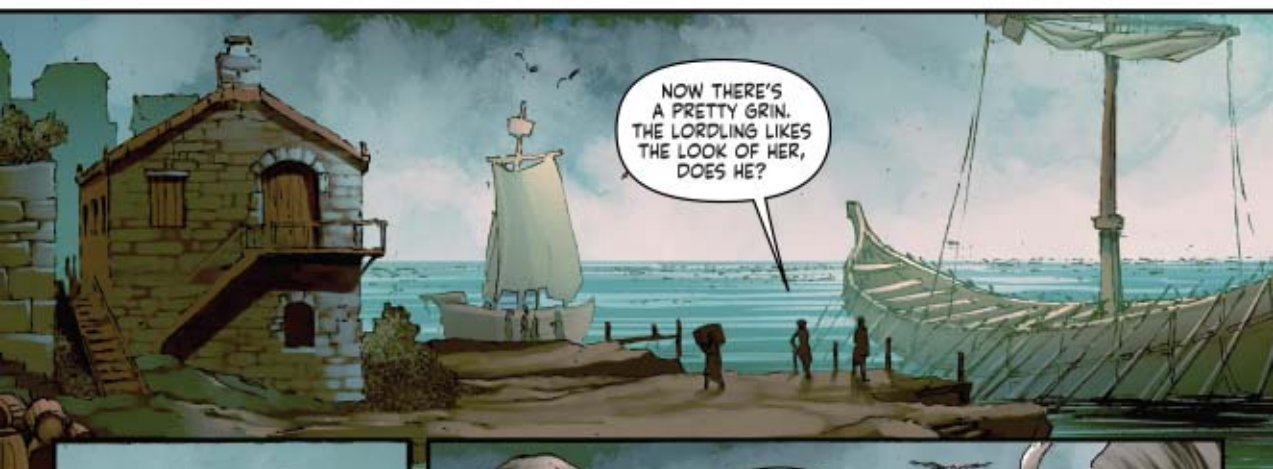


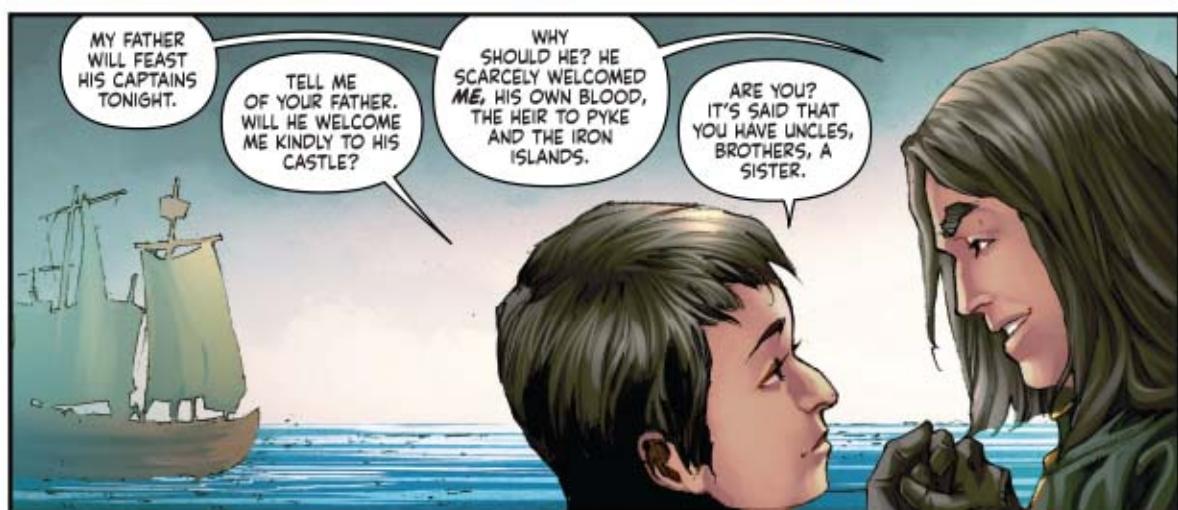
# THEON













*BUT I AM NOT WEAK, THEON TOLD HIMSELF, AND I MEAN TO BE STRONGER YET BY THE TIME MY FATHER DIES.*

MY UNCLAS POSE NO THREAT TO ME. AERON IS DRUNK ON SEAWATER AND SANCTITY. HE LIVES ONLY FOR HIS GOD.

AND VICTARION IS LIKE SOME GREAT GREY BULLOCK, STRONG AND TIRELESS AND DUTIFUL, BUT NOT LIKE TO WIN ANY RACES. HE HAS NEITHER THE WITS NOR THE AMBITION TO PLOT BETRAYAL.

I LEFT MY HORSE AT THE INN. COME.



BUT I HAVE NO HORSE, MY LORD.

SHARE MINE, THEN.

WOULD I BE BEHIND YOU, OR IN FRONT?

YOU WOULD BE WHEREVER YOU LIKED.

I LIKE TO BE ON TOP.



EURON CROWEYE HAS NO LACK OF CUNNING, THOUGH. I'VE HEARD MEN SAY TERRIBLE THINGS OF THAT ONE.

MY UNCLE EURON HAS NOT BEEN SEEN IN THE ISLANDS FOR CLOSE ON TWO YEARS. HE MAY BE DEAD.

*IF SO, IT MIGHT BE FOR THE BEST.*

*LORD BALON'S ELDEST BROTHER HAD NEVER GIVEN UP THE OLD WAY, EVEN FOR A DAY. HIS SILENCE, WITH ITS BLACK SAILS AND DARK RED HULL, WAS INFAMOUS IN EVERY PORT FROM IBSEN TO ASSHAI, IT WAS SAID.*

HE MAY BE DEAD. AND IF HE LIVES, WHY, HE HAS SPENT SO LONG AT SEA, HE'D BE HALF A STRANGER HERE. THE IRONBORN WOULD NEVER SEAT A STRANGER IN THE SEASTONE CHAIR.

I SUPPOSE NOT.



I WILL SEE THAT YOU HAVE AN HONORED PLACE TONIGHT AT THE FEAST. I MUST SIT ON THE DAIS, AT MY FATHER'S RIGHT HAND, BUT I WILL JOIN YOU WHEN HE LEAVES THE HALL. HE SELDOM LINGERS LONG. HE HAS NO BELLY FOR DRINK THESE DAYS.

A GRIEVOUS THING WHEN A GREAT MAN GROWS OLD.

LORD BALON IS BUT THE **FATHER** OF A GREAT MAN.

A MODEST LORDLING.

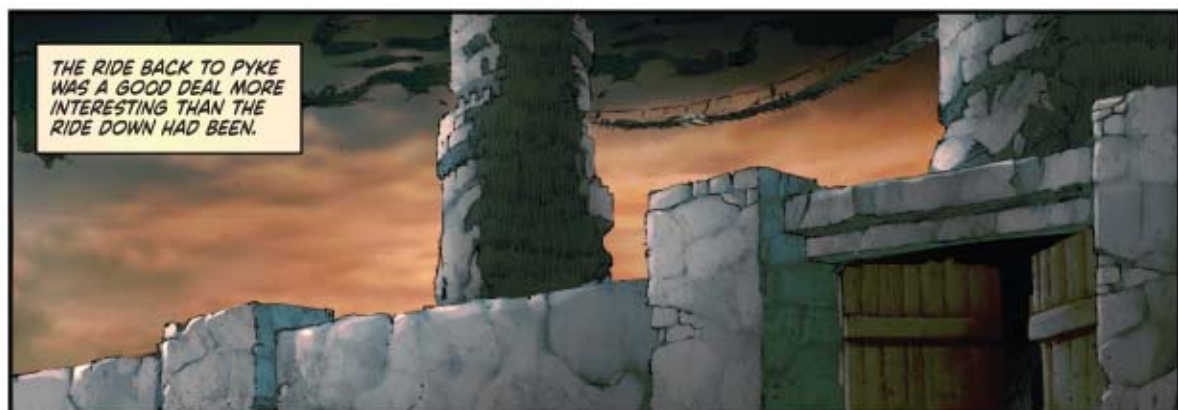


ONLY A FOOL HUMBLAS HIMSELF WHEN THE WORLD IS SO FULL OF MEN EAGER TO DO THAT JOB FOR HIM.

COME, LET US RIDE.







THE RIDE BACK TO PYKE WAS A GOOD DEAL MORE INTERESTING THAN THE RIDE DOWN HAD BEEN.



TAKE THE HORSE, AND GET THESE DAMN DOGS AWAY—



LADY ASHA. YOU'RE BACK.

LAST NIGHT, I SAILED FROM GREAT WYK WITH LORD GOODBROTHER, AND SPENT THE NIGHT AT THE INN. MY LITTLE BROTHER WAS KIND ENOUGH TO LET ME RIDE WITH HIM FROM LORDSPORT.



ALL HE COULD DO WAS STAND AND GAPE AT HER.

ASHA? SHE COULD NOT BE ASHA.

THE PIMPLES WENT WHEN THE BREASTS CAME, BUT I KEPT THE VULTURE'S BEAK.

WHY... WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME?

I WANTED TO SEE WHO YOU WERE FIRST. AND I DID.



AND NOW, LITTLE BROTHER, PRAY EXCUSE ME. I NEED TO BATHE AND DRESS FOR THE FEAST. I WONDER IF I STILL HAVE THAT CHAINMAIL GOWN I LIKE TO WEAR OVER MY BOILED LEATHER SMALLCLOTHES?

