

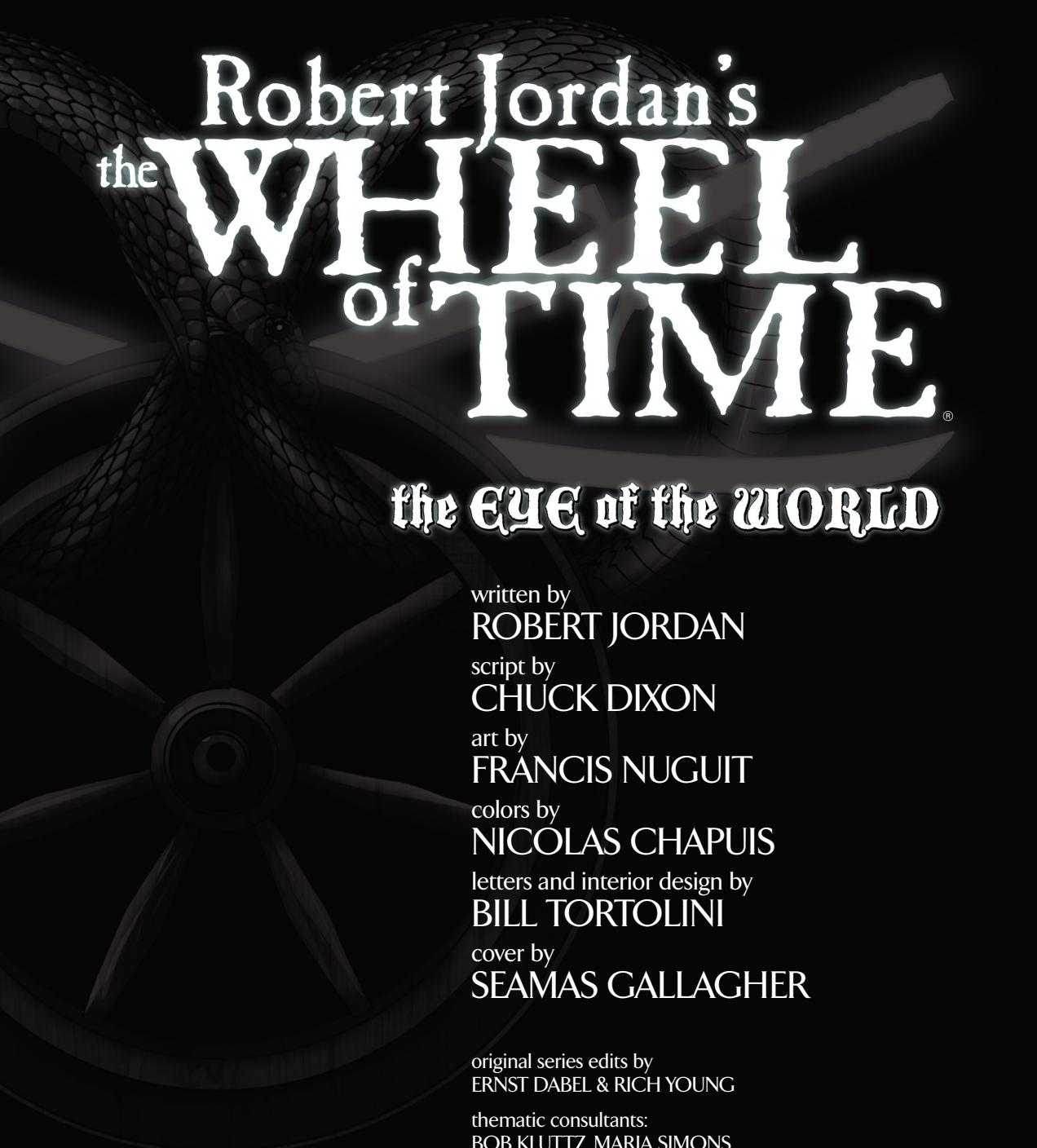
DYNAMITE
17

Robert Jordan's the WHEEL of TIME®



the EYE of the WORLD

ROBERT JORDAN, CHUCK DIXON & FRANCIS NUGUIT



Robert Jordan's the WHEEL of TIME®

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The heat, the gritty heat, it pricked Rand's skin. His sweat evaporated before it had a chance to bead, and his eyes burned.

How long had it been now? Too long. He had been there too long. He knew that.



And this was a **dangerous** place; he knew that, too - and not just because some of the thorns that made up the maze's walls had practically sliced open his finger.



Just ahead, Rand could see three openings in the high wall of thorns, but the way curved out of sight. **Anything** could be approaching from any one of those corners at this very **moment**.



So one way was as good as another here.



Rand remembered hearing once that you could get out of a maze by always turning in the same direction... so he turned right, and when the choice came up, he turned right again. And then...

HOW LONG
DO YOU THINK
YOU CAN EVADE ME,
BOY? HOW LONG DO
YOU THINK YOU CAN
EVADE YOUR
FATE?

YOU...

ARE... MINE!



LIGHT
HELP ME...

THE LIGHT
WILL NOT HELP
YOU, BOY, AND
THE EYE OF THE
WORLD WILL NOT
SERVE YOU.

A DREAM!

THIS IS A
DREAM!

RRRAAAGH

--A DREAM!

...OH.

Rand could feel smooth wooden planks under his hands. Deck planks. Rigging creaked in the night. He was on the Spray.

It was over... for another night at least.

Without thinking Rand put his finger in his mouth. At the taste of blood, he stopped breathing. He squinted in the dim moonlight, and saw a bead of blood form on his fingertip.

Blood... from the prick of a *thorn*.

The Spray made haste slowly down the Arinelle.

They did not put in to shore, neither by day nor by night. This was fine while the memory of the Trolloc attack was fresh in the minds of the crew, but as the shock of the attack began to fade, men began to mutter and grumble.

Thom did his part in diverting the crew from thoughts of mutiny. He told stories, with all the flourishes, every morning and every night, and in between he played any song they requested.

To support the notion that Rand and Mat wanted to be apprentice gleemen, he set aside time each day for lessons, and that was entertainment for the crew as well.

A good part of each day Rand spent leaning on the railing, staring at the shore. It was not that he really expected to see Egwene or any of the others suddenly appear on the riverbank, but the boat traveled so slowly that he sometimes hoped for it.

They **could** catch up without riding too hard. **If** they had **escaped**. **If** they were still **alive**.

One day, when the eastward shore had become flat grassland again, broken only occasionally by thickets, the sun glinted off something in the distance.

WHAT...
WHAT IS
THAT?

IT LOOKS
LIKE METAL...

IT DO BE
METAL--
OH!

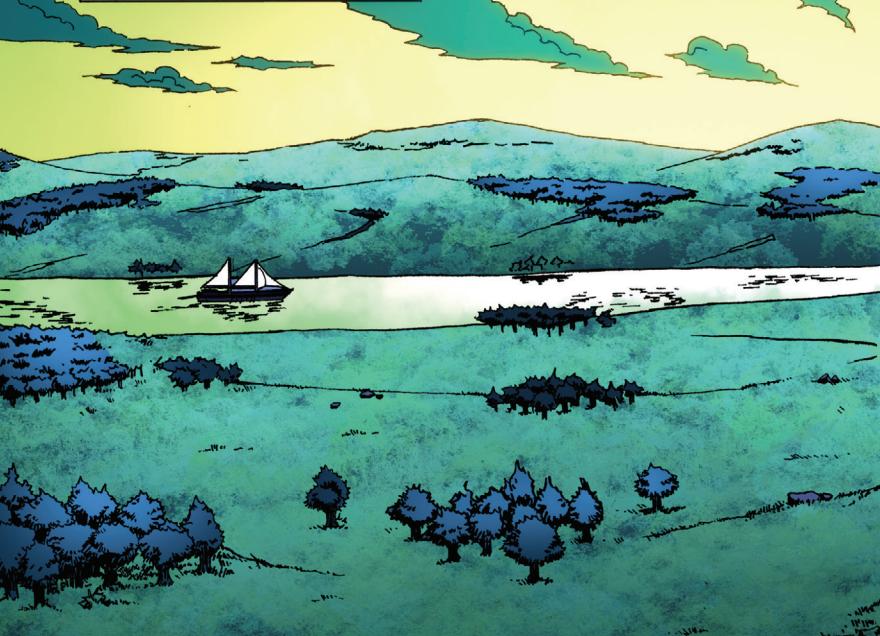
--A
TOWER OF
METAL.

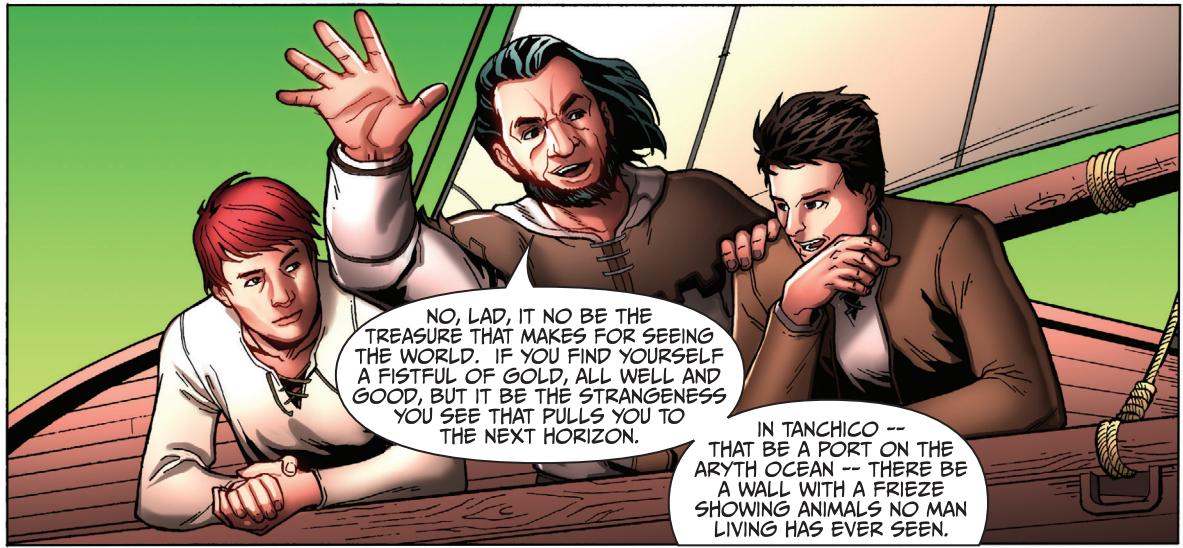
I HAVE SEEN IT CLOSE UP, AND
I KNOW. RIVER TRADERS USE
IT AS A MARKER. WE BE TEN
DAYS FROM WHITEBRIDGE
AT THE RATE WE GO.

WHAT'S
THAT YOU SAID?
A METAL
TOWER?



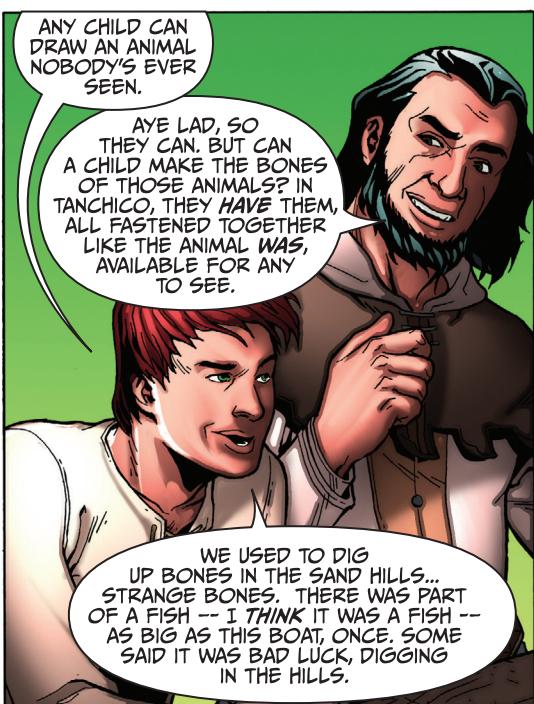
AYE.
SHINING STEEL,
BY THE LOOK AND
FEEL OF IT, BUT NO
SIGN OF RUST.
TWO HUNDRED
FEET HIGH IT BE,
AS BIG AROUND AS A HOUSE,
WITH NO A MARK ON IT, AND
NEVER AN OPENING TO
BE FOUND.





NO, LAD, IT NO BE THE TREASURE THAT MAKES FOR SEEING THE WORLD. IF YOU FIND YOURSELF A FISTFUL OF GOLD, ALL WELL AND GOOD, BUT IT BE THE STRANGENESS YOU SEE THAT PULLS YOU TO THE NEXT HORIZON.

IN TANCHICO -- THAT BE A PORT ON THE ARYTH OCEAN -- THERE BE A WALL WITH A FRIEZE SHOWING ANIMALS NO MAN LIVING HAS EVER SEEN.



ANY CHILD CAN DRAW AN ANIMAL NOBODY'S EVER SEEN.

AYE LAD, SO THEY CAN. BUT CAN A CHILD MAKE THE BONES OF THOSE ANIMALS? IN TANCHICO, THEY HAVE THEM, ALL FASTENED TOGETHER LIKE THE ANIMAL WAS, AVAILABLE FOR ANY TO SEE.

WE USED TO DIG UP BONES IN THE SAND HILLS... STRANGE BONES. THERE WAS PART OF A FISH -- I THINK IT WAS A FISH -- AS BIG AS THIS BOAT, ONCE. SOME SAID IT WAS BAD LUCK, DIGGING IN THE HILLS.



HAH! YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT HOME ALREADY, LAD, AND YOU JUST SET OUT IN THE WORLD? THE WORLD WILL PUT A HOOK IN YOUR MOUTH! YOU'LL SET OFF CHASING THE SUNSET, YOU WAIT AND SEE...

...AND IF YOU EVER GO BACK, YOUR VILLAGE'LL NO BE BIG ENOUGH TO HOLD YOU!

NO!

I WILL GO HOME, ONE DAY, WHEN I CAN. I'LL RAISE SHEEP LIKE... LIKE MY FATHER, AND IF I NEVER LEAVE AGAIN, IT WILL BE TOO SOON. RIGHT, MAT?



AS SOON AS WE CAN, WE'LL GO HOME AND FORGET ALL OF THIS EVEN EXISTS.

WHAT? OH.

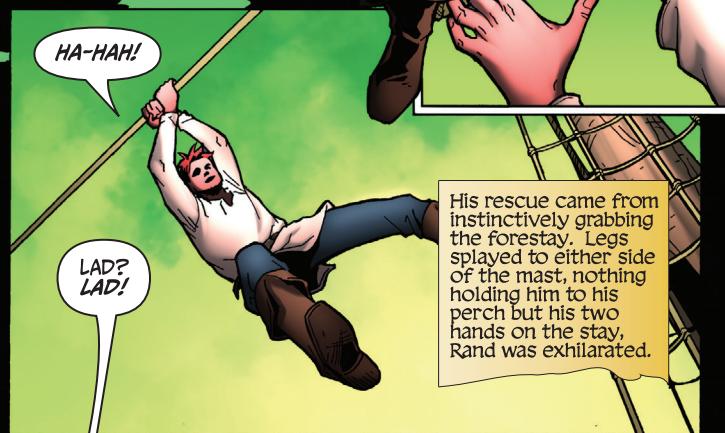
YES, OF COURSE. WE'LL GO HOME. OF COURSE.

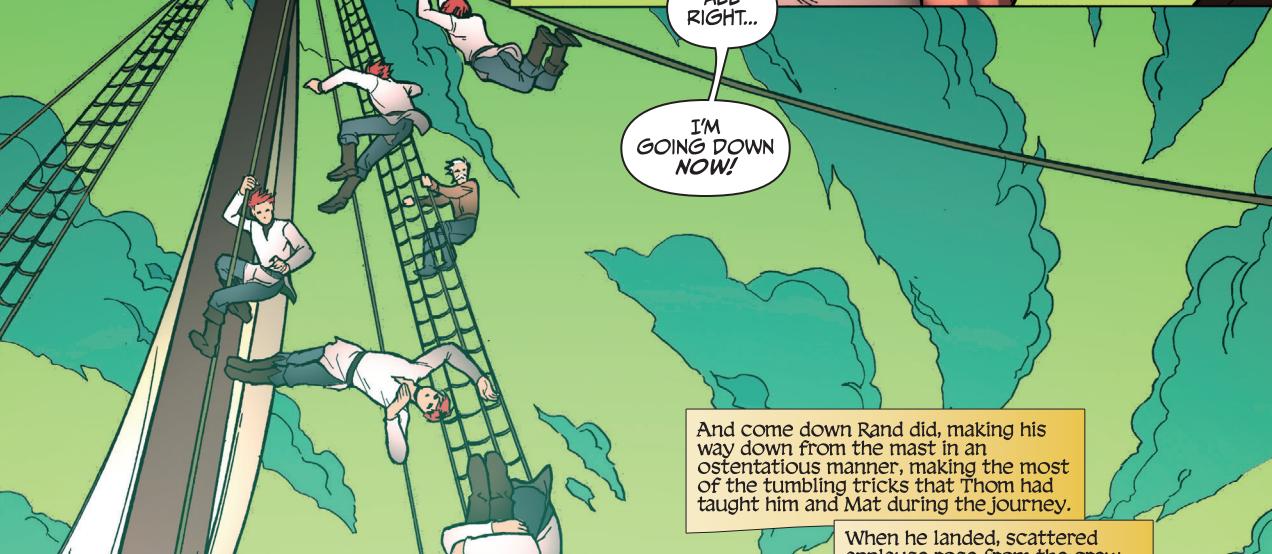
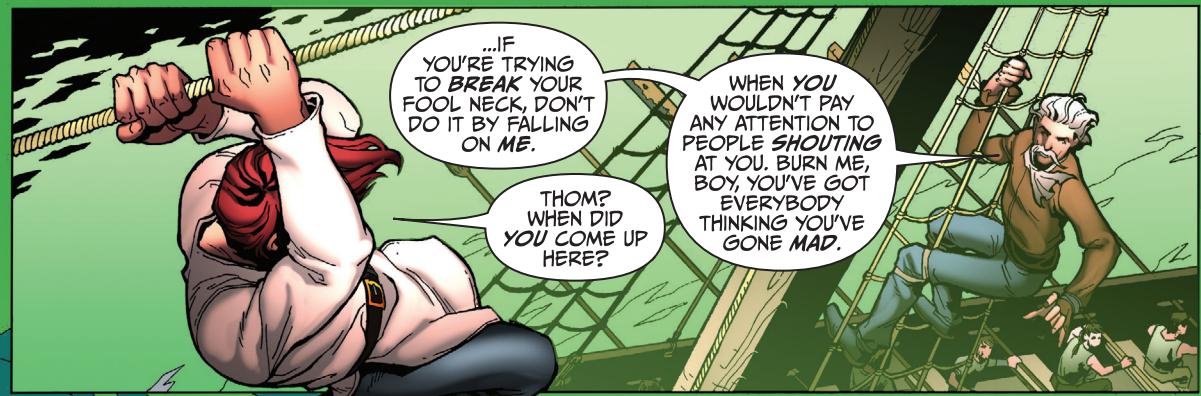
I'LL BET HE JUST DOESN'T WANT ANYBODY ELSE GOING AFTER THE TREASURE.

Four days into their trip downriver found Rand atop the mast, fifty feet above the water. The Spray rolled gently on the river, but as high up as he was that easy roll made the top of the mast sway back and forth through wide arcs. He had been as high as this before, in the trees back in the Two Rivers, but this time there were no branches to block his view, and he felt free.

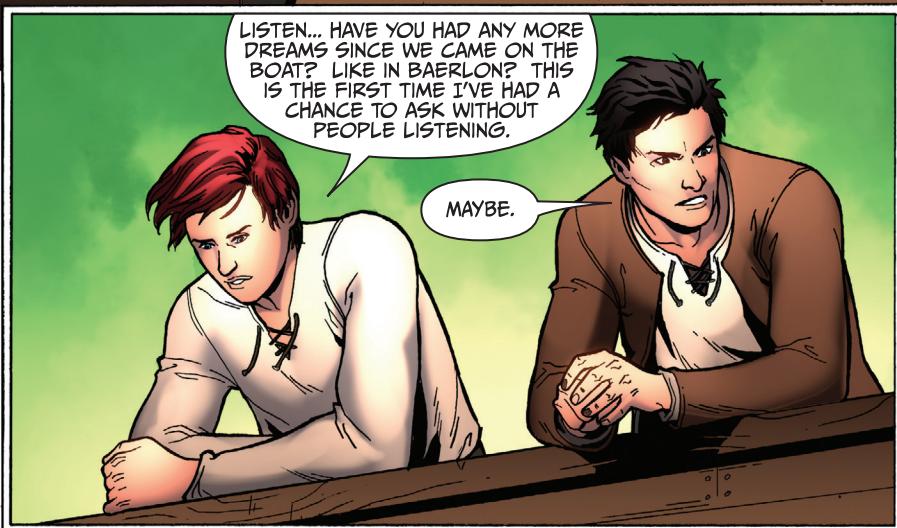
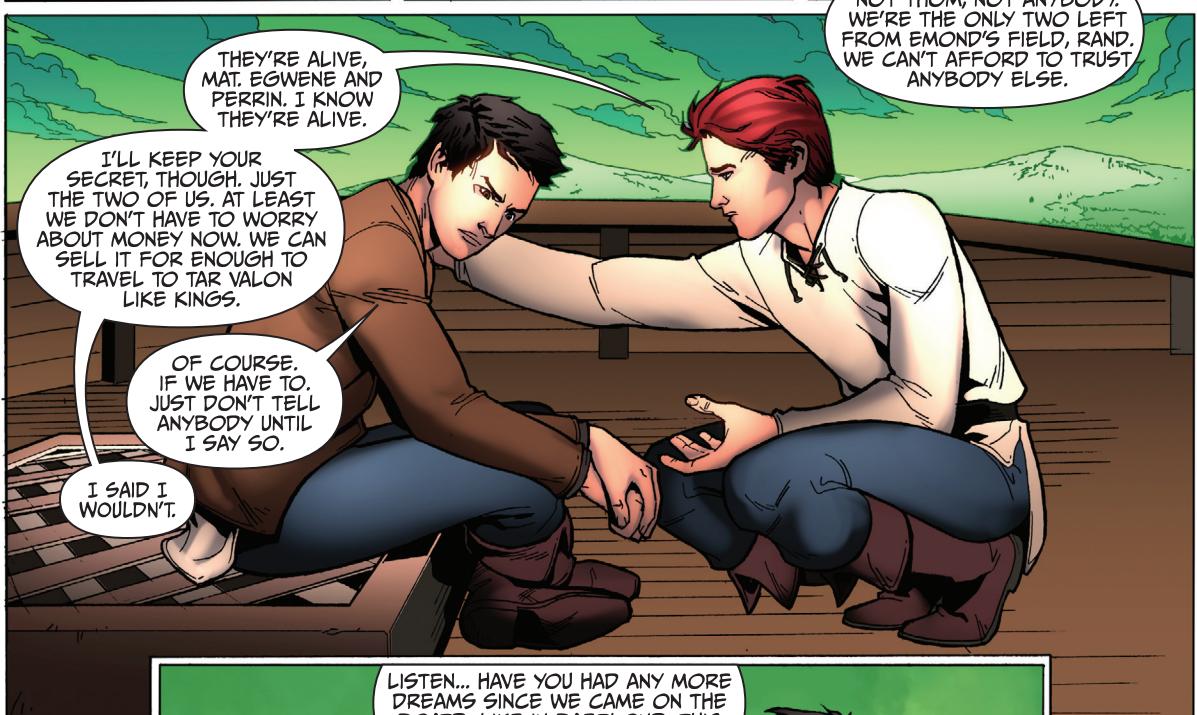
Everything on deck looked so odd from overhead, so squat and foreshortened, that Rand had spent an hour just staring and chuckling.

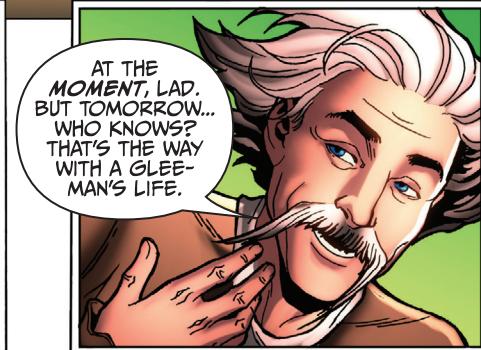
On a sudden impulse he unwrapped his legs from the stays bracing the mast, balancing himself against the sway.





...and what he was *hiding*.





For three days now Perrin and Egwene had been traveling with Elyas and the wolves, walking and riding south and east all day, stopping only when twilight thickened.

Dapple, Wind, and Hopper -- the three wolves -- were seldom seen, though each night they came to the fire for a time, and sometimes in the day they showed themselves briefly before vanishing.



Perrin knew they were out there, though, and where. He knew when they were scouting ahead and when they were watching the backtrail. And when the wolves vanished, he was aware of their return before he could see them, just as Elyas knew.



Perrin tried not thinking about wolves, but they crept into his thoughts all the same... and he had not dreamed about Ba'alzamon since meeting Elyas and the wolves.

His dreams now, as much as he remembered them upon waking, were of normal things - with one addition. Now, in his dreams, a wolf was always close at hand, its back to him. And Perrin knew in the dream that the wolf was watching for what might come, guarding against what might come. Only when he was awake did this seem strange.



Late in the day, they came to a stand of trees -- larger than most they had seen. Perrin felt the wolves give over quartering behind them and start forward, not hurrying. They had smelled and seen nothing dangerous.

It was time to start looking for a camp for the night, and the big copse would serve the purpose well.



The mastiffs' hackles stood stiff, and their growls had sounded like earthquakes. But with Elyas' whistle, the growls became whines. The dogs stepped back, turning their heads as if they wanted to go but were held.



Slowly, Elyas lowered his hand, and the pitch of his whistle lowered with it. The dogs followed until they lay flat on the ground.



SEE?
NO NEED FOR
WEAPONS.

THEY LOOK MEANER
THAN THEY ARE. THEY
MEANT TO FRIGHTEN US
OFF, AND THEY WOULDN'T
HAVE BITTEN UNLESS WE
TRIED TO GO INTO
THE TREES.

ANYWAY, THERE'S
NO WORRY OF THAT
NOW. WE CAN MAKE
THE NEXT THICKET
BEFORE FULL
DARK.

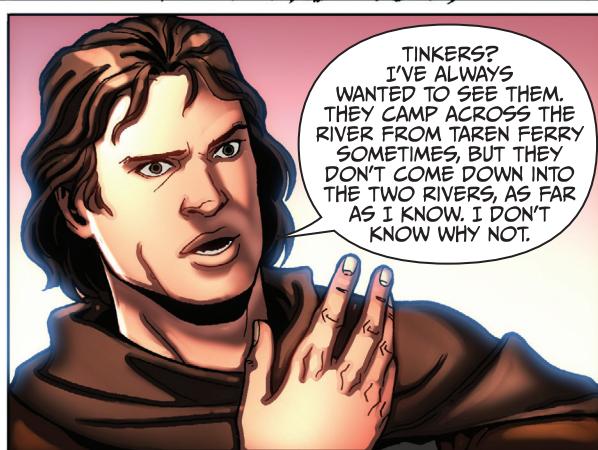
OH --
THERE'LL BE
TUATHA'AN HERE.
THE TRAVELING
PEOPLE.
TINKERS.



TINKERS?
I'VE ALWAYS
WANTED TO SEE THEM.
THEY CAMP ACROSS THE
RIVER FROM TAREN FERRY
SOMETIMES, BUT THEY
DON'T COME DOWN INTO
THE TWO RIVERS, AS FAR
AS I KNOW. I DON'T
KNOW WHY NOT.

PROBABLY
BECAUSE THE
TAREN FERRY
FOLK ARE AS
GREAT THIEVES
AS THE TINKERS.
THEY'D NO DOUBT
END UP STEALING
EACH OTHER
BLIND.

MASTER ELYAS,
IF THERE REALLY ARE
TINKERS NEARBY, SHOULDN'T
WE GO ON? WE DON'T WANT BELA
STOLEN, AND... WELL, WE DON'T
HAVE MUCH ELSE, BUT EVERYBODY
KNOWS TINKERS WILL
STEAL ANYTHING.





Elyas led the way into the trees and walked surely, as if he knew the way, and near the center of the stand the Tinkers' wagons appeared, scattered among the oak and ash.

Like everyone else in Emond's Field, Perrin had heard a great deal about the Tinkers even if he had never seen any, and the camp was just what he expected, full of music and dancing.



But abruptly, the music stopped, and Perrin realized all the Tinkers were looking at him and his companions. Even the children and the dogs stood still and watched, warily, as if on the point of flight.

For a moment, there was no sound at all, and then an old man approached Elyas, and bowed gravely, a bow which Elyas returned.

YOU ARE WELCOME TO OUR FIRES.

DO YOU KNOW THE SONG?

YOUR WELCOME WARM MY SPIRIT, MAHDI, AS YOUR FIRES WARM THE FLESH, BUT I DO NOT KNOW THE SONG.

THEN WE SEEK STILL. AS IT WAS, SO SHALL IT BE, IF WE BUT REMEMBER, SEEK, AND FIND. THE MEAL IS ALMOST READY. JOIN US, PLEASE.

YOUR... OTHER FRIENDS? THEY WILL STAY AWAY? THEY FRIGHTEN THE POOR DOGS SO.

THEY'LL STAY AWAY, RAEN. YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT BY NOW.

HIS NAME IS MAHDI?

HIS NAME'S RAEN. MAHDI'S HIS TITLE. IT MEANS SEEKER, AND YOU CAN CALL HIM THAT, IF YOU LIKE. HE'S THE LEADER OF THIS BAND.

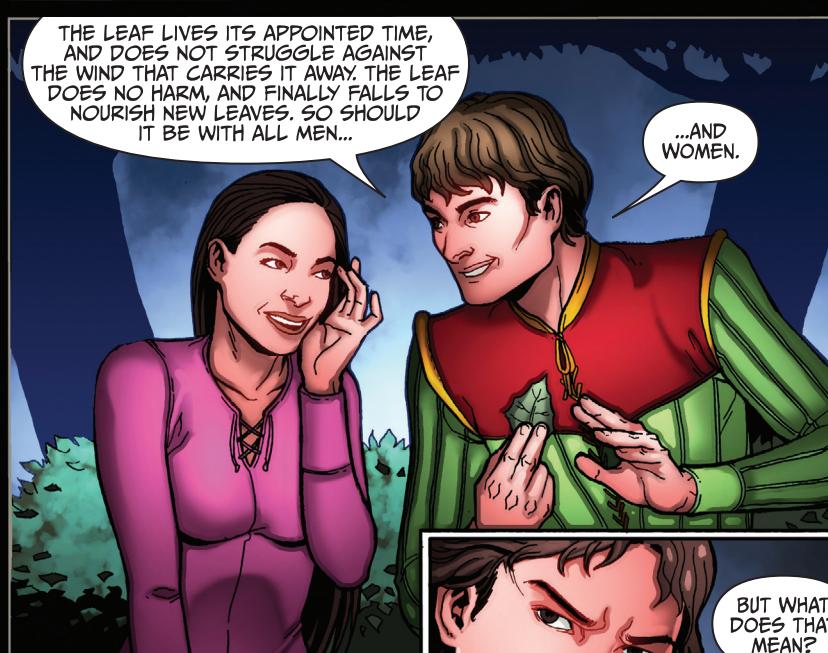
WHAT WAS THAT ABOUT A SONG?

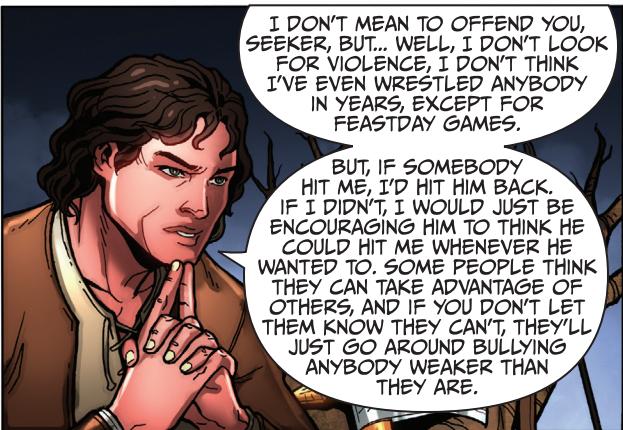
THAT'S WHY THEY TRAVEL, OR SO THEY SAY. THEY'RE LOOKING FOR A SONG. THAT'S WHAT THE MAHDI SEEKS.

THEY SAY THEY LOST IT DURING THE BREAKING OF THE WORLD, AND IF THEY CAN FIND IT AGAIN, THE PARADISE OF THE AGE OF LEGENDS WILL RETURN. THEY DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT THE SONG IS; THEY CLAIM THEY'LL KNOW IT WHEN THEY FIND IT.

THEY DON'T KNOW HOW IT'S SUPPOSED TO BRING PARADISE, EITHER, BUT THEY'VE BEEN LOOKING NEAR TO THREE THOUSAND YEARS, EVER SINCE THE BREAKING. I EXPECT THEY'LL BE LOOKING UNTIL THE WHEEL STOPS TURNING.

After meeting Raen's wife -- Ila -- Perrin and Egwene took their places at the fire.





I DON'T MEAN TO OFFEND YOU, SEEKER, BUT... WELL, I DON'T LOOK FOR VIOLENCE, I DON'T THINK I'VE EVEN WRESTLED ANYBODY IN YEARS, EXCEPT FOR FEASTDAY GAMES.

BUT, IF SOMEBODY HIT ME, I'D HIT HIM BACK. IF I DIDN'T, I WOULD JUST BE ENCOURAGING HIM TO THINK HE COULD HIT ME WHENEVER HE WANTED TO. SOME PEOPLE THINK THEY CAN TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OTHERS, AND IF YOU DON'T LET THEM KNOW THEY CAN'T, THEY'LL JUST GO AROUND BULLYING ANYBODY WEAKER THAN THEY ARE.



SOME PEOPLE CAN NEVER OVERCOME THEIR... BASER INSTINCTS.

I'LL BET YOU GET TO RUN AWAY A LOT.



WELL I THINK IT IS INTERESTING TO MEET SOMEONE WHO DOESN'T BELIEVE HIS MUSCLES CAN SOLVE EVERY PROBLEM.

COME, LET ME SHOW YOU OUR CAMP.

THERE IS DANCING!

I WOULD LIKE THAT.



I'M VERY SORRY, I AM A GUEST, AND I SHOULDN'T HAVE--

DON'T BE FOOLISH. IT WAS HIS FAULT FOR GOADING YOU. NOW PLEASE, EAT.

YES. ARAM IS A TROUBLED YOUNG MAN. SOMETIMES I THINK HE FINDS THE WAY OF THE LEAF A HARD WAY. SOME DO, I FEAR. BUT PLEASE, MY FIRE IS YOURS. EAT.

ELYAS, TELL ME -- HAVE YOU VISITED ANY OF THE TUATHA'AN SINCE YOU WERE WITH US LAST SPRING? I HAVE HEARD A STORY SINCE LAST WE MET, AND IF YOU HAVE NOT HEARD IT YET, IT MIGHT INTEREST YOU.

I'LL LISTEN. BUT IF THIS IS SOME STORY ABOUT A SONG...

NO, MY OLD FRIEND, NOT A SONG. I'M NOT SURE I KNOW WHAT IT IS ABOUT...



"IT WAS TWO YEARS AGO, A BAND OF THE PEOPLE WERE CROSSING THE WASTE ABOUT A HUNDRED MILES SOUTH OF THE BLIGHT WHEN THEY CAME ACROSS A GROUP OF THE AIEL."

"THEY WERE ALL DEAD, EXCEPT ONE, AND SHE WAS DYING. IT WAS CLEAR SHE KNEW SHE WAS CRAWLING TOWARD TUATHA'AN, AND HER LOATHING OUTWEIGHED HER PAIN - BUT SHE HAD A MESSAGE SO IMPORTANT TO HER THAT SHE MUST PASS IT ON TO SOMEONE, EVEN US, BEFORE SHE DIED."

WAIT,
SHE?

AIEL GIRLS
DON'T TEND HOUSE
IF THEY DON'T WANT TO,
BOY. THE ONES WHO WANT
TO BE WARRIOR JOIN A
WARRIOR SOCIETY AND
FIGHT RIGHT ALONGSIDE
THE MEN.

SHE WAS
THE ONLY
SURVIVOR?

SHE WAS.
MEN WENT TO SEE
IF THEY COULD HELP ANY OF
THE OTHERS -- THERE WAS A
TRAIL OF HER BLOOD TO
FOLLOW -- BUT ALL WERE
DEAD, AND SO WERE THREE
TIMES THEIR NUMBER IN
TROLLOCS.

A HUNDRED MILES INTO THE WASTE?
IMPOSSIBLE! DJEVIK K'SHAR, THAT'S WHAT
THE TROLLOCS CALL THE WASTE. THE
DYING GROUND. THEY WOULDN'T GO A
HUNDRED MILES INTO THE WASTE IF ALL
THE MYRDDRAAL IN THE BLIGHT
WERE DRIVING THEM.

YOU KNOW
AN AWFUL LOT
ABOUT TROLLOCS,
ELYAS.

GO ON
WITH YOUR
STORY.

"THE GIRL WOULD NOT LET
ANYONE TOUCH HER, NOT EVEN
TO TEND TO HER WOUNDS. BUT
SHE SEIZED THE SEEKER OF
THAT BAND BY HIS COAT, AND
THIS IS WHAT SHE SAID,
WORD FOR WORD:

LEAFBLIGHTER MEANS TO
BLIND THE EYE OF THE WORLD,
LOST ONE. HE MEANS TO SLAY
THE GREAT SERPENT.

WARN THE
PEOPLE, LOST ONE,
SIGHTBURNER COMES.
TELL THEM TO STAND READY
FOR HE WHO COMES
WITH THE DAWN.
TELL THEM...

"...AND THEN SHE DIED."

LEAFBLIGHTER AND SIGHTBURNER ARE AIEL NAMES FOR THE DARK ONE, BUT I DON'T UNDERSTAND ANOTHER WORD OF IT.

YET SHE THOUGHT IT IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO APPROACH THOSE SHE OBVIOUSLY DESPISED TO PASS IT ON WITH HER LAST BREATH. BUT TO WHO? WE ARE, OURSELVES, THE PEOPLE, BUT I HARDLY THINK SHE MEANT IT FOR US.

THE AIEL? THEY WOULD NOT LET US TELL THEM IF WE TRIED.

SOMETHING THEY LEARNED IN THE BLIGHT.

BUT NONE OF IT MAKES ANY SENSE. SLAY THE GREAT SERPENT? KILL TIME ITSELF AND BLIND THE EYE OF THE WORLD? AS WELL SAY HE'S GOING TO STARVE A ROCK.

MAYBE SHE WAS BABBLING, RAEN. WOUNDED, DYING, SHE COULD HAVE LOST HER GRIP ON WHAT WAS REAL. MAYBE SHE DIDN'T EVEN KNOW WHO THOSE TUATHA'AN WERE.

SHE KNEW WHAT SHE WAS SAYING, AND TO WHOM SHE WAS SAYING IT. SOMETHING MORE IMPORTANT TO HER THAN HER OWN LIFE, AND WE CANNOT EVEN UNDERSTAND IT.

WHEN I SAW YOU WALKING INTO OUR CAMP, I THOUGHT PERHAPS WE WOULD FIND THE ANSWER AT LAST, SINCE YOU WERE--

--ER, ARE A FRIEND, AND KNOW MANY STRANGE THINGS.

NOT ABOUT THIS.



Later.



To be continued...