



MAY 12 #140
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FRED PERRY

GOLD DIGGER



MAY 2012

An aerial view of a village with traditional thatched-roof houses built on a hillside. A river flows through the valley, and there are terraced fields in the foreground. The sky is a deep blue.

WELL NOW...
IT SEEMS I
OWE MY DEAR
BIG BROTHER
A KAPOWIE
TODAY.

WH-WHAT?
WHY!?

IT'S THE HARVEST
SEASON FESTIVAL...
IT'S BEEN YEARS
SINCE WE'VE BOTH
BEEN HOME TO
CELEBRATE WITH
MOM AND DAD...
AND YOU'RE A MOODY
LITTLE STORM CLOUD
THREATENING TO
DROWN MY
PARADE!

LUCKY FOR YOU,
IT NEVER RAINS
DURING THE HARVEST
SEASON HERE IN
JAG'S LAIR!

Two women are standing on a rocky cliff edge. The woman on the left is wearing a blue and green outfit, and the woman on the right is wearing a red and yellow outfit. They are both looking down at something off-camera.

IF I WANTED TO SPEND MY LEAVE
WITH A GRUMP, I WOULD HAVE
GONE WITH THE COMMANDER TO
MEET OUR OL' XERCIE THE
"WERE-LEMMING"!

RELAX,
WILL YOU?

SORRY...
IT'S JUST
THAT...

...COMING HOME
ALWAYS MAKES ME
FEEL...GUILTY...

...THAT I'M NOT
HERE HELPING
OUT AND--

WAIT--
THAT CRACK ABOUT
COUNCILOR XERCIE...
WHAT DO YOU MEAN
"WERE-LEMMING"?



YOU WERE OFF BEING TUTORED BY ARMSMASTER JULIA WHEN OUR FAMILY MOVED FROM THE RESERVATION TO JAG'S LAIR, SO YOU DIDN'T GO TO SCHOOL HERE.

MS. BIG SHOT XERCIE WAS IN MY "BASIC EDUCATION" CUB KINDE.

BACK THEN, SHE WAS THE PUNY LITTLE TIGER CUB WHO WAS ALWAYS PICKING FIGHTS WITH THE BIGGEST BULLIES!

ESPECIALLY WITH BULLIES WHOSE FAMILIES WERE NEW TO JAG'S LAIR, SO THEY THOUGHT THEY COULD MUSCLE IN AND VICTIMIZE THE SMALLER, WEAKER KIDS.



WELL, THOSE FIGHTS ALWAYS ENDED--

--WITH XERCIE PULLING HER VICTIM INTO A WATER WELL, ONTO THE STREET AS A PASSING CART WHEELED BY...

...OR OFF A STEEP CLIFF!

BEING WERE-CUBS EQUIPPED WITH MAGICAL REGENERATION AURAS MEANT THOSE "ACCIDENTS" WERE NEVER FATAL, BUT MAN, DID THEY HURT!



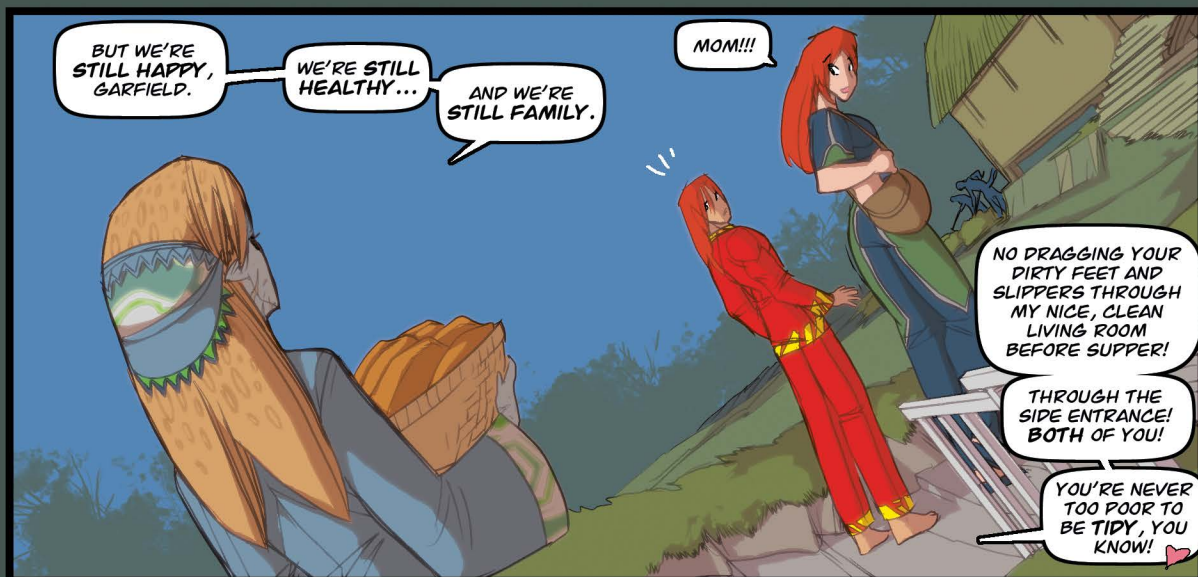
STILL, XERCIE ALWAYS WALKED AWAY FIRST... AND WITH A GRIN...

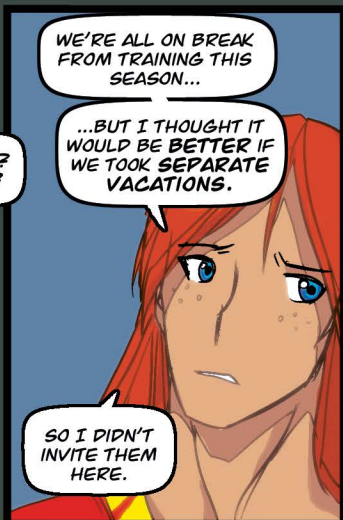
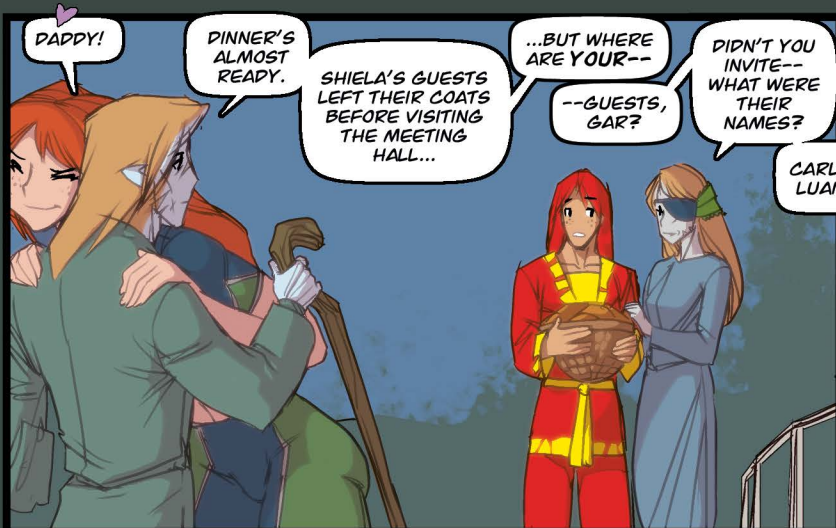
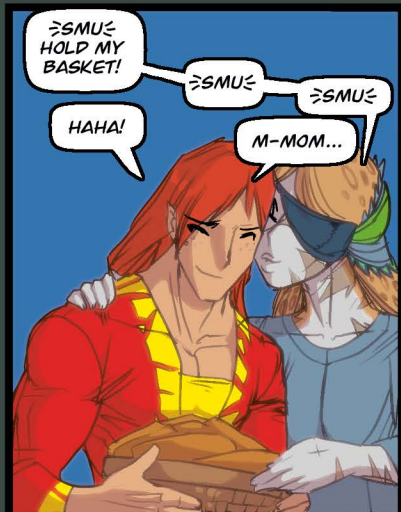
AFTER A WHILE, BULLIES STOPPED PICKING ON THE WEAKER KIDS.

NO ONE WANTED TO TANGLE WITH THE "WERE-LEMMING"!

I SEE.

HENCE THE STEWARD OF JAG'S LAIR'S CHILDHOOD NICKNAME.







OH NO, SHIELA.

YOU'VE GOT GAR ALL WRONG, DEAR.

GAR'S DREAMING ABOUT BRINGING "PROSPERITY" TO JAG'S LAIR...

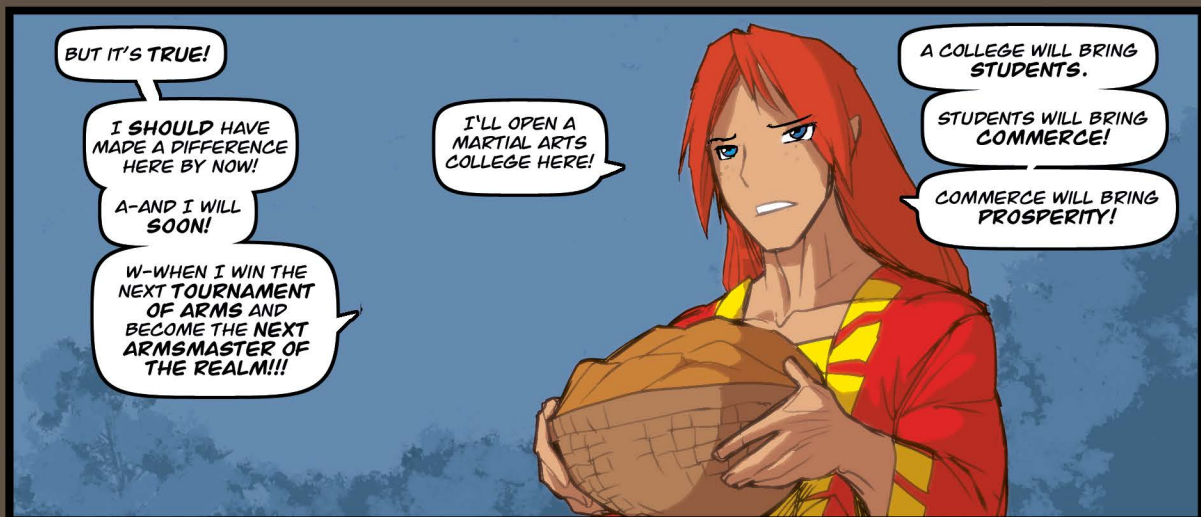
...BUT HE'S FRUSTRATED BY HIS LACK OF PROGRESS.

FRUSTRATED AND INSECURE.

HM-HM... GAR WANTS TO BRING LUAN AND CARLA TO A HUGE, METROPOLITAN UTOPIA...

...AND SAY TO THEM, "SEE ALL THIS? I HELPED TO BUILD IT!"

UGH... I FORGOT HOW YOU GUYS DOUBLE-TEAM YOUR LECTURES!



BUT IT'S TRUE!

I SHOULD HAVE MADE A DIFFERENCE HERE BY NOW!

A-AND I WILL SOON!

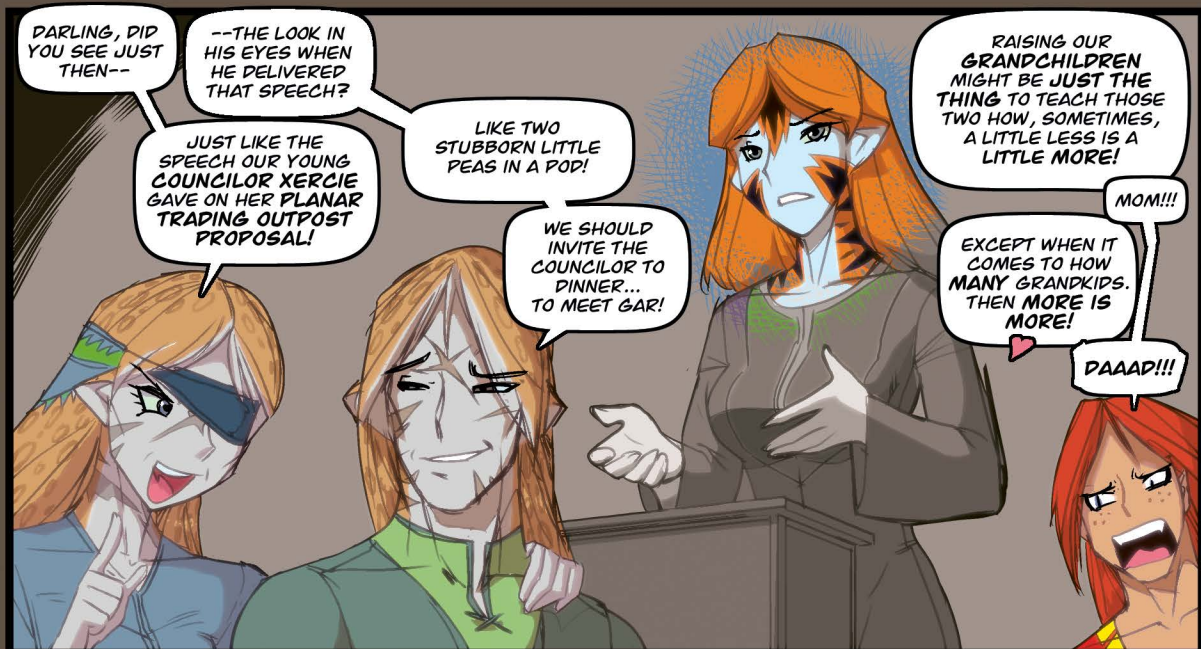
W-WHEN I WIN THE NEXT TOURNAMENT OF ARMS AND BECOME THE NEXT ARMSMASTER OF THE REALM!!!

I'LL OPEN A MARTIAL ARTS COLLEGE HERE!

A COLLEGE WILL BRING STUDENTS.

STUDENTS WILL BRING COMMERCE!

COMMERCE WILL BRING PROSPERITY!



DARLING, DID YOU SEE JUST THEN--

--THE LOOK IN HIS EYES WHEN HE DELIVERED THAT SPEECH?

JUST LIKE THE SPEECH OUR YOUNG COUNCILOR XERCIE GAVE ON HER PLANAR TRADING OUTPOST PROPOSAL!

LIKE TWO STUBBORN LITTLE PEAS IN A POD!

WE SHOULD INVITE THE COUNCILOR TO DINNER... TO MEET GAR!

RAISING OUR GRANDCHILDREN MIGHT BE JUST THE THING TO TEACH THOSE TWO HOW, SOMETIMES, A LITTLE LESS IS A LITTLE MORE!

MOM!!!

EXCEPT WHEN IT COMES TO HOW MANY GRANDKIDS. THEN MORE IS MORE!

DAAAAD!!!



LOOK...THERE ARE OTHER REASONS WHY WE NEED MORE RESOURCES... MORE GOLD...

WITH PROSPERITY, WE CAN AFFORD SECURITY!

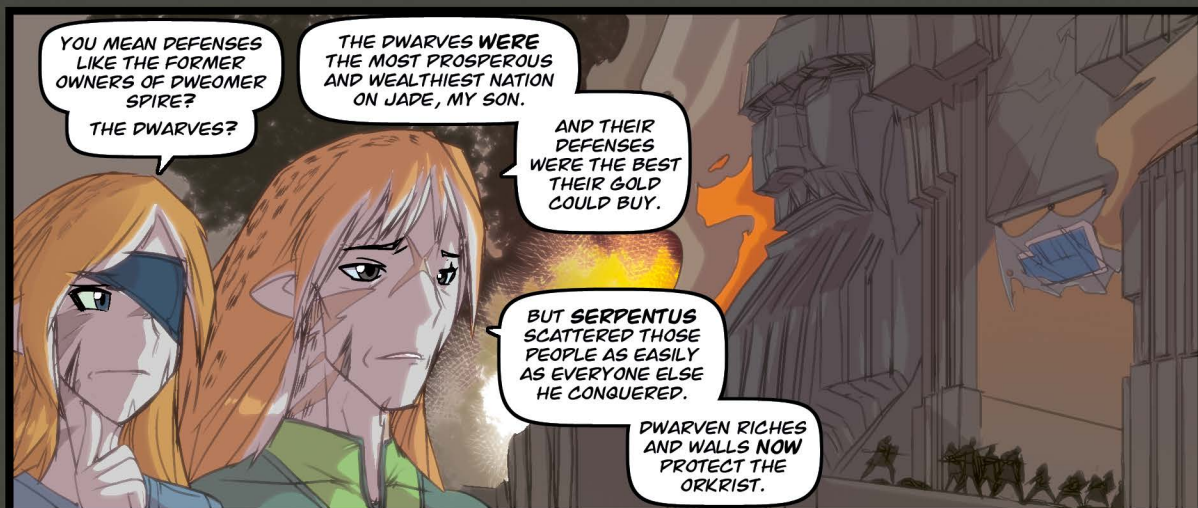
THREE SCORE YEARS AGO, SERPENTUS AND HIS HORDE OF ORKRIST TOOK EVERYTHING AWAY FROM US!

NONE OF THE WERE-CAT TRIBES ESCAPED.

OUR TRIBE WAS NEARLY WIPED OUT!

JAG'S LAIR MAY EXIST IN A CONTINENTAL MAGE-POCKET, BUT IT'S JUST AS VULNERABLE AS OUR OLD HOME ON THE NORTHERN LOWLANDS OF JADE-REALM, WHERE WE'RE ANCHORED!

WE NEED DEFENSES! A STANDING MILITIA!



YOU MEAN DEFENSES LIKE THE FORMER OWNERS OF DWEOMER SPIRE?

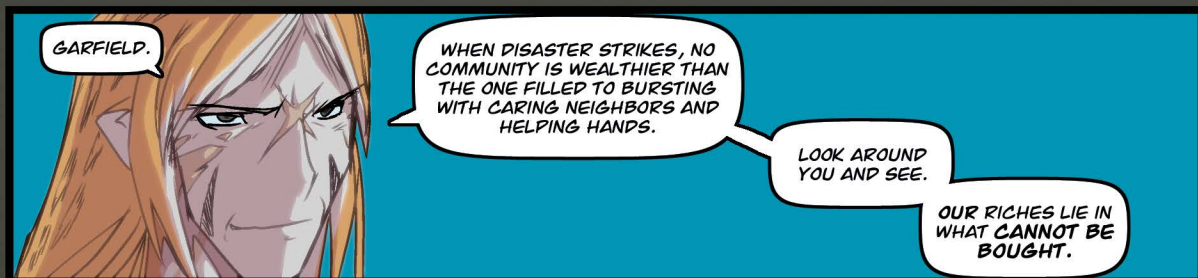
THE DWARVES?

THE DWARVES WERE THE MOST PROSPEROUS AND WEALTHIEST NATION ON JADE, MY SON.

AND THEIR DEFENSES WERE THE BEST THEIR GOLD COULD BUY.

BUT SERPENTUS SCATTERED THOSE PEOPLE AS EASILY AS EVERYONE ELSE HE CONQUERED.

DWARVEN RICHES AND WALLS NOW PROTECT THE ORKRIST.



GARFIELD.

WHEN DISASTER STRIKES, NO COMMUNITY IS WEALTHIER THAN THE ONE FILLED TO BURSTING WITH CARING NEIGHBORS AND HELPING HANDS.

LOOK AROUND YOU AND SEE.

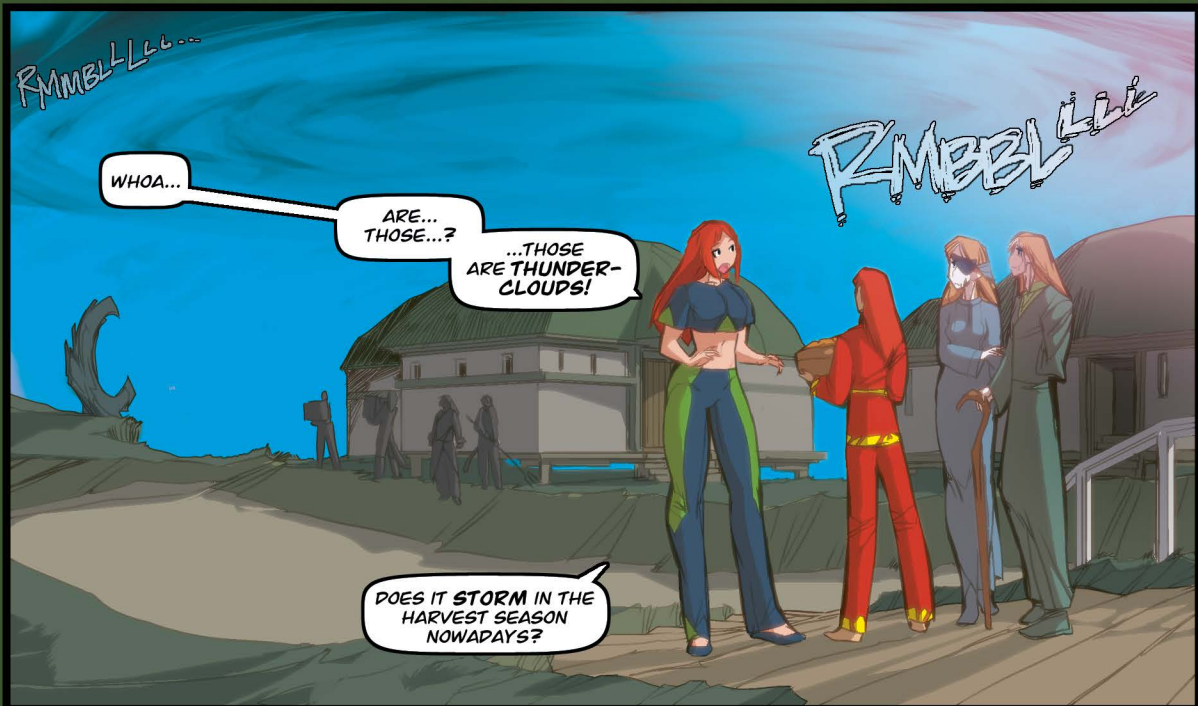
OUR RICHES LIE IN WHAT CANNOT BE BOUGHT.



DAD...I TAKE YOUR MEANING, BUT...

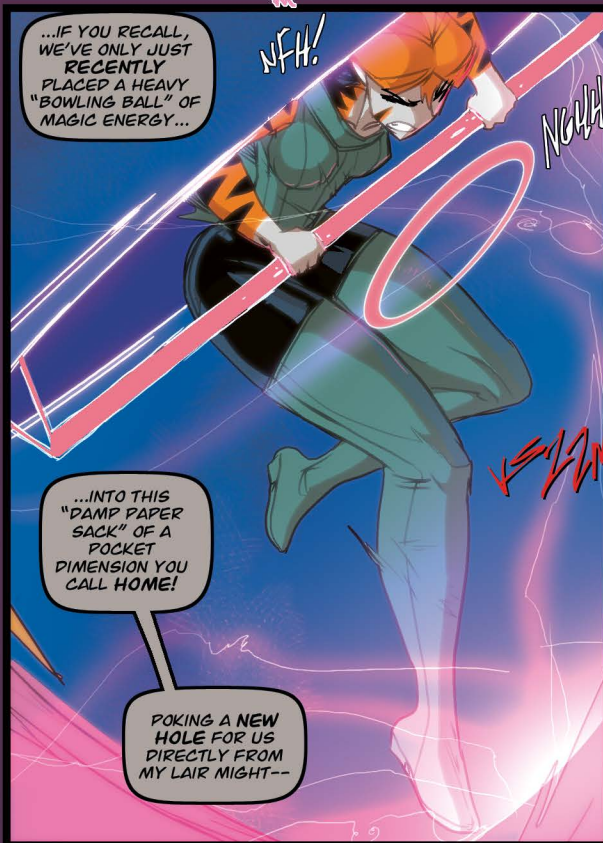
Rmmmm...
...WAIT.

WAS THAT... THUNDER?





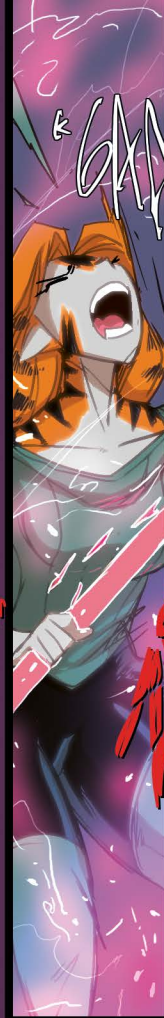
CAREFUL NOW,
XERCIE...



...IF YOU RECALL,
WE'VE ONLY JUST
RECENTLY
PLACED A HEAVY
"BOWLING BALL" OF
MAGIC ENERGY...

...INTO THIS
"DAMP PAPER
SACK" OF A
POCKET
DIMENSION YOU
CALL HOME!

POKING A NEW
HOLE FOR US
DIRECTLY FROM
MY LAIR MIGHT--



--CAUSE
A LITTLE
FEEDBACK.



TSK.

UNTIDY.

BUT EFFECTIVE.



ESPECIALLY SINCE
EVERY OTHER
PLANAR CORRIDOR
INTO JADE IS NOW
BEING GUARDED
BY ENCHANTMENTS
THAT LISTEN FOR
MY AURA!

TRUE, I HAVE THE
RESOURCES TO
SNEAK PAST THE
SENTRIES THAT
PROTECT THIS
PLANE...

...BUT ONLY A NATIVE
BALANCE MAGIC-
USER OF YOUR
CALIBRE IS ATTUNED
ENOUGH TO FIND
UNCHARTED WEAK
POINTS AND CRACKS
IN THE DIMENSIONAL
FABRIC.

SO THIS
DEMONSTRATION
OF YOUR
ABILITIES WAS
IMPRESSIVE...

...AND YET
CONFUSING!

WE ALREADY
HAD A SECRET
PASSAGE FROM MY
REALM TO YOUR
"JAG'S LAIR".

WHY MAKE THIS
NEW ONE?





EXCELLENT NOTION!
LET'S DISCUSS
EVERYTHING OPENLY,
SHALL WE?

YOU'RE BOTH MEMBERS
OF THE NORTHERN
EDGE-GUARD?

MARSHALLS OF
YOUR REGION?

THEN THIS
SHOULD BE
MOST
INTERESTING
TO Y--

FOUND
ANYTHING,
MIKKI?



NOPE...
JUST A
FEW GOLD
COINS,
MYNNY.

COPS
SELDOM
CARRY
LOOT.



I AM TRYING TO HAVE A
CONVERSATION...

BUT WE WERE
BORED!

S-SORRY, MR.
DREADWING...

...WE
FOUND A
FEW
COINS?

WHAT
DREADWING
SEES...

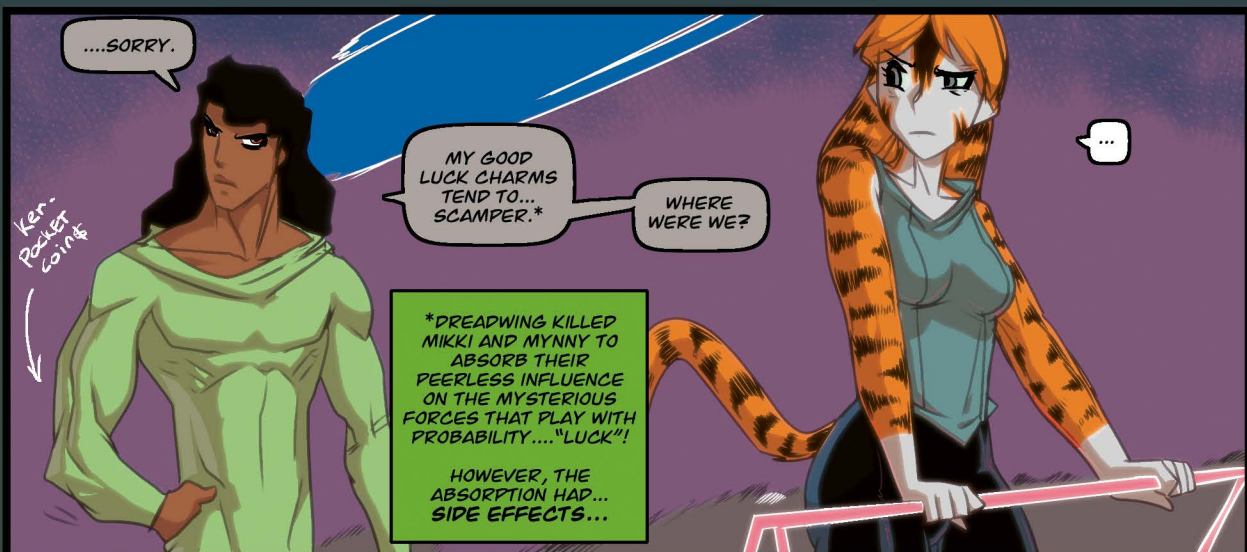


JUST--JUST STAY IN AND
DON'T COME OUT UNTIL
YOU'RE CALLED...

...NO!

SCRATCH THAT!
DON'T COME OUT!
EVER!!!

WHAT EVERYONE
ELSE SEES...



....SORRY.

MY GOOD
LUCK CHARMS
TEND TO...
SCAMPER.*

WHERE
WERE WE?

*DREADWING KILLED
MIKKI AND MYNNY TO
ABSORB THEIR
PEERLESS INFLUENCE
ON THE MYSTERIOUS
FORCES THAT PLAY WITH
PROBABILITY...."LUCK"!

HOWEVER, THE
ABSORPTION HAD...
SIDE EFFECTS...

ker-
pocket
going







AS FOR CALLING FOR ASSISTANCE...

NO GOOD.

THIS LINK CRYSTAL CAN'T GET A PULSE OUT OF JAG'S LAIR.

WE'RE ISOLATED.



XERCIE MUST HAVE DISRUPTED THE MOON GATE WITH HER BALANCE MAGIC!

AND IF THIS PRIMARY PATH IS CLOSED, ALL MINOR CORRIDORS MUST BE SEALED TOO!

WE'LL HAVE TO WAIT FOR THE ASTRAL RE-ALIGNMENT AT TWILIGHT.

WE CAN'T WAIT THAT LONG, GAR!!!

"WE'VE GOT TO FIND ANOTHER WAY TO REACH XERCIE!!!"



I MUST ADMIT TO YOUR SKILL IN WIELDING THAT MANA CALIBRATOR THUS FAR, COUNCILOR.

YOU'D BE SURPRISED HOW MANY MAGES FUMBLE ONCE THEIR MAGIC IS ENHANCED BY A PROPER FOCUS.

LOANING IT TO YOU FROM MY ARTIFACT ARMORY WASN'T A WASTE AFTER ALL.

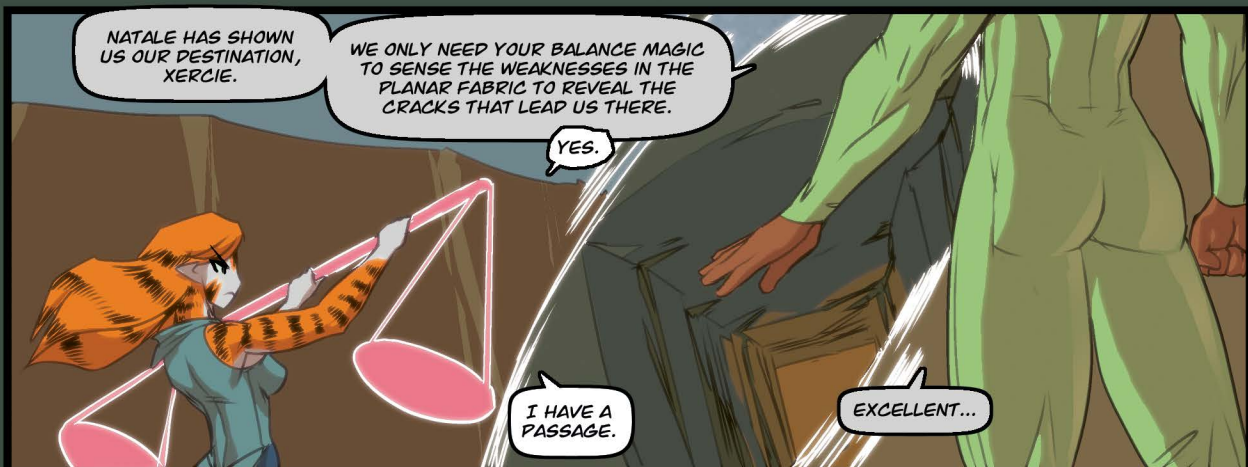


OH, DEAR. THAT LOOK.

SUCH RAGE.

IT'S ALMOST AS IF I JUST BETRAYED, DECEIVED AND THEN IMPRISONED EVERYONE WHO HELD FAITH IN YOUR AUTHORITY!

NO. WAIT. THAT WAS YOU!





ACCORDING TO HER, THESE UNSTABLE, UNCHARTED ENDO-PLANAR PASSAGES ARE DANGEROUS.

EVEN IF SHE WEREN'T INJURED, CORSICA WOULD HAVE NEEDED AN EXTRA BALANCE MAGIC-USER FOR THIS RESCUE.

YES.

BALANCE MAGIC CAN ONLY SAFELY MAINTAIN ONE PORTAL AT A TIME.



OTHERWISE...

...DEADLY ACCIDENTS COULD OCCUR...



HERE!

THE END OF THIS TUNNEL IS FOCUSED DIRECTLY ON OUR DESTINATION!

BUT THAT AREA IS FILLED WITH MAGIC-DISRUPTING COLD IRON CHAINS...

IF WE STEP THROUGH, IT WILL BE IMPOSSIBLE CAST AN ESCAPE SPELL!

WHICH IS WHY WE'RE GOING THROUGH THE TROUBLE OF THIS ENDO-PLANAR TUNNEL, NATALE.



AND WHILE XERCIE ATTENDS TO THE TUNNEL...I THINK THIS IS AN OPPORTUNE MOMENT FOR US TO HAVE A PRIVATE CHAT...NATALE.

M-MY LORD?

YOU'RE AWARE, OF COURSE, OF THE CONDITIONS THAT HAVE CREATED THE NEED FOR THIS CAMPAIGN?



YES.

THE ANCIENT ONE HAS VANISHED.

WE'RE MOVING AGAINST HER SANCTUARY HERE ON JADE.

WE'RE HERE TO PLUNDER HER COSMIC SECRETS BEFORE SHE RETURNS.

I AM ALSO AWARE THAT MY MATERIAL FORM'S RESEMBLANCE TO THE ANCIENT ONE'S APPEARANCE IS... SUSPICIOUS.

ESPECIALLY SINCE YOU'VE ONLY JUST SEEN ME.

BUT MY PHYSIQUE IS MERELY A PARAGON DERIVATIVE!

A COMMON MAGEND CREATION PHENOMENON.

GINA DIGGERS, THE ALLEGED PRECURSOR OF THE ANCIENT ONE, IS A LIVING PARAGON OF EARTH-BORN ARCHAEOLOGY.

I AM AN ARCHAEOLOGY AND ARCHITECTURE TALENT MAGEND.

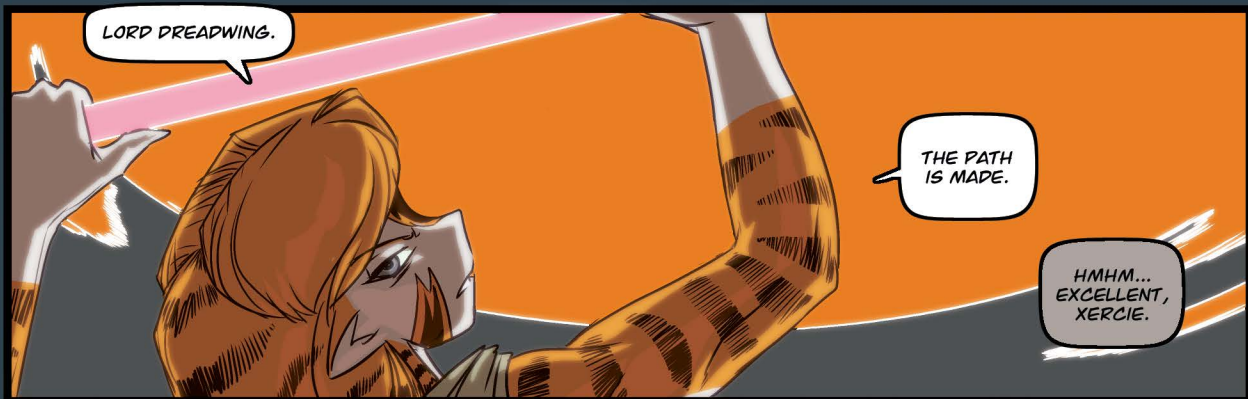
IF THE SUMMONER BROUGHT FORTH A DANCE TALENT MAGEND, SHE MIGHT HAVE LOOKED LIKE PAULA ABDU--

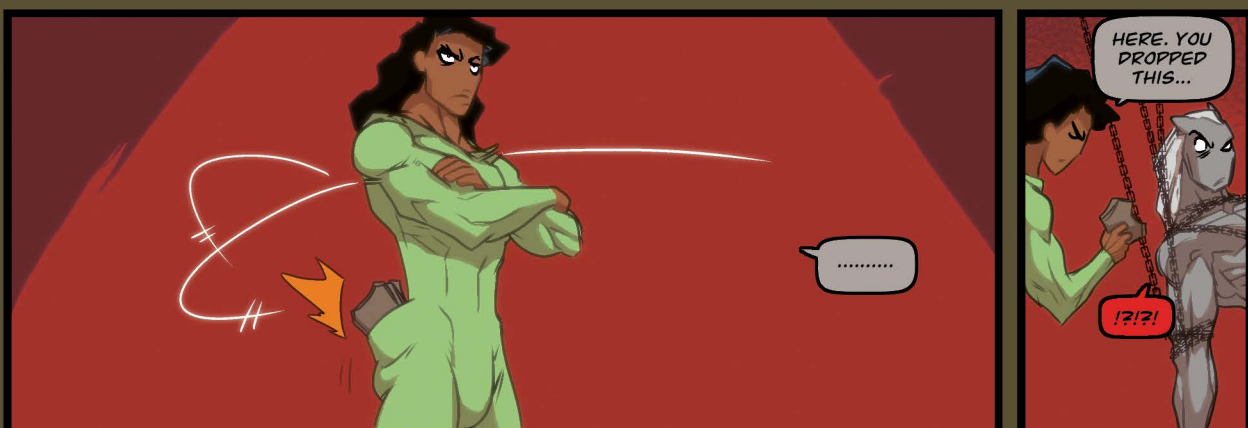
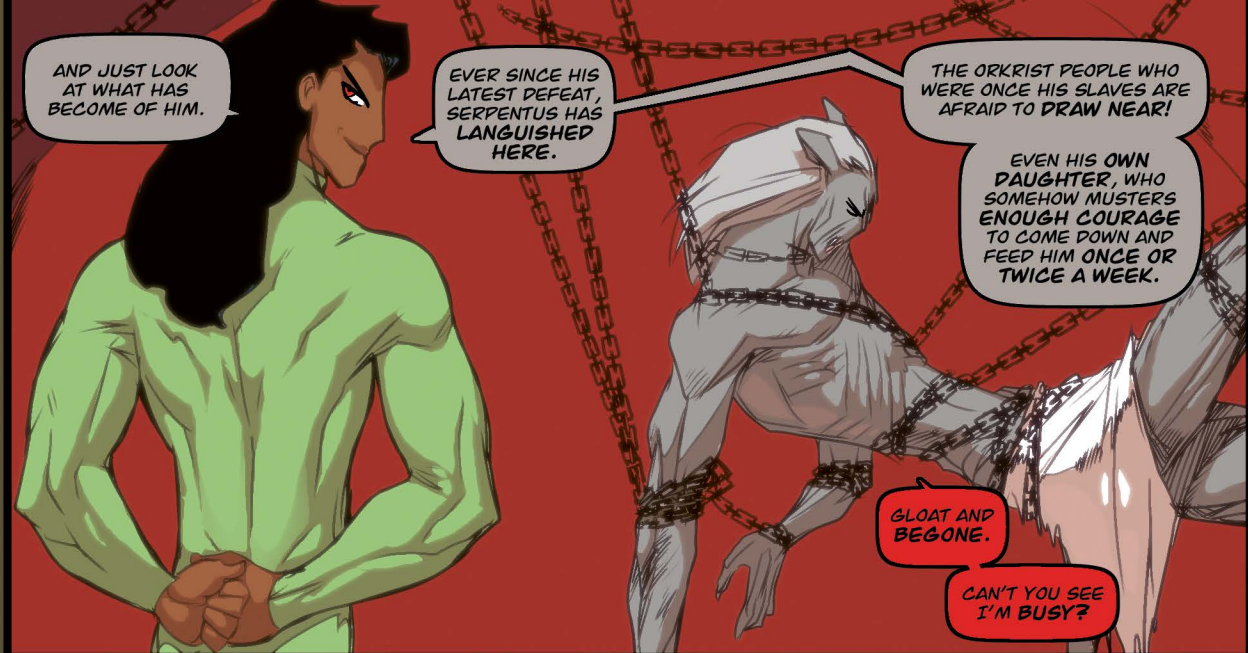


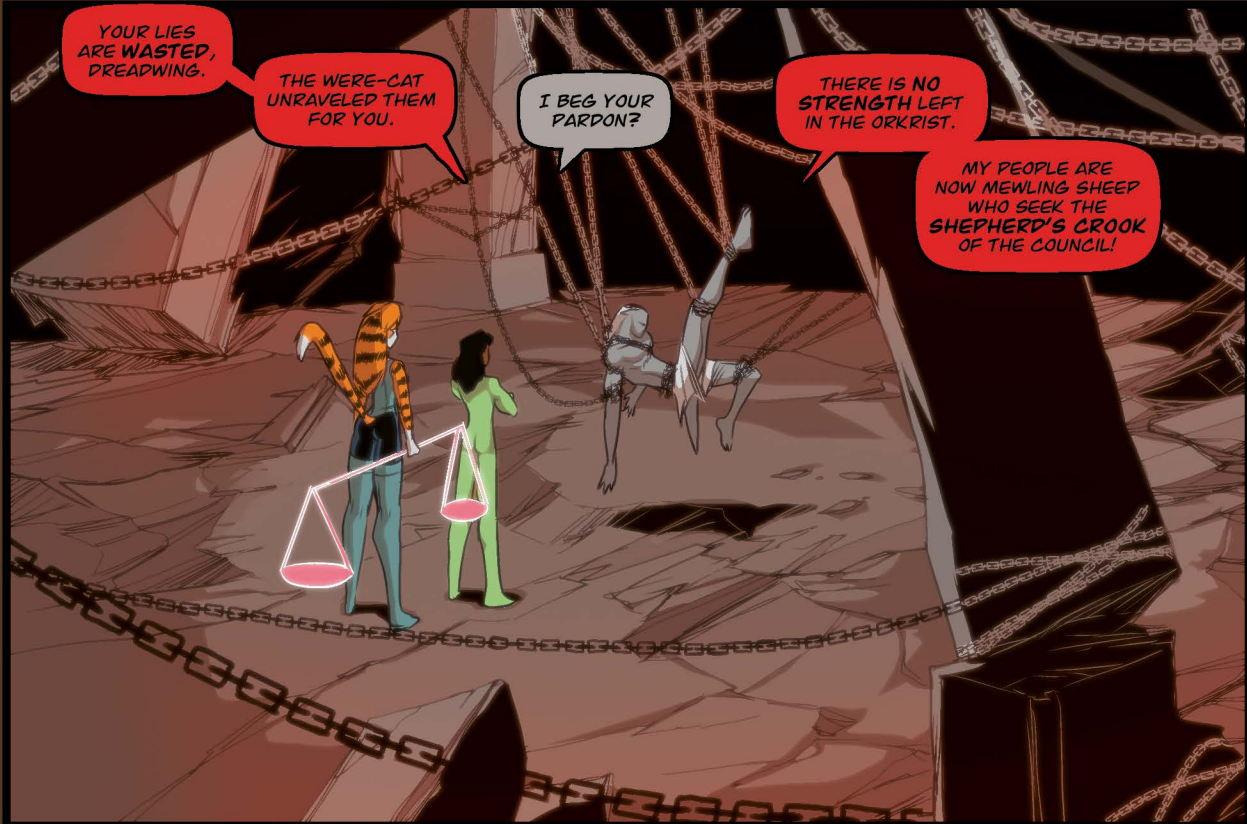
HM.

I SUPPOSE YOU'RE RIGHT.

YOU'RE DEFINITELY NOT THE ANCIENT ONE IN DISGUISE.







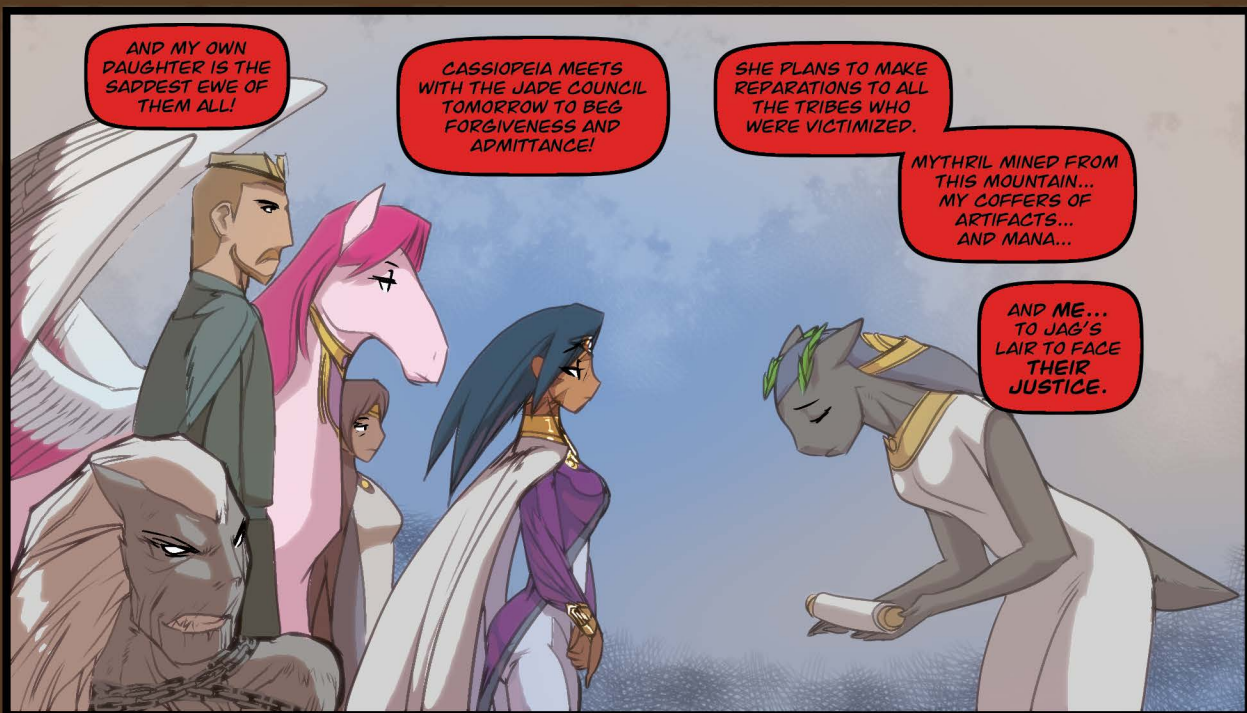
YOUR LIES
ARE WASTED,
DREADWING.

THE WERE-CAT
UNRAVELED THEM
FOR YOU.

I BEG YOUR
PARDON?

THERE IS NO
STRENGTH LEFT
IN THE ORKRIST.

MY PEOPLE ARE
NOW MEWLING SHEEP
WHO SEEK THE
SHEPHERD'S CROOK
OF THE COUNCIL!



AND MY OWN
DAUGHTER IS THE
SADDEST EWE OF
THEM ALL!

CASSIOPEIA MEETS
WITH THE JADE COUNCIL
TOMORROW TO BEG
FORGIVENESS AND
ADMITTANCE!

SHE PLANS TO MAKE
REPARATIONS TO ALL
THE TRIBES WHO
WERE VICTIMIZED.

MYTHRIL MINED FROM
THIS MOUNTAIN...
MY COFFERS OF
ARTIFACTS...
AND MANA...

AND ME...
TO JAG'S LAIR TO FACE
THEIR
JUSTICE.



SO IF YOU
WANTED TO
RESCUE ME,
XERCIE COULD
HAVE SIMPLY
WAITED A DAY
AND PLUCKED
ME FROM HER
DUNGEON WITH
A TURN OF
HER KEY!

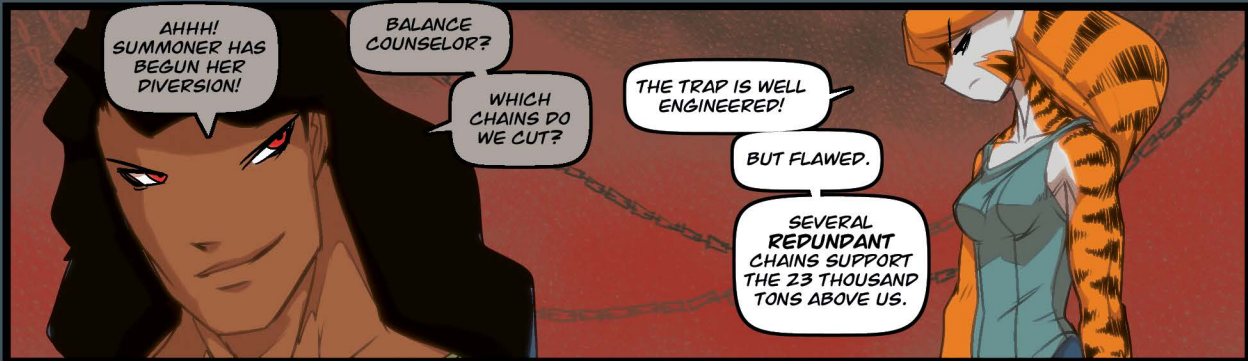
I SEE...

AND WHILE NOT THE
EQUAL TO MY OFFER,
SUCH TREASURE WOULD
BE A CONSIDERABLE
BOON!

XERCIE DIDN'T
NEED A PACT WITH
ME AFTER ALL!

AH, WELL...
A DEAL IS A
DEAL.

XcH000mmmm



AHHH!
SUMMONER HAS
BEGUN HER
DIVERSION!

BALANCE
COUNSELOR?

WHICH
CHAINS DO
WE CUT?

THE TRAP IS WELL
ENGINEERED!

BUT FLAWED.

SEVERAL
REDUNDANT
CHAINS SUPPORT
THE 23 THOUSAND
TONS ABOVE US.



FIRST, CUT
THIS LINK.

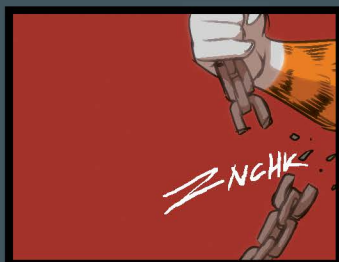


NOW THIS.



AND
FINALLY...

...BELOW
MY FIST.



I'M--
I'M FREE!!!

SPLENDID
WORK, XERCIE.

OUR ENDEAVOR
HAS SUCCEEDED!



OUR GEAS
HAS ENDED.



THIS CALLS
FOR A...
"CELEBRATION!"

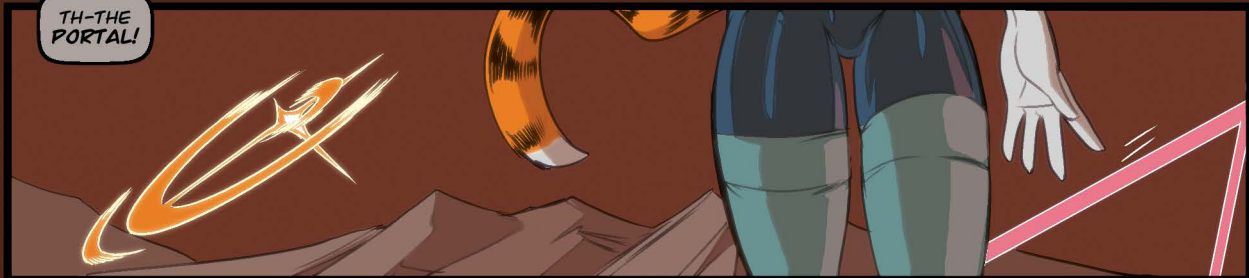
ACTUALLY, LORD
DREADWING...



...I WAS THINKING
OF DEMONSTRATING
HOW I "CELEBRATED"
WITH BULLIES LIKE
YOU BACK IN THE
OLD DAYS.

BACK WHEN THEY
CALLED ME "XERCIE
THE WERE-LEMMING!"

TH-THE
PORTAL!



YOU LITTLE
FOOL!!!

THESE COLD IRON
CHAINS DISRUPT
MAGIC!

WITH SO MANY IN THIS
LOCATION, THERE IS NO
WAY TO OPEN ANOTHER
PASSAGE FROM HERE!

WHEN SERPENTUS
SLIPPED FREE, I FELT
THE MYMIOR I
BARGAINED FOR
UNLOCK ITS MANA
TREASURE BACK IN
JAG'S LAIR!



ONE OF THE FARM
DRUIDS WILL NOTICE...

...JAG'S LAIR
WILL PROSPER
WITHOUT ME!

NO...





WE...
WE LIVE...

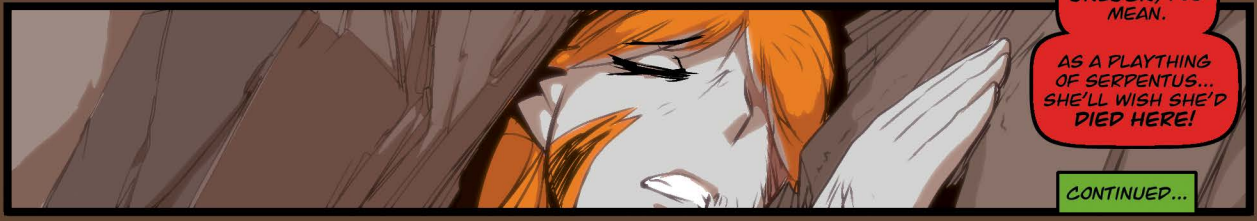
HM-HM...
IT APPEARS SO.
FORTUNE SMILES.

NGH.

AND THE
WERE-CAT?

EVEN A REGENERATION AURA
WON'T SAVE A HEART THAT IS
TOO CRUSHED TO BEAT.

SHE SURVIVES.
HER LUCK WAS IN
HER PROXIMITY
TO ME!



UNLUCK, YOU
MEAN.

AS A PLAYTHING
OF SERPENTUS...
SHE'LL WISH SHE'D
DIED HERE!

CONTINUED...