

THE  
RED  
HARLEQUIN<sup>©</sup>



THE  
**RED**  
H A R L E Q U I N

# The Black Nation

The Red Harlequin - Part I

Script: Roberto Ricci  
Pencil and ink: Giuseppe De Donato  
Colors: Elisa Bartolucci  
Art Direction, Cover and Layout: Alessandro Tarabelli  
Logo and visual concept: Pascal Demure



OUR WORLD IS DIFFERENT FROM YOURS...



IT IS A WORLD WHERE EVERYONE WEARS MASKS.



WHERE THE COLOR  
YOU BELONG TO DETERMINES  
WHO YOU ARE AND WHERE  
YOU WILL LIVE.



AND IF YOU WILL LIVE.



I WAS ALMOST FOURTEEN WHEN MY FATHER DECIDED IT WAS TIME FOR ME TO SEE AN EXECUTION.



COME, IT'S TIME.



THE EXECUTION OF A HARLEQUIN.

HARLEQUINS ARE GHASTLY CREATURES THAT KILL CHROMES AND DRINK THEIR BLOOD. OR AT LEAST THAT'S WHAT I'VE HEARD.



FATHER SAYS HARLEQUINS PRETEND TO BE LIKE US.



BUT THEY ARE NOT LIKE US.



THAT IS WHY WHEN A HARLEQUIN IS FOUND, HE MUST BE KILLED AT ONCE.



AND A CEREMONY IS HELD...



STAY CALM! NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS!

SO THAT WE CHROMES CAN SEE JUST HOW DECEITFUL A HARLEQUIN CAN BE.









HOW CAN YOU  
TELL HE'S A  
HARLEQUIN?



YOU'LL SEE IN  
A MOMENT.



PLEASE I  
BEG YOU! I'M  
NOT A-



LOOK!







SEE ALL THOSE  
COLORS? THAT WAS  
HIS HARLEQUIN AURA  
LEAVING HIS BODY.  
HE WASN'T A BLACK.



LET'S GO  
HOME.  
THE GODS ARE  
STILL ANGRY.



THIS HARLEQUIN IS A  
BAD OMEN. SOMETHING  
ELSE IS GOING TO  
HAPPEN. I CAN FEEL IT.

THAT NIGHT I ATE LIKE NEVER BEFORE, GRATEFUL TO THE GODS FOR BEING  
ALIVE. I THOUGHT ABOUT MY FATHER'S WORDS IN THE RAIN AND PRAYED THAT I  
WOULD NEVER MEET A HARLEQUIN AGAIN.



UNFORTUNATELY MY PRAYERS  
DID NOT GO ANSWERED.



## CHAPTER 2



POUEEEEE

POUEEEEE



ASHEVA  
WAKE UP!



PUT ON YOUR  
ROBES AND  
YOUR MASK!  
HURRY!



WHAT'S THE  
HURRY? I DON'T  
HAVE SEMINARY  
TODAY.

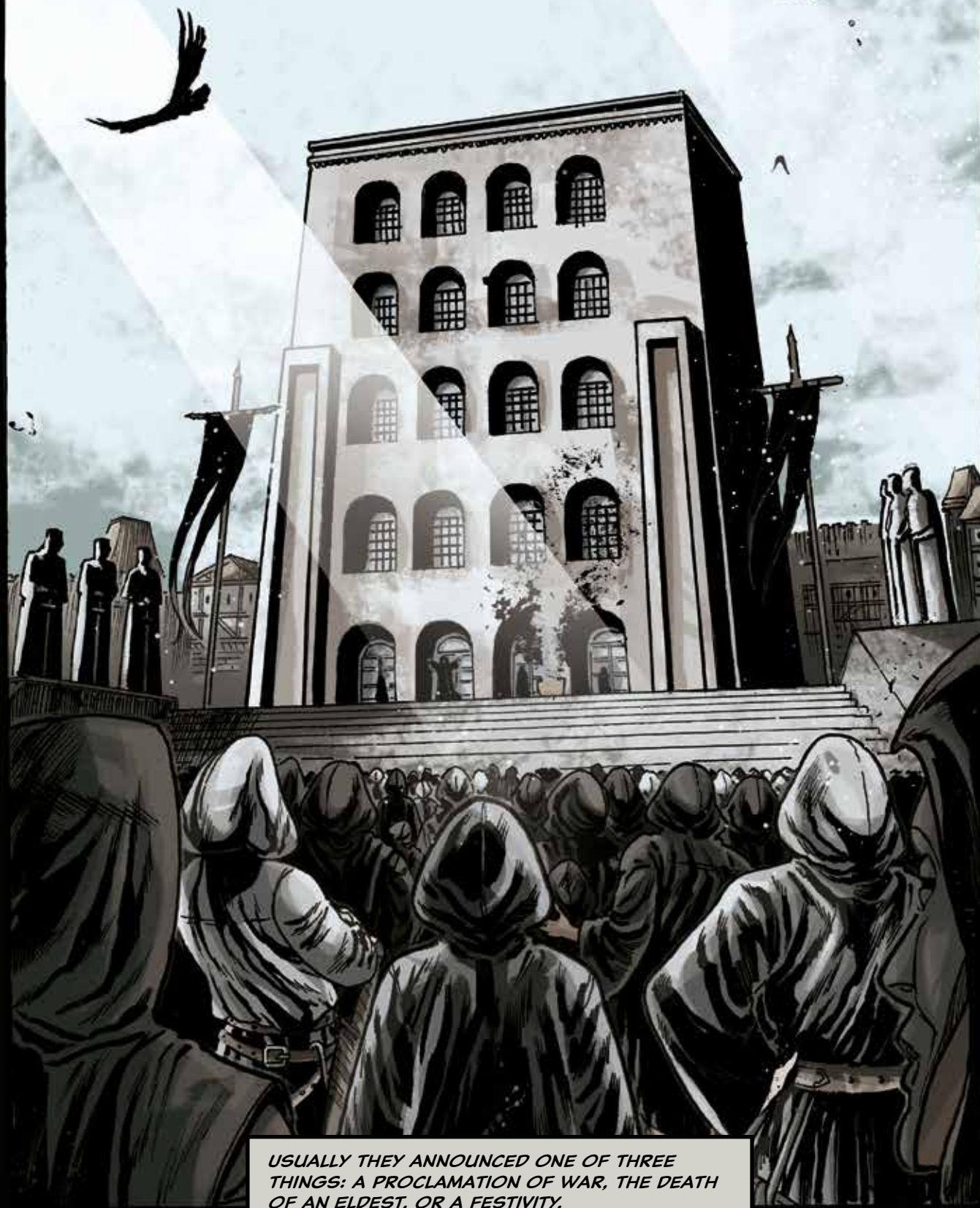


HAVEN'T YOU HEARD  
THE HERALDS? DO AS  
YOUR MOTHER TELLS  
YOU!





THE HERALDS...



USUALLY THEY ANNOUNCED ONE OF THREE THINGS: A PROCLAMATION OF WAR, THE DEATH OF AN ELDEST, OR A FESTIVITY.



DEVOUT MEMBERS OF THE BLACK NATION! TODAY WE RECEIVED A MESSAGE WE HAD BEEN LONG EXPECTING!

THE NEXT FESTIVITY WAS STILL FAR AWAY AND THE ELDEST WAS SPEAKING RIGHT IN FRONT OF US.



THE RED CHROMES HAVE DECLARED WAR AGAINST US. AGAINST THE GODS' CHOSEN!



THEY HAVE DECLARED WAR FIRST BUT WE SHALL STRIKE FIRST! OUR BLOW WILL BE SO POWERFUL THAT WE SHALL DESTROY THEM ONCE AND FOR ALL!

NOW BURN THEIR FLAG! AND LET THE FLAMES PURIFY US!



DEATH TO THE RED!



DEATH TO THE RED!





YOU'RE IN THE FIRST ARMY! YOU'LL BE THE FIRST TO ATTACK THE REDS!



REMEMBER SON. IN WAR, THERE ARE NO CHROME WINNERS. ONLY LOSERS.



HE IS THE ONLY WINNER. JARIES, THE GOD OF WAR AND VENGEANCE. THE MORE BLOOD IS SPILLED, THE MORE HIS THIRST IS QUENCHED.



YOUR FATHER IS LUCKY. HE GETS TO GO TO WAR. MY FATHER HAS TO STAY HERE INSTEAD.

ANDAHAR WAS MY BEST FRIEND BUT SOMETIMES HIS WORDS BAFFLED ME.



WHY WAS HIS FATHER DIFFERENT FROM MINE?



BY THE WAY, ARE YOU PREPARING FOR THE RITE? MY FATHER SAYS OUR TIME WILL COME SOON.



YES, I RUN ALONG THE WALLS OF THE CITY.



THE LAST ONE TO FINISH IS A RED CHROME!





I WON!



I'LL GET YOU NEXT TIME!



POVEEE



LET'S GO BACK NOW! THE CEREMONY IS ABOUT TO BEGIN!

ASHEVA WAIT!



WHEN OUR TIME WILL COME TO FIGHT, I WOULDN'T WANT ANYONE BESIDE ME BUT YOU.



MIGHTY JARIES, WE CALL UPON YOU!



LET THE BLOOD OF THE REDS BE THE WINE OF YOUR FEASTS.



JARIES! JARIES! JARIES!









DAYS CAME AND WENT. I EAGERLY AWAITED NEWS FROM MY FATHER. BUT THOSE NEVER ARRIVED.

ARE YOU WITH US, ASHEVA?



ER, YES MASTER!



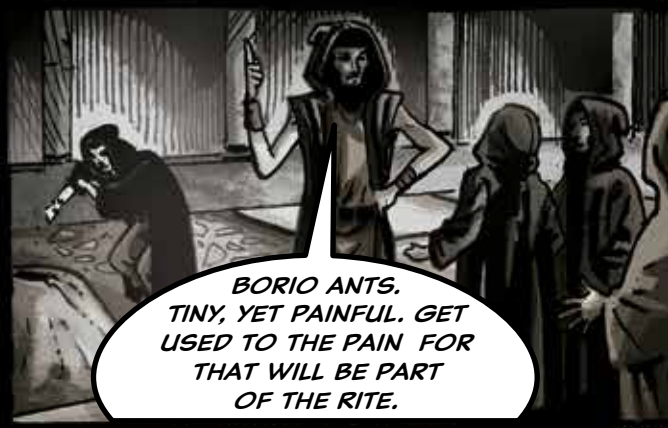
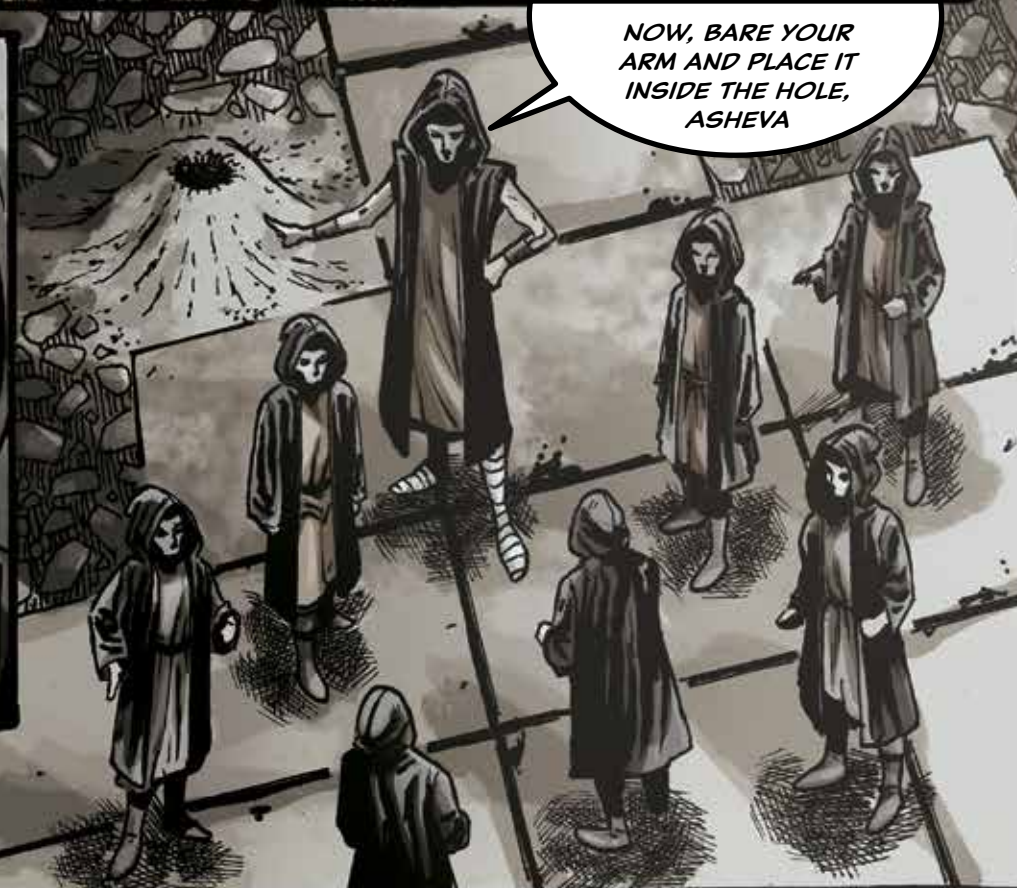
GOOD! BECAUSE TODAY'S LESSON HAS TO DO WITH THE RITE.



NOW, BARE YOUR ARM AND PLACE IT INSIDE THE HOLE, ASHEVA



REMEMBER, ONLY THOSE THAT PASS THE RITE CAN BE CONSIDERED TRUE SONS OF THE BLACK NATION.



BORIO ANTS. TINY, YET PAINFUL. GET USED TO THE PAIN FOR THAT WILL BE PART OF THE RITE.



DO YOU THINK WE'LL PASS THE RITE?



EVERY BLACK HAS DONE IT BEFORE US. WE'LL PASS IT TOO.

I WAS WRONG.



NIGHT-TIME WAS WHEN I CAME ALIVE AGAIN. THAT WAS WHEN STORIES WERE TOLD ABOUT THE WAR AND HOW IT WAS FARING.



BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF THE BLACK NATION!



TONIGHT I BRING YOU STORIES OF HEROISM!



EXAMPLES OF AUDACITY!



AND TALES OF SACRIFICE!



FIRST, I SHALL TELL YOU ABOUT THE LEGION OF THE HAWKS!

THAT'S MY FATHER'S LEGION!



OUR BRAVE LEGIONARIES, DISGUISED AS TREES, MADE THEIR WAY INSIDE THE EASTERN FOREST...



ONCE CLOSE TO THE REDS, THEY STOPPED AND REMAINED SO STILL THAT NO ONE, NOT EVEN THE GODS, COULD DISTINGUISH THEM FROM REAL TREES.



THEN, NOXA, THE GODDESS OF DARKNESS, MADE THE ENTIRE RED ARMY FALL ASLEEP.



IT WAS THEN THAT THE TREES BECAME ALIVE! AND THEY WERE MERCILESS WITH THE REDS!



DURING THOSE REPRESENTATIONS, BLACK DEATHS AND DEFEAT WERE NEVER MENTIONED. THOSE THINGS, I LEARNED, WERE DISCUSSED BEHIND CLOSED DOORS.





YOU HAVE BEEN SUMMONED TO THE PALACE.



SURELY IT HAS TO DO WITH YOUR RITE. MAYBE THEY WANT TO HAVE IT AWAY FROM THE FORESTS.

THEN WHY ARE WE THE ONLY ONES SUMMONED?



DON'T BE SILLY. WHAT ELSE COULD IT BE?



FORTY DAYS HAD PASSED SINCE THE PROCLAMATION OF WAR. FORTY DAYS AND MANY DEATHS, INCLUDING MY FATHER'S.






SPRING FINALLY ARRIVED. IN OTHER TIMES, THIS WOULD HAVE MARKED A BEGINNING. BUT FOR ME, IT MARKED AN END.



WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?




THE ORATOR... THE STAGE... NO ONE SHOWED UP TODAY. EVERYBODY'S GOING TO THE PALACE.



THE ORATOR IS GONE!




WE WANT TO SPEAK WITH THE ELDEST!



WE'RE HERE, BROTHERS AND SISTERS, WE'RE HERE!

ELDERS, COME OUT!



TONIGHT IS A SAD NIGHT FOR US. THE WAR IS LOST.





THE REDS HAVE ANNIHILATED OUR ENTIRE FIRST ARMY. THE SECOND AND THIRD ARMIES ARE RETREATING.



WHAT HAPPENS NOW?



EACH FAMILY MUST GIVE TEN OUNCES OF GOLD TO THE RED.



BUT WE HAVE NO SUCH AMOUNT!



THEN FIND IT! OR DO YOU WANT TO SEE THE REDS AT YOUR DOORSTEP TOMORROW?



WHAT ABOUT OUR HUSBANDS? WHO WILL COMPENSATE US FOR SUCH LOSS?



SHE'S RIGHT!



YOUR HUSBAND, LIKE ALL OUR SOLDIERS, WILL BE COMPENSATED BY THE GODS.



OUR GODS HAVE LEFT US! AND YOU BROUGHT THIS DEFEAT UPON US!



MY PATIENCE IS RUNNING THIN, FEMALE CHROME!



DO NOT PROVOKE ANY FURTHER.





IF YOUR FATHER  
WERE STILL ALIVE,  
THE ELDEST WOULD  
NOT HAVE BEEN SO  
ARROGANT!

MAYBE HE WAS ANGRY  
TOO BECAUSE OF THE  
REDS. AFTER ALL, IT'S  
THE ELDERS' DUTY TO  
PROTECT OUR NATION.

AND WHO WILL  
PROTECT US  
FROM  
THE ELDERS?



IT'S ABOUT  
TIME YOU  
OPENED!





GREETINGS  
ELDEST!



I SEE YOU'RE  
GROWING  
STRONG LIKE  
YOUR FATHER.



WHAT IS IT  
YOU WANT?



YOU SHOULD  
QUELL YOUR  
TEMPER. ESPECIALLY  
IN PUBLIC.



THESE ARE  
DIFFICULT TIMES.  
AND WE MUST  
BE CAREFUL IN  
SEPARATING  
FRIENDS FROM  
FOES.



VERY CAREFUL.







I'M SORRY ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED AT THE PALACE.



I'M AFRAID THAT'S NOT ENOUGH.



LEAVE US NOW. YOUR MOTHER AND I NEED TO TALK.



GO TO THE MARKET.



BUT IT'S STILL EARLY...



IT'LL OPEN SOON. GO ON. I'LL BE ALL RIGHT.



I DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED THAT MORNING...



MAYBE IT WAS THE GODS OR MAYBE IT WAS THE SPIRIT OF MY FATHER...



BUT SOMETHING MADE ME STOP AND RETRACE NOT ONLY MY FOOTSTEPS...



BUT MY ENTIRE LIFE UP UNTIL THEN.







AN ANCIENT  
BLACK  
PROVERB SAYS:  
"BLESSED ARE  
THE SONS  
OF DEPARTED  
WARRIORS..."



FOR THEIR  
SWORDS WILL  
BECOME THEIR  
FATHERS'  
REVENGE."







I STABBED HIM OVER AND OVER AGAIN. IT FELT SOFT. IT FELT GOOD.



HE'S DEAD.



AND SOON THEY'LL COME LOOKING FOR HIM.



COME! WE DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME!





YOU MUST LEAVE  
AXYUM BEFORE  
ANYONE FINDS OUT.

WHY? WE  
CAN EXPLAIN  
EVERYTHING.



LISTEN TO ME! WHEN  
THE ELDERS FIND  
OUT ABOUT THIS,  
THEY WILL HAVE YOU  
KILLED, REGARDLESS  
OF WHAT WE TELL  
THEM.

BUT WHY?



BECAUSE THEY ARE ALL  
THE SAME, ASHEVA.  
BAD WEEDS GROW IN  
BUNCHES.



HE WAS JUST THE  
TALLEST OF THE  
LOT.



THEN WE CAN  
LEAVE  
TOGETHER!

NO, ASHEVA.  
MY PLACE IS  
HERE. I'M NOT  
AFRAID  
OF THE  
CONSEQUENCES.



BUT YOU, YOU  
STILL NEED TO  
LIVE YOUR LIFE.



I'M NOT LEAVING  
WITHOUT YOU,  
MOTHER!



IF YOU LOVE ME,  
YOU WILL DO  
AS I SAY. HERE,  
TAKE YOUR  
FATHER'S KNIFE.



AND TAKE THIS AS  
WELL, SO THAT I WILL  
ALWAYS BE CLOSE TO  
YOU.





BUT  
WHERE WILL  
I GO?



FAR AWAY.  
SO FAR THAT  
THEY'LL NEVER  
FIND YOU.



THIS IS ALL I HAVE.  
NOW RUN TO THE  
EASTERN GATES!  
AND NEVER LOOK  
BACK!



ASHEVA!  
PRACTICING FOR  
THE RITE EARLY,  
ARE YOU?



I'M...  
JUST GOING TO  
THE SEMINARY.



THE SEMINARY?  
BUT IT'S THE  
OTHER WAY!



HEY! ARE YOU  
LISTENING TO  
ME? WHAT'S  
WRONG?



LEAVE ME  
ALONE!



ASHEVA  
WAIT!

GOOD-BYE, MY FRIEND.  
PERHAPS ONE DAY, YOU WOULD  
UNDERSTAND.





THE EASTERN GATES OPENED EVERY MORNING ON THE FIRST VIGIL OF THE SUN...

AS I WAITED, I TRIED TO KEEP CALM AND NOT THINK ABOUT THE WORLD THAT WAS CRUMBLING ALL AROUND ME.



OPEN THE GATES!



THE ELDEST IS DEAD! THE ELDEST IS DEAD!



THEY FOUND HIS BODY IN AN ALLEY!



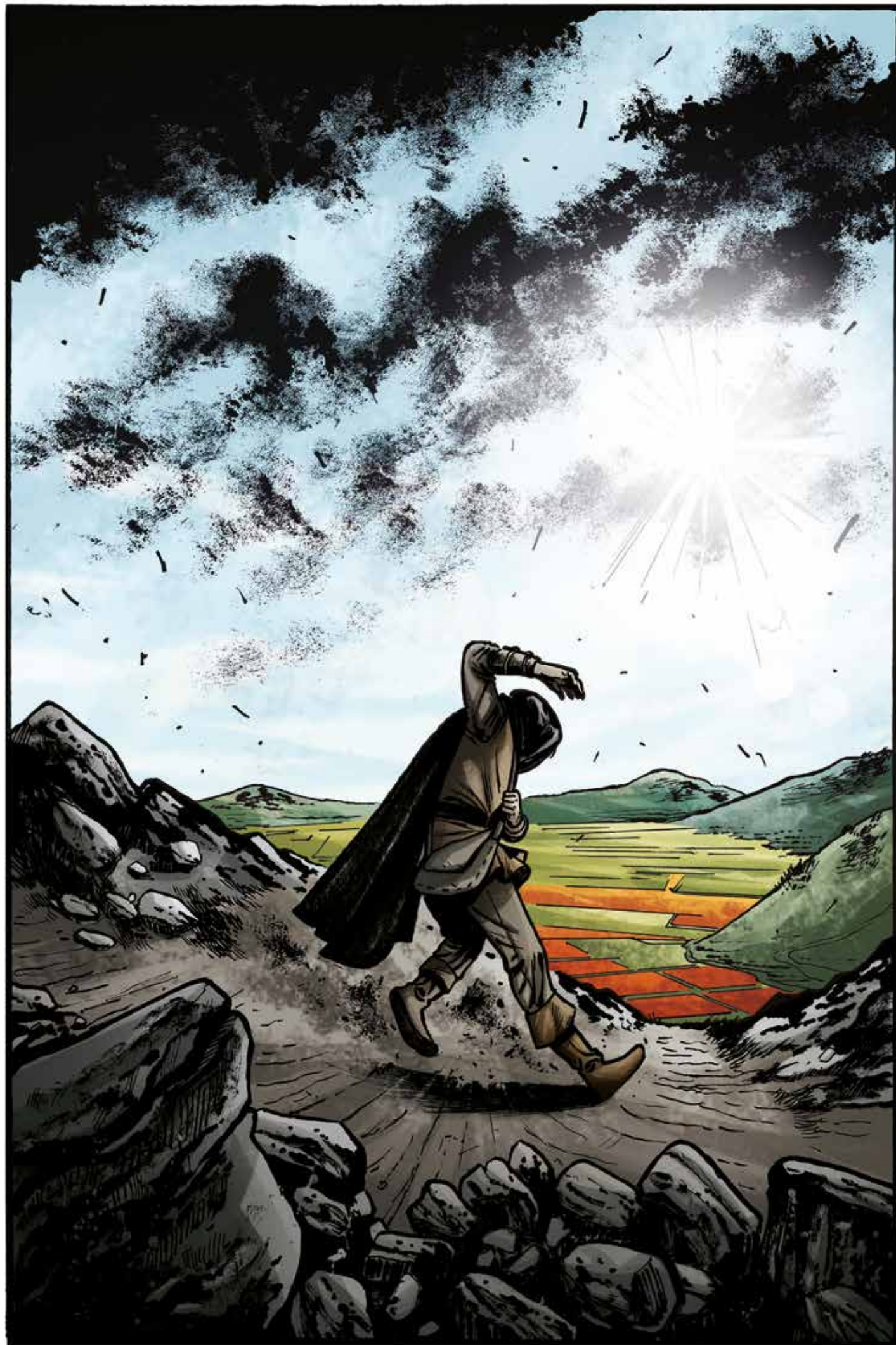
HOLD ON!



WHERE ARE YOU GOING? YOU SHOULD BE HEADING TO THE SEMINARY, NOT TO THE FIELDS.







IT WOULDN'T TAKE LONG FOR THEM TO FIND OUT WHAT HAD HAPPENED. AND ANDAHAR HAD SEEN ME RUNNING.



SO I PRESSED ON... TRYING NOT TO THINK ABOUT MY MOTHER. ABOUT MY HOME. ABOUT MY LIFE.

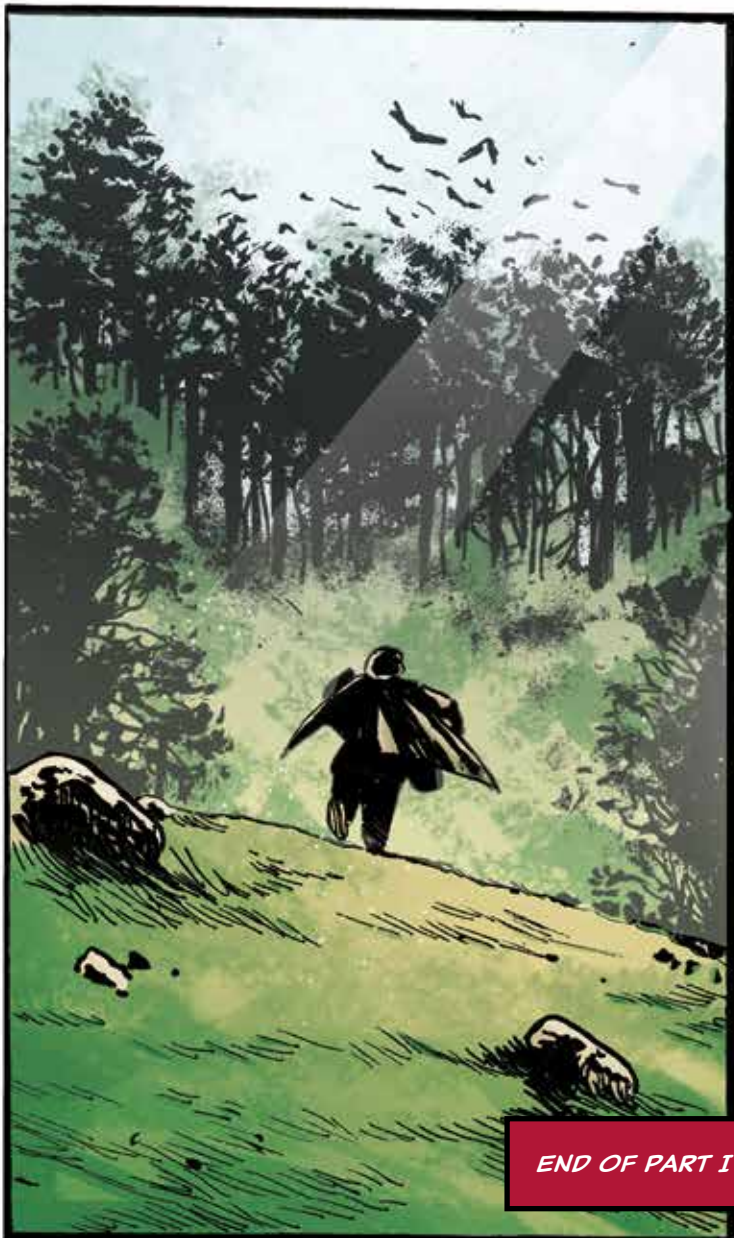




RUNNING UP AND DOWN HILLS...



UNTIL THE LAST FLAG OF AXYUM  
DISAPPEARED FROM MY SIGHT.



END OF PART I





