



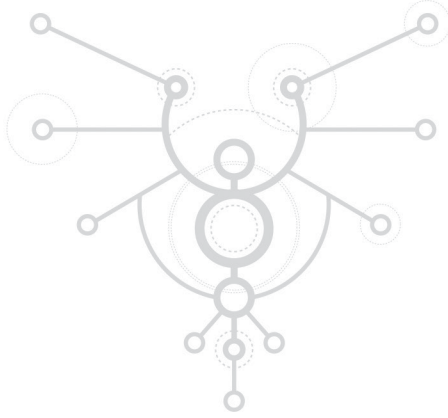
HICKMAN / BODENHEIM

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THE DYING & THE DEAD™



B&D
2015



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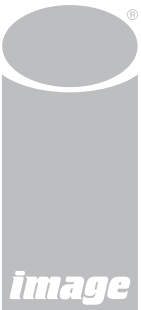
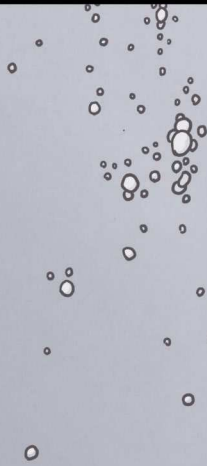


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Now.



"I know that terminal isn't a word we like to say..."



But it's time to start talking about *end-of-life* care for the patient in bed seven.

I think managing her pain needs to be our priority from here on out.

201

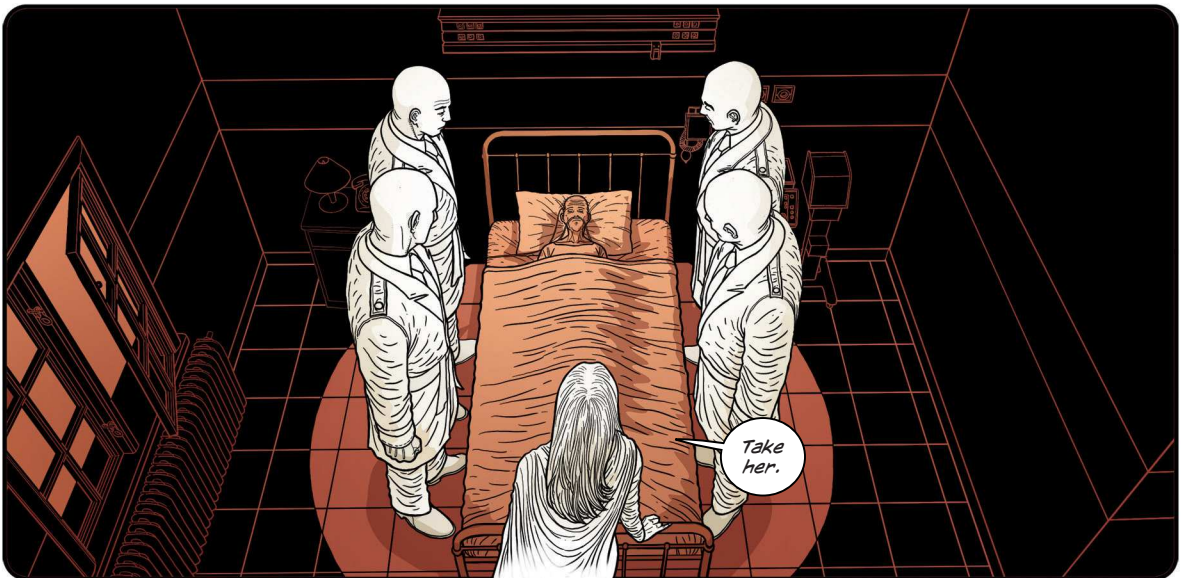
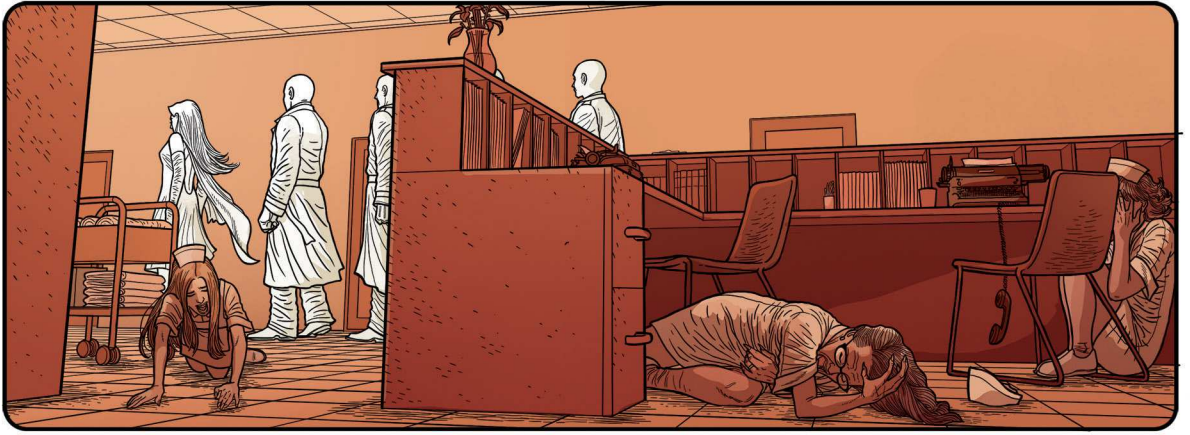


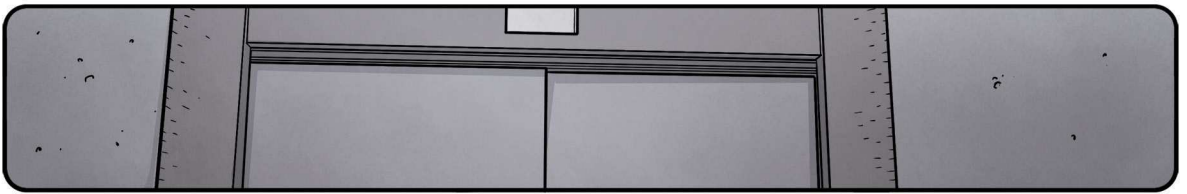
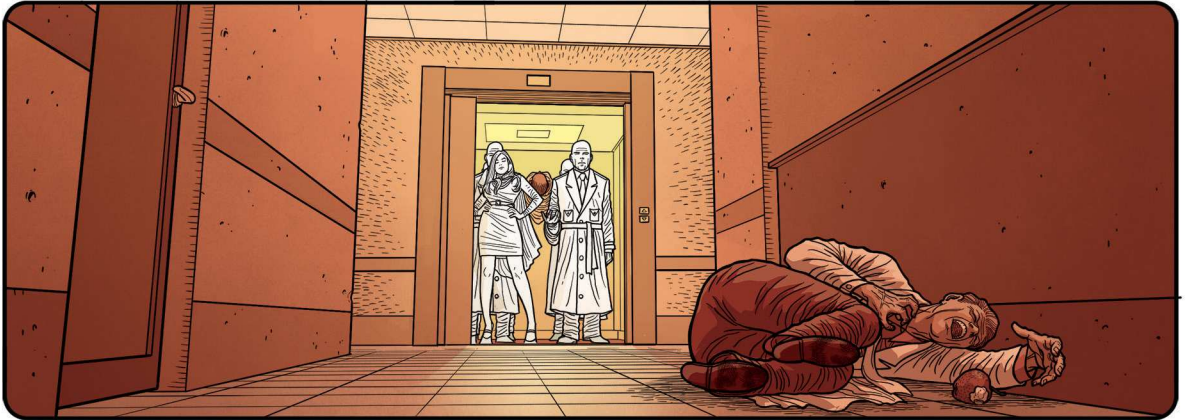
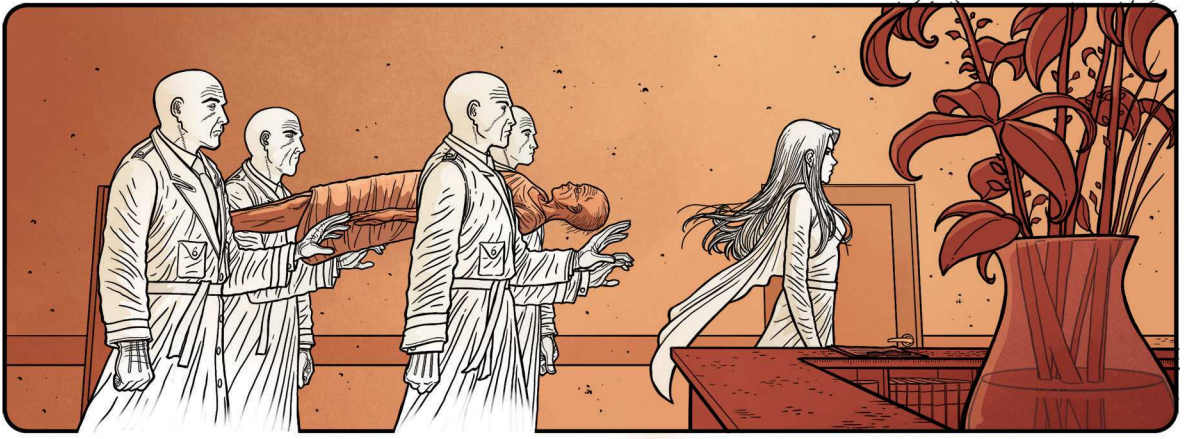
Her fluid intake continues to decrease, so I want to go ahead and increase her morphine dosage. We should also...also...



Auuuhh/lss...





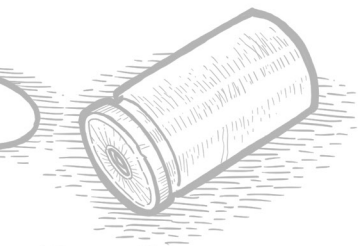


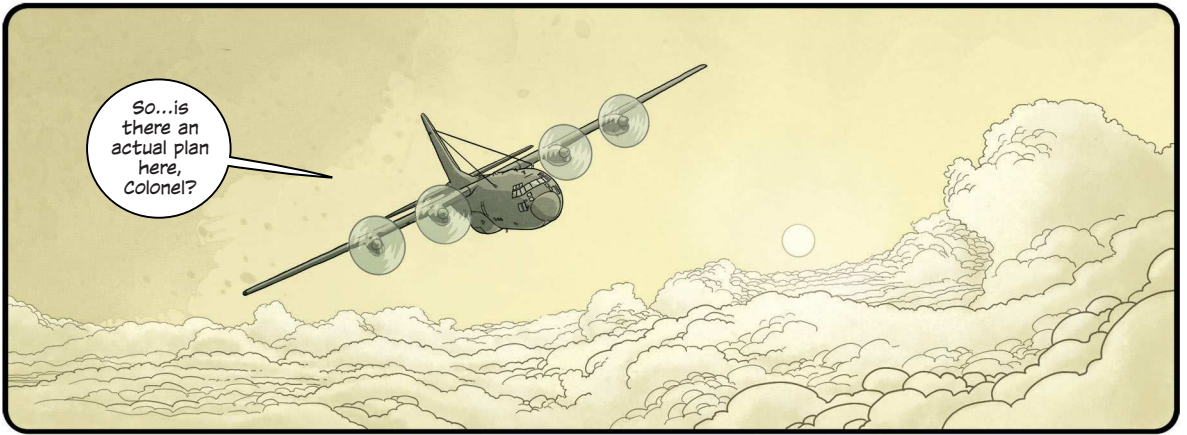


CHAPTER

4







So...is there an actual plan here, Colonel?



If I say no, will you at least give me credit for getting you outta the house?



Well, technically, the plane is mine. So, no, I don't think so.

Maybe -- maybe -- you get credit for the idea, Colonel, but *the execution*? That belongs to Momma Moss's beautiful baby boy.



So...you get about this much, Colonel.

I'll take what I can get...

But, yeah, there's a plan.



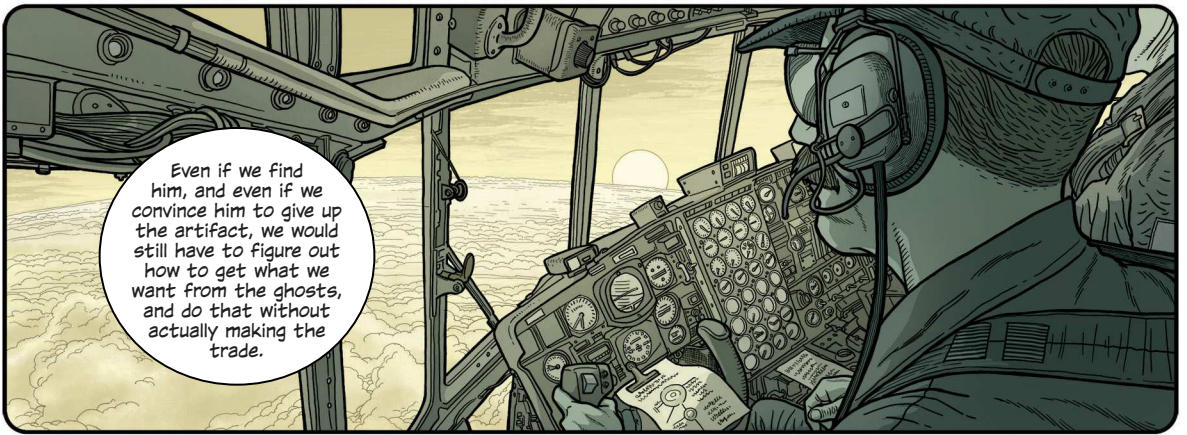
You mean the kid, right?

You really think he still knows where the spear is at?



That's not the real problem...

Even if he does know, do you really think he's going to give it to us knowing what you want to do with it?

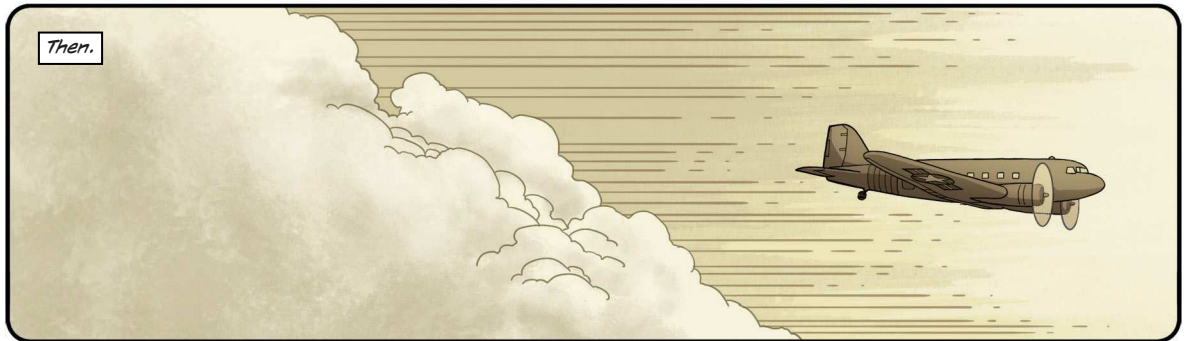
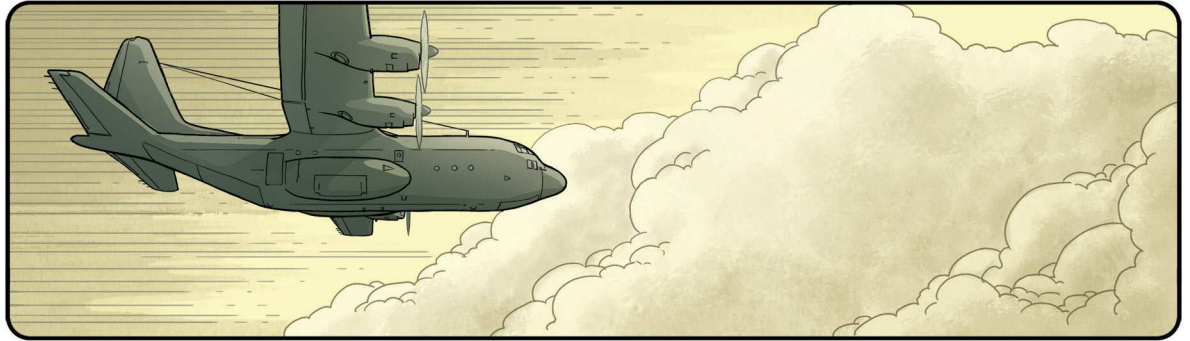


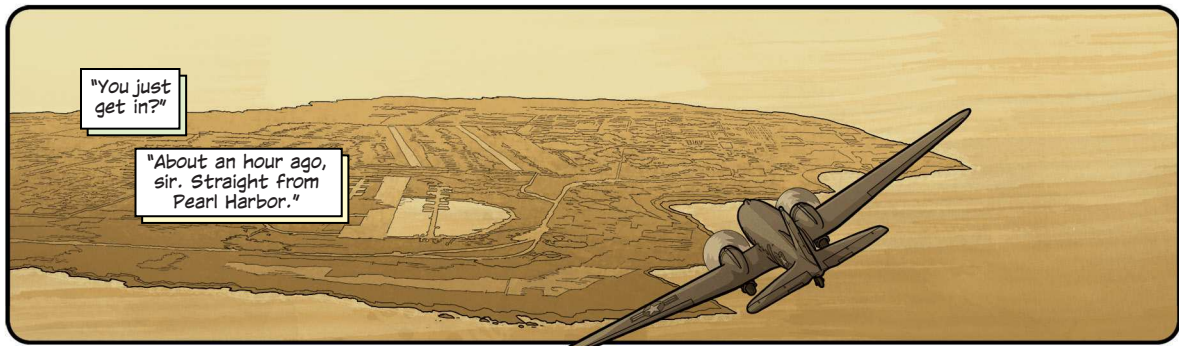
Even if we find him, and even if we convince him to give up the artifact, we would still have to figure out how to get what we want from the ghosts, and do that without actually making the trade.



Well, when you put it that way, sure...

One could argue we don't have much chance of pulling this off.





"You just get in?"

"About an hour ago, sir. Straight from Pearl Harbor."



"Your whole team?"

"Yes, sir."

"And before that?"



"Excuse me?"

"Before flying out of Pearl?"

"We flew overnight from Langley. Then we refueled at Cooke before heading to Oahu."



I can never sleep on planes.

Something to do with the noise and a healthy skepticism of aerodynamics.

What about you, son?

I cannot.

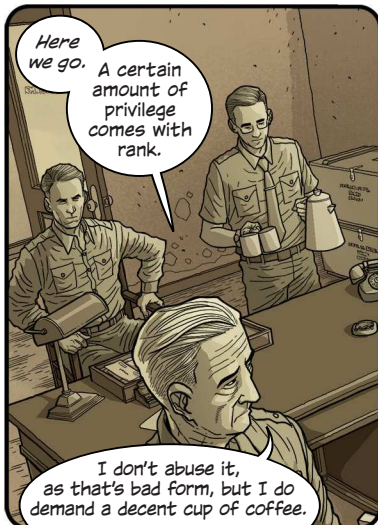


So you've been up a while?



I have.

Yeah. I figured. James is bringing us some coffee, then we'll get into it.



Here we go.

A certain amount of privilege comes with rank.

I don't abuse it, as that's bad form, but I do demand a decent cup of coffee.



It's very good, sir.



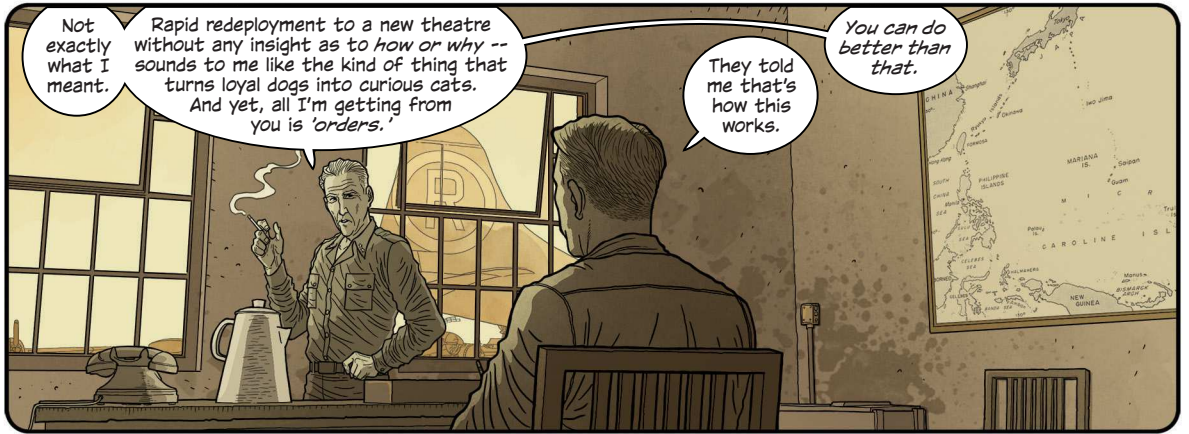
From what I understand, so are you and your team.

Do you know why you're here, Colonel?



Yes, sir.

We were ordered to report to you. So here we are.



Not exactly what I meant.

Rapid redeployment to a new theatre without any insight as to how or why -- sounds to me like the kind of thing that turns loyal dogs into curious cats. And yet, all I'm getting from you is 'orders.'

They told me that's how this works.

You can do better than that.



We've learned to roll with it, Admiral.

It's what makes us good at what we do.



I see.

Boots on the ground. Then your team adapts to fit the situation.

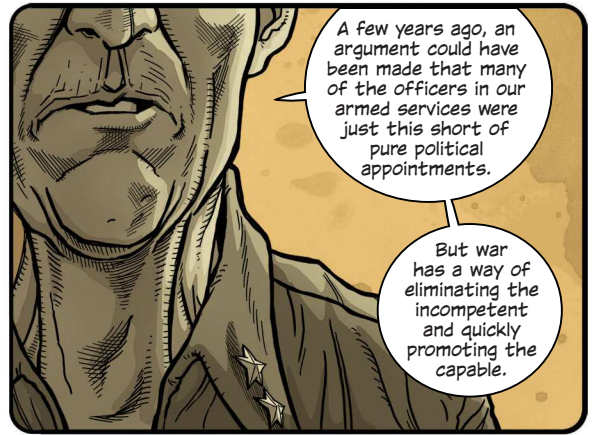


I'd say it's more like we figure out what we're supposed to do, and then we just go get it done, sir.



Well. That's a timely way to put it.

As you know, along with *privileges*, there are certain *expectations* that come with rank.



A few years ago, an argument could have been made that many of the officers in our armed services were just this short of pure political appointments.

But war has a way of eliminating the incompetent and quickly promoting the capable.

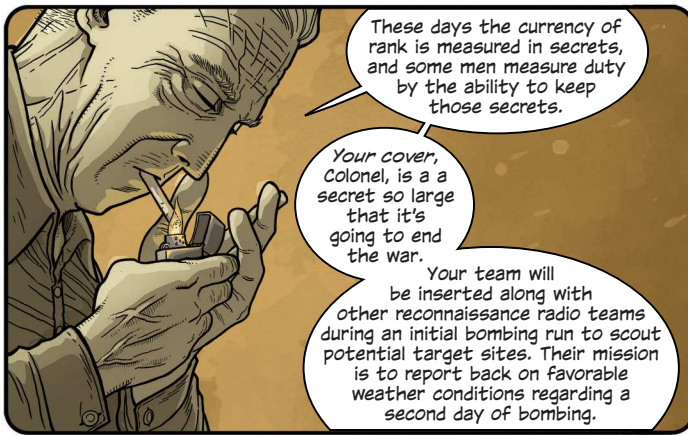


The fit find their role. As such, men like you become Colonels. And men like me become Admirals.

You'd agree with that, wouldn't you?

I would.

Good. Because I think we're about to find out just how capable you and your men are.



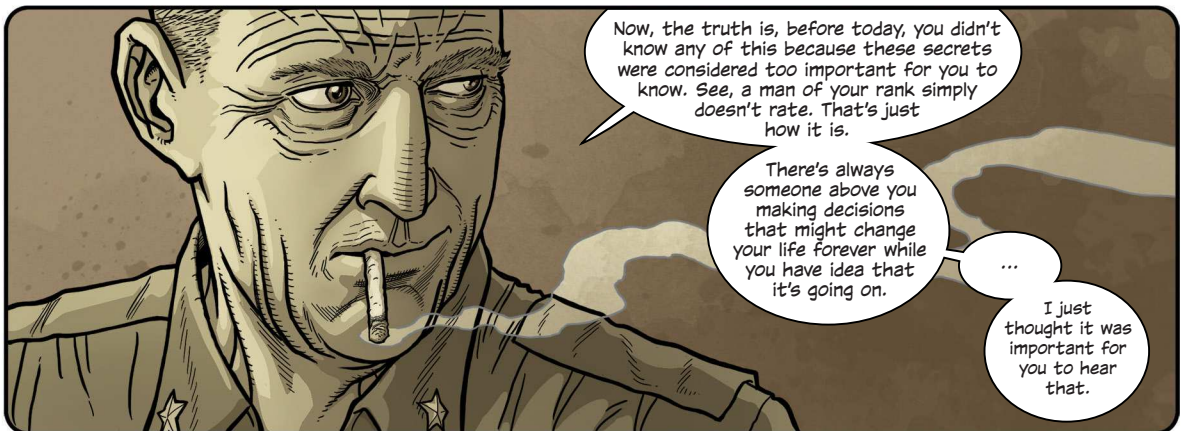
These days the currency of rank is measured in secrets, and some men measure duty by the ability to keep those secrets.

Your cover, Colonel, is a secret so large that it's going to end the war.

Your team will be inserted along with other reconnaissance radio teams during an initial bombing run to scout potential target sites. Their mission is to report back on favorable weather conditions regarding a second day of bombing.



That's your cover. Your team's real mission is contained inside this folder.



Now, the truth is, before today, you didn't know any of this because these secrets were considered too important for you to know. See, a man of your rank simply doesn't rate. That's just how it is.

There's always someone above you making decisions that might change your life forever while you have idea that it's going on.

...

I just thought it was important for you to hear that.



So. Here are your actual orders. And I, the commander of the Pacific Theatre, have been instructed to tell you that they are not to be opened until after insertion.



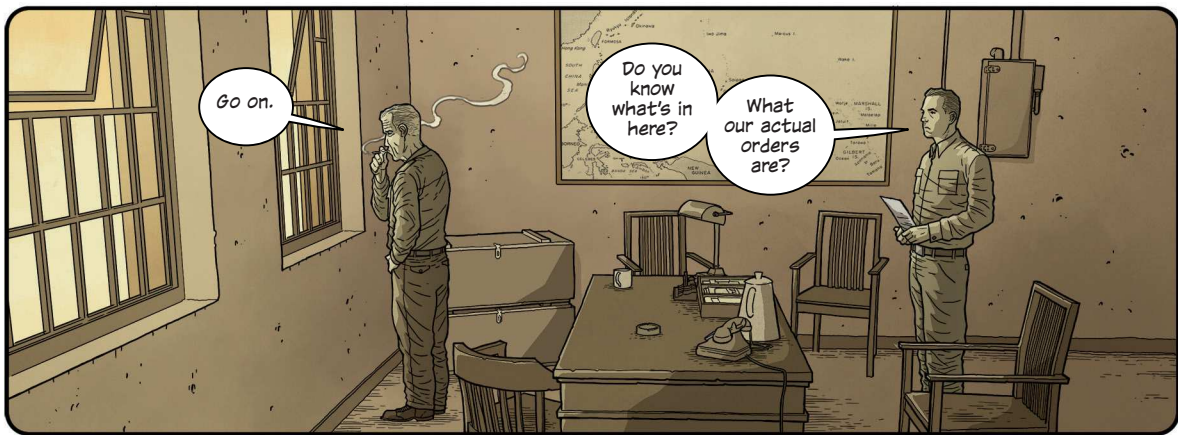
However, as a fellow capable man not so keen on our current economy of secrets, I want to offer you some advice that you can either consider or ignore: *Maybe open it sooner.*

Regardless of what you choose, you're on your way within the hour.



Thank you, sir.

Mind if I ask one last thing?



Go on.

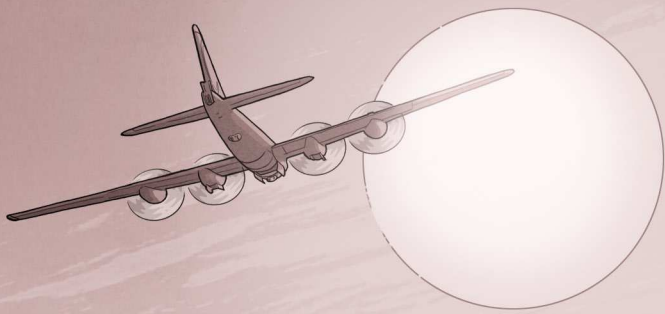
Do you know what's in here?

What our actual orders are?



Son, what you hold in your hands is a secret so large even Admirals do not rate.

"So, what are we waiting for?"







No, Colonel. I do not.



I think we should vote on it. Opening the orders.

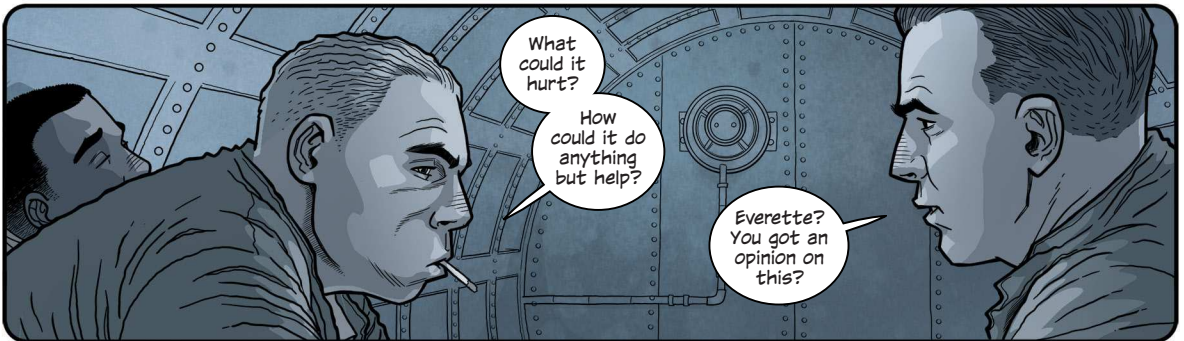
We should vote.



You wanna break the news to him, or should I?



I'm sorry, Finn. That's not how this works.



What could it hurt?

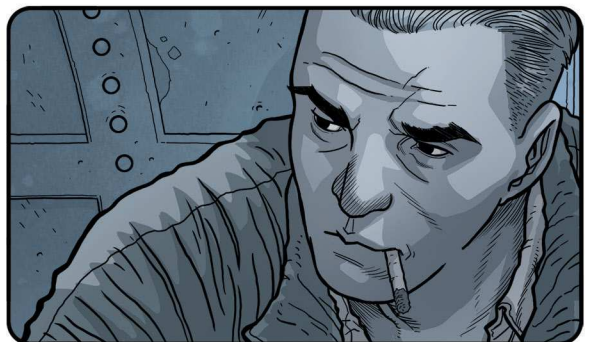
How could it do anything but help?

Everette? You got an opinion on this?



Finn makes a good point, but I'm good either way.

We live and die with you, Colonel. It's your call.





All right, Finn...



Break it to us gently.



That was really nice.



Well done. You maintained the integrity of your command while simultaneously strengthening team morale.



I think you may have found your calling, Colonel.



You know, I wasn't kidding earlier.

At some point, you're gonna have to quit drinkin' so much, Doyle.



You would think that, but I'm not so sure.



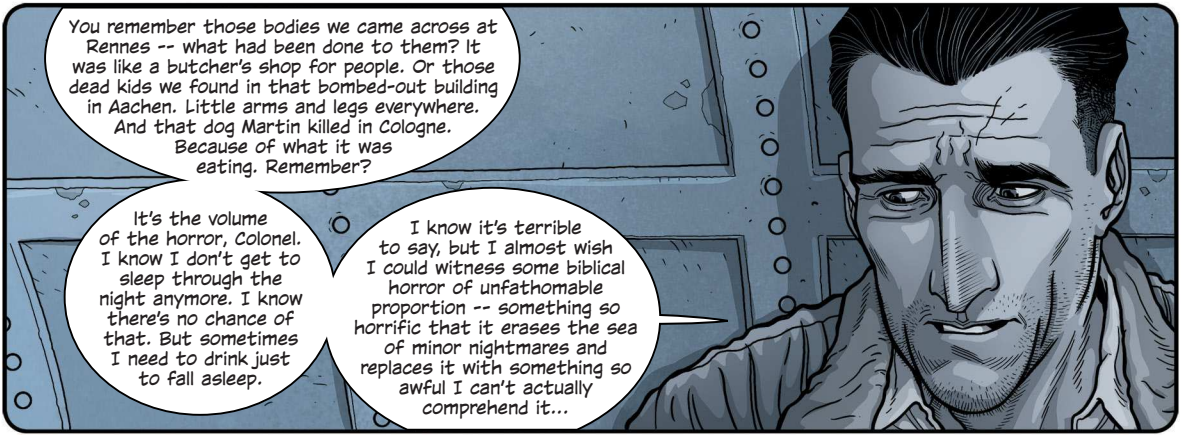
I am. It's a crutch, and we'd all be better off without you having it.

Either way, you keep going like this, and it's going to go from being your decision to mine. Understand?



...

It helps.



You remember those bodies we came across at Rennes -- what had been done to them? It was like a butcher's shop for people. Or those dead kids we found in that bombed-out building in Aachen. Little arms and legs everywhere. And that dog Martin killed in Cologne. Because of what it was eating. Remember?

It's the volume of the horror, Colonel. I know I don't get to sleep through the night anymore. I know there's no chance of that. But sometimes I need to drink just to fall asleep.

I know it's terrible to say, but I almost wish I could witness some biblical horror of unfathomable proportion -- something so horrific that it erases the sea of minor nightmares and replaces it with something so awful I can't actually comprehend it...



Something that confirms there's no saving the world -- that it is what it is, and the good fight is all that's left.

I see something like that and you won't have to take this from me. I'll give it to you.



Doyle.

Yeah?

That's a really shitty plan.



Dammit!



This is insane. They can't expect us to...

The insertion point, the terrain, the timeline, this entire goddamn thing...

Colonel, it's a suicide mission. There's a good chance we don't make it through the day.

See. Now you wish you didn't know, don't you?



Go to hell, Martin.

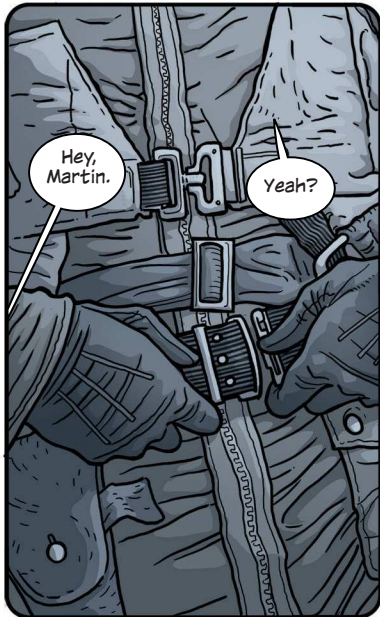
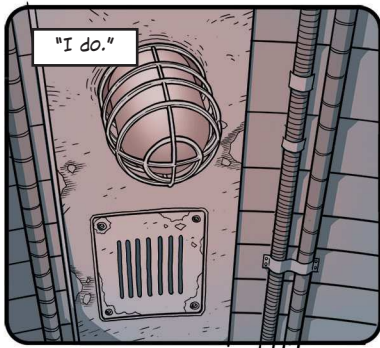
Colonel, you can't possibly expect us to...to...

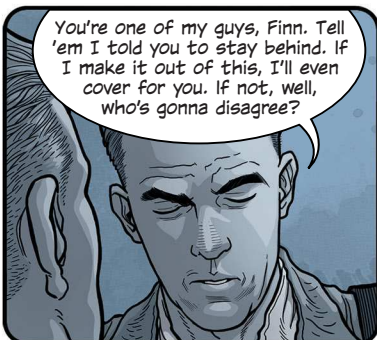
I mean, I know we follow orders but, this...

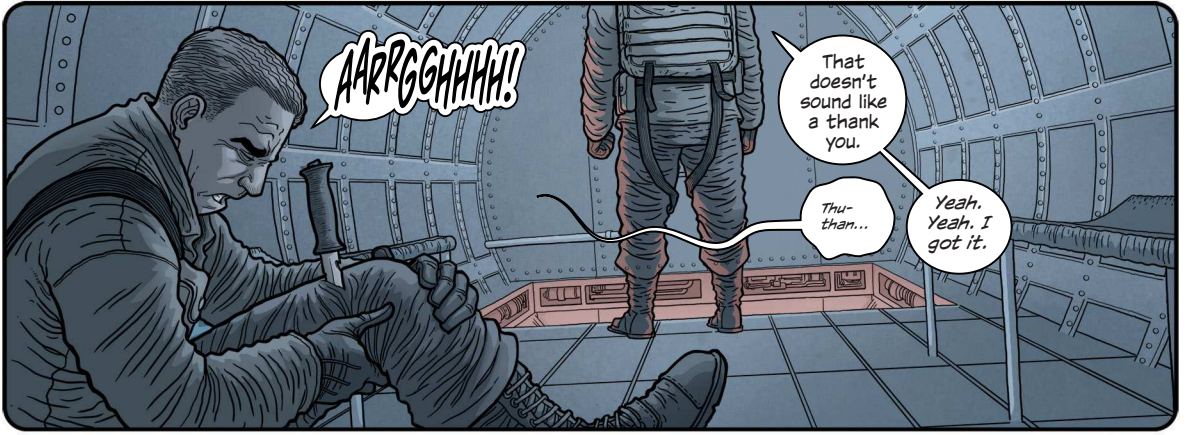


You just want us to go ahead with this...this... **bullshit?**

You expect us to do that?







AARRGGHHH!

That doesn't sound like a thank you.

Thu- than...

Yeah. Yeah. I got it.

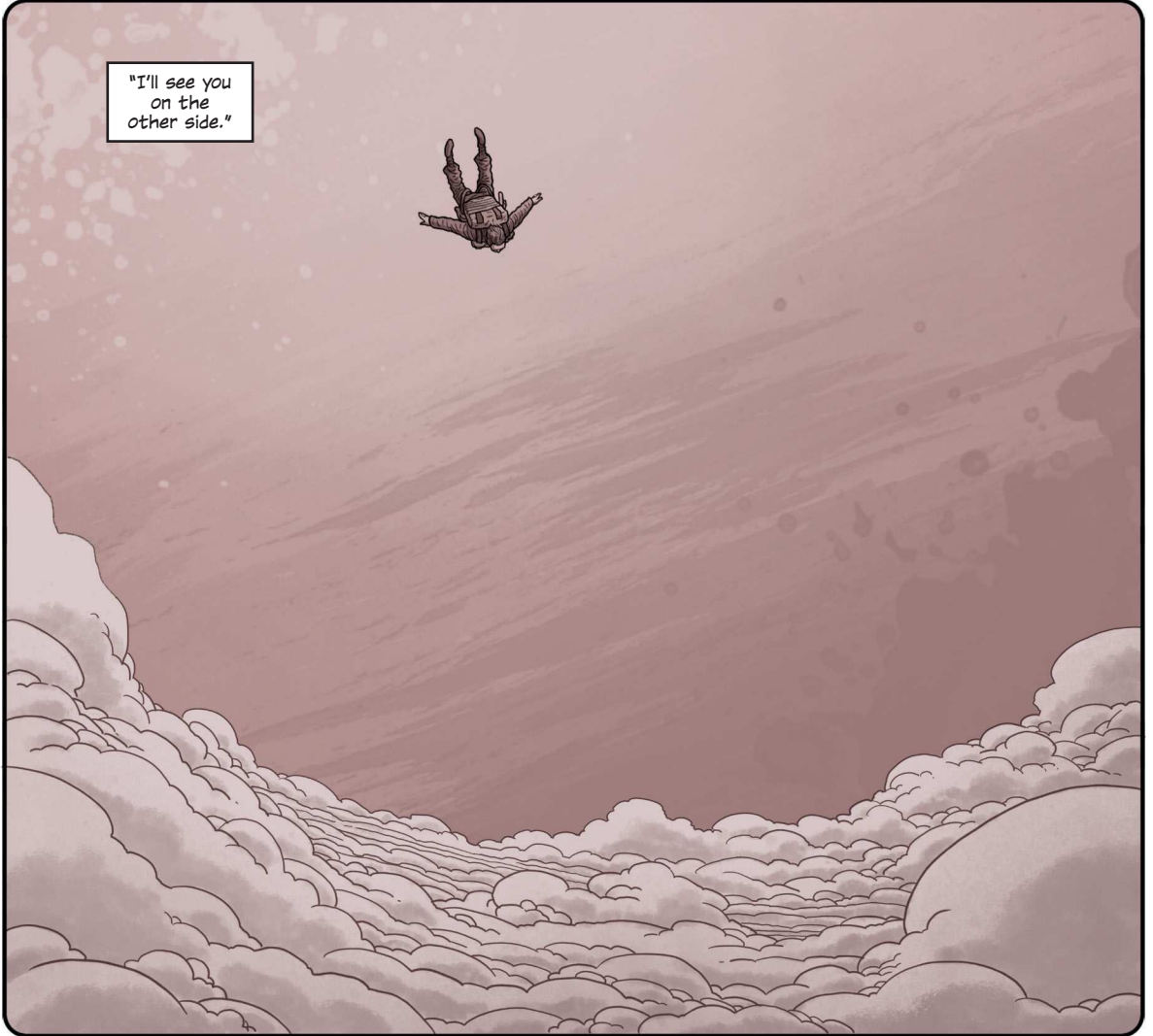


Listen, I wanna tell you something. That guy I shot in the back? The only reason I did that was to protect all of you.

If it was just me out there, I'd have let 'em go. Because I've never had a problem with the enemy knowing right where I was.

Saves me from havin' to hunt them down.

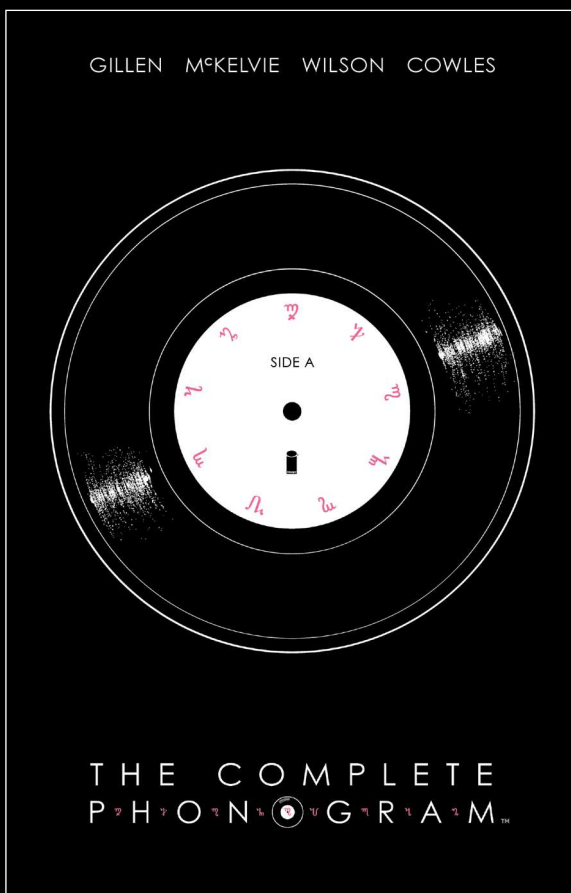
Get that leg looked at when you get back to the base, Finn. And I better not hear a goddamn thing about a Purple Heart.



"I'll see you on the other side."

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TWO SOULS CAN TRESPASS

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