

**JIM
ZUB**
**EDWIN
HUANG**
**MISTY
COATS**

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comics should buy
Skullkickers."**
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SKULL KICKERS

**1000 OPAS and
a DEAD BODY**



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SKULL KICKERS

1000 OPAS and a DEAD BODY



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Sneaky-Sneak and Imminent Violence

As they hack and slash their way through their fantastic world of werewolves, assassins and undead servitors, the unnamed skullkickers of Skullkickers follow a long and storied tradition.

The mighty-thewed granddaddy of them all would be Robert E. Howard's Conan the Barbarian. This sorcerer-slaying, maiden-shagging freebooter establishes the anti-heroic tradition of the sword and sorcery hero. He may bring his crimsoned blade down on people and creatures who are way nastier than he is, but he's in it for the money and the conquest. And the shagging. I mentioned the shagging, right?

The nameless dwarf guy and the nameless bald guy who romp through the volume you hold in your hands certainly share a body count with Conan. But in their camaraderie and breezy humor they bear a closer kinship to Fritz Leiber's Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser. In this classic series of stories, Leiber's contrasting pair of buddy thieves leavens the sword and sorcery sub-genre with a wit unseen in Howard's ichor-spattered output.

Another classic fusion of drollery and fantasy appears in Jack Vance's stories of the Dying Earth, especially those featuring the caviling, self-seeking Cugel the Clever. He outwits and is outwitted in turn as capricious fate buffets him through a decadent, expiring world of horror and beauty.

All of these literary forebears come together in the early 70s, swirled in the grid-mapped creative stewpot that is the roleplaying game. As deeply steeped in fantasy literature as they are in military history, a pair of hardcore wargame fanatics, Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson, fuse a series of proto-roleplaying games into a brave new form they call Dungeons & Dragons. At first spreading as much by illicit third-generation photocopies as by legit copies, it rapidly grows into an entire adventure gaming

hobby. In the process, it revitalizes the fantasy genre. A whole new audience hunts down its classics. They devour J.R.R. Tolkien's earnestly humanitarian epic Lord of the Rings and its many thin-blooded imitators.

But when they roll up characters and sit down at the gaming table to kill orcs and take their treasure, they behave more like Conan, Fafhrd and Cugel than the self-sacrificing Frodo and his ever-loyal Samwise. They gleefully slaughter, happily pillage, and greedily accumulate gold and experience points. They act, in short, exactly like bald guy and dwarf guy.

You don't have to know what a Con stat is, or how to choose your side in the hotly debated 3E vs. 4E divide, to appreciate the gonzo fantasy action of Skullkickers. Jim Zubkavich brilliantly channels the treasure-hoovering spirit of a thousand marathon dungeon-bashing sessions so that anyone who digs a beer joke or enjoys seeing an evil necromancer get his teeth punched in can join in the fun. Edwin Huang makes ultra-violence cute again, drawing a fantastic world a hundred times cooler than the collective imaginings of any pizza-fueled game group. From purple-cloaked dungeons perilous to scarlet-lit dens of magical diabolical, Misty Coats pops that world with vivid color. That's all you need to appreciate the lunatic fun you'll encounter as soon as you bust down the door on this foreword and charge into the pages that lie ahead.

But as Jim pushes the envelope of comic book onomatopoeia into exclamations that sound suspiciously like the whisperings of an offstage Dungeon Master, or Edwin brings hallucinatory surrealism to what is clearly a narrowly-rolled poison save (dwarves get +2, you know), there's a history at work here. A history that smells headily of decaying pulp and sounds like the plastic clattering of a d20 across a tabletop.

But to Hades with all that, warriors! Let's find some monsters, kill them, and take their stuff! Then to the tavern, to celebrate with ale and wenches!

--Robin Laws

January 2011

Writer and game designer Robin D. Laws is the force behind such RPG games as Feng Shui, The Dying Earth Roleplaying Game, HeroQuest, The Esoterrorists and Ashen Stars.

D&D players know his work on various supplements, including sections of the Dungeon Master's Guide 2 for both third and fourth editions of that game.

CHAPTER ONE





YEESH!
WHO
EVER HEARD
OF A FAT
WEREWOLF?!



KEEP MAKING JOKES, DWARF. I'LL SILENCE YOU SOON ENOUGH!

THUD



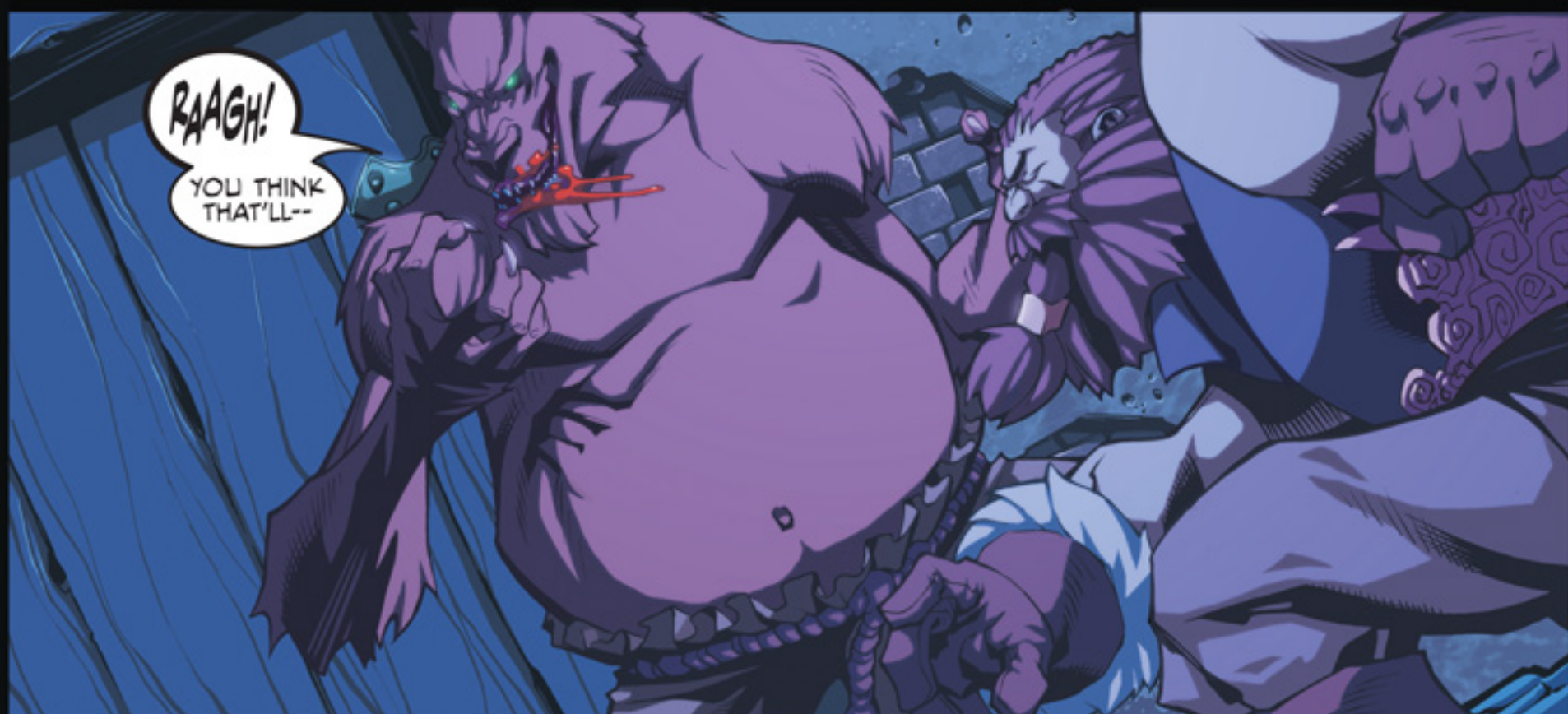
YOUR ALLY IS SURELY SLAIN BY MY LOYALISTS. YOUR DEATH IS *NIGH*. HUMOR IS ALL YOU HAVE LEFT!



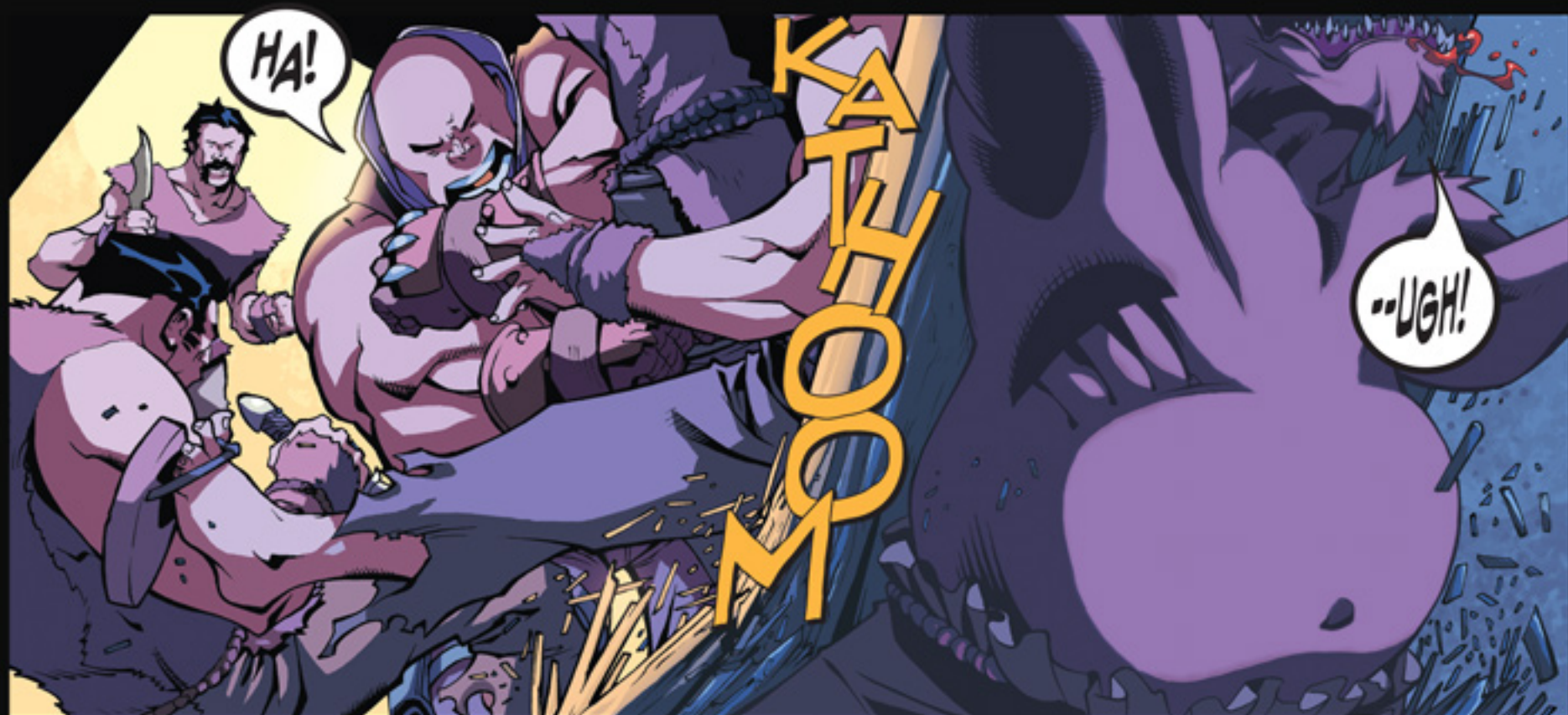
CRUNCH

HUMOR AN' A BOOT!

--URT!



RAAGH!
YOU THINK THAT'LL--



HA!

KATH MOO

--UGH!



KRA KOW

YOU CALL THAT AN AMBUSH?



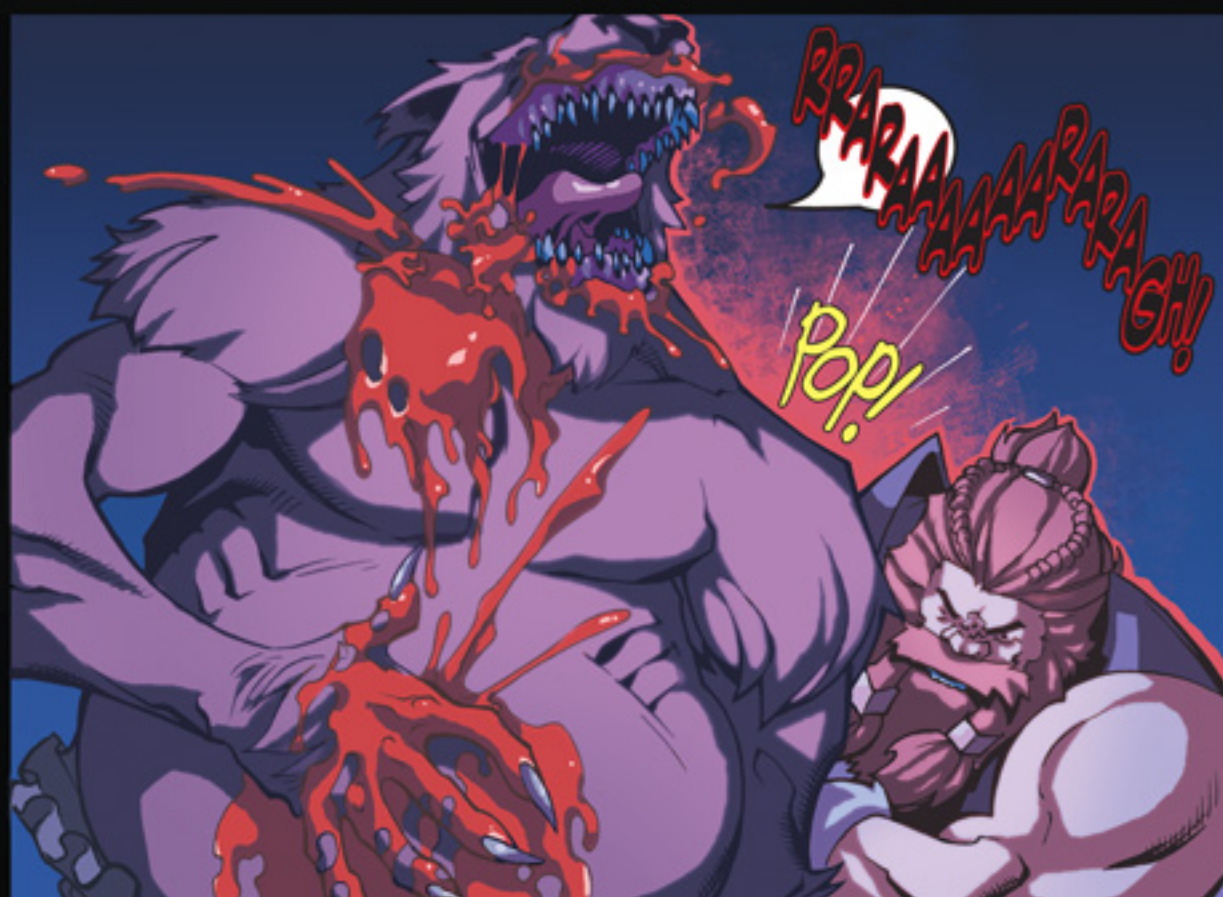
GRRRR--

I WILL SEND YOU TO--



RAAAAAAGH!

KRA KOW KRA KOW





THE NEXT MORNING~

UNGRATEFUL
FILTH!

MUDWICH TOWN
POPULATION:
DOWNTRODDEN



THE
Gizzard

WE KILLED
A LYCANTHROPE
AN' BROKE UP
A CULT!

WE
FOUND FOUR
UNCONSCIOUS
PEOPLE AND A
SMALL PILE OF
ASH.

CAN YOU
PROVE THAT
THEY TRIED TO
KILL YOU?



PROVE?!

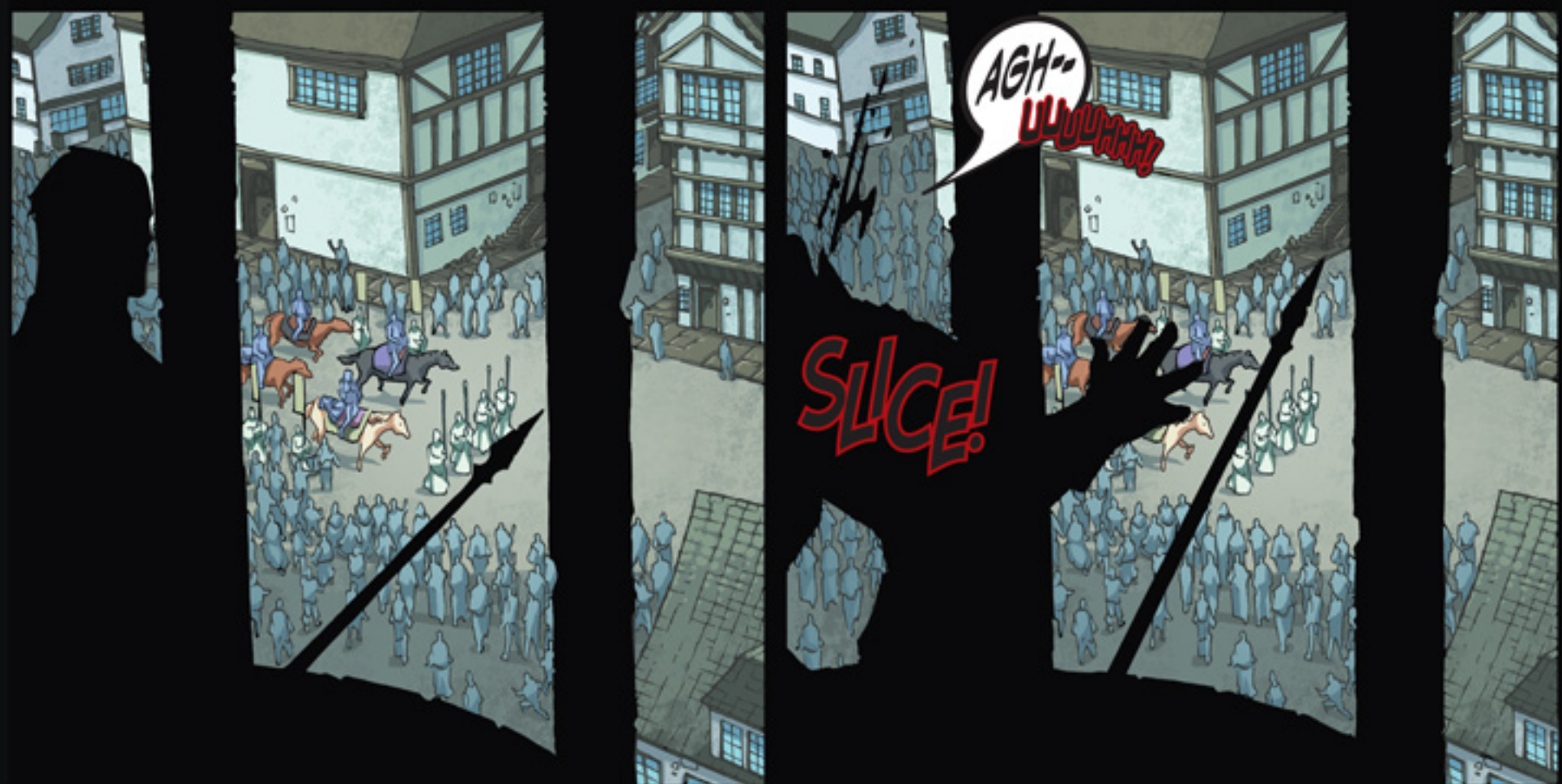
I'LL PROVE YUR
HEAD'S AS EMPTY
AS A PINT
GLASS!

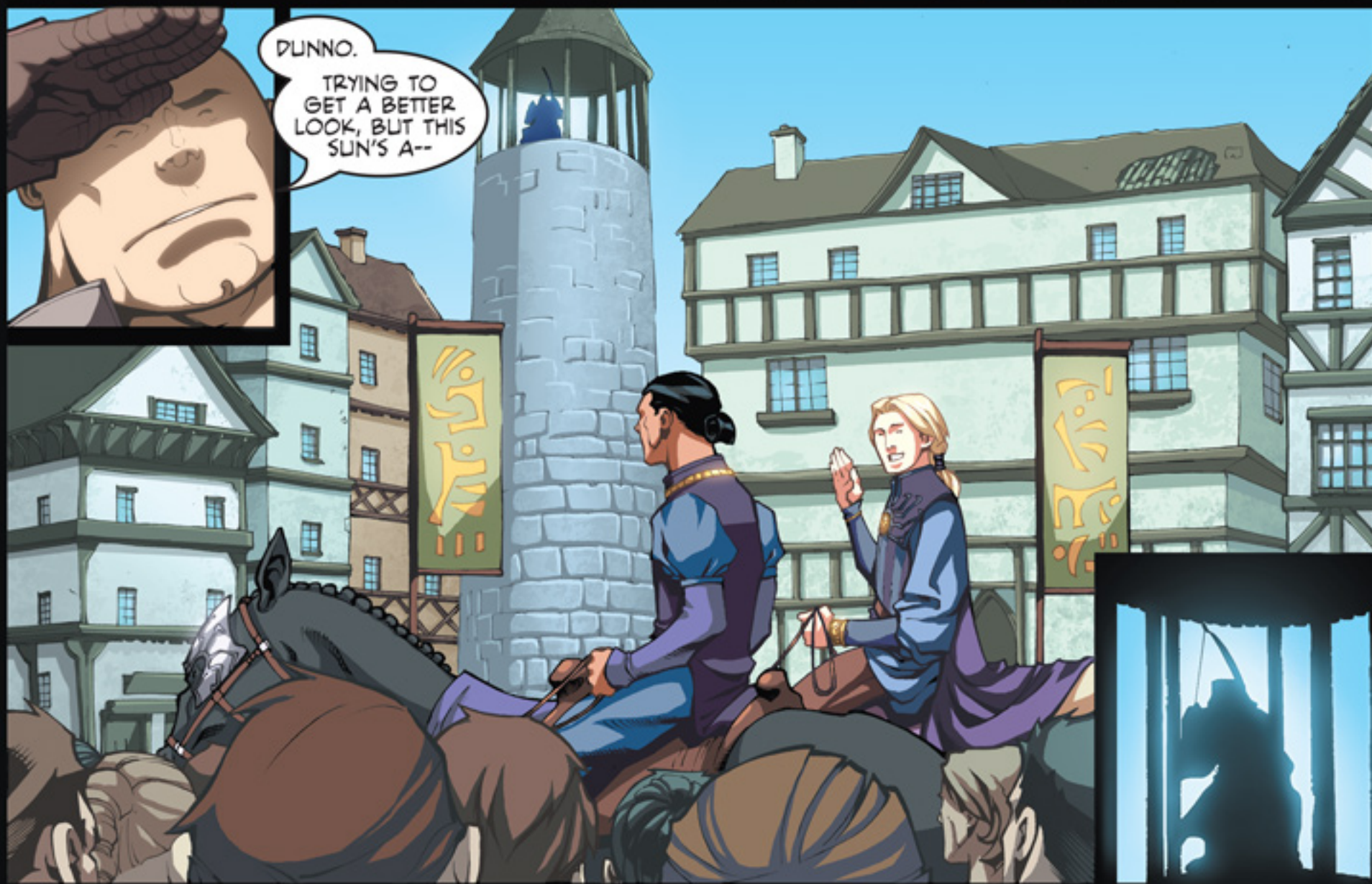
I AIN'T
GOTTA PROVE
NOTHIN'!!!
'TIS
TRUE!







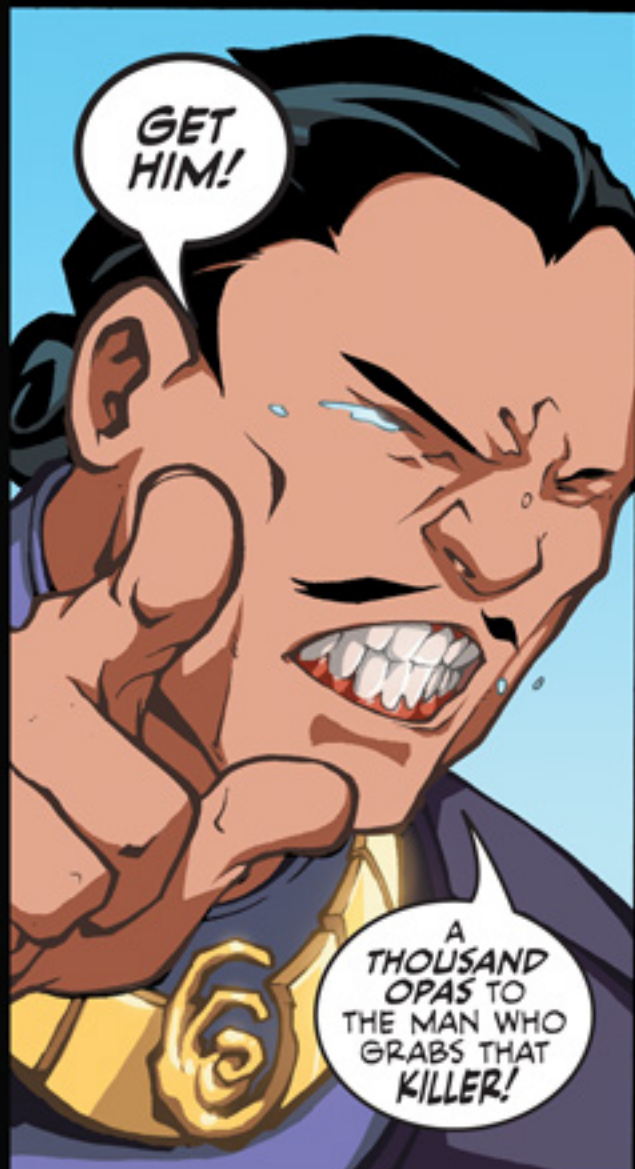






MANY THANKS, LIEUTENANT. OUR TRAVEL WAS BLESSED WITH GOOD FORTUNE IT SEEMS. ALL IS--









GREETIN'S!



FWOOSH

ACH!
IT SEEMS YER A TOUCH DEFENSIVE, BOWMAN.
NERVOUS EVEN!



CHUCK

KILLIN' CAN MAKE SOME FOLKS JITTERY, IT'S TRUE.



KA-TUNK

BUT AFTER ENOUGH OF 'EM, THA DEATH DON'T SHAKE YU UP...



...IT'S A RUSH!







WHERE?!
WHERE DID THE
ASSASSIN GO?
WHY AREN'T YOU
CHASING
HIM?!

JUST
HUSH FOR
A SEC, WILL
YA?

COULDN'T
GET A BEAD
ON HIM.



SHUT THE
GATES AND BLOCK
EVERY ACCESS
POINT!
I WANT
THIS KILLER
FOUND
NOW.

I THINK
YOU ALREADY
LOST HIM,
PAL.
HE
BOLTED
QUICKER THAN
A SPOOKED
BIRD.
GONE.



GIVE ME ONE
REASON WHY I
DON'T ARREST
YO--

HEY, WHY
ARE YOU
SMILING?

WHAT'S
SO DAMN
FUNNY?

JUST
WONDERING
HOW YOU'RE
GONNA EXPLAIN
THIS MESS TO
THE MAYOR.

HE LOOKS
KINDA...
DISPLEASED.



I HATE
YOU.

I
KNOW.



THE NEXT MORNING→

NO! THIS IS AN OUTRAGE!

YOU CAN'T DO THIS TO ME!

SORRY.

SORRY SIR, JUST FOLLOWING ORDERS.



I DEMAND THAT YOU GIVE US THE CHANCELLOR'S BODY!

YOU MUST NOT INTERFERE WITH OUR BURIAL RITES!

WHA-?

WHAT'S ALL TH'RACKET? AIN'T A BODY ABLE TA SLEEP ON THA STREET NO MORE?



FJALO, PLEASE. DON'T.

I'LL SEE YOU LASHED FOR THIS!

PULLED SKYWARD BY YOUR ANKLES AND LASHED!

J-JUST FOLLOWING ORDERS, SIR.

IT'S AN INVESTIGATION 'CAUSE THE WOUND LOOKS POISONED.



POISON?!

WHO CARES ABOUT POISON?

HE WAS SLAIN BY AN ARROW IN THE FACE, YOU IMBECILE!

HOW DOES THAT REQUIRE INVESTIGATION?!



WE NEED TO GET THAT BODY BACK.

I DON'T CARE HOW.

OY!
I SEE YA'RE IN NEED O' SOME HELP THERE.



WHO IS THIS?

A DWARF, SIR.

ONE OF THE GENTS WHO TRIED TO CATCH THE ASSASSIN YESTERDAY.

A MERCENARY OF THE HIGHEST QUALITY, YER RICHNESS.

A GUARD, A THIEF OR A KILLER IF THAT'S WHAT YE NEED.

HE SMELLS OF ALE, SIR.



THEY ALL SMELL LIKE ALE HERE.

INDEED. HOW WOULD WE KNOW THAT YOU ARE ALL THESE THINGS, AND GOOD AT THEM AS WELL?

HE FLEW THROUGH THE AIR TOWARDS THE TOWER LIKE A BLOATED BAT!

SEE THESE RINGS ON ME AXE HANDLE? I KILLED THAT MANY MONSTERS THIS WEEK.

YOU GIMME 600 OF YER OPAS AND I'LL GET THAT BODY BACK TO YE.



HE'S EAGER, BUT WHAT IF HE GETS CAUGHT?

WE DENY IT ALL AND SEND A MESSENGER HOME FOR REINFORCEMENTS.

WHAT'S TA LOSE, YER FORMALNESS?



NOTHING UP FRONT. 350 OPAS UPON COMPLETION.

550.

437 OPAS AND A HALF-GINNETE.

DEAL.

THAT NIGHT-



SNIFF
SNORT



SNIFF!

SOMETHIN'...
UP...
THERE...



WHUD

ULP!





WHOOOPS.

CHAPTER TWO





Stevens '10

RAAAARR!

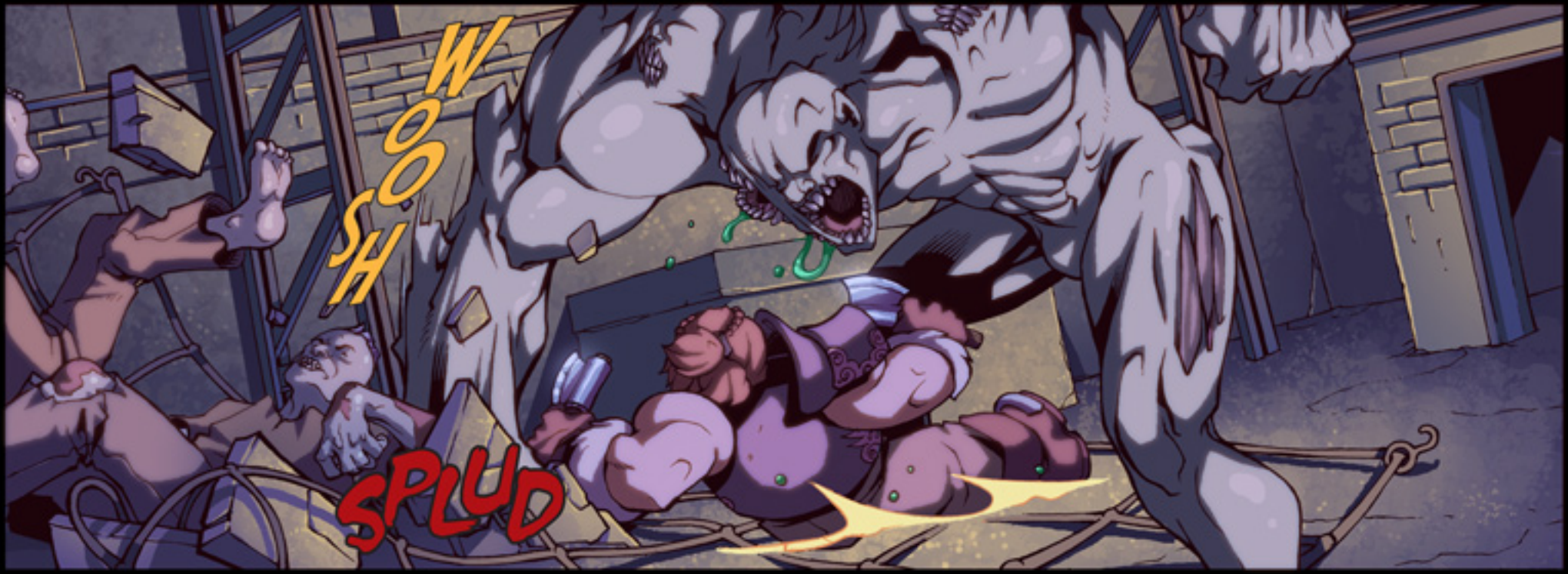
**KILL IT!
KILL IT
NOW!**

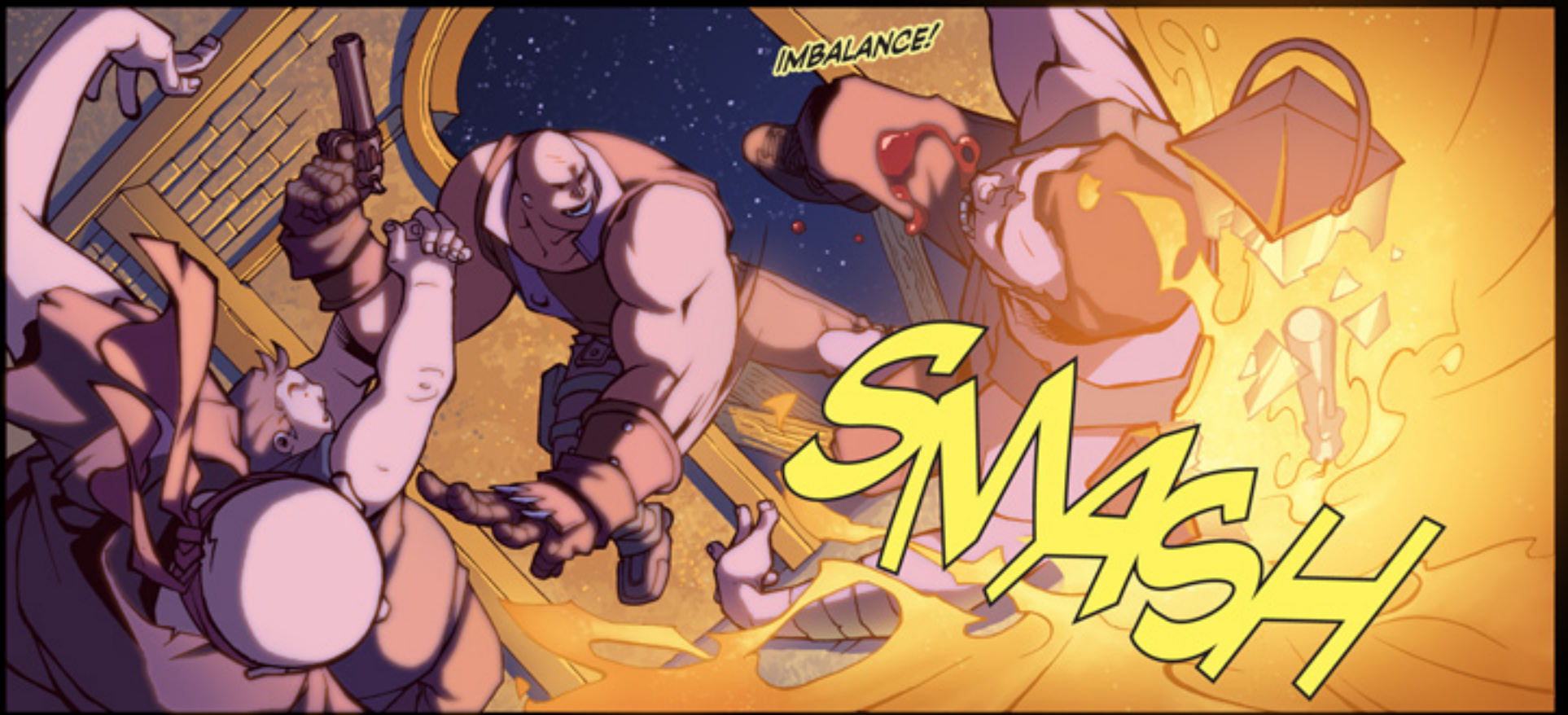
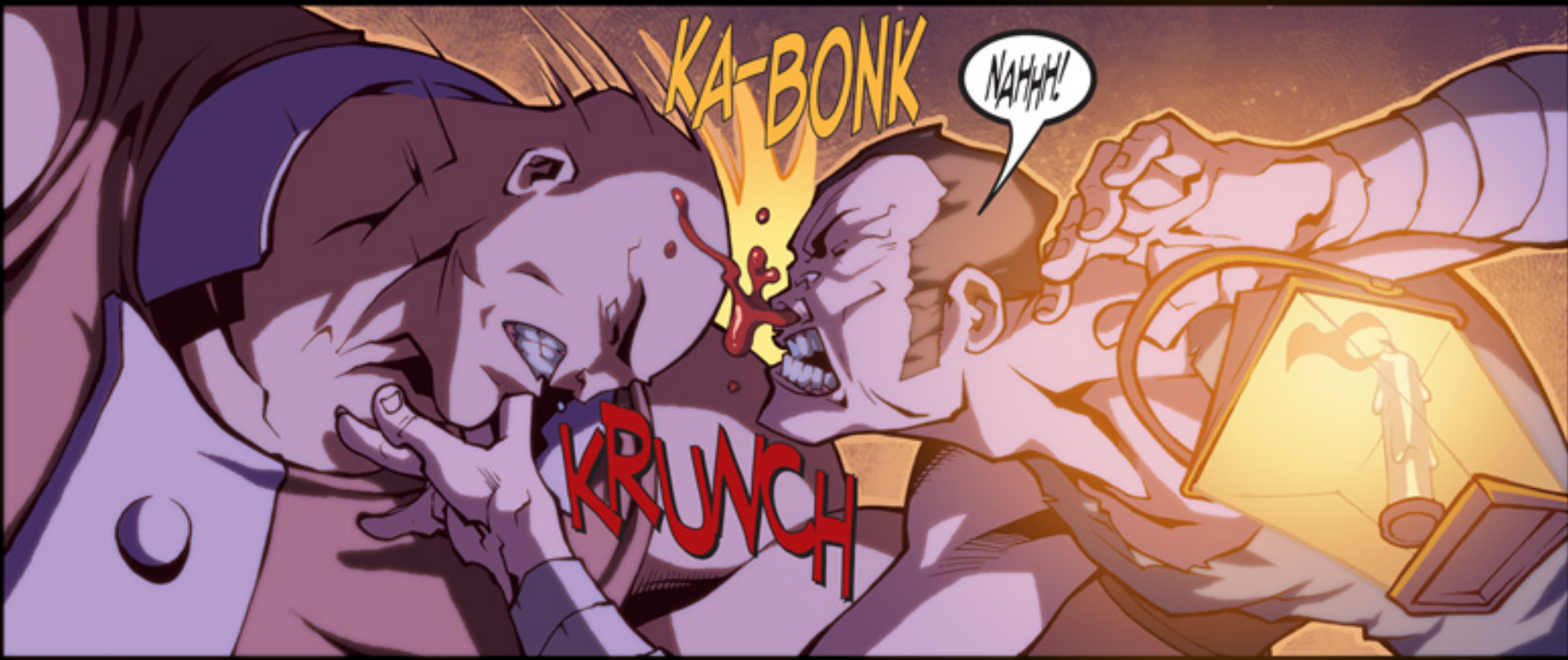
**STOP
THEM!**









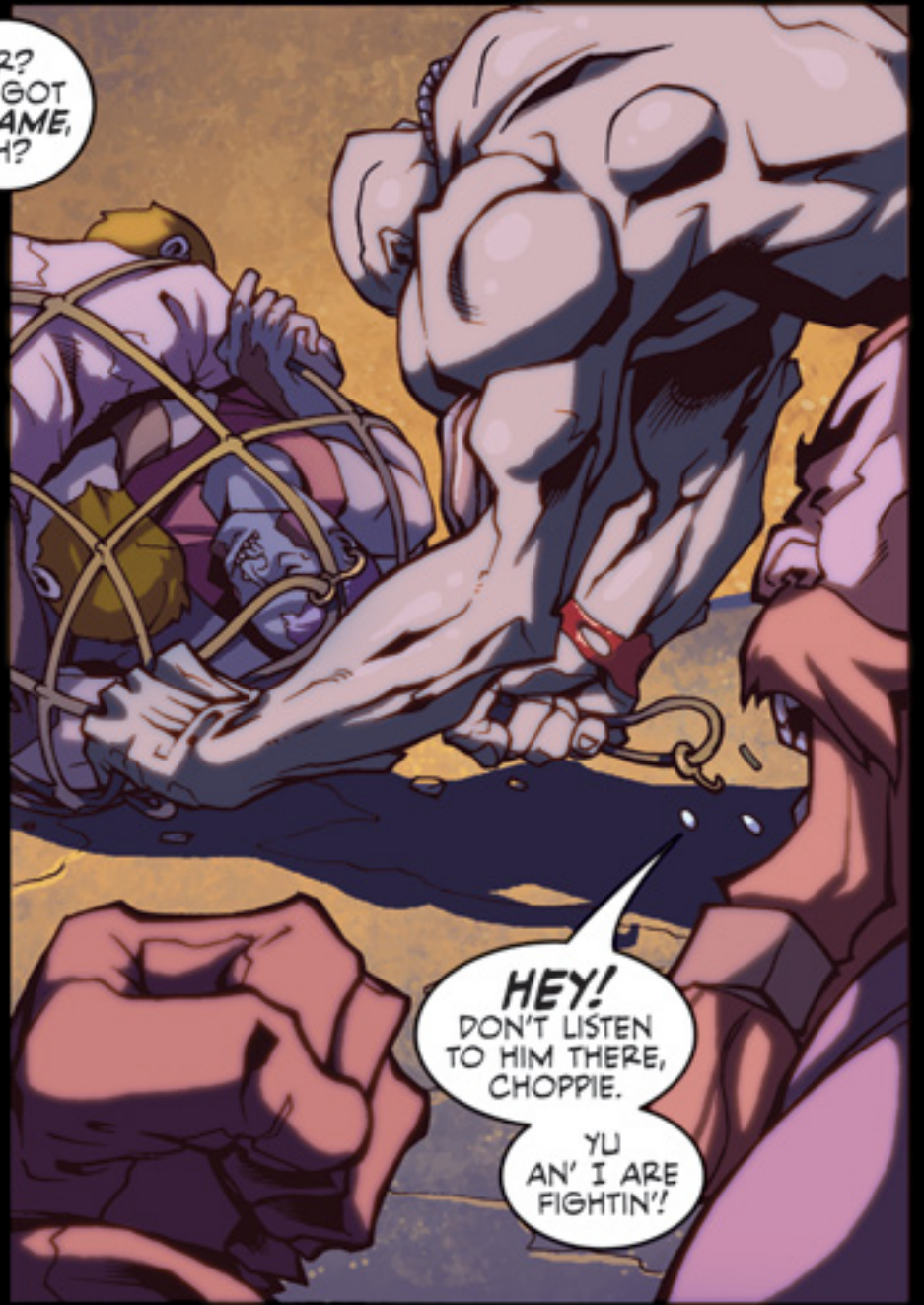




CHOP-CHOP!
TAKE BODIES!
GO HOME!

Err?

UR?
IT'S GOT
A NAME,
EH?



HEY!
DON'T LISTEN
TO HIM THERE,
CHOPPIE.

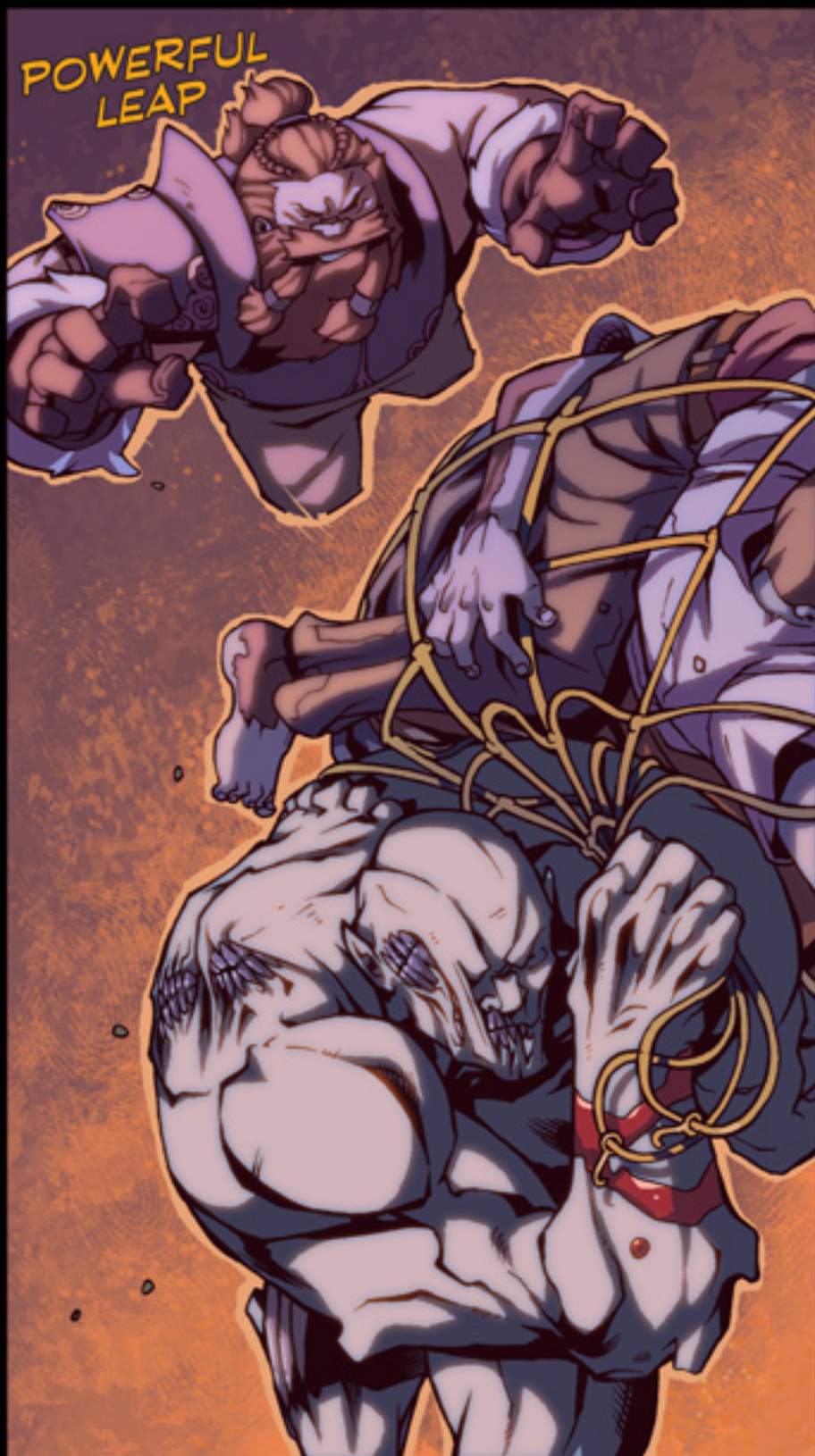
YU
AN' I ARE
FIGHTIN'!



OH?
THERE YU ARE!
THA' PRETTY
PRIZE!



GIMME.

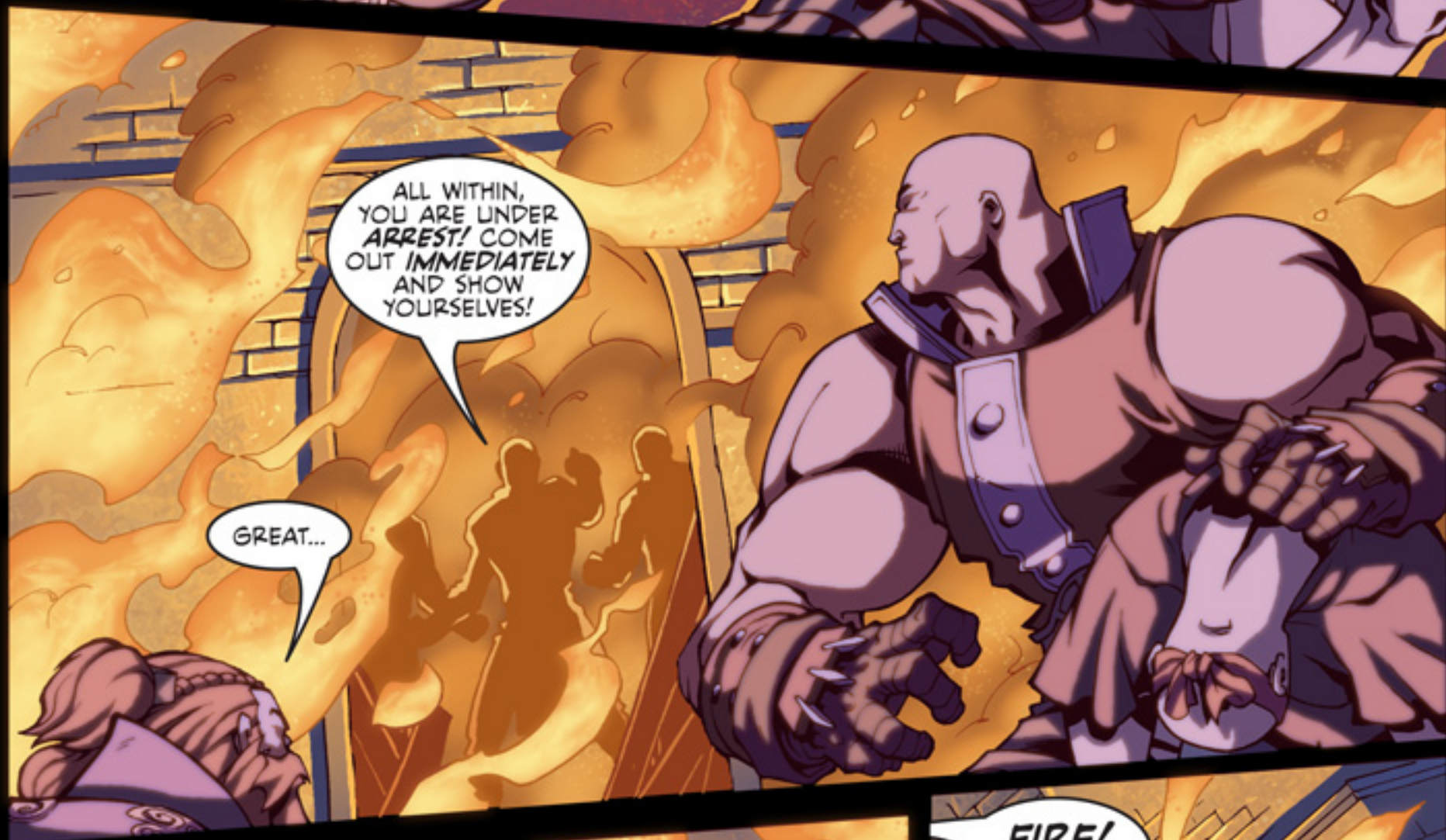




WELL, THEN THIS GUY CAN TELL US WHERE ITS 'HOME' IS!

KA-SOCK!

UHHH~



ALL WITHIN, YOU ARE UNDER ARREST! COME OUT IMMEDIATELY AND SHOW YOURSELVES!

GREAT...



OUT THE TOP?

AYE.



FIRE! STAY BACK!

THE SMELL!

IS ANYONE ALIVE?!

SHOVE!

AHHH!



MINUTES LATER

FIRE EVERYWHERE!

CALL FOR HELP!

THE HUMANITY!

NO!



HOW COULD THIS BE?!

MY SHOP!

MY LIVESTOCK!

NO! NO! NO!



ALL OF IT, BURNING!

CLEAR THE WAY FOR THE GUARD!

GATHER THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN!

HEAD TO THE RIVER!

תזת-ת



IS THERE A WEATHER MAGE IN TOWN?!

WE NEED RAIN!

DIG A FIRE TRENCH!

MY LEG'S ON FIRE!

ALL IS LOST!

THE GODS HAVE FORSAKEN US!

MORNING

IS IT
READY?

YLP,
NICE AN'
HOT.

WELL THEN,
LET'S GET
COOKIN'...

HUH?

AHHH!

WOOSH

THAT
SOUNDS PRETTY
GENUINE.

AHHH!

AYE.





WE'VE GOT A FEW **QUESTIONS** FOR YE. LINNERSTOOD?
WHERE DID YER PALS AND THE BIG LUMPY MONSTER GO?

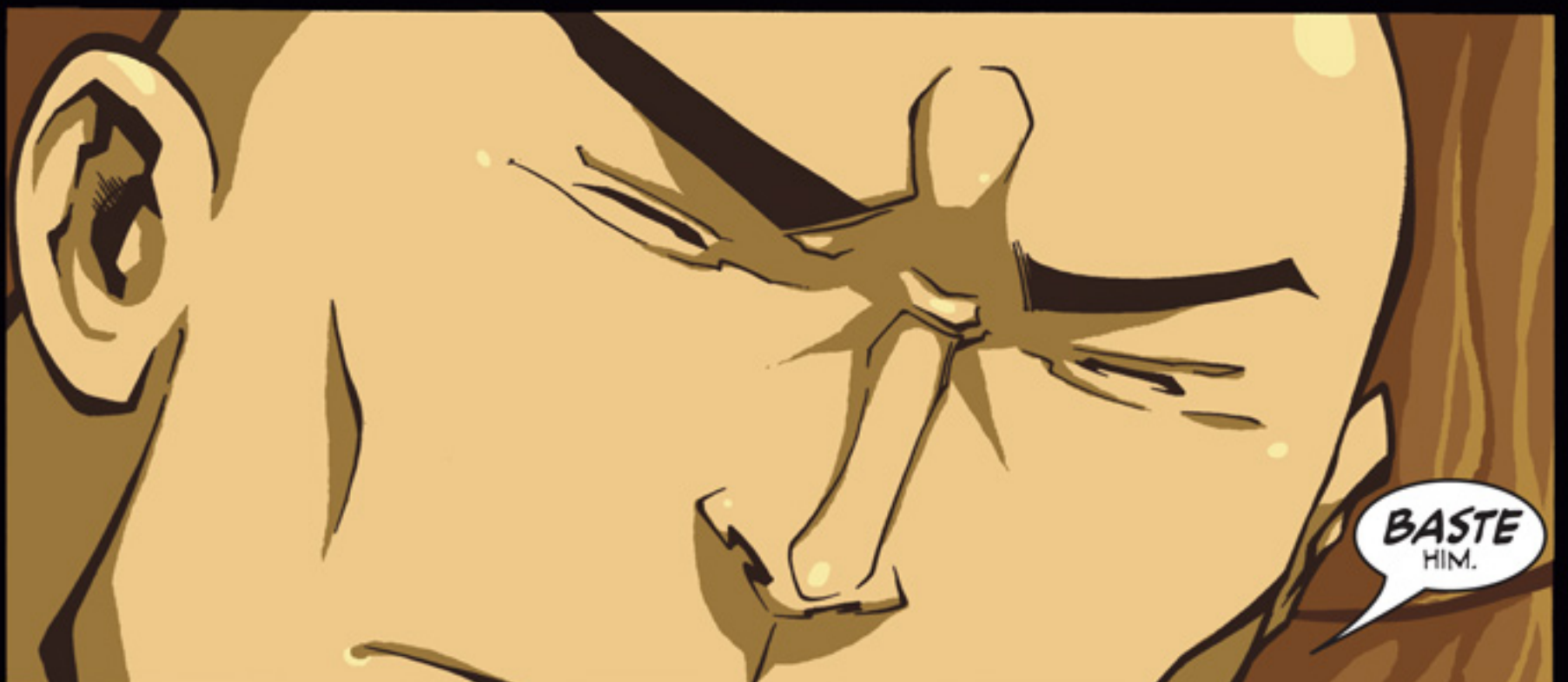


I-- I W-WON'T TELL YOU THAT!
I DON'T EVEN **KNOW!**



WELL, WHICH IS IT? YOU **WON'T** TELL US OR YOU **DON'T** KNOW?

WHA-?
NO, I, UH... I DON'T KNOW!



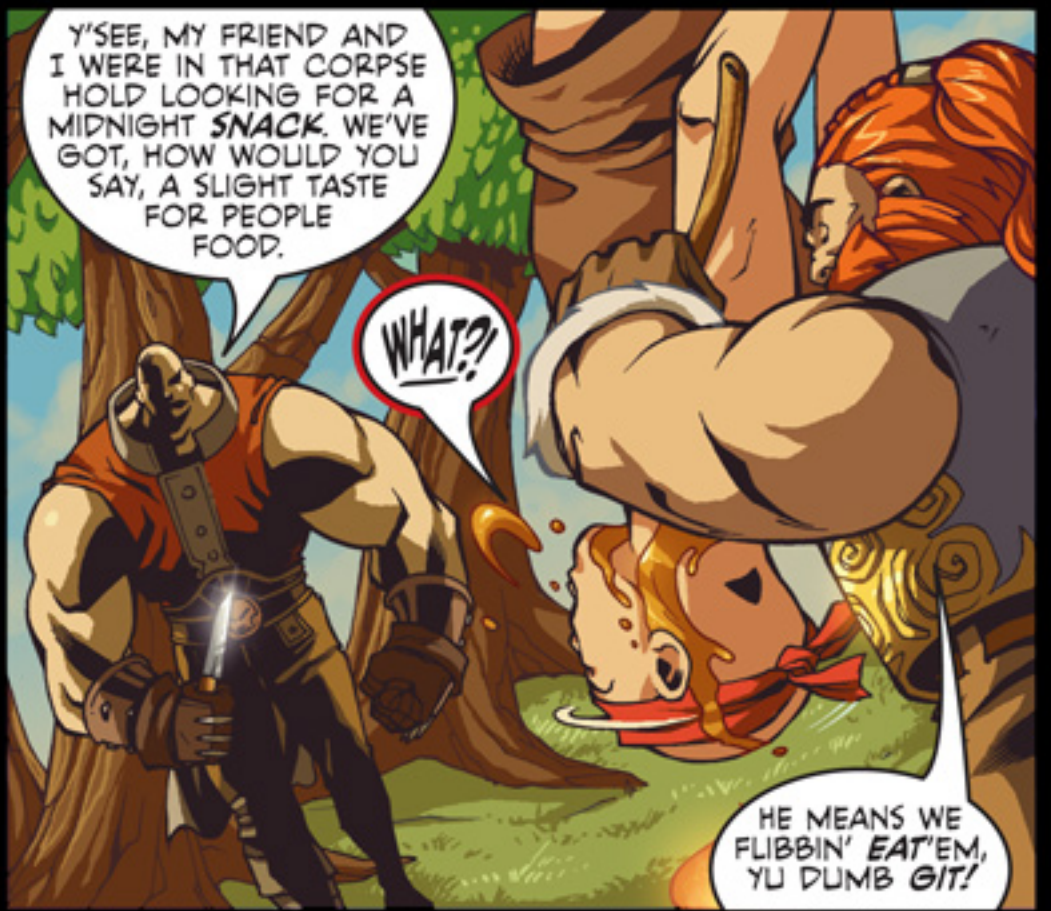
BASTE HIM.



WHAT ARE YOU--

BASTING.
DINNIT HE JUST SAY THAT?

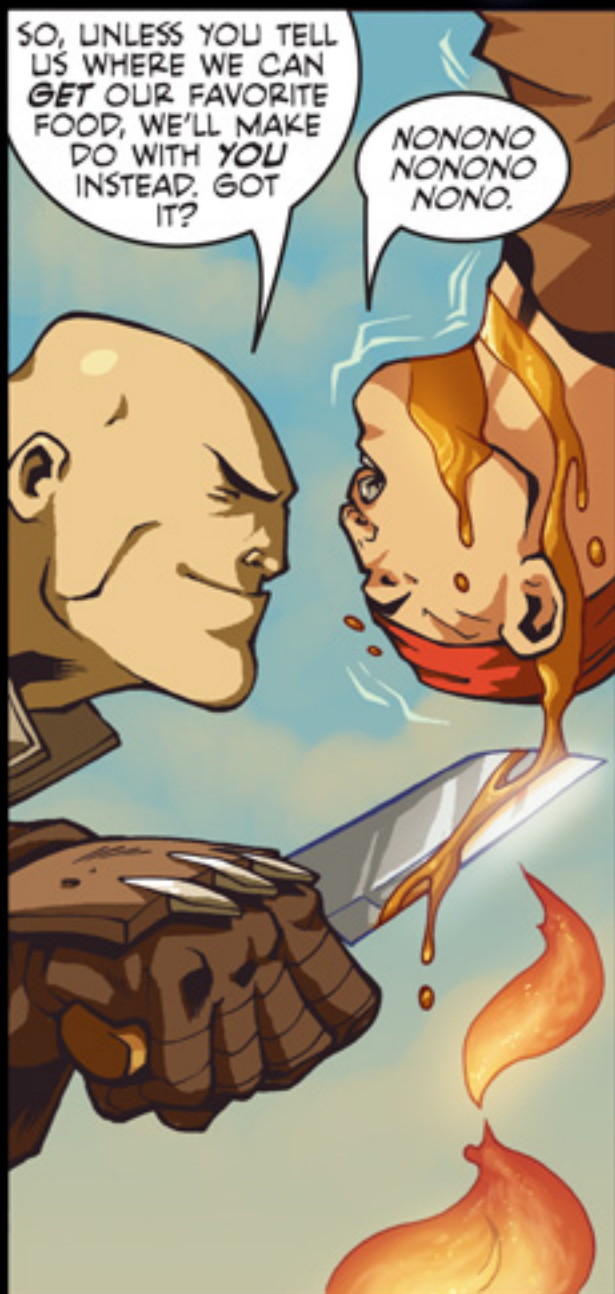
GLOP



Y'SEE, MY FRIEND AND I WERE IN THAT CORPSE HOLD LOOKING FOR A MIDNIGHT **SNACK**. WE'VE GOT, HOW WOULD YOU SAY, A SLIGHT TASTE FOR PEOPLE FOOD.

WHAT?!

HE MEANS WE FLIBBIN' EAT'EM, YU DUMB GIT!



SO, UNLESS YOU TELL US WHERE WE CAN **GET** OUR FAVORITE FOOD, WE'LL MAKE DO WITH **YOU** INSTEAD. GOT IT?

NONONO NONONO NONO.



YESYES YES!

STIP STIP



DRIP

SIZLE



I'LL TALK!

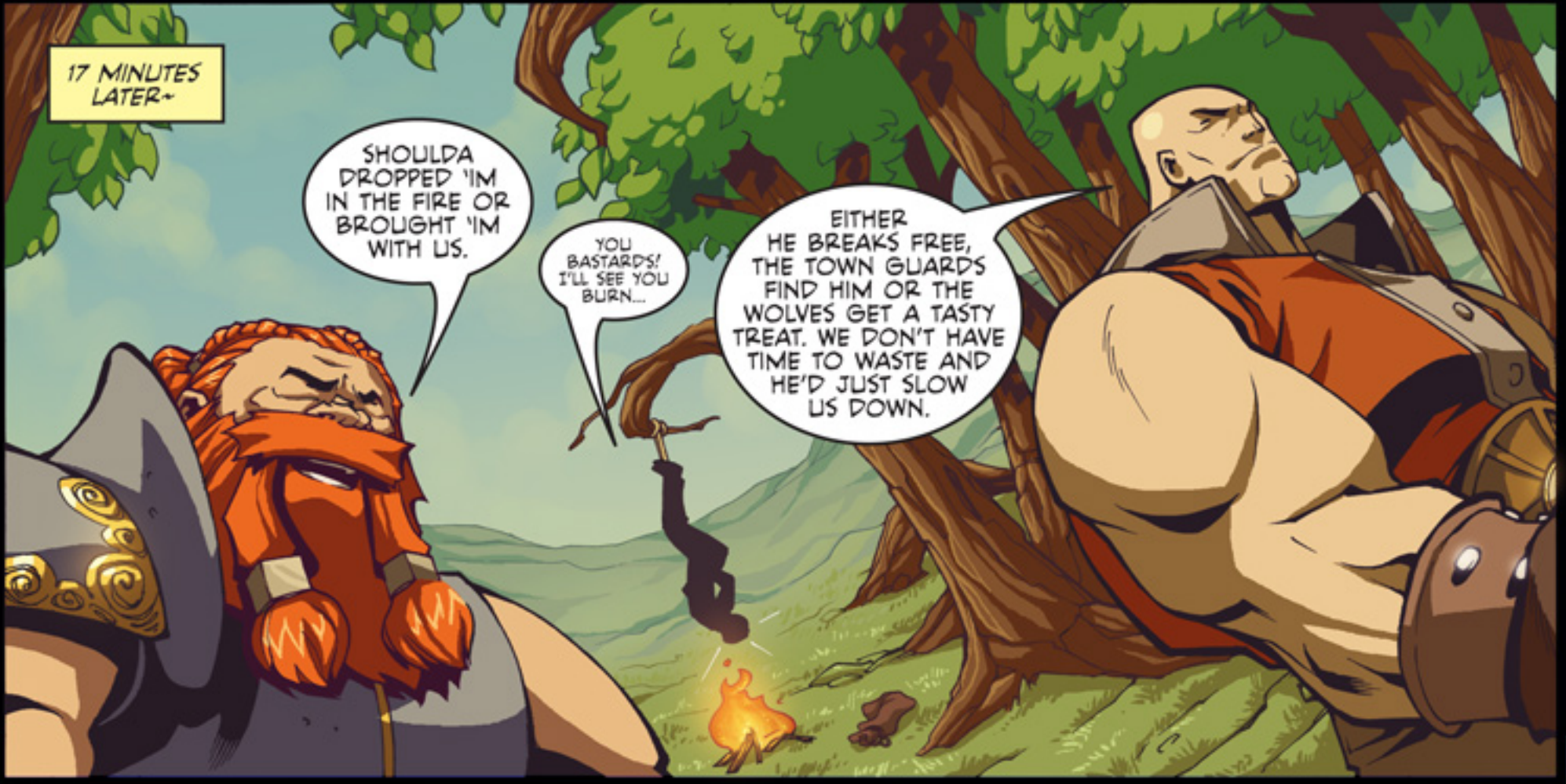
I'LL TALK!!

17 MINUTES LATER~

SHOULDA DROPPED 'IM IN THE FIRE OR BROUGHT 'IM WITH US.

YOU BASTARDS! I'LL SEE YOU BURN...

EITHER HE BREAKS FREE, THE TOWN GUARDS FIND HIM OR THE WOLVES GET A TASTY TREAT. WE DON'T HAVE TIME TO WASTE AND HE'D JUST SLOW US DOWN.



HUFF
HUFF
HUFF

STRIDE
STRIDE

RUN RUN RUN
RUN RUN RUN



I DON'T THINK YOUR LITTLE LEGS WILL--

SHUT UP, BALDY!



SUIT YOURSELF.



MID-AFTERNOON



NO SIGN OF ANY FORTRESS OR RUINS, NO. THERE'S A ROAD AHEAD, SO I THINK WE'RE GOING THE RIGHT WAY.

ANYTHIN'?



THE PROBLEM IS WE DON'T HAVE SUPPLIES FOR THIS KINDA TREK. WE'RE UNDER EQUIPPED AND OVER ARMORED.



HEY, THAT SOUNDS LIKE--

RUMBLE
RUMBLE
RUMBLE



OH, WAIT. LOOKS LIKE--



--HORSES!





--AND *THAT'S* WHY THE BROTH DOESN'T *THICKEN*, MY SWEET. YOU STIR IT IN BEFORE IT'S BUBBLING UP SO THE POWDER JUST SITS ON TOP.

LIKE YOU EVER MIXED THE PERFECT *POISON*, EH? WHO POISONED YOUR GREAT-UNCLE? WHO POISONED HIS MISTRESS AND THREE COUSINS? *HMM, HMM?*

SURE, YOU POISONED THEM BUT *AUNTIE* HELPED YOU MIX IT UP! LEFT TO YOUR OWN DEVICE YOU MAKE LAYERED MUSH THAT DOESN'T *WORK* RIGHT.



IS THAT *SO?*!



THEY'VE BEEN ARGUIN' ALL AFTERNOON. YOU THINK THEY'LL EVER SHUT UP?

IF WE KEEP OUR EARS OPEN, WE'LL KNOW ENOUGH ABOUT POISON TO TAKE CARE O' THEM BY DINNER TIME.



HEH. YEAH THAT'S A GO--

OOOF!

VOOSH! KLONK





WELL 'ELLO THERE, LOVELIES!



HA HA!

SMOOSH



DREEEE~!

WHAP

KRA KOW



POST-VIOLENCE

THANK YOU,
I THINK.

YER
WELCOME.

WE ARE BUT
HUMBLE MERCHANTS
TRAVELING THESE DIRT
ROADS. WE HAVE **LITTLE**
IN THE WAY OF COINAGE,
BUT YOU HAVE
MY ETERNAL--

A HORSE,
FOOD AND
MONEY.

WELL, MY
GUARDS HERE
WOULD BEG
TO DIFFER.

£&# YOU.
JUST GIVE 'EM
WHAT THEY WANT
OR THEY'LL KILL
US TOO.

I...
SEE.



THIS HEARTY STEW WILL FILL YOUR BELLIES AS YOU TRAVEL, MY NEW FRIENDS.

WHORES N' GOLD! THAT SMELLS GREAT!

AH, YES. MY WIFE IS AN EXCELLENT COOK.



GRAB SOME SADDLE BAGS AND LOAD THEM UP WITH VALUABLES.

YESSIR.



WHAT'S FUNNY IS WE WERE GONNA ATTACK YER CARAVAN AND STEAL A HORSE BUT THE GOBBOS GOT HERE FIRST! THEM THIEVES STEALIN' OUR STEAL, Y'KNOW?

OH, THAT IS QUITE AMUSING, YES.



"THE POISON IN THE POT WILL KILL THEM BY NIGHTFALL. THEN WE JUST FOLLOW THE HORSE TRACKS, FIND THEIR CAMP AND GET EVERYTHING BACK.

"IDEALLY, YES, BUT DID YOU MIX IT PROPERLY THIS TIME?"

SO... YOU SURE WE'RE GOIN' THE RIGHT WAY?"



CHAPTER THREE







I'M
STARVIN!!



WHORES
N' GOLD.
THIS STEW IS
GONNA--



--BE THE *LAST*
MEAL THEY
EVER EAT!

THAT HAIRLESS OAF
AND HIS MIDGET ARE
PROBABLY ALREADY
DEAD.

WE'LL HAVE
OUR HORSE AND
GOODS BACK BEFORE
MORNING. WHY AREN'T
YOU *HAPPY*?

IF YOU'RE
RIGHT, I'LL BE
ECSTATIC BUT I HAVE
MY DOUBTS. YOUR
MIXTURE--



--SMELLS
DISGUSTING!
DID SHE SAY WHAT
KIND OF STEW
IT WAS?

GOOD STEW!
AN' THA'S GOOD
ENOUGH FER ME!
YU'R JUS--



--AN *IDIOT!* WHY'D
YOU USE *FALLOWLEAF*
INSTEAD OF
MORIBUND??!

STOP YELLING! IT WAS ON
SALE, OKAY?! *FALLOW'S* LESS
POTENT BUT IT'LL DO THE JOB!
HOW MANY COUSINS HAVE
I KILLED FOR YOU,
HMM??!







DISGUSTING
DWARF CHILD,
YOU ARE CHOSEN
BY THE NIGHT SKY.
WE HAVE SEEN A
POWER IN YOU THAT
YOU CANNOT
IMAGINE.

MANY
HORRORS
AWAIT YOU, IN
PLACES NONE OF
YOUR KIND HAVE
EVER TREAD
BEFORE.

BUT
TREAD THEM
YOU SHALL.

POWER.

POWER.



AND
WHEN A COMET
BURNS BRIGHTEST IN
THE EASTERN SKY AND THE
FORESTS TURN THEIR BACK
ON ALL, YOU WILL KNOW
THE END TIMES HAVE
COME.

IF YOU
FACE THESE DAYS
WITH COURAGE AND
VANQUISH YOUR
ENEMIES, A KINGDOM
LIKE NO OTHER WILL
BE YOURS FOR
THE TAKING.

IF
YOU FAIL,
DESPAIR.

DESPAIR.

DESPAIR.



YOU CANNOT CONTACT THE SKY.

THERE IS NO PROPHECY, ONLY REALITY.

THOSE MADE.

RENT ASUNDER.

UNMADE.

CLEAVED WHOLE.

RED SWORD, BLACK KEY. THE GIZZARD.





KRA
KOW

KRA
KOW

KRA
KOW

COSMIC
FABRIC.

BENEATH
US.

AND

HAVE--

HAVE
YOU TRIED
THE ALE?

WHO
DOESN'T
LOVE A FINE
ALE?

DAWN.



HOURS LATER

I'M NEVER LEAVIN' TOWN AGAIN. TOWNS ARE SMALL AN' HAVE PLACES TO SLEEP.

WE CAN'T GO BACK WITHOUT THE CHANCELLOR'S CORPSE.

THE CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD HAS PROBABLY CHARGED US WITH MURDER AND GRAVE ROBBING BY NOW.

A BIT LATER

THIS IS THA PART OF TRAVELIN' THAT DON' MAKE IT INTA BALLADS SUNG BY THA BARDS...

THA PART WHERE YUR TIRED N' SICK AS A DOG.

IF YOU BARF AGAIN, I'LL TRAMPLE YOU.

LATER STILL~

DO YU BELIEVE IN PROPHECY?

SHUT UP.

AND, FINALLY~



WE'RE HERE.

JAB

ACK!



NICE.



LET'S GET A CLOSER LOOK AND SEE IF WE CAN'T STEAL BACK THAT STOLEN BODY.



UHH~

WHOOOMP







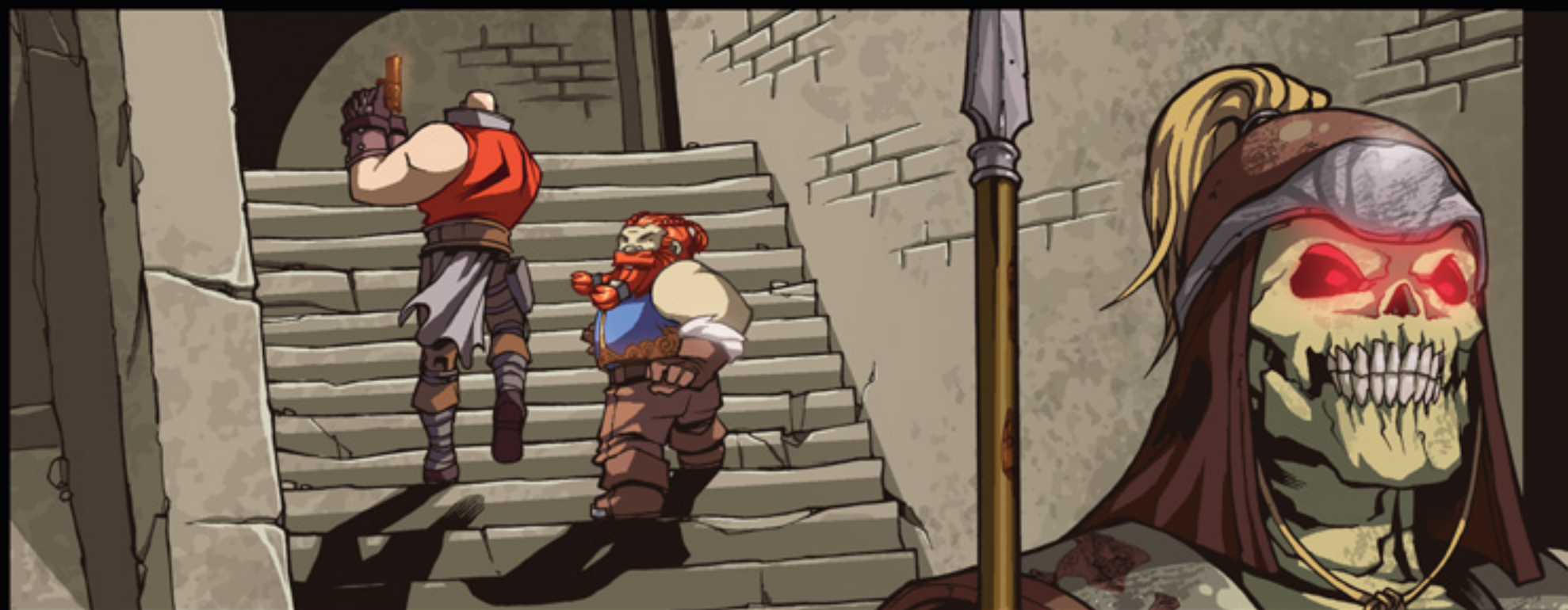
BODY LANGUAGE TRANSLATOR:
OH MAN I WANT TO SMASH
THESE GUYS SO BAD.

BODY LANGUAGE TRANSLATOR:
I KNOW YOU DO, BUT WE
CAN'T AFFORD TO MAKE
NOISE, SO COOL IT.



FACIAL EXPRESSION TRANSLATOR:
C'MON, PLEEE-EASE?

FACIAL EXPRESSION TRANSLATOR:
NO, YOU MORON. QUIT IT!





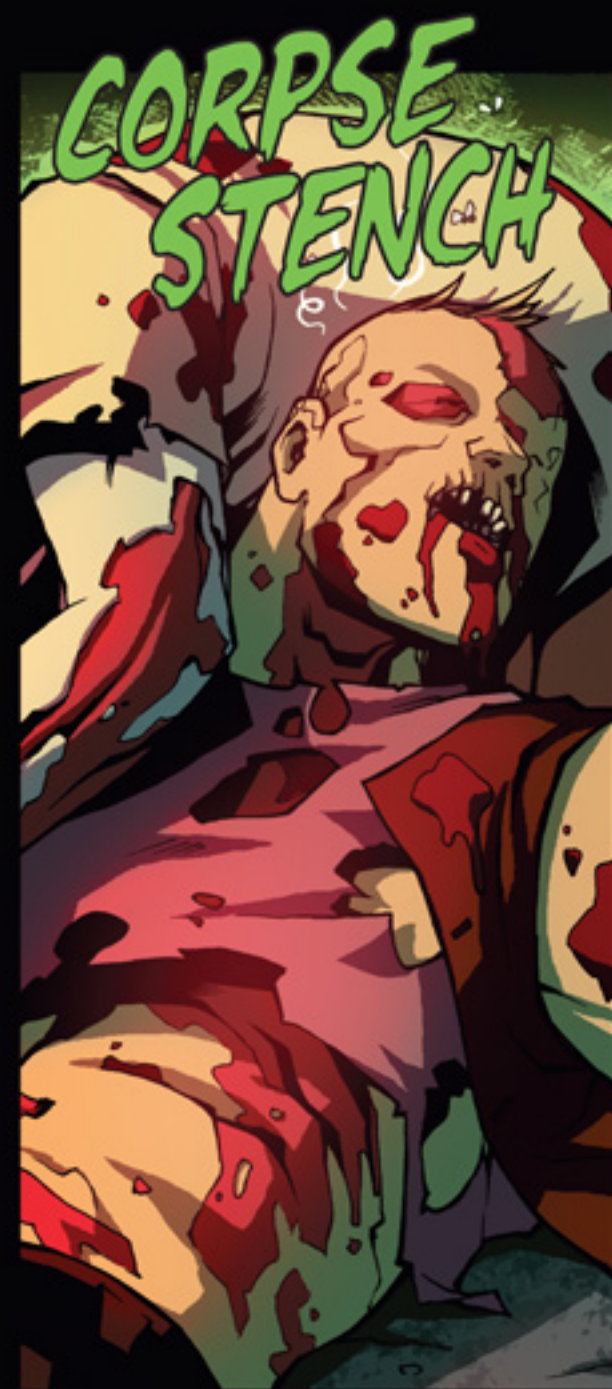
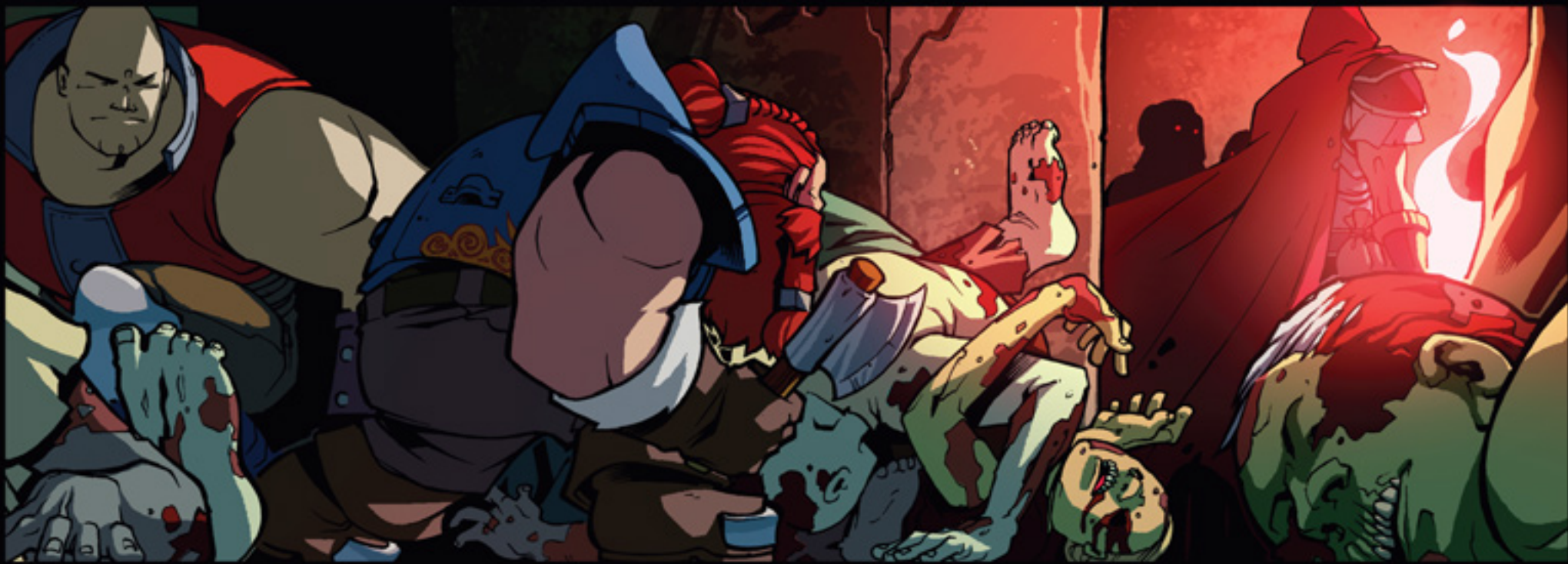
EJO DISO
SUPCOPIAE COPIE
TAXTHALMUS.

EVERTO
DEMOVOX LINDAVO.
I EXCITO VOBIS PER
LACUNA VOS CHO
HAI. EARO MIHI QUOD
REPONDE. ADDO
VITA ILLIS
CORPO.

PLANTO
LEMMMA VESTRI
VERNULA QUODI
PROMPTUS
MINISTRO.











YOU... BLASTED... DEAD...

GRAB

CLENCH



WHOMP

BLUH!



KAW

HOOOMP

~
~
~



CUD YUZ... BITTA HELP 'ERE...

EXCELLENT!

PREP THIS LITTLE INTERLOPER FOR A NEW CEREMONY. HE WILL JOIN OUR ARMY OF THE RISEN IMMEDIATELY!



CHAPTER FOUR





OH... THAT
SLUCKED...

עשה
לך יום

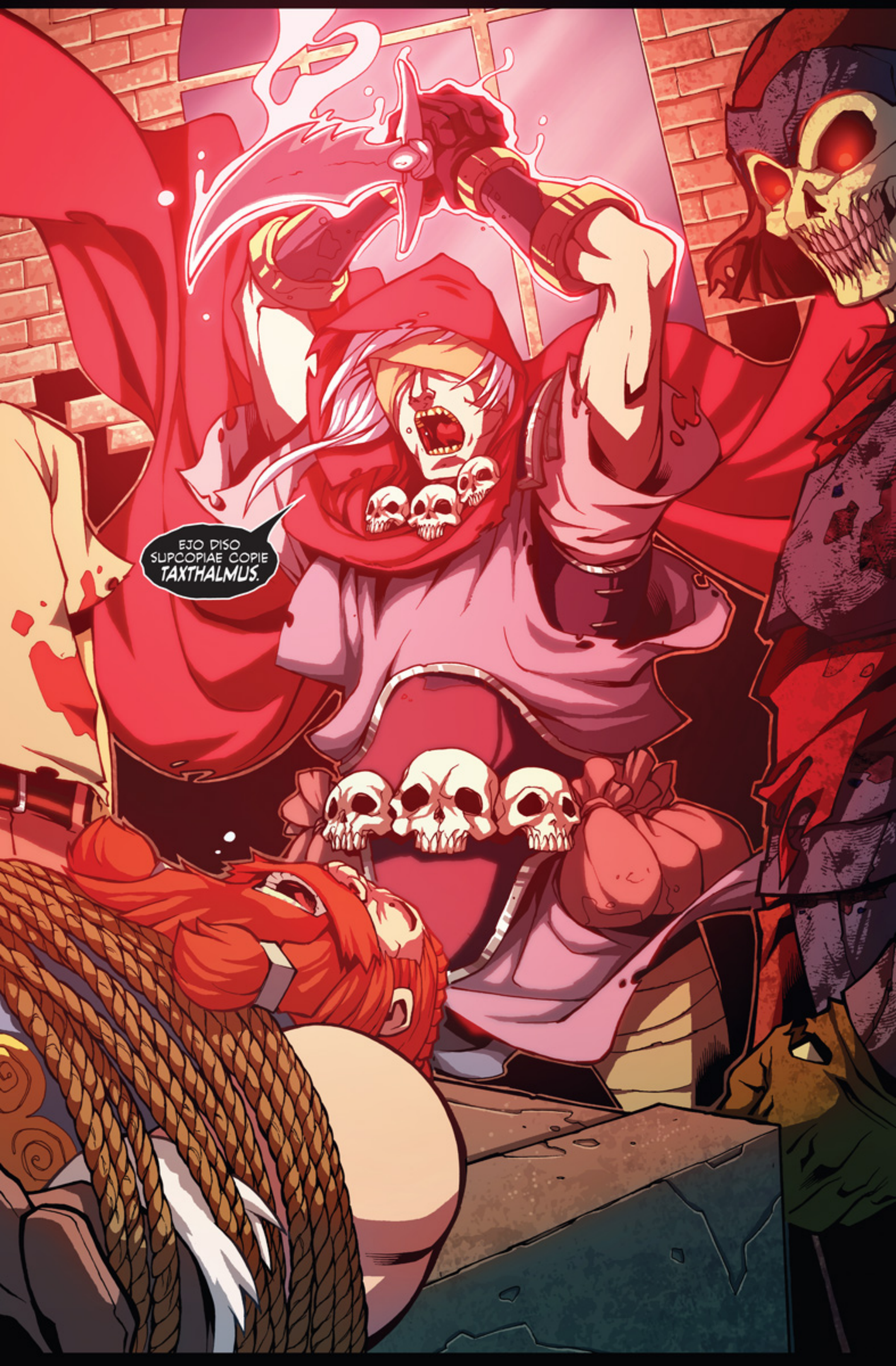
'S A ROUGH
DAY... AN--

--WILL CAUSE
INTENSE PAIN SINCE
YOU WON'T ACTUALLY
BE DEAD UNTIL THE
SPELL IS CAST. IT WILL
BE WONDERFUL TO
BEHOLD YOUR
ANGUISH.

UH,
OH.



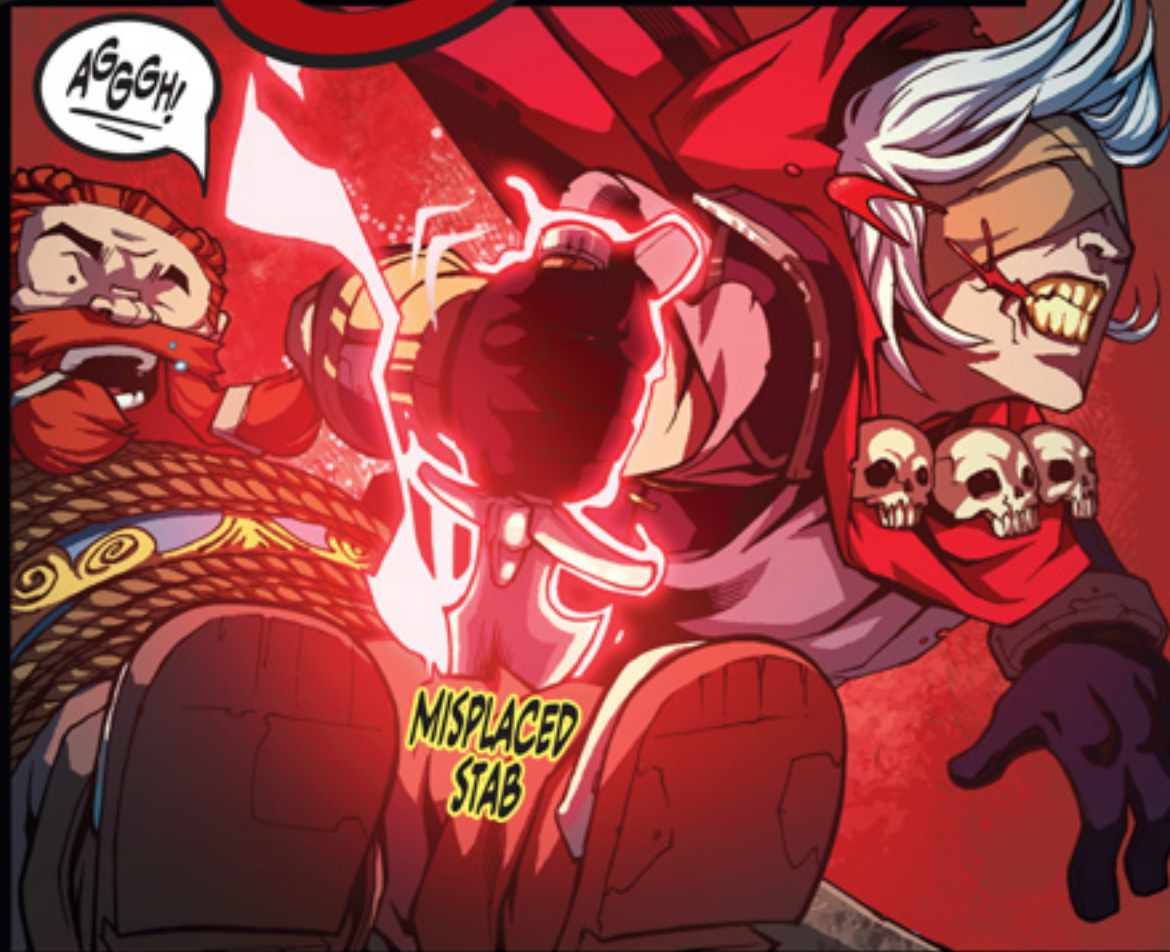
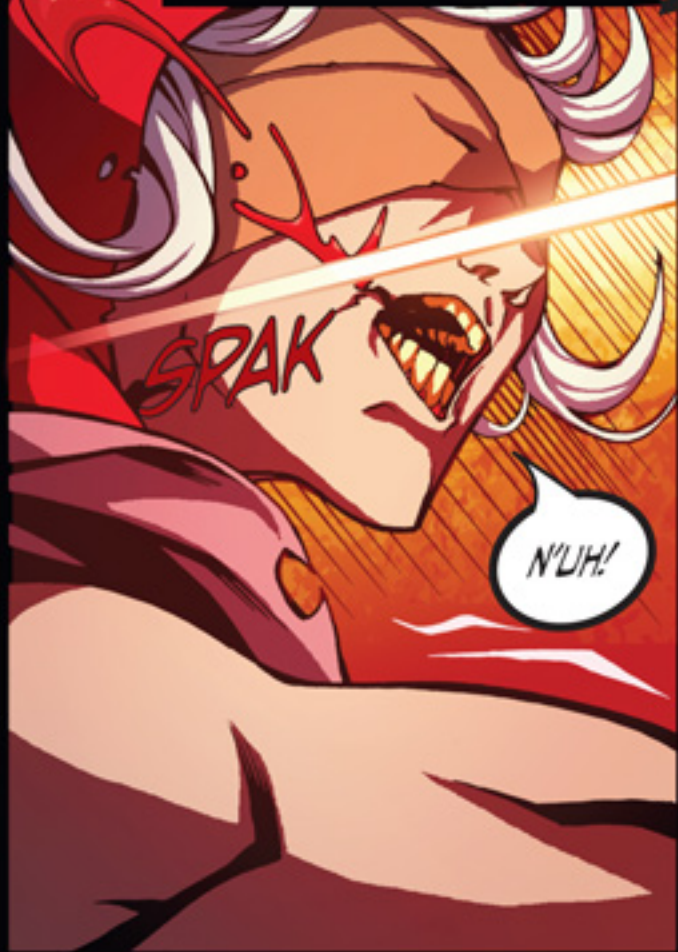




EJO DISO
SULPCOPIAE COPIE
TAXTHALMUS.



KRAKOW





NO NEED TO RUSH. I'LL BE HERE FOR A WHILE, BOYS.

KRA
KOW
KRA
KOW

~GRUNT SWEAR~



WHOMP

CREEAK



CRUSH

SPLUD



HE'LL BE OVERWHELMED SOON ENOUGH...

I MAY HAVE MISSED YOUR HEART BUT IT SEEMS YOU'RE STILL MINE TO COMMAND, SMALL ONE. RISE FROM DEATH AND SLAY YOUR ALLY.

SLICE



SMALL ONE?!

BOOT

WHOOM



WHEN I GET ONE A ME AXES I'LL CUT YER FLIBBIN' LEGS OFF AND WE'LL SEE WHO'S SMALL THEN, EH?



ENOUGH OF THESE PETTY INSULTS.

MY MAGIC IS MORE THAN ENOUGH TO DEAL WITH YOU.



THIS AIN'T WORKING.



ATRUM VENEFICUS OF MALUM--



'NUFF O' THAT GIBBERISH!

KA-BONK

VULN--

AGH!









MINUTES LATER~

SCRATCH
SCRATCH

BASH

BASH

OKAY,
WE NEED
A PLAN.

=WHIMPER=

A PLAN
NOW? WHAT
HAPPENED TO
THA' PLAN
BEFORE?



WHAT
DO YOU
MEAN?



I MEAN WHY'D
YU LEMME GET
CAPTURED AND
STABBED, YU
GIT?!

WHERE
WERE
YU?

WHY DINNA YU
BACK ME
UP!?



OH,
THAT.

I SAW THE
CHANCELLOR'S
BODY IN
THERE.

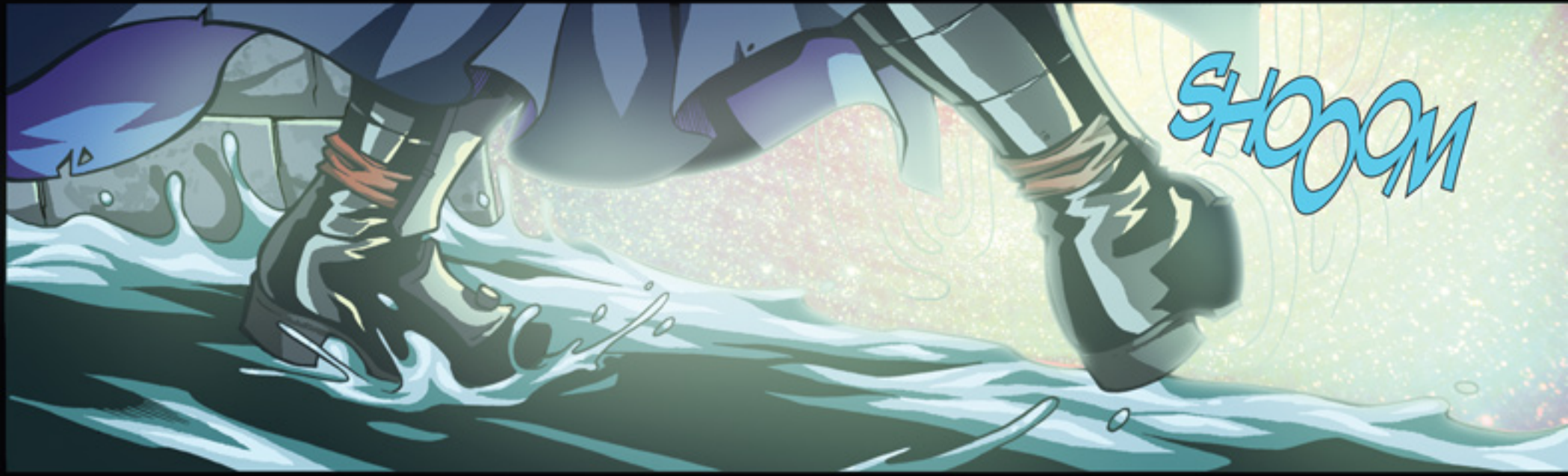
SO, WHILE YOU DISTRACTED
THEM, I DRAGGED HIS CORPSE
UP THE STAIRS, STASHED HIM
AWAY AND THEN CAME BACK
TO SAVE YOUR
ASS.



FAIR
'NUFF.

=WHIMPER=

ELSEWHERE



...IF IT ISN'T KUSIA, BACK FROM HER LITTLE MISSION.*

STOW THE SARCASM, FLUTTER-MOONE.



DARLING, PLEASE. I JUST EXPECTED A BIT BETTER FROM THE GREAT 'BLOOD FEATHER OF UNDERHOLLOW'. WHAT TOOK YOU SO LONG?



THE CHANCELLOR IS DEAD, AS REQUESTED. HIS BODYGUARDS WERE A BIT MORE...*DYNAMIC* THAN I'D ANTICIPATED. I TOOK A LONGER ESCAPE ROUTE.



THE IMPORTANT PART IS THAT IT'S *DONE* AND YOU'RE *BACK*.

THE COUNCIL WILL BE SO CAUGHT UP IN FUNERAL PLANNING AND IN-FIGHTING THAT WE CAN FINISH OUR PLANS AND MAKE THE CITY OUR OWN LITTLE GARDEN.



IT WON'T BE THAT EASY, FLUTTER. THE COUNCIL WILL INVESTIGATE THE ASSASSINATION.

LET THEM. BY THE TIME THEY FIGURE OUT WHAT'S GOING ON WE'LL HAVE THEM *SPELLBOUND* WITH FAERIE DUST, READY AND WILLING TO GIVE THEIR LIFEBLOOD TO *OLD MOTHER MARSH*.

TEE HEE!



MEANWHILE~

SCRATCH
SCRATCH

THUMP

THOSE ZOMBIES DON'T STOP, BUT THEY'RE NOT BREAKING DOWN THE DOOR EITHER. I GUESS THEY NEED TO BE TOLD TO BUST STUFF.

YEESH.

THEY'RE DUMBER THAN CRUSTY CENTAUR TURDS.

TRANSLATED FROM MASHED FACE CHATTER~

TAY MA NA HEY MEH BUT AY WEY GEH TU EVEHCHAY.

They may not have minds, but they will get through eventually.

IS HE CASTIN' ANOTHER SPELL?!

NAH, JUST BABBLIN'!

EH WEY SE YE BUH DEH. EH SWEY EH.

I will see you both dead. I swear it.

IS THERE A COMMAND WORD OR SOME CRAP? HOW DO WE GET THESE STIFFS TO LEAVE US ALONE?

EH! TEY YE HEY UH MEH! EFF UH YE OH!

Hey! Take your hands off me! \$%^& off, you oaf!

EH...

Uh...

PWE, JU INNO DEH

Please, just ignore that.



NOW...
WHAT HAVE
WE HERE?

MEY!
NE YE!

Mine! Not yours!



IF ME
BAD LEG'S ANY
INDICATOR, THEN
THAT LOOKS
PROMISIN'!

T
W
I
T
C
H

S
H
I
V
E
R

M
U
F
F
E
R



YU DU
UHSTEH TE PUVEH
IN TE STUH! YU
MU STEH!

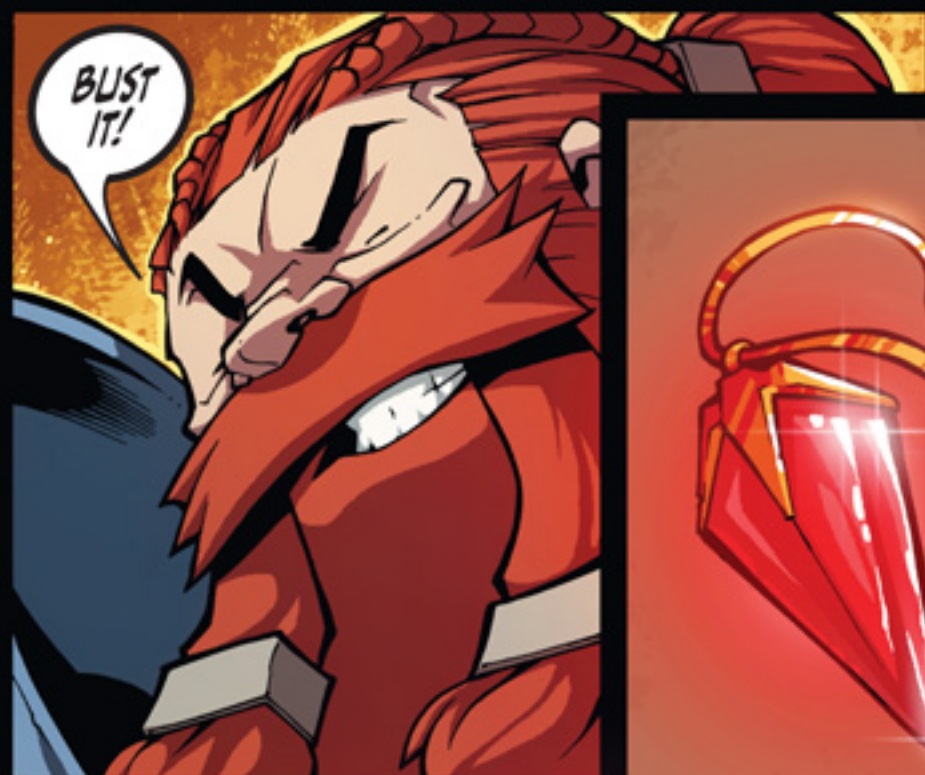
**You don't understand the power
in that stone! You must stop!**



COMMAND
WORD?

NU!
EH NE LU
DE!

No! It's not like that!







NU, YE *HUTHU!*
TE JU UH JU UH
CUTUH STU. YU
DU UH TUBUH
TUBUH TUH.

No, you heathens! That gem isn't just a control stone. You've done a terrible, terrible thing.



I DON' KNOW WHAT HE'S *WAILIN'* 'BOUT BUT I GOT MEH LEG BACK. THAS' ALL THA' MATTERS.



YUP. THEY'RE ALL DEAD...

ERR...
DEAD AGAIN.




SU BU BU BU BU BU!

It's bad, bad, bad, bad, bad!






SHUDDER



My ceremony contacted the mighty demon lord Taxthalmus.



He leant me a portion of his power, but I made sure I had a sliver of control.



But you destroyed it and now Taxthalmus' power is here, running free.



HU UVUH
SU HUGU,
YE FU.

AHH!

His evil soul hungers, you fools.

WU
DU!

We're doomed!



CHAPTER FIVE





AAAAAAAAAAH!!





THEY'RE GONNA CATCH US! GO FASTA! FASTA!

GRRRR...

BWAHUU-HUU

GALLOP GALLOP GALLOP GALLOP GALLOP GALLOP GALLOP GALLOP



OH NOOOOO! ME LEG AGAIN! THE LEG SPIRIT IS PULLIN!

-URK!

TWINGE

GALLOP GALLOP GALLOP GALLOP GALLOP GALLOP GALLOP GALLOP



WU DUH! WU EFF DUH!

*TRANSLATED FROM BROKEN TEETH/SMASHED JAW MUMBLINGS.

We're dead! We're %^&ing dead!*

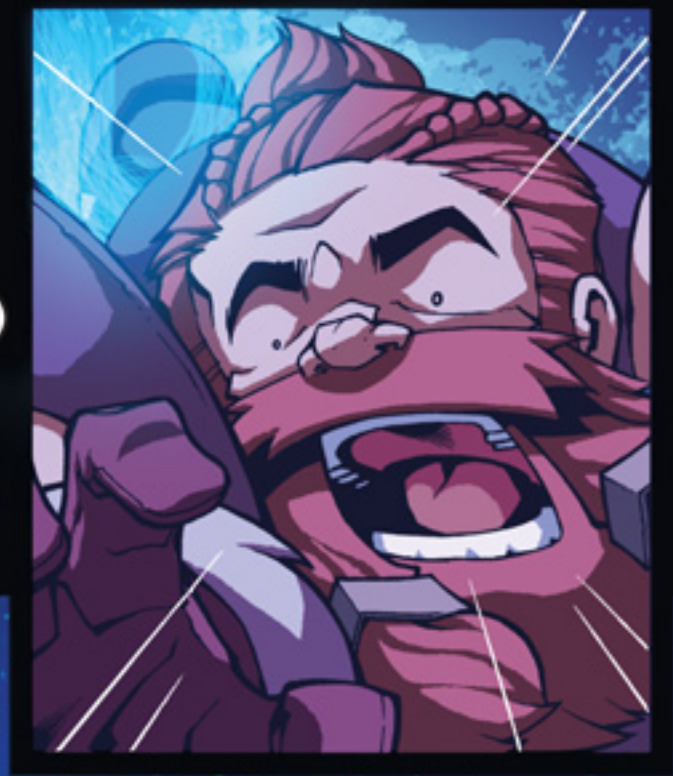
GALLOP GALLOP GALLOP



AWFUL... EVIL... LEG!

-CHOKE-!

GALLOP GALLOP GALLOP GALLOP GALLOP GALLOP GALLOP GALLOP



CHAOTIC MASS



MUDWICH TOWN
POPULATION:
UNIMPRESSIVE



NO TIME TO EXPLAIN. WAKE UP THE LIEUTENANT AND TELL HIM YOUR LITTLE BURG'S ABOUT TO BE OVERRUN BY THE DEMONIC DEAD.

WHO GOES THERE?! WHY ARE YOU RIDING IN LIKE A FOOL AT THIS TIME OF NIGHT?

ALSO, I'VE GOT THE CHANCELLOR'S MISSING CORPSE AND AN EVIL NECROMANCER FOR HIM.



YOU DON'T REALLY EXPECT-

KRA
KOW



AAAAAH!
FOOT! OW OW
OW OW!



GET THE LIEUTENANT.

Y-YES, SIR!

MOMENTS LATER



-AND YOU EXPECT ME TO JUST LET YOU GO?! YOU'RE INSANE! ASSAULT, THEFT, PROPERTY DAMAGE, DESECRATION OF THE DEAD...

I CAN KEEP GOING!

YELL ALL YOU WANT, LIEUTENANT. IT DOESN'T CHANGE THE FACTS.

YOU'VE GOT LESS THAN AN HOUR BEFORE THIS WHOLE PLACE IS OVERRUN BY A DEMONIC HORDE...

THIS BROKEN-FACED MORON'S RESPONSIBLE.

BLEH.



MAKE WAY FOR FJALO, THE FALLEN CHANCELLOR'S VIZIER!

WHAT IS GOING ON HERE? I WAS TOLD THE CHANCELLOR'S BODY HAS BEEN BROUGHT BACK?

OH, GIMME A BREAK... I DO NOT NEED THIS \$8'S RIGHT NOW.

SIR, ARE WE ARRESTING ANY ONE, OR WHAT?

-AAAAAAAAAAR!



THAT IS WHAT I WAS TALKING ABOUT. INCOMING NASTY \$%&.

EEP



RUN!

HELP!

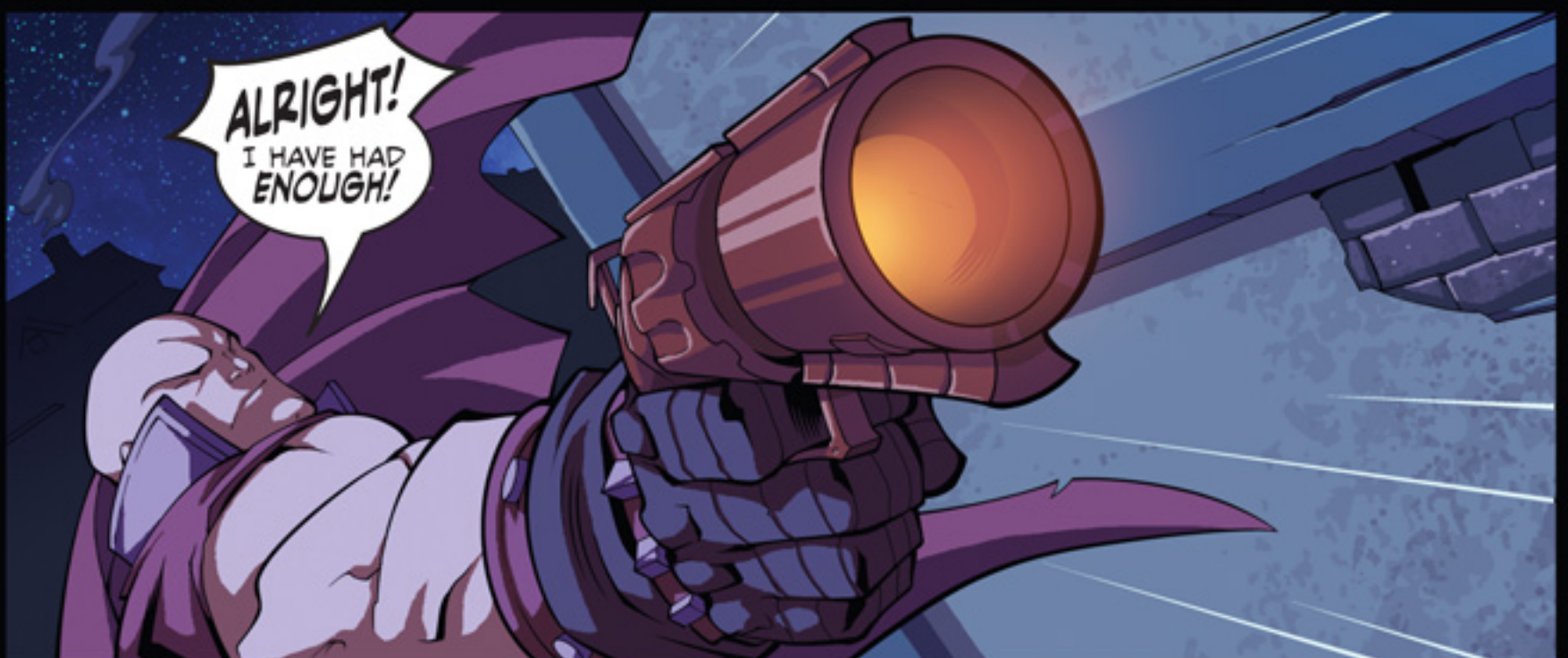
HOLY \$%&!

DO NOT ABANDON YOUR POST... AND BRING MY ARMOUR BACK!

GIVE ME THE CHANCELLOR'S BODY. NOW.

PAY FOR IT.







RAAAAAA!

SPLO

SPLO



KRA
KOW

YOU KILLED
MY BUDDY AND
WRECKED OUR
BIG HAUL.

YOU ARE
GOING DOWN,
YOU GIANT \$8'8
WALKER!

KRA
KOW



KRA
KOW

KRA
KOW

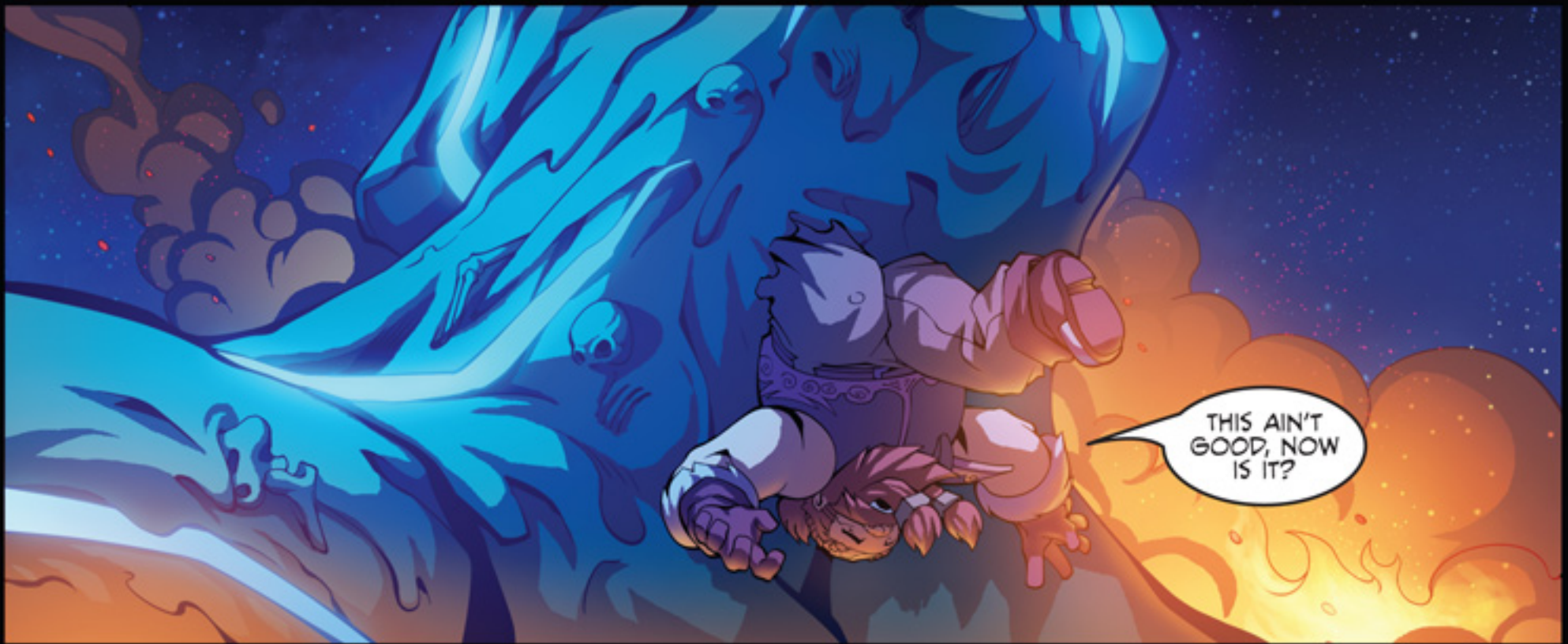
RAAAAAA!



GOTS TA
STOP BLACKIN'
OUT LIKE
THA'...

KRA
KOW

KRA
KOW



THIS AIN'T
GOOD, NOW
IS IT?



IT'S FINAL
JUDGEMENT
FROM THE
GODS!

SOMEBODY
STAB IT IN
THE FOOT, OR
BROW!

FIND
SHELTER!

MY LEG'S
ON FIRE
AGAIN!

NOPE.
NOT GOOD
AT ALL...

I TOLD
YOU NOT TO
CURSE YOUR
ANCESTORS!





LET MA LOVELY LIMB GO!

MIGHTY TUG!

LITTLE BRAIN HAEMORRHAGE

ARRHH!

CRASH



YOU GOT ANY KINDA WEAK SPOT UP THERE?

KRA KOW

SPLOD

KRA KOW



OOF!

GRAB



SQUEEEEEEEZE

-CACOPHONY OF CURSES-



FINE! IF YU DON' WANNA LEMME OUT THEN I'M COMIN' IN!

SKULL
KICK

SQUISH





COMPLETE
HORRENDOUS
BRAIN
DAMAGE!

uff



TWITCH

WHOAH!



WHOOM



UH...



THOOM

WHOOM



THE NEXT MORNING~



NOW THAT'S GRATTITUDE!



DO I GET TO CALL MYSELF "GIANT-KILLER" ALL THA TIME NOW?

LOOK, DON'T MAKE THIS ANY MORE PAINFUL THAN IT ALREADY IS.

I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU DID IT, BUT YOU KILLED THAT CREATURE AND THE WHOLE KINGDOM IS GRATEFUL, OKAY?



"TITAN MASHER"!

"CREATURE KILLER"!

"MONSTER MURDERER"!



OKAY, ENOUGH.

"DEMON DEAD-IFIER" ...

REST UP FOR A FEW DAYS AND THEN AN ENTOURAGE WILL BE COMING DOWN TO ESCORT YOU BOTH TO URBIA FOR A HEROES' FEAST AND CELEBRATION.

JUST GO.



"SKULL-KICKER"?...

CAN YOU SHUT HIM UP?

'FRAID NOT.



THE NECROMANCER'S DEAD, SO I'VE GOT NO WAY TO FIND OUT WHAT THAT MONSTER WAS OR WHERE IT CAME FROM. BUT, I'M NOT *STUPID*...

COULDA FOO-

I KNOW YOU TWO *SS-ES* PROBABLY HAD *SOMETHING* TO DO WITH ALL OF IT.

I CAN'T PROVE IT AND THE TOWNSPEOPLE ARE HAPPY AND SAFE SO IN THE END THAT'S ALL THAT MATTERS.



EVEN STILL, TAKE YOUR MIDGET ON A LITTLE TRIP TO THE CAPITAL CITY, CLAIM YOUR 'RIGHTEOUS' REWARD AND DON'T COME BACK HERE, OKAY?

WE'LL GO.

FOR NOW.



GOOD-BYE.

UNTIL NEXT TIME, YU UPTIGHT PRICK!

DEMON DWELL
THE UNDERWORLD

YOU
THOUGHT YOU
COULD TAME
THE POWER OF
A DEMON
LORD?

IS IT JUST
ME, OR IS HIS
SOUL PEERING
IN FEAR?

GIVE
'EM HELL,
TAX.

YOUR
ARROGANCE
DESERVES
ETERNAL
TORTURE

TAX IS
BONNA
SNUFF 'IM
OUT.

MAGE
OF THE DEAD
IS NOW A DEAD
MAGE.

I-RO-NY!

YOU
MISSED WITH
THE WRONG
DEMON,
BRO.

YES,
I KNOW. I HAVE
NO EXCUSE BEYOND
MY OWN FOOLISH
AMBITION, BUT
I CAN STILL BE
OF USE TO
YOU.

I KNOW
MUCH OF THE
WORLD ABOVE
AND MY SOUL WILL
BE YOURS TO USE
AS A WEAPON
AGAINST THE
MORTALS.


YOUR SOUL
WAS MINE THE
INSTANT YOU
CALLED UPON
THE POWER.

SOUL
PINCH

AAAAGH!

HOWEVER,
WHETHER YOU
INTENDED IT OR NOT,
YOU HAVE GIVEN ME
SOMETHING QUITE
USEFUL.

EVEN IN
DEFEAT, A SLIVER
OF MY POWER
STILL RESIDES IN
THE LIMB OF
THIS DWARF.



HE SHALL
BE THE KEY TO
OUR FUTURE
CONQUEST.

MY
'FOOTHOLD' ON
THE MORTAL
REALM.

TO BE CONTINUED!

TWO COPPER PIECES



SKULL KICKERS

2 COPPER PIECES

Skullkickers started off as two short stories in Image's Popgun anthology series.

Chris Stevens was approached by the editors of Popgun and asked to contribute a short story. When he had trouble brainstorming up something fun to draw, we chatted on the phone and I conjured up the idea of two battle-hardened monster killers who kicked butt and had fun banter between each other. Chris liked it and we were off to the races.

On these next few pages you can read those original Popgun stories and see the origin of what we'd eventually call 'Skullkickers'. The designs are almost identical (though the artwork is more realistic and rendered) and their personalities are intact. The violence is more pronounced and overall attitude is quite a bit more grim, but it's pretty much SK right off the bat.

The original short story is called '2 Copper Pieces' and it's a reference to the fact that these two 'heroes' are less than golden. It's also a bit of a joke about how much they'd charge to kill someone they didn't like. The ending is particularly morbid and, since I didn't think we'd ever use these characters again, I wasn't too worried about their moral standards.

The second story is called 'Gotcha' and I think it delivers on the SK premise quite strongly with tight little banter and then ridiculous violence.

Chris' natural sense of design alongside his atmospheric and earthy locales laid the ground work for the world these two oafs inhabit. The punchy visuals made it easy to come up with more ideas for fantasy clichés run amuck. When Erik Larsen (Image Publisher at the time) asked if we had more stories for these two, I leapt at the chance to flesh things out and take it further. Needless to say, I'm glad it all worked out.

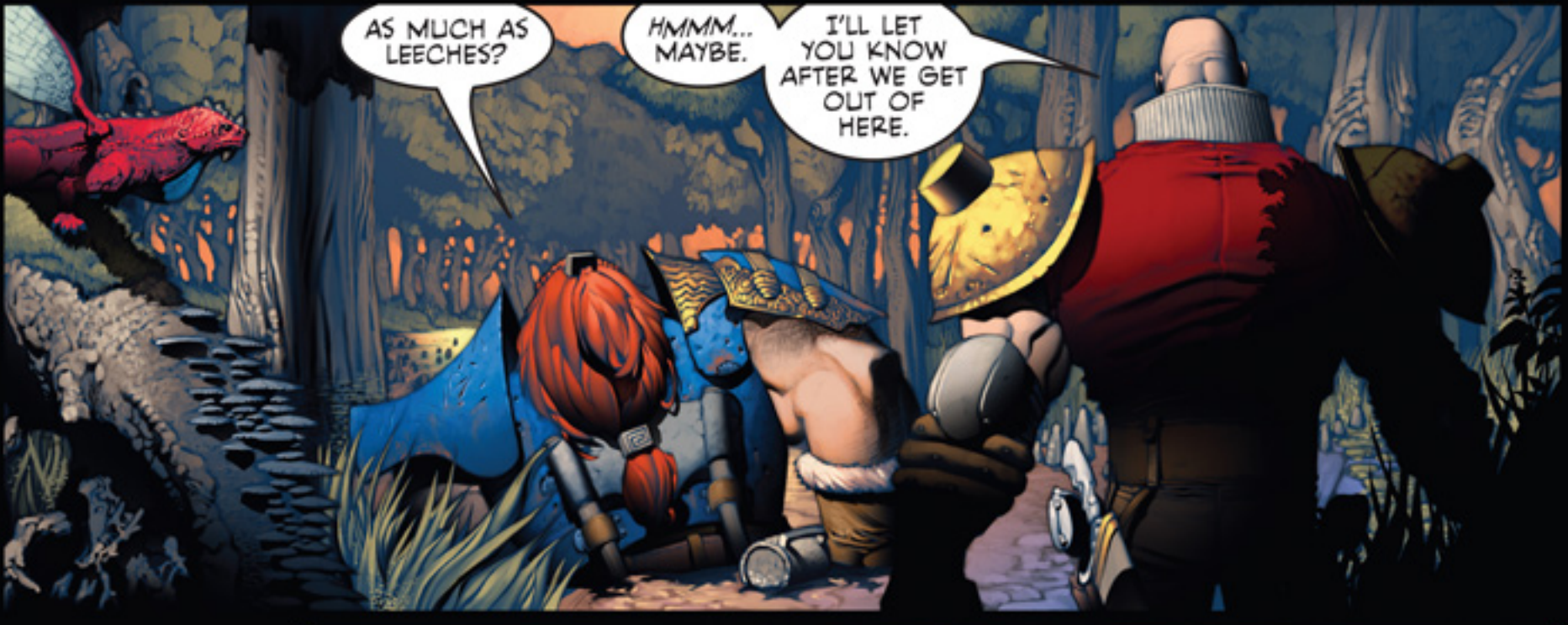
Enough of my blather - read on!

ZUB



I BET LEECHES ARE ALREADY ATTACHIN' THEMSELVES TO MEH FAMILY PRIDE.

LIAR.
YOUR FAMILY HATES YOU ALMOST AS MUCH AS I DO.



AS MUCH AS LEECHES?

HMMM... MAYBE.

I'LL LET YOU KNOW AFTER WE GET OUT OF HERE.



THE VILLAGERS SAID THIS BUGGER ATE OVER FORTY LOCALS?

SOMETHIN' LIKE THAT. THEY WERE A BIT CHOKED UP ABOUT IT.

KINDA HARD TO MAKE OUT DETAILS OVER THE WAILING AND SOBBING.



WHAT A BEAUT.

LOOKS LIKE OUR PAL'S GOT SOME DIGESTION PROBLEMS.

2 Copper Pieces

WORDS
Jim Zubkavich

ART
Chris Stevens

LETTERS
Marshall Dillon

NO WORRIES.

WE'LL GIVE 'M SOMETHIN' GOOD TO EAT.





CHOWING
THAT MANY
FOLKS MEANS
IT'S GONNA
BE FAT.

WHERE
DOES
SOMETHING
THAT BIG
HIDE?



THAT'S EASY,
BALDY.
IT DON'T
HIDE AT
ALL.



RIGHT
YOU
ARE.
YOU
WANNA GO
IN FIRST?



SURE. YOU BUY
THE FIRST ROUND
ONCE WE'RE
DONE WITH
TH-

RUMBLE





AAAAARRRR

WHOAH.
NOW
THAT'S A
LEECH.





GISH



HA HA HA!
IT'S JUST LIKE
CUTTIN' A FAT
OLD LADY!



I'M GONNA
PRETEND YOU
DIDN'T SAY
THAT.



YOU'RE
JUST WA-

KATHOOM

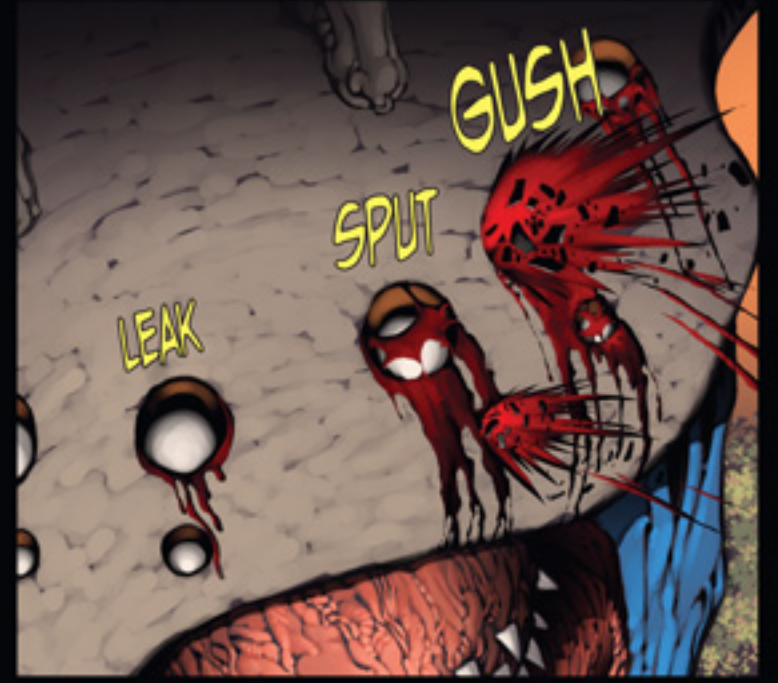




WHORES N' GOLD!
I GOT YA!

KA-THOK

SPLOOS



GUSH

SPUT

LEAK

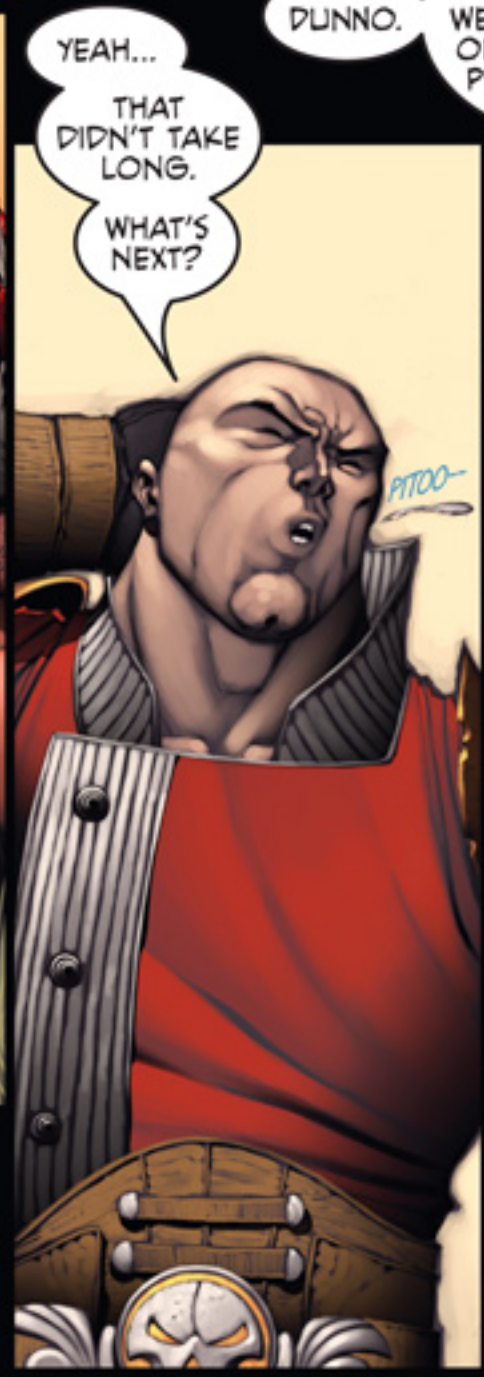


THOOOOO



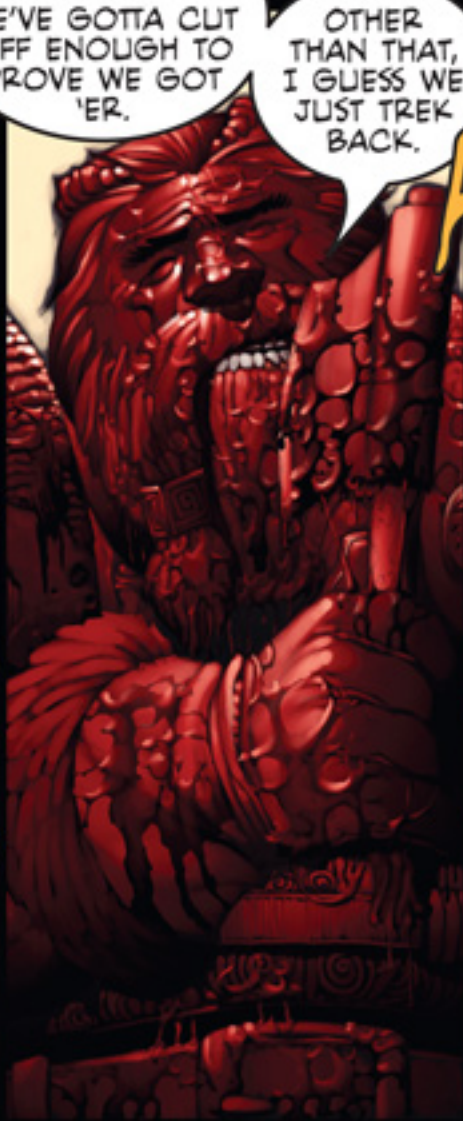
COUGH
COUGH
NICE KILL.

THANKS.
GOOD
DISTRACTION
THERE. DID
THE TRICK.



YEAH...
THAT
DIDN'T TAKE
LONG.
WHAT'S
NEXT?

PTOO-



DUNNO.
WE'VE GOTTA CUT
OFF ENOUGH TO
PROVE WE GOT
'ER.

OTHER
THAN THAT,
I GUESS WE
JUST TREK
BACK.



RRRRIP

EH?



MOOOOAAAAN! BLAAAAR! GWAAH! RAAARGH!



WHAT THE F-

WELL WHAT DO YA KNOW? IT ZOMBIFIED THE TOWNSFOLK IN ITS BELLY.



7 HOURS LATER

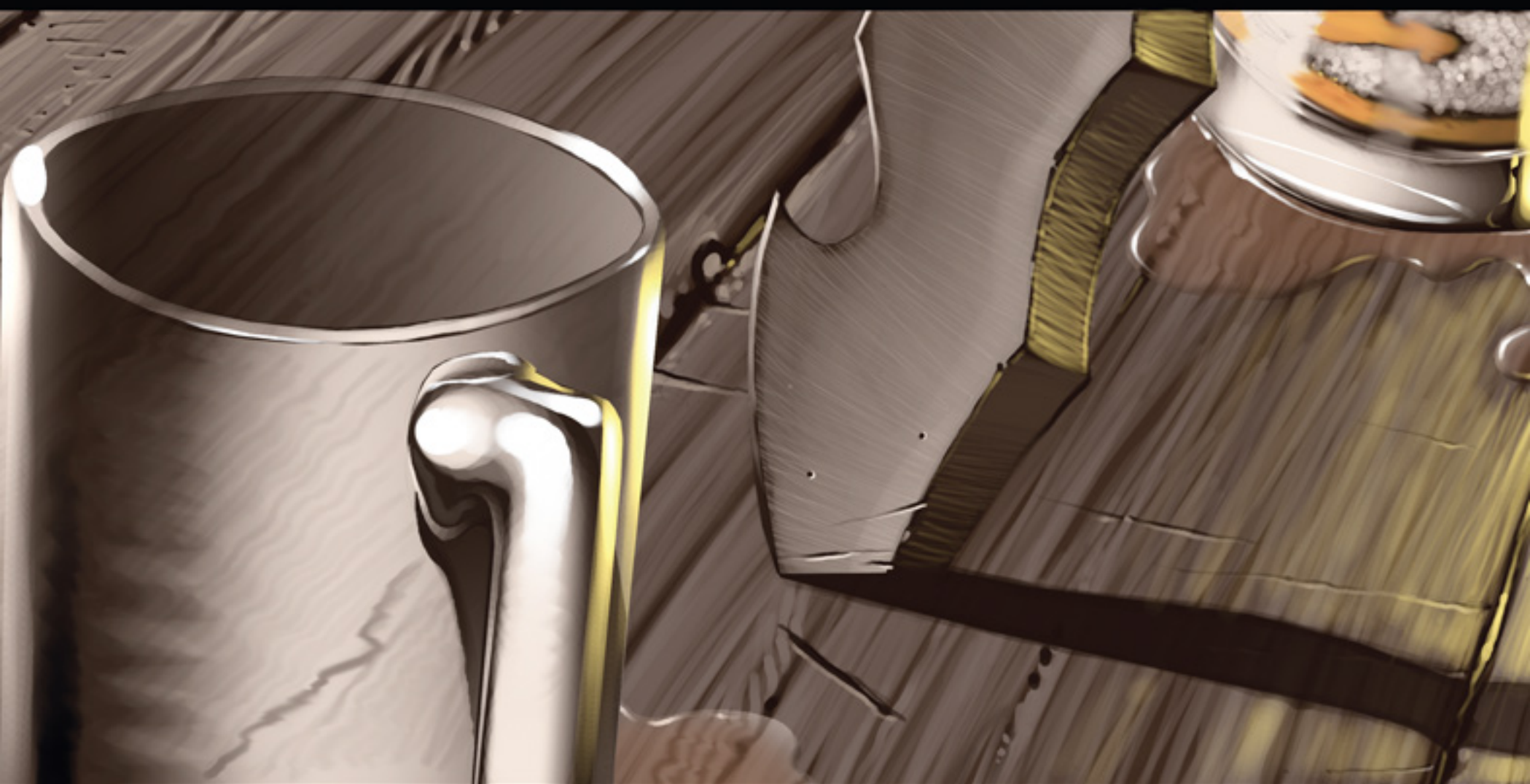
THAT'LL BE 15 SILVER FOR EXTRACTION AND TRANSPORT OF YER HUBBY.

THANKS FER THE BUSINESS, LADIES.

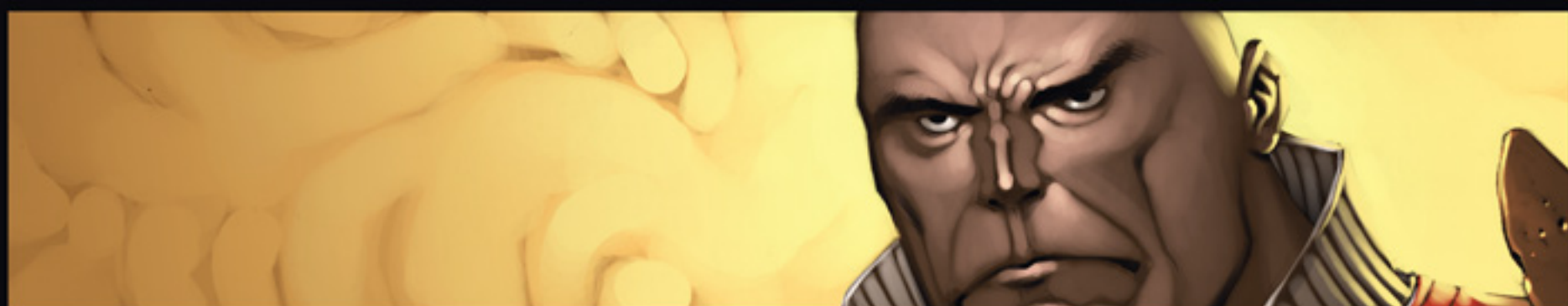
END.

2 Copper
Pieces

gotcha!



WORDS
Jim Zubkavich
ART
Chris Stevens
LETTERS
Marshall Dillon





WHAT'S YER PROBLEM?

YOU STILL WORRYIN' ABOUT THIS DOPPELGANGER WE'RE TRACKIN'?

GRUNT
MAGIC PISSES ME OFF. ILLUSIONS, ESPECIALLY.



HOW CAN WE PUT YER MIND AT EASE?

HMMM...

LET'S MAKE A CODE WORD FOR EACH OTHER SO WE CAN'T BE TRICKED BY THE DOPPELGANGER.



HOW ABOUT 'BEER'?

NO.



'BLOOD'?

NO.



'GOLD'?

NO.



'KILL'?

NO.



'FLOWERS'?

HELL, NO.



'MANGY CAT'?

NO.



'DEAD BIRD'?

NO.



'OLD WOMAN'?

NO.



'TRICKETY-TRICK'?

NO.



HOW ABOUT...



SKETCHES



Here are the first two sketches Chris Stevens ever put together for '2 Copper Pieces'.

There's a real ornate design sense to the outfits and although it was detailed and looked amazing, I was a bit worried that these two jerks might be looking too classy for the kind of story I had in mind.



Above and right: original design art by Chris Stevens.

Looking at these again, it's amazing how much from the original designs stayed intact in the final version. They were pretty iconic right from the get-go.

THE DWARF

Here's the pint-sized murder machine designed up for the comic series.

The style is streamlined and more expressive when compared to the original short stories, with a clean silhouette reminiscent of an animated cartoon.

The Dwarf is all emotional content - joy & violence always blaring.

He's quick to anger, but almost as quick to forgive. From one minute to the next you don't quite know what you're going to get.

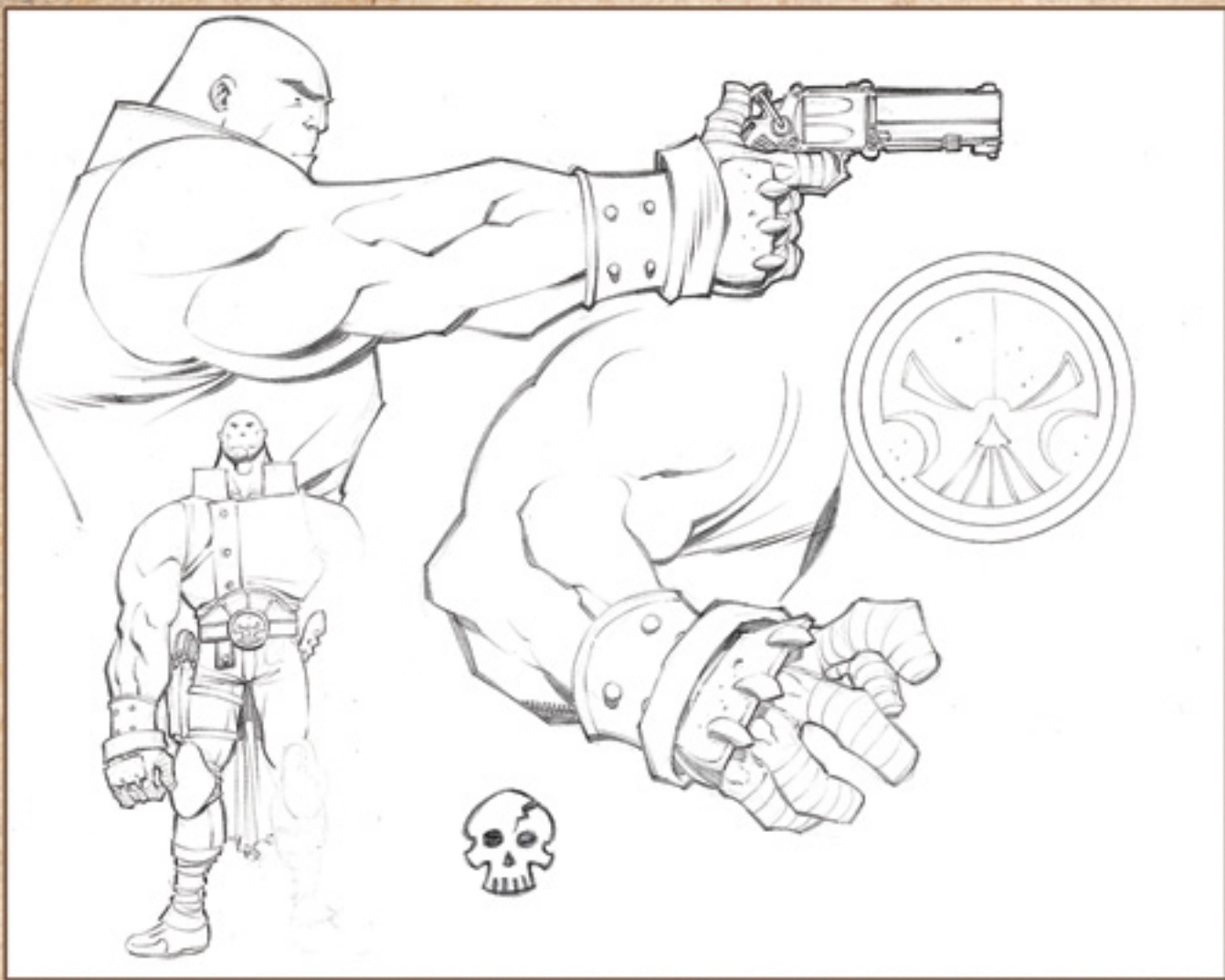


Above and left: Dwarf design art by Chris Stevens.

The werewolf punching piece on the left inspired the pot-bellied werewolf we used in chapter one.

I think I need to use that ear biting attack in a future issue.

THE BIG GUY



In this first story arc both mercenaries are nameless, like a pair of wandering “Men With No Name”.

To compensate, their appearance and distinct personalities had to be easy to describe.

Readers and reviewers would eventually start calling them “Baldy” and “Shorty”, which is good enough for now.

Above and right: Human design art by Chris Stevens.

The Big Guy is the more subdued of the two, trying to plan ahead a bit and keep things under control.

His physical size leads you to expect a hand-to-hand confrontation, but he’ll hang back and blast you with his pistol instead.

These expression sheets really hit the spot, delivering on the humor I wanted to have wrapped up in the series.



THE NECROMANCER



Above and right: Design sketches by Edwin Huang.

When Edwin came on-board the team he brought his own fantasy design sensibilities.


They were compatible with Chris', and yet were still distinctively his own. I can't wait to see what cool stuff he comes up with for future storylines.

I wanted the Necromancer to look goth, gaunt and intimidating, setting the reader up with the expectation he'd have the skills to match. Obviously, not the case.

Abusing this guy over and over was possibly the most fun part of writing the first Skullkickers adventure.

We haven't seen the last of him.





FANTASY ACTION-COMEDY

"This rowdy action story has whimsy, charm and wit."

- Gail Simone
(Birds of Prey, Wonder Woman)

Two mercenaries are entangled in a high-class assassination plot, and nothing — werewolves, skeletons or black magic — will stop them from getting paid.

If you love fantasy, action-comedy or a touch of black-hearted violence, then SKULLKICKERS is the book for you!

This book is for Teen Readers 13+ and includes the following - Alcohol use, comic mischief and cartoon violence. And by 'Violence', we mean: ugly face mashing, an axe in the skull, groin kicking, broken teeth, lopped off ears, choke holds, a gunshot in the face and an arrow in the eye. Ouch!

