

DYNAMITE
23

Robert Jordan's the WHEEL of TIME



the EYE of the 童 WORLD

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

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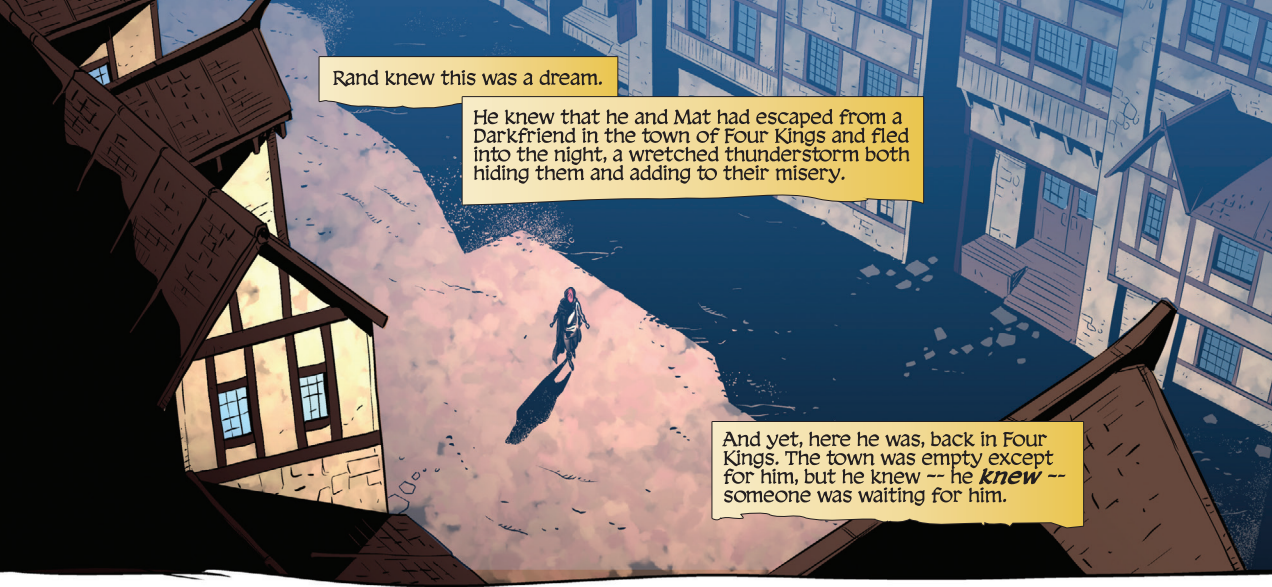


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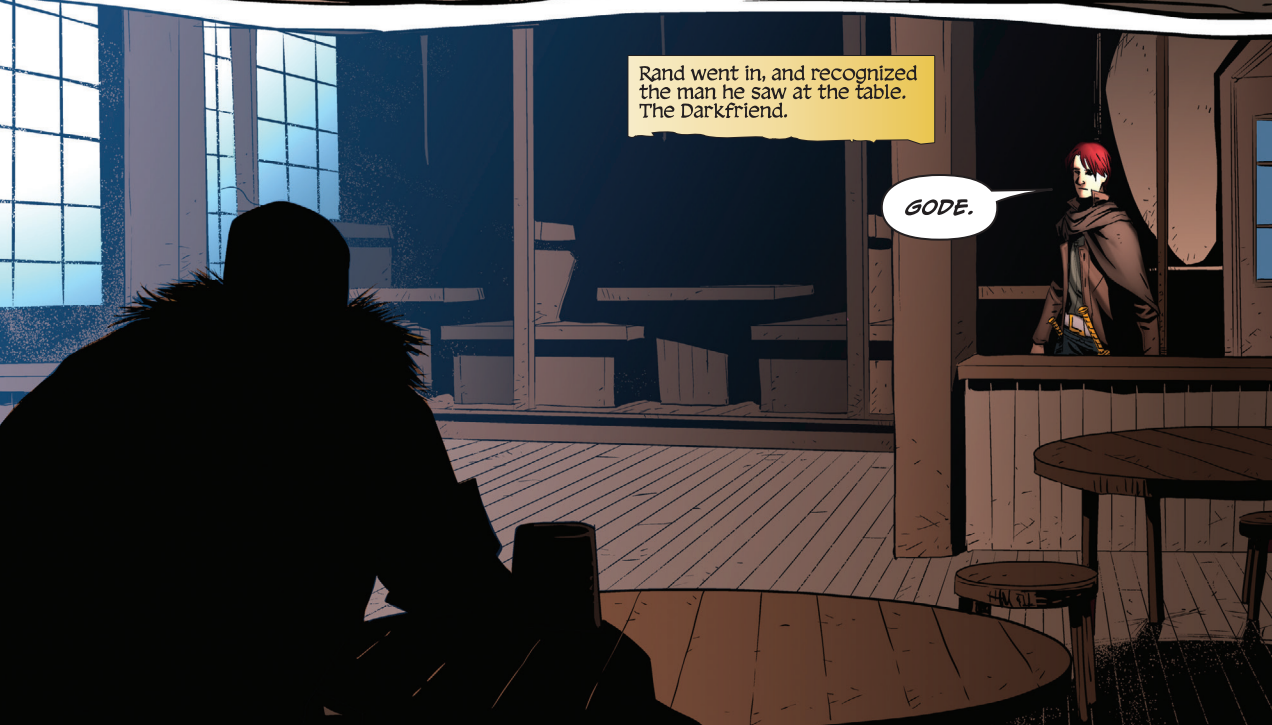
Rand knew this was a dream.

He knew that he and Mat had escaped from a Darkfriend in the town of Four Kings and fled into the night, a wretched thunderstorm both hiding them and adding to their misery.

And yet, here he was, back in Four Kings. The town was empty except for him, but he knew -- he *knew* -- someone was waiting for him.



The Dancing Cartman appeared before him; somehow even its garish paint seemed gray and lifeless.



Rand went in, and recognized the man he saw at the table. The Darkfriend.

GODE.

Rand had wondered if Gode was still chasing him, or if he had met his end in the spectacular lightning strike that had freed Rand and Mat from the Dancing Cartman.

And even though this was a dream, Rand felt -- knew that he had his answer.

SO YOU ARE DEAD.

YES.

BUT HE *DID* FIND YOU FOR ME. THAT DESERVES *SOME* REWARD, DON'T YOU THINK?



YOU SEE,
YOUNGLING, YOU
CANNOT HIDE FROM ME
FOREVER. ONE WAY OR
ANOTHER, I FIND
YOU.

WHAT
PROTECTS YOU
ALSO MAKES YOU
VULNERABLE. ONE TIME
YOU *HIDE*, THE NEXT
YOU LIGHT A SIGNAL
FLARE.

COME TO ME,
YOUNGLING.

IF MY
HOUNDS MUST
PULL YOU DOWN, THEY
MAY NOT BE GENTLE.
THEY ARE JEALOUS OF
WHAT YOU WILL BE
ONCE YOU HAVE
KNELT AT MY
FEET.

IT IS
YOUR DESTINY.
YOU *BELONG*
TO ME.

NO...

NO. I
BELONG TO
MYSELF. NOT
YOU. NOT
EVER.





IF YOUR
DARKFRIENDS
KILL ME, YOU'LL
NEVER HAVE
ME.

ALIVE
OR DEAD,
YOUNGLING,
YOU ARE
MINE.

THE GRAVE
BELONGS TO
ME. EASIER DEAD,
BUT BETTER ALIVE.
BETTER FOR YOU,
YOUNGLING...

...THE
LIVING HAVE
MORE POWER IN
MOST THINGS.

≡WHIMPER≡

YES,
MY GOOD
HOUND.

HERE
IS YOUR
REWARD.



YOU
ARE MINE,
YOUNGLING. ALIVE
OR DEAD. THE EYE
OF THE WORLD
WILL NEVER
SERVE YOU.

I MARK
YOU AS
MINE!

FWWOOSH

AAAAHHHH

MY EYES!
OH LIGHT, MY
EYES! HE TOOK
MY EYES!

YOU'RE ALL
RIGHT, MAT. HE
CAN'T HURT US.
WE WON'T LET
HIM.

HE
CAN'T HURT
US...

As Rand stared out
at the still-falling rain,
he remembered what
Ba'alzamon had said --
'What protects you
makes you vulnerable.'

...And then Rand
wondered if he
was going mad.

Rand and Mat woke early the next morning, drenched and certain they wouldn't survive another night outside.

They caught rides when they could, but otherwise, progress was slow -- Mat's vision had not yet cleared from the lightning strike at the Dancing Cartman, and Rand had to take extra care to keep Mat from injuring himself further on the walk.

WHEN ARE WE GOING TO STOP?

WHEN WE'RE SOMEWHERE WARM. COME ON, I SEE LIGHTS AHEAD.

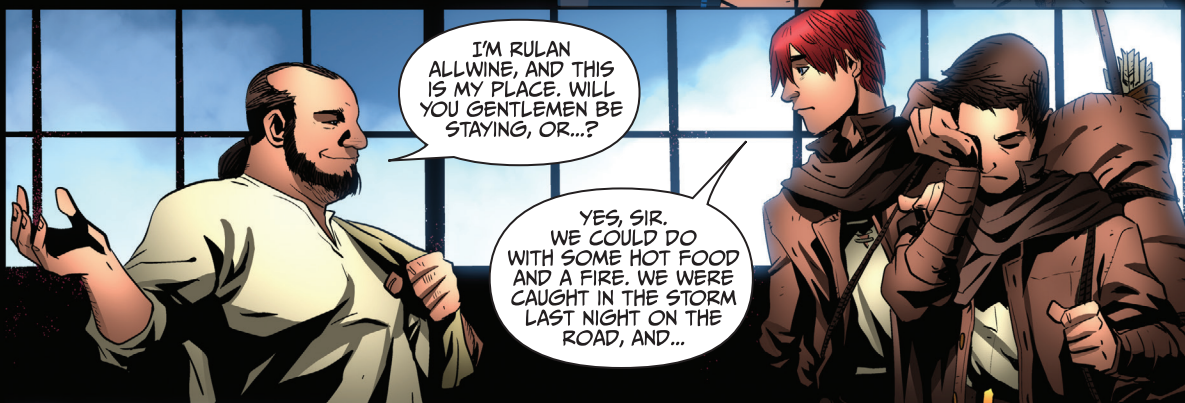
They couldn't afford to attract attention, so no playing the flute, and with his eyes, Mat could not juggle. They would have to pay to stay at the town inn.

Rand felt in his pocket feeling the coins there. It should be more than enough for a meal and a room for the two of them.

ALMOST THERE, MAT. THE INN IS JUST UP AHEAD.



WELCOME,
TRAVELERS!



I'M RULAN
ALLWINE, AND THIS
IS MY PLACE. WILL
YOU GENTLEMEN BE
STAYING, OR...?

YES, SIR.
WE COULD DO
WITH SOME HOT FOOD
AND A FIRE. WE WERE
CAUGHT IN THE STORM
LAST NIGHT ON THE
ROAD, AND...

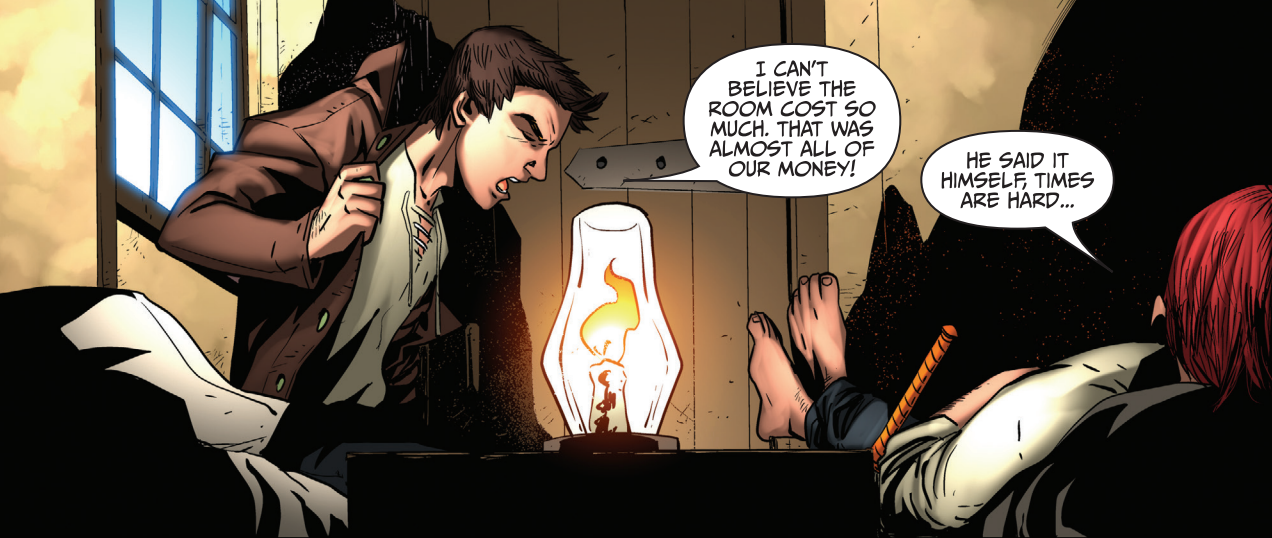


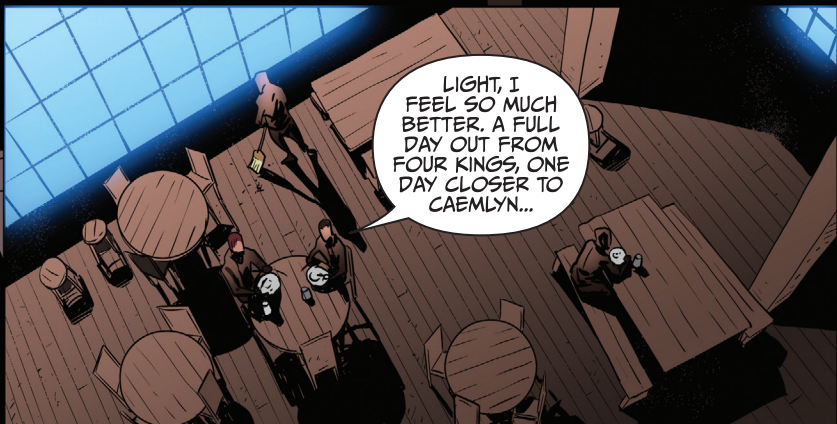
SAY NO MORE,
WE'LL HAVE YOU
WARMED UP IN NO TIME.
BUT, AH... I WILL NEED
YOUR PAYMENT UP
FRONT.

NOT
SUGGESTING
YOU'RE THE SORT,
UNDERSTAND, BUT
THERE'S SOME ON THE
ROAD THESE DAYS AREN'T
TOO PARTICULAR ABOUT
PAYING UP COME
MORNING...



OF COURSE,
SIR. I COMPLETELY
UNDERSTAND. WE'RE
JUST HAPPY TO NOT BE
SLEEPING UNDER
A HEDGE...





LIGHT, I
FEEL SO MUCH
BETTER. A FULL
DAY OUT FROM
FOUR KINGS, ONE
DAY CLOSER TO
CAEMLYN...



...I'M EVEN
LOOKING
FORWARD TO
SEEING MOIRRAINE
AGAIN. IN FACT,
I--

EXCUSE
ME...

MIND
IF I--

≡GULP≡

--MIND
IF I JOIN
YOU?

ALL RIGHT. WHAT'S YOUR
NAME?

MY NAME?
MY NAME. AH...
CALL ME
PAITR.



AH... THIS
IS NOT MY IDEA,
YOU UNDERSTAND. I
HAVE TO DO IT. I DIDN'T
WANT TO, BUT THEY
MADE ME.



YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND THAT. I DON'T WANT TO--

THUD



DARKFRIEND.



I--

LEAVE US ALONE. AND TELL YOUR FRIENDS TO LEAVE US ALONE. WE WANT NOTHING FROM THEM, AND THEY'LL GET NOTHING FROM US.

AND IF YOU DON'T, I'LL NAME YOU FOR WHAT YOU ARE. SEE WHAT YOUR VILLAGE FRIENDS THINK OF THAT.



TIME TO GO, MAT.

AS FOR YOU, DARKFRIEND, LEAVE US ALONE. I WON'T TELL YOU AGAIN.

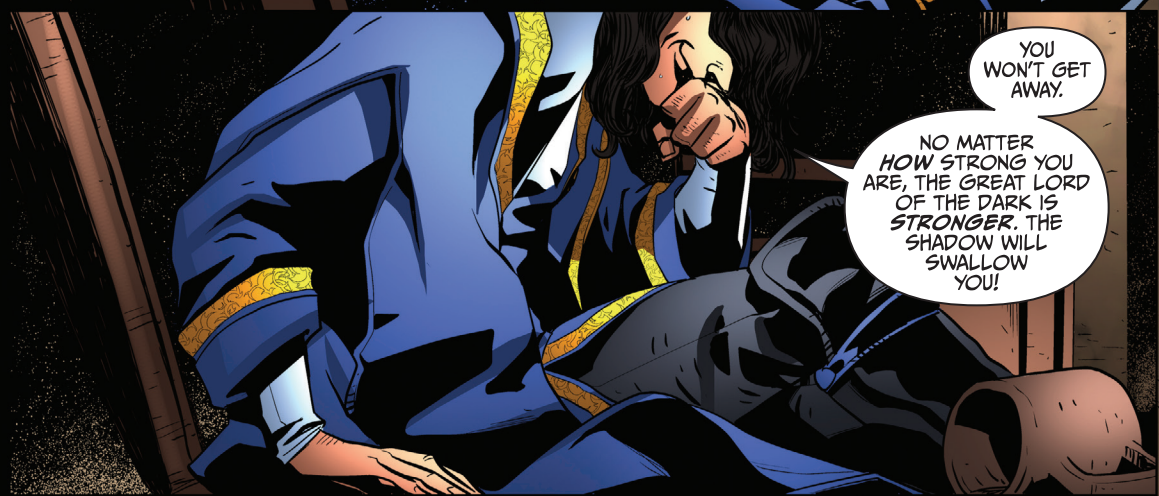


WAIT! YOU HAVE TO--



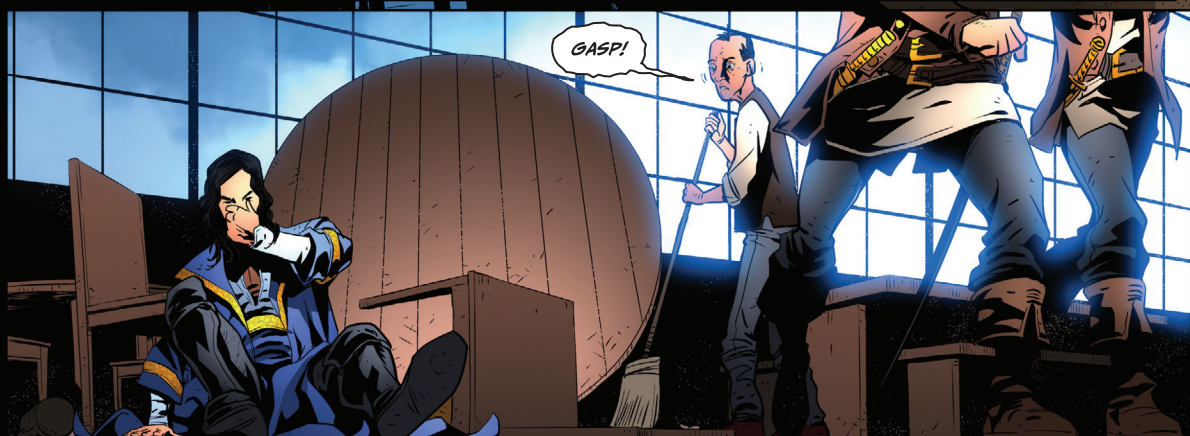
I SAID...
LEAVE US
ALONE!

KRAK



YOU
WON'T GET
AWAY.

NO MATTER
HOW STRONG YOU
ARE, THE GREAT LORD
OF THE DARK IS
STRONGER. THE
SHADOW WILL
SWALLOW
YOU!



GASP!



BLOOD AND ASHES,
THEY'RE ALWAYS
THERE, RIGHT ON OUR
HEELS! WE'LL NEVER
GET AWAY!

IF BA'ALZAMON
KNEW WE WERE
HERE, DO YOU THINK
HE'D HAVE LEFT IT TO *THAT*
FELLOW? THEY'RE STILL
HUNTING, BUT THEY WON'T
KNOW ANYTHING UNTIL
PAIRT TELLS THEM--
SO LET'S GET OUT
OF HERE!

Rand and Mat hustled out of the village as fast as they could, all the while listening for a hue and cry that never came.

They got several rides--short ones--during the day, hearing stories of Darkfriends in Market Sheran. Some were amused and disbelieving, some were horrified and distorted.



MAYBE
WE SHOULD TRY
OUR LUCK AT
THE INN?



I CAN SEE
WELL ENOUGH
AS LONG AS I
DON'T GET TOO
FANCY.

AND THERE
CAN'T BE DARKFRIENDS
AT EVERY INN BETWEEN HERE
AND CAEMLYN. BESIDES, I
DON'T WANT TO SLEEP UNDER
A BUSH IF I CAN SLEEP
IN A BED.



MAYBE YOU'RE
RIGHT. LET'S GO
AND TALK TO THE
INNKEEPER.

Rand and Mat met with the innkeeper, who was receptive to anything that could distract the guests that more than packed his Inn. Inside the kitchen, full of stoves and ovens crackling with heat, as Rand gave his pitch, his teeth began to chatter.



A queasiness grew in Rand's stomach. His head was pounding. And he was freezing.



Dimly, Rand was aware of Mat asking him something, shaking his shoulder, and then arguing with the Innkeeper and the cook--loudly.

Rand couldn't make out what anyone was saying -- the words were a buzz in his ears, and he could not seem to think at all.



S-S-SORRY,
M-M-MAT. M-MUST
HAVE... B-BEEN T-THE...
RAIN. O-O-ONE-MORE...
NIGHT OUT... W-WON'T
H-HURT... I GUESS...



NOT A BIT OF IT.
THAT INNKEEPER WAS
SO SCARED HIS PAYING
CUSTOMERS WOULD FIND OUT
THERE WAS SOMEBODY SICK AT
HIS INN... I TOLD HIM IF HE
TRIED TO THROW US OUT,
I'D TAKE YOU INTO THE
COMMON ROOM.

THAT'D
EMPTY HALF HIS
ROOMS IN TEN
MINUTES.

THEN
W-W-WHERE?





HERE.



WELL,
I'LL NEVER
GET YOU UP
THERE...

LIGHT,
I'M HOT...

WHAT
WAS THAT?



SO
HOT...

FIRST YOU
HAVE CHILLS,
AND NOW YOU'RE
BURNING UP...

I'M GOING
TO GO AND LOOK
FOR THE VILLAGE
WISDOM.



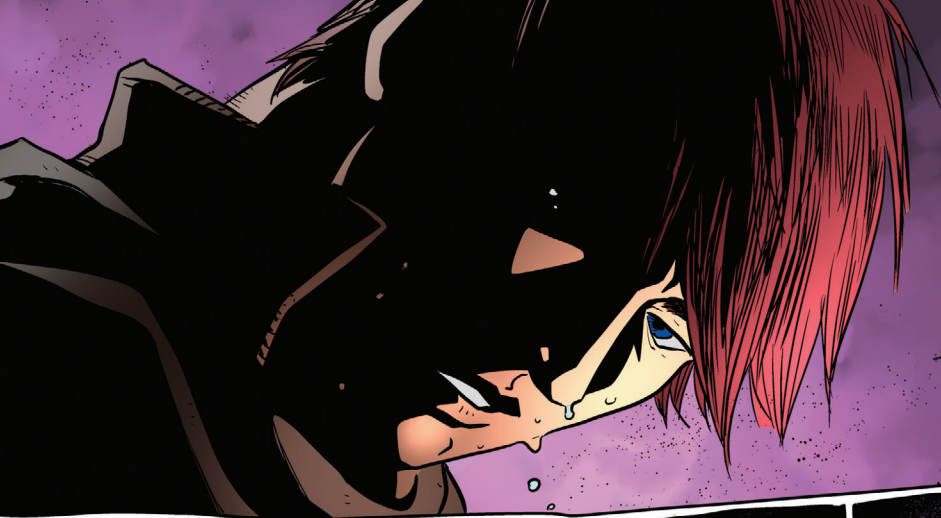
I'LL
BE RIGHT
BACK.



WHY DID YOU
LEAVE US? WE'RE
DEAD BECAUSE
YOU LEFT US.

WE'RE ALL
DEAD, AND DEATH
IS THE KINGDOM OF
THE DARK ONE. THE
DARK ONE HAS US
BECAUSE YOU
ABANDONED
US.





I DIDN'T WANT--I HAD NO CHOICE. EGWENE. PLEASE, EGWENE, DON'T GO. COME BACK, EGWENE!

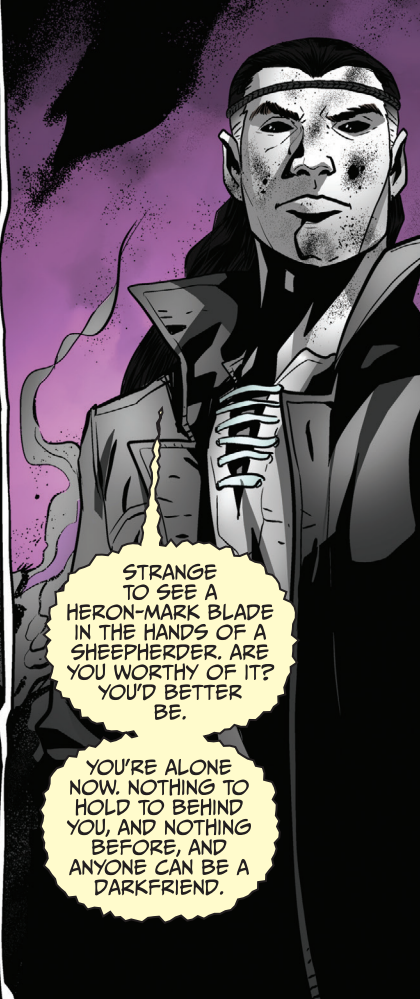


THAT IS RIGHT, RAND AL'THOR. YOU HAVE NO CHOICE. YOU MUST GO TO TAR VALON OR THE DARK ONE WILL TAKE YOU FOR HIS OWN. ETERNITY CHAINED IN SHADOW. ONLY AES SEDAI CAN SAVE YOU, NOW.



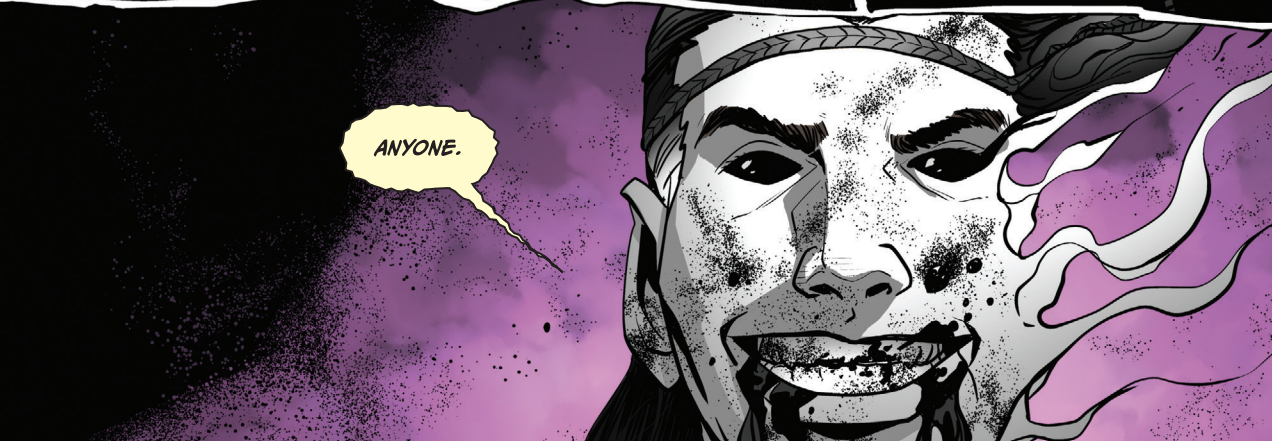
TRUST AES SEDAI, BOY, AND YOU'LL WISH YOU WERE DEAD. REMEMBER THE PRICE OF AES SEDAI HELP IS ALWAYS SMALLER THAN YOU CAN BELIEVE, ALWAYS GREATER THAN YOU CAN IMAGINE.

AND WHAT AJAH WILL FIND YOU FIRST, EH? RED? MAYBE BLACK. BEST TO RUN, BOY. RUN.



STRANGE TO SEE A HERON-MARK BLADE IN THE HANDS OF A SHEEPHERDER. ARE YOU WORTHY OF IT? YOU'D BETTER BE.

YOU'RE ALONE NOW. NOTHING TO HOLD TO BEHIND YOU, AND NOTHING BEFORE, AND ANYONE CAN BE A DARKFRIEND.



ANYONE.

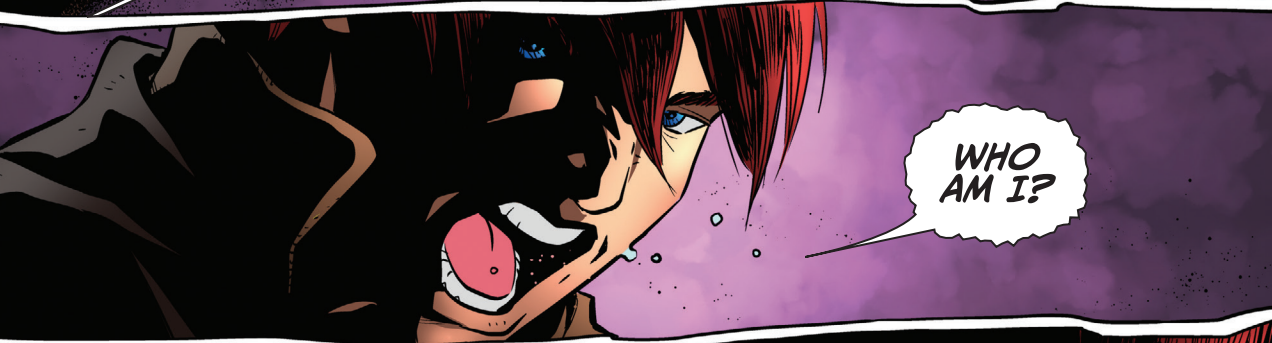


PLEASE...
YOU HAVE TO
TELL ME...

WHO AM I?
TELL ME, PLEASE...
WHO AM I?

And the last was Rand's
father who stood silently.

WHO
AM I?



WHO
AM I?



EASY,
RAND.

JUST REST
EASY. YOU'RE RAND
AL'THOR, THAT'S WHO YOU
ARE, WITH THE UGLIEST
FACE AND THE THICKEST
HEAD IN THE TWO
RIVERS.

RAND
AL'THOR?

THAT'S
RIGHT--HEY! YOU'RE
SWEATING! THE FEVER'S
BROKEN. GOOD THING,
TOO--THIS VILLAGE
DOESN'T EVEN HAVE
A WISDOM.

NOW WHY
DON'T WE TRY
GETTING SOME
SLEEP? YOU'LL FEEL
BETTER IN THE
MORNING.



Rand's sleep was untroubled by dreams--at least, any he remembered--but light enough that his eyes drifted open whenever Mat checked on him. Rand wondered if Mat was getting any sleep at all, but he fell back asleep before the thought got very far.



MAT. MAT!
SOMEONE'S
HERE!



I CAME
TO LOOK AT MY
HORSE, I--ARE
YOU ILL?

HE'S ALL
RIGHT. HE JUST
CAUGHT A CHILL
IN THE RAIN,
THAT'S ALL.

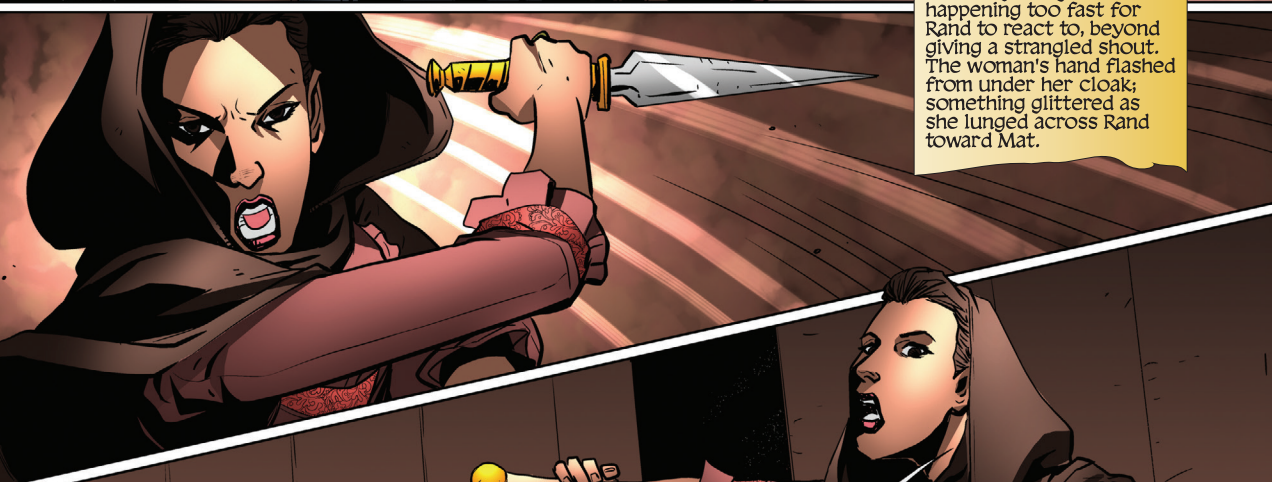
PERHAPS I
SHOULD LOOK AT
HIM. I HAVE SOME
KNOWLEDGE...

I'M FINE NOW.
REALLY, THERE'S
NO NEED...



NO FEVER.
YOU WERE SICK,
THOUGH. YES. YES, AND
STILL AS WEAK AS A
DAY-OLD KITTEN.
I THINK...

Suddenly things were happening too fast for Rand to react to, beyond giving a strangled shout. The woman's hand flashed from under her cloak; something glittered as she lunged across Rand toward Mat.



MAT! HER
DAGGER!



Mat gave the woman a push and she toppled back, sprawling away and catching herself with her hands behind her, never taking her eyes from Mat's dagger.



DON'T
MOVE.

WATCH
HER, RAND.

Rand wasn't sure what he was supposed to do if she tried anything; he certainly could not run after her if she tried to flee.


When Mat pulled her dagger from the wall the black spot it caused stopped growing, though a faint wisp of smoke still trailed up from it.



SHE TRIED
TO KILL ME,
RAND. SHE'D HAVE
KILLED YOU TOO.
SHE'S A DARK-
FRIEND.


BUT
WE'RE NOT,
MAT.

Mat handed the dagger to Rand, who took it gingerly, as if it were a live adder. It looked ordinary. Just a dagger. Except Rand had seen what it could do--charring wood with a touch. The hilt was not even warm.




YOU REALLY
SHOULD STOP
STRUGGLING. IT
WOULD BE FOR
THE BEST.

YOU WILL HAVE
HONORED PLACES IF
YOU COME TO THE GREAT
LORD OF YOUR OWN FREE
WILL, BUT AS LONG AS YOU
RUN, THERE WILL BE PURSUIT,
AND WHO CAN TELL WHAT
WILL HAPPEN THEN?



SO YOU'RE HAVING
TROUBLE WITH A COUPLE
OF FARMBOYS. MAYBE
YOU DARKFRIENDS AREN'T
AS DANGEROUS AS I'VE
ALWAYS HEARD.



YOU WILL
FIND OUT HOW
DANGEROUS
WE ARE.



WHEN
THE MYRDDRAAL
GETS HERE--



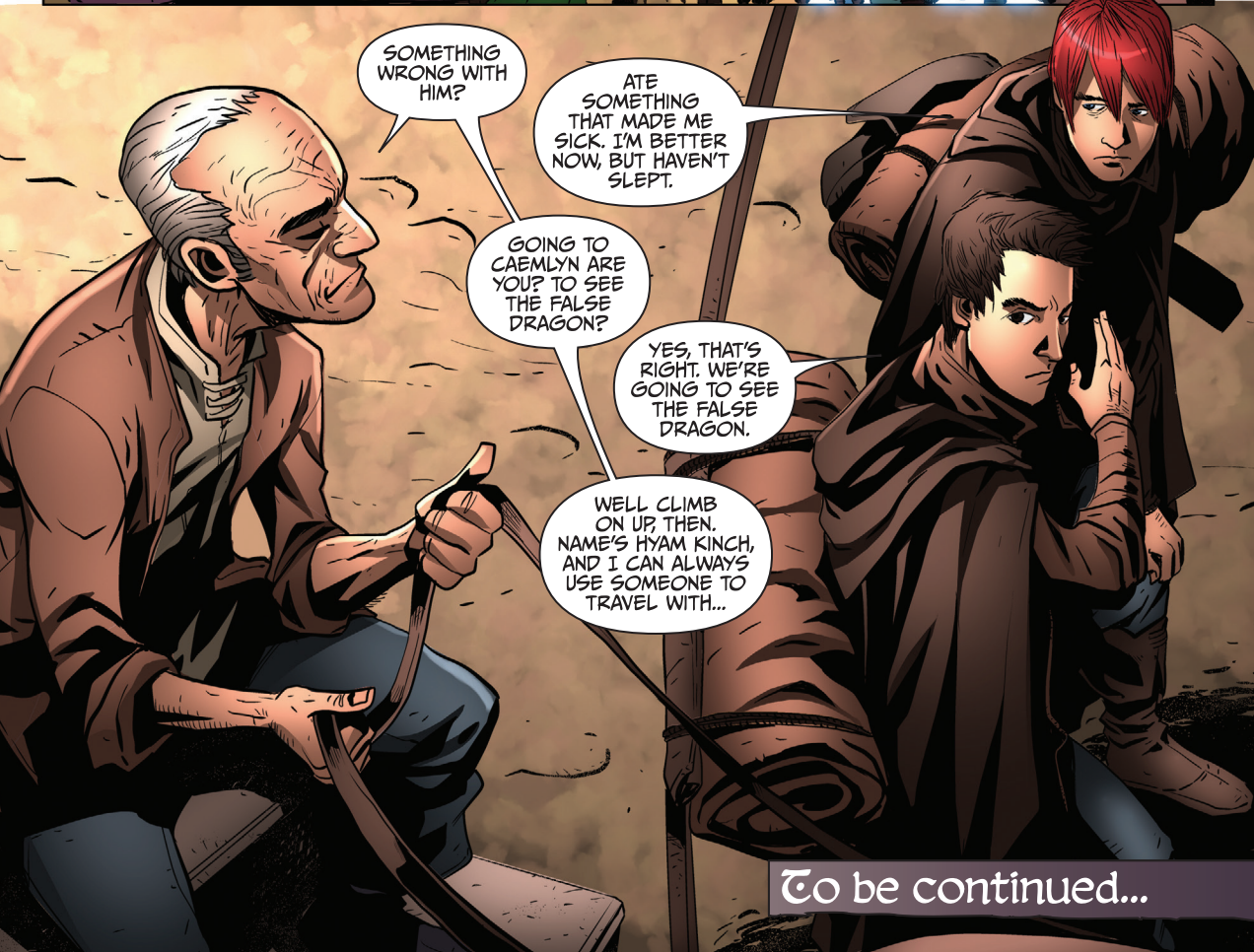
FADE.
COMING HERE,
SHE SAYS. HOW
ARE YOUR
LEGS?

I CAN'T
DANCE, BUT ONCE
I GET ON MY FEET,
I CAN WALK. BLOOD
AND ASHES, I'LL
RUN.



SOONER
OR LATER
SOMEBODY WILL
LET HER OUT, AND
THEN THEY'LL
BE AFTER US
AGAIN.

I KNOW.
UNH...



SOMETHING
WRONG WITH
HIM?

ATE
SOMETHING
THAT MADE ME
SICK. I'M BETTER
NOW, BUT HAVEN'T
SLEPT.

GOING TO
CAEMLYN ARE
YOU? TO SEE
THE FALSE
DRAGON?

YES, THAT'S
RIGHT. WE'RE
GOING TO SEE
THE FALSE
DRAGON.

WELL CLIMB
ON UP, THEN.
NAME'S HYAM KINCH,
AND I CAN ALWAYS
USE SOMEONE TO
TRAVEL WITH...

To be continued...