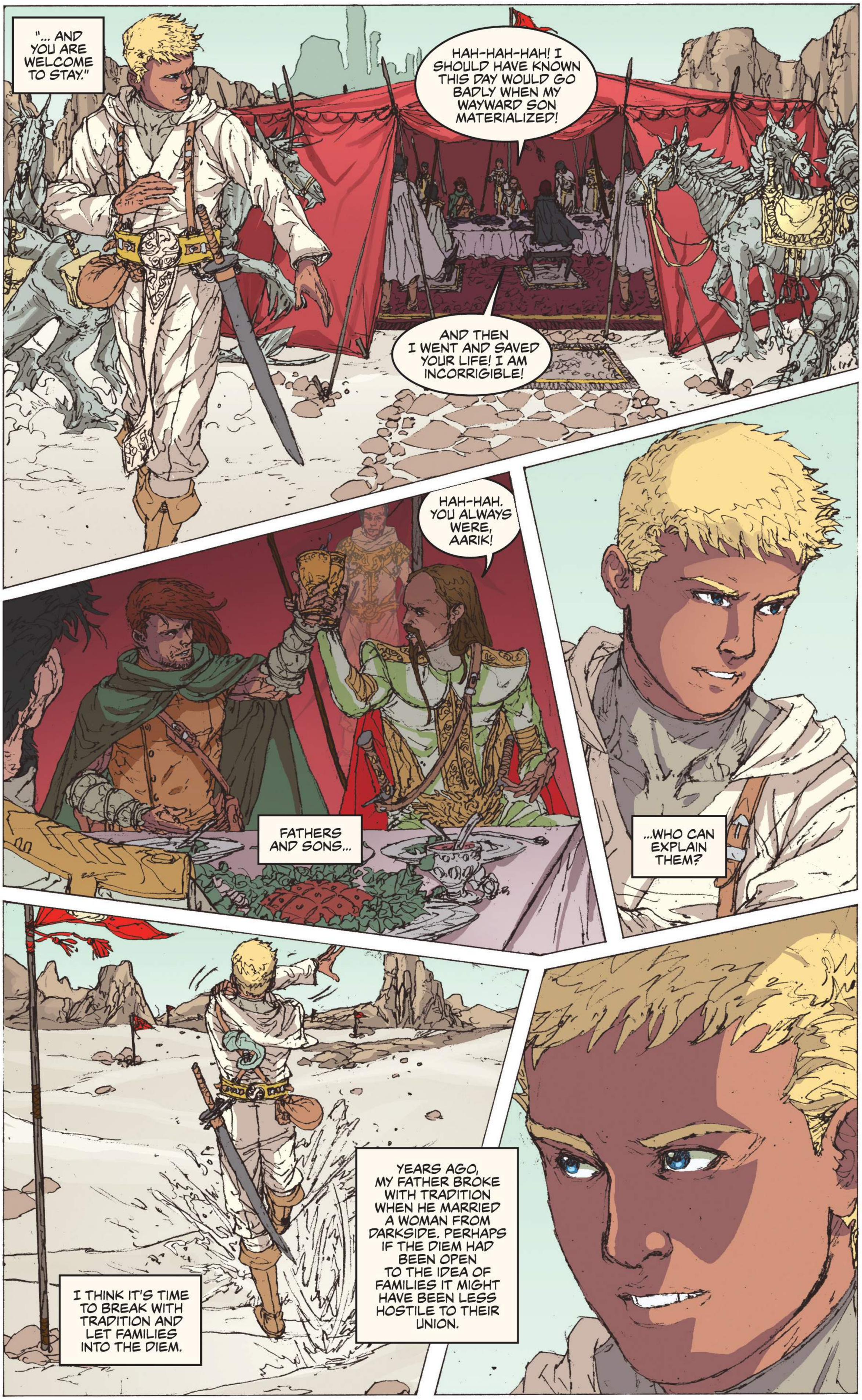
THUMP
INCREDIBLE.
AND I'M CONSIDERED ONE OF THE WEAK ONES.

LATER.
HAPPY TO SEE ME WOUNDED, BOY? YOU WERE JUST WAITING FOR SOMETHING LIKE THIS TO HAPPEN, I'M SURE.
PERHAPS. YOU IMPLIED THAT SAND MASTERY WAS USELESS. I THINK YOU NOW HAVE AMPLE EVIDENCE OTHERWISE.
YOUR HELP WASN'T REQUESTED.
AND IF I HADN'T BEEN THERE TODAY? MORE THAN TWELVE OF YOUR MEN WOULD HAVE DIED--AND YOU'D HAVE BEEN AMONG THEM.
GO AHEAD, SAND MASTER --GLOAT.
THIS ISN'T GLOATING. SANDS, MAN, YOUR HEAD IS AS THICK AS CARAPACE!
HAH-HAH-HAH! YOU'RE LIKE YOUR FATHER! HE WAS THE ONLY ONE WHO EVER HAD THE NERVE TO SPEAK TO ME LIKE THAT.
I CAN SEE THAT IF SOMETHING LIKE THIS HAPPENS AGAIN, YOU ARE PREPARED.
I COULD ASSIGN TWO DOZEN SAND MASTERS TO YOU THE MOMENT THE DIEM IS REINSTATED. YOURS TO DO WITH AS YOU WISH.

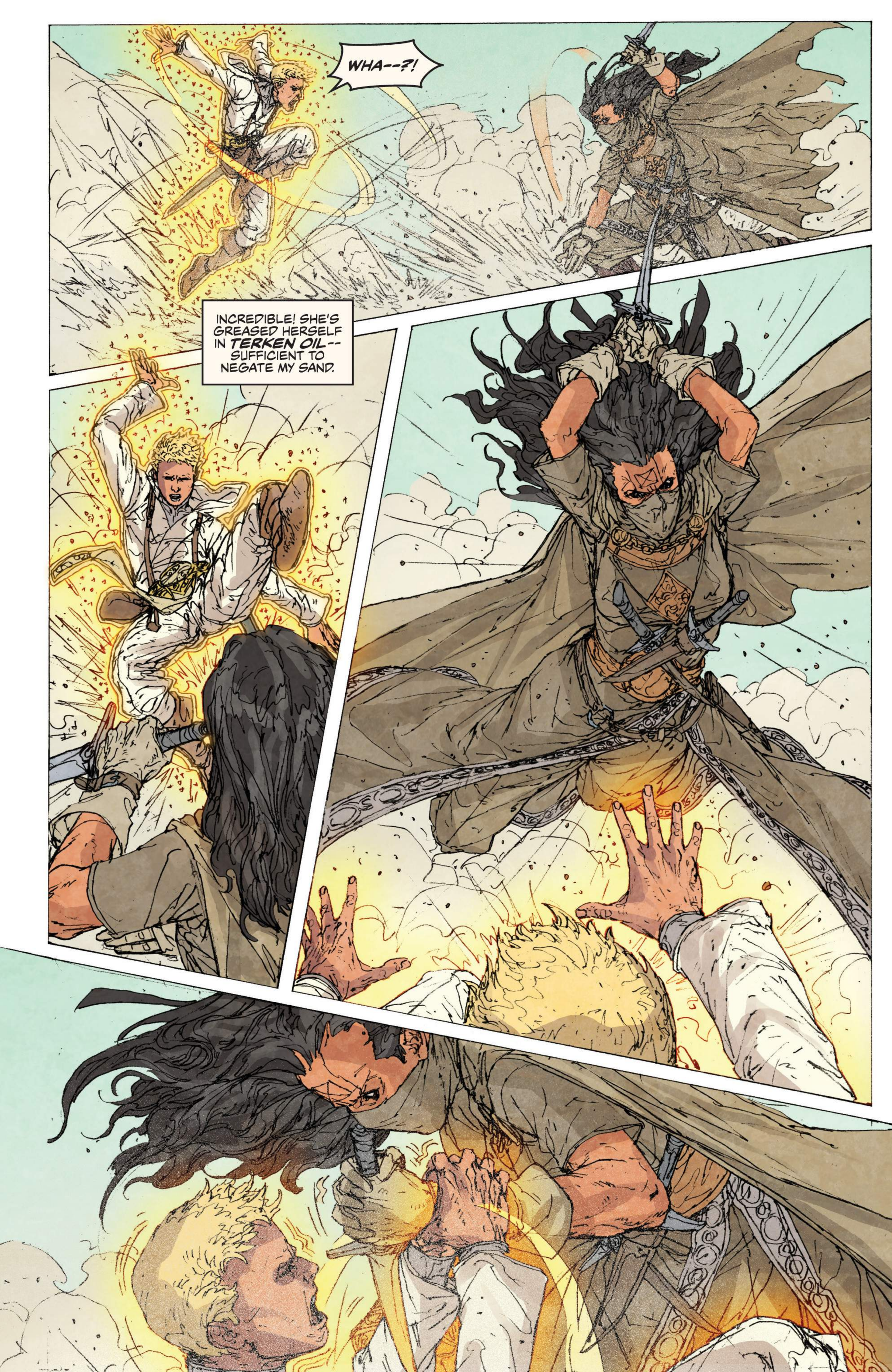
YOU WANTED SAND MASTERY'S PRESTIGE, BUT I'M OFFERING YOU SOMETHING FAR BETTER. ACCESS TO THE TRUE POWER OF THE DIEM.
THAT, PLUS THE VOW THAT THE SAND MASTERS WILL NO LONGER TAKE WHAT DOES NOT BELONG TO THEM--IN EXCHANGE FOR YOUR VOTE.
HMMM. WHAT KIND OF SAND MASTERS? I DON'T WANT YOU JUST SENDING ME ALL YOUR REJECTS.
AT LEAST ONE MASTRELL--
--WITH SUPPORTING MEMBERS, ONE OF EACH RANK.
DONE.
THANK YOU.
BOY, I JUST SAW YOU CUT THE HEAD OFF OF A SEVENTY-FOOT TALL MONSTER! I DON'T CARE WHAT I HAVE TO DO, THAT ISN'T THE KIND OF POWER WE CAN AFFORD TO CUT FREE.
AS LONG AS THERE'S A DIEM PROFESSION, THERE WILL BE RULES TO BIND YOU. IT OCCURS TO ME THAT MAYBE THE DIEM WAS ALWAYS INTENDED TO KEEP THE SAND MASTERS IN CHECK.
PERHAPS IT WAS. BUT NOW, AARIK AND I SHALL BID YOU GOOD DAY, LORD GENERAL.
WAIT! HAVE YOU BOYS EATEN? MY COOKS WILL BE FIXING DINNER SHORTLY...

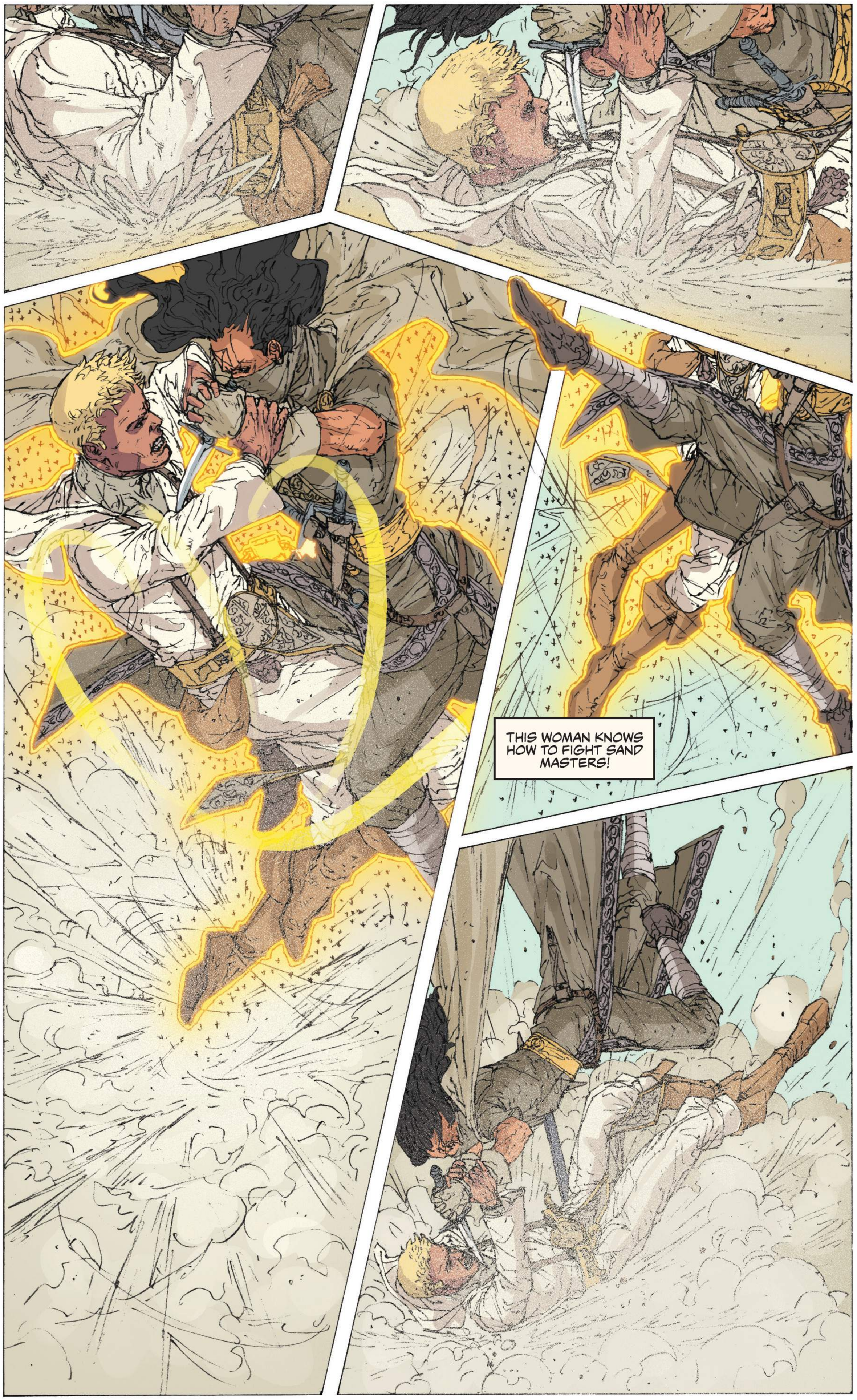

"... AND YOU ARE WELCOME TO STAY."
HAH-HAH-HAH! I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN THIS DAY WOULD GO BADLY WHEN MY WAYWARD SON MATERIALIZED!
AND THEN I WENT AND SAVED YOUR LIFE! I AM INCORRIGIBLE!
HAH-HAH. YOU ALWAYS WERE, AARIK!
FATHERS AND SONS...
...WHO CAN EXPLAIN THEM?
I THINK IT'S TIME TO BREAK WITH TRADITION AND LET FAMILIES INTO THE DIEM.
YEARS AGO, MY FATHER BROKE WITH TRADITION WHEN HE MARRIED A WOMAN FROM DARKSIDE. PERHAPS IF THE DIEM HAD BEEN OPEN TO THE IDEA OF FAMILIES IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN LESS HOSTILE TO THEIR UNION.

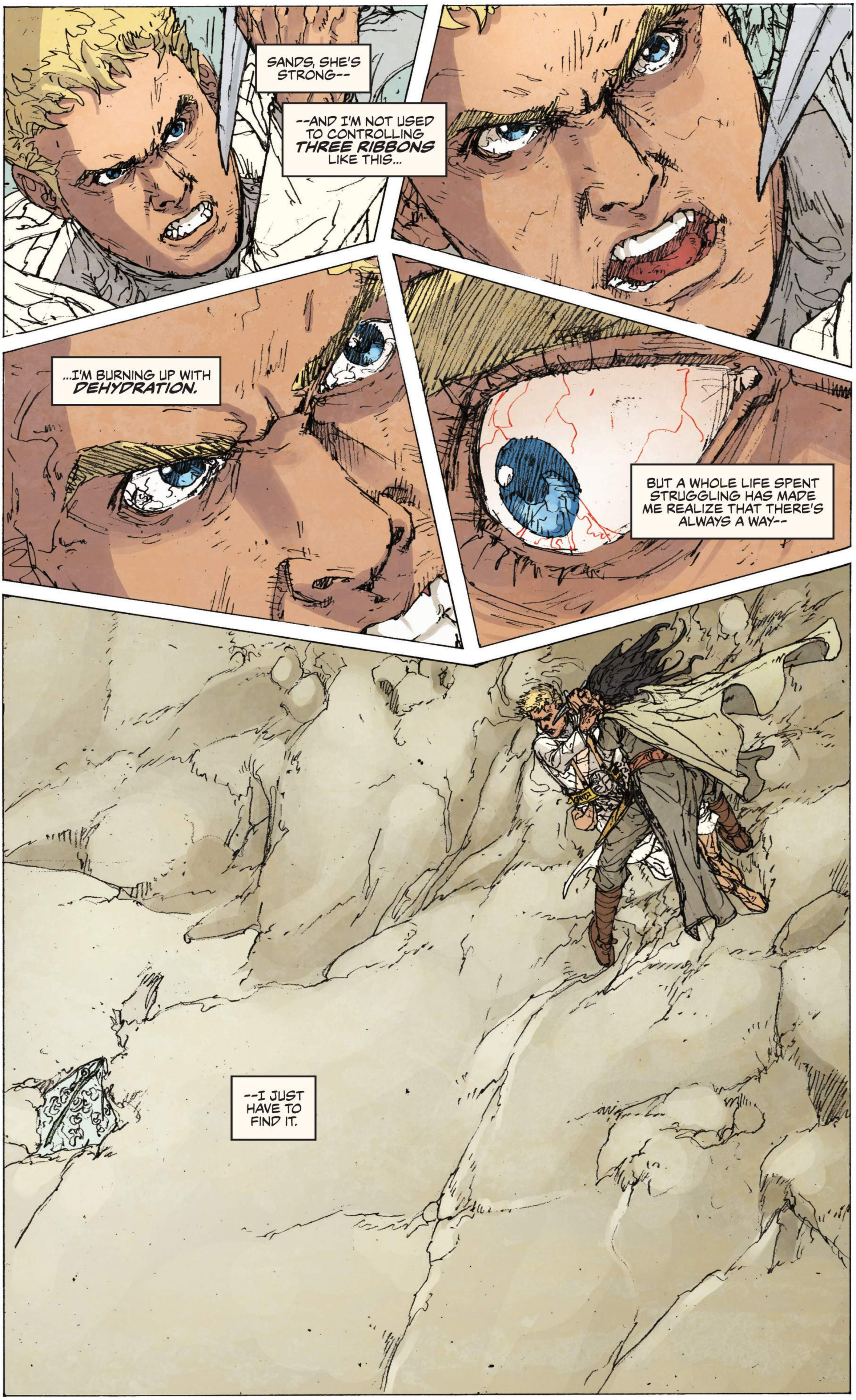
WHO--?
WHUFF!

RISING CHALLENGES

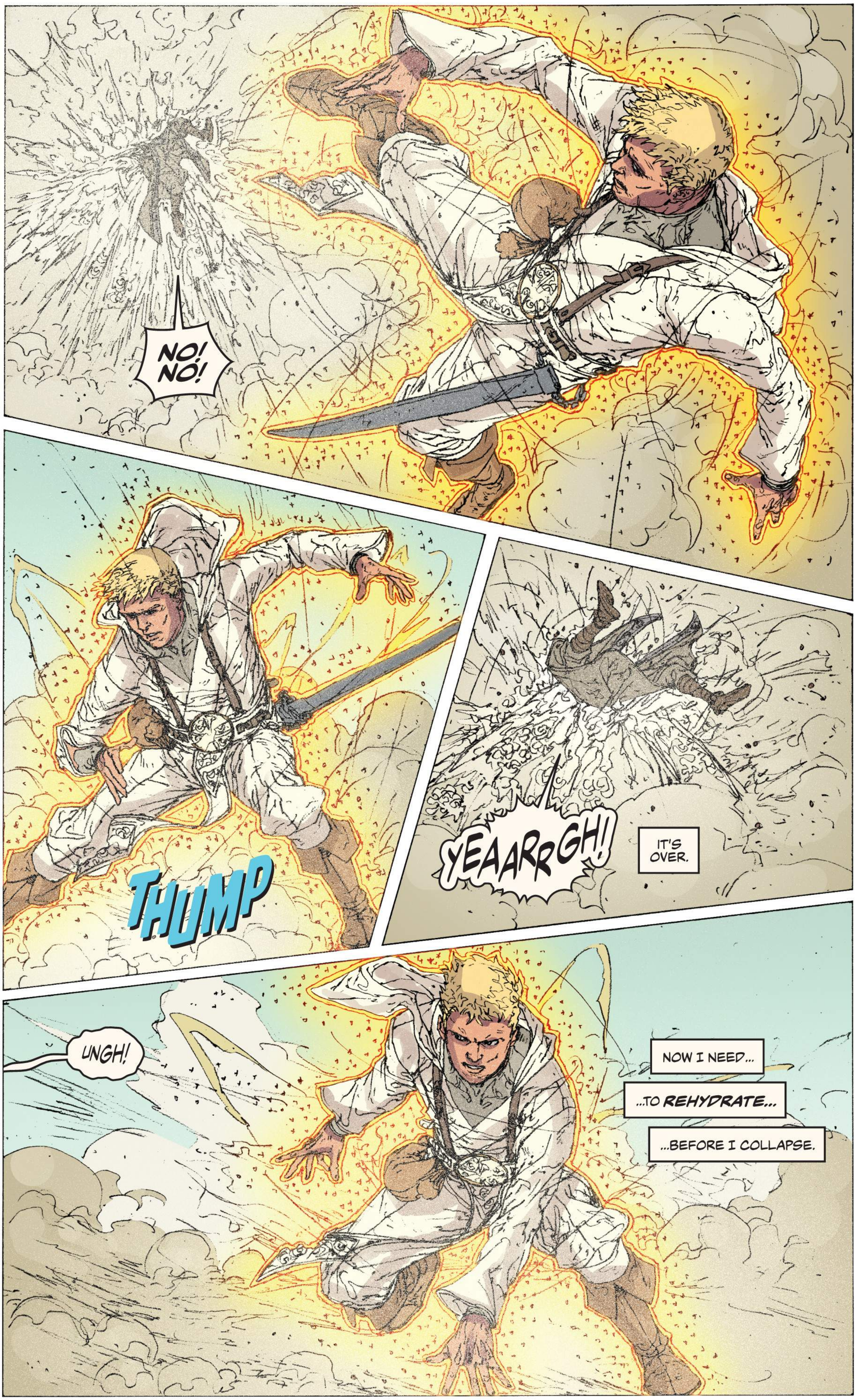
SHELLA! MY SWORD'S GONE!
NNNNGGGG!
WHAM
WHAT WAS IT AIS SAID? THAT THOSE LOYAL TO THE A'KAR WOULD KEEP SENDING ASSASSINS UNTIL...


WHA--?!
INCREDIBLE! SHE'S GREASED HERSELF IN TERKEN OIL-- SUFFICIENT TO NEGATE MY SAND.

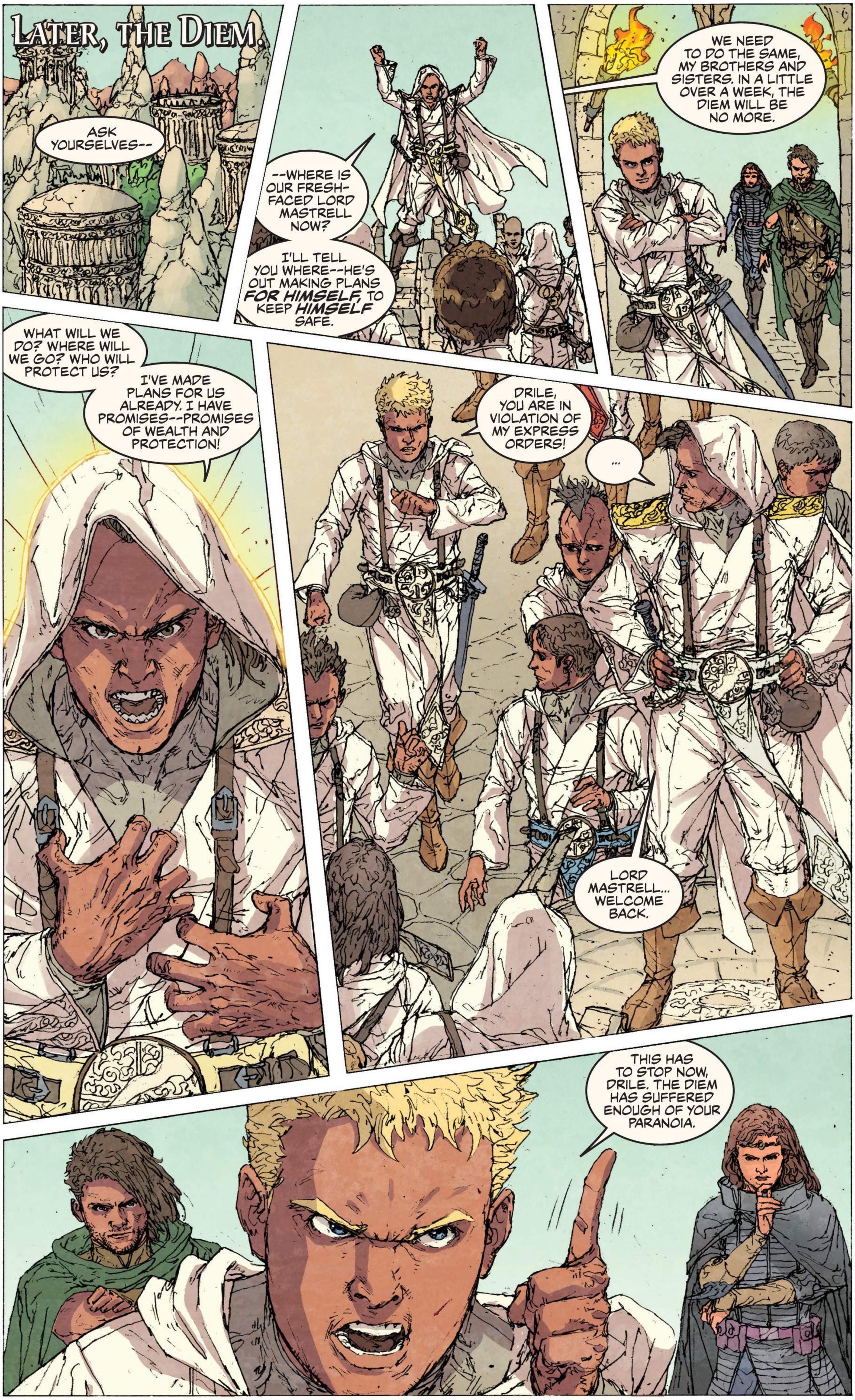

THIS WOMAN KNOWS HOW TO FIGHT SAND MASTERS!


SANDS, SHE'S STRONG--
--AND I'M NOT USED TO CONTROLLING THREE RIBBONS LIKE THIS...
...I'M BURNING UP WITH DEHYDRATION.
BUT A WHOLE LIFE SPENT STRUGGLING HAS MADE ME REALIZE THAT THERE'S ALWAYS A WAY--
--I JUST HAVE TO FIND IT.

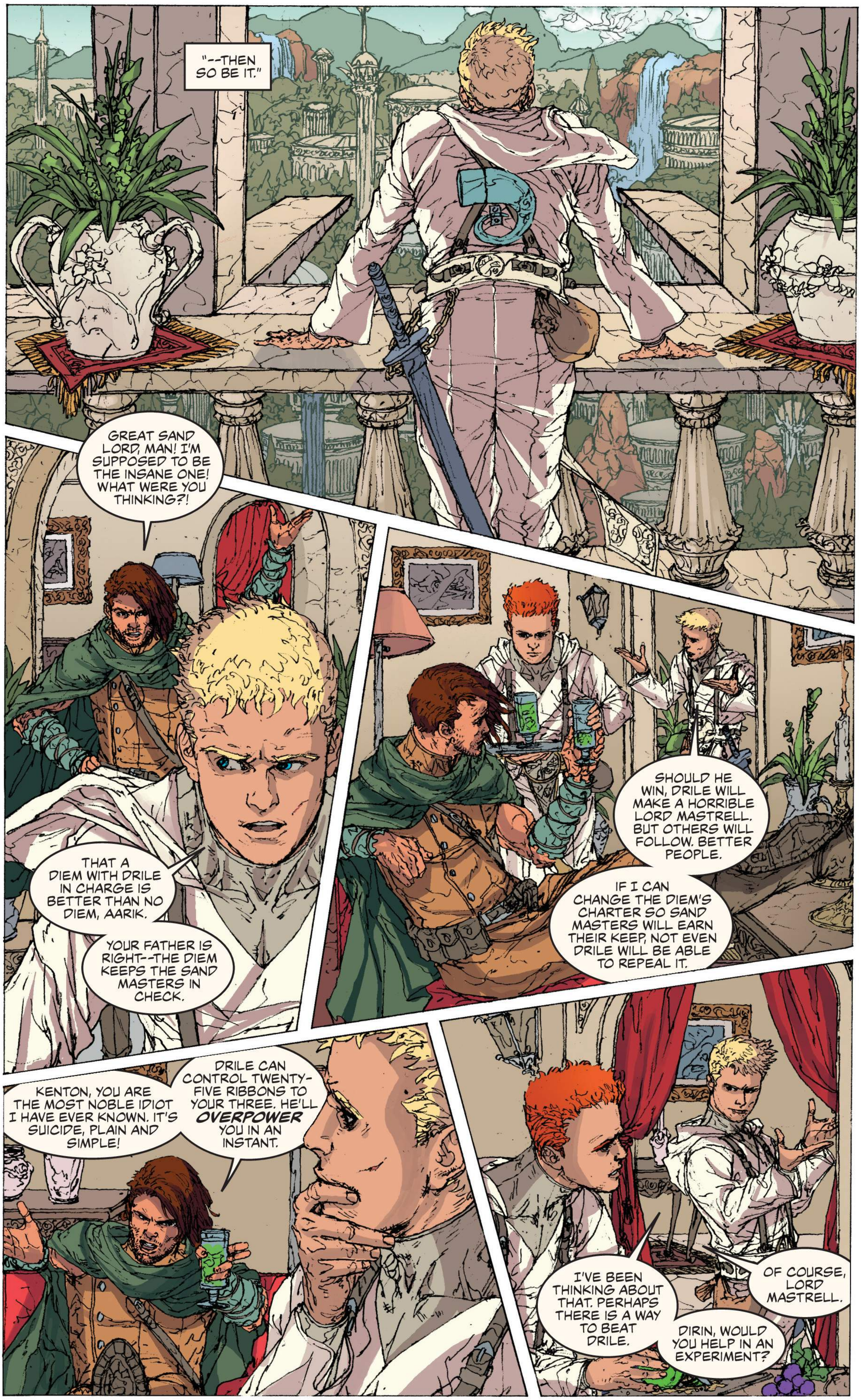
YOU'RE FINISHED, RY'KENSHA!
LORD RAAGENT SAID THE DELRAIKEN ARE HARMLESS--
--UNTIL YOU STEP ON ONE.
NO!


NO! NO!
THUMP
YEAARRGH!
IT'S OVER.
UNGH!
NOW I NEED...
...TO REHYDRATE...
...BEFORE I COLLAPSE.

LATER.
HOW DID THAT ASSASSIN FIND YOU OUT HERE, KENTON?
I FIGURE THEY MUST HAVE SOMEBODY WATCHING THE DIEM.
AND WHERE WERE YOU, AIS? I THOUGHT YOU WERE MY FRIEND'S BODYGUARD!
IF IT WAS THE SAND LORD'S WILL, I WOULD HAVE BEEN THERE.
I...JUST CANNOT ARGUE WITH THAT LOGIC. IT'S...MIND-BLOWING.
BUT TO TRACK SOMEONE ACROSS THE KERLA LIKE THAT...!
YOUR ENEMIES ARE NOTHING IF NOT AMBITIOUS.
THERE IS ONE THING HOWEVER-- IT LOOKS LIKE AIS WAS RIGHT ABOUT THE TIMING.
THE ASSASSIN WAITED UNTIL TWELFTH HOUR PASSED, OFFICIALLY PUTTING US INTO THE NEXT DAY BEFORE SHE ATTACKED.
BUT HOW'S YOUR FATHER?
STILL ANGRY WITH ME, BUT HE PROBABLY ALWAYS WILL BE.
HE STILL WON'T ACCEPT THE IDEA THAT I'M NOT GOING TO BECOME LORD GENERAL AFTER HIM--
--WOULD YOU BELIEVE THAT HE EVEN TRIED TO GIVE ME A SWORD?!
HE PROBABLY NOTICED YOU DON'T CARRY ONE THESE DAYS.

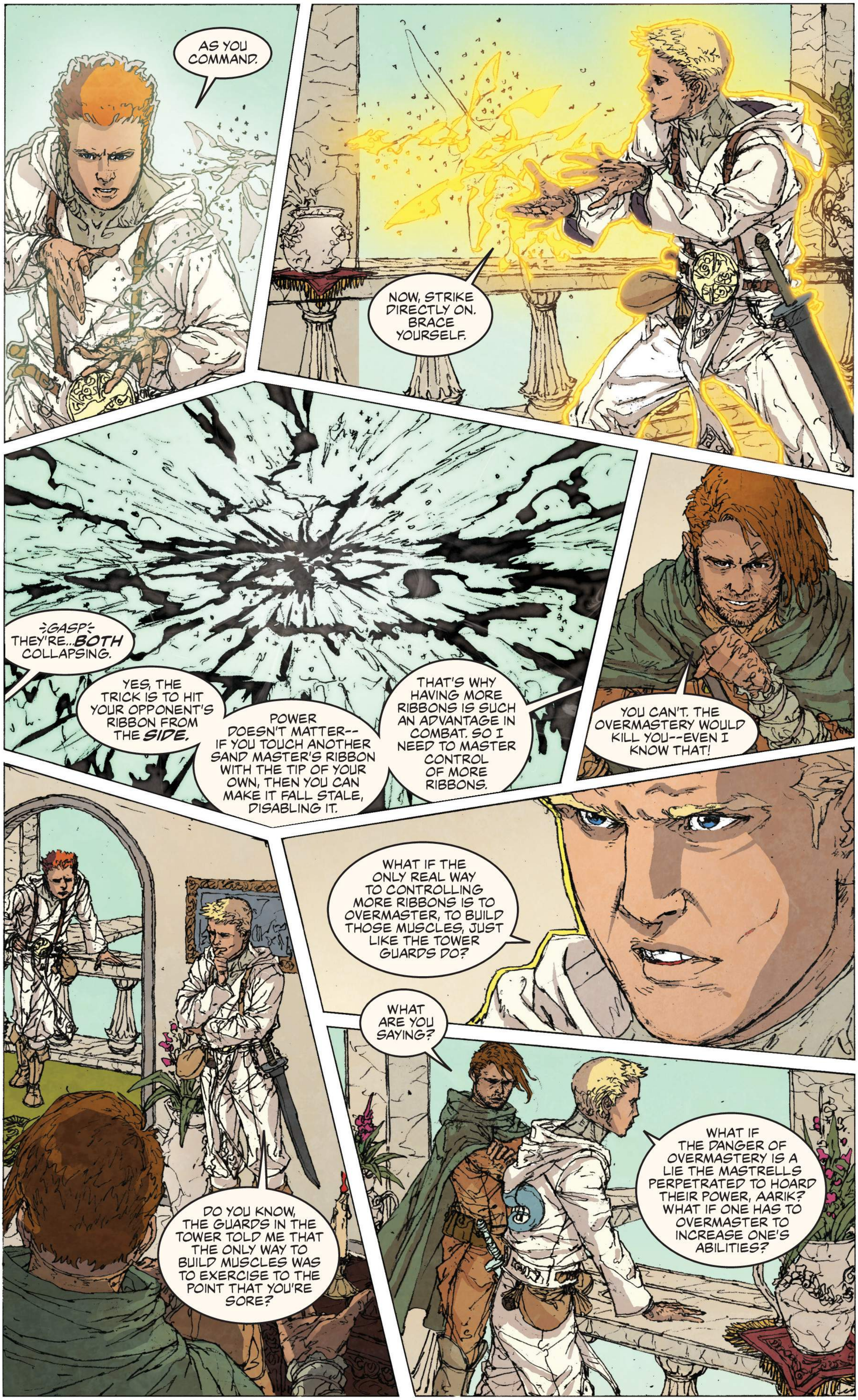

LATER, THE DIEM.
ASK YOURSELVES--
--WHERE IS OUR FRESH-FACED LORD MASTRELL NOW?
I'LL TELL YOU WHERE--HE'S OUT MAKING PLANS FOR HIMSELF, TO KEEP HIMSELF SAFE.
WE NEED TO DO THE SAME, MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS. IN A LITTLE OVER A WEEK, THE DIEM WILL BE NO MORE.
WHAT WILL WE DO? WHERE WILL WE GO? WHO WILL PROTECT US?
I'VE MADE PLANS FOR US ALREADY. I HAVE PROMISES--PROMISES OF WEALTH AND PROTECTION!
DRILE, YOU ARE IN VIOLATION OF MY EXPRESS ORDERS!
...
LORD MASTRELL... WELCOME BACK.
THIS HAS TO STOP NOW, DRILE. THE DIEM HAS SUFFERED ENOUGH OF YOUR PARANOIA.

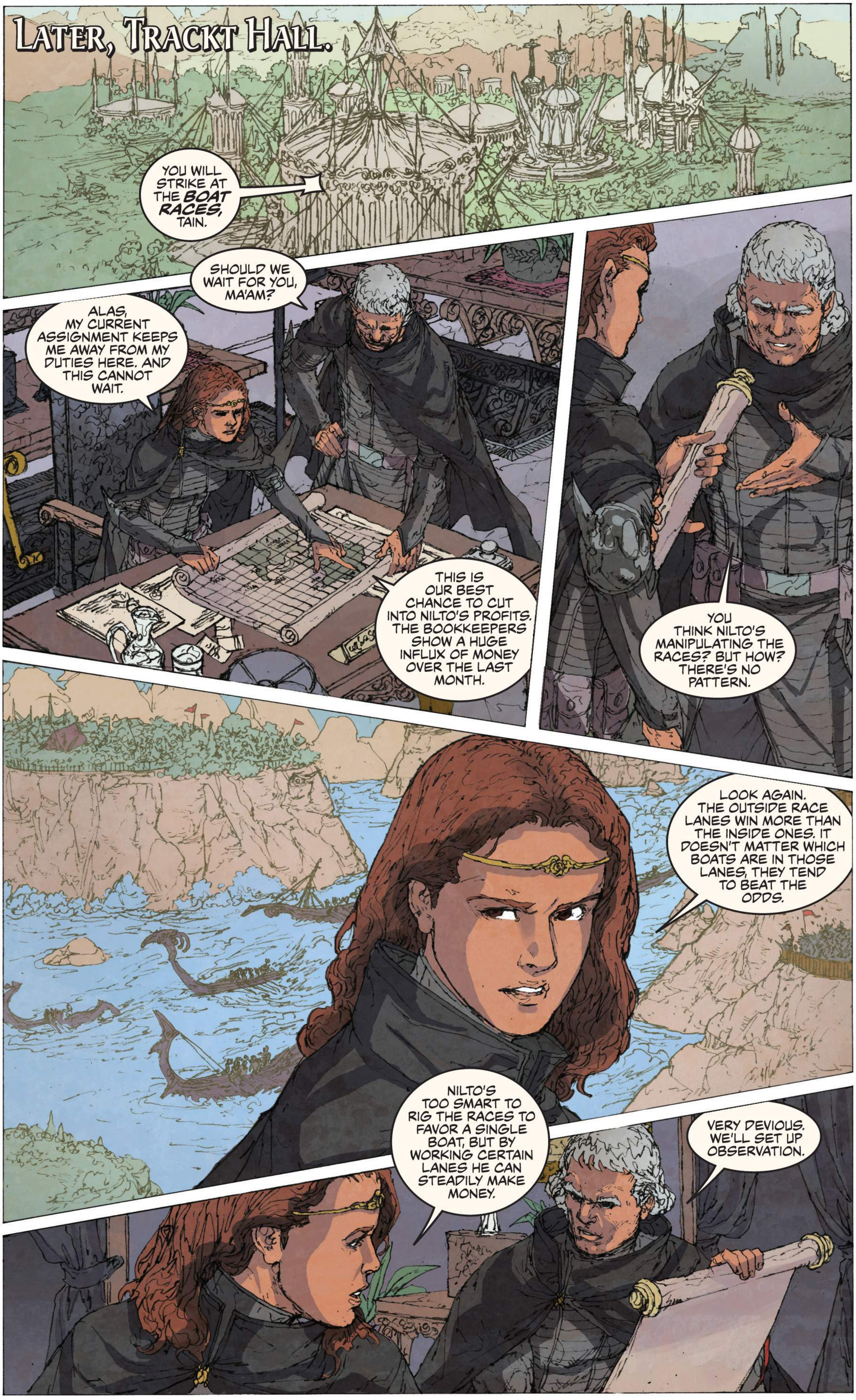
OH? AND, HOW DOES "THE DIEM" INTEND TO STOP IT?
YOU AND I OBVIOUSLY HAVE A PROBLEM.
OBVIOUSLY.
THEN WE NEED TO SETTLE IT.
I DON'T SEE HOW.
THERE WAS A WAY, ONCE. MANY YEARS AGO, OUR CONFERENCE AREA WAS CALLED BY ANOTHER NAME...
THUS--DRILE OF THE DIEM, I CHALLENGE YOU TO COMBAT, ONE-ON-ONE, IN THE DUELING PIT.
YOU ARE A FOOL.
I'LL CUT YOU APART IN SECONDS. WE BOTH KNOW IT.
THEN I WON'T DESERVE TO BE LORD MASTRELL, WILL I?
WE'LL DUEL IN TEN DAYS, RIGHT AFTER THE COUNCIL MAKES ITS DECISION.
BECAUSE I AM GOING TO SAVE THE DIEM--AND IF YOU KILL ME AFTERWARDS, THEN THE DIEM CAN BE YOURS.
I ACCEPT, BUT ON ONE CONDITION--THAT WE FIGHT BEFORE THE COUNCIL MAKES ITS DECISION--
--THAT WAY YOU'LL NEVER GET INSTATED AS THE REAL LORD MASTRELL.
IF THAT'S THE ONLY WAY TO SILENCE YOUR LIES--

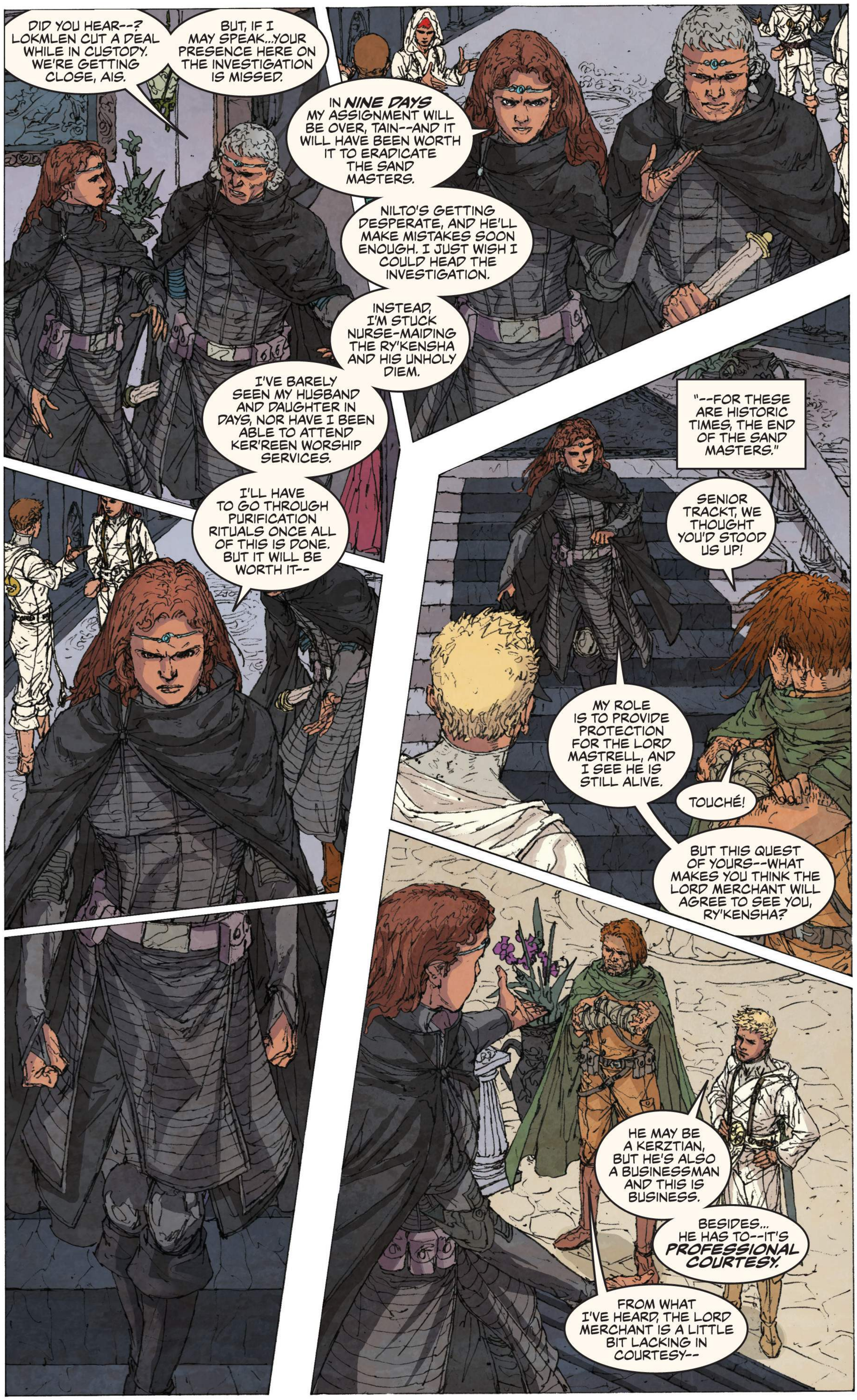

"--THEN SO BE IT."
GREAT SAND LORD, MAN! I'M SUPPOSED TO BE THE INSANE ONE! WHAT WERE YOU THINKING?!
THAT A DIEM WITH DRILE IN CHARGE IS BETTER THAN NO DIEM, AARIK.
YOUR FATHER IS RIGHT--THE DIEM KEEPS THE SAND MASTERS IN CHECK.
SHOULD HE WIN, DRILE WILL MAKE A HORRIBLE LORD MASTRELL. BUT OTHERS WILL FOLLOW. BETTER PEOPLE.
IF I CAN CHANGE THE DIEM'S CHARTER SO SAND MASTERS WILL EARN THEIR KEEP, NOT EVEN DRILE WILL BE ABLE TO REPEAL IT.
KENTON, YOU ARE THE MOST NOBLE IDIOT I HAVE EVER KNOWN. IT'S SUICIDE, PLAIN AND SIMPLE!
DRILE CAN CONTROL TWENTY-FIVE RIBBONS TO YOUR THREE. HE'LL OVERPOWER YOU IN AN INSTANT.
I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT THAT. PERHAPS THERE IS A WAY TO BEAT DRILE.
OF COURSE, LORD MASTRELL.
DIRIN, WOULD YOU HELP IN AN EXPERIMENT?

I NEED YOU TO CREATE A SAND RIBBON FOR ME.
THAT'S IT. LET IT FLOW FROM YOU.
GOOD. YOU'RE DOING WELL.
NOW HOLD IT STEADY.
STEADY.
UNGH!
I'M SORRY, LORD MASTRELL. I COULDN'T MAINTAIN IT ONCE YOUR RIBBON TOUCHED.
IT'S ALL RIGHT. NOW, YOU TRY ME.
LORD MASTRELL, I DON'T THINK I CAN...
JUST TRY.

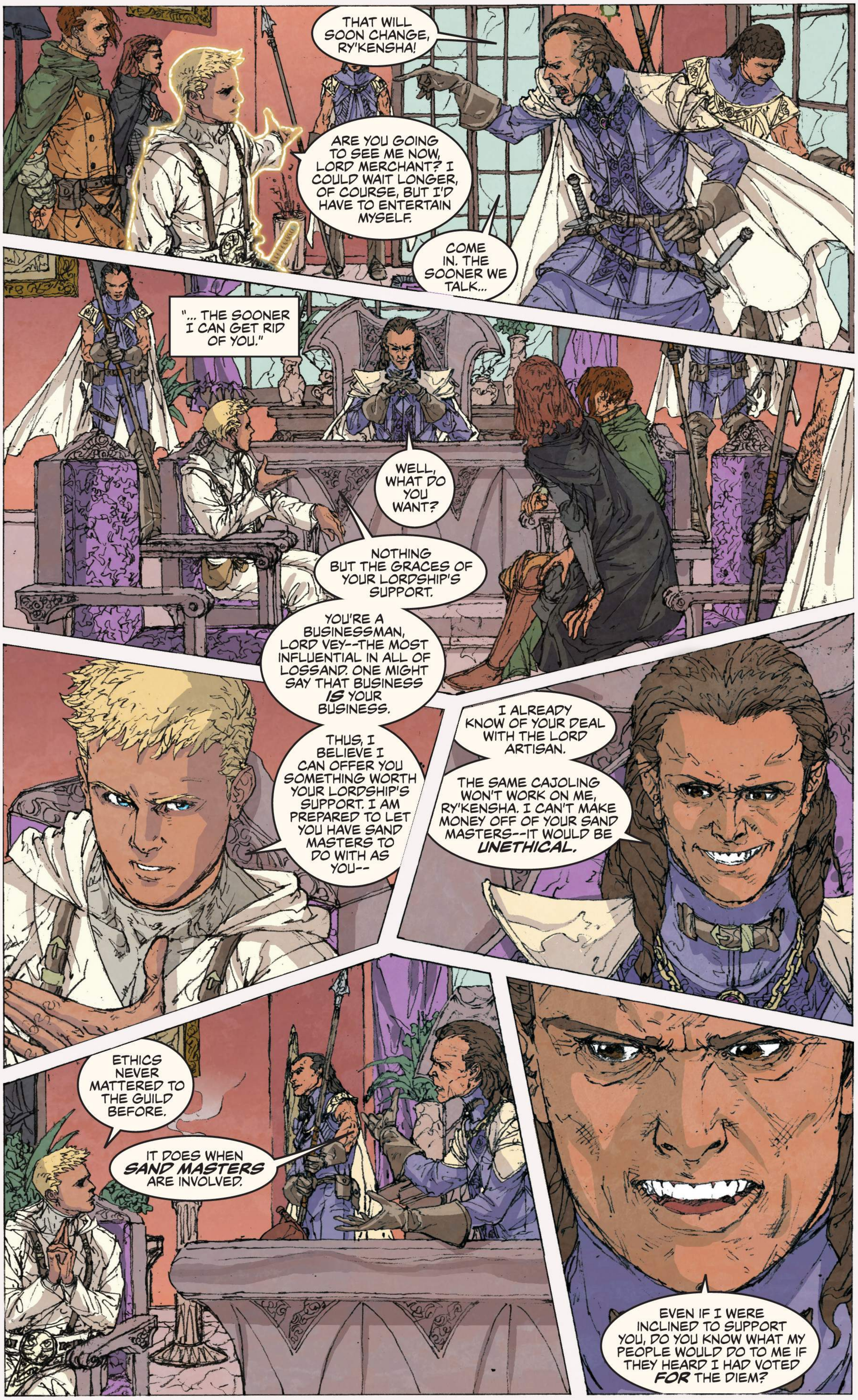
AS YOU ASK.
I WANT YOU TO BRING YOUR RIBBON TOWARDS MINE, DIRIN...
...AND STRIKE.
GOOD.
BUT YOUR RIBBON COLLAPSED.
AGAIN, DIRIN.


AS YOU COMMAND.
NOW, STRIKE DIRECTLY ON. BRACE YOURSELF.
-GASP- THEY'RE...BOTH COLLAPSING.
YES, THE TRICK IS TO HIT YOUR OPPONENT'S RIBBON FROM THE SIDE.
POWER DOESN'T MATTER-- IF YOU TOUCH ANOTHER SAND MASTER'S RIBBON WITH THE TIP OF YOUR OWN, THEN YOU CAN MAKE IT FALL STALE, DISABLING IT.
THAT'S WHY HAVING MORE RIBBONS IS SUCH AN ADVANTAGE IN COMBAT. SO I NEED TO MASTER CONTROL OF MORE RIBBONS.
YOU CAN'T. THE OVERMASTERY WOULD KILL YOU--EVEN I KNOW THAT!
WHAT IF THE ONLY REAL WAY TO CONTROLLING MORE RIBBONS IS TO OVERMASTER, TO BUILD THOSE MUSCLES, JUST LIKE THE TOWER GUARDS DO?
WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?
DO YOU KNOW, THE GUARDS IN THE TOWER TOLD ME THAT THE ONLY WAY TO BUILD MUSCLES WAS TO EXERCISE TO THE POINT THAT YOU'RE SORE?
WHAT IF THE DANGER OF OVERMASTERY IS A LIE THE MASTRELLS PERPETRATED TO HOARD THEIR POWER, AARIK? WHAT IF ONE HAS TO OVERMASTER TO INCREASE ONE'S ABILITIES?


LATER, TRACKT HALL.
YOU WILL STRIKE AT THE BOAT RACES, TAIN.
SHOULD WE WAIT FOR YOU, MA'AM?
ALAS, MY CURRENT ASSIGNMENT KEEPS ME AWAY FROM MY DUTIES HERE. AND THIS CANNOT WAIT.
THIS IS OUR BEST CHANCE TO CUT INTO NILTO'S PROFITS. THE BOOKKEEPERS SHOW A HUGE INFLUX OF MONEY OVER THE LAST MONTH.
YOU THINK NILTO'S MANIPULATING THE RACES? BUT HOW? THERE'S NO PATTERN.
LOOK AGAIN. THE OUTSIDE RACE LANES WIN MORE THAN THE INSIDE ONES. IT DOESN'T MATTER WHICH BOATS ARE IN THOSE LANES, THEY TEND TO BEAT THE ODDS.
NILTO'S TOO SMART TO RIG THE RACES TO FAVOR A SINGLE BOAT, BUT BY WORKING CERTAIN LANES HE CAN STEADILY MAKE MONEY.
VERY DEVIOUS. WE'LL SET UP OBSERVATION.


DID YOU HEAR--? LOKMLEN CUT A DEAL WHILE IN CUSTODY. WE'RE GETTING CLOSE, AIS.
BUT, IF I MAY SPEAK...YOUR PRESENCE HERE ON THE INVESTIGATION IS MISSED.
IN NINE DAYS MY ASSIGNMENT WILL BE OVER, TAIN--AND IT WILL HAVE BEEN WORTH IT TO ERADICATE THE SAND MASTERS.
NILTO'S GETTING DESPERATE, AND HE'LL MAKE MISTAKES SOON ENOUGH. I JUST WISH I COULD HEAD THE INVESTIGATION.
INSTEAD, I'M STUCK NURSE-MAIDING THE RY'KENSHA AND HIS UNHOLY DIEM.
I'VE BARELY SEEN MY HUSBAND AND DAUGHTER IN DAYS, NOR HAVE I BEEN ABLE TO ATTEND KER'REEN WORSHIP SERVICES.
I'LL HAVE TO GO THROUGH PURIFICATION RITUALS ONCE ALL OF THIS IS DONE. BUT IT WILL BE WORTH IT--
"--FOR THESE ARE HISTORIC TIMES, THE END OF THE SAND MASTERS."
SENIOR TRACKT, WE THOUGHT YOU'D STOOD US UP!
MY ROLE IS TO PROVIDE PROTECTION FOR THE LORD MASTRELL, AND I SEE HE IS STILL ALIVE.
TOUCHÉ!
BUT THIS QUEST OF YOURS--WHAT MAKES YOU THINK THE LORD MERCHANT WILL AGREE TO SEE YOU, RY'KENSHA?
HE MAY BE A KERZTIAN, BUT HE'S ALSO A BUSINESSMAN AND THIS IS BUSINESS.
BESIDES... HE HAS TO--IT'S PROFESSIONAL COURTESY.
FROM WHAT I'VE HEARD, THE LORD MERCHANT IS A LITTLE BIT LACKING IN COURTESY--

"--PROFESSIONAL OR OTHERWISE."
:SIGH:
THEY SAID IT WOULD BE A FEW MINUTES.
THAT WAS TWO HOURS AGO. OR DIDN'T YOU CATCH MY SIGH?
MAYBE I CAN FIND A WAY TO PASS THE TIME.
HEH. YOU WOULDN'T!
ARE YOU DOUBTING MY THRESHOLD FOR BOREDOM, OLD FRIEND?
HAH-HAH-HAH, NOT ME!
EEK!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!
HOW DARE YOU PRACTICE YOUR UNHOLY ART IN MY OFFICES!
THERE IS NO LAW AGAINST SAND MASTERY, LORD MERCHANT.

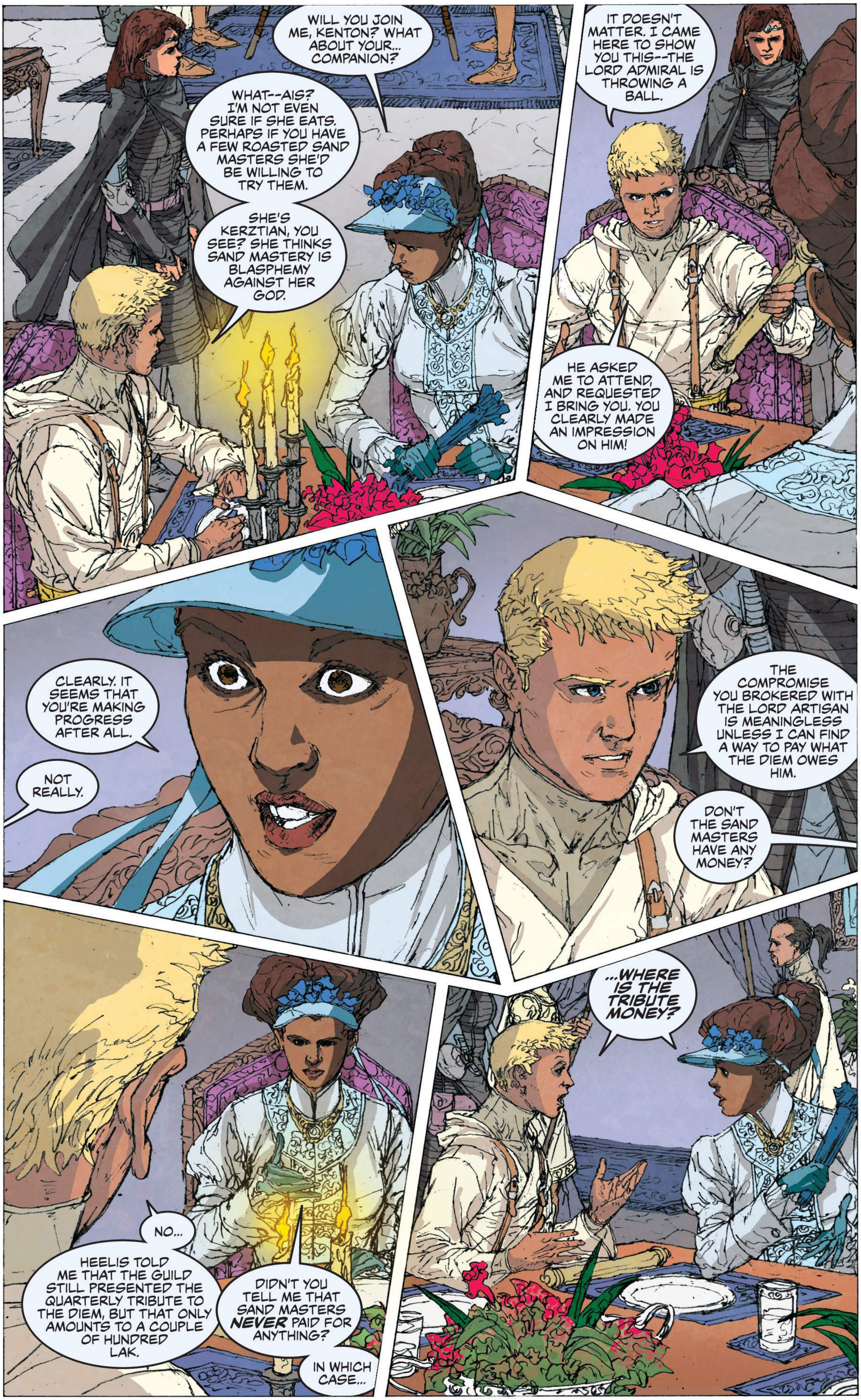

THAT WILL SOON CHANGE, RY'KENSHA!
ARE YOU GOING TO SEE ME NOW, LORD MERCHANT? I COULD WAIT LONGER, OF COURSE, BUT I'D HAVE TO ENTERTAIN MYSELF.
COME IN. THE SOONER WE TALK...
"... THE SOONER I CAN GET RID OF YOU."
WELL, WHAT DO YOU WANT?
NOTHING BUT THE GRACES OF YOUR LORDSHIP'S SUPPORT.
YOU'RE A BUSINESSMAN, LORD VEY--THE MOST INFLUENTIAL IN ALL OF LOSSAND. ONE MIGHT SAY THAT BUSINESS IS YOUR BUSINESS.
THUS, I BELIEVE I CAN OFFER YOU SOMETHING WORTH YOUR LORDSHIP'S SUPPORT. I AM PREPARED TO LET YOU HAVE SAND MASTERS TO DO WITH AS YOU--
I ALREADY KNOW OF YOUR DEAL WITH THE LORD ARTISAN.
THE SAME CAJOLING WON'T WORK ON ME, RY'KENSHA. I CAN'T MAKE MONEY OFF OF YOUR SAND MASTERS--IT WOULD BE UNETHICAL.
ETHICS NEVER MATTERED TO THE GUILD BEFORE.
IT DOES WHEN SAND MASTERS ARE INVOLVED.
EVEN IF I WERE INCLINED TO SUPPORT YOU, DO YOU KNOW WHAT MY PEOPLE WOULD DO TO ME IF THEY HEARD I HAD VOTED FOR THE DIEM?

TELL ME, TRACKT-- HAVE YOU EVER REGRETTED YOUR BETRAYAL OF YOUR PEOPLE?
NOW YOU TRAVEL WITH A SAND MASTER. AS IF YOUR SOUL WEREN'T ALREADY FORFEIT, YOU HAVE TO MAKE ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN TO EARN THE SAND LORD'S WRATH.
YOU ARE A DISGRACE! YOUR SOUL WILL WANDER THE SANDS, EXILED FROM THE SAND LORD.
YOU ARE NO BETTER THAN THEY. IN FACT, YOU ARE WORSE--YOU ARE ONE OF US, BUT A TRAITOR.
THAT IS ENOUGH, VEY!
KENTON...
WHAT'S THIS? YOU THREATEN ME IN MY OWN CHAMBERS?
YOU INSULT THE WOMAN I BRING AS A GUEST? AN HONORED AND WIDELY-RESPECTED MEMBER OF THE HALL?
I HATE YOU.
GOOD. YOU'RE TRUE TO YOUR RELIGION. NOW, BE TRUE TO YOUR PROFESSION--
--WHAT WILL IT COST ME TO BUY YOUR VOTE?

I WOULD SELL MY VERY SOUL FIRST!
N-NOW-- G-G-GET OUT!
So...
I'LL BET VEY'S STILL SHAKING WITH FEAR.
YOU'VE GROWN EVIL SINCE I LAST KNEW YOU, AARIK.
I DOUBT THERE IS A LOSSANDIN ON DAYSIDE WHO WOULDN'T FIND THE PROSPECT OF VEY'S DISCOMFORT AMUSING. HALF OF THEM PROBABLY OWE HIM MONEY.
NEVER DO THAT AGAIN.
DO WHAT?
DEFEND ME.
HMF! IF IT'S ANY CONSOLATION, SENIOR, I DOUBT THAT CONVERSATION COULD HAVE ENDED ANY OTHER WAY.
REGARDLESS, NO MATTER WHAT YOU THINK, NO MATTER WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE, I DON'T WANT YOUR HELP.
I CAN'T WIN WITH YOU, CAN I?
I THOUGHT THAT WAS OBVIOUS.
BRAVE HEART, KENTON. THINGS WILL LOOK BRIGHTER ONCE WE'RE...

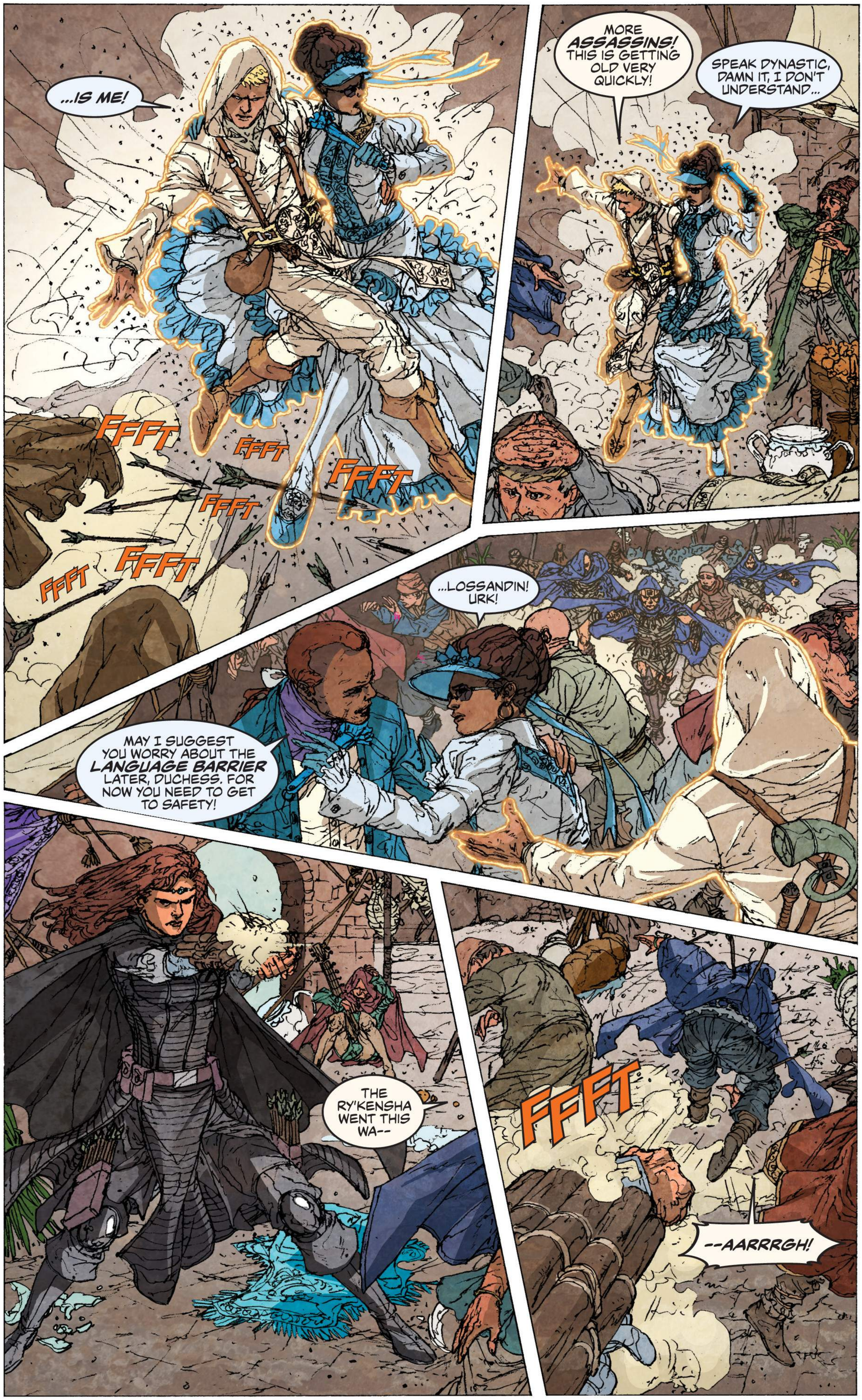
"... BACK AT THE DIEM."
LORD MASTRELL, THIS MESSENGER ARRIVED AT EIGHTH HOUR FOR YOU.
WHAT IS YOUR MESSAGE, LAD? LET ME SEE.
IT'S AN INVITATION FROM THE LORD ADMIRAL. HE'S THROWING A BALL... IN MY HONOR!
FROM DELIUS? I'D BETTER BE INVITED!
IT...DOESN'T MENTION YOU. IT SAYS I SHOULD BRING MY "DARKSIDE BEAUTY" IF YOU CAN BELIEVE THAT!
WELL, SHE IS PRETTY.
NOT THE POINT.
TELL ME, LAD, DID YOU BRING ANOTHER MESSAGE? THIS WAS LEFT FOR ME EARLIER BUT ITS ORIGIN IS A MYSTERY.
IT WAS NOT ME, SIR.
WHERE DID THAT COME FROM?
IT WAS ON THE FLOOR OF MY ROOM. CAN YOU MAKE SENSE OF IT, SENIOR?
YES, IT IS A MESSAGE FOR ME.
HE MUST HAVE KNOWN IT WOULD GET TO ME SOMEHOW.
HE? WHO?
IT...RELATES TO ANOTHER INVESTIGATION. NOTHING TO CONCERN YOU, RY'KENSHA. BE ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS.
SCRUNCH

LATER, DARKSIDE QUARTER, KEZARE.
DUCHESS, YOU HAVE A VISITOR.
YOU!
HELLO, KHRISSALLA. HOW HAVE YOU BEEN?
I WAS ABOUT TO EAT.
DON'T LET ME STOP YOU.
YOU SEEM... TALLER. WHAT ODD SHOES!
THEY'RE CALLED HEELS. MOST WOMEN WEAR THEM ON DARKSIDE.
WHY?
I DON'T KNOW. TO LOOK TALLER.
BUT TELL ME--WHAT PROGRESS HAVE YOU MADE?
NOT MUCH. I ONLY HAVE EIGHT DAYS LEFT, AND ONLY ONE OF THE TAISHA HAS PROMISED TO VOTE FOR ME.
THE REST RANGE FROM UNDECIDED...TO DOWNRIGHT HOSTILE.
WHOA-- WHAT IS THAT FOR?
ATMOSPHERE. ON DARKSIDE MOST ROOMS HAVE A FIREPLACE BECAUSE WE NEED THE WARMTH.
BUT LIVING ON DAYSIDE, I DON'T IMAGINE YOU'VE EVER BEEN COLD IN YOUR LIFE.

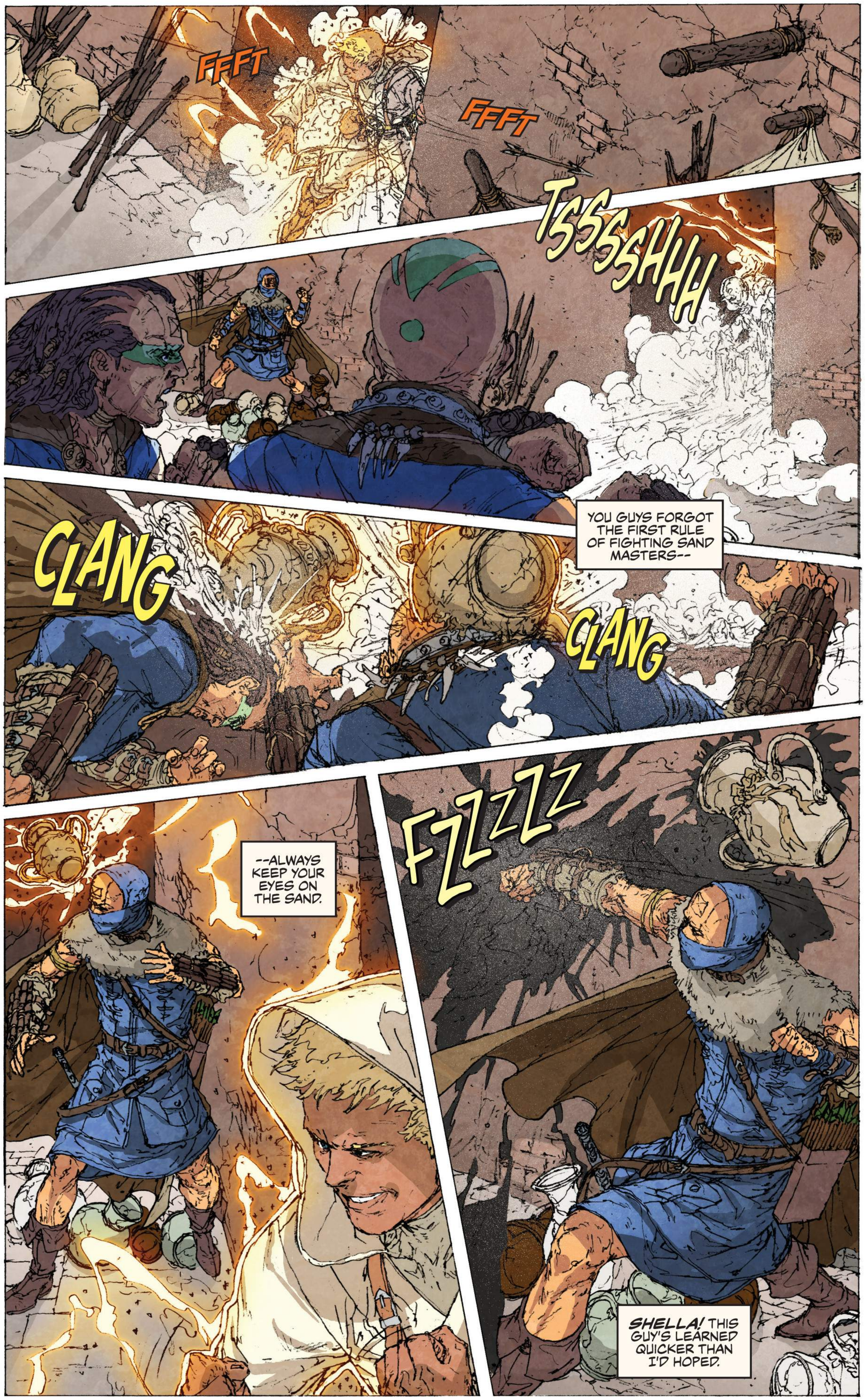

WILL YOU JOIN ME, KENTON? WHAT ABOUT YOUR... COMPANION?
WHAT--AIS? I'M NOT EVEN SURE IF SHE EATS. PERHAPS IF YOU HAVE A FEW ROASTED SAND MASTERS SHE'D BE WILLING TO TRY THEM.
SHE'S KERZTIAN, YOU SEE? SHE THINKS SAND MASTERY IS BLASPHEMY AGAINST HER GOD.
IT DOESN'T MATTER. I CAME HERE TO SHOW YOU THIS--THE LORD ADMIRAL IS THROWING A BALL.
HE ASKED ME TO ATTEND, AND REQUESTED I BRING YOU. YOU CLEARLY MADE AN IMPRESSION ON HIM!
CLEARLY. IT SEEMS THAT YOU'RE MAKING PROGRESS AFTER ALL.
NOT REALLY.
THE COMPROMISE YOU BROKERED WITH THE LORD ARTISAN IS MEANINGLESS UNLESS I CAN FIND A WAY TO PAY WHAT THE DIEM OWES HIM.
DON'T THE SAND MASTERS HAVE ANY MONEY?
NO...
HEELIS TOLD ME THAT THE GUILD STILL PRESENTED THE QUARTERLY TRIBUTE TO THE DIEM, BUT THAT ONLY AMOUNTS TO A COUPLE OF HUNDRED LAK.
DIDN'T YOU TELL ME THAT SAND MASTERS NEVER PAID FOR ANYTHING?
IN WHICH CASE...
...WHERE IS THE TRIBUTE MONEY?

PARTY POLITICS

KENTON, WE'RE IN THE MIDDLE OF LUNCH! WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING?
IT'S WHAT YOU SAID--SINCE SAND MASTERS DON'T NEED MONEY, THEN THE TRIBUTE MONEY HAS TO BE SOMEWHERE.
I DON'T UNDERSTAND. HOW CAN YOU BE IN DEBT--
UNGH!
LOOK WHERE YOU'RE...
...GOING.
WHO ARE YOU TALKING TO, DUCHESS?
JUST SOME... NOBODY. IT'S FUNNY THOUGH, I DON'T THINK I'VE SEEN A KERZTIAN DOWN HERE BEFORE.
A KERZTIAN?!
THE ONLY REASON A KERZTIAN WOULD COME TO THE DARKSIDE QUARTER...


...IS ME!
FFFT
FFFT
FFFT
FFFT
FFFT
FFFT
MORE ASSASSINS! THIS IS GETTING OLD VERY QUICKLY!
SPEAK DYNASTIC, DAMN IT, I DON'T UNDERSTAND...
...LOSSANDIN! URK!
MAY I SUGGEST YOU WORRY ABOUT THE LANGUAGE BARRIER LATER, DUCHESS. FOR NOW YOU NEED TO GET TO SAFETY!
THE RY'KENSHA WENT THIS WA--
FFFT
--AARRRGH!

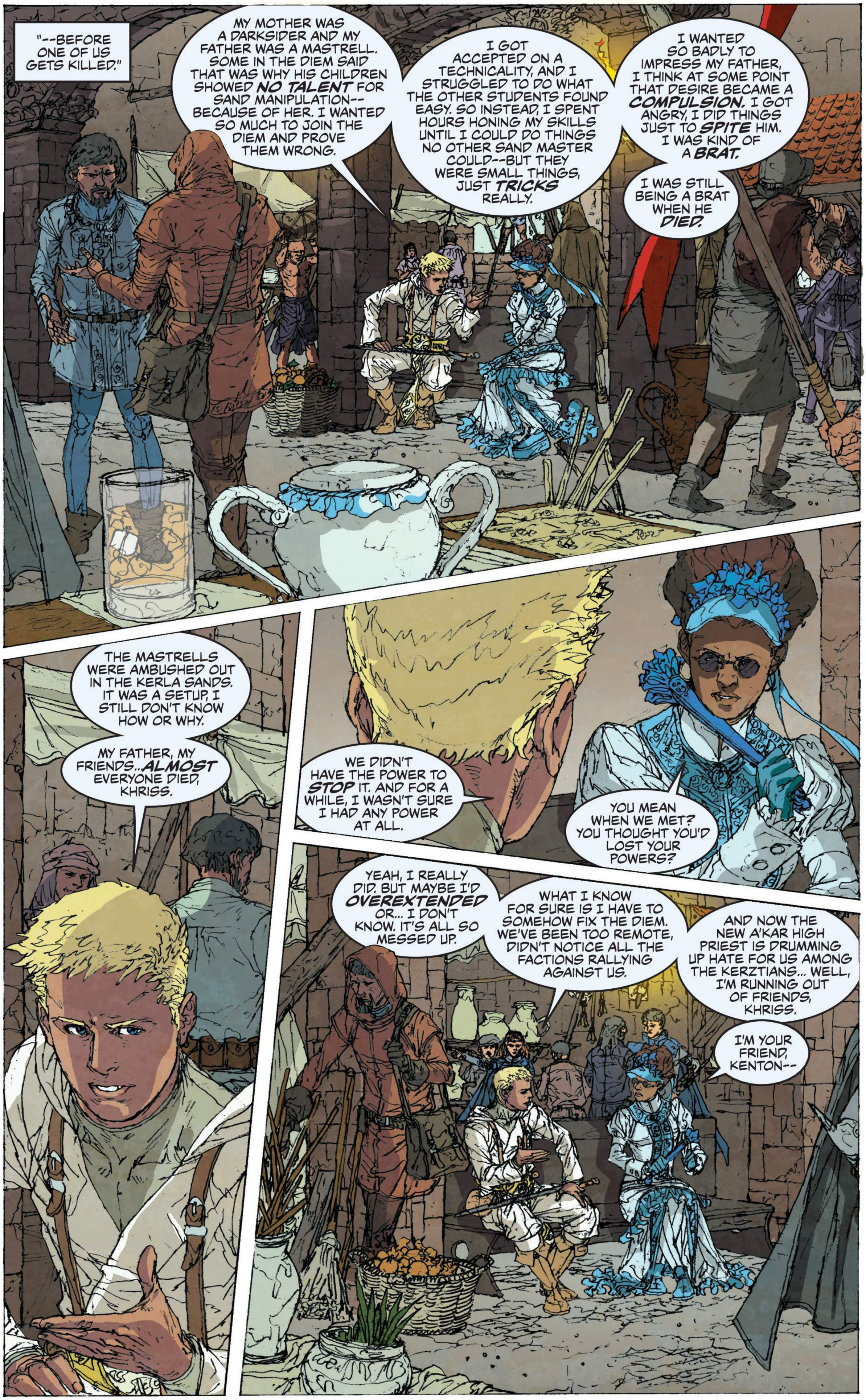
OKAY, SO AIS HAS A DEATH WISH. GOOD TO KNOW!
MISSED ME! BUT WHAT'S THIS?
BAON--
--LOOK OUT!
WHOMP
THIS IS BAD. BAON'S DOWN, AND I CAN'T BEGIN TO PROCESS WHAT AIS THINKS SHE'S DOING.
I HAVE TO DRAW THEIR FIRE.

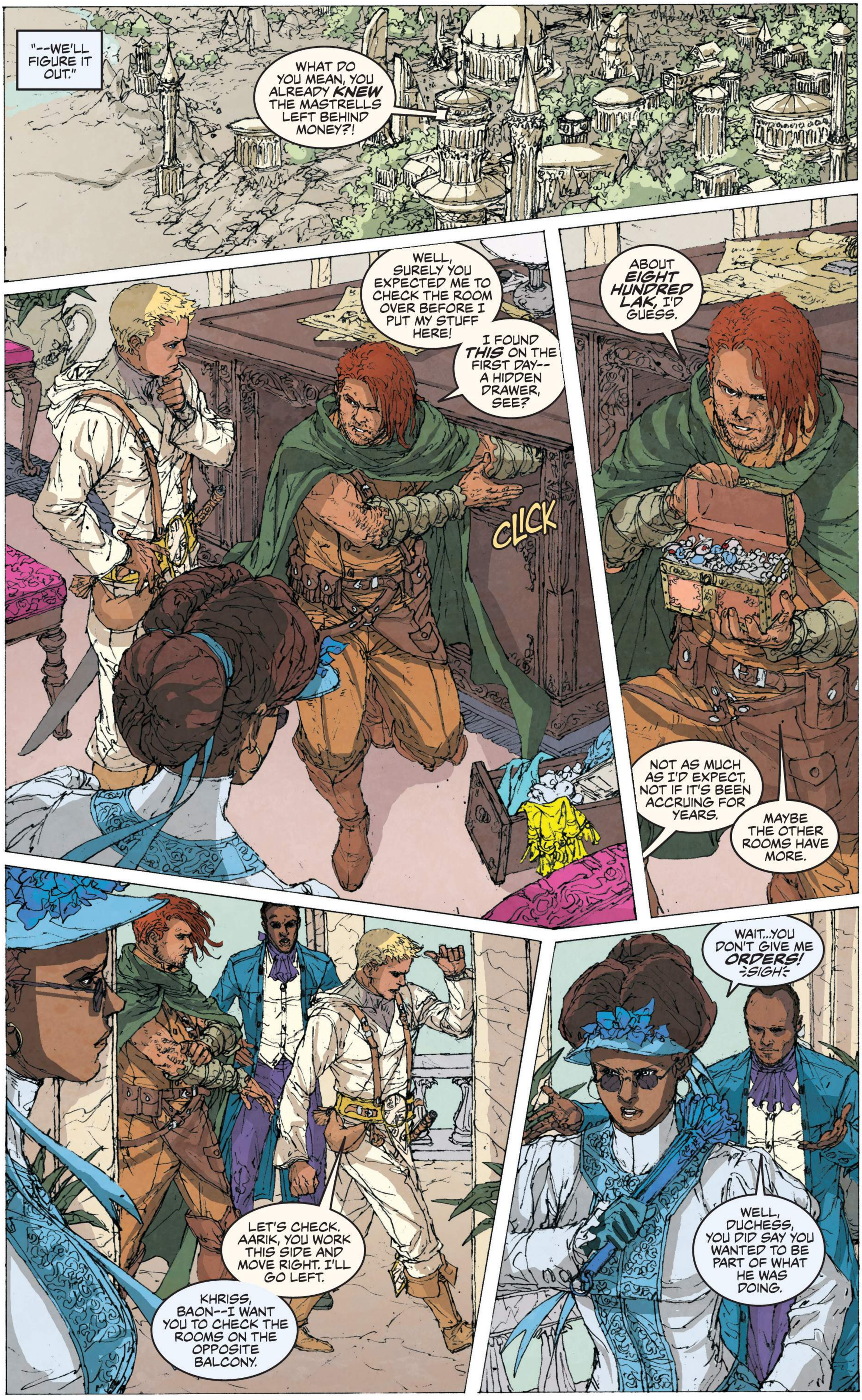

FFFT
FFFT
TSSSHHH
YOU GUYS FORGOT THE FIRST RULE OF FIGHTING SAND MASTERS--
CLANG
CLANG
--ALWAYS KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE SAND.
FZZZZZ
SHELLA! THIS GUY'S LEARNED QUICKER THAN I'D HOPED.

SO, WHAT NOW, RY'KENSHA?
I'M GOING TO DO SOMETHING YOU MAY FIND HERETICAL.
YOUR VERY EXISTENCE IS HERETICAL!
WE CAN DISCUSS THAT ONCE WE GET OUT OF THIS MESS, DEAL?
WHY BOTHER? WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU COULD POSSIBLY SAY TO ME THAT WOULD CHANGE WHAT IS RIGHT FROM WHAT IS WRONG?

GOOD POINT!
UNGH!
YEARGH!
KA-BOOM
KA-BOOM
FFFT
YEARGH!
YOU CAUGHT ME UNAWARES LAST TIME, ASSASSIN.
LET ME RETURN THE FAVOR.
SPLLLTT!

AND...
SEE? THIS SCARRING IS FRESH.
WHAT DOES IT MEAN?
I DON'T KNOW. THE KERZTIAN HIGH PRIEST HAS A CONTRACT ON MY LIFE BUT THIS IS THE FIRST LOSSANDIN WHO'S TRIED TO KILL ME.
I HEARD THAT THE A'KAR PROMISED TO LET LOSSANDINS JOIN KERZTIAN FAMILIES IF THEY DEDICATE THEMSELVES ONLY TO HIM.
I HAD ASSUMED THAT RUMOR TO BE FALSE UNTIL NOW.
SO, I'M NOT ONLY BEING HUNTED BY THE MOST AVID A'KAR IN RECENT HISTORY, BUT ALSO THE MOST OPEN-MINDED ONE?
THIS NEW A'KAR IS DIFFERENT. HE HAS STRANGE IDEAS AND HE'S DETERMINED TO WIN THE CHOOSING.
IF HE LETS LOSSANDINS JOIN, THEN HIS DAIKEEN WILL GROW FASTER, GIVING HIM MORE POWER. RIGHT NOW, YOU'RE THE ONLY THING STANDING IN HIS WAY.
HE TOLD THE KERZTIAN PEOPLE THAT HE HAD DESTROYED THE MASTRELLS, BUT THEN YOU CAME BACK. YOUR CONTINUED EXISTENCE MAKES HIM LOOK LIKE A FOOL AND A LIAR.
NO WONDER HE WANTS ME DEAD.
HOW COME EVERY TIME I GO SOMEWHERE WITH YOU, I ALMOST GET KILLED?
TRUST ME, KHRISSALLA--I WOULD AVOID THIS IF I COULD. I GUESS I OWE YOU A PROPER EXPLANATION--

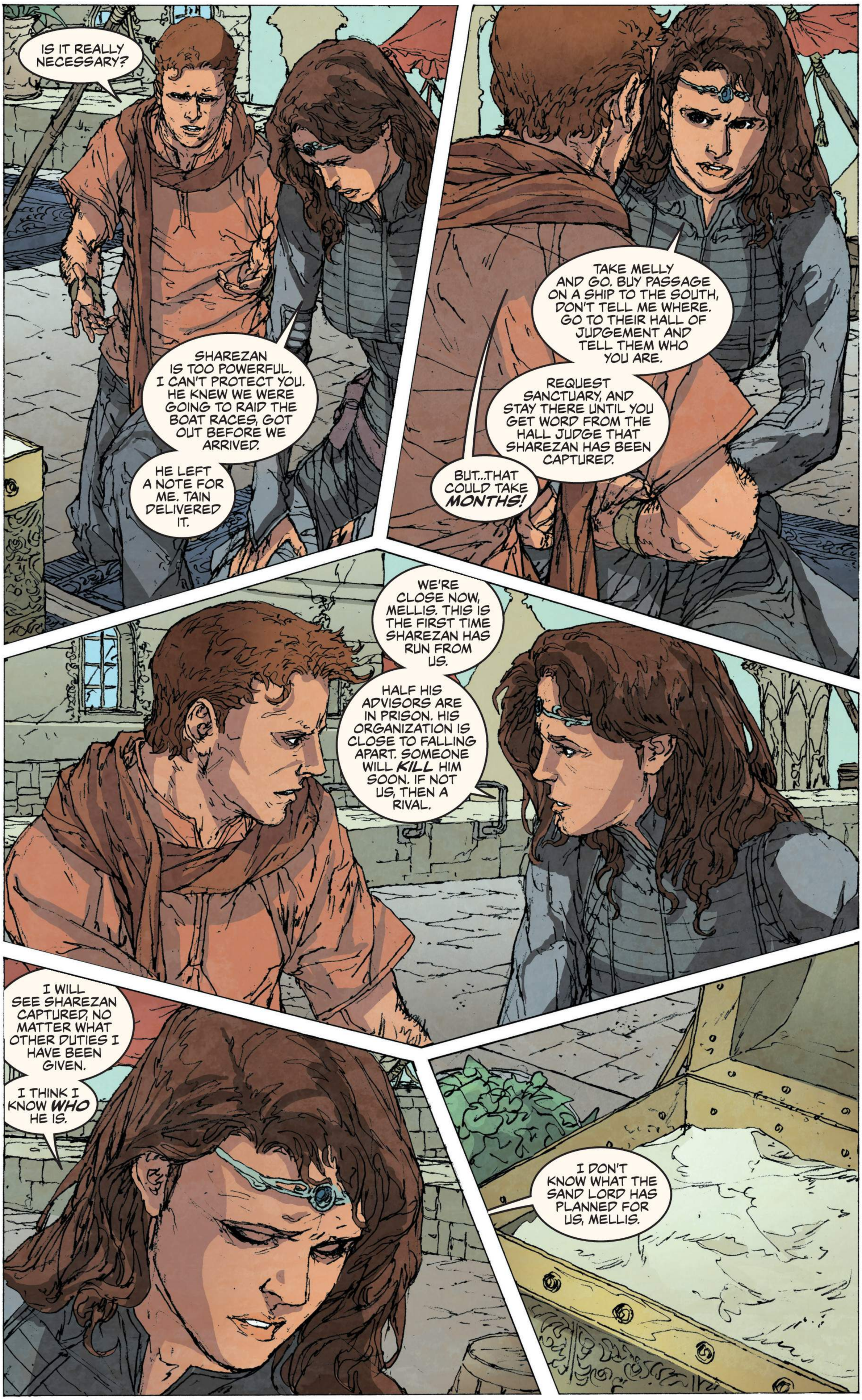

"--BEFORE ONE OF US GETS KILLED."
MY MOTHER WAS A DARKSIDER AND MY FATHER WAS A MASTRELL. SOME IN THE DIEM SAID THAT WAS WHY HIS CHILDREN SHOWED NO TALENT FOR SAND MANIPULATION--BECAUSE OF HER. I WANTED SO MUCH TO JOIN THE DIEM AND PROVE THEM WRONG.
I GOT ACCEPTED ON A TECHNICALITY, AND I STRUGGLED TO DO WHAT THE OTHER STUDENTS FOUND EASY. SO INSTEAD, I SPENT HOURS HONING MY SKILLS UNTIL I COULD DO THINGS NO OTHER SAND MASTER COULD--BUT THEY WERE SMALL THINGS, JUST TRICKS REALLY.
I WANTED SO BADLY TO IMPRESS MY FATHER, I THINK AT SOME POINT THAT DESIRE BECAME A COMPULSION. I GOT ANGRY, I DID THINGS JUST TO SPITE HIM. I WAS KIND OF A BRAT.
I WAS STILL BEING A BRAT WHEN HE DIED.
THE MASTRELLS WERE AMBUSHED OUT IN THE KERLA SANDS. IT WAS A SETUP, I STILL DON'T KNOW HOW OR WHY.
MY FATHER, MY FRIENDS...ALMOST EVERYONE DIED, KHRISS.
WE DIDN'T HAVE THE POWER TO STOP IT. AND FOR A WHILE, I WASN'T SURE I HAD ANY POWER AT ALL.
YOU MEAN WHEN WE MET? YOU THOUGHT YOU'D LOST YOUR POWERS?
YEAH, I REALLY DID. BUT MAYBE I'D OVEREXTENDED OR... I DON'T KNOW. IT'S ALL SO MESSED UP.
WHAT I KNOW FOR SURE IS I HAVE TO SOMEHOW FIX THE DIEM. WE'VE BEEN TOO REMOTE, DIDN'T NOTICE ALL THE FACTIONS RALLYING AGAINST US.
AND NOW THE NEW A'KAR HIGH PRIEST IS DRUMMING UP HATE FOR US AMONG THE KERZTIANS... WELL, I'M RUNNING OUT OF FRIENDS, KHRISS.
I'M YOUR FRIEND, KENTON--

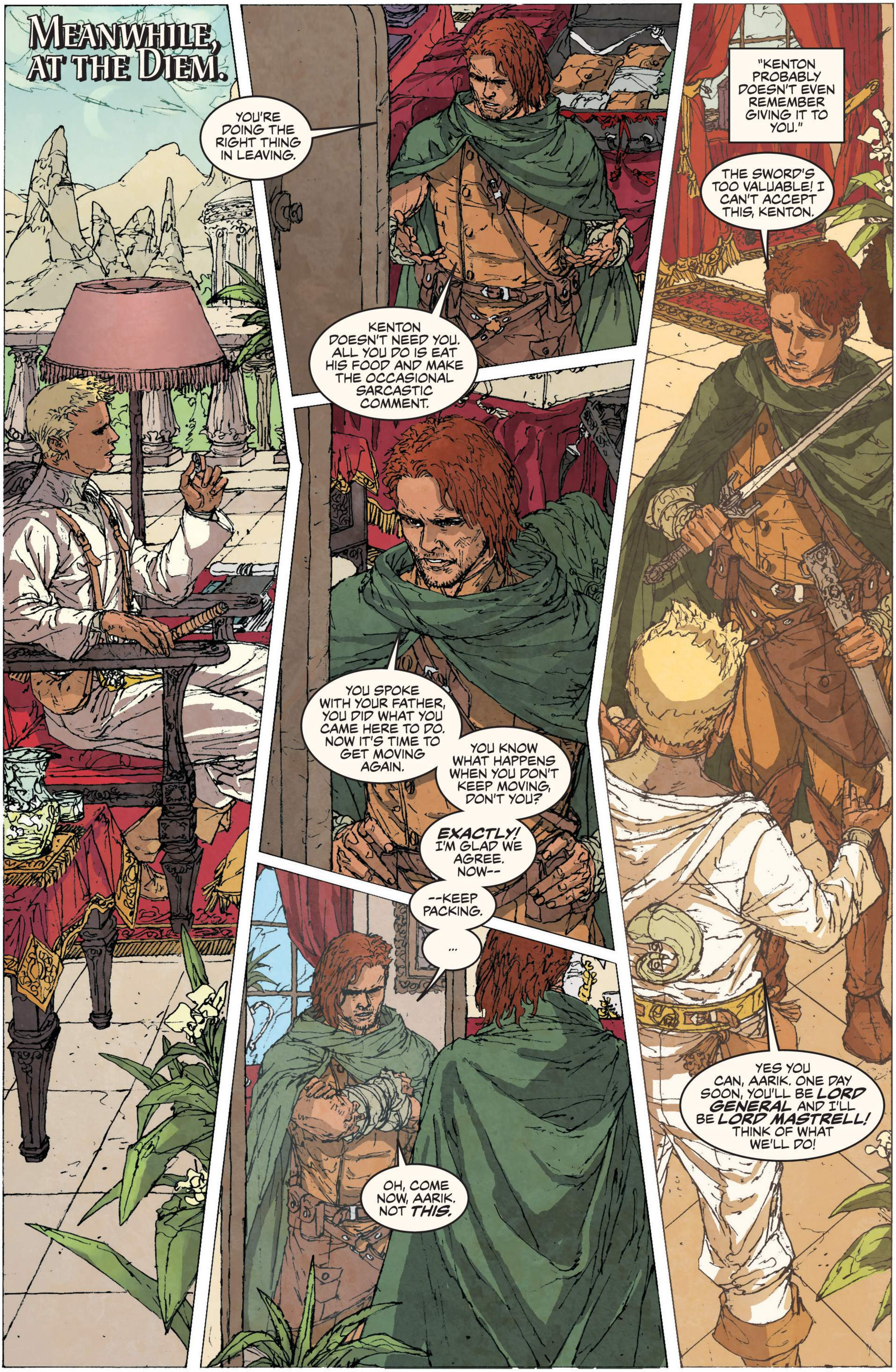

"--WE'LL FIGURE IT OUT."
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, YOU ALREADY KNEW THE MASTRELLS LEFT BEHIND MONEY?!
WELL, SURELY YOU EXPECTED ME TO CHECK THE ROOM OVER BEFORE I PUT MY STUFF HERE!
I FOUND THIS ON THE FIRST DAY--A HIDDEN DRAWER, SEE?
CLICK
ABOUT EIGHT HUNDRED LAK, I'D GUESS.
NOT AS MUCH AS I'D EXPECT, NOT IF IT'S BEEN ACCRUING FOR YEARS.
MAYBE THE OTHER ROOMS HAVE MORE.
LET'S CHECK. AARIK, YOU WORK THIS SIDE AND MOVE RIGHT. I'LL GO LEFT.
KHRISS, BAON--I WANT YOU TO CHECK THE ROOMS ON THE OPPOSITE BALCONY.
WAIT...YOU DON'T GIVE ME ORDERS! -SIGH-
WELL, DUCHESS, YOU DID SAY YOU WANTED TO BE PART OF WHAT HE WAS DOING.

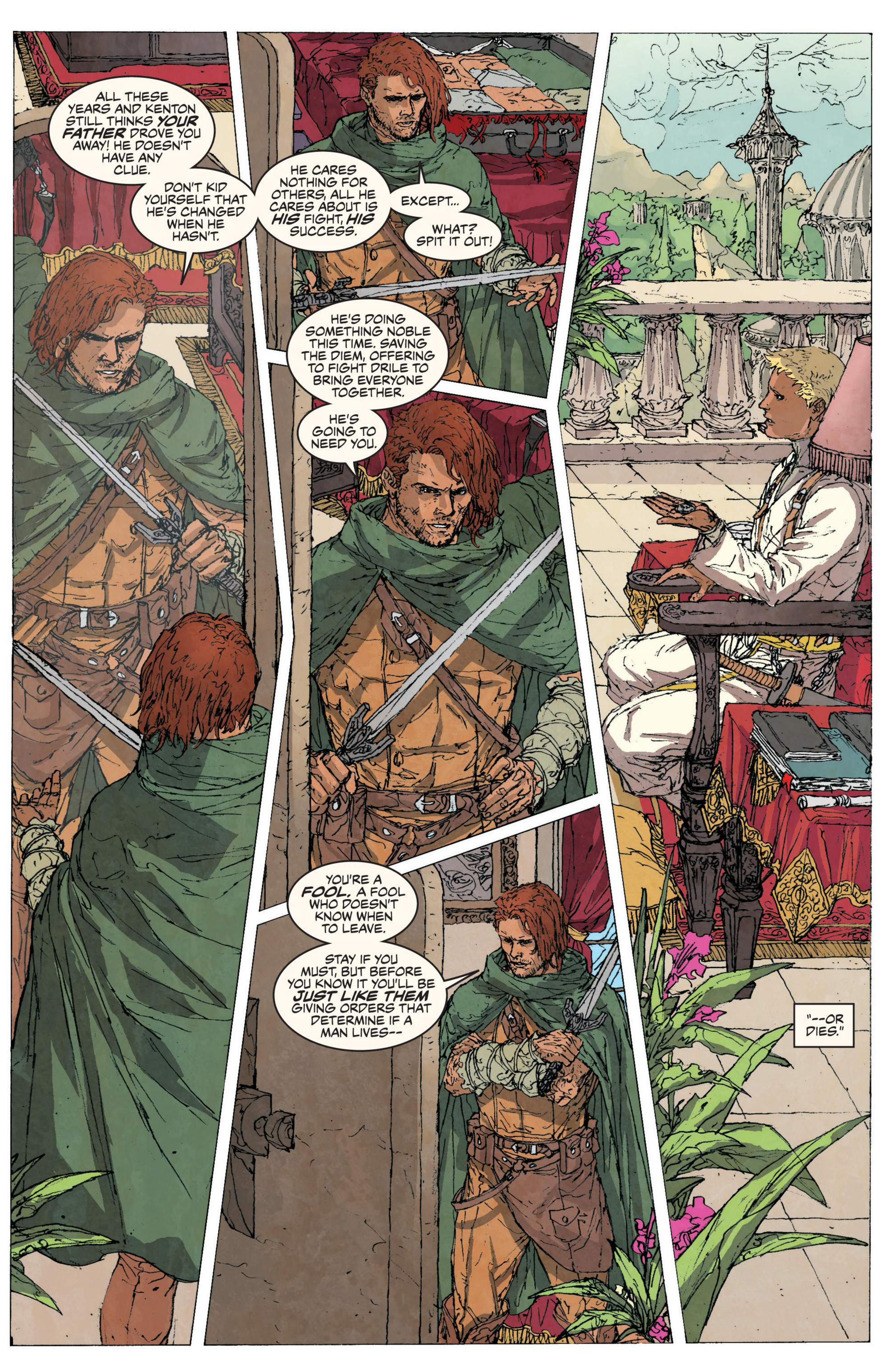
CLICK
STAY BACK, DUCHESS--IT COULD BE BOOBY-TRAPPED.
I MAINTAIN MY OBJECTION TO THIS...
NOTED.
IT'S ABOUT FIVE THOUSAND...MAYBE FIVE-TWO?
THAT'S A FAR CRY FROM THE TWO HUNDRED THOUSAND WE OWE.
A LITTLE LATER...
IT APPEARS THAT THE DIEM HAS QUITE A FEW HOLES IT NEEDS TO DIG ITSELF OUT OF, DUCHESS. IT COULD BE A LOST CAUSE.
SO WHERE'S THE REST OF THE TRIBUTE MONEY GONE?
BUT SAND MASTERY ISN'T, BAON. AND IT COULD JUST BE WHAT WE NEED.

FIFTH HOUR (MORNING)
SUN LORD BLESS ME.
SUN LORD WATCH OVER ME.
SUN LORD GUIDE ME IN ALL THAT I DO.
FORGIVE ME THIS DAY, AS MY DUTIES FORCE ME TO ADOPT THE ROLE OF THE RY'KENSHA'S PROTECTOR, CONTRARY TO YOUR TEACHINGS.
FORGIVE ME THIS DAY, AS MY DUTIES HAVE FORCED ME TO KILL MEN WHOSE MOTIVATIONS I SECRETLY APPLAUD.

FORGIVE ME.
AIS? ARE YOU UP HERE?
MELLIS? SORRY, DID I WAKE YOU?
NO. I'VE JUST MADE MELLONI'S BREAKFAST. ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ME. ALL MY LIFE I HAVE ONLY WANTED CONTROL, YET IT SEEMS TO BE THE ONE THING THAT I WILL NEVER OBTAIN.
HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED IF, PERHAPS, THIS IS WHAT THE SAND LORD WANTS FOR YOU, MY LOVE?
THIS? GOD, LAW AND FAMILY HAVE ALWAYS BEEN THE PILLARS OF STABILITY IN MY LIFE. BUT NOW...?
I WANT YOU TO LEAVE KEZARE. IT'S NOT SAFE FOR YOU HERE.


IS IT REALLY NECESSARY?
SHAREZAN IS TOO POWERFUL. I CAN'T PROTECT YOU. HE KNEW WE WERE GOING TO RAID THE BOAT RACES, GOT OUT BEFORE WE ARRIVED.
HE LEFT A NOTE FOR ME. TAIN DELIVERED IT.
TAKE MELLY AND GO. BUY PASSAGE ON A SHIP TO THE SOUTH, DON'T TELL ME WHERE. GO TO THEIR HALL OF JUDGEMENT AND TELL THEM WHO YOU ARE.
REQUEST SANCTUARY, AND STAY THERE UNTIL YOU GET WORD FROM THE HALL JUDGE THAT SHAREZAN HAS BEEN CAPTURED.
BUT...THAT COULD TAKE MONTHS!
WE'RE CLOSE NOW, MELLIS. THIS IS THE FIRST TIME SHAREZAN HAS RUN FROM US.
HALF HIS ADVISORS ARE IN PRISON. HIS ORGANIZATION IS CLOSE TO FALLING APART. SOMEONE WILL KILL HIM SOON. IF NOT US, THEN A RIVAL.
I WILL SEE SHAREZAN CAPTURED, NO MATTER WHAT OTHER DUTIES I HAVE BEEN GIVEN.
I THINK I KNOW WHO HE IS.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE SAND LORD HAS PLANNED FOR US, MELLIS.


MEANWHILE, AT THE DIEM.
YOU'RE DOING THE RIGHT THING IN LEAVING.
KENTON DOESN'T NEED YOU. ALL YOU DO IS EAT HIS FOOD AND MAKE THE OCCASIONAL SARCASTIC COMMENT.
YOU SPOKE WITH YOUR FATHER, YOU DID WHAT YOU CAME HERE TO DO. NOW IT'S TIME TO GET MOVING AGAIN.
YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DON'T KEEP MOVING, DON'T YOU?
EXACTLY! I'M GLAD WE AGREE. NOW--
--KEEP PACKING.
...
OH, COME NOW, AARIK. NOT THIS.
"KENTON PROBABLY DOESN'T EVEN REMEMBER GIVING IT TO YOU."
THE SWORD'S TOO VALUABLE! I CAN'T ACCEPT THIS, KENTON.
YES YOU CAN, AARIK. ONE DAY SOON, YOU'LL BE LORD GENERAL AND I'LL BE LORD MASTRELL! THINK OF WHAT WE'LL DO!


ALL THESE YEARS AND KENTON STILL THINKS YOUR FATHER DROVE YOU AWAY! HE DOESN'T HAVE ANY CLUE.
DON'T KID YOURSELF THAT HE'S CHANGED WHEN HE HASN'T.
HE CARES NOTHING FOR OTHERS, ALL HE CARES ABOUT IS HIS FIGHT, HIS SUCCESS.
EXCEPT...
WHAT? SPIT IT OUT!
HE'S DOING SOMETHING NOBLE THIS TIME. SAVING THE DIEM, OFFERING TO FIGHT DRILE TO BRING EVERYONE TOGETHER.
HE'S GOING TO NEED YOU.
YOU'RE A FOOL, A FOOL WHO DOESN'T KNOW WHEN TO LEAVE.
STAY IF YOU MUST, BUT BEFORE YOU KNOW IT YOU'LL BE JUST LIKE THEM GIVING ORDERS THAT DETERMINE IF A MAN LIVES--
"--OR DIES."

SIXTH HOUR, DARKSIDE QUARTER.
INTERESTING CHOICE OF DÉCOR, IF I MAY SAY, DUCHESS. WASN'T THIS YOUR BEDROOM?
JUST TAKE A LOOK AT THE SLIDES, CYNDER--
--AND TELL ME WHAT YOU SEE.
THEY'RE BOTH THE SAME--SOME CARAPACE.
NO, THE SECOND ONE IS SAND.
NOW, LOOK AT THIS AND TELL ME WHAT YOU SEE.
HMMM. DAYSIDE SAND.
DAYSIDE SAND WHERE WATER HAS BEEN POURED ON IT.
DARKSIDE SAND.

RIGHT EXCEPT FOR ONE. THIS IS DAYSIDE SAND THAT HAS BEEN EATEN AND SUBSEQUENTLY EXCRETED BY A SANDLING.
SANDLING FECES?
KIND OF--
"SAND WHICH HAS PASSED THROUGH A SANDLING'S GULLET LOOKS LIKE DARKSIDE SAND."
THE DIFFERENCE IN COLOR DOESN'T COME FROM ITS COMPOSITION BUT FROM SOMETHING THAT COVERS IT.
A KIND OF FILM, VERY THIN BUT VERY RESILIENT. IT EITHER GROWS OR ACCUMULATES ON THE SAND, AND TURNS BLACK IF WATER TOUCHES IT.
I'VE OBSERVED THAT LICHEN GROWS ALL OVER THE PLACE ON DARKSIDE. MAYBE THIS IS THE SAME SORT OF THING, ONLY A DAYSIDE VERSION.
PREPOSTEROUS! THAT WOULD MAKE IT A LIVING CREATURE, AND LIVING CREATURES NEED WATER TO SURVIVE.
SANDLINGS DON'T SEEM TO NEED WATER. WE MIGHT SPECULATE THAT IF IT GROWS SLOWLY ENOUGH PERHAPS IT COULD FLOURISH...?
HOWEVER, IT DOESN'T ACT LIKE CARAPACE. IT DOESN'T MELT WHEN YOU POUR WATER ON IT--
--WATCH CLOSELY.
SEE? IT EMITS LIGHT IN WHAT WE'D CALL SHIFTING COLORS.

THAT'S THE EXACT RADIANCE GIVEN OFF BY SAND THAT A SAND MASTER IS CONTROLLING.
WHAT'S MORE, WHEN A SAND MASTER IS DONE USING SAND, IT TURNS BLACK, JUST LIKE THIS HAS.
SO, WHAT MAKES THE SAND WHITE AGAIN?
I DON'T KNOW, BUT I INTEND TO FIND OUT HOW THIS WORKS, CYNDER.
AND WHEN I BRING IT BACK TO ELIS WITH ME WE'LL HAVE A WEAPON SKATHAN HAS NEVER HEARD OF!
A WORTHY GOAL. MAY THE DIVINE WATCH OVER YOU, MY LADY.
THANK YOU.
BAON, A MOMENT IF YOU WOULD?
YOU'RE FROM IIARIA AND YOU SAID YOU'D SEEN SKATHAN. IS IT TRUE WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT HIM? ABOUT HIS... ABILITIES?
YOU MEAN HIS MAGIC?
DUCHESS, WHEN I WAS A YOUNG BOY, SKATHAN LOOKED LIKE A MAN IN HIS MID-TWENTIES. HE LOOKED EXACTLY THE SAME WHEN I LEFT IIARIA.
THE HISTORIES SAY HE IS HUNDREDS OF YEARS OLD, AND I BELIEVE THEM.
I HAVE SEEN HIM DO THINGS IMPOSSIBLE OF ANY NORMAL MAN.
I'M STARTING TO REALIZE THAT WHAT WE CALL MAGIC IS MORE REAL THAN I GAVE IT CREDIT.

I'LL LEAVE YOU TO YOUR EXPLORATION OF THE SAND MAGES' TRICKS, DUCHESS.
THANK YOU.
NOW, WHY DO I FEEL LIKE YOU'RE NOT TELLING ME EVERYTHING, BAON?
NINTH HOUR.
IT'S REFRESHING TO SEE YOU WEAR SOMETHING OTHER THAN YOUR ROBES, KENTON.
I NEVER REALLY LIKED THEM...
...SO I DECIDED, NOW THAT I'M LORD MASTRELL, THAT IT WAS TIME FOR A CHANGE.
OTHER THAN YOUR CHANGE OF CLOTHES, WHAT CAN ONE EXPECT FROM THE ADMIRAL'S PARTY?
HONESTLY, I DON'T KNOW. I'D EXPECT A LOT OF KELZIN TRYING TO WORK OUT BUSINESS DEALS. PARTIES ARE REALLY JUST AN EXCUSE FOR BUSINESS.
NO DANCING THEN?
DANCING? WHY? MOST OF THE PEOPLE HERE WILL ALREADY BE MARRIED.
ANNOUNCING-- LORD MASTRELL OF THE DIEM, AND THE DUCHESS KHRISSALLA OF ELIS.
GULP!

YOUR MEN WILL NEED TO WAIT IN THE SERVANTS' TENT, MY LORD.
SURE.
NO, I SHALL BE ATTENDING INSTEAD OF THE LADY JUDGE HEELIS WHO REGRETS THAT SHE IS UNABLE TO ATTEND.
I-I-I PROFUSELY APOLOGIZE, MY LADY--
--I HAD NOT REALIZED.
APOLOGY ACCEPTED.
LORD MASHTRELL! I'D FEARED YOU WOULDN'T COME!
KHRISS, THIS IS DELIUS, THE LORD ADMIRAL. IT'S HIS PARTY, HE INVITED US.
WHAT AN INTERESHTING CHOICE OF CLOTHING--MUCH MORE FASSSHION'BLE THAN THOSSHE ROBESH.

NOW THEN--I HAVE AN ANNOUNSHH-MENT TO MAKE!
I HAVE CALLED THISH GATHERING FOR A SHPECIFIC PURPOSE--OR RATHER, A SHPECIFIC PERSHON. I WISHH... WISHH TO PRONOUNCE MY FORMAL... SUPPORT OF THE LORD MASHTRELL IN THE UPCOMING VOTE.
LET THE HELM BE THE FIRSHT TO ESHTEND OUR HAND TO OUR SAND MASHTER BRETHREN IN THEIR TIME OF NEED!
THUMP

THAT IS THE LORD ADMIRAL?
DELIUS. THE ONLY MAN IN LOSSAND WHO COULD COLLAPSE DRUNK BEFORE THE PARTY EVEN BEGINS!
DELIUS ALWAYS VOTES IN OPPOSITION TO THE REST OF THE COUNCIL, ESPECIALLY THE LORD MERCHANT.
JUST A FEW DAYS AGO HE TOLD ME HE WOULD FOLLOW THAT EXACT PATTERN, VOTING FOR ME ONLY IF LORD VEY VOTED AGAINST.
I WONDER WHAT MADE HIM CHANGE HIS MIND.
WHATEVER IT WAS, I GET THE IMPRESSION THE KELZIN DON'T LIKE IT!
BIG SURPRISE.
COME ON, WE SHOULD MINGLE.
WE SHOULD?
IT'S WHAT ONE DOES AT THESE THINGS, KENTON. DON'T YOU KNOW ANYTHING?
HEY! ARE YOU... YOU'RE NOT ACTUALLY ENJOYING YOURSELF, ARE YOU?
DO YOU KNOW, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A LONG WHILE--
--I THINK I REALLY AM!

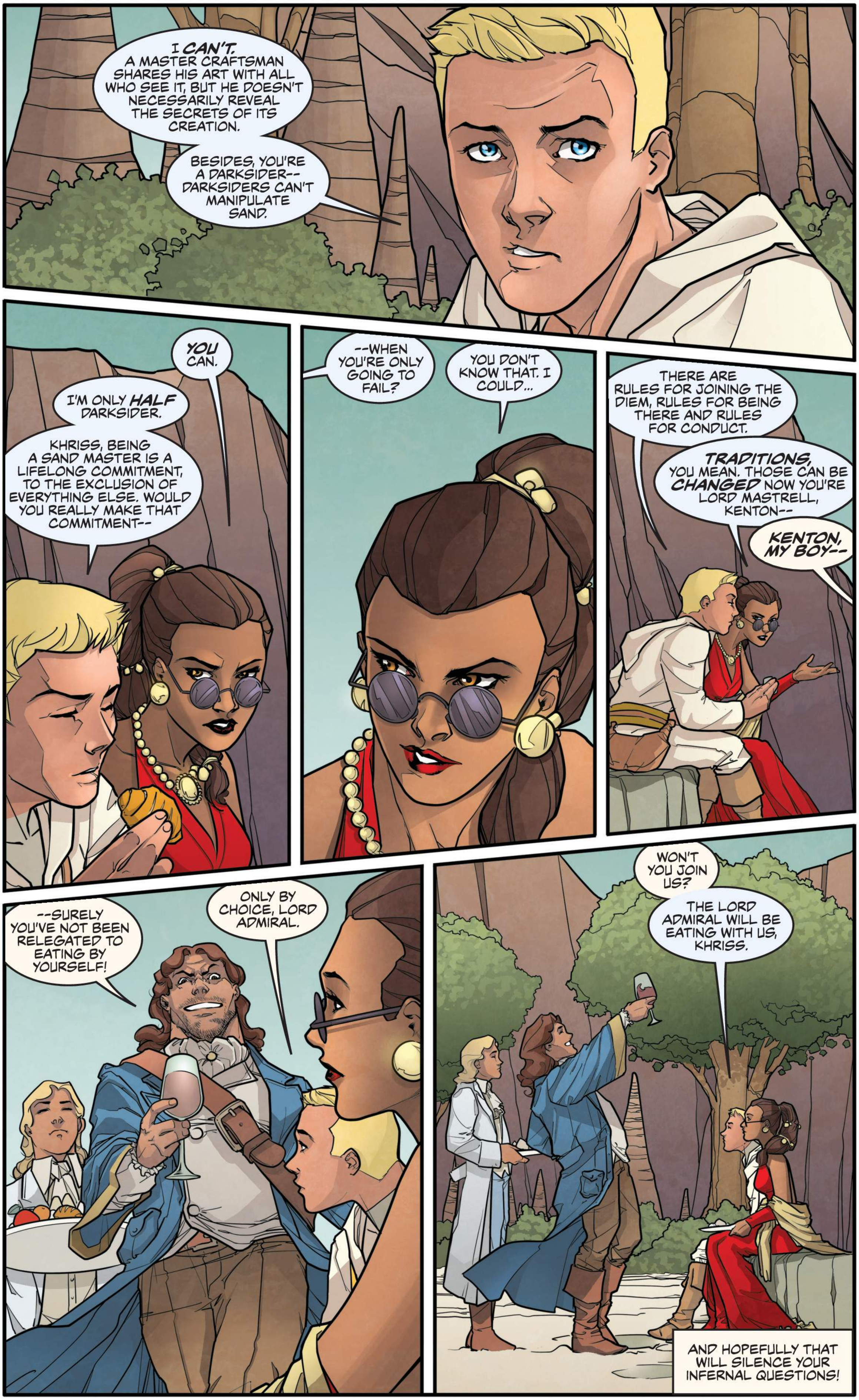
ABOUT TURN

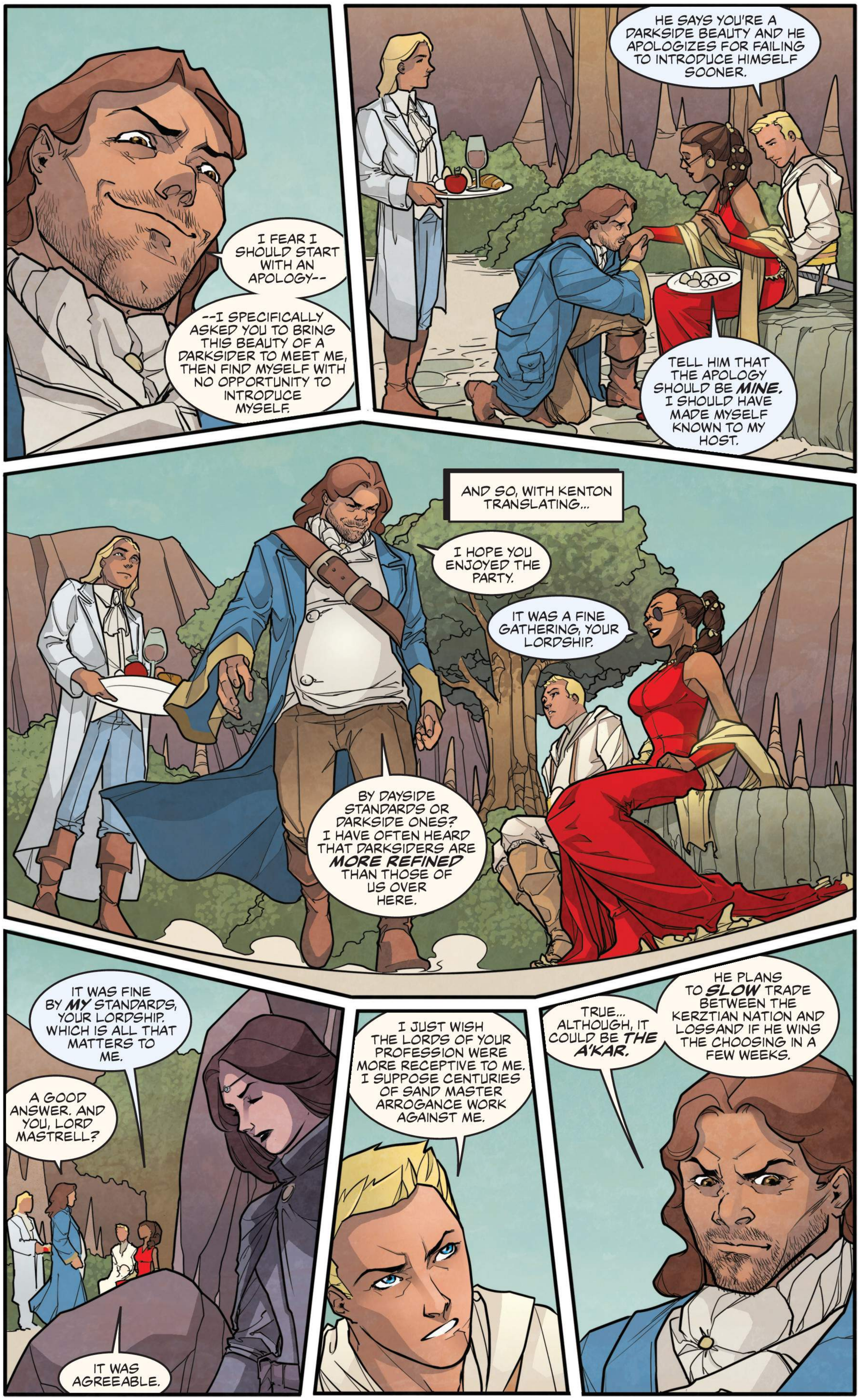
I THINK YOU'RE A HIT WITH THE OTHER GUESTS.
NOT ME, YOU. THE WEALTHY KELZIN JUST ENDURE ME.
WELL, AT LEAST THEY'RE POLITE ABOUT IT.

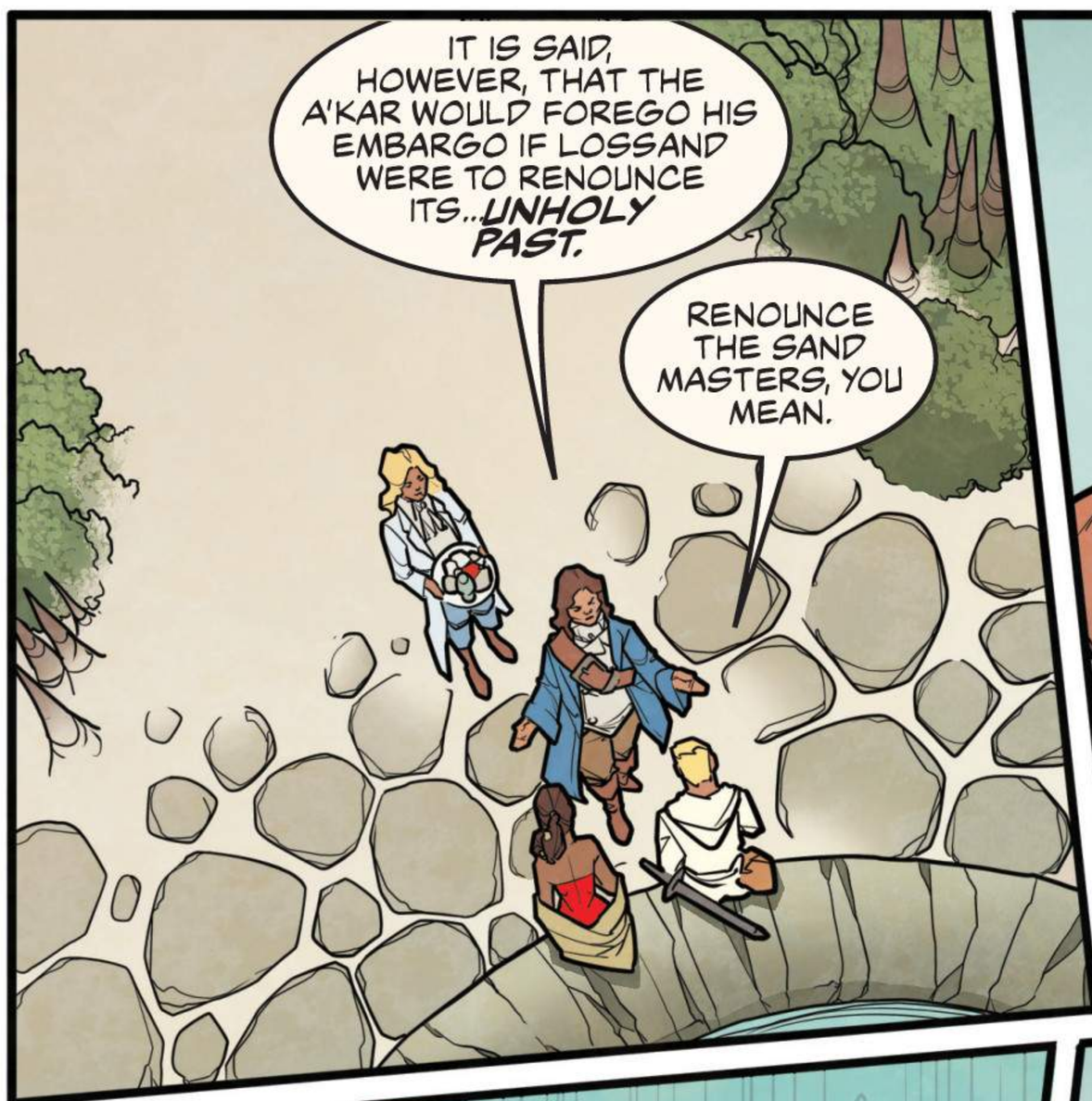
HOPEFULLY I'VE HELPED THEM SEE HOW THE DIEM COULD BRING PROSPERITY TO LOSSAND. IN MY EXPERIENCE, NOBLES DO LIKE PROSPERITY.
HAHAHAH! THAT'S BEEN MY EXPERIENCE, TOO.

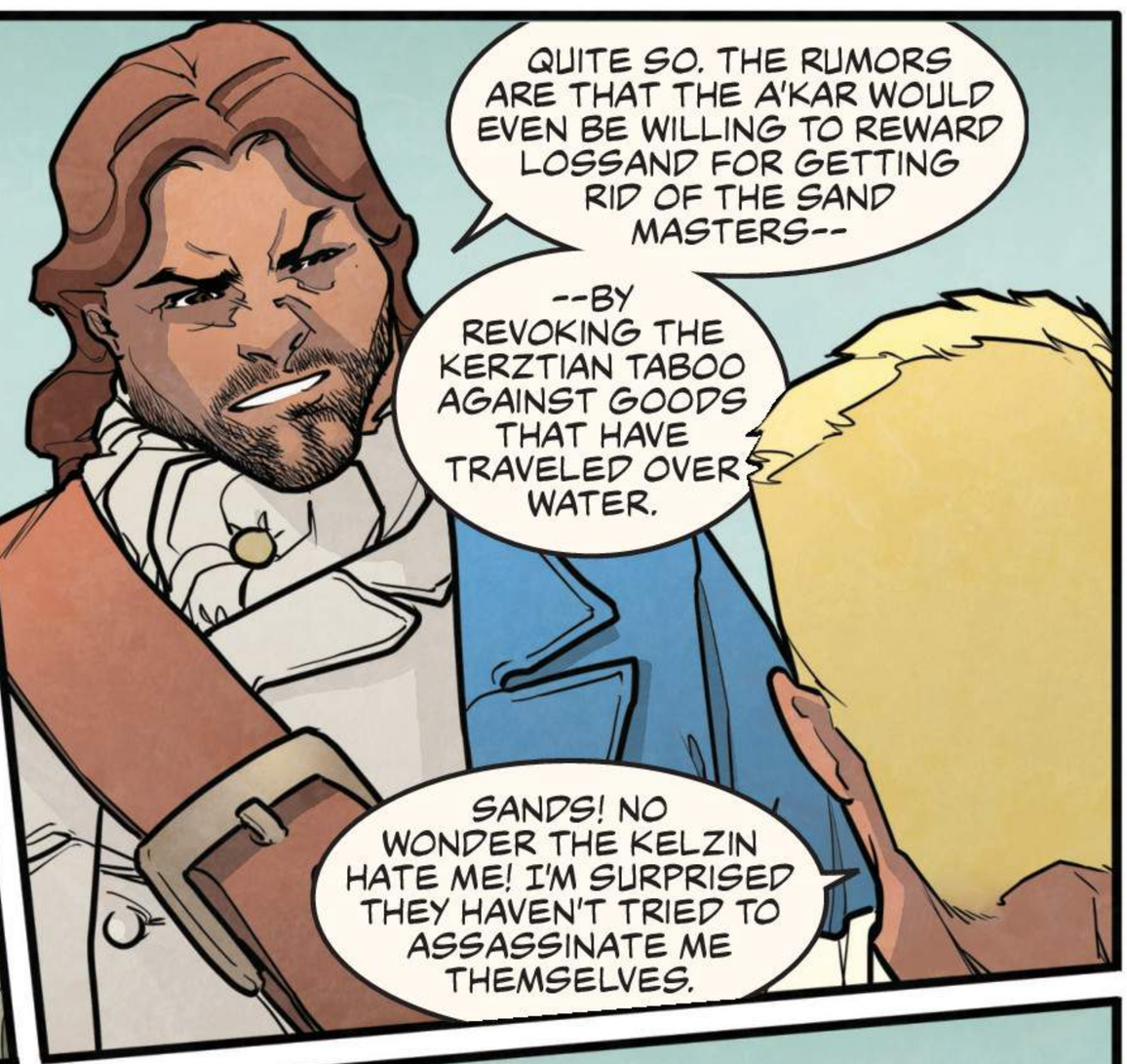
I FORGOT TO SAY EARLIER-- I LIKE YOUR BELT. VERY APT.
WELL, I FIGURED IT WOULD BE BEST TO PUT ON A UNITED FRONT IF YOU'RE GOING TO BRING SAND MASTERY TO THE MASSES.

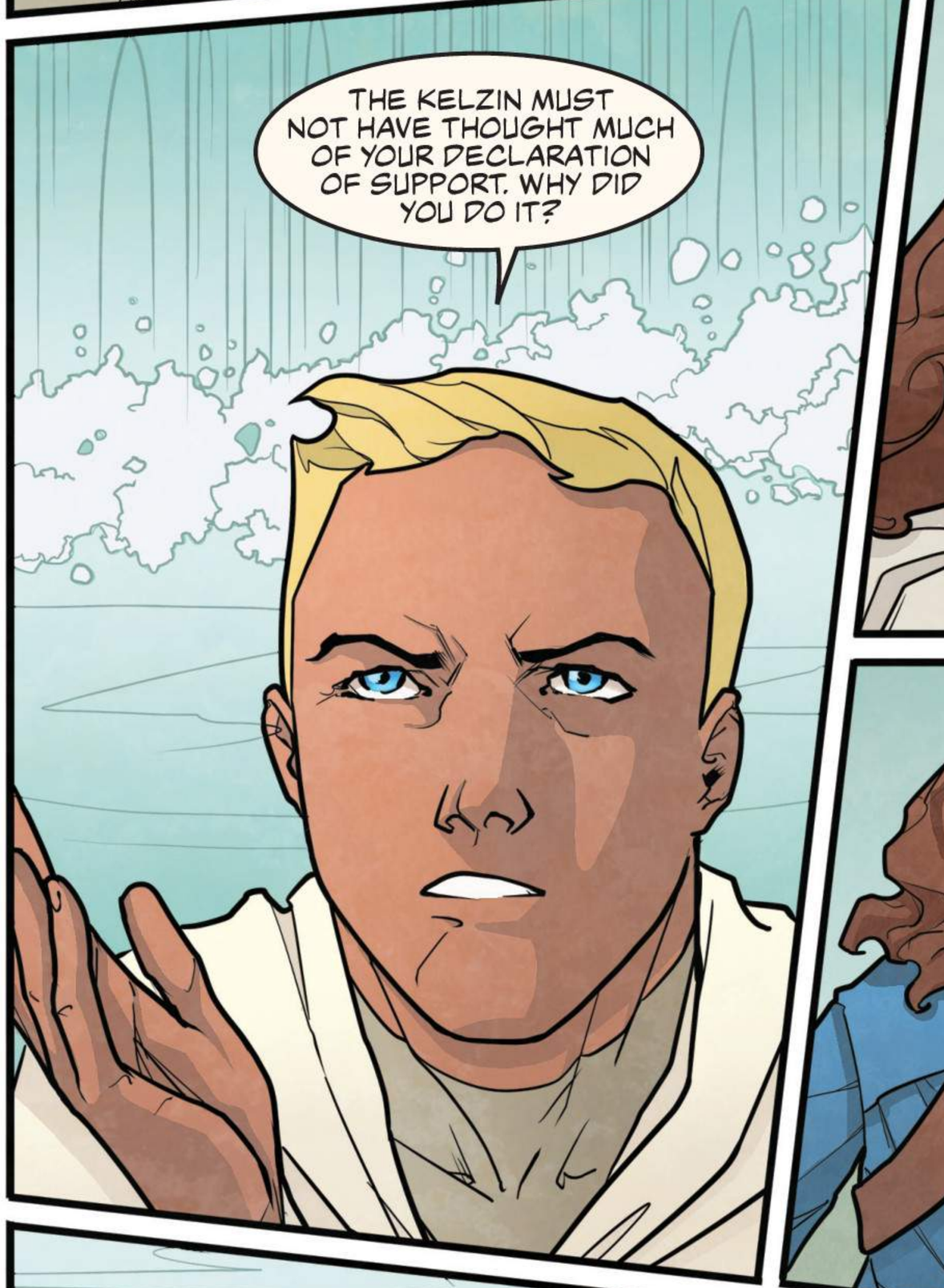
SPEAKING OF WHICH--
--HOW DOES SAND MASTERY WORK? CAN YOU SHOW ME?


I CAN'T. A MASTER CRAFTSMAN SHARES HIS ART WITH ALL WHO SEE IT, BUT HE DOESN'T NECESSARILY REVEAL THE SECRETS OF ITS CREATION.
BESIDES, YOU'RE A DARKSIDER-- DARKSIDERS CAN'T MANIPULATE SAND.
YOU CAN.
I'M ONLY HALF DARKSIDER.
KHRISS, BEING A SAND MASTER IS A LIFELONG COMMITMENT, TO THE EXCLUSION OF EVERYTHING ELSE. WOULD YOU REALLY MAKE THAT COMMITMENT--
--WHEN YOU'RE ONLY GOING TO FAIL?
YOU DON'T KNOW THAT. I COULD...
THERE ARE RULES FOR JOINING THE DIEM, RULES FOR BEING THERE AND RULES FOR CONDUCT.
TRADITIONS, YOU MEAN. THOSE CAN BE CHANGED NOW YOU'RE LORD MASTRELL, KENTON--
KENTON, MY BOY--
--SURELY YOU'VE NOT BEEN RELEGATED TO EATING BY YOURSELF!
ONLY BY CHOICE, LORD ADMIRAL.
WON'T YOU JOIN US?
THE LORD ADMIRAL WILL BE EATING WITH US, KHRISS.
AND HOPEFULLY THAT WILL SILENCE YOUR INFERNAL QUESTIONS!


I FEAR I SHOULD START WITH AN APOLOGY--
--I SPECIFICALLY ASKED YOU TO BRING THIS BEAUTY OF A DARKSIDER TO MEET ME, THEN FIND MYSELF WITH NO OPPORTUNITY TO INTRODUCE MYSELF.
HE SAYS YOU'RE A DARKSIDE BEAUTY AND HE APOLOGIZES FOR FAILING TO INTRODUCE HIMSELF SOONER.
TELL HIM THAT THE APOLOGY SHOULD BE MINE. I SHOULD HAVE MADE MYSELF KNOWN TO MY HOST.
AND SO, WITH KENTON TRANSLATING...
I HOPE YOU ENJOYED THE PARTY.
IT WAS A FINE GATHERING, YOUR LORDSHIP.
BY DAYSIDE STANDARDS OR DARKSIDE ONES? I HAVE OFTEN HEARD THAT DARKSIDERS ARE MORE REFINED THAN THOSE OF US OVER HERE.
IT WAS FINE BY MY STANDARDS, YOUR LORDSHIP. WHICH IS ALL THAT MATTERS TO ME.
A GOOD ANSWER. AND YOU, LORD MASTRELL?
IT WAS AGREEABLE.
I JUST WISH THE LORDS OF YOUR PROFESSION WERE MORE RECEPTIVE TO ME. I SUPPOSE CENTURIES OF SAND MASTER ARROGANCE WORK AGAINST ME.
TRUE... ALTHOUGH, IT COULD BE THE A'KAR.
HE PLANS TO SLOW TRADE BETWEEN THE KERZTIAN NATION AND LOSSAND IF HE WINS THE CHOOSING IN A FEW WEEKS.


IT IS SAID, HOWEVER, THAT THE A'KAR WOULD FOREGO HIS EMBARGO IF LOSSAND WERE TO RENOUNCE ITS...UNHOLY PAST.
RENOUNCE THE SAND MASTERS, YOU MEAN.


QUITE SO. THE RUMORS ARE THAT THE A'KAR WOULD EVEN BE WILLING TO REWARD LOSSAND FOR GETTING RID OF THE SAND MASTERS--
--BY REVOKING THE KERZTIAN TABOO AGAINST GOODS THAT HAVE TRAVELED OVER WATER.
SANDS! NO WONDER THE KELZIN HATE ME! I'M SURPRISED THEY HAVEN'T TRIED TO ASSASSINATE ME THEMSELVES.

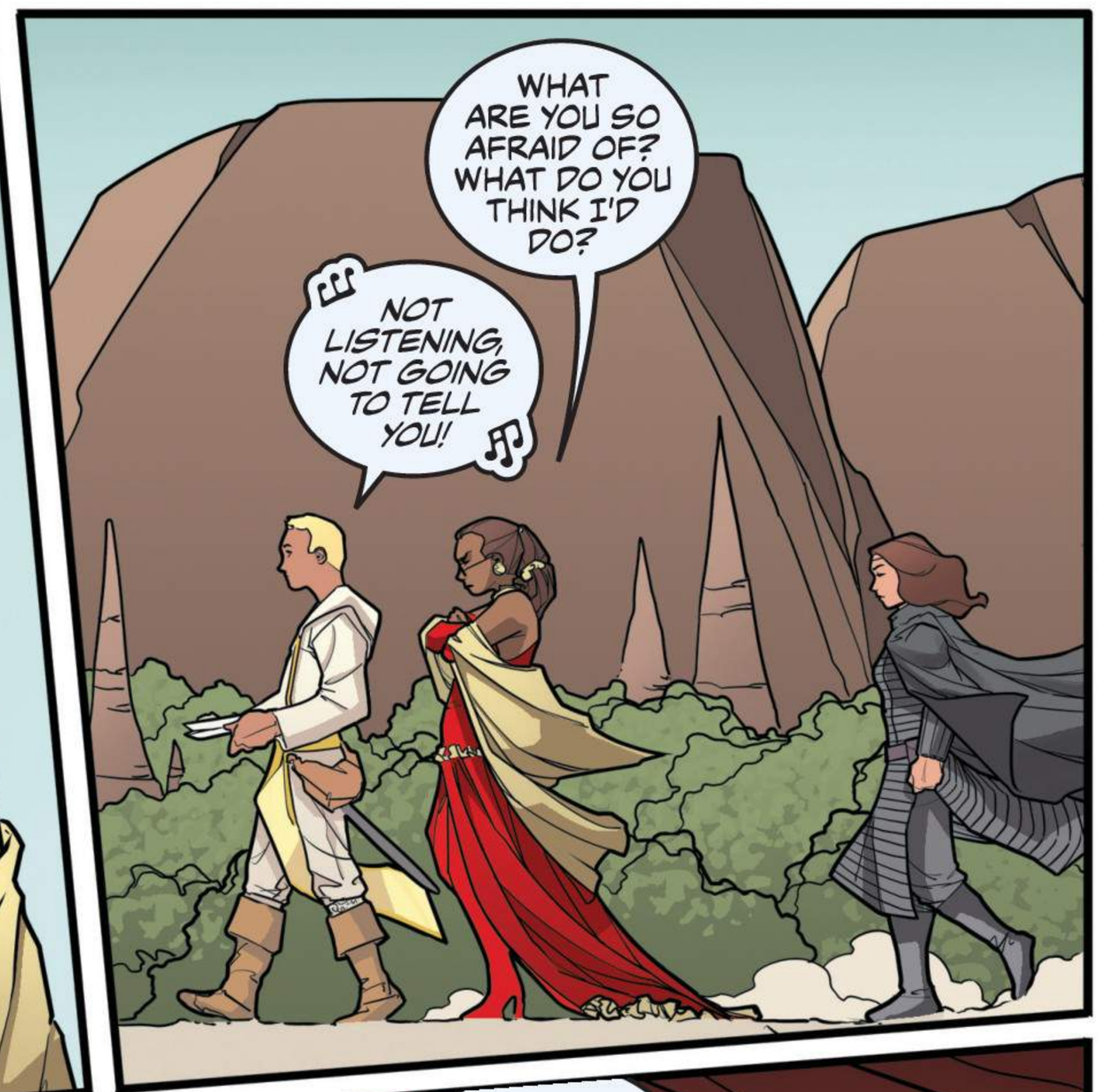

THE KELZIN MUST NOT HAVE THOUGHT MUCH OF YOUR DECLARATION OF SUPPORT. WHY DID YOU DO IT?

WELLLLL...I DON'T IMAGINE YOU KNOW MUCH ABOUT HOW THE HELM CHOOSES ITS LORD ADMIRAL.
AND IT'S BEST WE KEEP IT THAT WAY.
NOW, I MUST GO MINGLE. EAT AS MUCH AS YOU WANT AND DO TRY TO WASTE SOME WINE FOR ME.
KENTON--

--THAT MAN IS MORE THAN JUST A DRUNKEN SLOB. OR AT LEAST HE HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BE MORE.

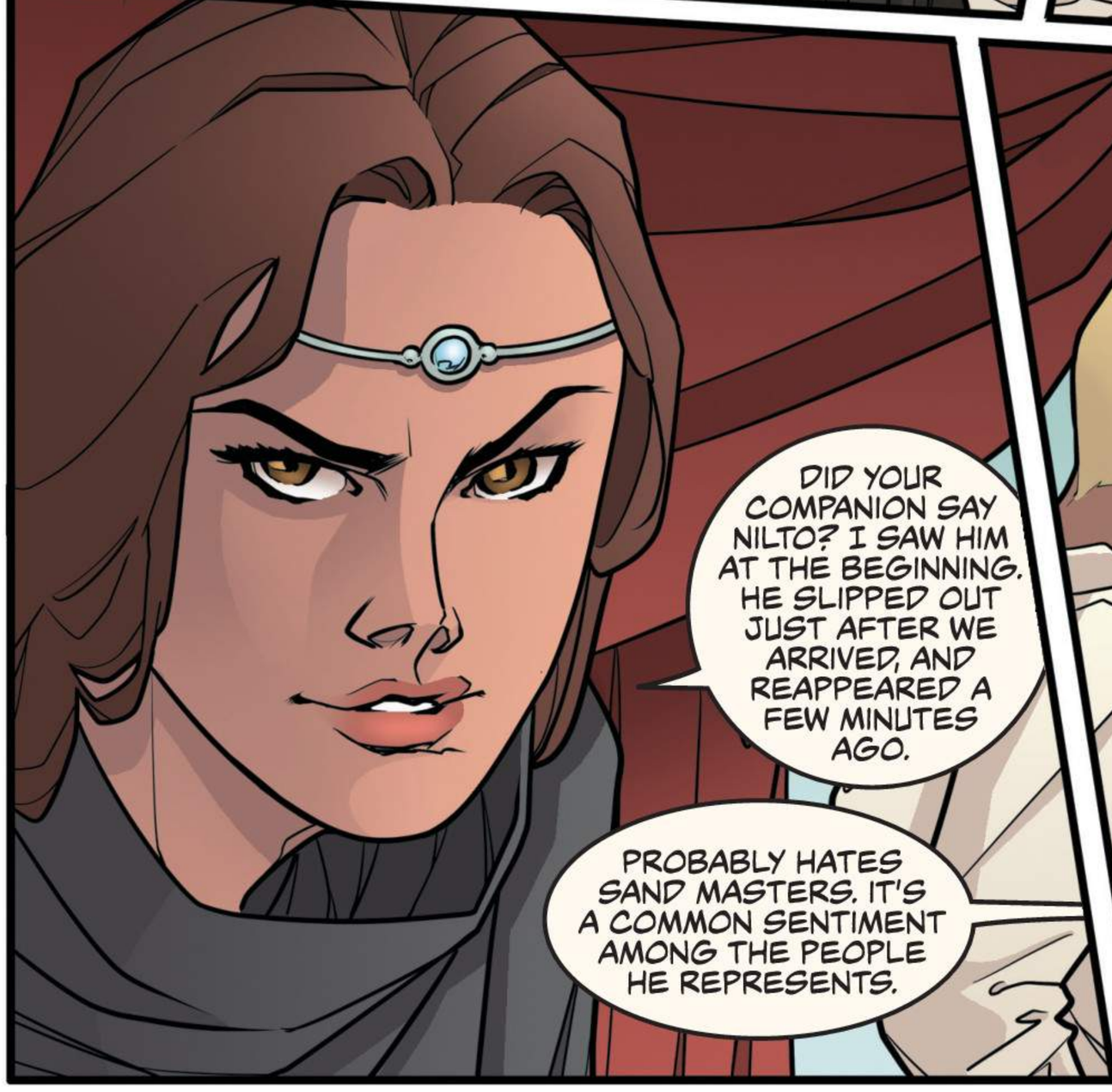
I KNOW. HE USED A WORD--WASTE--WHEN HE TALKED ABOUT THE WINE. IT SEEMED...OUT OF PLACE. I THINK HE WAS TRYING TO TELL ME SOMETHING.

SO...WE WERE TALKING ABOUT MY LEARNING SAND MASTERY.
HAH! NICE TRY, DUCHESS.


WHAT ARE YOU SO AFRAID OF? WHAT DO YOU THINK I'D DO?
NOT LISTENING, NOT GOING TO TELL YOU!

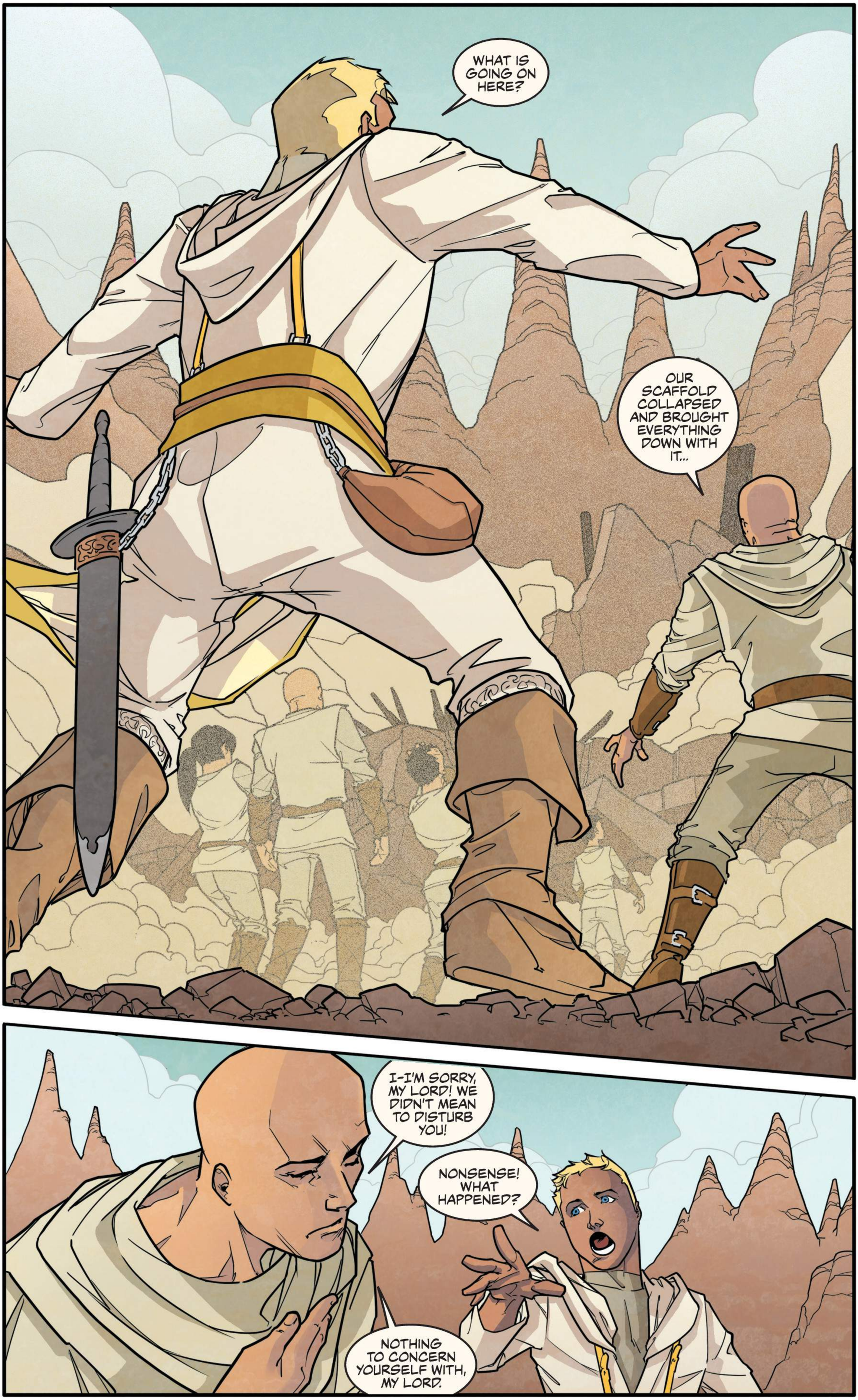
IS THAT NILTO?

YOU KNOW HIM? MAYBE HE ARRIVED LATE.

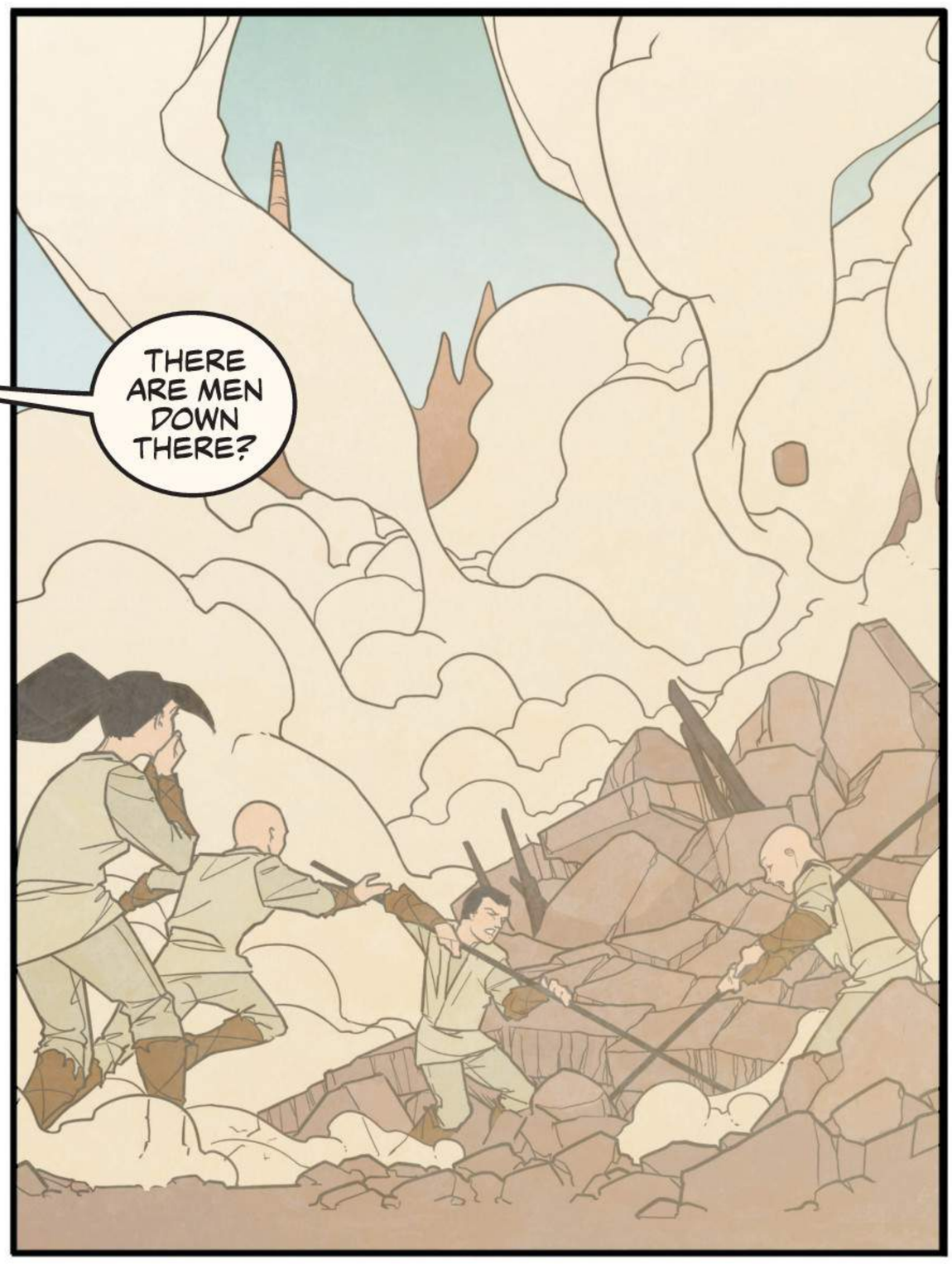

DID YOUR COMPANION SAY NILTO? I SAW HIM AT THE BEGINNING. HE SLIPPED OUT JUST AFTER WE ARRIVED, AND REAPPEARED A FEW MINUTES AGO.
PROBABLY HATES SAND MASTERS. IT'S A COMMON SENTIMENT AMONG THE PEOPLE HE REPRESENTS.

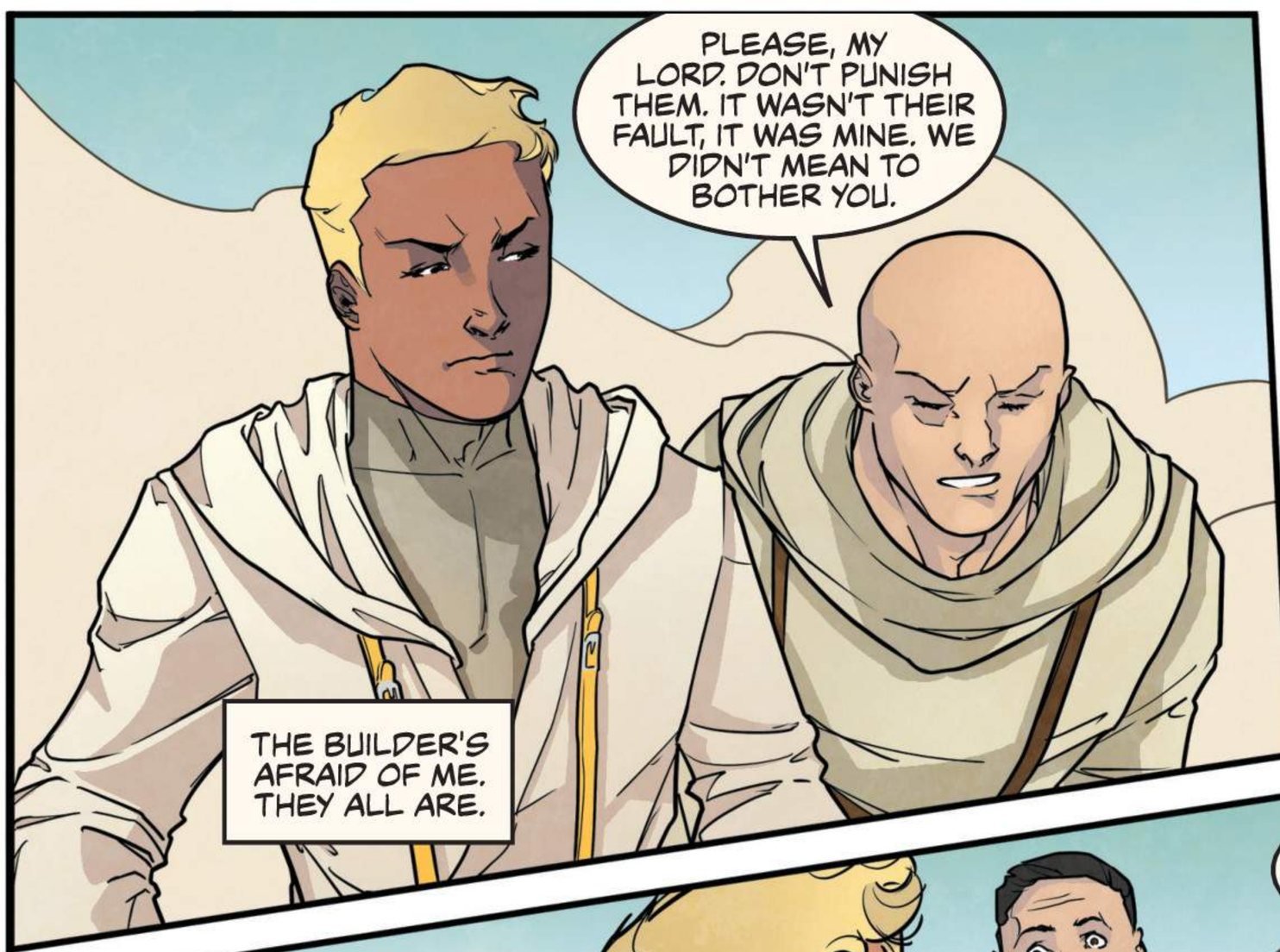
BUT HAVE YOU MET HIM BEFORE, KHRISS? WHAT'S THE PROTOCOL? SHOULD WE GREET HIM?
NO! LET'S JUST GO.

NOT TO COMPLAIN, LORD MASTRELL--
--BUT THE DIEM'S RATHER OUT OF MY WAY TO GIVE YOU A FREE RIDE.
NOT FREE. I'M IMPLEMENTING A NEW SYSTEM-- I'LL BE PAYING FOR THIS.
REALLY? SAND LORD BE PRAISED!
DO YOU HEAR SHOUTING? WHAT IS HAPPENING OVER THERE?
LET ME SEE...?
WAIT HERE!

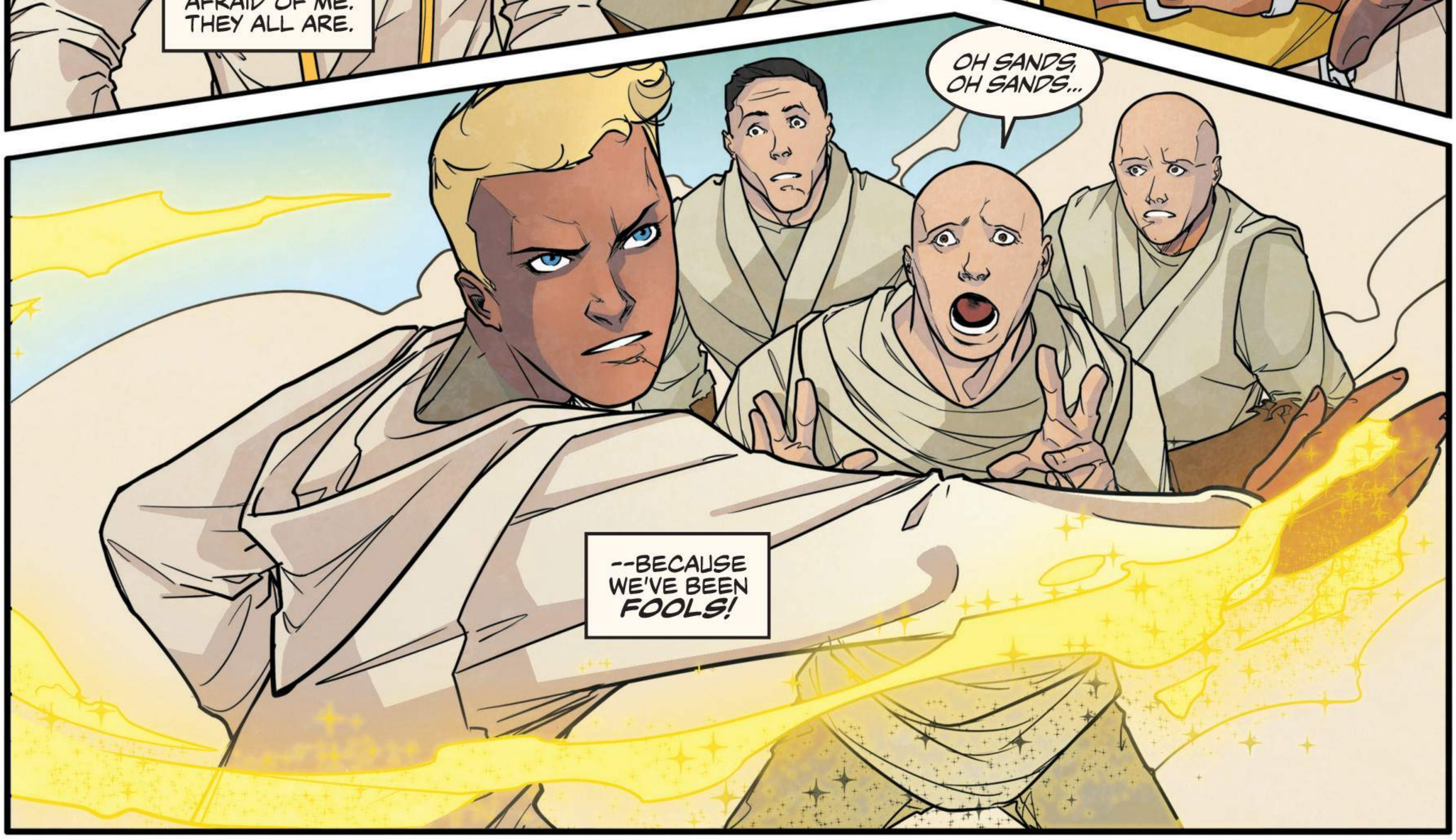

WHAT IS GOING ON HERE?
OUR SCAFFOLD COLLAPSED AND BROUGHT EVERYTHING DOWN WITH IT...
I-I'M SORRY, MY LORD! WE DIDN'T MEAN TO DISTURB YOU!
NONSENSE! WHAT HAPPENED?
NOTHING TO CONCERN YOURSELF WITH, MY LORD.

HELP! HELP!

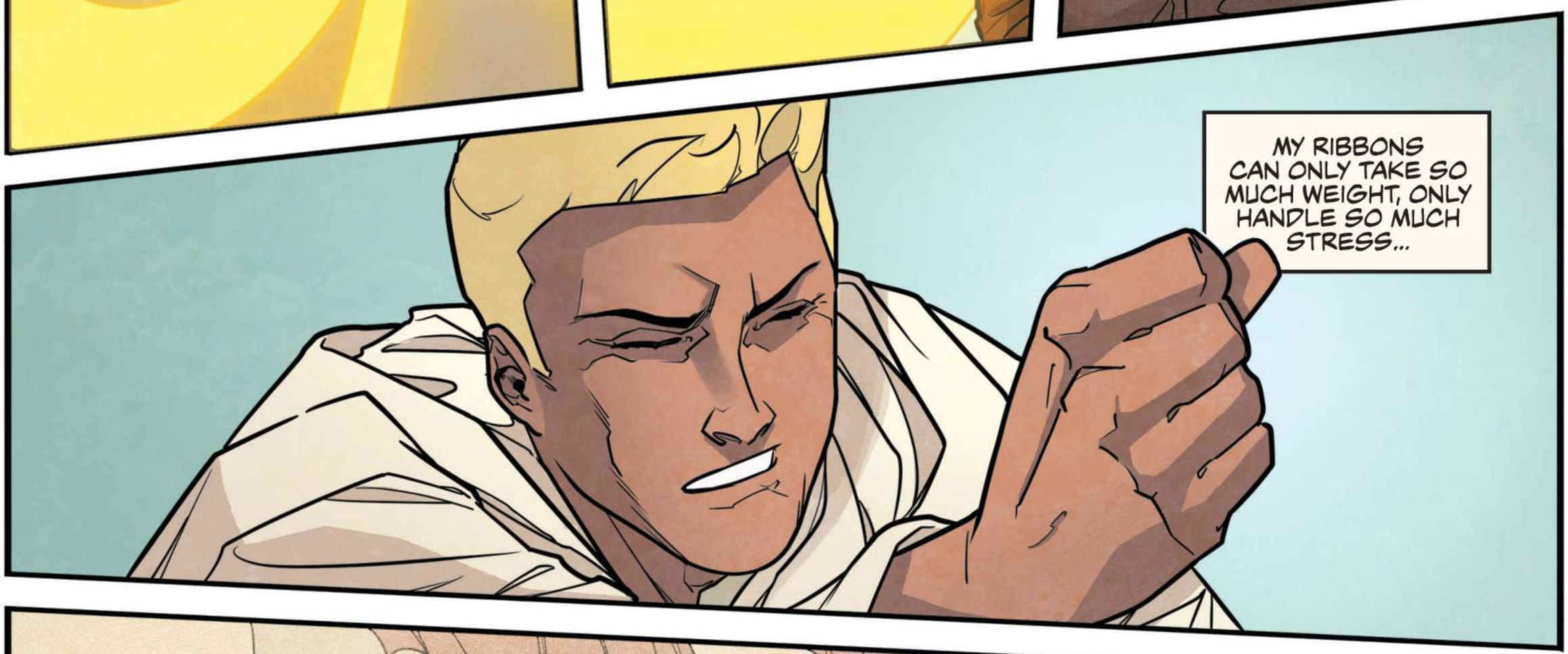

THERE ARE MEN DOWN THERE?

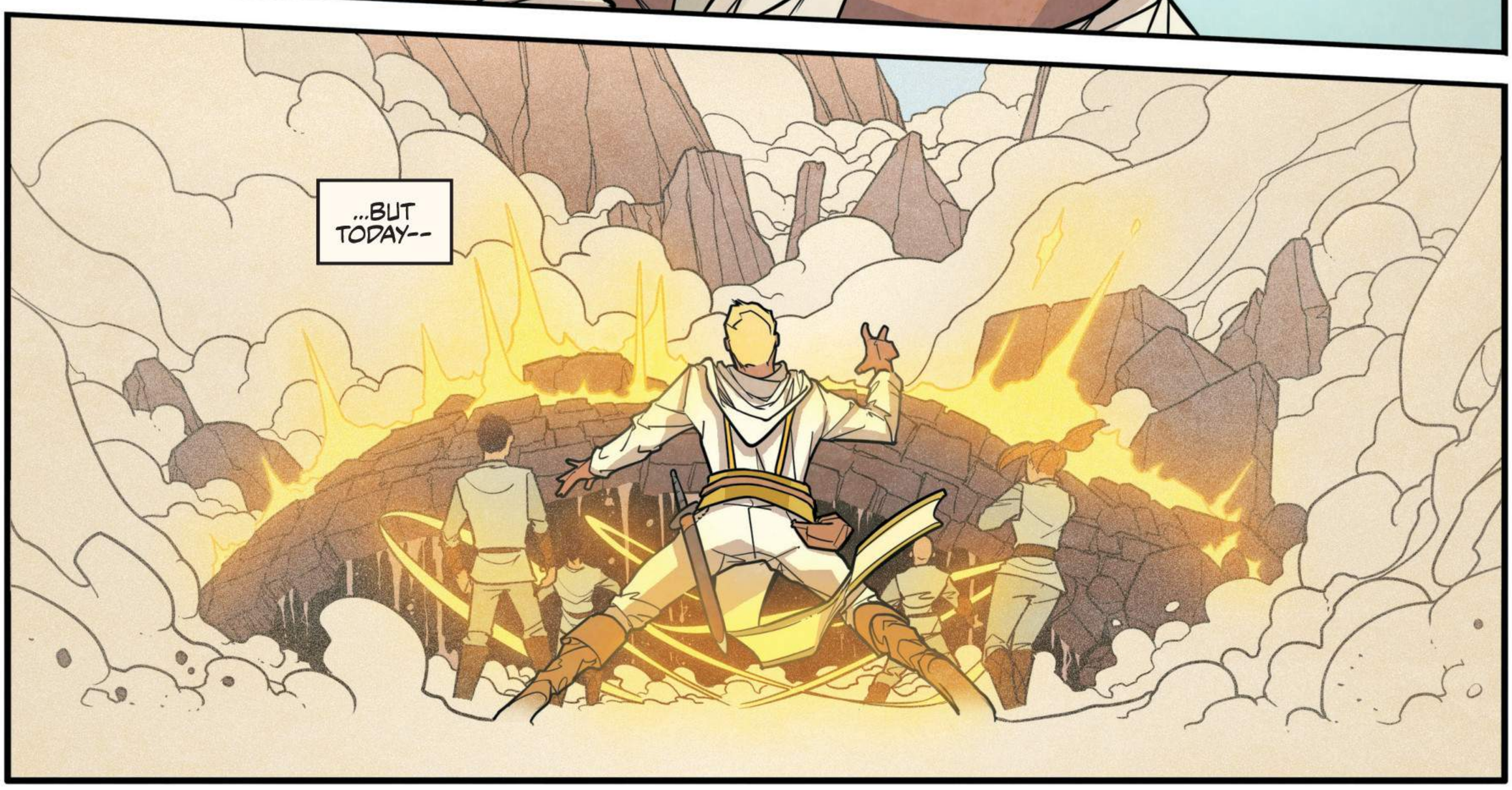

PLEASE, MY LORD. DON'T PUNISH THEM. IT WASN'T THEIR FAULT, IT WAS MINE. WE DIDN'T MEAN TO BOTHER YOU.
THE BUILDER'S AFRAID OF ME. THEY ALL ARE.

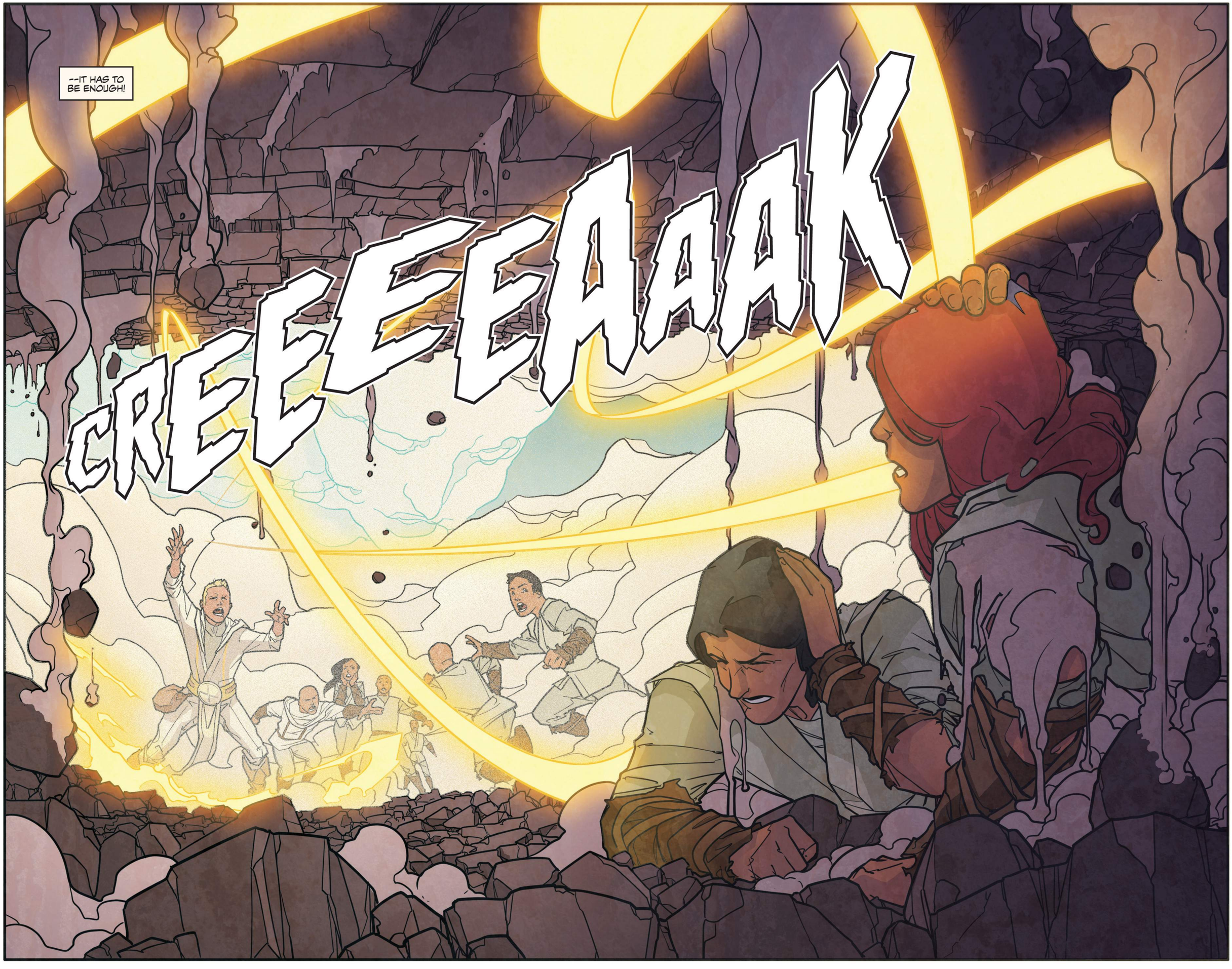
I SHOULDN'T DO THIS. SAND MASTERS RARELY USE THEIR POWERS TO HELP OTHERS OUTSIDE THE DIEM--


OH SANDS, OH SANDS...
--BECAUSE WE'VE BEEN FOOLS!

PLEASE DON'T HURT US!

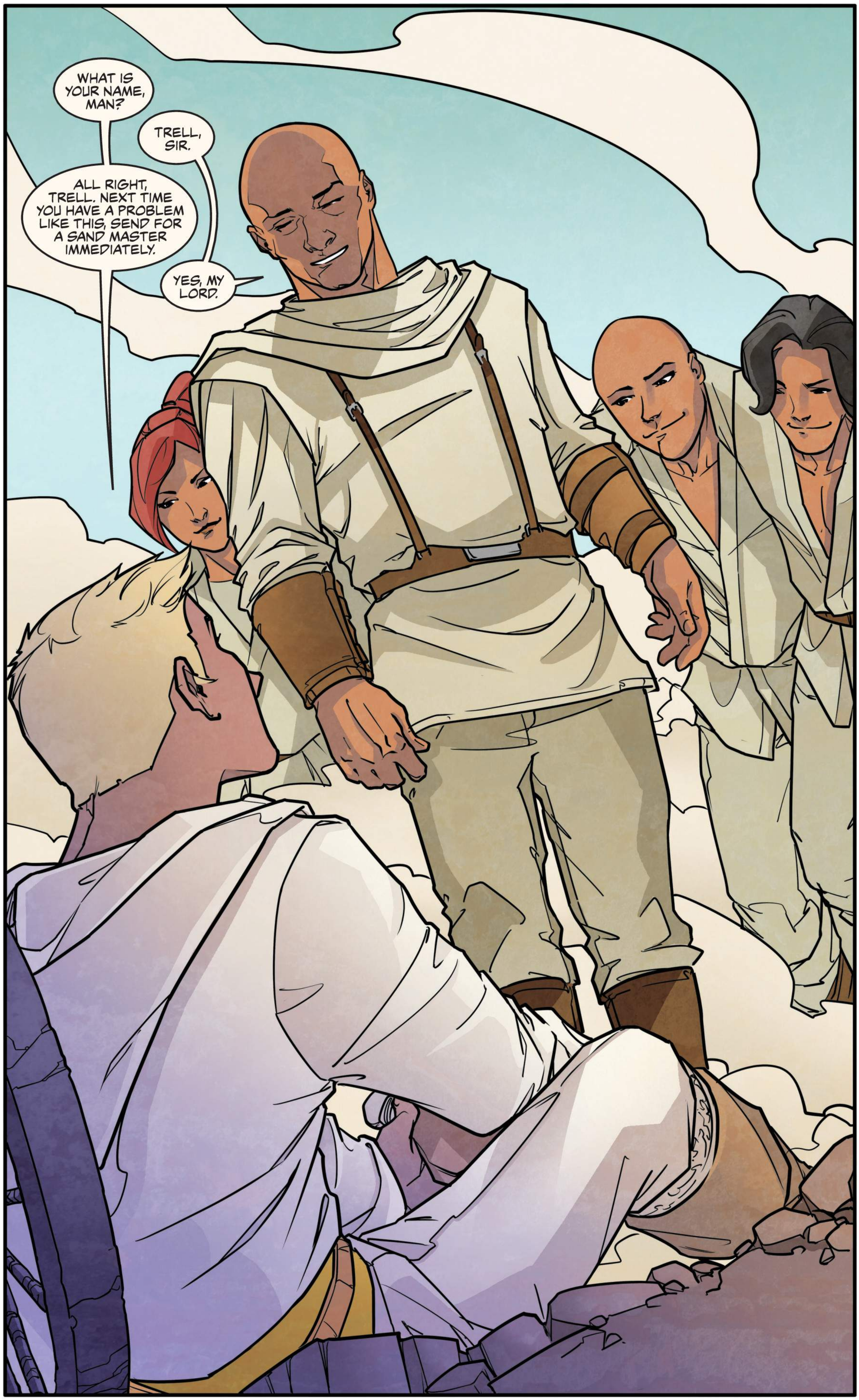

MY RIBBONS CAN ONLY TAKE SO MUCH WEIGHT, ONLY HANDLE SO MUCH STRESS...

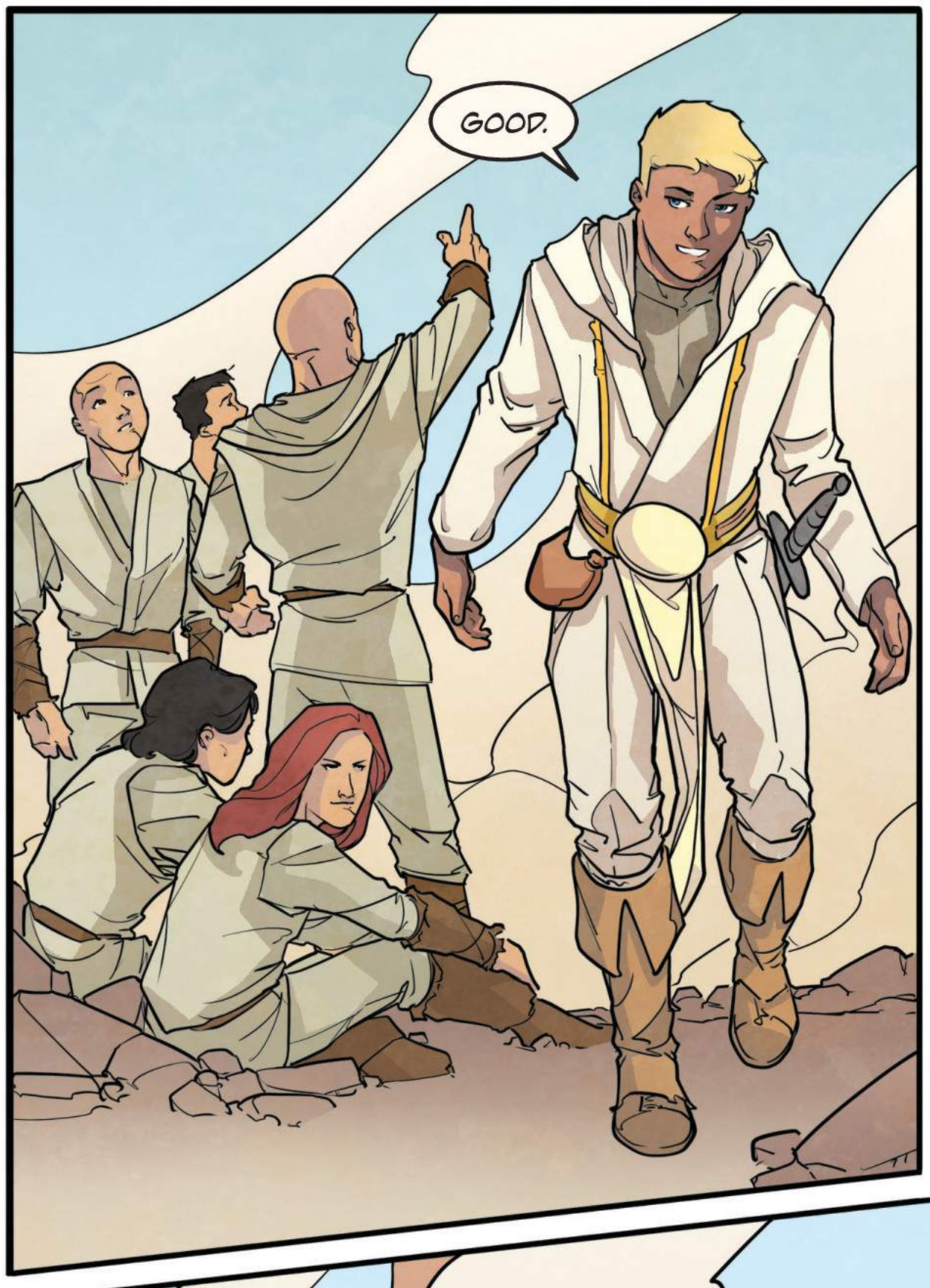

...BUT TODAY--


--IT HAS TO BE ENOUGH!
CREEEEAAAK

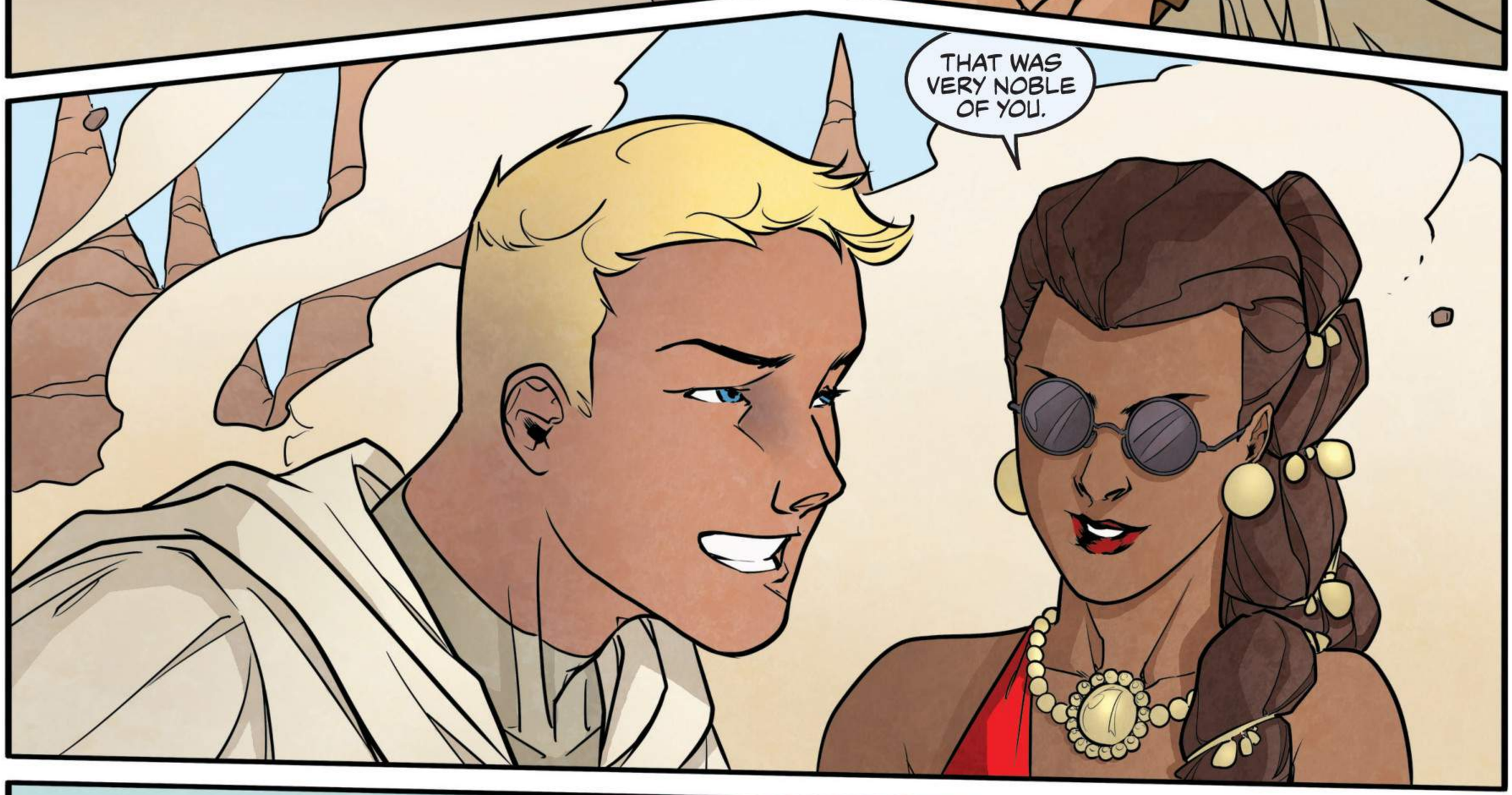
MOVE, KHYAN! MOVE!
SAND LORD BE BLESSED! SAND LORD BE BLESSED!
THOOM
UNGH!
I'M DEHYDRATED.

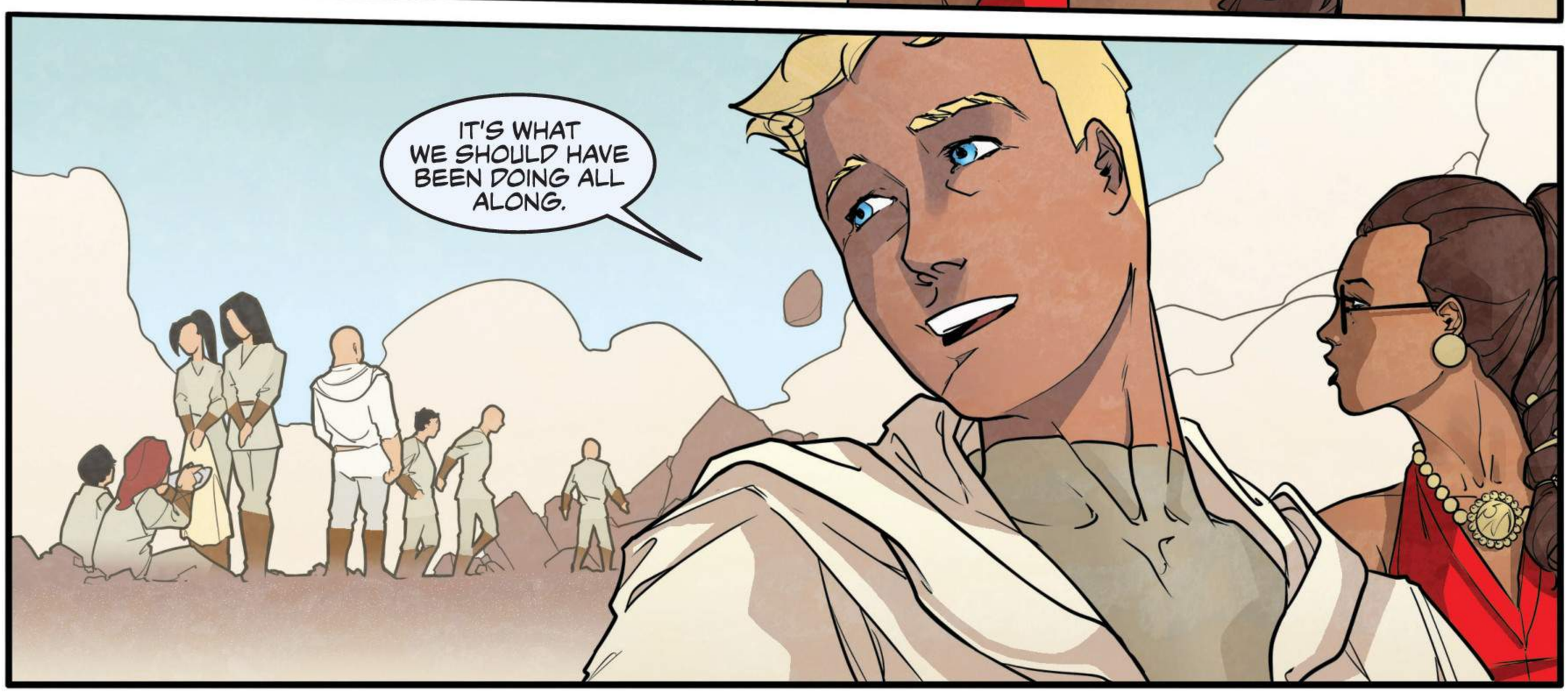
I CAN FEEL MYSELF DRYING OUT INSIDE.
I EXTENDED MYSELF--
--DANGEROUSLY SO--
--FOR PEOPLE WHO FEAR ME.
MY LORD...
...THANK YOU.

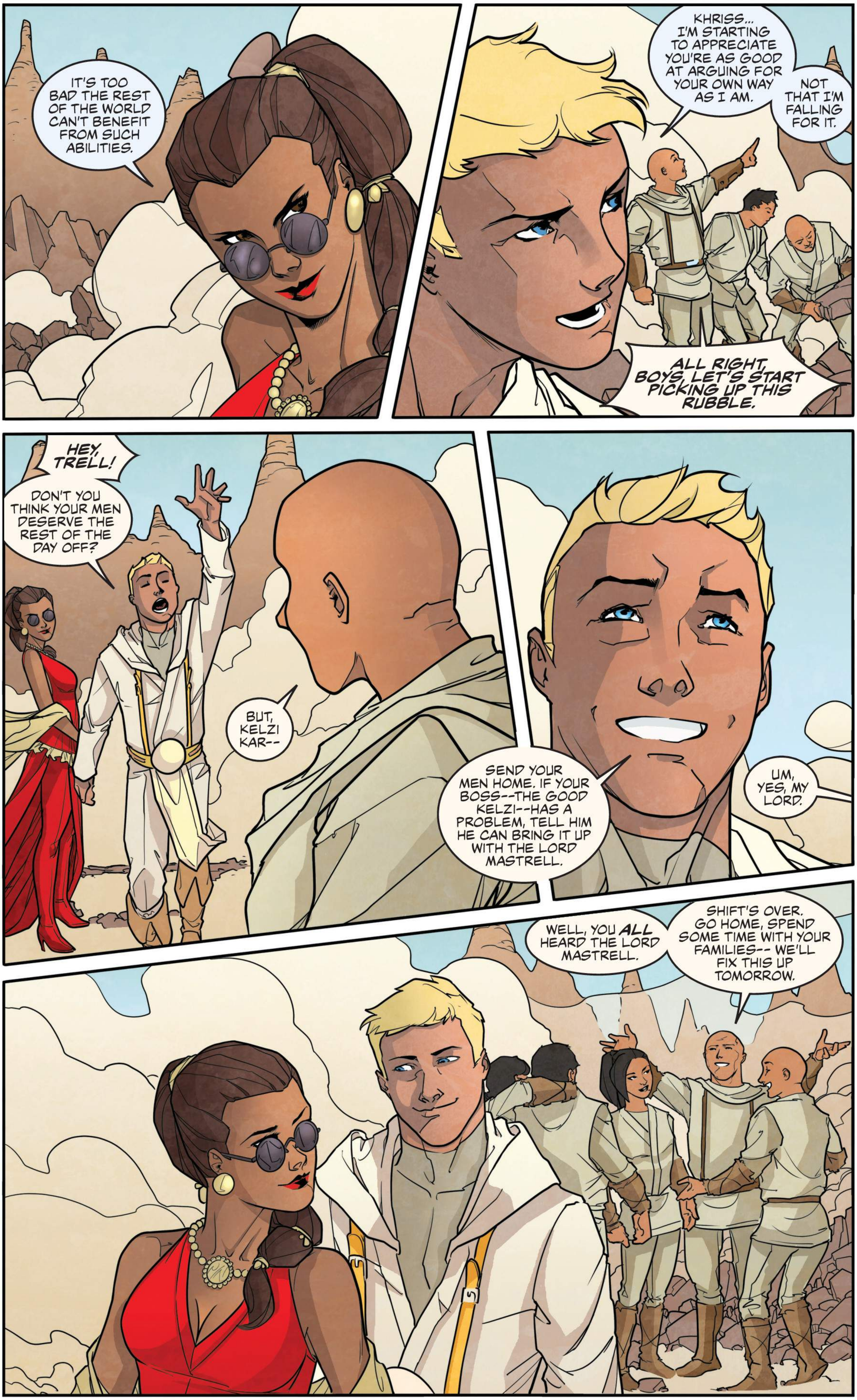

WHAT IS YOUR NAME, MAN?
TRELL, SIR.
ALL RIGHT, TRELL. NEXT TIME YOU HAVE A PROBLEM LIKE THIS, SEND FOR A SAND MASTER IMMEDIATELY.
YES, MY LORD.


GOOD.

KHRISS? YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE FOLLOWED...YOU COULD HAVE WALKED RIGHT INTO A TRAP MEANT TO KILL ME.
THEY CAN'T ATTACK YOU TODAY. YOU TOLD ME THAT, REMEMBER?
WELL... THAT'S THE THEORY!


THAT WAS VERY NOBLE OF YOU.


IT'S WHAT WE SHOULD HAVE BEEN DOING ALL ALONG.


IT'S TOO BAD THE REST OF THE WORLD CAN'T BENEFIT FROM SUCH ABILITIES.
KHRISS... I'M STARTING TO APPRECIATE YOU'RE AS GOOD AT ARGUING FOR YOUR OWN WAY AS I AM.
NOT THAT I'M FALLING FOR IT.
ALL RIGHT, BOYS, LET'S START PICKING UP THIS RUBBLE.
HEY, TRELL!
DON'T YOU THINK YOUR MEN DESERVE THE REST OF THE DAY OFF?
BUT, KELZI KAR--
SEND YOUR MEN HOME. IF YOUR BOSS--THE GOOD KELZI--HAS A PROBLEM, TELL HIM HE CAN BRING IT UP WITH THE LORD MASTRELL.
UM, YES, MY LORD.
WELL, YOU ALL HEARD THE LORD MASTRELL.
SHIFT'S OVER. GO HOME, SPEND SOME TIME WITH YOUR FAMILIES-- WE'LL FIX THIS UP TOMORROW.

NEXT DAY.
SO IT'S IMPOSSIBLE, DUCHESS?

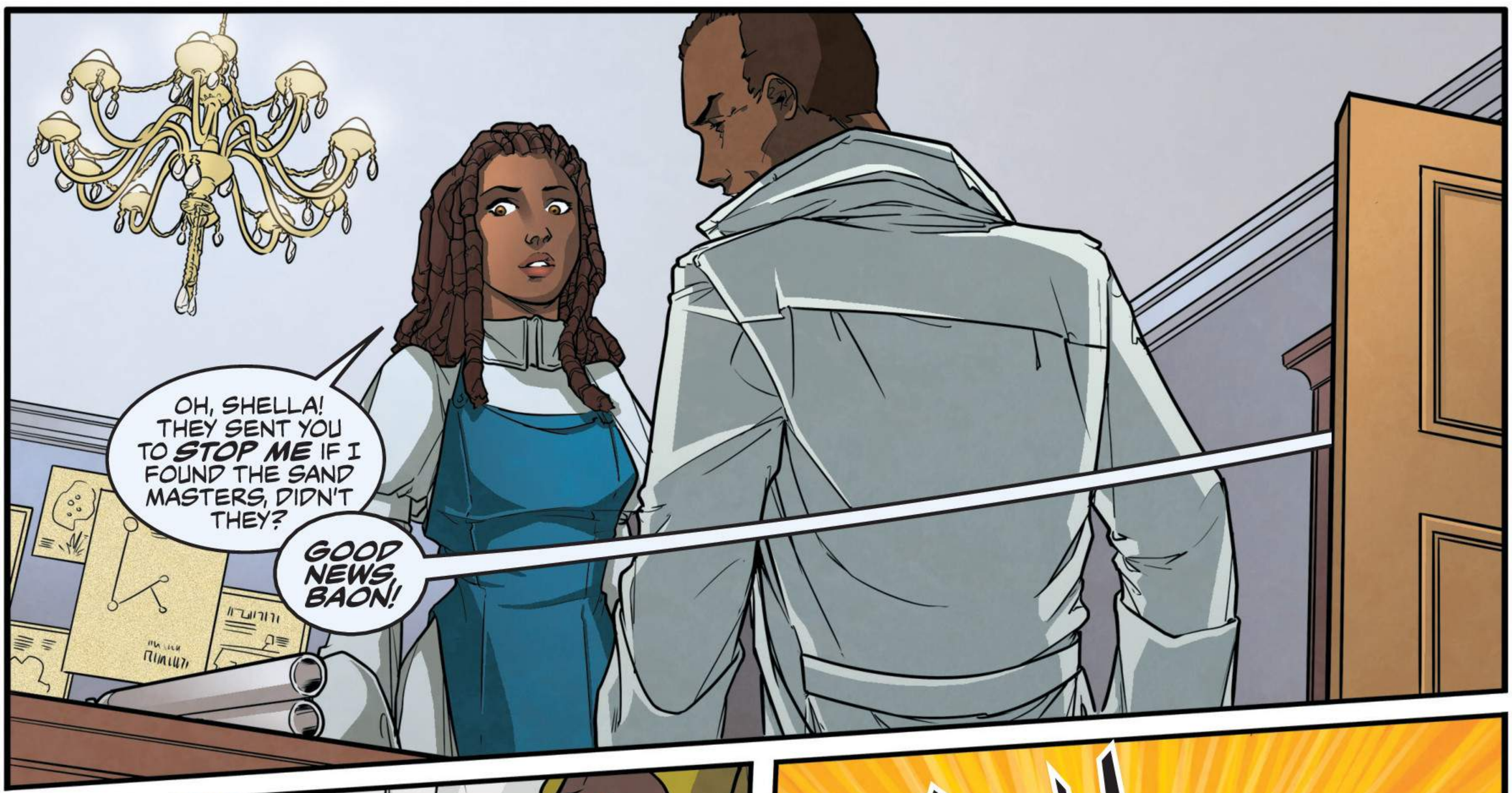
IT'S A FACT, BAON. YOU NEED SALTPETER TO MAKE GUNPOWDER. I COULD PROBABLY MAKE SOME, IF WE HAD THE TIME--

--BUT I INTEND TO HEAD BACK TO DARKSIDE AS SOON AS I KNOW THE SECRET OF SAND MASTERY.
ALTHOUGH RIGHT NOW KENTON'S BEING NEEDLESSLY OBSTRUCTIVE, AND THE WRETCHED LANGUAGE BARRIER MEANS I CAN'T EASILY TALK WITH THE OTHER SAND MASTERS.

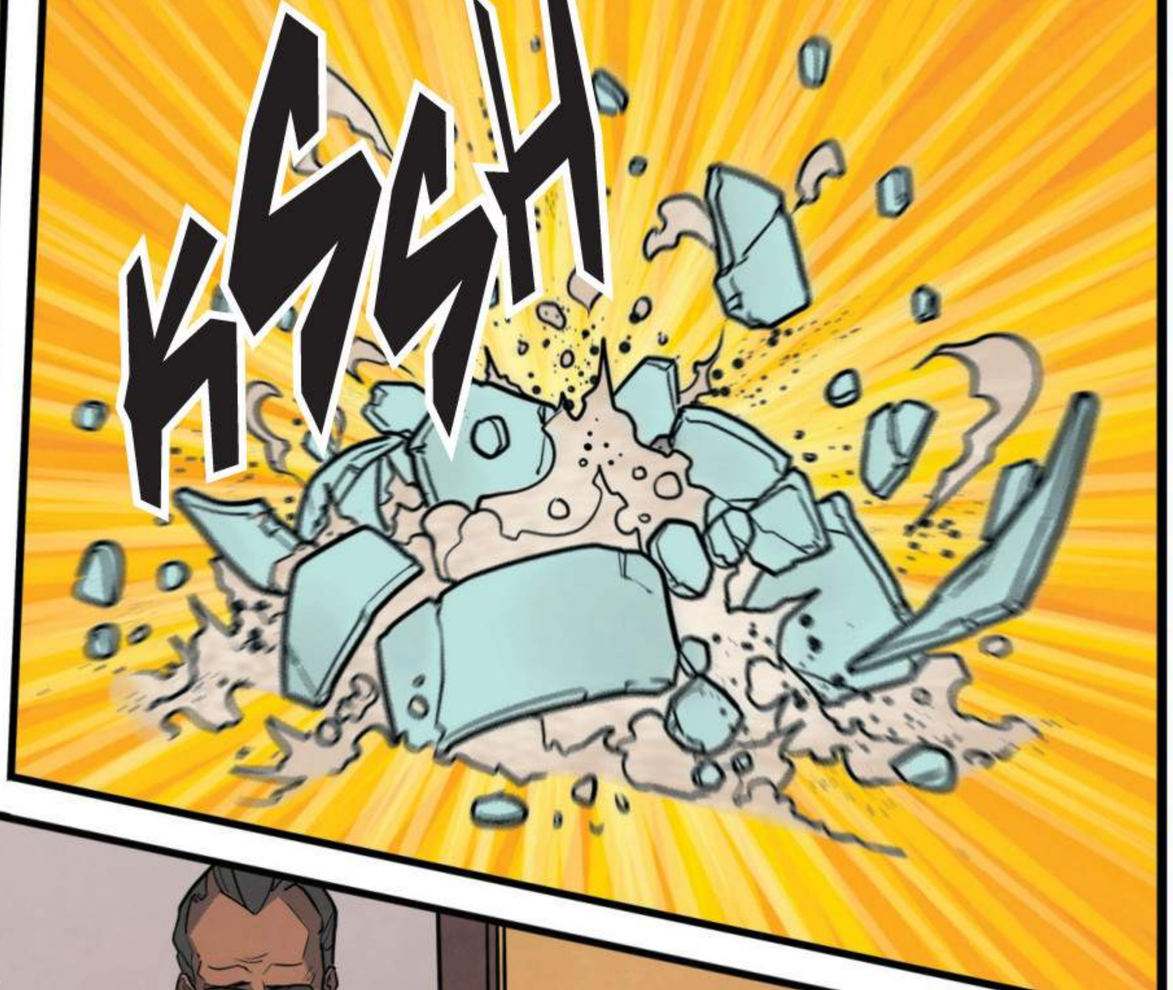
HOW MANY CHARGES DO YOU HAVE LEFT FOR YOUR PISTOLS?
SIX. DO YOU WANT ME TO SHOOT KENTON UNTIL HE RELENTS?
HAH, NO!
THOUGH I'M AFRAID YOU'LL HAVE TO GET VERY GOOD WITH A ZINKALL IF YOU INTEND ON SHOOTING ANYTHING AT ALL.

NOW, LET'S SEE...
FZZZZ
WAS THAT... CARAPACE?
YES. THE OUTER SURFACE REACTS WITH THE LIQUID, TRANSFORMING INTO SOMETHING INSOLUBLE WITH WATER.
A USEFUL PROCESS.

...
BAON, WHERE DID YOU GET YOUR PISTOLS?
I... ACQUIRED THEM.
BAON, THOSE ARE ELISIAN OFFICER'S PISTOLS. WHERE DID YOU GET THEM?
I DON'T THINK YOU WANT TO KNOW.
THEY'RE OFFICERS' PISTOLS LIKE CAPTAIN DERAL AND HIS LIEUTENANT WOULD HAVE CARRIED-- THE TWO MEN WHO WERE KILLED THAT NIGHT WHEN YOU WERE OFF SCOUTING.
BAON-- DID YOU KILL CAPTAIN DERAL?
YES.
WERE YOU SENT TO ELIS BY THE DYNASTY?
YES.

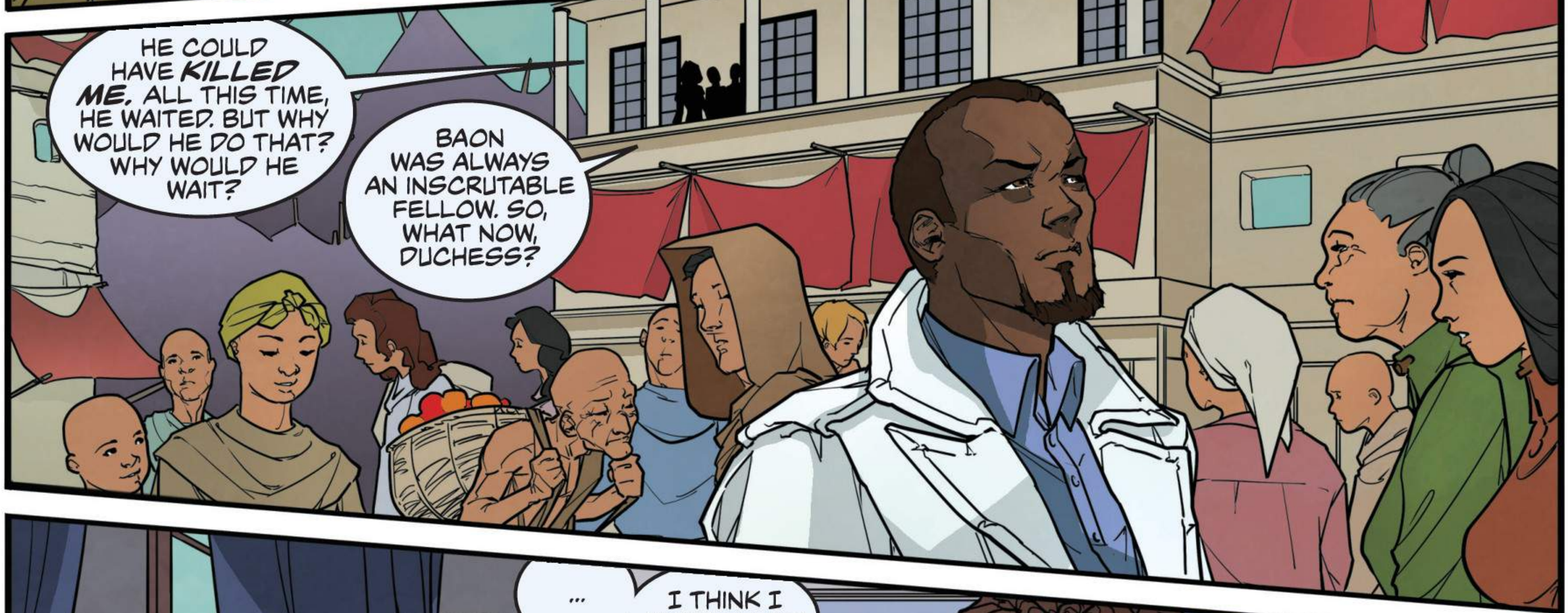

OH, SHELLA! THEY SENT YOU TO STOP ME IF I FOUND THE SAND MASTERS, DIDN'T THEY?
GOOD NEWS, BAON!

WE FOUND YOU SOME SALTPE-- ÷GASP÷


KSSH

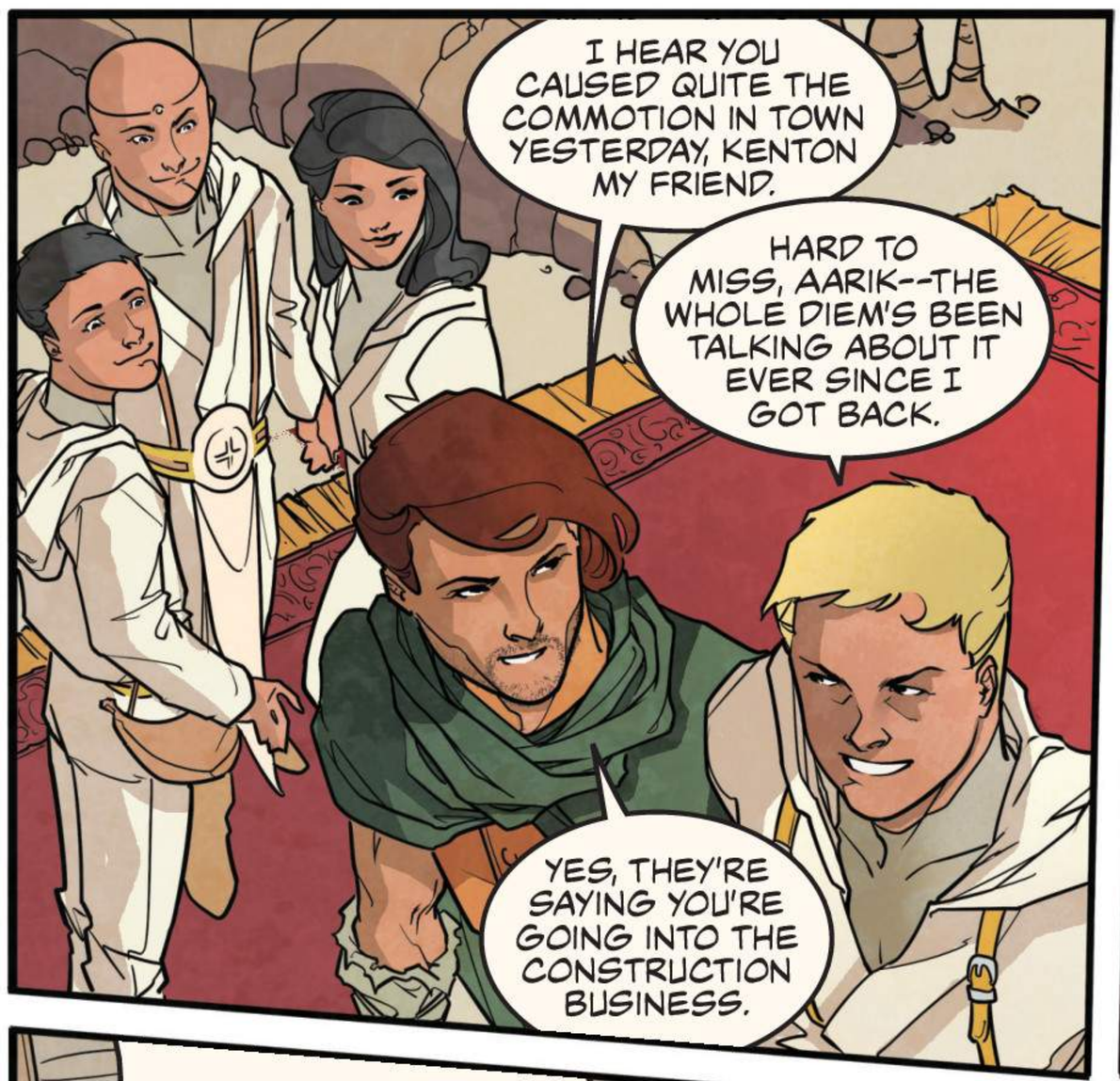
DUCHESS...?

THAT'S IT, THEN. GOOD DAY, DUCHESS.


HE COULD HAVE KILLED ME. ALL THIS TIME, HE WAITED. BUT WHY WOULD HE DO THAT? WHY WOULD HE WAIT?
BAON WAS ALWAYS AN INSCRUTABLE FELLOW. SO, WHAT NOW, DUCHESS?

...
I THINK I NEED TO GO TALK...

"...TO KENTON."



BY NOW YOU'VE DOUBTLESS ALL HEARD ABOUT WHAT I DID IN TOWN YESTERDAY. TIMES ARE CHANGING FOR US HERE AT THE DIEM, AND WE NEED TO CHANGE WITH THEM OR RUN THE RISK OF BEING MADE IRRELEVANT.

WE'RE NO LONGER GOING TO HIDE BEHIND OUR SECRETIVE WORLD OF RULES AND TRADITIONS--

--THE SAND MASTERS ARE GOING OUT THERE TO SERVE THE...

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