

VERTIGO #1

# MADAME XANADU™

MATT WAGNER AMY REEDER HADLEY



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suggested for mature readers



# CHAPTER THE FIRST

## BY THE RUNES

**S**EEING IS SACRED.

TO MY QUESTING EYES,  
PATTERNS EMERGE.

TO MY PATIENT MIND,  
PATHWAYS STAND REVEALED.

HIGH ABOVE, CHASTE  
**ARIANRHOD** GLISTENS  
WITHIN HER SHINY BOWER.

HER PALE, SLENDER FINGERS  
COMB THE RUSTLING LEAVES  
WITH A LOVER'S TENDER GRACE.

TOUCH MY EYES, HALLOWED  
MOON-MOTHER.

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SO THAT I  
MIGHT SEE.

...ALAS, THIS  
NIGHT...



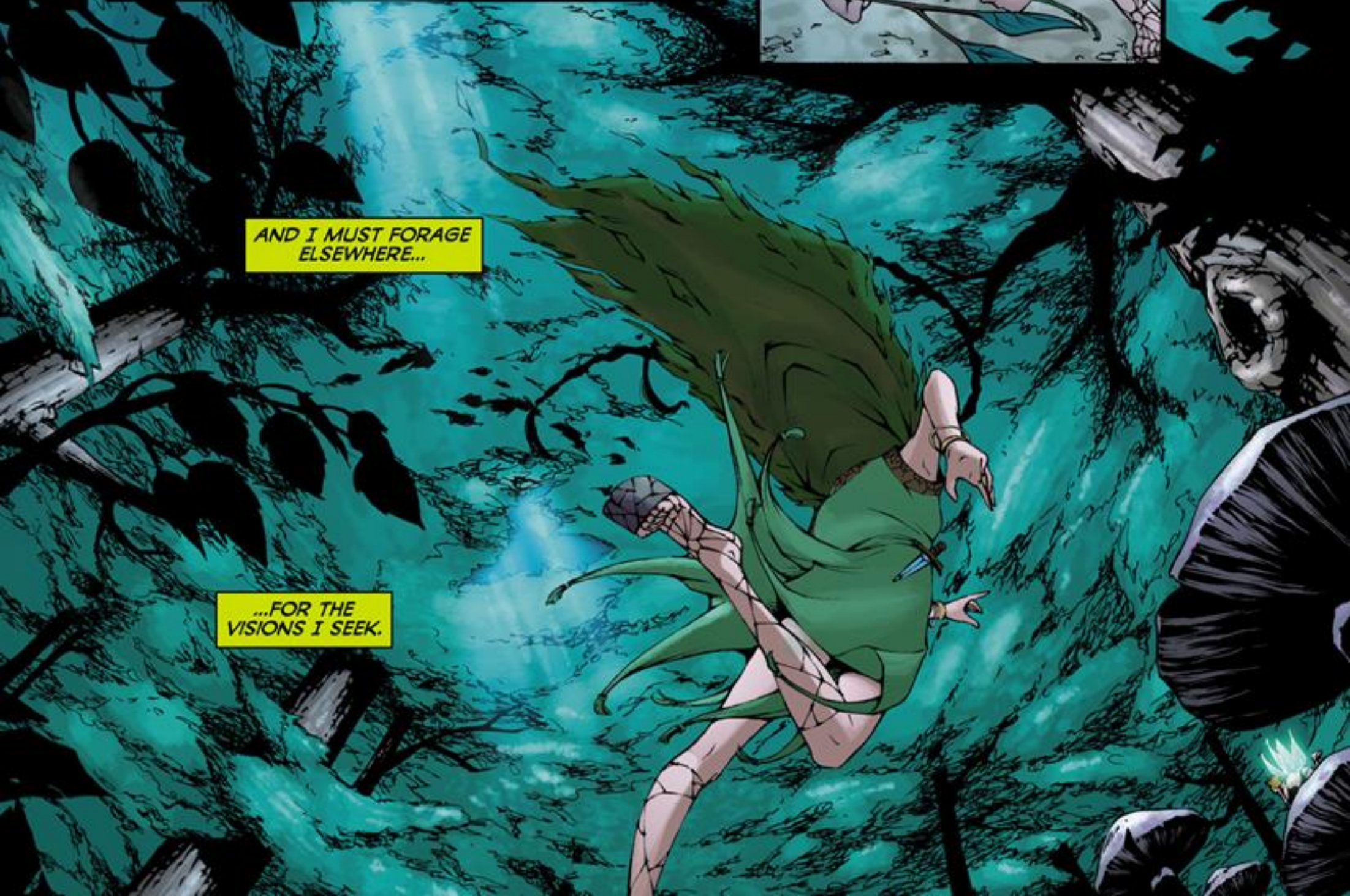
THE LUNAR QUEEN  
GUARDS HER  
SILVERY SECRETS.

THE LEAVES RETAIN  
THEIR ANCIENT CHAOS.



AND I MUST FORAGE  
ELSEWHERE...

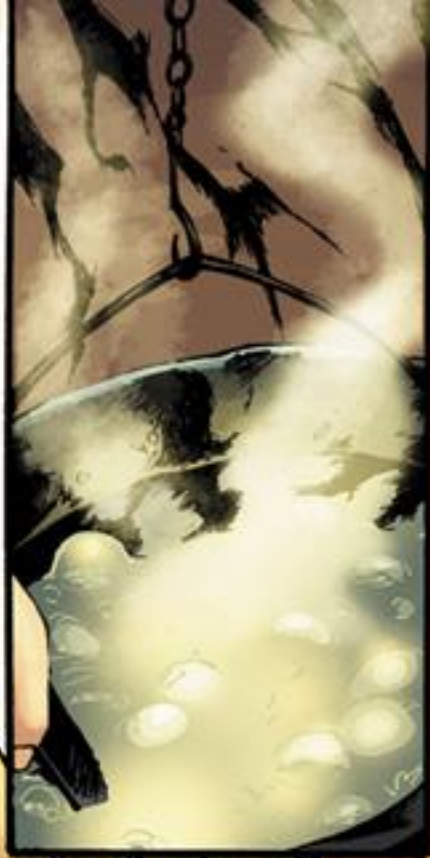
...FOR THE  
VISIONS I SEEK.











nimue  
back?

nimue  
make!

nimue  
see!

**T**HERE IS PATTERN  
IN EVERYTHING.

EVEN THE HUMBLEST SPECK OF DUST  
WAS ONCE A MIGHTY MOUNTAIN.

SEEING UNLOCKS  
THE PATTERNS.

AND THE TOOLS OF  
SEEING ARE MANY.

nimue  
make!

nimue  
seek!

nimue!

nimue  
find!

**CHOK CHOK**

OF NUDED ELM, THE  
TILES TAKE SHAPE.

OF SNAKE BLOOD, MOTH  
WINGS AND BOAR PISS,  
THE INK IS DISTILLED.

THE ELDER RUNES.

nimue  
spell!

nimue  
cast!

FEHU!  
URUZ!  
THURISAZ!  
ANSUZ!

OLD AS THE TREES AND  
THE WIND AND THE EARTH.

SA! JERA!  
EIHWAZ!  
PERTHRO!





THE CASTING OF RUNES IS NEVER TO BE UNDERTAKEN LIGHTLY.

ONCE SUMMONED, THEIR REVELATIONS CANNOT BE UNMADE.

nimue cast!

nimue seek!

nimue see!

KIAKA KIAKA KIAK!



nimue see!

A CAUTION I HAVE NEVER FEARED.

THE RUNES HAVE BEEN CAST.



MANNAZ... OTHALA... LAGUZ...

nimue read!



nimue find!

INGWAZ... TIWAZ.

FOR I AM COMPELLED TO SEE.



nimue find!

nimue hear!

nimue go!

EVEN WHEN THE WARNINGS ARE BLEAK AND THE OUTCOME DIRE.

TROUBLE LIES AHEAD.

BUT, FOR NOW... VISITORS NEAR.





NIMUE,  
MISTRESS  
OF THE  
SACRED  
GROVE!

SCRYER  
AND SEEKER,  
HEAR OUR  
APPEAL!

DRUIDS  
ALL, WE COME  
SEEKING YOUR  
WISDOM AND  
GUIDANCE!



HEED US,  
OH, SYLVAN  
NYMPH!

THE  
ELMWOOD  
COUNCIL ARE  
ALWAYS WELCOME  
IN THIS FOREST,  
BROTHER  
CATHBAD.



ENTER FREELY  
AND WALK WITH-  
OUT FEAR.



AS WELCOME, I  
SUMMON *LIGHT* TO  
EASE YOUR PASSING  
AND SOFTEN  
YOUR PATH.

WILL-O-  
WISPS!  
SPRITE  
FIRES!

THE  
LEAST  
I CAN  
DO...

...FOR  
THOSE WHO  
WORSHIP AND  
SAFEGUARD  
THESE  
WOODS.



NOW,  
THEN...  
HOW MAY  
I SERVE  
YOU?



A STAR  
READING?

TRACING  
MOONSHADOWS,  
PERHAPS?





IN TRUTH, MISTRESS, WE  
SEEK YOUR INFLUENCE  
MORE THAN YOUR  
FORESIGHT.

THE KING, ONCE  
SO GLORIOUS, HAS LOST  
ALL VIGOR AND HIS REALM  
THUS TEETERS ON *DISASTER*.  
BRUTISH FORCES NOW  
HOLD SWAY IN THE LAND.



I'M  
AFRAID...WE...  
COUNT YOUR  
*SISTER*  
AMONG  
THOSE.

MY...  
SISTER--?!



WE *KNOW*  
YOU ARE LOYAL  
TO THIS LAND,  
FAIR SYLPH! YOUR  
SISTER HAS *ALWAYS*  
HUNGRED FOR  
POWER IN WAYS  
UNKNOWN  
TO YOU!

WE *BEG*  
YOU...



...USE WHATEVER SWAY  
YOU HOLD WITH THE KING'S  
*WIZARD*! HIS POWER  
IS IMMENSE; HIS  
MANIPULATIONS, VAST!

HELP US AVOID  
THE COMING  
CALAMITIES!

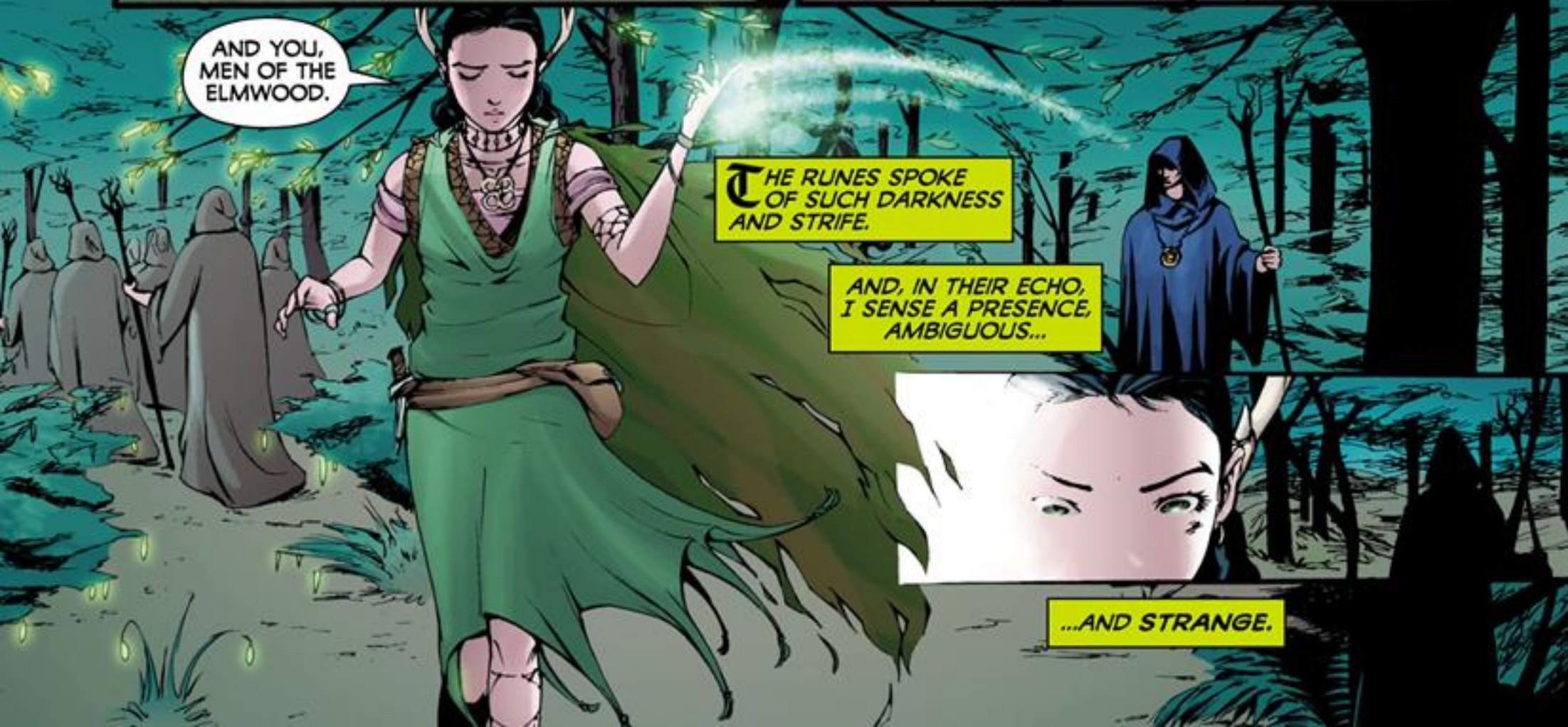


I...I WILL *TRY*,  
CATHBAD. YET, BE  
WARNED, THE WIZARD  
MOST OFTEN DOES  
AS *HE* SEES FIT.

EVEN *I* CAN'T  
GUARANTEE HIS  
ACTIONS. NOR HIS  
INTENTIONS.

BUT, AGAIN...  
I WILL DO  
MY BEST.

BLESSED  
ARE YOU,  
FOREST  
MAIDEN.



AND YOU,  
MEN OF THE  
ELMWOOD.

**T**HE RUNES SPOKE  
OF SUCH DARKNESS  
AND STRIFE.

AND, IN THEIR ECHO,  
I SENSE A PRESENCE,  
AMBIGUOUS...

...AND STRANGE.



SUCH  
PLEAS ARE  
USELESS. LIKE DRY  
LEAVES BEFORE  
A TEMPEST  
WIND.

**NIMUE INWUDU,**  
YOU MUST FOLLOW  
THE PATH YOU HAVE  
FORESEEN. YOU **KNOW**  
THE DESTINY OF WHAT  
IS TO COME!

WHO--  
WHO ARE  
YOU?!

I KNOW **ALL**  
OF THE ELMWOOD  
COUNCIL BUT HAVE  
NEVER SEEN YOUR FACE,  
NOR DO I RECALL  
THE SOUND OF  
YOUR VOICE.

YOU...  
DON'T--?

NO, OF COURSE...  
OF COURSE YOU DON'T.  
**THAT** WAS A DIFFERENT  
TIME...AND PLACE. HERE...  
AND NOW...EVEN TO  
**YOU**, I AM BUT...

...A  
**STRANGER.**

**HE** SPEAKS AS IF  
HE KNOWS ME.

**STAY  
BACK!**

I WARN YOU!  
CROSSING THIS  
BARRIER WILL  
SUMMON PAIN AND  
MISFORTUNE!

KEEP YOUR  
DISTANCE  
OR SUFFER  
CALAMITY!

HIS VOICE HOLDS AN  
AGELESS TIMBRE--OLDER  
THAN MY PEOPLE, OLD  
AS THE EARTH ITSELF.

NOTHING  
CAN CHANGE  
WHAT SHALL  
COME TO  
PASS.





DESTINY  
HAS DECLARED  
IT SO.

SLSLSL



AGAIN,  
I SAY,  
"BACK!"

NO  
CLOSER  
OR I'LL--

HE IGNORES MY WARDINGS AS  
IF CROSSING A RAIN PUDDLE.

THE  
KINGDOM'S RUIN  
IS ASSURED. ITS DAYS  
ARE NUMBERED, AS  
ARE *ALL* THINGS OF  
THIS WORLD.

AND TRANSMORPHS  
COLD STEEL INTO  
LIVING FLESH...

...WITH BUT A WAVE  
OF HIS HAND.

WHAT HAS  
BEEN WILL SOON  
PASS AND WHAT  
SHALL BE WILL  
THEN ARISE IN  
ITS PLACE.



I...  
I--



WHO *ARE*  
YOU?!

I HAVE NO  
NAME OF THIS  
EARTH. AS I SAID,  
I AM BUT A  
*STRANGER*.

HEED MY  
WORDS, NIMUE.  
YOU *KNOW*  
THEM TO BE  
TRUE.





**D**ESPITE THE  
STRANGER'S  
WARNINGS...

VIVIENNE,  
SISTER...MISTRESS  
OF THE MISTY LAKE!  
HEAR THE ENTREATY  
OF NIMUE, YOUR  
KIN!

I HAVE NEED  
TO TRAVEL YOUR  
WATERS THIS EVENING,  
FAIR SIBLING! I WOULD  
SPEAK WITH OUR  
*MIDDLE* SISTER.

I BRING YOU  
THE GIFT OF EARTH  
SEEDLINGS. ONE FOR  
EVERY DIRECTION  
OF THE WINDS...

...AND  
ONE FOR THE  
SILENT STAR  
THAT ANCHORS  
THE HEAVENS  
ABOVE.

PLIP

PLOP

...I HAVE PROMISED  
TO HONOR THE  
COUNCIL'S REQUEST.

MY ELDEST SISTER  
HAS ALWAYS  
FAVORED ME.





A SENTIMENT NOT EXACTLY SHARED BY OUR NEXT-IN-LINE.

IT HAS BEEN MANY YEARS SINCE I LAST VISITED HER DANK AND LONELY ISLE.

I PRAY SHE WILL WELCOME ME AS READILY AS THE LAKE-LADY.



WE ARE SISTERS, AFTER ALL.

A VISITOR!

FOR CHASING!

FOR SCARING!

I HAVE NEITHER TIME NOR PATIENCE FOR GOBLIN GAMES.

HER CASTLE, TALLER THAN LAST I SAW IT. COLD, BLACK STONE.



FOR BITING!

PÚCA GÁSTCWALU!



SPITT--!

CHOKES!

GGACK!

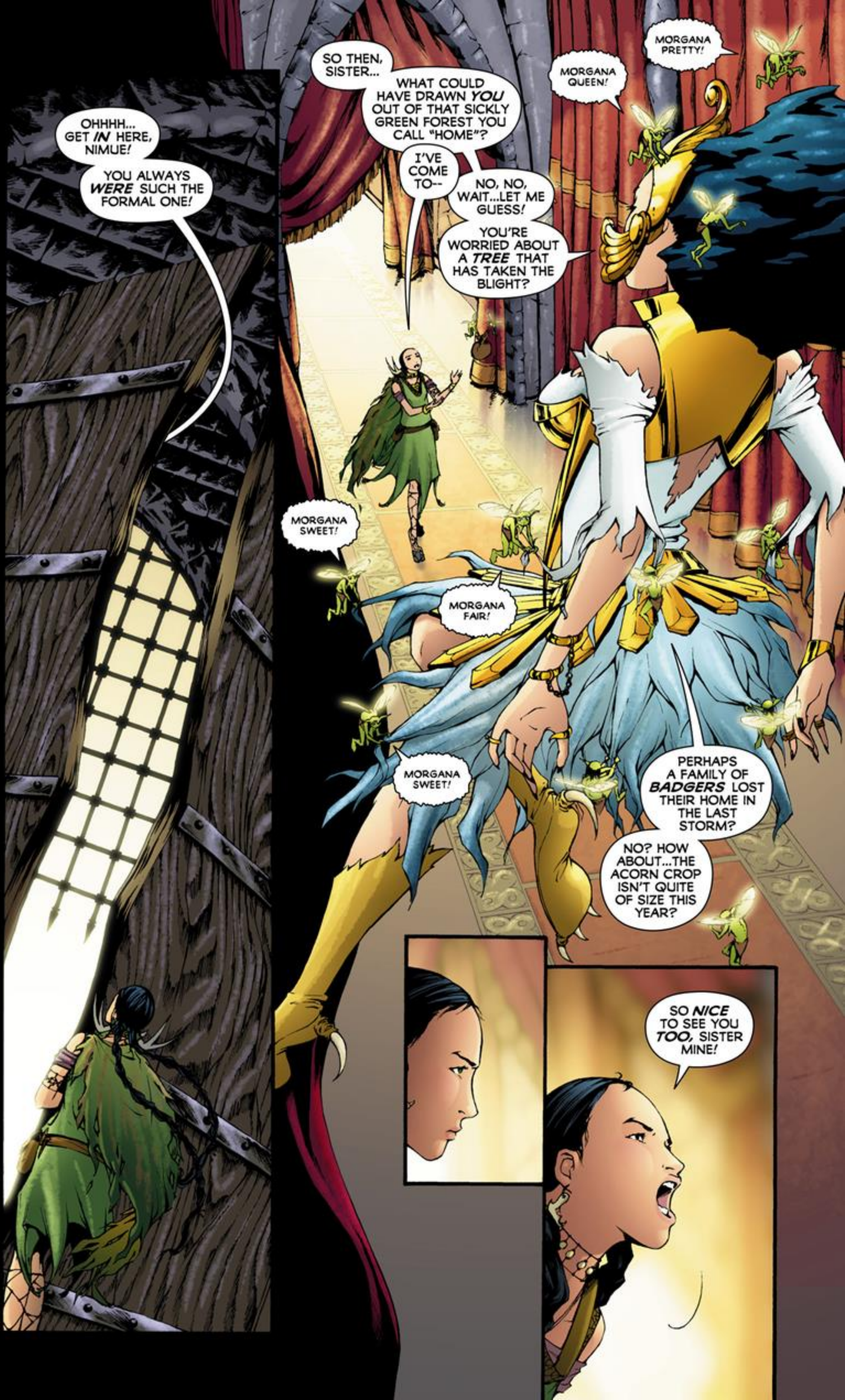
MORGANA, SISTER!

LOWER YOUR WEIRD DEFENSES SO THAT I MAY ENTER AND GREET YOU UNHARMED! I HAVE MUCH TO DISCUSS WITH YOU, MY KINDRED.

I BRING THE GIFTS OF MUD BALM AND SNAKE OIL FOR YOUR DELIGHT.







OHHHH...  
GET *IN* HERE,  
NIMUE!

YOU ALWAYS  
*WERE* SUCH THE  
FORMAL ONE!

SO THEN,  
SISTER...

WHAT COULD  
HAVE DRAWN *YOU*  
OUT OF THAT SICKLY  
GREEN FOREST YOU  
CALL "HOME"?

I'VE  
COME  
TO--

NO, NO,  
WAIT...LET ME  
GUESS!

YOU'RE  
WORRIED ABOUT  
A *TREE* THAT  
HAS TAKEN THE  
BLIGHT?

MORGANA  
QUEEN!

MORGANA  
PRETTY!

MORGANA  
SWEET!

MORGANA  
FAIR!

MORGANA  
SWEET!

PERHAPS  
A FAMILY OF  
*BADGERS* LOST  
THEIR HOME IN  
THE LAST  
STORM?

NO? HOW  
ABOUT...THE  
ACORN CROP  
ISN'T QUITE  
OF SIZE THIS  
YEAR?

SO *NICE*  
TO SEE YOU  
*TOO*, SISTER  
MINE!









STILL...  
YOU'VE GOT  
THAT FOOLISH OLD  
NECROMANCER  
SO UTTERLY  
**BESOTTED...**

MORGANA  
PRETTY!

I'D BE  
SURPRISED IF  
HE DIDN'T TRY TO  
INSTALL **YOU** AS  
THE NEXT RULER OF  
HIS PRECIOUS  
MONARCHY.

SWEET!

MORGANA  
QUEEN!

MORGANA  
SWEET!

**AFTER** MY  
DARLING BOY  
TAKES HIS CURRENT  
PROTÉGÉ'S HEAD  
ON THE TIP OF A  
LANCE, THAT IS.

SISTER, YOUR  
TONGUE IS SHARP  
AS A NEEDLE AND  
YOUR HEART...YOUR  
HEART IS A COLD  
AND EMPTY  
VESSEL.

AT LAST, I  
SEE...I BARELY  
KNOW YOU.

**T**HE ELMWOOD COUNCIL  
WERE RIGHT. MORGANA'S  
SCHEMINGS STAND TO UNSEAT  
THE KINGDOM'S LINEAGE.

HER BITTER GOALS WILL  
DISRUPT A PEACE THAT  
HAS LASTED FOR DECADES...  
ALL TO SATISFY HER OWN  
PETTY RESENTMENTS.



FAREWELL!



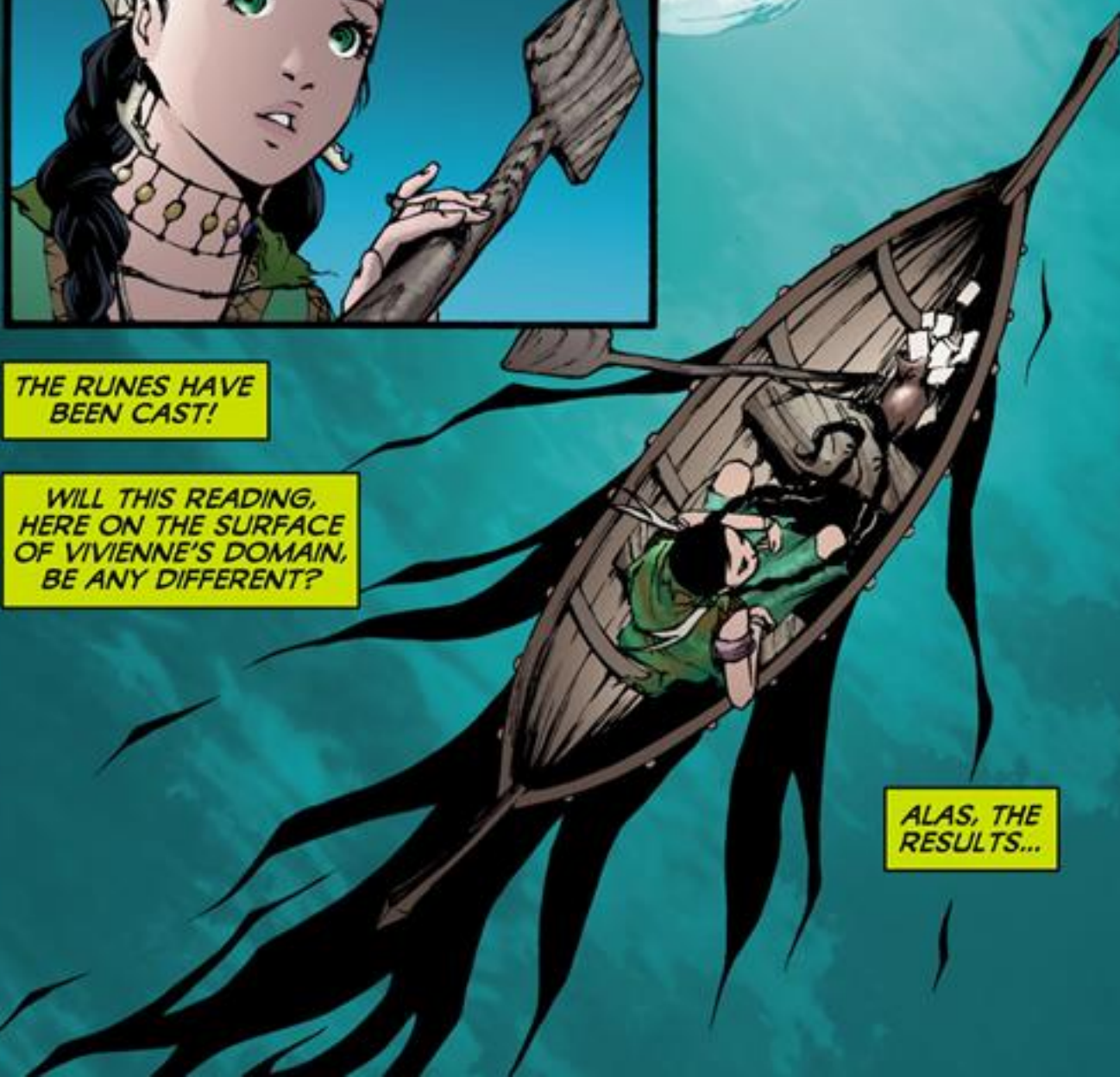
**THUNK**

**KLAKA  
KLAK!**



THE RUNES HAVE  
BEEN CAST!

WILL THIS READING,  
HERE ON THE SURFACE  
OF VIVIENNE'S DOMAIN,  
BE ANY DIFFERENT?



ALAS, THE  
RESULTS...



...REMAIN  
STUBBORNLY  
THE SAME.

THE KING'S CASTLE,  
ONCE THE PRIDE OF  
THE ENTIRE REALM.

LATELY, I MUST ADMIT...  
IT SEEMS A BIT SHABBY  
AROUND THE SEAMS.

HALT!  
WHO GOES  
THERE?

OOOOOH--  
AND I DON'T  
NEED ANY  
TROUBLE...

I SAID,  
WHO GOES  
TH--?!

...FROM  
THE LIKES  
OF YOU!


BUT I--I  
THOUGHT...  
I WAS *SURE*  
I SAW...

BEST  
LAY OFF  
THE MEAD,  
CEDRIC!

I AM ALWAYS WELCOME  
IN THE CHAMBERS  
I SEEK THIS NIGHT.

AND BY HE WHO  
OCCUPIES THEM...





THE WIZARD AND I  
HAVE LAIN TOGETHER  
EXACTLY SEVEN TIMES.

HIS POWERS ARE, INDEED,  
MORE THAN ANY MORTAL  
MAGISTER. SOME CLAIM  
HIM HALF-INFERNAL.

BUT I HOLD HIM IN A  
SWAY THAT IS DEEPER  
THAN THE MOST  
ANCIENT MAGICS.

INSERVIO  
DEMONICUS!

MAGI  
NUTUS!

SPIRITUS  
ARCUS!

AUDITUS!  
PARITUS!

AUDITUS!  
PARITUS!

A  
POWERFUL  
BINDING.  
INDEED!

HE LONGS FOR OUR NEXT  
INTIMACY, BUT SEVEN  
TIMES GRANTS ME AN  
EDGE OF ENCHANTMENT.

WHO  
DAREST?  
WHA--?!  
OH!

MY DARLING!  
WHAT A  
SURPRISE! SUCH  
A DELIGHT!

WELCOME,  
DEAR  
NYMPH!





AS ALWAYS, YOU WEAVE THE MOST POWERFUL MAGIC, MY HANDSOME SORCERER.

WHAT MENACE DO YOU SEEK TO CONTAIN?

OH, IT IS... IT IS NOTHING. A MINOR SPIRIT TO SERVE AT MY WHIM.

BUT, COME... LET ME GAZE UPON YOU. OHH... THE DEPTHS OF YOUR BEAUTY!

SIT WITH ME.

IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE THAT YOU ARE ONE OF *THE ELDER FOLK*.

WHY, YOUR SKIN IS AS SMOOTH AS THE FINEST CREAM!



YOU DON'T APPEAR A DAY OVER SIXTEEN YET I KNOW YOU ARE TEN TIMES THAT AND MORE!

A FRAIL TALENT COMPARED TO YOUR POWERS, OH MAGE!



YOU ARE BLESSED WITH *THE SIGHT!* TO KNOW THE FUTURE...

'TIS, AT BEST, AN UNCERTAIN GIFT. THE VISIONS ARE VAGUE... DIFFICULT TO COMPREHEND.

COME NOW...



...WON'T YOU SHARE YOUR ANTI-AGING SECRETS WITH ME?

AHHH, BUT MY LORD...THE CHARMS OF RETAINING YOUTH BEAR A DISTINCTLY *FEMININE* AURA.



AS YOU CAN PLAINLY *SEE*, YES?

OH, YES! OH MY, YESSSS!



OH, MY DEAR...

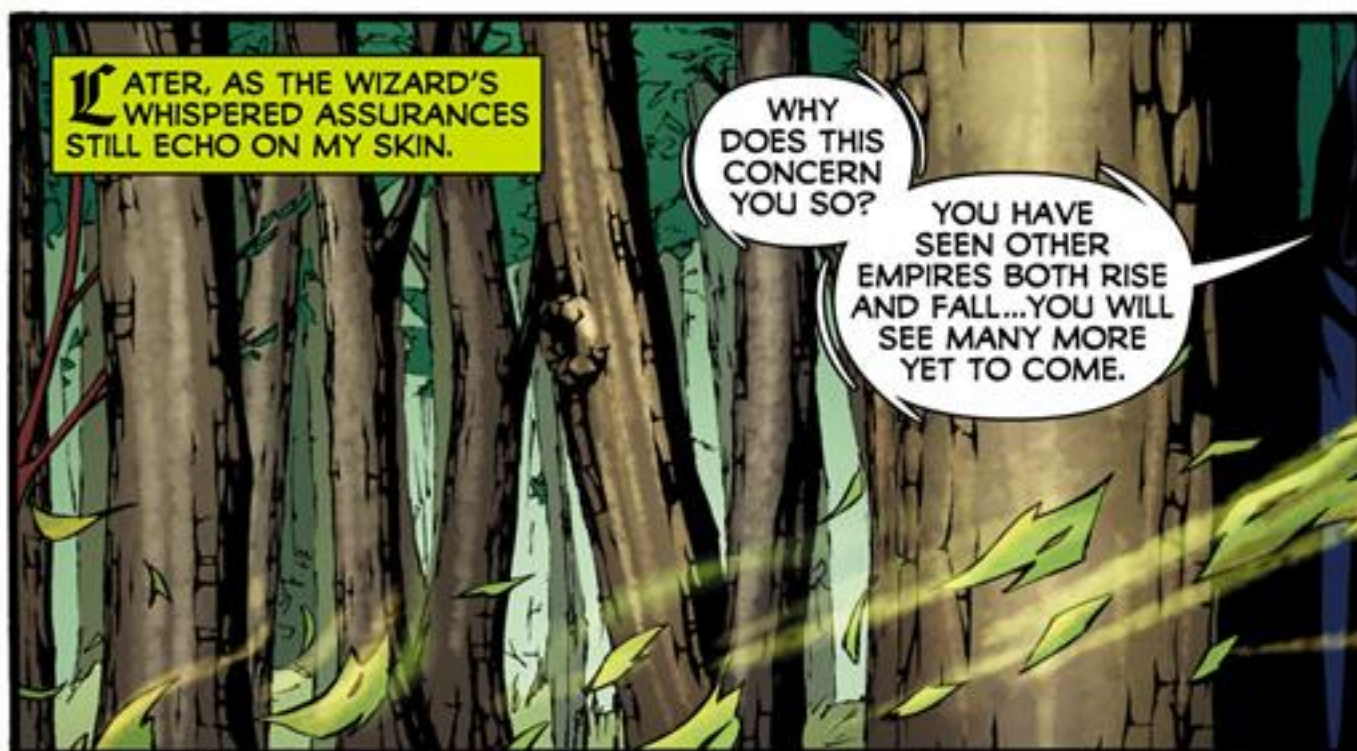
**A**S HIS LIPS GLIDE OVER MY FLESH, I WONDER IF EVEN HIS INFLUENCE CAN STAVE OFF THE INEVITABLE.



INSIDE HIS KEEPSAFE, SOME REEKING PRESENCE SCRATCHES AND GROWLS.

STRUGGLES TO BURST FREE.





WHY DOES THIS CONCERN YOU SO?

YOU HAVE SEEN OTHER EMPIRES BOTH RISE AND FALL...YOU WILL SEE MANY MORE YET TO COME.



YET THERE IS ONE CHANGE YOU ALONE CAN EFFECT.

HOLY GROVE!



STRANGER! WHY MUST YOU HARASS ME SO?!

IT IS YOUR LOVER, THE WIZARD.

HE IS THE TRUE CAUSE OF ALL THESE WOES. IT IS BY HIS METHODS THAT THE REALM NOW TEETERS ON DISASTER.



HIS POWERS ARE VAST--OF A LEVEL FEW HUMANS WILL EVER KNOW.

HE THINKS HIMSELF THE ARCHITECT OF CIVILIZATIONS YET TO COME BUT, IN FACT, HE IS A SPAWN OF THE UNDERWORLD.



HE CONSORTS WITH DEMONS.

NO! HE IS... I...I--



YOU ASKED WHY I INVOLVE MYSELF WITH THESE AFFAIRS.

COME WITH ME.













YOU CANNOT  
CHANGE WHAT HAS  
ALREADY BEEN  
WRITTEN.



THE  
DESTINIES OF  
MAN ARE FOREVER  
TEMPERED WITH  
SUCH CARNAGE  
AND STEEL.

LOOK  
THERE...

...THE FINAL  
BATTLE OF  
**CAMELOT**  
HAS BEGUN!



**TO BE CONTINUED...**