



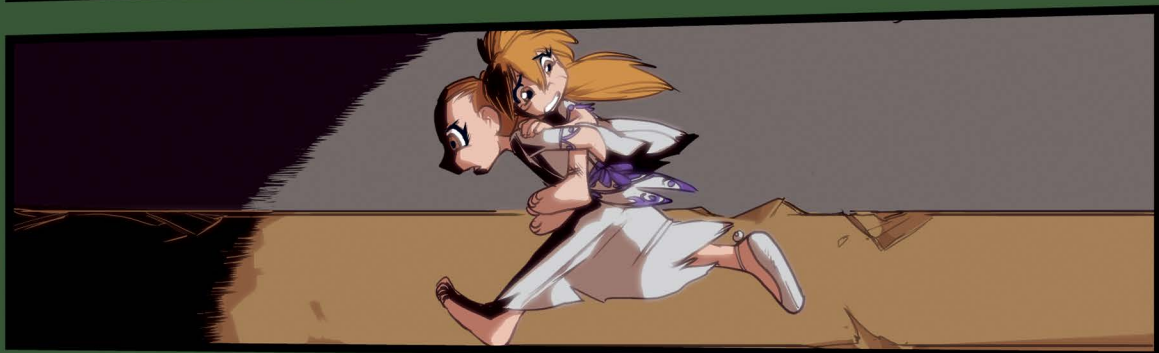
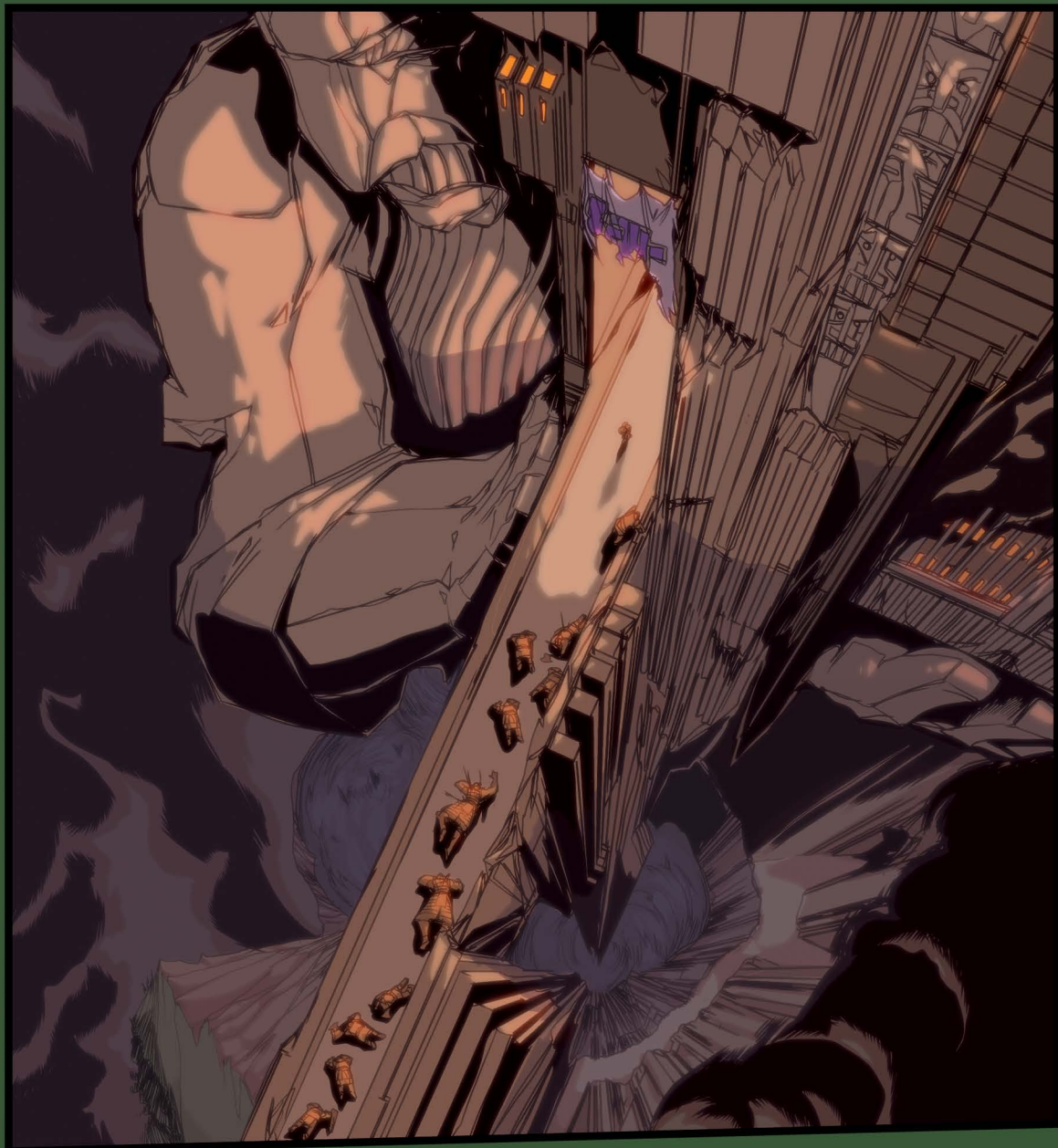
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FRED PERRY

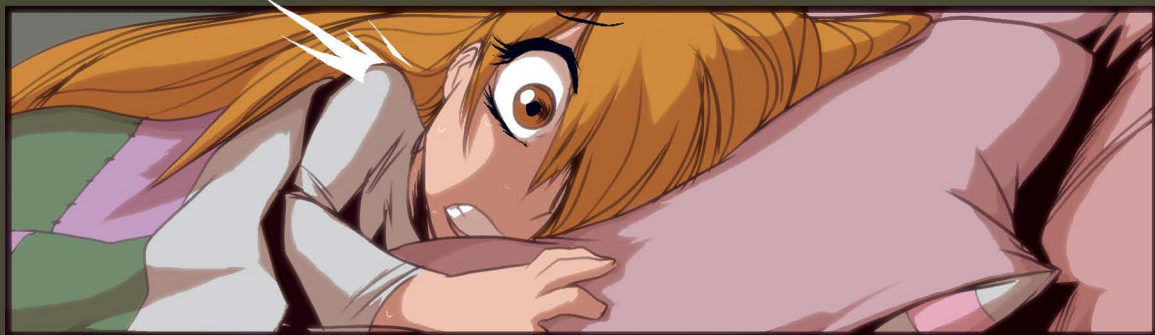
GOLD DIGGER



JUNE 2010







WH--
WHERE
AM I?

YOU ARE
IN THE ESTATE
OF MY LATE
HUSBAND...

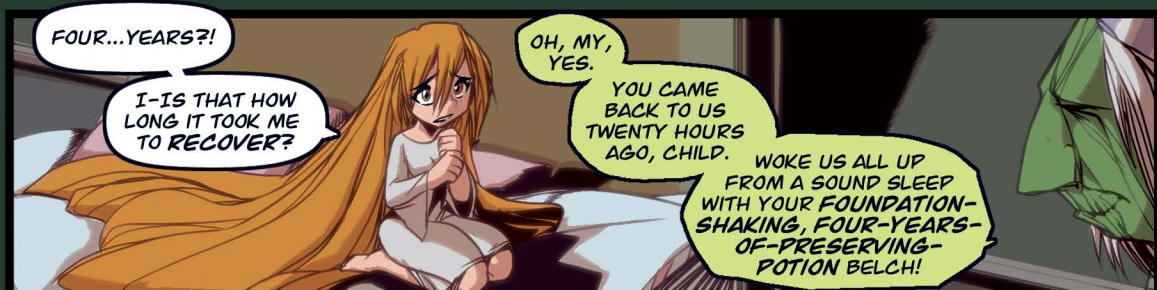
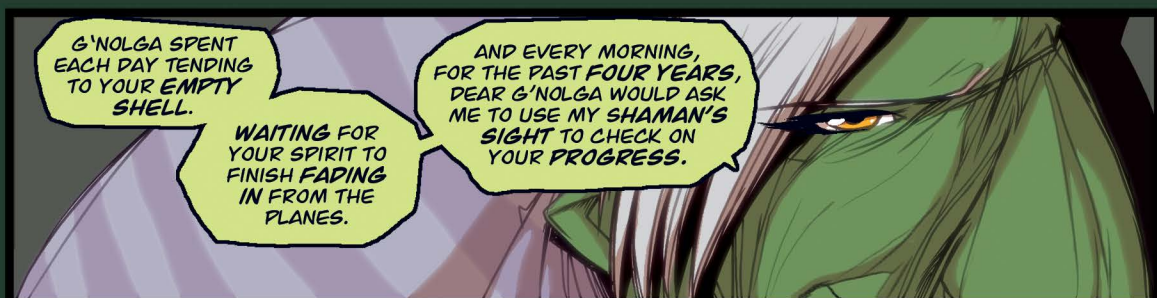
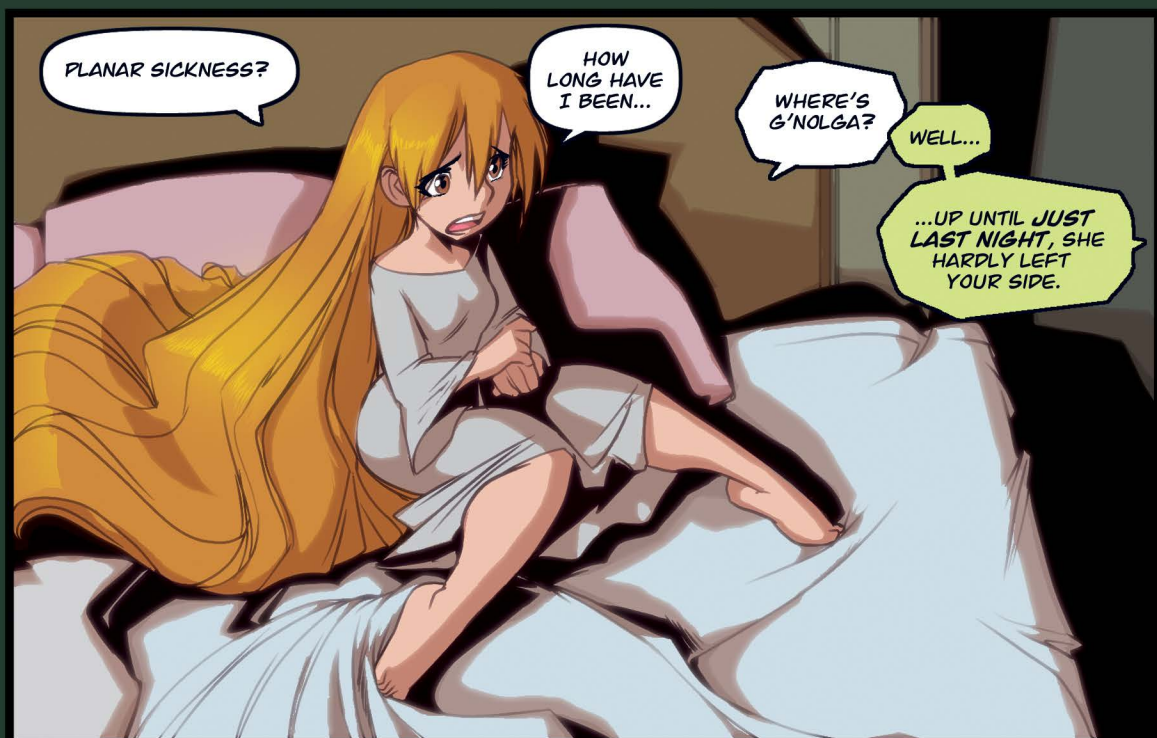
...THE FORMER
LORD OF
JADE-REALM'S
GREENCAVE.

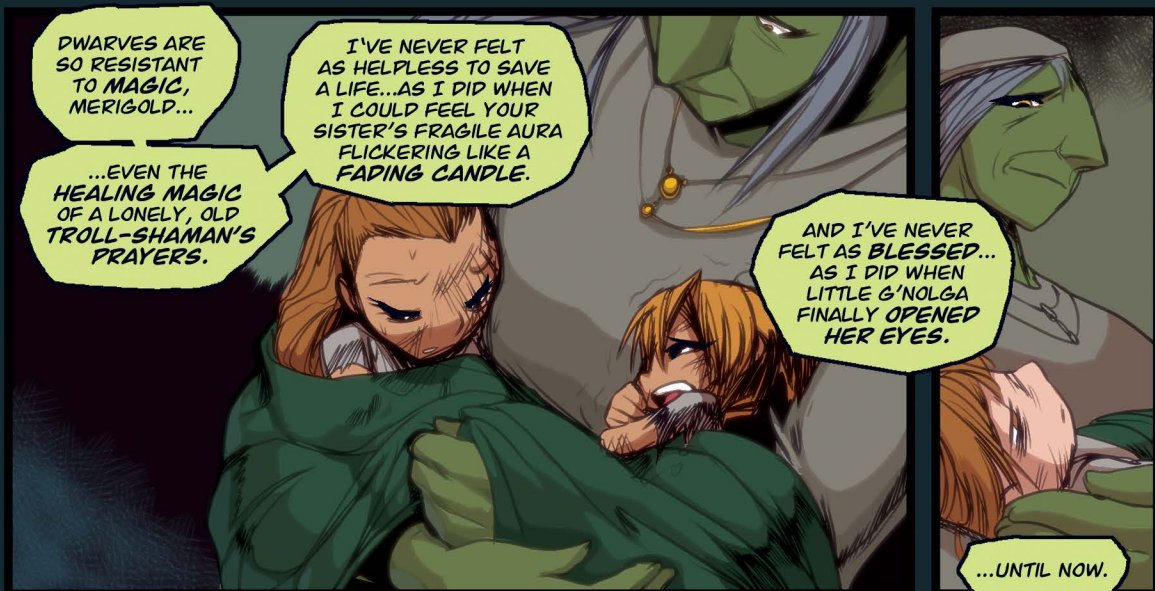


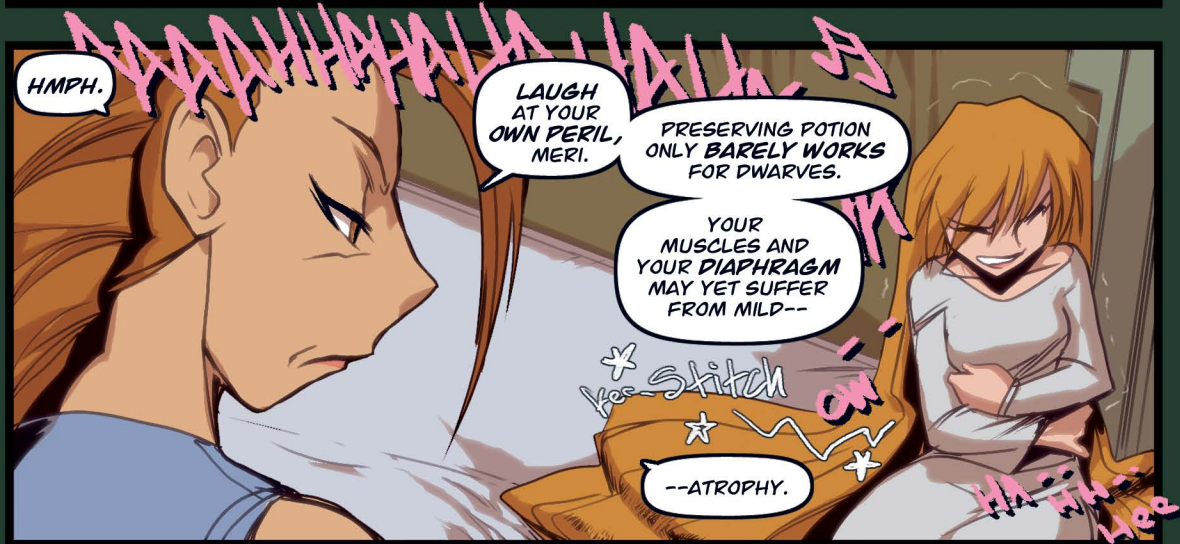
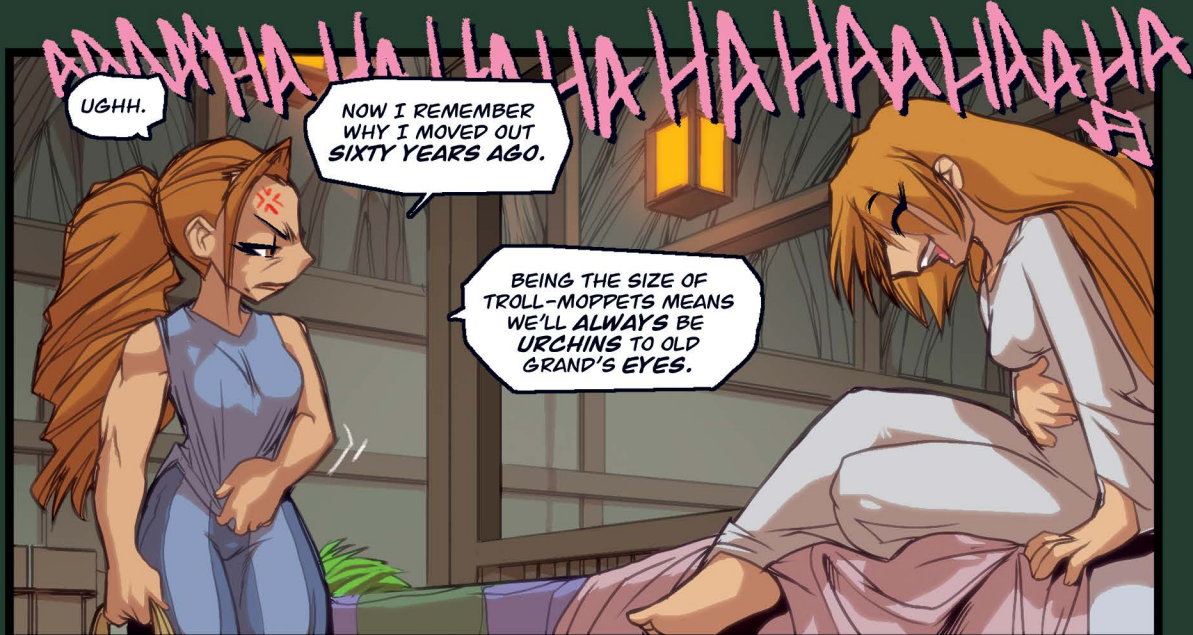
AND IT IS 10:00 IN
THE EVENING ON
OCTOBER 24TH...

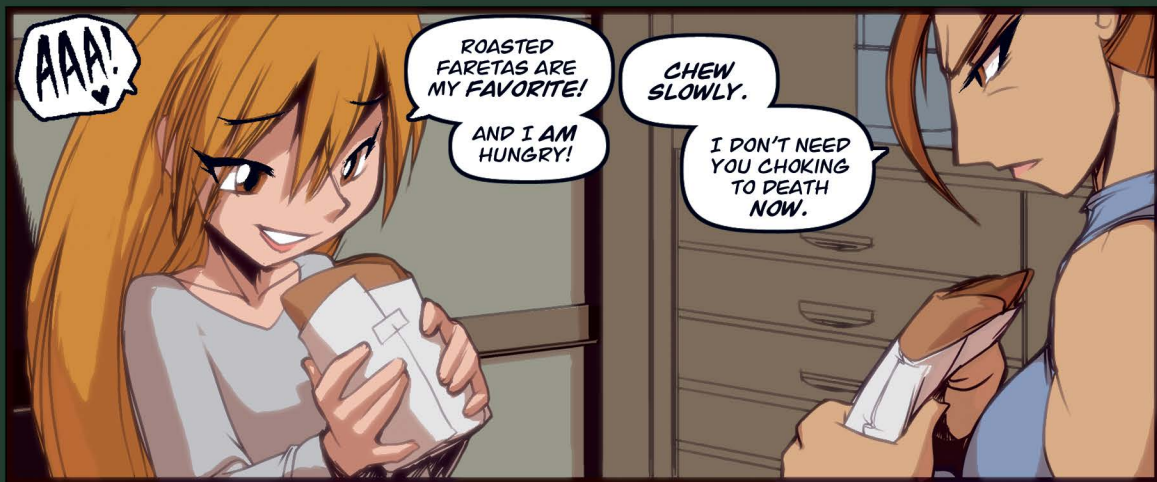
...IF YOU
WANT TO
KNOW.

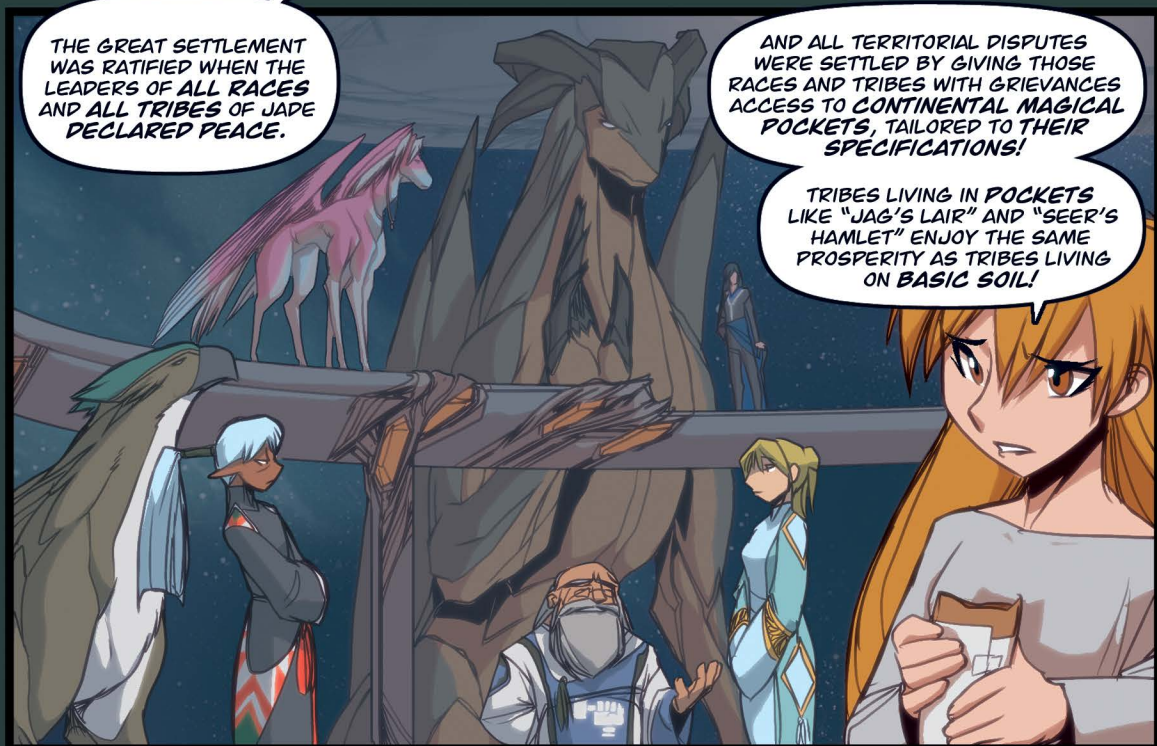
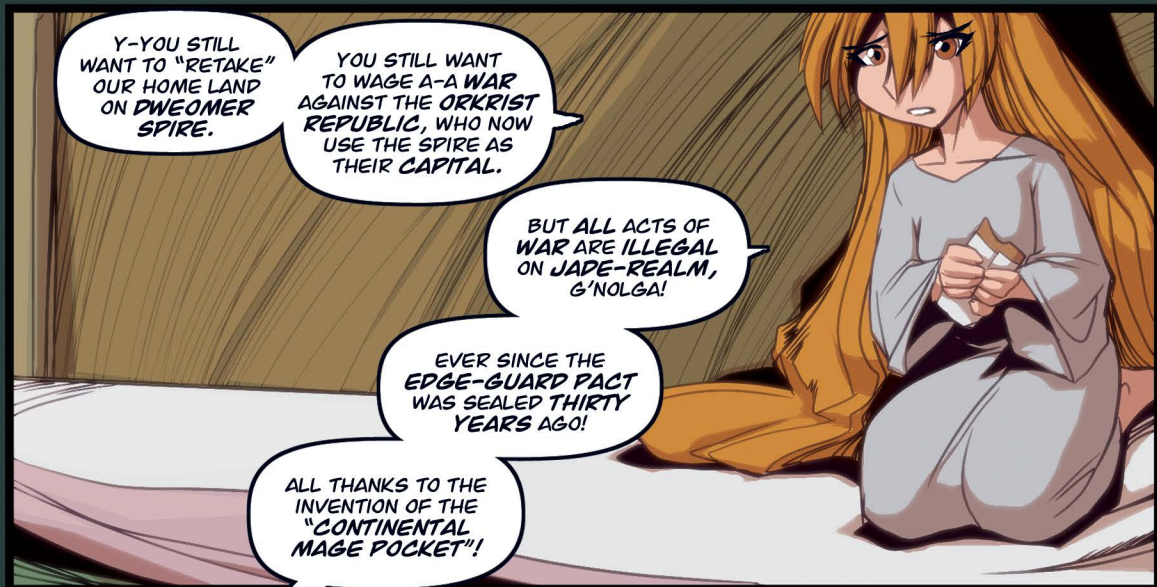
GR--
GRANDMA
DALE?

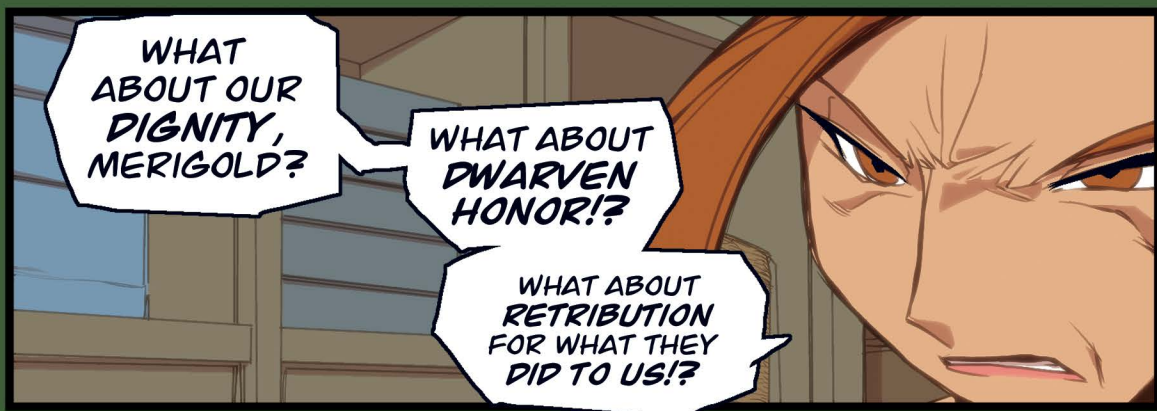














...AND YET...

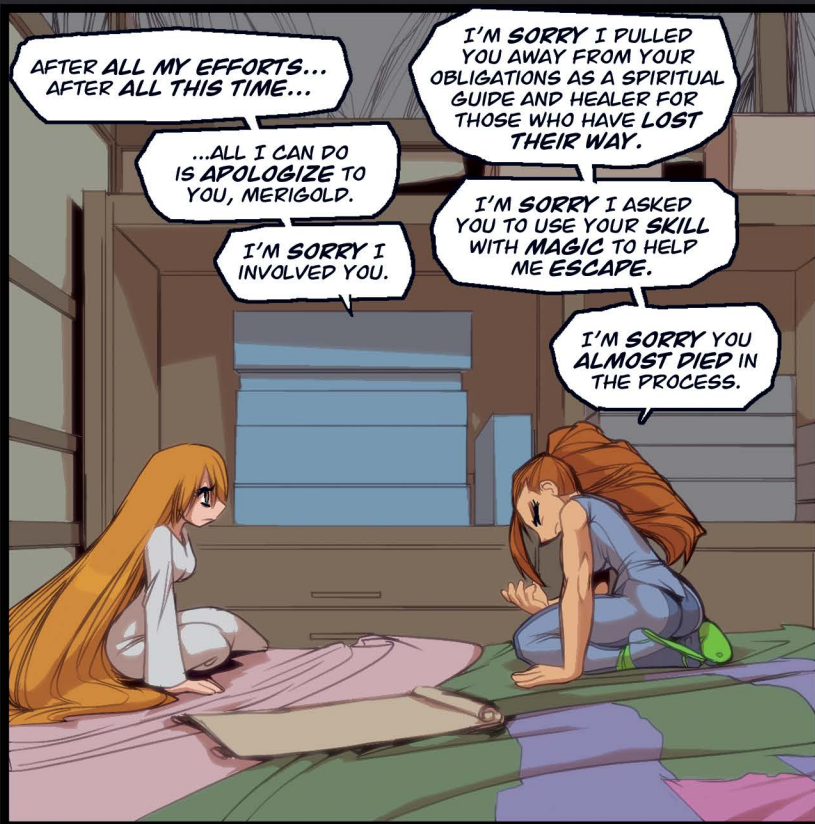
...AND YET
ALL MY EFFORTS
WERE FOR NAUGHT.

THE FORCES I
MARSHALLED IN
SECRET WERE
DISCOVERED AND
DISMANTLED BY
THE LAW.

AND THAT IS
HOW I CAME TO
BE IMPRISONED.

INTERNEED WITHIN THE
ASTRAL REALM OF
"THE RETREAT"...

...TO BE HEALED
BY THE KIND AND JUST
BALANCE COUNSELOR,
MERIGOLD.



AFTER ALL MY EFFORTS...
AFTER ALL THIS TIME...

...ALL I CAN DO
IS APOLOGIZE TO
YOU, MERIGOLD.

I'M SORRY I
INVOLVED YOU.

I'M SORRY I PULLED
YOU AWAY FROM YOUR
OBLIGATIONS AS A SPIRITUAL
GUIDE AND HEALER FOR
THOSE WHO HAVE LOST
THEIR WAY.

I'M SORRY I ASKED
YOU TO USE YOUR SKILL
WITH MAGIC TO HELP
ME ESCAPE.

I'M SORRY YOU
ALMOST DIED IN
THE PROCESS.



A-AND...

I'M SORRY I
HAVE TO ASK FOR
YOUR HELP THIS
ONE...LAST...
TIME.

BUT I NEED
EVERY RESOURCE...
EVERY ADVANTAGE...
EVERY ABLED BODY...
FOR THIS!



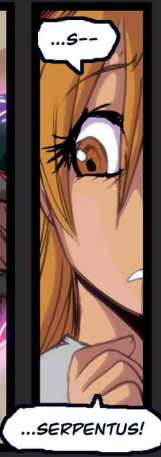
WE FOUND
HIM, SISTER!
WE...FOUND...
"HIM"!

THE RIPPER...
THE TERROR...
THE FELL
ARMS-MASTER!



THE SECRET WEAPON OF THE
ORKRIST AND MURDERER
OF OUR NOBLE FAMILY!

MY SPY NETWORK
HAS AT LAST DISCOVERED
HIS HIDDEN LAIR!



...S--

...SERPENTUS!



THE ORKRIST
REAPER.

I-IT
IS THE
LEGEND!

I THOUGHT HIM
TO BE A FIGMENT
OF MYTH...

...A DELUSION
HAUNTING MY
DARKEST
NIGHTMARES.

BUT...

...IT WAS HE
WE GLIMPSED ON
THE NIGHT OF
OUR CLAN'S
MASSACRE,
WASN'T IT.

WE DIDN'T
IMAGINE
HIM.

HE EXISTS.

AND HE
ROAMS
FREE.



'NOLLY.

WE'LL
LEAVE.

WE'LL
CARRY OUT
YOUR PLANS
AT ONCE.

TH-THERE
ISN'T A
MOMENT TO
LOSE.



HEEHEE...

LOOK WHAT'S
BEEN HIDING
IN THE CORNER
OF OL' GRAND'S
CELLAR FOR
THE PAST
TWO HUNDRED
YEARS!

HMPH!
A PESKY KEG
OF DWARVEN
AMBROSIA WE
FORGOT TO
OPEN ON MY
WEDDING
DAY!

WHO WANTS
TO HELP ME
DISPOSE OF THIS
NUISANCE?





THIS IS MY
GENERAL STAFF,
MERIGOLD.

THE TEAM I
PERSONALLY
COMMAND FOR
IMPORTANT
MISSIONS.



YOU HAVE ALREADY
BEEN INTRODUCED TO
CRUK, OUR **SAMURAI
BLISTER TITAN...**
OR "**WART OGRE**",
IF YOU WISH TO
BE **CRASS AND
UNCOUTH.**

CRUK IS A VETERAN OF
OVER **ONE THOUSAND
CAMPAIGNS** DURING
"**THE AGE OF TROUBLES**"
ON **JADE.**

HE ABANDONED HIS
WELL-EARNED RETIREMENT
PLANS WHEN HIS **WIFE AND
UNBORN CHILD** PERISHED
DURING AN **ORKRIST RAID**
SHORTLY AFTER THE
FALL OF **DWEOMER
SPIRE.**



KIT LYWI AND HER BROTHER,
KAT LYWI ARE **MASTER SCOUTS...**
THOUGH SOME REFER TO THEM
AS **NOTORIOUS THIEVES.**

THEY WERE ORPHANED
DURING THE "**RENEGADE**"
ORKRIST RAMPAGE
ON THE **WERE-JAGUAR**
SETTLEMENT NEAR
DWEOMER SPIRE A
FEW DECADES AGO.

HAIL.

HM.



AND THOSE TWO
OVER THERE ARE MY
**HIRED MUSCLE-
HEADS...**

..."**SLASHER**"...

...AND
HANZA.

TSK.

WHAT.
EVER.

DO NOT FORGET
TO DUCK BEHIND
ONE OF THEM WHEN
THE PROJECTILES
START FLYING.

THEY ARE WELL PAID
FOR THEIR SKILL IN
**CATCHING SUCH
ATTACKS.**

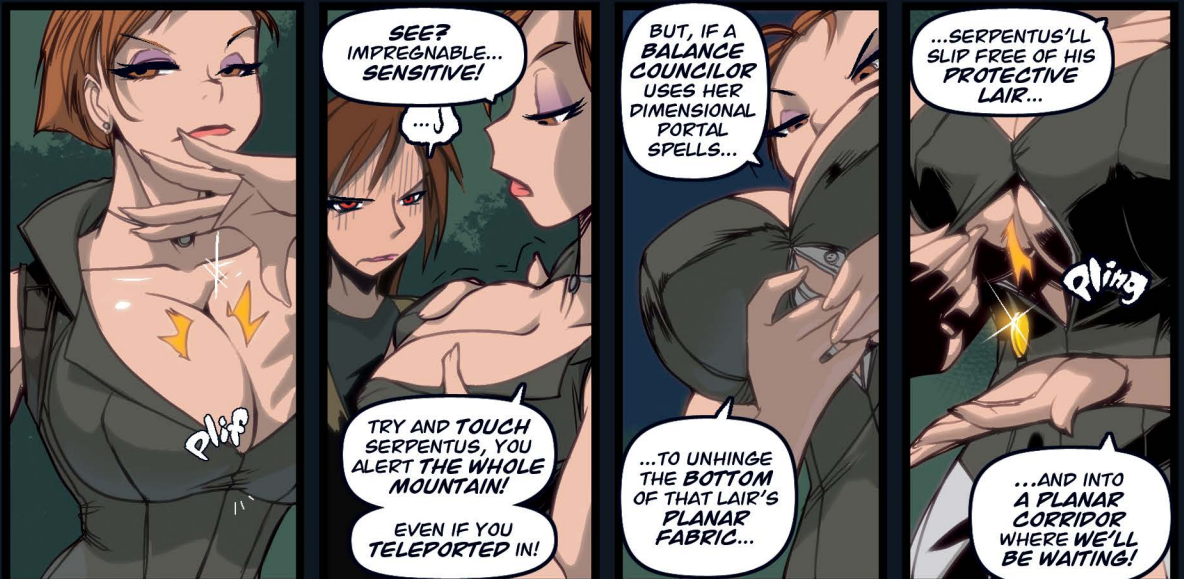
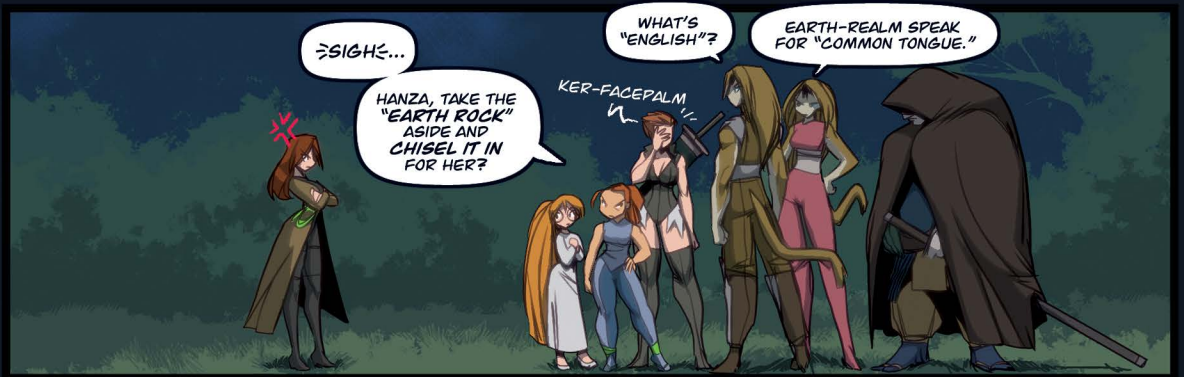
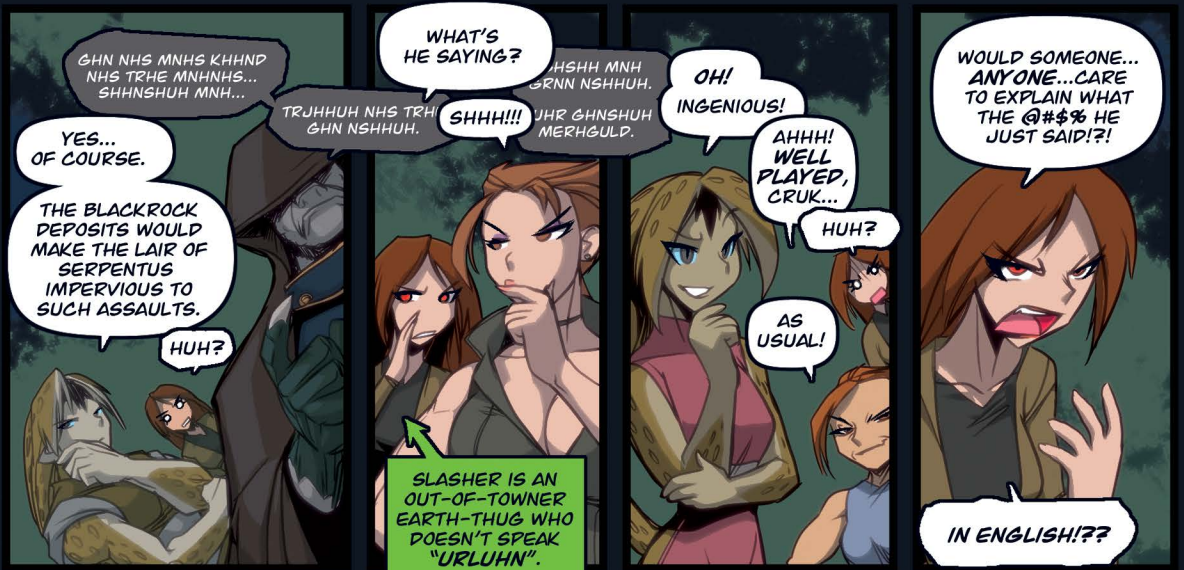


PARTY, THIS IS MY
SIBLING, MERIGOLD.

FORMER **BALANCE
COUNSELOR** OF THE
LAW WARDENS.

HER SKILLS WILL
BE **INVALUABLE TO
THIS CAMPAIGN'S
SUCCESS.**

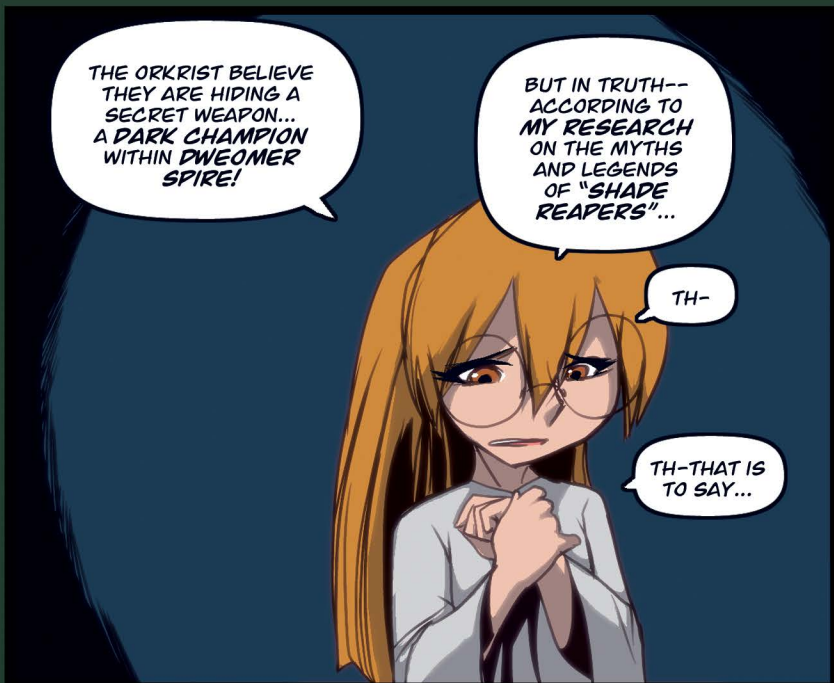
CRUK, PLEASE
EXPLAIN OUR
STRATEGY.





B-BEFORE WE BEGIN...

...I WANT TO STRESS THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS, OUR MISSION!

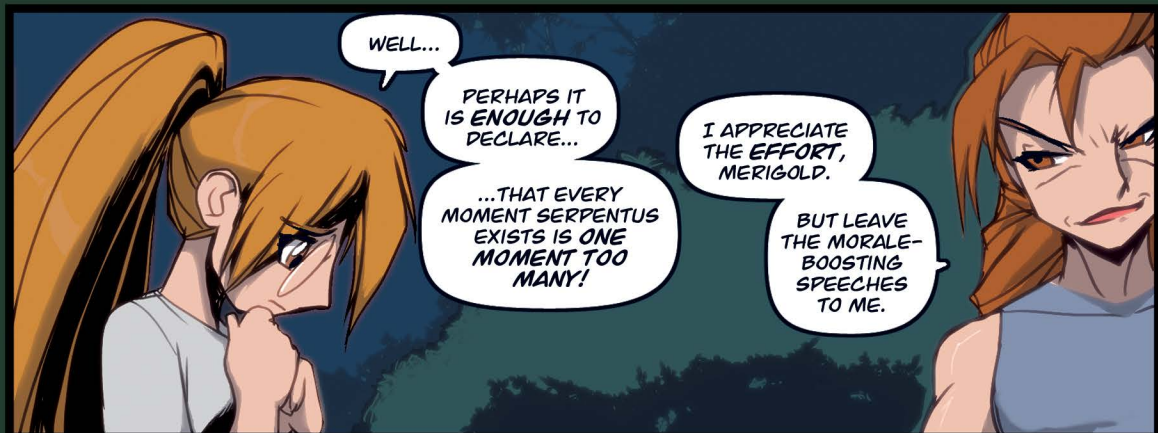


THE ORKRIST BELIEVE THEY ARE HIDING A SECRET WEAPON... A DARK CHAMPION WITHIN DWEOMER SPIRE!

BUT IN TRUTH-- ACCORDING TO MY RESEARCH ON THE MYTHS AND LEGENDS OF "SHADE REAPERS"...

TH-

TH-THAT IS TO SAY...



WELL...

PERHAPS IT IS ENOUGH TO DECLARE...

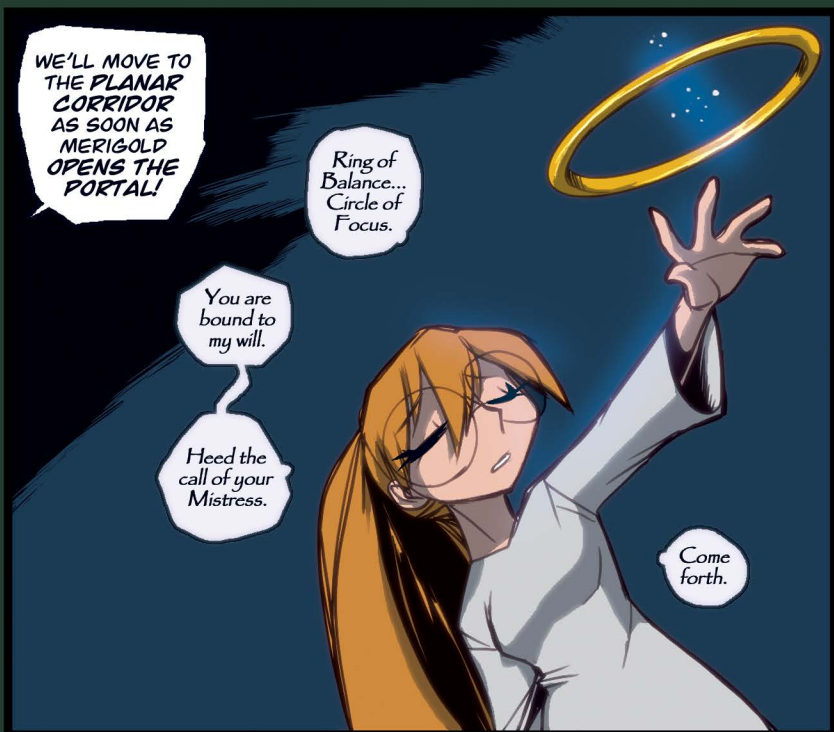
...THAT EVERY MOMENT SERPENTUS EXISTS IS ONE MOMENT TOO MANY!

I APPRECIATE THE EFFORT, MERIGOLD.

BUT LEAVE THE MORALE-BOOSTING SPEECHES TO ME.



READY YOUR GEAR!



WE'LL MOVE TO THE PLANAR CORRIDOR AS SOON AS MERIGOLD OPENS THE PORTAL!

Ring of Balance... Circle of Focus.

You are bound to my will.

Heed the call of your Mistress.

Come forth.

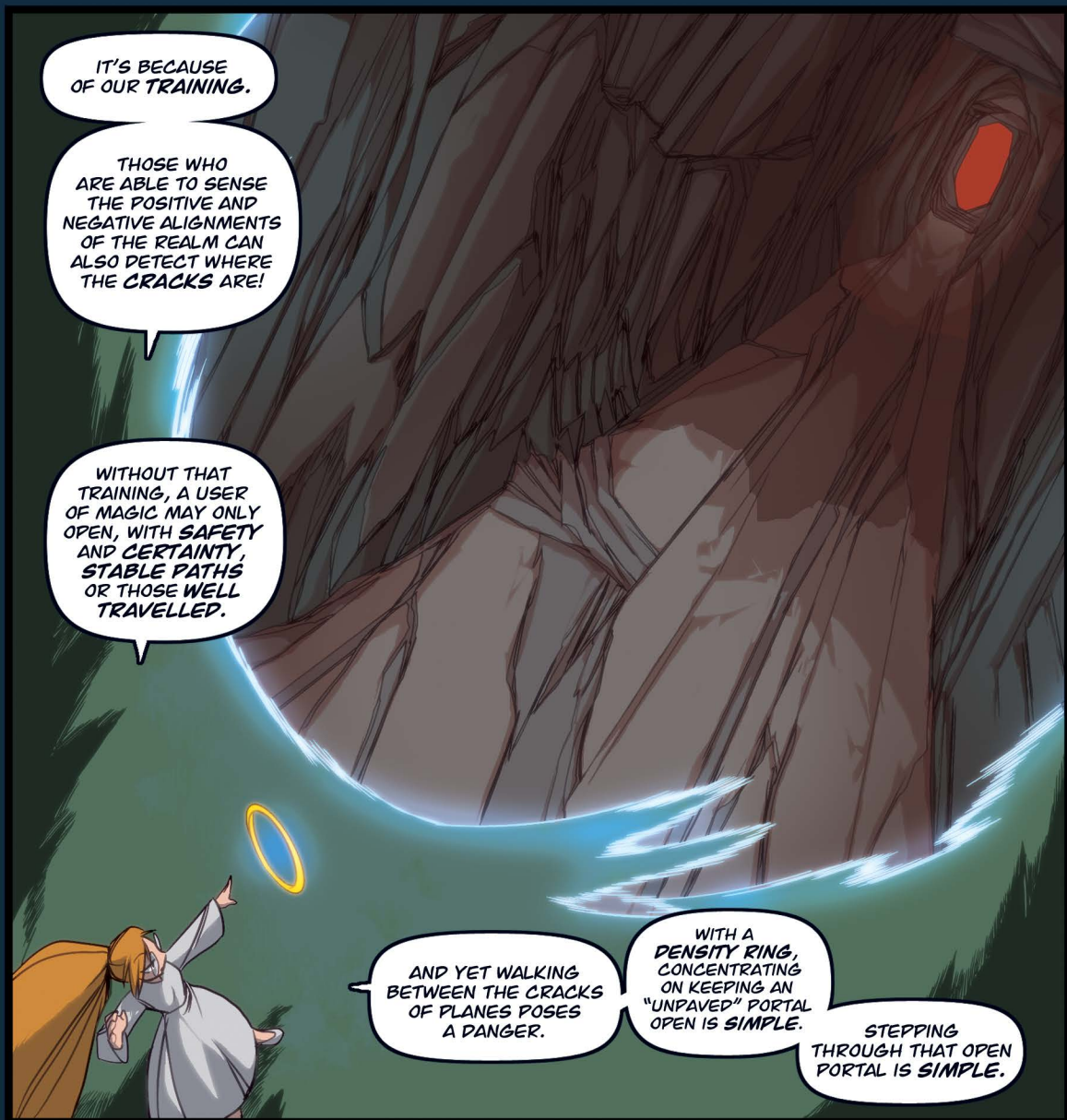


PST...
HEY,
HANZ'!

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL
ABOUT MERIGOLD BEING
A "BALANCE-WHOSITS"?

CAN'T ALL EXPERT
MAGIC-GUYS MAKE
STUFF APPEAR AND
DISAPPEAR INTO
PORTALS?

YOU'RE
ASKING
ME?



IT'S BECAUSE
OF OUR TRAINING.

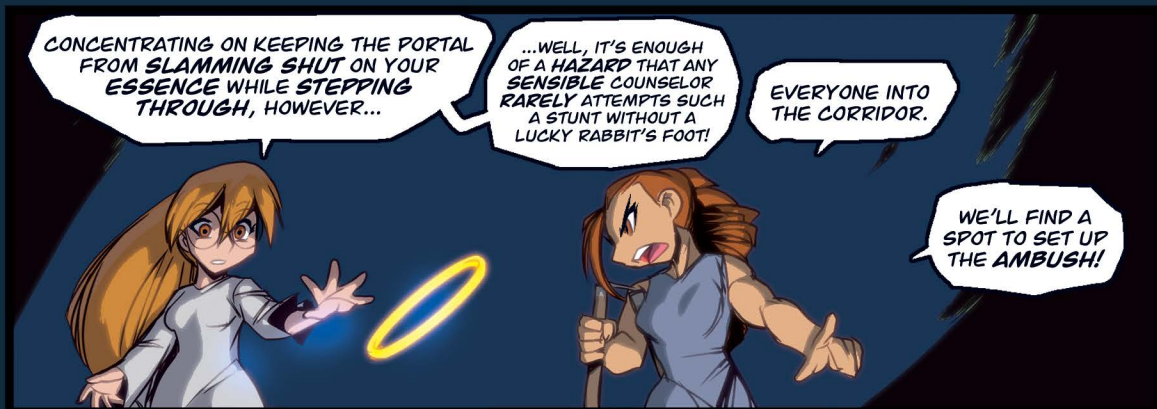
THOSE WHO
ARE ABLE TO SENSE
THE POSITIVE AND
NEGATIVE ALIGNMENTS
OF THE REALM CAN
ALSO DETECT WHERE
THE CRACKS ARE!

WITHOUT THAT
TRAINING, A USER
OF MAGIC MAY ONLY
OPEN, WITH SAFETY
AND CERTAINTY,
STABLE PATHS
OR THOSE WELL
TRAVELLED.

AND YET WALKING
BETWEEN THE CRACKS
OF PLANES POSES
A DANGER.

WITH A
DENSITY RING,
CONCENTRATING
ON KEEPING AN
"UNPAVED" PORTAL
OPEN IS SIMPLE.

STEPPING
THROUGH THAT OPEN
PORTAL IS SIMPLE.



CONCENTRATING ON KEEPING THE PORTAL
FROM SLAMMING SHUT ON YOUR
ESSENCE WHILE STEPPING
THROUGH, HOWEVER...

...WELL, IT'S ENOUGH
OF A HAZARD THAT ANY
SENSIBLE COUNSELOR
RARELY ATTEMPTS SUCH
A STUNT WITHOUT A
LUCKY RABBIT'S FOOT!

EVERYONE INTO
THE CORRIDOR.

WE'LL FIND A
SPOT TO SET UP
THE AMBUSH!

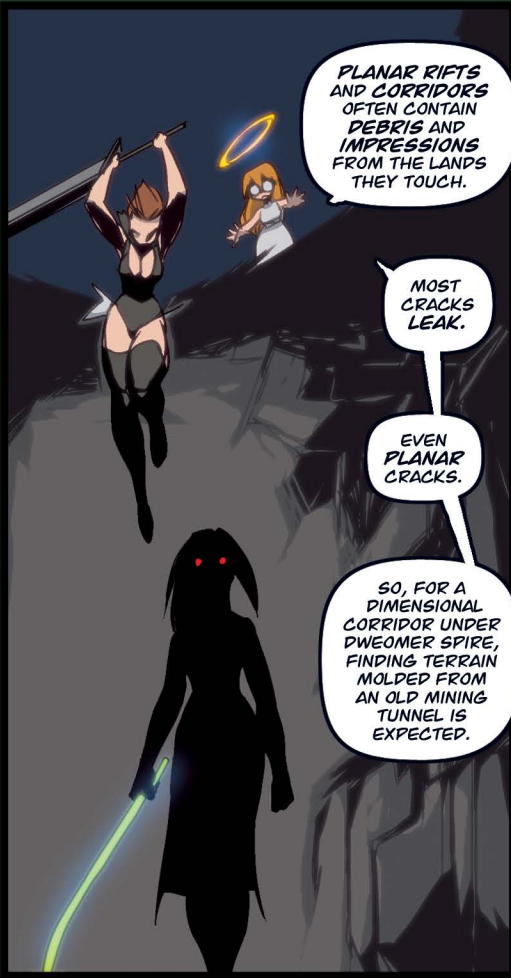


FORTUNATELY, I ONLY NEED TO PASS THROUGH THIS ONE PORTAL TONIGHT...

...SO I CAN KEEP OUR ESCAPE ROUTE OPEN ALL THE WHILE!

HMM. I WAS EXPECTING SOMETHING MORE LIKE AN ACID TRIP TO BE IN HERE!

YOU KNOW... WEIRDNESS!



PLANAR RIFTS AND CORRIDORS OFTEN CONTAIN DEBRIS AND IMPRESSIONS FROM THE LANDS THEY TOUCH.

MOST CRACKS LEAK.

EVEN PLANAR CRACKS.

SO, FOR A DIMENSIONAL CORRIDOR UNDER DWEOMER SPIRE, FINDING TERRAIN MOLDED FROM AN OLD MINING TUNNEL IS EXPECTED.



EXCEPT...

...IT DOESN'T APPEAR TO BE MOLDED FROM AN OLD... DWARVEN... MINING TUNNEL.



IN FACT...

...I'M BEGINNING TO THINK...THIS MAY BE AN ANCIENT ORKRIST MINING TUNNEL!

DON'T BE A FOOL, MERIGOLD...

...THIS TUNNEL FEELS AS THOUGH IT WAS MADE DURING THE AGE OF MAGIC, THOUSANDS OF YEARS AGO!

DWEOMER SPIRE WASN'T EVEN SETTLED BACK THEN, MUCH LESS MINED!



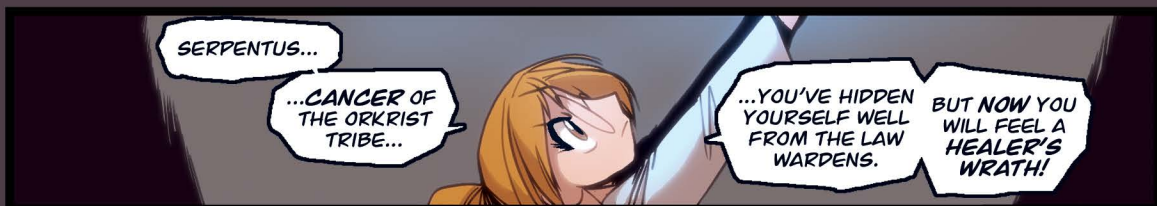
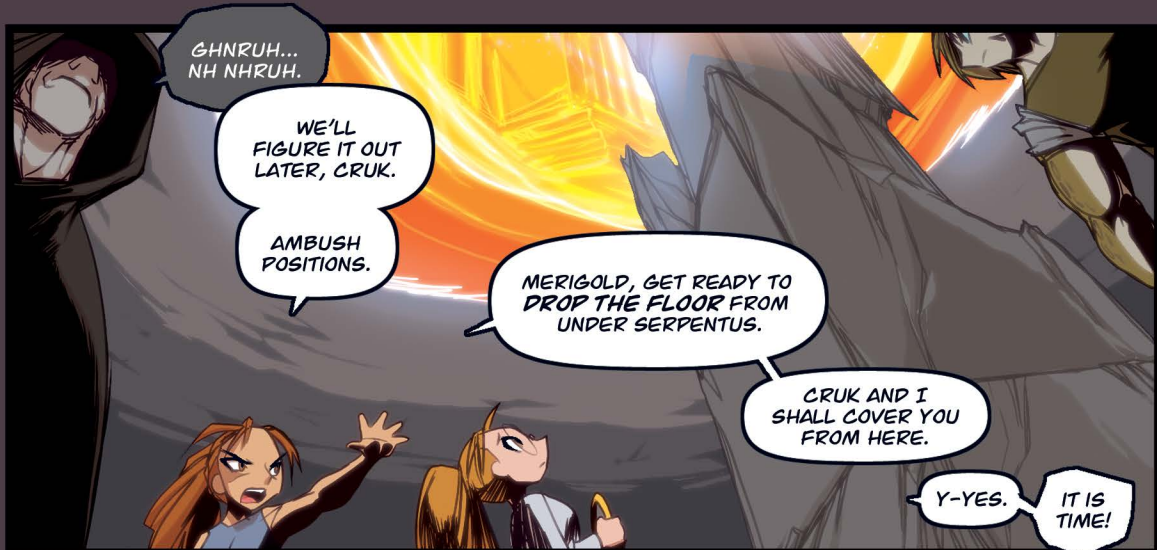
BUT THESE ARE ORKRIST STYLE CHISEL MARKINGS!

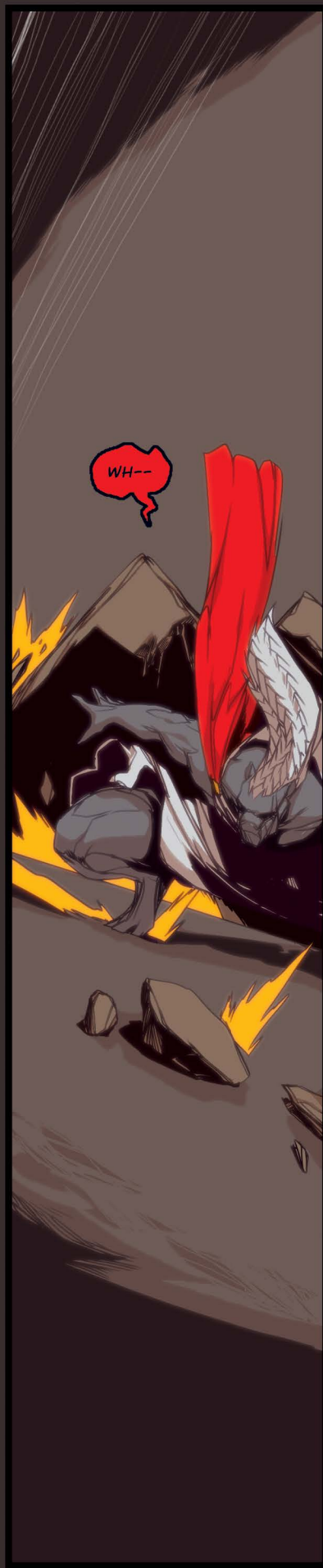
AND THIS IS DEEP GRANITE! MILES DOWN!

Y-YES... STRANGE.

COMMON SENSE TELLS US ONE THING...

...DWARVEN STONE SENSE TELLS US DIFFERENTLY.





WH-WHERE--?
WHO?

NOW!
CLOSE IN!

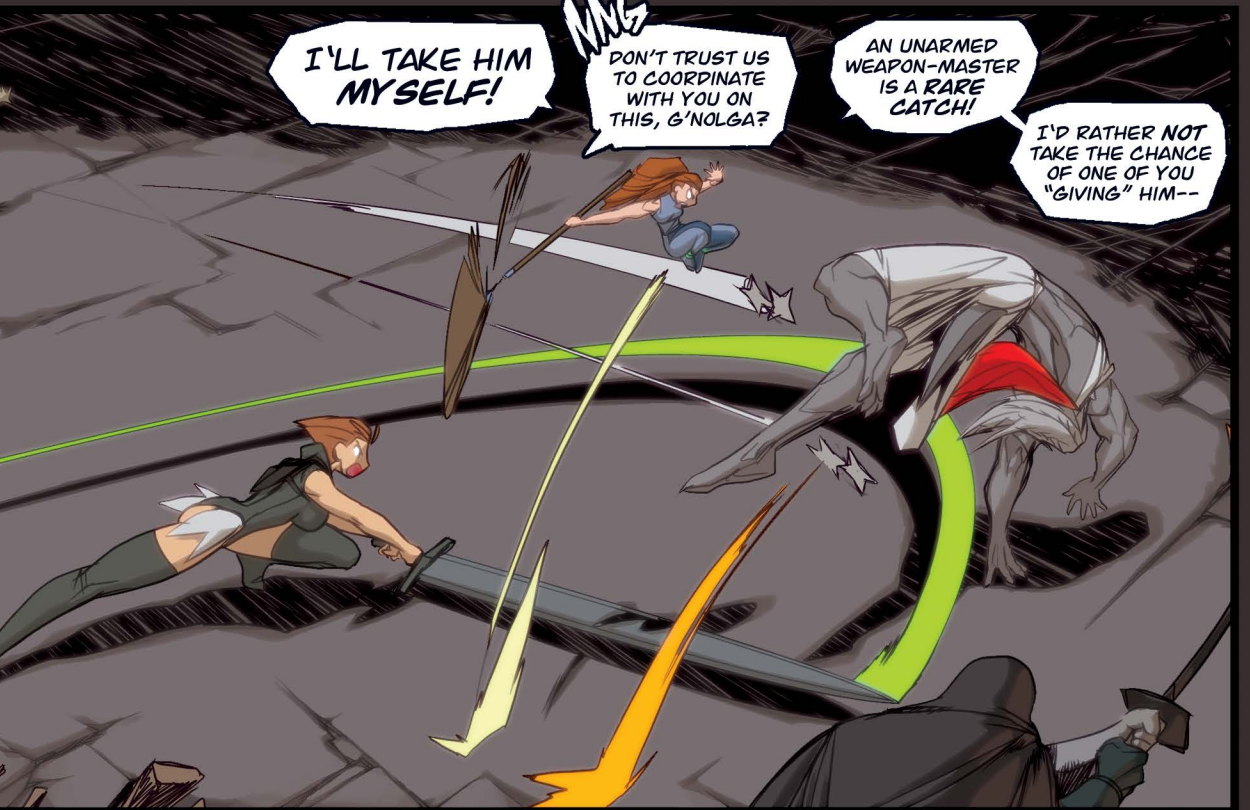


ENCIRCLE!



PUSH HIM
TO THE
CENTER...

...BUT STAY
OUT OF HIS
REACH!



I'LL TAKE HIM
MYSELF!

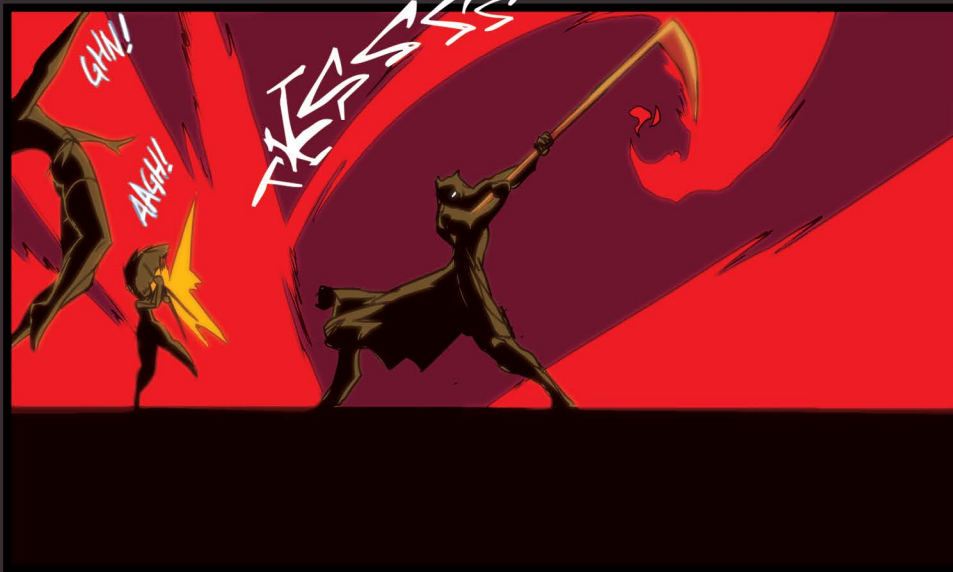
MAG
DON'T TRUST US
TO COORDINATE
WITH YOU ON
THIS, G'NOLGA?

AN UNARMED
WEAPON-MASTER
IS A RARE
CATCH!

I'D RATHER NOT
TAKE THE CHANCE
OF ONE OF YOU
"GIVING" HIM--



--A...
WEAPON...



WH--



POTENT.



VERY
POTENT!

ALRIGHT

NE!



GNHNHF!

RUHNHG!!!

NO!

HE DIDN'T
SUMMON AN
ELEMENTAL
WEAPON OR
SOUL EDGE,
CRUK!

TH-THAT
SCYTHE
WAS NEWLY
FORMED!



THE ENERGY
FLOWING WITHIN
IT...IT FEELS
AS THOUGH HE'S
HOLDING A-A
PART OF
G'NOLGA'S...

...AURA!!!

HER IMBALANCE!?!

≡GASP≡!!!

OH, NO!!!



HER...
HATRED!!!

SERPENTUS
FORGED A-A
WEAPON OUT OF
G'NOLGA'S
ENMITY!

I-IS THIS
THE POWER
OF A
"REAPER"?

"G'NOLGA."

IS THAT
WHAT
YOU ARE
CALLED?

I MUST
CONFESS...
G'NOLGA...IT HAS
BEEN A WHILE
SINCE I'VE HELD
A WEAPON THIS
POTENT.



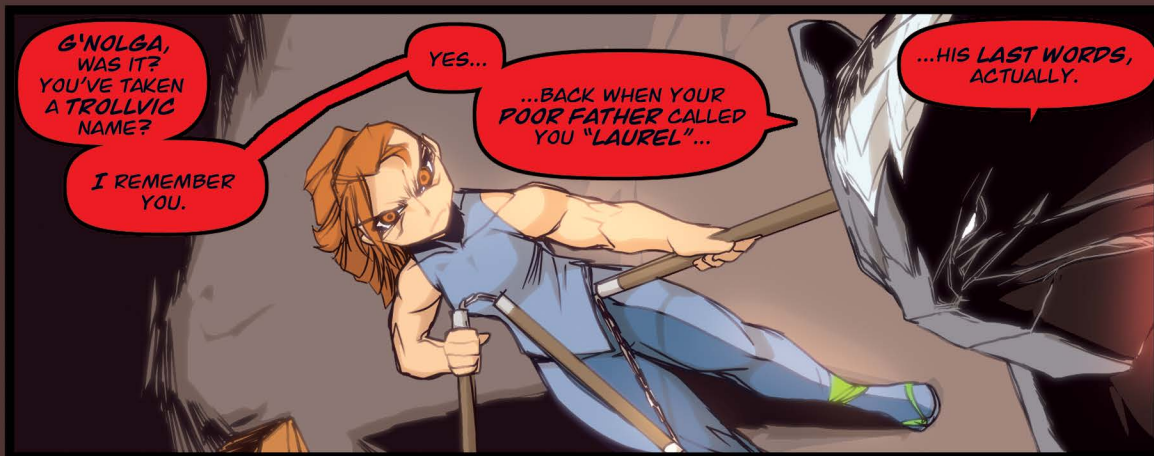
I COULD NEVER
HAVE HARVESTED
THIS FROM ANY
OF MY TRIBE.

TOO COMPLACENT.
TOO LAZY.
TOO AFRAID.

BUT THIS...

...BURNS
WITH THE HEAT OF
A SHATTERING
SUN!

WITH THIS...
I CAN BEGIN
ANEW MY
AMBITIONS!



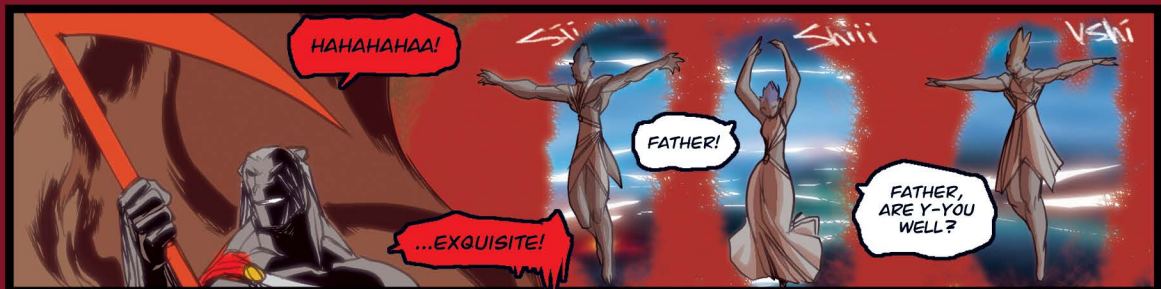
G'NOLGA,
WAS IT?
YOU'VE TAKEN
A TROLLVIC
NAME?

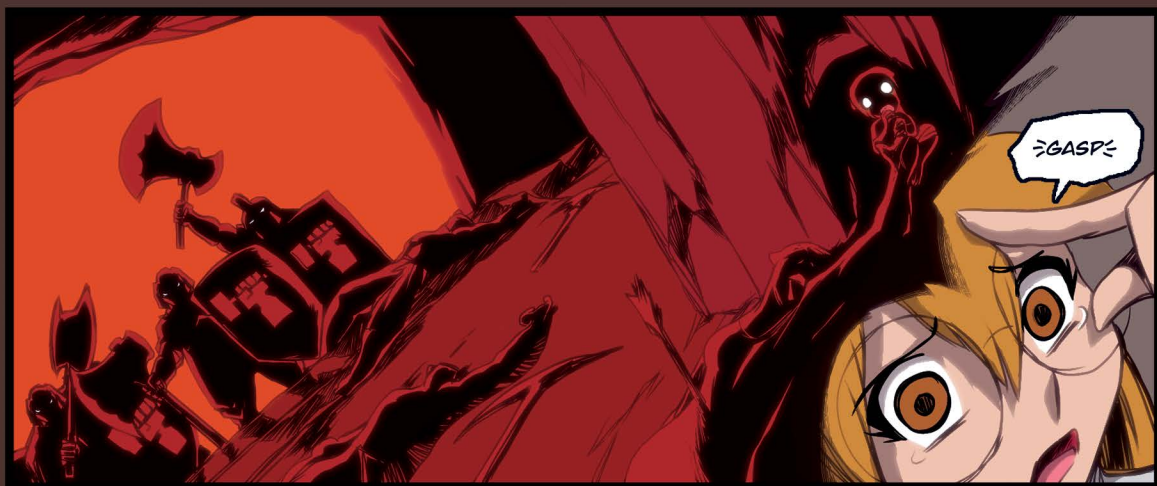
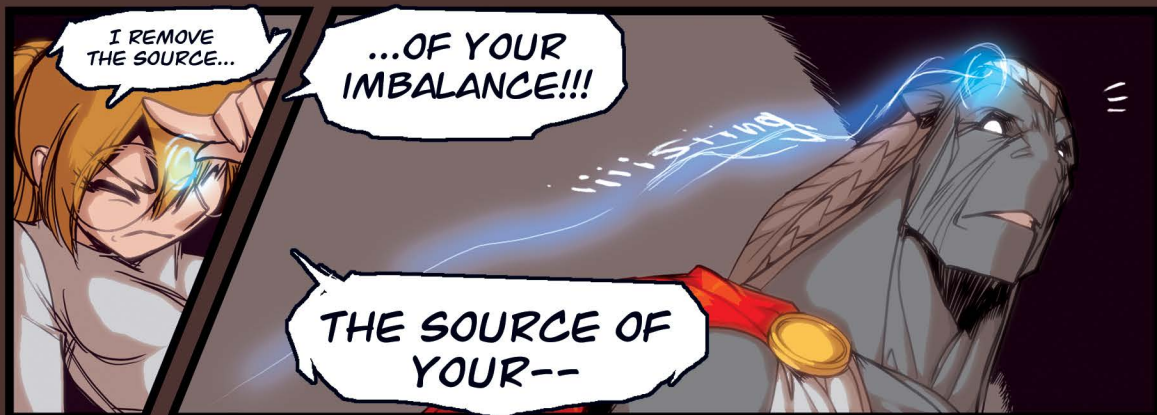
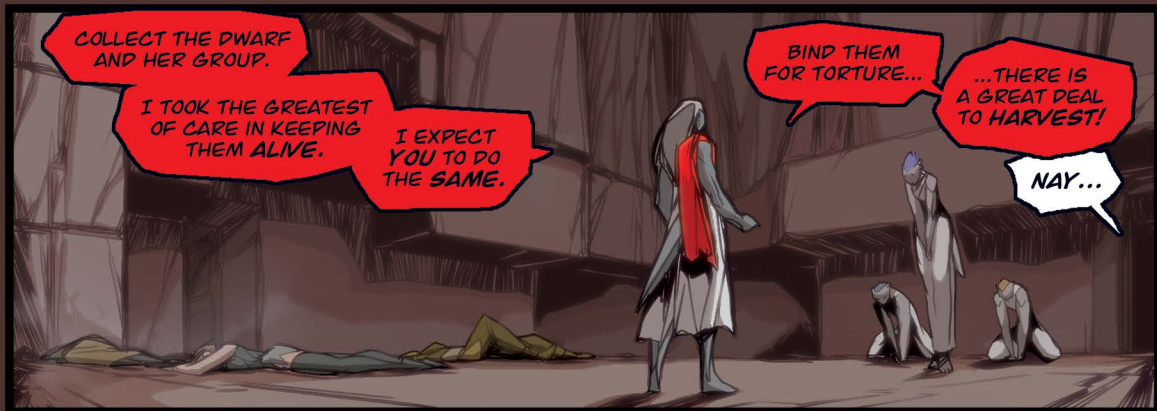
I REMEMBER
YOU.

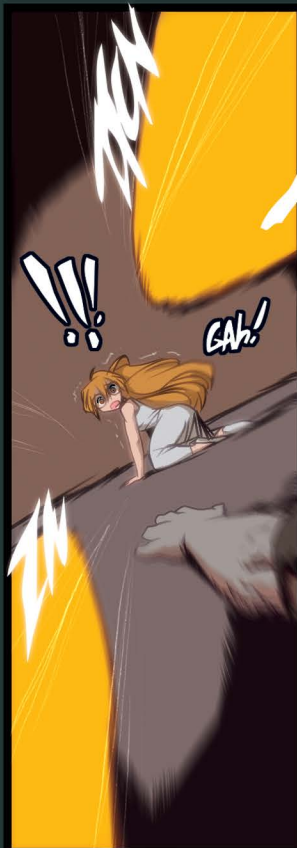
YES...

...BACK WHEN YOUR
POOR FATHER CALLED
YOU "LAUREL"...

...HIS LAST WORDS,
ACTUALLY.









HFF...
WE'LL
T-TAKE...

HFF...
THE PATH
YOU LEFT
OPEN.

'NOLLY AND
THE OTHERS...

...HFF...
THEY WON'T
RECOVER UNTIL
TH-THE MORNING!



HFF...
WE--WE
HAVE TO C-COME
BACK FOR THEM!

W-WITH...
HFF...

WITH HELP...
WITH...



WITH--

≥GASP≤

GRAND?



≥GASP≤



GR-GRAND!

GRAND!
H-HANG
ON!!!

GRAND!!!

CONTINUED...