

FROM AWARD-WINNING WRITER OF "Y: THE LAST MAN" AND "EX MACHINA"

BRIAN K. VAUGHAN

ART BY

NIKO HENRICHON

PRIIDE

of
baghdad

VERTIGO





BRIAN K. VAUGHAN is the Eisner Award-winning writer of *Y: THE LAST MAN* and *EX MACHINA*. He lives in California with his wife.



NIKO HENRICHON lives in Quebec City with his wife and cat as well. *PRIDE OF BAGHDAD* is his second graphic novel.

"This story of a pride of lions who escape from the Baghdad Zoo during Operation Iraqi Freedom bombing is simple, lavishly drawn, and devastating. . . . Stunning."

— PUBLISHERS WEEKLY
(STARRED REVIEW)

"Stunning and heartbreaking, *Pride of Baghdad* lingers with you like a haunting dream. Let it sink its teeth into you."

— BRAD MELTZER
(BEST-SELLING AUTHOR OF *THE FIRST COUNSEL* AND *THE BOOK OF FATE*)

FROM ONE OF AMERICA'S MOST CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED GRAPHIC NOVEL WRITERS – INSPIRED BY TRUE EVENTS, A STARTLINGLY ORIGINAL LOOK AT LIFE ON THE STREETS OF BAGHDAD DURING THE IRAQ WAR.

In his award-winning work on *Y: THE LAST MAN* and *EX MACHINA* (one of *Entertainment Weekly's* 2005 Ten Best Fiction titles), writer Brian K. Vaughan has displayed an understanding of both the cost of survival and the political nuances of the modern world. Now, in this provocative graphic novel, Vaughan examines life on the streets of war-torn Iraq.

In the spring of 2003, a pride of lions escaped from the Baghdad Zoo during an American bombing raid. Lost and confused, hungry but finally free, the four lions roamed the decimated streets of Baghdad in a desperate struggle for their lives. In documenting the plight of the lions, *PRIDE OF BAGHDAD* raises questions about the true meaning of freedom – can it be given or is it earned only through self-determination and sacrifice?

Based on a true story, Vaughan and artist Niko Henrichon (*BARNUM!*) have created a unique window into the nature of life during wartime, illuminating this struggle as only the graphic novel can.

SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS



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مستوحاة من قصة واقعية

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للكاتب: بريان قوقان
رسم: نايكو هنريكون
طباعة: تود كلين


PRIDE OF BAGHDAD

INSPIRED BY A TRUE STORY

WRITTEN BY BRIAN K. VAUGHAN

ART BY NIKO HENRICHON

LETTERING BY TODD KLEIN



FOR DANIEL M. KANEMOTO
-BRIAN K. VAUGHAN

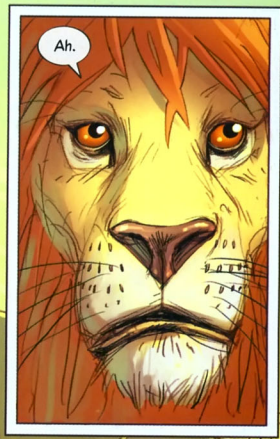
FOR LAËTITIA CASSAN
-NIKO HENRICHON

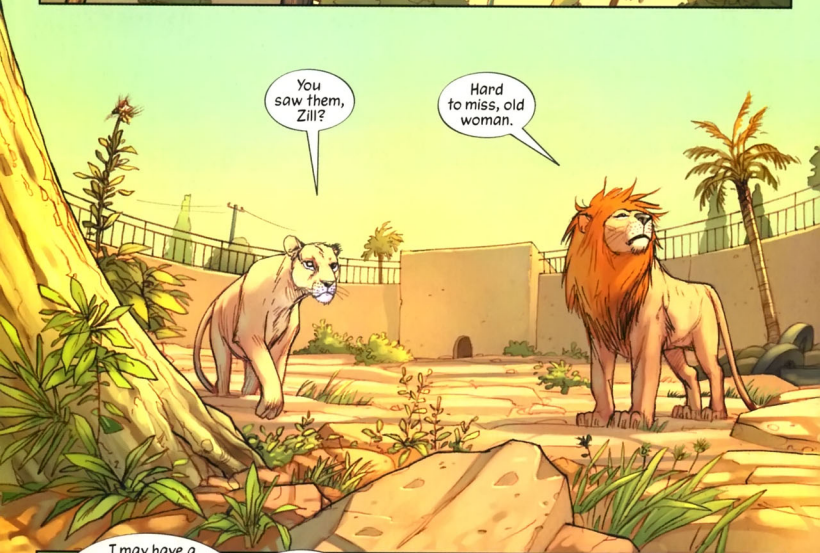
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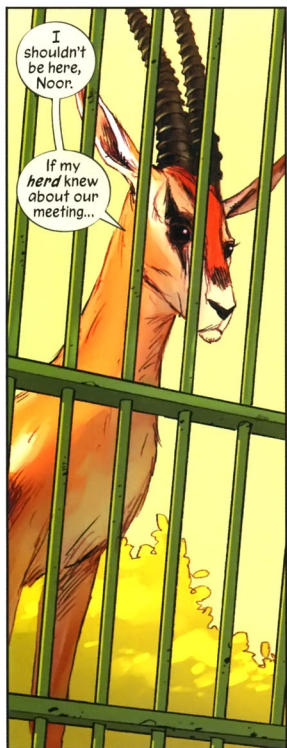
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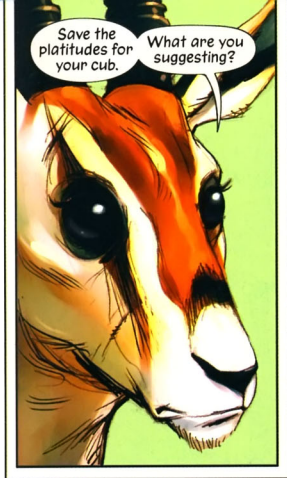












Save the platitudes for your cub.

What are you suggesting?



You, me, the camels, the mountain goats, *all* of us... we've spent too long bickering with each other when we only have one real enemy - *the keepers*.

If we work together, I think we can take them.

Don't be ridiculous.



Hear me out. The keepers know that if they ever set foot in *our* pit, my group would slaughter them.

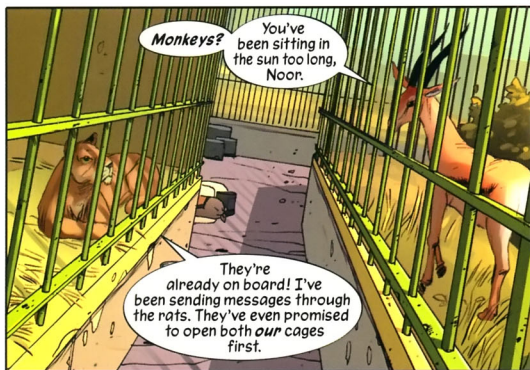


But the humans are foolish enough to lower their defenses around *your* kind. It would be a simple matter for one of you to *gore* a keeper, take his keys--

And do what with them? Assuming we'd be willing to risk our lives for something so *insane*, what would *we* do with *keys*?



That's where the monkeys come in.



Monkeys?

You've been sitting in the sun too long, Noor.

They're already on board! I've been sending messages through the rats. They've even promised to open both *our* cages first.



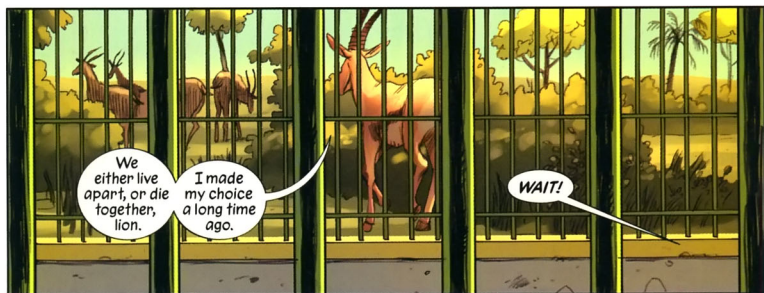
And why do I get the feeling that the first thing *you'd* open would be my *jugular*?



You don't *trust* me?

You've heard the one about the scorpion and the frog, right?

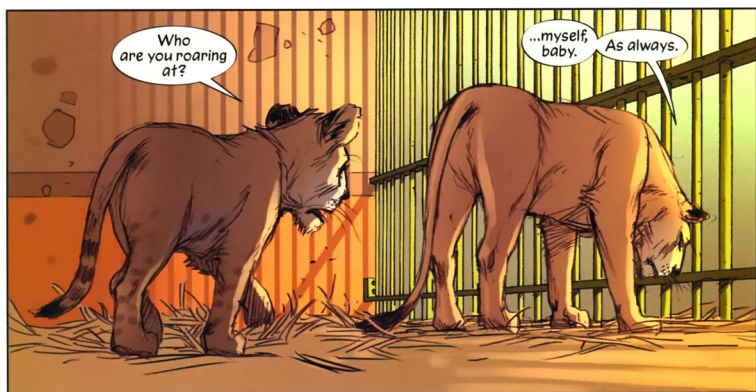
But we...we can rise *above* our basest instincts! There's a *bounty* waiting for us beyond these walls, enough for everyone! We could learn to--



We either live apart, or die together, lion.

I made my choice a long time ago.

WAIT!







GET
AWAY FROM
ME!

Relax,
Safa.

It's only six
seconds.



Go back to
your stupid brothers,
Bukk! This isn't your
territory!

Hey,
it wasn't
marked.

Blame
whatever pathetic
gray mane is supposed
to be *protecting*
you girls.





HELP!

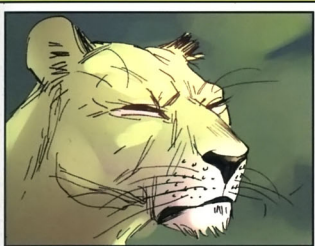
Somebody
HEL--

QUIET.

AAAH!!

Keep
fighting, and
I'll take one of
your *ears*,
too.



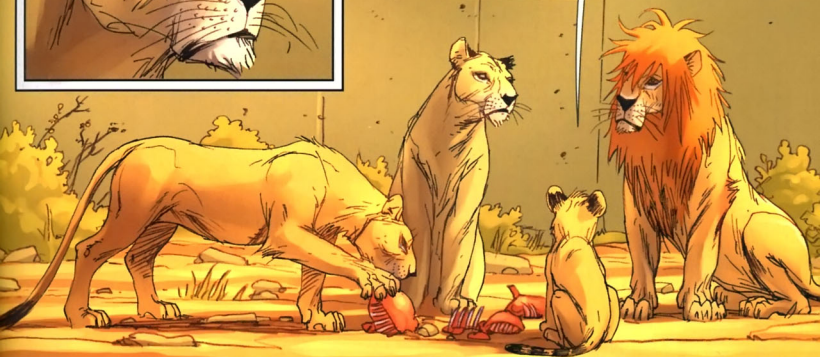


There were...flies, Ali.

Black, bloodsucking flies. Worse than anything we have here. You should count your blessings that this is the only life you've ever known.

Is that for true, Zill?

Well, I lived in a different area than Safa and your mother, so my experiences were probably--



Tell him about the sunsets, Zill!



Ah, the sunsets.

That's it.

I can't listen to *this* again...



My first pride lived next to a small hill, and in the evenings, I would go to the very top of it.

At the end of every day, I watched as the horizon *devoured* the sun in slow, steady bites, spilling its blood across the azure sky.



What's a *horizon*?

Oh, it's, uh... I suppose it's something that can't be seen from *this* home.

The horizon...



The horizon really doesn't matter, Ali. Not now, anyway. A spectacular view is nice, but so is eating more than once a week, a rarity in the old days.

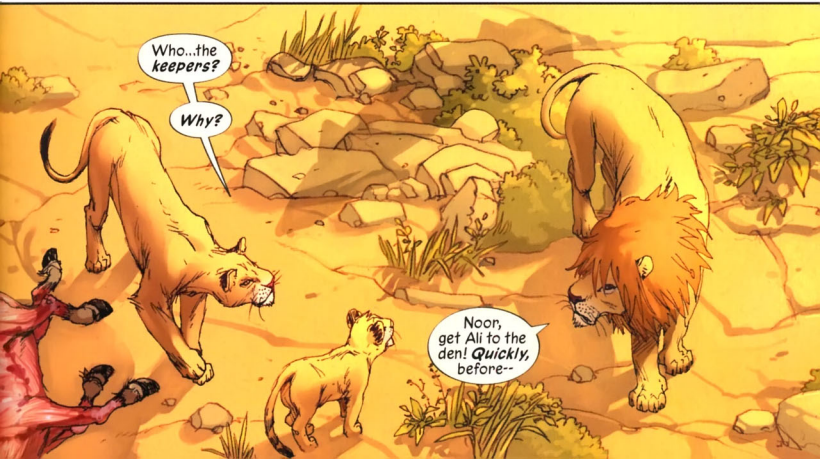
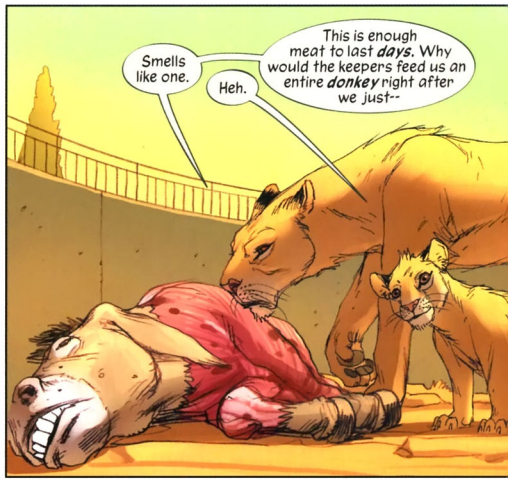
Besides, we lions make the most of whatever comes our way.

Yes, even when it's the tepid little carcasses of--

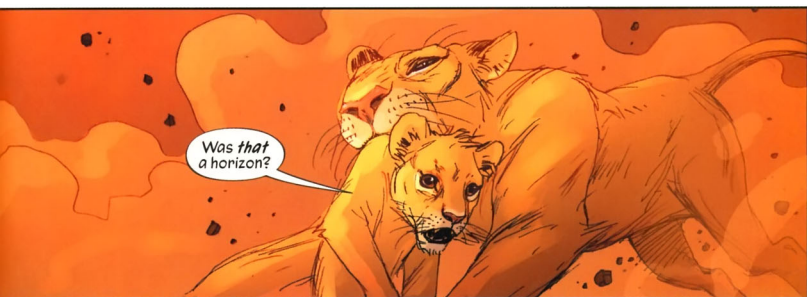


WUMP

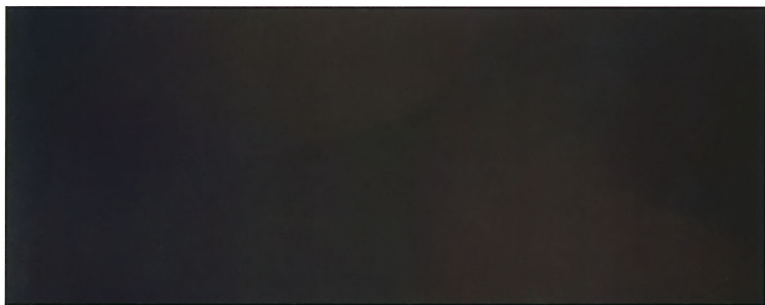
GAH!













...we're free.



YES!



This isn't right.



There's an old saying, Zill.

Freedom can't be given, only **earned**.



What is *that* supposed to mean, Noor? I thought this was all you ever wanted.



Yeah, well, there's another old saying.

You don't look a gift horse in the mouth...you **eat** him.



Perhaps... perhaps you're *right*.

Whatever, this isn't over yet.

Grab the cub's scruff, and let's make tracks.



Do what you will.

I'm not going anywhere.



But you *gotta*, Sifa! Mom says it's a jungle out there. We're gonna be kings!

Then enjoy your reign in Hell.

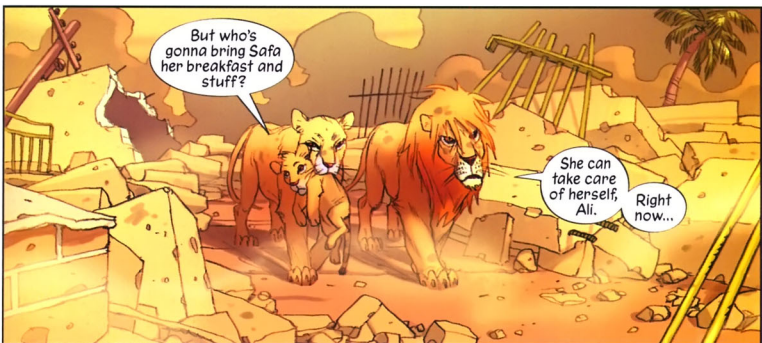
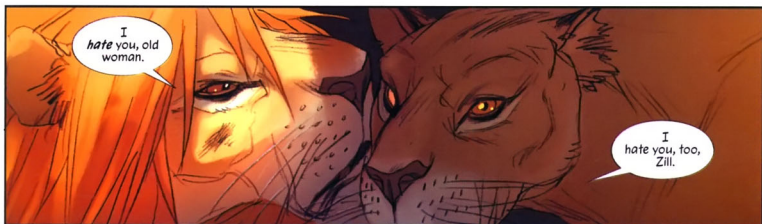
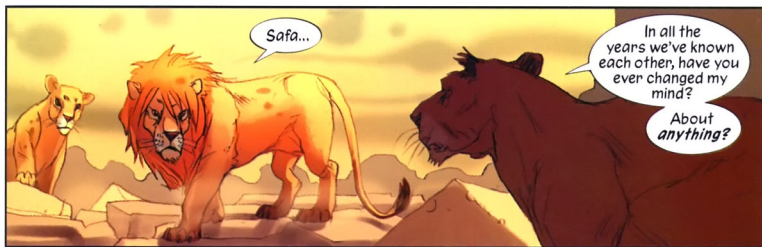
This place might not be perfect, but it's better than the alternative.



You really want to die *alone*, cut off from the rest of the world?

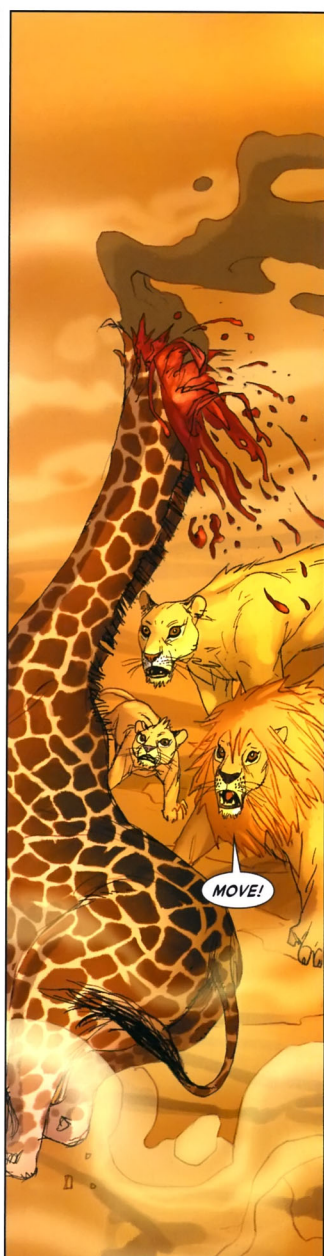
I want to die of *old age*, Zili.

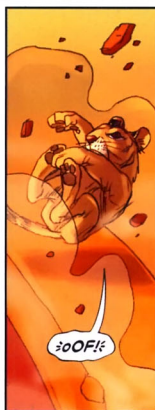
If the zoo is the price I have to pay for that, then so be it.

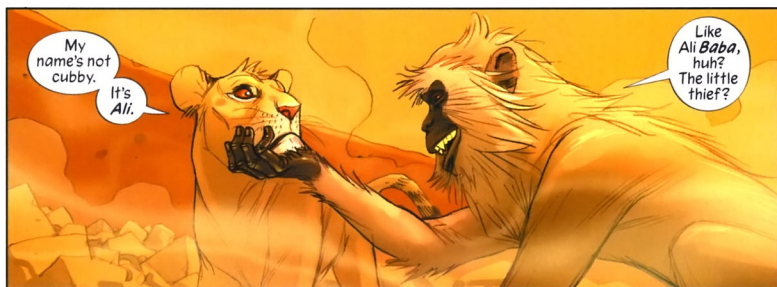




...we
have other
things to
worry
about.









Hey! Put me down!

Be cool, Ali. Us orphans gotta stick together, right?



Orphans...?

We used to have to settle for whatever stale rinds the *keepers* tossed us, but not anymore. Their world's our melon now, and it's ripe for the *picking*.

With muscle like you on our side, *nobody's* gonna stop us from taking whatever we want.



Lemme go!

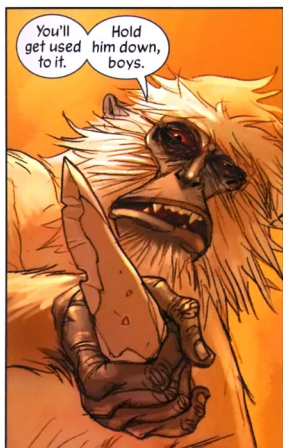
I want my *mom*!

She's *gone*, Ali.



We're your family now.







Let him go!

Or I'll
eviscerate every last
one of you!



Oh,
yeah?

When did
your kind learn how
to swim?



I'm
going
over.

Noor, no!
He's right. You'll
drown.

We'll circle back to
our old den, climb to the top of the
rubble. We should be able to jump
onto their island from the high
ground and--



We don't
have time! This is
my *child*, you craven
son of a--

MOM!
HELP!!





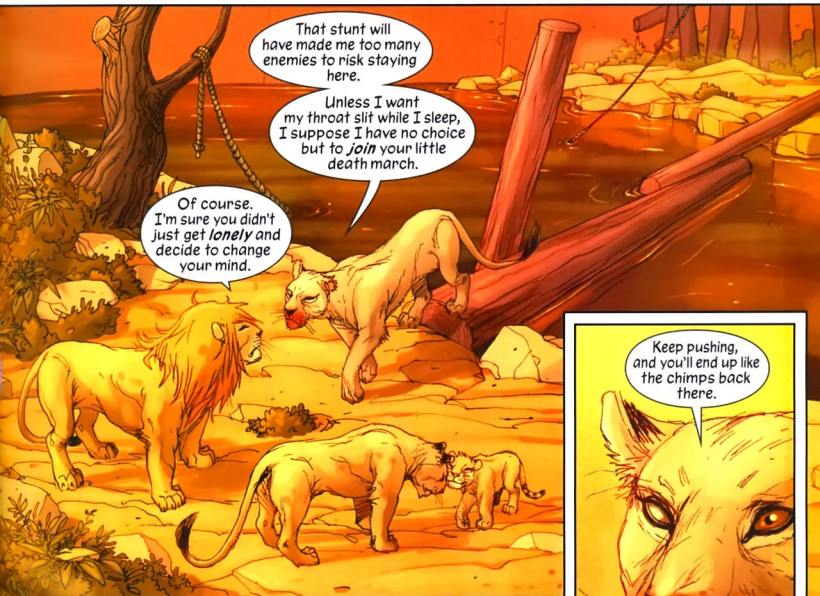






Safa, I...I don't know how to thank you.

We'll add that to the *long list* of things you don't know, Noor.



That stunt will have made me too many enemies to risk staying here.

Unless I want my throat slit while I sleep, I suppose I have no choice but to *join* your little death march.

Of course. I'm sure you didn't just get *lonely* and decide to change your mind.

Keep pushing, and you'll end up like the chimps back there.

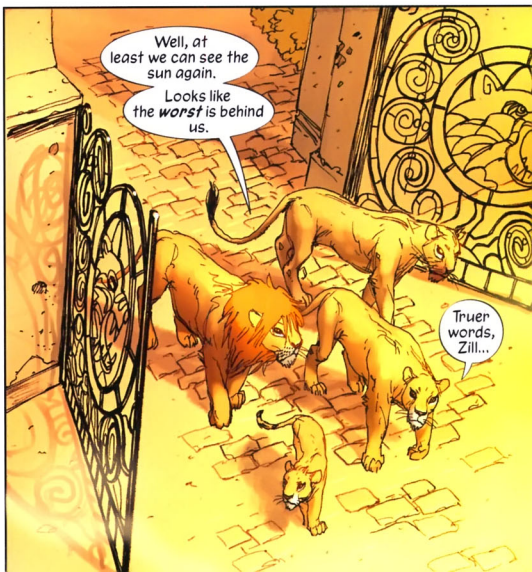


My tummy hurts, Mom.

I know, honey. Safa may have a belly full of monkey, but the rest of us should try to find one last meal before we go.

Well, don't all look at once...

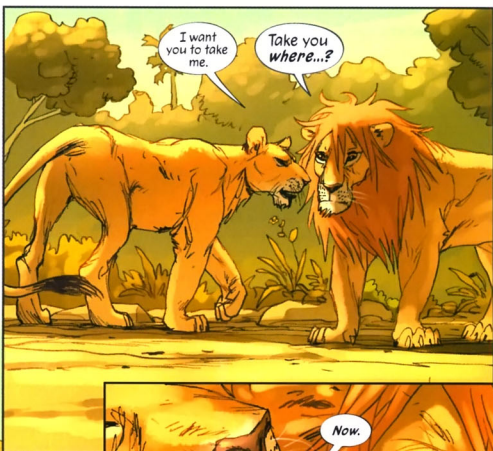














Hey,
where are they
going?

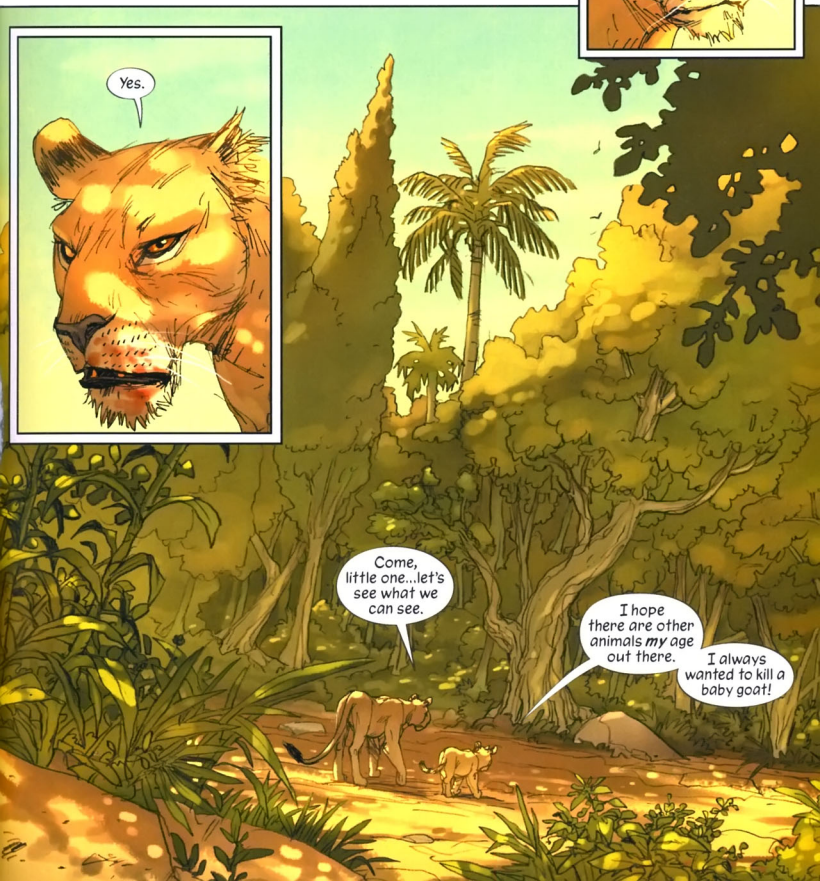
They need
some time alone,
Ali.



Oh. That's what
Zill used to say
when he'd go away
with you.



Yes.

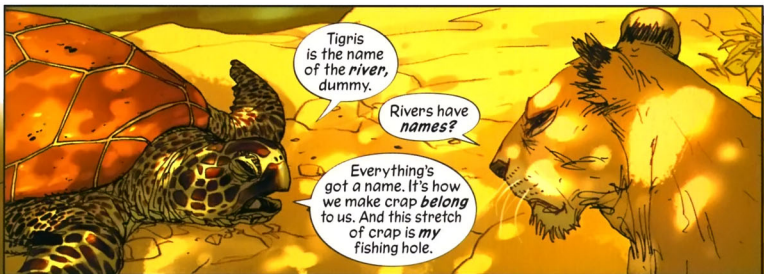


Come,
little one...let's
see what we
can see.

I hope
there are other
animals *my* age
out there.

I always
wanted to kill a
baby goat!



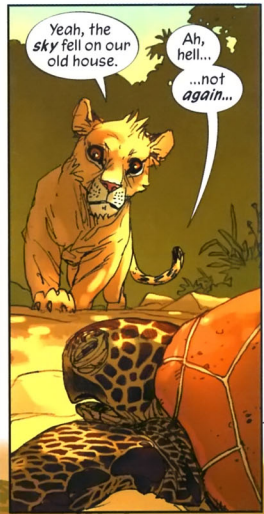




I don't remember hearing about any of *your* kind living in the zoo.

Zoo? I'm no cage dweller, lady.

Why, that where you two busted out of?



Yeah, the sky fell on our old house.

Ah, hell...
...not again...



This has happened *before*?

More than once. Last time was a dozen or so years ago.

A dozen? How old are you?



I hatched during the first big war...back when this sinkhole was still an *empire*.

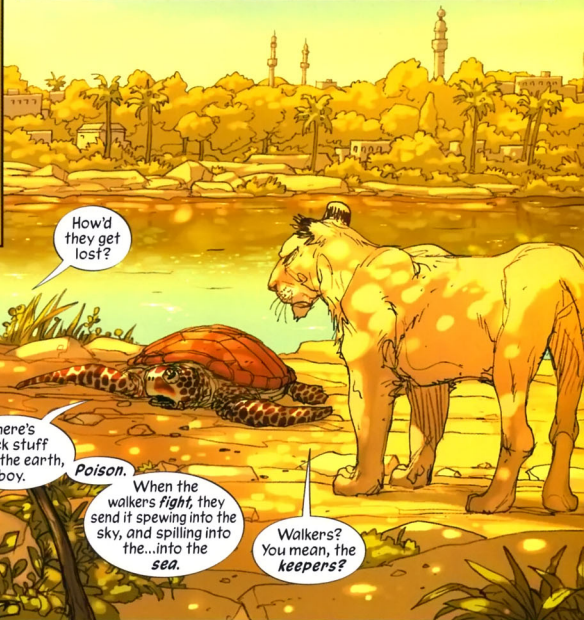


First war?

Listen, my people and I haven't been here nearly as long as you. What's this all about?



It's about losing your wife, your kids, every worthless friend you've ever made...



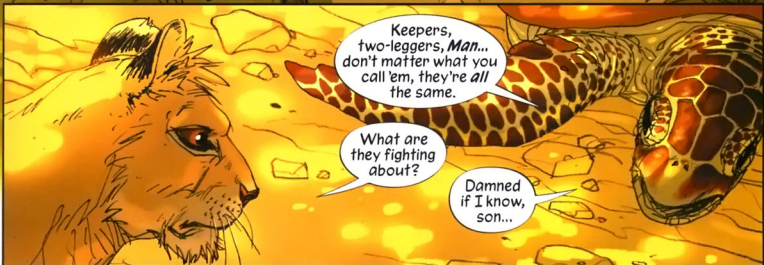
How'd they get lost?

There's black stuff under the earth, boy.

Poison.

When the walkers *fight*, they send it spewing into the sky, and spilling into the...into the *sea*.

Walkers? You mean, the *keepers*?



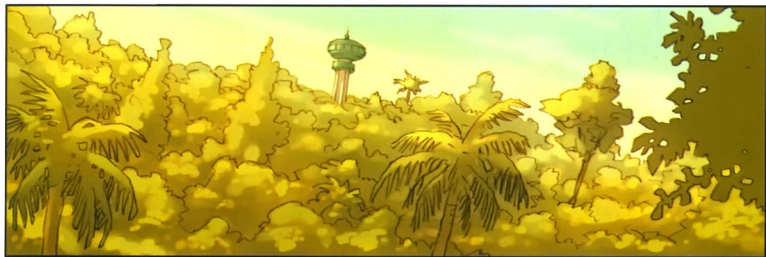
Keepers, two-leggers, *Man*... don't matter what you call 'em, they're *all* the same.

What are they fighting about?

Damned if I know, son...



Damned
if I care.





What *was* that, Safa?

Sounded like a...a *stomach* rumbling. A *big* stomach.

Those'll be the Lions of Babylon.

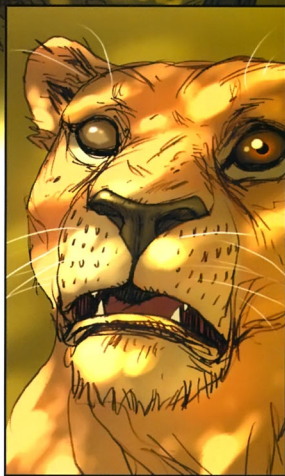
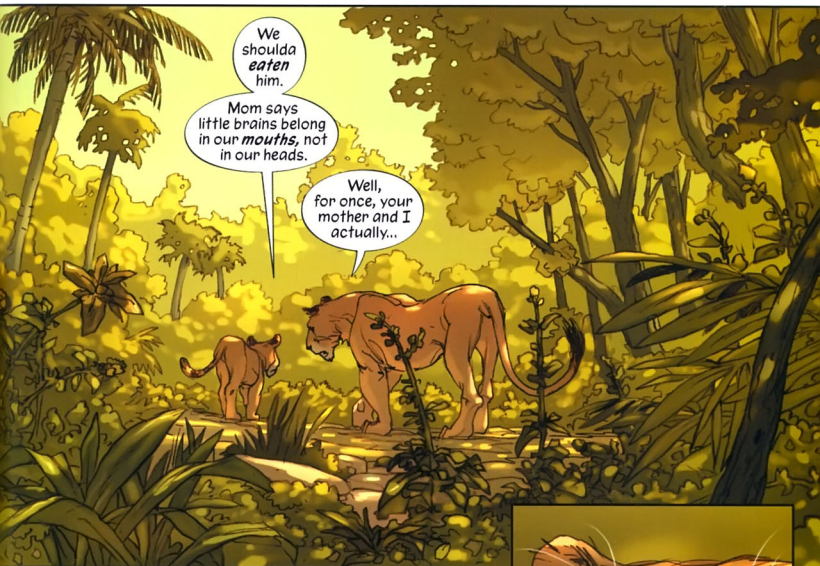
The what?

It's what the walkers call their *shells*.

What are you--

Don't worry, they ain't *real* lions.

You remember what I said about *names*, right?





KHOD
BAELAK!

IFSAH
ISEKA!







MOM!

Zill,
what is
this?

What's
happening?



I have no idea,
but there are *hundreds*
of those things, chewing up
everything in sight. It's
not safe here.

Then we
have to go back
home!



We *can't*, Safa. Their
stampede is a mile long. It's cut
off our only path to the zoo. If we
try to cross those beasts, we'll
be *trampled* to death.

Then
what?

We move
in the *opposite*
direction of what-
ever prey they're
charging towards,
stay *parallel* to the
beasts' march until
we find where
it ends.



But what
if they're *not* charging
towards prey? What if they're
charging *away* from a
predator?

We'd be
running right into
its jaws!

A predator?
Do you see how *big*
they are...?



Trust me, *nothing* that size has enemies.







Where
are we?

I have
no idea. I can
barely keep my
damn eye
open.

There's
not much to
see.

I...I
think it's
another
zoo.



Well,
wouldn't *that*
be bloody
perfect.

Oh, bite
your tongue,
Safa.

You're the
one who *wanted*
to spend the rest of
her life behind
bars.



Save it,
ladies.

If we don't
find food or shelter
soon, we'll be ready
for the *vultures* by
morning.

Then we should
keep moving upwind, so any
prey ahead of us won't be able
to catch our scents.



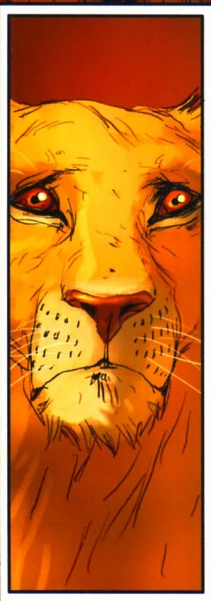
Are
you *mad*,
Noor?

If we
keep walking
into this storm,
we'll be sliced
to pieces.



Safa's right.
If there were any
free meals out here,
we probably would have
stumbled across
one already.

We should
double back and
look for a place to
rest until the wind
dies down.





Let
her walk it
off.

She'll
come back
to us when
she--

Guys!



What
do you *want*,
Ali?

Blood.



I
think I found
blood.



So this
is paradise,
eh?

What have
you gotten yourself
into, girl? What have
you--

CA-CLOK
CA-CLOK

Who's
there?

If...if you
so much as *look*
at me, I'll kill you
all. I...



Oh.



Is...
is that a
keeper?

Or
one of their
cubs.

Either
way, he should
be enough to feed
the lot of
us.



We're
not going
to *eat*
him!

How
come?

He looks
pretty fresh
to me.



Besides, we've
spent the last few years
of our lives feasting on
carcasses.

Why
stop
now?







...not
wolf.









Noor...

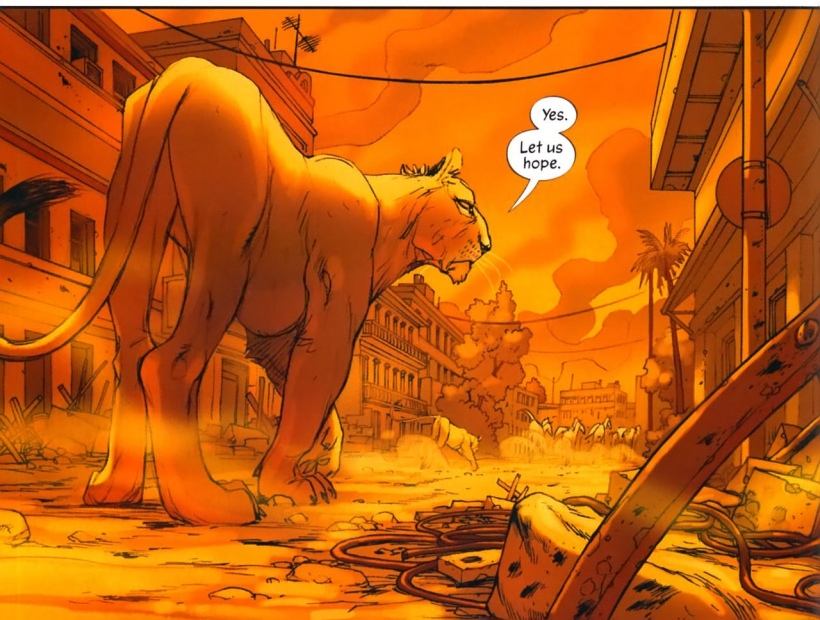
No need
to apologize,
Safa.

We both
said stupid things
today.

Girl, if I live
to be a hundred, you'll
still never get an apology
out of me.

I was
just going to say...
good work.







That's
it, you
swine!



Hide like
cowards!

I'm telling
you now, if you
all go into that
cave...



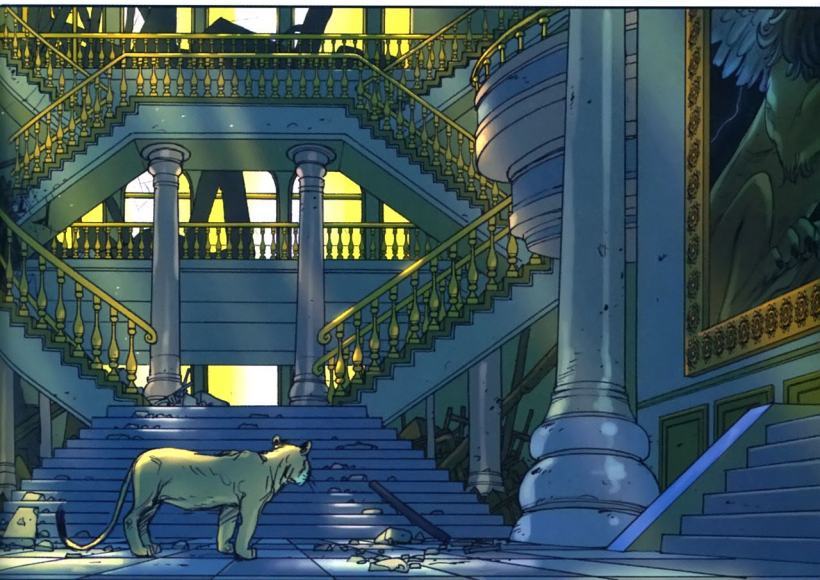
...*none*
of you are
coming out
alive.

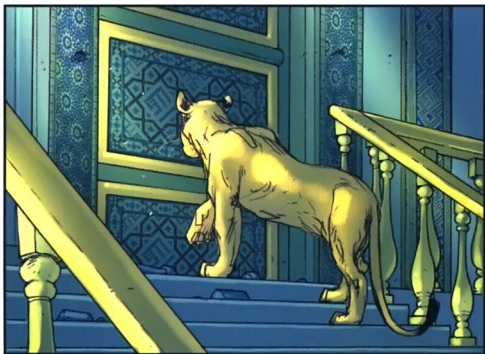


Don't
say I didn't
warn...



...YOU.







Safa.
How did
you--

I caught my
breath, then I just
followed the stench
of *fear*.

Yes, well,
this place scares
the hell out of
me.



Then
it must be
Heaven.

I
don't think
we're there
yet.

Our
own private
watering hole? The
safety of the zoo, but
the freedom to come
and go? What else
could this
be?



I think we're
in the den of the *keepers*.
This is where they must have
gone when they left *us*
at night.

If that's
the case, then
where did they
all--

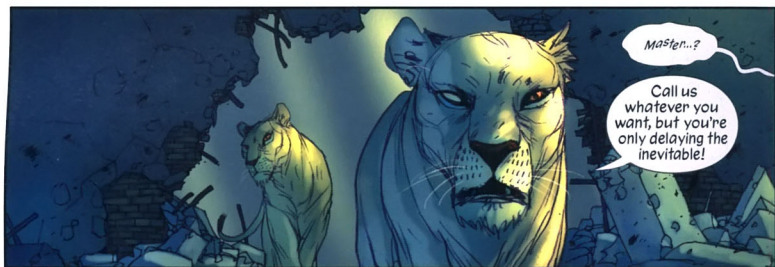
Muh...maşin...?



Was
that...?

Those
overgrown
mules you
lost.

Hurry!

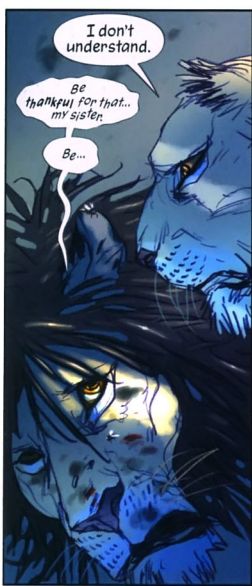




Brother,
do...do we know
you?

Not if
you still have your
claws...your
teeth...

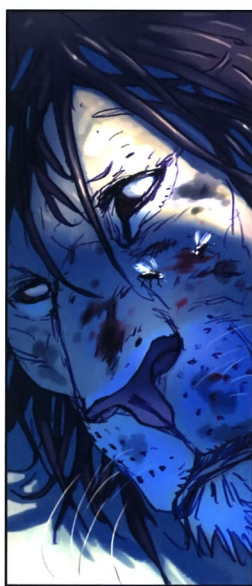
You were
never...on his
list...



I don't
understand.

Be
thankful for that...
my sister.

Be...



His
heart.
It's...
it's still
now.

Who?
Who did
this?
What kind
of monster?



Remember last spring, when we heard rumors of creatures from other cages being *disappeared*? This must be where the keepers brought them.

You're... you're wrong. They may have been our captors, but they weren't *tormenters*.



You have another word for whips and chains?

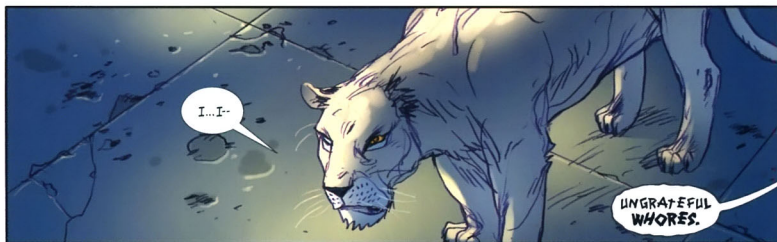
Even if the keepers *did* do this, it wasn't *our* keepers.

They weren't evil.



Safa, no matter how they might treat us, those who would hold us captive are *always* tyrants.

If we had *remained* as we were, we would have ended up hanging from a leash just like this poor bastard... and you know it as well as I.



I...I-

UNGRATEFUL WHORES.



RASHID WASN'T A PRISONER, HE WAS A PET...AND HE LIVED JUST AS COMFORTABLY AS YOU SPOILED PUSSYCATS EVER DID.





...DON'T
GET UP.



















Nnn...



HEH. "KING
OF THE BEASTS."
I'D SAY THERE'S
BEEN A REGIME
CHANGE,
YES?

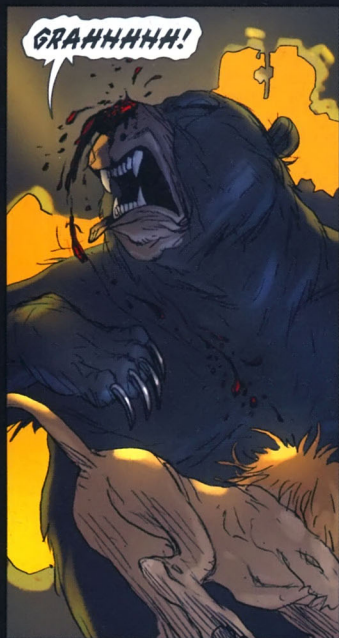
YOU KNOW,
IF YOU PEOPLE HAD
SIMPLY STAYED WHERE
YOU BELONGED, I MIGHT
HAVE PROTECTED YOU...
BUT YOU JUST HAD TO
CUT OFF YOUR NOSE
TO SPITE YOUR
FACE.

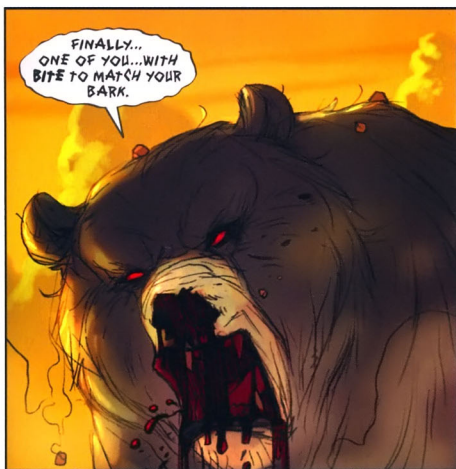
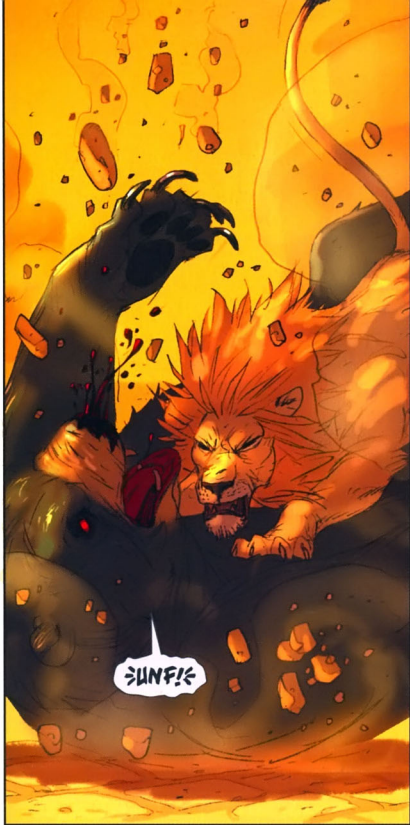


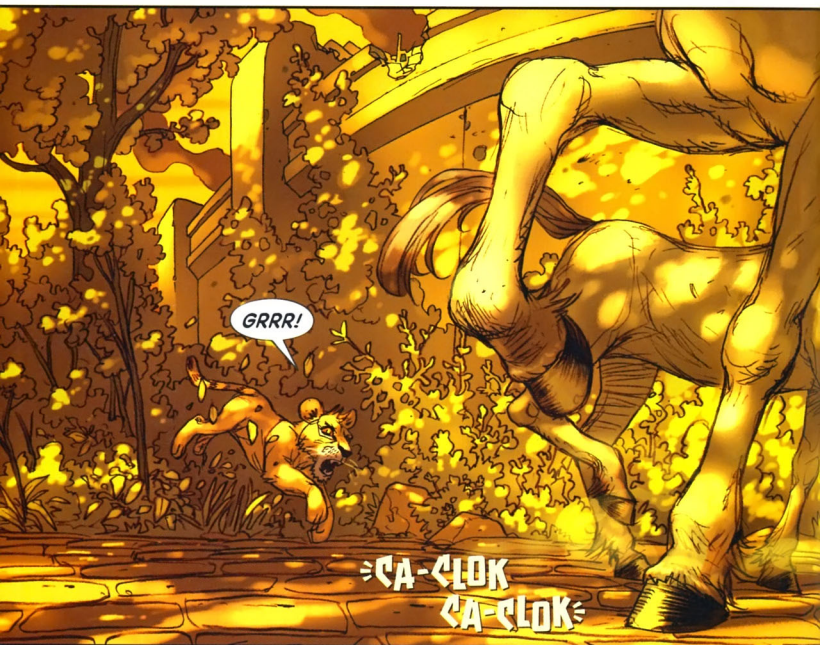
It's our
nature.

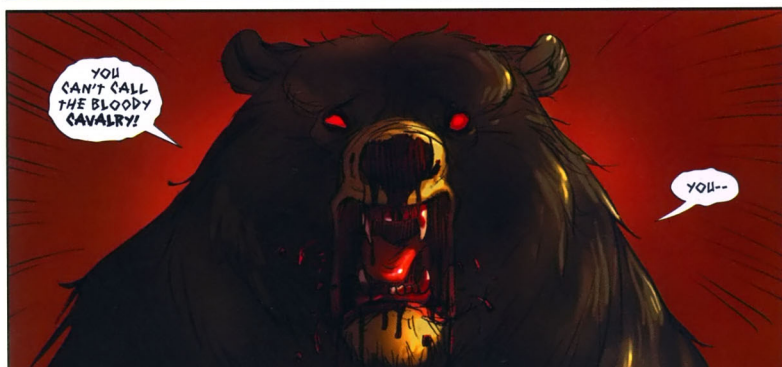


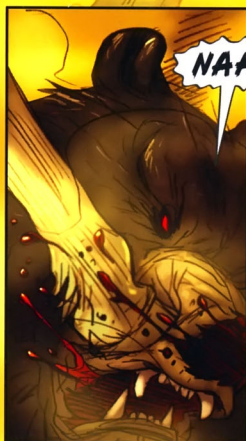
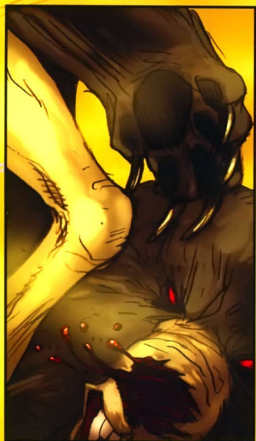
NAAH!

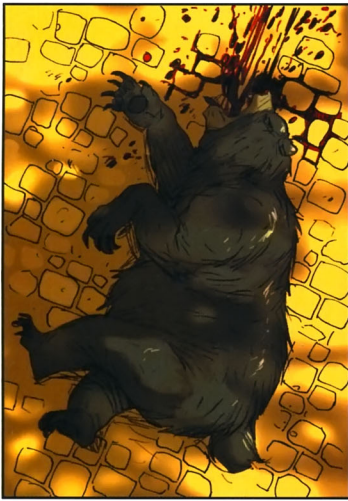












Should I keep chasing the white things, Zili?

Perhaps...but not today.

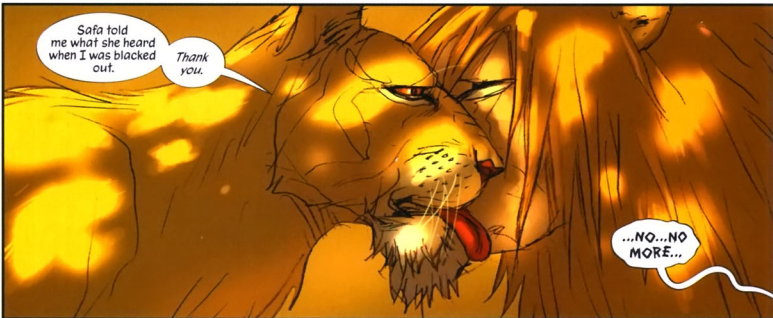
ALI!



Mom!

Are you *okay*? What...what happened to Safa's eye?

Just a...a *scratch*, child. Please, don't smell so *frightened*.



Safa told me what she heard when I was blacked out.

Thank you.

...NO...NO MORE...



...MY
SPINE...IS IN
TWO...

...END ME...
ALREADY...



Happily.

No.

What?
Now you're the
one with the delicate
appetite?



He doesn't
deserve a quick
finish.

Leave
what's left
of him for the
camel spiders
and the--

Fireflies!



I don't
think fireflies eat
flesh, baby.

No.

Up
there...



Fireflies.



Let's go!

Ali, hold your ground!

But I want to see those things up close!

Yes, well, last time I checked, we don't have wings.

Actually, some of us do.



Inside that place.

I saw a lion with--

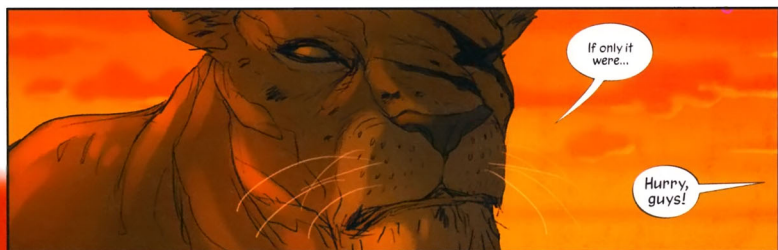
You're not helping, you know.



Come on!

I found a hill!

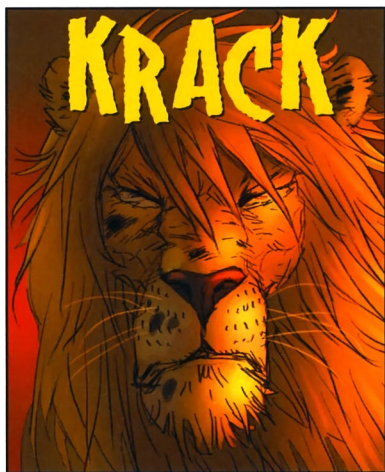
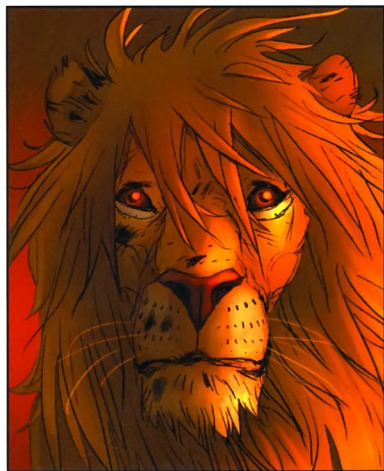




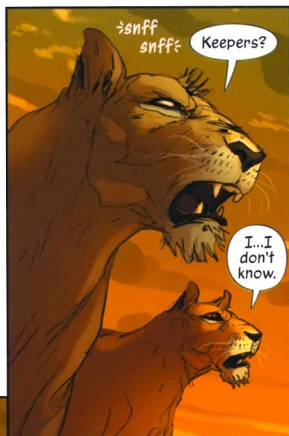


Is *that* a horizon?







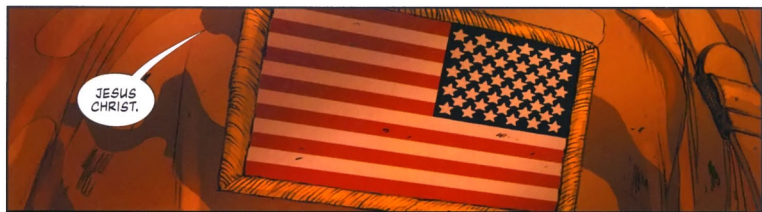


KRAKKA KRAKKA KRAKKA





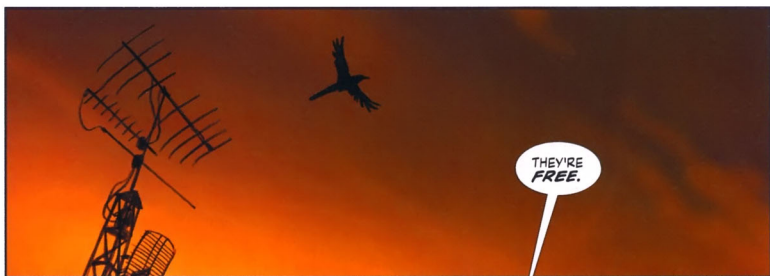




JESUS
CHRIST.



WHAT
THE HELL **WAS**
THAT?





In April of 2003, four lions escaped the
Baghdad Zoo during the bombing of Iraq.

The starving animals were eventually
shot and killed by U.S. soldiers.





There were other casualties as well.







BRIAN K. VAUGHAN

I'd like to thank the following people for their assistance and/or inspiration:

I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to Chris Cutter and Sarah Scarth at the International Fund for Animal Welfare (www.ifaw.org) for putting me in touch with the incomparable Mariette Hopley, who spoke with me at length about her work leading an emergency relief team to the Baghdad Zoo back in 2003.

I'd also like to recognize the civilian population of Iraq, especially those bloggers who generously shared their experiences with the world. And very special thanks to the dedicated men and women of the United States Armed Forces, particularly everyone from the Army's 3rd Infantry Division.

This story is inspired by true events, but the interpretation and viewpoint(s) are obviously mine and Niko's and don't necessarily reflect the feelings and opinions of the many people who kindly offered us their help. Any artistic liberties are my responsibility and mine alone, as are any and all errors of fact.

Oh, and thanks to my favorite wife, Ruth McKee, for letting me borrow her membership card to the San Diego Zoo.

Brian is the Eisner Award-winning writer of Y: THE LAST MAN and EX MACHINA. He lives in California with his wife.



NIKO HENRICHON

I would like to thank my friends and my family who have provided me support during the whole year it took to produce this book. It is also important to thank the people—citizens, reporters and soldiers—who were and still are in Iraq, for sharing their experience in written form or through pictures, despite the drama they are witnessing daily. I couldn't have made this book believable without them.

Niko lives in Québec City, with his wife and cat as well. PRIDE OF BAGHDAD is his second graphic novel.

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BRIAN K. VAUGHAN is
the Eisner Award-winning writer of
Y: THE LAST MAN and *EX MACHINA*.
He lives in California with his wife.



NIKO HENRICHON lives in
Quebec City with his wife and cat as well.
PRIDE OF BAGHDAD is his second
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Based on a true story, Vaughan and artist Niko Henrichon (*BARNUM!*) have created a unique window into the nature of life during wartime, illuminating this struggle as only the graphic novel can.

SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS

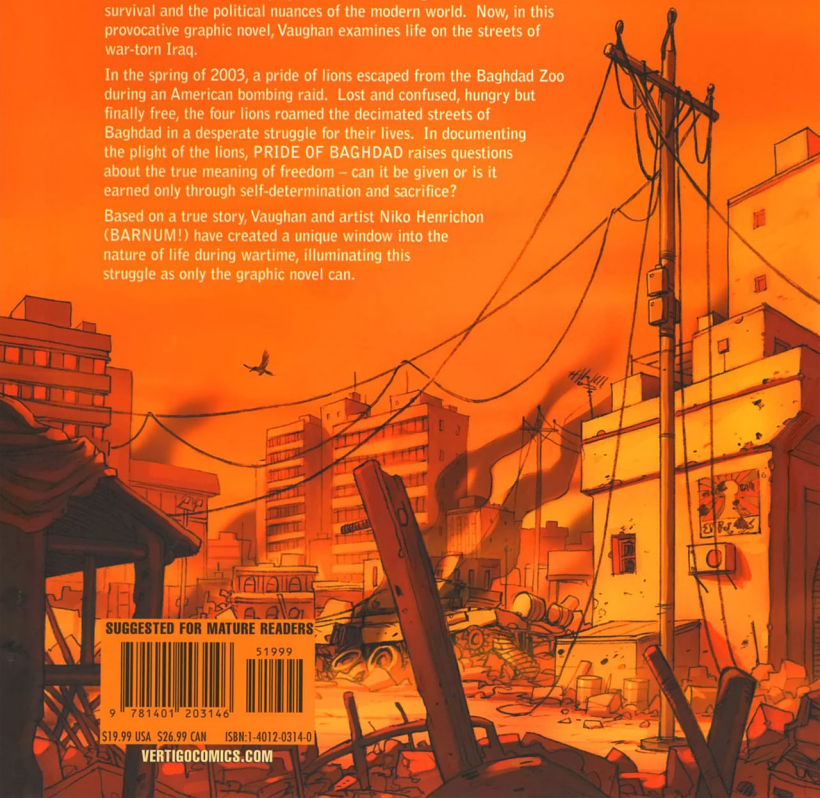


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