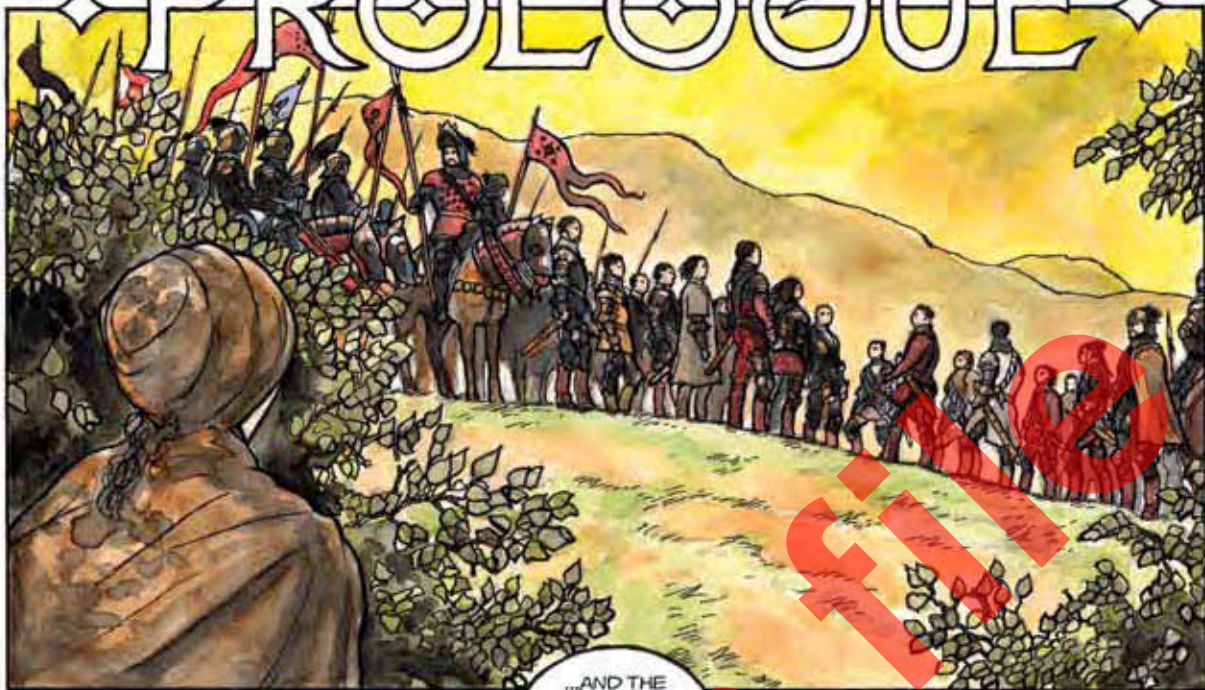


# PROLOGUE







FORTY, PERHAPS FIFTY MILES IN TWO DAYS...

YOU MARCH US SO FAST, DREAD CAPTAIN.

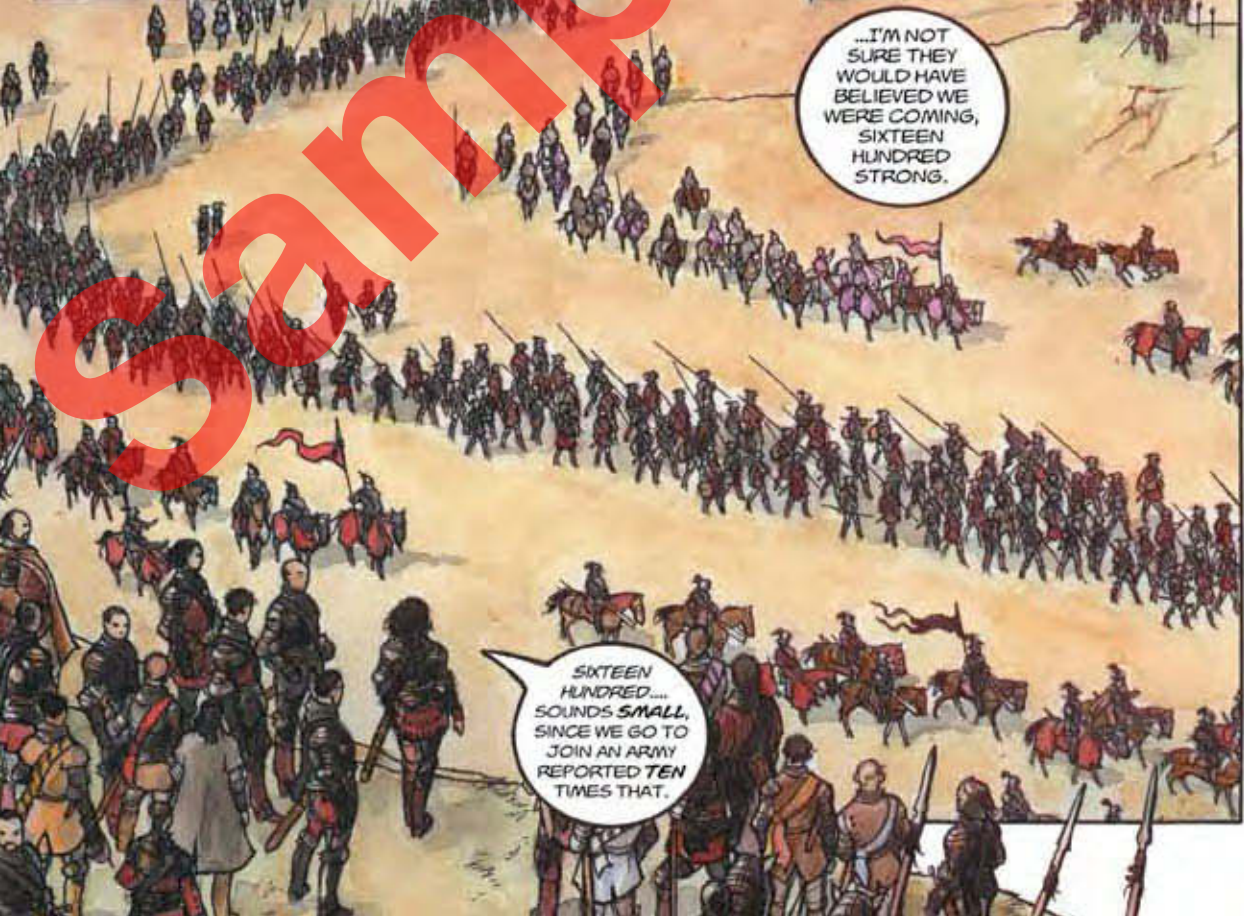
IF THE FOOT CAN KEEP THIS PACE, CERTAINLY YOUR BANNERMEN CAN DO SO AS WELL, NOBLE MAGNUS.

GEROVIC... WHAT DID PAVEL THINK OF THE HIGH KING AND HIS COURT?



MY LORD DECLARED AWAIN A FAIR KING, AND THE GRAND DUKE A TRUE VETERAN...

...BUT THE WELCOME OF THE KING'S COURT WAS... UNCERTAIN. IF NOT FOR YOUR BROTHER'S WORDS...



...I'M NOT SURE THEY WOULD HAVE BELIEVED WE WERE COMING, SIXTEEN HUNDRED STRONG.

SIXTEEN HUNDRED.... SOUNDS SMALL, SINCE WE GO TO JOIN AN ARMY REPORTED TEN TIMES THAT.





AN ENVOY  
OF THE KING  
COMES TO  
GREET YOU,  
ONE LORD  
TOMAS.

A MINOR  
FUNCTIONARY OF  
THE COURT, SAID  
TO BE THE CROWN  
PRINCE'S MAN.

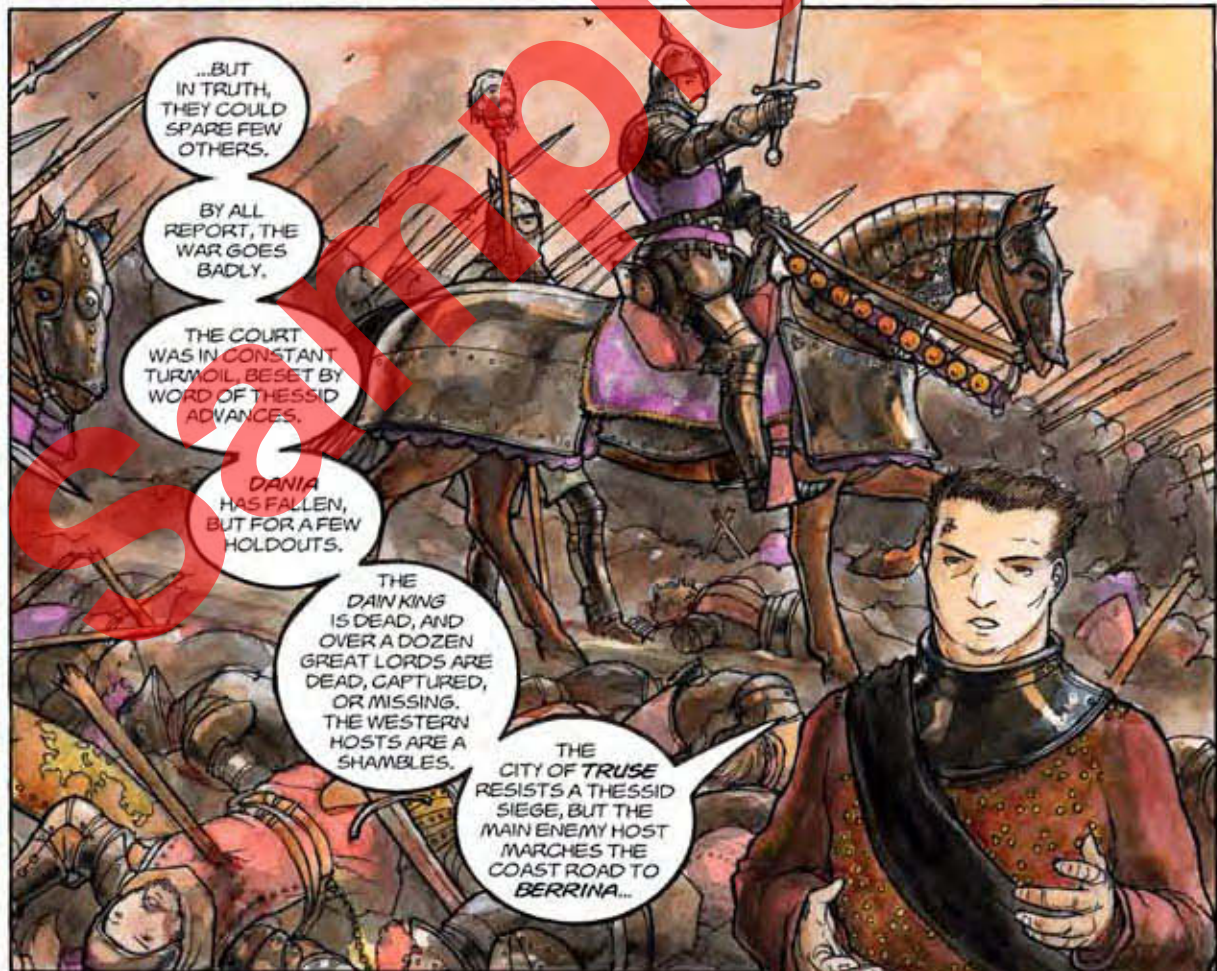
AN  
INSULT!



PERHAPS,  
WORD OF THE...  
UM, DEATH OF  
BRAN, AND OF THE  
AGALLITES, HAS  
REACHED  
THEM.

SOME  
ALREADY WHISPER  
THAT YOU ARE A  
PRETENDER, LIKE  
URECH OF PALATIA,  
DESERVING THE  
CENSURE OF THE  
SUN COURT.

THEY  
COMPARE  
ME TO THE  
USURPER...



...BUT  
IN TRUTH,  
THEY COULD  
SPARE FEW  
OTHERS.

BY ALL  
REPORT, THE  
WAR GOES  
BADLY.

THE COURT  
WAS IN CONSTANT  
TURMOIL, BESET BY  
WORD OF THESSID  
ADVANCES.

DANIA  
HAS FALLEN,  
BUT FOR A FEW  
HOLDOUTS.

THE  
DAIN KING  
IS DEAD, AND  
OVER A DOZEN  
GREAT LORDS ARE  
DEAD, CAPTURED,  
OR MISSING.  
THE WESTERN  
HOSTS ARE A  
SHAMBLE.

THE  
CITY OF TRUSE  
RESISTS A THESSID  
SIEGE, BUT THE  
MAIN ENEMY HOST  
MARCHES THE  
COAST ROAD TO  
BERRINA...





...SO THE KING MUST SPLIT HIS FORCES.

YES, PAVEL DOES NOT THINK THEY KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH US.

WE ARE TO WAIT BY AN-ANDRIA FOR WORD FROM THE GRAND DUKE, WHO COMMANDS THE NORTHERN HOST FOR THE KING.



I AM NOT IMPRESSED BY THE MIDDLE KINGDOMS SO FAR.

NORI!



NORI, IN TRUTH.

WHAT?

WE'RE BARELY A DAY OUT OF HAR KAMAS PASS AND ALREADY YOU WANT TO GO BACK?...



WHAT HAVE WE SEEN SO FAR?

A FEW VILLAGES? AN INN OR TWO?

AT LEAST WAIT UNTIL YOU GET TO SEE THERAPOLI....

OR PERHAPS A THESSID SOLDIER?

Pfeh. THE PEOPLE HERE SEEM DEAD INSIDE.

THEIR EYES ARE JOYLESS....















