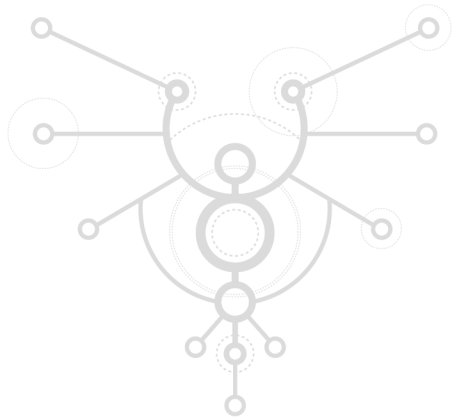


THE DYING & THE DEAD™





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COLORS

RUS WOOTON

LETTERS

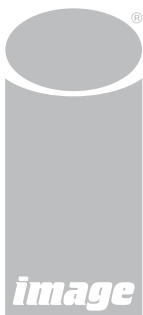
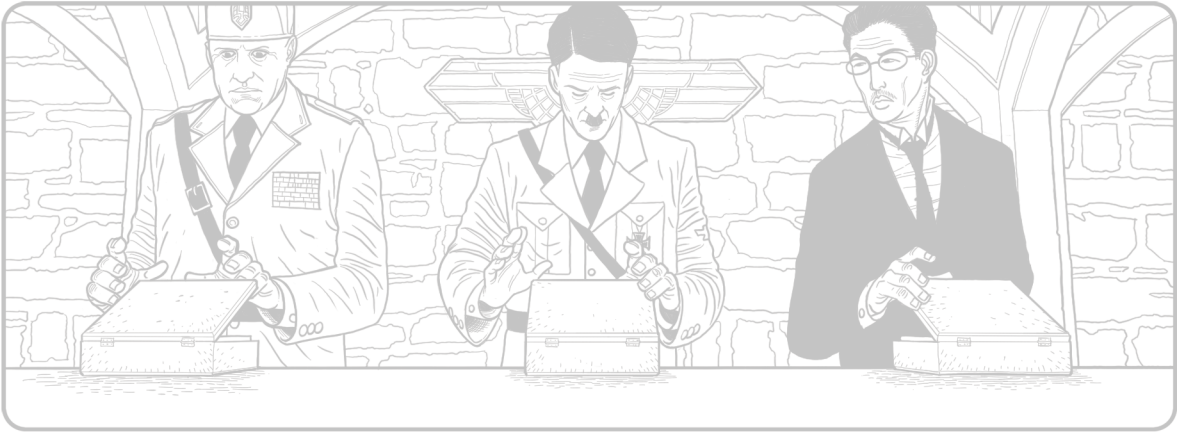
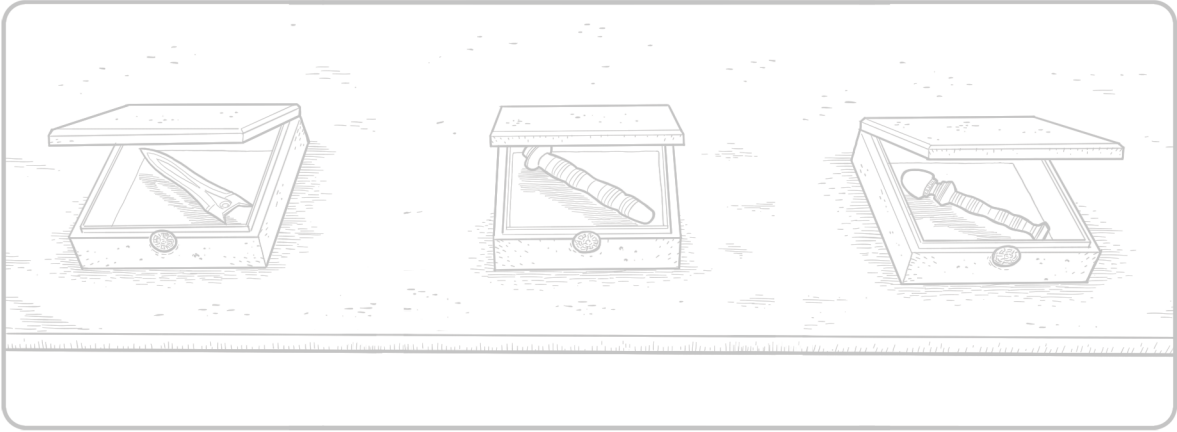


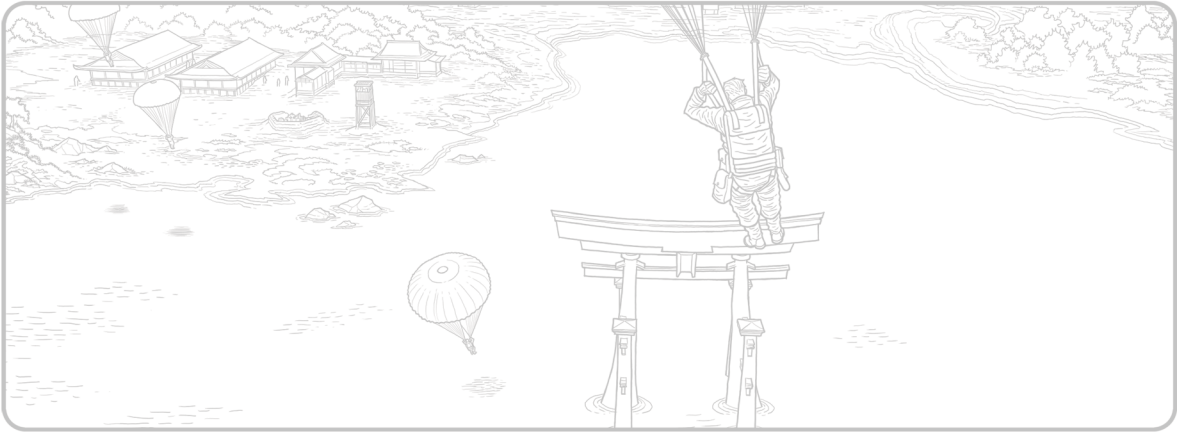
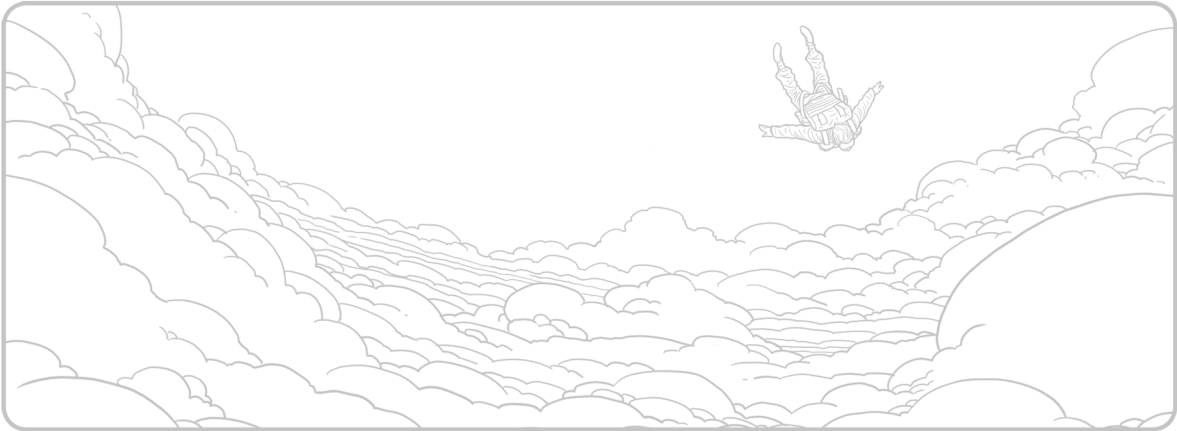
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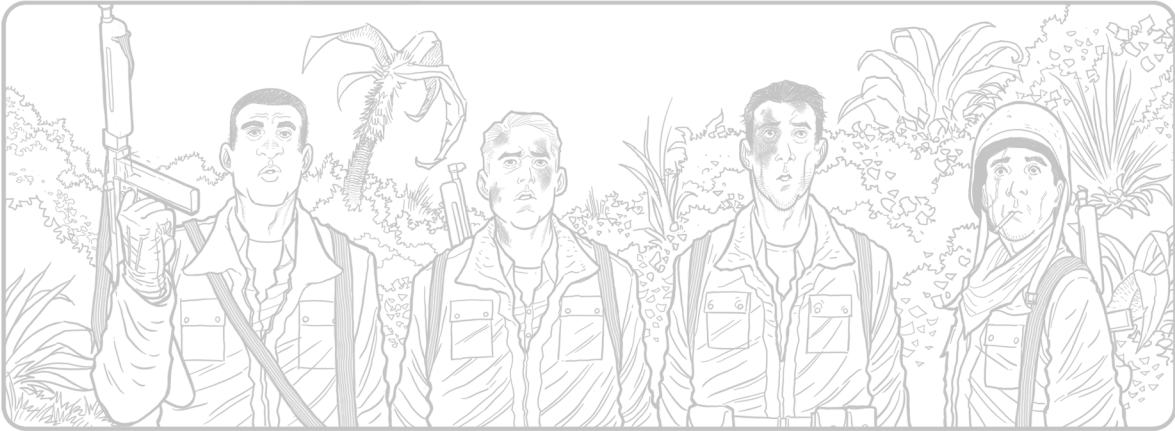
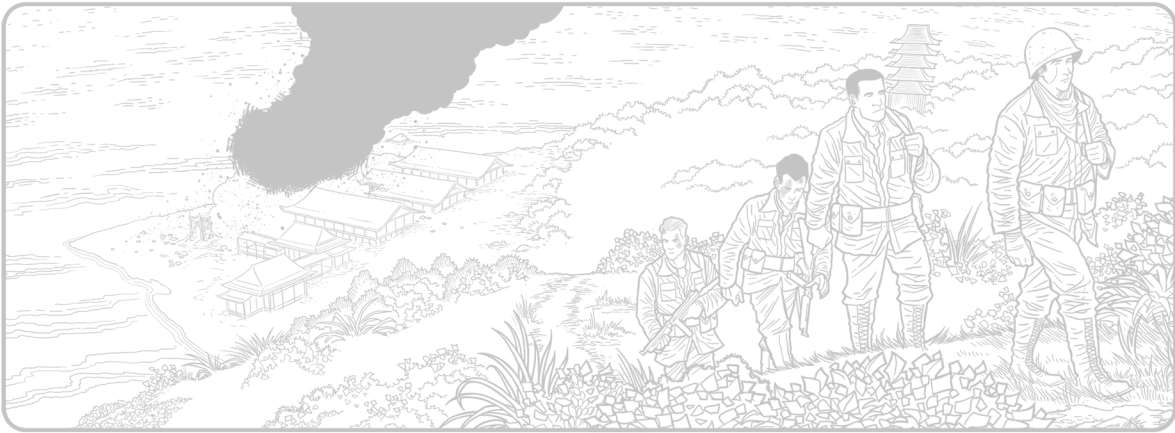
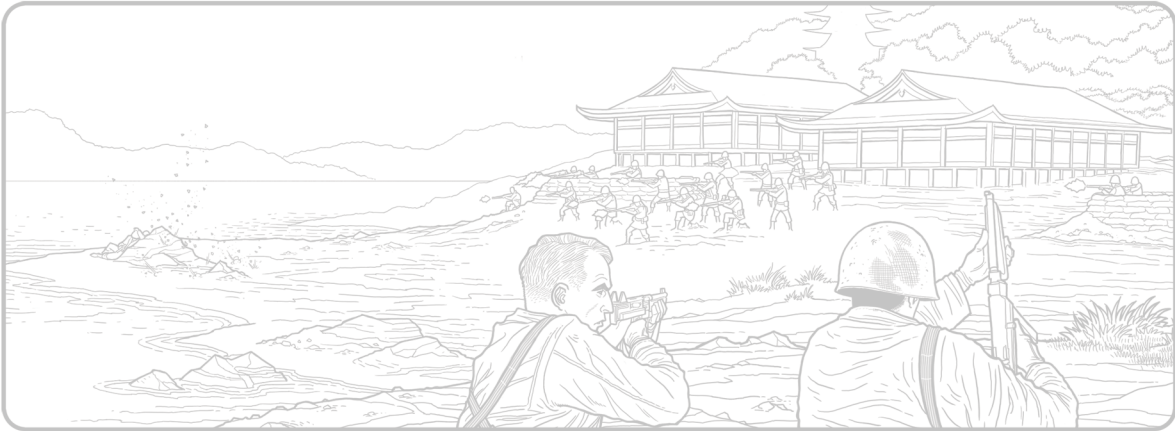
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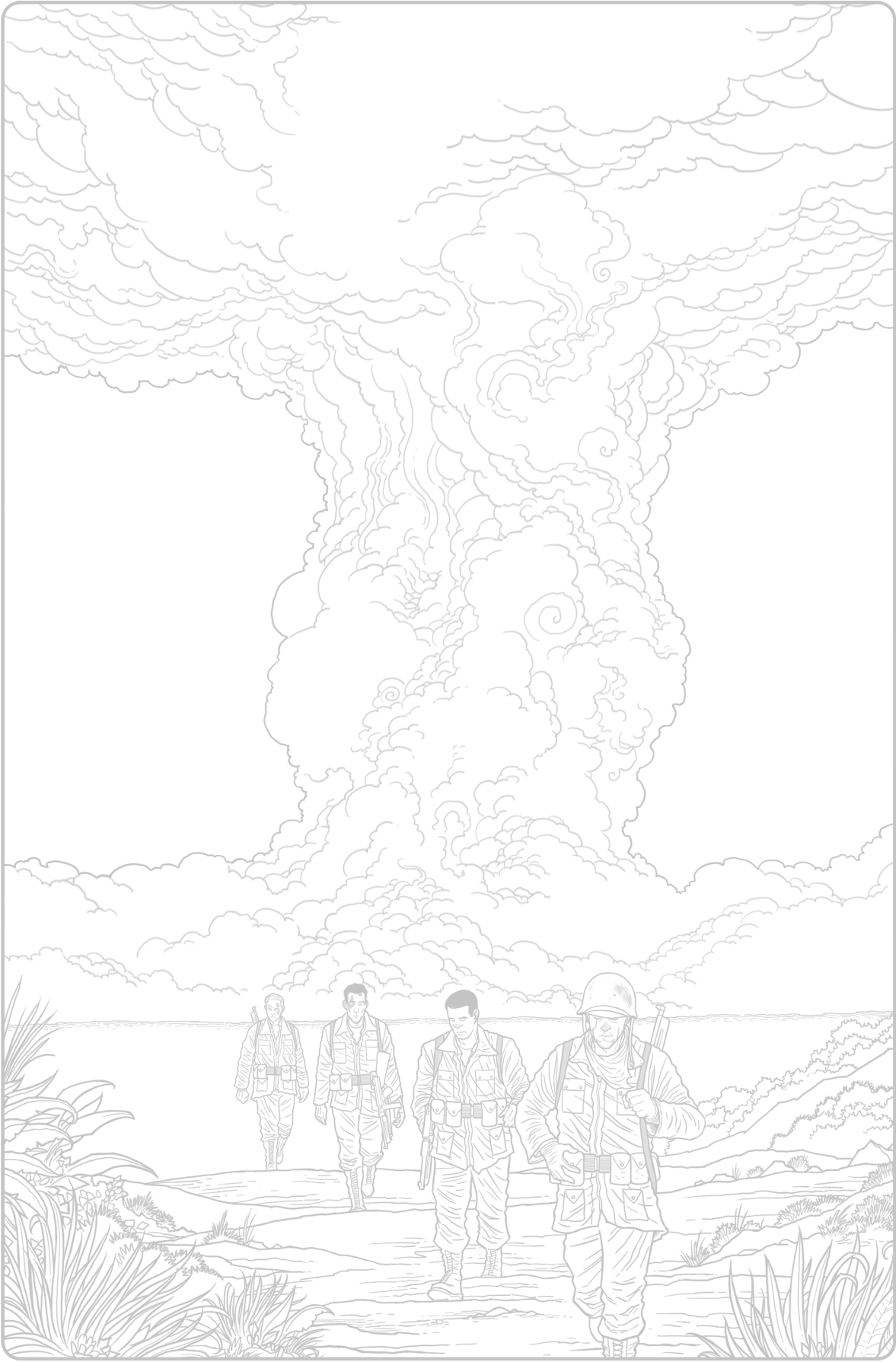
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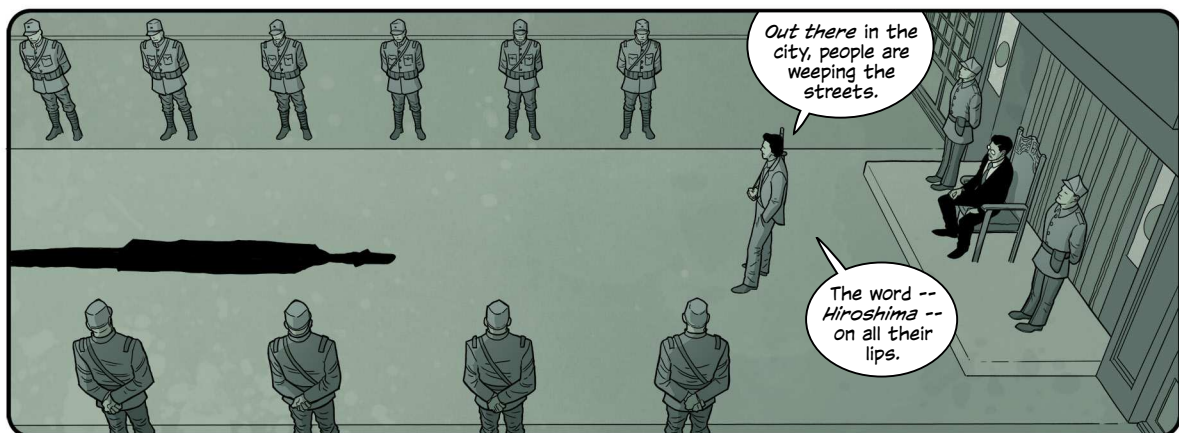
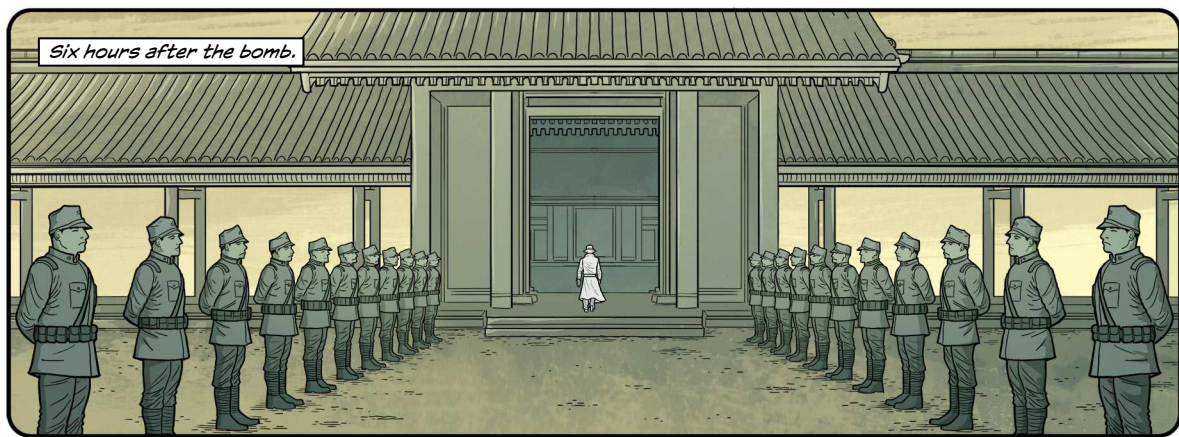


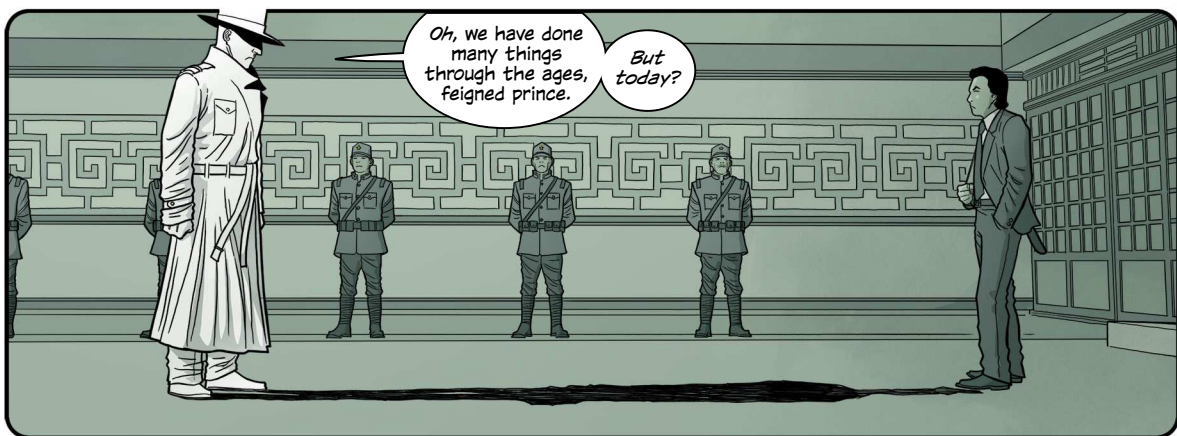
AND NOW...

The Imperial Palace.



Six hours after the bomb.







This?
Hiroshima?

I can only
assume it's
how you Baduri
say **no**.



In which
case the offer
of peace is
rescinded...

And
we are
enemies.



You could
not be more
wrong,
prince...

Our
answer...is
yes.



Hold.



Explain
yourself.



As I said...
our answer
is **yes**. We
accept your
trade.

We simply
did not like
what your
offer
implied:



That *control* of any *exchange* rested with solely with *you*.



As if you had something we so desired that you could lord it over us and, in return, extract something you desired as well.



You see, it was the offer of someone who truly understood the significance of what they possessed.

And that knowledge -- coupled with the weapon itself -- is far too dangerous for such casual barter.



So, we used one of our proxy nations to send you a message, Emperor.



Is that what it was? A message?

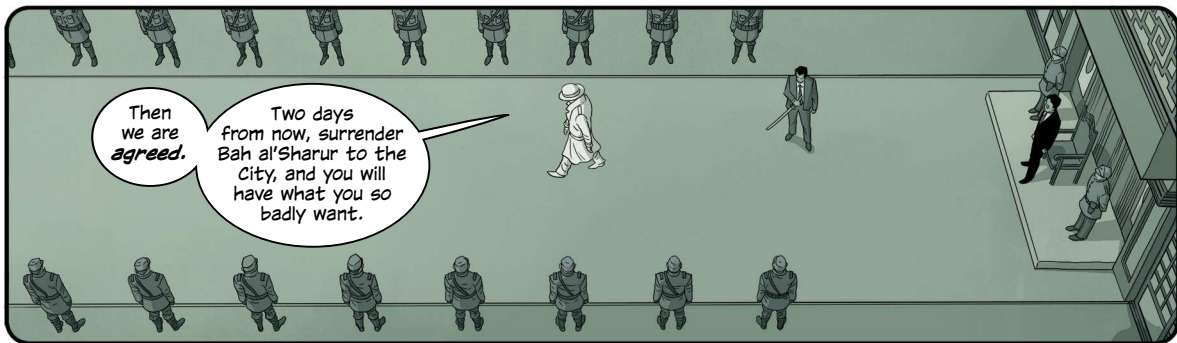


Yes, it was. **We are the power here.** And you... you are a simple supplicant blessed with good fortune.

And now, with order restored...do you still want your trade, Emperor?



Do you want to live forever?

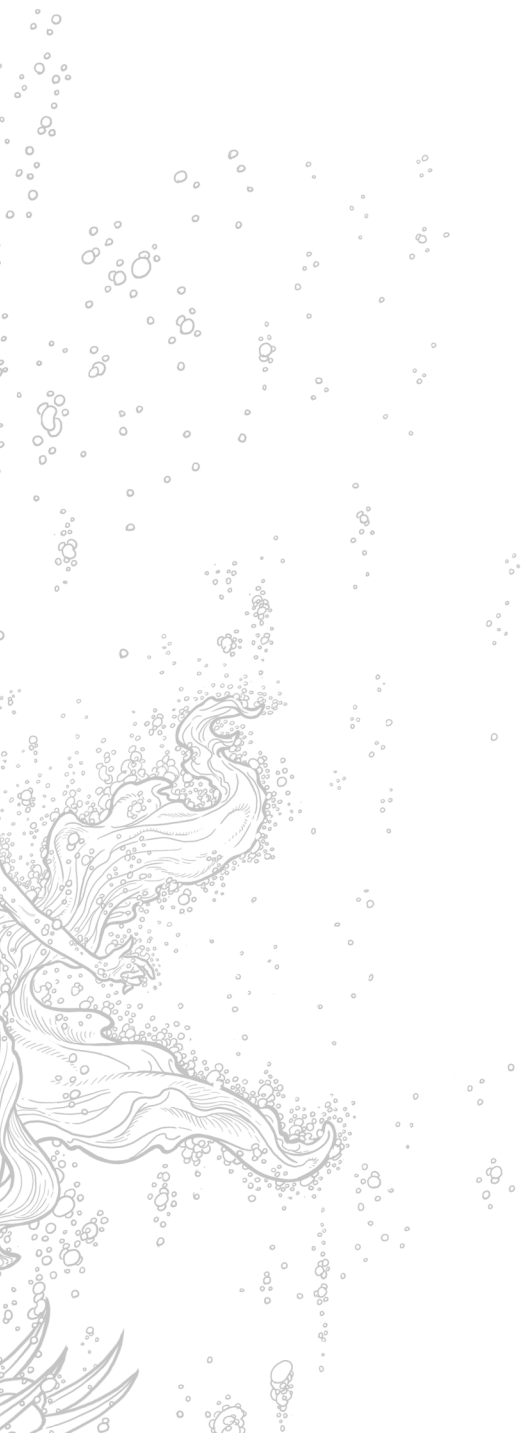


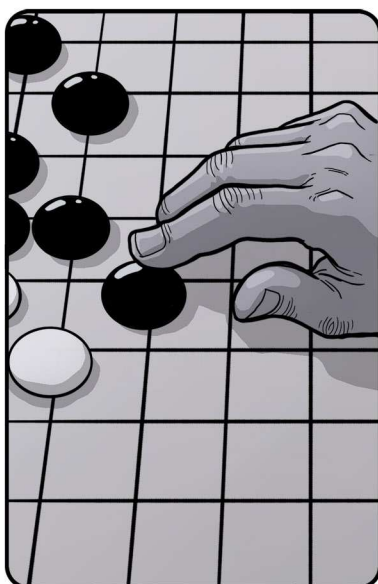
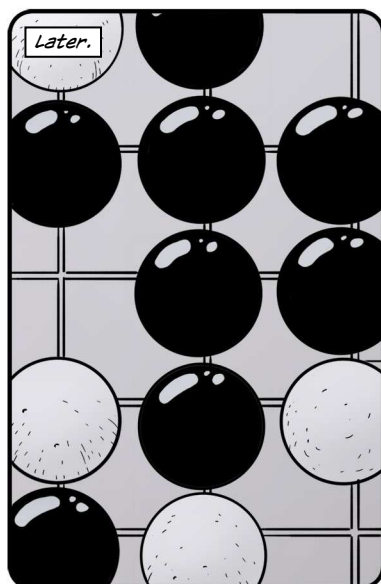


CHAPTER

6









Our true enemy is ancient -- *the oldest enemy of man* -- and our history is probably a subset of theirs.

They are duplicitous and ageless.

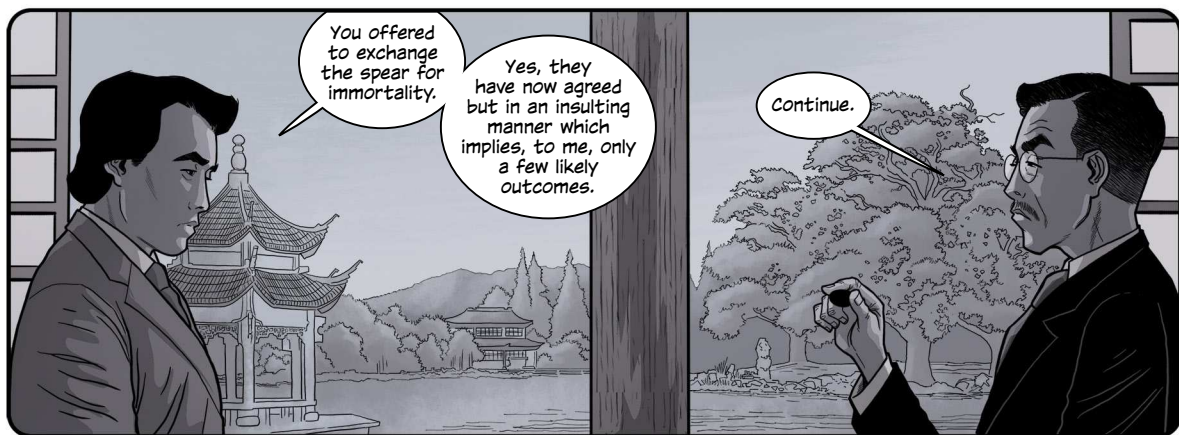
They risk nothing to gain everything, and they have only one weakness -- *a weapon which we possess.*



Who possesses it?

Forgive me. Which *you* possess.

Yes. *Now.* Tell me what you *believe* to be true.



You offered to exchange the spear for immortality.

Yes, they have now agreed but in an insulting manner which implies, to me, only a few likely outcomes.

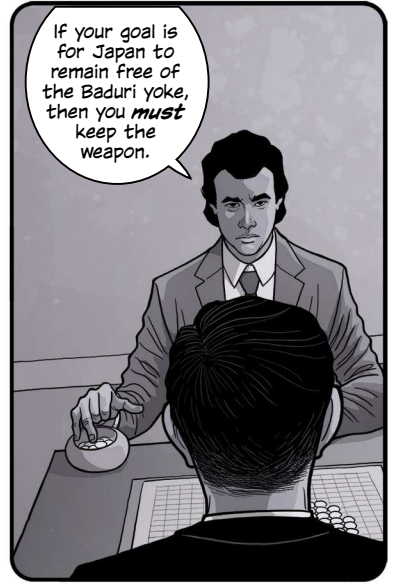
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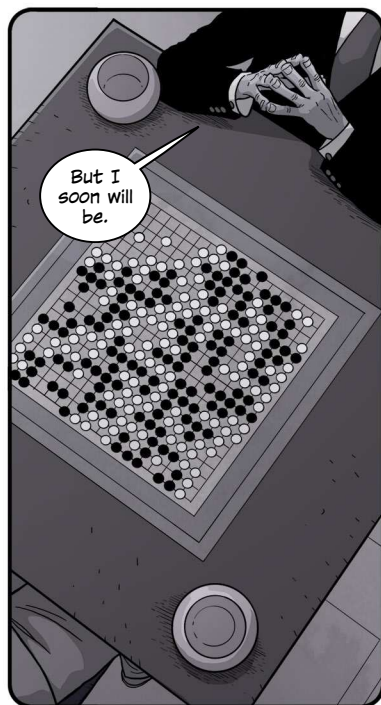


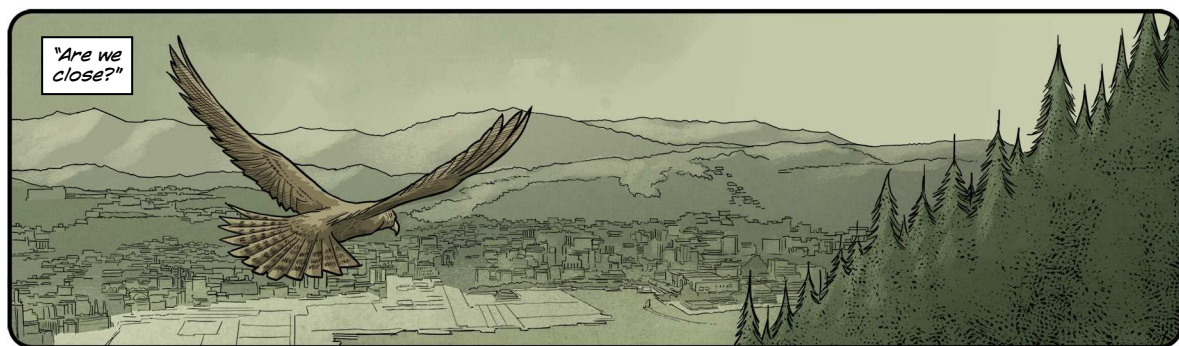
You agree, and they fulfill their end of the bargain, the result being an unholy union with our oldest enemy.

You agree, and they betray you, the result of which is the fall of your empire and the subjugation of your people.

Or...











"Our guests have arrived, Bishop."



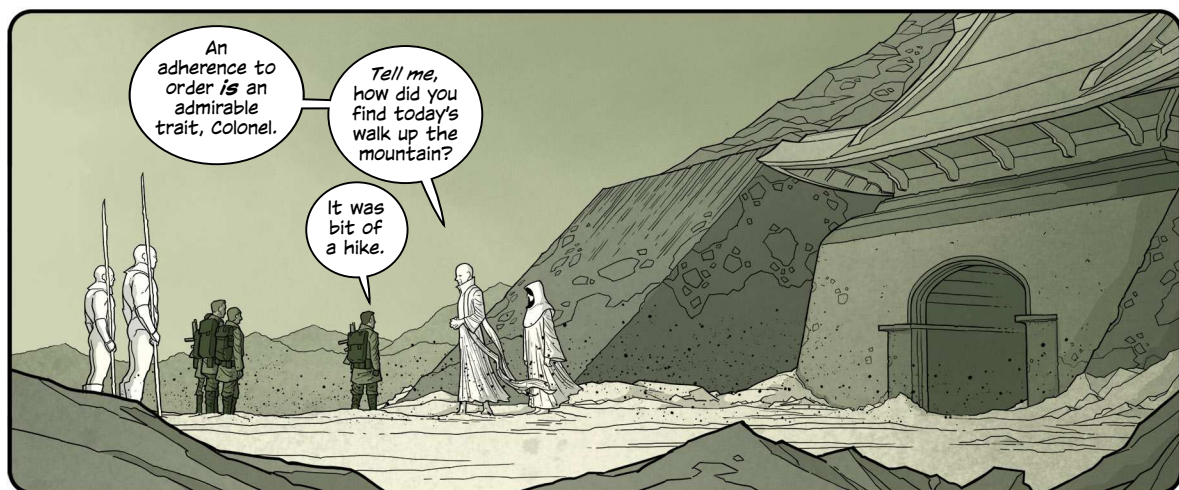
And are they what we asked for?

I believe so. They do look the part.

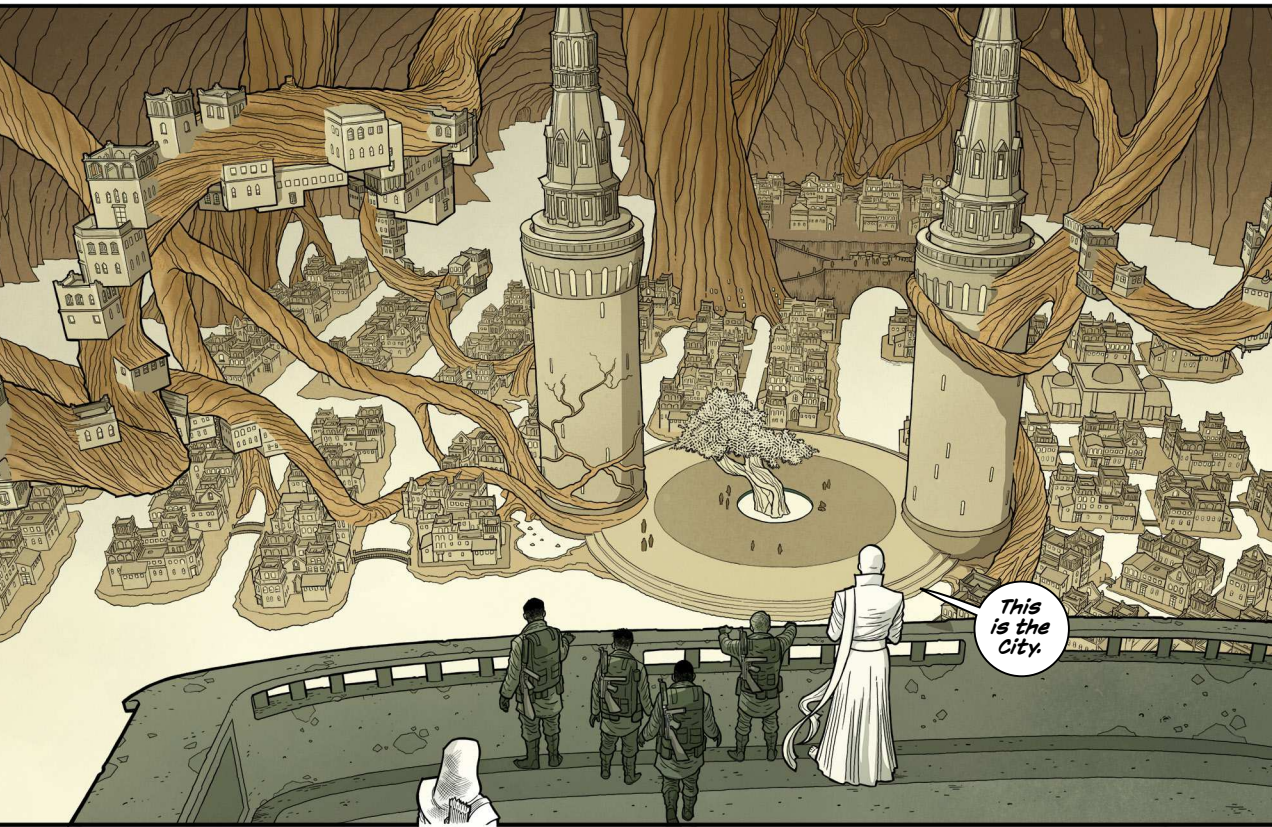


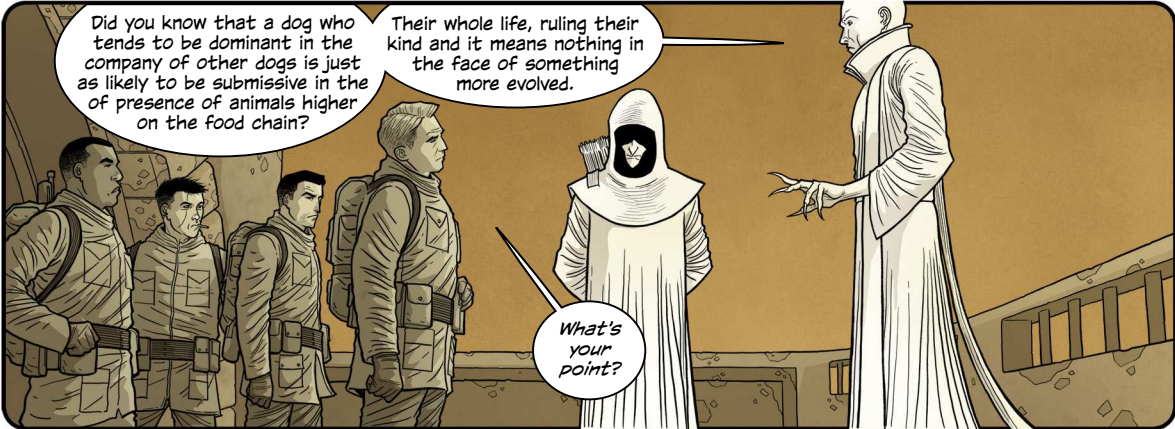
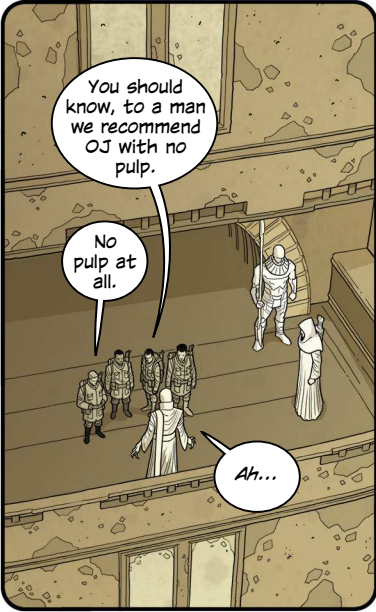
Greetings. Welcome. You are the American reconnaissance team we requested?

I think maybe that depends on who's asking.



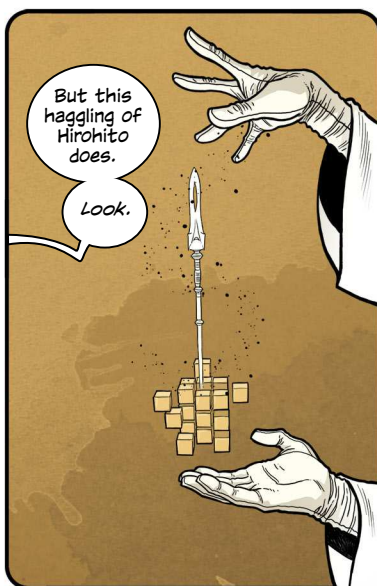








Pack behavior does not interest me...



But this haggling of Hirohito does.

Look.



The emperor is bringing me a weapon.

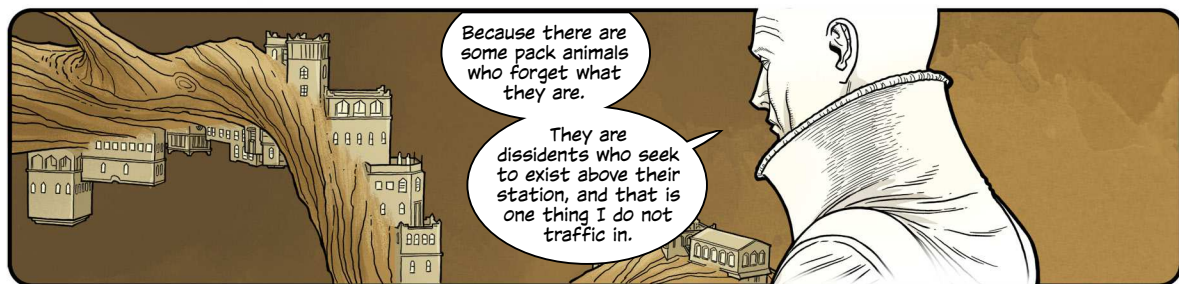
I want to make sure we acquire it. This is your sole concern and the sole reason you are here.



So, go get the thing? That's the job?

If that's how you wish to put it.

It is. Why not just do the deal?



Because there are some pack animals who forget what they are.

They are dissidents who seek to exist above their station, and that is one thing I do not traffic in.



So you be a good dog, Colonel. Deal with it.

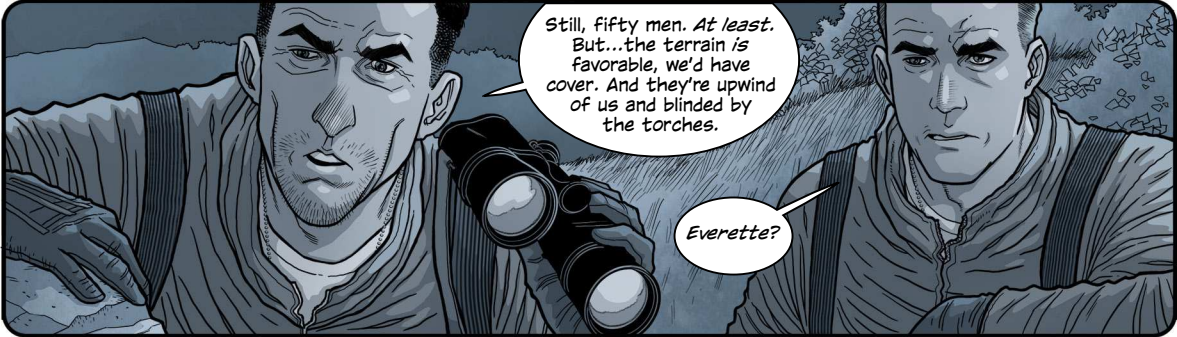
Steal the weapon, then return here and lay it at my feet.



"It's obvious that they're being very quiet about it."



"No need for someone that important to travel this way otherwise."



Still, fifty men. At least. But...the terrain is favorable, we'd have cover. And they're upwind of us and blinded by the torches.

Everette?



I don't like the odds, but it's doable.



So what's it gonna be, boss?

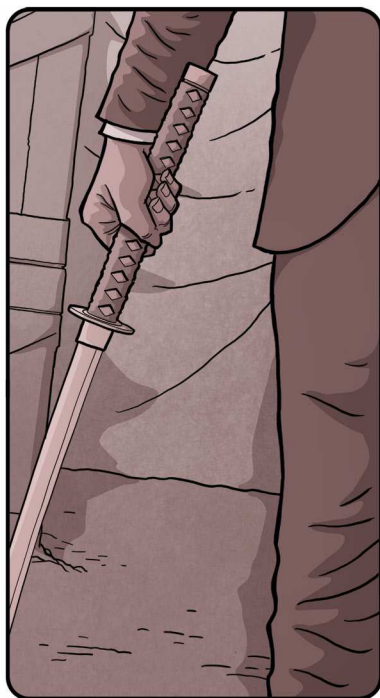
Good dog or bad?













JASON AARON
CAMERON STEWART
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