WOLVERTON

THIEF OF IMPOSSIBLE OBJECTS

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WOLVERTON

THIEF OF IMPOSSIBLE OBJECTS

A MESSAGE FROM TEAM WOLVERTON

WOLVERTON started as an ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY, attracting the ATTENTION of some MAJOR HOLLYWOOD players. The SPARKLING DIALOGUE and INSANE ACTION SEQUENCES were a director's wet dream, but the studio bean counters just couldn't see making a $100,000,000 movie based on an original idea. "*If only it was a comic book first, lads,*" they said.

SO, we made it a **COMIC BOOK** first! And, we have TROVES OF PEOPLE to THANK along the way – because we didn't know a helluva a lot about putting out a comic book!

THANK YOU

We would never have gotten to print without the astonishing assistance of Andrew Hollister and Greg Gutbezahl. **Our snappy promo video** would never have happened without Greg, Chris Mills and Chris Beat. We had quite a bit of ADVICE from Tom Plotkin, Van Jensen, Emil Ferris, Michael Tisserand and Bob Burden.
And, THANK YOU, Kraken Print for putting up with Michael's constant questions.

Michael would like to thank Elizabeth Gholston, Liz & John Perez, and his screenwriting mentors Ring Lardner Jr, Waldo Salt and Ian McLellan Hunter…**Terrell would like to thank** Bree Garrett, Tempest Garrett and Mike & Jessica Healy…**Derek would like to thank** Mara Freilich, Kuma & Balto, Matt Gallant, Sumi Ink and Carl Sagan.

And, to everyone who had our backs on Kickstarter!

Our crowd funding campaign was a raging success
and we'd like to thank all of our super backers:

Evan & Linda Shore • Aaron Kuder • Brook Fulton • RockitBot • Grassroots Labs Zachary Aten • William Huff • Viviana Goldenberg • Laurie Gardner • Chris Mills Kristina Zacharias • Bill Sweeney • Steve Fallon • Jason Zions • Michael Levy Blair Buscareno • Matthew Barton • Alexander J. Garrett • Terry Garrett Andy Peters • Keel Heisler • Terran Joy McCanna • Obi Gholston • Max Gholston Lisa Barcy • Robin Fagin • Christina Whitlatch • Rafa Reyes • Ray Bogdanovich Kevin Madden • Ruckus & Lane Skye • Jennifer Mackey • Andrew Perez Donna Ryder • Michael Giordano • B.J. Parker • Marcy & Chris McLamb Alexandra Krispel • Deb Sprague • Bruce Meyer • Quan Tran • Robert Koenig Nathan DeWitt • Rory McGee • Alexander Gent • Carolyn Carter • Gregory Nicoll, Roshell Resnick • Chuck Miller • Sergey Anikushin • Rebecca Perry Damsen Jonathan Smoot • Toni Ostrow • Lorelle Chizen • Stephen Hunking • Ryan Kirkpatrick Anita Hicks • Richard & Glynis Ward • Kristina Boothe • Jeffrey Archer!

If we spelled any names wrong, please don't sue us.
Publishing an indie comic book isn't easy!

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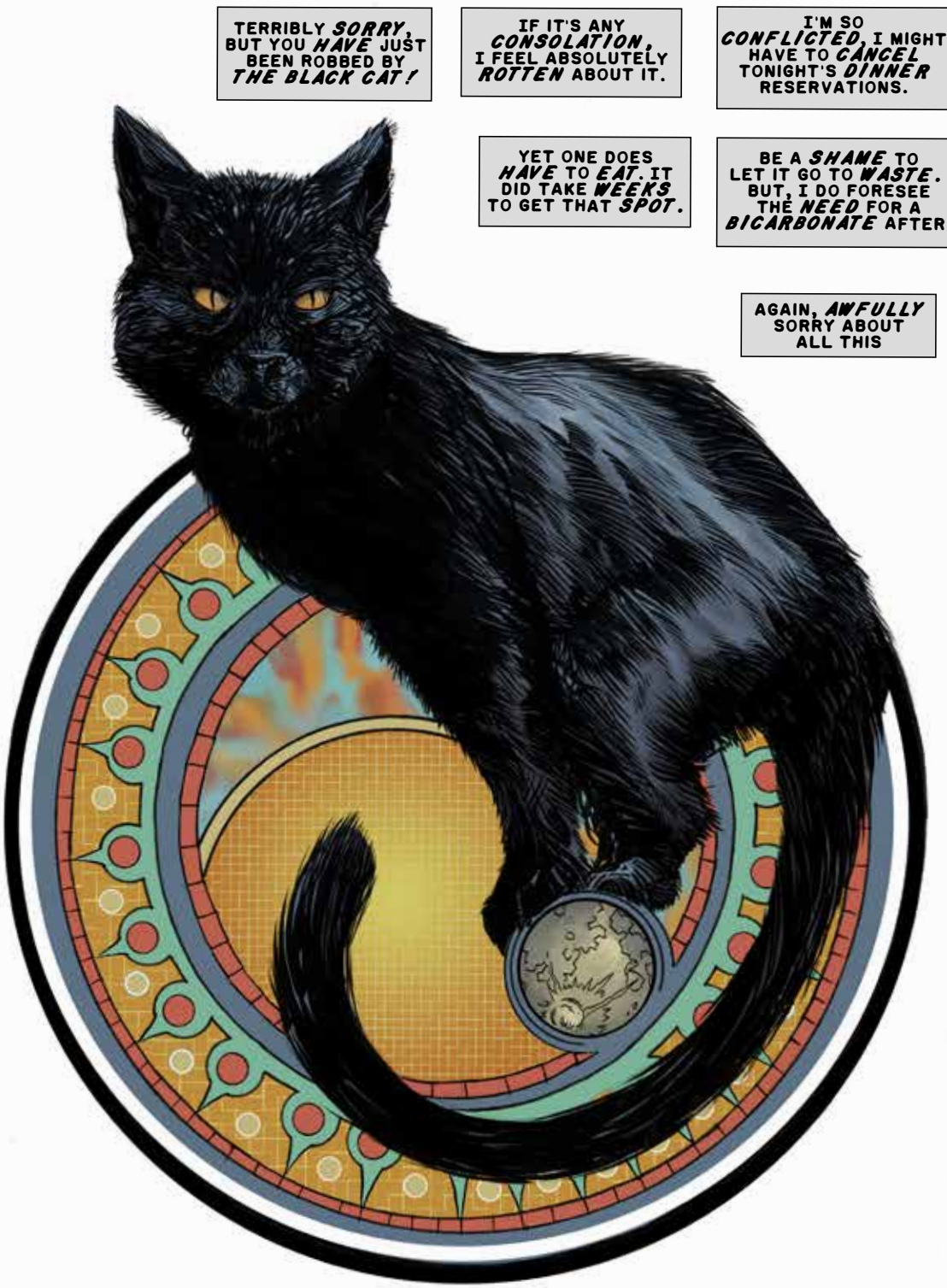

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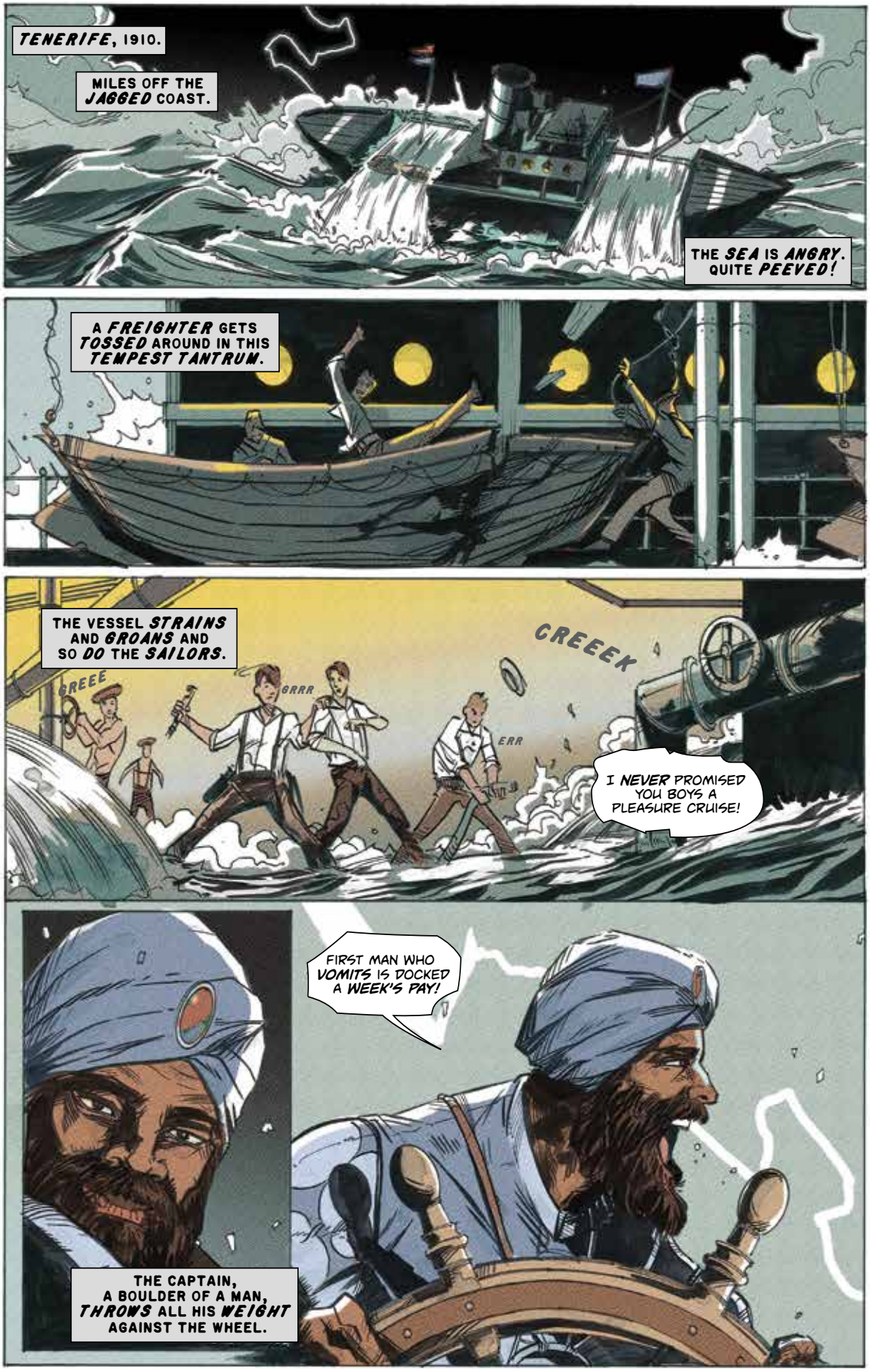
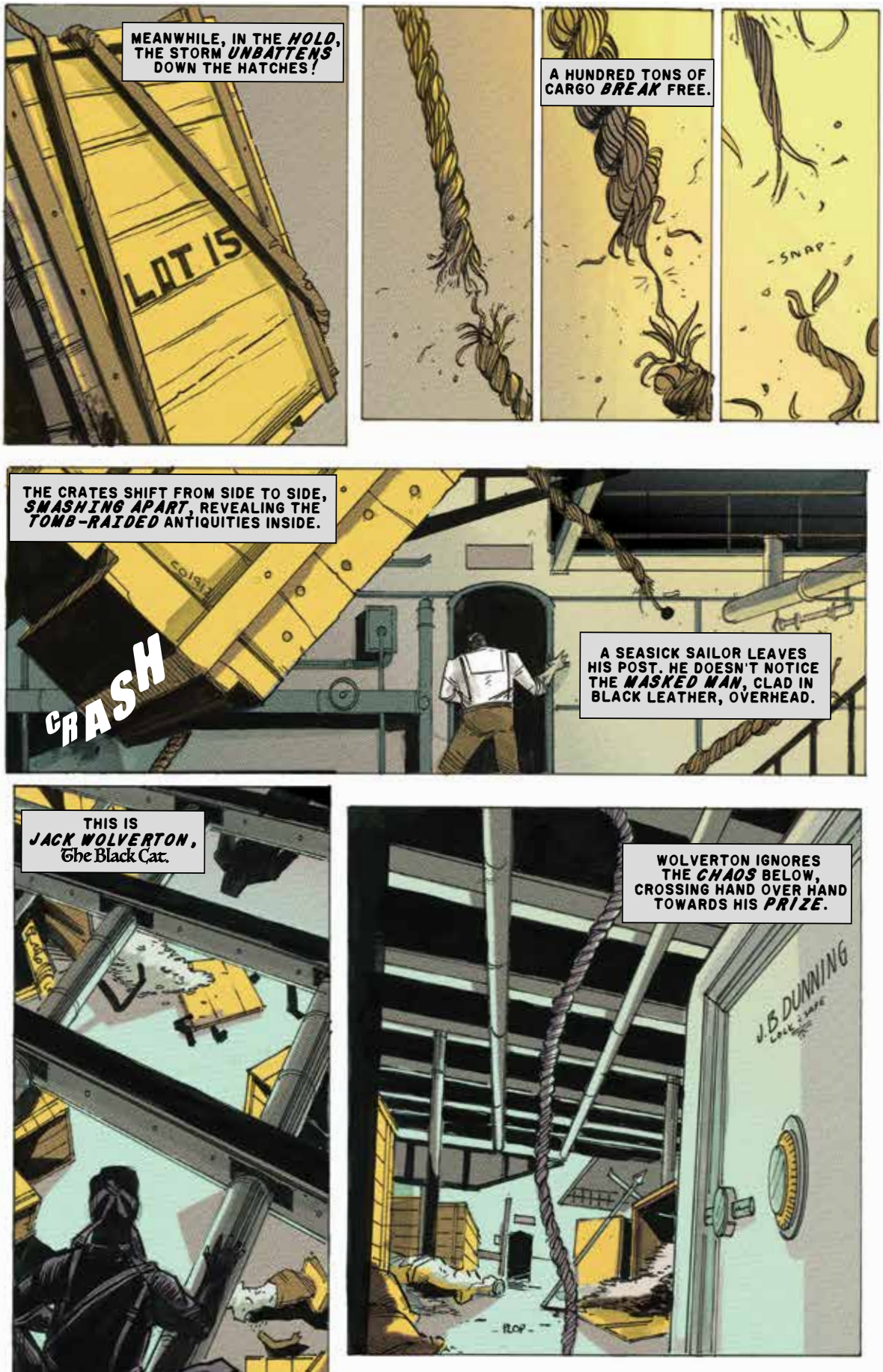

TENERIFE, 1910.
MILES OFF THE JAGGED COAST.
THE SEA IS ANGRY. QUITE PEEVED!
A FREIGHTER GETS TOSSED AROUND IN THIS TEMPEST TANTRUM.
THE VESSEL STRAINS AND GROANS AND SO DO THE SAILORS.
CREEEK
CREEE
GRRR
ERR
I NEVER PROMISED YOU BOYS A PLEASURE CRUISE!
FIRST MAN WHO VOMITS IS DOCKED A WEEK'S PAY!
THE CAPTAIN, A BOULDER OF A MAN, THROWS ALL HIS WEIGHT AGAINST THE WHEEL.


MEANWHILE, IN THE HOLD, THE STORM UNBATTENS DOWN THE HATCHES!
LOT 15
A HUNDRED TONS OF CARGO BREAK FREE.
-SNAP-
THE CRATES SHIFT FROM SIDE TO SIDE, SMASHING APART, REVEALING THE TOMB-RAIDED ANTIQUITIES INSIDE.
CRASH
A SEASICK SAILOR LEAVES HIS POST. HE DOESN'T NOTICE THE MASKED MAN, CLAD IN BLACK LEATHER, OVERHEAD.
THIS IS JACK WOLVERTON, The Black Cat.
WOLVERTON IGNORES THE CHAOS BELOW, CROSSING HAND OVER HAND TOWARDS HIS PRIZE.
J.B. DUNNING
-FLOP-

WOLVERTON TIES A ROPE TO THE RIGGINGS AND GRACEFULLY GLIDES DOWN.
A GIANT WAVE SENDS A CRATE HIS WAY.
HE CAUSALLY SWINGS OUT OF ITS PATH...
NO
...AND SWINGS BACK TO WORK.
HE CRACKS HIS KNUCKLES, PUTS AN EAR TO THE DOOR AND GETS TO WORK.
THE TUMBLERS FALL INTO PLACE.
CLICK
PIECE OF CAKE.
BUT, JUST AS HE'S ABOUT TO CRACK HER OPEN,
CLANG
ANOTHER WAVE SENDS HIM HEAD FIRST INTO THE STEEL DOOR, LOCKING IT AGAIN.
BLOODY HELL!

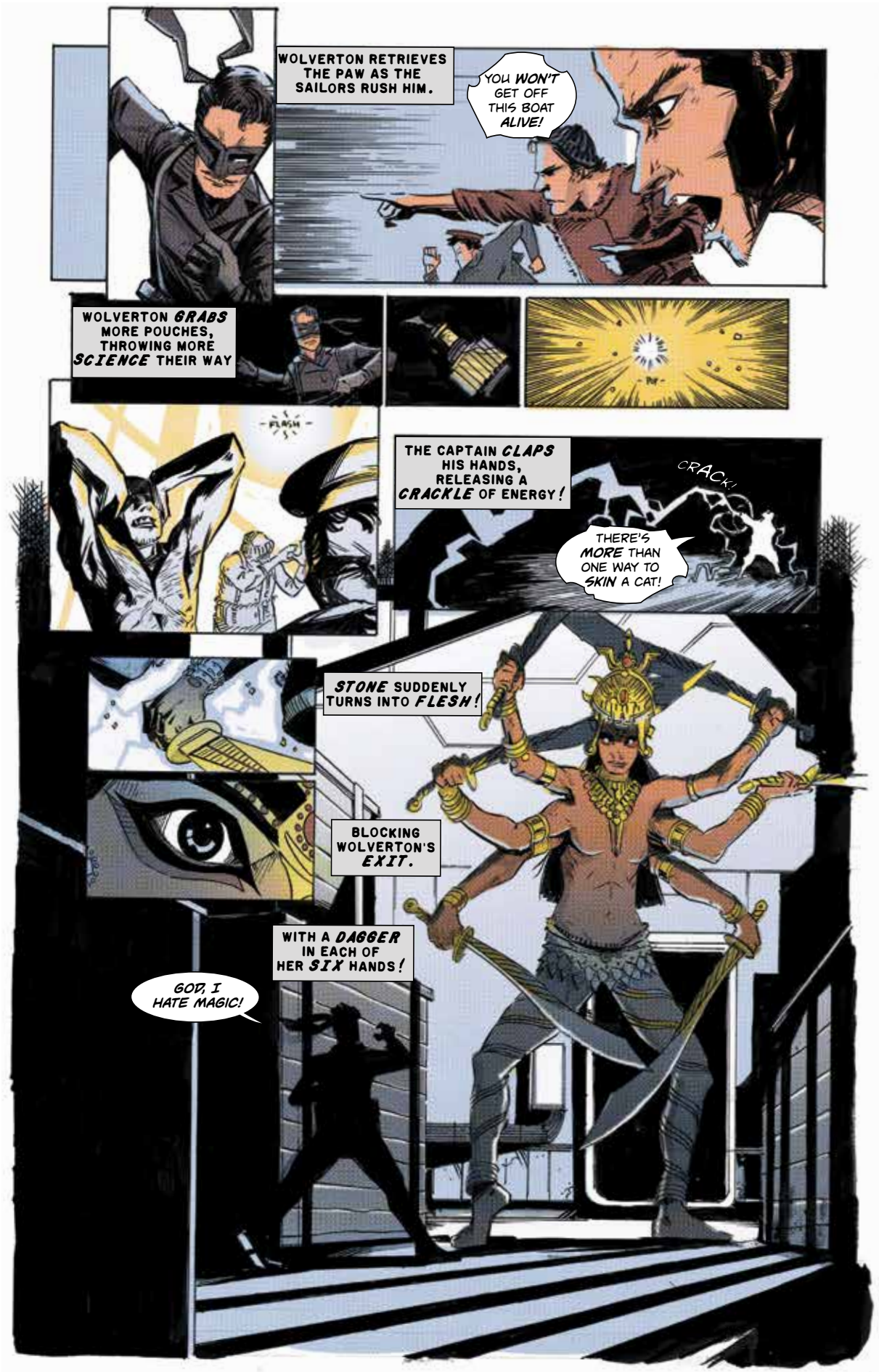
OKAY, ONCE AGAIN WITH FEELING.
-CRACK-
HE REPEATS THE STEPS
FASTER THIS TIME.
AVOIDING THE SLIPPING AND SLIDING CARGO, BARRELING TOWARDS HIM.
CLICK
HE PUSHES AWAY THE PILES OF CASH AND PRECIOUS GEMS FOR WHAT HE'S REALLY AFTER.
A BELL JAR WITH A MANGY SURPRISE INSIDE.
JACK WOLVERTON IS NO ORDINARY THIEF. HE SPECIALIZES IN THE ARCANE, THE ACCURSED AND THE OCCULTIC.
HE'S ALSO A GENTLEMAN. AND, A GENTLEMAN ALWAYS LEAVES HIS CALLING CARD!

BAM!
A GUNSHOT SEVERS THE ROPE. THE THIEF FALLS FAR FROM FELINE-LIKE TO THE FLOOR. THE GLASS JAR SHATTERS.
SO, THE BLACK CAT CROSSES MY PATH AGAIN.
OOOF!
THERE WOULDN'T PERCHANCE BE A CHIROPODIST ON BOARD?
ANOTHER WAVE SENDS EVERYTHING FLYING.
THE SAILORS STUMBLE AFTER HIM. STONEHENGE-SIZED CRATES SLIDE AROUND THEM LIKE A DEADLY GAME OF TETRIS.
ALWAYS WITH THE RUNNING AND CHASING.
GET HIM!
AND, GET ME THAT DAMNED PAW!!
KA-BOOM
IN MY COUNTRY, WE CHOP OFF THE HANDS OF A THIEF!
THEN, I'M GLAD WE'RE NOT IN YOUR COUNTRY.
THAT WOULD MAKE UNFASTENING A CORSET RATHER MORE DIFFICULT.

EASY PEASY.
PERHAPS NOT SO EASY PEASY!
-CRUNCH-
POP!
AAAIEEE!
WOLVERTON TRIES TO CATCH THE PAW,
CRIKEY!
WHOOSH
BUT SOME POACHED IVORY NEARLY IMPALES HIM!
DON'T MOVE, MY MAGGOTY, LITTLE MINX.
I'LL COME TO YOU.

BUT, WOLVERTON IS BEATEN TO THE PUNCH
SOME OF THE CREW KNOWS EXACTLY WHAT THIS TRINKET CAN DO.
I WISH FOR...
BLAM!
BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR.
WOLVERTON SCOOPS UP THE PAW, JUMPS ONTO A CRATE AND CONTAINER SURFS AWAY.
THE THIEF LEAPFROGS FROM CRATE TO CRATE, MAKING HIS ESCAPE.
THIS IS MUCH BIGGER GAME FOR YOU, CAPTAIN. WHO ARE YOU WORKING FOR?
HOW DO YOU KNOW I'M NOT SELF-EMPLOYED?
BECAUSE YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN SMALL TIME.
TWO SAILORS SCURRY UP THE BOXES AFTER HIM.
BUT THEY DON'T HAVE HALF THE BLACK CAT'S AGILITY!
SQUISH!

THE OTHER SAILOR PULLS A KNIFE.
REACHES FOR THE THIEF'S COLLAR.
AND, JUST MISSES IT, TUMBLING OFF THE EDGE.
SPLAT!
SMALL TIME?
STOP!
SLIP!
LET ME SHOW YOU HOW MUCH I'VE GROWN.
EVERYTHING MAGICALLY PAUSES!
OOOF!
SO MUCH FOR THE QUEENSBERRY RULES THEN.
WOW! YOUR MAGIC HAS GOTTEN QUITE GOOD.
THANKS, I'VE BEEN PRACTICING.
EVEN THOUGH MAGIC IS ILLEGAL?
DON'T DO A HELLUVA LOT THAT ISN'T.
APPARENTLY NOT.
BUT, WOLVERTON HAS HIS TRICKS, TOO.
HE REMOVES A POUCH FROM HIS BELT AND BLOWS...
I'VE ALWAYS PREFERRED THE CERTAINY OF SCIENCE MYSELF.
BOOM
AAAH!
THE CAPTAIN'S BEARD ERUPTS INTO FLAMES.
HE DROPS THE THIEF AND SWATS HIS BRISTLES.


WOLVERTON RETRIEVES THE PAW AS THE SAILORS RUSH HIM.
YOU WON'T GET OFF THIS BOAT ALIVE!
WOLVERTON GRABS MORE POUCHES, THROWING MORE SCIENCE THEIR WAY
-FLASH-
-FLASH-
THE CAPTAIN CLAPS HIS HANDS, RELEASING A CRACKLE OF ENERGY!
CRACK!
THERE'S MORE THAN ONE WAY TO SKIN A CAT!
STONE SUDDENLY TURNS INTO FLESH!
BLOCKING WOLVERTON'S EXIT.
WITH A DAGGER IN EACH OF HER SIX HANDS!
GOD, I HATE MAGIC!

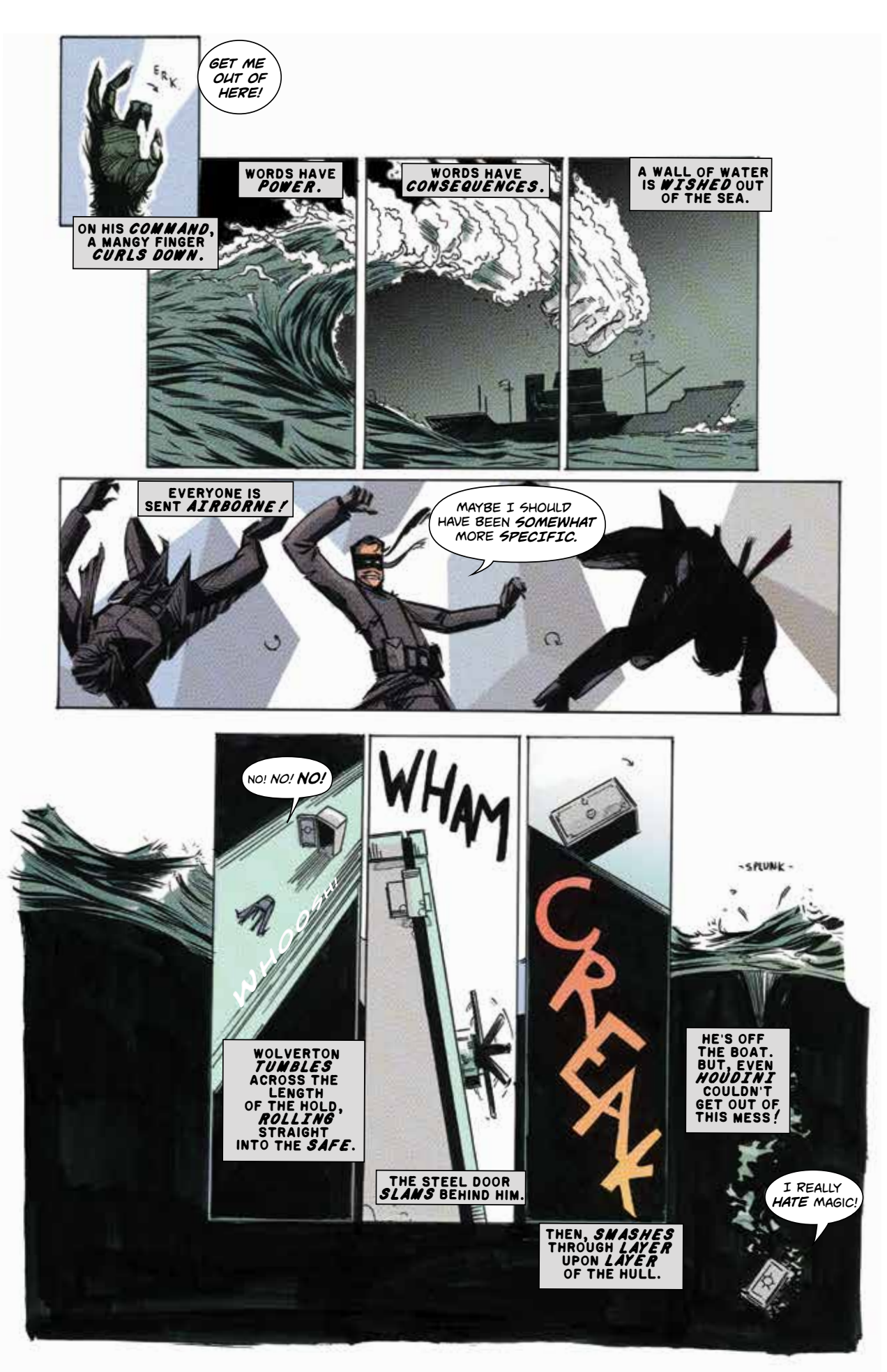
HE CHECKS HIMSELF OUT. ALL THE IMPORTANT BITS ARE STILL THERE.

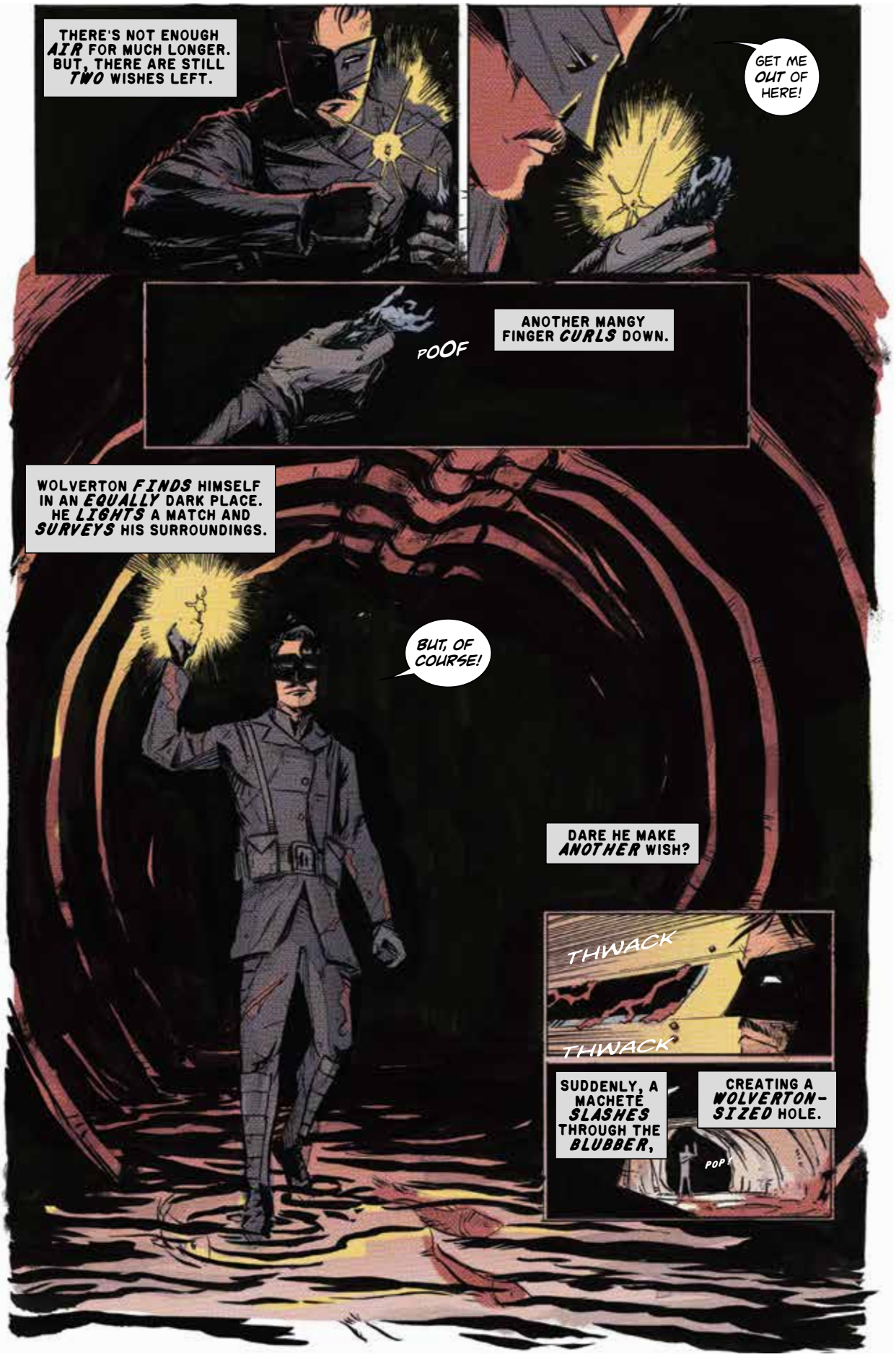
BUT, HE'S NOT COMPLETELY UNSCATHED. HIS OUTFIT IS IN TATTERS!

YOU'LL BE RECEIVING A BILL FROM MY TAILOR, OLD GIRL.

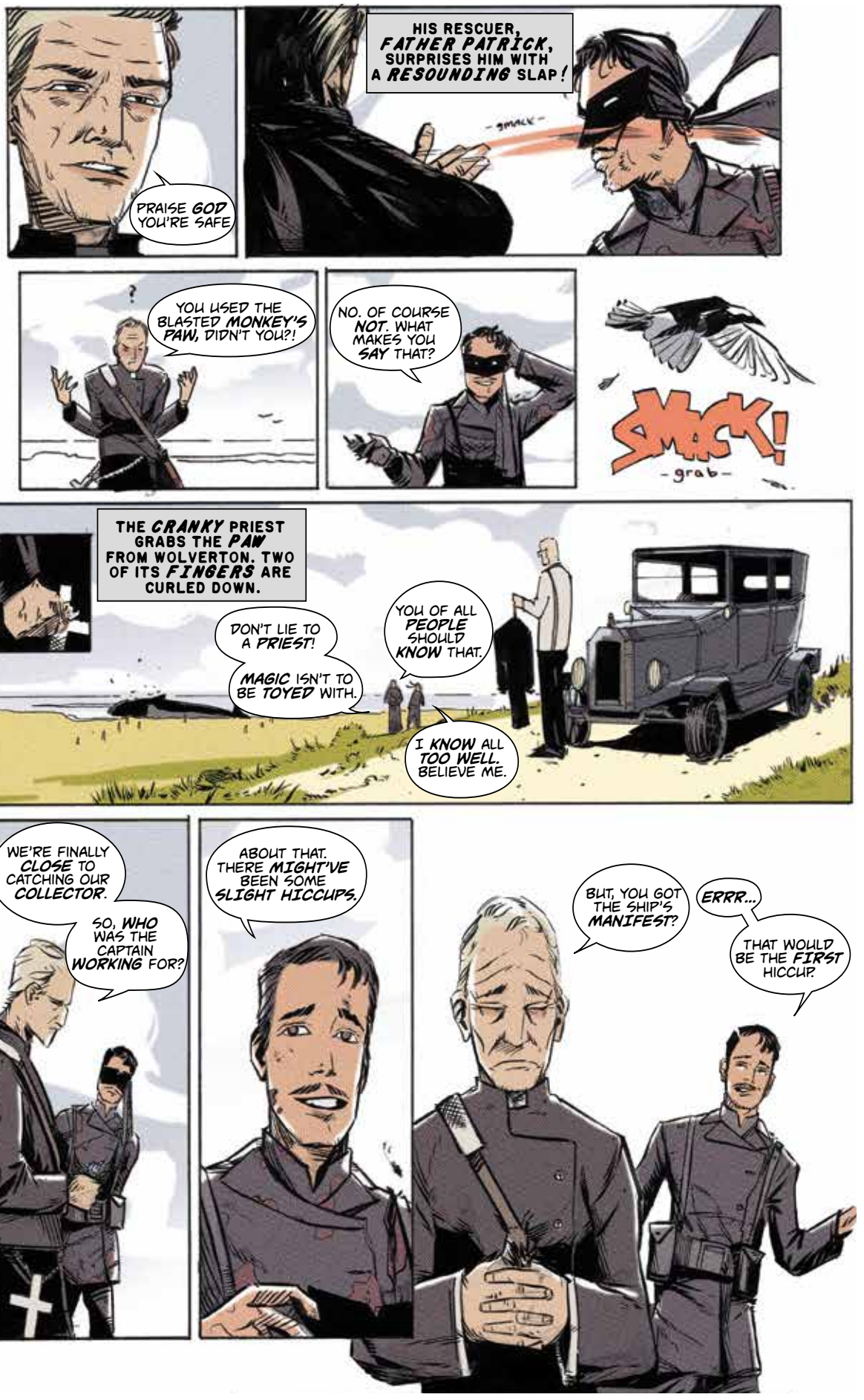
ANOTHER WAVE SENDS SOMETHING FAR MORE FORMIDABLE HIS WAY.
FINE!
I'M DONE WITH THE WHITE GLOVE TREATMENT!
CLANG
PREPARE TO BE COMPLETELY DE MILOED!

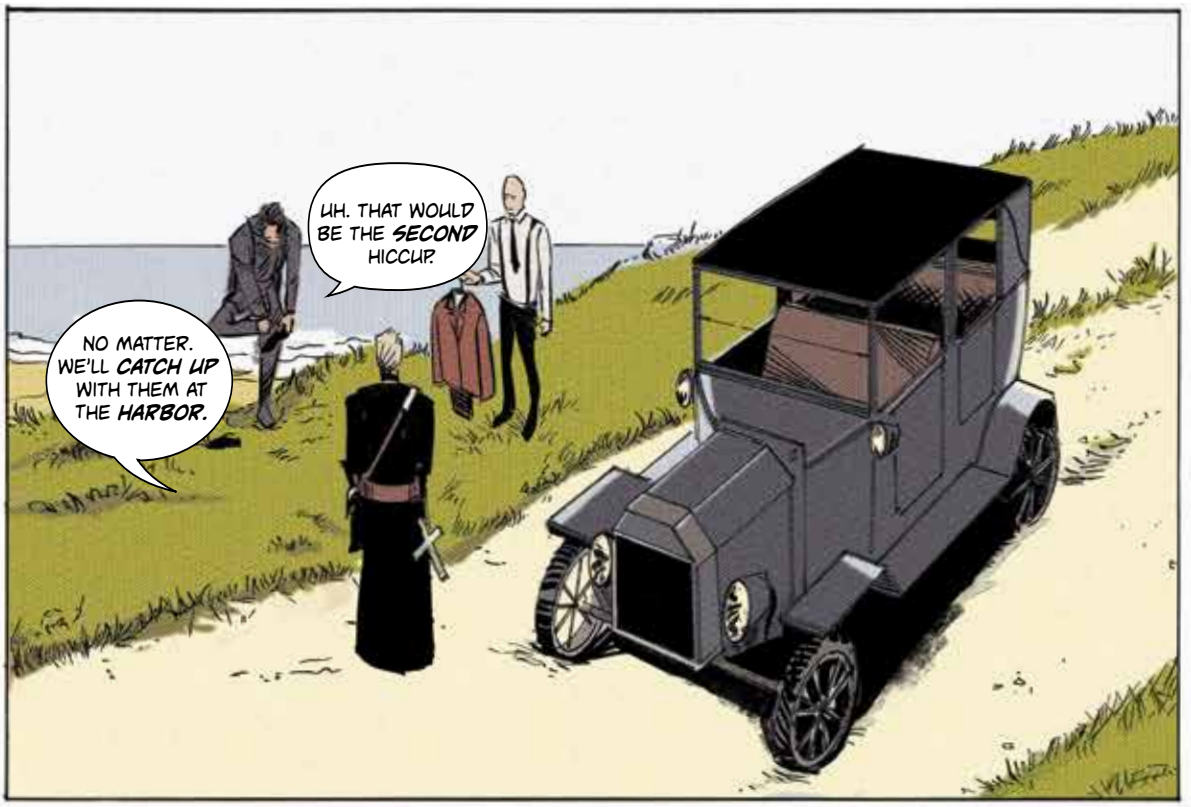
THE CAPTAIN RE-FURROWS HIS BROW. MORE STATUES COME TO LIFE.
SENDING A WHOLE SUPERNATURAL CONGA LINE AFTER WOLVERTON!
EVERYTHING STOPS! EVEN THE ENCHANTED KNOW THE POWER IT WIELDS!
DON'T! ONLY AN ADEPT CAN WIELD THAT KIND OF POWER WITHOUT REPERCUSSIONS.
NOW, YOU'RE JUST SHOWING OFF.
YOU LEFT ME NO CHOICE!
THE THIEF CLUTCHES THE PAW TO HIS CHEST TO MAKE A WISH!


ERK
GET ME OUT OF HERE!
ON HIS COMMAND, A MANGY FINGER CURLS DOWN.
WORDS HAVE POWER.
WORDS HAVE CONSEQUENCES.
A WALL OF WATER IS WISHED OUT OF THE SEA.
EVERYONE IS SENT AIRBORNE!
MAYBE I SHOULD HAVE BEEN SOMEWHAT MORE SPECIFIC.
NO! NO! NO!
WHOOSH!
WOLVERTON TUMBLES ACROSS THE LENGTH OF THE HOLD, ROLLING STRAIGHT INTO THE SAFE.
WHAM
THE STEEL DOOR SLAMS BEHIND HIM.
CREAK
THEN, SMASHES THROUGH LAYER UPON LAYER OF THE HULL.
-SPLUNK-
HE'S OFF THE BOAT. BUT, EVEN HOUDINI COULDN'T GET OUT OF THIS MESS!
I REALLY HATE MAGIC!


THERE'S NOT ENOUGH AIR FOR MUCH LONGER. BUT, THERE ARE STILL TWO WISHES LEFT.
GET ME OUT OF HERE!
POOF
ANOTHER MANGY FINGER CURLS DOWN.
WOLVERTON FINDS HIMSELF IN AN EQUALLY DARK PLACE. HE LIGHTS A MATCH AND SURVEYS HIS SURROUNDINGS.
BUT, OF COURSE!
DARE HE MAKE ANOTHER WISH?
THWACK
THWACK
SUDDENLY, A MACHETE SLASHES THROUGH THE BLUBBER,
CREATING A WOLVERTON-SIZED HOLE.
POP!

TWO HANDS *PULL* WOLVERTON OUT FROM THE *BELLY* OF THE *BEAST*.
A CROWD STARES AT THE *BEACHED WHALE* AND THE MODERN-DAY *JONAH* WHO RODE IN ON IT.
CARRY ON ...
NOTHING TO SEE HERE ...
BEAUTIFUL MORNING, ISN'T IT.


PRAISE GOD YOU'RE SAFE.
HIS RESCUER, FATHER PATRICK, SURPRISES HIM WITH A RESOUNDING SLAP!
-SMACK-
YOU USED THE BLASTED MONKEY'S PAW, DIDN'T YOU?!
NO. OF COURSE NOT. WHAT MAKES YOU SAY THAT?
SMACK!
-grab-
THE CRANKY PRIEST GRABS THE PAW FROM WOLVERTON. TWO OF ITS FINGERS ARE CURLED DOWN.
DON'T LIE TO A PRIEST!
MAGIC ISN'T TO BE TOYED WITH.
YOU OF ALL PEOPLE SHOULD KNOW THAT.
I KNOW ALL TOO WELL. BELIEVE ME.
WE'RE FINALLY CLOSE TO CATCHING OUR COLLECTOR.
SO, WHO WAS THE CAPTAIN WORKING FOR?
ABOUT THAT. THERE MIGHT'VE BEEN SOME SLIGHT HICCUPS.
BUT, YOU GOT THE SHIP'S MANIFEST?
ERRR...
THAT WOULD BE THE FIRST HICCUP.


UH. THAT WOULD BE THE SECOND HICCUP.
NO MATTER. WE'LL CATCH UP WITH THEM AT THE HARBOR.

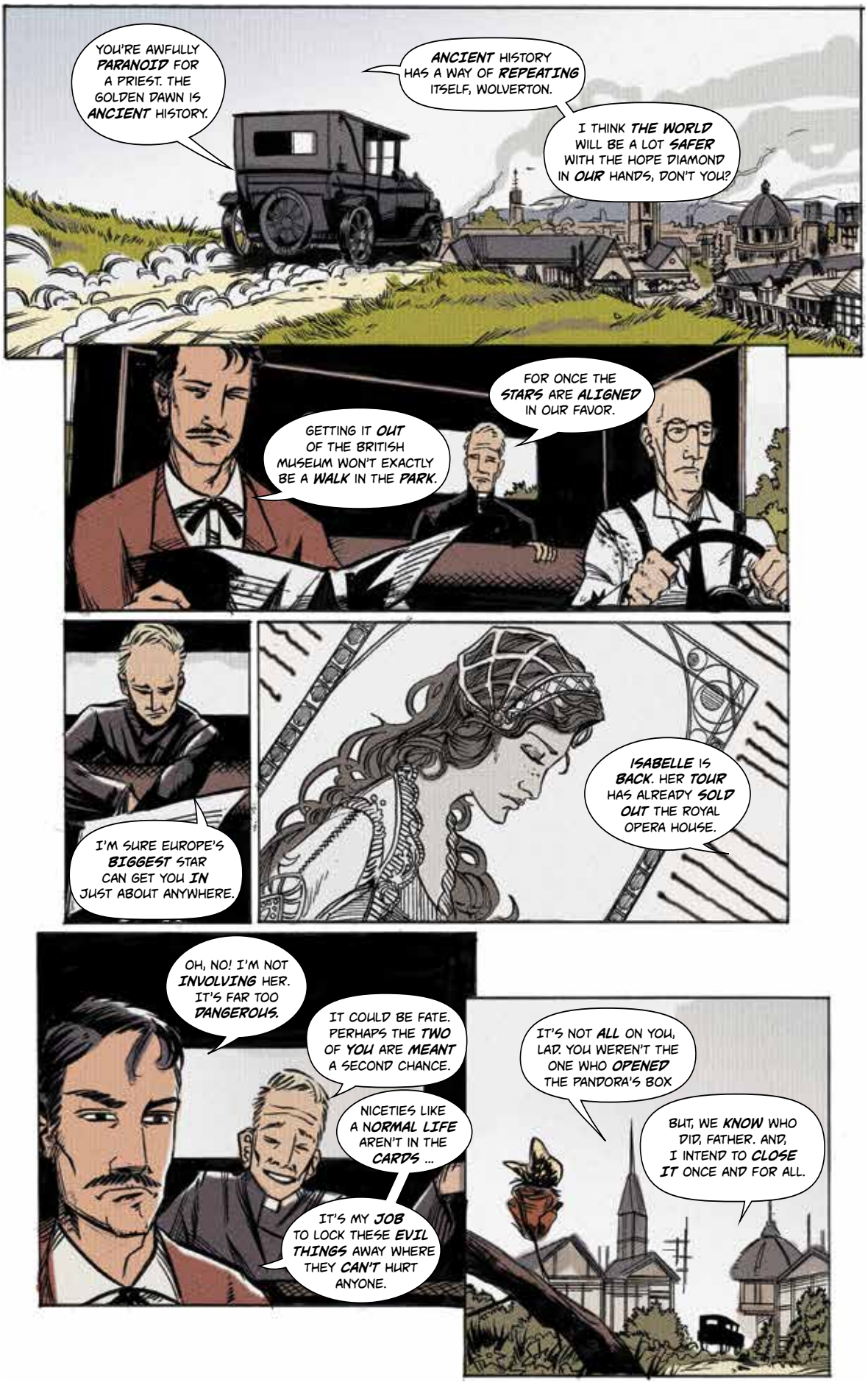
THE PRIEST REALIZES!
DEAR GOD! YOU WENT AND SUNK IT, DIDN'T YOU?
SOMETIMES, WOLVERTON, I WISH ...

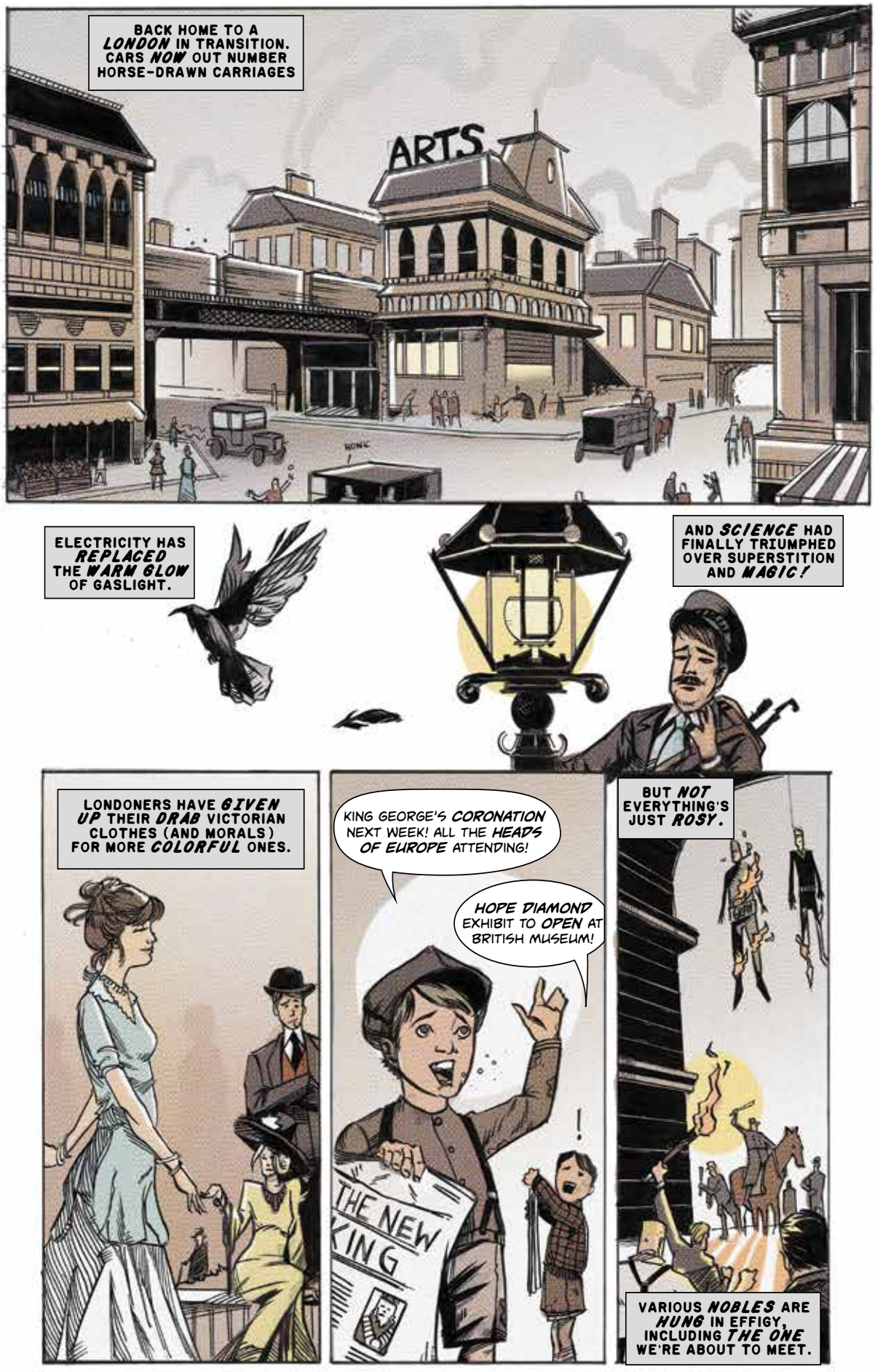
YOU MIGHT WANT TO WATCH YOUR WORDS, FATHER.
BOOP

FATHER PATRICK PUTS THE PAW SOMEWHERE SAFE, A LEAD BOX COVERED WITH CROSSES.
UNFORTUNATELY, THERE'S NO TIME FOR A BREATHER.
SOMETHING PARTICULARLY NASTY JUST SURFACED BACK HOME.

THE HOPE DIAMOND? ISN'T THAT JUST A FANCY HUNK OF JEWELRY?
HOPE IN THE HOPE DIAMOND?
Daily Express
HOPE DIAMOND EXHIBIT OPENS FOR KING'S CORONATION

TRY THE MOST LETHAL SUPERNATURAL WEAPON IN HISTORY! BEEN CURSED BY EVERY GOD IN THE HINDI PANTHEON.
WITH THE CONTINENT ON THE BRINK OF WAR, SOMETHING THAT POWERFUL COULD JUST TIP THE SCALES.
IMAGINE IF IT FELL INTO THE HANDS OF THE GOLDEN DAWN.


YOU'RE AWFULLY PARANOID FOR A PRIEST. THE GOLDEN DAWN IS ANCIENT HISTORY.
ANCIENT HISTORY HAS A WAY OF REPEATING ITSELF, WOLVERTON.
I THINK THE WORLD WILL BE A LOT SAFER WITH THE HOPE DIAMOND IN OUR HANDS, DON'T YOU?
FOR ONCE THE STARS ARE ALIGNED IN OUR FAVOR.
GETTING IT OUT OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM WON'T EXACTLY BE A WALK IN THE PARK.
I'M SURE EUROPE'S BIGGEST STAR CAN GET YOU IN JUST ABOUT ANYWHERE.
ISABELLE IS BACK. HER TOUR HAS ALREADY SOLD OUT THE ROYAL OPERA HOUSE.
OH, NO! I'M NOT INVOLVING HER. IT'S FAR TOO DANGEROUS.
IT COULD BE FATE. PERHAPS THE TWO OF YOU ARE MEANT A SECOND CHANCE.
NICETIES LIKE A NORMAL LIFE AREN'T IN THE CARDS ...
IT'S MY JOB TO LOCK THESE EVIL THINGS AWAY WHERE THEY CAN'T HURT ANYONE.
IT'S NOT ALL ON YOU, LAD. YOU WEREN'T THE ONE WHO OPENED THE PANDORA'S BOX
BUT, WE KNOW WHO DID, FATHER. AND, I INTEND TO CLOSE IT ONCE AND FOR ALL.


BACK HOME TO A *LONDON* IN TRANSITION. CARS *NOW* OUT NUMBER HORSE-DRAWN CARRIAGES
ARTS
ELECTRICITY HAS *REPLACED* THE *WARM GLOW* OF GASLIGHT.
AND *SCIENCE* HAD FINALLY TRIUMPHED OVER SUPERSTITION AND *MAGIC!*
LONDONERS HAVE *GIVEN UP* THEIR *DRAB* VICTORIAN CLOTHES (AND MORALS) FOR MORE *COLORFUL* ONES.
KING GEORGE'S *CORONATION* NEXT WEEK! ALL THE *HEADS OF EUROPE* ATTENDING!
HOPE DIAMOND EXHIBIT TO *OPEN* AT BRITISH MUSEUM!
THE NEW KING
BUT *NOT* EVERYTHING'S JUST *ROSY.*
VARIOUS *NOBLES* ARE *HUNG* IN EFFIGY, INCLUDING *THE ONE* WE'RE ABOUT TO MEET.

LORD GRAY HAS THE FACE OF A MICHELANGELO CHERUB, BUT A SOUL FROM A MUCH LOWER LATITUDE!
BOO
BOOO
WE CAN ALL AGREE THAT WAR IS INEVITABLE. BUT, WHY DO WE FEAR IT SO?
WHY AREN'T WE RUNNING HEADLONG INTO THE FLAMES? IGNITING THE FUSE?
SIT DOWN, GRAY! STOP THESE DAMNED THEATRICS!
MY LORDS, I CAN GUARANTEE THAT ENGLAND WILL BE THE VICTOR!
WE HAVE THE WEAPONS AT OUR DISPOSAL TO ENSURE OUR RIGHTFUL PLACE.
I KNOW MANY LIVES WILL BE LOST.
BUT, THINK OF IT AS NATURAL SELECTION.
HE'S DROWNED OUT BY AN ANTI-STANDING OVATION.
MY LORDS, GET A STOMACH AND STRIKE THAT MATCH!
FINE. I'VE GROWN TIRED OF SEEING US LOSE COLONY AFTER COLONY
I'LL BRING THE KINGDOM BACK TO DOMINANCE WHETHER YOU WANT IT OR NOT!
SHAME!
HISS!
GRAY STORMS OUT OF THE CHAMBER, THROWING HIS POWDERED WIG AND CAREER INTO THE NEAREST RECEPTACLE.

THE HATEFUL CROWD SEEMS TO ENERGIZE HIM. GRAY WHISTLES FOR HIS CARRIAGE.
BLAM!
DORIAN GRAY! YOU DEVIL!
BLAM!
BLAM!
THE ASSASSIN VANISHES IN THE COMMOTION. POLICEMEN RUN TO GRAY'S SIDE.
STAY STILL LORD! WE NEED TO GET YOU TO THE HOSPITAL!
THE VICTIM SURPRISES EVERYONE BY GETTING TO HIS FEET.
I NEED TO GO HOME!
GRITTING HIS TEETH IN PAIN, GRAY JUMPS INSIDE HIS CARRIAGE, LEAVING A TRAIL OF BLOOD.

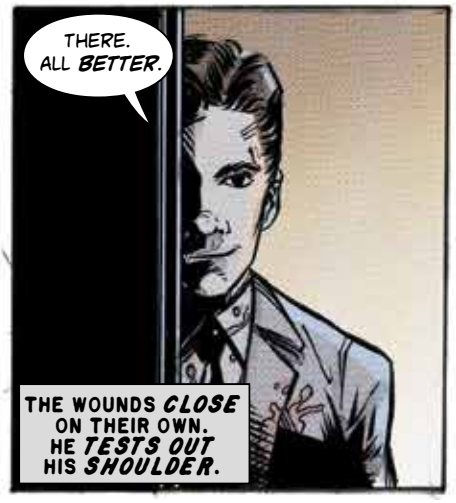
STARK
AND
RRETT

YOU'RE HURT!
YES. FANCY THAT.

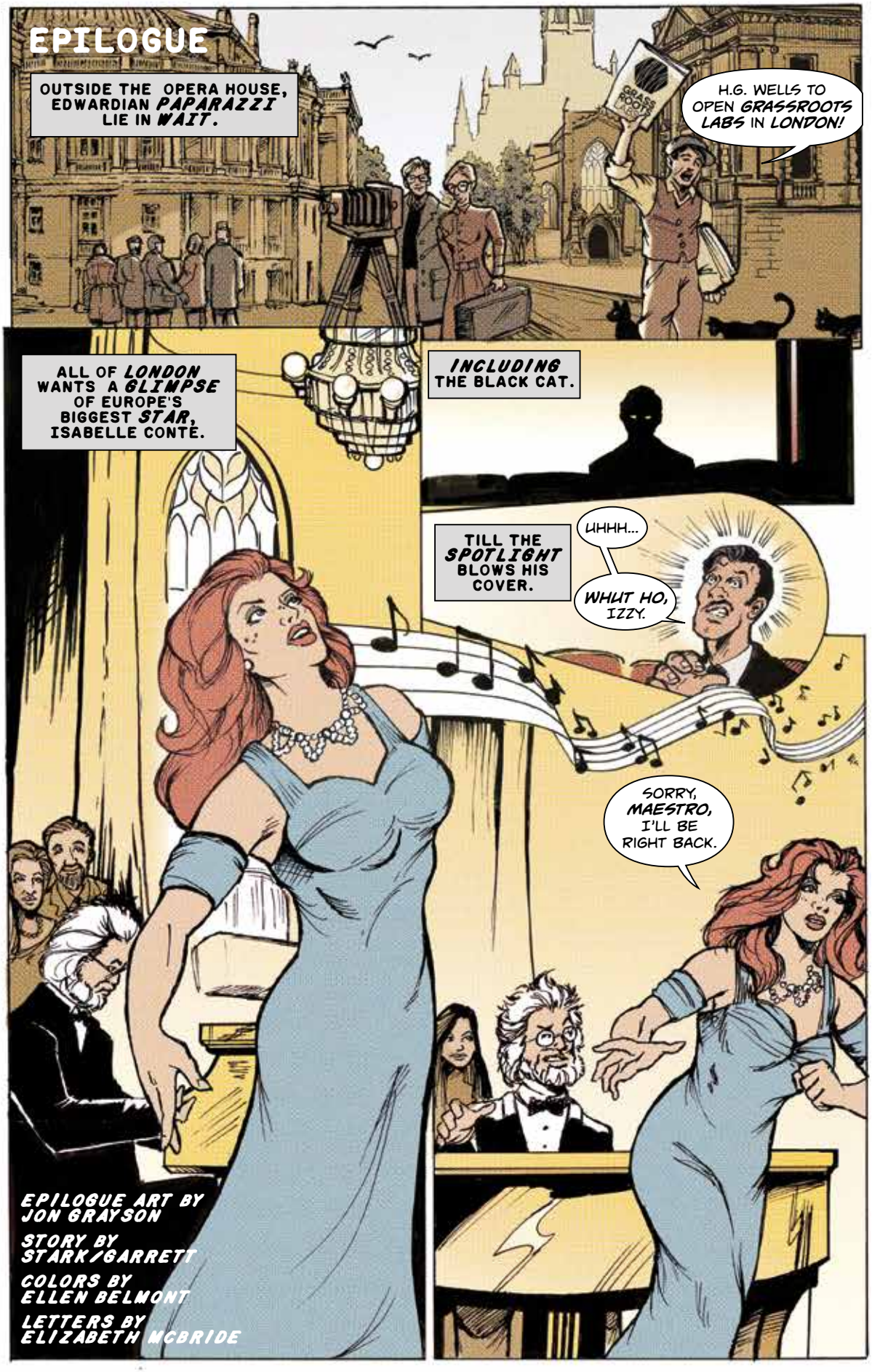
HE'S CARRIED TO THE SALON. THE WALLS ARE ALL COVERED WITH PORTRAITS OF THE SAME SUBJECT...
HIMSELF!
I'LL GET YOU A DOCTOR.
JUST GET ME A DRINK!

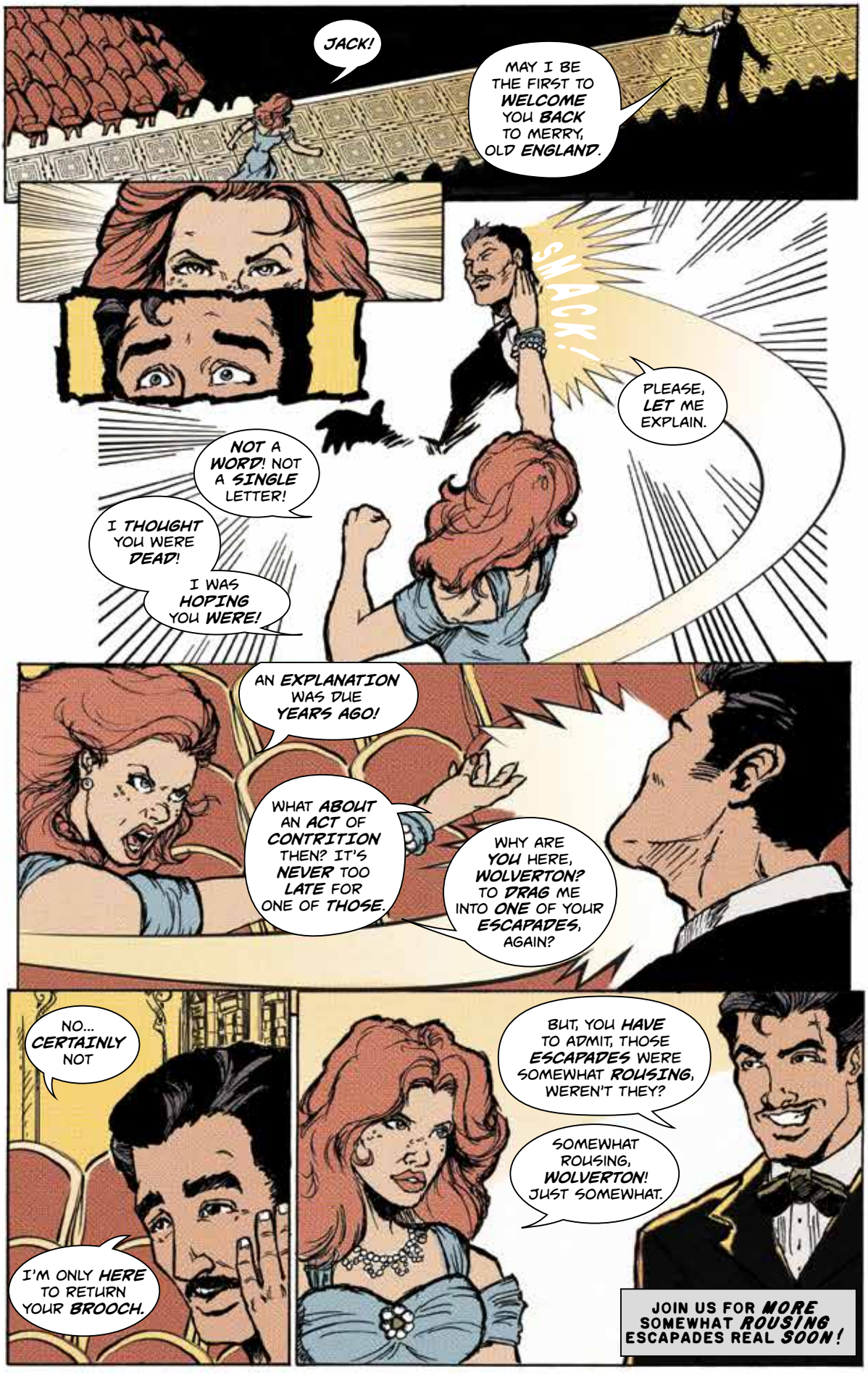
GRAY LIMPS OVER TO ONE IN PARTICULAR
AND CARESSES HIS LIKENESS.

THE PAIN VANISHES. THE CANVAS WORKS ITS FORBIDDEN MAGIC.
PING!
PING!
PING!


THERE. ALL BETTER.
THE WOUNDS CLOSE ON THEIR OWN. HE TESTS OUT HIS SHOULDER.

WE *PULL BACK* TO *REVEAL* A WELL-APPOINTED ROOM FILLED WITH PRICELESS ANTIQUES.
AS WELL AS A SHOCKING COLLECTION OF *ODDITIES* AND *GROTESQUES*.
AND, THERE'S *ALWAYS* ROOM FOR *ONE* MORE.
YOU KNOW HOW I *FEEL* ABOUT MIXING WITH THE *HOI POLLOI*.
WHY *DON'T* WE *SCHEDULE* A FAR MORE *PRIVATE* VIEWING OF THE *HOPE DIAMOND*, THEN?


EPILOGUE
OUTSIDE THE OPERA HOUSE, EDWARDIAN PAPARAZZI LIE IN WAIT.
H.G. WELLS TO OPEN GRASSROOTS LABS IN LONDON!
GRASS ROOTS LABS
ALL OF LONDON WANTS A GLIMPSE OF EUROPE'S BIGGEST STAR, ISABELLE CONTÉ.
INCLUDING THE BLACK CAT.
TILL THE SPOTLIGHT BLOWS HIS COVER.
UHHH...
WHUT HO, IZZY.
SORRY, MAESTRO, I'LL BE RIGHT BACK.
EPILOGUE ART BY JON GRAYSON
STORY BY STARK/GARRETT
COLORS BY ELLEN BELMONT
LETTERS BY ELIZABETH MCBRIDE


JACK!
MAY I BE THE FIRST TO WELCOME YOU BACK TO MERRY, OLD ENGLAND.
SMACK!
PLEASE, LET ME EXPLAIN.
NOT A WORD! NOT A SINGLE LETTER!
I THOUGHT YOU WERE DEAD!
I WAS HOPING YOU WERE!
AN EXPLANATION WAS DUE YEARS AGO!
WHAT ABOUT AN ACT OF CONTRITION THEN? IT'S NEVER TOO LATE FOR ONE OF THOSE.
WHY ARE YOU HERE, WOLVERTON? TO DRAG ME INTO ONE OF YOUR ESCAPADES, AGAIN?
NO... CERTAINLY NOT
I'M ONLY HERE TO RETURN YOUR BROOCH.
BUT, YOU HAVE TO ADMIT, THOSE ESCAPADES WERE SOMEWHAT ROUSING, WEREN'T THEY?
SOMEWHAT ROUSING, WOLVERTON! JUST SOMEWHAT.
JOIN US FOR MORE SOMEWHAT ROUSING ESCAPADES REAL SOON!

December 20, 1910

My father opened this Pandora's Box. It's my job to close it. It was always my job. I've never known another thing.

Lionel Wolverton wasn't a bad man, but the allure of these cursed things was just too strong. That's why we work together in this order. Lest any man get tempted. And, they get tempted. Throughout all of mankind, throughout history, don't they always?

We moved around a lot. But, it was in France where it all went to Hell. I was eleven. My parents rented a villa nestled in the hills of Provence. We always kept out of the cities and off the beaten path.

Before the fire, one could say my childhood was idyllic. Salad Days in a carnivorous world. My parents were a handsome couple so much in love. They didn't much miss high society; they brought fun and warmth wherever they holed up. And, a villa in France wasn't exactly roughing it. The Wolvertons might have made a holy vow, but that didn't exactly mean one of poverty.

We were entertained every evening by the steward and his beautiful daughter, Isabelle. Unless you've been locked up in the Tower of London, you've probably heard of her. I loved her then. I love her now. I've never known another thing.

Isa was like an angel to me. How could I help but stare? So, my spoon kept missing my mouth while she sang during supper.

My father ruffled my hair. "You're going to need a bigger spoon, son."

Then, a loud knock at the door stopped the music. Who knew we were here? Stupid question. Evil always knew where we were.

Our manservant, Dix, stopped serving and snapped to attention. My father signaled Isabelle's father to "Continuiez" He kept his cool, but I noticed a bead of sweat on his brow and him palming a tiny revolver.

I only caught glimpses. Couldn't hear a thing over the music. My father opened the door to two swarthy gypsies. He didn't seem happy to see them. They were loud and drunk and came bearing a gift – one poorly bundled in dirty swaddling. He grabbed it from them and I saw the wrapping come apart, exposing the mummified paw of an animal.

Always that damn paw. It begins there. It ends there. It circles back continuously there in an infinite loop I pray one day will end before I go mad.

That soul damning Monkey's Paw!

I couldn't sleep that night. My parents' arguing saw to that. It was the first time I ever heard my mother so upset.

"You promised you were done. I don't want those things anywhere near Jack. They're far too dangerous."

"Do you honestly think the church should have them? Or the King's army? They're all corruptible!"

"They go, Lionel. Or, I go!"

The door slammed. I heard my father's footsteps towards my room. I blew out the candle and pretended to be asleep. I smelled the alcohol on his breath immediately.

"I know you're playing possum."

"What were you and mother fighting about?"

"I have to go abroad in the morning. It won't be so long this time."

"You always say that."

"It's the last time. I promise."

Later that night, I found him passed out on the couch. Already a seasoned pickpocket, I dipped my fingers into his shirt pocket, where I found the key to the wine cellar. The one room in the house that was always off limits to me. Till now.

I made my way down the hall, but the door was already wide open. I took the lantern off the wall and ventured down. Our villa was old, but this part was absolutely ancient like the reliquary of a medieval abbey. The room seemed to stretch out endlessly.

And, I was not alone down there!

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