

**THE INDIE HYPE MAG**

# CATALYST



**ISSUE 12 - NOV 2023**

**PEČENKOVIĆ  
AMICK - AVIŃA  
ZUJOVIĆ  
COMICS  
PROSE  
GALLERY  
INTERVIEWS  
TIPS**

**INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM TAKES TIME**



# CATALYST

CATALYST MAGAZINE BROUGHT TO YOU BY NEXUS STUDIOS, INC.

**Welcome back!**

**Never late but always on time, right?**

**What can I say? Life be lifing, and this last few months it's lifed real hard. But here we are with a great group of indie creators, so sit back, relax, and enjoy!**

**Make sure to check out my first actual news article! Some indie shakeups inspired me to write something up, so make sure you check that out on page 82.**



COVER **The Crystal Compass** by creator/artist Hamza Pečenковиć

**2 COMING SOON**

**5 COMIC** **The Crystal Compass Book One Preview**

**18 INTERVIEW** Hamza Pečenковиć

**20 JUAN'S ONES**

**21 INTERVIEW** Shawn Amick

**23 PROSE** **The Cruelty of Magic Ch 1**

**34 GALLERY**

**37 INTERVIEW** John Aviña

**39 COMIC** **Lucha Forever #1**

**77 NEW HOTNESS**

**78 PROSE** **Deus Ex Ch 4**

**82 NEWS**



**84 EDITORIAL**

**87 CREATOR INDEX**



*Note: Amazon links are affiliate links and using them supports this publication.*

# COMING SOON

*For the skimmer types, I wanted to include a quick overview of all the live or upcoming campaigns from our featured creators.*

*Our cover feature **The Crystal Compass** is **[ LIVE NOW ]***



*From 4th Wall Entertainment, **Aceblade #7** **[ LIVE NOW ]***





# COMING SOON

*From Anthony Stokes, Intrusive Thoughts #2 is [\[\[ LIVE NOW \]\]](#)*



**INTRUSIVE  
THOUGHTS #2**



**STOKES  
DNS  
MORTAL**



*From featured author Shawn Amick, the campaign to fund the Audiobook production of *The Cruelty of Magic*, his upcoming novel, is [\[\[ LIVE NOW \]\]](#)*



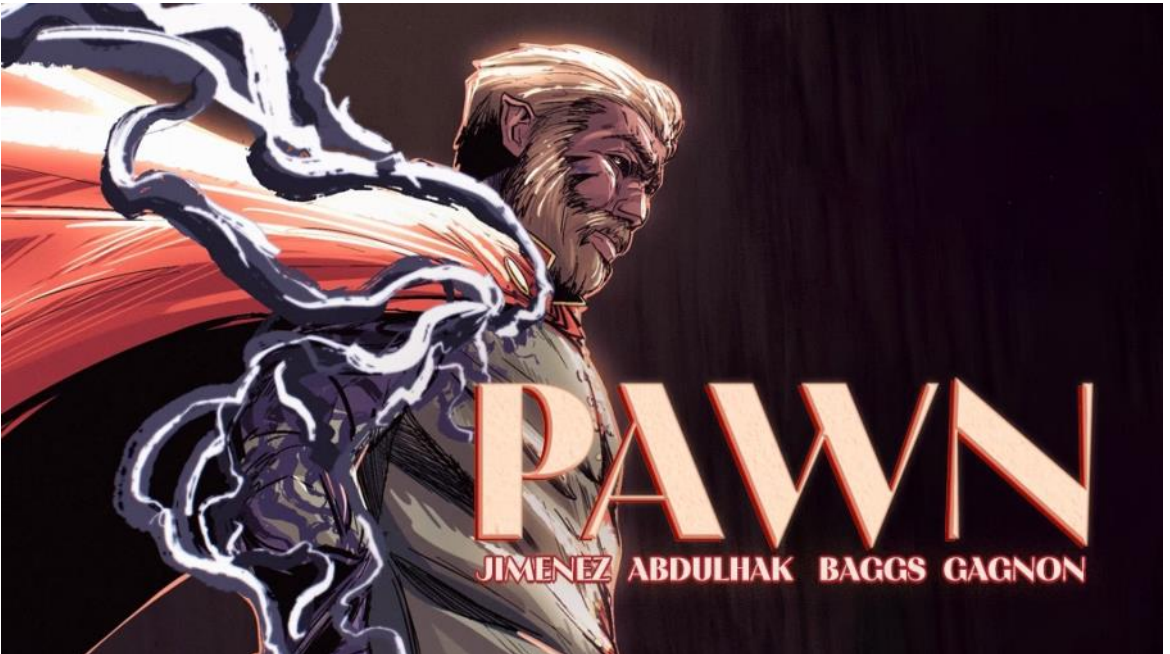


# COMING SOON

*Previously-featured creator Grant Lankard's Beowulf #6 is [\[\[ LIVE NOW \]\]](#)*



*This one's just a project I think is really cool. PAWN is [\[\[ LIVE NOW \]\]](#)*





# THE CRYSTAL COMPASS





ATEYAN SKIES, PAWN.  
IMPERIAL CONTROLLED  
QUADRANT.

# Hiding in the Blue

A Crystal Compass Story

BEHIND BLOCKADE LINES...



KAFKA,  
TAKE EVASIVE  
MANEUVERS!



WHY CAN'T  
THE IMPERIALS  
EVER CHASE US  
DURING NORMAL  
OPERATING  
HOURS?

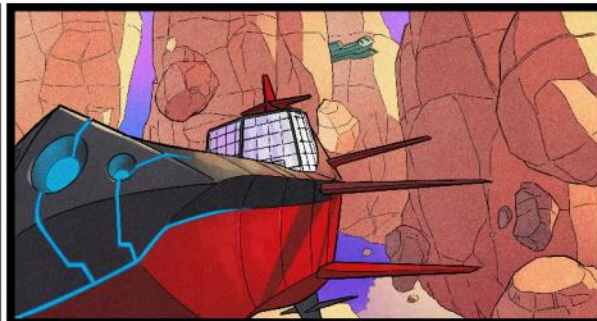
NINE TO  
FIVE, OFF ON  
THE WEEKENDS, IS  
THAT SO MUCH  
TO ASK?

SKIPPER,  
WE'VE GOT  
A SMALL ROCK  
FIELD ON OUR  
PORT SIDE.

TAKE US  
IN KAFKA.  
WE'LL LOSE  
THEM IN THE  
ROCKS.











JUST GOTTA FIND THAT OPENING AND...



WE'VE GAINED SOME GROUND ON THEM, BUT WE'RE ALREADY ALMOST THROUGH THE ROCK FIELD.



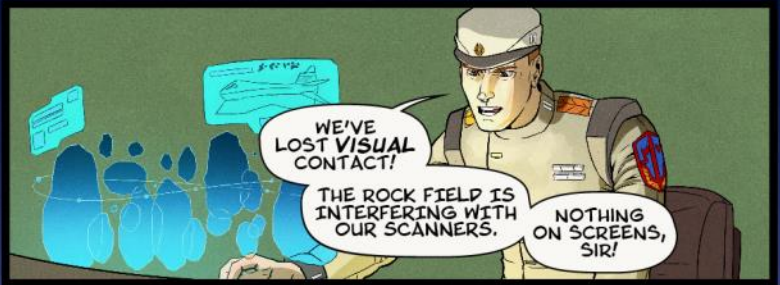
IF WE WANT TO LOSE THEM WE'LL HAVE TO FIND A ROCK TO DRIFT WITH.

HEY! NO BACKSEAT DRIVING.

I'VE GOT THIS!











THEY CAN'T WADE IN THE GRAVITY WELLS FOREVER.



ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, THIS IS THE LAST PAY THOSE PIRATES SAIL IN MY SKIES.



UH, SKIPPER, WE'RE LOSING ALTITUDE. FAST.



I THOUGHT WE'D HAVE MORE TIME.

THE GRAVITY WELLS HERE MUST BE MORE UNSTABLE.

WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO FIND ANOTHER WAY.



YOU TWO, PLOT A COURSE OUT OF THE ROCK FIELD.

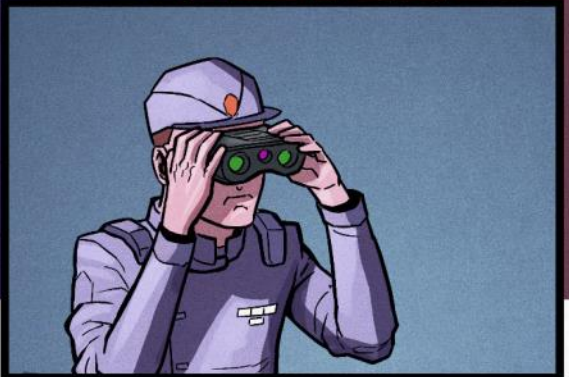
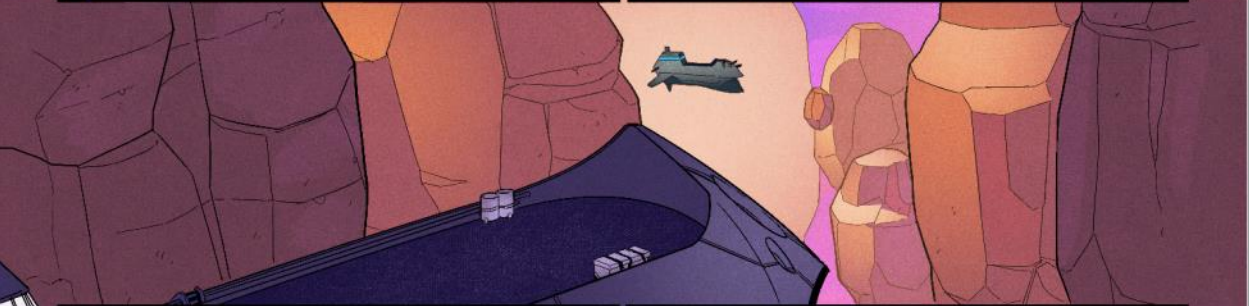
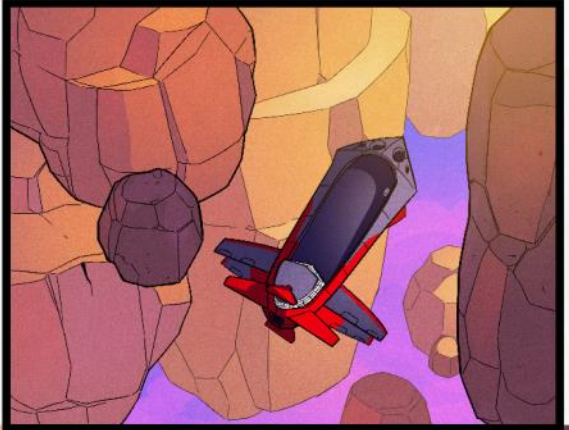


RED, ON MY MARK FULL POWER.



AT THE READY, SKIP.





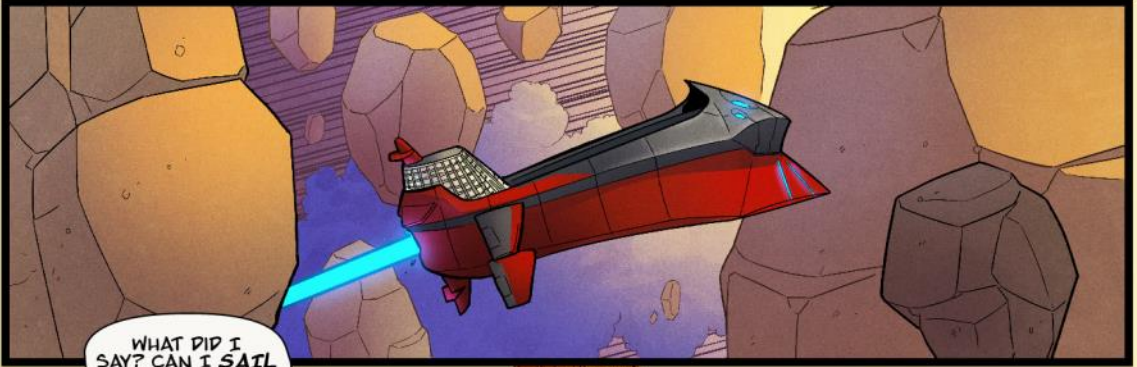












WHAT DID I SAY? CAN I SAIL OR WHAT?



ALRIGHT KAPKA, IT WAS A TEAM EFFORT.







THAT'S WHAT I SAID.

WHILE I'M DOWN THERE HOLDING THIS SHIP TOGETHER BY MYSELF!?

HMM... WHAT'S THIS?

BEEP BEEP



UH OH, I THINK YOU GUYS SHOULD REALLY TAKE A LOOK AT THIS.

BEEP BEEP



I REALLY THINK YOU SHOULD TAKE A SEA-

BEEP BEEP



BOOOOOM



WHAT WAS THAT?

OW...

I TRIED TO WARN YOU.

BUT YOU WERE TOO BUSY BICKERING.

ARE WE UNDER ATTACK?



SIT REP-

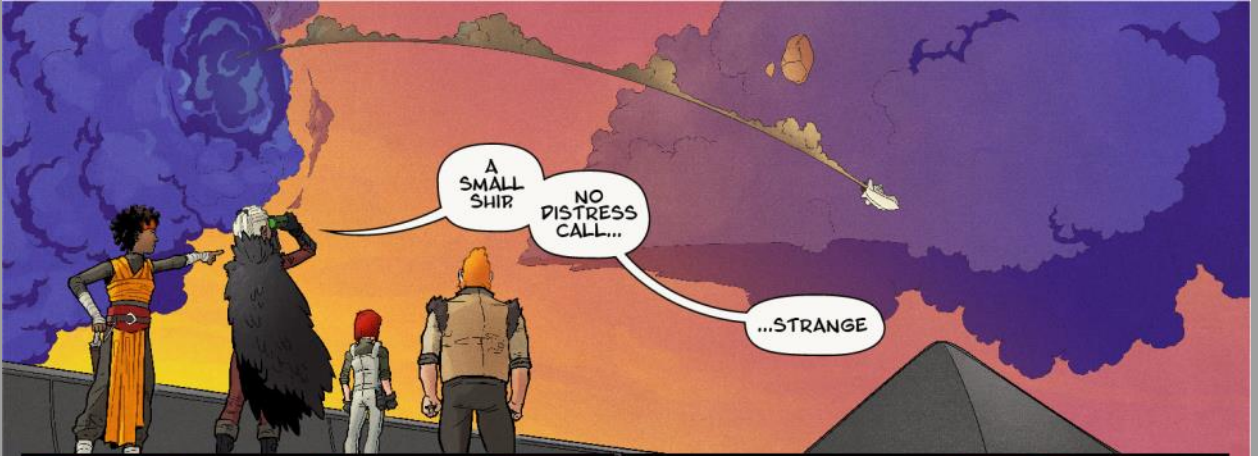
WELL, I DON'T KNOW, CAPTAIN.



I'M TRIANGULATING THE SOURCE.

THERE, TWENTY SIX DEGREES DUE SOUTH!





A SMALL SHIP

NO DISTRESS CALL...

...STRANGE



THE EMPIRE?

CRYSTAL DRIVE FAILURE MAYBE?

I'VE SEEN THEM GO BOOM BEFORE, BUT NOTHING LIKE THAT.



WHAT DO YOU THINK TUSK?

NO IMPERIALS AROUND, ONLY A FEW UNINHABITED ROCKS...

IF NOTHING ELSE, IT'S A FAIR SALVAGE...



...LET'S CHECK IT OUT.



THERE, NEAR THE OUTCROF



CAREFUL...



OH, IS THAT-

JUST WHAT WE NEED-

GROSS-

OH LOOK-







***I think you can agree that the preceding story looks great and is exciting as heck! A while back I came across a fellow Balkan in an indie Facebook group, and then as TikTok do, it led me to his work again. I—admittedly slowly—made the connection to the Facebook Balkan (we are everywhere, and the names aren't unique, let me tell you) and we started talking about his comic. Well that's the preview you just read, so let's finally have a word with***



# HAMZA PEČENKOVIĆ

***I'll cut to the chase right out of the gate here, first round with The Crystal Compass campaign did not go as expected. How has the approach changed for this new campaign?***



The Biggest change was hiring some outside help. I've been trying to solo this whole thing from day one, and I just don't see that as a successful tactic. When you look at the sheer amount of comics on the Kickstarter platform it was difficult to get eyes on The Crystal Compass so I needed some help from the pros on how to market a Kickstarter campaign. We're working with InkedStudios, they'll be handling things like PR, copywriting, social media, etc. We've also significantly lowered the campaign funding amount, but that also means the book has been split into three parts.

***Now that we've had an exciting introduction to the world of The Crystal Compass, and without giving too much away, what can you tell us about the crew of our hero ship? How about the mysterious boy that appeared on the last page of the preview? What is the empire the pursuing ship serves?***

We'll start from the empire and work backwards. The empire has a stranglehold on the world of Ateya, which is controlled by Emperor Thaine. Thaine is the only Ateyan who can wield a power lost to the people of Ateya centuries ago, a power that comes from the Crystals native to this world. The crystals power their ships, weapons and technology. This crystal is forged in the crushing pressures of the planet's surface, which we hint at a bit on page 7. Naturally a rebellion is at hand, and most of it







is fueled by pirates and smugglers, like the crew of our ship *Perl*, *Kafka*, *Tusk* and *Red*. *Perl* is the captain and owner of the ship, she has a complicated past with the Empire that I won't go into. *Tusk* is a deserter of the Empire's Aerial Navy, *Kafka* is the sole survivor of an Empire massacre, and *Red* is a kid genius born on her family's salvage yard. They all have a role to play on the ship,

smuggling supplies from behind enemy lines to the last free Ateyan tribes on an archipelago called *Utu*.

***Has the format change necessitated any changes in the story, or did you pick natural pauses and cliff-hangers to make the splits?***

There were a few small changes made, but nothing major, just adding a couple pages here & there.



***What's the planned release schedule for the series? Part one now, parts two, three four, etc - when?***

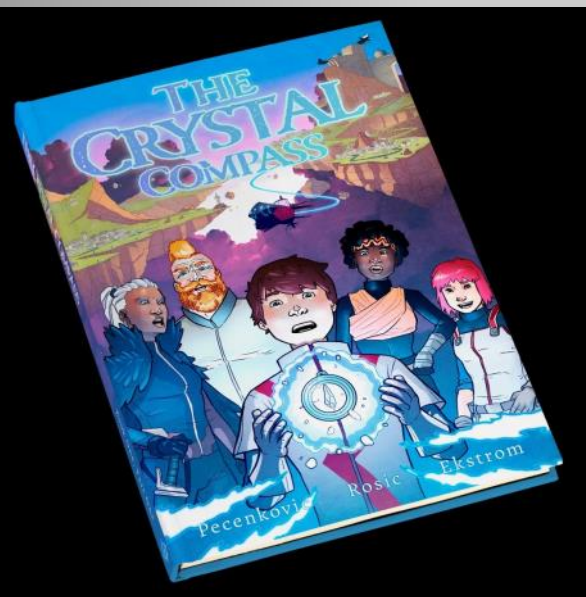
Part one will be out after the Holiday season, it'll be roughly 80 pages and will really give us a great introduction to the world and characters. I'm planning to fund book 2 with sales from book one, so as quickly as it sells we can make the next one! So we just have to make sure that it's all sold out in a timely manner.

***Are you publishing under a company banner that you've come up with, or are you and I partnering up and calling it Čevapčići Creative Comics Publishing?***

That's hilarious, I'm planning on self publishing but I'm pitching this book actively with a lot of YA publishers. So, I wouldn't be surprised to see this book under a publisher's banner soon.



***Back the campaign!***



***Check out the website!***

[www.TheCrystalCompass.com](http://www.TheCrystalCompass.com)

***Follow the socials!***

Facebook—[theCrystalCompass](https://www.facebook.com/theCrystalCompass)

Instagram—[illustrationsbyhamza](https://www.instagram.com/illustrationsbyhamza)

Threads—[illustrationsbyhamza](https://www.threads.net/@illustrationsbyhamza)



# JUAN'S ONES

**Juan from Juan Reads Comics will be checking out a new indie #1 every issue and giving us his thoughts!**

## STELLARLANDS

Comx Studio

Written by Max Ferrada & Art by Ben Worrell.

This story takes place in a futuristic, interglacial world where Anvil Liza has been sent on a mission to find intel on a remote moon & the government. She ends up finding a secret base that is not accounted for & an army that's looking for her.

I really love the pace of this story. It takes its time for you to get familiar with the character as we are on the ride with her as she discovers new obstacles in her way. I also enjoy that the story stops for 4 different pages sprinkled in the story to present you a commercial of an item that will be used in the pages to come or already have been shown. This keeps you connected as the world is being built around you, as you continue to read.

The colors are very vibrant & bright as well as the art in really, really, STELLAR! (lol)

I'm very interested to see what happens next in issue 2

But, what do I know. I'm just a guy who loves reading comics!

Until next time, READ YOUR COMICS

**Make sure to check out Stellarlands and more on [www.Comx.Studio](http://www.Comx.Studio)**





*TikTok provides, my friends. In this case, by connecting me to a fellow promoter, hype man, podcaster, and author. From his lessons on growing your BookTok audience, to the Between The Pages live podcast where he welcomes authors of all scope to talk about their work, I can't give enough credit to the latest face of BookTok,*



## SHAWN AMICK

***Let's start simple. Give us the pitch for *The Cruelty of Magic*.***



Impending war and doubts of prophecy initiate a complex magical journey where some mean to destroy gods and magic, while others seek understanding.

Kyra is named in a prophecy calling her to the Stained Temple, where no one else has ever gone. The prophecy is met with resistance and doubt while a warlord surrounds the hidden city harboring Kyra and her people. The warlord means to end all magic by destroying the city with his army, made up of every known magic-wielding civilization on the continent.

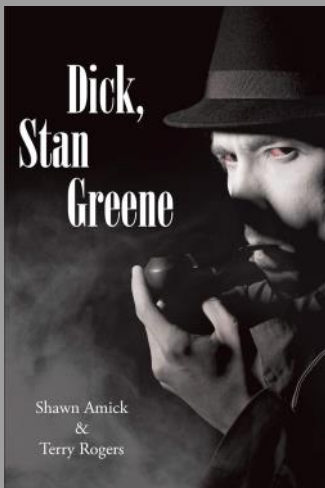
In the northern mountains, a dwarf flees to save his people, while a father and son practicing summoning magic scrape by in the sewers of a corrupt and dark city. Impending doom, religious doubt, political intrigue and tragedy haunt each step in this multiple point-of-view epic fantasy tale full of magical creatures, complex magic systems, and suspense.

The Cruelty of Magic is a unique twist on familiar tropes of high fantasy, incorporating new mechanics to keep the reader guessing. Readers will struggle to find a villain in this world of moral ambiguity with shadows guiding everyone's choices.

***We all have a moment, a transition from just reading and watching to writing. What was that moment for you?***

A crisis in college. I couldn't decide what I wanted to do with my life and I was on my 4th major in two semesters. I was spiraling. While on my 13th straight episode of Prison Break, I realized my true love was for stories, and escapism. I immediately paused the show, skipped classes, and changed my major a final time to focus on writing.





***The Cruelty of Magic seems a far cry from Dick, Stan Greene. Why such a drastic swing away from Noir?***

Cruelty is certainly a far cry from the noir genre of Dick, Stan Greene but fantasy was and will forever be my true love. In fact, if you read page 1 of Dick, Stan Greene the narrator jokingly refers to a fantasy book titled The Cruelty of Magic. I told everyone about this book three years ago, and was planning it far longer than that.

***When you begin work on a project, are you seeing the final product in your head and just working to get there, or do you approach it in more of a free-form workflow?***

I'm a pantsler with a goal. I know the end, the characters just lead me there.

***Is there an unfinished manuscript sitting on a hard drive somewhere that you gave up on?***

It's not unfinished, but there is a manuscript that will never see the light of day. Wrote that one in college. It was a psychological horror mystery centered around corruption. I have no interest in its resurrection.

***Alright reader, I'll work on that. Maybe we can get a rewrite, or a pen name, or something. But for now, follow Shawn across the socials below and let's check out the first chapter of The Cruelty of Magic on the next page.***

***Back the campaign for the audiobook!***

***Check out the website!***



<https://www.shawnamick.com/>

***Follow the socials!***

Facebook—[TheCrueltyOfMagic](#)

Instagram—[ShawnAmickAuthor](#)

Threads—[ShawnAmickAuthor](#)

Twitter—[ShawnAmick](#)

TikTok—[ShawnAmickAuthor](#)

***Preorder the book on Kindle!***

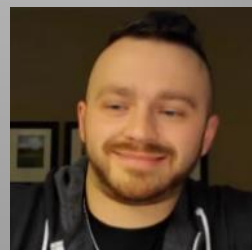
<https://amzn.to/49iI9fx>

Enjoy this screencap

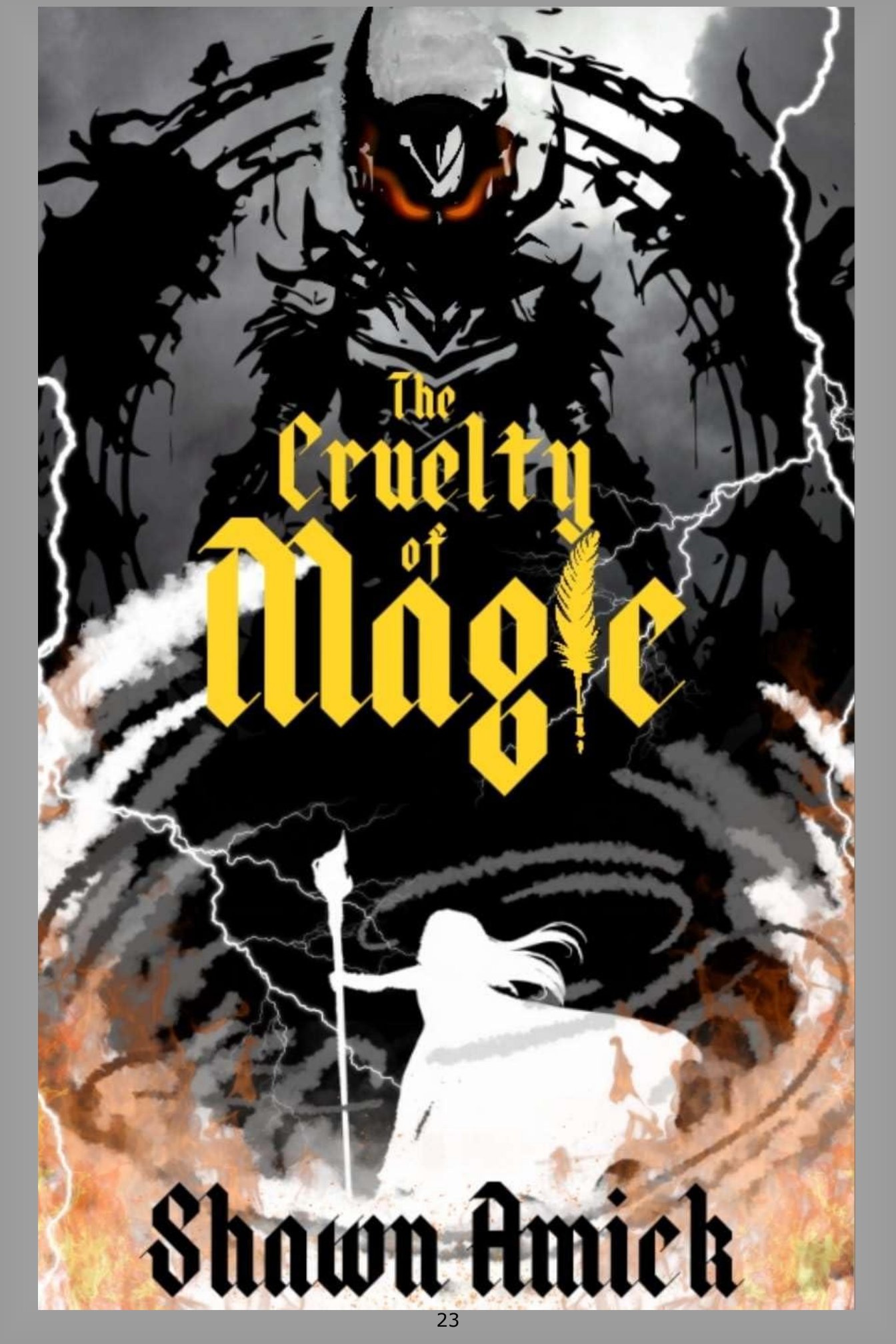
I collected while

Shawn was live on

Halloween!







The  
Cruelty  
of  
Magic

Shawn Amick



THE CRUELTY OF MAGIC

BY SHAWN AMICK



## Chapter 1: Lightning Strikes

Two guards stood gazing onto luscious plains, a field seemingly untrodden. The two bickered back and forth regarding which of them served the superior general, citing stories and gossip to support each of their claims. One served a Pyrosi underling, one of the revered generals of the Pyrosi army capable of manipulating fire to his will, at a cost. The other served a general of the Agualy army as an Agualyte, one of the great acolytes of the deep known for their powers over water. Neither of the two guards were capable of such acts, nor were the vast majority in both of their respective armies. Even still, they clung to the success of their betters as if it were their own.

"I saw fire form into a whip which cracked like thunder," said the Pyrosi, ignoring that the Pyrosi commander he watched do this act screamed in pain as his blood boiled unto his death.

"I saw a SeaHorse," said the Agualyte. "Our majestic horses which traverse the top of the sea like weightless ships. I saw one dive into the river with our great commander on its back and rise with a powerful tide. It crashed against an entire battalion on the shores of Riverbed and buried them in the deep!" While this was true, he neglected to tell the Pyrosi that the commander drowned beneath the crash of his own tide.

Fire, water, earth, and air. Each element could be molded by a select few who led their respective clans, though each of the rivaling clans always stood against one another.

However, the Warlord of Kaiya changed the course of war between each clan when he crushed each of their towns, tribes, and the few cities each of them ruled. One by one, Harigamun bent each of the groups to his demand. The warlord carried himself like a vengeful, warmongering vigilante, but in secret, his remorse for each conquering was unending.

The two guards continued their bickering into the long part of the night. Silence struck for only seconds before the sun rose. Crickets sang in the fading darkness and flowers dreamt of the sunlit morning as the drowning night's breeze grew stronger and turned to a bellowing gust.

"There's a storm brewing," the Agualyte said, looking to the gathering rain clouds far off in the distant darkness. His manner of speech sounded like a low-class fisherman to the Pyrosi due to a particular absence of particular syllables.

"You're no Agualyte," growled the Pyrosi, who the Agualyte thought spoke with over embellished syllables. "You can't move the water anymore than I can whisper to fire. Don't speak to me as if the clouds tell you their plans."

"I'll not speak for the other tribes," replied the Agualyte, "but we all have an affinity to water in the River Bed. Though, you are correct, I cannot bend it to my will. I still hear the streams." But, the Agualyte wasn't being truthful. He couldn't hear the streams talking to him anymore than the Pyrosi could translate embers from a



flame.

The Pyrosi scolded his counterpart with a mockingly smirked groan while gazing into the night's sky. An unusual amount of starlight was descending on the open plains before him, and it was enough for both of them to notice the harrowing clouds above.

"Perhaps you're right, you little barnacle," the Pyrosi chuckled while crossing his arms. "Those clouds are behaving awfully strange."

The clouds seemed to gather to a central location in the middle of a wide open plane which separated two large forests from one another. Unbeknownst to the two guards, those clouds gathered directly over the hidden city of Runefall. In the city, the Chief Runic – Arimeus Santar – broke from the council chamber in pursuit of a young woman named Kyra to tell her a decision made by the ruling council... on her behalf.

The two had never met, but Arimeus, being one of the members of the ruling council who would decide the young woman's fate, had learned much about Kyra over the past few weeks.

Moreover, Kyra had proven herself quite adept in the art of rune magic, surpassing all others in their capabilities currently training with her. Supposedly, the girl was casting spells without incurring the same costs others encounter when doing the same. Arimeus had taken to watching from afar to see how she managed to do so, but it always remained a secret. The girl simply performed magic as if it were a natural expression of her physiology, like an additional limb which no others possessed.

Kyra sat in a meditative state across from Gremanhas Silverskin, her teacher.

While most outside of Runefall lost the idea of houses and surnames decades ago, few still held onto them behind the Wall of Turmin in Runefall. Gremanhas's surname was more an open acknowledgement of his skin, and what he was, rather than respect to a family name. Though, most didn't know what he was, including himself. They treated him as one of the cursed Ansei elves who turned against their god in hope for the gift of long life, but in truth, Gremanhas was not of the Ansei elves. The teacher simply did not know his origin, nor did any residing in Runefall. He wilfully gave up that knowledge long before he entered Runefall.

Gremanhas was a man ripe with age, though his features would suggest otherwise. In fact, Gremanhas was among the eldest members of Runefall and decades ago the teacher refused an offer to join the ruling council. No one was ever offered an explanation as to why the old elf, as even then he was an old elf, declined the offer. He would have been given authority in the great city, autonomy over the learned crafts of those who wish to practice rune magic, wealth, fame, and much more, just as the other members of the Council had received over their many years. Still, the old man declined with a smile and always told those who would request more of him "I think I'll just keep to my teachings."

Moments before Arimeus broke through the door, Gremanhas bade Kyra to wake from her meditation as he heard the approach. As Kyra's eyes opened, she felt the rumble of heavy steps approaching the double wooden doors of the temple. Kyra turned to see who was the cause of the heavy footfall and she saw a sweat-stricken Arimeus with a tinted brow beneath his uniquely scarred head and white mane.

Kyra rose to her feet in a battle stance, her left foot behind her with her right di-

rectly pointed towards Arimeus. Her hands formed together in preparation to cast a defensive spell of protection by creating a forcefield that could not be penetrated. Arimeus recognized the hand motions and stood aghast.

While this spell could protect against the standard weapon bearer, the cost came with the almost guarantee of the loss of one's own life. For, if a magical blade or some other weapon were to penetrate the shield with the proper enchantment once the spell came into contact with the blood of its caster, the spell would spread like poison through the body. But, could the spell be less or more effective without calling to a written rune, as Arimeus would need to do if he were to try and use this spell? Kyra was clearly not using a written rune. The hand motions were obvious and visible, but even still, the old man knew that Kyra was aware of something that he was not.

Once Arimeus met Kyra's eyes, the chief runic looked down to the ground and laid out his two swords resting on both hips and bowed as a gesture of both reverence and peace. This act of respect gave Kyra calm, as Gremanhas often attacked her with the same level of surprise to test her mettle. At Arimeus's bowing, Kyra too lowered herself to a more respecting stature.

Arimeus's blades were faded with the color of rust, but rust had not taken them. Age was engraved into the blades once flowing with spells from a great number of runes carved into them, but Arimeus saw fit many years ago to tamper with the runes in a meticulous effort that took many weeks to accomplish. Truly, it had been one of his few moments requiring great arcane knowledge and use of his runes which did not cause him great peril, except the loss of time.

"So it is time," Gremanhas said with sorrow and relief.

Kyra shot a glare at her mentor, who had clearly made plans without her knowledge.

"Time for what?" Kyra asked her weathered teacher.

"You've heard tell of the prophecy, yes girl?" Arimeus asked.

"Hardly a girl, though she is quite young, not quite through her nineteenth year," Gremanhas said with a slight smirk.

"Yes," Kyra said with a tightening brow as she glanced back and forth between Arimeus and her teacher.

"Speak it then, girl. You have a role to play," Arimeus said, rising from his reverent posture.

"As it is written on the stone, I cannot recall," answered Kyra. "Though, in essence, if I may?"

"Speak as you know, Kyra," responded Gremanhas.

"The end of an age will befall all of Kaiya unless the name upon the stone meets the challenge of the Kaiyar," Kyra answered.

Arimeus continued his line of questioning, "And, pray tell, what is the end of an age?"

With a great gulp and a fearful look towards Gremanhas, Kyra turned to Arimeus



to answer the question, which she would clearly now bear the burden of.

“Was it...my name?” Kyra asked with deep dread.

“Answer the damn question, girl!” Arimeus thrust his blades into his scabbards and made his way over to the young woman. “You’ve not the time for fear, now answer the question!”

Kyra’s eyes began to wet as she answered, “The ground will open, cities will be lost, magic will vanish from the world and all that was thought great in this time will be lost to the echoes of spirits who haunt the Unda’Hearth as a wicked punishment for failing to honor the Lords of Kaiya.”

Kyra stared into the broken eyes of Arimeus. Something was hiding behind the Chief Runic’s scornful look as he seemed to be holding anger, or resentment towards her.

Gremanhas thoughtfully watched Arimeus attempting to discern his intentions, and more importantly, trying to understand the thrashing upon the young woman from Arimeus. Gremanhas had taken the girl under his tutelage at a very young age, in accordance with commands set by Arimeus himself. Kyra, along with other children, were tasked to Gremanhas in preparation for this day. Tir had spoken with one of the Kaiyar, which one she could not tell, but Tir was told the birthing day of the one who would be chosen to honor the Kaiyan lords.

Six children were birthed that day, and six children were taken from their homes from across all the lands of Kaiya. Six children were robbed of the life they might have known and placed in the servitude of Runefall under the guise of a false life. Thus, Gremanhas could only show his pupils kindness, yet it never slowed his intense teaching methods, which often caused great pain to his students.

After a moment of pondering, Gremanhas asked “How do you know?”

“The strongest among you will travel to the Stained Temple,” Arimeus said with sorrow.

Indeed, Kyra had proven to be the most capable student in the runic arts and had developed a keen intellect for its practical use while avoiding much of the pain others needed to endure. Still, her abilities had yet to be truly tested in any real battle, and books and teachings could only do so much hidden behind the Wall of Turmin.

Suddenly, Kyra burst out in defense, “But I’m not the strongest!” Kyra’s fear overtook her. Many spoke of the prophecies, especially since the rise of war gathering all around the hidden city. The young woman was clueless to her involvement over these many years and all of a sudden the responsibility of Near’Hearth and all of its peoples was placed on her. It was unfair, it was ridiculous, and she felt betrayed.

With a long sigh Gremanhas replied to her, “Kyra, when the Lords of Kaiya, our gods, speak of strength, they care not for the weight of stone which you can carry. No. The gods speak of their own image, and their own gifts they have bestowed to our lands. There is no question here, you are the strongest mage among your fellow students.”

“But, but I- -,” Kyra was intentionally cut off by Arimeus.

“You’re frightened, Kyra,” Arimeus’ eyes slowed and the anger in them faded. “We

know that you are lost in this. We could not be certain, and for that lack of knowledge, we could not be preemptive.”

Kyra looked to her teacher and quickly went back to Arimeus. There was no changing things. There was no going back. Fear or courage, she was being called to this task.

“If I have no choice –,” the young mage said.

“You do not,” Arimeus once again interrupted with a returning boom in his voice.

“I understand,” Kyra responded with a slight bow of her head.

At the depth of Kyra’s bow, she studied the cracks of wood beneath her in the floor of the temple. Then, she reached for the grooves in the wood and rested herself on all four limbs with a continued reverence to Arimeus, and his demands. “If I should go, my Lord. I would ask that I not go alone.”

“No,” Gremanhas replied with a smile. “You shall not be going alone.”

“I’m afraid you’ll be staying within the city walls, Gremanhas,” Arimeus said with authority.

Without warning, Gremanhas exploded with an anger Kyra had never witnessed from her seasoned teacher.

“You tell me to raise these children as my own? I’ve done so! You tell me to weaponize these youth for a battle beyond any of us? I’ve done so! I’ve dedicated my life to these children and the moment of calling finally arrives and you would tell me to stand aside and *hope* for their safe return?”

Arimeus watched his old friend writhe in fury.

“I will not stand idly as I watch the closest thing I have to a daughter walk these lands alone to be scorched by the fires of war!”

Arimeus lowered himself to one knee and bowed his head to Gremanhas.

“You may command legions, Arimeus. But you do not command me!”

Slowly, Arimeus raised his head to Gremanhas, still resting on one knee.

“Gremanhas, my long friend –,” Arimeus started to explain.

Gremanhas continued to erupt, “I’ll not be patronized by you or your damned council!”

Arimeus rose from his knee. “This ought not to be said in front of the girl, Gremanhas. Give me a quiet room, and I’ll explain.”

Gremanhas glared with fury into Arimeus’ silver eyes. “You’d send the girl to the ends of the world to fulfill your prophecy, but a look into the politics of the realm is too much for her? Share what you must if all of our fate so clearly hangs in her hands.”

Arimeus recognized there was no turning back from this point of conflict, and in truth, Gremanhas was right. If Kyra could be thrown into the wilderness without



the safekeeping of her teacher, perhaps further knowledge of Runefall might hasten her steps, or at the very least, give her cause to keep moving forward.

"We need you to fight. The battle is coming and I know you see it," Arimeus's voice changed to a tone reminiscent of disparity. "Chieftains gather from all sorts and alliances have been made between sworn enemies to bring down this city. We've remained hidden from sight by naught but the protection of runes, and should they fail, all that separates us from wanton death is the wall of Turmin – and great as it may stand, it has never been tested."

"You doubt your fellow lord's wall." Gremanhas grinned with a touch of sarcasm.

"I do not doubt that should this city fall under siege, it will need the greatest mage we have ever known to defend it," Arimeus answered with impunity.

Once more Kyra stood in dismay. Talk had filled the city with fears of the surmounting armies rising against Runefall, and the few who could leave the hidden city spoke of powerful forces gathering for the purpose of Runefall's doom. Yet, those living in the city were always reassured that the barriers would hold, Turmin's wall was impenetrable, and the runes hiding the city from sight could not be shaken. Why then was this concern, which stood contrary to the reassurances offered by Runefall's ruling council; why then should they be so afraid that they could not send the most able mage within city walls to help Kyra?

Gremanhas, trying to understand, abruptly asked, "What could have caused such fear in you to doubt what hides this city? The runes were carved by Salaril, Lord of Runes. Our lord protected this city with his own designs which remain untouched and incorruptible."

Arimeus seemed to become smothered with deep-seated dereliction. "Yes, Gremanhas. We hold Salaril's favor," the chieftain explained, "but he no longer holds the favor of the Kaiyar."

With a hard discomfort, Gremanhas burst once more. "How? How can this happen? How can you know? How long have you known?"

"The depth of knowing matters little. Tir spoke with Ishmail in Unda'Hearth," Arimeus explained. "It has been many years in the making, but a deep reckoning has fallen on us. Salaril and his brother Ishmail hide in Unda'Hearth."

"And of Raknar, the Unda'Lord?" Gremanhas demanded with panic in his voice. "Where has the blood lord gone?"

"This, we do not know," Arimeus answered with regret. "He offered safekeeping to Salaril and his brother, the Lord of Dreams. But after that, it is said Raknar meant to question the pantheon of lords, and has not been heard from since."

Aghast, Gremanhas fell to his knees and scoured the temple floor for meaning. His lord of runes had been cast forlorn from his heavenly host of Kaiyar, meaning his followers were likely to be endangered. Ishmail, Lord of Dreams and Prophet to Kaiyar had seemingly been punished for nothing more than kinship, and now it seemed the protection Runefall once knew was coming to a dark end.

Then, Gremanhas heard the world break against a crash of thunder. In a moment, the entire city erupted to a point of chaos encased by fearsome screams which vibrated the temple. All of a sudden, Samiel, another of the six children raised by Gremanhas, broke through the door in a frenzy.

"My lords," Samiel fought as he tried to catch his breath. "Lightning struck the city. Our barriers hold, but the energy from the strike courses over our city with each moment pulsating across our borders. I've no doubt this can be seen from miles and miles away, my lords." He stopped once more and hunched over to catch his breath. "What should we do?"

Gremanhas looked to Arimeus as the Chief Runic became wracked with disbelief. "This was no accident, then," he said to Arimeus as the crackling of electricity surged around the city. "No, old friend. This was Krishalla."

"The council bade Kyra hide behind the walls, but that has clearly gone to folly," Arimeus sighed. "Gremanhas, I would ask that you join Galantis as he no doubt gathers the full force of Runefall. The city needs its best mage. In your stead, I will travel with Kyra to the Stained Temple, but we must move with haste as the eyes of Harigamun fall on our fair city for the first time, and should our enemies witness our leave, I fear what may become of us."

Gremanhas stood in disbelief. His god Salaril had been forsaken by the other Kaiyar, the lord whom he had served his entire grown life. He found himself questioning why that prophetic rune ever fell from the heavens to begin with. Why should his city carry the burden of this land just for it all to come crashing down around them?

Then, Gremanhas thought deep within himself and his piety became flooded with doubt in an instant, "What if the prophecy is wrong?"

For just a short interlude of silence, no more than seconds, Gremanhas regained his piety. Rather, even if he did not regain his piety, he chose to voice it for others – not trusting his own confusion.

"I know not the correct path. In fact, I know not even what I believe on this day," Gremanhas responded in sadness, "but...I have followed my lord's will until this day, and it's all I know to do. Salaril has said the girl should make haste to the Stained Temple, and so she shall."

Gremanhas looked to his right out of a grand window of stained glass depicting the fall of the first rune to the city. It was beheld as a glorious moment of thrashing colors striking the air, like a rainbow of lightning. The earth shook and quaked and the stars stepped beneath the clouds and shone with a beauty most thought was within reach, if they could just jump high enough. That day was the deliverance of not only rune magic, but magic as Kaiya knew it. At least, that is how the stories were told.

Outside of the window, Gremanhas could see the crackling of Runefall. Lightning surged across the city and he knew this would be the beginning of a horrible war. The teacher pondered whether the decision of the city, the council, and himself, were worth it.

"Take Samiel," Gremanhas said with a quickness to his breath. "Physically, I've no stronger fighter out of those I've trained. He's brutish in combat but never lacking in compassion for Kyra. You'll need him."

Samiel looked shocked at the suggestion as he was still trying to piece together the conversation. "I'm going to the Stained Temple with Kyra?"

Samiel was a spectacle to behold. Being of Litree, his kin were most usually among the smallest beings of Kaiya, but he grew far beyond what was normal for his kind. He stood around the same height as Kyra, which would doubtless be near



two feet taller than his average kindred. Furthermore, beyond any of the other children taken in by Gremanhas, Samiel worked at his strength daily. The boy placed little value in being able to practice magic for himself but insisted on being able to protect his friends who did.

Thus, Samiel boasted the muscle of a battle-hardened warrior with the innocent features of a child. His brown hair atop his almost yellow skin made sure he stood out, as Litree were not often seen in the city of Runefall, and travel had been restricted for many years which prevented any newcomers that would risk the discovery of the city. He wore fighting-leathers with light-skinned boots, as he preferred to maintain his mobility at the sacrifice of greater protection. Even still, no matter how much it got in his way when he was fighting, the Litel refused to cut his shoulder-length hair.

However, Samiel often thought to himself, "If I get caught off-guard, then I guess I deserve it," which often kept him motivated enough to dodge a blade in his training. Samiel's weapon proficiency allowed him to wield what was necessary or available, which led him to favor no particular weapon. Usually he would choose from what was available at the training grounds that day, rather than taking a weapon as his own, and he definitely never considered naming a weapon.

Kyra, however, dressed in traditional garments laid out by the highest practitioners of rune magic. The Ragi adorned themselves with silken white robes with colorful stone embroidery matching the particular Ragi's runic affinity. For instance, Kyra's strengths lay in defensive spells. Thus, the Ragi order embroidered her robe with sapphire. In contrast, one who focused on strength would bear the ruby, which she desperately tried to have made for Samiel, though her order would not allow it. Additionally, Ragi who focused on the use of nature as an ally would be adorned in emerald. The dwarves of the south crafted the robes on behalf of the Ragi many years ago and the city had not seen a new robe for well over a decade. Kyra's robe was tailored to fit her with the intention of making her more versatile. The young Ragi more often wore shoes for court, rather than battle, and often removed them to meditate. In fact, she so often removed them that she would leave training and completely forget that she had worn shoes, which then required Gremanhas to deliver them back to her.

Finally, Kyra's weapon of choice was her double-sided, perfectly symmetrical, staff. Dreadfall, she called it. The staff was intricately woven as if two oak trees were entwined to perfection, root after root crossing over each other in the most intentional design. Kyra frequently referred to the root pattern as a song. A song of dread for those who would oppose her, for it had something hidden about it that none could tell, none save its unknown smithy.

"Gather what is needed and let's go," Arimeus rushed the two untested fighters. "We've a long road ahead and the city is not safe. We must go before Harigamun attempts to breach the walls."

"What of the others?" Samiel always had a heart for the other children he was raised with. "Where are my brothers and sisters meant to be in all of this? Do they have a role to play?"

"They will aid me, Sam. You will go with Arimeus and Kyra. You must keep her safe and deliver her to the Stained Temple," Gremanhas explained as he glanced at a closet door in the corner of the room. Samiel didn't understand the command, nor did he have a clue where the temple was. But, such as the good soldier he was, Samiel nodded and looked to Kyra with dedication.

"I don't understand what you were saying about the lords and gods of Kaiya," Kyra said to her teacher. "I've always felt Salaril was alive, and the others I just as-

sumed were part of the story. But, you speak of them as if you know them.” Kyra’s brow raised and her confusion grew.

“We don’t have time!” Arimeus’ voice thrashed about the oaken frame of the temple with a boom that racked the ears of all who could hear. “You’ll learn what you need to know on the damn road! We don’t have time for childish questions or history lessons. We need to get out of this gods forsaken city!”

“Have the gods forsaken the city?” Gremanhas asked himself. Was he about to fight in a war that he was already determined to lose? The weary teacher did not know, and could not know. He could only hope his actions were serving the correct idea.

With that, Kyra sprinted over to the closet Gremanhas was looking at to grab some common linens and change out of her robe. It would be best, she thought, not to be recognized as being from Runefall, let alone a Ragi, in the open world. With a loose gray tunic, worn leather shoes, and bottoms of a fading red-stained leather, Kyra latched onto Dreadfall and walked over to Arimeus who stared her down with ripe annoyance. But, suddenly, the feeling faded, and a smile breached his scowl.

“I am sorry, Kyra. This should not have been placed on you,” the Chief Runic said. “I’ll do what I can along the way to keep you safe.”

Samiel had also ran to the closet and grabbed a bag of dirks along with a long-sword and its scabbard. Whilst Arimeus spoke with Kyra, Samiel fastened the scabbard and tied the bag of dirks to his belt while his teacher watched.

“Do not lose yourself in this journey, Sam. We will need you yet,” Gremanhas said softly with a hand squeezing the back of Samiel’s neck as he pushed their heads together. “Go with haste, but not with hate.”

Without delay, a second crash of lightning battered the city and the world shook beneath their feet.

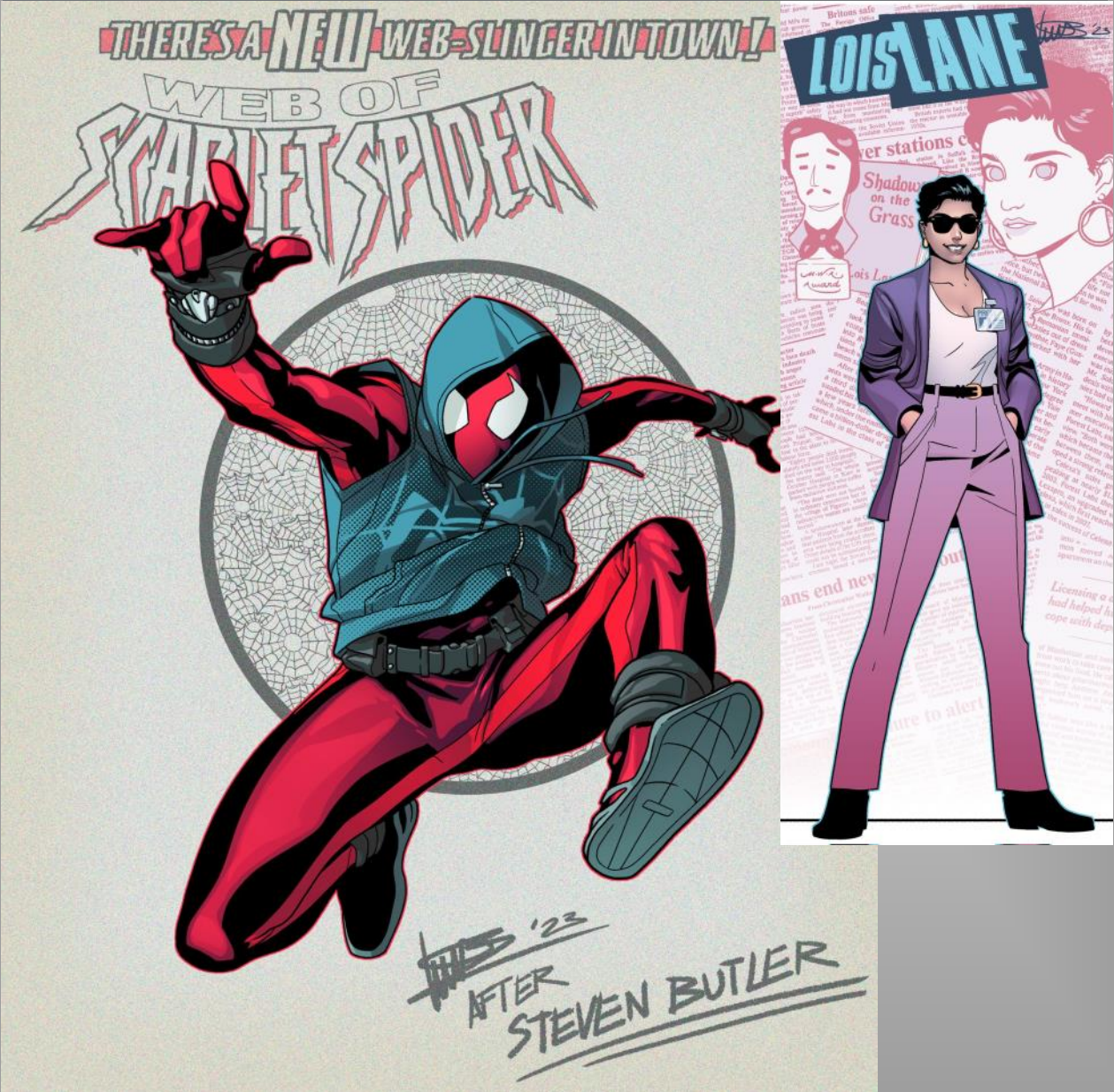
“Gremanhas, get to Galantis as soon as possible,” Arimeus shouted over the continued snapping around them.

Arimeus grabbed hold of Samiel and Kyra and looked forward, bursting into a sprint indicating the other two were meant to follow him. They broke off with speed driven by fear as Gremanhas turned back to the closet.

The teacher opened the door and pressed his hand against the back wall where a rune suddenly appeared shining with a clear-blue sheen in the shadows. The back wall shuttered backwards and then opened revealing a suit of armor and swords behind flawless cobwebs. Gremanhas would join this fight, and to the teacher’s own hopes, it would be his last.



# GALLERY



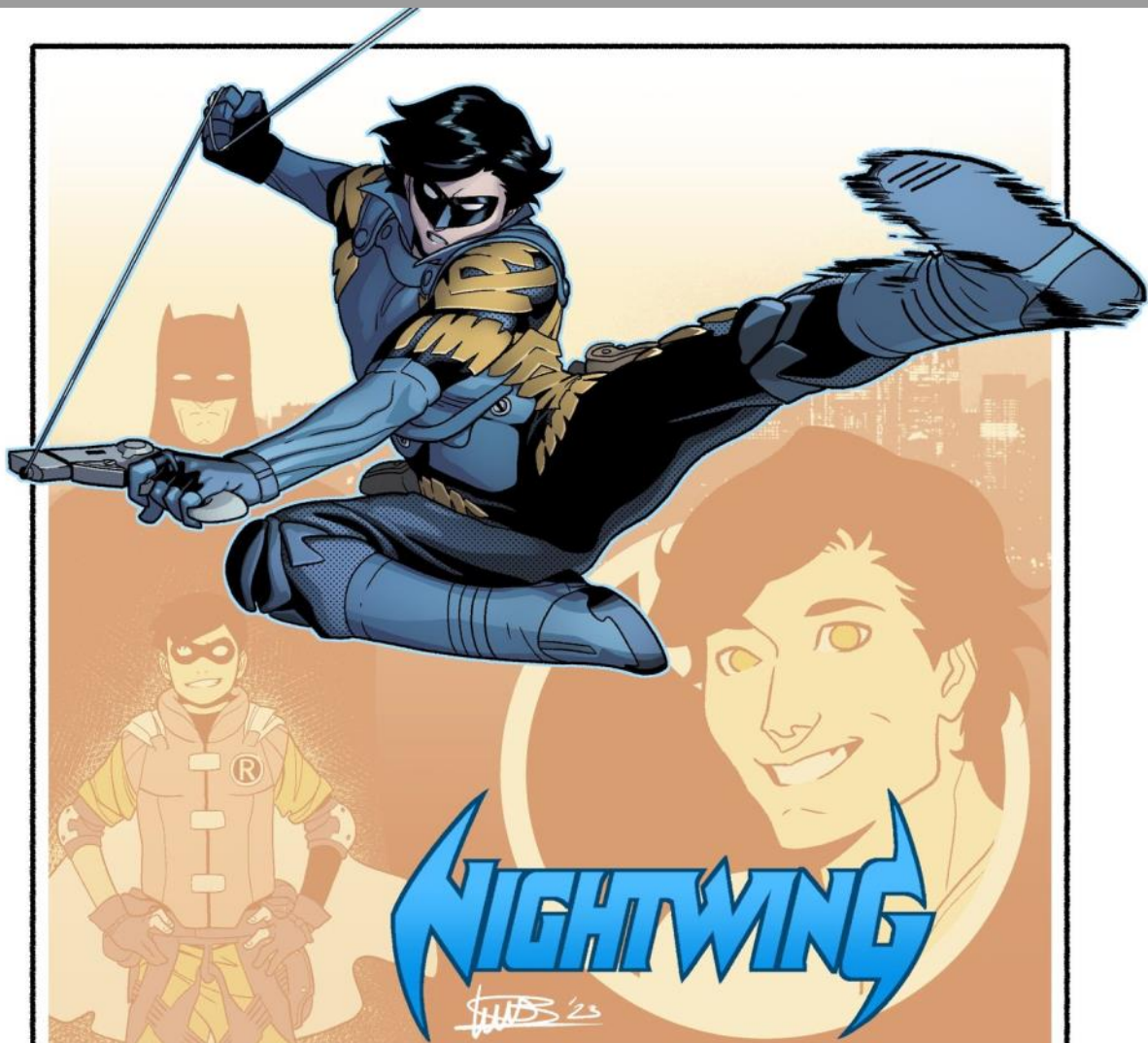


I have to admit, as much of a dumpster fire as Twitter has become, it still does allow for discovery of some great talent, such as [LuisBC](#).

Just... just look at 'em all! You should absolutely be following him.







L. B. C.

So great right?!

Twitter's the only social I found, but you should absolutely be going to follow him [there](#).



***For our final feature, we're going the same way we came—a TikTok connection. This young man has impressed me in the absolute best ways. From his first comic released last year, to his array of titles today, let's have a chat with***



# JOHN AVIÑA



***Let's start simple, what is your origin story? What got you into comics, and more specifically writing them?***

I started off in comics when I was a kid. I read the old Simpsons comics and eventually migrated to the major books. I started writing comics in 2020 during the pandemic and started doing shows in 2023.

***Your books all have strong Latine influences. Was it always a plan to include your culture as a big part of the stories?***

I didn't set out for that but I knew I wanted the comics to be a reflection of me. They say write what you know and that's what ended up happening.



***With so many projects already out, I feel like I know the answer to this, but for the readers - when you begin work on a new project, are you planning the full final product ahead of time, or do you approach it in more of a free-form workflow?***



Free form, I start off knowing the start and end of the book but I let the characters guide me through.

***Has a project ever failed to get off the ground - for whatever reason - and if so, will you ever get back to it?***

Yes I've been trying to get this great pirate tale off the ground but everytime I do something gets in the way.

***What is the best and most challenging thing about publishing independently?***

Best part is fan interaction, every reader helps motivate me to keep going. The cost of making each title is financially straining.









**AV**

AVINA  
COMICS

**1**

# LUCHA FOREVER



AVINA

EROS

SANTOS

SPACELY X





Writer:

**JOHN AVIÑA**

Artist:

**MOZART EROS**

Color:

**JÚLIO SANTOS**

Letters:

**SPACELY X**



[www.avinacomics.com](http://www.avinacomics.com)



[@avinacomics](https://www.instagram.com/avinacomics)



[@bluelobsterartcomics](https://www.instagram.com/bluelobsterartcomics)

LUCHA FUERTE  
SEASON 3 EPISODE 13  
ORIGINAL AIR DATE  
09/10/1996



OH WOW!  
YOU GOT A  
KING MIDAS  
CARD!

YEAH!  
KING  
MIDAS IS THE  
GREATEST LUCHA  
WRESTLER  
EVER!



KING  
MIDAS IS A  
JOKE!

EL TORO  
FUERTE IS  
THE FUTURE  
OF LUCHA  
LIBRE!



EL TORO  
FUERTE IS A BULLY,  
AND ONLY HALF THE  
WRESTLER KING  
MIDAS IS!







NOW YOU BOYS HAVE DONE IT!

EL TORO FUERTE!

WHERE IS YOUR HERO KING MIDAS WHEN YOU NEED HIM?



UNHAND THOSE BOYS!

WHO DARES SPEAK TO ME LIKE THAT?

IT IS I, KING MIDAS AND MY PARTNER LA MANO!

EL TORO FUERTE YOU'RE NO MATCH FOR OUR LUCHA MIGHT!



LET'S CUT TO THE POINT KING MIDAS.









IT'S TIME FOR...



WATCH OUT KIDS, IT'S TIME FOR KING MIDAS SIGNATURE MOVE.



THE MIDAS TOUCH!



WILL KING MIDAS MAKE IT IN TIME OR WILL EL TORO FUERTE BE VICTORIOUS?

FIND OUT NEXT WEEK ON ANOTHER EXCITING EPISODE OF ¡LUCHA FUERTE!



I CAN'T WAIT TILL NEXT WEEK'S EPISODE!

I HOPE THIS SHOW NEVER ENDS!





LOS ANGELES TODAY

"MY SHOW LUCHA FUERTE RAN FOR 8 SEASONS, MAKING MY PARTNER AND I THE MOST FAMOUS WRESTLERS IN MEXICO."

LISTEN TO ME DARLA.

ALL THE NOTES FOUND IN THE KILLER'S CELLAR POINT TO ONE THING.

"NOW HERE I AM IN LOS ANGELES AUDITIONING FOR A MAJOR MOTION PICTURE."

THAT THE KILLER WAS YOU ALL ALONG.

OK WE ARE READY FOR GUILLERMO D'IAZ.

THAT'S HIM ISN'T IT?

I THOUGHT HE'D BE TALLER.

"IT'S BEEN 24 YEARS SINCE MY LAST STARRING ROLE. BUT I HAVE A REALLY GOOD FEELING ABOUT TODAY."









CUT.  
ARE YOU THAT KING MIDAS GUY?



YES BUT THAT WAS A LONG TIME AGO.  
COULD WE CONTINUE WITH THE SCENE?



THAT'S OKAY WE HAVE THE TAPE.

WE WILL CALL YOU, THANK YOU.



WATCH OUT KIDS, IT'S TIME FOR...



THE MIDAS TOUCH!



**DING**  
STAND CLEAR THE DOORS ARE CLOSING!









TOUGH LOVE TIME. LOOK AROUND MY SHOP.  
IT'S FILLED WITH CRAP PEOPLE THREW AWAY

NOW I BLAME MYSELF FOR ENABLING YOU, BUT I REMEMBER THE YOUNG HOPEFUL MAN THAT FIRST CAME THROUGH MY DOOR WITH HIS SON ON HIS SHOULDERS LOOKING FOR A FEW BUCKS TO BUY A VIDEO CAMERA.

YOU'VE WAGERED YOUR LEGACY AND LOST. TAKE YOUR LICKS AND GET A JOB. A REAL JOB.

YOU'RE TOO OLD TO BE THE NEXT SLY STALLONE. THIS TOWN CHEWS UP PEOPLE EVERY DAY, DON'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY.



TWO HUNDRED, PLEASE.

ONE FIFTY CAUSE I LIKE YAH.

THANKS LUANA. WAIT, IS THAT MY RING? MY CHAMPIONSHIP RING?

IT'S BEEN 90 DAYS ON YOUR LOAN GUILLERMO. I NEED TO MAKE MY MONEY BACK.

IF YOU SELL ME YOUR MASK I HAVE A BUYER WILLING TO PAY \$5000 FOR IT.



I DON'T THINK I CAN PART WITH THAT YET.



\*HI MOM!  
YES, THE AUDITION WENT WELL. YOUR PRAYERS REALLY HELPED.

\*I'M A LITTLE SHORT THIS MONTH. DO YOU THINK YOU COULD HELP ME ONE MORE TIME?

\*THANK YOU, EVERYDAY GETS ME ONE STEP CLOSER TO THAT STAR ON THE WALK OF FAME.

(\*TRANSLATED FROM SPANISH)

























CHINGA LA MADRE!

WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ME!



PICK UP!  
PICK UP!

GUILLELMO,  
THE LANDLORD  
HAS BEEN COMING  
BY EVERY HALF  
HOUR LOOKING  
FOR YOU.

ARE  
WE BEHIND  
ON OUR RENT  
AGAIN?



ELENA  
LISTEN GRAB  
THE KIDS....

MY SISTER  
IS ON OUR  
LEASE!

IF THIS  
HITS THEIR  
CREDIT...



ELENA,  
GRAB THE BOYS  
AND RUN.







ᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ ᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ  
ᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ ᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ ᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ



NO  
MAMES.



OOF



PA!

ZAP

I ALWAYS THOUGHT  
LIFE WAS LIKE ROCKY VS  
APOLLO YOU GET HIT BUT  
YOU KEEP GOING.

Turns out I  
was wrong, its  
Rocky IV and I'm  
Apollo Creed.

LOOK AT ME LIP  
THERE MIGUEL  
STANDING PROUDLY  
BESIDE ME, I WAS  
THE CHAMP!

ᑦᑦᑦᑦ ᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ  
ᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ ᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ ᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ



MAYBE I CAN BE  
ONE MORE TIME.  
AFTER ALL IT AINT  
ABOUT HOW HARD  
YOU'RE HIT.



IT'S ABOUT HOW MUCH YOU CAN TAKE AND KEEP MOVING FORWARD.

AYE FEO!  
EAT FIST!

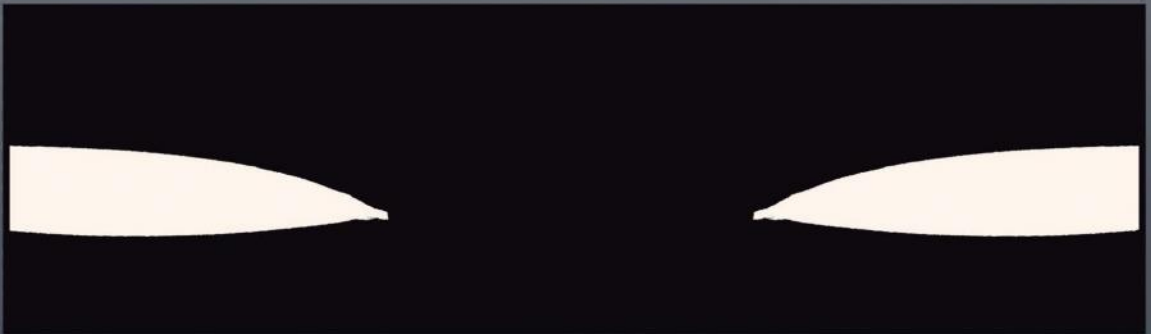
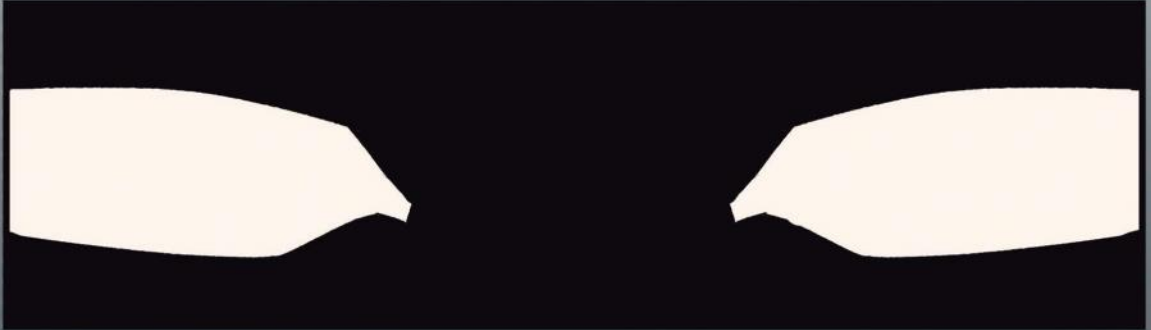
**BAM!**

THAT'S HOW WINNING IS DONE!

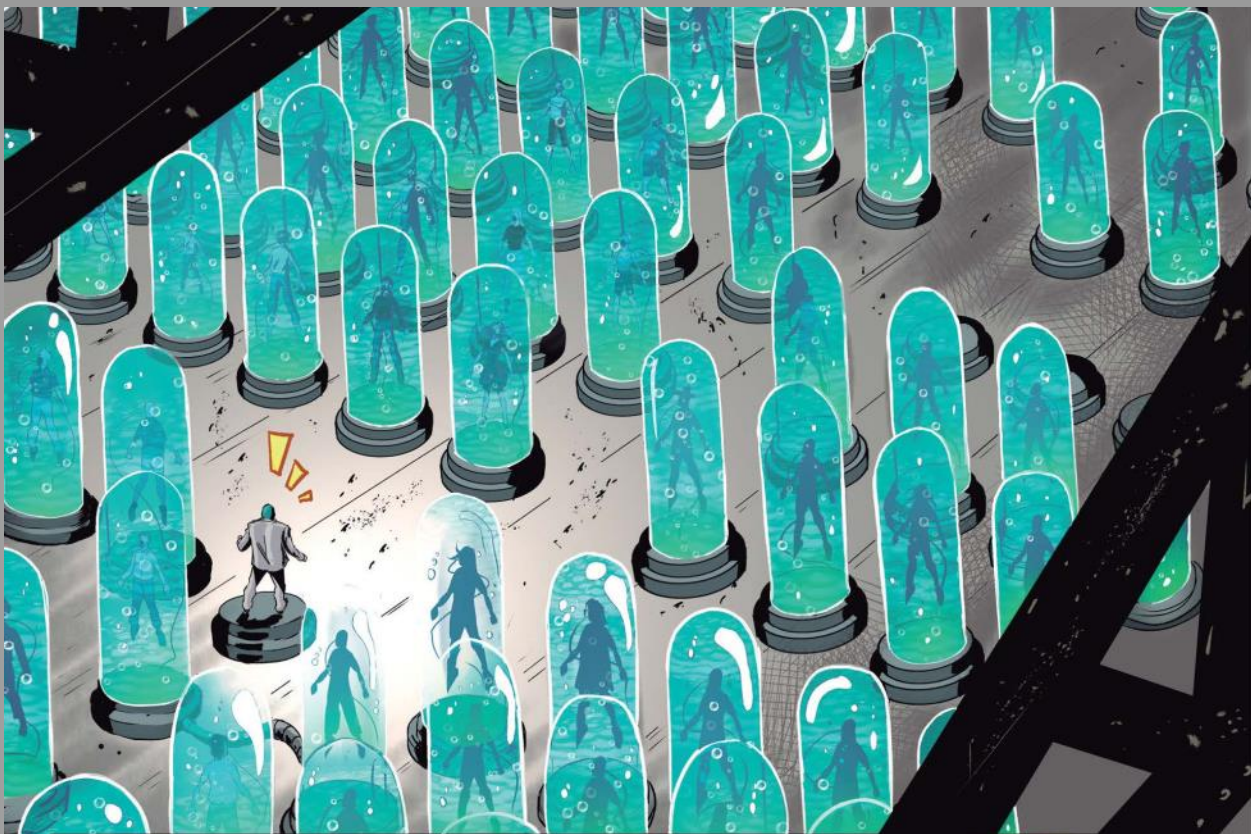
oof!













IN 2002 I WAS ON THE SET OF STAR TREK NEMESIS, IT LOOKED JUST LIKE THIS.



PATRICK STEWART TOLD ME I HAD A LOT OF POTENTIAL.

JULIO,  
MIGUEL.

CLINK  
CLINK  
CLINK



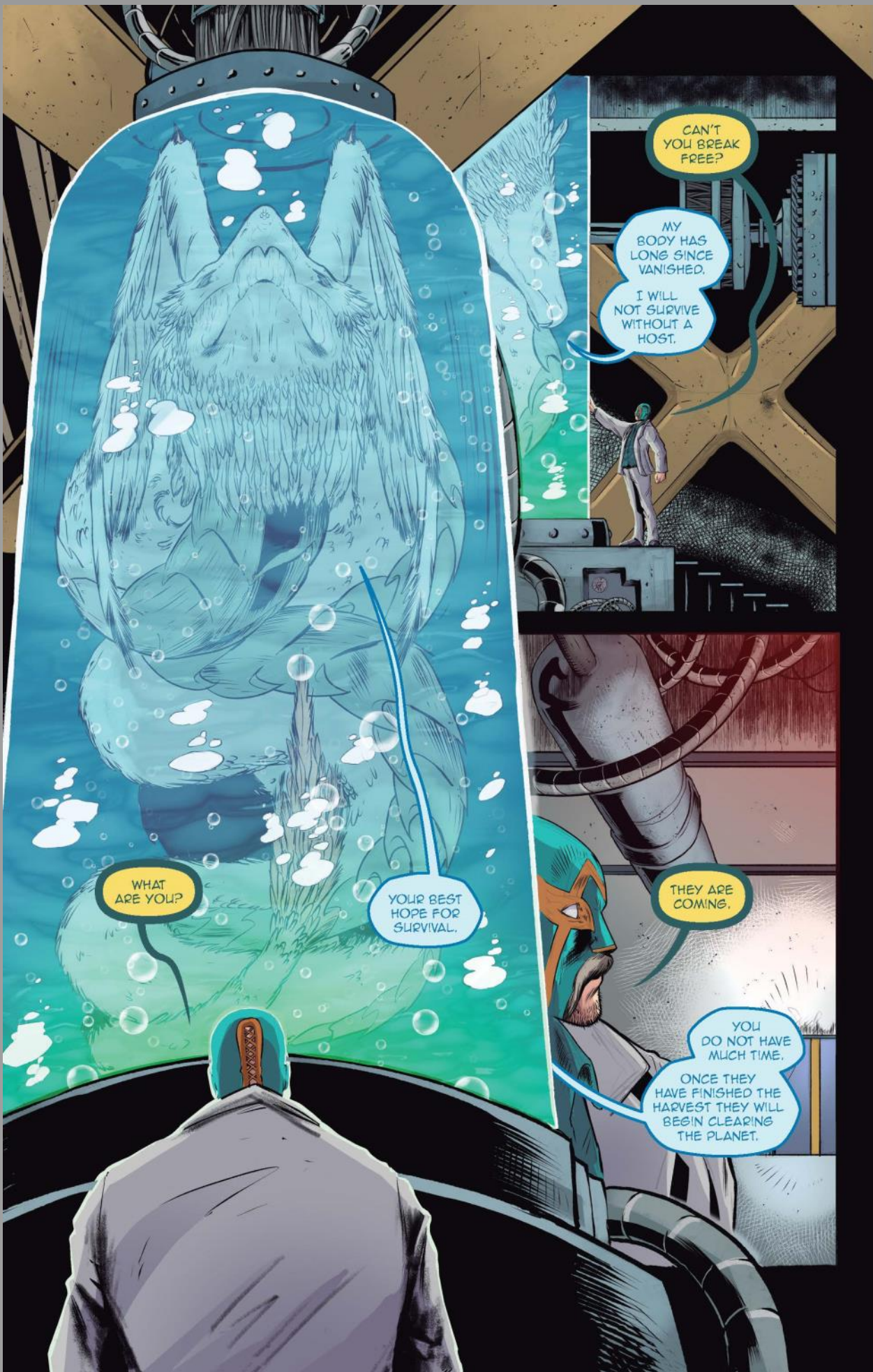
BUENOS DÍAS.



ARGH!

THAT WILL NOT HOLD THEM FOR LONG.





WHAT ARE YOU?

YOUR BEST HOPE FOR SURVIVAL.

CAN'T YOU BREAK FREE?

MY BODY HAS LONG SINCE VANISHED.  
I WILL NOT SURVIVE WITHOUT A HOST.

THEY ARE COMING.

YOU DO NOT HAVE MUCH TIME.  
ONCE THEY HAVE FINISHED THE HARVEST THEY WILL BEGIN CLEARING THE PLANET.



THESE CREATURES  
ARE GALACTIC  
CONQUISTADORS.



CLEARING  
PLANETS TO  
GROW THEIR  
EMPIRE



THEY USE THE NATIVE  
POPULATIONS TO BUILD  
THEIR WAR MACHINES AND  
DRAIN THE RESOURCES  
FOR THEIR HOME PLANET.



TILL THERE IS  
NOTHING LEFT.





TELL ME HUMAN WHAT IS YOUR NAME.

GUILLERMO LUIS DIAZ.

DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A WARRIOR?

THE PLANET NEEDS YOU GUILLERMO

WILL YOU ACCEPT MY HELP, SO THAT WE MAY SAVE THE WORLD?

LET'S GO.





ALL AT ONCE I SAW  
THE UNIVERSE AND THE  
TERROR THAT SPREAD  
FROM THE EDGE OF  
THE GALAXY.

A CYCLE OF VIOLENCE  
REPEATING. NOT SINCE  
I WAS A BOY STANDING  
ON THE EDGE OF A  
WRESTLING MAT HAD I  
FELT THIS ALIVE.







WHERE DID THEY GO?

I SEE SOMETHING IN THE SMOKE.

I CAN UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY'RE SAYING?

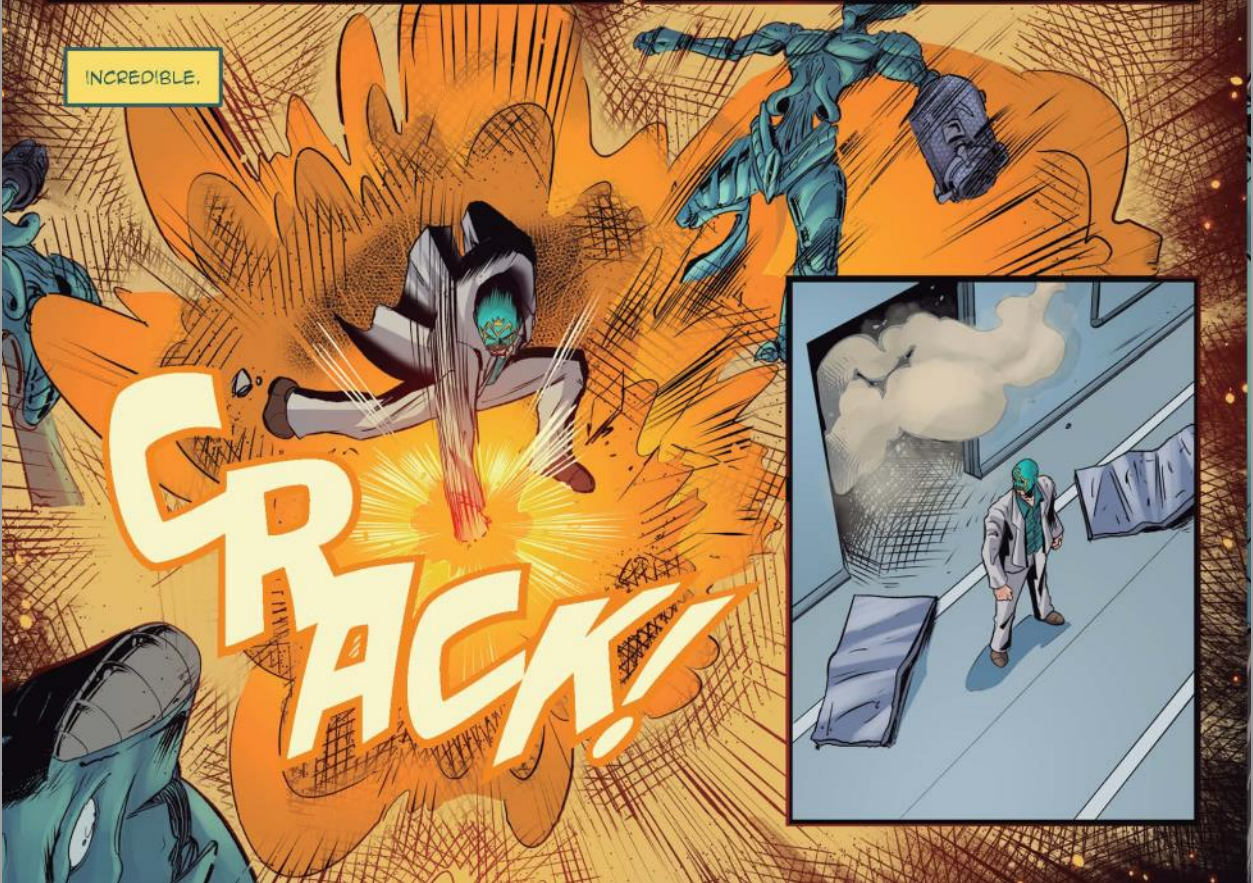
TO DEFEAT YOUR ENEMY YOU MUST KNOW THEM.



IT'S TIME TO...



LUCHA!



INCREDIBLE.

CRACK!



THIS IS AMAZING!

ZAP

POW

CAREFUL GUILLERMO YOU MUST STAY FOCUSED.

BANG







TRANSMIT ME TO THE CONTROL SHIP.

SIR, THE MISSION IS A FAILURE. OUR POWER CELL HAS ESCAPED.



OUR CONTAINMENT ATTEMPTS HAVE FAILED.



FAILURE IS NOT AN OPTION.



IT'S HIM!



FREE MY PEOPLE!

THE KROSS EMPIRE WILL NEVER SURRENDER.



IT'S TIME TO FLY NOW.

WE'LL SEE.



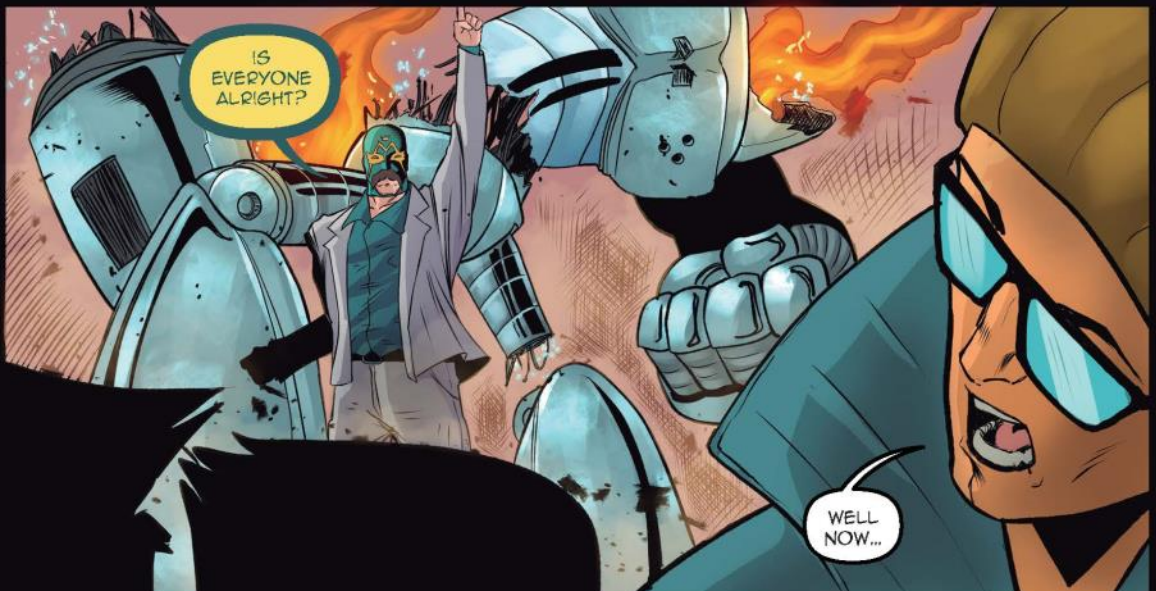




THE MIDAS TOUCH!











THEY WILL RETURN, IN LARGER NUMBERS.

1989

I'LL BE READY.



MY GOODNESS.

PA!

LUCY I'M HOME!



THIS IS GONNA CHANGE EVERYTHING.



LOOK WHAT THE ALIENS LEFT US!

MAYBE OUR LUCK IS CHANGING JULIO!













NO WAIT!



LONG LIVE THE EMPIRE.



SIN!  
SIN DO YOU HEAR ME?

I HEAR YOU.



THIS IS YOUR NEW TARGET LOCATED IN SECTOR 2304.

HE SINGLE HANDEDLY PREVENTED OUR CONVERSION.

TAKE CARE OF HIM.

**BOOM**

UNDERSTOOD.

**BOOM**





WELL GUILLERMO YOU WANTED CHANGE AND NOW YOU GOT IT.



I DON'T DESERVE THIS POWER. MAYBE I SHOULD....



YOU LOOK LIKE A TIRED OLD MAN.

SOLEDAD?

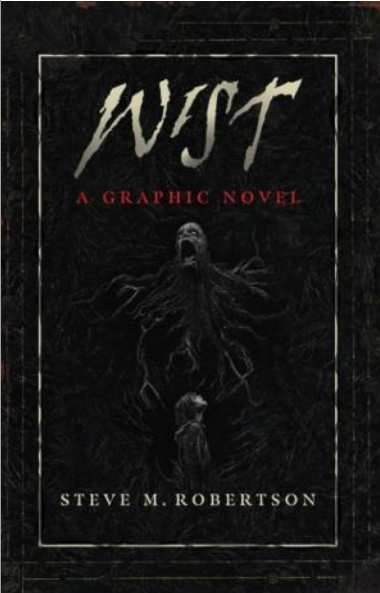


I REALLY HOPED I'D NEVER SEE YOU AGAIN, PADRINO.



# NEW HOTNESS

***This is a list of indie books I read since the last issue and have loved.***

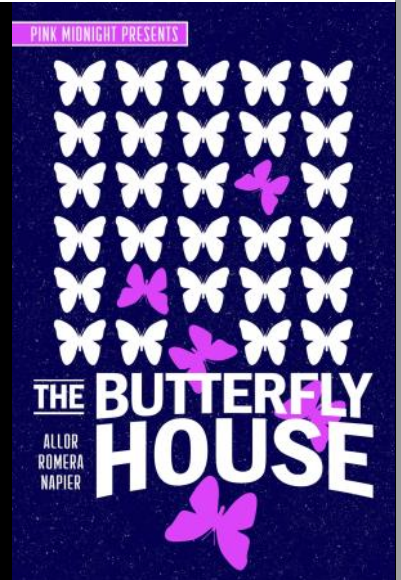


This is a weird choice, and even weirder that I'm putting it first, but I'm going to tell you what I didn't know until I opened the book—the graphics are in some part generated by AI, so do with that what you will.

That said, the story is still great. Check out the book on [Amazon!](#)

I don't know what this was, but you should read it, so that maybe you could tell me what it was.

Check out Paul's [Twitter](#) and see if you can score a copy!

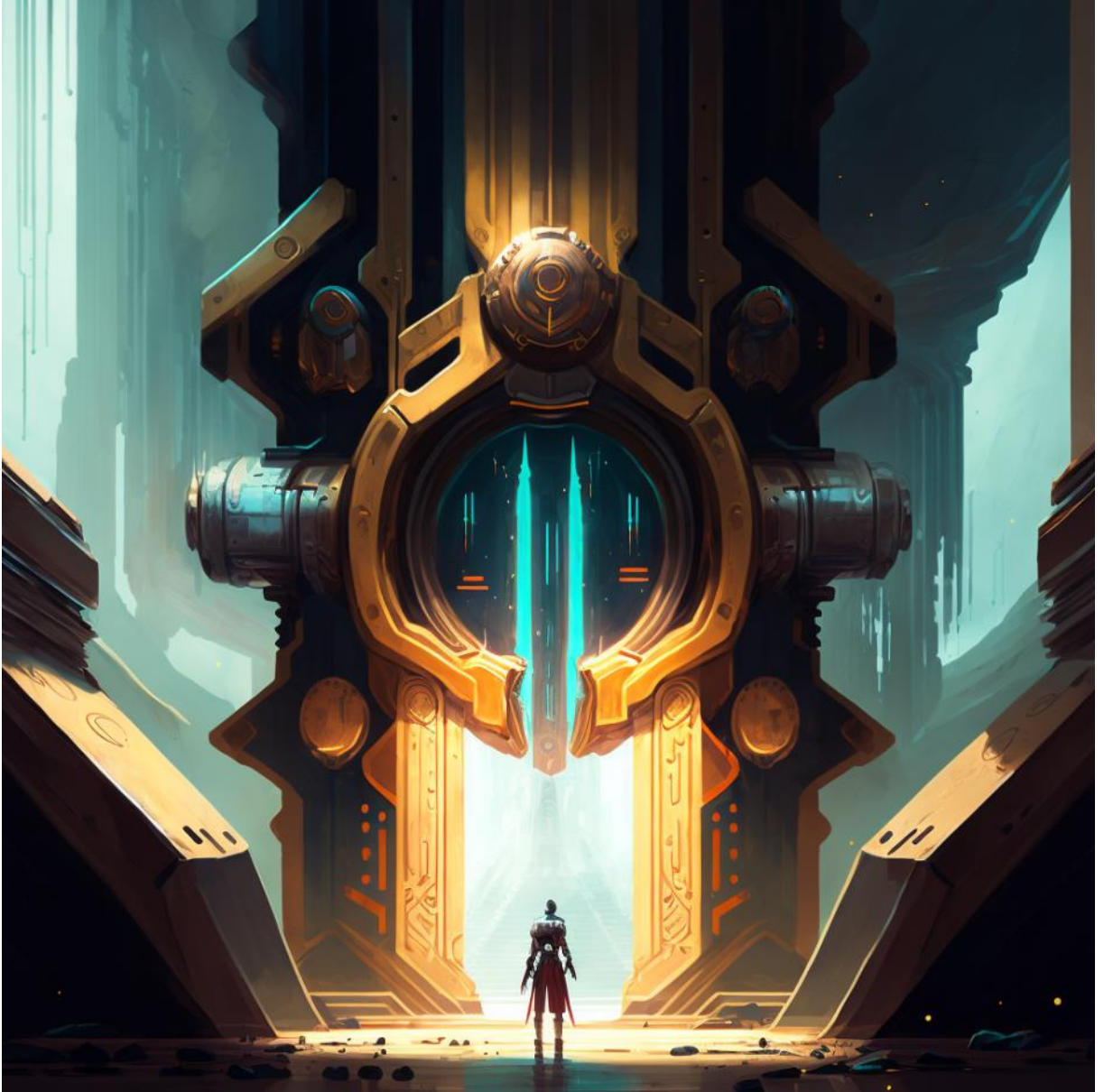


The disconnect with ministream creators doing indie work is real to me, but even though Millar is working with Netflix and has worked for Marvel and DC, Chrononauts is an indie book, and a great one at that.

Time travel shenanigans.

Get it on [Amazon](#).





# DEUS EX (THE ARMORY)

DALIBOR ZUJOVIC



"Run that back for me, Ragnarok?"

"Yup! That's a story for another day however, what you need to know is this. Once we were all in the warehouse, or Armory as I like to call it, we thought that was going to be it. We all set up camp among the many many floors and rooms that we built into the place, originally intended for storage and research, and we thought that was going to be it. Powerful and long-lived as we were, none of us wanted to die, so roughly 3000 of us ended up in the Armory. We didn't know what was going to happen next, though our most educated had some theories, and we saw days of debate, until we saw light through the windows. We'd all forgotten that the place had windows, busy as we were to get everyone in and situated before the universe collapsed."

"So the universe was re-forming?"

"It was. Or rather, they were."

"They?"

"Yup. When we saw the light sources from every direction, the brains reintroduced an old theory that floated around the brain spaces in our world - that our world was, in effect, a rough draft. All the ideas slapped into the same story that couldn't coexist, and yet they did. So after a long enough timeframe, with enough cosmic, world-ending scenarios tearing apart the fabric of reality, reality just said 'fuck it' and collapsed on itself. But energy can't be destroyed, right? So it essentially all collapsed into a single point, and after enough pressure built up, it exploded again."

"The rubber band theory. You're talking about the-"

"Yes, the "Big Bang" your scientists like to talk about occasionally. They're close, but they're still so very far away. The explosion started splintering, from as early as the explosion itself, the energies diverged into two, then three, and eventually infinite universes. Well you can bet the brains got to work cataloging them quickly. Some universes moved fast, others slow, but among them all we were still exempt from any noticeable passage of time. The brains eventually noticed that some of the weapons and charms and such in the place were attuning to different realities. After some heated debate sessions, we decided to try and get the items to the realities they seemed to belong to. So that's what we've all been doing for - well as far as you and any particular reality is concerned, forever.

"Alright so, let's say I buy this at face value. What did you bring here?"

What's weird or magical or whatever item that you brought to my world? Why the hell are you here?"

"I'm almost there, I promise." Steve takes a sip of his coffee, and stares at Samuel for a moment before nodding at him to continue. "We all got assigned different worlds and different items. Some ended up staying where they went, and just sent back their call-back devices, eventually leaving 1500 of us who were still making deliveries, and still living in the Armory. With seven thousand years worth of collectibles, it was going to take a while. We made a pact to deliver every single item, and it wasn't always a perfect delivery. Some worlds are almost identical in their place in the multiverse, so there was a lot of land - scan - go back - and try again with just a digit or two difference in address. But we did it. Well at least I did it. We all got a list, and we all committed to it."

"Hell of an achievement, I'd say."

"I'd say so too, which is why I wanted to celebrate. And I did that by choosing a world and going there to party. This world. A world that was untouched by our people - no deliveries. No magic, no gods, no fae - nothing special about the place."

"Gee, thanks." Steve realized he did take offense, he had aspirations of doing something bigger. Hearing that his world is specifically lacking in bigger - it felt like hitting a wall he didn't know was there.

"Don't get your boxers in a bunch, Steven. It didn't stay that way." Samuel takes a long drink of his coffee, allowing Steve's curiosity to grow.

"Don't 'dramatic pause' me! Get on with it."

"I came here during the mid 1400s. I landed in what had just been named



Sarajevo, and found a hole-in-the wall, partied with the locals, and took a couple ladies to bed. The next morning I jumped over to Osaka and continued my celebration. Then spent a few days in Iceland, then an insane weekend in London, then over the pond to Ozine lands, then the Aztecs, and eventually Patagonia."

"So what, you boned your way through our world? I can't hope that you used protection, can I?"

"Here's the thing-I didn't think I'd need it. None of us did. When we started exploring the myriad worlds, the youngest among us broke rules fast, and we documented zero compatibility besides the mechanical bits. No pregnancies, no illness transfer - nothing. So after centuries of deliveries and intercourse with people in hundreds of realities, I had ample evidence to support my belief that I wouldn't need protection."

"And let me guess. We're the .01% right? Every contraceptive claims 99.99%, because something always happens."

"I'm afraid so. Upon tracking down my dalliances, it turns out that literally every single pairing that week ended in a viable birth. And those people lived long, healthy, and very fruitful lives."

"So now what, we're all cousins? Me, the guy at that booth, Lucy? All cousins, huh?"

"Well yes, but I've checked - that's not a concern here. The biodiversity is strong enough that there is no concern regarding intermixing."

"So what then?"

"When I ran my projections, they went several generations ahead. You have to understand, I realized the situation moments after I came back, and the research took a few days' time. So from my perspective, all this data came to me yesterday."

"And what did it say?"

"It said that the introduction of my DNA into your world's gene pool created the ideal conditions to generate enhanced humans in 20 generations."

"So..." Steve looks up, doing the math in his head. "About now."

"About now."

"Fuck me dead." Steve sinks into a slump.

"If it'll get your mood up, I just might, mister." Lucy says the words with a smile, but stops in place, her face turning to shock when she realizes they were said aloud.

"Ha Ha!" Steven laughs loudly as Lucy's cheeks turn bright red and Steve stares at her in disbelief.

"I'm gonna..." Lucy's words trail off as she walks away shyly.

"Steven, she is adorable. You two ought to get together."

"Are you saying that we should because we already do?"

"I'm not Nostradamus, dummy. I'm just saying you two clearly like one another. Don't be stupid."

"So we can make a superhero?"

"No, Steven. So you can teach them."

TO BE CONCLUDED



# TIPS 'N' TRICKS

Hamza:

I think the most important thing I would tell an aspiring creator is to study storytelling. What I mean by that is study panel layouts, shot choice, composition, and framing. Some masters are Will Eisner and Wally Wood.

Study perspective! It's not as hard as you think and once you get it, your work will hit that next level you're looking for. And finally, f\*\*\*\*\* draw! Draw everyday! When you want to draw, draw! And when you don't, draw some more!

Shawn:

Talk to your audience as the only individual in the world, make them feel valued and a part of something. Post frequently, watch the analytics, and drop what doesn't work. Lastly, don't focus on the product you want to sell. Rather, focus on the value you bring to the viewer.

John

1. Be a fan of your own work, other people will try and out it down so you need to stand up for it.
2. Write and read everyday. Even if it's only for a few minutes.
3. Surround yourself with people that inspire you, don't let negativity in.

For the digital book we are releasing a new title on Monday called starved rock I can send you the digital edition.



# INDIE NEWS

## Unlikely Split!

### Creators and Titles Exit Unlikely Heroes Studios

Unlikely Heroes Studios has been pumping out some gems in the past few years that I've known of them - and even longer than that before they came to my attention. Many folks know Super!, Elsewhere, and The Surgeon. More recently, Catalyst alum and writer extraordinaire Russell Nohelty's Cthulhu is Hard To Spell was getting a fresh release under the UHS banner!

Well, in a shocking bit of news at the end of August, Laurie Foster - previously billed on the UHS site as the owner of UHS - announced her resignation from the company, citing "*recent personal issues and complications.*" Now folks, as much as I credit my inspiration for this magazine to Wizard, this is absolutely not Wizard, and we will be doing a total zero assumptions or wild opining about what those complications and personal issues may be. Let's just talk about the facts.



Photo from Laguna Studios Kickstarter. Crudely Edited to include Laguna logo by Dalibor Zujovic

Laurie is building out her new imprint Laguna Studios, and is bringing over basically the entire UHS catalog with her! In the newsletter sent Aug 31, she wrote "*Many of UHS' well known and loved series will be moving with me and Sarah, so you can expect more upcoming content from Warp Hustler, Miss Medusa, Unthinkables, The Surgeon, The Sundering, Russell Nohelty, and more!*" To the eagle-eyed, that's Sarah White, who has been handling Graphic Design and Marketing for UHS, and will be doing the same for Laguna going forward.

Their website is live and I have to point out the one thing that stuck out at me—the Fulfillment tab! Laurie and Sarah are providing fulfillment services. I know that can be one of the more challenging aspects of indie comic publication, so I imagine that's going to come in handy for many creators.

In addition to those titles, Laurie specifically mentioned that there are forthcoming NSFW titles coming as well. While I am personally not a massive fan of that category of books, there's no debating that these books make money and that there is a huge audience for them. Since the first draft of this article, Laguna ran a campaign for [Hearteater #1](#) that funded in less than 24 hours and SMASHED its \$6000 goal to collect over \$20000! Like I said, the genre sells.



**UNLIKELY HEROES**  
**STUDIOS**

Where does this leave Unlikely Heroes? Well it's hard to tell, honestly. I took note that Super! Was not on the list of titles, so it's likely that it stays with them, but this does without question decimate their library. The UHS store is down at the moment, presumably to remove the titles they no longer will be handling.

I do want to note that I received another newsletter marked with the same "You are receiving this email because you signed up for a newsletter or backed a crowdfunding project by Unlikely Heroes Studios, LLC." note at the top. This one opened with the following statement:

"Speaking as the owners of Unlikely Heroes Studios, please join us in welcoming



two new comix ventures into the fold: **Factor Comix** and **Laguna Studios!**"

I'll be honest this did confuse me, since Laurie confirmed via DM to the Laguna Comics Kickstarter profile that she was parting ways with UHS. When I reached out through the Kickstarter DM for clarification, Sarah replied with a decisive "*Laguna Studios is not affiliated with Factor Comix or UHS.*" So that clears that up at least.

I don't know about you dear reader, but I'm excited to see where this goes, and how everything shakes out.



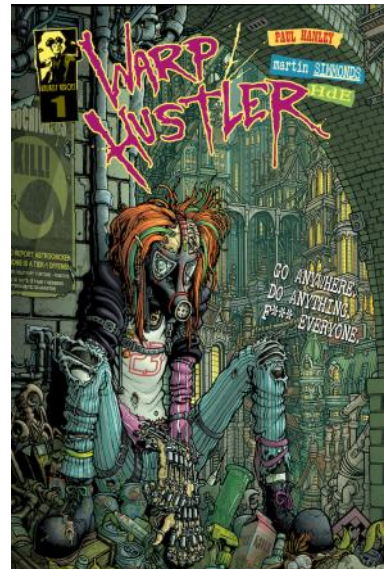
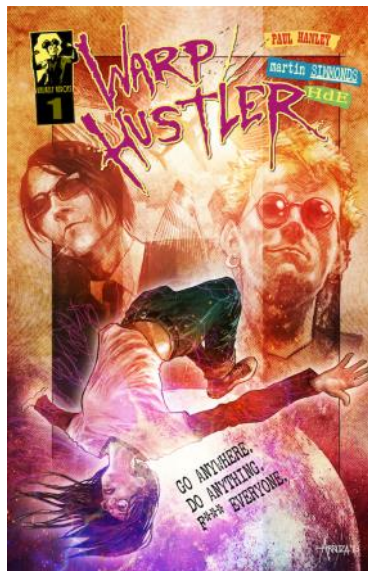
To follow along for updates and news, check out Laguna Studios across the internet:

<https://www.kickstarter.com/profile/lagunastudios>

<https://www.facebook.com/lagunastudioscomics>

<https://www.instagram.com/lagunastudioscomics/>

[Since they'll likely be printed and downloaded with Laguna banners, I included the latest campaign's covers with UHS branding for archival purposes, so that KS is not the only place they'll exist. Side note, who knew that the UHS logo was just a drawing of a photo of Laurie? That's awesome.]





# EDITORIAL

## One Thousand True Fans

This is inspired by a creator I will leave unnamed because of his unappealing approach of essentially putting down indie creators if they don't make and sell comics in the way he thinks is best - and not only best, correct. I've tried multiple times to reason with him and then encourage him to come at it from a more understanding place and a more open-minded perspective but he kept just digging his own grave as it were so I had to block him across. Among his many false and misguided assertions, one thing he was not wrong about is that we need to build our fan bases. His approach however is incredibly flawed, so I'd like to share my thoughts on the subject of building fan bases.

Every time a campaign goes up I see people scramble to try to get a hundred pre-saves. If they get it, they celebrate the 100 people, as if it were some sort of metric that guarantees a successful campaign. But if 100 people pledge \$1, you've accomplished nothing. It seems like someone arbitrarily came up with this at some point, or maybe it did work for a long time. Today though, I think we are setting the bar incredibly incredibly low with a hundred. I think every single creator that is producing a product to sell to consumers needs to push for a thousand.

A lot of different business gurus and marketing experts call it The Thousand True Fans (or some variation of the same) and I think in the space of storytelling and comic books especially we should be building that thousand. Obviously be grateful for whatever audience you have. If one hundred people is all you get, but that hundred gets you across the finish line and you put your work out and they are true fans, and every single time you're making the money you need to make the work for that hundred - congratulations! You're succeeding at making stuff.

However, if we are to grow, and go full time creator with a reasonable income, we need to be shooting for more. I see a lot of creators shooting for that hundred and then when the final tally is not double or triple or whatever goal they set on the campaign, they get upset or they get salty. I've seen that multiple times with multiple creators, yet I've seen no change in behavior. I think the biggest point of failure is marketing.

There is a lot of media that could be produced about your product and distributed across the many socials to lead people to your campaign. I know this is where it gets very difficult because you're already doing the thing now to have to do other things on top of that is a bit obscene but as it is, content needs to be made and you need eyeballs to be on you so that people can be told about your products. Most indie creators do not have the financial backing to set a marketing person/company to that task, so it ends up on us to do the extra work. I am The Indie Hype Man, and I do my part for the people I know and the campaigns I find, but I'm not the target audience for everything, so I'm definitely missing a ton of campaigns that could hit their goals if they sought out their audience.

Look at it this way; if MCU movies didn't happen it is very possible and I would say even likely that Marvel Comics may be in a much more dire situation than they had been prior to the MCU blowing up. Content in this case specifically relating back to the product increase sales new fans were introduced to the property because of this content that they created. Of course that is heavily produced story content that has generated its own separate fan base that often doesn't even cross over, so it's not quite a one-to-one comparison. Obviously Disney is a much larger



machine than most of us are working with but the point remains you need to get eyeballs on you and or your product.

Here are some ideas for content directly about your work, all can be done as any one or combination of twitter/ig/threads/fb/tiktok posts and or animations:

- Character profiles - tell me about your hero/organization/creature/etc
- Lore - if you're if your story is set in the year 2500 you could give a series of videos about how we got from point A to point B and then on to the year 2500 and the situation that your book or story, your comic or whatever starts.
- variant cover teases and reveals, give us a faded/grayed out version a-la New Avengers #1 - make us guess who the people/creatures/places on the cover are
- stretch goal teases and reveals - same as above, if it's a challenge coin, get a real detail close-up that will make people wonder, then as you get to or at least closer to that goal, drop the reveal
- team profiles - maybe your artist has worked on a widely popular book, or maybe your colorist is a Marvel alum, you never know what will bring people in
- process - never ever underestimate the power of process to drive interest. Look at someone like Fish Lee who shared his process for Kaaw the Crowmagnon for weeks before the campaign launched - 164% funded.

Basically any part of your book or campaign that you can share to platforms, do. There is no such thing as too much - not everyone will see every post. Different aspects of what you're sharing will be served to different audiences. People might get your process post but not the lore post, for instance, but both people could be brought in and could potentially become part of that thousand true fans - each for different reasons.

Regardless of what the talking points on angry broke Twitter are, comic books are in the best place they've ever been. More children are growing up with comic books in hand than ever before in history, and it's easier to reach those same kids on social media as they grow up. We as creators just need to find a way to bridge that gap from Cat Kid Comics Club and Diary of a Wimpy Kid, both of which out-sold HARRY POTTER in 2022, and the work we're making - if appropriate. Obviously a lot of us make more late-teen to outright adult-themed titles, but what's stopping us from making books to bridge the gap? You're not gonna tell me everyone in your universe is always murdering violently and having wild freaky sex, are you? I mean if they are, then maybe you need to focus on a different market. For the rest of us, it's possible to take a side character, or a prequel story, and make it for that in-between market of readers that could potentially lead them to be life-long fans. A lot of us fell in love with certain characters by way of kid-friendly cartoons, which brought us to more teen-rated cics, which has then evolved into life-long fandoms. We need to foster that transition. Obviously we can't all put out a cartoon on Kids WB (even if it still existed) but we can make work that will appeal to a younger audience, and get the younger teens and kids engaged with our work, so that as they grow they have the opportunity to become lifelong fans. If you're good. Just look at TJ at RAE Comics. Joystick Angels is a perfect example of that in-between space. It's not a kids book, but it's not specifically for grownups. It will serve as a perfect entry point for a lot of kids and young teens who may well grow to read Okemus, Shattered Visions, and whatever else TJ manifests out into the universe.

I'm a chronic influencer with my friend's children and I bring them indie comic books that I think they would like because I want kids to go into reading more comic books, so I bring them stuff that is like the things they already like. My niece loves anime so I brought her Bloom: Heist on the Magical Girl's Vault, from the homies over at Unshaven Comics who are in fact a great example of making content to promote your brand they regularly post on Facebook on Instagram just conversation starters things that will get people to interact sometimes they're hot button topics other times they're not they're usually related to comic books but they always have their website address on the graphic.



If you're looking for an example on what kind of content to make I would direct you to the short form content of one Vactor - The Vectorverse on TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. He does incredible short form content where he talks about a single character it's entirely screenshots and snippets from animation/film, so he's not on camera at all. So if you're somebody who doesn't want to be on camera you can just take shots from your comic or you can have artwork drawing or you can have related artwork whatever you want as you talk about the thing. There's captions and changing graphics that keep the viewer engaged, everything you need for social success in today's market.

The point is that is a great example of the kind of content that I think any creators need to be making to get people engaged because if you see a 15-second breakdown of who Justice from Wingless Comics is, that will get you as a reader if it's up your alley or it's tangential it's going to get you interested. That is how we expand this search for a hundred pre-saves to that search for a thousand true fans that will pre-save because they're tuned in to what you're doing.

Go make some content already!

-Dalibor

# CREATOR INDEX

The whole point here is to get you the reader to interact with, consume, and ideally spend money with the creators I've spotlighted in this magazine. Below you will find a list of everybody's websites and social media tags. Go buy something you bums!

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