BASED ON THE SHORT STORY BY ANDRZEJ SAPKOWSKI

THE WITCHER®

A QUESTION OF PRICE



MARTA
KRAJEWSKA

STEFAN
KIEŁBASIEWICZ

MATTEO
BELLISARIO

IGOR
MONTI

HASSAN
OTSMANE-ELHAOU

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ORIGINAL SHORT STORY
ANDRZEJ SAPKOWSKI

STORY ADAPTATION
MARTA KRAJEWSKA

ENGLISH ADAPTATION
STEFAN KIEŁBASIEWICZ

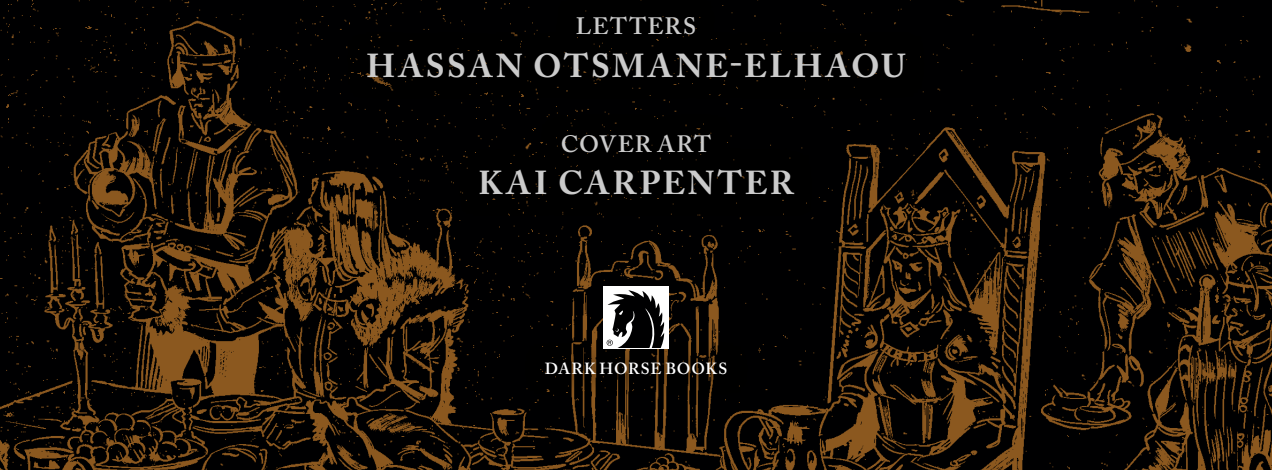
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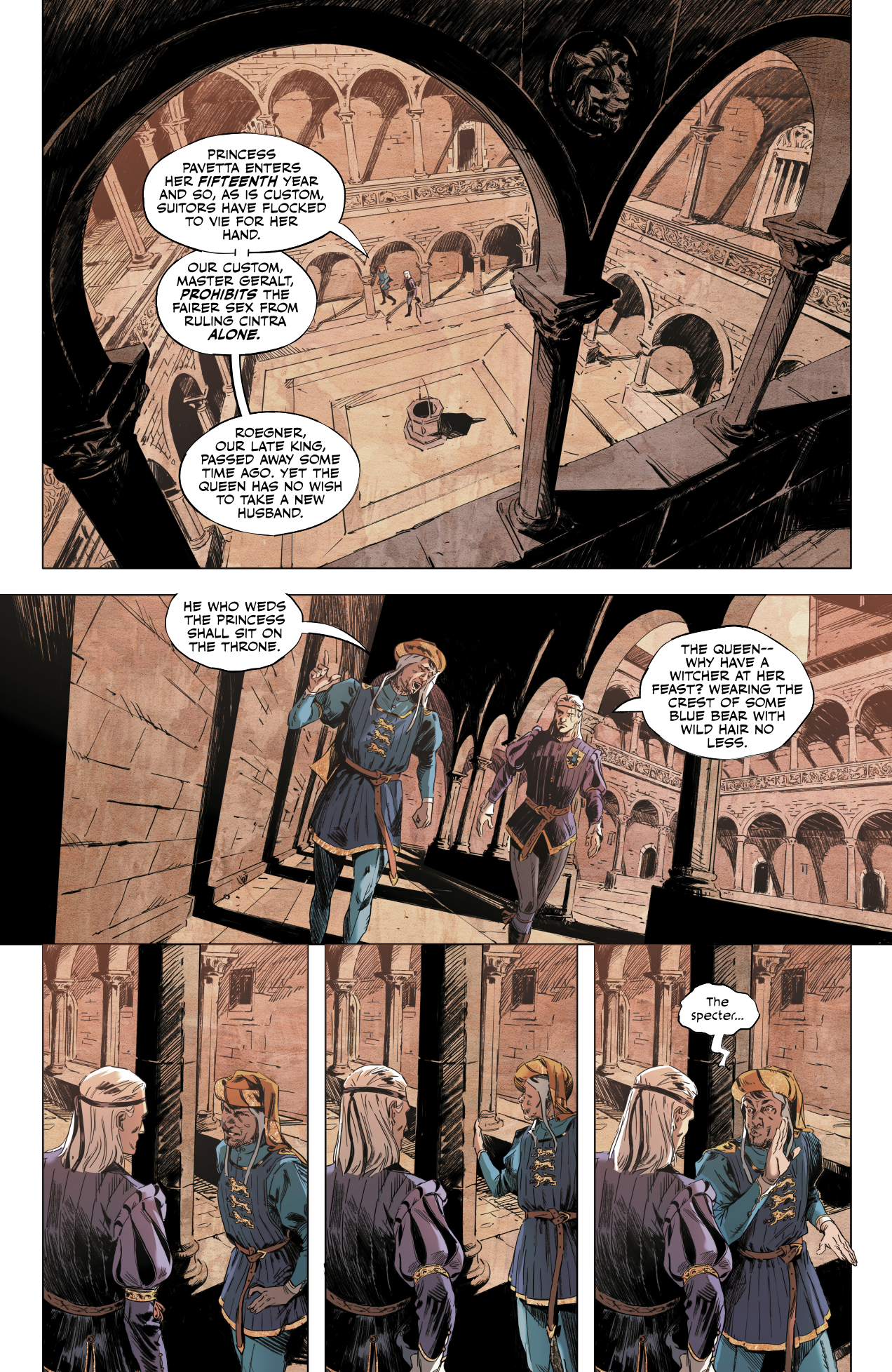


DARK HORSE BOOKS

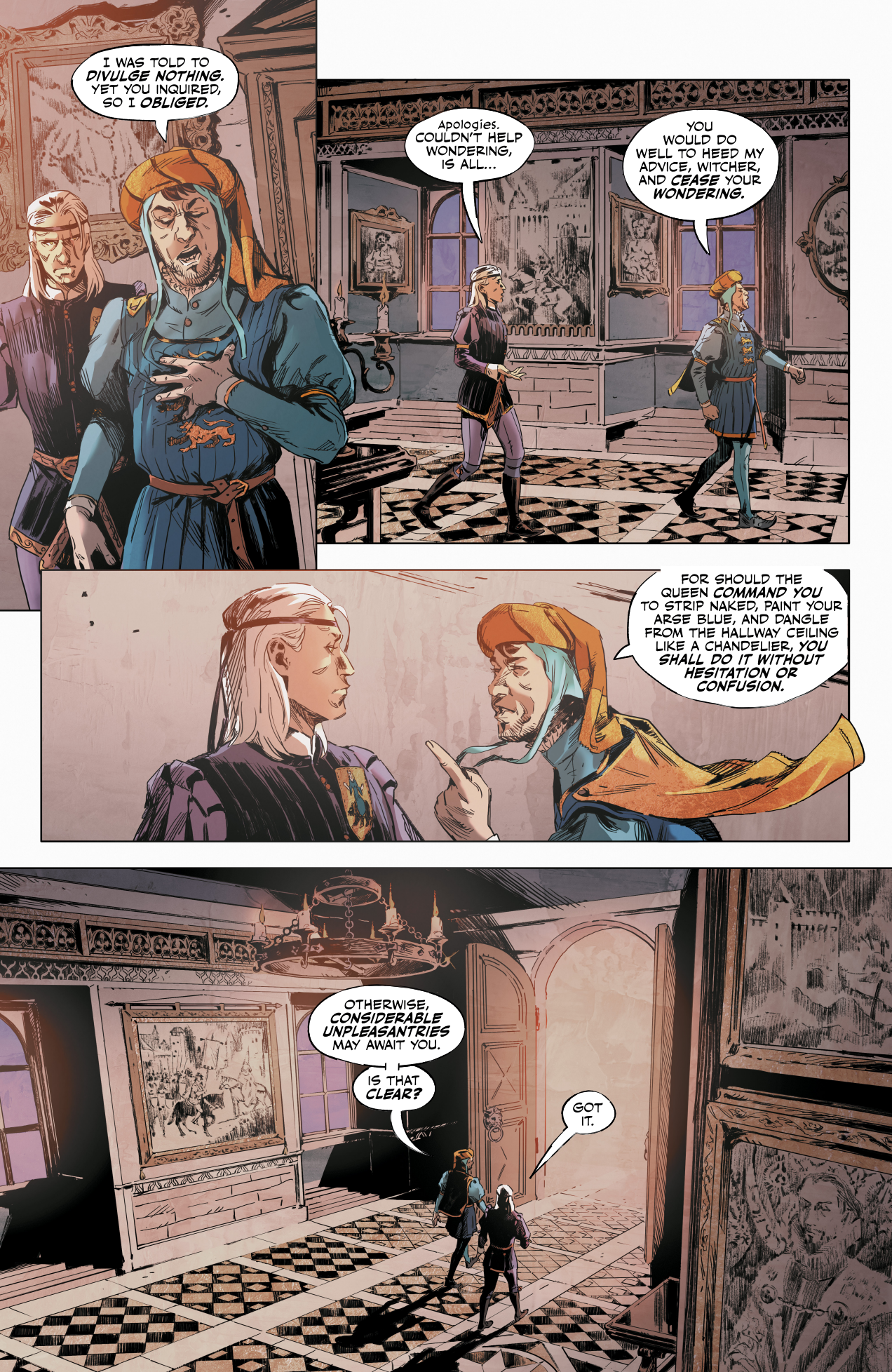



ANDRZEJ SAPKOWSKI'S
A QUESTION OF PRICE

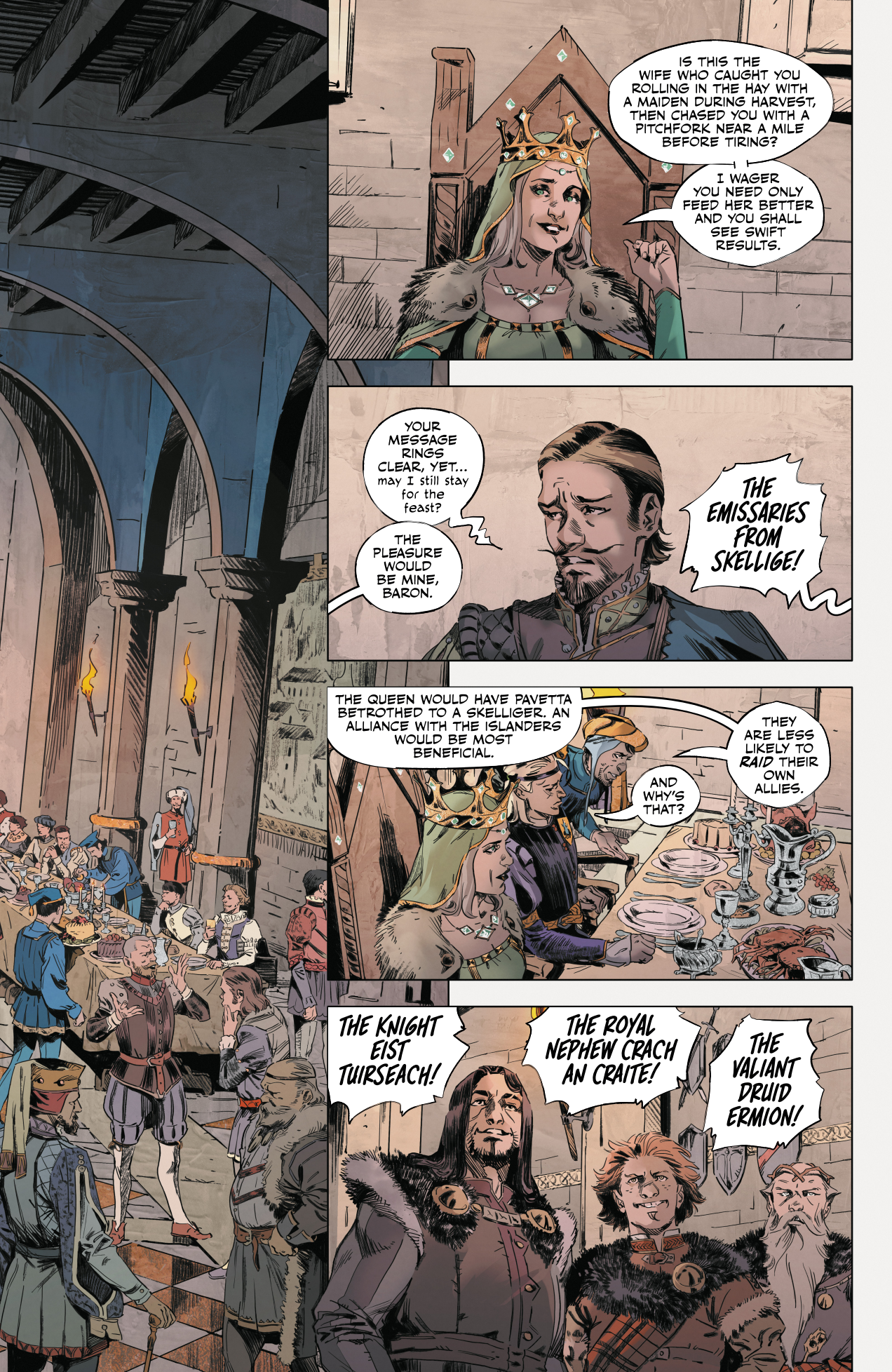

YOUR ATTIRE, MASTER GERALT.
FOR THE DURATION OF THE FEAST YOU SHALL BE KNOWN AS RAVIX OF FOURHORN, ESQUIRE.
"YOUR FAMILY CREST-- A BLACK BEAR WANDERING A GOLDEN PLAIN."
ATOP THE BEAR, A BLUE-ROBED MAIDEN WITH WILD HAIR, HER ARMS RAISED TO THE SKY.
THE FEAST, HAXO. RATHER YOU TOLD ME THE OCCASION.


PRINCESS PAVETTA ENTERS HER *FIFTEENTH* YEAR AND SO, AS IS CUSTOM, SUITORS HAVE FLOCKED TO VIE FOR HER HAND.
OUR CUSTOM, MASTER GERALT, *PROHIBITS* THE FAIRER SEX FROM RULING CINTRA *ALONE.*
ROEGNER, OUR LATE KING, PASSED AWAY SOME TIME AGO. YET THE QUEEN HAS NO WISH TO TAKE A NEW HUSBAND.
HE WHO WEDS THE PRINCESS SHALL SIT ON THE THRONE.
THE QUEEN-- WHY HAVE A WITCHER AT HER FEAST? WEARING THE CREST OF SOME BLUE BEAR WITH WILD HAIR NO LESS.
The specter...

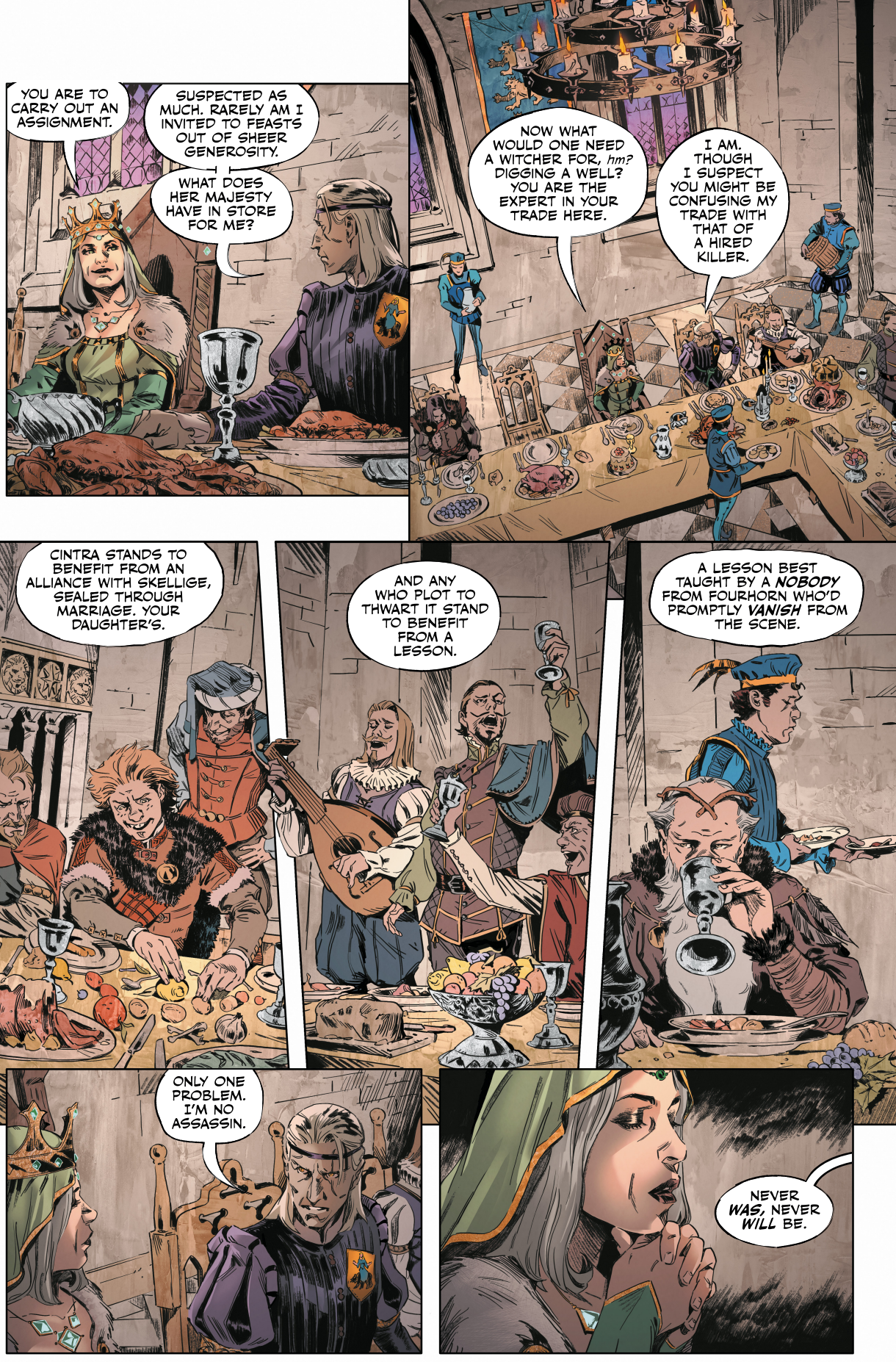

...THEY SAY HE IS SMALL AND ROUND, SPINES LIKE A HEDGEHOG'S, SCURRYING ABOUT THE CASTLE AT NIGHT, HIS GROANS AND GRUNTS ECHOING THROUGH THE CHAMBERS.
TELLING ME I'VE BEEN INVITED TO A SUITORS' BANQUET...
...TO KEEP WATCH UNDER THE TABLE? STOP SOME PRICKLY, GRUNTING HUNCHBACK FROM LEAPING OUT? UNARMED AND DRESSED LIKE A COURT JESTER? MAKES NO SENSE.


I WAS TOLD TO *DIVULGE NOTHING.* YET YOU INQUIRED, SO I *OBLIGED.*
Apologies. COULDN'T HELP WONDERING, IS ALL...
YOU WOULD DO WELL TO HEED MY ADVICE, WITCHER, AND *CEASE* YOUR *WONDERING.*
FOR SHOULD THE QUEEN *COMMAND YOU* TO STRIP NAKED, PAINT YOUR ARSE BLUE, AND DANGLE FROM THE HALLWAY CEILING LIKE A CHANDELIER, *YOU SHALL DO IT WITHOUT HESITATION OR CONFUSION.*
OTHERWISE, *CONSIDERABLE UNPLEASANTRIES* MAY AWAIT YOU.
IS THAT *CLEAR?*
GOT IT.


GREETINGS AND WELCOME, COODCOODAK. I AM DELIGHTED YOU'VE COME.
THE PLEASURE IS *ALL MINE!* EVEN MORE SO IF I COULD, WITH YOUR MAJESTY'S PERMISSION, STEAL A PEEK AT THE PRINCESS.
FOR MY WIFE, YOU SEE, IS EVER SO *FRAIL* AND WITH A POX SWEEPING THE LAND...


IS THIS THE WIFE WHO CAUGHT YOU ROLLING IN THE HAY WITH A MAIDEN DURING HARVEST, THEN CHASED YOU WITH A PITCHFORK NEAR A MILE BEFORE TIRING?
I WAGER YOU NEED ONLY FEED HER BETTER AND YOU SHALL SEE SWIFT RESULTS.
YOUR MESSAGE RINGS CLEAR, YET... may I still stay for the feast?
THE PLEASURE WOULD BE MINE, BARON.
THE EMISSARIES FROM SKELLIGE!
THE QUEEN WOULD HAVE PAVETTA BETROTHED TO A SKELLIGER. AN ALLIANCE WITH THE ISLANDERS WOULD BE MOST BENEFICIAL.
AND WHY'S THAT?
THEY ARE LESS LIKELY TO *RAID* THEIR OWN ALLIES.
THE KNIGHT EIST TUIRSEACH!
THE ROYAL NEPHEW CRACH AN CRAITE!
THE VALIANT DRUID ERMION!


EIST TUIRSEACH. WERE I IGNORANT OF YOUR CONTEMPT FOR MARRIAGE, I MIGHT BE HOPEFUL OF YOUR SEEKING PAVETTA'S HAND.
PAVETTA, YOUR MAJESTY, IS A BUD YET TO BLOSSOM. ONE NEED BUT LAY EYES UPON YOU TO KNOW THE BEAUTY THAT SHALL EMERGE.
THE PRINCESS'S HAND OUGHT TO BE PURSUED BY GREENER SHOOTS, SUCH AS CRACH HERE.
BE SEATED, NOBLE GUESTS.
WELL THEN, WITCHER. THE DIN HAS RISEN SUCH THAT WE MAY FINALLY CONVERSE.


YOU ARE TO CARRY OUT AN ASSIGNMENT.
SUSPECTED AS MUCH. RARELY AM I INVITED TO FEASTS OUT OF SHEER GENEROSITY.
WHAT DOES HER MAJESTY HAVE IN STORE FOR ME?
NOW WHAT WOULD ONE NEED A WITCHER FOR, *hm?* DIGGING A WELL? YOU ARE THE EXPERT IN YOUR TRADE HERE.
I AM. THOUGH I SUSPECT YOU MIGHT BE CONFUSING MY TRADE WITH THAT OF A HIRED KILLER.
CINTRA STANDS TO BENEFIT FROM AN ALLIANCE WITH SKELLIGE, SEALED THROUGH MARRIAGE. YOUR DAUGHTER'S.
AND ANY WHO PLOT TO THWART IT STAND TO BENEFIT FROM A LESSON.
A LESSON BEST TAUGHT BY A ***NOBODY*** FROM FOURHORN WHO'D PROMPTLY ***VANISH*** FROM THE SCENE.
ONLY ONE PROBLEM. I'M NO ASSASSIN.
NEVER ***WAS,*** NEVER ***WILL*** BE.


NEVER DO THAT AGAIN, GERALT. DO NOT SPEAK THAT WAY TO THOSE WHO RULE, FOR NEXT TIME YOU MAY NOT BE EXCUSED.
EVEN THE SMALLEST SLIP IN DECORUM IS OFTEN ENOUGH TO GET THE RACK.
TO A QUEEN, THERE ARE TWO KINDS OF PEOPLE.
THOSE WHOM SHE ORDERS, AND THOSE WHOM SHE PURCHASES.
EVERYONE CAN BE BOUGHT.
IT IS BUT A QUESTION OF PRICE.
Oh, GERALT. I PRATTLE AWAY, WHILE YOU SEEM TO HAVE MISPLACED YOUR TONGUE.
HUMOR ME, hm? I AM BEGINNING TO MISS YOUR CLEVER REMARKS.


CLEARLY, YOUR MAJESTY, I MAKE FOR DULL COMPANY AT THE TABLE.
COULD'VE PUT SOMEONE MORE TALKATIVE IN MY PLACE.
NEED'VE ONLY ORDERED, OR BOUGHT THEM.
JUST A QUESTION OF PRICE.
MIGHT THINK I WOULD TAKE PRIDE IN SITTING BESIDE A QUEEN. BUT PRIDE, FOR A WITCHER, MEANS MUCH MORE.
ONE TIME, A CERTAIN LORD OFFENDED A WITCHER'S PRIDE WITH A CERTAIN JOB, NOT CONSIDERING THE WITCHER'S CODE, HIS DIGNITY, AND WHAT'S WORSE, NOT ACCEPTING THE WITCHER'S POLITE REFUSAL.
WASN'T THAT LORD'S BEST IDEA.

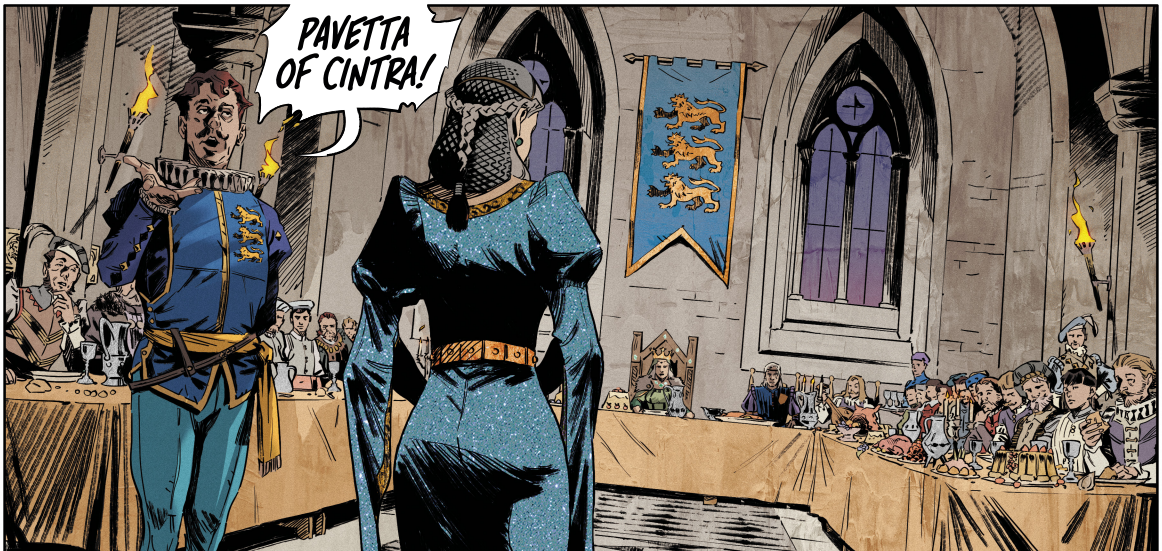

YOUR MAJESTY, SURELY YOU HAVE IMPORTANT REASONS TO SACRIFICE SO MUCH TIME TO THE NOBLE FELLOW FROM FOURHORN, YET IT IS *HIGH TIME* TO BEHOLD THE *PRINCESS.*
RIGHT YOU ARE, EIST. AS USUAL.
HAXO!

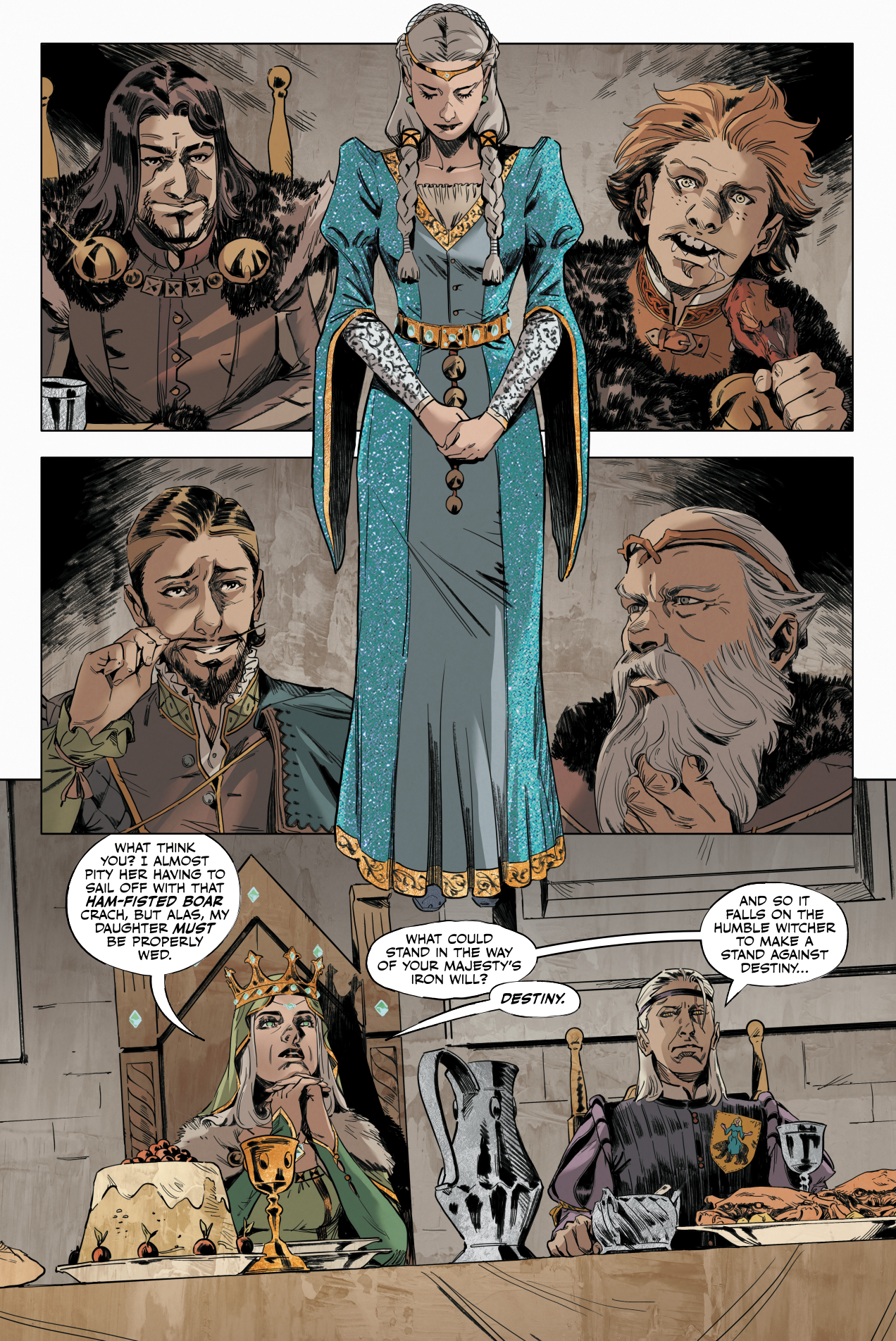

DID YOU HEAR? WE HAVE EXCHANGED PLEASANTRIES FOR FAR TOO LONG. NOW *LISTEN WELL.*
I AIM TO ACHIEVE WHAT I'VE SET OUT TO DO. YOU HAVE A *CHOICE.*


EITHER YOU SHALL FOLLOW ORDERS, OR I SHALL REMUNERATE YOU FOR YOUR SERVICES.
NOTICE I DID NOT SAY *"BUY YOU,"* SO AS NOT TO OFFEND YOUR *FRAGILE* WITCHER'S *PRIDE.* A SHARP DISTINCTION, WOULD YOU NOT AGREE?


SOMEHOW, THE SHARPNESS OF THAT DISTINCTION FLEW RIGHT PAST MY HEAD.


THOSE BOUGHT ARE PAID ACCORDING TO WHIM, WHILE THOSE WHO OFFER A SERVICE SET THEIR OWN PRICE. PLAIN ENOUGH?

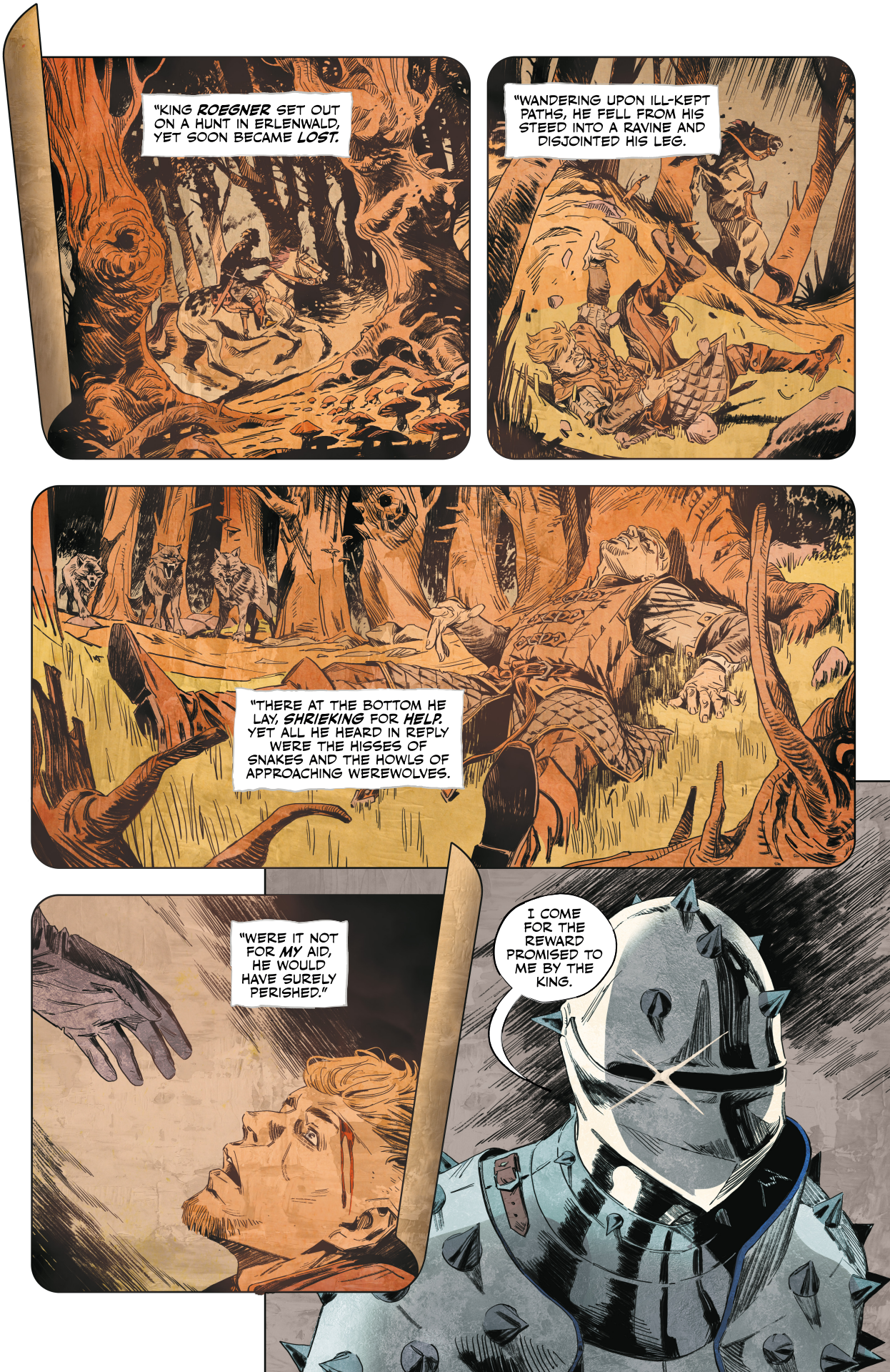

PAVETTA OF CINTRA!

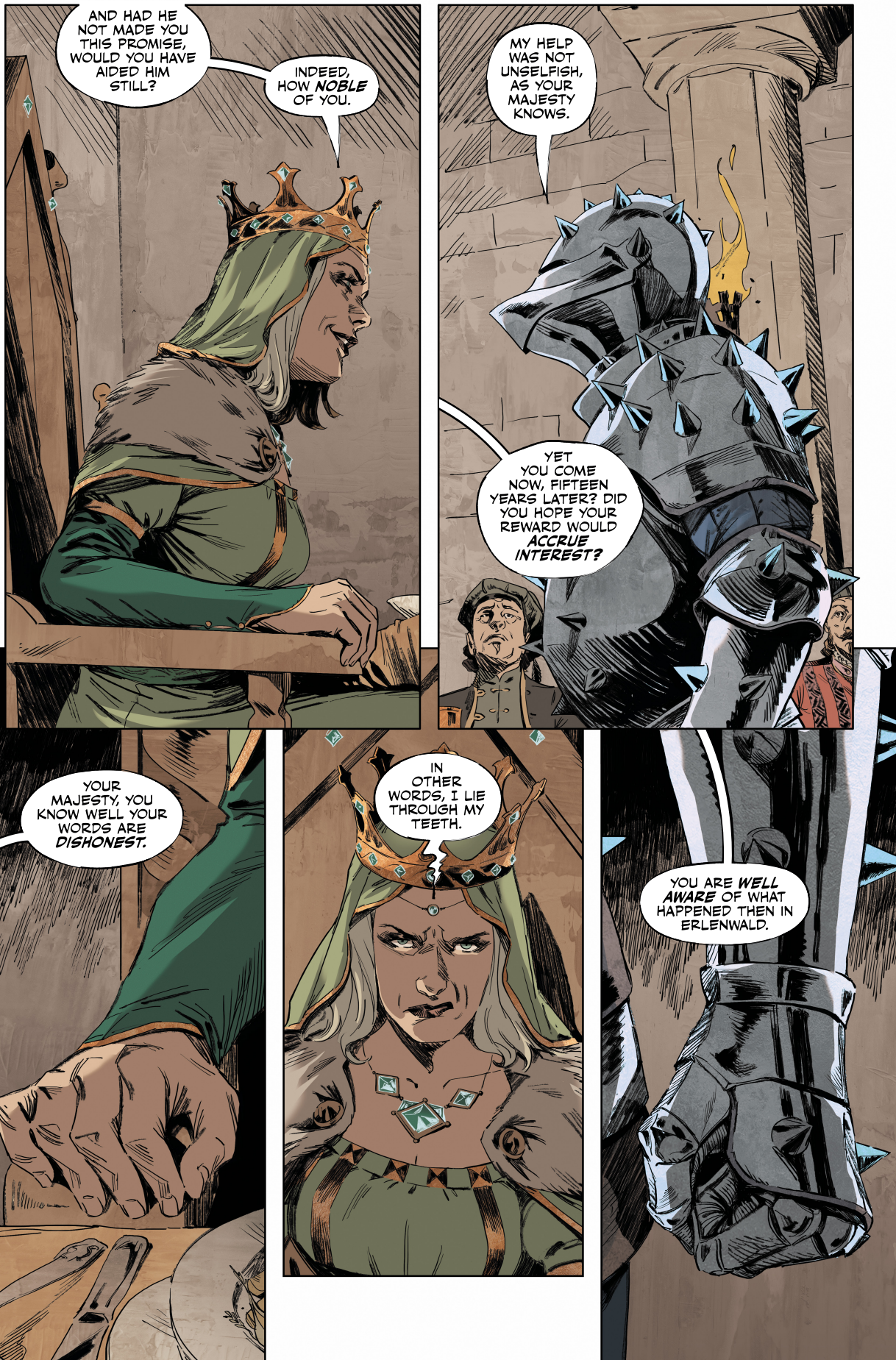

WHAT THINK YOU? I ALMOST PITY HER HAVING TO SAIL OFF WITH THAT *HAM-FISTED BOAR* CRACH, BUT ALAS, MY DAUGHTER *MUST* BE PROPERLY WED.
WHAT COULD STAND IN THE WAY OF YOUR MAJESTY'S IRON WILL?
DESTINY.
AND SO IT FALLS ON THE HUMBLE WITCHER TO MAKE A STAND AGAINST DESTINY...


DO NOT BE CUTE. YOU WILL ENSURE THE DESIRED OUTCOME, AND IN TURN I SHALL GIVE YOU WHATEVER YOU ASK.
YOU'LL HAVE TO REPEAT THAT, YOUR MAJESTY.
I SHALL GIVE WHATEVER YOU WISH. YOU NEED BUT ANSWER YES, OR NO.
YES.
BETTER. *MUCH* BETTER, GERALT. NOW TAKE YOUR HAND AND PLACE IT, DISCREETLY, ON THE BACK OF MY THRONE.
YOU DO REALIZE, YOUR MAJESTY, THAT A *SWORD* CAN'T COMPETE WITH *DESTINY.*
I DO. ALL IT NEEDS IS A WITCHER TO HOLD IT. AS YOU CAN SEE, I HAVE ARRANGED FOR *BOTH.*
YOUR MAJESTY, NOBLE SIRES!

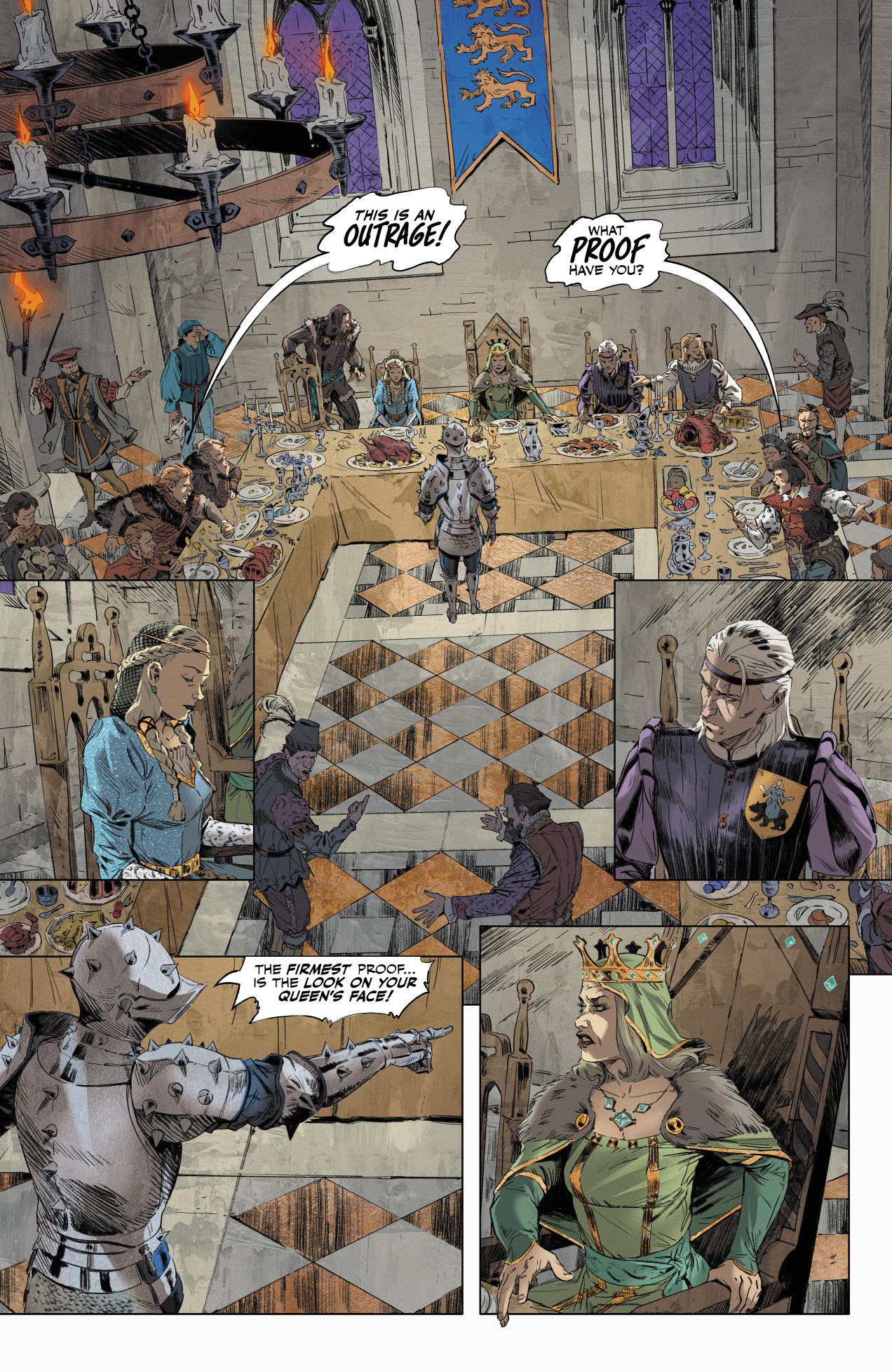

I AM
URCHEON OF
ERLENWALD.

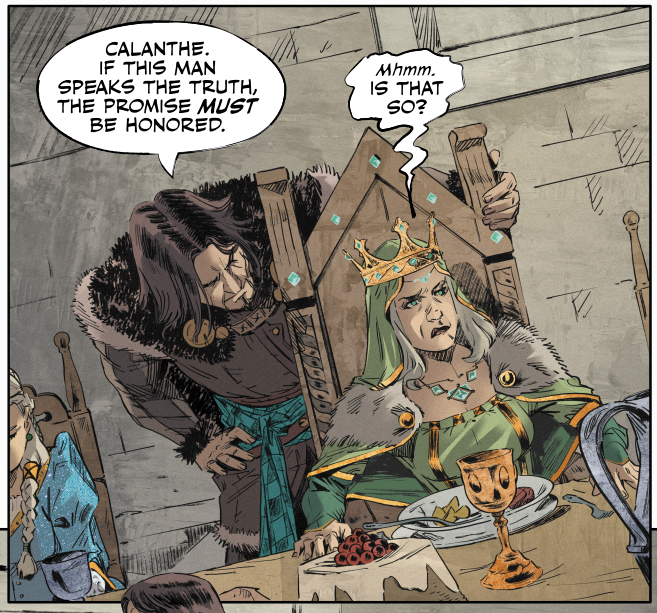

WELCOME AND FIND A SEAT. IN CINTRA, WE ARE GLAD TO HOST ALL GUESTS.
I THANK YOU, YET I COME WITH A MATTER OF GREAT URGENCY.
WITH YOUR MAJESTY'S PERMISSION, I WILL PRESENT IT FORTHWITH OUT OF RESPECT FOR YOUR TIME.
YOUR CONCERN FOR OUR TIME DOES NOT EXCUSE YOUR LACK OF COMMON COURTESY. REMOVE YOUR HELM.
MY FACE, YOUR MAJESTY, MUST REMAIN CONCEALED UNTIL THE STROKE OF MIDNIGHT. I AM BOUND BY A KNIGHT'S OATH.
I SHALL ALLOW IT. TELL US WHY YOU HAVE COME, URCHEON WITHOUT-A-FACE.
FIFTEEN YEARS AGO...


"KING ROEGNER SET OUT ON A HUNT IN ERLENWALD, YET SOON BECAME LOST.
"WANDERING UPON ILL-KEPT PATHS, HE FELL FROM HIS STEED INTO A RAVINE AND DISJOINTED HIS LEG.
"THERE AT THE BOTTOM HE LAY, SHRIEKING FOR HELP. YET ALL HE HEARD IN REPLY WERE THE HISSES OF SNAKES AND THE HOWLS OF APPROACHING WEREWOLVES.
"WERE IT NOT FOR MY AID, HE WOULD HAVE SURELY PERISHED."
I COME FOR THE REWARD PROMISED TO ME BY THE KING.


AND HAD HE NOT MADE YOU THIS PROMISE, WOULD YOU HAVE AIDED HIM STILL?
INDEED, HOW *NOBLE* OF YOU.
MY HELP WAS NOT UNSELFISH, AS YOUR MAJESTY KNOWS.
YET YOU COME NOW, FIFTEEN YEARS LATER? DID YOU HOPE YOUR REWARD WOULD *ACCRUE INTEREST?*
YOUR MAJESTY, YOU KNOW WELL YOUR WORDS ARE *DISHONEST.*
IN OTHER WORDS, I LIE THROUGH MY TEETH.
YOU ARE *WELL AWARE* OF WHAT HAPPENED THEN IN ERLENWALD.


"WHEN THE KING, SPARED FROM UNFORTUNATE HAPPENSTANCE, ASKED ME WHAT I WISHED FOR THE SECOND TIME, I ANSWERED HIM THUS.
"'THAT WHICH YOU WILL FIND AT HOME, YET DO NOT EXPECT...'
"THE KING SWORE THAT IT WOULD BE SO.
"UPON HIS RETURN TO THIS CASTLE HE FOUND YOU, CALANTHE, BLESSED WITH A NEWBORN."
MY GOOD KNIGHTS, YOU HAVE COME IN VAIN! FOR SINCE THE DAY OF HER BIRTH...
...PAVETTA HAS BELONGED TO ME!
HMP


THIS IS AN OUTRAGE!
WHAT PROOF HAVE YOU?
THE FIRMEST PROOF... IS THE LOOK ON YOUR QUEEN'S FACE!


CALANTHE. IF THIS MAN SPEAKS THE TRUTH, THE PROMISE *MUST* BE HONORED.
Mhmm. IS THAT SO?


OR AM I TO BELIEVE YOU THINK SO HIGHLY OF *ALL* PROMISES?
EIST, THIS IS *NOT* THE *SAME*...








YOU INSOLENT DOG! I DIDN'T SAIL ALL THE WAY FROM SKELLIGE TO RETURN EMPTY-HANDED! IF IT'S A SCRAP YOU CRAVE, I'LL GLADLY OBLIGE.
SOMEONE FETCH MY BLADE!
PERHAPS SOMEONE OUGHT TO SEW YOUR GOB SHUT, CRACH?
WILL YOU SILENCE ME, TOO, TUIRSEACH? I SHALL WASH ANY DISRESPECT FLUNG AT MY PRINCE WITH BLOOD, AND I DARE ANYONE TO STOP ME!
ARE WE TO TURN CINTRA'S THRONE ROOM INTO A ROADSIDE TAVERN THEN? TO BASH OUR HEADS BLOODY WHEN TEMPERS RUN HOT?
KA-BRAAA-AAA-GH!

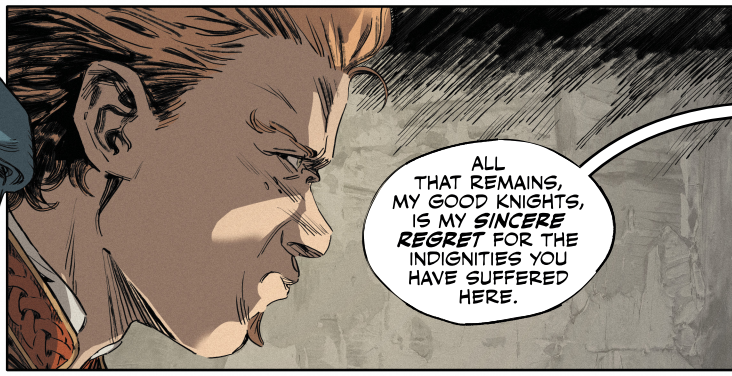

NOT A TAVERN, BUT A MENAGERIE! HENCE MY WELL-TIMED SQUAWK! MY ESTEEMED CALANTHE, LET ME SPEAK MY PIECE.
SPEAK. BUT BE BRIEF AND TO THE POINT.
INDEED, URCHEON OF ERLENWALD HAS DEMANDED A PECULIAR REWARD. BUT LET US NOT PRETEND NONE HAVE HEARD OF THE LAW OF SURPRISE.
"UPON RETURNING HOME, YOU SHALL GRANT ME WHAT YOU FIND, YET DO NOT EXPECT." IT COULD BE A DOG, A MAN IN YOUR WIFE'S BED, YOUR MOTHER-IN-LAW...
...YET SOMETIMES...
...IT IS A CHILD MARKED BY DESTINY.
AND ONE DOES NOT TRIFLE WITH DESTINY!
DO NOT ATTEMPT TO FRIGHTEN ME, COODCOODAK.
I AM REMINDED OF ANOTHER LEGEND IN WHICH THE KING KEPT HIS WORD, AS KINGS DO.
INDEED, FOR US LOWLY VASSALS, ALL THAT BINDS US TO A KING IS THEIR WORD. OUR PRIVILEGES, OUR FIEFDOMS REST UPON IT.
HAVE WE CAUSE, THEN, TO DOUBT IT?


GENTLEMEN, THIS...
...URCHEON...

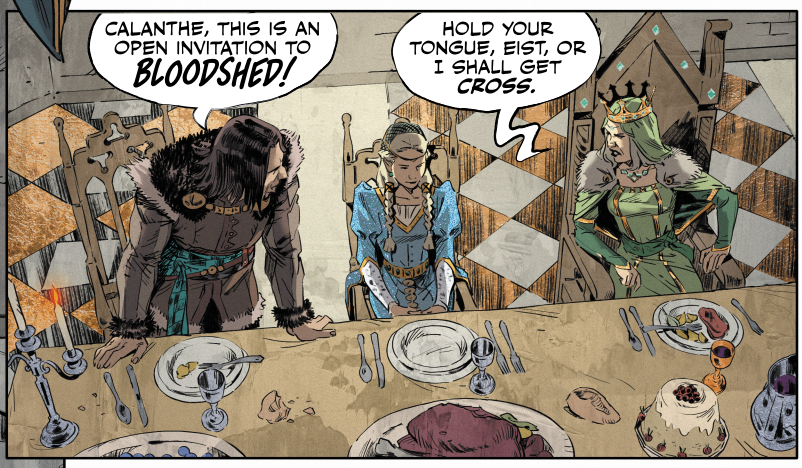

...SPEAKS THE TRUTH.


COODCOODAK HAS REMINDED ME I AM NOT JUST A MOTHER, BUT ALSO QUEEN.

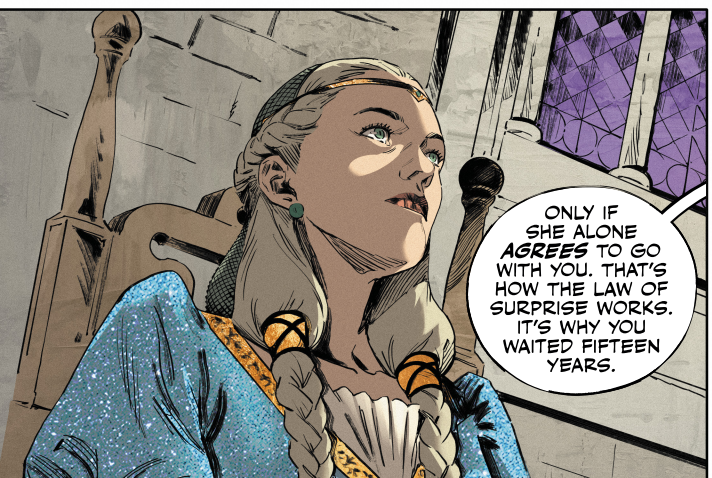

TOMORROW, I SHALL SUMMON THE COURT. LET THEM DECLARE WHETHER CINTRA'S THRONE SHOULD BE HANDED AWAY TO SOME VAGABOND, OR OCCUPIED IN SERVICE OF THE KINGDOM'S BEST INTERESTS.

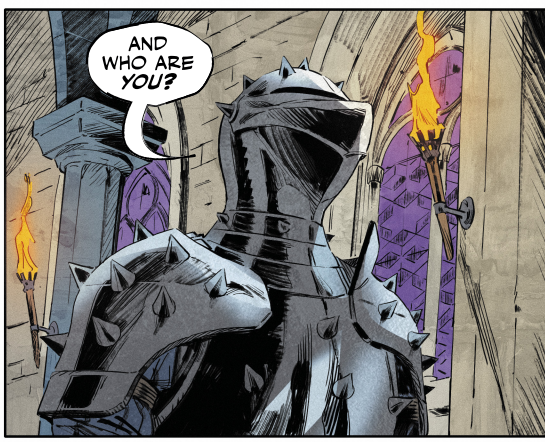

ALL THAT REMAINS, MY GOOD KNIGHTS, IS MY SINCERE REGRET FOR THE INDIGNITIES YOU HAVE SUFFERED HERE.


BUT THE FAULT LIES NOT WITH ME.


CALANTHE, THIS IS AN OPEN INVITATION TO BLOODSHED!
HOLD YOUR TONGUE, EIST, OR I SHALL GET CROSS.


NO NEED TO SUMMON ANY COURTS.
A CHILD CHOSEN BY BLIND FATE, BOUND THROUGH DESTINY TO ANOTHER--THEIR LIFE CAN SERVE AN *IMPORTANT PURPOSE.*
IT'S WHY URCHEON DEMANDED ONLY *THAT* AND *NOTHING ELSE.*
HE DOESN'T WANT THE *CINTRIAN THRONE.* HE'S HERE FOR THE *PRINCESS.*
YES! AND I SHALL HAVE MY *DESTINY!*
GOT NO CLAIM TO THE PRINCESS. *YET.*


ONLY IF SHE ALONE *AGREES* TO GO WITH YOU. THAT'S HOW THE LAW OF SURPRISE WORKS. IT'S WHY YOU WAITED FIFTEEN YEARS.


AND WHO ARE *YOU?*


GERALT OF RIVIA.
NONE 'ERE KNOW THE LAW OF SURPRISE BETTER THAN HE. TAKEN FROM HIS HOME, HE WERE.
AND THROUGH THE FORCE OF DESTINY, HE BECAME WHAT YOU SEE NOW.
A WITCHER.
MIDNIGHT HAS STRUCK. YOU ARE FREED FROM YOUR OATH. BEFORE MY DAUGHTER SEALS HER FATE, LET HER BEHOLD YOUR FACE.
REMOVE YOUR HELM!


THUS I LOOK, AS YOU KNEW WELL, CALANTHE. YOU *PREPARED* FOR MY ARRIVAL.
ENOUGH.
PAVETTA! YOU SEE NOW WHO, OR RATHER *WHAT,* HAS LAID CLAIM TO YOU. UNDER THE LAW OF SURPRISE, THE CHOICE IS *YOURS.*
YOU HOPED TO *HUMILIATE* ME. KNOW THAT YOU HAVE ONLY HUMILIATED *YOURSELF.*


PAVETTA! SAY *YES* AND YOU SHALL BECOME THIS *BEAST'S* PRIZE AND PREY. SAY *NO* AND NEVERMORE SHALL YOU LAY EYES ON HIM.
ANSWER.


YES.
WE HAVE ALL HEARD IT. TRUTH AND DESTINY HAVE TRUMPED LIES AND DECEIT. MY CLAIM HAS BEEN PROVEN.
GUARDS! KILL HIM!


DUUUNYYY!
SLSLH


KRASH
KLATER
SLICE

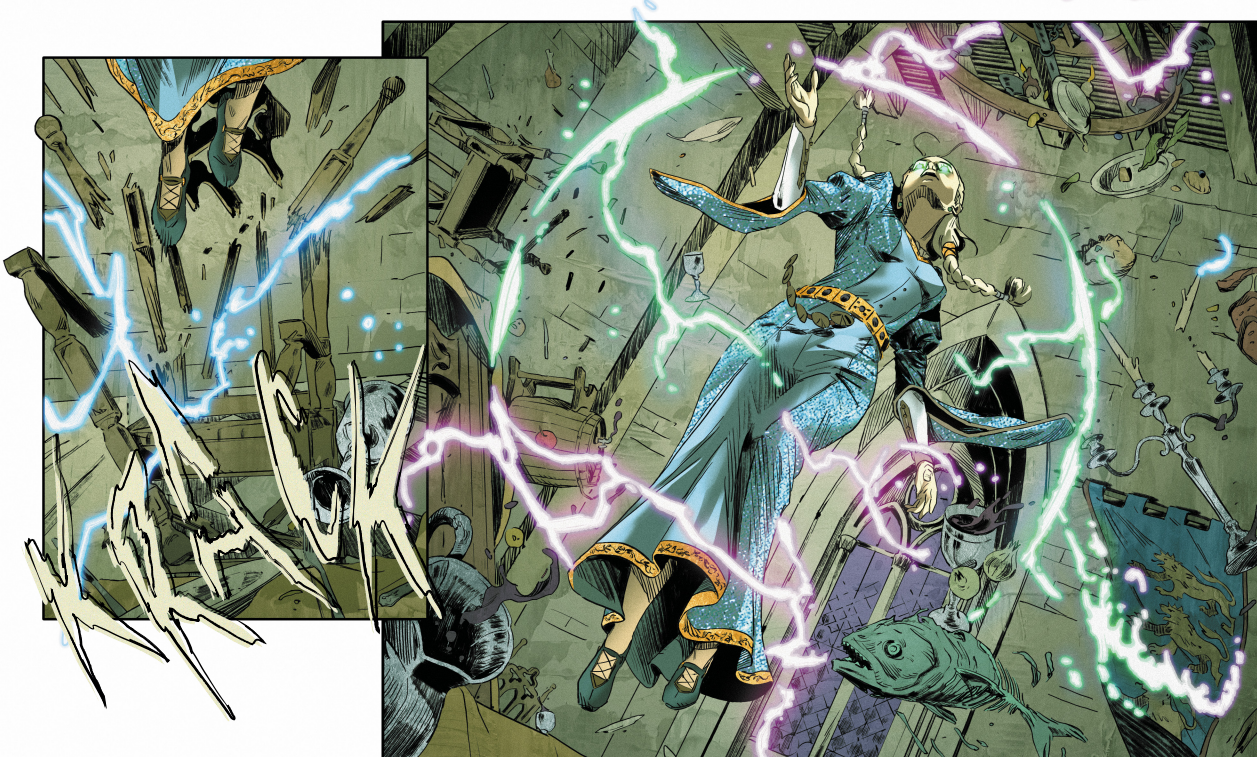



CALANTHE!


IT'S PURE PRIMORDIAL POWER! SHE'S NOT IN CONTROL!
CLEARLY! GOTTA STOP HER!


READY?
AYE!

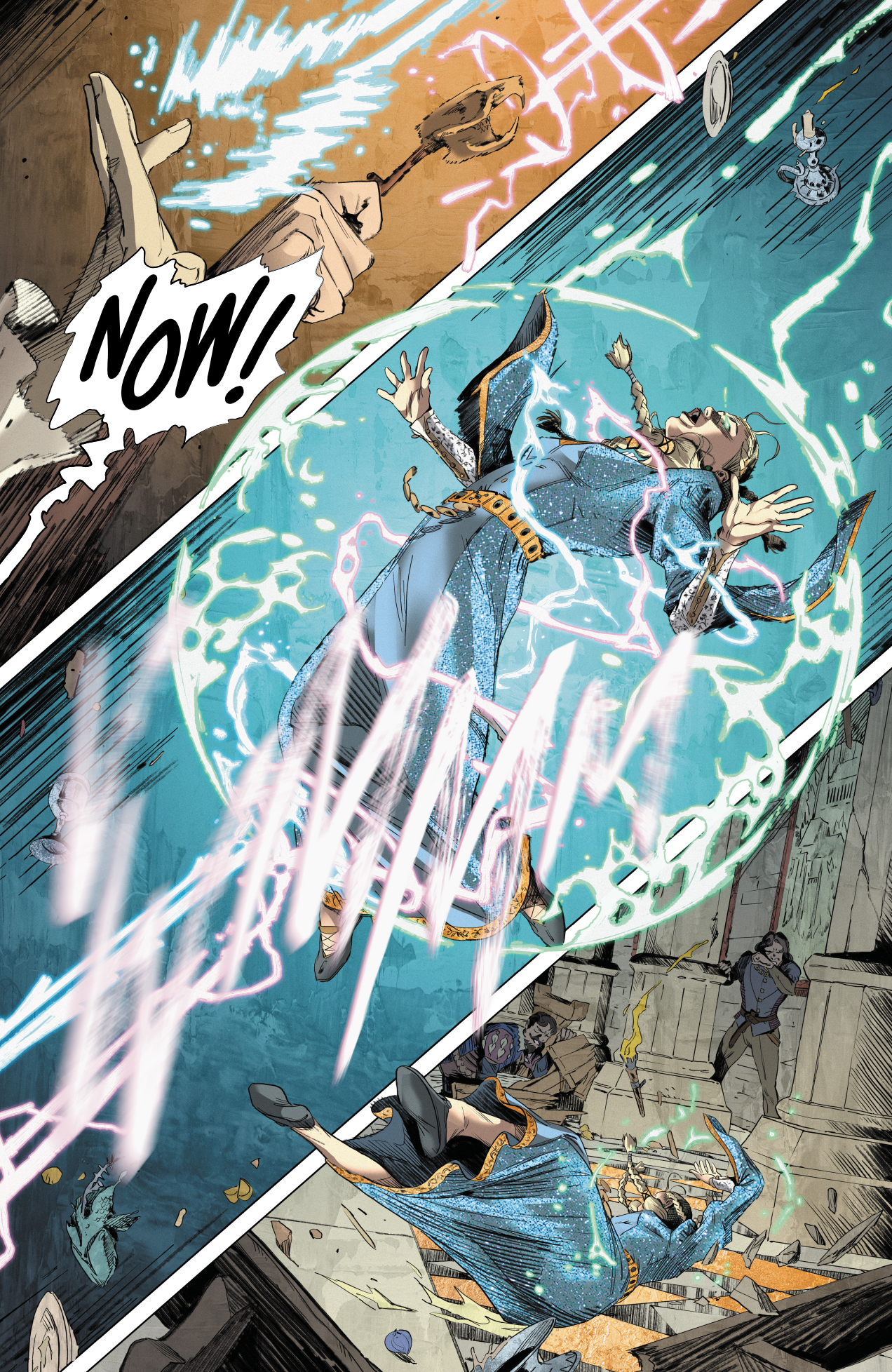

NOW!



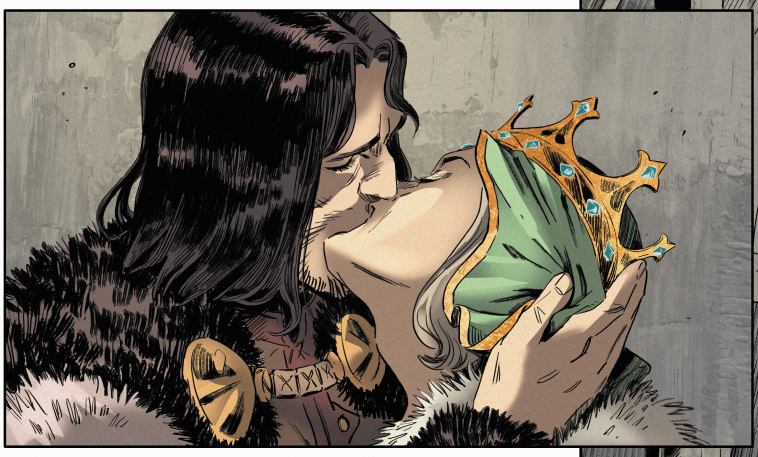

By all the bloody demons...!
HOLD HER, ERMION!
OR WE'RE DONE FOR!
EEEKHAAA
SHE'S LET GO... GERALT, SHE'S REFOCUSING ALL HER FORCE ON US!


OOOF!


BRAAK!
GHAAA-BK


NOW!

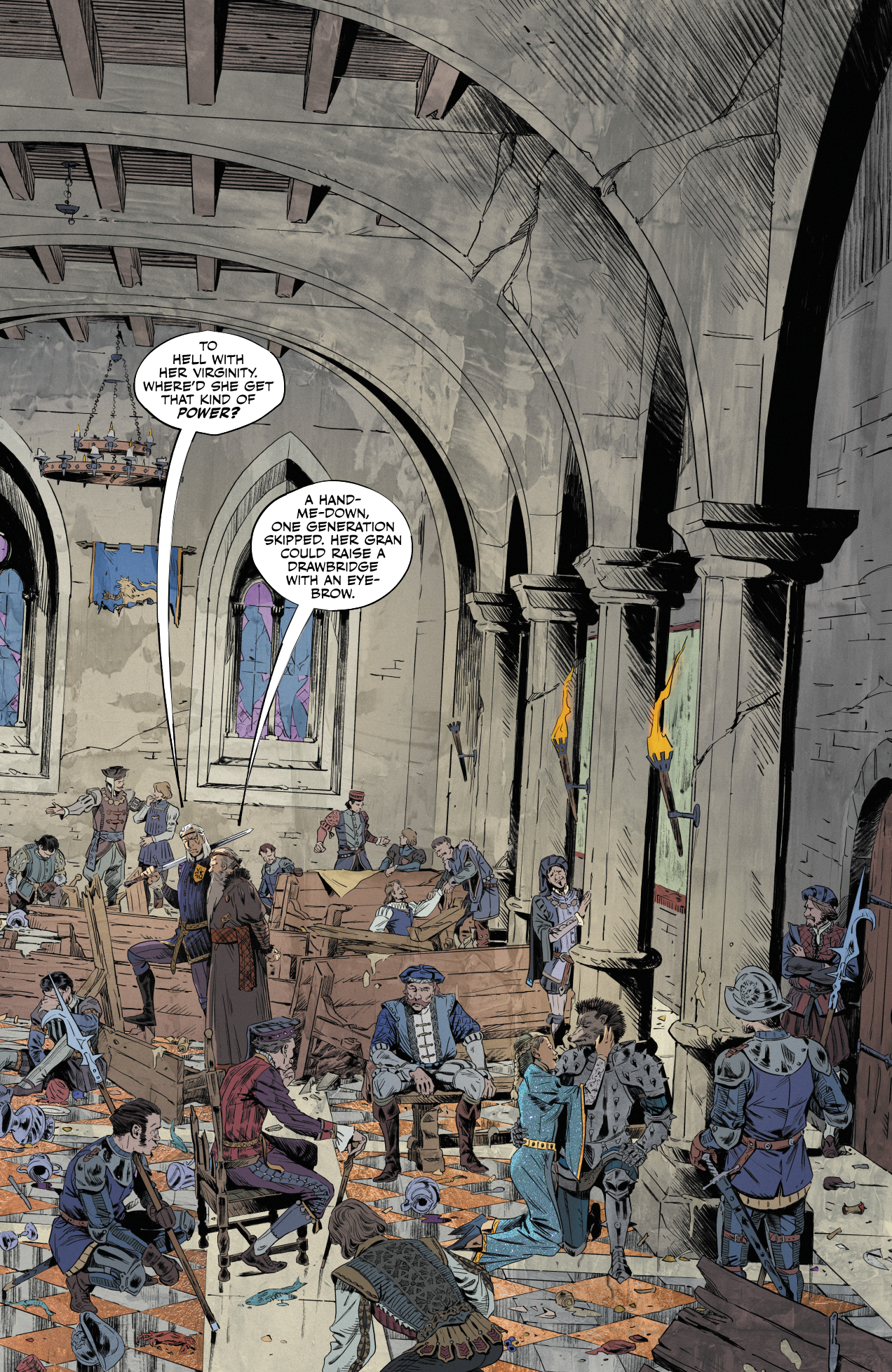

MY BELOVED, MY SWEETEST...
EYES ARE UPON US, EIST.
LET THEM GAWK.



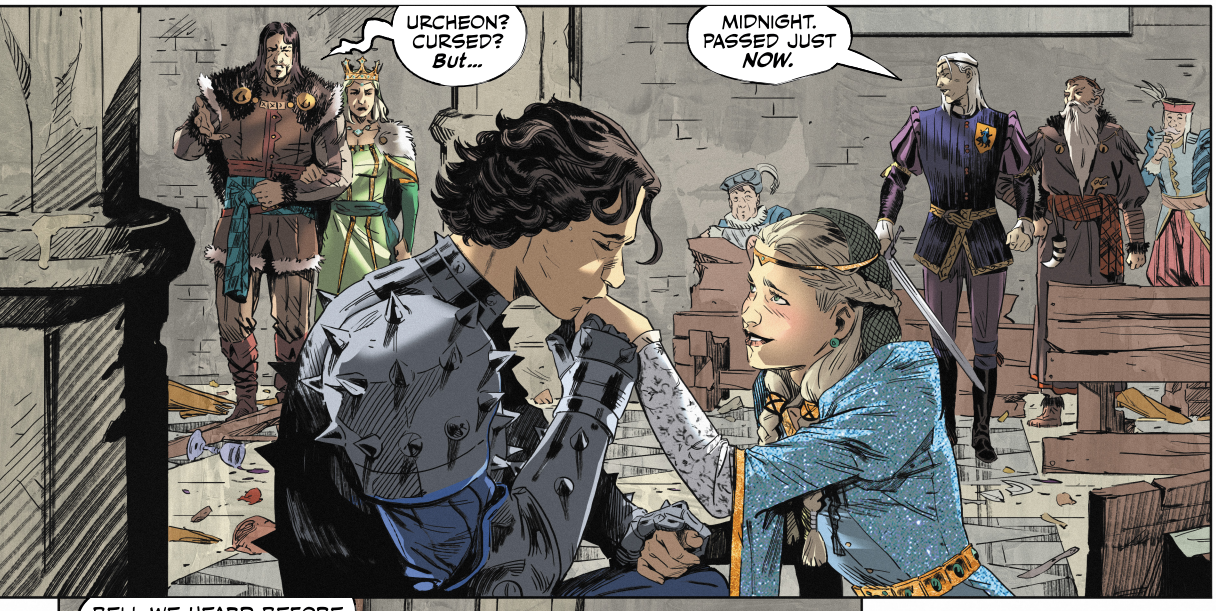

LASSES THESE DAYS... ONLY ONE THING ON THEIR MINDS!
Huh?
KNOW YE NOT, WITCHER, THAT VIRGINS CANNOT WIELD MAGIC?


DUNY...


WATER!
BEER!
HEALER!


TO HELL WITH HER VIRGINITY. WHERE'D SHE GET THAT KIND OF *POWER?*
A HAND-ME-DOWN, ONE GENERATION SKIPPED. HER GRAN COULD RAISE A DRAWBRIDGE WITH AN EYE-BROW.



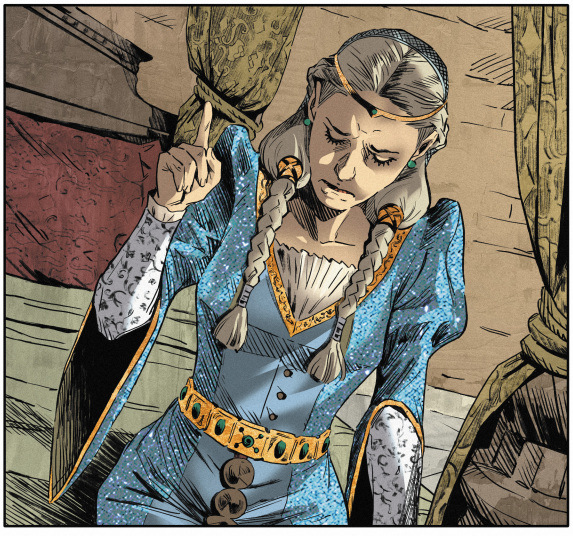

URCHEON? CURSED? But...
MIDNIGHT. PASSED JUST NOW.


BELL WE HEARD BEFORE WAS THE TOLLER'S MISTAKE...
...RIGHT, CALANTHE?

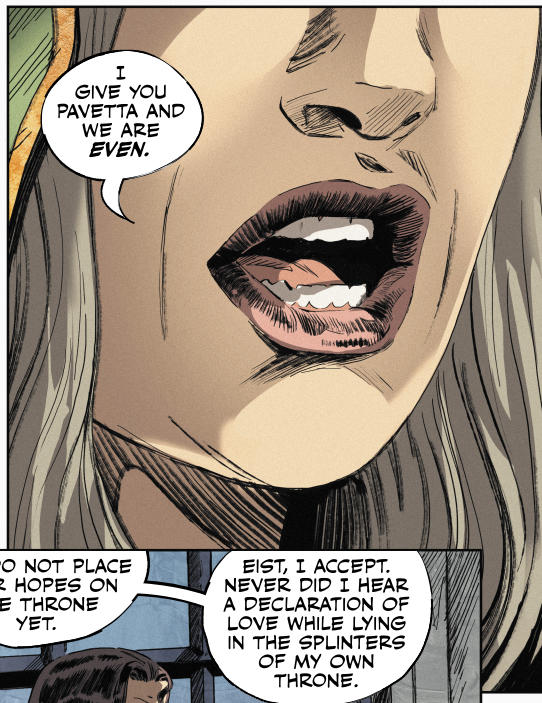

ENOUGH. I WISH TO SEE YOU IN MY CHAMBERS.
ALL OF YOU.


INDEED, A CURSE SINCE BIRTH. I NEVER DISCOVERED THE CAUSE.
BETWEEN MIDNIGHT AND DAYBREAK, AN ORDINARY MAN... AND THEN...YOU HAVE SEEN IT. I WAS TOLD A CHILD OF SURPRISE COULD BREAK THE CURSE.
SHORTLY AFTER, I CHANCED UPON ROEGNER. THE REST YOU KNOW.
Oh, I THINK WE CAN FILL IN THE GAPS...


SUCH AS YOU WAITING NOT FIFTEEN YEARS, BUT WOOING MY DAUGHTER FAR SOONER!
PAVETTA! SINCE WHEN?




CALANTHE...
I AM NOT FINISHED.
DUNY, I WOULD SEEK YOUR FORGIVENESS WERE I NOT SO LOATH TO APOLOGIZE.


I GIVE YOU PAVETTA AND WE ARE *EVEN.*


THANKS, M'LADY. *THANKS.*

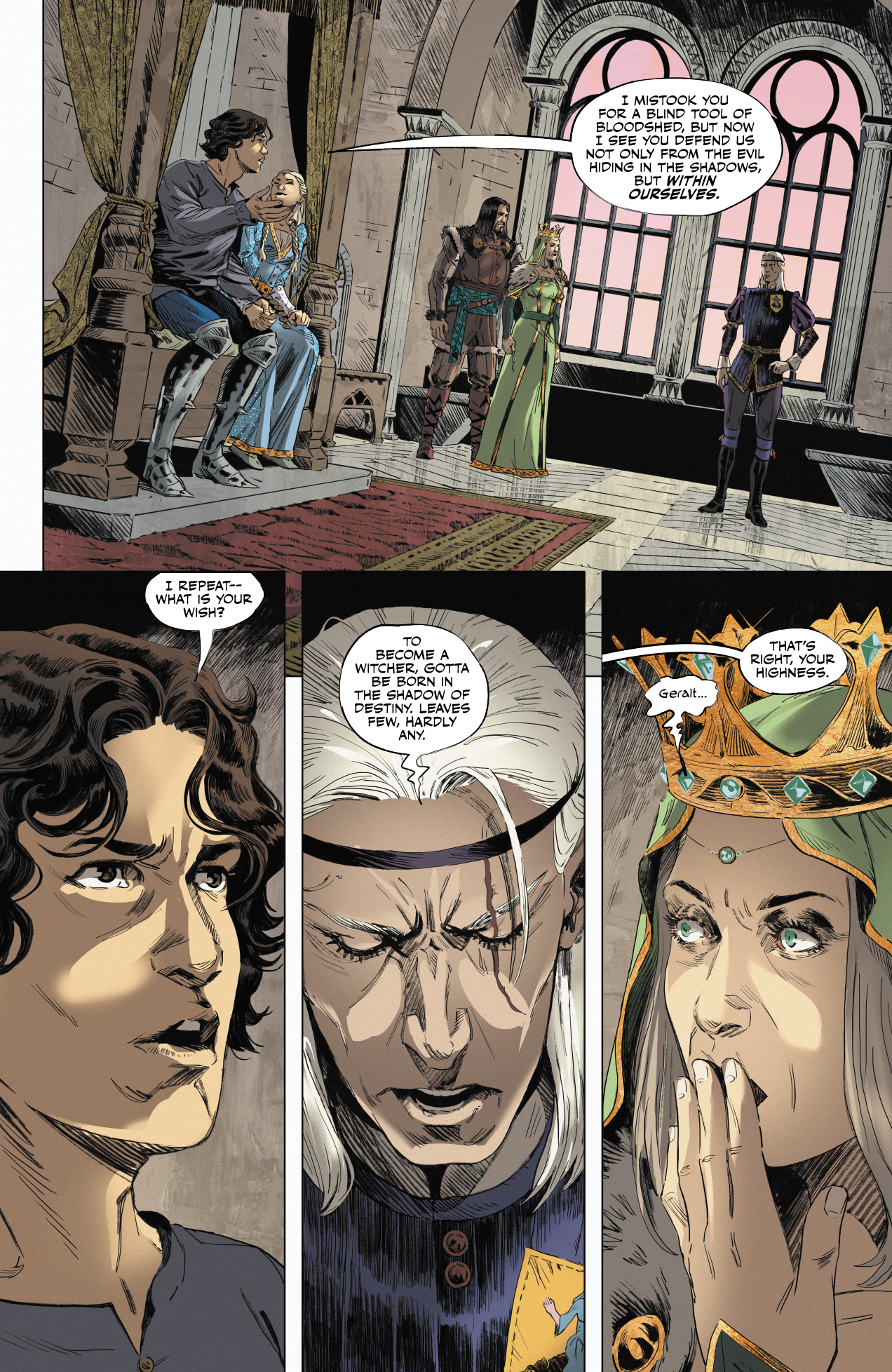

YET DO NOT PLACE YOUR HOPES ON THE THRONE YET.
EIST, I ACCEPT. NEVER DID I HEAR A DECLARATION OF LOVE WHILE LYING IN THE SPLINTERS OF MY OWN THRONE.


BY THE BY, ERMION. PAVETTA SHALL NEED A MENTOR.
IT WOULD BE MY HONOR.
I SHOULD HOPE SO.


Dawn already...


DUNY! IT IS LIGHT AND YET...
YOU LIFTED THE CURSE.
THE SECOND YOU UTTERED "I GIVE YOU PAVETTA," DESTINY WAS FULFILLED.
SO IT WORKED... YOUR MAJESTY! THANK YOU!
THE OUTCOME I DESIRED... IT CAME TO PASS. CINTRA IS ALLIED WITH SKELLIGE. MY DAUGHTER SHALL NOT WED FOR THE WORSE.
ONLY RAINFARN'S DAGGER MIGHT HAVE ALTERED THE COURSE OF DESTINY WERE IT NOT FOR THE WITCHER'S SWORD. IT APPEARS YOUR INTEGRITY HAS PAID OFF.
PAVETTA, DID YOU HEAR?!
Mhmm.
IT IS NOW BUT A QUESTION OF PRICE. NAME YOURS.


YOUR GREEN SASH. SO I'LL NEVER FORGET THE EYES OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL QUEEN I'VE MET.
HA!
HERE, THE STONES IN THIS TRINKET ARE TRUER IN HUE.
I, TOO, AM IN YOUR DEBT, WITCHER. IF IT IS A QUESTION OF PRICE, THEN IT IS *I* WHO SHOULD PAY.
WHAT IS YOUR WISH, GERALT?
WHEN A WITCHER HEARS THAT QUESTION, HE MUST ASK THAT IT BE *REPEATED.*


I MISTOOK YOU FOR A BLIND TOOL OF BLOODSHED, BUT NOW I SEE YOU DEFEND US NOT ONLY FROM THE EVIL HIDING IN THE SHADOWS, BUT *WITHIN OURSELVES.*
I REPEAT-- WHAT IS YOUR WISH?
TO BECOME A WITCHER, GOTTA BE BORN IN THE SHADOW OF DESTINY. LEAVES FEW, HARDLY ANY.
Geralt...
THAT'S RIGHT, YOUR HIGHNESS.


DUNY. YOU'LL GIVE ME WHAT YOU HAVE, BUT DO NOT KNOW OF.
IN SIX YEARS, I'LL RETURN TO SEE WHETHER DESTINY HAS SMILED ON ME.
PAVETTA!
Are... ARE YOU...?!
YES.

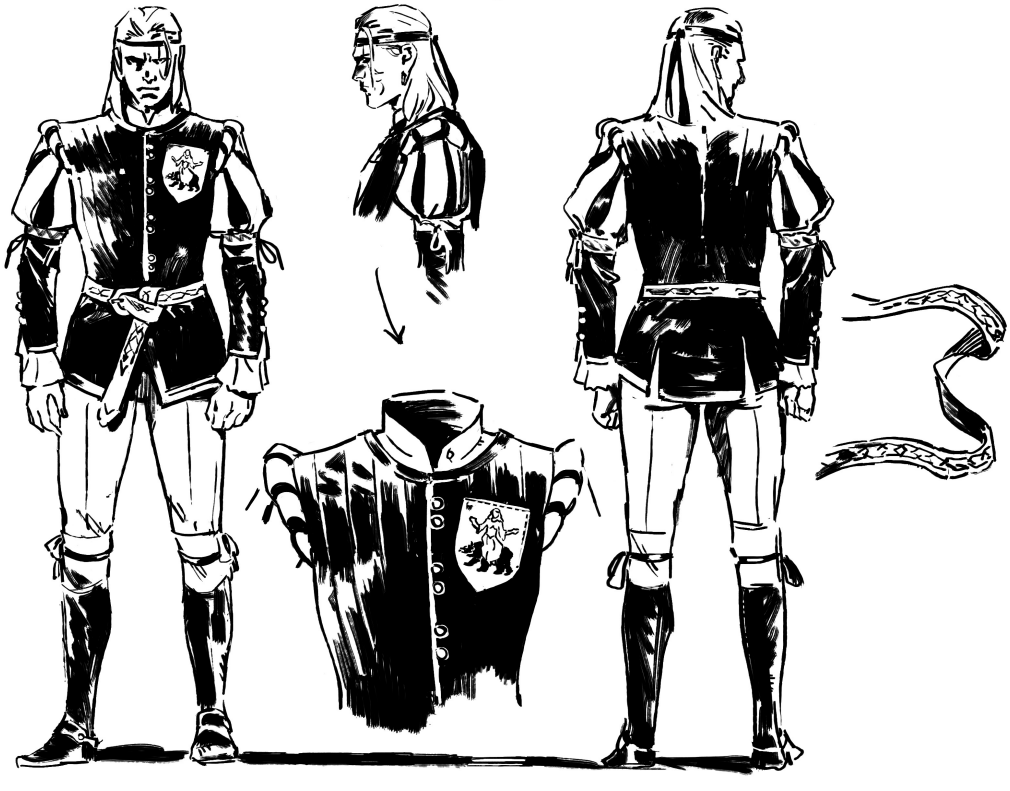


CHARACTER SKETCHES OF GERALT

BY MATTEO BELLISARIO



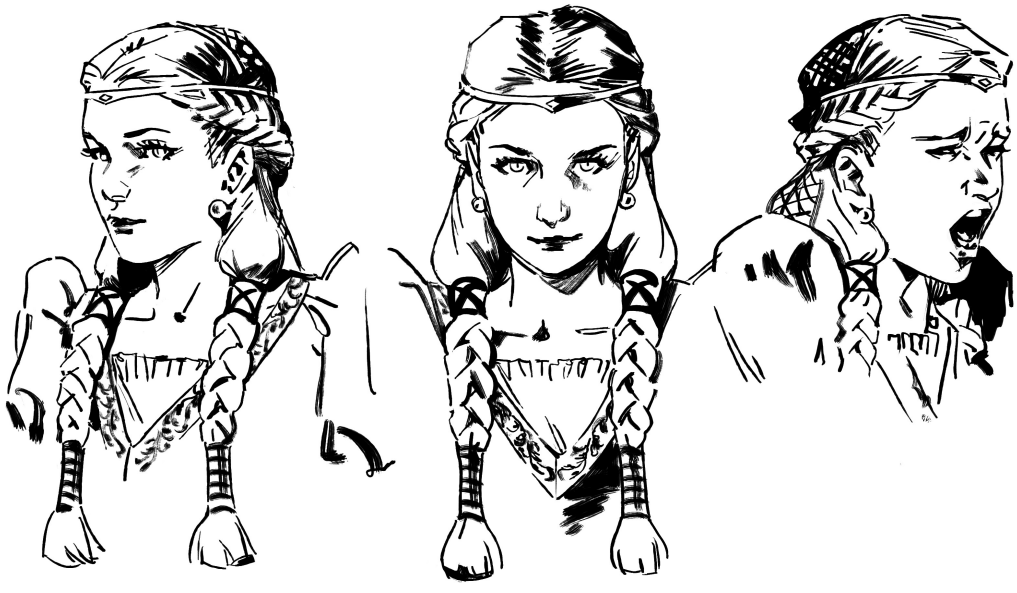


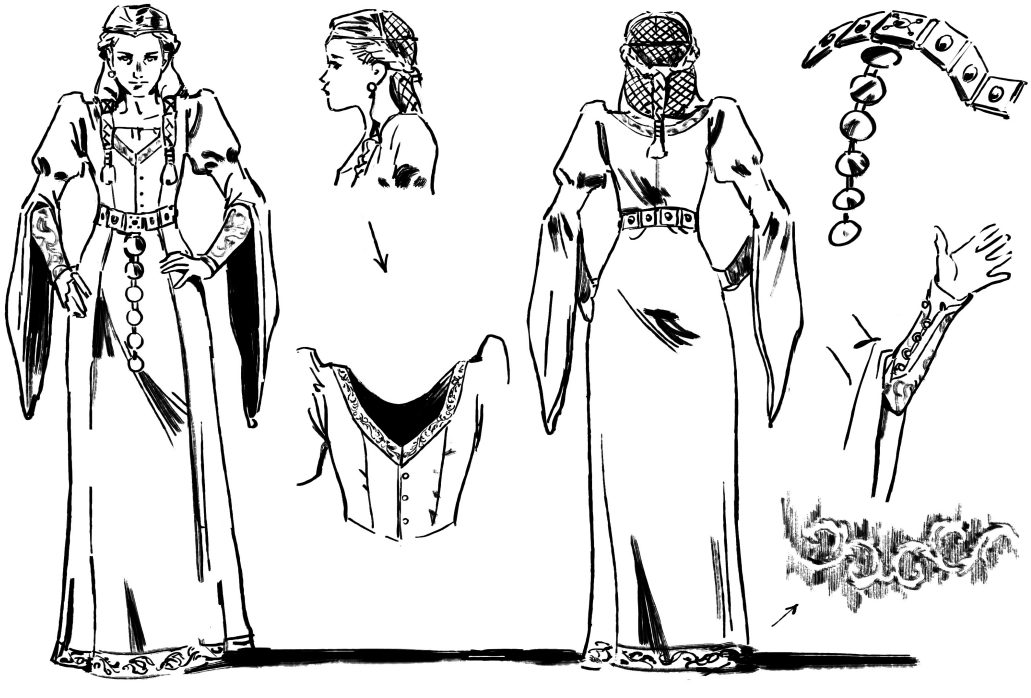


CHARACTER SKETCHES OF PAVETTA

BY MATTEO BELLISARIO





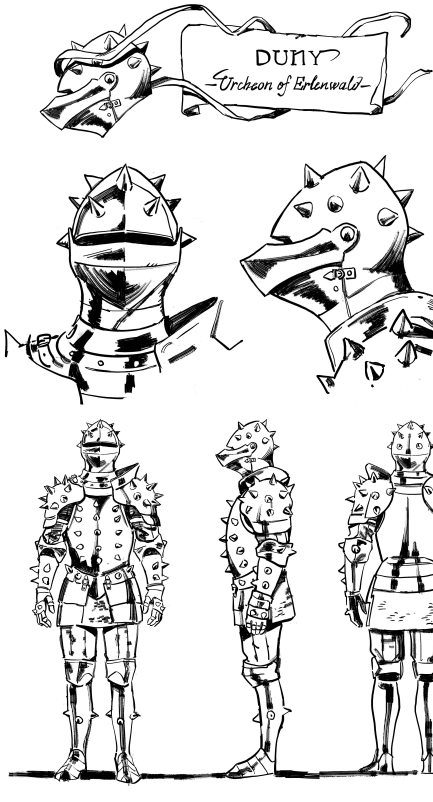


CHARACTER SKETCHES OF DUNY

BY MATTEO BELLISARIO











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THE WITCHER: A QUESTION OF PRICE

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