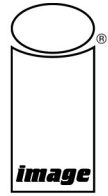


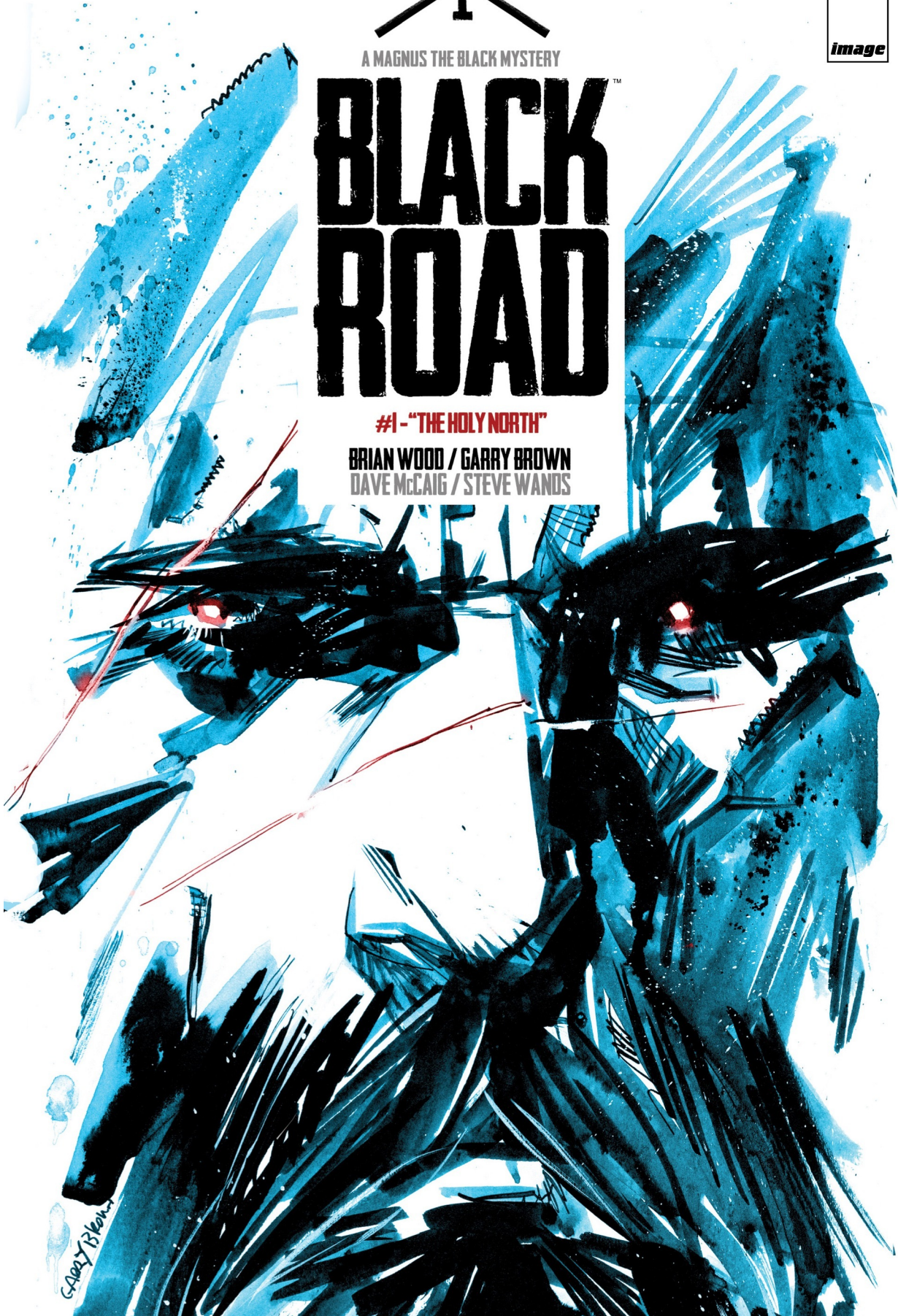
A MAGNUS THE BLACK MYSTERY



# BLACK ROAD™

#1 - "THE HOLY NORTH"

BRIAN WOOD / GARRY BROWN  
DAVE McCAIG / STEVE WANDS



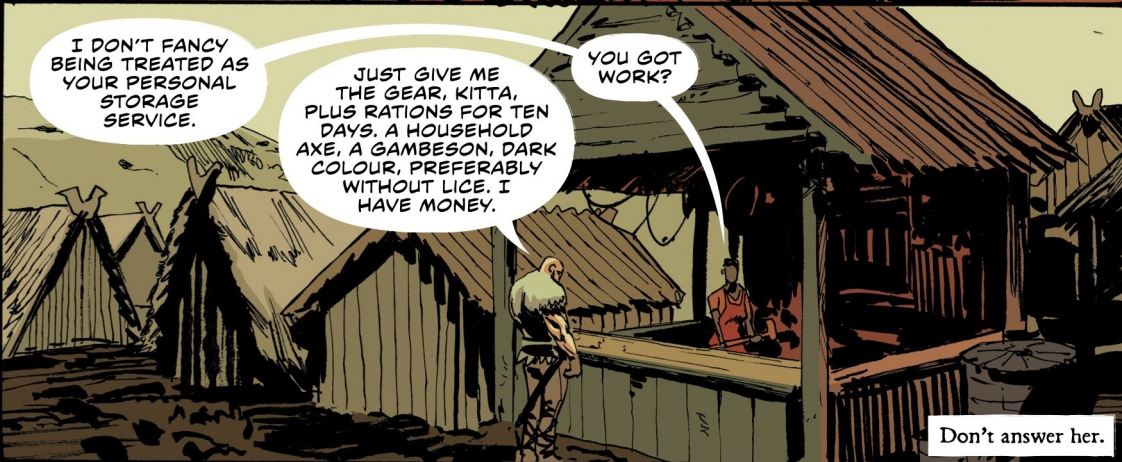
GARY BLANK

**A BIT LATER.**



BACK FOR YOUR [REDACTED] EH? HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN, MAGNUS?

Kitta. Blacksmith. And it's been almost a year.

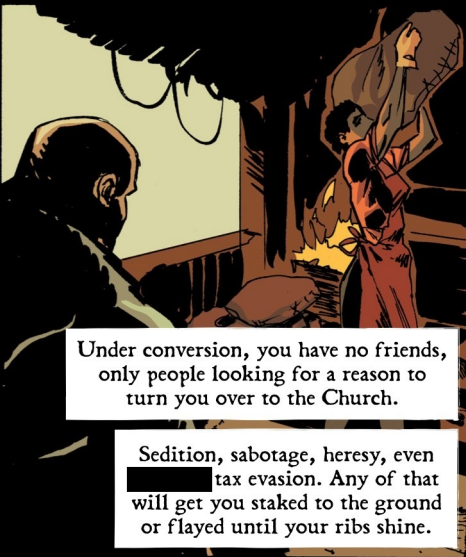


I DON'T FANCY BEING TREATED AS YOUR PERSONAL STORAGE SERVICE.

JUST GIVE ME THE GEAR, KITTA, PLUS RATIONS FOR TEN DAYS. A HOUSEHOLD AXE, A GAMBESON, DARK COLOUR, PREFERABLY WITHOUT LICE. I HAVE MONEY.

YOU GOT WORK?

Don't answer her.



Under conversion, you have no friends, only people looking for a reason to turn you over to the Church.

Sedition, sabotage, heresy, even [REDACTED] tax evasion. Any of that will get you staked to the ground or flayed until your ribs shine.



TIGHT MOUTH.

ROUGH TOWN.

TRUE ENOUGH.

THUD

EARLY NEXT MORNING.



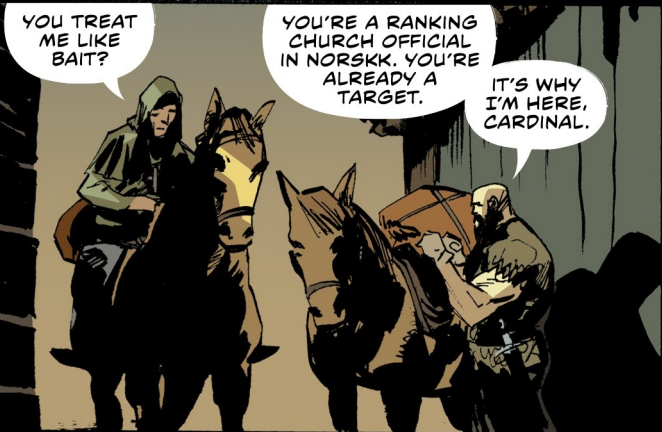
FARINA.



ARE YOU ALONE?

I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR CLOSE TO HALF AN HOUR. ARE YOU ALWAYS THIS LATE?

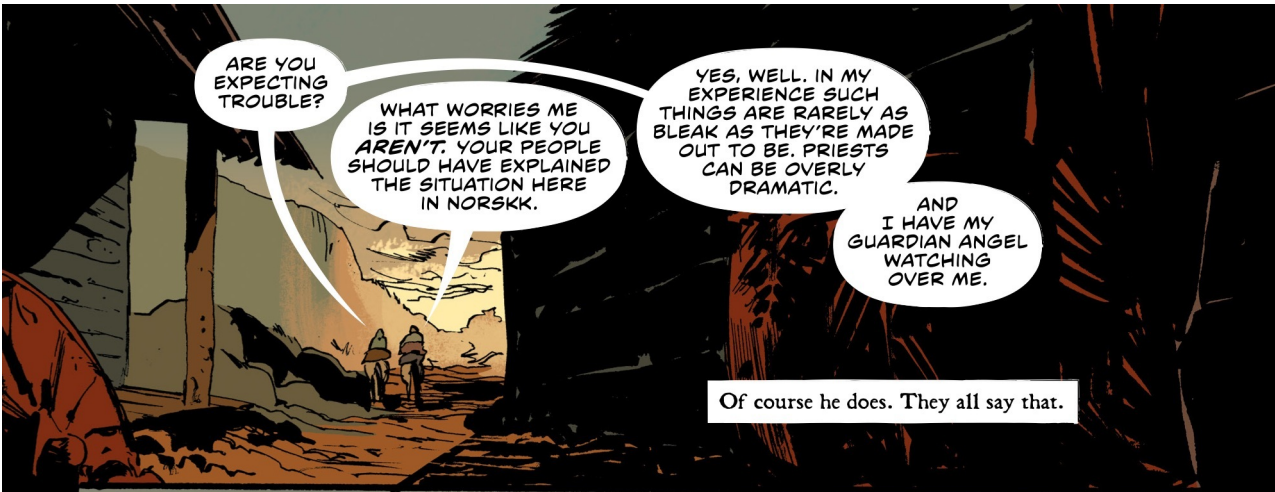
I WANTED TO SEE IF ANYONE ELSE WAS ABOUT BEFORE I APPROACHED.



YOU TREAT ME LIKE BAIT?

YOU'RE A RANKING CHURCH OFFICIAL IN NORSKK. YOU'RE ALREADY A TARGET.

IT'S WHY I'M HERE, CARDINAL.



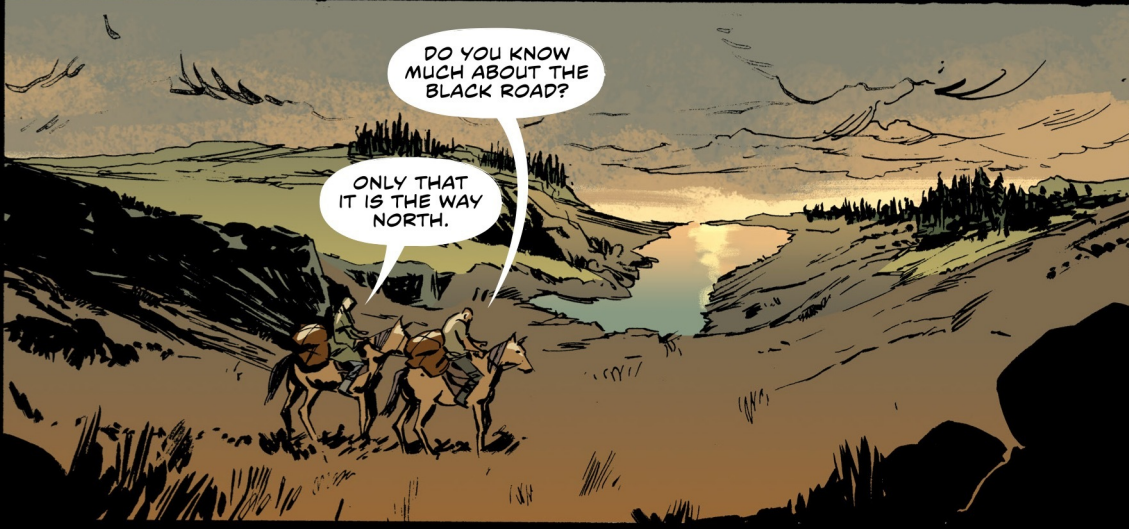
ARE YOU EXPECTING TROUBLE?

WHAT WORRIES ME IS IT SEEMS LIKE YOU AREN'T. YOUR PEOPLE SHOULD HAVE EXPLAINED THE SITUATION HERE IN NORSKK.

YES, WELL. IN MY EXPERIENCE SUCH THINGS ARE RARELY AS BLEAK AS THEY'RE MADE OUT TO BE. PRIESTS CAN BE OVERLY DRAMATIC.

AND I HAVE MY GUARDIAN ANGEL WATCHING OVER ME.

Of course he does. They all say that.



DO YOU KNOW MUCH ABOUT THE BLACK ROAD?

ONLY THAT IT IS THE WAY NORTH.



IT'S A PATH BUILT OF MISERY, SORROW, BLOOD AND BILE. ARMIES HAVE DIED ON THE ROAD, MOTHERS HAVE BEEN BUTCHERED, CHILDREN ENSLAVED... ANY MANNER OF UNSPEAKABLE CRIME YOU CAN IMAGINE, ITS VICTIMS HAVE BEEN FOUND STREWN ALONG THE WAYSIDE.

GOOD GOD.

THERE ARE NO ANGELS HERE.

If gold was really all I wanted, I'd be on a boat somewhere, viking.

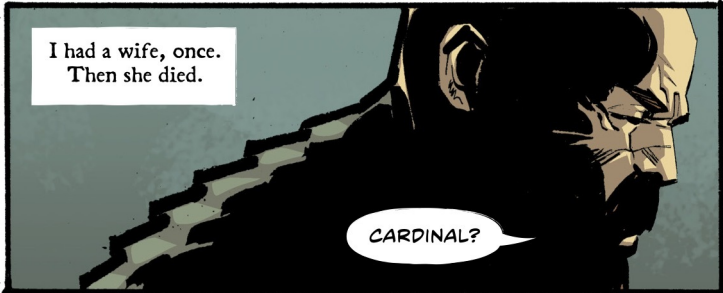


But I wanted to be closer to the Christians. They talk in riddles. They preach peace and love in the midst of performing incredible violence.

There's a structure, a purpose to what they do that is beyond my ken. They're changing Norskk, changing it with words and with iron and with blood. I need to understand them better.



I have yet to determine if I will go to war for the Christians, or against them.



I had a wife, once. Then she died.

CARDINAL?



YOU MAY CALL ME FATHER; IT'S A CHRISTIAN CUSTOM.

A MONK TOLD ME THAT ONE NEEDS TO BE FIRST BATHED IN A RIVER TO BE ALLOWED INTO THE CHRISTIAN AFTERLIFE.

IT'S CALLED BEING BAPTISED.



THIS IS REQUIRED?

IT'S A BIT MORE COMPLEX THAN TAKING A BATH. A PRIEST PERFORMS A CEREMONY, HOLY WORDS ARE SPOKEN, AND SO ON.



IF A PERSON DIED WITH NO SUCH CEREMONY? THE CHRISTIAN AFTERLIFE CLOSED TO THEM?


THE LORD CHRIST SAVES ONLY THOSE WHO COME TO HIM SEEKING PROTECTION IN THE CHURCH.



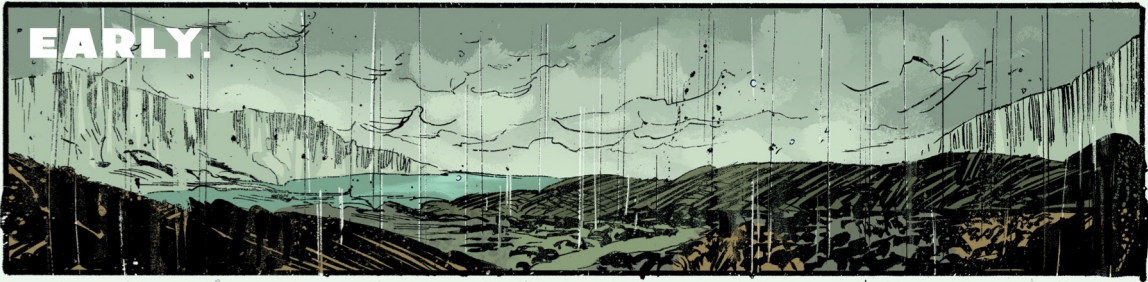
THE EXCEPTION IS, OF COURSE, FOR NEWBORNS...

...AND OTHERS TOO PURE OF HEART AND SPIRIT TO HAVE SINNED. SO, IF THIS HYPOTHETICAL PERSON WAS EXCEPTIONAL IN THAT RESPECT...

...THEN YES, HE--OR SHE-- WOULD ASCEND AND LIVE FOREVER IN THE BOSOM OF THE LORD, AN ETERNAL PARADISE.



While our own gods barely know we're here.













WHO'S THERE?



A DEAD MAN.



MY GUARDIAN ANGEL, MAGNUS. PLEASE.

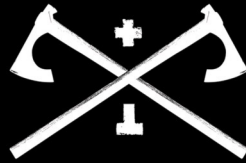
He was a good man, who worked hard without complaining and had no airs about him.



SHUK

I liked him. But this is Conversion. This is the Black Road.

A MAGNUS THE BLACK MYSTERY



# BLACK ROAD

"THE HOLY NORTH"

STORY: BRIAN WOOD

ART AND COVER: GARRY BROWN

COLORS: DAVE MCCAIG

LETTERING AND PRODUCTION: STEVE WANDS

BLACK ROAD IS CREATED BY BRIAN WOOD AND GARRY BROWN



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This is what happens.



I've suffered beatings before.

But I wasn't sure I'd wake up from this one.





But I did wake.

Thanks to her.

WHO ARE YOU?

**IN TIME**

JULIA.

SO YOU'RE CARDINAL FARINA'S GUARDIAN ANGEL.

HE LIKES TO CALL ME THAT. I THINK IT'S BLASPHEMY.

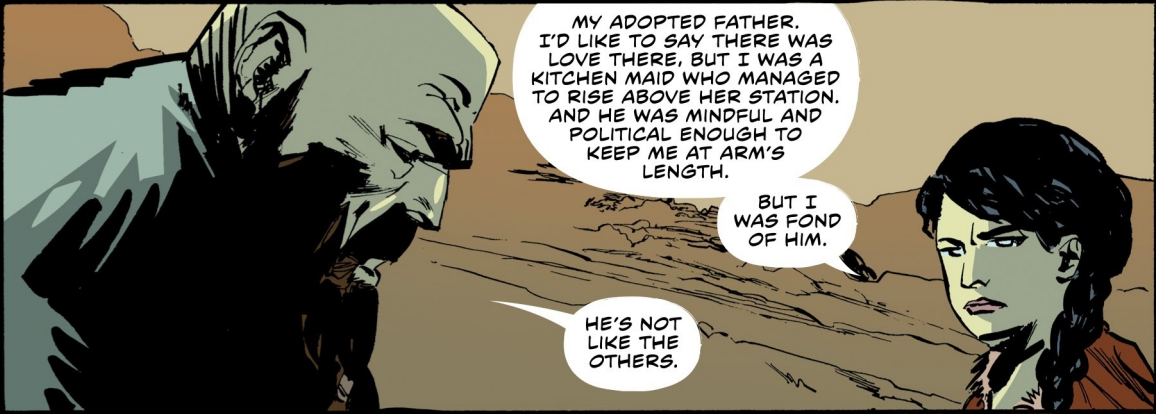
I THOUGHT THE OLD MAN WENT INSANE WITH FEAR IN THOSE LAST MINUTES. MAYBE HE STILL DID, BUT YOU'RE REAL ENOUGH.

I'M HIS DAUGHTER.

AH.

I'M SORRY.

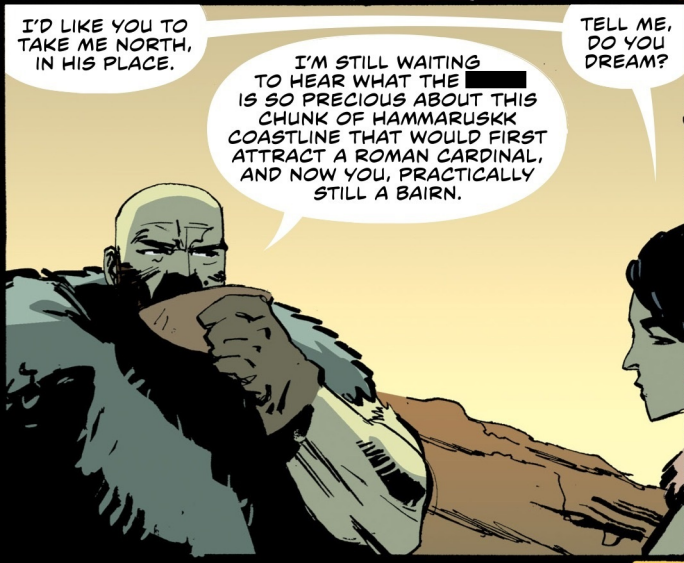




MY ADOPTED FATHER. I'D LIKE TO SAY THERE WAS LOVE THERE, BUT I WAS A KITCHEN MAID WHO MANAGED TO RISE ABOVE HER STATION. AND HE WAS MINDFUL AND POLITICAL ENOUGH TO KEEP ME AT ARM'S LENGTH.

BUT I WAS FOND OF HIM.

HE'S NOT LIKE THE OTHERS.



I'D LIKE YOU TO TAKE ME NORTH, IN HIS PLACE.

I'M STILL WAITING TO HEAR WHAT THE [REDACTED] IS SO PRECIOUS ABOUT THIS CHUNK OF HAMMARUSKK COASTLINE THAT WOULD FIRST ATTRACT A ROMAN CARDINAL, AND NOW YOU, PRACTICALLY STILL A BAIRN.

TELL ME, DO YOU DREAM?



OF THE WORLD SET ON FIRE?



...

I TOLD YOU A STORY, WHILE YOU TOSSED AND TURNED. YOU WERE RUNNING A FEVER.

A STORY? OR TRUTH? EVENTS STILL TO COME?



COME WITH ME AND SEE.

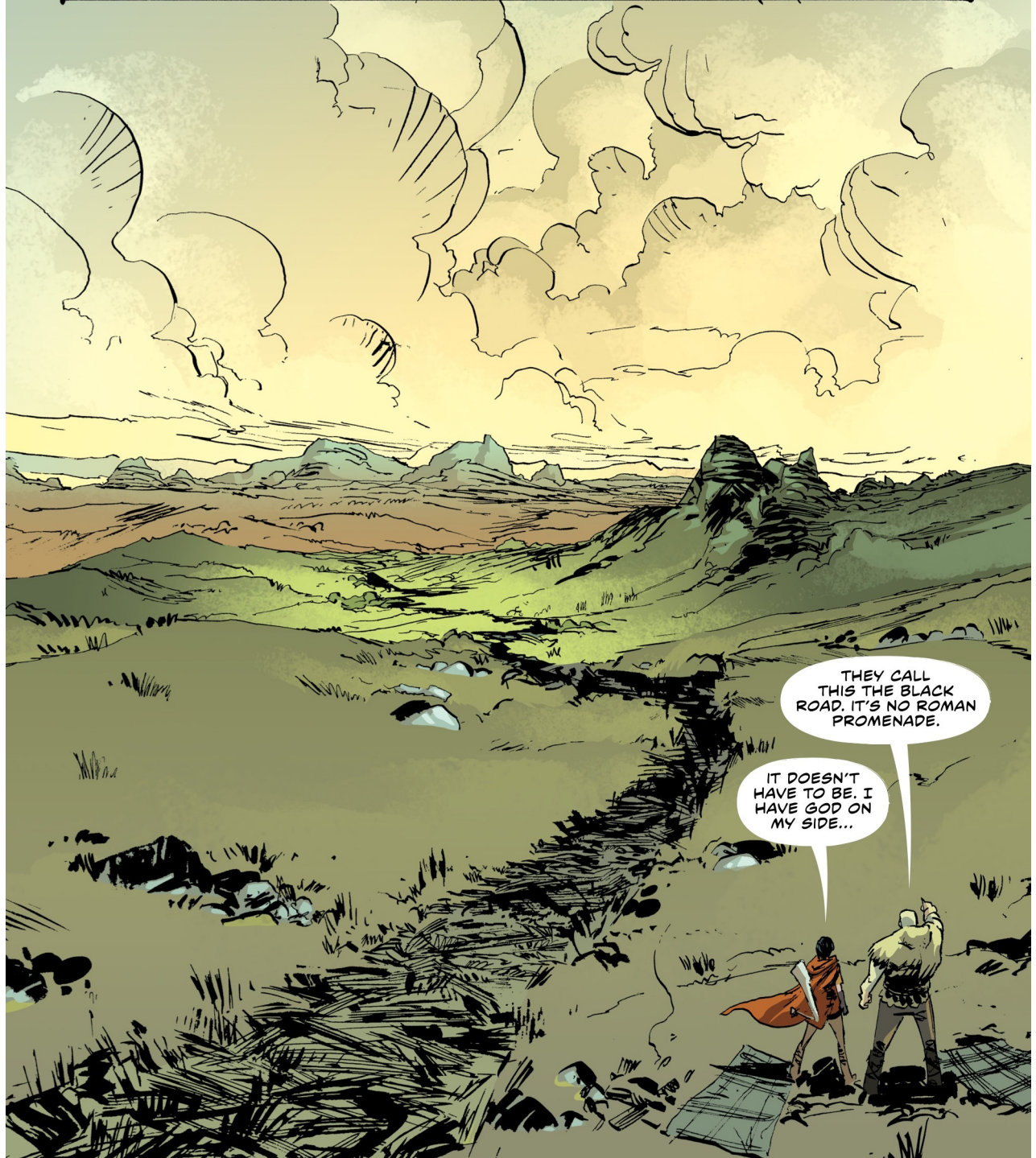
THE NORTHERN COASTLINE. HAMMARUSKK.

I took their gold, and I got my contract killed.

And according to this jumped-up kitchen maid, somewhere at the frozen end of my homeland is something evil. And it's compelling my attention.

But to get there is weeks and weeks of pretty rough travel. No horses, no gear.

I CAN HANDLE IT.



THEY CALL THIS THE BLACK ROAD. IT'S NO ROMAN PROMENADE.

IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE. I HAVE GOD ON MY SIDE...

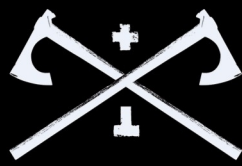


...AND I ALSO HAVE YOU, MAGNUS.

Remember how I said the old gods barely notice us?

Right now, I can practically hear them laughing.

Next month:  
**BLACK ROAD PART TWO**  
**“DAUGHTER OF ROME”**



# THE BLACK ROAD / DESIGN HISTORY



GARY  
BERRY  
2014



Heavy  
fur-lined  
cloak



Dirty  
Tanned  
Cloak

Scars  
across  
face

pleated?

MAGNUS

66





The ships rose and fell on huge ocean swells, vaulting skyward some forty feet and driving down into the bottom of the trough with sickening impact. The shallow bellied-hulls are better suited for coastal waters, not this frigid arctic bite.

The lead ship skidded down the backside of the swell, its load of cargo shifting under the floorboards. The captain cursed twice - once for the cargo, anonymously triple-bagged in greasy leather, and once for the armed escorts that sat quietly aboard his ship. Bright red crosses covered their clothing, across their chest, on their shoulders and back, their wrists, and often times incorporated into their weaponry. They were clearly pious men, but that didn't stop him from wondering if they had orders to kill him once offloading was complete.

Land was sighted the next morning, and with it Oakenfort's heresy. The massive compound practically leapt out at them, the raw pine boards bright in the dawn sun. It occupied high ground; its exterior walls built flush with the cliff face. From sea level the bastard was easily eighty feet tall.

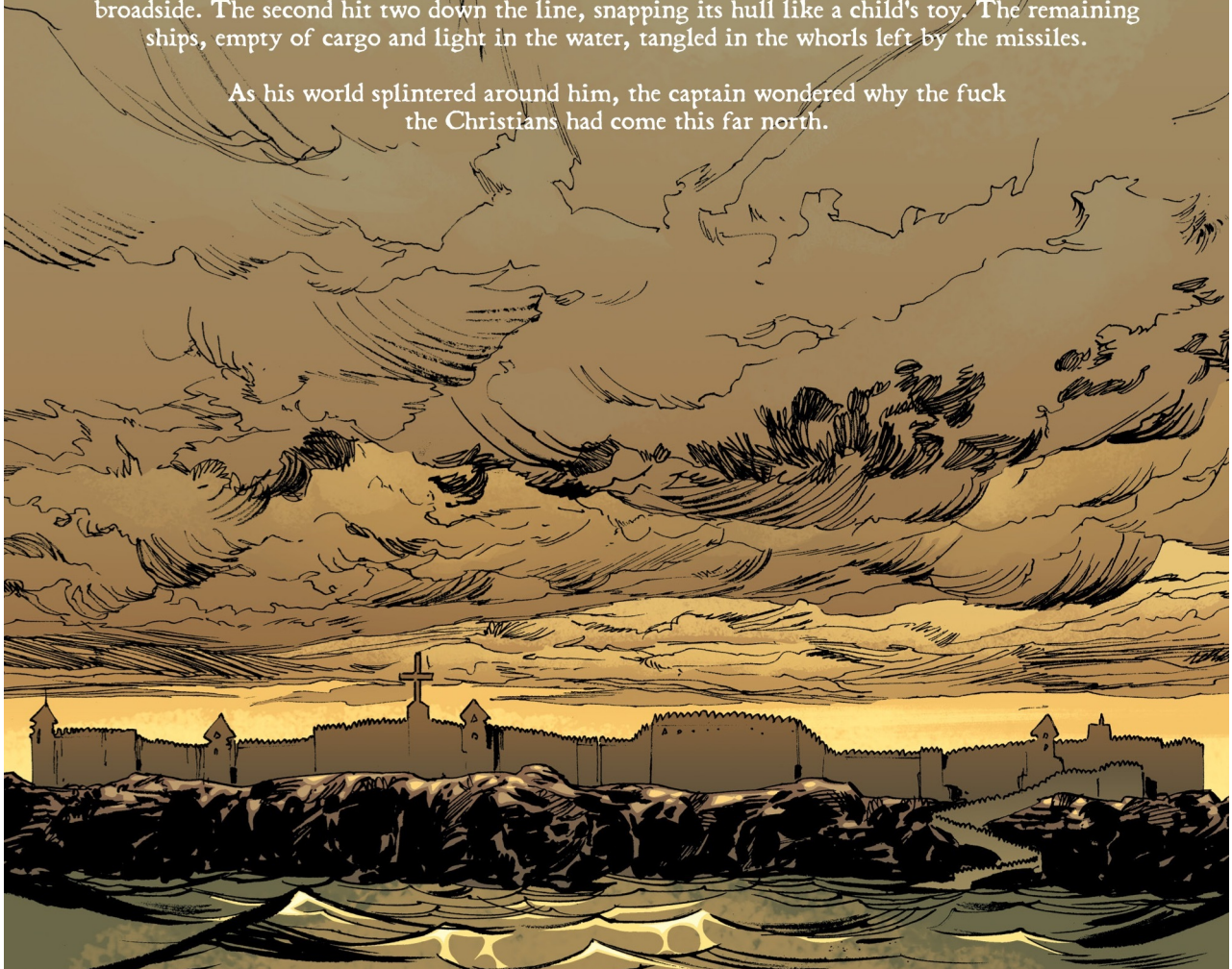
Cut into the cliff face was a path, and the captain could already see more of the cross-heavy soldiers climbing down to meet them. This is it, he thought, steeling himself for a bloody death. But the soldiers disembarked with the cargo, and he was free of them.

Glancing back over his shoulder as they reversed out of the harbor, he took in the mammoth structure. As the ships turned east the church within its walls became visible - a wicked-looking thing, all angles and edges, and that stark, oversized cross at the top. The exterior wall was still incomplete on this side, and within the compound more buildings and barracks stood, alongside construction cranes, vast stacks of timber and stone, granaries and grow-houses. It was the labor of a thousand men at a minimum.

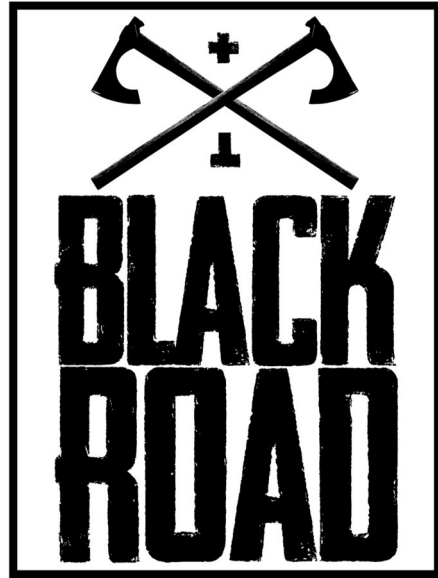
And it was right at this moment he noticed the siege equipment, emplaced and facing the sea, the counterweights on the mighty stone-throwers already falling. He quickly averted his eyes, as if that would do any good, and then a sound like thunder cracked across the bay.

The first stone struck the water in front of his ship, creating a suction effect that spun it around broadside. The second hit two down the line, snapping its hull like a child's toy. The remaining ships, empty of cargo and light in the water, tangled in the whorls left by the missiles.

As his world splintered around him, the captain wondered why the fuck the Christians had come this far north.



**BLACK ROAD**



**BLACKROAD**  
A MAGNUS THE BLACK MYSTERY

BRIAN WOOD + GARRY BROWN

**BLACK ROAD**

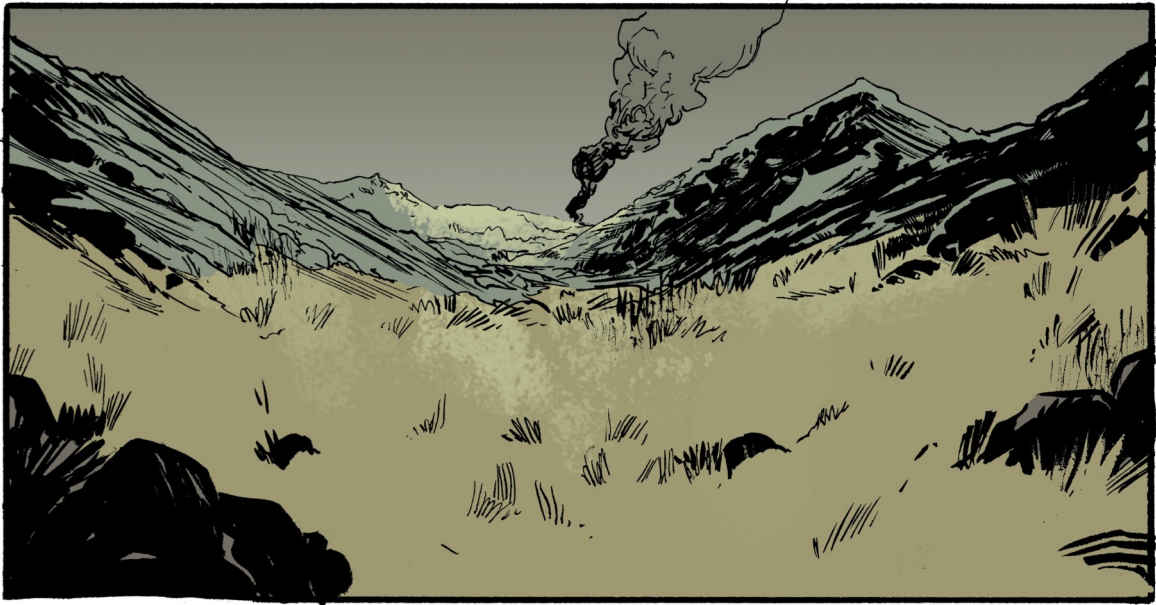
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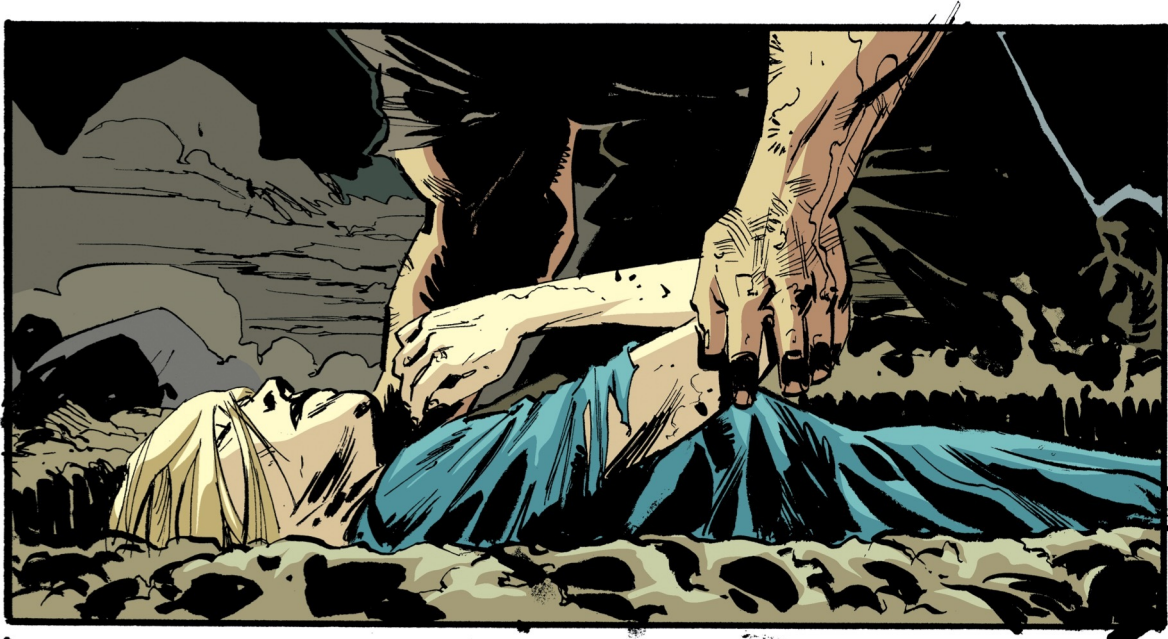
MAGNUS  
THE  
BLACK  
MYSTERY

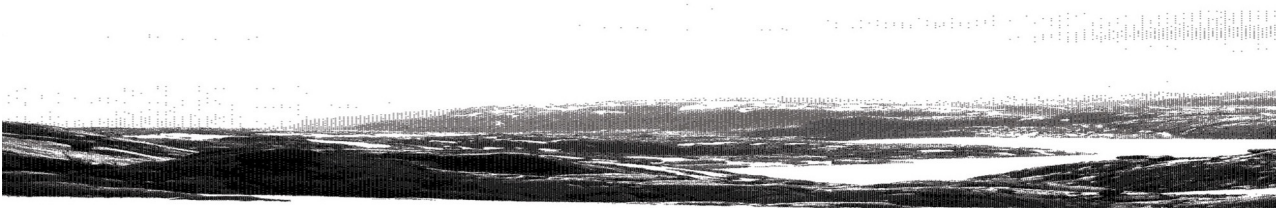


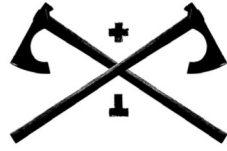








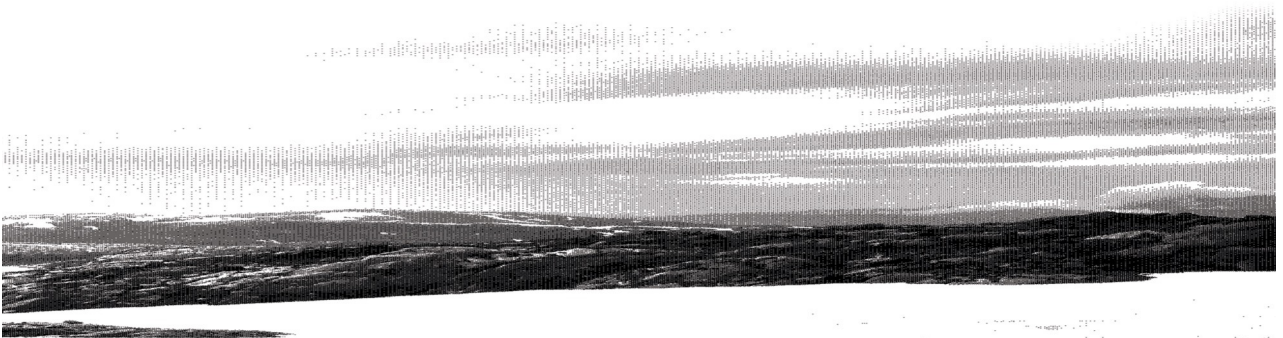




BRIAN WOOD / GARRY BROWN / DAVE McCAIG / STEVE WANDS

# BLACK ROAD

**#1 - "THE HOLY NORTH"**



A MAGNUS THE BLACK MYSTERY

This is Iskfold.



...PASSIO  
CHRISTI,  
CONFORTA  
ME...  
...INTRA  
TUA VULNERA  
ABSCONDE...

Currently suffering under conversion.



Churches bubble up like blisters, and priests spread like lice. The taxes levied by the Christians reduce families to poverty.

Those who follow the old ways flee into the wilderness.

There was a time I'd have considered Iskfold beautiful. Now it feels like a war zone.





OFF, I'M EATING.

TAKE IT EASY.

THIS IS BUSINESS, YOU ARE MAGNUS, YES?

I ONLY ARRIVED IN TOWN THIS MORNING. NO ONE SHOULD KNOW ME.

PERHAPS YOUR REPUTATION PRECEDES YOU?

REPUTATIONS KILL. I PREFER TO BE ALONE AND UNKNOWN.

HOW MUCH PRIVACY, MAGNUS, WOULD THIS BUY YOU?

WHAT'S THAT FOR? YOU WANT SOMEONE KILLED?

NOT AT ALL! GOOD HEAVENS. I'M NOT TALKING ABOUT MURDER. I'M TALKING ABOUT AN ESCORT JOB. TAKING A CHURCH OFFICIAL UP THE NORTHERN ROAD TO THE HAMMARUSKK COAST.

"THE NORTHERN ROAD."

WE CALL IT THE BLACK ROAD, AND HAD YOU SPENT MORE THAN TWO MINUTES IN THIS LAND, YOU'D HAVE KNOWN THAT.

AND A VOYAGE UP THE BLACK ROAD MOST LIKELY IS A MURDER TRIP.

So we settled at four times the price.