

This is Iskfold.



There was a time I'd have considered Iskfold beautiful. Now it feels like a war zone.





OFF, I'M EATING.

TAKE IT EASY.

THIS IS BUSINESS. YOU ARE MAGNUS, YES?

I ONLY ARRIVED IN TOWN THIS MORNING. NO ONE SHOULD KNOW ME.

PERHAPS YOUR REPUTATION PRECEDES YOU?



REPUTATIONS KILL. I PREFER TO BE ALONE AND UNKNOWN.

HOW MUCH PRIVACY, MAGNUS, WOULD THIS BUY YOU?

WHAT'S THAT FOR? YOU WANT SOMEONE KILLED?

NOT AT ALL! GOOD HEAVENS, I'M NOT TALKING ABOUT MURDER. I'M TALKING ABOUT AN ESCORT JOB. TAKING A CHURCH OFFICIAL UP THE NORTHERN ROAD TO THE HAMMARUSKK COAST.

"THE NORTHERN ROAD."



WE CALL IT THE BLACK ROAD, AND HAD YOU SPENT MORE THAN TWO [REDACTED] MINUTES IN THIS LAND, YOU'D HAVE KNOWN THAT.

AND A VOYAGE UP THE BLACK ROAD MOST LIKELY IS A MURDER TRIP.

So we settled at four times the price.

A BIT LATER.

BACK FOR YOUR [REDACTED] EH? HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN, MAGNUS?

Kitta. Blacksmith. And it's been almost a year.

I DON'T FANCY BEING TREATED AS YOUR PERSONAL STORAGE SERVICE.

JUST GIVE ME THE GEAR, KITTA, PLUS RATIONS FOR TEN DAYS. A HOUSEHOLD AXE, A GAMBESON, DARK COLOUR, PREFERABLY WITHOUT LICE. I HAVE MONEY.

YOU GOT WORK?

Don't answer her.

Under conversion, you have no friends, only people looking for a reason to turn you over to the Church.

Sedition, sabotage, heresy, even [REDACTED] tax evasion. Any of that will get you staked to the ground or flayed until your ribs shine.

TIGHT MOUTH.

ROUGH TOWN.

TRUE ENOUGH.

KUD

EARLY NEXT MORNING



FARINA.



ARE YOU ALONE?

I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR CLOSE TO HALF AN HOUR. ARE YOU ALWAYS THIS LATE?

I WANTED TO SEE IF ANYONE ELSE WAS ABOUT BEFORE I APPROACHED.

YOU TREAT ME LIKE BAIT?

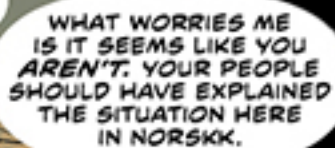
YOU'RE A RANKING CHURCH OFFICIAL IN NORSKK. YOU'RE ALREADY A TARGET.

IT'S WHY I'M HERE, CARDINAL.

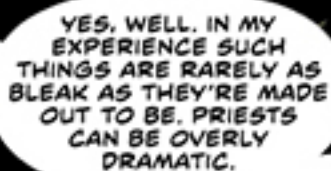




ARE YOU EXPECTING TROUBLE?



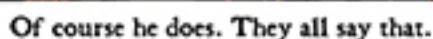
WHAT WORRIES ME IS IT SEEMS LIKE YOU AREN'T. YOUR PEOPLE SHOULD HAVE EXPLAINED THE SITUATION HERE IN NORSKK.



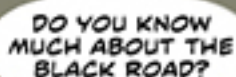
YES, WELL. IN MY EXPERIENCE SUCH THINGS ARE RARELY AS BLEAK AS THEY'RE MADE OUT TO BE. PRIESTS CAN BE OVERLY DRAMATIC.



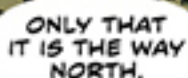
AND I HAVE MY GUARDIAN ANGEL WATCHING OVER ME.



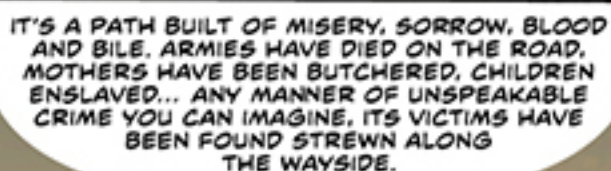
Of course he does. They all say that.



DO YOU KNOW MUCH ABOUT THE BLACK ROAD?



ONLY THAT IT IS THE WAY NORTH.



IT'S A PATH BUILT OF MISERY, SORROW, BLOOD AND BILE. ARMIES HAVE DIED ON THE ROAD, MOTHERS HAVE BEEN BUTCHERED, CHILDREN ENSLAVED... ANY MANNER OF UNSPEAKABLE CRIME YOU CAN IMAGINE, ITS VICTIMS HAVE BEEN FOUND STREWN ALONG THE WAYSIDE.



GOOD GOD.



THERE ARE NO ANGELS HERE.