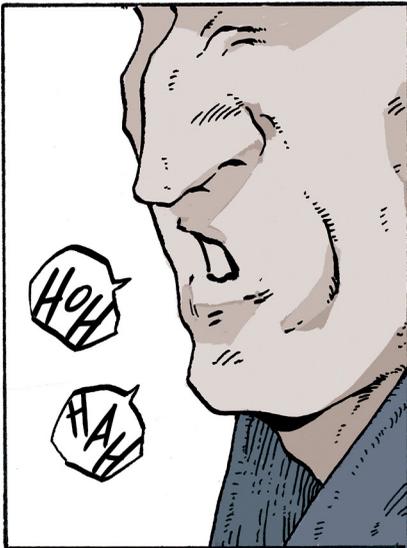






Chapter 2





LIVE ON HUMBLLY, BUT LIVE...

VILLAGE IS DOING FINE AS FAR AS I CAN SEE.

ABANDON THE DAM.



YOU WOULD HAVE US ABANDON OUR FUTURE INSTEAD! YOU WOULD LEAVE US TO DIE AT THE CLAWS OF BEASTS! GO, THEN!

AARGH!
FREAK!
OUTCAST!
INHUMAN
FILTH!
MONSTER
SLAYER?
HAH!

GOT A DECISION TO MAKE!
YOU!

ALL OF YOU!



DAMMIT... I TRIED.

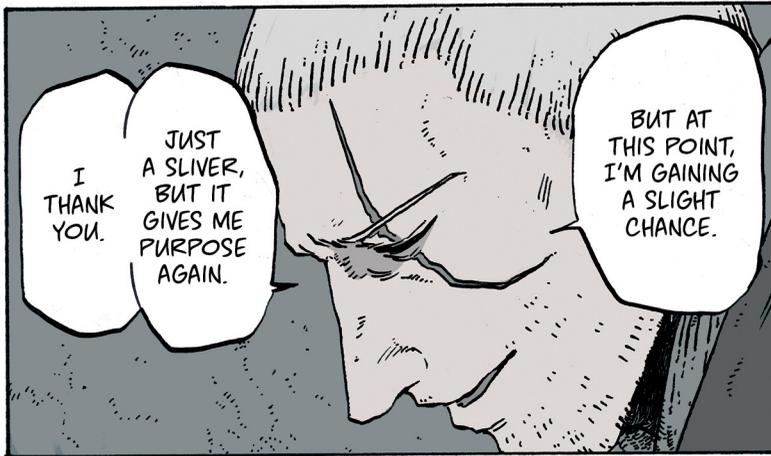
YOU CHOSE YOUR PATH, CHOSE YOUR DESTINY.



LEAVE!
AWAY WITH YOU,
FREAK!

GAH!
WAH!
WAH!

UGH!
WAH!
WAH!



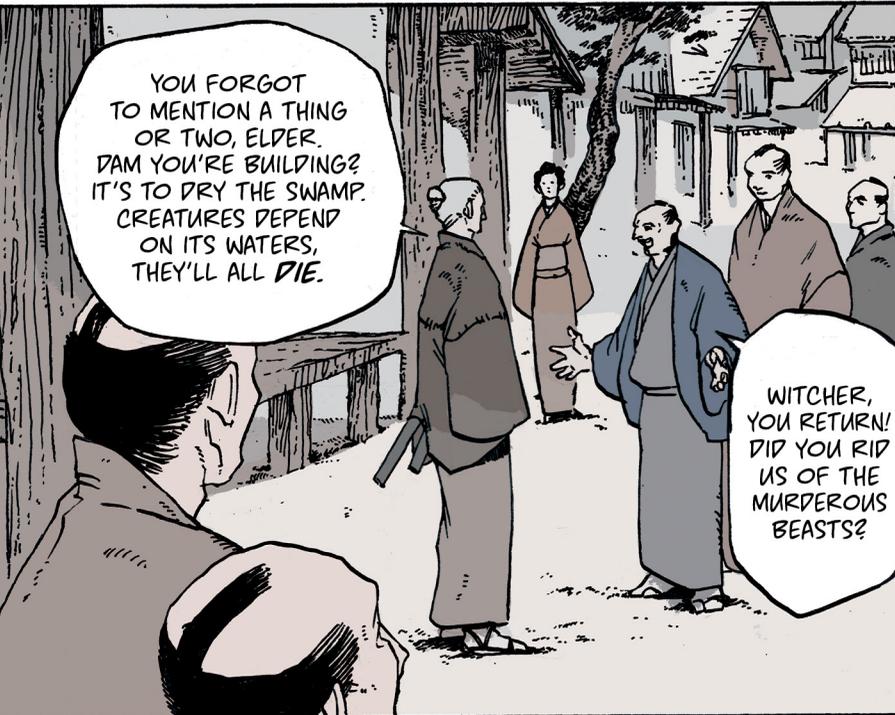
I
THANK
YOU.

JUST
A SLIVER,
BUT IT
GIVES ME
PURPOSE
AGAIN.

BUT AT
THIS POINT,
I'M GAINING
A SLIGHT
CHANCE.



DESTINY...
DON'T
BELIEVE IN
DESTINY.



YOU FORGOT
TO MENTION A THING
OR TWO, ELDER.
DAM YOU'RE BUILDING?
IT'S TO DRY THE SWAMP.
CREATURES DEPEND
ON ITS WATERS,
THEY'LL ALL DIE.

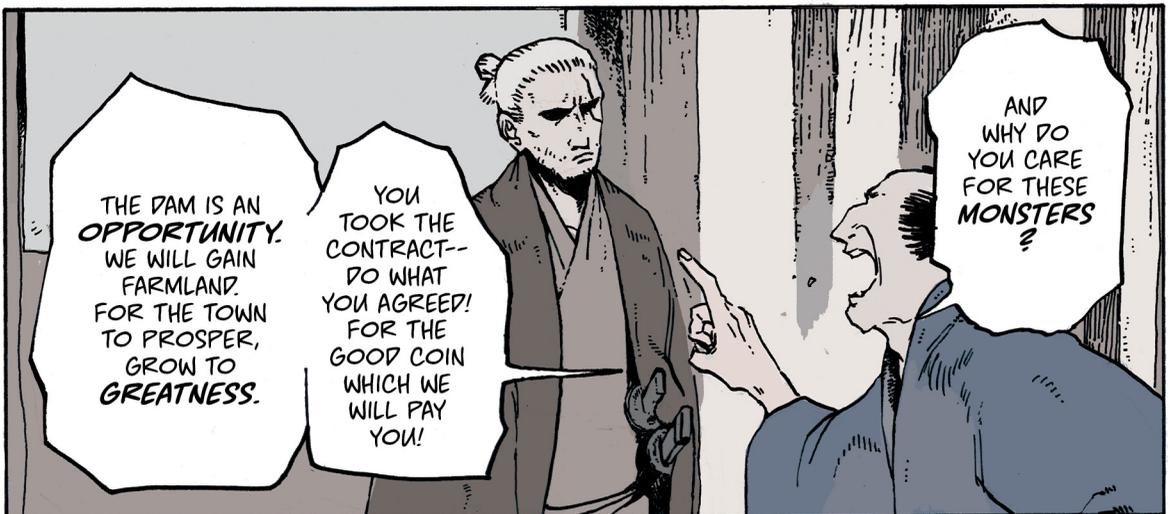
WITCHER,
YOU RETURN!
DID YOU RIP
US OF THE
MURDEROUS
BEASTS?



ざわ jibber
jabber
ざわ



fush # fush



THE DAM IS AN
OPPORTUNITY.
WE WILL GAIN
FARMLAND.
FOR THE TOWN
TO PROSPER,
GROW TO
GREATNESS.

YOU
TOOK THE
CONTRACT--
DO WHAT
YOU AGREED!
FOR THE GOOD COIN
WHICH WE
WILL PAY
YOU!

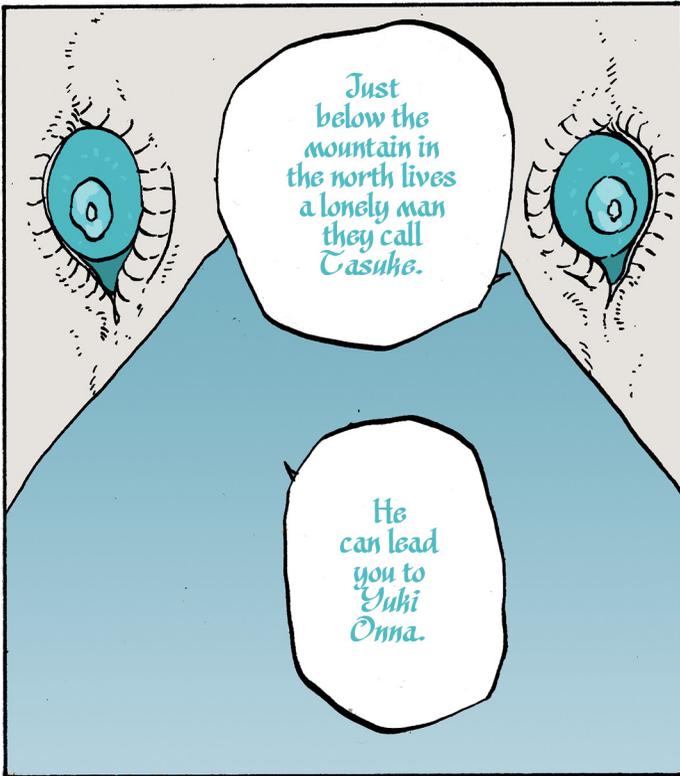
AND
WHY DO
YOU CARE
FOR THESE
MONSTERS
?



Yes.
Yet you believe in them too much. They will not listen.

IF THEY ABANDON THE DAM, BUILD NO MORE, YOU'LL STOP ATTACKING?

VILLAGERS -- NO MORE KILLING 'EM.



Just below the mountain in the north lives a lonely man they call *Tasuke*.

He can lead you to *Yuki Onna*.

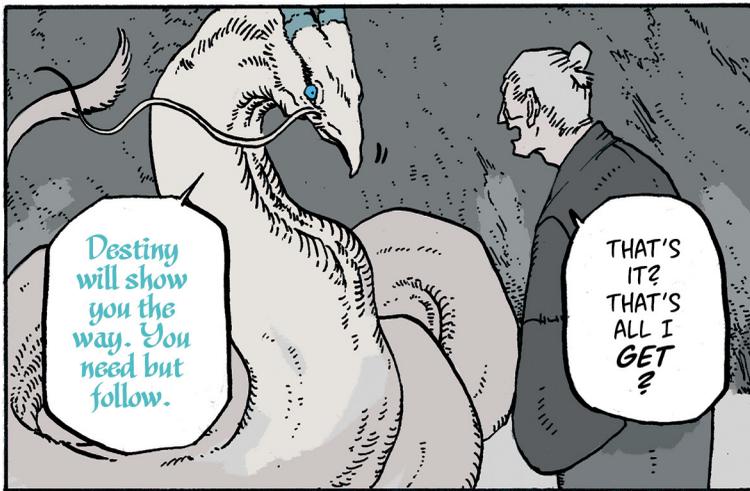


I'LL TRY TO HELP, THEN BE ON MY WAY.

NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THEM, THEIR ACTIONS.

ALL RIGHT-- WE GOT A DEAL. NOW SPEAK.

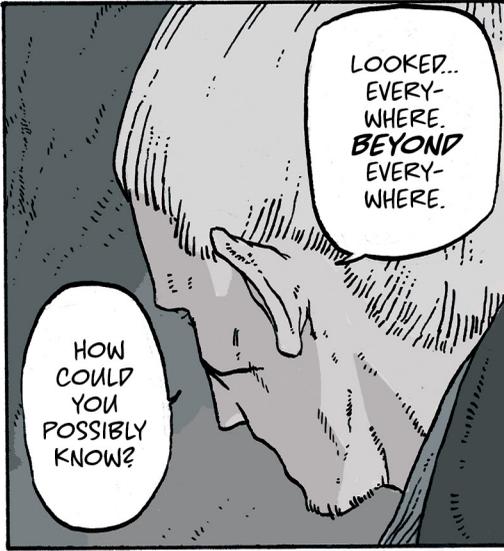
HOW THEY DEAL WITH WHAT I TELL THEM, THAT'S ON THEM.



Destiny will show you the way. You need but follow.

THAT'S IT? THAT'S ALL I GET?



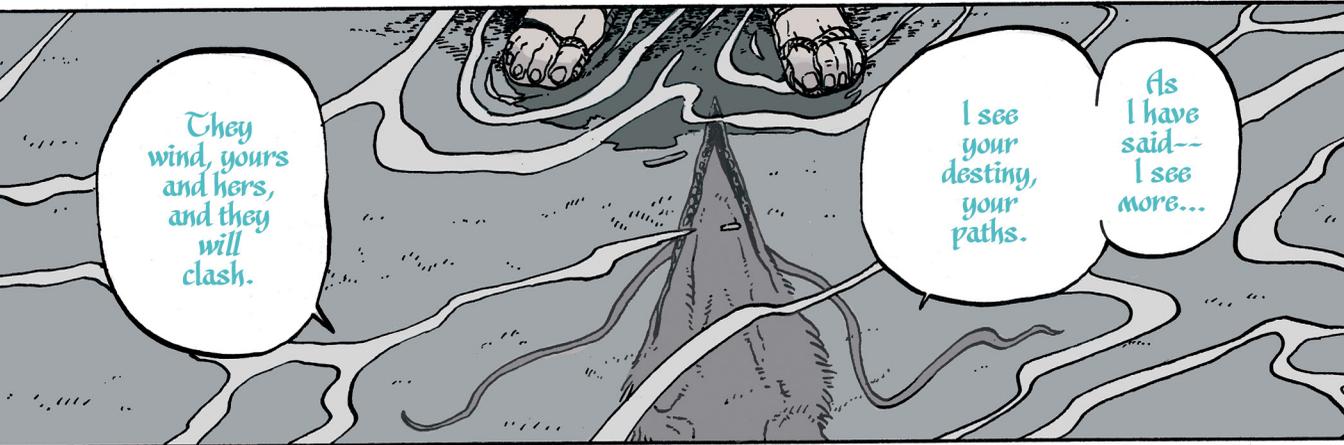


LOOKED...
EVERY-
WHERE.
BEYOND
EVERY-
WHERE.

HOW
COULD
YOU
POSSIBLY
KNOW?



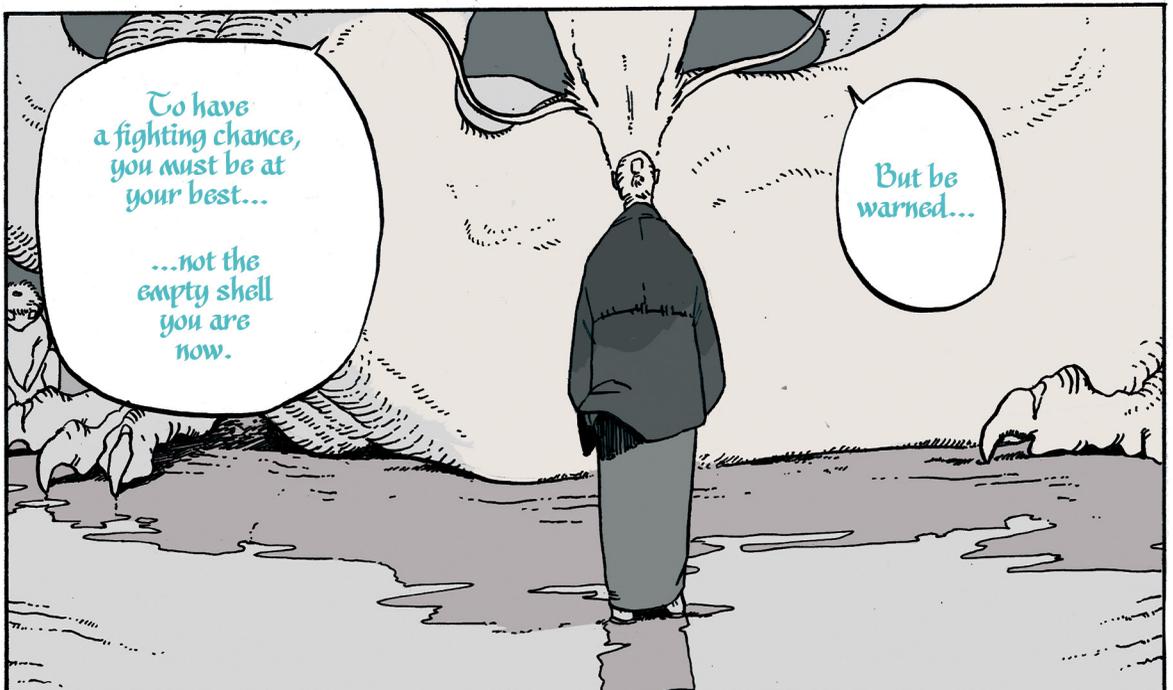
I will
tell you how
to find
the woman
common folk
call *Yuki*
Onna.



They
wind, yours
and hers,
and they
will
clash.

I see
your
destiny,
your
paths.

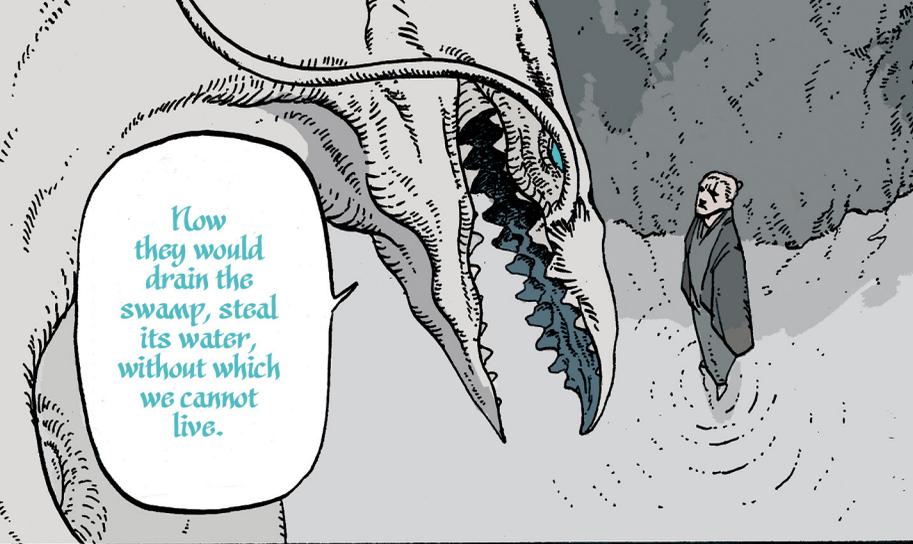
As
I have
said--
I see
more...



To have
a fighting
chance,
you must be at
your best...

...not the
empty shell
you are
now.

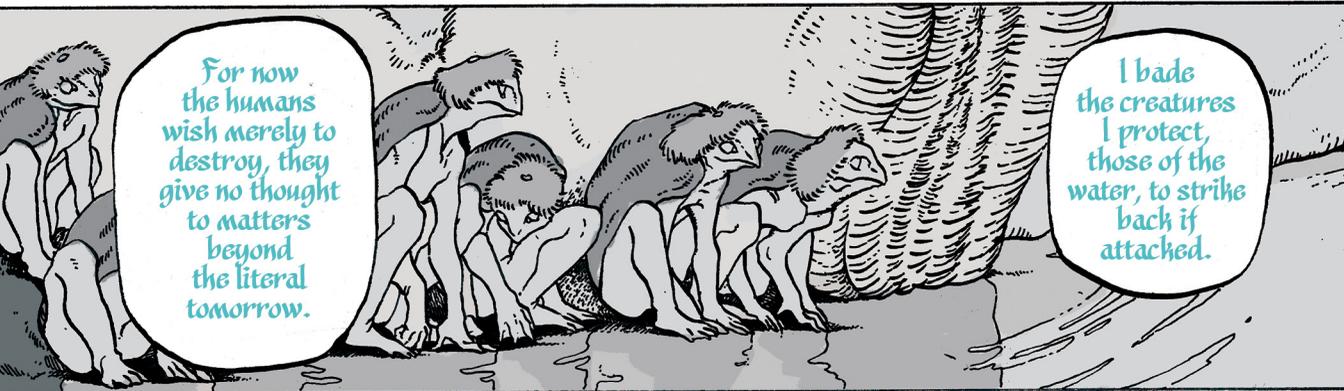
But be
warned...



Now they would drain the swamp, steal its water, without which we cannot live.



The humans respected the water, gave thanks for its gifts.



For now the humans wish merely to destroy, they give no thought to matters beyond the literal tomorrow.

I bade the creatures I protect those of the water, to strike back if attacked.



You must speak with the villagers. Tell them we wish simply to live, as they live.

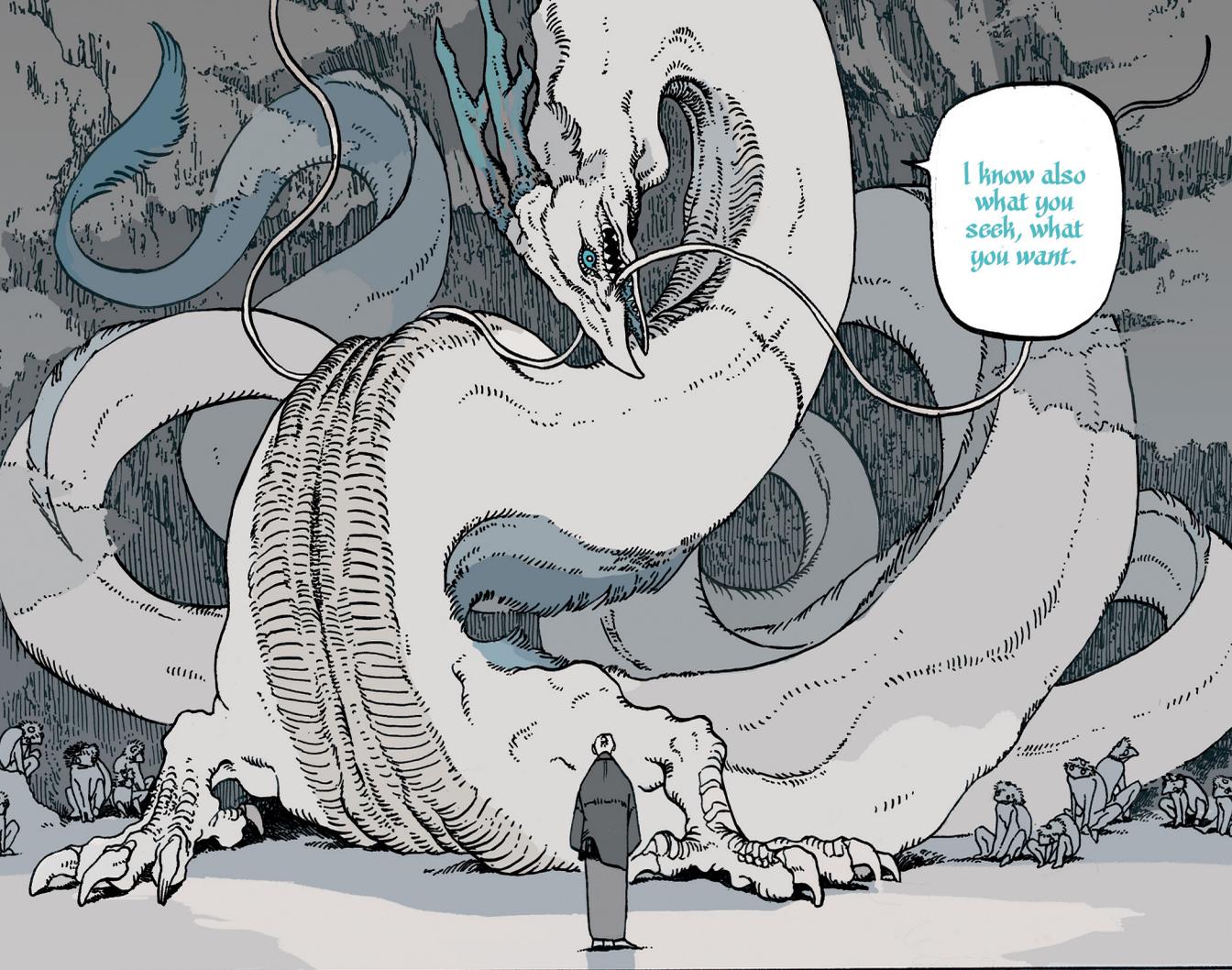
FOLK DIED. THE REST LIVE IN FEAR. WHAT MORE DO YOU WANT? WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME?



MADE YOUR POINT, I'D SAY.



Then you must fulfill your true destiny.



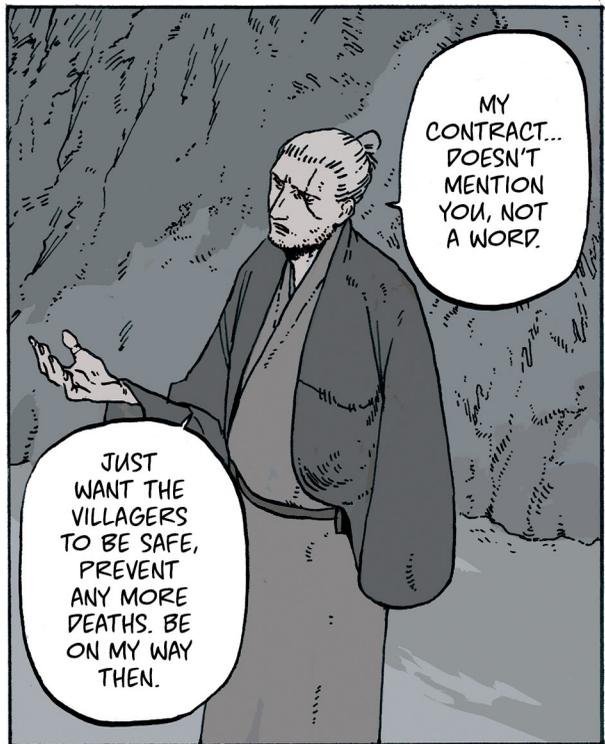
I know also what you seek, what you want.



We lived in peace, side by side, for generations.



The Elder told you only one truth, his truth, what he sees. I see more...



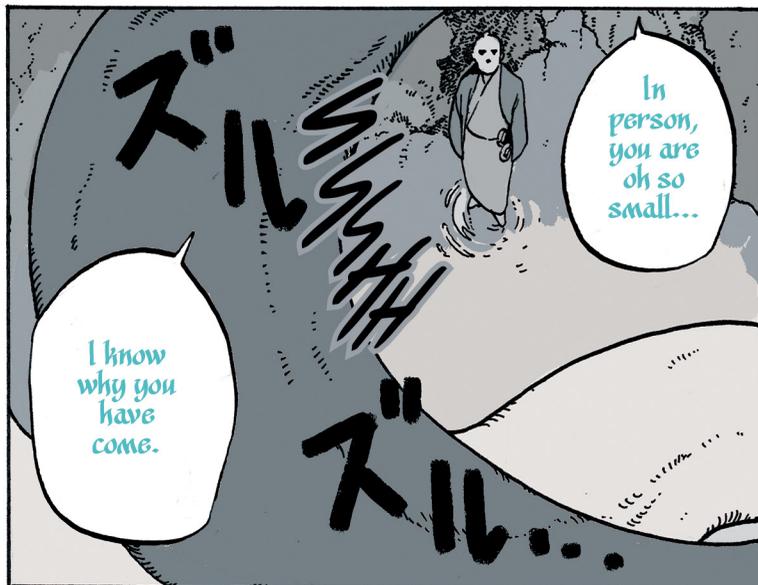
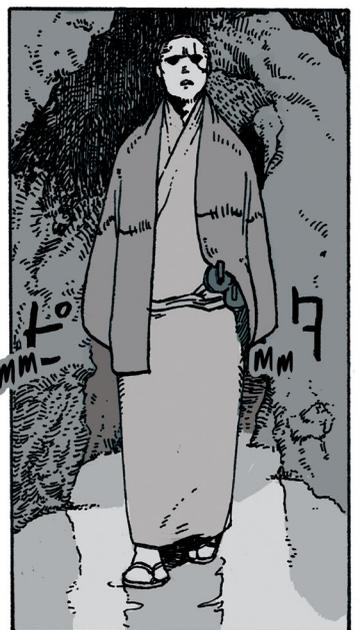
MY CONTRACT... DOESN'T MENTION YOU, NOT A WORD.

JUST WANT THE VILLAGERS TO BE SAFE, PREVENT ANY MORE DEATHS. BE ON MY WAY THEN.



WHAT THE HELL'S ALL THIS ABOUT?

HUH. REGULAR, TRICKY KAPPAS, SEEMS LIKE...



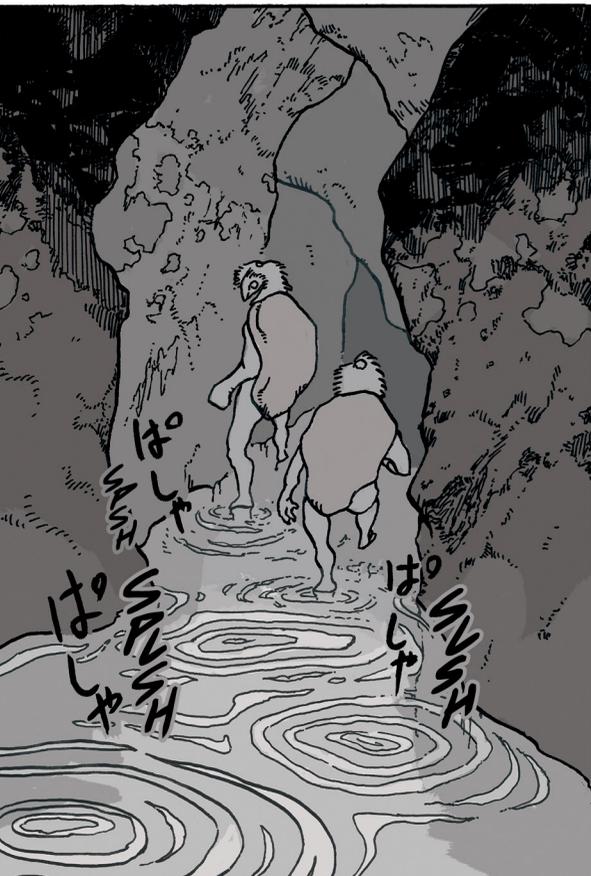
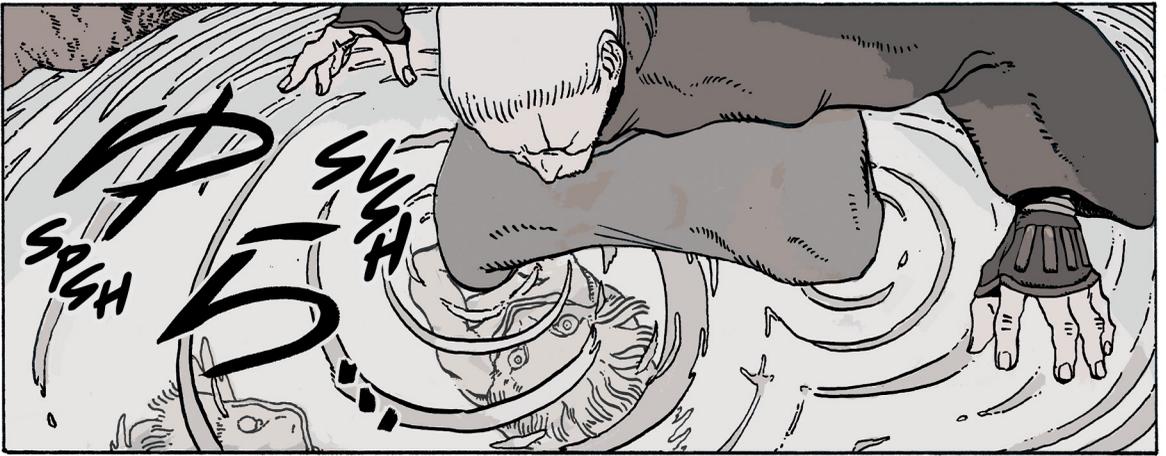
I know why you have come.

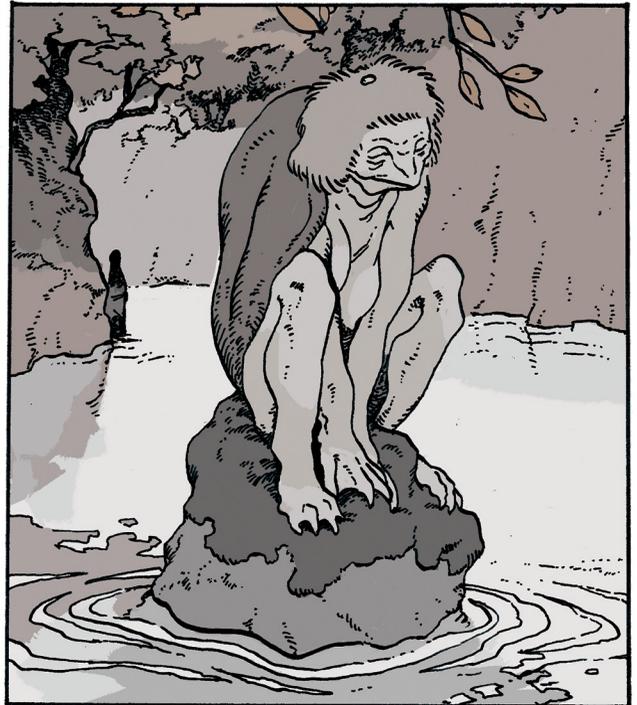
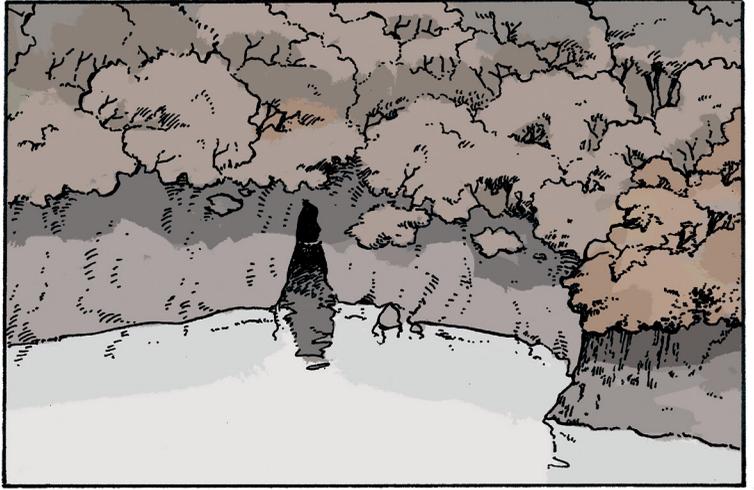
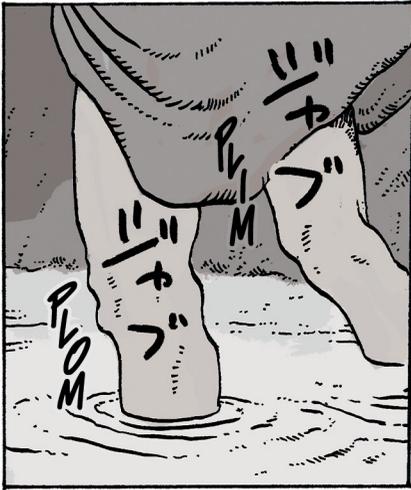
In person, you are oh so small...

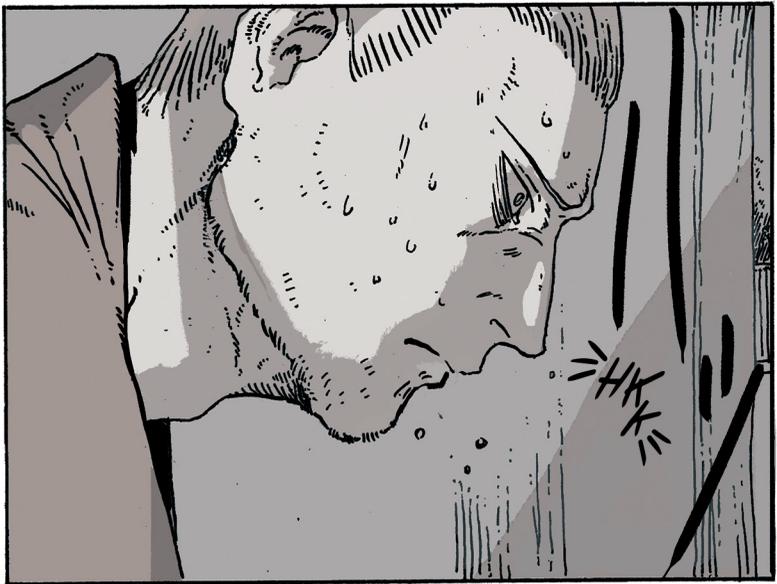
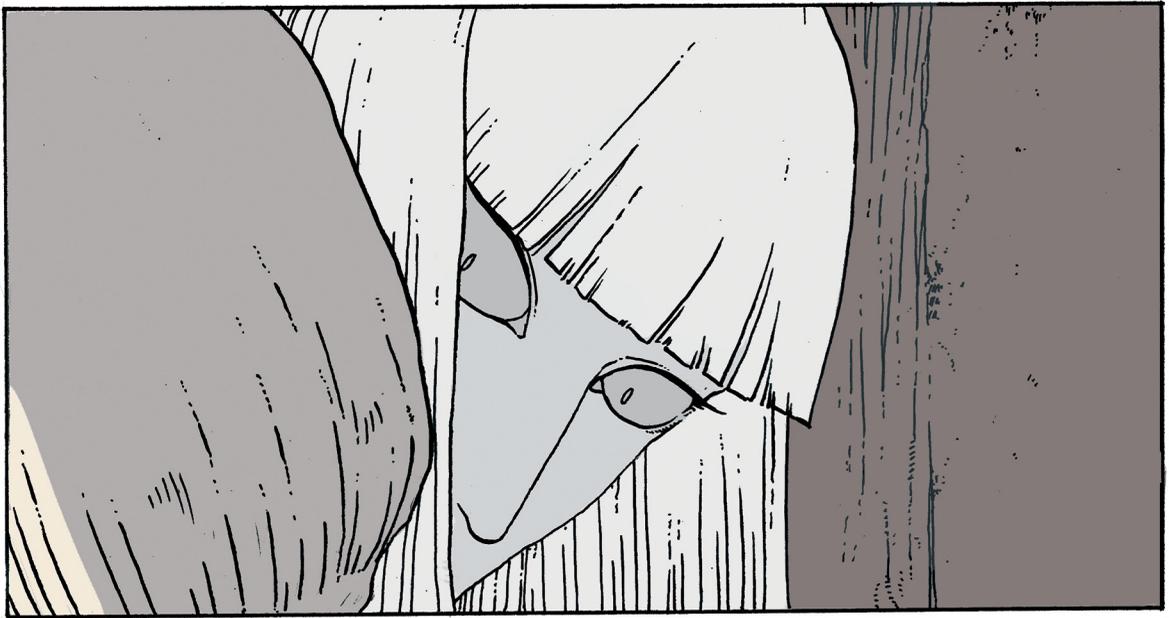
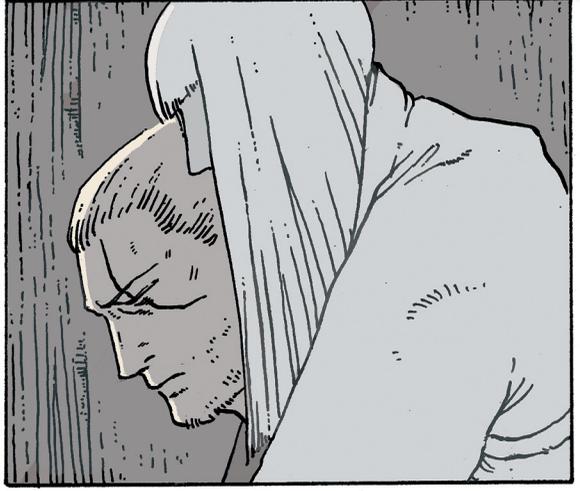
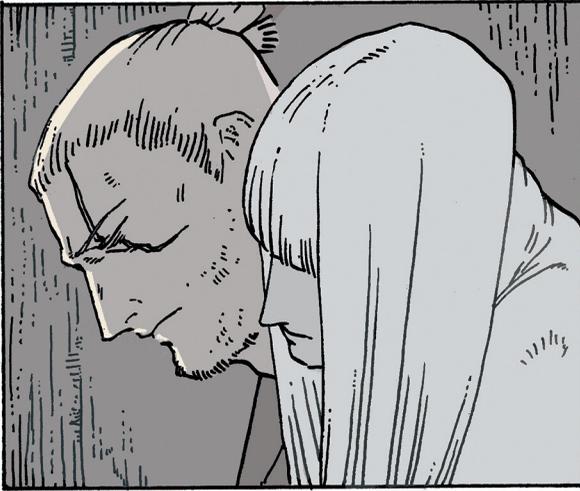


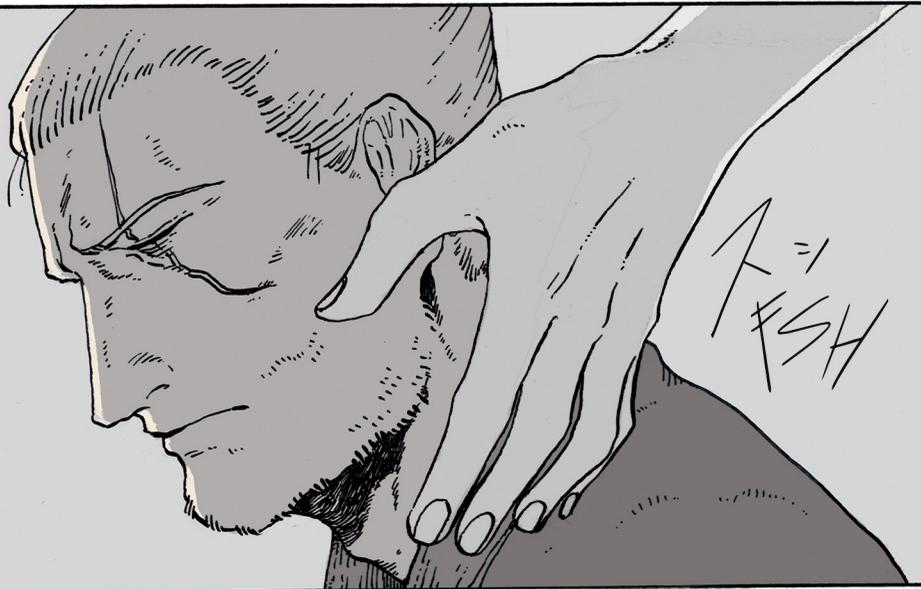
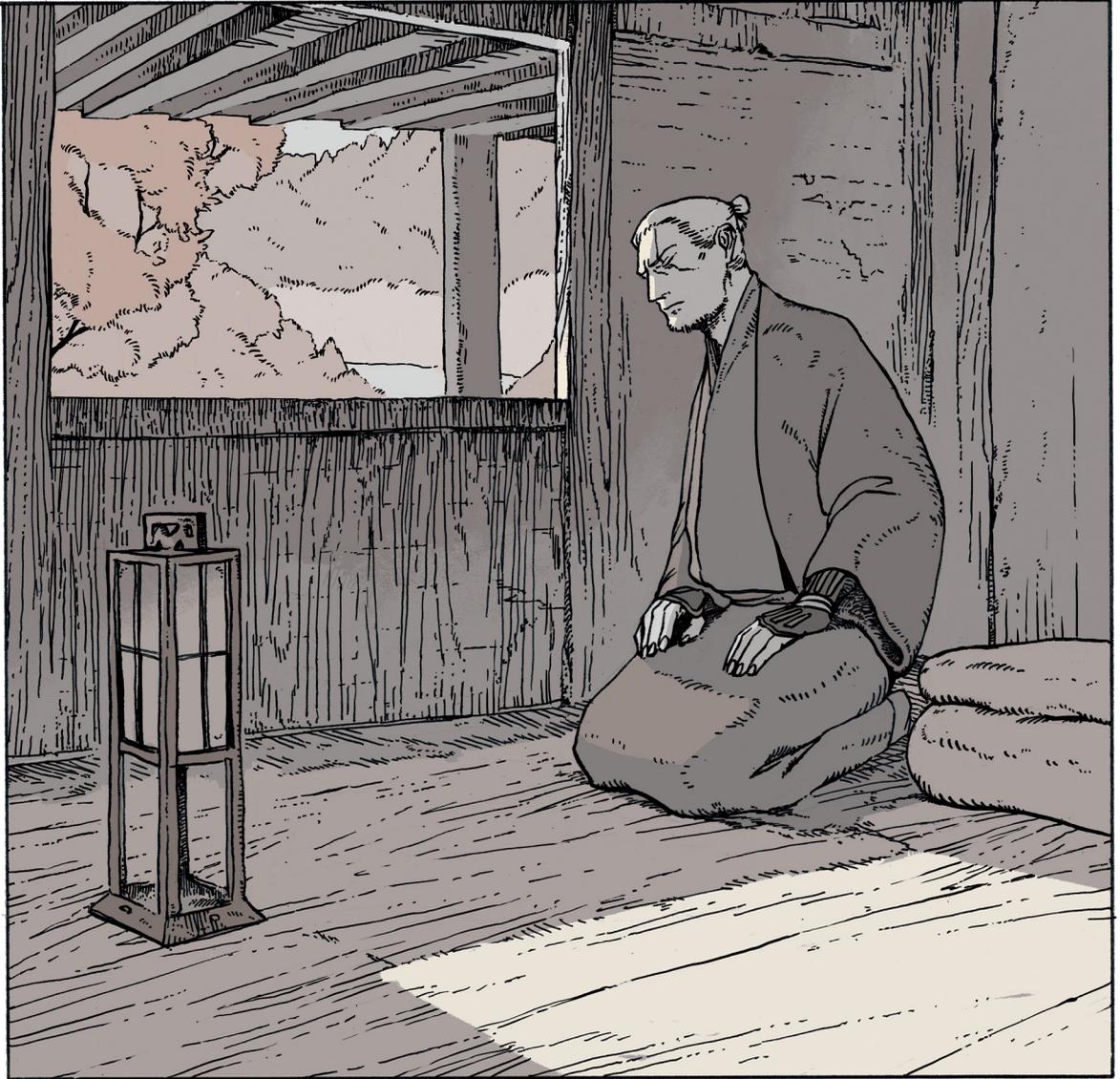
I saw you in my visions.

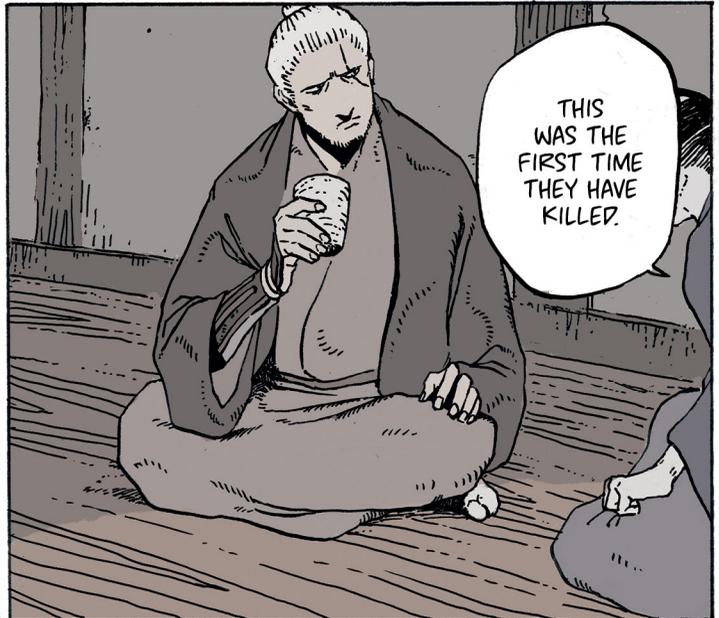
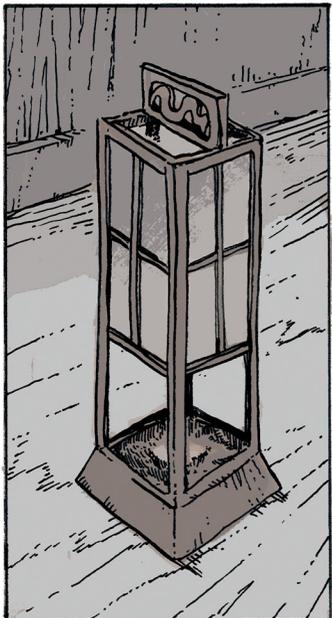
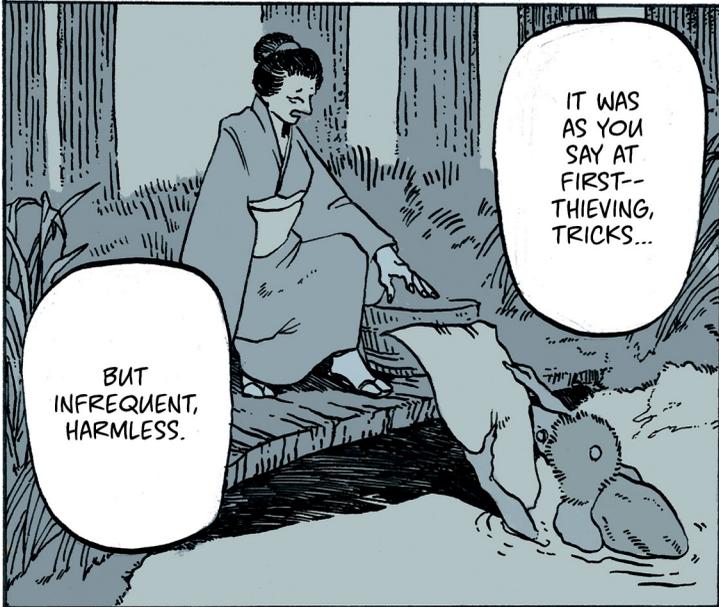
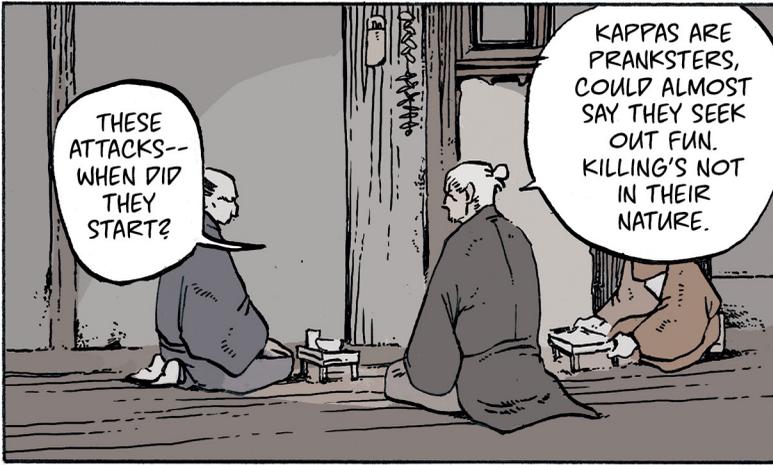
I am the guardian of this swamp and those who dwell here.













ALSO
NEED TO
STAY FOR
A NIGHT,
NEED
A PLACE.



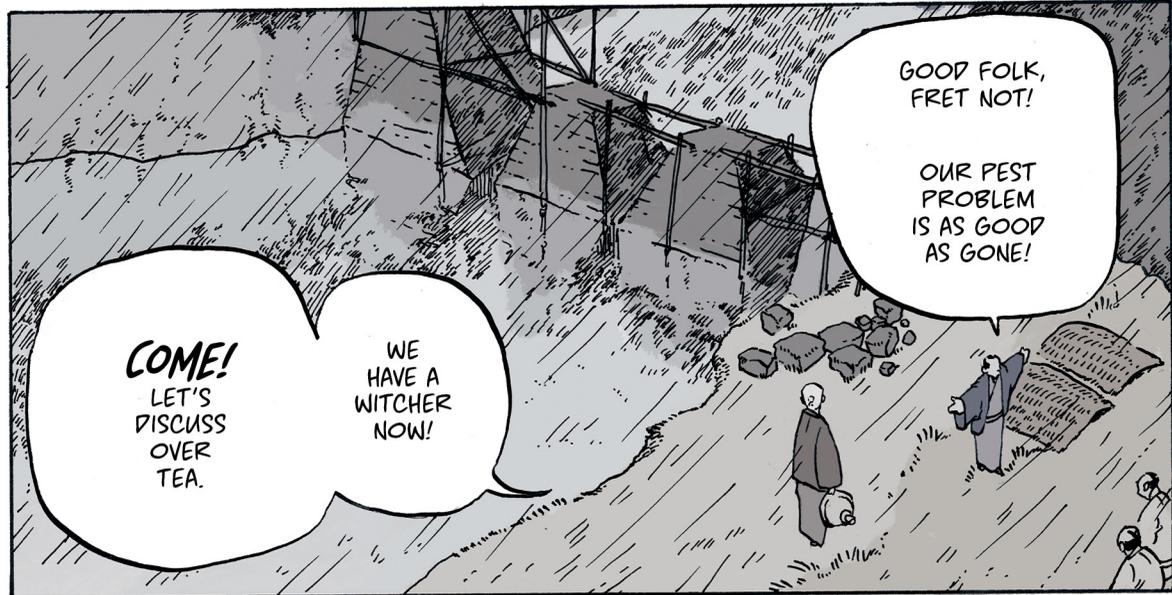
A RYO
PER KAPPA
HEAD--
THAT'S WHAT
YOU'LL
PAY.

WHAT?!

FIVE RYO
FOR ALL
OF THE
KAPPAS--
DEAD.



SO BE
IT. ONE
RYO PER
HEAD...

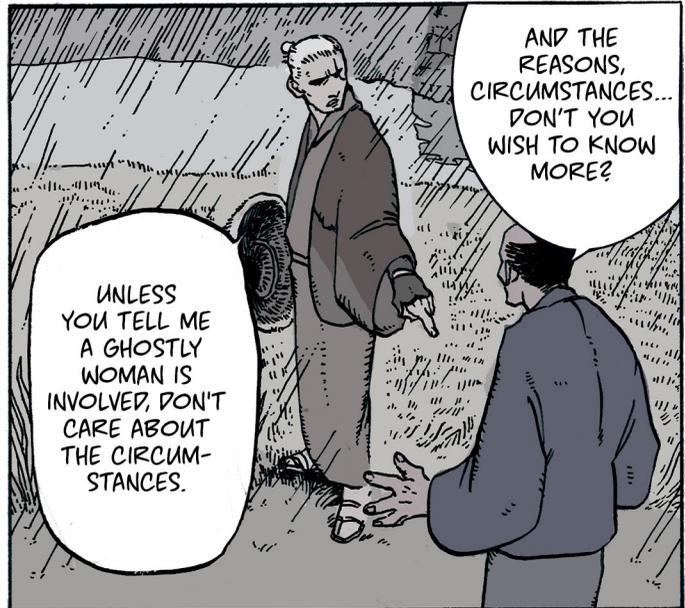
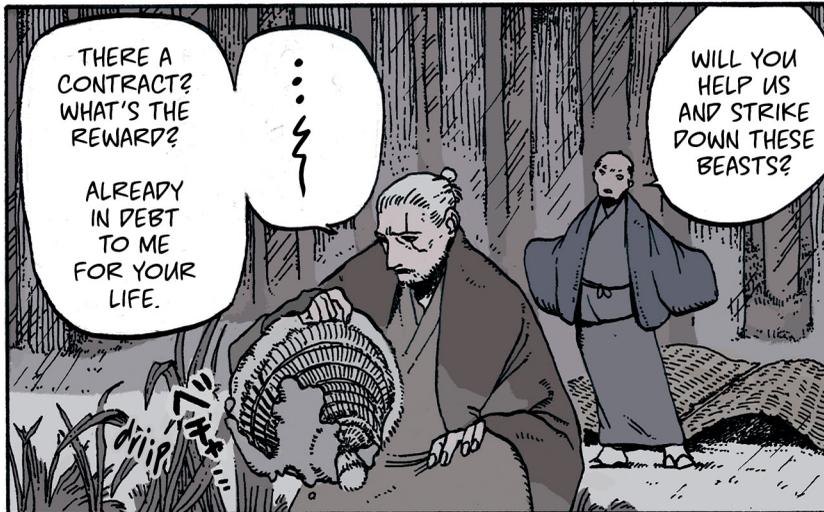
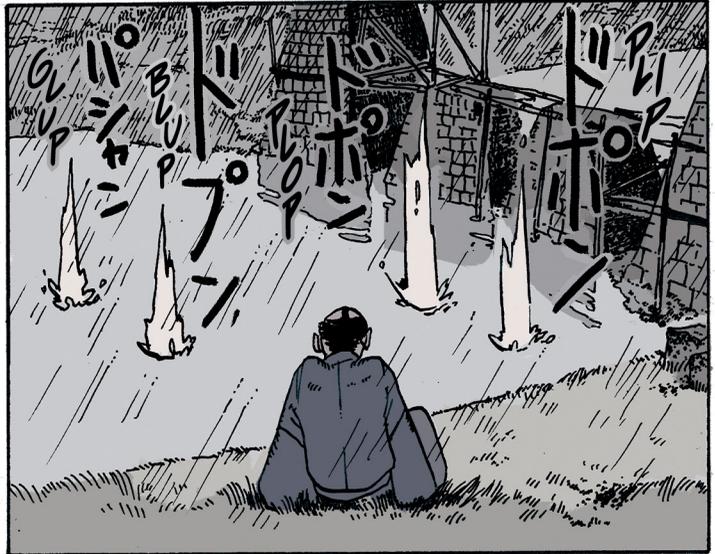
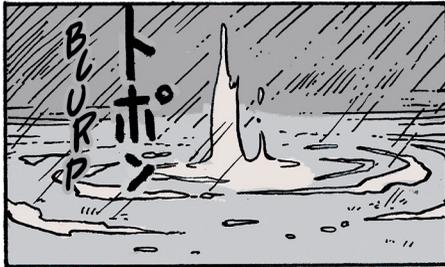
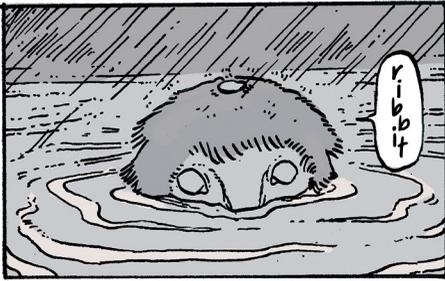


COME!
LET'S
DISCUSS
OVER
TEA.

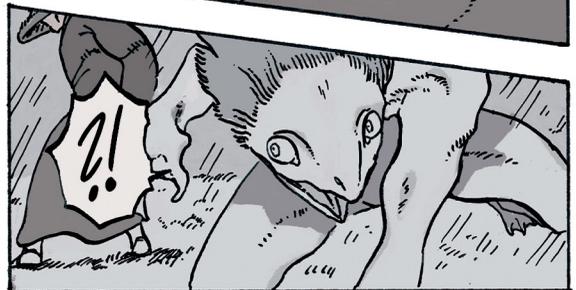
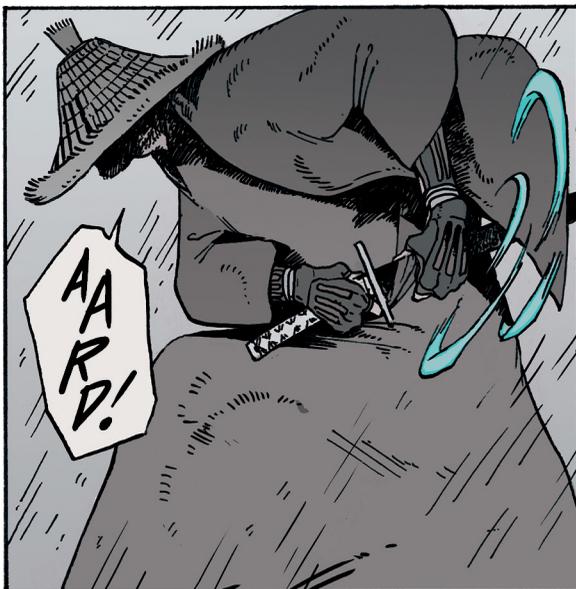
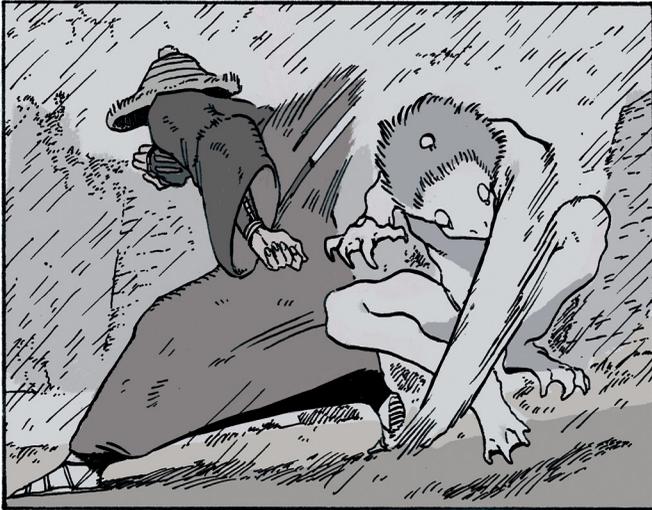
WE
HAVE A
WITCHER
NOW!

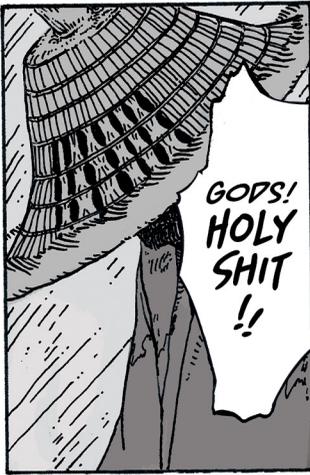
GOOD FOLK,
FRET NOT!

OUR PEST
PROBLEM
IS AS GOOD
AS GONE!

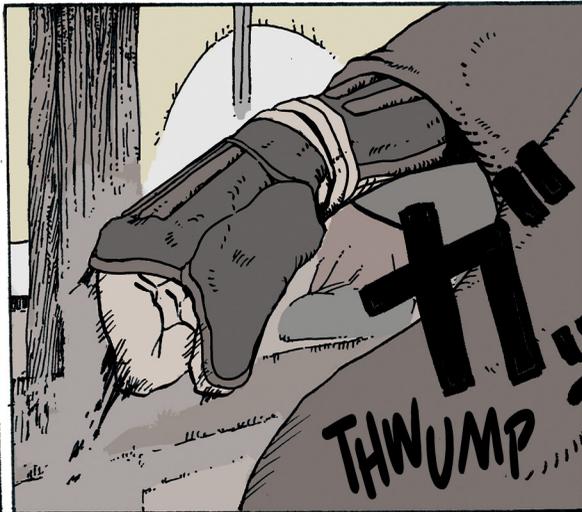
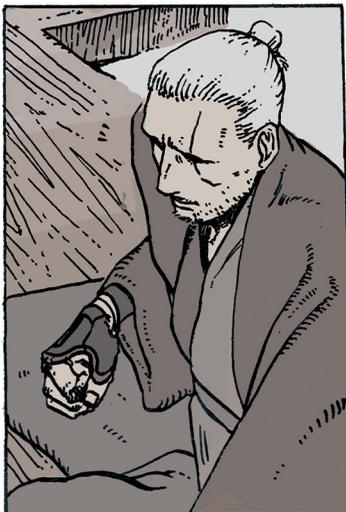
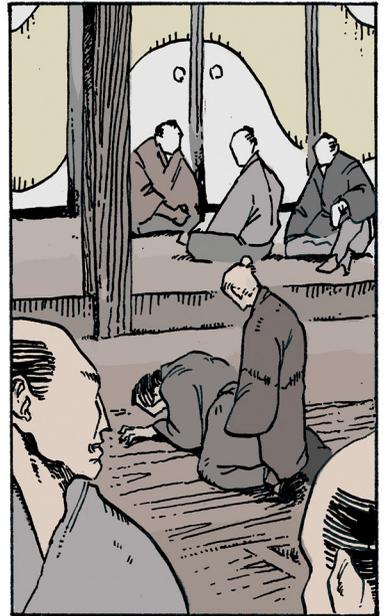
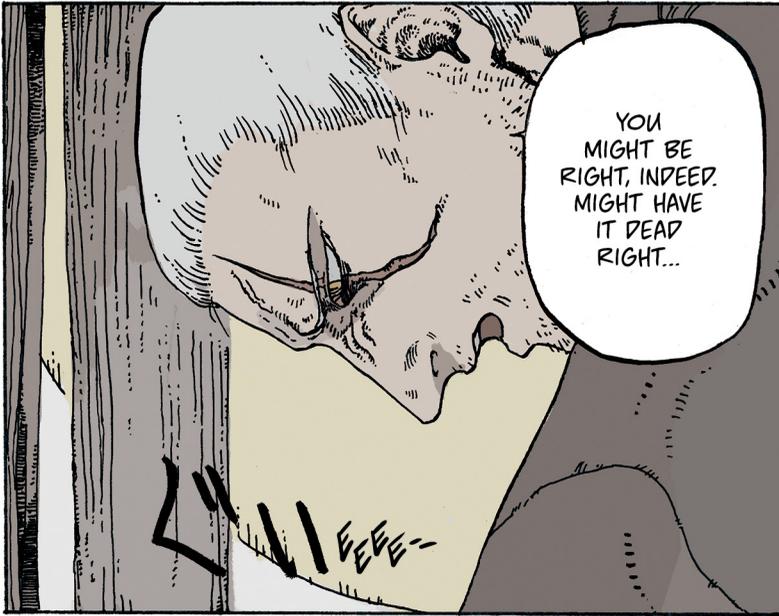


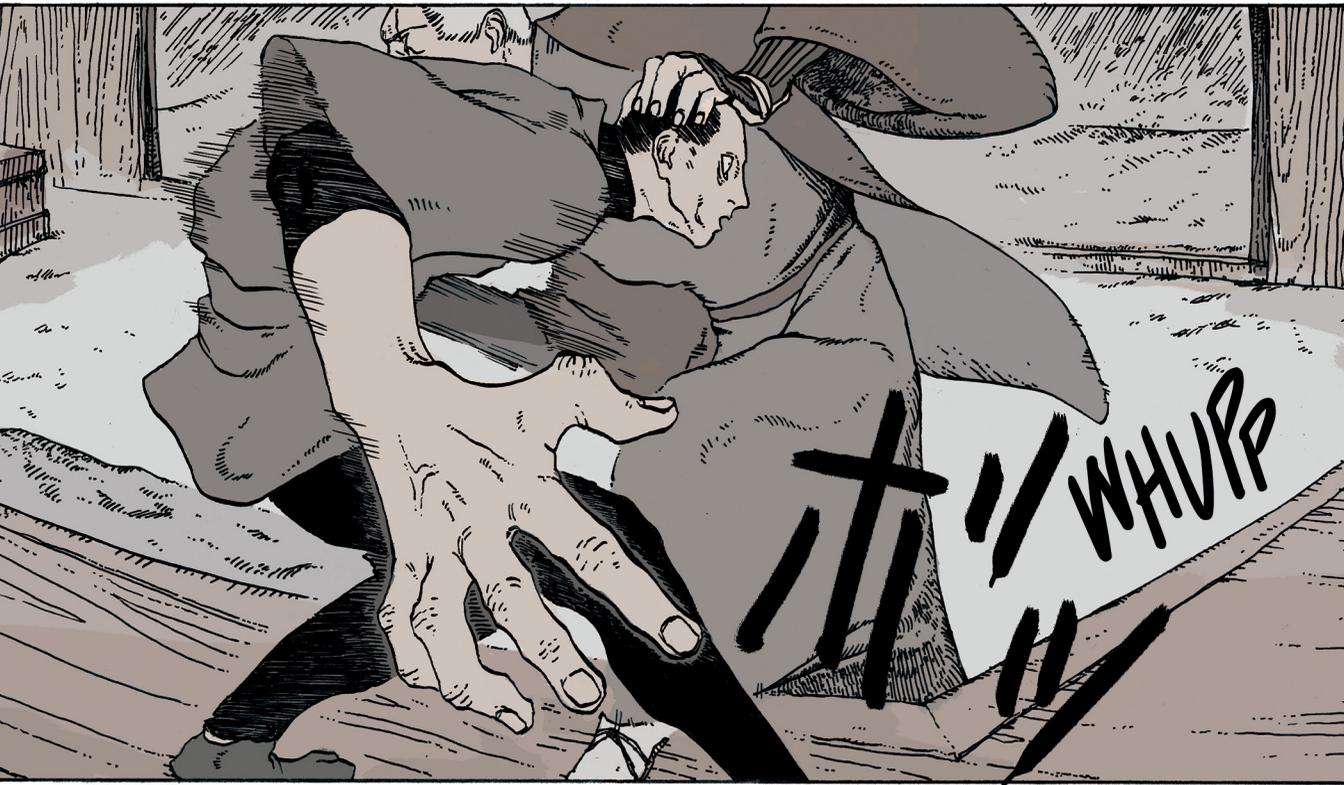
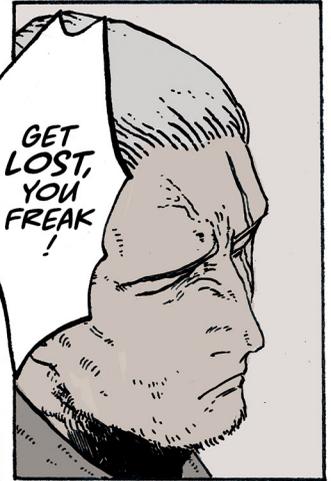
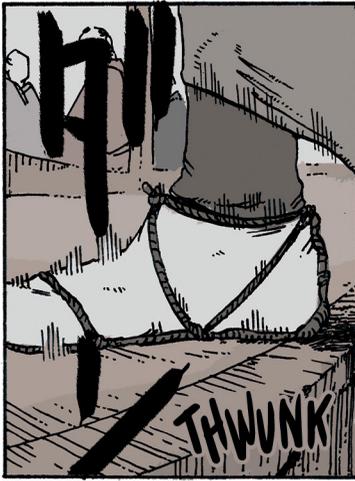


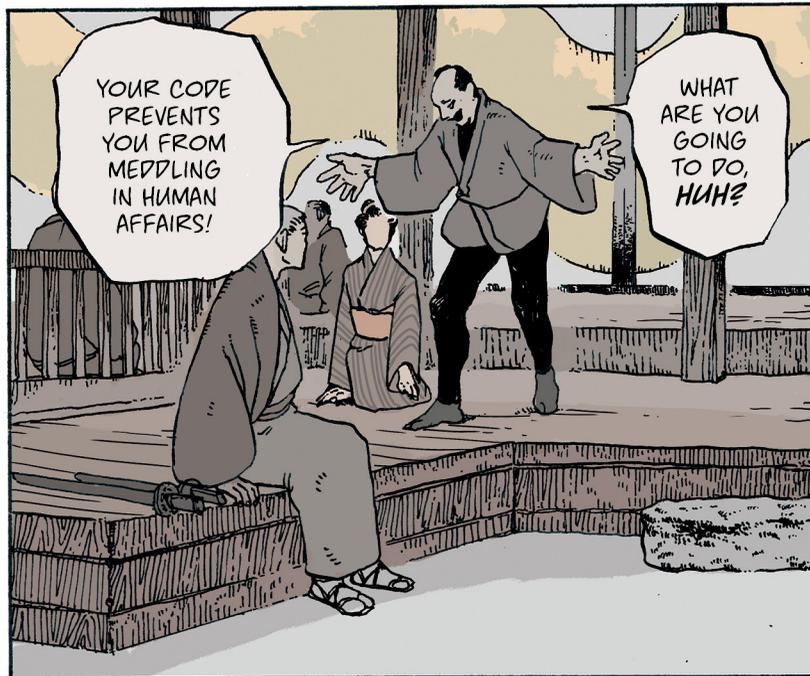


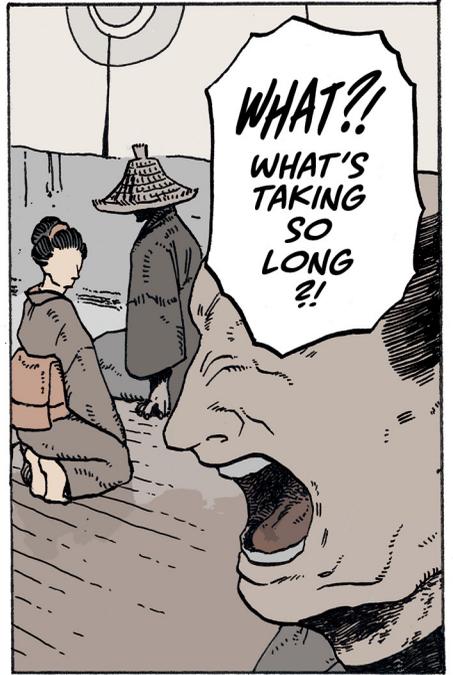
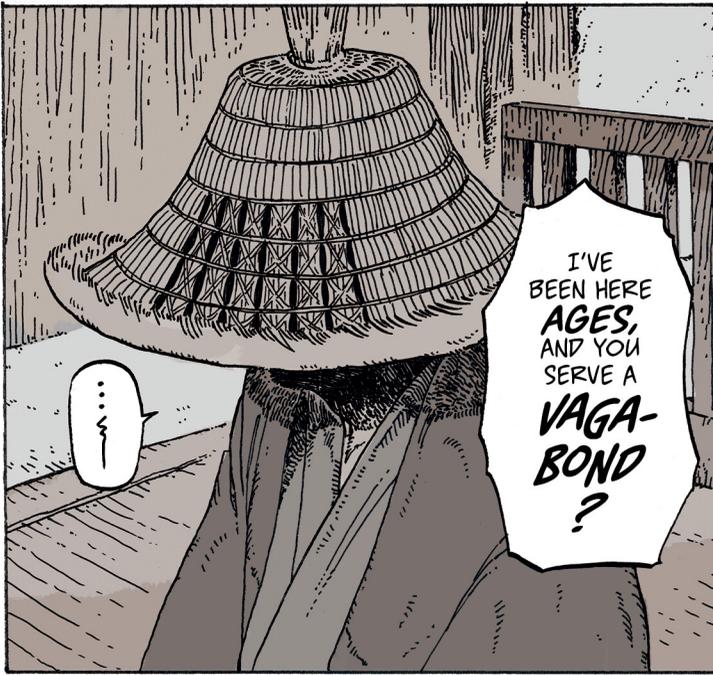


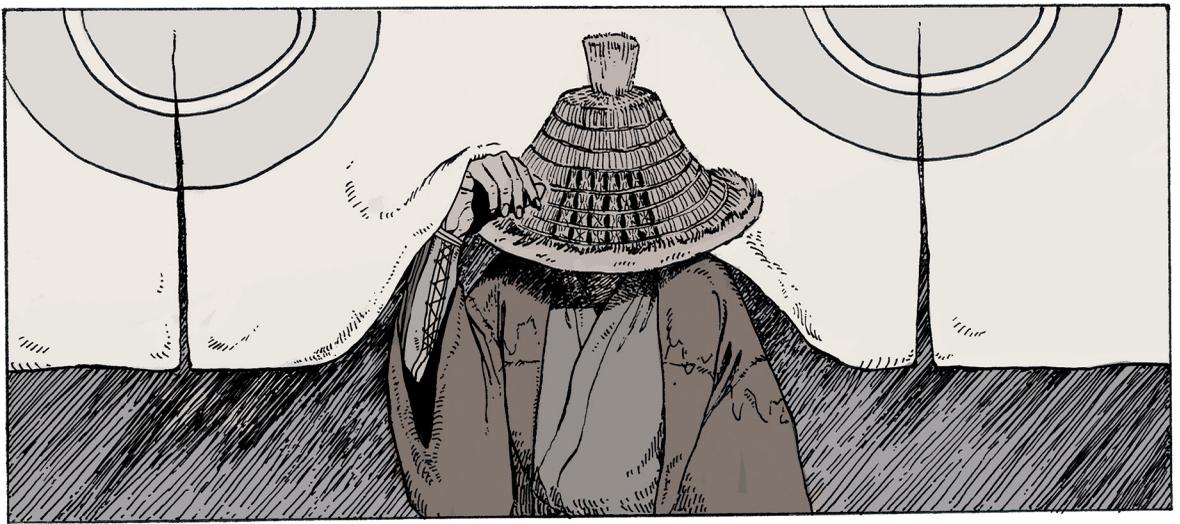
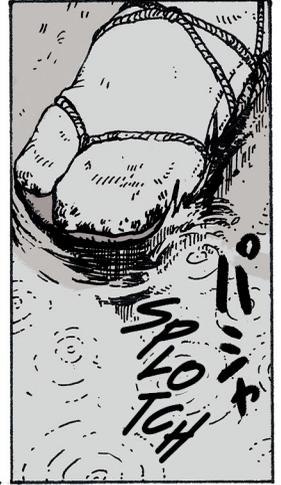


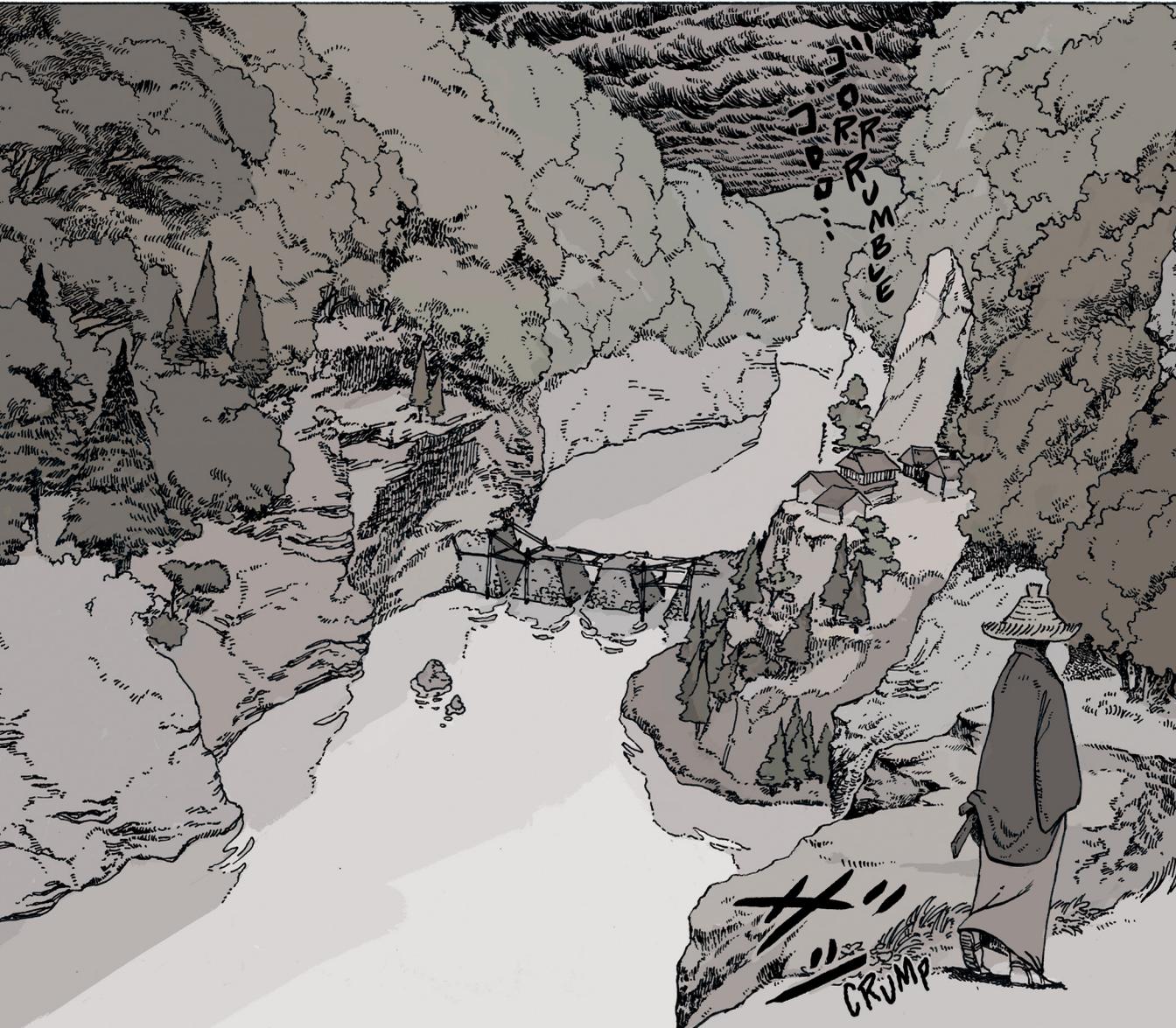
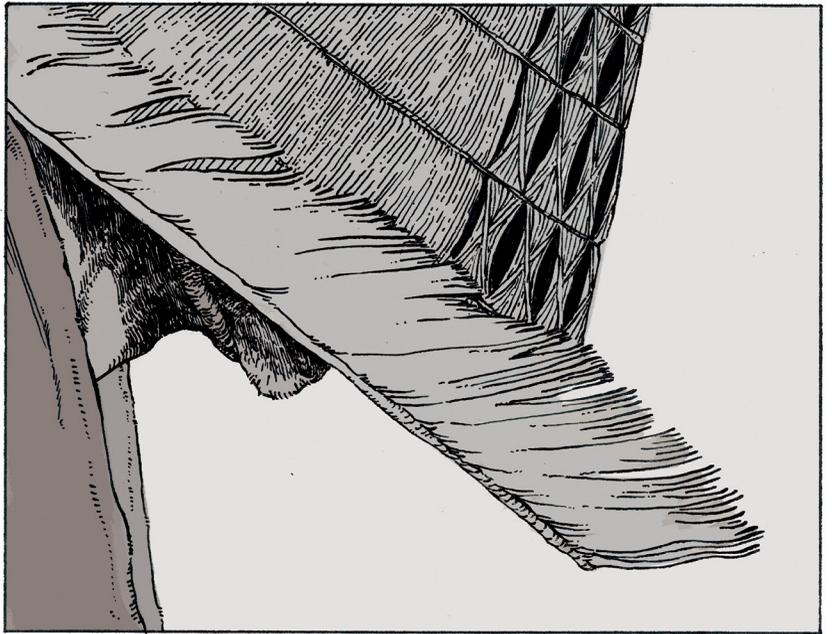
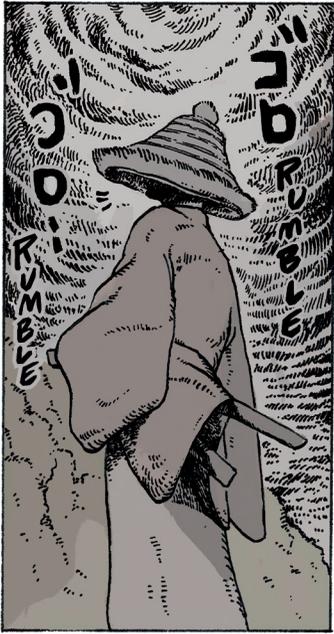














Chapter 1

For my son, Eric
Rafal Jaki



THE
WITCHER[®]
RONIN

STORY

Rafał Jaki

ART

Hataya

LETTERS

Aditya Bidikar

COVER ART

Jen Bartel



DARK HORSE MANGA

JAKI | HATAYA

THE
WITCHER[®]
RONIN

JEN
BAR
TEL

