

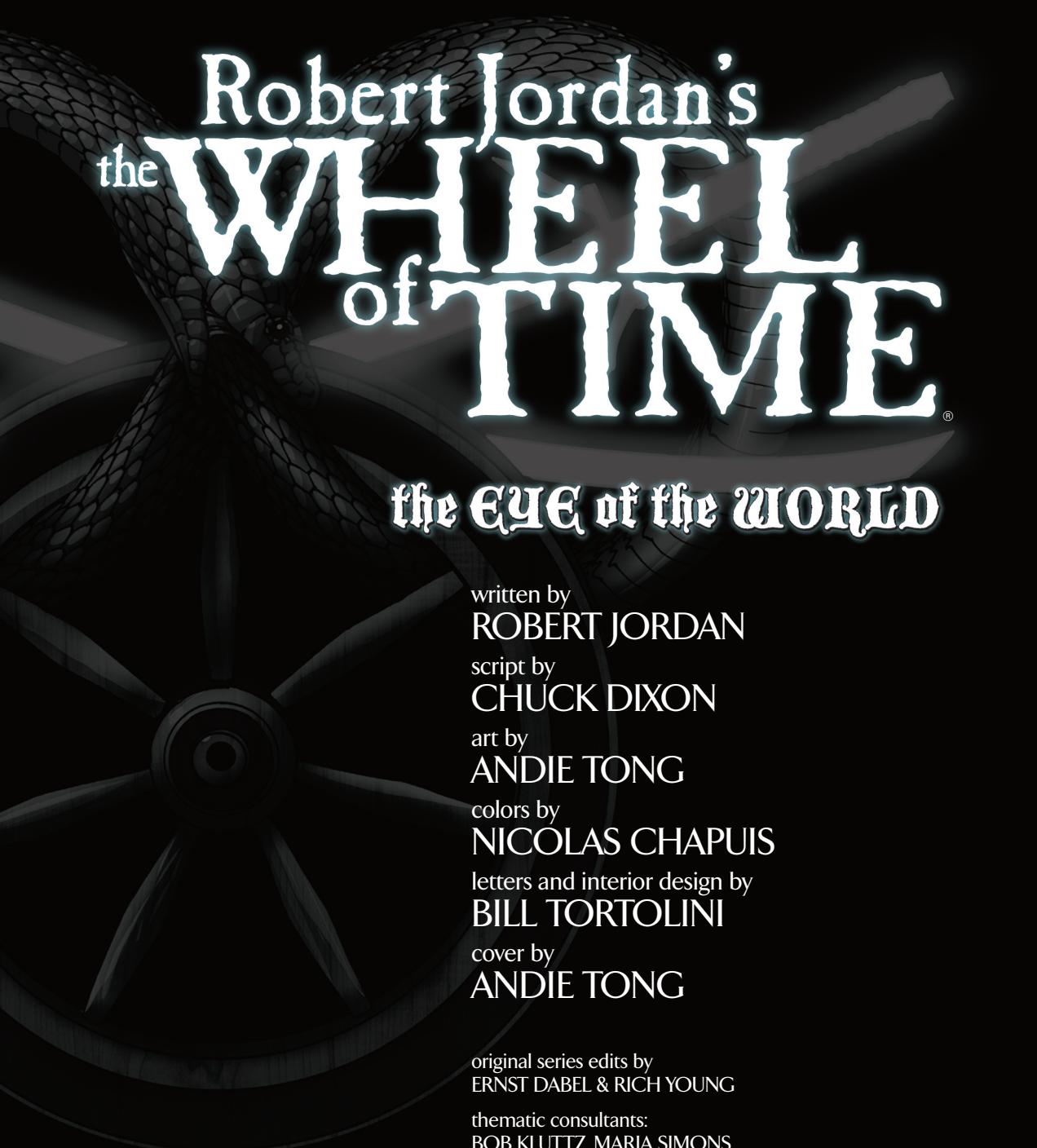
Robert Jordan's
the **WHEEL** of **TIME**®

DYNAMITE
20



the EYE of the WORLD

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Robert Jordan's the WHEEL of TIME®

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Elyas pushed for speed as if trying to make up for the time spent with the Traveling People, setting a pace southward that had even Bela grateful to stop when twilight deepened.

Despite his desire for haste, though, he took precautions he had not taken before.



At night they had a fire only if there was dead wood already on the ground. He would not let them take so much as a twig off of a standing tree.

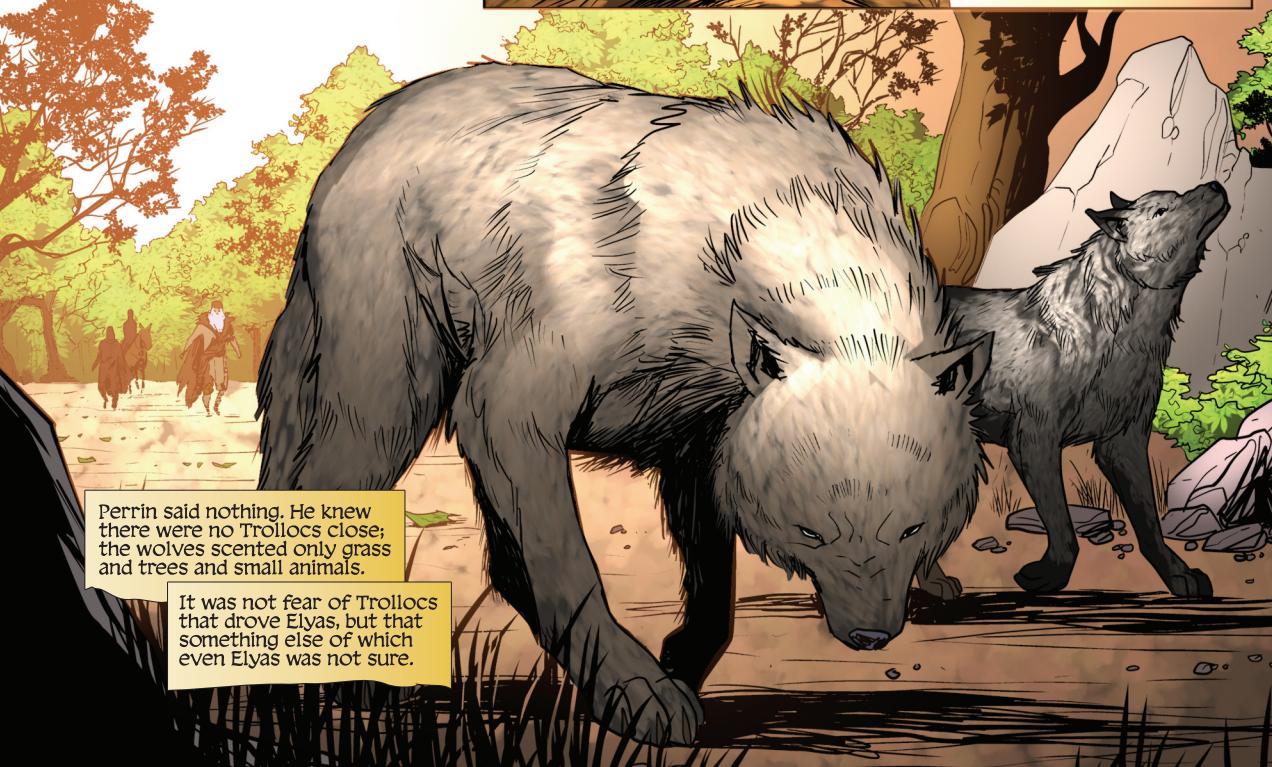


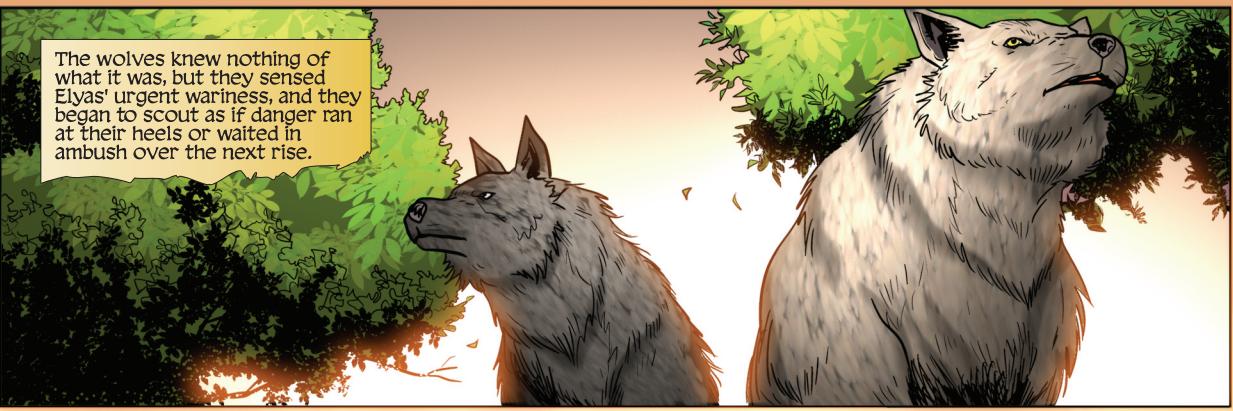
Before they set out again in the gray false dawn, Elyas went over the campsite inch by inch to make sure there was no sign that anyone had ever been there.

He even righted overturned rocks and straightened bent-down weeds. He did it quickly, never taking more than a few minutes, but they did not leave until he was satisfied.



Perrin did not think the precautions were much good against dreams, but when he began to think of what they **might** be good against, he wished it were only the dreams.

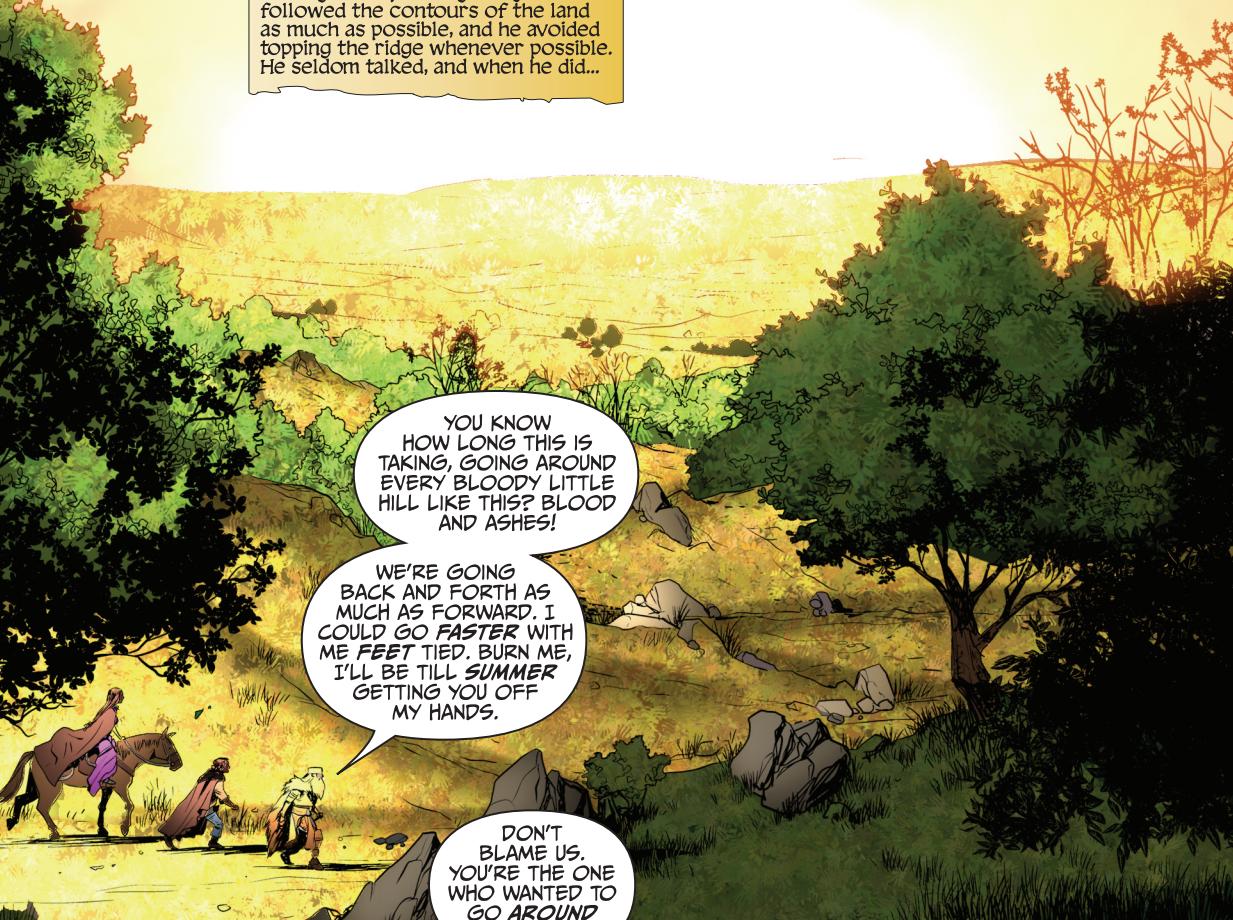




The wolves knew nothing of what it was, but they sensed Elyas' urgent wariness, and they began to scout as if danger ran at their heels or waited in ambush over the next rise.



The land became long, rolling crests, too low to be called hills, rising across their path.



Among the squat ridges Elyas followed the contours of the land as much as possible, and he avoided topping the ridge whenever possible. He seldom talked, and when he did...

YOU KNOW
HOW LONG THIS IS
TAKING, GOING AROUND
EVERY BLOODY LITTLE
HILL LIKE THIS? BLOOD
AND ASHES!

WE'RE GOING
BACK AND FORTH AS
MUCH AS FORWARD. I
COULD GO FASTER WITH
ME FEET TIED. BURN ME,
I'LL BE TILL SUMMER
GETTING YOU OFF
MY HANDS.

DON'T
BLAME US.
YOU'RE THE ONE
WHO WANTED TO
GO AROUND
THE HILLS.





Sometimes, a longer ridge than usual lay across their path, stretching miles to the east and west.

Even Elyas had to agree that going around those would take them too far out of their way. He did not let them simply cross over, though. Not ever.

As Elyas crept up the latest ridge, Perrin's mind wandered...

The wolves will warn if there's danger... so what is Elyas looking for? **What?**

I...



Well short of the crest
Elyas flattened himself on
the ground, wriggling forward
the last few yards.

KEEP
LOW.

Peering through a clump of
thorny weeds, Perrin saw only
the same rolling plain that lay
behind them.

The downslope was bare, though a
clump of trees a hundred paces across
grew in the hollow, perhaps a half mile
south from the ridge. The wolves had
already been through it, smelling no
trace of Trollocs or Myrddraal.

East and west the land was the same as
far as Perrin could see, rolling grassland
and wide-scattered thickets. Nothing
moved. The wolves were more than a
mile ahead now; they had seen nothing
when they covered this ground.

What was Elyas
looking for?

WE'RE
WASTING TIME.
I'M--



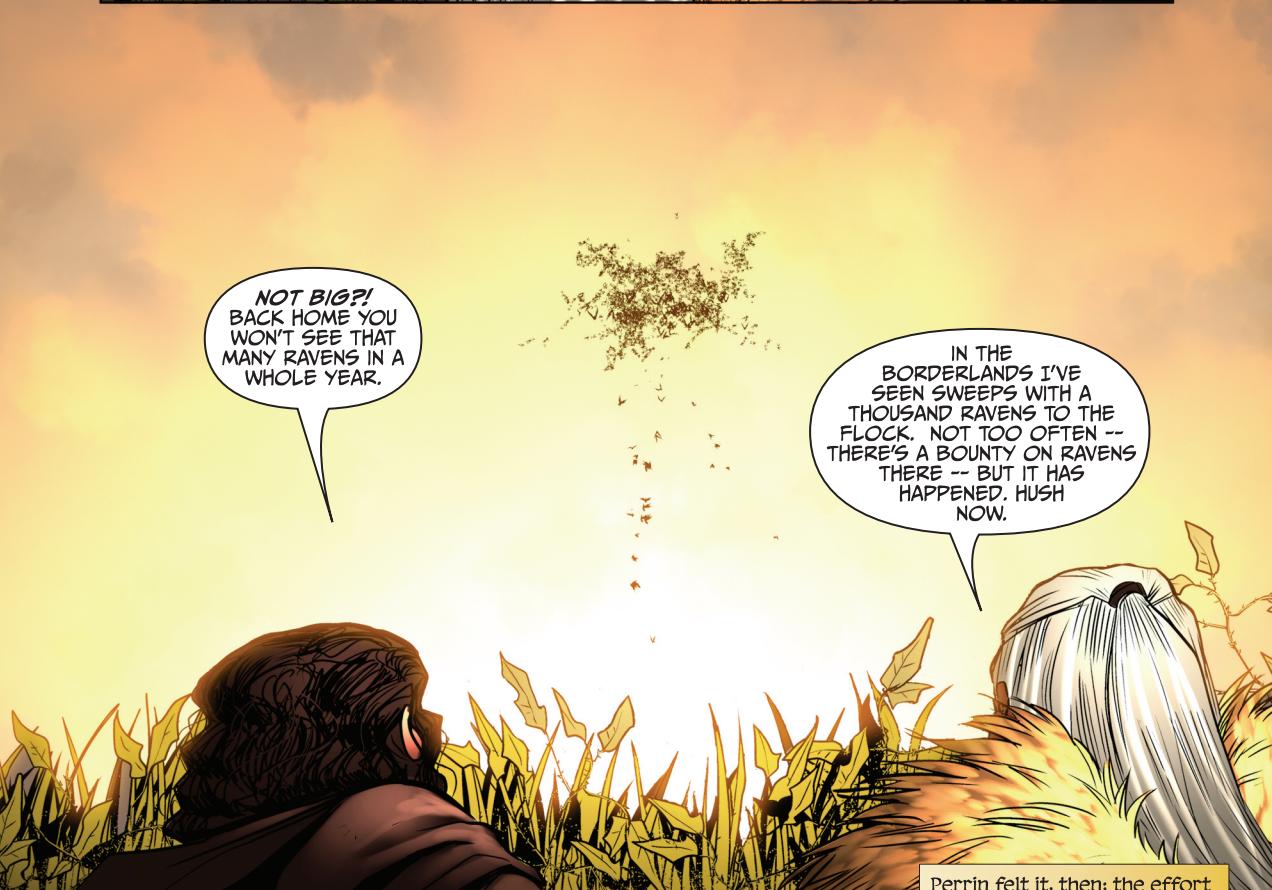
And then, as Perrin started to stand, a flock of ravens burst into the sky from the trees below. Fifty, a hundred black birds spiraling into the sky.



THE DARK ONE'S EYES.
DID THEY SEE ME?



As if one thought had suddenly sparked in a hundred tiny minds, every raven broke sharply in the same direction: south. To the east another thicket disgorged more ravens. The black mass wheeled twice, and joined the first flock, heading south.



YOU THINK
THERE ARE MORE
RAVENS BEHIND
US?

COULD
BE. THEY
DO IT THAT WAY,
SOMETIMES.

I KNOW A
PLACE, IF WE
CAN REACH IT BY
DARK. WE HAVE TO KEEP
MOVING UNTIL FULL DARK
ANYWAY, EVEN IF WE DON'T
GET THERE, BUT WE CAN'T
GO AS FAST AS I WOULD
LIKE. CAN'T AFFORD TO
GET TOO CLOSE TO THE
RAVENS AHEAD OF US.
BUT IF THEY'RE
BEHIND US, TOO...

WHY
DARK?

WHAT PLACE?
SOMEWHERE SAFE
FROM THE
RAVENS?

SAFE FROM
RAVENS, BUT TOO
MANY PEOPLE
KNOW...

RAVENS
ROOST FOR THE
NIGHT. WE DON'T HAVE
TO WORRY ABOUT THEM
FINDING US IN THE DARK.
THE LIGHT SEND RAVENS
ARE ALL WE HAVE
TO WORRY ABOUT
THEN.

MOVE,
BURN YOU!

BUT DARK
IS A LONG WAY
OFF. WE HAVE TO
GET MOVING.





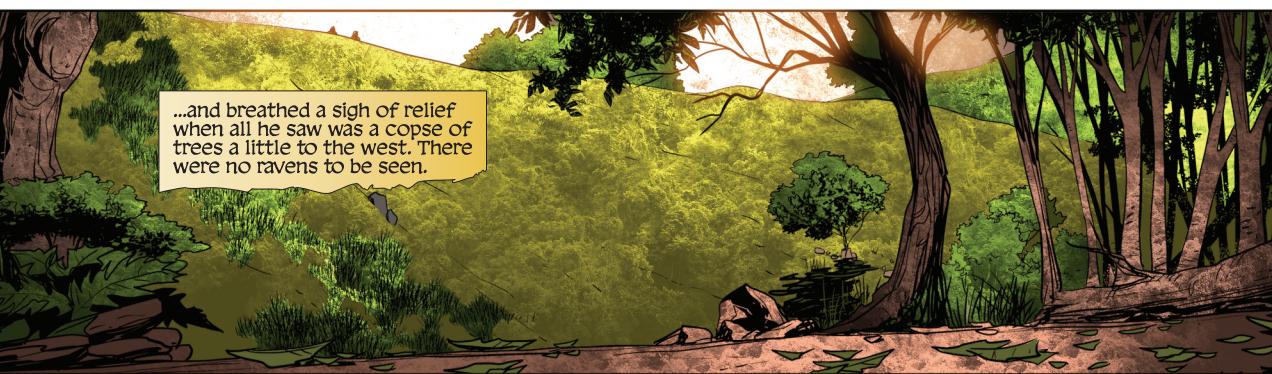
Perrin explained the ravens and Elyas' safe place to Egwene as they continued on. She asked questions for which, as often as not, he had no answers. The questions kept on until they reached the next ridge.

Ordinarily they would have gone around this one rather than over, but Elyas insisted on scouting anyway.



Perrin found himself wondering if the ravens ever doubled back as Elyas climbed up to the crest of the ridge.

When he reached the top he inched his head up until he could just see...



...and breathed a sigh of relief when all he saw was a copse of trees a little to the west. There were no ravens to be seen.



Abruptly, a fox burst out of the trees...

...and ravens poured from the branches after it.



The beat of their wings almost drowned out the desperate whining from the fox.

The fox's jaws snapped at the ravens, but they darted in, and darted away untouched, their black beaks glistening wetly.



The fox turned back towards the trees, seeking the safety of its den. It ran awkwardly now, and the ravens flapped around it, more and more of them at once.

The fluttering mass thickened until it hid the fox completely.



And then...

...as suddenly as they had descended the ravens rose, wheeled, and vanished over the next rise to the south.

A misshapen lump of torn fur marked what had been the fox.

From where he sat, Perrin swallowed hard. A hundred ravens could also do that... to them.



WE NEED
TO MOVE,
NOW.



MOVE,
BURN YOU!
MOVE!

As Elyas urged them on, Perrin noticed a lone raven had winged out of the copse, tilted toward them, screamed, and spun its way south.

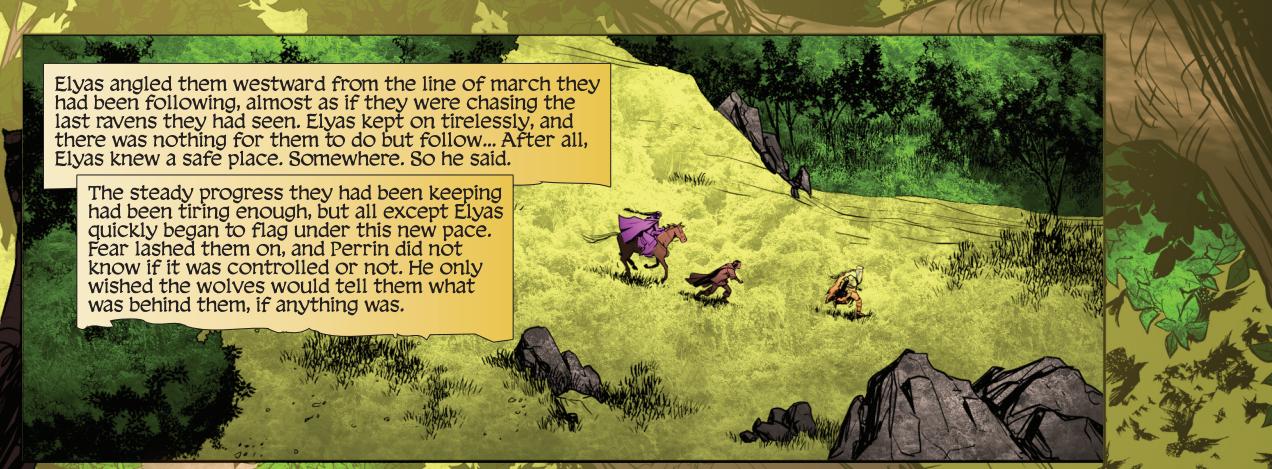


Knowing he was already too late, Perrin fumbled his sling from around his waist.



Perrin was still trying to get a stone from his pocket to the sling when the raven abruptly folded up in mid-air and plummeted to the ground.





Elyas angled them westward from the line of march they had been following, almost as if they were chasing the last ravens they had seen. Elyas kept on tirelessly, and there was nothing for them to do but follow... After all, Elyas knew a safe place. Somewhere. So he said.

The steady progress they had been keeping had been tiring enough, but all except Elyas quickly began to flag under this new pace. Fear lashed them on, and Perrin did not know if it was controlled or not. He only wished the wolves would tell them what was behind them, if anything was.



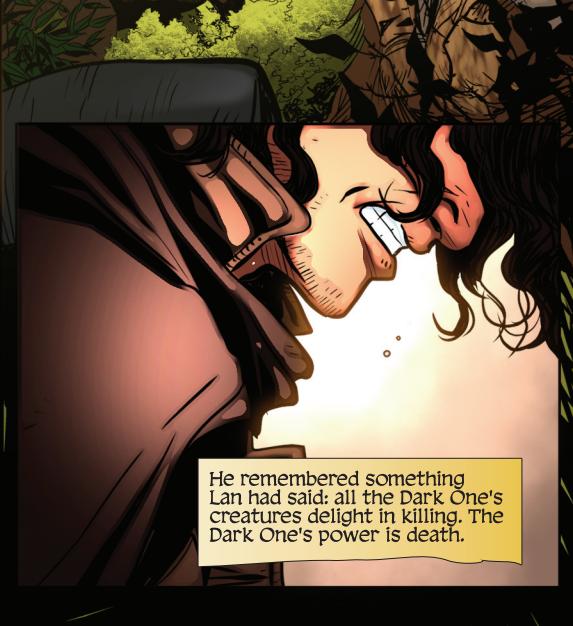
Ahead were more ravens than Perrin ever hoped to see again. To the left and right the black birds billowed up, and to the south.



A dozen times they reached the hiding place of a grove or a scant shelter of a slope only moments before ravens swept the sky. Sweat rolled down Perrin's face despite the wind, until the last black shape dwindled to a dot and vanished.



Perrin saw more than enough evidence lying in the path the ravens had covered to justify his fear. He had stared with queasy fascination at a rabbit that had been torn to pieces. Birds, too, stabbed to shapeless masses of feathers. And two more foxes.



He remembered something Lan had said: all the Dark One's creatures delight in killing. The Dark One's power is death.



Suddenly, images began to flash into Perrin's head: the wolves had found ravens to the north. Screaming birds dove and whirled and dove again, beaks drawing blood with every swoop.

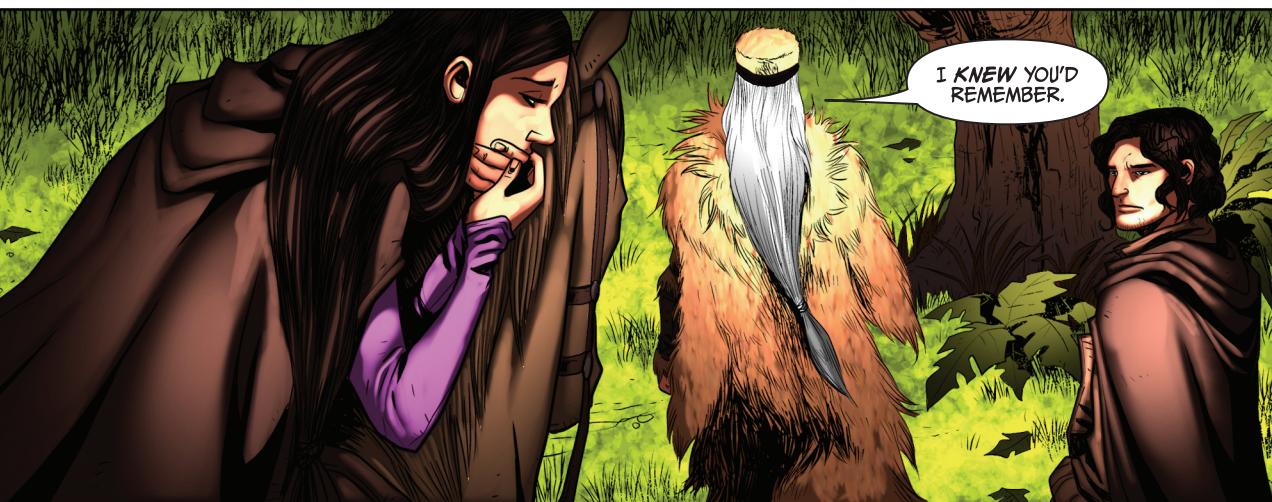
Again and again, Perrin tasted feathers and the foul taste of fluttering ravens crushed alive, felt the pain of oozing gashes all over his body, knew with a despair that never touched on giving up that all his effort was not enough.

Suddenly the ravens broke away, wheeling overhead for one last shriek of rage at the wolves.

Wolves did not die as easily as foxes, and they had a mission. A flap of black wings, and they were gone, a few black feathers drifting down on their dead.

Wind licked at a puncture on his left foreleg. There was something wrong with one of Hopper's eyes. Ignoring her own hurts, Dapple gathered them and they settled into a painful lope in the direction the ravens had gone.

We Come. Danger Comes Before Us.



They began coming down from the hills as soon as the last raven vanished over the next one, then when the last trailers still flapped over the hilltop.

One bird looking back while they hurried across the open spaces, one bird is all it would take.

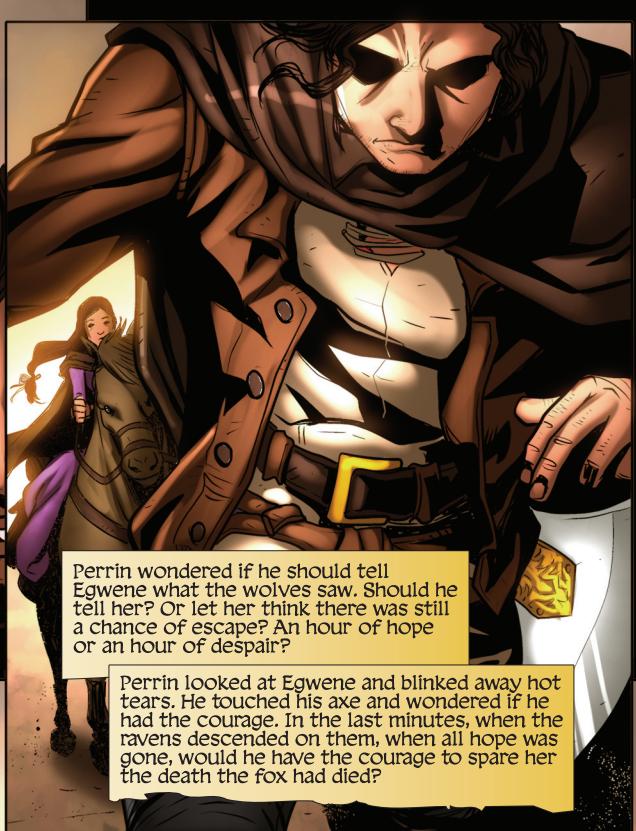
Seeing what the wolves saw, Perrin pieced together the position of the ravens that were behind. The birds would be on them in an hour, maybe two.

They could die with the setting sun. Slaughtered like the fox.



IT'S YOUR TURN TO RIDE, PERRIN.

IN A BIT, I'M GOOD FOR MILES, YET.



Perrin wondered if he should tell Egwene what the wolves saw. Should he tell her? Or let her think there was still a chance of escape? An hour of hope or an hour of despair?

Perrin looked at Egwene and blinked away hot tears. He touched his axe and wondered if he had the courage. In the last minutes, when the ravens descended on them, when all hope was gone, would he have the courage to spare her the death the fox had died?

But then...

...the ravens ahead of them suddenly seemed to vanish. Perrin could still make out dark, misty clouds far to the east and west, but ahead... nothing.

Where did they go?

Abruptly, a chill ran through Perrin, one cold, clean tingle as if he had jumped into the Winespring Water in midwinter. It rippled through him and seemed to carry away some of his fatigue, a little of the ache in his legs and the burning of his lungs.

It left behind... something. He could not say what, only he felt different. He stumbled to a halt and looked around, afraid.

Elyas watched with a gleam behind his eyes. He knew what was going on, but said nothing.



IT'S...
STRANGE. I FEEL
AS IF I LOST
SOMETHING.

WHAT...
WHAT WAS
THAT?

NO AES SEDAI, EITHER.
THE ONE POWER WON'T
WORK HERE; THEY CAN'T
TOUCH THE TRUE SOURCE.
CAN'T EVEN FEEL THE
SOURCE, LIKE IT
VANISHED.

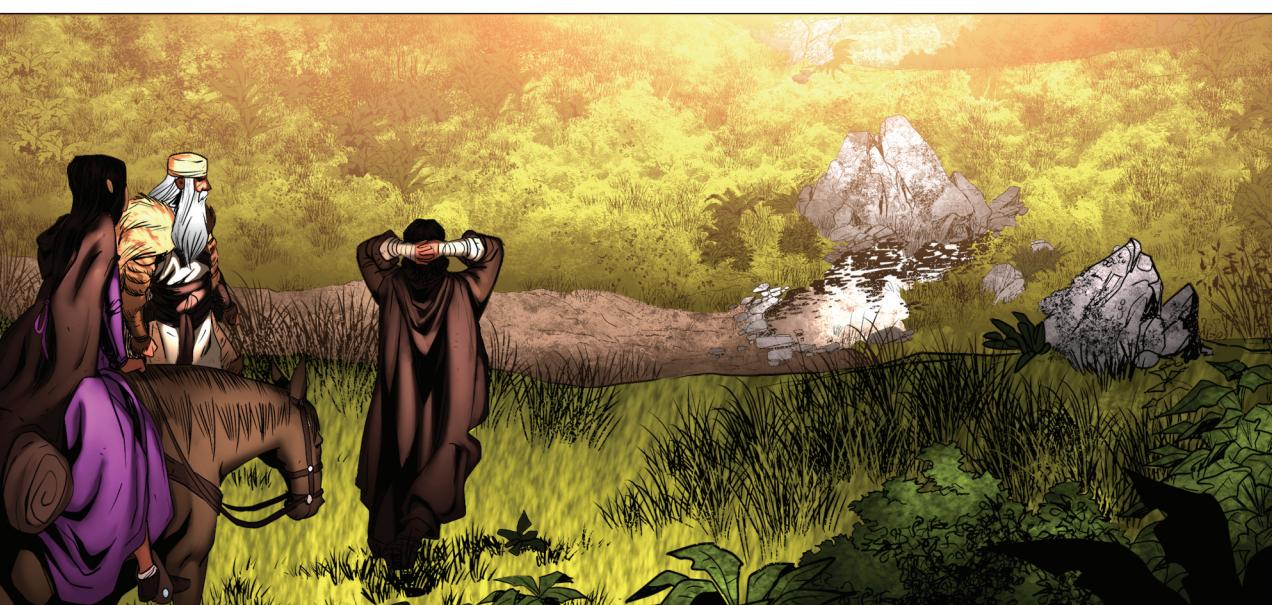
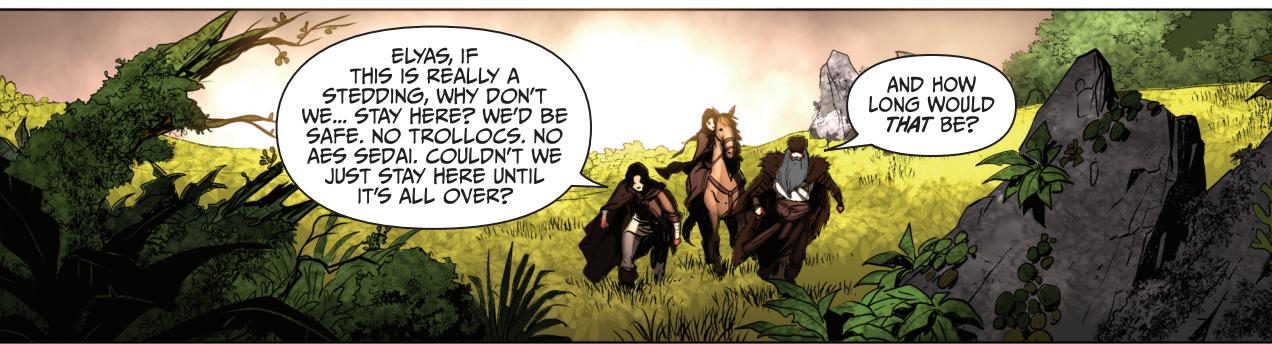
MAKES THEM
ITCH INSIDE,
THAT DOES, GIVES
THEM THE SHAKES
LIKE A SEVEN-DAY
DRUNK. IT'S
SAFETY.

A STEDDING.
YOU NEVER
LISTEN TO THE
OLD STORIES?
OF COURSE,
THERE HASN'T
BEEN AN OGIER
HERE IN THREE
THOUSAND
YEARS, NOT
SINCE THE
BREAKING OF
THE WORLD,
BUT IT'S THE
STEDDING THAT
MAKES THE
OGIER, NOT
THE OGIER
MAKE THE
STEDDING.

HAH! SAFETY,
THAT'S WHAT. WE MADE
IT, YOU BLOODY FOOLS.
NO RAVEN WILL CROSS
THAT LINE... NOT ONE
THAT CARRIES THE
DARK ONE'S EYES,
ANYWAYS.

A TROLLLOC
WOULD HAVE TO
BE DRIVEN ACROSS,
AND THERE'D NEED TO
BE SOMETHING FIERCE
PUSHING THE
MYRDDRAAL TO DO
THE DRIVING.

WHAT IS
IT? WHAT IS
THIS PLACE? I
DON'T THINK I
LIKE IT.





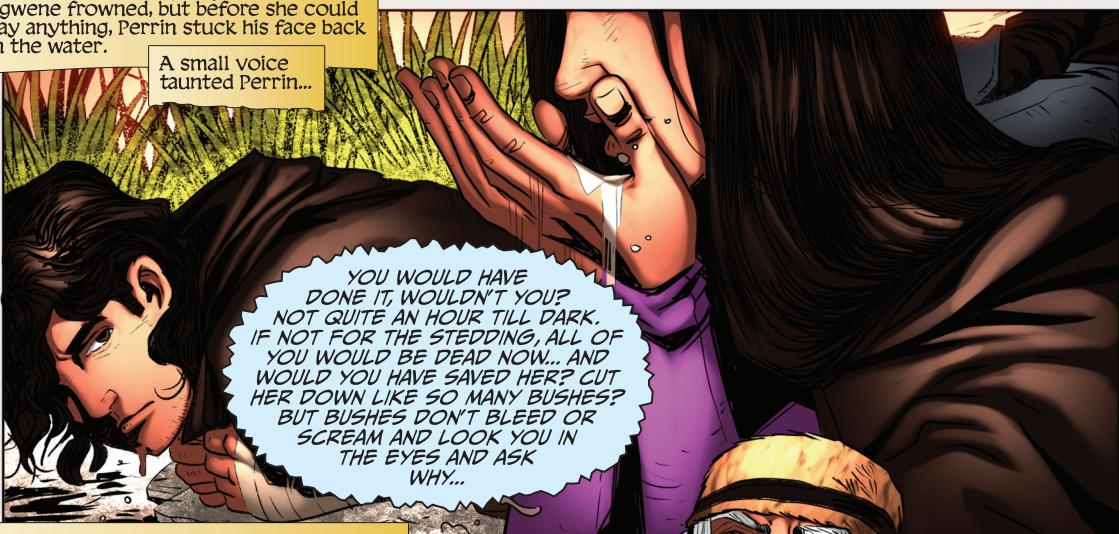
When he reached the pool, Perrin plunged his head in, an instant later sputtering from the cold of the water that had welled up from the depths of the earth.

He shook his head, his long hair spraying a rain of drops. Egwene grinned and splashed back.



And then Perrin's eyes grew sober. Egwene frowned, but before she could say anything, Perrin stuck his face back in the water.

A small voice taunted Perrin...



YOU WOULD HAVE
DONE IT, WOULDN'T YOU?
NOT QUITE AN HOUR TILL DARK.
IF NOT FOR THE STEDDING, ALL OF
YOU WOULD BE DEAD NOW... AND
WOULD YOU HAVE SAVED HER? CUT
HER DOWN LIKE SO MANY BUSHES?
BUT BUSHES DON'T BLEED OR
SCREAM AND LOOK YOU IN
THE EYES AND ASK
WHY...

Perrin drew in on himself more. He could feel something laughing at him, deep in the back of his mind. Something cruel. Not the Dark One. He almost wished it was. Not the Dark One; himself.

ALL RIGHT.
ANYBODY WANTS
TO EAT, I WANT
SOME HELP.



For once, Elyas had broken his rules about fires. There were no trees, but he had snipped dead branches from the brush and built his fire against a huge chunk of rock sticking out of the hillside. From the layers of soot staining the stone, Perrin thought the site must have been used by generations of travelers.

YOU KNOW, THAT...

...LOOKS LIKE AN EYE.

IT IS. ARTUR HAWKING'S EYE. THE EYE OF THE HIGH KING HIMSELF.

THIS IS WHAT HIS POWER AND GLORY CAME TO, IN THE END.

ARTUR HAWKING! YOU'RE JOKING WITH ME! WHY WOULD SOMEBODY CARVE ARTUR HAWKING'S EYE ON A ROCK OUT HERE?

WHAT DO THEY TEACH YOU VILLAGE WHELP? ARTUR HAWKING, THE HIGH KING, UNITED ALL LANDS FROM THE GREAT BLIGHT TO THE SEA OF STORMS, FROM THE ARYTH OCEAN TO THE AIEL WASTE, AND EVEN SOME BEYOND THE WASTE.

THE STORIES SAY HE RULED THE WORLD, BUT WHAT HE REALLY DID RULE WAS ENOUGH FOR ANY MAN OUTSIDE OF A STORY. AND HE BROUGHT PEACE AND JUSTICE TO THE LAND.

ALL STOOD EQUAL BEFORE THE LAW, AND NO MAN RAISED HIS HAND AGAINST ANOTHER.

SO YOU'VE HEARD THE STORIES, AT LEAST.

ARTUR
HAWKING
BROUGHT PEACE
AND JUSTICE, BUT
HE DID IT WITH FIRE
AND SWORD.

A CHILD COULD
RIDE ALONE WITH A BAG OF
GOLD FROM THE ARYTH OCEAN
TO THE SPINE OF THE WORLD
WITHOUT A MOMENT'S FEAR, BUT THE
HIGH KING'S JUSTICE WAS AS HARSH
AS THAT ROCK THERE FOR ANYONE
WHO CHALLENGED HIS POWER,
EVEN IF IT WAS JUST BY
BEING WHO THEY
WERE.

THE COMMON
FOLK HAD PEACE,
AND JUSTICE, AND FULL
BELLIES, BUT HE LAID A
TWENTY-YEAR SIEGE TO
TAR VALON AND PUT A
PRICE OF A THOUSAND
GOLD CROWNS ON THE
HEAD OF EVERY
AES SEDAI.

I THOUGHT
YOU DIDN'T LIKE
AES SEDAI.

DOESN'T
MATTER WHAT I
LIKE, GIRL. ARTUR
HAWKING WAS A
PROUD FOOL.

AN AES SEDAI
HEALER COULD HAVE SAVED
HIM WHEN HE TOOK SICK--OR WAS
POISONED, AS SOME SAY--BUT EVEN
IF HE DIDN'T HAVE THEM TRAPPED
BEHIND THEIR OWN WALLS BY HIS
ARMY HE'D NEVER HAVE LET ONE
NEAR HIM. HE HATED AES SEDAI
AS MUCH AS HE HATED THE
DARK ONE.

JUST THIS, GIRL.
THE KING DECIDED IT WAS
TIME TO BUILD HIMSELF A CAPITAL--
A NEW CITY, NOT CONNECTED IN ANY
MAN'S MIND WITH ANY OLD CAUSE
OR FACTION OR RIVALRY.

WHAT DOES
ALL THAT HAVE TO
DO WITH WHETHER
THAT'S ARTUR
HAWKING'S
EYE?

HERE, HE'D BUILD
IT, AT THE VERY CENTER
OF THE LAND BORDERED BY
THE SEAS AND THE WASTE AND
THE BLIGHT, WHERE NO AES
SEDAI WOULD EVER COME
WILLING OR COULD USE
THE POWER IF
THEY DID.

WHEN THEY
HEARD THE PROCLAMATION,
THE COMMON PEOPLE
SUBSCRIBED ENOUGH MONEY
TO BUILD A MONUMENT
TO HIM.

MOST OF THEM
LOOKED ON HIM AS
ONLY A STEP BELOW THE
CREATOR--A SHORT
STEP.

IT TOOK FIVE
YEARS TO CARVE AND
BUILD. A STATUE OF HAWKING,
HIMSELF, A HUNDRED TIMES
BIGGER THAN THE MAN. THEY
RAISED IT RIGHT HERE,
AND THE CITY WAS TO
RISE AROUND IT.



THERE WAS NEVER ANY CITY HERE. THERE WOULD HAVE TO BE SOMETHING LEFT IF THERE WAS. SOMETHING.



INDEED THERE WAS NOT. ARTUR HAWKING DIED THE VERY DAY THE STATUE WAS FINISHED, AND HIS SONS AND THE REST OF HIS BLOOD FOUGHT OVER WHO WOULD SIT ON HIS THRONE.



THE STATUE STOOD ALONE IN THE MIDST OF THESE HILLS WHILE THE SONS AND NEPHEWS AND COUSINS DIED, AND THE LAST OF HAWKING'S BLOOD VANISHED FROM THE EARTH.



IN THE END, THERE WAS NOTHING LEFT OF HIM BUT THE STORIES, AND MOST OF THEM WRONG. THAT'S WHAT HIS GLORY CAME TO.



THE FIGHTING DIDN'T STOP, OF COURSE, JUST BECAUSE HAWKING AND HIS KIN WERE DEAD. THERE WAS STILL A THRONE TO BE WON, AND EVERY LORD AND LADY WHO COULD MUSTER FIGHTING MEN WANTED IT.



IT WAS THE BEGINNING OF THE WAR OF THE HUNDRED YEARS, AND SOMETIME DURING THOSE YEARS THE STATUE WAS PULLED DOWN. MAYBE THEY COULDN'T STAND MEASURING THEMSELVES AGAINST IT ANY LONGER.



FIRST YOU SOUND AS IF YOU DESPISE HIM, AND NOW YOU SOUND AS IF YOU ADMIRE HIM.



HEH. GET SOME MORE TEA NOW, IF YOU WANT ANY. I WANT THE FIRE OUT BEFORE DARK.



While Egwene brewed a final cup of tea, Perrin stared at the eye. He could make it out clearly now, despite the failing light. It was bigger than a man's head, and the shadows falling across it made it seem like a raven's eye, hard and black and without pity.



He wished they were sleeping somewhere else.



To be continued...