



...STEPHANE MESNIER, FOUND GUILTY OF CRIMES AGAINST YOUR NEIGHBORS, YOUR COUNTRY, YOUR KING AND YOUR GOD, AND SENTENCED TO HANG.  
HAVE YOU ANY FINAL WORDS?



I DON'T, I... PLEASE. I AM NOT A GOOD MAN, I HAVE... HAVE DONE THESE THINGS. I ADMIT IT. BUT PLEASE, H-HAVE MERCY ON A SINNER.  
PLEASE DO NOT...



SO, WE PROCEED, JACQUES, THE HOOD, THE NOOSE.  
H-MERCY... MERCY...

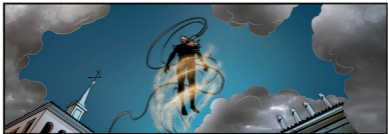
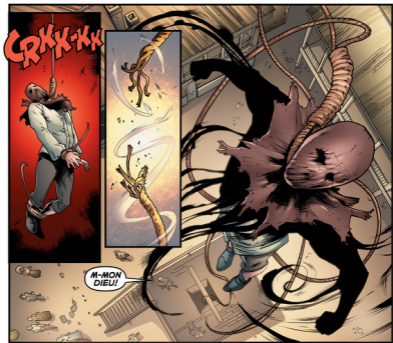


IT IS SNUG, ONWARD.  
AND MAY THE LORD HAVE MERCY ON YOUR SOUL, THERE IS NONE HERE.



**K-KLAK**

AH --!





# The Party of the First Part

SHADOW HILL.

I HAVE LIVED HERE ALL MY LIFE, AND EVERY BIT OF IT SAYS "HOME" TO ME. EVERY BUILDING, EVERY WINDING STREET, EVERY COBBLESTONE.

THE WAY THE SUN LIGHTS IT UP GLITTERING IN THE MORNINGS, LIKE SOME GLEAMING HOLY RELIC.

THE WAY THE BULK OF MOUNT KIRBY LOOMS OVER IT, CASTING DEEP SHADOWS BY THE END OF THE DAY.

AND THOUGH IT IS NOT WITHOUT ITS DANGERS -- THOUGH IT HAS NEVER BEEN WITHOUT DANGER --

-- I LOVE MY HOME.



I SAY THE WORDS OF PROTECTION AS I LEAVE.

I'VE FRESHENED THE WOLFSKANE, DOUBLE-CHECKED MY CRUCIFIX, TAPPED THE SIGN OF TEUSZ ON THE DOOR FOR LUCK.



THEY KNOW MY ORDER AT GROZA'S.

MARTA!  
GO WELL TODAY!

AFTER ALL THESE YEARS, IT WOULD BE A SURPRISE IF THEY DIDN'T.



I SEE THE HANGED MAN, AS I DO MORE DAYS THAN NOT. I THANK HIM, SILENTLY, FOR HIS PROTECTION.

AND FOR THE FIRST TIME IN OVER TWENTY YEARS...



...HE LOOKS AT ME.



I HAVE LEARNED, IN MY LIFE, TO GIVE WEIGHT TO OMENS.

THIS IS ONE, CERTAINLY, THE LAST TIME HE LOOKED AT ME, MY LIFE CHANGED DRAMATICALLY.

WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN THIS TIME?

I MULL IT OVER ALL THE WAY TO WORK, BUT I AM NO MORE ENLIGHTENED WHEN I ARRIVE THAN WHEN I STARTED.

BUT TIME WILL TELL. IT ALWAYS DOES.



CLARA!

MARTA, I'VE PUT THE MORNING'S NEW BUSINESS ON YOUR DESK ALREADY, BUT BEFORE YOU GET TO IT...

...LAURA IS GIVING NOTICE.

OH?



LOOK, LET ME GET A LITTLE COFFEE IN ME, THEN SEND HER IN. GIVE US FIVE MINUTES, THEN WE'LL TALK. OKAY?

OF COURSE.



IT'S THE USUAL PAPERWORK, THERE'S A NEW CLIENT CONTACT CALL FROM A RAITHA MCCANN, A NAME I FEEL LIKE I SHOULD RECOGNIZE.

I START TO MAKE A NOTE TO HAVE CLARA FOLLOW UP...

UH, MS. DOBRESCU?

CLARA SAID I SHOULD...

