

MATT KINDT ♦ MATT SMITH ♦ CHRIS O'HALLORAN

folklords™



MATT KINDT — MATT SMITH — CHRIS O'HALLORAN

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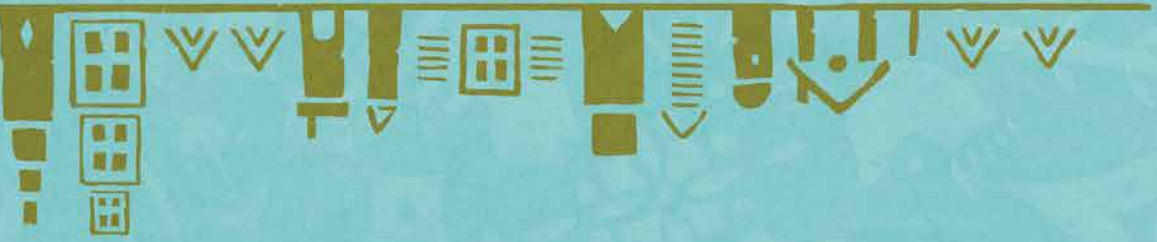
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**MATT KINDT
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CHAPTER ONE



ONCE UPON
A TIME...

No... Just this
one time.

ANSEL!

This Kid...

AREN'T
YOU SUPPOSED
TO BE THERE
BY NOW?

Sigh
This thing
never
works.

This Kid REALLY
did not belong.

This Kid dressed
crazy.

This Kid was way
too curious.

YOU CAN
BE LATE TONIGHT,
BUT DON'T BE LATE
TOMORROW!

DON'T WORRY!
I WON'T BE!

What this kid had
yet to realize?

YOU'RE STILL
INSISTING ON
WEARING THAT
OUTFIT?

Curiosity?
Answers?

ABSOLUTELY!

Knowledge?

Knowledge is a
freaking curse.







--SO SICK OF
TALKING ABOUT
QUESTS...

WHAT?! THIS IS
OUR LAST CHANCE TO
DO SOMETHING **AMAZING**
BEFORE WE BECOME
COBBLERS, IRONSMITHS,
CARPENTERS, AND
FARMERS.



YOU PICK THE RIGHT
QUEST, YOU CAN GET
OUT OF THIS VILLAGE.
SEE THE WORLD.
MAYBE SCORE A
PRINCESS AND SOME
GOLD AND NEVER
COME BACK.



YEAH? SO
WHAT'S **YOUR**
QUEST?



I'M GONNA EAT
SOME MERMAID
FLESH. LIVE
FOREVER!



Lgh. THAT'S
BARBARIC. AND
IT'S NOT TRUE.
IT'S A **MYTH**.



YOU
CAN'T
EVEN
SWIM.



BILLY FOUND
MERMAID FLESH
FIVE YEARS
AGO. IT'S
TRUE.

BUT
BILLY **DIED**.
HE DEFINITELY
WASN'T IMMORTAL
AFTER EATING IT.

DON'T
YOU WORRY
ABOUT
ME.

WHAT
ABOUT THE
REST OF YOU?
DEMIURE?
ARCHER?



I DID MINE LAST
YEAR. GOLDEN
GOOSE. FOUND IT.
THE END. IT'S
NOT ABOUT ME
ANYMORE.



I STILL
DON'T KNOW. I
CAN'T THINK OF
ANYTHING.



THE PUBLIC QUEST
ANNOUNCEMENT IS
TOMORROW! YOU
BETTER FIGURE
IT OUT!

WHAT
ABOUT YOU,
ANSEL?

AND CAN
YOU **PLEASE**
EXPLAIN, WHAT
EXACTLY **ARE** YOU
WEARING?



IT'S MY, uh...
QUESTING
SUIT.



OOKOKAY.

WELL,
WHAT'S
YOUR
QUEST?







BUT...
YOUR
QUEST.
I--

I DON'T
THINK YOU
SHOULD DO
THAT ONE.



WHAT ARE YOU
TALKING ABOUT?
WHY DO YOU
CARE?

I... I DO
CARE. I CARE
ABOUT YOU,
ANSEL.

WE'VE
BEEN FRIENDS
SINCE WE WERE
KIDS. I...



DEE... I
HAVE TO
DO THIS
ONE.

WHY?!



BECAUSE...

YOU'RE
GOING TO
THINK I'M
CRAZY.



WHAT
IS IT?



I'VE HAD DREAMS. BUT... MORE THAN THAT. THEY'RE LIKE VISIONS.

WHEN I SLEEP, BUT SOMETIMES WHEN I'M AWAKE, TOO. I HAVE THESE VISIONS OF... OF ANOTHER WORLD.



IN THIS OTHER WORLD? THERE ARE BUILDINGS AS TALL AS MOUNTAINS. THERE ARE SHIPS THAT FLY THROUGH THE AIR. CARRIAGES THAT MOVE WITHOUT HORSES.

IS THAT WHERE YOU GET YOUR IDEAS FOR CLOTHES AND ALL THOSE... THOSE THINGS YOU MAKE?



THIS IS HOW THE PEOPLE THERE DRESS. PEOPLE AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE. NO TREES AT ALL. AND THEY LIVE IN GIGANTIC VILLAGES...

LOOK. I THINK THIS PLACE IS REAL. I THINK I CAN ACTUALLY GET THERE. AND I THINK THE FOLKLORDS KNOW THE WAY.



YOU'RE GREEDY.

WHAT?



YOU'RE GREEDY FOR SECRETS.

WHAT'S THE POINT OF EVERY STORY YOUR PARENTS TOLD YOU WHEN YOU WERE A KID?

THE GLUTTONOUS GOOSE? THE UNHAPPY BEAR?

WHAT'S THE LESSON OF THOSE TALES?



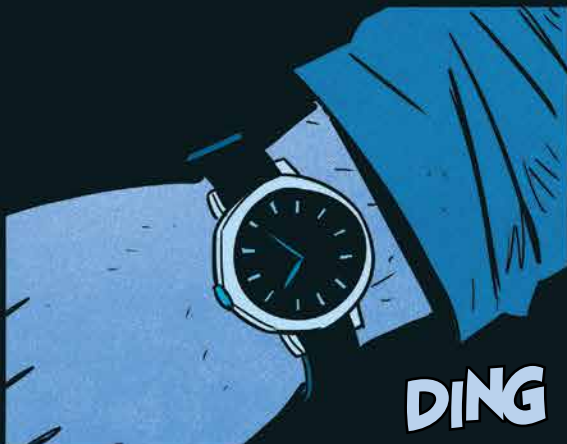
"DON'T BE GREEDY. BE CONTENT. ENJOY WHAT YOU HAVE."



DING



DING



DING



DING



DING



DING



DING

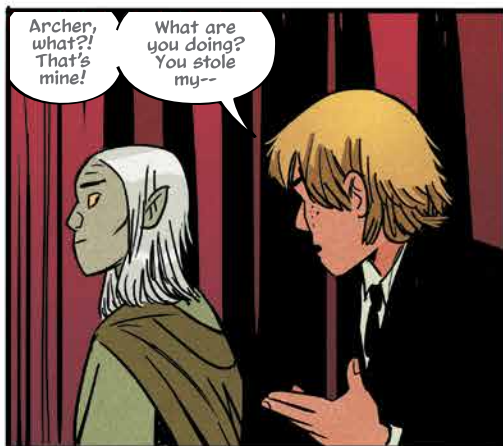
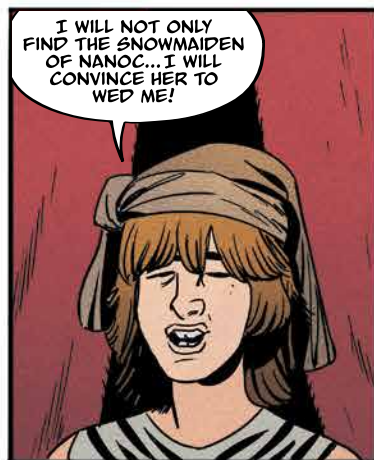
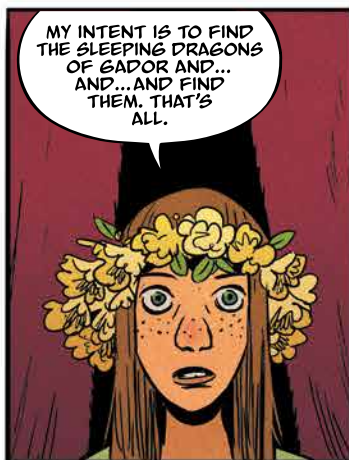


DONG















IN ADDITION, THERE HAVE BEEN REPORTS OF **WILD THING** ATTACKS AT THE EDGES OF OUR LANDS.

AS A RESULT, QUESTS BEYOND OUR BORDERS HAVE BEEN DEEMED UNSAFE.



Isn't that the point? Quests are always unsafe.



THEREFORE, THIS YEAR'S QUEST-TAKERS WILL HAVE THEIR QUESTS ASSIGNED TO THEM.

IT IS A MATTER OF VILLAGE SECURITY.

ANY VIOLATION WILL BE PUNISHABLE BY IMMEDIATE EXECUTION.

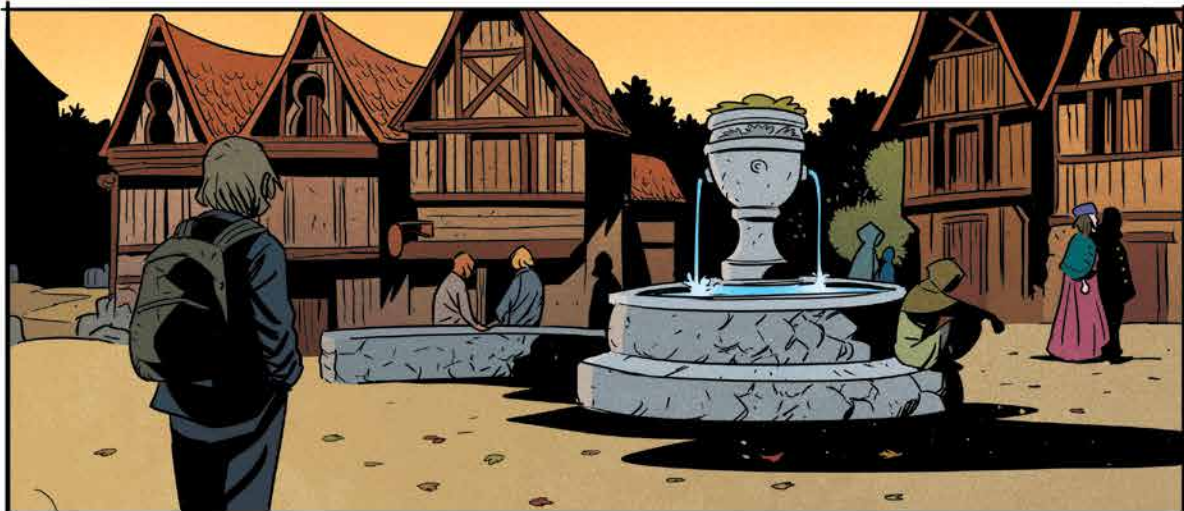


PLEASE FORM AN ORDERLY LINE AND YOUR QUESTS WILL BE HANDLED TO YOU AS YOU EXIT THE BUILDING.



THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION.

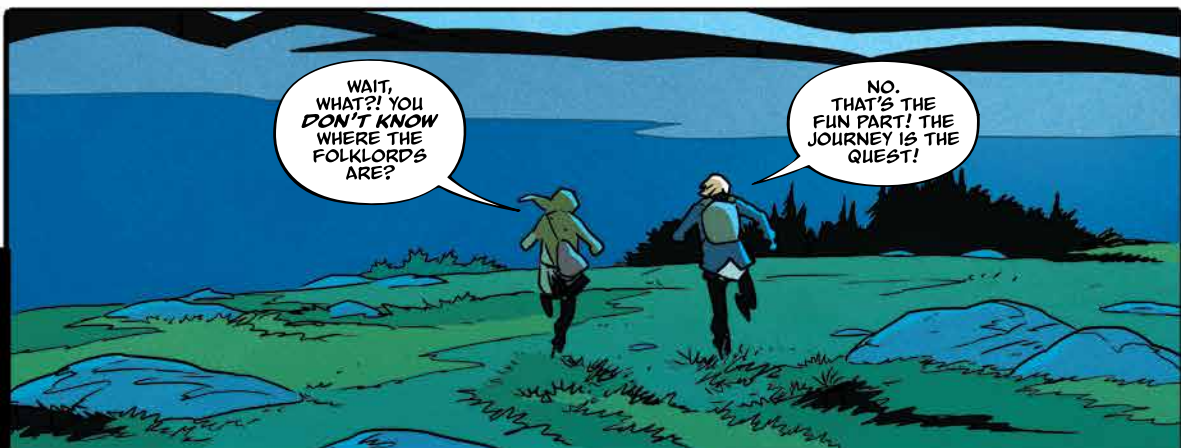








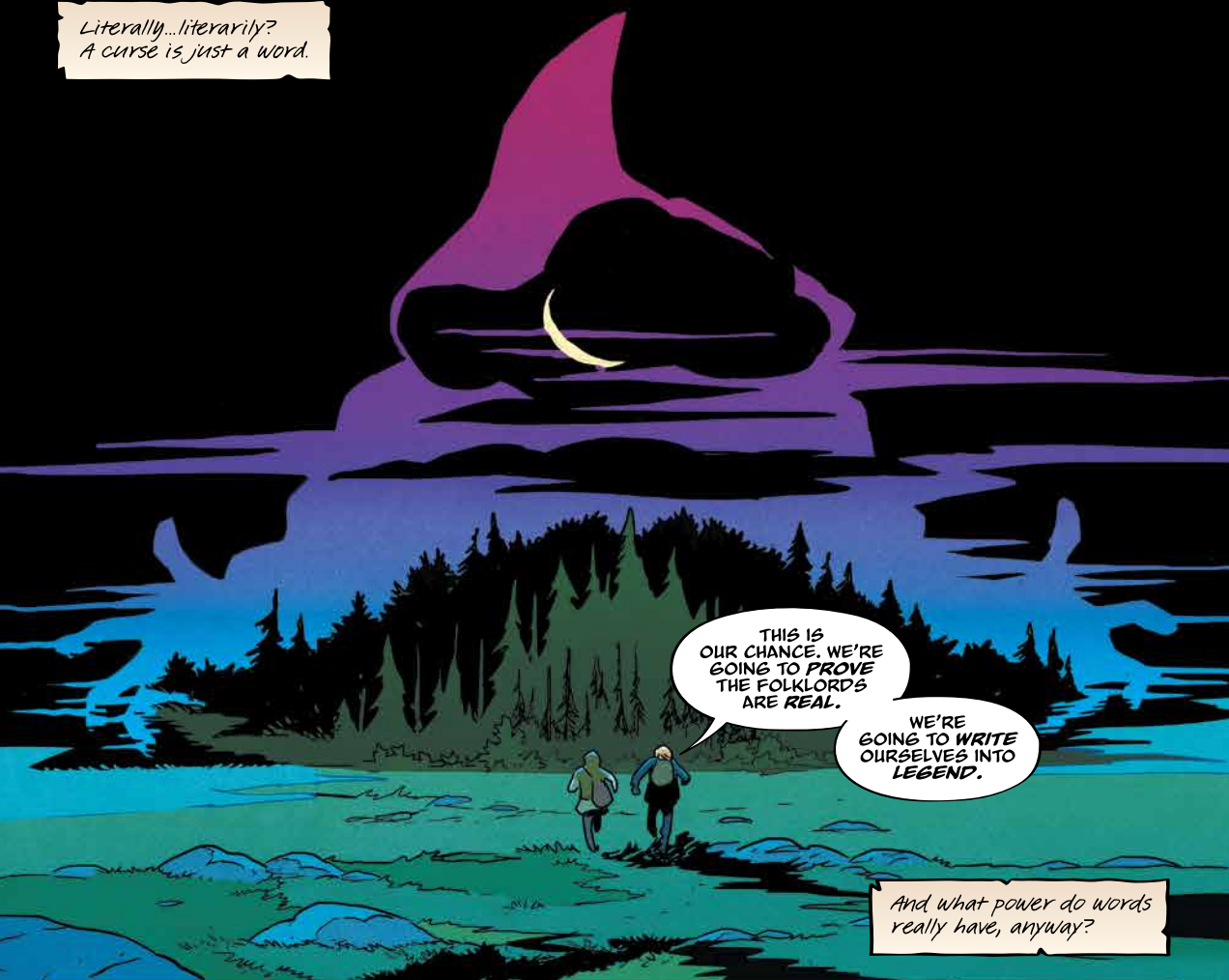




WAIT,
WHAT?! YOU
DON'T KNOW
WHERE THE
FOLKLORDS
ARE?

NO.
THAT'S THE
FUN PART! THE
JOURNEY IS THE
QUEST!

*Literally...literarily?
A curse is just a word.*



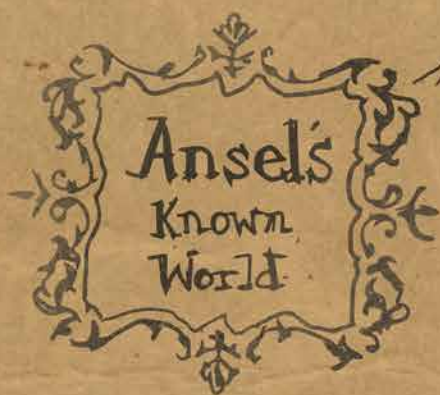
THIS IS
OUR CHANCE. WE'RE
GOING TO **PROVE**
THE FOLKLORDS
ARE **REAL**.

WE'RE
GOING TO **WRITE**
OURSELVES INTO
LEGEND.

*And what power do words
really have, anyway?*



To be continued...





CHAPTER TWO





ONCE UPON A TIME...

SO... YOUR ENTIRE LIFE, YOU'VE BEEN OBSESSED WITH FINDING THE "FOLKLORDS."

YEAH.



"Once"? Was it just once? We'd better hope so.

AND YOU'VE BEEN WAITING EIGHTEEN YEARS TO ANNOUNCE THAT AS YOUR QUEST. YOU'VE HAD EIGHTEEN YEARS TO PLAN. JUST LIKE WE ALL DO...

YEAH.



And "time"? It's relative. Don't even get me started.

EIGHTEEN YEARS AND YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHERE TO START.

FOLKLORD LORE IS... KIND OF FORBIDDEN. WHAT WAS I SUPPOSED TO DO? THE LIBRARIANS WON'T HELP.

MY PLAN WAS ALWAYS THIS. JUST HIT THE ROAD. SEE THE WORLD. MEET PEOPLE. GATHER INFORMATION.



"Once upon a time" actually kind of implies that there are multiple instances in multiple timelines...

YEAH. IT DOES FEEL GOOD TO BE OUT ON THE OPEN ROAD.

RIGHT? YOU DON'T REALIZE HOW SMALL OUR VILLAGE IS UNTIL YOU START WALKING. GUESS THAT'S THE WHOLE POINT OF THE QUEST.



Is that what all this is? Please, god, no.

SEE THE WORLD. BROADEN OUR HORIZONS. OUR VILLAGE IS DOWNRIGHT CLAUSTROPHOBIC.

WHERE ARE YOU FROM ORIGINALLY? IS THAT--IS THAT RUDE TO ASK?



I'M THE ONLY ELF
IN THE VILLAGE. I'VE
BEEN ASKED THAT
MY ENTIRE
LIFE.

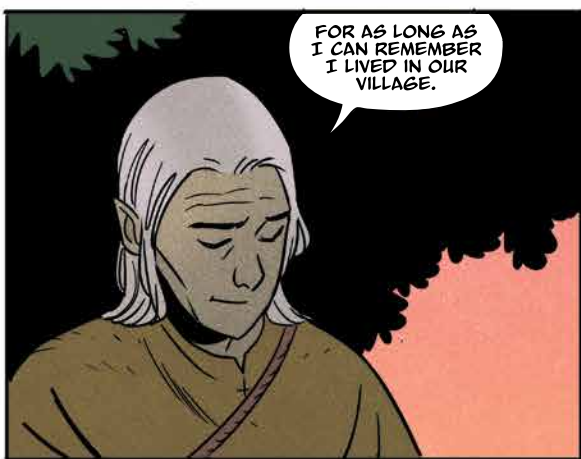


WHEN YOU'RE THE ONLY
KID WITH POINTY EARS...
YOU DEFINITELY GET
TREATED A LITTLE
DIFFERENT.

I'M
SORRY...



Nah. IT'S OKAY.
I GOT TREATED
BETTER THAN
THE GNOME'S,
THAT'S FOR
SURE.



FOR AS LONG AS
I CAN REMEMBER
I LIVED IN OUR
VILLAGE.



BUT
ACCORDING TO
MY DAD...



"...I WASN'T
BORN THERE."



"THE WAY MY PARENTS TELL IT, MY DAD WAS ON HIS WAY HOME FROM THE MARKET.

"HE FOUND ME ON THE ROAD. ABANDONED."



"HE ASSUMED SOME ELF FAMILY HAD FALLEN ON HARD TIMES AND LEFT ME.

"ANYWAY, I NEVER KNEW MY REAL PARENTS."



"MY ADOPTIVE PARENTS WERE POOR. PROBABLY THE REASON THEY NEVER HAD KIDS.

"THEY COULD BARELY AFFORD TO FEED THEMSELVES. MY DAD ALWAYS BLAMED THE EXORBITANT PROPERTY TAXES LEVIED BY THE UNREAL ESTATE AGENTS."



"DAD TOOK ME HOME AND THEY LOVED ME. THEY'D NEVER HAD KIDS, BUT THEY ALWAYS WANTED THEM."



"I WAS
THEIR 'LITTLE
BLESSING.'"



COUGH

COUGH

THE CHILD IS
CURSED...



YOU-YOU'VE GOT TO GET
RID OF HIM... BEFORE...
BEFORE YOU DIE,
TOO...

NEVER...
NEVER SHOULD
HAVE TAKEN
HIM IN...



DAD!
WATCH
THIS!

"THEY WERE
OLD WHEN THEY
FOUND ME."

"EVENTUALLY MOM
DIED, AND THEN IT WAS
JUST ME AND DAD."

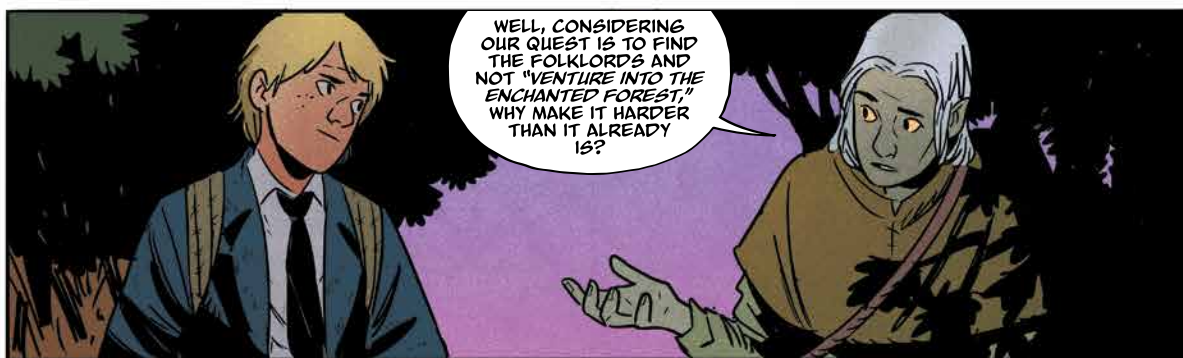


"AND
EVENTUALLY
IT WAS JUST
ME."



WELL, THEY
WERE LUCKY
TO FIND
YOU.

I GUESS.





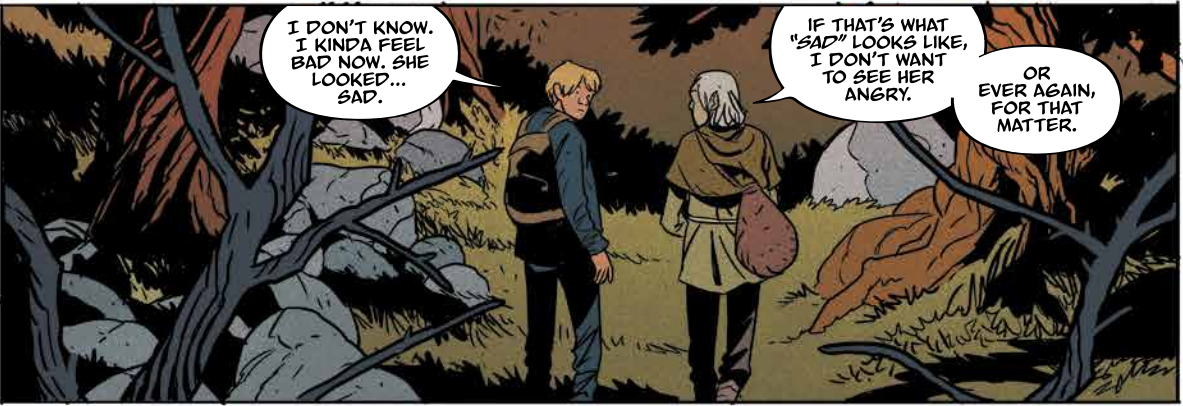












I DON'T KNOW. I KINDA FEEL BAD NOW. SHE LOOKED... SAD.

IF THAT'S WHAT "SAD" LOOKS LIKE, I DON'T WANT TO SEE HER ANGRY.

OR EVER AGAIN, FOR THAT MATTER.



EITHER WAY, YOU PROBABLY SHOULDN'T HAVE HIT HER WITH A ROCK.

I SAVED YOUR LIFE.

YOU MADE AN ENEMY. WE WERE ONE GOAT-CURRY PIE FROM MAKING AN ALLY.

THAT THING IS NEVER GONNA BE YOUR--



YOU HEAR THAT?

...sobbbb...sobbbb...



sobbbb...sobbbb...sobbbb...



isobbbb



THIS IS TOTALLY A TRAP.



Come on. We haven't helped a *single person* so far on this quest. That's a bad sign.

We're *not* passing up another chance.



MA'AM? CAN WE HELP?



¿SNIFF? HELP? ¿SNIFF?



I-I'M NOT SURE. I'M LOST. I'M HUNGRY. I'M TIRED.

I'VE BEEN IN THESE WOODS SO LONG, I...

...I'M SCARED.



HERE, HAVE SOME FRESH WATER.



TH-THANK YOU. THESE WOODS... THEY'RE A CRUEL PLACE.

EVERYONE LOOKING OUT FOR THEMSELVES.



I'M ANGEL, AND THIS IS MY GOOD FRIEND ARCHER.

I-I AM GRETA.



WELL, GRETA. YOU'RE NOT ALONE ANYMORE.

LET'S FIND A PLACE TO SET UP CAMP AND WE'LL GET IT ALL SORTED.



Are you flirting right now? You think Demure would approve?

I'm helping. It's nothing more than that.







THE
LEGEND SAYS
THAT THE KILLER
CHOKES THEIR
VICTIMS...



...AND
FORCES THEM
TO SWALLOW A SEED
HIDDEN INSIDE A
SWEET CANDY.



"AFTER TORTURING THE
VICTIMS, THEY ARE SAID
TO BURY THEM IN THE
GROUND."



"THE SEED INSIDE THE
CORPSE CONTINUES
TO GROW..."



CREATING THIS FOREST
FULL OF BONE-TREES...THE
BONES OF THEIR VICTIMS
GROWN OVER THE YEARS.
THE TREES ACTING AS
GRAVESTONES...



YIKES. WHAT KIND OF
MONSTER WOULD DO
SOMETHING LIKE
THAT?

OH WAIT.
I THINK WE
ALREADY BUMPED
INTO HER.

I HIT
HER WITH A
ROCK. ANSEL
OFFERED HER
FOOD.



I DON'T
THINK THAT
WAS THE
KILLER.

DON'T WORRY,
GRETA. TOMORROW
WE'RE GOING TO
FIND YOUR
BROTHER.

YOUR
QUEST IS
OUR
QUEST.









NO...
WHOLE THING
COVERED IN
CANDY...

GRETA
WAS
RIGHT...



GRETA...



CANDY
COATING...
MUST BE
DRUGGED...



Hee!

Too
laaaate...!



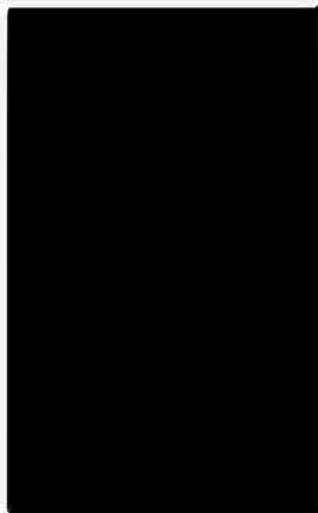
...GOT
TO...



...got
to...



...help...





folklords
is just a clever title. To
intrigue you. A hook.



The **ONCE UPON A TIME...**
is real. Trust me.



Are you reading this?
Or are you living it?



For the longest time
I thought it wasn't.



Your "wizard items"
that you make?



You're going
to need them.



You're going
to need all of
that and
more...

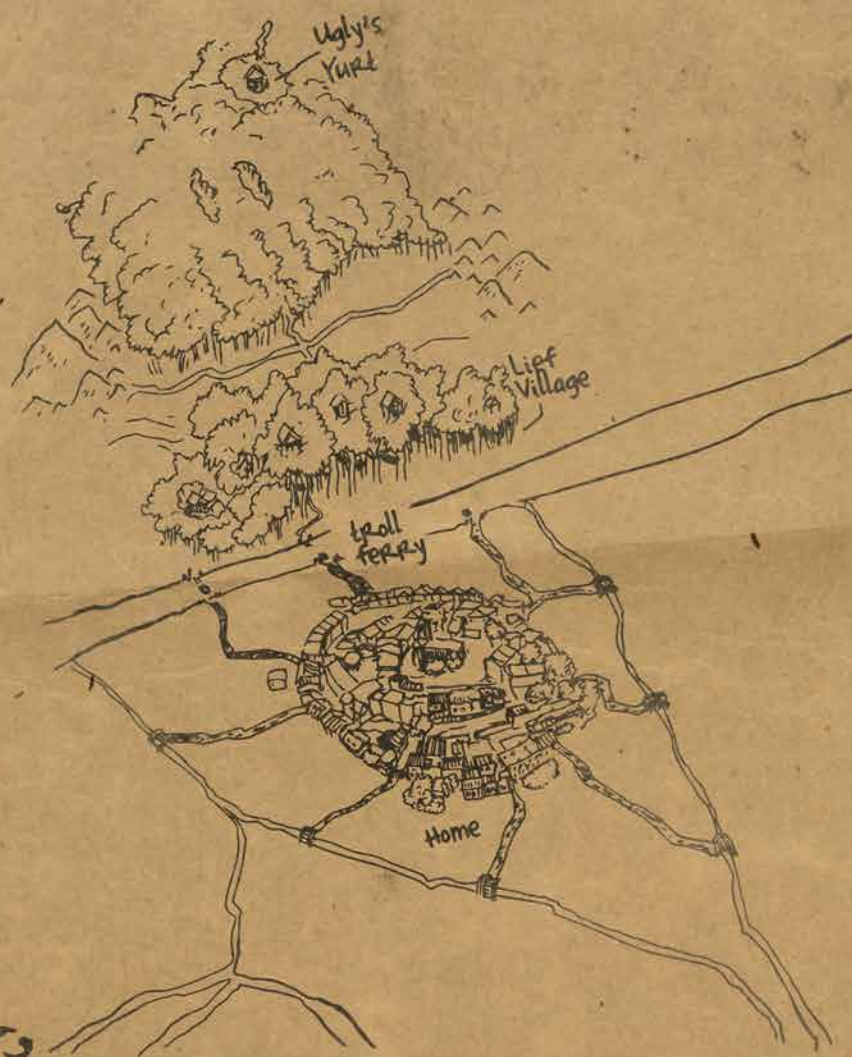


...if you want to
make it to your
real home... alive.



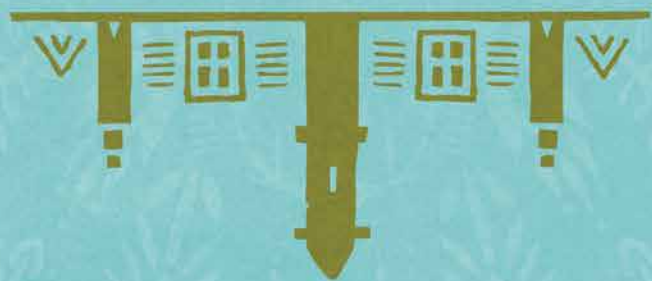
WAKY?







CHAPTER **THREE**



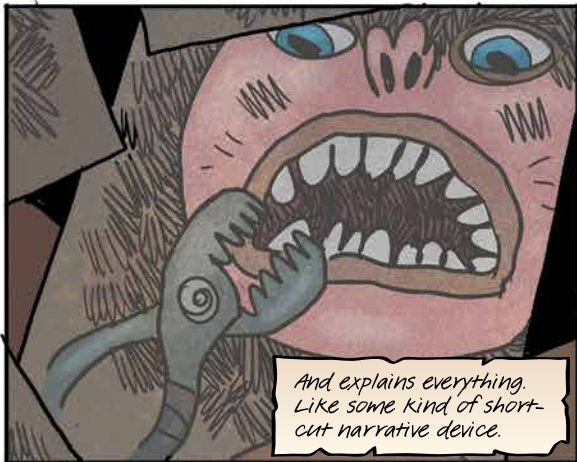


"ONCE UPON
A TIME"?

Maybe this was
a bedtime story.



But I swear. I am **NOT** the
voice that's gonna hold
your hand through this...



And explains everything.
Like some kind of short-
cut narrative device.



At least...God...I hope
I'm not that.



I'm definitely not
omniscient. I wish.



In a lot of ways,
I'm just as in the
dark as you are.



taking up
space until
I can make
sense of
it all.



I really hope this
isn't one of those
stupid stories
where it's all
a dream.

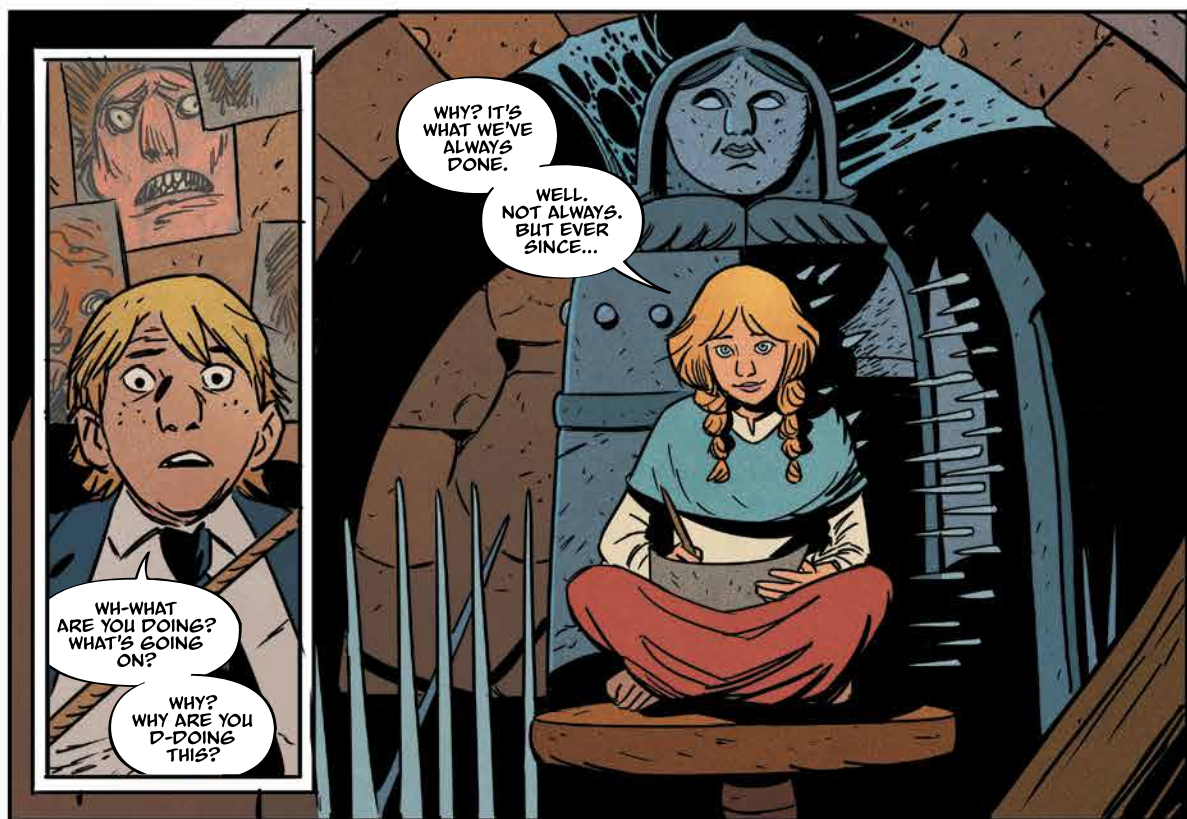
One thing
I do know?



WOW, YOU
ACTUALLY
FAINTED.



IT'S WAY LESS
GOOD WHEN THEY LOSE
CONSCIOUSNESS.

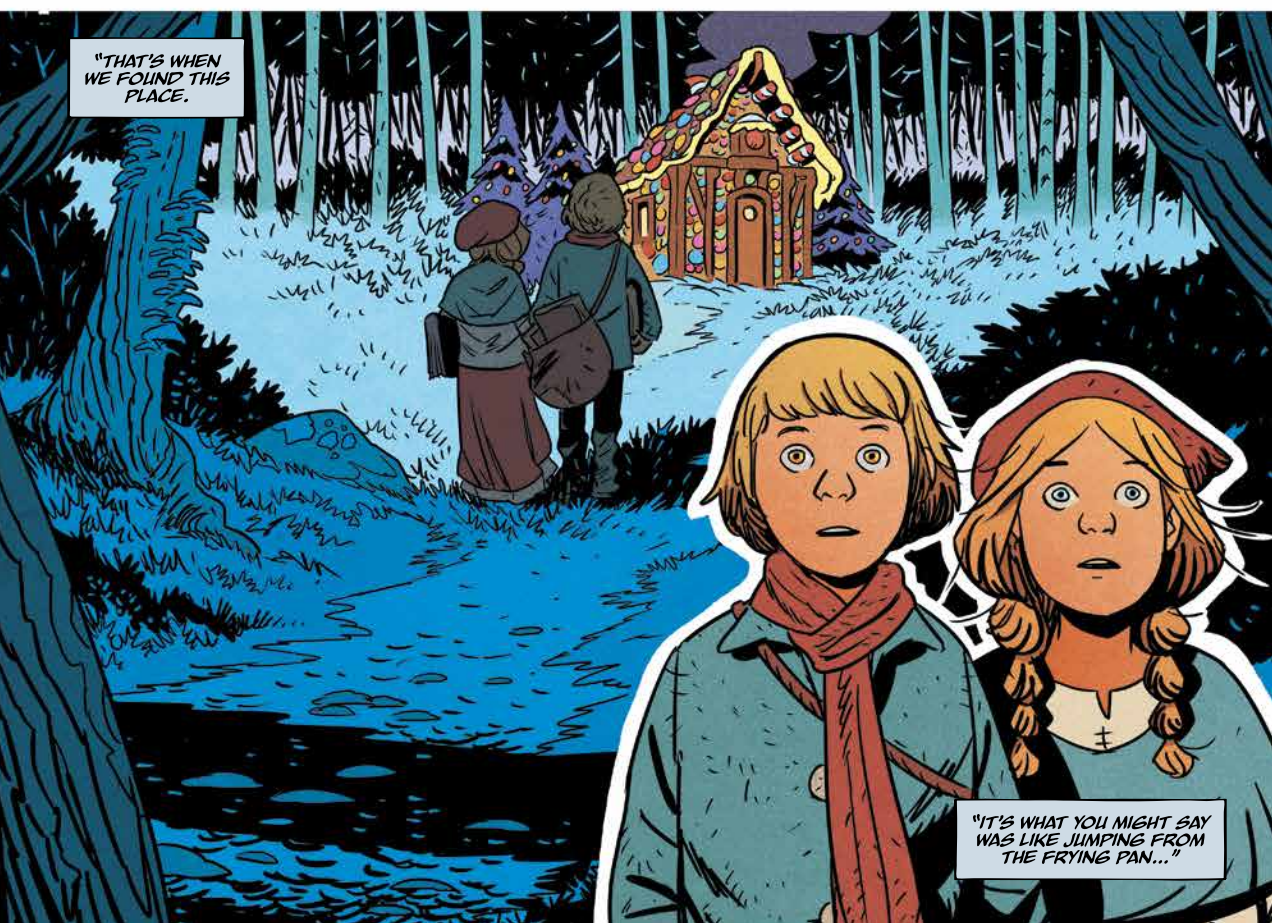
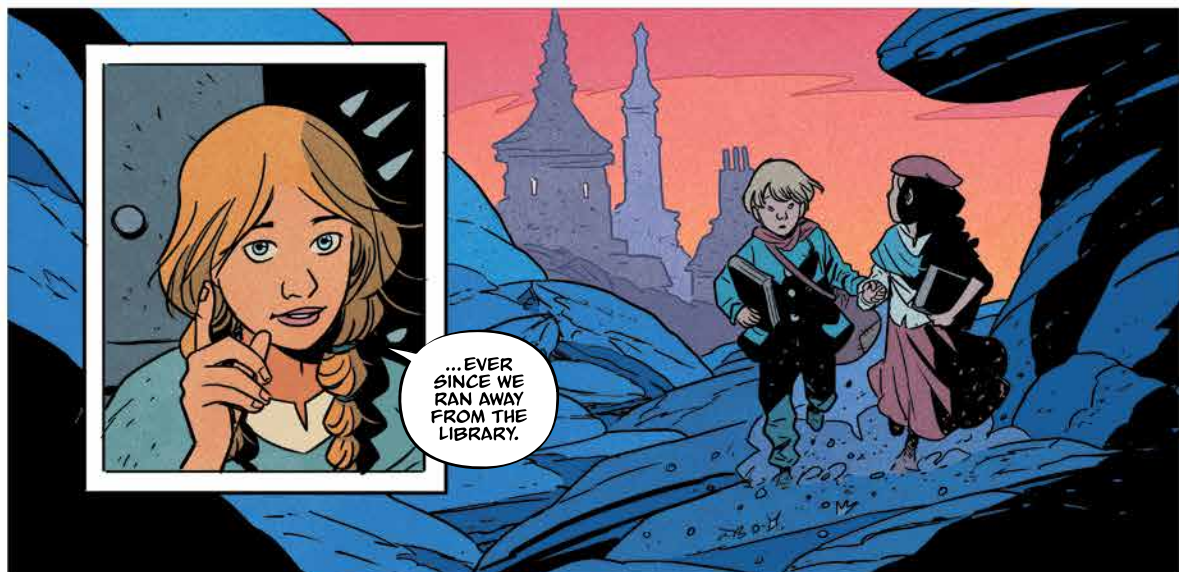


WH-WHAT
ARE YOU DOING?
WHAT'S GOING
ON?

WHY?
WHY ARE YOU
D-DOING
THIS?

WHY? IT'S
WHAT WE'VE
ALWAYS
DONE.

WELL,
NOT ALWAYS.
BUT EVER
SINCE...





"...INTO
THE FIRE.

"HOW WERE WE SUPPOSED
TO KNOW? WE SAW A HOUSE
COVERED IN CANDY. IT WAS
A DIFFERENT TIME.



"BACK THEN? NO
ONE LOCKED THEIR
DOORS, AND YOU
COULD TRUST A
GINGERBREAD
COTTAGE.



"HOW WERE WE SUPPOSED
TO KNOW THIS OLD GUY,
TIMES, WAS IN LEAGUE
WITH THE LIBRARIANS?



"HOW WERE WE
SUPPOSED TO
KNOW THAT ALL
THE KIDS THAT
EVER ESCAPED
ENDED UP
HERE...



"...AND WERE
NEVER SEEN
AGAIN?"



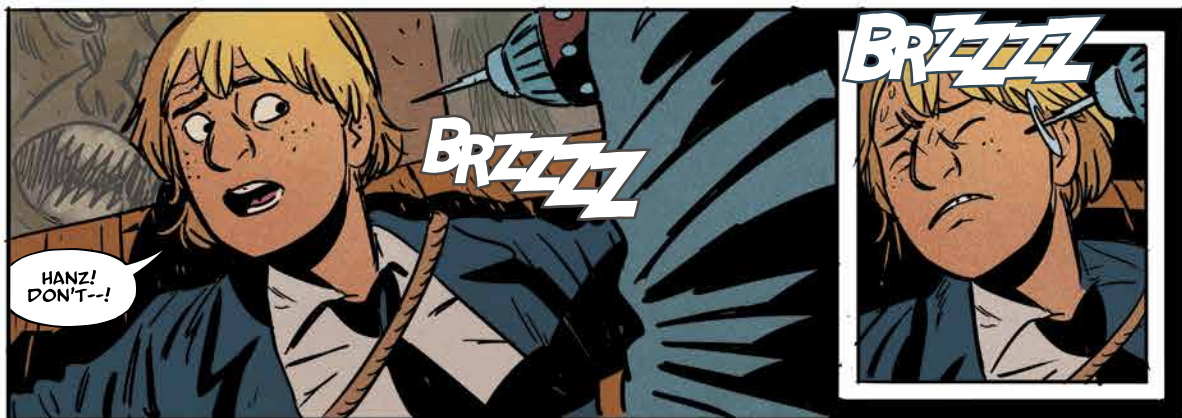






















WHAT ARE YOU DOING?



I-I...



TOLD YOU TO CLEAR OUT.

I-I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT NEED HELP.

DOES IT LOOK LIKE I NEED HELP?



SHOULD'VE DONE THIS A LONG TIME AGO. THEY WERE NOTHING BUT COLD-BLOODED KILLERS.

scrth scrth



TRIED TO GIVE THEM THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT. IT'S JUST HARD TO REALLY KNOW SOMEONE.

DAMMIT! THING WON'T LIGHT.



HEY...





BETTER
GET FAR AWAY.
FUMES FROM
THIS PLACE WILL
PROBABLY BE...
DANGEROUS.

THANKS FOR
THAT BACK
THERE.

I'M...
I'M SORRY
MY FRIEND
ATTACKED YOU
THE OTHER
DAY.



DON'T
WORRY
ABOUT IT.
I'M USED
TO IT.





YOUR NAME ISN'T
"UGLY." WHAT IS
IT, REALLY?

I'VE BEEN CALLED
THAT SO LONG, KID,
I DON'T REMEMBER
WHAT MY NAME
IS ANYMORE.



THING
IS? I DON'T
REALLY CARE.
I JUST OWN
IT.



YOU CAN THINK OF
YOURSELF HOWEVER
YOU WANT. BUT AT
THE END OF THE DAY?
IT'S THE WORLD
THAT'S GONNA
NAME YOU.

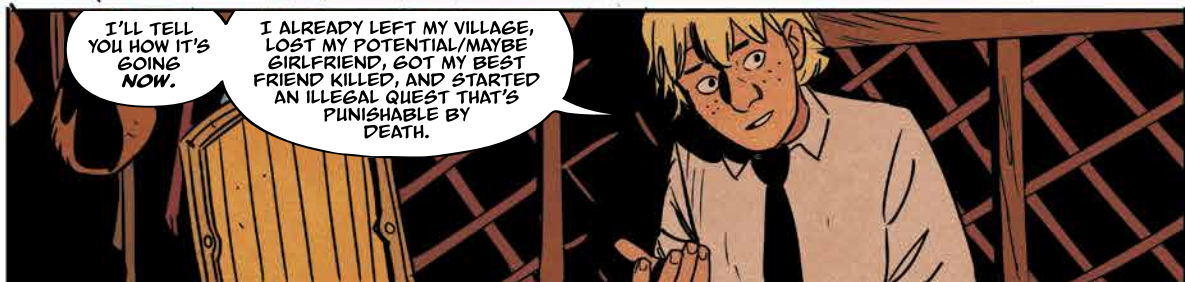


DOESN'T
MATTER WHAT
YOU CALL
YOURSELF.



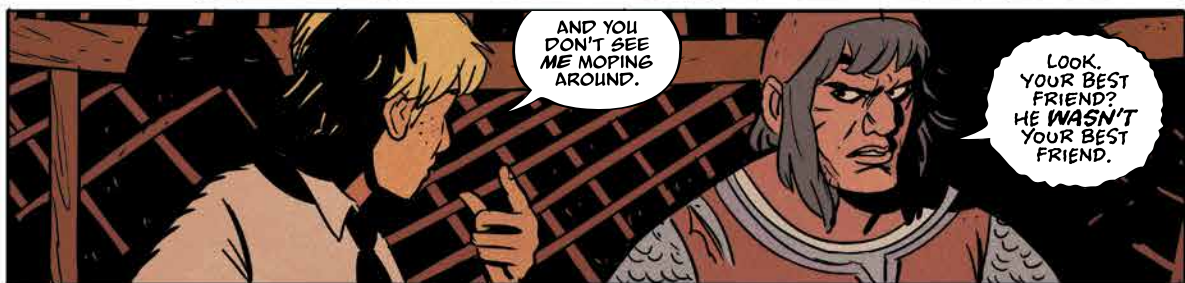
NOW, COME ON. THAT'S A REALLY JADED THING TO SAY. YOU DEFINE YOU. NOT THE "WORLD."

YEAH? GET BACK TO ME IN A FEW YEARS, KID. LET ME KNOW HOW THAT GOES.



I'LL TELL YOU HOW IT'S GOING NOW.

I ALREADY LEFT MY VILLAGE, LOST MY POTENTIAL/MAYBE GIRLFRIEND, GOT MY BEST FRIEND KILLED, AND STARTED AN ILLEGAL QUEST THAT'S PUNISHABLE BY DEATH.



AND YOU DON'T SEE ME MOPING AROUND.

LOOK. YOUR BEST FRIEND? HE WASN'T YOUR BEST FRIEND.



WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

I FOLLOWED YOU TWO. THAT NIGHT AFTER YOU ATTACKED ME?



I WATCHED YOU BY THE FIRE THE NIGHT YOU FOUND GRETA. AND I SAW GRETA AND ARCHER WHISPERING. HE RAN OFF.

WHAT? WHY WOULD HE? THAT CAN'T BE.

YOUR BEST FRIEND? SOLD YOU OUT.

BELIEVE ME OR DON'T. NO SKIN OFF MY NOSE.

... WHAT'S YOUR QUEST?



I'M TRYING TO FIND THE FOLKLORDS. AND AS IT HAPPENS? I FOUND THIS IN THE COTTAGE BACK THERE. LOOK!



THE FOLKLORDS? I THINK THEY'RE CONNECTED TO MY VISIONS.

"VISIONS"?



YEAH. LONG STORY.

ANYWAY, MY VISIONS SHOW ME THESE SAME KINDS OF CRAZY CONTRACTIONS. LIKE MY "FIRE LIGHTER." STUFF THAT DOESN'T EXIST. STUFF LIKE WHAT'S IN THIS BOOK!

WHOEVER MADE THIS? THEY WERE EITHER A FOLKLORD OR THEY HAD DIRECT KNOWLEDGE OF THEIR WORLD!



HUH.

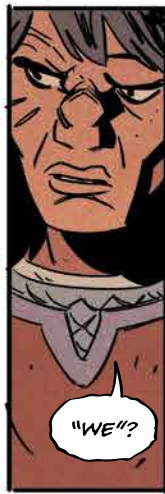


"IF FOUND, PLEASE RETURN TO THE BRANCH LIBRARY OF BANNED BOOKS-- ON PENALTY OF DEATH."

WELL. IF THIS IS THE CLUE TO THE FOLKLORDS? THEN I KNOW WHERE YOU NEED TO GO.



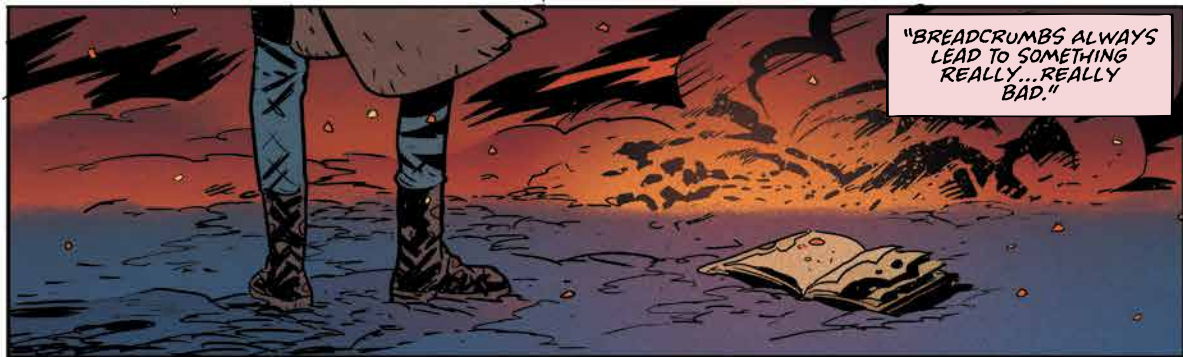
THIS IS IT! THIS IS JUST THE BREADCRUMB WE NEED!



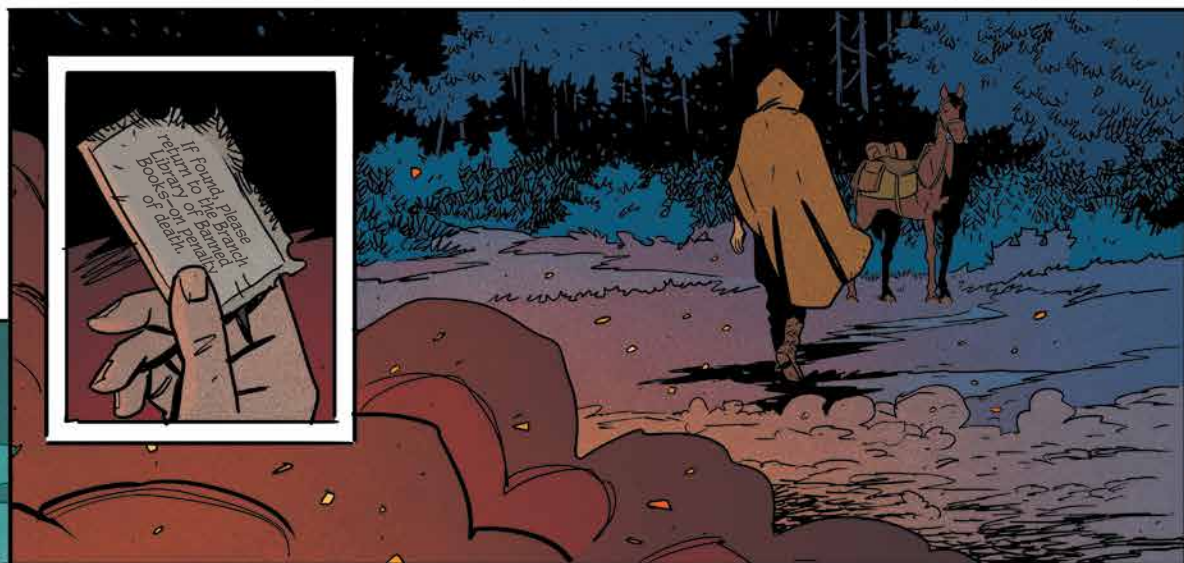
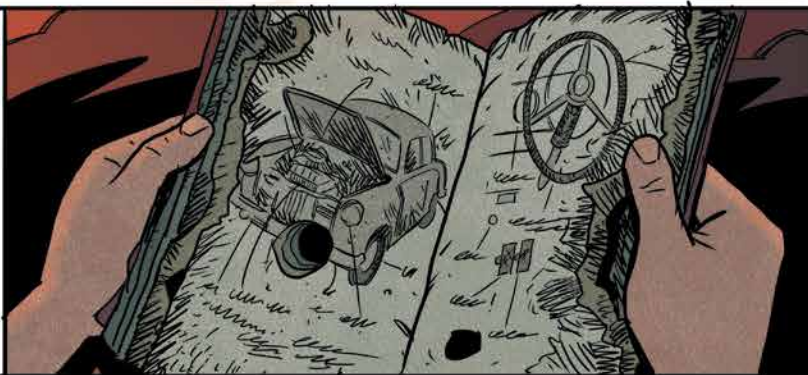
"WE"?



UGH. JUST, PLEASE. DON'T SAY "BREADCRUMB."



"BREADCRUMBS ALWAYS
LEAD TO SOMETHING
REALLY...REALLY
BAD."



If found, please
return to the branch
library of painted
books or heralds
of death.



So, if I WAS
omniscient?



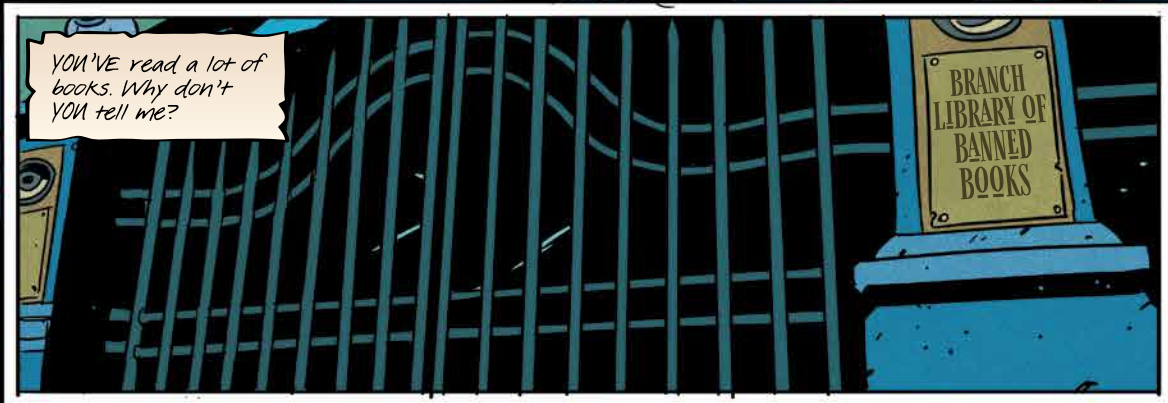
This is where I'd talk
about the dark clouds
on the horizon.

But are there dark
clouds? Is there
impending doom?

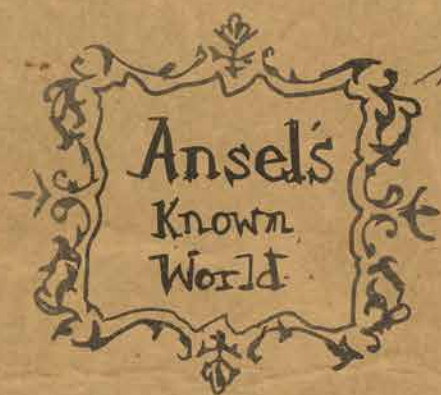
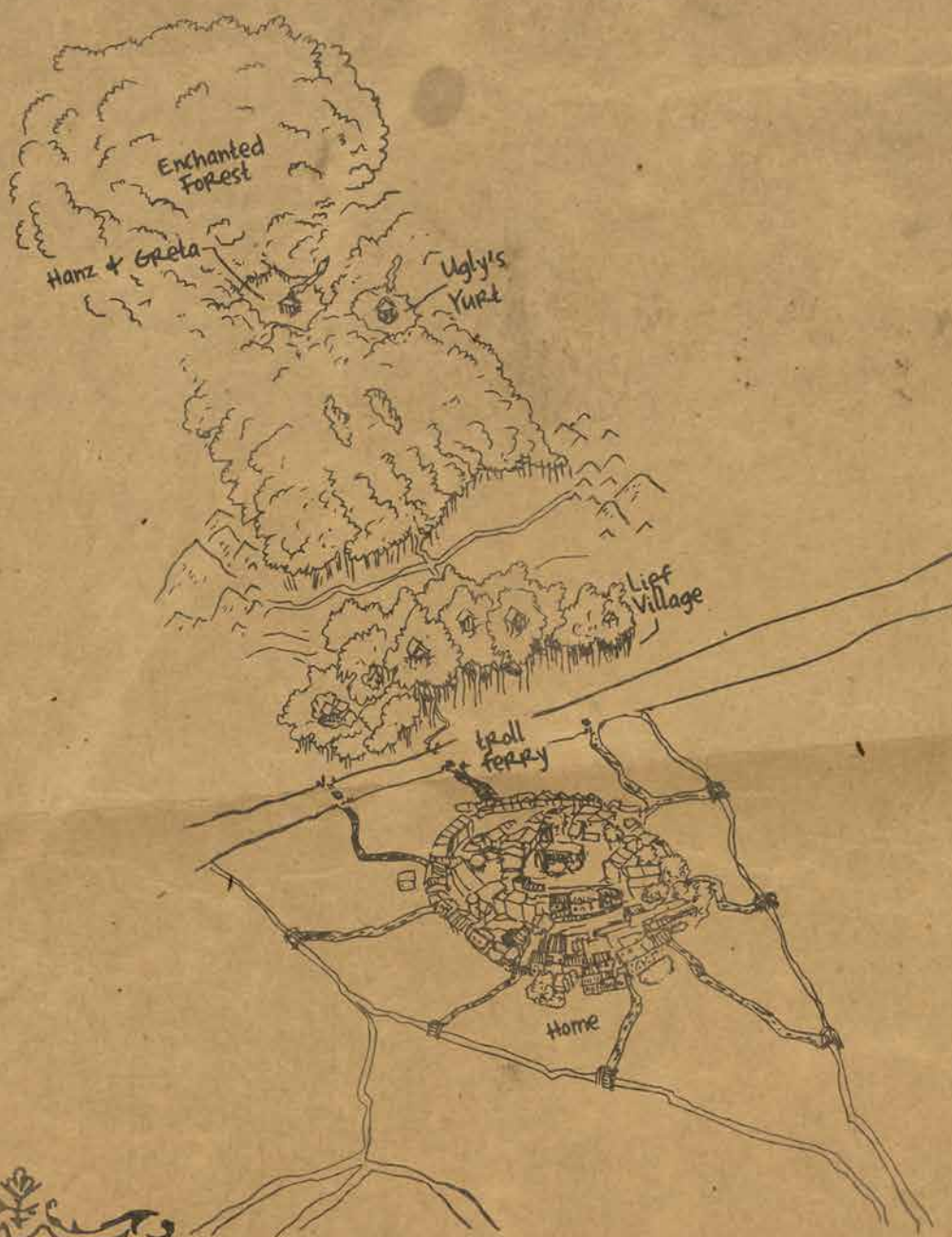
I don't know. I told you.
I'm NOT omniscient.



If you're reading
this? Maybe YOU'RE
the omniscient one.

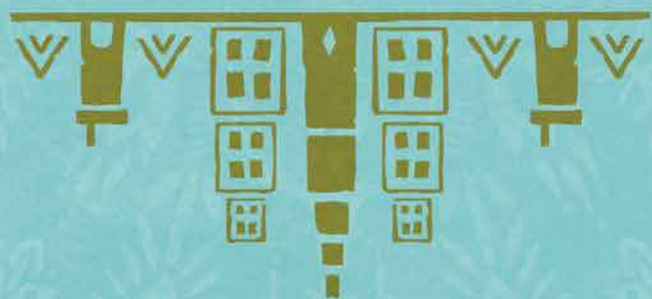


YOU'VE read a lot of
books. Why don't
YOU tell me?





CHAPTER **FOUR**





Have you figured it out yet?

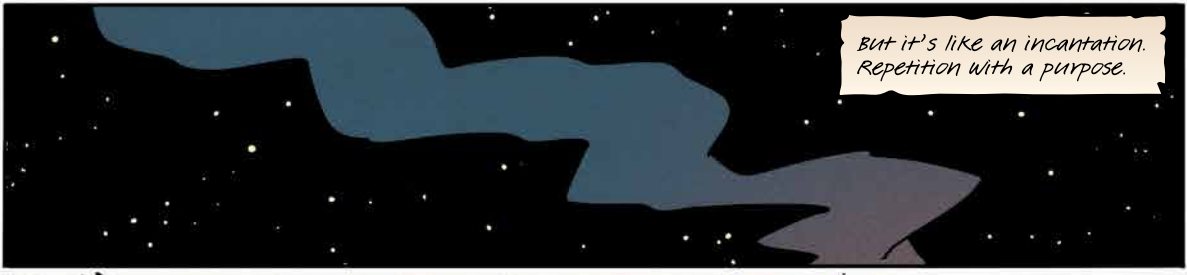
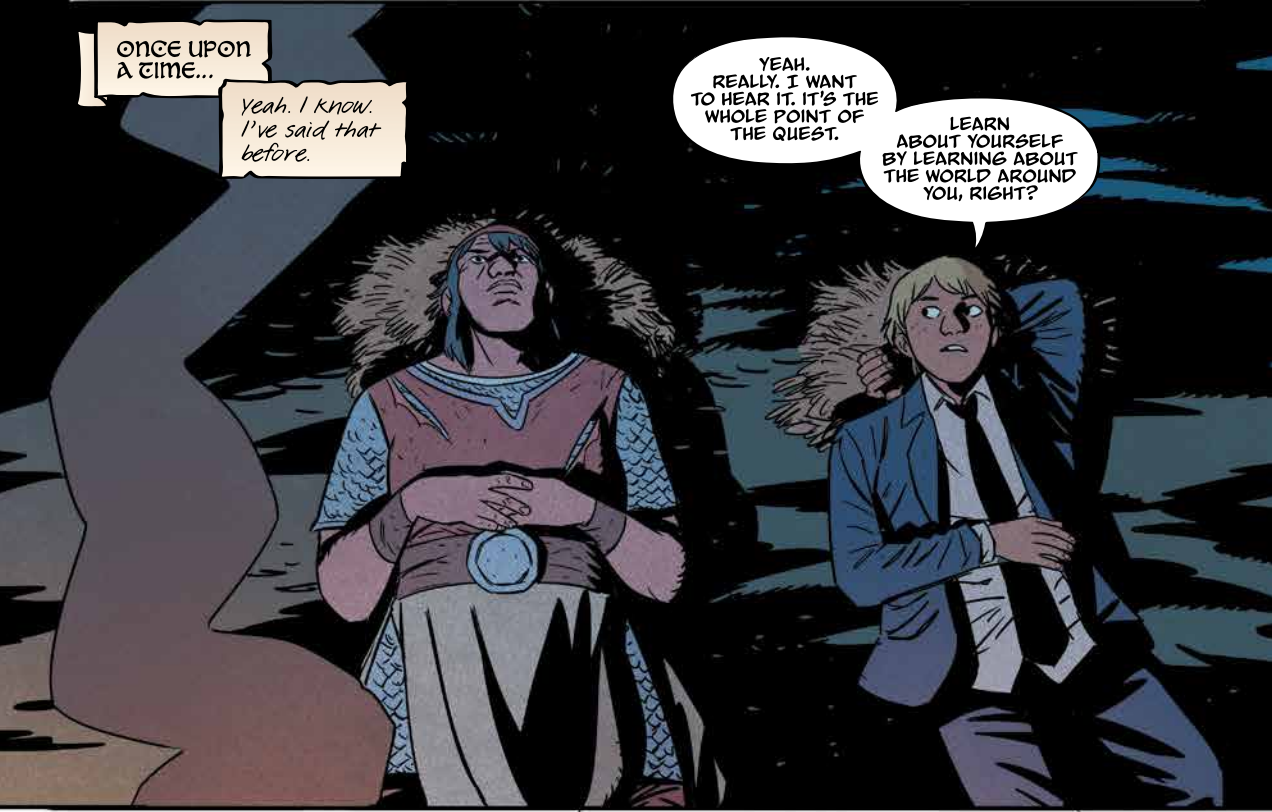
IT'S BEEN SO LONG SINCE ANYONE'S ASKED ME A QUESTION ABOUT...ANYTHING. YOU'RE SURE?

ONCE UPON A TIME...

Yeah. I know. I've said that before.

YEAH. REALLY. I WANT TO HEAR IT. IT'S THE WHOLE POINT OF THE QUEST.

LEARN ABOUT YOURSELF BY LEARNING ABOUT THE WORLD AROUND YOU, RIGHT?



But it's like an incantation. Repetition with a purpose.



'Cause I'm pretty sure this has happened a lot of times. Don't worry. You're getting there. You're nearly caught up...

ALL RIGHT. WELL...EVERY KID THINKS THEY'RE AN OUTCAST AT SOME POINT. FEELS LIKE THEY DON'T BELONG.

IT'S A "PHASE." SOMETHING EVERY KID GOES THROUGH. BUT ME?



"IT WAS REAL
OBVIOUS I WASN'T
GOING TO EVER
BELONG."

HEY!
UGLY!

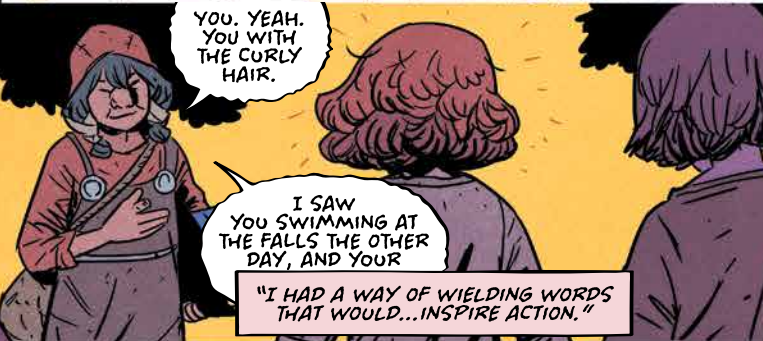


snicker

giggle



"LET'S JUST SAY
I WAS ELOQUENT AT
A YOUNG AGE."



YOU. YEAH.
YOU WITH
THE CURLY
HAIR.

I SAW
YOU SWIMMING AT
THE FALLS THE OTHER
DAY, AND YOUR

"I HAD A WAY OF WIELDING WORDS
THAT WOULD...INSPIRE ACTION."



WHY YOU
BIG NASTY
TROLL--!



IN FACT,
WHEN I SAW IT

"REALLY, I WAS
JUST SEARCHING
FOR A REASON.
I HAD TO BE LIKE
I WAS FOR SOME
REASON."

"I WAS CONVINCED
I WAS SPECIAL.
DIFFERENT."



OOF!

"CURSED."



HIGH...
YOU'RE EVEN
WORSE UP
CLOSE...

"I HAD READ A LOT OF BOOKS.
I WAS ALSO CONVINCED I KNEW
HOW TO LIFT THE CURSE."





"MY QUEST WAS AN EASY ONE. 'LIFT MY CURSE,' I LEFT AT EIGHTEEN AND I NEVER CAME BACK.



"YEARS ON THE ROAD AND ALWAYS THE SAME."



EHKE



"SPREADING PEACE AND LOVE..."

"ONE KISS AT A TIME."



"EVENTUALLY I STOPPED EXPECTING RESULTS."



"AND JUST
STARTED
HAVING
FUN."



"ENJOYING
LIFE..."



"...INSTEAD OF FIGHTING
WHO I WAS."

"I GUESS I JUST
GREW INTO MY
SKIN."



I'M A REFLECTION OF THE WORLD. THE QUEST IS THE LIE THEY TELL YOU TO KEEP YOU OCCUPIED.

TH-THEN... WHY DID YOU AGREE TO HELP ME?



I'M A FAN OF FUTILE CAUSES AND SUICIDE MISSIONS.



Oh.



G'NIGHT.



zzzzzz...

...wake up...

...this is real...

WAKE UP





THIS IS IT.
THE BRANCH
LIBRARY OF
BANNED BOOKS.



YOU SURE
ABOUT
THIS?

WE'VE COME THIS
FAR. AND THERE'S A
DIFFERENCE BETWEEN
ALL YOUR OTHER
ADVENTURES AND
THIS ONE.



YEAH?
WHAT'S
THAT?



YOU HAVE
A PARTNER.
WE'RE WORKING
TOGETHER. AND
NOTHING IS
GONNA...



...stop
us...

AW,
HELLHOUNDS...







UNNGHH!

GAHHH!



D-DON'T
FIGHT! I KNOW YOU.
NOT JUST FROM
BEFORE...

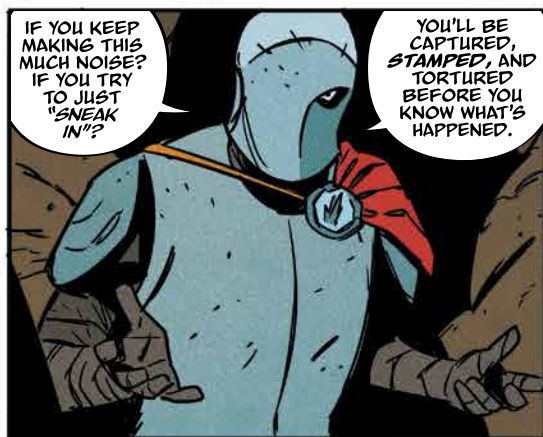
...BUT FROM
MY VISIONS. YOU'RE
DIFFERENT FROM
THE REST.



LISTEN. I'M
HERE TO
HELP...



WHAT?!

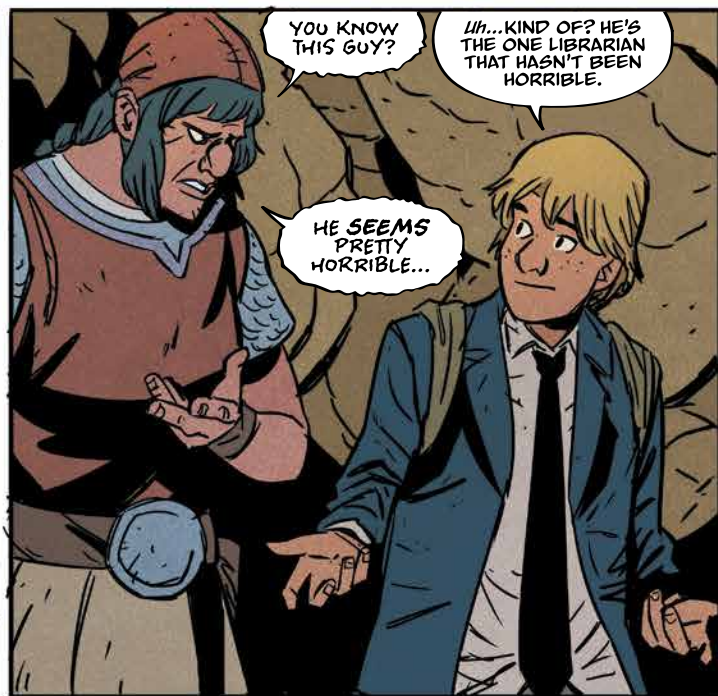


IF YOU KEEP
MAKING THIS
MUCH NOISE?
IF YOU TRY
TO JUST
"SNEAK
IN"?

YOU'LL BE
CAPTURED,
STAMPED, AND
TORTURED
BEFORE YOU
KNOW WHAT'S
HAPPENED.



FOLLOW
ME IF YOU
WANT TO
SUCCEED.



YOU KNOW
THIS GUY?

Uh...KIND OF? HE'S
THE ONE LIBRARIAN
THAT HASN'T BEEN
HORRIBLE.

HE SEEMS
PRETTY
HORRIBLE...





QUICK!
JUMP
IN...!



THIS COULD BE A
TRAP. IS HE SETTING
US UP?

SOMETIMES...
YOU JUST HAVE
TO HAVE FAITH
IN PEOPLE.

I DID, KID.
TRUST ME. IT
GETS OLD
QUICK.



NOTICE THAT HE
DIDN'T FOLLOW
US DOWN HERE.
I DON'T LIKE
IT--

SHH!



YOU BOTH TALK AND
SPLASH WAY TOO
MUCH. IF YOU'RE NOT
CAREFUL YOU'LL
GET US ALL
KILLED.

HOW'D
YOU--?



FOLLOW ME,
QUIETLY, AND
STICK TO THE
EDGES.



SO WHAT
IS YOUR ROLE
IN ALL THIS?
I SAW YOU IN
MY VISION.

WE
ALL HAVE
VISIONS. IF I
KNEW WHAT IT
MEANT, I'D
TELL YOU.



DO YOU HAVE
A NAME
OR...?

CALL
ME SAL.

SAL
PARADISE.



OKAY, SAL.
DID THEY DO
SOMETHING
TO Y--



snif
sniff



GHI KAHN
SHMELL
GHOO...



W-WHAT WAS THAT?

LIBRARIANS HAVE BEEN EXPERIMENTING. BLINDING TROLLS. HEIGHTENING THEIR OTHER SENSES.

THAT'S AWFUL! I-I KNOW A TROLL.

CONGRATULATIONS. BUT RIGHT NOW, YOU NEED TO FOCUS.



THERE'S A LOT MORE TO THIS WORLD THAN THEY LET YOU KNOW. THE LIBRARIANS LIKE YOU TO THINK THEY'RE THE AUTHORITY.



THEY PRETEND THEY'RE KEEPING YOU SAFE. THEY WANT YOU TO THINK THEY'RE SHARING KNOWLEDGE. ENCOURAGING IDEAS.

THIS PLACE...IT AIN'T A REPOSITORY OF KNOWLEDGE. IT'S A PRISON.

PRISON?



DAMMIT!

YOU'LL SEE SOON ENOUGH.



THEY'RE CONTROLLING IDEAS. STEERING THOUGHT.

BUT YOU'RE ONE OF THEM.



I WAS. I TRIED TO FIGHT THEM ONCE.

I STARTED FOLK WAR ONE. MAYBE YOU'VE HEARD OF IT.

TH-THAT WAS YOU?!

YEAH. GOT ME EXILED.

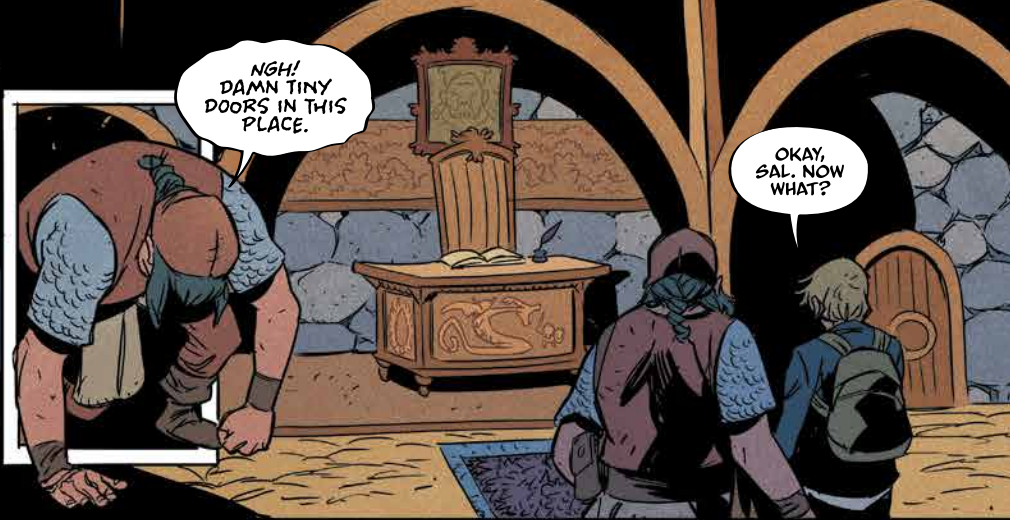


THEN I REALIZED I NEEDED HELP. IT'S BIGGER THAN ONE LIBRARIAN. OR ONE KID ON A QUEST.



THIS IS IT. YOU READY?

YOU KNOW I AM.











WHAT IS GOING ON?

WE'RE NOT DREAMING... RIGHT? THIS IS HAPPENING?

Oh... it's more than that!



Tis some visitor darkening my door! Tis only... Ronald and nothing more...



THEY SEEM... DRUGGED...



Don't you hear it?



KEEP MOVING. SAL WOULDN'T HAVE SENT US THIS WAY WITHOUT A REASON.



"Reason"? That's not the Librarians' strong suit. Trust me...

Pull up the floorboards! You'll see!



You'll see what I've done!

...HURRY...

WHOA!



ARCHER?!
IS THAT
YOU?

*Allegories. I really
hate 'em.*

Seriously. If you want to say something? Just say it.



Let TUNNELS, and DOORWAYS, and WARS just be what they are.



Shh!



Shh!

Shh!

We're all grown-ups here.



Shh!

Or close enough.



Shh!

Shh!

Shh!

We can take it.



The last thing I need right now is a freaking literary device.



If life is a dream?

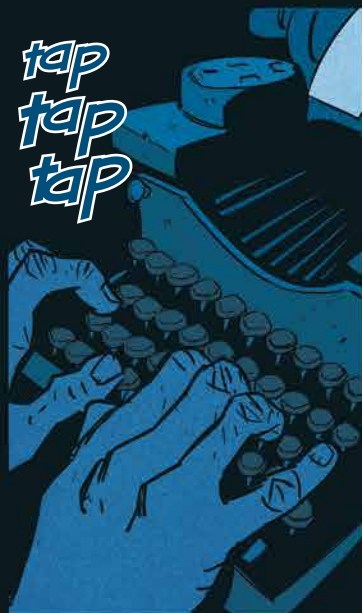
Then please, please, please. Let me wake up.



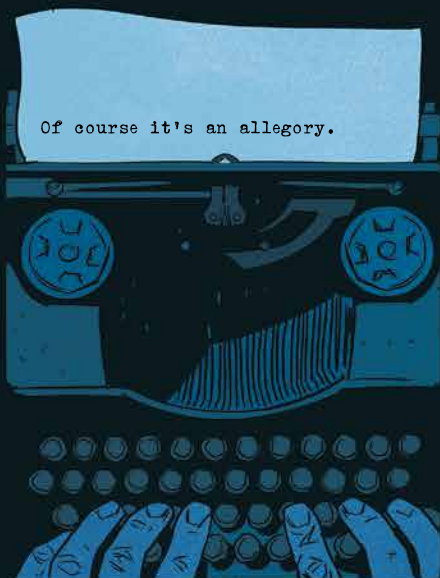
shh...



fshh



tap
tap
tap



Of course it's an allegory.

Life is
nothing but
allegory.

To be
continued.



Always to
be continued.



But to continue?
Sometimes I am
forced to take
things into my
own hands.



Time
for me to
play my
role.





Ansel's
Known
World



CHAPTER FIVE





This is it. No more running.

RUN!



ARCHER? WHERE DID YOU GO? I THOUGHT YOU-- YOU WERE DEAD!

SAVE IT FOR LATER. SOMETHING'S...

Something's coming.

I--

GRMMMBLL



Oh boy. I've seen one of these before, but something's wrong with it...

Something is wrong.



ANSEL! WHAT ARE YOU DOING? WE DON'T KNOW WHAT IT'S CAPABLE OF.

JUST LIKE... MY VISION.

COME ON. IT'S

ONCE UPON A TIME...

to do something about it.

BUT... THIS
ONE IS WOOD.
THAT'S NOT
RIGHT...

But will he know
what to do?

HUP!

I KNEW
IT!

Will he see
through the
illusion?

Either way...

IT'S
SAFE! C'MON!
I NEED YOUR
HELP!

He's going to
need help.



THIS IS WHY THE GNOMES ARE SO ANGRY. THEY'RE BEING DRUGGED UP AND USED AS SLAVE LABOR FOR SOME TERRIBLE EXPERIMENTS.



SO...WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU?



HE SNUCK OFF AND BETRAYED YOU, IS WHAT HE DID. I SAW HIM THAT NIGHT.



TH-THAT'S NOT TRUE! WHAT DO YOU KNOW? WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT ME?!



THE TRUTH IS... I DID LEAVE YOU THAT NIGHT.

YOU DID? BUT WHY?!



I-I WAS TALKING TO GRETA. SHE LET SLIP WHAT HER PLAN WAS. I WAS GOING TO...TO SNEAK OFF, AND THEN COME RESCUE YOU BEFORE--

YOU LET ME GET CAPTURED? HOW COULD YOU--?!

FELLAS. HEY--



YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY ONE WITH HISTORY, ANSEL. OR THE ONLY ONE WITH A QUEST.

I'VE GOT MORE TO WORRY ABOUT THAN ANY OF YOU EVEN KNOW--

WHAT I KNOW IS YOU'VE BACK-STABBED ME AT EVERY TURN--

GUYS! STOP FIGHTING!



Uh-oh.



UGLY, WHAT?! I NEED TO SORT THIS--

WE'RE IN TROUBLE.





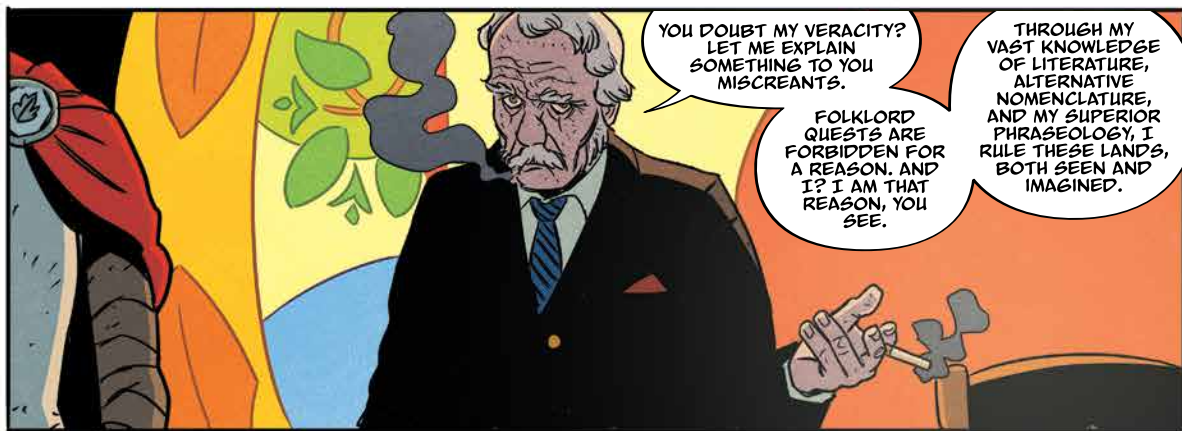
MY NAME
IS JOHN
RONALD.

I AM THE
FOLKLORD.

WHA?
FOR
REAL?

KIND OF
DISAPPOINTING,
REALLY.

I DON'T
KNOW...



YOU DOUBT MY VERACITY?
LET ME EXPLAIN
SOMETHING TO YOU
MISCREANTS.

FOLKLORD
QUESTS ARE
FORBIDDEN FOR
A REASON. AND
I? I AM THAT
REASON, YOU
SEE.

THROUGH MY
VAST KNOWLEDGE
OF LITERATURE,
ALTERNATIVE
NOMENCLATURE,
AND MY SUPERIOR
PHRASEOLOGY, I
RULE THESE LANDS,
BOTH SEEN AND
IMAGINED.



I AM WHAT THE
PEOPLE OF MY HOMETLAND
CALL A WORDSMITH. I
BUILD WORDS WITH
VOCABULARY. I AM...
THE CREATOR.



I AM A
WEAVER OF
WORLDS. A
MAGICIAN.



...A
SPEWER OF
DRIVEL...



CONJURING
UP LIFE FROM
NOTHING BUT MY
IMAGINATION.



IF YOU DON'T LIKE THAT SCENARIO? NOT A GOOD ENOUGH TWIST? WELL, THEN-- LET'S CHANGE IT.

HOW ABOUT THIS? YOU'RE ASLEEP. IN A COMA.



DREAMING ALL OF THIS UP YOURSELF.



OR PERHAPS YOUR PERSONALITY? YOUR DESIRES AND FEARS ARE SIMPLY A FIGMENT OF MY PRODIGIOUS MIND.



NO. THAT'S A LIE.

I HAVE VISIONS. FLYING CARRIAGES. CITIES OF GLASS. PEOPLE DRESSED LIKE YOU.

BUT I FEEL ANGER. I DOUBT MY ABILITIES. I FEEL LOVE. DEEPER THAN ANYTHING YOU COULD SAY OR PUT ON PAPER.



HA! ANSEL. YOU ARE CORRECT.

YOU'RE NOT IN A COMA. I DIDN'T CREATE THIS PLACE. OR YOU.

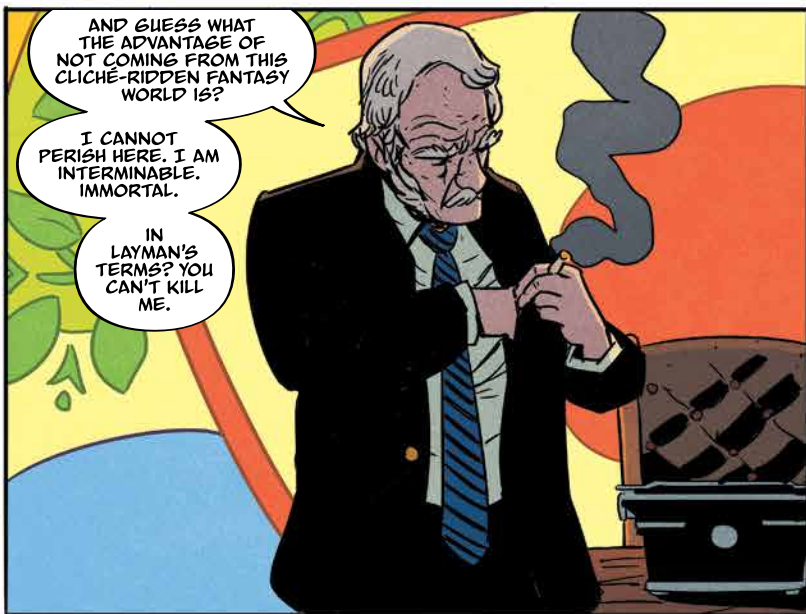
WHY WOULD I WASTE MY INVALUABLE TIME CREATING SUCH PEDESTRIAN AND JUVENILE EMOTIONS FOR YOU? TRUST ME, YOUR INANE PRATTLE IS ONE-HUNDRED-PERCENT YOU.

BUT... I DO RULE THIS WORLD. BECAUSE I DO NOT COME FROM HERE.



Hm. AND YOU FEEL LIKE YOU DON'T BELONG? WHY DO YOU THINK THAT IS?

MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE YOU DON'T BELONG.



AND GUESS WHAT THE ADVANTAGE OF NOT COMING FROM THIS CLICHE-RIDDEN FANTASY WORLD IS?

I CANNOT PERISH HERE. I AM INTERMINABLE. IMMORTAL.

IN LAYMAN'S TERMS? YOU CAN'T KILL ME.



BUT ALL OF YOU, ON THE OTHER HAND? YOU ARE ALL VERY MORTAL.

IT'S FUNNY. I PULL A GUN IN MY WORLD? EVERYONE PANICS. HERE? NO ONE HAS ANY IDEA.

NO ONE BUT YOU, ANGEL. YES, I'VE HAD MY EYE ON YOU.



WELL, NOT *JUST* YOU. DON'T GO THINKING YOU'RE SPECIAL.

I'VE HAD MY EYE ON THE **PHENOMENON** YOU'RE EXPERIENCING. YOU ARE LIKE A WINDOW. NEITHER HERE NOR THERE.

JUST A TRANSPARENT VEIL BETWEEN HERE...AND A PLACE KNOWN AS THE **WRITERS' ROOM**--



I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, BUT I'VE HAD ENOUGH OF YOUR STUPID CHATTER, BUDDY.



UGLY, NO! THAT GUN! HE CAN KILL YOU--



YOU-- YOU--!



YES. WELL SAID, ANGEL.

BUT I LIKE TO CONSIDER "KILLING" PART OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS. A FORM OF...EDITING.



PLEASE...!

SOMETIMES EDITS ARE NECESSARY. FOR THE GREATER GOOD.





LOOK. MY QUEST WHEN I TURNED EIGHTEEN? IT WASN'T TO FIND A GOLDEN GOOSE OR ANYTHING LIKE THAT.



I LIED... TO EVERYONE. EVEN YOU.



I REQUESTED TO FIND THE FOLKLORDS. JUST LIKE YOU. AND I RAN INTO RONALD. HE...HE KILLED MY FRIEND. I BARELY ESCAPED.

I DIDN'T WANT...



...I DIDN'T WANT THE SAME THING TO HAPPEN TO YOU.



YOU COULD HAVE TOLD ME. WE COULD HAVE DONE THIS TOGETHER. YOU KNOW I'VE ALWAYS WANTED YOU TO--





WHAT PART OF "IMMORTAL" DID SHE NOT UNDERSTAND? ONLY SOMEONE FROM MY REALITY CAN HURT ME.

YOU--YOU'RE A MONSTER. WHEREVER YOU COME FROM? I'M GONNA SEND YOU BACK!



EDITS. THIS ENTIRE ROOM NEEDS EDITS!



YOU'RE ALL FAILING TO APPRECIATE THE POWER I WIELD HERE. I CAN KILL YOU. AND YOU? YOU CAN'T HARM ME--







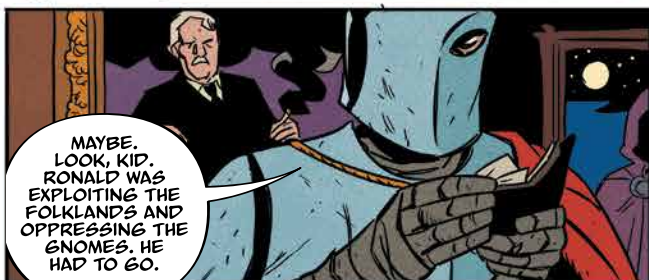
LOOK. HE HAD IT COMING. BEEN TRACKING THIS GUY FOR A LONG TIME. SINCE BEFORE MY EXILE.

BUT I NEEDED TO DRAW HIM OUT. WHEN WORD GOT OUT ABOUT ANSEL'S QUEST AND HIS VISIONS. I KNEW HE WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO RESIST.

AND I'D BE ABLE TO GET SOME REVENGE FOR...WHAT WAS DONE TO ME.



YOU HAD ME COME HERE TO THE LIBRARY AS... AS BAIT?



MAYBE. LOOK, KID. RONALD WAS EXPLOITING THE FOLKLANDS AND OPPRESSING THE GNOMES. HE HAD TO GO.



Oh MY GOD! UGLY?! SH-SHE'S...



I'M SO SORRY. AFTER ALL YOU DID...



NGH... WHA?!



YOU'RE OKAY! THANK GOD! ARE YOU...A FOLKLORD TOO?!

THIS MAIL HAS TAKEN HARDER HITS FROM A TROLL HAMMER. KNOCKED MY HEAD PRETTY GOOD, THOUGH.



BUT...RONALD WAS A FOLKLORD. SO TECHNICALLY... WE DID FINISH ANSEL'S QUEST, RIGHT?

RONALD WASN'T A GOD. AND HE DEFINITELY WASN'T IMMORTAL.

EVEN THOUGH HIS STORY NEVER SEEMS TO GET OLD.

A POWER-HUNGRY MAN EXPLOITING EVERYONE AROUND HIM TO GET EVEN MORE.



THE QUEST IS FINISHED. BUT... BUT IT HASN'T ANSWERED ANYTHING.



LISTEN, ANSEL. WE DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME.

YOUR QUEST ISN'T OVER. IT'S JUST BEGINNING.



Hmm.



THIS'LL DO.



SAL?!
WHATEVER
YOU HAVE
PLANNED,
YOU'D BETTER
MAKE IT
QUICK!



SAL?!
WHERE
ARE
YOU?!



GAH!

SILENCE!

Has he
lost his
mind?

LISTEN TO ME,
MY LIBRARIAN
BRETHREN!

BY GUILD LAW, I
REQUEST SILENCE--
AND WHEN SILENCE IS
REQUESTED, YOU
MUST OBEY.

I HOLD HERE
THE SACRED SCREED
OF SILENCE. THIS IS
FOLKLORD RONALD'S
AMENDMENT TO OUR
SCRIPTURE.

DANGEROUS IDEAS ARE
FORBIDDEN. THE PURSUIT
AND/OR HARBORING OF
DANGEROUS IDEAS IS
THEREFORE ALSO
FORBIDDEN.

AS SUCH, I FIND THAT YOUR
ALLEGIANCE TO THE FOLKLORD
RONALD TO BE IN BREACH OF
OUR SACRED CODE
OF ETHICS.

YOU
ARE ALL
GUILTY.

whisper...

mutter...

mutter...

mutter...

whisper...

mutter...

whisper...

whisper...

AS THE SOLE OUTSIDER,
I ALONE AM GUILTY.
AND IT IS I ALONE THAT
COMMAND YOU NOW TO
LAY DOWN YOUR
WEAPONS!



BOW TO YOUR
NEW LEADER
AND HEAD
LIBRARIAN!



WOW.

HE IS
CRAZY.

BUT HE'S
GOT THEM ALL
BOWING!



YOU
THREE--



--WITH
ME.



HEY,
uh...SAL?
THIS BOOK IS
ALL ABOUT
BIRDS.

YEAH.
WELL. IT
WAS THAT OR
FIGHT OUR WAY
OUT.

I'M ACTUALLY
EMBARRASSED
THAT I WAS PART OF
AN ORGANIZATION SO
EASILY MANIPULATED.



I WISH I COULD ACCOMPANY YOU. BUT I MUST REMAIN HERE. THE LIBRARIANS ARE A FORMIDABLE FORCE THAT MUST BE MONITORED AT ALL TIMES.

FIND THE WRITER'S ROOM, ANSEL. COMPLETE YOUR QUEST.

THERE ARE MORE ANSWERS FOR YOU OUT THERE. ANSWERS I DON'T HAVE. OF THAT, I AM SURE.

THANK YOU, SAL.



SAL SEEMED KIND OF ANGRY.

TRUE.

WELL, HE JUST VOLUNTEERED TO BE THE LEADER OF AN INSANE, BLOOD-THIRSTY CULT THAT COULD TURN ON HIM AT A MOMENT'S NOTICE.



AND WHAT ABOUT ARCHER?

DISAPPEARED AGAIN. AS SOON AS THINGS GET TOUGH...

BUT HE'S GOT HIS OWN BAGGAGE. I THINK SOMETIMES? HE JUST DOESN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO.





once upon
a time...



COMING!

I wasn't always
running late.



ONCE UPON
A TIME...



I felt like
I belonged.



I didn't dress
crazy.



I knew who
I was.



BUT WHAT
I realized?



Playing along doesn't
solve any problems.



"Fitting in" doesn't
answer any questions.



And answers?
Answers can be a
freaking curse.

But sometimes...to beat
the curse you have to
find the cause.



But the "cause" in this case? Is
a person. And right now? I really
need you to meet me halfway...

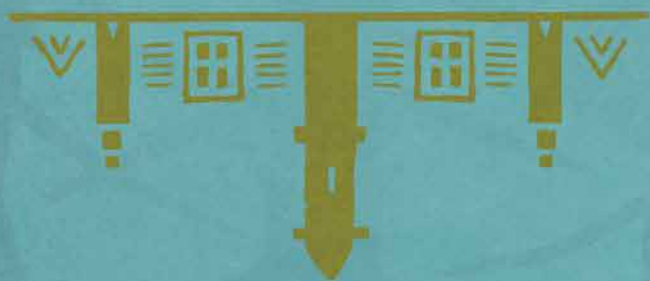
"ANSEL."
Whoever
you are.





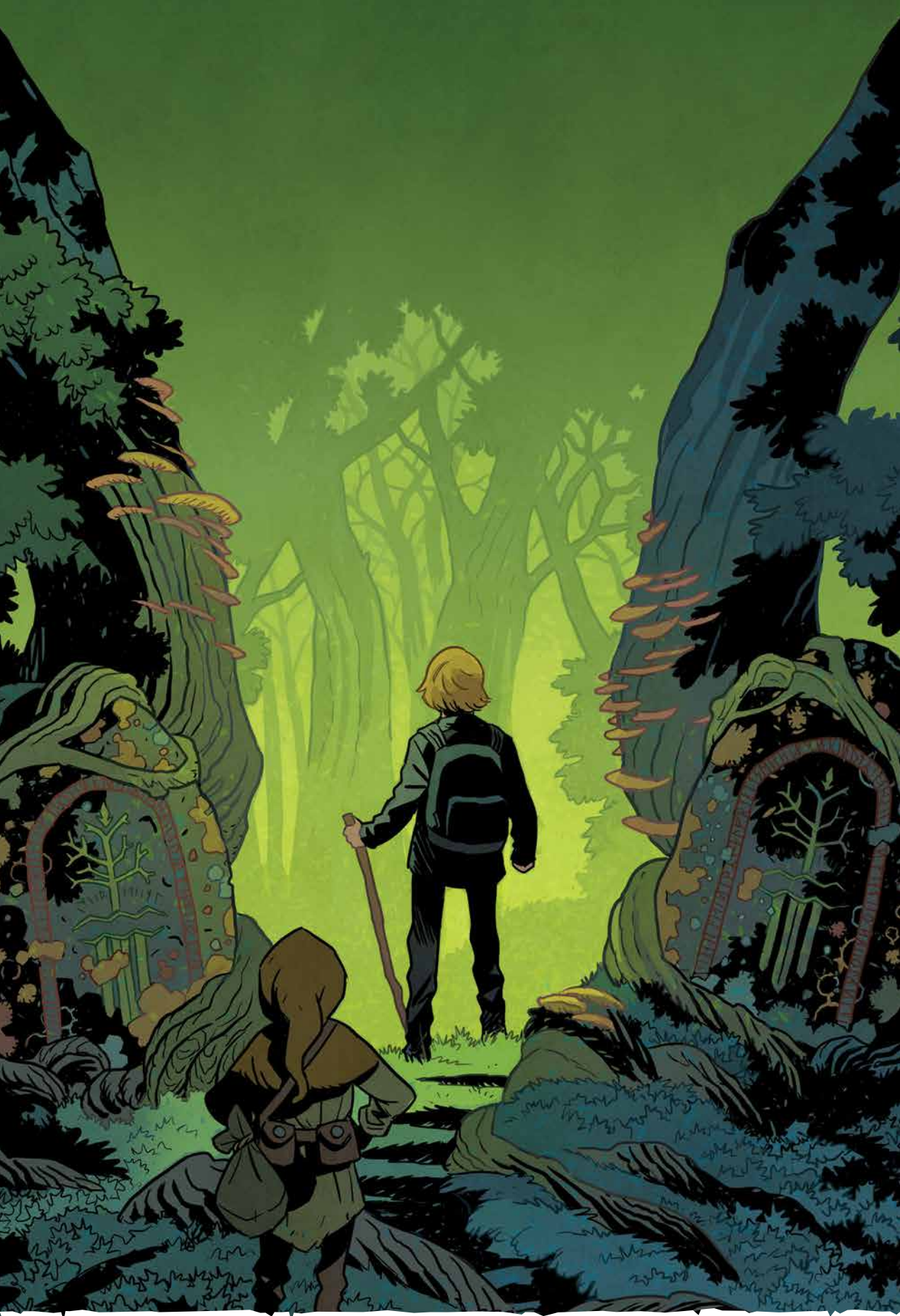


COVER GALLERY





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In a world of magic and monsters, Ansel is an outsider haunted by visions of well-pressed suits and modern technology. When it comes time for him to declare his Quest, Ansel decides to seek out the mysterious Folklords, hoping they can explain his visions...but looking for the Folklords is strictly forbidden, punishable by death. How much is Ansel willing to risk to find out about the world he has never truly belonged in?

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