

**MARVEL**  
LIMITED SERIES  
1 of 6

PETER DAVID  
ROBIN FURTH  
RICHARD ISANOVE

# STEPHEN THE DARK KING KNOWER

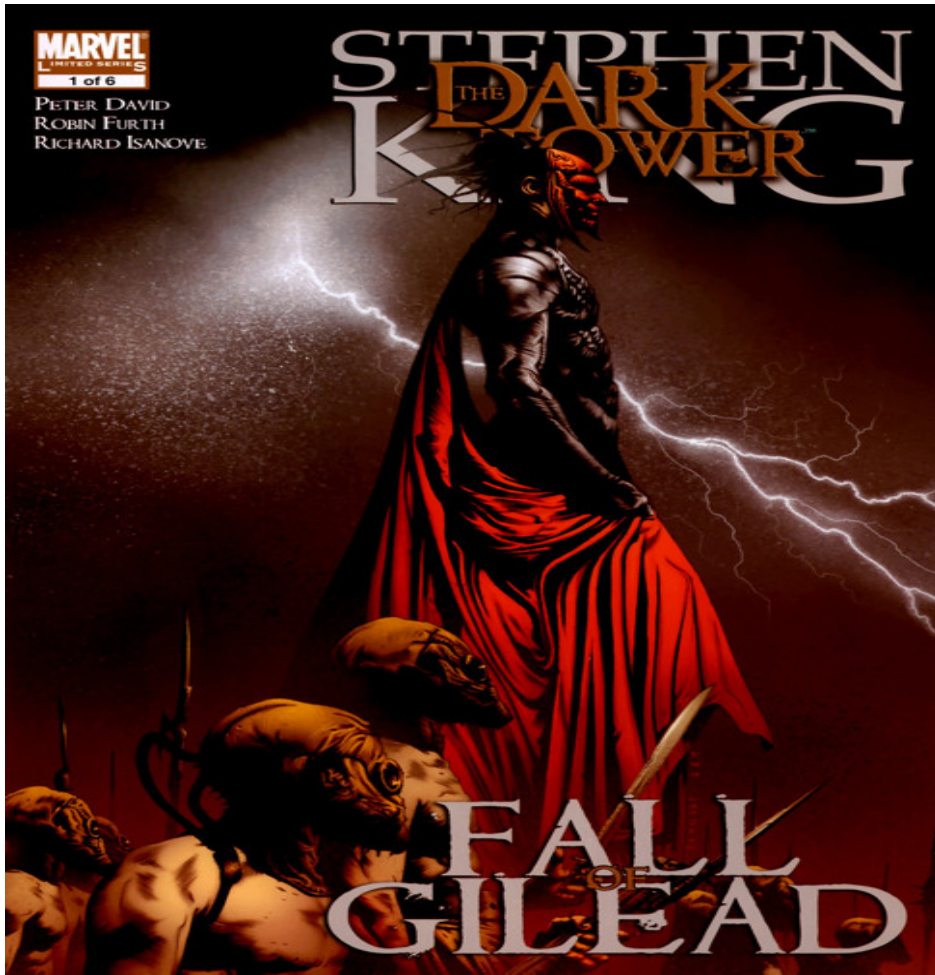


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# FALL OF GILEAD

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## IN A WORLD THAT HAS MOVED ON...

Earning the title of gunslinger at the unheard-of age of fourteen, young Roland Deschain quickly became a target for his father's enemies, namely John Farson, and was forced to flee his home of Gilead or face death.

Roland returned to Gilead equipped with Farson's greatest prize: the sphere known as Maerlyn's Grapefruit, an object he almost died obtaining. Still under the mentally destructive influence of the sphere, Roland kept it hidden from his father Steven until his ka-tet forced him to reveal it. Wisely, Steven locked it away so it could harm no one.

As Gilead prepared for the festive celebration of its newly-titled gunslingers, Roland's mother prepared to repent for her adulterous sins with the sorcerer Marten. Seemingly out of nowhere, Marten appeared and lured Gabrielle into becoming the prime element in the planned assassination of her husband Steven with the help of Farson's spy. Distrusting his returned mother, Roland left the festivities to find the sphere hidden away in her chambers. The sphere drew him into a hallucination that provoked him into fatally shooting Gabrielle...



*Fill 'em with bullet holes and they might allow themselves to be yanked, kickin' and protestin', into unconsciousness.*

*But just passing out all womanish 'cause somethin's done so bad that they can't take it no more and their brain just shuts down?*

*Nah. That don't happen. To you and me, p'haps, but not gunslingers.*

*'Cept now, in this case, in this moment. 'Cause there's Roland Peschain, out cold, dead to the world.*

*In his defense, though, he's young and inexperienced...*



*G*unslingers don't faint. They just...

*They don't.*



*...and his mother is lying five feet away, also dead to the world, but dead in the way that don't include waking up ever.*

*And he was the one what gunned her down, tricked into it by the forces of John Farson.*

*So we can pardon him his weakness.*

*And if ya happen to be the sort what believes in ghosts...*



...then we're not the only ones offering absolution at this moment.



Oh Roland. Oh, my sweet boy.

Look what I have brought down upon us. Everything is so clear to me now, as it never was in life.

'Twas not your fault, my dearest love. We were betrayed, the both of us. My pain is done, but yours, alas, is *just* beginning.

I would give anything to spare you the heartache to come...but I've naught *left* to give save forgiveness. And that I provide willingly, as I pray you will to me.

Forgive us both, my son. We knew not what we did.



Mother...?





*He don't remember everything that happened at first. He has to piece it together a little at a time.*

*The hunt for Maerlyn's Grapefruit, stolen from his father's study through Gabrielle's treachery.*

*His furious pursuit of his mother to her own chambers, where he found himself staring into that damnable magic sphere yet again...*

*...and seeing behind him, in its reflection, the wicked Rhea of the Coos ready to garrote him.*



*And he turned and fired, and there was his mother, holding a hand crafted belt, a gift for him, and she had a startled look on her face and blood on her chest.*




*By that point, he understands.*

*By that point, as he tries to stop the sucking chest wound and realizes that her body is already growing cold...*

...it's too late.






John Farson's spider's web had reached to the innermost recesses of Gilead. But Farson's nephew, at least, won't be around to see it.

Shuff & Shuff

Oh, stop your huffing and puffing, Cuthbert. It was just some stairs.



Ten flights of stairs! While carrying a corpse!

Considering the number of people who want to kill us, and that we're all armed besides...

You'd think the morgue would be more accessible since we're obviously going to be needing it!





**SMACK**

Ow! Hey!  
Ka-Mail!  
I am **NOT** a fool!  
Your words indicate otherwise!

The mark of a truly great fool, Alain, is his willingness to speak truth even if it hurts. And the answer is no, apparently my "charms" can't.

Even his mother, whom he clearly disdains, holds more interest for him. He went off in pursuit of her when she ran past.

That's... odd. Why would he... unless...?

He thought she was *up* to something?

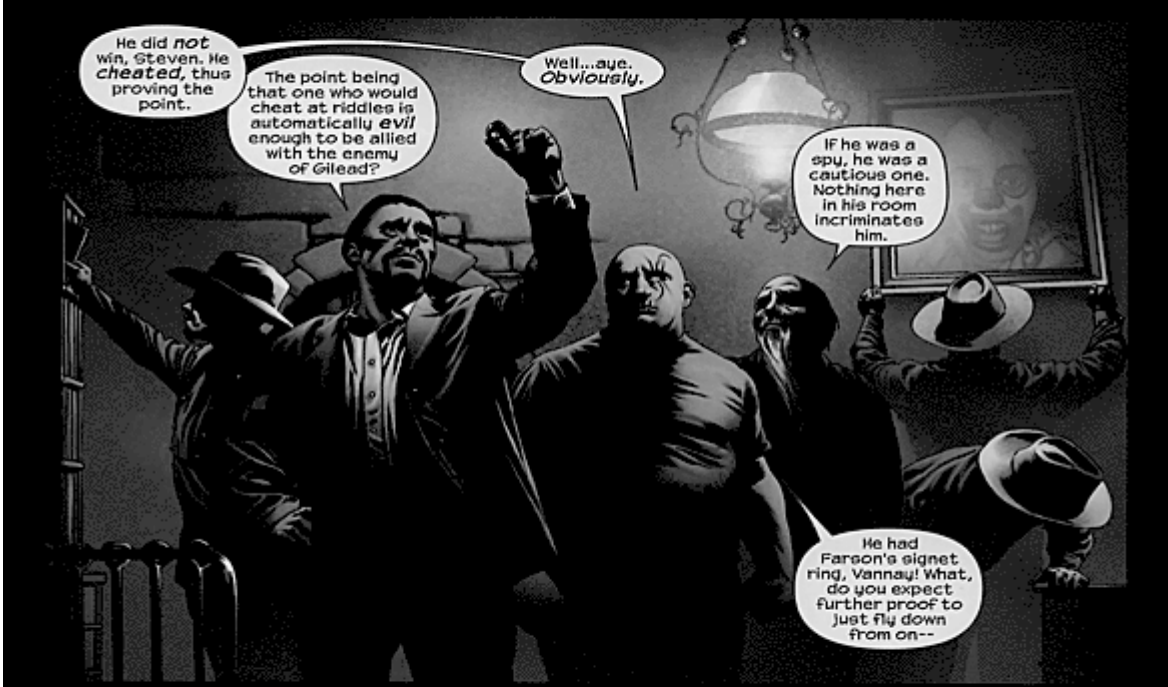
The lady of Gilead, a villain?

Lock up the morgue and let us away. This warrants investigation.



'Twas fortunate, Cort, that you found this ring in Kingson's pocket, proving his connection to Farson.

Otherwise *some* might believe you killed him simply because he won at riddles.



He did *not* win, Steven. He *cheated*, thus proving the point.

The point being that one who would cheat at riddles is automatically *evil* enough to be allied with the enemy of Gilead?

Well...aye. *Obviously.*

If he was a spy, he was a cautious one. Nothing here in his room incriminates him.

He had Farson's signet ring, Vannay! What, do you expect further proof to just fly down from on--



--high?

Look! The thing has a note tied to it!



"Will collect the grapefruit at midnight." Some manner of fruit-based code, perhaps...?"



Not code. The grapefruit is that cursed sphere of Farson's. It's locked away in my study.

If 'twas locked away, how did Kingson hope to retrieve it? Steal the key from you, perhaps?

Impossible! I have the key right...



...right...

What's wrong?

I...don't believe it! He must have *snatched* it! But how? He was nowhere *near* me at any point!

Was anyone *else* in close contact with you tonight?



"Milord? I said--"

"I heard you. And yes. Yes, there was, damn her."





"There are to be two guards posted at every way in or out.

"Anyone coming or going is to be brought to me for questioning. And I mean anyone, regardless of standing or rank.

"All are under suspicion, be they our fellow gunslingers, the children of our loins...



...or the women of our beds.



Cort. Vannay. Continue to search the room. See if any other clues present themselves.

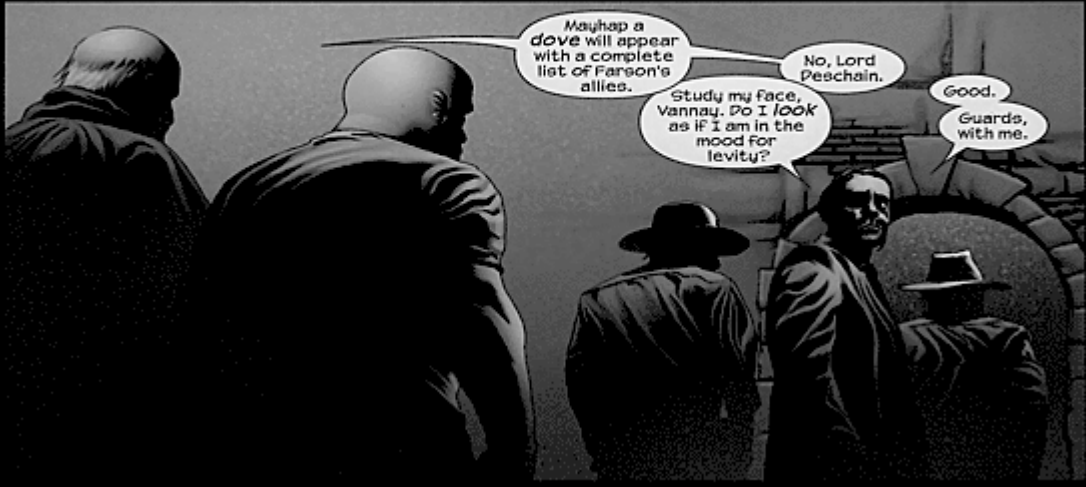


Mayhap a dove will appear with a complete list of Parson's allies.

No, Lord Peschain.

Study my face, Vannay. Do I look as if I am in the mood for levity?

Good. Guards, with me.






Cort, my old friend...do you *truly* think that throwing Kingson's papers around is the most *efficient* way to proceed?

I'm *not* thinking right now, Vannay. I'm busy blaming myself.

For what?



If I hadn't slain that bastard, we could be *questioning* him instead of trying to find his leavings.

I will not let anyone be *harm*ed due to *his* schemes and *my* impulsiveness! Do you hear?



I will *protect* this castle and all within!



Well, you've certainly protected us from that *pillow*. It will harm *no one* ever again.



Cort...I suspect there's more on your mind than your own culpability.

We both know what preys upon you: The likelihood that Gabrielle Pechain is a traitor.

I was taught as a child never to speak the worst aloud, lest the worst sees it as an invitation.

I cannot fathom it. I've known her since childhood. Her father was an honorable man.

So are they all, all honorable men, *and* women. But if they honor the enemies of Gilead...

"...then whoever they are, dinh's wife or no, they will hang for it."

Vannay... with all respect... I would be alone for a time.

As you wish. I'm too old to be crawling around under beds anyway. But consider this, Cort...

"...if Gabrielle is a traitor to her people and her bed, the chances are that she is not wholly responsible.

"Marten Broadcloak may well have stolen her mind and her heart. However, he did it not through the goodness of his soul...



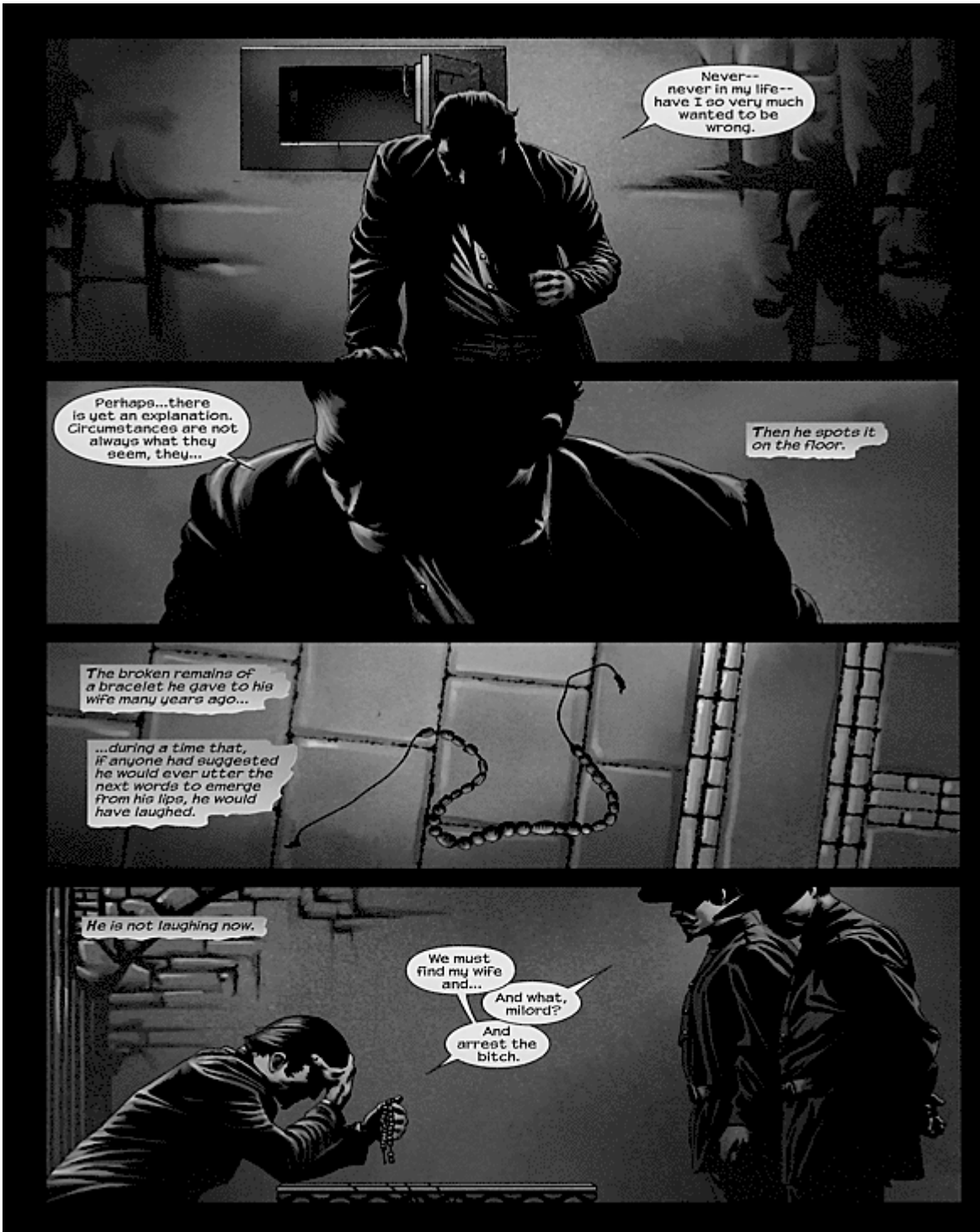
"...but rather through the darkness of his arts. This business stinks of sorcery, Cort. And sorcery can catch anyone unawares, at any time. Even the canny can be undone by the uncanny.

"In the face of such power, even the most clever individuals in the world can find themselves left with nothing."



*Damnation!*





Never--  
never in my life--  
have I so very much  
wanted to be  
wrong.

Perhaps...there  
is yet an explanation.  
Circumstances are not  
always what they  
seem, they...

Then he spots it  
on the floor.

The broken remains of  
a bracelet he gave to his  
wife many years ago...

...during a time that,  
if anyone had suggested  
he would ever utter the  
next words to emerge  
from his lips, he would  
have laughed.

He is not laughing now.

We must  
find my wife  
and...  
And what,  
milord?  
And  
arrest the  
bitch.





--something!

Ha! Now I *really* regret killing the little cretin!

I would have loved to see his Face when we uncovered this little stash!

Books. Maps...

...a Journal!

The late Kingson may have left us all the information we need to bring Farson crashing down!

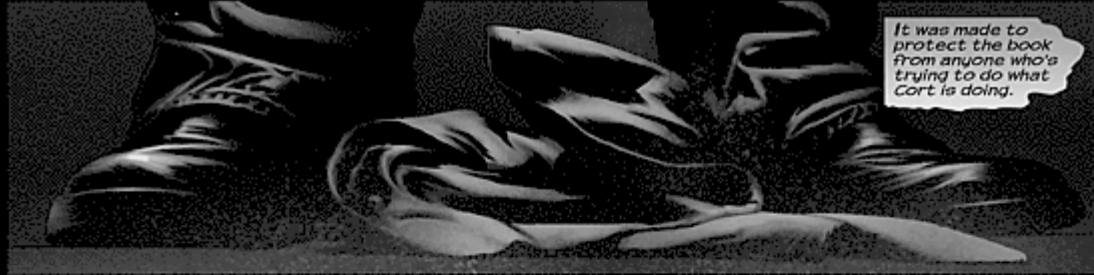


Cort eagerly unwraps the hidden journal that Kingson has left behind...



...tossing aside the dustcloth so he can peruse the book. He flips through the text, licking his fingers as he does so to facilitate turning the pages.

Unfortunately, what Cort don't ken is that the cloth weren't just designed to protect the contents from dust.

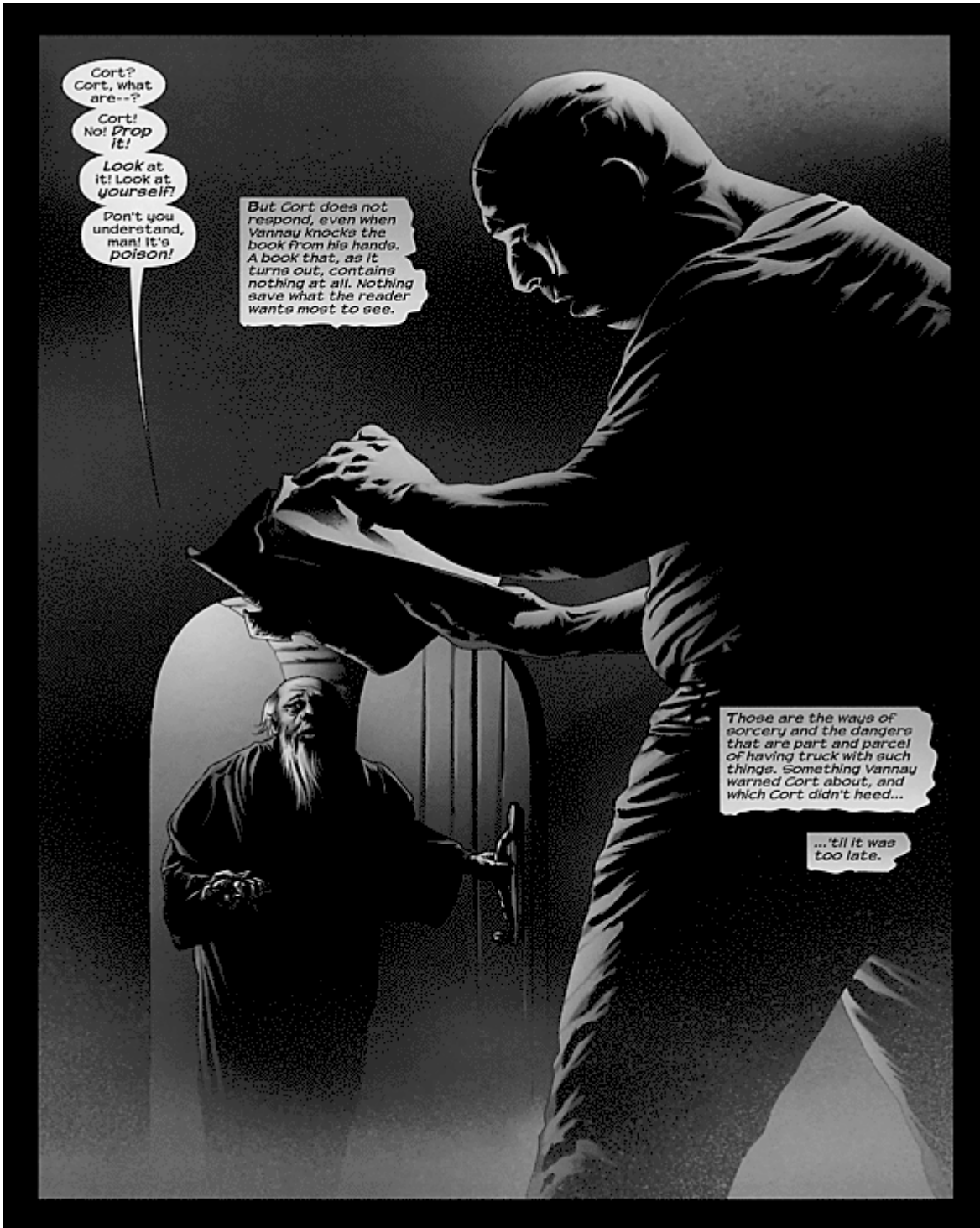


It was made to protect the book from anyone who's trying to do what Cort is doing.



I think I've left my old friend alone long enough to stew in his own juices.





Cort?  
Cort, what  
are--?

Cort!  
No! *Drop*  
*it!*

Look at  
it! Look at  
*yourself!*

Don't you  
understand,  
man! It's  
*poison!*

*But Cort does not respond, even when Vannay knocks the book from his hands. A book that, as it turns out, contains nothing at all. Nothing save what the reader wants most to see.*

*Those are the ways of sorcery and the dangers that are part and parcel of having truck with such things. Something Vannay warned Cort about, and which Cort didn't heed...*

*... 'til it was too late.*



Elsewhere...

Normally Steven Peschain walks so softly that he can come up on ya like a ghost.

Not now, though. Now his feet are heavy as he walks like a condemned man to the gallows.

'Cept he's not the one going to the gallows. Least that's what he's figuring.

Gabrielle!  
Open the door,  
"my love."  
You who  
hold the key  
to my heart...  
...and my  
sore!

Gabrielle!  
I said...!

He recognizes the smell before his eyes adjust to the darkness.

A gunslinger would know the stench of death, after all.

Roland...



God in heaven!

Roland! Do you know who *did* this?! If so, speak the walking dead man's name so that I may visit his final fate upon him!

TO BE CONTINUED

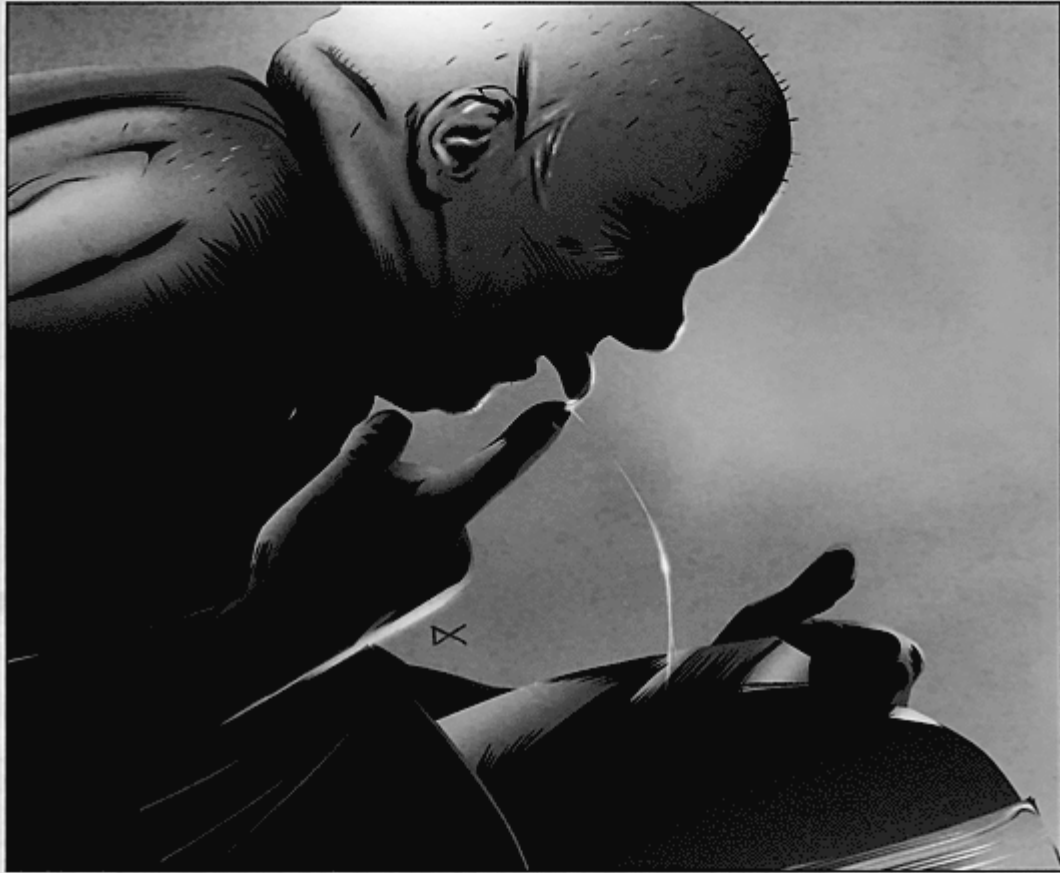
POISONED PEN.  
POISONED BOOK:  
THE FALL OF  
CORTLAND ANDRUS

As the writer in charge of plotting *The Fall of Gilead*, I've faced several major challenges. The first—and perhaps the most difficult to overcome—was my own grief. As I created the story that begins with the issue that you have just finished, I could barely see for tears. Tragedy loomed over me. Not only had I already let my beloved dinh Roland murder his own mother, but I was already plotting—nay, scheming—how to breach the defenses of Roland's home city and how to most efficiently attack the people he called family and ka-tet. To spin *The Fall of Gilead*, I have had to lay down my gunslinger's six-guns and take up the banner of

chaos and evil carried by Walter O'Dim's many aliases who, like me, have the initials R.F. In order to recreate the horrors of Gilead's final battle, I had to begin to think like an agent of the Outer Dark and become a traitor to my adopted city. Like Richard Fannin, Rudin Filario, and the notorious Randall Flagg, I had to sell my soul to the Crimson King.

Over the next five to six months, you will witness much that makes you want to avert your eyes. My hands and my pen are stained with blood, though whose blood will drench the pages to come I will not yet reveal. The pain, and the pleasure, is in the waiting. However, as readers of the novels know, I did not play Judas by choice. Far from it. My treachery was born of loyalty to my other dinh, Stephen King. Roland's life is a tale of romance and tragedy, and so I had to relate what Roland experienced, both for good and for dis. In other words, in order to stand and be true to sai King, I have had to put Roland through hell.





But even as I painted a staring red eye (Eye of the King!) atop my computer keyboard, I knew I was about to face an even greater challenge. How could I wage the Red King's war upon Gilead? After all, I have no battle experience, while Roland, his tet, and his mentors are all hardened warriors. More often than not I knew my characters' fates from the Dark Tower books, but frequently the means by which these fates come to pass is not revealed by said King either in his books or in his emails. (Sometimes he likes to let me figure things out for myself.) For example, I knew Cortland

Andrus had to be poisoned—I knew that from the novels—but how could I deliver that poison? How could I fool such a canny and experienced soldier into swallowing something that smelled strange or that looked suspicious? Killing Roland's mother had been relatively easy—all I had to do was describe the scene as told in *Wizard and Glass*. But to poison Cort? That was a different matter!

Over the course of creating *The Fall of Gilead* I discovered that being *ka's* Grim Reaper is no easy job. However, I also discovered

a few tricks of my own. So as to please my fellow Constant Readers (and to please sai King, which is always first and foremost in my heart and mind), I knew I had to make my tale convincing, and in order to poison Cort in a realistic manner I turned to the great poisoners of history. I might not know how to fool Gilead's weaponmaster into imbibing or inhaling a deathly toxin, but in the annals of history and literature there were plenty of women and men who did. All I had to do was to find those agents of the Crimson King and discover their secrets.

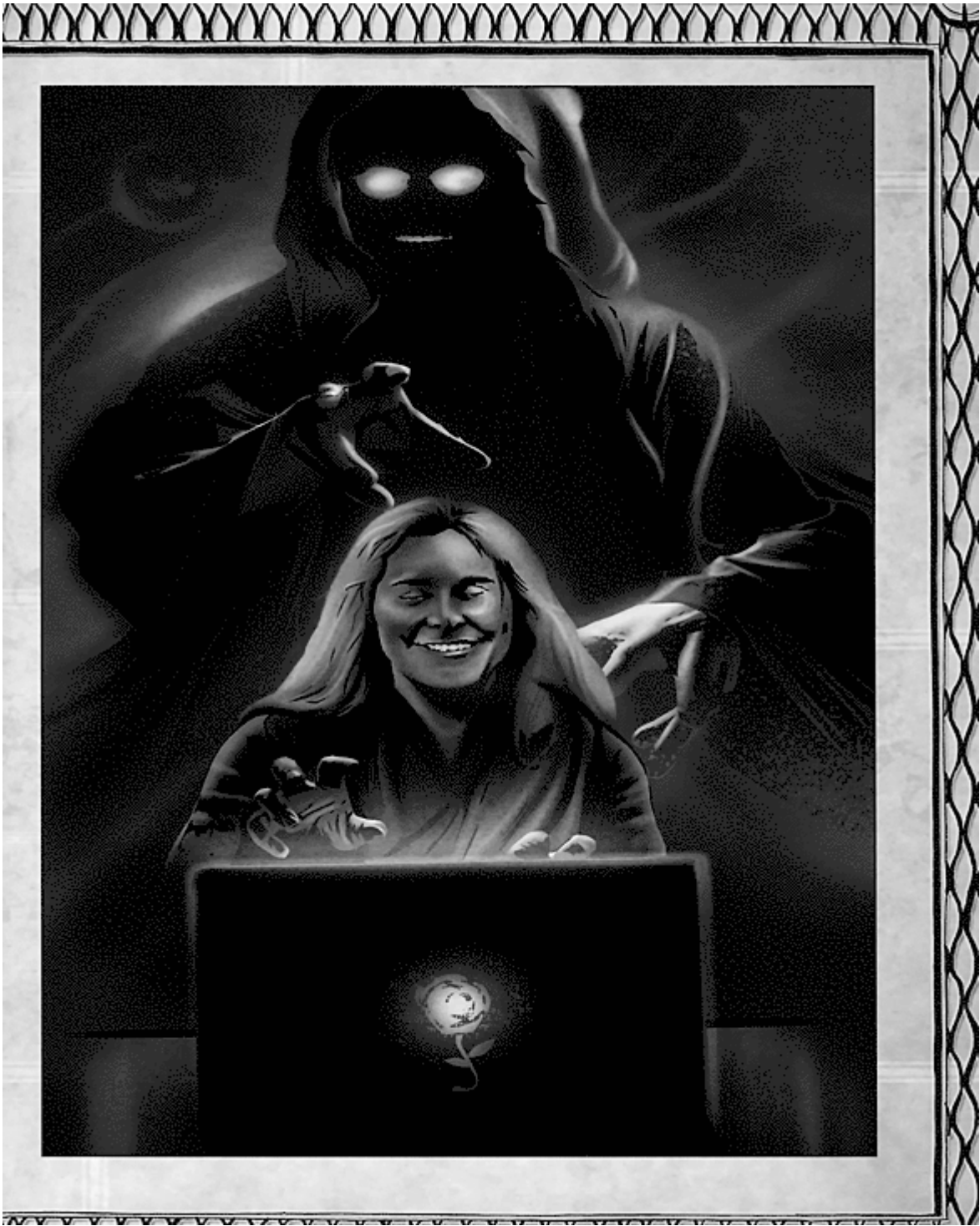
Those of you who have either read *Queen Margot*, written by Alexander Dumas, or seen the 1994 French film of the same name, will recognize the means by which Cort is poisoned. Like *The Fall of Gilead*, *Queen Margot* takes place during a time of great political upheaval. It is the year 1572, and Catherine de Medici, a French Catholic, rules through her weak son, King Charles IX. Catherine is a great poisoner, and when her son-in-law, the Protestant/Huguenot King, Henri of Navarre, displeases her, she decides to end his life. But like Cort, Henri is a wily man. He has lived in the shadow of deception and murder too long to be easily fooled by his treacherous mother-in-law, so Catherine must deliver her poison in as unusual a way as possible. Knowing that Henri is eager to learn about falconry, Catherine arranges to give him a rare and valuable book on the subject—a book whose pages are imbued with arsenic.

As a book lover, the idea of a poisonous book both amazed and horrified me. It was the most unusual method of poisoning I had ever heard of, and one which I doubted even the gunslingers of Gilead would suspect. Hence,

Cort's fate was sealed. He would be poisoned by a book of false war plans. And the final twist in Cort's tragedy is one that readers of *The Scorer* one-shot will know well. The toxic book which Cort reads so avidly is not really a book about war plans at all. The poisonous pages (created by none other than our favorite villain, Marten Broadcloak/Walter O'Dim) are actually blank leaves of psychic paper. In other words, the book which Cort discovers among the possessions of the recently deceased James Farson is a trap. For that psychic paper reflects whatever the reader most wants to see, the single thing that will make the book's hapless victim turn page after page, licking his fingers as he goes, imbibing the poison which will lead to annihilation. (As many of you might suspect, the psychic paper which fools Cort does not come from Alexander Dumas's novel but was borrowed from the pocket of the last Time Lord of the planet Gallifrey, Dr. Who.)

So my fellow Constant Readers, have your tissues and handkerchiefs ready. Much tragedy is to come. But remember, ultimately tragedy has meaning too. After all, even heartbreak serves the Beam, and heartbreak is what will ultimately make Roland such an unrelenting warrior. To reach the Dark Tower, Roland must trudge through blood as red as the roses of End-World. **OR**

WRITTEN BY:  
ROBIN FURTH  
ILLUSTRATED BY:  
DENNIS CALERO



## MATRICIDE



As the daughter and granddaughter of pathologists, and as a long time horror fan, I have a fairly high tolerance for gore. As I get older this tolerance decreases, but I'm still probably higher on the scale of what you can take than most folks. When I was a child, my sisters and I had a secret game. When my parents were downstairs we'd sneak into my dad's study and pull out his medical books. We'd choose a disease like gangrene or tertiary stage syphilis (the grosser the better) and we'd see who could stare at the affliction the longest. Although I was the youngest (and though for years I was excluded from the game on the grounds that I would cry and tell) by the time I was allowed to take part I always won, hands down.

I suppose that my ability to stare at those diseases had more to do with a profound compassion for the people afflicted by such horror than

with any innate pleasure in grossing myself out. After all, disease is a microbial or physical attack upon the body, and does not reflect upon the person whose mind and spirit reside within that body. I suppose that—on some level—my reactions may have been those of a nascent doctor or nurse rather than those specifically of a writer, and if I had been better at science than at English perhaps my life would have taken a very different course. However, this ability to look at rashes, diseases, open wounds and physical malformations had and continues to have an odd flip side. The body in pain does not disgust me, though it arouses a profound compassion for the individual so afflicted. And while I do not turn away from the blood and gore before me, the image of the spirit in torment—either from physical pain or from existential despair—makes me weep.

As you might expect, my high gore-tolerance has stood me in good stead as Stephen King's research assistant. It means that I can read about the crimes of child-eating cannibals like Albert Fish, or study the white worms squirming like maggots through a defective but fleshy North Central Positronics robot, and keep my cool. Yet sometimes I think it is my weakness—my automatic sympathy for, and identification with, an individual who is pressed to the wall by grief, existential despair, or the fear of the void—that has aided me







the most in my travels with the King of Horror. As every Constant Reader knows, Stephen King's novels aren't just about hauntings, psychic abilities, pierced-veils-between-worlds or attacking monsters. They are also about what makes us profoundly human . . . or inhuman.

I have always maintained that it is not ultimately the gore of a scary story that sends us running. Instead, it is the existential horror BEHIND the face of the knife or axe-wielding psycho (or demon) that terrifies. What makes someone a murderer, a rapist, a torturer? What makes someone take pleasure in another person's pain? Are these people really like the rest of us? And what about the person who commits a crime of passion and kills someone he or she loves? Once the blinding red fury has passed, how can

that person live with the knowledge of what he or she has done?

This might sound strange, but I have long suspected that it is my compassion for Roland Deschain's secret pain, rather than my love of his death-wielding guns, that has made him keep me as his traveling companion for so many years. For as those familiar with the original Dark Tower novels know, Roland Deschain is a murderer, but he is a murderer who ultimately wants to atone for his sins.

Back in 2005, when Marvel's journey with Roland Deschain had just begun, I was asked about the purpose of this Dark Tower prequel. I maintained then—as I do now—that what we are showing over the course of thirty comic books is the story of

Roland's transformation from a well-born boy to a bitter and dangerous man. Our goal—from Roland's coming-of-age battle in *The Gunslinger Born* to the final shootouts on Jericho Hill—is to show Roland's descent into the internal nightmare from which he must emerge over the course of the seven *Dark Tower* novels. In a series of comics, and then graphic novels, we show how Roland becomes the unrelenting warrior who tracks his quarry over barren desert after barren desert, killing his enemies—and occasionally his companions—without mercy.

So far, our comic books have dealt with the young Roland—a boy trained to be a killer, but one who still believes that his guns work solely for good. After all, he is a gunslinger born from a long line of gunslingers. He thinks that he and those of his kind can do no wrong. After all, they represent the White . . . don't they? But at the end of *Treachery* Roland's unquestioning faith in the ways of his fathers, and in his training, is challenged as profoundly as it could be challenged. Tricked by the glamour of Maerlyn's Grapefruit and betrayed by his eye, his hand, and his instincts which have been honed to a killing edge, Roland shoots his mother, Gabrielle.

Honor thy father and thy mother. That is one of the most fundamental human beliefs. Yet Roland has just slaughtered the woman who bore him and in so doing has committed matricide. His preternaturally fast hands, and his years of training, have ultimately betrayed him.

The man in black fled across the desert, and the gunslinger followed. Every *Dark Tower* junkie knows that line by heart. But how many of us have stopped to contemplate the nature of that desert? How many of us have thought about why the green fields of Gilead dry up, or why her lush orchards turn to rot and weeds? At what point in history do the waters of Mid-World really begin to recede, and when does Gilead's fertility turn sterile?

In the days of old, men and women believed that the king, and the land he ruled, were one and the same. If the king sickened, the land died. Roland is directly descended from Arthur Eld, the ancient king of All-World, albeit from a gilly rather than a legitimate wife. Yet he is the last of his line and the last of his kind. After his father's death, he will be Mid-World's final dinh. Hence, what affects Roland affects his world. But the disease that is beginning to eat at Roland's heart is not physical but existential. At the end of *Treachery* and at the beginning of *The Fall of Gilead*, Roland takes the final, deadly step from childhood to manhood, and the last of his innocence falls away. If Roland proved his right to be called an adult by winning his six-shooters and remembering the face of his father in Gilead's Square Yard where he battled his teacher Cort, then he slaughtered the remains of his young self in his mother's chamber with those same guns.

If the king bears a sin so heavy that he can no longer afford to touch his own human emotions, something inside of him desiccates. If love is too painful to feel, because in order to survive all emotion must be placed behind a wall, otherwise it would drown the one who feels, then something within the self dies. Similarly, if the king can no longer drink from the cup of human feeling, then the land—which is but an extension of the king—becomes a desert.

For me, Roland's matricide is a turning point in his personal development. In fact, it is the pivotal point of his existence. In the convex pink glass of Maerlyn's Grapefruit, Roland saw his mother as his worst enemy. For a moment she transformed into the hag Rhea of the Cöos, and in that moment Roland shot her. But though this murder was a mistake, the rage behind the murder—and Roland's rage about the cuckolding of his father—was real. Hence, in his heart Roland knows that this act of violence wasn't a complete accident. On some level he wanted to punish his mother for her adultery, and ultimately that is what he does.



Seen through the distorting lens of Maerlyn's Grapefruit, and knowing that his hands are stained with the blood of the woman who bore him, Roland can look backwards and also blame himself for the death of his first lover, Susan Delgado. After all, he did not save her from the mob who burnt her on a Charyou Tree fire—a decision that is more conscious and obvious in the novels than in the comics. And as we know from the books, early on in their relationship Roland compares Susan to his own "whorish" mother. The murder of the mother

becomes also the murder of the beloved. It is a guilt worthy of Sigmund Freud's couch.

When we began work on this story arc, I was the one who wanted to call it *The Fall of Gilead*. Some of the folks in marketing worried that the title gave away too much of the plot, but I didn't think so. You see, ultimately the fall we witness isn't just the fall of a city or even a land: it's the fall of an individual. In that ancient way of thinking, Roland is Gilead. And when he succumbs to the treachery of his enemies and kills his mother, he loses that first piece of his soul.

Before Roland can reach the Dark Tower, he must journey through the deadly Mohaine Desert, which he does at the beginning of *The Gunslinger*. But in order to reach the Tower, Roland must also survey the desiccation of his spirit. The Roland we meet at the beginning of *The Gunslinger* is a man who carries a smoldering burden, but it is a man who wishes to shed that burden and fulfill his destiny as a servant of the White. If in the Dark Tower comics we see how Roland becomes a man, in the Dark Tower novels which come after, we see how Roland tries to reclaim the tortured, grieving boy that sleeps within him. **CR**

WRITTEN BY:  
ROBIN FURTH  
ILLUSTRATED BY:  
DENNIS CALERO



**DARK TOWER:  
FALL OF GILEAD  
ISSUE #1  
SKETCHBOOK**

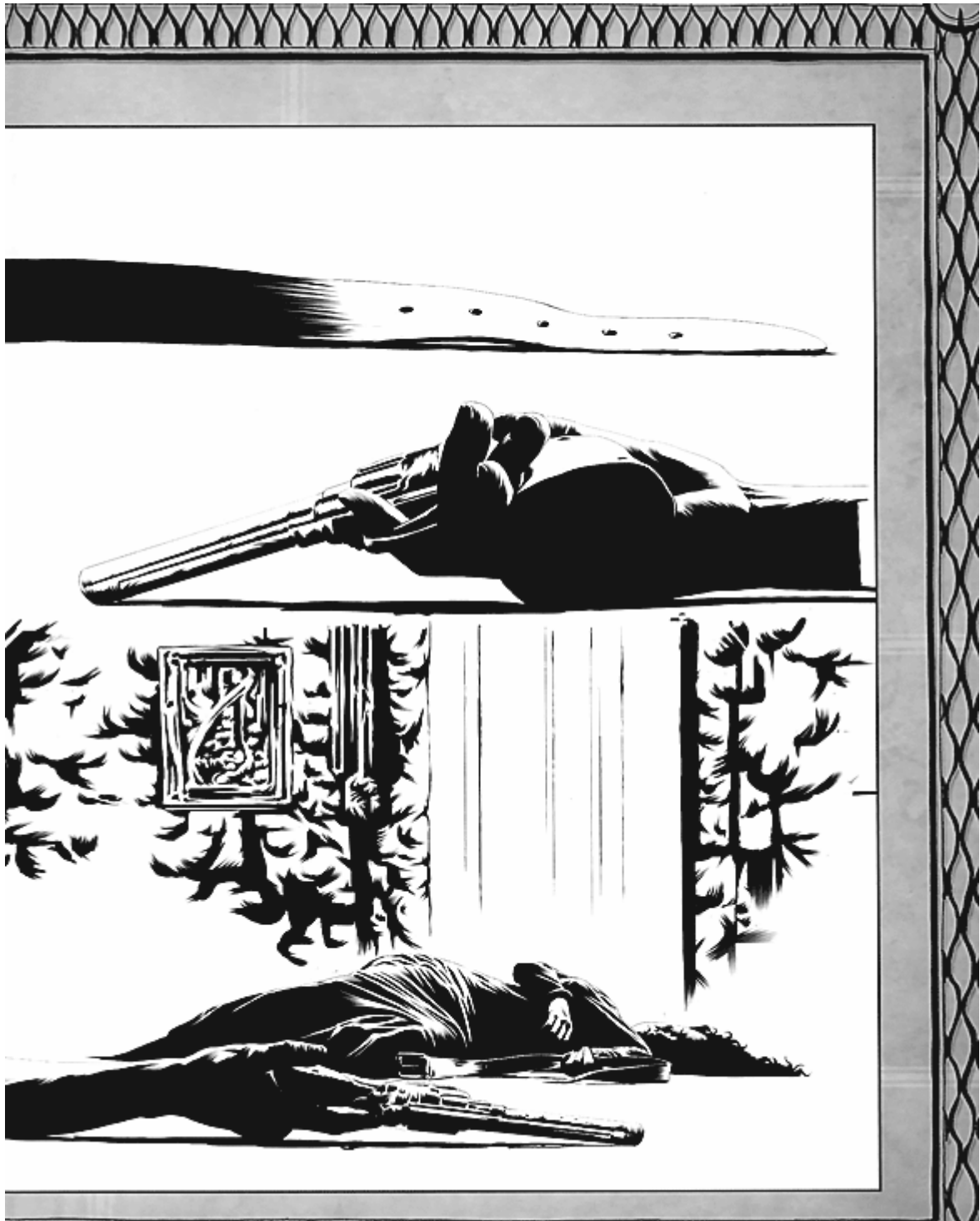
**A look at the creative team's in-progress work,  
including layouts, pencil art and cover concepts.**



Jae Lee's Cover Pencils.

Richard Isanove's black and white artwork.  
The finished versions appear earlier in this issue.













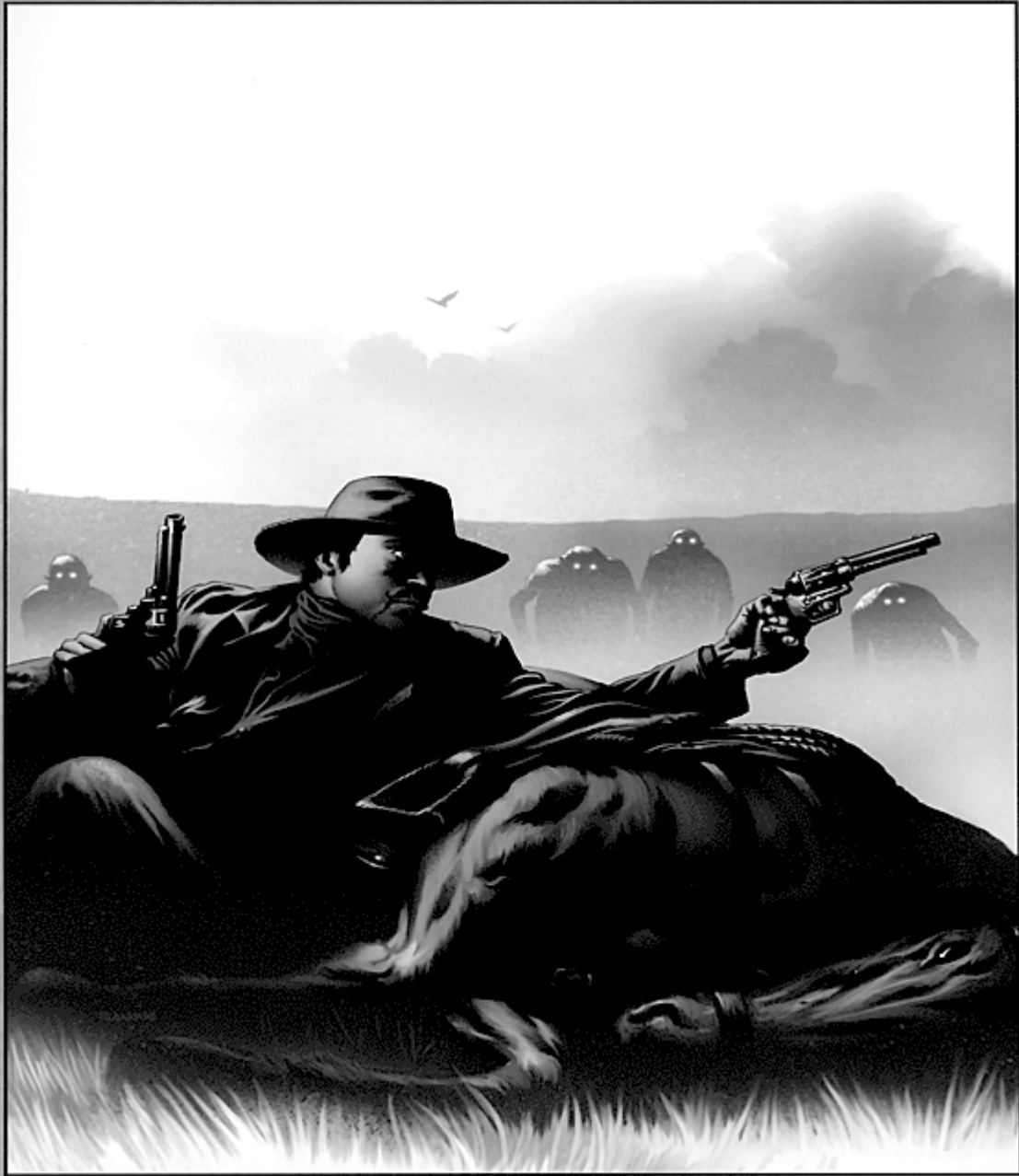
Richard Isanove's layouts with his notes.



Acclaimed Marvel superstar Adi Granov delivers this stunning variant cover. The final piece is seen here with Adi's proposal sketch.



**NEXT: With Roland imprisoned for Gabrielle's murder, who will stop Marten's magic from tearing apart the halls of Gilead? Can Steven Deschain protect his son from the law...or will he bow to the demands of courtly justice?**





All is not well in Mid-World. Gunslinger Roland Deschain, the young man whose destiny it is to seek and save the Dark Tower, is haunted by horrifying visions from the evil seeing sphere, Maerlyn's Grapefruit. The Crimson King, enemy of all that lives, has long plotted the utter destruction of the Tower, and the undoing of reality itself. Now, with Roland unable to act, his monstrous foe has put his plan into motion...

From the creative team that brought Roland's early adventures to life in *The Dark Tower: The Gunslinger Born*, *The Dark Tower: The Long Road Home*, and *The Dark Tower: Treachery* comes the next chapter of this dark saga of friendship, betrayal and a cosmic quest as conceived by master storyteller Stephen King.

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# STEPHEN THE DARK KING TOWER



# STEPHEN THE DARK KING TOWER

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## IN A WORLD THAT HAS MOVED ON...

Earning the title of gunslinger at the unheard-of age of fourteen, young Roland Deschain quickly became a target for his father's enemies, namely John Farson, and was forced to flee his home of Gilead or face death.

Roland and his ka-tet returned home to Gilead after he barely survived his first nearly fatal experience with Farson's greatest prize: the sphere known as Maerlyn's Grapefruit. Still under the mentally destructive influence of the sphere, Roland kept it hidden from his father Steven until his ka-tet forced him to reveal it. Wisely, Steven locked it away so it could harm no one.

As Gilead prepared for the festive celebration of its newly-titled gunslingers, Roland's mother prepared to repent for her adulterous sins with the sorcerer Marten. Seemingly out of nowhere, Marten appeared and lured Gabrielle into becoming the prime element in the planned assassination of her husband Steven with the help of Farson's spy. Distrustful of his returned mother, Roland left the festivities to find the sphere hidden away in her chambers. The sphere drew him into a hallucination that provoked him into fatally shooting Gabrielle...

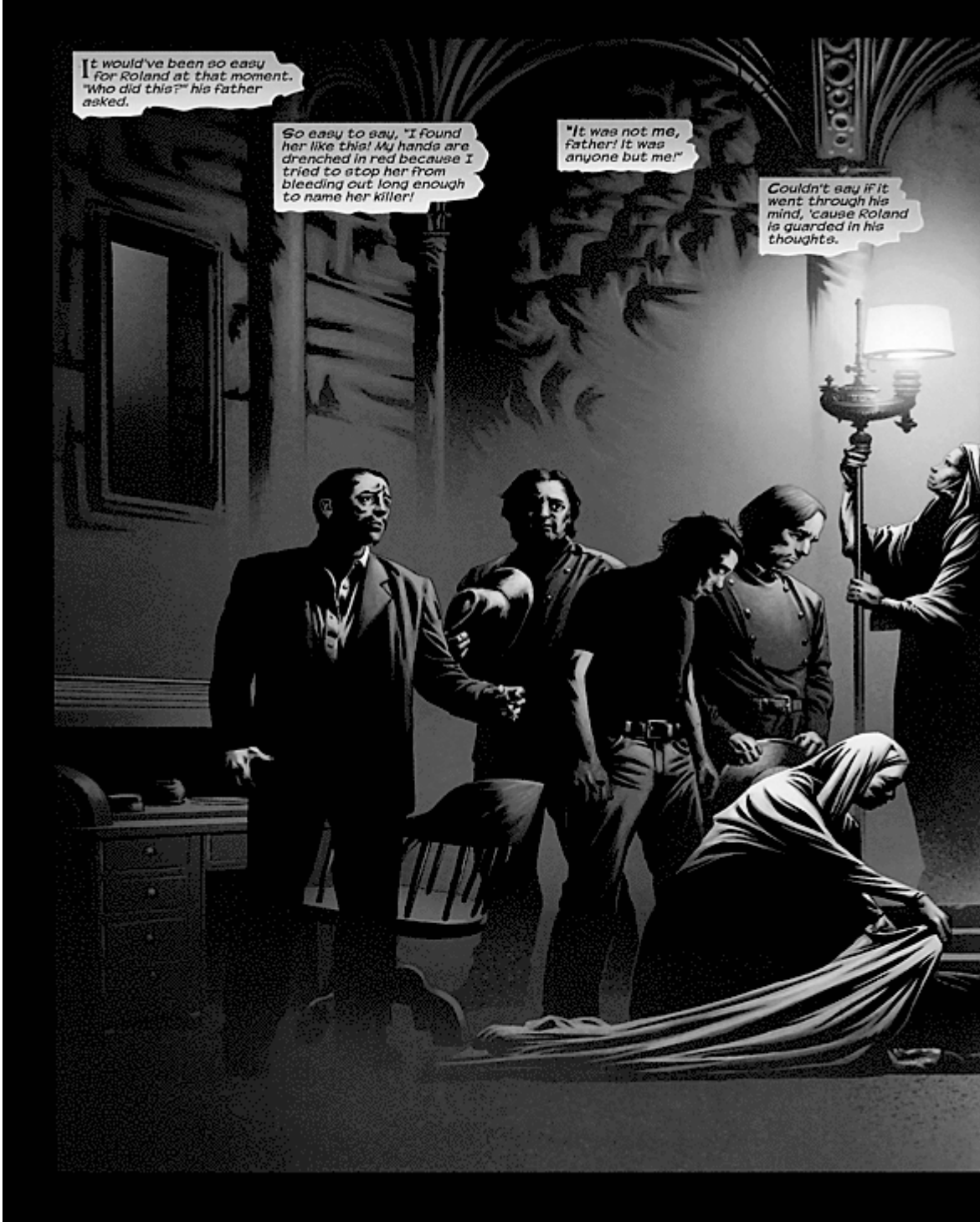
Meanwhile, Steven Deschain has discovered his wife's treachery and heads to his chambers where he sees that Maerlyn's Grapefruit is gone from his safe. And the only person who was close enough to Steven to take the key was Gabrielle Deschain.

*It would've been so easy for Roland at that moment. "Who did this?" his father asked.*

*So easy to say, "I found her like this! My hands are drenched in red because I tried to stop her from bleeding out long enough to name her killer!"*

*"It was not me, father! It was anyone but me!"*

*Couldn't say if it went through his mind, 'cause Roland is guarded in his thoughts.*





*He stands there, stares at the corpse of her what gave him birth. His father calls his name like he's witnessing his son drowning, going down for the final time.*

*But finally--after what probably seemed an eternity to him--he speaks.*



I did it.

Well... 'twas the hand of Parson, or Marten or his pet witch, Rhea...

...reaching through that damnable Maerlyn's Grapefruit into Gilead... in my mind...

But my hand pulled the trigger. So if you seek an assassin to hang, I stand before you--



Don't speak of such things.

How many of my loved ones would you have me lose in a day?

That sphere *made* you--?

A glamor of some sort. Made me think that Rhea was attacking.



You could easily have denied any involvement. That weighs in your favor somewhat.

But proving the grapefruit's potency to anyone else is problematic without the sphere in our possession.

Yet here, upon Gabrielle's dresser... the key to the vault in which I kept the sphere. It would seem to... to...



*Emotion chokes off his voice. I'll warrant he's holding himself together with both hands, and he's starting to leak through his own fingers.*

*Alain, Cuthbert and Aileen look on at their friend and friend's father. They likely never felt more helpless than right then.*



Robert...Chris...  
no matter what else  
she is, she remains  
my queen. I cannot  
bear for strangers  
to...to...

Say no  
more, Steven.  
We will attend  
to her...

Her  
remains.

And then, if Steven Deschain  
needed any more proof of his  
wife's murderous intent...

...as Alain and Cuthbert's  
fathers endeavor to move  
Gabrielle's bloody corpse...

A  
knife? Steven...  
she...

She had a  
knife up her  
sleeve?

For self-  
protection,  
surely...

His tone is cold  
and flat and even  
more lifeless than  
his queen.

A knife with Farson's  
sigil emblazoned upon it.  
It would seem that what she  
intended to protect was the  
Good Man's interests...

Probably  
by slipping this  
between my ribs.





Your mother's final gift to you, Roland.

I...I don't understand--?



From beyond the grave, she convinces me of your story.

Fareon plays us against each other. His wizard, Marten, had my wife betray me...and then Fareon sacrificed Gabrielle to turn me against you. He is a master gamesman.

And now we must play through our own game. A game of law that we must hope will see the truth, with *you* caught in its rules.

I understand, father. There cannot be one law for gunslingers and another for the rest of Gilead.



Guards...take my son into custody.



You want to cry out in protest, Aileen. You want to run to him.

Yes, Bert...

I...

If you fancy yourself to have the heart of a gunlinger...

Then exercise the *control* of a gunlinger. Help him when you can... but this is *NOT* that time.



My lord!  
ZhunF! ZhunF!  
Something  
has...

It is...  
impossible!  
I can  
scarcely--

Calm yourself.  
Nothing is to be  
served by your  
collapsing.

"A raven was seen flying from the castle, hauling a velvet sack. The north tower guard, suspicious, attempted to shoot it from the sky..."

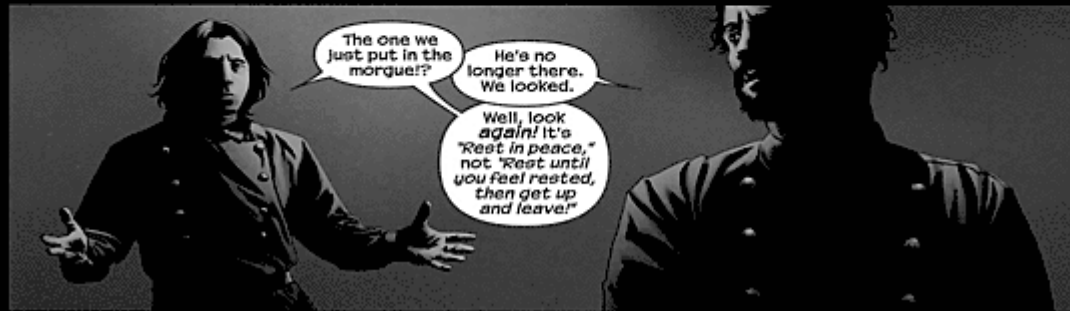
"...and was struck down by a bolt of lightning."



"While medics sought to revive him--  
*unsuccessfully*--  
three men rode through the western checkpoint. None could even slow them."

"One fit the description of Marten Broadcloak..."

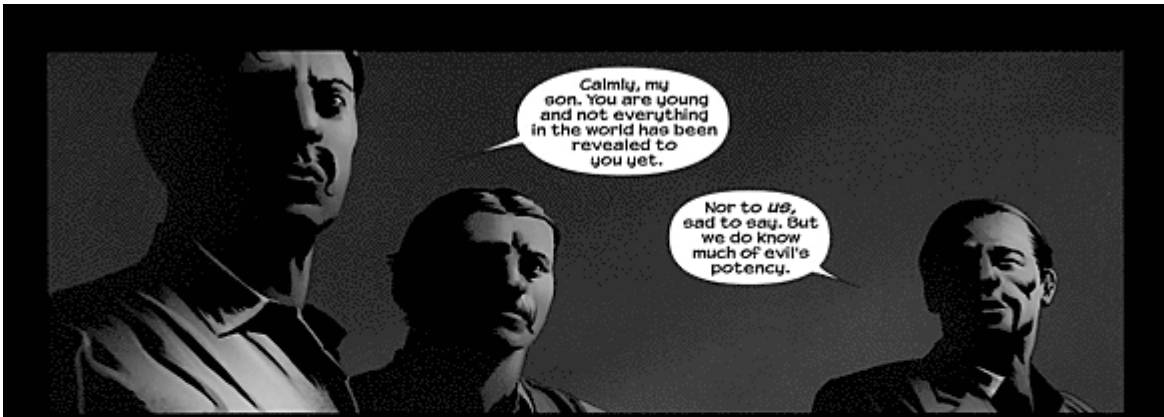
"...and another could well have been the traitorous musician."



The one we just put in the morgue!?"

He's no longer there. We looked.

Well, look *again!* It's "Rest in peace," not "Rest until you feel rested, then get up and leave!"





Aye.  
It sure  
is.



The raven  
could have been  
Marten's *Familiar*,  
making off with the  
grapefruit...

Or perhaps even  
a transformed  
Marten himself,  
who secured the  
grapefruit and  
then returned  
to liberate the  
"corpse."



Either way, he  
couldn't be a  
far enough  
distance yet to  
be safe from  
pursuit.

Then,  
gentlemen...



...let  
us *pursue*  
him.

As the gunslingers prepare their posse, over in Cort's cottage, well...

Ever feel so sick ya wish you was dead? Well, Cort's pretty much at that point. Unfortunately, it's likely his wish'll be granted.



Your vomiting patient, my dear DeCurry, is an *idiot*. I warned him not to muck with whatever he found in the traitor's room, but did he listen?

He did not?

You know of his pigheadedness, nurse?

No, Vannay, you've just said it three times already.



I like your nurse's *spunk*, Doctor! If I recover, I might want to see her socially.

If I do not, well...it'll be worth it for having uncovered Parson's plans! His death will avenge mine!

Stop speaking of death, you old fool.

If 'tis mine, I've earned it, Vannay, and will speak of it when I wish.



See for yourself, Vannay. In that book, all his plans. Do you see?

Yes, I... see all too well.



Blank. Ensorcelled so that Cort would see what he wanted to...

And thus keep exposing himself to its toxic contents?

Aye.



Well, 'twas effective. Pragon's blood, by the look of it.

And beyond my power to--

Doctor!



He's passed out.



That's for the best.

His skin will continue to seep blood, faster and faster, until he has none left to lose.

Damn you, Marten! This business has your stink about it!



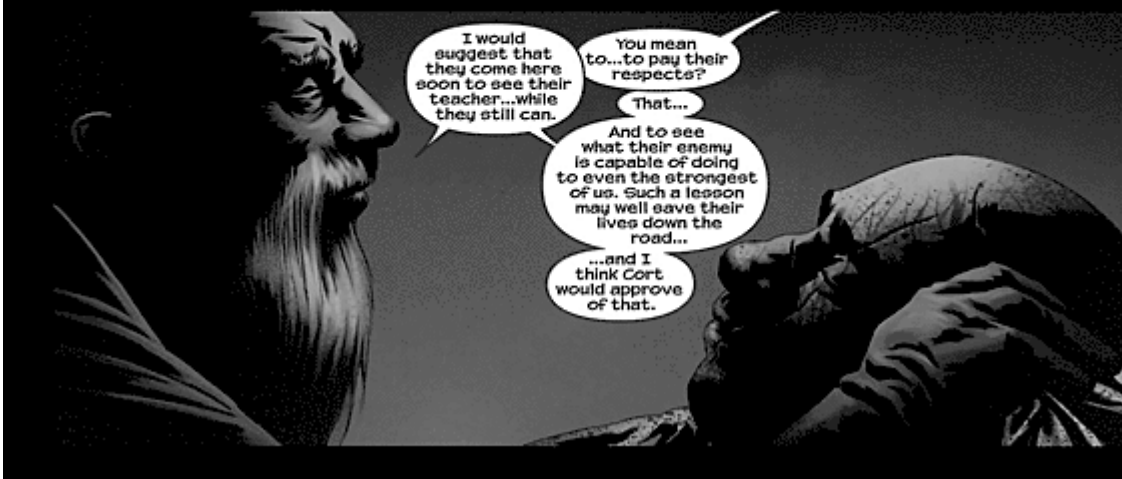
I'll return with some morphine. It will help manage the pain slightly, should he be *unfortunate* enough to wake up.

Other than that, there's naught to be done.

Doctor... your son, James, and his ka-tet, graduate as gunslingers next week, do they not?



Yes. What of it?



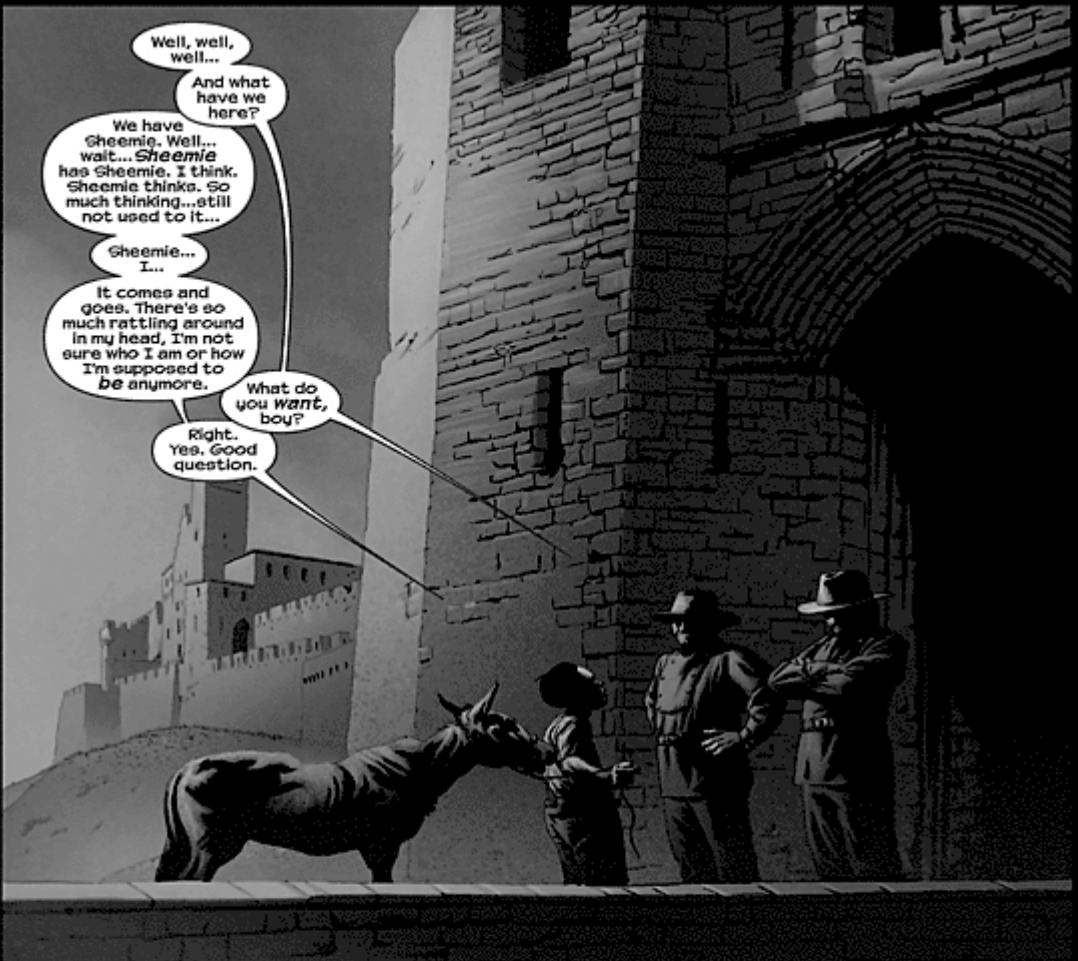
I would suggest that they come here soon to see their teacher...while they still can.

You mean to...to pay their respects?

That...

And to see what their enemy is capable of doing to even the strongest of us. Such a lesson may well save their lives down the road...

...and I think Cort would approve of that.



Well, well, well...  
And what have we here?

We have Sheemie. Well... wait... *Sheemie* has Sheemie. I think. Sheemie thinks. So much thinking...still not used to it...

Sheemie... I...

It comes and goes. There's so much rattling around in my head, I'm not sure who I am or how I'm supposed to *be* anymore.

What do you *want*, boy?

Right. Yes. Good question.



Roland. Roland, Cuthbert and Alain. They had different names when I met them.

But whoever I am *now*...that's who *they* are now. Understand?

Not remotely. Now be on your way.





Don't mean to be all fussy mussy, but you're *in my way*, so...

If you *seriously* think we'll be passing such as you to the young princes--



Actually, *serious* thinking is a novel experience for me.

There I go again. Speaking with someone *else's* voice.

Anyway, either you're going or I am, and since you seem resolved--

What's wrong with your eyes? What're you...?



Holy--! He's gone!



He's one of the Not-Men! Has to be!

Not-Men are old stories for children!

Then I'm a gods damned child! *Now sound the alarm!* He could be anywhere!



Do you believe what they're claiming?

A Not-Man? It's ridiculous.

Maybe Parson has added their minds.


If some imbecile child with a mule is wandering around Gilead, he'll be *found*, never fear.

Well...we're in, Cap. Just keep it quiet, okay dokay?

Now we just have to find Roland, is all.


Is all.  
Is really really really *big* all.






Tricked or not, I *did* shoot her. Her blood remains on my hands, in *every* sense.

And if I'd listened to you, I'd have had nothing to do with that globe, and he never could have infested my mind.



*My negligence-- my hubris, if nothing else--is criminal. And my actions are an extension of that.*

When I hang, as the treacherous Hax did so many years ago, it will be *deserved*.




You're being ridiculous, Roland. It will never happen.



Just promise me this. When the time comes...*you* be the ones to do it. Let my *friends* send me on to the next world.

If nothing else, Bert, I can count on you to fashion the knot properly. You always excelled at knots.



"Roland, I *swear* to you, should you be found guilty--and it will not happen, but if it *did*--


"We would break you out of here and become fugitives by your side before we allow you to dance on air.

"And it will never come to trial. Even now, our fathers are tracking Marten. They will find him, beat a confession from him, and that will be that.

"There is no way--none--that he will be able to elude them."

How could he have *eluded* us this way?

The hoof prints stop at the sheer rock face, for the Gods' sake!



Not sheer. There seems to be some sort of door.

A door, embedded in a rock wall! More of Marten's doing, I'll wager.

With respect, Steven, I think you'd lose that wager. Our mistake is in thinking this to be a *naturally* made mountain.

These rocks...bits of debris...I think they're actually rubble. This is a fallen city, overgrown in the midst of the forest.

A city? Who lived here?



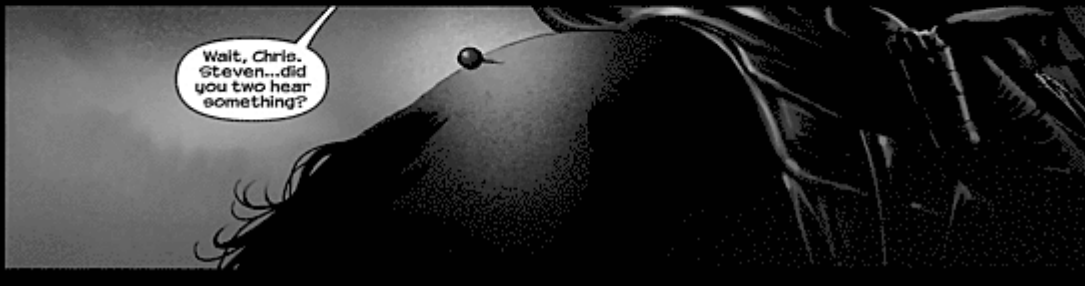
Back then? Before the fall of the Imperium? Who cares? But now? Slow mutants, most probably. Watching us right now, for all we know, or rooting around in tunnels beneath our feet.

This business stinks of a trap.

We need to be quit of this area, or at least return during daylight, lest--



Wait, Chris. Steven...did you two hear something?









*These ain't the first people that the Slow Mutants have ambushed.*

*Thing is, everybody they've ever attacked ran and screamed and begged and died.*



*But the gunslingers... they're in the business of dealing death.*

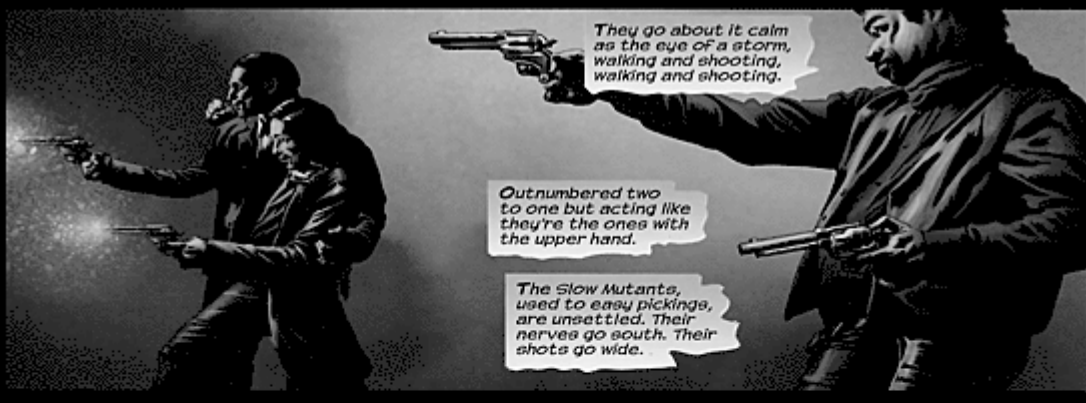
*So for them, this is just another day at work.*



*They go about it calm as the eye of a storm, walking and shooting, walking and shooting.*

*Outnumbered two to one but acting like they're the ones with the upper hand.*

*The Slow Mutants, used to easy pickings, are unsettled. Their nerves go south. Their shots go wide.*



*Their lives go away.*

*All of them... except one.*



Unfortunately, one's  
all it takes.



**BLAM**

That one was  
still twitching.  
Could have been  
death spasms,  
though.  
I'll scout  
the area,  
make sure  
that--



**PFFFT**



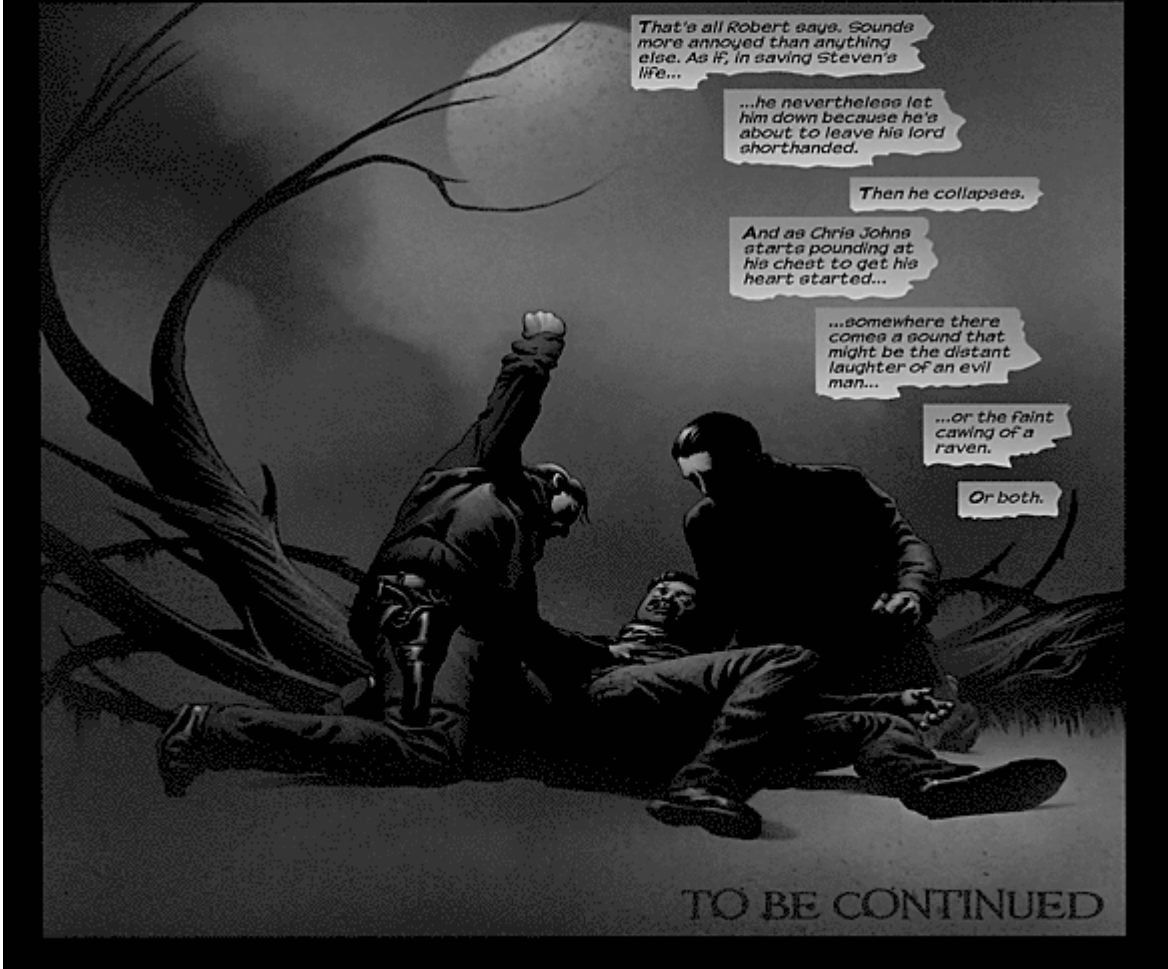
Steven,  
DOWN!



**BLAM**



Oh...  
...damnation.



*That's all Robert says. Sounds more annoyed than anything else. As if, in saving Steven's life...*

*...he nevertheless let him down because he's about to leave his lord short-handed.*

*Then he collapses.*

*And as Chris Johns starts pounding at his chest to get his heart started...*

*...somewhere there comes a sound that might be the distant laughter of an evil man...*

*...or the faint cawing of a raven.*

*Or both.*

TO BE CONTINUED

## THE ART AND DISCIPLINE OF CREATIVE CONTINUITY

Each time I sit down to write out the plot for a Dark Tower comic book, I'm faced with two urgent tasks. On the one hand, I need to create a story that is new and (hopefully!) full of enough enjoyable surprises to keep even the most hardened Dark Tower junkie traveling with us. On the other hand, I must also remain true to Stephen King's original vision. As all Constant Readers know, in *The Gunslinger Born* I had the storyline of Wizard and Glass to follow and so was on fairly safe ground on both accounts. But as our tale progresses and as our tet moves further and

further from Hambry and closer and closer to its final confrontation with the Outer Dark, these two imperatives become a little trickier to juggle.

In numerous interviews and articles, I've discussed how I create the Dark Tower story from the many fragmentary tales which Roland confides to his American tet over the course of Stephen King's seven volume saga. But what I haven't talked about very much is the way in which I assemble these individual tales. Sometimes, the transition from novel to graphic novel is clean and direct and I jump for joy. But most of the time, even those scenes which seem to be taken whole from the novel must be transformed in order to work in the new visual context. In essence, my job always seems to be less that of assembling a jigsaw puzzle—where the full picture is already waiting for me and all I have to do is put the pieces in the appropriate places—but more like recreating an ancient mosaic from beautiful, multi-colored tiles. What often happens is that, in order





to stand and be true to the spirit of Stephen King's tale which is full of wonderful plotting and powerful dramatic tension, I have to play a little fast and loose with rigid facts. Although this may occasionally fash hardcore fans, I cry your pardon. I am doing the best I can to remember the faces of my fathers.

Here's an example to illustrate what I mean. Because of the extremely powerful flashback in *Wizard and Glass* that shows Roland shooting his mother Gabrielle in the chest, I knew the time and method by which Gabrielle was doomed to travel to the clearing. I also knew that Roland would be tricked into committing matricide by a vision he sees in *Maerlyn's Grapefruit*. (Standing in his mother's chamber and staring into the Pink sphere, Roland thinks that Rhea of the Coös is sneaking up behind him, her snake in her hands. Unfortunately for him, the woman approaching him from behind is actually his mother, holding the belt that she made for him while in a women's retreat in Debaria.) However, while the essence of this scene remains the same in both graphic novel and original prose, in *Wizard and Glass* and

*Treachery*, the context of this scene is quite different.

In our graphic novel version, Gabrielle's death happens almost immediately after the riddling contest that follows Roland's coming-of-age banquet. Cort has murdered the cheater who claims the Fair Day goose, but while searching the man's pocket he finds incriminating evidence—a ring stamped with the staring red eye of the Crimson King, a symbol which also happens to be the sigil of John Farson. Holding the ring aloft, Cort states that there are other traitors in Gilead. In response, guilty Gabrielle flees the Great Hall, a flight which is witnessed by her son. Knowing of his mother's past infidelities, and of her devotion to the traitor Marten Broadcloak, Roland becomes suspicious and follows her to her chamber. The tragic result of his pursuit is a foregone conclusion.

However, in the original novel, this awful matricide takes place under quite different circumstances. First of all, it does not happen on the night of Roland's coming-of-age banquet, but many months later. In Stephen King's version of the tale, Roland comes to his mother not as an angry and suspi-

cious boy trying to root out a traitor, but as a conciliator and peacemaker. In that brief flashback, we learn that on the night of Roland's coming-of-age banquet, Gabrielle was supposed to stab her husband in the chest with a poisoned dagger. However, Roland somehow or other managed to intercept the weapon, and by so doing, prevented his mother from committing a crime for which she would probably have been hanged. When Roland knocks on his mother's door, he does not already suspect that she has stolen the Grapefruit for her treacherous lover. Instead, Roland comes to ask his mother to repent of her affair with Marten Broadcloak once and for all, and to return his father's love. Alas, Roland is not only disappointed in this task, but his good intentions are twisted by his enemies.

Another example of this condensing process can be found in the character of Farson's nephew, James Farson. (And by the way, in the books we never learn this nasty young man's first name. I borrowed the name James from *The Little Sisters of Eluria*, a Dark Tower novella which I will discuss shortly.) In *The Wastelands*, Roland tells us that Cort once murdered a wandering, cross-eyed singer and acrobat who dared to cheat during one of Gilead's sacred Fair-Day Riddling contests. Instead of taking home the Fair-Day Goose as he'd planned, this unfortunate trickster ended up lying in the dirt, Cort's dagger in his chest. This event did not necessarily happen during Roland's coming-of-age feast, though we can assume (given the importance of Riddling contests during Gilead's major festivals) that it could have. And as far as we know, the wandering singer and minstrel whom Cort killed was not Farson's nephew at all, but an unnamed and unimportant person.

However, as always, I try my best to ground my stories in the energies of Stephen King's novels. In *Wizard and Glass*, we do learn that Farson's nephew once sneaked into Gilead dressed

as a wandering musician. His job was to smuggle a poisoned knife to the castle's chief of domestic staff, and this treacherous servant was charged with delivering the weapon to Gabrielle. As you can see, I had to conflate two characters and several different scenes in order to create the fateful night of Roland's coming-of-age banquet, but my hope in so doing was to fit more of Stephen King's vision into our tale, rather than less.

But merging scenes and characters is not my only means of dealing with sections of our story that are not detailed in our beloved books. Occasionally I am thrown back completely upon my own resources, since as all fans of the original novels know, Roland is too busy battling enemies to explain every detail of his past life to his new traveling companions. In such circumstances, I still keep my two main objectives in mind. I just have to approach them via a slightly different route.

Although scenes such as the resurrection of James Farson, or the mutants ambushing Steven Deschain, Robert Allgood, and Chris Johns, do not take place in the original novels, each one is based upon a theme or adventure that happens in one or more of the books, or in one of the Dark Tower-related novels. Hence, though Roland never recounts these particular adventures, they all are ultimately inspired by Stephen King's imagination and his world.

For example, let's examine the resurrection of James Farson, a scene which is shown in full in *The Sorcerer*, but discussed in *Fall of Gilead*. Once I'd made the decision to have Cort kill Farson's nephew (albeit unwittingly, since he never learns the young man's true name), I faced a crossroads. Given the Good Man's past record of murder and mayhem, I was fairly certain that Farson would attack Gilead if he knew that his nephew had been slaughtered there, but I also knew (from the books) that much more had to happen in Gilead before any such attack could



take place. And so I hit upon an idea. In *The Gunslinger* we learned that Walter can raise the dead, so couldn't he enact that same magical feat in our comics? And if Walter did manage to resurrect a corpse, it would not only be an interesting plot twist, but it would also show new readers a little more about the amazing extent of Walter's powers. Once again, my prime directives were fulfilled, and so I ran with the idea.

When it came to the mutants ambushing Steven Deschain and his ka-tet, I struggled for a long time about whether or not to include the adventure. After all, though we know that the ruins of Gilead will eventually house a nest of Slow Mutants, we don't ever discover when that process takes place. In the end I decided in favor of the scene, in large part because I felt that having Slow Mutants creeping into Gilead foreshadowed something that long-time readers of the series knew was bound to happen. It also meant I could adapt a fight which had long been among my favorites. Namely, the opening section of *The Little Sisters of Eluria*, where Roland is attacked by a band of Slow Mutants known as the Green Folk.

When Richard asked me to describe the mutants that ambush Steven and

his tet, I pointed out this scene to him. I used these particular mutants in our tale since I needed them to be clever enough to use weapons, and since they, like the Rods that we meet in Volume VII of the novels, are some of the few that still have working minds, not just raging appetites. But unlike the Rods of Volume VII, who are loyal to the descendants of Eld, the Green Folk of Eluria have strong ties to the servants of the Outer Dark. Hence, they could easily do the bidding of Walter O'Dim. (And by the way, I told Richard that these variations on the Green Folk didn't have to be green.) In order to strengthen these mutants' ties with Walter, I armed them with poisonous darts rather than the clubs used by the original Green Folk. For as every fan of *The Eyes of the Dragon* knows, Walter's alter-ego, Randall Flagg, is an adept at the use of poisons, and curare—which paralyzes the muscles but does not taint the body-meat—is one of his favorites.


Finally, I'd like to add a word about Aileen Ritter. Many curious fans have asked me where she appears in the books, since they have paged through all seven volumes and have not been able to find her. I admit that she is difficult to find, but she is most definitely there. In the



1982 version of *The Gunslinger*, we're told that Aileen was Roland's second important lover. He became intimate with her after his return from Hambry and before Gilead fell to its enemies. However in the revised 2003 version of this novel, Aileen becomes merely Roland's dancing companion and the girl his father wants him to marry, not the great love of his life. In our comics, I borrowed a little bit from each version of Aileen. As for Aileen's relationship to Cort, and as for her aspiration to be a gunslinger, they are my additions. However, as always, these decisions were ultimately based on my desire to stand and be true. In the novels, Roland has one female gunslinger-companion, and her energy is

central to the books. Since in Gilead it was forbidden for a woman to train in the arts of war, I had to find a way for a woman to be exposed to those arts, and so I settled on Aileen's kinship to Cort, in spirit as well as in blood.

So my fellow Constant Readers, for this month I will leave you. Thanks for taking the time to listen. From those of us here in Gilead, long days and pleasant nights.

All the best— 

Robin Furth

WRITTEN BY:  
ROBIN FURTH  
ILLUSTRATED BY:  
DENNIS CALERO





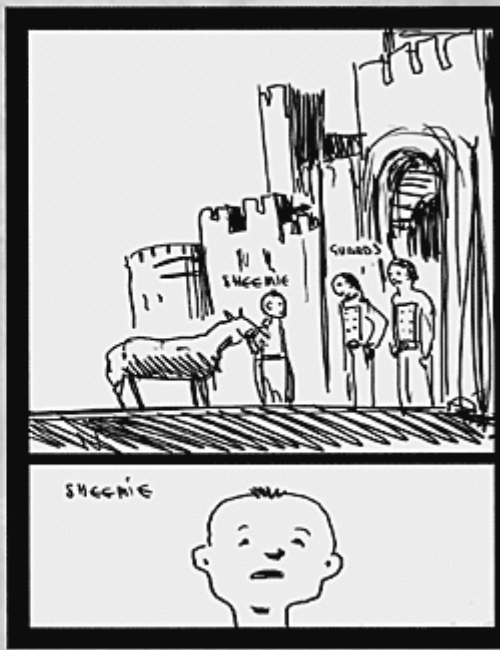
DARK  
TOWER: FALL OF  
GILEAD  
ISSUE #2  
SKETCHBOOK

A look at the creative team's in-progress work,  
including layouts, pencil art and cover concepts.



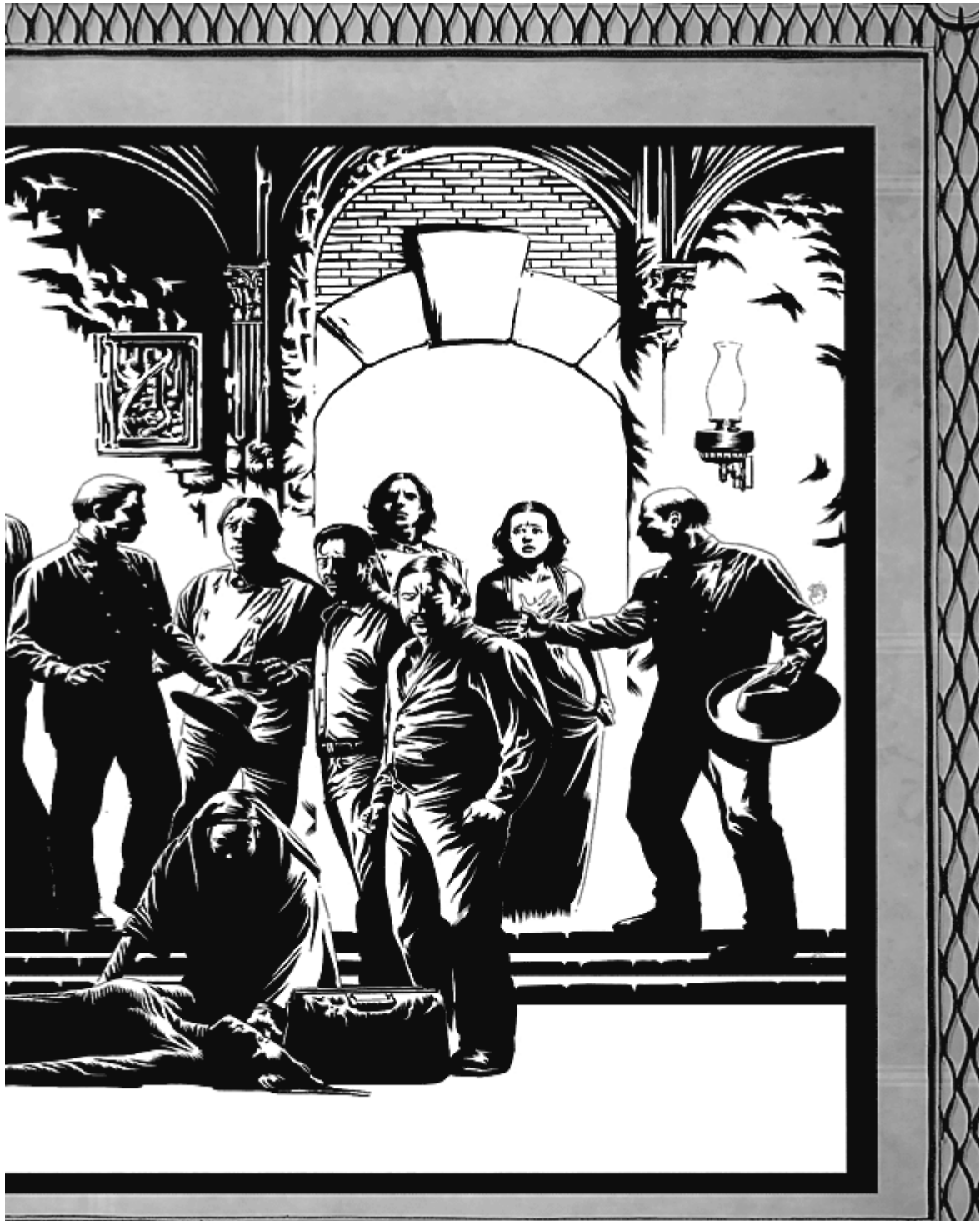
Richard Isanove's layouts with his notes.  
 Peter David scripts his dialog using these breakdowns of Robin Furth's plot.

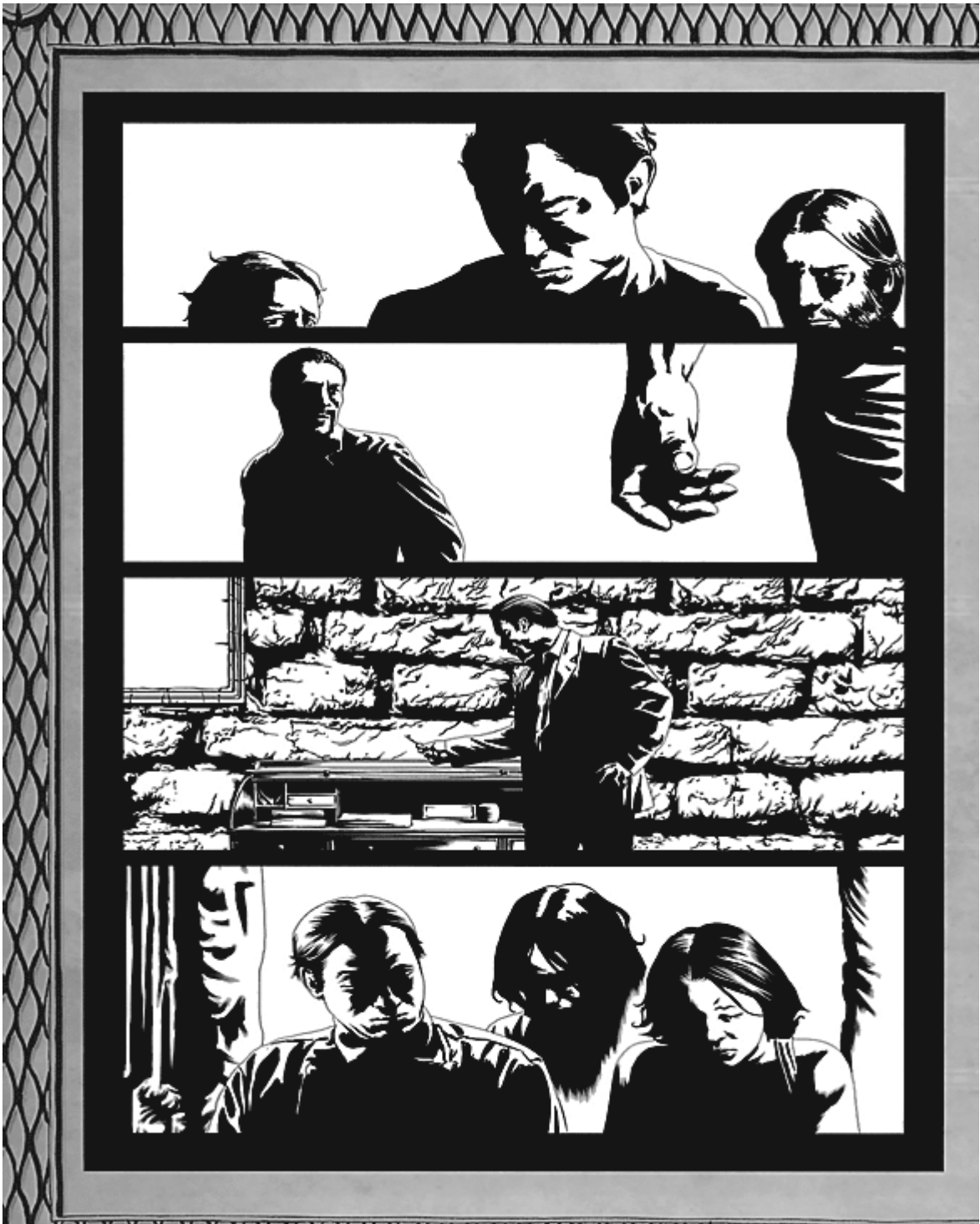


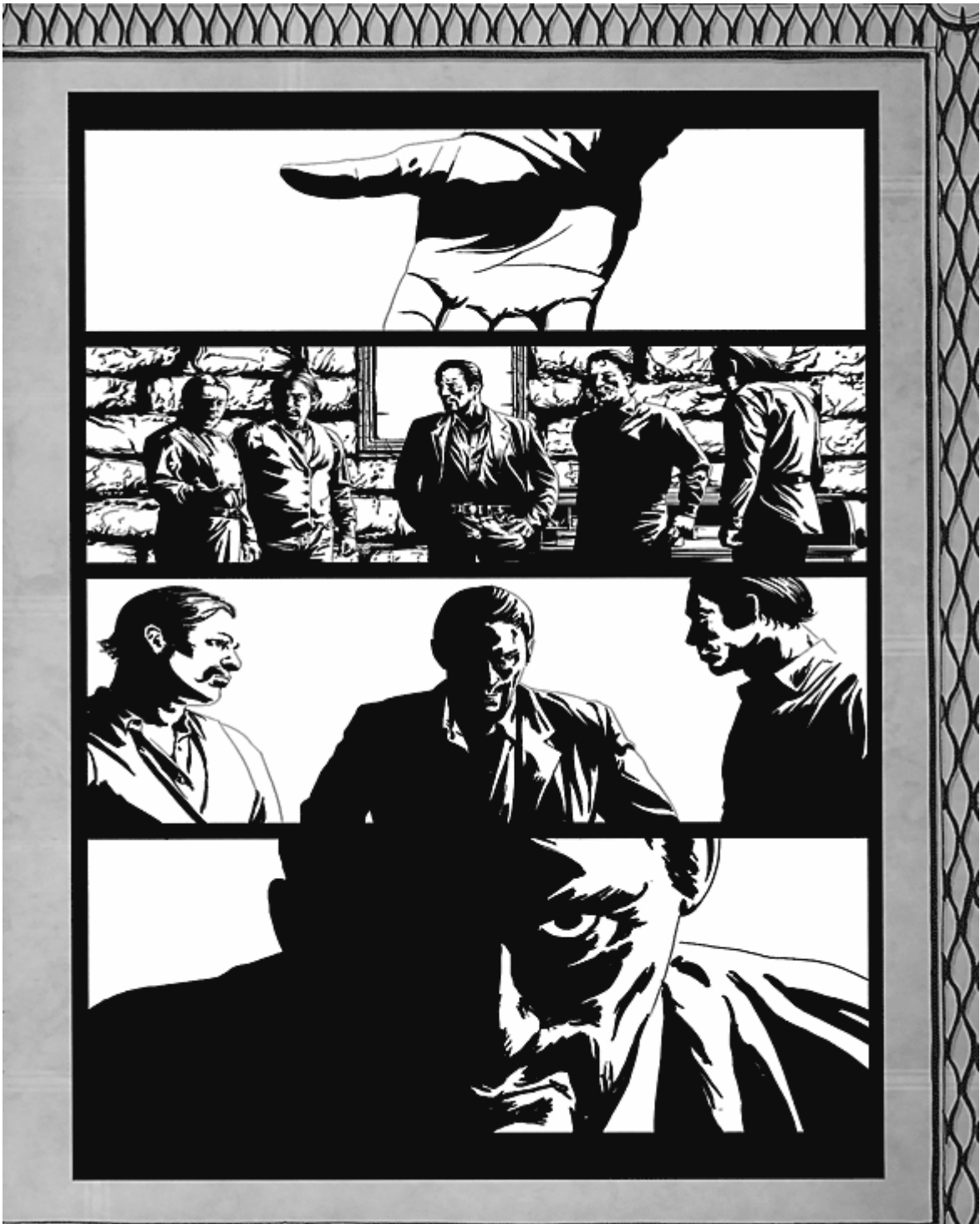


Richard Isanove's black and white artwork.  
The finished versions appear earlier in this issue.

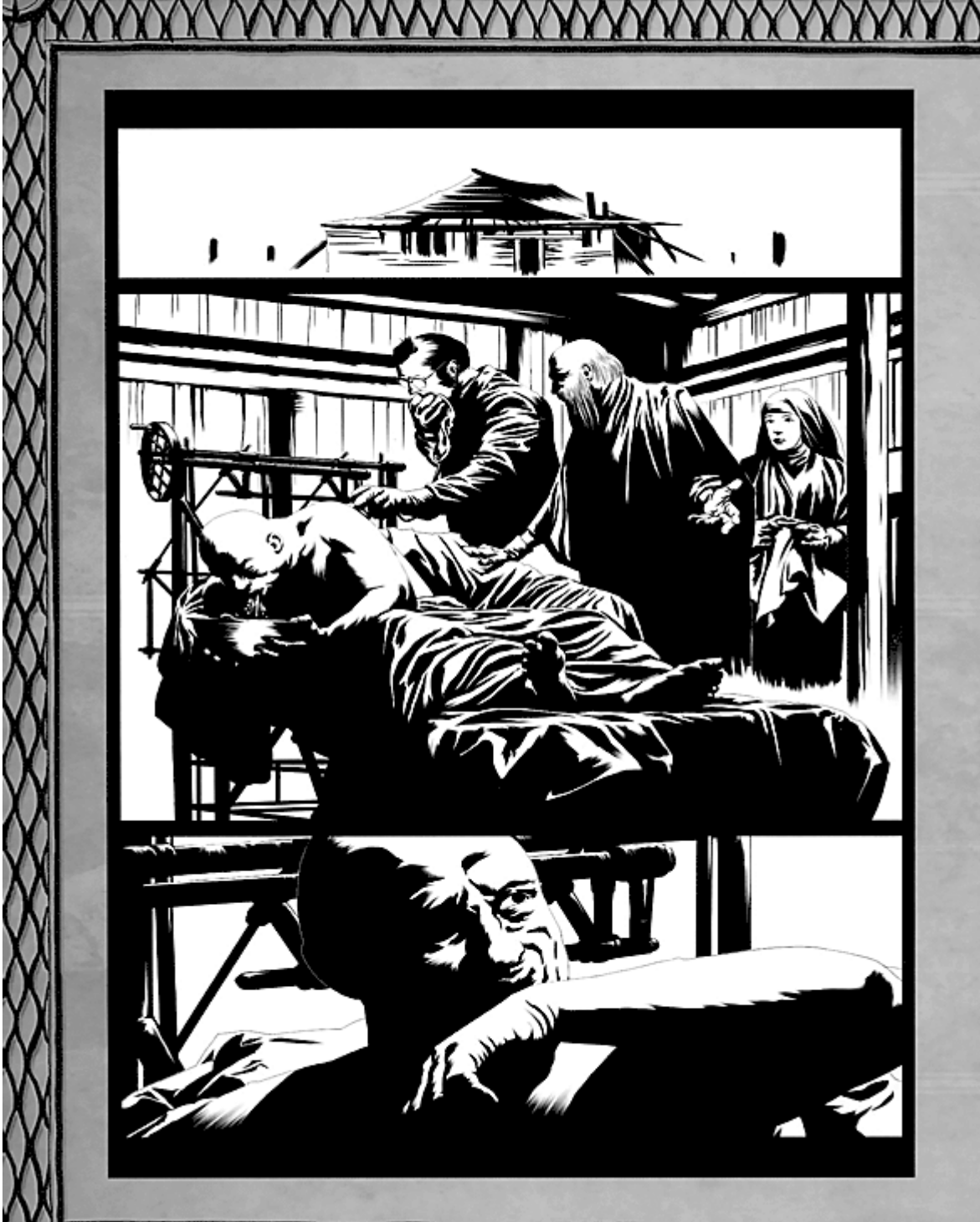


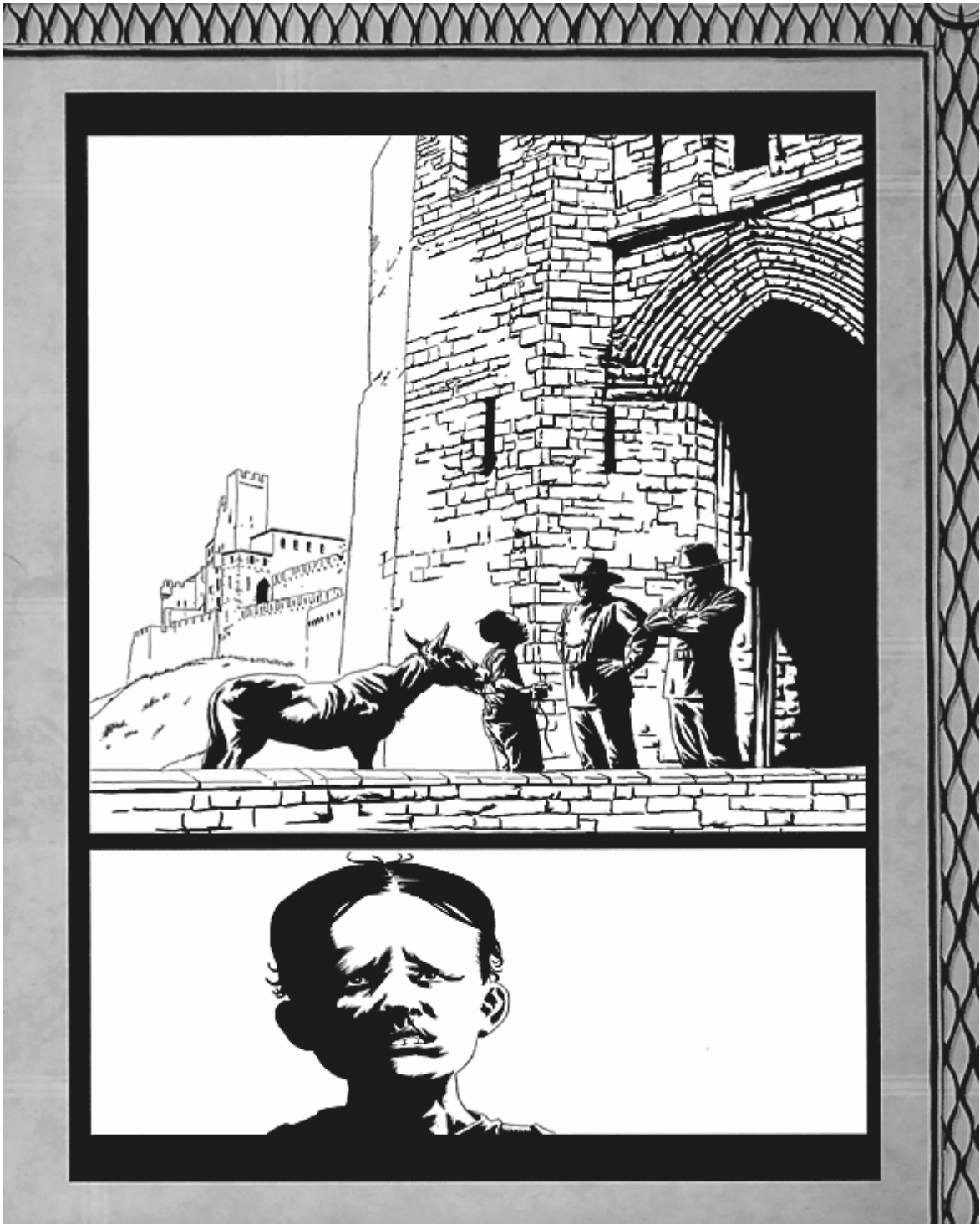












Renowned artist Tommy Lee Edwards (MARVEL 1985, WOLVERINE) provides a tense and foreboding portrait of Roland in his impressionistic variant. Seen here is his preliminary sketch.



**NEXT: While the siege of Gilead begins, Cort battles the effects of Marten's poisonous book!**





All is not well in Mid-World. Gunslinger Roland Deschain, the young man whose destiny it is to seek and save the Dark Tower, is haunted by horrifying visions from the evil seeing sphere, Maerlyn's Grapefruit. The Crimson King, enemy of all that lives, has long plotted the utter destruction of the Tower, and the undoing of reality itself. Now, with Roland unable to act, his monstrous foe has put his plan into motion...

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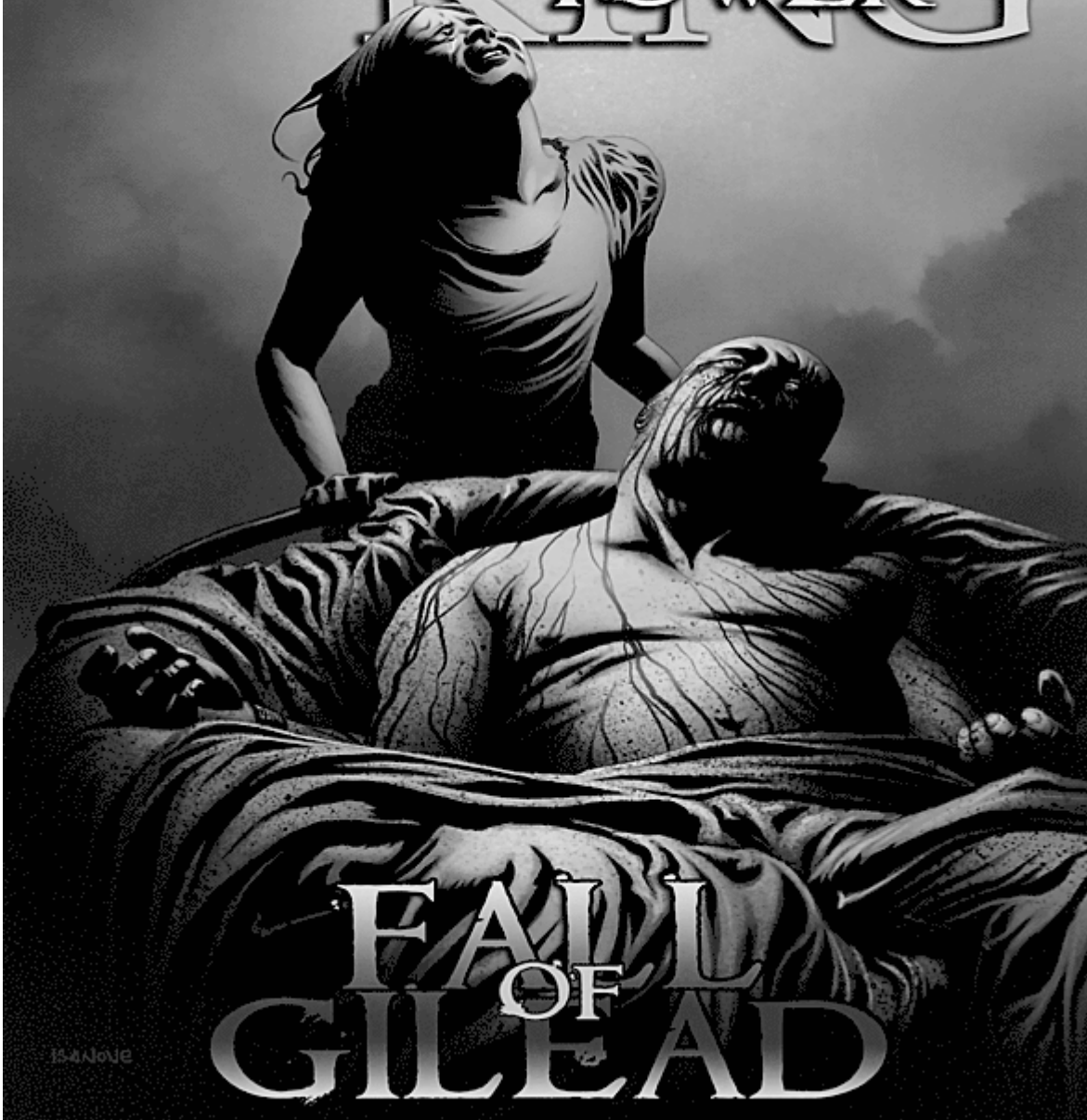


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## IN A WORLD THAT HAS MOVED ON...

As Gilead prepared for the festive celebration of its newly titled gunslingers, Roland's mother prepared to repent for her adulterous sins with the sorcerer Marten. Seemingly out of nowhere, Marten appeared and lured Gabrielle into becoming the prime element in the planned assassination of her husband Steven with the help of Steven's great enemy, John Farson, and Farson's nephew and spy, Kingson. Distrusting of his returned mother, Roland left the festivities to find the destructive sphere called Maerlyn's Grapefruit hidden away in her chambers. The sphere drew him into a hallucination that provoked him into fatally shooting Gabrielle...

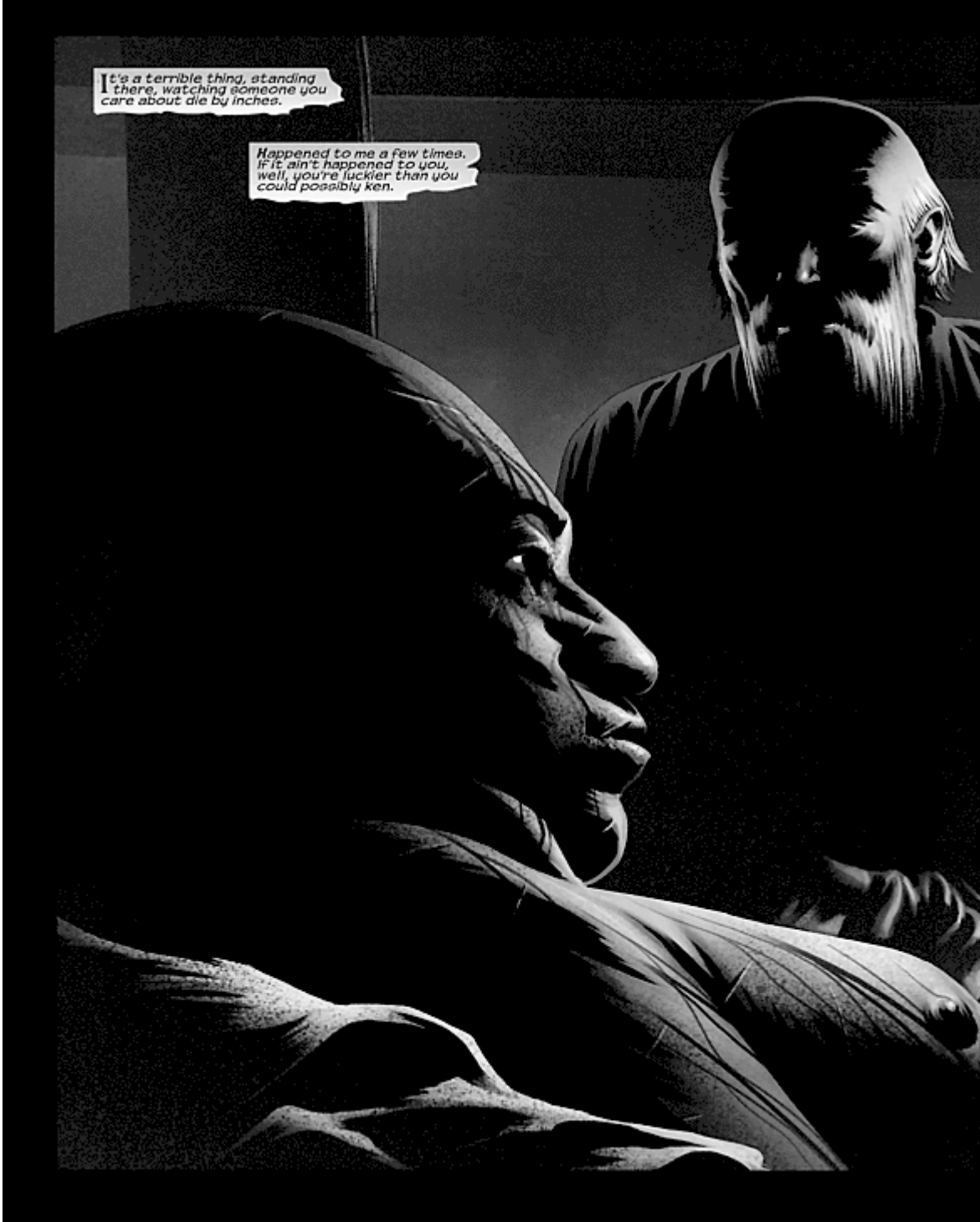
Meanwhile, Steven Deschain has discovered his wife's treachery and heads to his chambers where he sees that Maerlyn's Grapefruit is gone from his safe. And the only person who was close enough to Stephen to take the key was Gabrielle Deschain. The posse is ambushed by Slow Mutants and one of Steven's men takes a poison dart intended for him.

Back in Gilead, Roland's former teacher, Cort, discovers the treachery of Farson's nephew and slays him.

But then, upon reading a journal Kingson left in his room, Cort is poisoned by fine particles left on the pages...

*It's a terrible thing, standing  
there, watching someone you  
care about die by inches.*

*Happened to me a few times.  
If it ain't happened to you,  
well, you're luckier than you  
could possibly ken.*



Couldn't say for sure how many times Vannay had to deal with it. But if watching what's befalling Cort is even his first time, as unlikely as that is...

...it's gotta be one time too many.

Cort? Cort... some of your students are here. They wish to extend their...

Condolences?

Their best wishes for a... a speedy recovery.

Then let's hope they're better than you.







Well? No point in their hanging about. Bring them in.

Speak softly. He's very ill.

But he... *Will* get better, right?



Apparently someone had misinformed the youngsters.

When Cort vomits up more of his blood, though, well... even they figure it out right quick.



What's that...? Is that... blubbling? Future gunslingers, blubbling like infants?

I'm... we're sorry...



To hell with your sorry.

I don't care about your sorries. Nor do your enemies... or your fathers.

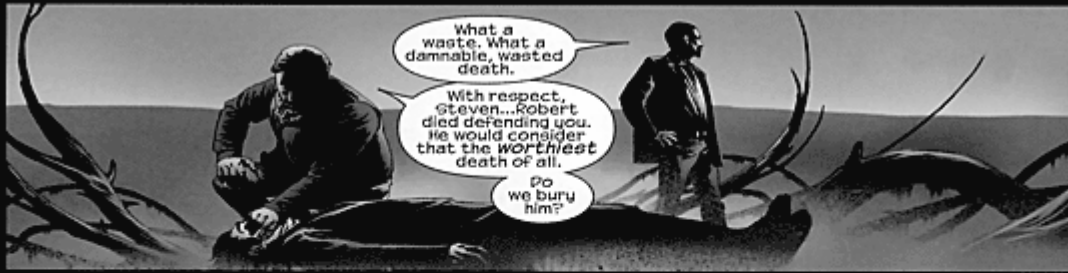
Remember that...

"...and remember  
the face of your  
fathers.

"My life's race is run...  
but yours...and theirs...  
will depend upon the  
lessons that I have  
taught you all."







What a waste. What a damnable, wasted death.

With respect, Steven... Robert died defending you. He would consider that the *worthiest* death of all.

Do we bury him?



No. We'll fashion a stretcher and carry him back to Gilead.

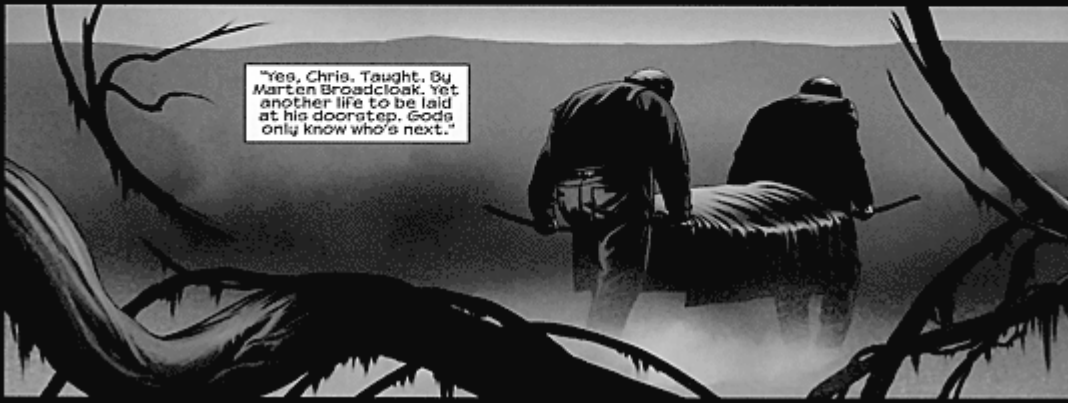
I'll not have the mutants digging him up and feasting on his body.

The mutants. When did mutants start using *poison* darts? They're little more than animals.



Even animals can be taught tricks.

Taught?



"Yes, Chris. Taught. By Marten Broadcloak. Yet another life to be laid at his doorstep. Gods only know who's next."



Cort!

My niece... wears a dress. Now I know the end... is near...



Aileen, stay back--!

You can't die! You promised to teach me!



Finally... someone with her... priorities in order...

You have already learned so much. Lady Griza... slayer of the harrier Gray Pick... would have **nothing** on you...

The darkness falls upon me... and yet I see things so much more... clearly...

Damn the old ways... you, and every woman with a fighting heart... deserve to be a gunslinger...



If... if it meant you living... I would forswear ever--

Don't you dare... complete that sentence.

Don't ever let anyone... even you **yourself**...

...make you less than you are...



Don't you understand?  
As long as you remember my lessons...

...I will never die...

I will live on in you...



...so that when you find the bastard who did this to me...

...and shoot him in his black heart...

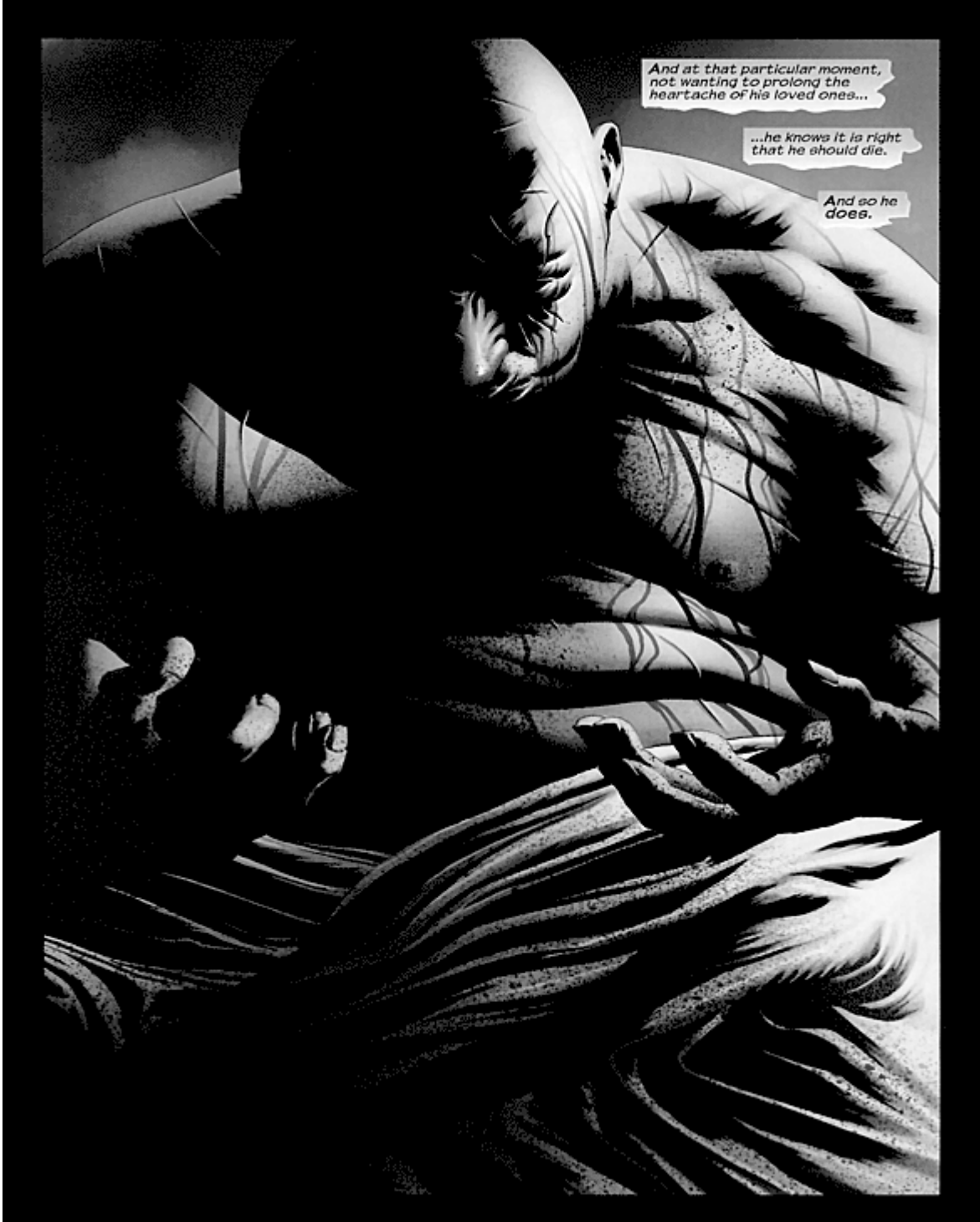
...in a way...  
...it will be my finger...upon the trig--



The convulsions seize his body, then, and Aileen cries out his name and begs him not to die, pleads with him...

...even orders him,

But Cort is his own man, and as always, does what he believes to be right.



*And at that particular moment,  
not wanting to prolong the  
heartache of his loved ones...*

*...he knows it is right  
that he should die.*

*And so he  
does.*



Aileen...  
It's over.  
You wear his blood. Let's get you washed up--

"Washed up?"  
Because I should become all prettified...

...so I can sit and be quiet like a good little girl?!

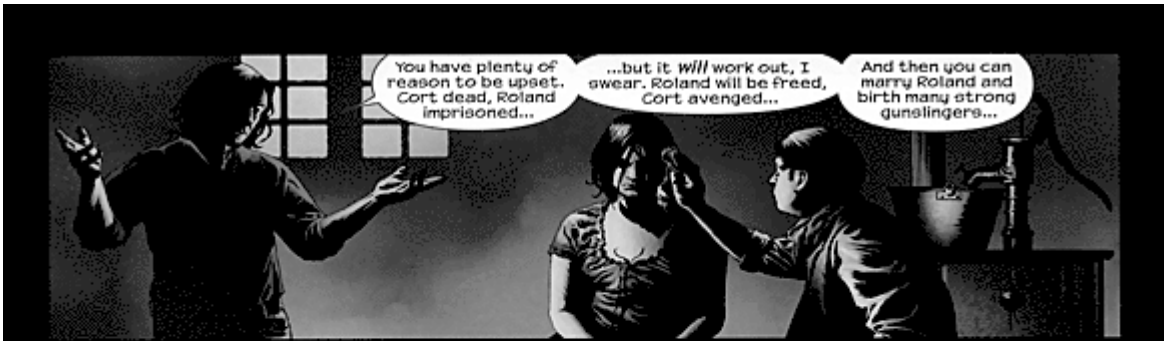
Going for the ferruman, Cort. Smooth voyage.

That's *NOT* what I meant! At all! You're being--

A hysterical female?! Like girls are wont to be?

Aileen, for gods' sakes!

I'm sorry. I...  
You're just trying to help. I know that.





Women ain't the only ones that leave men scratching their heads.

There's Sheemie, for instance...



...who disappeared himself right into the heart of Gilead, as passing as a thought, leaving guards confused and downright spooked.

That's it. That's a good Cap.



You just chew on some of that nice grass, and wait here with Sheemie 'til dark.

Other people, they get a'scared 'yawwwn! of the dark, but if you wants to avoid sunlight, it's the best way. We can sneaky-sneak in the dark.



The 'yawwwwn! dark is our friend, yes it is.



Yup. Women is on everybody's minds, it seems.



Not the least of whom is Aileen herself.

The one man who understood me is gone.

Crying about it isn't going to change it.



And the fact is...the fact is...



...that even the best of the men is going to think just like Cuthbert.







I don't know who to feel the most sorry for:

Cort, because of his dismal end...

Us, because we have lost a great warrior and teacher...

Or Aileen, because he was her last family member, and she has no one.

She has us, Bert. You, me, Roland...

Plus, as *dinh*, Roland's father becomes her guardian.



Wouldn't that make them like unto siblings? Roland and Aileen?

How could they marry then?

What? No! That's ridiculous.



I mean... I *think* that's ridiculous. I'm... *fairly* certain...

"Fairly certain." Which means I could be right.

Well, if you are... what then?



I... ..well...

I suppose I could marry her. Just to, you know... keep her safe.



Alain?  
Alain, I  
said--

I heard you  
and, short answer,  
she'd kill *you*, or  
*herself*, or  
both.

The long  
answer can  
wait. See those  
crows?



Yes. Gods...  
*look* at them.  
An ominous  
sign, that.

Those carrion-  
eating scavengers  
show up when they  
think there will be  
food aplenty.

When a  
murder of  
crows appears,  
it brings war on  
its wings.



Alain--!  
Did you *hear*  
that? A woman  
screaming--!

Screaming,  
*yes*, but *not* a  
woman! I'll set my  
watch and warrant  
on it...



...that was Sheemie!



"Sheemie! What the hell is he doing here? How--?"

"I suggest, Alain, that we gave the questions for after we've found him..."



"...and killed whatever's making him howl for his life!"



Alain Allgood! Cuthbert Johns! Sheemie found you!

Our names go the other way around, Sheemie.

Oh. Gorry.

Cuthbert Johns! Alain Allgood! Sheemie found you!





Mu lord, child, *slow down!* The food ain't going nowhere save into your gullet!

Sheemie was taught to eat fast, lest the dog grab it up.

Well, you're not competing with mongrels here, Sheemie, so you can--



--can--  
Oh, gods.

Cuthbert... would you come with me please?

Ahhhh, I knew it. Marietta threatened to blab.



Last week's rendezvous was all *her* idea, but she had regrets afterward and--

Bert...  
Don't worry, I'll clear this up. Be right back.




Alain knew right off, of course.

As if it weren't enough that he had the psychic touch...

...the sight of the two men without Robert, asking to speak to his son...


...it was evident to anyone. Even Sheemie. But not Bert.




I suppose when you're dealing with something that's unthinkable...

...it ain't what first pops into your mind.

It just don't occur to you until you're faced right with it.



And then you're overwhelmed.



He lets the guns that are offered him--his father's guns--fall to the floor.

And now he fully kens Aileen's last words to Cort.

For he would as soon never own the guns... never wield one again... if it meant having his father back with him.

For the family of gunslingers of Gilead, a brace of kinsmen has been lost this day.

And as Vannay prepares his dear friend's body for burial, here's one brutal truth we need to keep in mind.



Yes?

Vannay?

The very same. But this is not the best time to--

Actually, I have a message for you.

Oh? Sigh? Very well. If it is *bad* news, then-- as the saying goes-- I shall try not to kill the messenger.







That won't be an issue.

And that brutal truth I mentioned before is this:

The day's not over.

**BLAM**

TO BE CONTINUED

## AILEEN RITTER AND THE FEMALE GUNSLINGER

Over the past year I have participated in three different panels about women in comics. In each case, the panel discussion focused on two very specific but interrelated issues. First, how are women depicted in the pages of comic books, and second, what role do women play in the comic book industry? In each case, a third question has always arisen quite naturally from the topics at hand. Namely, how do women writers and artists choose to depict female characters in their own work?

I'm always really pleased to participate in these panels, but I am also always slightly daunted. First of all, although I've been writing and publishing in other areas for about twenty years, I'm still pretty new to comics. I came to the illustrated page as Roland Deschain's sidekick, and so I don't have the long professional history in the industry that most of my panel-mates have. Secondly, unlike many of the other panel participants, I am a writer, not a writer/artist. Hence my work is always collaborative, and the final product that emerges is inevitably a melding of multiple imaginative visions, both male and female. Finally

and most importantly, though I inhabit Mid-World and though I have become, over the years, one of its naturalized citizens, I am not its ultimate architect. Although I create the plots for the Dark Tower story arcs, Mid-World's culture, its social codes, its history, and the majority of its female characters were originally created by the master storyteller Stephen King, and one of my main priorities is to remain true to his original vision.

So, you might ask, what do I do during these panels? Although I feel I'm too much of





a neophyte to discuss the comic book business as a whole or to speak for other women writers and artists whose situations and paths have probably been very different from mine, I always try to share at least part of my own experience. After all, I'm a woman writing predominantly about men, and about a very masculine world, and that in itself is quite a strange situation when you think about it. And although I may have inherited Mid-World's characters and customs, don't we *all* inherit the societies we inhabit? We don't *make* our cultures—we're born into them and are shaped by them.

Throughout the Dark Tower novels Stephen King makes it very clear that Mid-World is closely related to our world. In fact, the two are twins. When we read about Mid-World we are staring at a mirror-image of our own reality. And though that mirror image may not seem to reflect our present culture, it *does* reflect a mythic past, a kind of contemporary dream-life that underlies our waking lives. Because Mid-World reflects our culture's mythic history, its heroic codes of behavior and its gender roles are extremely familiar to us. In fact, they reflect rules and ideals of conduct that we absorbed so early in our lives that it is difficult for us to articulate just where they came from or how they have affected our perceptions of the world around us, and of ourselves.

With my whole heart, I have tried to bring the Gilead of Roland's youth to life, and through the medium of Gilead's predominantly male cast and male heroic codes I have tried to explore what it means to be human. But as a woman, I have also tried to explore a theme which arises quite explicitly in the later Dark Tower novels, namely, what does it mean to be a woman in such a male-oriented world?

Although most of Roland's youthful memories are focused on his male friends and male teachers—and of course, his tragic love, Susan Delgado—implied in all of those memories is a story about the fate of Mid-World's women. After all, does not Susan Delgado pay for her amorous rebellion—her decision

to stand and be true to herself and her lover Roland rather than her social role—with her very life? Does not Roland's adventure in *Hambry begin* because he has discovered his mother's covert affair with Marten Broadcloak?

When I started plotting *Treachery* I made a conscious decision to try to explore the *women* of Gilead as well as the men. I wanted to know their motivations, their desires, and their heartbreaks. Roland's mother betrayed her people, but I knew that there was a *reason* for that betrayal, and that her story would tell us much more about the inner workings of Gilead. Similarly, I chose to expand the role of Aileen Ritter—a young girl who has her heart set on becoming a gunslinger though the world tells her it is forbidden—because I knew it would show me what growing up in Gilead must have been like for young women. But my ultimate goal in expanding the role of female characters in Gilead was not just to create a wider scope for the story. I also wanted to use the Mid-World mirror to explore what it has meant, historically, to be female in *our* world. By doing this, I felt that I was also remaining true to Stephen King's original vision. After all, as every Dark Tower fan knows, although Roland grew up in a world where women were not allowed to be warriors, in the later novels, women and women fighters play a huge part in Roland's tale.

Appropriately enough, I first started to contemplate the complexities of being a woman writing about Mid-World after the first of my panels about *women in comics* ended. The convention was in England, and I was

just leaving the conference room when a young fellow in his twenties came up to talk to me. He was smiling, but he looked pretty abashed. It only took a minute for me to find out why. *I thought you were a man*, he said. *My friends and I, we all really thought you were a man!* At first I had to laugh (after all, I haven't been mistaken for anything but female since puberty) but then I started to think more deeply about what such a mistake meant. On the one hand I was pleased that my take on a male coming-of-age story had been so convincing, but then I started to wonder how it was that I manage to step *out* of this female body of mine and *become* Cuthbert, Alain, or Roland. What is it inside of me that identifies so completely with an experience which is ultimately so radically different from my own?

It took a lot of soul-searching before I realized the truth. But then when I *did* realize what was going on inside my heart and mind I saw that the answer had been on my bookshelves all along. Like so many women writers of the last few centuries, I'd been mentally cross-dressing for years!

When I was little, I often played a game called "Tom, Dick, Sue, and Tina" with my sisters and a couple of neighborhood girls. Tom, Dick, Sue, and Tina had a spaceship, and they spent their time exploring alien worlds. Since I was the youngest, I was always assigned the part of Tina. (I guess it sounded a bit like "tiny".) I think I was about four when I realized that I was sick of being Tina. She never got to do anything fun. For that matter, neither did Sue. Tom and Dick got all the good parts—the



laser fights, the scouting jobs, the encounters with hostile life forms. Tina and Sue were always instructed to stay close to the spaceship, where they'd be safe. (What can I say? This was the late 1960s/early 1970s, and feminism hadn't come to my neighborhood yet.)

It didn't matter that we were all girls. From watching television (*Leave it to Beaver* reruns were still on Channel 48, as was *Gilligan's Island* and my personal favorite, *Star Trek*), we all knew that boys had the most exciting adventures, and that girls became moms or girlfriends or maidens-in-distress. Hence, if I wanted to be the star of my own dream-life, I would have to switch genders. (Hey, Uhura was great, but I really wanted to be Spock.)

By about age six, I had forged myself a playtime identity. I became a boy. It felt really freeing. I could be a pirate, a spy, or return to the Stone Age to fight dinosaurs and know that I was

powerful enough to emerge triumphant. It wasn't like I was a *weak* and *emotional* girl anymore. Who wanted to be one of those? Hadn't I heard somebody on one of the news programs my parents watched say that a woman could never be president, since as soon as she was faced with a crisis she would cry?

By the time I reached puberty, I'd overcome at least some of my ambivalence about being female. But unfortunately I still couldn't identify with any of the images of femininity I saw around me, because none of them reflected how I felt on the *inside*. Why was it that all the things I wanted from life seemed to be reserved for boys and men? Couldn't I have ambitions too? I began to secretly suspect that I was a boy in really good drag. As you can imagine, it was a pretty isolating experience. It wasn't until the transformative ideas of the 60s and 70s began to leak into my town that I began to discover that I didn't have to be this stereotype called *boy* or this

stereotype called *girl*. I could be myself.

As I've already said, I believe that Mid-World is, among other things, a cultural mirror for our world. The hierarchical, heroic code by which its gunslingers live is glorious, but the fact that the society it engenders has so little personal and social mobility is what brings about its eventual destruction. When I contemplate the inequalities of Gilead, I can't help but think about the Langston Hughes poem, "Montage of a Dream Deferred." Deferred dreams can dry up and blow away like chaff, or they can poison the person who once held them dear. But such deferred dreams can also turn into time bombs. And as we know, time bombs are destined to explode.

I think most readers will agree with me when I say that Mid-World is, in almost every way, a man's world, and a world where those born to power are expected to keep it. Gilead's elite social group is the caste of gunslingers, and though women may belong to that caste, they are barred from training in the art of war, which—in Gilead—is the most important of callings. Mid-World is also a static world, where the caste a person is born into will—for the most part—define him (or her) for the rest of their life. The gunslingers' code of honor is closer to the heroic codes of the ancient world than to the contemporary codes of behavior that we believe in today. Great heroes were expected to be courageous and fearless, and to put loyalty to clan and *dinh* above all else. But in Gilead, it was the face of the father, and not the mother, that was to be remembered.

Ultimately, it is the oppressed people of Gilead—both male and female—who join with John Farson's rebels and bring Mid-World, as we know it, to an end. And it is the danger of this suppressed energy—a desire which is not allowed to manifest—which still holds a lesson for us today. We all love Gilead, but ultimately Gilead—with its strict hierarchies and its rules of what men and women can do and cannot do—is *destined to fall*.

Think of the Tower card in the Tarot pack. When the time-honored structures we have lived with all of our lives begin to col-



lapse, we feel as if the heavens themselves are falling. But it is only when those outdated structures collapse that we are free to create afresh. Gilead is not a utopia: it is one stage in a culture's transformative evolution. And ultimately, *transformation*—or building something stronger out of the ashes of the past—is part of what the Dark Tower novels are all about.

When it came time for me to write out the tales of Roland's boyhood, I looked at Gilead as a place I knew well, and loved, but which also caused me great sadness. What were my places in that world? I could be Roland's mother, married to a man who—because of the heroic code—put his duty to clan and Father before his love for me. I could become one of the Sisters of the Rose (which I had adapted from the much more sinister *Little Sisters of Eluria*), but ultimately such a nun-like existence would kill me. No matter which way I looked at it, I kept getting the same image. I saw a girl, much like me, staring into a mirror and hating what she saw. A girl who—enraged that every door

she wanted to open was nailed shut—grabbed a pair of scissors and began cutting off her hair, which was ultimately a symbol of her girlhood, her voicelessness, her *difference*.

In the original novels, Aileen Ritter plays only a very tiny part. Her tale takes up about two sentences. We are told that Aileen is the girl that Roland's parents *wanted* him to marry. The rest of her story—what appears in the comics you are presently reading—grew out of my own life, my own hopes, and my knowledge of *what will happen in Mid-World once Gilead falls*. In fact I would go so far as to say that Mid-World's collapse, and Aileen's accomplishments on behalf of *all* girls who want to be gunslingers, could only happen in a land where all the old ways have *already* become unstable. If the old order was still intact, would Cort have felt compelled to train his niece in the ways of war? Ultimately, Cort wanted Aileen to be safe, but some deep instinctual part of himself whispered that someday, Gilead would need *all* of her talented fighters, regardless of





birth, background, or sex. And it is this openness to difference—which in our comics we attribute to Roland's greatest teacher, Cort—that Roland practices throughout the later Dark Tower novels.

In the wreckage of Mid-World which Roland travels through as a lost and lonely adult, he remembers the faces of the many lost mothers. In *The Waste Lands*, he pays homage to an ancient matriarch who holds her town together despite the harriers who come through burning and looting and blinding. In *The Wolves of the Calla*, he fights alongside a group of women warriors, called The Sisters of Oriza, and acknowledges that they are his most important allies in his battle against the Wolves of End-World. And perhaps most importantly, from *The Drawing of the Three* until *The Dark Tower*, we watch Roland throw aside all of the rules of his culture in order to train a woman named Susannah Dean in the ways of the White, and then to call her comrade.

As I have already said, I didn't make Mid-World; I inherited it. But as I also said, we all inherit a worldview. We don't make the rules or the codes of right/wrong, honorable/dishonorable which we're expected to understand and uphold—we absorb them. And once these rules of behavior are absorbed, they become—for good or for dis—central to our identity. But sometimes it is important to *stand and be true*, and remember—as the adult Roland does—that *everyone* has a face that must be remembered. It doesn't matter if the individual is male or female, black or white, young or old. It doesn't matter if the person walks on two feet or uses a wheelchair to make it across the terrain, as does Susannah. Just because we're told that something is right doesn't mean that it is right. *The world moves on*, but as Roland himself would admit, we can try to make it move on in a better direction. **OR**

WRITTEN BY:  
ROBIN FURTH  
ILLUSTRATED BY:  
DENNIS CALERO



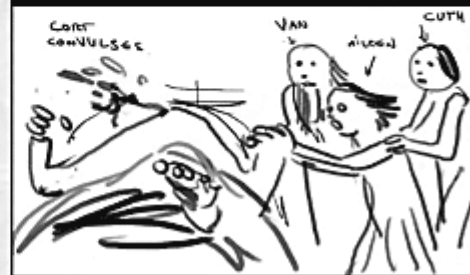
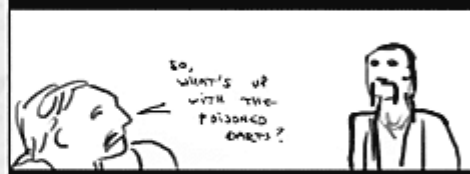


**DARK TOWER:  
FALL OF GILEAD  
ISSUE #3  
SKETCHBOOK**

**A look at the creative team's in-progress work,  
including layouts, pencil art and cover concepts.**

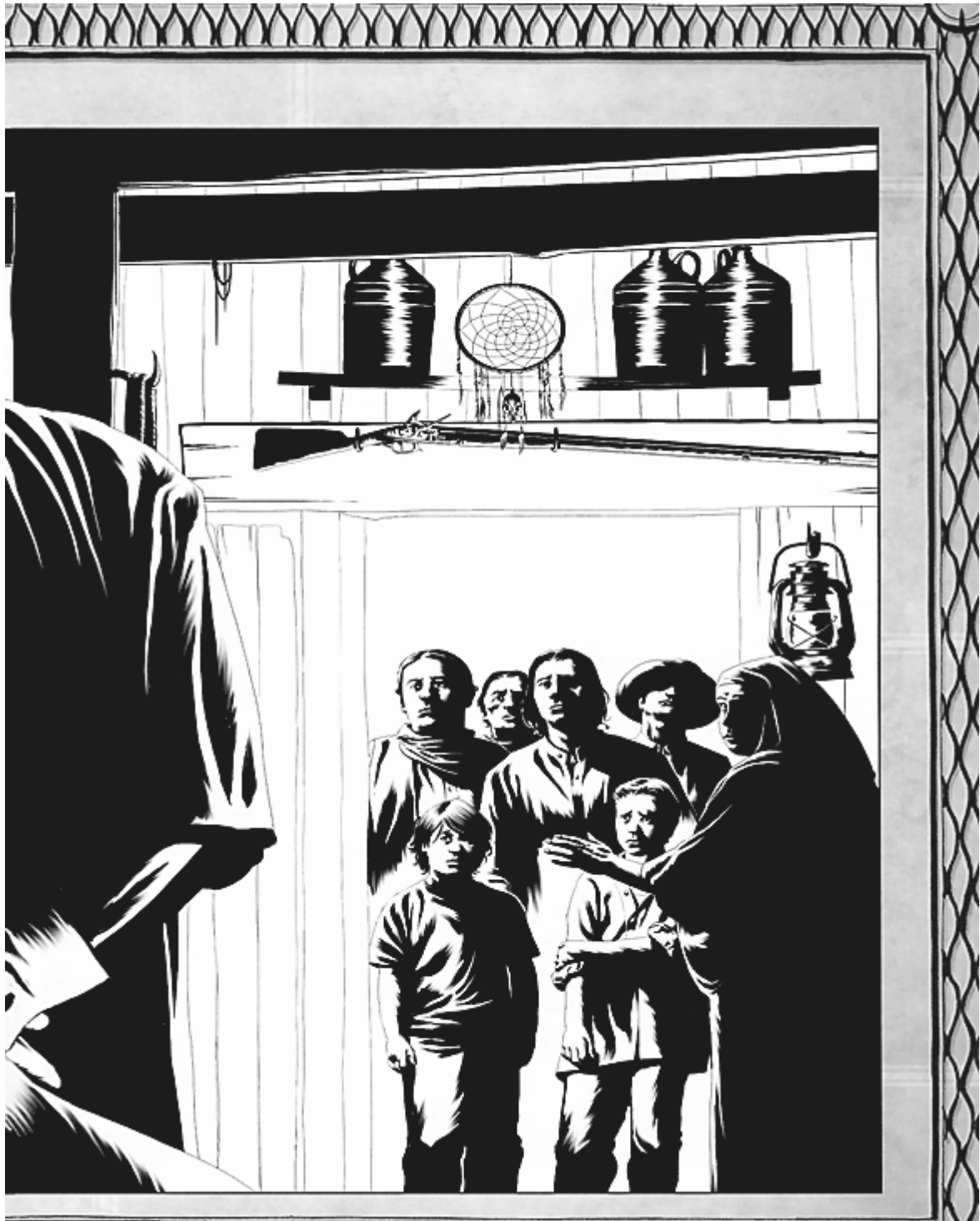
Richard Isanove's layouts with his notes.  
Peter David scripts his dialog using these breakdowns of Robin Furth's plot.





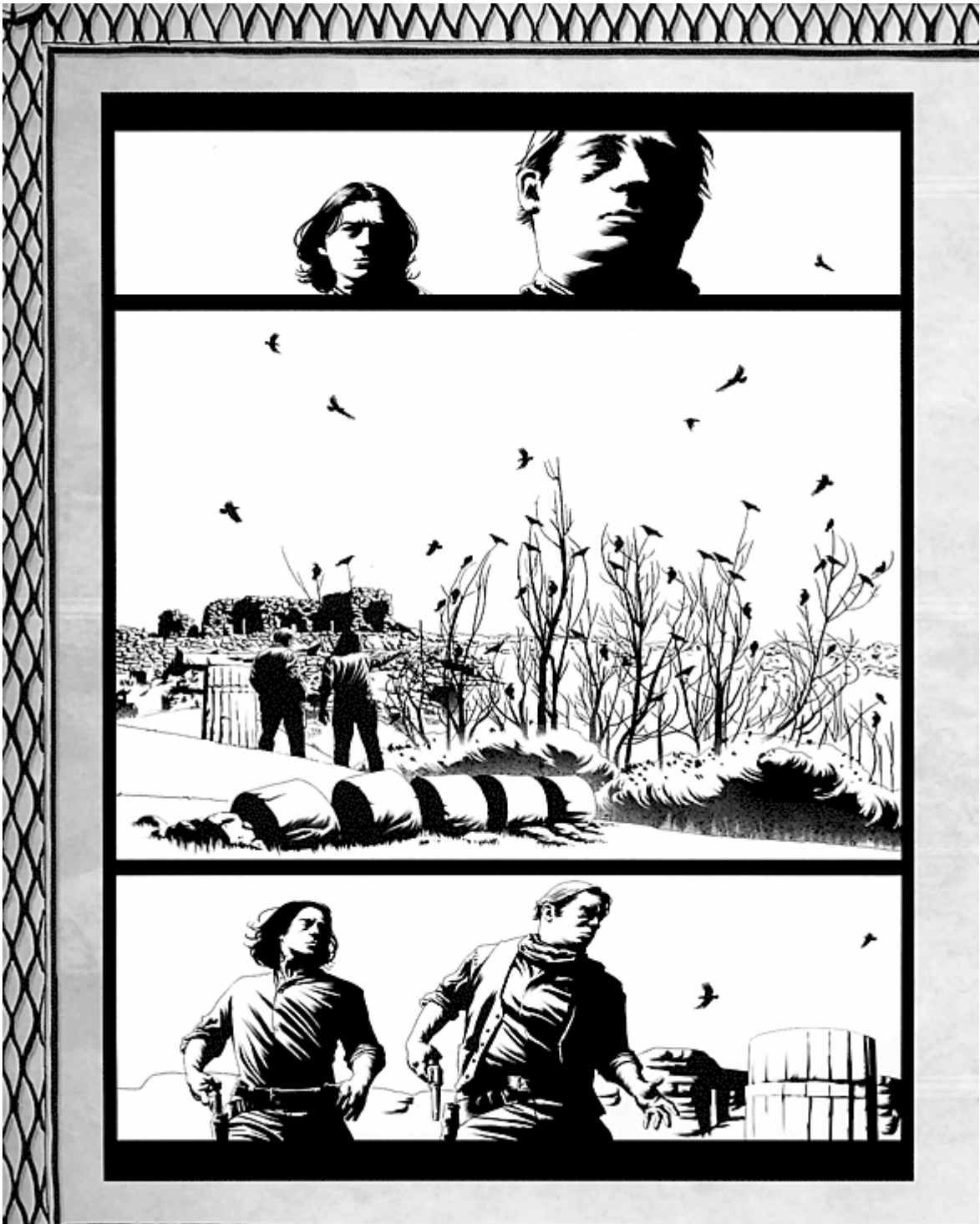
Richard Isanove's black and white artwork.  
The finished versions appear earlier in this issue.



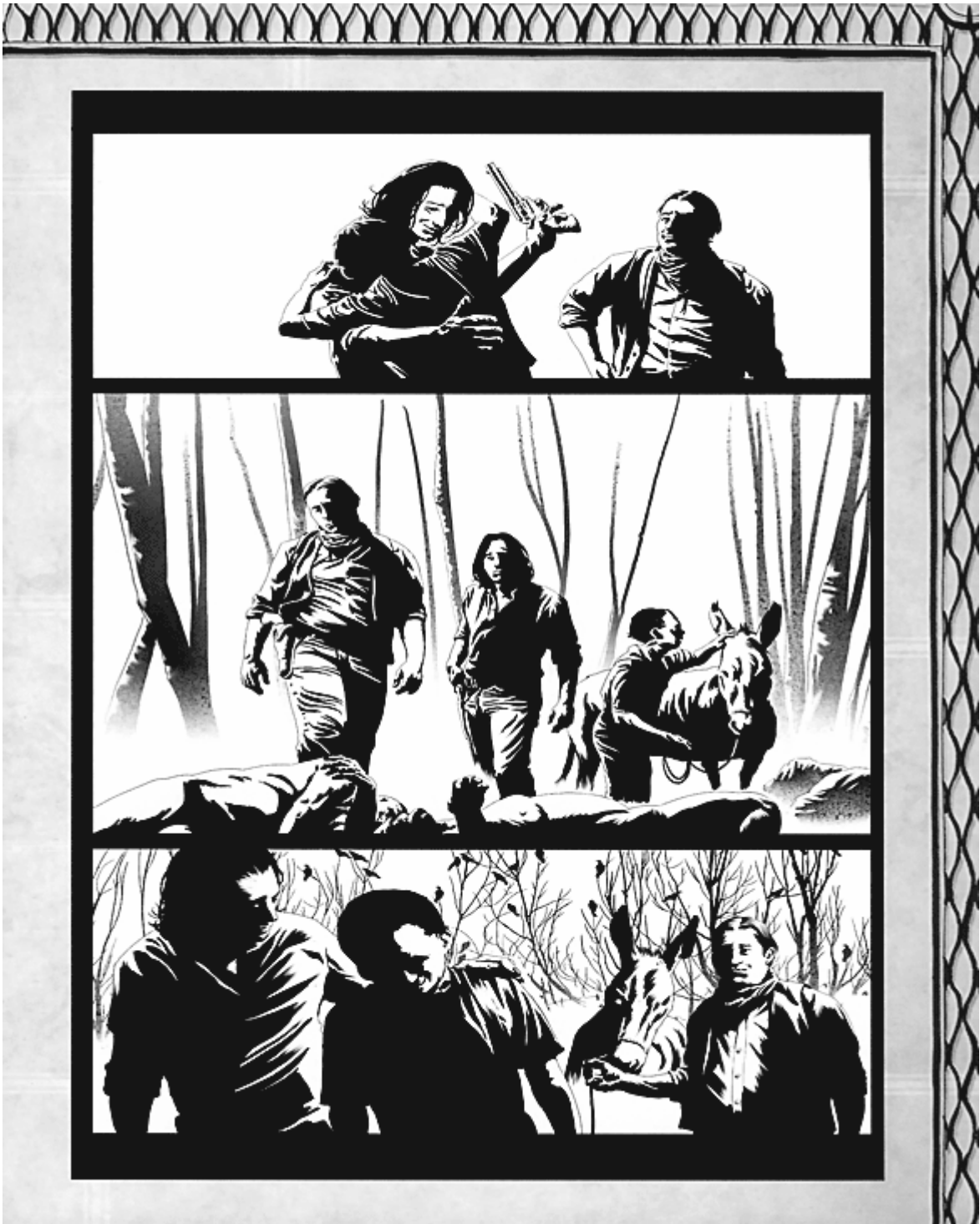












Rising Marvel superstar Mitch Breitweiser (CAPTAIN AMERICA, UNCANNY X-MEN) brings Mid-World's Western influences to the fore in his searing variant cover painting. Seen here is his initial concept art.



**NEXT: The honorable people of Gilead versus  
Roland Deschain!**





All is not well in Mid-World. Gunslinger Roland Deschain, the young man whose destiny it is to seek and save the Dark Tower, is haunted by horrifying visions from the evil seeing sphere, Maerlyn's Grapefruit. The Crimson King, enemy of all that lives, has long plotted the utter destruction of the Tower, and the undoing of reality itself. Now, with Roland unable to act, his monstrous foe has put his plan into motion...

From the creative team that brought Roland's early adventures to life in *The Dark Tower: The Gunslinger Born*, *The Dark Tower: The Long Road Home*, and *The Dark Tower: Treachery* comes the next chapter of this dark saga of friendship, betrayal and a cosmic quest as conceived by master storyteller Stephen King.

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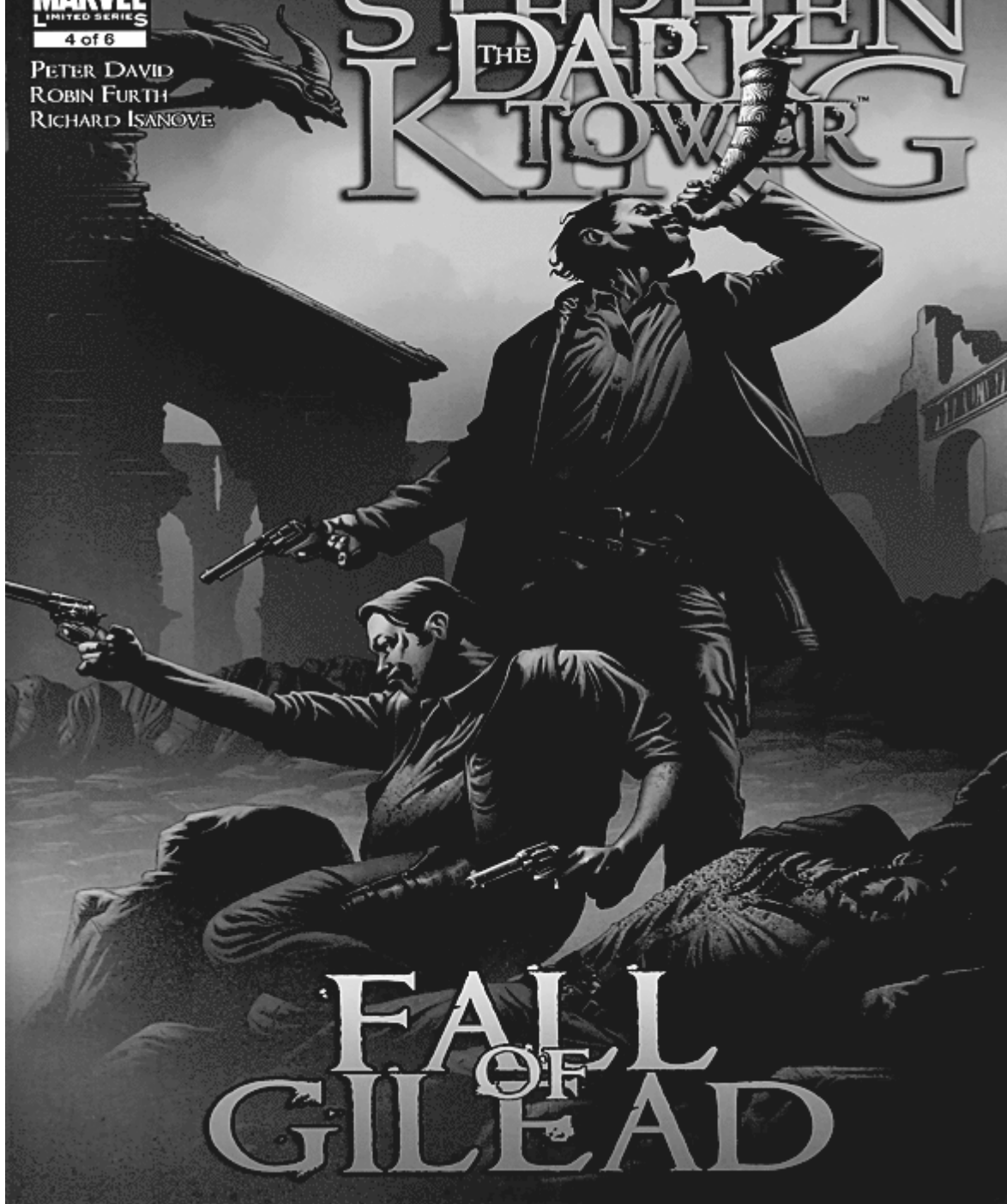
# FALL OF GILEAD

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# FALL OF GILEAD

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## IN A WORLD THAT HAS MOVED ON...

As Gilead prepared for the festive celebration of its newly-titled gunslingers, Roland's mother prepared to repent for her adulterous sins with the sorcerer Marten. Seemingly out of nowhere, Marten appeared and lured Gabrielle into becoming the prime element in the planned assassination of her husband Steven with the help of Steven's great enemy, John Farson, and Farson's nephew and spy, Kingson. Distrustful of his returned mother, Roland left the festivities to find the destructive sphere called Maerlyn's Grapefruit hidden away in her chambers. The sphere drew him into a hallucination that provoked him into fatally shooting Gabrielle...

Meanwhile, Steven Deschain has discovered his wife's betrayal and heads to his chambers where he sees that Maerlyn's Grapefruit is gone from his safe. And the only person who was close enough to Stephen to take the key was Gabrielle Deschain.

Roland's former teacher, Cort, discovers the treachery of Farson's nephew and slays him. Upon reading a journal Kingson left in his room, Cort was poisoned by fine particles left on the pages. With Cort's death, his niece Aileen now becomes more intent on becoming a gunslinger than ever, even to the extent of cutting her hair to appear boyish.

And while Vannay the riddle master prepares Cort's body for burial, he is shot by an unknown assailant.



*"The beginning  
of the end."*

*It's an old enough turn of  
phrase. We toss it around  
so much that it don't got  
much meaning.*

*Hard to say whether Steven  
Peschain knew that the end  
was bearing down upon him  
and his goodly gunslingers.*

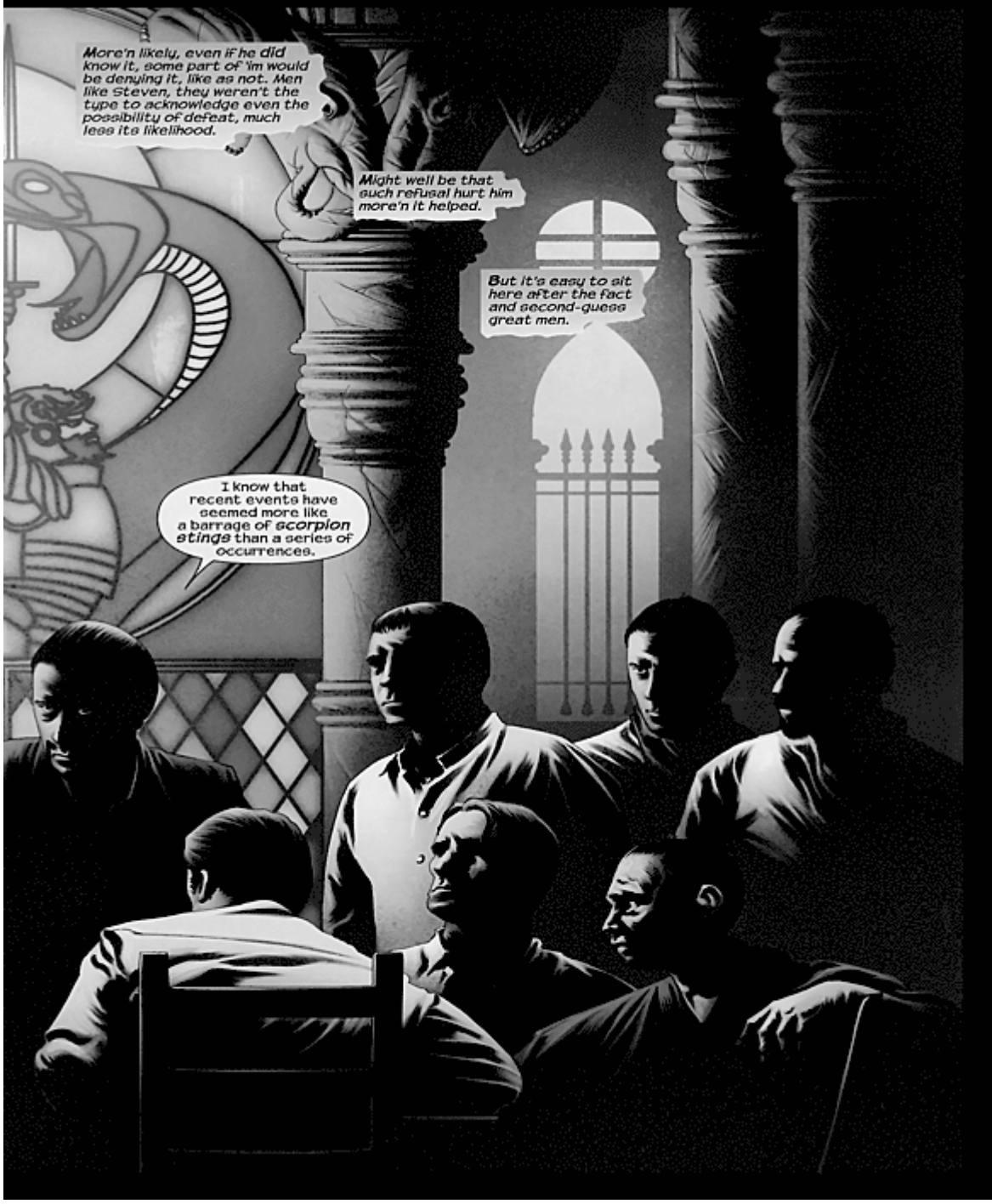



*More'n likely, even if he did know it, some part of 'im would be denying it, like as not. Men like Steven, they weren't the type to acknowledge even the possibility of defeat, much less its likelihood.*

*Might well be that such refusal hurt him more'n it helped.*

*But it's easy to sit here after the fact and second-guess great men.*

I know that recent events have seemed more like a barrage of *scorpion stings* than a series of occurrences.






"My wife, *dead*. Say what you *will* of her--and I could say *much*--


"--she was still queen, and a victim of forces beyond her ken.

"And she deserved *better*...



"...than to die at the hand of her own son.

"My son--Roland--himself a *pawn* in a vast game...



"...the apparent object of which was that damnable Maerlyn's Grapefruit.

"And now we have had the first *casualty* from within our ranks.

"Robert Allgood lies dead, sacrificing himself to save my own unworthy life.



"Struck down by voracious mutants who now wander with impunity in New Canaan. And behind it all...



"...the hand of *John Farson*, the *Good Man*. He moves his black chess pieces with certainty of his eventual triumph.



"But we, the knights of the white, will *confound* his plans."



And I, a humble spy, am the key to that confounding, am I?

You will speak when *spoken to*, Justus.

With respect, milord...I suggest you initiate the dialogue sooner rather than later.

For if you wish to capture Farson and save this majestic city, well... I can *aid* you in that.

"I can help you leave his camp in flames while he rides before you in disgrace.

"But you will have to move *tonight*."

Farson's camp is undermanned and reinforcements are a distance off.

Capture Farson, *kill* the sorcerer Marten, retrieve the mystic sphere...

You can do it *all* this very evening.

Or you can stand around *talking* about it.



A...a *thousand* pardons, milord... my lords...

Liam, milord.

Your name, guard?

Speak your piece, Liam. Does another threat present itself?



Of a sort, milord.

It is--with respect-- regarding your *WIFE*.

The poor woman is dead, Liam. Whatever threat *she* presented is ended.

With respect, some people are a *greater* threat when deceased. With respect--



A little less *respect* and a bit more *alacrity*, Liam. *Speak plainly*.


Plainly, then...whatever her sins might have been...



...your wife was popular among the common folk for her charity and kindness.

Her violent passing was taken hard by those unaware of her misdeeds...

...which, if revealed *NOW*, would be dismissed as speaking ill of the dead.



"Worse, there are...*agitators*... claiming that the hand which slew her will receive merely a slap on the wrist.

"Instigators, I'll warrant, who are in Farson's employ.

"I have not seen them, but my wife is *very* well connected. Naught transpires in the city at the gossip level that eludes her.


"There is talk of forming a...what's the phrase--?"



Lunch mob?

Aye, *that's* it. To find and hang your son. They claim the gunslingers are corrupt and should be overthrown for protecting him.

My God. Can my soldiers be trusted to fire on our own people?



It will ne'er come to that.

How do you guarantee *that*, Christopher?

Full disclosure. An *open* trial for Roland. One that cannot be impeached or condemned as hiding from the public view.



It will be overseen by a civil judge...a jury culled from--

From the very public who would see him hanged? What if it's too late?

What if Farson's men have poisoned their minds so that Roland is dead before the first word of testimony is uttered?



You already know the answer to that, milord.

Your son is doomed...

...unless the machinations of Farson are brought to light.



Then let that light be from *tomorrow's* dawn.

We attack this evening, gentlemen. Tonight, this ends. Tonight...

...we save Roland.





Roland?

Hmmm?

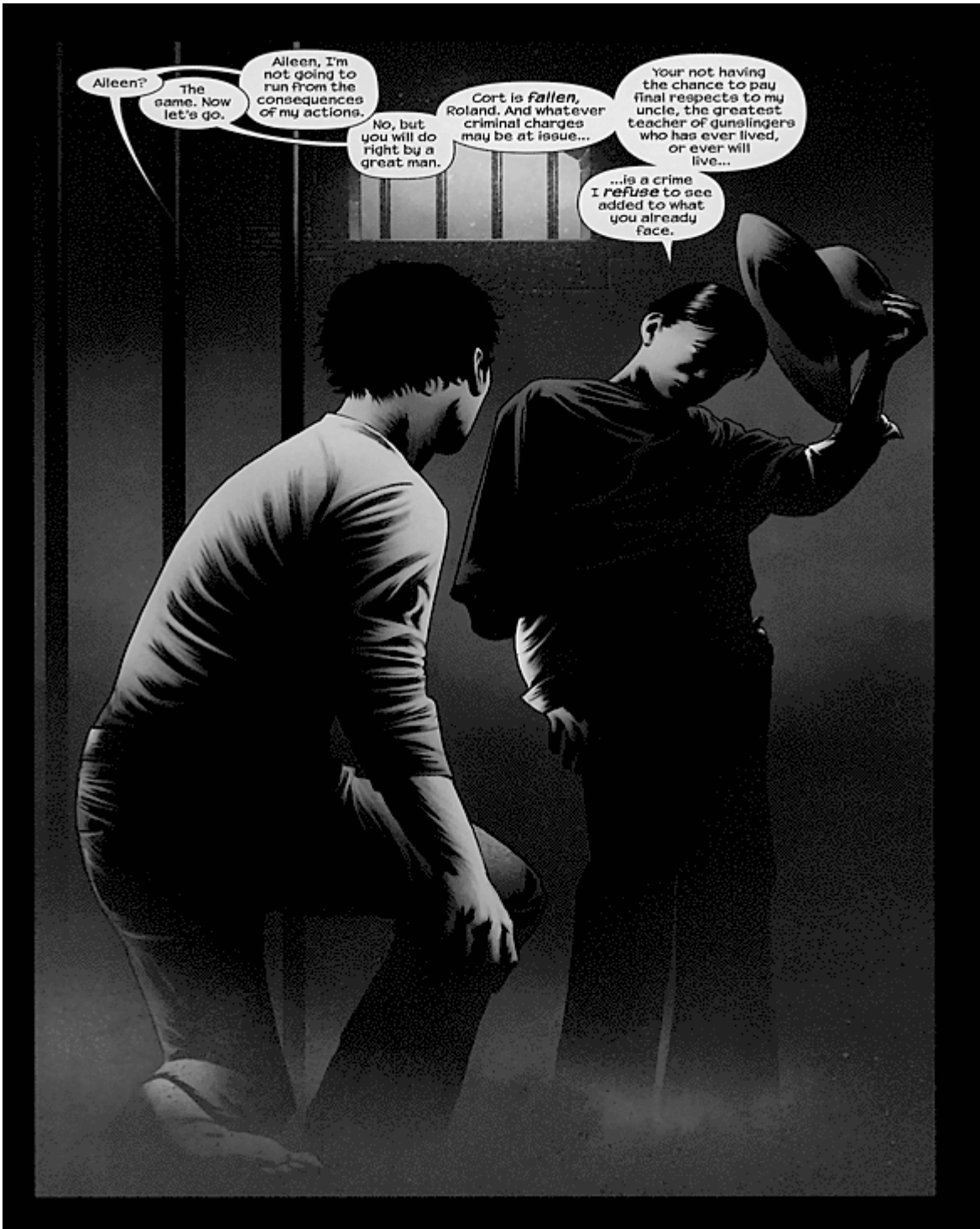


Roland.  
Get off your  
ass and come  
on.

What are  
you--?

What sort  
of *trick*  
is...?

"Trick?" Are  
you so addled  
that you can't  
tell friend from  
foe?



Aileen?

The same. Now let's go.

Aileen, I'm not going to run from the consequences of my actions.

No, but you will do right by a great man.

Cort is *fallen*, Roland. And whatever criminal charges may be at issue...

Your not having the chance to pay final respects to my uncle, the greatest teacher of gunslingers who has ever lived, or ever will live...

...is a crime I *refuse* to see added to what you already face.



Unfortunately, there are more crimes slated for this evening that Aileen and Roland have no say over.

Such as the one to be committed against this man, who's dedicated his life to helping others.

Well, the inflammation's subsided somewhat. Still, I'll be wanting to keep an eye on those tonsils.



Doctor DeCurry? Your presence is required immediately.

By whom, may I ask?



You may ask.

Would you get your equipment and come this way?



Of course. I live to serve.



Just...let me fetch my equipment.

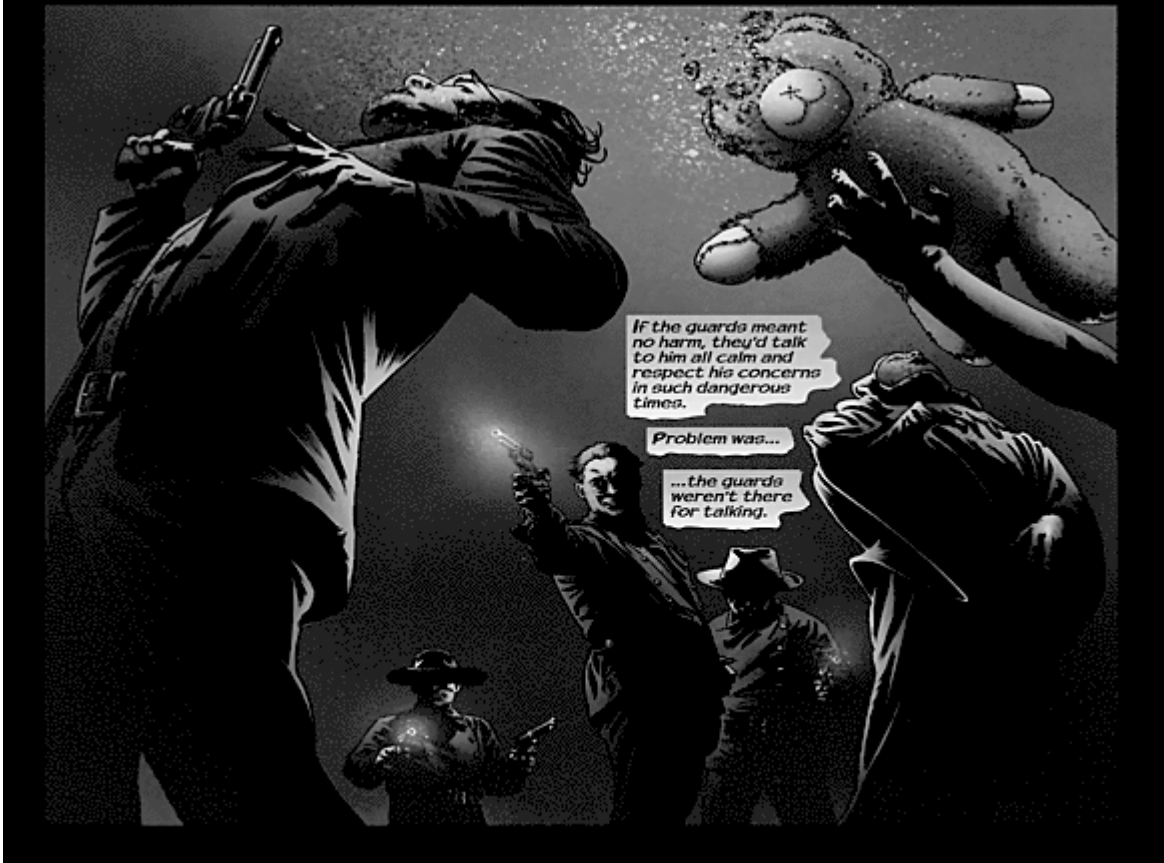
At your leisure.

Hard to say what exactly tipped off the Doc that something weren't right.

If I had to guess, it would be how the guard spoke with urgency in one breath...

...and then told him to take his time with the next.

I kind of doubt that the Doc would've opened fire. He would simply have acted with caution.



If the guards meant no harm, they'd talk to him all calm and respect his concerns in such dangerous times.

Problem was...

...the guards weren't there for talking.



*Were this some epic tale of good against evil, where the good folk always win, then gunslingers would'a burst in and saved the doc and the others.*

*But it ain't. Proof of that is that the gunslingers were otherwise engaged.*

Hold up.



Why the hesitancy, milord? He's ripe for the picking, I tell you.

And I'll take the assurance of mine own eyes over your tongue, Justus.



*He creeps so stealthy that a lion hiding in the high weeds would be caught flatfooted.*

*But what he sees...*



*...catches him flatfooted instead.*

Damnation!

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STILL AVAILABLE



DARK TOWER:  
THE GUNSLINGER BORN HC

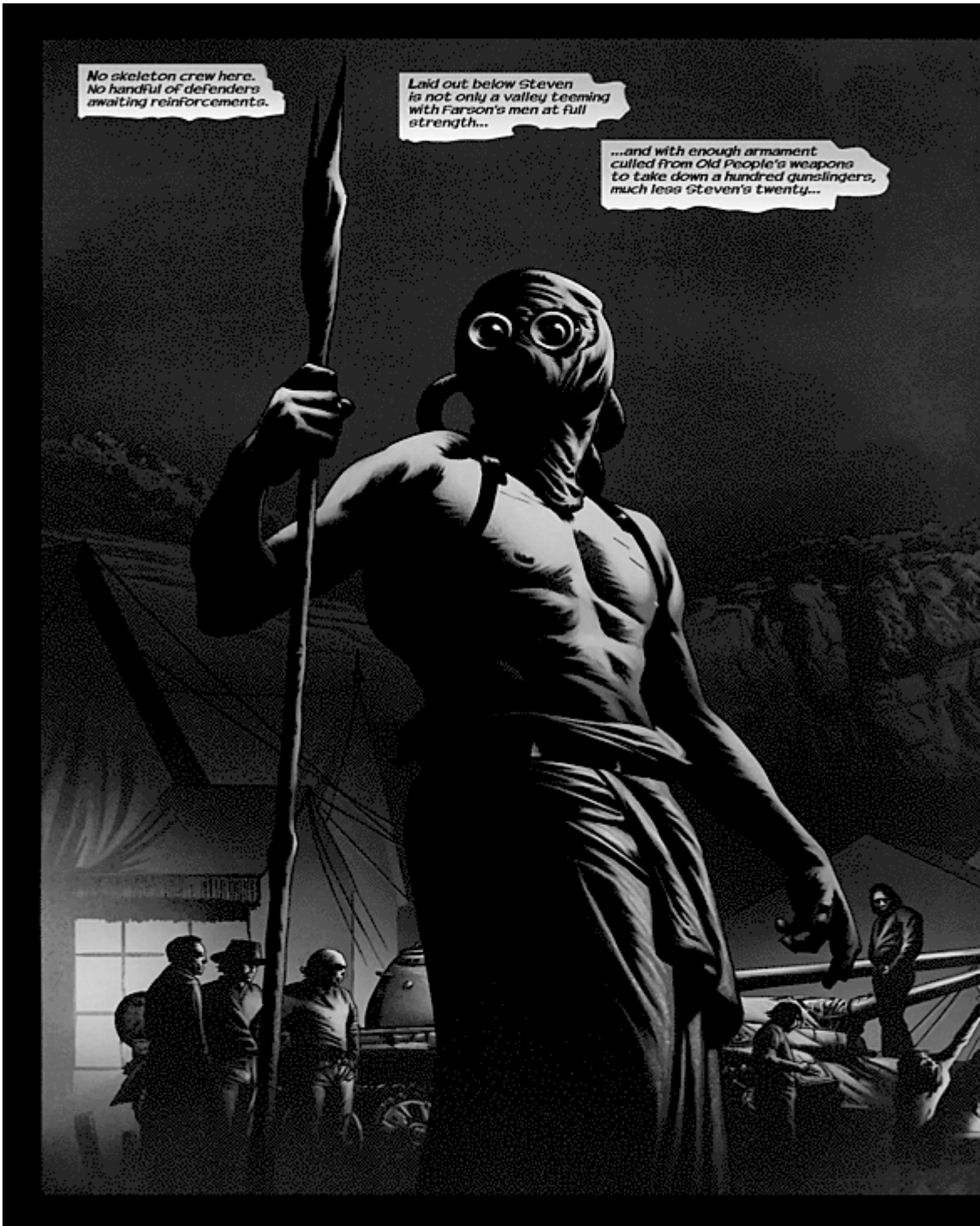


DARK TOWER:  
LONG ROAD HOME HC

No skeleton crew here.  
No handful of defenders  
awaiting reinforcements.

Laid out below Steven  
is not only a valley teeming  
with Farson's men at full  
strength...

...and with enough armament  
culled from Old People's weapons  
to take down a hundred gunslingers,  
much less Steven's twenty...



*...but there's a passel  
of mutants as well.*

*Even from his high outpost,  
Steven can see how  
uncomfortably the humans  
mingle with the mutants...*

*...but there is no doubt that,  
should the Good Man point  
them in a direction and cry,  
"Unleash havoc!"...*

*...they will seamlessly unite  
in an orgy of destruction, all  
in the name of John Farson.*





Justus!  
You lying  
bastard!

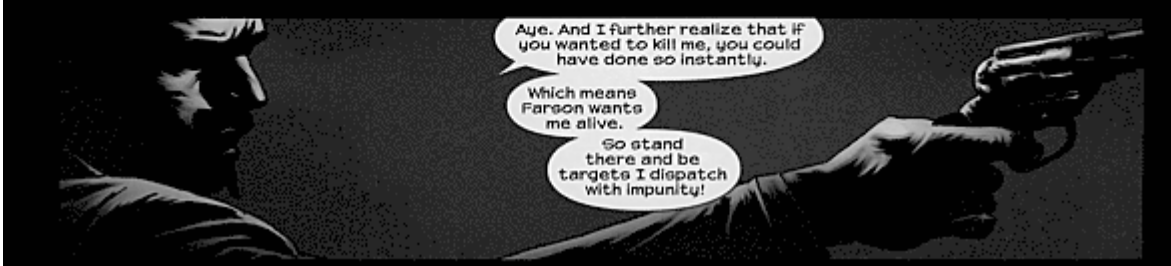
You  
think to betray  
me with your false  
descriptions of  
Parson's  
readiness?



Actually,  
Steven...may I  
call you that?  
"Steven?"

Actually, Steven,  
I believe you'll see,  
by the fact that  
you're completely  
surrounded...

...that my  
betraying you has  
moved far beyond  
the stage of my  
"thinking" it.





Stand down! The lot of you!

Hoister your weapons and give way--

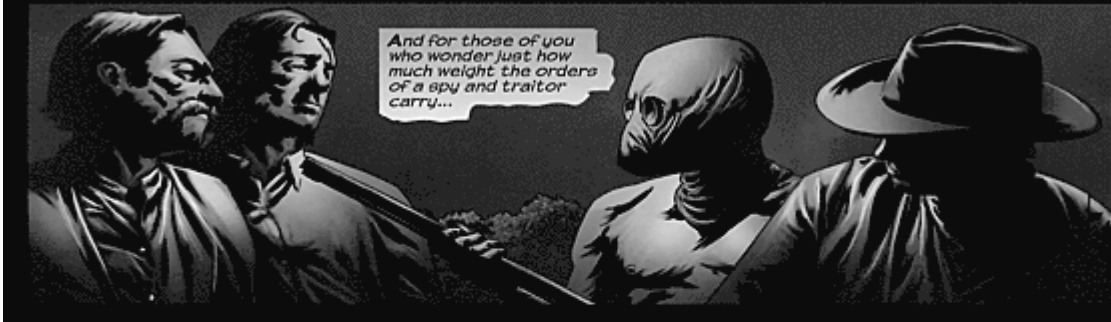
--or I swear, Justus here will die!

*Justus' jaw was broken when Steven pistol-whipped him, but he's still able to say, "Do as he says! Stand down", although it comes out more like...*

*Poozessez! Stannown!*



*Still, Farson's men, they savvy the orders well enough.*



*And for those of you who wonder just how much weight the orders of a spy and traitor carry...*



*...here's your answer.*

**BLAM  
BLAM  
BLAM**



Surrender,  
gunslinger!



Two words  
that have *no  
business* being  
in the same  
sentence!

*Gunslingers!*



Let the  
faces of our  
fathers smile  
upon us this  
day!

Go them  
proud--

-- and leave  
not *one* of  
those sons  
of bitches  
*standing!*





What...  
what do we do,  
Roland?

Do?

We have  
to find the  
one who did  
this!

He could be  
*fleeing* Gilead  
even as we  
speak!

Fleeing?  
Why would they  
do that? This is just  
the beginning.

They?

We do not  
face a lone wolf,  
Aileen. We face  
a ravenous  
*pack*.

And God  
knows how many  
more they will  
destroy before  
we can put  
them down.



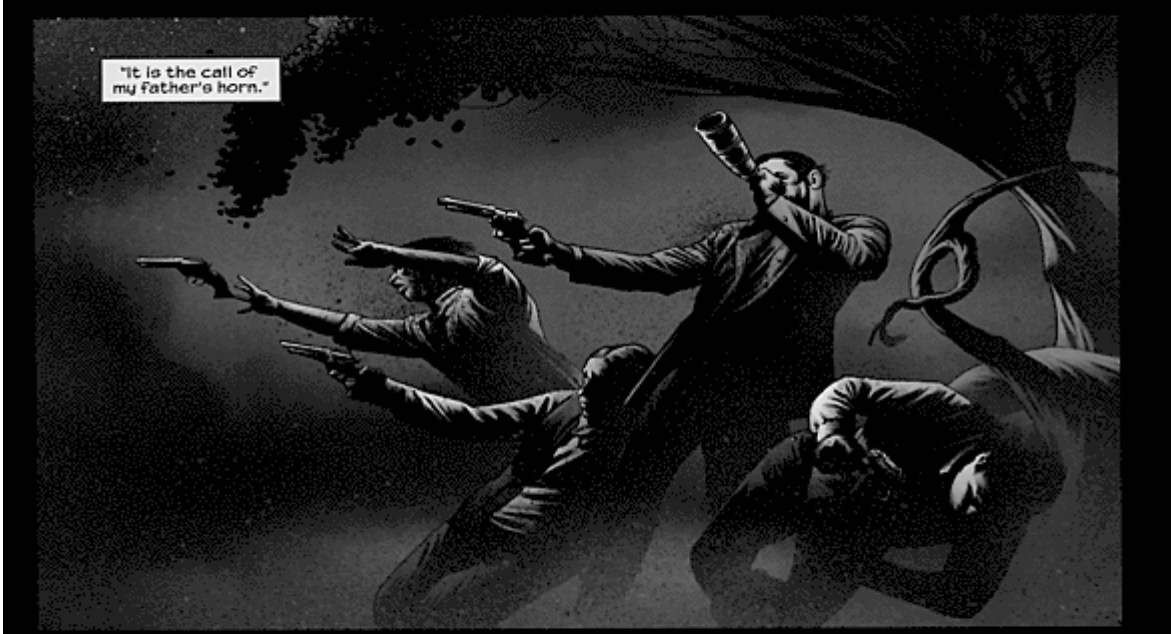
Wait...Aileen...  
do you hear  
that?

What, Roland?  
I hear nothing save  
the wind...

Not the wind,  
but the sound  
it *carries*  
upon it.

Yes...  
now that  
you...

Lord, it  
sounds so  
distant, so...  
mournful. What  
is it--?



"It is the call of  
my father's horn."



I was wrong,  
Aileen. This  
isn't just the  
beginning.

*It's the  
beginning of  
the end.*

TO BE  
CONTINUED

## THE MANY LEGENDARY ROLANDS

Every Dark Tower fan knows that Stephen King's magnum opus was inspired by Robert Browning's wonderful and enigmatic poem, "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came." As in Stephen King's tale, "Childe Roland" tells the story of a young man wandering a desolate wasteland in search of a Dark Tower. By the time we meet him, he has been traveling for many years. Along the way he has remembered his lost friends (one of whom is named Cuthbert) and has suffered terrible pangs of self-doubt. After

all, have not many knights before him failed in this most terrible yet significant quest? Despite the almost supernaturally oppressive landscape he must traverse and despite the strange, fey beings he meets, Childe Roland eventually triumphs. Through persistent effort and constancy of purpose, he reaches his goal:

Burningly it came on me  
all at once,

This was the place! those  
two hills on the right

Crouched like two bulls  
locked horn in horn in fight  
...

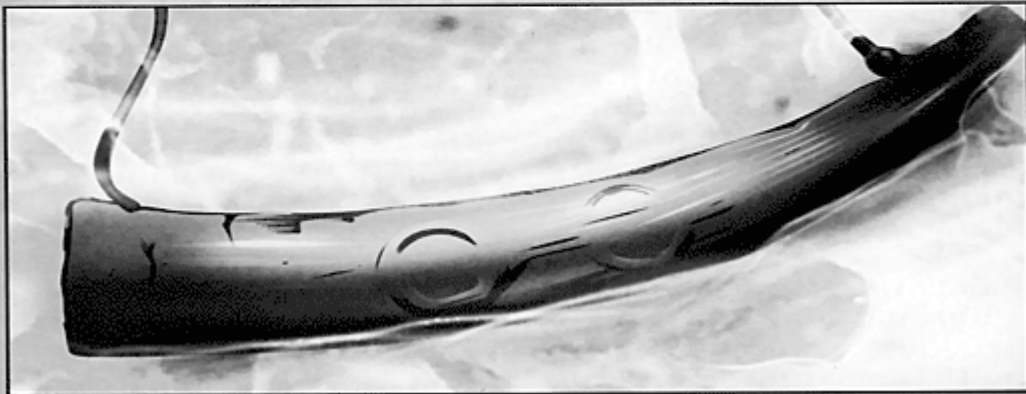
What in the midst lay but  
the Tower itself?

The round squat turret,  
blind as the fool's heart,

Built of brown stone,  
without a counterpart

In the whole world . . .

As Childe Roland







approaches the Tower he is forced to face the ghosts of his lost comrades. As he draws near, all his dead dears rise up from the hills in a sheet of flame, though whether they come to welcome him or to deter him we never learn. All that we know is that their names ring in Roland's ears, reminding him of their bravery and strength, which, like their bodies, are lost forever. With the woe of years hanging heavy on his heart, and facing the specters of his lost comrades, Childe Roland raises his horn to his lips and blows his single note. And so the poem ends with that most resonant line:

"Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came."

But who was the Roland of Robert Browning's poem? Was he a historical figure or a character distilled from Browning's own rich imagination? Although Browning himself maintained that the inspiration for "Childe Rolande" came from a dream, legend is full of warriors named Roland. And it is my firm belief that it is these other Rolands that lend our Roland such potency. They are, in essence, his grandfathers, and they give him the stateliness and power of myth.

Perhaps the most famous ancestor of our beloved gunslinger was the French hero Roland, knight of Charlemagne and the protagonist of the *Chanson de Roland*, or *Song of Roland*. Although the *Chanson de Roland* wasn't recorded until the 11th or 12th century, the story itself is probably much older, since at the Battle of Hastings in 1066, Roland's glorious deeds were already being recounted to soldiers preparing to do battle. Although this Roland was probably a historical figure, in legend he became larger than life. According to folklore, he stood eight feet tall and had a countenance so open and so regal that men automatically trusted him,

but respected him too. He had a magical sword named Durandal and an enchanted ivory horn called Olivant. Although the sword supposedly once belonged to the Trojan hero Hector, Roland won his horn from a giant named Jutmundus. Like our beloved hero, the Roland of French legend was incredibly brave, but he was also sometimes proud and rash, traits which—during the Frankish knight's final battle—cost many lives.

In *The Song of Roland*, we're told that Roland was so devoted to his uncle Charlemagne that he took on the dangerous task of protecting the king's troops against the Saracens as they crossed



the Pyrenees Mountains. However, Roland's jealous stepfather Ganelon betrayed Roland's route to his enemies. The Saracen king attacked Roland and his 20,000 men at the pass of Roncesvalles. Roland and his men fought valiantly, but they were greatly outnumbered. Though Roland could have called for aid, he continued to fight until 100,000 of the Saracens lay dead and only 50 of his own men remained alive. Although he had previously been too proud to call for help, once an additional 50,000 enemies poured into the pass, Roland raised his horn to his lips and blew, hoping to warn his king of what had happened.

Roland's horn was truly magical. So loud was its sounding that birds fell dead from the sky and the Saracen army was struck with panic. At the third warning blast the horn cracked in half, but it was already too late. By the time Charlemagne arrived Roland's men had been slaughtered. But to the end, Roland hoped to save his king. Afraid that his magical sword would fall into the hands of the enemy, the dying Roland attempted to break his weapon. But since the sword was unbreakable, he tossed it into a poisoned stream, where (according to legend) it still rests.

But this legendary



Roland is not the only influence upon our beloved main character. As many of you already know, Browning's "Childe Roland" was in part inspired by an old Scottish ballad referred to in Shakespeare's play King Lear. This ballad told the story of another very different Roland—one who was not a grown soldier but a young boy. (The term "childe" refers to a young, unknighthed man.) Unlike his French namesake, this Scottish hero did not have to face an army of trained soldiers but a single, magical being—the evil king of Faerie.


There are many versions of this Scottish tale of Childe Roland. In the version of the story I know best, Childe Roland, also known as Jack Rowland, is the youngest

brother of the lovely Helen, whom the King of the Fairies longs to capture. One day while Roland, his two brothers, and Helen are playing, Roland kicks a ball high over the church steeple. Helen runs after it, but though the boys wait and wait, she never returns. Frantic for their sister's safety, Roland and his two brothers search for Helen everywhere, but cannot find her. Heads hanging, they return home to their mother and tell her that Helen has been lost. But when she hears the news, their mother bursts into tears, for she knows the truth: Helen has been stolen by the King of Faeryland, and they will never see her again.

As happens in so many folktales, the two elder brothers go in search of Helen but

they too become prisoners of Faeryland. In the end it is left to the youngest boy, Roland, to save his family. Guided by magical advice (in many versions of the tale this advice is given by the magician Merlin, though in the story I know best, Merlin is replaced by a magical talking horse!) Childe Roland straps on his father's sword Excalibur and enters Faeryland. Finally, after slaying all of the magical beings who speak to him, and after going without food or drink for many days (for to eat or drink in the land of the faeries is to be trapped there forever), Childe Roland arrives at the Dark Tower. There he finds his sister Helen who cries out that he should never have come—the king of the Faeries will kill him! But Roland will not be deterred. Though the shape-shifting King of the Faeries attacks him, Roland kills the king with his father's trusty sword, freeing his sister and two brothers from their magical enchantment.

While plotting the Dark Tower comic books, the stories of these two Rolands, and of Browning's Roland, were never far from my mind. In Charlemagne's knight I saw the young, impetuous Roland who is always ready to fight for honor and glory. But in Childe Roland I saw the young hero of The Long

Road Home, who is spirited off to End-World (Mid-World's version of nasty Faeryland!) where he must confront the demonic, shape-shifting Crimson King who hopes to destroy the line of Eld forever. But it was in Browning's hero, who must traverse a desolate landscape bereft of life, that I saw the journey that awaited the adult Roland. For unlike the Frankish Roland who battles Saracens or the Scottish boy who triumphs over magical beings, Browning's hero travels through a ruined landscape haunted by the specters of his past—the fragmented ruins of the world he loved. In some ways, I suppose Browning's hero has the most terrible journey, because along the way he must battle his own inner demons. But his persistence and his constancy are rewarded. Though the journey has cost him his old friends and his old life, he reaches his goal. Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came. And once he arrives, he sounds his horn, in triumph. 

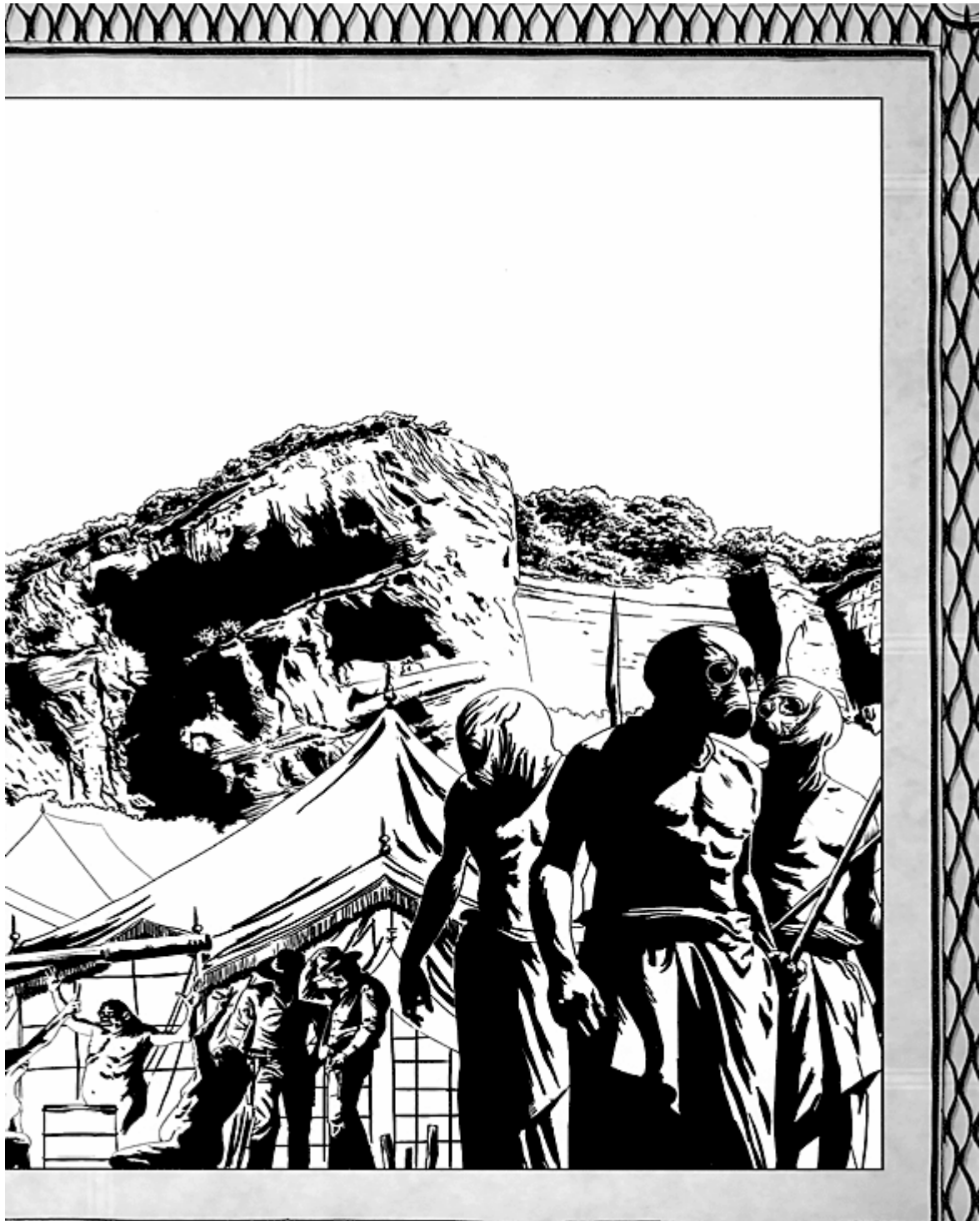
WRITTEN BY:  
ROBIN FURTH  
ILLUSTRATED BY:  
DENNIS CALERO

Richard Isanove's black and white artwork.  
The finished versions appear earlier in this issue.

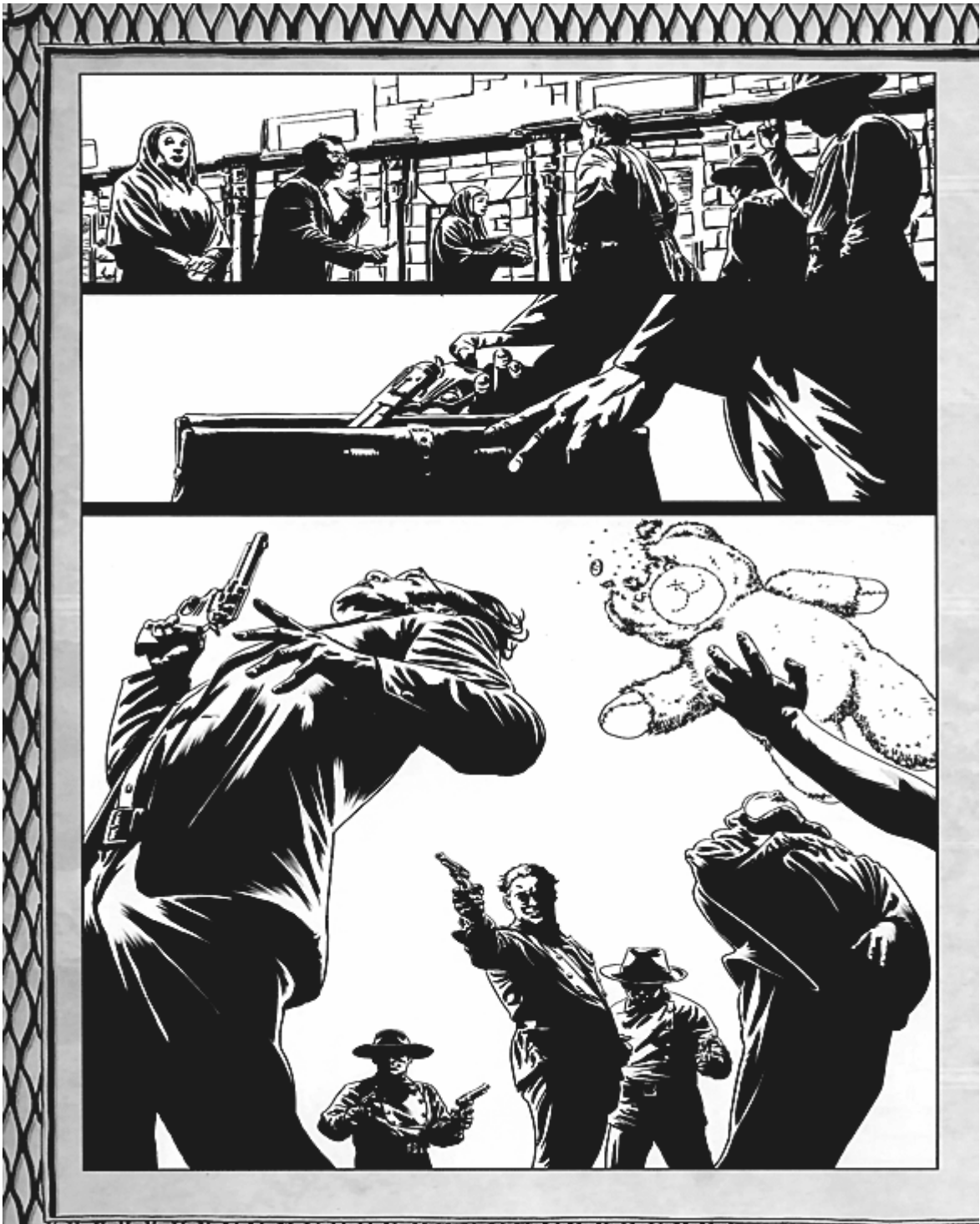












SEEN HERE IS AN UNUSED LAYOUT BY ARTIST DAVID LAFUENTE (ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN, HELLCAT). A RISING STAR AT MARVEL, LAFUENTE TAKES US BEHIND THE SCENES OF HIS JOURNEY INTO MID-WORLD.

LAFUENTE:

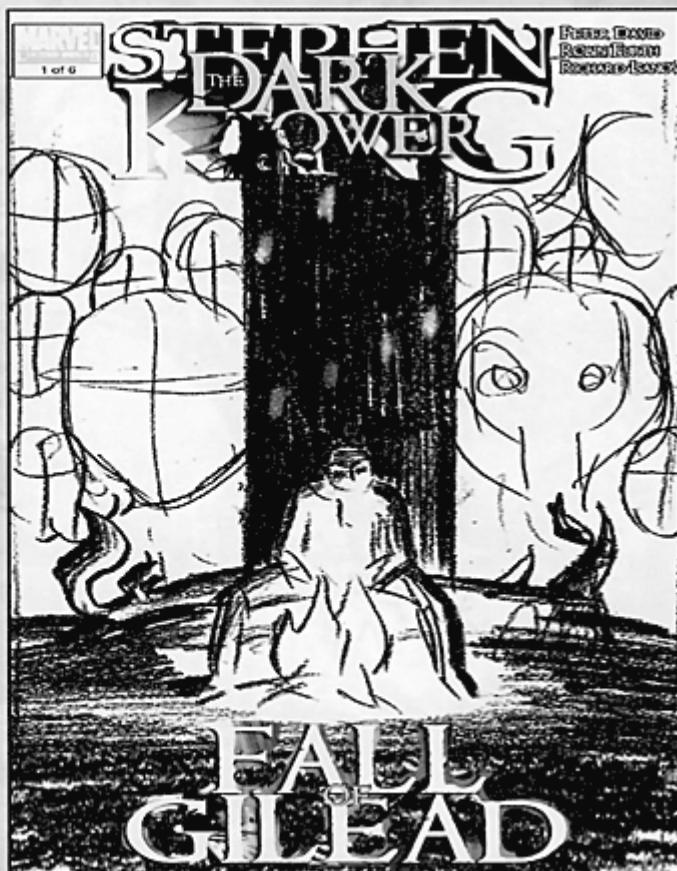
When I was gathering visual references I found that most of the variant cover artists walked a similar path, portraying iconic shots in a book-cover style layout of Roland, either young or adult, and they didn't get too much into the rest of the Dark Tower world, a world that I was fascinated by while investigating. So I tried to bring something previously unseen to the table, so to say. A peek to the background around Roland... in a very comic-book fashion. Steranko's one-image-story comes to mind.

I proposed two ideas, both featuring the supporting cast. One featuring adult Roland and characters from the novels with a layout in the tradition of the classic action comic-book covers—snapshot or even a synopsis of the interior story. The other proposal featured young Roland and... well, showing the good and evil characters and I'd stop when I ran out of paper. The thought behind it was to bring George Perez's cover concepts, those "Where's Wally?" pieces, to the Dark Tower universe.

We decided to save the novel characters for some other time and stay with the present cast. Since we all were happy with the layout composition of the adult Roland sketch, I kept it as a base. Adult Roland became young Roland and I added Aileen instead of Odetta. And crab-baddies, and robo-baddies, and bird-baddies.

Yes, I enjoyed quite a lot.

*David's unused cover sketch.*

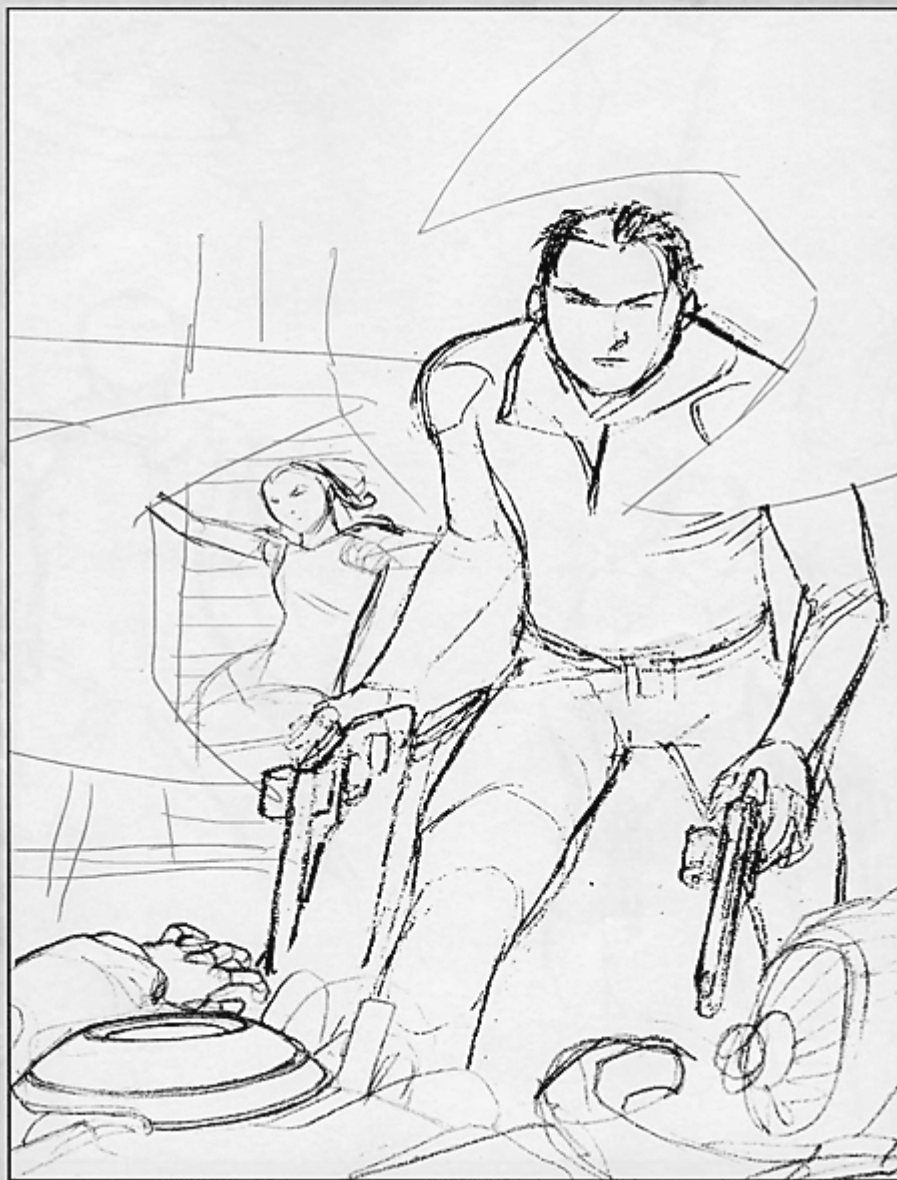


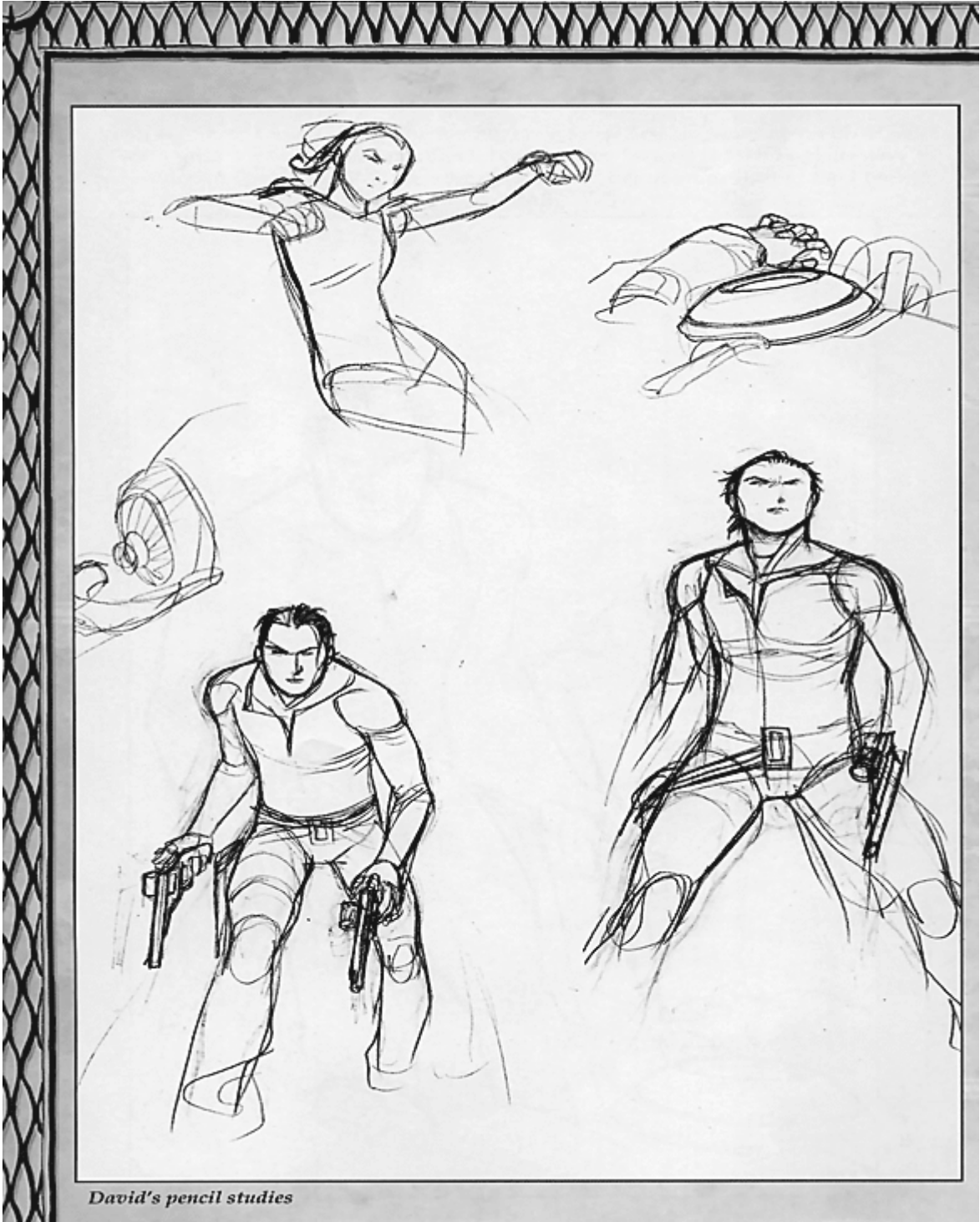
David's approved cover sketch. Odetta from the novels was featured in the original concept, but was replaced with Aileen for the final cover.



LAFUENTE:

I like to do my homework, so I spent some time reading the issues I could get a hold of, collecting all the covers and variants and the illustrations done for King's books. Once I knew a little more of the Dark Tower universe I decided to go in a different direction.



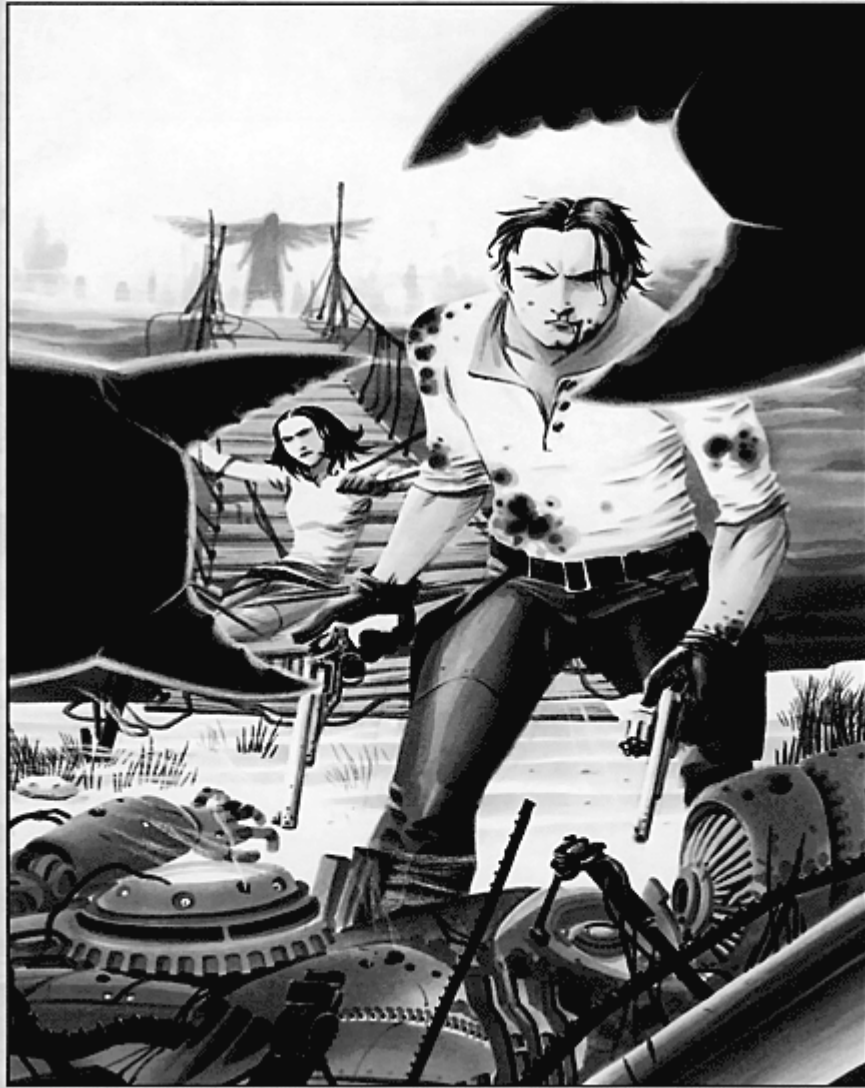


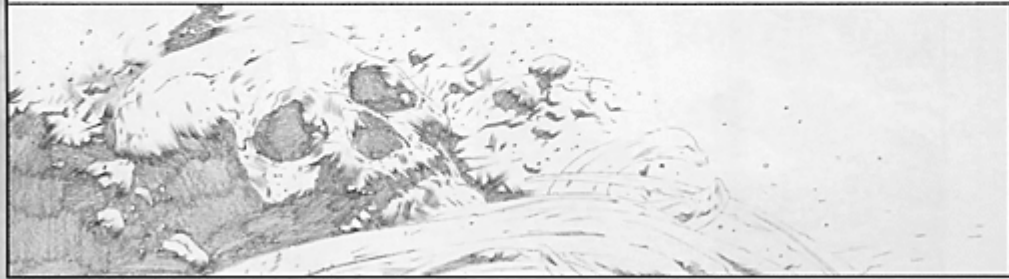
*David's pencil studies*

**LAFUENTE:**

For this cover I used Copic markers and Faber Castell Pitt pens. The former in 90% of the piece and the latter just a little at the very end of the process, to stress the expression in Roland's face, detail the belt, guns, etc. Some white pencil too.

I look for a nice, adequate, cool... idea, and then I worry about how to translate that to the paper. It leads me to push harder, to get better and experiment with the tools. Sometimes it also leads to "seven hours of drawing and it still doesn't work, arg!"





**A preview of things to come...**

**NEXT: The Horn of Deschain is rung as the final battle begins!**







All is not well in Mid-World. Gunslinger Roland Deschain, the young man whose destiny it is to seek and save the Dark Tower, is haunted by horrifying visions from the evil seeing sphere, Maerlyn's Grapefruit. The Crimson King, enemy of all that lives, has long plotted the utter destruction of the Tower, and the undoing of reality itself. Now, with Roland unable to act, his monstrous foe has put his plan into motion...

From the creative team that brought Roland's early adventures to life in *The Dark Tower: The Gunslinger Born*, *The Dark Tower: The Long Road Home*, and *The Dark Tower: Treachery* comes the next chapter of this dark saga of friendship, betrayal and a cosmic quest as conceived by master storyteller Stephen King.

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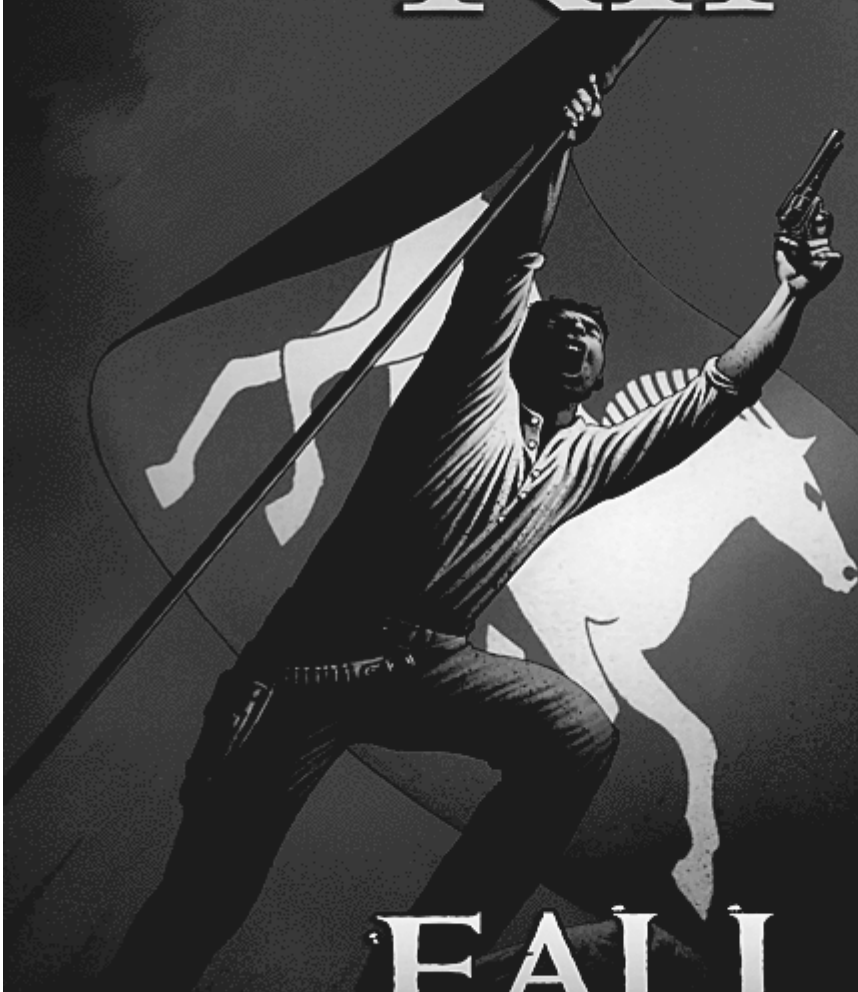


# FALL OF GILEAD

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# FALL OF GILEAD

# STEPHEN THE DARK KING TOWER

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## IN A WORLD THAT HAS MOVED ON...

As Gilead readied itself for the festive celebration of its new-titled gunslingers, Roland's mother prepared to repent for her adulterous sins with the sorcerer Marten. Seemingly out of nowhere, Marten appeared and lured Gabrielle into becoming the prime element in the planned assassination of her husband Steven with the help of Steven's great enemy, John Farson, and Farson's nephew and spy, Kingson. Distrusting of his returned mother, Roland left the festivities to find the destructive sphere called Maerlyn's Grapefruit hidden away in her chambers. The sphere drew him into a hallucination that provoked him into fatally shooting Gabrielle...

Meanwhile, Steven has discovered his wife's treachery and heads to his chambers where he sees that Maerlyn's Grapefruit is gone from his safe. And the only person who was close enough to Stephen to take the key was Gabrielle.

Steven makes the decision to track the Good Man, John Farson, to his camp and then capture him, kill the evil sorcerer Marten and retrieve Maerlyn's Grapefruit.

Only by bringing the machinations of Farson into the light can the taint of premeditated murder be removed from his son Roland.

But one of Deschain's men, Justus, is a traitor and alerts Farson's men to Steven's presence. Swiftly, Steven and his twenty gunslingers are surrounded as a fierce gun battle ensues...

**M**en of legend are a double-edged sword, do ya kennt?

*They are the ones who inspire the rest of us with tales of their smarts and great deeds and what-have-ya.*

*We're told to remember not only their faces, but the whole of their greatness, and let that greatness inform our actions.*

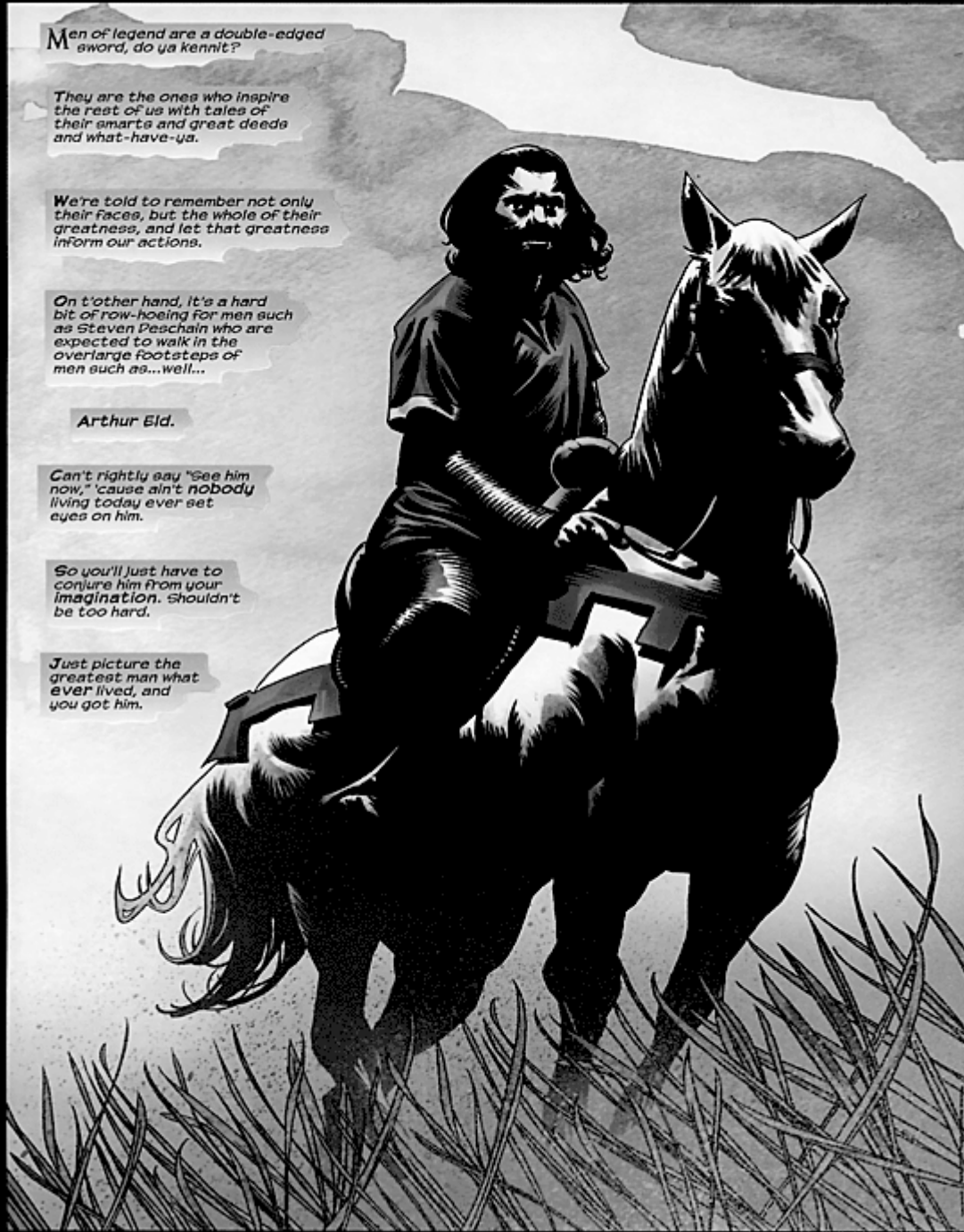
*On t'other hand, it's a hard bit of row-hoeing for men such as Steven Deschain who are expected to walk in the overlarge footsteps of men such as...well...*

**Arthur Eld.**

*Can't rightly say "See him now," 'cause ain't nobody living today ever set eyes on him.*

*So you'll just have to conjure him from your imagination. Shouldn't be too hard.*

*Just picture the greatest man what ever lived, and you got him.*





*As accomplished, as formidable a leader as Steven Deschain is...*

*...in some ways he is simply the caretaker for all that Arthur Eld accomplished.*



*Gilead didn't exist as such until Arthur Eld practically willed it into existence, brick by brick.*



*And since he knew perfectly well that for everything that's built, there's them what desires to tear it down...*

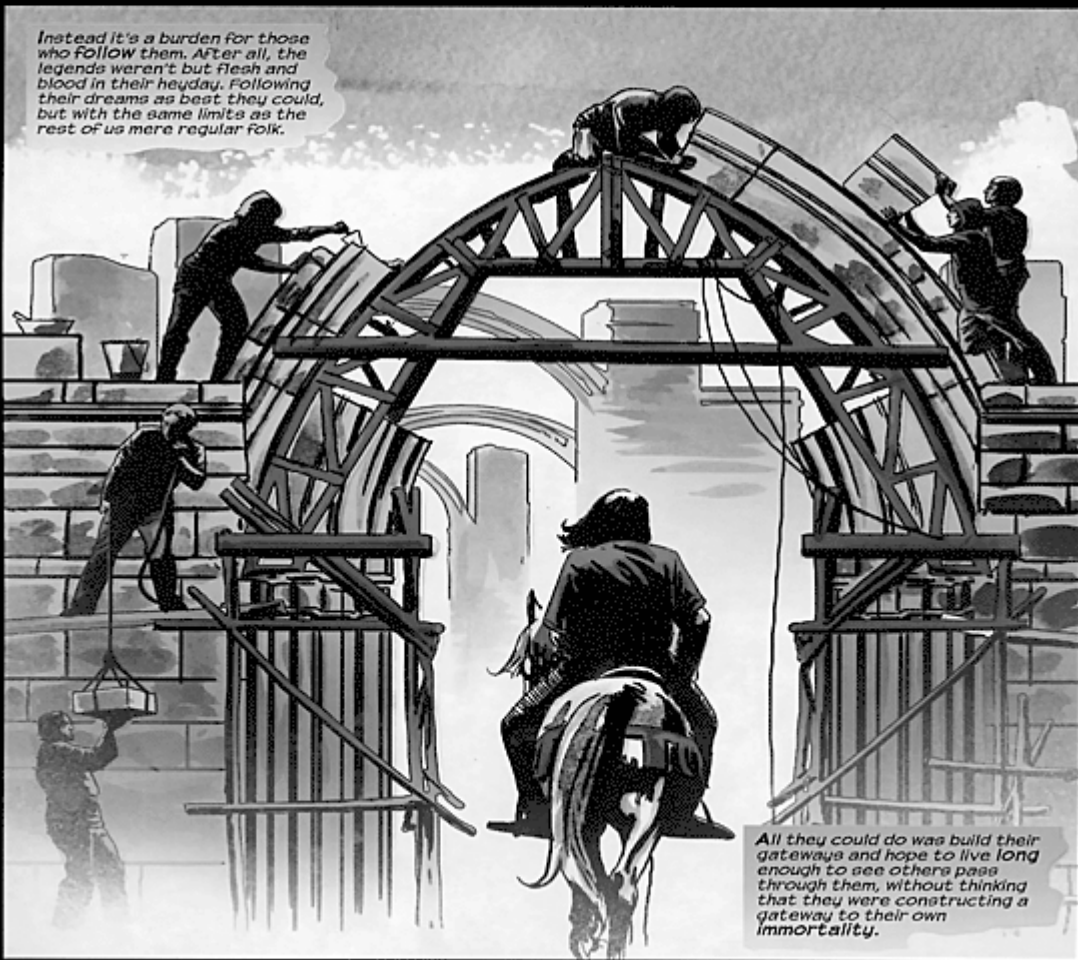


*...he prepared some rather pointed and cutting "welcomes" for unwanted visitors.*





*Aye, a great man was he. But a man, just the same. We tend to elevate such men of legend nigh unto godhood. That ain't a problem for the legends since they're long gone.*



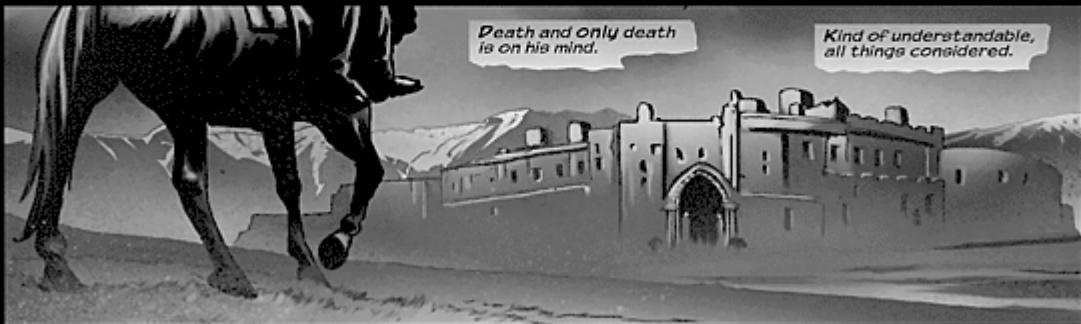
*Instead it's a burden for those who follow them. After all, the legends weren't but flesh and blood in their heyday. Following their dreams as best they could, but with the same limits as the rest of us mere regular folk.*

*All they could do was build their gateways and hope to live long enough to see others pass through them, without thinking that they were constructing a gateway to their own immortality.*



Now Steven  
Peschain...

...he ain't thinking  
much about  
immortality of any  
sort. Not Arthur  
Eld's, and certainly  
not his own.



Death and only death  
is on his mind.

Kind of understandable,  
all things considered.



Milord!  
Where...

Where  
are the  
others?

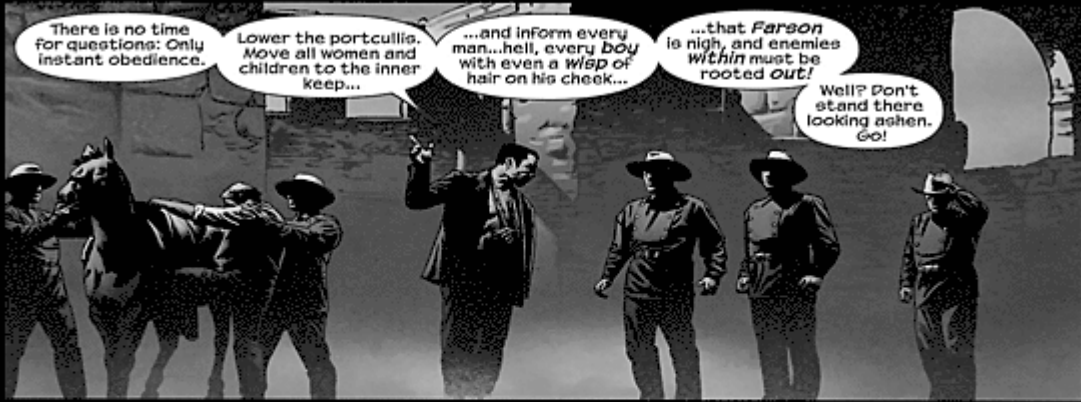


Looking  
upon their  
fathers'  
faces.

It was an  
ambush. Chris  
and I...

We're the only  
survivors.

But--



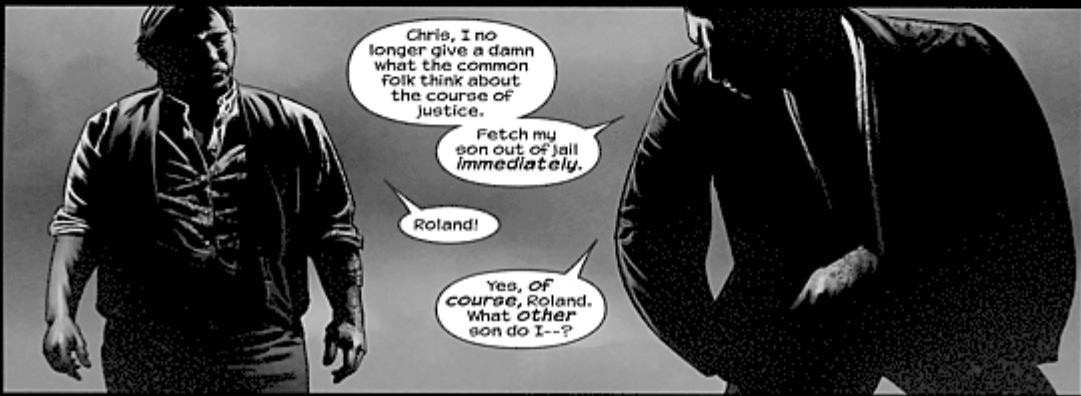
There is no time for questions: Only instant obedience.

Lower the portcullis. Move all women and children to the inner keep...

...and inform every man...hell, every *boy* with even a *wisp* of hair on his cheek...

...that *Farson* is nigh, and enemies *within* must be rooted *out*!

Well? Don't stand there looking ashen. Go!



Chris, I no longer give a damn what the common folk think about the course of justice.

Fetch my son out of jail *immediately*.

Roland!

Yes, *of course*, Roland. What *other* son do I--?



No, I mean... right *there*. It's Roland.

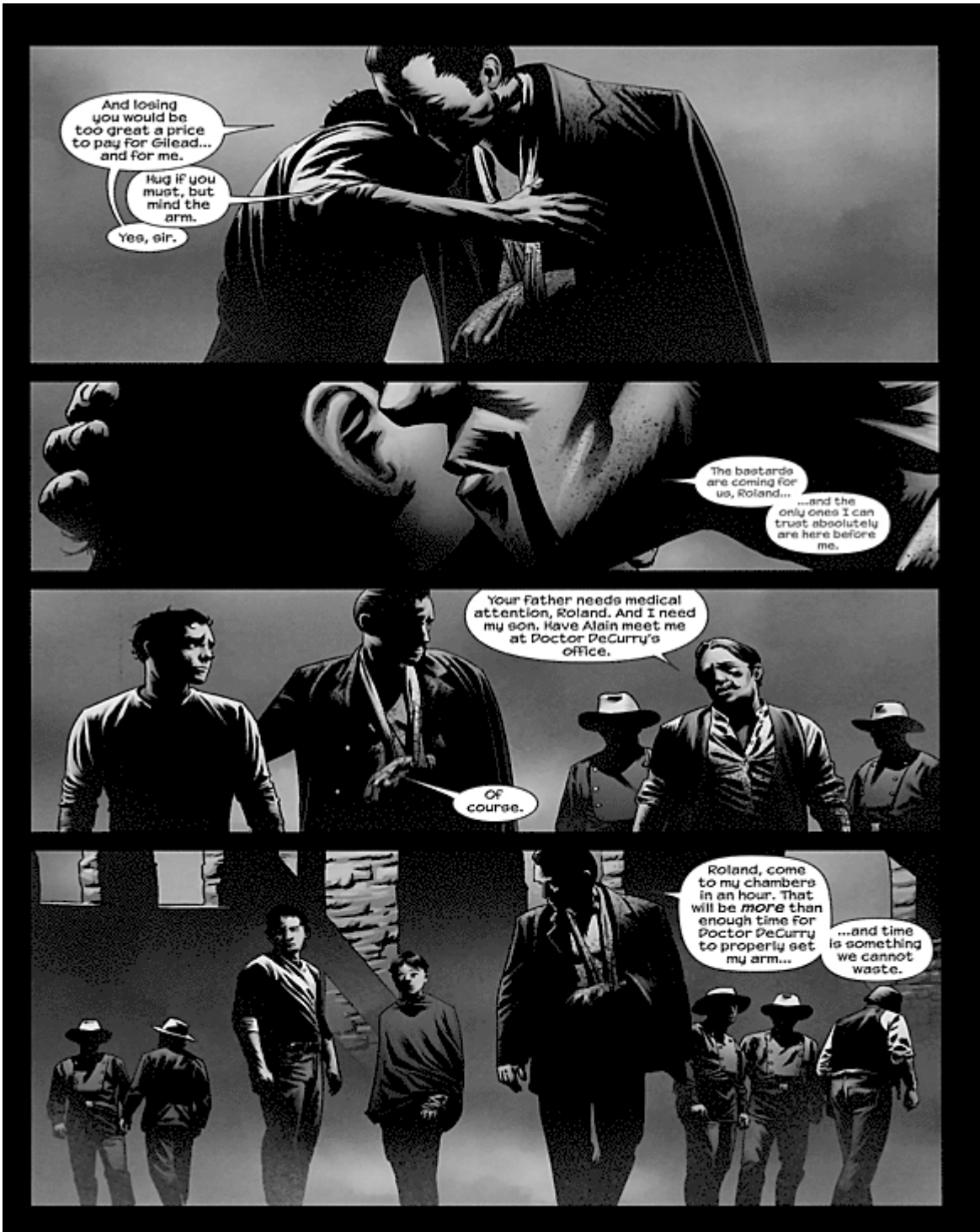
Ah. Yes, well...

Smartly done, Chris.



Father... gods, your arm... the *pain* must be--

Too many of my men will ne'er again feel anything. Pain is a small price to pay for living.



And losing you would be too great a price to pay for Gilead... and for me.

Hug if you must, but mind the arm.

Yes, sir.

The bastards are coming for us, Roland...

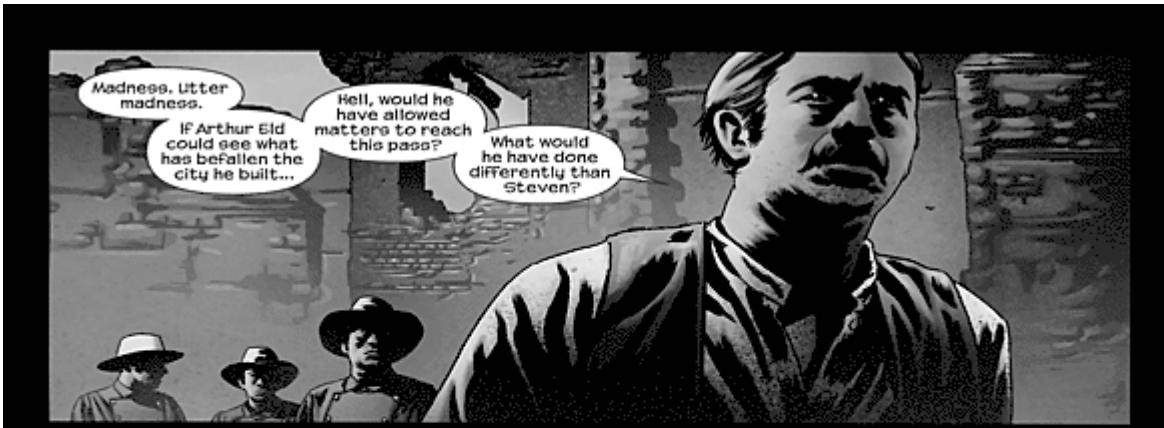
...and the only ones I can trust absolutely are here before me.

Your father needs medical attention, Roland. And I need my son. Have Alain meet me at Doctor PeCurry's office.


Of course.

Roland, come to my chambers in an hour. That will be *more* than enough time for Doctor PeCurry to properly set my arm...

...and time is something we cannot waste.








Nothing dims pain quite like a drink or two.

It also dulls the wits, though. But Steven figures he has a little time to fully recover them.

And in wine is also the truth, or so they say. Cause of that, Steven Deschain finds himself facing some harsh truths...

I have let thee down, Arthur Eld. Look at what has befallen thy city.



On my watch has the enemy brought us to this pass.

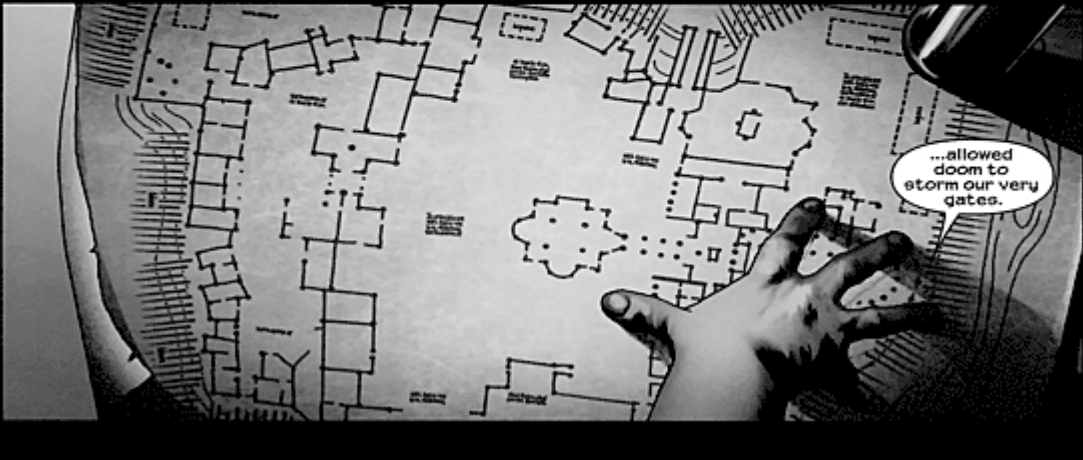
On my head are the souls that have been lost.

And now I turn to you, oh my greatest ancestor.

For you were a far wiser, insightful man than I could ever hope to be.

Let me review your original plans for this city...

...and reacquaint myself with the safeguards you built in for a time when a poor, pathetic fool such as myself...



...allowed doom to storm our very gates.







Well, Deschain? You *wanted* instant obedience. You *wanted* enemies within revealed.

Here I have given you what you asked.



Ah. And in return you've provided me with a *generous* gift.

A detailed schematic of Gilead's defenses!



John Farson *thanks* you.



Unnhhhh--!!

And I thank you...

...for thinking I am as easily slain...

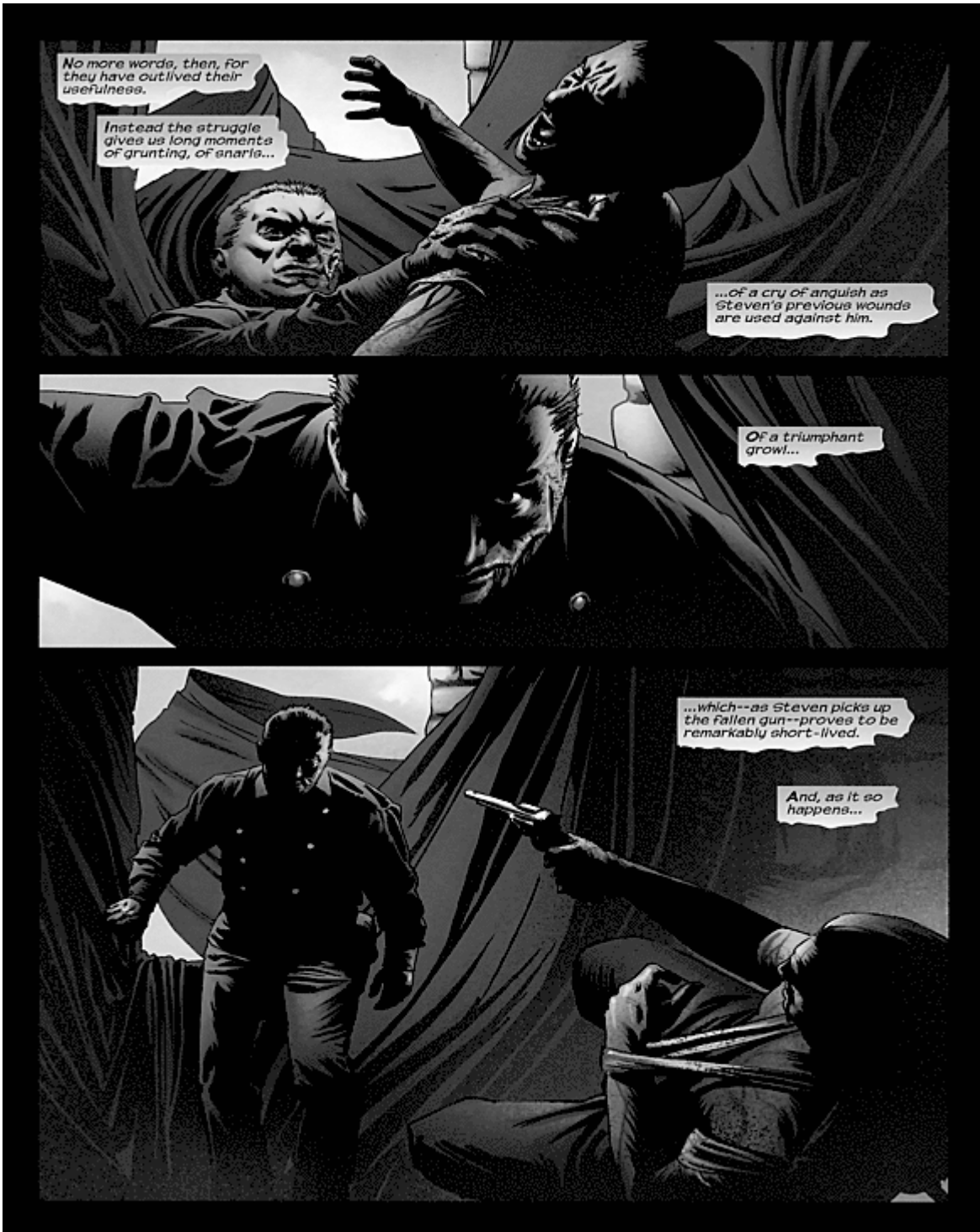
...as that!

A guard should know better...

...than to lower his guard!







No more words, then, for they have outlived their usefulness.

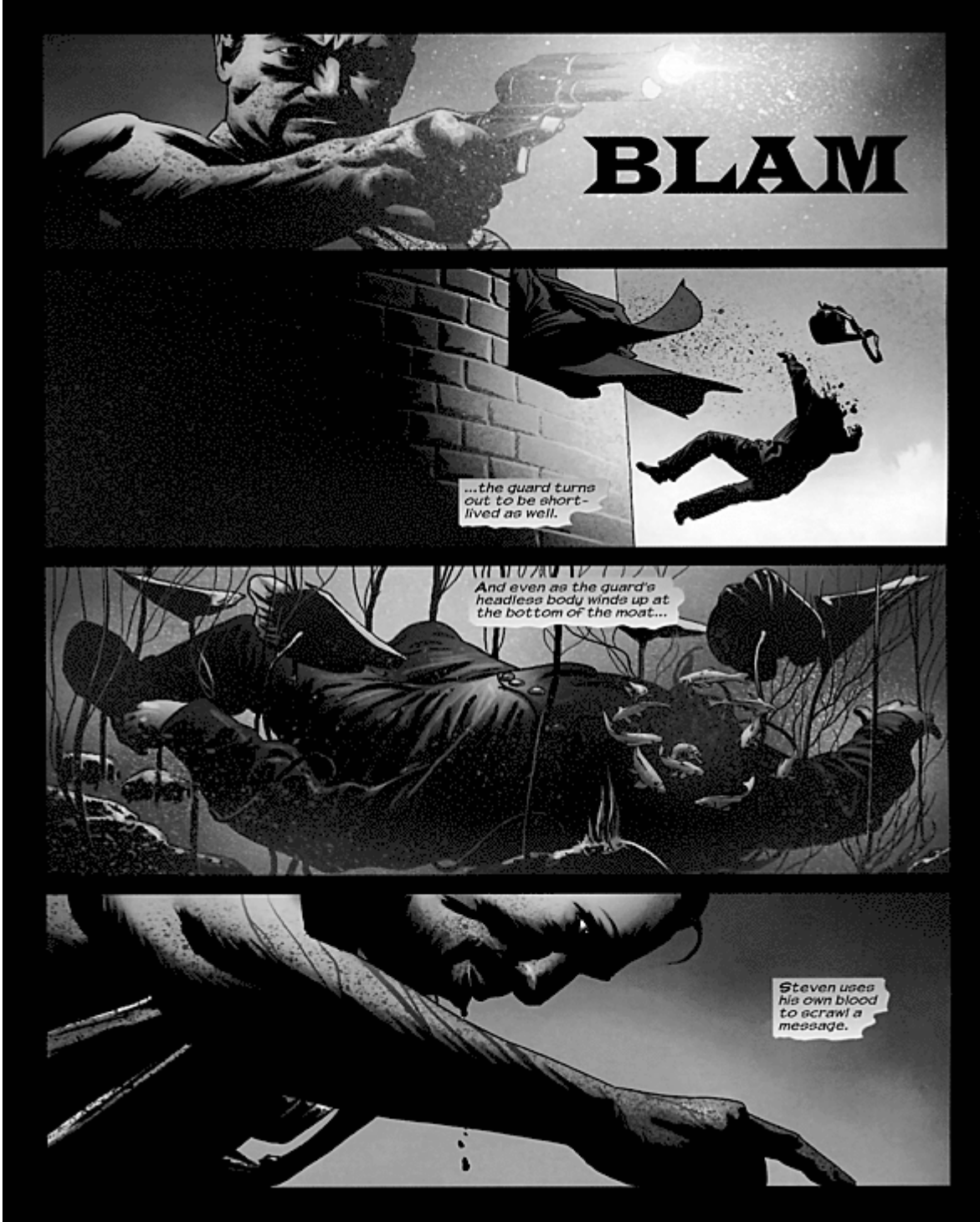
Instead the struggle gives us long moments of grunting, of snarls...

...of a cry of anguish as Steven's previous wounds are used against him.

Of a triumphant growl...

...which--as Steven picks up the fallen gun--proves to be remarkably short-lived.

And, as it so happens...



**BLAM**

...the guard turns out to be short-lived as well.

And even as the guard's headless body winds up at the bottom of the moat...

Steven uses his own blood to scrawl a message.



F-father...?  
Father!!



He...he must have died trying to defend--

No. His spilled blood is fresher.

He found this... this massacre...and was jumped...



But it makes no sense!

It makes *perfect* sense, Aileen. Anticipating a battle? Kill the healers.



You just have to have the stomach for slaughtering innocents.

And Farson obviously does. Bert...what do we do?

We *fight* him. And we try *not* to bleed.



My father...

Gods...if  
traitors are so  
deeply embedded  
that even Chris Johns  
could be...then my  
father is...



He runs then, running so fast  
that the world seems to blur  
around him. Aileen shouts  
his name, warning him...




...worried that if  
Steven Peachain  
faces some manner  
of trap, Roland  
racing headlong  
into it won't help  
matters none.

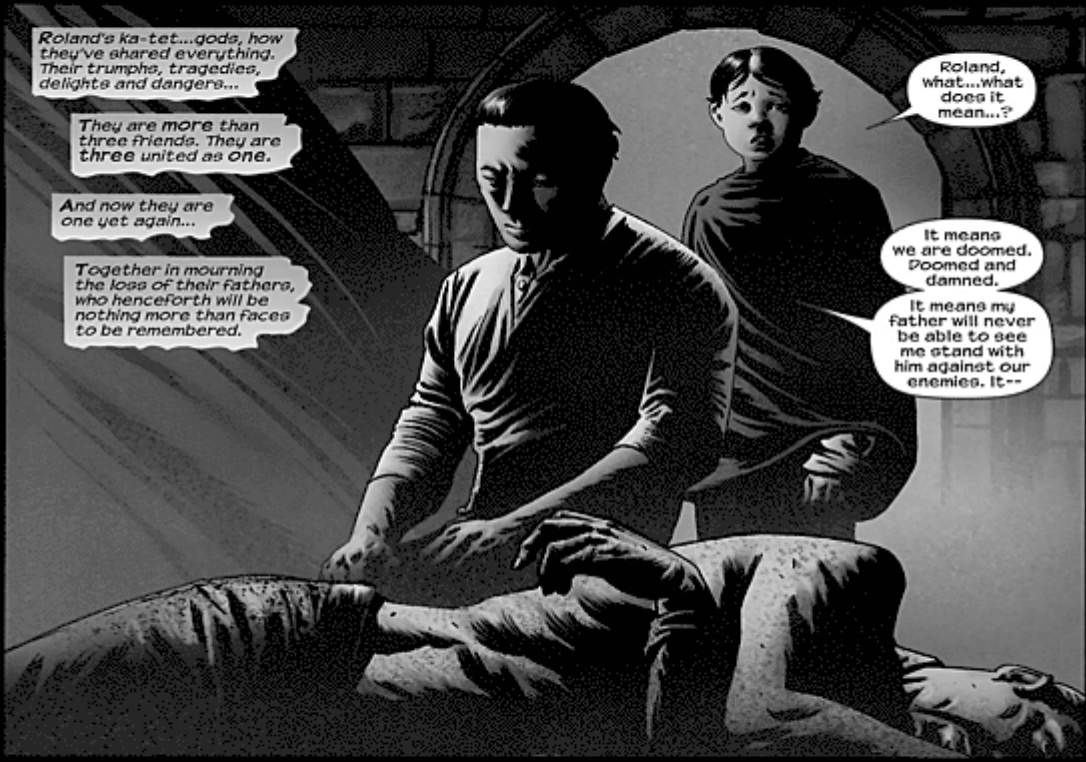


But Roland ignores her,  
heeding nothing but the  
rasping of his lungs and  
the pounding of his  
heart...a heart that  
Aileen now sees...





...is forever broken.



Roland's ka-tet... gods, how they've shared everything. Their triumphs, tragedies, delights and dangers...

They are more than three friends. They are three united as one.


And now they are one yet again...

Together in mourning the loss of their fathers, who henceforth will be nothing more than faces to be remembered.

Roland, what... what does it mean...?

It means we are doomed. Doomed and damned.

It means my father will never be able to see me stand with him against our enemies. It--



Roland, I cry thy pardon, truly, but I...

I meant... what does *that* mean? Those words...

OPEN  
THE  
PITS

It means  
my father knew  
his death was  
nigh...

...and he had  
no desire for  
us to join  
him.

The pits are  
Gilead's ancient  
source of self-defense.  
Diabolical instruments of  
slaughter, to be used  
only in the most dire of  
circumstances.



*His father's body still  
cooling in his chambers,  
Roland now looks upon  
the young gunslingers  
gathered in the council  
room and continues...*

I think we  
all concur that  
circumstances do  
not come more  
dire than  
these.





These traps, Roland...they're real? I mean...

...my mother used to scare me with tales of them so I would not wander off on my own. I never thought--



Aye, Randolph... they're quite real. These drawings give us their positions and how to activate them.



But they must be used at precisely the right time. Cuthbert... you will be their operator. Alain...

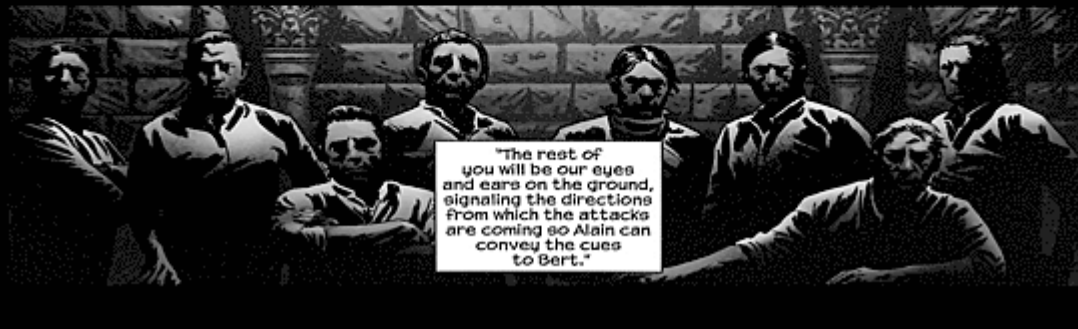


Alain, are you *with* me?

Speak. I will answer.

You will be Bert's lookout, conveying the right moments to activate each trap. Do you understand?

I'm in *shock*, Roland, I'm not *deaf*.



"The rest of you will be our eyes and ears on the ground, signaling the directions from which the attacks are coming so Alain can convey the cues to Bert."



Roland, no one can dispute the tragedy surrounding this moment...  
...but I think we can all agree...



...that your father would have wanted you to have these.



I...believe you are right, Aileen.



And this as well, Roland. When sounding the attack of the enemy...  
...there are none more fit to blow the horn.



*They come together  
then and call his name:*

*"Long live Roland,  
dinh of Gilead!"*



*They congratulate him  
in an understandably  
muted manner...*



*...and as they admire  
the formidable guns and  
the famed horn, Roland slips  
out onto the balcony,  
unseen by all...*



*...save one.*



Roland...will it work? Will the pit...?

The future is no more open to me than it is you, Bert.

Well...what if it *doesn't* work?

Then we die. But I swear, if I do...

"...it will be with my teeth buried in the throat of John Farson."



TO BE CONTINUED

## IN DEFENSE OF GILEAD



All citizens of Mid-World know that Arthur Eld, the ancient king of All-World, was a great hero. In the years following Mid-World's blighted age, Arthur Eld traveled from fortified town to fortified town, uniting the surviving men and women against the mutants and harriers who oppressed them. With eloquent speeches, he advocated the cause of strength through unity. With his sword and his guns he tamed the lawless lands, and with his band of fearsome and devoted knights, he ushered in an era of peace and stability. It was he who rebuilt the city of Gilead from the Old People's ruins, and it was he who slaughtered the great serpent Saita so that the people of In-World could sleep soundly in their beds.

But few people know that Arthur Eld was also a scholar. As a young baron in western Mid-World, he amassed a huge library. Traveling through all the known lands, he sought out those books and manuscripts that had survived the Great Cataclysm, and employed linguists to decipher and translate them. Some of these books were histories, but others were tomes of technological magic which described the principles underlying the Old People's amazing mechanisms. In fact, it was from these texts that Arthur Eld and his followers learned how to plant crops to clear toxins from the earth, and how to filter water in order to purify it. It was also these texts that

described how to use sparklights and how to generate the energy needed to power the stoves and ice machines of the palace.

Yet Arthur Eld was not content just to collect the Old People's ancient knowledge. He also wanted to understand what had happened to Mid-World in the years after the Great Poisoning. In an attempt to create a coherent history of the land, he sent scribes to every corner of Mid-World so that they could record tales of Mid-World's Dark Age. For Arthur Eld believed that to prepare for the future, he first needed to understand the past.





What the Eld discovered disturbed him greatly. All the stories his scribes recorded—no matter how ancient or modern—pointed to one uncomfortable truth: Mid-World's history was one of cyclical bloodshed. The first man-made structures erected on the land were the Druid Stone Circles—altars dedicated to the gods of death—and it seemed that even after centuries of tranquility, it was to the worship of these ancient canchar that the people of Mid-World inevitably returned. Hence Arthur Eld knew that although he and his knights had ushered in an era of peace, someday the Kingdom of All-World would fall, and their beloved city of Gilead would be besieged by those who wished to quench its light and return the world to turmoil and darkness. The Eld and his followers had triumphed over Mid-World's many harriers, but they knew too well that these lawless gangs had not been completely destroyed. Instead they hid in their dens, licking their wounds like angry beasts, awaiting a time when Gilead's defenses were weak, so that they could rise up and destroy it.

Calling his advisors and knights together, Arthur Eld shared his concerns. He feared that even if he and his men managed to keep the forces of the Outer Dark at bay, in the time of their grandchildren, or great-grandchildren, these enemies of the White would overwhelm the city and slaughter its citizens. Scrutinizing face after face, Arthur Eld stated that they had to find a way for the city to defend itself . . . forever.

For many moments, the room was silent. But then, after several minutes had passed, Sir Bertrand Allgood stood to speak. Clearing his throat, he suggested that they stockpile the Old People's weapons in a vault below the city. They should create an arsenal unrivaled anywhere else in the known lands. Who would dare to challenge them once it became known that the knights of Gilead were armed with flamethrowers and lasers, tanks and ant-omic guns?

But even as Sir Bertrand spoke, his old friend Sir Alfred Johns shook his head. The Old People's weapons, he said, were tainted, and brought



a kind of leprosy to their users. All who touched them or tried to operate them found that their skins erupted in sores, their teeth softened and fell out, and eventually their bodies weakened and died. How could Knights of the White possibly endanger their people by keeping such dangerous artifacts below their city?

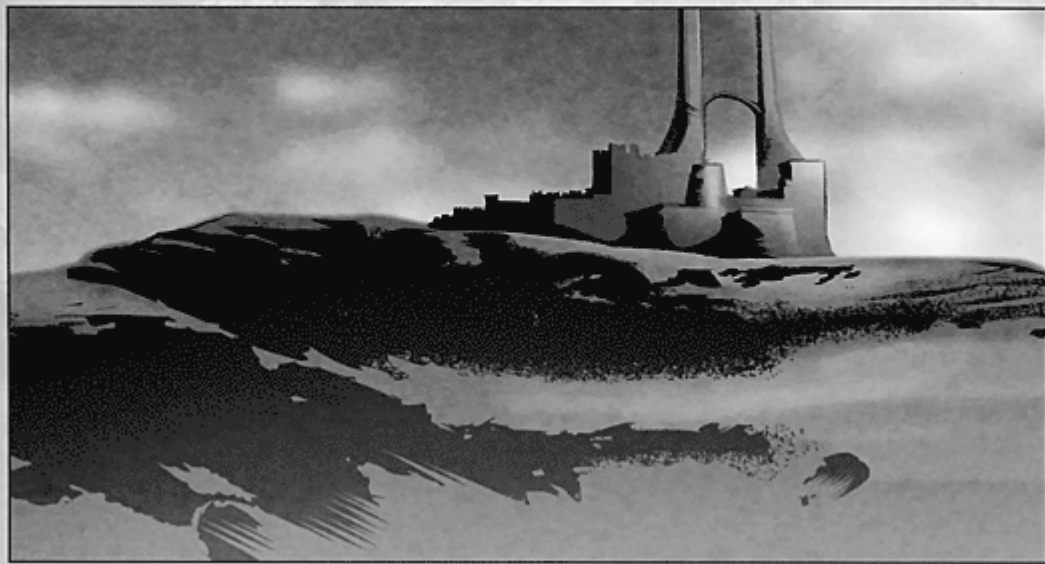
Many of Arthur's knights pounded the table in agreement, but the Eld raised his hand to silence his men. Both Sir Bertrand and Sir Alfred made good points, he said. Sir Alfred was right, the Old People's weapons were deadly, but in an ancient text, he and Sir Bertrand had read that the poison which tainted the Old People's weapons was called radioactivity and it decayed over time. Such poisons had what the Old People called half-lives, and as time passed these poisons grew weaker. Hence, it was conceivable that in five hundred years or so, the Old People's weapons would be useable again.

The king's words met with murmurs of surprise, but once again the king raised his hand to silence his men.

Although, he said, they could conceivably store the Old People's weapons in sealed tanks, he felt they should reject the use of the Old Ones' dangerous artifacts upon moral grounds. For the Old People's weapons had already destroyed Mid-World once. Surely they—as knights of the White—did not want to risk doing so again.

At this point one of Arthur Eld's weapon masters stood to speak. He said he agreed with the king—to use the Old People's weapons was unwise. Their kingdom could not serve the White and also adopt the deadly ways of the past. However they did have to keep in mind that future harriers would have no such scruples. As soon as it was discovered that the Old Ones' weapons were no longer toxic, the ancient factories and arsenals would be raided. Hence, whatever defenses Gilead erected, they had to be strong enough to withstand an army wielding the most horrific firepower imaginable.

Arthur Eld nodded. The weapon master was right. The best way to secure the future of Gilead was not





to store poisonous weapons but to strengthen the city's defenses so that they could withstand the most powerful army. Surely that was not beyond their ability? After all, did not Gilead have the best library in all Mid-World, one that contained all of the Old People's accumulated wisdom, and was not knowledge strength? If they combed through the books,

scrolls, and manuscripts stored in the palace, surely they would be able to harness the Old People's vast knowledge and use it in a way that was both true to the White and deadly to their enemies?

For two full years Arthur Eld and his advisors scoured every book, every manuscript, and every scroll in






the library. They drew up blueprints, and then destroyed them, and then drew up new plans. After much discussion they decided what to do. They would create a unified defense for the city, one that was secret but which could be operated from a central and well-protected location. Although her citizens would not know it, their city would become like a giant spider, or great viper, or powerful lion, able to kill any enemy who ventured too close.

Beneath the city of Gilead Arthur Eld's technicians and weapon masters built a huge, complex war machine. This machine, which would be operated by levers located in a tower above the inner keep, controlled a series of traps which encircled both Gilead's outer wall and her inner sanctum. The first defenses were Gilead's pits. Huge holes were excavated in the earth and were lined with upward-pointing spikes, each of

which was tipped with poison that became more deadly with each passing year. Enormous trap doors were placed above these pits and then covered with soil and seeds. Within a season, the grasses would make the pits undetectable, but if Gilead were besieged, then her attackers would be skewered. The second defenses were spring-loaded spears, hidden at the bases of both the city and inner sanctum walls. When released, these poison-tipped spears would shoot upward at 45 degrees, piercing and killing. Finally, metal tracks were inserted along the wall of the inner keep. When activated, lightning-fast blades would spin along these tracks, slicing open any who dared to scale the masonry.

The plan took ten years to fine-tune, and it required another ten years to put the machinery and traps in place. But in the end, the defenses of Gilead were proclaimed miraculous, and said to rival the great structures erected by the Old People. In fact, the stories about these defenses were so amazing that many people did not believe they existed at all, and within three generations the defenses were relegated to the realm of myth. But Arthur Eld's blueprints remained. Generation after generation, Gilead's dinhs studied these plans, knowing that if their city was ever attacked, they would be able to defend their home. 

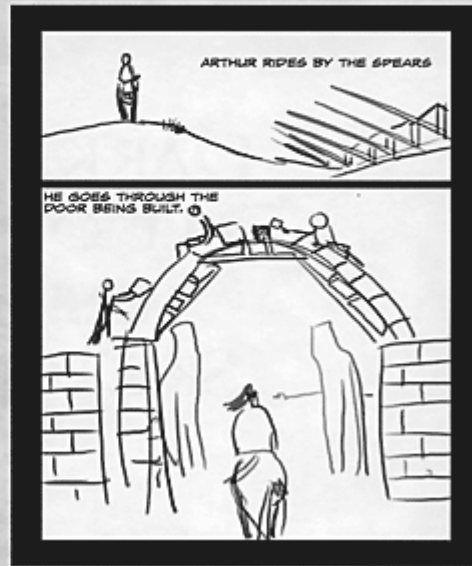
WRITTEN BY:  
ROBIN FURTH  
ILLUSTRATED BY:  
DENNIS CALERO



**DARK TOWER:  
FALL OF GILEAD  
ISSUE #5  
SKETCHBOOK**

**A look at the creative team's in-progress work,  
including layouts, pencil art and cover concepts.**

Richard Isanove's layouts with his notes.





RICHARD ISANOVE'S BLACK AND WHITE ARTWORK. THE FINISHED VERSION OF THIS SPREAD APPEARED EARLIER IN THE ISSUE.







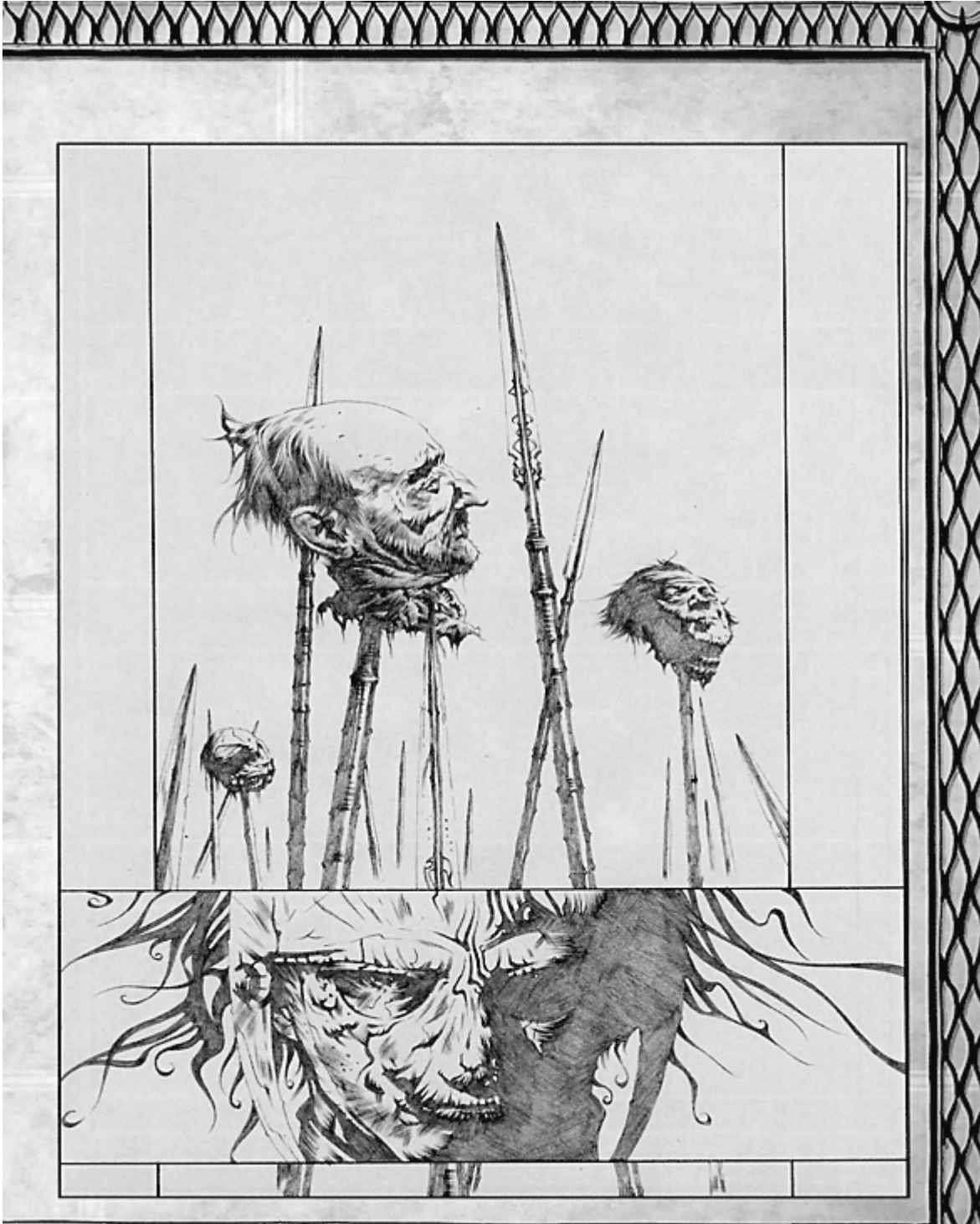
MARVEL YOUNG GUN RAFA SANDOVAL (AVENGERS: THE INITIATIVE) BRINGS ROLANDS YOUNG AND OLD TO LIFE IN THIS ACTION-PACKED VARIANT COVER. SEEN HERE ARE RAFA'S INITIAL PROPOSAL SKETCHES, HIS COMPLETED PENCILS, AND THE INKS BY HIS LONGTIME COLLABORATOR, ROGER BONET. THE FINAL COVER WAS COLORED BY EDGAR DELGADO.

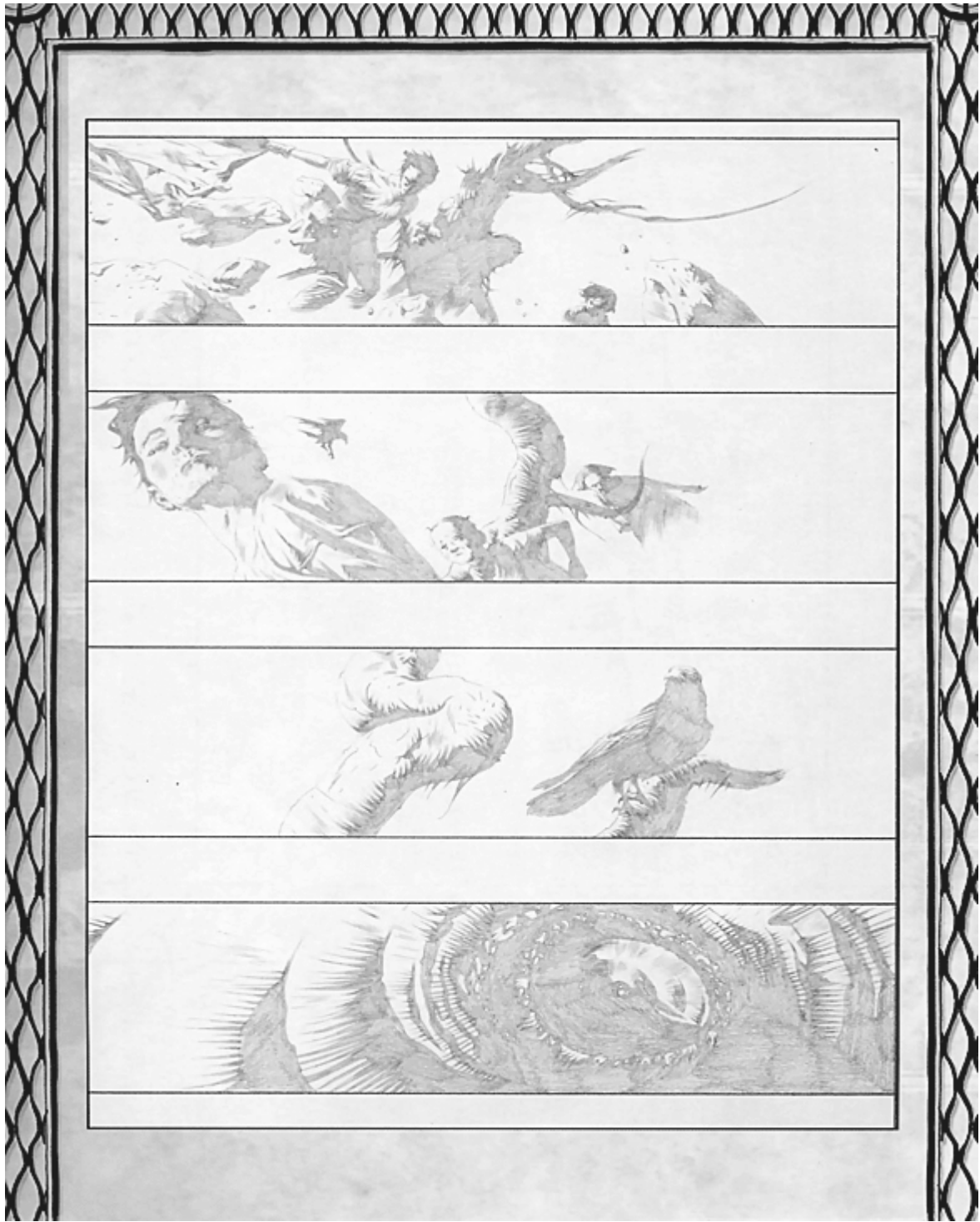




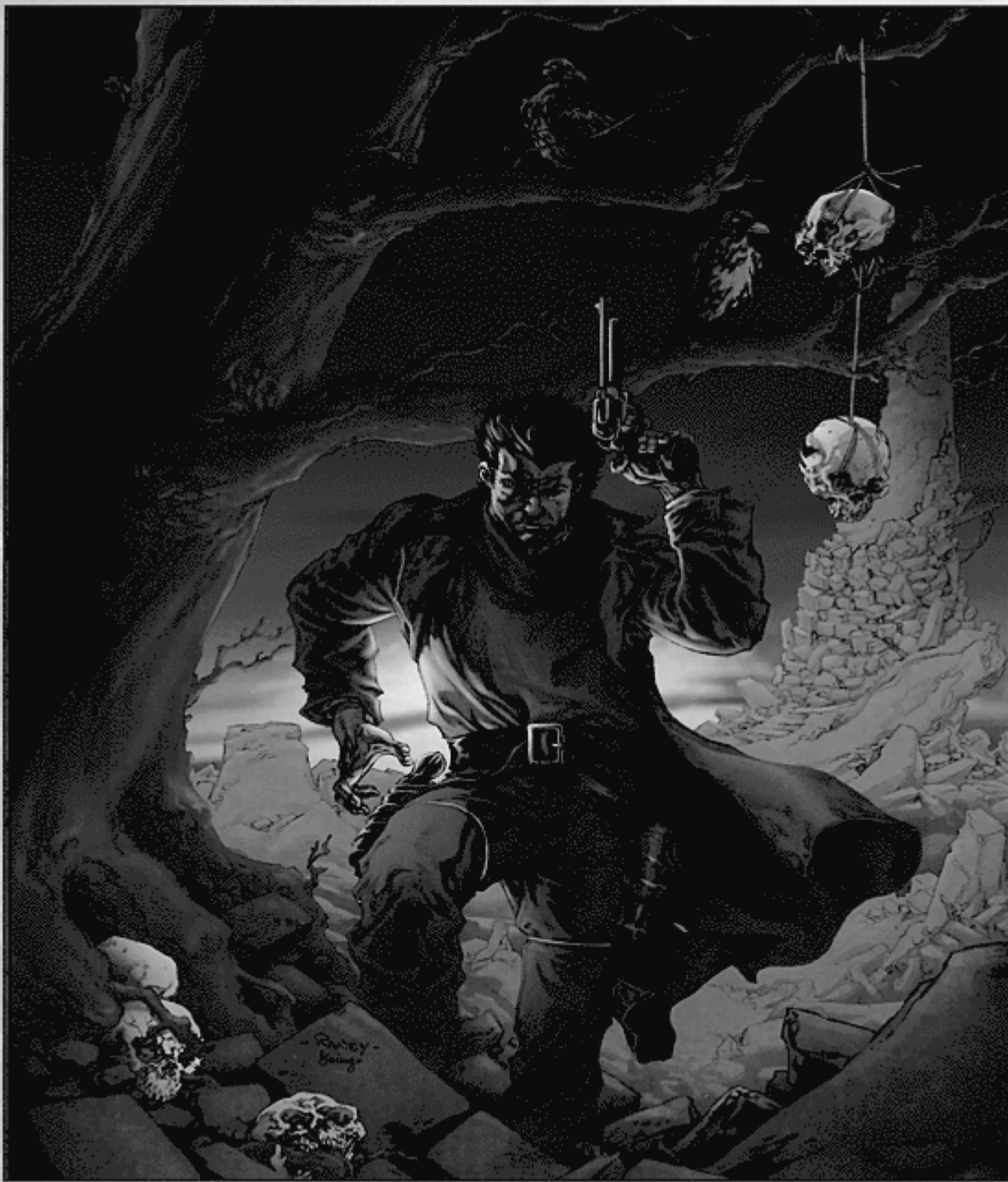
An exclusive preview of DARK TOWER: THE BATTLE OF JERICHO HILL.  
Pencil art by Jae Lee.







**NEXT: The battle ends as a gunslinger makes his last stand!**





All is not well in Mid-World. Gunslinger Roland Deschain, the young man whose destiny it is to seek and save the Dark Tower, is haunted by horrifying visions from the evil seeing sphere, Maerlyn's Grapefruit. The Crimson King, enemy of all that lives, has long plotted the utter destruction of the Tower, and the undoing of reality itself. Now, with Roland unable to act, his monstrous foe has put his plan into motion...

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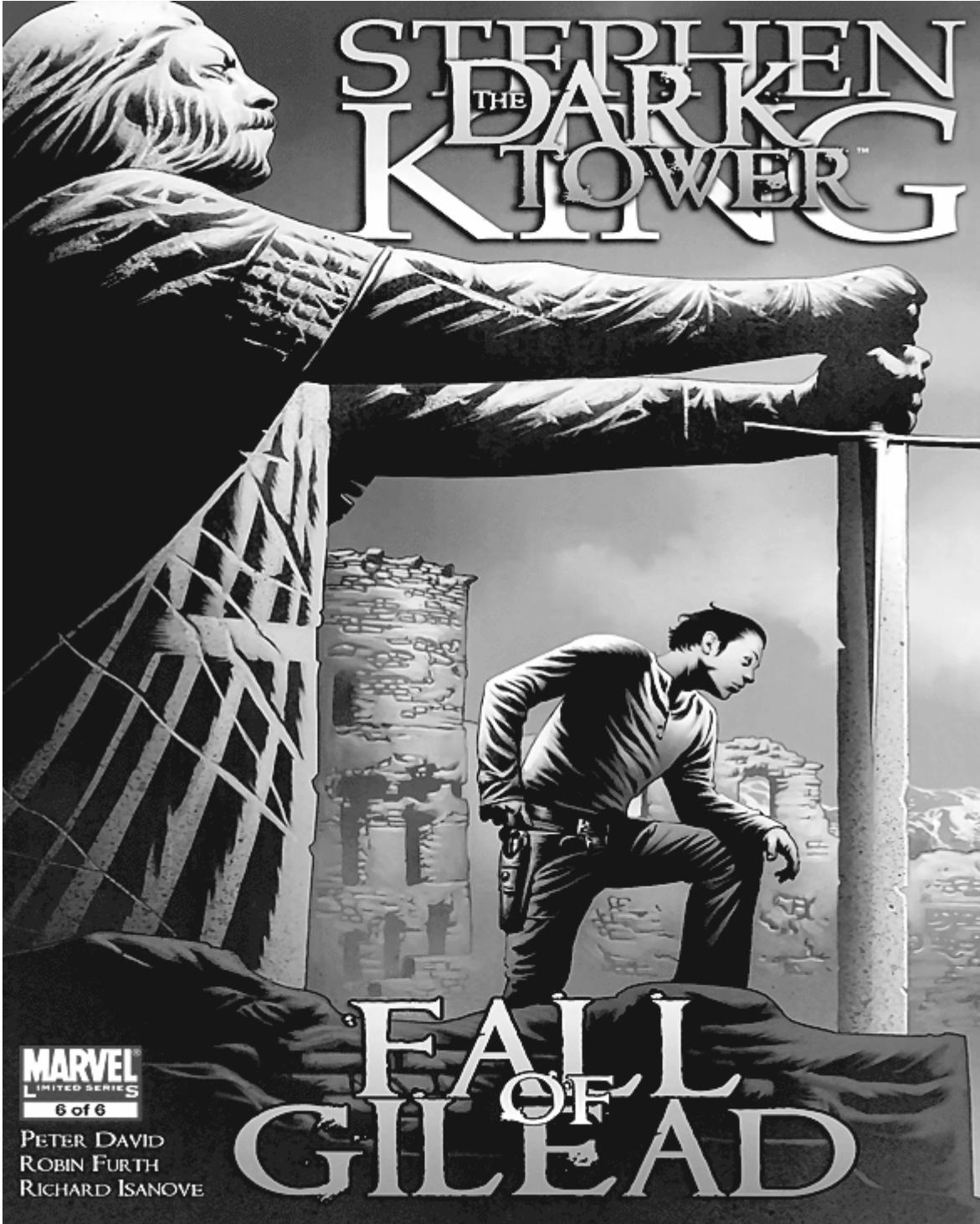




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**FALL OF GILEAD**



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## IN A WORLD THAT HAS MOVED ON...

As Gilead readied itself for the festive celebration of its new-titled gunslingers, Roland's mother prepared to repent for her adulterous sins with the sorcerer Marten. Seemingly out of nowhere, Marten appeared and lured Gabrielle into becoming the prime element in the planned assassination of her husband Steven with the help of Steven's great enemy, John Farson, and Farson's nephew and spy, Kingson. Distrusting his returned mother, Roland left the festivities to find the destructive sphere called Maerlyn's Grapefruit hidden away in her chambers. The sphere drew him into a hallucination that provoked him into fatally shooting Gabrielle...

Meanwhile, Steven has discovered his wife's treachery and heads to his chambers where he sees that Maerlyn's Grapefruit is gone from his safe. And the only person who was close enough to Steven to take the key was Gabrielle.

Steven makes the decision to track the Good Man, John Farson, to his camp and then capture him, kill the evil sorcerer Marten and retrieve Maerlyn's Grapefruit.

Only by bringing the machinations of Farson into the light can the taint of premeditated murder be removed from his son Roland.

But one of Deschain's men, Justus, is a traitor and alerts Farson's men to Steven's presence. Swiftly, Steven and his twenty gunslingers are surrounded, and a fierce gun battle ensues.

The few survivors return to the city where Steven prepares to activate doomsday defenses installed by his ancestor, Arthur Eld.

But Steven is assassinated by an agent of the Good Man and so the fate of Gilead now rests in the hands of his young son Roland, who must prepare the city to face the forces of John Farson.

*"Maybe it won't be so bad."*

*That's what Thomas, yonder on the left, whispers to Aileen, and she kinda nods and whispers back, "Mebbe."*

*Hard to say whether she believes it or not.*

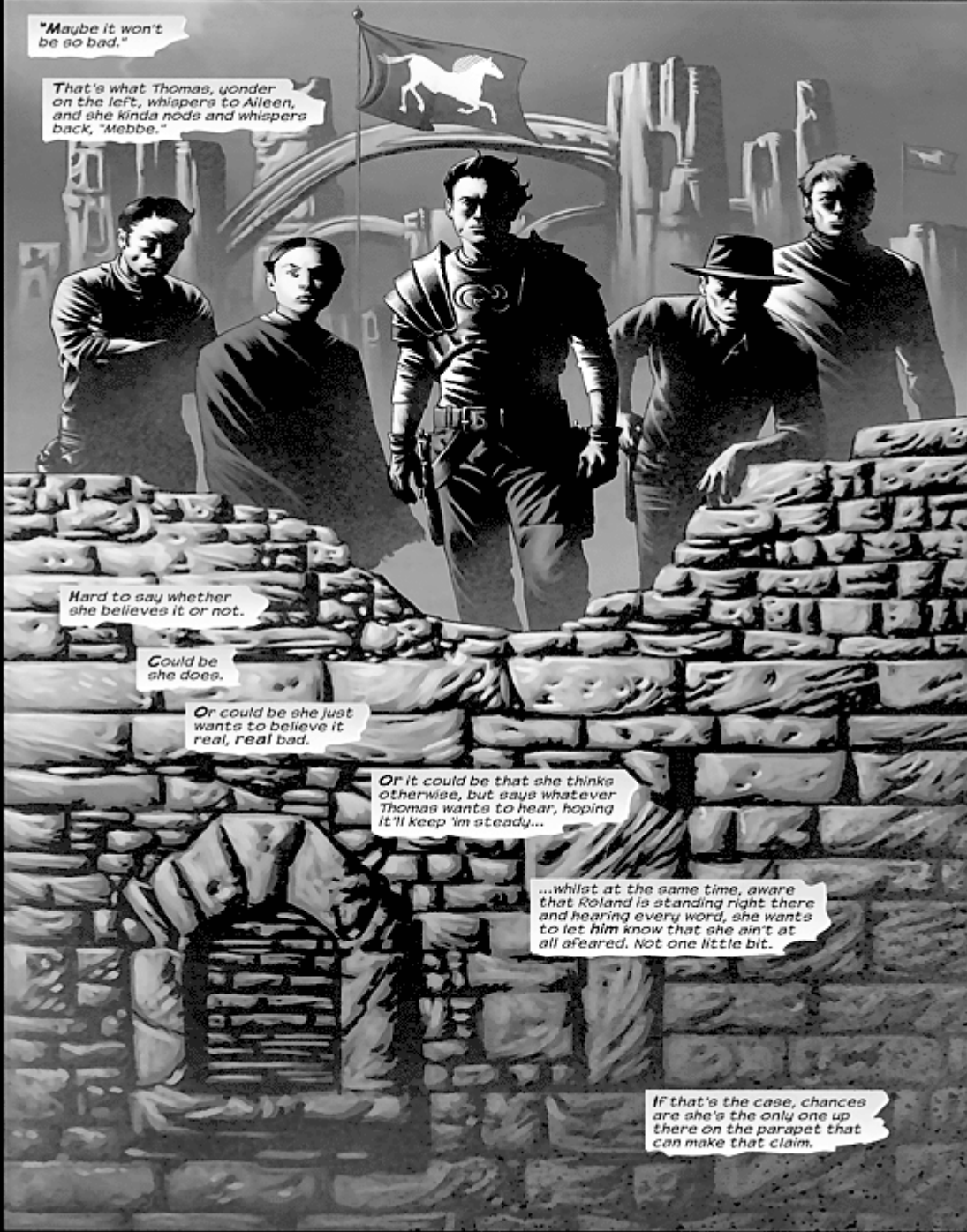
*Could be she does.*

*Or could be she just wants to believe it real, real bad.*

*Or it could be that she thinks otherwise, but says whatever Thomas wants to hear, hoping it'll keep 'im steady...*

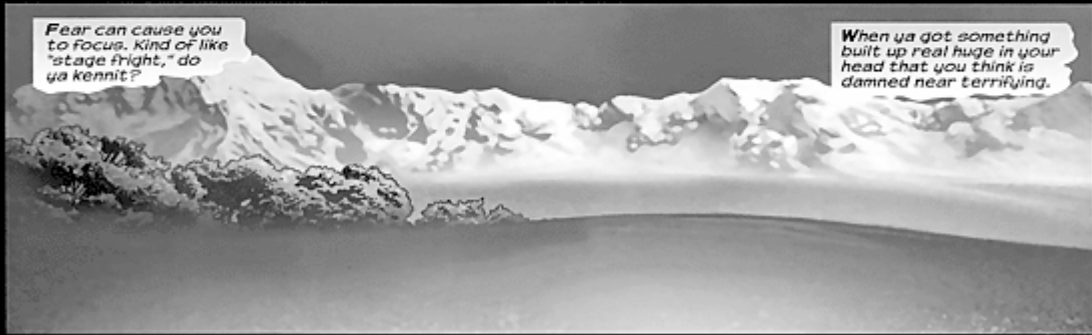
*...whilst at the same time, aware that Roland is standing right there and hearing every word, she wants to let him know that she ain't at all afeared. Not one little bit.*

*If that's the case, chances are she's the only one up there on the parapet that can make that claim.*



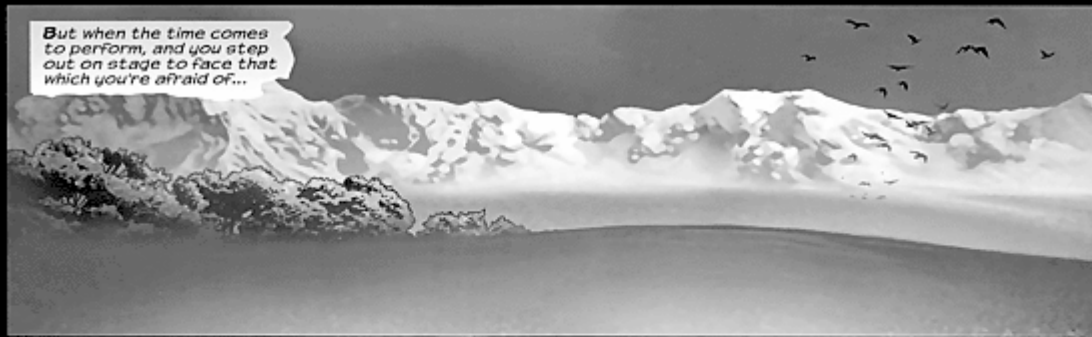


Yet fear can be useful, too. Roland knows that.

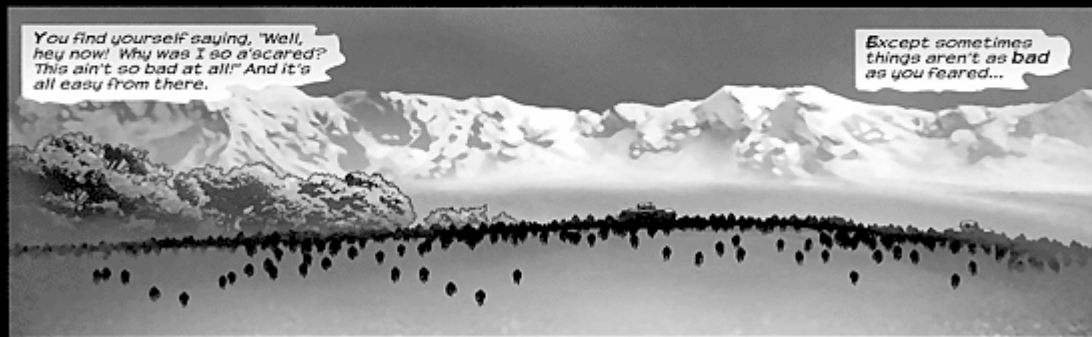


Fear can cause you to focus. Kind of like "stage fright," do ya kenneit?

When ya got something built up real huge in your head that you think is damned near terrifying.

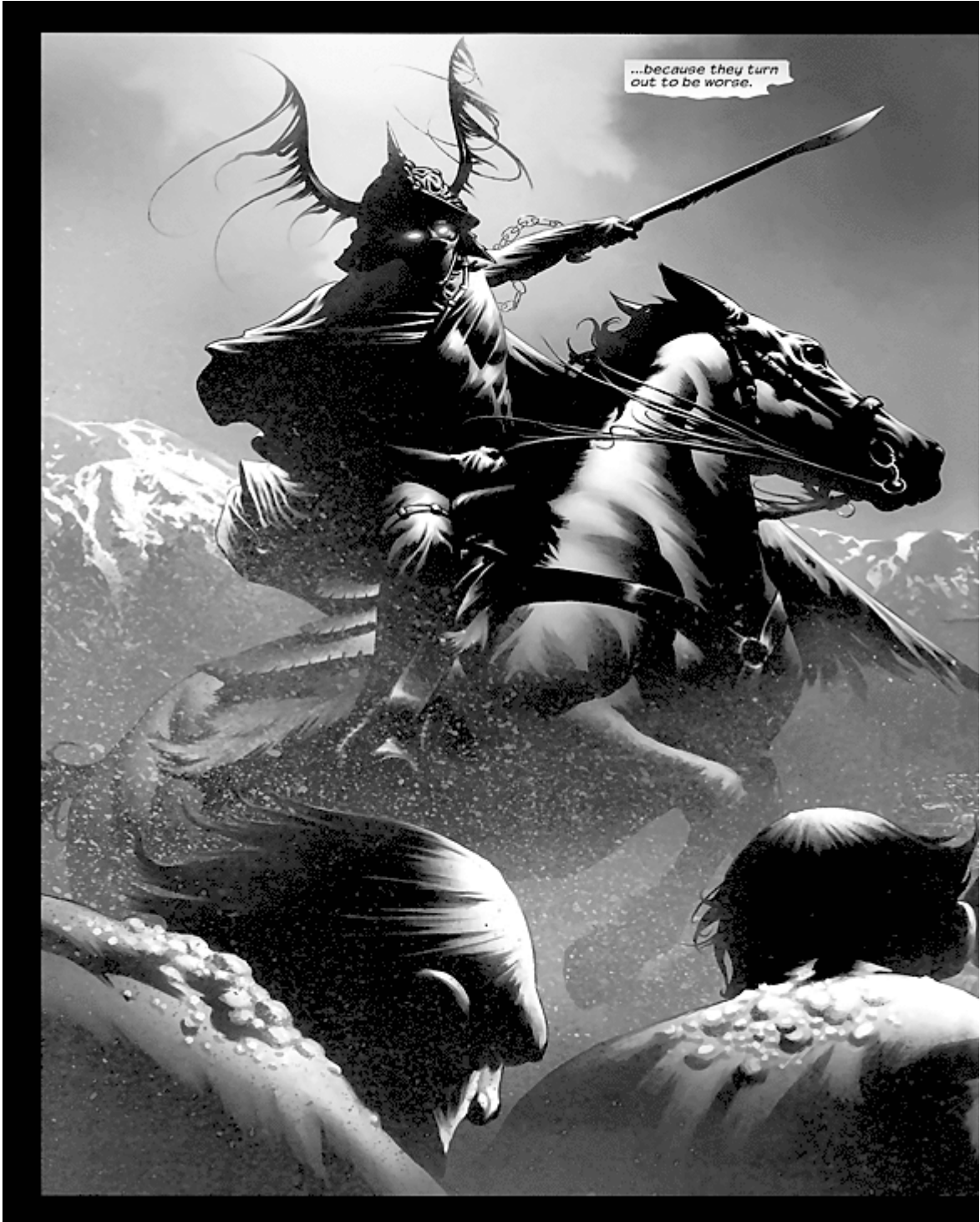


But when the time comes to perform, and you step out on stage to face that which you're afraid of...



You find yourself saying, "Well, hey now! Why was I so a'scared? This ain't so bad at all!" And it's all easy from there.

Except sometimes things aren't as bad as you feared...



...because they turn out to be worse.

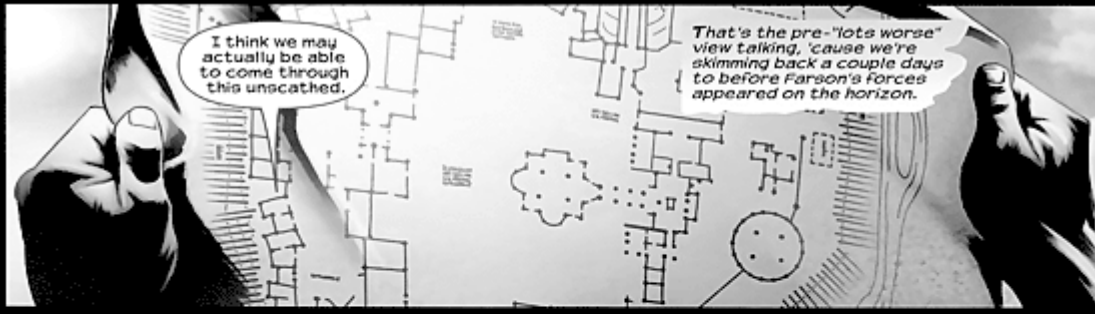
*Lots worse.*

*Ultimate  
nightmare  
worse.*

*Farson's assault  
on Gilead is one  
of those times.*







I think we may actually be able to come through this unscathed.

That's the pre-"lots worse" view talking, 'cause we're skimming back a couple days to before Farson's forces appeared on the horizon.



Seriously, Roland? You're not just saying that--

Seriously, Jamie. These plans of Arthur Eld's may be ancient, but they're as formidable today as ages ago.

So from where do the spears shoot out?



Right here, Thomas.

Careful! Don't set them off by accident!

Were that possible, we'd have been worm meat long before this.



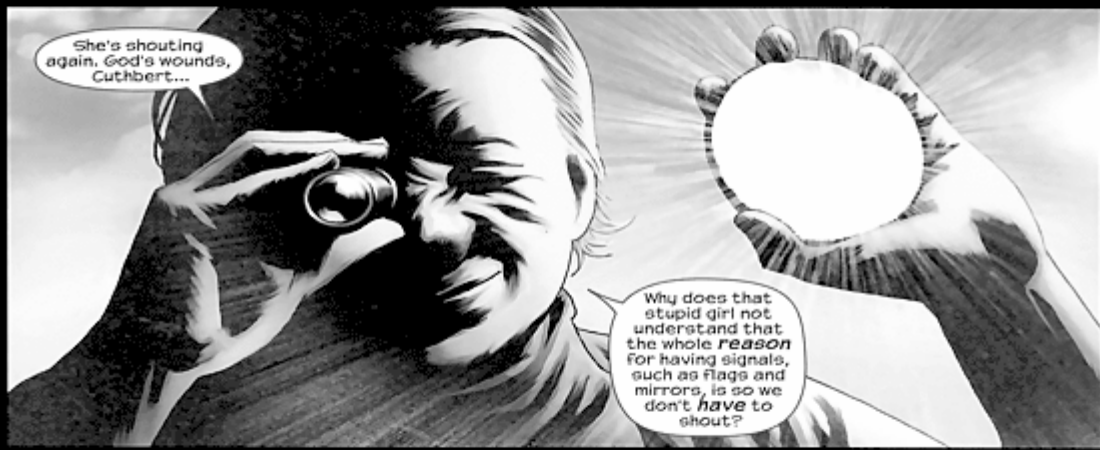
Aileen! How fares the signal brigade? And the "additional" troops?







Alain! Can you still see the flag?!



She's shouting again. God's wounds, Cuthbert...

Why does that stupid girl not understand that the whole *reason* for having signals, such as flags and mirrors, is so we don't *have* to shout?



Go easy on her, Alain. This is her first impending fight to the death.

Once she's survived a *few* such encounters, she'll develop into as experienced a battle-ready ass as you, I'll warrant.

I should certainly hope s--

Wait, what?



What did you just say to me--?

Alain, just...not now, all right? Please?

Do we have a problem here?

Well, that depends. Are you sanguine about having our lives depending upon antiquated, decrepit machinery that hasn't been maintained since well before our great-grandfathers suckled at their mothers' breasts?

Uhm...no. No, I'm not sanguine about that at all.

Then yes, we have a problem. But as long as we have two weeks to get things in order, we'll be fine.

Three days later...

"Cuthbert! Cuthbert,  
he's *signaling!*"



"The mutants  
have reached the  
first marker!"



*Cuthbert!*  
I said they've  
reached the  
marker!



By all means,  
you half-wit, keep  
*screaming* at me!  
Maybe your *voice*  
will jar loose  
the rust!





I'm *doing* my damned job! So *you* do y--



Oh, pus in a bucket.  
**Incoming!**



*The mortar shell strikes way too close, taking off the top of the tower and sending rubble spilling down and jolting the whole structure...*

*...and, by a stroke of luck--*



**Alain!** That shook the lever loose!

Good thinking, getting them to shoot at you!

Uhm... thanks... I guess.

*Like the yawning gateways  
to hell they were intended  
to emulate...*



*...the Pits open wide. Just  
like that, hundreds upon  
hundreds of mutants and  
soldiers tumble down,  
down...*

*...to be impaled upon  
stakes that have been  
waiting for his opportunity  
for centuries. A development  
to which John Farson reacts  
with his customary  
compassion...*





Well. *That* was interesting.

They're...they're *gone!* The entire front lines are gone!

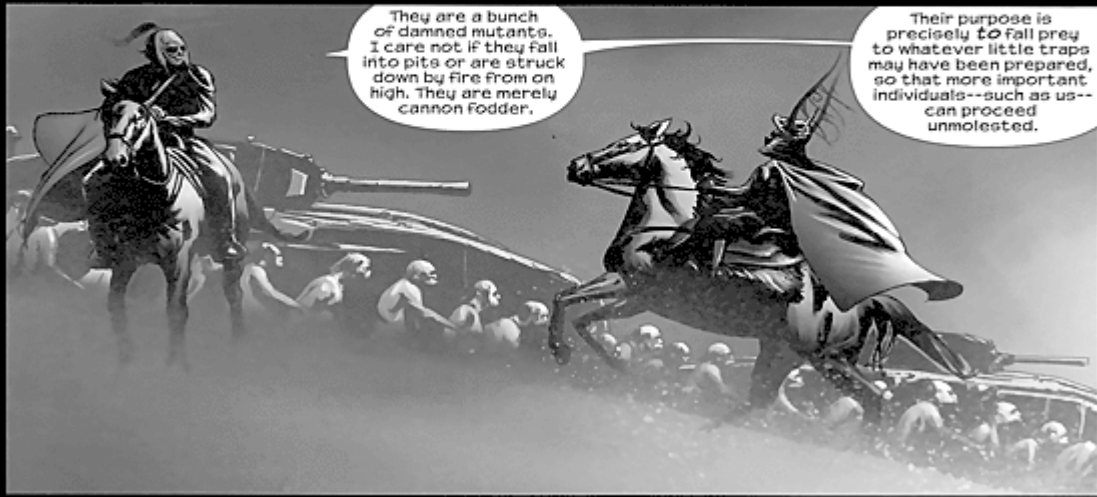
*Thank you, Marten.* Were my eyes failing me, that observation would have been of some use.



Lord Farson! They had some manner of booby traps rigged! Vast pits that--

And thank *you*, General Grissom. It appears my closest advisors have chosen to spend the battle informing me of the patently obvious.

I shall respond in kind:

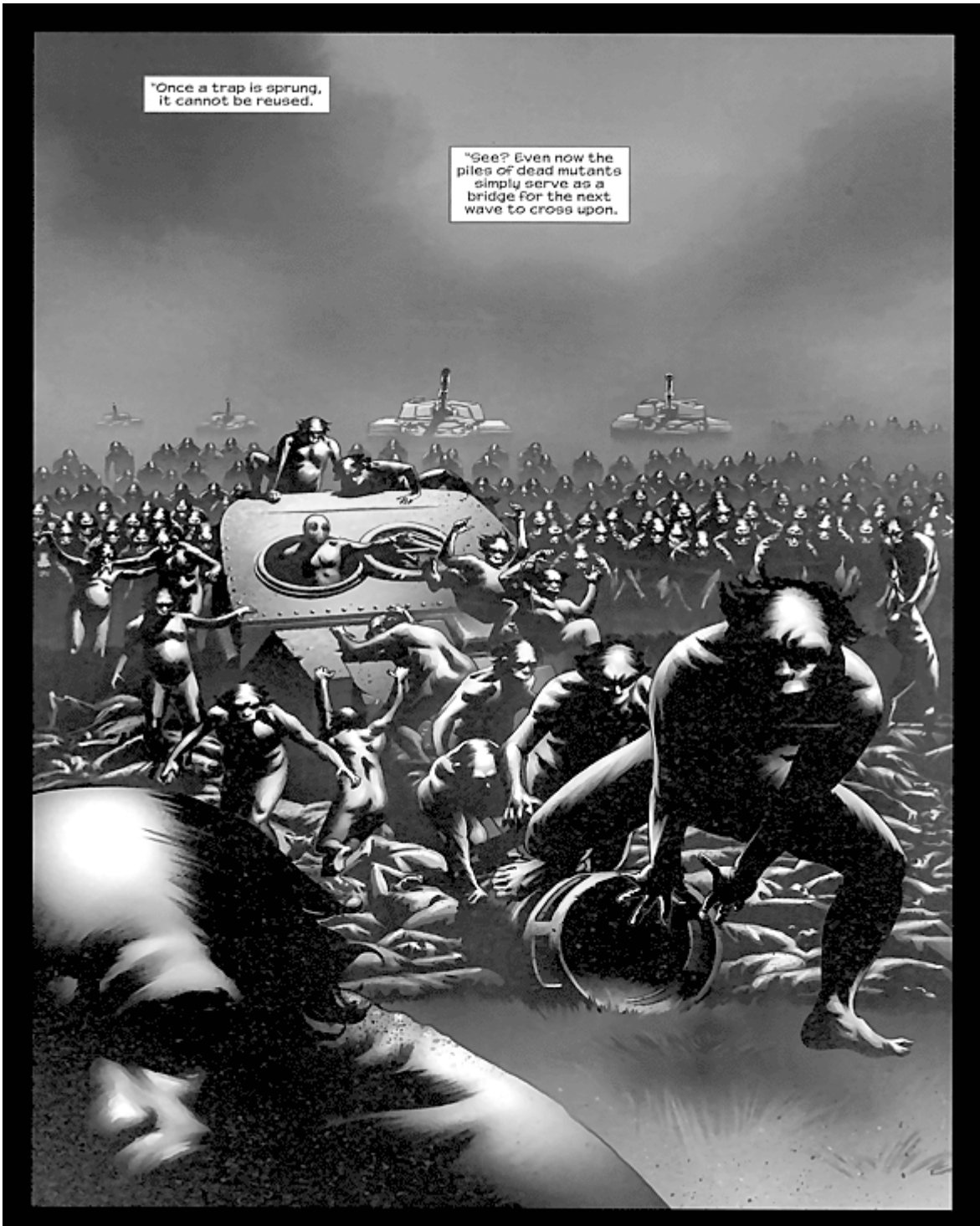


They are a bunch of damned mutants. I care not if they fall into pits or are struck down by fire from on high. They are merely cannon fodder.

Their purpose is precisely *to* fall prey to whatever little traps may have been prepared, so that more important individuals--such as us--can proceed unmolested.

"Once a trap is sprung,  
it cannot be reused.

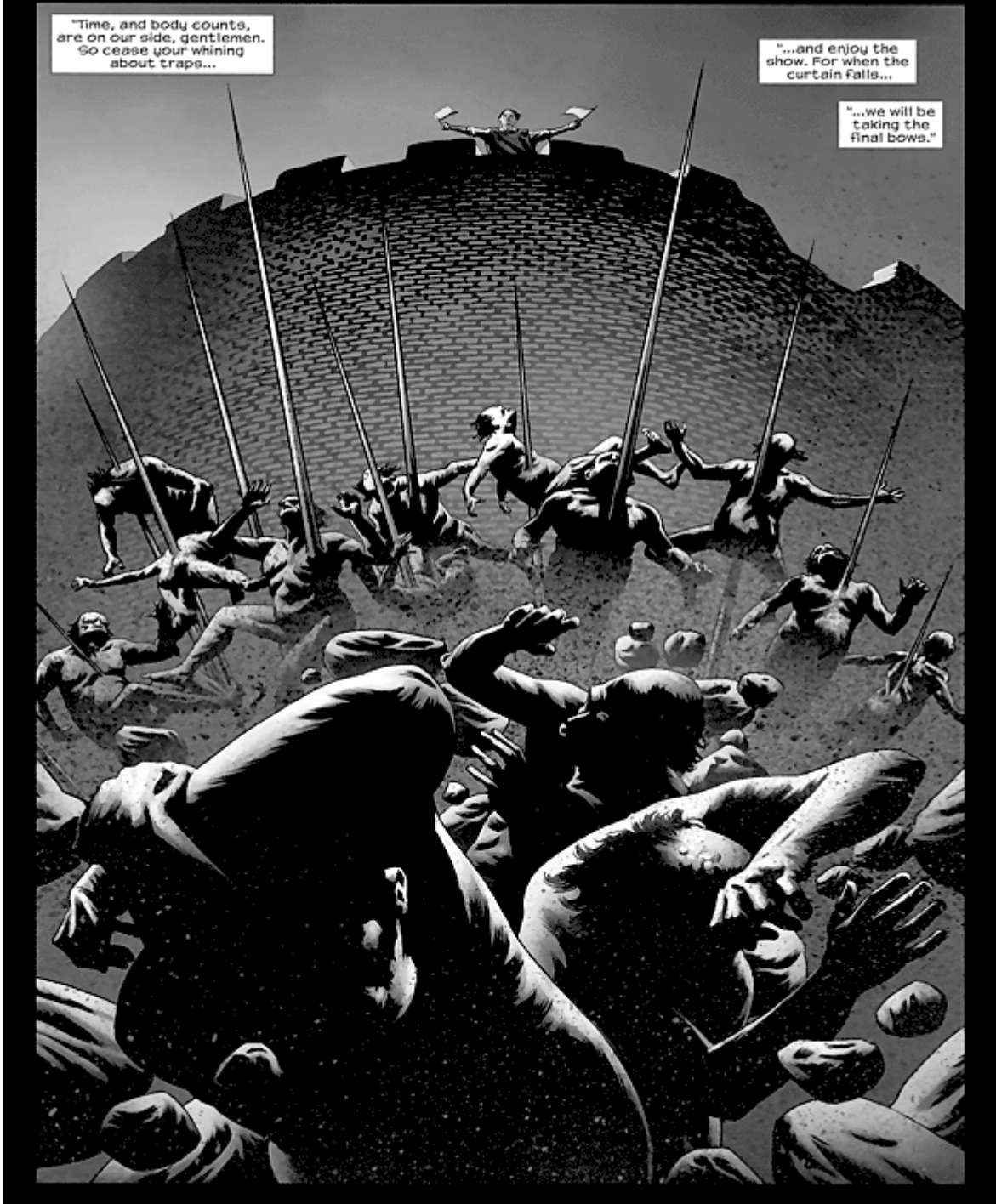
"See? Even now the  
piles of dead mutants  
simply serve as a  
bridge for the next  
wave to cross upon.



"Time, and body counts,  
are on our side, gentlemen.  
So cease your whining  
about traps..."

"...and enjoy the  
show. For when the  
curtain falls..."

"...we will be  
taking the  
final bows."





They're going to try and breach the walls!

Make every shot count! For the lives of the mothers that bore you and the faces of the fathers who smiled upon you--



Don't shoot  
until you see the  
whites in their  
eyes--and when  
you do--

--let their  
faces run red  
with blood!

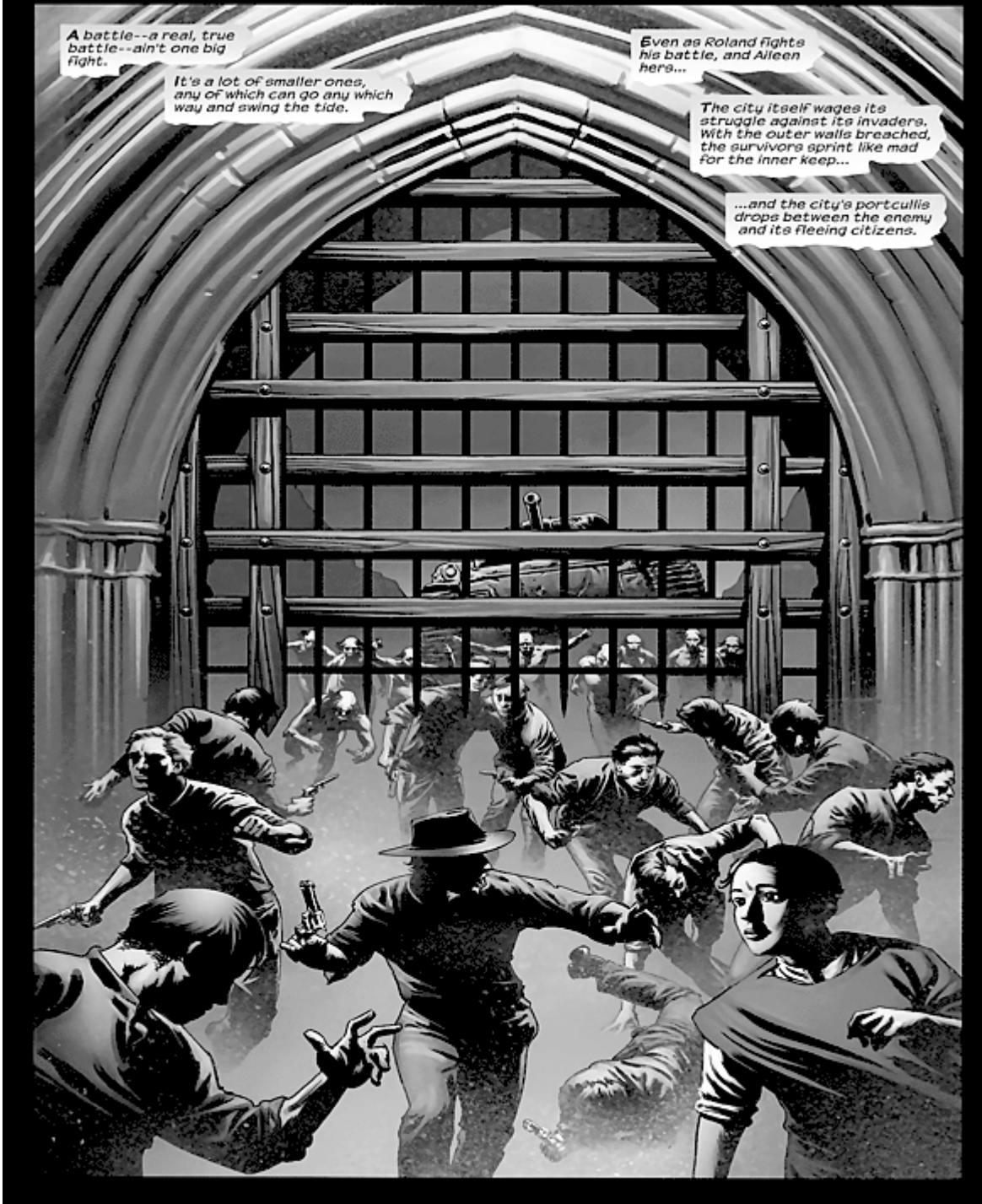
A battle--a real, true  
battle--ain't one big  
fight.

It's a lot of smaller ones,  
any of which can go any which  
way and swing the tide.

Even as Roland fights  
his battle, and Aileen  
here...

The city itself wages its  
struggle against its invaders.  
With the outer walls breached,  
the survivors sprint like mad  
for the inner keep...

...and the city's portcullis  
drops between the enemy  
and its fleeing citizens.



Three days earlier, of course, no mutants were assailing Gilead. Three days earlier...

...there was still hope.



The blades should come out here, then.



I swear, I'm never going to look at this garden the same way again. Blood will be its new water, and decaying bodies its fertilizer.

Roland... speak truly:



Do you believe you're ever going to be able to look at this garden in any way again?

I don't know what you mean.



Yes, you do.

You mean do I believe we'll survive?

Aye.



Absolutely.

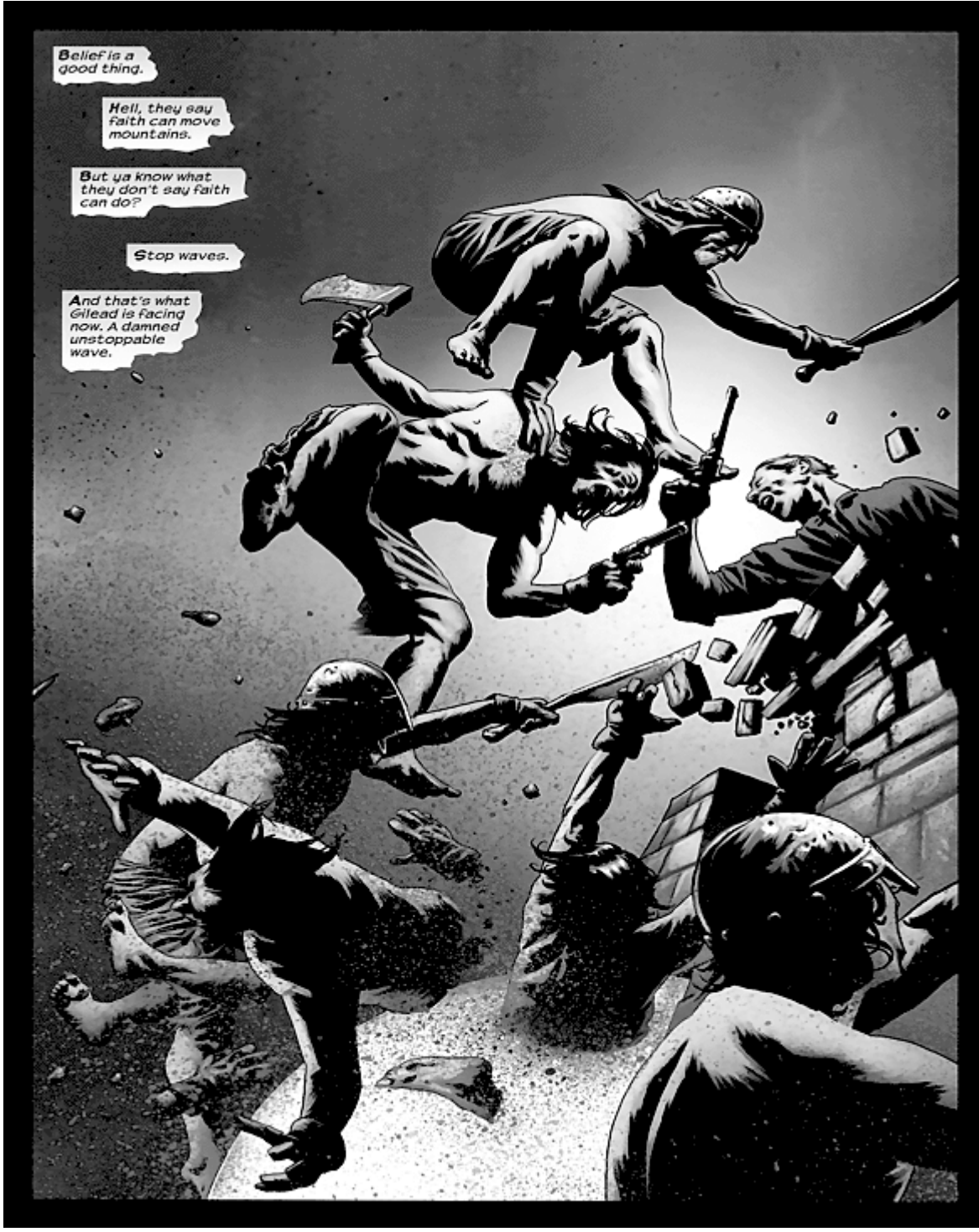
*Belief is a good thing.*

*Hell, they say faith can move mountains.*

*But ya know what they don't say faith can do?*

*Stop waves.*

*And that's what Gilead is facing now. A damned unstoppable wave.*









The young dinh seems to have a tendency to shoot off his mouth.

*Grissom!*  
Shoot off his mouth *for* him!  
And while you're at it--

Shoot him off the walls, along with the rest of his damned gunslingers, and take the walls with them!



The bazookas spit out death, a single shell carrying more destruction than a hundred bullets from the gunslingers could inflict.

Down come the inner walls, bringing the last fleeting hopes of the city's defenders with them.



The air is thick with smoke and debris and the smell of death is everywhere.



Meanwhile the damnable traitors who were responsible for, among other deaths, that of Alain's father Chris...



...make their way through the streets of Gilead, descending down, down...

...down to the sanctuary where the women and children are huddled.



Is...is it over?



For you?  
Yes.  
Yes, it is.





Hail,  
Roland! Dinh  
of Gilead...



...or should  
we say...*last* dinh  
of Gilead.



Who would have thought *this*  
sorry lot would be the last stand  
of the mighty gunslingers?



It shall be  
poetic justice,  
then. With your  
city in flames...  
...let you  
share the manner  
of its death.

PFFFFFFT



It's out of fuel?! You let it run out of--

Shut up! Ah...

Hail... Roland? Renowned for his mercy and--



BLAM BLAM  
BLAM BLAM BLAM  
BLAM BLAM  
BLAM BLAM BLAM



Idiots.

If I thought for a moment that such as *these* had anything to do with my father's death, I'd likely shoot *myself* from *shame*.



Christ  
and the Man-  
Jesus...

That's...  
why they were  
out of fuel. They  
used up all their  
flames on...



As they walk through a  
sanctuary that proved  
to be anything but,  
he says nothing more.



Why should he?  
What else is there  
to say?

*Especially when  
the flag of John  
Farson, flying  
above the  
remains of  
Gilead...*

*...says it all.*



THE END



## PLANNING THE FALL OF GILEAD

Of all the Dark Tower comic books that I've plotted so far, Issues 5 and 6 of *Fall of Gilead* were the most difficult to complete. The reason? In these two issues I had to describe the collapse of Roland's beloved home city—one of the most significant and formative experiences of Roland's youth—but in the Dark Tower novels, details about this battle are few. Although the Fall of Gilead radically altered the course of Roland's life and in many ways initiated his wanderings across Mid-World, Roland tells us next to nothing about the collapse of his homeland. What battle tactics did Farson use when he besieged the city? How did Roland and his friends defend the townsfolk once their elders were dead? And most importantly of all, how did

our *tel* escape with their lives when their attackers so vastly outnumbered them? Although I returned to the novels over and over, I found little there to help me reconstruct that catastrophic series of events.

As I hope my fellow Dark Tower junkies will attest, most of the significant occurrences that we've covered so far in our comics were preordained. The plot of *The Gunslinger Born* was adapted from *Wizard and Glass*, which is Book IV of the Dark Tower series. Although I needed to draw upon scenes from *The Gunslinger* (Book I) in order to fill in some background information, the tale of Roland's trip to Hambry and of his doomed love affair with beautiful Susan Delgado had already been told in great detail by the Master himself.

The story recounted in *The Long Road Home* was also based on established events. After our *tel*'s shootout with Farson's followers and the death of the Big Coffin Hunter Eldred Jonas, our friends galloped back to Gilead pursued by Clay Reynolds and the surviving Hambry traitors. But unlike the earlier adventures where Roland remained firmly in control, during that long





trip across the Xay River and through Mid-World's forests, Alain and Cuthbert were forced to show their devotion and bravery. While Alain and Cuthbert carried Roland's inert body homeward, Roland's consciousness was trapped within the evil seeing sphere known as Maerlyn's Grapefruit. (And as Stephen King assured me during an email conversation, much could have happened during Roland's sojourn that he later forgot to confide to his *tet*-mates!)

The third installment of our tale began with our *tet*'s triumphant return to Gilead, but soon enough the meaning of the title *Treachery* became obvious. While Roland and his friends were battling the Good Man's followers in Hambry, Roland's mother took refuge in a women's retreat in Debaria. And though she'd initially made that journey to pay penance for betraying her husband and her city, she soon returned to the

arms of her treacherous lover, Marten Broadcloak (aka Walter O'Dim). From there, her fate was sealed.

To please Marten, Gabrielle agreed to murder her husband with a poisoned knife smuggled to her by Farson's nephew, who entered Gilead dressed as a wandering musician. But thanks to a *glam* thrown by Maerlyn's Grapefruit, Gabrielle didn't succeed in her plan but was instead killed by her son Roland. (And for those of you who are interested, the subplot in which Farson's nephew was murdered by Cort for cheating at riddles arose from an interesting intersection of events recounted in the novels. I knew that Farson's nephew had entered Gilead dressed as a minstrel, but I also knew that Cort—who took his riddling matches very seriously—once murdered a wandering minstrel for cheating. The synchronicity was too good to pass up . . .)

Given what had happened so far, beginning *The Fall of Gilead* wasn't so scary. Since *Treachery* had ended with the death of Gabrielle Deschain, I knew that *The Fall of Gilead* had to begin with Roland's arrest. Since in the books we're never told that Farson's nephew died in the city, I thought I could bring him back to life again by adapting one of my favorite scenes from *The Gunslinger*, where Walter O'Dim resurrects a dead weedeater in the town of Tull. Although this may have seemed like an odd choice to some readers out there, I hoped that by including this scene I could show new Dark Tower fans something that longtime Constant Readers already knew—namely that Walter had power over death as well as life.

Next on my agenda was reintroducing Sheemie, since in Book VII of our saga Roland tells us that Sheemie found his way to Gilead before the city's fall. After that, I had to turn to murder and mayhem. First on the chopping block was my old friend Cort, who had to be poisoned. After that, I had to pick off all of the elder gunslingers, including Steven Deschain. Steven's death scene was particularly tricky, since Roland makes it very clear in the books that the identity of his father's murderer was never discovered. (And by the way, the brilliant idea of having Steven's murderer fall into Gilead's moat was the brainchild of Richard Isanove.) So, up until the end of Issue 4, I felt fairly confi-

dent that I was following the forward momentum of *ka's* wheel, and weaving a plot that retained the vision of the original books. However the final battle was already beginning to loom and I was getting nervous.

Luckily for me, sometimes *ka* is kind. Although I knew very little about the fall of Gilead, I *did* have copious notes which I'd copied down during Marvel's initial meeting with Stephen King. And though during that meeting Stephen didn't describe the battle of Gilead specifically, he *was* very clear about how well equipped Farson's men should be at this point in the game. And I must tell you, the odds against our *let's* survival were pretty appalling. One glance at my notes told me that Roland and his friends—a few apprentices and newly fledged gunslingers armed only with handguns and backed up by inexperienced merchants and farmers—didn't stand a chance against the advanced weaponry that Farson's hoards wielded. But I also knew that our young *dinh* was both valiant and resourceful. From many years of studying Roland's battle strategies, I knew our hero would come up with *something*. The problem was, what would it be?

Sleepless night followed sleepless night. What was I going to do? I wanted to weave a plot that illustrated Roland's resourcefulness, but which would also tie together the many loose story strands that hung in tatters. I



couldn't let Peter and Richard down, but I was stumped. Again and again I returned to the fact that—although he was outnumbered—Roland was on home ground and that *had* to give him some advantage over his enemies, however slight. But what could that advantage be? Every gunslinger had to remember the faces of his fathers, but didn't those fathers also have a responsibility to their sons? Roland's father Steven was dead, but couldn't he attempt something—some final valiant act—that would help his beloved heir? And what about Arthur Eld, that brilliant strategist? During his lifetime he had fought to secure All-World against harriers and mutants. Couldn't Mid-World's Once and Future King have anticipated an attack much like the one that was about to take place?

From these midnight musings, the idea for Gilead's secret defenses was born. How else could Roland and his friends inflict some damage on the enemy and yet still escape with their lives? And given the gunslingers' code of honor, our young friends *had* to try to rescue their townsfolk, even if that rescue effort was doomed to fail. (And as for that failure, I couldn't let Roland or his friends go valiantly down with the ship, since I knew that their most important stand against the enemy was yet to come. . .)

Believe it or not, the first draft of Gilead's defenses was drawn up on a napkin in an airport café. I'd already handed in the outlines for *Fall of Gilead* issues 1-4 and the entire volume of *The Battle of Jericho Hill*, but the story of Gilead's final stand had hitherto eluded me. Time was short, Richard and Peter were desperate to get started, yet I was still chewing my nails.

Over a really bad cup of coffee, I started to confide my worries to my husband. How could so few poorly armed boys defend themselves against so many well-equipped madmen? Was it possible that the city itself could



have some traps in it? And if so, what could those traps be? Wracking my brain, I recalled the battle scenes of every Hollywood epic I had ever watched. I thought of great Westerns, like John Wayne's version of *The Alamo*. I went back over *The Lord of the Rings*, and the many fantasy and sci-fi novels I'd read over the years. And I also thought about ancient history. How did people defend themselves when they were besieged in their castles for months or even years at a time?

Luckily for me, my husband is a big fantasy and science fiction fan too, and he spent his early years



devouring books about ancient and medieval history. Between the two of us we made quite an inky mess of that napkin. We figured out what defenses Arthur Eld might have built into his city, and how they might have worked. We asked ourselves what challenges our young friends would face when they tried to use such rusty machinery and what might go wrong. How could they maximize the traditional defenses such as boiling pitch, and how could they pretend that their numbers were much greater than they actually were? And most of all, how much time would Arthur Eld's traps buy our friends, and how much damage would they let us inflict upon Farson's hoards?

Whether or not I succeeded in my attempts to defend Gilead is up to you, but please be gentle in your assessment. I did my best to remember the faces of my fathers and mothers, and most of all, I tried to stand and be true to our favorite *kas-ka Gan*<sup>1</sup>, Stephen King.


Believe me, it's not easy trying to second-guess Roland's cruel ka. But my job is to set our hero on the long road to Jericho Hill, and that I have done. Unfortunately for Roland, the

<sup>1</sup>Prophet of Gan, or singer of Gan.

road ahead of him is arduous, and the fate that awaits him is even more painful.

May your days be long upon the earth. I've done my best to give our *ka-tet* a few more days as well.

All the Best—

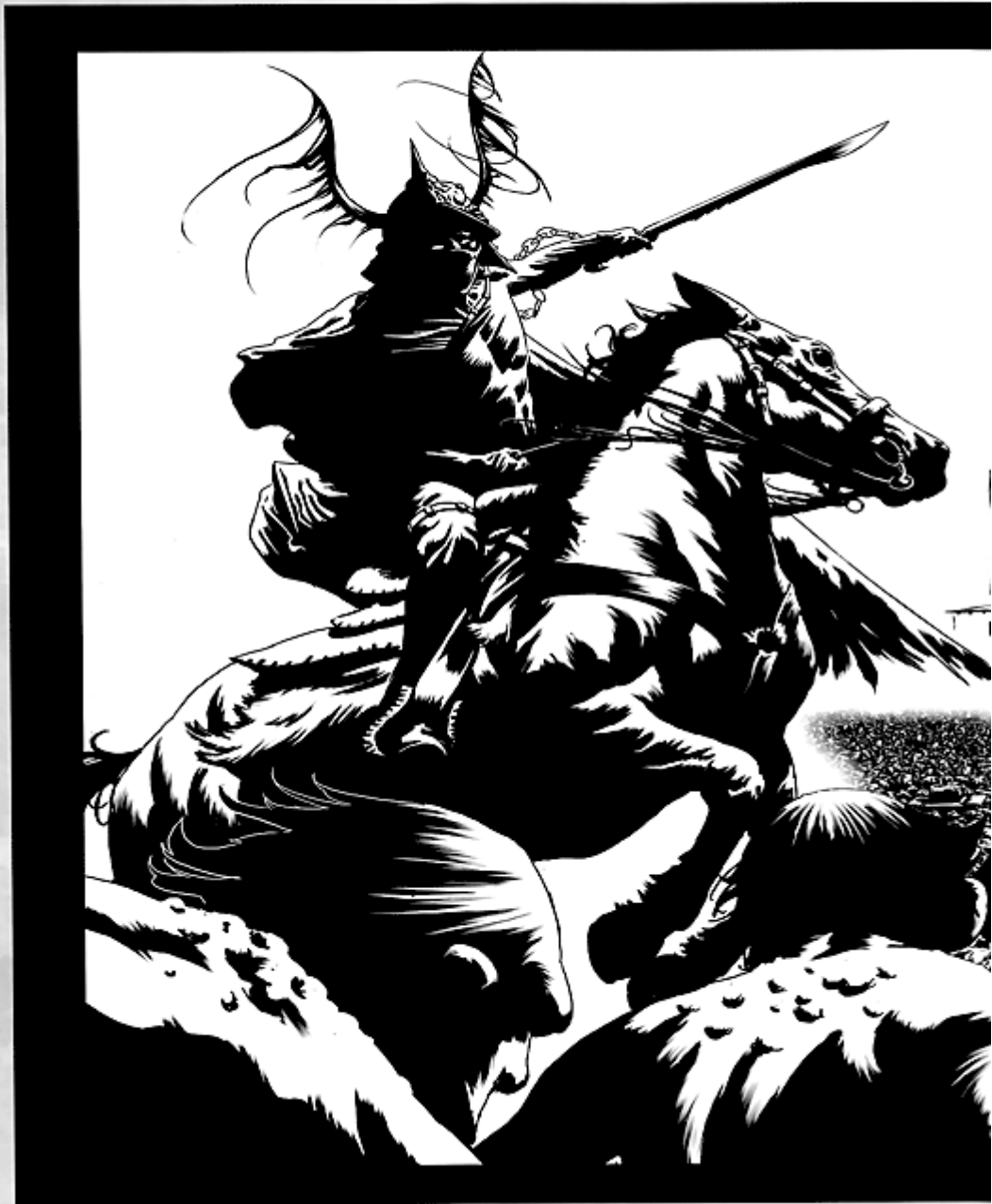
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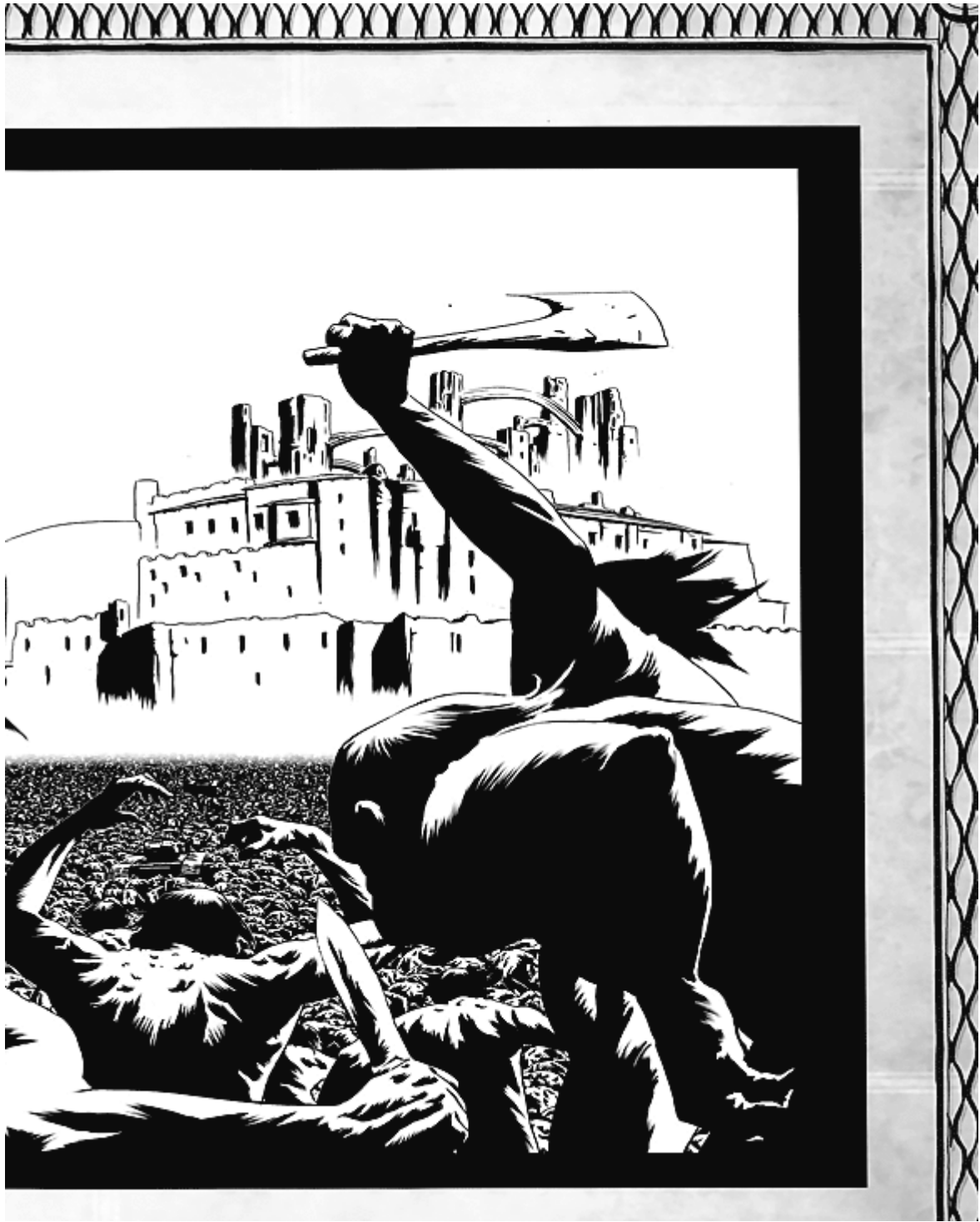
WRITTEN BY:  
ROBIN FURTH  
ILLUSTRATED BY:  
DENNIS CALERO

Veteran Marvel artist Tom Raney (*Annihilation: Conquest*; *Black Widow: Deadly Origin*) does justice to the stoic Roland in this moody portrait of Mid-World's gunslinger. The final version was colored by Tom's wife and longtime coloring partner, Gina Going-Raney.

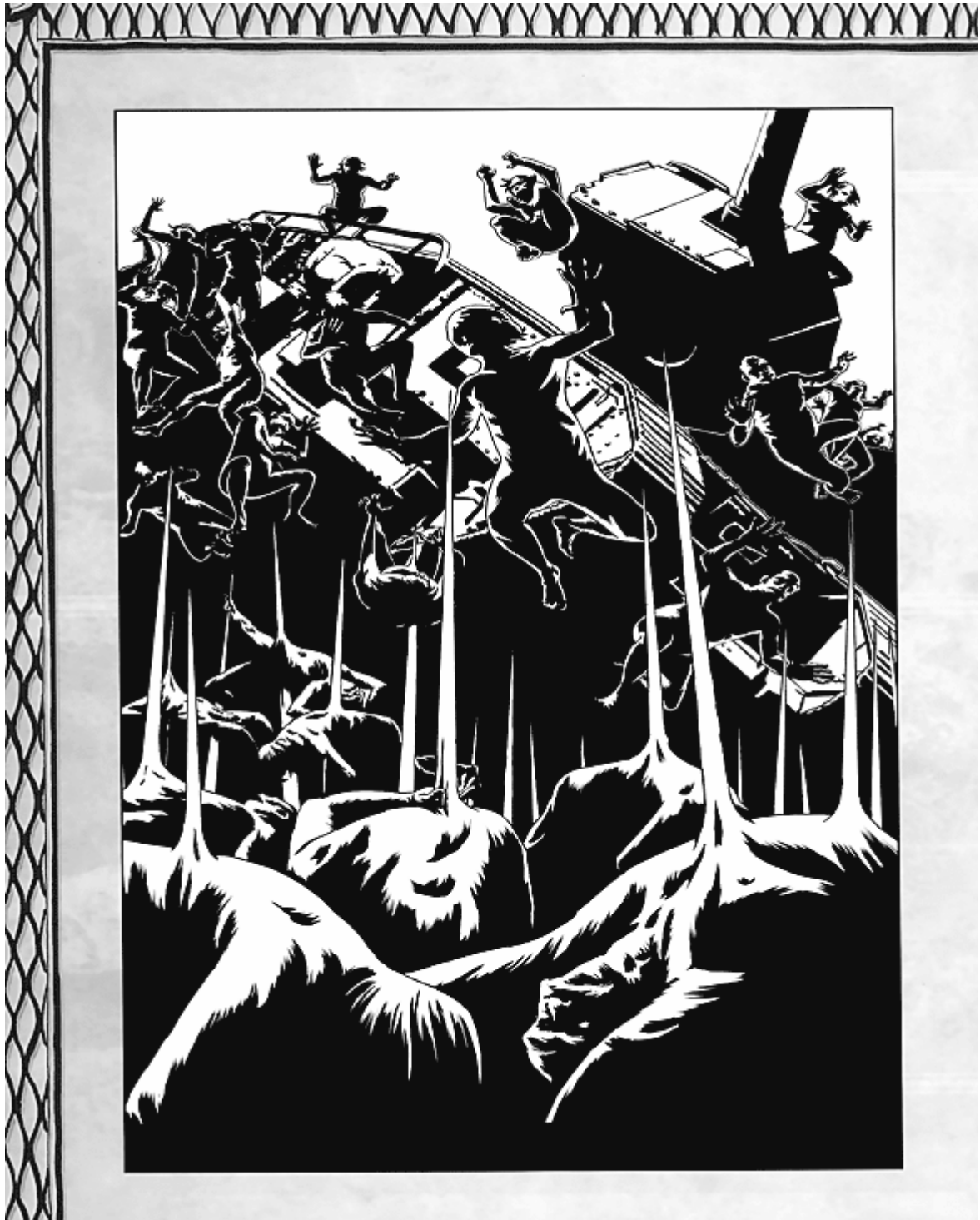


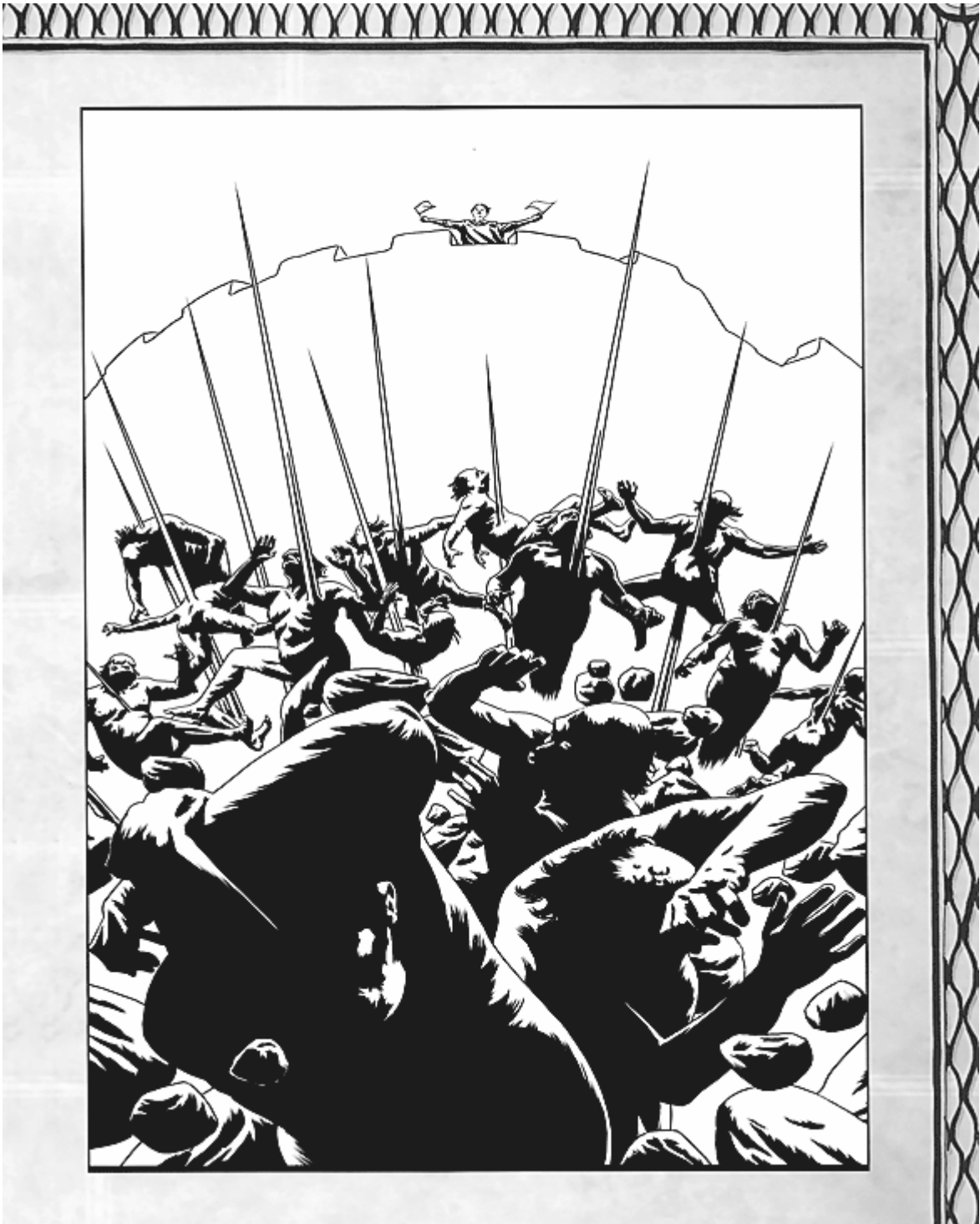
RICHARD ISANOVE'S BLACK AND WHITE ARTWORK. THE FINISHED VERSION OF THESE PAGES APPEARED EARLIER IN THE ISSUE.







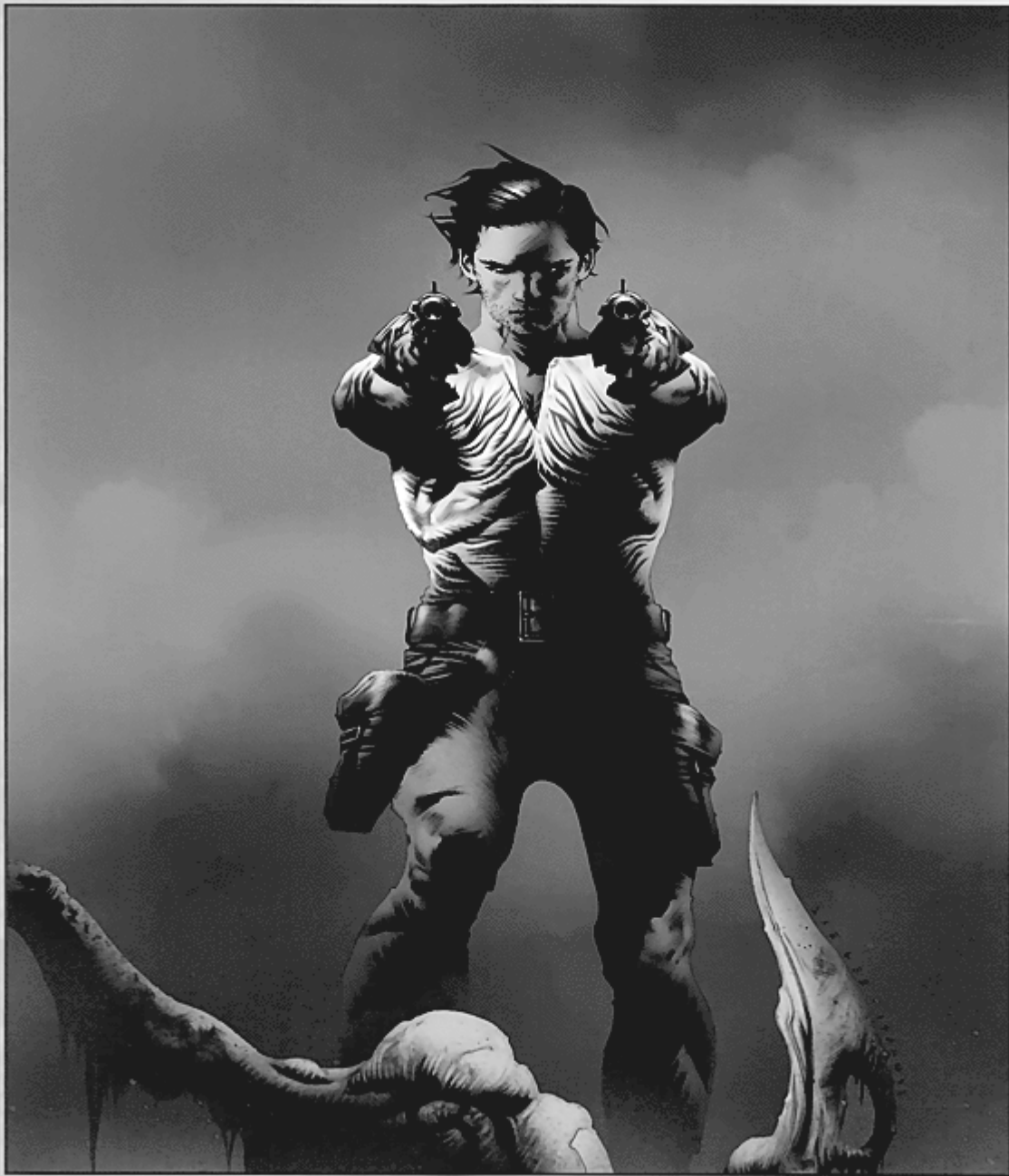




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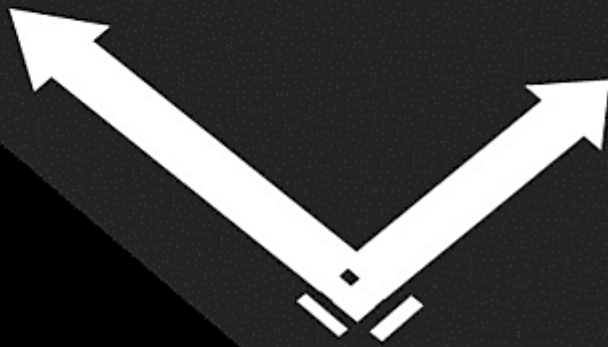
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