

LB RIS

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SIX OF CROWS

A DARKER SHORE

Letters from Ketterdam

LEIGH BARDUGO

Character and location portraits by E.K. Belsher
"Safe Harbor" composed by E. Aaron Wilson

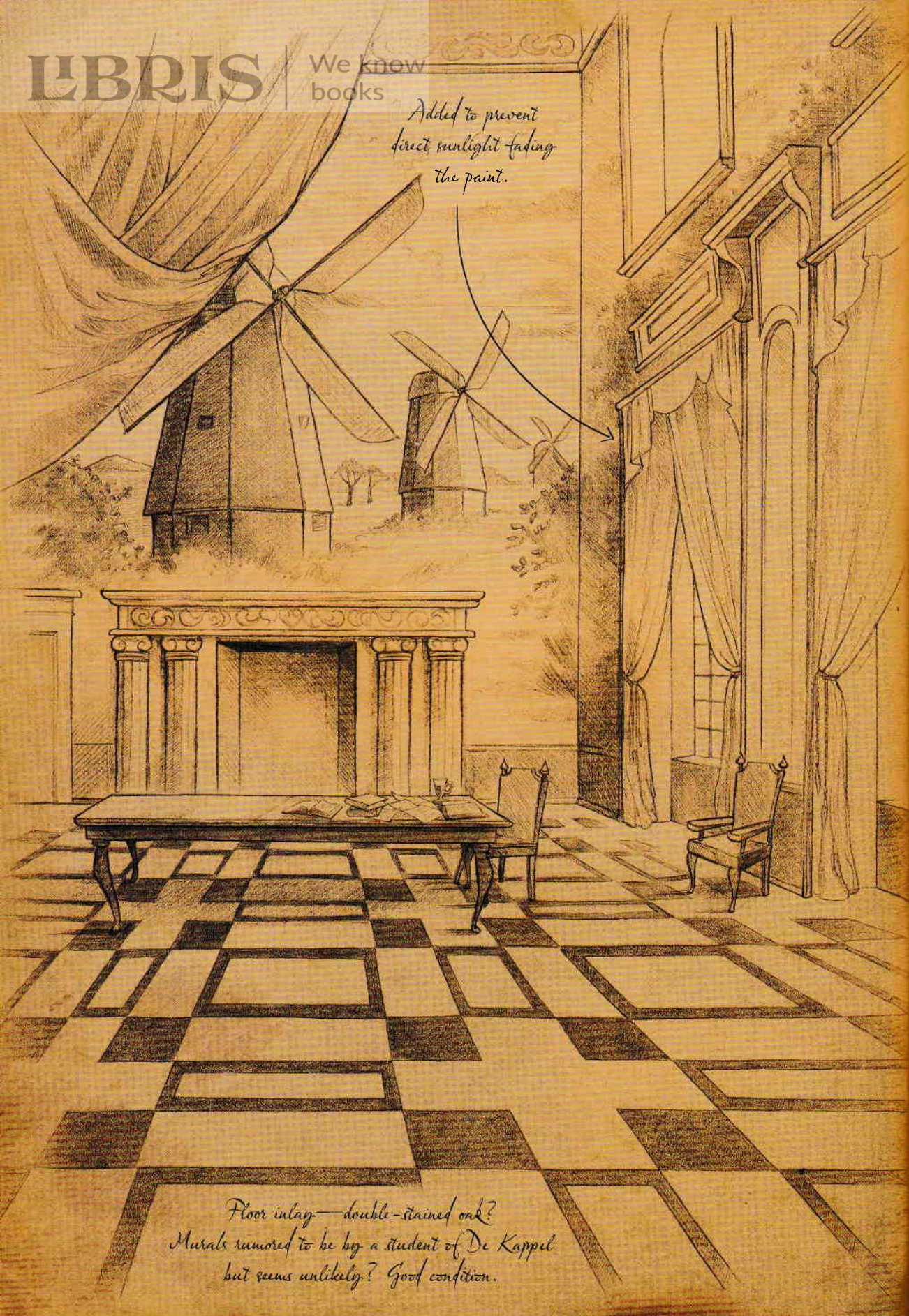
TEMPEST

An Insight Editions Book

LIBRIS

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*Added to prevent
direct sunlight fading
the paint.*



*Floor inlay—double-stained oak?
Murals rumored to be by a student of De Kappel
but seems unlikely? Good condition.*

Minutes from the initial consultation of Inspectors Gerwin Merx and Anton Haggart as elected by the Special Committee on Corruption and approved by the Merchant Council of Ketterdam. Minutes recorded by Arnoldus Meijer.

.....

Haggart: Please note the date and time and that we meet today—one of the rare sunny days in this filthy, balled-up handkerchief of a city—in the east wing of the Stadhall in Ketterdam's Government District. Per the recommendation of the Merchant Council, the estimable Inspector Merx and I are meeting in private to discuss this case. We have been provided the use of the Zander Room, known for its very fine frescoes of the windmills at Lij and its ruthlessly uncomfortable chairs. My eyes can attest to the beauty of the former, and my ass can attest to the truth of the latter.

Merx: Inspector Haggart, if you would—

Haggart: Apologies. Strike that from the record. We have been provided the use of the Zander Room—high ceilings, splendid ventilation—which will serve us well as Inspector Merx and I delve into this investigation. From my very comfortable seat at the table, I have a view of the harbor and of Merx's balding head as he sketches away in his little diary.

Merx: Inspector Haggart!

Haggart: Apologies again. But you're young to be balding, so I thought I would note it for the record. Let the record show that despite my advanced age and protuberant belly, I have a fulsome head of hair. Bless Ghezen. That's a most excellent rendering of the room. Do you draw people too? I need someone to sketch portraits at my niece's engagement party.

Merx: Yes . . . I . . . No.

Haggart: A shame. Do you think we can get some coffee?

Merx: I don't see why not.

Haggart: Arnoldus, ring for the coffee cart and a plate of sandwiches. Merx looks like he's wasting away. Also a bottle of whiskey for the chill.

Merx: You said yourself it's a sunny day.

Haggart: The weather could always turn.

Merx: Perhaps it would be wise for us to state our task and begin these proceedings. We have a considerable amount of material to get through.

Haggart: By all means, set the stage.

Merx: I, Gerwin Merx, have been selected to assist Inspector Anton Haggart in this investigation into the events leading up to the tragedy off the island of Vellvals. We will be examining evidence as gathered by intelligence over the last month. Inspector Haggart, perhaps you'd like to give some historical context to these proceedings.

Haggart: Historical . . . context? Yes. Of course. Well, as you know, Kerch was originally founded as a small community of fishermen-

Merx: I meant more recent history.

Haggart: Certainly. Absolutely. Oh thank Chezen, the coffee is here.

[Minutes paused.]

[Minutes resumed.]

Merx: Now that you've refreshed yourself, Inspector Haggart?

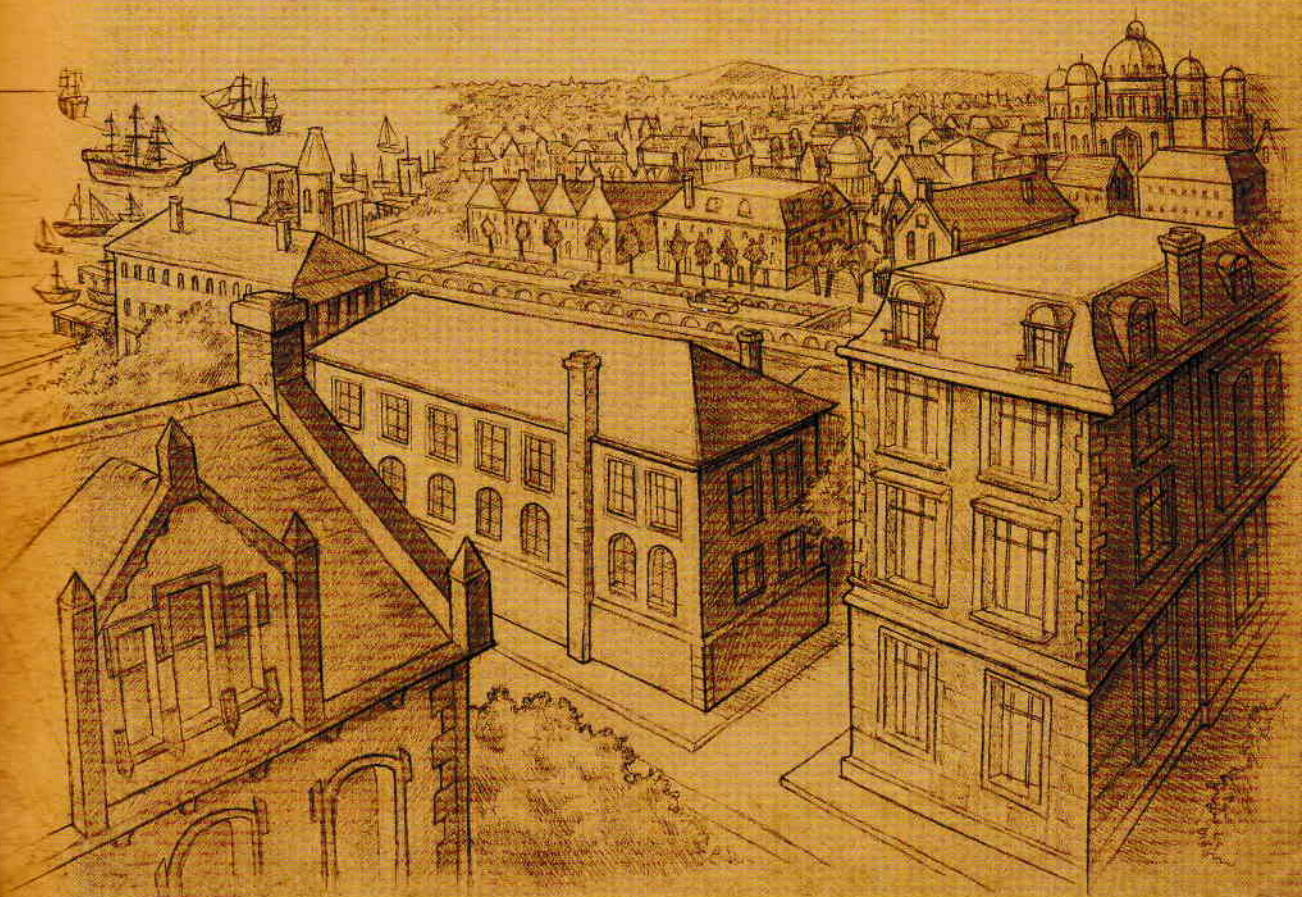
Haggart: My pleasure. As we all know, the city has experienced some upheaval over the last few years. After the chaotic events at the auction for the indenture of the young scientist Kuwei Yul-Bo and the violence that ensued, the Merchant Council faced a period of scrutiny and calls to root out corruption in its highest ranks. The trial and imprisonment of Jan Van Eck was widely seen as a step toward redemption for the Council. However, there were rumblings that other members of the Merchant Council have been involved in criminal dealings.

Merx: Can you be more specific?

Haggart: Is that entirely necessary?

Merx: I believe that it is.

*View of Fifth Harbor from the Zelver District.
Who financed its dredging and rehabilitation? I've tried to
dig into the records, but each company I can't trace belongs to
yet another company I can't trace. It's like chasing ghosts.*

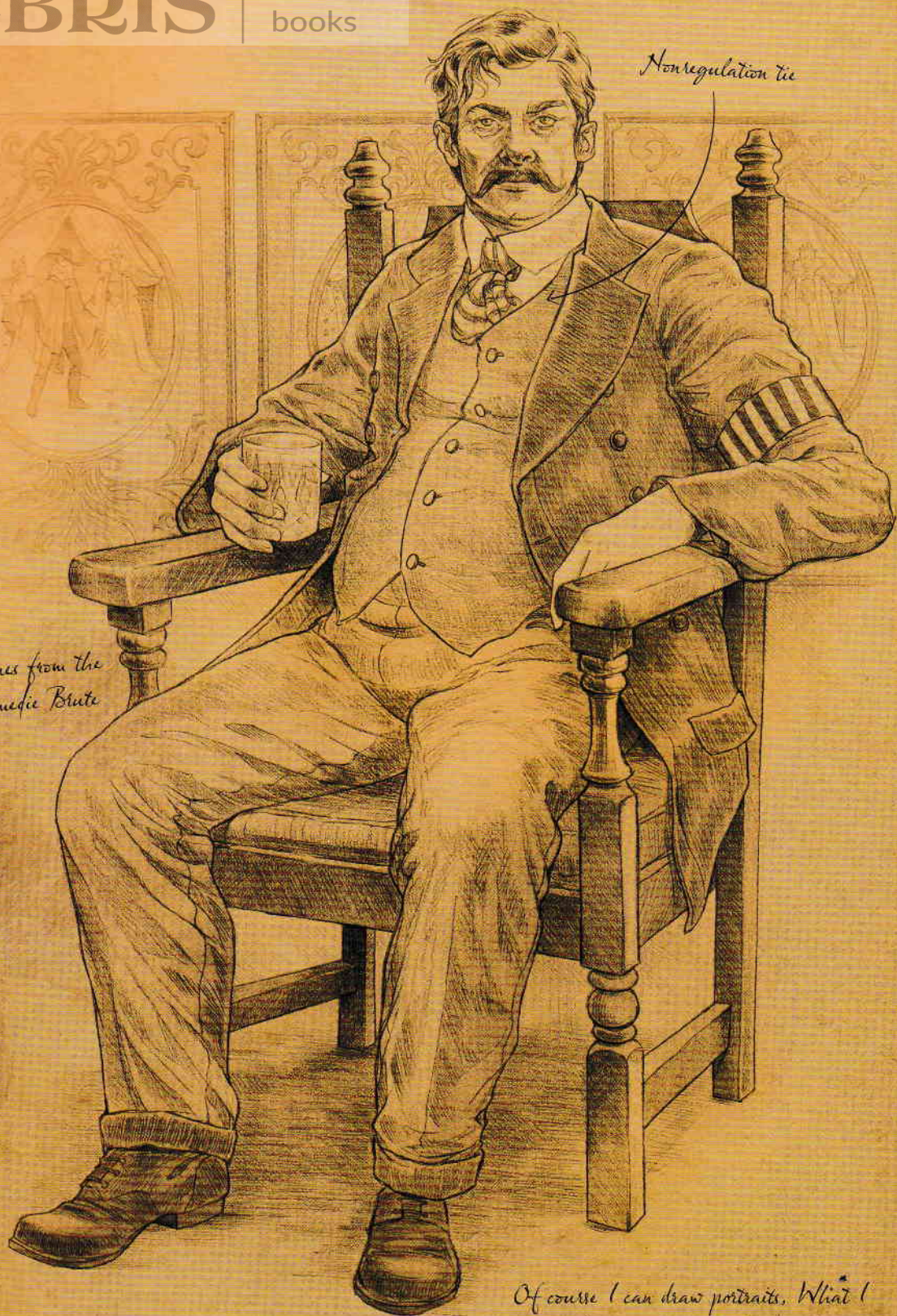


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Nonregulation tie

*Scenes from the
Komedie Blute*



*Of course I can draw portraits. What I
cannot do is countenance the humiliation
of entertaining Inspector Haggart's party
guests. Does he even have a niece?*

Haggart: Inspector Merx is doing the good work of Ghezen. Very well. Several Council members were implicated in creating false indentures and engaging in the trade of human cargo. Most notably, one cold winter morning, two councilmen, Dryden and Reijnders, were found tied back-to-back on the steps of this very building with the word "slaver" carved into their chests. Ledgers delivered to the Stadwatch and the Council made clear the charges were just. It was all very dramatic and a considerable escalation in what Merx will no doubt describe as vigilante action.

Merx: But that wasn't the end.

Haggart: No, I think it's fair to say that was just the beginning. In the last two years, several wealthy merchants have been forced to flee the city as their secret businesses were exposed. Ships have sunk or gone missing. Crewmen have disappeared. Trade routes have been disrupted.

Merx: All the work of the ship known as the Wraith.

Haggart: Well.

Merx: Well?

Haggart: Well, any thinking man would agree it's unlikely that a single vessel under the command of an unknown woman could do so much damage in so short a time.

Merx: But it's possible.

Haggart: Anything is possible, Merx. I might sprout wings and float out of this room to fetch myself another shot of whiskey.

Merx: Regardless of Inspector Haggart's colorful imagination, we can agree that some members of the Merchant Council decided the Wraith and her mysterious captain were a problem. A warrant was issued for the captain's arrest under the charge of piracy, and that warrant may be seen as the start of the trouble that came to such a bloody end near Vellvals.

Haggart: And over the next sure-to-be-interminable days, Inspector Merx and I will be reviewing materials gathered by our intelligence officers so that we can find someone to take the blame.

Merx: Haggart. Please.