

ENRIQUE
FERNÁNDEZ

Tales from the Age of the Cobra



*For my dear friends Antonio and Tania, Dela, Javi & Carol, Marc and Ana,
Ramon & Mabel, Sam & Karla, Sergio & Sonia — E.F.*

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EuroComics.us

EuroComics is an imprint of
IDW Publishing
a Division of Idea and Design Works, LLC
2765 Truxtun Road
San Diego, CA 92106
www.idwpublishing.com

ISBN: 978-1-68405-063-5 • First Printing, December 2017

Distributed to the book trade by Penguin Random House
Distributed to the comic book trade by Diamond Book Distributors

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Special thanks to Germund von Wowern, Justin Eisinger, and Alonzo Simon.

Originally published in French as *Les contes de L'ère du Cobra*, in two volumes.

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WELCOME TO MY HUMBLE THEATER.

TODAY, ON THE FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE NIGHT OF FIRES, ALLOW ME TO TICKLE YOUR FANCIES WITH MY TALE, A TALE WOVEN FROM THE THREADS OF A HUNDRED OTHER TALES...



LET ME BEWITCH YOU WITH MY STORY. IT'S VERY EASY TO FOLLOW, HAS NO MORAL AT THE END, AND DEMANDS NO SPECIAL EFFORT FROM ITS AUDIENCE TO BE APPRECIATED.



GRANT ME THE PLEASURE OF ENTERTAINING YOU, AND WITH A LITTLE LUCK, OF SETTING THOSE AMONG YOU WITH LIVELY IMAGINATIONS A-DREAMING...

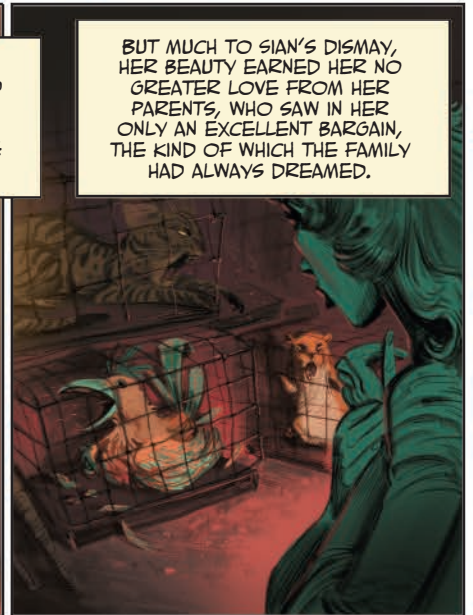
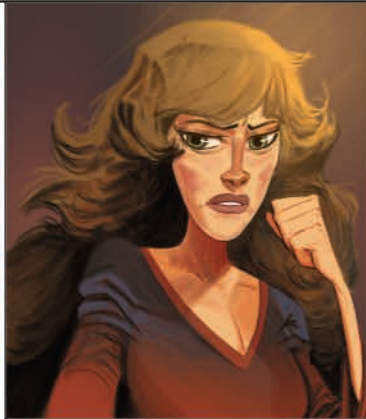


THIS STORY INVOLVES QUITE A FEW CHARACTERS, STARTING WITH THE BEAUTIFUL SIAN, A FLOWER BORN ON A DUNGHILL.

HER FAMILY, HUMBLE MERCHANTS ONE AND ALL, JOURNEYED FOR GENERATIONS SEEKING THE FINEST MERCHANDISE TO TRADE IN THEIR LAND.

OVER TIME, HER ANCESTRAL TREE PUT DOWN ROOTS HERE, THERE, AND EVERYWHERE, IN EVERY KNOWN LAND, AND FROM SUCH CROSS-FERTILIZING OF SOILS FINALLY AROSE THIS RAVISHING EXOTIC BLOSSOM.

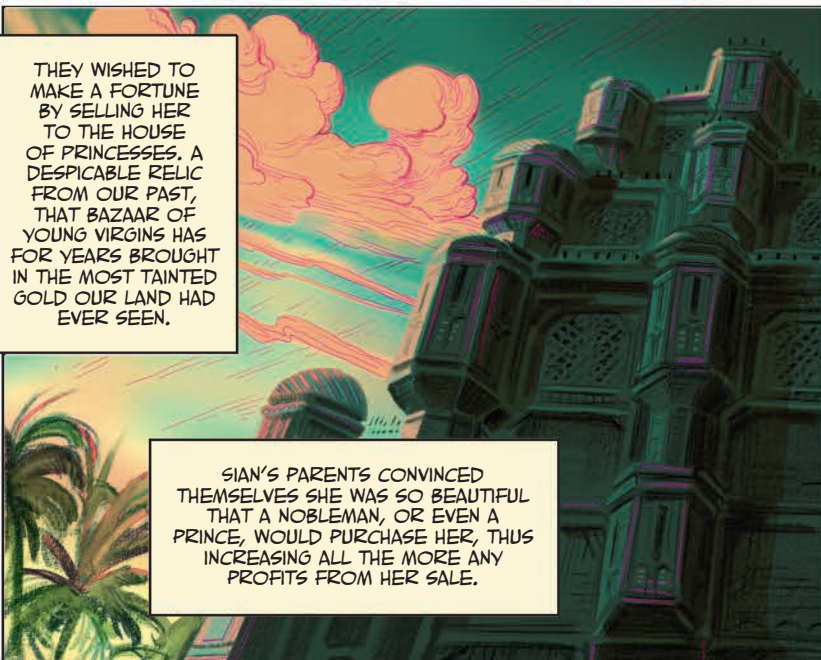
BUT MUCH TO SIAN'S DISMAY, HER BEAUTY EARNED HER NO GREATER LOVE FROM HER PARENTS, WHO SAW IN HER ONLY AN EXCELLENT BARGAIN, THE KIND OF WHICH THE FAMILY HAD ALWAYS DREAMED.

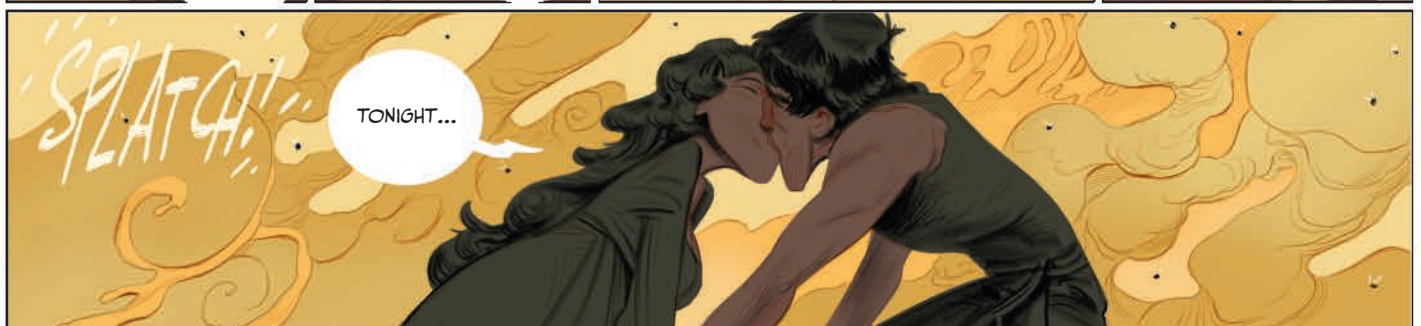
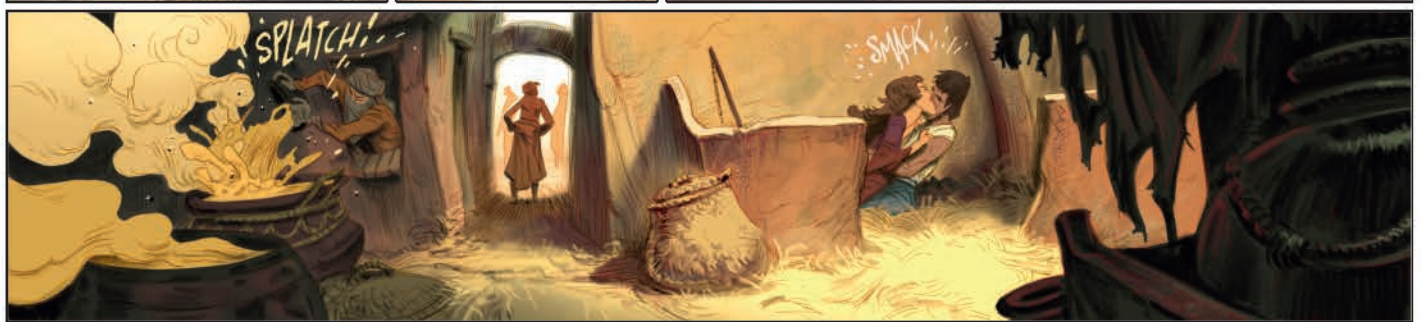


THEY WISHED TO MAKE A FORTUNE BY SELLING HER TO THE HOUSE OF PRINCESSES. A DESPICABLE RELIC FROM OUR PAST, THAT BAZAAR OF YOUNG VIRGINS HAS FOR YEARS BROUGHT IN THE MOST TAINTED GOLD OUR LAND HAD EVER SEEN.

SIAN'S PARENTS CONVINCED THEMSELVES SHE WAS SO BEAUTIFUL THAT A NOBLEMAN, OR EVEN A PRINCE, WOULD PURCHASE HER, THUS INCREASING ALL THE MORE ANY PROFITS FROM HER SALE.

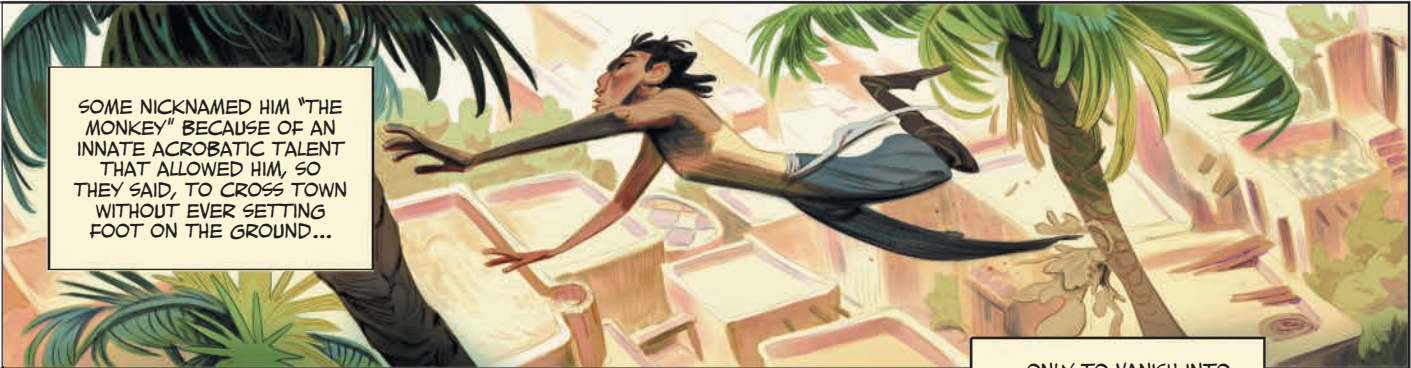
BUT THEY HADN'T COUNTED ON THE YOUNG LADY HAVING OTHER PLANS IN MIND FOR HER FUTURE...











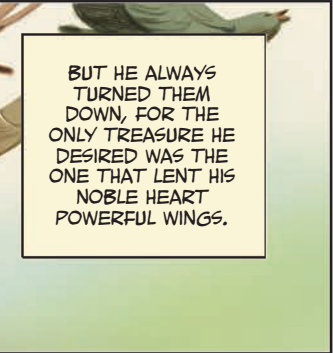


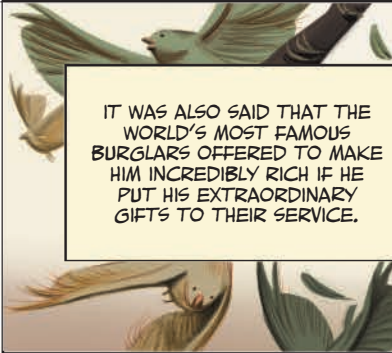
QUITE A SINGULAR
CREATURE, THAT
YOUNG IRVI.



SOME NICKNAMED HIM "THE
MONKEY" BECAUSE OF AN
INNATE ACROBATIC TALENT
THAT ALLOWED HIM, SO
THEY SAID, TO CROSS TOWN
WITHOUT EVER SETTING
FOOT ON THE GROUND...



...ONLY TO VANISH INTO
THE SHADOWS
WITHOUT A TRACE.



IT WAS ALSO SAID THAT THE
WORLD'S MOST FAMOUS
BURGLARS OFFERED TO MAKE
HIM INCREDIBLY RICH IF HE
PUT HIS EXTRAORDINARY
GIFTS TO THEIR SERVICE.

BUT HE ALWAYS
TURNED THEM
DOWN, FOR THE
ONLY TREASURE HE
DESIRED WAS THE
ONE THAT LENT HIS
NOBLE HEART
POWERFUL WINGS.

THAT NIGHT, TWO HEARTS
THRILLED IN FEVERISH ANTI-
CIPATION OF THE PLEASURES OF
A MAGICAL NIGHT, A NIGHT OF
PURE FEELINGS, IMPASSIONED
DISCOVERIES, AND CLUMSY,
TENDER CARESSES.

ALL WILL BE WELL,
THEY KEPT
TELLING
THEMSELVES.

AND SO IT WOULD HAVE, WERE
IT NOT FOR A STROKE OF BAD
LUCK, FATE'S TERRIBLE JOKE.

DESPAIR AND ANGUISH HURT SO MUCH WHEN
FIRST THEY BESIEGE SUCH YOUNG SOULS! HOW
TO FIND THE STRENGTH TO OVERCOME SUCH
PAIN WHEN IT THREATENED TO DROWN THEM?