

# SQUIRE

SARA ALFAGEEH

NADIA SHAMMAS



"Instantly compelling. I want to live in this story forever."

—MOLLY KNOX OSTERTAG, author of *The Girl from the Sea*

Praise for  
**SQUIRE**

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—**MOLLY KNOX OSTERTAG**, author of *The Girl from the Sea*

“A sweeping, gorgeous tale of tenacity and friendship,  
*Squire* makes you want to fight for a better world.”

—**G. WILLOW WILSON**, author of *The Bird King*

“An utterly gorgeous and heartfelt adventure that examines  
the roots of empire and the fables invented to maintain it.”

—**S. A. CHAKRABORTY**, author of *The City of Brass*

“*Squire* is the fantasy epic we need right now—something wildly  
new that still manages to feel like an old favorite. Put simply,  
Shammas and Alfageeh are the bright future of comics.”

—**SALADIN AHMED**, author of *Throne of the Crescent Moon*

“Loving families, conflicted loyalties, and fierce hope animate  
this warm, tender exploration of friendship and belonging within the  
devouring bounds of empire by two wonderfully talented creators.”

—**AMAL EL-MOHTAR**, author of *This Is How You Lose the Time War*



# SQUIRE





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SARA ALFAGEEH NADIA SHAMMAS



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Squire.

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FIRST EDITION



*To Edward Said, for giving me the language to see myself clearly.*

—N.S.

*To ten-year-old Sara and long summers in Jordan.*

—S.A.





# CHAPTER 1



**AIZA!**  
Don't forget  
to take the  
apricots!



I know,  
Mama,  
I know!

Good  
luck  
today!



You again?  
You know, I  
don't have  
to give you  
anything.

You're  
not even  
my dog!



Mama



You  
win again,  
you fluffy  
mutt.





APRICOTS!

GET  
YOUR  
APRICOTS  
HERE!

FRESH  
AND IN  
SEASON!!









No,  
wait!



APRICOTS!!

APRICOTS!!  
FRESH AND  
IN SEASON, THE BEST  
APRICOTS IN  
BAYT-SAJJI!!













"Oh, I don't have any extra."

"I just come to the market every day with tons of food and charge people an arm and a leg for it."

We all know you people hide your stores and scam real Bayt-Sajji.

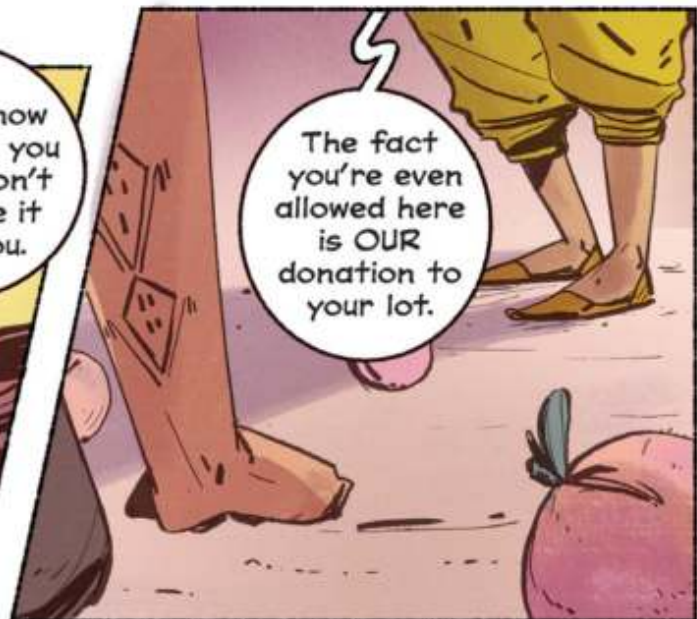


Let. Go.

You're not the first idiot to try to take this basket from me.

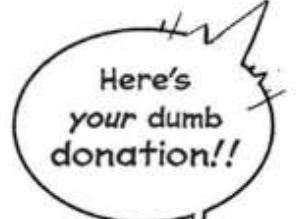


You should know how lucky you are we don't just take it from you.



The fact you're even allowed here is OUR donation to your lot.



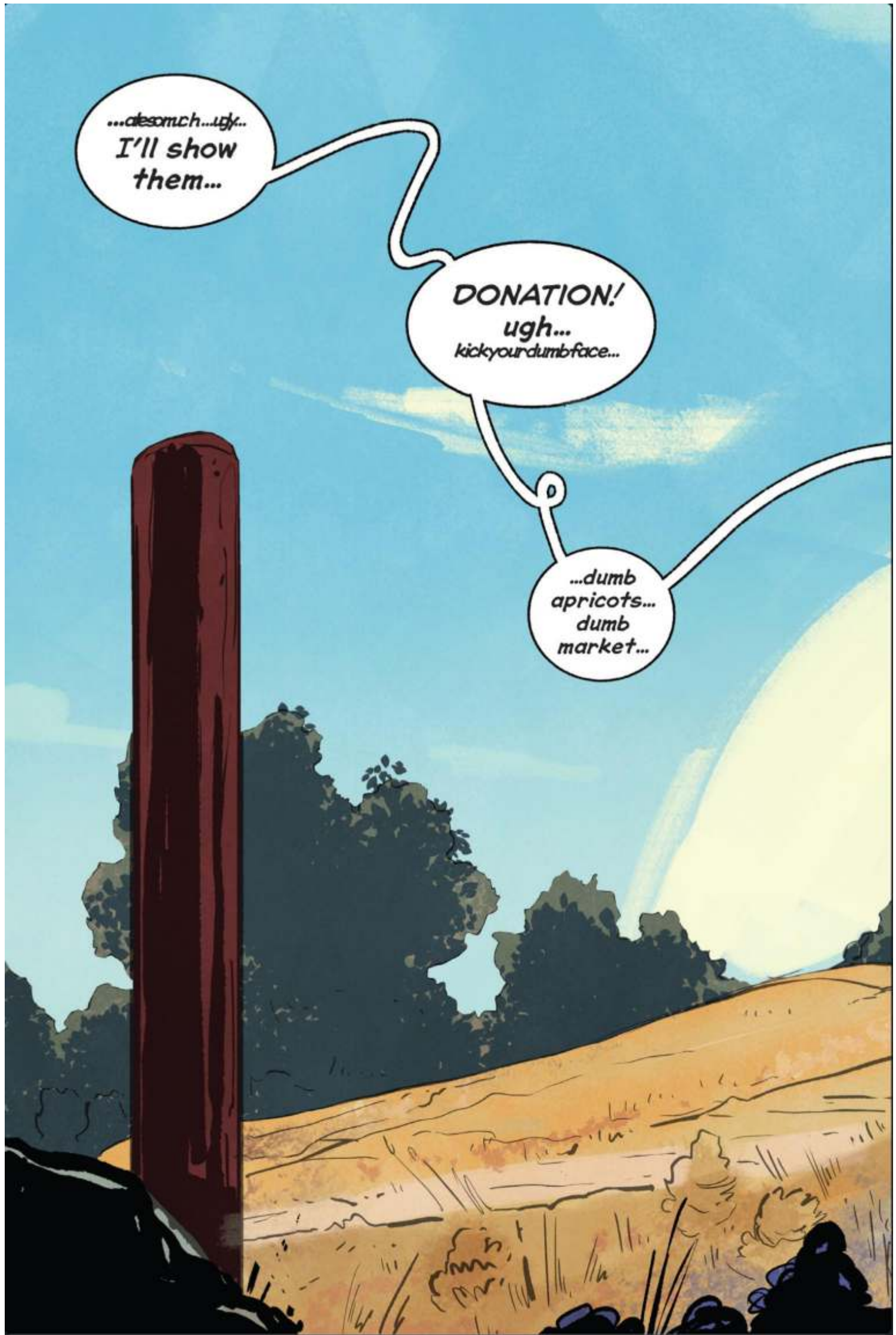




*...desomch...ugh...*  
**I'll show  
them...**

**DONATION!**  
*ugh...*  
*kickyourdumbface...*

*...dumb  
apricots...  
dumb  
market...*





*"...oh wow,  
look at me.  
I'm a citizen,  
you're an  
Ornu, ooh..."*

*UGH.*







DOUF

DOUF



DOUF

DOUF

گفردان



DOUF

DOUF







Residents  
of the  
**Qamuh**  
Province!

We come  
bearing  
glorious news  
for you and  
your young  
ones.







By order of his most splendid Emir, the Bayt-Sajji military is continuing to *expand* our might by recruiting from the conquered territories.

Any individual between the ages of *12 and 17* is welcome to enlist.



We have expanded the benefits so that those who complete training will be allowed to apply for citizenship...

...and therefore be given permission to relocate outside your *designated camps*.



And, for those of you who excel...

...you may find yourself in training to become a *Squire*.

With squiredom comes *knighthood*. And with knighthood comes the benefits of full *citizenship* automatically.





You will be allowed to own your property.

You will be allowed to enter government positions.

You will be allowed to travel without having to register at checkpoints.



All interested recruits will gather at the closest checkpoint at dawn.

Do not miss this opportunity. Find meaning, honor, and glory in the service of your benevolent empire.









When I was younger, I would worry about things like that.

*Real happiness and adventure.*

But when I got older I understood what was more important.

Duty, responsibility. There are worse places to be "trapped," as you put it.

Mama, come o-

No, no, we don't have the most space or the most clothes but we have **enough**. We aren't poor or starving, there's always food, which is more than most in Bayt-Sajji can say with the famine going on.



It isn't about **clothes**-

There are more important things in life.

Yes, this is a mandated community, but at least we're surrounded by our own people, who share our culture and heritage. Food we make ourselves. That's something to be grateful for.

**I AM grate-**



We can keep our customs and trust all of our neighbors. Family is close. Those things are worth more than wandering around, searching for some unknown *sense of*-

**MAMA, I WANT TO JOIN THE KNIGHTS.**





Absolutely not.



Mama...

This again...

I've heard enough of this. You brought it up last year, and the year before that.



It's not fair!

What's not fair is that you keep asking us. What's not fair is that we said no, and it's *still a no.*























The Ornu are a proud people, with strong traditions.



It's our custom to mark ourselves, so if any of us are in any land, we can find one of our own.

It's a symbol of trust and unity.













Begin Your

Adventure!

Join the  
Squires!



Com. H.







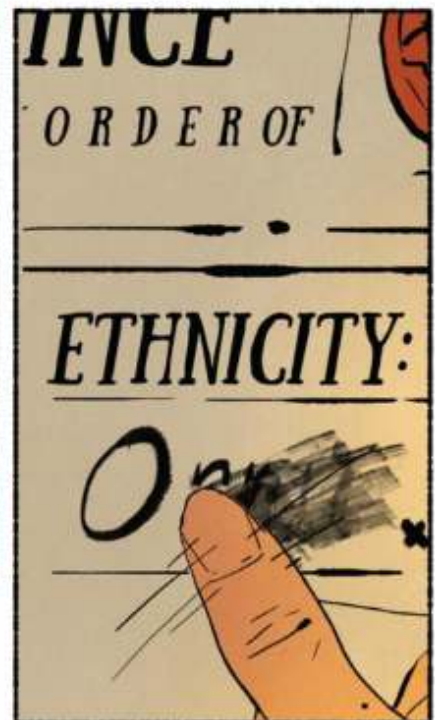
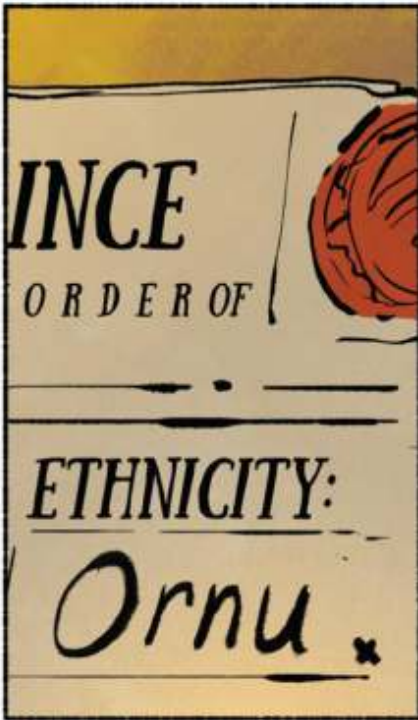
# CHAPTER 2































My favorite Knight is *Juhyn the Shining*.



Here he is with his legendary sword, *The Sun*.

You can see how he had it gilded, and there are these lines that are supposed to represent sunshine.

When I get my legendary weapon, I want it to be a longsword. I want it to have a wave design, because I'm *Al-Baharyi*.

I want them to call me something like *Husni the Unbreakable*, because I keep coming, like the ocean.









Yeah...  
I stole  
this one.

WHAT?!



No one  
even saw me  
coming. I guess  
when I become a  
hero, they'll call  
me *Aiza the  
Speedy!*

Or...Aiza...  
the Swift?



What's  
your legendary  
weapon going  
to be called?

**Swift  
Wind!**



HA  
HA  
HAI!

**SIT  
DOWN.**

No one  
can dodge  
my blows!

AHA  
HAI!









They say  
when she would  
finish a battle, the  
field would erupt into  
flowers the very  
next day.

No way!









# CHAPTER 3







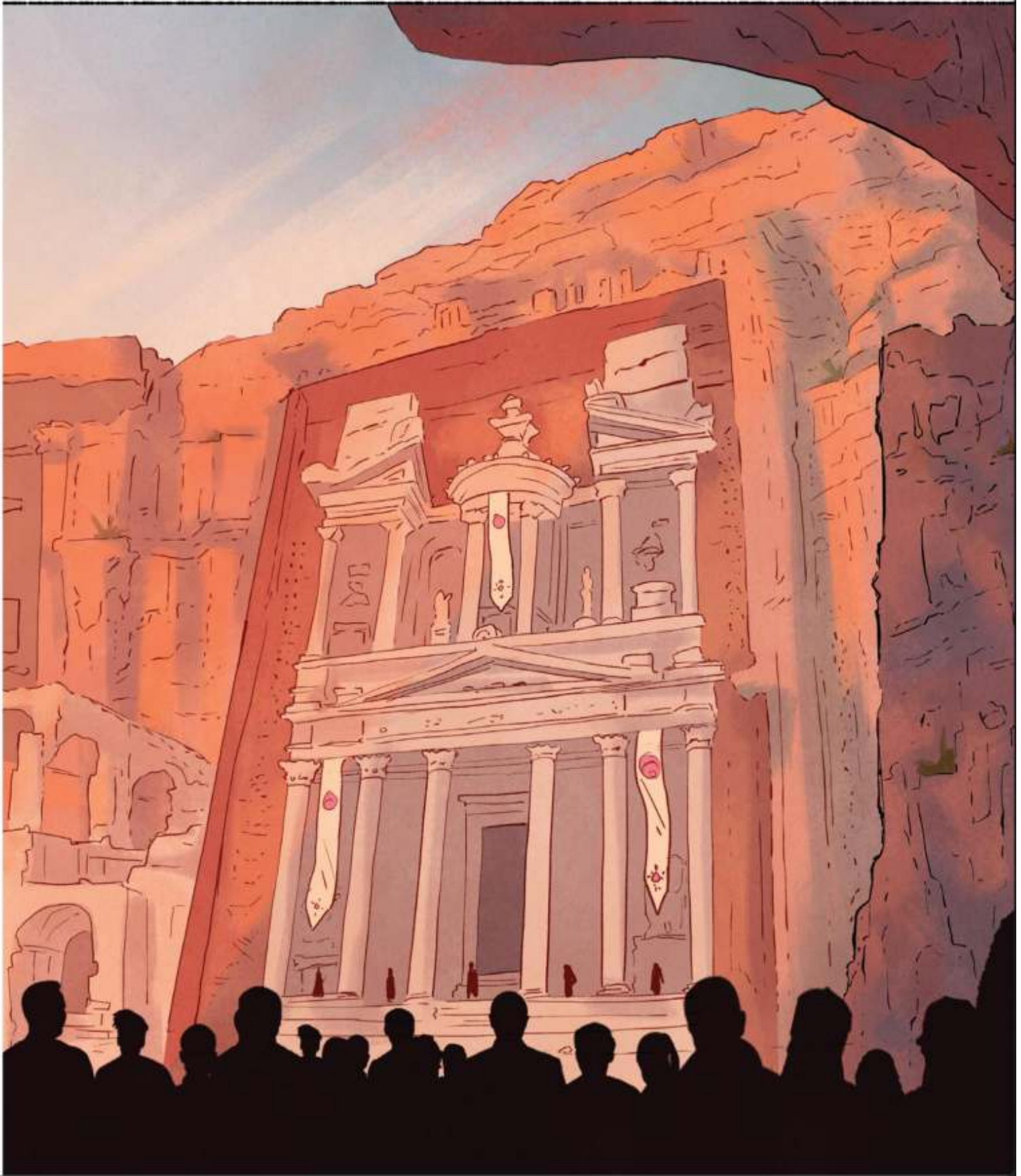




Arrange yourselves in single file! We're wasting light.











Keep it moving!



All recruits, this way for orientation.

Sit!



Welcome to the first day of recruitment.

This is the day you all chose to elevate yourselves and serve your Empire.



This is the most important day of your lives.





I am your drill sergeant, Zakeer.

In the next few weeks, I will be working tirelessly to train you into someone worthy of being a soldier for our great nation.



Now, I am honored to introduce the highly esteemed General of the Knights, the heart of our enterprise: **General Hende!**



Thank you, Zakeer.



Recruits...

You are here to become soldiers.

Some of you came for glory, to be a hero. Others are here to better your lives, or the lives of your families.

But really, you're here for a higher purpose than you know...





You are here for *this*.

Most of you will not know what this is, what it represents. We have become out of touch with the history that made us great.



In this age of isolation, you weren't taught about this structure, a testament to a time when our entire region was united.



Once, the Bayt-Sajji, the Dourullah, the Ornu, the Al-Baharyi, and the Gihre together accomplished things that divided we could not dream of.

Their methods have been lost to us.



Sixty years ago, the Bayt-Sajji Empire attempted to reclaim this golden age.



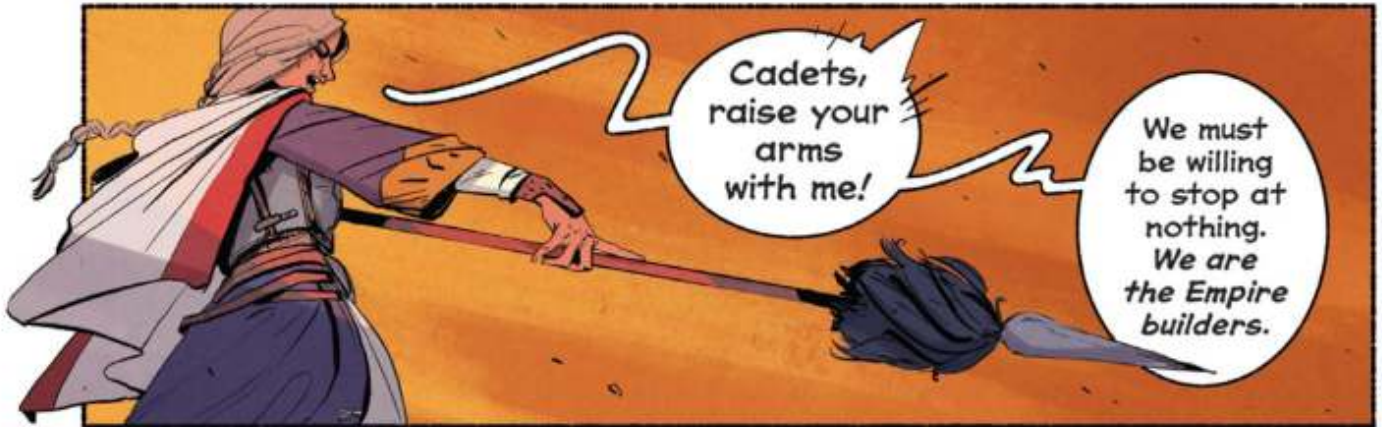
Because of those who would defend *some lines in the sand*, we fell short.





You here before me represent the future—the youth who will raise our Empire once more and bring stability to our region.

You will be staying in this monument to remind you of your heritage. May the spirit of this Empire's forefathers bring you strength and pride.



Cadets, raise your arms with me!

We must be willing to stop at nothing. We are the Empire builders.



And for those of you from our newly acquired territories, this is your chance to elevate yourselves beyond the roles you were born into. Work hard in the service of Bayt-Sajji...



...and you will earn your place in the new world we build.





As sundown is upon us, you will now retreat to stay the night here. Older cadets, show the newcomers where to go.

**Dismissed!**



Guess we're really spending the night up here.



Hello?

TAP TAP

Yeah!



Sorry,

I was just thinking about that speech.

I know. I've got goose bumps. And now we get to stay in this...thing! It's so amazing!



I can't wait to see what's inside... I've never seen such a huge building in my life.

Well, it's not a building, it's more like a...





...cave.



Oh god, it's dirt and no furniture again.

Why is it so much dirt? Where is all this dust coming from?



Lamps go out in fifteen minutes!



Why, why...

So I guess we just find a spot to lie down for the night?



Why would they carve it so beautifully outside and leave it like this inside...

Where are the standards?!

Come on, I think I see some carved slabs over there that could serve as a bed.





You heard me.

The beds were claimed by the first group here, and you're the last.

Newbies sleep on the floor, we earned these spots.



Well, that's not fair. We have every right to this bed because you weren't here.

I'm not moving.





















You mean enlisting?  
Haha, no.

How come?



I see it as getting to be part of history.

I read all those books, and now I get to step in and be part of it. Even in the speech the General said, we're part of what happens next.

Someday, we're going to be in a book.



Yeah...

I guess you're right. I like that.

By becoming Knights, we become a part of Bayt-Sajji Empire's greatest heroes.

Isn't that exciting?





Hey, newbies,  
pipe down.



Why don't  
you both save  
your dreaming  
for actual sleep.  
You think  
training's going  
to be games and  
talking about  
fantasies?



No,  
obviously,  
but we're  
going to be  
in Squire  
training.

That  
means we're  
training to  
be heroes.



Listen, you  
two were with  
the last group of  
recruits to arrive.  
I've been here three  
days waiting for  
orientation.  
If training's  
anything like  
I've heard,  
there's no meat  
dinners  
or dancing.

Some  
say sword  
fighting is like  
learning how  
to dance.



This is  
going to be  
hard work, and you  
two might be too  
young to realize it,  
but you need rest  
for that.  
So go  
to sleep.





Well, if you know so much, where is training anyway?



They're taking us to the border between Ornu and Bayt-Sajji.

Apparently there's some forest and a river there, and it's at least less cold than the mountains.

That's all I know.



A forest? Well, I guess there's no dust... but there'll be dirt...

Kid, they're going to give you new clothes. Uniforms. That shouldn't be the thing you're worried about.

What should I be worried about?

What happens if you fail Squire training?

Failing Squire training.

I hear they send you straight to the front lines.



Isn't that the same-

How do you know that?

About the front lines? They don't just let people leave if they fail, obviously.

What about the border?

The border between Ornu and Bayt-Sajji.











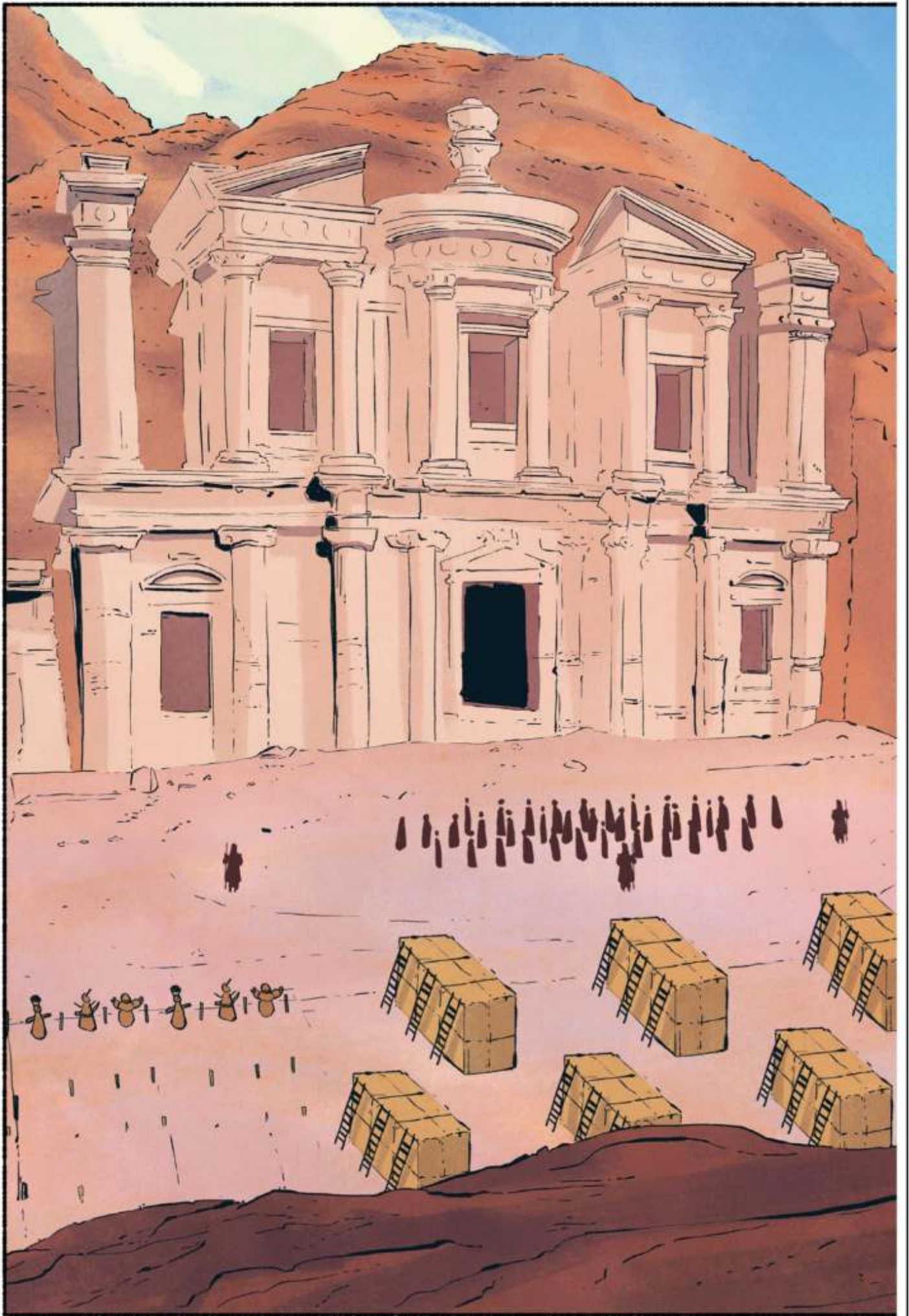






# CHAPTER 4







*Recruits!*

*Welcome to training.*







What does it mean to be a Squire?

It means discipline. It means teamwork.

It means humility, and it means suffering for the sake of greatness.



Understood?

**Sir!**



While you are here, do not expect a soft bed.

Do not expect rich foods or thick blankets. Any comfort you get is a comfort you earn.

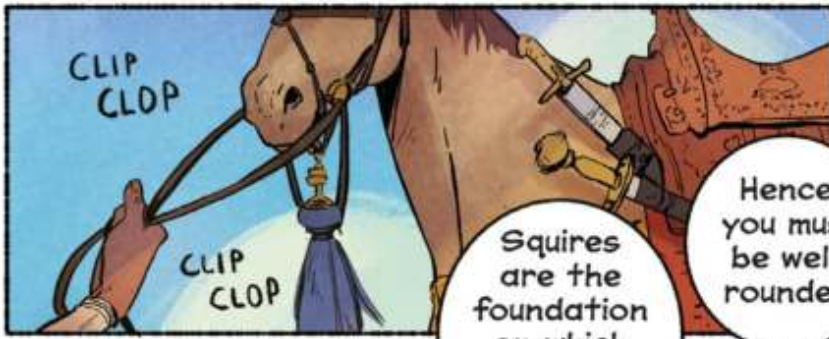
Understood?



**Yes, sir!**

Let's go over your duties.





Squires are the foundation on which the Knights flourish.

Hence, you must be well-rounded.

You will learn to care for and maintain armor, weaponry, and horses.

You will learn marksmanship. You will learn group combat.



You will take history and strategy lessons daily.



And of course...



...you will learn to ride.





























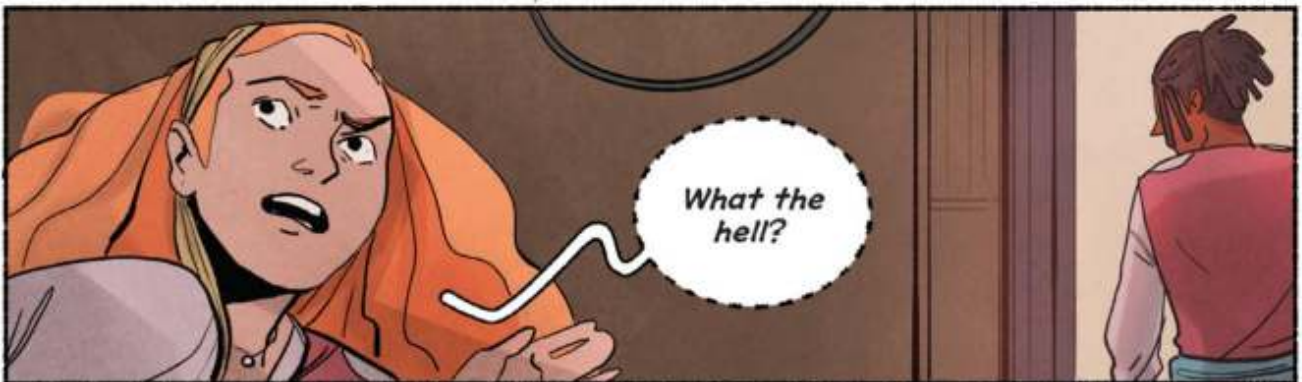
















Don't mind him.

Basem's...  
...a friend from back home.

It's complicated.

Doesn't seem like much of a friend.



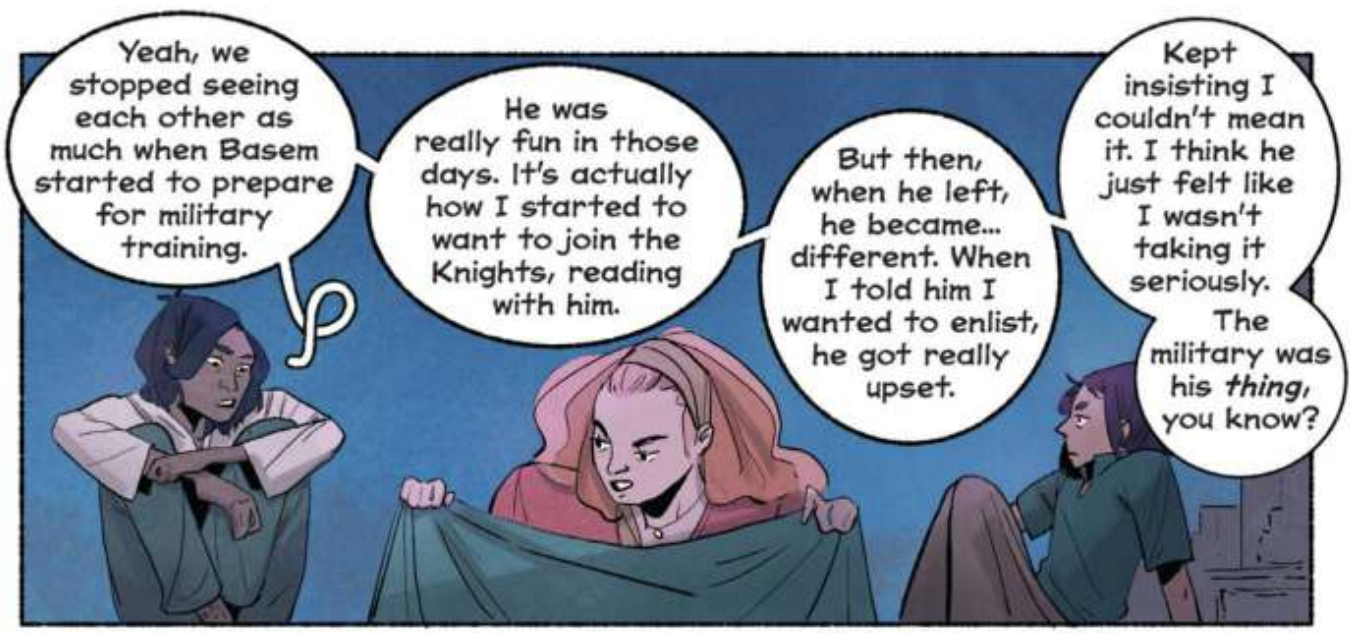
We were closer when we were younger, because we'd always end up together when our fathers had to talk business. My father owns a trading fleet, so he deals with Basem's father pretty often.

What does his dad do?

His dad is a senator. Senator Fareed.

Wait, a senator?





Yeah, we stopped seeing each other as much when Basem started to prepare for military training.

He was really fun in those days. It's actually how I started to want to join the Knights, reading with him.

But then, when he left, he became... different. When I told him I wanted to enlist, he got really upset.

Kept insisting I couldn't mean it. I think he just felt like I wasn't taking it seriously. The military was his thing, you know?



Honestly, he sounds like an ass.

He wasn't always, but lately he's been...a lot.

A lotta ass more like.



Both of you shut up now. At least in recruitment there were those stone slabs you could use as a bed.

Now we're all on the ground.

HA!



SHHH!

You shh!



Hope he's not in too much trouble with the General this early on.

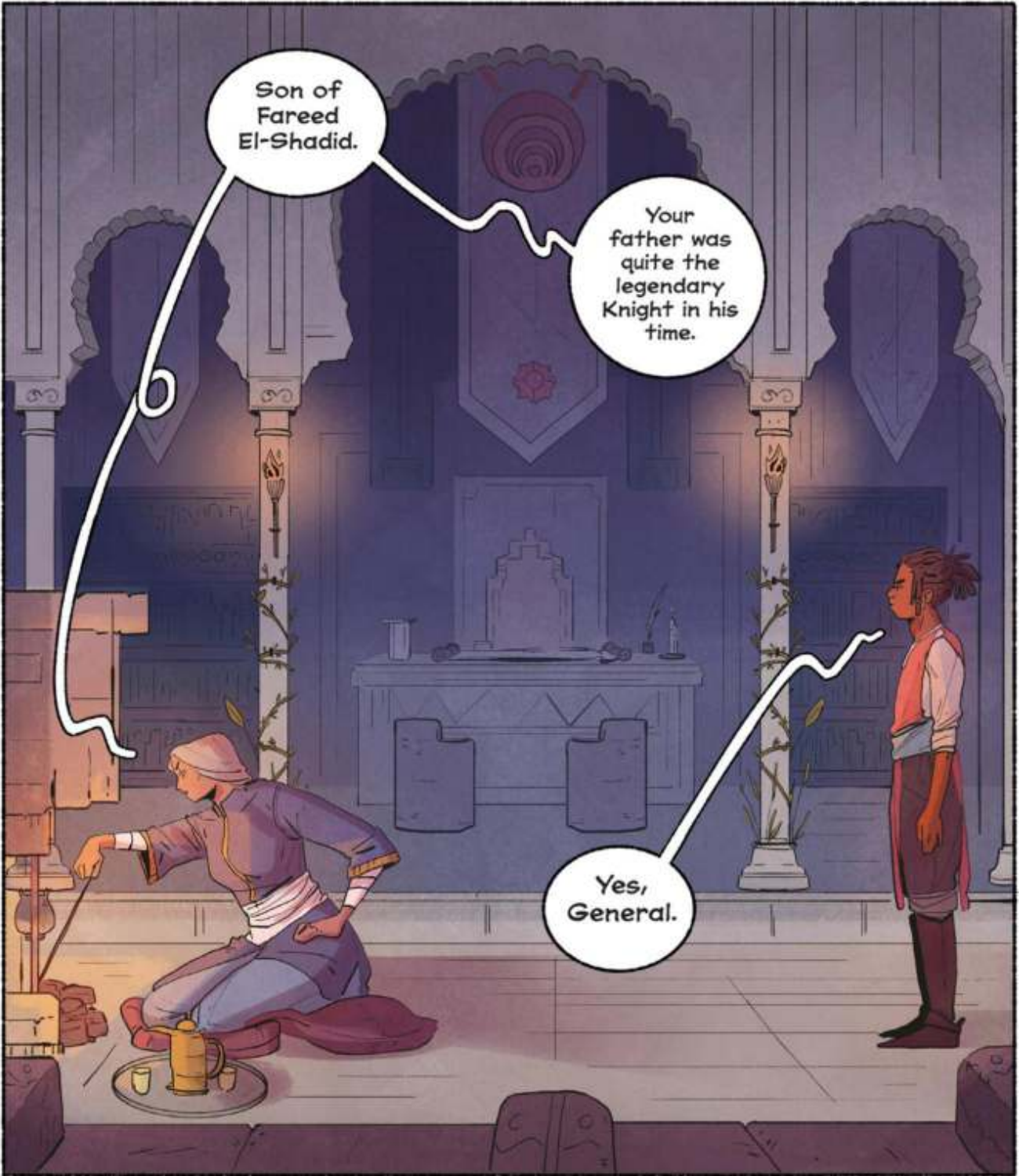
His dad'll kill him.





So,

Basem  
El-Shadid.



Son of  
Fareed  
El-Shadid.

Your  
father was  
quite the  
legendary  
Knight in his  
time.

Yes,  
General.





*Fareed the Sea Master.*  
Revolutionized marine warfare tactics for the Bayt-Sajji, a historically land-based military.

Leveraged his quick conquest of the coastal Al-Baharyi territories into a senatorship.



Said to have made Squire after only three years of training, practically a record.



How long has he given you?



One year.



Quite a predicament.





I'm confident in my ability to excel, General.



Ah, yes. I'm sure your father has had you on horseback since you could lift your little head all on your own. I bet you've been looking at maps since you could open your eyes.



You're strong, brave, excellent at combat. I'm certain you're intelligent and a born leader.

You could probably recite our history and formations by heart.



But do you want to know a secret?



That's not enough to stand out.





Yes, most of these recruits haven't had the...rigorous upbringing you've had. Your fellow recruits have been made strong through a life of repetitive labor.

There are children who are curious, brilliant strategists by nature.

What do you have to offer that they don't?



Sugar?



I don't *take* sugar.



Yes, I recall your father not taking sugar in his tea either.

So what advice do you have for me, *most exalted General*?





Hmm.

Even as frustrated as you are, you remember your manners.



Do you see what I did there?

I made an observation. In war, the power of observation is priceless.

Have a seat.



Observe for me.  
No one can doubt your loyalty to the Empire and her glory, Basem.

Make sure I know what I need to. My job here is to plant the seeds which will grow into an exceptional army.

Only the very best will do, and I want nothing to do with the weak-willed.













# CHAPTER 5



Dear Baba and Mama,



Dear Mama and Baba,



Dear Baba,



Dear Baba,







First thing's first,  
I'm safe and doing good.  
It's been an awesome few weeks.



The food here is fine.  
Not as good as yours.



Come on.  
This  
again??

What do  
you want,  
princess,  
an **egg**?



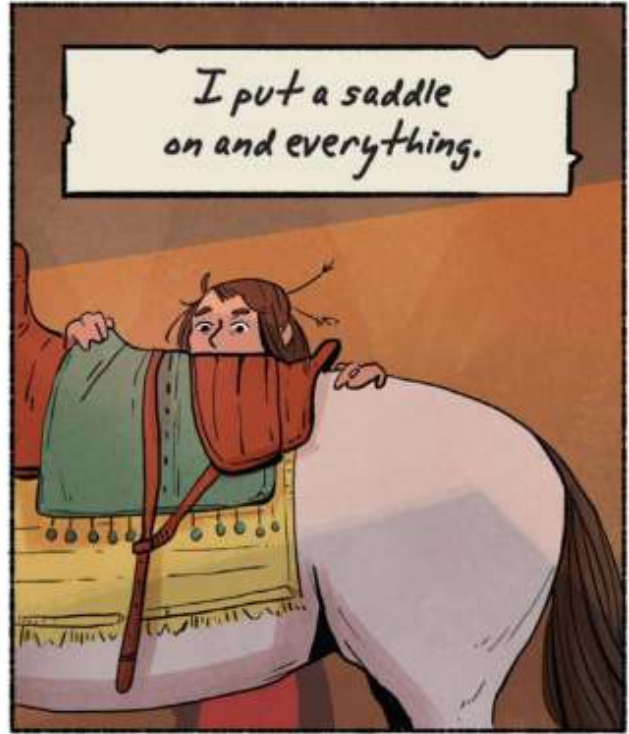
I was kind of hoping  
for meat sometimes.  
I guess the famine  
is everywhere.

**NEXT!**





I put a saddle on and everything.



I'm learning so much.  
I'm learning to ride  
a horse! A real horse!!



I have my own horse I train  
with. Her name is Zahra.



We're so connected. It's like I've been riding with her my whole life.



There's just a ton of other stuff too. I'm learning first aid.



Weapon care.

Go! Go! Go!



Action can strike at any moment. A Knight is always prepared!

We do drills every day. Sometimes they wake us up in the middle of the night just to do laps,

Which makes no sense to me. I get that we're supposed to be tough and ready for anything, but sleep is important too and this is just --

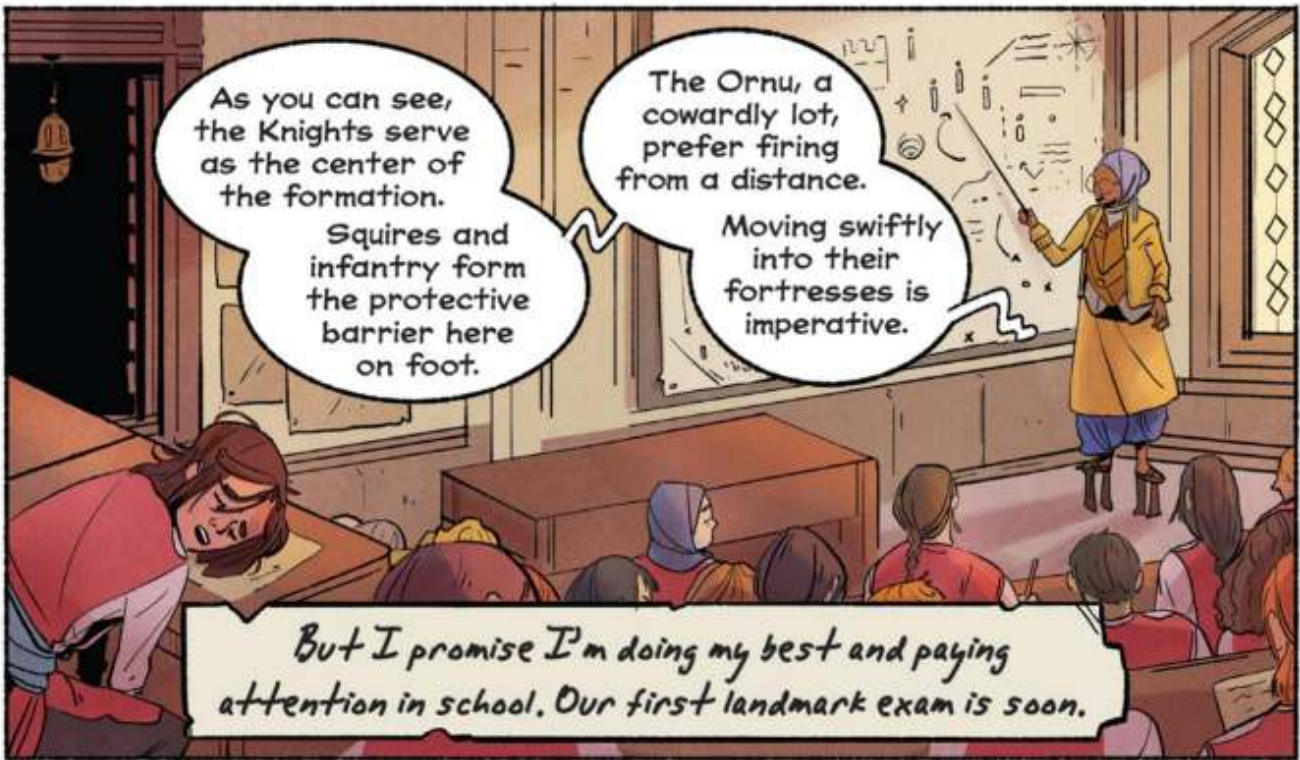


Ah, crap.



It's better than the strategy lessons at least. I'd rather run every night all night than sit through more tactical lectures.





As you can see, the Knights serve as the center of the formation. Squires and infantry form the protective barrier here on foot.

The Ornu, a cowardly lot, prefer firing from a distance. Moving swiftly into their fortresses is imperative.

*But I promise I'm doing my best and paying attention in school. Our first landmark exam is soon.*



...curved blades have an advantage on horseback, as they're better for quick slashing motions than straight blades.

*I'm working hard, so you guys should know I'm not wasting this chance.*



*Thank you for letting me join. And the thing we talked about before I left?*

*I've still got that secret under wraps. Ha. Love you!!! Atiza.*





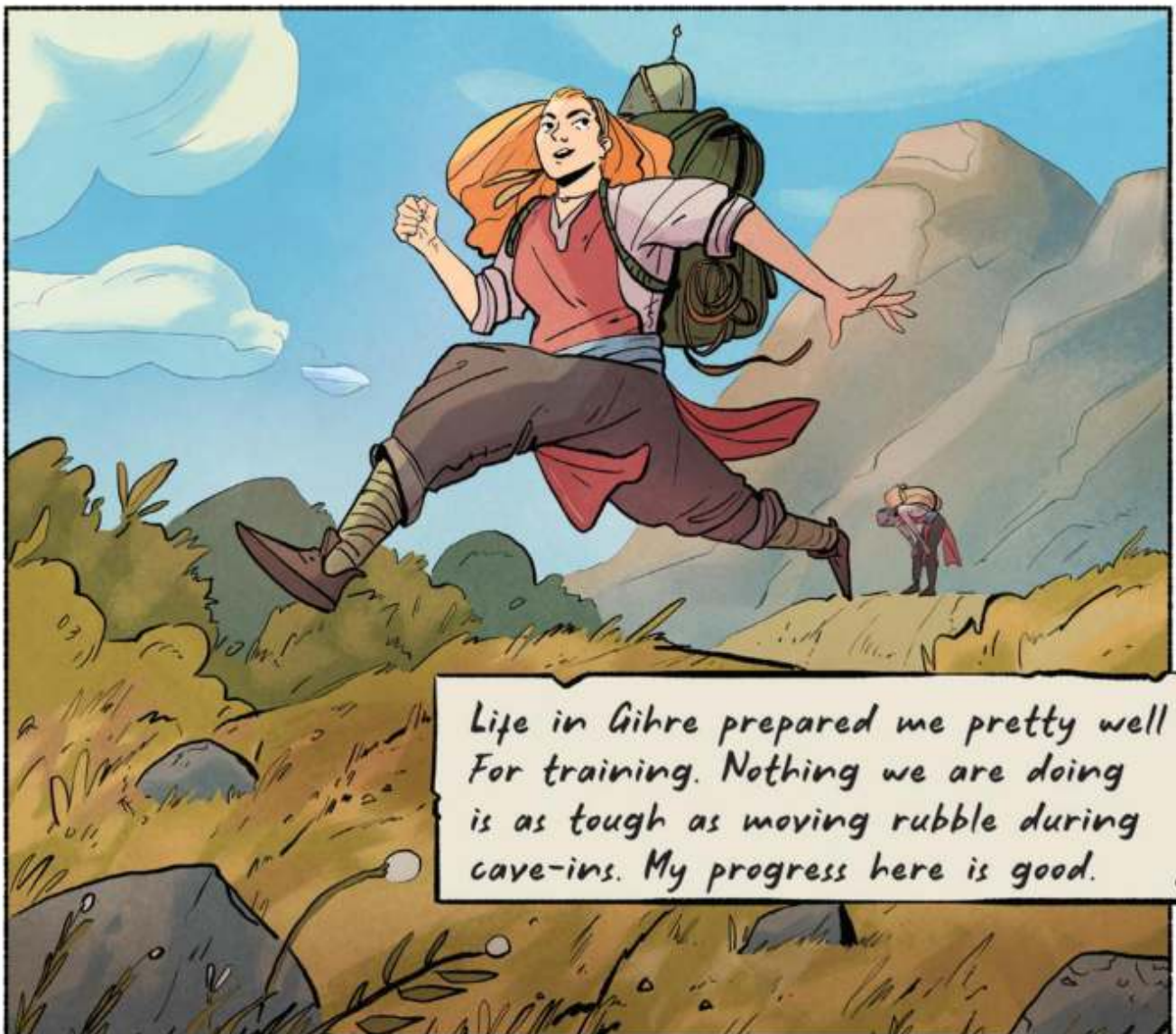


Dear Mama and Baba,



How are you?  
How is everyone?

I hope Baba's back got  
better in the weeks  
I've been gone.



Life in Gihre prepared me pretty well  
For training. Nothing we are doing  
is as tough as moving rubble during  
cave-ins. My progress here is good.





Recruits don't get stipends, but I'll be getting something once I make Squire. The first exam is coming up, and I hope to be making money soon.



Well done, Sahar, excellent defense!

Say hello to Rami, Jad, Jon, Janan, Noor...everybody. Their sister is working hard.



Please don't send a letter back. I know how expensive paper is, and I have access to it here for free.







Dear Baba, I miss you so much!

Training is everything I hoped and feared it would be. As expected, I'm not the strongest one here. But you'd be surprised at how much stronger I've been getting. Or maybe not.



If I got my determination from anywhere, I got it from you.



As always, I excel in my written studies. I also seem to have an **EYE** for archery! Get it?

Use your core! Shoulders back, neck straight.



Quiet, nerd.

You'd laugh too if you could read this.





Oh, and Basem's here!  
It was nice to see him.



Although, not so sure he  
was so happy to see me.

py to see me.

~~py to see me.~~





It's been...



It was nice to see him.

I can't wait to get your letter, Baba. Thank you for always believing in me. I'm doing it! I'm making my dreams come true.



Love,  
Husni!





Baba,



Wait,  
no.

CRUNCH



To Senator  
Fareed El-Shadid,

Ok.  
Better.



Goddamn.  
Why is this  
so difficult!



A letter from recruit Basem  
El-Shadid to the Honorable  
Senator Fareed El-Shadid  
15th Coastal District.

I want to  
tell you how  
hard I'm trying.  
How hard this  
is, but that I'm  
succeeding  
anyway.





*El-Shadid means strength.  
It means we don't whine.  
You told me there are no  
hardships, only weak people.*



*Our family's future is  
Bayt-Sajji's future.  
• I know this. •*

**DAMN  
IT!**

**PLOP!**



*Screw this.  
Forget  
letters.*

*All I need to  
know is that  
I won't fail.  
I can't fail.*





General Hende?

Yes?



I h-have the recruits' letters to home.



Ah, excellent. Bring them.

Oh, and next time?



Don't forget to knock.



Dismissed.













# CHAPTER 6





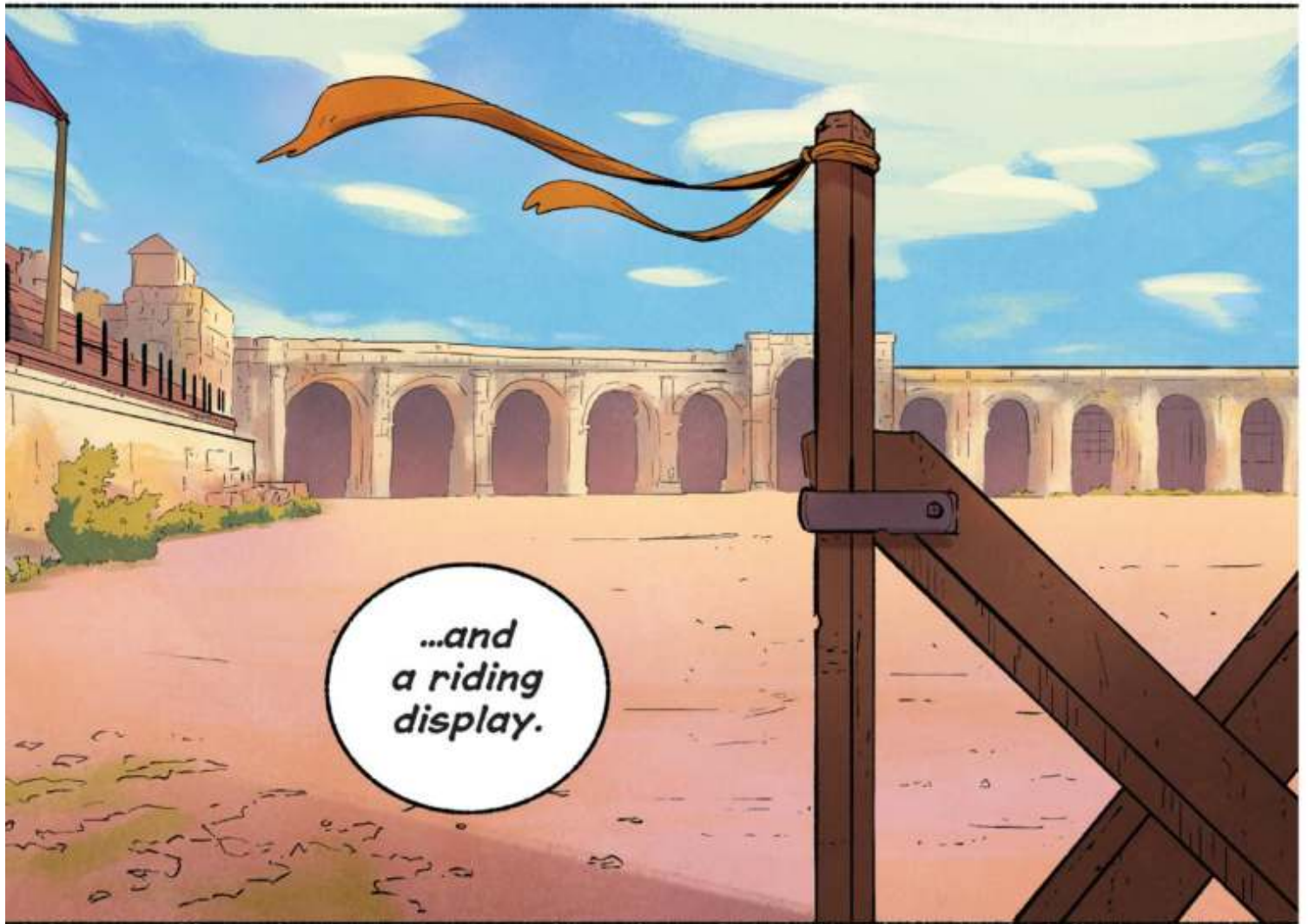
*The first Squire examinations will consist of three parts.*



*First, we'll begin with a riding display.*

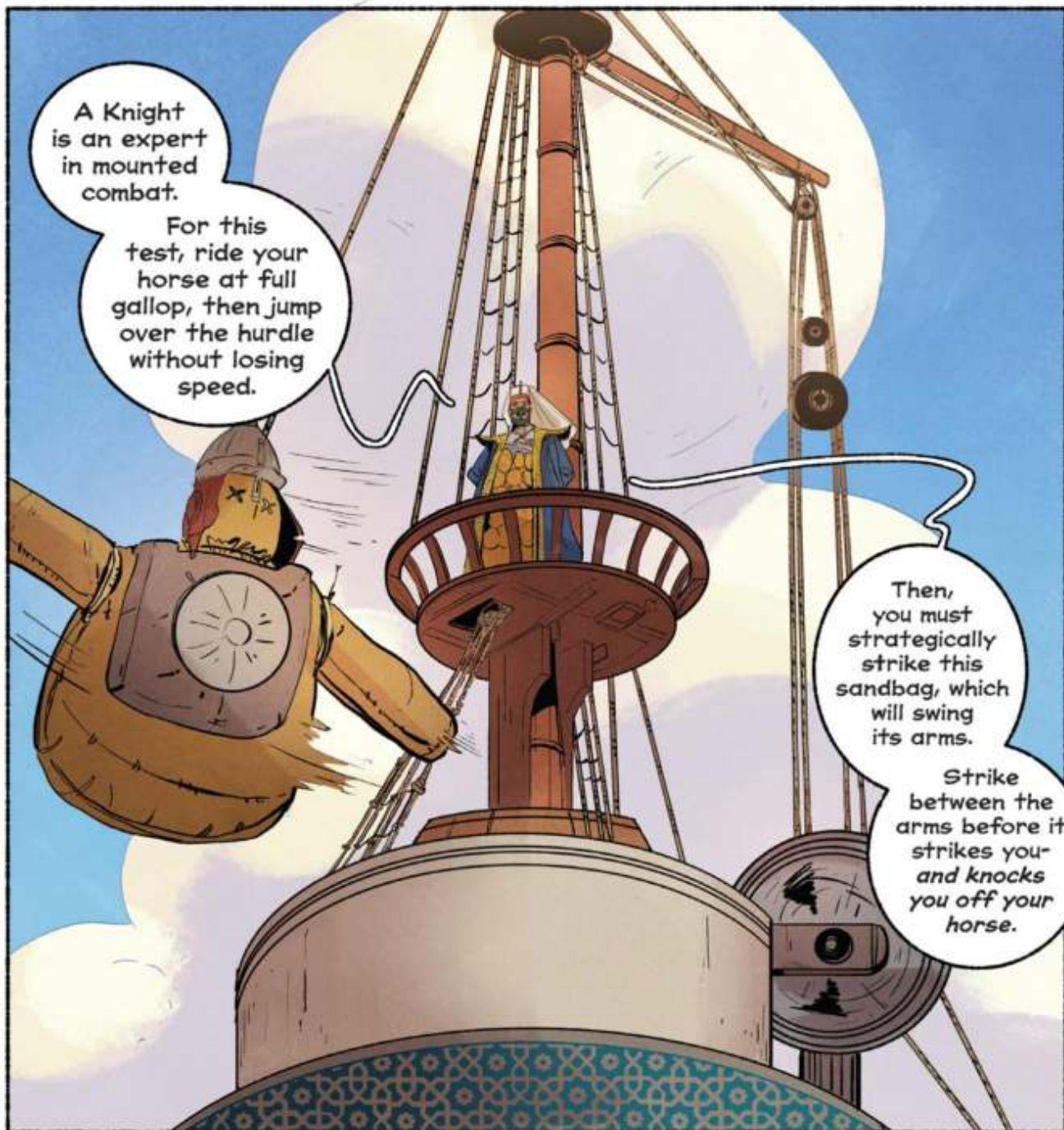
*Next, we'll move inside for a written exam.*

*Finally, we'll end with a group combat scenario...*



*...and a riding display.*





A Knight is an expert in mounted combat.

For this test, ride your horse at full gallop, then jump over the hurdle without losing speed.

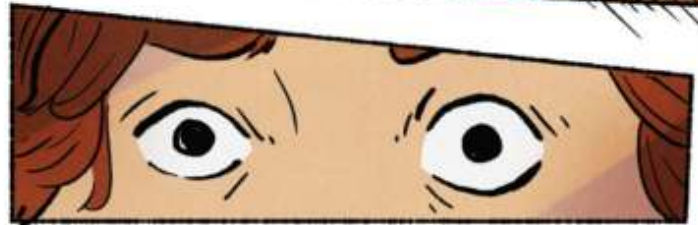
Then, you must strategically strike this sandbag, which will swing its arms.

Strike between the arms before it strikes you- and knocks you off your horse.



Who's first?



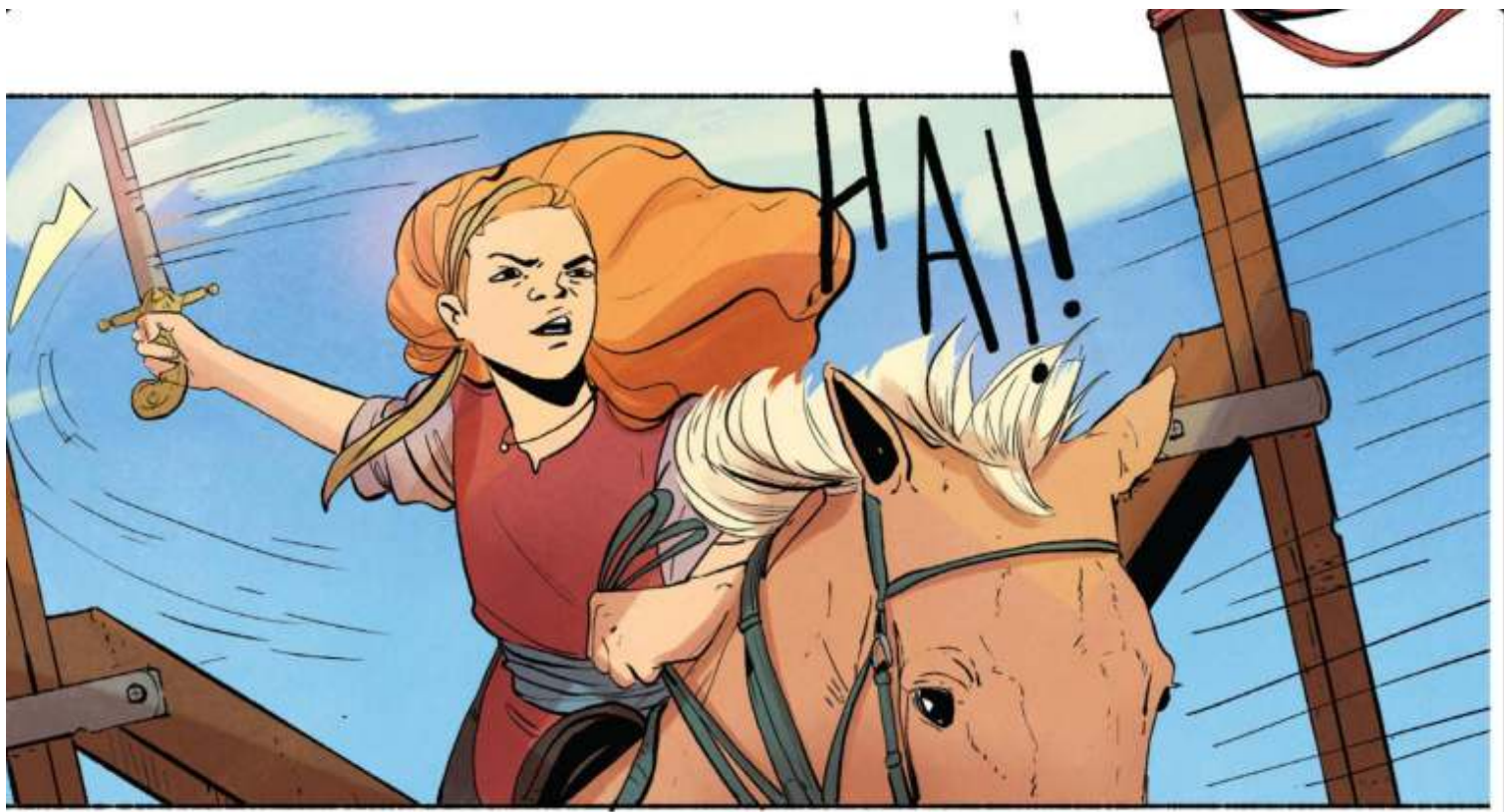






Excellent!





Superb  
form!





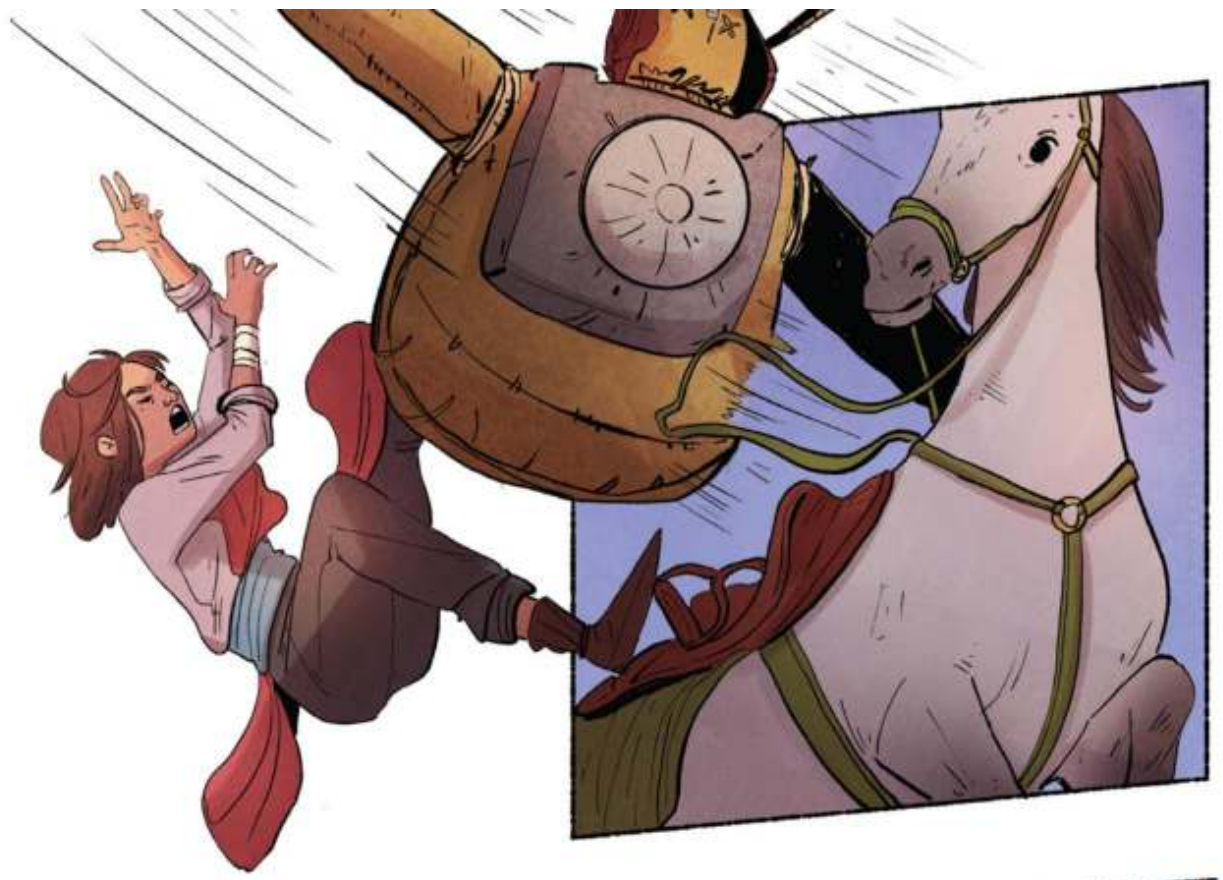
**KRRISHH**















Next question.

What do we call the variation of the tactic "Inverted Wedge" in which the enemies' units are divided and conquered piece by piece?



Were you cheating?

N-no...

RECRUIT!



Leave.

You're dismissed.





By the way, I want you to know something. I'm not failing you because you're cheating.

I'm failing you because you lied.

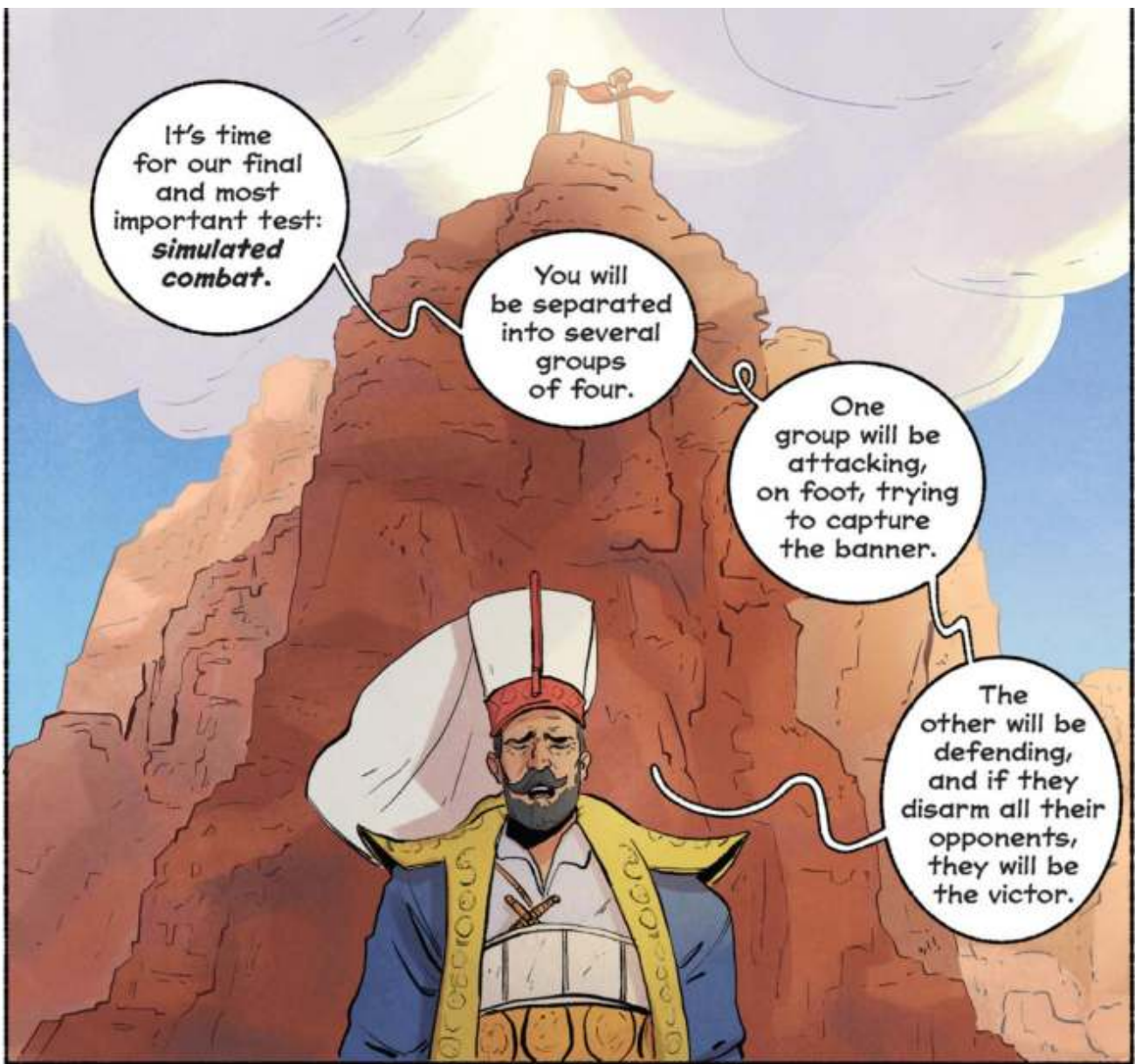


Next question!

In what year did the treacherous Ornu steal fertile land from Bayt-Sajji in a surprise ambush?







It's time for our final and most important test: **simulated combat.**

You will be separated into several groups of four.

One group will be attacking, on foot, trying to capture the banner.

The other will be defending, and if they disarm all their opponents, they will be the victor.



In group one we will have Fourat, Raja, Husni, and Aiza.



Group two will be Basem, Suhaib, Rania, and Jihan.



CRAACK



THWACK!!







CLACK



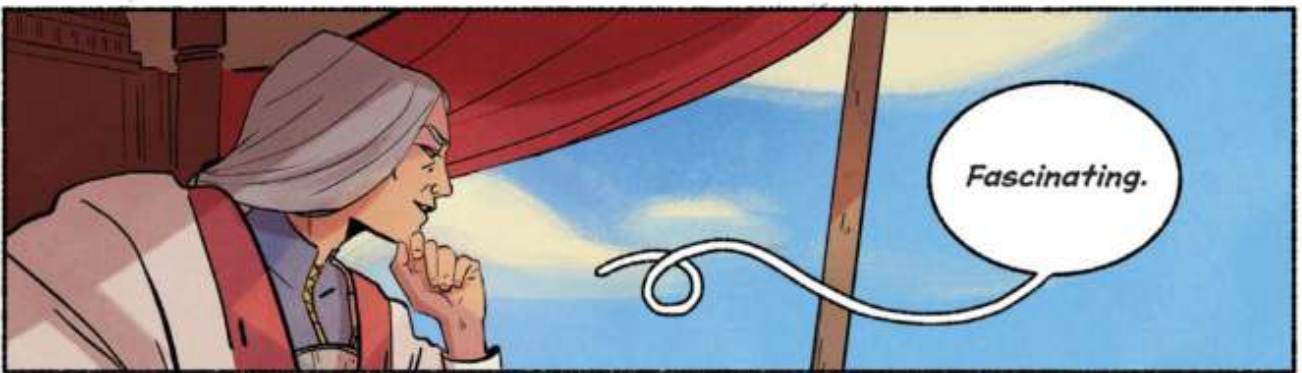
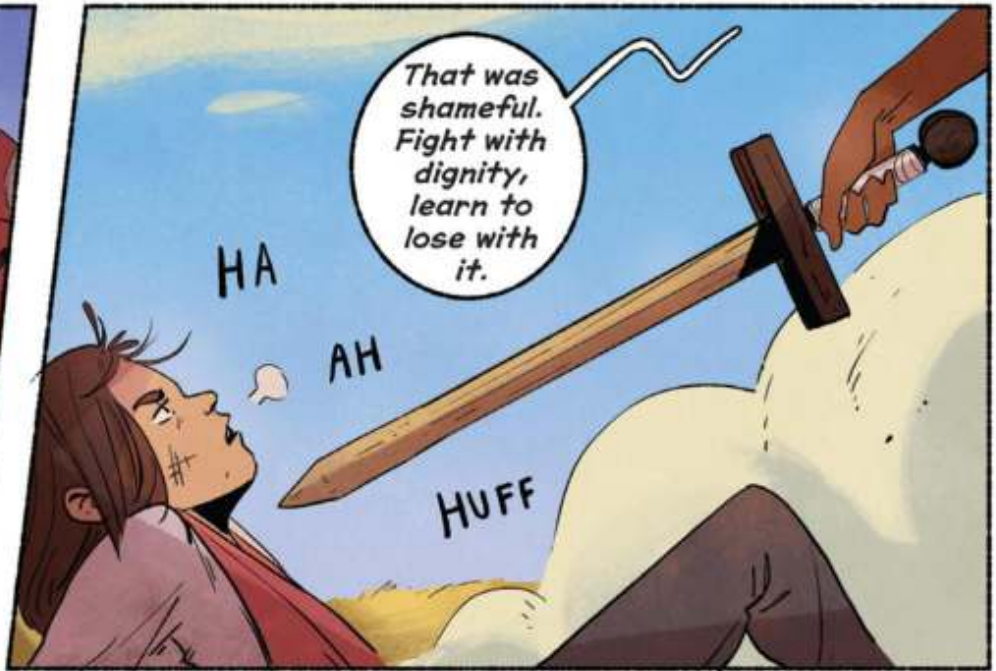




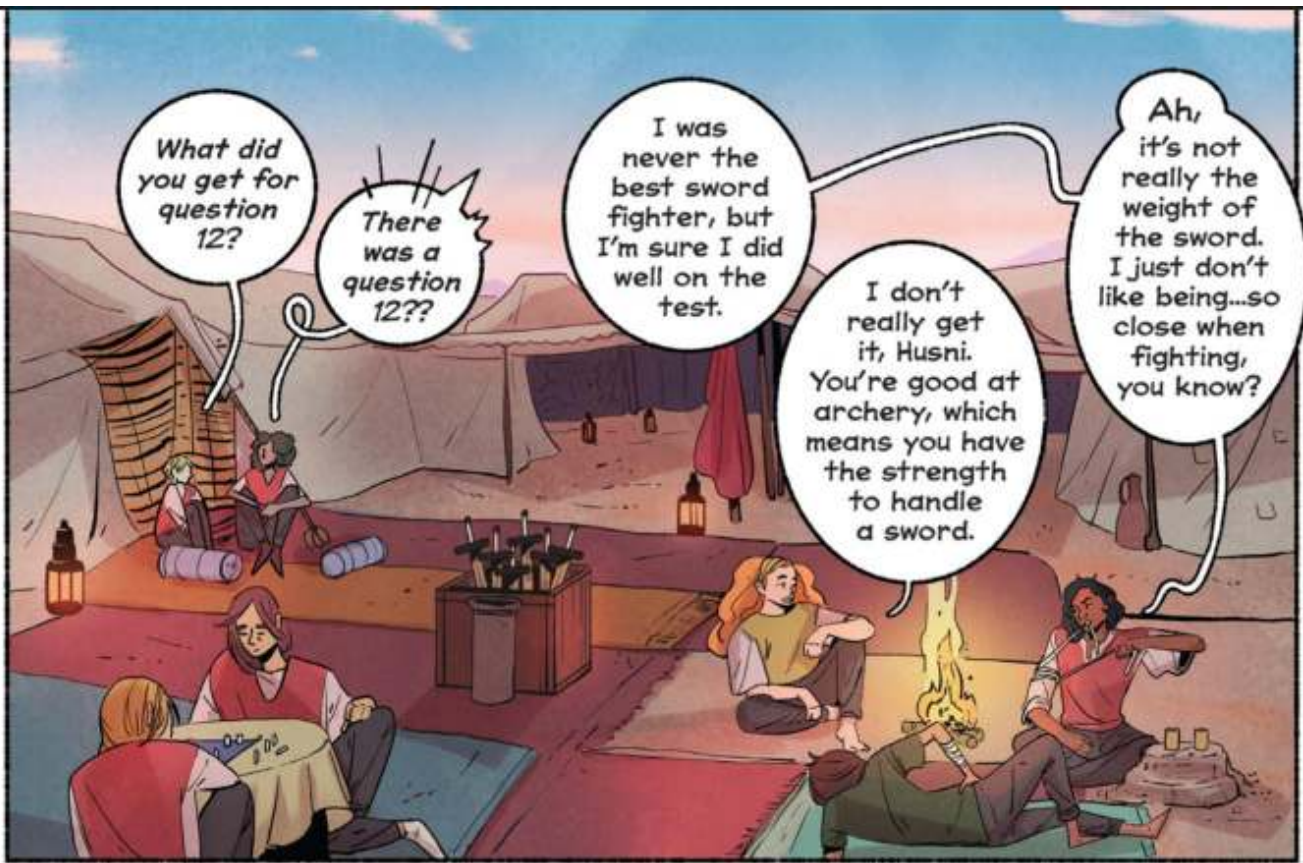












What did you get for question 12?

There was a question 12??

I was never the best sword fighter, but I'm sure I did well on the test.

I don't really get it, Husni. You're good at archery, which means you have the strength to handle a sword.

Ah, it's not really the weight of the sword. I just don't like being...so close when fighting, you know?



Hey, great job out there, Basem.

That hit is really gonna bruise.

Yeah, I know.

That's the point of combat.



**Buzz off, Basem.**

You're not better than us because of anything other than the fact that you're rich and you practiced before you got here.

If we had that time and money, you wouldn't be special.





You know what makes me *special*?

I'm not here to better my status or to fulfill some personal fantasy.

I'm here for duty. Honor.

I'm here because I'm loyal to my country, I love and serve my Empire for the sake of its ideals.



When you fight for yourself, you don't have the strength to do what you need to do.

That's what happens when you fixate on lines in the sand. An army that can't put the Empire first is just a group of freeloaders.



I can be both. My background is Al-Baharyi, but I'm Bayt-Sajji too.

It doesn't make me less.



Al-Baharyi was Bayt-Sajji once. And your area is Bayt-Sajji now. What good is holding onto that divide when the Empire makes you stronger together?



You remember what the General said.



If you can't simply call yourself Bayt-Sajji, you are creating a division.

You might as well go back to the sea for all the use you are.





Come to think of it, where are you from, Aiza?

I don't think you've ever said.

I'm from here.  
Bayt-Sajji.  
Just poor.



I'm tired. I want to get tonight done with and find out our results in the morning.

Aiza, look.



Some of the kids are leaving.

Why?



This is what I was telling you about when we first met. If you fail two Squire exams, you're sent straight to infantry. Right to the front lines.

Are the front lines really all that bad? I kind of thought they'd be like Knights, but not on horseback.



The front lines are nothing like Knighthood. You're at every battle. They send you all over the Empire.

Front lines means first to fight, first to die.



That sucks.

But...only failures quit, anyway.





You aren't a little bit worried?

...No?









# CHAPTER 7





Wake up, recruit.

Drills again...?

Wha...



You failed your first round of Squire tests.

First failures who don't desert have night-watch duty. Next time it's the infantry.

Wha...

Come, child. Sleep is for successes.



Was... was I the only failure?

No.









I...  
failed.



Sniff

I failed.



I failed...

HAH

AH

I failed...















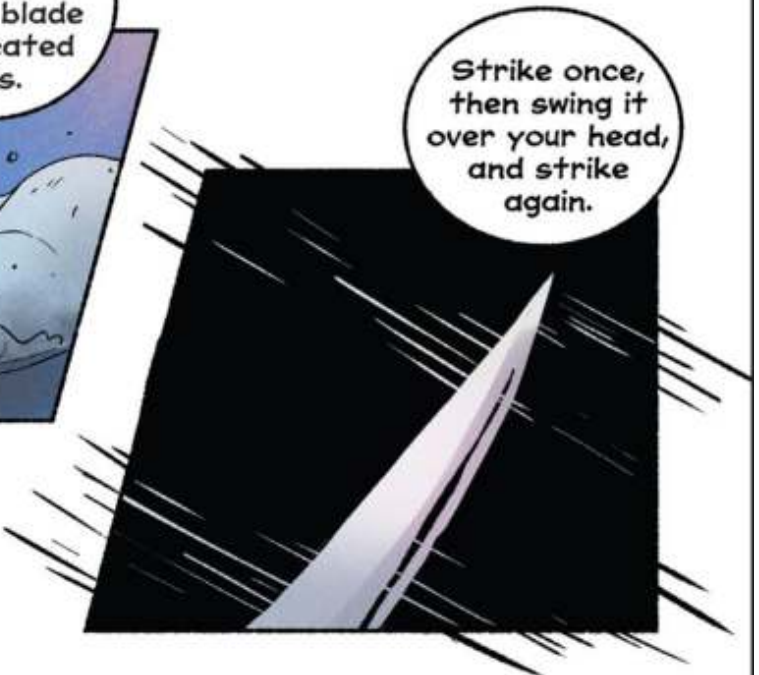
Don't overextend your wrist.

The pommel is there to stop you from letting your hand fall into an angle where you won't be able to swing it again.

Hold your sword firm as you strike.



The beauty of the curved blade is repeated cuts.



Strike once, then swing it over your head, and strike again.



This way, even if your opponent blocks the first blow, you can quickly strike from the side.





Yeah,  
that's  
what I was  
doing.



A girl  
who fails her  
exams shouldn't  
take that kind  
of tone.  
Now.  
Show me.







Good.

Now, I'll take my leave of you.

Still work to be done.

Wait!



How about...

...we spar.

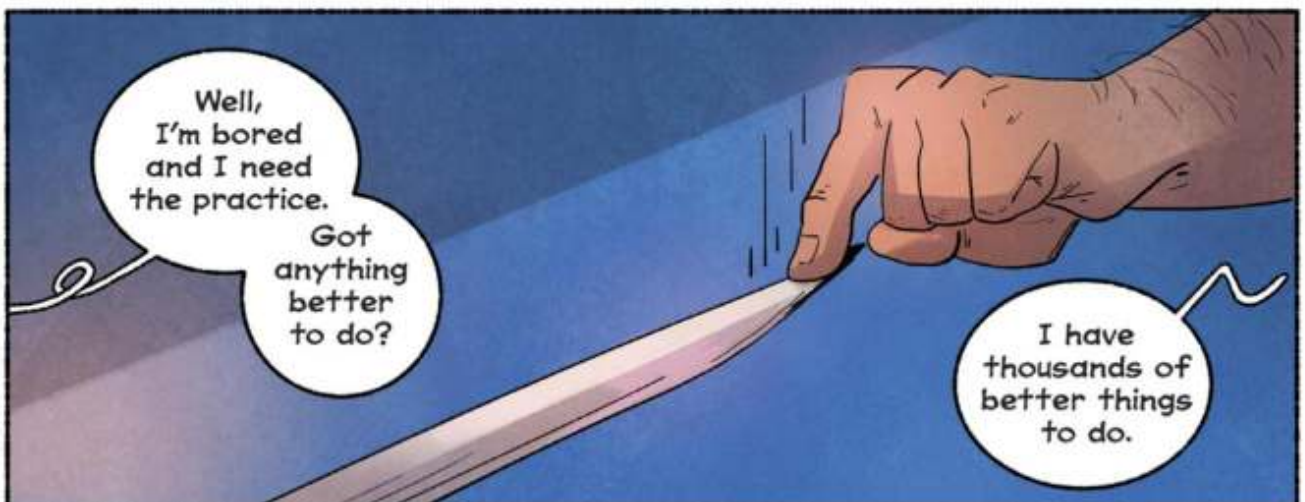


Spar?

I just taught you one move. Before you were swinging your sword like a fool.

What are ya, scared?

That is decidedly absurd. You are half my size and have a fraction of my expertise.



Well, I'm bored and I need the practice.

Got anything better to do?

I have thousands of better things to do.





However...

I'll give you the honor of one more lesson. Grab the blunted training swords.

No need to cut your head off.



Oh, yeah? Don't wanna lose the other arm?



Ah...

I... I'm sorry.

That wasn't funny.



No.



It was funny.

Arm up.













My name is Aiza.

Good for you.

No, you don't get it.



I... I failed my test.

I'm aware.

What you taught me last night helped a lot. I haven't been able to figure out a move like that on my own.



Will you train me?



No.

















Faster.



Wrong  
move.



Dead.

Dead  
again.











Your size is no weakness, it is your strength.




Opponents aren't used to aiming down, and they'll underestimate you on sight.

They'll have no patience and try to take you out quick.

Crack!



Use the strength of their blows against them. Make quick, precise movements.



And success is inevitable.

Even for a fool like you.





Ugh, another bruise. You're killing me here.

Stop whining and put some olive oil on it. It'll heal faster.



Girl.



You shouldn't put all your hopes on being a Squire.



What? Since when do *you* care how I feel about things?

I don't. I'm only stating facts.



Well, I know what I'm doing. There's no way I'm going to infantry.



Is...  
...is it about how you lost your arm?



No. The infantry is a death sentence, but that wasn't how I lost this arm. I have no regrets about how I lost this arm.



Well...  
...how did you lose it?



I mean...  
...the other recruits talk,  
there's rumors, but-

I lost this arm in action.

I was a Knight once, and things... happened.

There's little honor and even less glory when working with sharpened blades.

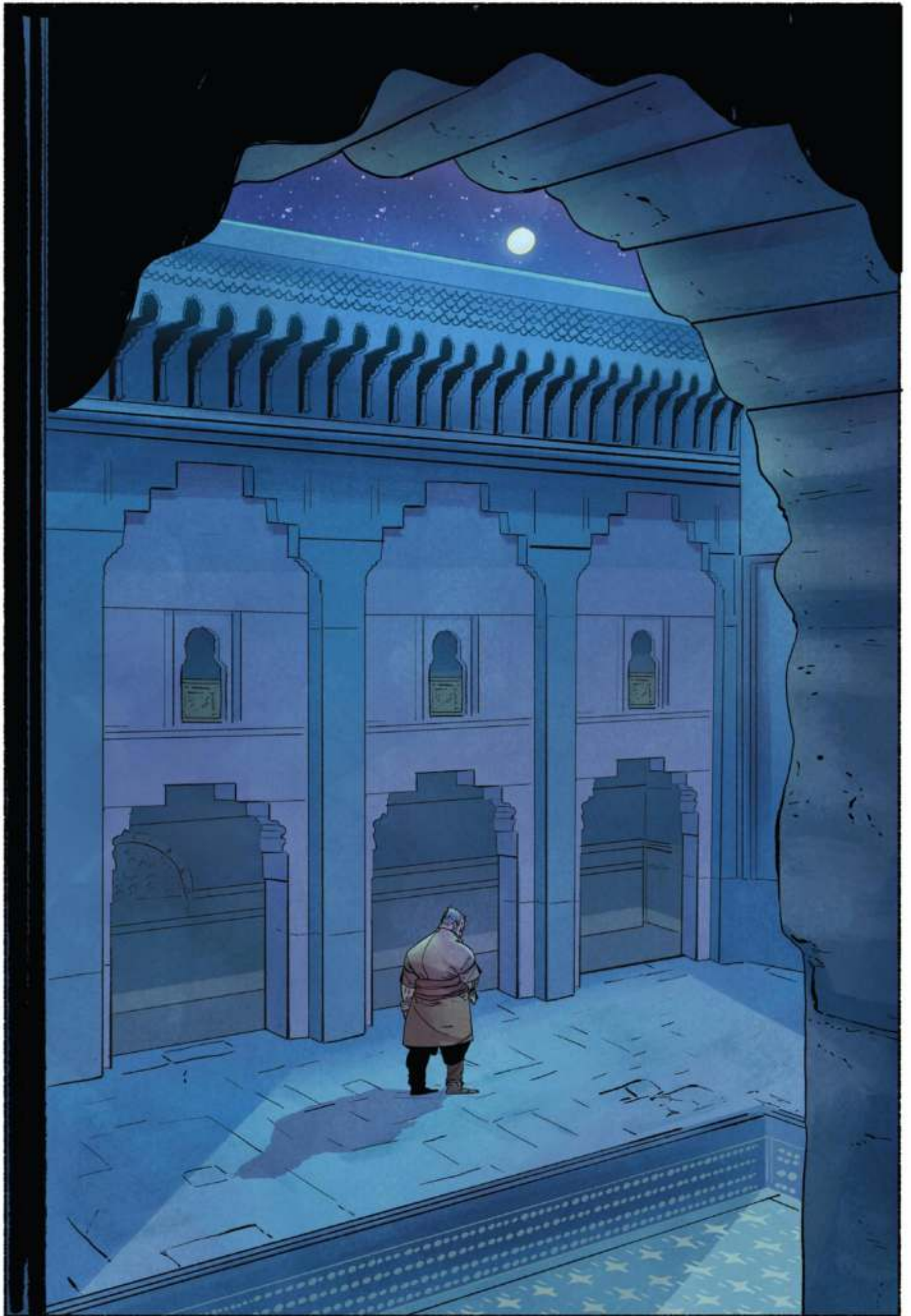
No training can prepare you for it.



















# CHAPTER 8





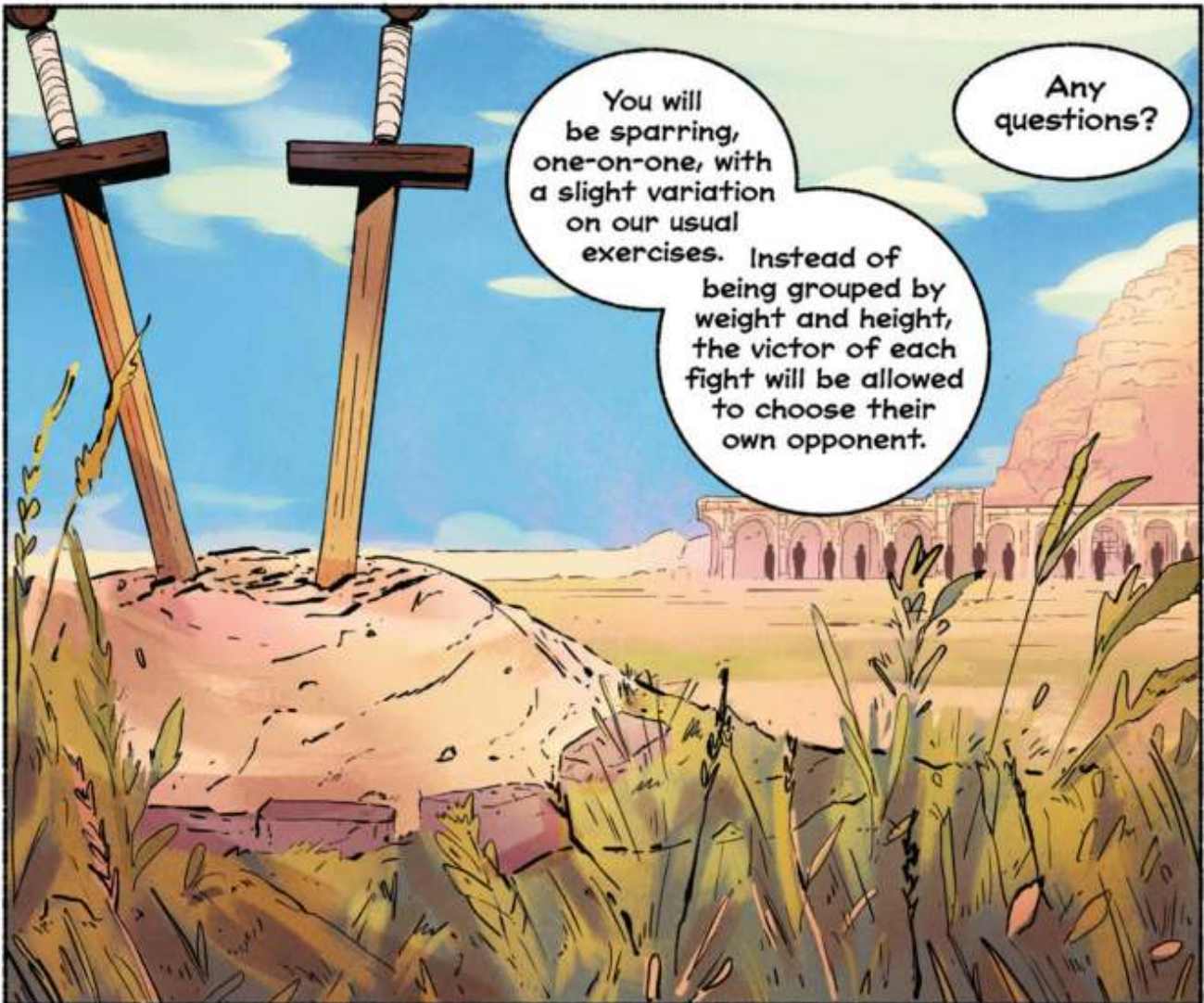
**Recruits!**

We have  
a most joyous  
surprise for  
you all.



Our  
most esteemed  
General Hende  
will be observing  
a special exercise  
today.

Thank  
you,  
my dearest  
Zakeer.



You will  
be sparring,  
one-on-one, with  
a slight variation  
on our usual  
exercises. Instead of  
being grouped by  
weight and height,  
the victor of each  
fight will be allowed  
to choose their  
own opponent.

Any  
questions?





Um, most honored instructor? What is the purpose of this exercise?

I understand swordsmanship training, but setting soldiers against one another like this...

Wouldn't it be better if we learned to fight in groups?



My boy, your training is multi-faceted.

You spend plenty of time in strategy classes and riding classes learning to move as one team.



On the field, you will meet soldiers of all sizes and strength.

You must be ready for any of them.



Furthermore, there's nothing like a little friendly competition to cull the wheat from the chaff, hm?

Who would like to begin?

















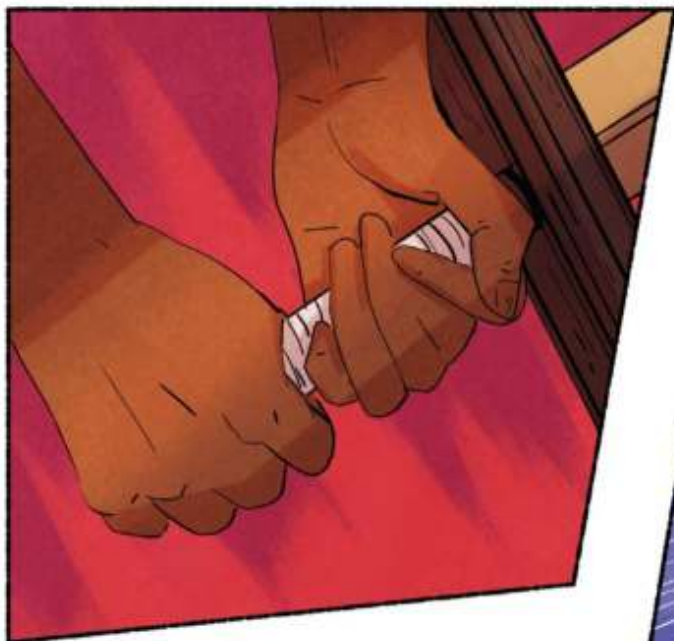
THRACK















Well done.  
A draw.



For the exercise,  
a stunning performance.  
Do remember  
for the field,  
there's no  
such thing as  
a draw.



Kill or  
be killed,  
recruits.



Aiza,  
you choose the  
next opponent.  
Basem, you can  
go next.





Did you guys see me??

I killed him.



I don't know if I'd call a draw a kill, but it was very impressive.

You should be proud.

Oh, I am.



-Huh?

AHAHAHA!  
Really?



HAHA!  
Oh, that's good.



OH MAN

HA!

BWAH HAAAA!

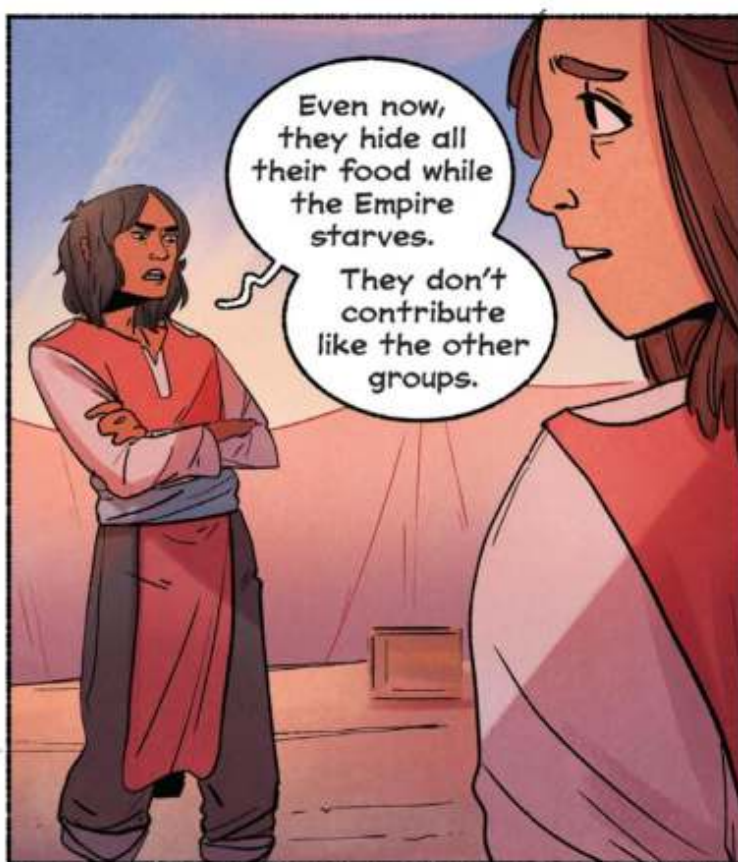
HA HA

HA













You don't know what it's like to be cut down like that. And besides... *...it's true.*



Other groups have better integrated.



I'm going to the armory.



Your shift hasn't even started yet.




**I DON'T CARE!**









Aiza has been sneaking off to the armory at nights.



Ah, the armory, where I assigned her, and at night, when she's supposed to be guarding as punishment.



Really, Basem, if this is your urgent intel I might as well ask a goat to keep me informed.



She's leaving before her shift. No one knows where she goes or what she's doing.



Hmm...

I would assume she's been training off-hours.

It seems there's been some marked improvement, wouldn't you say?







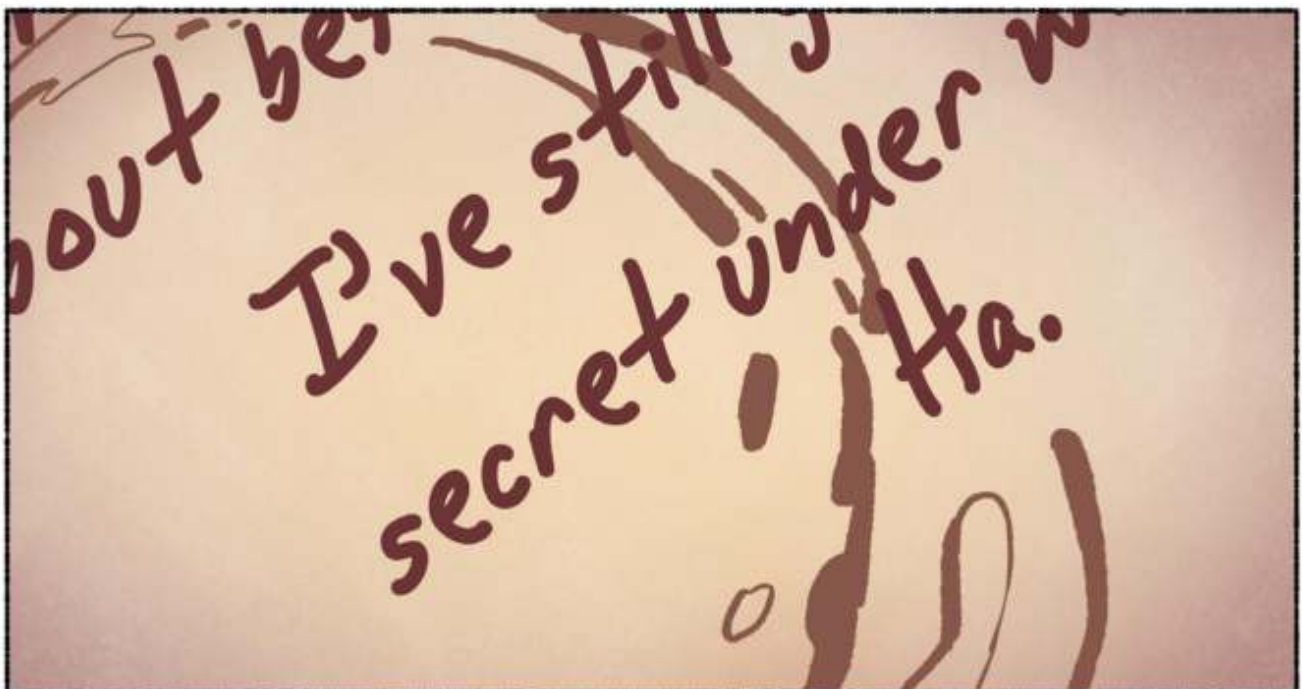
However.

I suppose  
it is true  
we can't  
be certain.



Thank you,  
Basem.

I will keep  
Aiza's...recent  
disappearances  
in mind.

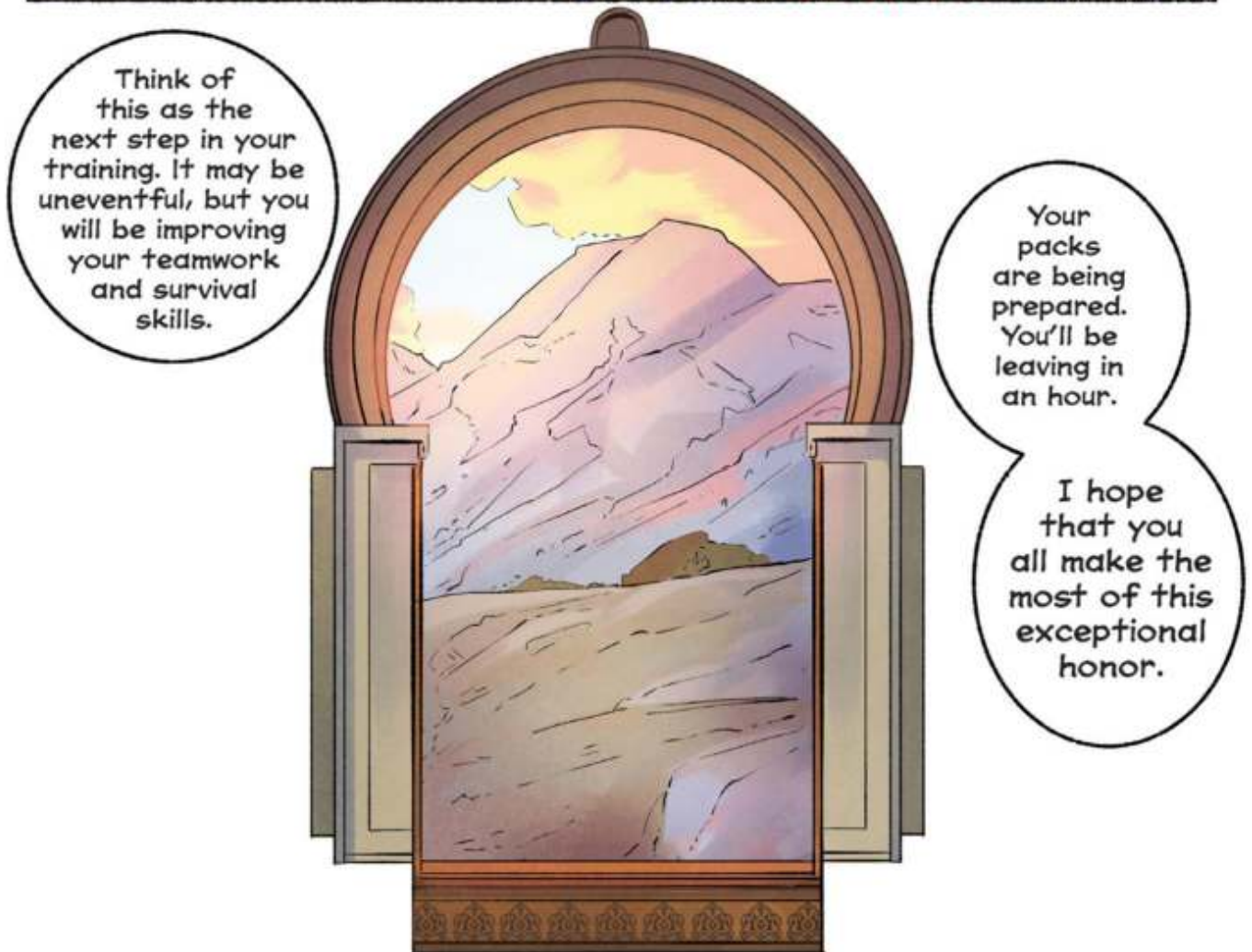


I've still got  
that secret under  
wraps.  
Ha.

















# CHAPTER 9





All right, team.

Let's split into the designated groups.

We'll meet back at sunset by the largest tree, indicated here on the map.







There was a Knight once named Tariq.







No,  
no, no.

*I  
mean  
it!*





This one honestly has a beautiful voice.

Stop making fun of me!

He took lessons.



Sing us something!



Yeah, I couldn't...



Come on, noble boy, sing us something.



Ah.

Ok.



*Because  
Bayt-Sajji is great  
Because my Empire  
is great*

*~  
She was  
able to revive  
the strength in  
our hearts*

*She erased  
in a moment  
She erased  
in a moment*

*~  
The feelings  
of defeat  
And she sowed  
willpower into the  
battlefield*

*Because  
she is beautiful  
Because she is  
beautiful*

*~  
We were  
able to do  
that which was  
impossible  
You told your  
soldiers*

*Those  
who spill  
their blood for  
me are my  
children*

THUMP  
THUMP







*And I  
will say,  
my mother,  
my country*

*You have  
my love and  
my heart*



*I swear  
by the  
rivers  
and the  
stones*

~

*I swear by  
every grain  
of sand in  
the desert*



And I will say,  
my mother,  
my country

~  
You have  
my love and  
my heart

I swear by  
the rivers and  
the stones

~  
I swear by  
every grain  
of sand in  
the desert

I swear  
that I will  
fight for  
you

~  
As long  
as I am on the  
face of this  
earth







Amazing!

You've always had a beautiful voice, Basem



Thank you. My grandfather taught me that song.

RUSTLE  
RUSTLE



Do you also play the oud?

Yes, I've been playing for years.



You should play for us!

Haha, I don't think we have an oud back at base.





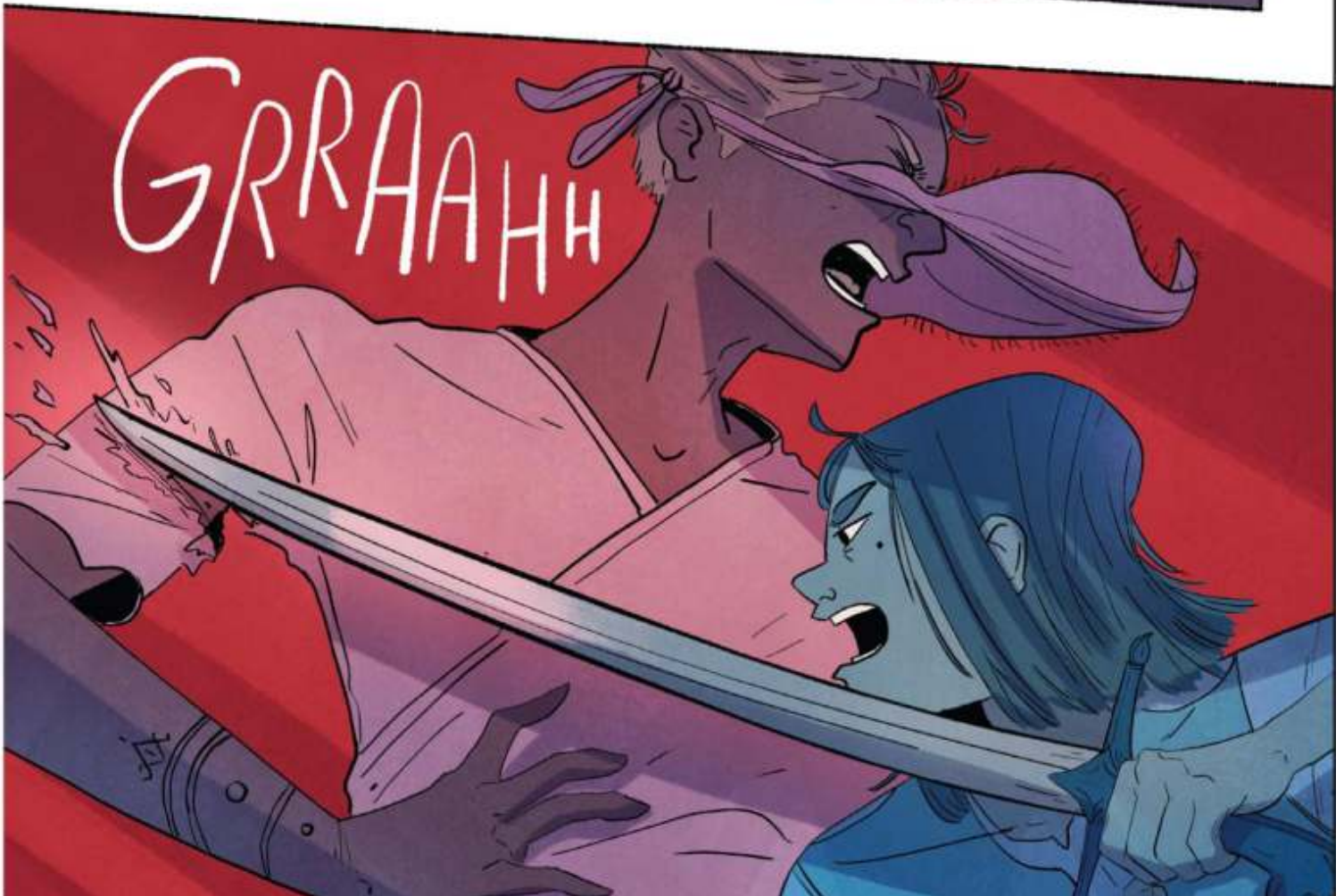
















**RETREAT!**













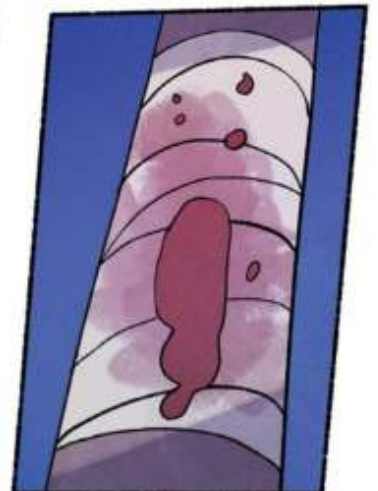


H-Husni?

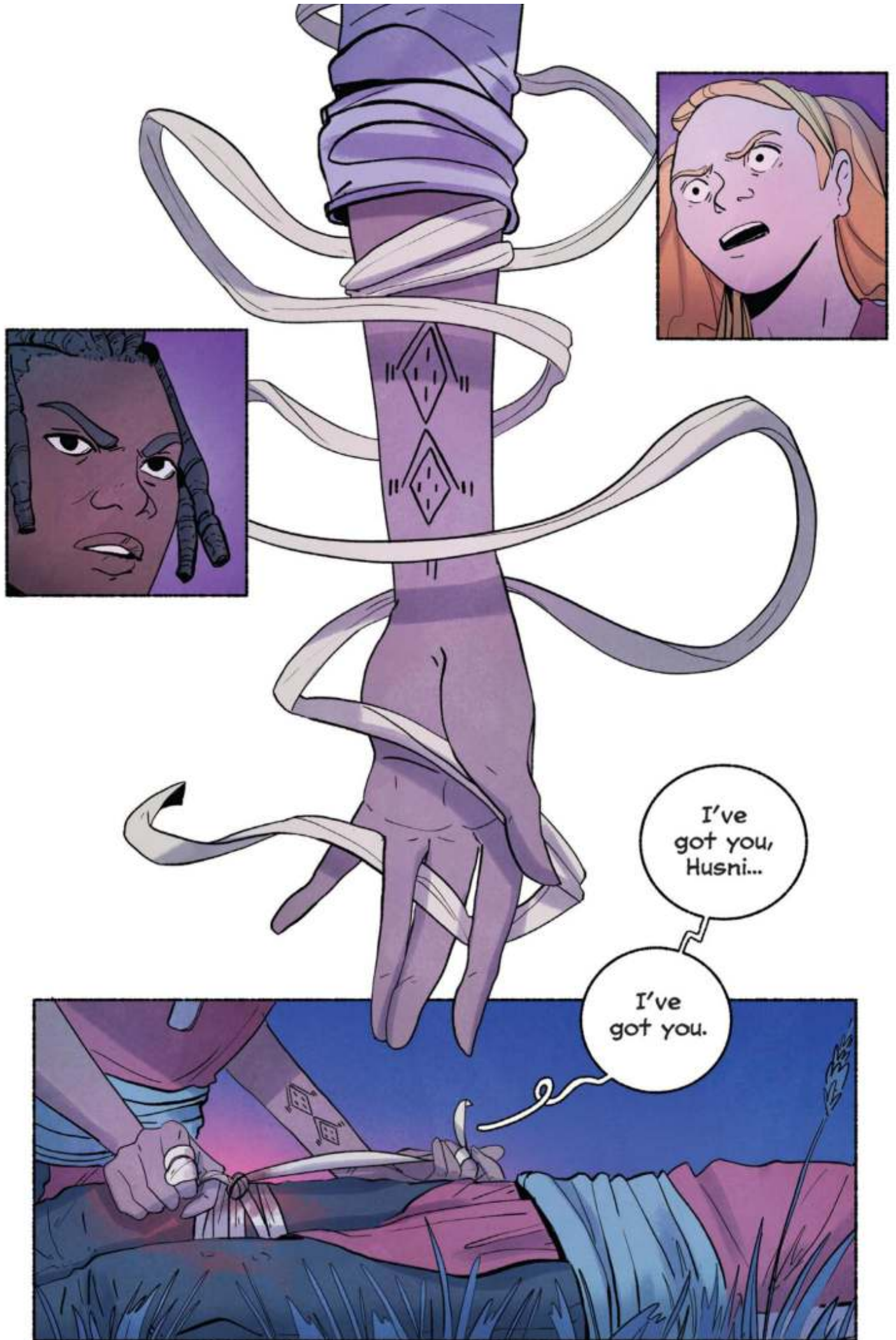
















I've  
got  
you.



I've  
got  
you.



I've  
got  
you.









# CHAPTER 10

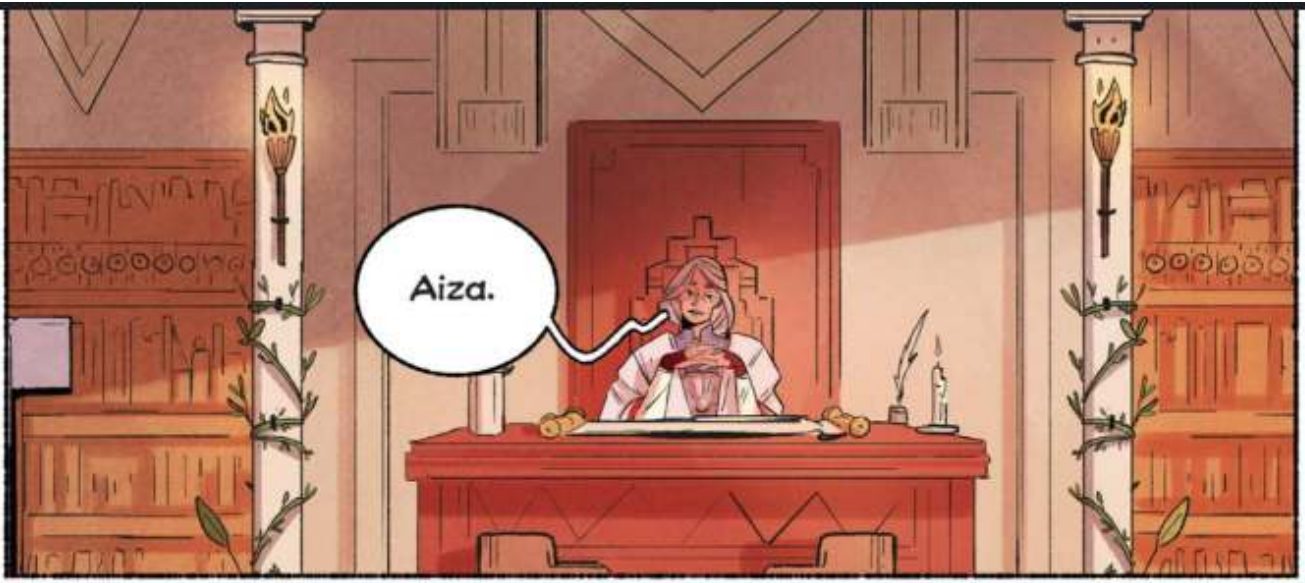












Aiza.



So.  
You're Ornu.



Yes,  
General.



And you  
were hiding  
it from  
everyone,  
including  
us.



Yes,  
General.



Now,  
being an  
Ornu is no  
crime.



However,  
taking such  
great lengths  
to hide it...

Well,  
it does  
make one  
wonder.

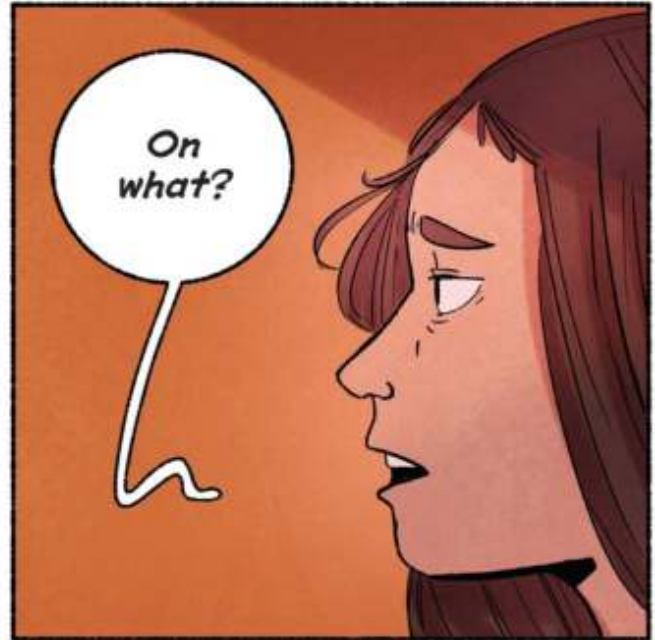


Why  
did you  
do it?





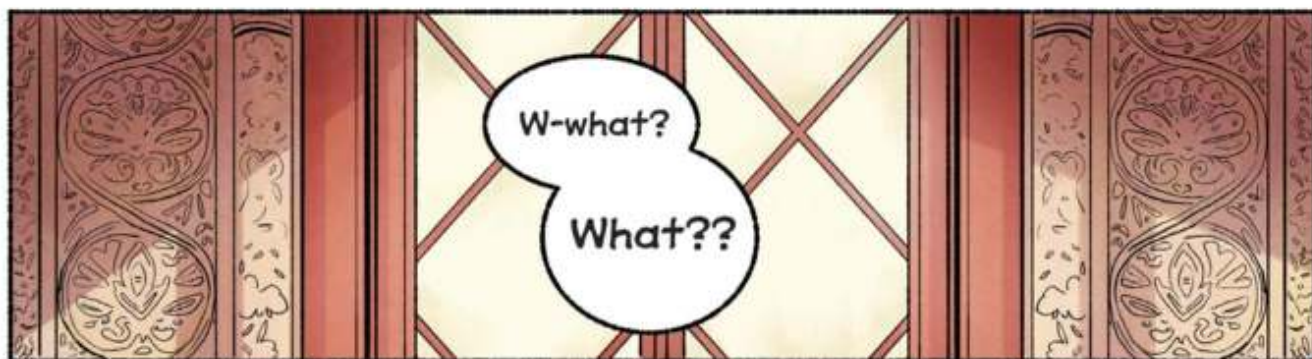








On making Squire.



W-what?  
What??



You acted like a true hero.  
You saved your fellow soldier.  
From what I hear, you fought off the attacking Ornu bravely.

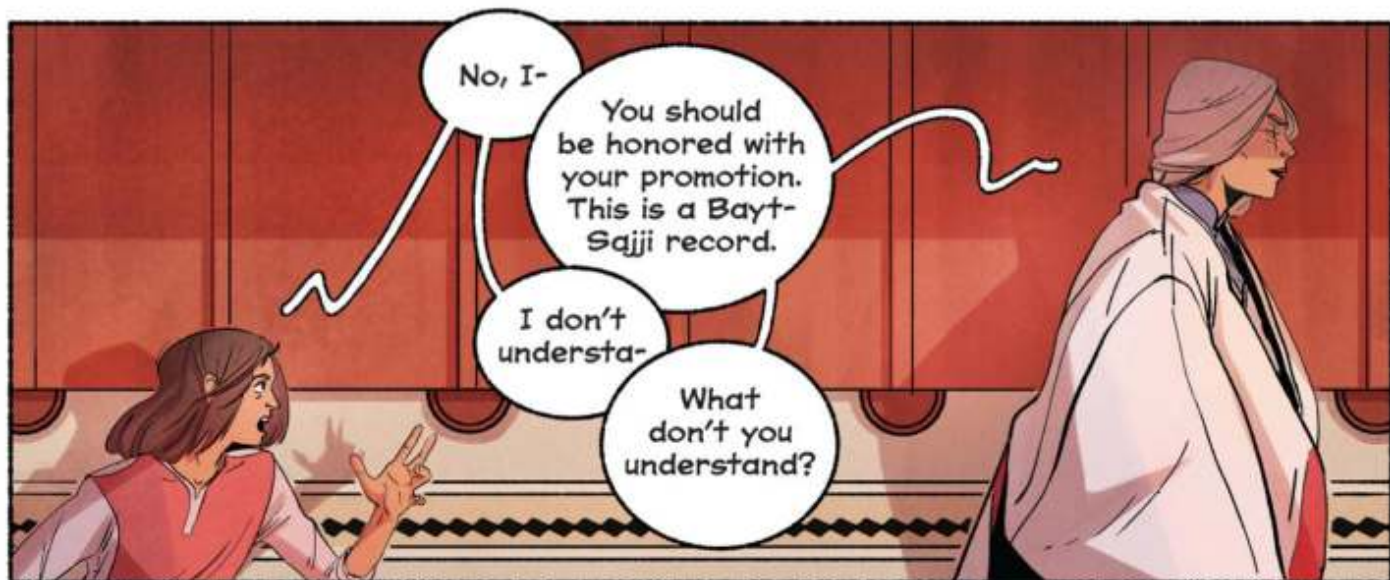


That's not...*the others* did...



The others didn't do as much as you, so they won't be receiving the same honor.





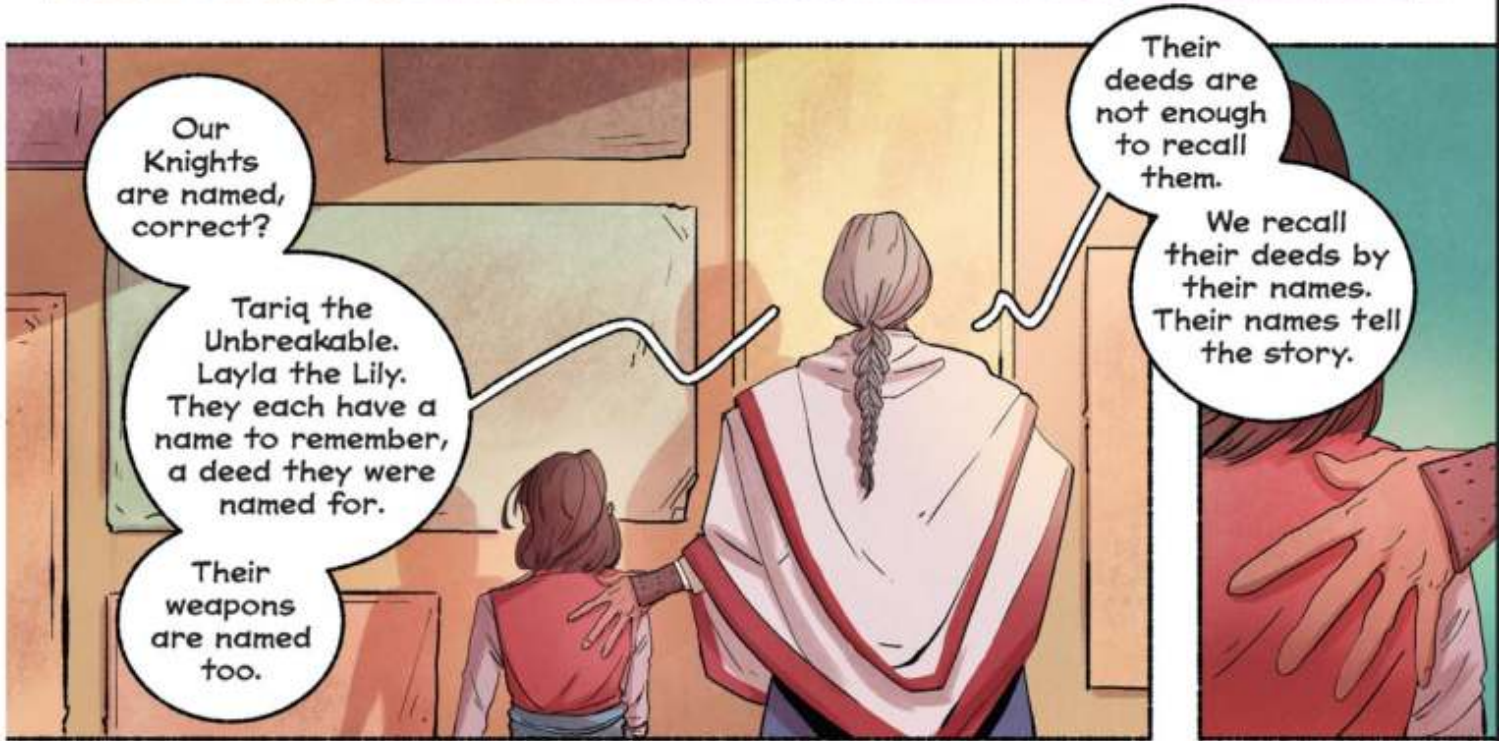




When you tell a history, you tell a story.

History is how we know who we are, what we've done.  
What we have yet to do.

Do you understand?



Our Knights are named, correct?

Tariq the Unbreakable. Layla the Lily. They each have a name to remember, a deed they were named for.

Their weapons are named too.

Their deeds are not enough to recall them.

We recall their deeds by their names. Their names tell the story.



Merit and skill are good in war. To win a war, however, you need more than skill.

You need an idea, an ideology.

History is that, and more.



History is the story you tell about yourself.

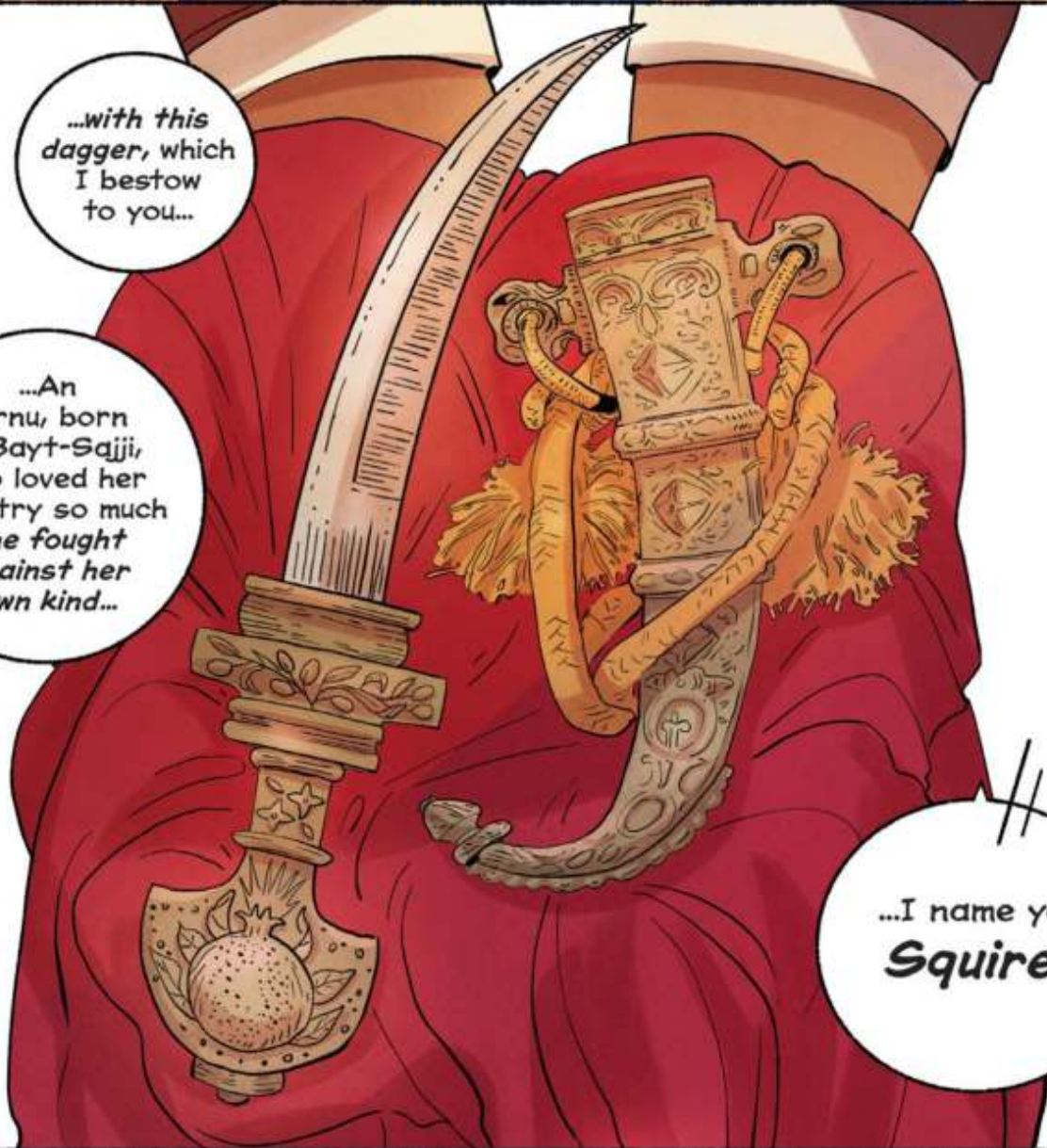




Aiza...

...with this dagger, which I bestow to you...

...An Ornu, born in Bayt-Sajji, who loved her country so much she fought against her own kind...

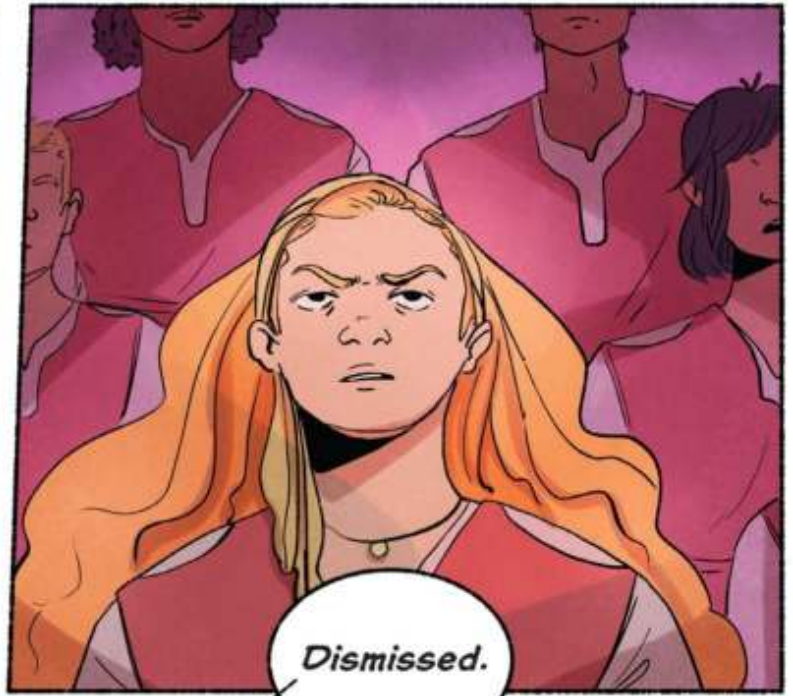


...I name you **Squire!**



You are a wonderful story.





Dismissed.



No, Aiza.

You don't stay with the recruits anymore.



You're a Squire now.

You stay in the proper barracks, with the Knights.





**Bullshit!**  
**Absolute bullshit.**

The rest of us were there. The rest of us fought just as hard, if not harder.



But she, alone, becomes Squire?

Just like that? She didn't earn it.

She didn't speak up for the rest of us.



Well.



What did you expect from an Ornu?



Yeah... Yeah!

She didn't tell anyone she was an Ornu, either.



She hid it from everybody.









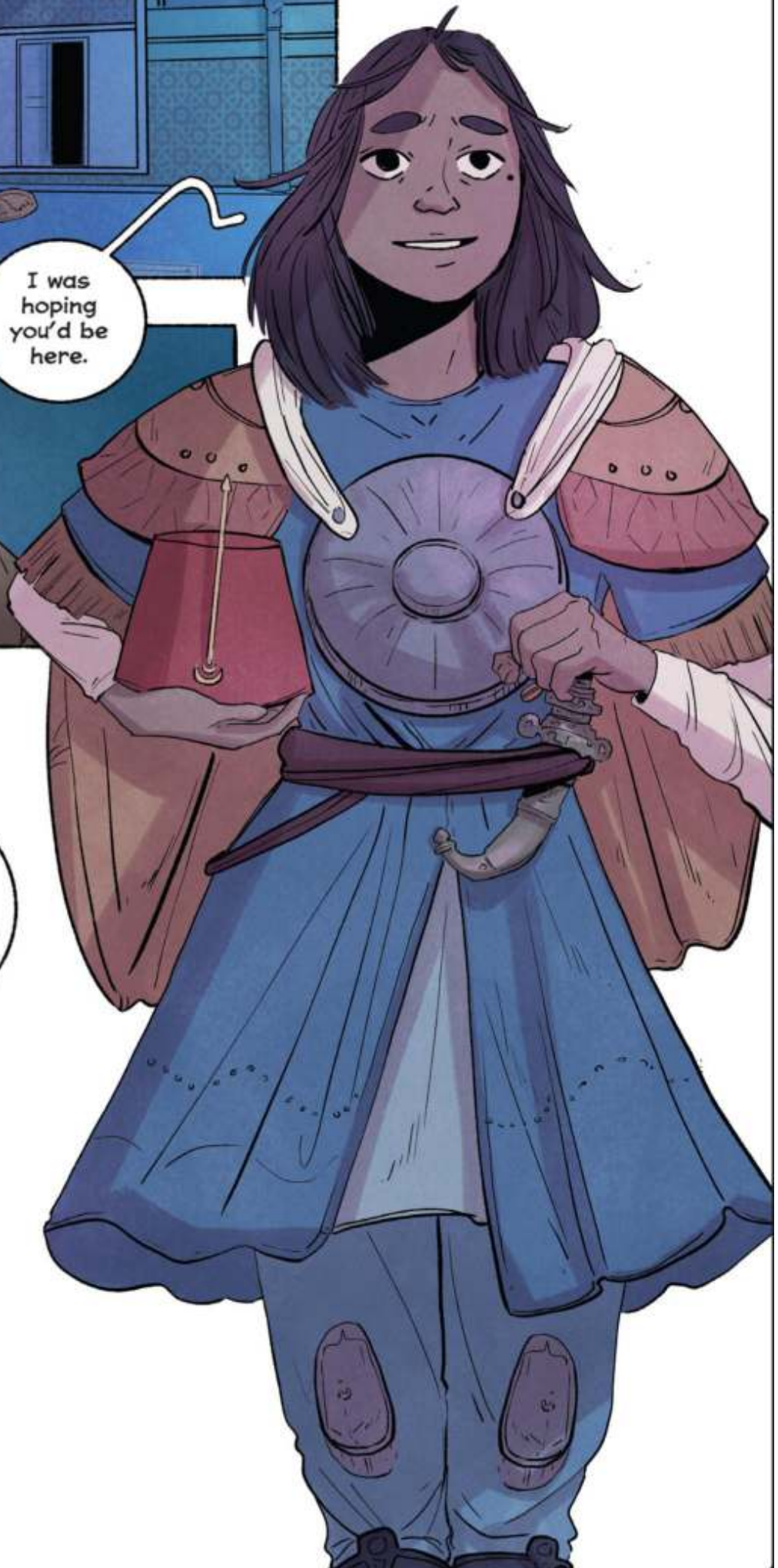




I was hoping you'd be here.



I see you won't need much more training from the likes of me.















Ykhrub baytak.

You stubborn old man!

Bitter because you can't do what I'm about to, because your time has passed.



I came here to tell you.

To tell you I'm joining my first march tomorrow.



I thought this was what it was all for.

This is the reason we were doing this.



Committing violence and teaching others violence. That's all we're good for in the end.

Violence.





Go on.

Go show them what I taught you.





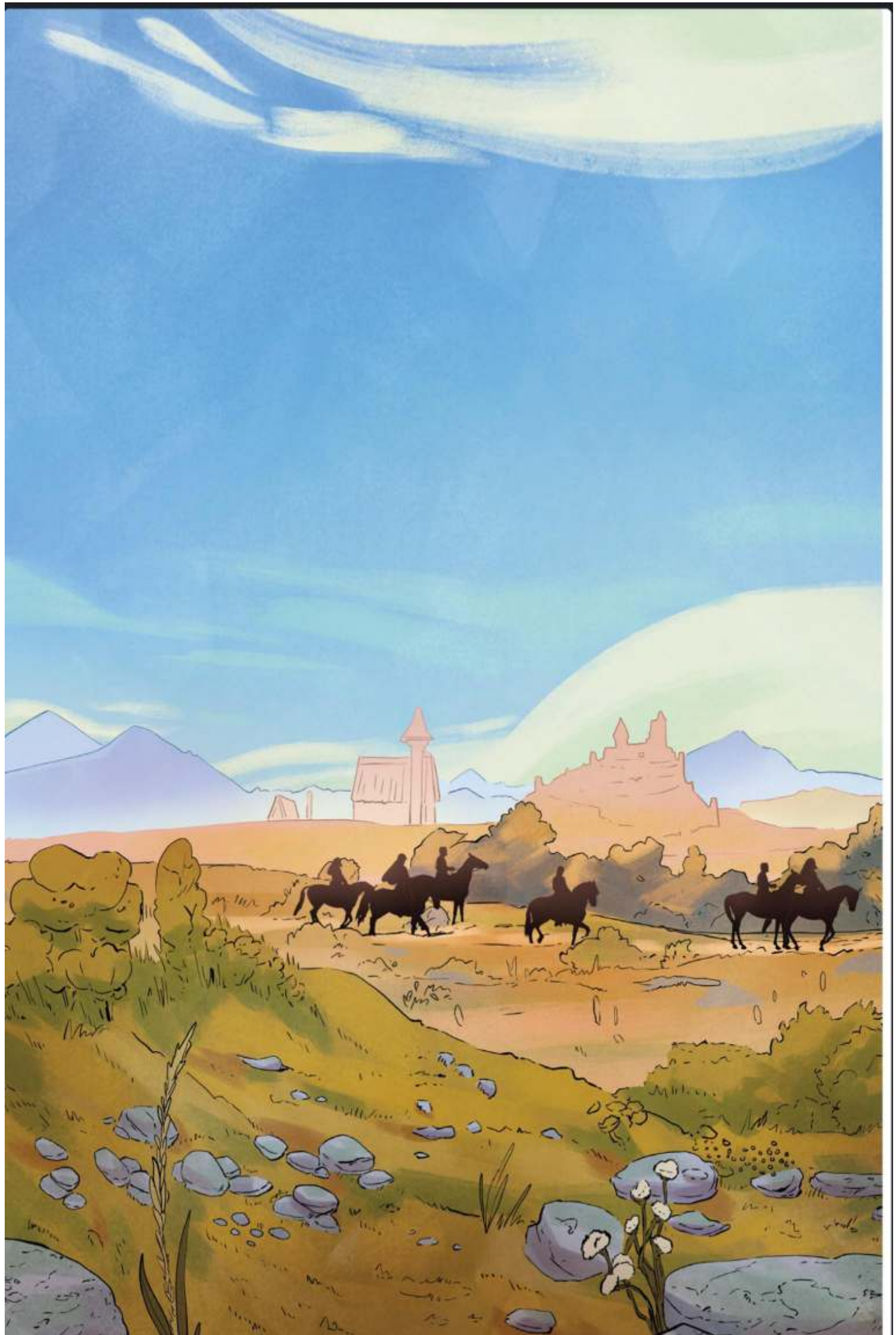






# CHAPTER 11









So how's it feel for Zahra to become your horse officially?

...It's nice. She even handles better now.



First day as Squire.

How are you doing?



Ah.

Fine.



Don't worry.

It's a pretty standard mission.





We're checking on the Ornu village next to camp.

We go every month to speak to the village elders, trade goods, keep an eye on everything.



It is especially important after that recent attack.

We need to see if it came from this village or from another one farther up.



It's fine.

I'm sorry you were part of that.

How's your friend?



I don't know.

























*Inti mithli!  
Ailtik mish  
ib'eedeen min  
houn! Kayf surti  
Squire??*



Wait I  
don't...



*Bahkeelik  
be lughatnah.  
Al-mushkeleh  
akbar mini,  
ifhami al-khatar  
ihna fi.*

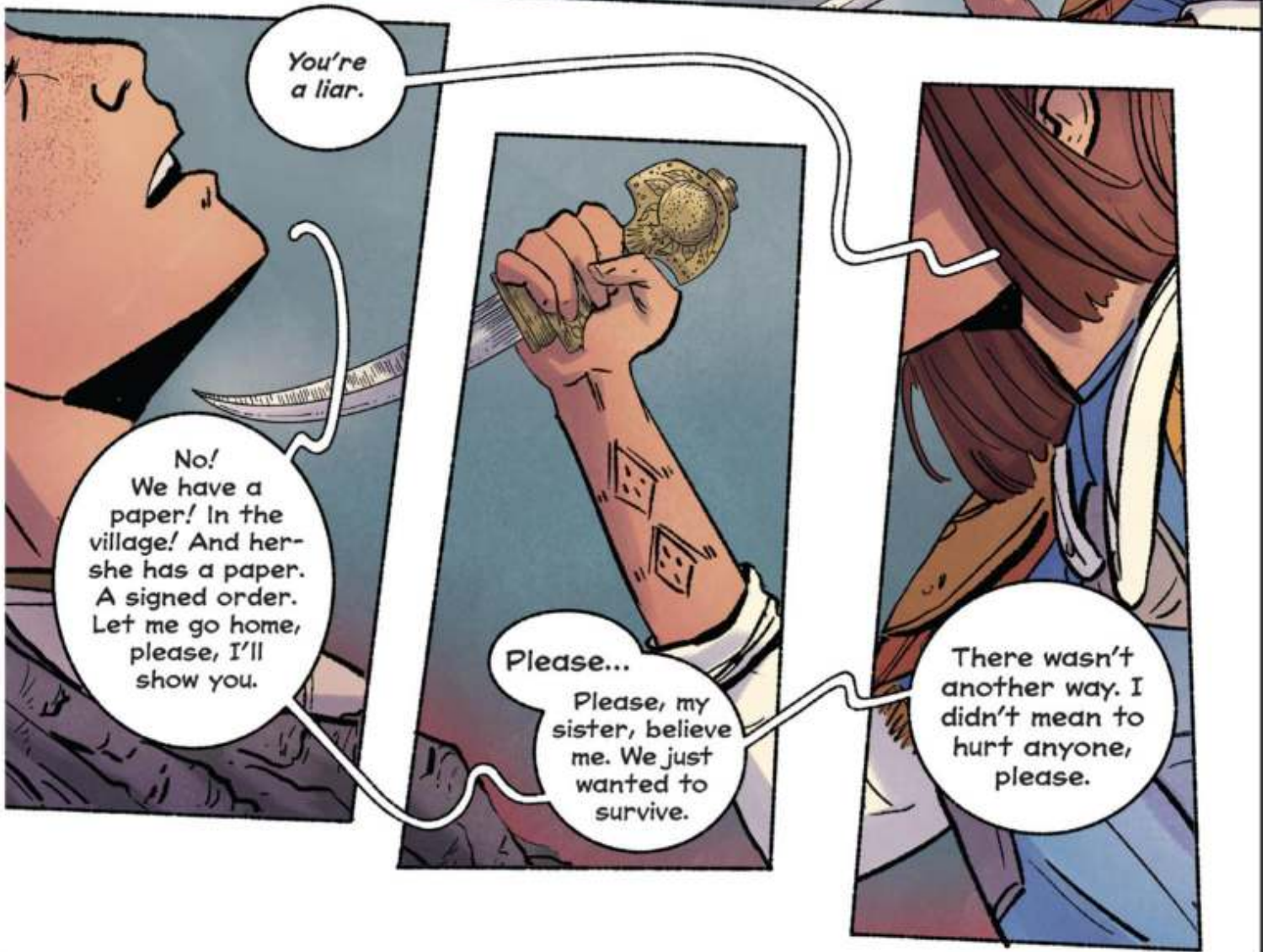


I don't  
speak  
that!



OK! Wait-  
I understand...  
I understand.  
It's okay.









You ruined my life. You hurt my friends.



You took everything away from me.

What's your name?



N-Nazir.



Nazir.



I should kill you.



**I SHOULD KILL YOU!!**





Run into the forest.

Don't go back into the village until we leave.



Don't make me regret this.





Where the *hell* did you go??



I saw one of them.

One of the villagers who attacked us that night.

What?

Did you capture him?



No.

He got away in the forest.

























We can do nothing.

Nothing.



Nothing?

Be thankful, girl. You're on the stronger side of the conflict.

Enjoy your pay, do your duty, and hope you don't wind up on the end of someone's sword before you can retire in prominence.

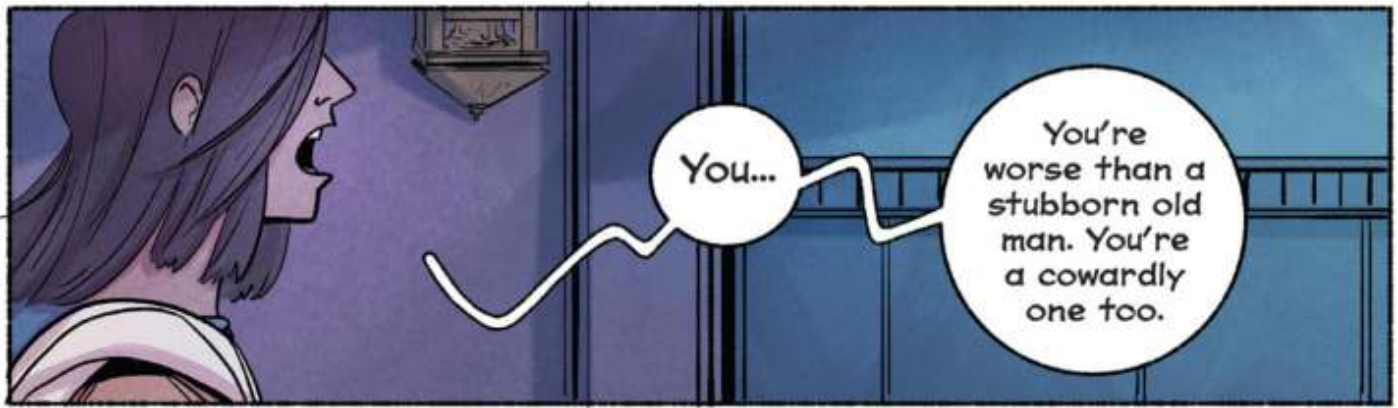


But you just said, about the cycle-



We don't make the wheel, but the cart can take you where you want to go.





You...

You're worse than a stubborn old man. You're a cowardly one too.



I have my own scars!

I've given enough trying to change things. Real change doesn't come from people like us.

Where will it come if no one tries?!



You are struggling against the inevitable. Being part of the army in any way is being part of war.

You benefiting from a prosperous Empire while others suffer for it? That's war, too.

There's no innocence. Trying to fight the machinations of Empire is like trying to fight the air you breathe.

This is bigger than us.





Then who is it for, hm?

If no one takes responsibility, then how does the cart move??



*I'm sorry.*

I should have never gotten involved with you.



I promise you now that this will get easier. You'll be amazed... how quickly you stop noticing.





I won't do it.



I don't want it.



You lied to me.

You all did.

Your silence was a lie.  
The stories left out the part where you hurt innocent people, civilians.

The story left out the part where you trade your people for comfort.







Huh...?



Where...?



Aiza...

Where did you get this?

This is the dagger that was presented to me at my coronation.

This is my Squire dagger.







Hende knows.

She knows everything.



You see...

this was the dagger I presented her at her coronation.



When she was my Squire.









# CHAPTER 12





During the last war, I was a Knight and the drill sergeant. I trained recruits and Squires alike.

It was my greatest pride.

Like you, I wasn't Bayt-Sajjian by race. I had come as a young man. But I had hoped enlisting would take any sense of my foreignness away. It seemed to work, for a time.



Of all those I taught, none of them were like Hende. She was bright and fierce. More determined than anyone.

That is, I suppose, until you.



Having her as my Squire was challenging, in the best way. She was my equal. She valued strength and patriotism.

I... valued her greatly.






A man with a beard and a woman are riding horses through a forest. The man is on the left, wearing a brown tunic and a red sash. The woman is on the right, wearing a blue tunic and a red headscarf. They are both looking towards the right.


Things  
went on,  
golden,  
for years.

Until...this  
one day.

A close-up of a man's face, showing his eyes, nose, and mouth. He has a serious expression and is looking slightly to the right.

It was the  
most ordinary  
of days, until  
it wasn't. A raid,  
simple enough,  
on an enemy  
village.

It wasn't  
until we were  
there that I  
realized...

A village is shown in flames. The sky is filled with thick, dark smoke. In the foreground, a large fire is burning, and a person is standing near it. The buildings are made of wood and are being destroyed.

...this was  
the village  
I was  
born in.





I was asked to...  
question the village  
elders. *My elders.*  
Or they had been.

Once, a  
lifetime ago.



I...could  
not.



You've  
been  
through  
training.

You know  
defying orders  
is grounds  
for punishment,  
or worse,  
treason.



While  
awaiting my trial,  
Hende was furious. She  
could not understand  
why I had denied them,  
after all the horrible  
things we had done in  
the name of war.

In truth, I too  
wondered why  
I had taken so  
long to deny  
them.





When the day of my trial came, Hende had insisted she come with me.

She would testify on my behalf.  
*My Squire.*

When the time of her testimony came, she did not go up to the judge.


She didn't say a word.



She took my arm. My wielding arm.


The arm that I had refused to raise against the village.





After that, she rebuked me in the court, for my weakness, my lack of loyalty. She was not punished.

In fact, she was promoted.



I was given a choice: to become a groundskeeper, as I was fit for little else, or to go back to civilian life.

But what kind of life was it they would send me to? It was no real choice at all.



So you see, Aiza. This dagger represents a message.

She knows we've been training. She wanted to let me know that she knows.









Listen.  
The boy, the  
Ornu boy, said  
there was a paper.  
A signed agreement,  
signed by Hende  
herself.

And how  
do you  
expect to  
get it?



I'm going  
to sneak into  
her office  
and steal  
it.

You have  
no idea how  
absurd that  
idea is-

No,  
listen to  
me!



I get  
the paper.  
You go to the  
Ornu village, you  
get the boy  
I spoke to,  
Nazir.

We tell all  
the recruits.  
Everyone.

We bring her  
down, we keep  
hostilities from  
escalating.

We  
end  
this.

Knights  
are supposed  
to be heroes,  
Doruk.

We do  
this, and that  
is what we are.  
**Heroes.**





Are you with me?



You are a child yet.

This isn't the way the world works, girl.

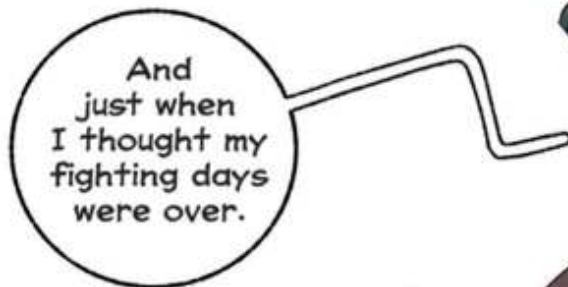


Maybe not.

But the world is only how we make it. How will you make it?



Damn it, girl.



And just when I thought my fighting days were over.





We'll meet at the tent at dawn.



If you don't see me in two hours...



...tell the recruits without me.

Tell Sahar.



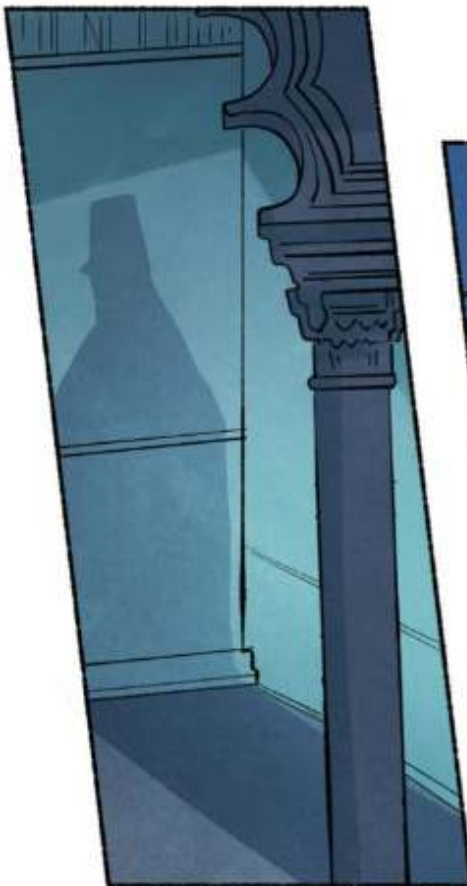
Getting the truth out is the mission.



Not any one person.

Not me.





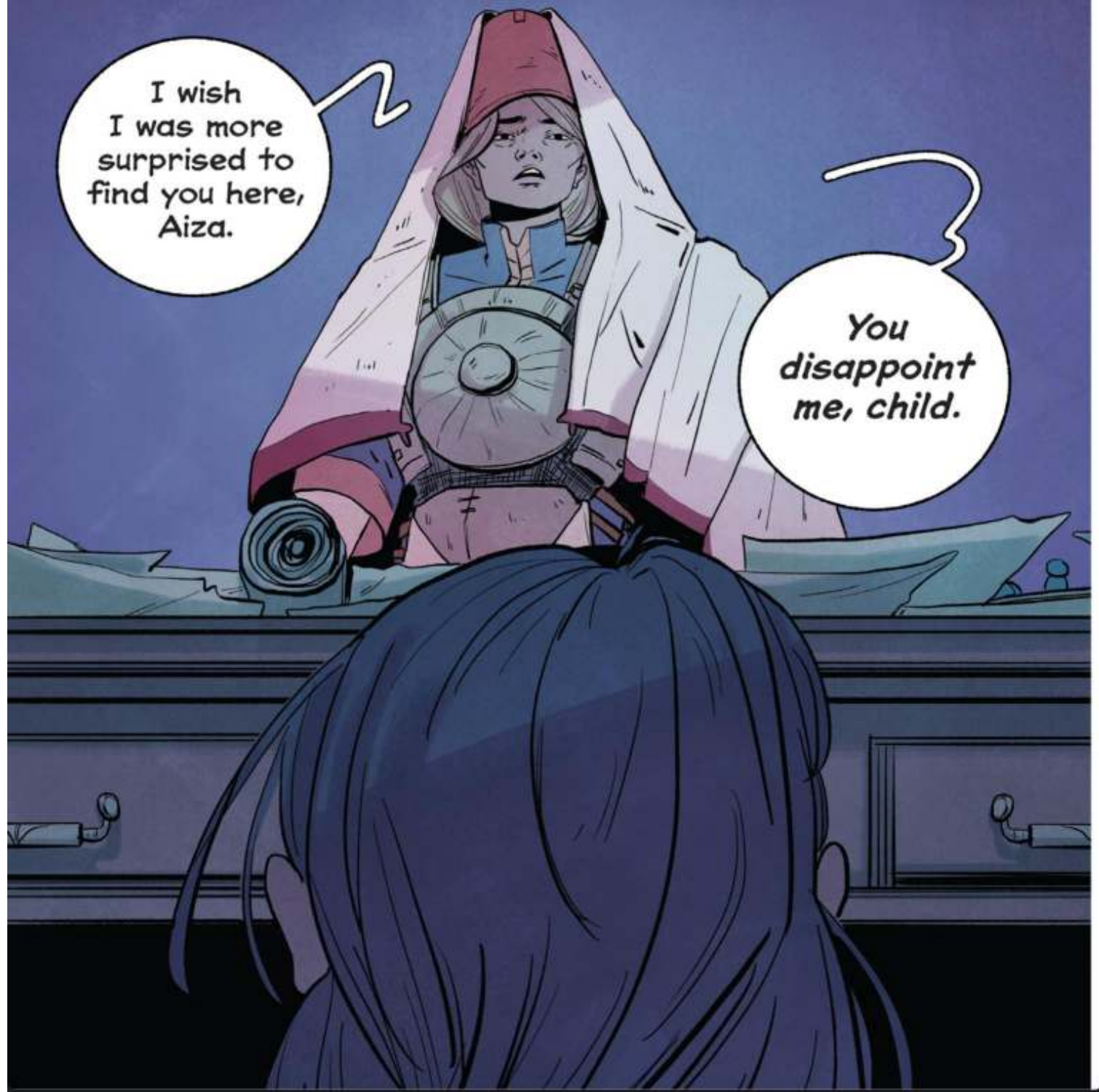




They...  
never  
got my  
letter.



*I  
must have  
forgotten  
to mail  
them.*



*I wish  
I was more  
surprised to  
find you here,  
Aiza.*

*You  
disappoint  
me, child.*





I don't care much about making you proud. I know what you've done.

*What you are trying to do.*

All I do, *all that I am*, is for the betterment and survival of Bayt-Sajji.

If we are not the conquerors, we will soon be conquered. We will be nameless, lost to time, absorbed into someone else.

*I fight for my country.* The point of this army is to fight for my country. If you do not stand with us, you are a threat to my country.





You've taught us many stories.



But I've learned one of my own.



This is for Doruk!





It saddens  
me that you  
don't understand  
your own story,  
Aiza.



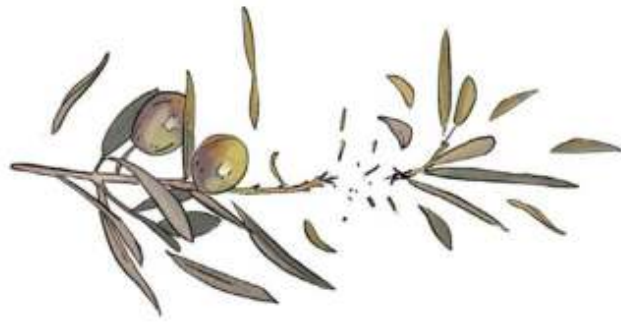
I had  
already  
given you  
your happy  
ending.





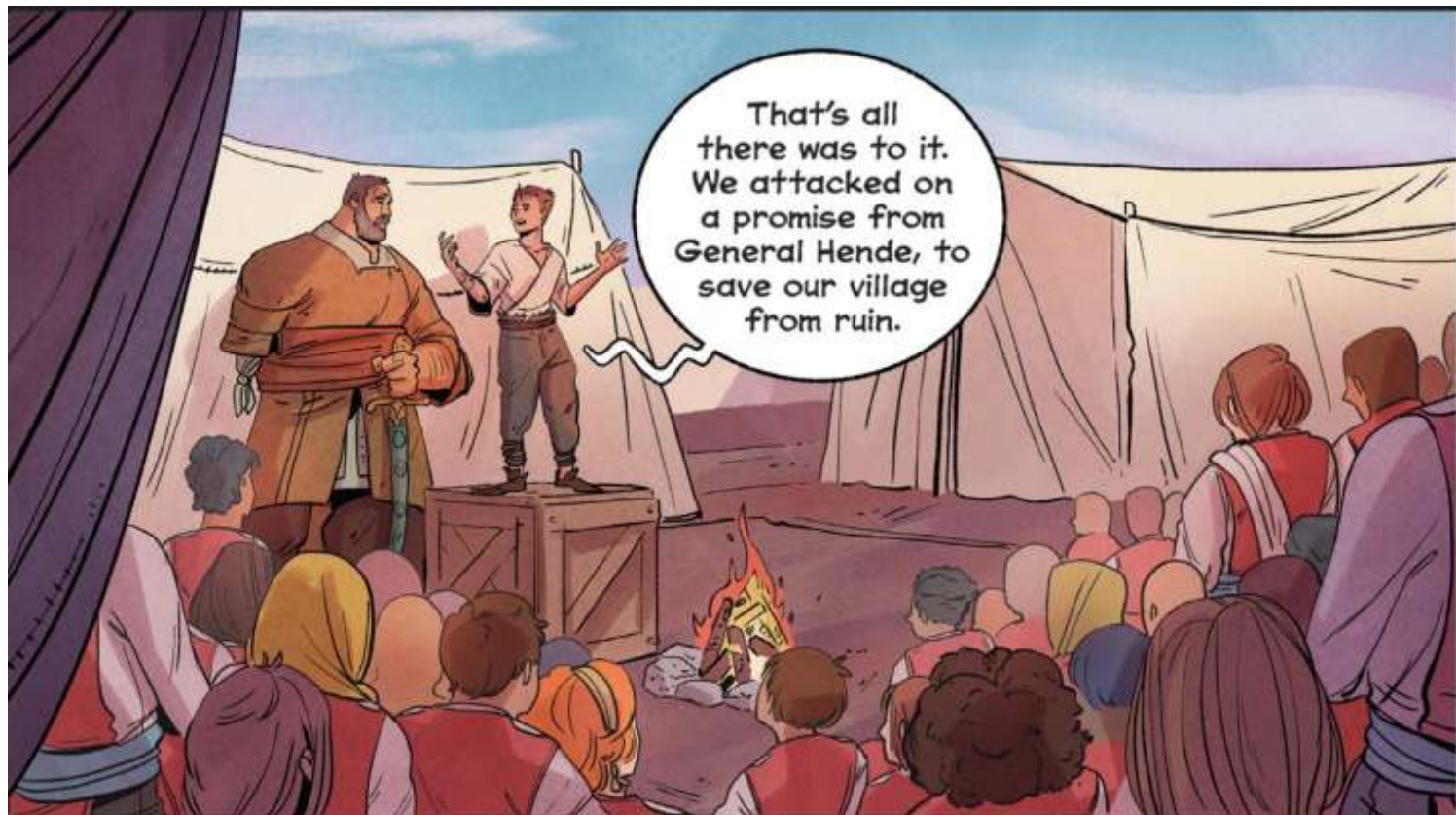






# **CHAPTER 13**









What?

**Bull. Shit.**

You bring the *literal enemy* across the camp lines, you show him the way, and you let him tell us a *bullshit* story about how he almost killed Husni!!



**BULLSHIT.**  
I say we give him the Empire's justice right here!



Don't you dare, boy.



Why would you defend him??  
**Believe him??**

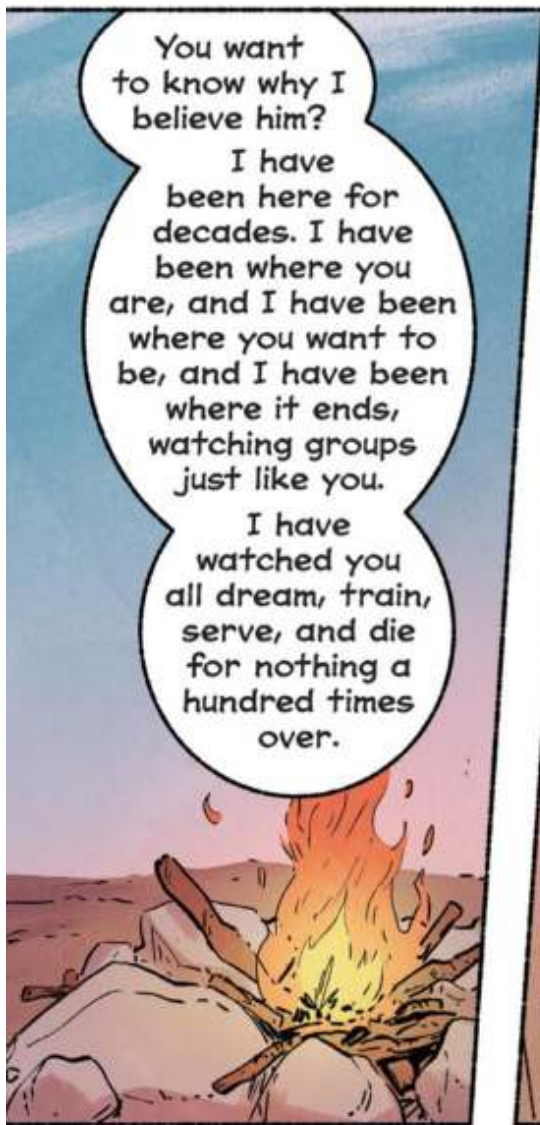
We have a right to defend ourselves. Our enemy will not stop until they have overtaken us.

Only the strong survive. So we must be strong, here.



You sound so much like her.





You want to know why I believe him?

I have been here for decades. I have been where you are, and I have been where you want to be, and I have been where it ends, watching groups just like you.

I have watched you all dream, train, serve, and die for nothing a hundred times over.



Why did you come here? Money or food? Citizenship... or honor?

They dangle the prize of status, mobility, a better life. They use your bodies and train you and their sweet rewards stay in the future while you toil here, now.



Tell me...

Did they tell you about the front lines? The flyers you've all seen showed a Squire, decorated, and each of you thought that would be you.



Look around you. Look at how many are gone. Most of you will die on a field you've never seen before, surrounded by strangers.

What will all this talk of history and Empire mean to you then? Is your life not worth more than platitudes?





Think for a moment about what you've been promised, and what you have received instead.



They've been lying to you from the beginning.



Why wouldn't they lie now?



**Enough!**





I will not allow you to manipulate us further.

Yes, we've sacrificed. Yes, we've suffered.

But this is what a citizen must do.



What? Are you going to tell me this was all for nothing?

We came this far for nothing??



This is you, trying to cover your mistakes.

You trained Aiza, she turned out to be an Ornu spy.

Now you're bringing this other Ornu in here to break her out.

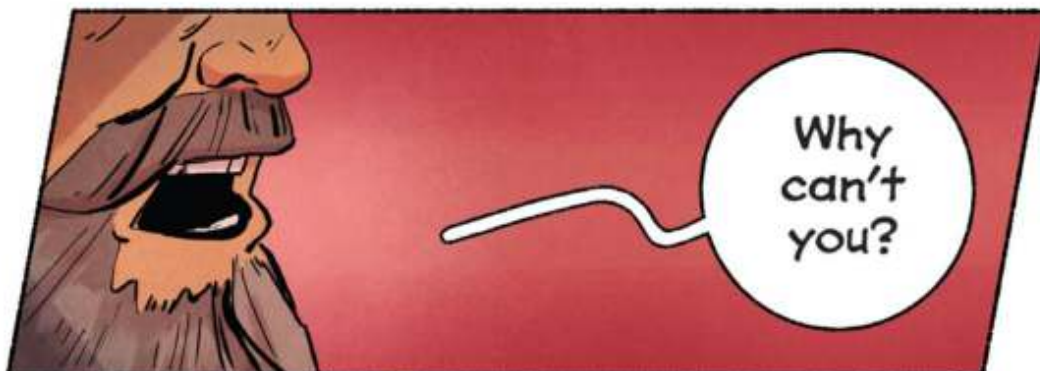


You're either a traitor or a fool.



The General was right to have me keep an eye on you.













So, w-what do we do?

I should have known Hende would have a spy amongst the recruits. Aiza isn't safe.

If she doesn't show up in another hour, we'll have to presume she's been taken by Hende and will be put to trial at dawn.

We must be ready for a fight.



Aren't we all going to be in trouble then, too?



I'll go back to my village and warn them about what might be coming.



That's good.

The rest of us must get armed, quickly.



How are we supposed to get to the armory without arousing suspicion?



Leave that to me.

No one notices the janitor.









I did a bad thing, Husni.

We all do bad things.

No, you don't understand. I b-betrayed her. Aiza, I *didn't*-



I didn't understand. Why she lied, why she hid it from us.

*I was jealous.*

I felt like she left us behind, and after everything we did for her-



I...

I let them spread rumors. I believed those rumors. I didn't trust her.

*Why didn't I trust her?*



*I've had a lot of time to think.*



Not much else to do here but think.

What I thought of them- *the Ornu*. What I learned about them, here, and at home.

I wondered, would I have even spoken to Aiza if I'd known? *Would I have been close to her?*

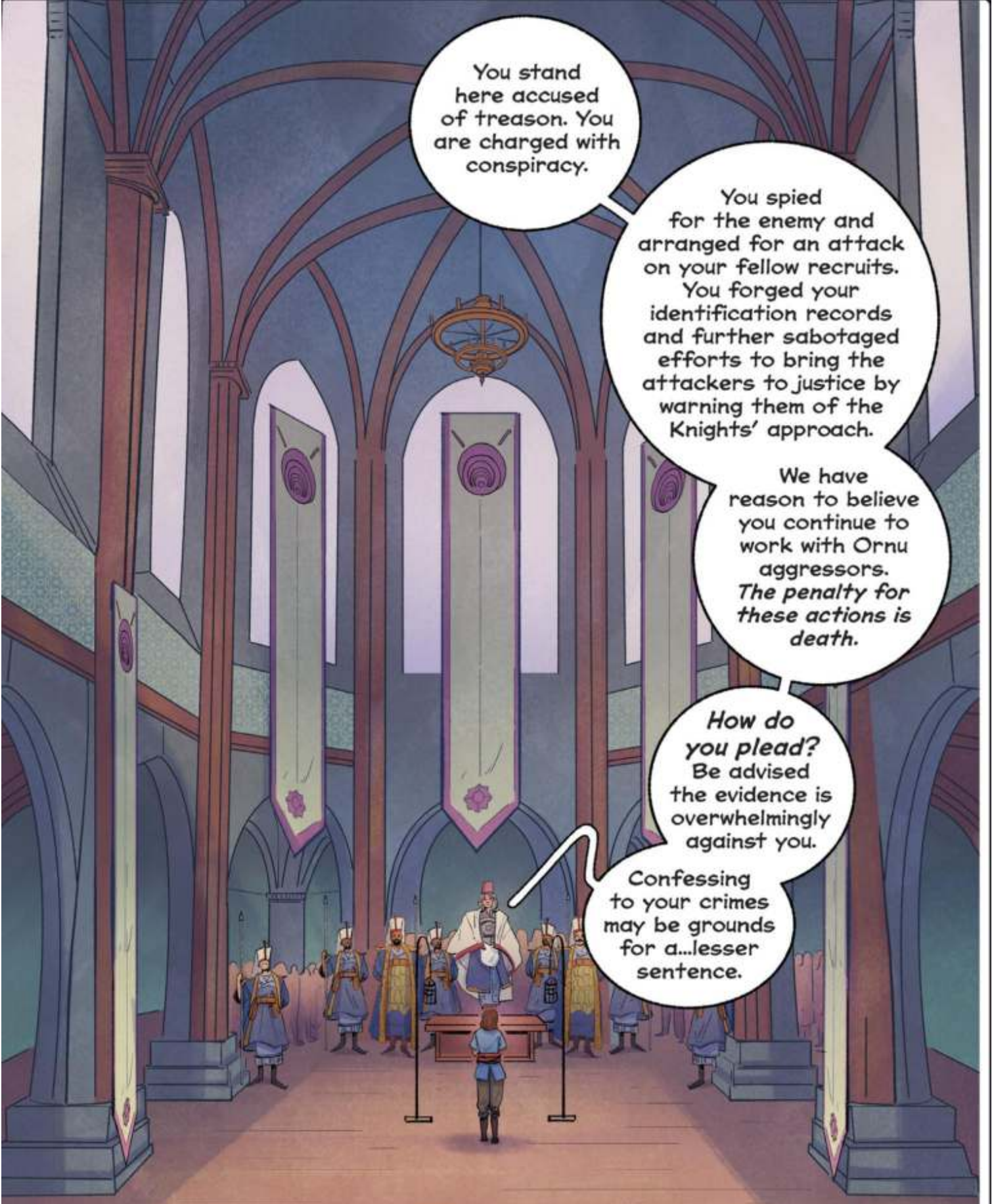













You stand here accused of treason. You are charged with conspiracy.

You spied for the enemy and arranged for an attack on your fellow recruits. You forged your identification records and further sabotaged efforts to bring the attackers to justice by warning them of the Knights' approach.

We have reason to believe you continue to work with Ornu aggressors. *The penalty for these actions is death.*

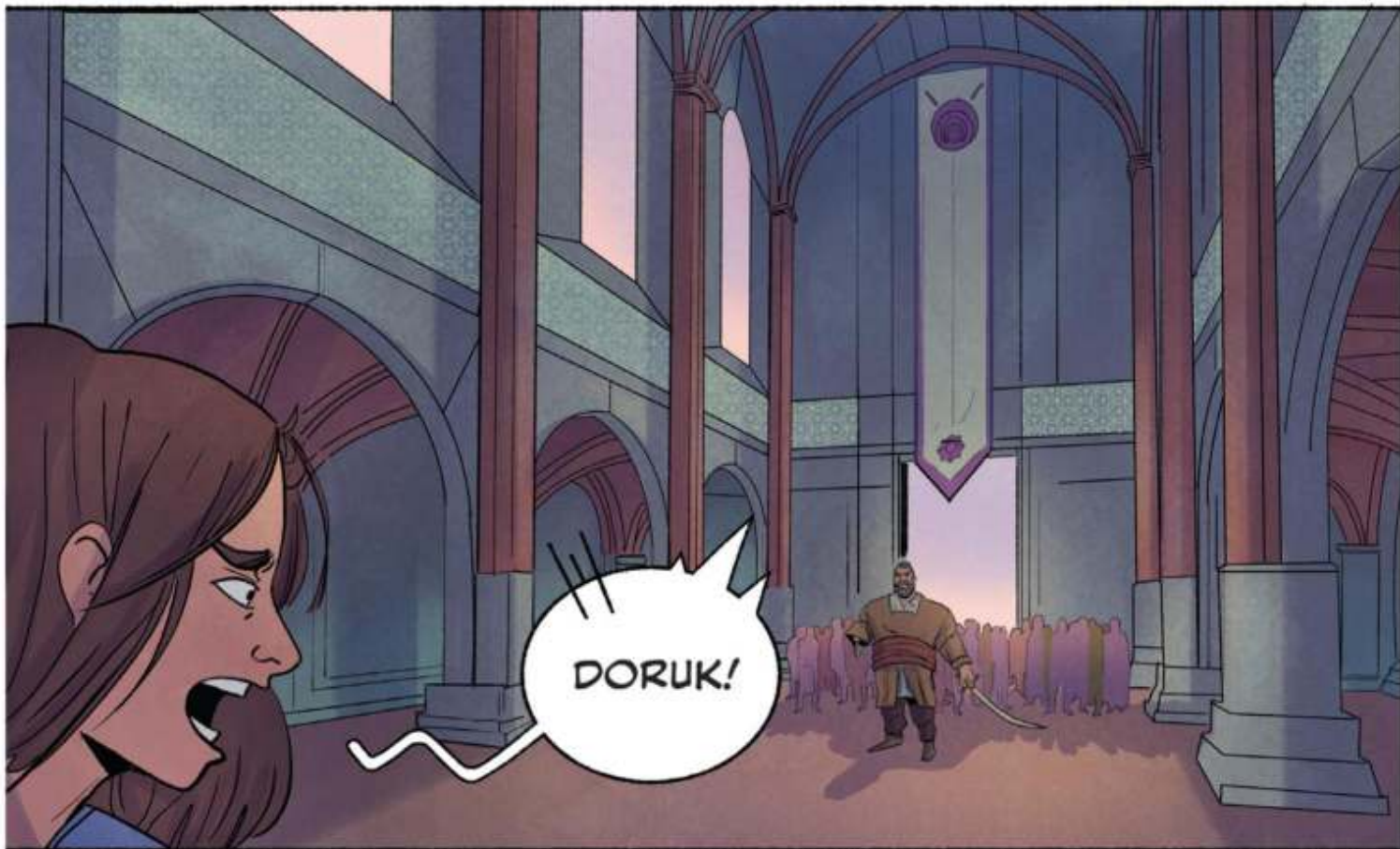
*How do you plead?*  
Be advised the evidence is overwhelmingly against you.

Confessing to your crimes may be grounds for a...lesser sentence.



I am innocent.









Stand down.

This is an obstruction of justice.



There is no justice here. *Not with you.*



Basem, on which arm do the Ornu traditionally tattoo their young?

The right, my General.



The right arm.

The arm our janitor here is missing.



I suppose it's no surprise one Ornu would vouch for another.





It seems corruption and rot runs deep in our midst.

It's time to cut it out.



Surrender yourself to the courts, Doruk, and you will be given the same option for mercy as your compatriot here.

There's no need for you to throw your life away for the second time.

The rest of you will also be pardoned.



You've disarmed me once. It will not happen again.

Or have you forgotten? I taught you everything you know.













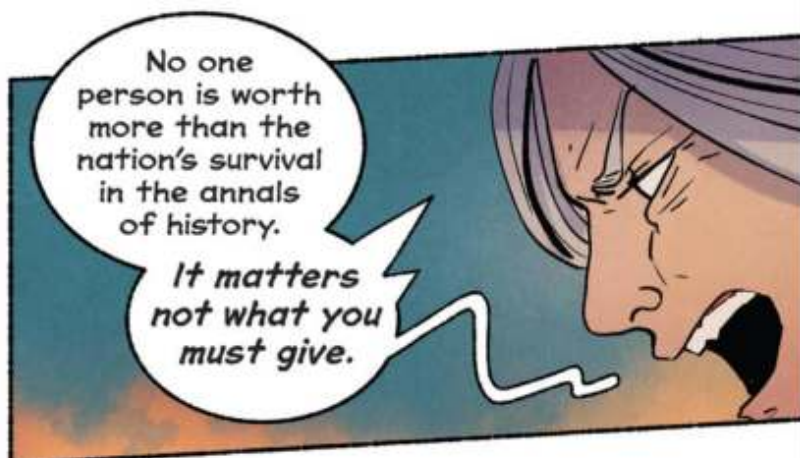




























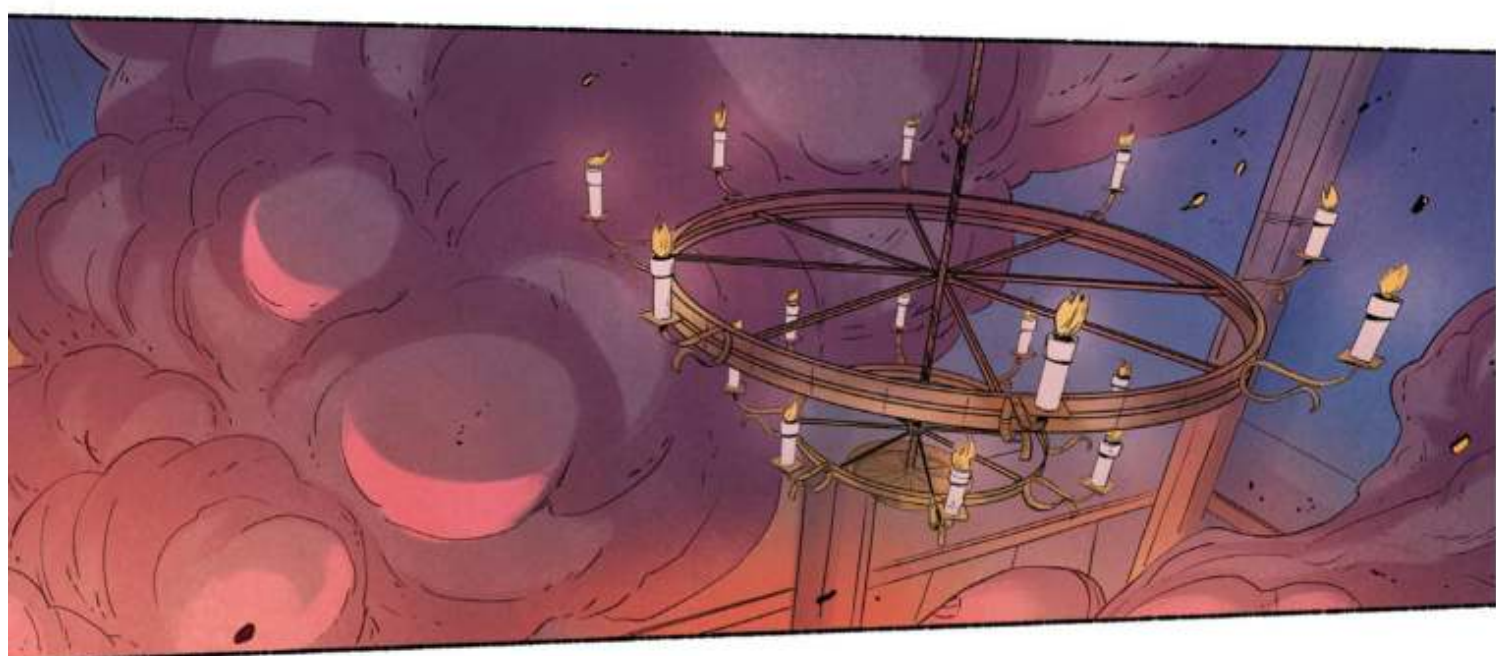




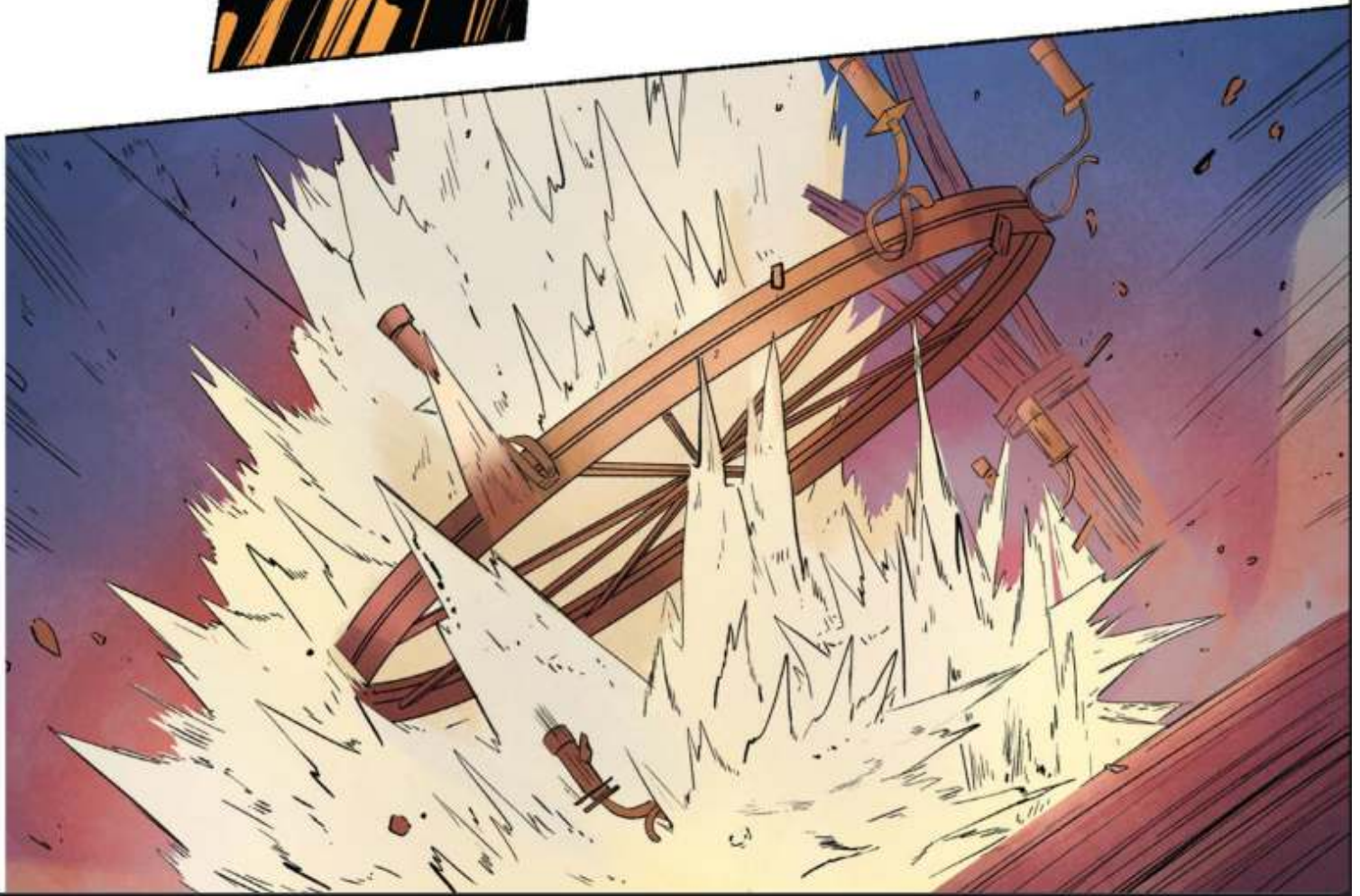
























Don't...  
you walk  
away...

Face  
me!



You...  
coward!



You...

...did not  
defeat...  
me...!

I know.





Is it over?



This part is.

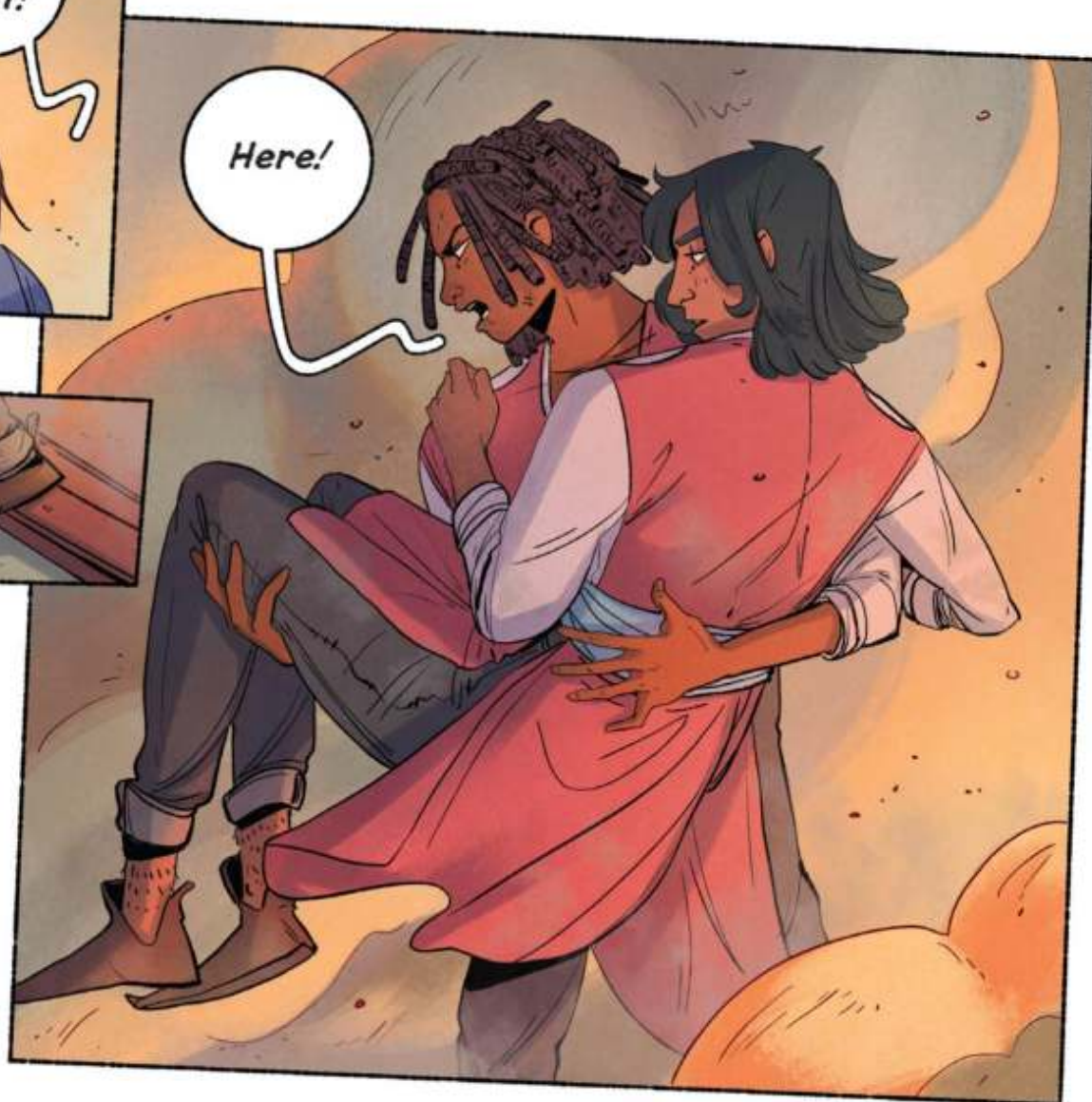


Where's Husni?

I thought Doruk pulled him out??

I didn't see him.

















# **CHAPTER 14**





Zakeer and Safa have left with the remaining Knights. He's going to the capital, and to the Emir.

I told him what Hende had done. I'm not sure if the Emir will hear, though.



What will you do now?





There's only really one thing to do.



I have to leave. I can't do this.

*Be part of this.*

I turned my back on what the Knights really were when I let Nazir go-



When you let him live.



You taught me that.

No. I didn't.





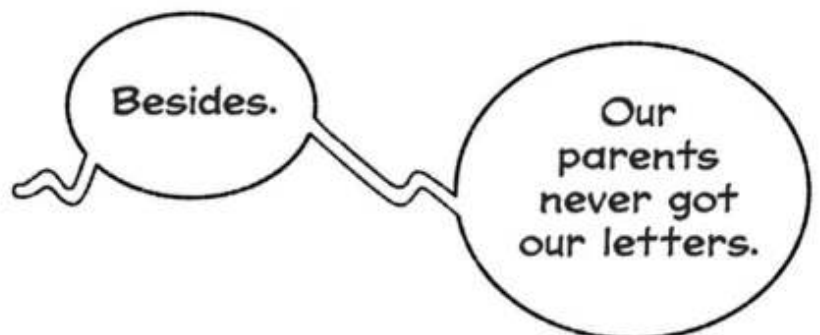
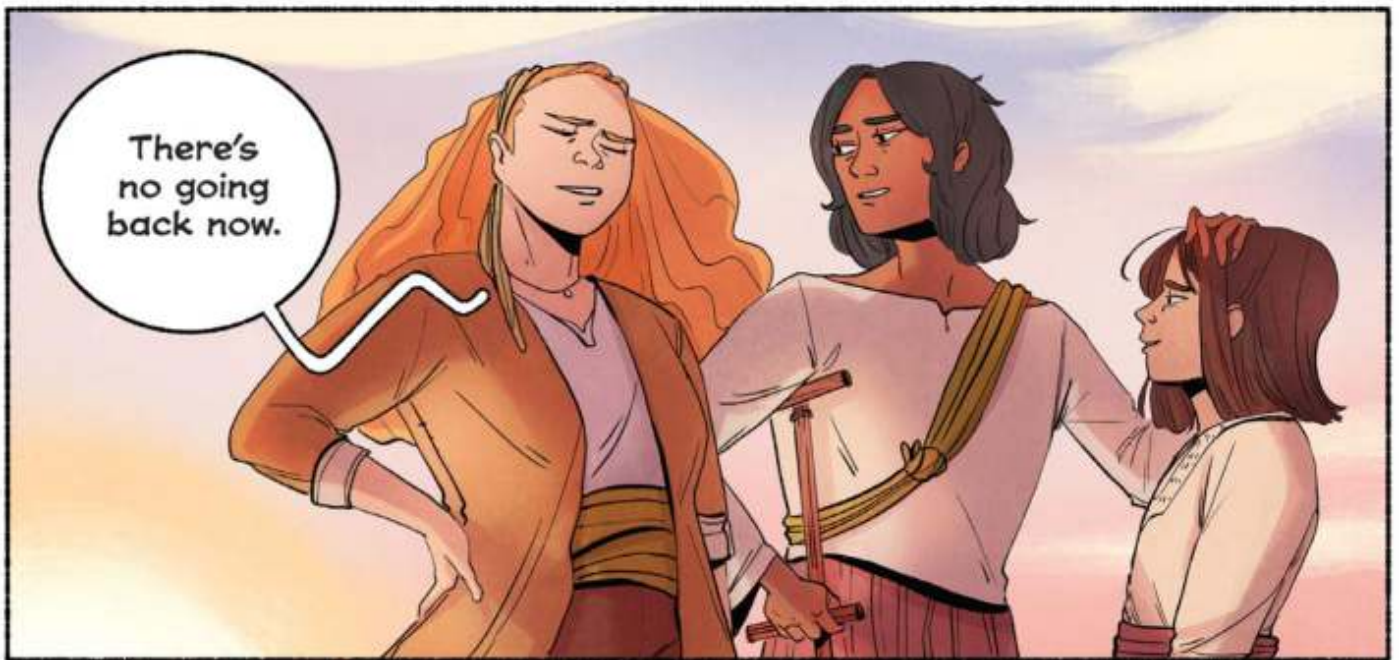




















There were no heroes here.



We were chewed up and spit out and almost became part of something terrible.



But we're not the first, and we probably won't be the last.



So I guess all there is, is to keep looking for where the heroes are.

And when we find them? We'll figure out how to truly help.





I said, no one is going anywhere!



I will not be ignored!



You need to learn when the fighting is done, son.









I truly doubt this will be the last time I hear about you, Aiza.

I hope it is the last time. I hope I never hear my name in a song.

If all goes well, none of you will ever hear about me again.



BWUHAH  
AHAHA

Smart girl.



Look at us. **Defectors.** The top recruits.

I think "top recruits" is a little bit generous.

Wasn't it Aiza who said deserters were losers and quitters?













**ABOUT  
SQUIRE**





# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It took a village to make this book. A literal village. I spent summers in my father's hometown of Kafr Abel, Jordan. I'd packed as many fantasy books, comics, and sketchbooks as Heathrow Airport's weight limit would allow.

It was in the shade of olive and fig trees that my mind left to Hogwarts, joined the Knights of the Round Table, and devoured volumes of manga. *Squire* is all the themes I love, in a setting I see myself in. This book is a whole lotta immigrant kid feelings.

I knew Nadia was my partner in this because we quickly found out we had this same stuttered, hyphenated experience growing up Arab-American. We shared the same nerdy connection that started in English, ended in Arabic, and still included a *Fullmetal Alchemist* reference. I just wanted to draw girls with swords, but with Nadia we were able to pull out Aiza's story from each other.

I must thank my editor Andrew Eliopoulos, who called me up three years ago and asked me if I wanted to make a book, and I replied "I dunno that sounds like a lot of work" (I was right); and Alexandra Cooper, who pulled *Squire* across the finish line. I owe my everything to my agent, Charlie Olsen, who has helped me navigate the wild waters of publishing this whole time.

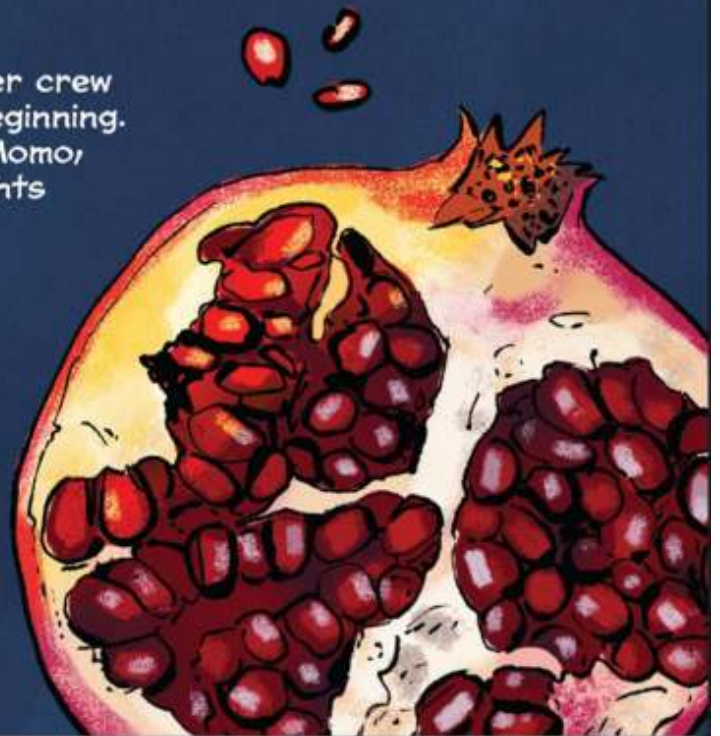
Endless love to my family, who would stop the car for every single reference photo I needed in Jordan and Turkey, paid off every library fee I racked up as a kid, and continues supporting this weird art thing I do.

الى ماما وبابا:  
لا اجد كلمات كافيه تعبر عن جبي وشكري لكم،  
على ما قدمتم لي من الدعم والدعاء.

All my love to boss man Thariq, Hisham (Squirefan23), Guru, and the whole Tilter crew who have supported me from the very beginning. Thank you to my first reader, my cat Momo, for keeping me company during late nights of work and always reminding me to take breaks.

Thank you for reading!  
- Sara Alfageeh

ساره الفقيه





# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I've held the themes of what *Squire* would become in my heart for a long time, as long as I've wanted to write. I believed I would have to wait and work for years before making the book of my dreams. But here we are, at the end of the book, a tangible manifestation of a nerdy childhood, a life's dream, and the support of countless people. Comics gave me community, and I'm thankful for that.

Firstly, I want to thank Sara for doing this with me. This book was created between hours long talk sessions on the phone, going to dinner and plotting directly on the tablecloth instead of eating, and lots of anime fight scene reference hunting. Out of all that, out of my own messy diaspora feelings about growing up where I did, when I did, and out of our friendship, I can say my debut book is, unflinchingly, exactly what I've always dreamed of doing.

I would like to thank my partner, Yuriy, for providing tireless emotional support and whose unwavering faith in me and my voice keeps me afloat on difficult days. I thank my cats, Lilith and Dash, for being wretched little monsters who are excellent at shedding and giving kisses.

I thank our editor, Andrew Eliopoulos, and our agent, Charlie Olsen, for holding my hand through this entire experience. I thank every friend kind enough to read drafts and generally listen to me yammer about story. I thank Pantelis for his help in historical research. Thank you Tanoreen in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, as *Squire* was basically written fueled on your musakhan.

And finally, I thank my dad, Raja, and my mom, Vida, for their support and encouragement as I embarked on this journey even when they weren't really sure what I was doing. You taught me to work hard and to speak up for the things I want and believe in, as in the words of my dad: Squeaky wheels get the oil.

All my gratitude,  
Nadia Shammās

ناديا شاماس

دُشكر جَدِّي الحَبِيبِ فَرِيالَ لِأَنَّهَا  
كَانَتْ أَلْمُحِبَّةَ أَلْأُولَى بِي طَوَالَ  
هَذِهِ أَلْسِنِينَ وَلِأَنَّهَا نَحَلَتْ  
دَائِبَاءَ عَلَيَّ أَنْ لَا أُنْسِيَ جَدُّورِي  
أَنْتَ كُنْتَ أَلدَّفَاعَ أَلذِي يَجْعَلُنِي  
أَسْتَنْظَ بُوْطُنِي وَتَرَاثِي فِي قَلْبِي





**Sara:**

When I first came up with *Squire*, it was for a homework assignment in my third year of art school.

I came up with a high-fantasy adventure of a young orc named Flea.



**Sara:**

I always had a fondness for young, scrappy girls with swords. Much of that same energy transferred to Aiza.

Flea's story was about traveling the land with a disgraced one-armed knight, hiding her identity as they signed up for tourneys.

Flea stayed behind in the sketchbook, as I toned down the magic and fantastical elements of *Squire*, and wanted to age up our main protagonist into more of a teenager.

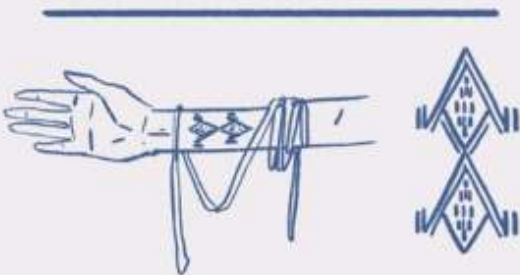






**Sara:**

Aiza was meant to look like the runt of the litter next to all the others in training. I wanted her to be very expressive in her body language.



The boot camp uniform was tricky. It had to be practical and look good on many different body types. I took a lot of references from visual archives from Turkey and Syria in particular.

The tattoo was one of the first details I chose, inspired by Bedouin and Berber traditions. My family is Jordanian and these geometric tattoos are part of the Bedouin culture, especially for women. My great aunts had similar designs tattooed on their chins and cheeks.





**Sara:**

Doruk changed the least, from when I first came up with *Squire* until the final page years later.

He and Aiza were drawn as an unlikely pair. Designed as total opposites and yet they are the ones who understand each other best.

I originally wanted him to carry a giant shield, but now my drawing hand is thankful that I scrapped that idea.

So grumpy. So beefy.







**Sara:**

General Hende's original name was Captain Aiza, but I liked the name so much I swapped it out for our protagonist. Her design changed from fantastical to more historically accurate. The armor is Ottoman, the spear more realistic than the axe, the cape for drama of course. Hende was a very self-indulgent design for me.





# SQUIRE AND HISTORY

I've grown up a lover of fantasy, but fantasy didn't always love me back. Honestly, most of the media I adored didn't. If Arabs were even hinted at in Western fantasy, we were the orcs. The barbarians. The savages with strange customs who needed to be tamed and civilized, usually by an attractive white person. Lots of blood magic, twisted souls, and nefarious sorcerers on our end; a lot of immortal beings of benevolent good on theirs. But, as a young person, you take what you get. Ultimately, the danger is that you start to believe these narratives about yourself. Perhaps the elves are the good to strive for, perhaps the ones who look or sound like you are to be rejected.

The twist of the knife is that this doesn't just appear in our fiction. The way history is told in our classrooms and textbooks is a cut-and-dried timeline of events and names. Tales of empires expanding and falling, tales of heroic figures, tales of how the world came to be are presented in such a way as to suggest that it's natural. This is the way the world is and it's inevitable. In many ways, fantasy and history walk hand in hand, but there's an important thing about the way we view history in comparison: history is, above all else, neutral. If you are on the outskirts of the empire's convenient history, however, you know it's anything but.

Constructing a story, even a story from your own memory, requires knitting together the things that happened in a way that makes sense to someone else, whether or not it happened so cleanly. The way you tell a story is informed by your own perspective and by your own goals in telling it. History exists in the same way. History is made not by the figures who we talk about today but by those who are invested in documenting and shaping it. In their hands, events are a tool. Characters are a tool. History, altogether, is a tool, and tools are neutral until they're wielded. When you listen to a story, think about who is telling it. When you listen to a history, think about who it serves.



In *Squire*, history is as much a weapon as Aiza's blade. The story of a previously illustrious empire, something to aspire to, is used to justify expansion into various neighboring countries. Refugees are second-class citizens who can aspire to integrate by serving the empire. And if you live in the heart of the empire, you serve one way or another, through taxes, through relative safety compared to your relatives back home. If you are Arab-American, you know this. You know what it is to hear about drone strikes and wonder when you might hear about it landing close to your family's ancestral home. You know how it feels to watch the country you were raised in be in constant struggle with the place where you're from. You know what it is to be disconnected both from back home and from where you're sitting right now. But you also know, there's so much to love about being Arab-American. That joy is part of your personal history too.

I wrote *Squire* in the hopes of writing something that not only made sense to me, but reflected me and the people around me. It is a story about someone stuck between conflicting existences realizing that empire never holds place for the conquered. Learning to interrogate history contextualizes the present. History is, in actuality, quite personal. All narratives should be interrogated, including this one. But don't let any one story tell you who you are.

No more orcs. No magical chosen ones. Just people learning how to unlearn the justifications of colonialism and finding their way. Each of us must find our own way there: It's my hope that you found something in this book to help you on your journey.

- Nadia Shammās









# THE MAKING OF A PAGE







Panel one: We see a shot of AIZA practicing tying a tourniquet to HUSNI's arm.  
(FORESHADOWING)

1. AIZA (letter): There's just a ton of other stuff too. I'm learning first aid.

Panel two: AIZA is sitting cross-legged on the ground with a plain curved dagger in one hand and a whetstone in the other. She's looking up at an instructor we can't fully see, listening intently.

2. AIZA (letter): Weapon care.

Panel three: Long shot of the kids, including AIZA, running out of the sleeping tent area under the moonlight. AIZA is lagging a bit in the back, rubbing her eyes. A drill instructor carries a torch in one hand and a large bell in the other, which she rings hard.

3. AIZA (letter) : We do drills every day. Sometimes they wake us up in the middle of the night just to do laps.

4. DRILL INSTRUCTOR: Go, go, go! Action can strike at any moment. A Knight is always prepared!

SFX: \*ding, ding, ding\*

Panel four: We finally see AIZA in the present, actually letter writing. I imagine she's on the floor in the large sleeping area, writing nearby one of the hanging lanterns. She's writing furiously.

5. AIZA (letter): Which makes no sense to me, I get that we're supposed to be tough and ready for anything, but sleep is important too and this is just—

Panel five: In her vigor, she accidentally gets some wet ink on her bandage and smudges some of the words of the letter. She looks at the damage, wondering whether she should fix it.

NO COPY



Panel six: She decides to ignore it and keep writing.

6. AIZA (letter): It's better than the strategy lessons at least. I'd rather run every night all night than sit through more tactical lectures.



# THE SCRIPT.

## NADIA:

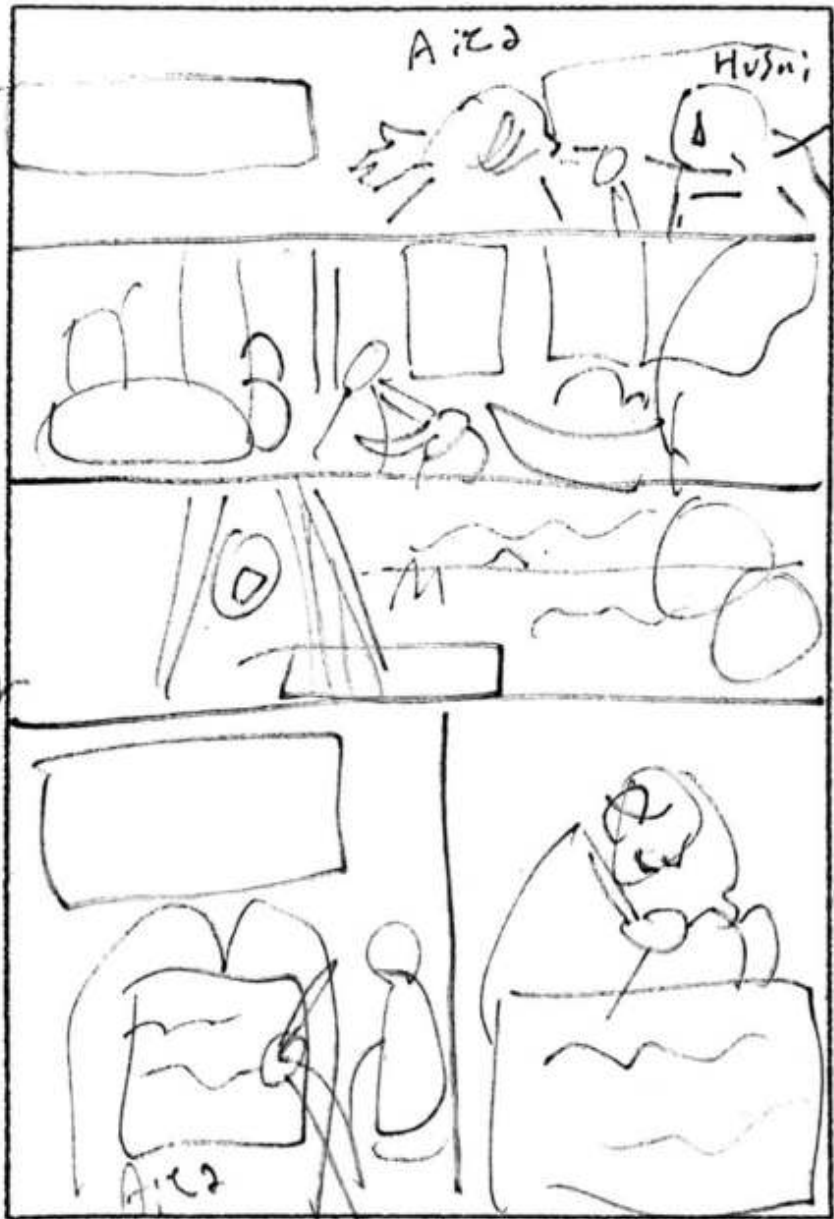
Comics doesn't necessarily have a standard script-writing style, so I do what makes sense to me. I write my scripts for the artists I am working with, so I tend to use references I know they like as best as I can. I focus more on the feeling of a moment than choreographing every action, so that I allow space for my collaborator to interpret the scene. Since the lion's share of work is on the art end, I try to include as many reference materials in the actual script as possible.

## SARA:

Nadia and I conceptualized this story together, but Nadia is the one who stopped *Squire* from becoming three hundred pages of jokes I think are funny.

A good script is deceptively simple. Let the art talk. Trust your collaborators.





Chapter 5  
Page 4  
R

Aiza  
out of  
tent of  
york

maybe  
flip?

penicil  
headscarf





# THUMBNAILS

## **SARA:**

Thumbnails are what I draw as I'm reading the script. It is the only step I do on pen and paper, not digitally. I use super cheap paper and the worst pen I have around so I'm not tempted to make a good drawing. The goal for thumbnails is to make sure that everything fits, and the basic panel structure actually makes sense. These drawings are very small and allow me to test ideas quickly and easily.

No one sees this stage; these scribbles only make sense to me.



There's just a ton  
of other stuff too.  
I'm learning first aid.



Weapon care.

Go!  
Sen!  
Go!

Action  
can strike at  
any moment.

A Knight  
is always  
prepared!

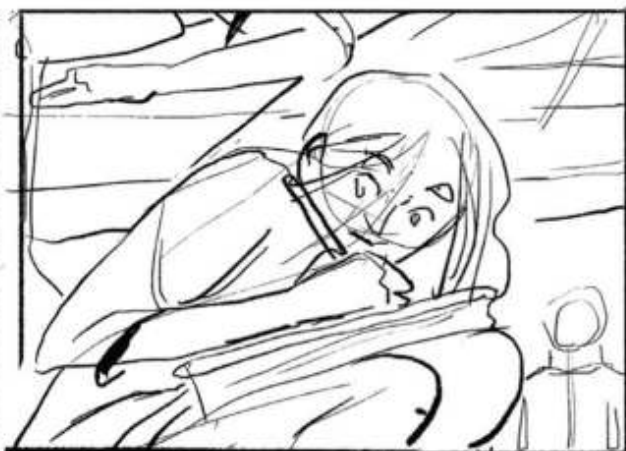
DING  
DING  
DING

We do drills every day. Sometimes they wake us  
up in the middle of the night just to do laps,

Which makes no sense to me.  
I get that we're supposed to  
be tough and ready for anything,  
but sleep is important too and  
this is just --

Ah,  
crap.

It's better than the strategy  
lessons at least. I'd rather run  
every night all night than sit  
through more tactical lectures.





# PENCILS AND LETTERING

## SARA:

Now the real drawing starts. Technically the stage is called "pencils," but I do this stage digitally. I work entirely in Photoshop. I draw on a Wacom Cintiq tablet when I'm at home and on an iPad when I'm traveling.

This stage takes the longest for me. It requires a lot of focus and decision-making. I dig up references, research for specific details, and do all the lettering (placing the dialogue and word balloons).

I have to make it *just* clear enough so my editor can understand what the heck I'm doing, and rough enough so I don't waste too much time perfecting a drawing I might have to change later.



There's just a ton of other stuff too. I'm learning first aid.



Weapon care.

Go!  
Go!  
Go!

Action can strike at any moment.

A Knight is always prepared!



We do drills every day. Sometimes they wake us up in the middle of the night just to do laps,

Which makes no sense to me. I get that we're supposed to be tough and ready for anything, but sleep is important too and this is just --



Ah, crap.



It's better than the strategy lessons at least. I'd rather run every night all night than sit through more tactical lectures.





# INKING

## **SARA:**

My editor gives me any notes they have, and my assistant, Lynette, cleans up my panels and word balloons. After that I get to do my favorite part: inking!

Here I redraw the page properly, add all the fun details, and decide what parts of the page should be described with line details and what areas should be detailed with color instead.

I have to be careful not to spend too much time on this stage because I could ink forever.



There's just a ton of other stuff too. I'm learning first aid.



Weapon care.

Go!  
Go!  
Go!

Action can strike at any moment.

A Knight is always prepared!

DING

DING  
DING

We do drills every day. Sometimes they wake us up in the middle of the night just to do laps,

Which makes no sense to me. I get that we're supposed to be tough and ready for anything, but sleep is important too and this is just --

Ah, crap.



It's better than the strategy lessons at least. I'd rather run every night all night than sit through more tactical lectures.





# FLATS

## **SARA:**

Flats are **placeholder** colors that are put down to make the process of digitally coloring and painting work much easier. It is a time consuming but very important step so changes can be made easily.

The flat colors of Chapter 1 through Chapter 4 are by my assistant, *Lynette Wong*.

The flat colors of Chapter 5 through Chapter 14 are by artist *Mara Jayne Carpenter*.



There's just a ton of other stuff too. I'm learning first aid.



Weapon care.

Go! Go! Go!

Action can strike at any moment.

A Knight is always prepared!



We do drills every day. Sometimes they wake us up in the middle of the night just to do laps,

Which makes no sense to me. I get that we're supposed to be tough and ready for anything, but sleep is important too and this is just --

Ah, crap.



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# FINAL COLORS

## SARA:

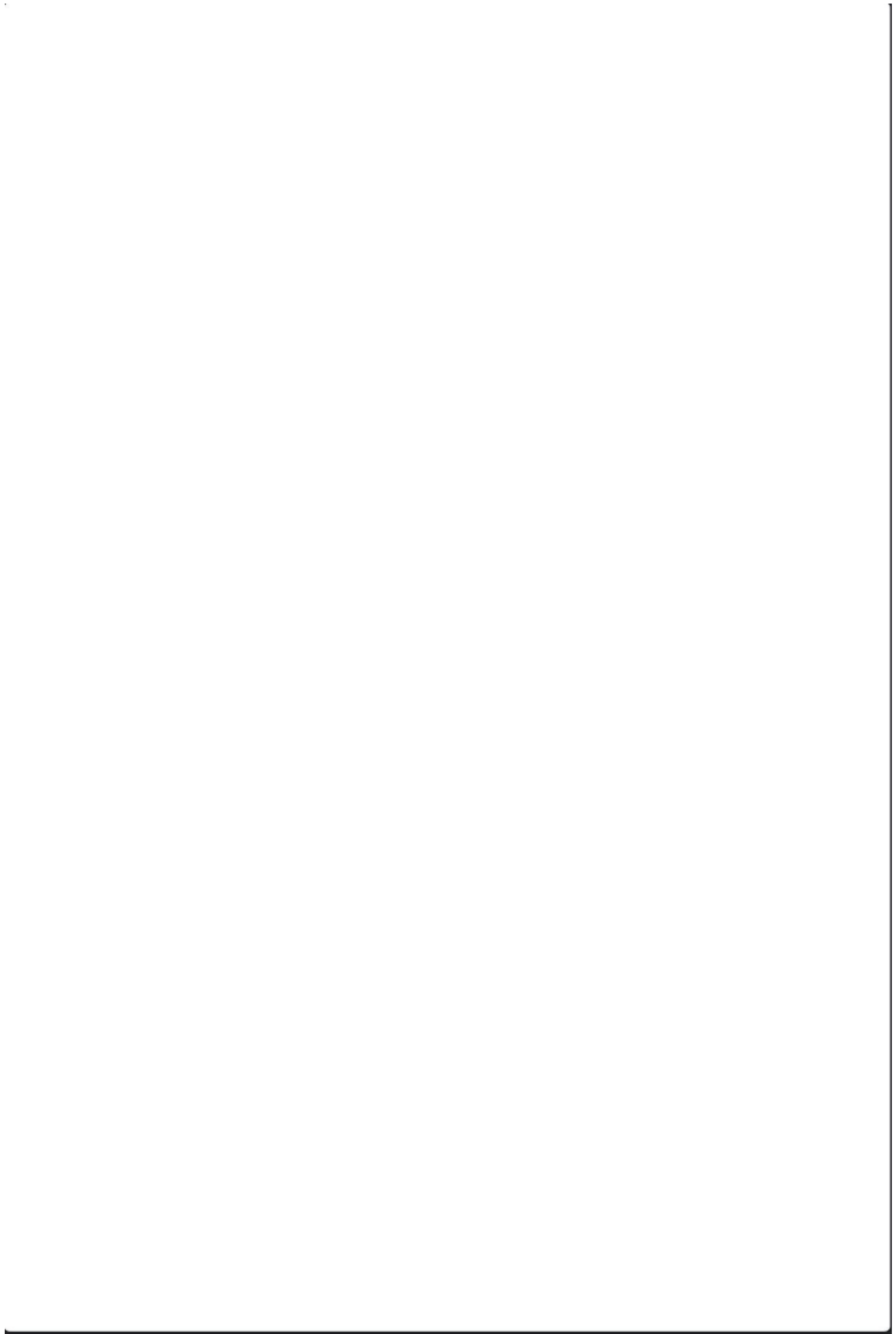
Figuring out how to color *Squire* was one of the hardest creative problems I have faced as an artist. It's this careful balance of what's JUST enough detail to make the art feel alive, but stopping right before the process makes you lose your mind.

Your influences + what you enjoy doing + your specific brand of laziness = Art Style.

Storytelling with light and shadows was very important to me. I took many photos in Jordan and Turkey, and I tried to pull as many colors from the region as I could carry back with me.

Lynette Wong was my color assistant throughout this book, re-creating my style and skillfully working with my wild notes.







Courtesy of Nadia Shammamas



**NADIA SHAMMAS** is a Palestinian-American writer from Brooklyn, New York. She's best known for creating *CORPUS: A Comic Anthology of Bodily Ailments* as well as being the writer of *Ms. Marvel: Stretched Thin*. Her work often focuses on identity, memory, and decolonizing genre tropes. When she's not writing, she's trying to perfect her cold brew recipe and win the love of her cats, Lilith and Dash. Visit her online at [www.nadiashammamas.com](http://www.nadiashammamas.com).

FIND NADIA SHAMMAS ON



Courtesy of Sara Alfageeh



**SARA ALFAGEEH** is a Jordanian-American illustrator and creative director from Boston. She's passionate about history, nuances in visual storytelling, and the spaces where art and identity intersect. She's known for her work for Marvel Comics, Star Wars, and children's publishing. While that's cool and all—Sara really just wants to draw girls with swords. Visit her online at [www.sara-alfa.com](http://www.sara-alfa.com).

FIND SARA ALFAGEEH ON





“A sweeping, gorgeous tale of tenacity and friendship,  
*Squire* makes you want to fight for a better world.”

—G. WILLOW WILSON, author of *The Bird King*

**B**orn a second-class citizen, Aiza has always dreamt of becoming a Knight. It's the highest military honor in the once-great Bayt-Sajji Empire and, as a member of the recently colonized Ornu people, it's her only way to full citizenship. Now, ravaged by famine and mounting tensions between the different provinces, Bayt-Sajji finds itself on the brink of war once again, and Aiza can finally enlist in the competitive Squire training program.

It's not how she imagined it, though. Hiding her Ornu status in order to better blend in, Aiza must navigate new friendships, rivalries, and rigorous training under the merciless General Hende. As the pressure mounts, Aiza realizes that the “greater good” Bayt-Sajji's military promises might not include her, and that the recruits might be in more danger than she ever imagined. She will have to choose: loyalty to her heart and heritage, or loyalty to the Empire.

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