

THE MAKING OF **TEMPIAR**

ISABELLE

a conversation with
Jordan Mechner, LeUyen Pham and Alex Puvilland



In 2008, Prince of Persia creator Jordan Mechner teamed up with husband-and-wife artistic team LeUyen Pham and Alex Puvilland to produce an original graphic novel. The result, 480 pages and five years in the making, is *Templar*.

In this e-book, the author and illustrators offer a candid and personal look at their collaborative work process, and the joys and trials of bringing *Templar* to life.





PARIS, 1307...

For two hundred years of Crusades, the **KNIGHTS TEMPLAR** have been heroes to ordinary medieval people. Sworn to poverty and chastity, dedicated to protecting pilgrims, their obedience is to God and the Pope himself, not to any king or feudal lord. Their fighting prowess is legendary.

Four thousand knights strong, with fortresses all over Europe, the Templars are inviolate – or so everyone believes.

On one October dawn, in a massive, simultaneous police raid, King Philip's ruthless minister Nogaret arrests all the Knights Templar in France. The charges – heresy and witchcraft – are a pretext. Nogaret's real objective is the famed treasure stored in the Templars' Paris fortress, which he desperately needs to finance the ever-expanding royal budget. But he finds only an empty vault. The treasure has vanished.

With the order's leadership imprisoned and tortured by the Inquisition, a handful of rank-and-file Templars manage to slip through the king's dragnet. They may not be the noblest or most steadfast of their brethren – but they're the only ones in a position to fight back against Nogaret. Fugitives hunted down by the king's men, they band together to avenge their order in the only way they can: Steal the Templar treasure out from under the king's nose.





THE MAKING OF



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<http://templarbook.com>
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THE CHARACTERS

A Gang Of Thieves



LEUYEN PHAM: Let's start with the main guys. Jordan, why seven?



JORDAN MECHNER: Seven is the magic number. It's Seven Samurai, The Magnificent Seven, Snow White and the Seven Dwarves. More than seven characters in a band, and they start to blur together. How many people can remember all eleven members of Ocean's Eleven?



LEUYEN PHAM: Designing seven characters who look really different from each other was a challenge. We needed to cast them so that just by looking at their silhouettes in a lineup, you could tell: That's Martin, that's Bernard, that's the priest...



ALEX PUVILLAND: We needed variety in the body shapes and sizes as well as the faces.



At heart, *Templar* is a bromance. There's a gang of seven, there's a romantic triangle, but at its core it's about these two guys, Martin and Bernard. What they mean to each other.





MARTIN

joined the Templars because of a broken heart. Rather than see the girl he loved marry another man, Martin ran off to the Crusades.

Twelve years later, he's back in Paris on leave — where a chance glimpse of her shakes his vows and sends him on a drunken bender, away from barracks, on the fateful night when all his comrades are arrested. Martin's shame at having survived while his nobler brethren endure prison and torture drives him to undertake a desperate mission. He assembles a band of former Templars — the scattered few who, like him, escaped capture — to pull off the greatest heist of the 14th century.





BERNARD

is the kind of scoundrel who gives the order a bad name. Out in the cold, left to his own devices, Bernard puts his Templar skills to use as a bandit – and adapts to larceny as cheerfully as he did to soldiering. He's everything the highly moral Martin despises. Clearly, they're destined to team up.





When you first came up with Martin, how did you imagine him? Was what we drew anything like what you were imagining?



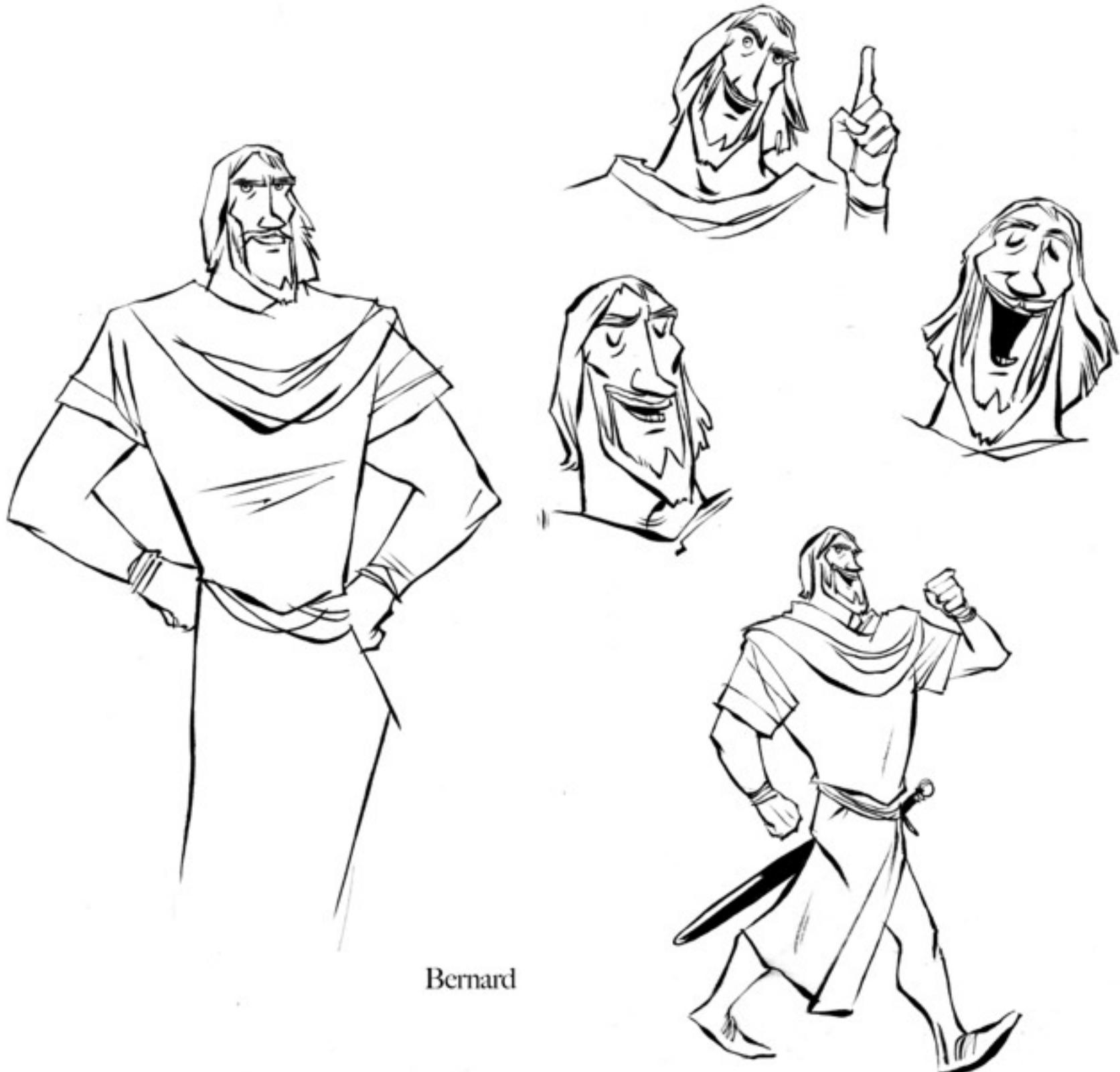
Martin's one-line description in the script was "A brooding, silent leading man type in the Russell Crowe/Steve McQueen mold."



I remember that! Russell Crowe. But we completely didn't follow that.



In my mind, I cast him as Eric Bana.



Bernard



I would never describe a character in a film screenplay by referring to actual actors like that. But as a jumping-off point for a character design in a graphic novel, it can be a useful shorthand. Bernard I described as "a tall, handsome, easygoing lowlife bandit."



Bernard I pictured as a young Gérard Depardieu. I don't know if you've seen "Les Valseuses" ("Going Places") that he made in the 70s. It's the story of two losers, thugs, wandering in France, and Depardieu is very young and skinny, which is hard to believe because he's so big now. But he has that crazy face, a really strong nose, a strong chin, and that's where Bernard came from.



He's got that sunny quality. He's fun-loving.



Personally, of the two, if I were Isabelle, I would have gone for Bernard, because, you know, Martin was depressed all the time! And constantly moral.



I agree. He was always very serious. It's part of who he is. But he's also got the cool broken nose! That gave him something distinctive. You know there must be a story behind that nose. On a visual level, we always tried to give all the characters strong features to make them easier to recognize.



I remember arguing with you about that nose. I kept thinking, what girl is going to go for a guy with a terrible potato-shaped nose?



Uyen kept drawing the broken nose smaller and smaller, and I kept going back and saying "No, the broken nose is not big enough!" It had to be a very strong nose.



I love the broken nose. I loved it instantly.





For Bernard, it was the very long chin.



The long chin, the long nose, he was all long and tall and lanky. Martin was bulky and square.



Those things helped us find a shape language for both of them.



Bernard had to be a little taller than Martin, but not towering over him. If a guy is too much taller than another guy, then no matter what, he just seems more powerful. But I think that Martin and Bernard are equal in power to each other.



What was funny from the beginning is that Bernard is such a fan of Martin, almost like in a puppy dog way, he's so excited to be around him. And the fun of their relationship was that Martin didn't want to have anything to do with him.



You felt that if Bernard ever had to choose between Martin and Isabelle, Isabelle wouldn't stand a chance. It would be bro over ho every single time. Which is why I found him so charming.



When you read the first draft, you said "Bernard has all the good lines!" You kept pushing to find ways to give Martin more lightness, to make him more appealing. You did that in the art, but also you pushed me to change the script. By the end of all those revisions, Martin was a much more dimensional character.



Isn't that why you added the second scene of Martin being drunk? It was initially just one scene in the beginning where Martin drinks, but then you made him get drunk again at the end of Book One to lighten it up.



Yeah, Martin tries to be good, but then when he drinks, this whole other side comes out. It needed to be twice, because just showing it once isn't enough to establish a character trait like that.



There was a part at the beginning of Book Two, where Bernard was arguing with Martin, and we complained "Bernard wouldn't say this, it's too aggressive!" And you switched Bernard's lines with the priest and suddenly the scene worked. I was amazed that it worked so well.



Every time a line or action felt out of character, you'd catch it. It's like an actor on set arguing with the director and saying "I would never say this as a character! You've gotta change this line!" Because you couldn't draw it.



That's true. When we staged the scene in the thumbnails, right away we could tell if it worked or not. If the text works, it's a lot easier to stage. But if it's out of character, then you're pulling your hair to make it work.



And it usually doesn't work.



For example the ending of the book didn't change at all. The first time I read the script, I knew the end was going to work. It wasn't necessary to say anything about it.



A lot of the comments that we gave about Martin and Bernard throughout the book were to justify the ending. Because the end was so strong, we needed to make sure that the characters really lived up to it. By the end, you had to really love Bernard, you had to really care about Martin's ideals, and feel how much they both meant to Isabelle.



No spoilers!



ISABELLE



is the girl Martin joined the Templars to forget – now unhappily married to a nobleman in the King's service. When her brother the Archbishop is placed in charge of the Templar trial, Isabelle finds herself in a position to help her old love – if he'll let her – knowing she'll be risking her position, and her life.



Isabelle is kind of trapped in this gilded cage by her husband and her brother. The heist is her chance for an adventure, to do something noble for a higher cause, the way Martin did when he joined the

Templars and went off to the Crusades. As a woman, she never got that chance.



Her brother is her protector, but he's also keeping her from truly living.



We wanted to show that Isabelle had her own agenda. That even if Martin had never come along, she would still have done something to try to escape her situation.



In Book One, when we cut away from our guys and show Isabelle sneaking into her brother's study to search his papers, that subconsciously cues the reader that she's an important character. Giving her the power to start a scene, so early in the book, elevates her importance in a way that just seeing her through Martin's eyes doesn't.



Isabelle was a hard character to design. I figured that being the only girl in this group, it'd be a snap for me to draw her – but then you guys kept looking at my first sketches and saying "She's not sexy enough!" I thought she looked elegant and refined. Then Alex did a sketch and you, Jordan, were like "Yeah, NOW she's cute!"



I think we had more discussion about Isabelle than any other character.



Her emotions had to be just right. I remember Alex and me fighting about that a lot.



We knew what we wanted with her, it was just about how to communicate it.



Isabelle was the character with the broadest range of emotion. She had to be able to look defiant, innocent, smart, coy, in love, and all that – which made her really difficult to draw. To encompass all that and be believable. The thing I never wanted was to draw her crying, because I felt it would look too weak. Even when she does cry, we see – I hope we see – that she's fighting the tears, that she doesn't want to give in.



Uyen always had good character notes about Isabelle and a very good grasp of how she should behave.





 It's true, I identify especially with Isabelle, so sometimes I'd get upset if she did something I personally wouldn't have done. I remember fighting with you, Jordan, on certain lines of dialog: "Come on, she's a strong woman, why doesn't she say this instead?" And I'd suggest alternatives. And then you'd change it back to what it was, because clearly you had a voice in mind for her. And I'd be "Dammit! Okay, she'll say the line... but she's gonna act it like THIS."



You challenged me a lot on Isabelle. She got stronger because of it.



You've been very gracious with us. Because Uyen and I were drawing the characters, we put our interpretation on the acting, and I feel like we distorted your intention pretty often to match our sensibilities. There were very few cases when you came back and said "No, this isn't how I see it, you have to do it over."

In three books and almost 500 pages, I can count the examples on one hand when you did that. The rest of the time you always let us get away with it.



Drawing is like acting. If actors do a scene and it works, what writer or director is gonna say "No, don't do that, act it this way"? When a scene works, it works.



THE PRIEST

retired from the Templars to a small village parish, where he supplements his income as a pawnbroker and fence of stolen goods. By accident, a great secret falls into his hands.



I remember for the Priest we talked about Harry Dean Stanton.



I tried that and it didn't work at all because he looked too shady. He had to look like a monk you see on those Camembert boxes in France. He had to be round and trustworthy and a little bit dumb looking.



The Priest was fun to draw. When he first shows up, he seems so benevolent, and then he turns out to be this con man. I really liked that switch. The way we drew him, he can pull off the comic relief because of his round body shape, but he has this sharp nose and facial features that let him be crafty and sneaky a little bit later. I loved drawing the scene in Book One where he's confronted by Devoet. The way his expression changes from one panel to the next.



JEHAN

is the oldest knight you're ever likely to meet. Pious and stern, a living relic of the Templars' glory days, he abhors the moral laxity of the younger men. His intimate knowledge of the Paris Temple, where he's served for decades as custodian of the water supply, makes him indispensable to the gang.



Didn't we go back and forth a bit about whether Jehan should be big or small? You had to believe he could still be a tough fighter.



It was good to draw him short. So when you see the group together, they're all different shapes and sizes.



I figured he used to be a huge stocky guy on top. So we gave him enormous arms and a barrel chest, but skinny legs. You know, the way some old guys thin out at the bottom.



Uyen draws very much in volumes. I have a hard time doing that. I think more in terms of lines, the actual graphic appearance of the shapes. That's why I need prominent features so you recognize the characters, because I have a hard time making them turn in 3D. But Jehan was easy for me, because he's a hunchback.



Jehan is the survivor of the days of the Templars' glory. The younger guys weren't there for the great days, they came in when it was already on the way downhill. Jehan was there.



How old IS Jehan?



I actually did a timeline, to figure out what age all the guys were and which battles they had fought in. But I can't remember the specifics.



I was really touched by the scene in the jail where Jehan gets the rosary and you see his devotion to Reynald. That for me made him instantly a likeable character. You wanted to see him get out of there and be part of this gang. He is staunch and unmovable and represents the Templar code. Martin might waver, but Jehan never did. It reminded you that they really were Templar knights, not just a rogue band of thieves.





Reynald is the first Templar Knight we see in the prologue. He's the only Templar in the book who we actually see fighting in the Crusades.



I just sketched Reynald once, based on your description in the script. When I showed it to Alex, he said, "Wow, I wish we could do a comic just based on Reynald," because he liked the look of it so much. Then I got worried about being able to live up to that with the actual drawings.

VON BERG

was sent to sea in a Templar galley at age eight, and by twenty was commander of his own ship. Demoted and stripped of his command for profiteering, he's languished as a sergeant ever since, and has never stopped dreaming of reinstatement and of one day returning to the sea.



ODO

entered the Templars eager to be sent overseas, but has yet to see battle or even leave France. The youngest of the band, he's proud of his archery skill, and sensitive about the fact that he's never been tested in combat.



Von Berg was a fun character to write. One thing I had to be careful of was that he's such a large presence, he might overshadow Bernard.





Especially because we introduce Von Berg and Odo so early in Book One. I didn't want to mislead readers into expecting they're going to be Martin's main companions.



Right. They're in the first chapter and then they disappear for a really long time, until the middle of Book Two.



Von Berg had to be clearly a character actor, not a leading man. So we injected him with visual symbols, like the eye patch, and making him bald, and enormous. He's like a big burly clown.



I tried to pair Odo with Von Berg as much as possible, so we'd think of them as a unit. That leaves room for Martin and Bernard to become the main pair, when we meet Bernard later.



I really liked drawing Von Berg – he's so cartoony! Alex designed him. Of all the characters, he was the easiest to get him to do what I wanted to do. He could look surprised, devious, happy. The only hard thing was to draw him angry. because the eye patch limits his expression. We had to constantly stage it so Von Berg would be facing left, because facing right all you saw was the eye patch and you couldn't tell what he was thinking.



That leaves us one more gang member to talk about.



SALIM

joined the Templars in the East and stayed with them when the Crusades ended. A Turk who converted from Islam, he's regarded with suspicion in France as a dark-skinned foreigner. The fall of the Order leaves him truly homeless, an outcast among outcasts. He has skills and secret knowledge the gang needs to succeed – they just don't know it.



I loved the way you wrote Salim. I found him the most intriguing and touching of all the characters. What made you think of having one of the gang be Muslim?



When the Crusaders won a battle, they would sometimes gain recruits from the other side. To join, a Muslim had to convert to Christianity. So Salim's predicament is even worse than the other Templars. As a dark-skinned man in France at that time, when Christianity was the only accepted religion, how can he justify his existence without admitting he's a Templar, which has just been outlawed? He's doubly outcast. Martin's gang is the only place where he could be accepted.



I'm always drawn to underdogs.



He's an underdog among underdogs.



He had the most backstory of all the characters. Your description of him as a cat stalking the alleyways really made us curious. We wanted to know

more about him. That's what inspired that visual flashback scene.



In that period, the Islamic world was more advanced scientifically than the West in many ways. The knowledge of fluid dynamics and hydraulics was more developed. The fountains and waterworks in *Prince of Persia* [the graphic novel] were built hundreds of years before that kind of sophisticated plumbing was understood in the West. Salim was a character who could explain to the others this thing that was really unknown by most people at the time.



For me that made Salim the most interesting character in the gang. They could never have done it without him.



Heist movies should be high-tech. That's part of the fun – the lasers and motion sensors they have to get past. How they split into different teams and synchronize their digital watches and so forth. I wanted to see the medieval version of THAT. I loved the idea that the high-tech system the Templars built to guard their treasure might be based in science they brought back from the Crusades, before it was known in the West. Real science, not some made-up Dan Brown thing or a power source they got from aliens.

A Powerful Enemy

GUILLAUME DE NOGARET,

chief minister to the King of France, is the architect of the Templars' downfall. Ascetic, unscrupulous and merciless, his weapon is the pen, not the sword. He's made a career of using the Inquisition to destroy the king's enemies – and his own – with such success that even the Pope fears him.



Nogaret is a real historical character. He was like a 14th century Joseph McCarthy. He was absolutely ruthless about attacking the Templars and the pope with accusations of heresy and corruption, on behalf of the king. Everything he does in the book, he did in real life.



I liked that Nogaret seemed to have more dimension to him than a typical baddie. He's really loyal to the king – with everything he does, you never see him plotting against his master. You feel that in his own mind, he's on the right side of history.





He's fascinating. I felt like he must have been driven by some personal animus against the Templars and the church, something that came from a very deep place.



In your original script you described him as being sickly. He was dying and looking for a cure for his own disease.



That was an early draft plot element that we ended up dropping.





That's why in the first sketches we drew him really old, almost skeletal. Jordan didn't like him to seem that weak, so we had to make him less sickly. But he's still pretty old.



He always reminded me of the Grinch. Or a mix between the Grinch and Voldemort from *Harry Potter*.



Nogaret is a schemer, a manipulator. He's not the kind of villain who'd ever pick up a sword and fight the hero. That's why he has his henchman Devoet, to do the dirty work.



Like a James Bond villain. Goldfinger never fights Bond, he has his henchman for that.



Although when Nogaret confronts Isabelle, it's pretty scary. You definitely feel that he is dangerous.

DEVOET

is Nogaret's attack dog. A matchless swordsman and captain of the king's guard, his long service to Nogaret has led him to betray every ideal he ever possessed. He finds solace in pursuing his duty to fight crime with remorseless zeal — especially tracking down and bringing to justice escaped Templars.



I don't see Devoet as a monster. He's a professional, a soldier doing his job. There's no question of morals in it for him.



He's like Javert from *Les Misérables*, the implacable policeman. Devoet never asks himself if Nogaret is right or wrong, that's not his job. He hates Martin because he's an outlaw who's continuously breaking the law and getting away with it.



I didn't realize Devoet was a real person.



The name came from the trial records. It was the name of a captain of the guards. Everything else about him is invented.



You really feel Devoet is a formidable opponent for Martin. Every time they fight, Martin gets away by chance. He never actually bests Devoet, which speaks a lot about Devoet's ability as an opponent. The last battle is a lot more interesting because you realize Martin is up against somebody who's actually better than him.



We talked about Rutger Hauer's character in "Blade Runner."



I remember I looked at pictures of him when I was sketching Devoet. The lack of eyebrows, inset eyes, white hair.



And after Book One, his face is burnt.



Which Alex kept toning down. I'd draw him like Two-Face from Batman, and Alex would say "That's too much!"



I didn't want to disfigure him too much because it would have made him too much like a monster. I liked that Devoet was a handsome guy, almost like a hero himself. There's something elegant about him, you feel he cares about his appearance.



Like Robert Shaw in "From Russia With Love," the Russian agent who fights James Bond. You feel that Bond has really met his match, because Shaw looks like he could be a hero too.



It's a more interesting way to approach him. Devoet is a knight, very much like Martin. It's just that he has a different employer.



I remember you pushing for Devoet to be more clever, not only aggressive. To show him doing real detective work in his search for the Templars.



For me he was like Nogaret's favorite hunting dog.



I liked that Nogaret relied so much on Devoet. It felt like a real relationship.

A Few Good Men

GILLES AYCELIN,

Archbishop of Narbonne, is charged by the Pope with ensuring that the Templars get a fair trial. As a high official in the King's administration, this puts him in the precarious position of having to satisfy two masters. His situation is more dangerous than he knows: His younger sister Isabelle is secretly aiding a most-wanted Templar fugitive, her old paramour Martin.



Aycelin is an interesting historical character, because he's torn between his loyalty to the king and the pope. He had a sister, but nothing is known about her. I thought making Isabelle his sister was a useful way to bring her into the action.



We modeled him on a cross between Brendan Gleeson and Phillip Seymour Hoffman, if I remember it right.



He had to be stout. A solid citizen.



It's a good visual contrast with Nogaret who is tall, thin and angular. Just looking at them, you feel that Nogaret is an extremist and Aycelin is the opposite. He's built his entire career out of not offending anyone who's powerful.





Reading the early drafts, I was kind of confused about Aycelin's role. I could never quite figure out his character, where he stood.



You guys gave great feedback to clarify his situation more, especially in Book Two. It was a challenge, because we had to walk that line. He's such a cautious character. You know he's on the Templars' side, but you can never be sure if he's actually going to come to their rescue.



Also the trial part is a bit complicated and involves political maneuvering that needed to be clear.



That's the great advantage of doing a graphic novel versus a feature film. We could take the time in Book Two to show the real legal and political machinations of the trial, in a way that does justice to the history – which is fascinating – but would be too complicated for a movie. A lot hinged on the multiple jurisdictions of church and state. It's much like today in the U.S., where you can have federal and state prosecution of the same crime.



You mentioned that things Aycelin, Bologna and Nogaret say in the book are very close to what they said at the actual trial.



It was really important to me that the book would depict the Templar trial with historical accuracy. The heist is fictional, of course, but it's woven in with the real historical events in such a way that nothing real is violated.



Let's talk about Pierre de Bologna.



PIERRE DE BOLOGNA,

a Templar priest, steps into the void left by the Order's leaders to become the defender of his fellow prisoners. His legal arguments – passionate, articulate, well-reasoned – are the only chance to sway the court and save hundreds of brothers from an unjust fate.



Pierre de Bologna is the unsung hero of the Templar trial. I was fascinated that in this situation where the leaders were silent (or silenced), here was this ordinary man who emerged from the ranks and took charge of the legal defense.



How much is based on what really happened and what comes from your own speculations?



Everything Bologna does in the book, he really did – organizing the knights to testify and the appeals he made on their behalf. Some of it is almost verbatim from the trial transcript. For dramatic reasons, I put certain things in as dialog where actually he wrote them in letters or documents, but the arguments and reasoning are his.



I like Pierre de Bologna a lot. He felt like the moral compass of the book. He was the genuine opponent of Nogaret.





Bologna, Nogaret and Aycelin all had similar legal clerical training. They're lawyers. After law school they went to different employers – Nogaret to the king, Aycelin to the church, Bologna to the Templars. Bologna builds his case on the legal principles that in theory they all subscribe to, as if they're arguing on equal ground. That's his mistake. Nogaret isn't interested in meeting anyone on equal ground.



It was hard to design Bologna to make him look different enough from our priest. Priests are hard to draw in general, because they all have the tonsure and that makes them look alike.



I love the way you guys drew him, with his round face and frizzy hair.



His face is always sort of set and has a serious air to it.

JACQUES DE MOLAY ,

the last Grand Master of the Knights Templar, falls overnight from an esteemed leader of men to a helpless prisoner. Abandoned by his powerful friends, including the pope and the king of France, Molay's arrest costs him everything – and possibly his strength and sanity.



De Molay is probably the most famous Templar, because he was the last Grand Master and he was burned at the stake.





He's one of the only historical characters in the book that we could find references for how he actually looked. Like his weird bifurcated beard.



A lot of Templar legends and conspiracy theories focus on Molay and his martyrdom. I didn't want to make him a main player in the book, because I think the more likely truth is that from the moment of his arrest, he was powerless. You can see in his testimony that he was confused and terrorized and wasn't really tracking what was going on. As a prisoner, he completely failed to organize the Templar defense or even offer moral leadership.



He's the one who cursed the king and the pope that they would die within a year.



That's the legend. The sentencing where he supposedly said that – if he actually did, which historians doubt – happened in 1314, anyway, after the trial was over and it was too late to save the Templars.



2

HISTORICAL RESEARCH



What gave you the idea to do a book about the Knights Templar in the first place? Where did it start?



I think my fascination with the Templars goes back to seeing "The Maltese Falcon" on TV, when it says in the prologue that the falcon had belonged to the Knights Templar. Even to a 10-year-old kid, somehow that made the falcon sound cooler and more intriguing. Then I heard that George Lucas had based the Jedi Knights in "Star Wars" on the Templars, and of course that made me curious. It wasn't until years later that I read *Foucault's Pendulum*, and started to learn the real history of the Templars and their trial. And I thought it was weirder and more fascinating than any of the pop-fiction, pseudo-history Templar conspiracy stuff. I wanted to see a movie or read a story about THAT. But I couldn't find one. No one had written it.



How did you find your way into the story?



What interested me wasn't so much the mystery of "what happened to the Templar treasure" – although that's definitely part of the fun of it – as the human story of the knights themselves. I didn't want to write another story that portrays the Templars as masterminds secretly working through the centuries for some long-term plan. That didn't fit with what I felt reading the trial records. These guys were soldiers. Their whole ethic was brotherhood and bravery and obedience – today, they'd be U.S. Marines or Navy SEALS.

In other words, a bunch of rowdy young guys, who've taken vows against all the normal things that rowdy young guys do, and they're supposed to channel it all into brotherhood and combat. If you read the 12th-century Templar rule book – which has fortunately been preserved – it spells out the penalties for every infraction: Drinking, gambling, sneaking a woman into the barracks, selling your sword or your horse to pay a debt and lying that you lost it in battle.

The Templars weren't robots. They were guys who joined up because they believed in an ideal. They put their lives on the line for what they were told was a noble cause, the highest possible cause. They spent years fighting these brutal civil



EDWARD I

wars in the Middle East. And then came home to find themselves arrested and charged with crimes they had absolutely no way to defend themselves against.

I was really touched by that predicament. To have the only structure they knew suddenly taken away from them – their leaders, their chain of command, everything – what would that feel like, how would they handle it? That was the spark that led to me writing *Templar*.





Did you read all the trial transcripts or just morsels?

I'm not a medieval scholar. I started by reading anything I could find, including historians like Malcolm Barber, and that eventually led me to some of the primary sources. I don't read Latin or Old French, so I was limited by what's been translated – although it can be strangely useful to read things in an antiquated language, even if you don't really understand it. There's something about feeling that you're hearing the actual voices of the people who lived through those events, not somebody else's interpretation of them. It helps even with little things, like the kind of swear words they used, and the songs they sang. All the songs in the book are from the period.



You seemed to always have medieval song lyrics handy for us when we needed them. As if you had some endless collection of medieval music CDs to pull from.



The Internet is great for that. I tried to find lyrics that fit the story. That Crusades song

they all know, Old Jehan sings it in a different dialect from the other guys, because he's from a different region. And some details are kind of playful – like when the Priest is surprised by the jailer in Act Two and suddenly has to pretend to be praying, what he actually recites are the lyrics to a drinking song, because it's the first thing in Latin that pops into his head. It's a subtle way to suggest that he's maybe not such a good priest as he's led the guys to believe.



How did you guys get started on the book? Was there a long period of preparation and research?



Yes! Alex spent a few months not drawing, but just looking at references and reading. We came to visit and you loaned us a bunch of books. You had so much stuff already, which was great.



We went through all the books you lent us. There's one we constantly used again and again.



The *Atlas de Paris au Moyen Âge*?



Yes, we loved that one, it simply had everything! That book was specifically about medieval Paris and it answered a lot of the questions that were in the story, but also others you run into when you start drawing street scenes. Like:

What neighborhood was that, what trade was practiced there, who are the people you'd see in the street? General knowledge about the city at that time that helped us a lot. We always tried to add as much information in the background as possible and most of that came from that book.



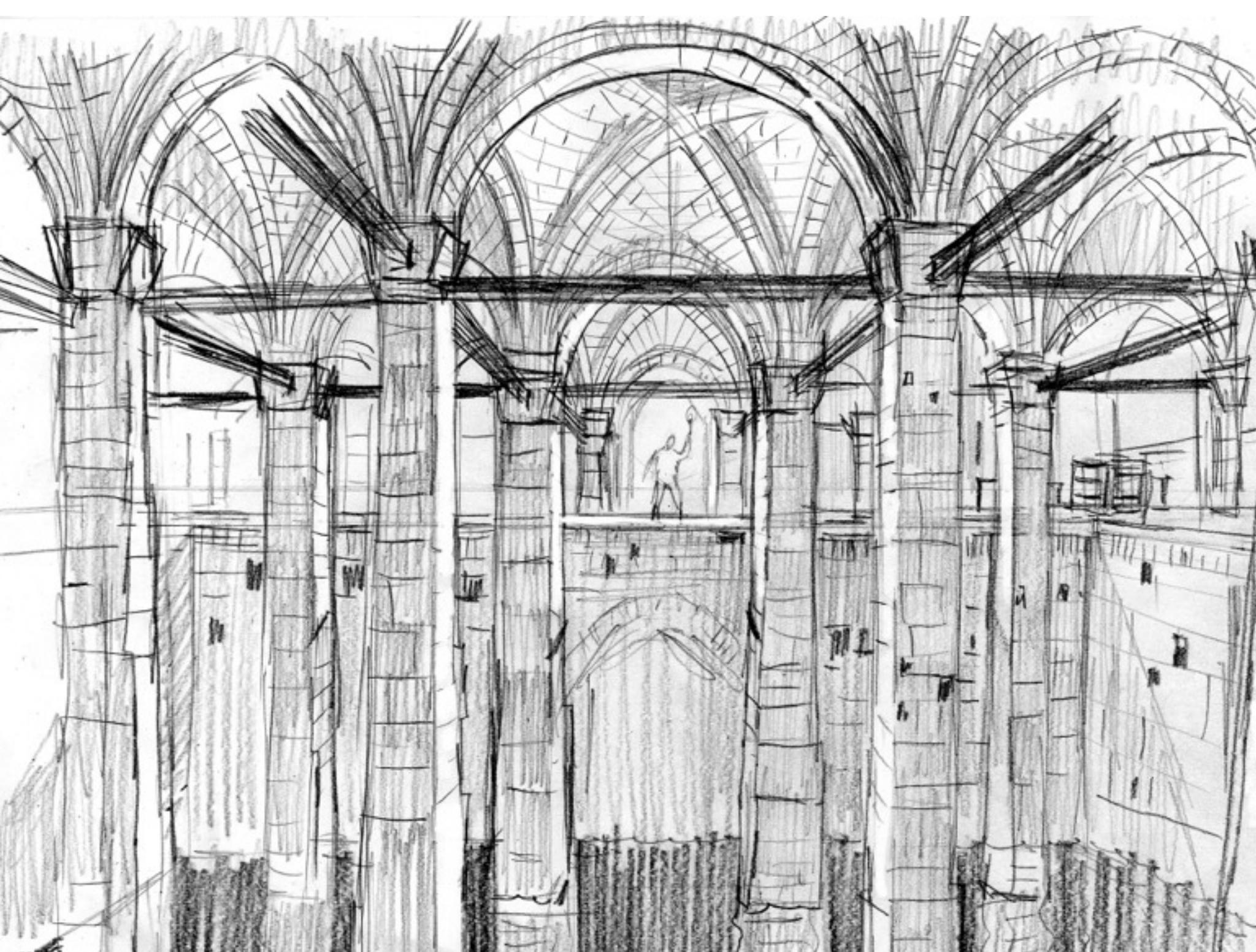
I have to say that when I first read the script, in my head, I thought: "How fun it will be to draw medieval Paris! It will be so nice!" Then Alex came and said "Uyen, medieval Paris was ugly. Everything was dirty and disgusting." It wasn't like the charming "Beauty and the Beast" setting I had in mind.



How much permission did you give yourselves to take liberties with reality? Like "Our story is 1307 and that tower wasn't built until 1348"?



We took lots of liberties. That's a slight regret I had on *Prince of Persia* [the graphic novel], where we tried to be as accurate as possible in the architecture, and chose not to use a lot of really cool-looking references we had simply because it wasn't from the right period. With *Templar*, we weren't trying to make a documentary about life in the Middle Ages. It's about adventure and action, so we could cheat as long as things looked right. Obviously you can't totally betray the period and you have to stay within a certain limit. But the more you work on it, the more you develop a sense of what's right or not for the story.





Which is hard to define. I still don't understand why Alex got obsessed about certain details and not others. We would talk about Isabelle's costume, her hairstyle, where are the Templars going to find a pipe...



It's true, there are things that would bother Uyen and not me, and vice versa. We would have those endless discussions about it. I remember one of them about a scene in Book One where the guys steal a baker's cart to escape which is filled with baked goods. Uyen wanted to have them eat croissants and I had to put my foot down on that. Croissants are from the 19th century, 500 years later! So we had them eat bread instead.



Generic People Crowd



I'm not joking, Jordan. We would get into arguments where I would say "Alex, you can't have that character hold his sword in his right hand in this panel and have it in his left hand the next!" And Alex would be "No, it doesn't matter, it doesn't matter at all!" But then he would fight tooth and nail for a croissant.



What can I say? We looked at different things.



I remember the map of medieval Paris Alex had put on the wall. Then we went to Paris to visit, and it was amazing to find the actual traces of all these places we have in the book. Paris was so small at that time, yet to them it was a thriving metropolis.



When I first started to plan the story, I didn't realize how early 1307 really was. My image of medieval France came from movies like "Queen Margot" and "The Three Musketeers." But that was the 17th century, 300 years later. In 1307, that style of architecture and the buildings you can see in Paris today, like the Louvre, didn't exist yet.



One thing we tried to stay true to was the general layout of the city, the major buildings, especially in the later part of the book where it starts to matter for the story. That's where we used that medieval map which had all the churches and major buildings, to figure out what you'd see from such-and-such point of view.

Going to Paris after we finished the book, I kept looking at all the locations we drew and was sometimes surprised how right or not we got it. For example, the Seine river is surprisingly narrower than I thought.





The quais got built up later. In the 14th century it was just natural riverbanks and grass sloping down, so it would have been a lot wider, especially when the river was full. I think you can feel okay about that.



The way we started was, we went through the script and listed every single location and character seen in the story. Then we designed all the characters, from the main guys down to the peasant or milk maid you see in the street. And we compiled a list of specific references for each location we would need.





 As far as the costumes, you had given us a few very good books. We tried to stay consistent to the costumes of the time. The character we took the most liberties with was Isabelle, simply because the dresses of the 14th century were very unrevealing and very straight and stiff. We needed her to be able to move and have a figure. I think we went up a hundred years with her.

 If you try to stick to reality too much, you end up with elements that don't fit the story.

 Like, Alex didn't want the characters to have those dippy smurfy shoes. You know, the long goofy medieval shoes.

 The hanging socks! People did wear those things, so it's historically accurate. For them at the time, long drapes or long shoes were a mark of social prestige. But to us it doesn't have the same meaning. They look really ridiculous to the modern eye. You can't have a bad guy or a hero wearing that kind of attire.



So Alex would go around editing the size of my characters' feet.



I got a lot of stuff from the Musée du Carnavalet archives in Paris about all the professions in the streets of Paris. A milk maid would dress and carry the milk a certain way. It didn't change that much over hundreds of years.



We compiled a research bible to make sure we were consistent. We had lots of examples organized by class, sex, occupation. The reference bible we made actually ended up being bigger than the actual book!



Well, I wrote the scripts in a year and you guys worked on it for five. So that makes sense.



3

ACTION!

Comics, Movies, Video Games

I grew up reading graphic novels, but *Templar* was my first time writing one. I had a lot to learn about how action sequences work on the page – it's very different from writing a movie screenplay. My education started when I saw how you (Alex) broke down the fight I'd written between Martin and Devoet in Book One.





The way you wrote it would have probably worked great on screen, but it wasn't going to work as well on the page. Fight scenes are like car chases. You can't do a car chase in a comic; they're something that really exists only in movies. The strengths of the mediums are too different.



The truck chase in "Raiders of the Lost Ark" is a great example of what movies can do that graphic novels can't. For 10 minutes our attention is absolutely riveted by moment-to-moment suspense with almost no dialog. Filmmakers control time – we can stretch it out or accelerate it for the audience. In a graphic novel, the reader can skim.



Yes, unlike in the movies, you can't force the reader to look at something.



If you have a 10-page action scene with no dialog, a lot of readers will just skip ahead to the end.



Another big difference is that there's no sound in a comic. There are things you can do to signify sound, but it remains an abstraction. You don't hear anything. Comics are a much more abstract medium than film.

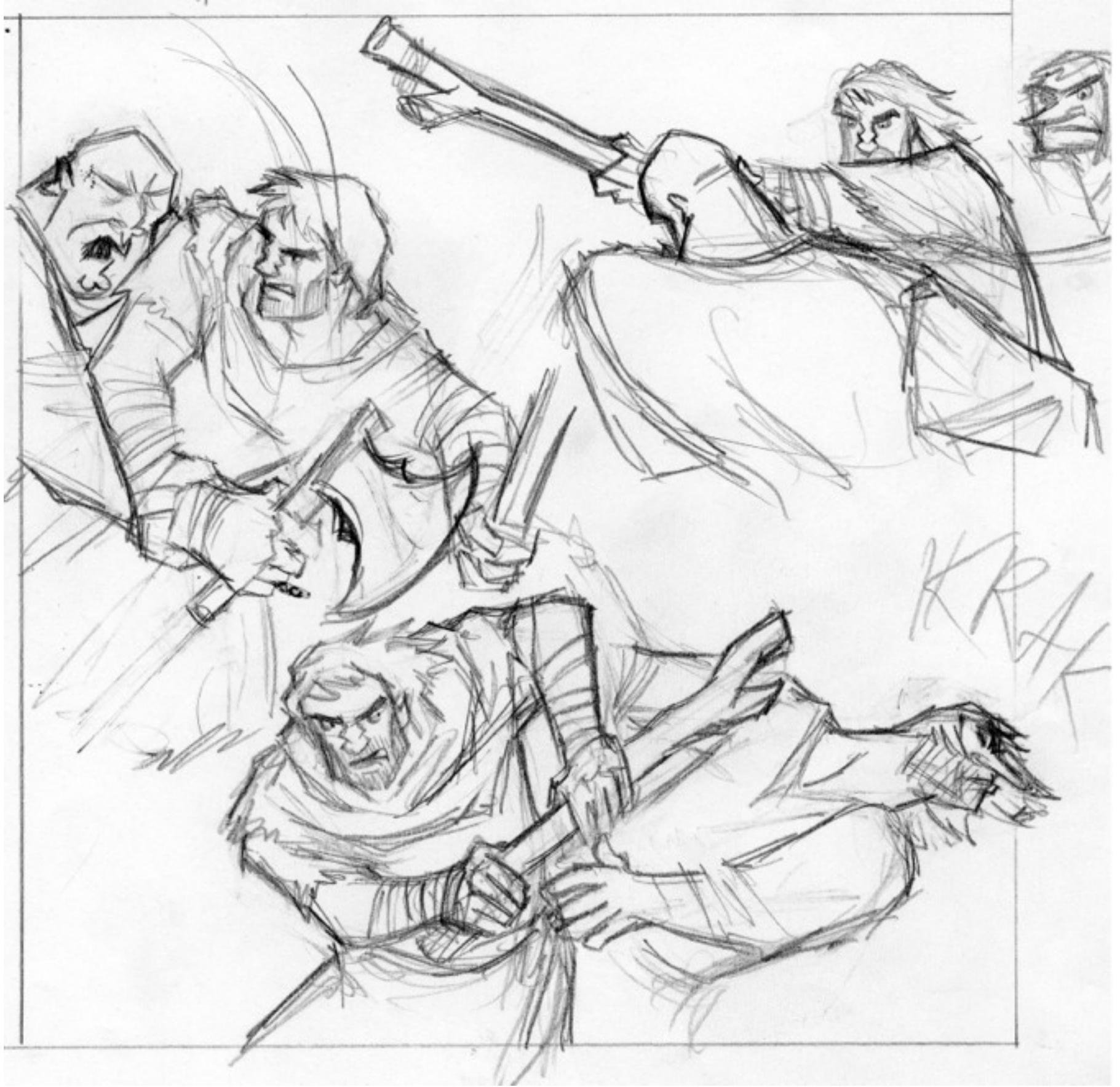


It takes mental effort for the reader to track a complex action sequence.



In Japanese manga, the treatment of action and time is very different. They are a lot closer to movie storyboards. They managed to develop a style that allows very dynamic action scenes, but it's a certain type of action. It's very stylized and would not have worked for us in *Templar*.

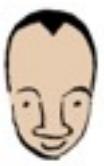




Jordan, did making video games help you at all in writing the action sequences?



There are certain ways of thinking about action sequences that are common to all forms of storytelling – choosing a setting, considering what type of objects you'd find there. Whether it's a graphic novel or a video game or a movie, an action sequence shouldn't be generic; you try to find settings that bring out something specific about the characters and that particular moment in the story. But how you execute it is different for each medium.



Video game action sequences are made to be played; movies are to be watched; whereas in a comic, the action unfolds as a series of static images. The reader has to interpret them and mentally reconstruct the sound and movement.



It was fun to try to find interesting action gags in constrained spaces, like a tower. To find unexpected ways to use an ordinary object like a ladder.



One challenge we had is that a lot of the action scenes are sword fights, and you can't draw sword fights too many times without starting to repeat the same poses.

SOLOMON'S EDGE





The heavy swords these guys had are not elegant fencing swords like in “The Three Musketeers.” There are basically two ways to kill your man: you either skewer the guy or you decapitate him. So ending fights was always a little bit of a headache. We ended up with a lot of skewering, because it seems less violent, for weird reasons.



The heist sequence in particular was a huge set piece that took a lot of planning. You guys did some fun things to clarify the action that you can only do in a graphic novel, like diagrams and maps.



Designing treasure maps is fun. Also, it was functional. In the heist, the script cuts back and forth between different groups of people doing different things simultaneously, and while that type of intercutting between scenes is easy in movies, it's trickier in comics. In a film the audience can recognize very quickly where they are; you have sound, movement, you can communicate a lot of information almost instantly. But in comics, once again, people look at what they want. You glance at a panel which is a still image, read the dialog, then move on to the next panel. That makes it difficult to reliably and quickly communicate non-verbal information like: Who are we looking at now? Where are these guys compared to the other guys? Every time you jump from one place to another, you break the flow.



Visual Storytelling



I wrote the script in “master shot.” That is, I didn’t usually try to dictate where panel breaks would go. I knew that whatever I said, you’d end up doing it your own way. How did you go about breaking down the script into panels, deciding how to lay out the action on the page?



We started by breaking down each chapter into pre-thumbnails. Those were very small drawings. Two inches across.



At that stage, we would already make most of the big pacing decisions. Like "We need a double page spread for this moment," or making sure that a big reveal would be on a left-hand page, not the right.



Often, double-page spreads were not action scenes. Like the Cemetery of the Innocents in Book Two. It’s a quiet moment where nothing happens, but reading the script, you could sense that a pause was needed there. The characters are tiny in the background, it’s not about grand spectacle. It has an ominous feeling.



A lot has to do with rhythm. The scene leading up to that double-page spread is a series of small panels, head shots with lots of dialog. Then you go from that to a big, almost silent panel. The contrast makes it work. As Uyen says, these decisions are very often implied by the script. You get a sense of where to slow down and where to speed up. We might choose four panels instead of one, or long horizontal panels instead of square ones, because it suggests different perceptions of the action: Is it long or short, shattered or continuous? Do we have time cuts? How will the dialog be treated, is it one line per panel or a big panel with eight text boxes?

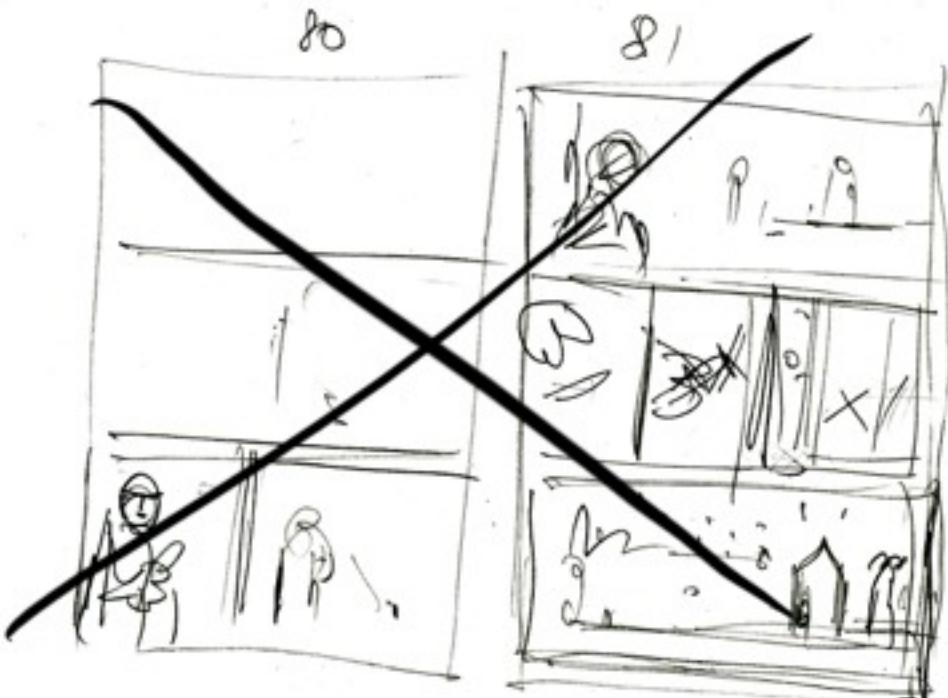
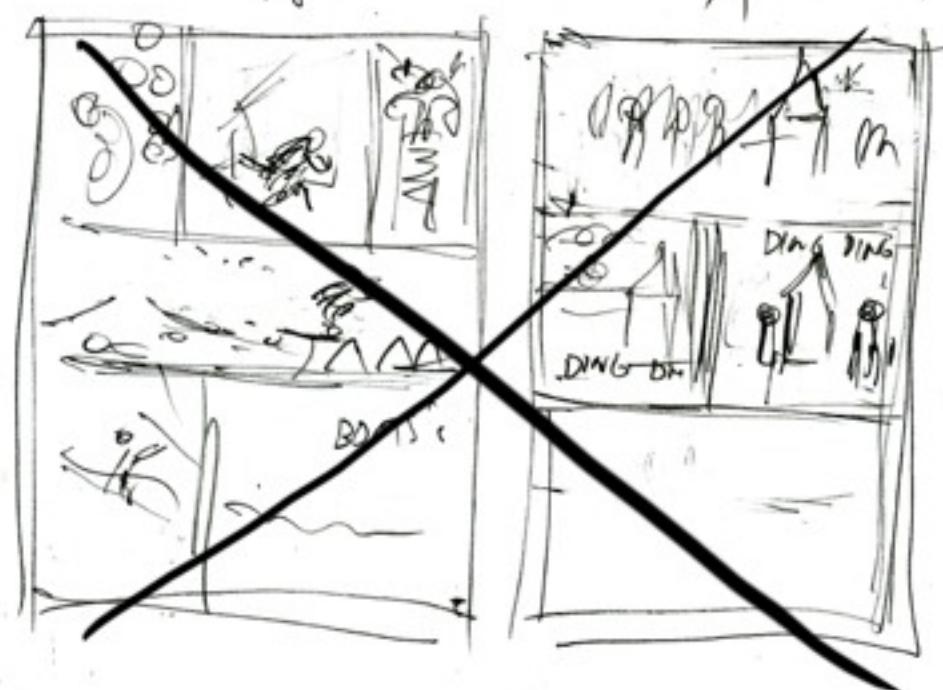
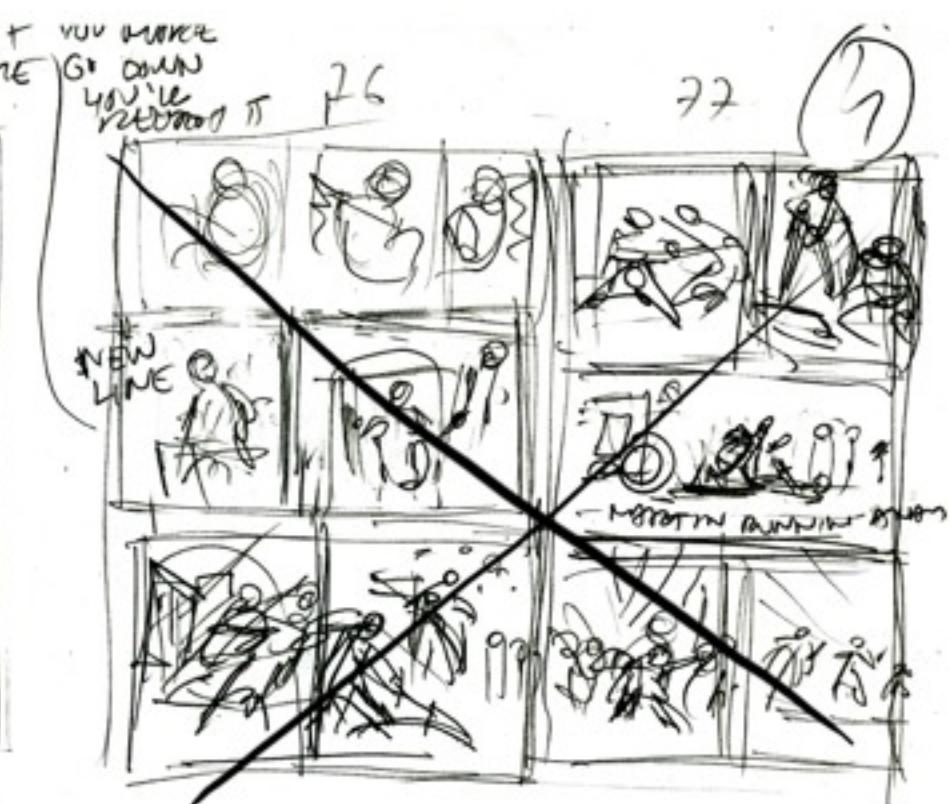


We argued about everything, but interestingly, we never disagreed about where to put the double-page spreads. Those moments were like pillars, foundation stones we would build around.



Sometimes, after reading a specific scene, we would decide it would be nice to have five or six pages with no dialog. Like the scene where Martin follows Isabelle for the first time. That was Uyen’s idea and it worked great.







Jordan, did we ever skip a moment you wished we'd dwelled on longer?



There were small moments, like a glance exchanged between two characters, that I'd envisioned in the script but that disappeared in the thumbnails. Usually, when I saw how you did it, I'd agree. Sometimes those moments would have worked in a movie but not so well on the page. I also liked it when you cut dialog. The fewer words, the better.



The only time we cut dialog was when we were sure we could communicate what you wanted to say without it.

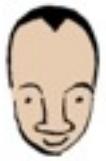


That happens in screenwriting too. You realize when you do the scene with actors that some lines aren't needed, their faces say it all.

The Heist Genre



What gave you the idea to write a medieval heist?



Starting with the idea of doing a story about the Templar trial from the knights' point of view, I realized that those historical events were so dark and grim, it needed something to lighten it. I wondered: What happened to the knights who didn't get captured, the ones who slipped through the net? Because there must have been a few. How would they survive, as fugitives and outlaws?



It occurred to me that some of them might have become thieves. Then I thought of the disappearance of the Templar treasure, which is one of the great historical mysteries. And a heist kind of jumped into my mind as the perfect thing to counterbalance the darkness of the trial.



Was there a particular heist movie you were influenced by?



Heist movies are such a well-established movie genre – from “Ocean's Eleven” and “The Italian Job” all the way back to “Topkapi” and “The Sting,” which was my favorite movie when I was nine. Part of the fun is the mechanics of the heist itself, but also the colorful criminal characters you can have in the gang, and the interplay between them. They're usually people who are outside society, underdogs who come together for this special purpose. And the person they're stealing from is the villain – someone much more powerful who's safely protected by the establishment, but is truly evil, which makes us root for our guys. All that was a great fit for the Templars. Historically, these were guys who joined out of a certain ideal of heroism, and then it was taken away from them.



What I like in the heist genre is the “how to” aspect of it. The movies, books, stories in that genre have an almost educational side. They show you how it's done, practically speaking. It's interesting to see people work. I'm a sucker for great craftsmanship, I guess.



It's practically a requirement that each member of the gang has a special knowledge or skill that is needed to break into the impregnable vault. Often they split into separate teams, where one has to disable a video feed or some kind of high-tech defense system.

It was fun to try to figure out what would be the medieval equivalent of that, like synchronizing their actions by the tolling of the church bells. The 14th-century version of high tech. And then, of course, the heist never goes as planned.



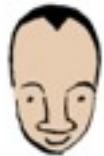
It's like watching a puzzle assembling itself. You have to make sure all the parts fit and work as they're supposed to. It's fun to see the pieces coming together and there's suspense because you're afraid it won't fit in the end.



5

CREATIVE COLLABORATION

Courtship



Alex, didn't you hesitate to do this project at first, because so many French comic books are historical adventures?



It's true, that's a very well-represented genre in France. There are millions of them. Another reason was the scale of the project – three books which ended up

making up almost 500 pages. I knew it would go on for years... and it did! Also, I had just finished working with Uyen on another book, and a baby, so I was hoping to do something on my own, rather than collaborate again with my darling wife. For all these reasons I was not sure at the time if this was the right project to do next.



You have me to thank for getting Alex to do it, because when we got the script I thought: "That sounds fun!" I'm the type of person who just jumps in, not thinking about the amount of work it's going to involve, and Alex is so not that way. Then you came to visit us in San Francisco.



It was the first time we met in person, which is kind of crazy considering you'd just spent a year on *Prince of Persia*. I'd wanted the PoP graphic novel to be different from the video games, and from the movie (which I was writing at the time), so I tried to keep at arm's length on that book and not meddle too much – not just because I didn't want to step on your toes, but also I didn't want to step on [writer] A.B.'s toes.



On *Prince of Persia* we really felt isolated, not

"SOLOMON'S THIEVES"

BOOK ONE:
SIDON

CHAPTER 1

ACRE AT SUNSET

A walled Crusader city on the Mediterranean. Templar ships crowd the harbor, their flag a red cross on white. Seen from this distance, the view is almost postcard with the setting sun turning the sky a dramatic pink-orange. It's only on second look that we notice the battle raging, and fires burning throughout the city. May, 1291.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
I never saw Jerusalem, that
holiest of holy places.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The closest I got was Acre.

There's a distant DRUMBEAT coming from somewhere inside the city: BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM...

CLOSER VIEW

Focusing on the Templar fortress at the seaward extremity of the city. Except for this one holdout, the rest of the city has already fallen to the attacking Muslim army, whose cover the plain outside. Now, with catapults and towers they're laying siege to the last fortress.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
For twelve days our fortress held fast, while the Saracens laid waste to the city.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Thousands took refuge with us. Women, children. We shared

looking straight at Martin and Isabelle. Their conversation has attracted attention; it's too intense and intimate, given their disparity in social class.

TIN
s a hand on Isabelle's arm, speaks into her ear...

MARTIN

Meet me at Notre-Dame, tomorrow
at vespers. By the statue of
Mary.

cking up, bowing, and speaking LOUDLY for the watchers' benefit:
...the shilling, ma'am.



I only knew you from your emails. But I noticed that on the rare occasions you offered story suggestions, your ideas were absolutely spot on.



The lesson we learned on *Prince of Persia* was that we had to take charge for what the book was going to look like, that we were ultimately responsible for the final outcome.



So I came to your place in San Francisco and tried to sell you guys on *Templar*. You said you'd think about it. I left feeling you probably weren't going to do it – for all the reasons Alex mentioned – but I really wished you would!



Jordan, you had him at hello.



That's because he brought us croissants when he came to visit. How can I say no to a man who brings me delicious croissants?



Seriously, it was THE thing we didn't like on *Prince of Persia*, that we had so little contact with the writer or impact on the story. We wanted to really work with someone, and I think when you came it

part of a collaborative process. We were sort of the hired hands brought in to make sure everything comes together, but we didn't really get to talk to the writer or the editor or even you about the book.

EXT. PARIS - VIEW FROM LEFT BANK - DAWN

Quieter and less crowded than the Right Bank, with feel, the Left Bank of Paris is dominated by religious establishments -- churches, abbeys, monasteries, and university -- with much of the land in between devoted to farmland, pastures, etc. Vineyards cover the slope of Genevieve hill from the abbey down to the Seine.

We're looking down on the Ile de la Cite and Notre-Dame. Somewhere in the city far below, a CRYER shouts...

CRYER
Hear ye, hear ye! The Commission of Bishops is now in session!

And from another part of the city, another CRYER...

CRYER (CONT'D)
Hear ye! Anyone who wishes to speak in defense of the Order

became very clear it would be a lot more hands-on. We liked talking to you straight away. You seemed very receptive to ideas. I even remember Alex saying "here are the things I'm not too crazy about with the story" and your reaction made it clear to us that you were going to be great to work with.



That's what allowed us to decide right away. We said "Give us two weeks to think about it," but the truth is that we made our decision within three minutes after you left our place.



And you kept me hanging all day!



It could have been worse. We could have waited two weeks.



Here you are. You charmed us!

The Story Evolves



How did you get started on the book?



To begin, both of us re-read the script and took notes. You'd given us a full script for Book One and a synopsis for Books Two and Three. We sent you our first big round of notes before we drew anything. Then we started working on character designs.



I went off and started drawing the characters while you two were still talking about the story.



Then we did these pre-thumbnails we mentioned earlier. Tiny little drawings to give us a first, rough idea of how to storyboard the action on the page. Uyen and I would argue about the number of pages for each scene.



Endlessly! Every time Alex had to thumbnail action scenes, he would start too long. I would push him to cut the number of pages, to reduce it to the essential.



The script was very long and we had to make sure we could tell the story in a reasonable number of pages. On Book Three, Uyen finally gave up, saying she was tired of fighting with me about the page count, and let me have my way. That's why book three is 40% longer than the first two.



The original plan was to publish three volumes one year apart. Book One was published first, as *Solomon's Thieves*. But then when you guys were almost finished with Book Two, First Second made the decision to publish the three books together as one large volume, which I was really happy about. So Book Two went on the shelf.



For two years.



Then, in the course of doing Book Three, we figured out a new solution for the final stage of the heist, which worked much better than what we had before.

er
35.5 KB Save Quick Look

alright so we uploaded all our stuff on
A few notes:
We're not 100% happy with all the cha
opposites or something like that. Ayce
In some case we moved away from th
trustworthy enough for that character.
In some other characters, the costume
a lot of small stuff to tweak there and t
But anyway it's good to have a whole
we're finishing the 3 test pages and sh
that's it!
all comments are welcome
Uyen + aLex

book 1, latest draft
2007 6:27:11 AM GMT+01:00
er

From: Alex Puvilland
Subject: 3rd page
Date: April 19, 2008 7:27:12 AM GMT+02:00
To: Jordan Mechner , LeUyen Pham

Jordan
We glad you like the direction we're taking with the pages.
I quickly finished page 32 and added the extra dialog on page 31 for you to
colors and the font are still stand-ins for the real thing (we also tweaked
It sounds great to have the thumbnails going back and forth between you
Maret and Isabelle and start the pre-thumbnail stage of book one as soon
also send you our notes for the 3rd draft of book 2 when we have a mor
You told me you'd like to come up 05/14-05/15. Can you come on 05/15-05
you soon!

1/19/07

Notes on Solomon's Thieves (2nd draft)

Chapter 1:
Notes on Martin

-- His Drunkenness --
Will that device be used again in the other books? If yes, then that's fine
and you can skip the next paragraph) but if not, it feels too drastic of a
change, almost like a Doctor Jekyll/Mr Hyde thing. It suggests something
deeper than just a one-time trick and sticks out from the rest of the story as a
result.

What do you think of just having his friends make him drunk and thrusting
an adventure upon him? The text could be manipulated so that his friends
somehow trick the drunken Martin into helping them (the whole tunnel bit), etc

- Introduction of Isabelle -- We're kind of thinking
Isabelle's character (martin sees her on the balcony)
spiced up a bit more, perhaps be more suggestive
that the exposition told later has more impact. Our
one that maybe Odo and Von Berg notice Isabelle about it, then they realize that this is THE GIRL M
about, the One That Got Away kind of thing. Late

Jordan Mechner Mechne
Jordan Mechner Mechne
LeUyen Pham
Jordan Mechner

To: Mark Siegel
Cc: LeUyen Pham , Alex Puvilland

Mark- Yes, nearly all text fixes. A few that affect color- see below.
Here they are!
Copying Uyen and Alex because a couple are questions for them.
Again, it's just great.
Best ~J

Text fixes:

p0- prologue: the space between 2 middle paragraphs is smaller than the others, is this o
p21- the song split between 2 panels should have only 2 quotation marks, one at beginni
p22- Jehan should be in bold italic [my fault]
p40- panel 2 Who did she say... should be bold italic
p48- caption should read: Royal Palace
p49- on panel 3 "The Templars? I thought..." the letter I should be the one with bars at top
p52- "a few bad apples..." should end in a period, not ellipsis [my fault]

OSR: There is an extra, nearly invisible "le anhnhu there?" in the bottom panel. quanlo

Delete Junk Reply Reply All Forward Print To Do

From: Alex Puvilland
Subject: ST LAST BATCH!
Date: January 26, 2009 7:12:23 AM GMT+01:00
To: Hilary Sycamore
Cc: LeUyen Pham , Calista Brill
Jordan Mechner , Mark Siegel , Danica Novgorodoff

Hi Everybody !

We're transferring the last batch of pages as I write these lines.
We'll write notes for the new pages for you Hilary very soon. We'll also do and send a PDF as usual probab
pages we also included a folder with the corrections we've made on some pages from ch

ead and replace the pages you have with these new ones when appropriate.
have an indesign file for the whole book that we'll put on a CD to be sent to you guys tomor
boxes not fitting the text, Danica if you run into more of these or if the copy editing chang
color pages 1-45. It looks great. We're gathering our notes for these and will send them in

finished book one !!!

From: Alex Puvilland
Subject: first batch pages 1-45
Date: August 31, 2008 8:11:35 PM GMT+02:00
To: Hillary Sycamore
Cc: Mark Siegel, Jordan Mechner

Hi Hilary

We put a CD with pages 1-45 and son
for the overall Acre color scheme) and
A few notes about the batch you're ab

We treated the Acre battle a bit differe
of the book will have a lot of black. So
As a general guide and for you to see
The way we see it, since the whole sc
contrast.
It would also be nice to have the red c
making certain that the audience und
army is the one coming in, and the ter
Overall that whole sequence could be

So before we start, w
job weaving the Ter
and fictional charact
characters really add
researched historica
a lot of fun.

OK. The following :

about some of these
And you are, of cou

• Sidon: The f
apprehension
and finally h
the reader in
focus a bit.
it seems no

Delete Junk Reply Reply All Forward Print To Do

From: Jordan Mechner
Subject: ST1 a few notes
Date: February 3, 2009 11:56:26 PM GMT+01:00
To: LeUyen Pham , Alex Puvilland

Hi- I read it through carefully and have a couple notes
p17 bottom- need tails on both dialog boxes ("Benedictus" and "Women") with sparkies to show vo



Alex, you'd never been fully satisfied with what we had originally, so you were happy to change it. But it meant going back to change large sections of Book Two that were already finished. Not only drawn, but colored by Hilary, and proofread. Luckily, because First Second had held Book Two instead of publishing it, we were able to do that. So Books Two and Three really fit together.



On Books Two and Three our process was even more collaborative than book one. You moved entire chunks of action, reshuffled scenes left and right.



We got bolder with you on Book Two. We gave you more notes, since we saw you reacted so well to suggestions. In exchange we started to include you earlier in our illustration process, sending you rough thumbnails to get your input. We wanted to let you adjust the story if necessary by showing you how things fitted together. Since you were so open to our feedback, we had to do the same.



I was always nervous what you would say back. We gave you so many notes, and you integrated everything and gave us back new pages in record time. It was very impressive to me.



I like rewriting.



Uyen was worried every time we changed something: "Jordan is going to be upset! We should ask him first!"



That's because I come from the children's illustration world, where it's sacrilegious for an artist to make changes. You do not touch another artist's work. You just don't do that.



You must have been really traumatized working on those children's books.



That's why I now have a harder time illustrating other people's scripts. I prefer to work on my own stories so I can change the dialog if I want.



I'm used to the video game and screenwriting worlds, which are extremely collaborative. By the time cameras roll on a movie, the screenplay has been gone

over and over a million times with everybody giving their notes. Then it continues to evolve during production. Video games are even more that way – whatever script or design documents you start with become obsolete very quickly. A game is like a lump of clay with the whole team working on it at once – it's constantly being reshaped by many hands, and the writer or creative director is scrambling to stay on top of things.



If we had to break down everybody's role to compare us to a film crew, Jordan, you would be the writer and producer, Alex the director, I would be more the actor.



Don't forget, you guys are also the production designer, costume designer, cinematographer, stunt coordinator, and all the background actors...

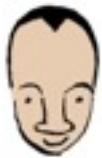


I like the fact that the three of us had not only complementary skill sets but also complementary interests. We paid attention to different things, and each looked at the story and characters from a slightly different point of view. That allowed the book to be well balanced – between the action and the historical side, for example. Uyen would always see certain sides to the characters I would not have noticed by myself. Same thing with your feedback. Jordan. You would remind us about something we had missed or refocus us on the center of the scene. I think that's why our collaboration was so efficient. We completed each other.



Very Jerry Maguire of you.

A Creative Marriage



I can't believe you had two babies during the making of this book. And Leo is now five.



Yep.



That's why we got so behind on Book Three. I remember having to send those e-mails to First Second – and I was always the one to have to write them! First it was "Can we have eight more months?" I thought: "Better to ask for more and then finish early, than the other way around." But at the end of the extra eight months, we ended up asking for six more months! By then our editor was starting to worry if we were ever going to finish.



Readers, blame us if you had to wait so long.



No, blame our child...



You have to put in some of those cartoons you guys did for each other, about working together and juggling the book and kids.



Alex is really hard to collaborate with on his own. It's very hard to argue him off a point if he feels he's right. Whereas I'm much easier to work with.



Absolutely. I'm completely the diva of the group. Uyen is a better collaborator than I am. She's more used to it. That said, Uyen can also be difficult. For example, if she draws something once she won't want to redo it a second time to make it better. You have to force her. Then she'll do it out of spite, just to show that it's not better.



Our processes are different. Alex can redraw something many times until he gets it right. I'm not like that. If I don't hit it the first time, I can't do it.



She's like those actors who give their best performance on the first take, and I'm the guy who needs 27 takes to produce something good.





Actually, that's not so true anymore. I changed under Uyen's influence. I could see she had an advantage, so I started to work faster and be more like her.



And I learned to slow down, to take a bit more time to redraw when necessary. But I'll tell you this: If we had a disagreement, Alex would fix the page when my back was turned. Then I would change it back when inking. Then he'd change it back again when inking his part or scanning the page.



Uyen didn't have enough patience to beat me at that. I was too stubborn.



So much for collaboration! It's more like the last man standing.

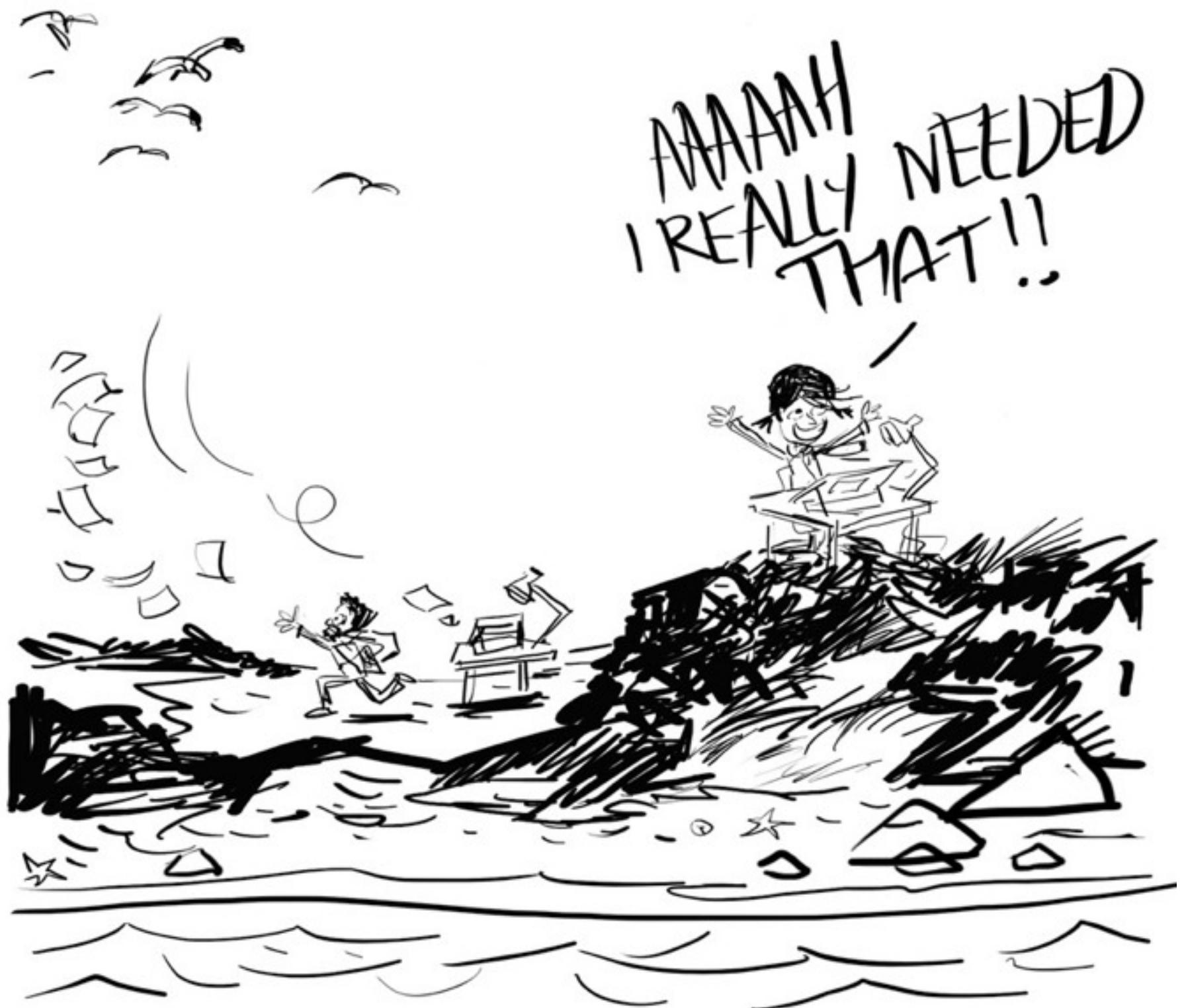


No, I think when you really cared about something, you stood your ground. Everything you really wanted ended up in the book. And we argued less over time. Starting with Book Two, I think we really found our marks working together.



Sometimes we would send alternate versions of the same page to Jordan to let him pick one. Like two siblings fighting and asking their father to determine

who's right. I remember in Book One, Martin's torture scene, right before they put him on the rack. I had drawn the page one way, Alex another. And Jordan in a very diplomatic manner took half of each of our pages to make a new, third version. Which is in the book.



Adding Color



After Uyen and I did the final inking, we would give the pages to our colorist, Hilary Sycamore. usually in big batches of 50 pages at once. She would come up with color schemes to fit the mood of the different moments of the story. All the colors are hers.



She's a great colorist and is amazingly fast. We would give two rounds of notes and that would be it. Most of our notes were storytelling notes, to make sure the colors served the story



I almost always agreed with your color notes and would only occasionally chime in. Often it was about clarity, to help separate different locations.



I remember, Jordan, you once gave a note to Hilary saying that the colors for the last batch of 50 pages were “too tasteful” and that it looked like a Pottery Barn catalog. Uyen and I were cringing: “I can’t believe he said that!” I thought Hilary might break all her china set, screaming your name, but she just wrote back totally calm and collected that she would fix that immediately. Nothing ever made her blow her top. You could send her ten pages of notes and she would make them all and never complain. She always gave us the room to get to a place where we would be happy with the colored pages.



It's true, Hilary is the most easy-going of all of us.



We've never met her. We spoke to her once.

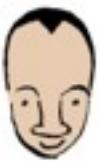


It's always a bit of a shock to see our pages in color. It takes a while to adjust after seeing the pages in black and white for so long.





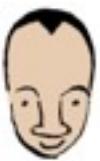
It's true, there is something very strong about the light and contrast in a black and white image, which you lose a bit in the colored version. You feel like it has been dimmed down a bit. But you get a lot back. Colors bring something immediate to the drawing. And colors suggest emotions.



Color is more inviting to the reader. When I start reading a graphic novel, if it's in black and white, I feel like it's a barrier I have to pass. It's like reading a book with a lot of very dense small print. It doesn't mean I'll enjoy it less, just that it's going to take more effort to read. But once I'm into it, it doesn't matter any more.



Black and white is more abstract. I have a friend who doesn't like to watch black and white movies. It bothers him so much that he won't be able to enter in the story.



My kids will watch a black and white movie if they have to, but they'll grumble for the first five minutes.



What's funny is that I can only see *Templar* in color now. Looking back at the earlier drawings we're collecting for the Making Of, I'm happy to see the original black and white pages again.



If we ever have to do a paperback edition in black and white, would you do it in straight black and white or gray scale?



Black and white!



I don't think gray scale based on the current colors would look good, because they don't have a lot of value contrast. Hilary's colors are deliberately close to the mid-tone range to keep the black line of the inks clear and readable.



6

THE LONG HAUL



What was it like for you, working on such a long project?



Overall it was good, but there were ups and downs. Because it was such a long and arduous book on our end. The hardest for me was the thumbnailing phase. Sometimes I would spend six months doing rough drawings without finishing a single page. When you work too long on something without finishing it, after a certain point, you feel like you're never going to see the end of it.



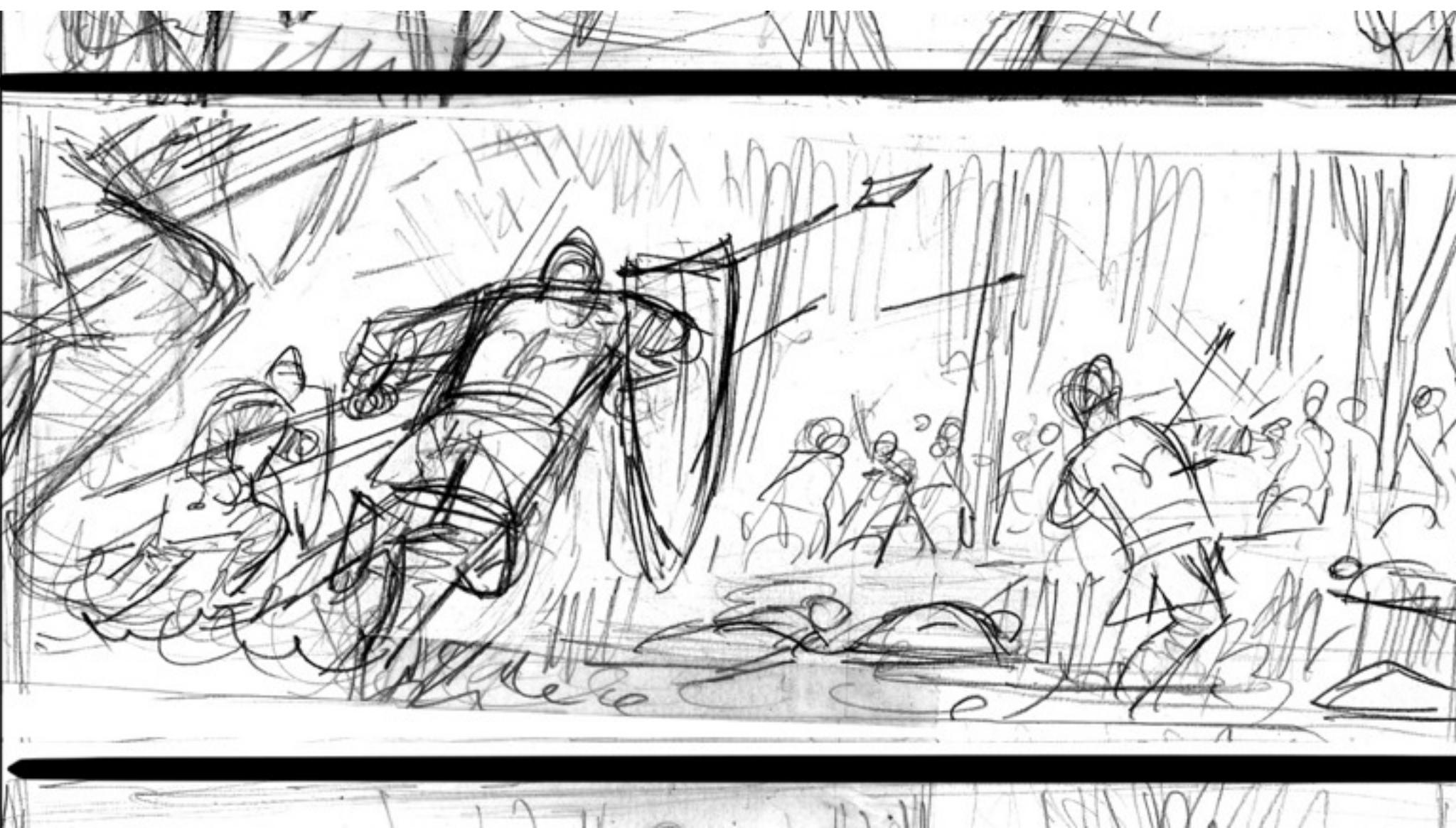
Alex had it tough. In the beginning we worked on the thumbnails together, but after Book Two he started to do that part by himself. We continued to talk about it, but my job was more to make sure that it worked and everybody's ideas came through.



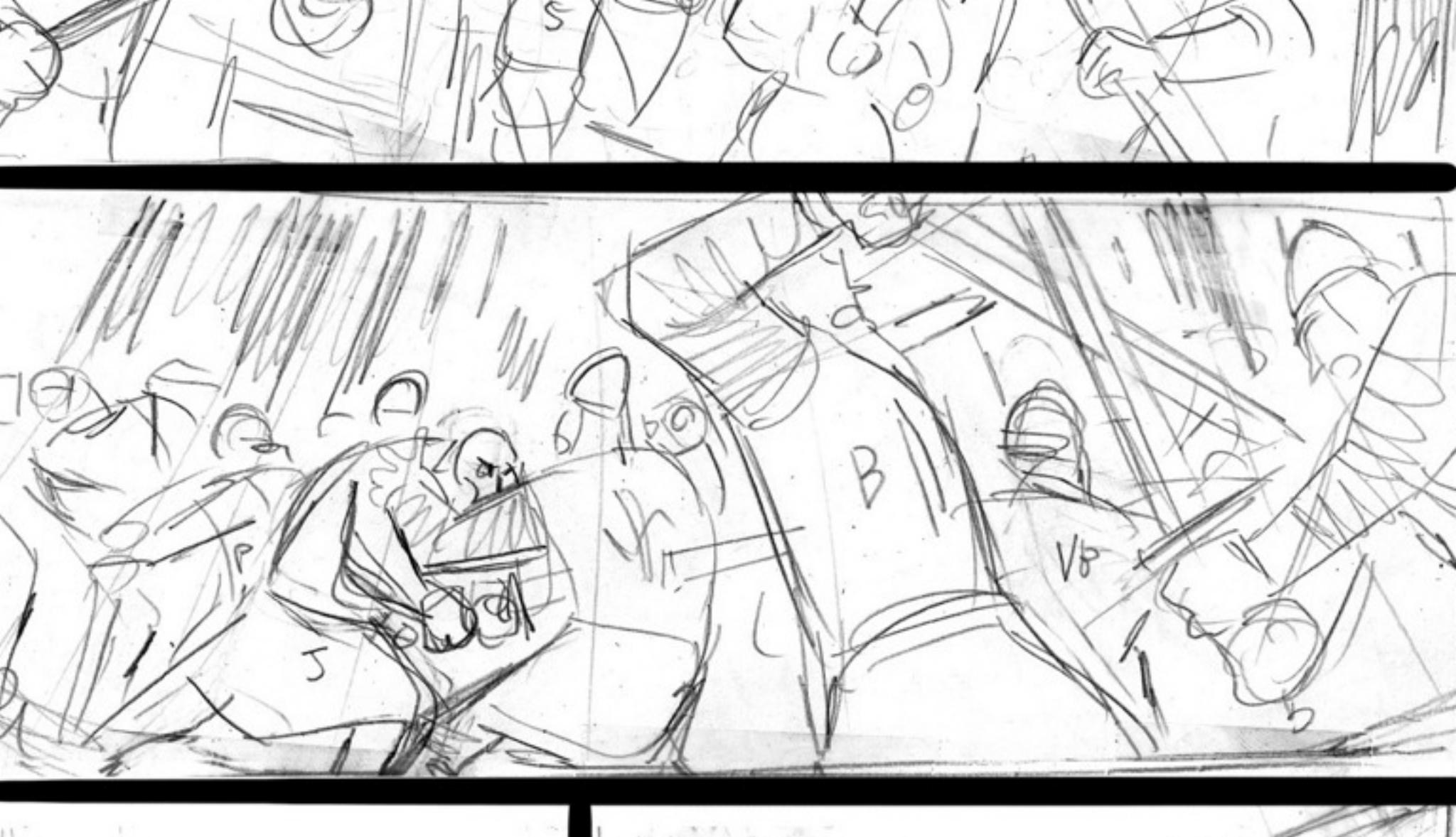
All I knew was that you guys would disappear for a long long time, months, and then I'd get an email with this huge amount of work done.



Alex would work on the thumbnails for six months, and then I would come on like the Little Engine that Could and do all the sketches in two months. I would ink ten pages in a day and give them to Alex for his notes. That would speed him up.



That's true. It always gave me a boost of energy to have somebody else working on the project with me, and also Uyen is a true force of nature when it comes to drawing. She would bang out pages and pages of complicated drawings in an impossibly short time. Like a water tap you turn on at full force.



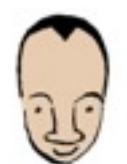
It would just flow everywhere, unstoppable! We've worked on four books together – or two, if you count *Templar* as one book – and that never ceased to amaze me. Once the thumbnails were out of the way, the actual drawing and inking of the pages was a lot easier. That's the fun part. You get to execute what you planned and you see the book progress really fast. It's like surfing a giant wave. You get in that mode of doing finished artwork and it goes pretty fast.



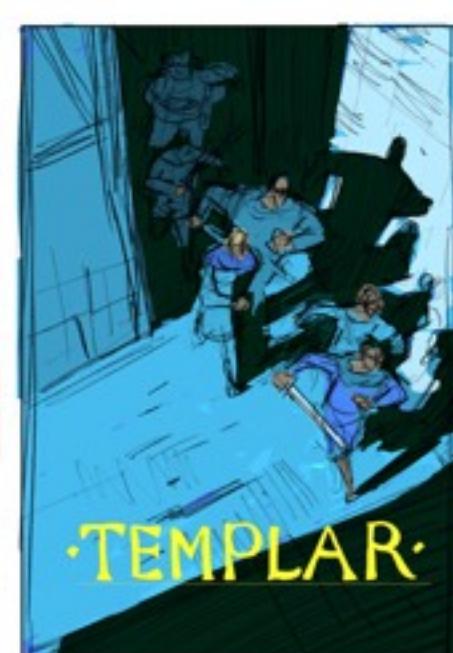
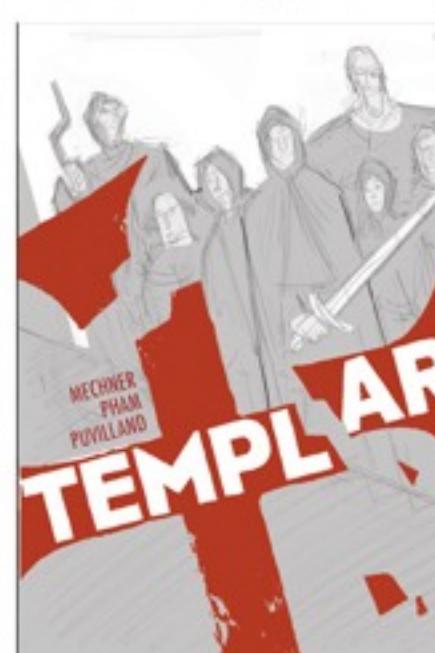
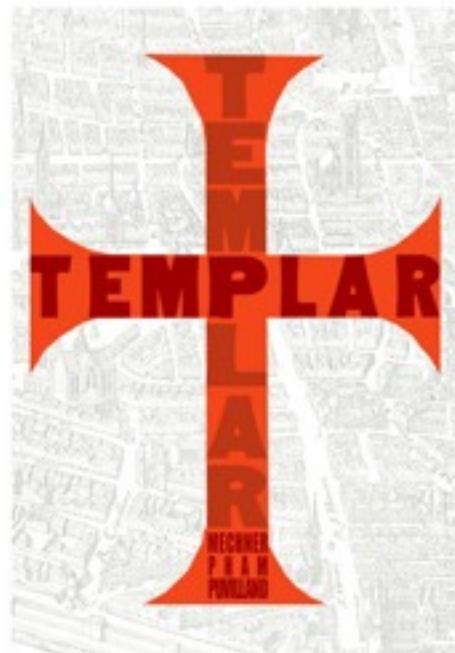
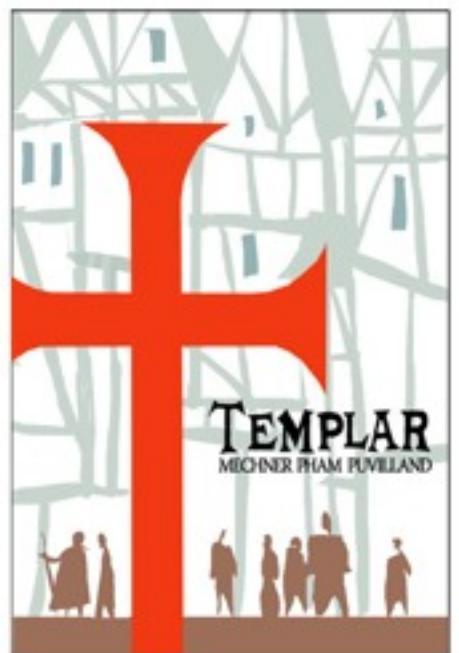
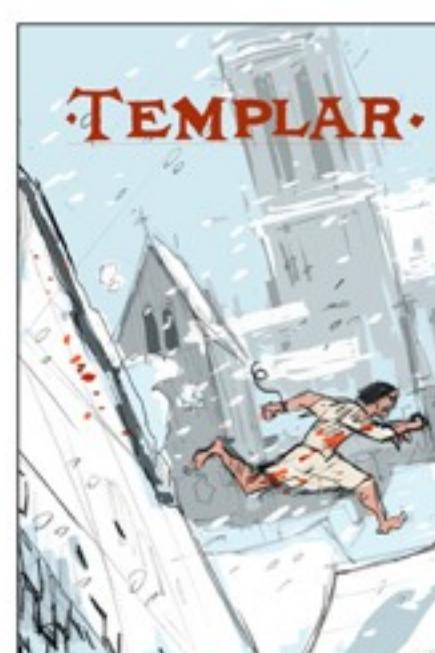
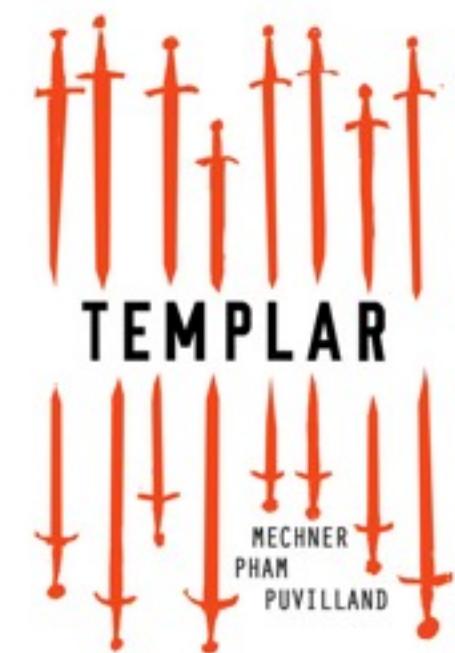
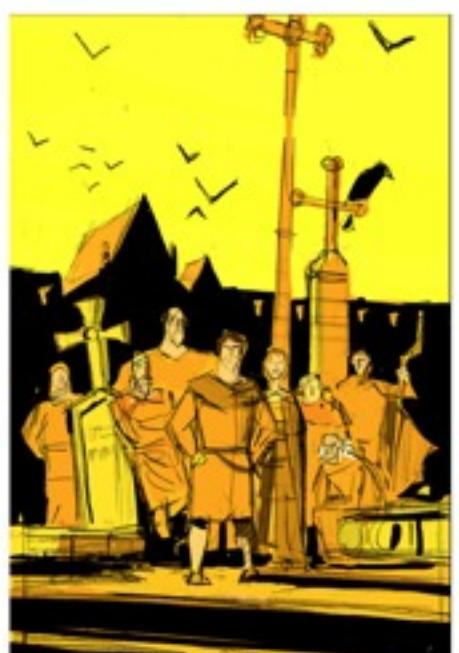
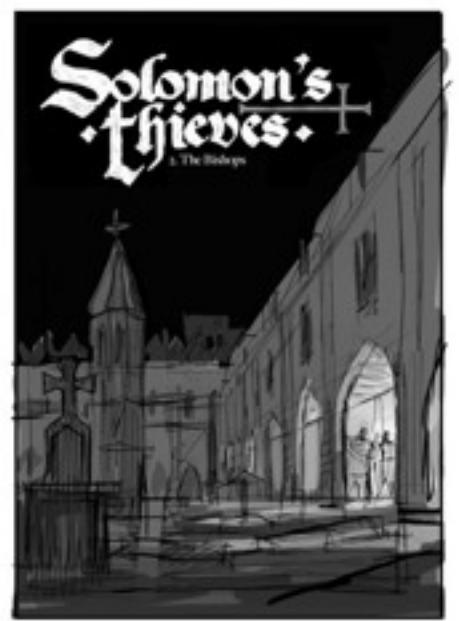
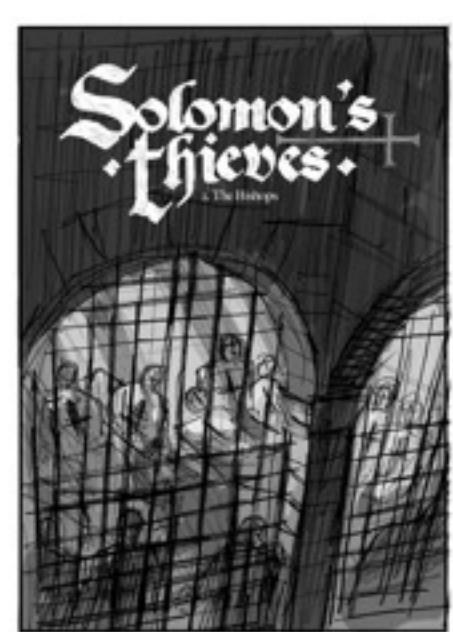
When we're working hard on thumbnails, we can't listen to anything – but when we draw or ink finished pages, we talk while we work, we listen to entire seasons of "Mad Men" and "30 Rock." We're like drawing monkeys at that stage. And it feels really good to be done and to send finished pages to you, Jordan.



What about you? Did your general mood and enthusiasm stay the same all the way through or did it fluctuate?

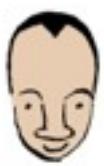


Once you guys came on board, my main emotion was impatience for it to be finished. I loved the work you were doing. Every time you sent me a new batch of pages I was as excited as a kid at Christmas. I knew it was going to be great. But I had to be patient and pace my enthusiasm, because it would be years before the thing was done.





What about in the beginning? How did you feel setting out to write such a big story? Did you ever doubt you were going to be able to finish it the way you wanted?



I think I had already gone through the hard part and the self-doubt by the time I gave you the script. It took me a few months to crack it and figure out how the heist would fit in with the real historical events of the trial. Was it an ensemble story, or a story about two guys, or a love story? And how should it end? It took me a while to find the basic structure, but once I had that, I felt confident and it was more a matter of how to execute it. It was complicated – like a big mechanical puzzle where all the pieces had to work together – but I had no doubt we would get there.



It's a bit of a side question, but do you develop a lot of stories or ideas that you end up abandoning?



Sure. Maybe one idea in six gets to be a complete script.



So, you try for a few months and then realize it's not going anywhere?



Or something else comes along that's newer and sexier, so I drop the project I was having trouble with. Sometimes I get as far as an outline or even a partly written script and realize my heart's not in it. Before *Templar*, around 2001, I spent a good bit of time trying to write a modern-day conspiracy thriller involving the Templars. I tried it several different ways. One was a screenplay prequel to my game *The Last Express*, titled "Red Serpent." I wrote about the first 40 pages and then Ubisoft came with the proposal to revive *Prince of Persia*, so I did that instead. Which was probably for the best.

It was kind of funny when the next year, Dan Brown came out with *The Da Vinci Code*, because the plot elements were so weirdly similar to this half-written thing I'd abandoned. Most of it came from *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, anyway, which is a classic of Templar pseudo-history. I was actually relieved when I read *The Da Vinci Code*, because it absolved me of any lingering obligation to finish "Red Serpent." The ideas were too similar.

So I set aside all the Templar stuff for a few years. Then in 2007, when you guys were drawing the Prince of Persia book, and the Prince of Persia movie was about to start pre-production, all of that gave me a real appetite to write another period, swashbuckling kind of adventure story. I thought about the Templars again, and the trial, and this time I got the idea of an heist and suddenly it all came together. The idea came in an instant, but on the other hand, it had been gestating for ten years. So abandoned ideas are never really wasted.



That's crazy. I can't imagine committing that much time to something and not finishing it.



I always have folders full of ideas, plots, settings, characters, research. Right now, I have a dozen stories in different stages and I know I'll end up writing only one or two of them.



Now that the book is done and out, how do you feel about it?



I've looked at those pages too much. I can't really see them anymore. On the one hand I'm really proud of the work. But I can't look at it without seeing all the things I'd like to redraw or do differently.



I do so many books a year that when I finish a book I can't really look at it for a while. It only makes me think of all the time I spent working on it. But this one, because it was so long in the making, it felt really good to read the whole

thing when we got the final PDF of the book. I was able to step back and see it more as an observer, which is a good place to be.



I'd read the PDF over and over, but never for pleasure, only looking for mistakes, anything I might still catch before it went to press. Then I didn't look at it again for a long time, because it was too late to change anything. By the time the advance copy came, it had been a year since we finished. I gave myself an evening to read the book and just experience it as a reader. Of course I was terrified there would be some huge mistake I had missed. To my relief, it was a great read. It felt all of a piece, it fit together with no sense that four years had elapsed between making the first part and the end. It's weird – it took us five years to make something that can be experienced in a couple of hours. I love it. I'm proud to give it to people.



I'm so glad it's one big book, instead of three separate volumes as was originally planned. The story is so dense that if you waited a year to read the next installment, by the time you got to Book Three you'd have forgotten what was set up in book one.



It would be like watching the first thirty minutes of a movie and then waiting a year for the rest. It's one story. It was absolutely the right decision to publish it as a single volume.



What's weird is that it feels apart from me. Usually when I do a book I feel total ownership over it. Because this one was so collaborative, I feel like I have a fingerprint in it but it's not mine.



It's definitely from the three of us.



Our third child. Thank you, Jordan!



I can't believe we finished it...







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