

# WITCH OF THE RUINS

by Mattie Courtney





WHAT'S  
HAPPENING  
TO ME?

THIS WASN'T  
PART OF OUR  
AGREEMENT!

YOUR FATE  
IS SEALED,  
OUR BOND,  
COMPLETE.

THE TIME  
OF BEASTS  
HAS COME  
AGAIN!



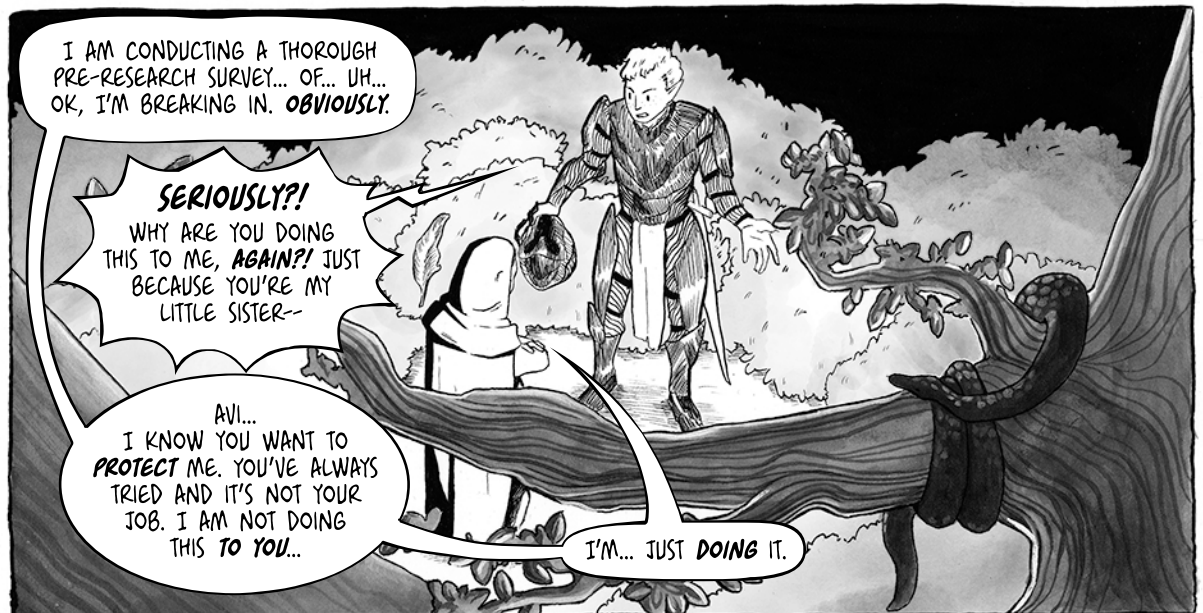
3 DAYS EARLIER...

Meilwydd. My once peaceful home.  
Vast, ancient and thrumming with  
secrets and nameless magic.

The newly-discovered cavern was so close. It  
wouldn't be long before the Wardens came to lock  
the site down... but for once, I got there first.

OH,  
NO YOU  
DON'T!

Well, I almost  
got there first.



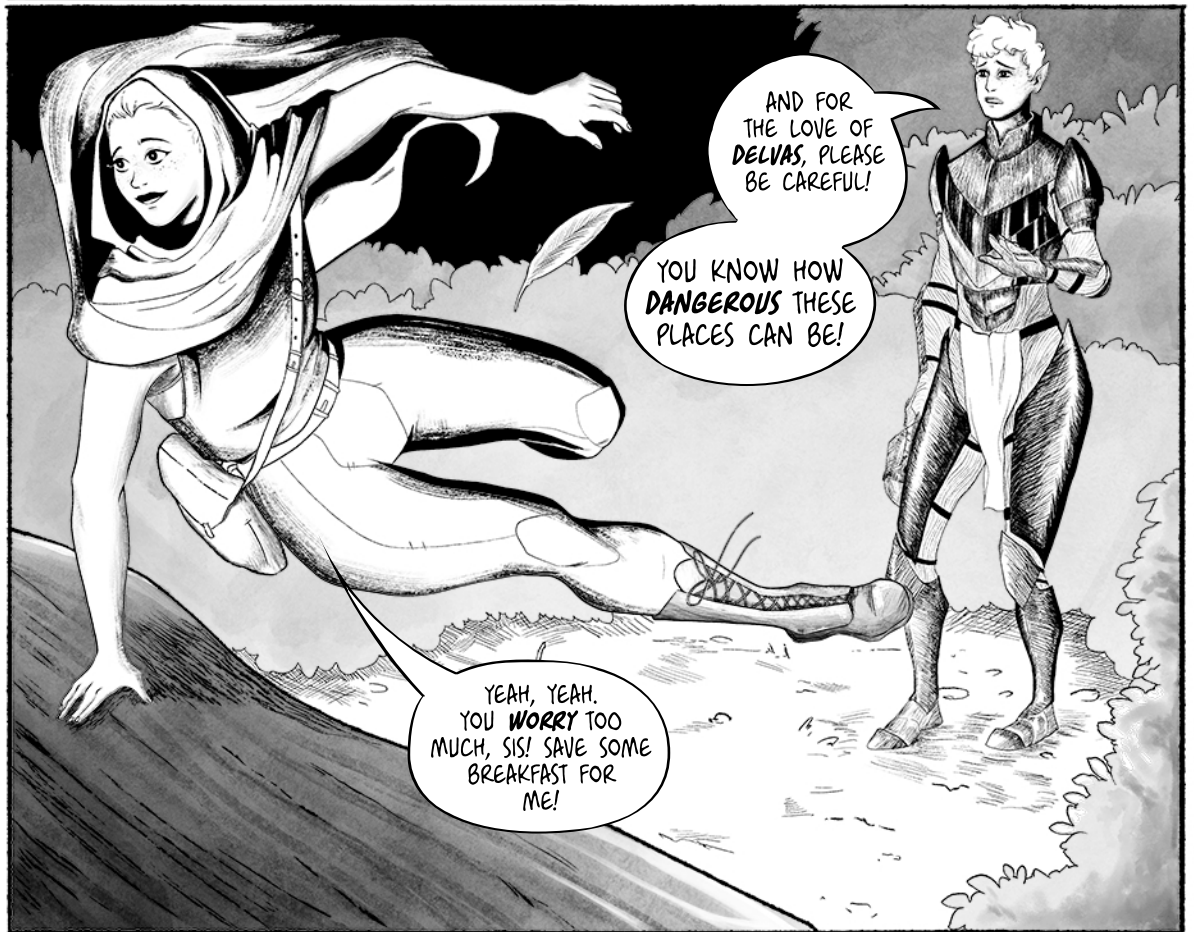




I HAVE TO FIND OUT IF THERE ARE **RUINS** BEFORE YOUR BUDDIES **SCRUB** THE PLACE. YOU **KNOW** I DO. YOU KNOW I HAVE TO SEE IF THERE ARE RELICS FROM THE **FAY EMPIRE**.

I WON'T TOUCH ANYTHING, I **PROMISE**.

**FAE**, PLEASE DON'T MAKE PROMISES YOU WON'T KEEP. THIS IS THE **LAST TIME** I COVER FOR YOU. I **PROMISE YOU**.



AND FOR THE LOVE OF **DELVAS**, PLEASE BE CAREFUL!

YOU KNOW HOW **DANGEROUS** THESE PLACES CAN BE!

YEAH, YEAH. YOU **WORRY** TOO MUCH, SIS! SAVE SOME BREAKFAST FOR ME!



IT'LL ALL BE FINE. I'LL BE IN AND OUT. EASY.



I HAVE TO KNOW.



COME ON, PLUM. IT'S YOUR TIME TO SHINE.



I was confident in my abilities.

"Youngest Wizard to Create Perfect Homunculus, First Try!"

"Fastest (and Neatest!) Spellcaster of the Cycle!"



DEER.



"Forest's 30 Under 300!"

OH, THAT'S..

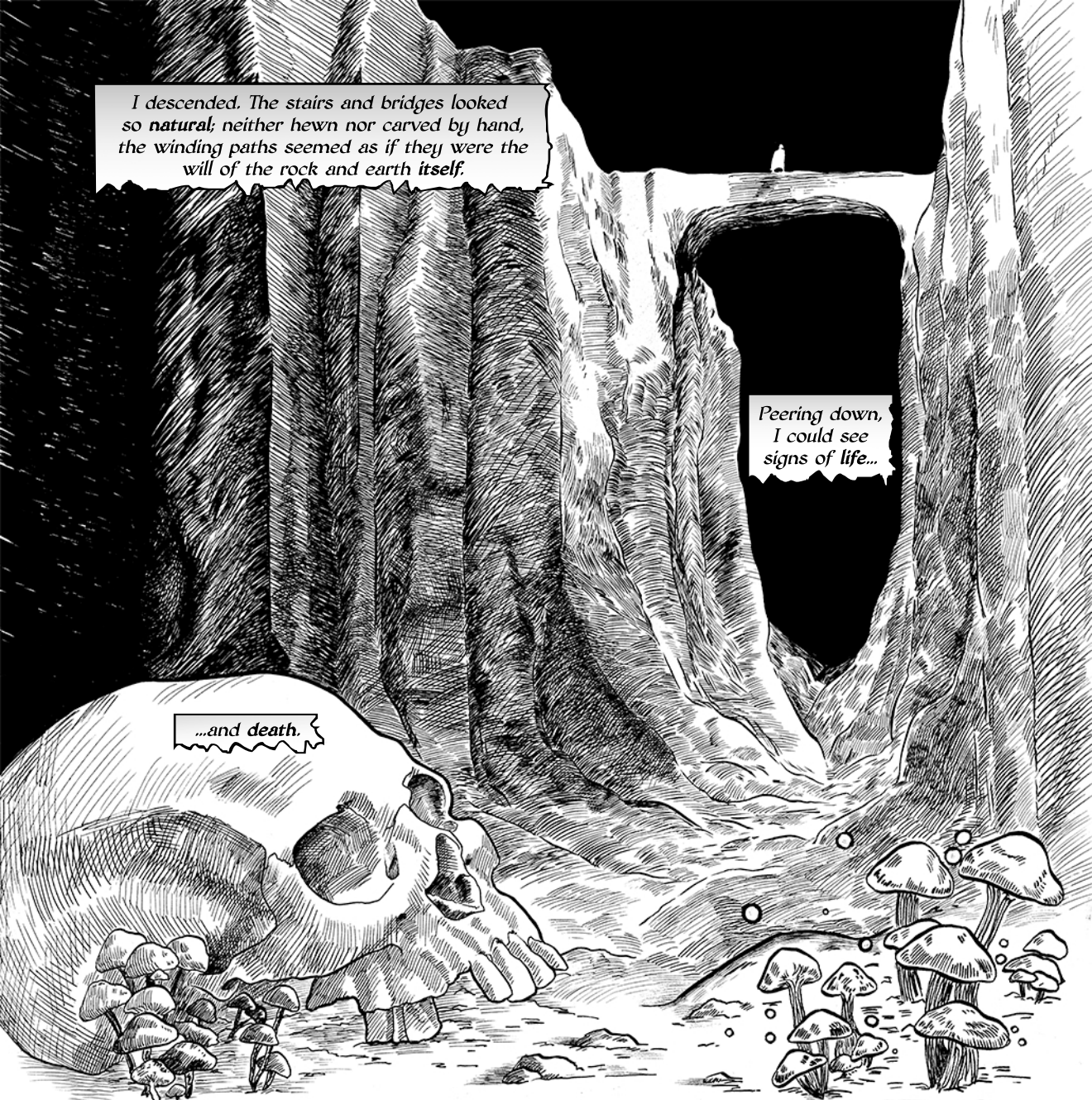
I thought I was hot shit. I knew nothing.



I descended. The stairs and bridges looked so *natural*; neither hewn nor carved by hand, the winding paths seemed as if they were the will of the rock and earth itself.

Peering down, I could see signs of life...

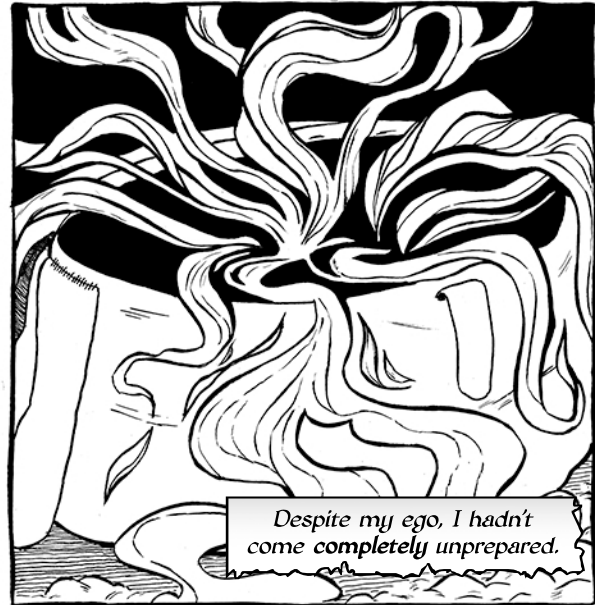
...and death.




IT LOOKS LIKE AN **EXPLOSION** RIPPED AN ENTRANCE INTO THIS ROOM.

BETTER GEAR UP!

Despite my ego, I hadn't come **completely** unprepared.





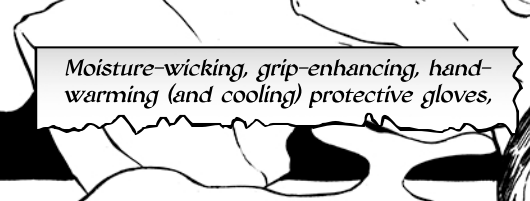
Brush, tough on dirt, gentle on artifacts,



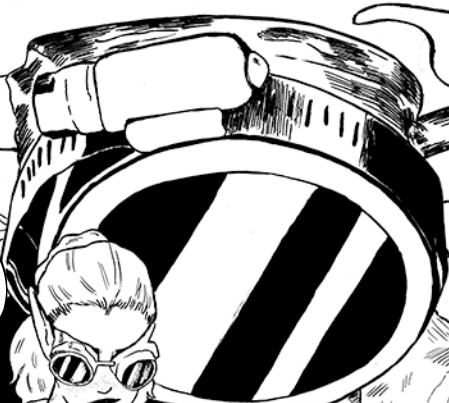
Anti-trap-triggering pliers,



Sealed vials for volatile samples,



Moisture-wicking, grip-enhancing, hand-warming (and cooling) protective gloves,



And sensible - yet fashionable - goggles, able to detect and identify magical spaces and items...



SAFETY THIRD!  
HA.



TAKE SOME NOTES FOR ME, PLUM?

... all invented and enchanted by yours truly.

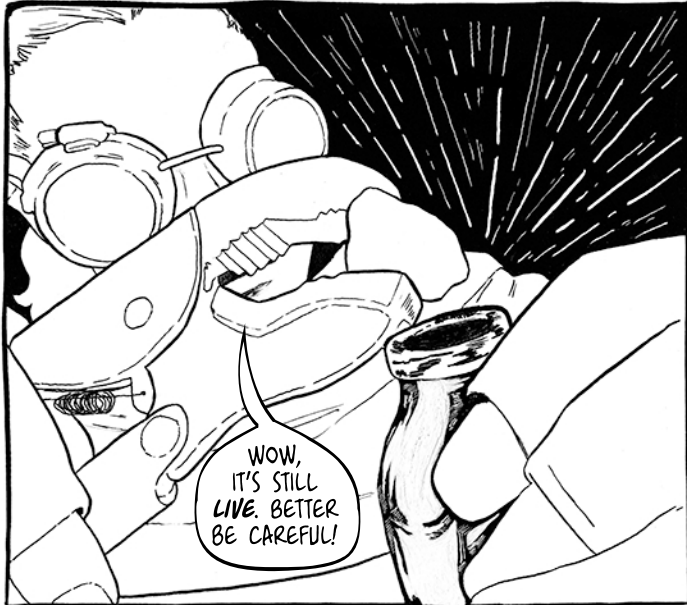
Yeah, I thought I was a badass.





IS THIS SHRAPNEL? DEFINITELY AN EXPLOSION, THEN.

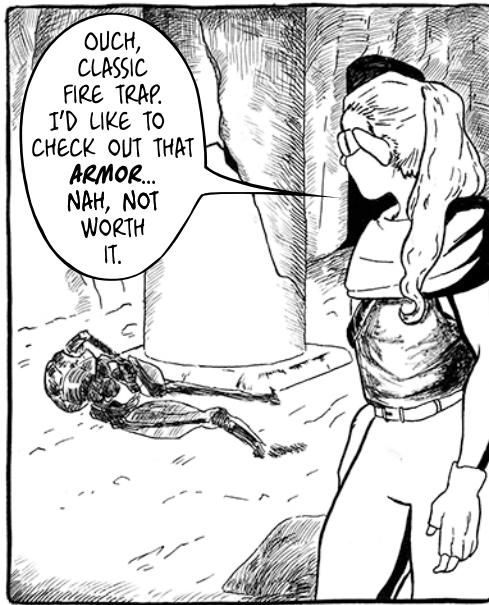
MAGICAL, FOR SURE.



WOW, IT'S STILL LIVE. BETTER BE CAREFUL!



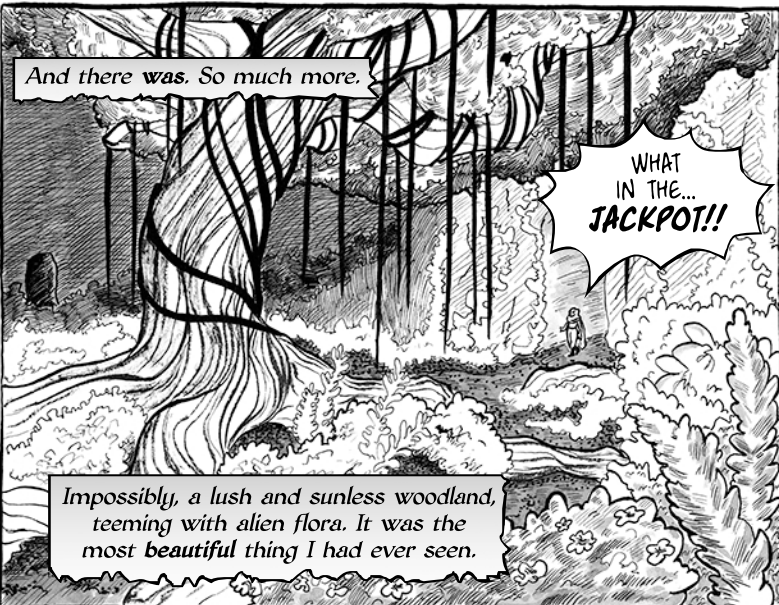
I CAN HARDLY TELL WHAT THIS STATUE WAS. A CAT, MAYBE? AND CLEARLY ENCHANTED - FOR DEFENSE?



OUCH, CLASSIC FIRE TRAP. I'D LIKE TO CHECK OUT THAT ARMOR... NAH, NOT WORTH IT.



THIS PLACE IS A MESS. I HOPE THE REST IS MORE INTACT.



And there was. So much more.

WHAT IN THE... JACKPOT!!

Impossibly, a lush and sunless woodland, teeming with alien flora. It was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen.





Things became more obvious.



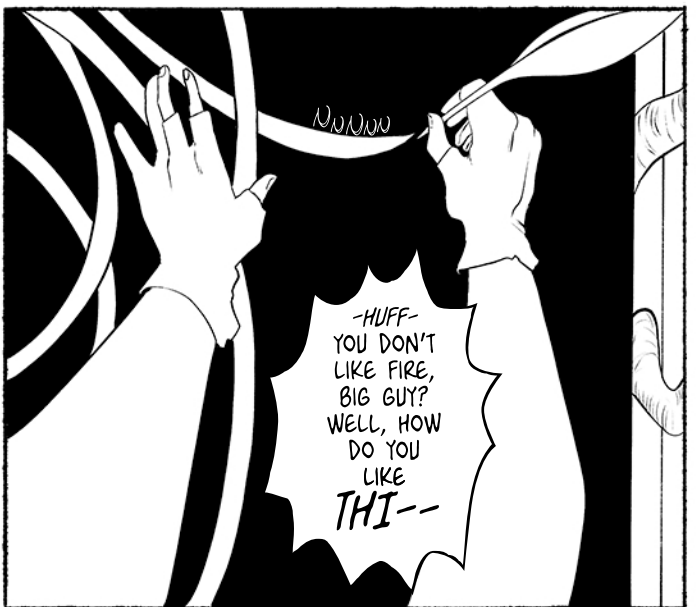
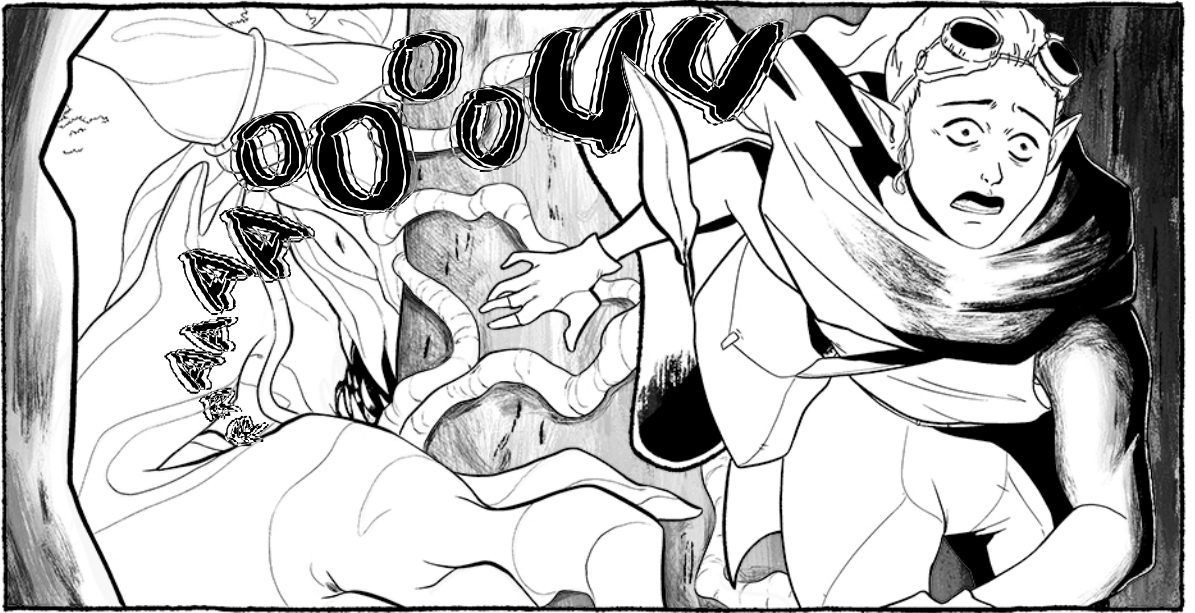
I GOTTA  
GET OUT OF  
HERE FAST OR  
I'M MULCH!



OH,  
NO, NO,  
NO! I  
NEED  
THAT  
DOOR!



DODGE,  
PLUM,  
DODGE!







Doubt set in, finally, after that terrifying encounter. That... thing... that was old magic. Dark magic. Stuff I didn't want to be caught messing with.



SNIF

SOB=

WHAT HAVE I DONE?

WHAT AM I GOING TO TELL AVELINE...  
-HIC-



But my curiosity had been piqued. So on I went. Deeper.

It was there, in the Library,  
that I first felt It...

TAKE  
A LOOK  
AT THIS  
LIBRARY,  
PLUM. IT'S  
HUGE!

IMAGINE  
EVERYTHING  
WE'LL BE ABLE TO  
LEARN! IT ALMOST  
MAKES THE TREE  
WORTH IT,  
THOUGH...

...HOW  
DID WE  
NOT KNOW  
ABOUT THIS?  
ALL OF THIS,  
SO CLOSE TO  
THE CITY...

I CAN'T  
UNDERSTAND  
A SINGLE THING  
IN ANY OF  
THESE!

HM,  
CAN'T  
READ THIS  
ONE. IT LOOKS  
LIKE A DIALECT  
OF ONE OF THE  
FEY LANGUAGES,  
BUT IT'S...  
OFF.

≡UFF≡  
THESE  
SHELVES ARE  
EVEN TALLER  
THAN THEY  
LOOK!

WHEN  
I LOOK  
AWAY FROM THEM,  
EVERYTHING I  
READ SLIDES  
OUT OF MY  
HEAD...

...AN  
ENCHANTMENT?  
BUT MY GOOGLES  
AREN'T PICKING  
IT UP!

I THINK  
THERE'S  
SOMETHING  
HERE...  
I CAN'T SEE  
IT, BUT I... I  
CAN FEEL  
IT?

IT'S A  
SPELL! A  
POWERFUL ONE.  
IT FEELS LIKE SOME  
KIND OF LOCK?  
WHAT IF I TRY  
TOUCH--  
G#K-!\*

IT'S...  
SAPPING  
SOMETHING  
FROM ME  
...!

RRRUUMMMMBLL



*...One of the kingdom's oldest enemies, long since vanquished along with its four siblings...*

*...A remnant of the fury and wildness of the Fey Empire...*

*...brought low by the last and greatest sacrifice of our most venerated Saint. An old god...*



K  
K  
K  
R  
R  
R  
R  
R



...the Wolf.

THEIR MAGIC,  
IT'S STILL  
HERE... IN  
THIS STATUE.

IT'S  
OVERWHELMING.  
I... CAN'T  
STAND...



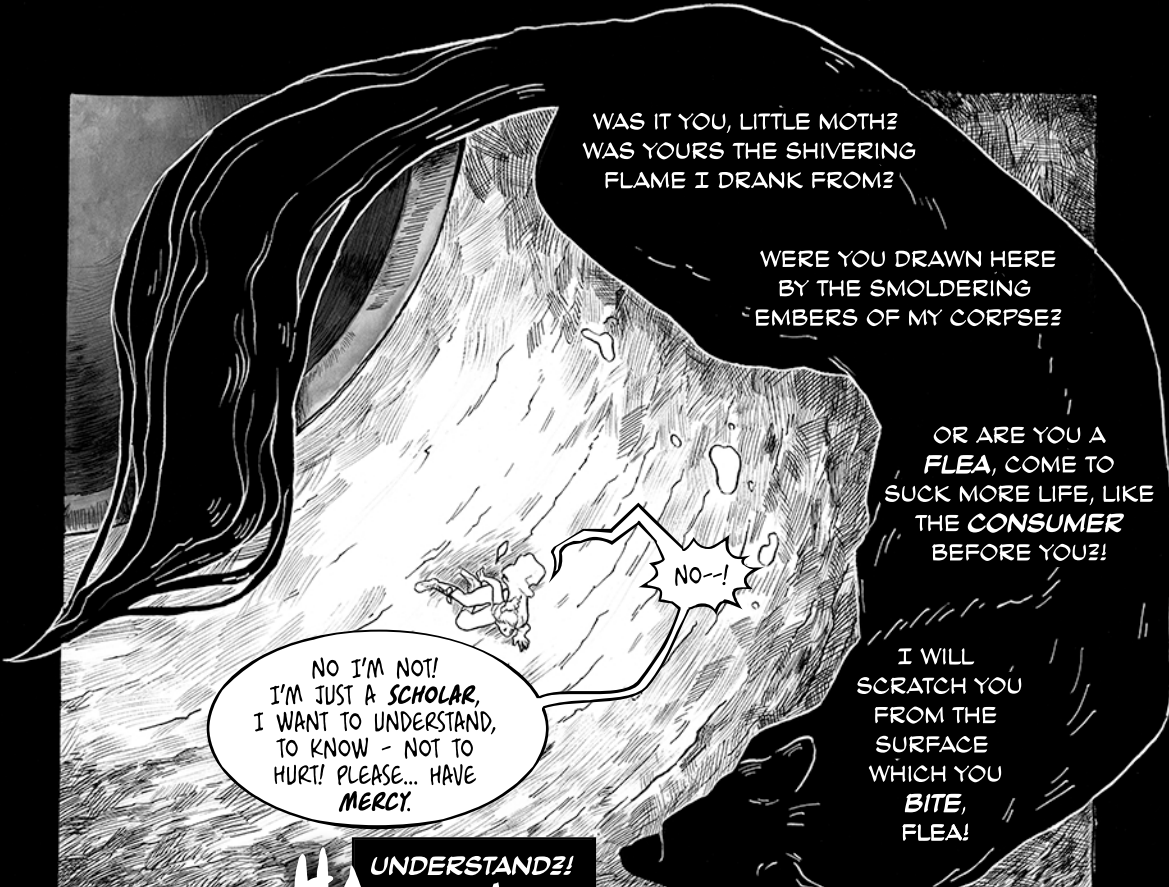
NYAAAANG

SOMEONE CALLS, AFTER  
SO LONG IN THE DARK.

THIS WAS A...  
A TEMPLE.  
TO THE  
OLD GODS.

OH!H, NO.  
YOU ARE...  
DEFINITELY  
SUPPOSED  
TO BE  
DEAD.





WAS IT YOU, LITTLE MOTH?  
WAS YOURS THE SHIVERING  
FLAME I DRANK FROM?

WERE YOU DRAWN HERE  
BY THE SMOLDERING  
EMBERS OF MY CORPSE?

OR ARE YOU A  
**FLEA**, COME TO  
SUCK MORE LIFE, LIKE  
THE **CONSUMER**  
BEFORE YOU?!

I WILL  
SCRATCH YOU  
FROM THE  
SURFACE  
WHICH YOU  
**BITE**,  
**FLEA!**

NO I'M NOT!  
I'M JUST A **SCHOLAR**,  
I WANT TO UNDERSTAND,  
TO KNOW - NOT TO  
HURT! PLEASE... HAVE  
**MERCY.**

NO--!

**UNDERSTAND?!**

**HAHAHA!!**

ALL YOU  
**KNOW** ARE  
THE **LIES** YOU  
HAVE BEEN  
FED.

SO  
**TEACH** ME!  
TELL ME THE  
**TRUTH!**

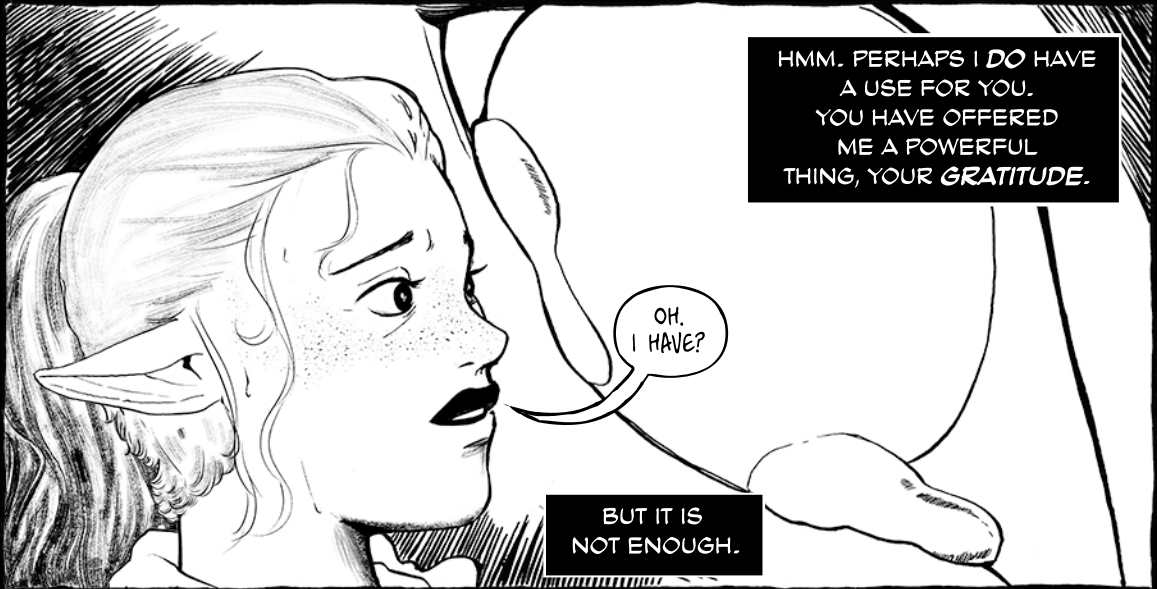
I - I  
CAN PRESERVE  
AND PROTECT  
YOUR ANCIENT  
KNOWLE--

YOU CANNOT EVEN  
PROTECT YOURSELF.  
YOU ARE **PATHETIC**.  
WORTHLESS, LIKE  
ALL YOUR KIN.

THEN...  
LET ME GO,  
I WON'T TELL  
ANYONE ABOUT  
YOU, I... I...

...WOULD  
BE VERY  
**GRATEFUL?**

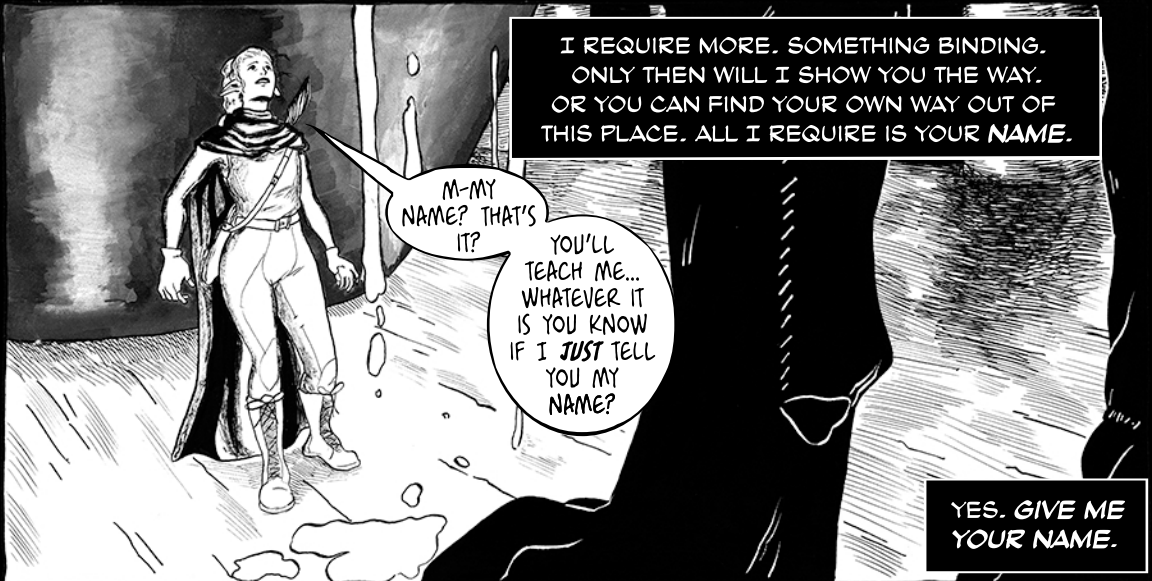




HMM. PERHAPS I DO HAVE A USE FOR YOU. YOU HAVE OFFERED ME A POWERFUL THING, YOUR *GRATITUDE*.

OH, I HAVE?

BUT IT IS NOT ENOUGH.



I REQUIRE MORE. SOMETHING BINDING. ONLY THEN WILL I SHOW YOU THE WAY. OR YOU CAN FIND YOUR OWN WAY OUT OF THIS PLACE. ALL I REQUIRE IS YOUR *NAME*.

M-MY NAME? THAT'S IT?

YOU'LL TEACH ME... WHATEVER IT IS YOU KNOW IF I *JUST* TELL YOU MY NAME?


YES. GIVE ME YOUR NAME.



MY NAME IS *FAELAN*.

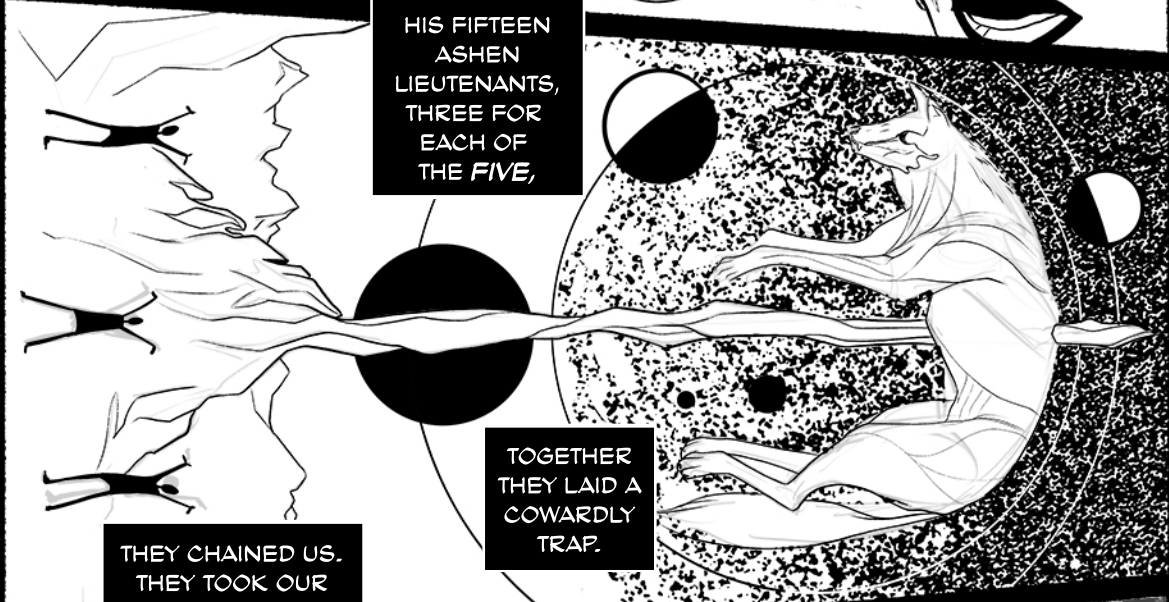
*PREPARE YOURSELF, FAELAN.*





AFTER ANNIHILATING  
THE FEY EMPIRE, YOUR  
SELF-PROCLAIMED *GOD*  
SOUGHT OUT *OUR* MOST  
HIDDEN AND SACRED  
PLACES...

...AND PROFANED  
THEM WITH METAL  
AND BLOOD.



HIS FIFTEEN  
ASHEN  
LIEUTENANTS,  
THREE FOR  
EACH OF  
THE FIVE,

TOGETHER  
THEY LAID A  
COWARDLY  
TRAP.

THEY CHAINED US.  
THEY TOOK OUR  
POWER, AND THEY  
SPREAD LIES  
OF OUR DEMISE.



WE ARE NOW  
FIVE OPEN  
WOUNDS,

HEMORRHAGING  
BILE AND RAGE,  
INFECTING ALL  
AROUND US.

UNCHECKED, YOU  
WILL SUFFER OUR  
FATE: *UNLIFE*. ALL  
THOSE YOU LOVE  
WILL BECOME  
PALE SHADOWS...

...WANDERING THE  
FETID WASTES  
OF THIS WORLD:  
*INSANE, WAILING, FERAL.*



BUT...  
THAT MEANS  
**EVERYTHING** I WAS TAUGHT...  
THAT I BELIEVED...  
IS A **LIE!**



NOW  
YOU **SEE**.  
AND I SEE  
IN YOU...  
**POTENTIAL**.

I INVOKE  
YOUR DEBT.  
YOUR **GRATITUDE**.  
ARE YOU GRATEFUL  
IN KNOWING?

WILL YOU  
AID ME?



THEN OUR  
BOND IS SEALED.  
**LET US BEGIN.**