

WYND™







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Can we get this over with?

I'm dying, boy. I'm **dying** and you can't wait to be **rid** of me.



No, Dad. It's just...

It's **hard**. Doing this every day is hard.



I'm leaving you the **Last Empire of Man** in this world. It **should** be hard. It will always be hard. But you will rise to meet the challenge.



But you will need to be **vigilant**. You will need to **protect** them. You know what lurks in those damned forests, outside our walls.

My last wish to you will become **law**, and you will uphold it until the last of your days. This is the way of our people.



Tell me you understand this.

I understand, Father.



You will keep the **Blood Laws**. You will keep those tainted with the magic wild of the world from mingling with and **tainting** the blood of our people.

In doing so, you will keep the old ways, and the old cultures alive. You do it in memory of our ancestors chased out of their homes by twisted weirdblooded monsters.

You will do it in memory of me.



Say you understand and accept.

Yes, Father. I understand and accept.



Basil. I want **double** the guards on his room tonight.

If we're lucky I'll pass tonight and we'll be done with this damned **ritual**, and I'll be free of this pain in me.

Otherwise, have the boy brought back to me in the morning, and I'll give my **last wishes** again.



Yes, Your Majesty. I will see to it.



Get the boy out of my sight, and bring me the Bandaged Man.





I SMELL TERRIBLE!

That smell's a point of pride.

That's the smell of an apprentice in the *Pipetown Engineer Corps*. It cakes on to you and you'll never be fully rid of it.



Breathe it in, Lass.



It's *still* pretty terrible.



Yes, dear, and we'd prefer everyone not vomit over their suppers now, wouldn't we? Go clean up and get ready for the dinner rush.









And they're sure?



Yes, Molly. They're saying he won't last a few more days. Maybe a week.

If it's going to *happen*, it needs to happen *now*.

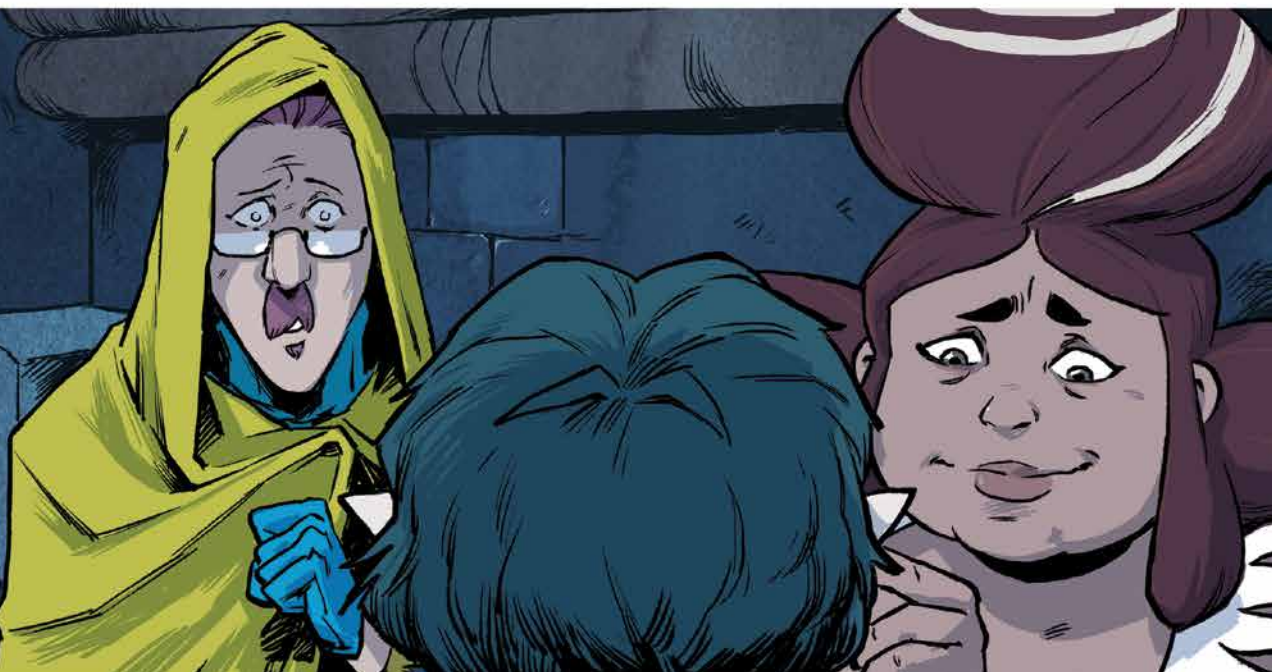
I understand. There's...something else. A *favor* I'd like to ask--



We're not alone.



I'm sorry.













Tomorrow,
I'm making a
supply run down to
Southport through
the central transport
pipeline. A night
run.

A night
run? Why--

Just
let me get
through this,
Oakley.



Wynd, I'm
going to need
you to pack a **bag**.
Bring only what you
need. What you can
carry easily and
won't take up
much space.



You're
going to be
coming with
me.



What, is
he going to
use his **renowned**
haggling skills to
get you a good
price on **pork
loin**?



No, dear.
I'm putting him
on a boat to
Northport.





I don't *want* to show people my ears!



I'm sorry, it's not *safe* for you here anymore. Much as I wish that wasn't the case. Much as I've *prayed* things might change.



It's going to get so much *worse*. Worse in a way I don't think either of you can *understand*.

The King calling the *Bandaged Man* down from the North. That's how it began *last time*.

He can *smell* the magic in a person's blood, Wynd. And he loves what he does...It's a *vendetta* of sorts.



They say his family was *killed* in one of the northern magic wars.

He didn't know whether it was the *Faeries* or the *Vampyres* who did it, so his hate turned to all *magic-blooded* people.

He became very good at *killing* them. Good enough to get the attention of the King.



"Before either of you were born, the **Duke** had been helping magic-blooded people settle in the **shadows** of Pipetown.



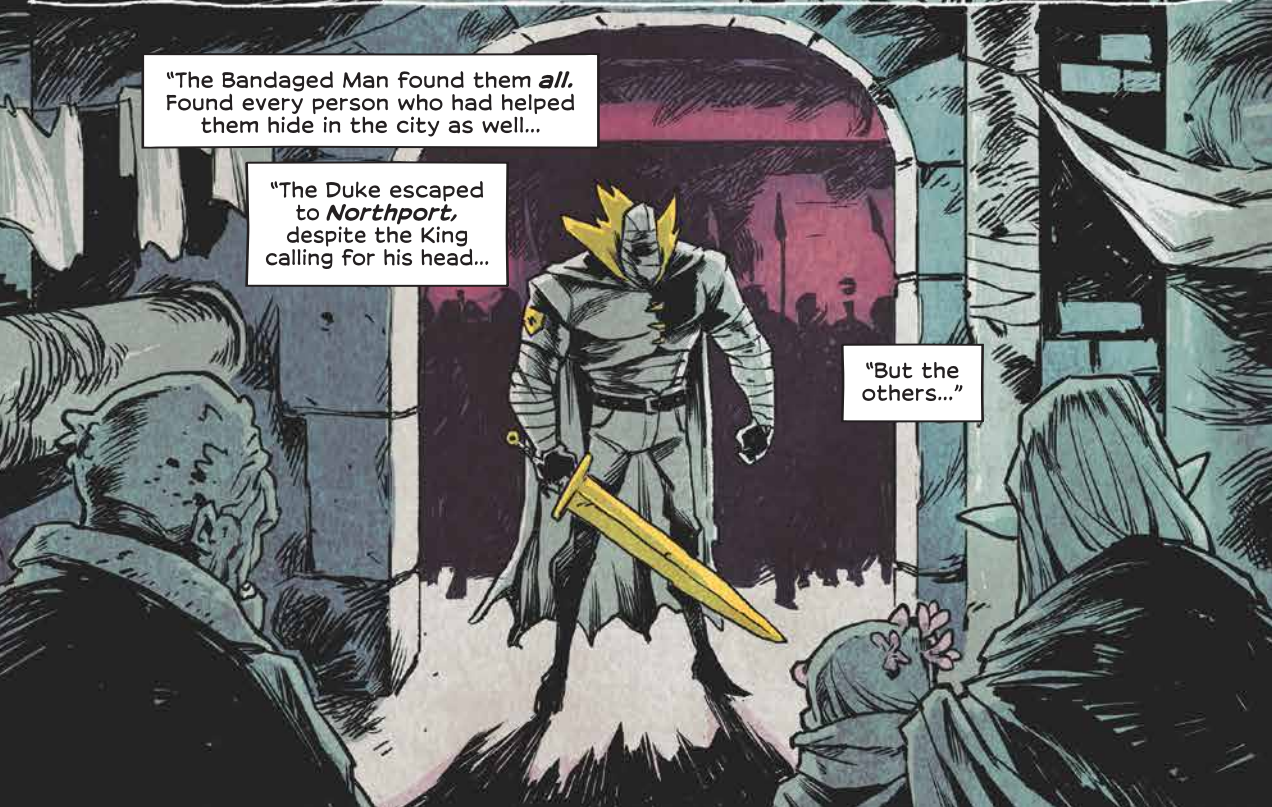
"He found them jobs and homes... Half-Faeries, Quarter-Vampyres, and anyone who had just been touched and changed by the **wild magic** of the world.



"The Bandaged Man found them **all**. Found every person who had helped them hide in the city as well...

"The Duke escaped to **Northport**, despite the King calling for his head...

"But the others..."





"I still remember
the *bodies* piled
on the sides of
the road."



"And when I found you, months later, on patrol 'round the northern floodgates..."



"This beautiful child with *pointed ears*..."



"It was *suicide* to take you in, but I couldn't let myself leave you to die.



"I'd sat back and watched too much *death* already."



It's not *fair*.



The world rarely is.



I want to stay *here*. This is my *home*. This is where I *fit in*.



Dear, there's so much of yourself you *don't know*. That you don't understand. I've been *selfish* keeping you this close this long...



Up in the magic north of *Esseriel*, you'll be able to become who you were always *meant* to be.



NO!



Wynd...



Mom.



You know I'm **right**, dear. He doesn't hear how the people still talk about the **weirdbloods**. You can't pretend you haven't heard the other engineers say **horrible things**.

You're too smart to be **blind** to all that.



It's not that. I want to know why we're just **sitting on our asses** in a kingdom where they'd just as soon **kill** someone we love! And when things get bad, we just **kick him out** and keep going.



There are **responsibilities** here, dear. You'll understand someday.



I hope
I *never* do.
I hope I'm
never that
selfish.



You think
I wouldn't
rather *run*
off on a
lark?!

You think
I don't *dream*
of Northport?!



**THEN
SEND ME
WITH
HIM!**



This isn't a
discussion.



No,
it sure
as hell
isn't.







YOU DON'T
THINK I KNOW IT'S
DANGEROUS?!



Wynd...



I can
hear them
through the spouts,
Oakley. I hear them
talking *every single*
day, and I know
what they think
about people
like me.

I know
what they'd
do to me if
they had the
chance.



They're
wrong...

They're
just *afraid*
because they
don't under-
stand they
don't need
to be...



You don't
know that! You
don't know that
you shouldn't
be afraid...

My ears
keep *growing*,
and who knows
what will happen
to me next.



It'll keep *infecting* and *twisting* me from the inside out until I'm *something horrible*.

Something even *you* couldn't look at without being *afraid*.



You don't know that...



Magic *spreads*, Oakley! If I go out of Pipetown, where it's *wild* in the world, it's going to spread into *me*.

This...This *thing* in me. That makes my ears look like some kind of *freak* so I can't live a *normal* life.



That's what's wrong with me, Oakley.



It's a part of you...



I DON'T
WANT
IT TO BE
A PART
OF ME!

I WANT TO BE
NORMAL!



All I want is
to wake up one
morning and have
small, normal
ears, and regular
dreams.



Maybe I could
even...*introduce* myself
to someone like that boy at
the castle. That *gardener*.
I don't know his name.

Maybe...Maybe
I could *ask* him his name.
Maybe we could have a life
together.



Wynd...





















Most folks
you meet, though,
are just people.

They're nice
as anyone else,
just have a touch of
the *strange* to them.
A bit of the world
stuck on where it
shouldn't be.

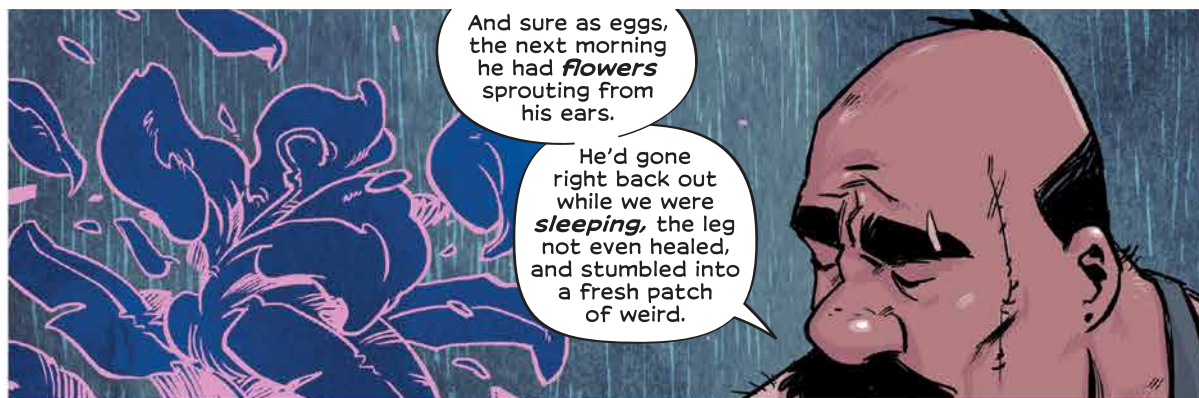


'Course,
there are
bad ones,
too.



Was doing a trade run down
the *Old Road* from Northport,
through the Faeriewoods, and
there was this real *scoundrel*
on the cart with us.

He'd sneak
off the path at
night to try and get
some bits of *moss*
to sell at the black
market here in
Pipetown, knowing
it could get us
all *killed*.

























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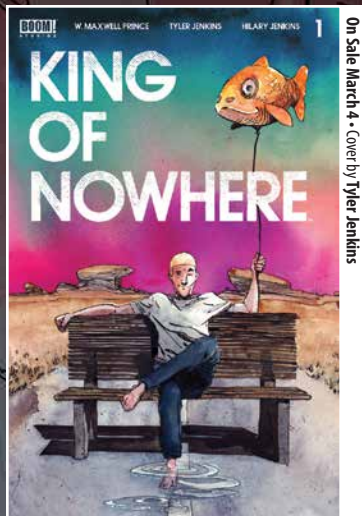
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