

THE YEAR OF OUR LORD 1030



IT WAS TO BE EXPECTED THAT THE PEACE THAT HAD HELD FOR THIRTY YEARS WOULD COME TO AN END SOONER OR LATER. THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MAGYAR KING, STEPHEN I, HAD USED THIS TIME ALL TOO WELL. HE HAD SUBDUED THE LAST REBELLIOUS CHIEFTAINS AND THROUGH IRON, LAND OR MARRIAGE SECURED HIS AUTHORITY OVER THEM. HE MADE NEW ALLIANCES AND ALL THE RULERS FROM CONSTANTINOPLE TO CRACOW RECOGNISED THE INDEPENDENT MAGYAR KINGDOM. BUT THIS BROUGHT HIM POWERFUL ENEMIES. WHEN KING STEPHEN LAID CLAIM TO THE BAVARIAN PRINCEDOM FOR HIS SON, PRINCE EMERIC, THROUGH THE RIGHTS OF HIS WIFE, THE NEW HOLY ROMAN EMPEROR, CONRAD II, DECIDED TO SUBDUE HIS EVER MORE POWERFUL NEIGHBOUR: USING A SKIRMISH ON THE BORDER AS A CASUS BELLI HE INVADED THE MAGYAR KINGDOM WITH HIS ARMY IN THE AUTUMN OF 1030 AND LED HIS TROOPS TOWARDS THE ROYAL SEAT OF ESZTERGOM. BUT THE WAR DID NOT GO AS THE GERMANS HAD PLANNED...

VOLUNTAS TUA

SEPTEMBER, 1030
THE CAMP OF CONRAD II. SOMEWHERE
IN THE MOSON WETLANDS



DIE MAGYAREN,
MEIN KAISER!!

WHAT, AGAIN? WHERE
WAS THE GUARD?



THE GLORIOUS BAVARIAN, SAXON
AND LOTHARINGIAN NOBLE LORDS?
AH, WELL, IT MATTERS NOT.
EVERYONE TO THEIR ARMOUR!!

THEY'RE ALREADY IN IT,
BUT IT'S SCANT ENOUGH...

FILIBERT! GIVE ME MY CHAINMAIL,
MY CLOAK AND MY SWORD.



DON'T JUST LINGER AROUND,
GET A WEAPON!

BUT LORD, I'M JUST
A SERVANT.

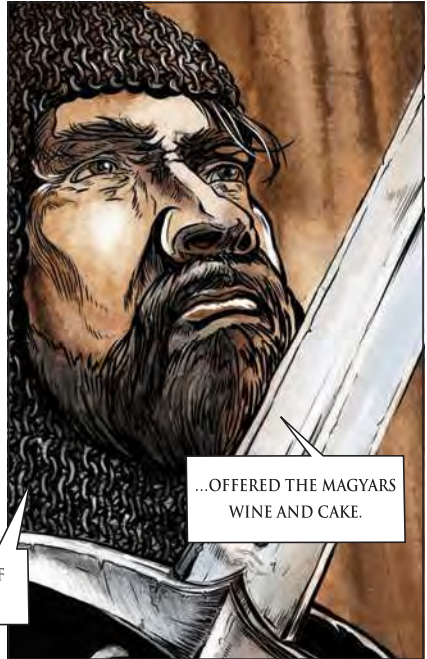
YOU'LL BE A DEAD SERVANT SOON
ENOUGH IF YOU DON'T DO IT.



I WILL TELL YOUR FATHER,
WHO FOUGHT WITH
LOYALTY ALL OF HIS LIFE...



...THAT INSTEAD OF
STEEL, HIS SON...



...OFFERED THE MAGYARS
WINE AND CAKE.



LET'S TEACH A LESSON TO THOSE FAITHLESS
MAGYARS, WHO HAVE STILL NOT LEARNED
TO FIGHT WORTHY OF KNIGHTS.

A TRUE NOBLE KNIGHT DOES NOT
FIGHT AT DAWN, IN SCANT ARMOUR.





CONRAD II, THE GLORIOUS HOLY ROMAN
EMPEROR, STEPS OUT OF HIS TENT AND IS
STRUCK WITH TERROR. GALLOPING ABOUT, THE
MAGYARS ARE CUTTING DOWN HIS MEN WITH
DEVILISH SKILL FROM THEIR SMALL HORSES.
THE SLOTH-LIKE GERMAN KNIGHTS RESIST
THE ARROWS AND LANCES BUT TO NO AVAIL.



CONRAD'S BODYGUARDS IMMEDIATELY LINE UP AROUND HIM. PICKED SAXON KNIGHTS THEY ARE NATURALLY IN FULL ARMOUR FROM HEAD TO FOOT WITH ALL THEIR WEAPONS. THEY HAD PROBABLY SLEPT THIS WAY.



MAJESTY, IT'S NOT SAFE HERE.
GO BACK TO THE TENT!



A SMALL GROUP OF MAGYARS NOTICES THE EMPEROR WITHIN THE RING OF HIS MEN AND MAKE THEIR WAY TOWARDS HIM.



...IN CLOSE COMBAT THE SAXON BODYGUARDS PROVE A HARD NUT TO CRACK. WITH THEIR ENORMOUS HATCHETS THEY MANAGE TO BEAT BACK THE CHARGE. BUT ONE OF THE ATTACKERS PROVES TO BE ALL TOO RECKLESS...

...AS THE SAXON COMMANDER OF THE BODYGUARD SOON DEMONSTRATES. THE RIDER COVERS THE EMPEROR AND ALL AROUND HIM IN A SHOWER OF MUD IN BLASPHEMOUS FASHION.





BEFORE CONRAD CAN AVENGE THIS INSULT, HIS VICTIM ROLLS TO THE SIDE SPRINGING TO HIS FEET LIKE A CAT.



GREETINGS,
IMPERATORE MIO.



HE BENDS OVER AND WITH AN INSIDIOUS BUT EFFECTIVE MOVE SWEEPS HIS SWORD AROUND, TAKING HIS SAXON ASSAILENTS OFF GUARD.



THEN HE MOUNTS A LOOSE HORSE, LIKE ONLY A MAGYAR CAN, AND GALLOPS AFTER HIS FELLOWS.



UNTIL TOMORROW,
MONSIGNORE!



DONNERWETTER!



CAN ANYBODY
TELL ME...

...HOW THESE CURSED BARBARIANS
GOT RIGHT TO MY TENT?

AND WHY THEY RETREATED SO SOON? IS IT THE USUAL
MAGYAR TACTIC? IF THEY EXPECT US TO CHASE THEM
INTO THIS SEA OF MUD THEY ARE SADLY MISTAKEN.



MY LORD, ARE YOU HURT?

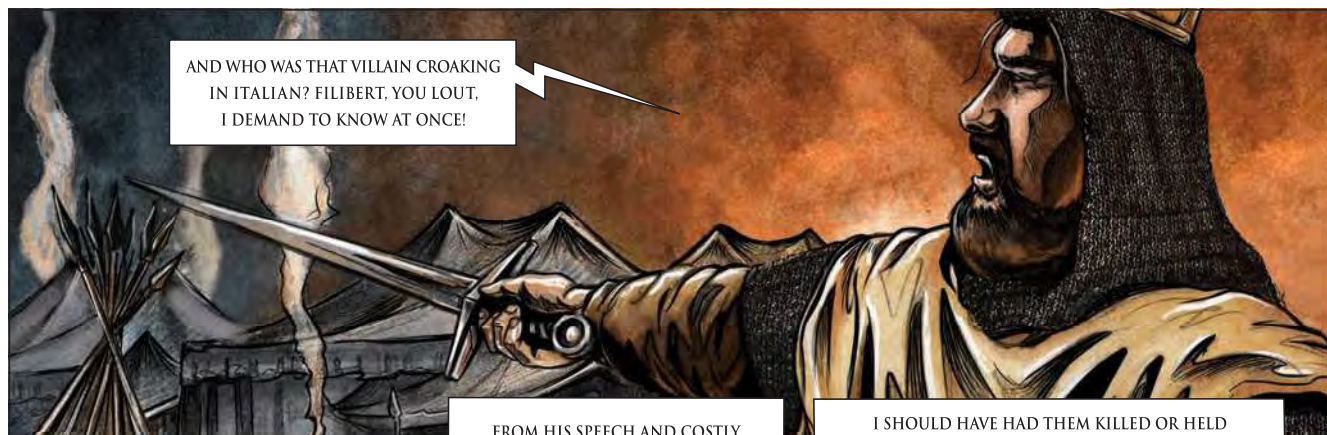


NO, BUT NOT FOR THEIR
WANT OF TRYING. GET THEM
OUT OF MY SIGHT!

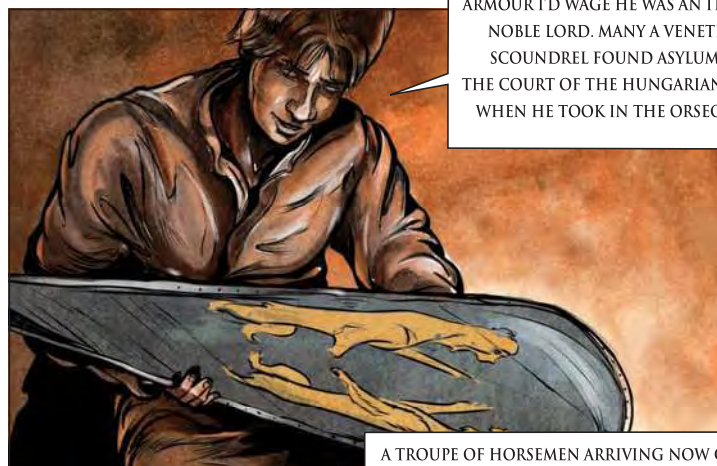
IN THE THREE MONTHS SINCE WE SET OUT THE RAIN
HAS NOT STOPPED. EVERYWHERE IS SWAMP AND MUD
WITH NOT A SOUL, NOR EVEN AN ANIMAL ANYWHERE.

THEY HAVE TORCHED THE HOUSES AND DESTROYED
ANYTHING WE COULD EAT. MY SOLDIERS AND HORSES
ARE STARVING. WE DO NOT EVEN KNOW IF WE ARE
HEADING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION FOR ESZTERGOM,
FOR KING STEPHEN'S CASTLE.

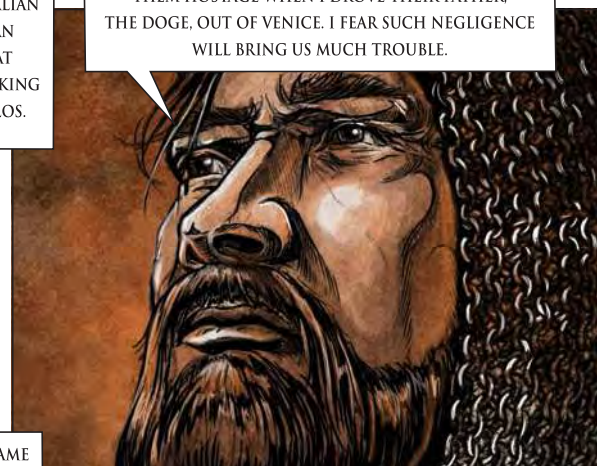




AND WHO WAS THAT VILLAIN CROAKING
IN ITALIAN? FILIBERT, YOU LOUT,
I DEMAND TO KNOW AT ONCE!



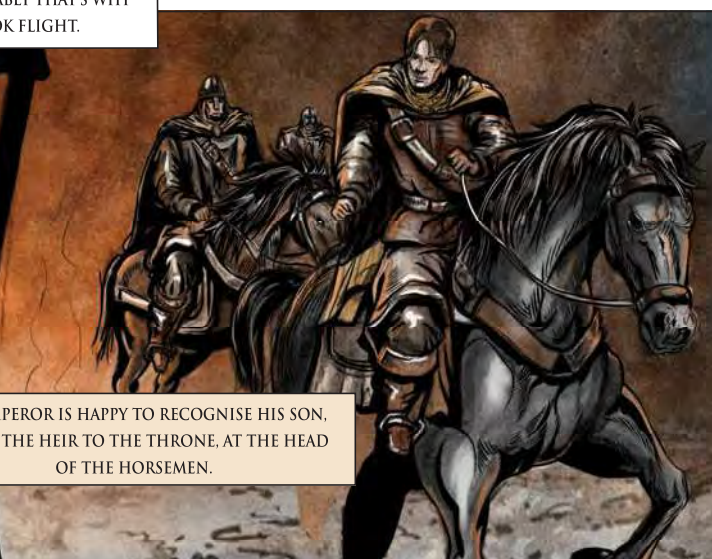
FROM HIS SPEECH AND COSTLY
ARMOUR I'D WAGE HE WAS AN ITALIAN
NOBLE LORD. MANY A VENETIAN
SCOUNDREL FOUND ASYLUM AT
THE COURT OF THE HUNGARIAN KING
WHEN HE TOOK IN THE ORSEOLO.



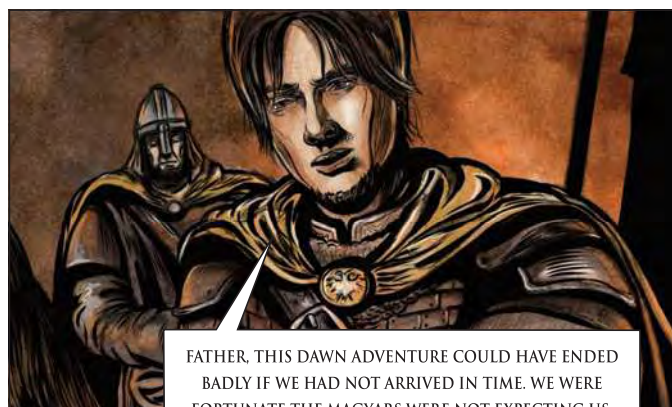
I SHOULD HAVE HAD THEM KILLED OR HELD
THEM HOSTAGE WHEN I DROVE THEIR FATHER,
THE DOGE, OUT OF VENICE. I FEAR SUCH NEGLIGENCE
WILL BRING US MUCH TROUBLE.



A TROUPE OF HORSEMEN ARRIVING NOW CAME
UPON THE MAGYARS. PROBABLY THAT'S WHY
THEY SUDDENLY TOOK FLIGHT.



THE EMPEROR IS HAPPY TO RECOGNISE HIS SON,
HENRY, THE HEIR TO THE THRONE, AT THE HEAD
OF THE HORSEMEN.



FATHER, THIS DAWN ADVENTURE COULD HAVE ENDED
BADLY IF WE HAD NOT ARRIVED IN TIME. WE WERE
FORTUNATE THE MAGYARS WERE NOT EXPECTING US.



WELCOME, MY SON. IT IS GOOD
YOU ARE HERE. I WILL NEED YOU
AND ALL YOUR MEN.

I WANT TO PUT THOSE DOGS FROM THE
EAST IN THEIR PLACE ONCE AND FOR ALL!
WE SHALL CONVENE A COUNCIL
IMMEDIATELY.



FATHER, TELL ME, WHY DO WE, THE LORDS OF SUCH FLOURISHING PROVINCES, NEED THIS DESOLATE SWAMP? EVEN THE FORESAKEN TOWNS THE MISSIONARIES CLAIM FAR FROM HERE WOULD BE BETTER...

I BEGIN TO HAVE MY DOUBTS. SHOULD WE LEAVE THIS WAR TO OUR ALLY, BRETISLAUS, DUKE OF BOHEMIA?



YOU ARE RIGHT! HE WOULD NEED ONLY TO RIDE DOWN FROM THE MOUNTAINS AND ATTACK KING STEPHEN AT ESZTERGOM.



LET'S LISTEN TO WHAT THE GREAT LORDS THINK! I'M CURIOUS WHO I CAN COUNT ON IN THIS CURSED WAR.



CONRAD II RECEIVES HIS GREAT LORDS IN HIS TENT, HAVING ALL HIS ADVISORS, WAR LEADERS AND BISHOPS STAND AROUND HIM AS THEY DESERVE. IT WAS THEY WHO HAD PERSUADED HIM TO UNDERTAKE THIS COMPLETELY UNNECESSARY, EXPENSIVE AND EVER MORE UNSUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGN. PILGRIM, THE BISHOP OF COLOGNE, CLEARS HIS THROAT...



MAJESTY, OUR HORSEMEN SINK INTO THE MUD. WE HAVE LONG SINCE ABANDONED MOST OF THE CARTS. WE ARE LUCKY TO COVER A MILE A DAY. I DO NOT KNOW IF WE WILL EVER REACH THE CITY OF THE MAGYAR KING.

CONRAD LOOKS AROUND IN CASE THERE ARE OTHER OPINIONS. TO THE SIDE IN A SMALL GROUP STAND THE MEN OF THE BAVARIAN MARGRAVE ARNOLD VON WELS-LAMBACH. NOW AS EVER THEY ARE SPEAKING IN WHISPERS REplete WITH DISCONTENT.



COME NOW, GOOD GENTLEMEN, I WOULD HEAR YOUR OPINIONS!