





O FIE!
FIE UPON
MY OWN
WRETCHED
MIND!

Lament!
THIS CRUEL
FORTUNE DOETH
PLAGUE
ME SO.



DOETH
THE MASTER
OF ENGLISH
NOW SUCCEUMB
TO THE
SCRIVENER'S
GLOATING
FIEND?



**WRITER'S
BLOCK!**



SIR
SHAKESPEARE?

A FOOLISH
YOUNG PAGE ENTER'D
MY CHAMBER, WITHOUT
SO MUCH AS A KNOCK
ON MY DOOR.



WAS MY REQUEST NOT
CLEAR AS SUMMER SKY?
YOU KNOW I ASKED
NEVER TO BE DISTURBED,
ESPECIALLY WHILST
I WAS HARD AT
WORK.

WOULD YOU
ALL WRITERS
ENDURE THESE
TORTURES?

NAY, SIR,
THE MATTER
IS AN URGENT
ONE.

WOULDEST
THOU ANNOY
A SURGEON AS
HE TOILED WITH
OPEN-GUTTED
WOUNDS?

THINK
HIM
AS I!

BUT
SIR...

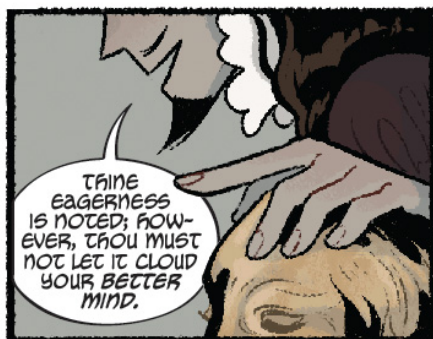
THAT IS THE
COWARD'S REMORSELESS
EXCUSE. TO "BUT SIR" YOUR
EMPLOYER! OUT WITH YOU!



I DID NOT
MEAN OFFENSE
TO MY MASTER...



THE BLOODY
QUEEN'S
BEEN STOLEN
FROM HER
THRONE!





FAIR LONDON
TOWN MUST CONTAIN
CHESTS GALORE,
BUT IN WHOSE BREAST
COULD BEAT A HEART
SO FOUL AS TO COMMIT
SUCH AN ATROCIOUS
CRIME? OUR QUEEN
ELIZABETH MUST BE
SO SCARED.

THOUGH
I HAVE MY SUSPICIONS,
WE MUST WAIT UNTIL WE
CAN DIVINE A PROPER CLUE.
IT IS UNWISE TO PUT A STEED
BEHIND THE CART, IN FRONT
OF WHICH IT WOULD
RUN TRUE.



YOUR POWER
OF WILL IS
HUMBLING,
MASTER.

OUR SEARCH
FOR QUEEN ELIZABETH
SHALL NOW COMMENCE
WITH THOROUGH STUDY
OF THE SCENE.

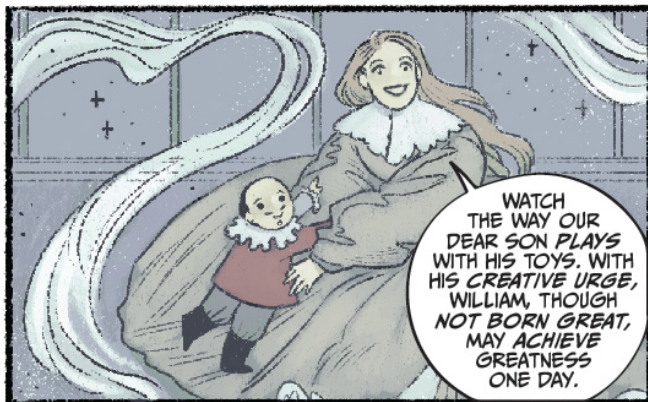
INHIBIT NOT
THINE SENSE OF
SIGHT AND LEND
UTMOST ATTENTION
TO THE TASK AT HAND
PERCHANCE WE MIGHT
REVEAL THE GUILTY
TRAIL.

BUT KNOW
THE VILLAIN WHO DID
STEAL THE QUEEN MUST
HAVE THE STONES OF
TWENTY THOUSAND BOARDS!
LET CIRCUMSTANCE PREPARE
US FOR THE WORST.



WE RIDE TO
BUCKINGHAM PALACE
WITH HASTE!

E'er since I donned this *mask'd* identity, my mission: prejudicial capturing of treacherous and fiendish faerie knave after he turned my world upon its head, and to exhaust all necessary means to bring this awful creature to the light.



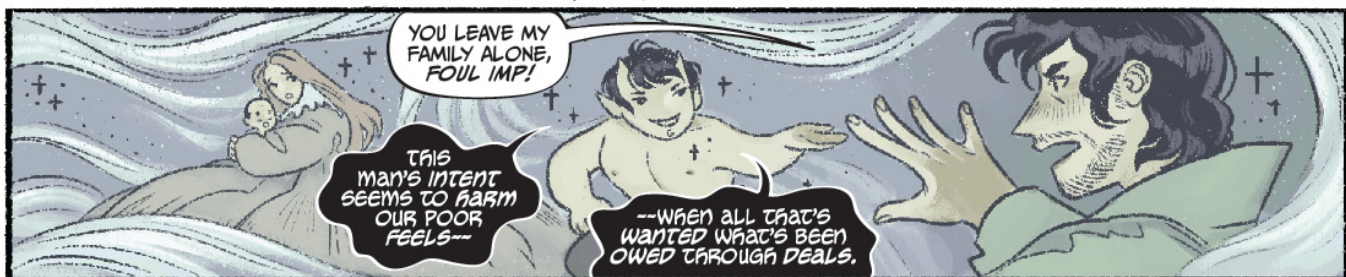
WATCH THE WAY OUR DEAR SON PLAYS WITH HIS TOYS. WITH HIS CREATIVE URGE, WILLIAM, THOUGH NOT BORN GREAT, MAY ACHIEVE GREATNESS ONE DAY.



WITH LUCK, MARY, HE HATH OUR BLOOD, YOU KNOW--

BE STILL, I FEAR COLLECTOR DOTH APPROACH.

JOHN SHAKESPEARE, IS THAT HOW YOU TREAT A GUEST?



YOU LEAVE MY FAMILY ALONE, FOUL IMP!

THIS man's INTENT seems to HARM OUR POOR FEELS--

--WHEN ALL THAT'S WANTED WHAT'S BEEN OWED THROUGH DEALS.



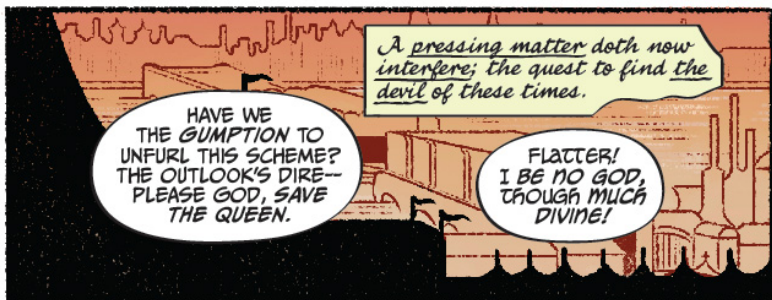
THEN WE SHALL HAVE TO TEACH HIM SOME RESPECT,



WHEN ASS'S NOSE IS FIXE'D UPON HIS NECK.

EXQUISITE MAYHEM! RUN AWAY, YOUNG BOY!

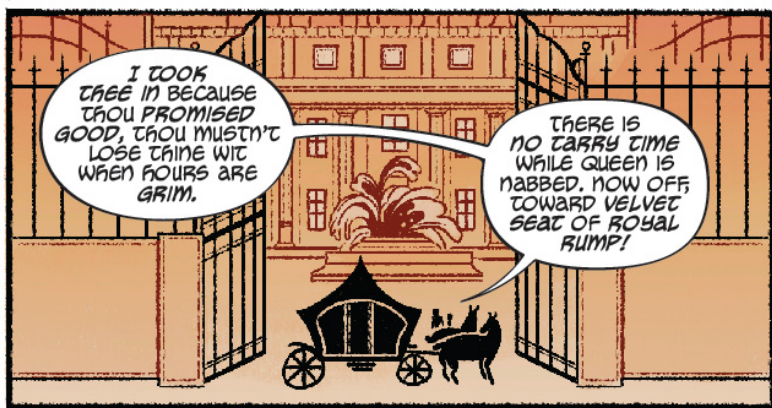
From since that day, I vowed to mete what's just. And when not writing plays, I wear the mask.



A pressing matter doth now interfere; the quest to find the devil of these times.

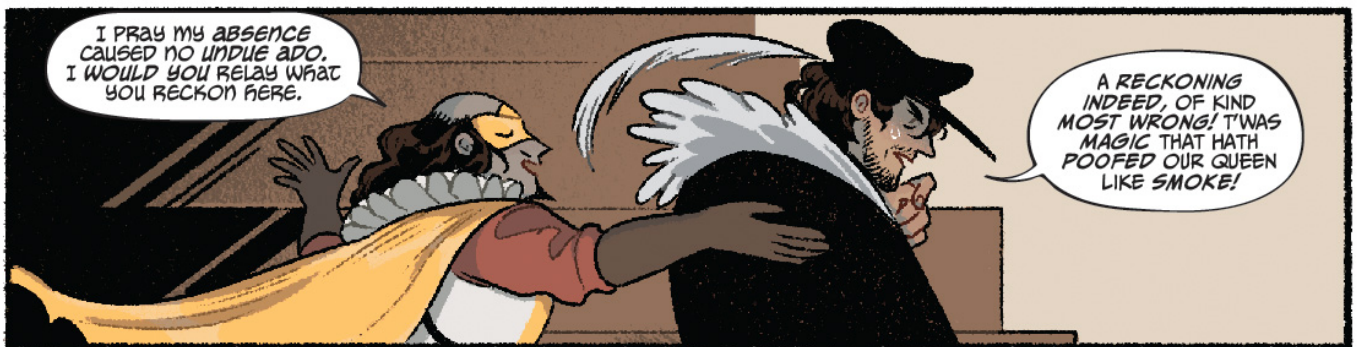
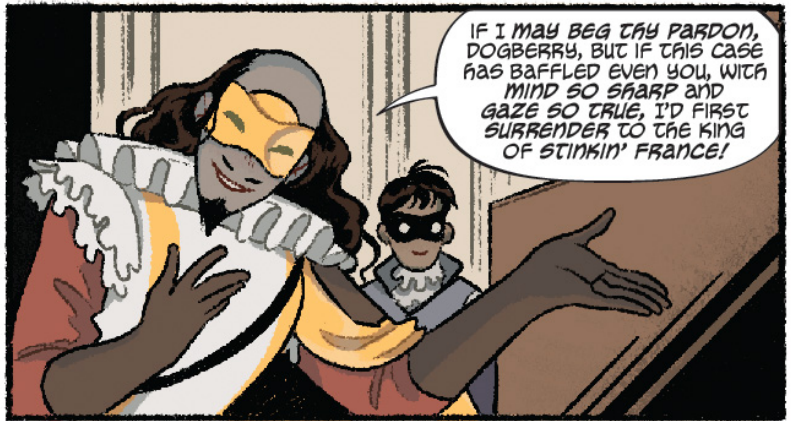
HAVE WE THE GUMPTION TO UNFURL THIS SCHEME? THE OUTLOOK'S DIRE-- PLEASE GOD, SAVE THE QUEEN.

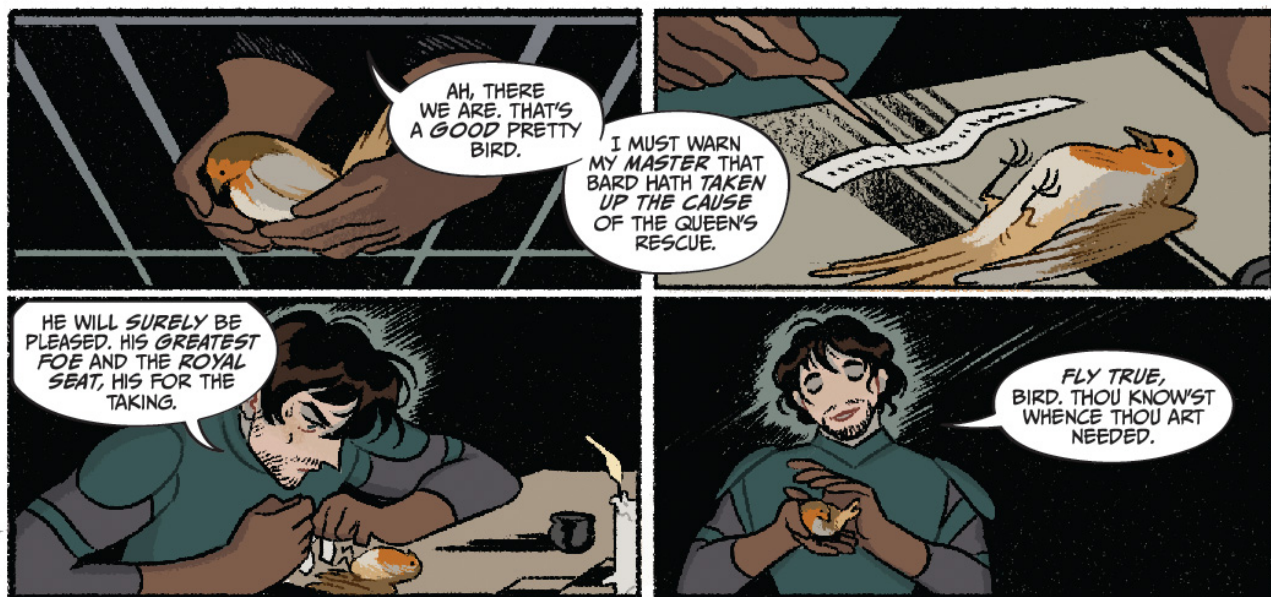
FLATTER! I BE NO GOD, THOUGH MUCH DIVINE!

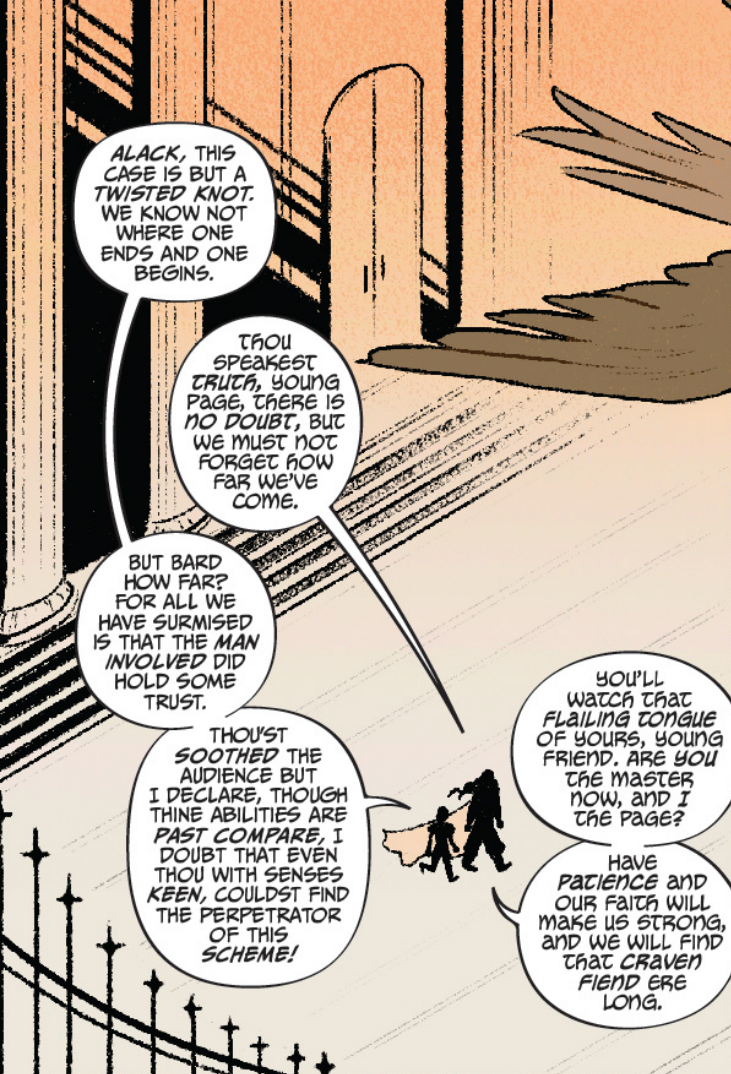


I TOOK THEE IN BECAUSE THOU PROMISED GOOD, THOU MUSTN'T LOSE THINE WIT WHEN HOURS ARE GRIM.

THERE IS NO TARRY TIME WHILE QUEEN IS NABBED. NOW OFF, TOWARD VELVET SEAT OF ROYAL RUMP!







ALACK, THIS CASE IS BUT A TWISTED KNOT. WE KNOW NOT WHERE ONE ENDS AND ONE BEGINS.

THOU SPEAKEST TRUTH, YOUNG PAGE, THERE IS NO DOUBT, BUT WE MUST NOT FORGET HOW FAR WE'VE COME.

BUT BARD HOW FAR? FOR ALL WE HAVE SURMISED IS THAT THE MAN INVOLVED DID HOLD SOME TRUST.

THOU'ST SOOTHED THE AUDIENCE BUT I DECLARE, THOUGH THINE ABILITIES ARE PAST COMPARE, I DOUBT THAT EVEN THOU WITH SENSES KEEN, COULDST FIND THE PERPETRATOR OF THIS SCHEME!

YOU'LL WATCH THAT FLAILING TONGUE OF YOURS, YOUNG FRIEND. ARE YOU THE MASTER NOW, AND I THE PAGE?

HAVE PATIENCE AND OUR FAITH WILL MAKE US STRONG, AND WE WILL FIND THAT CRAVEN FIEND ERE LONG.



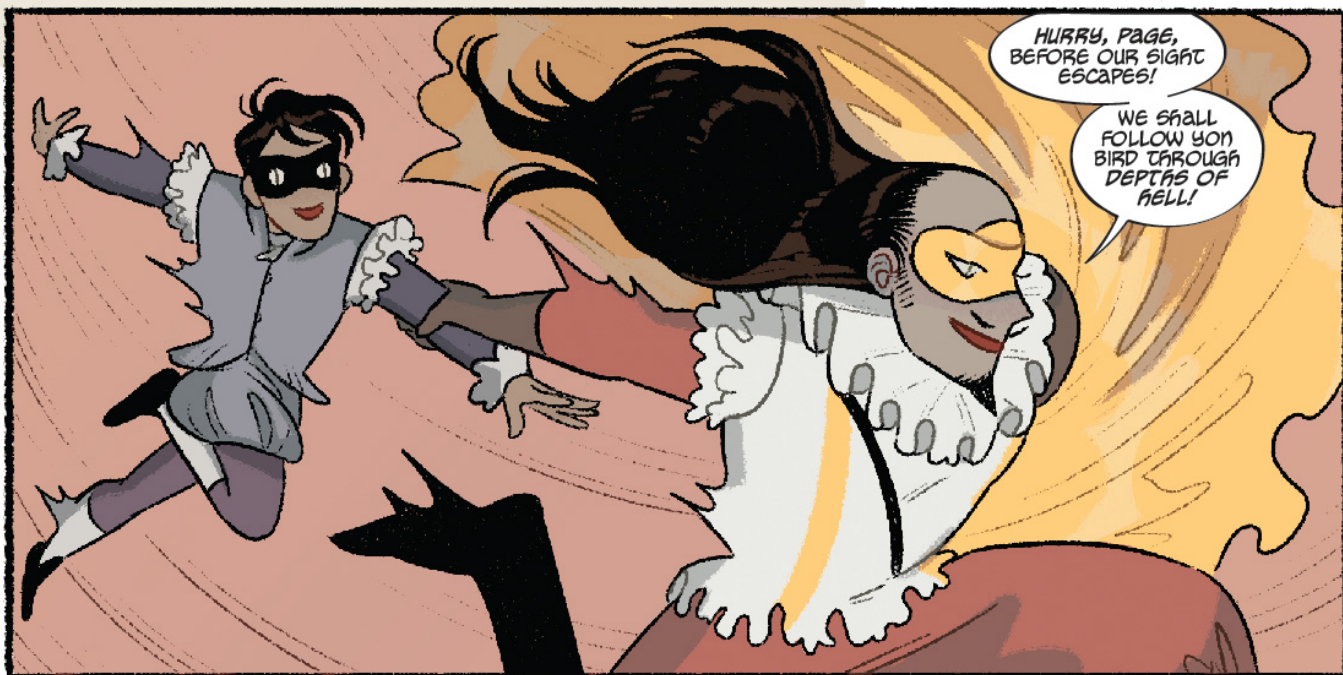
LO YONDER BIRD FLIES CROOK'ED OVERHEAD.



A ROBIN, GOOD FELLOW AND NOTHING MORE, IT SYMBOLIZES LOVE AND GOOD IN STORE.



OH, HAAAARK?! PERHAPS IT IS NOT BUT A SIGN. A MESSAGE APPEARS WRAPPED UPON ITS LIMB. QUICK, FOLLOW IT TO SEE WHAT IT MAY HOLD!



HURRY, PAGE, BEFORE OUR SIGHT ESCAPES!

WE SHALL FOLLOW YON BIRD THROUGH DEPTHS OF HELL!

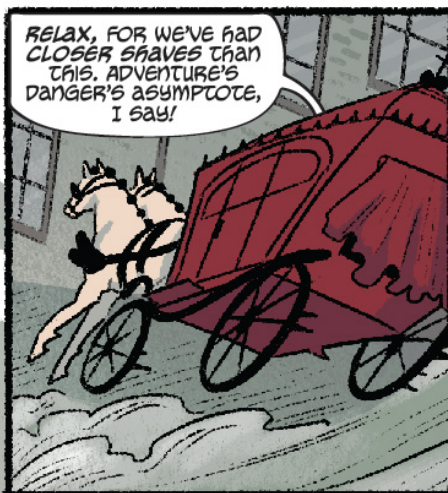


I OWE YOU AN APOLOGY, MASTER. PRAY SLAP ME IF I DO DOUBT YOU AGAIN!

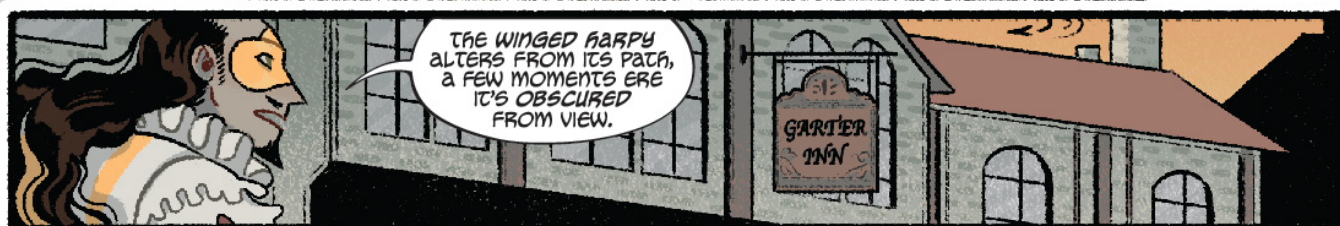
SAVE YOUR BREATH, YOUNG PAGE. WE MAY NEED IT YET.



EXCEPT WE'RE GOING TO CRASH INTO THAT WALL!



RELAX, FOR WE'VE HAD CLOSER SHAVES THAN THIS. ADVENTURE'S DANGER'S ASYMPTOTE, I SAY!



THE WINGED HARPY ALTERS FROM ITS PATH, A FEW MOMENTS ERE IT'S OBSCURED FROM VIEW.



THOSE BLESSED FATES MUST BE WITH US TODAY. DO BE A LAD AND PULL THE COACH 'ROUND BACK.



HMM.

UH, BOSS? METHINKS THAT IS A PULLING DOOR.



FANCY A DRINK TA SLAKE YOUR THIRST? WE HAVE THE FINEST BOOZE IN ALL OF LONDON TOWN. MY NAME'S FALSTAFF AND HOST THE GARTER INN...

AT LEAST WHEN MISTRESS QUICKLY'S INDISPOSED.



I MUST
RESPECTFULLY
DECLINE BUT
ASK FAVOR TO
SEE A ROOM
UPSTAIRS AT
ONCE.

THAT'S
A WONDER, HOW
LONG WILT THOU
BE HERE?



DREAD KIDNAPPING'S
WHAT I INVESTIGATE,
OF UTMOST IMPORT
TO THE QUEEN AND
COUNTRY!

I TRACK
A BIRD
ATOP GOOD
KEEPER'S
INN.



NO NEED TO
TALK MY EAR
OFF, COME
THIS WAY.

YOU SHALL
HAVE MY SINCEREST
GRATITUDE.

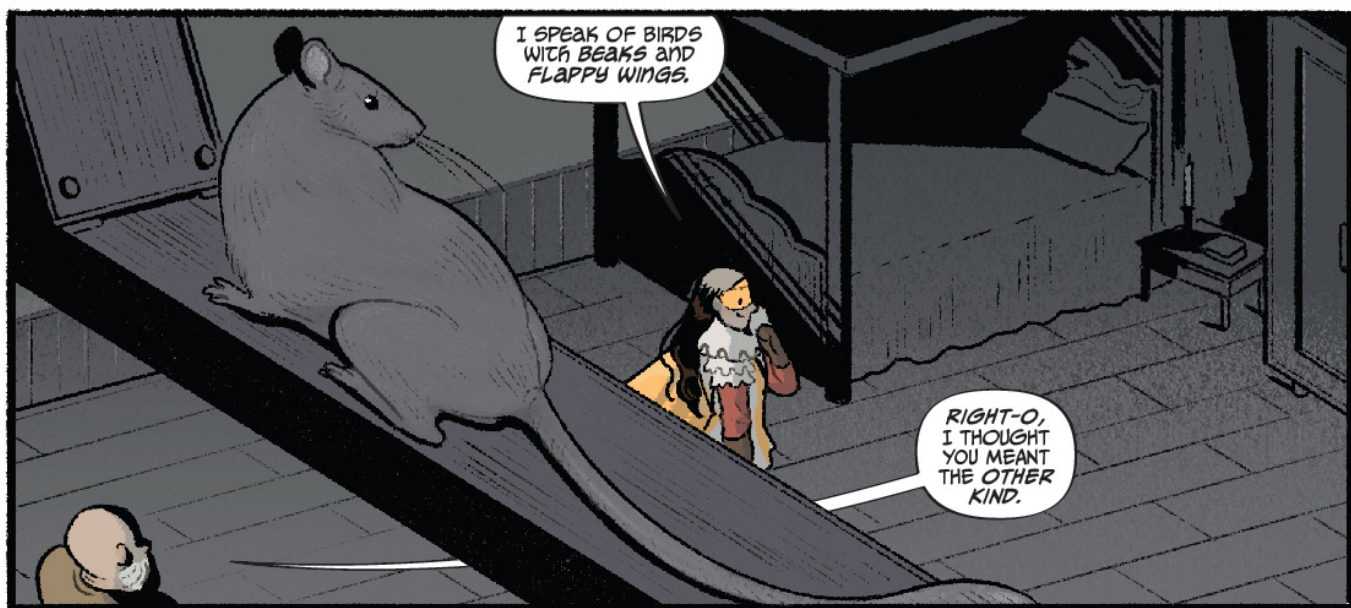


WE DO
NOT OFTEN HOST
YOUR CALIBER OF
PERSONAGE INSIDE
THIS HUMBLE
INN...

FOR
AFTER ALL,
THOU HAST
DISCERNING
TASTES.



IF IT'S A BIRD
YOU WANT, I KNOW
SOME DAMES. THEY
MAY PLAY HARD TO
GET, BUT THAT'S
THEIR GAME!



I SPEAK OF BIRDS
WITH BEAKS AND
FLAPPY WINGS.

RIGHT-O,
I THOUGHT
YOU MEANT
THE OTHER
KIND.





WHAT BRAND
OF MADNESS
DISPLAYEST
THOU NOW?



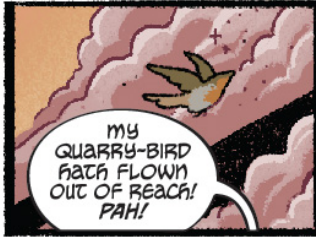
NOT
MADNESS
AT ALL. ONLY
ANGER
PURE!



OH!

I HOPED
TO LAY MY
EYES UPON
THE BARD.

AND TO
DISPOSE OF
HIM WHEN THAT
TIME CAME.



MY
QUARRY-BIRD
HATH FLOWN
OUT OF REACH!
PAH!



NOW YOU SHALL FEEL
THE POWER OF MY FIST!



I WOULD
MISTAKE THAT
FOR A WEE
BABE'S TOUCH!



THOU
ALWAYS STRUCK
ME AS A GLORY
HOG.

ART THOU
AFRAID TO FACE
WHAT THOU HAST
WROUGHT, A WORLD
GONE SOUR
BECAUSE OF THY
DEEDS?



NOW I SHALL
EXPOSE THINE
FACE TO THE
WORLD!



I ONLY EVER
TRIED MY BEST
TO PLEASE.



SHAKESPEARE?
THE BARD? DO
MINE EYES
DECEIVE ME?



NO.
IT CANNOT
BE. THINE
WORKS ART
LOVELY.



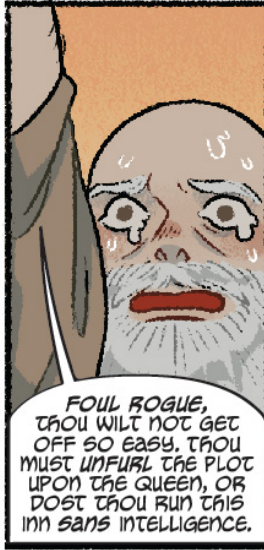
THE MAN
TOLD ME THAT
I'D HAVE MY
REVENGE AGAINST
THINE HAUGHTY
ATTITUDE--

YOUR
STEP!



THOUGH
YOU TRIED
TO MURDER
ME, I SHALL
NOT LET YOU
DIE THIS
DAY.

SPARE THINE
PLATITUDES. THOU
COULDEST NOT LIFT
ME E'EN IF THOU
DIDST TRIED.



FOUL ROGUE,
THOU WILT NOT GET
OFF SO EASY. THOU
MUST UNFURL THE PLOT
UPON THE QUEEN, OR
DOST THOU RUN THIS
INN SANS INTELLIGENCE.

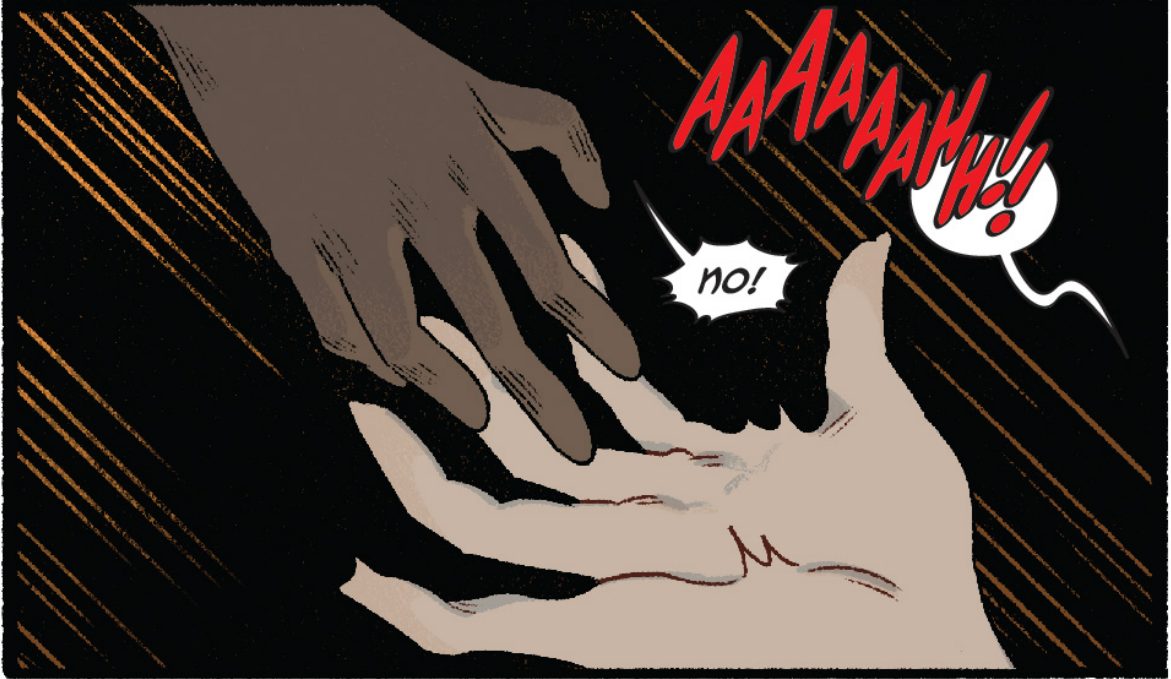


I HAVE
BEEN SWORN
TO *SECRECY*!
I WOULD BE
A DEAD MAN
ERE SPILLING
PLOTTER'S
BEANS!



YOU ARE A DEAD
MAN! I CANNOT
HOLD ON!

THOU
MAKEST
A POINT. THE
MAN'S NAME
WAS--



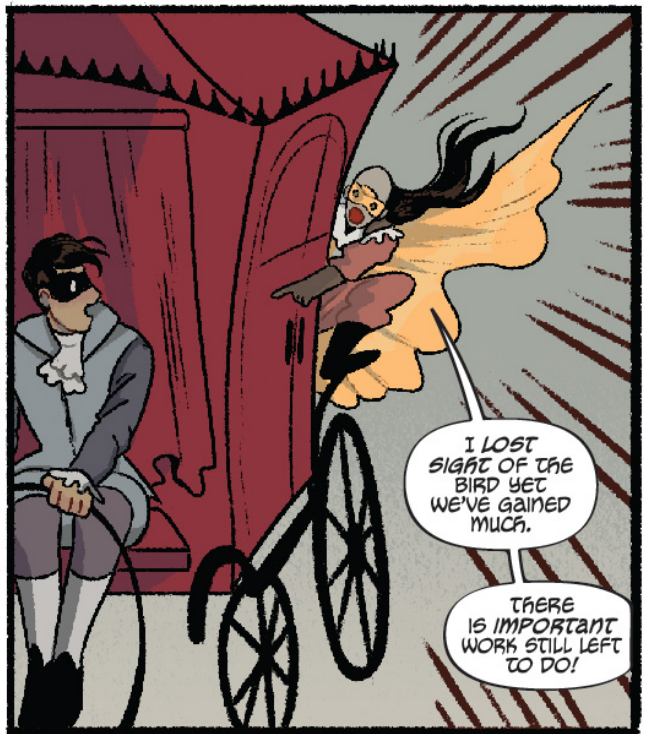
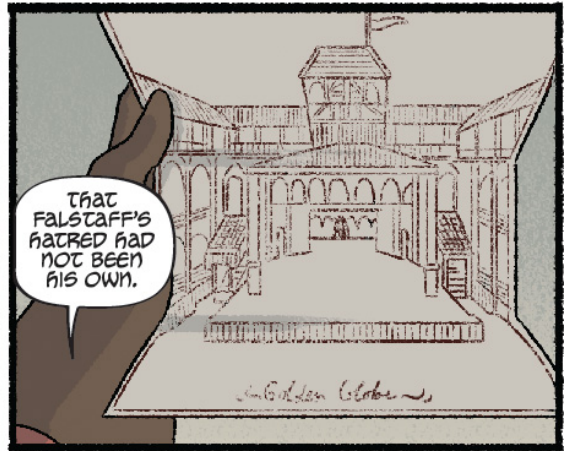
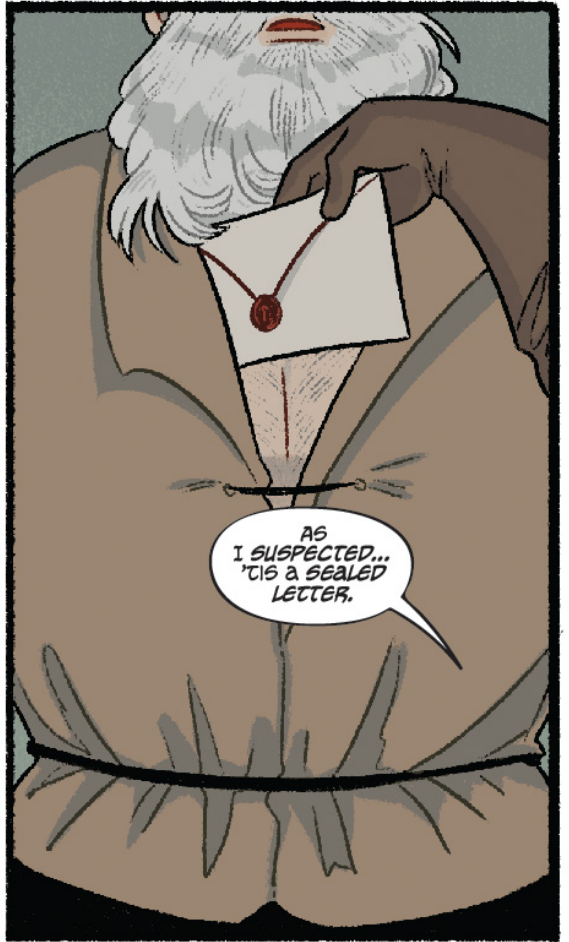
AAAAAH!!

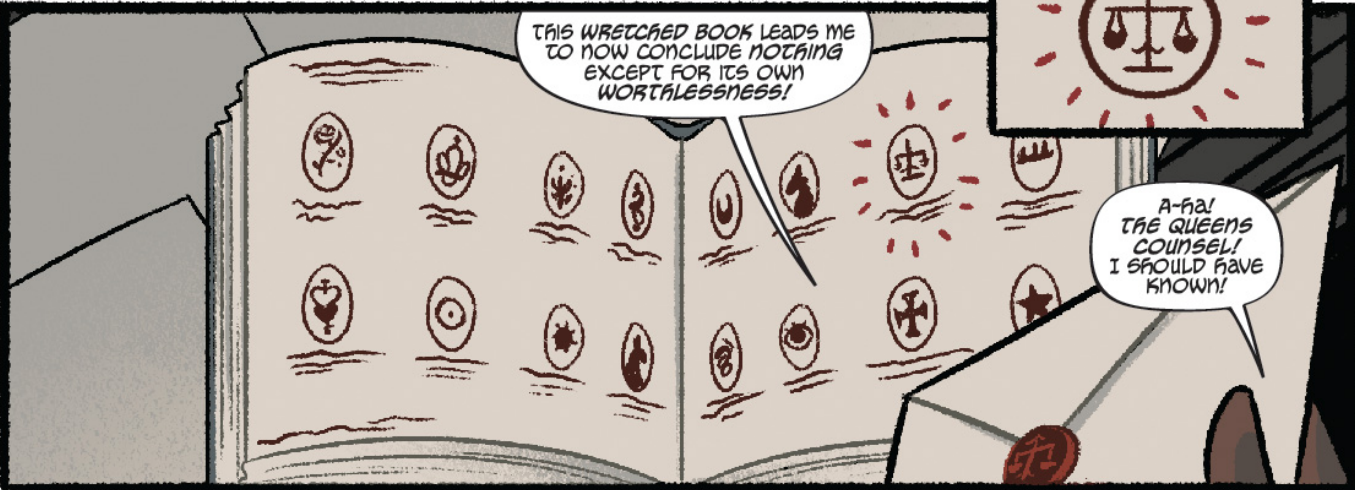
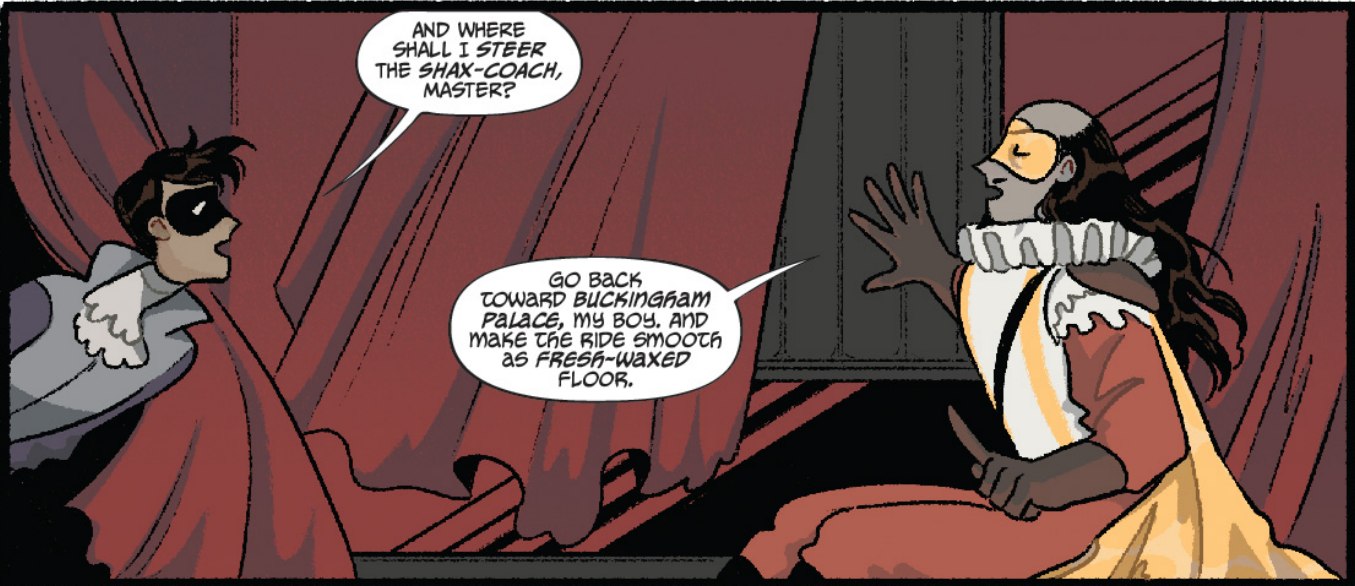
NO!

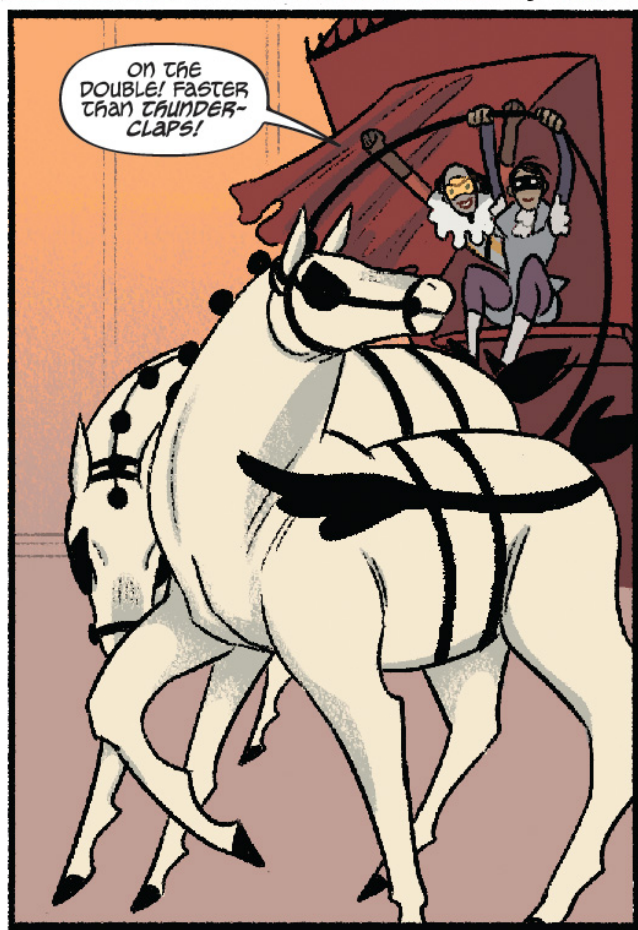


YE GODS ARE
ACTING AWFULLY
CRUEL TO-DAY.
AND CRUELER
STILL ARE THE
TORMENTED
MEN.

POOR Falstaff WAS
BLINDED BY HIS RAGE.
HE TRIED TO TOSS ME,
YET HE FELL INSTEAD.
PERHAPS IRONY IS
THE CRUELEST
FORCE.









BY ORDER OF THE CONSTABLE WE WOULD DEMAND AUDIENCE WITH THE QUEEN'S COUNSEL!



HA, NO! NO SINGLE SOUL SHOULD PASS ALIVE!

YEAH, WHAT HE SAID! DEFEND THIS VERY GATE UNTO THE DEATH-- THAT IS OUR DUTY SWORN!



BY WHOSE ORDER? I HATE TO FORCE YOU TWO TO BREAK YOUR OATHS, WHICH WERE LIKELY SWORN IN SOLEMNITY, BUT DO NOT FORCE OUR HANDS.



SINCE THOU DOST NOT KNOW THAT 'T WAS SIR FRANCIS BACON'S INSTRUCTION WE SHALL NEVER TELL.

ROSENCRANTZ! THOU HAST SPOILT THE MASTER'S NAME!



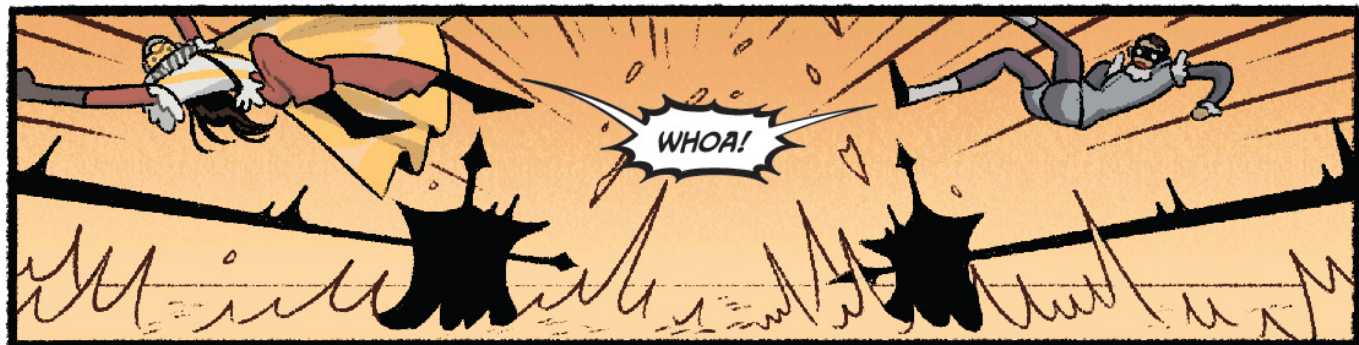
FRANCIS BACON! MINE OLDEST FRENEMY! HOW COULDEST THOU REMAIN HIDDEN FOR SO LONG?

ARE YOU TWO LOITS LOYAL TO QUEEN OR FIEND?



NOW THOU SHALT TAKE HIS SECRET TO THE GRAVE!

PREPARE FOR SATAN'S SWEET EMBRACE, YOU TWO!



THESE BOYS ARE PLAYING ROUGHER THAN WE'D HOPED. NOW PAGE, EXACT DUE PUNISHMENT WHERE OWED!



RIGHT!



HUNH?



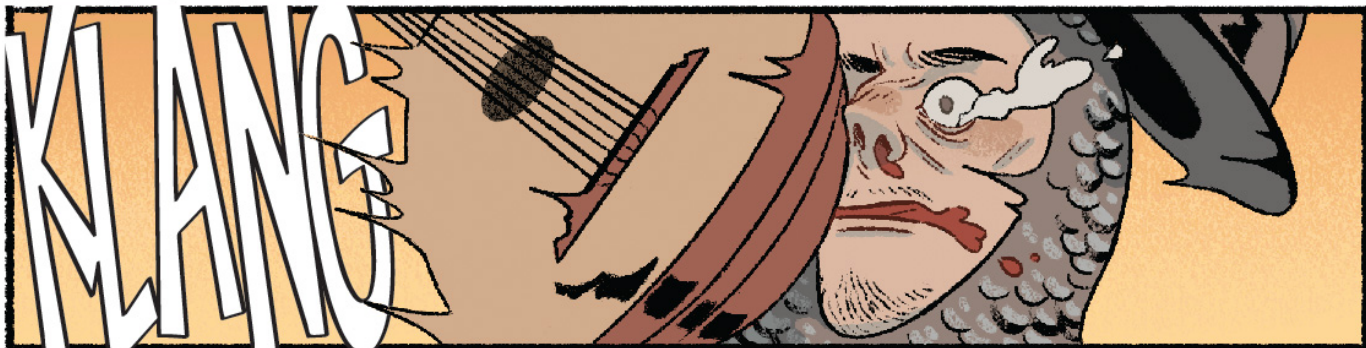
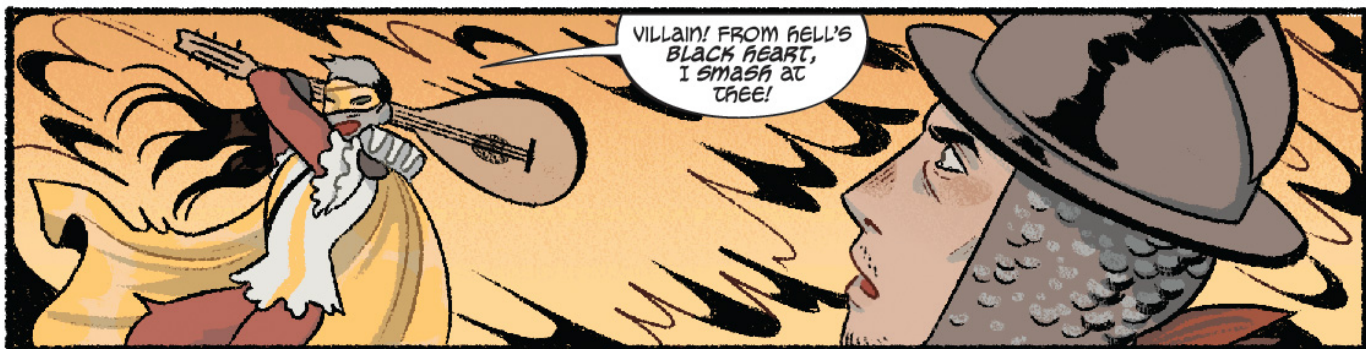
PAGE! REMEMBER HOW TO LAND UPON YOUR FEET!

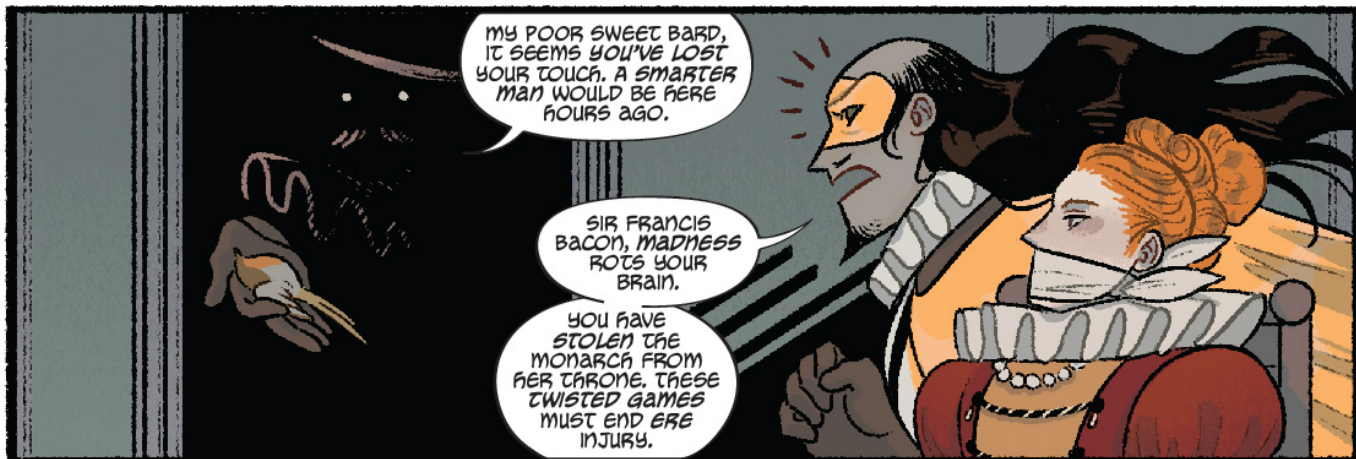
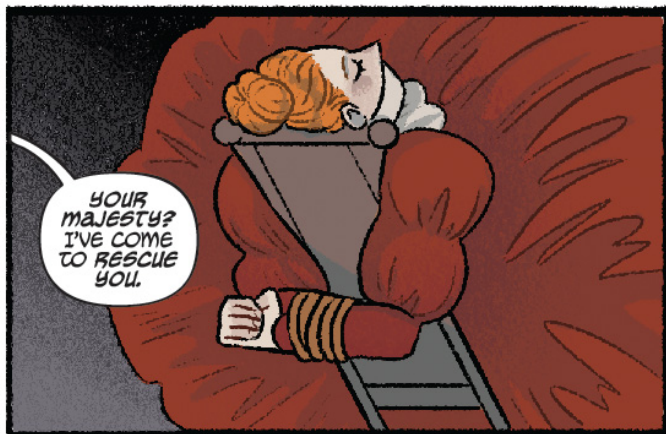


YOU MUDDY-MOTTLED MANGY-DOGS WILL PAY!

NO RAPSCALLION SHALL HARM--









BACON, THOU
ART A LILY-LIVER'D
FOOL. I BUT A SINGLE
QUESTION HAVE:
WHEREFORE?

RUMINATE,
WILL, THINE
TRIUMPHS ARE
MANY. BUT IF
THE PEOPLE
ATtribution
DOUBT...

THEN
BACON SHALL
THE AUTHORSHIP
ASSUME! I'LL
PLANT THE SEED
AND TAKE
WHAT'S RIGHTLY
MINE.



WHEN
PEOPLE SPEAK
OF THE LANGUAGE'S
LORD, SIR FRANCIS
BACON'S NAME
WILL PASS THEIR
LIPS!

BACON'S
TRAGEDIES, BACON'S
COMEDIES, BACON'S
HISTORIES, PROBLEMS,
SONNETS ALL! DREAD
SHAKESPEARE
MEANWHILE SMEARED
UPON THE WALL!



TO
A ROPE'S-END,
SIR; I SHALL CUT
THEM OFF.

HERE'S
SNIP AND NIP
AND CUT AND
SLASH AND
SLASH.



CURSES
ON FALSE
CUTS! I AM
MISTAKEN.



QUICK, PAGE,
WE'VE PLANNED
CONTINGENCIES
FOR THIS!

OF COURSE!
STAY ALIVE
WHILE I TAKE
MY LEAVE!

