

The Dementia of Magic

CHAPTER THREE

By Nicholas Killewald



The Dementia of Magic

Chapter Three

(the eBook)

(the second edition)



I would like to take this time to thank everyone involved in this.

But that part comes at the end of the book, not here in the dedication.

QUICK NOTES ON THE SECOND EBOOK EDITION

This is the second edition of the eBook version of the Chapter Three book. In a similar manner to the second eBook Chapter Two book, most of this is just the notes from the second physical Chapter Three book glommed onto notes detailing the differences between the eBook and physical versions. It is understandable if you need to re-read that sentence a couple times to figure out what I said. A lot of what I'm about to say here might seem awfully repetitive if you've read the second edition of the Chapter Two book, but there's always some chance you jumped right into Chapter Three without going through Chapter Two for some reason, so hey.

Why a second edition? The short version is that the first edition was 8"x10½" due to it originally being made for a service that closed down right before I was going to use it but after I had it all laid out. I wasn't in the mood at that point to make sure it worked with a more "standard" size, so I was stuck with what seems to be referred to by print-on-demand places as a "custom" size, which seriously reduced my choices in who would accept it. Now it's early 2021, global-pandemic-induced cabin fever's setting in, and I decided to take the time to reformat it into an 8½"x11", US-Letter-sized second edition. A4 was an option, but nah.

That's the main difference: Everything's been reformatted to fit US Letter pages. As this is slightly larger than what I had before, this means all the comics are slightly larger and there's a little bit more space for commentary and sketches alongside them. Unlike with the Chapter Two book, though, I designed all the full-bleed pages in the digital domain, and going over the originals, I apparently did so much more tightly to the original 8"x10½" size. So, I had to make some edits to make sure they still covered the full bleed size without stretching. Chances are you won't even notice, but I figured I'd mention it. I at least had the feasible *option* of editing things to fit this time around, so I consider that a win.

Otherwise, the comics themselves are unchanged. The re-texting I did the first time stands as it did, and the art's the same, too. Same goes with the not-full-bleed sketches and such. It's just the full-bleed stuff that needed fixing. There aren't any new sketches, either.

But, again, this is the eBook version. It's all digital, virtual, minty-fresh (where available), and effectively weightless, which means a lot of the compromises I had to make in the physical realm for weird comics don't need to be here. Comics split between two pages have been rejoined into one, empty pages are removed, and that one annoying comic where I established Front Spiral in the Healing Springs isn't rotated (the page itself is landscape instead). It all makes a lot more sense digitally, trust me. Though the super-tall comic where Alex is in the alchemy lab is still split up on-page, because that doesn't look right super-tall anyway.

Like with the Chapter Two second edition, I also went through all the commentary to reword, rework, tweak, nudge, update, and futz with it until it was all largely more better-ish. I hope all of it reads smoother now. The introduction also got reworked slightly, though it's still largely a series of rambling paragraphs that primarily devolve into me reciting lists of comma-separated things. It's not the same level of revamp Chapter Two got where I added a whole new paragraph for 2021.

Once again, if you're keeping track of that sort of thing, the page numbers on the bottom line up with the first edition (first *physical* edition; thus, there may be some weird numbering discrepancies where two split pages got merged into one). Then this addendum adds more pages, but the numbering still starts at the page which kicks off the chapter proper.

Finally, I said this before in the Chapter Two book, but it bears repeating: Thanks for reading and hopefully enjoying the DoM. It's been a long road, it's definitely not done yet, and it means a lot having others along for the ride. At time of writing, Chapter Eight is nearing its conclusion, and I'm getting it done, and it'll be great. I'm far from done yet.

Also, it's really weird writing this like a week or so after I wrote the addendum for Chapter Two, especially since the original two books were a few years apart.

-Nicholas Killewald



INTRODUCTION

The idea of making a printed collection of a webcomic is sort of a weird one when you think about it.

I mean, consider what webcomics are for a second: They're like print comics, just more, well, web-ish. On the web, for instance, you don't have the restrictions of paper. There's no need to make sure the panel layout fits on a standard 8½"x11" US-Letter-sized page, just to pick an arbitrary size out of thin air. You've got as much space as your readers are willing to scroll through, or, conversely, as little as you might need without worrying about wasted empty space on a printed page. You can toy with layouts and structure to your heart's content, experiment with crazy designs that would be impossible on any physical medium, enhance it with animation and music, even make it a directly interactive experience in more complex ways than asking the reader to turn to page 181 if they want to poke the dragon with the stick they found earlier (don't actually try that with this book).

The limits of the medium itself aren't the only thing. Publishing on the web allows you to get your content up and in front of your readers with the click of a button (and the filling of a network transfer progress bar) without the need to print copies and distribute them yourself or hand them off to a distributor. With that comes immediate feedback; you don't have to wait for printing and shipping for people to tell you what you did right or wrong once you've finished, moreso if you need to make your comics months in advance to allow for physical distribution on a national or worldwide scale. Plus, you get to decide on your own schedule, your own style, your own presentation, and your own content, all free from the meddling hands of marketing departments and editors (for better or for worse), not to mention the ease of quickly fixing typos and other mistakes without having to re-issue new editions of a book.

It's easy to see why webcomiccing is an incredible draw for creative types who don't necessarily need to make money off of their art and statistically probably never will. It's fast, convenient, flexible, and it hits a wide audience in perhaps the easiest way in recorded history.

And yet, many webcomic authors still leap at the opportunity to make print versions of their comics.

Oh, sure, it's a great way to get neat extra content out there in a way that doesn't involve directing your readers to new sections of your website, sections you have to maintain going forward. Most authors stuff their books full of bonus artwork, sketches, and sometimes even medium-length rambling essays about imaginary, exaggerated versions of 1998 and 2002 where there was a highly-popular webcomic called The Tales of Trevor Turducken and the Teutonic Terror of Tannhauser. They write commentary on past comics, giving fans insight, personal context, snarky self-deprecating remarks, and egotistical blather the whole way through. Some even take the opportunity to fix more glaring mistakes and inconsistencies that have sat, maybe unnoticed, for years. There's usually far more involved than just putting existing images in a layout program and pressing the Export-To-PDF button. And it's not just the authors who want to do it; the fans frequently ask for printed books of webcomics, complete with all the extra stuff I mentioned, so it's not like making a book is a wasted effort. People just like them.

But it's still weird to think about taking a work that was designed for something a certain sector of the population take delight in smugly reminding you is "modern" and making it work in something those same people would like to snidely remind you is much older. You have to make sure each comic originally designed with virtually no restrictions in layout or size fits on the same size pages as any other comic in the book. If your comic already has commentary that's integral to the experience, you have to go over every part of it to see if it still works without any external links you might have used that were perfectly natural to include when you were making it for the web. Do those links you used years ago even still work anymore? Are they even necessary or relevant? And what about interactivity? Do you have the slightest clue how you're going to handle any comic where you added animation or sound just because you could? Did you make Easter eggs in Flash all that time ago that you need to somehow put on paper now? And can you really justify to your readers having to pay around twenty to thirty bucks (USD, plus shipping) for something like this*?

Why would someone want to go through all that when they already have a perfectly acceptable medium where they don't have to worry about it, and in fact have been doing a pretty good job not worrying about it all this time?

*: Turns out, it actually costs a surprisingly high amount of money to run off a print-on-demand copy of a 200+ page, full-color book.

A few years back, I decided to go through exactly all that for Chapter Two of the DoM (minus the parts about animation, sound, and interactivity). Like I mentioned in the first book, it took me a while to come to that decision, partially because of the reasons I mentioned above (again, minus the animation, sound, and interactivity parts; don't ask how any of this is supposed to look animated). Even besides the fact that I'd have to start in Chapter Two, I did ask myself why it was a good idea. I mean, really, my readers were the ones asking me for it, and I felt it'd be a cool thing to make for them (and they sort of deserved it after putting up with all my usual delays), and I kinda liked the idea of having my own physical book that I made myself, but I still found myself wondering about it.

So why did I, personally, make the final call to make the book?

Well, because it turns out it was fun.

Turns out it really was an interesting creative challenge to arrange everything I had into a paper layout. I got to learn a new tool; now I'm at least reasonably confident in how Scribus works, sort of. Figuring that out also taught me a few tips about how things work with book layouts. Making commentary forced me to look over every strip I made in Chapter Two to remember neat tidbits about them, and that brought it more into focus how far I've come in my art and writing since then. And, of course, coming up with a bunch of new sketches to pepper the chapter was a lot of fun as I watched the book slowly evolve into a real, actual thing.

And at the end of it all, following a couple proofs, nitpicking analyses, and that silly set of pictures I uploaded to the site, I had something I could hold in my hands, something I could reasonably say I created, something that took up actual space in the physical world, something that I could show off to my friends without starting a PDF viewer or web browser, and something that I thought looked good. All said, I thought that was really really cool.

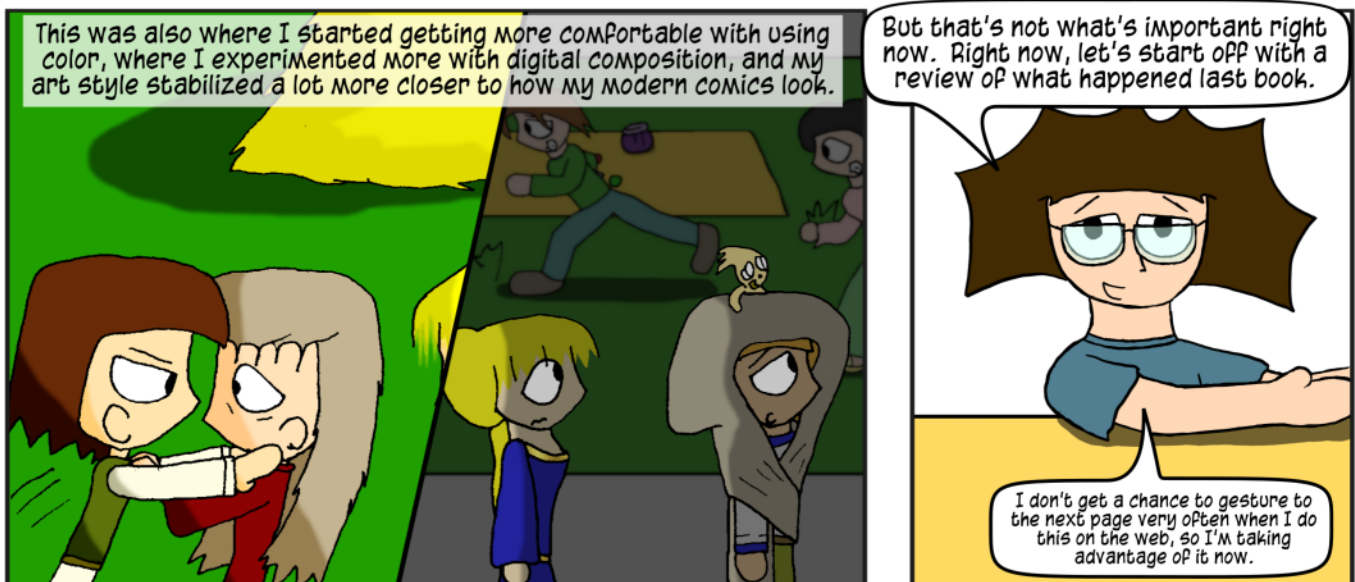
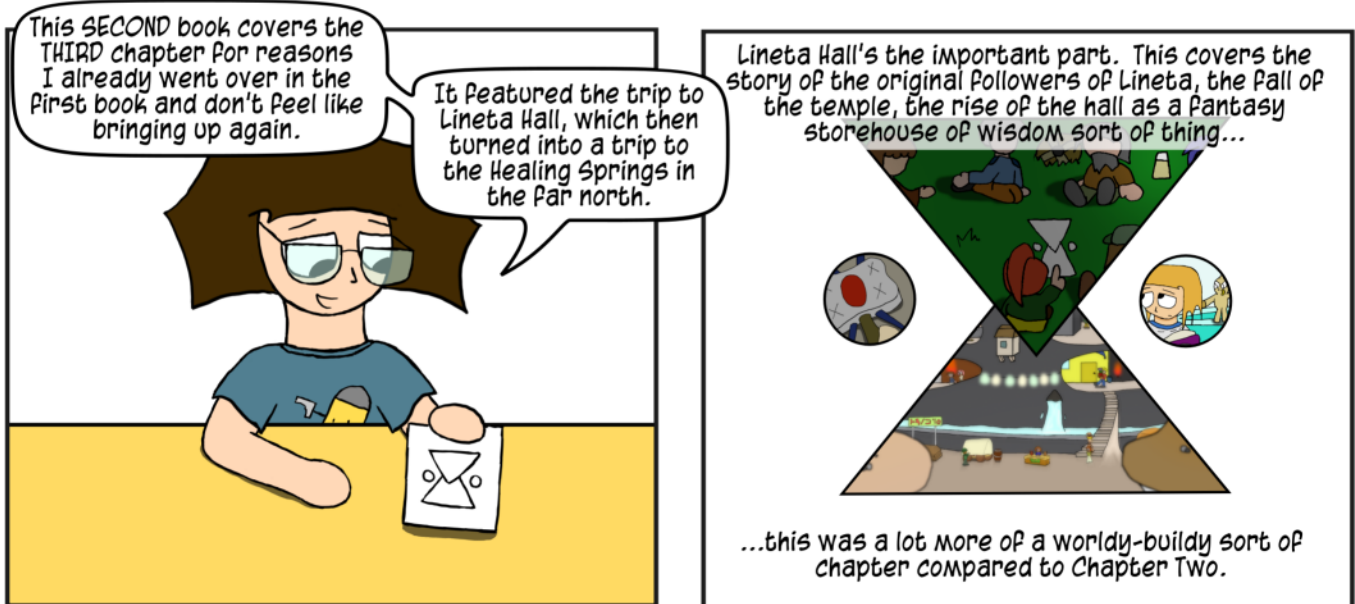
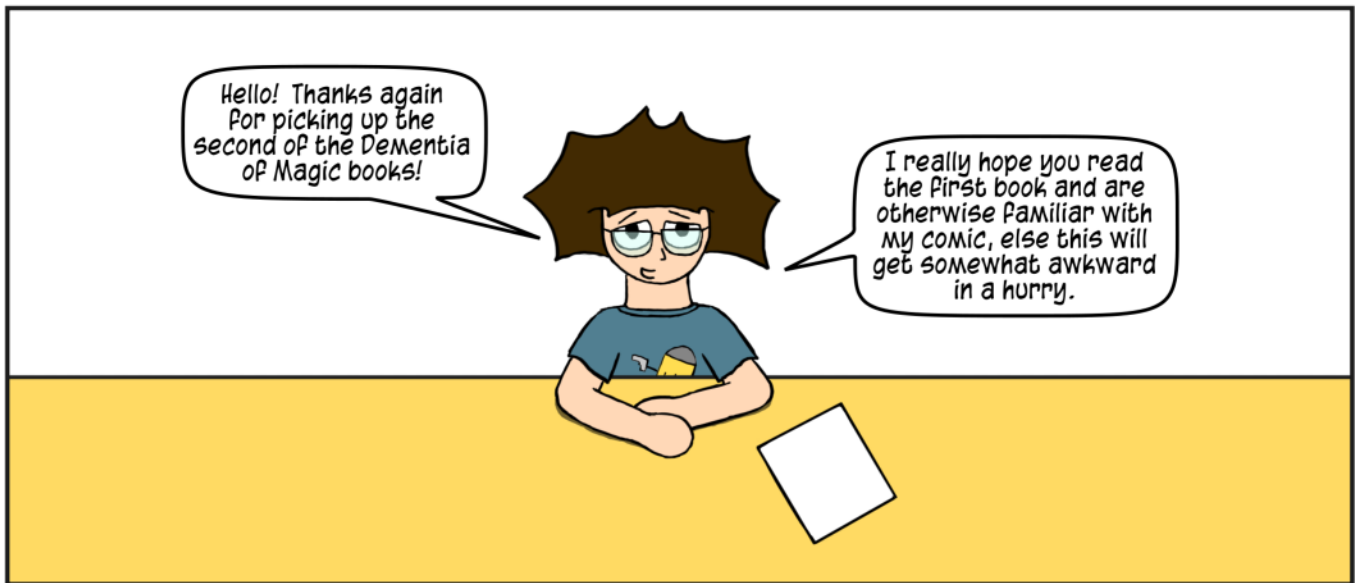
I didn't make much money off it, but it was still a lot of fun, so I did it again for Chapter Three. In the process, I picked up a few more tricks, took this opportunity to learn some of how Krita worked, did a lot more tablet work than I ever have, and created a new intro made up primarily of rambling paragraphs that frequently involve me reciting lists of things, something I didn't notice until just now. And now, you hold the results of that work in your hands**.

** : Ignore that last part if you're reading the PDF version.

The point is, making a book can be a nifty creative project for artists or people like me who can pass as artists in a pinch. And really, that's all a lot of us are here for. It's why we started drawing stuff, after all.

Okay, others actually need to make books and other merchandise as a vital income source and they just happen to enjoy it, and they might not enjoy the financial stability of a day job... y'know, let's just hand it off to my cartoonish doppelgänger on the next page over there and I'll try to sort this out later. Maybe I'll come up with a different sort of intro for the next book, one which I won't make specifically to resemble the intro from the first book at first glance.

-Nicholas Killewald



This is Cy. He's the captain of Sapphire Squad in the Landis Royal Army and an elf from Yuulor Forest.



We only found out that last part after a pub brawl revealed that he wasn't just a rather tall, skinny human, which apparently happens once in a while.



We also learned that he and Phinn knew each other back in Yuulor, and that Cy's been away from the forest for many years.



Long story short, he fled Yuulor during a sudden attack by a Soul Golem, of all things.



That part remains unresolved.

Unrelated, this is Stephanie. She's not exactly a pleasant person to deal with.



For starters, she poisoned the water at the Perfect Equinox Festival at Castle Landis.



Matt followed her to a grove where he came across Simon, a man she managed to turn into a large walking frog.

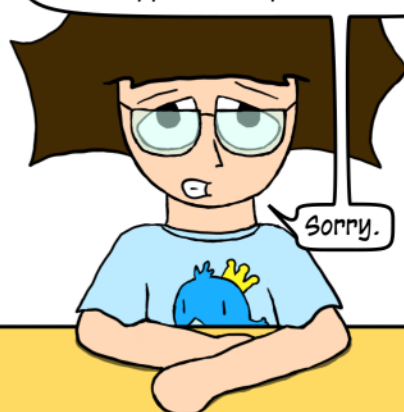


Eventually, that ended with a not-well-planned fight scene that saw Stephanie dead. Matt is not exactly proud of this.



Now, we know from Chapter Five that didn't stick, but Matt doesn't.

Got all that? Good, because... well, it turns out those two don't have any bearing on what's about to happen in Chapter Three.

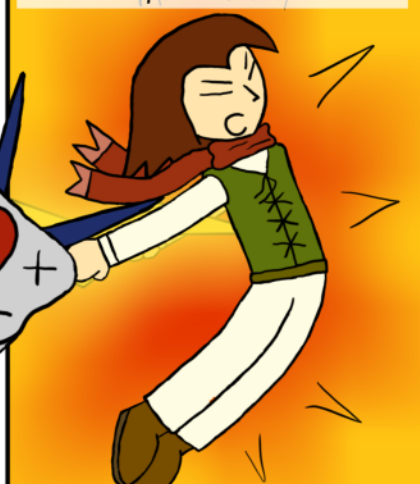


Sorry.

This guy, however, does. His name is Marzos. He hails from the Healing Springs far to the north, and he is one of the most experienced mages in the known world.



Our main cast met him over the winter where he half-finished a spell on Matt.



Around springtime, that spell took effect. Alex, acting on her mentor's advice, set to work trying to undo it.



In the end, it turned out all right, and we'll just leave it at that.



However, Salthalus, Alex's mentor, also an incredibly wise mage and also from the Healing Springs, recognized the work of Marzos.



She and others knew Marzos back in the Springs. A man of reckless ambition, he worried everyone with his studies.



So, when he tried opening a portal to worlds unknown, they felt it wise to maybe say something.

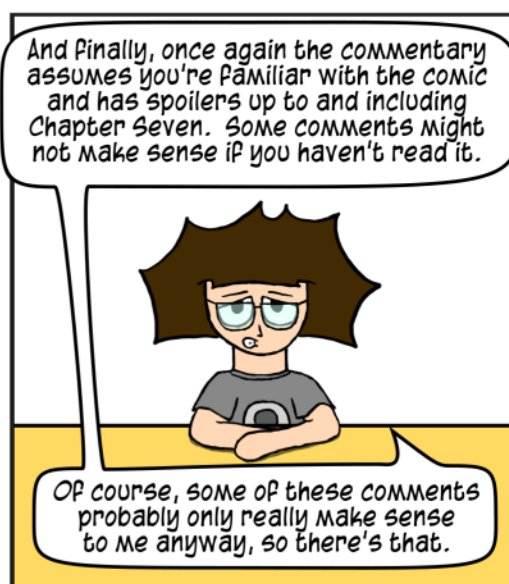
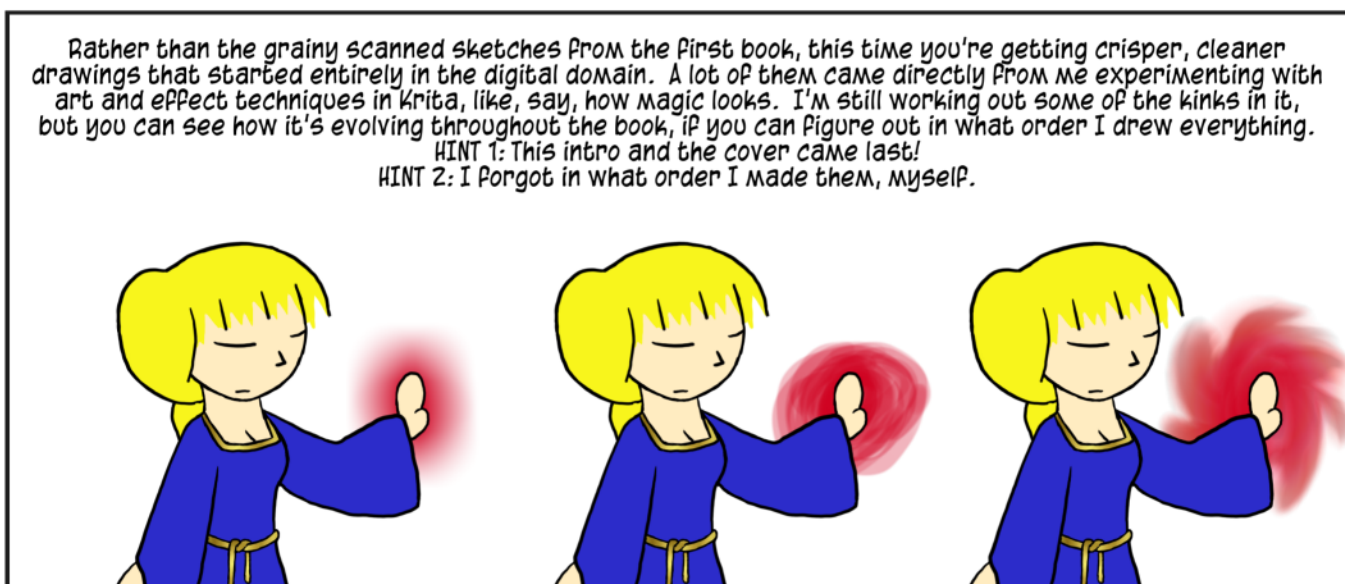
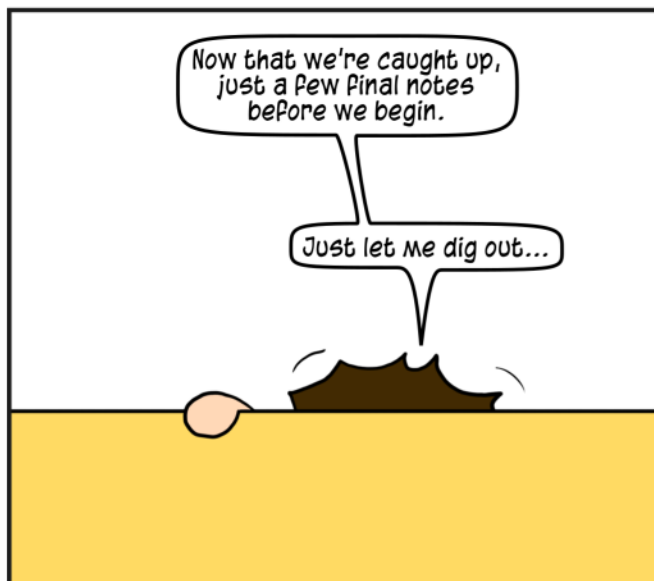


In the end, they managed to seal him away, confident they wouldn't have to deal with him again.

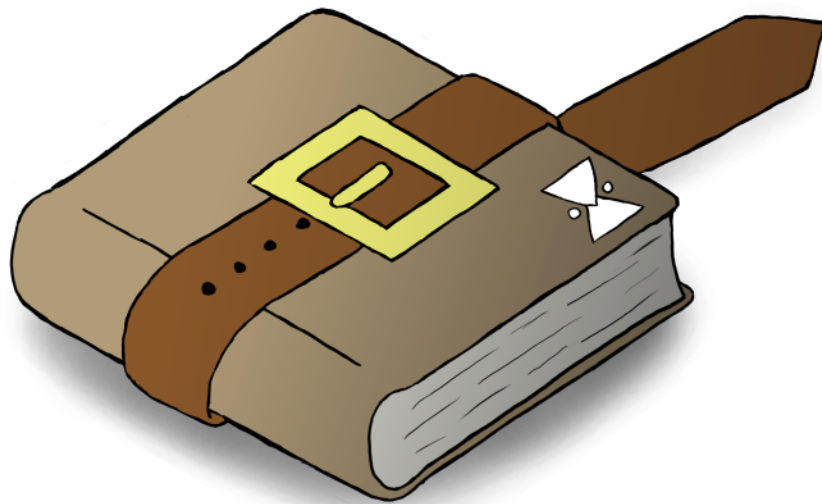


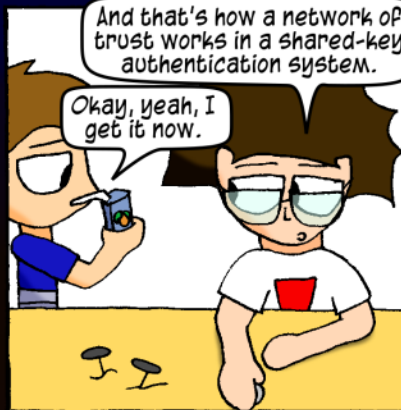
But, of course, the fact that he clearly managed to get free is very troubling to Salthalus, and as we begin Chapter Three, she wants answers...





CHAPTER THREE: THE POWER OF WISDOM, THE WISDOM OF POWER





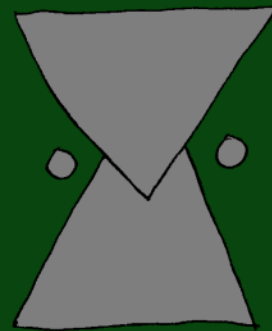
IN ANCIENT TIMES, A GROUP OF PEOPLE REGULARLY GATHERED TO DISCUSS WHATEVER NEEDED DISCUSSING. THEY GATHERED WHEREVER THEY COULD WITH ANYONE WHO WAS AROUND AND WILLING TO JOIN THE DISCUSSION.

THEY CAME FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE. MAGES, TOOLSMITHS, WARRIORS, FARMERS, ALL SORTS GATHERED TO TRADE SKILLS, CONCEPTS, TECHNIQUES, AND IDEAS.



THOUGH THEY WERE INCREDIBLY DIVERSE, THEY ALL SHARED ONE THING IN COMMON: A LOVE OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE DESIRE TO SHARE SAID KNOWLEDGE WITH OTHERS.

THESE PEOPLE WERE THE FIRST FOLLOWERS OF LINETA, GODDESS OF WISDOM.



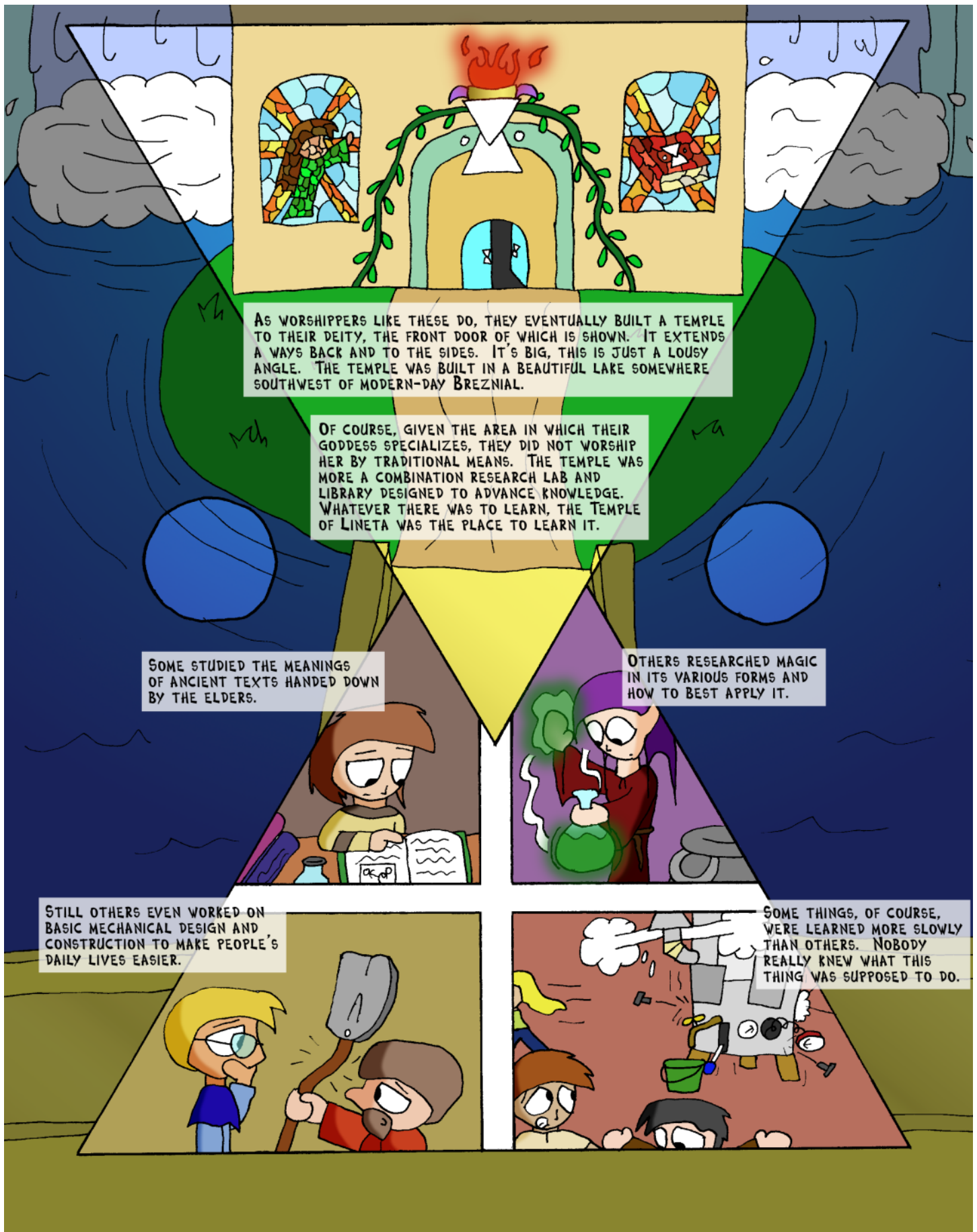
I sometimes get the urge to actually try to concoct a way to explain a network of trust in a shared-key authentication system that ends with the difference between heads and tails on a coin. Thankfully, those thoughts never go anywhere.

Here we are! Chapter Three! It's happening again! And it's starting with a full-bleed (relative to the image bounds, not these pages), full-color introduction! How about that? Unfortunately, image-size bleeds don't quite work out as well when printed in a book (please ignore the fact that this is a PDF meant for digital reading). I did a few bleeds like this in the chapter, and I designed them all around web viewing, so they may not look exactly the way you'd expect here. If I ever do the Chapter One redraw, I'll make actual page-sized bleeds.

This chapter heavily features Lineta Hall, the closest thing the DoM world has to a storehouse of ancient wisdom or what-have-you. And how does such a storehouse fit in with the usual DoM tomfoolery? We're about to find out! Join us on this journey! Well, me. Join me on this journey.

See the girl in the lower-left of the ring there? The brown-haired one with the red and yellow shirt? That would be Charlene (aka "Charlie"), resident pyro of Chris Paluszek's old webcomic, Carzorthade. Shame the website's dead (as per this writing), but fortunately, he's still in the comic/cartoonery business. Just, professionally now. He works with studios and everything. Now that I think about it, Charlie's not the only member of Carzorthade I hid in this chapter, but more on that later.





AS WORSHIPPERS LIKE THESE DO, THEY EVENTUALLY BUILT A TEMPLE TO THEIR DEITY, THE FRONT DOOR OF WHICH IS SHOWN. IT EXTENDS A WAYS BACK AND TO THE SIDES. IT'S BIG, THIS IS JUST A LOUSY ANGLE. THE TEMPLE WAS BUILT IN A BEAUTIFUL LAKE SOMEWHERE SOUTHWEST OF MODERN-DAY BREZNIAL.

OF COURSE, GIVEN THE AREA IN WHICH THEIR GODDESS SPECIALIZES, THEY DID NOT WORSHIP HER BY TRADITIONAL MEANS. THE TEMPLE WAS MORE A COMBINATION RESEARCH LAB AND LIBRARY DESIGNED TO ADVANCE KNOWLEDGE. WHATEVER THERE WAS TO LEARN, THE TEMPLE OF LINETA WAS THE PLACE TO LEARN IT.

SOME STUDIED THE MEANINGS OF ANCIENT TEXTS HANDED DOWN BY THE ELDERS.

OTHERS RESEARCHED MAGIC IN ITS VARIOUS FORMS AND HOW TO BEST APPLY IT.

STILL OTHERS EVEN WORKED ON BASIC MECHANICAL DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION TO MAKE PEOPLE'S DAILY LIVES EASIER.

SOME THINGS, OF COURSE, WERE LEARNED MORE SLOWLY THAN OTHERS. NOBODY REALLY KNEW WHAT THIS THING WAS SUPPOSED TO DO.

I did a lot more digital composition this time around. You can tell I'm having too much fun with layers here.

Like I said in the previous book, I don't do too much directly involving the deities of the DoM world. It's a story about people, not gods, after all. So in general, when I'm going into a story about someone titled "Lineta, Goddess of Wisdom", you know it's not going in the usual direction this sort of thing goes. Like here, for starters. How ELSE would you expect a bunch of worshippers to praise a "Goddess of Wisdom" other than a rigorous schedule of research and experimentation?

Also note that an ersatz storehouse of ancient wisdom in a fantasy world can have things OTHER than powerful magic artifacts and insane mechanical contraptions otherwise lost to the ages. It can very well have mundane things like improved ergonomics, forgotten literature, agricultural advancements, and nifty stained glass. It's not all world-ending power the heroes are in a mad rush to protect, then inevitably destroy because they believe the world isn't ready for it yet.



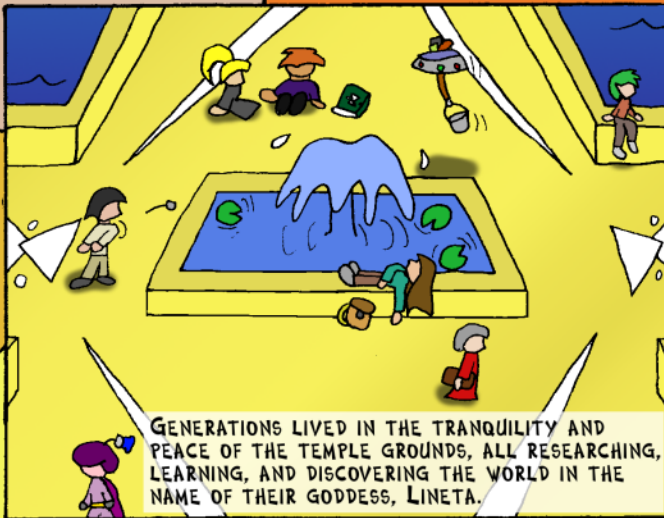
NEW TECHNOLOGIES WERE DEVELOPED, MANY OF WHICH STILL DON'T EXIST IN MODERN TIMES.



SUPERIOR MEDICINE WAS CREATED, TO THE POINT WHERE TO THIS DAY CLERICS AND HEALERS STILL CARRY THE CREST OF LINETA AS THEIR SYMBOL.



THE TEMPLE ALSO BECAME A CULTURAL CENTER FOR PEOPLE THE WORLD OVER, ALL WITH A DESIRE TO DISCOVER AND LEARN.



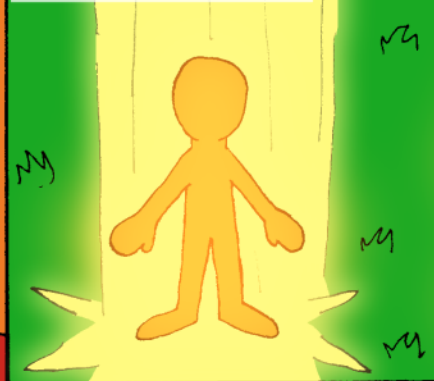
GENERATIONS LIVED IN THE TRANQUILITY AND PEACE OF THE TEMPLE GROUNDS, ALL RESEARCHING, LEARNING, AND DISCOVERING THE WORLD IN THE NAME OF THEIR GODDESS, LINETA.

Sounds great. So what's the inevitable problem?

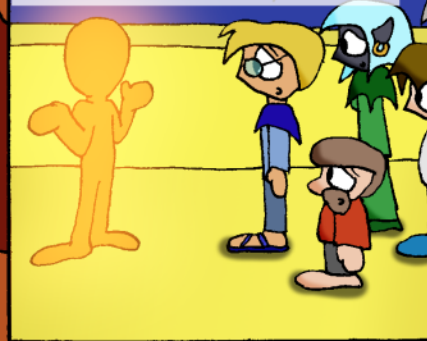


Well, there's this thing about the deities in the DoM, you see.

EVERY SO OFTEN, THEY SEND OUT MESSENGERS TO, WELL, DELIVER MESSAGES.



AND ONE DAY, ONE SUCH MESSENGER APPEARED. IT INFORMED THEM THAT THERE ACTUALLY WAS NO LINETA, GODDESS OF WISDOM, AND SORRY FOR THE CONFUSION AND INCONVENIENCE.



The Followers didn't take this well.



Look! On the label on the jar on the shelf in the second panel! It's Bean Man! Bean Man, everyone! And there's Captain Spam in the fourth panel! I'm not even going to try to come up with a reasonable explanation for him being there!

As indicated, the Linetan icon is the general "medical symbol" in the DoM world, or at least anywhere the followers of Lineta have influenced. You know, a medical symbol, like the Rod of Asclepius or the Caduceus. You may have noticed it on the bags the clerics in Landis had at the end of the previous chapter.

This is also the first time we see a beach elf, right there in the third panel. I'll get to them in more detail later in this book. They get discussed a lot more in the next chapter, come to think of it. This particular example isn't wearing traditional beach elf attire, though.

I'm pretty sure around now is when I was re-reading the Jargon File/New Hacker's Dictionary again. I say this because that's the age-old PDP-era comic hero Crunchly on the wall behind me. The ancient computer world was apparently a much different place.

You can say what you will about the concepts of religion and deities in the real world, but in fantasy worlds where such concepts are undeniably real, it's entirely possible that those deities might wind up pulling you aside for a quick chat about how the goddess you're worshipping doesn't, y'know, exist and all. Now, the implication is that the followers of Lineta had been at this for a very, very long time before this happened. I guess the gods were just busy all this time. Or maybe they just wanted to see how it would play out.

I like the messenger's little shrug, there. It's like, no hard feelings and all.

Huh. I wonder what those two in the third panel are looking at.



THE USUALLY RATIONAL LINETAN WORSHIPPERS BROKE INTO HYSTERICS OVER THE SUDDEN NEWS THAT THEIR GODDESS HAD NEVER EXISTED IN THE FIRST PLACE. THEY LEFT THEIR WORK IN SHAMBLES.

AFTER THEY CALMED DOWN, THEY ALL AGREED TO LEAVE THE TEMPLE AND NEVER RETURN. EACH WENT HIS OR HER OWN WAY IN THE WORLD, TAKING SMALL PARTS OF THEIR WISDOM WITH THEM TO LIVE SIMPLE LIVES AWAY FROM THE MEMORIES OF THEIR RELIGION.

SO, THE TEMPLE REMAINED WHERE IT STOOD, A SILENT TRIBUTE TO PEOPLE NOT BEING ABLE TO SEE THE FOREST FOR THE TREES.

PROTECTED FROM THE ELEMENTS BY SOME OF THE INVENTIONS CREATED IN THE TEMPLE'S GLORY DAYS, IT AND ITS ACCUMULATED KNOWLEDGE SAT IN THE LAKE FOR MANY, MANY YEARS, WHERE IT SLOWLY FADED FROM THE MINDS OF THE WORLD...

...UNTIL A SMALL GROUP OF EXPLORERS HAPPENED UPON IT AGAIN ONE DAY...

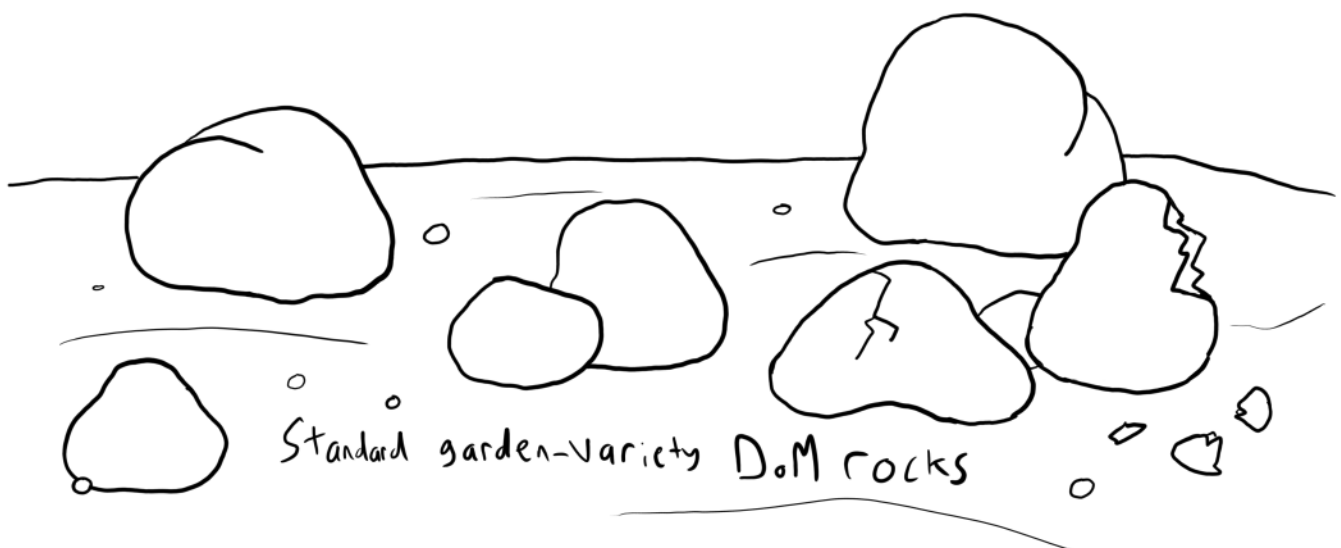
...AND SAW THE ANCIENT CREATIONS CONTAINED INSIDE.

More abuse of color filters and layers. I was having way too much fun back then.

It's amazing that nobody noticed the temple all that time after the mass exodus of the (former) followers of Lineta. You'd think word would've gotten out during their heyday. It's also amazing that after a mass freak-out of people working with potentially dangerous magic and mechanics that none of it went catastrophic and the whole place was still standing.

I'm not quite sure where Lineta Town eventually fits in to this scene. If you look ahead, you'll see that the town, as it exists in the comic's modern era, is considerably larger than the area in front of the bridge walkway to the temple here, and it sits right up against the bridge, too (the Founders just lived in the temple itself, I guess). I mean, it's assumed that the Temple of Lineta was active in ancient times, so it's possible that, since that time, the forest over on the edge of the road there was completely clear-cut, but you'd think any forest elves who were heavily in the Lineta Hall scene might have more than just a few objections to that while it happened, even if they're a bit more progressive and less tradition-bound than most of their race.

The cliff in the foreground is too far away to have an impact on city planning, though. That part at least makes sense.



SOON, THE TEMPLE WAS AGAIN FULL OF KNOWLEDGE-SEEKERS. THIS TIME, MOST OF THEM WERE TRYING TO RECONSTRUCT AND DECIPHER THE SCATTERED NOTES LEFT BEHIND BY THE FORMER WORSHIPPERS.

INCOMPLETE, BROKEN NOTES THAT CARPETED SOME ROOMS KNEE-DEEP. ALL THERE TO BE DISCOVERED ANEW.

EVEN WITHOUT A GODDESS, THE NEW PEOPLE STRIVED TO LEARN FROM THE PAST AND CONTINUE THE RESEARCH FOR THE FUTURE WITH THE SAME PASSION THE FOLLOWERS OF LINETA ONCE HAD.

SOME LIVE HERE, OTHERS VACATION HERE. ALL OF THEM SHARE THE SAME HUNGER FOR UNDERSTANDING AND KNOWLEDGE THAT ONCE ECHOED THROUGH EVERY CORRIDOR MANY YEARS AGO.

IT'S JUST A MATTER OF WHAT THEY INTEND TO DO WITH SAID KNOWLEDGE.

WITHOUT A DEITY HANDY FOR IT TO TECHNICALLY BE CALLED A TEMPLE, THE BUILDING IS NOW KNOWN AS LINETA HALL. MUCH OF THE HALL HAS BEEN REPAIRED OR RENOVATED TO ACCOMMODATE A NEW GENERATION OF RESEARCHERS.

CHAPTER THREE:

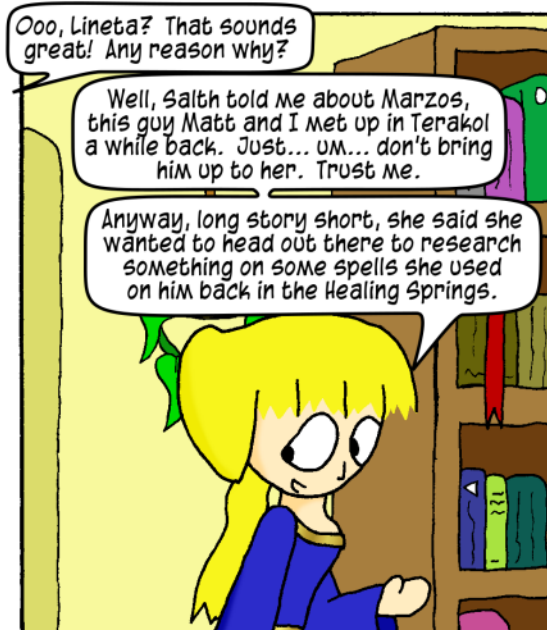
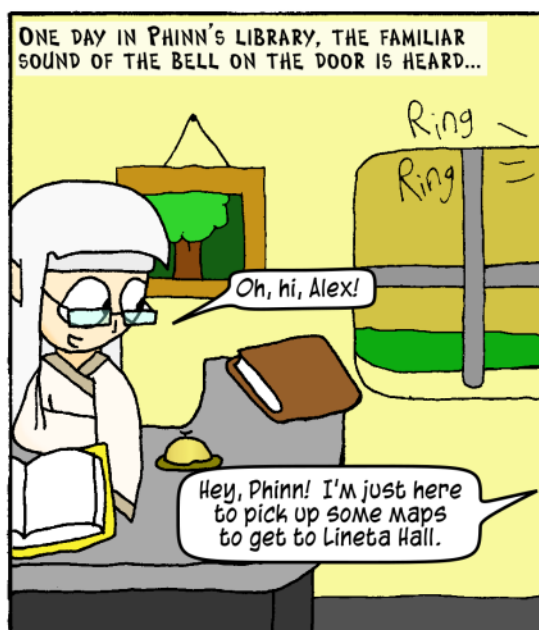
THE POWER OF WISDOM, THE WISDOM OF POWER

The progression of "glass" elements in this and the past three pages is something I thought was clever when I made it, but I guess is really hard to even notice. You start with the pristine Temple of Lineta stained glass in the layout and the shot of the main entrance, move on to it fading from a clear-sky blue to a disastrous red and breaking during the fall of the temple, broken panels making up the aftermath, and here you have patched-together panels and a shot of Lineta Hall's entrance after the reconstruction. I liked it, but there's just way too much stuff actually happening in and around the panels for it to stand out. Ah, well.

I've gotten better at drawing candles over the years. Just doesn't feel like a fantastic home of knowledge without dribbly candles every so often, you know? Other than the fact that, being a home of knowledge, they've probably invented new technologies that would render candles unnecessary and all. In fact, I don't think I drew too many of them this chapter.

"Deity" is a really weird word. I keep thinking it should be spelled "diety".

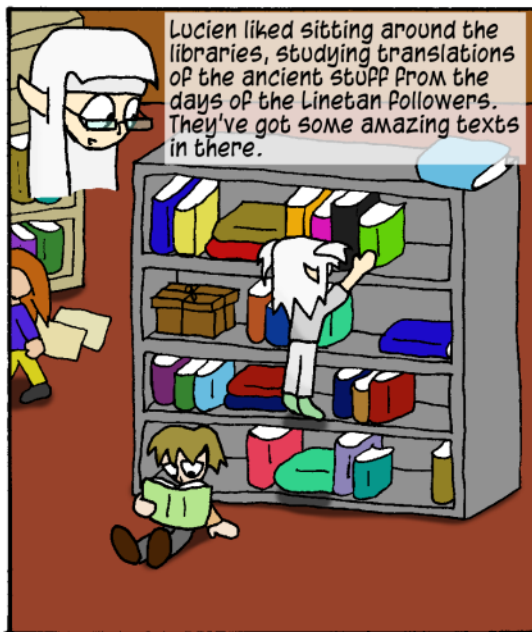
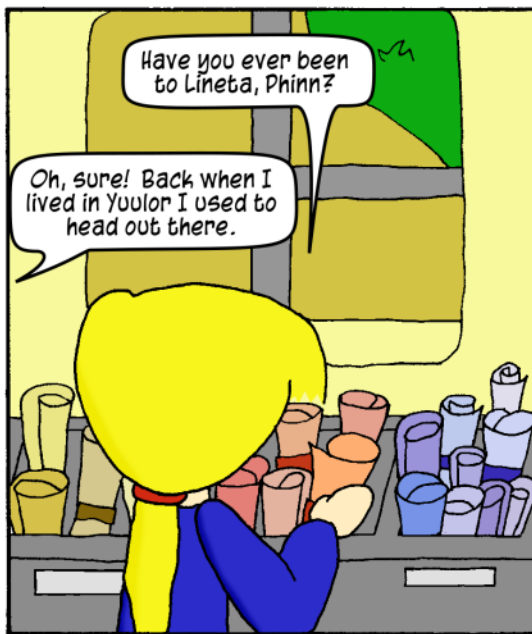




I've tried to keep the inside of Phinn's library relatively consistent over time. Not like Salth's hut, where I decided it was better off cylindrical and red as time went on.

You're going to notice an evolution of sound effects over the course of this chapter. At this point, I was still using Paint Shop Pro for anything vector-related (text), so I just drew the sound effects onto the panels in the original art. I had some vector effects in the previous chapter, but those were all done in GIMP and manipulated there. After I switched to and got more comfortable with Inkscape for text work, I started experimenting with using it for post-production vectors as well, which turns out to be a much more flexible solution for sound effects, and hence they went fully-vector after a while.

I doubt I'm going to eventually make the entire comic be vector-based, but you never know.



Stupid bookshelves. I've been over this before.

I don't know why I settled on that look for Phinn's younger self. I can't help but think that if you tie off your hair into pigtails, there generally isn't going to be enough left to be shoulder-length like that. I'm probably wrong.

Also, pay attention to that second panel. There'll be a subtle review later.





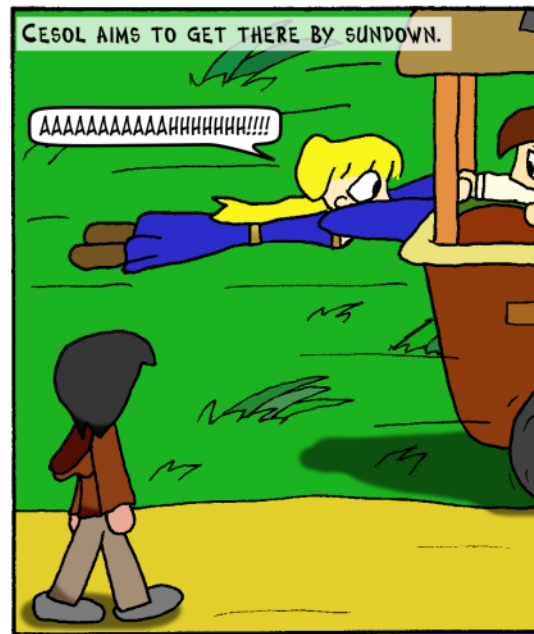
I never said the DoM was an accurate representation of medieval life. Sure, there's magic and elves and not quite so much disease and starvation, that's the obvious part. But it really starts to show when there's slightly too modern of civic services maintained by the monarchy, like municipal libraries outside the castle walls. Plus the fact that they apparently assist the libraries enough by providing regional maps for loan like this. In assorted colors, too!

Though, I do like how these services DO exist, that it's natural for Alex to check out some maps before taking off on a trip like this, and that it at least seems to be reasonably within the technology level of the era. It's not MUCH world-building, but it's still THERE and all.



This was the first time I tried to keep the design of Cesol's steam cart consistent, I think. It looks a bit different from the last chapter, I know that much. And then he crashes it twice in this chapter, one more time in Chapter Seven, and at time of writing is in the process of redesigning it altogether.

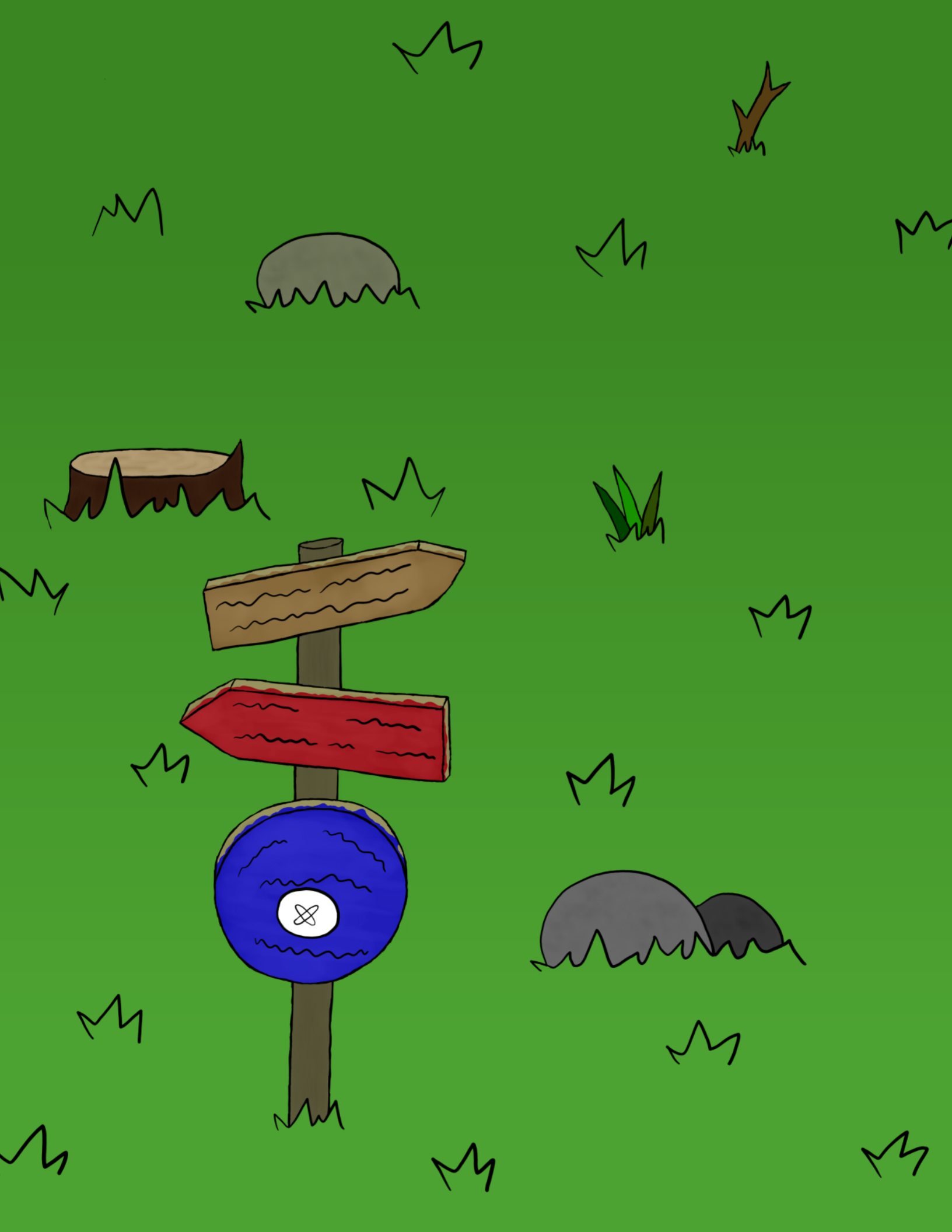
I was also still pretty bad at poses outside standing and walking at this point (and I didn't do those very well, either). I got better at it through the chapter. Amazingly, I didn't really get basic posing constructs until around Chapter Six or so.



Hey, there's another beach elf! He's a long way from the beach.

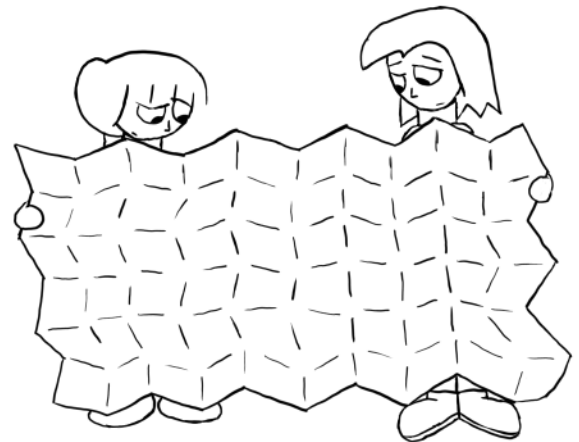
If you're familiar with how I draw patches of grass, you know by now the usual accents I add to make it "grassy". Namely, little jagged tufts on the ground, sometimes broken up with rocks, signposts, and if it's in a forest, the occasional tree or stump. Here, though, we've got "tufts with overgrown blades of grass once in a while". Going back over this chapter reminded me I used to do that, which is why they suddenly started appearing again in Chapter Seven. Variety! A good thing.

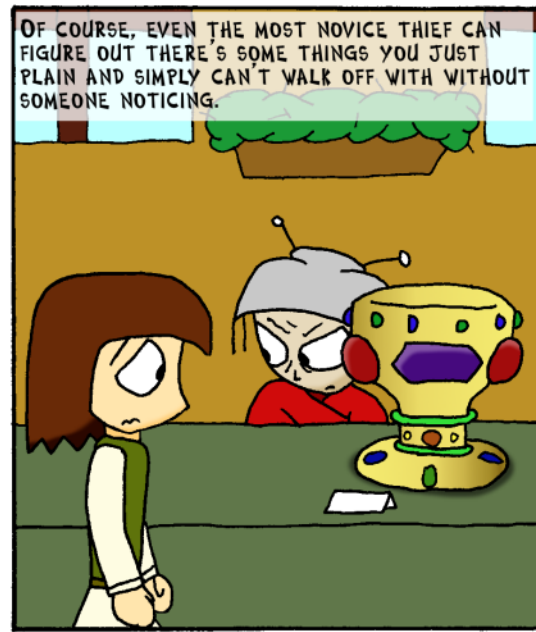
Also, please ignore the fact that in the first panel, it looks like Cesol ran over an ikki bird, hence the pink/purple feathers.





The DoM world is kinda-sorta medieval-Europey and therefore largely made of kingdoms, yes, but there's also large independent cities here and there that don't operate under any crown. Or maybe I just wanted to try my hand at European-style packed-in buildings. Either way, the point is, I never stopped to figure out just how far from Landis they are right now.





Look! Right behind Matt in the third panel! It's Bean Man! Bean Man, everyone!

Every once in a while I like to go through a bit of thief life with Matt, mostly because I've never really liked the "super-mega-uber smug thief who can walk off with literally anything" trope. Sometimes it's better to write in moderation and all.

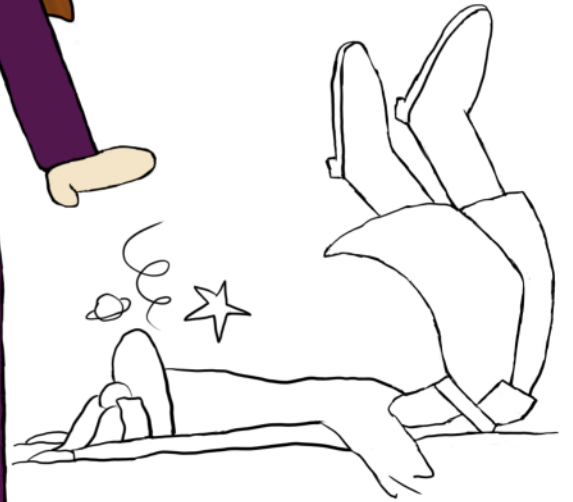
Though, this being a market square, I don't know what Granny Crotchety in the fourth panel is hoping to accomplish with her stand. I guess she's expecting someone to buy that?



I sort of like this girl's hat. I forget what I based it off of, but I'm pretty sure there was something I was using as a reference. Or inspiration. Hang on, let me look it up...

Oh, wait, that's right. Romana's outfit from The Androids of Tara. It was sort of a silly hat there, too, but I still sort of liked it.

Yeah, you heard me. Go look it up. Durn kids today and your weeping angels...



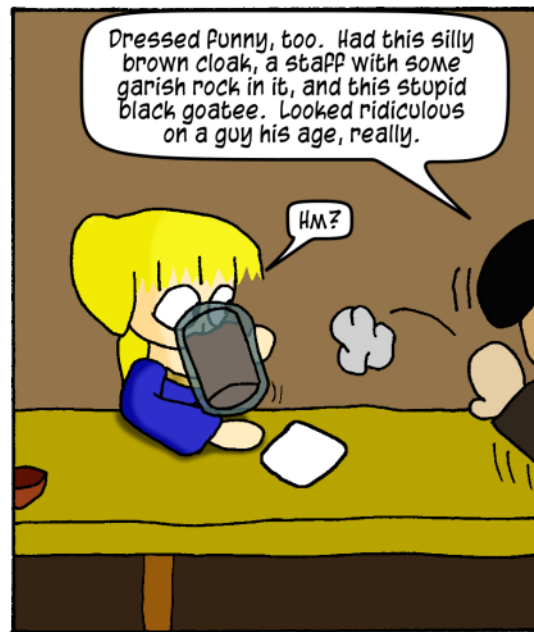
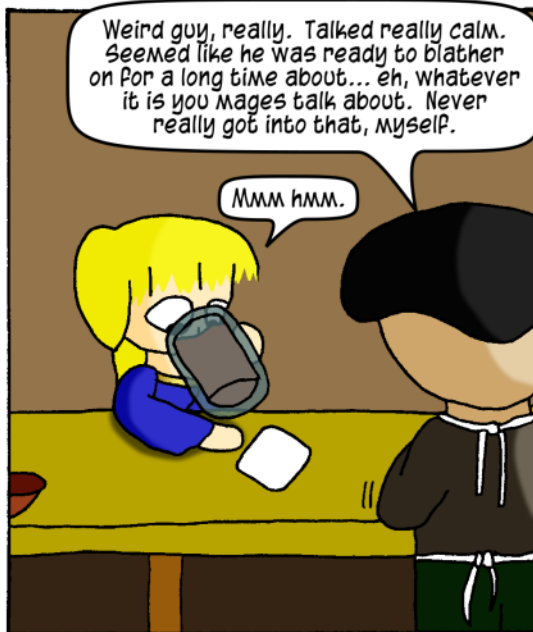


I wish I could take credit for the stout/stroat wordplay. But, I got it from a now-long-concluded webcomic, *Fragile Gravity*. Good times back then, man, good times.

It's a shame I don't have Chapter One redone for a book yet. I went over the Redoubled Red Ogre back then, pulling the trigger on the inevitable joke of making an absurdly long footnote, perhaps way too early. Maybe I'll reprint it if I ever get around to the complete redraw I've had kicking around in the back of my mind.

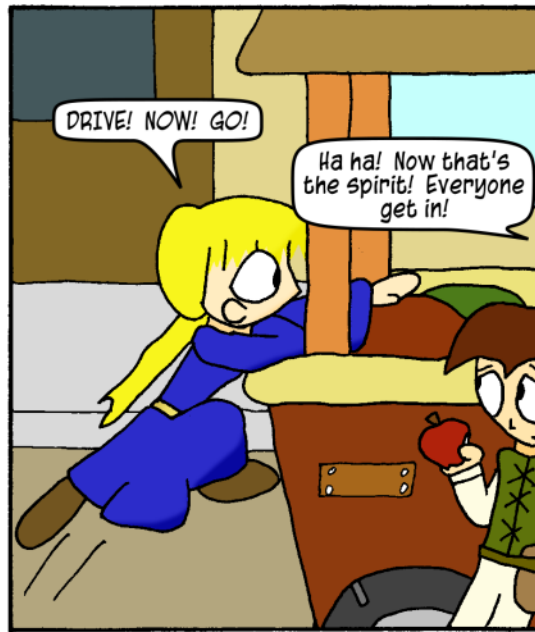
I tend to avoid adding in guys creeping on girls in the DoM like this, mostly because I write the world with more or less a gender equality edge to it, so that sort of thing doesn't really fit in. Though, it's also because I'm terrible at writing really sleazy guys. That sort of creepiness doesn't exactly come naturally to me.

Of course, it's clear Alex has the situation under control. The bartender was even halfway expecting it.



Like I mentioned in the first book, when I was coming up with how mages fit into the DoM world, I drew a lot on my experience in the computer programming and administration fields. Most relevant to this right here is the concept that magic is just a talent someone can learn. Some people just catch on to it, and to other people, it just doesn't make sense. Nothing else to it, really; it's not a matter of birthright, being "chosen", being blessed, it's just if you get it or not. That's why the bartender doesn't even bat an eye at Alex responding appropriately to someone creeping on her.

I really hope I don't keep forgetting I mentioned the whole how-magic-fits-in-the-world thing in the first book. This particular comic's commentary went through a few revisions for that reason before it got to this point, and it's still repeating most of what I said then.



Comedically tempting as it was, I managed to resist having Alex be dragged along behind the cart for the rest of the trip.





I still wish I had more time to develop the "Marzos's outfit looks ridiculous" gag. Ah, well.





Oh, hey, another beach elf! It's worth noting that this particular one happens to be wearing an earring. It's worth noting THAT because I rarely draw earrings. And I rarely draw earrings because I only seem to draw ears on elves (either type). Odd how that works out.

Cesol wrecking his steam cart is a common theme here. Alex and Matt somehow managed to not crash it last chapter when they took it to Castle Landis for Perfect Equinox, so it's not like it CAN'T be stopped smoothly.



It should be mentioned, of course, that getting yourself confused over learning magic that's way out of your league isn't quite the same as simply getting a headache, getting frustrated, and throwing a book across the room or out the window, possibly hitting a goose along the way. It's a bit worse, in fact, even if you account for an enraged goose calling on all its friends to chase you across campus. Especially when you consider that magic has a fair amount to do with your mind. The same mind, mind you, that you've just frustrated and confused thanks to you recklessly diving into things you really should've worked your way up to gradually.

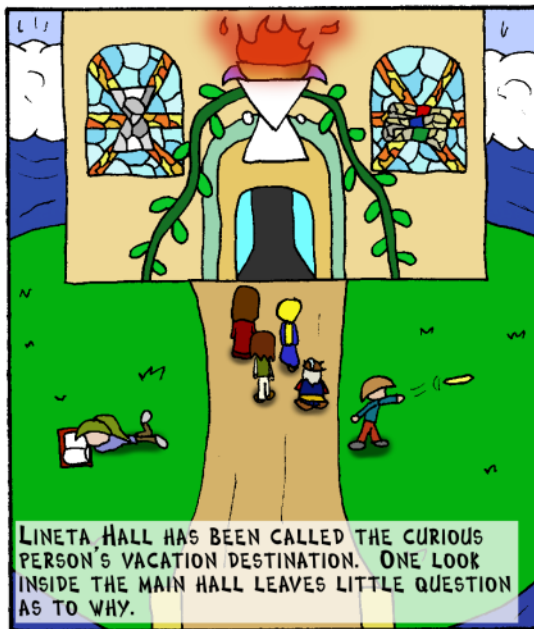
It's more like... well, you know how you're looking at a new service motherboard in the hardware programming labs, and you're looking over the docs for it? And so you poke around with every little feature you can find in it until you're hopelessly confused as to what does what and how you'd use it? And then you turn over the wrong register and wind up blowing out the board in a glorious puff of burning electronics? It's kinda like that.

I had a lot of fun in my hardware classes. I'm at least partly certain I didn't fry any service motherboards, though. Either that or I'm just not admitting to it in public. Nobody'll find out anyway. Funny how I wound up in software as a career.

The geese, though. The geese. Hateful, hateful waterfowl.

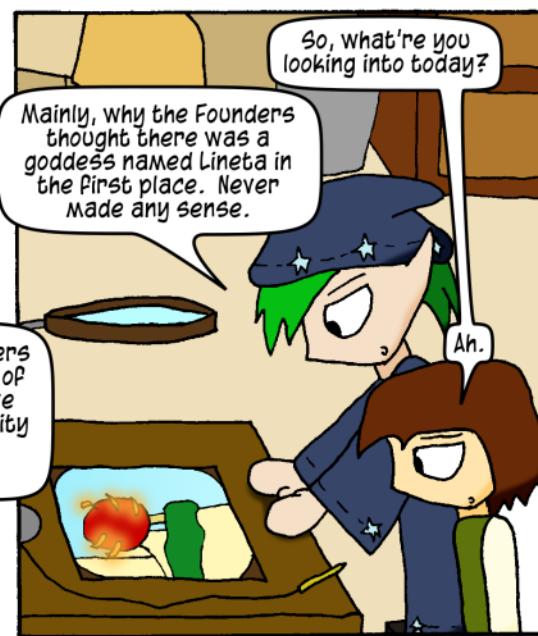
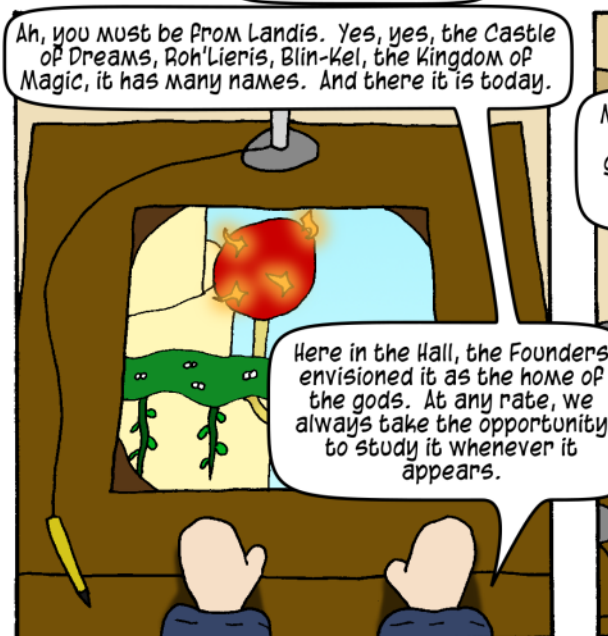
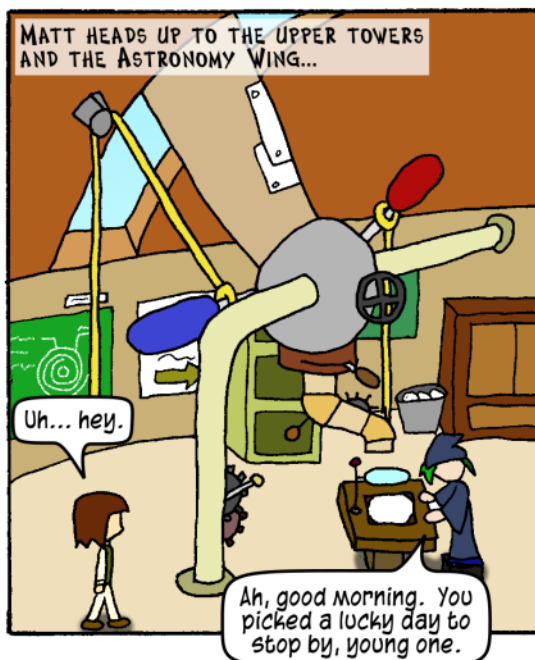
In case it wasn't obvious by now, the concept of Lineta Hall came largely from university life. A sort of idealized, unstructured university, in a way. The sort where most everyone's there out of curiosity and a sense of wanting to learn, where people are on the whole more socially progressive (a key example comes up later, in fact), and where the town, well, looks something like this. A mish-mash of design choices and architectures as the town's evolved over the years, with some people who live there full-time and an otherwise moderate tourism cycle. So, like if learning was more a tourist attraction.





If I were doing this today, I'd get a better shot of the front door of Lineta Hall than THAT. Like, something that at least implies depth. Maybe with at least a hint of a camera angle that doesn't make the perspective look like a flat rectangle. Sort of like how I did one of the intro pages to Chapter Eight.

The stained glass, though, I'd keep. Even if you can't possibly tell that one on the right is supposed to be a bunch of scrolls.



That large device taking up most of the room is, obviously, a telescope.

The small device on the table that is projecting the image of the castle, however, is just a mirror. Astronomers in this world quickly realized that looking in a tiny little eyepiece to observe things in telescopes is a bit silly, causes headaches, and leaves one open to the classic blackeye gag. Thus, through a clever system of lenses, the image is instead reflected off a mirror to make it easier to see. Makes far more sense. Maybe.

Remember in the last book how I mentioned that my understanding of astrophysics is flaky at best (hence Perfect Equinox)? My understanding of astronomy is also probably rather suspect. At least the parts revolving around astronomy equipment; I'm pretty sure the way I depict a telescope-like mechanism (using a series of mirrors and lenses to view images in a way that doesn't involve looking through a tiny eyepiece) wouldn't work at all in real life. Just assume that what's on the table is a mirror, and that might help.



Some people asked what Alex is trying to do with the rock here and what it has to do with anything, which, honestly, is a fair concern. "What" is simple to answer: She's trying to shatter or otherwise crack the rock with a magically-enhanced fist.

"Why", on the other hand, is a case of me setting up something that didn't pay off because I changed the story around on-the-fly. When I originally planned out this chapter, the confrontation with Marzos was going to happen deep in a basement lab in Lineta Hall. Alex and Howard would still be there, of course, but they would have come across him by more subtle means; the otherworld portal wouldn't have been nearly as apparent to the population there, but Alex would've somehow known something was up. I think that plan even involved a callback to the first time they found Marzos in Terakol in Chapter One, the part with the plants drained of life. You probably didn't remember THAT, did you?

Ultimately, Marzos would've been defeated much in the same way as he is in the final version: Alex and Howard distract him and shove him into his own portal. However, Howard would've only been gravely injured in the process, not outright killed (oh, hey, you DID remember in the introduction when I said I assumed you were familiar with the chapter and spoilers and all, right?), and Alex would've dragged him to safety amidst the portal's collapse. As for the collapse, now THAT would've attracted attention. Specifically, Rostone Squad's attention; they wouldn't have retreated back to Castle Landis and instead would be trying to figure out where Howard went.

And that's where this scene would've come in. Alex, of course, wouldn't want to just toss Howard back to the Landis Royal Army. So, as Rostone Squad would've made their way to the lab to investigate but before they had a chance to see what was going on, she would've used this spell (done correctly, and with spoken word enchantments, no less) on the basement walls to cause a minor cave-in, sealing the two of them from view until the squad gave up and left (I think I also assumed Alex set up something to protect both of them from, y'know, the entire cave-in and all). Then, after treatment by Lineta Hall's medical department, Howard would've been back to his old self in far less time than it took to travel to the Healing Springs in the real story, and actually wouldn't need to travel to the Healing Springs in the first place. And I guess he wouldn't have to deal with service in the Landis Royal Army anymore? That part was a little hazy, come to think of it.

But, before I got there, I kept revising Marzos's part. It moved to the top of Sunlit Tower (I couldn't have Alex use the spell she's practicing here, else the tower would've collapsed); the portal's presence was made more apparent to the people in the Hall (that became the reason why Rostone Squad bailed out without Howard); and Salth, Matt, and Cesol were made aware of what Alex and Howard were up to (so they played more of a part in the conclusion). Things like that. Eventually, I had the idea to conclude the chapter by going to the Healing Springs to bring Stephanie back into the picture, so I had to make sure Alex and Howard were found quickly, and so the whole idea with the shattering rock fell apart.

So there's your lesson, kids: Try not to make major revisions to your storyline while it's in motion. In the end, I liked what happened better, since it led to a lot more than what the original ending would have. Though, after looking over this scene again, I kinda wish I pushed things more in a direction where Alex started studying spoken word enchantments because of Howard. That would've been cuter.





It should be noted that there is a distinct difference between magically *removing* something, which is what Salth did here, and magically *destroying* something. Magically *removing* something involves, for a lack of boring detail, sort of sending said thing to a sort of magic holding area or limbo-ish place. For all intents and purposes, gone, but retrievable with considerable difficulty. Difficult enough that it isn't ideal for a substitute for luggage. Stop whining and just carry your bags.

Magically *destroying* something would be functionally equivalent to, for example, going ape on said thing with a wood axe.

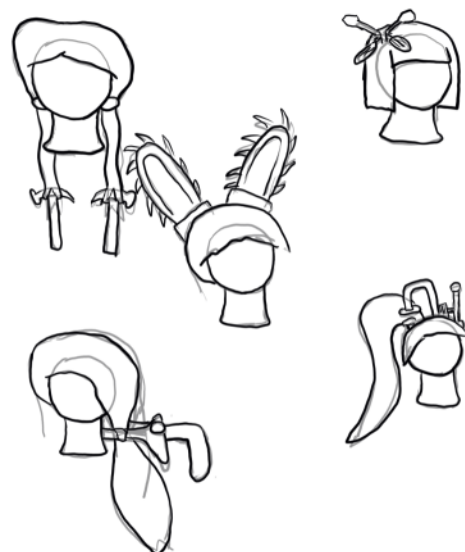
Ah, bookshelves. My old nemesis. We meet again. This time, I see you brought friends.

There was a time I was going to declare that the "calm" dwarves, like this one here (as opposed to the eccentric, engineering-obsessed dwarves), were a separate race, sort of like how the beach elves are separate from forest elves. I was all ready to call them "plains dwarves", too. But, eventually I figured they were better off coexisting as the same race so at least some part of their kingdoms can be partially sane and all.



Presumably, this device is some component of the Kroloff Claw, as it gets named later in the chapter. The dwarves must've found a way to make it smaller by the time Cesol gets it to the Healing Springs next chapter.

The dwarf girl in the back is indeed using cogs as pigtail ties. It's amazing how many common tools can be used as hair decorations if one tries hard enough.





Lucien's very presence makes people feel uncomfortable. In Chapter One, Matt quickly became awake when he stopped by the inn, here Alex is suddenly getting uneasy when he's nearby, and in Chapter Six, we see Cy start to think something's a bit wrong right before he strikes. Hm... I wonder if that means anything...

I want to imagine the magic studies department at Lineta Hall just has free raikke mushrooms and necklace chains sitting around for people to grab. Even though those things are way too bulky to really work as necklaces.



Fun fact: Gratuitous name-dropping is NOT a surefire way to gain someone's trust! It can, in fact, be a very terrible way to do so! Especially when you don't trust some of that name's friends to begin with!

I'm not quite sure what this hallway is supposed to be, as I'm somehow treating it as a darkened, dead-end alley in the middle of a building. Maybe I was just in the mindset of Dodge Hall back at Oakland University, where they keep many of the engineering professors' offices tucked away in a labyrinth deep in the lower floor.

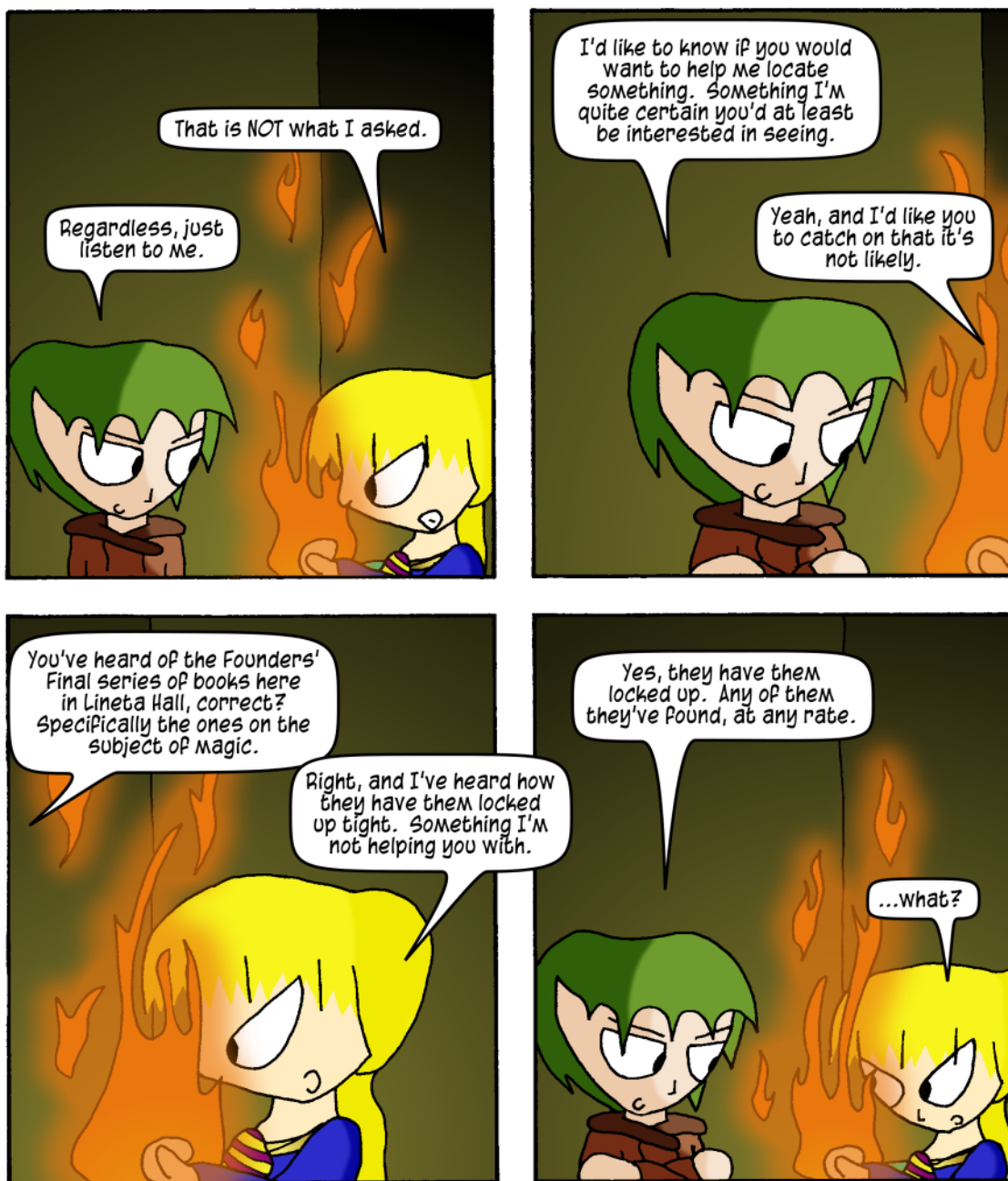
Oakland University has some odd layout choices, to be honest.



Lucien's taking a magic flame dangerously close to his face surprisingly calmly.

The first time we saw Lucien was back in Chapter One. Back then, everything was pencil-shaded, and, more importantly, greyscale. This meant I had to make up an awful lot of colors all of a sudden when I switched to computer-backed coloring. For most of the main cast, I already had their colors worked out. Lucien was not one of them.

It was around that point when I decided that elves, on the whole, tend to have oddly-colored hair. Phinn has sheer white hair, Cy has weird highlights, Lucien has green hair, etc. Not that all elves have weird hair colors, mind; just more often than not. Also not that other races CAN'T have weird hair colors, either; I do some things different around here, but I'm not just going to throw away EVERY dumb visual trope of a fantasy comic.



Also, of course the flames coming from Alex's hand aren't burning her hair. She's controlling the flames, that's why. Next question.

I don't really like drawing backgroundless panels. I know that removing backgrounds helps for things like action scenes, where doing so helps keep the focus on the action, but since the DoM isn't a very action-driven comic, blank backgrounds just seem out of place to me. Regardless, drawing backgrounds does slow me down from time to time, keeping track of what's back there, making sure it's either staying away from the foreground characters or that they interact with it logically, etc. I bring that up now because this darkened hallway is quite pleasingly minimalistic, which was nice from a speed perspective.



You don't really think they've explored every bit of this place, do you? The Founders did a lot of work for many generations. They find new places in the Hall that nobody has ever seen all the time.



I've been told of one such place that happens to hold one of the Founders' Final books on magic. I have no reason not to believe it, but I also have very few details past that.

Yeah, and I know better than to study magic that's out of my league. What's your point?



You're not going to be reading it. I've been tasked to retrieve it for someone. And as I've tried to get you to understand, I've found I need your help in doing so.

And you're still talking as if you think I'm going to help you. Why?



Your own curiosity, of course.

That IS why you're here, isn't it? That's why everyone comes here.

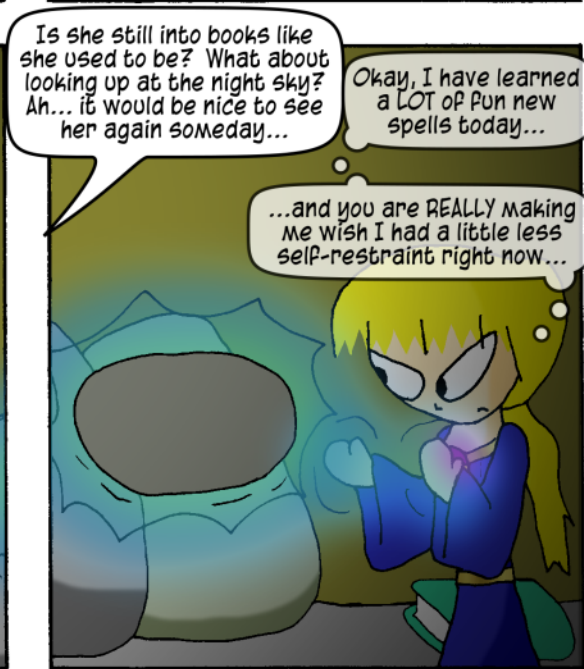


The Founders' Final series of books are the last collections of information that the Temple of Lineta's Founders wrote before everything went kerflooey. They cover a wide variety of topics, from alchemy to metallurgy to cooking to magic to military strategy and more. It is generally accepted that these tomes are the authority on whatever subject they happen to be about.

It's safe to say Lucien probably isn't looking for a book on cooking a wicked good raikke mushroom stew.

Well, have to admit, he's got you there, Alex.

I think this was one of the longest strings of back-and-forth banter I've had in the comic up to this point. Four strips, mostly a text dump, (almost) all stuck on the same background? I try not to do that. Comics are supposed to be a visual medium, after all.



If I ever make merchandise for the DoM (besides books), bulky light-up raikke mushroom necklaces will have to be on the list, right alongside a plush nasal fly. Actually, I wouldn't mind making a plush nasal fly sometime, maybe as a one-off thing. Maybe even just plastic/resin. I've messed with Blender a bit before, maybe I can come up with a 3D model of one and bug someone with a 3D printer to make it as a keychain fob or something.

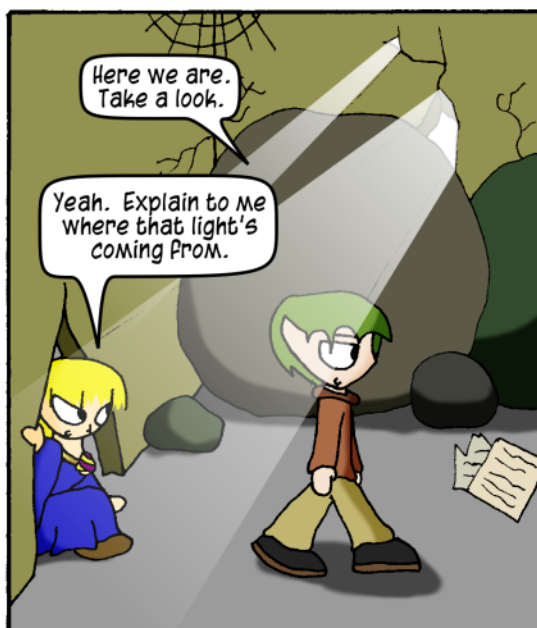
(note: I'm not really that good with Blender)





The second panel here is indeed the same as when Phinn was talking about her trips to Lineta Hall with Lucien back at the start of the chapter. It's just slightly different when Lucien's telling the story.

I completely forgot until just now that, along with Phinn having the pigtails in her absurdly long hair when she was young, Lucien's hair was more yellowy back then. At some point I should actually try to put a more solid definition for how elf hair grows and matures throughout their (very long) lifetimes. That point is not now. At least Phinn's was definitely always white, and she also had that headband for some reason.

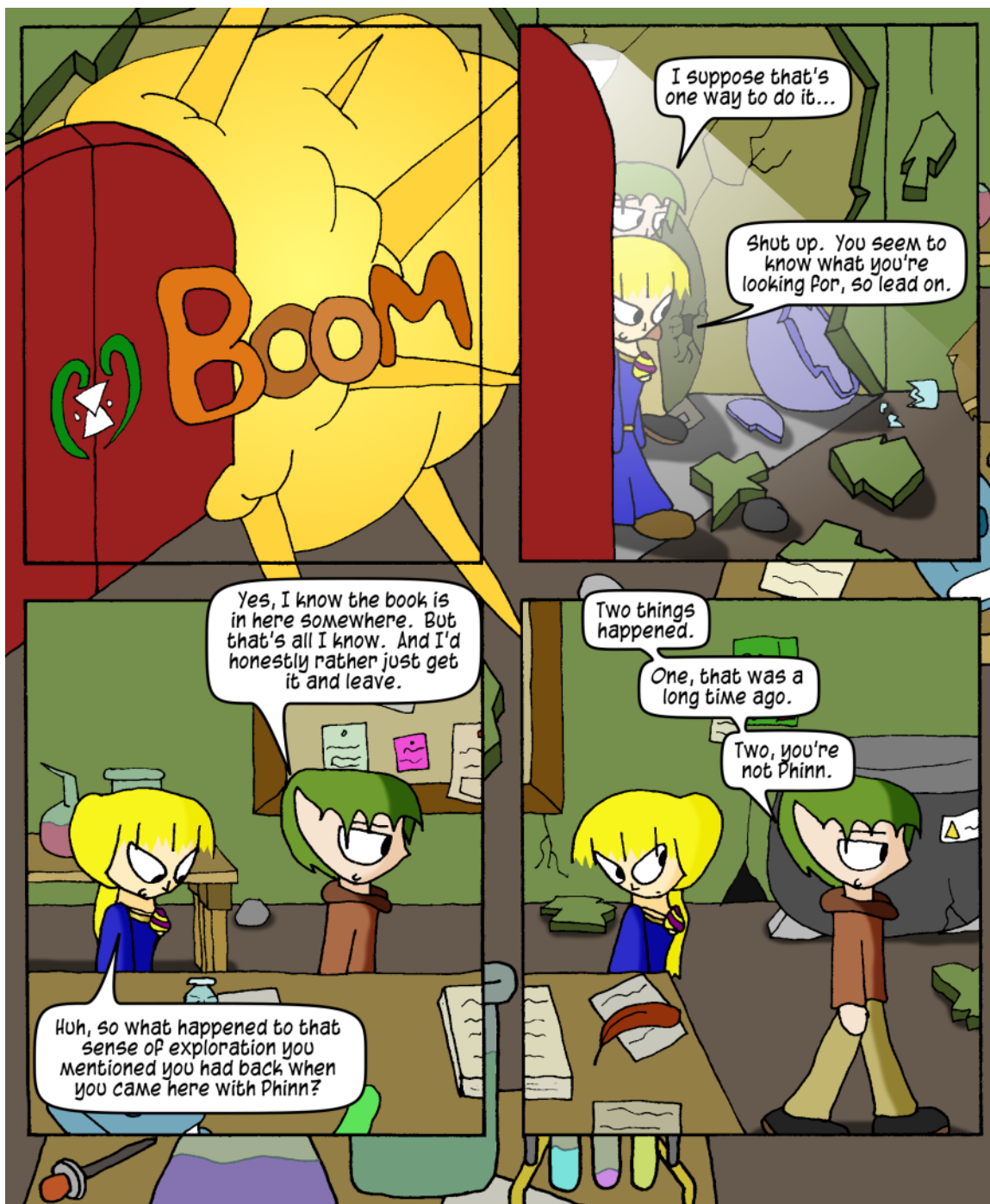


A physical magic lock is a magic lock or seal with some kind of physical component to it. That is, you can see it and touch it, but that still probably won't help you open it. This is as opposed to a nonphysical, or "pure" magic lock, which is typically invisible to the naked eye and far more useful for irritating people who don't know it's there.

The note is, of course, handwritten. Specifically, my own handwriting, with a bit of extra curviness and roundness to make it look like modern handwriting had evolved over the ages in the DoM world (and was presumably in some common language). Even without the added curvy flair, you can tell why I don't feature my own handwriting in the comic much these days.



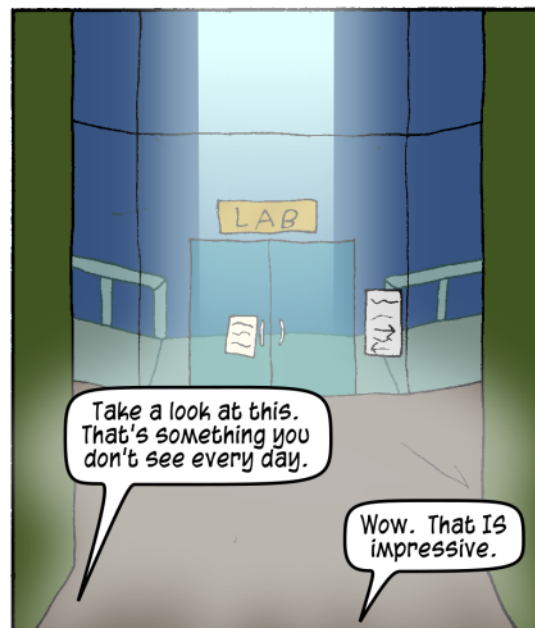
One of the interesting parts of making a webcomic is that you get to do silly layouts like this without any concern about how the comic will look on paper. And then I decided to make a book and print it on paper.



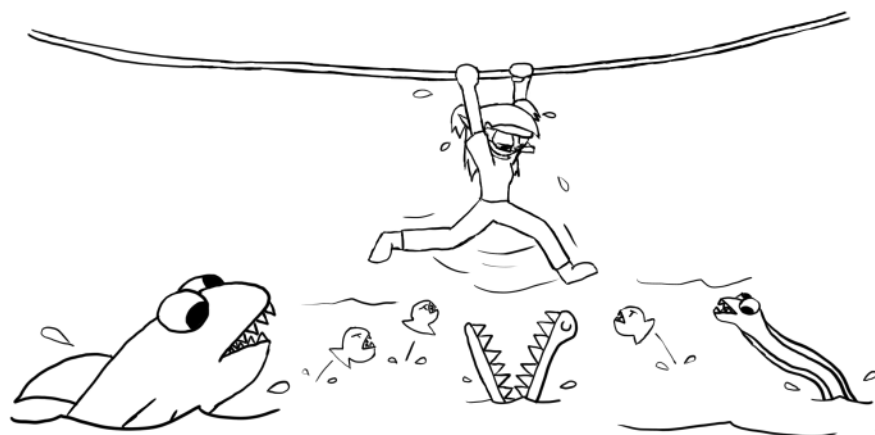
Then for THIS comic, I did a nifty full-image bleed. Looks pretty neat on the web, doesn't quite look as neat on paper where the image isn't the size of the page.

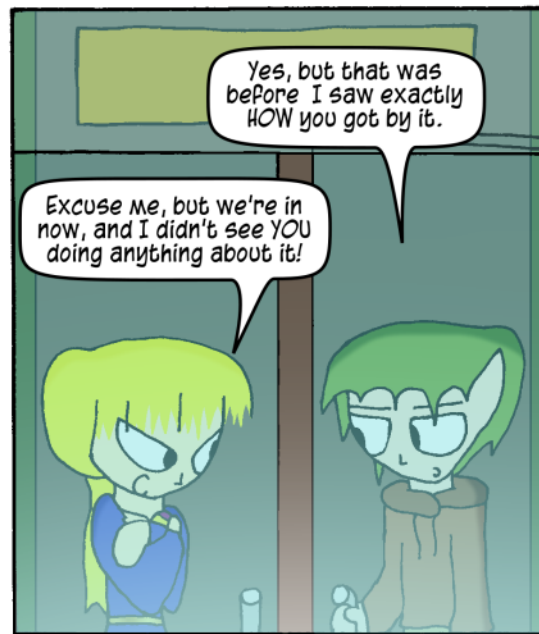
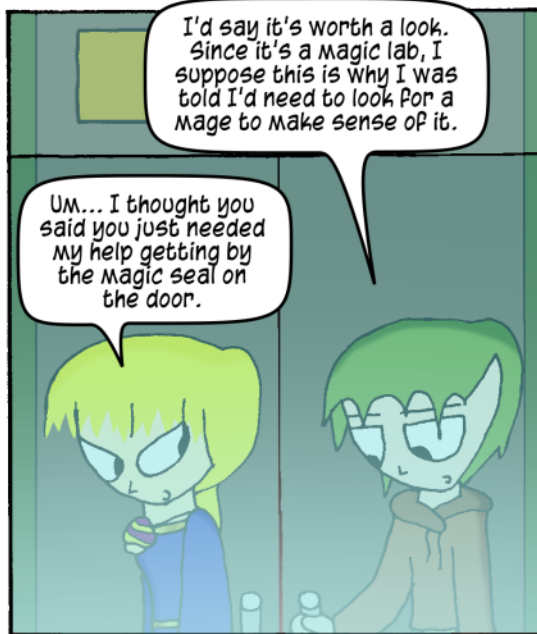
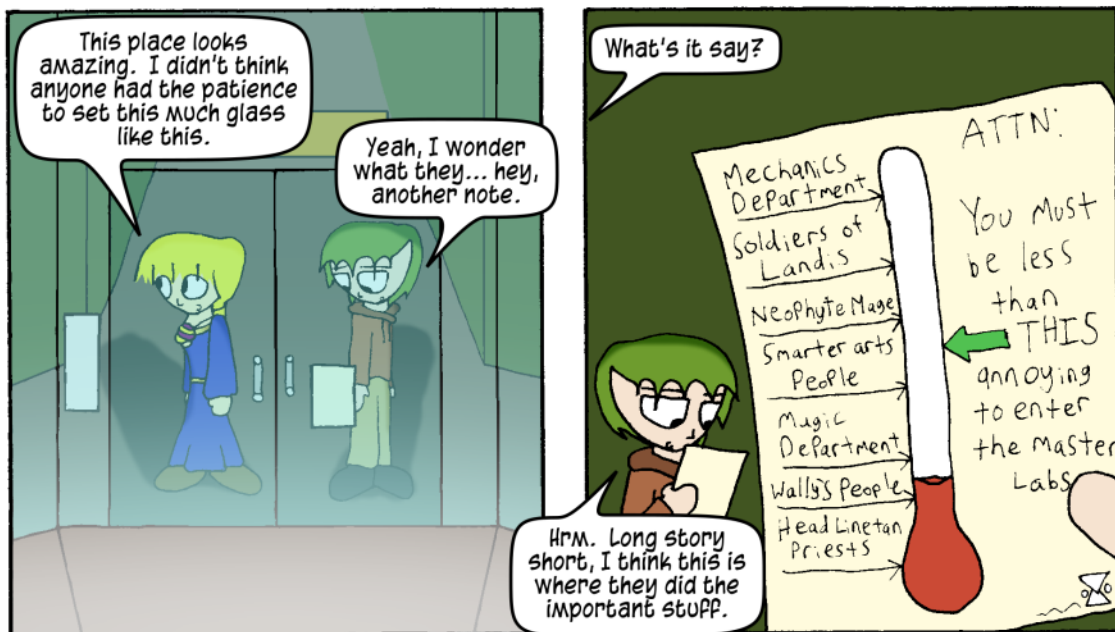
I know there's probably a "real" term for this sort of thing (have I mentioned I've never taken a class in art design?), but in my head, I just call what I did in the first panel a "leaky panel"; that is, the panel is where it otherwise should be in the layout, but its contents are "leaking" into the gutters (which, in turn, makes a full-image bleed). For the record, its inverse would be a "floating panel". When Alex and Lucien first enter the lab in a couple pages, you'll see. I don't know why I kept the panel borders on the leaky first panel.

It will do you no good to correct me on these terms.



Remember how I said I wasn't good at writing creepy guys? Yeah, I guess I can write Lucien, at least, and he's creepy. Maybe I just can't write genuinely misogynistic creeps that well.

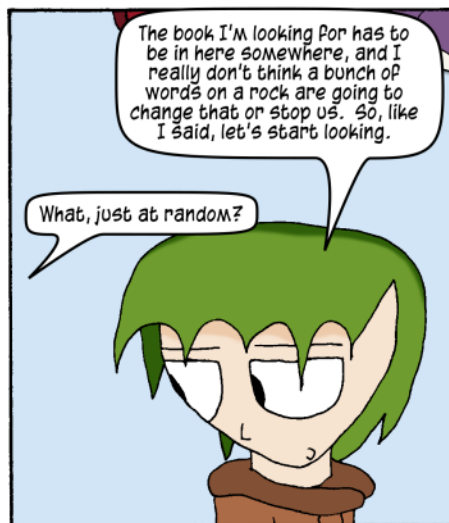




The note left by the former occupants of the lab makes reference to soldiers from Landis. That Landis is only tangentially related to the Landis of today. While the Landis family line does stretch back into the times of the original Followers of Lineta, this particular Landis was a warlord whose territory fell ironically in present-day Breznial. The ancient Warlord Landis was a vicious leader who took over a great deal of land for the time, but his forces were no match for the combined knowledge of ancient Lineta, no matter how many times he tried to take the temple.

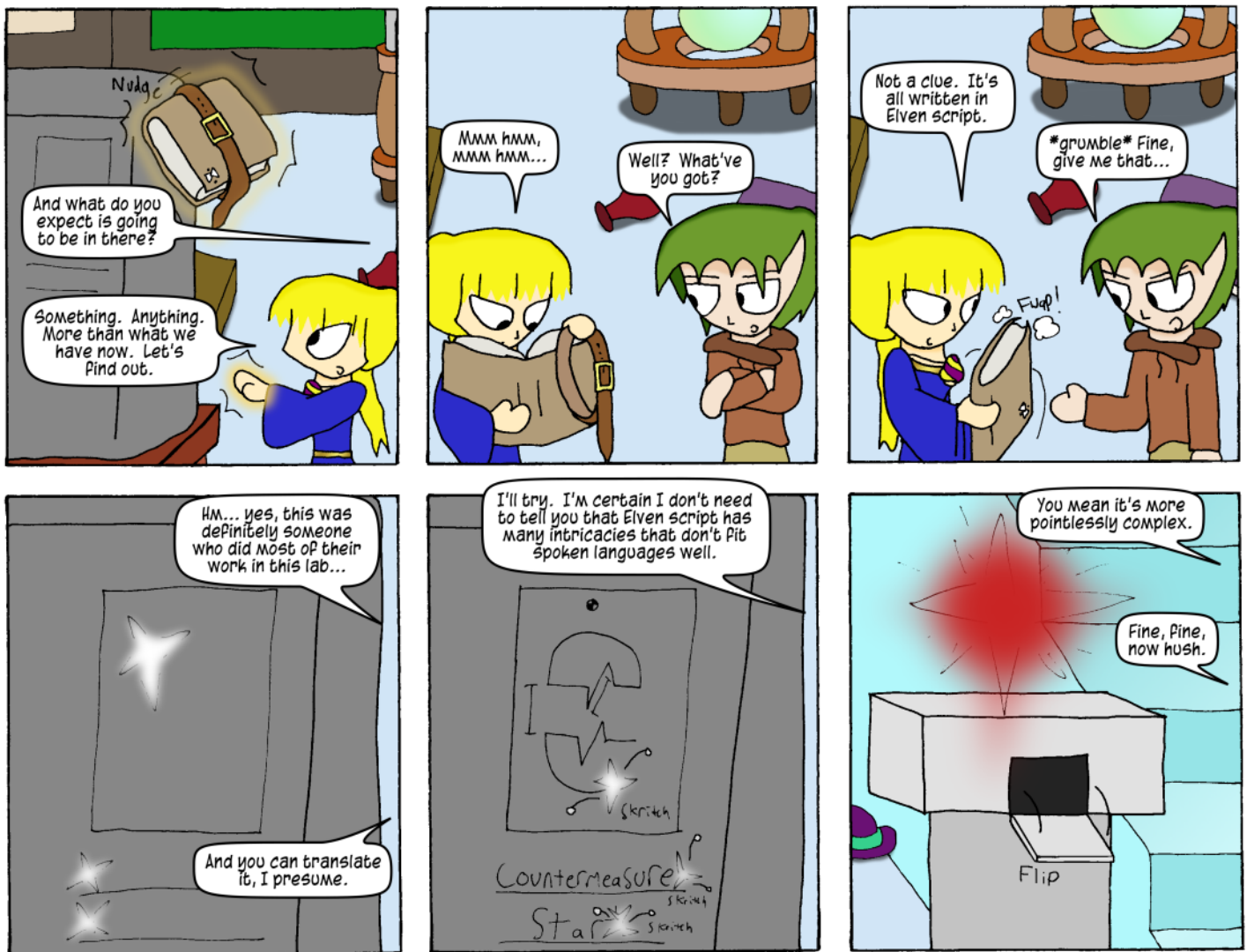
The fact that his soldiers were more than a bit annoying is pure coincidence.

Totally not a continuity error I didn't notice until I pushed the comic out to the website. For totally sure.



One thing I used to do a lot in the earlier comics was put way too much action in Alex's ponytail. You could see it in the previous strip when she whipped her head around, and you can see it here in the fourth panel when she's getting angry with Lucien. You can see it in other mages, too, like when Salth is casting spells and her hair flares out. I eventually stopped with that except for more powerful spells or stronger actions, as it looked kinda silly and weightless, to be honest.





If someone were to ask me to pick which comics best describe how magic fits into the DoM, this would be one of the top ones. Which is actually counter-intuitive, seeing as how it requires me explaining why before it becomes clear.

Let's say you have a book sitting on top of a high surface, one that's too high for you to reach without help. How would you retrieve this book? Get a ladder or step stool or something on which to stand to reach it? Of course not; you're lazy. You'd grab a broomstick or something, knock the book off, and catch it in your hand as it fell. Or not, the book isn't exactly fragile, after all. It can hit the floor.

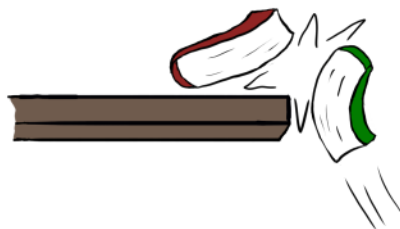


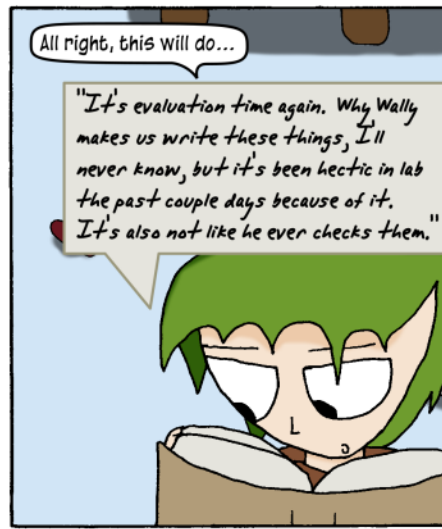


So here we see Alex wanting to get a book off the top of the writing rock. Sure, she could cobble together some unstable platform on which she can stand to reach the book, but she knows magic, and can thus use that to get it down. But does she do something like magically lift the book and draw it down to her hand? Of course not. That'd be too much effort for something that simple. She just applies a bit of force to knock it down and catch it in her hand manually, just like with you and the broomstick.

What's more, Lucien doesn't find this unusual or surprising in the slightest. The concept of someone knowing how to magically knock a book off a ledge like that is entirely natural to people of the comic, even to people who never studied magic. It's a tool that gets a job done, and that's it.

Even a simple tool can do really impressive things at times, but this isn't one of those times. This is just a mundane yet useful thing.





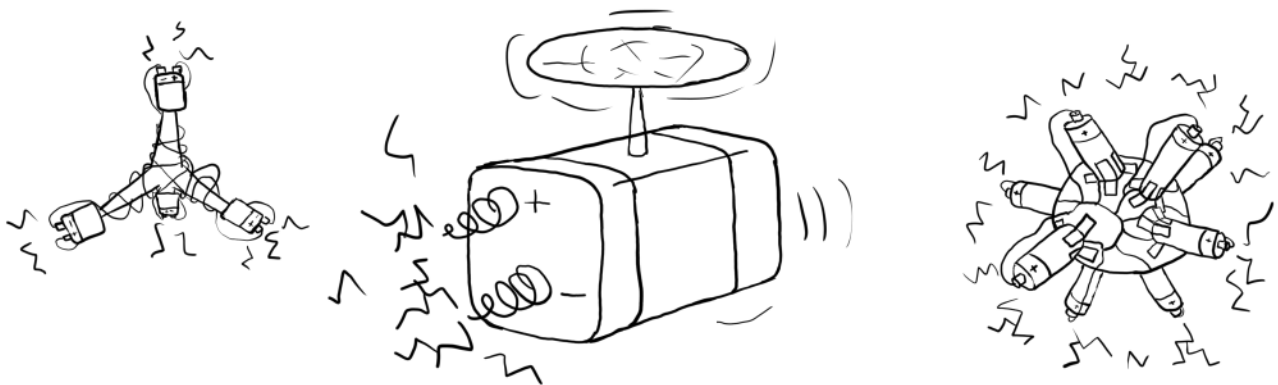
Elven script is one of those things I'm not going to actually define or draw any time soon. It's not like I'm a linguistics professor who could invent that sort of thing with any degree of consistency. If you see something that looks like a bunch of unidentified glyphs in the DoM, rest assured that it's not Elven script.

The font being used when Lucien reads the book, though, *that's just a font I found somewhere called AlphaMack AOE*. I wanted something that looked handwriting-ish and was still readable in this context (and had lowercase letters, which seems to be far too much to ask for in a comic font these days for some reason). It has its weird quirks, like rendering at a somewhat tiny point size and not at all aligning with the baseline of other fonts (note how it looks earlier in this paragraph compared to its surrounding text), but in isolation, it does the job of looking like journal notes.



You can tell I just gave up on figuring out what the other side of the lab looked like.

I also started getting annoyed with redrawing the exact same background over and over again, like what you're seeing in the first five panels here. Later in the chapter is when I started playing around more with just drawing a background ONCE and repeating it when necessary and if the camera angle didn't change. Hooray for digital composition!





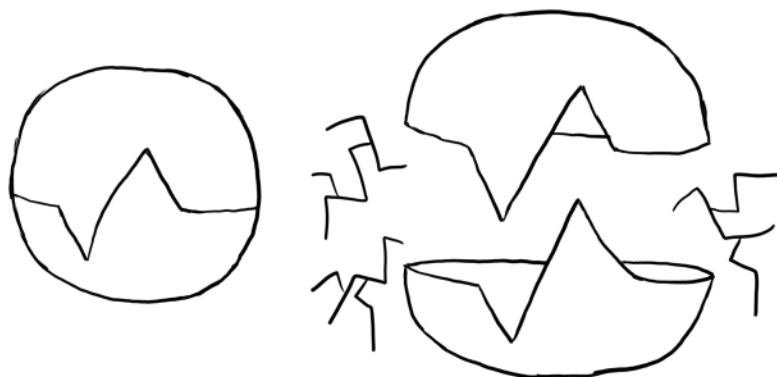
I have to wonder if the term "electrocute" would actually be common in something like the DoM world. Generally, when you think of electricity in a quasi-medieval fantasy world setup, you think of lightning. Lightning, as far as most people are concerned (especially people unaware of electronics), doesn't so much "electrocute" people as it "makes them become very very hot for a brief amount of time before they explode violently". Plus, when "ill-defined energy bolt" is an option for mages, throwing electricity around just seems inefficient and difficult to control, especially when electrical theory hasn't really been studied yet. So I'm not actually sure if Alex should be aware of the term.

But, who knows, maybe she's read about weird electrical research the dwarves have come up with.



Elves are light and fast. And, at times, determined. Next question.

I'm not actually sure why I went with electro-zappy floating sphere thingamajigs. I know I needed some sort of non-lethal, large-scale prank type of thing that a magic studies department in Lineta Temple would've come up with to dissuade other departments from bugging them or sneaking into their labs when nobody else is around. Even at that, though, it seems a bit odd a choice.

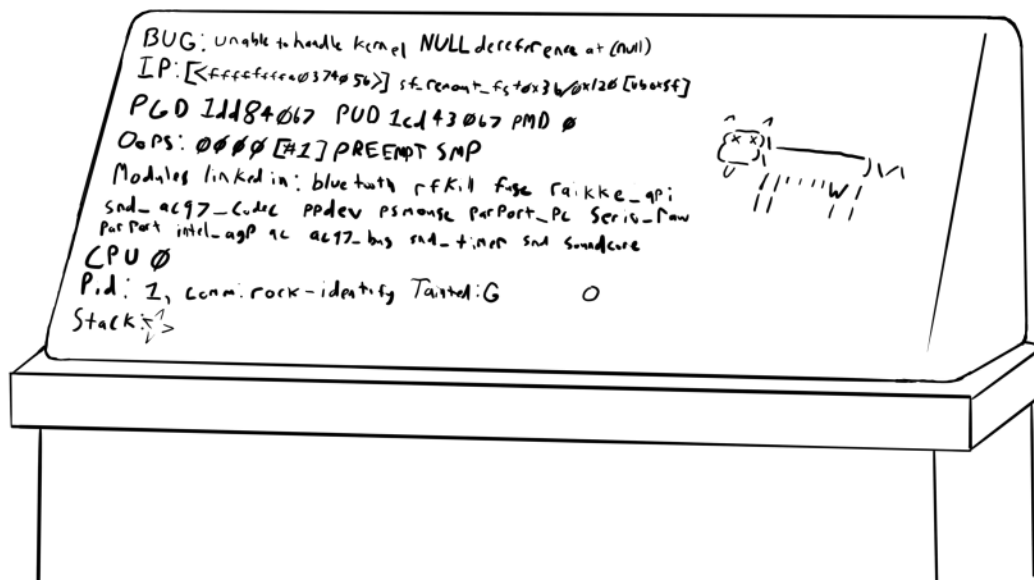


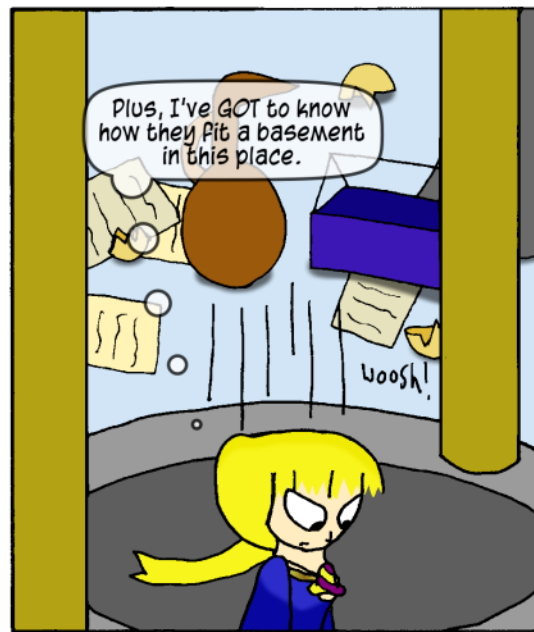


The way magic effects are represented in the comic have evolved over time as I've gotten used to more and more digital effects and filters I can use to my advantage. I'd probably come up with a better way to handle the magic shield than this if I were doing it today.

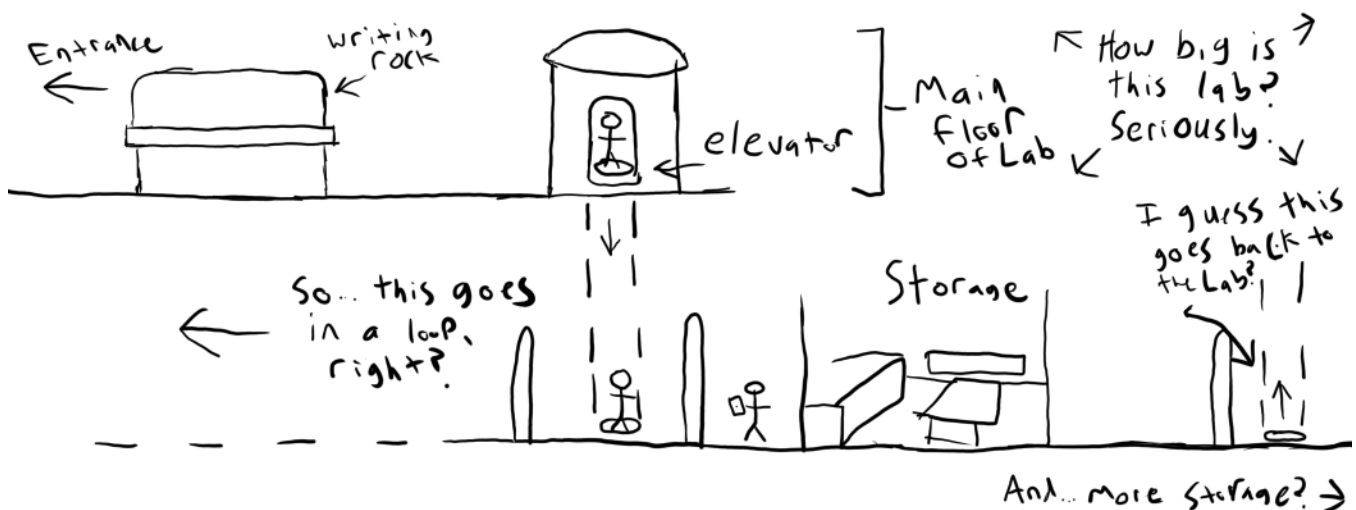


I don't know if this behavior should be considered a bug or an unexpected use case of the software.





Or maybe Lucien was right and you're just following him to find the book because you're naturally curious, Alex.





Look! On the small white piece of paper posted on the wall in the fourth panel! Look really really closely! It's Bean Man! Bean Man, everyone!

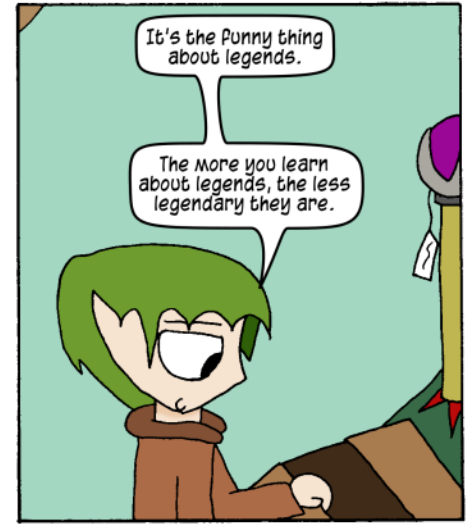
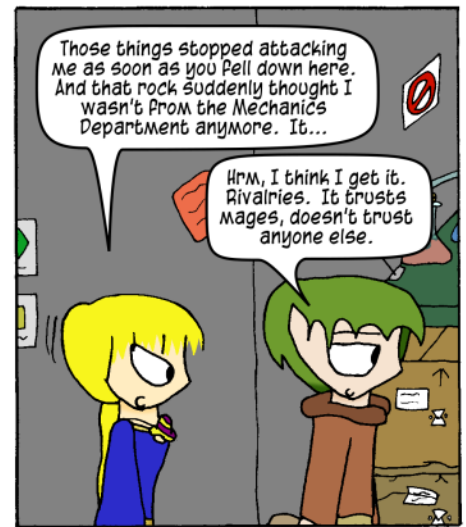
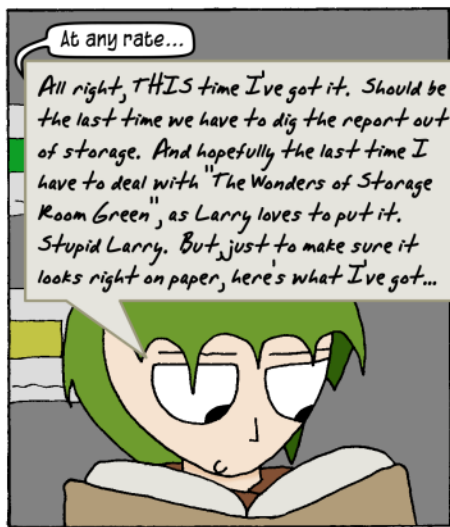
Let's talk about beach elves (I'm assuming you've read Chapter Four by this point and know their story in-universe). I know I said in the last book that I'd bring them up in a Chapter Four book if I ever made one, but hey, there's one now, the blueish-grey-skinned girl in the fourth panel, so I may as well. Back when I started the comic, I was trying to get ideas together for the various races I was going to use. Humans, elves, dwarves, etc, the standard stable of fantasy people. I tried to make sure they had some degree of my own personal twists to how they did things, though in the end a lot of them turned out similar to what you think of when you think "Tolkienesque dwarf" or whatnot.

At that point, I got the idea in my head to add in dark elves (or drow or what-have-you). I didn't, however, have a very clear idea of just what they were going to DO, per se; the stories I had were perhaps not quite as fantastical as one might expect from a fantasy webcomic made by a computer programmer, and I didn't really have anywhere to put "race that is just an evil/corrupt clone of another race", like how dark elves are traditionally represented. I like things to fit a larger world if I can help it, and that sort of thing just doesn't really feel right there. That's also partly why you won't see any standard-issue "evil clones of the main cast" storylines in my comic, but that's another matter. So, not having any good ideas, I pushed off the dark elves for later. I figured I'd just come up with some reason why they're rarely seen around the village in which Matt and Alex live.

Later on, I started thinking about them again. I don't know why I started thinking along these lines, but I figured that if I had dwarves who spoke with the usual generic Scottish accent that tends to be associated with them, why not give these dark elves a standard surfer-slang accent? And since I might not've been thinking straight, I couldn't think of any reasons why not. Before this chapter started, I worked out the backstory that Phinn tells Melzos in Chapter Four, and thus beach elves were born. And some of them hang out in Lineta Hall from time to time.

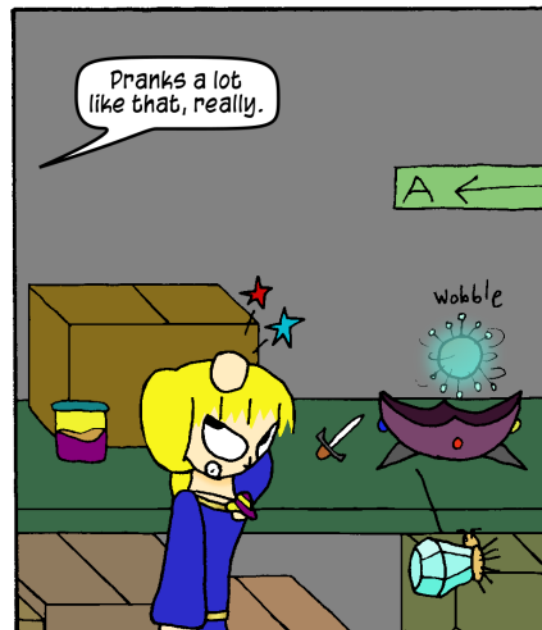
It's worth mentioning that at the time I wrote all this, I'd never lived anywhere near a major beach. Lake St. Clair doesn't count.



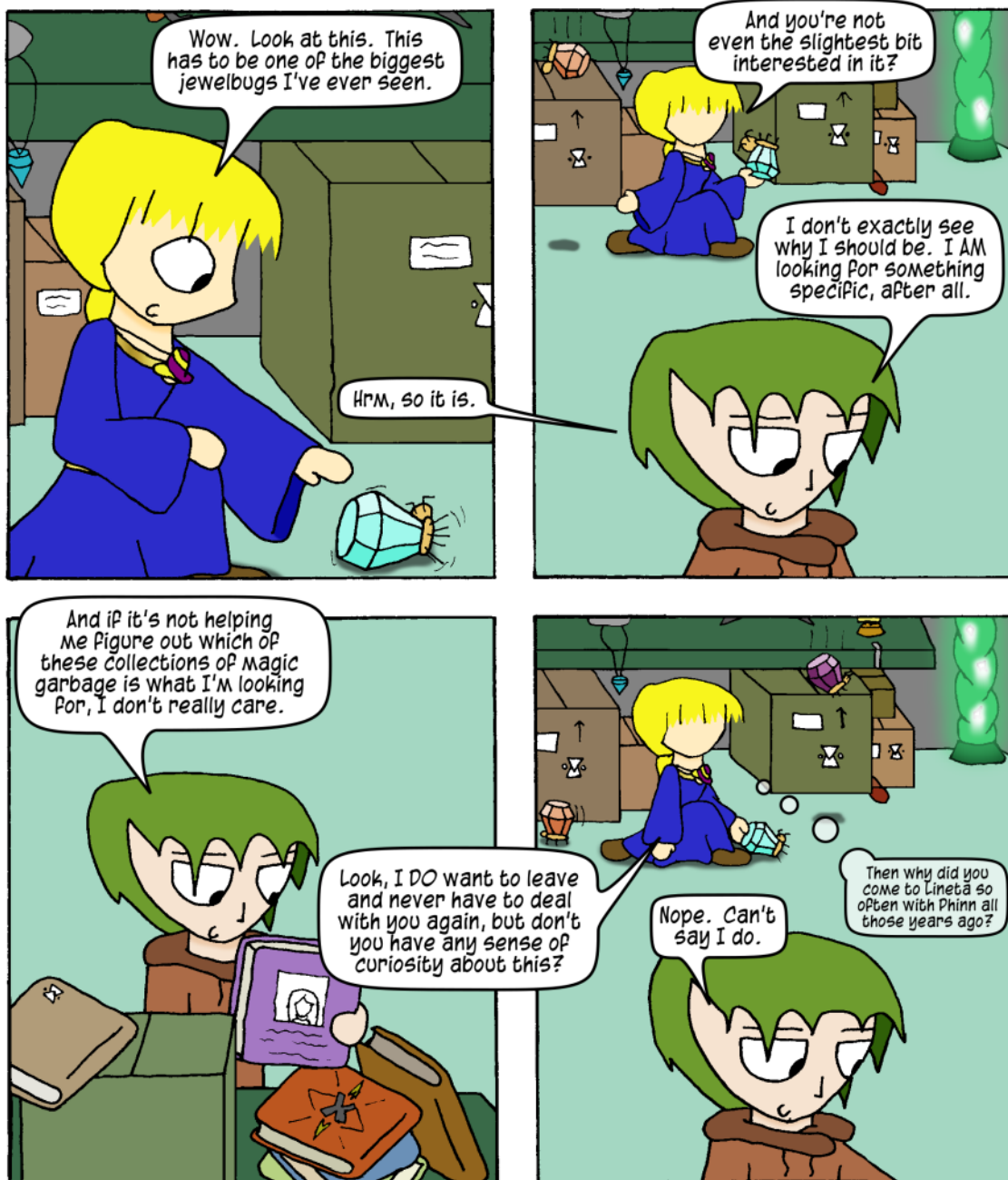


Magic script, like Elven script, is another thing I most likely won't ever actually show, as I'm in no hurry to make super-concrete "rules" of how magic works in the DoM (general, vague rules, yes, that's intended to remain relatively consistent, but not exact rules that would be understandable to the reader). Going back to the computer programming example, just assume that, with training and practice, magic script is something that just makes sense for teaching how magic works, like how code snippets tell a programmer what's going on. Some of the stuff on the walls of a magic lab obviously has magic script written on it, but I just squiggle that out to unreadability anyway.

Though just to be clear, the glyphs used in spoken enchantments aren't magic script. Totally different.



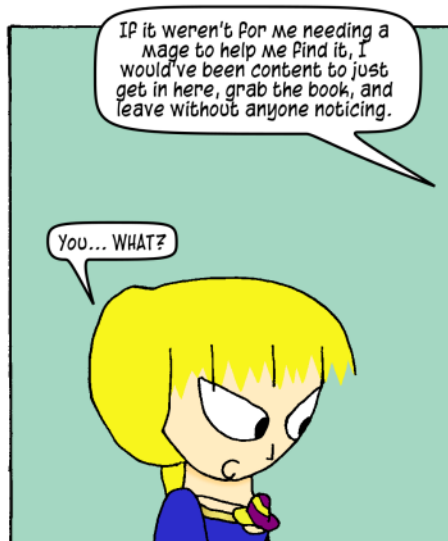
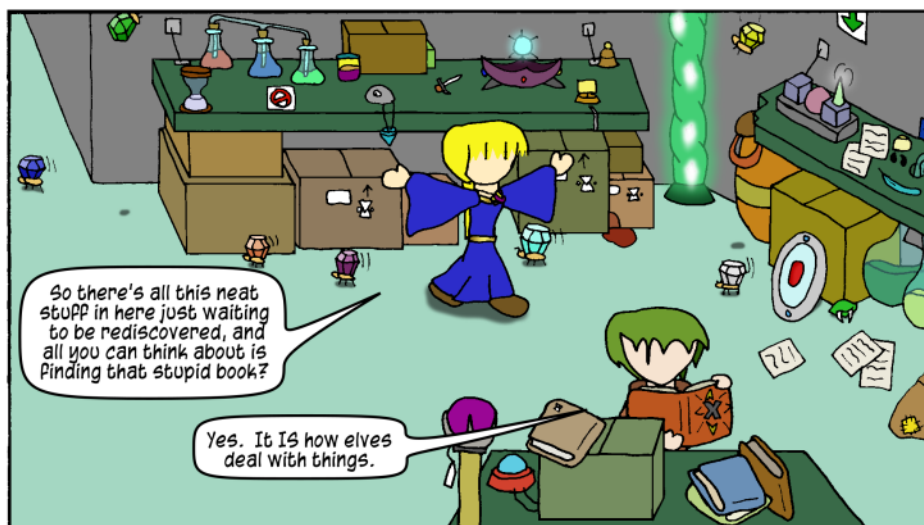
Maybe it's just me, but I think the concept of "legends weren't all that legendary in real life" (or rather, "legends were normal people like anyone else") is really interesting in a worldbuilding sense when some additional context is given to who the legends were and what they did in their normal day-to-day lives. It doesn't have to be "it turns out the legends were actually insufferable jerks", of course (and I prefer to think writers can do better than that), but I just feel that giving some impression that they were just ordinary people whose achievements became inflated over centuries of stories being retold helps establish some sort of history to the world.



The common jewelbug has taken a somewhat strange evolutionary path. For defense against predators, it has developed a large, jewel-like exoskeleton. Shown in this comic is just one example of the shapes it can take. While generally stronger than the exoskeletons of most other insects, it is nowhere near as strong as the actual jewels they look like. Additionally, they usually don't get as big as the one Alex is holding.

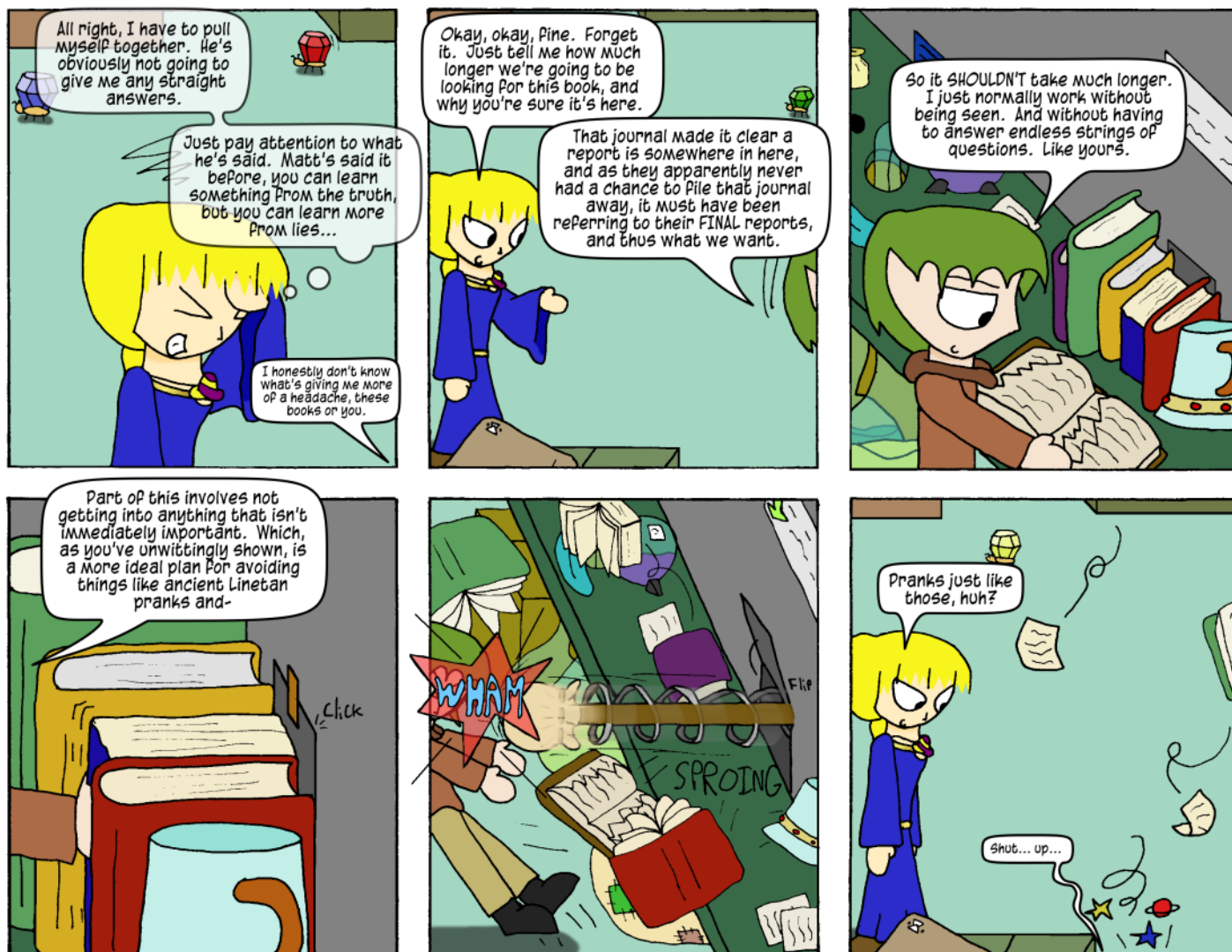
The jewel-like appearance also helps them blend in with actual jewels. Exactly why is unclear; while it can be easy to mistake a jewelbug for an actual jewel at first glance, the ruse doesn't last very long, and the exoskeleton, while considerably stronger than that of other common insects, is no match for the foot of someone angered by the fact that he or she just wasted time and excitement over a bug.

I really should do more with jewelbugs. In fact, I should probably do more with animal life in the DoM in general.



That is a healthy amount of junk I drew in that lab for back then. Shame about the perspective. That's something I've been trying to correct recently: Draw scenes from angles that don't look like I started with an isometric projection and worked out from there. Or in other words, draw out some depth to the background, rather than aim the camera such that we're always looking at the floor.

Of course, to do that, I need to learn how to STOP drawing a background so that I don't fret over how deep I need to make things. Fortunately, stuff like hills, trees, buildings, and mountains are good at breaking up backgrounds like that. Or, say, the back wall of a research lab, meaning I should've done exactly that here to make for a better camera angle. Dangit.



See? That shelf Lucien's investigating is at a SUPER weird perspective that really shouldn't have happened if I were better at this back then.

Matt learned a lot about magic from growing up with Alex. Likewise, Alex learned a lot about seeing through difficult people from growing up with Matt.



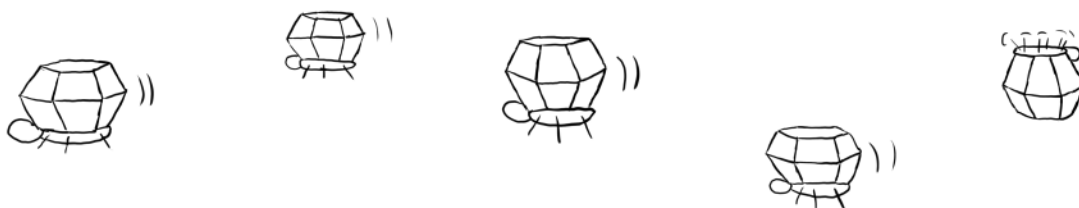
Hey, there's still a steady stream of jewelbugs marching across the floor up there! Eh, probably nothing worth worrying about.

I've always wondered why, in stories where the main characters are investigating something with the assistance of a journal none of them have ever seen before, the only information they ever seem to find in it is completely plot-relevant. Like, they just open the book, flip a couple pages, and hey presto, there's just what they need from someone's barely-structured, completely unindexed personal journal. Context-sensitive, too! Exactly what they need, when they need it.

Take note: Thanks to the stupid angle, I effectively didn't have to draw a background for this or the next four comics.



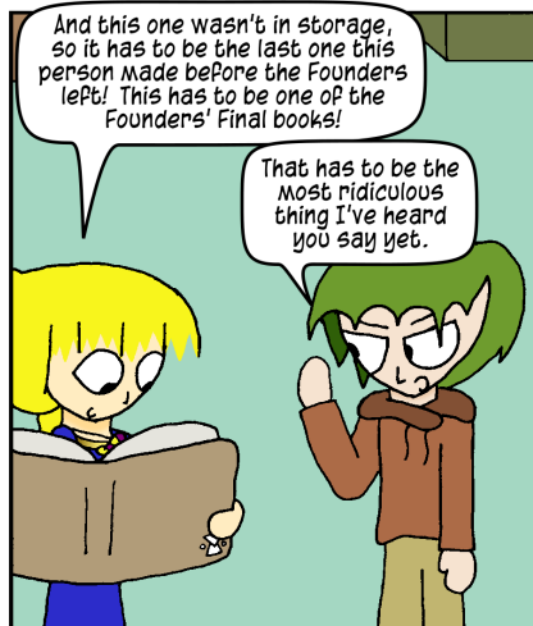
Do you know how hard it is to reasonably portray, in comic form, someone quickly collapsing into a headache pain from reading something that literally isn't settling well in their brain? It's not easy, let me tell you. This sort of scene would work better in an animated context.





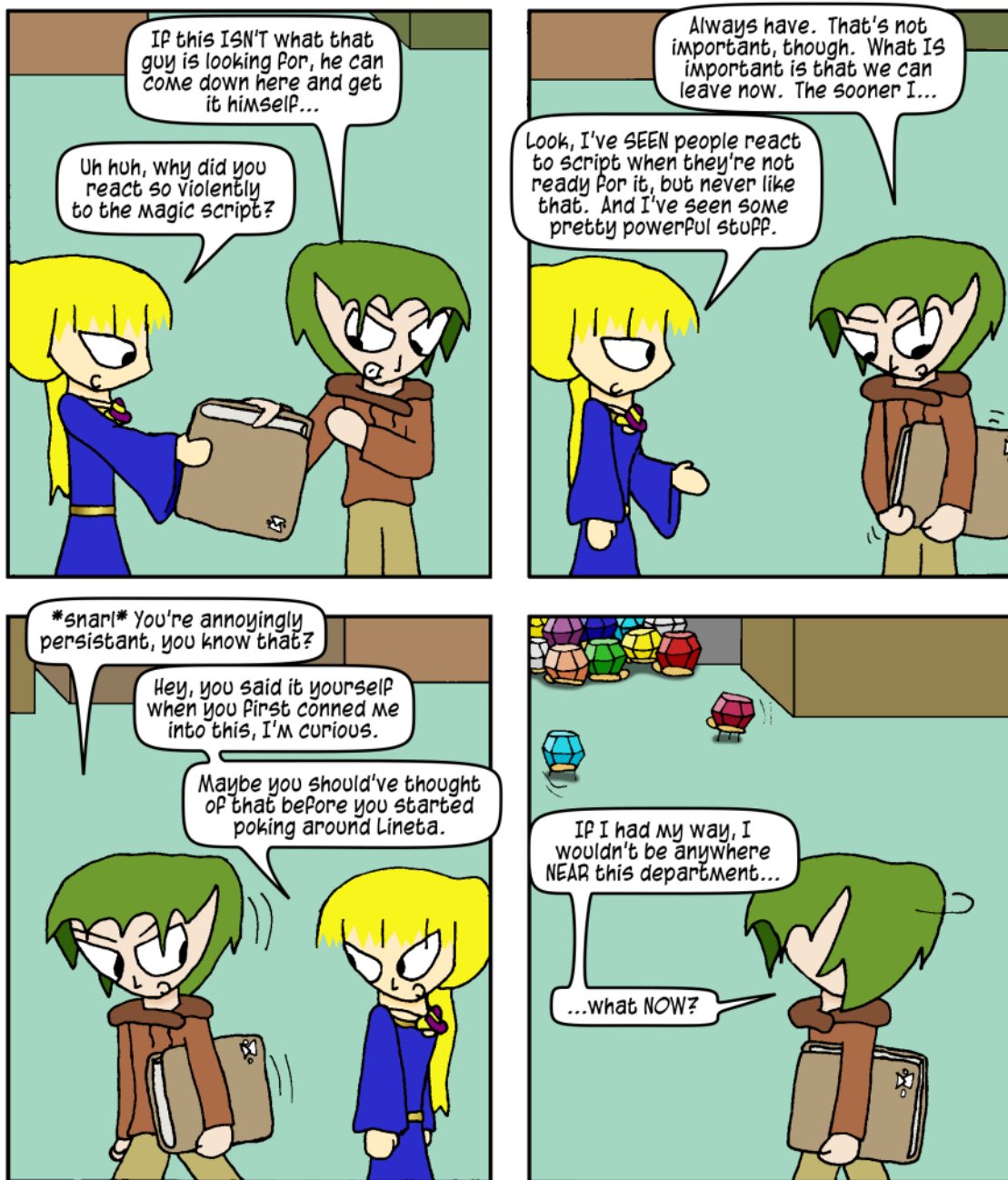
Well, you knew I wasn't going to have them just find it where they expected to, right?





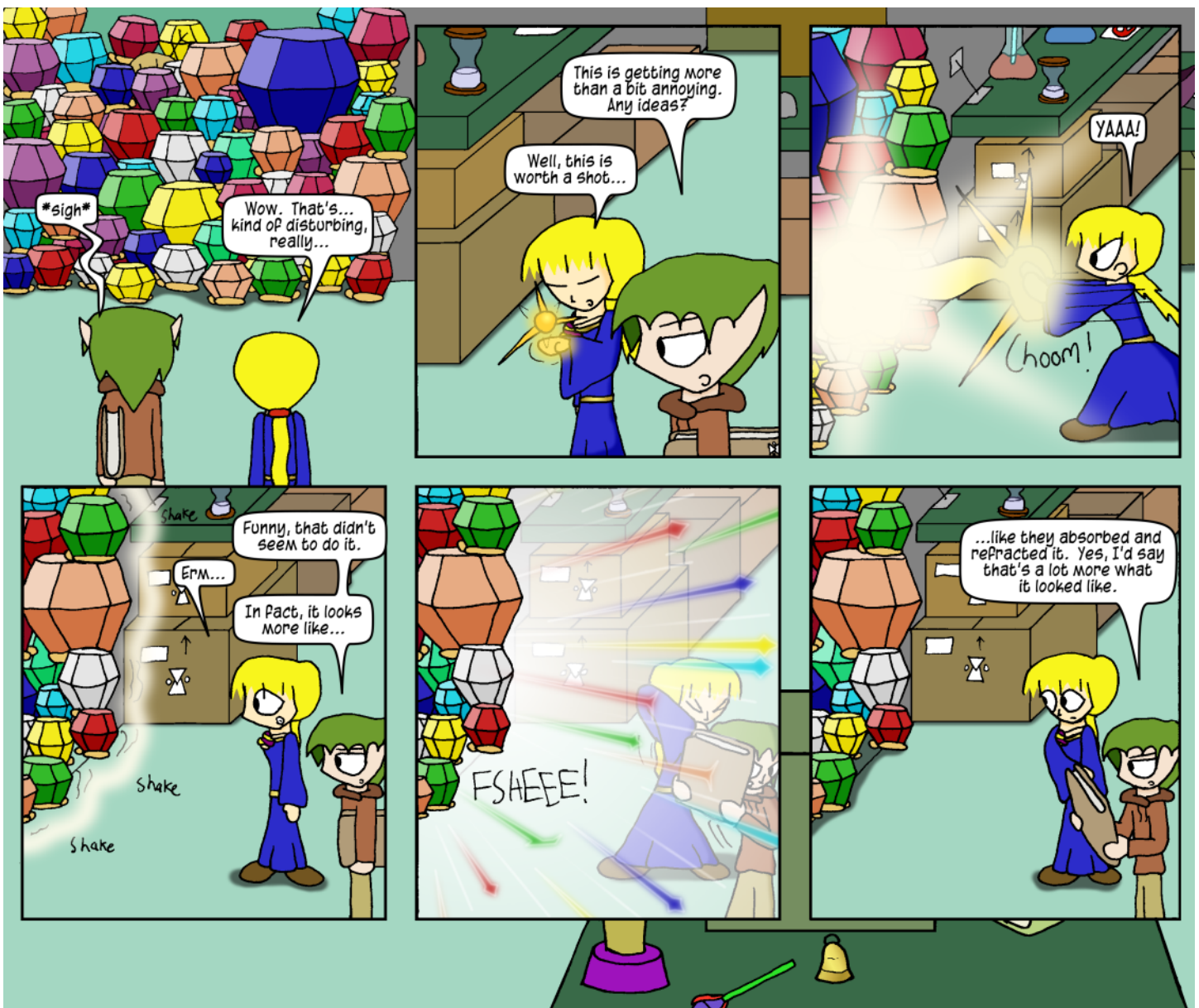
You DID deserve that, Lucien.





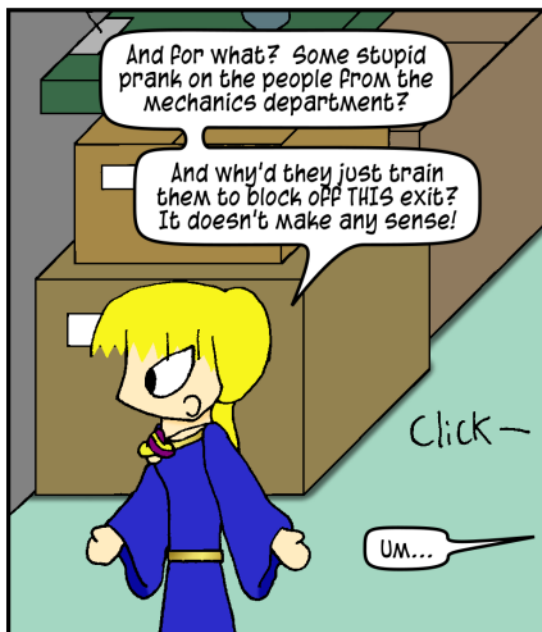
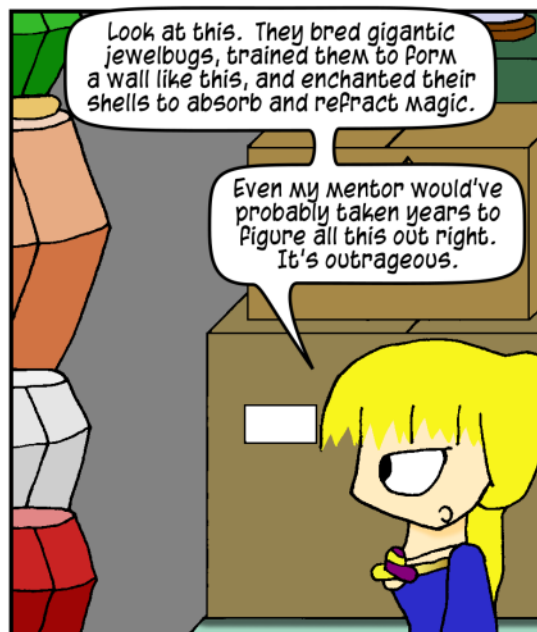
In the same way I'll never explicitly define what magic script looks like, I most likely won't ever nail down its exact properties, either, like exactly how it affects people reading it. It apparently affects Lucien quite badly, since we see it again in Chapter Four. I'll at least try to be marginally consistent about it; it's just unreal text that describes how certain parts of magic work, after all. Alex could probably write it if she weren't so preoccupied with learning new stuff.

Why, exactly, does it affect Lucien when he reads it? Well, now...



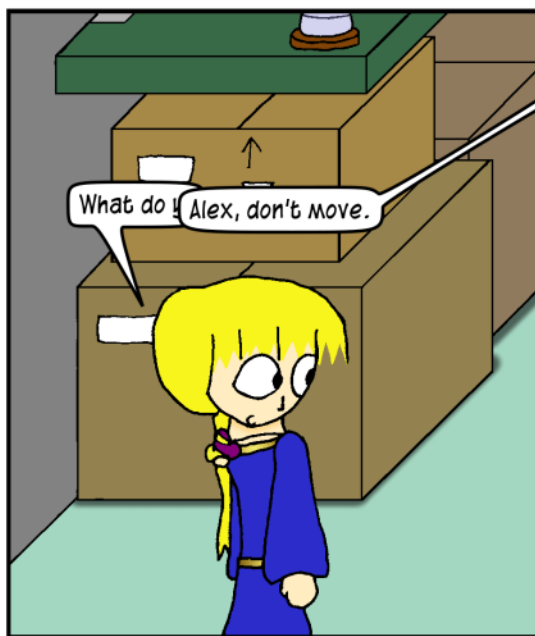
Look! Near the top of the wall of jewelbugs in the leaky first panel! It's Bean Man! Bean Man, everyone!

The main thing I remember about this comic is how excruciatingly long it took me to draw each individual jewelbug in that wall. And color each one, too. I might use simple floodfills for a lot of my colors, but that's still a pain...



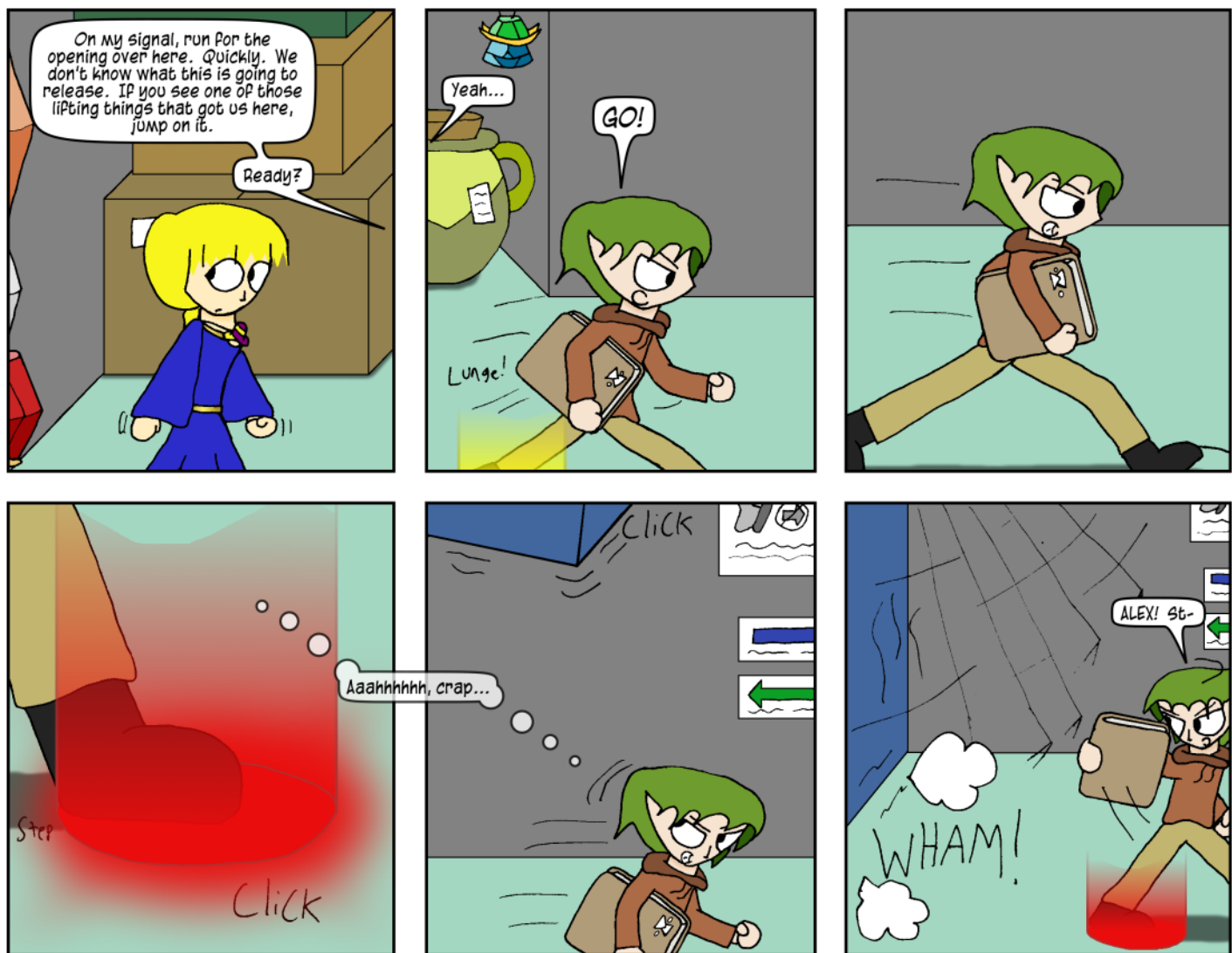
...and therefore, that's why I only drew the wall from the side like this from here on out.

Also, Alex might've pointed out the absurdity of how the jewelbugs apparently continued to breed for the thousands of years since the Founders were in Lineta and managed to maintain those properties and training over countless generations. Or maybe they were magically suspended in time until the trap was triggered. Something like that, sure, let's go with it.



In retrospect, working in this lab had to be a nerve-wracking experience, given most everything seems to be rigged as a trap for anyone unaware of what's going on. Sure, maybe they only armed everything after everyone left for the night, but the last thing that happened here was everyone going bonkers after the messenger from the gods came by, then fleeing the temple for good, so it doesn't seem like anyone would have time to set everything up before they left. Then again, the magic department could've just been that petty and spiteful before they left.

Legendary people, am I right?



Now this just seems ill-thought-out if your plan was to NOT cause lasting injury or potential death.

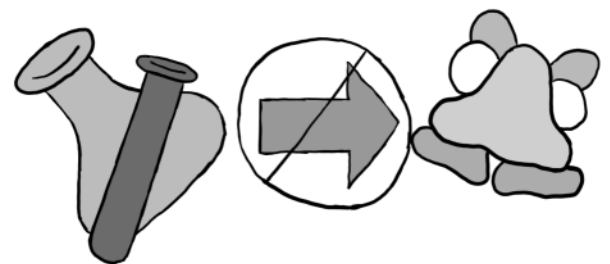
The idea here was that the first plate (the one with the yellow glow) is priming the system and the second plate (red glow) triggers the door if the yellow one was hit first. I think. That doesn't sound right now that I type it out, come to think of it. If the magic department wanted to know when interlopers LEFT (and make sure they didn't easily return), you'd think they would leave out the first plate entirely. In fact, you'd think they'd use something larger than a slightly-bigger-than-foot-sized plate.

Maybe the yellow plate is attached to something that's broken, then, and Lucien and Alex misread it and panicked. Or maybe it was never attached to anything to begin with and the magic department was playing mind games with any unwanted visitors. Yeah, that's the ticket.

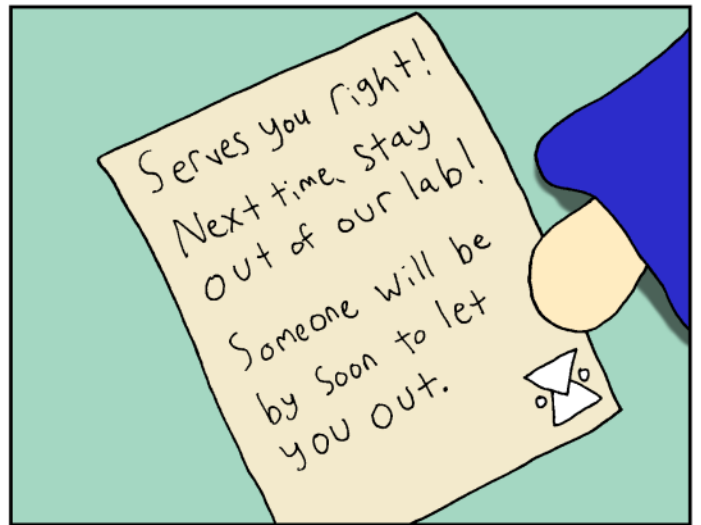
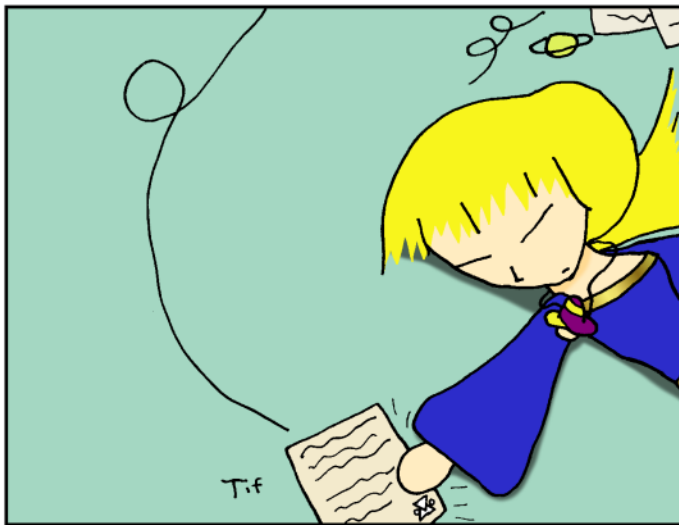
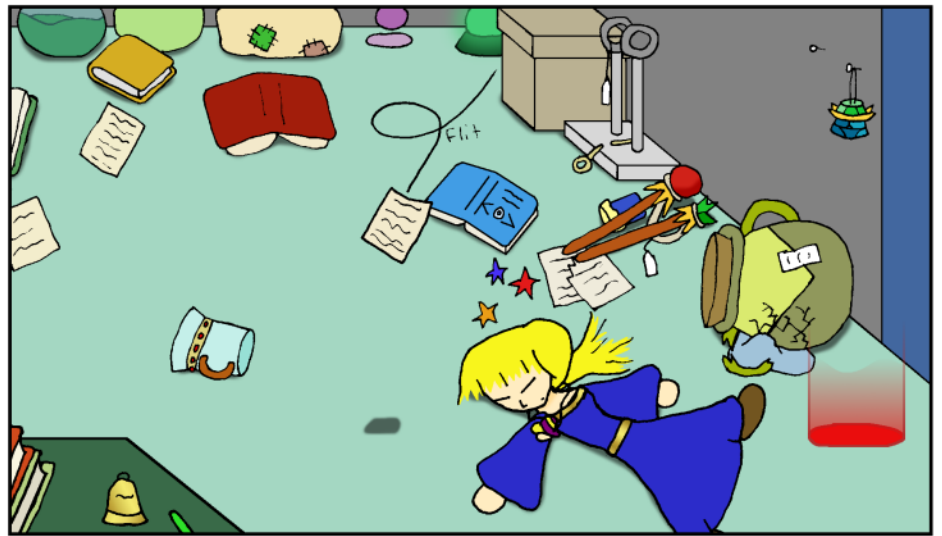
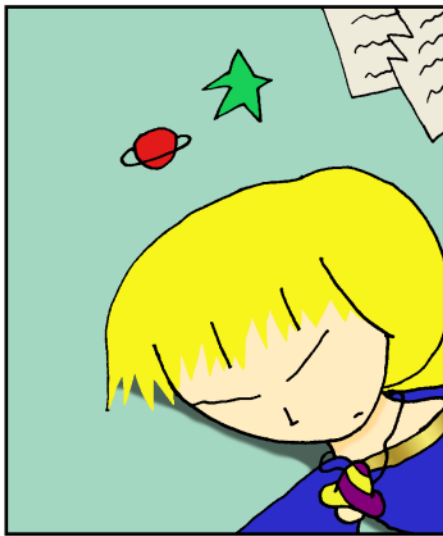


That one sign on the wall that was very clearly intended to be a helpful magical reminder of some sort. Note the nasal fly icon.

As a general case, I try not to alter the original art when I make these books. However, you might note that I did slightly change the contents of the letter Lucien's holding (then again, if you did note that, you either have a disturbingly good memory or you compared the book to what's on the web before I had a chance to update the latter years ago). I've been trying to make it a point to not have the word "geez" be a part of the DoM lexicon ever since a friend of mine (Laura Taylor) pointed out it's sort of etymologically improbable in that world.



That's another one of those things I'll probably forget and screw up as I go along. I know for a fact I forgot that in at least one of the Chapter Two comics.



All right, that was clearly luck that it landed right UNDER her hand like that. You're not impressing anyone anymore, Founders.

The angles I used in previous comics get really confusing, but I at least THINK the shelf that contained the spring-loaded trap that got Lucien is on the BACK wall of this angle, not the RIGHT side (where the door slammed shut). I'm pretty sure I didn't just completely forget to put that in here when I drew the scene. That would mean the entrance (the one that is now blocked by a wall of jewelbugs) is to the LEFT of this scene. Yeah, that makes sense.

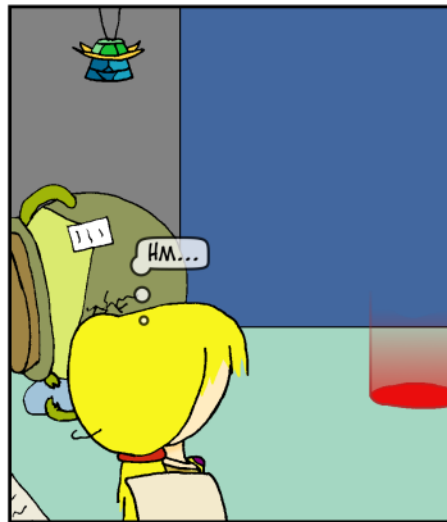
Also, continuing the theme of "not very well thought-out", the Founders must have had to clean up this storage room a lot if the vibrations from that huge stone wall slamming shut kept knocking everything over like we can see in the background.



The cogs-as-pigtail-ties dwarf girl from earlier has nothing on the wrenches-as-hair-sticks dwarf girl here.

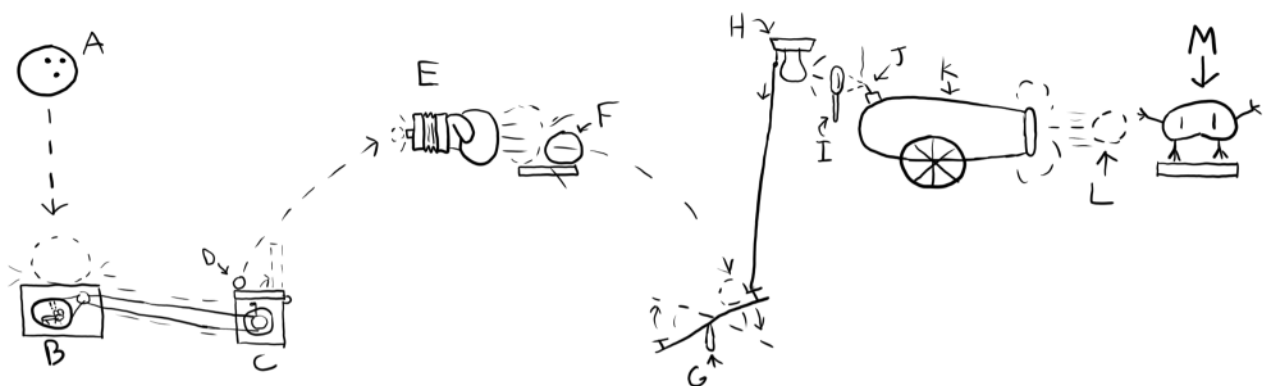
Dwarves and beach elves tend to get along all right. But then again, this is Lineta Hall we're talking about. The sort of people who'd willingly be there in the first place tend to be far more progressive and tolerant than others regardless. That's why we'll see this particular beach elf getting along all right with a forest elf later in the chapter.

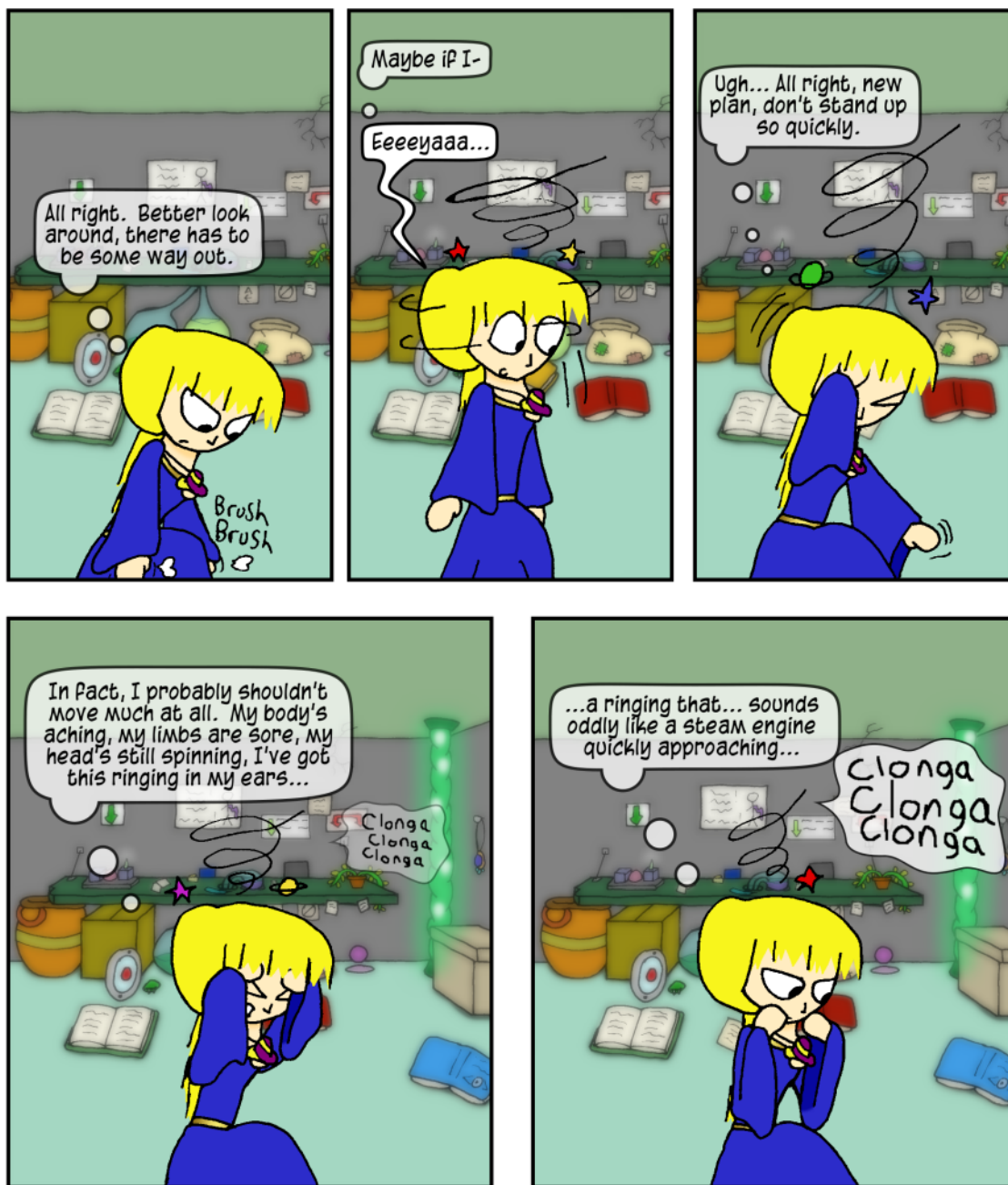
For the record, dwarves and forest elves in the DoM are generally more ambivalent towards each other. Dwarves see little use in holding that tightly to tradition (and they hate climbing trees), and forest elves aren't too keen on haywire machinery (and they prefer forests to mountains). So, they don't wind up near each other much.



I think it was around here that I stopped doing anniversary strips. Part of it was because I wasn't putting out a consistent enough schedule to make them mean anything, but there's also only so many jokes you can get out of a webcomic anniversary.

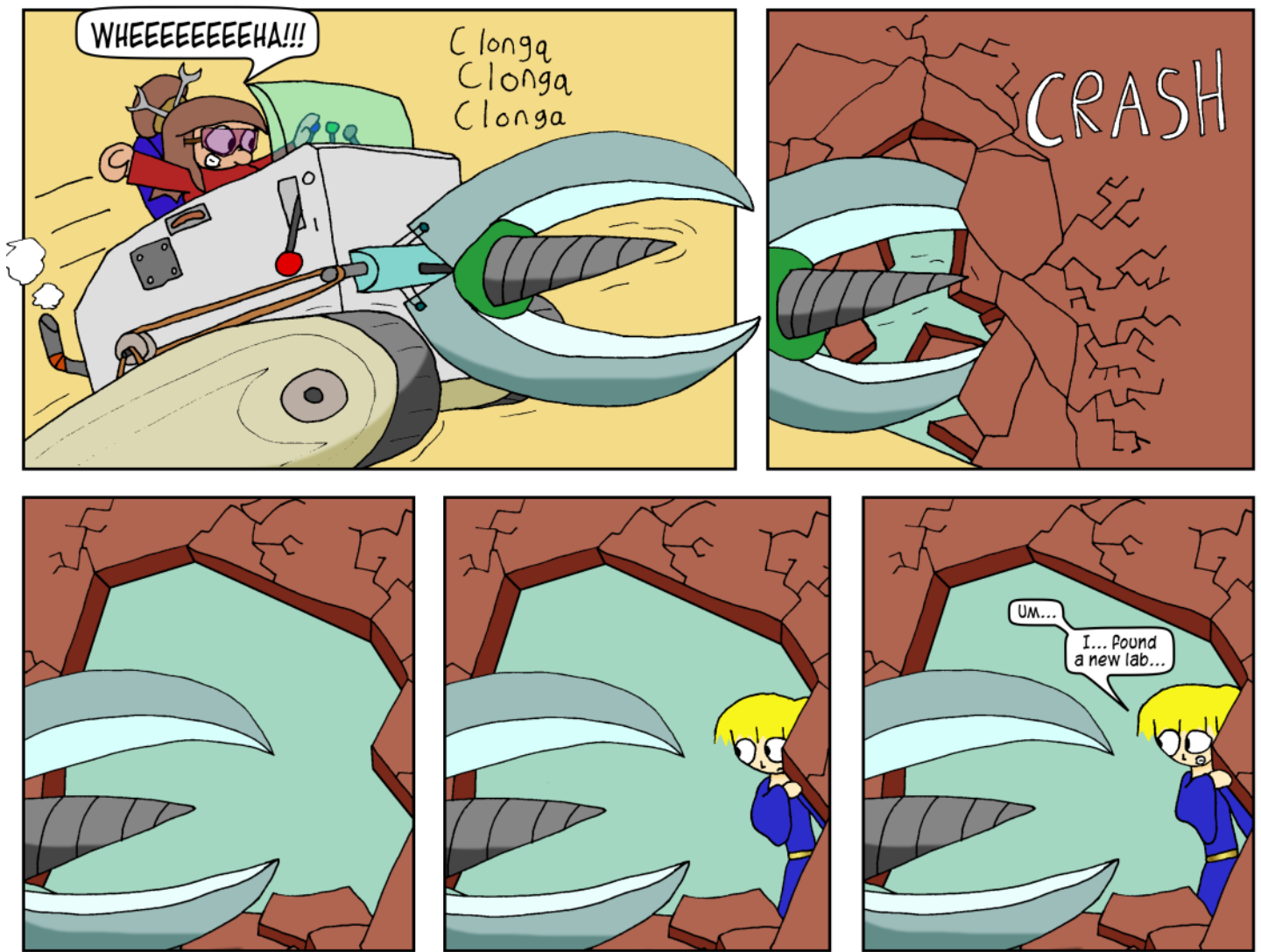
The bowling ball, though, I don't remember why I put that there. The icon on the shirt I'm wearing looks sort of like the light bulb logo from The Incredible Machine 2 (and 3.0), and the bowling ball part was blue in the original games, but that's all I got there.





Aha! THIS is where I started drawing backgrounds and foregrounds separately if I knew I was going to be repeating the same angle for numerous panels! Oh, man, that worked out so much better. And I could apply fake bloom effects and blurs to them, too! Man, it almost makes me wish I didn't work on using more dynamic camera angles later in the strip such that it's harder to repeat the same background like this a lot.

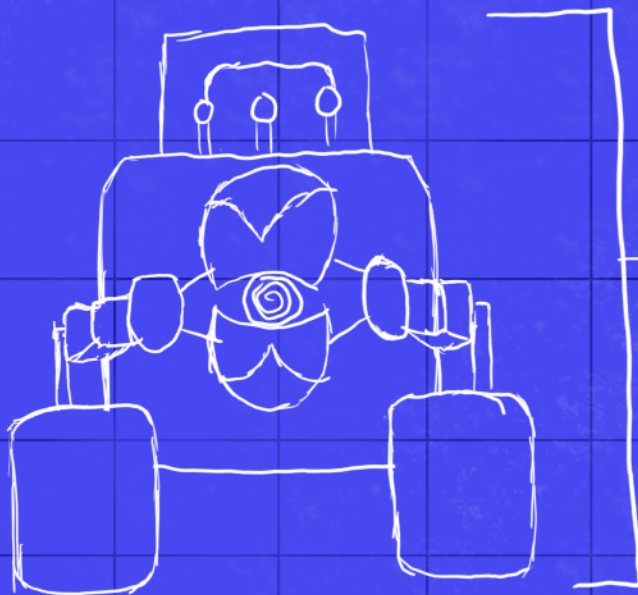
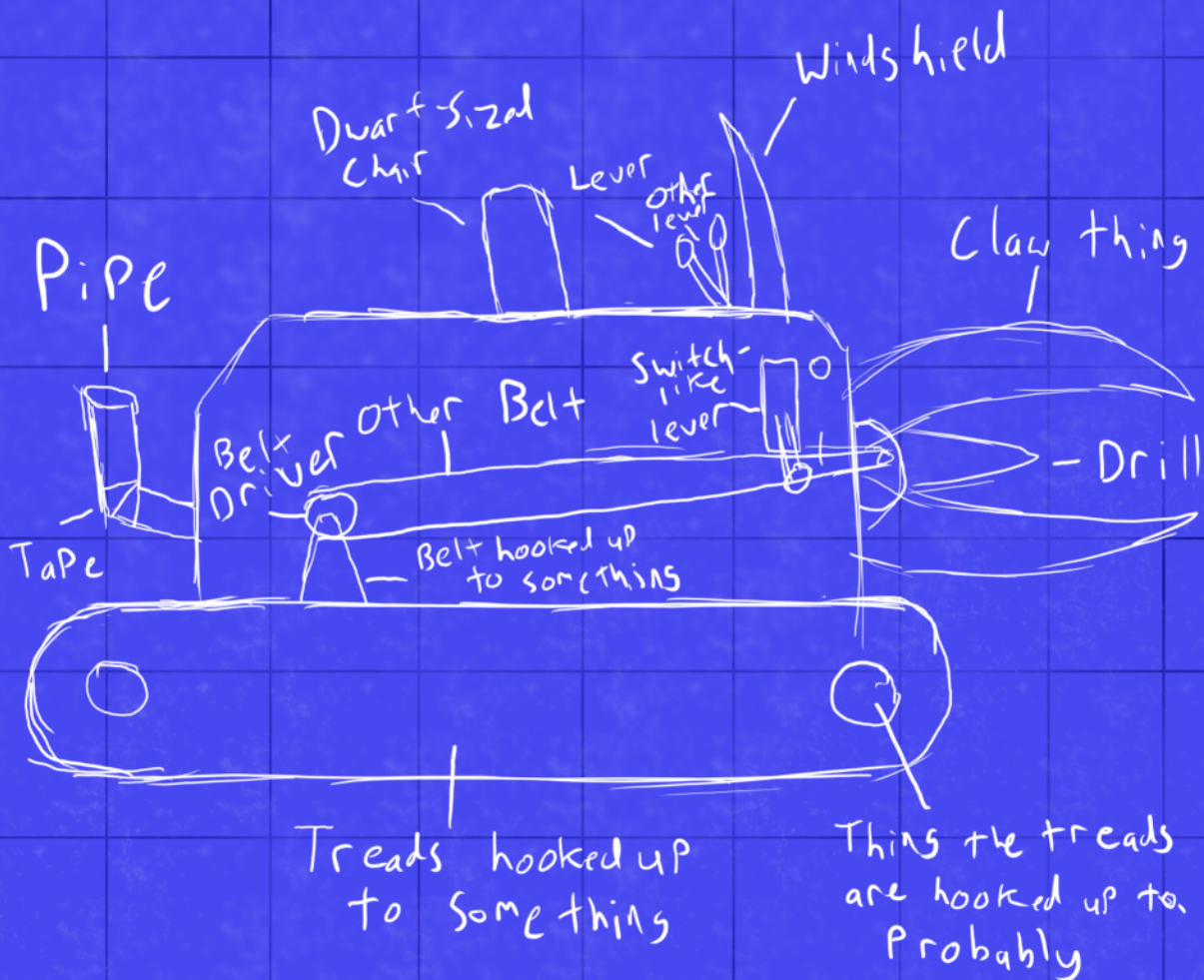
I'm surprised that mushroom's held up this well, all things considered.



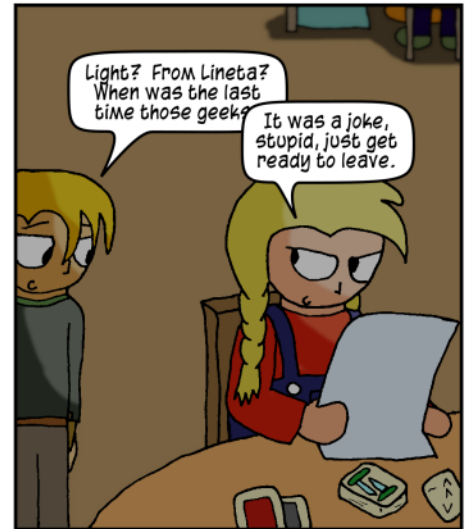
Sitting around in the myriad of files I have for the DoM (of which there are many), I've got the dwarf girl's drilling machine split out into a separate file. There was a time I was going to make a standalone wallpaper out of that. I'm pretty sure that's not going to happen now, but that file just continues to sit there.



That Drill Thingy



The same device.
Crudely drawn
from the front
this time



I came up with the name "The Drunk Boar" out of nowhere. That's probably how most bars get names like that, come to think of it, so that's not a particularly interesting story. Sorry.

Welcome back to Breznial! We haven't seen much of Landis's crime-riddled neighboring kingdom since Chapter One (besides a minor teaser at the end of Chapter Two). And, come to think of it, we haven't seen much of it lately, either. Ethyl's as-yet-unnamed gang is the most powerful and influential in the kingdom, which nets them a fair amount of special tasks "from the queen" (as we know from Chapter Four, really her council). I tend to assume Landis and Breznial have something of a general animosity between them, but stopping barely short of actual hostilities. The council must think there's something to be gained tactically by sending out their "best" to raid Lineta Hall like this.

I didn't design a full set of playing cards for whatever Ethyl's playing there. You can make up your own rules for whatever solitaire-like game she's apparently playing.

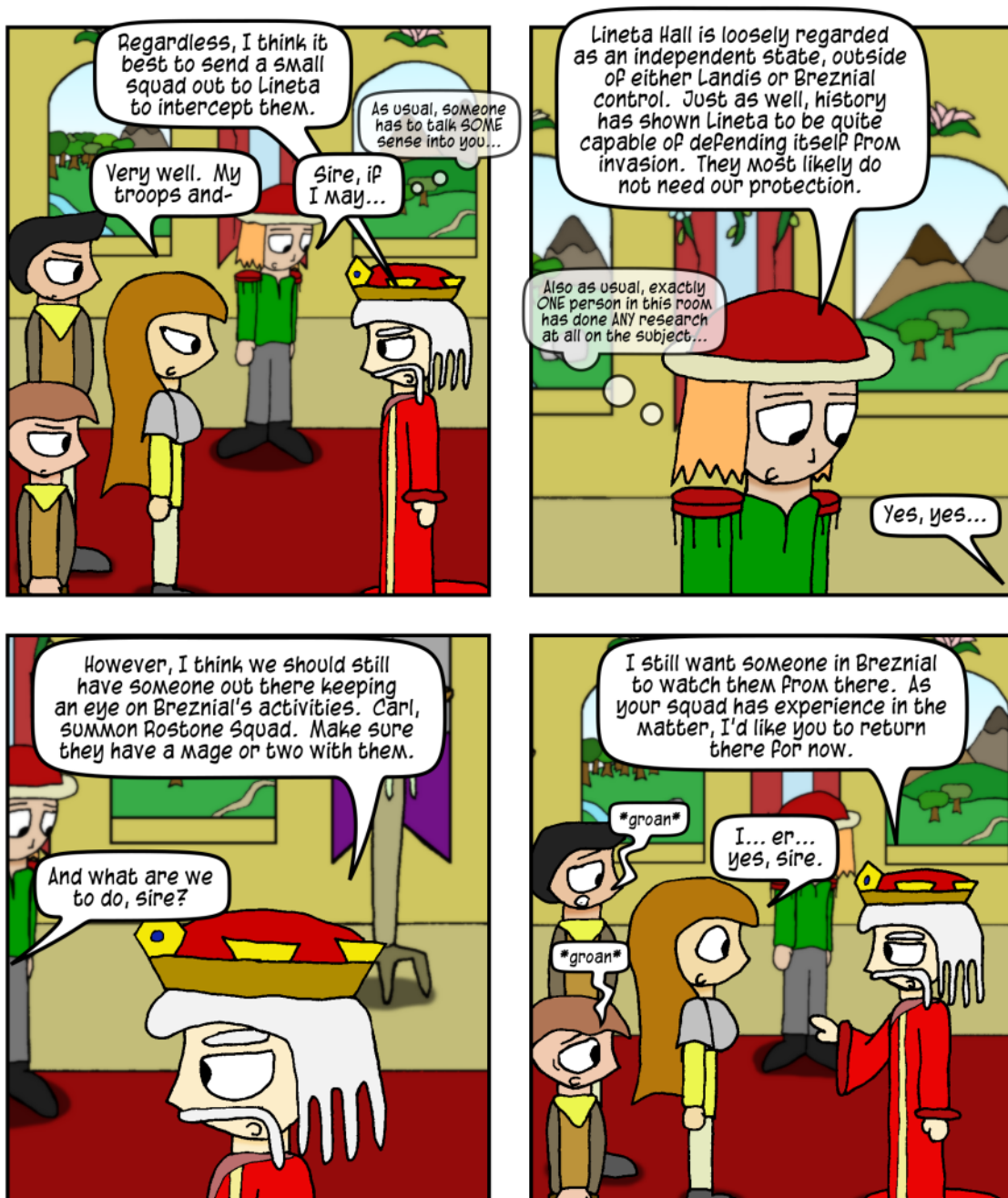


I write Ethyl as being harsh and abrasive, like you'd expect the leader of a gang of violent thugs to be. Though when I do that, I also have to be careful to make sure there's enough reason why she's REMAINED the leader of a gang of violent thugs and has not yet been killed by said gang of violent thugs. And frankly, "because she can take them all in a fight and can't ever be ambushed and is better than all of them and is unstoppable" just makes for very lazy writing. There, I said it, and I'd say it again if I had to. So I actually try to make her a LEADER, per se, with at least some concern about her gang. You need a balance between fear and respect, else you won't get anywhere.



Ah, Carl. Don't ever change. I originally had a long-term story idea where King Landis would've been assassinated (maybe by Stephanie) and the eulogy at the funeral service would've revealed that he had some psychic talent, much to Carl's shock. But, that was a dumb idea that thankfully never went anywhere. Stephanie's got bigger plans.

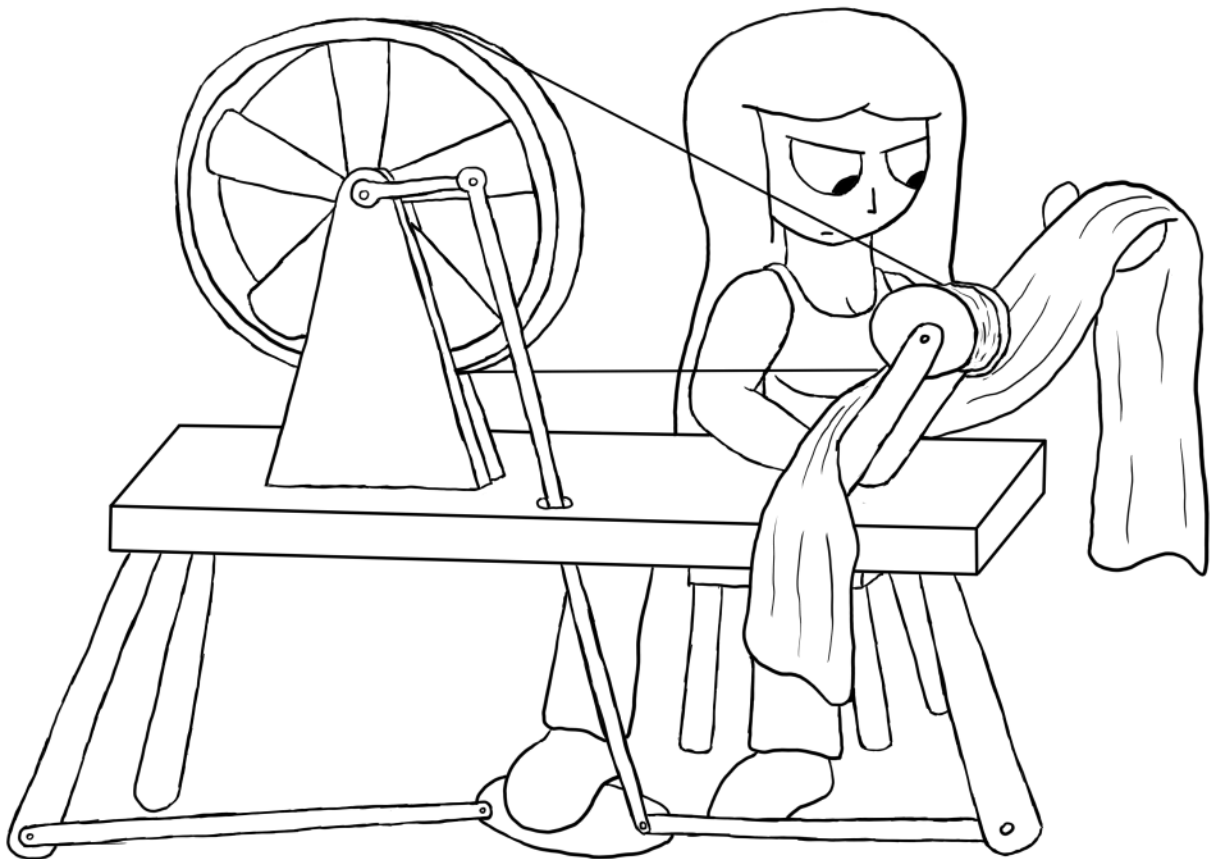
I just kept going with copying backgrounds into multiple panels like this. It allowed me to make more detailed backgrounds, knowing I (hopefully) wouldn't have to remember each and every single detail so I could keep redrawing it. It unfortunately had the side effect of making this room look vastly different than it did at the end of Chapter Two.

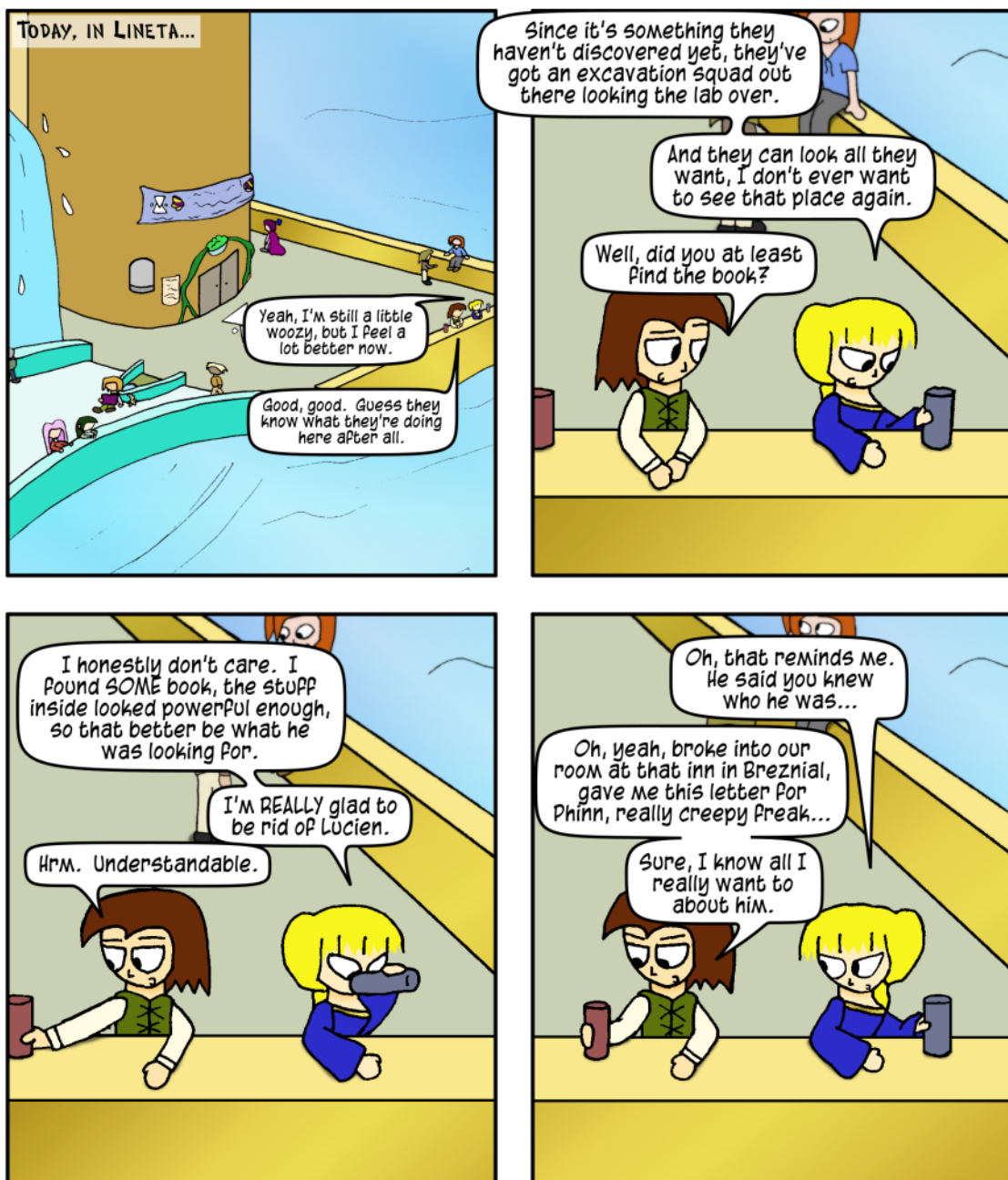


The major patrol squads of Landis are named after precious jewels. Sally is captain of Topaz Squad, Cy is captain of Sapphire Squad, etc. The squads are kept small (one captain, two troops) to maintain ease of deployment, though it is not uncommon for individual members of squads to join others should the need arise. The royal army mages are not normally parts of patrol squads and are generally distributed to whatever squad needs a mage at the time, owing to the differences in training and utility between soldiers and mages, and also because the soldiers don't like dealing with the mages and hold them in a bit of contempt.

Rostone Squad is named after the rostone, a precious jewel known mainly for its truly hideous brown color, unimpressively dull face, and legitimately impressive hardness. While it has its applications in art and design, it is usually used for its blunt surfaces, easily able to be crafted into incredibly strong blunt tools for smiths or blunt weapons for people who like blunt weapons. Rostone Squad fields a fair amount of casual ribbing for this.

Topaz Squad (shown) is Landis's go-to squad when surveillance is called for. Or, more specifically, surveillance that requires disguise, like how the three of them were in the Drunk Boar overhearing Ethyl's plans. The way I have it in my notes is that Sally is a skilled seamstress in addition to her usual patrol captain duties. As such, she can typically devise better outfits for the purposes of subterfuge than what the royal tailors can come up with (see upcoming comic where Matt instantly recognizes a Landis casual uniform), making her squad ideal for things like light infiltration and investigating the goings-on in Breznial. But, again, I've found that's another thing that's really hard to explain in-universe without making it seem forced or awkward. Plus, any self-respecting Discworld fan would be very upset at me over the confusion generated by actually legitimately declaring a character to be a seamstress.

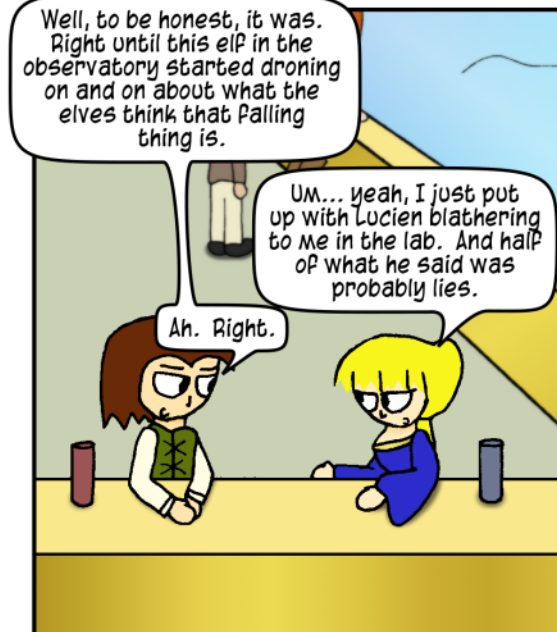
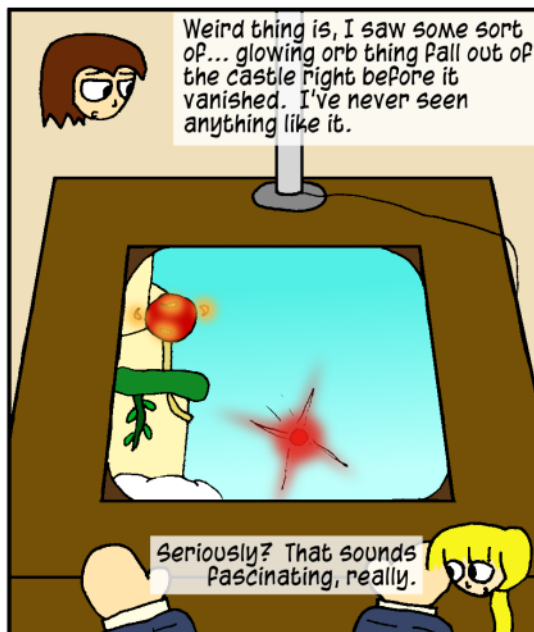




You weren't supposed to notice that's Howard and Tilly in the wide shot unless you were looking for them. That was just me being fancy just in case you went back to check if they were indeed sitting there the whole time once Alex sees them.

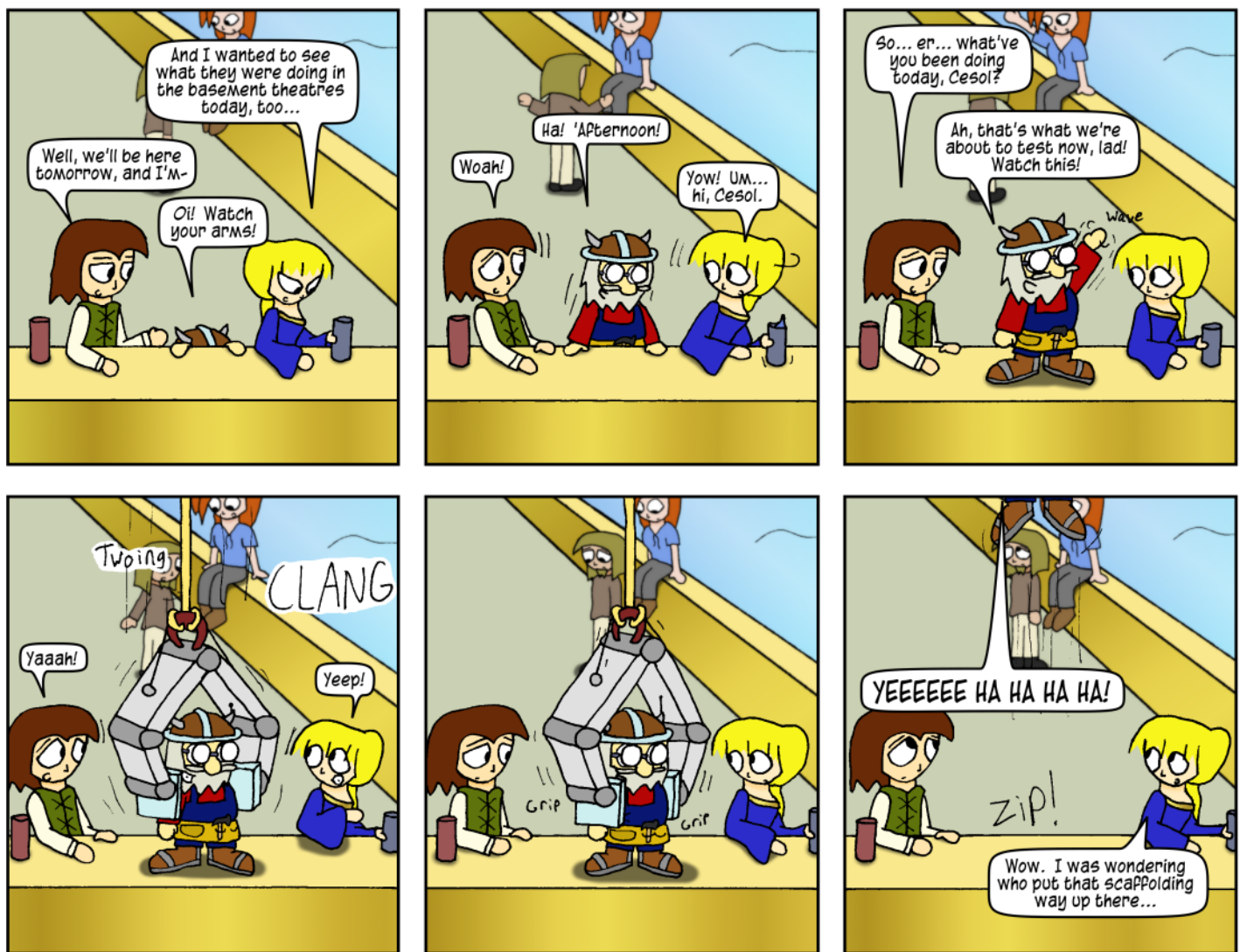
That's also the same two people on the edge of the bridge that come up later as one-shot characters (look for the pink-haired girl with the weird thread thing in her hair in a few pages). In fact, I think I overdrew a LOT of that scene because I wasn't sure how much I'd zoom in on it in the end, so there's probably a file sitting around somewhere that has every single person we see on the bridge detailed out. Wow, that was silly of me.

And yes, that's Captain Spam walking around the corner there. He gets around.



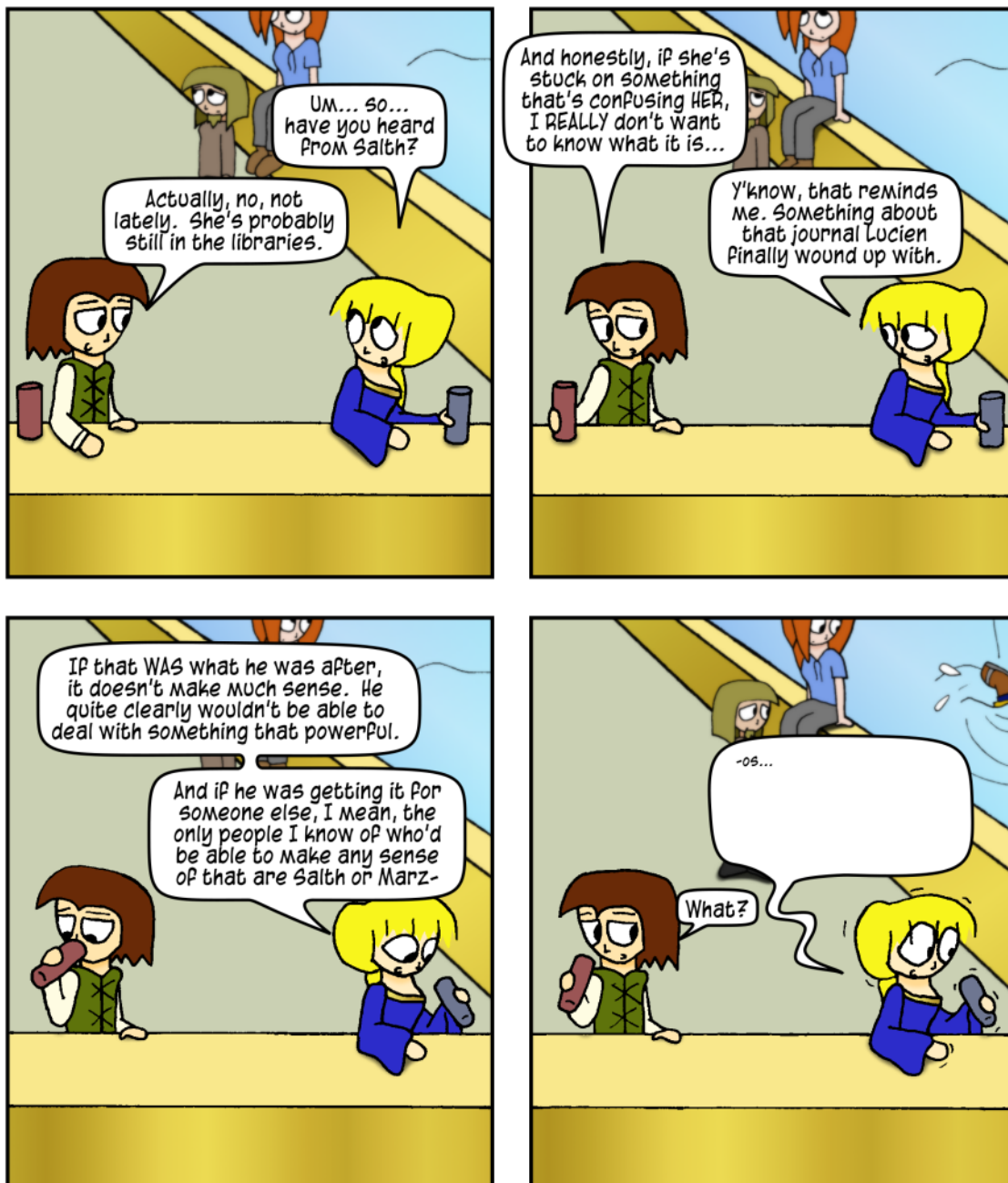
I should really put Matt in the astronomer's robes again. I'm guessing he was probably allowed to take that set home with him. They probably have a lot of spares.

The idea of "elves like to tell long, rambling stories" is one I try to insert in every once in a while. Tilly complains about Phinn possibly doing that in Chapter One, in fact. They're a timelessly old race of people who themselves have incredibly long lifespans and an innate knack for keeping intricately detailed stories and records, so they like telling said stories from time to time.



Though it's hard to believably pull off in the space of the more interesting parts of a few people's lives, I want to impart SOME impression that technology (including magic research) actually advances in this world, rather than imply that it'll remain in a quasi-medieval state forever. Hence the Kroloff Claw and how Cesol builds it in more places as the comic goes along. It's not so much that it's never been made before (the drilling machine dwarf recognizes it immediately later), it's just that the team working on it have devised ways to make it simpler to build. Hence, mass production. When the comic gets to more places where Cesol HASN'T been and we see Kroloff Claws installed (likely from dwarves returning home after visiting Lineta Hall), it'll make more sense.

Also, those two in the back were obviously made separate from the foreground elements. They... didn't quite line up with what was going on in with the claw. Oops.



I admit I really like the almost-empty speech bubble as a means of expressing sudden realization of dread. I've used it again since, and it's not going to be the last time I use it.

At least the background people somewhat plausibly tracked Cesol as he was flung through the air. That wound up better than how they looked in the previous comic.



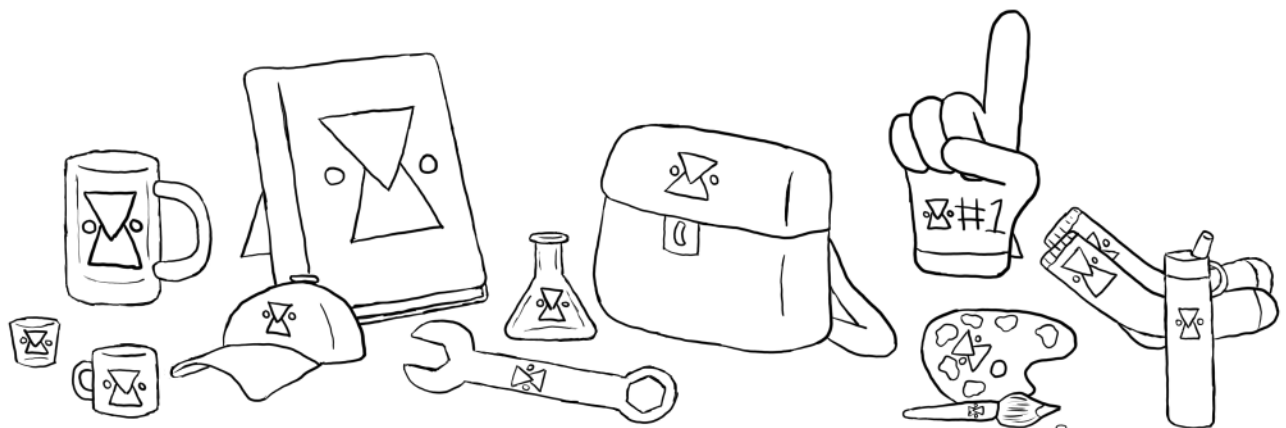
Hey, it's Marzos! And his ridiculous robe!

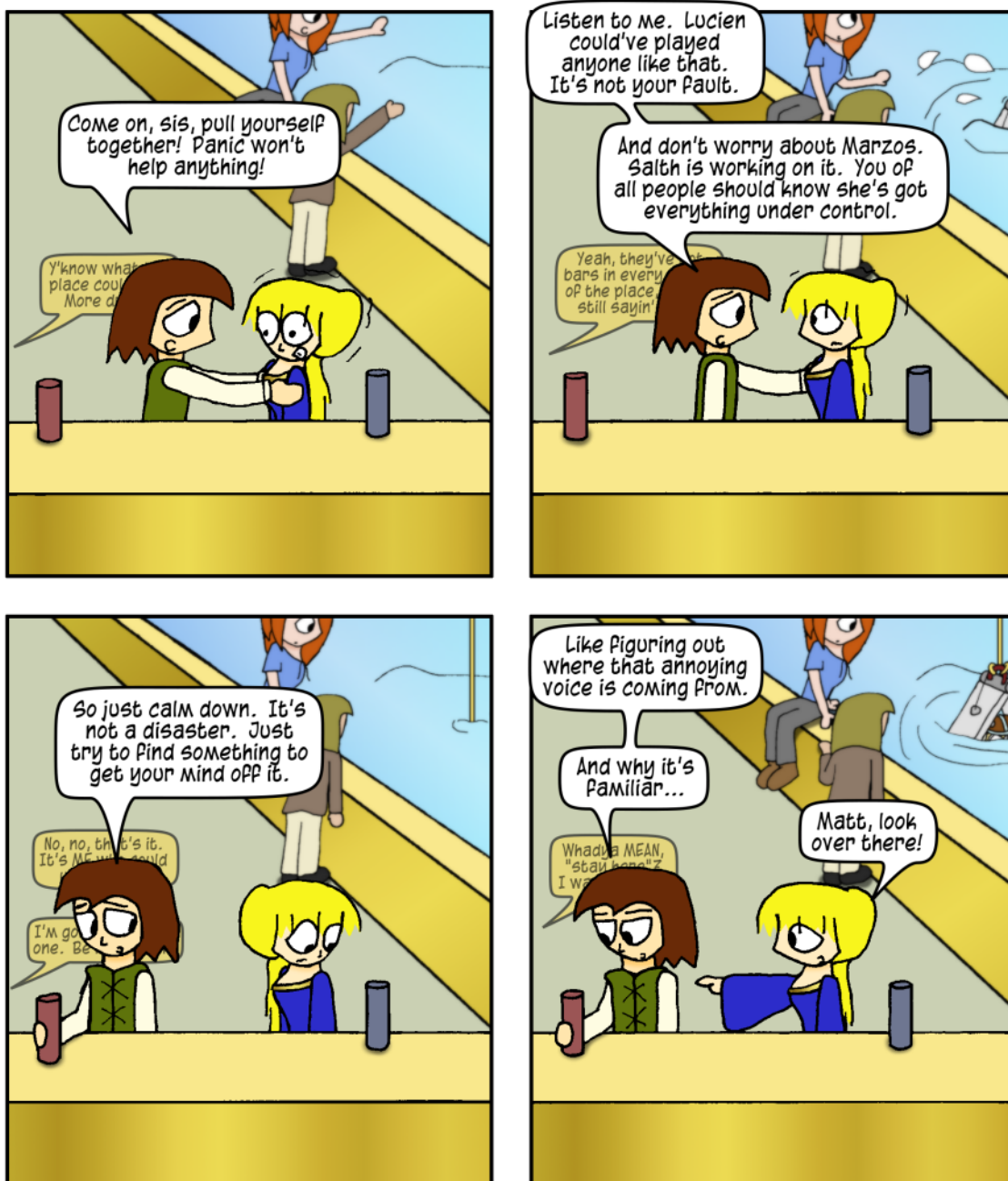
I've got quite long-term plans regarding Lucien, so keeping track of how he acts around specific people is sort of important for me. He's far more annoyed talking to Marzos than he is talking to Matt or Alex. And then there's what happened with Cy in Chapter Six...

At any rate, rest assured that the thingamajig he's been handed is important. The fact that I just pointed it out to you might make a couple other scenes in later chapters a bit more meaningful.



Thing is, Marzos reading from a journal whose only marking is the Linetan icon wouldn't be too out of place in Lineta. I know from experience working in a college bookstore that universities will sell any random junk with their logo on it.





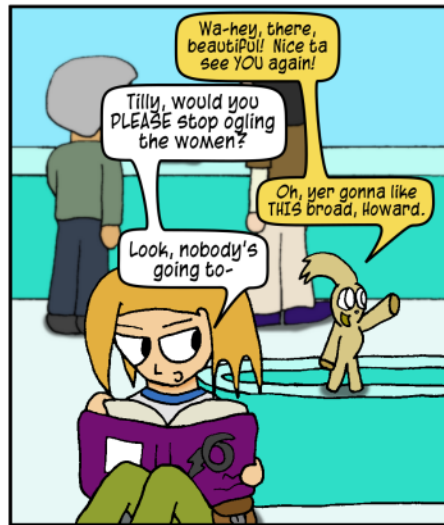
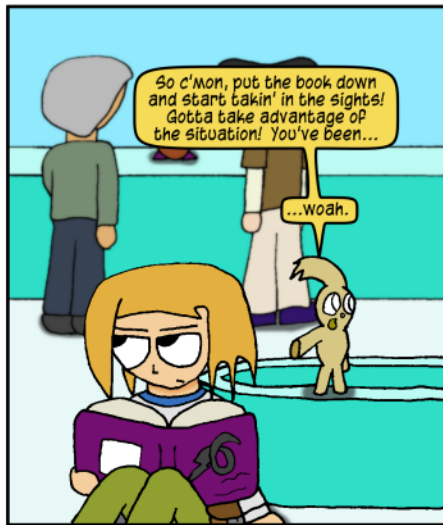
I'd imagine a drink shop in the corner of an upscale quasi-university would have obnoxious tall-and-thin glasses like what Matt and Alex have there. It really doesn't take much for me to be able to picture that.

Comics like this are why I was considering switching to a program that relatively seamlessly blends raster and vector layers. I don't do it often, but keeping Tilly's speech bubbles under the foreground raster portion wound up being a bit of a hack job in Inkscape that could've been avoided if the entire thing was handled in one program. Paint Shop Pro did it when I used it, but I got sick of other things it did, hence the GIMP-and-Inkscape setup I used at this point. It worked well enough for my purposes.

Before you ask, Krita doesn't give me anywhere near the same control over its vector layers as Inkscape does.



This is what I was talking about with Sally and Topaz Squad earlier. Castle Landis doesn't exactly have the most creative of tailors if everyone knows what their standard-issue "trying to be discreet" outfit is. Or if they even HAVE a standard-issue outfit for that in the first place.



Tilly is always fun to write, just like Stephanie. Only where Stephanie is sadistic and sociopathic, Tilly is more brazen and impulsive. I don't get a chance to do that often in the DoM.

I also like that pink-haired girl with whatever thread or whatnot is going through her hair like that. I like making fun one-shot background characters like her or the Romana's-hat-girl earlier in the chapter, and there'll be a few others as the chapter goes on.



The ledge on which Tilly is standing (and from which he was just slapped by Alex) is a decorative gap in the walkway that leads to the lake on which Lineta Hall sits. Given how it has that shin-height wall around it, I have to wonder if that's at all safe. OSHA Man would not approve.

I'll admit to several character design issues with Howard, to be honest. I mean, there's his weird hair, for instance. I'm not at all sure what's going on with it apart from it being asymmetrical. But more importantly is that, apart from the hair thingy on the viewer's left of his head, he really resembles Matt a lot. I've got to do something about that in the future.



I keep around all my old comics for later reference. For instance, right here, I dug up the conversation between Howard and Phinn back in Chapter One (shortly after Phinn punched Tilly off of Howard's shoulder) and tried to redraw it in my at-the-time modern style. Part of it included that winter outfit for Phinn. Next time it's winter in the village, that's definitely coming back.





At the time I originally wrote this, we were out of Chapter Seven, and we know Miles and Triala of Amethyst Squad here (Sam is off-panel to the right). Yes, that is the same squad from that one short interaction they had with Howard and Tilly back in Chapter One. That doesn't really affect anything story-wise, I just like implying that the troops are more of people and less of generic throwaway grunts.

Though, I have changed how the patrol members' armor looks. When I first drew Landis patrol squads, I always gave them something resembling plate armor, or at least something metal (the captains always had lighter armor, though). That was until I started wondering about the logistics of general patrol duties in something as heavy as plate armor, moreso when I explicitly defined the patrol squads as not really combat troops and more of... well, light patrol squads. Kingdom-wide investigators, more or less. Something like that.

Because of that, I later changed their outfits into squad-colored shirts over what is some lighter form of armor (hardened leather, etc), presumably with a padding layer underneath that directly touches skin. They still have collar and shoulder plates, for whatever they're worth, but the current patrol uniforms should be much lighter, and at least marginally more believable.

So, y'know, just treat the old plate armor as a continuity error. It's not like Landis is suddenly cutting back or anything. The full-on soldiers still have much heavier armor, for instance. We see that briefly in the intro pages to Chapter Seven.

Also, it should be clear by this point that Castle Landis has stopped caring about Matt managing to abandon the army near the start of Chapter One. They get used to that; nobody really likes the drafts, and quite a few people get away with abandoning it.



Base



Padding Layer



Actual Armor



Squad-Specific Shirt



Right in the back there, underneath Howard's narration box, is Captain Spam! Like I said in the previous book, he really doesn't show up often, not nearly as much as Bean Man does, though now that I look back, I notice he showed up a lot in this chapter.

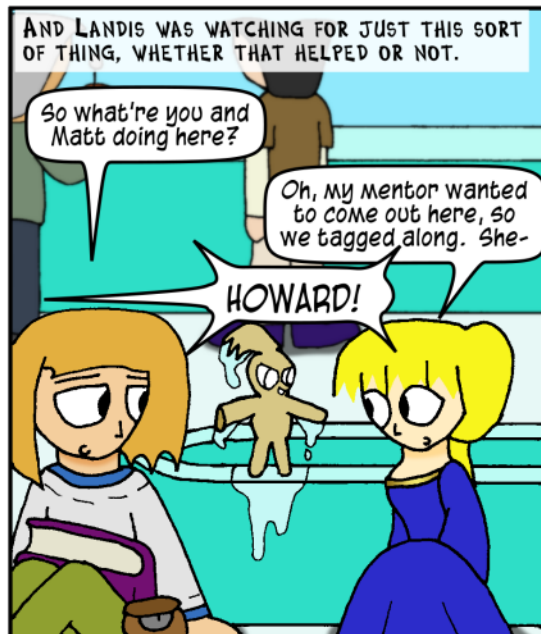
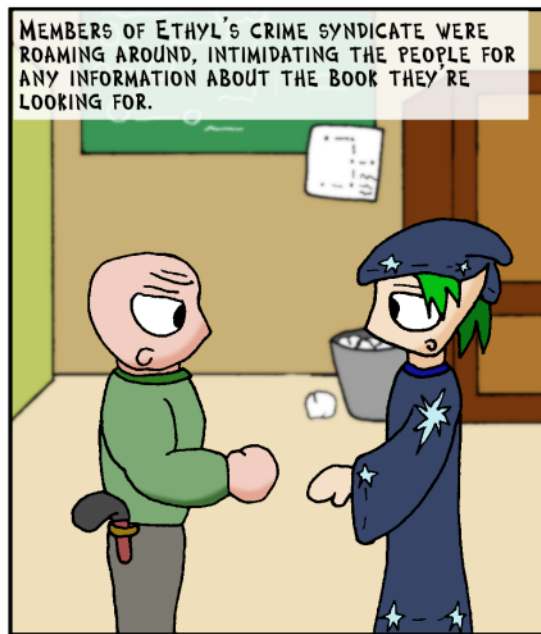
In the Landis army, thaumaturgy is its own unit, separate from the patrol squads or the front-line military forces. They're generally deployed as detachments on an as-needed basis, like here where Howard was assigned to accompany Rostone Squad in their investigation of Ethyl's planned invasion of Lineta Hall. Because of this whole arrangement, mages traditionally don't get much respect in the army, as they rarely work with the same team twice. They also just don't tend to get along well with the soldiers anyway.



Ha! You bookshelves aren't very threatening without all your books, now, are you?

Now, my style is one where hands don't get the subtle detail of "having fingers". That's all nice and good, really, but this also extends to feet not having toes. That looks much, much stranger to me when the person is wearing sandals, hence why the large thug's toes aren't visible in the last three panels.

It's not often you see a dwarf interested in magic.



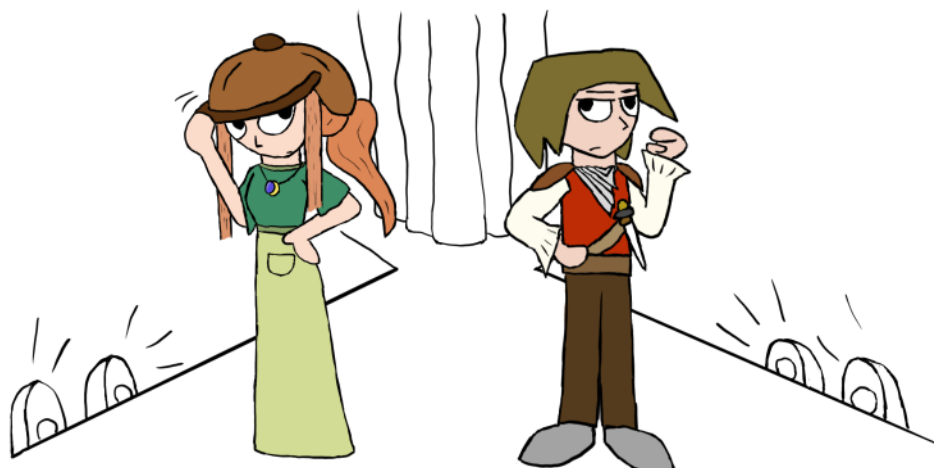
Clearly, the punk girl in the first panel is in way over her head there. You just don't get all up in the business of an old person doing research in a storehouse of ancient wisdom like that.

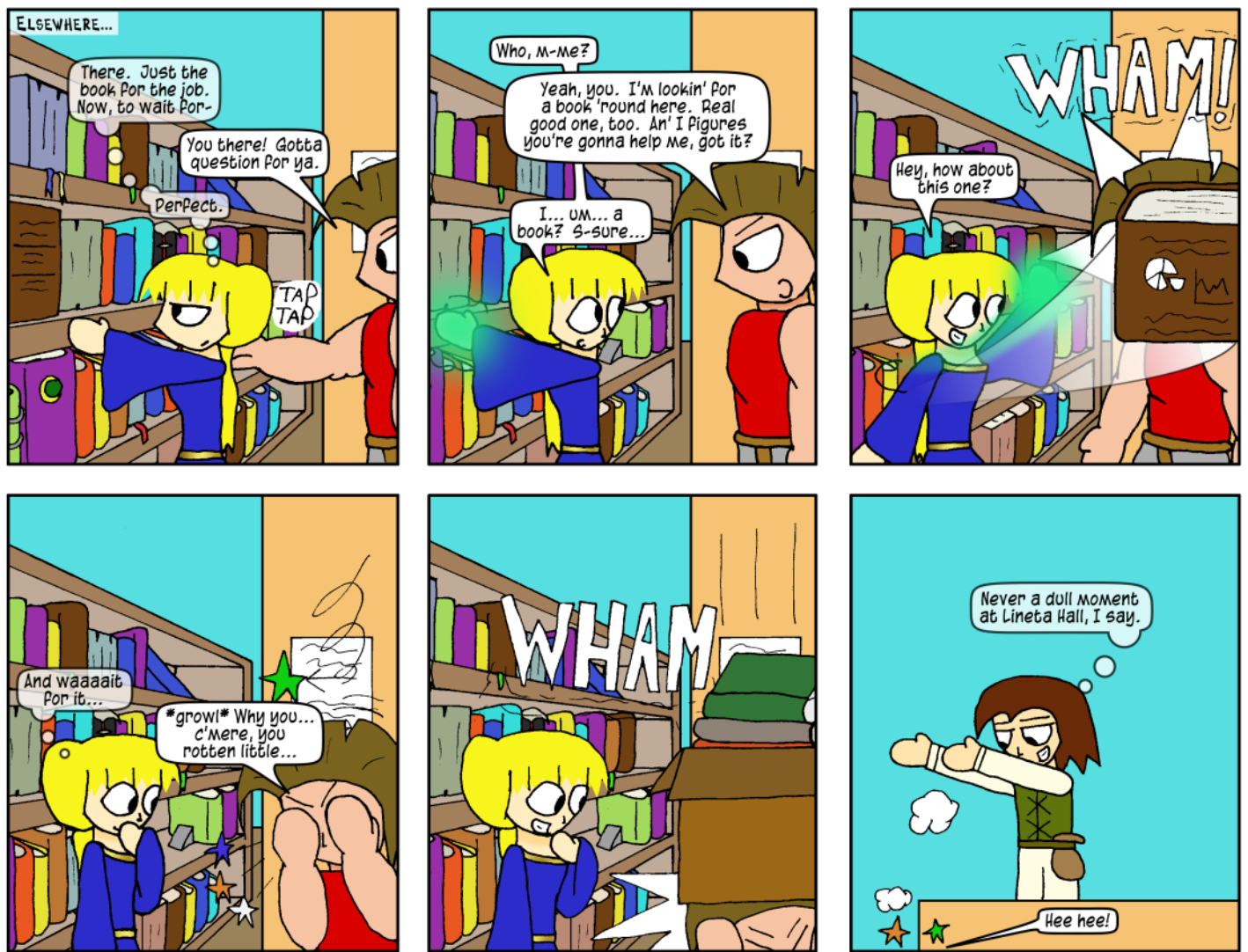
If Tilly was able to climb out of that gap in the bridge, I guess it's not all that dangerous after all, right? Right. That's totally how safety standards work.





That is one hell of a hat the Linetan girl has. That is also one hell of an outfit on the Breznialian thug.

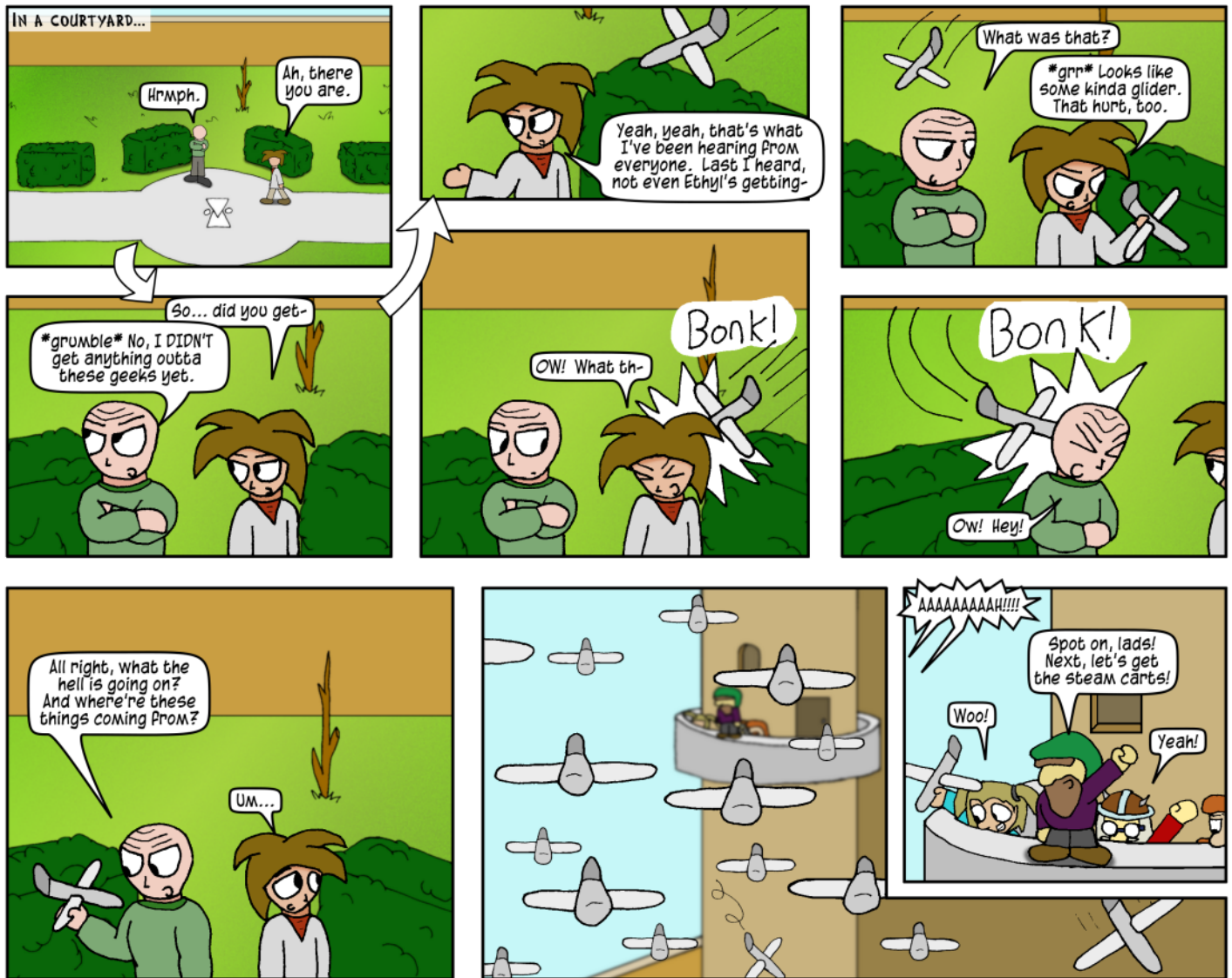




Here I was finally just draw a fully-loaded bookshelf ONCE and have it apply to all panels. Shame there's no real background aside from it, though.

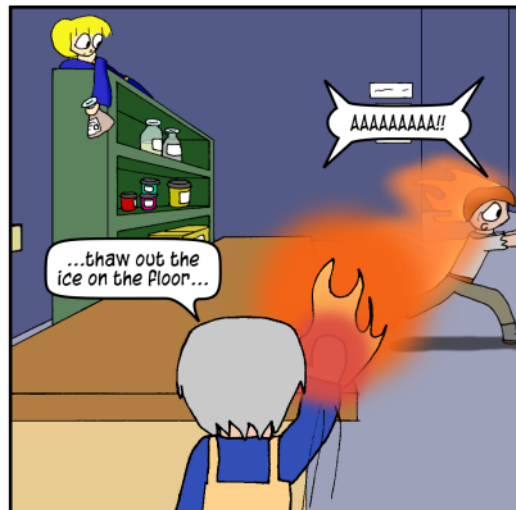
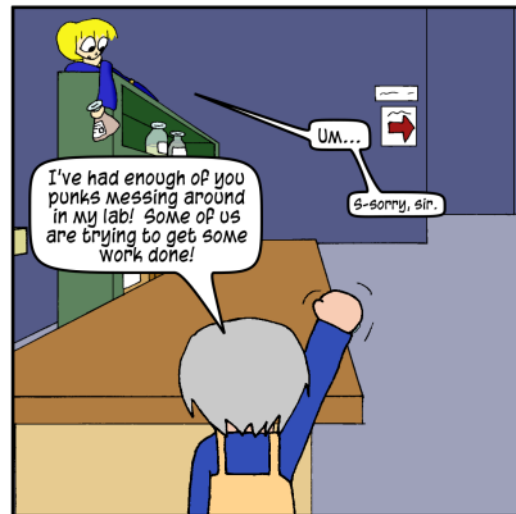
I recall it being harder than it looked to write Alex feigning innocence like that. Probably partly because that's really not in her nature, but also because it doesn't fit the DoM world very well, either. Like I hinted at before, I tend to avoid things like having characters just assume female characters are weaker for whatever reason. I mean, sure, Alex isn't exactly physically intimidating, especially not compared to the Breznial thug, so maybe he's actually sort of justified in assuming he can push her around on size alone, but still.

I really need to give names to Ethyl's thugs.



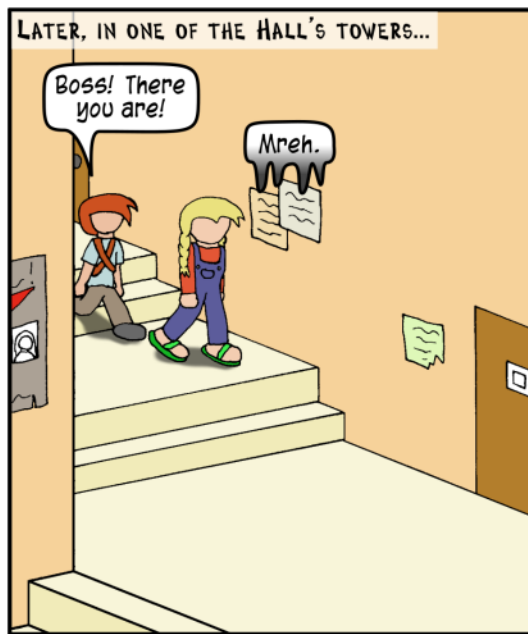
One may point out that a group of dwarves given free reign to create small gliders may have come up with a far more vast and varied array of such devices, rather than all making the same basic model, as is shown here. One would, in fact, be very correct in this assumption. But one would have to remember that the artist is in computer science, not aerospace engineering.

After putting this one up, someone contacted me and suggested that I perhaps should have checked if any of my readers actually WERE aerospace engineers before making the large panel. Dangit.



Boy oh boy, this panel layout sure seemed like a clever idea when I didn't have any plans of putting these into a book!

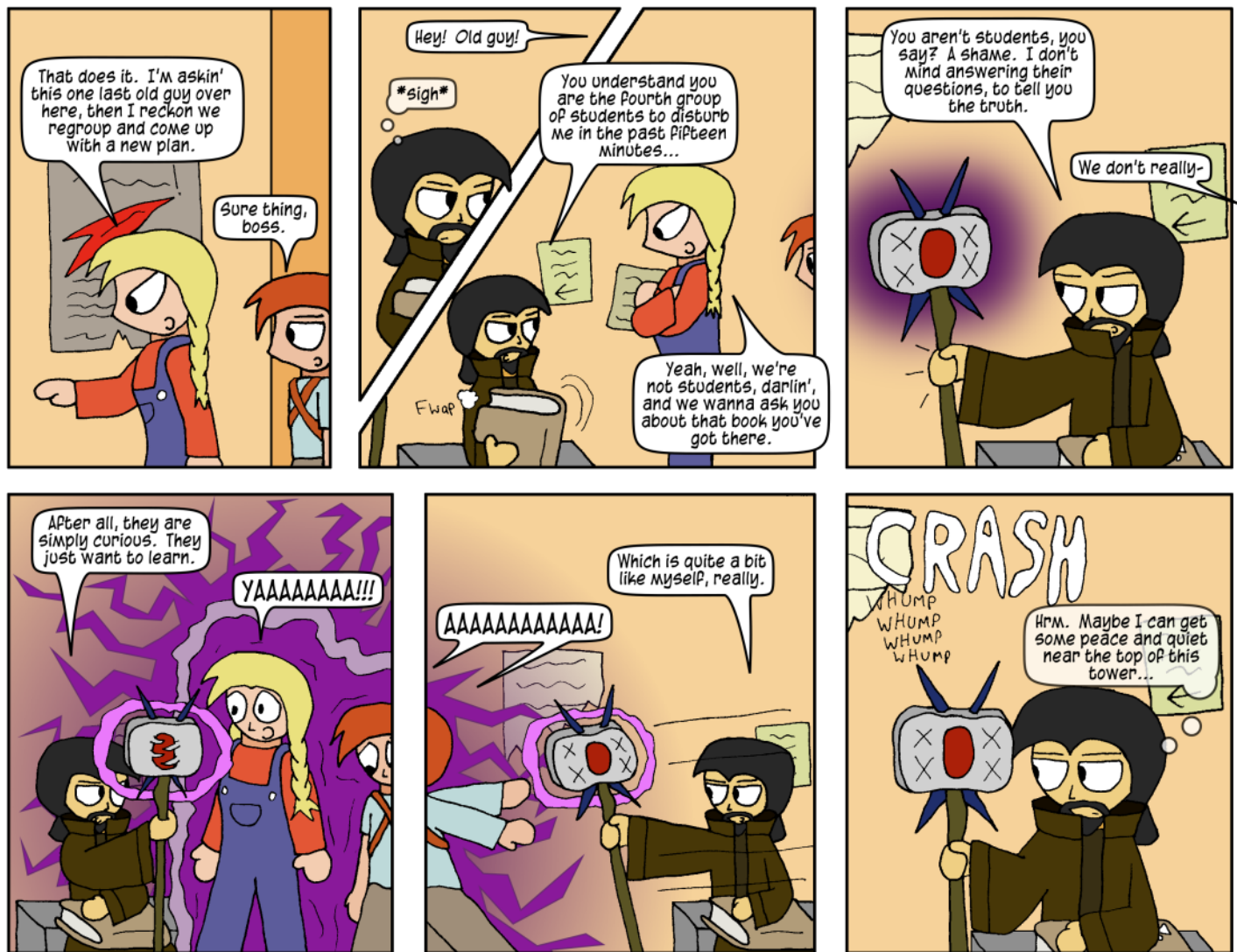
Glinda! Right, I did name at least one of Ethyl's thugs after all. She was apparently the pink-haired punk girl.



See? Now Glinda knows better.

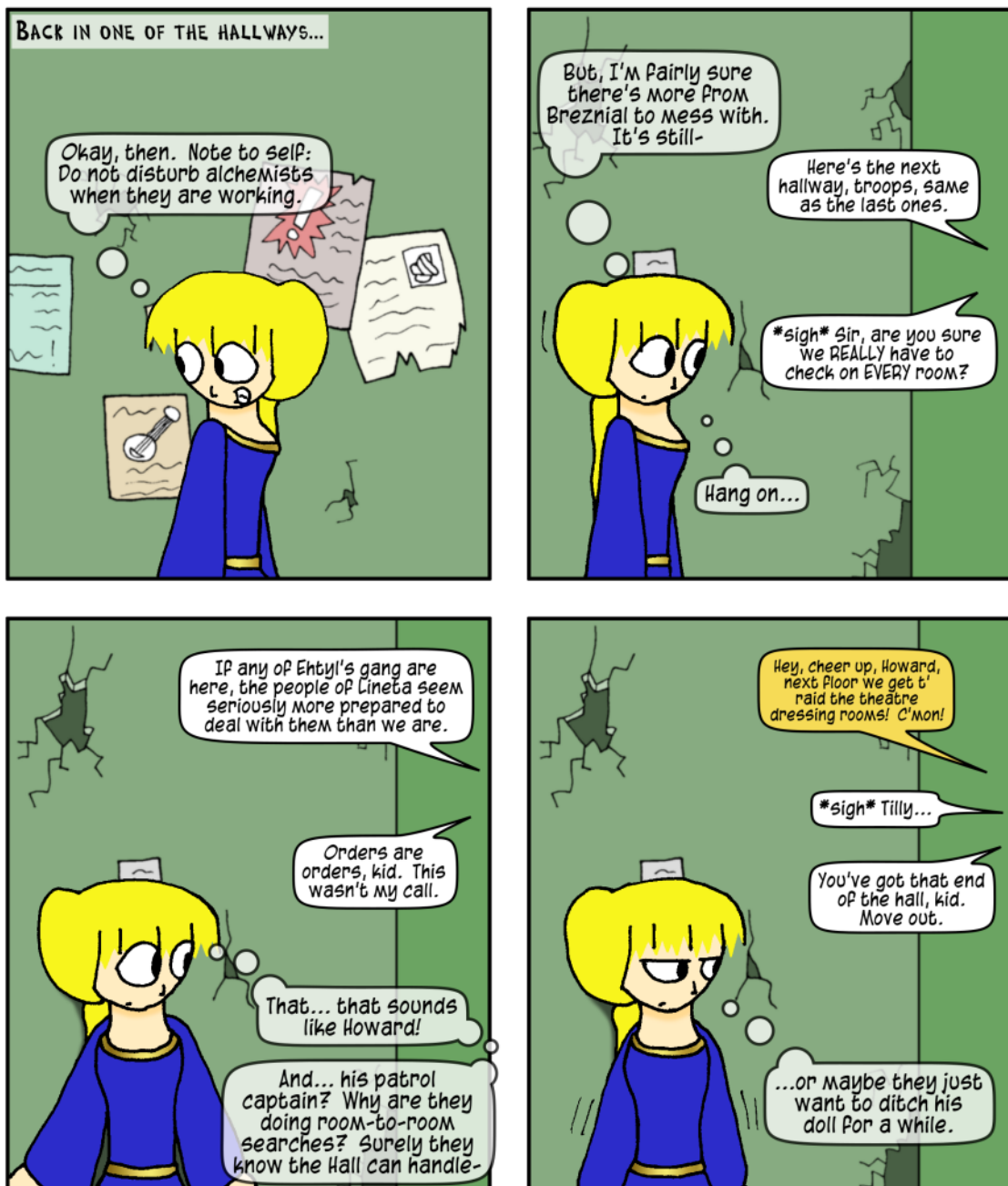
Ethyl also wears sandals. Maybe I should take the time to come up with a better concept of a bare foot for my style. Drawing out individual toes looks seriously wrong when I don't draw out individual fingers. Though, it turns out I don't need it that often. Most people in the DoM wear shoes or boots.

Actually, have I mentioned I'm not all that good at drawing legs in the first place? That's why nearly everyone either wears loose-fitting long pants (including overalls with Ethyl or Melzos), robes, or long skirts. That's probably related to why sandals aren't worn very often around here.



When designing a villain, a good way to start is have someone who actually, truly believes that what they're doing is right, perhaps with some reservation. Marzos actually does legitimately believe what he's doing is for the good of science and knowledge. Salthalus will explain later.

Of course, you don't always HAVE to do that. Stephanie is more driven by plain ol' reckless ambition, mixed with a cruel streak. Lucien's agenda... will be revealed in time.



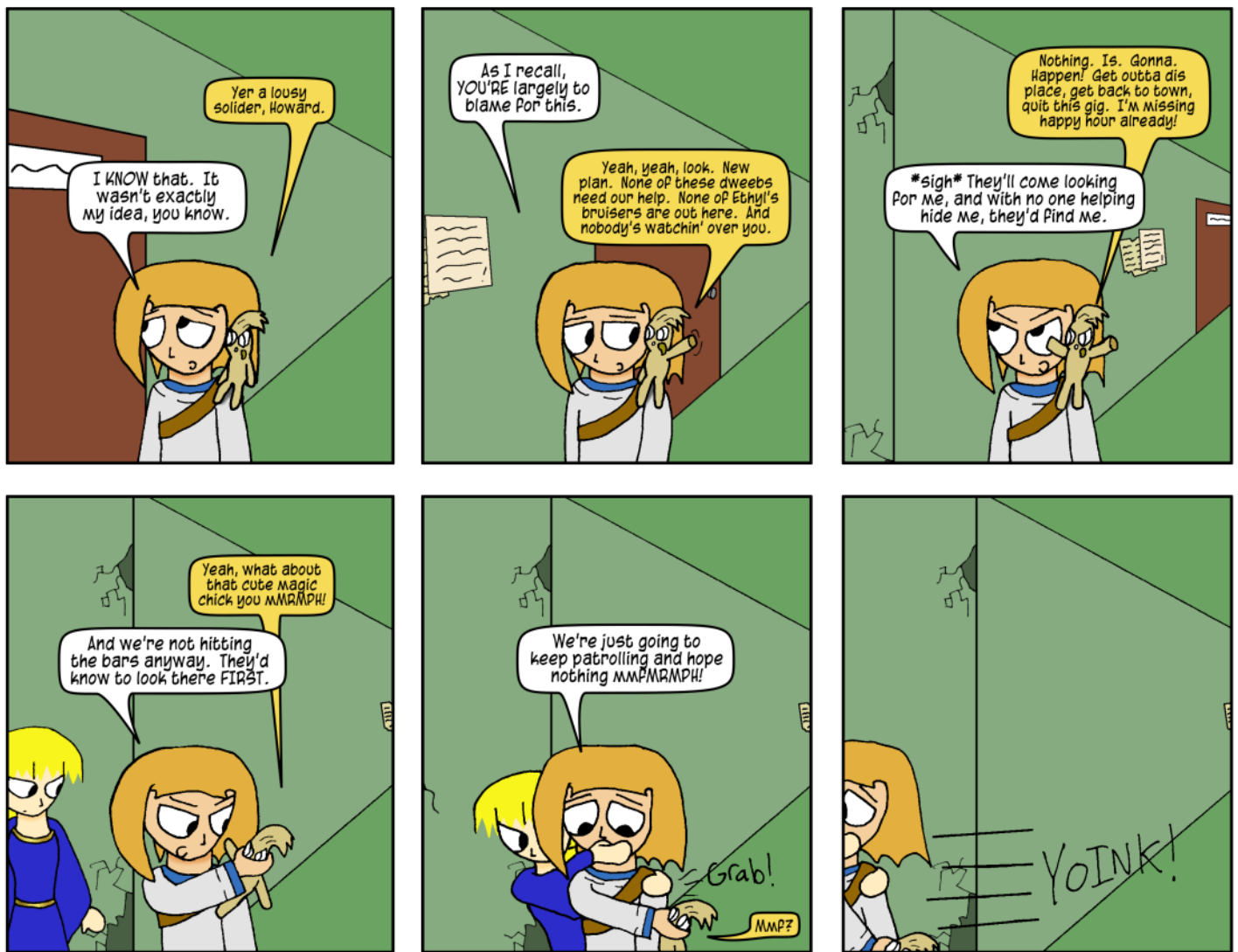
"Alchemist", as a term in the DoM, is a more archaic, regional form of "witch" or "warlock"; that is, alchemy is the study of magic potions, elixirs, powders, and other related forms. That was just the term used in the age of the Founders, so modern Linetans have taken to it as well. It's also convenient as a gender-neutral form of the term. Unfortunately, its association with the age of the Founders has led to it being more associated with hipsters attaching a perhaps undeserved implication of superiority to it. Don't worry about it, they'll get there.

I tend to think of the colored text bubbles of dolls as a sort of artificial magic voice. Like, a voice that sounds off somehow, but you can easily get used to it over time. Still instantly recognizable, though.



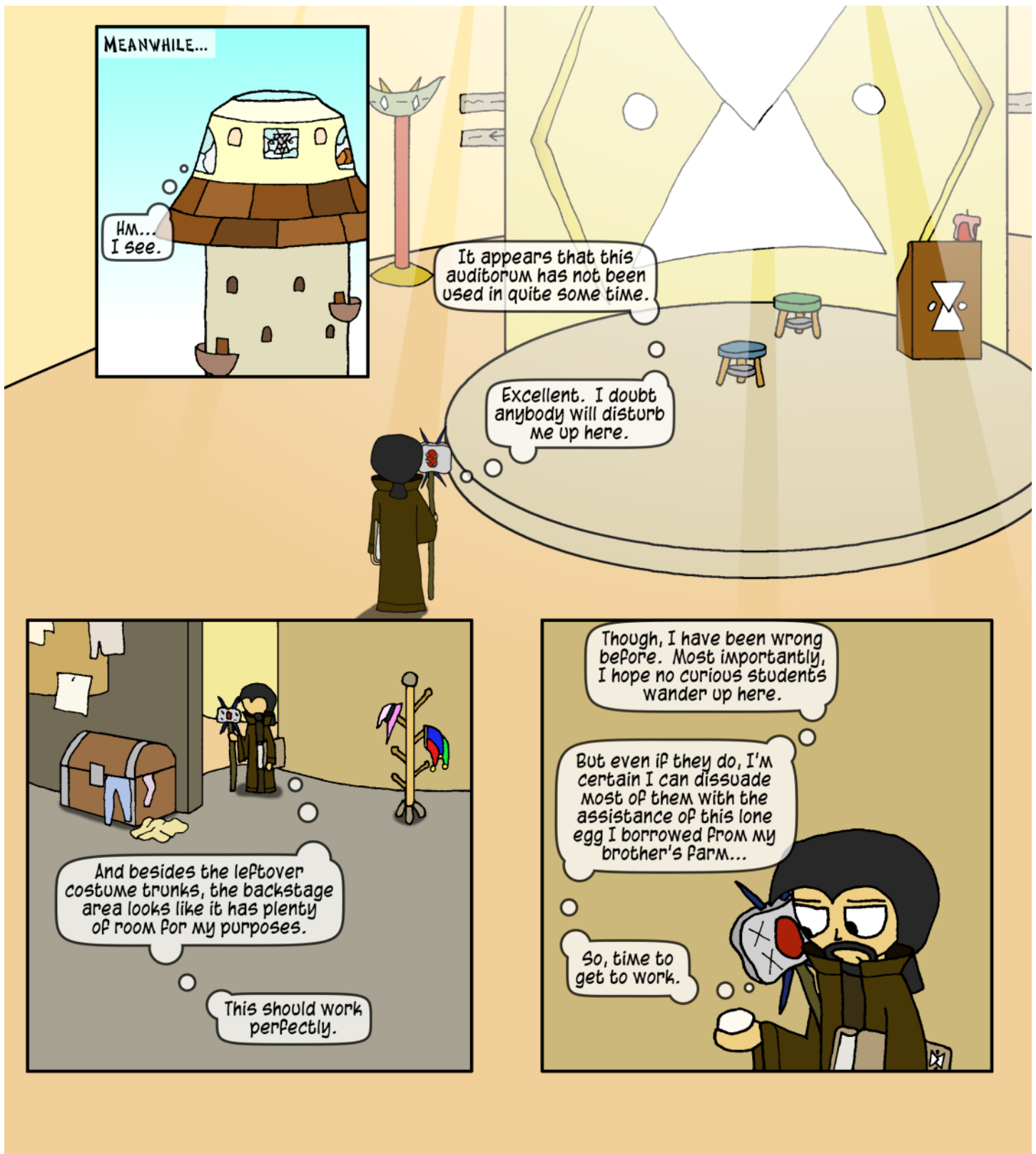
Lineta's don't take too kindly to Landis patrols, just like Landis citizens. Or maybe they're just not happy that he keeps blundering his way into the theatre dressing rooms, as mentioned in the previous comic.

No, I'm not going to draw the theatre dressing rooms into which he and Tilly are barging. I have SOME dignity.



See? Alex HAS learned a thing or two from Matt after all. Yoink!





Here we are high atop Sunlit Tower, and not in a sub-basement somewhere as I mentioned earlier was part of Plan A for the chapter. This is one of the few times I actually worked out the layout of the area in some amount of detail before starting off on it, and of course I can't find those original layout plans anymore.

I would prefer not to speculate on how long Marzos has been carrying that raw egg.



When you draw a background that's meant to be repeated across panels like I do, you really need to make sure you make it big enough to fit all the zoom levels you'll be using, or at least make it so that when you do zoom in, de-focusing the background to a blur is at least feasible. It's best if you redraw each zoom level as appropriate to maintain line weight consistency, but if not, you want to draw to the most zoomed-in scale to reduce scaling artifacts. Remember, you want to scale DOWN, not scale UP!

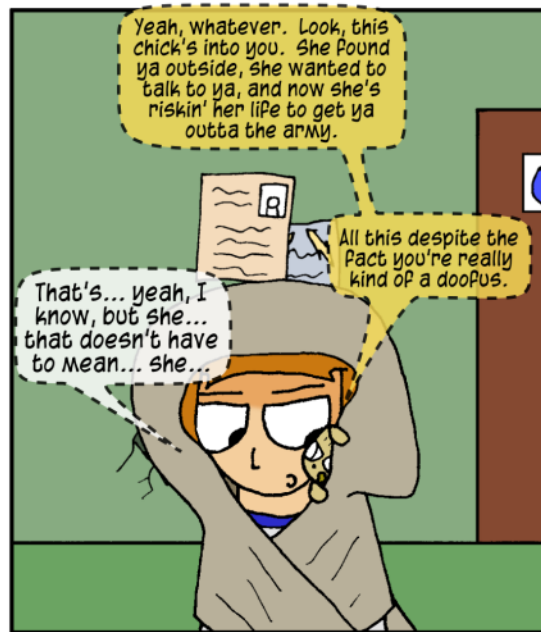
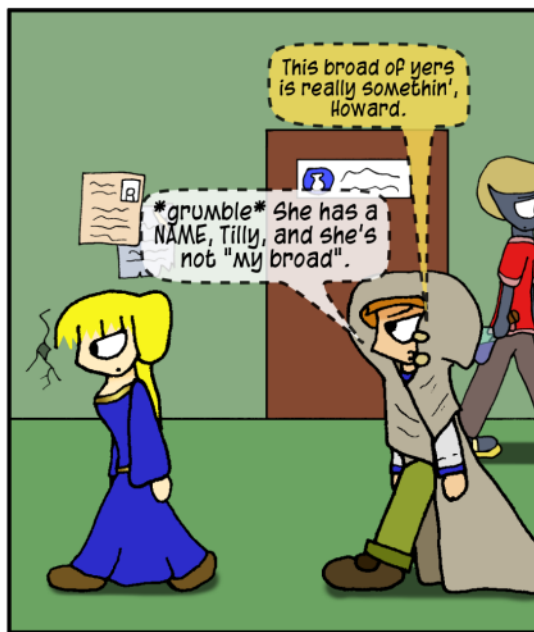
I forgot to do any of that for this comic. The entire scene was drawn once to the scale of the top-middle panel (most zoomed out) before I realized that wouldn't work for any other panel, as it needed to be scaled UP for the tighter shots of Alex and Howard/Tilly alone. On the web, the scaling artifacts were largely offset by scaling down to web size (the line weights are still a problem, though), but here with the 300dpi originals, the blurriness is so much more distinct.

This is why as I've gone along, I depended less and less on repeating backgrounds, or at least making sure the scale remains consistent. And that, boys and girls, is why art is a constant learning experience.



Splash cloth is the most common name for a non-magic material used by alchemists to absorb alchemical spills and splatters, protecting whatever is underneath it. The continuous amount Alex has found is not uncommon at all; splash cloth is not generally used as cleanup rag or a small-scale protection device. Splash cloth is most commonly used to cover an entire lab and its contents for experiments that require the alchemy department to call the dwarves in the mechanics department to wire up a contraption to set off the reaction while the people conducting the experiment are standing in the safety of the hallway, typically behind more splash cloth.

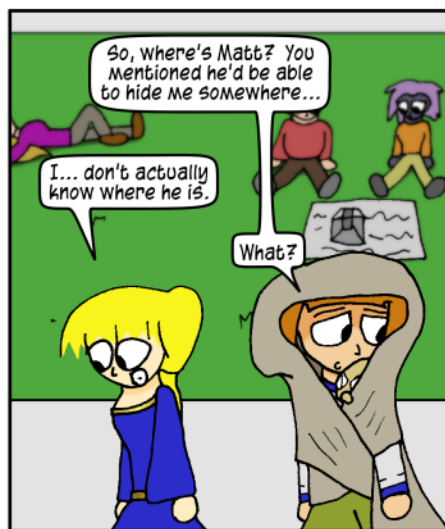
This made Howard the most complicated character for me to draw for a while. This was mostly because I forced myself to keep drawing his entire "normal" outfit first, then add the makeshift cloak over it just to make sure the right bits of the outfit showed through. You'd think I would've come up with a cheesy shortcut at that point.



I'm somewhat inconsistent about how whispering speech bubbles show up. Most of the time they're not translucent like this, but they usually at least have the dashed outline around them. Translucency is generally reserved for thought bubbles or anything else where I put fanciness over readability, I guess.

Though an animated doll does share a strong psychic link with its master, it isn't just an extension of its master's mind. Or in other words, Tilly isn't supposed to be Howard's unbound id, per se. Howard's a nice guy, though somewhat shy at times, and he does like Alex, so that sort of thing might make sense from a narrative standpoint, but Tilly's not above leering at Alex *independent* of Howard.

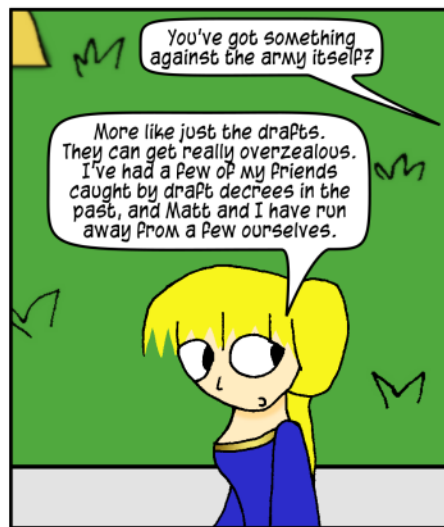
I also don't really picture Alex as a person at whom most people would leer, which sort of makes it weird to write. Also, WETZEL!



Captain Spam probably didn't crash-land right onto the grass there in the first panel. Maybe. Also, the significantly pale-skinned girl in the grey skirt in the back is Hecate, resident goth girl from Chris Paluszek's Carzorthade! Told you I had another one.

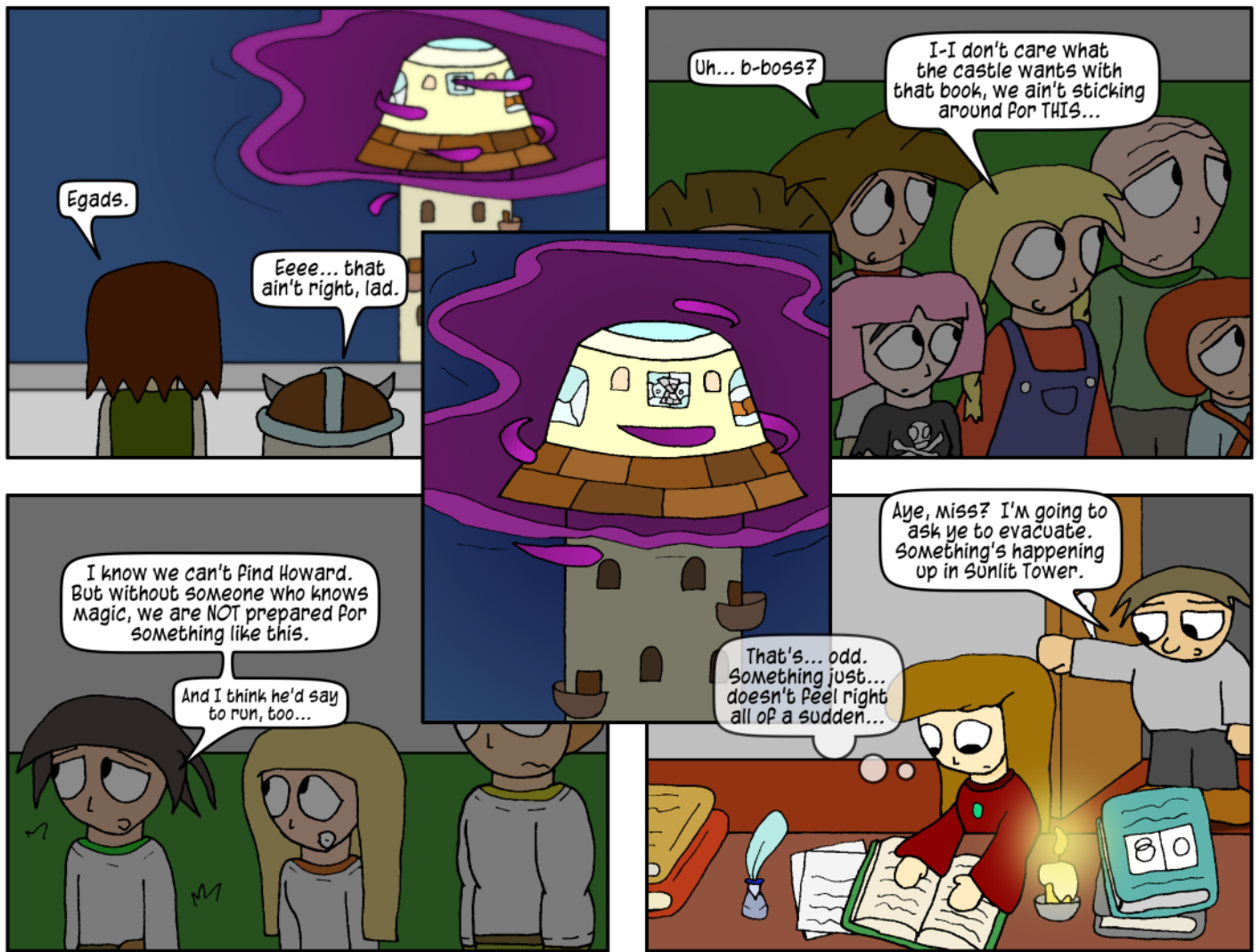
I'll be honest, I thought I was going to have more places to put her during the courtyard sequence, but she just wound up exactly once in the distance like that. Ah, well; at least I got this drawing out of it.





Alex didn't think this through very far beyond "grab Howard, then finding a way to get him out of the Landis Royal Army should somehow come naturally".

If I'm going to be putting more details in backgrounds like this, I'm going to want to take the time to have background characters actually DO something to make said backgrounds be more animated and dynamic. Those two reacting to the encroaching darkness, for instance. I like that sort of thing when I notice it in other people's work. Makes a scene seem more alive.



I'm going to have to remember those members of Rostone Squad next time I need them. This is literally the only time they've shown up as per this writing (besides the captain, who shows up in the debrief next chapter).

I am amused at how I forgot to apply the shading effect to the tower in the first panel.





No, Alex, this wasn't your fault. It was Lucien's. He's a jerk.

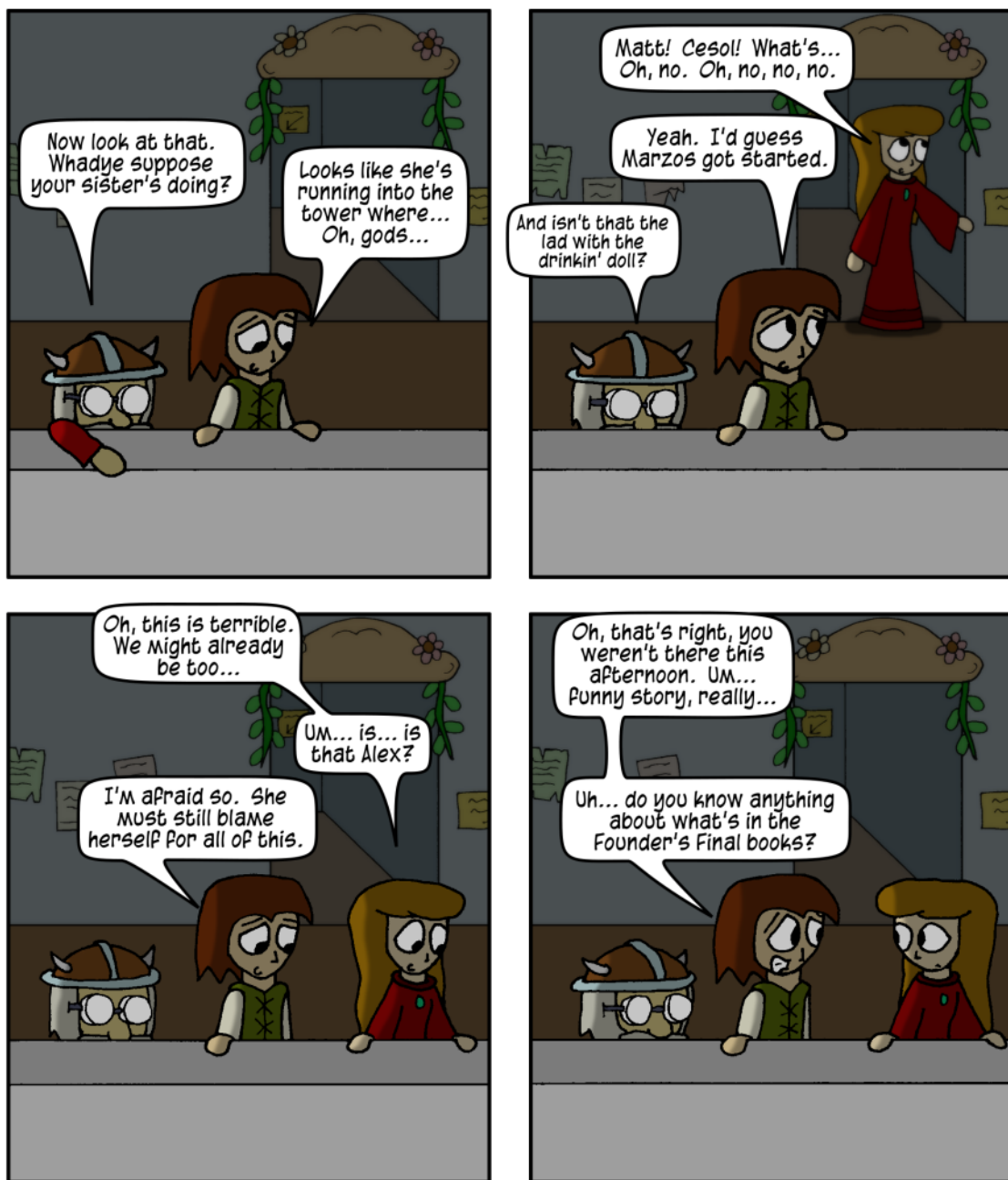
Another note about shading: I've been working on making it more consistent over time (or just not doing it at all if the scene doesn't have specific, significant lighting). The light in this case (or rather, the lack of darkness) is coming from behind Howard and Alex. In the first two panels, you can at least kinda-sorta assume they're standing off a bit from each other such that the lighting works as drawn, and that's why I shaded it like that. The third and fourth panels, though, they're supposed to be in line with each other (observe Howard trying to hold Alex back with both hands), but Howard's hands and arms are clearly shaded, yet Alex's arm isn't. Grr.

Note that one guy in the back has limbs. Thus, he's not at all who you're thinking he is.



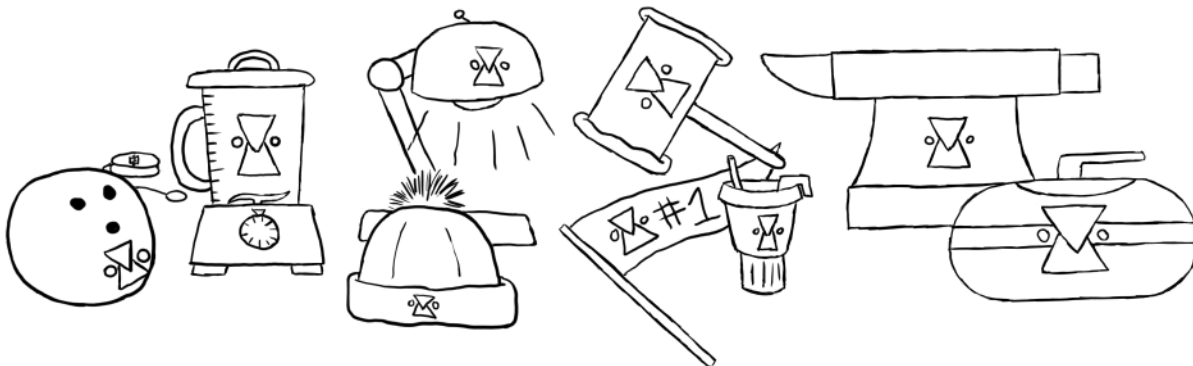
When I first made Tilly back in Chapter One, I gave his speech much more of a drunken slurriness. That, it turns out, isn't very sustainable when he has more of a speaking part than a minor bit character. So starting in this chapter, he has more a snide, loudmouthed sort of drunk speech pattern, like right here. We saw it right when he was yelling at Howard on the water walkway earlier, in fact.

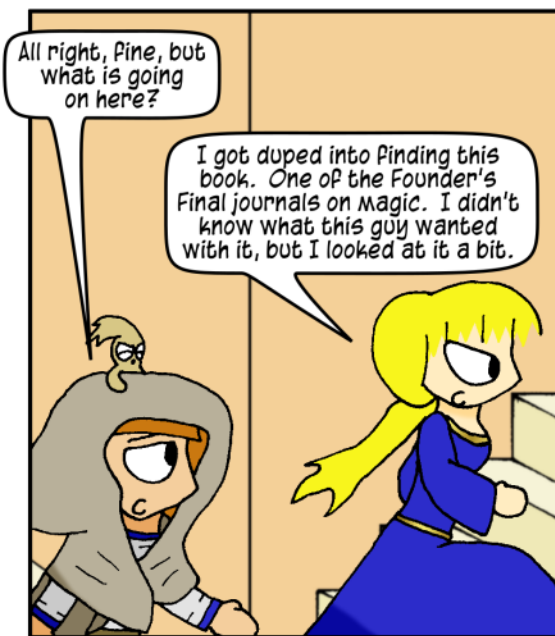




I'm surprised I didn't put the Linetan icon above the door here. As I mentioned before, like any modern university, Lineta Hall is really keen on branding everything in sight.

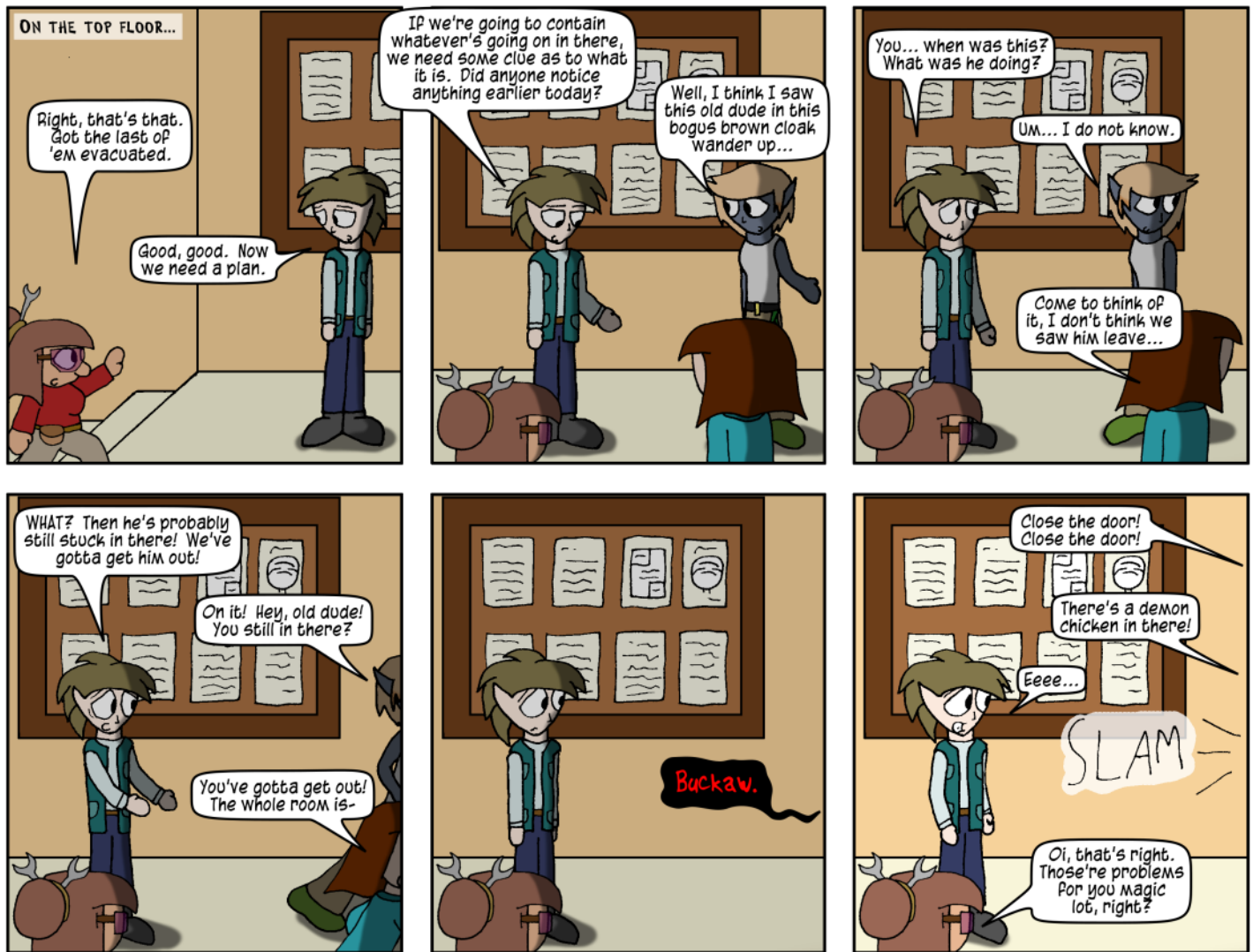
I also somehow forgot to put Matt's shirt under the collar area of his vest.





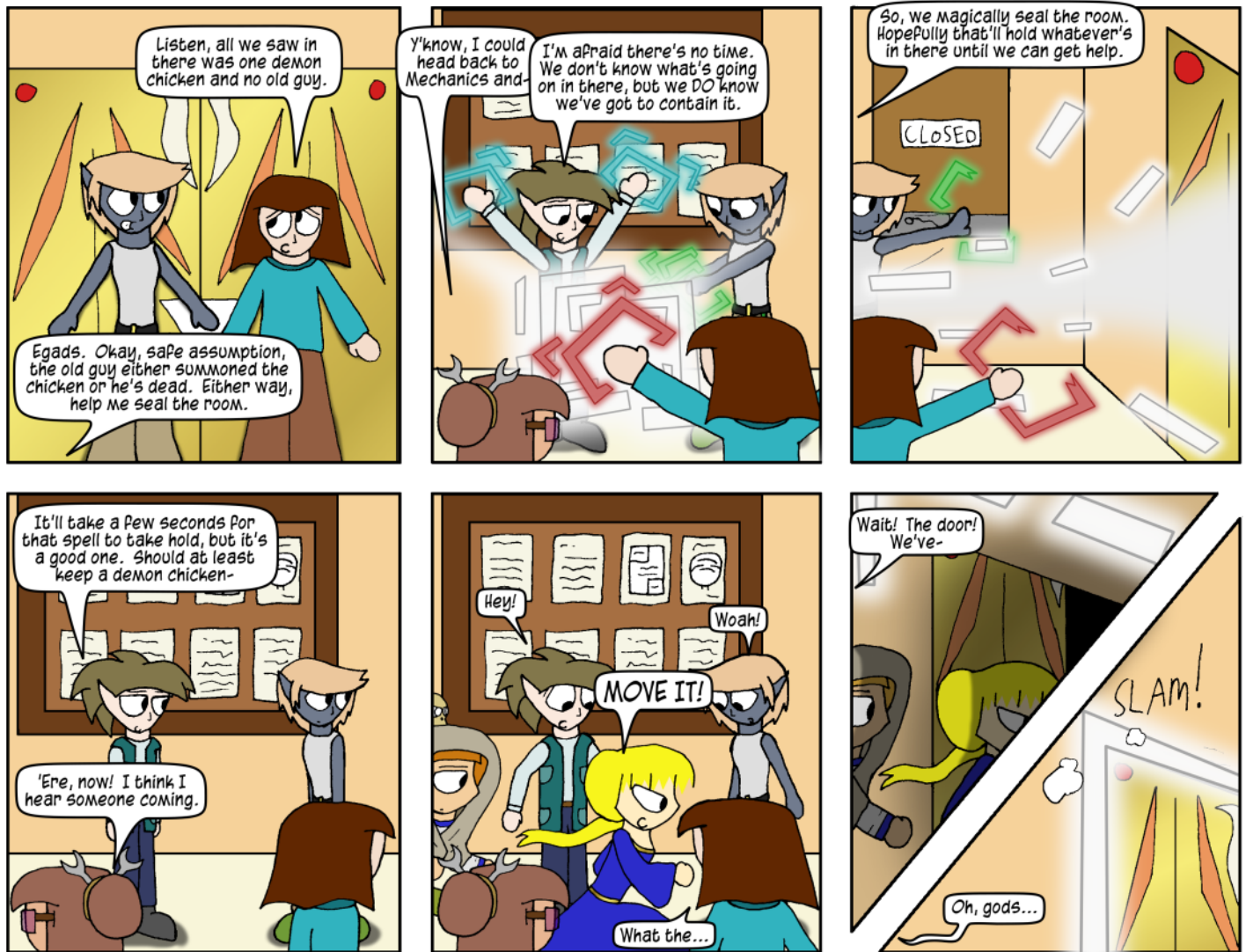
It is worth noting the lack of darkness in the tower, at least at the ground floor. Radiant darkness behaves much like radiant light. While there was nothing out in the open to stop the darkness high atop Sunlit Tower from overcoming the courtyard Howard and Alex were just in, Sunlit Tower's ground floor has numerous floors of stone and wood in the way. Hence, until they get closer to the top (and somebody bothers to open the door to the rooftop auditorium where all this is happening), the ambient light in the tower is more than sufficient.

Again, here's some line weight issues, specifically on Howard as he runs in from the background. Well, line weight issues and the fact that he isn't quite lined up right to the scene. I got better at that sort of thing, sort of like how Alex and Howard running up the stairs looks better than my previous attempts at drawing people running.



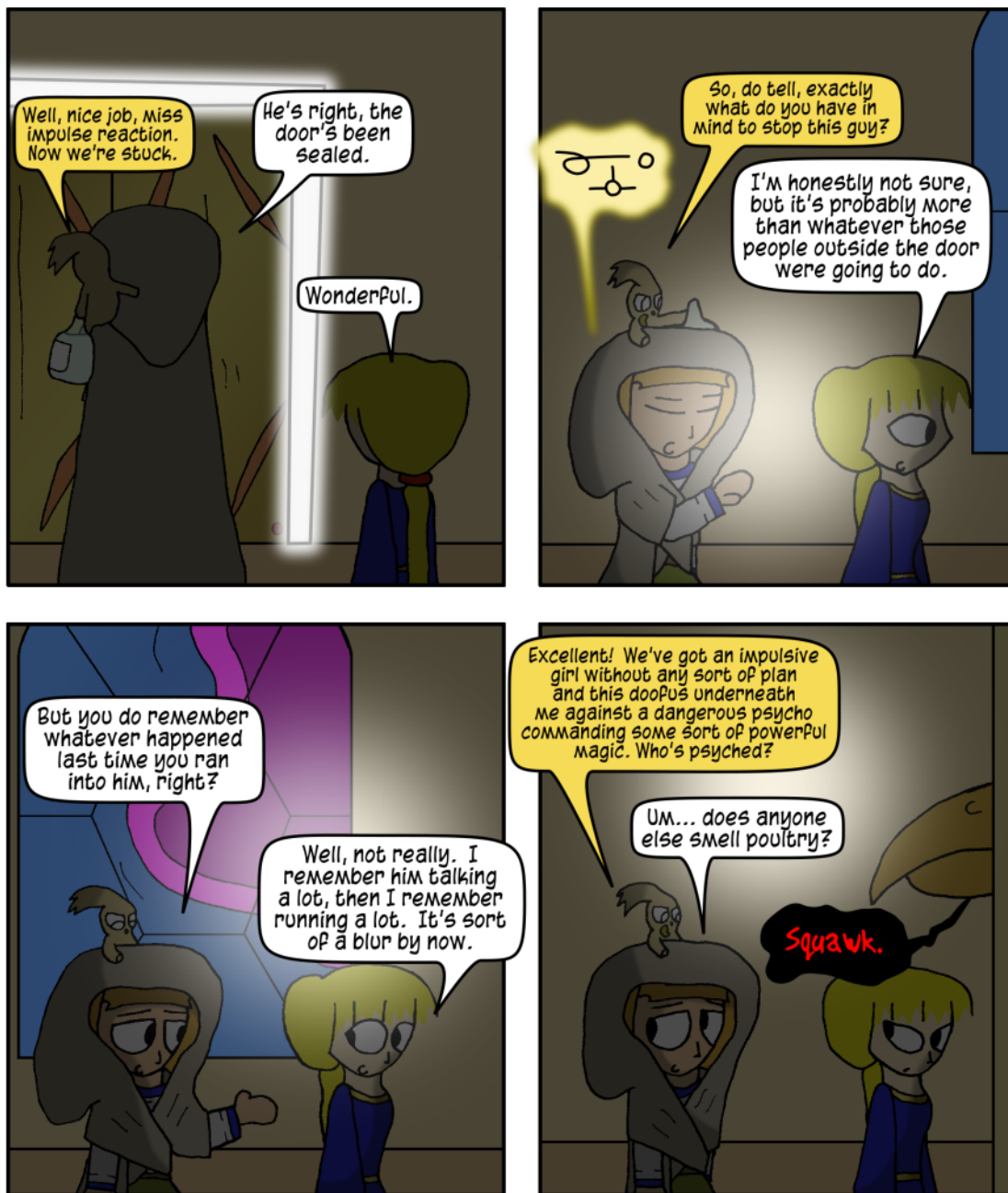
The previous note on magic darkness is why the room got brighter when the door to the main auditorium was closed. It all makes sense now. Now, to figure out why they didn't close the door until just now.

As I said before, the sort of people who would go to and hang out around Lineta Hall are more progressive than most. Hence why we see a forest elf working together well with a beach elf. That sort of thing wouldn't happen very often outside the Lineta area.



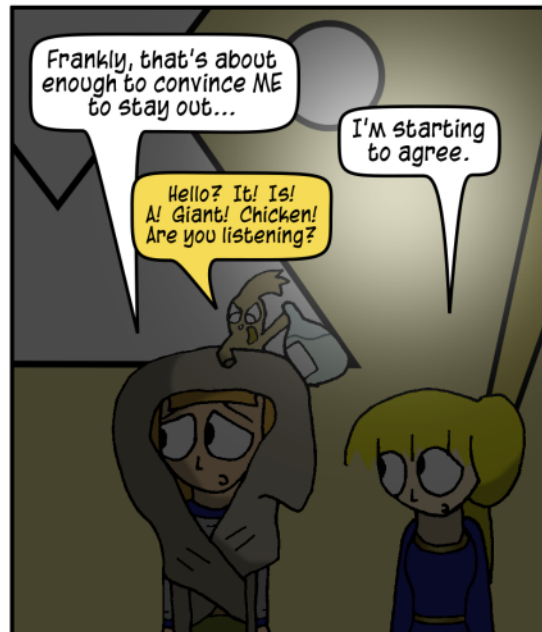
The visual effects of magic differ depending on who's casting it. Or more specifically, how they were taught. There's many schools of magic out there, and some of them just teach things differently. More straight lines and shapes and such are common to Linetan students of magic. The end effects are pretty much the same.

But, then I go and experiment with visual effects for established characters who've already been seen casting magic, so really, it's another of those things where art is a constantly developing process. I do want to keep the idea that Linetan mages use distinct lines, though.



Now we're getting into spoken-word enchantments. These first showed up in Chapter One when we met Howard.

As I mentioned way back in one of the Break Time comics for Chapter One, I have a file sitting around with a list of every magic glyph I've used in spoken enchantments. I try to keep the glyphs consistent (in those notes, the glyphs shown here are "relates to caster's position or motion", "follow", and "simple light"), and I try to keep single phrases consistent (so what Howard's saying is more or less "create simple light that follows caster"), but beyond that I don't have any real solid "grammar" to what's said. This is largely for the same reasons why I don't have Elven and magic script defined at all.



It is true that demon chickens, mentioned near the start of the second chapter, are nearly immune to magic. It is, however, possible to convince a demon chicken to do your bidding. Moreso if you happen to be the one that summoned it in the first place.

You'd think that Tilly, being a small animated doll that is presumably made of some rather flammable material, ought to be a bit more afraid of a giant enraged chicken that is exhaling a puff of smoke from its beak in the third panel. You'd think that, but you'd be wrong.

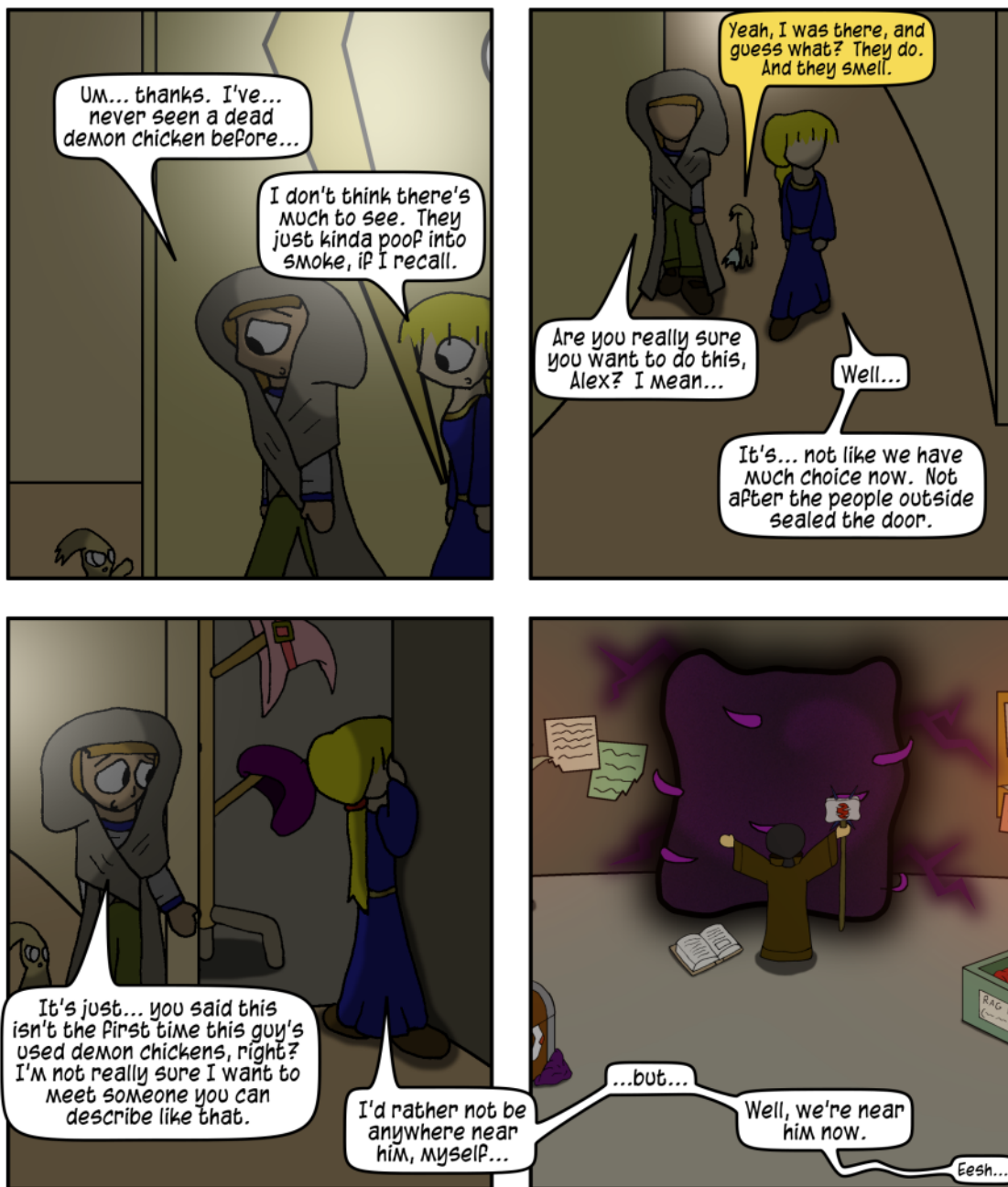


I'd like to think that Landis does at least give even their mages some sort of small blade and some introductory combat training for situations just like this, but it's entirely possible that they don't really care. It's also possible that neither Howard nor Alex would really be able to handle the situation even if they had a knife handy. When you're used to throwing vaguely-defined energy from your hands, you start to realize how much practice and training it takes to properly use a simple knife in combat against demonic poultry.

Or, for that matter, to properly use a broken bottle.

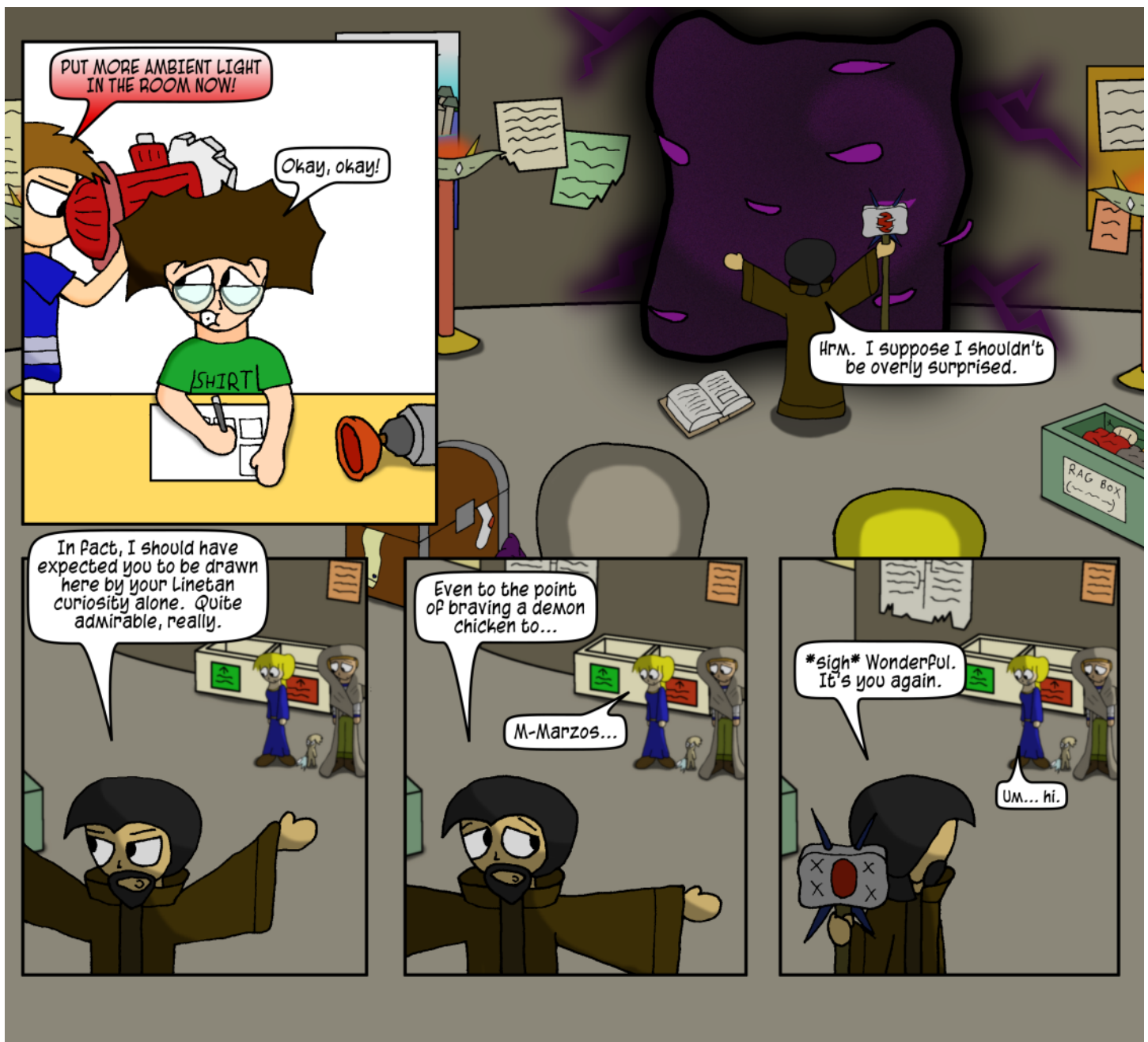


Why no, I actually wasn't in any mood to attempt to figure out how to draw out an even barely believable fight between a small doll and a gigantic fire-breathing chicken that ended with the doll jamming a broken bottle into the chicken's neck. How did you guess?



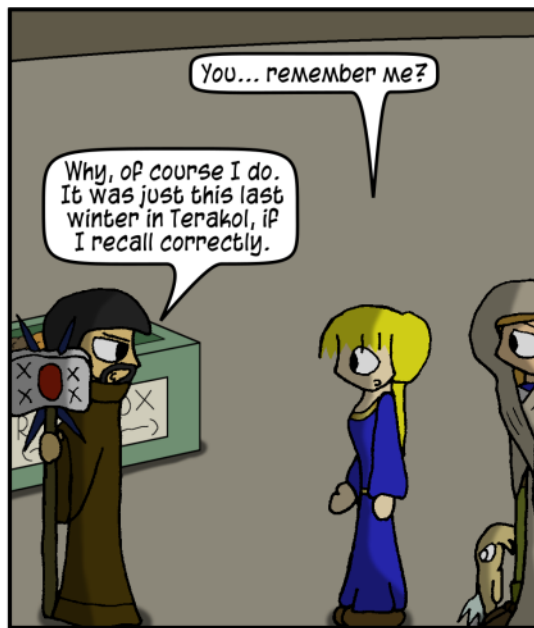
Yes, that IS Captain Spam's purple helmet on the hatrack there. And some sort of... pink pointed hat with a buckle on it? I think someone has slightly missed the concept of a witch's hat.

The way I write Alex, I try to make her headstrong and a bit hotheaded at times, in addition to being keenly curious and willing to learn. That should be obvious by now. But, I also hope to keep the headstrong and hotheaded parts at least partially grounded in reality. She's perfectly willing to admit when she might be in way over her head, for instance, like right when she was reminded that Marzos is an incredibly wise and powerful mage who uses demon chickens on a semi-regular basis. I've never liked characters where "headstrong" means there is literally no challenge or problem, no matter how absurd, that will dissuade them in the least bit.



When I work out colors and shading and such, I've only got my own monitor (and lighting conditions in my room) from which I can judge how dark a scene is going to be. Color profiles and correction won't do me much good if this is intended for digital distribution where the reader might not have (or care about) proper color correction on their own display or software drivers, let alone whether or not mine is utterly perfect to begin with

So I ran into a problem around here when I felt that the darkening I applied to the scenes up in the Sunlit Tower auditorium were going too far, as it was getting a bit difficult to see on my own screen. In hindsight, I think it was just a crappy monitor I had at the time (or more specifically, a once-decent CRT monitor whose tube had faded from years of use). But, that's why I cut the darkening right here. I'm pretty sure I didn't need it on the web, but looking at it in print, it helps. You didn't want to see the first draft of this book's cover. In fact, you only barely could see it.



When I first put this comic out, I punted on the background for a day or two because it was taking me too long to work out all the random junk I wanted to put in there. Y'know, all that random junk that's just sitting there on the floor? Yeah. That empty floor really took me a while.

In all reality, I was having a harder time than I thought figuring it out and just wanted to get the important stuff up. In a few more strips you'll see the same background, only more appropriately populated with a variety of junk, not just the rag box.

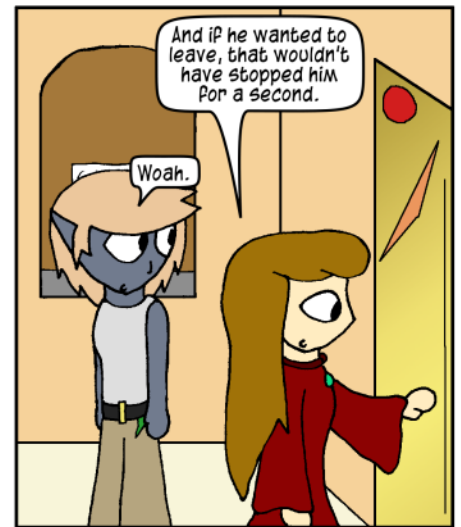
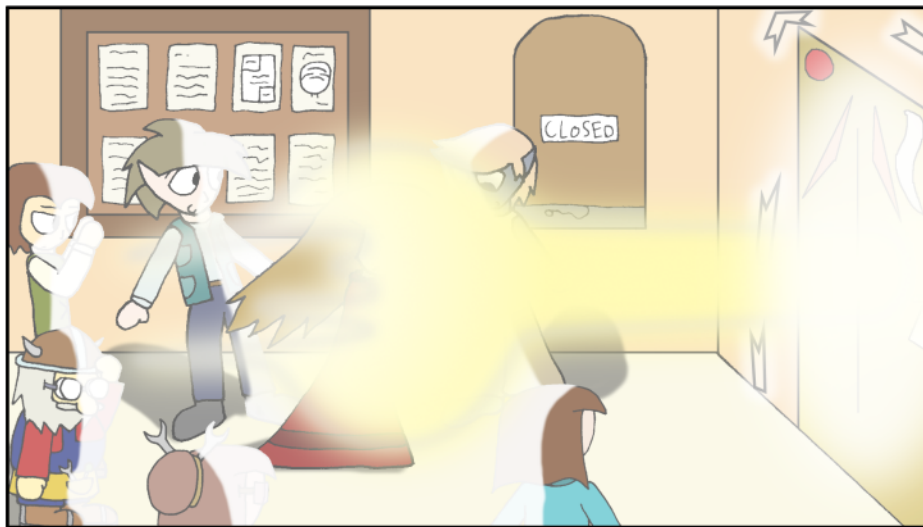


Oh, wait, that's right, Marzos had a penchant for talking people's ears off back in Chapter One, too. Now I remember.



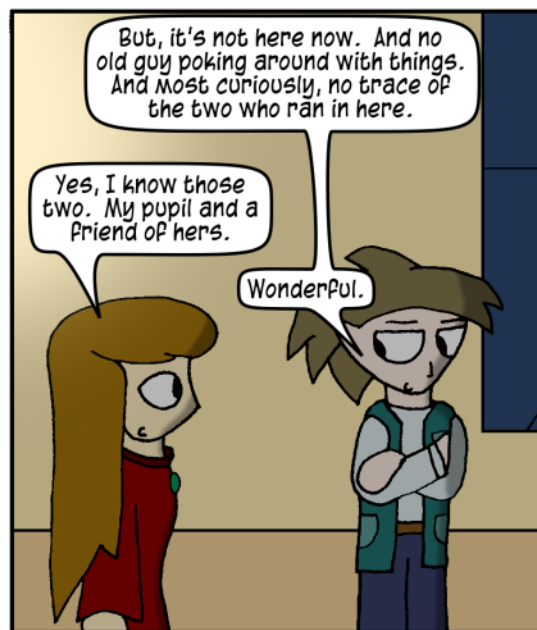
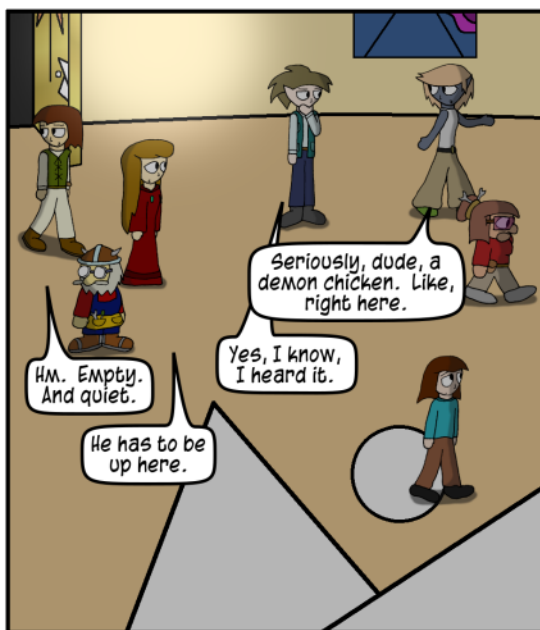


One problem I had at first with writing beach elves was, whenever I picture "generic surfer dude", complete with the appropriate manner of speech, I think of beach movies from the 70s or 80s or so (obviously heavily bent towards Bill S. Preston, Esq and Ted "Theodore" Logan). But, far as I can recall, such characters were almost invariably male. When I initially tried to picture the "voice" of a female beach elf, like the one shown here, I thought about what the female counterpart to a surfer dude was in those movies. Unfortunately, the answer I kept coming up with was "valley girl", and I quickly decided that wasn't where I'm going with them at all, so I just kinda started winging it.



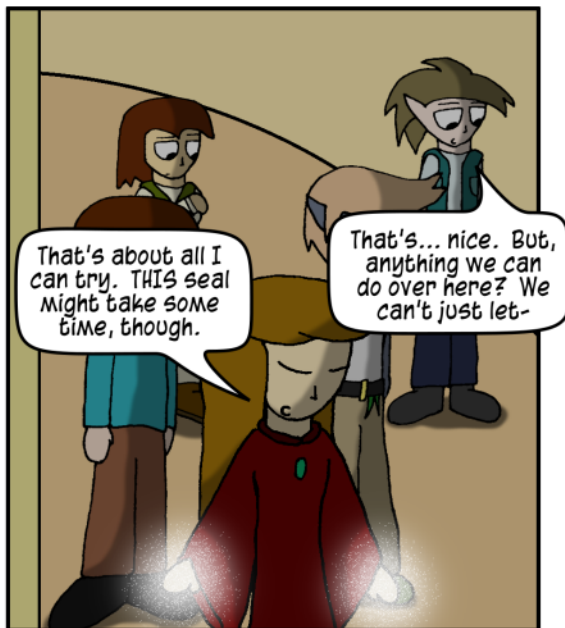
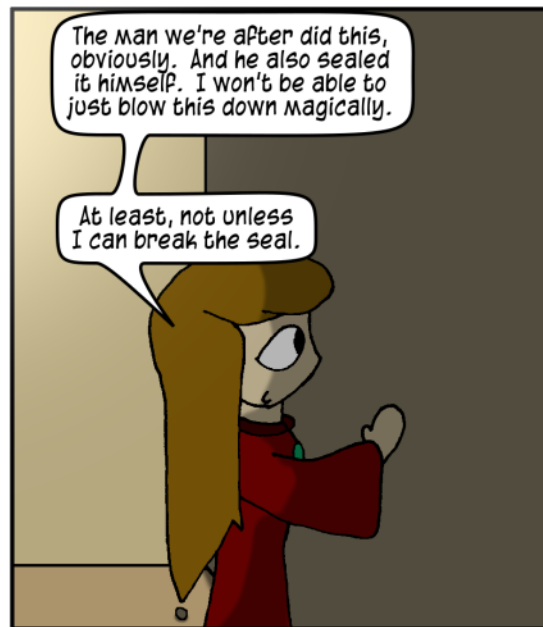
Magic seals, like locks, were not made to be opened. And, as with locks, sometimes there's a clever way around them, and sometimes you just metaphorically fling a truck through them and that works. That was a very strange metaphor, now that I think about it, and I'm not sure why it was the first one that came to mind just now.

It's hard to tell, but note that Matt and Cesol are just casually shielding their eyes as if they expected Salth to do this. Compare this to the Linetans, who are genuinely surprised by this person who has just waltzed up the tower and effortlessly destroyed their magic lock. It also makes me wonder why Matt and Cesol are shielding their eyes in the first place, as the Linetans aren't exactly blinded from the blast afterward.



Hooray for more line weight issues!

Balls of light that follow the caster around are one of the simplest things a mage in the DoM can do. Hence, it's quite common to see a mage walking around at night or otherwise in the darkness with a light source handy. I hadn't standardized on what that light looks like yet at this point; right now it just looks like a hole in the darkness above Salth's head here. Which is weird, it was actually a ball of white light earlier when Howard did it.



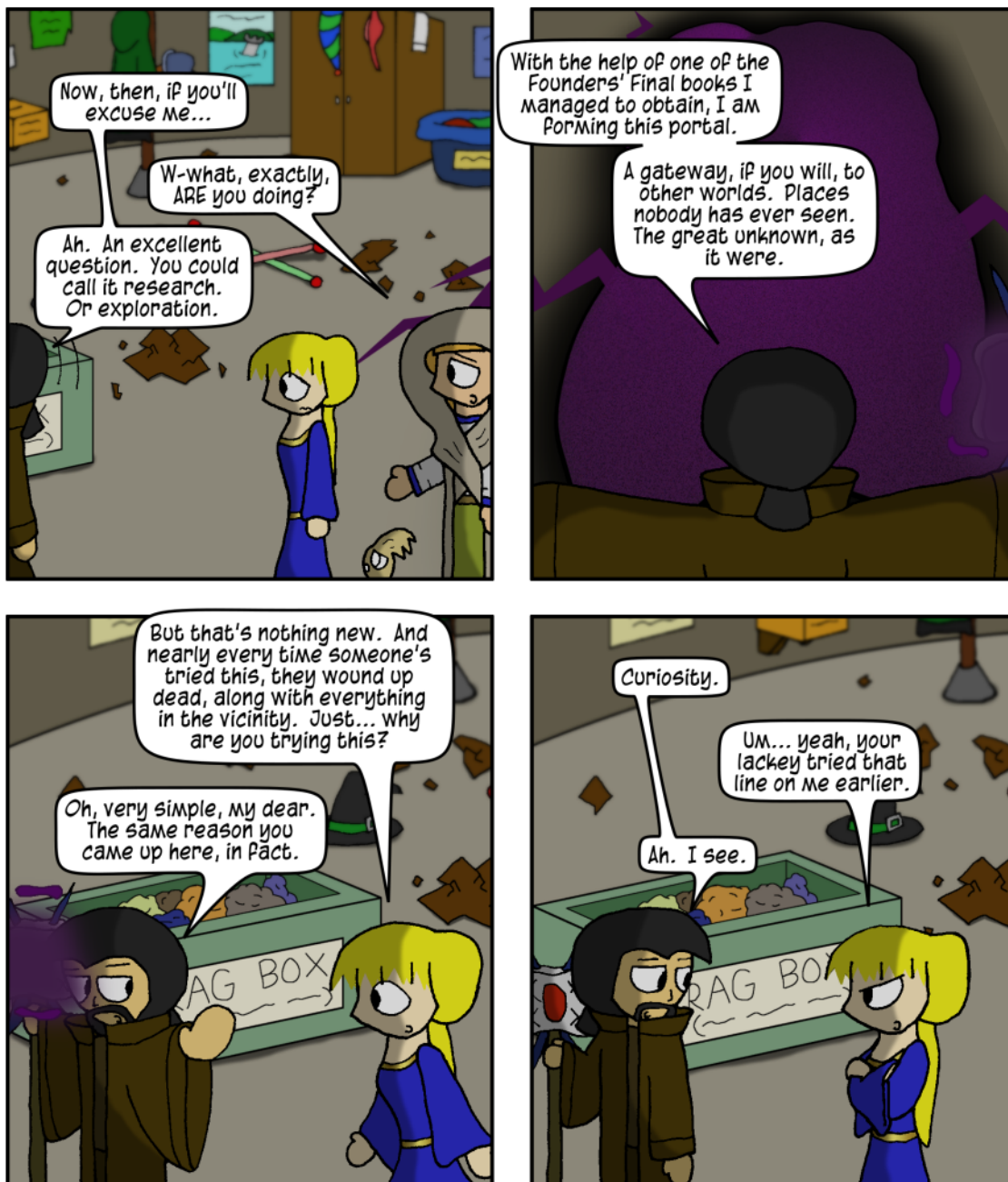
I'm not quite sure where Cesol or the wrenches-as-hair-sticks dwarf girl are in the last two panels. Also, I really should've given the girl a name. Then again, I never gave anyone else in this group a name, either.

I've also really got to work on differentiating faces and hair at some point, as that forest elf looks an awful lot like Cy. People who are really really picky about that sort of thing probably despise my comic, as it's kind of clear I've only got like a few basic face shapes. I don't even do things like detail cheekbones or proper jawlines or whatnot.



There we are! There's the rest of the background. And a more proper witch hat, too! Also, check that poster in the background. The one that looks a bit like a castle tower (with parapet) sinking quickly into some body of water? Looks like someone must've tried putting on a production of *The Sinking Castle* in the Sunlit Tower auditorium!

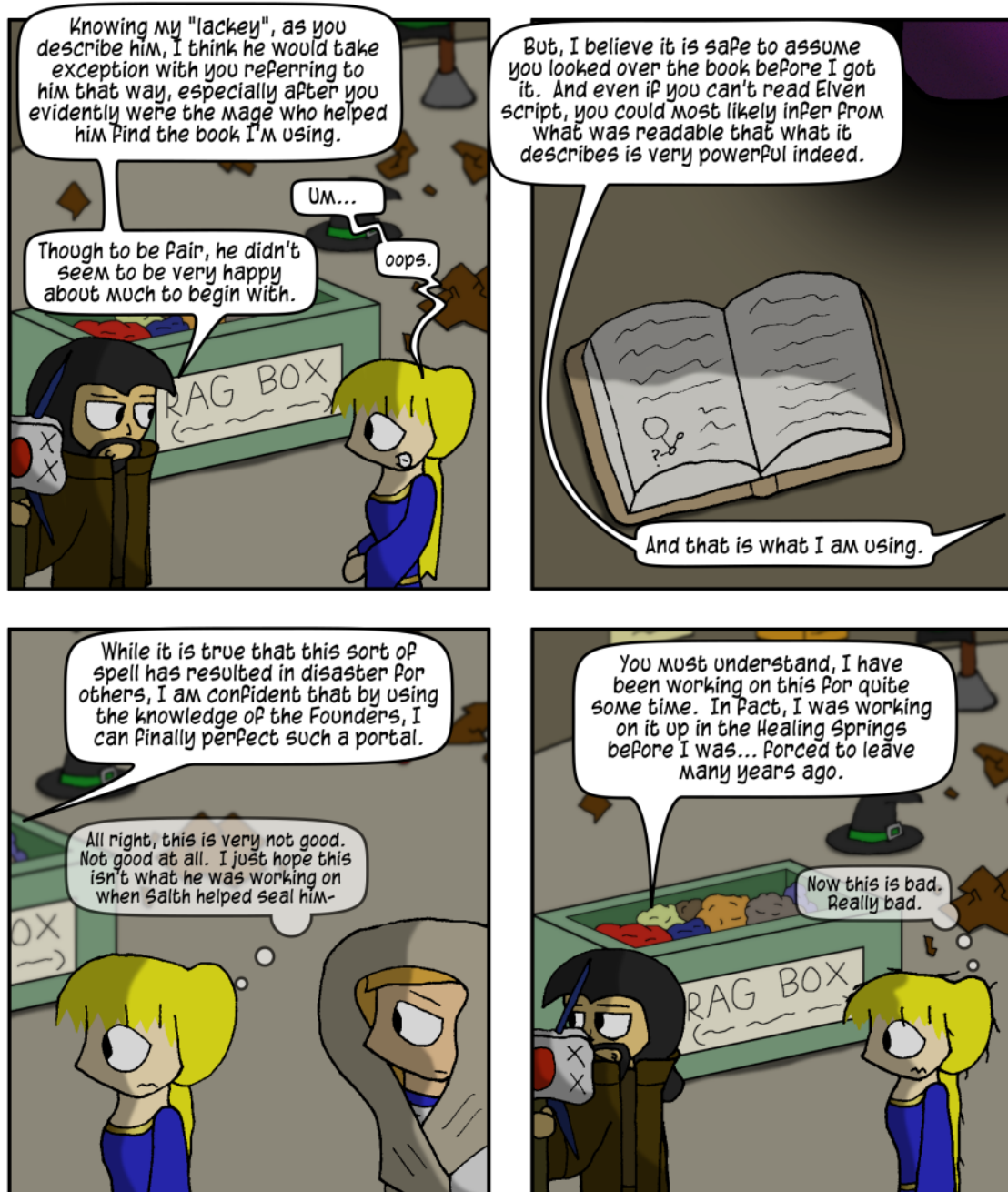
I was putting Inkscape more and more to good use around now. Nowadays, it's getting to the point where most effects that aren't really blurry magic or fire come from vector objects.



There's something I really like about Alex straight up no-selling the dramatic delivery of Marzos's last line there.

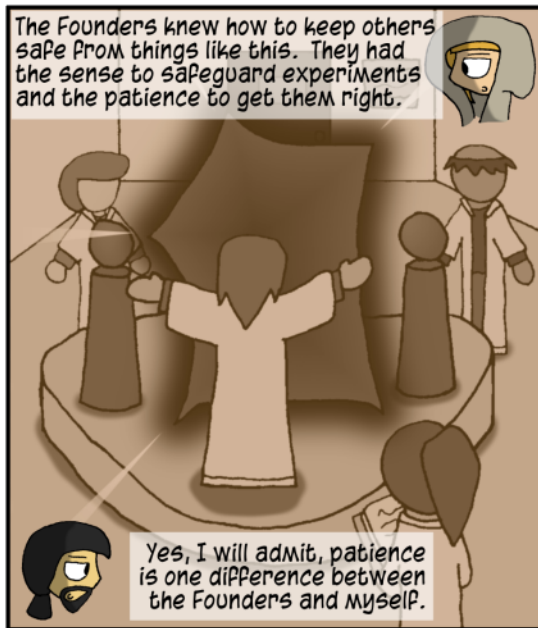
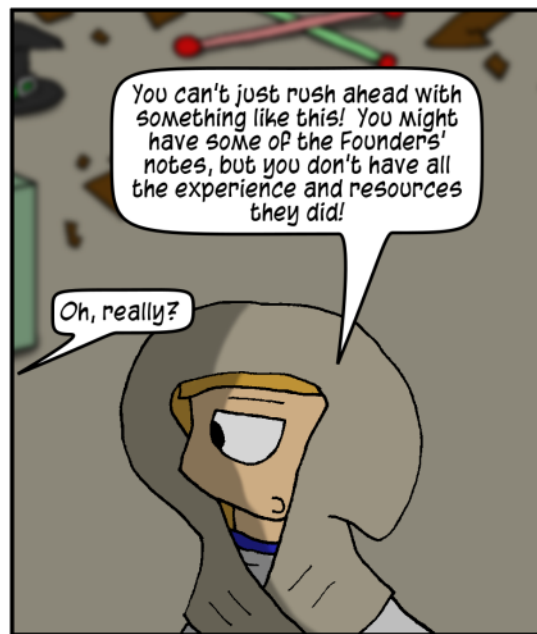
The portal effect was a thorn in my side through this entire section, mostly because after I applied it once, I realized I didn't take note of exactly what I did. I think it mostly revolved around some combination of a swirl gradient, a noise filter, some glowing, and lots and lots of purple. In the end, maybe I shouldn't have bothered being quite so complicated, given most of it turned into a purple smear anyway.

Small note: The swirl gradient is more apparent here if Marzos's text bubble isn't in the way (and doesn't show up well in print anyway).

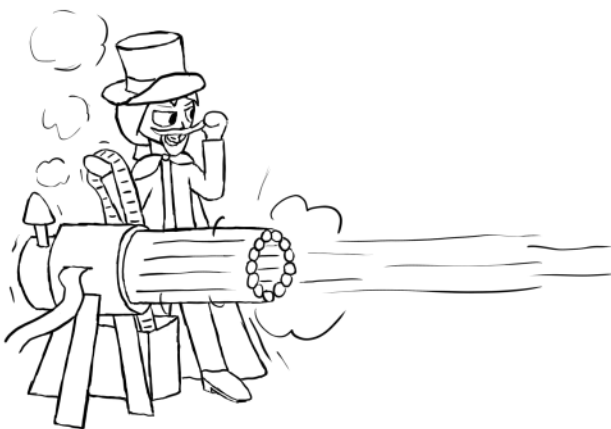


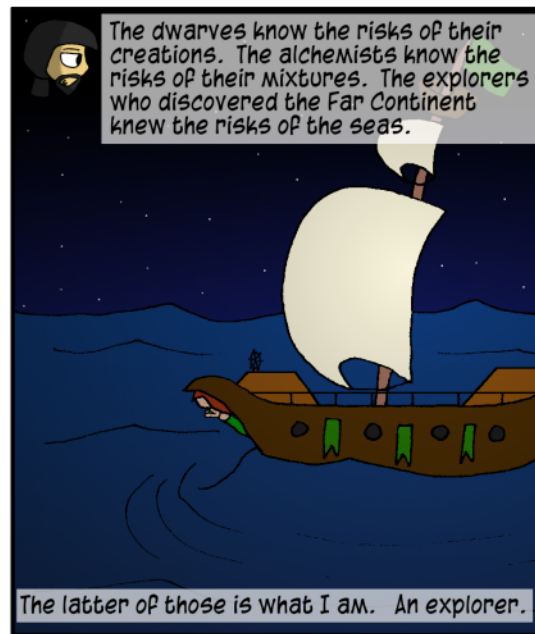
And, there's also something I really like about Marzos being entirely undeterred by Alex shooting down his dramatic delivery in the previous comic. Though now that I think about it, it turned out the fact that Marzos now knows Alex helped Lucien get him the book wasn't very important to the story at all.

I don't do things like the sudden-frazzled-hair-as-soon-as-someone-gets-really-worried bit with Alex in the last panel very often. It's one of those things that's similar to the hair-goes-flying-whenever-magic-is-involved thing I mentioned earlier, in that I thought it got sort of silly shortly after I started doing it.



I forget; is it stylistically legal to use sepia tone to visually indicate an event happened in the past when the "present" is medieval-ish times? Isn't that better-suited to a wild west setting? Or am I just being too blatant in setting up the following sketch?





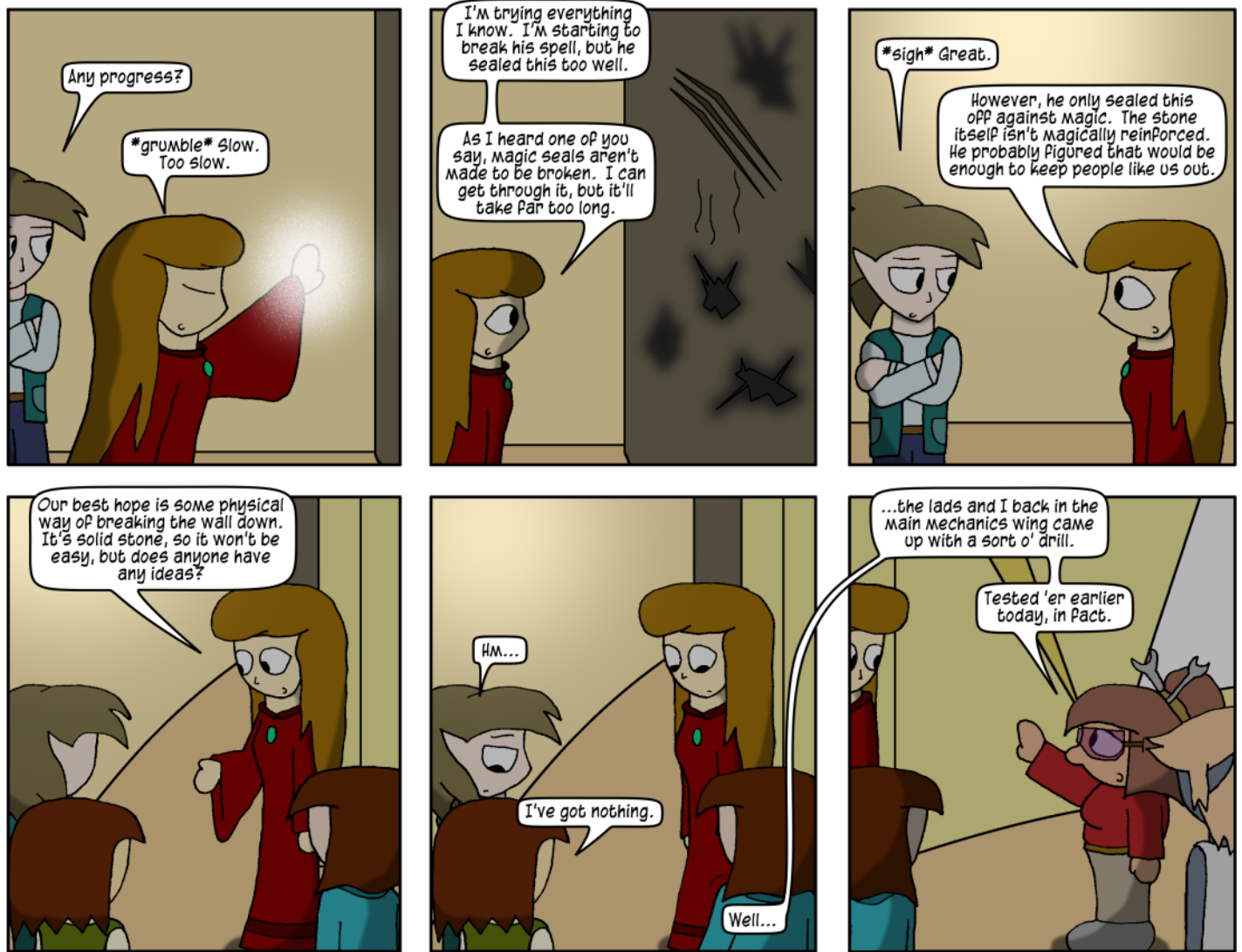
This might be as close as you're going to get to understanding how an actual mad scientist would reason things out: Someone who legitimately doesn't think himself villainous and sincerely believes that what he's doing is nothing but virtuous but has zero concern for the welfare of anyone outside of himself.

Sorry, no insane cackling glee, giant switches, or doing vaguely-defined SCIENCE!!! just because some fools laughed and said not to, just disquietingly reasoned-out conclusions that aren't exactly right.



That is a *lot* of purple going on.





I tried not to think too hard about what sorts of seal-breaking spells would've caused marks like those on the wall. You know, the usual sort of "don't try to reveal too much about how magic works in too much detail" thing. I just figured I needed SOME sort of markings to show Salth was trying everything she knew. But claw marks?

Also, so THAT'S where wrenches-as-hair-sticks girl was standing: Off-camera behind the wall. And as we see in the next comic, that's apparently where Cesol was, too. Maybe they just had no particular interest in watching a mage try to blast down a wall magically.

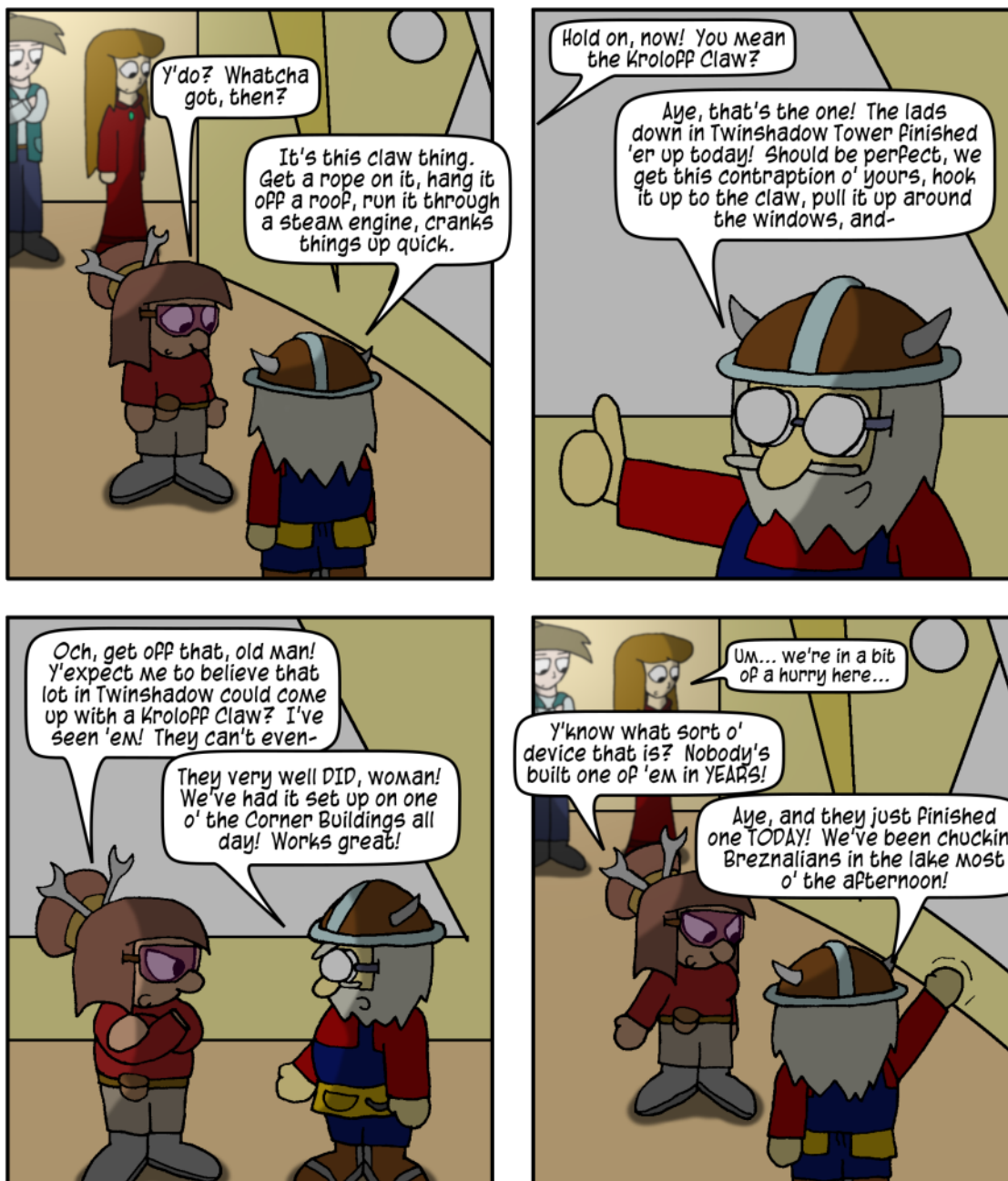


You just knew that machine was going to show up again later.



The Lineta Hall tower everyone is in right now is known as Sunlit Tower. It was named this by the Founders after the fact that it is the tallest of its cluster of buildings, meaning it gets a lot of sunlight throughout the day. The Rooftop Auditorium at the top of the tower is frequently hailed as one of the best auditoriums in all of Lineta due to the excellent sunlight the room gets. Simple.

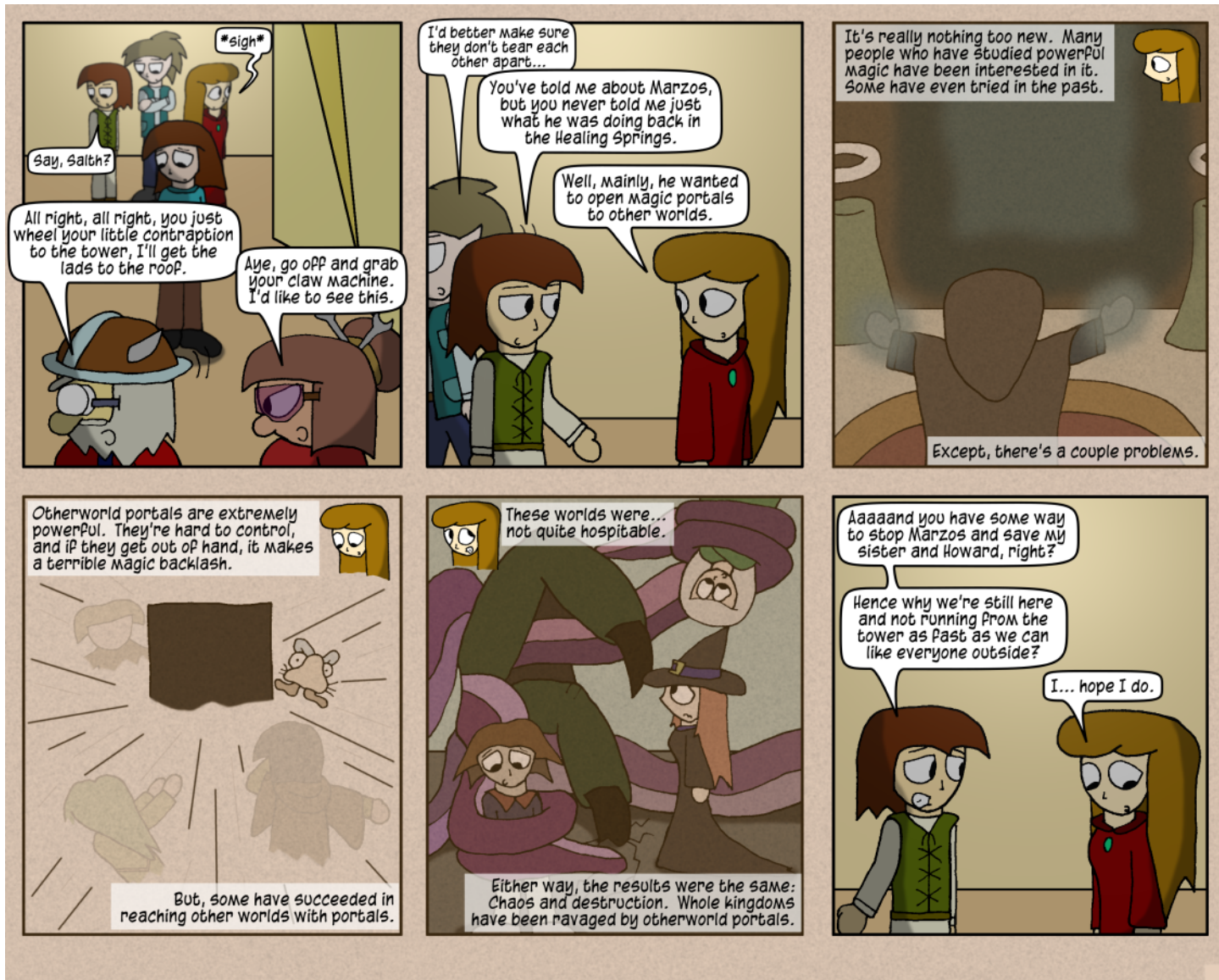
Twinshadow Tower was named as such after the Founders realized a drastic engineering oversight in its construction. It was initially designed to be an ideal weather study tower. However, the tower itself was placed directly between two larger towers, casting it in shadow both when the sun rises and when it sets, hence the name. After the weather researchers gave up on it, it was soon repopulated mostly by the engineering department, who didn't particularly mind being in darkness for most hours of the day. Some used to consider the possibility of running a large glass corridor between the two nearby towers to block



As I mentioned before, what wrenches-as-hair-sticks girl is surprised about is how anyone bothered to build a Kroloff Claw to begin with, not that it's seemingly impossible to build or whatnot. Now it's just easier to build. And apparently easier to transport to another rooftop.

more sunlight, but that idea didn't get much traction.

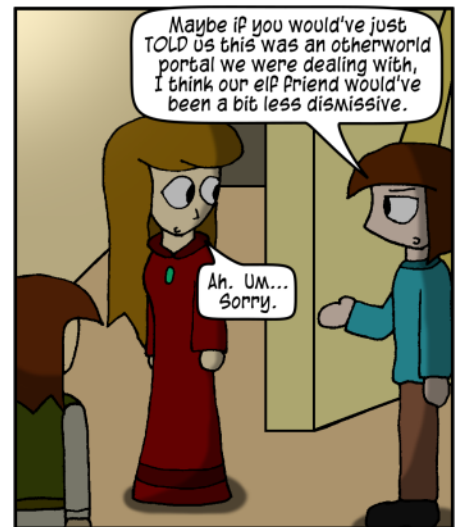
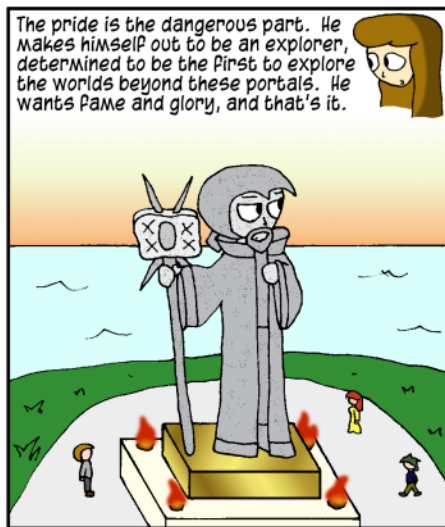
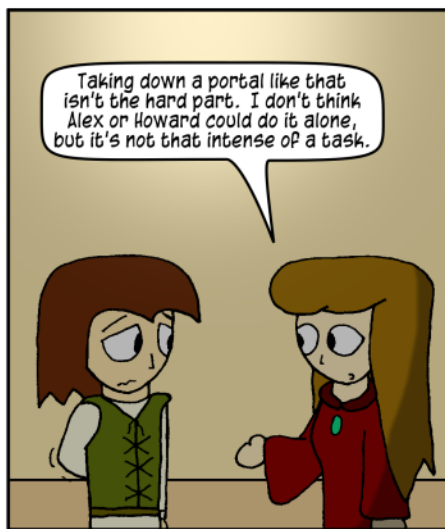
The Kroloff Claw is what Cesol and the other dwarves in Twinshadow Tower built. It was named after Kroloff, the original designer of such a device. When he first made it, though, he wasn't able to build a full-scale heavy-lifting apparatus like what they have now. While his theories were sound, all he had a chance to produce was a small-scale prototype, amounting to a small amusement device which could be used by onlookers to attempt to fish trinkets out of a glass case. This was not considered the most useful application of such technology.



There's the sepia tone again. I really wish I remembered the order in which I applied the filters to make that effect. There's probably a noise/hurl for texture, some desaturation, a bit of blur, a dash of alpha drop, hue shift, things like that. I say this because it would be nice if I could redo the effect to fill in that weird square that somehow appeared in the lower-right of the image. I have no idea how that got there.

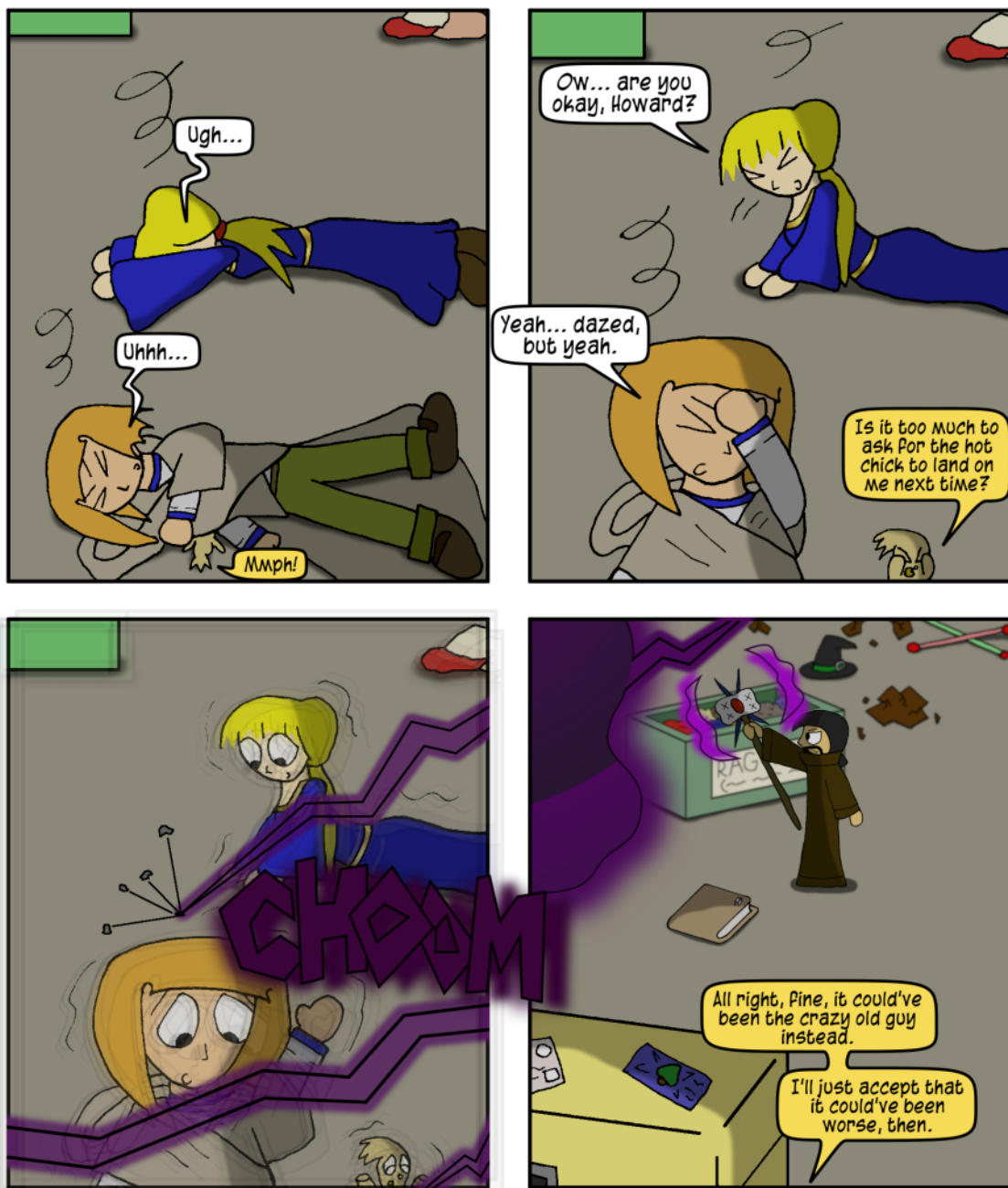
Here we see the same story Marzos was telling, more or less, just from a different perspective and with different conclusions. Conclusions that involve fewer noble attempts at spreading knowledge to the world and more blinding flashes of magic and tentacle-and-claw monsters that don't appear to fit in proper geometry and such.

I do like the fifth panel. The expression of the girl in the witch hat just screams "oops".



The portal's effect is completely different from what I used back in Chapter Two when Salth first mentioned it. That one involved a lot of stupid feedback effects by making copies of the surrounding artwork combined with me browsing through GIMP's filter list at random, so I'm at least glad I stopped doing THAT.

If you wish, you can just imagine a plaque under that statue reading "Marzos And His Ridiculous Robe That Was Stupid And Dumb And We All Thought It Looked Silly".

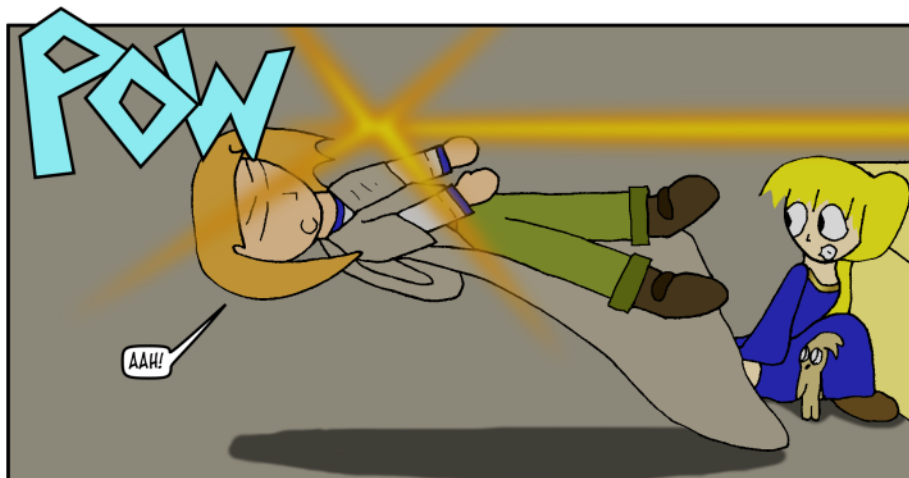
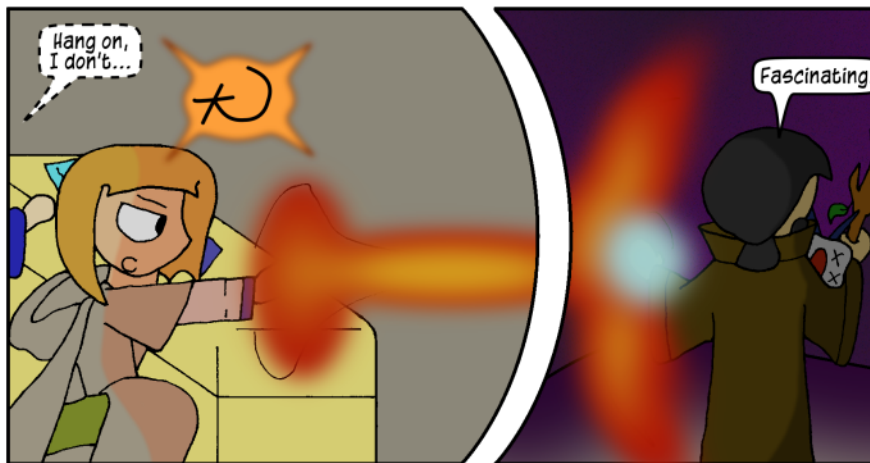
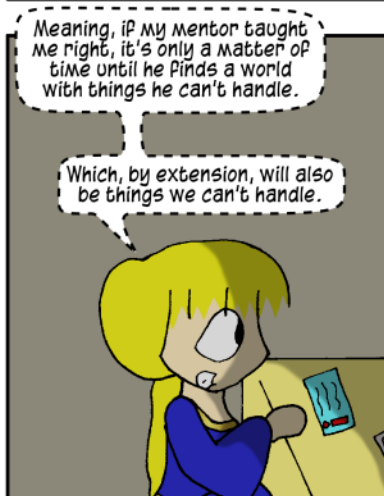


As I said earlier, I don't really like to think of Alex as "the hot chick", which makes writing some of Tilly's interactions with her super weird. I'll grant that she IS intended to be more or less attractive, but really, Tilly's just a chauvinistic pig, is all.

There's a subtle point here about how, apart from the bit in Chapter One with the dwarves in the cave he took over (a scene I'm not entirely sure I'll keep if I redraw that chapter from scratch for a book), Marzos ISN'T just killing people to get them out of his hair (as mentioned a few comics ago, that was a part of petty revenge against the Healing Springs, which he is now over). He just threw Alex, Howard, and Tilly off to the side and continued his work. Indiscriminately killing people like that is something someone like, say, Stephanie would do. Marzos has *standards*.



Marzo's impression of
the notebook of that one
guy you knew in middle
school who was really into
D&D and metal bands.

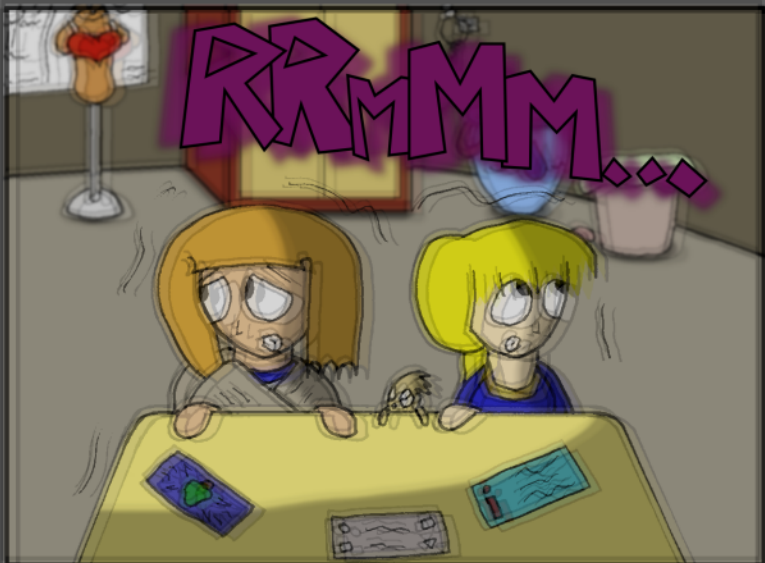
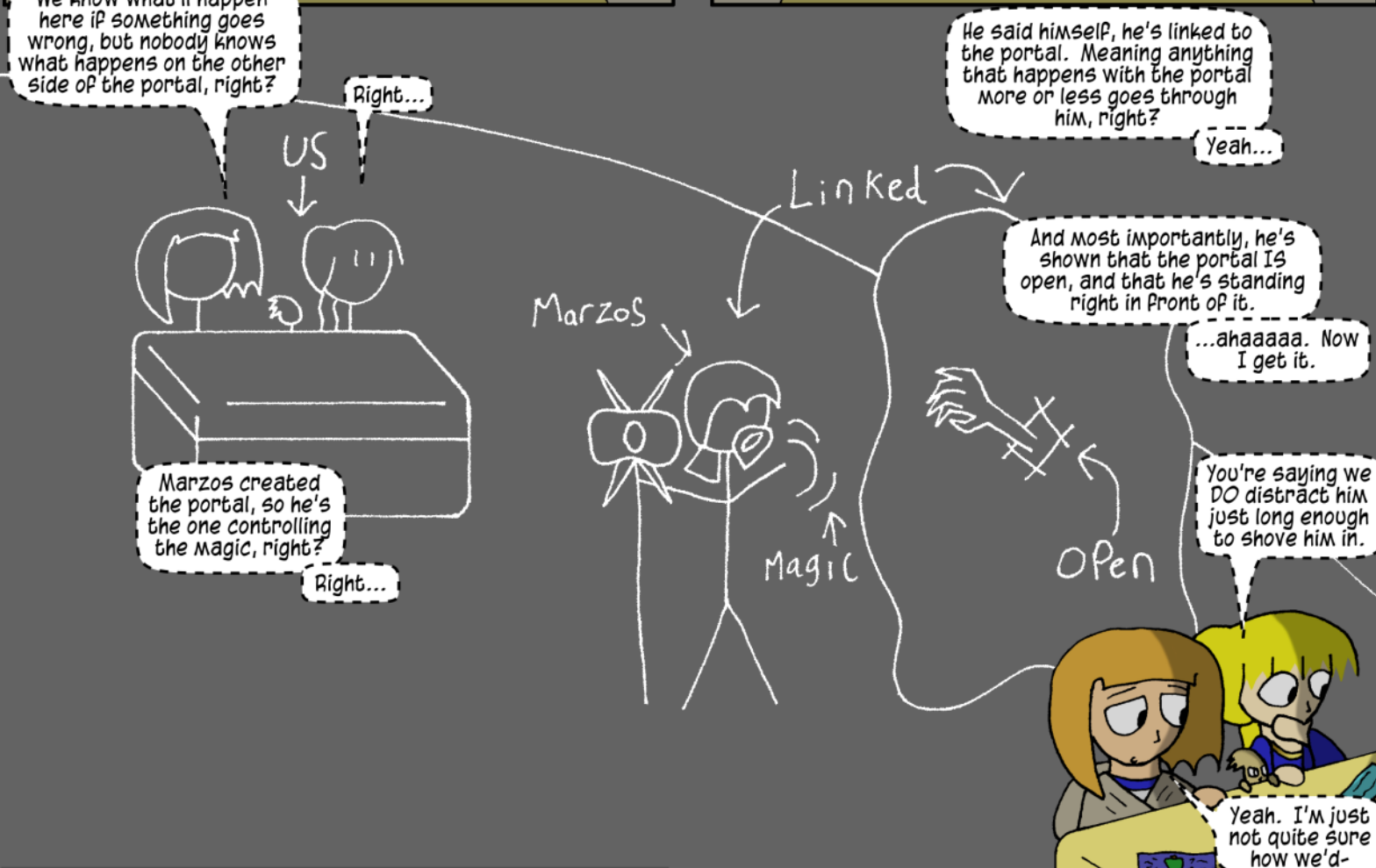


Now we get into a stretch of stupidly big comic updates. I guess I was feeling really layout-happy back then. Looking back over them, maybe doing a full comic-book-size redraw of Chapter One isn't such a ridiculous idea after all...

Howard's first spoken enchantment is "create fire that will go in the general vicinity of forward". The second one is "execute statement", because clearly the first one is a prepared statement that got the appropriate parameters entered in at some point we didn't see. Gotta protect against injection exploits, after all.

I had an idea after I made this strip that the tree arm Marzos is inspecting would still be alive when the Linetan investigation team came by to check out the lab. It would've crawled away from the lab, found its way to the courtyard outside Sunlit Tower, planted itself, and over time grown into a new sentient tree that would baffle even the most experienced of druids in the DoM world. That idea went nowhere because it would've been tied to a really minor background event right here, plus I was never sure what exactly that tree would DO, except maybe be frustrated that it wasn't in whatever other world it came from.





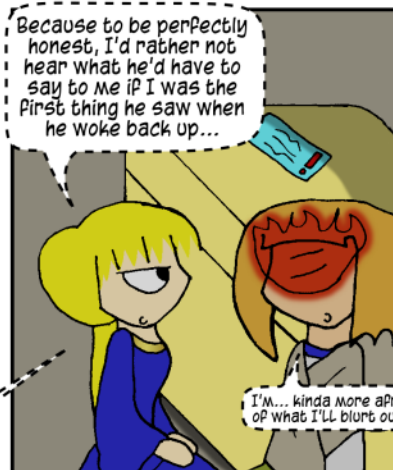
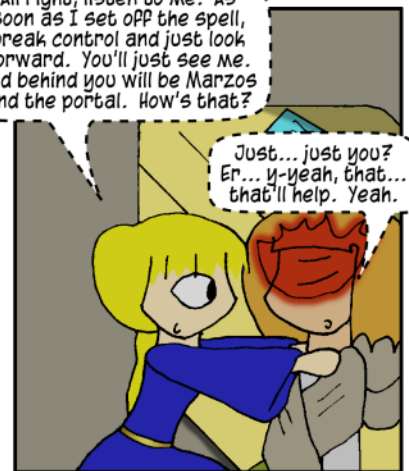
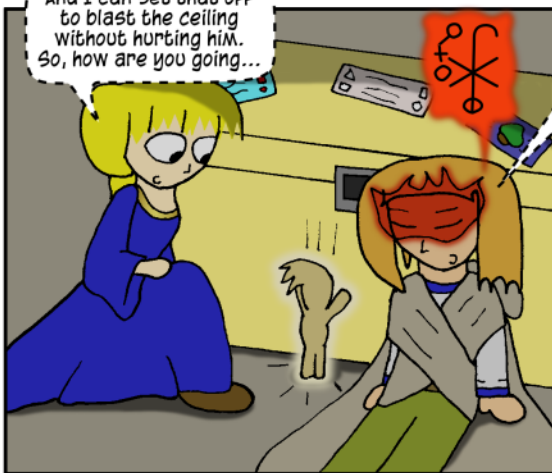
On the physical copy, this comic is split between two pages. Here, it just messes you up if you expect each page to be the same size. Compromises had to be made.

Regardless, back to one of the topics at hand: The random odds and ends I use to populate backgrounds. You might wonder what sorts of shows go on in this auditorium if they store a heart-shaped top backstage on a mannequin like that, but if we go back to the assumption that Lineta Hall is kinda-sorta a proto-university, it could be anything. Performance art, most likely.

The diagram below the initial panels is similar to how I planned out scenes in my sketchbook back then: Stick figures with specific heads indicating characters, labeled arrows to point out key elements, and rough concepts of where everything's supposed to go. This, of course, made that part a lot easier to draw, as I could skip the entire "make this into a real drawing" phase of the operation.

Nowadays, my planning phase tends more towards rough panel layouts, very simple stick figures for character placement, a wall of shorthand-encrusted text nearby for dialogue and effects (for instance, one key entry in Chapter Eight that you might be able to guess from this description simply reads "S: (eats sand)"), and maybe a few more detailed test panels if it's something that needs a bit more careful thought. My sketchbooks would make very little sense to anyone not familiar with the comic, and anyone who is not me. Maybe I should, y'know, do more actual sketching.





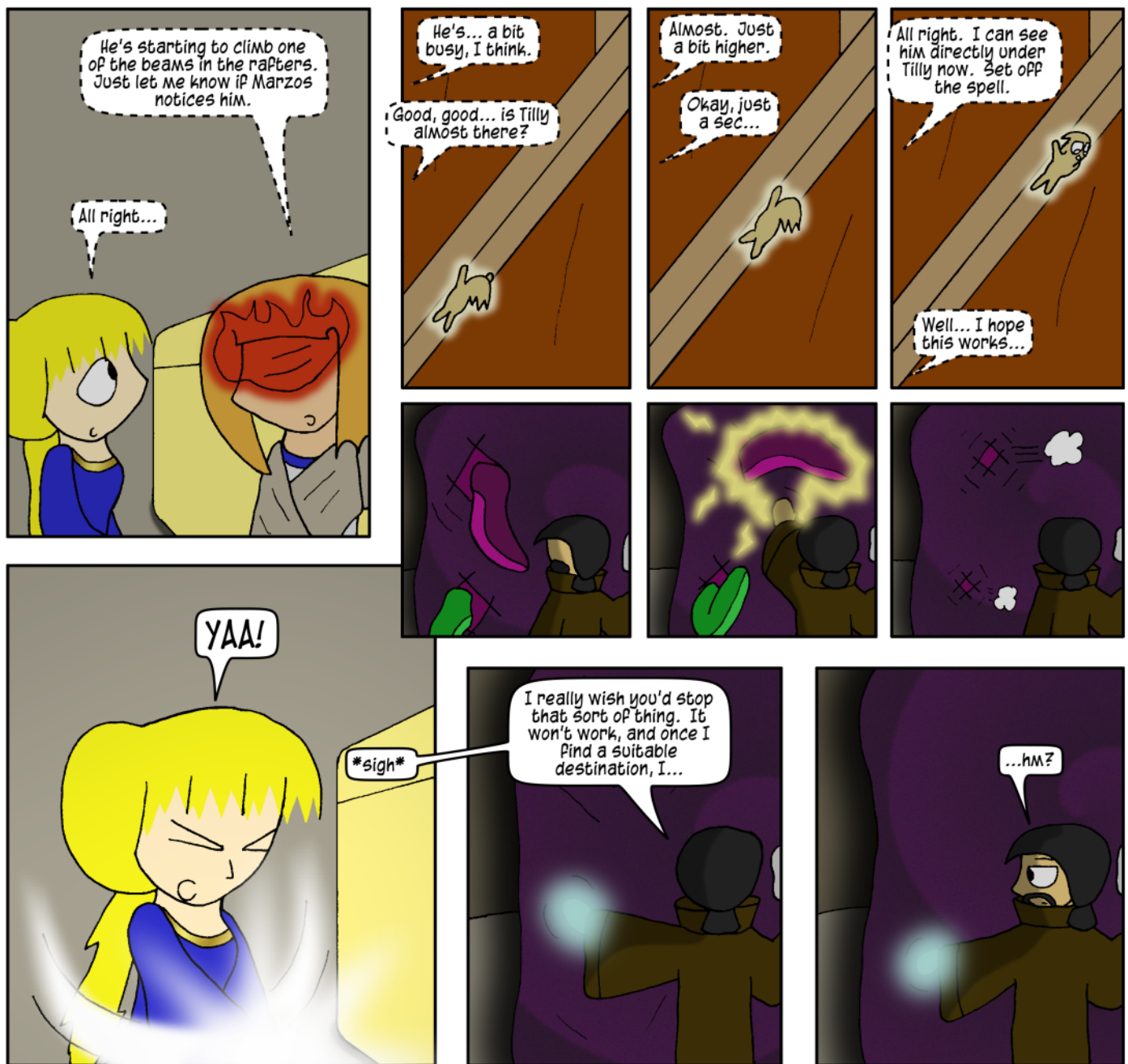
I gave Howard that same flame-eyes effect when he gave Tilly direct orders back in Chapter One. I think I did that for his usual spoken enchantments back then, too, but I gave up on that now for many of the same reasons that I've stopped making Alex's ponytail flare out when she casts spells.

In the first panel, those glyphs are "doll, come to attention". The squiggly bit on the right is more or less a mashing together of the Greek letters alpha, tau, and omega (everything else there is "basic doll prefix" or "doll plugin hook"). Assuming omega is the end of the alphabet and thus analogous to Z, that symbol works out to ATZ. Now for today's history pop quiz: Who wants to dig up their old Hayes-compatible modems and tell me why that's appropriate?

Howard's other spoken enchantment just works out to "take manual control of doll", which isn't as interesting.

It's awkward to write Howard blurting out things like that to Alex at the end of the comic, but then again, awkwardness IS exactly what's going on there, so I guess it works out all right.





Next up on Confusing Panel Playhouse, we see the vertical mess of the three (six) panels in the upper-right. They're meant to be read... um... all at once? Top-to-bottom and left-to-right at the same time? In some way such that it's clear Tilly is directly above Marzos, who isn't paying attention to him? It made more sense in my head.

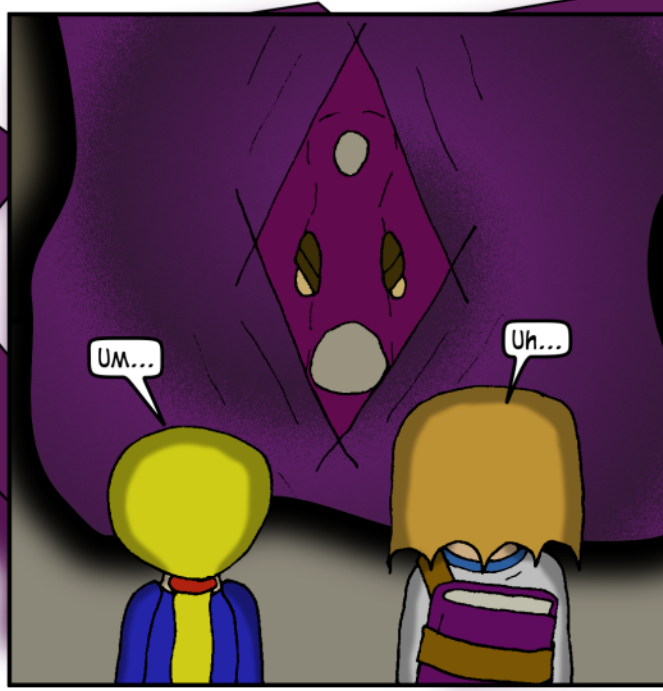
Incidentally, yes, Marzos did reach a world with a green and a purple tentacle. All we need is a hamster and a microwave and we're set.



As should be obvious, I rarely draw characters from directly above, like with Marzos in that second panel. Drawing characters from different camera angles is something I ought to do more of, but since a lot of the comic is dialogue-based, the situation doesn't come up often.



"Throw implied object forward". Presumably, there's something we're not seeing that places the address of the cloak in the appropriate register. No, I'm not going to use consistent programming metaphors when describing this.

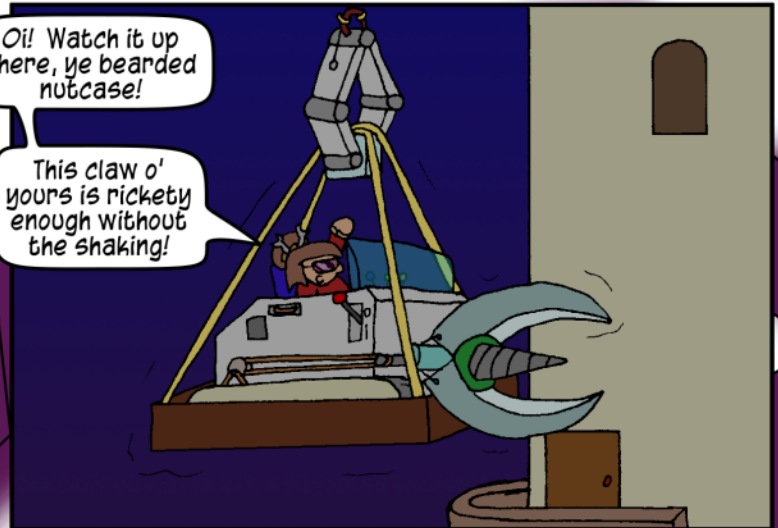


Um...

Uh...

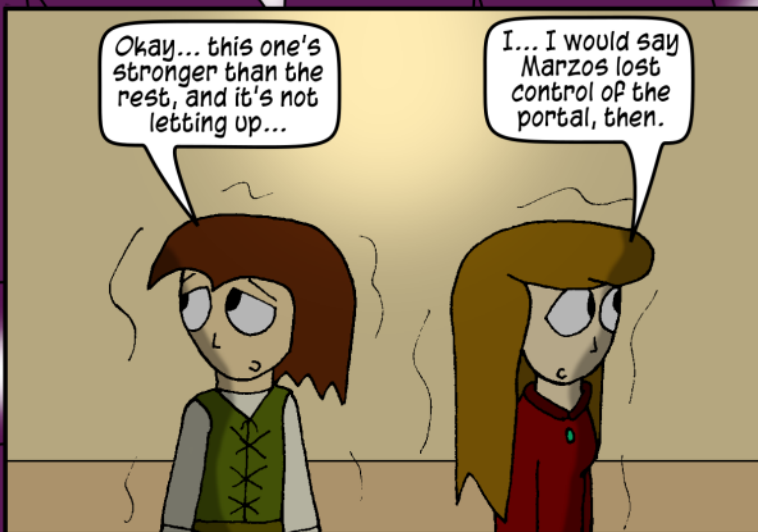


Eh...



Oi! Watch it up there, ye bearded nutcase!

This claw o' yours is rickety enough without the shaking!

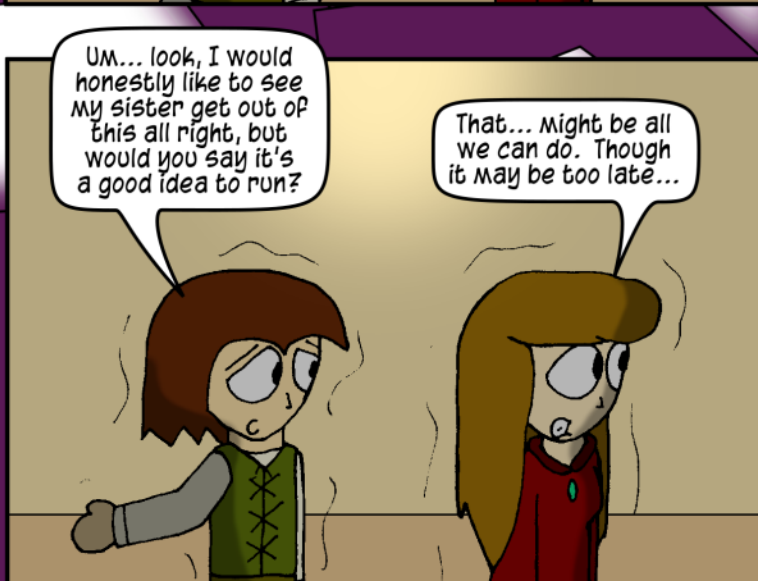


Okay... this one's stronger than the rest, and it's not letting up...

I... I would say Marzos lost control of the portal, then.

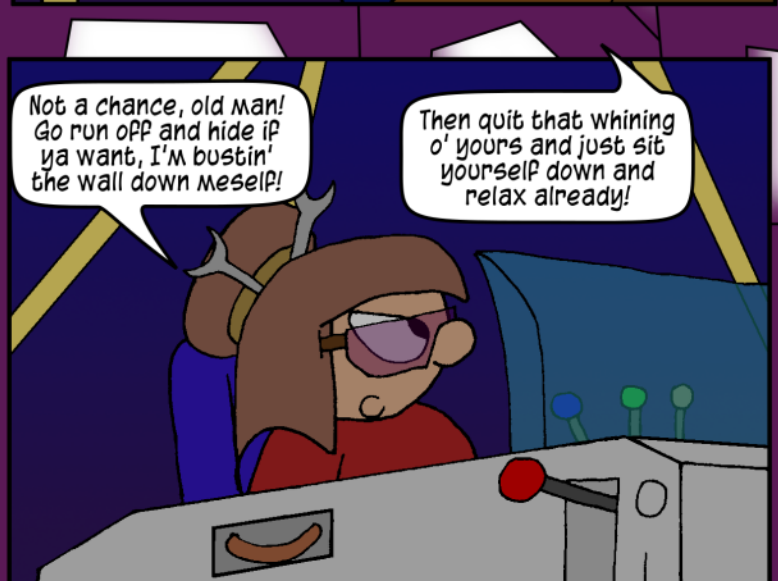


Och, come on, already! If you're afraid o' your overblown drill shakin' apart, ya can run off and I'll haul it up without ya!



Um... look, I would honestly like to see my sister get out of this all right, but would you say it's a good idea to run?

That... Might be all we can do. Though it may be too late...



Not a chance, old man! Go run off and hide if ya want, I'm bustin' the wall down meself!

Then quit that whining o' yours and just sit yourself down and relax already!



Well, it worked. I think. Maybe we should run now?

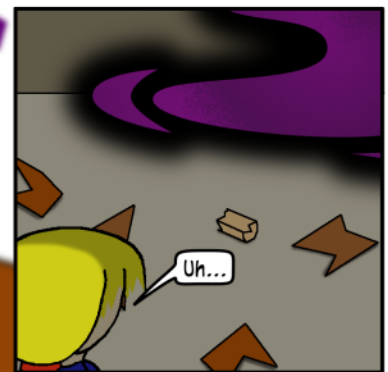
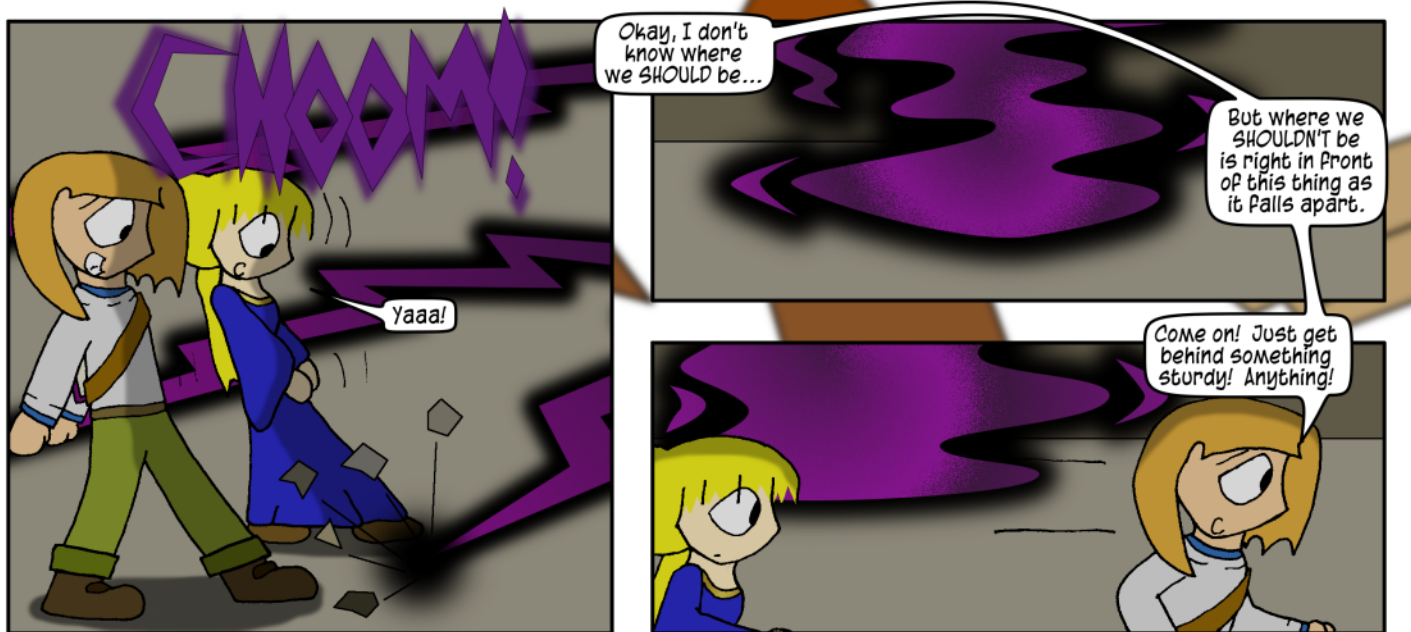
Sure, sure...

...as soon as you can tell me WHERE.

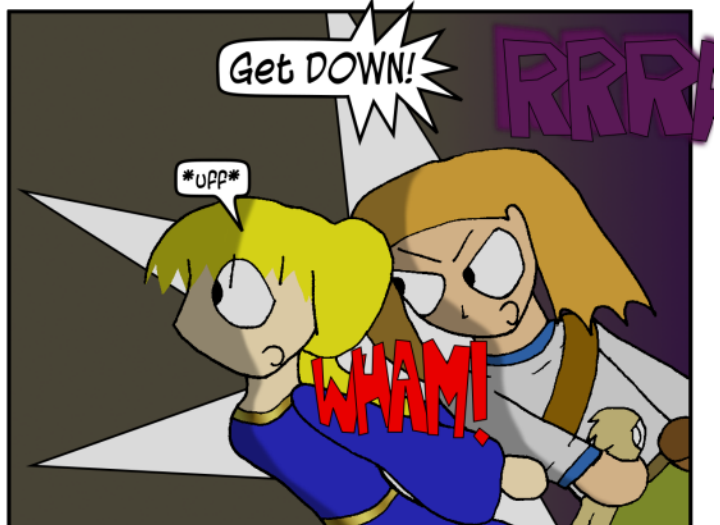
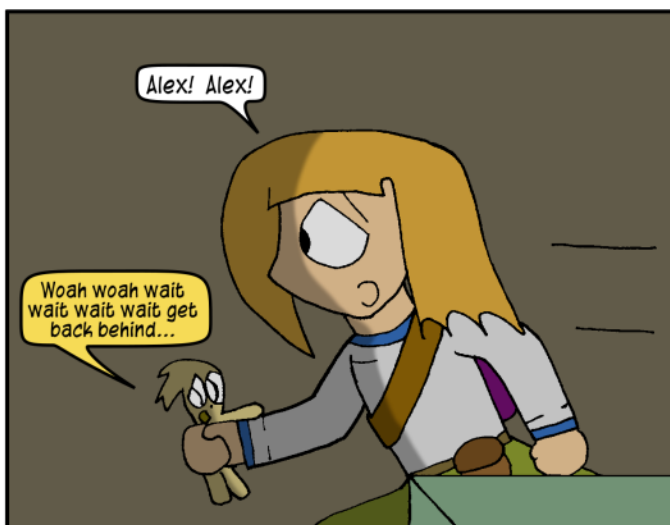
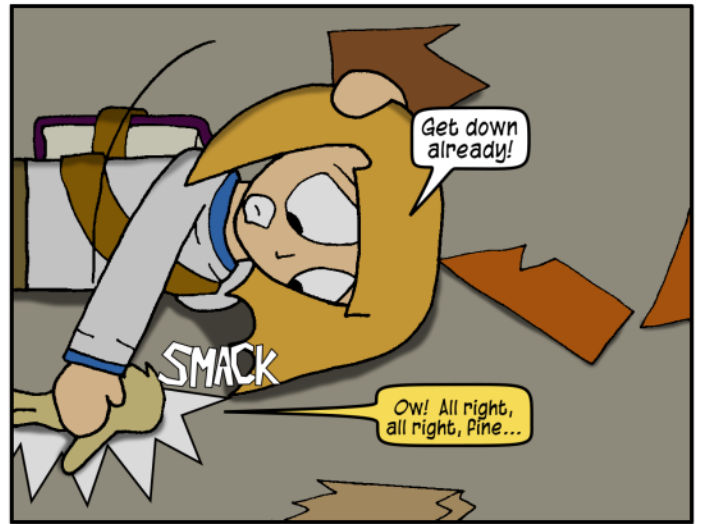
This is another comic that had to be split on the physical version. Though, really, I had more fun with the split this time, re-making the background Rs to splash across both pages. With full bleed, too! Regardless, this was a really weird comic on the web to begin with, what with the rumbling noise all through the gutters and straight to the edges of the image. It also made for a very tall comic, and like we've seen twice in this book already, those do not translate well to the printed page.

I'll admit that there may be better ways to show two events occurring simultaneously in the medium of a comic (if it's not clear, the left and right columns are happening at the same time, with Alex and Howard's part happening sort of around them), but this is the way I chose, and I like it well enough. Still conveys a sense of growing panic and chaos, and you get the idea when things are happening. Yay!



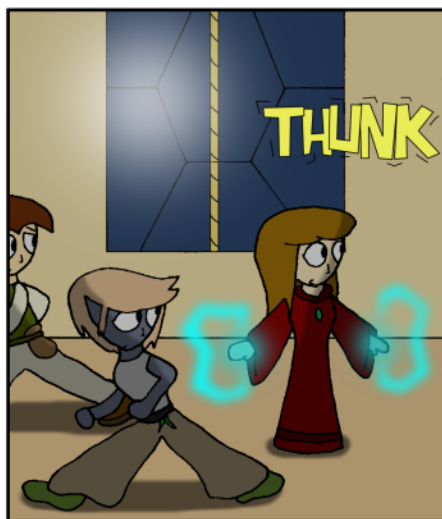
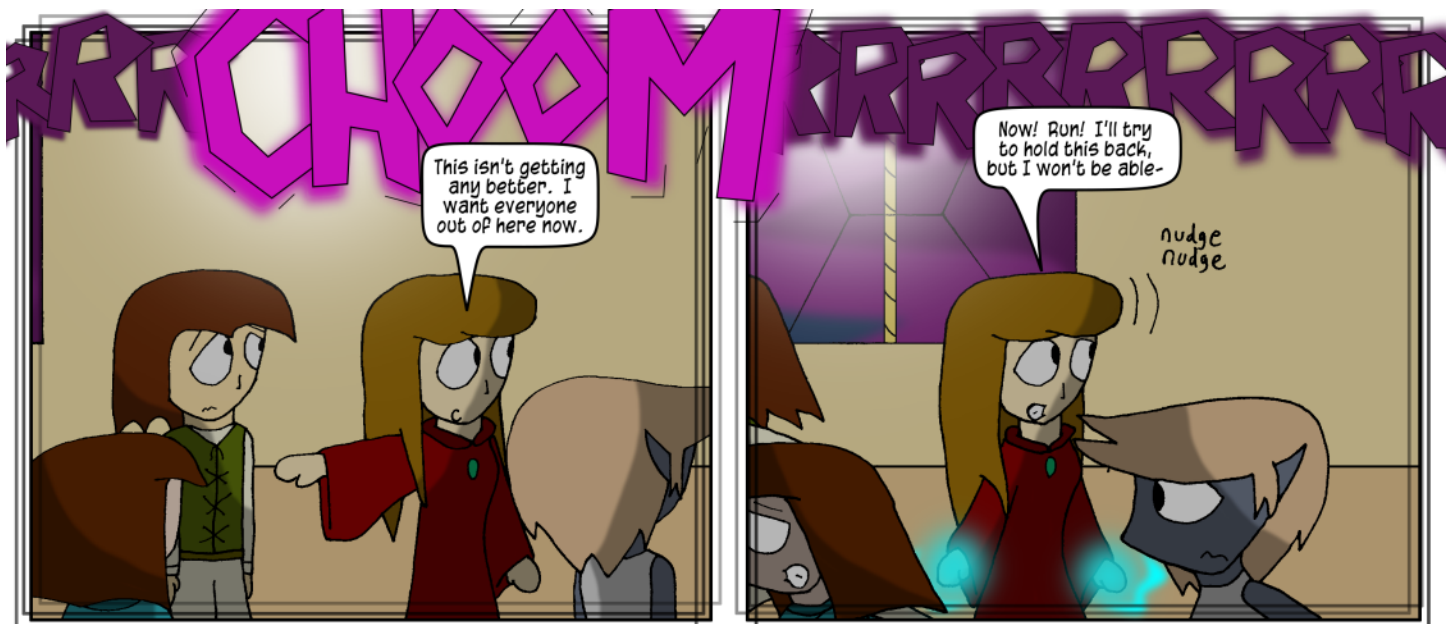


Choom.

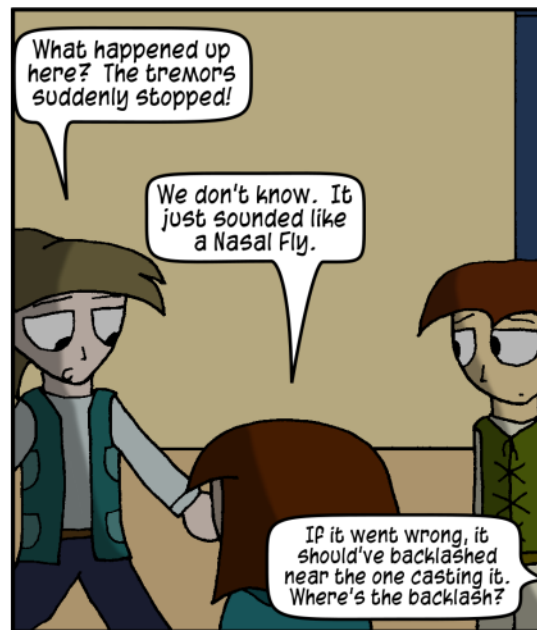


Get FUNKY!

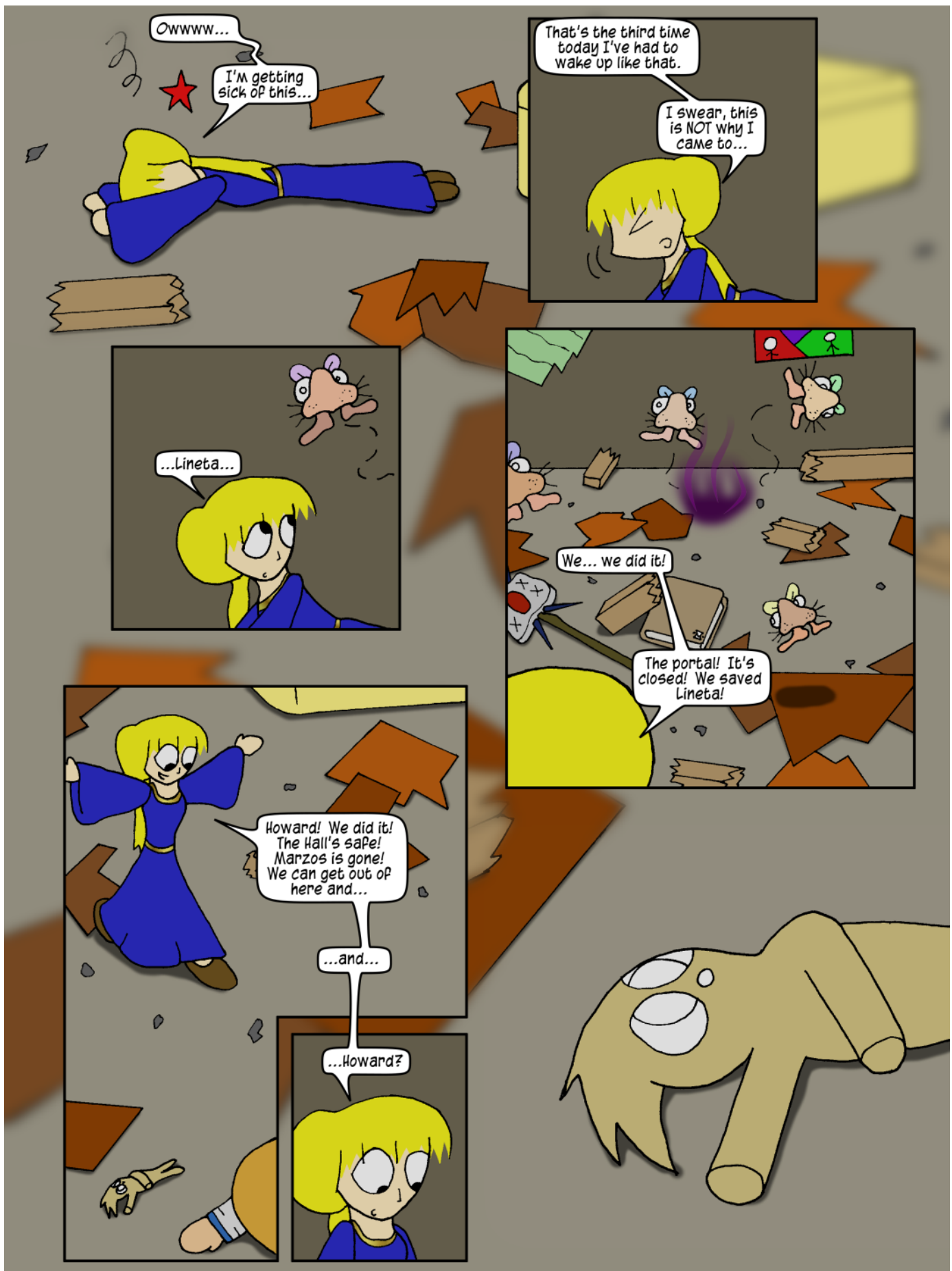




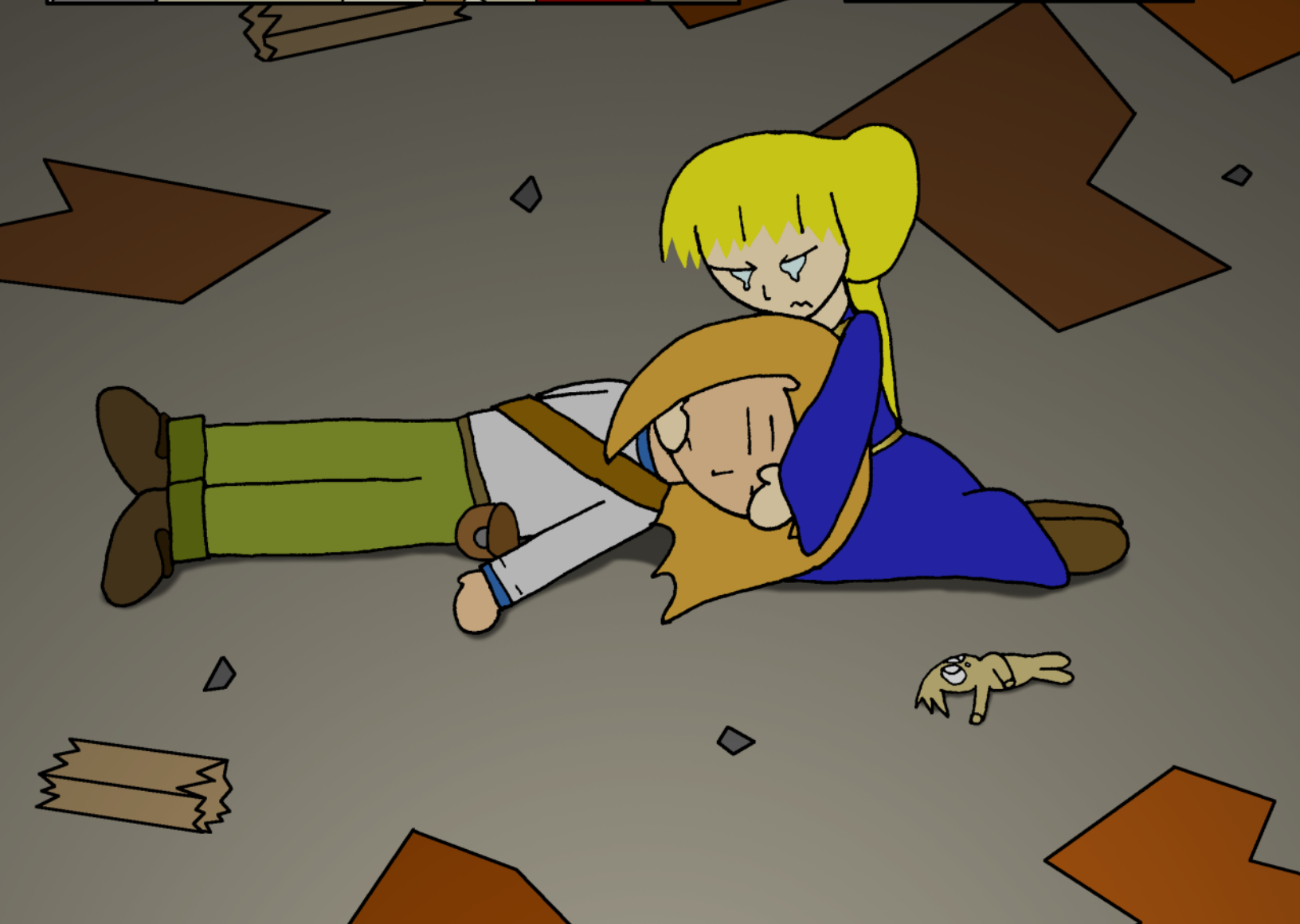
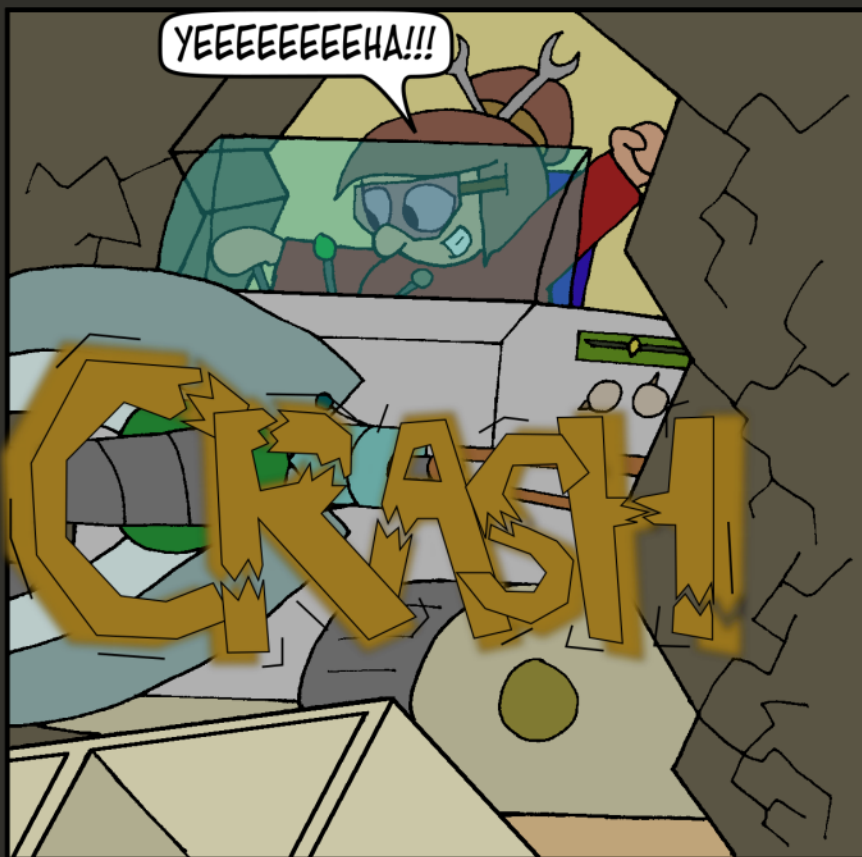
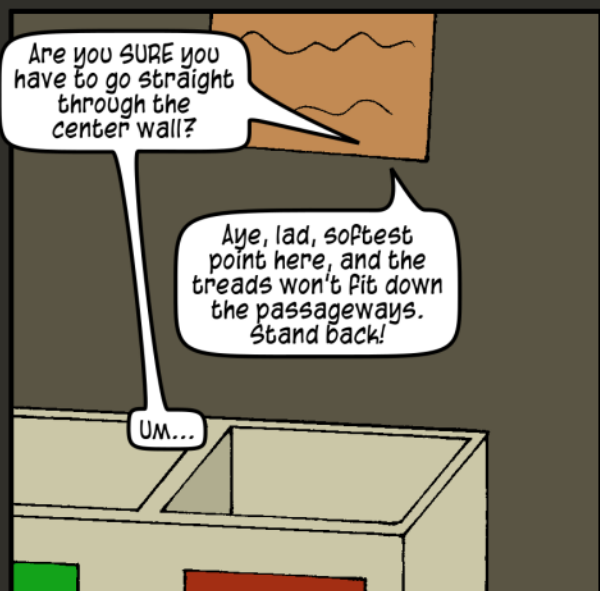
Once the portal's collapsed, the darkness should've been removed immediately, both inside the tower and out in the sky through that window. After all, it's still mid-afternoon or so. Oops.



Gotta say, Matt really is just along for the ride at this point.



As soon as I had the idea for Howard and the Healing Springs in my head, I realized that shot of Tilly at the end was the only possible way I could pull it off.

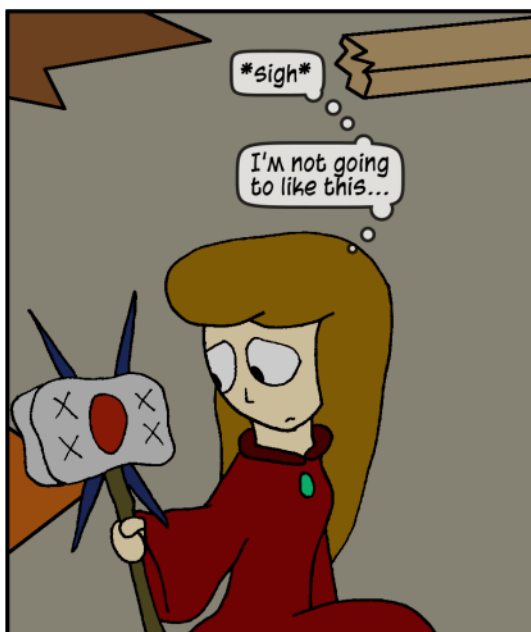
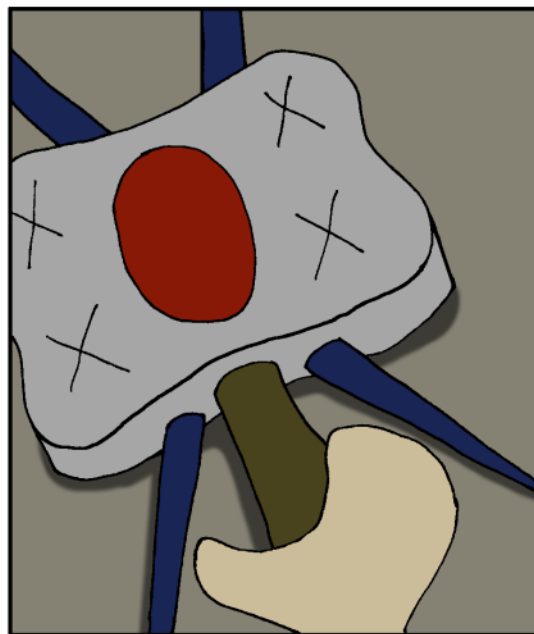


There is absolutely NO evidence that shows what actually happened to Howard. None.

Like the part when Matt finally stabs Stephanie in Chapter Two, this comic came with a click-through warning beforehand. Also like the other part, in hindsight it was sort of a dumb idea. I'll stop doing those.



Welp, climax is over, folks. You had your fun, back to normal panels now.



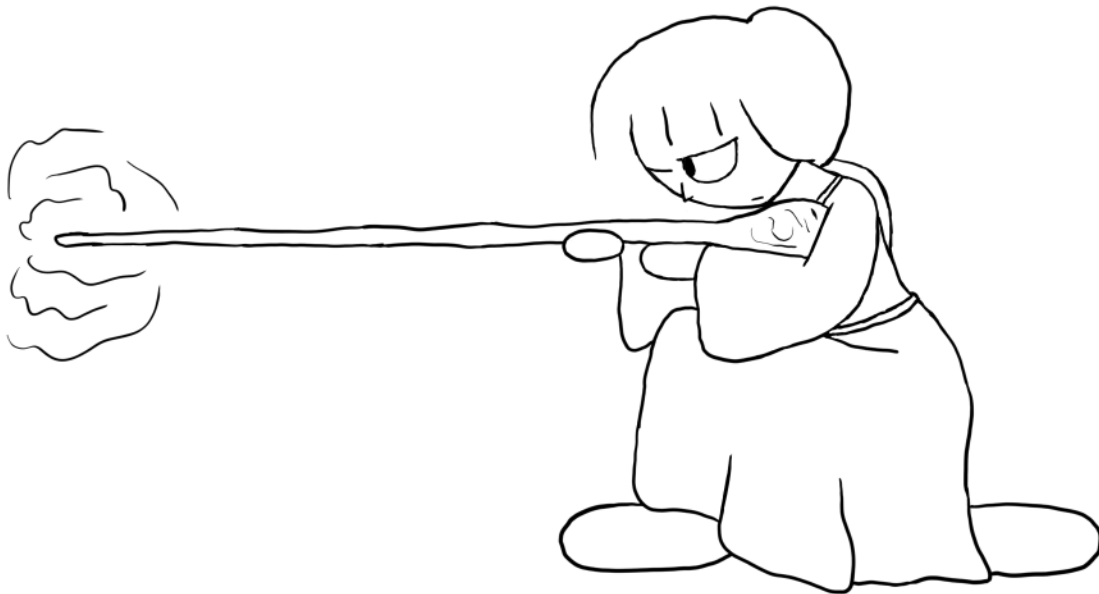
First, a couple words about magic staves: Bull hockey.

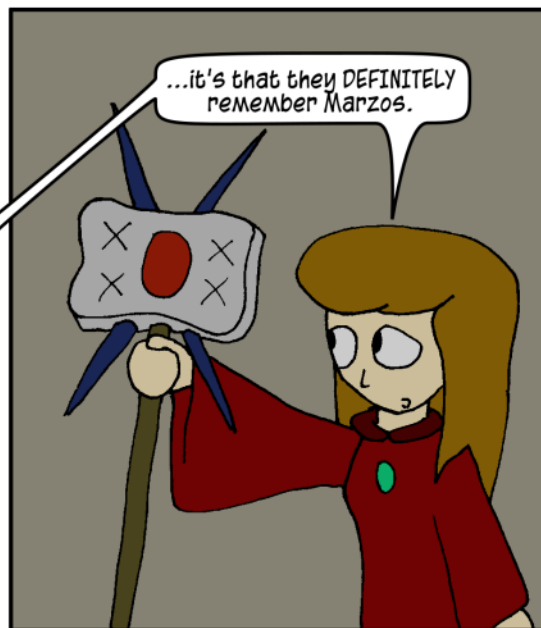
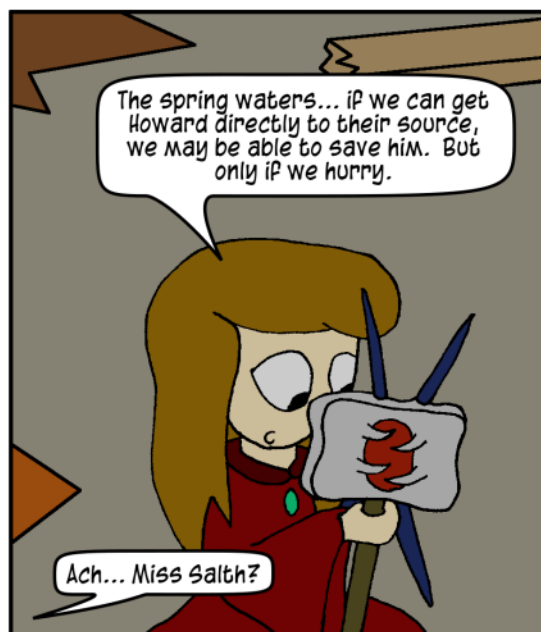
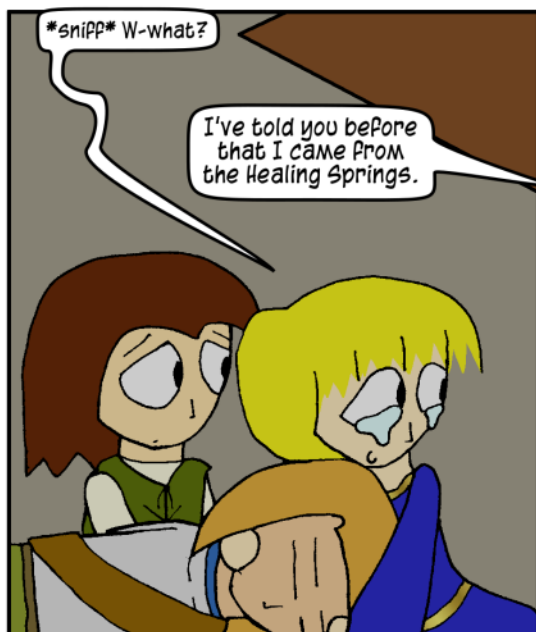
Second, a few more, perhaps more descriptive words. Enchanted staves are considerably uncommon. There is just very little use for them. The ones that ARE enchanted are generally only used by neophyte mages or non-mages as a tool with which to cast otherwise trivial or useful spells.

A staff, however, CAN be used as a focusing tool. That is to say, it can help a mage focus an otherwise overly powerful or confusing spell properly. Staves being used in this manner are relatively common, but the staff itself generally isn't at all enchanted. Even at that, the staff doesn't even take on any residual magic from the spells focused through it.

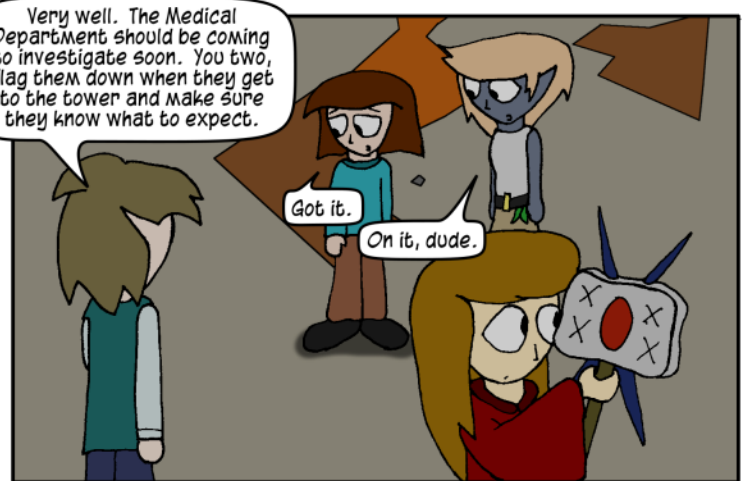
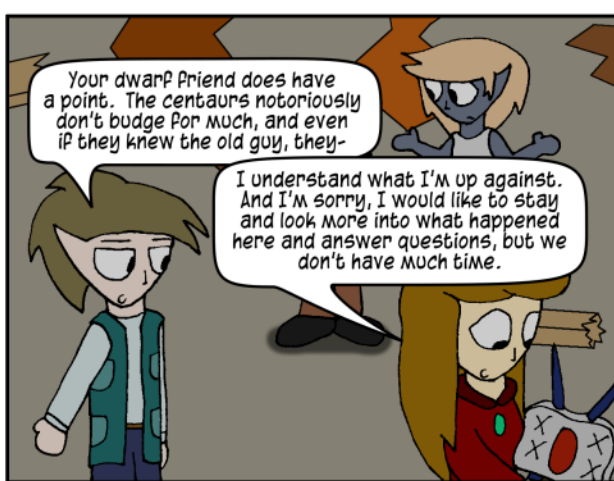
That is to say, no, this won't be as simple a solution as some may think.

Before I decided that staves are generally not magic in and of themselves, I had this scene in my head of Alex finding someone's magic staff, trying to figure out how to invoke its enchantments, and eventually deciding that holding it like a sniper rifle seemed the most right. That sort of amused me as a joke, but looking around a bit more after the fact, it seems the concept is taken *seriously* in some works. Still, I'm not putting it in the DoM proper.

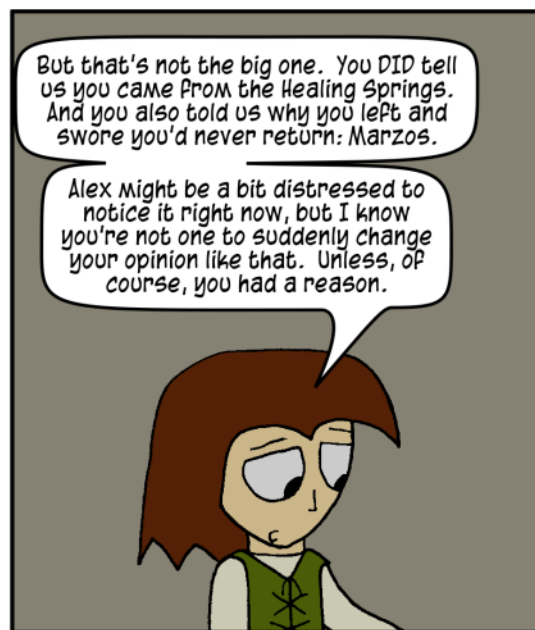




This segment of a few comics is, to date, the single instance of any DoM character crying. I suppose you can probably tell I'm terrible at emotional parts. Doesn't stop me from trying, though!



Again, I sort of have a very not-reasonable concept of how much time has passed here. Unless you assume the main cast has been here a day or two before Alex found Lucien, everything after Cesol crashed the cart into Lineta Town to now is apparently roughly one day, I guess? Even if you don't assume that, everything that's happened implies that Lucien, Howard, and Marzos all happened in one day. So one set of dwarves finished up and started testing a Kroloff Claw and another set put the final touches on a large drilling machine on the same day, and the latter group found the time to repair Cesol's steam cart, too.

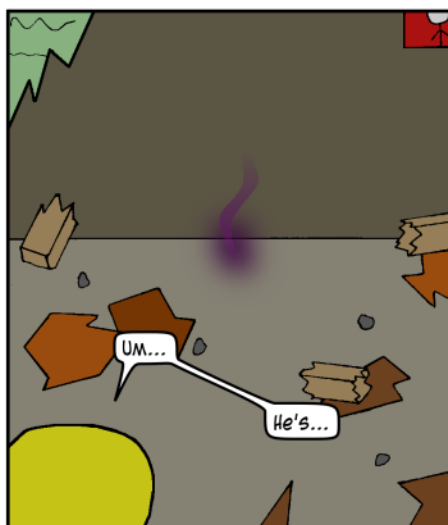
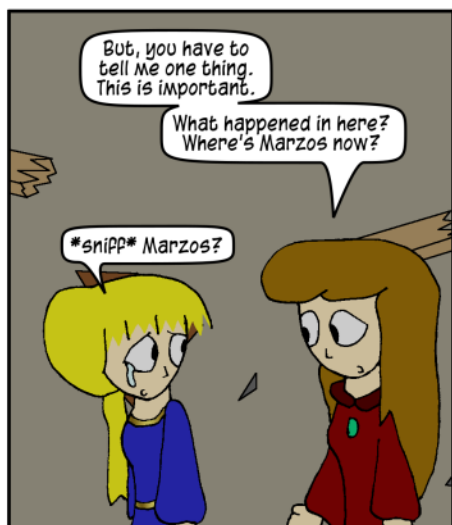


It's actually genuinely difficult to *intentionally* write holes in someone's plan that a character should pick out in-universe. Usually I just screw up along the way, but to actually sit down and write something that sounds reasonable at first glance but has subtle problems is a lot harder than it sounds, especially when you, as the writer, know what's wrong with it.



This is one of those comics I had to dig up in Chapter Five when I assembled the group of people who imprisoned Marzos. I invented a couple more to fill it out, but these two definitely made it back, though aged a bit. Though, as you'll see later when we get to the Healing Springs, there's not nearly this much green grass out there as I put here.

Also, the whole "lying to her pupil" part is one of those hints that Salth miiiiiiight be starting to take the whole point of making sure Marzos won't come back a bit too seriously.



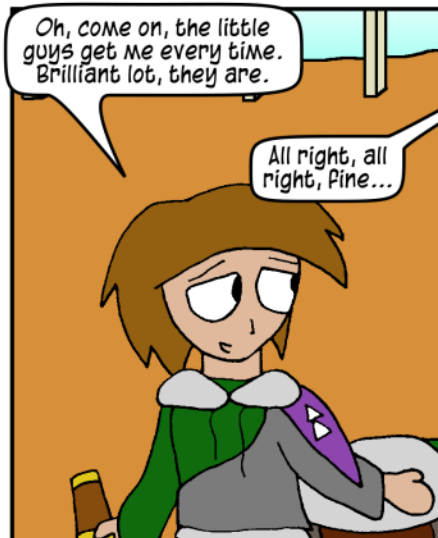
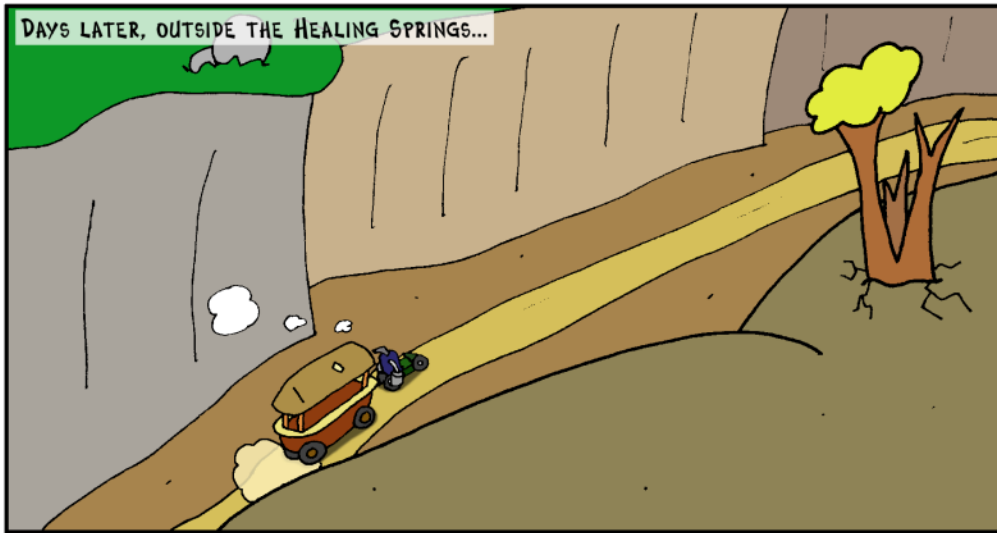
I'm terrible at coming up with new hairstyles for characters. I try to avoid the pitfall of "every character's hairstyle must be outrageous and absurd to tell them apart", but that sometimes leads to really generic-looking styles. Though, sometimes when I'm trying something new, it just looks sort of stupid, like with the blond guy in back there.

You might notice some implied questions here. Namely, when is Marzos going to come back? Will he be different? Still thinking what he did was right? Will he try this same scheme again? Will he toss that away to instead seek revenge? Yep, those sure are questions, all right! You have properly identified those sentence structures, boy howdy!



I was originally going to end the chapter here, but I realized that Howard's recovery was vital to what was going to happen in the Springs in Chapter Five, and that recovery had to take a long time for both atmosphere and plot reasons, so I had to put that off until after his trip up Central Spiral itself. Otherwise, Chapter Five would've started out by approaching the Springs a day or two later, the trip up the spiral to revive Howard, getting rooms at June's inn, and then suddenly everything jumps forward a few weeks. The "jumps forward a few weeks" part seemed better suited for a chapter break than the "a day or two later" part.

And yes, that IS a bloody mary in Phil's hand. Sometimes I give him *actual* drinks.



The centaurs were supposed to have something of a kind-of-but-not-quite generic British accent to them. Maybe slightly weighted towards cockney? Then it turned out I'm terrible at writing such an accent and they all just sounded like slightly different dwarves.

The proper name of the Springs is the "Healing Springs Of Promalle", Promalle being the DoM's Goddess of Mercy. The double-upward-triangle is her icon, much like how the Founders somehow thought the crossed-triangles-with-dots-on-the-side was Lineta's icon (later generations just accepted that as the Lineta Hall icon). I mentioned this in the Chapter Two book, about how I tend to make holy icons like that out of simple shapes, usually triangles. What I'm saying is that the double-upward-triangle icon is going to show up around the Springs a lot.

Now, as I also mentioned in the Chapter Two book, I don't plan on actually drawing out the various deities of the DoM. This isn't really a story about gods and goddesses, so there's no real place for them. Besides, that sort of thing tends to veer way too close to concepts like destiny and Chosen Ones™ for my liking. Though any time I think of Promalle, I have this image in my head of a stereotypical friendly Minnesotan grandmother, complete with a teacup and several layers of blankets and shawls.

Of course, I also had the idea of the DoM's God of Fire being this guy who lives in a volcano, but he's really irritated by the fact that he doesn't even like fire to begin with, so maybe my concepts of fantasy deities aren't exactly normal.

THE MOUNTAINS OF THE HEALING SPRINGS OF PROMALLE, FRONT SPIRAL



Look! On the right side of the spiral! It's Bean Man! Bean Man, everyone! And there's Captain Spam on the left side of the top row, too!

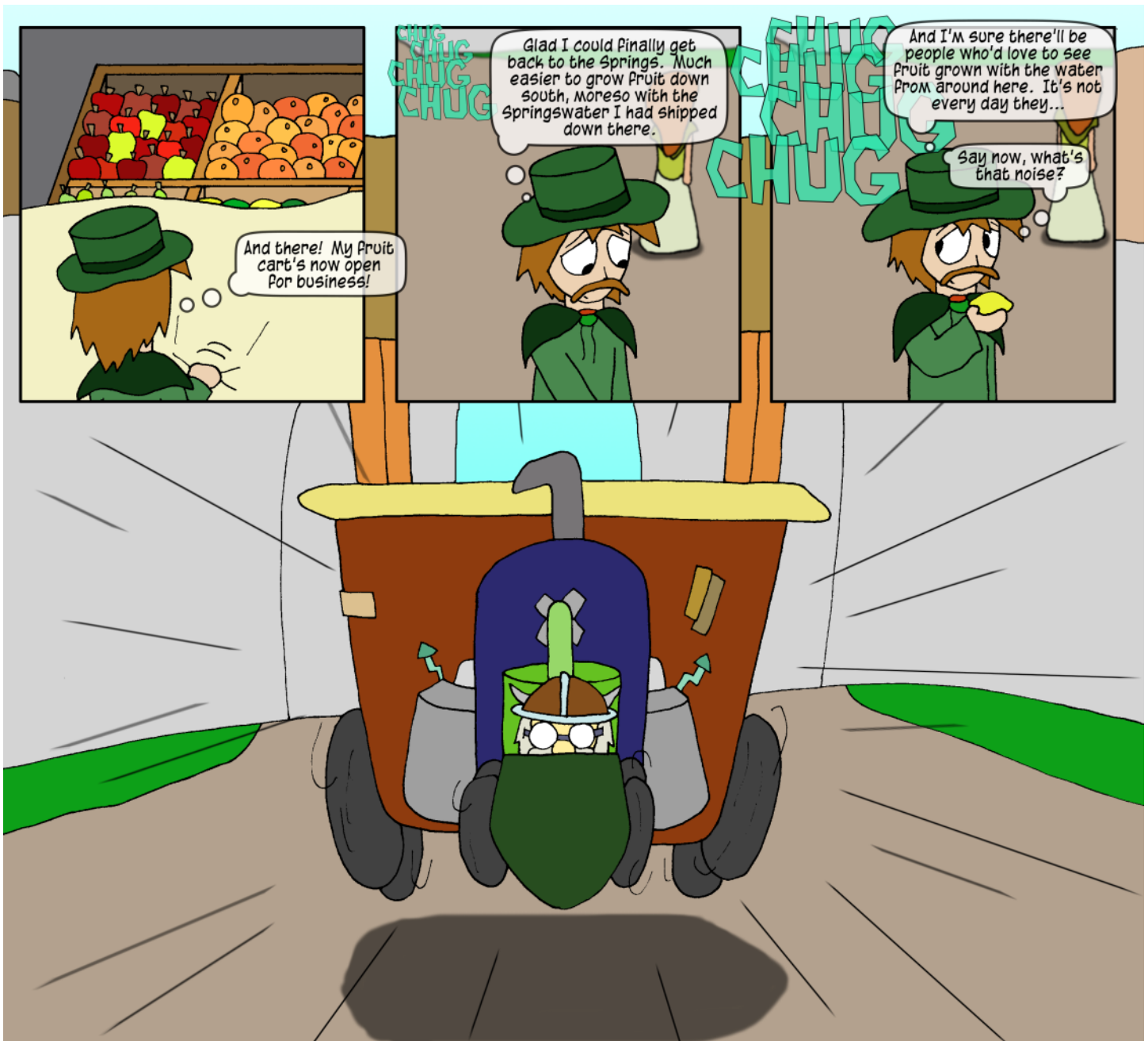
This took me way too long to plan out, way too long to draw, involved way too many minor details, and in the end didn't look right at all. Line weights all over the place, really weird blurring artifacts, the spiral doesn't look all that massive like it's supposed to, I don't have any idea what's going on with the inner parts of the mountain, it's all just a huge mess. And then I made it into a wallpaper! And what's more, the best way to put it in this book is to turn it sideways like this! I had to rethink how I wanted other comics to reach the margins and bleed lines because of this! It's not even large enough for the bleeds, so I had to ram it down to the margins so it would look remotely reasonable!

But, there are a few interesting points, at least. One of which is the man in green at ground level, about to pull the cover off his fruit stand. He's the same guy we're about to see in the next comic, just going about his day. There's also the fact that, like I said a few comics ago, it's a lot more of a rocky area than how I drew it in Salth's flashbacks. Not for any real plot reason, I just felt like this was a better motif for the area and completely forgot I defined it as grassier when I did the first of the flashbacks in Chapter Two.

Then there's those weird banners with completely unknown glyphs on them. To put it quickly, those aren't a "language", per se, it's just me coming up with random gibberish for situations where a scribbly line won't do because we're supposed to actually be able to see whatever it says.

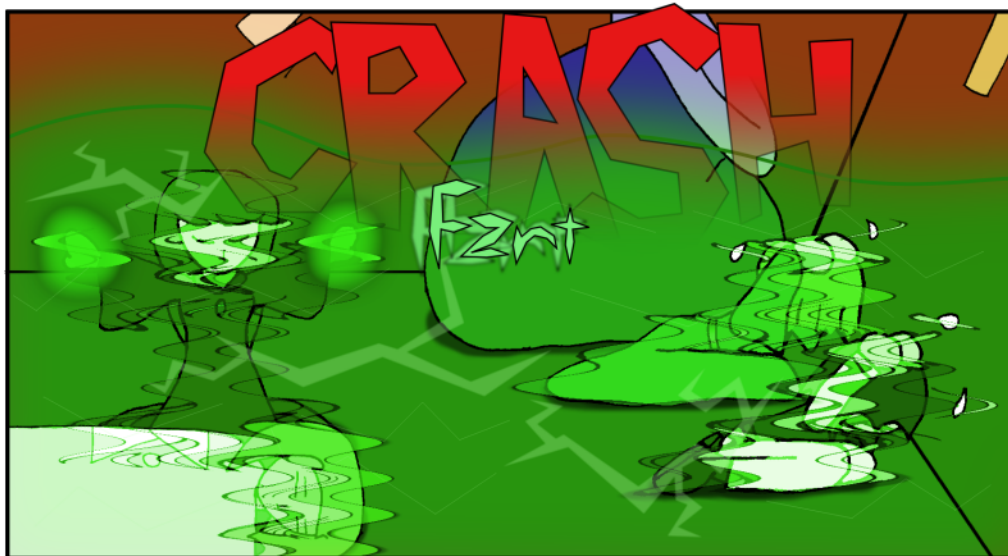
And, say, who's that walking up the steps in the lower-right? She looks familiar, now...

Though in all reality, she shouldn't have. That's Stephanie in her *stage* outfit as The Traveler in The Sinking Castle (see Chapter Five). She really shouldn't be walking around in that off-stage, especially so far from the theatre. I didn't have her new street outfit designed yet, so I just used what I had planned for her on stage. Then again, what wound up being her outfit involved a large cloak (Stephanie just really likes the cape/cloak look), and then we wouldn't have been able to notice her at all.

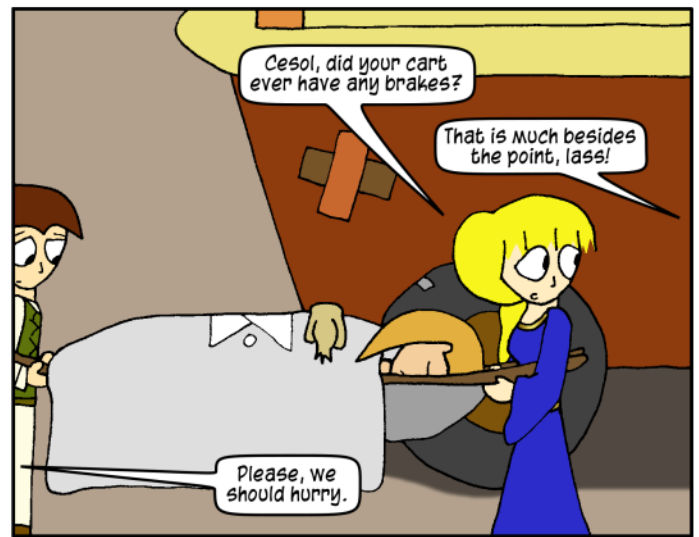


You have no idea how satisfying it is to work a good old-fashioned fruit cart crash into a story.

Throughout the comic, I've used numerous different sound effects to represent the noises that dwarf-made steam engines make. You'd think I would've settled on one by this point, but you'd be wrong.

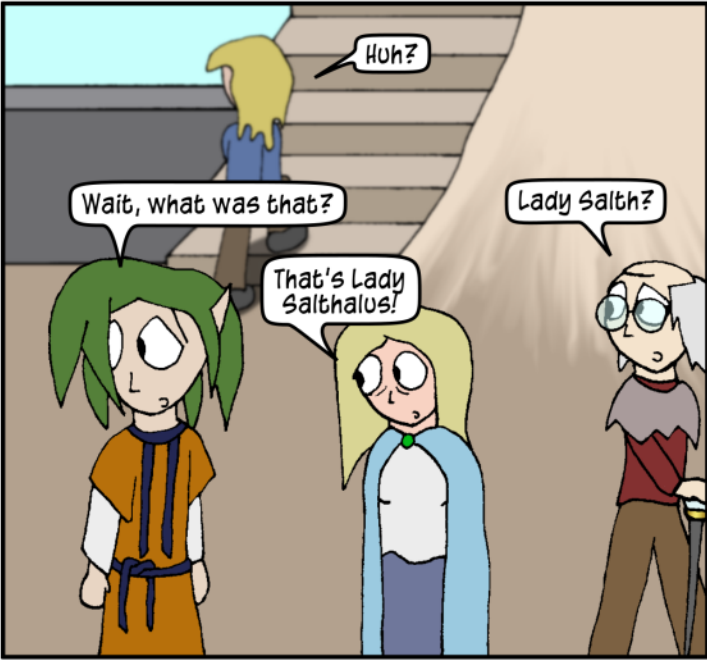


Ignoring for a second the massive error in scale here inside the storage area of Cesol's cart, I really hope it's clear that what Salth did was cast a spell that negated the inertial effects of crashing into the base of the spiral like that. She was prepared after experiencing the first crash back in Lineta Town.

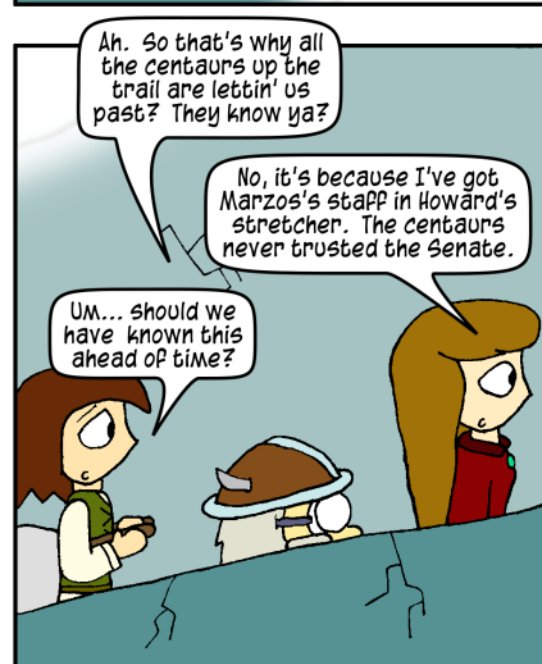
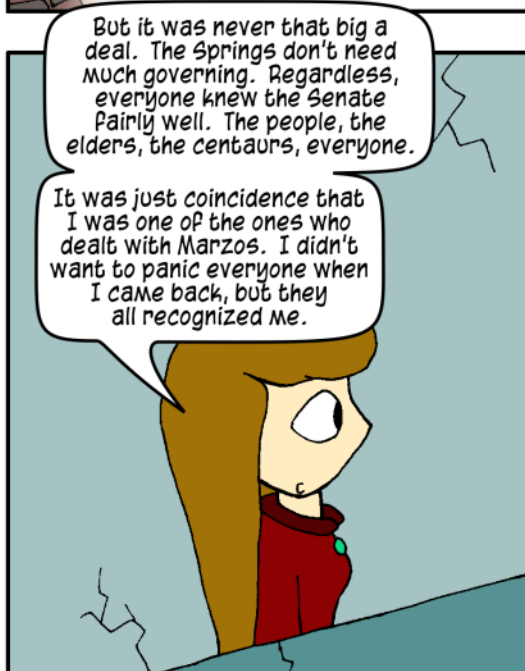


Yes, that's the Linetan icon on the blanket covering Howard. There's probably spare parts inside Cesol's steam cart that have the Linetan icon on them from when wrenches-as-hair-sticks girl and her team repaired it. Frankly, they're lucky to have gotten out of Lineta Hall without the side of the cart getting covered with flyers for local bands.

I like how the fruit stand owner looks like he's just sighing and accepting this turn of events. After all, he DID put up a fruit stand. You can't just do that and NOT expect something to come barrelling into it. If you run a business like that, you take your chances.



Since Salth's been away from the Springs so long, I had to make sure that the only people who would recognize her would look a bit advanced in age (younger people would never have met her). The exceptions are elves, who don't show age as much and live a lot longer regardless.



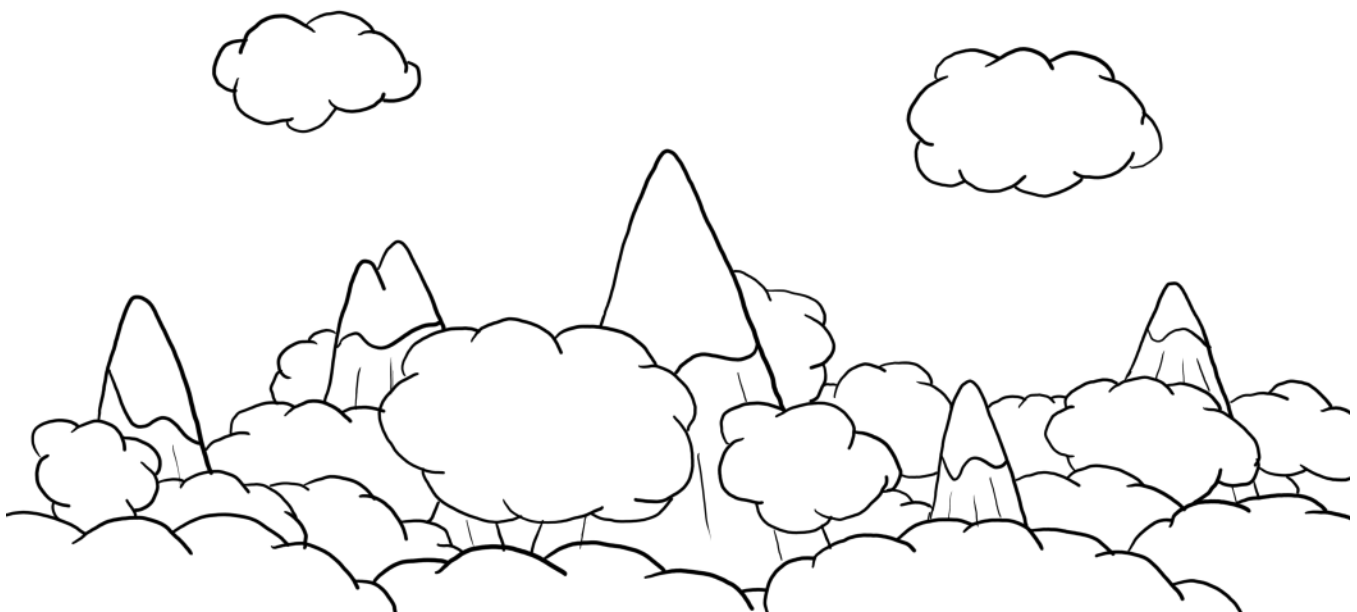
Confusingly, the term "The Healing Springs" can refer to two different things. By literal definition, it means the Healing Springs of Promalle; that is, the source of the healing water itself high atop the Central Spiral, guarded by the Centaur Sentries of Promalle. However, given the centaurs are tasked with protecting the source of the Springs from all but those considered worthy, people more often than not mean the surrounding developed and inhabited area that sprung up due to the still-useful qualities of the water as it streamed down the mountain. The centaurs have, over time, learned to deal with these people.

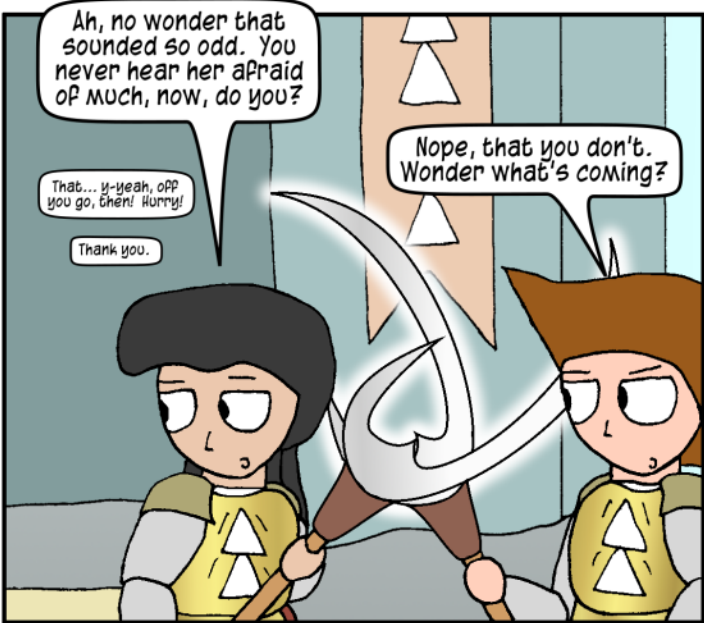
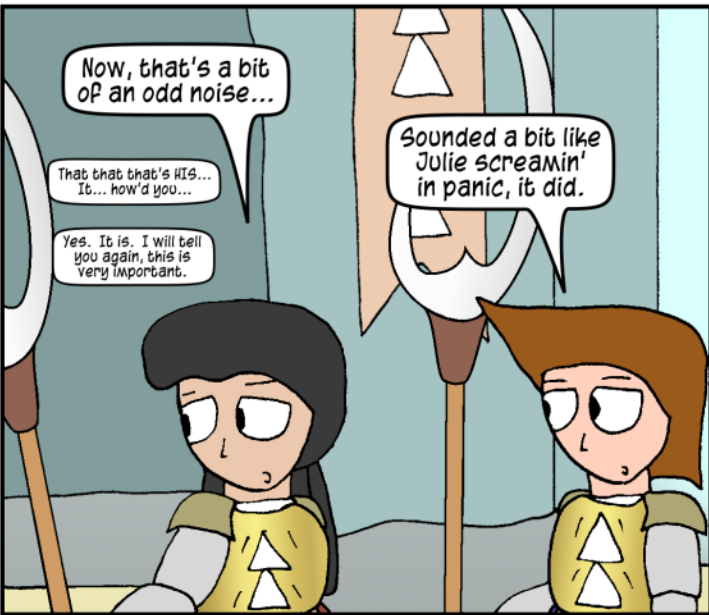
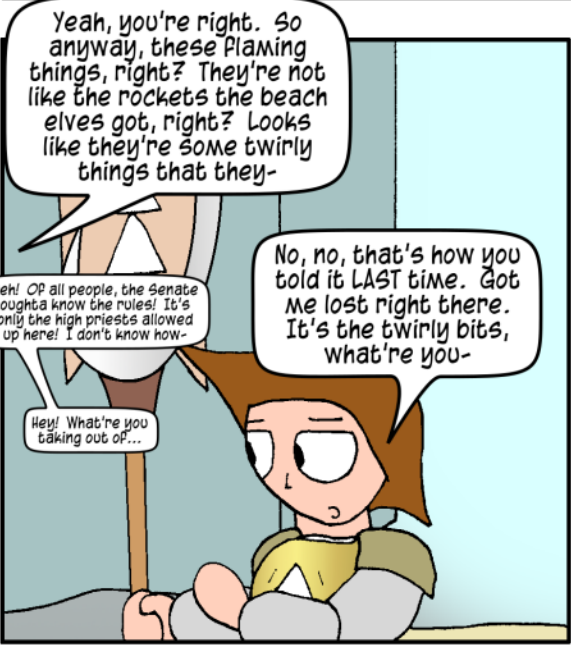
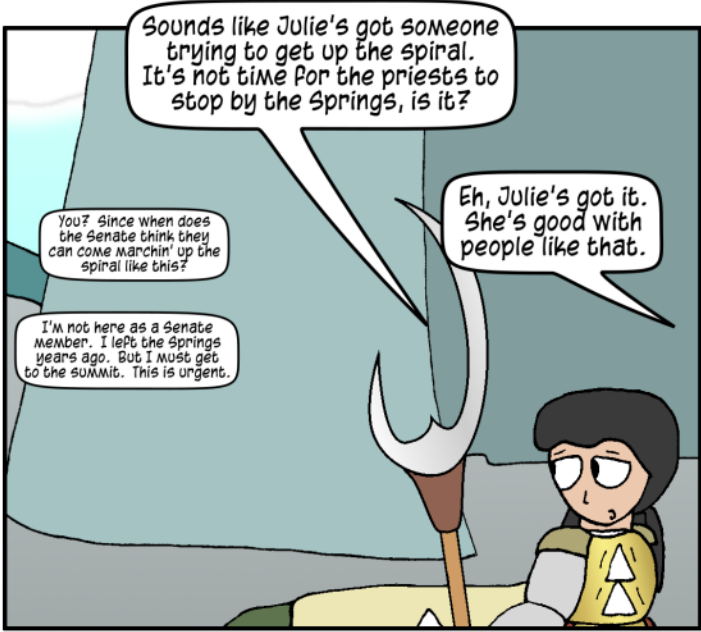
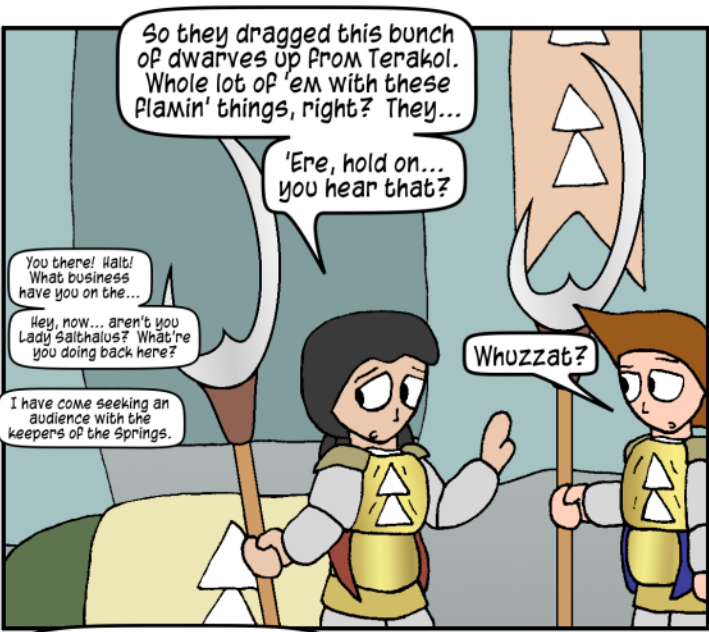
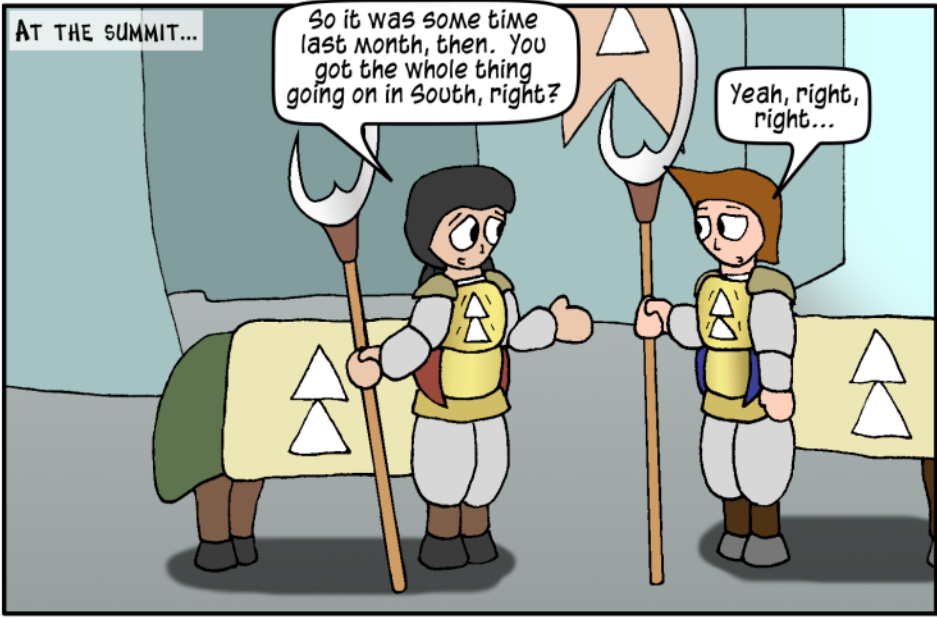
The surrounding area primarily consists of a series of communities carved into spiral walkways going up numerous mountains and rock faces nearby. Five of these spirals — the north, south, east, west, and central ones — are considered the main centers of activity. Each also acts as a gateway to the area from the harsh mountainous regions nearby, with the South Spiral, also known as the Front Spiral, being the most-used, mainly because everybody comes in from the south. Central Spiral, the tallest, contains the actual Springs themselves. And numerous centaurs. And, at present, our main cast.

Outside of their divine duties, the centaurs aren't half bad of people. They're sort of sticklers to procedure otherwise, though.

Yes, from now on, any time Cesol has a reason to address Salth, he's going to address her as some form of "Lady Salthalus", no matter how many times she tries to remind him that's all in the past and she doesn't really like it anymore. Dwarves in the DoM habitually do that, call people by their last-known title.

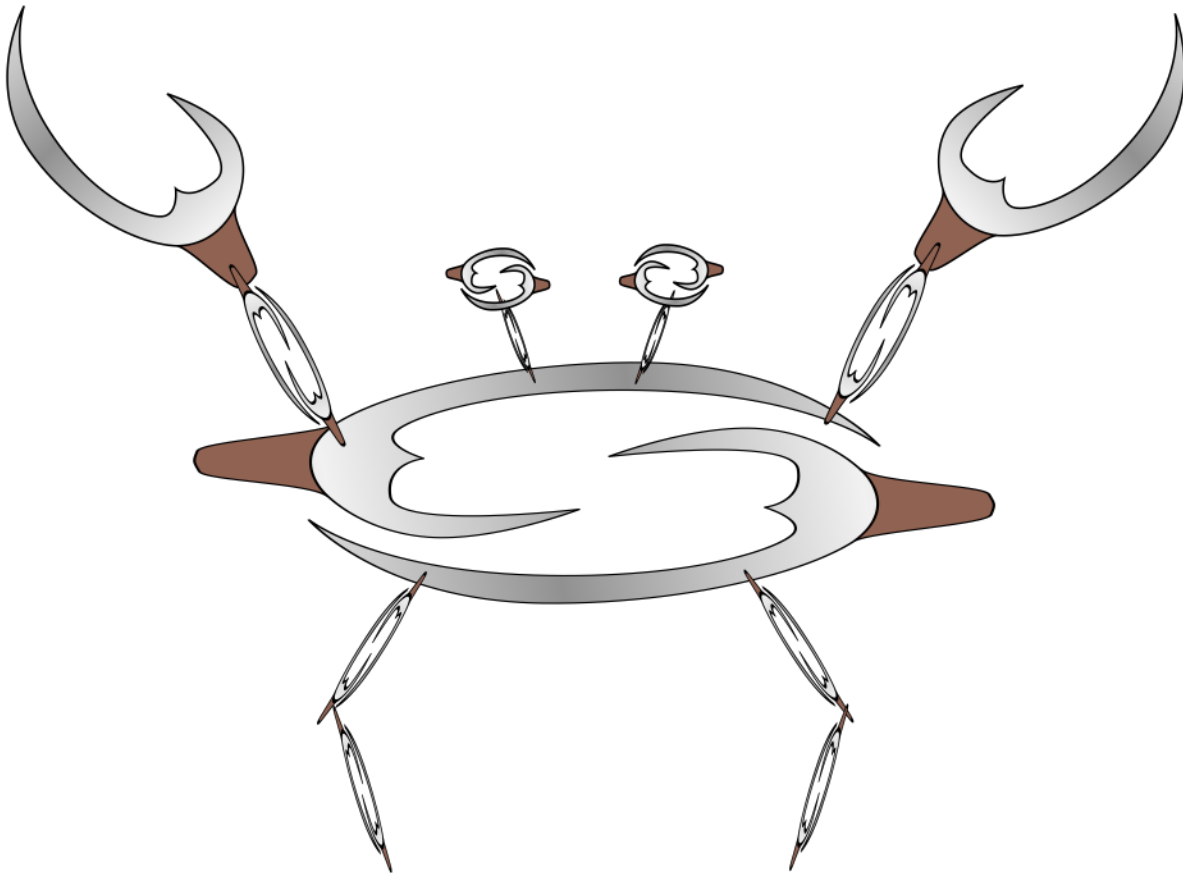
Whenever I draw skies, I've noticed I rarely add clouds unless there's a specific reason for them to be there. Like, a rainy night, a miserable day, the sort of scene you'd expect to be overcast will usually be overcast, but otherwise, it's pretty much always going to be a crystal-clear day or night without even so much as a fluffy white cloud in the sky. I really need to fix that at some point, just as soon as I decide on how I want clouds to look. I'm kinda certain, though, that I don't want them to look like the clouds surrounding Central Spiral here. Doesn't help that they sort of look like how I draw treetops.



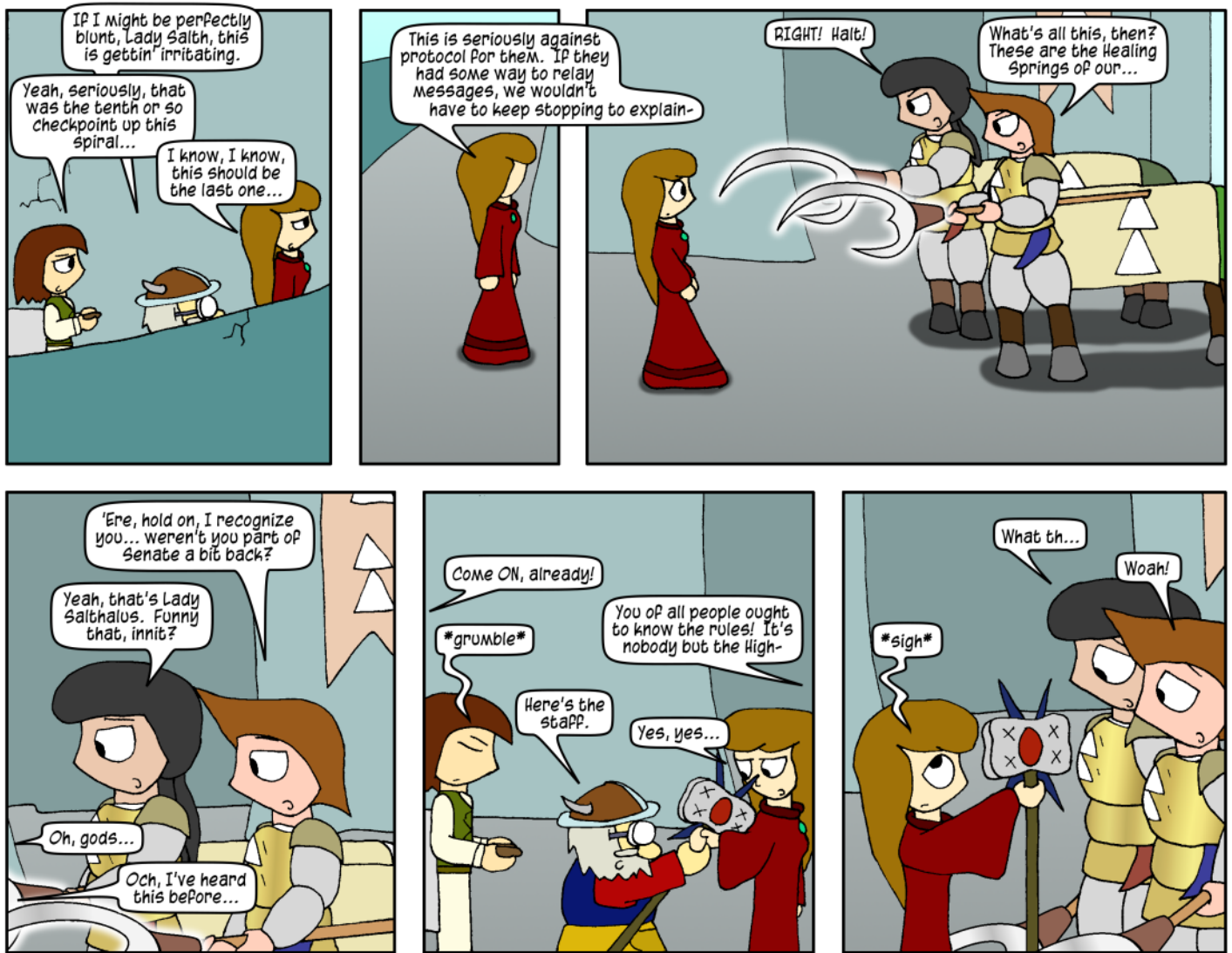


These two actually are supposed to be a weird, sideways reference to something. If you can figure out who they were intended to resemble before I gave up on it, well, that's really weird, but congrats all the same. That's all I can say. It's not really an obscure reference, but there are many, many reasons I rarely draw what are supposed to be actual people. I am absolutely terrible at it. If I get to a Chapter Five book, there's one group in the J-B Theatre I'll have to name just so you can see how bad I am at it.

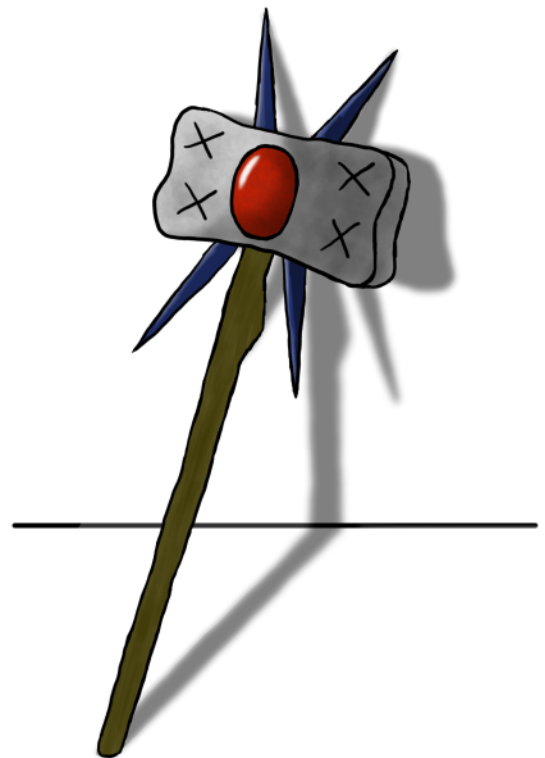
The pikes they're holding are just the same vector object repeated over and over again throughout all these comics. That was intended to evoke a somewhat unnatural look to them, what with everything else being either straight lines or my unsteady linework. It didn't work as well as I hoped it would.

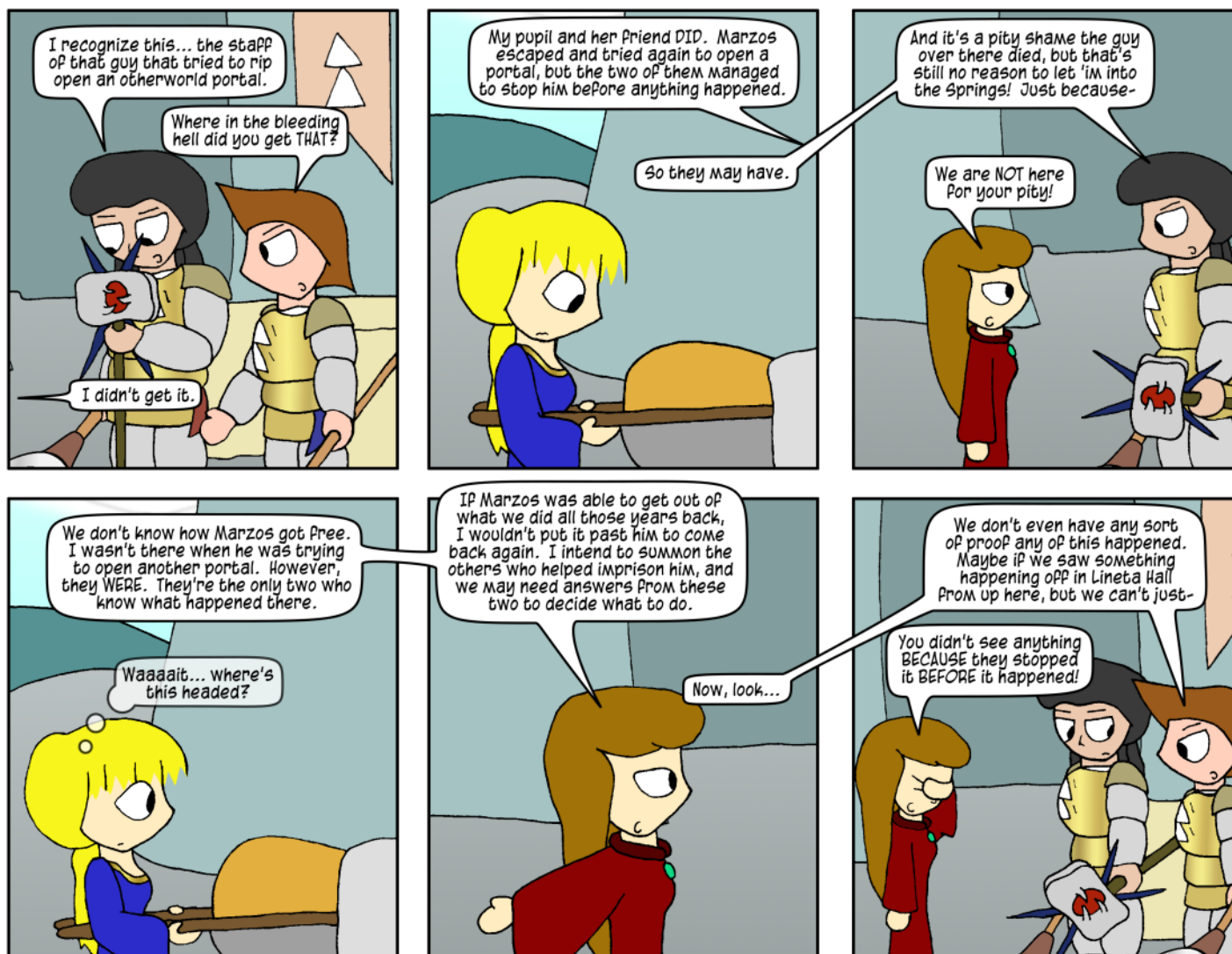


The vicious Pike Crab



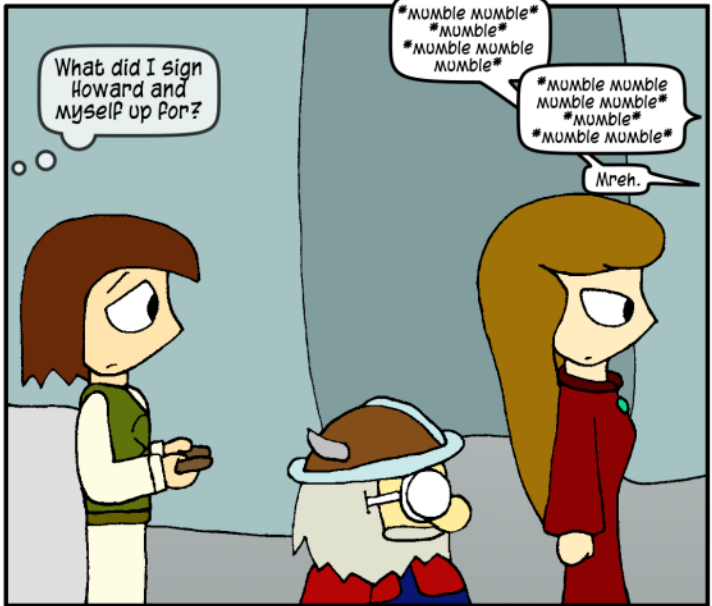
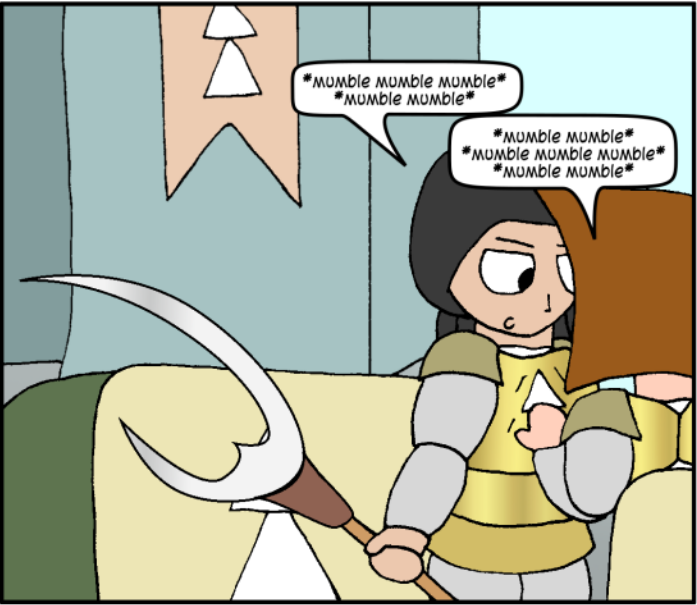
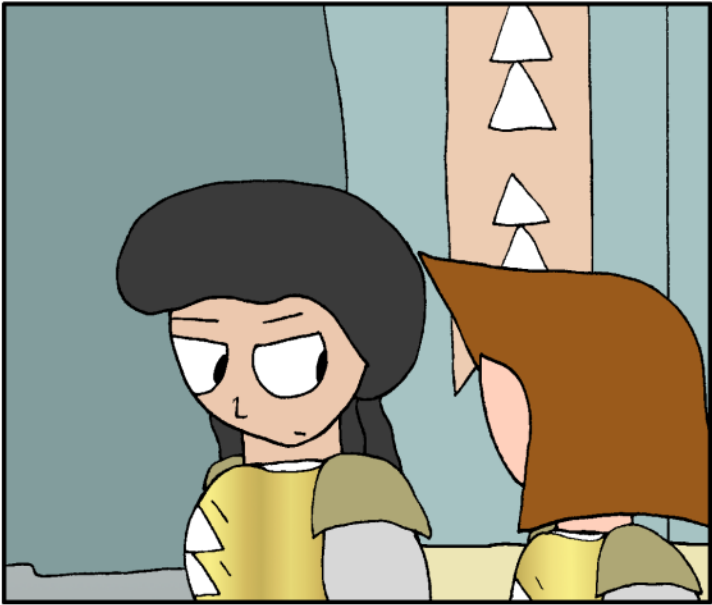
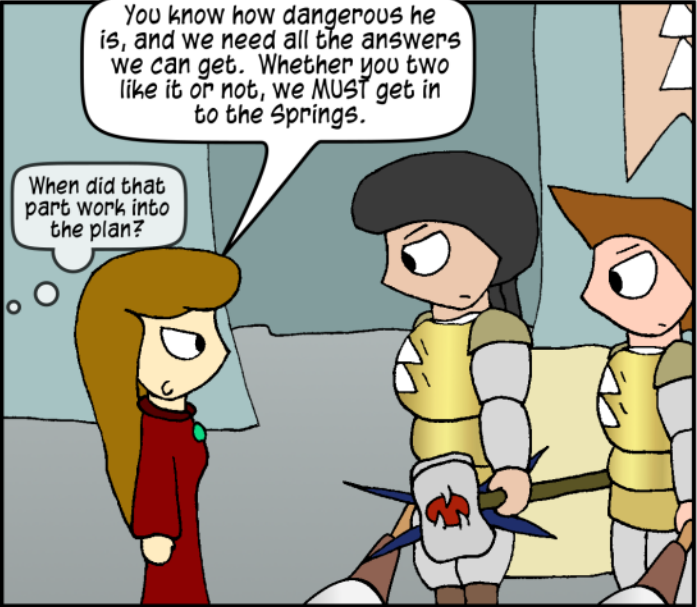
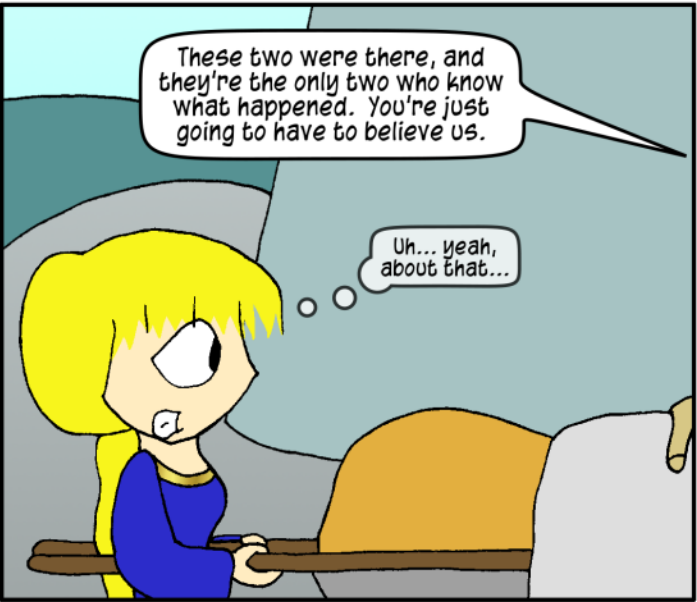
Salth, you really should've just held on to Marzos's staff the whole way up. I mean, you had to know you were going to be questioned over and over again, you just said yourself this is against protocol and they have no fast way of relaying information up the spiral, and the staff is how you're convincing everyone to let you pass.





I guess Lineta Hall isn't really visible from the Springs, despite what the centaurs are saying, hence why they didn't see the darkness emanating from Sunlit Tower. A throwaway line next chapter implies that it's most likely visible from Castle Landis, but the Springs are quite a bit further away. Of course, the centaurs might not have been too concerned about it regardless, even if they could see it, so they could've just ignored it. They tend to have very specific priorities, after all.

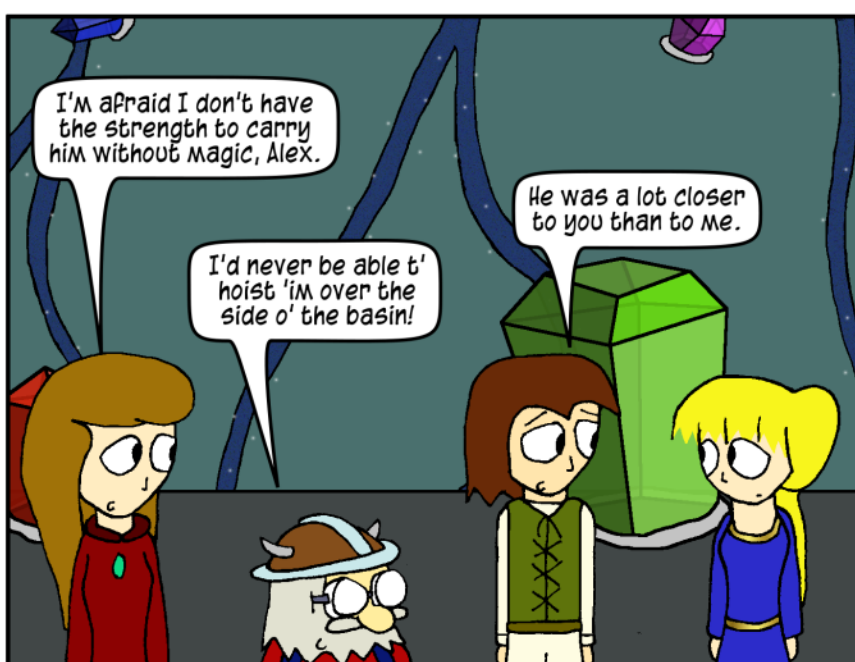
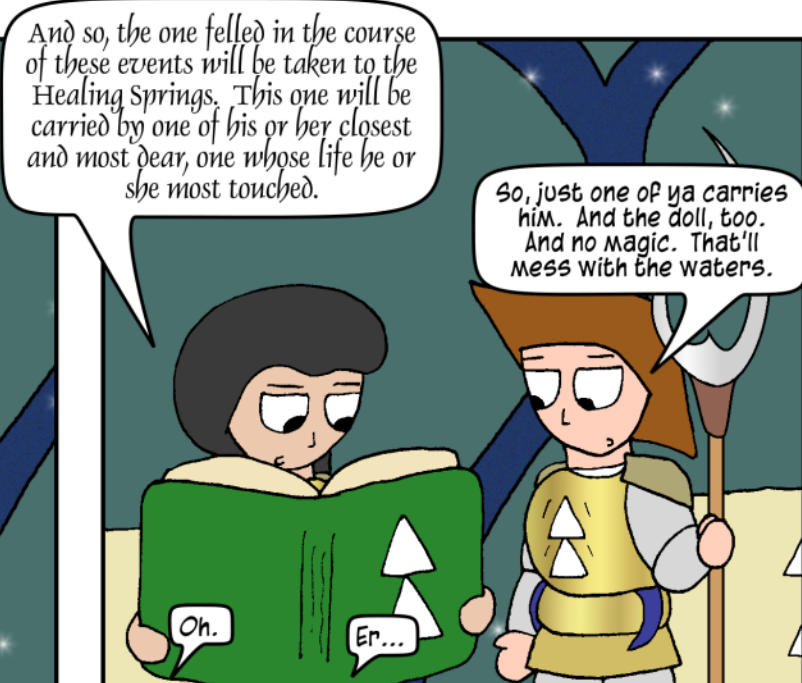
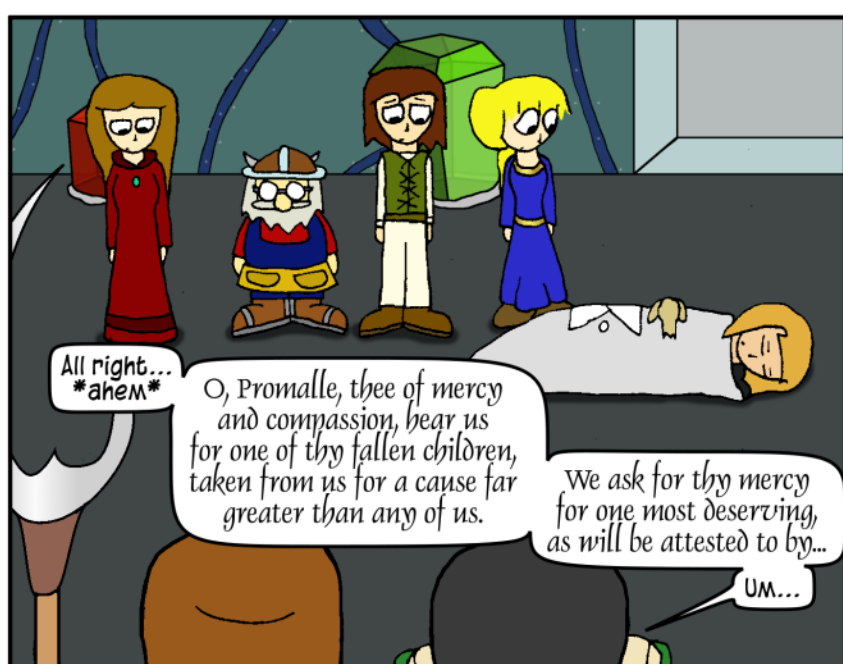
There are reasons you don't mess with Salthalus, only one of which is her powerful mastery of magic. She's also quite capable of arguing face-to-face with the divine guardians of the Healing Springs and not backing down.



Oh boy! More nonstandard panel layouts that are increasingly difficult to put in the book while maintaining consistency between pages! What was I thinking (HINT: I was probably thinking I wasn't ever going to make a book out of this, and therefore layout concerns were a problem for Future Me to worry about)? Seriously, I really should just do that book-centric Chapter One remake I've been thinking of for years, just so I know how it feels to plan things out from the ground up in terms of paper size limitations.

Once in a while I try to toss in subtle character variants and not bring much attention to them, even if I just go ahead and bring attention to them when I make a book. Like making characters left-handed out of the blue and keeping them that way. I mentioned in the previous book that I did that with Alex from the get-go (something I've only screwed up a few times so far), and here again with the brown-haired centaur and the bladed pike staff thingamajig he's holding. I dunno, it's nice for variety every so often.

And just for the record, I didn't actually intend for the phrase "centaur sentries" I used in the footnote a few strips back to work out as well as it does.





The chamber containing the source of the Springs and the basin thereof are actually not that much larger than what is apparently pictured. Regardless, this is still a nasty perspective error. Sorry.

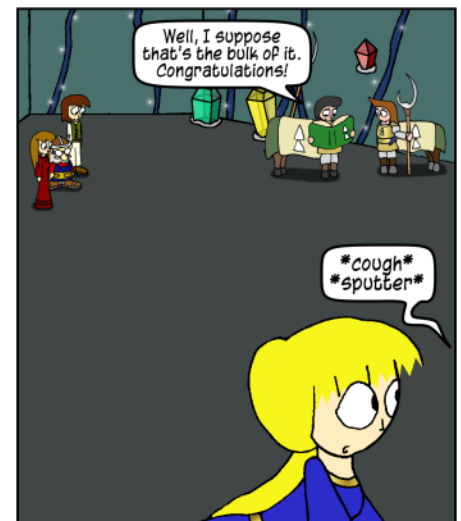
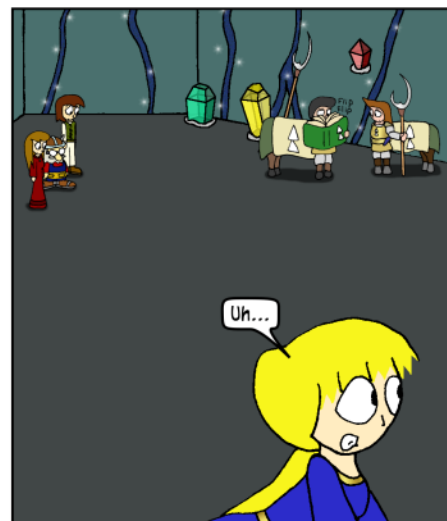
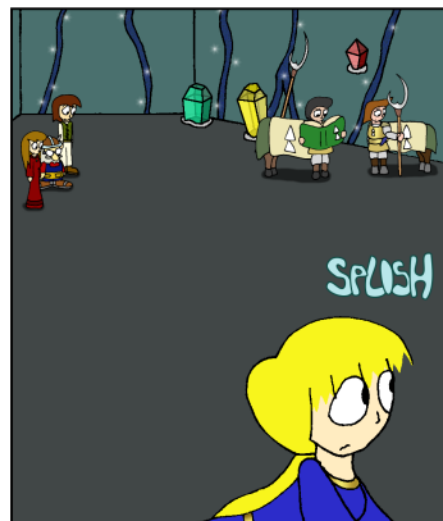
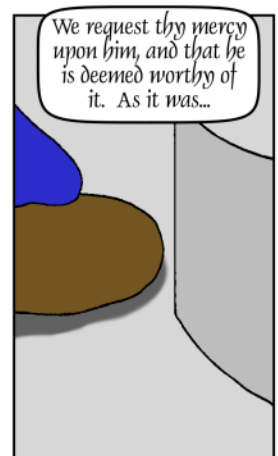
The Healing Springs Grand Ceremony is, in fact, not really all that long to begin with, depending heavily on the amount of people the person in question knew. In a general case, the procession starts at the base of the spiral and works its way up, owing to the limited space in the Springs chamber itself. Most other people worthy of the Grand Ceremony each have many people to attest to his or her worth, though each normally limit themselves to small blurbs. It's all quite dramatic, and the fact that it, on average, only happens once every few centuries (if that) makes it a real shame the whole ceremony couldn't be seen here.

The ceremony normally does involve a lot of slow, reverent walking up the spiral, though. That part is generally not appreciated.

I mentioned this before, but it bears repeating that I do NOT draw characters directly facing the camera very often. This applies to both body poses and facial expressions. Faces get it the worst.

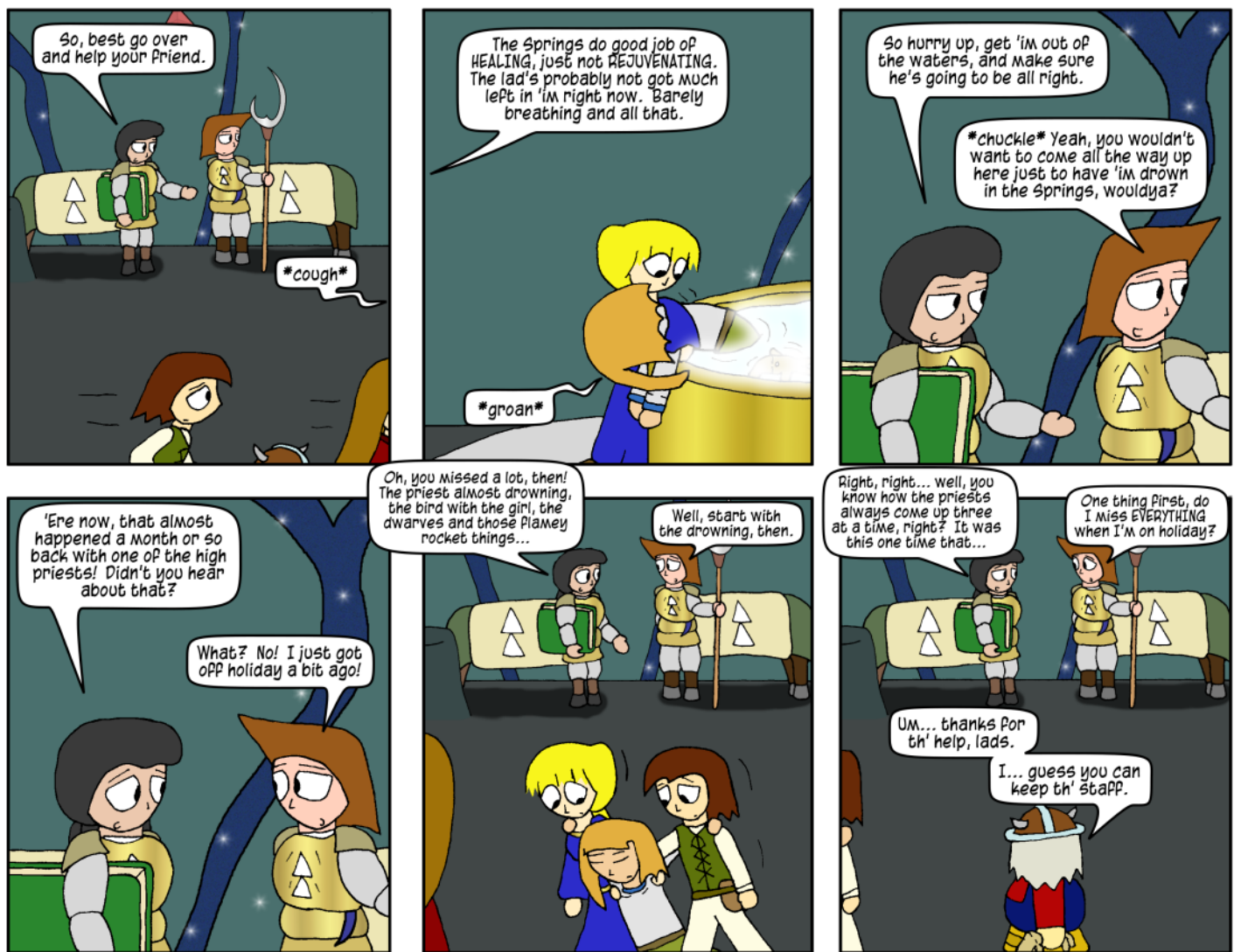
If I were drawing this today, I would make the room seem more organic. Or, well, more mineral, I suppose. I still tend to think of rooms in terms of right angles from the floor to the ceiling. This could really benefit from an uneven surface and more giant gems jutting out randomly.

On the topic of the how the centaurs are reading the ritual, I had an idea before about a semi-major character who spoke in standard-issue not-really-accurate olde English. Would've just been explained as the regional dialect where he's from. I might talk about him in more detail in a later book, but far as I know, he doesn't fit in with any plans I've got. Shame, really, I kinda liked his story.



Alex may be a strong-willed person, but this does not mean she's necessarily, you know, *physically* strong and all.

The entire bit about the centaurs deciding to skip parts of the ritual that don't apply to this situation, as well as Alex struggling to carry Howard's body up to the basin and accidentally dumping him in, came about as another example of me waaaaay overthinking things. At least I didn't actually write out the entire ritual and slice it apart later.



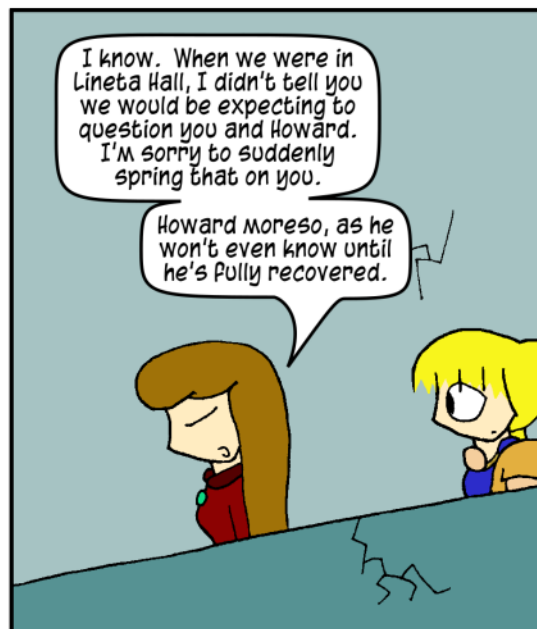
The centaurs protecting the Healing Springs have a very protracted sense of time. This is mostly due to their incredible lifespan, easily rivalling that of even the elves. The implication that the rightmost centaur's holiday/vacation was at least a couple months long is nothing surprising, especially considering that their normal guard shifts last for weeks on end. They don't mind.

So here's the deal: I am fully aware that giving a manner by which the dead can be revived seemingly opens the door to generally making death cheap. I am also fully aware that the majority of this perception, especially in the world of comics, comes from decades of, let's be frank here, comics themselves. Plus, for every story made where the writer took the time and effort to ensure that bringing someone back from the dead has actual, definitive limits and/or long-lasting consequences, there's easily a hundred or so where it's just a cheap ploy to keep a franchise dragged out forever, and the latter stories are generally far better-known than those that make reviving *matter*. I can't really fight that perception. When I write stuff like this, I do so with full awareness that there is effectively nobody reading comics whose idea of "character comes back to life" isn't tainted by preconceived notions in some way.

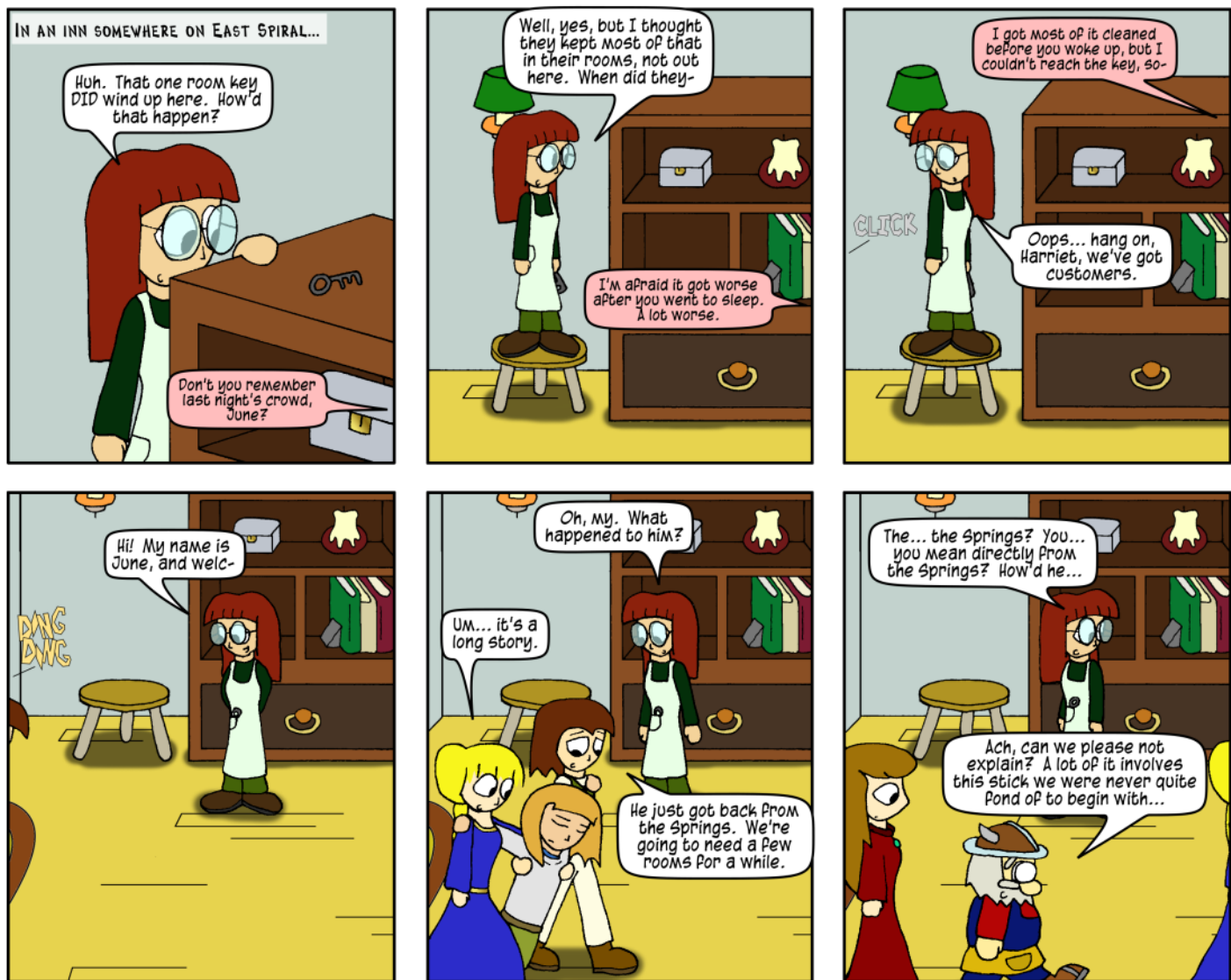
That's why I made it quite clear that this doesn't happen often and that, except in legitimately unbelievable circumstances, the centaurs WILL stop it from happening. It's also why the waters revive but don't rejuvenate, thus putting Howard in a coma for several weeks, and, in Chapter Five, waking up to horrifying discomfort and dizziness with disconcerting gaps in his memory around the point he was killed, all of which led to what happened at the end of that chapter. Add to that the fact that Salth has now made it clear to everyone involved that Howard's going to be peppered with questions as soon as he's recovered, and this is less a glorious event than it sounds. So, "perfectly" reviving the dead in the DoM is a rare occurrence, a not-at-all pleasing one, and it leaves a lot of problems for both the victim and loved ones to come to terms with, is what I'm saying. And I'm not even getting into necromancy yet. That gets ugly. Give it time, we'll get to that, too.

Though, the part about the centaurs stopping people from getting into the springs isn't perfect, after all. We know this, of course, having read Chapters Four and Five already (did I mention I was assuming you did?), but it sounds like the black-haired centaur will be relating the story of "the bird with the girl" in due time...

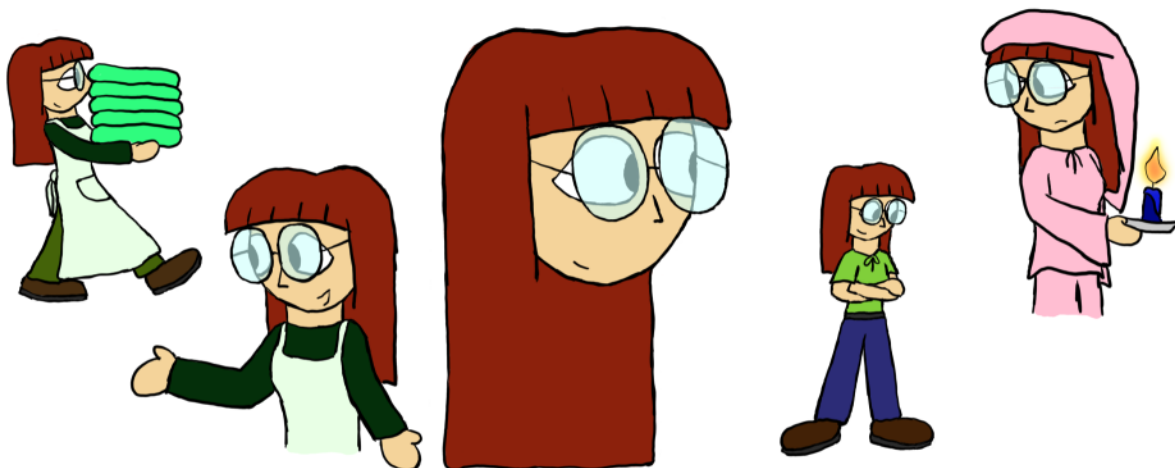
The upshot of all this is, if there somehow winds up being an adaptation of the DoM that involves people freely and easily being brought back from the dead with no repercussions, you can rest assured I didn't sign off on that part.

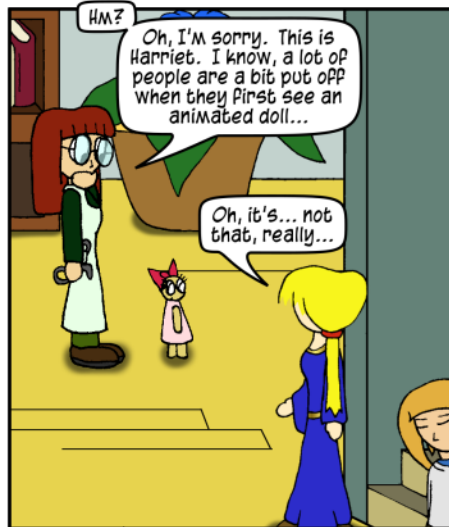
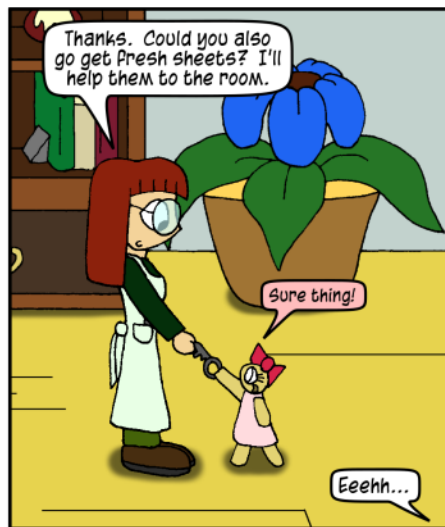


I'd have more to say here if I hadn't already discussed Salth's growing obsession with making sure Marzos is stopped for good. Instead, maybe I should remind myself to look through what I've written and count how many times I use "actually", "really", and "a bit" as intensifiers, as well as overuse of the phrase "more or less" and starting sentences with "so", "I mean", or variants on the phrase "I like <something shown in this comic>". I'll probably be disappointed!



Meet June, our main cast's host for Chapter Five, and her doll, Harriet! She oddly didn't go through too many revisions before I got her look nailed down; somehow, "deep-red-haired girl with green clothing and giant glasses" seemed the most logical choice for an innkeeper. She got a couple other outfits later and I fiddled around a bit with the length of her hair, but the look she's got now just worked quickly.

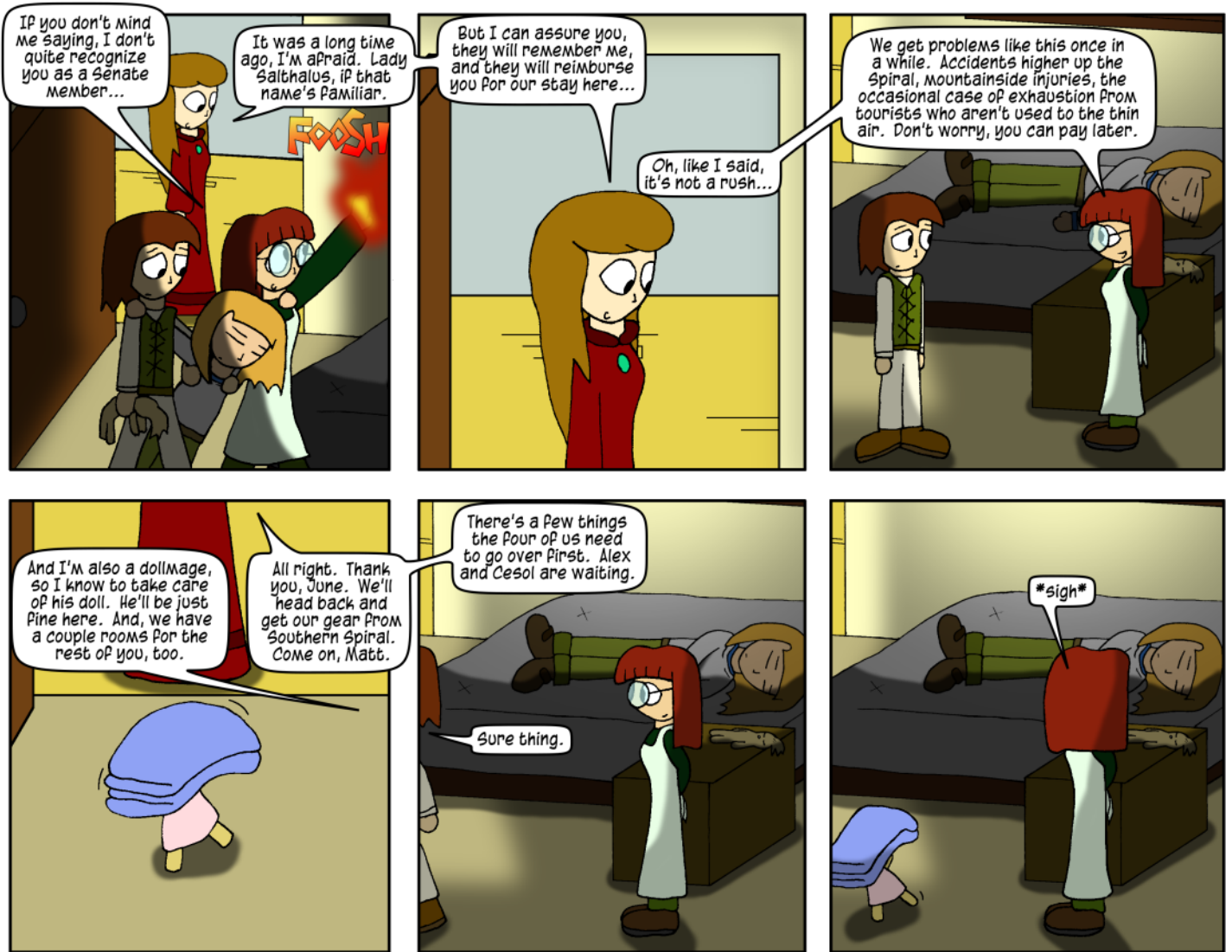




I hope nobody's actually measuring the sizes of all these panels, because I really don't have any answer as to why the lower three panels on the previous page are taller than most.

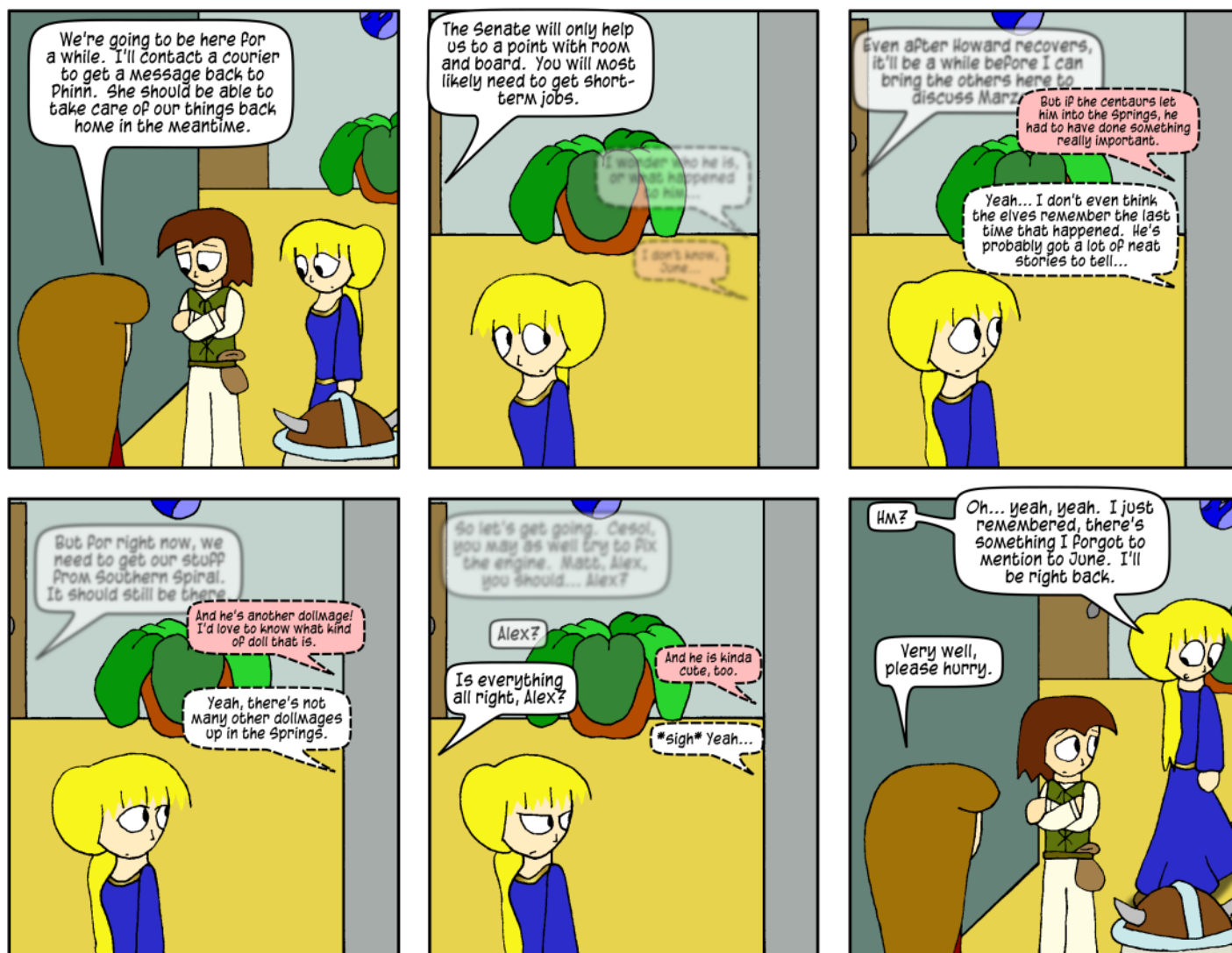
I made June a dollmage for a variety of reasons. Having an assistant for innkeeping work seems like a logical idea, but really, I wanted another dollmage character besides Howard, and, more importantly, I wanted someone whose doll was actually cooperative, unlike Tilly. So what you see here is more or less what a dollmage-doll relationship SHOULD look like.





Note that in this case June is actually trying to light something that will continue burning without her input, rather than summon a ball of light. Hence the flame. Yes, as I've mentioned before, magic light is among the easiest of spells to cast and maintain in the DoM world, but even at that, sometimes a mage doesn't feel like keeping track of it and just lights a candle.

I never really gave it much thought until now that June seems to be taking Salth on her word that she was a member of the Senate. Though I suppose in a place like the Healing Springs, they would tend more towards trusting others and helping out people first and worrying about things like that later. Or maybe there's reasons people don't go around impersonating former Senate members in an attempt to scam free services out of local businesses. Maybe some people just aren't jerks for once, ever think of that?



There's the implication here that sending a message back to Landis will take some time. Similar thing as back at the beginning of the chapter: This is a medieval world with a lot of medieval limitations (but not all of them), so there's going to be a lack of instantaneous global communication. I try to stay out of Flintstones-like "it's really the modern world, just with a bunch of magical stand-ins for things that didn't exist back then" conveniences. I mean, there's an old webcomic friend of mine who did that in his comic, and it's not like I'm down on him or his work because of it, and it's not like I'm all that perfect in that myself, but I just prefer avoiding it when I can.

What isn't clear, however, is why Salth didn't contact a courier at Lineta Hall before they left. Maybe she just wanted to get the address where they'd be staying first?



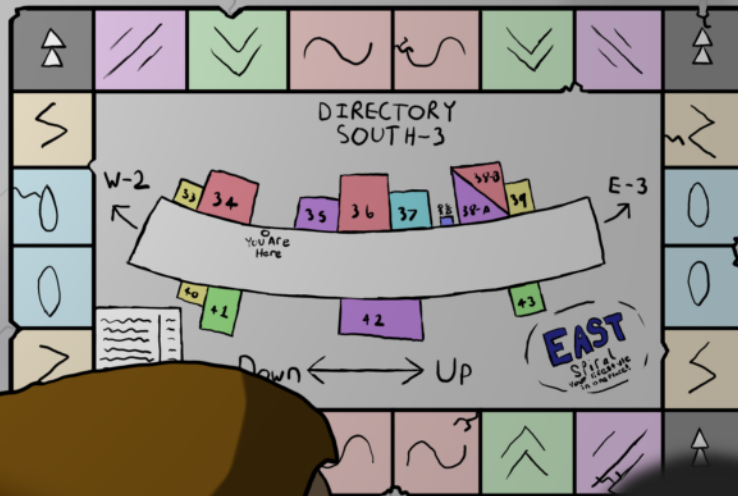
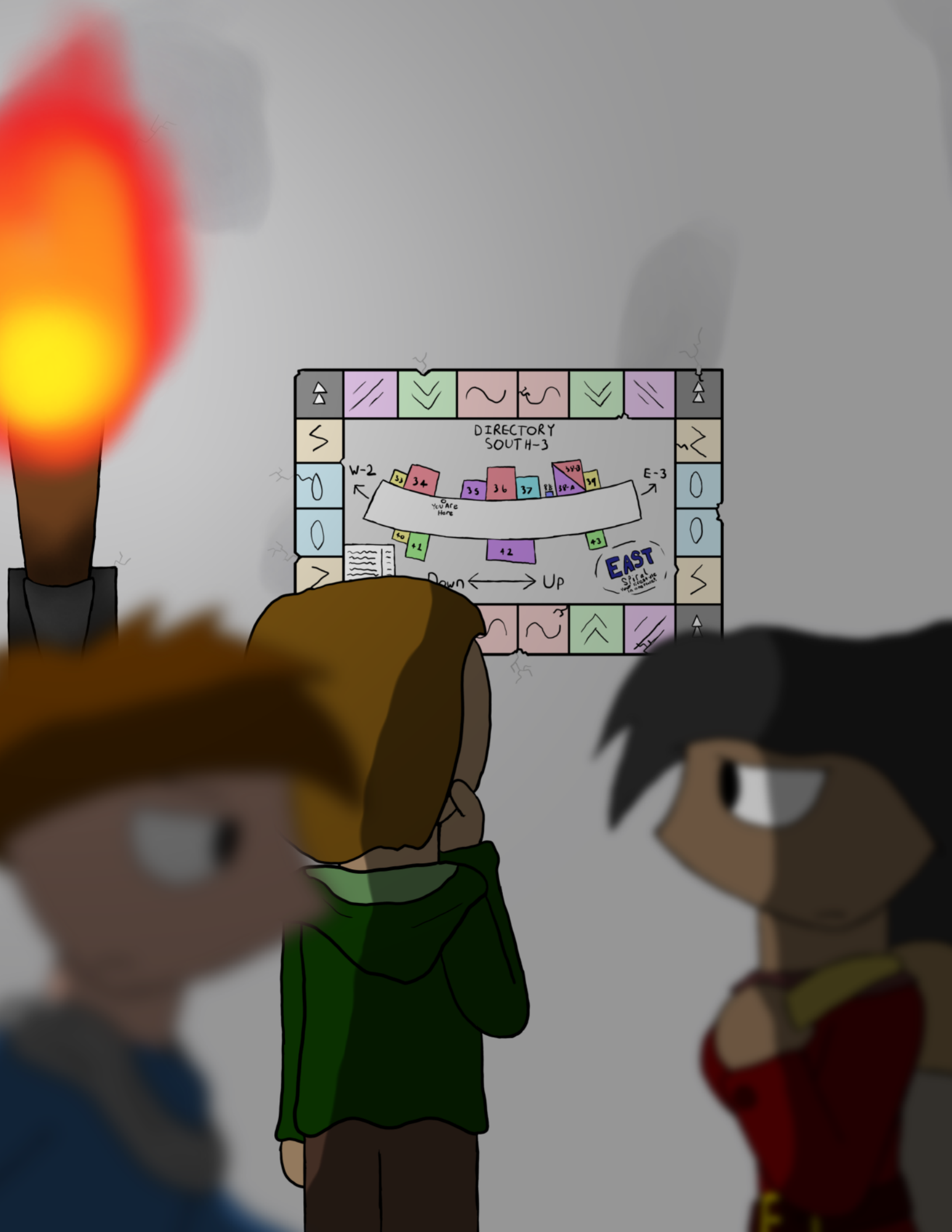
Neat thing to remember: If you plan on threatening someone, what you want to avoid doing is threatening them with their own talents, unless you are completely confident you are insurmountably better than they are at it. If you're only slightly better at what they do, you're doing nothing more than angering them and driving them to be that extra bit better to get back at you. No, what you want is to use a talent you feel they lack, one that catches them off-guard, something they wouldn't be able to learn and catch up with in reasonable time. Hence, Alex is going more physical here, rather than magical as one may expect.





Okay, NOW we're done with the chapter! Yay! Chapters Two and Three were easily the longest I've done yet (well, depending on how you count it, Chapter One is probably longer). Chapter Four was a shorter run of side stories and such, but we'll get to those in time. Thanks for reading this entire thing, unless you started here near the end of the book for some reason, in which case the narrative structure of my gratitude makes no sense!

Oh, and the cup on my desk fully reads "Carowinds 2008". Carowinds is an amusement park on the North/South Carolina border. A couple friends and I visited it that year. Fun times.



APPENDIX A:

HOLIDAY AND OTHER BONUS STRIPS





Yes, I did this three strips into the chapter. Yes, I was already missing updates at this point. And yes, I still haven't really made up for said missed updates. Ah, well. That's what happens when you get a full-time job, I guess. I also stopped doing full-strip anniversary things around this point, both because I was missing a lot of updates and because I was running out of anniversary jokes to make. There was the one-panel anniversary thing later in the chapter, but that's about it.

Also, when did I get a finger? I'll try not to let that happen again.



Arr, t'were International Talk Like A Pirate Day yet again, me hearties! This here comic be what was flyin' atop the mast the day prior, so here it be in piratical form. And "forestlubber" be a great term, I has to put that in me vocabulary more often.



When writing Marzos's lines in the real strip, I swear I had a hard time resisting doing this. It's worth noting that the meme in question was still relatively fresh at the time. The weird part is that it still works.



This comic went up immediately after the proper end of the chapter. Every single last one of these things was completely and entirely true (including my brother doing postgrad work at the Large Hadron Collider, interestingly enough). I took a REALLY long time getting that chapter done. Like, seriously. Way too long. But, you know that already if you actually try to keep track of the comic. I mean, how long did that one comic with me using my tablet and setting my laptop on fire stay up while I worked on this book?

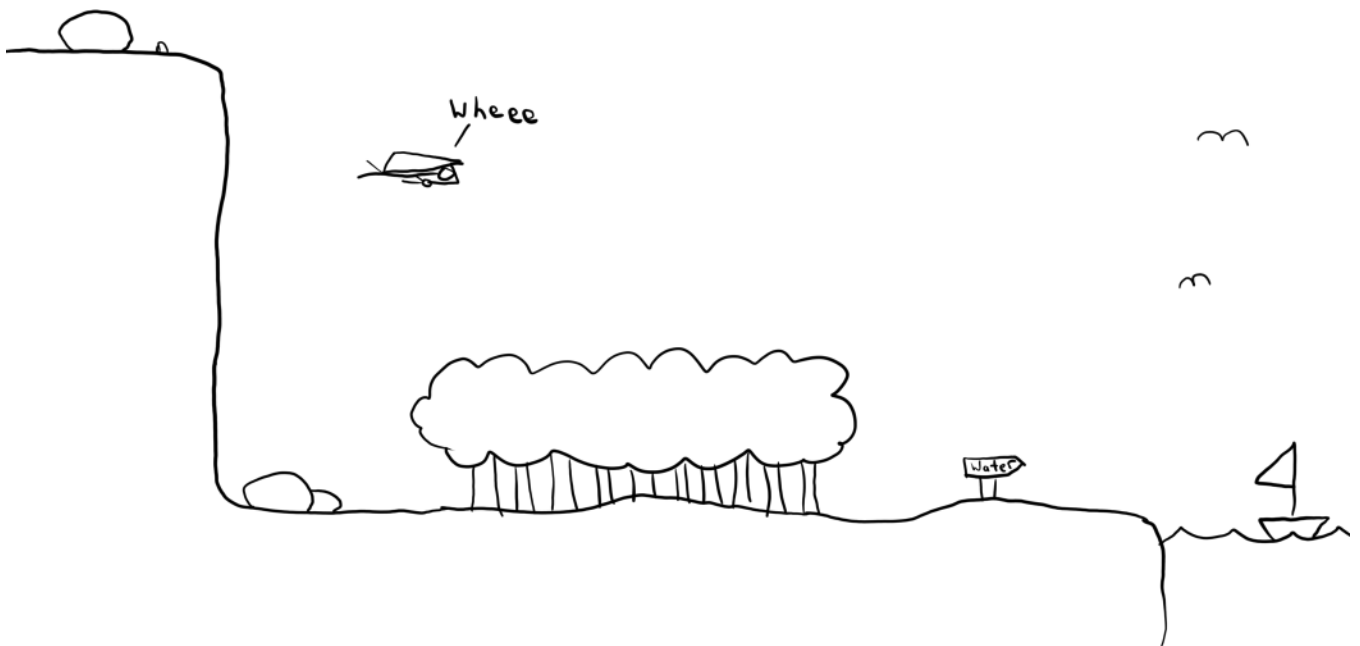


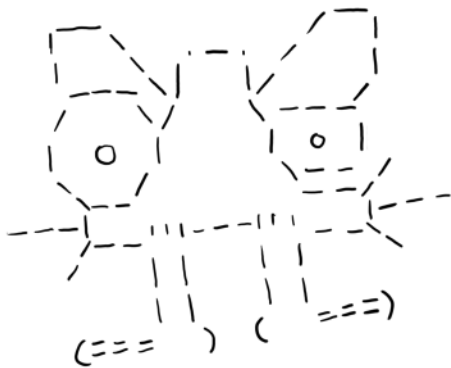
APPENDIX B:

VARIOUS ODDS AND ENDS I DOODLED ON MY TABLET WHILE COMING UP WITH OTHER SKETCHES IN THIS BOOK

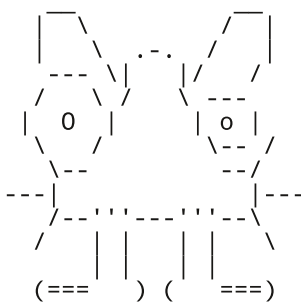


THE
\$22.22
(CAD)
PYRAMID
La Pyramide \$22.22 (canadienne)



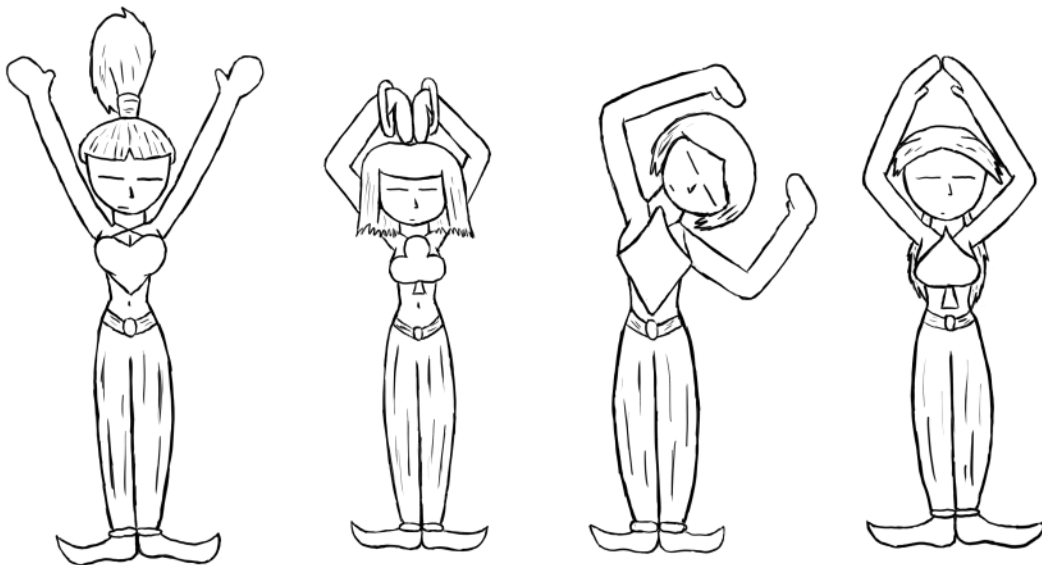


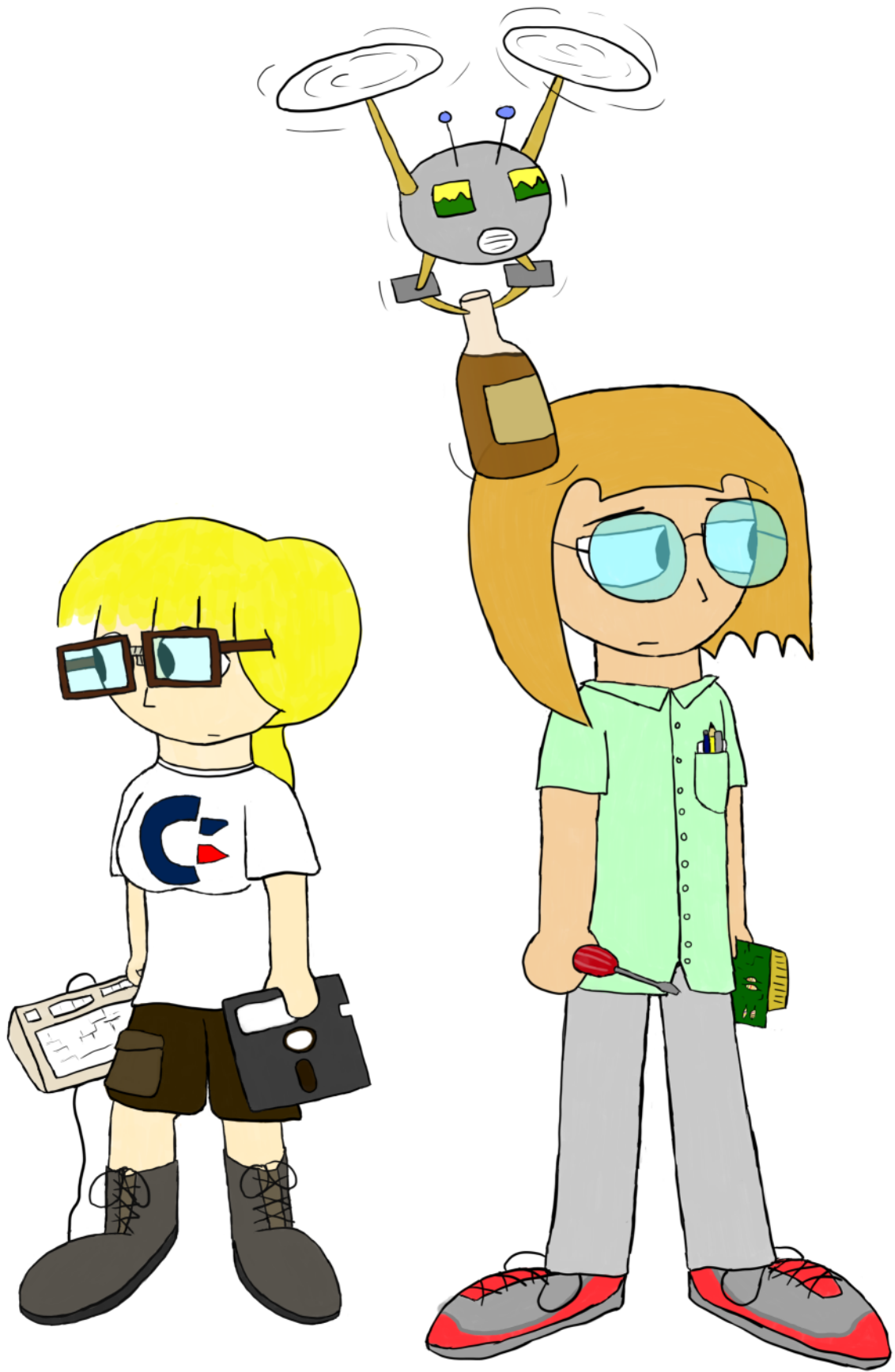
When I made the standard ASCII art cow for the writing rock's kernel panic sketch, I wondered how hard it would be to make an ASCII art nasal fly. Turns out, not that hard.





See, this is what happens when you make me draw legs.

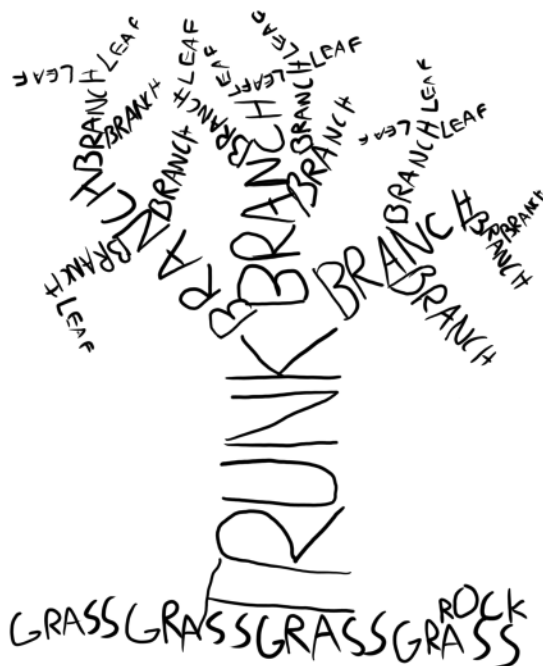




I made this after I wrote a few comments about how the DoM's magic system is vaguely based on computing, but ultimately didn't have the room to put it near any point where I mentioned it. Still got to use this version of Howard for the ATZ joke, though.



This was the original draft of that one sketch of Phinn's winter outfit. I redid it into a talking pose when I realized all I did here was basically draw a square with Phinn's head on top of it.

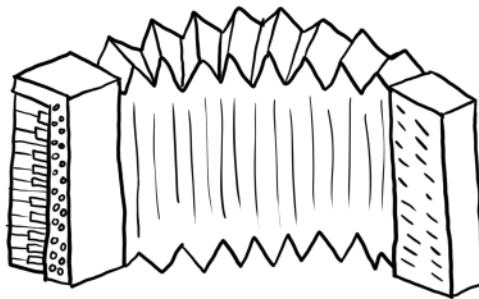






Trevor Turducken?

I had to at least TRY. Maybe next time I'll come up with a few pages of The Tales of Trevor Turducken and the Teutonic Terror of Tannhauser. Suki Sashimi will have to wait until later.



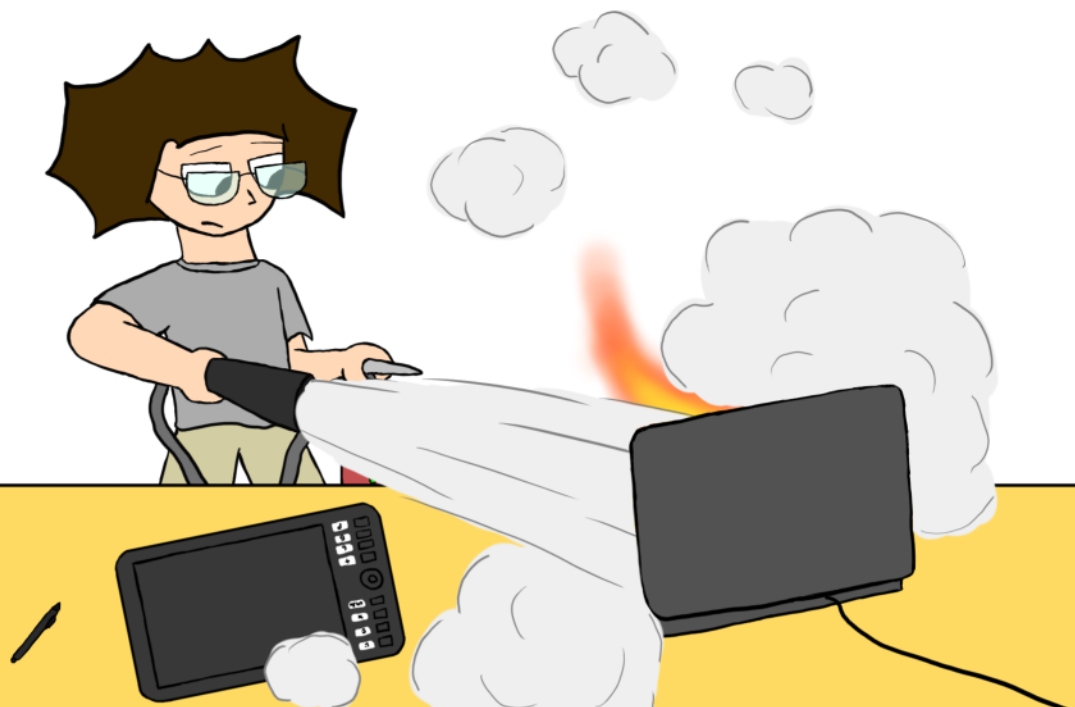
I have no idea how to properly sketch a cartoon accordion.

OUTRODUCTION

I wasn't kidding in the intro when I said it was fun putting these books together. Really. Despite the issues I mentioned there, plus a few extra ones specific to my own strange manner of artwork and layout (i.e. having to redo all the text from before I started using Inkscape, then redoing all the other text anyway to maintain consistency), there's always that nice little thrill seeing everything come together and eventually winding up as a book I can hold in my hands. And, in spite of the delays it causes on the actual comic, I hope you enjoy it, too.

Like I said in the first book, I didn't really know what my few readers wanted in a book, I wasn't sure I knew, either, and it turns out I still don't truly know. All I've got is something that looks right to me, and I figure that, hopefully, if you like my comics to begin with, you'll like these books, too. Was worth a shot, at least. Am I repeating myself too much? I can swear I said this in the last book, too. I guess I'm not really all that eloquent.

Anyway, thanks for putting up me once again as I ran off for a while to make a book. I'm glad someone out there likes it, at least. Who knows? Maybe at some point I'll make that completely-redrawn Chapter One book I keep talking about. This book was originally a proof of concept that I can do some work with a tablet, and I've since switched to making comics entirely that way so there's hope. That might take a lot longer, though. Regardless, I'm not done yet. There's still way too many stories I've got in my head for the DoM world. In fact, if you'll excuse me, I need to finish up Chapter Eight. It was a really rough year last year. Cheers!



SPECIAL THANKS

Thanks to Robin Armstrong, Chris Paluszek, Dave Perry, Walter Shumate, and Laura Taylor, among others, for putting up with me dumping sketches, layouts, test PDFs, and other things on them repeatedly as I put everything together for this book. Especially Laura, since she helped with some of the major layout issues with the really tall comics. So, the story about the concert in Vancouver basically goes that Laura asked around if anyone wanted the spare tickets she had for a Jonathan Coulton concert (his first in Vancouver, in fact; with Paul and Storm as his opening band, appropriately). Turns out she was understandably just asking her local friends, really, but since I showed interest and they didn't, I wound up on my way to Vancouver (from central Kentucky) for a JoCo concert. It took me a few days of planning and darting around to renew my passport before I realized that this concert was coincidentally *during the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics*. Once I noticed that and got into town, it was a surreal experience, let me tell you, but man was it a lot of fun hanging out with Laura and walking around downtown while it was all set up for the games. Anyway, where was I?

Thanks also to the respective teams behind GIMP, Inkscape, Scribus, and, new to the suite of tools I keep around for this sort of thing, Krita, for comic production, vector imaging, book layout, and tablet sketching, respectively. Despite some... minor historic animosity between GIMP and Krita, the two programs were soon working together in my artistic workflow whether they liked it or not, providing comics and tablet work for all.

And, thanks again to Nicholas Knight for co-writing the website-updating script I use and turning control of it over to me so I could keep it current. I have not kept it current since 2008. I'll also thank him for hosting the comic itself and hope that putting ~100MB PDFs up for download doesn't burn his hosting too badly.

And of course, thanks to you, the people out there who read what I make and consider yourselves fans (or who just had this handed to them and hopefully might become fans), even with all the delays and slowdowns. I really couldn't do any of this without you. And this time, I DID figure out who made the TV Tropes entries for the DoM! And it wasn't me! Besides that one entry in the Pure Magic Being page. That... that actually was me. Sorry.

