



BRUGEAS TOULHOAT

# IRATJ DEI

1. THE GOLD OF THE QAIDS

euRoPe  
COMICS



BRUGEAS TOULHOAT

# IRAJDEI

1. THE GOLD OF THE QAIDS





NEAR OF GRACE 1037,  
ANATOLIC THEME.



MAN IS  
IMPERFECT.

SOME SIN THROUGH PRIDE,  
OTHERS THROUGH LUST  
OR AMBITION.

AND OTHERS,  
RARER STILL, WANDER  
THIS WORLD AS IF IT WERE  
THEIR OWN, CRUSHING THE  
WEAK WITHOUT REMORSE  
OR THE SLIGHTEST CARE.



YOU WERE RIGHT, MY FATHER.  
GOD SHOULD HAVE SPARED THEM  
A THOUGHT WHEN HE MADE  
A PLACE LIKE THIS.



ABLE TO HUMBLE THE  
MOST IGNOBLE OF LORDS  
OR RETURN THEM TO THE  
FOLD AND THE PATH OF  
THE ONE TRUE FAITH.



AND I THANK YOU, FATHER, FOR HAVING  
INCULCATED IN ME SUCH A LESSON.



YEAR OF GRACE 1040.  
THE SICILIAN COAST.

OVER THE COURSE OF ITS  
HISTORY, SICILY HAS BEEN  
UNDER THE YOKE OF MANY  
MASTERS, PAGAN AND  
HERETIC ALIKE.

GREEKS,  
CARTHAGINIANS,  
ROMANS, BYZANTINES,  
AND FINALLY  
ARABS.

THE MOST RECENT MUSLIM  
CONQUEST OF THE ISLE IS NO LESS  
FRAGILE AND INCOMPLETE.

THE POWER OF THE EMIR IN PALERMO IS  
CONTESTED FROM WITHIN BY HIS OWN VASSALS,  
TRIBAL CHIEFTAINS KNOWN AS GAIDS.



AWARE OF THE EMIR'S  
WEAKNESSES, BASILEUS MICHAEL  
IV HOPES TO BRING THE ISLE BACK  
INTO THE BOSOM OF BYZANTIUM.



THUS THE EMPEROR HAS ORDERED  
HIS FINEST GENERAL, STRATEGOS MANIAKIS,  
WHO VANQUISHED THE FEARSOME SELJUKS,  
TO TAKE BACK THE ISLAND.

17  
02

WHO GOES THERE?!!



SINCE MESSINA'S CAPTURE, THE GREEK ARMY HAS BEEN IDLING IMPATIENTLY BEFORE THE WALLS OF SYRACUSE.

LORD TANCRED AND HIS TROOPS, EAGER TO FIGHT AND LOOT. FOR THE GLORY OF BYZANTIUM, OF COURSE!



UNSATISFIED AND DISPLEASED, MANIAKIS TASKED HIS LIEUTENANT, HARALD, HEAD OF THE MIGHTY VARANGIAN GUARD, TO TAKE THE CITY OF TAORMINA WHOSE GARRISON INTERFERED WITH HIS SUPPLY LINES.

GREEK SOLDIERS, VARANGIAN WARRIORS, TURKMEN RIDERS, ARAB RENEGADES, NORMAN AND LOMBARD MERCENARIES... THE GREAT BYZANTINE ARMY IN SICILY IS A MOSAIC OF PEOPLES AND FAITHS.



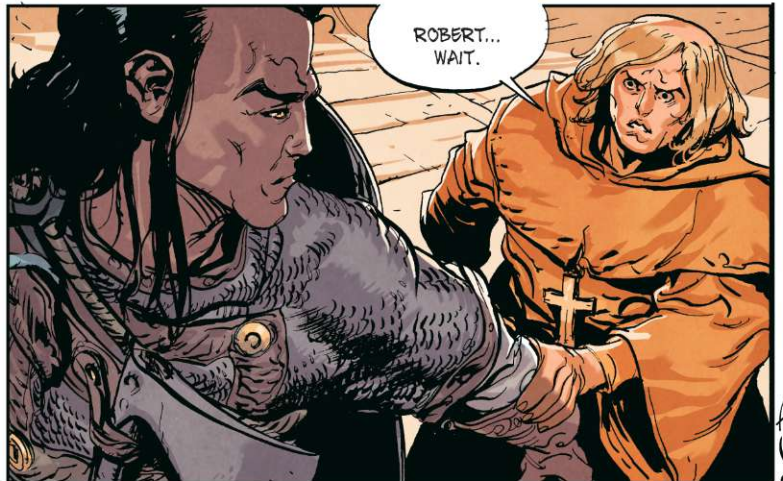
AMONG THIS HOST OF SOLDIERS, THERE ARE SOME WHO FOLLOW THE TRUE FAITH.



AND I INTEND TO MAKE THEM ACT IN THE INTERESTS OF ROME AND THE LORD.



ROBERT... WAIT.



03

ARE YOU SURE THIS IS WISE? HE'S A NORMAN. WHAT IF HE RECOGNIZES YOU?

I'M TO LIVE IN THIS CAMP AND WIN THESE MEN'S TRUST, THEY'RE GOING TO HAVE TO SEE ME SOMEDAY, AREN'T THEY?

BESIDES, IT'S NO MORE RECKLESS THAN CALLING ME ROBERT FOR ALL TO HEAR.



NORMAN?

GUILTY AS CHARGED.



I THOUGHT AS MUCH. HOW MANY OF NORMANDY'S YOUNGER SONS WANDER THE MEDITERRANEAN, SEEKING FORTUNE?

FAR TOO MANY. ONCE THE LOOT'S DIVVIED UP, IT MIGHT TURN OUT A PALTRY SUM.

WELL SAID! I AM GUILLAUME DE HAUTEVILLE, MERCENARY IN THE SERVICE OF BYZANTIUM... FOR NOW.

A PLEASURE. THIS IS DEACON ÉTIENNE, PAPAL LEGATE, WHO WATCHES OVER THE BLACK SOULS OF OUR FLOCK.

WHAT A HEAVY BURDEN!

MAY I DISEMBARK MY MEN AND PITCH MY TENTS?

GO AHEAD! AND WELCOME!

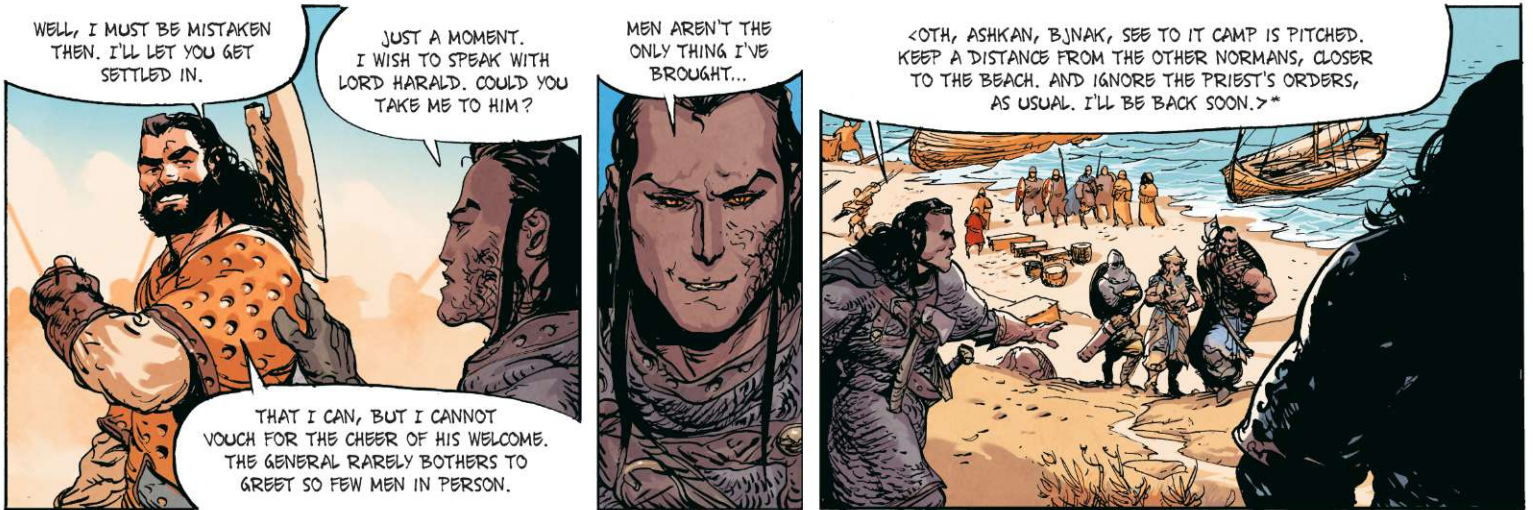




HAVE WE MET BEFORE, LORD TANCRED? YOUR FACE SEEMS FAMILIAR TO ME.

I DOUBT IT.

I'D NOT SOON FORGET A MAN OF YOUR BUILD, GUILLAUME. AND YOU'D REMEMBER AN UGLY SCAR LIKE MINE. IT'S BEEN WITH ME SINCE MY EARLIEST CHILDHOOD.



WELL, I MUST BE MISTAKEN THEN. I'LL LET YOU GET SETTLED IN.

JUST A MOMENT. I WISH TO SPEAK WITH LORD HARALD. COULD YOU TAKE ME TO HIM?

MEN AREN'T THE ONLY THING I'VE BROUGHT...

<OTH, ASHKAN, BJNAK, SEE TO IT CAMP IS PITCHED. KEEP A DISTANCE FROM THE OTHER NORMANS, CLOSER TO THE BEACH. AND IGNORE THE PRIEST'S ORDERS, AS USUAL. I'LL BE BACK SOON.>\*

THAT I CAN, BUT I CANNOT VOUCH FOR THE CHEER OF HIS WELCOME. THE GENERAL RARELY BOTHERS TO GREET SO FEW MEN IN PERSON.



WELCOME TO TAORMINA.

\* IN PECHENEG.



I SEE ABOVE ALL THAT HARALD IS CLEVER. HE KNOWS HOW TO SPOT THE WEAK POINT IN A RAMPART.



AN EXPERT, EH?



OH, I KNOW A LITTLE. I SEE A SIEGE TOWER BEING BUILT, BUT NO CATAPULTS OR BALLISTAE?

THE SIEGE ENGINE'S IN SYRACUSE ALONG WITH THE MAIN ARMY, AND MANIAKIS HAS KEPT MOST OF THE ENGINEERS.

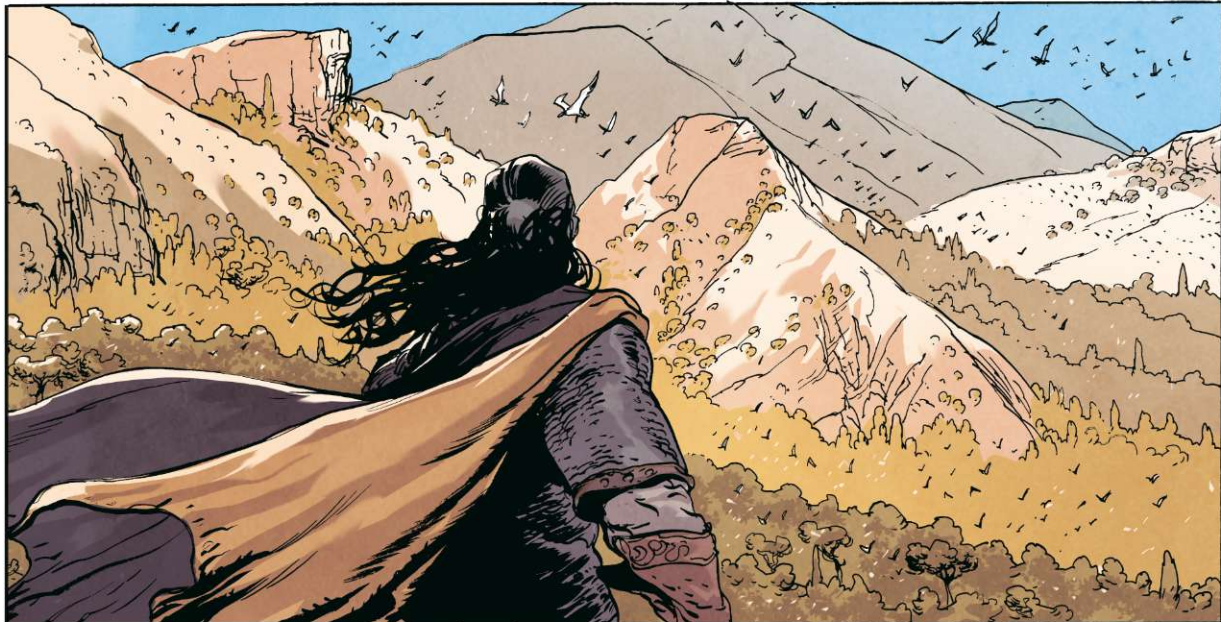




RAMPARTS BUILT BY GREEKS,  
DEFENDED BY ARABS, AND BESIEGED  
BY NORMANS, LOMBARDS, AND OTHER  
RACES IN THE SERVICE OF BYZANTIUM.  
UNHOLY HAVOC, EH?



BUT IT'S AS GOOD  
A WAY AS ANY OTHER TO  
DISCREDIT HARALD...







MY MEN ARE FEW, I CONFESS, BUT THEY'RE EACH WORTH A THOUSAND.



HOW ABOUT WE PUT THAT TO THE TEST?



MY ARMY OFTEN REPLENISHES ITS STORES FROM NEARBY VILLAGES.



BUT A HORDE OF ARAB RIDERS HAS BEEN HARRYING MY FORAGERS WITHOUT RESPIRE FOR SEVERAL WEEKS.



GREEKS, NORMANS, VARANGIANS... NOT A ONE HAVE MANAGED TO GET THEIR HANDS ON THEM.



...AND LIVED  
TO TELL THE  
TALE.

YEAR OF GRACE 1038,  
SULFUR MINES OF SYNNADA,  
ANATOLIC THEME.



<EASY NOW. SAVE  
YOUR STRENGTH.  
YOU'LL SOON BE  
NEEDING IT.>



<WHAT FOR??>



<FOR OUR  
ESCAPE.>

<IS  
THIS SOME  
JOKE??>



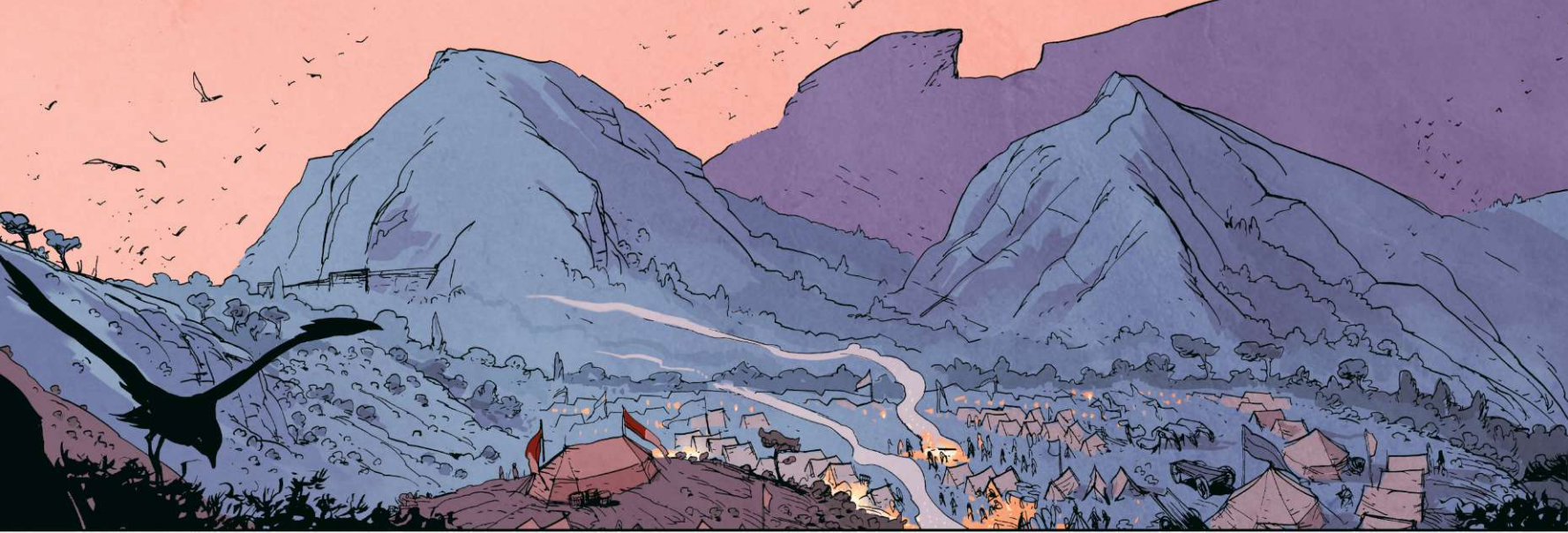
<ONE STEP AT  
A TIME.>



<JUST  
HOW DO YOU  
PLAN TO GO  
ABOUT IT??>



<STEP ONE:  
RECRUIT RELIABLE  
ALLIES.>



LOMBARDS, NORMANS, PERSIANS, TURKMENS, LIBYANS,  
AND EVEN A PECHENEG... QUITE AN ECLECTIC BAND  
YOU'VE GOT HERE, LITTLE PRIEST.



TRULY, PROOF THAT  
FAITH WORKS MIRACLES:  
GATHERING DIVERSE  
SOULS TOWARD A  
GLORIOUS END.

A GLORIOUS  
END? IS THAT  
ALL?



THERE'S NO GLORY  
TO BE FOUND IN THIS  
PLACE... JUST SOME  
TRIFLING LOOT TO  
PLUNDER.

OH, YOU'D BE  
SURPRISED. THE LORD  
OUR FATHER WORKS IN  
MYSTERIOUS WAYS.



STOW THIS AWAY  
AT ONCE.

AH... NEWS  
TRAVELS FAST!



WHO'S  
THAT?

ARDUINO,  
EMISSARY OF THE  
LOMBARD KING GUAIMAR  
OF SALERNO. IN CHARGE  
OF ALL THE NORMAN  
MERCENARIES HEREABOUTS,  
MYSELF INCLUDED. OR SO  
HE LIKES TO BELIEVE.





YOU, THERE!

WHO ARE YOU?

WHO SAID YOU COULD LAND HERE?

I DID. THIS YOUNG MAN IS A PAPAL LEGATE TRAVELING IN THE COMPANY OF A NORMAN LORD AND HIS MERCENARY TROOP.

I DON'T CARE IF THIS LORD OF YOURS IS TRAVELING WITH THE POPE HIMSELF! IF YOU'RE TO JOIN THIS ARMY, YOU AND YOUR LITTLE BAND MUST ANSWER TO MY AUTHORITY ALONE.



THE ONLY AUTHORITY I ACKNOWLEDGE IS OUR HOLY FATHER'S.



NOTHING AND NO ONE WILL KEEP ME FROM WIELDING THE AUTHORITY VESTED IN ME BY--

AUTHORITY IS NOT GIVEN.



IT IS EARNED.

WHAT--



MEN OF THE NORTH!!

HARALD HAS GIVEN ME A MISSION! TO FLUSH OUT THE ARAB FORCES HARRYING US, AND DESTROY THEM. A FAT PURSE OF GOLD AWAITS WHOSEVER MARCHES WITH ME!



BAH! WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE? WE'VE TRIED TIME AND AGAIN TO CATCH THOSE ARABS, BUT THEY KEEP SLIPPING THROUGH OUR FINGERS. YOU THINK YOU CAN DO BETTER?



I SHALL DO BETTER. ALL I NEED TO LURE THEM OUT IS THE RIGHT BAIT. JUST HARDY ENOUGH TO KEEP THEM OCCUPIED WITHOUT SCARING THEM OFF.



AND WHO SHALL PLAY THE BAIT?  
WHO WILL ACCEPT DEATH TO ENRICH  
HIS BRETHREN?



MY MEN...  
AND I.



IT'S BEEN FAR TOO LONG SINCE  
ANYONE PUT HIM IN HIS PLACE SO  
HANDSOMELY!



I DOUBT YOU NEED ME TO SHUT  
THAT LOUT UP. WHY DO YOU BOTHER  
PUTTING UP WITH HIM?

**BAH!**  
WE ARE ALL BUT A GIFT TO THE EMPEROR  
FROM GUAIMAR, PRINCE OF SALERNO. AS HIS  
EMISSARY, ARDUINO REPRESENTS HIM. I CANNOT  
REASONABLY DISRESPECT THE OLD LOMBARD KING.



AFTER ALL,  
I AM HIS SON-  
IN-LAW...



A GOOD REASON NOT TO BURDEN YOURSELF WITH THAT OLD LOMBARD BLOWHARD, NO?

HAH! PERHAPS. HE AMUSES ME!



MY THANKS TO YOU.

THINK NOTHING OF IT. I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE YOU TAKE CHARGE OF THINGS LIKE A TRUE NORMAN!



YOU'VE BEEN AVOIDING ME, ROBERT.



YOU OUGHT TO STOP CALLING ME THAT. HERE, I AM TANCRÉD.

I SHALL ENDEAVOR TO KEEP IT IN MIND. BUT RIGHT NOW, YOU'RE DODGING MY QUESTION.



YOU GAVE ME A MISSION: WIN HARALD OVER AND BECOME HIS RIGHT-HAND MAN. THAT'S WHAT I'M DOING. NOTHING ELSE MATTERS.

VERY WELL. YOU'VE MANAGED TO IMPRESS OUR NORMAN FRIENDS. I'M COUNTING ON PREACHING AND PRAYER TO FINISH THE JOB.



PRAY, RATHER, FOR LAVISH SPOILS. THAT'LL BE LIKELIER TO ENDEAR US TO THEM...

GOOD NIGHT, DIACRE.





WE'RE DONE. PUT YOUR CLOTHES BACK ON. NOT A SCRATCH OR LACERATION TO BE SEEN.

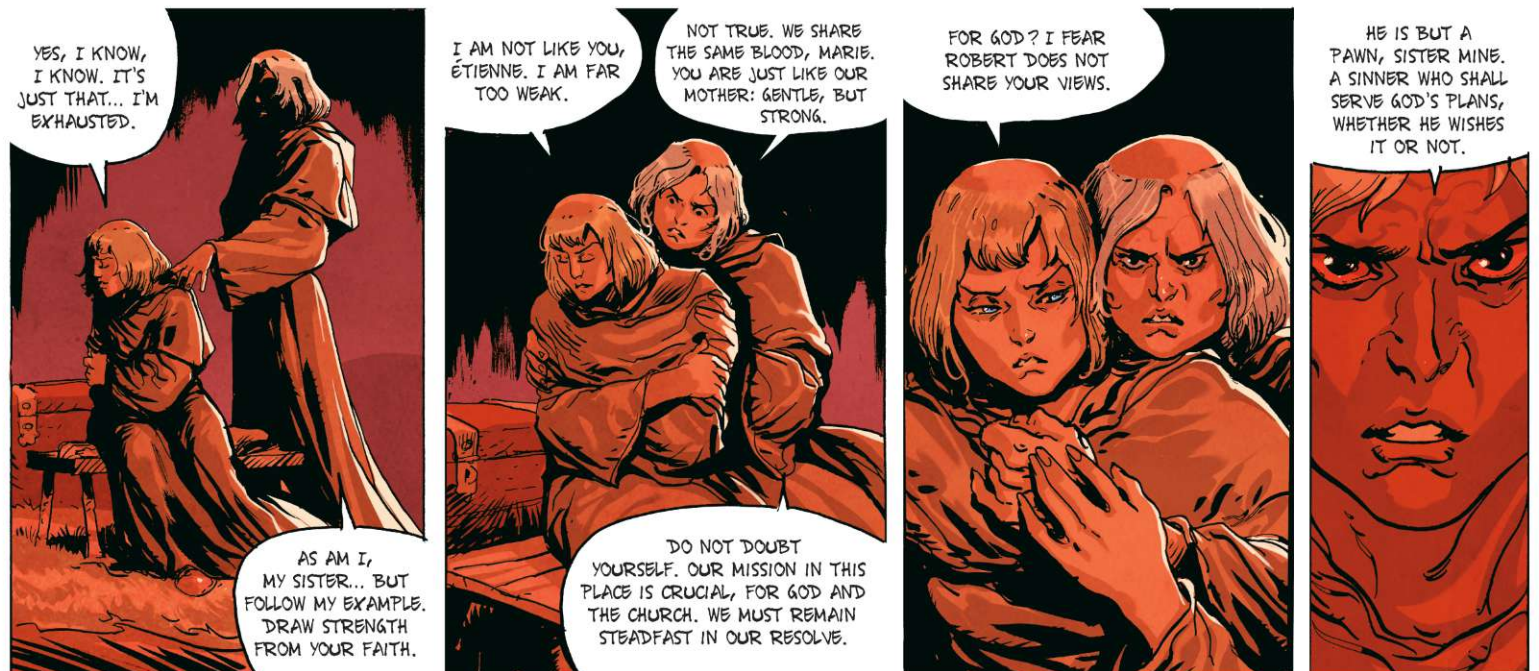
ARE YOU QUITE SURE? THE SLIGHTEST OVERSIGHT--



ÉTIENNE... I'M LIKELY TO GO BLIND FROM SCRUTINIZING YOUR BODY EVERY NIGHT. AND YET YOU STILL DON'T TRUST ME.

OF COURSE I TRUST YOU. IT'S JUST THAT SOMETIMES... FEAR GETS THE UPPER HAND. THE MEREST SCRAPER COULD GROW INFECTED AND... I NEED YOUR HELP, MARIE.

FOR THOUGH OUR LORD HAS BLESSED ME, HE IS ALSO TESTING ME.



YES, I KNOW, I KNOW. IT'S JUST THAT... I'M EXHAUSTED.

I AM NOT LIKE YOU, ÉTIENNE. I AM FAR TOO WEAK.

NOT TRUE. WE SHARE THE SAME BLOOD, MARIE. YOU ARE JUST LIKE OUR MOTHER: GENTLE, BUT STRONG.

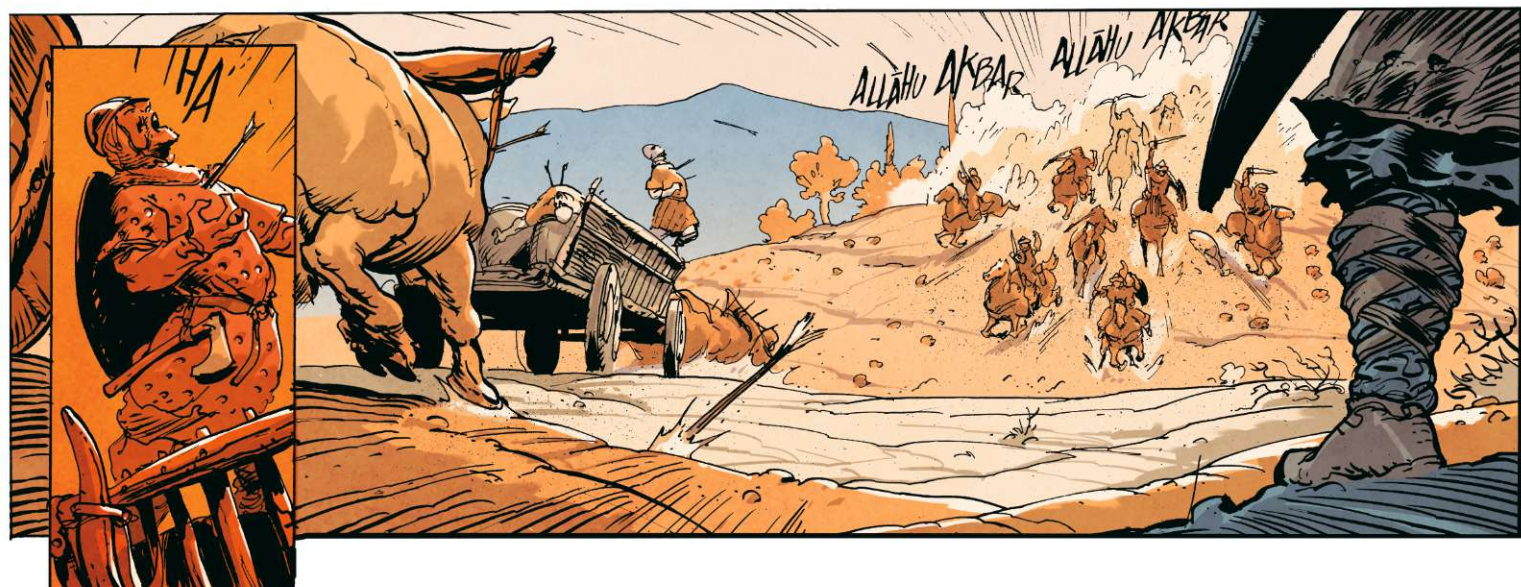
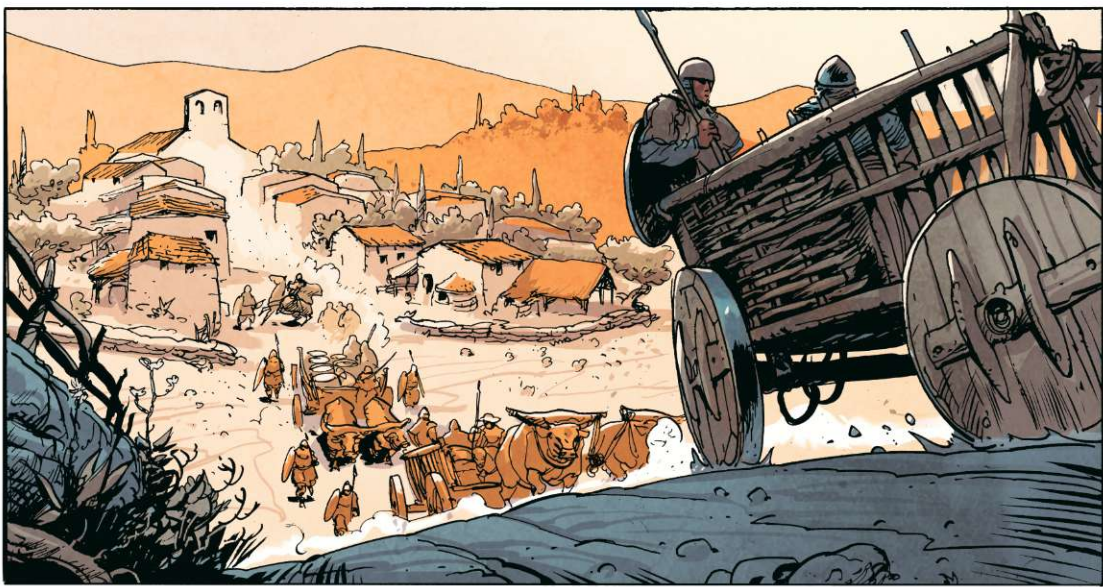
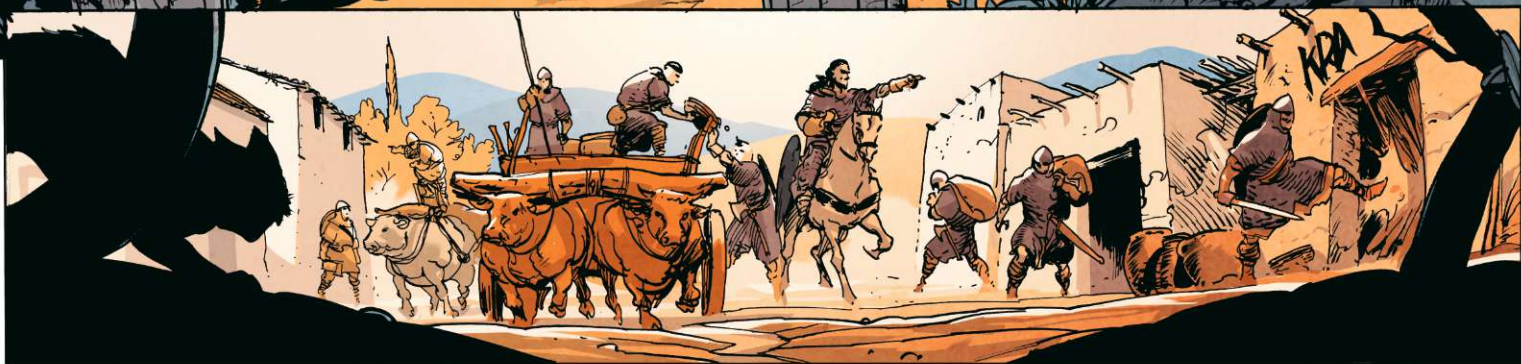
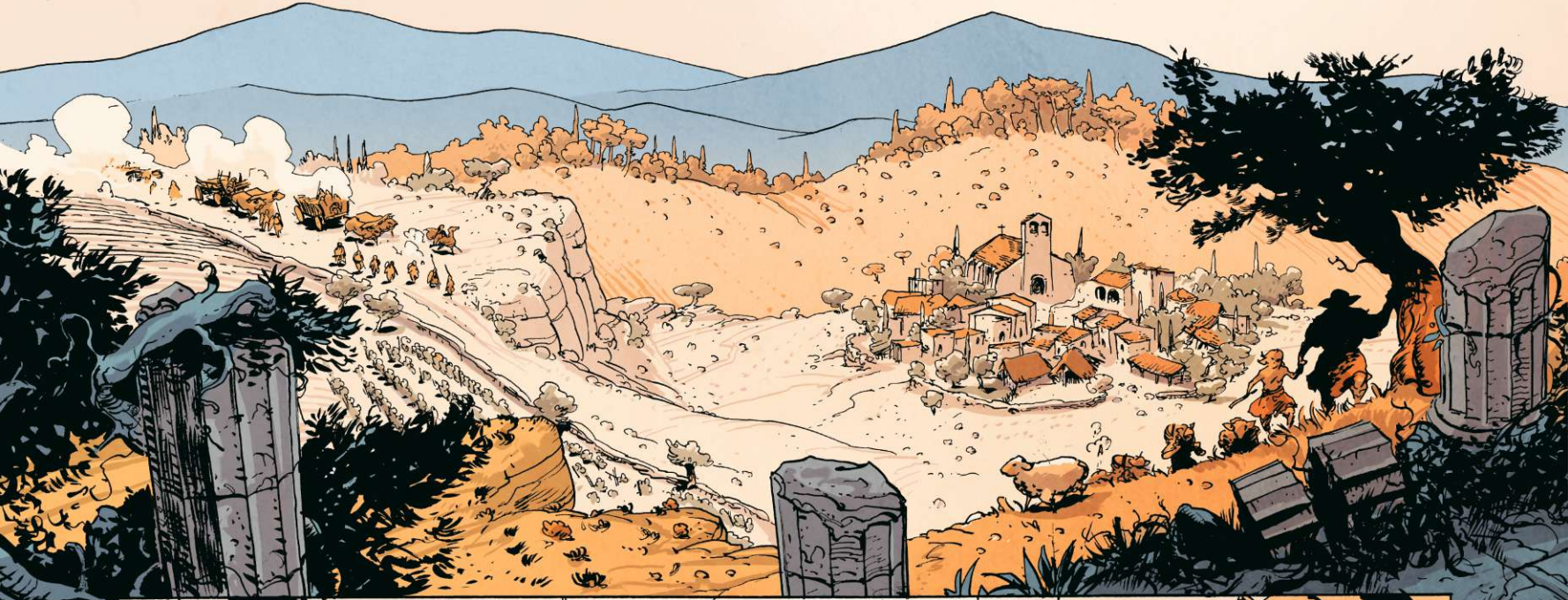
FOR GOD? I FEAR ROBERT DOES NOT SHARE YOUR VIEWS.

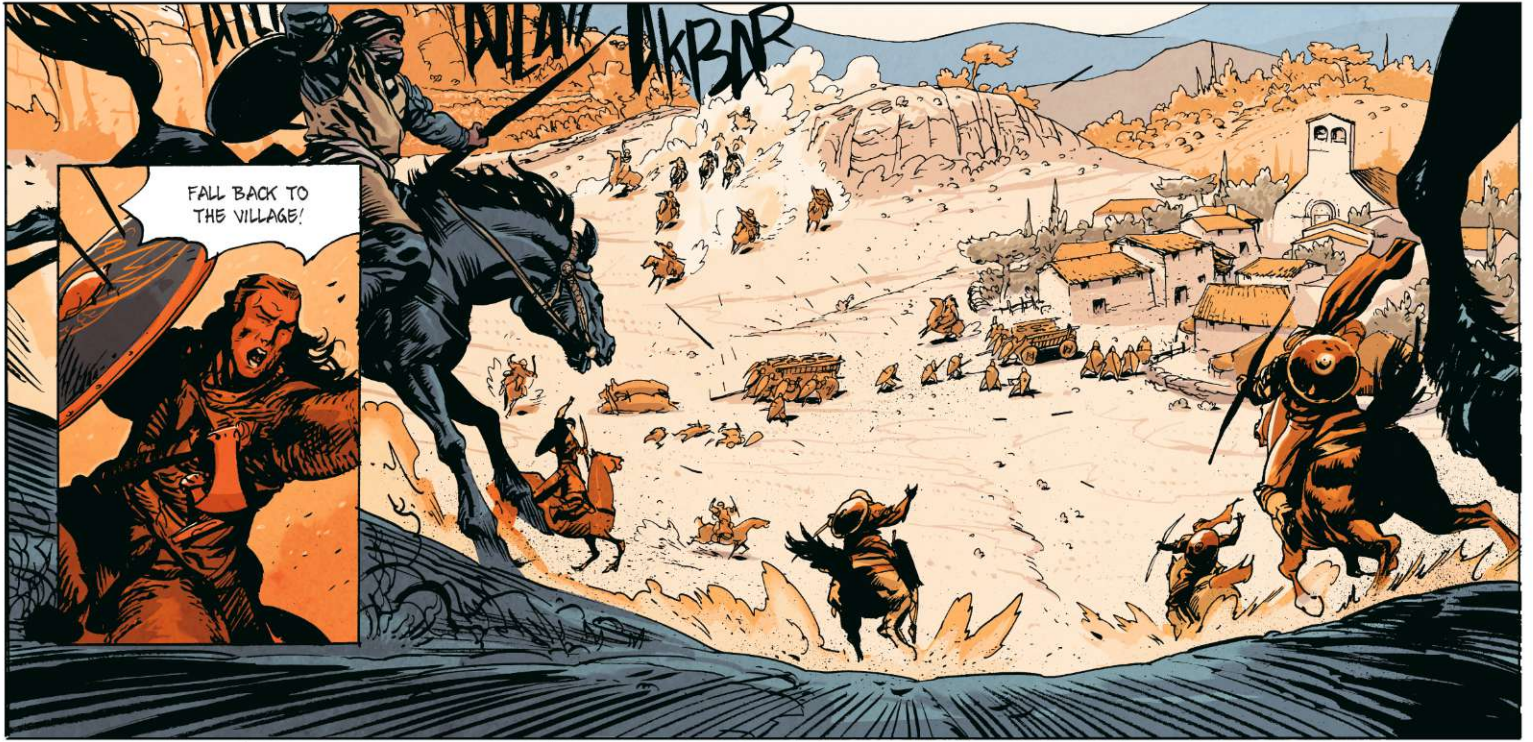
HE IS BUT A PAWN, SISTER MINE. A SINNER WHO SHALL SERVE GOD'S PLANS, WHETHER HE WISHES IT OR NOT.

AS AM I, MY SISTER... BUT FOLLOW MY EXAMPLE. DRAW STRENGTH FROM YOUR FAITH.

DO NOT DOUBT YOURSELF. OUR MISSION IN THIS PLACE IS CRUCIAL, FOR GOD AND THE CHURCH. WE MUST REMAIN STEADFAST IN OUR RESOLVE.













**CHAAARGE!!**

**DEX AIE!!!**

**DEX ME**

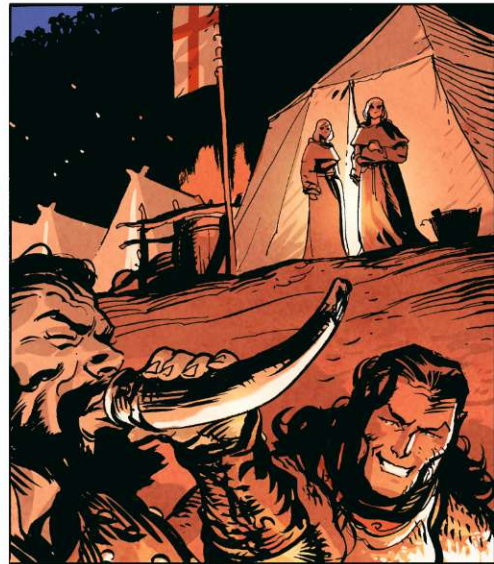
**RAAA AA'AA**

**DEX**









**NORMANS!!**  
YOUR FEATS HAVE REACHED MY EARS! I HAVE COME TO CONGRATULATE YOU IN PERSON.



SO LET ME ADD THIS: THERE'LL BE A BONUS TO REWARD YOUR DEEDS THIS DAY!



FINE WORDS, YOUR LORDSHIP. ENOUGH TO WARM ANY WARRIOR'S HEART!

MY THANKS, LORD HAUTEVILLE. I'VE HEARD TELL YOU WERE AMONG THE MOST VALIANT.



RUMORS ARE SOMETIMES FULL OF TRUTH.

TANCRED, MIGHT I SPEAK WITH YOU FOR A MOMENT?

AS YOU WISH.

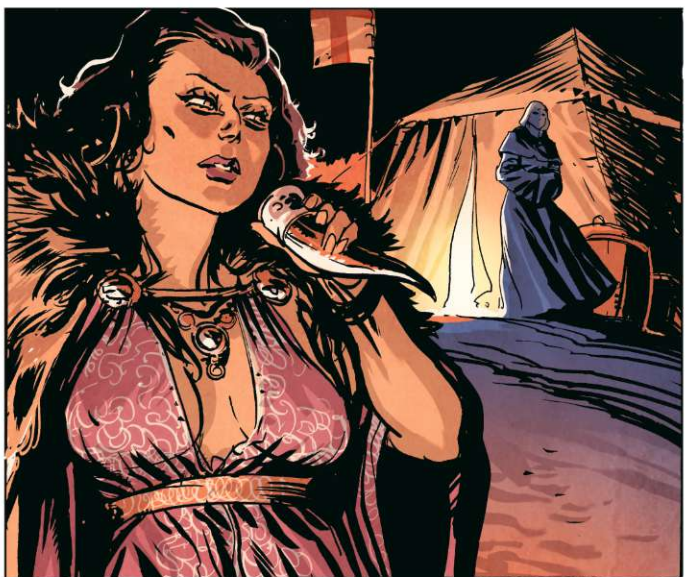


I'VE BROUGHT ALONG ONE OF THE FINEST GREEK WINES. WHAT DO YOU SAY TO SHARING IT WITH ME FAR FROM PRYING EARS?

THIS WAY.



JUST A MOMENT...





TANCRED, I'LL ADMIT YOU'VE PROVED YOURSELF. I KNOW NOTHING OF YOU, OTHER THAN YOU ARE A TRUE WARLORD. AND FOR NOW, LET'S SAY THAT WILL SUFFICE.



I'D LIKE YOUR COUNSEL, THEN. WHAT'S THE QUICKEST WAY TO TAKE THIS CITY?

MY COUNSEL COMES AT A PRICE, GENERAL.



NAME IT. YOU HAVE MY WORD.

WELL THEN, A LITTLE BIRD TOLD ME THE MOST INTERESTING STORY. THE WEALTHIEST QANDS OF MESSINA FLED THEIR CITY BEFORE THE BYZANTINES SEIZED IT, TAKING THEIR RICHES WITH THEM. A CONSIDERABLE FORTUNE.



ALAS, IN THE COURSE OF THEIR FLIGHT, THEY WERE FORCED TO STOP HERE, IN TAORMINA. AND NOW THEY ARE TRAPPED. ALONG WITH THEIR TREASURE.



MY, YOU ARE WELL INFORMED! BUT THIS STORY IS NO SECRET. YOU WISH FOR A SHARE OF THE TREASURE? THAT'S SOMETHING I CAN ARRANGE.

I'LL SEE TO IT THE CITY FALLS IN THREE DAYS, FOR HALF THE LOOT.



HALF? DO YOU JEST?!



DO I SEEM TO BE?



DEVIL OF A MAN!



YOU CAN COME OUT NOW.



I'M NOT AT ALL SURE THE LORD FORGIVES EAVESDROPPERS.

ENOUGH MOCKERY! WHAT'S GOTTEN INTO YOU?

HOW'S THAT?



YOU WERE TO WIN HARALD'S TRUST, BECOME HIS MOST VALUED ADVISOR!

AND WHAT DO YOU DO INSTEAD? REJECT HIS OFFER FOR A SHARE OF A TREASURE WE DON'T EVEN CARE ABOUT!



WINNING HIS TRUST DOESN'T MEAN LICKING HIS BOOTS.



HE'LL BE BACK, TRUST ME. AFTER ALL, I'VE ALREADY WON OVER THE NORMANS, HAVEN'T I?



ADMITTEDLY, BUT YOUR LITTLE VICTORY COST US DEARLY. WE LOST A GREAT MANY MEN.

A NECESSARY SACRIFICE, OR ELSE THE ARABS WOULDN'T HAVE WALKED RIGHT INTO OUR TRAP. BESIDES...



...WE WILL SOON HAVE THREE HUNDRED NORMAN MERCENARIES READY TO REPLACE THEM.

YEAR OF GRACE 1038,  
SULFUR MINES OF SYNNAVA,  
ANATOLIC THEME.



WE'RE GETTING CLOSE.  
I CAN ALMOST SMELL THE  
MEPHITIC REEK OF  
THE EVIL ONE.

NO NEED TO DRAG THE  
DEVIL INTO IT, THEODERIC,  
IT'S JUST SULFUR. FOUL-  
SMELLING, BUT NO TRESPASS  
AGAINST THE LORD...



...UNLIKE THE  
ONE WE'VE COME  
HERE TO FIND.



LET'S MOVE  
CLOSER.

THIS IS  
ILL-ADVISED, YOUR  
LORDSHIP.



NOT A  
LIVING SOUL.  
I DON'T LIKE THIS.

COME NOW,  
THEODERIC. WE DIDN'T  
COME ALL THIS WAY TO  
STOP SO CLOSE TO  
OUR GOAL.













**NO!!!**



HE--

HE IS MY BROTHER.

AH. A FAMILY AFFAIR. HOW TOUCHING.



HOW KIND OF YOUR BROTHER TO TAKE YOU ON AS A COMMON SLATTERN. HE DENIES ALL THAT YOU ARE.

YOU KNOW NOTHING OF HIM, OR OF ME. HE SAVED ME! OUR FATHER... I COULDN'T LIVE WITH HIM ANYMORE. ÉTIENNE CAME BACK FOR ME. HE PROTECTS ME.



PROTECTS YOU? HE'S TAKEN AWAY THE ONLY WEAPON NATURE EVER GAVE YOU.

WEAPON?



YOUR FEMININITY.



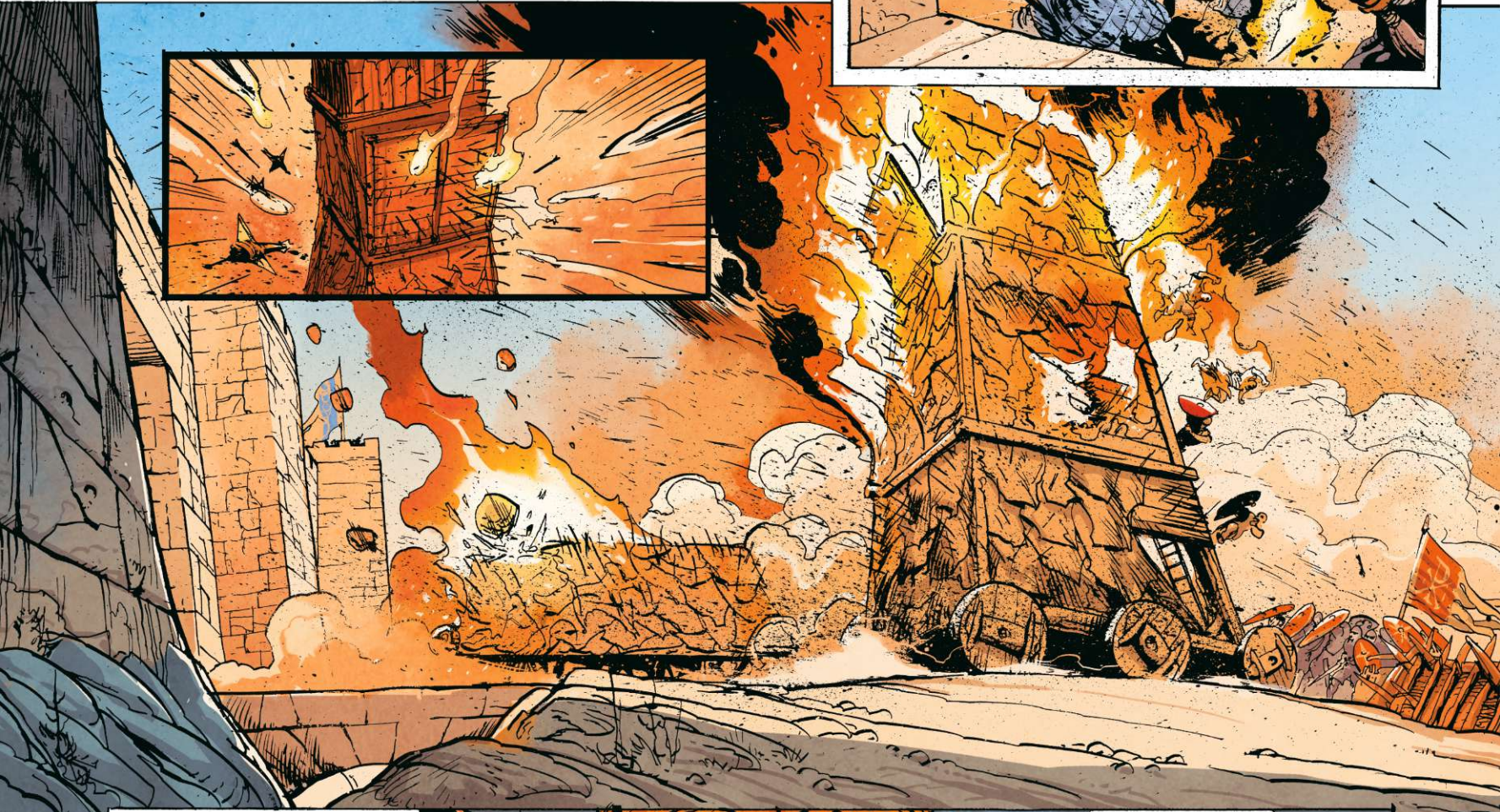
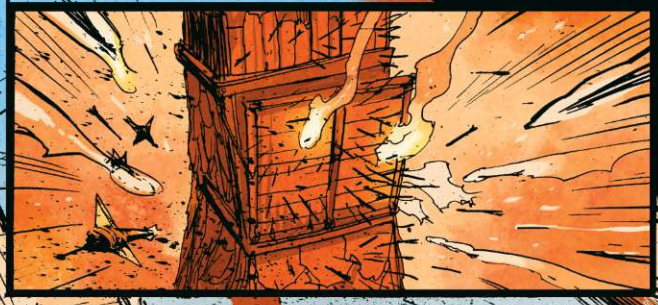
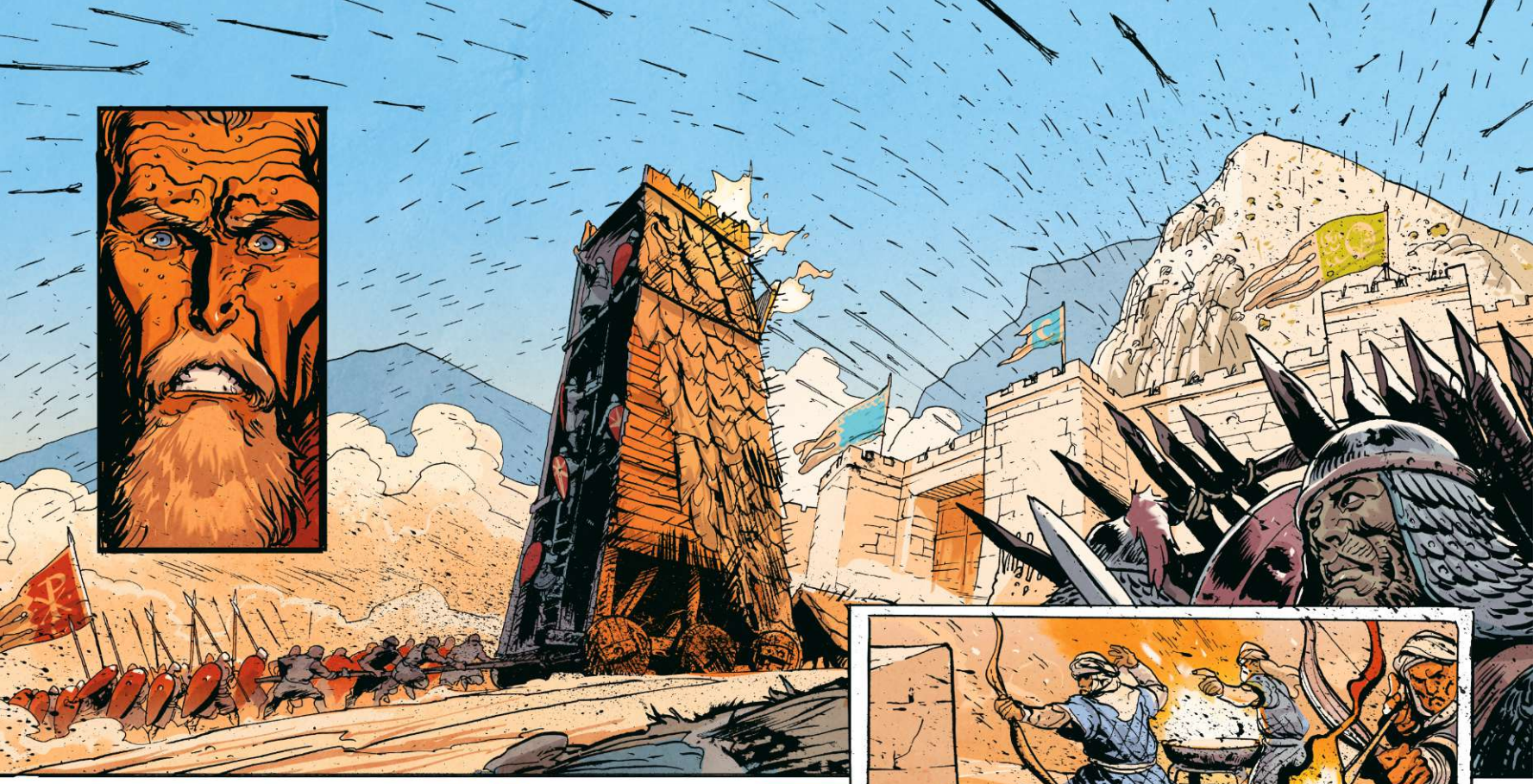
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

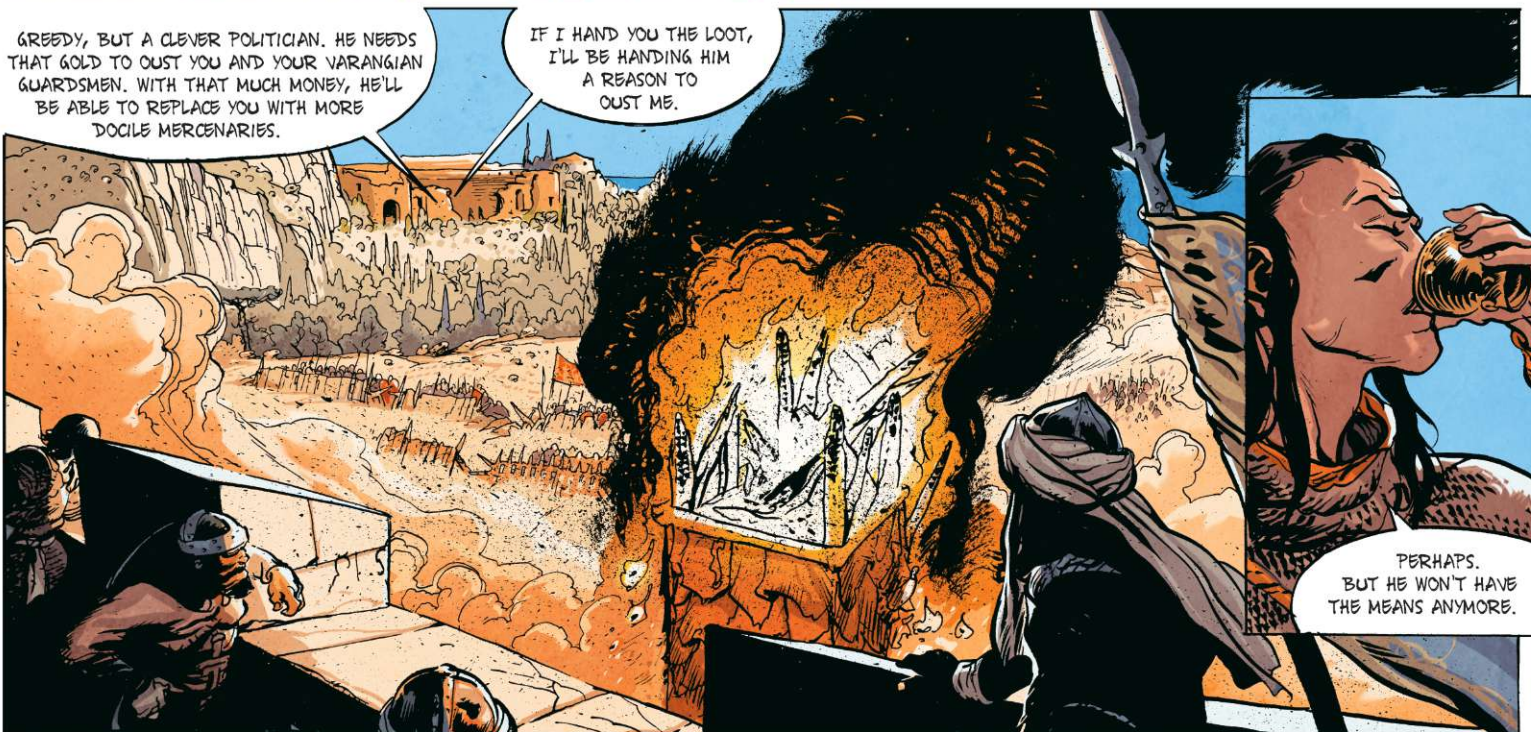


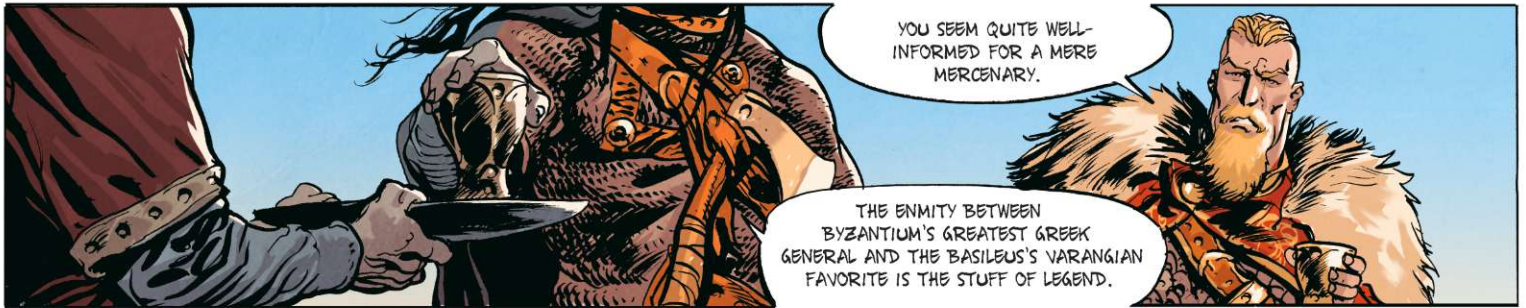
I WISHED TO MEET THE HOLY MAN IN PERSON. THE PREACHER...



ALAS, I WAS DISAPPOINTED. I LEARNED HE WAS JUST A MAN LIKE ALL THE REST.







YOU SEEM QUITE WELL-INFORMED FOR A MERE MERCENARY.

THE ENMITY BETWEEN BYZANTIUM'S GREATEST GREEK GENERAL AND THE BASILEUS'S VARANGIAN FAVORITE IS THE STUFF OF LEGEND.



THE REST IS BUT OBVIOUS POLITICAL SKULLDUGGERY... THANKS FOR THE WINE.



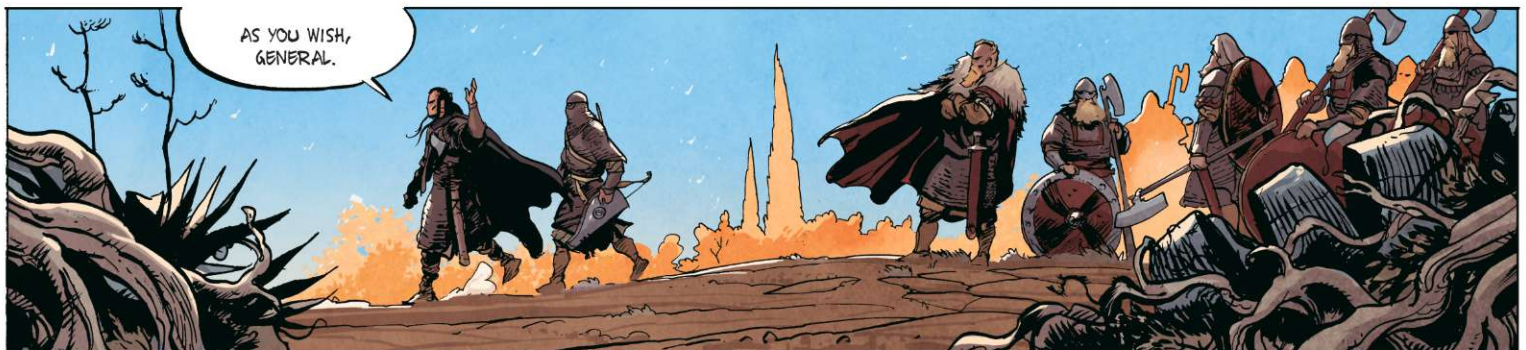
TANCRED!



THREE DAYS, EH?



TAKE THIS CITY, NO MATTER THE COST.



AS YOU WISH, GENERAL.

UPON ARRIVING, I NOTICED THE PRESENCE OF A GREAT MANY BIRDS VERY COMMON TO THE MEDITERRANEAN SHORES.

THEY COME SEEKING FOOD IN THE UNDERBRUSH, BUT NEST BENEATH THE EAVES AND AWNINGS OF THE NEAREST CITIES... LIKE TAORMINA.

MY IDEA IS QUITE SIMPLE.



AFTER CAPTURING A GOOD HUNDRED OF THESE BIRDS...



...WE WILL COAT THEM WITH A MIXTURE OF WAX AND SULFUR.



INCREDIBLY STICKY AND ABOVE ALL... FLAMMABLE.



WHEN THE MOMENT COMES, WE WILL SET THEM ON FIRE, THEN RELEASE THEM.



THE WAX WILL PROTECT THEM FROM THE FLAMES FOR THE TIME IT TAKES THEM TO RETURN HOME TO THE ROOFTOPS OF TAORMINA, AND SET THE CITY ABLAZE.



QUICKER AND SURER THAN A TREBUCHET WHICH, AT ANY RATE, HARALD LACKS THE MEANS TO BUILD. THE CITIZENS WILL HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO OPEN THE CITY'S GATES TO ESCAPE THE INFERNO.

THAT STRAPPING FRAME CONCEALS A TRULY WILY MIND, TANCRED. THE DEVIL HIMSELF MUST WHISPER HIS RUSES IN YOUR EAR...





TANCRED, I'D LIKE A WORD WITH YOU.

GO ON.



ALONE, IF POSSIBLE.

I HAVE NO SECRETS FROM GUILLAUME.

SPEAK!



WELL...



THE GREEK COURTESAN... I DON'T TRUST HER.



NOW THAT'S A VERY HEALTHY ATTITUDE, PRIEST! THAT WOMAN LIVES AND BREATHE PERFDY!

I--



EUDOXIA IS OF NO IMPORTANCE. SHE IS NO DOUBT MANIAKIS'S SPY. AND HE IS INTERESTED IN NO ONE'S ACTIONS BUT HARALD'S.



SO WE HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR FROM HER. FORGET HER. WE HAVE MANY OTHER MORE PRESSING MATTERS AT HAND.

I AGREE ENTIRELY. ARDUINO'S THE ONE YOU SHOULD WATCH OUT FOR. THAT ACCURSED LOMBARD'S JEALOUS OF YOUR SUCCESS, AND FEARS FOR HIS AUTHORITY.

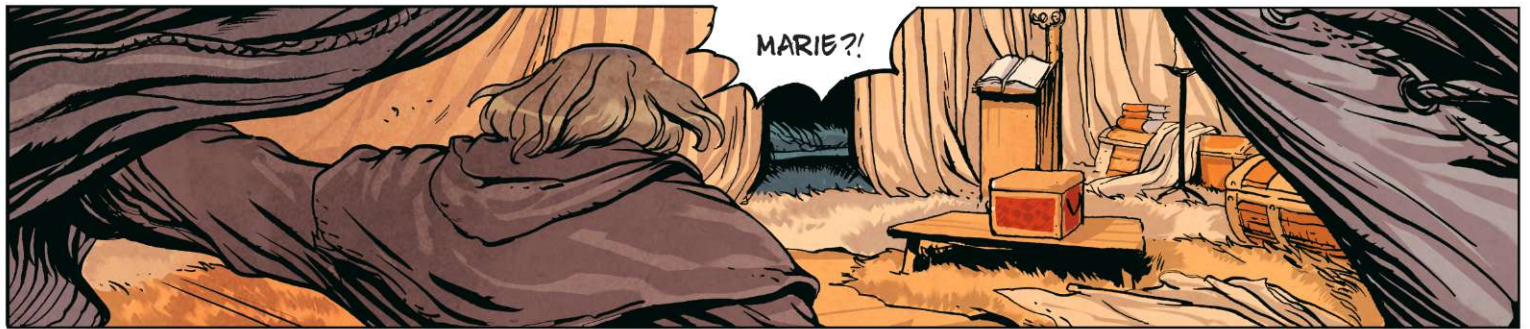
I HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR FROM SUCH A COWARD.



STILL, I'D WATCH MY BACK. HE'S SURELY PLOTTING SOMETHING. HE'S A SCHEMER, THAT ONE.

I... I MUST TAKE MY LEAVE.







OH, STOP PLAYING THE TERRIFIED VIRGIN!

YOU COME OUT OF NOWHERE, YOU TAKE MY MEN AWAY FROM ME...

...YOU QUESTION MY AUTHORITY...

DO YOU THINK I'M JUST GOING TO LET YOU GET AWAY WITH IT?



NEVER!

YOU'RE GOING TO CALL OFF YOUR DOG AND LEAVE THIS ISLAND.

OR ELSE SHE DIES.



I CANNOT.

DON'T TELL ME YOU CAN'T. I'M NOT BLIND! I CAN TELL YOU'RE THE ONE PULLING THE STRINGS. YOU'RE IN CHARGE. IN SPITE OF ALL HIS GRAND AIRS, TANCRÉD IS NOTHING!



THAT'S NOT THE PROBLEM, ARDUINO.



THE TRUTH IS, GOD GAVE ME A GIFT. THERE IS A GOOD REASON I CAN FEEL NO PAIN.



YOU MIGHT BE THE EMISSARY OF A PRINCE...

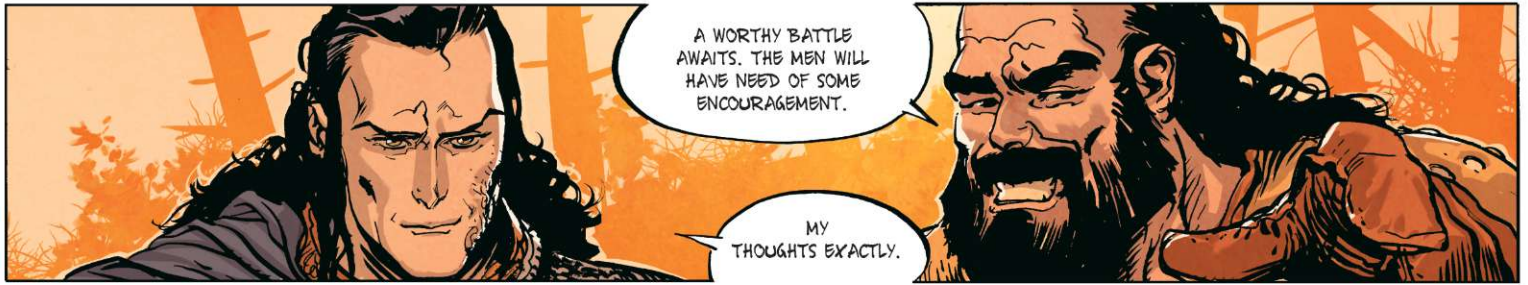


...BUT I AM A MESSENGER FROM GOD.





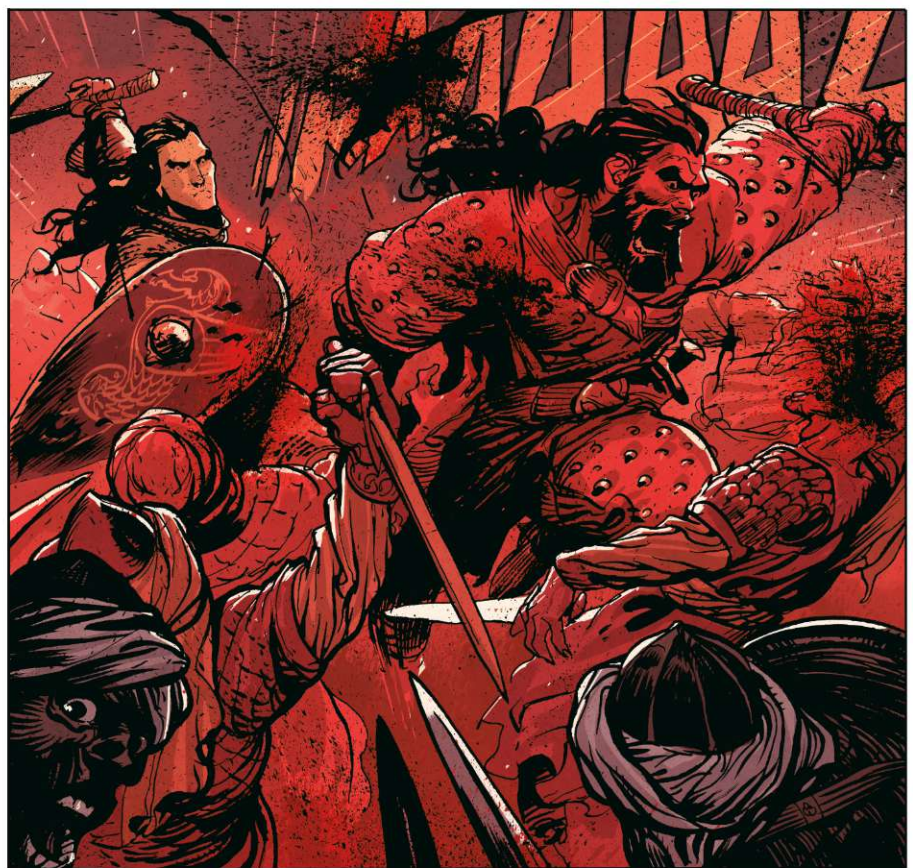


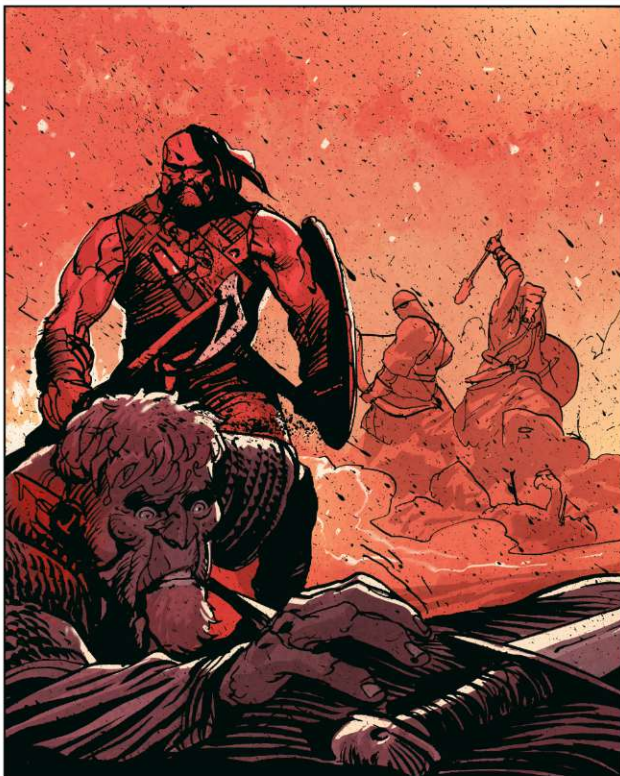














THE GOLD  
OF THE RAIDS  
IS OURS!





WHAT IS THIS? WHAT ARE YOU DOING? IS THE ASSAULT-- ROBERT?



GOOD GOD! W-WHY?!



WHERE'S ROBERT? WHY?

WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?



SAY SOMETHING! FOR THE LOVE OF CHRIST!



SAY SOMETHING... PLEASE...



YEAR OF GRACE 1038, SULFUR MINES OF SYNNAVA, ANATOLIC THEME.

DELIGHTED TO FIND YOU IN GOOD HEALTH, ROBERT, FIRST OF HIS NAME, DUKE OF THE NORMANS.



WHAT IS A MAN OF THE CLOTH DOING IN THE ORTHODOX TERRITORY OF BYZANTIUM? AND MOREOVER, IN THIS RATHOLE?



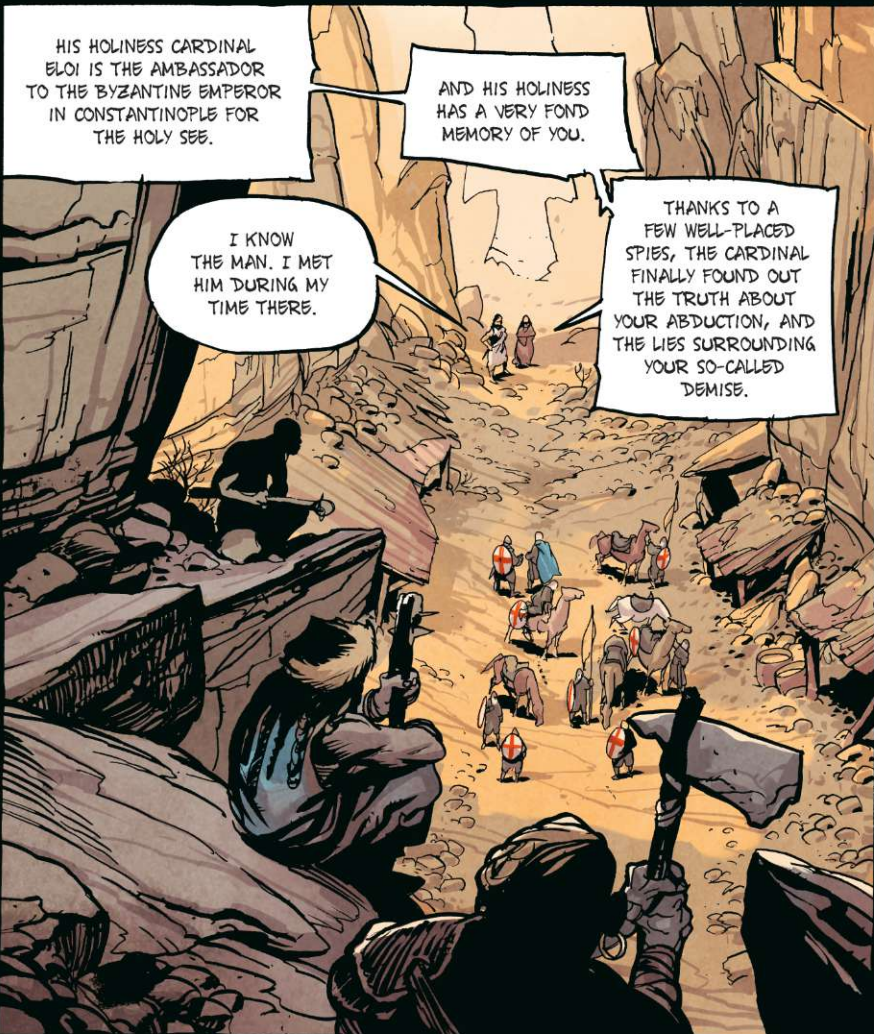
AND HOW IS IT YOU KNOW MY NAME?



SO MANY QUESTIONS! I'D LOVE TO ANSWER THEM AS SOON AS YOUR MEN SHOW ME A FRIENDLIER BEARING.



MANY THANKS.



HIS HOLINESS CARDINAL BLOI IS THE AMBASSADOR TO THE BYZANTINE EMPEROR IN CONSTANTINOPLE FOR THE HOLY SEE.

AND HIS HOLINESS HAS A VERY FOND MEMORY OF YOU.

I KNOW THE MAN. I MET HIM DURING MY TIME THERE.

THANKS TO A FEW WELL-PLACED SPIES, THE CARDINAL FINALLY FOUND OUT THE TRUTH ABOUT YOUR ABDUCTION, AND THE LIES SURROUNDING YOUR SO-CALLED DEMISE.



WHO WAS BEHIND IT?

BASILEUS MICHAEL IV HIMSELF. FOR A TRESPASS YOU COMMITTED DURING YOUR SOJOURN.

DAMN HIM.



AT ANY RATE, AFTER GREASING A FEW PALMS, HIS HOLINESS SENT ME TO FREE YOU. WE'RE TERRIBLY SORRY TO HAVE ARRIVED SO LATE. YOU'VE BEEN ROTTING AWAY HERE FOR FAR TOO LONG.

ON THE CONTRARY! I CAN ONLY PRAISE THE CARDINAL'S GENEROSITY. AND VOW TO RENDER UNTO THE CHURCH WHAT IT SO KINDLY GAVE ME, ONCE I'VE TAKEN BACK MY DUCHY.



APOLOGIES, MY LORD, BUT YOU CAN NEVER RECOVER YOUR NAME, MUCH LESS THE LAND THAT WERE YOURS.

WHAT? MY NAME? MY LANDS?



AFTER YOUR LONG ABSENCE AND THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF YOUR DEATH, YOUR RETURN WOULD ONLY BRING CHAOS AND CIVIL WAR. SOME OF YOUR VASSALS WOULD LIKELY DOUBT YOUR IDENTITY, AND UNDERSTANDABLY SO. YOUR SON MUST REIGN NOW. YOUR TIME IS OVER.

I AM SORRY.



LET US WALK A BIT, SHALL WE?



WHY DID YOU COME TO FREE ME, IF I MUST GIVE UP MY TITLE?

THE CHURCH HOPES YOU CAN SERVE IT IN ANOTHER WAY. I HAVE ASSEMBLED A SMALL TROOP TO COMBAT THE PAGAN, MUSLIM... AND EVEN ORTHODOX INFLUENCE.

THE CARDINAL NEEDS A MAN OF YOUR TALENTS TO LEAD US. WE WILL BE ACTING IN THE SHADOWS, OFF THE BATTLEFIELDS, BUT ALWAYS CLOSE TO THE ENEMY, IN HIS CASTLES AND TEMPLES, WHEREVER HE MAY BE. WE--



WHAT ARE THOSE?



THE BODIES OF OUR JAILERS. WE LET THOSE DOGS ROT IN THE SUNLIGHT.



HIS HOLINESS SPOKE TRUE. YOU ARE THE MAN WE NEED.



I'VE AWAITED THIS DAY FOR THREE YEARS. EVER SINCE ANATOLIA AND THAT DAMNED SULFUR MINE.

I'VE KNOWN THE TRUTH THIS WHOLE TIME. SOME OF THE MINE GUARDS MENTIONED THEIR MYSTERIOUS EMPLOYER BEFORE THEY DIED. THE CHURCH AND THE CARDINAL WERE THE ONLY ONES TO BLAME FOR MY ABDUCTION... AND MY SCAR.



WHY DIDN'T YOU SAY ANYTHING? YOU COULD HAVE KILLED ME.

YOU WERE JUST SMALL FRY. WITH YOU BY MY SIDE, I COULD LEAVE ANATOLIA WITHOUT HAVING TO FIGHT.

BESIDES...

...I WANTED TO KNOW THE TRUTH. WHY KIDNAP ME? WHY BETRAY ME? AFTER ALL, I'D FALLEN IN LINE. I'D INCREASED THE CHURCH'S PRIVILEGES IN NORMANDY. I'D EVEN UNDERTAKEN A PILGRIMAGE! SO WHY?

WHY FAKE MY DEATH? WHY IMPRISON ME IN THAT MINE?



YOUR LEGATE DIED BEFORE HE COULD ANSWER MY QUESTION AND SUFFER MY VENGEANCE. A PITY. YOU SHALL SUFFER IN HIS STEAD THE FATE I HAD IN STORE FOR HIM.

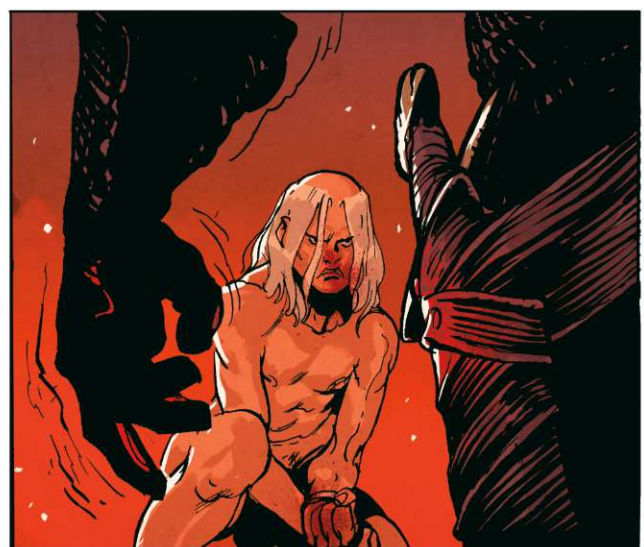


THE CHURCH TOOK MY NAME AND MY DUCHY AWAY FROM ME. BUT YOU, HOWEVER, GAVE ME THREE HUNDRED WARRIORS ON A SILVER PLATTER. WITH THEM, I SHALL FOUND A KINGDOM, AT THE POPE'S EXPENSE.



I KNOW THE TRUTH.







YOUR HOLINESS,  
YOU ONCE SAID I WAS  
NOT READY.

YOU TOLD ME THAT WE  
WOULD MEET WITH OBSTACLES  
THAT FAITH ALONE COULD  
NOT OVERCOME.



YOU THOUGHT THAT  
SOME MEN COULD BE CLEVER  
AND MORE WICKED THAN  
THE DEVIL HIMSELF.



THAT DECEIT  
AND TREASON WERE  
EVERYWHERE.

YOUR HOLINESS,  
YOU WERE RIGHT.



I SINNED THROUGH PRIDE,  
FAILED IN MY MISSION,  
FAILED THE CHURCH.



BUT SO LOW  
HAVE I FALLEN...



...THAT NOW I CANNOT  
BUT RISE AGAIN.





MASSE D'ARME?



ARDUIN



ROUPE



OU

ASHNAK





LE PÈRE



Coatou



HARALD



SOEUR PÈRE  
- JEAN / JEANNE  
- ALIX  
- CATHIE  
ISEULT



BOULIGR

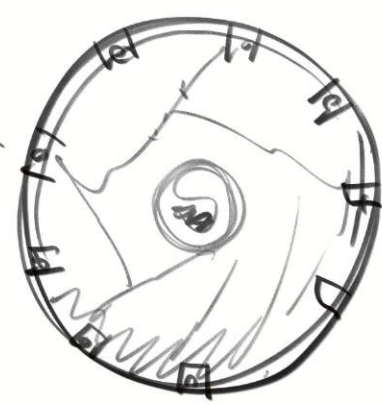
BLESSURE  
À LA MAIN  
(IL NE PEUT  
PLUS TIRER  
À L'ARC)



OTU  
SELTUR



BJNAK  
LE  
PETCHENEG





GUILLAUME  
 À BRAS DE FER



LE HACHOIS



NUNIDE



L'ÉLOCHÉ











At the dawn of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the Mare Nostrum of Ancient Rome had become the crossroads of three very different worlds...

Aided by a still-powerful army, the Byzantine Empire stood firm against ever more numerous enemies.

After four hundred years of expansion, the Muslim world lay riven by internal struggles, each emir and caliph now seeking to hoard the fruits of conquest.

And the feudal West, feeling cramped in its territory, looked to the East while the Pope struggled to hold sway over a Christian world about to splinter (the Great Schism was near at hand).

However, though the Mediterranean was a place of conflict, it was also a place of rewarding exchanges. Franks traded with Arabs, and Greeks bartered with both. It was a world of porous borders and shifting alliances.

An ideal theatre for Norman mercenaries hungry for riches and determined to carve out their own private empires, sword in hand... In the Mediterranean, today's allies were so often tomorrow's enemies...

## VINCENT BRUGEAS

Huge thanks to the studio — you know what I owe you...

Denis, Valérie, Alexis, Brice, Yoann, Johann, Julien, Thibaud, Djet, thank you.

Thomas, Lena, Sophie, you are my foundation.

Lili and my children put up admirably with my wandering mind and regular "absences." Thank you to them for always being by my side, even when I'm not always by theirs.

Thank you to Emmanuel Herzet: two years of collaborating and sharing already... you have such a wise influence on my work now!

## RONAN

## VINCENT

Thank you to the whole crew at Dargaud, especially Yves and Ryun, for their enthusiasm and top-notch professionalism.

Richard and Emmanuel from Editions Akileos would sometimes say with a smile: "If you leave us, it'll be for Dargaud." After eight years of patiently preparing us, the deed is done. This book is dedicated to you.

## RONAN AND VINCENT

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THE ENEMY IS EVERYONE ELSE.  
*EVERY LAST ONE OF THEM.*