Dungeons & Dragons

Down

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DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®

DOWN

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It is a time of magic and monsters, a time when the civilized world has been reduced to a few scattered points of light glowing with stubborn determination amid a rising tide of shadows. It is a time when only the bravest dare tread the wilds of the unknown.

A small town built upon the ruins of a larger city, Fallcrest lies at the crossroads of the Nentir Vale, a great wilderness dotted with a handful of inhabited villages and towns where bandits and monsters roam freely, threatening all who venture far from settlements.

This is a place in need of a few heroes.

Fallcrest is home to many adventurers, and Adric Fell leads one such group.

Fell's Five recently escaped from the Feywild thanks to a lot of moxie and the help of a deposed eladrin lord, but made an enemy for life in the process.

Art by Tyler Walpole

Chapter 1

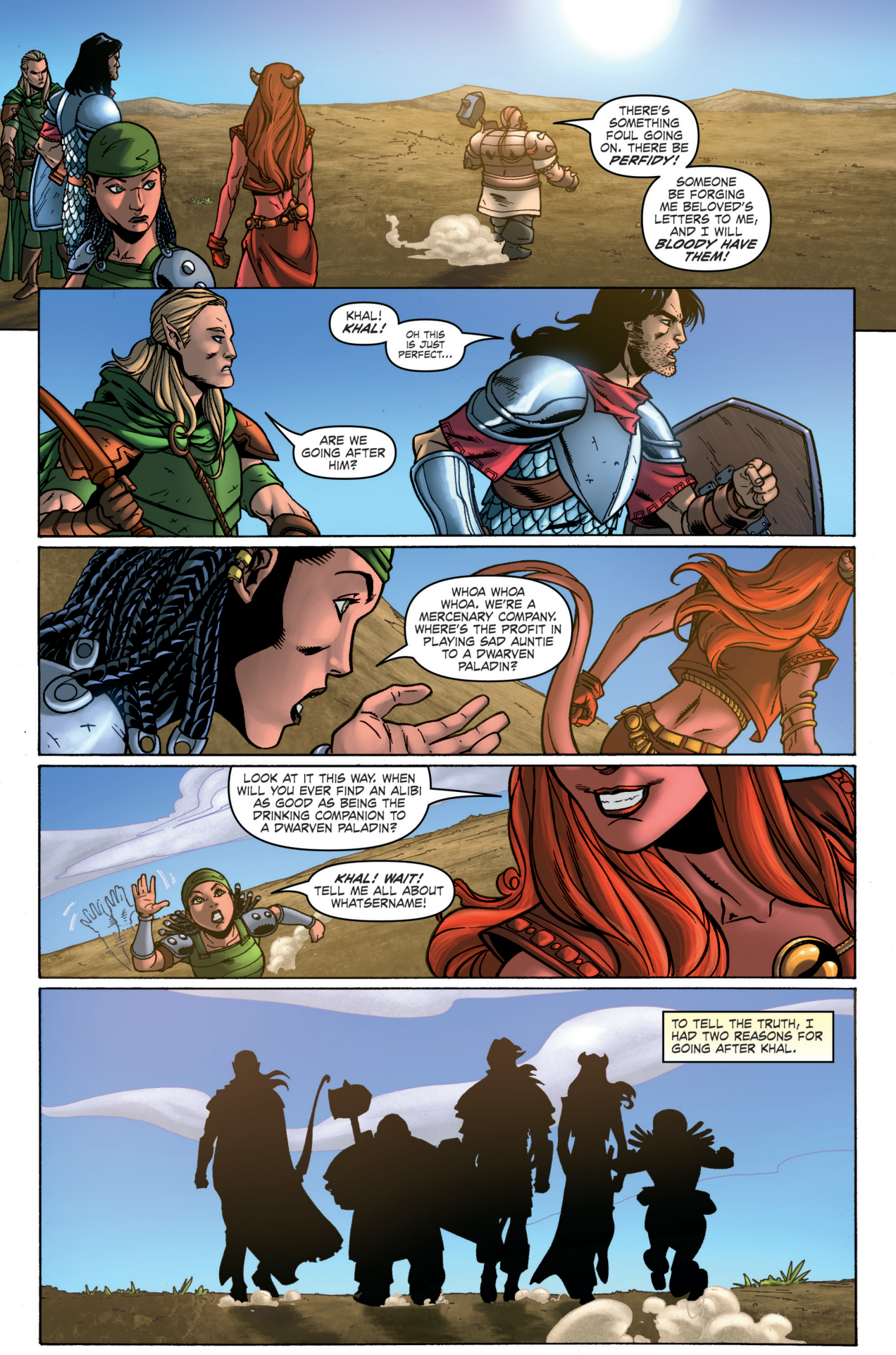
PROTECT THE CARGO!
PROTECT THE CARGO!
THE THINGS WE DO FOR LOVE.

SCHUNK
AIIEEEE!
THESE THINGS ARE BLOODY TOUGH—
"DUCK"! I SAID "DUCK"!
WHAT EVIL, POWER-MAD MAGE COOKED THESE UP?
SCREEEEE!
-:SIGH:-
TIEFLINGS CREATED KRUTHIKS, DIDN'T THEY?
...YESSSS.
REALLY? I HAD NO IDEA!
EVIL MONSTERS MADE BY TIEFLINGS. WHO KNEW?
BREE, WOULD YE STOP MUCKIN' ABOUT—
—AND GET THESE SACKS AWAY FROM THE KRUTHIKS!
WATCH IT!

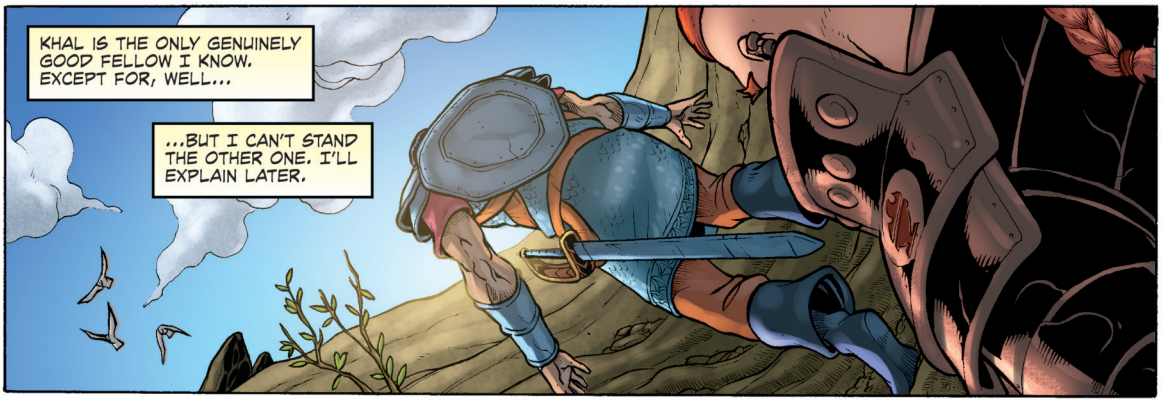
KHAL! KEEP YOUR HEAD IN THE FIGHT!
THAT'S THE LAST OF THEM!
PLEASE BE THE LAST OF THEM.
CHUNK
CHKKCHKK— KRRRK
TAKE IT EASY, THERE, WE—
—DON'T WE KNOW YOU?
UNF... DAVAN.
RUNNING CARAVANS IN THE VALE IS A DANGEROUS JOB.
IF NOBODY RUNS THE WAGONS, WE CAN NEVER REBUILD. SOMEBODY'S GOT TO DO IT.
SO, WHAT QUEST ARE YOU LADS ON THIS TIME? RESCUING MAIDENS? FIGHTING MONSTERS?
TELL YOU THE TRUTH, WE WERE LOOKING FOR YOU.

KHAL NEEDED TO READ THE MAIL.
RIGHT NOW.
BUT WE'RE DUE IN FALLCREST IN JUST A WEEK.
IF WE HADN'T COME ALONG, YOU'D BE RED STAINS ON THE WAGONS. SO COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS HE'S IMPATIENT.
THIS IS WRONG. KRUTHIKS STALK THE UNDERDARK. DEEP IN THE UNDERDARK.
SO SOMETHING DROVE THEM TOPSIDE?
CAN'T YOU COMMAND THEM WITH YOUR EVIL MIND?
I HAVE HAD JUST ABOUT ENOUGH OF—
AHA!
HERE IT BE. THE NEXT LETTER FROM MY BELOVED DANNI, ADDRESSED TO ME IN FALLCREST!

"...AND I'LL BE FOREVER YOUR GUIDESTONE IN THE DARK, YOUR SUNROD IN THE MINES OF THE LONELY NIGHT!"
THAT SOUNDS ROMANTIC ENOUGH. IN A DWARFY, COMPLETELY NON-ROMANTIC SENSE.
IT BE AN ODD TURN OF PHRASE FROM AN ENGINEER. SHE'S LIVED AMONG THE STONES SINCE HER BIRTH, SHE'D CALL IT A "LODESTONE" NOT A "GUIDESTONE"!
AND YE NEVER USE A SUNROD IN THE MINES! SUNROD'S LIGHT BURNS YELLOW-WHITE, THROWS OFF YOUR EYE FOR SPOTTING COPPER VEINS IN THE WALL!
YES.
...OF COURSE?
WAS I NAE SAYIN' IT, BREE, BEFORE THE SHADOWPLAGUE, HOW HER LETTERS BE SHORTER AND LESS SWEET?
WAS... WAS I SUPPOSED TO BE PAYING ATTENTION?
IT WASN'T ABOUT GOLD SO I JUST HEARD "BLAH BLAH NOT GOLD BLAH."


THERE'S SOMETHING FOUL GOING ON. THERE BE PERFIDY!
SOMEONE BE FORGING ME BELOVED'S LETTERS TO ME, AND I WILL BLOODY HAVE THEM!
KHAL! KHAL!
OH THIS IS JUST PERFECT...
ARE WE GOING AFTER HIM?
WHOA WHOA WHOA. WE'RE A MERCENARY COMPANY. WHERE'S THE PROFIT IN PLAYING SAD AUNTIE TO A DWARVEN PALADIN?
LOOK AT IT THIS WAY. WHEN WILL YOU EVER FIND AN ALIBI AS GOOD AS BEING THE DRINKING COMPANION TO A DWARVEN PALADIN?
KHAL! WAIT! TELL ME ALL ABOUT WHATSERNAME!
TO TELL THE TRUTH, I HAD TWO REASONS FOR GOING AFTER KHAL.

VARIS IS GENIALLY CORRUPT. TISHA HAS HER OWN AGENDA, I SUSPECT. BREE IS... BREE.
COPERNICUS JINX IS MANIPULATIVE, AND EVEN JULIANA CRAVES MAGICAL POWER.


KHAL IS THE ONLY GENUINELY GOOD FELLOW I KNOW. EXCEPT FOR, WELL...
...BUT I CAN'T STAND THE OTHER ONE. I'LL EXPLAIN LATER.

I'D HATE TO LOSE KHAL. BUT THERE'S ANOTHER REASON.
I'VE NEVER BEEN TO A *DWARVEN STEAD.*

MY YOUNGER BROTHER ALWAYS WANTED TO GO. HE LOVED THE STORIES OF THE DWARVEN HEROES.
SEEING AS I'M THE LAST OF THE FAMILY, I SUPPOSE THERE'S ONE BIT OF GOOD I CAN DO IN HIS MEMORY.

HOW COME YOU'VE GOT *FIELDS* OUT HERE?
CATTLE EAT GRASS.

GRASS DOES 'NAE GROW IN THE DARK OF THE HOLD. AND EVERY HOLD MUST BE ABLE TO STAND ALONE.

NO CITY OF ANY SIZE CAN STAND ALONE.
A HOLD CAN. IT MUST, IN CASE SOME ENEMY WIPES OUT THE OTHER HOLDS.

HAS THAT EVER HAPPENED BEFORE?
NO. BUT IT MIGHT.
THAT IS... CHEERFUL. SO WHY—

HELP! *HELLLP!*

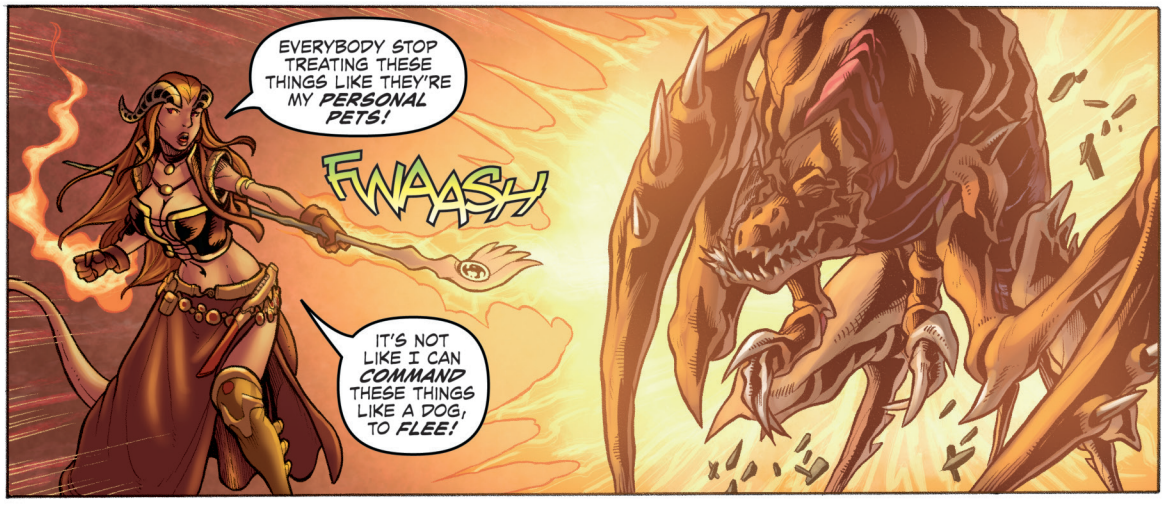
RING THE ALARMS! SCAVENGER!

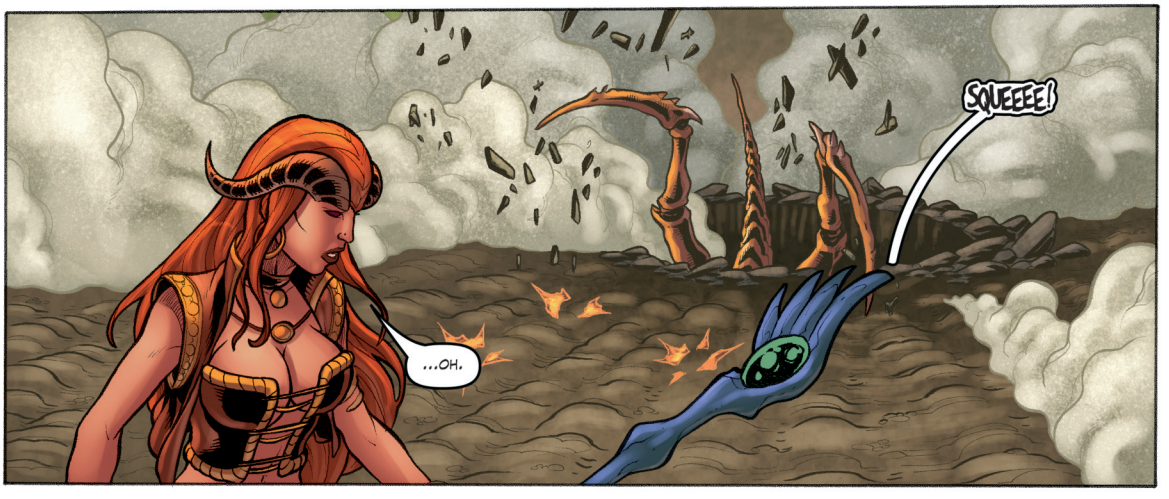
STEADY ON, LADS. WE'LL DEAL WITH THIS ONE!

IT'S... IT'S YOU!
OH BUGGER.

IT'S A BIT BIGGER, BUT ONLY ONE—

—GAH! COULD'VE WARNED ME, TISHA!


EVERYBODY STOP TREATING THESE THINGS LIKE THEY'RE MY *PERSONAL PETS!*
FWAASH
IT'S NOT LIKE I CAN *COMMAND* THESE THINGS LIKE A DOG, TO *FLEE!*


SQUEEEE!
...OH.

IT DID WHAT YOU TOLD IT TO DO.
I,,, I BLASTED IT. THAT'S WHY.

NO OFFENSE, BUT YOUR EVIL BLAST WAS NOT AS EFFECTIVE AS YOUR EVIL COMMAND.
MOOOO
THE COW IS WITH ME ON THIS.

YOU'VE *SEEN* THESE BEFORE?
SEEN 'EM? WE'RE BLOODY INFESTED WITH 'EM!

KHAL, WE BETTER LET YOUR HOLD COUNCIL KNOW WE'VE SEEN EVEN MORE OF THESE THINGS—
STOP! DON'T DO IT!
DON'T TELL EVERYONE!
SOMETHING I SHOULD KNOW?
YOU'LL FIND OUT SOON ENOUGH.
AND BREE WILL NEVER LET ME HEAR THE END OF IT.
I THOUGHT WE'D ATTRACT MORE ATTENTION.
WE'RE NOTED BY EVERY GUARD, MIDWIFE AND TODDLER.
BUT DWARVES KEEP THEMSELVES TO THEMSELVES. WE WON'T EVEN GET A NOD WITHIN.

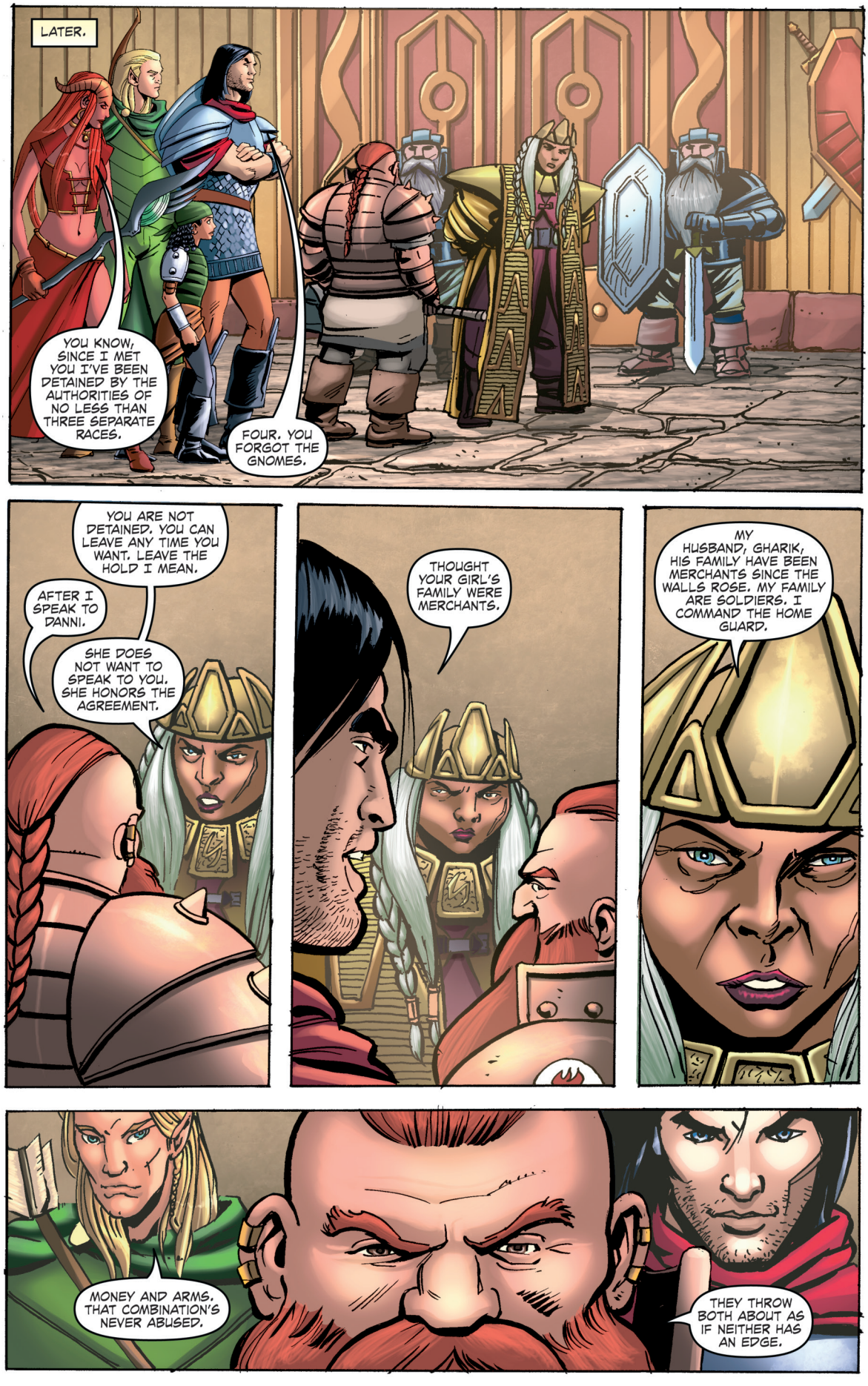
BY. THE. GODS.
HEY TYMON, I'M IN A HOLD. IT'S BEAUTIFUL.
WISH YOU WERE HERE.

WHAT THE—
THE SONG OF THE ANVIL!
HE'S BACK!
THE SONG HAS RETURNED!
THE SONG OF THE ANVIL!
THE SONG! THE SONG!
THE SONG OF THE ANVIL!
YOU'RE FAMOUS.
HELLO, YES, HELLO, GOOD—
IT'S NOT MY FAULT.
—GOOD TO BE BACK, YES, GOOD TO BE BACK.
THIS COUNTS AS A NOD.
COUNTS AS A BLOODY SWARM.

ADRIC, WE'LL NEVER GET TO DANNI'S HOMERISE UNLESS I GIVE THEM WHAT THEY WANT.
THEN GO AHEAD. GIVE THEM—
—WHATEVER IT IS.
LOVERS AND SMITHS, LEND ME YOUR EARS!
HUZZAH!
THE SONG!
HUZZAH!
THE SONG!
SPEAK IT! SPEAK IT!
TAKA-TAKKA-TAK-TAK-TAK
TAKA-TAKKA-TAK-TAK-TAK
TAKA-TAKKA-TAK-TAK-TAK
AS SPARKS FROM THE FIRE/ AS IRON FROM THE STONE/
THE DREAM OF A DWARF'S FOR A NAME OF HIS OWN!
TAKA-TAKKA-TAK-TAK-TAK TAKA-TAKKA-TAK-TAK-TAK

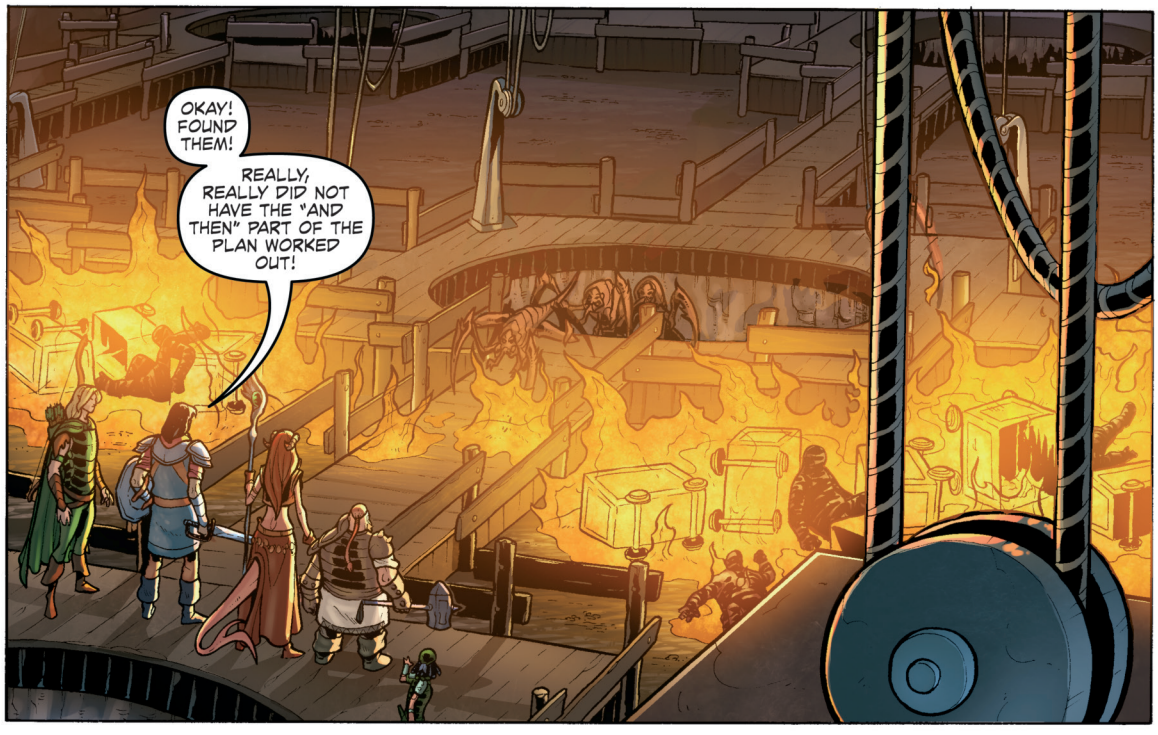
THE SONG OF THE ANVIL SINGS FOR GREAT AND FOR SMALL! THE SONG OF THE ANVIL BEATS OUT FOR US ALL!
IN THE DARK OF THE STONE 'NEATH THE MINE'S ANCIENT BEAM/
THE SONG OF THE ANVIL LEADS US ALL IN THE DREAM—!
KHAL KHALUNDURRIN!
YOU STAND ACCUSED OF UNLAWFUL ASSEMBLY!
AND INDEPENDENT POETRY!
THIS CROWD WILL DISPERSE—
—AND YOU WILL COME WITH ME!
OH, AYE, I WILL! AND YOU WILL TELL ME WHICH ONE OF YOUR HARPY SISTERS ARE FORGING DANNI'S LETTERS TO ME!

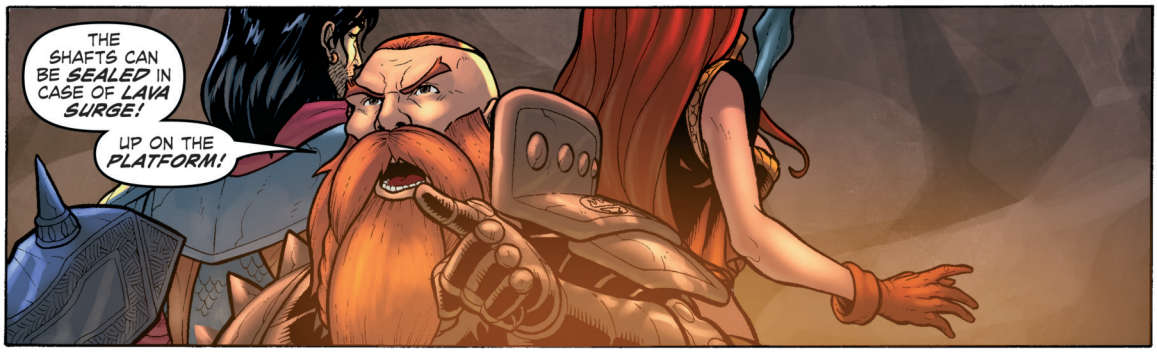
I... CEASE YOUR PRATTLE. YOU HAVE BROKEN THE AGREEMENT.
AND THIS IS...
ME PROSPECTIVE MOTHER-IN-LAW.
SORRY.
NOT AS SORRY AS I AM.
I WISH HE'D DO THAT MORE OFTEN.
HE *IS* TALENTED.
NO, I MEAN THAT CROWD IS A PICKPOCKET'S *GOLD MINE.*
NEVER CHANGE, BREE.
KTHHKKK-K-K


LATER.
YOU KNOW, SINCE I MET YOU I'VE BEEN DETAINED BY THE AUTHORITIES OF NO LESS THAN THREE SEPARATE RACES.
FOUR. YOU FORGOT THE GNOMES.
YOU ARE NOT DETAINED. YOU CAN LEAVE ANY TIME YOU WANT. LEAVE THE HOLD I MEAN.
AFTER I SPEAK TO DANNI.
SHE DOES NOT WANT TO SPEAK TO YOU. SHE HONORS THE AGREEMENT.
THOUGHT YOUR GIRL'S FAMILY WERE MERCHANTS.
MY HUSBAND, GHARIK, HIS FAMILY HAVE BEEN MERCHANTS SINCE THE WALLS ROSE. MY FAMILY ARE SOLDIERS. I COMMAND THE HOME GUARD.
MONEY AND ARMS. THAT COMBINATION'S NEVER ABUSED.
THEY THROW BOTH ABOUT AS IF NEITHER HAS AN EDGE.

THE AGREEMENT WAS YOU'D LEAVE AND NOT RETURN UNTIL SHE'D CONVINCED US, THROUGH YOUR DEEDS AS A PALADIN, YOU WERE WORTHY OF OUR FAMILY.
FOR ALL I KNOW, SHE HAS SUMMONED ME. BECAUSE THOSE WERE *NOT* HER LETTERS.
NOW YOU'LL TELL ME THE TRUTH, OR I'LL TAKE OFF THIS HOLY SYMBOL AND SHOW YOU JUST WHAT I'VE LEARNED IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS.
YOU THINK THAT WEAK-BLOOD RABBLE YOU TRAVEL WITH WOULD DIE FOR YOU?
YOU THINK THAT AN ELF WOULD DIE FOR YOUR LOVE?
NAH.
BUT I'D DO A BIT OF KILLING FOR IT.
...KILL THEM.

KRASH
GUNNNGH...
AHHHH!
KTHHKKK-IK-IK
BACK, BACK—FORCE IT BACK!
BLOODY HELL, LOOK!
WHAT'S THE PHRASE? OUT OF THE FRYING PAN...
...AND ONTO THE FORK?
COME ON! THESE THINGS CAN'T EAT THROUGH SOLID ROCK!
THEY HAVE TO BE COMING FROM SOMEWHERE!
GOOD MOVE! CHOKE OFF THE ENTRANCE, KEEP THE GUARD FROM BEING OVERWHELMED!
THE MINES! HEAD DARKWARD AND DOWN!


OKAY! FOUND THEM!
REALLY, REALLY DID NOT HAVE THE "AND THEN" PART OF THE PLAN WORKED OUT!


THE SHAFTS CAN BE SEALED IN CASE OF LAVA SURGE!
UP ON THE PLATFORM!

I— GAH! THESE THINGS ARE NOT SAFE!
SO MUCH FOR DWARVEN WORK!

THEY GOT HALF-TON BEASTIES CLAMBERING ALL OVER 'EM! ELF-MADE WOULD BE KINDLING BY NOW!
RELEASE LATCHES ARE AT THE END!

CHANK-WHIRRRRR
WHOA! IS THIS SAFE TO BE OUT HERE WHEN WE DO THIS?
WE GOT A WHOLE TEN SECONDS A'FORE THE STONE DROPS. STOP WHININ' AND THROW LEVERS—
CHA-KUNK
DAMN YOU, KHALUNDURRIN!
I KNEW IF THE LETTERS STOPPED, YOU'D COME BACK!
YOU'D COME BACK AND NEVER REST UNTIL YOU FOUND HER! YOU'D RUIN EVERYTHING!
WHERE IS SHE? WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO HER?!
KHAL, WE NEED TO GET OFF THIS THING!
YOU IDIOT! I DID IT ALL TO PROTECT HER NAME! TO PROTECT MY FAMILY'S NAME!

ALL THIS IS HER FAULT! SHE'S THE ONE WHO WOKE THESE THINGS UP!
...NO.
SHE'S DEAD, PALADIN! AND NOW THAT YOU KNOW...
...YOU HAVE TO DIE, TOO!
FIRE!
THWP
THWP
THWP

Art by Steve Ellis

Art by Tyler Walpole

Chapter 2

SO, KHAL SUSPECTED SOMETHING WAS AMISS WITH HIS BELOVED, AND RETURNED TO HIS STEAD.
YOU'RE LYING!
I'LL TEAR THAT *LYING TONGUE OUT*—
WE FOUND HIS FAIR DANNI MISSING, PRESUMED DEAD, AND POSSIBLY TO BLAME FOR THE HELLSPAWN SWARMING HIS HOMELAND.

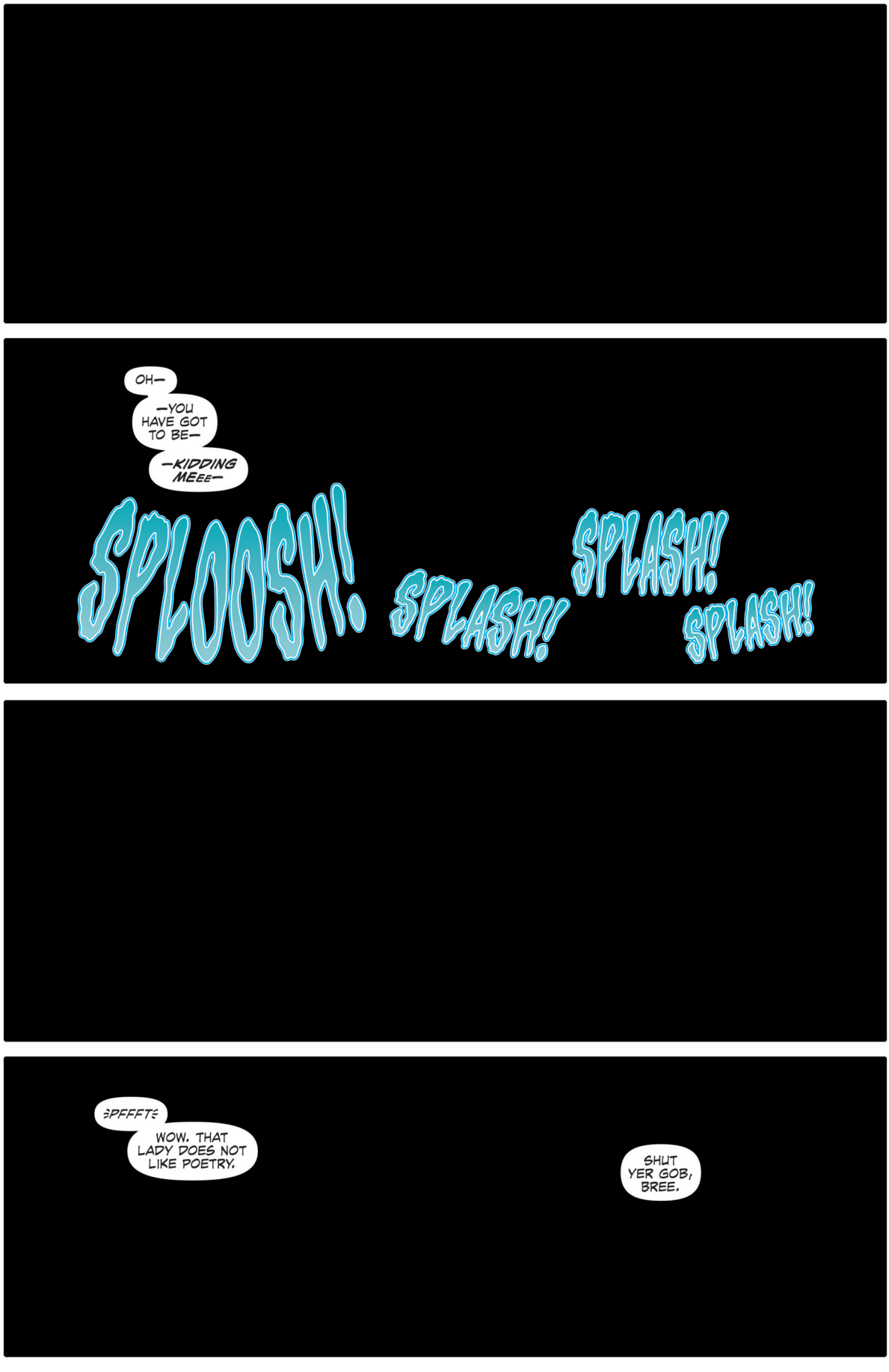
OH, AND HIS MOTHER-IN-LAW IS TRYING TO MURDER US.
RELOAD! FIRE ON MY MARK! KILL THE POET!
SO IT'S BEEN THAT KIND OF DAY.
BACK! BACK!
YOU SAID YOU COULDN'T CONTROL 'EM.
I'LL TRY ANYTHING RIGHT NOW.
KHAL, FOCUS! WE NEED TO STOP THESE THINGS FROM SWARMING THE CITY.
THAT'S DONE! THE MINE CAP WILL SEAL—
—OH, UH-OH.
RRRRRRRRUMMBBBLE
READY! AIM! FI—
THAT'S A HUNDRED-ODD TONS OF STONE AND MAGICAL STEEL SEALING THAT MINE, TIGHT AS A MISER'S SMILE.
WHA-THOOM!
DWARVEN WORKMANSHIP, AS KHAL WOULD SAY.

AND LIKE MOST DWARVEN WORKMANSHIP...
THIS IS A VERY BAD SAFETY SYSTEM!
...BEING ON THE RECEIVING END IS USUALLY FATAL.
OOF!
I. AM. SICK. OF. FALLING!
FEEDER TUNNEL! THIS WAY!
SKREE!
KRUNCH!

KKRRRR—
CLEAR! GET CLEAR!
OUTTA-THE-WAY OUT OF MY WAY!
-KRASH
SQUEEE-KKKK!
KKIIIKREEE!
ABOUT TIME.
PHEW.
OKAY. OKAY. NOW THAT THAT'S OVER, WE NEED A PLAN—
—THE PLAN IS TO RUN!
WE USE THAT PLAN A LOT!
IT'S A GOOD PLAN!
HOLD ON!
AANNND THESE THINGS ARE NOT DESIGNED FOR PASSENGERS. AT ALL.
THAK— THUNK

NOT AT ALL! THIS BE VERY, VERY DANGEROUS!
WE HAVE TO GO FASTER!
DO WORDS NOT MEAN THE SAME TO HIM? IS HE INJURED IN THE HEAD?
HEY, WE TAKE ORDERS FROM HIM. WHAT DOES THAT MAKE US?
SCHAKK
NO!
KA-CHANG
THE CHAIN DOES NAE JUST DRIVE THE CAR!
IT ALSO BE THE BRAKE!
...WOULD IT HELP IF I EXPLAINED WE DON'T HAVE MINES IN THE FOREST?

UGH!
SQUOOSH
GAH!
BLEAGH!
CHAKKA-CHAKKA-CHAKKA-CHAKKA
AND THAT IS WHY I CARRY A SHIELD.
BE A BLOODY WEEK GETTIN' THIS OUT OF ME BEARD.
GOOD NEWS! WE'VE RUN OUT OF KRUTHIK!
I THINK THAT'S BECAUSE—
CHAKKA CHAKKA CHAKKA
CHAKKA-CHUNK
NOT AGAIN.


OH—
—YOU HAVE GOT TO BE—
—KIDDING MEee—
SPLOOSH!
SPLASH!
SPLASH!
SPLASH!
:PFFFT:
WOW. THAT LADY DOES NOT LIKE POETRY.
SHUT YER GOB, BREE.

JUST A FEW MINUTES WITHOUT YER PRATTLIN'. GIVE A DWARF TIME TO THINK.
KTANG-FSSSH
FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH, I'M SORRY.
AH, HERE WE GO.
WHAT THAT WOMAN SAID ABOUT YOUR BELOVED. BEING DEAD.
KATHANG
VOOOSH
VOOOSH
VOOOSH
VOOOSH
WELL, THAT'S A HELL OF A THING.
SYMPATHETIC SUNSTONES. DON'T STAY LIT FOR LONG, BUT NEVER NEED REPLACIN'.
DANNI'S WORK, THAT.

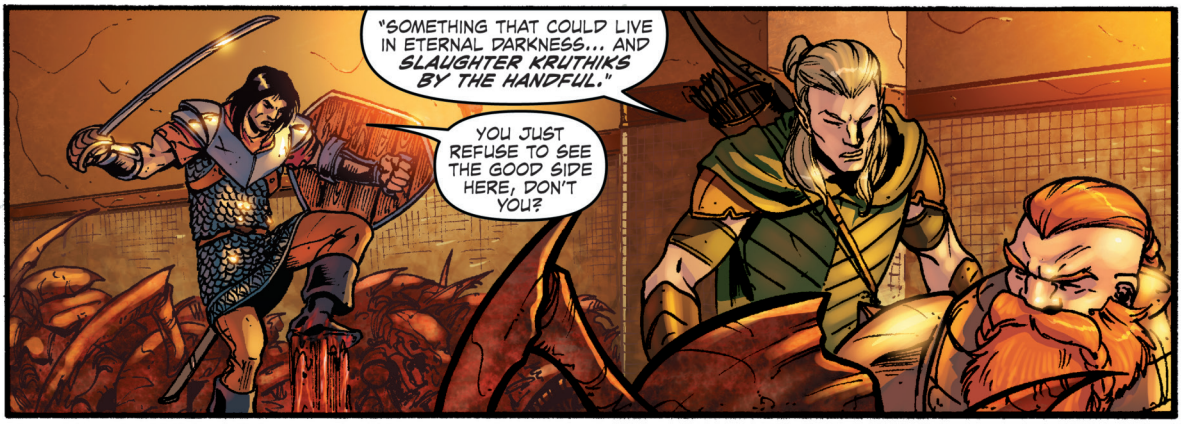
SHE BUILT 'EM AFTER I TOLD HER THE STORY OF AL'BIHEL, THOSE SUNBOMBS I SAW THERE. HELL OF AN ENGINEER, MY GIRL.
I SAID I'M SORRY—
DON'T BE. SHE'S NAE DEAD.
HOW—
IF DANNI BE DEAD, I'D KNOW IT.
WE REALLY GONNA GO DOWN INTO THE GUTS OF THE EARTH BASED ON YOUR FEELINGS?
NO, WE'RE GOING BECAUSE OF WHAT GERDA DID.
GERDA FORGED THE LETTERS TO KHAL. WHY? TO KEEP HIM FROM COMING HERE TO FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENED TO DANNI.
BUT THAT ONLY MAKES SENSE IF WHAT HAPPENED TO DANNI WAS A MYSTERY.
IF DANNI JUST DIED IN AN ACCIDENT, OR EVEN WAS MURDERED, GERDA COULD PRESENT KHAL HER BODY. A MYSTERY MEANS SHE DISAPPEARED.
=OOF=

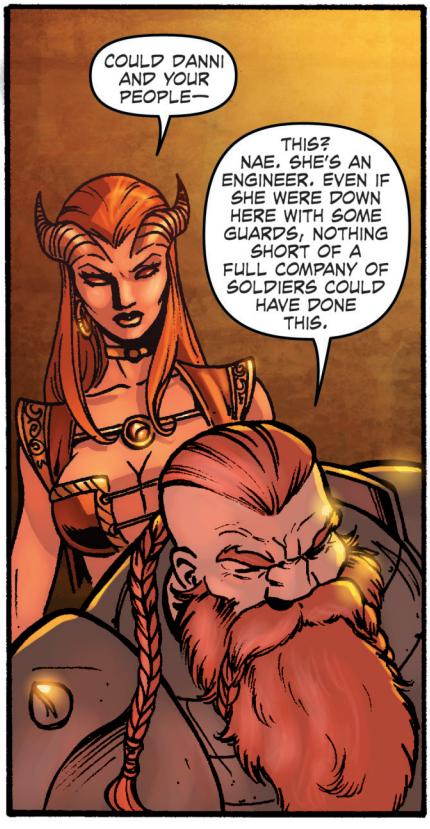
BUT EVEN THEN, WHY BE SO AFRAID OF KHAL POKING AROUND, LOOKING FOR DANNI?
SECOND CLUE—THE KRUTHIKS. GERDA THINKS DANNI DID SOMETHING TO CAUSE THE KRUTHIKS TO SWARM. WHY?
THIS BE NEW.
BECAUSE DANNI MUST'VE BEEN DOWN HERE WHEN THE KRUTHIK BEGAN TO ATTACK. WHICH MEANS SHE WAS LAST SEEN... DOWN HERE.
...WHAT?
YOU MUST WORK VERY, VERY HARD TO APPEAR SO DENSE MOST OF THE TIME.
PRESSURE CRACKS. ONLY HAPPENS WITH—
—INTERSECTING TUNNELS.
BLOODY HELL.

THESE ARE OLD ROADS.
NOT DWARVEN?
NO. WE DON'T WORK STONE LIKE THIS.
NOR TILE LIKE THIS.
I'VE SEEN DWARVEN TILE WORK—
NOT LIKE THIS.
THIS IS BONE.
HUMAN, ELVEN, DWARVEN... BUT ALL POLISHED BONE.

SO YOU'RE A NECROMANCER.
BONE GIVES OFF A... GLOW.
NOT A "NO."
MAY I RAISE AN OBJECTION?
TO US FOLLOWING AN ANCIENT ROAD PAVED WITH HUMAN REMAINS, SWARMING WITH KRUTHIK?
IT'S EVEN WORSE WHEN *YOU* SAY IT.
KHAL, SOME CAUTION—
THESE SCONCES WERE NOT ORIGINAL. MY PEOPLE PUT THEM IN, TO EXPLORE.
WE'RE ON THE RIGHT PATH.
NO ORIGINAL LIGHT SOURCES.
SO IT'S AN ANCIENT ROAD PAVED WITH HUMAN REMAINS *BY SOMETHING WHICH COULD LIVE IN ETERNAL DARKNESS—*
—SWARMING WITH MONSTERS. NOTED.
GAHHH. WHAT IS THAT *STENCH?*
WE'VE SMELLED THAT BEFORE...

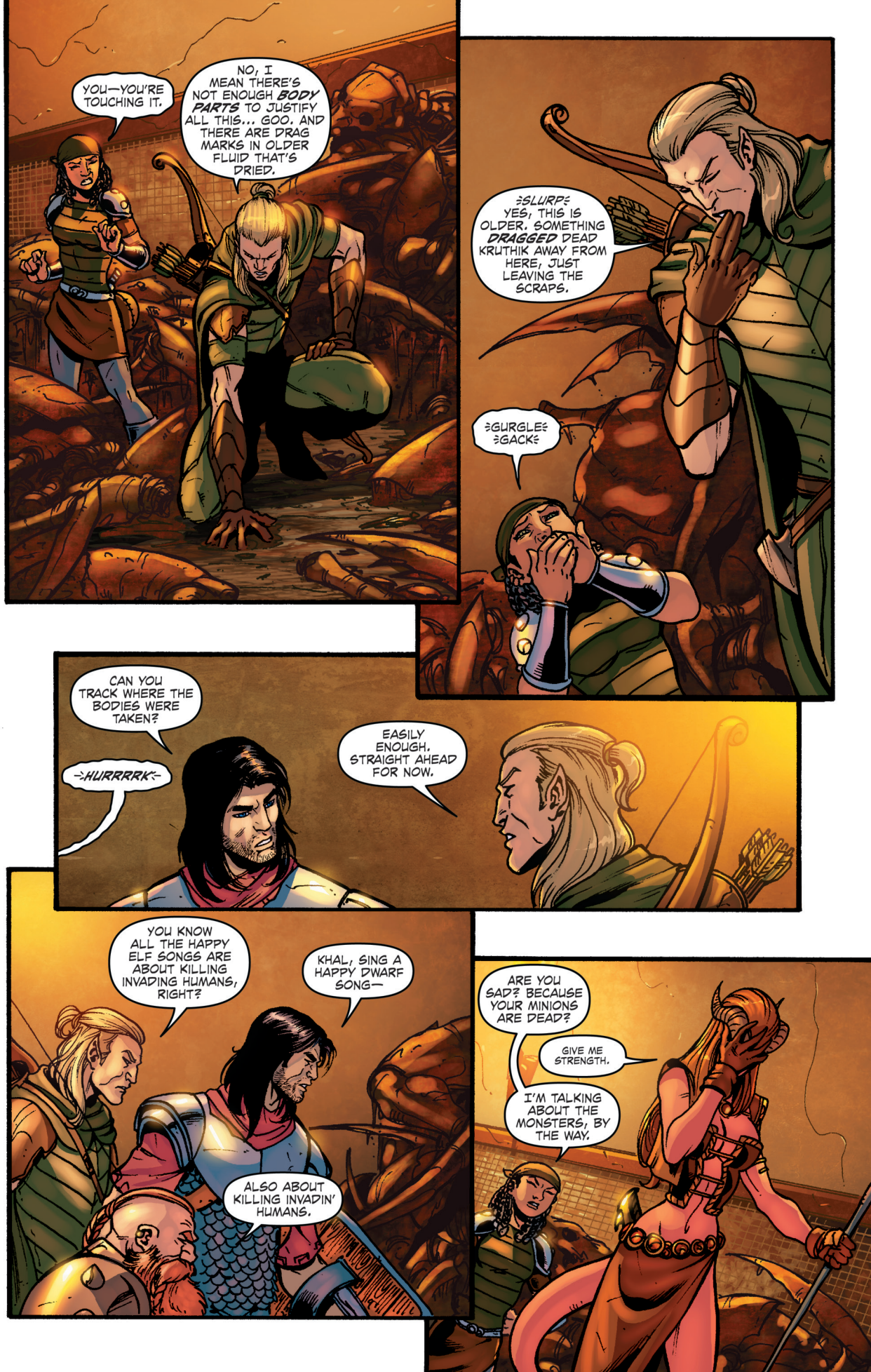
BUT IN MUCH SMALLER AMOUNTS.


"SOMETHING THAT COULD LIVE IN ETERNAL DARKNESS... AND *SLAUGHTER KRUTHIKS BY THE HANDFUL.*"
YOU JUST REFUSE TO SEE THE GOOD SIDE HERE, DON'T YOU?


COULD DANNI AND YOUR PEOPLE—
THIS? NAE. SHE'S AN ENGINEER. EVEN IF SHE WERE DOWN HERE WITH SOME GUARDS, NOTHING SHORT OF A FULL COMPANY OF SOLDIERS COULD HAVE DONE THIS.

UH, GUYS? MAYBE THIS MEANS THE KRUTHIK WEREN'T *INVADING* THE SURFACE.
MAYBE THEY WERE *FLEEING.*

THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG HERE...
I DON'T REMEMBER YOU WORRYING THIS MUCH BEFORE. SING A HAPPY ELF SONG OR SOMETHING.


YOU—YOU'RE TOUCHING IT.
NO, I MEAN THERE'S NOT ENOUGH BODY PARTS TO JUSTIFY ALL THIS... GOO. AND THERE ARE DRAG MARKS IN OLDER FLUID THAT'S DRIED.
=SLURP= YES, THIS IS OLDER. SOMETHING DRAGGED DEAD KRUTHIK AWAY FROM HERE, JUST LEAVING THE SCRAPS.
=GURGLE= =GACK=
CAN YOU TRACK WHERE THE BODIES WERE TAKEN?
=HURRRRK=
EASILY ENOUGH. STRAIGHT AHEAD FOR NOW.
YOU KNOW ALL THE HAPPY ELF SONGS ARE ABOUT KILLING INVADING HUMANS, RIGHT?
KHAL, SING A HAPPY DWARF SONG—
ALSO ABOUT KILLING INVADIN' HUMANS.
ARE YOU SAD? BECAUSE YOUR MINIONS ARE DEAD?
GIVE ME STRENGTH.
I'M TALKING ABOUT THE MONSTERS, BY THE WAY.

SO YOUR PEOPLE FOUND THAT TUNNEL, DECIDED TO EXPLORE.
AYE.
HOW FAR WOULD THEY KEEP GOING?
UNTIL THE END OF THE ROAD.
UNFORTUNATE CHOICE OF WORDS.

DRAG MARKS. SOMEBODY PULLED THE KRUTHIK CORPSES ALONG OVER THAT BRIDGE.
LET'S BE OFF, THEN.
HOLD UP JUST A SECOND. THIS REQUIRES SUBTLETY.
NOT OUR STRONG POINT.
HEY, WE WERE SUBTLE BACK IN THE FEYWILD.
BEFORE OR AFTER YOU WOKE UP THE GIANT DEATH GOLEM?
I HAVEN'T SEEN ANYTHING SCREAM "I AM EVIL" THIS LOUD SINCE THE SIEGE AT TINDALL-REE.
=SHUDDER= THE PUS CATAPULT. THAT MAD WIZARD BE TOO MAD.
AND, OF COURSE, YOU REALIZE WE'RE BEING FOLLOWED.
...I DID NOT KNOW THAT.
I NOTICED.
YES, WELL THAT'S YOUR JOB.

WHOEVER IT IS HASN'T ATTACKED YET, SO THEY'RE PROBABLY MORE AFRAID OF US THAN WE ARE OF THEM.
ANNND—
—DON'T MOVE!
HELLO.
I WANT TO LICK THE INSIDE OF YOUR RIB CAGE.
HEE.

YEAH. I'M DONE.
DESPAIR :GIGGLE:
YAAAAGHHH!
I CHANGED MY MIND!
SO INTO THE—
—INTO THE EVIL TEMPLE! LOVE THAT IDEA!

DO NOT LET THEM ESCAPE! MASTER WILL NOT BE PLEASED!
THESE THINGS HAVE A MASTER!
I DO NOT WANT TO MEET HIM. EVER!
DOOR'S OPEN! INSIDE!
NO! DON'T FOLLOW—
GOOD JOB ON THE DOOR, BREE!
—YOU GOT IT, BOSS! ANYTHING FOR YOU!
HIGHER GROUND! GET TO—

—THE WALL OF KRUTHIK CORPSES. WONDERFUL.
OUR MASTER IS COMING!
READ YOUR GUTS FOR PROPHECY!
PAFF
PAFF
PAFF
PAFF
...MADNESS...
GAHHHHHHH!
SLASH
HELLS, ARE THEY ALL 'PORTERS?

LET'S SEE.
CHKKKGGG
SPLORCH
THE FOUR-ARMED BEASTIES AIN'T.
HA! WALL'S A CHOKE POINT!
FORM UP ON THE OTHER SIDE!
MY HEAD...
THERE BE RUBBLE BACK HERE FOR COVER—
WHIRRRRRRRR
AGH!
KHAL!
CHUNK
CHUNK
CHUNK
CHUNK
CHUNK
CHUNK

WELL, THERE'S ONE MYSTERY SOLVED.
KHAL?
OH GODS, NO—
KHAL!
AIN'T SHE A CLEVER GIRL?
UNFORTUNATELY.

Art by Steve Ellis

Art by Tyler Walpole

Chapter 3

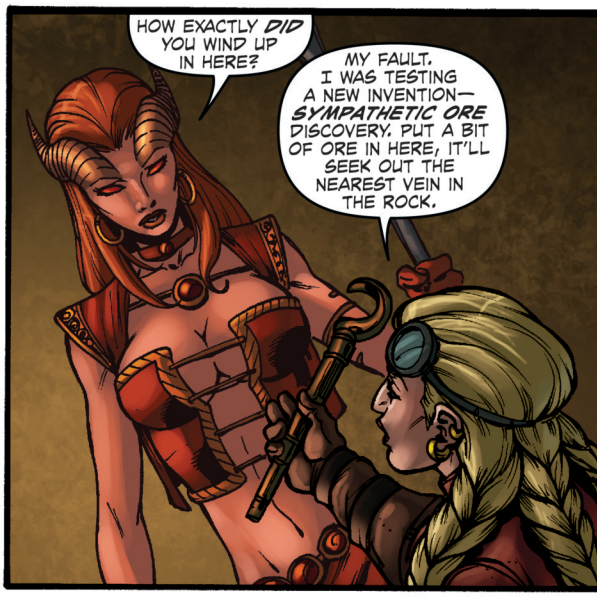
THE THINGS WE DO FOR LOVE.
GET HIM TO COVER! NOW!
GNNNGGG.
KHAL JUST GOT SHOT IN THE CHEST BY HIS INTENDED. NOT QUITE THE REUNION HE WAS HOPING FOR.

LET ME IN YOUR MIND—
—GUURK.
THAT'S FOR CREEPING AROUND IN MY SKULL.
WE WILL PASS!
OUR MASTER DEMANDS—
BREE!
RESCUE TIME!
AGGHHHH!
WE WILL BE BACK! FOR YOUR DELICIOUS SPLEENS!

THAT WAS ODDLY SPECIFIC.
KHAL! OH, KHAL, SPEAK TO ME!
:KAFF: NO WORRIES, BELOVED.
YER DEVICE'LL DROP A BEASTIE, BUT THIS ARMOR IS DWARVEN WORK.
CHINK
(YOU TWO-BIT ACTOR!)
FIT FOR A BARD'S PLAY, FALLING DOWN LIKE THAT.
THIS IS A GOOD RESCUE.
WE ARE TOTALLY CUT OFF FROM THE SURFACE.
WORKING ON IT.

YOU'D BE ADRIC, THEN. KHAL'S LETTERS WERE VERY DETAILED.
WELL MET, LADY DANNAE.
AND TISHA.
AND HIS SIDEKICK VARIS.
AND THE ADDLED HALFLING.

THANK. YOU. FOR. COMING. HERE.
SHE'S SHORTHANDIN' A BIT.
PAT PAT PAT
STAB STAB STABBY


HOW EXACTLY DID YOU WIND UP IN HERE?
MY FAULT. I WAS TESTING A NEW INVENTION— SYMPATHETIC ORE DISCOVERY. PUT A BIT OF ORE IN HERE, IT'LL SEEK OUT THE NEAREST VEIN IN THE ROCK.

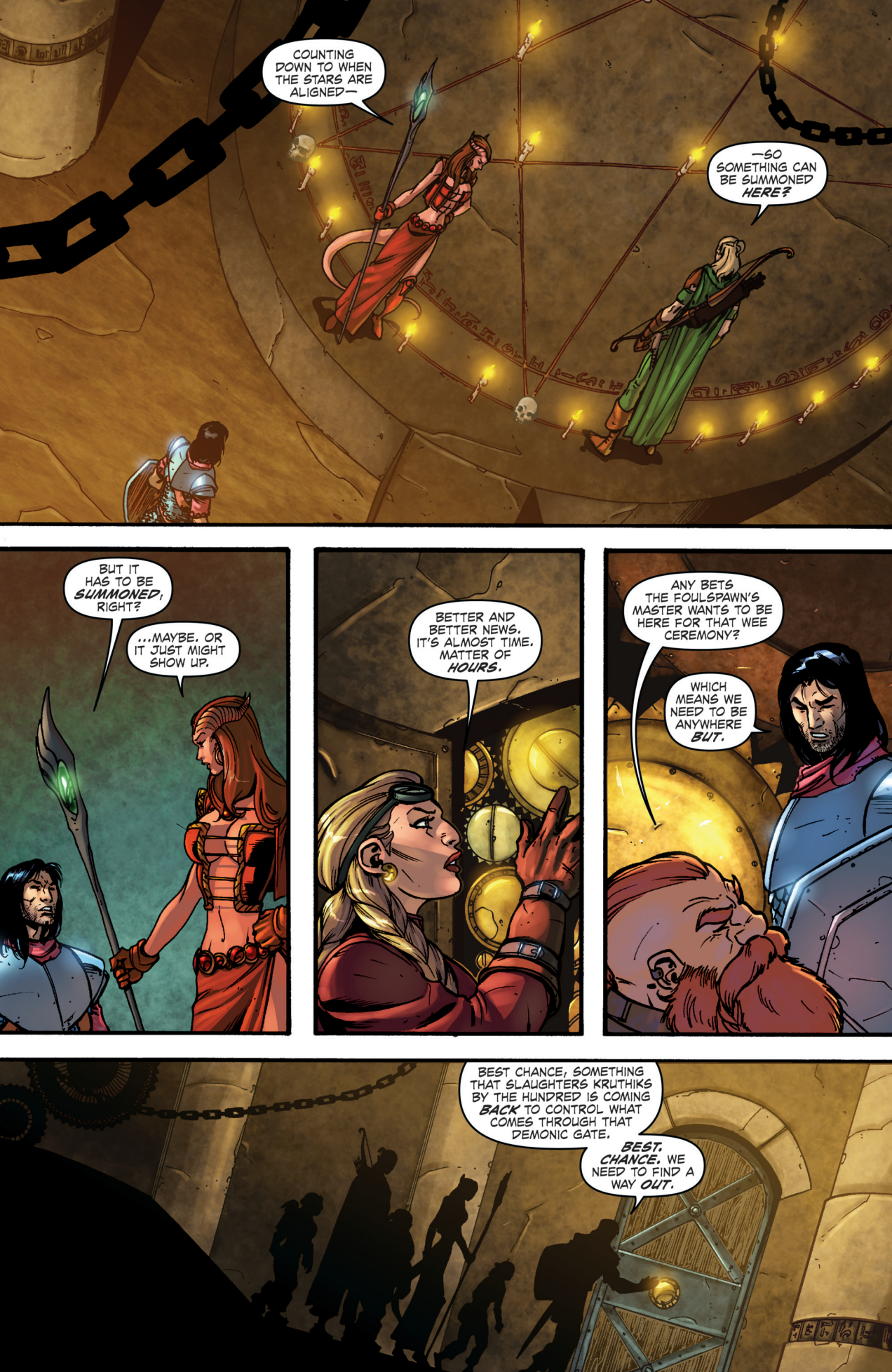
KOLIKOS AND HIS CREW WERE WITH ME. INSTEAD OF A GOLD VEIN, WE FOUND THAT OLD TUNNEL.
MUST'A BEEN GOLD HAULED THROUGH THAT TUNNEL, LEFT GOLD-DUST IN THE TILE SEAMS.

NEXT THING YOU KNOW, HALF OF US ARE DEAD FROM THE SWARMING KRUTHIKS. LUCKY WE FOUND REFUGE HERE.
WAIT, YOU KILLED ALL THOSE KRUTHIKS IN THE TUNNEL?

NO, FOULSPAWN DID THAT. WE FOUND THE SLAUGHTER-SITE AND DRAGGED THE KRUTHIK BODIES HERE. THEY SHY AWAY FROM THEIR DEAD.
COME, I WANT TO SHOW YOU SOMETHING.
HMM. THOSE FOULSPAWN ARE, AH... FOUL, BUT THERE'S NO WAY THOSE SIX KILLED ALL THOSE KRUTHIKS.
MAYBE THIS "MASTER" THEY'RE SHRIEKING ABOUT ALL THE TIME. WE FOUGHT THEM OFF A FEW TIMES BEFORE WE SET UP THE BARRICADE.
THEY KEPT TRYING TO GET IN HERE?
I THINK THEIR MASTER WANTS SOMETHING DEEP IN THIS TEMPLE.
KRICK

I THINK THEY'RE LOOKING FOR THIS.
MORADIN'S BREATH.
IS IT LOCKED?
YES.
GOOD.
RIGHT, BEST TO LEAVE SLEEPING DEMONS LIE—
KICKKA CHUNK
THUNK
UNLOCKED!

BREE, WHY?
YOU DON'T PUT THAT SORT OF LOCK ON ANYTHING BUT TREASURE!
WE ALL WANT TREASURE, DON'T WE?
WHAT'S THE GOOD NEWS?
THERE'S NONE. THIS IS A CLOCK.
EASIER WAYS TO BUILD A CLOCK.
IT DOESN'T JUST MEASURE TIME IN THIS DIMENSION. IT'S COUNTING DOWN ALIGNMENTS. OF CONSTELLATIONS, OF PLANES, OF OTHER... ENERGIES.
LET ME LOOK AT THAT.
OOOH, YES, PLATINUM HERE...
LOOK AT HER. ALWAYS THE ENGINEER.
COUNTING DOWN TO WHAT?
THIS.


COUNTING DOWN TO WHEN THE STARS ARE ALIGNED—
—SO SOMETHING CAN BE SUMMONED *HERE?*
BUT IT HAS TO BE *SUMMONED*, RIGHT?
...MAYBE. OR IT JUST MIGHT SHOW UP.
BETTER AND BETTER NEWS. IT'S ALMOST TIME. MATTER OF *HOURS.*
ANY BETS THE FOULSPAWN'S MASTER WANTS TO BE HERE FOR THAT WEE CEREMONY?
WHICH MEANS WE NEED TO BE ANYWHERE *BUT.*
BEST CHANCE, SOMETHING THAT SLAUGHTERS KRUTHIKS BY THE HUNDRED IS COMING *BACK* TO CONTROL WHAT COMES THROUGH THAT DEMONIC GATE.
BEST. CHANCE. WE NEED TO FIND A WAY *OUT.*

SO WE FIND STAIRS UP, THEN WE FIND TUNNELS UP—
—OH.
MIGHT BE A LITTLE TRICKIER THAN WE THOUGHT.
TISHA, TELL ME THAT'S AN ILLUSION.
IS THIS ONE OF THOSE TIMES I LIE TO YOU TO MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER?
SURE.
ILLUSION.
JUST FIND A WAY OUT OF THIS PLACE THAT DOESN'T INVOLVE THE FRONT DOOR. MEET BACK AT THE BLOCKADE.

GOOD WORK ON PICKING OFF THAT MIND-KICKER.
AH, THAT. I NEED TO KEEP YOU ALIVE. WHO ELSE WOULD HIRE ME?

DID YOU SEE MY MOTHER WHEN—
SHE TRIED TO KILL ME.
SO NOTHING'S CHANGED.

YOU'RE VERY GOOD WITH THAT BOW.
OF COURSE. BUT SOMEBODY ELSE HIRES ME, EVENTUALLY I WIND UP WITH OTHER ELVES. AND SEEING AS I'M *BANISHED*—

YOU DISAPPEARED WITH YOUR NEW INVENTION—
"ABOMINATION."
—SAME TIME AS THE KRUTHIKS SWARMED. SHE THOUGHT YOU DID IT, WAS COVERIN' UP YER BLAME.

I DIDN'T KNOW ELVES "BANISHED" OTHER ELVES.
WE'RE NOT THAT ORGANIZED. IT'S MORE A "GET THEE FROM THE FOREST, AND NE'ER RETURN!" THING.

AND THERE WAS THE POETRY.
SIGH NOT THE POETRY. THE POEM...

WAIT, WEREN'T WE GOING DOWN?
YOU SANG "SONG OF THE ANVIL," DIDN'T YOU?
SO?
IT'S... SOMEWHAT ILLEGAL.
OOOO, PALADIN BREAKING THE LAAAAW.
LOOK, IF WE CAN GET UP THERE...
I'VE MAPPED ALL THE WATERWAYS THAT CROSS OVER WITH THE MINES. WE CAN DEFINITELY USE IT TO GET HOME!
AHHH, THEY MIGHT HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY ABOUT THAT.
UNLESS YOU WANT TO RUN OVER THEIR BACKS...

"LET'S HOPE ADRIC'S HAVING MORE LUCK."
WHAT DID YOU DO THAT WAS SO BAD—
—WAIT, WEREN'T WE GOING UP?
:SIGH: I HATE EVIL TEMPLES. I REALLY, REALLY DO.
OH, GREAT. EVIL WIZARD'S DEN.
MORE "WORKSHOP." LOOK BACK HERE—
WHAT THE DEVIL?
THIS ROOM'S BEEN ENTERED RECENTLY. TRACKS IN THE DUST.
THERE'S A LOT OF SYMPATHETIC MAGIC DOWN HERE, A FAIR BIT OF ALCHEMY...
OH, HELL.
IS THAT—
WE NEED TO FIND THEM.
NOW!

GOOD NEWS!

WE FOUND AN EXIT—
—IN THE CEILING.
WE JUST NEED TO RUN A ROPE—
—OVER AN ENTIRE CAVERN OF KRUTHIKS.

NOT HELPIN'.
I COULD'VE SAID "THROUGH THE KRUTHIKS."
MY FRIENDS, THE SLOW HALFLING SPEAKS THE TRUTH.

HEY!
THE TUNNEL IS INDEED UNREACHABLE.
BUT WE ARE DWARVES!

WE HAVE BRIDGED RIVERS OF LAVA WITH IRON AND STONE!
WE HAVE CARVED STAIRS A MILE DEEP INTO THE ENDLESS DARK!

IF ANYONE CAN DO THI—
DON'T MOVE!

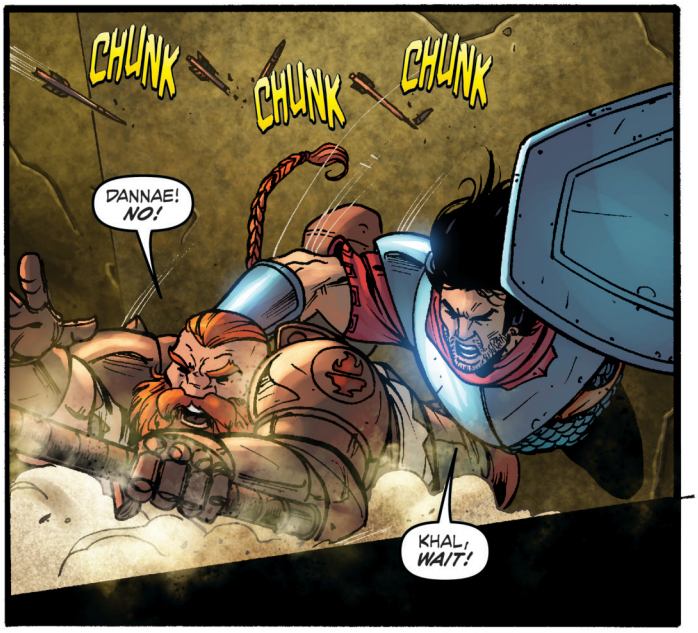
KHAL, BREE, STEP OVER HERE.
RIGHT NOW.
THIS BE MADNESS!
WE FOUND AN EXIT, WITH A BIT O' LUCK—
DANNAE, WHEN'S THE LAST TIME YOU ALL ATE?
WE ... WE BROUGHT RATIONS...
YOU'VE BEEN DOWN HERE TWO MONTHS. ALMOST TEN PEOPLE COULDN'T HAVE SURVIVED THAT LONG ON PACK RATIONS.
BUT ONE MIGHT.

YOU'RE NOT... MAKING SENSE.
BACK AWAY FROM HER.
MY HEAD. MY HEAD HURTS SO MUCH.
DANNAE, BE CALM AND TELL ME—
I SAID—
STAY AWAY FROM HER!
WHIP
UNNNGH!
I ƎNNNGƎ SHOULD HAVE KNOWN THIS WAS A TRICK.
YOU ARE ILLUSIONS SENT BY THE FOULSPAWN!
WHAT BE THIS?
WE SAW THE BODIES—

"—THEY"RE ALL DEAD!"
LIES!
PROTECT THE MISTRESS!
THIS CAN'NAE BE TRUE!
WE FOUND THE BODIES DOWN IN A LABORATORY!
QUICK HINT—IF YOU HAVEN'T SEEN ME IN A FEW SECONDS?
YOU'RE ALREADY DEAD.
HEY!
NO! HER BODY WAS MISSING!
MAYBE WE CAN SAVE HER!
I DO NOT NEED SAVING!

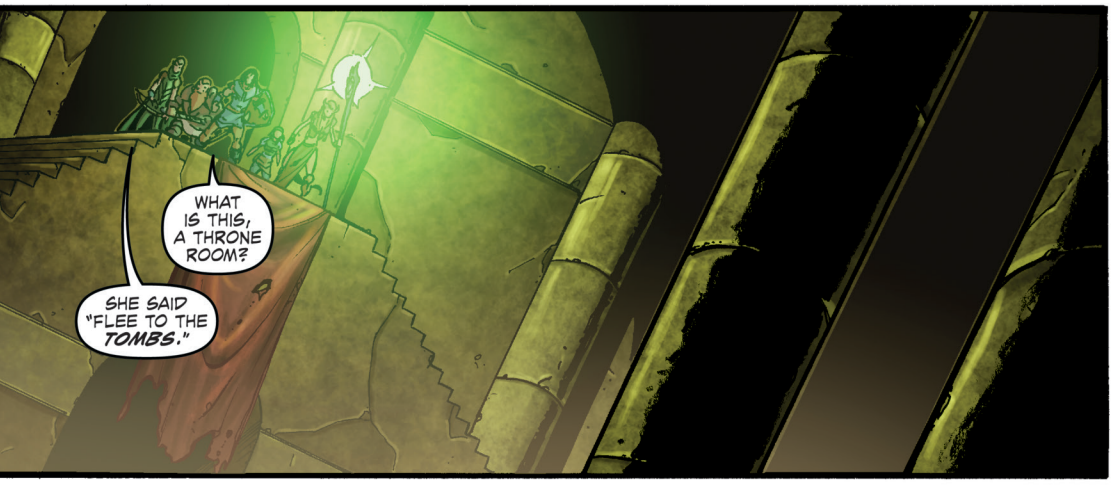
I SAVED ALL OF THEM!
FFT
FFT
FFT
FFT
FFT
CHANKA-
PSSSSSS

RETREAT! THESE ARE FOULSPAWN TRICKS!
TO THE TOMBS!


CHUNK
CHUNK
CHUNK
DANNAE! NO!
KHAL, WAIT!

SHE'S NOT DEAD!
WE NEVER SAID SHE WAS.
SHE WOULDA BEEN, IF SOMEBODY DIDN'T TRIP ME.

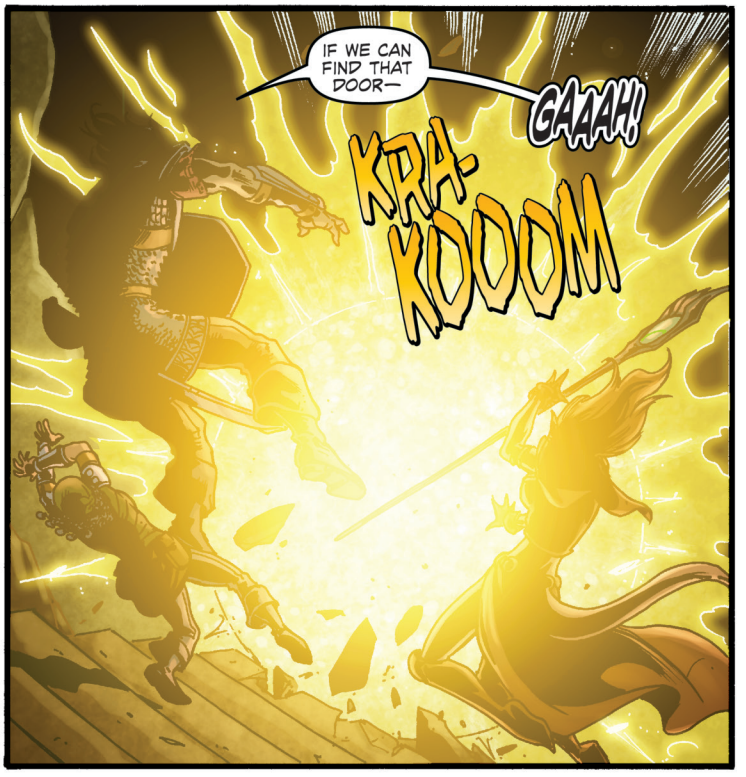
WE DON'T KNOW IF SHE'S CONTROLLING THEM OR THEY'RE CONTROLLING HER.
BUT WE WON'T LET HER GO; I PROMISE.


WHAT IS THIS, A THRONE ROOM?
SHE SAID "FLEE TO THE *TOMBS.*"

WHY DO THEY NEVER FLEE SOMEWHERE NICE?
VARIS AND KHAL, GO DOWN *HERE!*
"TO OUR LAIR AT THE PUB!"
BREE AND TISHA, WITH ME!

"FLEE TO THE PIE SHOP!"
"TO OUR WIZARD TOWER BY THE DUCK POND!"
I AM NOT LISTENING TO YOU.

I ASSUME THIS IS ONE OF YOUR "MORE QUICK THEN CLEVER" PLANS.
SERVANT'S ENTRANCE. EVERY PLACE LIKE THIS HAS A SERVANT'S ENTRANCE INTO THE GUTS OF THE PLACE.


IF WE CAN FIND THAT DOOR—
GAAAH!
KRA-KOOOM

KRA-KOOOM
HEAR THAT?
ADRIC'S BLOWING SUMMIT' UP AGAIN. IT BE HIS WAY.
NICE TRY, FOULSPAWN! BUT YOU'VE RUN STRAIGHT INTO MY TRAP.
DANNAE, IT'S ME! WHY WOULD YOU DOUBT ME?
PLEASE. WHAT ARE THE ODDS THAT I'D BE TRAPPED UNDER THE EARTH, IN A PLACE NO DWARF HAS EVER EXPLORED, AND MY TRUE LOVE IS THE ONE TO FIND ME?
YOU MADE YOUR ILLUSION TOO GOOD TO BELIEVE, MONSTER!
BUT I'VE GOT A FEW TRICKS UP MY OWN SLEEVE.
NOW WHEN I COMPLAIN ABOUT DWARVES BEING STUBBORN, YOU'LL UNDERSTAND.
I SEE YER POINT.

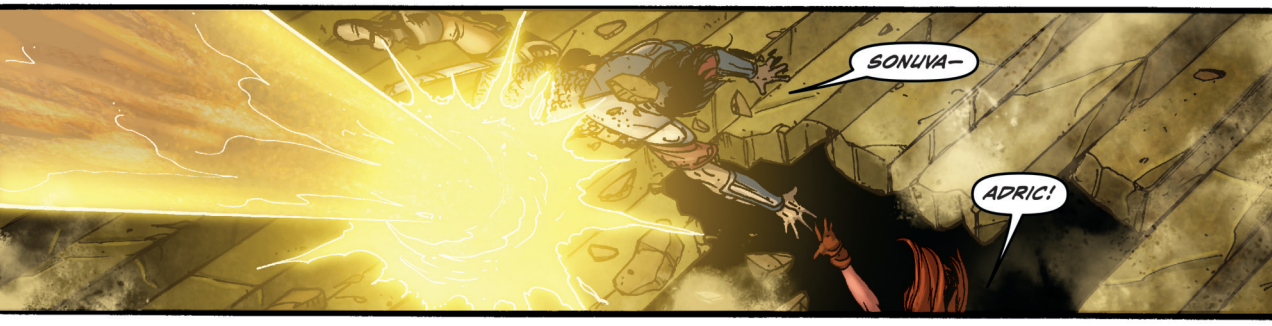
TOLD YOU. WHEN MASTER RETURNS, YOU PAY.
HOLD THE GOOD THREATS, I CAN'T HEAR A THING.

ADRIC! A LITTLE HELP!
NO, A LOT OF HELP!

KLANG
COMING, TISHA!
BREE! BUY ME SOME TIME!

HEY! REMEMBER ME—
PHASSHH
ARRG!

BREE!
THAT'S NOT GOOD. WHO CAN HIT BREE?


SONUVA—
ADRIC!

NO!
AAADRIIIICCC...

NOW I WILL GIFT MY MASTER WITH YOUR GUTS—

AAIIIIEEEEE
CHUNK
SORRY, USING MY GUTS. HAVE THESE.

RIGHT, LET'S FINALLY SEE THIS MASTER OF YOURS!
SO I CAN SHOVE YOUR HEAD DOWN HIS THROAT.

I WILL ADMIT, YOU FIGHT WELL.
OH, BUGGER.
THERE HAVE ONLY BEEN THREE TIMES IN MY LIFE WHEN I WAS ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN I WAS GOING TO DIE...

BUT I HAVE AN APPOINTMENT TO KEEP.
SO I NEED TO MURDER YOU RATHER QUICKLY.
...THIS WAS TWO OF THEM.

Art by Steve Ellis
ELLIS AFTER FRAZETTA

Art by Tyler Walpole

Chapter 4

THEY'RE CALLED "BEHOLDERS." NOT SURE WHY.
AH-HA-HAAAAA!
KZZAP
FWOOSH
I ASSUME "PANTS-SOILERS" WAS ALREADY TAKEN.

...*WHAZZAT*...
...SOMETHIN' RUINED KNIFE-Y TIME...
FWOOSH
HEY!
WHAT ARE—STOP IT!
I'M NOT A SACK OF OATS YOU CAN—
...
WHY ARE YOU NOT RUNNING FASTER?!
DO YOU NEED ME TO STAB YOU?!

SONUVA—
WHERE'S THE TIEFLING?
FELL DOWN A BOTTOMLESS CHASM.
LUCKY HER.

LUCKY US. THAT'S JUST AN EYE OF FLAME. LIMITED POWERS.
LIKE?
TELEKINESIS. FEAR. BUT MOSTLY FIRE.

NO DAY WITH "MOSTLY FIRE" EVER ENDS WELL.

NOW DO YOU KNOW FEAR?
I'VE KNOWN FEAR ALL MY LIFE, UGLY.

UUUAAGGHHH!
THAT'S WHAT THE SWORD IS FOR!

BONG BONG
UM, I DON'T SUPPOSE WE COULD NEGOTIATE?
WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO OFFER?
MOSTLY KNIVES.
BONG BONG
GAAHHH! IS THAT THE BEST YOU CAN DO?
SNIKT
SADLY, YEAH.
BONG BONG BONG
WHAT IS THAT SOUND?!
BONG BONG
BEST GUESS IS THE SUMMONING CIRCLE.

"ANOTHER GUEST IS COMING TO THE PARTY!"
UNNGH
BONG BONG BONG
...ONE OF THESE DAYS...
...GOING TO LAND ON MY HEAD.
SIGH
TELEPORT. FLY. ALL THINGS ON MY "MAGIC TO LEARN" LIST.
NATURAL TUNNELS UNDER THE TEMPLE. MAYBE I CAN FIND MY WAY UP THROUGH THE FOUNDATION...
HELLO, THIS IS PROMISING. BIGGER ROOM.
COME ON, BE A WINE CELLAR...

FWASH
OH.
MOTHER. FATHER. I'M SORRY.
TKCATIKITA
TICKETY
KHRRRKK
YES. YOU WILL DO. ONE OF THE MAKERS.
AHHH... THANKS?
GIANT KRUTHIK TALKING IN MY SKULL...

...I DID NOT THINK IT COULD GET STRANGER THAN THE HOMUNCULUS DWARVES.
DANNI! DANNI! LISTEN TO ME!
I DID NOT THINK IT COULD STRANGER THAN THE HOMUNCULUS DWARVES...
YOUR MIND BE FOGGED BY YOUR TIME DOWN HERE.
BY THE DEATHS OF YOUR GOOD FRIENDS!
THE DEATHS THAT YOU CAUSED! YOU AND YOUR KRUTHIK MONSTERS!
TO BE FAIR, I THINK THE KRUTHIKS ARE WORKING ON THEIR OWN.
VERY HELPFUL, PINE-SUCKER. GOT ANY IDEAS?
A VERY BAD ONE.

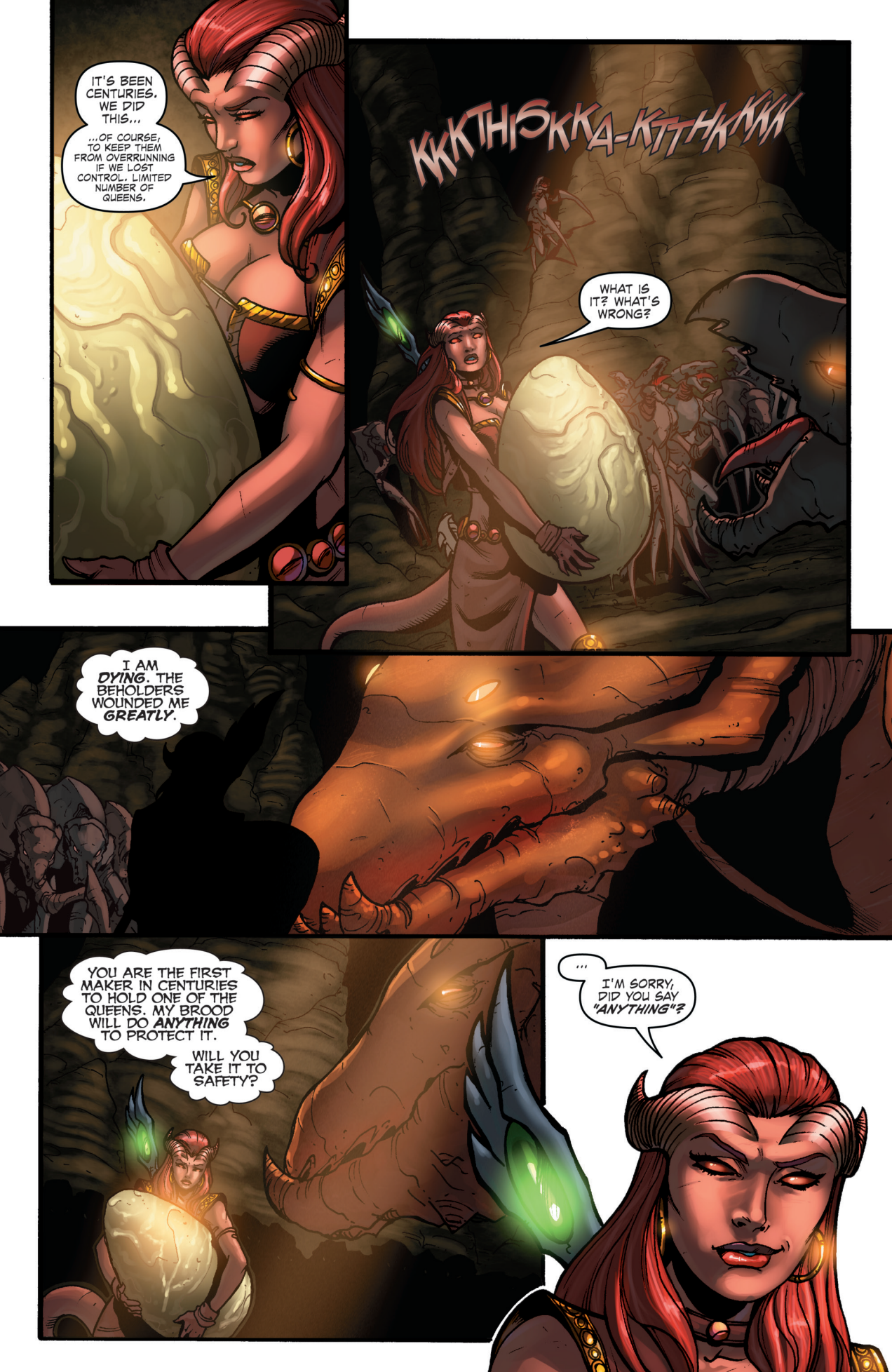
NO!
AGGGHHHHH!
YOU—
I JUST PROVED THAT SHE'S CONTROLLING THEM. WHICH LEADS ME TO ASK HOW.
YOU'RE WELCOME.
DANNI! THE SYMPATHY MAGIC! THAT'S WHAT LED YOU HERE, YOUR DETECTOR!

NOT THE GOLD! THAT MUCK THE FALSE DWARVES BE MADE OF!
THE MAGIC HERE SENSED YER NEED! IT BENT TO YOUR WILL!
BUT IT BENT YOU IN RETURN!
I JUST... JUST WANTED TO SAVE THEM... TO BRING THEM BACK.
THE CLOSER YOU GET HER TO REALITY—
STOP HURTING HER!
—THEY'LL KILL US BEFORE SHE'S ALL THE WAY BACK!
STOP HURTING HER! STOP HURTING HER!
THEN I'LL DIE! BUT SHE'LL KNOW I'M REAL!!
THAT MY LOVE FOR HER IS REAL!

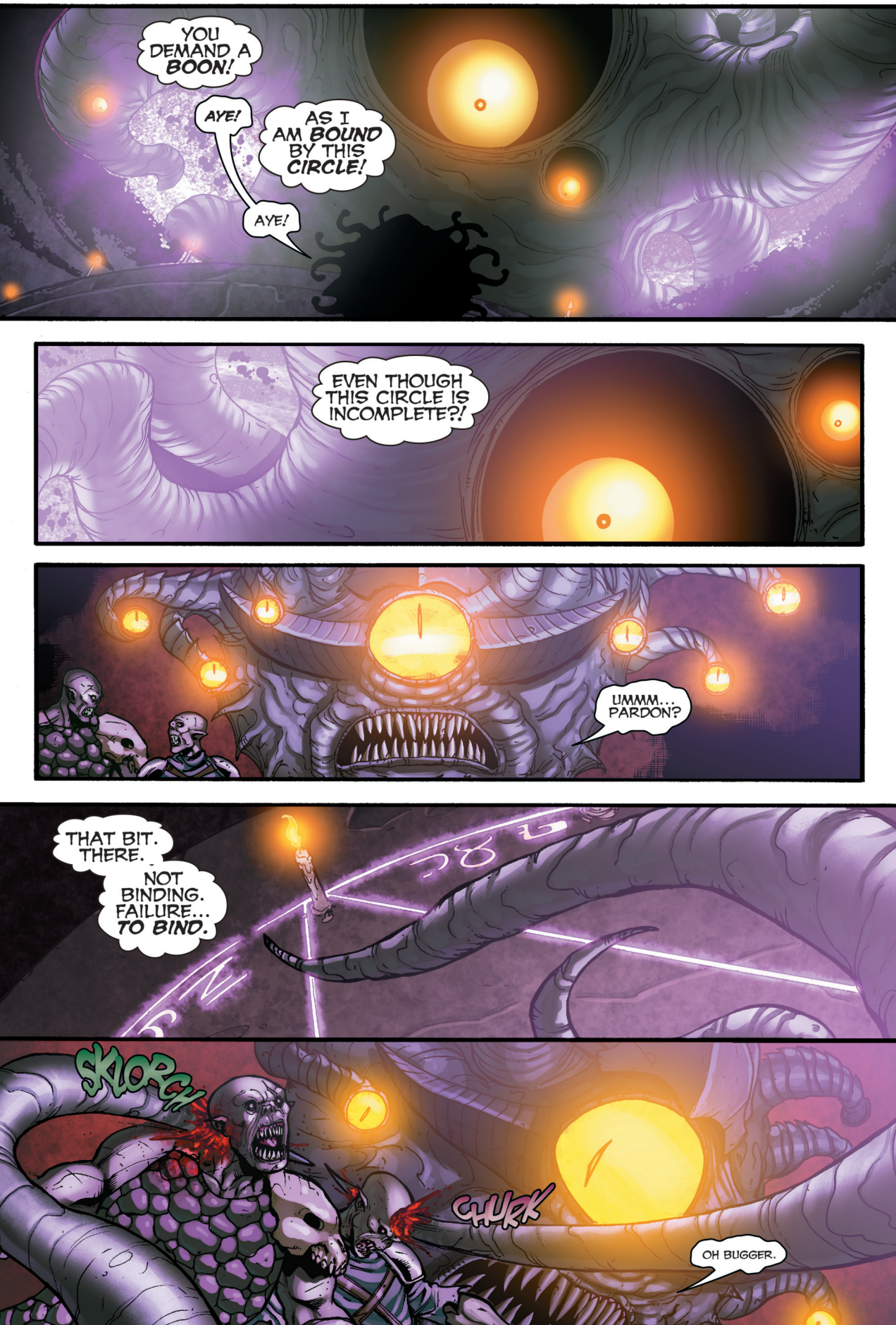
AS LONG AS I DIE IN HER ARMS.
I'LL BE ...
...OH. EW.
KHAL?
AYE!
YOUR BEARD SMELLS AWFUL..
AH. YE BE ALL THE WAY BACK, THEN.
I AM NOT COMFORTABLE WITH THIS.
COULD WE PLEASE LOOK FOR OUR FRIENDS ...

"... I'M SURE THEY'VE FOUND A WAY OUT BY NOW."
BONG BONG BONG
WE SHOULD BE FINDING A WAY OUT!
SURE! TELL ME YOUR PLAN FOR GETTING PAST THAT THING!
BONG BONG
ESCAPE IN THE SHADOWS WHILE IT TORTURES YOU TO DEATH!
I DON'T LIKE THAT PLAN!
GOT A BETTER ONE?
IT'S A LITTLE TRICKY.
BONG BONG BONG
TIMING IS EVERYTHING.
I COULD NOT HATE YOU MORE.
BONG BONG BONG

THE TIME IS UPON ME, MAKER.
I MUST PASS ON MY MEMORIES AND ESSENCE TO MY DAUGHTER.
THAT'S... THAT'S WHY THE KRUTHIKS WON'T LEAVE.
EVEN WHEN THE BEHOLDER LAID WASTE TO THEM, THEY'RE DRAWN TO YOU.
ALL THAT I AM, A MOTHER OF MY PEOPLE.
ALL THAT I WILL BE, A MOTHER OF MY PEOPLE.
SKLORCH
AH. THIS IS... AH.
I'M HONORED. I THINK.
DID YOU NOT KNOW, MAKER, THIS IS HOW YOUR PEOPLE FORGED ME.
EACH MOTHER, IMMORTAL, REGENERATING.


IT'S BEEN CENTURIES. WE DID THIS...
...OF COURSE, TO KEEP THEM FROM OVERRUNNING IF WE LOST CONTROL. LIMITED NUMBER OF QUEENS.
KKKTHISKKA-KTTHKKKK
WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S WRONG?
I AM DYING. THE BEHOLDERS WOUNDED ME GREATLY.
YOU ARE THE FIRST MAKER IN CENTURIES TO HOLD ONE OF THE QUEENS. MY BROOD WILL DO ANYTHING TO PROTECT IT.
WILL YOU TAKE IT TO SAFETY?
...
I'M SORRY, DID YOU SAY "ANYTHING"?

FIND THEM! THE TIME OF ARRIVAL IS ALMOST—
I AM THE WALKER BEYOND THE STARS!
I AM THE DARKNESS IN THE LONG NIGHT!
WHO HAS SUMMONED ME?!
MY RESEARCH IS CORRECT.
I SHALL BECOME A GOD WITH THIS SPIRIT'S KNOWLEDGE.
I DID NOT SUMMON YOU, SPIRIT!
BUT YOU ARE BOUND HERE, UNTIL RELEASED, AND I DEMAND A BOON!
GIVE TO ME THE SECRET OF ULTIMATE SORCERY! AND THEN I WILL RELEASE YOU!


YOU DEMAND A BOON!
AYE!
AS I AM BOUND BY THIS CIRCLE!
AYE!
EVEN THOUGH THIS CIRCLE IS INCOMPLETE?!
UMMM... PARDON?
THAT BIT. THERE.
NOT BINDING. FAILURE... TO BIND.
SKLORCH
CHURK
OH BUGGER.

NO! NOOO! GAHHHH!
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THAT THING RUNS OUT OF EYEBALL TO CHEW ON?
THE SUMMONING CIRCLE COLLAPSES AND THAT THING GOES HOME.
ARE YOU SURE—
NO.
GOOD NEWS, WE—
CRASH
SMASH
AH. ONE OF YOUR PLANS THEN?
THIS IS A VERY BAD RESCUE—
THEY USUALLY ARE!

THERE, WE SPOTTED THAT EARLIER. I CAN RIG A LINE—
TOO LATE! WE NEED ANOTHER WAY UP—
HOW ABOUT A *RIDE*?

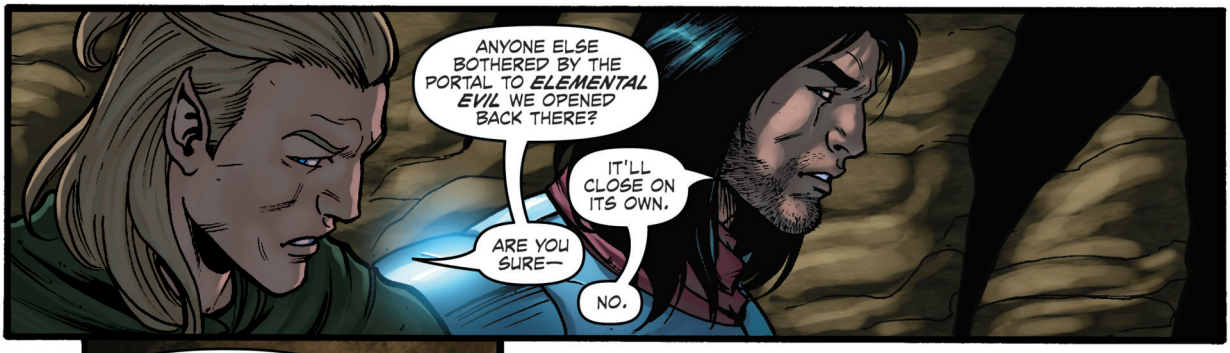
AHH. YES. THOSE WERE TRYING TO KILL US.
VERY RECENTLY.
I WILL NEVER COMPLAIN ABOUT YOU BEING EVIL AGAIN!
AS LONG AS YOU USE YOUR EVIL POWERS TO SAVE MY LIFE!
I'M GOING TO ASSUME THESE THINGS WILL OBEY ME AS LONG AS I HAVE THE EGG. AND I JUST HAVE TO THINK—
AHHHH!
—OKAY! NEED TO BE MORE EXPLICIT!

CHUNK
HOLD ON!
THUNK
KRRRK
WOOSH
WOOSH
YOU KNOW, I COULD GET USED TO—
HEY!
DO YOU THINK YOU CAN ESCAPE ME?!
WOOSH
WOOSH
ANY MORE TRICKS UP YOUR SLEEVE, TISHA?!

JUST ONE. A MOTHER'S LOVE.
NOOOO!

I WILL NOT ASK HOW YOU CAN CONTROL THESE THINGS. I WILL JUST ASK IF WE CAN WALK THE REST OF THE WAY.
BECAUSE THESE THINGS ARE CREEPING ME THE HELL OUT.

I'LL SEND THEM ON TO SCOUT AHEAD. I'LL LOSE CONTROL OVER THEM NOW THAT THE MOTHER'S DEAD, I THINK.


ANYONE ELSE BOTHERED BY THE PORTAL TO ***ELEMENTAL EVIL*** WE OPENED BACK THERE?
IT'LL CLOSE ON ITS OWN.
ARE YOU SURE—
NO.

HEY KHAL, WHY WAS DANNAE'S MOTHER ALL TICKED OFF ABOUT THAT POEM, ANYWAY?

BECAUSE IT'S A POEM ABOUT ***CHOICE***. ABOUT A DWARF'S DREAM TO RISE ABOVE HIS STATION. BY THE STRENGTH OF HIS HARD WORK.
NOT BOUND BY FAMILY, OR CASTE, OR CLASS.

THE CHANCE TO LIVE AS I LIVE WITH *YOU* IDIOTS, TRUTH BE TOLD.
AH, YOU LOVE IT, YOU BEARDED GIT. DON'T PLAY TOUGH.
WHAT'S A WEEK WITHOUT ODDS OF TREASURE AND TWICE THE ODDS FOR DYING?
...THE THINGS WE DO FOR LOVE, INDEED.

Art by Steve Ellis
STEVE ELLIS 2011

Art by Andrea Di Vito

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Glossary

Kruthik: Kruthiks burrow through the earth, riddling the Underdark with tunnels. They hunt in packs and nest in sprawling subterranean warrens. Kruthiks dig tunnels that remain intact behind them. They communicate with one another through a series of hisses and chitters.

Kruthik Hatchling **Level 2 Minion**
Small natural beast (reptile) XP 31

Initiative +4 **Senses** Perception +1; low-light vision, tremorsense 10
Gnashing Horde aura 1; an enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 2 damage.
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 15; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 12
Speed 8, burrow 2 (tunneling), climb 8
⊕ **Claw** (standard; at-will)
+5 vs. AC; 4 damage.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –

Str 13 (+2)	**Dex** 16 (+4)	**Wis** 10 (+1)
Con 13 (+2)	**Int** 4 (-2)	**Cha** 6 (-1)

Kruthik Young **Level 2 Brute**
Small natural beast (reptile) XP 125

Initiative +4 **Senses** Perception +1; low-light vision, tremorsense 10
Gnashing Horde aura 1; an enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 2 damage.
HP 43; **Bloodied** 21
AC 15; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 11
Speed 8, burrow 2, climb 8
⊕ **Claw** (standard; at-will)
+5 vs. AC; 1d8 + 2 damage.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –

Str 15 (+3)	**Dex** 16 (+4)	**Wis** 10 (+1)
Con 13 (+2)	**Int** 4 (-2)	**Cha** 6 (-1)

Kruthik Adult **Level 4 Brute**
Medium natural beast (reptile) XP 175

Initiative +6 **Senses** Perception +4; low-light vision, tremorsense 10
Gnashing Horde aura 1; an enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 2 damage.
HP 67; **Bloodied** 33
AC 17; **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 13
Speed 6, burrow 3 (tunneling), climb 6
⊕ **Claw** (standard; at-will)
+8 vs. AC; 1d10 + 3 damage.
Toxic Spikes (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Poison**
The kruthik makes 2 attacks against two different targets: ranged 5; +7 vs. AC; 1d8 + 4 damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 poison damage and is slowed (save ends both).
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –

Str 17 (+5)	**Dex** 18 (+6)	**Wis** 12 (+4)
Con 17 (+5)	**Int** 4 (-1)	**Cha** 8 (+1)

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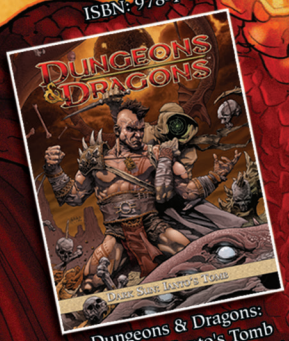

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