

PARIS.

CROISSANT OR PAIN AU CHOCOLAT. ON THE FACE OF IT MIGHT BE A SIMPLE QUESTION, BUT IT SAYS A LOT ABOUT A PERSON...

LIKE PUTTING THE TEA BAG IN AFTER POURING THE WATER?

NO. THAT I CLASS A DEAL BREAKER...

LIKE HUMMING ALONG TO COLDPLAY?

MUSIC FOR BED WETTERS.

A LITTLE HARSH, MAYBE, BUT I'M NOT GOING TO ARGUE.

SO THIS GUY--HE DOES KNOW WE'RE COMING, DOESN'T HE?

OH, LOOK AT THAT, THERE'S THE EIFFEL TOWER.
WEIRD HOW IT ALWAYS SEEMS TO CREEP UP ON YOU LIKE THAT...

CONSTANTINE, DON'T CHANGE THE SUBJECT. I'M NOT ELEVEN ANYMORE.
WHO THE HELL IS THIS GUY WE'VE COME ALL THIS WAY TO SEE?

JACQUE HENRY, FRENCHMAN, IF YOU HONESTLY COULDN'T GUESS BY THAT NAME. AND WHO HE IS?
WELL, THAT'S A LONG STORY...

**L' OCCIDENT PETROLEUM CO.
ARABIQUE SURVEYING EXPEDITION, 1936.**

WITH THREE WEEKS BEHIND US, EACH STEP TAKES US FURTHER FROM WHAT I SO RECENTLY CONSIDERED CIVILIZATION.

AND WHERE LAKES AND RIVERS ONCE FLOWED, OUR ROUTE TRACES THE INVISIBLE FOOTSTEPS OF THE FRANKINCENSE TRADERS WHO CAME BEFORE US...

...IN PURSUIT OF THE LIQUEFIED FOSSILS OF CREATURES WHO MILLIONS OF YEARS AGO ROAMED THESE VERY PLAINS.

THE SMOKELESS FIRE

PART 1

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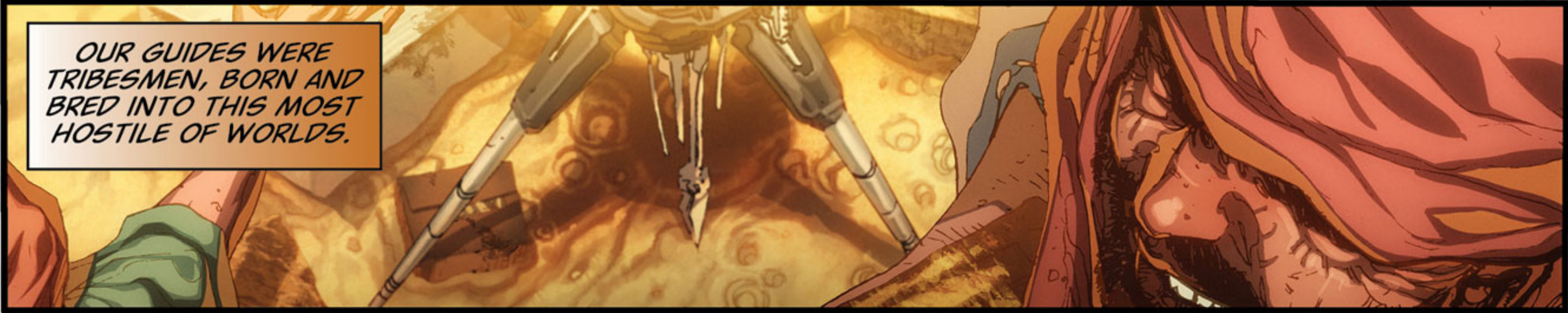
JOHN TOTLEBEN AND JAMIE DELANO & JOHN RIDGWAY

ONWARDS WE WANDER, AS FAR AS ANY MAN DARE VENTURE...

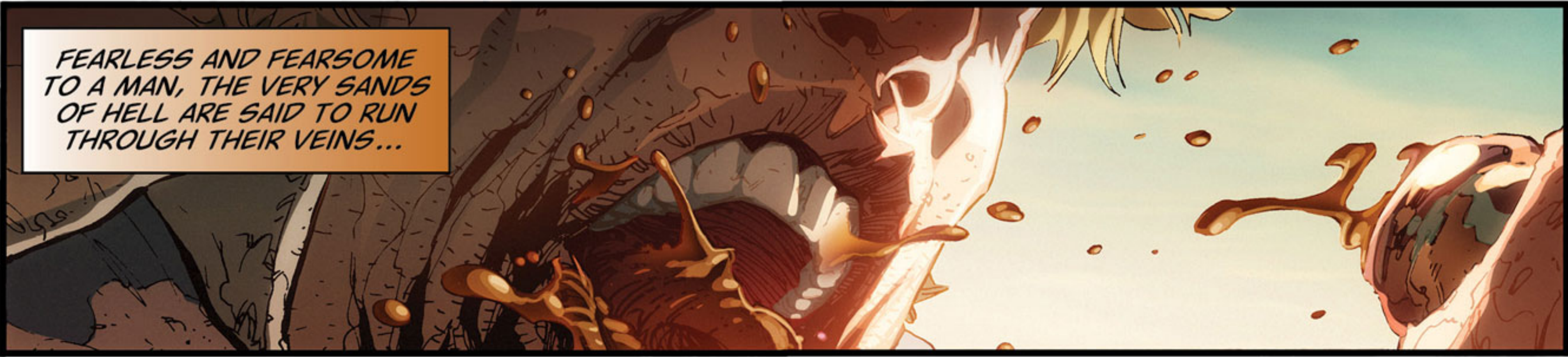
...FAR BEYOND WHERE ANY WHITE MAN HAS EVER SET FOOT.

AND DEEPER INTO THE UNKNOWN...





OUR GUIDES WERE TRIBESMEN, BORN AND BRED INTO THIS MOST HOSTILE OF WORLDS.



FEARLESS AND FEARSOME TO A MAN, THE VERY SANDS OF HELL ARE SAID TO RUN THROUGH THEIR VEINS...



BEYOND SIMPLE ADMIRATION, AND DESPITE MY INITIAL NAIVE RESERVATIONS, I HAVE GROWN TO MARVEL AT THEIR CAPACITY FOR FORTITUDE, ENDURANCE, AND SILENCE IN THE FACE OF HARDSHIPS...

...HARDSHIPS THAT ONLY MONTHS BEFORE, BACK IN THE COMFORT OF MY NATIVE PARIS, I COULD NEVER HAVE BELIEVED, LET ALONE CONCEIVED...

CAREFUL WITH THOSE CASES...



FILS DE PUTE!

I SAID CAREFUL...

DESPITE MONSIEUR BAPTISTE'S TREATMENT, THEIR NOBILITY RISES ABOVE ALL...



...AND I HAVE GROWN TO TRUST THIS MOTLEY AND GRIZZLED TROUPE WITH NOTHING LESS THAN MY LIFE.

BUT AS MY COMFORT AND ACCEPTANCE OF THIS ALIEN ENVIRONMENT GROWS...

... WITH EACH STEP I SENSE A PALPABLE ANXIOUSNESS GROWING AMONGST OUR GUIDES.

BUT WHEREAS MY FEAR WAS A FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN, THEIRS WAS A FEAR OF THE KNOWN.

A FEAR BORNE OF A KNOWLEDGE PASSED DOWN BETWEEN GENERATIONS...

... A KNOWLEDGE OF WHAT THEY BELIEVE LIES IN WAIT FOR US IN THE RUB' AL KHALI.

AND A FEAR OF THE CREATURE THEY BELIEVE DWELLS DEEP BELOW THE SANDS RUNNING BENEATH OUR FEET.

A FEAR OF A CREATURE KNOWN BY THESE MEN AS THE DJINN.



SERIOUSLY, CONSTANTINE, WE CAME TO PARIS TO COLD-CALL SOME OLD GUY YOU MET YEARS AGO IN A DIVE BAR?

HE SEEMED LONELY, IT WAS JUST ANOTHER GHOST STORY...

...WHAT CAN I SAY? I'VE GOT ONE OF *THOSE* FACES, PEOPLE TELL ME ALL SORTS.

AND AS LONG AS THERE'S ENOUGH TO DRINK YOU'RE ONLY TOO HAPPY TO HEAR THEM OUT...

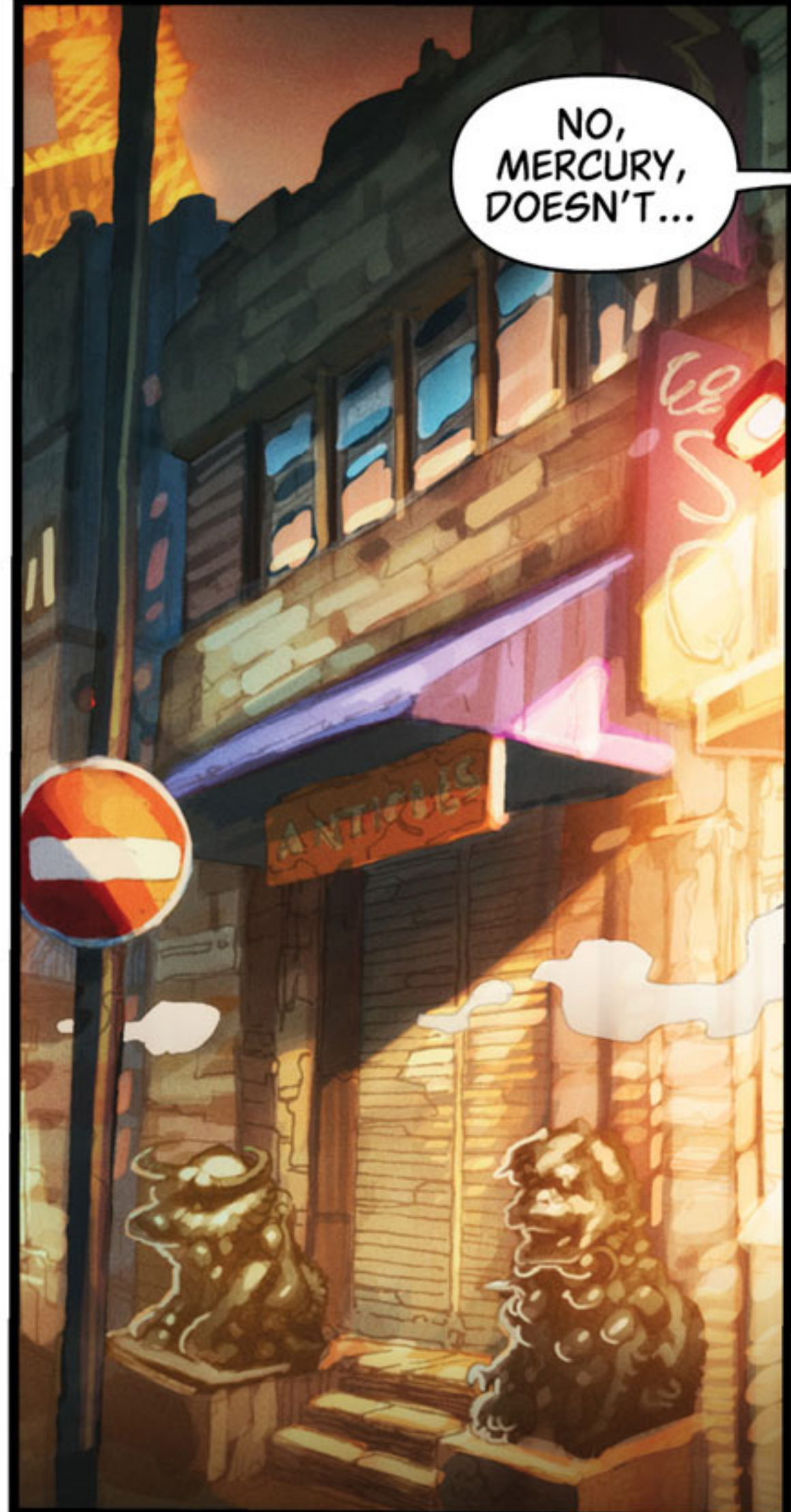


TOO RIGHT. THE BEST BOTTLE OF SINGLE MALT I EVER TASTED WAS UNCORKED BY SOMEONE TRYING TO SELL ME LOCH NESS MONSTER PUPS.

AND DID YOU BUY THEM?

COURSE NOT--EVERYONE KNOWS NESSIE HAS CALVES, NOT PUPS.

SHE DOES?



NO, MERCURY, DOESN'T...



...BECAUSE YOU'D HAVE TO BE ONE SANDWICH SHORT OF A PICNIC TO BELIEVE NESSIE WAS REAL.

SCREW YOU...

SORRY-- COULDN'T HELP MYSELF.



WE'RE GONNA SEE THIS FELLA HENRY, HE'S GONNA TELL US HOW TO DEFEAT THE DJINN, YOU GET TO KEEP YOUR PROMISE TO THE JOLLY GREEN GIANT, GET ABBY BACK SAFELY TO THE ROT AND WE ALL LIVE HAPPILY EVER AFTER.



AND I PINKY PROMISE TO TRY AND BE LESS OF AN ARSEHOLE...

I'LL ADD THAT TO THE LIST OF "SIX IMPOSSIBLE THINGS TO BELIEVE BEFORE BREAKFAST."