



Taramis, queen of Khauran, awakened from a dream-haunted slumber to a silence that seemed more like the stillness of nighted catacombs than the normal quiet of a sleeping place.



ISHTAR! I AM BEWITCHED!

BEWITCHED? NO, SWEET SISTER! HERE IS NO SORCERY.

S-SISTER? I HAVE NO SISTER.



YOU NEVER HAD A SISTER? NEVER A TWIN SISTER WHOSE FLESH WAS AS SOFT AS YOURS TO CARESS OR HURT?

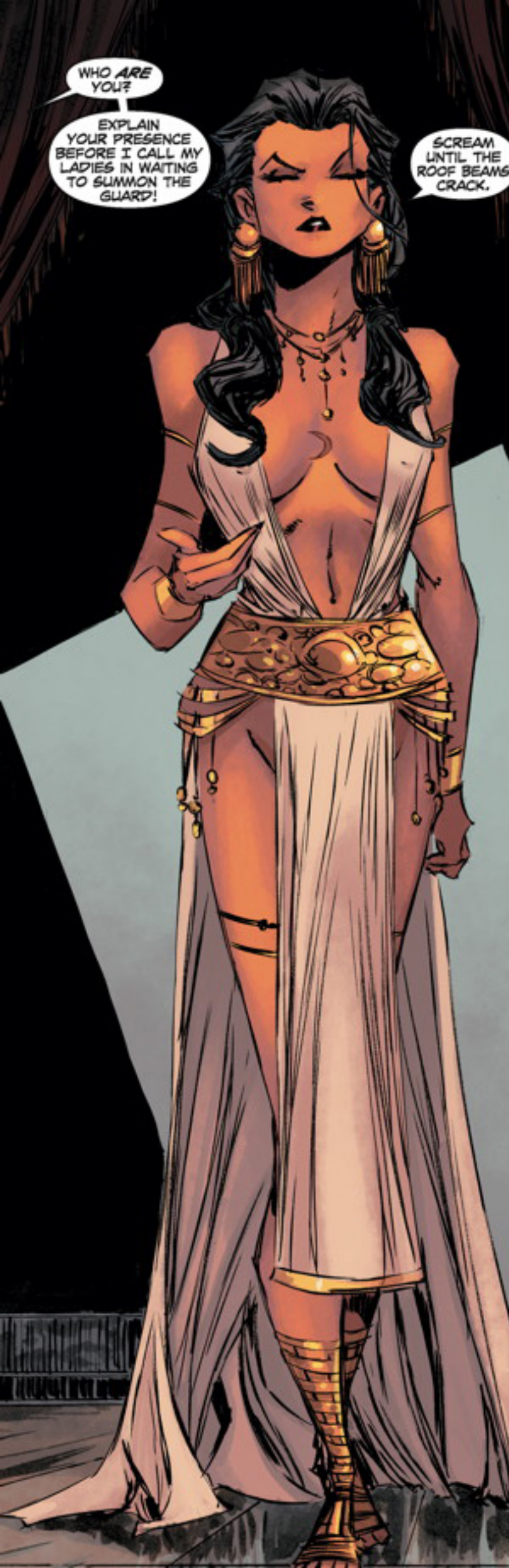
WHY... ONCE I HAD A SISTER. BUT SHE DIED--



YOU LIE!

SHE DID NOT DIE! FOOL!

OH, ENOUGH OF THIS MUMMERY! LOOK--AND LET YOUR SIGHT BE BLASTED!




WHO ARE YOU?

EXPLAIN YOUR PRESENCE BEFORE I CALL MY LADIES IN WAITING TO SUMMON THE GUARD!

SCREAM UNTIL THE ROOF BEAMS CRACK.



YOUR [REDACTED] WILL NOT WAKE TILL DAWN, THOUGH THE PALACE SPRING INTO FLAMES ABOUT THEM.



"YOUR GUARDSMEN WILL NOT HEAR YOUR SQUEALS; THEY HAVE BEEN SENT OUT OF THIS WING OF THE PALACE."



WHAT! WHO DARED GIVE MY GUARDSMEN SUCH A COMMAND?



I DID, SWEET SISTER. A LITTLE WHILE AGO, BEFORE I ENTERED. THEY THOUGHT IT WAS THEIR DARLING, ADORED QUEEN.



HA! HOW BEAUTIFULLY I ACTED THE PART!



WHO ARE YOU? WHAT MADNESS IS THIS? WHY DO YOU COME HERE?

WITH WHAT IMPERIOUS DIGNITY, SOFTENED BY WOMANLY SWEETNESS, DID I ADDRESS THE GREAT LOUYS WHO KNELT IN THEIR ARMOR AND PLUMED HELMETS!



WHO AM I?

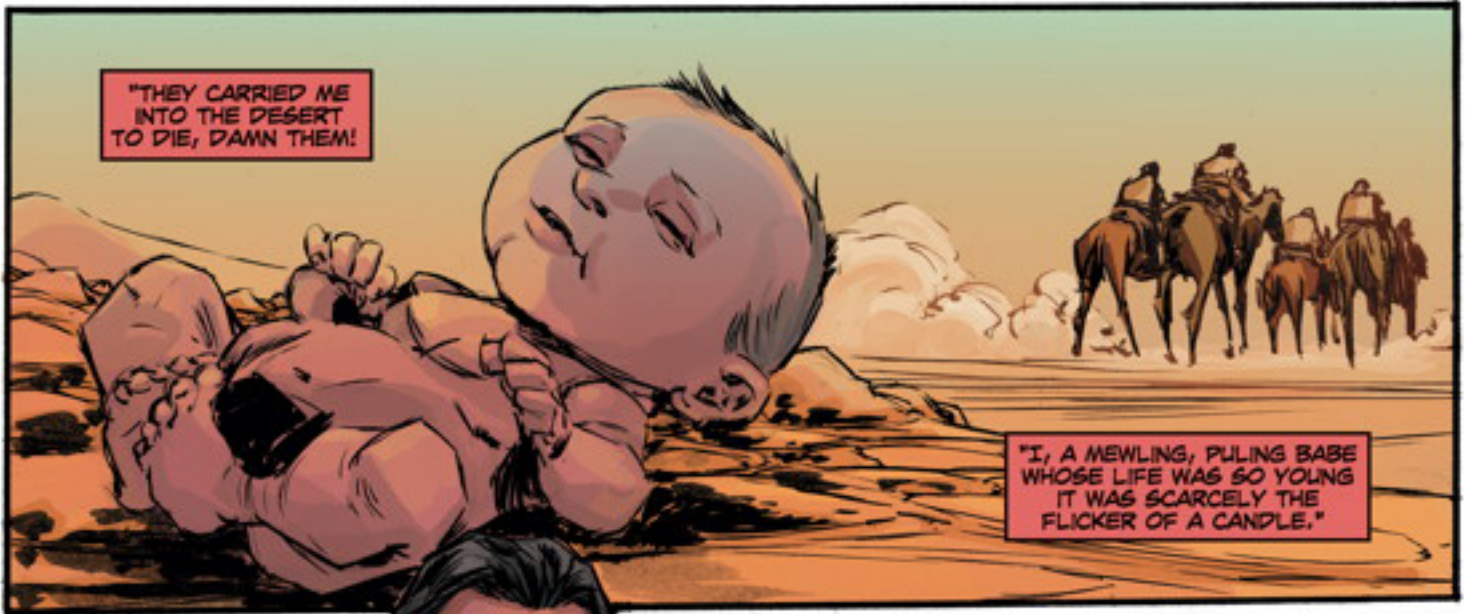
FOOL! CAN YOU ASK? CAN YOU WONDER? I AM SALOME!



SALOME! I THOUGHT YOU DIED WITHIN THE HOUR OF YOUR BIRTH...



SO I THOUGHT MANY.



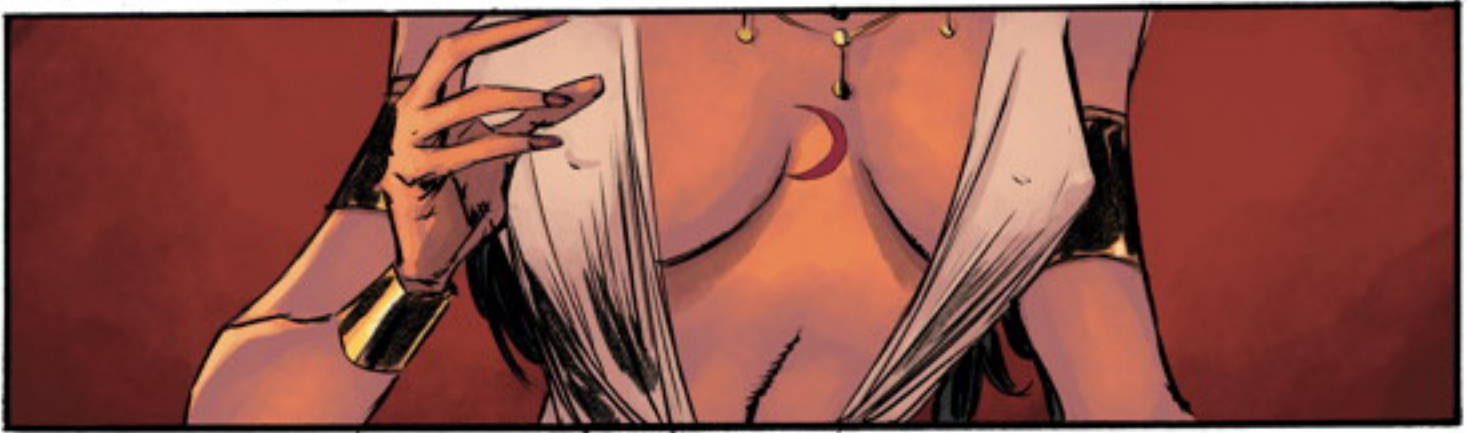
"THEY CARRIED ME INTO THE DESERT TO DIE, DAMN THEM!"

"I, A MEWLING, PULING BABE WHOSE LIFE WAS SO YOUNG IT WAS SCARCELY THE FLICKER OF A CANDLE."



AND DO YOU KNOW *WHY* THEY BORE ME FORTH TO DIE?

I--I HAVE HEARD THE STORY--



THE MARK OF THE WITCH...