

Righteous

Issue 1 Script

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PAGE 1

I'm thinking each panel covering the width of the page.

1 – A line of refugees descends from the hills, walking beside covered wagons and gaunt horses. These are the ancestors of the modern Avin, and look much more Mongolian than their eventual descendants. Their clothing is not ragged, but they are obviously tired, especially since they are unused to walking.

CAP: Eight centuries ago, our people descended from the steppes.

2 – Close on the middle of the line, where we see a pitiable refugee girl, all of ten years old. Her gaze is long and she is sincerely fatigued.

CAP: They wanted only shelter, a place to call home, away from the famine that ravaged their lands.

3 – Arrows arc into a similar wagon train from an ambush on an overlook bluff. The ambushers look like the present-day Inshull, and represent the original occupants of the land that became Avin. The refugees scatter, those that haven't already been hit by arrows.

CAP: But they were beset on all sides, by barbarian bandits...

4 – A Sllooah rises from rocks next to yet another wagon train, yanking a man into the air by his leg as other men run away, abandoning their wagons.

CAP: ...and foul monsters.

PAGE 2

1 – Masul, the founder of the Avin empire, stands on a rise above the Sllooah, pushing a boulder with all his might. It's a huge strain, and this should show on his face and body, with veins bulging as if he were overdoing it.

CAP: But one man was determined to fight for his people.

2 – Masul stands in tired satisfaction as his rock, having rolled off the rise, crushes the Sllooah, sending fragments flying everywhere. The man it was holding drops unceremoniously to the ground.

CAP: He was a mighty warrior...

3 – Two more Sllooah loom over Masul from behind. He looks back uncertainly.

CAP: ...but his enemies were numberless as the stars of the great dome of night.

4 – Light bathes the scene, nearly obscuring the Sllooah from view. Masul partially covers his eyes against the glare, but keeps trying to look into it.

CAP: It was then, in this time of greatest need...

5 – Masul reaches into the light with both hands, eyes full of fire and wonder. The glare no longer bothers him.

CAP: ...that the man received the greatest of gifts.

6 – Close on the sword laid in Masul's hands, wreathed in a cold flame that does him no harm. It is flawless.

CAP: The sword Tadzik.

PAGE 3

1 – The new King smashes a Sllooah to fragments with a mighty swing of Tadzik.

CAP: Armed by God, the man defeated the vile Slloahs*...

EXP CAP: *Stone spirits

2 – In a later scene, King Masul stands in shin-deep water at the future site of the city of Avin, Tadzik in hand, dripping wet. His eyes are determined, yet sure and faithful. A handful of smaller Zkahls (about twice his size) back off in fear, some of them obviously injured by his strokes (you'll have to play with what magical sword strokes out of a watery being look like).

CAP: ..and drove the Zkahls* to the depths of the ocean.

EXP CAP: *Storm spirits

3 – King Masul stands proud amid fallen foes and discarded weapons. There are other soldiers with him, but right now they are indistinct and in the background.

CAP: His enemies fled before him...

4 – King Masul looks back at the other soldiers who fought with him. They are tired, but proud, inspired by their leader.

CAP: ...and his people followed him.

5 – Close on King Masul as he stands, Tadzik held before him at an angle as if on guard. He is focused, looking into the future.

CAP: For God gave him more than the holy blade Tadzik. He gave him strength to match his faith.

6 – Close on Masul's eyes. Still focused and futured.

CAP: And he gave him a purpose, to be the ruler of our people and to found our great city...

PAGE 4

1 – Full page city of Avin.

CAP: AVIN!

2 – An inset panel: the palace complex.

PAGE 5

1 – We walk just behind Nanza as he heads into the emperor's war room. Emperor Damkev stands at the head of a table, Tadzik unsheathed and in hand. The sword is a little duller than it was in the mythic origin tale we just saw. Around the emperor, generals stand at rapt attention. General Udmeh looks back at Nanza, unhappy at his late entrance. Here we learn that the emperor has been narrating this whole time. There is a window in the back of the room that looks down on the bay, though that may not yet be visible.

EMPEROR: And here it has stood for almost a thousand years, strong in its courage, the chosen city.

2 – Udmeh gives Nanza a dirty look up close as Nanza fills the gap beside him. They speak in hushed voices.

UDMEH: You're late.

NANZA: I was talking to the men.

NANZA: They're afraid.

3 – The emperor looks down at the map on the table – but mostly he looks down to set up his next point. He is a good orator, and he's playing just right to his crowd of generals, advisors and nobles.

EMPEROR: But our blessings are not maintained by an idle hand.

EMPEROR: No.

4 – Udmeh upbraids Nanza, keeping his face forward so he seems to be listening. Nanza listens to both at once.

UDMEH: You MAKE them afraid, boy. With all your talk.

5 – The emperor looks up again, hitting the dramatic beat at just the right time.

EMPEROR: There are wolves at our borders. They plague the sea and taint the land.

6 – The emperor stands to his full height. He is impressive.

EMPEROR: They would kill us, if they could. If we but let them, they will do just that.

PAGE 6

1 – The emperor holds Tadzik aloft, eyeing the men in the room, making sure they're hooked and paying attention.

EMPEROR: I will NOT give the Inshull that chance. The oceans are ours by right, won with this blade.

2 – The emperor brings Tadzik down to the map, resting it on the map, tip on the capital of Inshulla.

EMPEROR: In two days, we sail.

3 – Nanza, innocent of the trespass he is committing, speaks. Udmeh looks shocked, but it's too late to prevent the young man's gaffe.

NANZA: Then the negotiations have failed?

4 – The emperor addresses Nanza directly, as if explaining things to a young child.

EMPEROR: Negotiation is not for such as the Inshull. They listen to force, and force alone will quell them.

5 – Nanza speaks from his heart. Earnest.

NANZA: The ocean is large, my emperor. Can no arrangement be reached?

6 – The emperor walks to the window, beyond which we see the bay and some of the many ships of Avin.

EMPEROR: We are a blessed people. Their fake barbarian god will NOT steal that from us.

PAGE 7

1 – Nanza and Udmeh walk away from the meeting as the crowd of generals and other officials disperses.

UDMEH: NANZA!

2 – Udmeh slams Nanza into the wall, spitting rage into his face. Nanza's eyes are wide, but not in fear. He just thinks Udmeh is acting exceptionally strange.

UDMEH: Are you INSANE, boy? What were you THINKING, questioning the EMPEROR like that?

3 – Nanza, serious, looks his general in the eyes and explains himself.

NANZA: He's making a mistake, general.

UDMEH: A mistake, Nanza? Do please enlighten me.

4 – Nanza continues to explain, eyes still locked with Udmeh, despite the general's frightening demeanor.

NANZA: Inshulla has NEVER attacked us. We could sign a treaty, share the seas.

NANZA: Not war. It doesn't have to come to war.

5 – Udmeh steps back, letting go, almost pushing Nanza away from him, as if Nanza were something repellent.

UDMEH: That's IT. I can't use you, boy. You're WEAK, and DANGEROUS.

6 – Udmeh walks away, leaving Nanza where he shoved him against the wall. Nanza sort of reaches after him, trying to figure out what's going on.

NANZA: GENERAL! Where are you going?

UDMEH: To find someone else to lead your men, BOY.

PAGE 8

1 – The emperor's grand noya leads the fleet out of the Avin bay. It moves without sails or oars, water rippling with fishlike shapes formed from the salty water itself, pushing at the noya's sides and stern. Men stand stationed all across the deck, with some near the bow and more near the stern, where the emperor and his retinue remain.

CAP: It's an honor, really.

2 – On the foredeck of the emperor's noya, Nanza and two soldiers stand, looking out at the open ocean beyond the bay as the noya moves. The breeze from the ocean blows back in their faces.

NANZA: Guarding the emperor is holy duty. A gift.

3 – Nanza squints at the horizon. The nearest soldier gives him a funny look, wondering why this young officer is trying to jinx him.

NANZA: This is a mistake. We bring war where there should be fellowship.

SOLDIER: If you say so. I...I'm going to go check on the emperor.

4 – Distracted, Nanza continues to watch as the three soldiers walk gratefully away, glancing back at the strange, young officer. The bow wind continues to blow.

NANZA: Yeah, you do that.

5 – Close on Nanza as he is taken off guard by Iskeh, who is not yet visible.

ISKEH (off-panel): What do you see?

6 – Nanza smiles to quash the startle and turns to look at Iskeh. His body motion should be very restrained – she is the emperor's daughter.

NANZA: Water, princess Iskeh. All the water in the world.

PAGE 9

1 – Eyes glinting at her own wit, Iskeh prods the young officer with her words. She thinks he's a little cute, and also is completely aware that he is beneath her. Nanza is temporarily taken with her good looks.

ISKEH: I have it on good authority that we have yet to see all the water in the world.

NANZA: Indeed.

2 – Nanza returns to his senses and realizes he has failed to make a proper introduction. Iskeh smiles benevolently.

NANZA: Forgive me, princess. I am Nanza, a lieutenant in our blessed emperor's army.

3 – She points at his armor and tabard, smiling, mildly mocking.

ISKEH: I can see that, Nanza.

4 – She steps up beside Nanza to lean against the rail a little, looking at him.

ISKEH: You must be very special to be posted to my father's ship. It's a great honor.

5 – Nanza looks back at Iskeh, trying not to check her out too much. He couches his answer very carefully.

NANZA: I'm very outspoken.

6 – Iskeh raises her eyebrow, seeing through the situation instantly. Nanza is already looking away from her, starting to notice what's coming on the horizon (which we can't see).

ISKEH: Really? Father normally doesn't like that in his subjects.

7 – Nanza yells toward the back of the ship, and Iskeh stares at the Inshull fleet, which we still can't see.

ISKEH: I said –

NANZA: ENEMY IN SIGHT! Run up the banners! ENEMY IN SIGHT!

PAGE 10

1 – (Top half of the page) The two fleets approach each other across the water. The Avin fleet is obviously larger, perhaps three times as many ships as the Inshull fleet, and all of them larger. Seen at this moment, the fight will blatantly be short, as the larger Avin fleet must necessarily crush the Inshull.

2 – The fleet admiral looks out over the water, standing next to the emperor. The admiral wears no armor, as suits a sailor who is quite afraid of drowning, more than weapons. Next to them, two similarly unarmored sailors wave substantial banners marked with clear-cut geometric shapes that signal combat maneuvers for the rest of the fleet.

ADMIRAL: We outnumber them at least two to one, my emperor. They may have seen us in time to deploy, but they will not stand against our might.

3 – The emperor watches, eyes bright. Nanza steps in near the cluster of people around the emperor, also watching the opposing fleet.

EMPEROR: GLORIOUS. This will be a GREAT day for our people.

4 – Nanza speaks, almost glumly. We can be close on him, since no one's listening.

NANZA: Those poor Inshull bastards.

5 – The admiral squints into the sun, surprised and confused.

ADMIRAL: What are they doing?

PAGE 11

1 – (Top half of the page, again) The Inshull ships pull hard over to port and starboard, breaking out of formation. They appear to have lost their nerve en masse, and are about to receive a crushing attack from the Avin fleet, which still moves forward at high speed, as a coordinated unit.

2 – The admiral narrates the action, confused and elated all at once. This day is going to be much, much easier than he imagined.

ADMIRAL: They're breaking away. They're...they're RUNNING!

3 – Nanza is both confused and suspicious. Again, no one's really listening to him. He's talking for his own benefit, which is not unusual.

NANZA: If they were going to run, why did they even show up?

4 – The emperor, not a complete dummy by any means, leans over toward the admiral and asks him a question while keeping a suspicious eye on the apparent panic and disorder among the Inshull.

EMPEROR: Is it a trap?

ADMIRAL: We're in the middle of the straight, my emperor. It CAN'T be.

5 – Close on the emperor. He makes a command decision, and once again, fire is in his eyes.

EMPEROR: Then give chase, and let none escape.

EMPEROR: They thought to challenge Avin, and for that they MUST pay.

PAGE 12

1 – Onboard the Inshull flagship, which rests dead in the back of the scattering Inshull fleet, the Inshull admiral and Shankura stand side by side. The officer, obviously concerned about their position and not trusting in Shankura, leans in to express his worries one more time. Shankura remains still, unflustered.

INSHULL ADMIRAL: <We're retreating as planned. This better work, or they'll cut us to pieces even YOU can't mend.>*

SHANKURA: <Show some faith. Your king trusts me for a reason.>

SHANKURA: <Now be quiet.>

EXP CAP: *From the Inshull language.

2 – Shankura closes his eyes and lifts his hands. The admiral takes a careful sidestep to give him some room, and just in case something goes wrong.

SHANKURA: <Awake. Awake and rise. There are trespassers in your home.>

3 – Back on the Avin flagship, the admiral is busy observing and commanding the battle, but Iskeh notices something amiss on the Inshull flagship.

ADMIRAL: Our first ships are almost upon them, my emperor. This won't take long.

ISKEH: Why does that one ship wait while all the others run?

4 – A distant view of the Inshull flagship and Shankura, as they might be seen from the command area of the emperor's noya. The surrounding Inshull ships have scattered, leaving the flagship dreadfully exposed.

CAP: Did they bring a priest?

5 – The emperor smiles and points, ready to watch the destruction unfold in all its one-sided glory. Iskeh watches, eyes wide. This is the first time she's been at war.

EMPEROR: If so, no one's listening to his prayers. Look – our first ship is almost on them.

6 – The bow of the lead Avin noya, its ram slicing through the water like a knife through exposed flesh. Soldiers cluster at the bow deck, swords out, ready to leap across and challenge the crew of the first vessel they ram.

CAPTION: They're about to feel the truth of our blessing, wrought in blood and iron.

PAGE 13

(I'm envisioning panels 1–3 running across the top, mid-sized, with the bottom taken up by panel 4, and panel 5 as an inset in 4.)

1 – A top-down view of the lead Avin ship moving through the water. A small shadow forms in the water ahead of it.

2 – Again at the bow of the Avin ship. Men wait, ready to leap, adrenalin dumping into their systems, widening their eyes. They should be frightening, eager to kill for their nation.

3 – Top-down view again. There's now a massive shadow underneath the middle of the ship, as if a blue whale were about to breach at that exact spot.

4 – The Zkahl rises into view for the first time, bucking the noya aside in a hail of splintered wood and men hurled hither and yon. The noya's keel snaps from the abuse – not that it would have been seaworthy after having a massive chunk torn out of its side.

F/X: CRASH!

5 – Close on Nanza's face. His nostrils flare as he comprehends just how bad the situation has suddenly become for them. It is, after all, a trap.

NANZA: Something listened.

PAGE 14

1 – On the emperor's ship, fear alights. The emperor just stares, not quite comprehending how he can be seeing what he's seeing. The Admiral and the nearest sailor *do* understand, even if they've never seen a Zkahl so huge before. They both look ill.

ADMIRAL: It's a Zkahl!*

SAILOR: God protect us from this evil.

EXP CAPTION: *Storm spirit.

2 – The Zkhal picks up a noya with both hands, spilling men everywhere as the ship starts to splinter and crack apart.

F/X: KER-ACK!

3 – Close on Nanza and the princess. Both are horrified, though Nanza is pained as well. He knows the nearest ships have no chance of surviving, no matter what they do.

4 – The Zkahl flings the ship away, sending the remaining crew flying off like droplets from a wet branch. The ship arcs over and...

5 – Smashes crosswise into another noya, hitting with a huge splash and staving the thing in half.

F/X: KRUNCH!

PAGE 15

1 – Eyes full of hatred the Zkahl regards the right flank of the Avin fleet and winds up, as if to throw an imaginary baseball or shot put.

2 – Aboard the Avin flagship, the emperor shakes the admiral, panic, anger and frustration merging. The admiral lets the emperor shake him, restraining the urge to push his liege away. The bannermen have stopped waving and simply gape at the destruction.

EMPEROR: WHY aren't our ships moving to ATTACK? Order the ATTACK, damn it all!

3 – The admiral, despairing at the loss of his fleet, pulls the emperor over and forces him to look at the water over the side of the ship. We probably want to look down from behind them, so we can see the becalmed surface a well.

ADMIRAL: It's no USE, my emperor. The Zkahl must have frightened our water spirits away. Our ships...our ships cannot move.

ADMIRAL: We're dead in the water.

4 – An Avin ship nearest the Zkahl, dead in the water. As morale crumbles and order disintegrates, some soldiers prepare to fight, looking up at the Zkahl in mortal terror, while others strip their weapons and armor and leap off the deck, trying to swim to safety.

PAGE 16

1 – The Zkahl crashes into the water, unleashing its windup right in front of the becalmed noya. A giant wave blasts up, lifting the first noya like a surfer cresting a swell...

F/X: SPLASH!

2 – ...then ripping through the other nearby ships, bowling some over and crushing them to flinders. Others, including that first noya, rocket to the top of the wave and are launched over, their crews flung everywhere.

3 – A high shot of the Zkahl. It surveys the damage it has done to the Avin fleet. Wrecked ships and floating sailors are everywhere, and the right flank of the fleet is basically gone.

4 – An underwater shot, as armored soldiers of Avin sink into the depths, struggling futilely to swim (which is impossible in their armor).

5 – Shankura narrows his eyes meditatively and considers the damage from afar as he continues to direct the Zkahl. The Inshull admiral just watches, awed, as do two Inshull sailors.

SHANKURA: <You have hurt them, but they are not dead. They still pollute your clean waters.>

SHANKURA: <Their leader. Kill him, and they will relent. Kill him, and you may rest.>

6 – The sailors talk now, starting to become excited about the Zkahl's great success against the Avin fleet. Obviously annoyed, Shankura chides them for their words, but keeps his eyes on the Zkahl.

SAILOR #1: <Would you look at that. Those poor bastards.>

SAILOR #2: <I know. It's beautiful.>

SHANKURA: <No it's not. Be quiet.>

PAGE 17

1 – The emperor fumes and rages, while the admiral just looks sick, watching the shattered remnant of his once-mighty fleet. Nanza stares out without focus and gropes for a plan while Iskeh leans on him, aghast.

EMPEROR: That THING is killing MY men!

2 – The emperor draws Tadzik from its scabbard and yells, his face marking his rage.

EMPEROR: Come here, MONSTER! I'll KILL you! I'LL KILL YOU!

3 – The Zkahl turns and looks straight at us (naturally, we're taking the emperor's POV here). The blind rage it demonstrated a moment before tones down a touch – now it has the right target.

4 – The emperor stares, and the first fear creeps onto his face. Iskeh hides her face in Nanza's shoulder while the admiral steps back, uselessly distancing himself from the emperor. Nanza's focus snaps to the Zkahl now, but he still has no plan. It's just too big.

NANZA: I think it heard you, my emperor.

5 – The Zkahl cruises through the water (as if wading waist-deep, though it actually is formed from the water itself and thus really isn't doing that), brushing wrecked ships and swimming sailors aside with equal disregard.

6 – The emperor shoulders past Nanza, Tadzik held out before him. He's trying to be brave, but the fear in his eyes remains. Iskeh reaches after him, but can't quite snag his shoulder to stop him.

EMPEROR: All right. Your time has come, spirit. Now, you die.

ISKEH: FATHER! NO!

PAGE 18

1 – (I'd like this panel to go across the top of the page) The Zkahl looms over the emperor near the bow of the ship. The emperor has Tadzik in hand. Around him, some soldiers and sailors run, while a few of the

soldiers stand their ground, swords and shields ready, but unable to do anything.

2 – Close on the emperor. He trembles, but manages to keep Tadzik up, amping himself up to take a swing at the Zkahl when it tries to strike.

EMPEROR: N–nothing s–stands before the h–holy sword Tadzik.

3 – The emperor tries to strike the Zkahl as it reaches in and grabs him. Tadzik “bounces” with a little splash of water off the Zkahl’s arm. The soldiers standing near the emperor are knocked aside by the Zkahl’s grab.

EMPEROR: Aaah – OOF!

SOLDIER #1: Urk!

SOLDIER #2: Oof!

4 – Held aloft in the Zkahl’s mighty hand, the emperor reverses his blade, preparing to plunge it downward into that hand (which is now closed around his torso). He’s as brave as his going to be, eyes wide, full of adrenalin and the taste of death and heroism, overcoming his fear.

EMPEROR: I’ll kill you, monster. KILL –

5 – The Zkahl frowns and tightens its grip, crushing the emperor’s ribs. The emperor’s grip loosens, and Tadzik’s tip wanders off target. There is no way he can drive it down into the Zkahl now.

EMPEROR: Aaaaah!

F/X: Kerrunch.

6 – The emperor drops Tadzik as he goes limp, unconscious from the Zkahl’s brutal attack. The sword is just beginning to tumble away from his hand.

PAGE 19

(Except for the bottom two panels, this page could be arranged in a fairly fractured manner. It’s meant to be a series of images as everyone reacts to what’s just happened. It might also work well to have many pictures of Tadzik tumbling to the deck of the ship, perhaps from the upper left of

the top section of the page to the lower right. There should be a final image of Tadzik hitting the deck.)

The images:

The admiral stares up in pure horror, thinking he's certainly next.

Shankara watches from afar, somber.

Iskeh cries, unable to look away.

Nanza isn't looking up like everyone else – he's watching Tadzik fall.

Bottom two panels:

1 – The Zkahl winds up, bring its arm back as if for a javelin toss...

2 – ...and chucks the emperor over the horizon.

PAGE 20

1 – The Zkahl turns its attention back to the ship, a terror to behold. It is a giant, fell creature and it is going to kill them all.

2 – A reaction shot of those who remain near Nanza et al. Iskeh breaks down and falls to her knees crying, ignoring the Zkahl. The admiral is rooted in place by his terror. A remaining soldier, backed up to the group, clasps his hands in panicked prayer. Nanza eyes the Zkahl and the distance to Tadzik, judging his odds.

ISKEH (quietly): Father...

SOLDIER: Blessed Vanti, protect us from this evil. Please Vanti, please...

3 – Close on Nanza's eyes. He thinks he can make it to the sword.

4 – Tadzik, resting alone on the deck.

5 – Nanza rushes forward as the admiral finally moves to run away and the soldier starts to cry. I very much mean to contrast the admiral's decision to retreat and Nanza's own decision to rush in in the face of massive danger.

6 – The Zkahl notices the little man and is enraged.

PAGE 21

1 – The Zkahl's left hand crashes right through the deck behind Nanza, smashing through the ship's hull. Nanza is focused on the sword, charging ahead at full speed, a step ahead of the Zkahl, sort of (gotta watch out for that other arm).

F/X: Kerash!

2 – Watching from behind Nanza, we see the Zkahl's right hand sweeping down to cut off Nanza's path to the sword. The hand is huge, and it seems as if Nanza will be cut off for sure, killed just as the emperor was.

3 – Nanza ducks and rolls to his left, just under the Zkahl's massive hand.

4 – Nanza rolls up and partway into a stand, grabbing Tadzik as he rolls over it.

PAGE 22

Full page – Nanza stands at the bow of the ship, Tadzik up and ready to strike, facing the massive Zkahl.