



GOLD RIGGER

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FRED PERRY



JULY 2010



THE SHUN
MARTIAL ARTS
PROVING
GROUNDS.

NESTLED IN
A SECLUDED
VALLEY AT THE
END OF A MYSTIC
MOUNTAIN
PASS...

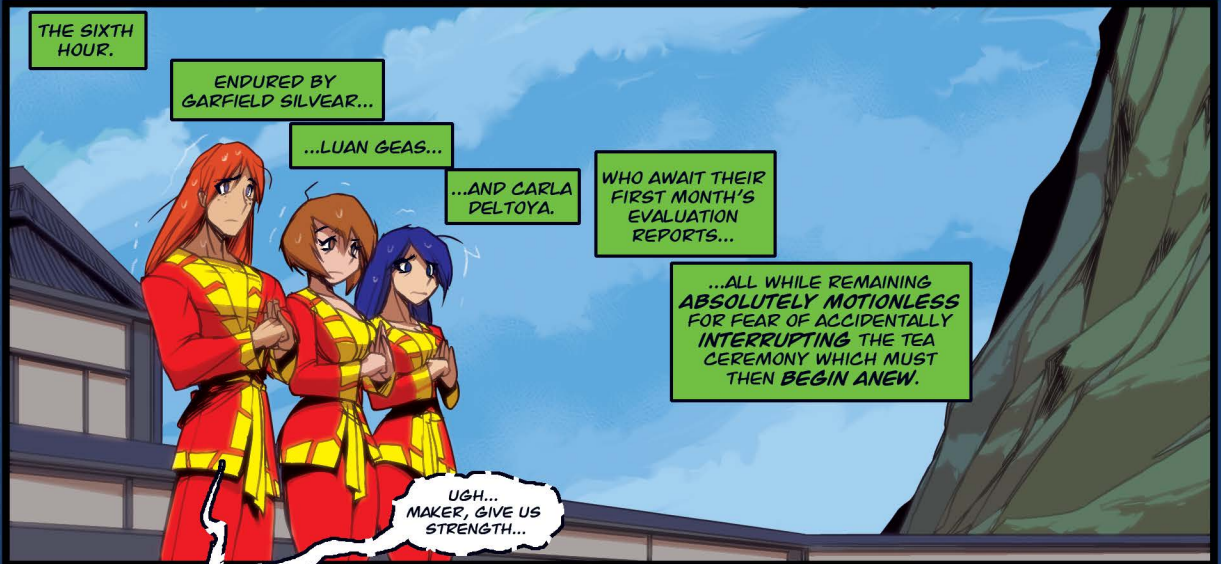
...WITHIN THE
REALM OF JADE.



THE TRADITIONAL
TEA CEREMONY.

HOSTED BY THE
PHANTOM INSTRUCTOR
OF THE GROUNDS'
SPIRITUAL TRIALS...

...AND ATTENDED BY
THIS GENERATION'S
TEACHER AND MASTER
OF THE SHUN
MARTIAL ARTS.



THE SIXTH
HOUR.

ENDURED BY
GARFIELD SILVEAR...

...LUAN GEAS...

...AND CARLA
DELTOYA.

WHO AWAIT THEIR
FIRST MONTH'S
EVALUATION
REPORTS...

...ALL WHILE REMAINING
ABSOLUTELY MOTIONLESS
FOR FEAR OF ACCIDENTALLY
INTERRUPTING THE TEA
CEREMONY WHICH MUST
THEN BEGIN ANEW.

UGH...
MAKER, GIVE US
STRENGTH...



GAR!!!

DON'T YOU
DARE SCREW
THIS UP WITH
IMPATIENCE!

I KNOW YOUR FEET
ARE TIRED!

MY REAR'S
NO BETTER
OFF!

ULP!

NO, GAR DOESN'T
READ MINDS...

...BUT HE'S PRETTY
ACQUAINTED WITH THE
"LANGUAGE" OF HIS
TEACHER'S GLARES!



ANNNNND BACK ON MY TIMING
QUICKLY ENOUGH TO INTERCEPT
AND ACKNOWLEDGE THE
TRADITIONAL SUGAR
BOWL PASS!

DON'T SPILL THE
STEEPED-TO-THE-
VERY-BRIM TEA...

AND SLIGHT
BOW...ANNNNND
PAUSE...

DO. NOT. SPILL.

AND SAMPLE
AROMA...AND
PAUSE ANNNND...
APPRECIATE
COLOR...



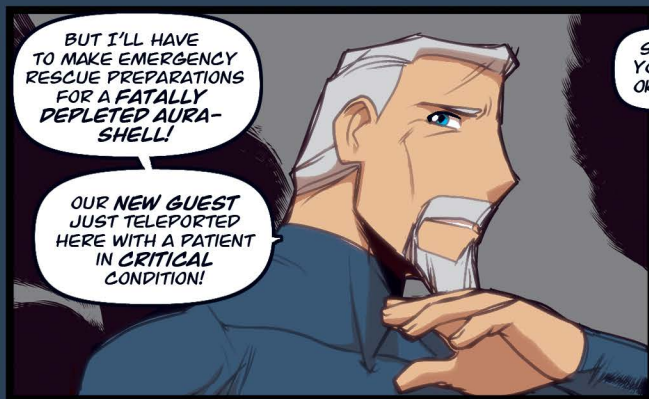
AND
THERE IT
IS!

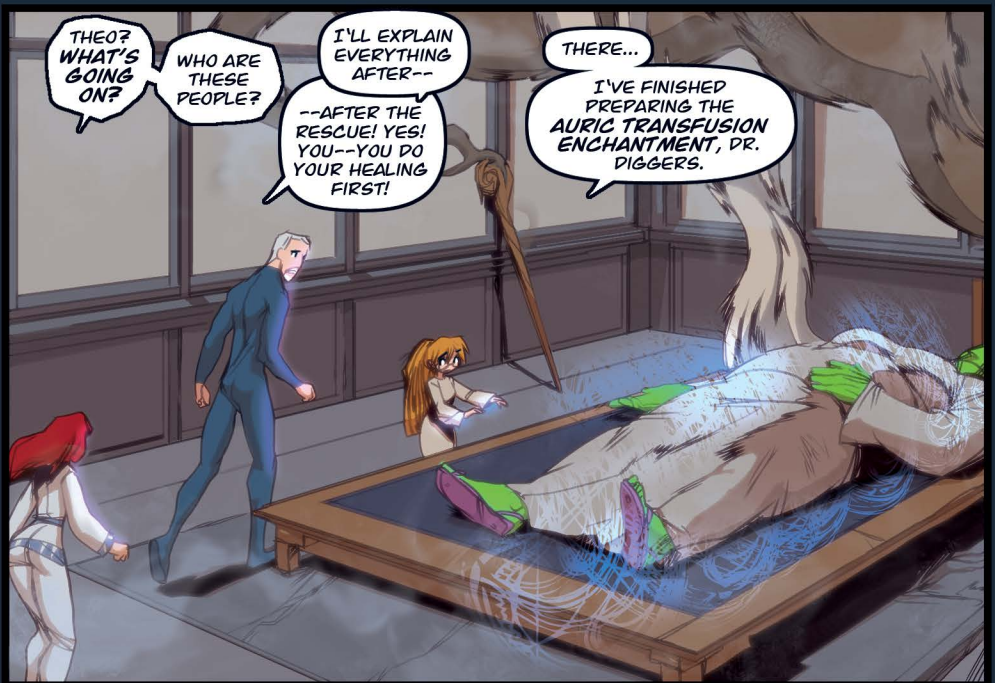
THE END-GAME PLAY...
SKIP THE CRUMPETS...

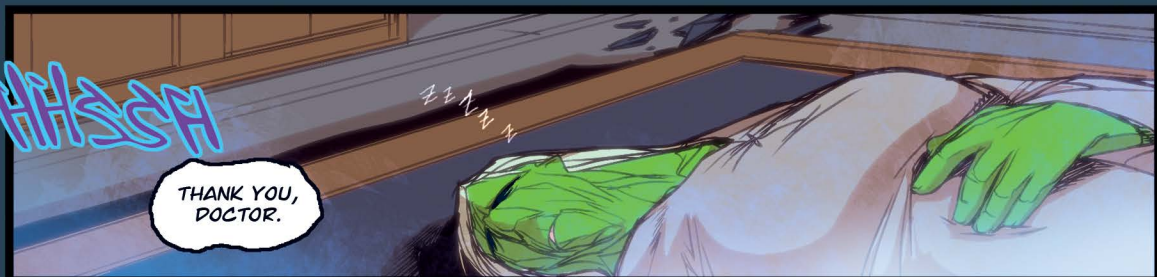
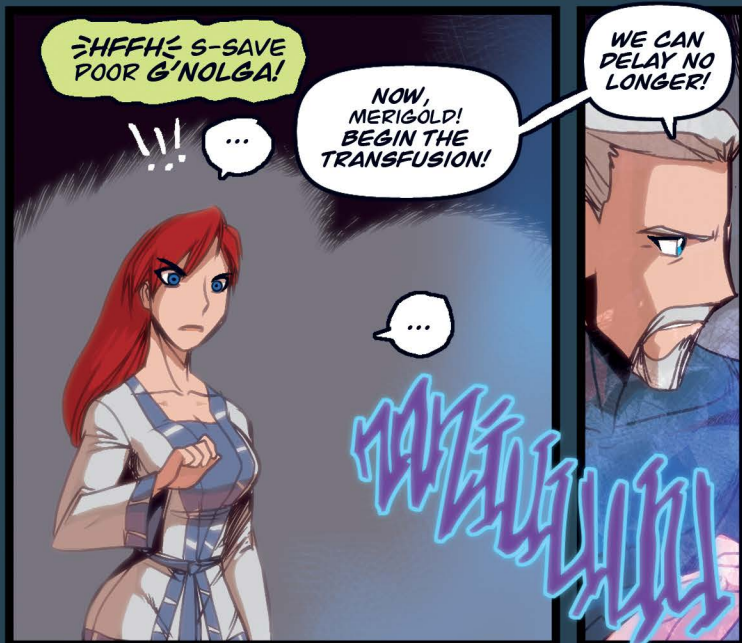
...GO FOR THE
QUICK SIP FOR
THE FINI--

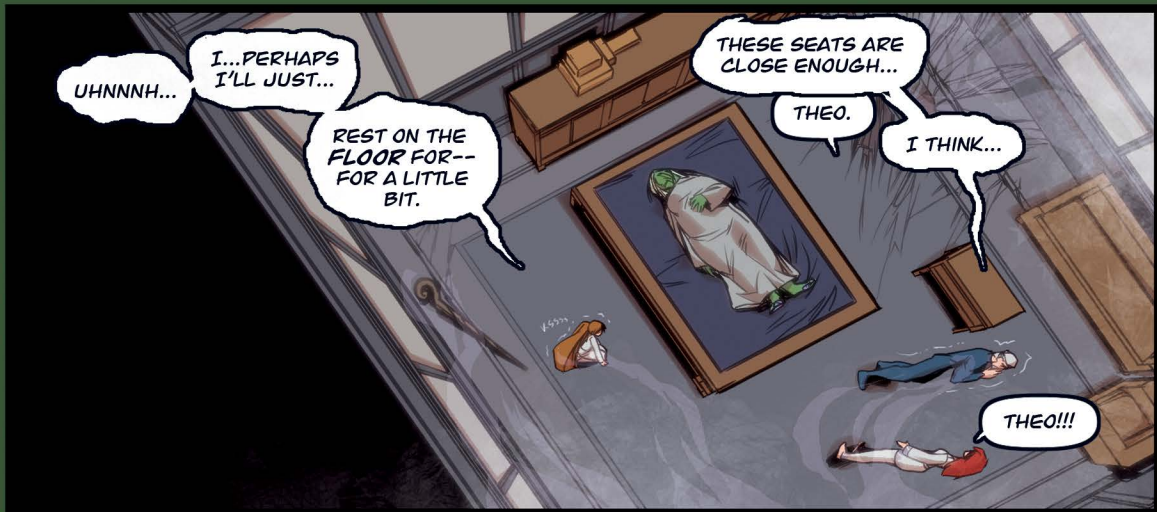
THE SUITE JULIA
AND HER HUSBAND,
THEODORE...

...WERE
STAYING IN...









UHHNNH...

I...PERHAPS
I'LL JUST...

REST ON THE
FLOOR FOR--
FOR A LITTLE
BIT.

THESE SEATS ARE
CLOSE ENOUGH...

THEO.

I THINK...

THEO!!!



HOW
LONG HAVE
YOU KNOWN
MERIGOLD?

HOW LONG
HAVE YOU KNOWN
THE SISTER OF
MY DEADLIEST
ENEMY?

JULIA, EVEN
IF MERIGOLD
AND I HAD NOT
SERVED AS
MAGE COUNCIL
APPRENTICES
TWENTY YEARS
AGO...



...EVEN IF WE HAD
NOT REMAINED
FRIENDS EVER
SINCE...

...EVEN IF
I HAD KNOWN
OF HER SISTER ALL
ALONG INSTEAD OF
DISCOVERING IT
JUST NOW...

...I WOULD
NOT HAVE HESITATED
IN GIVING THIS AID!

AND
BESIDES...
KNOWING
MERIGOLD'S
PENCHANT FOR
BALANCE...

...THIS FRIENDSHIP
WITH THE HUSBAND
OF HER "DEADLIEST
ENEMY" WOULD BE
A SURPRISE TO
G'NOLGA AS
WELL.



TSK...

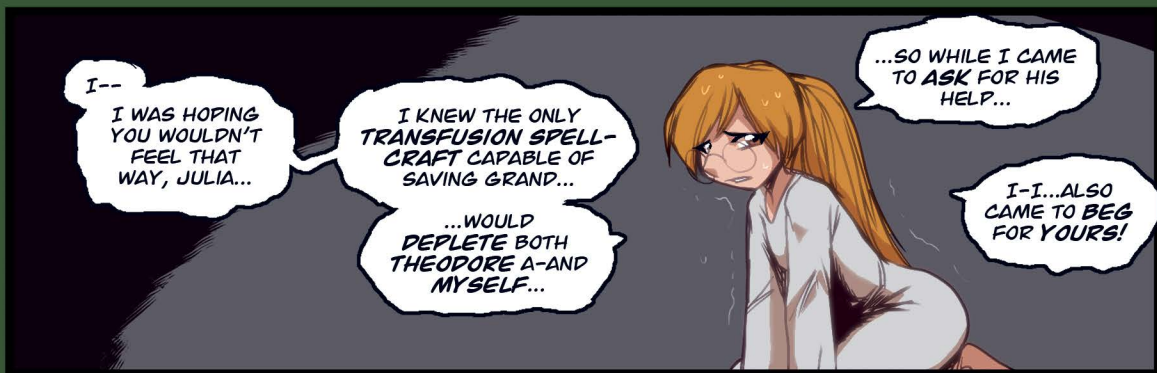
YOU'RE
RIGHT.

IT'S JUST...

THERE IS
A LOT OF
BAD BLOOD
BETWEEN
G'NOLGA
AND ME...

AND BROKEN
BONES...

AND...
FEAR...



I--

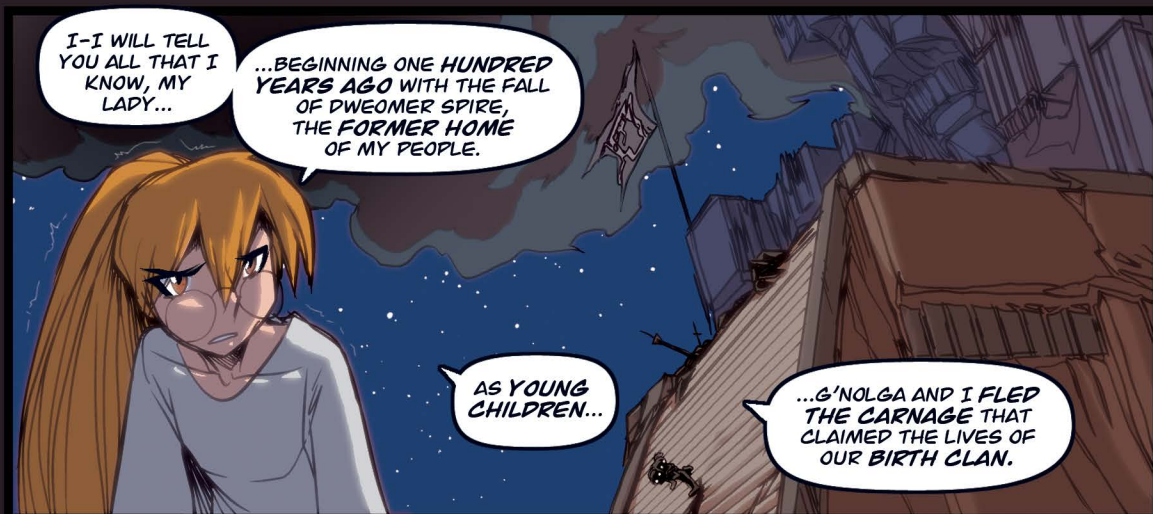
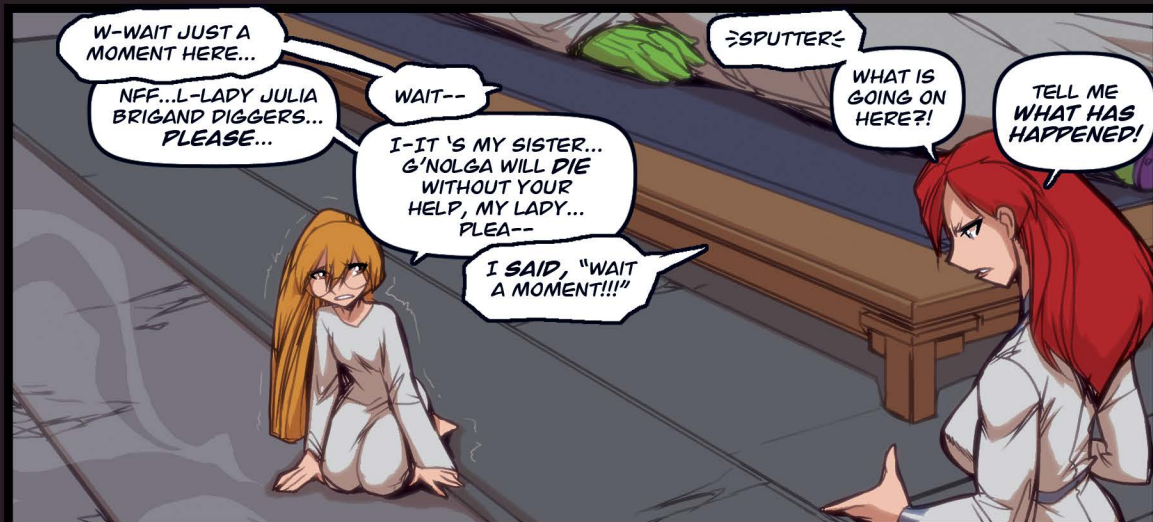
I WAS HOPING
YOU WOULDN'T
FEEL THAT
WAY, JULIA...

I KNEW THE ONLY
TRANSFUSION SPELL-
CRAFT CAPABLE OF
SAVING GRAND...

...WOULD
DEplete BOTH
THEODORE A-AND
MYSELF...

...SO WHILE I CAME
TO ASK FOR HIS
HELP...

I-I...ALSO
CAME TO BEG
FOR YOURS!

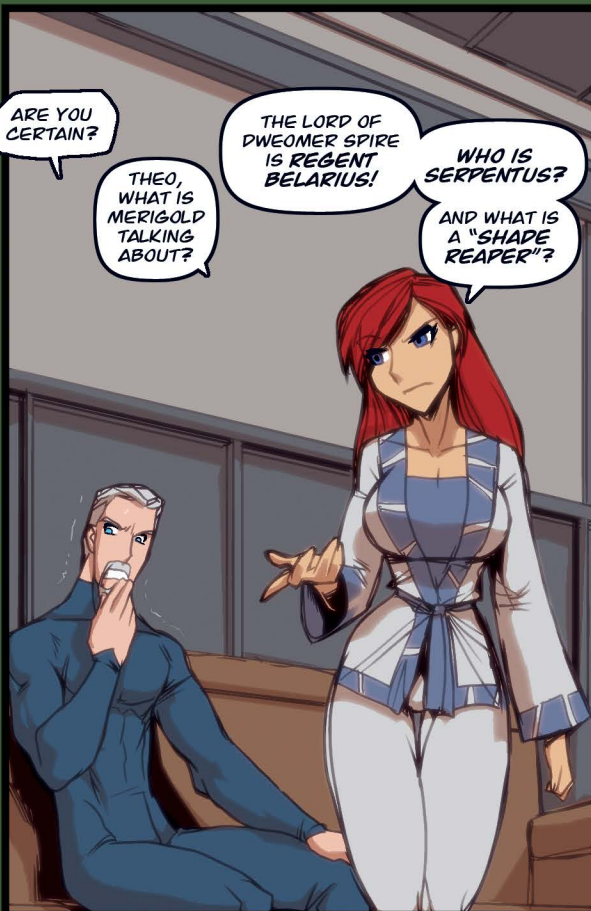




SER--
SERPENTUS!

MERIGOLD...
A REAPER?

?



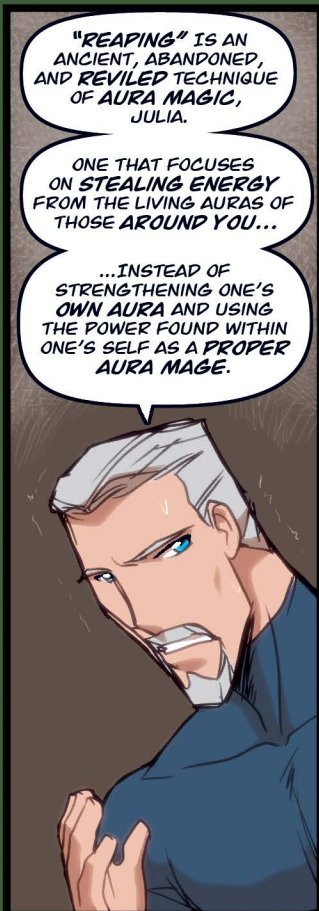
ARE YOU
CERTAIN?

THEO,
WHAT IS
MERIGOLD
TALKING
ABOUT?

THE LORD OF
DWEOMER SPIRE
IS **REBENT
BELARIUS!**

WHO IS
SERPENTUS?

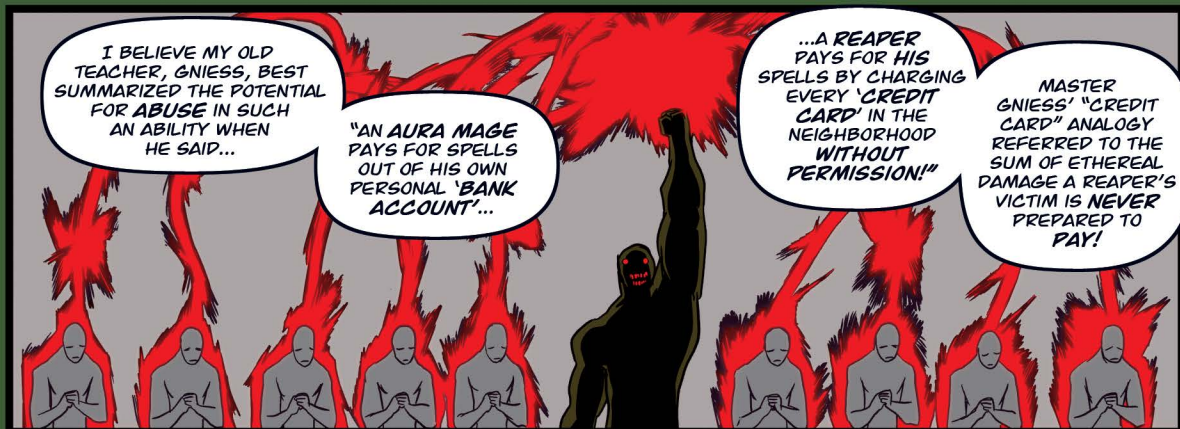
AND WHAT IS
A "SHADE
REAPER"?



"REAPING" IS AN
ANCIENT, ABANDONED,
AND **REVILED** TECHNIQUE
OF **AURA MAGIC**,
JULIA.

ONE THAT FOCUSES
ON **STEALING ENERGY**
FROM THE **LIVING AURAS** OF
THOSE **AROUND YOU...**

...INSTEAD OF
STRENGTHENING ONE'S
OWN AURA AND USING
THE **POWER FOUND WITHIN**
ONE'S **SELF** AS A **PROPER
AURA MAGE.**

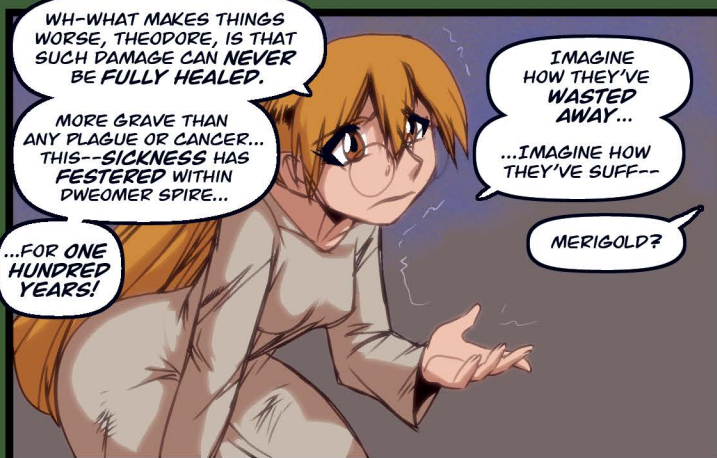


I BELIEVE MY OLD
TEACHER, GNISS, BEST
SUMMARIZED THE **POTENTIAL
FOR ABUSE** IN SUCH
AN **ABILITY** WHEN
HE SAID...

"AN **AURA MAGE**
PAYS FOR SPELLS
OUT OF HIS OWN
PERSONAL '**BANK
ACCOUNT**'..."

...A **REAPER**
PAYS FOR HIS
SPELLS BY **CHARGING**
EVERY '**CREDIT
CARD**' IN THE
NEIGHBORHOOD
**WITHOUT
PERMISSION!**"

MASTER
GNISS' "**CREDIT
CARD**" ANALOGY
REFERRED TO THE
SUM OF **ETHEREAL
DAMAGE** A **REAPER'S**
VICTIM IS **NEVER**
PREPARED TO
PAY!



WH-WHAT MAKES THINGS
WORSE, THEODORE, IS THAT
SUCH **DAMAGE** CAN **NEVER**
BE **FULLY HEALED.**

MORE GRAVE THAN
ANY **PLAGUE** OR **CANCER...**
THIS--**SICKNESS** HAS
FESTERED WITHIN
DWEOMER SPIRE...

...FOR **ONE
HUNDRED
YEARS!**

IMAGINE
HOW THEY'VE
**WASTED
AWAY...**

...IMAGINE HOW
THEY'VE **SUFF--**

MERIGOLD?



YOU--

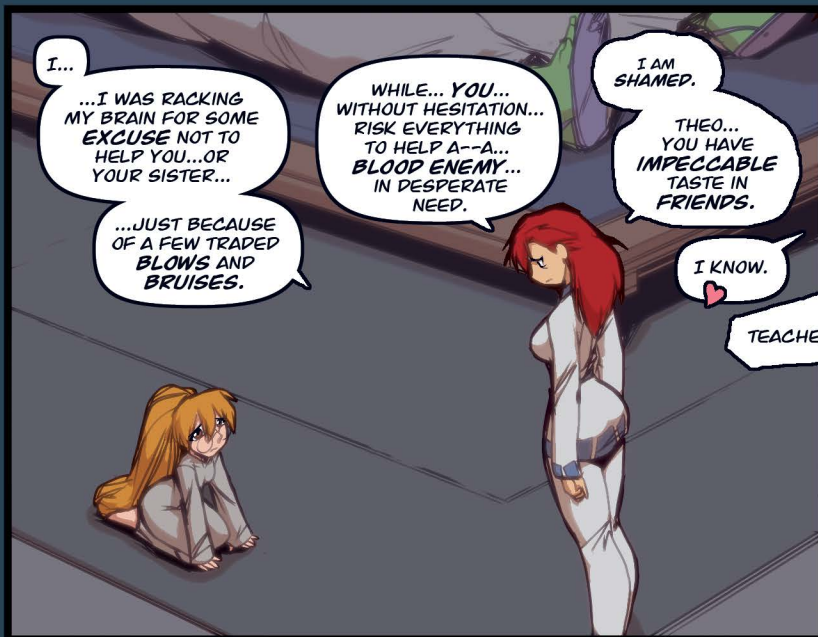
YOU **DIDN'T** GO
TO THE **ORKRIST**
FOR **REVENGE...**
DID YOU?



YOU **RAIDED**
THE **VERY** **TRIBE**
WHO **KILLED**
YOUR **FAMILY...**

...IN ORDER
TO **SAVE**
THEM!?!
...

DID
G'NOLGA
KNOW
THAT?
...



I...

...I WAS RACKING
MY BRAIN FOR SOME
EXCUSE NOT TO
HELP YOU...OR
YOUR SISTER...

...JUST BECAUSE
OF A FEW TRAPPED
BLOWS AND
BRUISES.

WHILE... YOU...
WITHOUT HESITATION...
RISK EVERYTHING
TO HELP A--A...
BLOOD ENEMY...
IN DESPERATE
NEED.

I AM
SHAMED.

THEO...
YOU HAVE
IMPECCABLE
TASTE IN
FRIENDS.

I KNOW.

TEACHER!!!



TEACHER!!!
IT'S LUAN!!!

IT'S GAR!!!

THEY'VE LEFT
THE PROVING
GROUNDS!



THEY'RE HEADING
FOR THE MOON-GATE
AT THE FOOT OF
THE MOUNTAIN!

D--

DAMN!

I FORGOT ABOUT
GAR'S WERE-JAGUAR
HEARING!



I FORGOT
THOSE EARS HAVE
HEARD THE NAME OF
SERPENTUS BEFORE...

...FROM
AN ORKRIST
BATTLE CRY...



...BACK WHEN HE WAS
A FRIGHTENED LITTLE
BOY WATCHING HIS
VILLAGE BURN!



I-I BESEECHED THEM BOTH TO HOLD FAST.

THAT YOU MAY CONSIDER US **CAPABLE ASSISTANTS** SHOULD YOU CHOOSE TO RESCUE G'NOLGA AND FACE THE **ORKRIST WARLORD!**

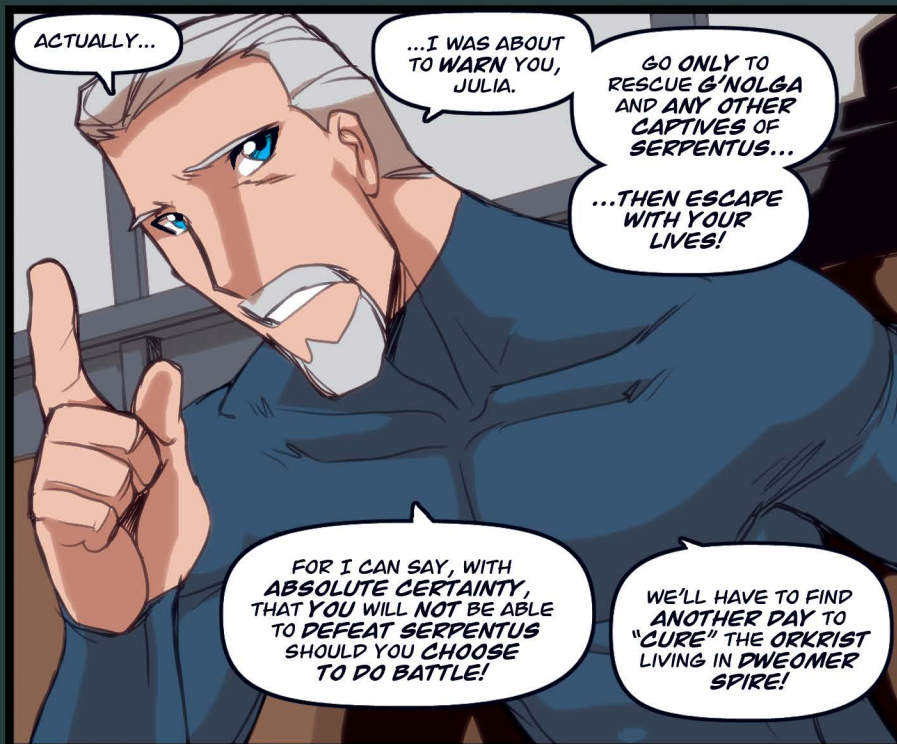
AND YOU WERE RIGHT.

COME, CARLA... WE'LL CATCH UP TO GAR AND LUAN BEFORE THEY GET THEMSELVES KILLED!

>TSKS< WHY ON JAPE ARE ALL OF MY STUDENTS SO HEADSTRONG?

WELL...

DON'T ANSWER THAT!



ACTUALLY...

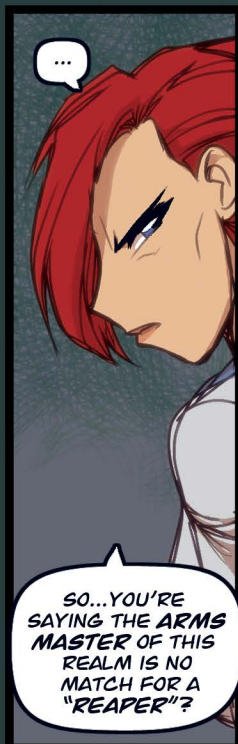
...I WAS ABOUT TO WARN YOU, JULIA.

GO ONLY TO RESCUE G'NOLGA AND ANY OTHER CAPTIVES OF SERPENTUS...

...THEN ESCAPE WITH YOUR LIVES!

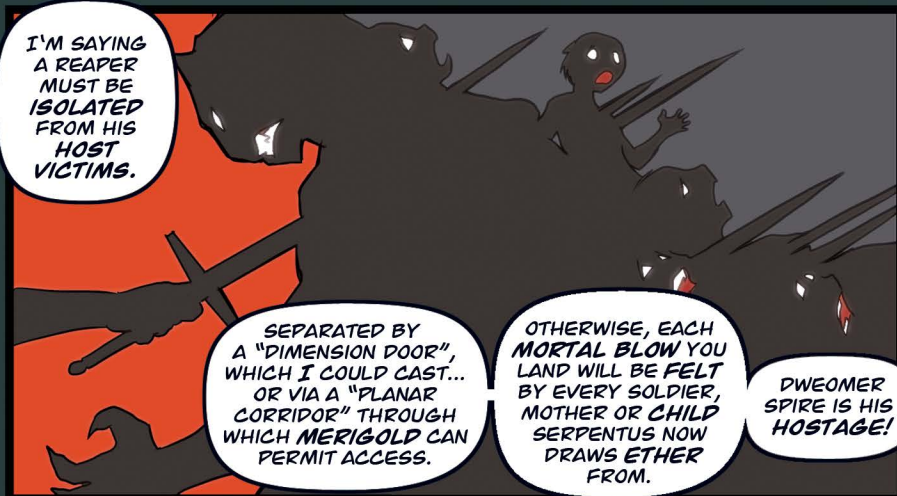
FOR I CAN SAY, WITH **ABSOLUTE CERTAINTY**, THAT YOU WILL NOT BE ABLE TO DEFEAT **SERPENTUS** SHOULD YOU CHOOSE TO DO BATTLE!

WE'LL HAVE TO FIND ANOTHER WAY TO "CURE" THE **ORKRIST** LIVING IN **DWEOMER SPIRE!**



...

SO...YOU'RE SAYING THE **ARMS MASTER** OF THIS REALM IS NO MATCH FOR A "REAPER"?



I'M SAYING A REAPER MUST BE ISOLATED FROM HIS HOST VICTIMS.

SEPARATED BY A "DIMENSION DOOR", WHICH I COULD CAST... OR VIA A "PLANAR CORRIDOR" THROUGH WHICH MERIGOLD CAN PERMIT ACCESS.

OTHERWISE, EACH MORTAL BLOW YOU LAND WILL BE FELT BY EVERY SOLDIER, MOTHER OR CHILD SERPENTUS NOW DRAWS ETHER FROM.

DWEOMER SPIRE IS HIS HOSTAGE!



I...SEE.

HM.



CARLA, LET'S COLLECT OUR EQUIPMENT AND BE ON OUR WAY.

LUAN AND GAR HAVE PROBABLY TRAVELLED THROUGH THE MOON GATE BY NOW!

W-WAIT, MRS. DIGGERS... PLEASE, J-UST A MOMENT!



TAKE GRAND'S SHAMAN STAFF WITH YOU.

THERE IS A SOLITARY TELEPORTATION SPELL CHARGE REMAINING INSIDE.

YOU WILL HAVE TO SHATTER THE STAFF TO USE IT.

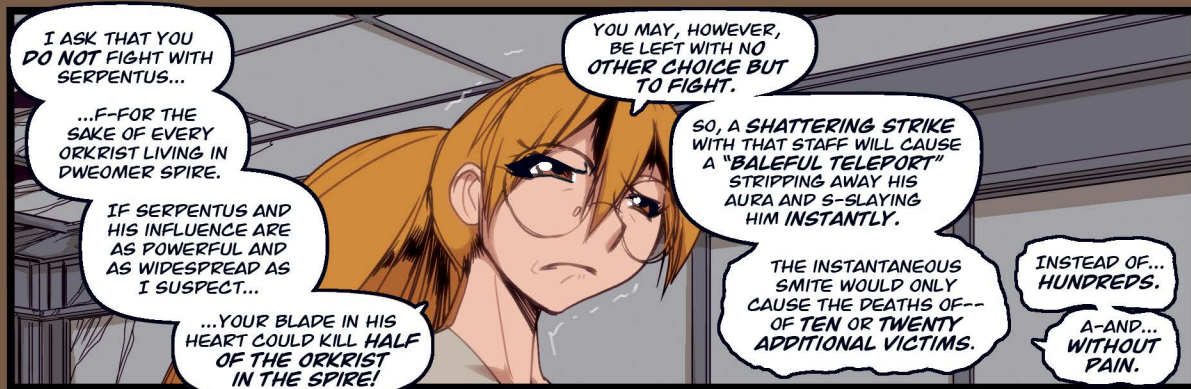


I SEE...

AN EMERGENCY ESCAPE ROUTE?

TRUE...THAT IS ONE WAY TO UTILIZE THE CHARGE...

...BUT THAT IS NOT WHY I AM GIVING YOU GRAND'S STAFF.



I ASK THAT YOU DO NOT FIGHT WITH SERPENTUS...

...F-FOR THE SAKE OF EVERY ORKRIST LIVING IN DWOMER SPIRE.

IF SERPENTUS AND HIS INFLUENCE ARE AS POWERFUL AND AS WIDESPREAD AS I SUSPECT...

...YOUR BLADE IN HIS HEART COULD KILL HALF OF THE ORKRIST IN THE SPIRE!

YOU MAY, HOWEVER, BE LEFT WITH NO OTHER CHOICE BUT TO FIGHT.

SO, A SHATTERING STRIKE WITH THAT STAFF WILL CAUSE A "BALEFUL TELEPORT" STRIPPING AWAY HIS AURA AND S-SLAYING HIM INSTANTLY.

THE INSTANTANEOUS SMITE WOULD ONLY CAUSE THE DEATHS OF-- OF TEN OR TWENTY ADDITIONAL VICTIMS.

INSTEAD OF... HUNDREDS.

A-AND... WITHOUT PAIN.



MERIGOLD.

I CAN SEE THAT YOU TRULY DO NOT WANT ME TO USE THIS OPTION.

I DEEPLY APPRECIATE YOU GIVING IT TO ME, REGARDLESS.

AND SO I PROMISE...



"...I'LL DO EVERYTHING IN MY POWER TO KEEP THE GROUND CLEAN OF INNOCENT BLOOD."

THE MOON GATE.

DO YOU KNOW HOW TO FOCUS IT ON THE SPIRE, GAR?



NO, BUT WE WON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT THAT.

HUH?

IT'S FOCUSING?



THE MOON GATE'S OPENING BY ITSELF?

MY SISTER'S DOING.
SHEILA'S COMING WITH US FOR THIS.



THAT EXPLAINS THE MOON GATE ACCESS.

SHEILA'S IN JADE REALM'S NORTHERN EDGE GUARD.

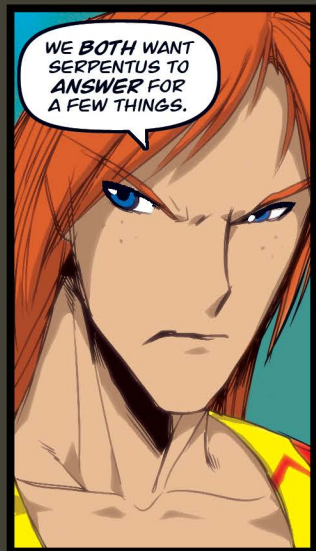
THEY NEED MOON GATES FOR MOVING FROM PLACE TO PLACE TO RESCUE CITIZENS!



BUT HOW DID SHEILA KNOW?

WHEN I HEARD THAT NAME... "SERPENTUS"...

...I KEYED MY OLD EDGE GUARD LINK-CRYSTAL SO SHE COULD HEAR.



WE BOTH WANT SERPENTUS TO ANSWER FOR A FEW THINGS.



FOR FATHER'S ARM...

FOR MOTHER'S EYE...



...FOR THE PARENTS IN OUR VILLAGE WHO DIDN'T SURVIVE HIS CRUELTY DURING THE FIRST OF THOSE ORKRIST RAIDS...



YOU DON'T HAVE TO COME, LUAN.

THE TRUTH IS... SHEILA AND I ARE GOING TO HAVE TO **BREAK A FEW LAWS...**

...TO SEE **THIS JUSTICE DONE.**



YOU NEED NOT WORRY, GARFIELD.

I STAND RESOLVED.

I STAND WITH YOU.

BUT WHAT **LAWS** PROTECT THIS-- THIS VILLAIN?



SHEILA.

"UNLAWFUL INTRUSION",
"UNWARRANTED ASSAULT",
"DENIAL OF RIGHTS TO THE ACCUSED"...

...FOR OPENERS.



WE CAN'T **ARREST SERPENTUS.**

HE'S EVEN **MORE DANGEROUS** TO THE REALM IMPRISONED.

SOME OF THE **MAGE COUNCIL** AND A FEW **LAW WARDENS** WOULD BE TEMPTED BEYOND REASONING FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO STUDY A "**LOST ART**" LIKE "**REAPING**".



DON'T GET ME WRONG...

...THE COUNCIL IS **NOT** CORRUPT.

BUT SOME OF OUR **STRONGER PILLARS** HAVE A FEW TINY... **CRACKS.**

AND ARE **PRONE TO CLOUDY JUDGMENT** UNDER... **RARE AND...UNUSUAL... CIRCUMSTANCES.**



AN **EDGE GUARD SUPPLY SATCHEL.**

WHAT DID YOU BRING FOR US, SHEILA?

"**ETHER CLOAKS**".

ONE OF **THROPAN'S NEW INVENTIONS!**

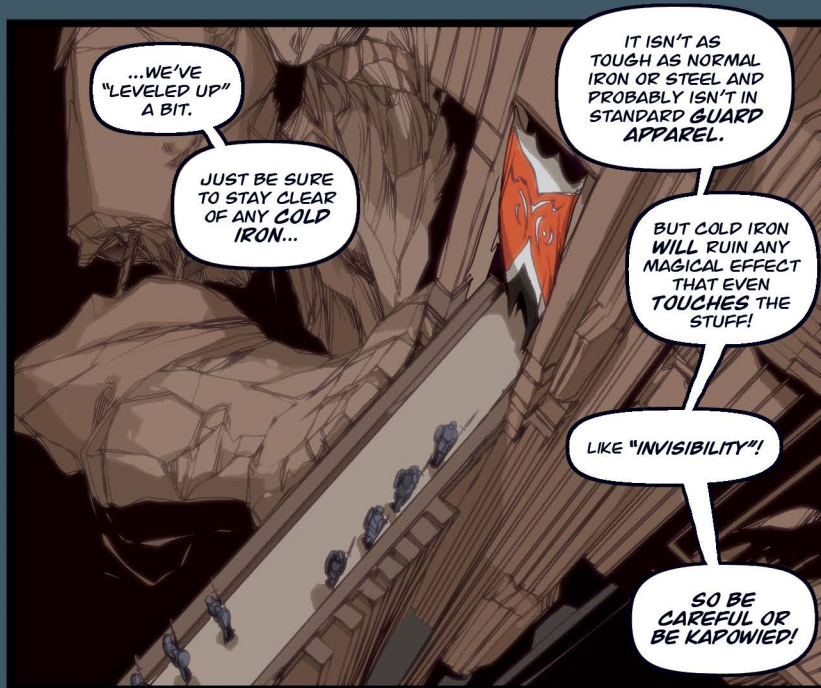


THEY...LOOK LIKE **ORDINARY CLOAKS.**

HMMHMMH!

YOU'VE BEEN AWAY FOR **TOO LONG**, BIG BROTHER.

SINCE YOU'VE LEFT...



...WE'VE
"LEVELED UP"
A BIT.

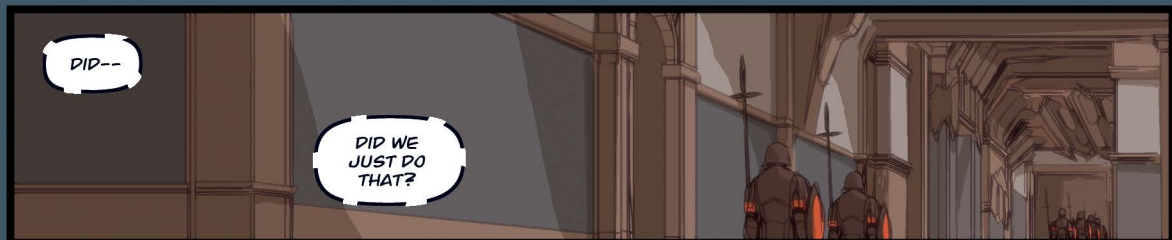
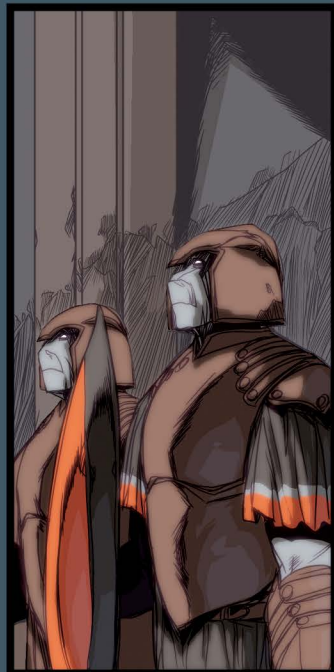
JUST BE SURE
TO STAY CLEAR
OF ANY COLD
IRON...

IT ISN'T AS
TOUGH AS NORMAL
IRON OR STEEL AND
PROBABLY ISN'T IN
STANDARD GUARD
APPAREL.

BUT COLD IRON
WILL RUIN ANY
MAGICAL EFFECT
THAT EVEN
TOUCHES THE
STUFF!

LIKE "INVISIBILITY"!

SO BE
CAREFUL OR
BE KAPOWED!



DID--

DID WE
JUST DO
THAT?



DID WE
JUST...

...STROLL PAST
THE ENTIRE ORKRIST
GATE GUARD!?!

SHH.



NOW COMES
OUR FIRST
TRIAL.

FINDING
SERPENTUS IS
NOT AS EASY AS
SIMPLY HEADING
FOR THE THRONE
ROOM.

THAT'S HIS
PUPPET'S
CAGE.



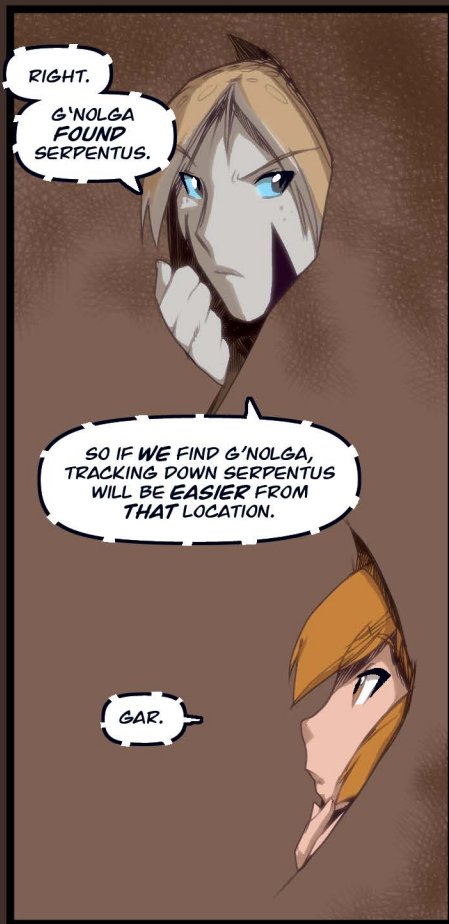
WHAT OTHERWISE
WOULD TAKE MONTHS
OF STEALTH AND
CAREFUL LISTENING...

...CAN BE
CIRCUMVENTED
WITH A "SIMPLE"
AURA SENSOR.



THERE...
ONE DWARVEN
AURA FOUND...

G'NOLGA.



RIGHT.

G'NOLGA
FOUND
SERPENTUS.

SO IF WE FIND G'NOLGA,
TRACKING DOWN SERPENTUS
WILL BE EASIER FROM
THAT LOCATION.

GAR.



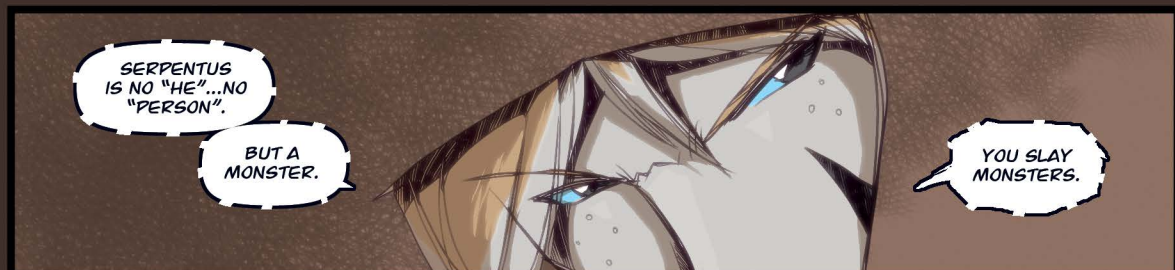
PRAY, TELL ME
YOUR PLANS FOR
THE ORKRIST
OVERLORD?

WHAT WILL
YOU AND
SHEILA...
DO...

...WH-WHEN
YOU FIND
HIM?

--IT!

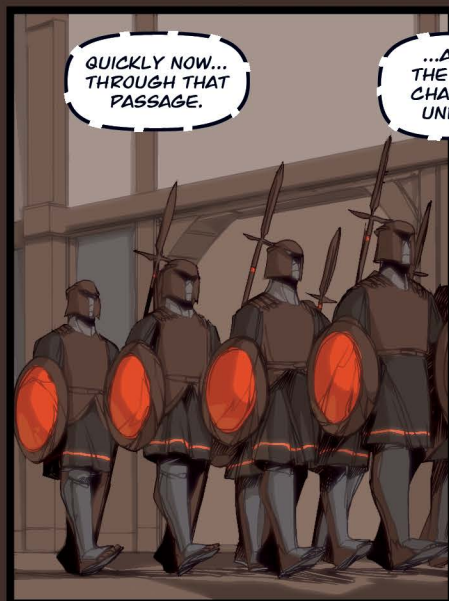
FIND "IT"!



SERPENTUS
IS NO "HE"...NO
"PERSON".

BUT A
MONSTER.

YOU SLAY
MONSTERS.



QUICKLY NOW...
THROUGH THAT
PASSAGE.

...AND TO
THE LOWER
CHAMBERS
UNDER--



OOP.



WH-WHO...

WHO ARE YOU?

...

IN--INTRUDER.

WHERE?



UHM.

HELLO?
ANYONE HOME?

SHEILA!
GET BACK!

??



THEY'RE STILL DANGEROUS!

EEEK!

FIST



CHIK PCK

CURSED LUCK!

AYE!

SO ENDS OUR STEALTHY APPROACH!

THFF

WE FIGHT FROM HERE!



NOPE!

PULL EYES...

STRETCH

...SHARP SKILL!

WATCH YOUR BACKS!

WATCH YOUR OPPONE--

STOP.



STOP.



GAR...

YES.

WE KNOW
THAT VOICE,
SHEILA.



SUCH
ENMITY...

RAGE...

HATRED.

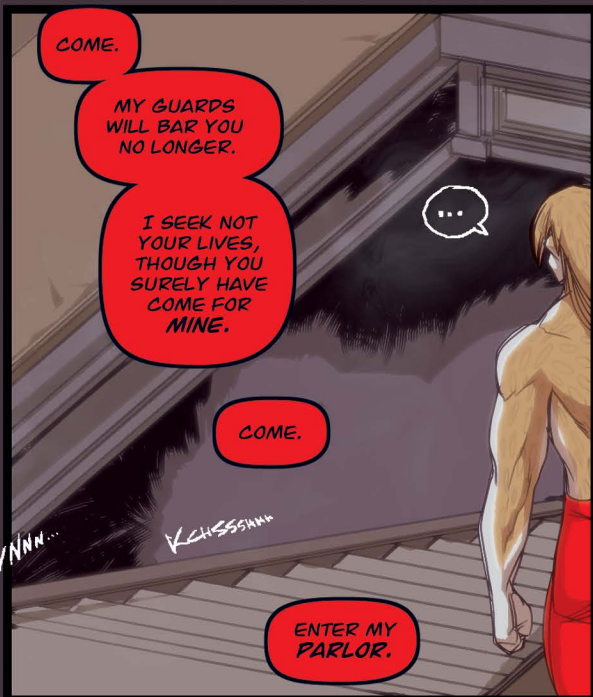
I CAN
TASTE IT
FROM
HERE.



PLEASE...
ALLOW
ME.

KLZHHH

VMMNNNN...



COME.

MY GUARDS
WILL BAR YOU
NO LONGER.

I SEEK NOT
YOUR LIVES,
THOUGH YOU
SURELY HAVE
COME FOR
MINE.

...

COME.

ENTER MY
PARLOR.



IMPRESSIVE?
I'LL NOT PRETEND
TO TAKE CREDIT.

THIS IS THE
CLOCKWORK OF
THE DWEMEOR...
THE ANCIENT
DWARVES OF
DWEOMER
SPIRE...
...THOSE WHO
STOLE THIS
MOUNTAIN FROM
MY CLAN.



THAT--
BASTARD...

I WAS LOST
FROM MY SCATTERED
PEOPLE...BUT SAVED BY
THE KINDNESS OF
THAT ONE.

SHH.
LET HIM
TALK.

THE TROPHY HANGING
IN DWARVEN COLD IRON
TO YOUR LEFT.

A LUCAVARI
OR..."LIZARD."

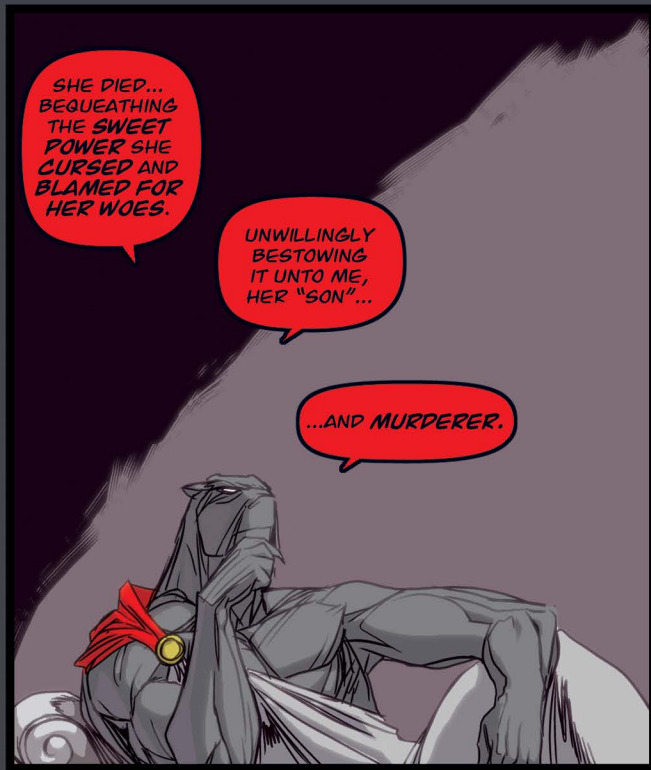
SHE
WAS THE
LAST.

THERE
EXIST NO
OTHERS.

I SUPPOSE SHE
TOOK ME IN TO
SATISFY SOME
DESPERATE
MATERNAL
CRAVING.

BUT WHAT INTERESTED
ME MOST WAS HER
SPELLCRAFT!

"MOTHER" WAS
A REAPER...
AND ALSO
THE LAST.



SHE DIED...
BEQUEATHING
THE SWEET
POWER SHE
CURSED AND
BLAMED FOR
HER WOES.

UNWILLINGLY
BESTOWING
IT UNTO ME,
HER "SON"...

...AND MURDERER.



AND THOUGH
BORN ANEW
WITH MY
MOTHER'S
PARTING
GIFT...

...I SOON
REACHED
THE LIMIT
OF MY OWN
POTENTIAL

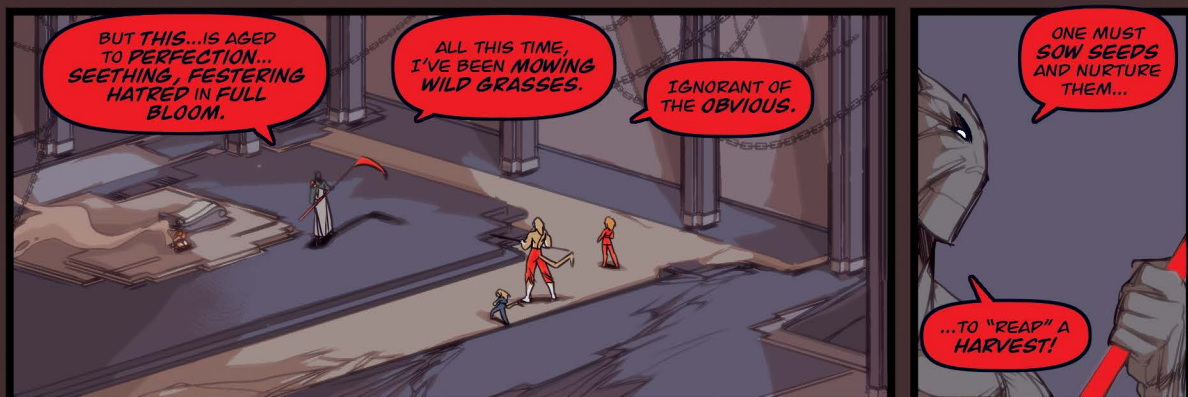


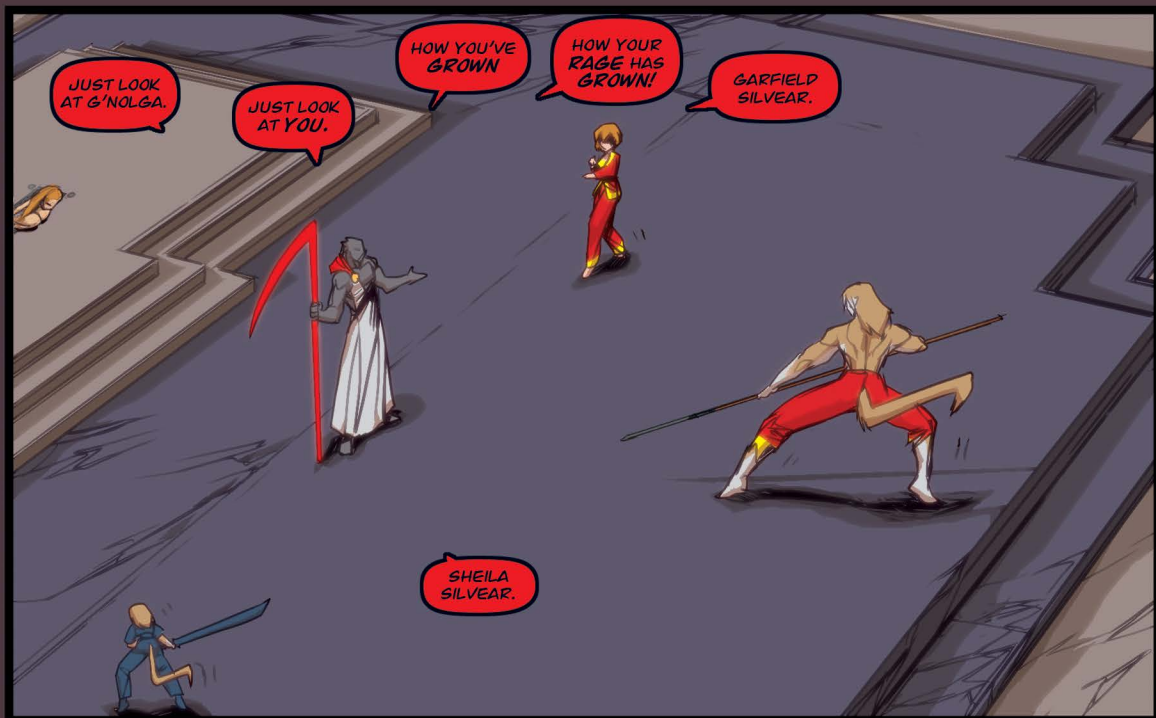
I NEVER HAD
A TUTOR.

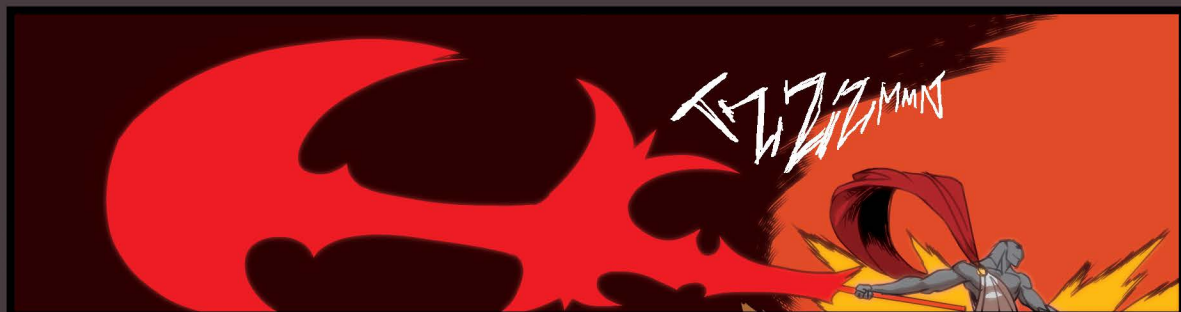
THE TRUE
STRENGTH
OF THIS
SPELLCRAFT
REMAINED
UNTAPPED.

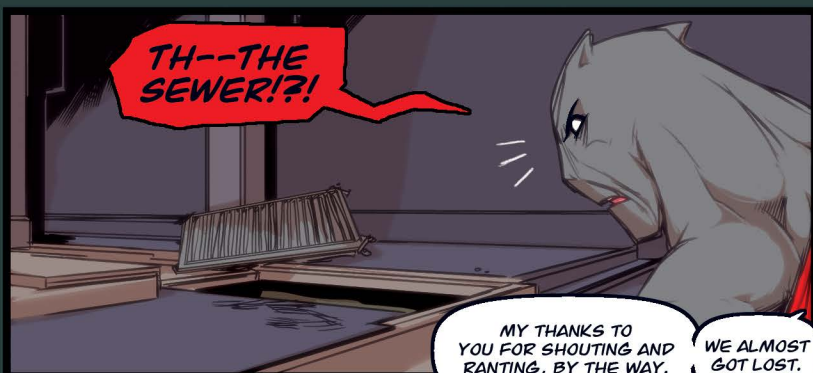
THAT IS...
UNTIL A "SEED"
I PLANTED BY
ACCIDENT
RETURNED TO
ME...

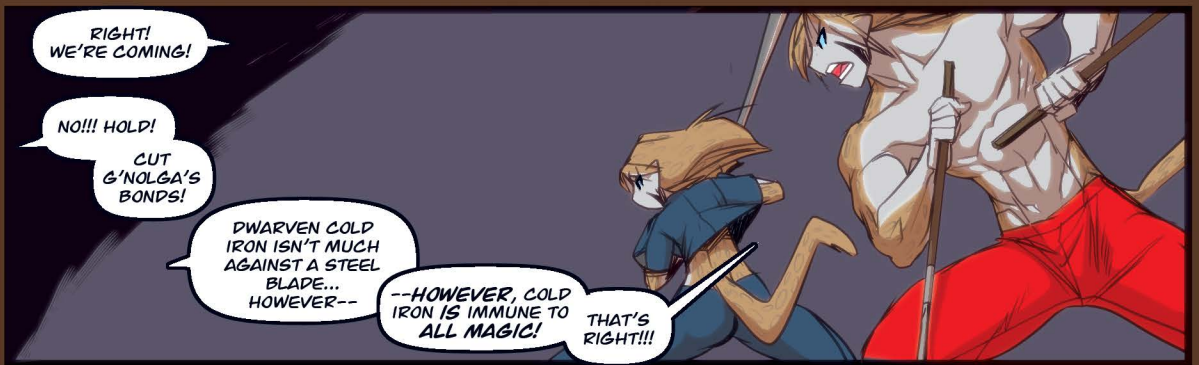
...IN FULL
BLOOM!

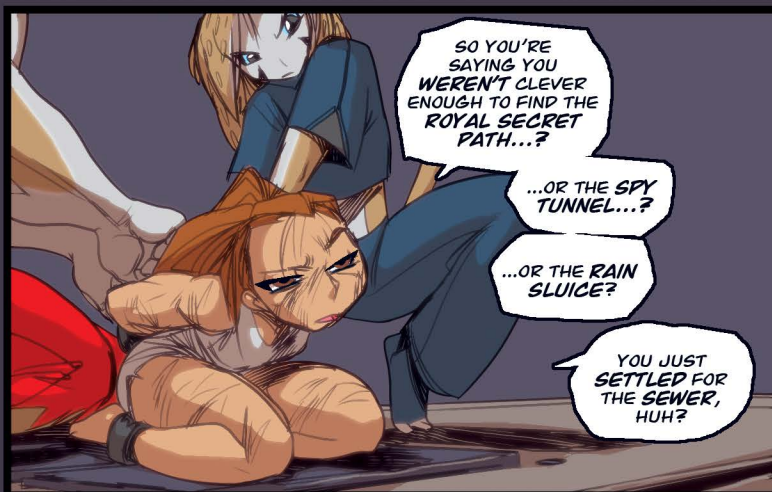
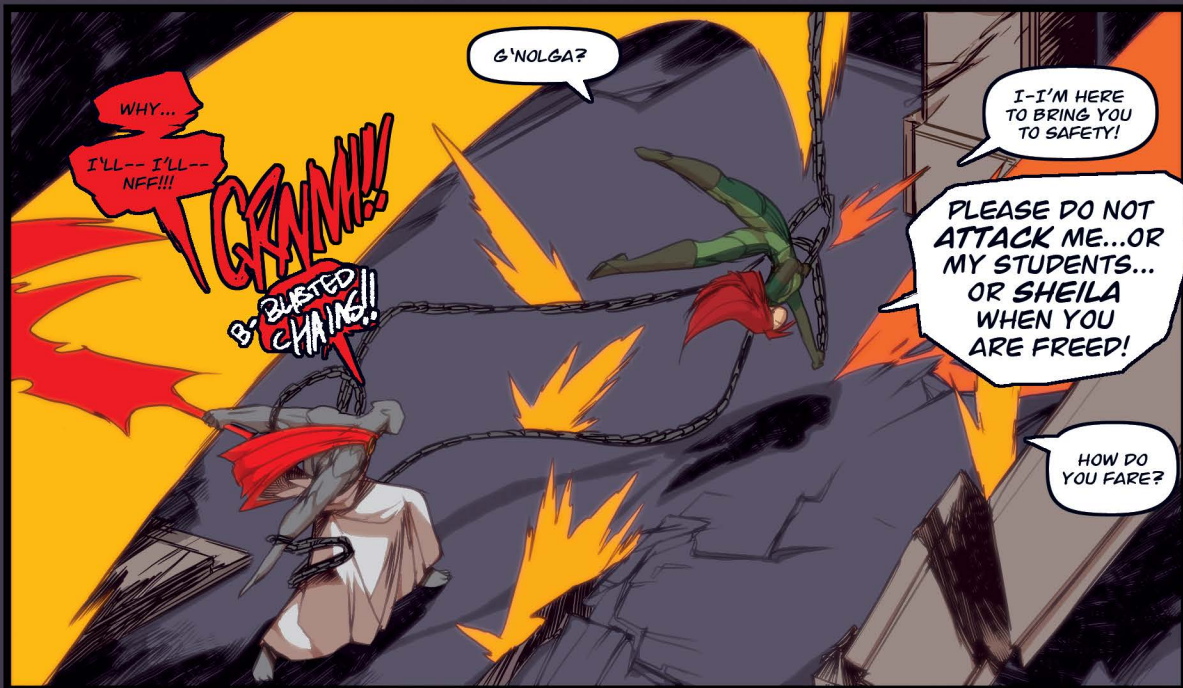


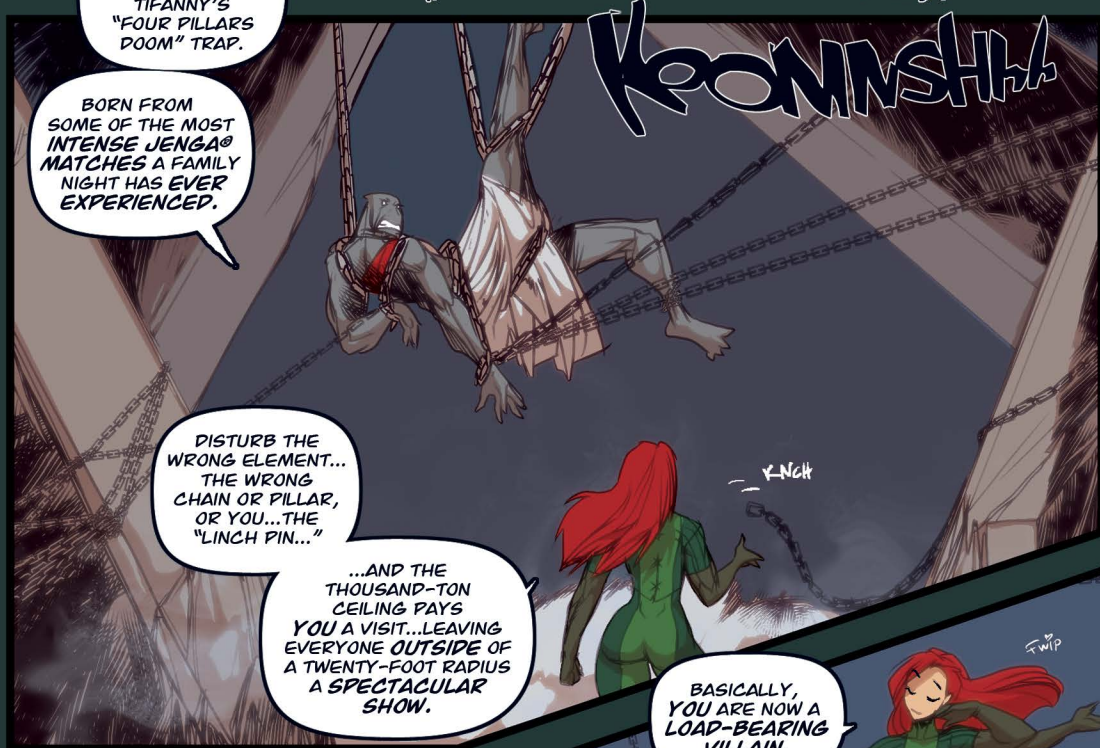
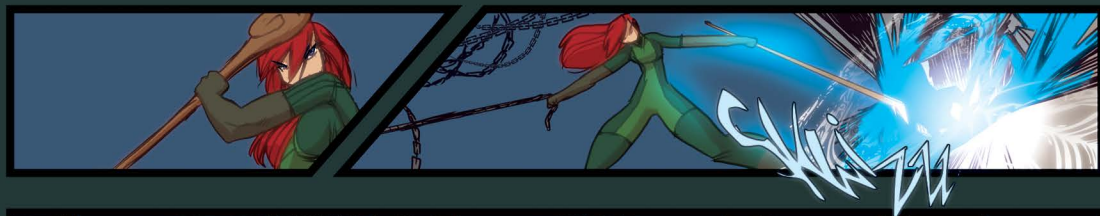




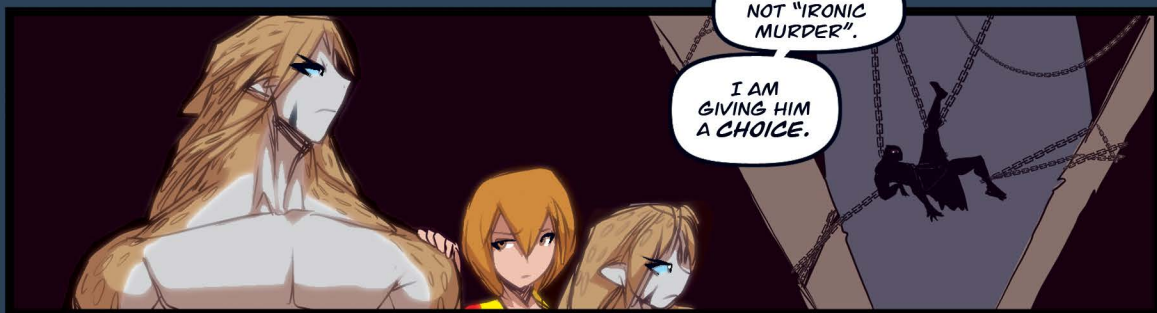
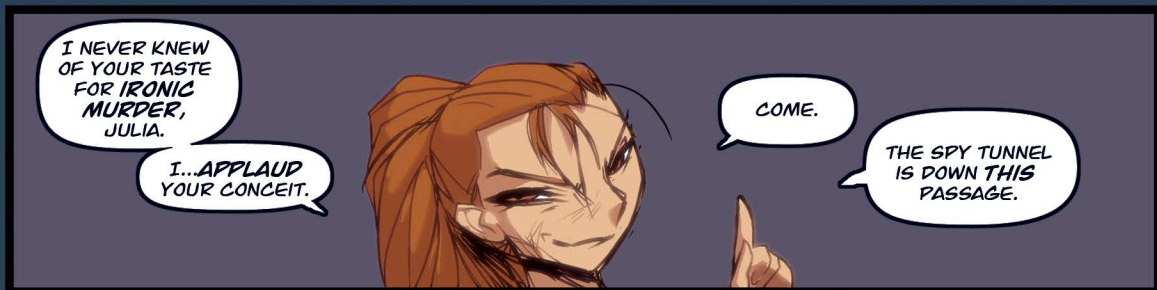
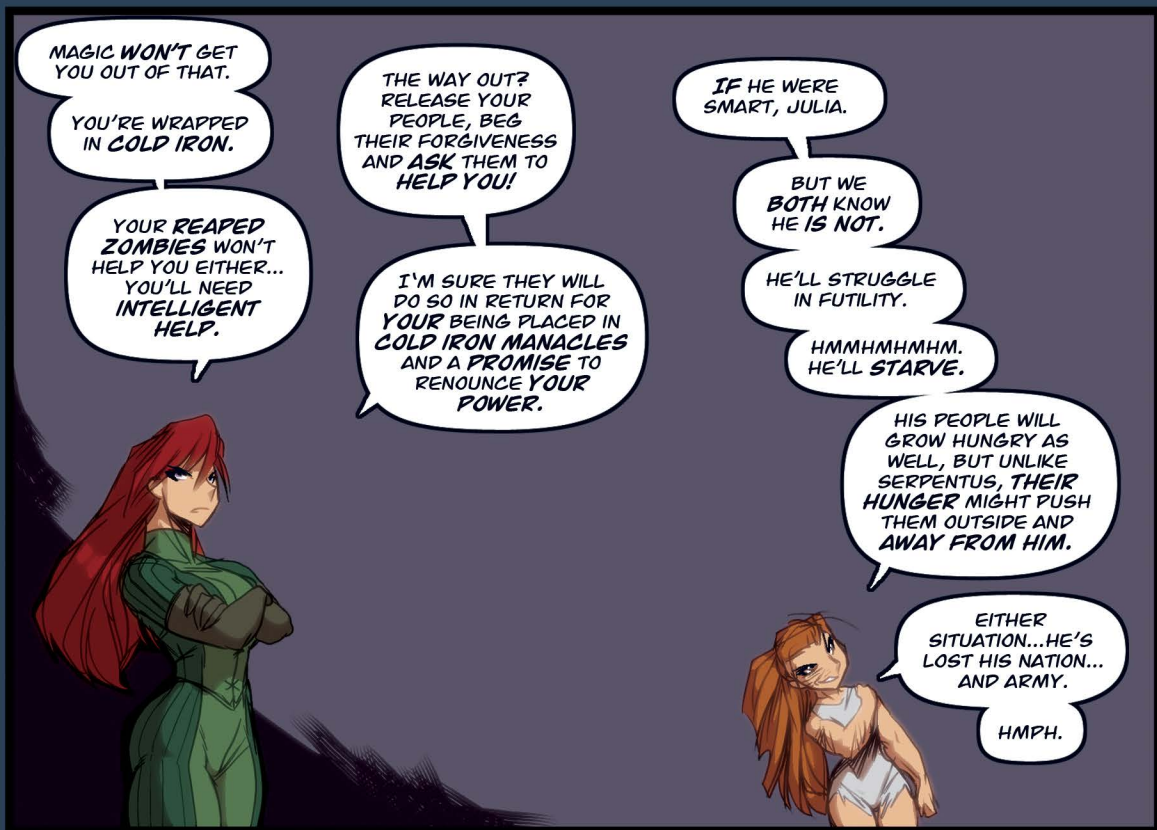








BASICALLY, YOU ARE NOW A LOAD-BEARING VILLAIN.



OH SURELY, JULIA... **SURELY**.

EPILOGUE ONE: HANZA'S REACTION

YOU MEAN TO TELL ME WE
TROMPED AROUND, LOST IN AN ORK
SEWER FOR FOUR HOURS...

...FOR NOTHING!?!?

THERE WERE
OTHER PASSAGES?!?!?

GETTING INSIDE PWEOMER
SPIRE WITH A SMALL GROUP
WAS NEVER A PROBLEM...
THAT SMALL GROUP NOT
BEING ERADICATED WAS
THE PROBLEM!

BUT YES.
YOU'RE NOW
STINKY FOR
NO GOOD
REASON.

POOR CARLA
FELL INTO A
BOG-WORM
WELL...
EYEBROW
DEEP.

CASTING
"PURGE
PEW"
(WELL, TECHNICALLY, IT'S
CALLED "PE-ODOR")

EPILOGUE 2: A GESTURE

G'NOLGA.

IF YOU ARE...

...I'M WILLING TO--
TO LET BYGONES BE
BYGO--

FRIENDSHIP? WITH YOU?!?
DON'T MAKE ME LAUGH.

AND LOSE MY
MOST WORTHY
RIVAL?

NEVER.