

DYNAMITE

23

Robert Jordan's
the WHEEL of TIME®



the EYE of the WORLD



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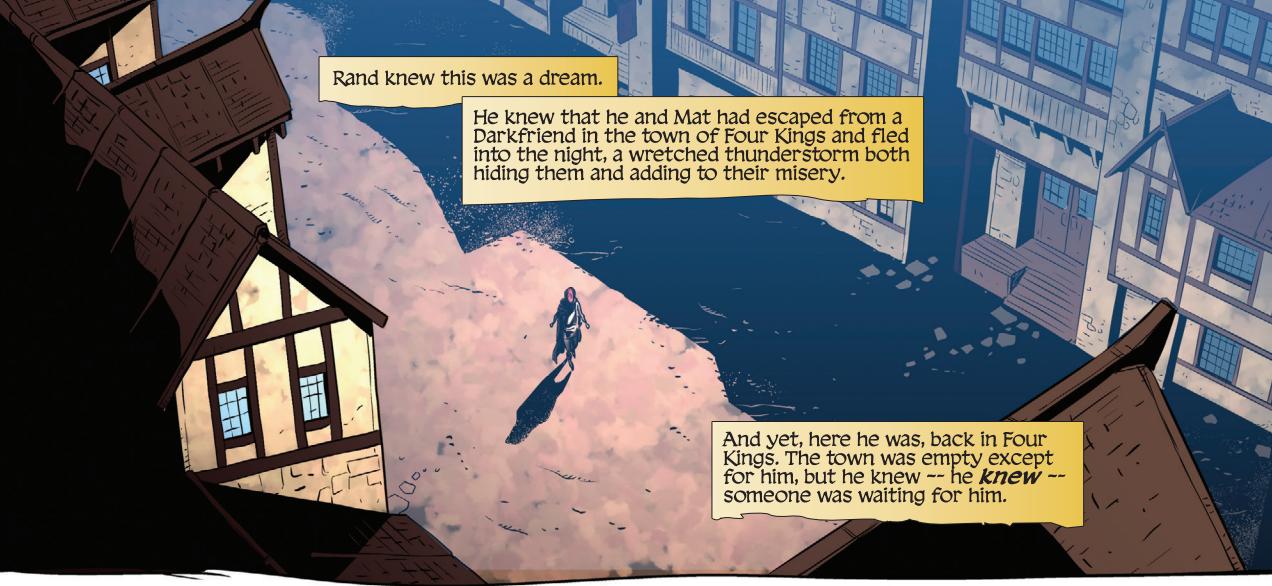


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Rand knew this was a dream.

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.

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.

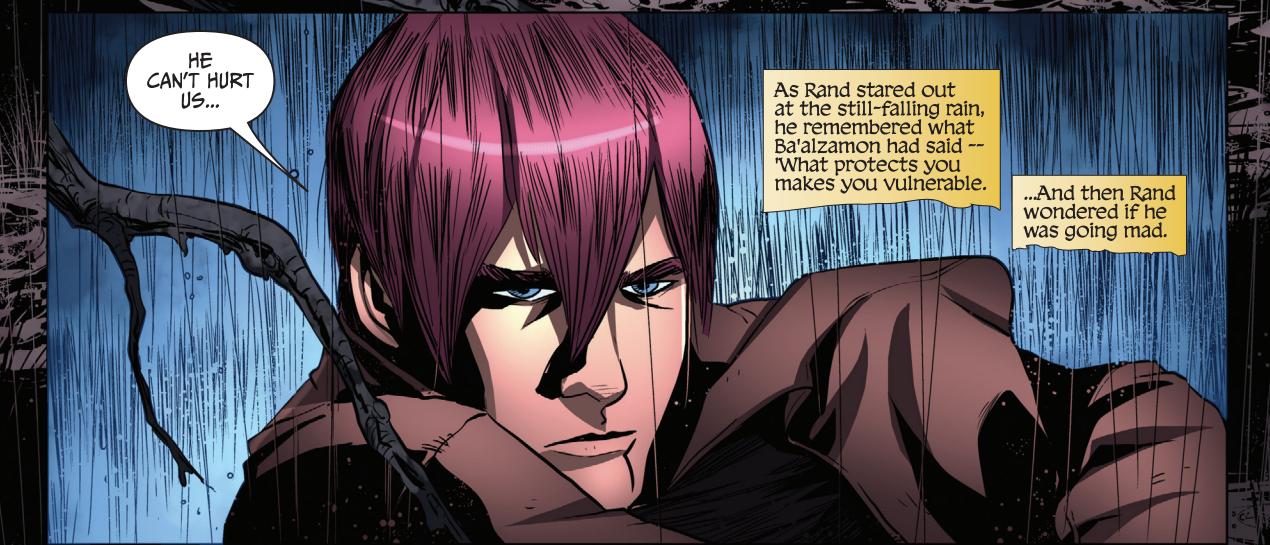
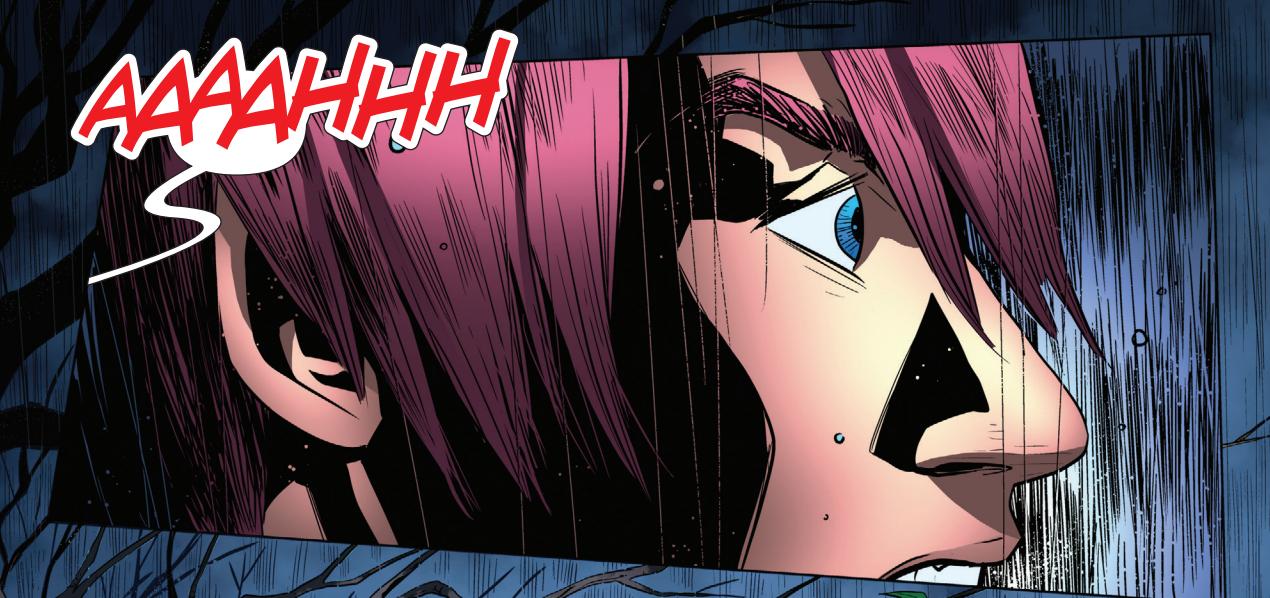
=WHIMPER=

YES,
MY GOOD
HOUND.

HERE
IS YOUR
REWARD.



AAAAAHHH



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.

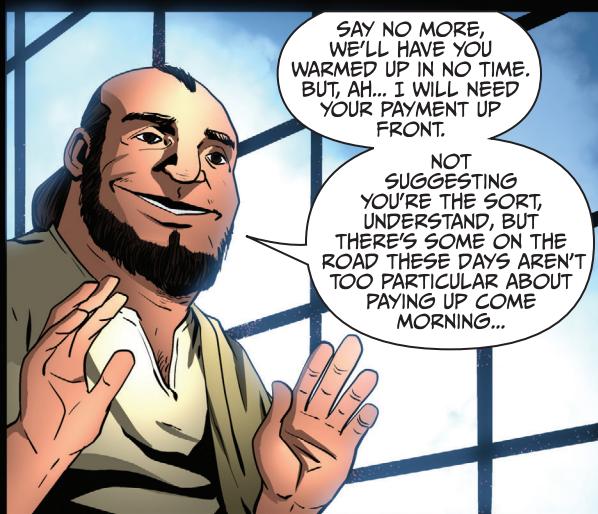
WHEN ARE WE GOING TO STOP?

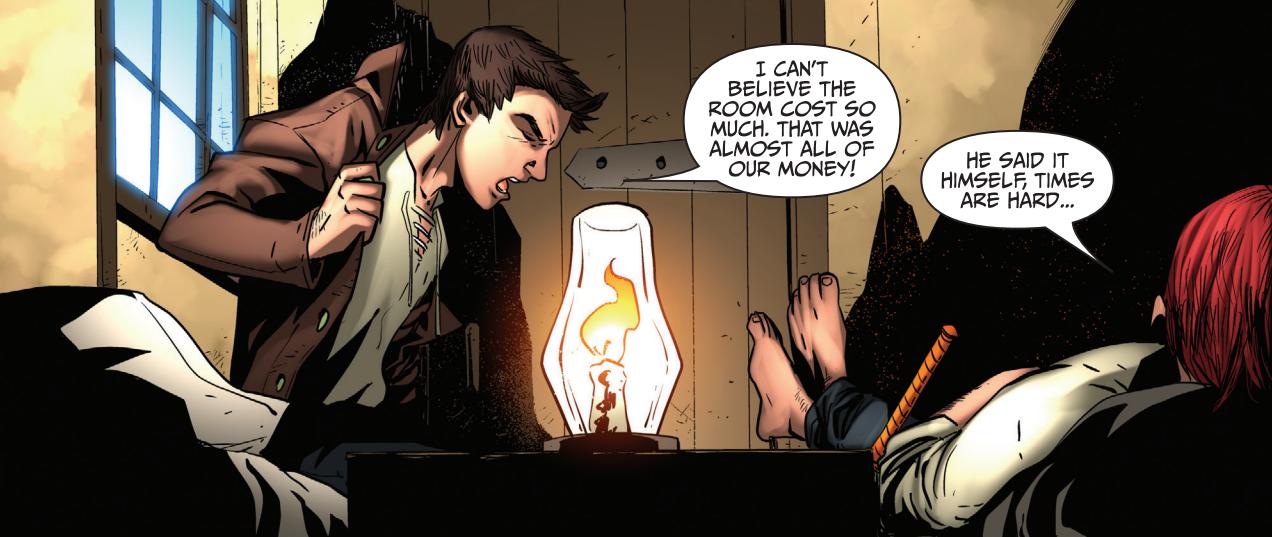
WHEN WE'RE SOMEWHERE WARM, COME ON, I SEE LIGHTS AHEAD.

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.







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 MOIRANE
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
PAIRT.







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
PAITR 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-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-WHERE?





...MAT?

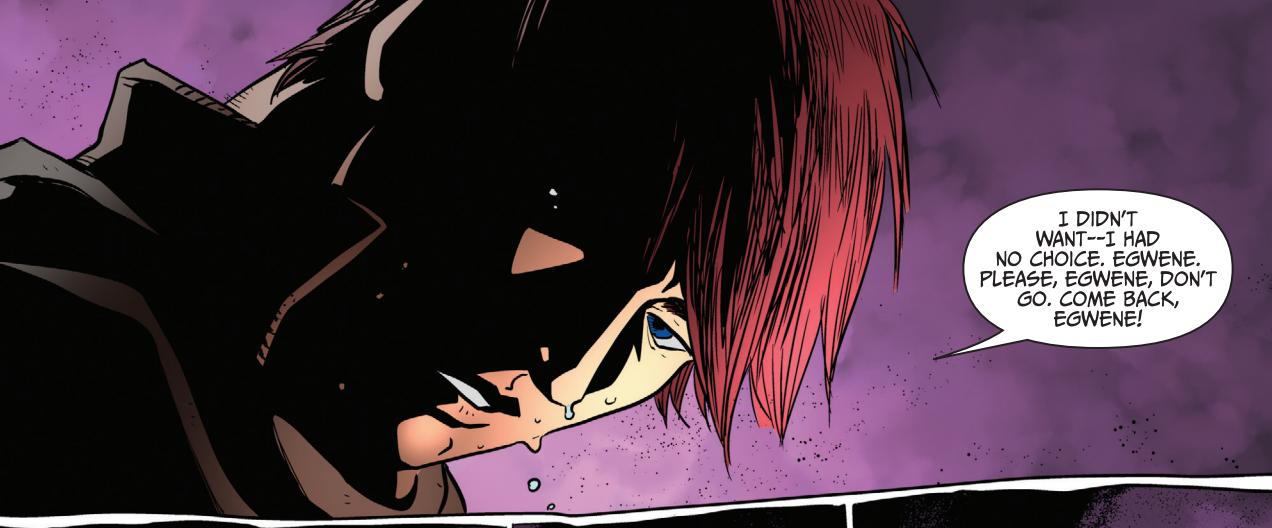


WHY DID YOU
LEAVE US? WE'RE
DEAD BECAUSE
YOU LEFT US.



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.



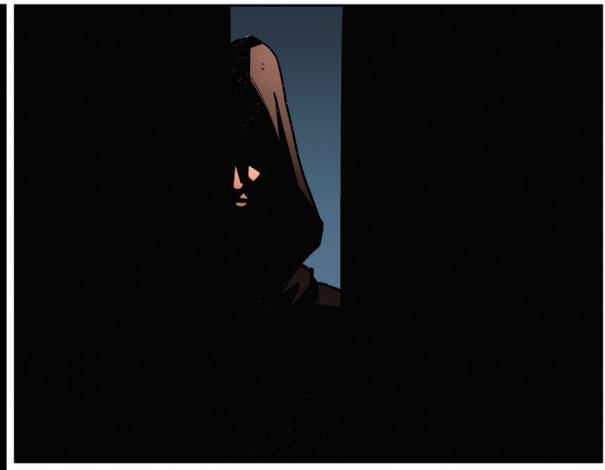
ANYONE.



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



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.

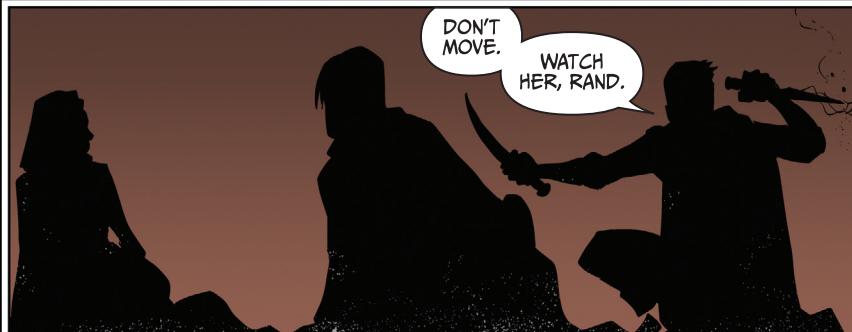


NO FEVER.
YOU WERE SICK,
THOUGH. YES, YES, AND
STILL AS WEAK AS A
DAY-OLD KITTEN.
I THINK...

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.



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

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.

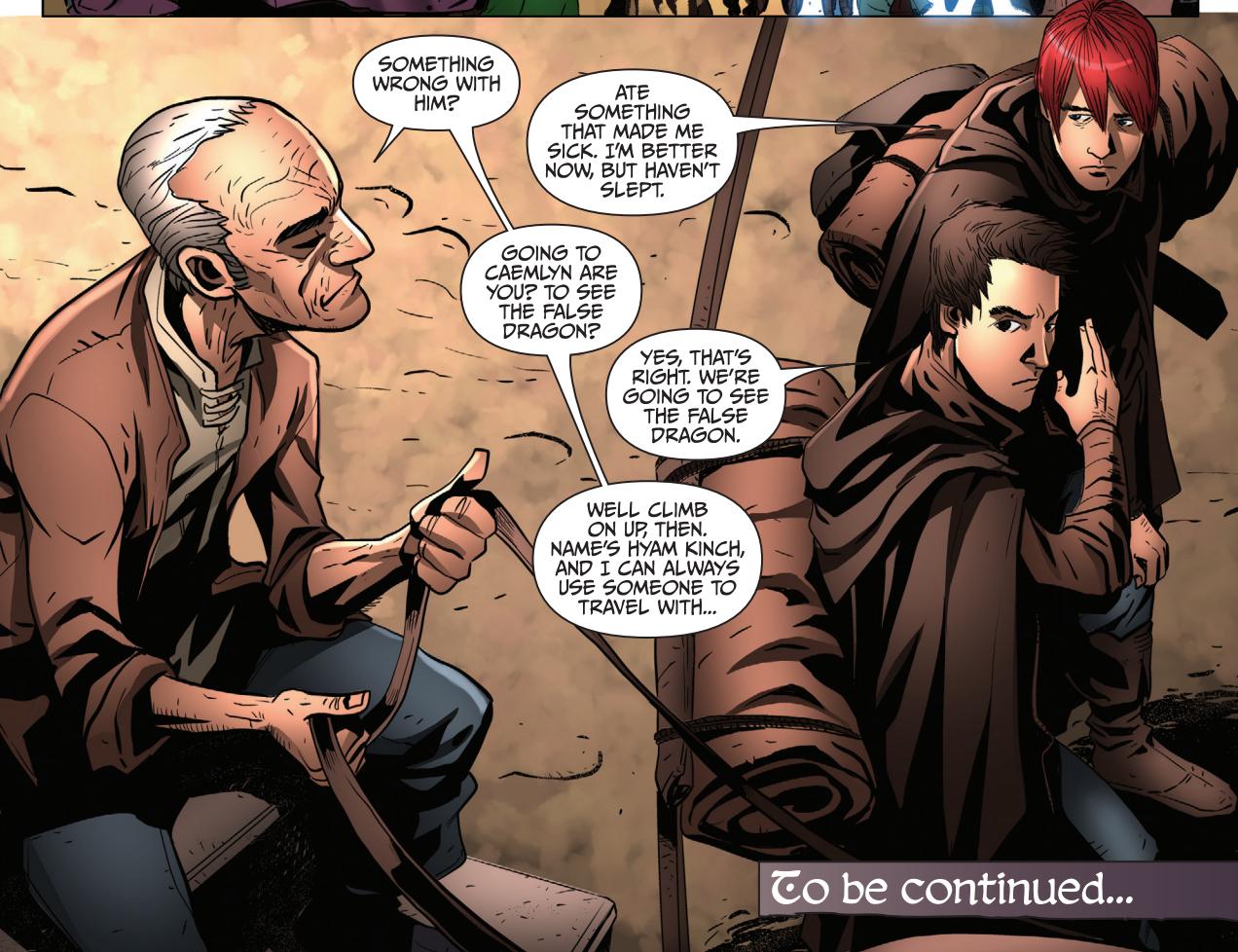
YOU WILL HAVE
HONORED PLACES IF
YOU COME TO THE GREAT
LORD OF YOUR OWN FREE
WILL, BUT AS LONG AS YOU
RUN, THERE WILL BE PURSUIT,
AND WHO CAN TELL WHAT
WILL HAPPEN THEN?



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.



To be continued...