

The Red Heresy

Issue #1

"The Ritual"



PAGE 1 (4 panels)

PANEL 1: Close on REPTILIAN EYES, watching intently, waiting to strike.

CAPTION: "I'm thinking of a number," she would say.

PANEL 2: A silhouetted figure through the brush. This is KARU a female *Red Scale*, a crimson-colored race of lizardfolk.

CAPTION: "So? What number are you thinking of?"

KARU: I-Is someone there?

PANEL 3: Close on REPTILIAN EYES again. The eyes smile with anticipation.

KARU: Ekuja...?

CAPTION: "You have to guess!" she implored.

PANEL 4: Bursting from the brush, EKUJA spooks his older sister, KARU, his arms raised in a fierce pantomime of a vicious predator.

SFX: GRAAHHH!

KARU: Eek!

CAPTION: "But what's the fun in that?"

PAGE 2 (4 Panels)

PANEL 1: With a quick swipe, Karu swats her brother's nose.

KARU: Don't SCARE me!

EKUJA: Ow!

CAPTION: I never guessed Karu's number.

PANEL 2: ECUJA rubs his snout tenderly, whining to KARU.

EKUJA: You nicked me!

CAPTION: Was it the ascension of the 9? The 13 clans of the Red Scale? The 84 of our brood year?

PANEL 3: A RUSTLING in the nearby brush catches ECUJA's eye.

KARU: It's barely a scratch.

Rustling SFX: kshhh kshh

EKUJA: ...?

CAPTION: Why should I play her games?

PANEL 4: KARU drags her brother by the arm, ready to expose his next mischievous scheme.

KARU: Oh. Verrry funny.

KARU: Who is it this time? Ferud? Ika?

EKUJA: I didn't... It's not...

CAPTION: Would guessing have changed our fate?

PAGE 3 (4 Panels)

PANEL 1: Leaping from the brush, a HUMAN erupts with a twisted war-cry, a savage laughter. The HUMAN beams with the thrill of battle, his blunt, barbaric sword raised overhead for a killing stroke. KARU shields EKUJA, they cower in fear.

CAPTION: Did the humans waste their time with games?

SFX: RAAAAHHHHHAHAHAHAH!

PANEL 2: Close on a powerful, REPTILIAN ARM reaching out, speed-lines indicating a quick, deliberate action.

PANEL 3: Close on the REPTILIAN HAND as it finds its target, gripping the HUMAN's face between its clawed fingers.

PANEL 4: URBA, clearly an adult red scale, strong, confident, holds the HUMAN by his face, his feet dangling a few feet off the ground. In the foreground, EKUJA and KARU recover from their initial terror.

EKUJA: U-Urba?

KARU: Is he--?

URBA: Go.

PAGE 4 (3 Panels)

PANEL 1: Looking down a steep hill, we see EKUJA leading KARU upward in a panicked sprint.

EKUJA: Hurry, Karu!

PANEL 2: Close on EKUJA, he turns toward the reader, his eyes wide with shock.

PANEL 3: EKUJA and KARU have halted their climb. Over their shoulders we follow their view to a vicious battle stretching into the distance. HUMAN and RED SCALE combatants cross swords, exchange blows.

NOTE: despite their numbers and ferocity, the humans are outmatched in battle, in diminutive size and in their primitive weaponry.

FLOATING BALLOON: Back to the norf wif ya!

PAGE 5 (4 Panels)

PANEL 1: A bird's eye view of the COUNCIL CHAMBER, an ornate rectangular table surrounded by seated Red Scale elders, LAUGHING and eating a grand medieval feast with fruits and meats, goblets of grog.

SFX: HA HA HAH HA HA

ELDER NISKA: Where haff all the piggy's scrambled, eh, Urba?

PANEL 2: URBA stands at his chair, reporting to the council like a staunch military leader.

URBA: They've retreated to the Dwarven Ruins in the east, but a raiding party was seen heading northwest.

PANEL 3: The pompous, well-fed ELDER HOLKA, laughs derisively in his chair, brimming with over-confidence and hubris, a bit of Henry VIII.

ELDER HOLKA: Oh good. Bout time the ogres had a snack.

PANEL 4: Outside the Council Chamber, EKUJA, sits against the stone walls of the antechamber, eavesdropping intently, his face painted with dread as the elders LAUGH.

SFX: HA HA HAH HA

PAGE 6 (6 Panels)

PANEL 1: An establishing shot, an apple orchard, the leaves saturated in autumn colors.

CAPTION: Seasons passed. Each passing day bolstered the elders' confidence.

PANEL 2: Close on A SILHOUETTED FIGURE (KARU) running through thick brush.

CAPTION: A calm had settled over the valley.

SFX: huf huf huf

PANEL 3: EKUJA lowers himself to sit under the shade of a peaceful tree.

CAPTION: The harvest was in, dragonflies turned south, the leaves had gone the color of fire.

PANEL 4: Close on the SILHOUETTED FIGURE continuing, still obscured by dense foliage.

SFX: huf huf huf huf

PANEL 5: Close on EKUJA as he bites into a piece of fruit.

CAPTION: The work was done. The Red Scale settled in for the coming winter.

BITING SFX: omf

KARU(off-panel): Ekuja!

PANEL 6: EKUJA looks up from his snack to see KARU struggling for breath, pointing back in the other direction.

CAPTION: And winter came all too soon.

EKUJA: Karu...?

KARU: They're back!

PAGE 7 (1 Panel)

PANEL 1: A full page spread. A vicious battle as HUMANS lead feral OGRES into war against the RED SCALE SOLDIERS. The human's weapons are notably improved, their blunt swords and axes replaced with sleek, sharp metals. Unlike the previous battle, humans have the upper hand and the lizardfolk scramble, ill prepared for the human/ogre offensive.

CAPTION: While we tended our crops, turned our heads to the sun,
Man had evolved.

PAGE 8 (5 Panels)

PANEL 1: Establishing. A line of RED SCALE SOLDIERS awaiting their weapons filter through a makeshift armory consisting of garrisoned stone houses and several crude canopies. Barrels filled with swords are scattered about, metal shields stacked high, GOBLIN BLACKSMITHS in leather aprons shape new weaponry with hammer and anvil while others heat new metal in braziers.

FLOATING BUBBLE: Keep it moving, imps!

PANEL 2: EKUJA, in the line of soldiers, tightens the leather straps of his new pauldron, the metal armor over his left shoulder, for the first time.

FLOATING BUBBLE: Grab your gear, report for duty!

PANEL 3: A GOBLIN SMITH hands EKUJA a sword (in its scabbard and leather belt). He gratefully takes the weapon with his right hand, while ANOTHER SMITH lifts a rounded shield toward Ekuja's left hand.

FLOATING BUBBLE: Move it move it move it!

EKUJA: Thank you.

PANEL 4: Similar to Panel 3, but the unexpected weight of the shield has pulled EKUJA clumsily off-balance to his left side.

FLOATING BUBBLE: The humans will not wait for you!

PANEL 5: EKUJA recovers sheepishly, gathering his sword and shield, looking up at the GOBLIN SMITHS to apologize.

EKUJA: Sorry.

EKUJA: Thank you.

PAGE 9 (6 Panels)

PANEL 1: Medium shot, a barbaric HUMAN soldier cocks a battleaxe, preparing a violent, horizontal swing at his unseen opponent.

CAPTION: Karu once asked my greatest fear.

CAPTION: “That I don’t belong here,” I answered.

PANEL 2: EKUJA glances the axe blow, shunting the strike to the side with his shield.

CAPTION: “With the Red Scale?” She asked.

SHIELD SFX: chingg

CAPTION: “No, no. In the fields, in the kitchen, at the market.”

CAPTION: “What if I never find my place? What if I’m never *good* at anything?”

PANEL 3: Close on the HUMAN stumbling off-balance, exposing his side.

PANEL 4: Close on EKUJA, a look of shock and sadness as he raises his sword for a stabbing thrust.

CAPTION: “You could join the guard,” she teased.

PANEL 5: Close on EKUJA, his eyes closed, head turned away slightly, his sword thrusts forward out of frame, a bit of blood spatter, his first kill.

HUMAN (off-panel): GAHHH!

CAPTION: “You’d be a great soldier.”

PANEL 6: EKUJA stands stunned, oblivious to his surroundings. Behind him, URBA has crossed swords with a human swinging for Ekuja’s backside.

URBA: Ekuja! Defend your home!

CAPTION: I fear the choice was never mine.

PAGE 10 (5 Panels)

PANEL 1: URBA stands before a table, maps on rolled parchment strewn about. He points decisively to a point on the map. At his sides, fellow soldiers follow his instruction, among them, EKUJA.

URBA: The handlers lead their ogres north to the pines. Ika, take your guard, head them off at the treeline."

ELDER HOLKA (off-panel) No no no.

PANEL 2: URBA looks up from his maps, across the table to ELDER HOLKA, sitting lazily in an ornate chair.

ELDER HOLKA: Ika's guard stays in the city.

URBA: For what purpose?

PANEL 3: Two shot. ELDER HOLKA and URBA face off across the table. HOLKA's listless overconfidence versus URBA's intimidating and commanding physique.

ELDER HOLKA: The Council has consulted the Nomad. He has requested Ika's guard specifically.

URBA: The elf? You're mad!

ELDER HOLKA: The elf has answers.

PANEL 4: URBA SLAMS his fist into the thick wooden table in anger.

URBA: The elf is A TRICKSTER!

FIST SFX: POOM!

CAPTION: It was the first time I'd heard Urba raise his voice.

PANEL 5: URBA leans on the table, his head hangs low, searching for calm, searching for answers that won't come. EKUJA and the other Red Scale soldiers stand behind him, ill at ease.

CAPTION: And the first time we looked to Urba...

CAPTION: ...and saw defeat.

PAGE 11 (4 Panels)

PANEL 1: Through ornate wooden doors, robed lizardfolk (The Drake) follow a luxurious carpet into the castle. We watch the scene from a walkway above, where Red Scale Soldiers gather to see the reptilian newcomers with pale skin like eggshells. INGANUE, an elf in braided hair and light armor, leads the procession.

CAPTION: Then *they* arrived. A small cadre, their ebony cloaks offset by their hauntingly pale complexion.

INGANUE: Greetings, brothers! We bring aid in your time of need!

PANEL 2: Medium shot of INGANUE (in-GAHN-way), he throws his arms in the air like a circus ringmaster, a televangelist, an experienced showman.

CAPTION: Led to our gates by Inganue, the Nomad, or the Prophet of Peace, to ask him.

INGANUE (off-panel): We have marched from the east in fellowship...

CAPTION: "Never trust someone with nothing to live for," Urba once told me.

PANEL 3: Medium shot of EKUJA, he watches skeptically from above, pushed against the railing by his fellow soldiers, eager to see the commotion.

INGANUE(off-panel): ... to combat our common foe...

CAPTION: Though long-lived, elves had not been born in ages. Their numbers neared extinction. They displayed no urgency. They had no kingdom, no lands, no allegiances.

PANEL 4: Low -angle shot, INGANUE rests a hand on the shoulder of one of the DRAKE PRIESTS, extending his other hand out to his audience, embodying the conduit between these two cultures, welcoming them together.

CAPTION: What had Inganue to lose? Why lead these pale priests?

NOMAD: ... and take back these lands.

CAPTION: What, to Inganue, were THE DRAKE?

PAGE 12 (5 Panels)

PANEL 1: A DRAKE PRIEST in his hooded robe tosses a severed human head toward the reader. The human head dons a regal helmet, clearly a leader of men.

DRAKE PRIEST: A gift.

PANEL 2: In the War Room, ELDER HOLKA, and other Red Scale elders stare, mouths agape at the severed human head thrown onto the table in front of them. URBA, cross-armed responds with measured calm.

URBA: The River King. An *insect*.

PANEL 3: Closer now, The Drake Priest standing lowers his hood. We see that his left eye and much of his snout is peppered with scars. This cult leader has seen several battles.

DRAKE PRIEST: He flanked your troops in the east canyon. We took the liberty.

PANEL 4: Medium shot of URBA, looking up from the table to his new ally.

URBA: How many are you?

PANEL 5: Close on the scarred mouth of the DRAKE PRIEST, a slight smile.

DRAKE PRIEST: More everyday.

PAGE 13 (3 Panels)

PANEL 1: RED SCALE SOLDIERS spar with HUMAN SOLDIERS while TWO DRAKE SOLDIERS viciously tear into a FERAL OGRE.

CAPTION: The War changed overnight. The bloodthirsty hordes of humanity had met their match.

PANEL 2: For the first time, we see one of the lizardfolk (in this case, one of THE DRAKE SOLDIERS) use their mighty jaws, biting into the shoulder and neck of an unfortunate HUMAN SOLDIER.

CAPTION: No. Not their match.

CAPTION: The humans had met their end.

PANEL 3: Side by side, EKUJA and the other Red Scale drive back the humans with the DRAKE SOLDIERS leading the push.

CAPTION: Within days, the human advance had been turned back.

PAGE 14 (6 Panels)

PANEL 1: A DRAKE PRIEST in ebony robe plunges a BRANDING IRON into a ceremonial brazier. Behind him, several priests surround a stone slab where a Red Scale soldier lies, slightly obscured.

CAPTION: But The War wasn't over.

PANEL 2: Outside this ritual room, in the stone hallway, ECUJA leads KARU quietly to spy on this ceremony. ECUJA hushes his sister with an extended finger pressed to his lips.

CHANTING: ... led from the darkness, cleansed by the fire, reborn in the faith...

PANEL 3: Through the stone archway, SOUNDS OF PAIN erupt from the figure at the center of the huddled reptilian priests.

RED SCALE: GAHHH! HRRRR HRR Hff hHuff hff

PANEL 4: KARU moves toward the room off-panel, toward the sounds of another in pain, but ECUJA restrains her to conceal their presence.

KARU: Let me go! Let me--

PANEL 5: Close on a PALE REPTILIAN HAND clutching the stone wall for balance.

PANEL 6: Now standing in the archway into the ritual room, we reveal the victim of the ritual to be URBA now one of The Drake. He braces himself with one arm against the wall, flexing his other arm, awed by the power now coursing through his pale-skinned body.

URBA: You... should not be here.

PAGE 15 (5 Panels)

PANEL 1: URBA roars atop a stony outcropping on the battlefield, puffing out his chest, the king of the mountain. Around him, HUMAN and RED SCALE SOLDIERS, all flinch, fearful of the new Drake Soldier's bloodlust.

URBA: RRRWWWWGGG

CAPTION: Urba was changed.

PANEL 2: URBA clenches his teeth in pain, his eyes go wide with fury as a HUMAN runs a sword through URBA's mid-section.

URBA: nnnnggg!

PANEL 3: With the human's sword still in his mid-section, URBA breaks his own sword against the human's armor with a quick, bludgeoning blow and calls out for a replacement.

URBA: SWORD!

PANEL 4: A GOBLIN SMITH approaches, holding a sword in its scabbard, outstretched for URBA to draw.

GOBLIN SMITH: My lord!

CAPTION: Though we won the day...

PANEL 5: In a SWIPE, Urba slices the GOBLIN in two with his new sword, turning over his shoulder to call out his venomous order.

URBA: Drag this goblin FILTH from my battlefield!

CAPTION: ... I was sure we had lost.

PAGE 16 (2 Panels)

PANEL 1: DRAKE SOLDIERS drive HUMANS from the tall grass while DRAKE PRIESTS summon FIREBIRDS, churning their fiery wings, setting the vegetation ablaze with each heated stroke.

CAPTION: But victory wasn't enough.

CAPTION: Drake Priests commanded great firebirds, driving the humans out by scorching our land.

CAPTION: Their fireborne magics transformed the outer territories into the Desolate Plain.

PANEL 2: EKUJA watches in horror as his own allies burn his homeland.

CAPTION: A cursed land that would separate the world's most vicious armies for ages to come.

PAGE 17 (5 Panels)

PANEL 1: In the foreground of a stone hallway, a paranoid EKUJA steals a look at the DRAKE SOLDIERS behind him. The soldiers glare at EKUJA. He is weak, tainted, other.

CAPTION: It was then I began to notice.

CAPTION: The looks.

PANEL 2: An overhead view, EKUJA walks through a room, the only Red Scale among several DRAKE SOLDIERS and PRIESTS.

CAPTION: Though our lands were reclaimed, the rituals had continued. Their numbers grew.

PANEL 3: EKUJA walks by the Ritual Room peering toward the stone archway we had seen on Page 14. DRAKE SOLDIERS lead a new convert to the chamber and EKUJA recognizes her at a distance.

CAPTION: Had they any plans to stop?

EKUJA: Karu?

PANEL 4: Close on KARU. She turns toward the reader (Ekuja), hopeless, powerless, saddened by her fate.

PANEL5: EKUJA reaches desperately toward the reader, but two DRAKE soldiers drag him away.

EKUJA: KARU!

PAGE 18 (5 Panels)

PANEL 1: Tossed by a DRAKE SOLDIER through the iron gate of a medieval prison cell, EKUJA careens toward the reader.

PANEL 2: Close on a PALE REPTILIAN HAND turning a heavy iron key, locking the gate.

SFX: ch-clink

PANEL 3: A blacked out panel.

PANEL 4: A second blacked out panel.

PANEL 5: EKUJA slumps against the stone wall of his prison cell, starved, weak. He has been here a while.

GUARD (off-panel): It's time.

PAGE 19 (4 Panels)

PANEL 1: EKUJA's head hangs weakly as TWO DRAKE GUARDS lead him through the stone hallway.

PANEL 2: In the foreground, ONE DRAKE GUARD has stepped through a stone archway and looks to the right to ensure the way is clear, but behind him EKUJA has caught the SECOND GUARD with a quick elbow to the snout.

PANEL 3: EKUJA tosses the stunned GUARD into the FIRST DRAKE GUARD, knocking the two Guards off-balance.

PANEL 4: EKUJA sprints through the hall.

GUARD (off-panel): SEIZE THE HERETIC!

PAGE 20 (4 Panels)

PANEL 1: Now hiding in the wooden rafters of a stone room, concealed by darkness, EKUJA waits for TWO DRAKE GUARDS to pass beneath him.

PANEL 2: EKUJA lowers himself quietly from the rafters, stepping lightly.

PANEL 3: EKUJA sprints through the hallway, looking behind him for any pursuers, but...

PANEL 4: Close up on EKUJA, he chokes as a PALE REPTILIAN HAND clutches his throat, lifting him up. EKUJA tries in vain to pry open the choking grip.

SFX:

hrrk

PAGE 21 (3 Panels)

PANEL 1: In a high angle shot, we reveal KARU, now one of The Drake, pale, vicious, still clutching EKUJA by the throat.

EKUJA: No...

KARU: Stop running, traitor!

PANEL 2: Close on EKUJA, his eyes wide with panic.

EKUJA: No...

PANEL 3: His claws extended, EKUJA swipes violently at KARU's snout, wounding his sister.

EKUJA: No!

KARU: AH!

PAGE 22 (5 Panels)

PANEL 1: DRAKE SOLDIERS surround EKUJA, now free of Karu's grip. EKUJA crouches defensively, scanning for a way out.

PANEL 2: EKUJA runs up the stone wall, surprising the onlooking GUARDS with his acrobatics.

PANEL 3: Like a parkour runner, EKUJA leaps off the wall toward a high window.

PANEL 4: EKUJA, his shoulder lowered, plunges through the window among a shower of glass shards.

SFX:

kkrrsshh

PANEL 5: The exterior of the medieval castle perched atop a steep cliff of jagged, unforgiving rocks. On the broad side, we see EKUJA (albeit tiny), plummeting from the high window toward the ominous mists below.

PAGE 23 (3 Panels)

PANEL 1: A DRAKE GUARD approaches KARU, now crouched, her face obscured as she evaluates her new wounds.

DRAKE SOLDIER: Mistress Karu, he--

KARU: Find him...

PANEL 2: Close on KARU, her face is terribly scarred from Ekuja's attack in three distinct claw marks.

KARU: KILL HIM!

PANEL 3: Night has fallen and SEVERAL DRAKE GUARDS search the jagged rocks at the base of the cliff with torches, their swords drawn and eager to strike.

PAGE 24 (4 Panels)

PANEL 1: A dusty, impoverished marketplace on the edge of the Desolate Plain. This is a lawless gathering, a demilitarized no-man's land of thieves and outcasts of all species. Among the shifty characters, we see a hooded figure, his thick cloak obscuring his face as well as his species. He leads a large ostrich-like saddled bird through the crowd.

PANEL 2: A HALFLING MERCHANT tends a fruit stand, mostly shriveled bushels of apples and stone fruits. The hooded figure leads his avian steed to a barrel and lifts an apple in his gloved hand.

HALFLING: Two copper for three, five copper for ten, friend.

PANEL 3: Without a word, the HOODED FIGURE pockets a few apples and the HALFLING sits upright to scold him.

HALFLING: Tha's two copper now, stranger! I mayn't look muchly, but I-I--

PANEL 4: The HOODED FIGURE drops two copper coins into the HALFLING's open hands, but the HALFLING is more surprised to notice the figure's sleeve has pushed up past the glove, revealing a RED, SCALY FOREARM.

HALFLING: ahh...!

PAGE 25 (4 Panels)

PANEL 1: Though the STRANGER (EKUJA) walks away, the HALFLING leans forward, calling out.

HALFLING: Y-You're one o' them!

PANEL 2: Though his hood obscures his eyes, we see the reptilian snout of EKUJA turned toward the eager HALFLING leaning out of his humble store. Incognito, EKUJA has smeared the lower portion of his face with black earth to obscure its red color.

CAPTION: "I'm thinking of a number," she would say.

EKUJA: No.

PANEL 3: Similar to Panel 2, but EKUJA has turned away from the HALFLING, lowered his head

EKUJA: I'm only one.

PANEL 4: A wide shot of the marketplace, but among the shops, the shifty characters, the thick dust of shuffling feet, there is no sign of EKUJA or the bird he rode in on. At his fruit stand, the HALFLING stands atop one of his barrels, looking eagerly into the crowd for one last glimpse but the Red Scaled stranger is gone.

END OF ISSUE