

D. A. Da Rosa

The Archeomancer

Echoes of the Shattered Empire

1

JOURNEY TO THE
RUINED CAPITAL!

MIDNIGHT JOURNEYS EDITIONS

PROLOGUE



THE CAPITAL'S WASTELANDS.

ARE WE
CLOSE?

IT'S SOMEWHERE
AROUND HERE, BUT I
CAN'T PINPOINT
EXACTLY WHERE...

RGHHHH...

RGHHHH...

THEN HURRY,
MAGE, OR
THEY'LL TEAR US
APART!

KEEP QUIET,
BOTH OF YOU.
WE DON'T WANT TO
ATTRACT THE
HORDE...

WAIT.
I CAN FEEL
SOMETHING!
THE KAYNN HERE IS
STABLE ENOUGH
TO TRY THE
SPELL.

RGHHHH...



HERDA, GODDESS OF MYSTERIES, REVEAL MY QUARRY AND GRANT ME MY WISHES!

WHAT THE...



WHAT? FEELING ANYTHING?

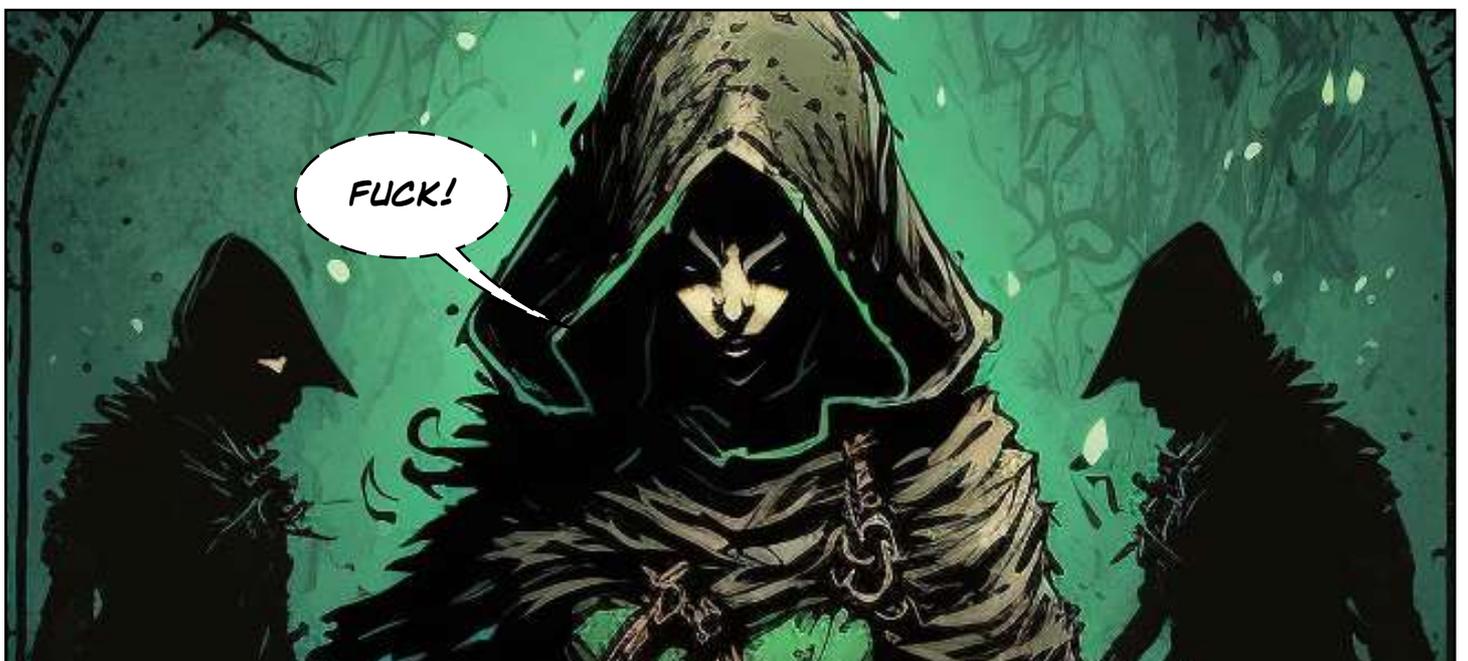
WE MUST HURRY! THERE'S A WEIRD PRESENCE HERE!



CRACK



RGHHHH?



FUCK!



RGHHHH!!!



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Echoes of the Shattered Empire



ART BY MIDJOURNEY

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SHOUT OUT TO DANILO VIEIRA, SHAM BANGHAL, DARKSTAR,
DEVGEAR, JW-VEGAS AND MATADORRR.

MIDNIGHT JOURNEYS EDITIONS

1. PATH TO RUIN

THERE ONCE
WAS AN
EMPIRE.



THE QUESDUN
DYNASTY
SPREAD
KNOWLEDGE,
CIVILITY AND
PEACE
THROUGHOUT
THE NINE
PROVINCES.



WHEN THE **LAST QUESDUN**
EMPEROR DIED, SO DID THE
EMPIRE. HIS SUICIDE
DOOMED THE WHOLE
CONTINENT.



SINCE THEN, THE
PEOPLE HAVE BEEN
SUFFERING. THEY
NEED HOPE. THEY
NEED UNITY.

ARE YOU
DENSE?

AND I KNOW
HOW TO MAKE
THINGS RIGHT.



I JUST NEED
TO GET
THERE.

THE
ANSWER IS
NO!



I'M CERTAIN I
CAN RETURN WITH
SOMETHING
VALUABLE...



SHHHINK!

I'M NOT
RISKING MY
PEOPLE TAKING
YOU TO THAT
SHITHOLE!



NO NEED TO
GET ALL
POINTY ON ME,
NANASH.



MY HORSES BRING
PEOPLE HERE OR
TAKE THEM AWAY, BUT
THEY'LL NEVER GO NEAR
THOSE DAMNED
RUINS.

SO
FUCK.
OFF.



HEY,
OUTSIDER!

GET OUT
BEFORE THE
FURBALL HERE
STABS YOU WITH
HIS HAIR!



JUST DO LIKE
EVERY OTHER
ADVENTURER AND
GATHER A PARTY
TO HELP YOU...

I DON'T NEED A
PARTY. I NEED
SOMEONE TO
GUIDE ME.

AND I WOULD
REALLY LIKE A
HORSE. MY FEET
ARE **KILLING ME.**



BUT I'M AFRAID I'M
GOING TO HAVE TO
WALK **ALONE** ALL
THE WAY TO THE
RUINED CAPITAL.

THE TRAVEL BOOKS
SAY THAT THIS IS THE
MOST DANGEROUS
PART OF THE
JOURNEY.

AFTER ALL I'VE
DONE TO GET HERE,
I'M STARTING TO
WONDER IF I COULD
HANDLE THIS ON MY
OWN.



THIS IS THE CLOSEST TOWN TO THE TAINTED LANDS, AND THESE DAYS, IT'S ALMOST A GHOST TOWN.

THESE PEOPLE SHOULD BE DESPERATE. BUT THEY ARE DOWNRIGHT HOSTILE.



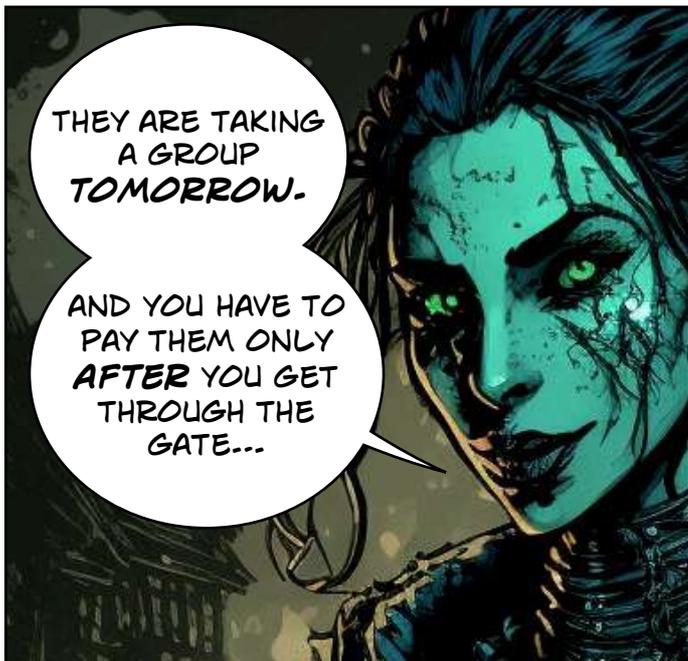
IS THAT WHAT TAINTED KAYNN DO TO PEOPLE?

HEY, HOOD! I COULDN'T HELP BUT OVERHEAR WHAT YOU WERE SAYING BACK THERE...



YOU WANNA GET PAST THE FENCE?

I KNOW PEOPLE WHO CAN HELP YOU WITH JUST THAT.

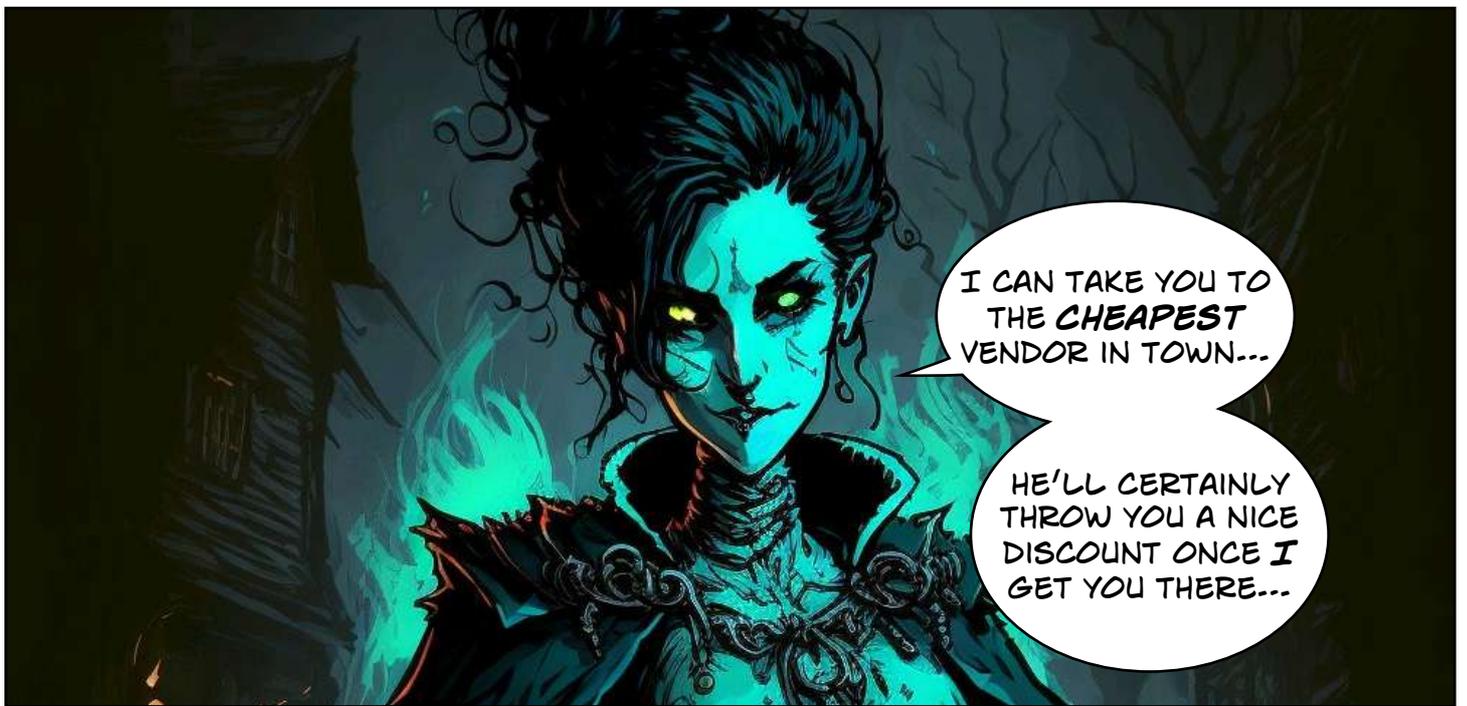


THEY ARE TAKING A GROUP TOMORROW.

AND YOU HAVE TO PAY THEM ONLY AFTER YOU GET THROUGH THE GATE...



WELL, WHAT CHOICE DO I HAVE?

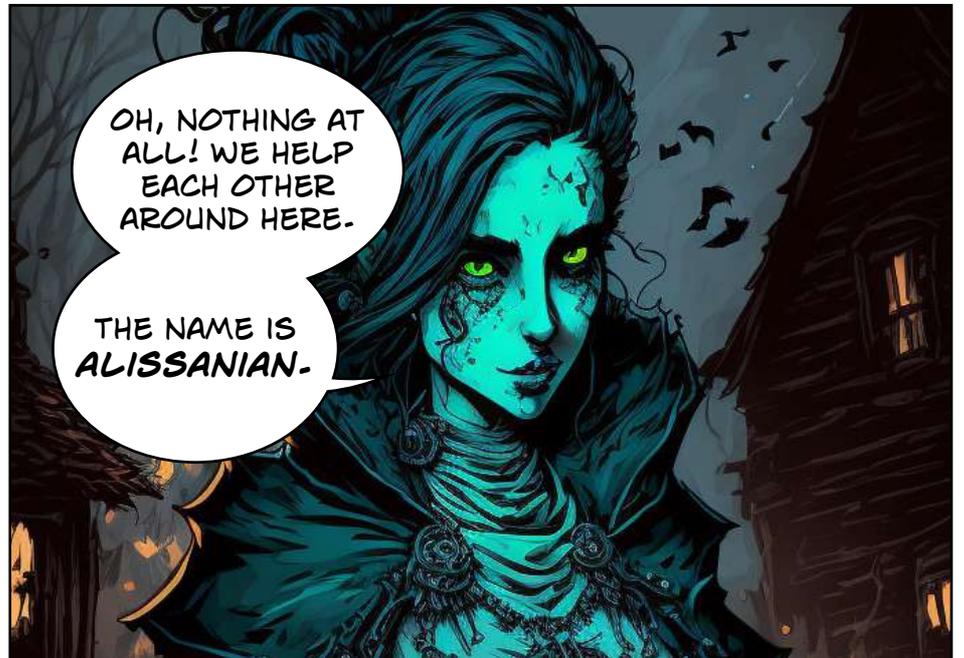


I CAN TAKE YOU TO
THE **CHEAPEST**
VENDOR IN TOWN...

HE'LL CERTAINLY
THROW YOU A NICE
DISCOUNT ONCE I
GET YOU THERE...



AND WHAT DO YOU
EXPECT OF ME FOR THIS
STAGGERING DISPLAY OF
KINDNESS?



OH, NOTHING AT
ALL! WE HELP
EACH OTHER
AROUND HERE.

THE NAME IS
ALISSANIAN.



NICE TO MEET
YOU. I'M
DORALAC.

I LIE.

A **BASHERÒ**,
THEN? YOU DON'T
SOUND LIKE A
HORSE-LOVER,
HAHA...

DAMN.
I MESSED UP
THE ACCENT.



SO,
ALISSANIAN,
RIGHT? WHERE
CAN WE MEET
TOMORROW?

AUSHULIA, 12TH DAY OF
MID-AUTUMN.



AUSHULIA, 9TH DAY OF MID-AUTUMN, 40 YEARS AFTER THE END.

TWO EXPERIENCED AND ROUGH GUIDES.

A LARGE GROUP OF OTHER ADVENTURERS.



WE WERE A SILENT BUNCH. WE WERE AS AFRAID OF EACH OTHER AS OF DIRE ANIMALS OR HIGHWAYMEN.

STOP LOOKING AT MY STUFF, YE HORSE-LICKER!



OH, I FUCKIN' HATE HARPIES!

THE CLOSER TO THE CAPITAL, THE MORE BIZARRE OUR ENEMIES - AND OUR MEALS - BECAME.



AT FIRST, OUR VICTORIES GOT US OPTIMISTIC.

HAVE YA SEEN HOW I GOT 'EM?



ANDIEL, LOOK OUT!

THEN WE REACHED THE CURSED WOODS, WHERE WE SUFFERED OUR FIRST LOSS.



AS TENSIONS ROSE,
INTRIGUE SEEPED IN.

THIS
DOLARAC
FELLOW CAN'T BE
TRUSTED, MARDRIGO.
WHY THE MASK? WHY
THE FAKE
ACCENT?

HMM.

AND MISTRUST
FESTERED.

...THIS
MARDRIGO
DUDE IS KINDA
BOSSY, BUT HE
HAS A POINT,
PETARIAN.

I DON'T
KNOW, UQIJJ,
I THINK
DOLARAC'S
FINE...

WHISPER BY
WHISPER.

SO, THAT
MARDRIGO
DUDE'S BEEN
SAYING YOU ARE A
THIEF AND A
LIAR...

THERE'S
SOMETHING
HERE. UQIJJ, GO
CHECK IT WHILE
WE PREPARE.

CORRODING OUR
TRUST.

WHO MADE
YOU OUR
LEADER,
MARDRIGO?

JUST DO
YOUR JOB,
DOLARAC.

NUMBING OUR
SENSES.

LYNNARD,
BEHIND YOU!

HOLY FU-!

GRAARGH!

A FREAKING
LEPANTO!

BY THE
SACRED HEART,
IT'S COMING FOR
ME!

HEY,
BEAST!

TASTE
MY
GLOVE.

GRARGH?

BAKOOOM!

IT'S
RUNNING
AWAY!

THANKS,
MARCHIA! YOU
SAVED MY
LIFE!

OH, AND
YOU TWO
FUCKS...

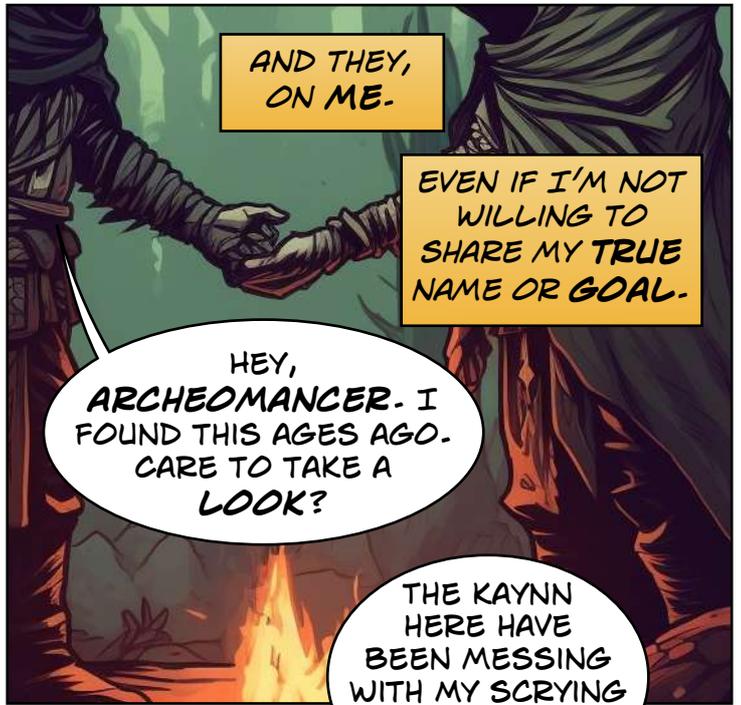
JUST QUIT IT
ALREADY!

YEAH,
DOLARAC IS NO
TRUE BASHERO AND
MADRIGO IS
ANNOYING AS FUCK.
SO WHAT?

WE'RE HERE
TO GET TO THAT
DARNED CITY, SO
LET'S FUCKIN'
DO IT.



SO, TO SURVIVE, I EVENTUALLY HAD TO LEARN TO RELY ON THE OTHERS.



AND THEY, ON ME.

EVEN IF I'M NOT WILLING TO SHARE MY TRUE NAME OR GOAL.

HEY, ARCHEOMANCER. I FOUND THIS AGES AGO. CARE TO TAKE A LOOK?

THE KAYNN HERE HAVE BEEN MESSING WITH MY SCRYING SPELLS, BUT SURE.



WOW! THIS RING ONCE BELONGED TO AN IMPERIAL BATTLEMAGE! IT'S NOT ENCHANTED, BUT...

IT'S JUST TRASH THEN? TSK. HOW DISAPPOINTING.

THIS IS NOT THE SAME TO SAY THAT I NOW LIKE THEM.

THEY HAVE NO RESPECT FOR THE EMPIRE NOR FOR ITS HISTORY.



IT'S JUST THAT I NOTICED THAT I HAVE A BETTER CHANCE TO SAVE THE WORLD WITH OTHERS BY MY SIDE.



IN THE CURSED WOODS, WE FACED MUTANT BEASTS AND TREES...

ALL AT ONCE!

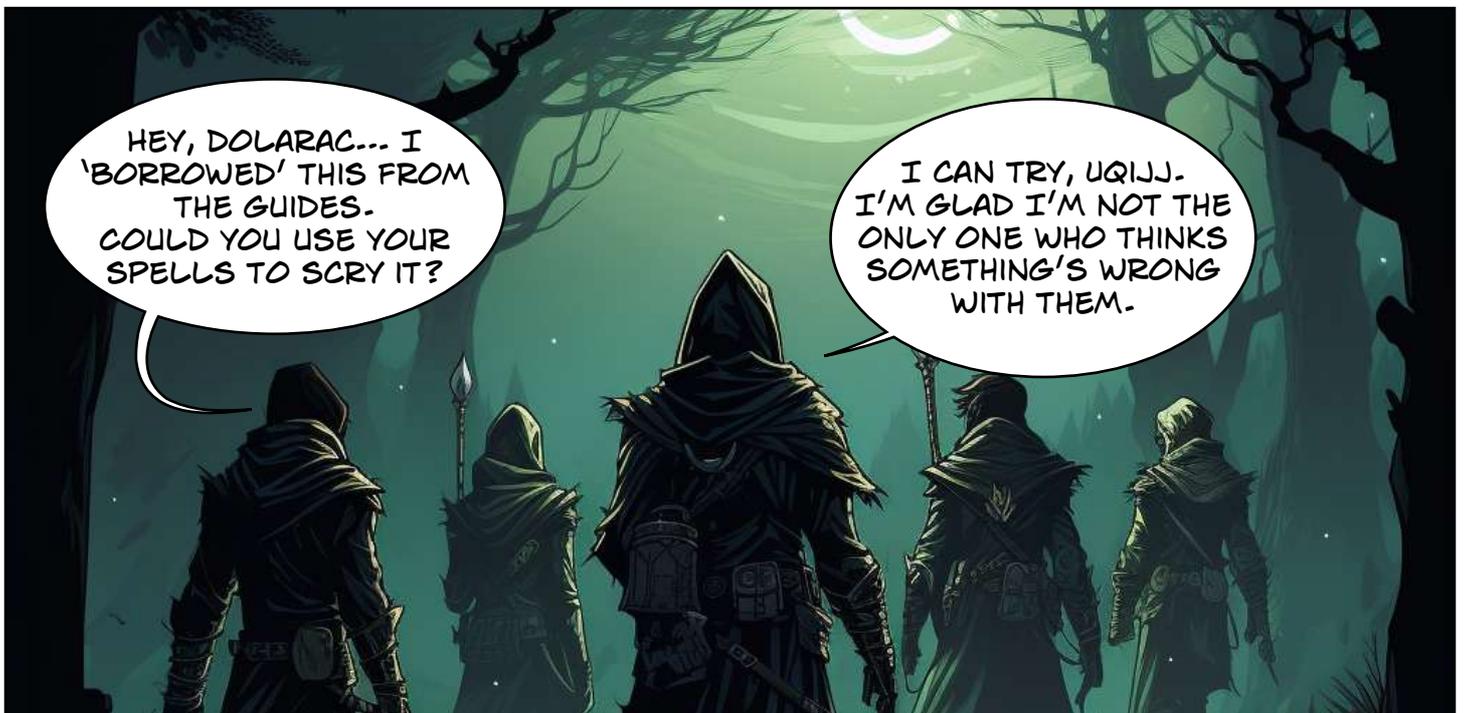


...BUT NO PEOPLE.

HEY, MARDRIGO. WHAT DO YOU THINK?

IT'S NOT THAT I DISAGREE WITH YOU, BUT WITHOUT THEM, HOW CAN WE GET THERE?

NOT YET.



HEY, DOLARAC... I 'BORROWED' THIS FROM THE GUIDES. COULD YOU USE YOUR SPELLS TO SCRY IT?

I CAN TRY, UQIJJ. I'M GLAD I'M NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO THINKS SOMETHING'S WRONG WITH THEM.



WITH THE TAINTED KAYNN RUSHING THROUGH ME, I'VE NEVER FELT SO POWERFUL BEFORE.

DAMN IT.

AND YET, MY SCRYING AND CHANNELING SPELLS STILL DIDN'T WORK.



LIFE-OR-DEATH SITUATIONS REALLY BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER.

HERE, TAKE THIS. IT WILL HELP YOU HEAL.

THANKS, PETARIAN---



CAMARADERIE BRINGS LEVITY.

DAMN, WE ALMOST GOT TO SEE WHAT'S BEHIND THE MASK THIS TIME!

HAHAH!

HAHAHA!



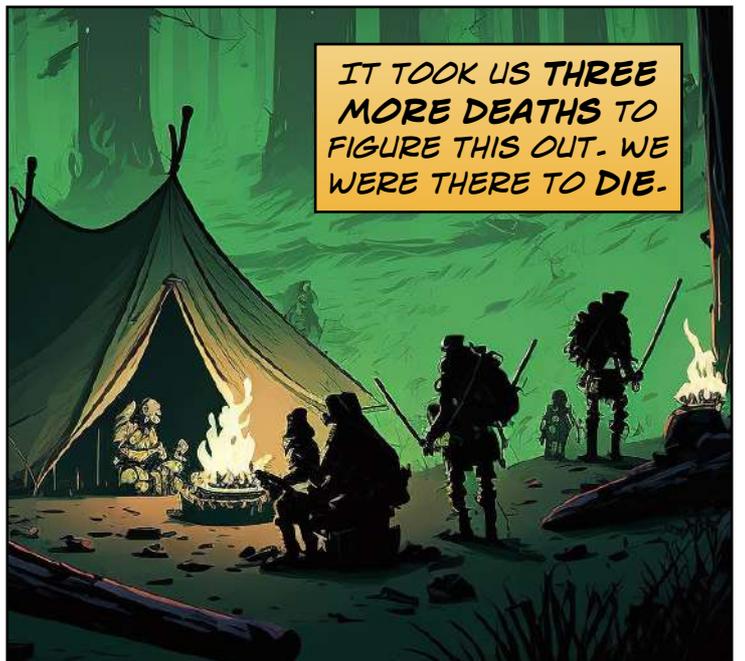
BUT OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE GUIDES ONLY WORSENERD.



THEY KEPT TAKING THE EQUIPMENT OF OUR DEAD TO THEMSELVES.



AND WE EVENTUALLY UNDERSTOOD WHY ALL THOSE EQUIPMENT WERE SO CHEAP.



IT TOOK US THREE MORE DEATHS TO FIGURE THIS OUT. WE WERE THERE TO DIE.



WE LOST ONE MORE ADVENTURER WHEN WE DECIDED THAT THAT WAS ENOUGH.

BARUGA, TO YOUR RIGHT!

SHE WAS A GOOD NANASH.



LATER THAT DAY, WE DECIDED TO TAKE ACTION.

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?



WE ARE DONE WITH YOU TWO! YOU HAVE BEEN LEADING US TO OUR DEATHS!

YOU TOOK ENOUGH FROM US! GIVE US THE MAP AND LEAVE!

SO, BY THE FOURTH DAY, WE TURNED ON OUR GUIDES AND CAST THEM OUT.



WE AREN'T GIVING YOU ANYTHING, SUCKERS!

WE'LL BE BACK TO COLLECT OUR LOOT SOON! HAHHA!



WE WENT AFTER THEM FOR A WHILE, BUT WITHOUT SUCCESS.

WE WERE VERY CAREFUL AT FIRST, WITH THE BEST OF US LEADING THE GROUP.

AUSHULIA, 12TH DAY OF MID-AUTUMN.



ANYONE HEARD SOMETHING?

BUT EVENTUALLY, WE GOT AMBUSHED.



A FORGOTTEN WOODEN DEITY AND ITS HARBINGERS, SUMMONED WITH AN ANCIENT TALISMAN.



MY WEAPONS HAVE NO EFFECT!



LOOK OUT!

FRRRRSHHH!



REDR'S CURSES! MY GLOVE IS ALMOST SPENT!



MARDRIGO, PROTECT PETARIAN!

DOLARAC, HELP... DOLARAC?!

EVERYONE! PROTECT DOLARAC! HE'S TRYING TO CAST SOMETHING!



Helaka, goddess of memory, hear this..



HURRY! WE CAN'T HOLD THEM MUCH LONGER!



SASHSHSHSH...

HUH?

SHHHHRAK!

THIS WAS ONCE CALLED
"THE OBLIVION"
SPELL.

GRUAAAAARGH!!!



ONCE STRUCK BY IT, THEY
BECAME NOTHING BUT
TRUNKS AND VINES.



AAAARGH!

MY VERSION OF THE
"OBLIVION" TRACKS
DOWN CONJURERS
AS WELL, IF THEY ARE
NEAR ENOUGH.



FUCK!
THAT'S OUR
GUIDE!

THESE
FUCKIN' GUIDES,
MAN...

WHERE'S THE
OTHER?



IT
DOESN'T
MATTER. THIS
WAS THE ONE WITH
THE MAP.
MAY HE REST
WITH HIS
GOD.

THE MAP WAS ENCRYPTED,
SO IT TOOK A WHILE UNTIL
UQIJJ DECODED ITS SIGILS.

BUT AS TIME PASSED
AND WE VENTURED
FURTHER, OUR BONDS
STRENGTHENED.

MAN,
YOU SAVED US
ALL BACK
THERE.

I HAD NO
IDEA YOU WERE
THIS
POWERFUL!

IT'S MORE LIKE
I HAD THE RIGHT
TOOL FOR THE
OCCASION, BUT
THANKS.

SECRETS WERE
SHARED AMONG
THOSE WHO WERE
CLOSER.

IF I MAY
ASK, WHAT'S
WITH THE
MASK?

OH...
IT'S AN
ARTIFACT
DESIGNED TO
FILTER OUT THE
KAYNN. THE BOOKS
SAID THAT THEY
WERE TOXIC
HERE.

SO, WHY DO
YOU WANT TO
GO TO THE
CAPITAL?

WANNA FIND
ARTIFACTS
PARTS TO SELL.
YOU?

I'M
HERE FOR
INTEL. THE
MANUUM FAMILY
HIRED ME TO GET
DIRT ON THE
UXER.

BASHER'S
MANE, YOU ARE
SUCH A BIG
SHOT!

BUT HALF OF THOSE WHO
HAD SURVIVED UNTIL THEN
DECIDED TO GIVE UP THE
JOURNEY.



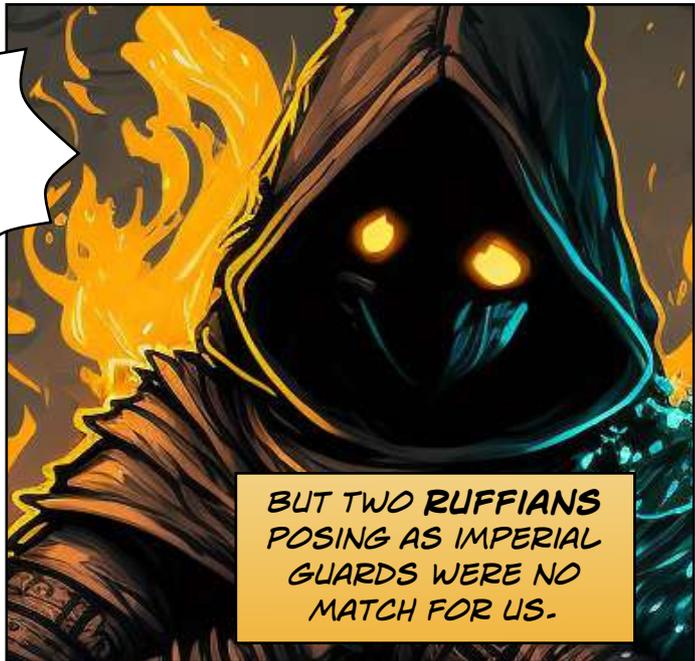
BY THE FIFTH DAY, ONLY FIVE OF US HAD REACHED THE SOUTHERN GATE.



UNFORTUNATELY, IT WAS GUARDED.

IN THE TIMES OF OLD, THEY WOULD BE IMPERIAL GUARDS.

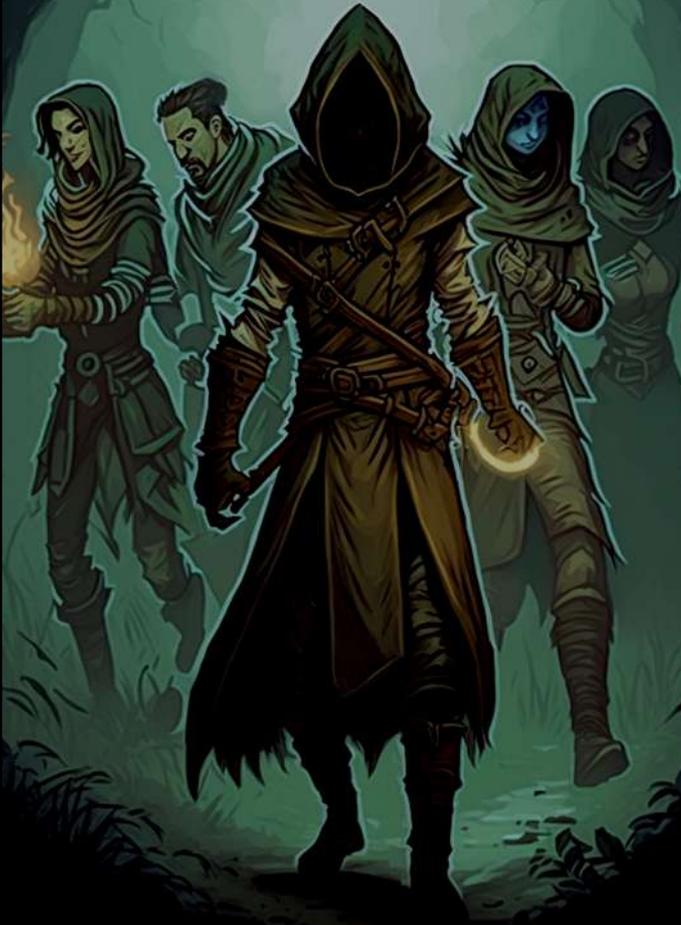
STOP RIGHT THERE, TRESPASSING SCUM!



BUT TWO RUFFIANS POSING AS IMPERIAL GUARDS WERE NO MATCH FOR US.

WE WEREN'T THE SAME AS WHEN THIS JOURNEY HAD STARTED.

WE WEREN'T STRANGERS ANYMORE.



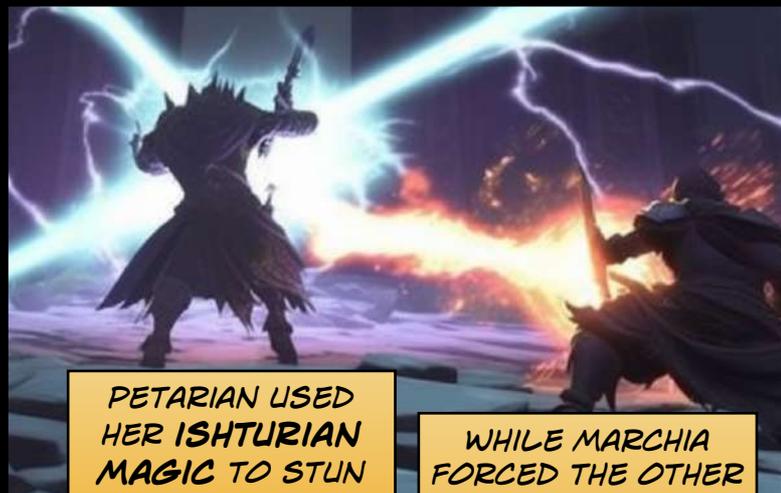
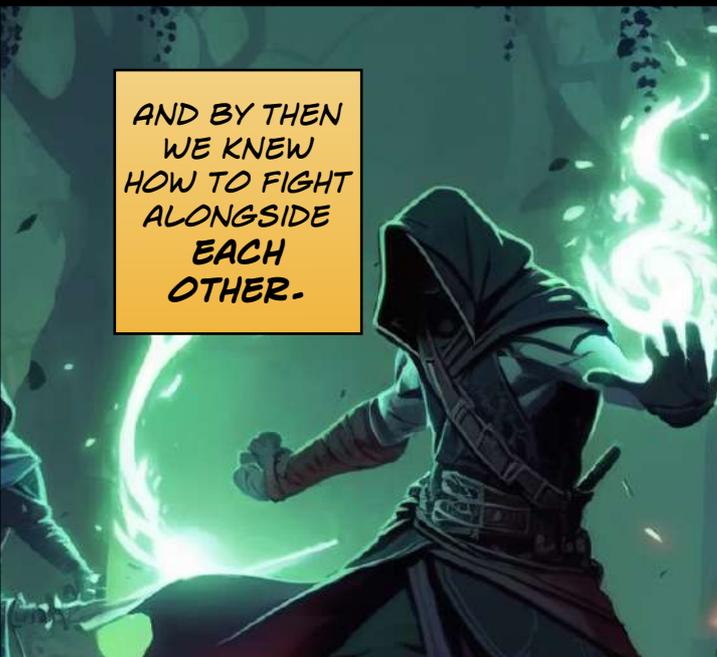
THOSE THUGS USED MAGIC DEVICES AND FOUL TACTICS.



BUT BY MY SIDE, I HAD A SWORDSMAN, A THIEF, A MARTIAL ARTIST, AND A HEALER.



AND BY THEN WE KNEW HOW TO FIGHT ALONGSIDE EACH OTHER.



PETARIAN USED HER ISHTURIAN MAGIC TO STUN ONE OF THEM.

WHILE MARCHIA FORCED THE OTHER TO BLOCK HER FIREFIST GLOVE.



I ENCHANTED LIQIJJ TO FLANK AND VANQUISH THE STUNNED BANDIT.



AND MARDRIGO DELIVERED A MERCIFUL COUP DE GRÂCE TO THE LAST ONE.



OUR VICTORY TOOK A TOLL ON ME.

BUT WE MADE IT.



WE FINALLY MADE IT PAST THE FENCE.



THE WORST PART IS BEHIND US.



HERDA!!! I SENSE... MY PREY!

PROBABLY.

NOW, IT'S JUST A
MATTER OF TIME.

I'M GOING TO SAVE
EVERYONE FROM
CHAOS AND
DISSENT.

I JUST NEED SOME
REST FIRST.

I... SENSE...
MAGESSSS...

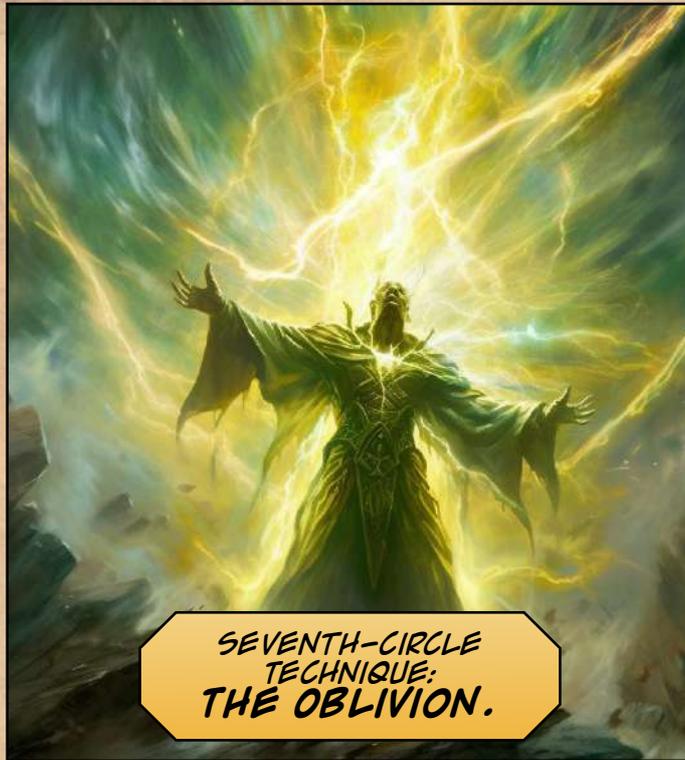
RGHHHH...

RGHHHH!

RGHHHH...

TO BE CONTINUED...

THE ARCHEOMANCER'S TOOLS



SEVENTH-CIRCLE
TECHNIQUE:
THE OBLIVION.

ENTITIES MADE OF KAYNN SUCH AS GODS, SPIRITS AND, GHOSTS ARE HIGHLY RESILIENT TO COMMON WEAPONS AND REGULAR SPELLS.

CONSTRUCTS OF BELIEF AND FAITH, THESE BEINGS ARE CONNECTED TO MEMORIES AND DEVOTION IMPRINTED ON THE KAYNN BY SENTIENT PEOPLE.

THEY ARE FORMIDABLE ADVERSARIES AND, WITH ENOUGH FOLLOWERS, THEY CAN EVEN TRANSCEND THE RULES OF MAGIC, ACHIEVING TRUE DIVINITY.

THE OBLIVION SPELL CAN PENETRATE THE KAYNN THAT CONSTITUTE THESE BEINGS AND FORCEFULLY REPLACE THEM WITH THE KAYNN ON THEIR SURROUNDINGS. IF THEY NO LONGER HAVE ANY TRUE BELIEVERS LEFT OR ARE LONG FORGOTTEN, THEY ARE BOUND TO BE STRUCK OUT OF EXISTENCE.

DARING TO KNOW

EXCERPTS FROM KARU MARUKZ, AT *AANDIA AND ITS PEOPLE*. PUBLISHED AT FRANKHURT, NANASHUR, TWENTY FIVE YEARS AFTER THE FALL.



THE HUMAN RACE.

"HUMANS ARE PRIMATES LIKE US, BUT VARY VASTLY IN COLORS AND SHAPES. THEY MAY NOT POSSESS THE SAME LEVEL OF INHERENT MAGICAL ABILITIES AS THE VOI AND THEIR HAIR IS DEAD, BUT THEY MANAGED TO ESTABLISH A CIVILIZATION THAT SUBDUED THE ENTIRE CONTINENT.

THEY GOVERN THE PROVINCES OF BASHERANIA, ASHAIIA, STERDN-INLII, AND THE SEAT OF THEIR FORMER EMPIRE, AUSHULIA".

THE VOI.

"THESE AZURE BASTARDS ACT AS IF THEY ARE SUPERIOR TO EVERYONE SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY POSSESS INNATE AND EXCEPTIONAL MAGICAL TALENTS. THEY HAVE DEVELOPED THEIR OWN HIGHLY POTENT AND PERILOUS FORM OF MAGIC CALLED ISHTURIA.

THEY HOLD DOMINION OVER FOHRVOI AND GRADVOI. THEIR SOCIETY IS DIVIDED BETWEEN THE 'BLESSED', MEMBERS OF THEIR THIRTEEN CASTES, AND THE 'DISGRACED' OR 'UNBLESSED', THOSE WHO ARE CASTELESS - AND, YES, THIS INCLUDES US."



THE NANASHIN.

"THESE ARE MY PEOPLE, KNOWN AS THE 'LIVING-REDBAIRS' OR, AS WE REFER TO OURSELVES, THE 'DREAMING PEOPLE'. WE ARE AS INTELLECTIVE AS WE ARE STRONG AND TAKE PRIDE OF HOW WE CAN CONTROL OUR HAIR AND FUR WITH JUST A THOUGHT. IT'S NOT FANCY AS MAGIC, BUT WE COULD EXCEL AT IT TOO, IF WE DESIRED.

OUR ORIGINS LIE MOSTLY IN THE NANASHUR MOUNTAINS, AND WE ARE RULED BY THE EGALITARIAN AND MATERIALISTIC GOVERNMENT KNOWN AS THE CHAMBER OF THE PEOPLE."





THE HISTORIAN'S REFUGE:

HELLO, EVERYONE!

LET ME START THIS BY TACKLING THE MOST OBVIOUS AND CONTROVERSIAL MATTER THAT A COMIC BOOK SUCH AS THIS ENTAILS: THE USE OF AI ART. THE FIRST CLARIFICATION I'D LIKE TO MAKE IS THAT, EVEN THOUGH I LOVE DRAWING, I'M NOT A VISUAL ARTIST. I CONSIDER MYSELF A STORYTELLER.

BY USING MIDJOURNEY, I COULD BECOME SOMETHING LIKE A VISUAL WRITER, BUT THAT'S IT. I'M NOT A PAINTER, A PENCILLER, AN INKER. THAT'S NOT TO SAY THAT THE TREATMENT OF ARTISTS BY MIDJOURNEY IS COMPLETELY FAIR. HOWEVER, AT LEAST BY AMERICAN LAW, THE SILVER LINING FOR THE ARTISTS IS THAT AI-CREATED IMAGES AREN'T "OWNED" BY ANYBODY. THIS IS A RECOGNITION OF THE COLLECTIVE NATURE OF THIS TECHNOLOGY AND CRAFT.

THAT BEING SAID, THE PROCESS IT TAKES TO CREATE A COMIC BOOK SUCH AS THIS IS IMMENSE - EVEN IF IT'S NOT EVEN REMOTELY COMPARABLE TO WHAT IT WOULD ENTAIL TO DO THE SAME BY TRADITIONAL MEANS. BUT THAT'S THE POINT: THIS WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE FOR ME TO DO, EVEN WITH ALL THE HELP I GOT, ESPECIALLY FROM PAULO.

AI-CREATED IMAGES GAVE ME A WAY TO EXPRESS MYSELF AND TELL A STORY AND, FOR THAT, I'M THOROUGHLY GRATEFUL. BUT IT HURTS TO SEE THAT THE ADVANCES IN TECHNOLOGY FRIGHTENS PEOPLE INSTEAD OF SETTING THEM FREE. HOW MANY OTHER ARTISTS WOULD WE HAVE IF PEOPLE DIDN'T HAVE TO SELL THEIR TIME TO EAT, DRINK AND HAVE SHELTER - YOU KNOW, OUR BASIC HUMAN NEEDS?

I HOPE YOU ENJOY THE STORY I'M TELLING FOR WHAT IT IS, BUT I CAN UNDERSTAND PEOPLE WHO WON'T GIVE IT A CHANCE, EVEN IF THEY DON'T CARE ABOUT THE AI STUFF. IT'S MY FIRST COMIC BOOK, I'M WRITING IT IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE AND I'M USING A TECHNOLOGY WHICH IS NOT QUITE THERE YET IN GENERATING CONSISTENT PANELS, SO I KNOW THERE'S A LOT TO IMPROVE. BUT MY MAIN GOAL HERE IS TO BECOME A BETTER STORYTELLER. LET'S SEE HOW THAT GOES, SHALL WE?

MAY, 2023.
D.-A. DA ROSA.

THE EMPIRE HAS
FALLEN.

NOW, ONLY HISTORY
CAN BRING PEACE
TO A FRACTURED
LAND.

BUT CAN THE
PAST EVER BE
TRUSTED?

The Archeomancer

Echoes of the Shattered Empire

MIDNIGHT JOURNEYS EDITIONS