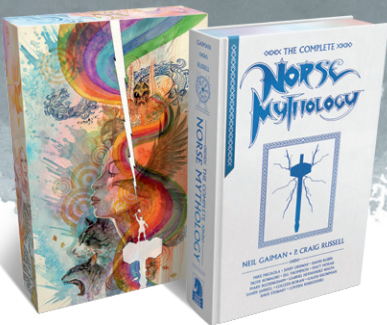


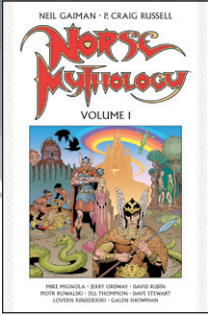
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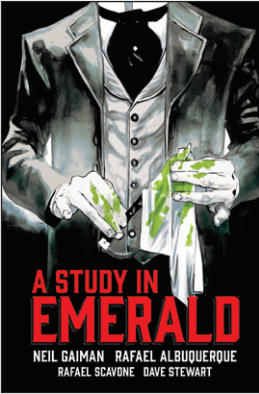
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Neil Gaiman's A Study in Emerald

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American Gods Volume 1: Shadows

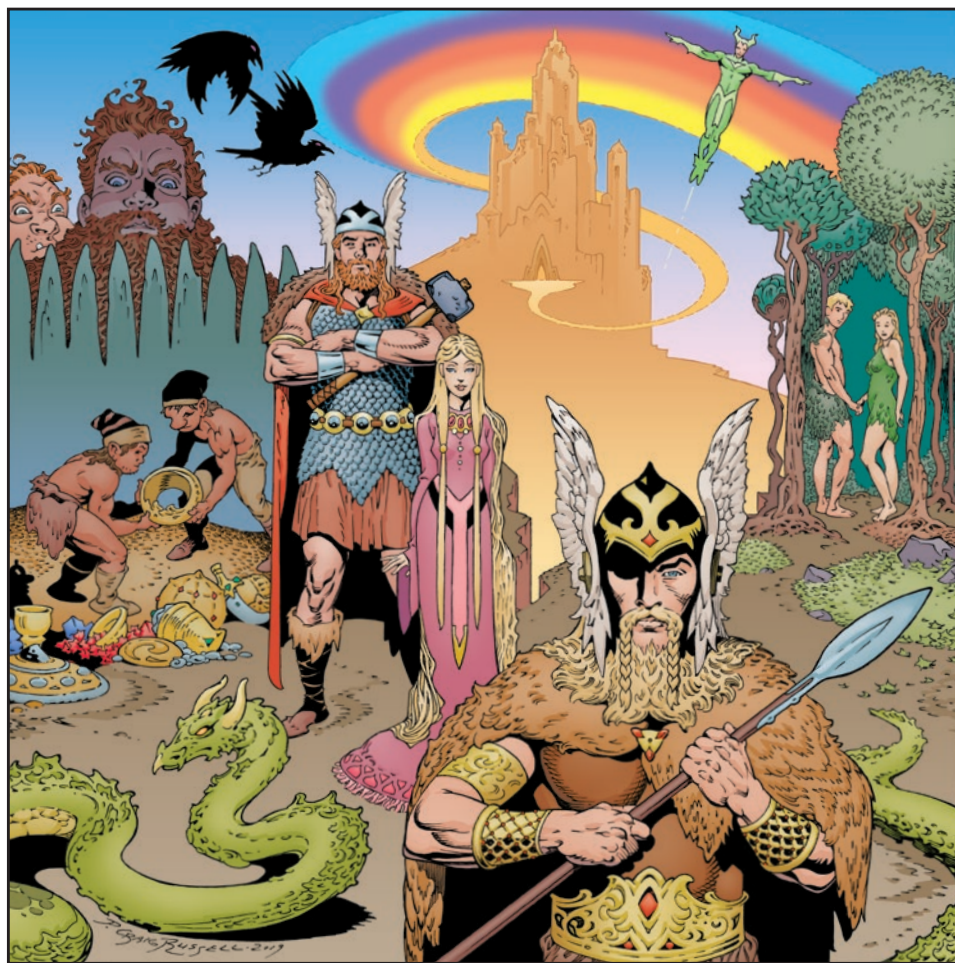
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PIOTR KOWALSKI • JILL THOMPSON • DAVE STEWART
LOVERN KINDZIERSKI • GALEN SHOWMAN

Story and Words by NEIL GAIMAN
Script and Layouts by P. CRAIG RUSSELL
Letters by GALEN SHOWMAN

NORSE MYTHOLOGY

VOLUME 1

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PROLOGUE

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Art by P. CRAIG RUSSELL Colors by LOVERN KINDZIERSKI

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MIMIR'S HEAD AND ODIN'S EYE

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THE TREASURES OF THE GODS

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THE CHILDREN OF LOKI

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FREYA'S UNUSUAL WEDDING

Art and Colors by JILL THOMPSON

◇◇◇ COVER ◇◇◇

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NORSE MYTHOLOGY VOLUME 1

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PROLOGUE

BEFORE THE BEGINNING
THERE WAS NOTHING--

ONLY THE FIRE
AND THE MIST



NEIL GAIMAN'S
**NORSE
MYTHOLOGY**

ADAPTED FOR COMICS

by

P. CRAIG RUSSELL

COLORS
LOVERN KINDZIERSKI
LETTERS
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TO THE NORTH WAS *NIFLHEIM*, COLDER THAN COLD,
HIDDEN BY MIST AND CHILLY FOG.

HERE ELEVEN POISONOUS RIVERS
SPRANG FROM THE SAME ROARING
MAELSTROM CALLED *HVERGELMIR*.

TO THE SOUTH WAS *MUSPELL*.
HERE WAS NOTHING BUT SPURTING
HEAT, FIRE, AND MOLTEN LAVA.

AT THE EDGE
OF THE FLAME,
WHERE THE
MIST BURNS INTO
LIGHT, STOOD
SURTR, WHO
EXISTED BEFORE
THE GODS.

HE STANDS THERE
NOW, HOLDING HIS
FLAMING SWORD.

IT IS SAID THAT AT *RAGNAROK*, WHICH IS THE END OF THE WORLD,
SURTR WILL LEAVE HIS STATION. HE WILL GO FORTH AND BURN THE
WORLD WITH FIRE, AND ONE BY ONE THE GODS WILL FALL BEFORE HIM.



BETWEEN
MUSPELL
AND
NIFLHEIM
WAS A
VOID. THE
POISONED
RIVERS
FLOWED
INTO THE
VOID,
CALLED
GINNINGAGAP.

OVER TIME BEYOND MEASURE, THE POISONED RIVERS
SOLIDIFIED INTO HUGE GLACIERS, FROZEN IN THE NORTH,
MELTING IN THE SOUTH.

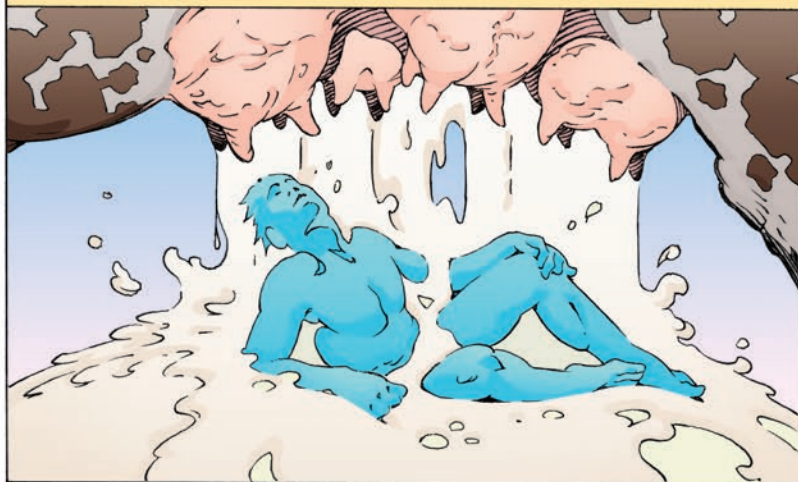
WHERE THE ICE MELTED, THE LIKENESS OF A PERSON
APPEARED, NEITHER MALE NOR FEMALE, HUGER THAN ANY
GIANT THAT HAS EVER BEEN. IT CALLED ITSELF YMI/R.

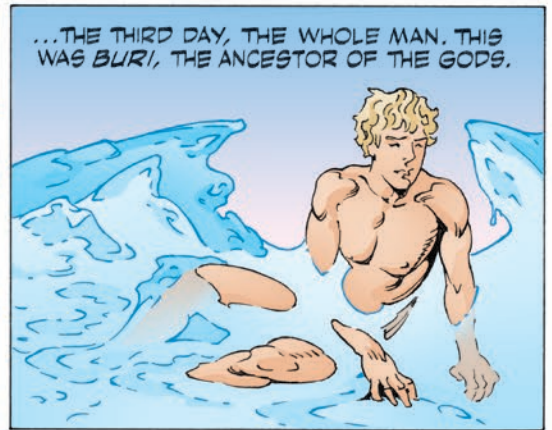
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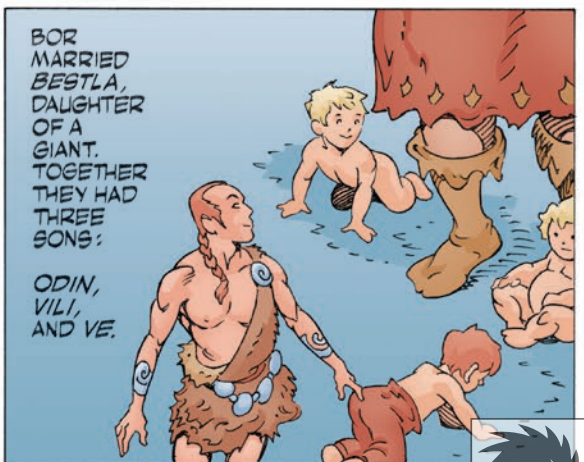
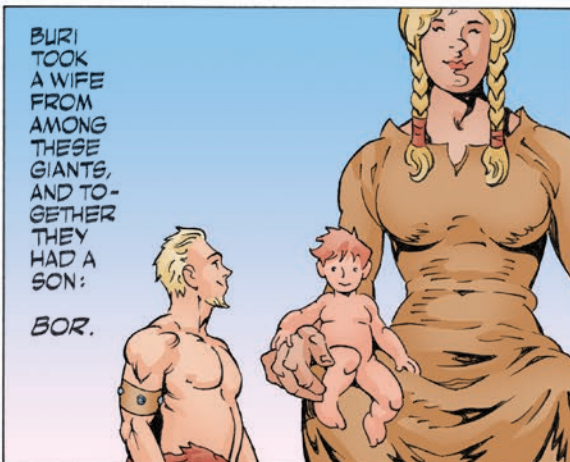
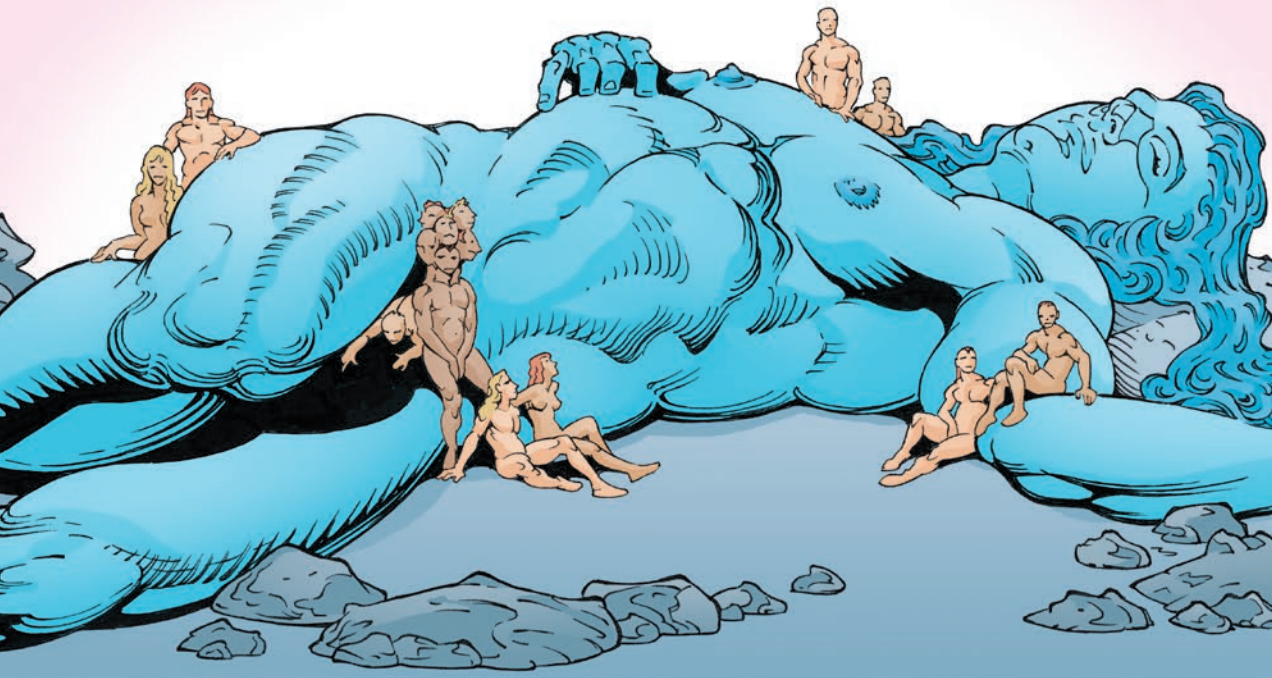
THE MELTING ICE ALSO FORMED A HORNLESS COW. THE
MILK FROM HER FOUR UDDERS FLOWED LIKE RIVERS.
IT WAS THIS MILK THAT NOURISHED YMIR.

THE COW'S PINK TONGUE
LICKED PEOPLE FROM
THE BLOCKS OF ICE ...





WHILE YMIR SLEPT, IT GAVE BIRTH: A MALE AND FEMALE GIANT FROM BENEATH ITS LEFT ARM, A SIX-HEADED GIANT FROM ITS LEGS. FROM THESE, YMIR'S CHILDREN, ALL GIANTS ARE DESCENDED.



THE
THREE
SONS OF
BOR GREW,
TRAPPED
FOREVER
IN THE
VAST
GAP OF
GINNUNGAGAP.

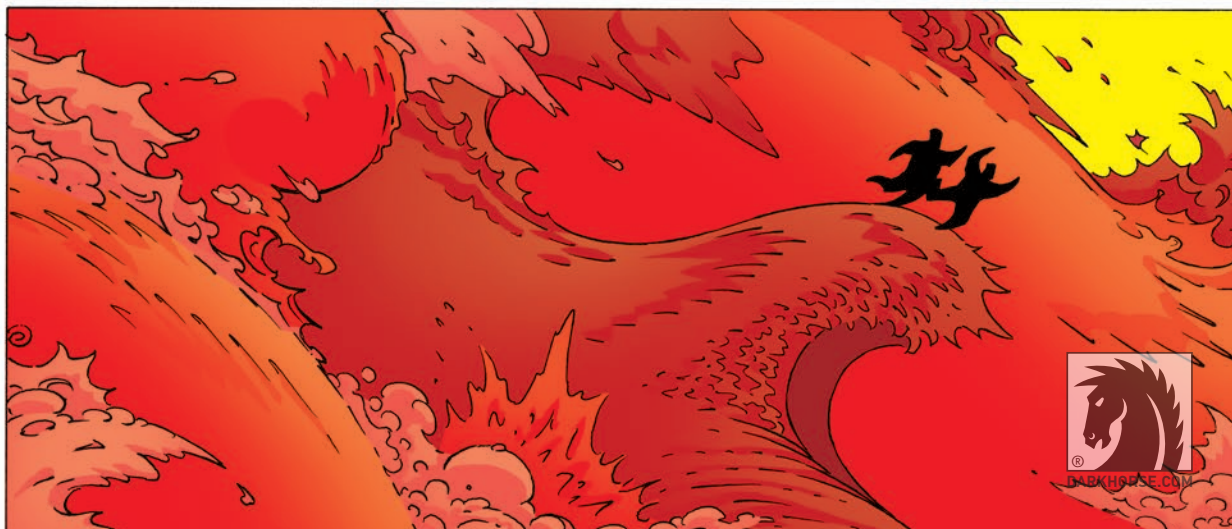


IT
WAS TIME
FOR THE
CREATION
OF EVERY-
THING.
VE AND
VILI AND
ODIN
SPOKE OF
WHAT WAS
NEEDFUL
TO DO.

THEY
KILLED
THE
GIANT
YMWIR.
IT HAD
TO BE
DONE.



FOUNTAINS OF BLOOD GUSHED OUT IN A FLOOD SO POWERFUL THAT IT DROWNED ALL THE GIANTS SAVE TWO. ALL THE GIANTS WE FEAR TODAY ARE DESCENDED FROM THEM.



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ODIN AND HIS BROTHERS
MADE THE SOIL FROM
YMIR'S FLESH...



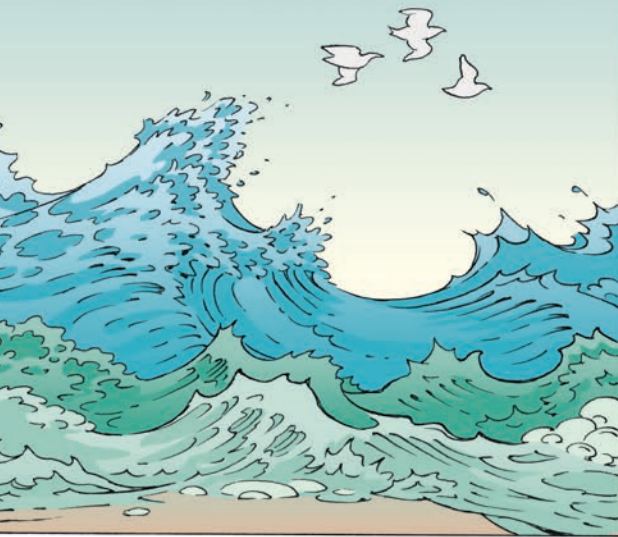
...THE MOUNTAINS AND CLIFFS FROM HIS BONES.



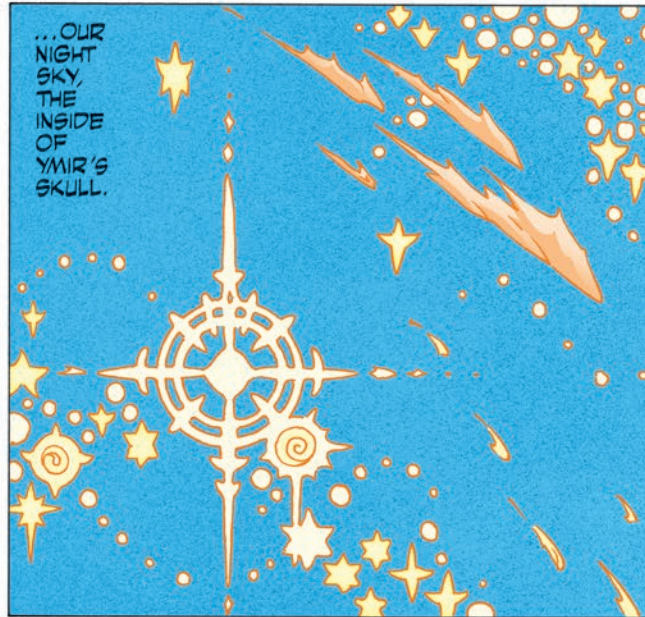
OUR ROCKS AND PEBBLES ARE YMIR'S TEETH, CRUSHED.



THE SEAS ARE YMIR'S BLOOD AND SWEAT...



...OUR
NIGHT
SKY,
THE
INSIDE
OF
YMIR'S
SKULL.

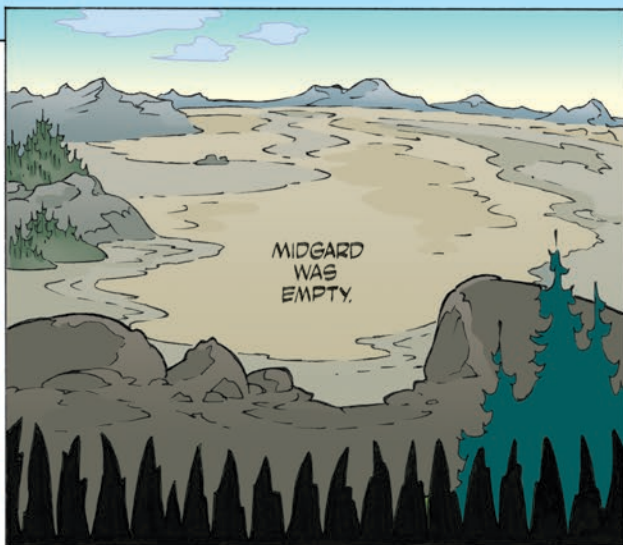


THE CLOUDS YOU SEE? THESE WERE ONCE YMIR'S BRAINS, AND WHO KNOWS WHAT
THOUGHTS THEY ARE THINKING, EVEN NOW.



THE SEA ENCIRCLES THE WORLD. GIANTS LIVE AT THE EDGES, BESIDE THE DEEPEST SEAS.

TO KEEP THE GIANTS AT BAY, ODIN MADE A WALL FROM YMIR'S EYELASHES AND SET IT AROUND THE MIDDLE OF THE WORLD, MIDGARD.

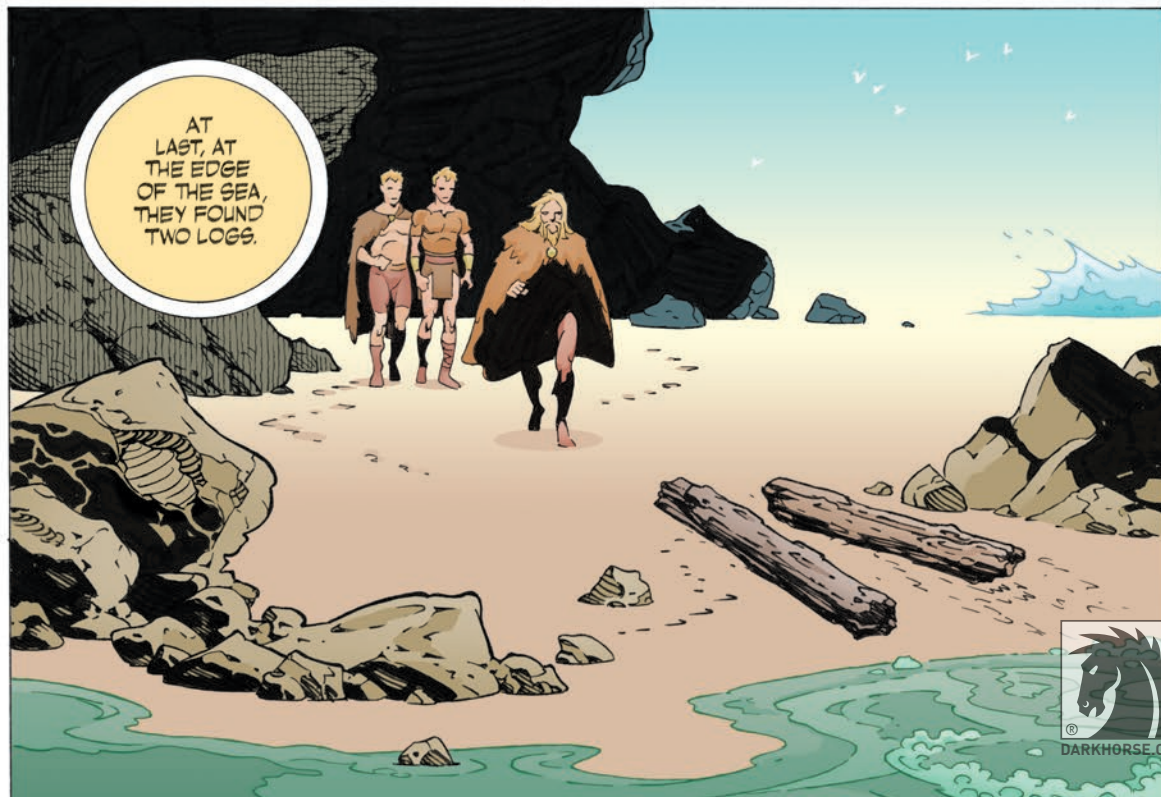


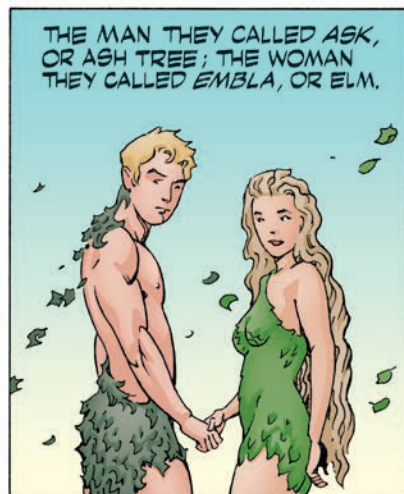
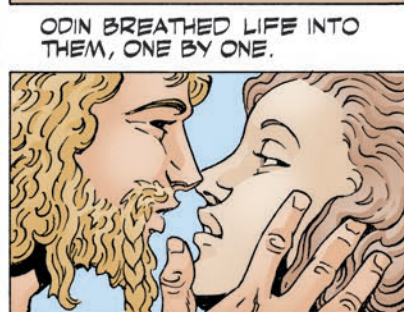
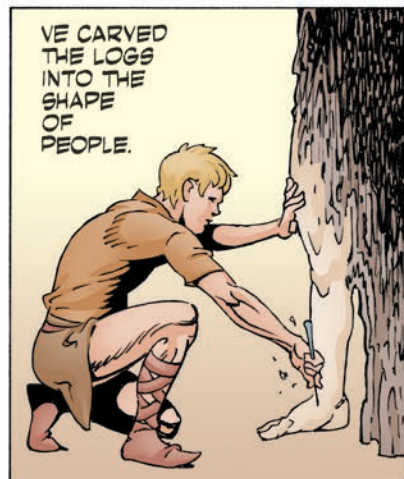
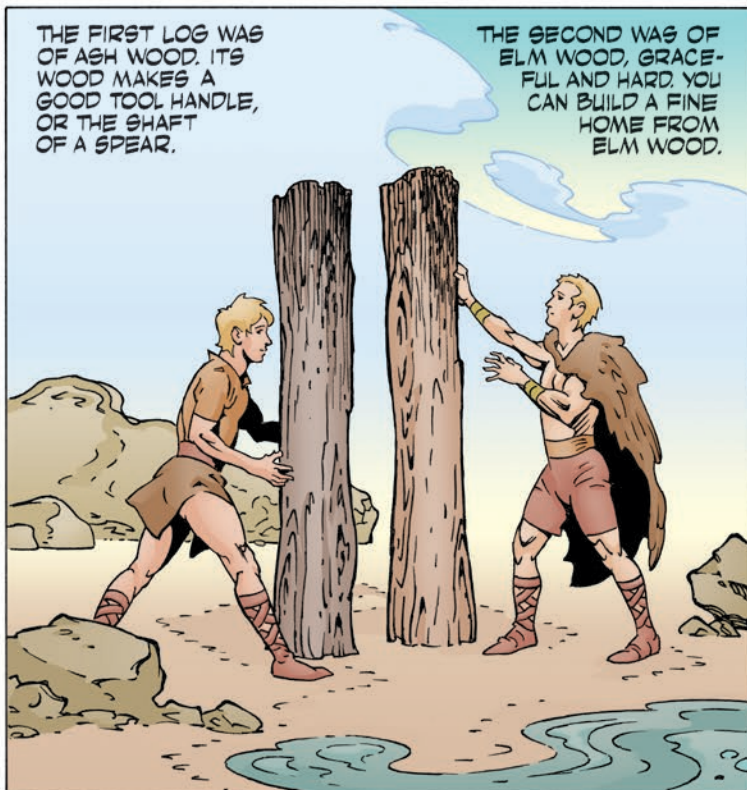
MIDGARD
WAS
EMPTY.

THE BROTHERS WANDERED HIGH AND LOW,
LOOKING FOR PEOPLE.

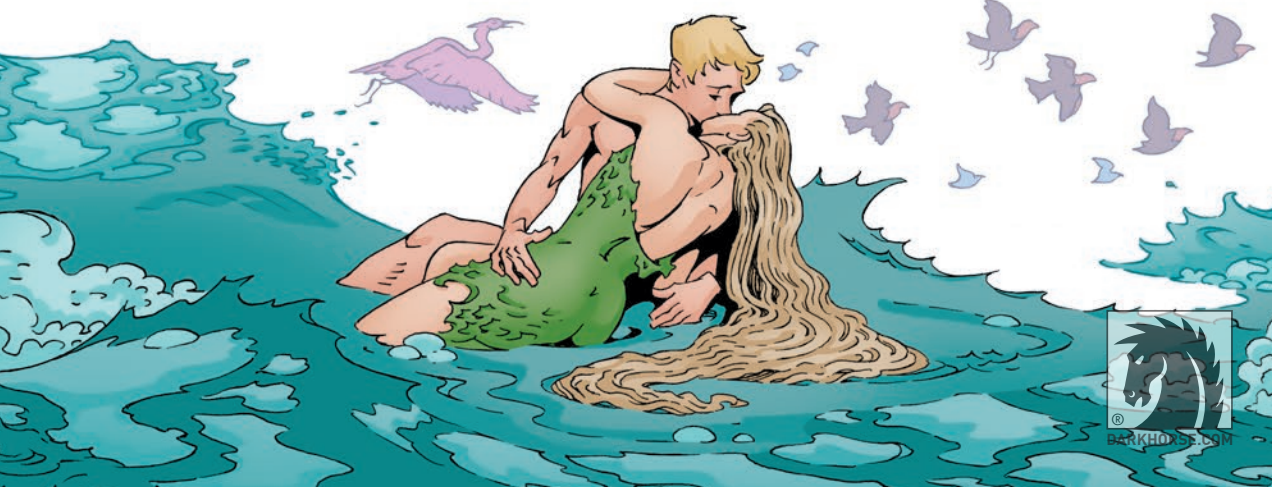


AT
LAST, AT
THE EDGE
OF THE SEA,
THEY FOUND
TWO LOGS.



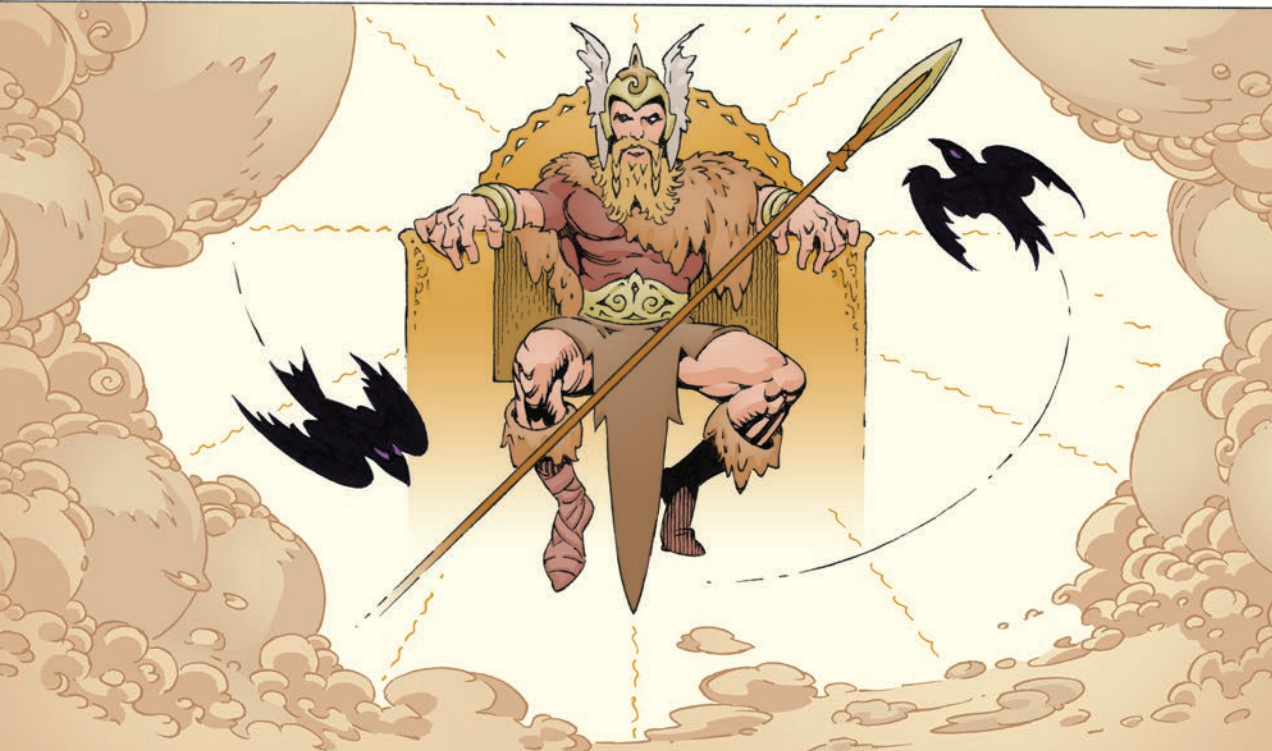


ASK AND EMBLA WERE THE FATHER AND MOTHER OF US ALL. GO FAR ENOUGH BACK, AND THE ANCESTORS OF EACH OF US WERE ASK AND EMBLA.





ASK AND EMBLA STAYED SAFE
IN MIDGARD, WHERE THEY
COULD RAISE THEIR CHILDREN
IN PEACE, PROTECTED FROM
ALL THE DANGERS THAT WAIT
IN THE WASTES.



THAT IS WHY ODIN IS CALLED THE ALL-FATHER. BECAUSE HE BREATHED LIFE INTO OUR
GRANDPARENTS' GRANDPARENTS' GRANDPARENTS. WHETHER WE ARE GODS OR MORTALS,
ODIN IS THE FATHER OF US ALL.



YGGDRASIL AND THE NINE WORLDS



THE
ASH TREE
YGGDRASIL IS A
MIGHTY ASH TREE,
THE MOST PERFECT AND
BEAUTIFUL OF ALL.
THE ROOTS OF THE
ASH ARE IN THREE
WORLDS, FED
BY THREE
WELLS.

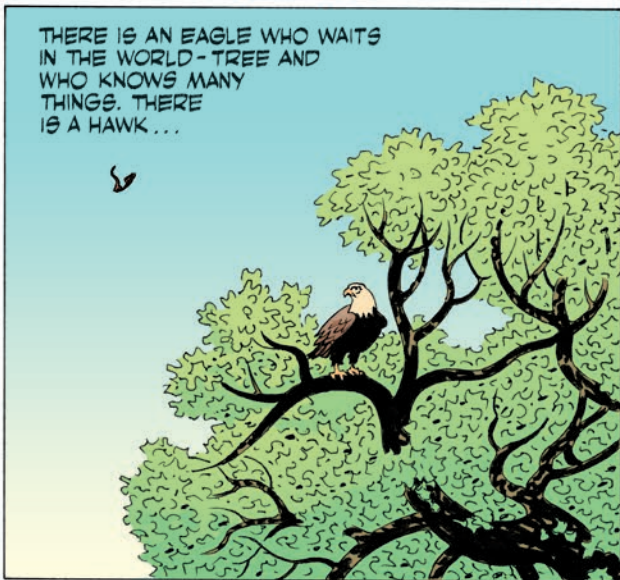
THE FIRST ROOT, THE DEEPEST, GOES TO NIFLHEIM, THE DARK WORLD WITH ITS EVER-CHURNING SPRING, HVERGELMIR. THE DRAGON NIDHOGG LIVES HERE, ALWAYS GNAWING AT THE ROOT FROM BELOW.



THE SECOND ROOT GOES TO THE REALM OF THE FROST GIANTS, AND THE WELL THAT BELONGS TO MIMIR.



THERE IS AN EAGLE WHO WAITS IN THE WORLD-TREE AND WHO KNOWS MANY THINGS. THERE IS A HAWK ...



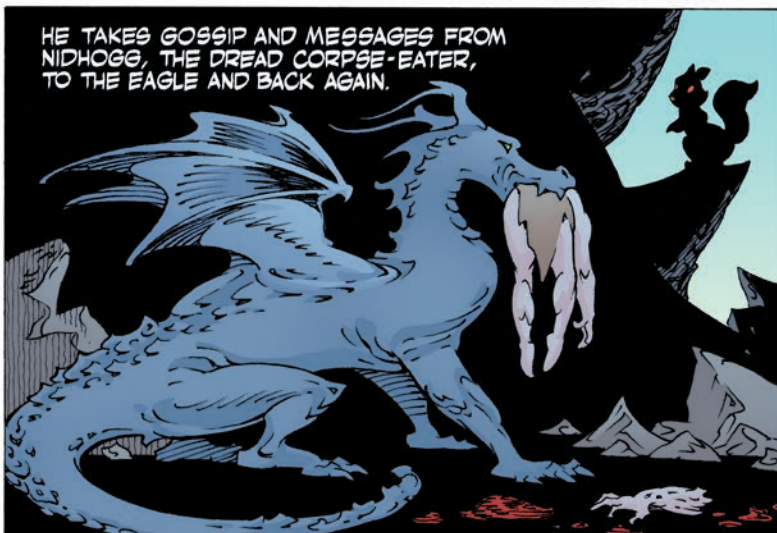
...PERCHED BETWEEN THE EAGLE'S EYES.



THERE IS A SQUIRREL... RATATOSK.



HE TAKES GOSSIP AND MESSAGES FROM NIDHOGG, THE DREAD CORPSE-EATER, TO THE EAGLE AND BACK AGAIN.



HE LIES TO BOTH OF THEM, AND TAKES JOY IN PROVOKING ANGER.



FOUR STAGS GRAZE ON THE
HUGE BRANCHES OF THE
WORLD-TREE, DEVOURING
THE FOLIAGE AND
THE BARK...



...WHILE UNCOUNTABLE SNAKES BITE AT ITS ROOTS.



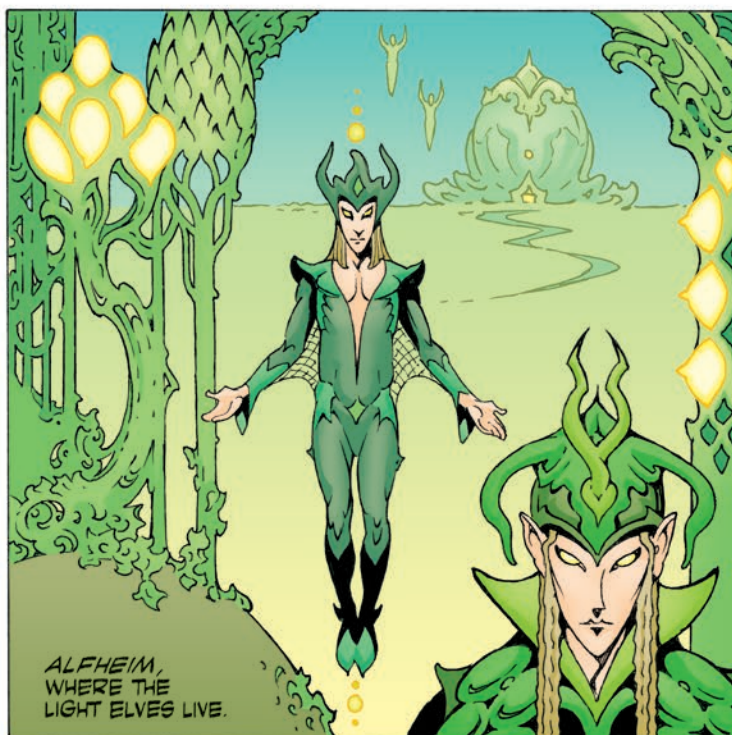
IT IS FROM THIS
TREE THAT ODIN
HANGED HIMSELF
IN SACRIFICE.



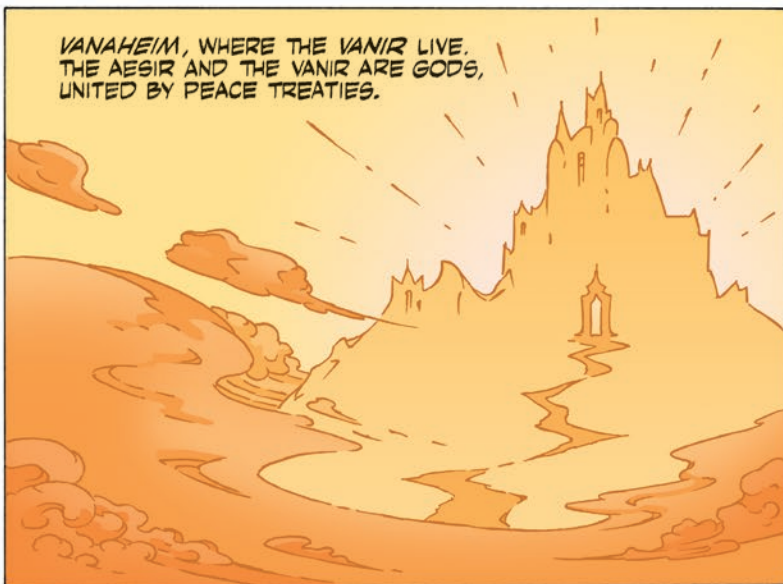
THE GODS DO NOT CLIMB THE WORLD-TREE. THEY TRAVEL BETWEEN
THE WORLDS USING BIFROST, THE RAINBOW BRIDGE. IT WOULD
BURN THE FEET OF ANY GIANTS OR TROLLS WHO ATTEMPTED TO
CLAMBER UP IT TO REACH ASGARD.



THESE ARE THE NINE WORLDS:



VANAHEIM, WHERE THE VANIR LIVE.
THE AESIR AND THE VANIR ARE GODS,
UNITED BY PEACE TREATIES.



NIFLHEIM,
THE DARK MIST WORLD.



MUSPELL, THE WORLD OF FLAME, WHERE SURTR WAITS.



HEL, WHERE THE
DEAD GO WHO DID
NOT DIE BRAVELY
IN BATTLE.



THE LAST ROOT GOES TO A SPRING IN ASGARD. IT IS HERE
THE GODS WILL GATHER IN THE LAST DAYS OF THE WORLD,
BEFORE THE FINAL BATTLE OF RAGNAROK.

IT IS CALLED THE WELL OF URD.

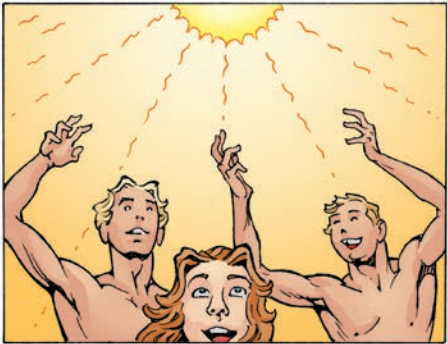


THERE ARE THE THREE SISTERS, THE NORN, THAT TEND THE WELL. THE WELL BELONGS TO URD; SHE IS FATE, AND DESTINY. SHE IS YOUR PAST. WITH HER ARE VERDANDI--HERS IS THE PRESENT--AND SKULD--HER DOMAIN IS THE FUTURE.

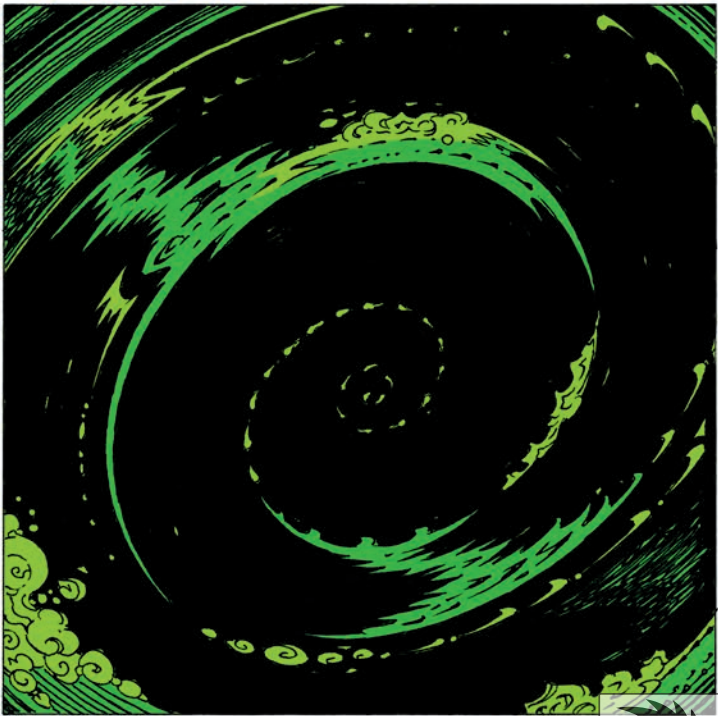


THERE ARE OTHER NORN - AS WELL. GIANT, ELF, DWARF, AND VANIR NORN, GOOD NORN AND BAD.

SOME NORN GIVE US GOOD LIVES...



...OTHERS GIVE US HARD, SHORT, OR TWISTED LIVES.



THEY WILL SHAPE YOUR FATE, THERE AT URD'S WELL.

SNOW,
GLASS,
APPLES™



NEIL GAIMAN
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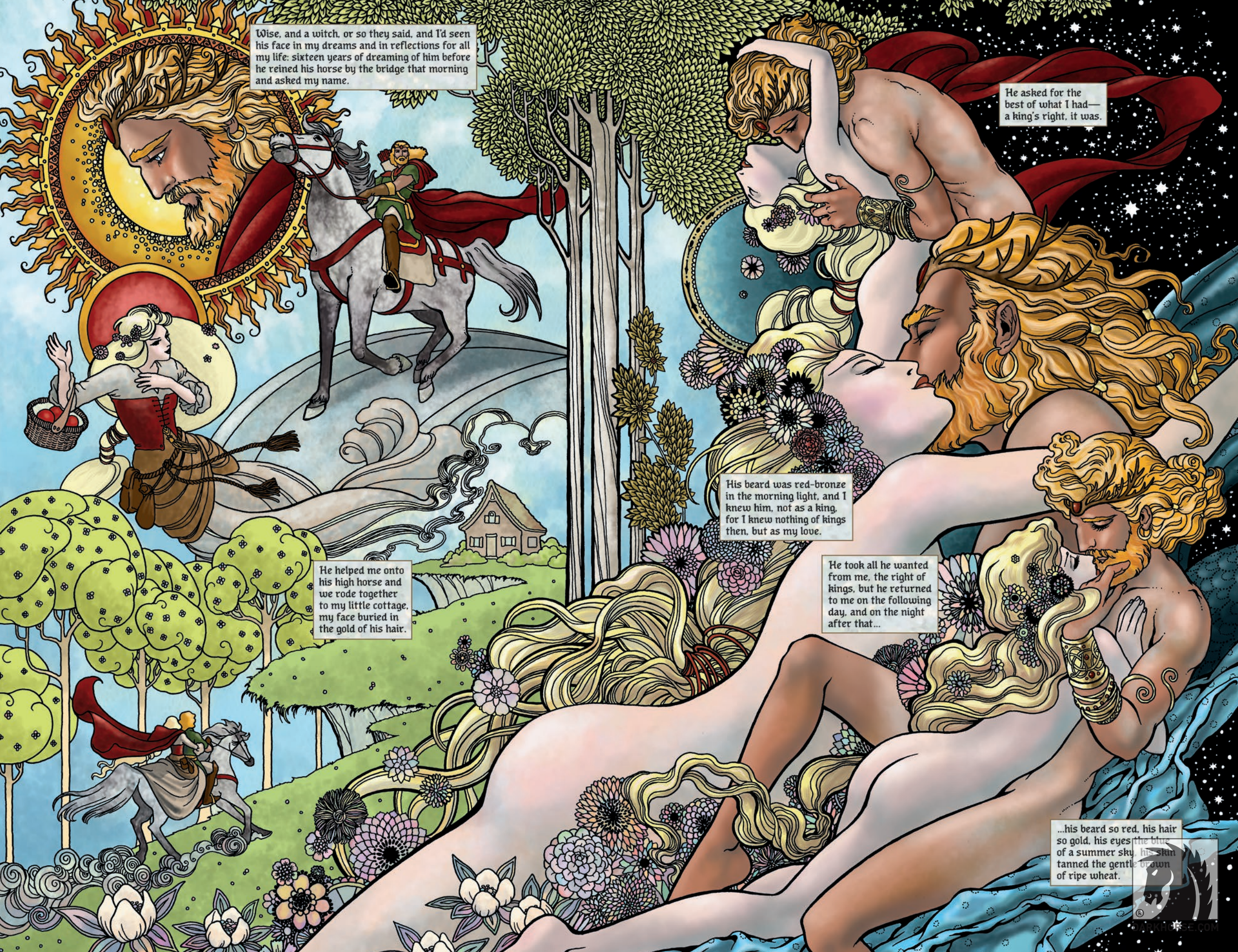
I do not know what manner
of thing she is. None of us do.
She killed her mother in the
birthing, but that's never
enough to account for it.

They call me wise, but I
am far from wise, for all
that I foresaw fragments
of it, frozen moments
caught in pools of water...

...or in the cold glass
of my mirror.

If I were wise I would not
have tried to change what
I saw. If I were wise I
would have killed myself
before ever I encountered
her, before ever I caught him.





Wise, and a witch, or so they said, and I'd seen his face in my dreams and in reflections for all my life: sixteen years of dreaming of him before he reined his horse by the bridge that morning and asked my name.

He asked for the best of what I had—a king's right, it was.

His beard was red-bronze in the morning light, and I knew him, not as a king, for I knew nothing of kings then, but as my love.

He took all he wanted from me, the right of kings, but he returned to me on the following day, and on the night after that...

He helped me onto his high horse and we rode together to my little cottage, my face buried in the gold of his hair.

...his beard so red, his hair so gold, his eyes the blue of a summer sky, his skin tanned the gentle brown of ripe wheat.





His daughter was only a child: no more than five years of age when I came to the palace.

A portrait of her dead mother hung in the princess's tower room: a tall woman, hair the color of dark wood, eyes nut-brown.

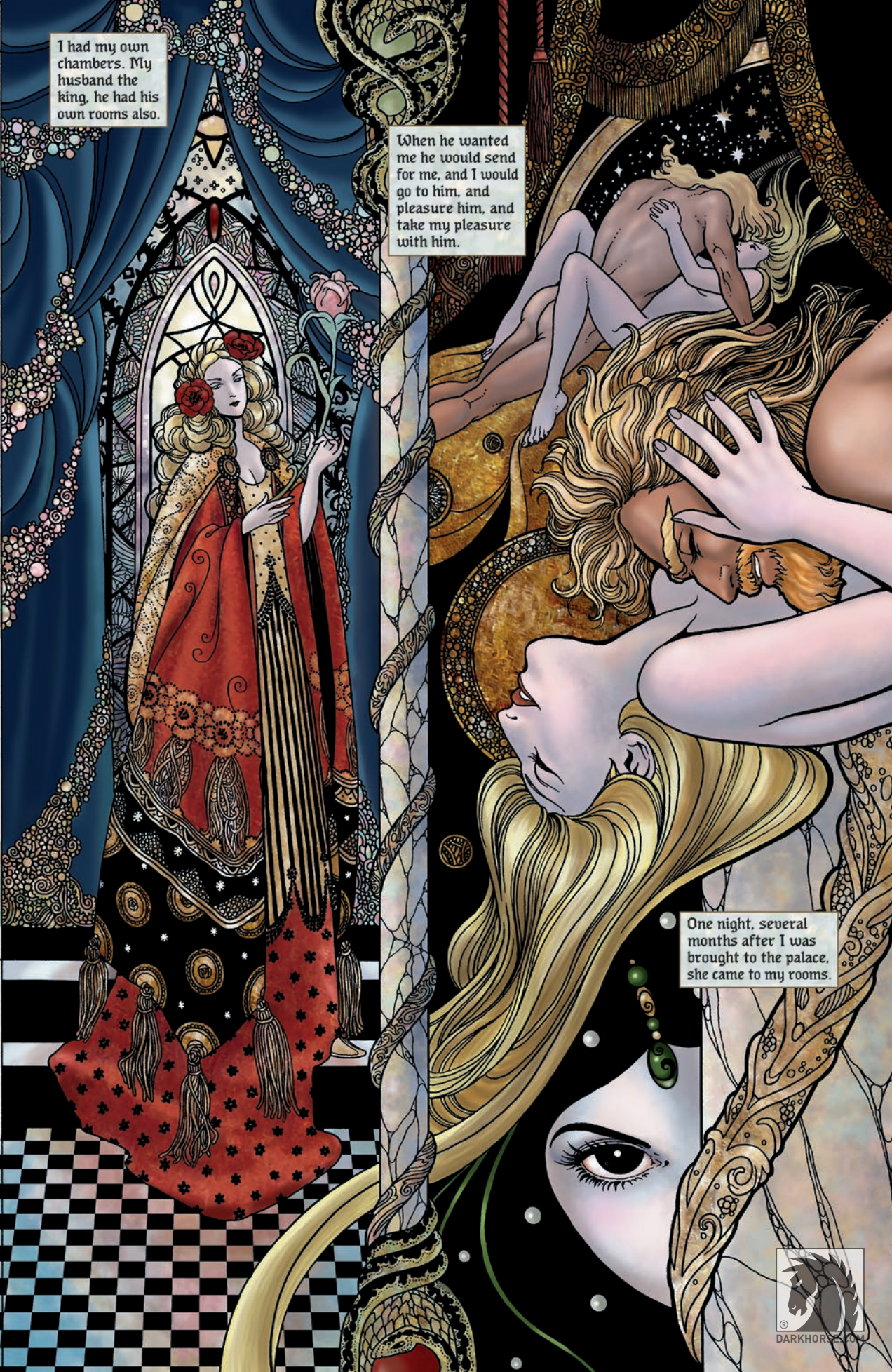
She was of different blood to her pale daughter.

The girl would not eat with us.

I do not know where in the palace she ate.



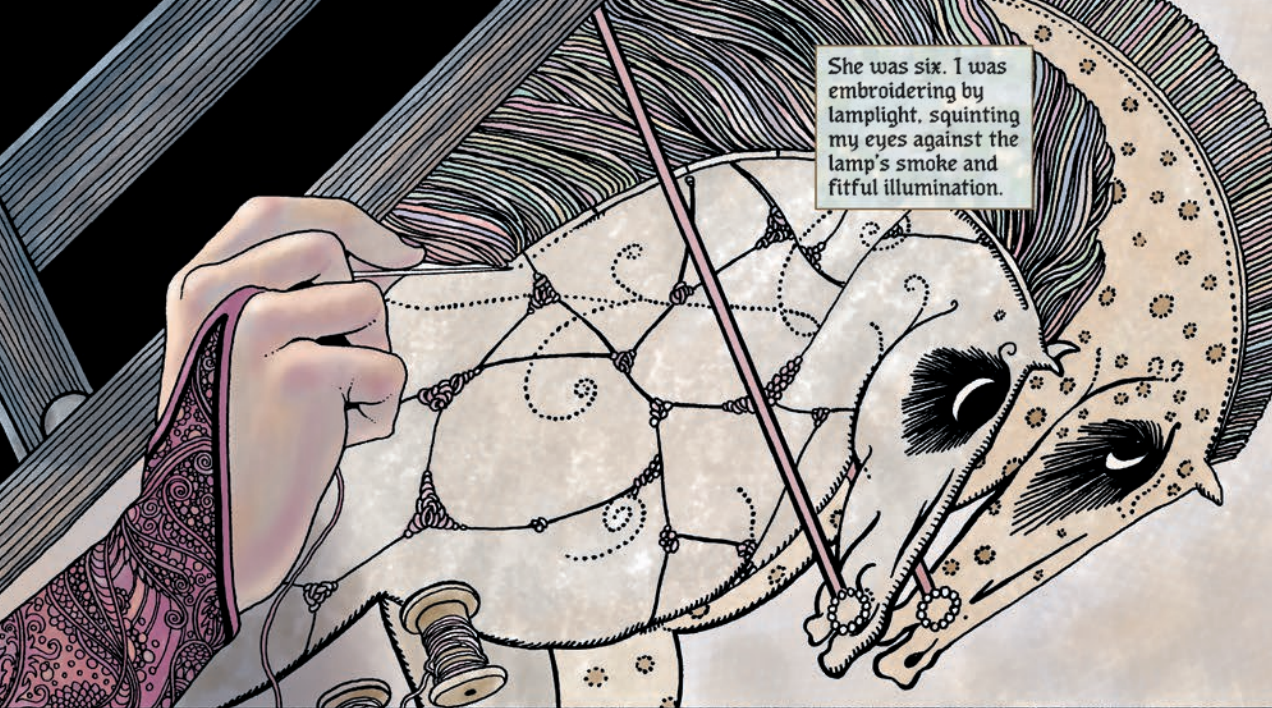
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I had my own chambers. My husband the king, he had his own rooms also.

When he wanted me he would send for me, and I would go to him, and pleasure him, and take my pleasure with him.

One night, several months after I was brought to the palace, she came to my rooms.



She was six. I was embroidering by lamplight, squinting my eyes against the lamp's smoke and fitful illumination.



PRINCESS?



She said nothing. Her eyes were black as coal, black as her hair—her lips were redder than blood.



She looked up at me and smiled. Her teeth seemed sharp, even then, in the lamplight.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING AWAY FROM YOUR ROOM?

I'M HUNGRY.



It was winter, when fresh food is a dream of warmth and sunlight—but I had strings of whole apples, cored and dried, hanging from the beams of my chamber.



I pulled an apple down for her.

HERE.



Autumn is the time of drying, of preserving, a time of picking apples, of rendering the goose fat.

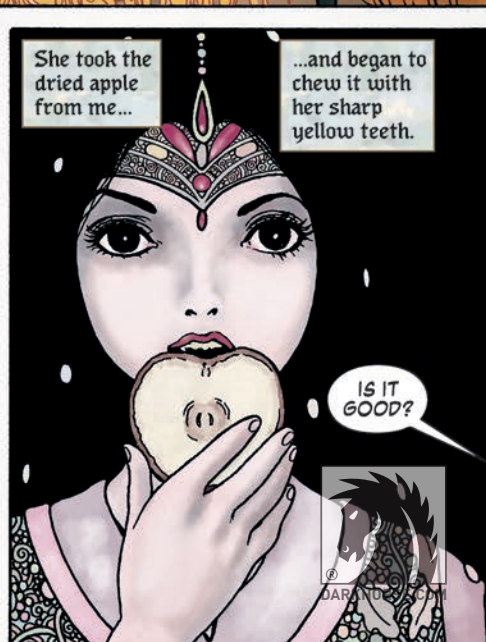
Winter is the time of hunger, of snow, and of death—and it is the time of the midwinter feast, when we rub the goose-fat into the skin of a whole pig, stuffed with that autumn's apples...

Then we roast it or spit it, and we prepare to feast upon the crackling.



She took the dried apple from me...

...and began to chew it with her sharp yellow teeth.



IS IT GOOD?



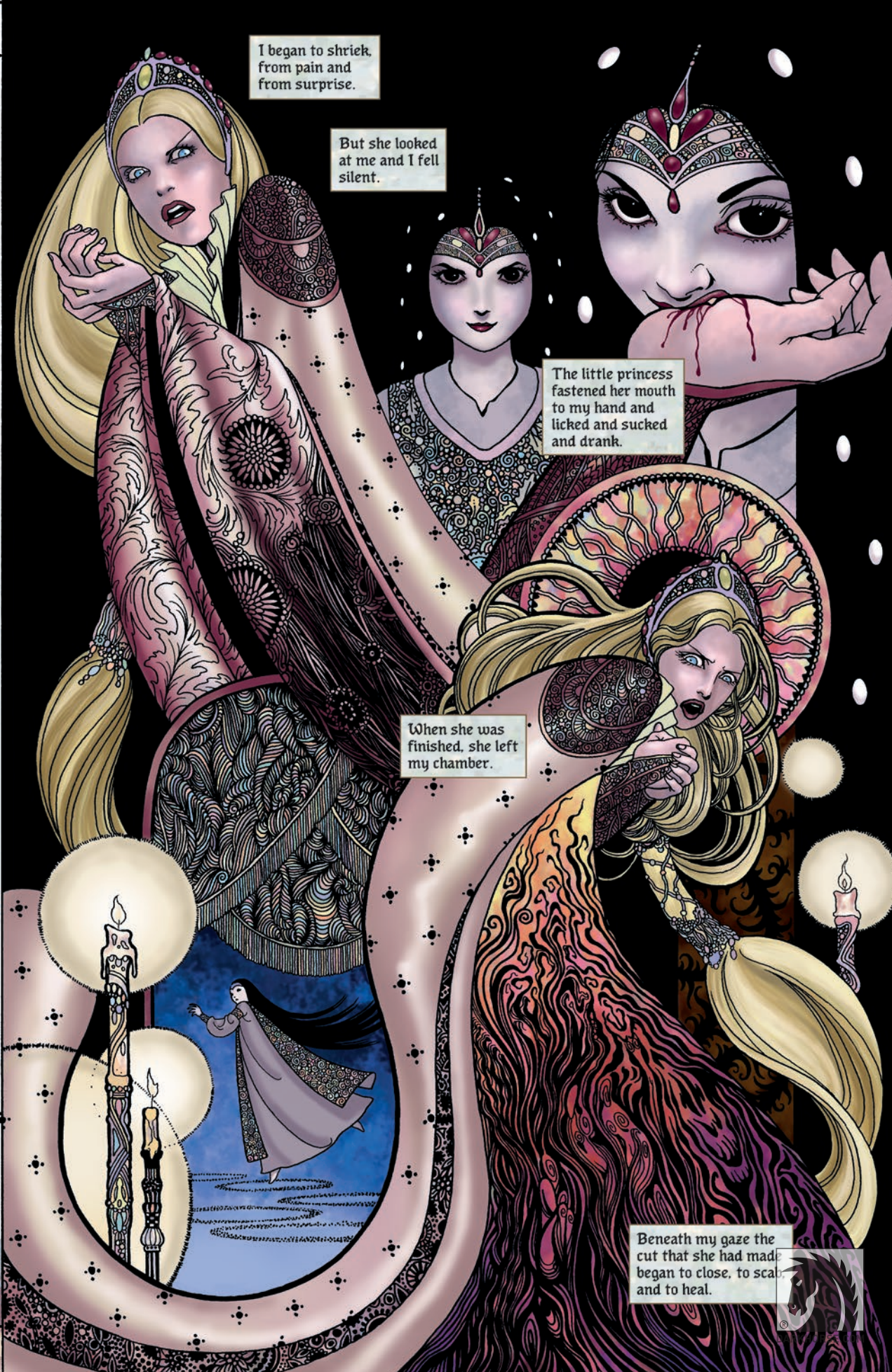
She nodded.

I had always been scared of the little princess, but at that moment I warmed to her and—

—with my fingers, gently, I stroked her cheek.

She looked at me and smiled—she smiled but rarely—

Then she sank her teeth into the base of my thumb, the Mound of Venus, and she drew blood.



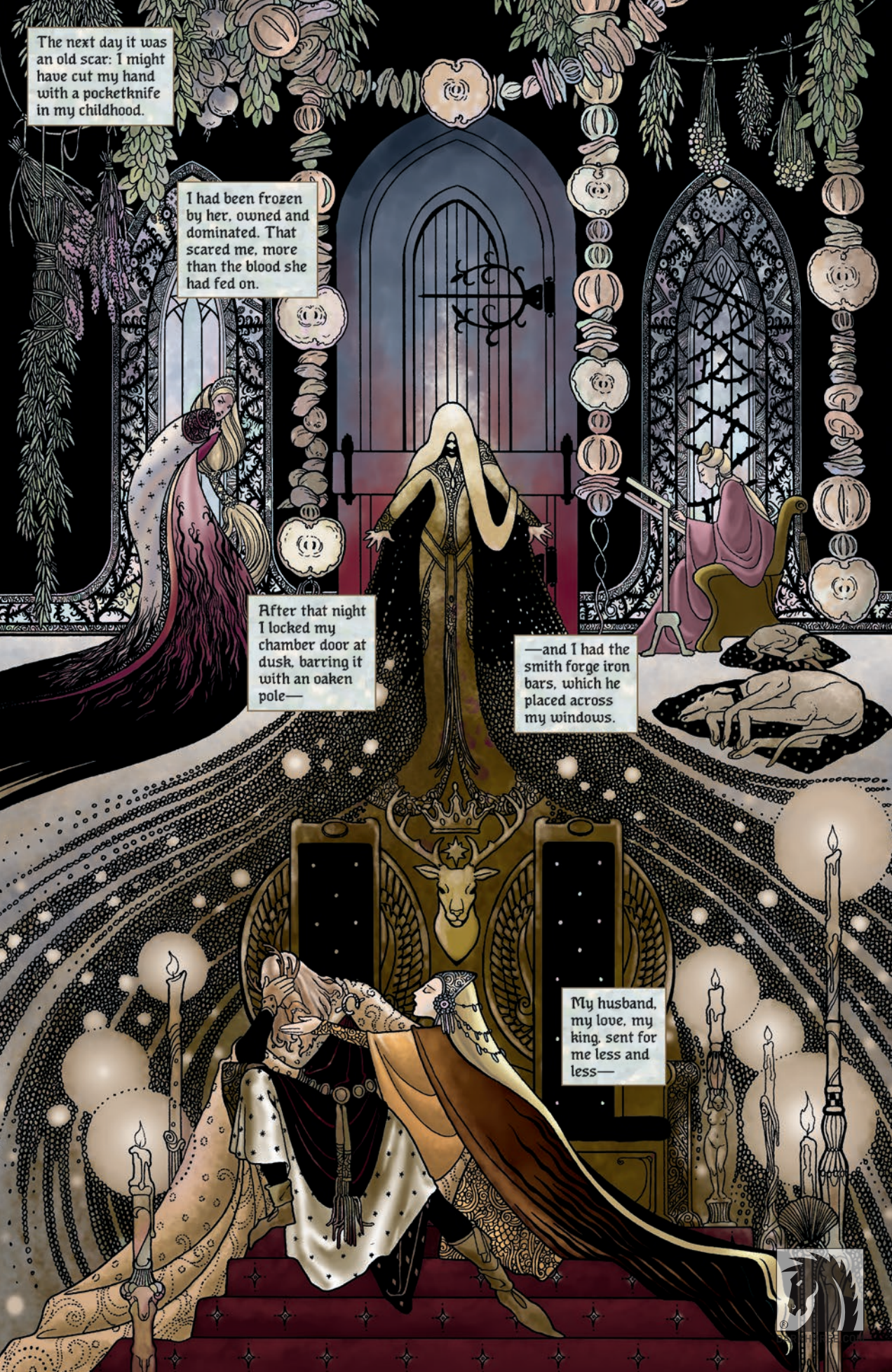
I began to shriek,
from pain and
from surprise.

But she looked
at me and I fell
silent.

The little princess
fastened her mouth
to my hand and
licked and sucked
and drank.

When she was
finished, she left
my chamber.

Beneath my gaze the
cut that she had made
began to close, to scar,
and to heal.



The next day it was an old scar: I might have cut my hand with a pocketknife in my childhood.

I had been frozen by her, owned and dominated. That scared me, more than the blood she had fed on.

After that night I locked my chamber door at dusk, barring it with an oaken pole—

—and I had the smith forge iron bars, which he placed across my windows.

My husband, my love, my king, sent for me less and less—



—and when
I came to him
he was dizzy,
listless,
confused.

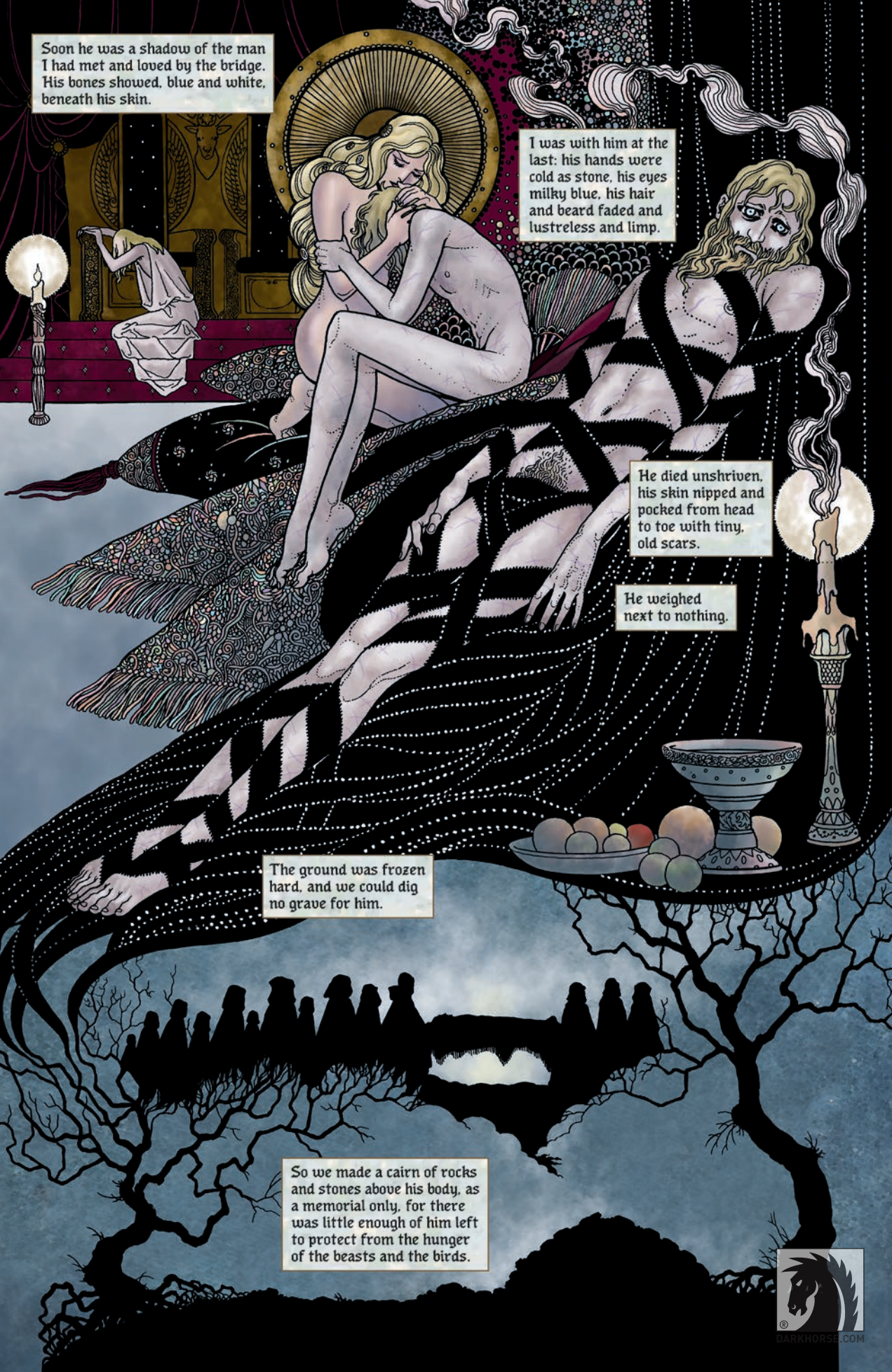
He could no longer
make love as a man
makes love—and he
would not permit me
to pleasure him with
my mouth.

The one time I
tried, he started,
violently, and
began to weep.

I pulled my mouth
away and held him
tightly, until the sob-
bing had stopped, and
he slept, like a child.

I ran my fingers
across his skin as
he slept. It was
covered in a multi-
tude of ancient scars.

But I could recall no
scars from the days
of our courtship,
save one, on his side,
where a boat had
gored him when he
was a youth.



Soon he was a shadow of the man
I had met and loved by the bridge.
His bones showed, blue and white,
beneath his skin.

I was with him at the
last: his hands were
cold as stone, his eyes
milky blue, his hair
and beard faded and
lustreless and limp.

He died unshriven,
his skin nipped and
pocked from head
to toe with tiny,
old scars.

He weighed
next to nothing.

The ground was frozen
hard, and we could dig
no grave for him.

So we made a cairn of rocks
and stones above his body, as
a memorial only, for there
was little enough of him left
to protect from the hunger
of the beasts and the birds.





So I was
queen.

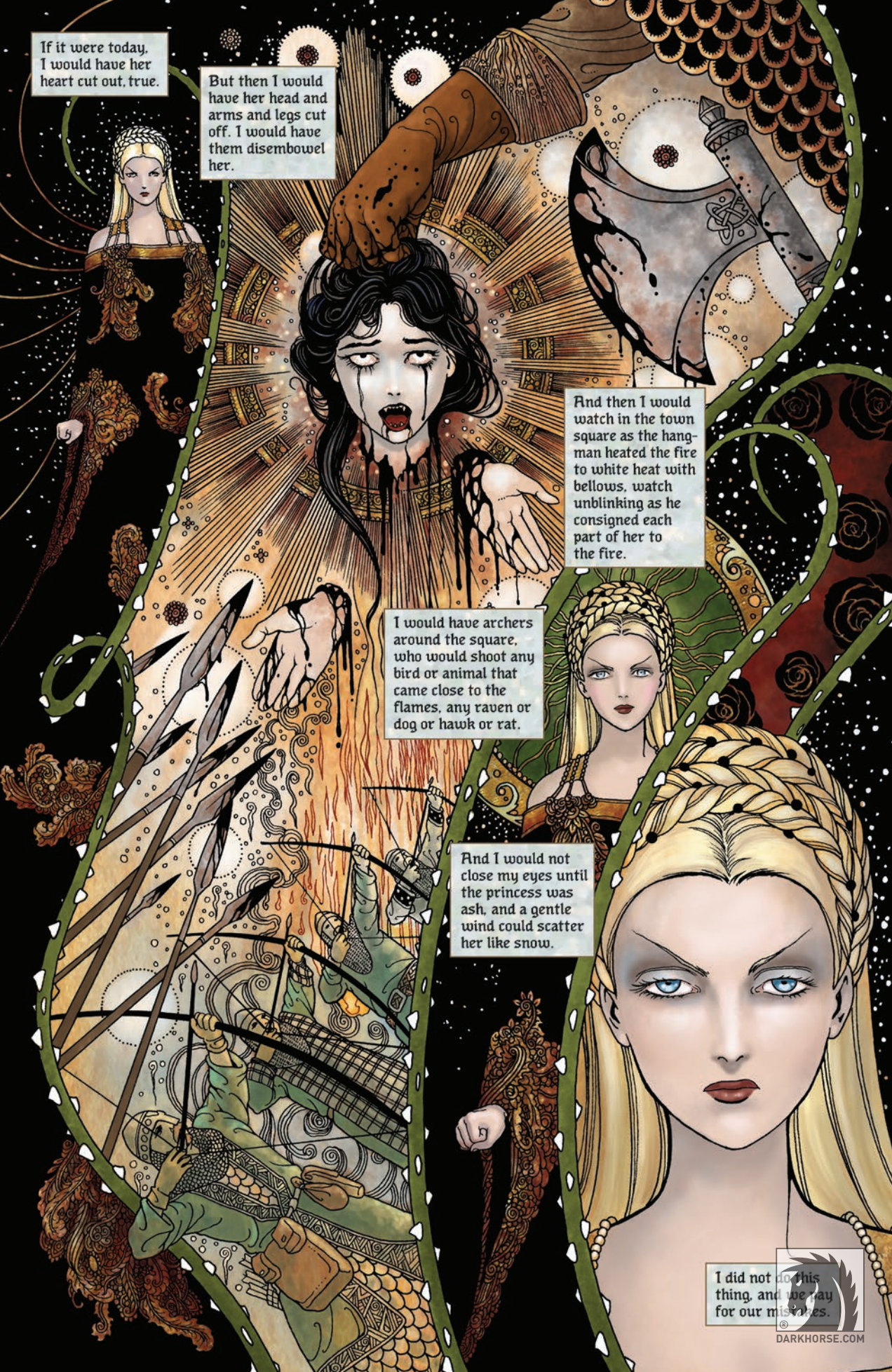
And I was
foolish and
young.

Eighteen summers
had come and gone
since I first saw
daylight.

And I did not
do what I
would do now.



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If it were today,
I would have her
heart cut out, true.

But then I would
have her head and
arms and legs cut
off. I would have
them disembowel
her.

And then I would
watch in the town
square as the hang-
man heated the fire
to white heat with
bellows, watch
unblinking as he
consigned each
part of her to
the fire.

I would have archers
around the square,
who would shoot any
bird or animal that
came close to the
flames, any raven or
dog or hawk or rat.

And I would not
close my eyes until
the princess was
ash, and a gentle
wind could scatter
her like snow.

I did not do this
thing, and we pay
for our mistakes.



They say I was
fooled—that it
was not her
heart. That it
was the heart
of an animal—
a stag, perhaps,
or a boar.

They say that, and
they are wrong.

And some say (but it is
her lie, not mine) that I
was given the heart,
and that I ate it.

Lies and half-truths fall like snow,
covering the things that I remember,
the things I saw. A landscape,
unrecognizable after a snowfall—
that is what she has made of my life.

There were scars on my love,
her father's, thighs, and on his
ballock-pouch, and on his male
member, when he died.



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I did not go with them. They took her in the day, while she slept and was at her weakest.

The forest is a dark place, the border to many kingdoms—no one would be foolish enough to claim jurisdiction over it.

Outlaws live in the forest. Robbers live in the forest, and so do wolves.

They took her to the heart of the forest, and there they opened her blouse.

You can ride through the forest for a dozen days and never see a soul...

They cut out her heart, and they left her dead, in a gully, for the forest to swallow.

...but there are eyes upon you the entire time.

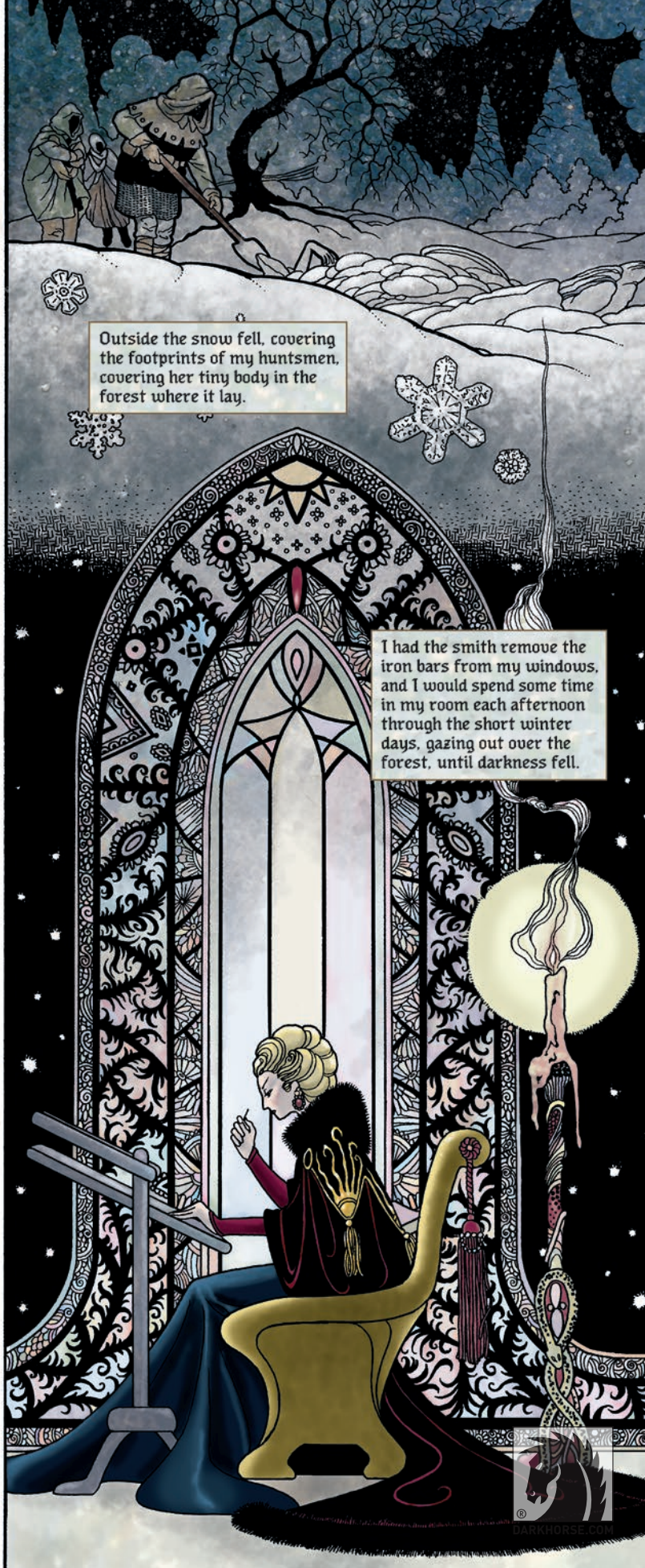
They brought me her heart. I know it was—no sow's heart or doe's would have continued to beat and pulse after it had been cut out, as that one did.

I took it to my chamber...I did not eat it.

DM



I hung it from the beams above my bed, placed it on a length of twine that I strung with rowan berries, orange-red as a robin's breast—and with bulbs of garlic.



Outside the snow fell, covering the footprints of my huntsmen, covering her tiny body in the forest where it lay.

I had the smith remove the iron bars from my windows, and I would spend some time in my room each afternoon through the short winter days, gazing out over the forest, until darkness fell.



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There were, as I have already stated, people in the forest.

They would come out, some of them, for the Spring Fair: a greedy, feral, dangerous people;

some were stunted—dwarfs and pygmies and hunchbacks; others had the huge teeth and vacant gazes of idiots; some had fingers like flippers or crab claws.

They would creep out of the forest each year for the Spring Fair, held when the snows had melted.

As a young lass I had worked at the Fair, and they had scared me then, the forest folk.

I told fortunes for the Fairgoers, scrying in a pool of still water...

...and, later, when I was older, in a disc of polished glass, its back all silvered — a gift from a merchant whose straying horse I had seen in a pool of ink.



The stallholders at the fair were afraid of the forest folk.

They would nail their wares to the bare boards of their stalls—slabs of gingerbread or leather belts were nailed with great iron nails to the wood.

If their wares were not nailed, they said, the forest folk would take them, and run away, chewing on the stolen gingerbread, flailing about them with the belts.

The forest folk had money, though: a coin here, another there, sometimes stained green by time or the earth, the face on the coin unknown to even the oldest of us.

Also they had things to trade, and thus the fair continued, serving the outcasts and the dwarfs, serving the robbers (if they were circumspect) who preyed on the rare travelers from lands beyond the forest, or on gypsies, or on the deer.

This was robbery in the eyes of the law. The deer were the queen's.



The years
passed by
slowly, and
my people
claimed that
I ruled them
with wisdom.



The heart still
hung above my
bed, pulsing
gently in the
night.



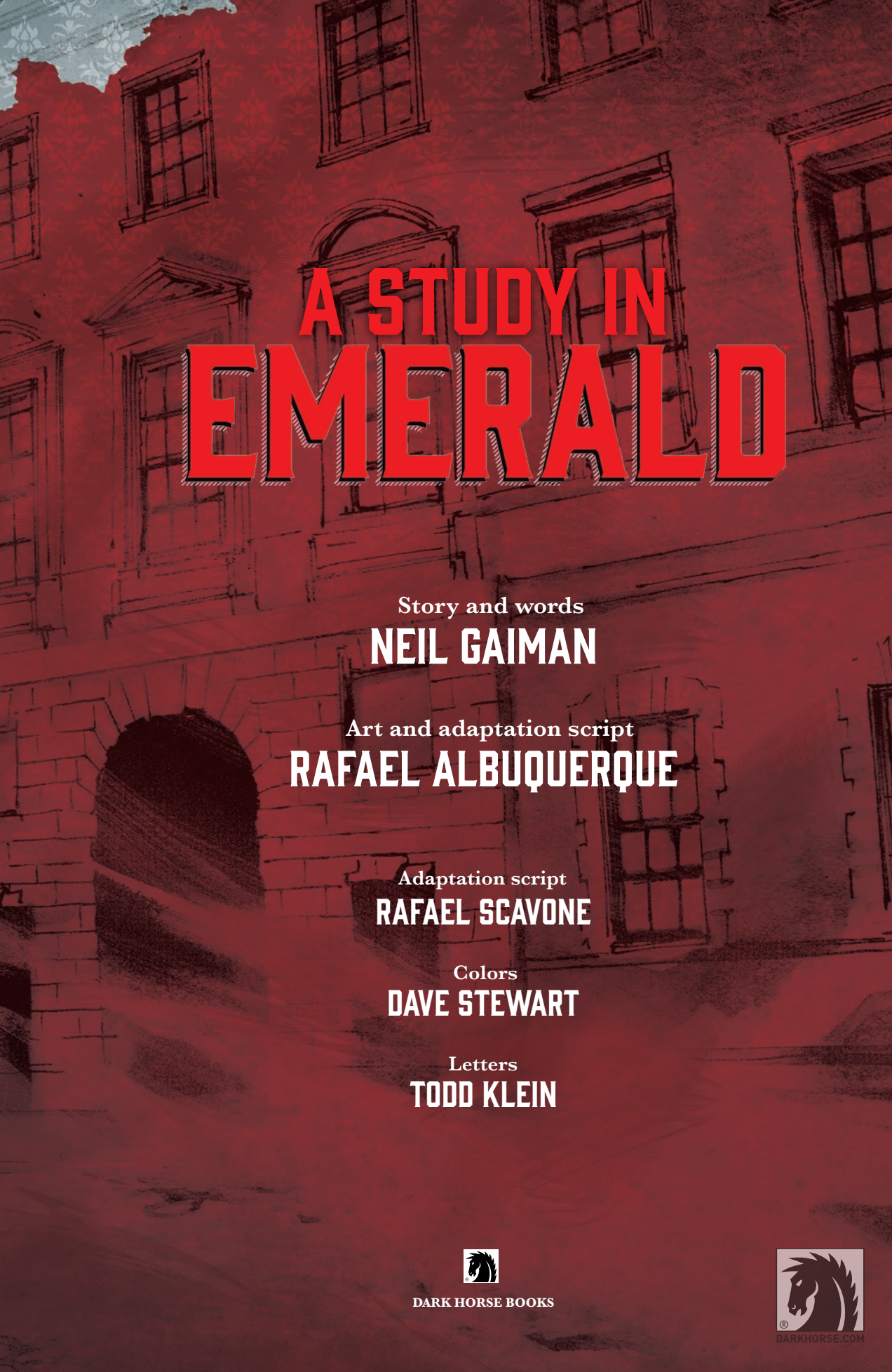
If there were any
who mourned the
child, I saw no
evidence.

She was a thing of terror,
back then, and they believed
themselves well rid of her.



A STUDY IN EMERALD™

NEIL GAIMAN RAFAEL ALBUQUERQUE
RAFAEL SCAVONE DAVE STEWART



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NEIL GAIMAN

Art and adaptation script

RAFAEL ALBUQUERQUE

Adaptation script

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It is the immensity, I believe.
The hugeness of things below.
The darkness of dreams.

But I am wool-gathering.
Forgive me. I am not a
literary man.



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I had been in need of lodgings. That was how I met him.

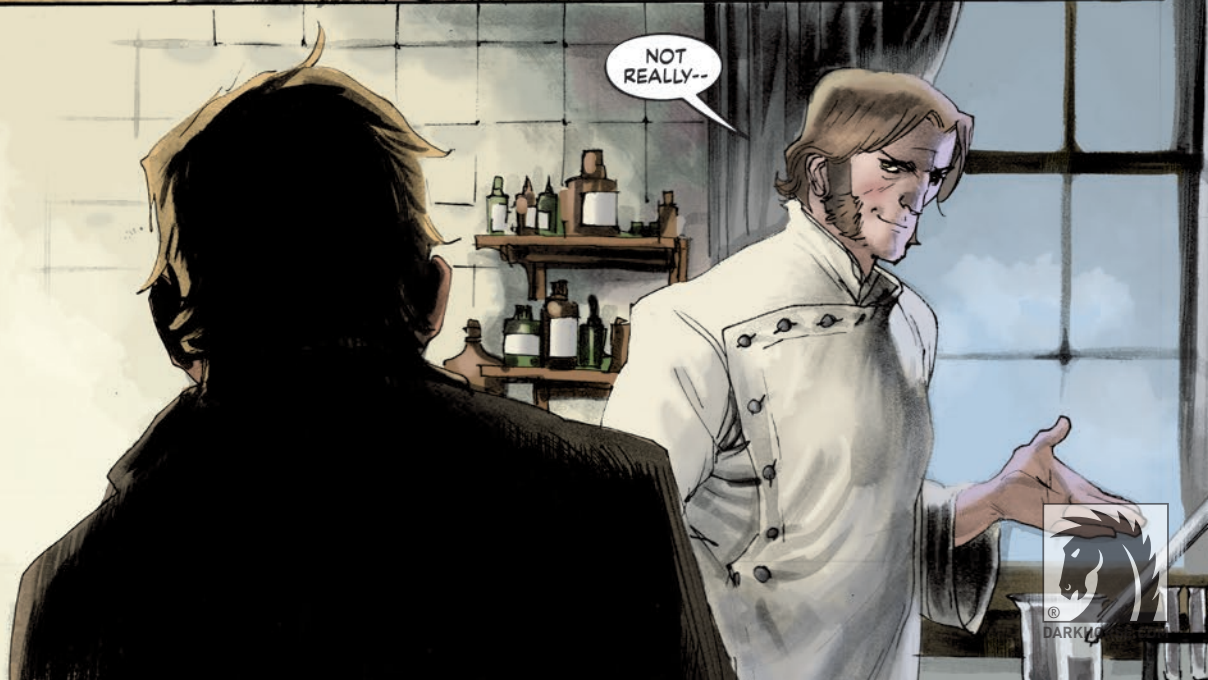


I wanted someone to share the cost of rooms with me.



We were introduced by a mutual acquaintance, in the chemical laboratories of St. Bart's.







FROM THE WAY
YOU HOLD YOUR ARM,
I SEE YOU HAVE BEEN
WOUNDED--

--AND IN
A PARTICULAR
WAY.



YOU HAVE A DEEP TAN. YOU ALSO
HAVE A MILITARY BEARING, AND
THERE ARE FEW ENOUGH PLACES
IN THE EMPIRE THAT A MILITARY
MAN CAN BE BOTH TANNED
AND--



--GIVEN THE NATURE OF THE
INJURY TO YOUR SHOULDER
AND THE TRADITIONS OF
THE AFGHAN CAVE
FOLK--

--TORTURED.

Put like that, of course,
it was absurdly simple. But
then, it always was.

I had been tanned nut-brown.
And I had indeed, as he had
observed, been tortured.



The gods and men of Afghanistan
were savages, unwilling to be
ruled from Whitehall or from
Berlin or even from Moscow,
and unprepared to see reason.



I had been sent into those
hills, attached to the
--th Regiment.

As long as the fighting
remained in the hills and
mountains, we fought on
an equal footing.

When the
skirmishes
descended
into the
caves
and the
darkness--

--then we found
ourselves, as it
were, out of our
depth and in over
our heads.



I shall not forget the mirrored surface of the underground lake, nor the thing that emerged from the lake--

BZZZZZ



--its eyes opening and closing and the singing whispers that accompanied it as it rose--

--wreathing their way about it like the buzzing of flies, bigger than worlds.

That I survived was a miracle--

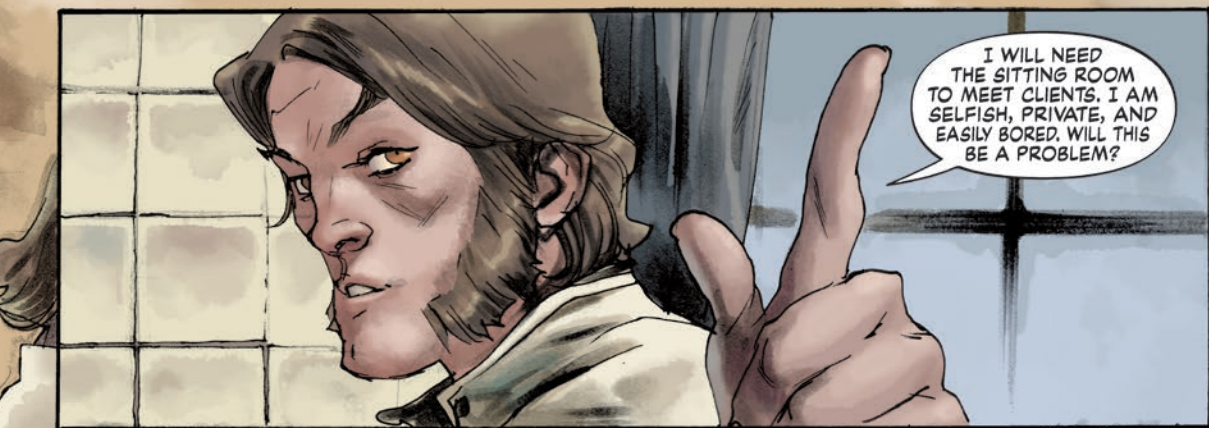
--but survive I did, and I returned to England with my nerves in shreds and tatters.

The place that leechlike mouth had touched me was tattooed forever, frog white, into the skin of my now withered shoulder. I had once been a crack shot. Now I had nothing, save a fear of the world-beneath-the-world akin to panic.



I SCREAM IN THE NIGHT.





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The rooms he had found for us,
in Baker Street, were more than
adequate for two bachelors.

BAKER STREET

I bore in mind all my friend had
said about his desire for privacy--

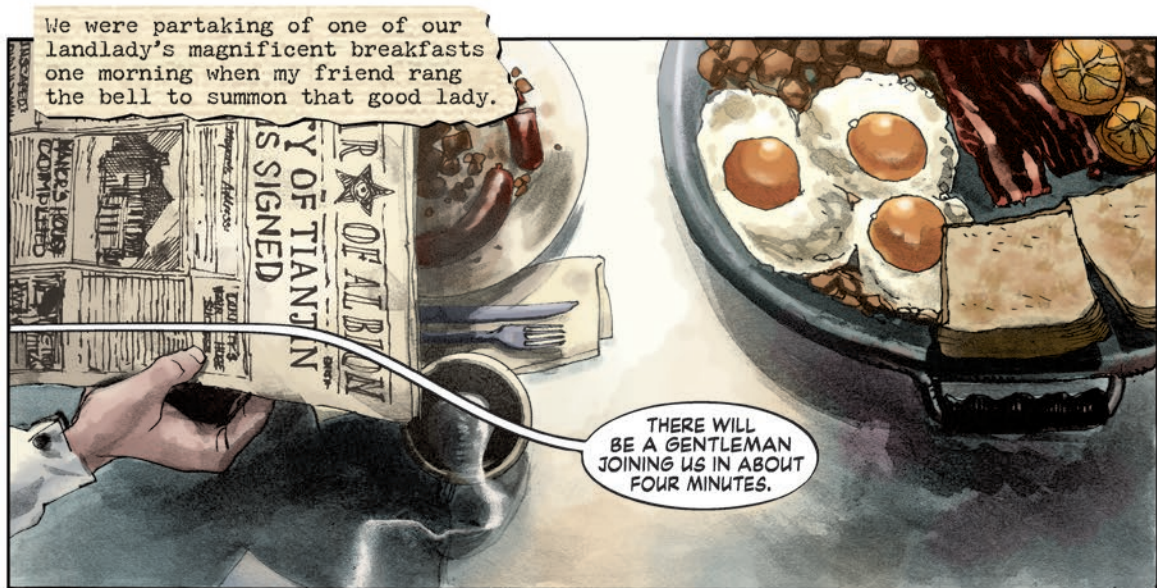
--and I forbore from
asking what it was he
did for a living.

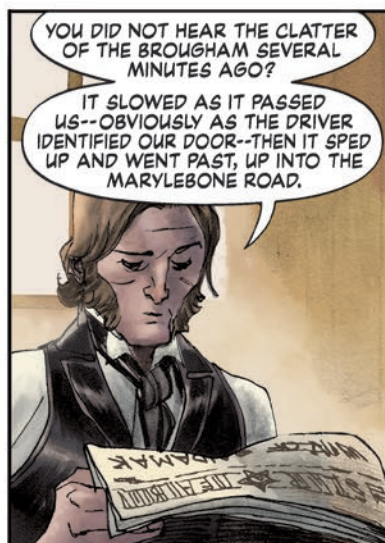
Still, there was
much to pique my
curiosity.

Visitors would arrive at
all hours, and when they
did I would leave the
sitting room and repair
to my bedroom, pondering
what they had in common
with my friend:

The pale woman with one
eye bone white, the small
man who looked like a
commercial traveler,
the portly dandy
in his velvet
jacket, and
the rest.

He was a
mystery
to me.









SURELY THE
WORD **CANNOT** BE
OUT ALREADY.

TELL
ME IT IS
NOT.



OF
COURSE
NOT.



I KNOW THE SQUEAK
OF YOUR BROUGHAM WHEELS,
THOUGH, AFTER ALL THIS TIME:
AN OSCILLATING G-SHARP
ABOVE HIGH C.

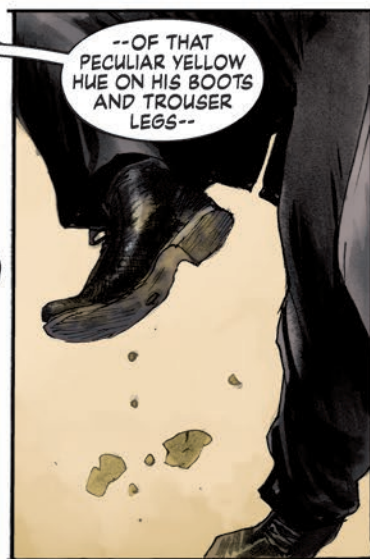
ERGO, IT INVOLVES
THOSE ABOVE US AND IS
A MATTER OF NATIONAL
IMPORTANCE.

AND IF INSPECTOR
LESTRADE OF SCOTLAND YARD
CANNOT PUBLICLY BE SEEN TO
COME INTO THE PARLOR OF
LONDON'S ONLY CONSULTING
DETECTIVE--

--YET COMES
ANYWAY, AND WITHOUT
HAVING HAD HIS BREAKFAST,
THEN I KNOW THAT THIS
IS NOT A ROUTINE
CASE.







We rode to the East End in a cab, Inspector Lestrade had walked up to the Marylebone Road to find his brougham, and left us alone.

SO YOU ARE TRULY A CONSULTING DETECTIVE?



I DO NOT TAKE CASES. INSTEAD, I CONSULT.

OTHERS BRING ME THEIR INSOLUBLE PROBLEMS, THEY DESCRIBE THEM AND, SOMETIMES, I SOLVE THEM.

THEN THOSE PEOPLE WHO COME TO YOU--

ARE, IN THE MAIN, POLICE OFFICERS, OR ARE DETECTIVES THEMSELVES, YES.

It was a fine morning, but we were now jolting about the edges of the Rookery of St Giles, that warren of thieves and cutthroats which sits on London like a cancer on the face of a pretty flower seller, and the only light to enter the cab was dim and faint.

ARE YOU SURE THAT YOU WISH ME ALONG WITH YOU?

I HAVE A FEELING THAT WE WERE MEANT TO BE TOGETHER.

THAT WE HAVE FOUGHT THE GOOD FIGHT, SIDE BY SIDE, IN THE PAST OR IN THE FUTURE, I DO NOT KNOW.

I AM A RATIONAL MAN, BUT I HAVE LEARNED THE VALUE OF A GOOD COMPANION, AND FROM THE MOMENT I CLAPPED EYES ON YOU, I **KNEW** I TRUSTED YOU AS WELL AS I DO MYSELF.



YES. I WANT YOU WITH ME.

For the first time since Afghanistan, I felt that I had worth in the world.



NEIL
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AMERICAN GODS

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SCOTT HAMPTON

Letters by
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Chapter title pages by **GLENN FABRY** with **ADAM BROWN**

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I want to thank my "co-director" **Jaime Hodge** for her help in making *American Gods* one of the most rewarding books of my career. I couldn't ask for a better artistic collaborator. —**Scott Hampton**

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1

SHADOW HAD DONE THREE YEARS IN PRISON.

HE WAS BIG ENOUGH AND LOOKED DON'T-
FUCK-WITH-ME ENOUGH THAT HIS
BIGGEST PROBLEM WAS KILLING TIME.



SO HE KEPT HIM-
SELF IN SHAPE...

... AND TAUGHT HIMSELF COIN TRICKS...



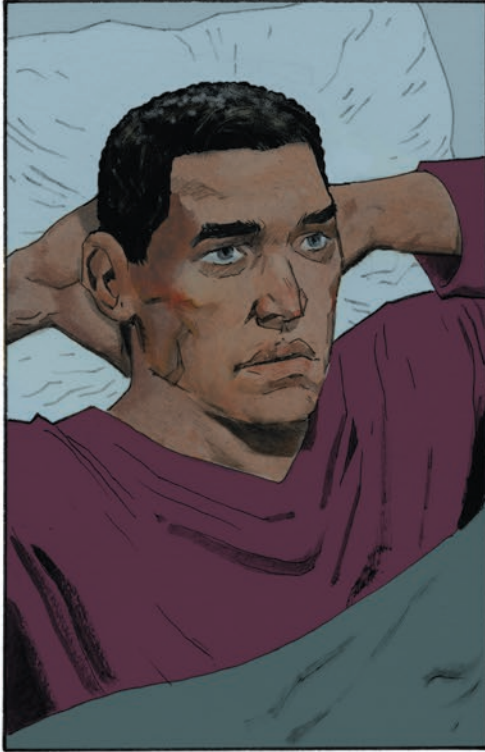
... AND THOUGHT A LOT ABOUT HOW MUCH HE LOVED HIS WIFE.



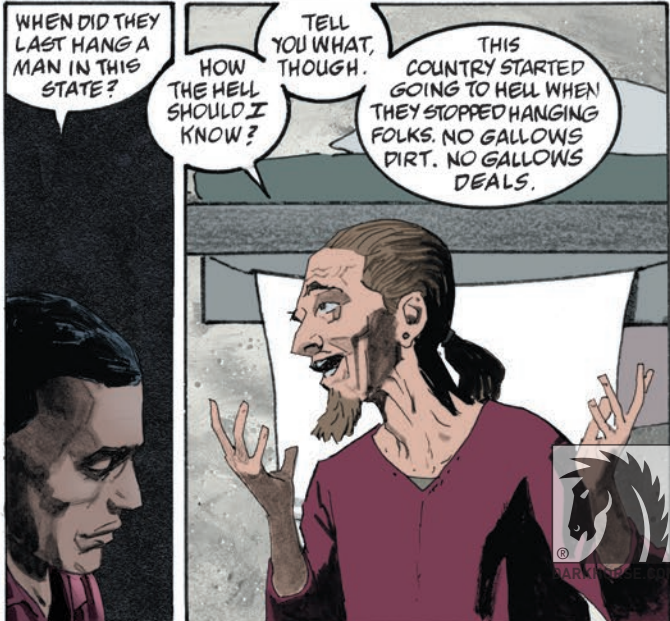
THE BEST THING--IN SHADOW'S OPINION, PERHAPS THE ONLY GOOD THING--ABOUT BEING IN PRISON WAS A FEELING OF RELIEF. THE FEELING THAT HE HAD PLUNGED AS LOW AS HE COULD PLUNGE AND HE'D HIT BOTTOM. HE DIDN'T WORRY THAT THE MAN WAS GOING TO GET HIM, BECAUSE THE MAN HAD GOT HIM.

HE DID NOT AWAKE IN PRISON WITH A FEELING OF DREAD; HE WAS NO LONGER SCARED OF WHAT TOMORROW MIGHT BRING BECAUSE YESTERDAY HAD BROUGHT IT.

SHADOW TRIED NOT TO TALK TOO MUCH. SOMEWHERE AROUND THE MIDDLE OF YEAR TWO HE MENTIONED HIS THEORY TO LOW KEY LIESMITH, HIS CELLMATE.



THAT'S WHEN YOU REMEMBER THE JOKES ABOUT THE GUYS WHO KICKED THEIR BOOTS OFF AS THE NOOSE FLIPPED AROUND THEIR NECKS BECAUSE THEIR FRIENDS ALWAYS TOLD THEM THEY'D DIE WITH THEIR BOOTS ON.



THERE'S NOTHING ROMANTIC IN A DEATH SENTENCE. IF YOU DON'T HAVE A DEATH SENTENCE, THEN PRISON IS ONLY A TEMPORARY REPRIEVE FROM LIFE.

LIFE CREEPS BACK INTO PRISON. THERE ARE ALWAYS PLACES TO GO FURTHER DOWN. LIFE GOES ON, EVEN IF IT'S LIFE UNDER A MICROSCOPE OR LIFE IN A CAGE.

AND SECOND, IF YOU JUST HANG IN THERE, SOMEDAY THEY'RE GOING TO HAVE TO LET YOU OUT.



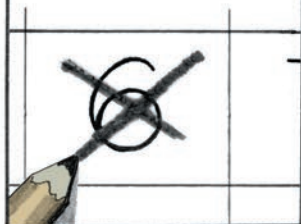
IN THE BEGINNING IT WAS TOO FAR AWAY FOR SHADOW TO FOCUS ON. THEN IT BECAME A DISTANT BEAM OF HOPE AND HE LEARNED TO TELL HIMSELF WHEN THE PRISON SHIT WENT DOWN...



THIS TOO SHALL PASS.

ONE DAY THE MAGIC DOOR WOULD OPEN AND HE WOULD WALK THROUGH IT.

SO HE MARKED OFF THE DAYS...



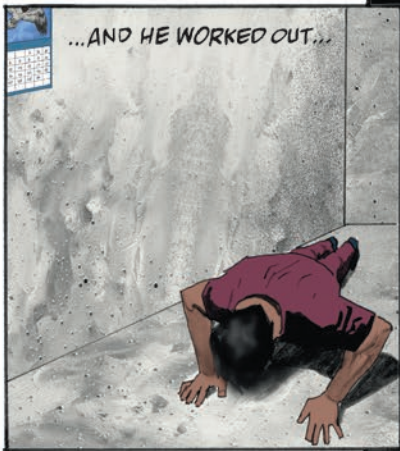
...AND THE SUN WENT DOWN AND HE DIDN'T SEE IT AND THE SUN CAME UP AND HE DIDN'T SEE IT.



HE PRACTICED HIS COIN TRICKS...



...AND HE WORKED OUT...



...AND HE MADE LISTS IN HIS HEAD OF WHAT HE'D DO WHEN HE GOT OUT OF PRISON.



FIRST, HE WAS GOING TO TAKE A BATH, A REAL LONG SERIOUS SOAK IN A TUB WITH BUBBLES IN IT. MAYBE READ THE PAPER, MAYBE NOT.



SECOND, HE WAS GOING TO TOWEL HIMSELF OFF, PUT ON A ROBE, MAYBE SLIPPERS. HE LIKED THE IDEA OF SLIPPERS.



HE WOULD PICK UP HIS WIFE IN HIS ARMS AND SHE WOULD SQUEAL IN MOCK HORROR AND REAL DELIGHT...

PUPPY, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?



HE WOULD CARRY HER INTO THE BEDROOM AND CLOSE THE DOOR.



THEY'D CALL OUT FOR PIZZAS IF THEY GOT HUNGRY.



THIRD, AFTER HE AND LAURA HAD COME OUT OF THE BEDROOM, HE WAS GOING TO KEEP HIS HEAD DOWN AND STAY OUT OF TROUBLE FOR THE REST OF HIS LIFE.



AND THEN YOU'LL BE HAPPY.

CALL NO MAN HAPPY UNTIL HE IS DEAD.

HERODOTUS. HEY, YOU'RE LEARNING.

WHO THE FUCK IS HERODOTUS?

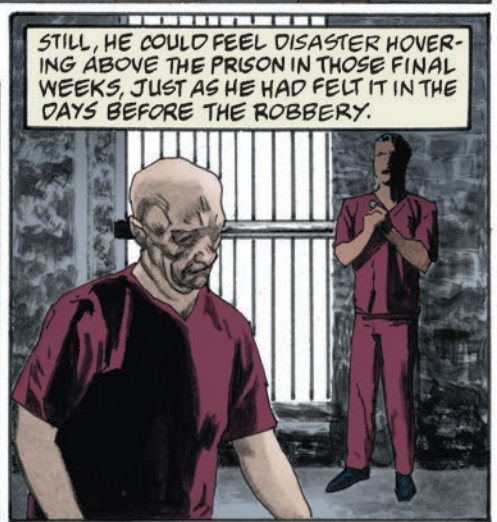
DEAD GREEK.



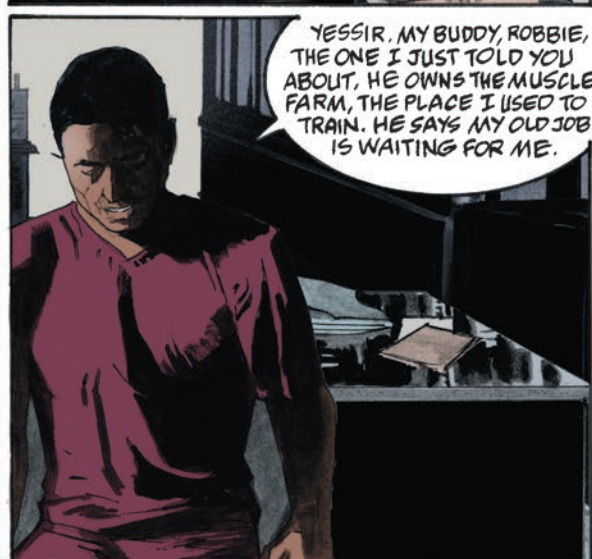
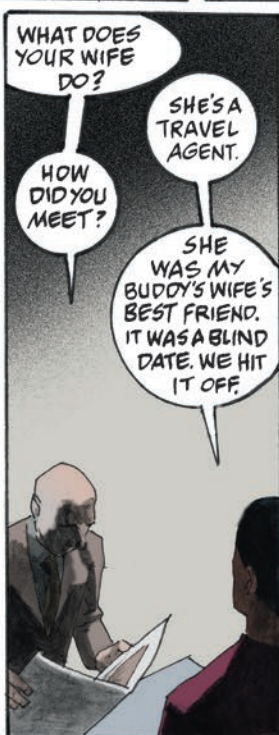
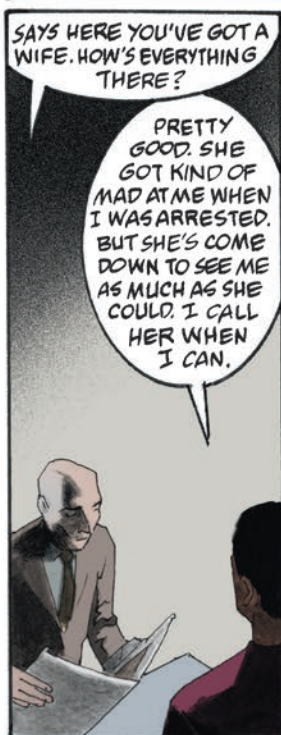
MY LAST GIRLFRIEND WAS GREEK AND IT AIN'T TRUE WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT THEM. I TRIED GIVING IT TO MY GIRL IN THE ASS AND SHE ALMOST CLAWED MY EYES OUT.



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A MONTH BEFORE HE WAS DUE TO BE RELEASED, SHADOW SAT IN A CHILLY OFFICE.



HOW'RE YOU GETTING HOME FROM HERE? GREYHOUND?

FLYING HOME. IT'S GOOD TO HAVE A WIFE WHO'S A TRAVEL AGENT.

SHE SENT YOU A TICKET?

DIDN'T NEED TO. JUST SENT ME A CONFIRMATION NUMBER. ALL I HAVE TO DO IS TURN UP AT THE AIRPORT IN A MONTH AND SHOW THEM MY I.D. AND I'M OUTTA HERE.

MMM

YOU'RE LUCKY, YOU HAVE SOMEONE TO GO BACK TO, YOU GOT A JOB WAITING. YOU GOT A SECOND CHANCE.

MAKE THE MOST OF IT.

THE MAN DID NOT OFFER TO SHAKE SHADOW'S HAND AS HE ROSE TO LEAVE, NOR DID SHADOW EXPECT HIM TO.

IN SOME WAYS THE LAST WEEK WAS WORSE THAN THE WHOLE THREE YEARS PUT TOGETHER. SHADOW HAD THE JITTERS AND THE HEEBIE-JEEBIES, A FEELING DEEP IN HIS STOMACH THAT SOMETHING WAS ENTIRELY WRONG.

HE CALLED HIS WIFE COLLECT.

SOMETHING FEELS WEIRD. MAYBE IT'S THE WEATHER. LIKE A STORM IS COMING.

IT'S NICE HERE. THE LAST OF THE LEAVES HAVEN'T QUITE FALLEN. IF WE DON'T GET A STORM, YOU'LL BE ABLE TO SEE THEM WHEN YOU GET HOME.

FIVE DAYS.

ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY HOURS.



EVERY-
THING
OKAY
THERE?
NOTHING
WRONG
?

EVERYTHING'S FINE.
I'M SEEING ROBBIE TONIGHT.
WE'RE PLANNING YOUR SURPRISE
WELCOME-HOME PARTY.

"SURPRISE PARTY?"

OF COURSE.
YOU DON'T KNOW
ANYTHING ABOUT
IT, DO YOU?

"NOT A THING."

THAT'S MY
HUSBAND.

SHADOW REALIZED
HE WAS SMILING. HE
HAD BEEN INSIDE FOR
THREE YEARS, BUT SHE
COULD STILL MAKE
HIM SMILE.

LOVE
YOU,
BABES.

LOVE
YOU,
PUPPY.

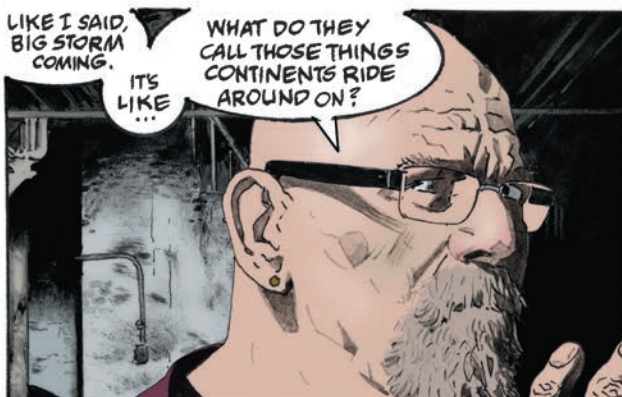
WE GOT TO TALK.

MMM?

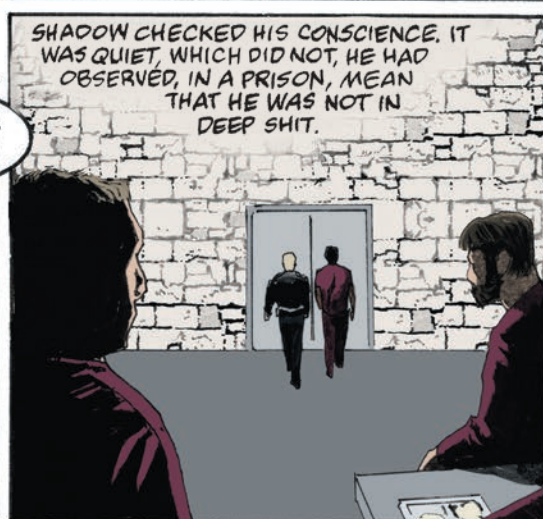
STORM'S ON THE WAY.

FEELS
LIKE IT.
MAYBE IT'LL
SNOW SOON.

NOT THAT KIND OF STORM. BIGGER STORMS
THAN THAT COMING. I TELL YOU, BOY, YOU'RE
BETTER OFF IN HERE THAN OUT ON THE
STREET WHEN THE BIG STORM COMES.

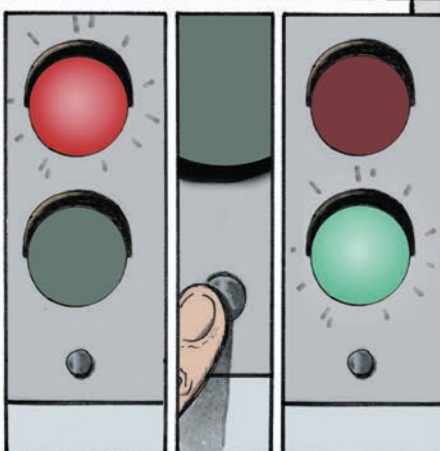


TWO DAYS TO GO, STARTING WITH
PRISON COFFEE AND A GUARD
NAMED WILSON...

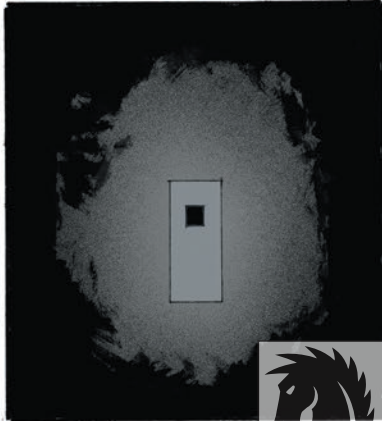
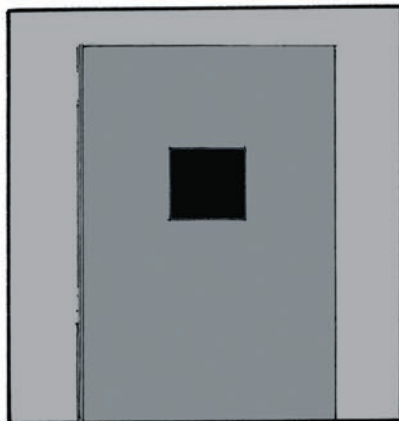


THE BAD
THING IS
HAPPEN-
ING.











SHADOW SAT ON THE BUS AND SHIVERED UNTIL THE HEATERS STARTED WORKING, WONDERING WHAT HE WAS DOING, WHERE HE WAS GOING NOW.



SHIT!
THERE'S
PUSSY
OUT
THERE.



SHADOW SWALLOWED. IT OCCURED TO HIM THAT HE HAD NOT CRIED YET-- HAD IN FACT FELT NOTHING AT ALL.



NO TEARS...



...NO SORROW...



...NOTHING.





BUS STATION. EVERYBODY OUT.

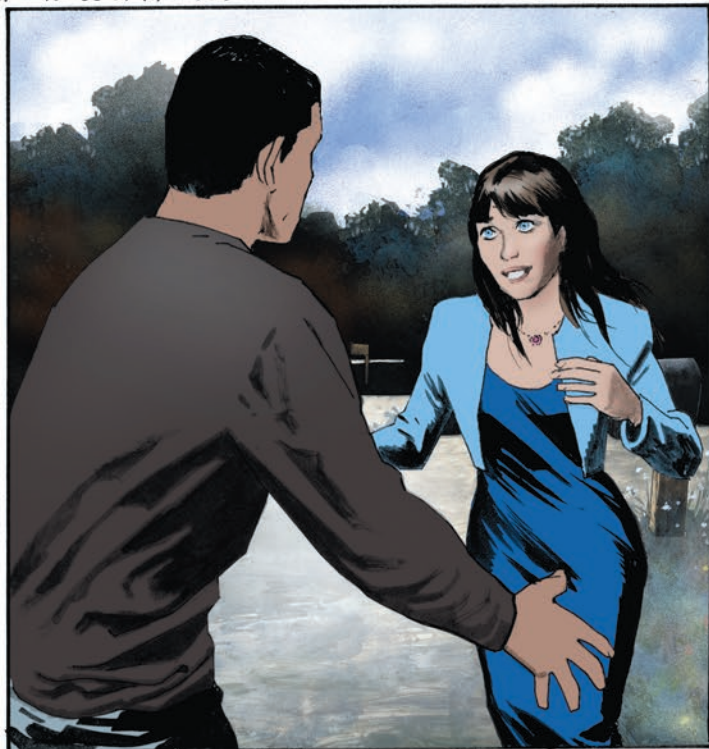


THEN SHADOW WAS STUMBLING THROUGH THE BRIGHTLY LIT AIRPORT TERMINAL, WORRIED ABOUT THE WHOLE E-TICKET BUSINESS. HE LIKED THINGS HE COULD HOLD AND TOUCH.



HOME.

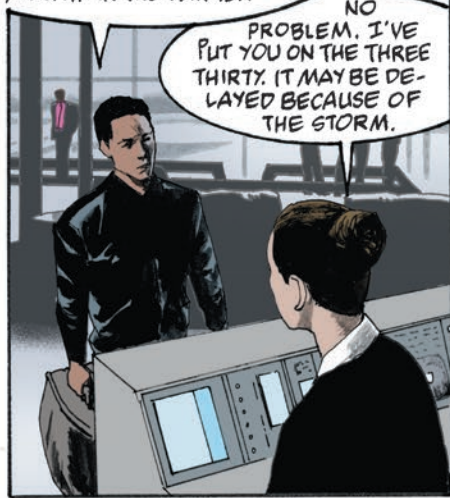
AND HE HAD THE CERTAINTY THAT ONCE HE GOT HOME, EVERYTHING WOULD BE RIGHT ONCE MORE. LAURA WOULD BE FINE AGAIN. PERHAPS IT WAS A SIMPLE MIX-UP: SOME OTHER LAURA MOON'S BODY HAD BEEN DRAGGED FROM THE HIGHWAY WRECKAGE.



A TIRED WOMAN STARED AT HIM.

MAY I HELP YOU?

I'VE GOT AN E-TICKET NUMBER FOR FRIDAY, BUT I HAVE TO GO TODAY. THERE WAS A DEATH IN THE FAMILY.



NO PROBLEM. I'VE PUT YOU ON THE THREE THIRTY. IT MAY BE DELAYED BECAUSE OF THE STORM.

IT WAS NOT A BIG AIRPORT, BUT THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE JUST WANDERING AMAZED HIM. HE WATCHED PEOPLE PUT DOWN BAGS CASUALLY, OBSERVED WALLET'S STUFFED INTO BACK POCKETS, PURSES PUT DOWN, UNWATCHED, UNDER CHAIRS. THAT WAS WHEN HE REALIZED...



...I'M NO LONGER IN PRISON.



THIRTY MINUTES TO WAIT UNTIL BOARDING. HE CALLED ROBBIE AT THE MUSCLE FARM, BUT THE MACHINE ANSWERED.



THEN, BECAUSE PEOPLE MAKE MISTAKES ...



...HE CALLED HOME AND LISTENED TO LAURA'S VOICE.



HI. I'M NOT HERE, OR I CAN'T COME TO THE PHONE. LEAVE A MESSAGE AND I'LL GET BACK TO YOU. AND HAVE A GOOD DAY.



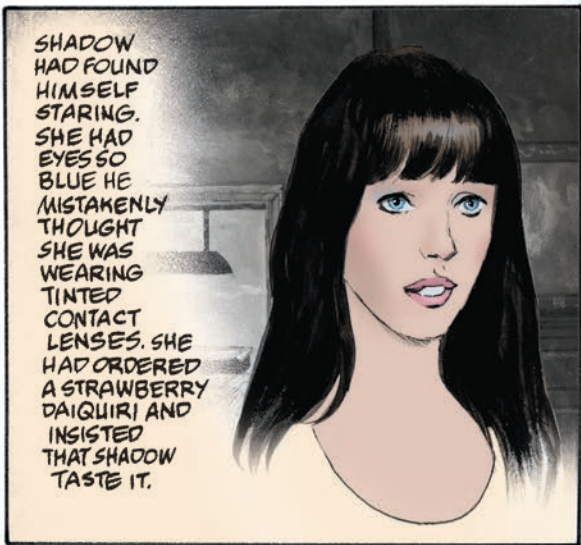
HE HELD HIS BAG SO TIGHT HE HURT HIS HAND. HE WAS THINKING ABOUT THE FIRST TIME HE HAD EVER SEEN LAURA.



HE HAD BEEN SITTING IN A BOOTH AT CHI-CHI'S WHEN SHE HAD WALKED IN BEHIND AUDREY BURTON.



SHADOW HAD FOUND HIMSELF STARING. SHE HAD EYES SO BLUE HE MISTAKENLY THOUGHT SHE WAS WEARING TINTED CONTACT LENSES. SHE HAD ORDERED A STRAWBERRY DAIQUIRI AND INSISTED THAT SHADOW TASTE IT.



LAURA LOVED PEOPLE TO TASTE WHAT SHE TASTED.



HE HAD KISSED HER GOOD NIGHT THAT NIGHT, AND SHE HAD TASTED OF STRAWBERRY DAIQUIRIS, AND HE HAD NEVER WANTED TO KISS ANYONE ELSE AGAIN.



A WOMAN ANNOUNCED HIS PLANE WAS BOARDING.



AS THE PLANE TOOK OFF HE FELL ASLEEP.



SHADOW
WAS IN
A DARK
PLACE.

CHANGES ARE
COMING. THERE ARE
CERTAIN DECISIONS
TO BE MADE.

WHERE
AM I?

IN THE EARTH AND
UNDER THE EARTH.

YOU ARE WHERE THE
FORGOTTEN WAIT.



IF YOU ARE
TO SURVIVE, YOU
MUST BELIEVE.

BELIEVE WHAT?
WHAT SHOULD I
BELIEVE?



THEN HE DOZED ONCE MORE AND
DREAMED HE WAS BACK IN PRISON.

SOMEONE
HAS PUT OUT
A CONTRACT ON
YOUR LIFE.

BUT SHADOW COULD NOT FIND OUT WHO OR WHY, AND
WHEN HE WOKE UP THEY WERE COMING IN FOR A LANDING.



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HE STUMBLED OFF THE PLANE, BLINKING AND WAKING. ALL AIRPORTS, HE HAD DECIDED, LOOK VERY MUCH THE SAME. THIS AIRPORT LOOKED LIKE AN AIRPORT. THE TROUBLE IS, THIS WASN'T THE AIRPORT HE WAS GOING TO. THIS WAS A BIG AIRPORT WITH WAY TOO MANY PEOPLE.

EXCUSE ME, MA'AM. WHAT AIRPORT IS THIS?

?
ST. LOUIS!

I THOUGHT THIS WAS THE PLANE TO EAGLE POINT.

IT WAS. THEY REDIRECTED IT HERE BECAUSE OF THE STORM. DIDN'T THEY MAKE AN ANNOUNCEMENT?

I FELL ASLEEP.

YOU NEED TO TALK TO THAT MAN OVER THERE.

GATE 47--IT'S ON THE FAR SIDE OF THE TERMINAL. YOU NEED TO RUN.

RUN!

THE DOORS WERE ALREADY CLOSED WHEN HE GOT TO THE GATE. HE WATCHED THE PLANE PULL AWAY FROM THE GATE. HE EXPLAINED HIS PROBLEM TO THE GATE ATTENDANT.

SHE SENT HIM TO THE PASSENGER ASSISTANCE DESK.

PASSENGER ASSISTANCE CONSULTED WITH ANOTHER WOMAN.

NOPE. THAT ONE'S OUT. THEY JUST CANCELED IT.

WAIT. HERE WE GO. THIS WILL GET YOU THERE. WE'LL CALL AHEAD TO THE GATE. GO!

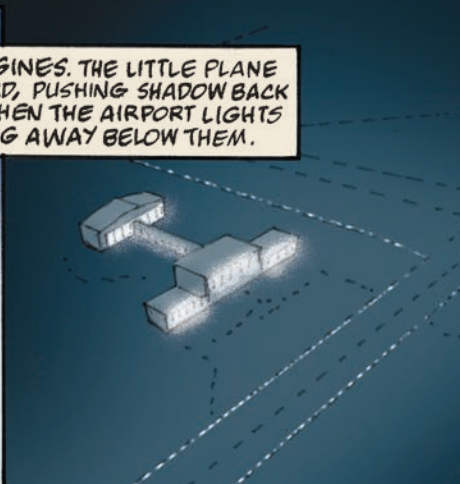
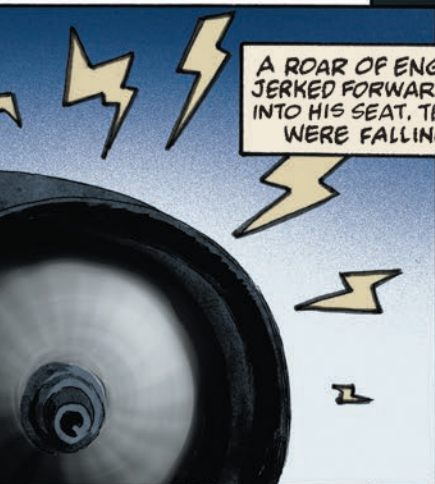
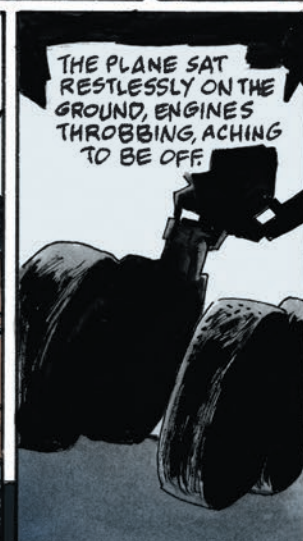
SHADOW FELT LIKE A PEA BEING FLICKED BETWEEN THREE CUPS.

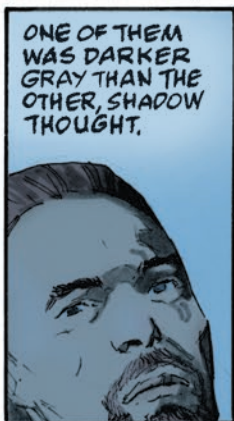
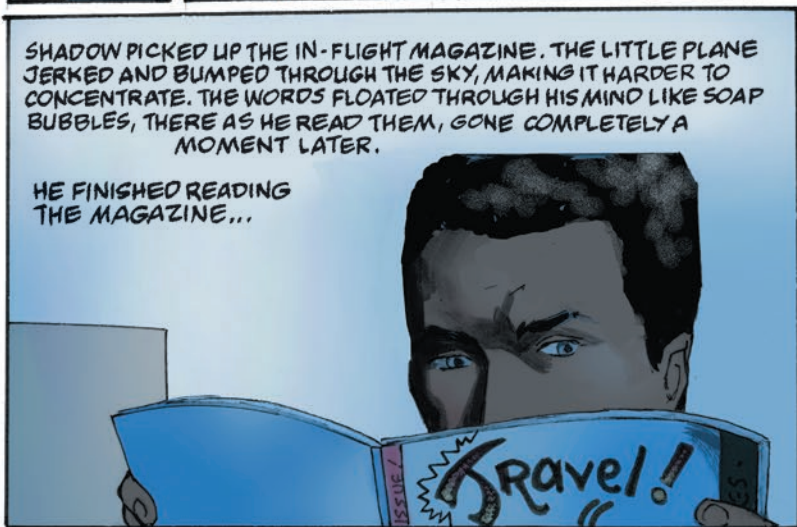
WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU.

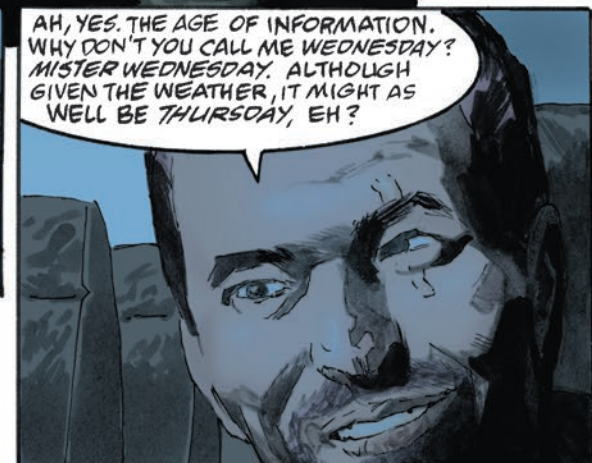
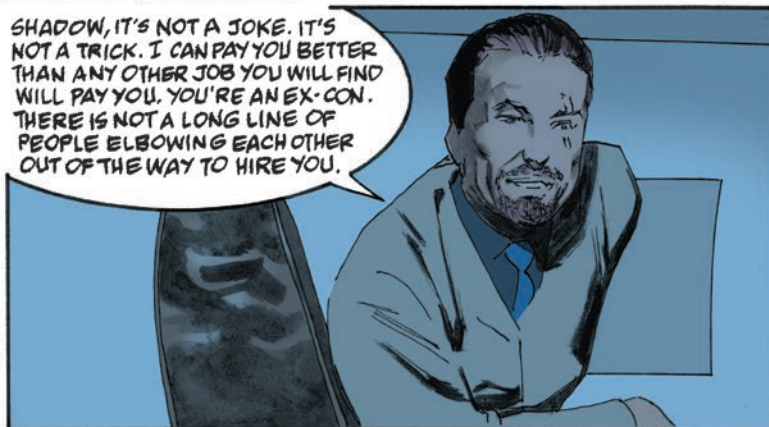
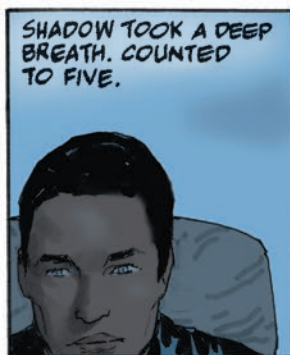
17-D.



THE PLANE
BACKED AWAY
FROM THE
GATE.







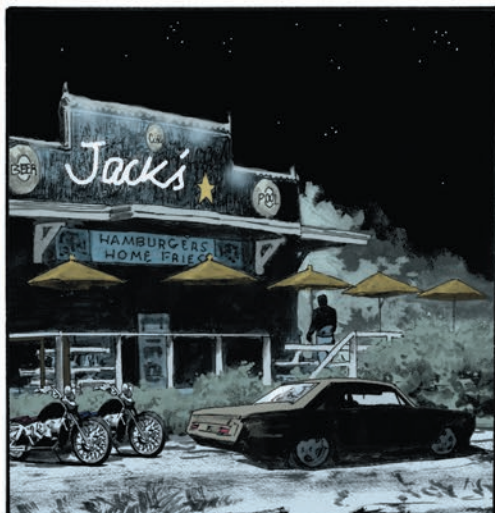


EAGLE POINT WAS TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY MILES AWAY. HE DROVE NORTH FOR AN HOUR AND A HALF. IT WAS GETTING LATE AND HE WAS HUNGRY.

WHERE'S THE BEST BAR IN THE AREA? SOMEWHERE I CAN GET SOMETHING TO EAT.

JACK'S CROCODILE BAR. JACK'S A CHARACTER... GOT A COUPLE OF CROCS, A SNAKE... ONE A THEM BIG LIZARD THINGS.

WEST ON COUNTY ROAD N.



WHAT'LL IT BE?

HOUSE BEER AND A HAMBURGER WITH ALL THE TRIMMINGS.

BOWL OF CHILI TO START? BEST CHILI IN THE STATE.

SOUNDS GOOD, WHERE'S THE RESTROOM?



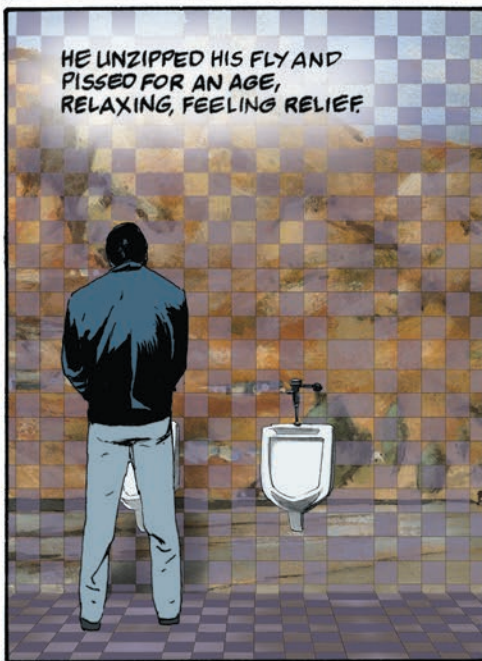
IT WAS A
CLEAN,
WELL-LIT
RESTROOM.
SHADOW
LOOKED
AROUND
THE ROOM
FIRST;
FORCE OF
HABIT.



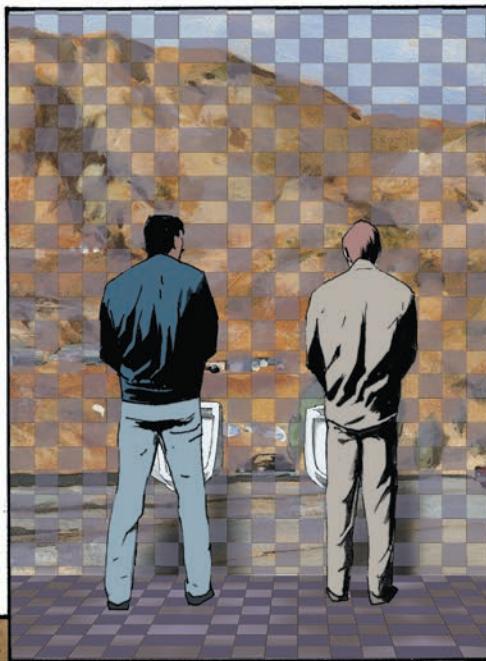
REMEMBER, SHADOW,
YOU CAN'T FIGHT BACK
WHEN YOU'RE PISSING.



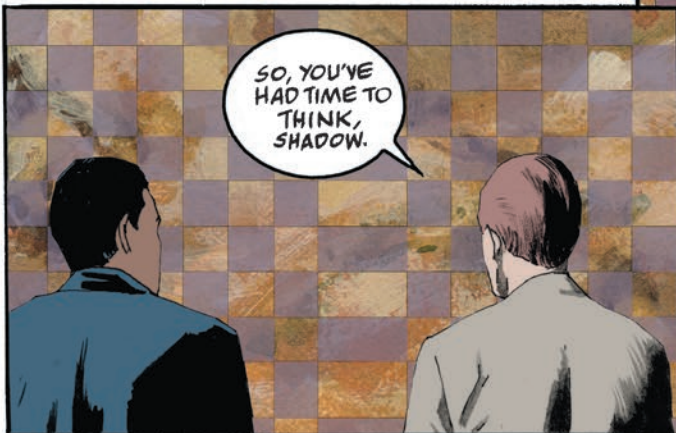
HE UNZIPPED HIS FLY AND
PISSSED FOR AN AGE,
RELAXING, FEELING RELIEF.



COF



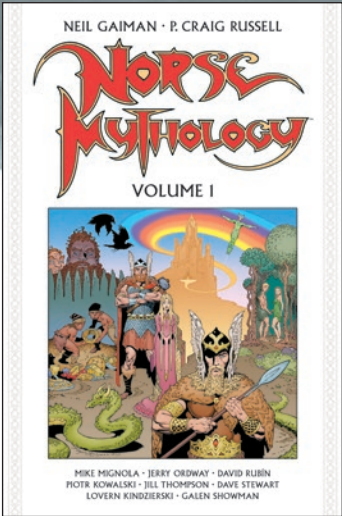
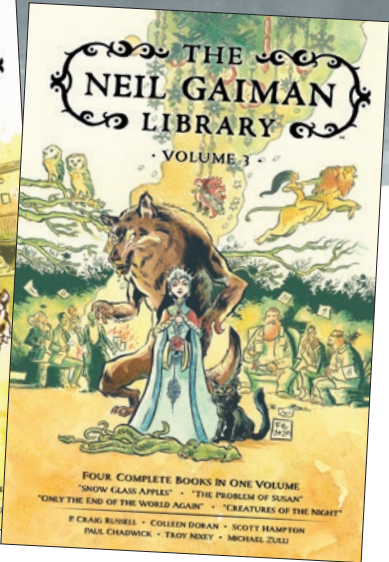
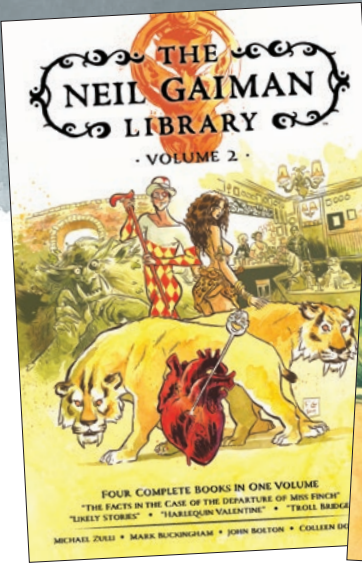
SO, YOU'VE
HAD TIME TO
THINK,
SHADOW.



DO YOU
WANT A
JOB?



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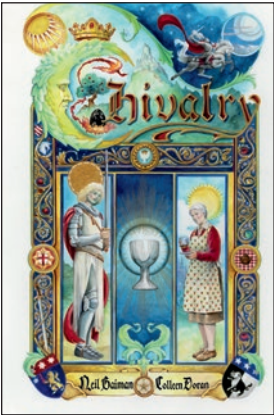
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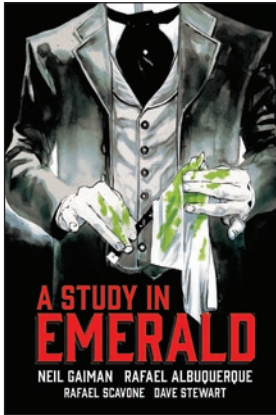
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