

The
Order of the **Stick**[™]

presents

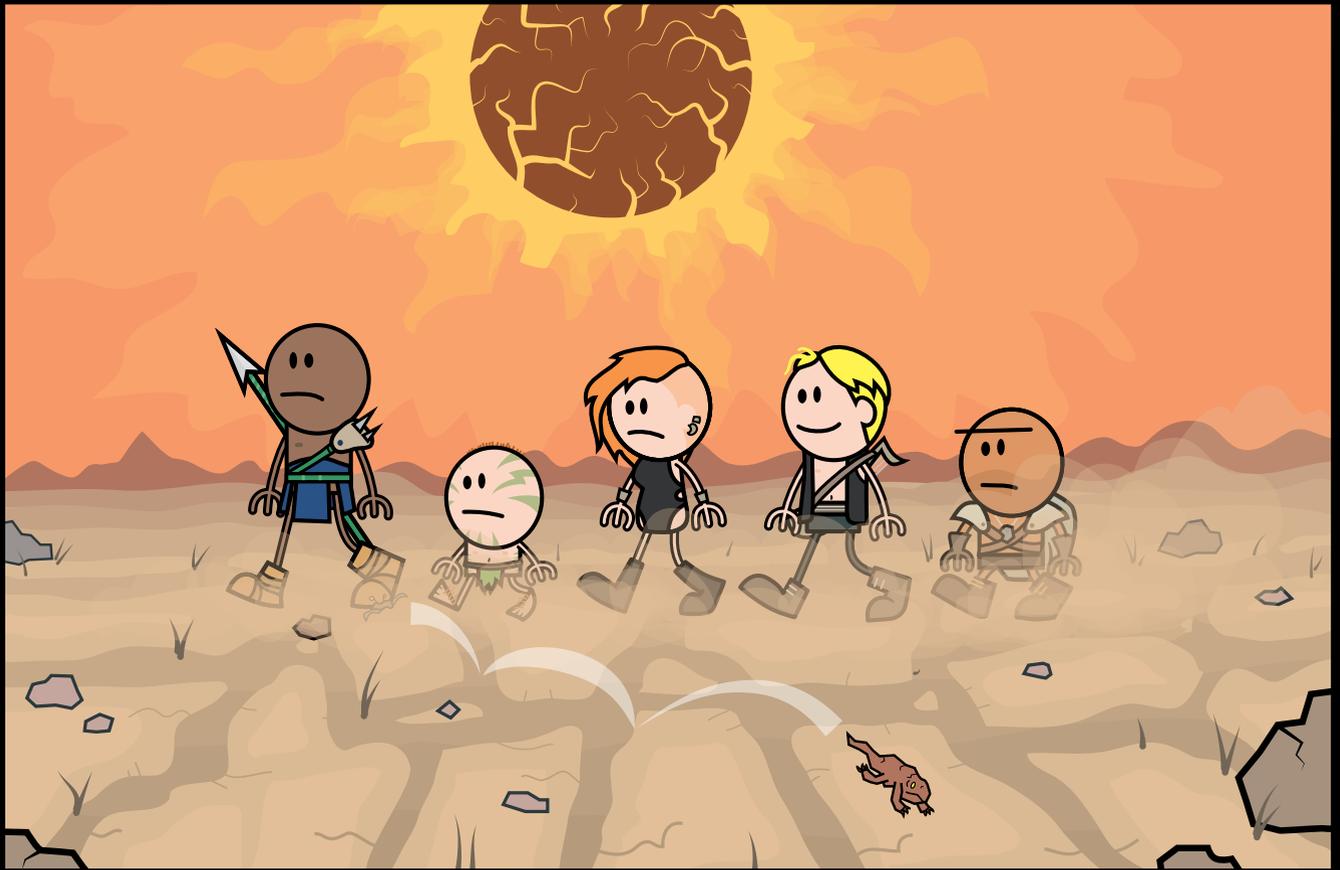
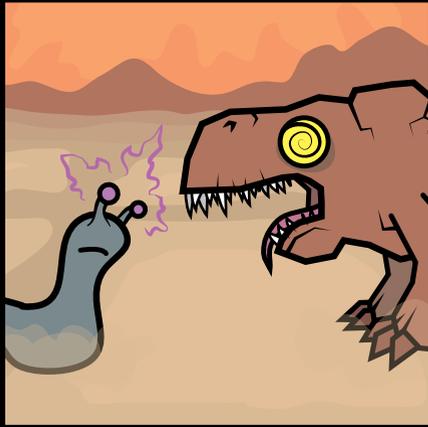
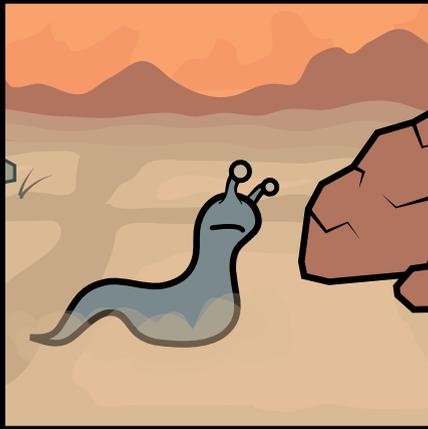
Dim Sun



by Rich Burlew

GIANT in
the
PLAYGROUND[™]

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OK, gang, we're almost back home.

Our quest to defeat *Xy-Konn*, the evil sorcerer-king who rules our city, is in its final stages.

We've acquired the mystical *Greenheart Spear* with the help of the cannibalistic halfling tribes that live in the world's last forest, so now we-

Whoa, whoa, whoa! I find that language deeply problematic.

First of all, we were here first, so that makes the rest of you doublelings.

And second, I object strongly to the term "cannibalistic."

But...it's true. In this grim ecologically devastated world, halflings are cannibals.

How can you say something so offensive?!?

Because you literally eat people! You ate Pstevie!

Man, he was so rad.

Now who's going to explain how my wild talent works?

I'll have you know that we halflings consider ourselves strict humanitarians.

I agree that it was very kind of your people to help us, but the fact remains that-

No, I mean our diet consists of humanoids. We're humanitarians.

How is that not a cannibal?!?

This isn't that complicated. Yes, we do like to cook and eat humans.

And sure, a nice smoked dwarf ham is hard to beat.

And could I go for some shredded elf tacos right now? Of course I could. Of course.

But we *don't* eat other halflings. So we're not technically cannibals, and I demand an apology!

Ugh, fine. I'm sorry I called you a cannibal just because you ate our telepath.

Apology accepted.

I don't know what I was thinking.

Probably because you ate our telepath.

If it makes you feel any better, he was pretty salty.

How would that possibly make me feel better?!

Though honestly, that leather jacket should've been the first clue that his taste was gonna be off.

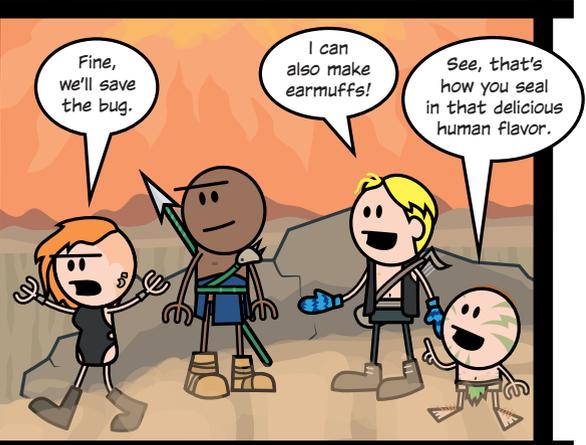
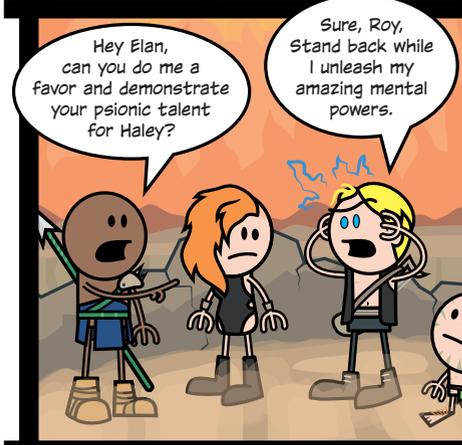
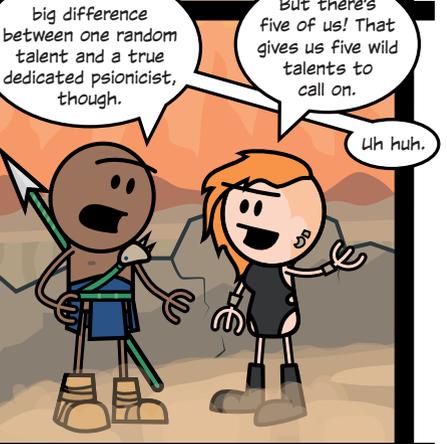
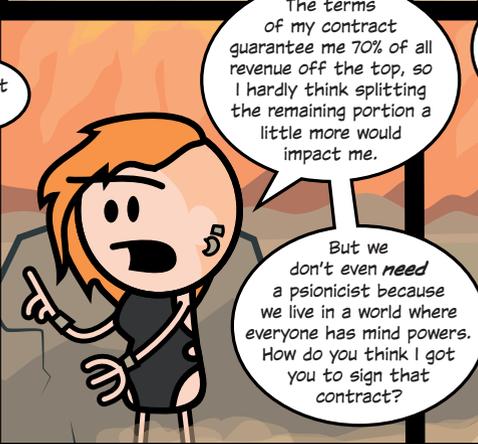
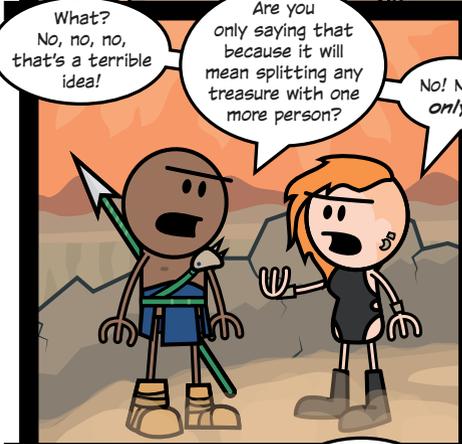
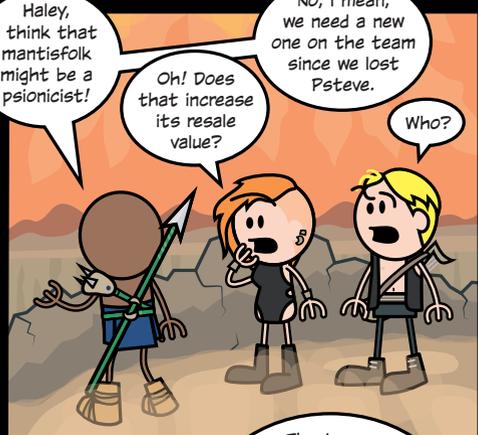
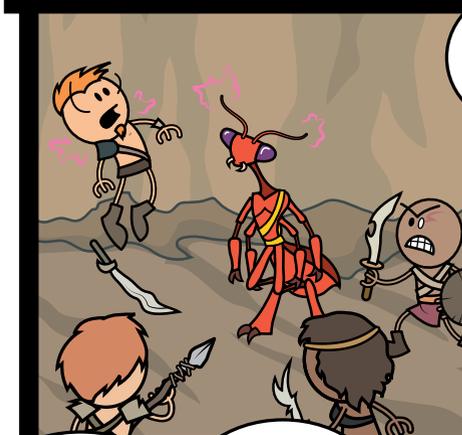
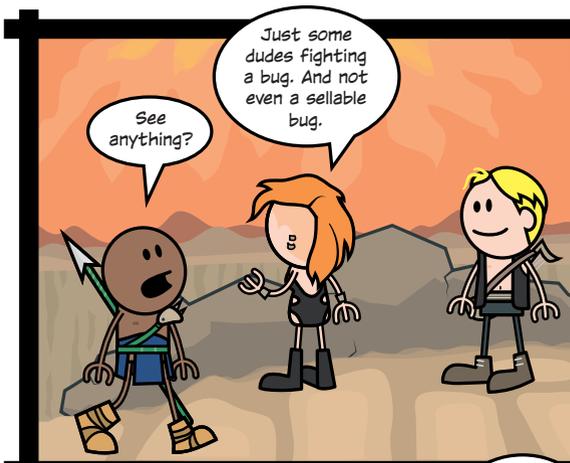
I'm sure he would be very sad to hear his flavor profile didn't live up to your exacting culinary standards.

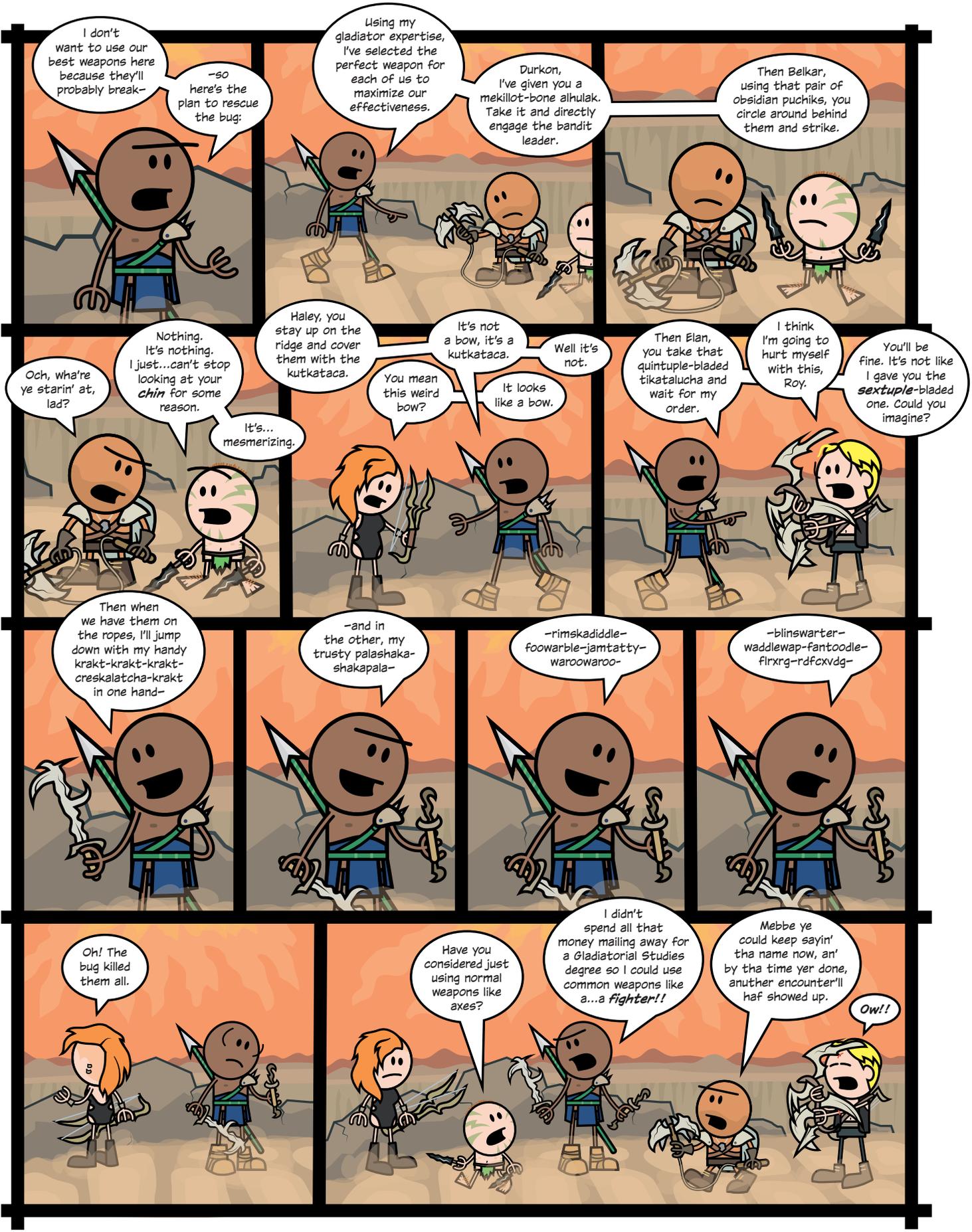
Is that on a four- or five-star scale?

Five, definitely.

Wow, this really *is* a harsh setting.

Plus he was a bit chewy? Two stars, three at best.





I don't want to use our best weapons here because they'll probably break-

-so here's the plan to rescue the bug:

Using my gladiator expertise, I've selected the perfect weapon for each of us to maximize our effectiveness.

Durkon, I've given you a mekillot-bone alhulak. Take it and directly engage the bandit leader.

Then Belkar, using that pair of obsidian puchiks, you circle around behind them and strike.

Nothing. It's nothing. I just...can't stop looking at your chin for some reason.

Och, wha're ye starin' at, lad?

It's...mesmerizing.

Haley, you stay up on the ridge and cover them with the kutkataka.

It's not a bow, it's a kutkataka.

Well it's not.

You mean this weird bow?

It looks like a bow.

Then Eian, you take that quintuple-bladed tikatalucha and wait for my order.

I think I'm going to hurt myself with this, Roy.

You'll be fine. It's not like I gave you the sextuple-bladed one. Could you imagine?

Then when we have them on the ropes, I'll jump down with my handy krakt-krakt-krakt-creskalatcha-krakt in one hand-

-and in the other, my trusty palashaka-shakapala-

-rimskadiddle-foowarble-jamtatty-warowaroo-

-blinswarter-waddelwap-fantoodle-flrxrg-rdfcxv-dg-

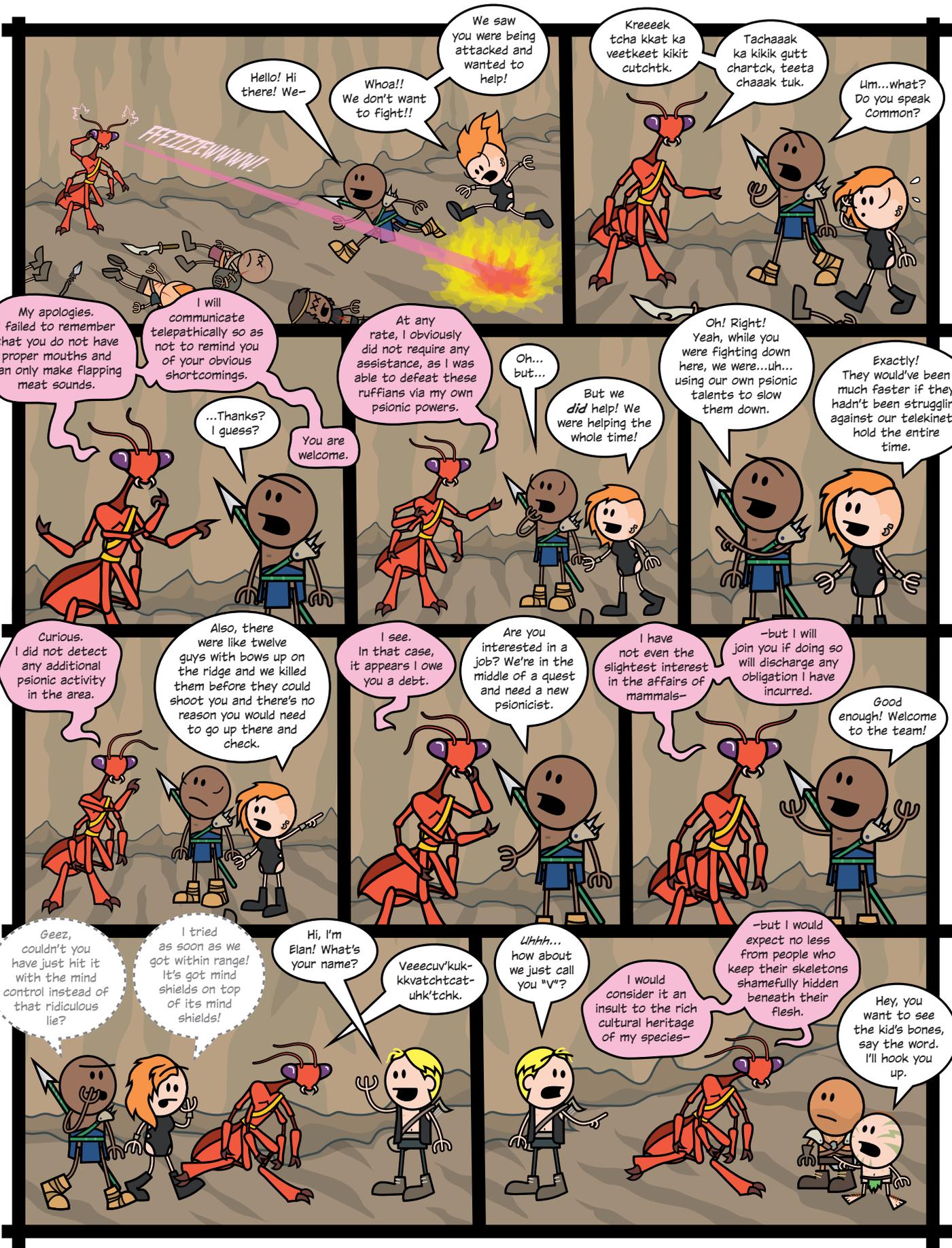
Oh! The bug killed them all.

Have you considered just using normal weapons like axes?

I didn't spend all that money mailing away for a Gladiatorial Studies degree so I could use common weapons like a...a fighter!!

Mebbe ye could keep sayin' tha name now, an' by tha time yer done, another encounter'll haf showed up.

Ow!!



Hello! Hi there! We-

Whoa!! We don't want to fight!!

We saw you were being attacked and wanted to help!

Kreeek tcha kkat ka veetkeet kikit cutchtk.

Tachaak ka kikit gutt chartck, teeta chaaak tuk.

Um...what? Do you speak Common?

My apologies. I failed to remember that you do not have proper mouths and can only make flapping meat sounds.

I will communicate telepathically so as not to remind you of your obvious shortcomings.

At any rate, I obviously did not require any assistance, as I was able to defeat these ruffians via my own psionic powers.

Oh... but...

But we *did* help! We were helping the whole time!

Oh! Right! Yeah, while you were fighting down here, we were...uh... using our own psionic talents to slow them down.

Exactly! They would've been much faster if they hadn't been struggling against our telekinetic hold the entire time.

...Thanks? I guess?

You are welcome.

Curious. I did not detect any additional psionic activity in the area.

Also, there were like twelve guys with bows up on the ridge and we killed them before they could shoot you and there's no reason you would need to go up there and check.

I see. In that case, it appears I owe you a debt.

Are you interested in a job? We're in the middle of a quest and need a new psionicist.

I have not even the slightest interest in the affairs of mammals-

-but I will join you if doing so will discharge any obligation I have incurred.

Good enough! Welcome to the team!

Geez, couldn't you have just hit it with the mind control instead of that ridiculous lie?

I tried as soon as we got within range! It's got mind shields on top of its mind shields!

Hi, I'm Elan! What's your name?

Veeecuv'kuk-kkvatchtcat-uhk'tchtk.

Uhhh... how about we just call you "v"?

I would consider it an insult to the rich cultural heritage of my species-

-but I would expect no less from people who keep their skeletons shamefully hidden beneath their flesh.

Hey, you want to see the kid's bones, say the word. I'll hook you up.

Look! We've made it home from our incredible adventure beyond the edges of the included poster map!

So that's the magnificent city-state of Tyr, huh?

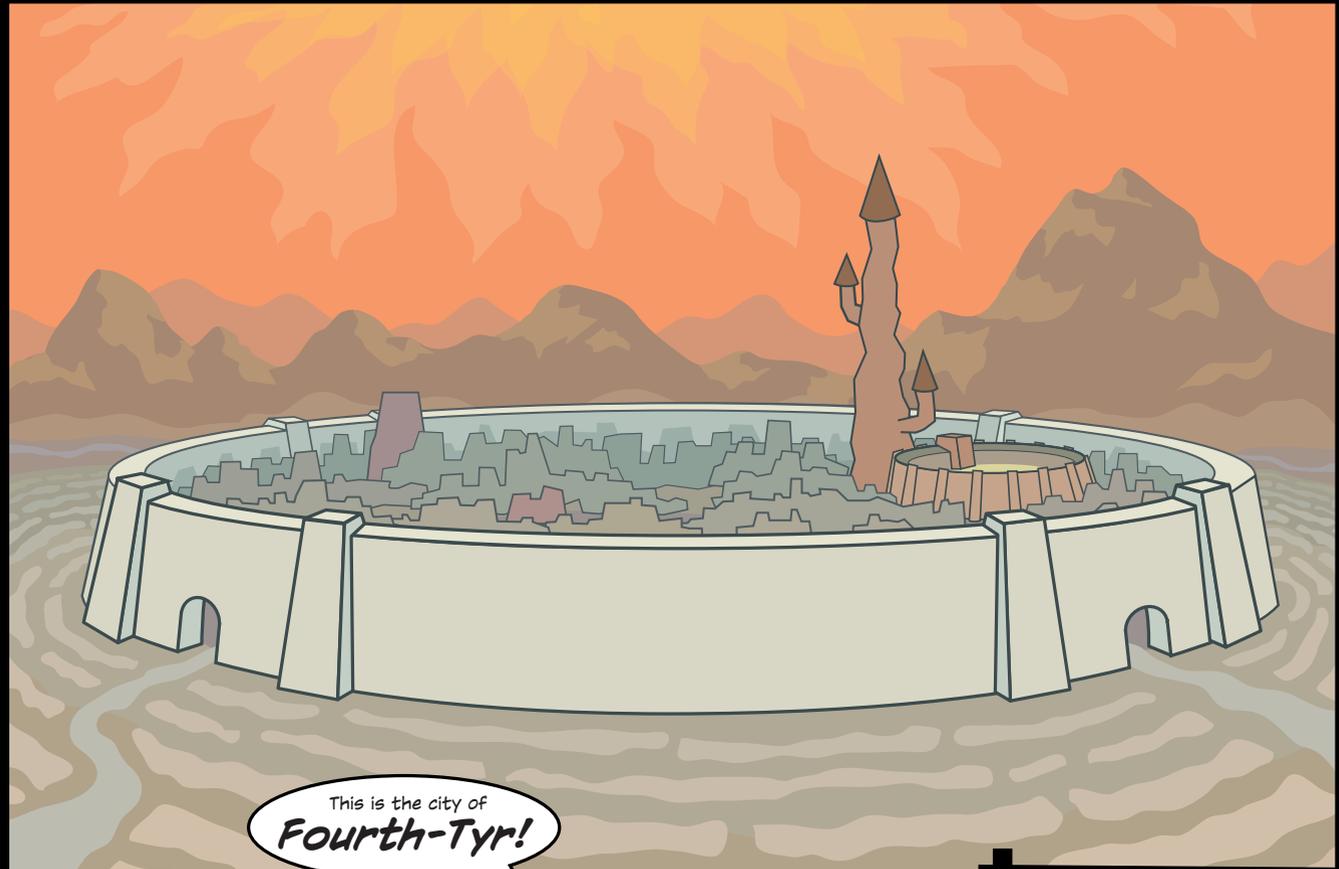
No, no, no. Tyr was destroyed by an earthquake years ago.

Oh. They rebuilt it, then?

Aye, but tha rebuilt city burned ta tha ground.

Then they rebuilt *that*, but it was swallowed up by a huge sandstorm.

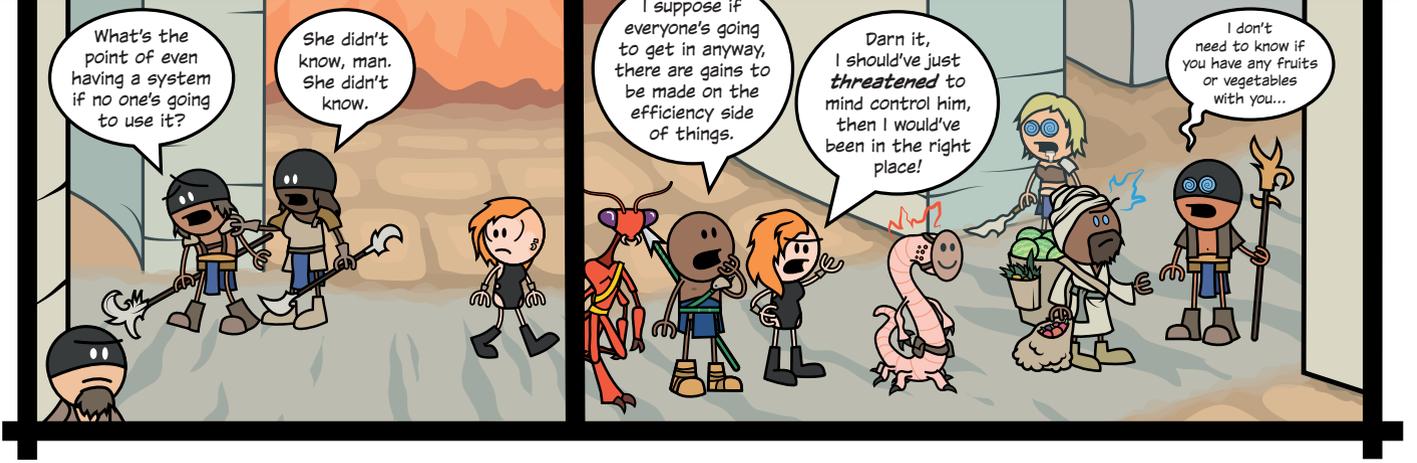
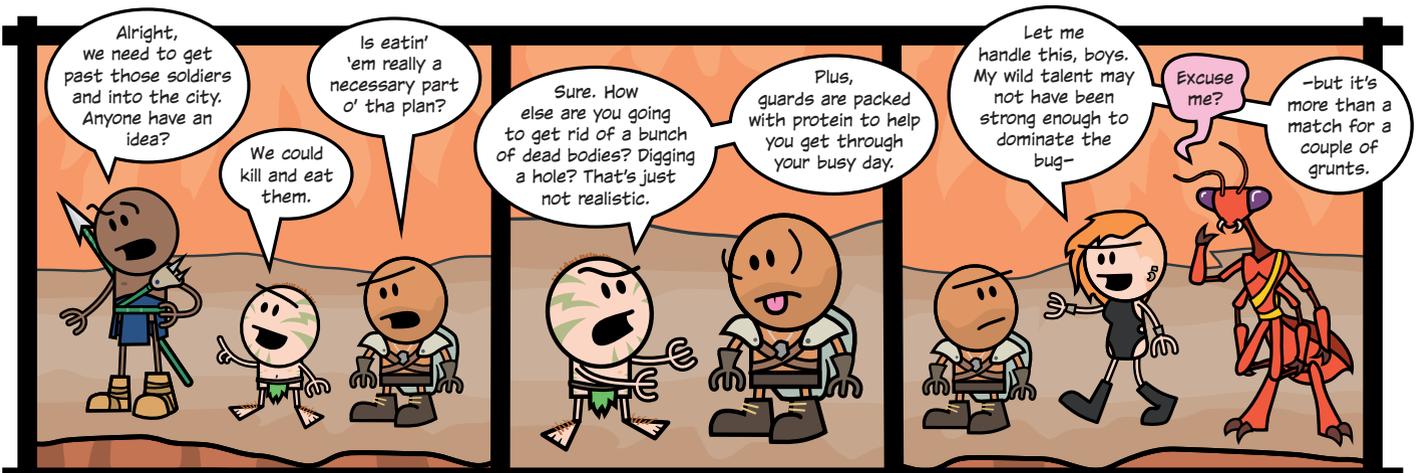
Then the sandstorm exploded!



This is the city of **Fourth-Tyr!**

It's, you know...

It's fine. It gets the job done.





Wait, so this is the corrupt civilization everyone keeps warning me about?

This place is *great!*

What? No, it's your run-of-the-mill hive of scum and villany.

Not even the most wretched.

My whole life, monsters have been dropping those things when I killed them, and I never knew what to do with them until now.

But you have all these other people doing the crappy jobs you don't want to do, and all you need to do is give them some of your little ceramic disks.

Look, you can get anything here! Sticks, rocks, bones—you name it!

You can find all those things outside for *free*, if you look hard enough.

But looking hard is *hard!* Now I don't have to!



They even have hot and cold running sex workers!

Hey there, cutie. How about a party?

I wouldn't step on you unless you paid me.

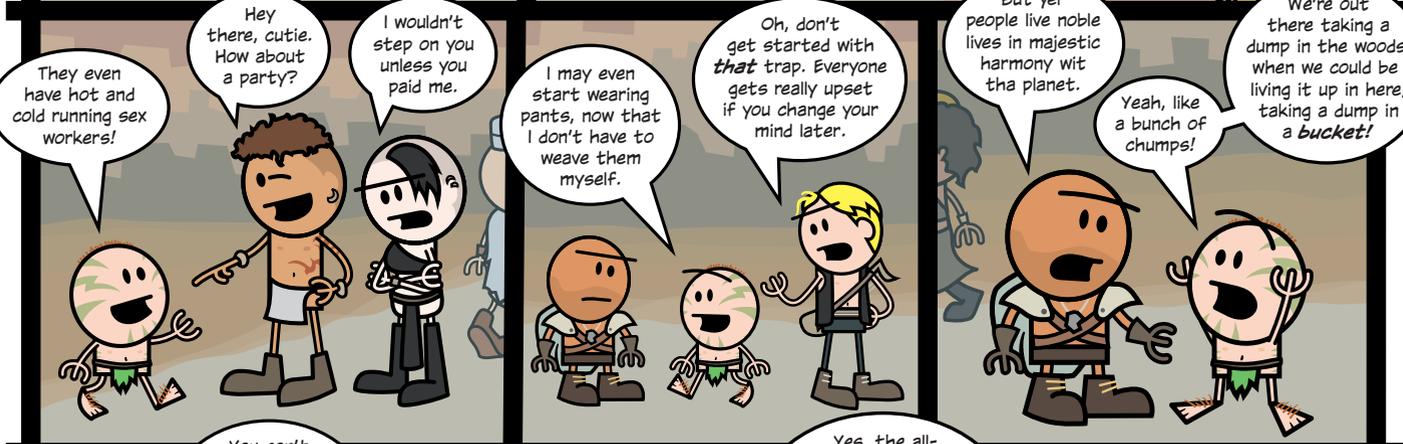
I may even start wearing pants, now that I don't have to weave them myself.

Oh, don't get started with *that* trap. Everyone gets really upset if you change your mind later.

But yer people live noble lives in majestic harmony wit tha planet.

Yeah, like a bunch of chumps!

We're out there taking a dump in the woods, when we could be living it up in here, taking a dump in a *bucket!*



You can't get distracted by flashy new ideas like division of labor or market-based resource allocation.

Yeah, you have to think about all these poor pathetic unwashed slob.

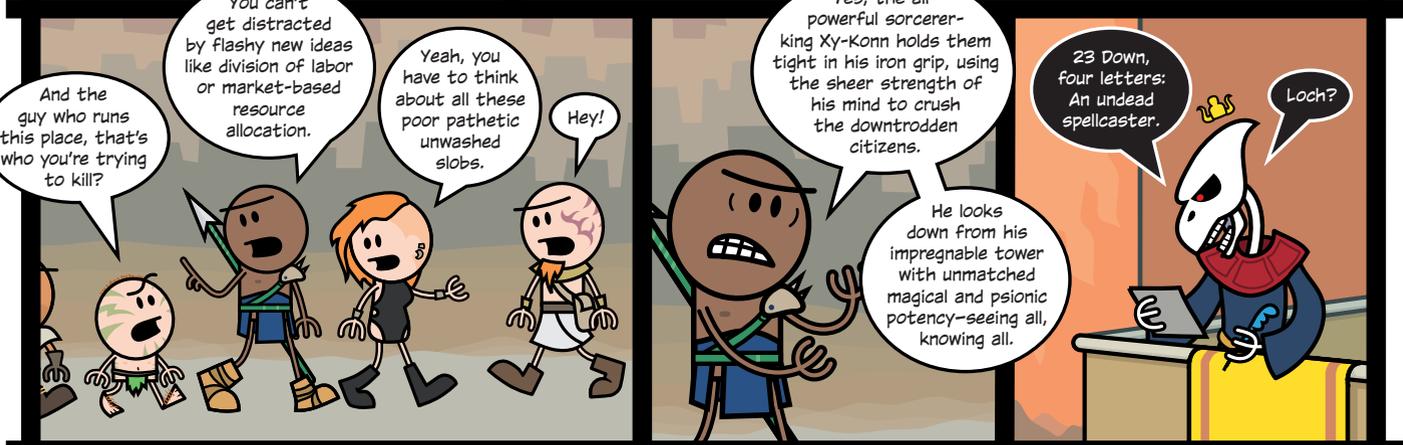
Hey!

Yes, the all-powerful sorcerer-king Xy-Konn holds them tight in his iron grip, using the sheer strength of his mind to crush the downtrodden citizens.

He looks down from his impregnable tower with unmatched magical and psionic potency—seeing all, knowing all.

23 Down, four letters: An undead spellcaster.

Loch?





There you are, my lord. I was hoping to go over the quarterly suffering projections with you.

General misery is way up, buoyed by gains in abject misery.

Sir, if you don't mind me saying, you don't seem as excited for this as usual.

What? I always hate meetings like this.

True, but you normally have the energy to dish out a few insulting names first.

Oh, right. Like pointdexter or number-cruncher.

Again?? I'll have the rut-filling team executed immediately.

I mean I'm feeling bored. Like, what have I really accomplished in a thousand years of tyrannical rulership?

Oh, hey Red Templar. Sure, that's fine.

I guess I've just been feeling stuck in a rut lately.



Sir, how can you say that? You've made Fourth-Tyr into a prosperous beacon of wealth and stability!

Tablelands Monthly just named it a top ten city-state to raise a family in!

Aren't there only seven city-states?

Right, so we beat at least three blank spots!

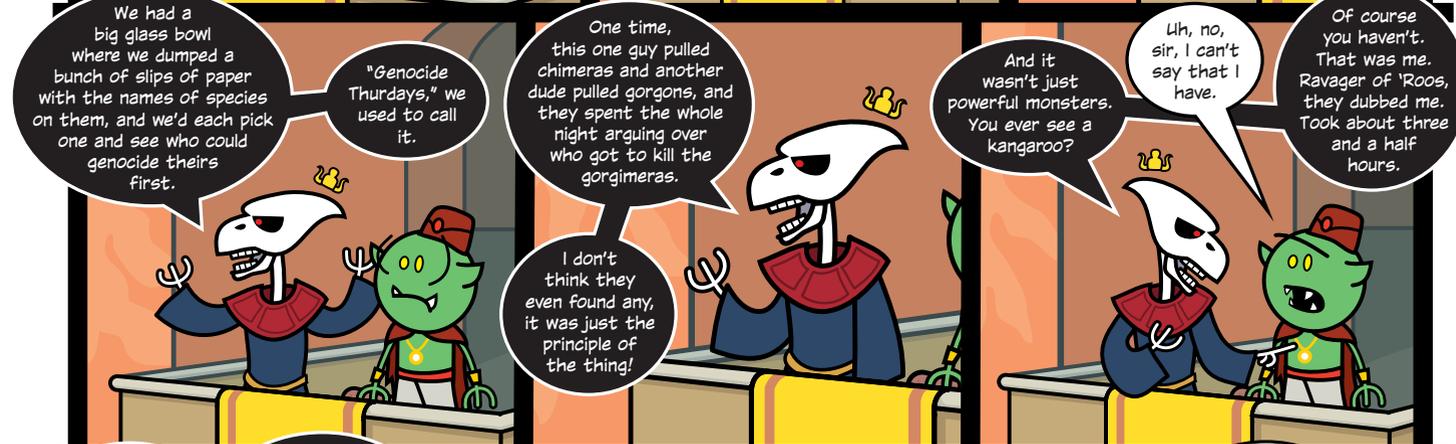
I guess. It's not like the old days, though. You know, me and the other sorcerer-kings were really tight, back in the day.

Before we all settled down and started having children do our manual labor.

We'd have these huge parties at each others' houses, with music and dancing.

I miss the food and the booze and the laughter.

And the genocide, of course.



We had a big glass bowl where we dumped a bunch of slips of paper with the names of species on them, and we'd each pick one and see who could genocide theirs first.

"Genocide Thursdays," we used to call it.

One time, this one guy pulled chimeras and another dude pulled gorgons, and they spent the whole night arguing over who got to kill the gorgimeras.

I don't think they even found any, it was just the principle of the thing!

And it wasn't just powerful monsters. You ever see a kangaroo?

Uh, no, sir, I can't say that I have.

Of course you haven't. That was me. Ravager of 'Roos, they dubbed me. Took about three and a half hours.



Camels were probably a mistake, though. They would've come in handy by now.

But at least we got rid of all those redundant humanoids, like orcs and goblins and kobolds.

Goblins? But sir, isn't the Red Templar a gob-

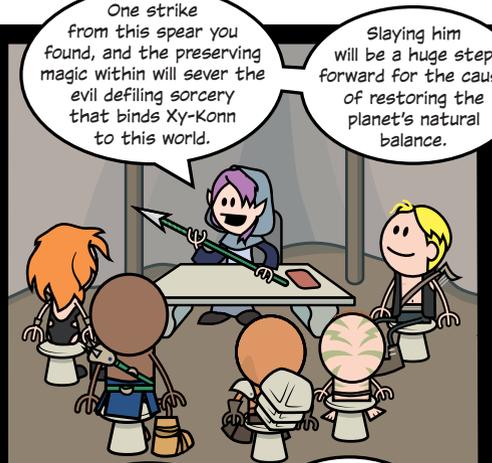
SMACK!

What was that?

He said, "Isn't the Red Templar gobsmacked by your efficient ruthlessness?" and the answer is yes, sir. Yes, I am.

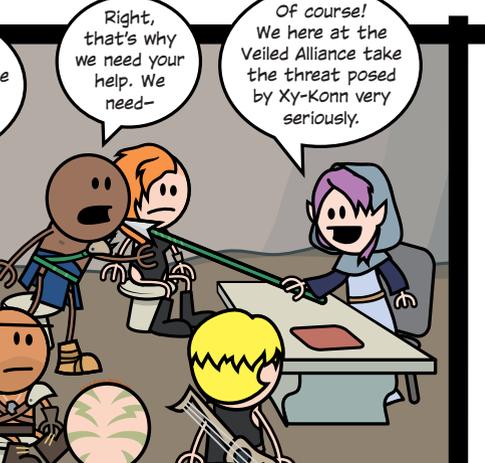


This is excellent work, Roy!



One strike from this spear you found, and the preserving magic within will sever the evil defiling sorcery that binds Xy-Konn to this world.

Slaying him will be a huge step forward for the cause of restoring the planet's natural balance.



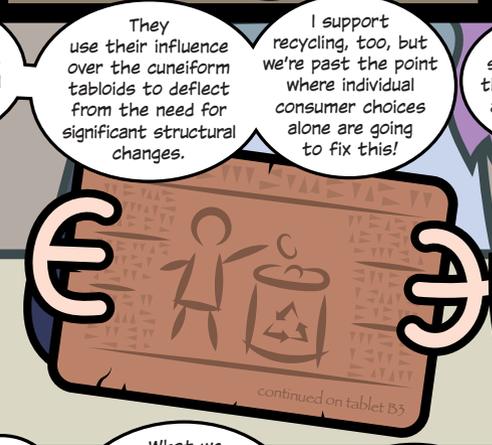
Right, that's why we need your help. We need-

Of course! We here at the Veiled Alliance take the threat posed by Xy-Konn very seriously.



Everyone knows that this world's environment has been ravaged over the years by the cruel evil of defiling magic.

But did you know the majority of ecological destruction is caused by just a handful of powerful sorcerers? It's true!



They use their influence over the cuneiform tablids to deflect from the need for significant structural changes.

I support recycling, too, but we're past the point where individual consumer choices alone are going to fix this!

I mean, that ship sailed when the oceans boiled away, don't you think?

How did a ship sail without an ocean?

Exactly!!
What's an "ocean"?



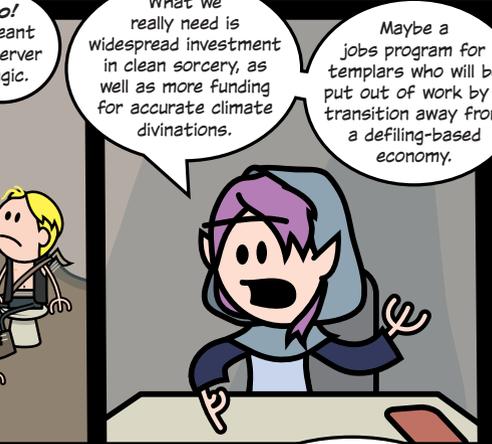
All while ignoring the obvious alternative to their destructive arcane practices.

Not that one!

No! I meant preserver magic.

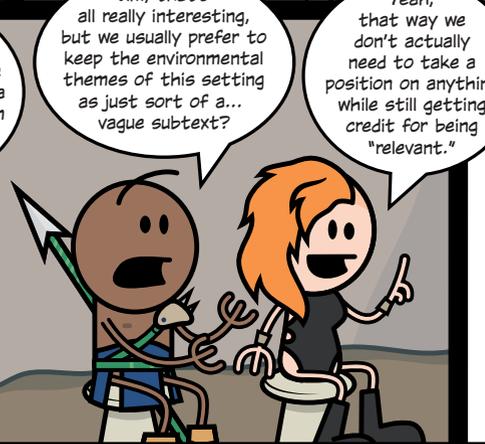
Psionics?

Elemental clerics?



What we really need is widespread investment in clean sorcery, as well as more funding for accurate climate divinations.

Maybe a jobs program for templars who will be put out of work by a transition away from a defiling-based economy.



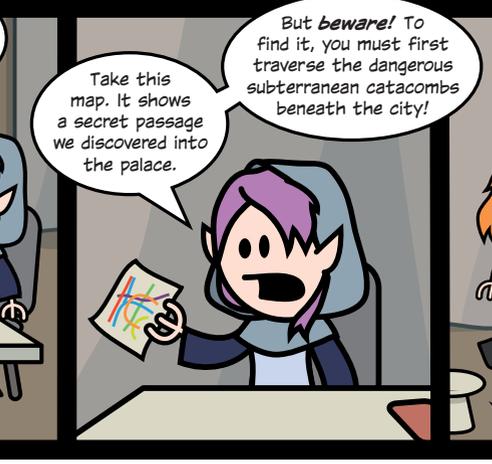
Um, that's all really interesting, but we usually prefer to keep the environmental themes of this setting as just sort of a... vague subtext?

Yeah, that way we don't actually need to take a position on anything while still getting credit for being "relevant."



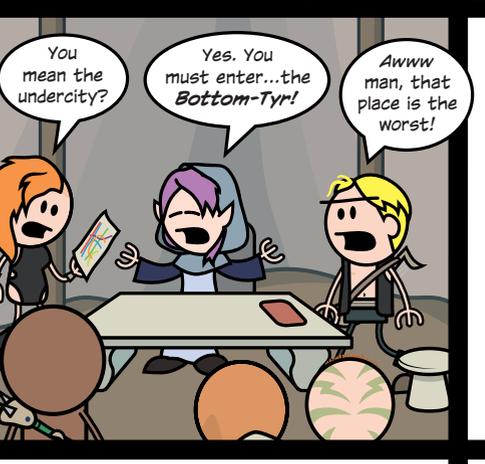
What we really need is help sneaking into Xy-konn's tower.

Oh! Sure, I can do that.



Take this map. It shows a secret passage we discovered into the palace.

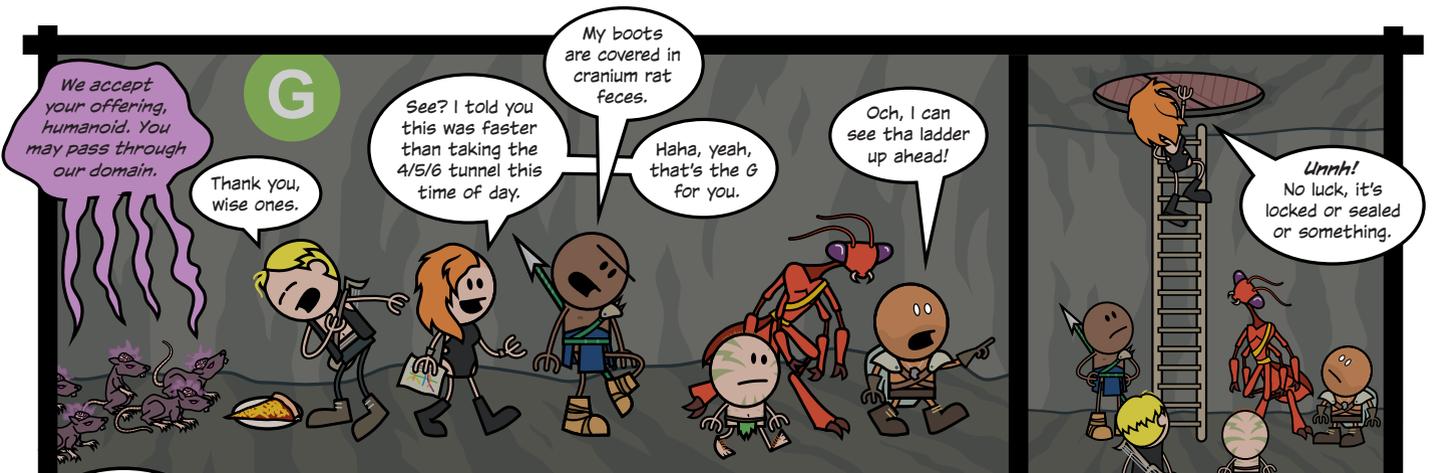
But beware! To find it, you must first traverse the dangerous subterranean catacombs beneath the city!



You mean the undercity?

Yes. You must enter...the **Bottom-Tyr!**

Awww man, that place is the worst!



We accept your offering, humanoid. You may pass through our domain.

G

Thank you, wise ones.

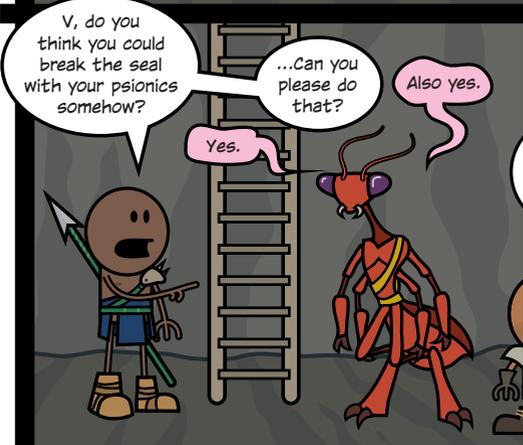
See? I told you this was faster than taking the 4/5/6 tunnel this time of day.

My boots are covered in cranium rat faces.

Haha, yeah, that's the G for you.

Och, I can see the ladder up ahead!

Ummh! No luck, it's locked or sealed or something.



V, do you think you could break the seal with your psionics somehow?

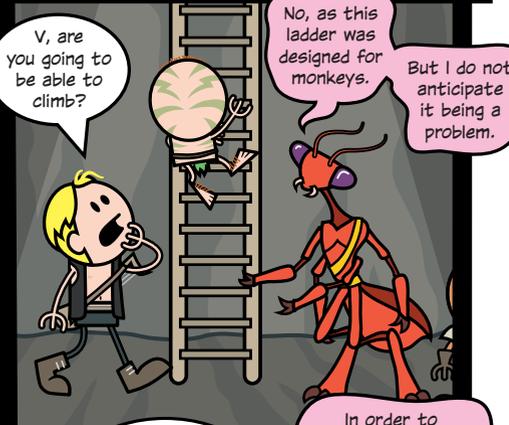
...Can you please do that?

Also yes.

Yes.



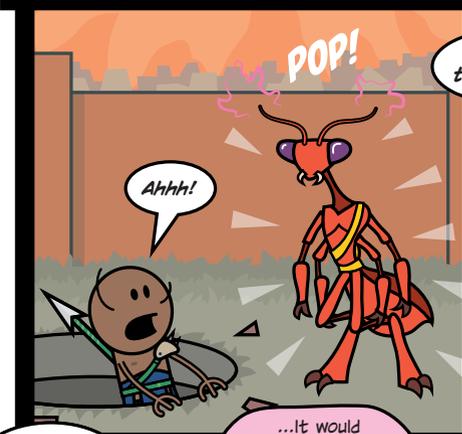
Great! Everyone up the ladder!



V, are you going to be able to climb?

No, as this ladder was designed for monkeys.

But I do not anticipate it being a problem.



POP!

Ahhh!

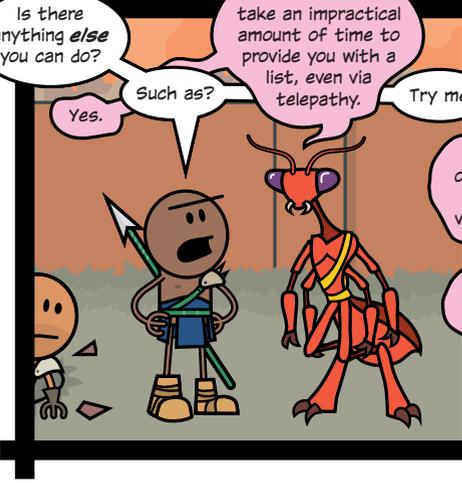
You can teleport?!

Why didn't you say so? We could've teleported into the city! Or right into the tower!

At no point before now did you ask.

Of course we didn't ask! Why would we randomly ask someone we just met, "Hey, can you teleport?"

In order to determine whether or not they could teleport. A lesson learned, perhaps.



Is there anything *else* you can do?

Such as?

...It would take an impractical amount of time to provide you with a list, even via telepathy.

Try me.

I am capable of algebra, and geometry, and trigonometry.

I am capable of leaping moderate distances.

OK, OK, you were right. You can stop.

I am capable of graciously accepting when I have been proven correct.

I am capable of understanding sarcasm.

I am capable of differentiating between a wide variety of colors.

I am capable of starting fires with my mind.

Aye, how magnan'mous o' ye.

I am capable of folding a cloth napkin so that it resembles a swan.

I am capable of not eating soup.

I am capable of performing a threat display to dissuade predation.

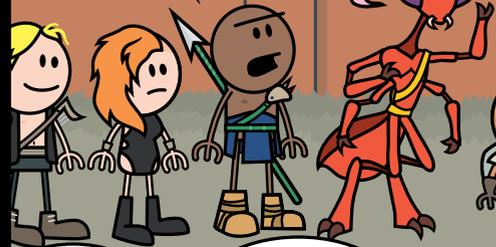
I am capable of rotating my head approximately 179.3 degrees.

I am capable of—

OK, well, now that I know, can you teleport us into the tower itself?

...No. The tower is sealed against dimensional travel.

Of course it is. Guess we're walking, then.



Wow! Look at how lush this garden is!

Yeah, I've seen worse places to sneak through.

Och, disgraceful! Tha ev'n a wretch like Xy-Konn would ally 'imself wit such a malign force.

Ta invite it into 'is own palace like this!!

You have a problem with... **water??**

Aye, lass. I'm an elemental cleric, worshippin' Earth. Tha means tha other elements are enemies o' me faith.

An' Water's tha worst.

Water **wants** ye ta think it's all splashy an' harmless, but look at all tha damage it's done ta innocent rocks ov'r tha centuries.

Ye call it erosion, I call it a pattern o' abuse.

I don't know why I feel like saying this, but please tell me this isn't going to be a thing where you hate trees.

Tha trees? Tha would be silly, wha haf trees ev'r done wrong? Tha na ev'n sentient.

Oh good.

It's tha **water** tha's tha real villain 'ere.



An' it's na just Earth it hurts. Ev'ryone blames Fire when thar house burns down-

-but who d'ya find sittin' around in puddles once they put out tha flames?

But that's because they used the water to put out the-

I've had rocks go up my nose. It's a lot worse.

But Earth isn't even the opposing element of Water! Earth is opposed to Air!

Och, but what're ye gonna do, be mad at tha air? Tha's just dumb, ye need air ta live.

You need **water** to live!!

Sure, if'n ye believe thar propaganda.



Aye! Awfully suspicious, dinnae ye think?

An' haf ye ev'r had water go up yer nose? Terrible!

Wait, so then you don't just shave your beard-

Don't you slice up your whole face?

Can we just call this a rare win for resource conservation and get back to the mission? Is that a thing we can do?

This doesn't even make sense. How do you clean yourself? How do you brush your teeth??

Sand?? How does that even work?

I use sand.

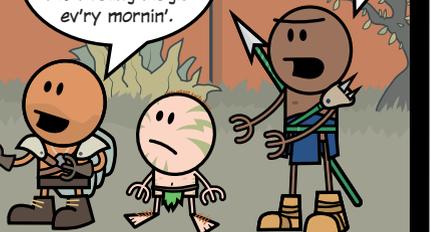
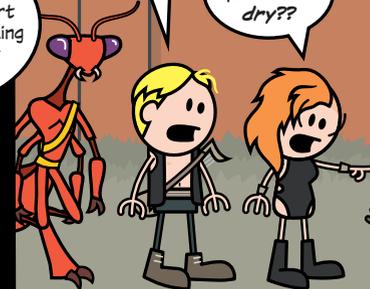
OK, to be fair, every fantasy setting falls apart if you start thinking too hard about dental health.

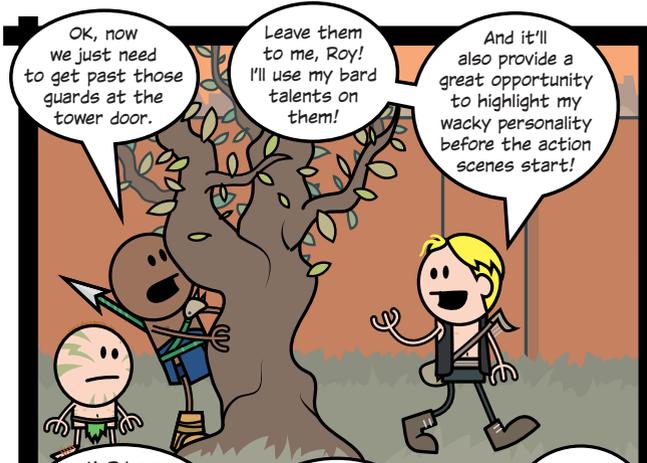
Wait, so then you don't just shave your beard-

Don't you slice up your whole face?

You shave your beard **dry??**

An' tha's why tha benevol'nt Earth provides me wit healing magic ev'ry mornin'.





OK, now we just need to get past those guards at the tower door.

Leave them to me, Roy! I'll use my bard talents on them!

And it'll also provide a great opportunity to highlight my wacky personality before the action scenes start!



Wait, Elan-!

Hello, gentlepeople!

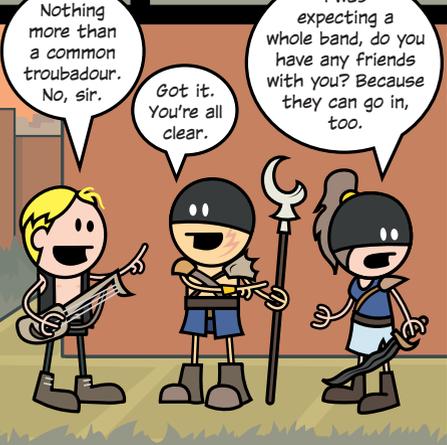
Who are you?

Are you authorized to be in this area?



Me? I am but a humble bard. A simple performer, traveling the dusty wastelands and plying my musical trade for the people.

Oh, you're tonight's show? Running a little early, but head on up.



Nothing more than a common troubadour. No, sir.

Got it. You're all clear.

I was expecting a whole band, do you have any friends with you? Because they can go in, too.



I'm definitely **not** a secret assassin.

I didn't mean to imply that you were.

Good, because I'm not.

Right.



But **he** is!!

SKLURTCH!



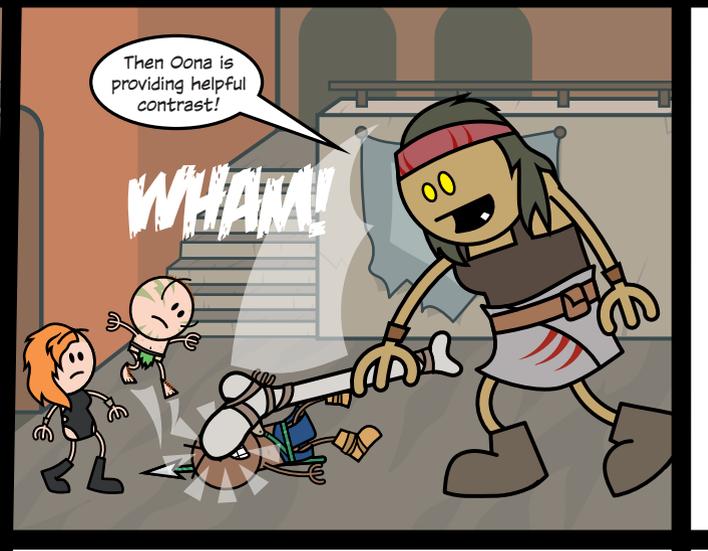
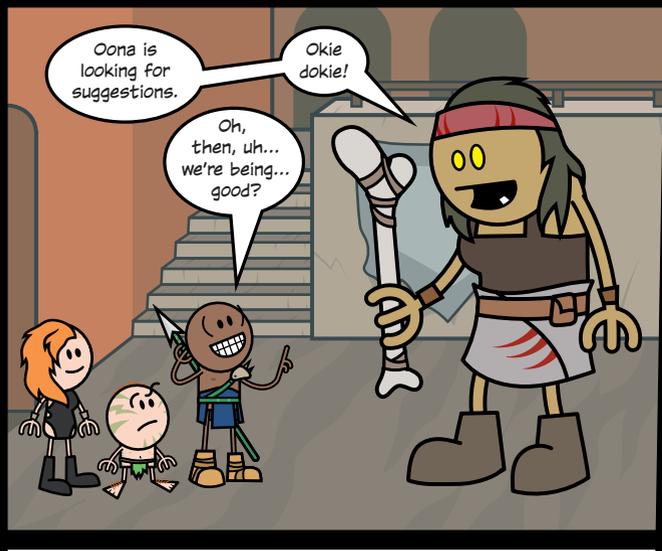
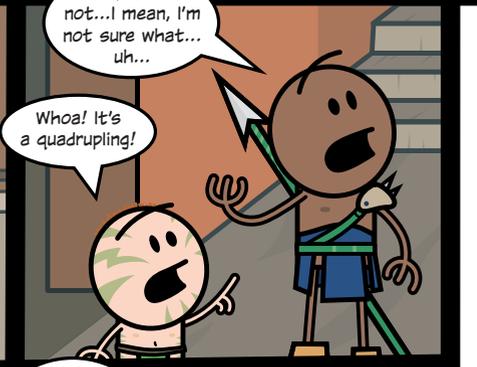
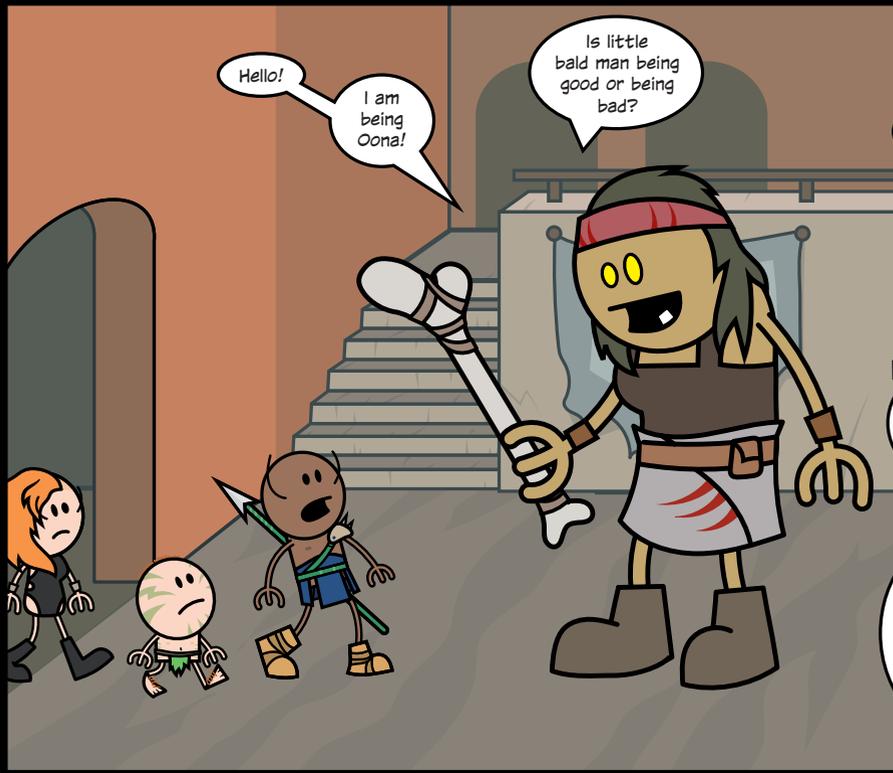
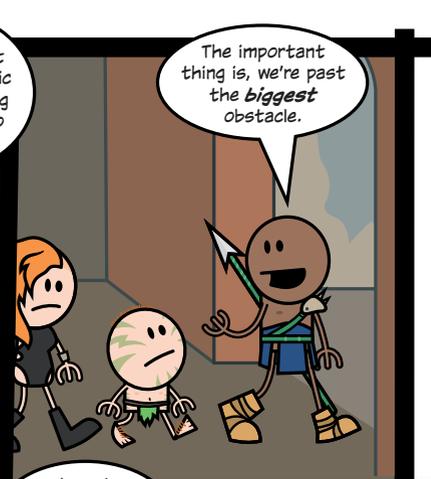
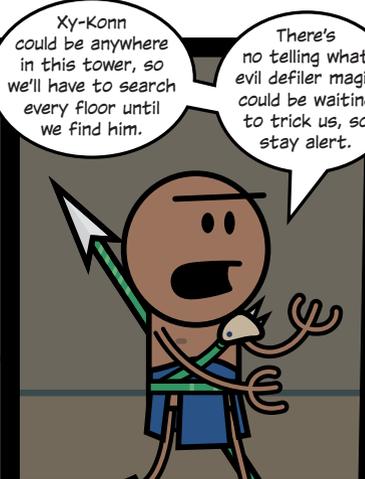
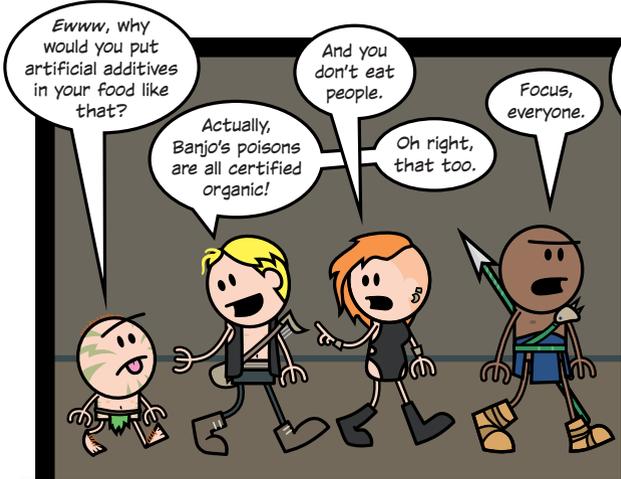
WHUMP

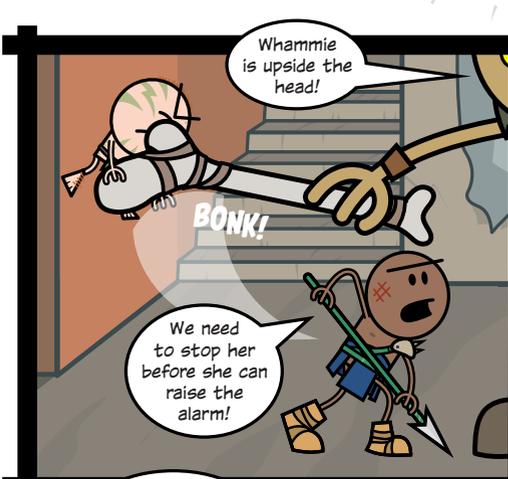


Hahaha, puppets are great.

Third floor, second door on the left, my dude.

Zzzzz...





Whammie is upside the head!

BONK!

We need to stop her before she can raise the alarm!



Oh right! Ha ha, Oona is always forgetting the alarm.

CLUNK!



Do not be worrying, giant gong in far end of room!

Auntie Oona will be hitting you soon!

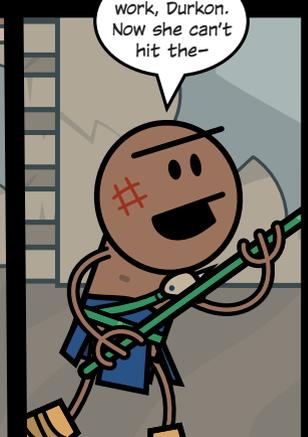


Tha power o' Earth'll stop 'er in 'er tracks, lad!



Oh! Floor is giving Oona foot hugs.

Oona loves you too, little floor, but now is not a good time!



Great work, Durkon. Now she can't hit the-

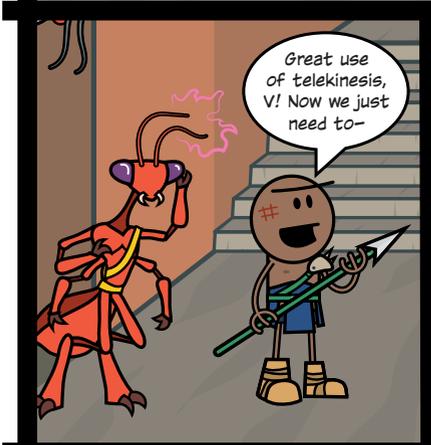
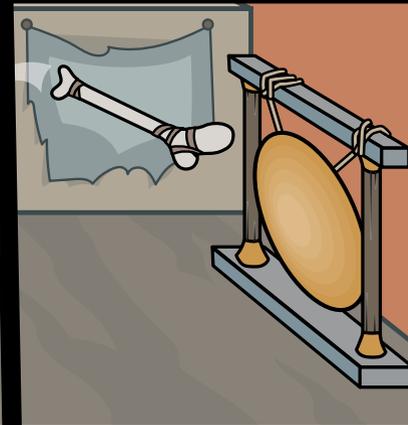


Bone fling!

Wheeeee!

WHOMP!

Oww!



Great use of telekinesis, V! Now we just need to-



Is wonderful.

KKtght!

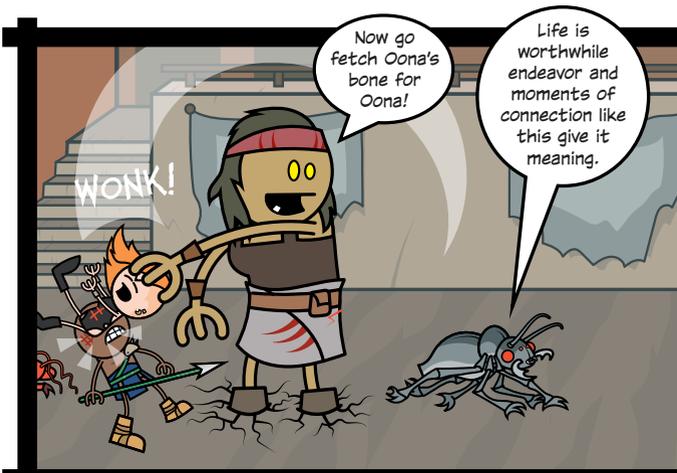


Bug down, people! The bug is down!

Is all doing well.

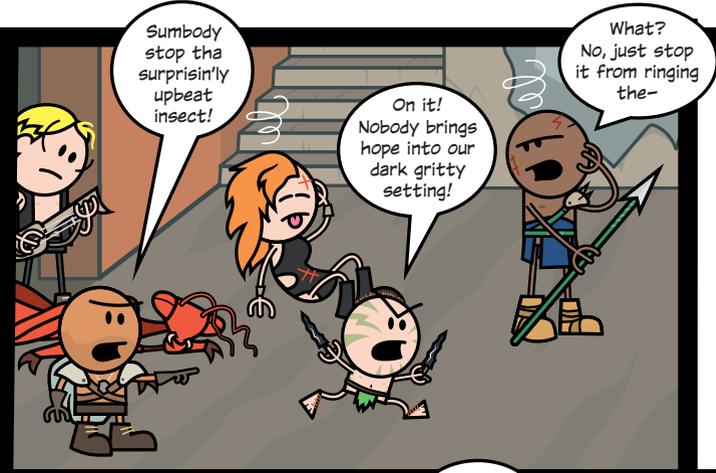
You are being great dog-bug, Brightside! Oona is giving you treats later!

When warm embrace of life envelops you, you will remember and appreciate each treat freely given.



Now go fetch Oona's bone for Oona!

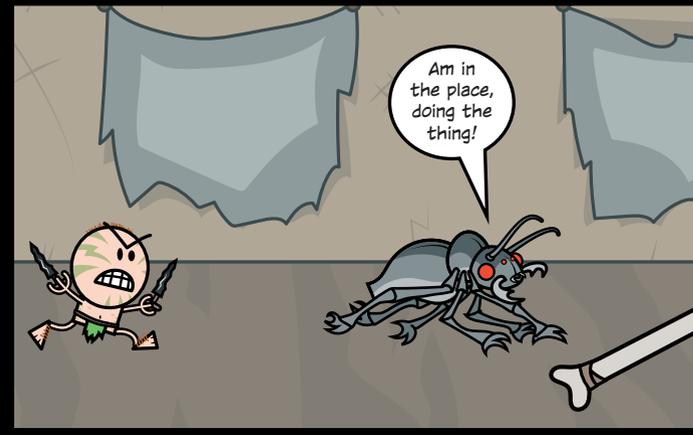
Life is worthwhile endeavor and moments of connection like this give it meaning.



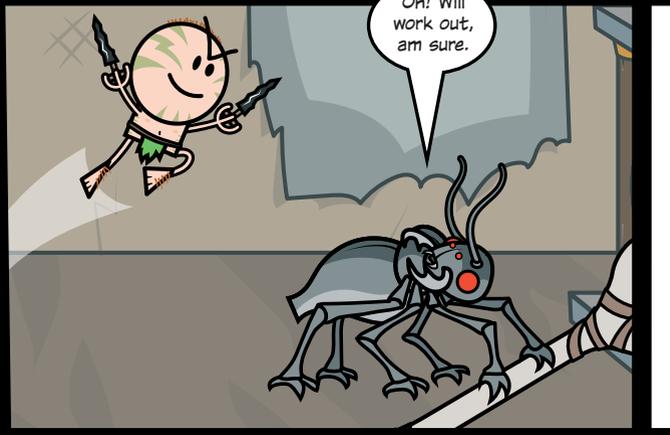
Sumbdy stop tha surprisin'ly upbeat insect!

On it! Nobody brings hope into our dark gritty setting!

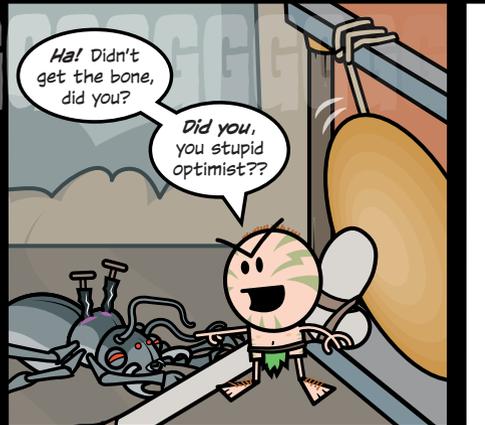
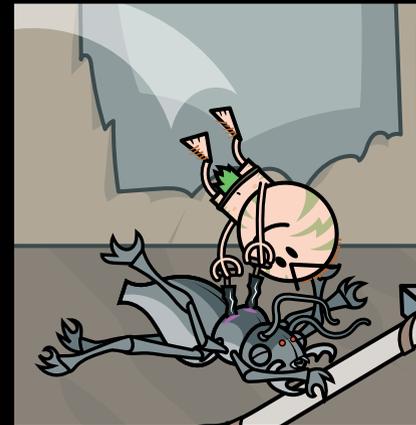
What? No, just stop it from ringing the-



Am in the place, doing the thing!



Oh! Will work out, am sure.



Ha! Didn't get the bone, did you?

Did you, you stupid optimist??



Is fine.

Is ultimately but one loose thread in grand beautiful tapestry of life.



Wait, so you're saying all those guards rushed in because the gong got hit?

Yes!

How did they know to do that?

Because... I don't know, because they have rules for it. They train to respond to the alarm.

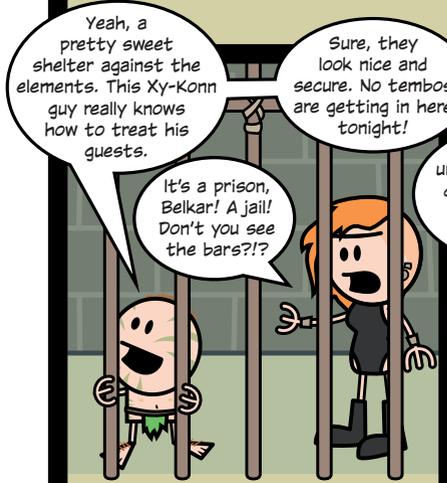
Huh. In my tribe, we just yell out loud when we're getting attacked.

Like, "Hey, I know it's late but just FYI, I'm getting eaten by a ravenous tembo."

It's a pretty flexible system, since you can also use it to announce that there are leftover snacks in the conference grove.

Anyway, sorry about that. But it all worked out fine.

What? No, it didn't! Look where we are!



Yeah, a pretty sweet shelter against the elements. This Xy-Konn guy really knows how to treat his guests.

It's a prison, Belkar! A jail! Don't you see the bars?!?!

Sure, they look nice and secure. No tembos are getting in here tonight!

Och, ye unnerstand traps, dinnae ye? We're trapped! We cannae leave!

Uh, yes we can. We have a big teleporting bug.

OK, but that's not... They didn't know we had that when they-

We can't escape.

No, I mean... we *shouldn't* escape.

Ugh, it's hard to explain when there's a guard standing right outside.

Leave that to me, Roy!

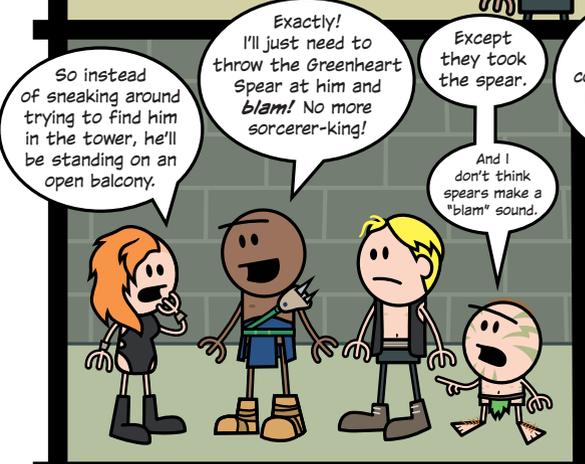


You know, I really didn't expect that to end up being useful.

That's the power of foreshadowing!

Here's the deal: I heard the guards say as they were locking us up that they're going to send us to fight in the gladiatorial arena in the morning.

Xy-Konn always oversees the weekly bouts personally—he likes to give the "thumbs down" himself.



So instead of sneaking around trying to find him in the tower, he'll be standing on an open balcony.

Exactly! I'll just need to throw the Greenheart Spear at him and *blam!* No more sorcerer-king!

Except they took the spear.

And I don't think spears make a "blam" sound.

Right, but as a card-carrying gladiator, my union contract gives me the right to choose my weapon before the fight starts.

So Haley, I'll need you to sneak out tonight, find the spear, and swap it into the arena's armory so I can pick it.

Do you think you can manage that?

I think so, yeah.

CAPTURED HERO GEAR STORAGE

-and the most important thing is, if anyone breaks out of jail and comes to get their stuff, *do not* fight them until they're fully equipped.

It's a pain in the ass for everyone if they have to recalculate all their combat stats on the fly.

CAPTURED HERO GEAR STORAGE

Got it.

Dude, what the hell? The recycling bin is right over there!



CAPTURED HERO GEAR STORAGE

We all need to do our part to save the planet, you know.

Yeah, OK. Sorry.



Didn't we used to send this stuff over to the city-state of Urik?

Yes, where they would break it down with their special Urik Acid.

But alas, poor Urik won't take it anymore, and this is a lot cheaper than recycling it ourselves.

Ha ha, yeah, I guess you just need to pay one guy, right?

... Ah, crap.



Urik...I could be halfway to Urik by morning, if I left now.

I bet a magic spear would fetch a good price, too.

And it would be pretty good...until Xy-Konn and his legions invaded there, too.

Darn it!

What is this world coming to when a girl can't even rely on her ruthless instinct for self-preservation anymore??





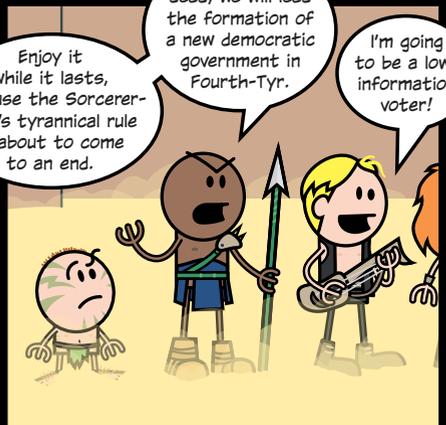
Wow! This place is amazing!



I've never seen so many people in one place without it being a huge battle.

Xy-Konn dishes out a gruesome spectacle for the rabble to watch, controlling the populace with bread and circuses.

Dinner and a show? Classy!

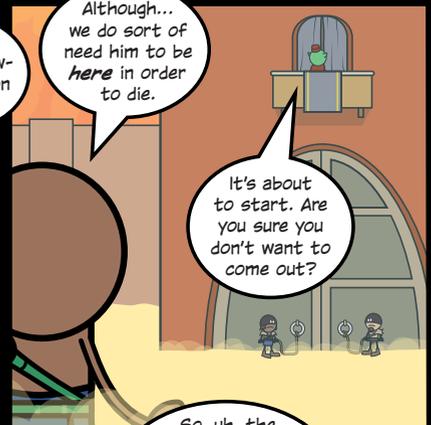


Enjoy it while it lasts, because the Sorcerer-King's tyrannical rule is about to come to an end.

After he's dead, we will lead the formation of a new democratic government in Fourth-Tyr.

I'm going to be a low-information voter!

Although... we do sort of need him to be **here** in order to die.



It's about to start. Are you sure you don't want to come out?



Yes! It's the same thing, week after week.

A bunch of sweaty Boris Vallejo knock-offs getting eaten by whatever we pulled out of the wasteland.

6 Down, nine letters, "Give in." Starts with an A.



Acquiesce.

No, that's your answer.

Glad you see it my way.

Oh! Yeah, thanks.

If I can have everyone's attention?

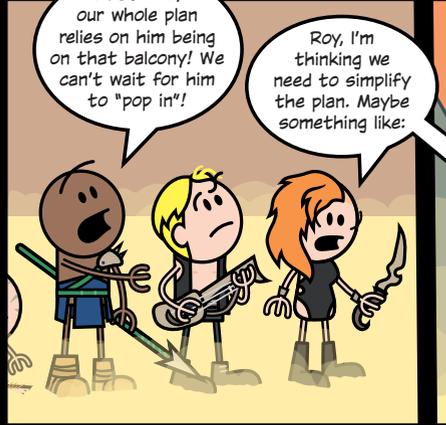


So, uh, the great Sorcerer-King Xy-Konn is... running a bit late? He's doing important sorcerer-kinging?

Whatever, I don't need to explain. If you don't like it, we'll kill you. Let's start, and maybe he'll pop in later.



Guards, bring out the opponent.



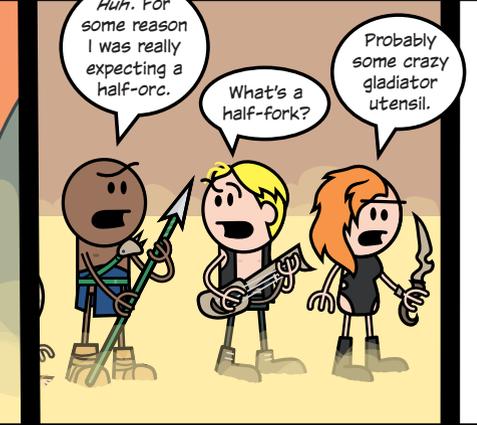
What? No, our whole plan relies on him being on that balcony! We can't wait for him to "pop in"!

Roy, I'm thinking we need to simplify the plan. Maybe something like:



Step 1: Stay alive.

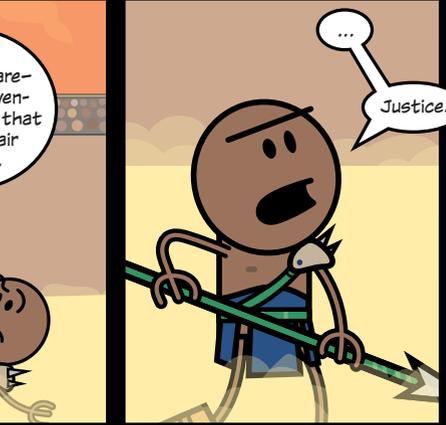
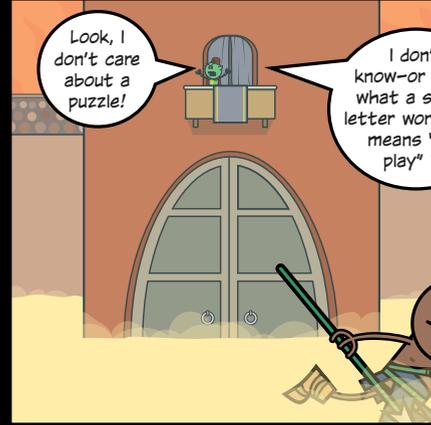
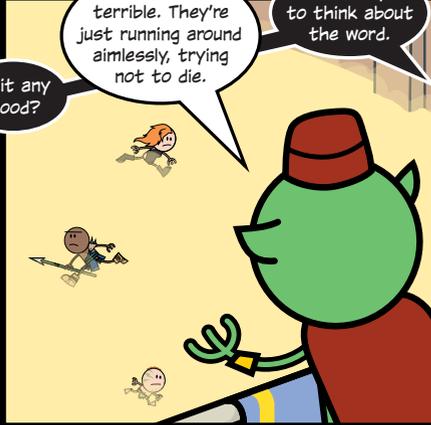
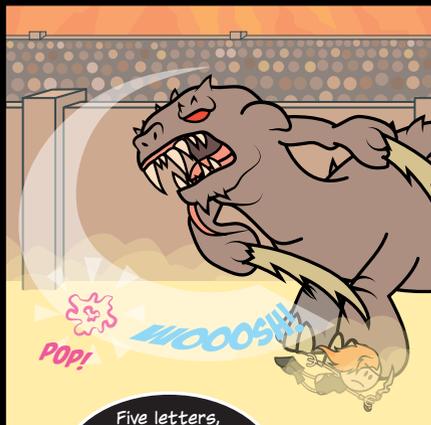
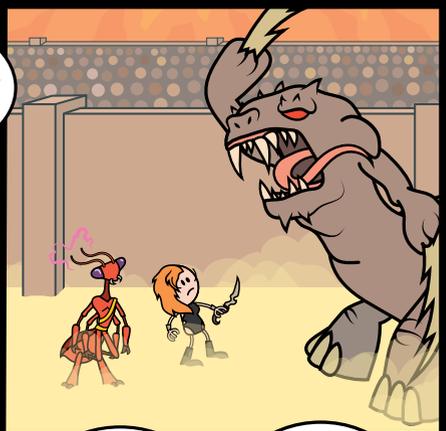
GRRRRRAAWWR!!

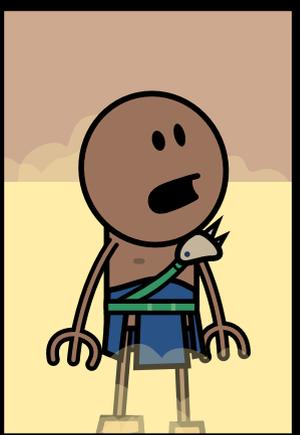
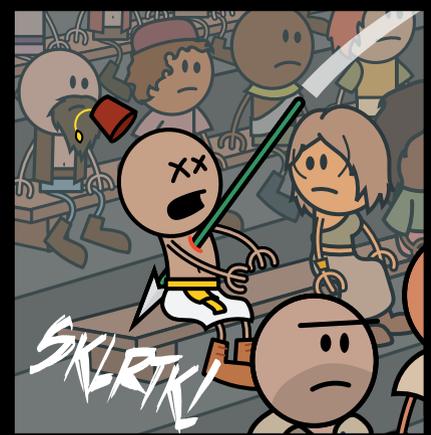
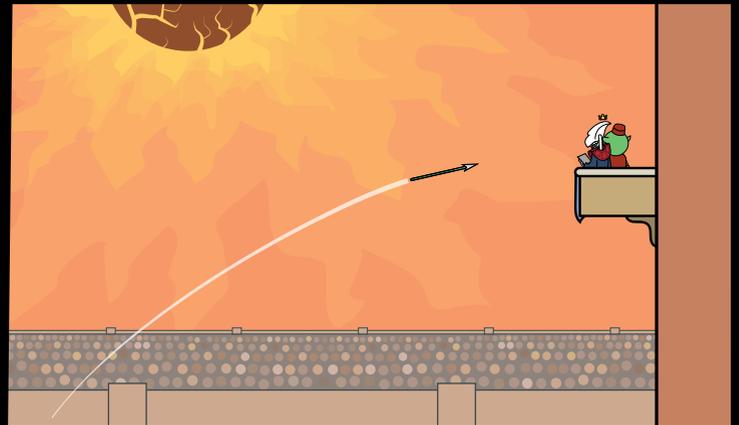
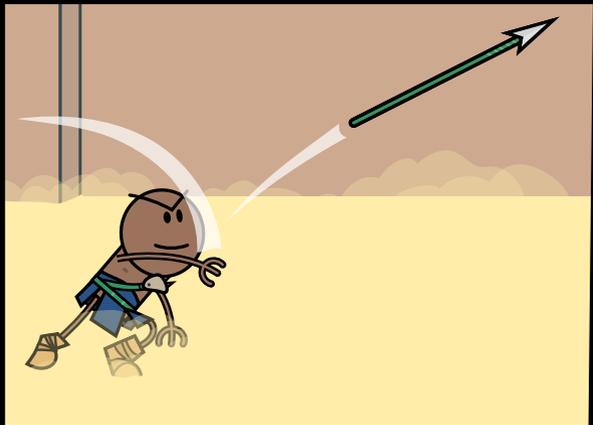
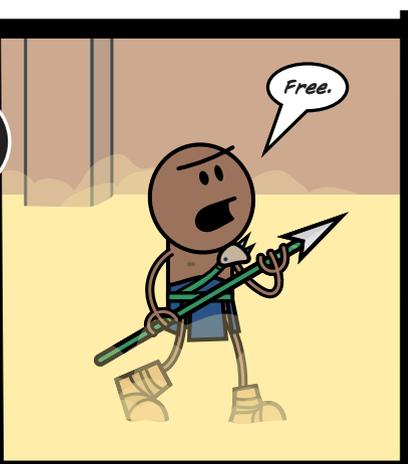
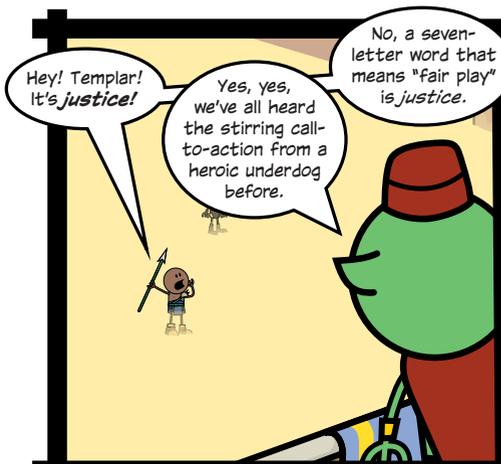


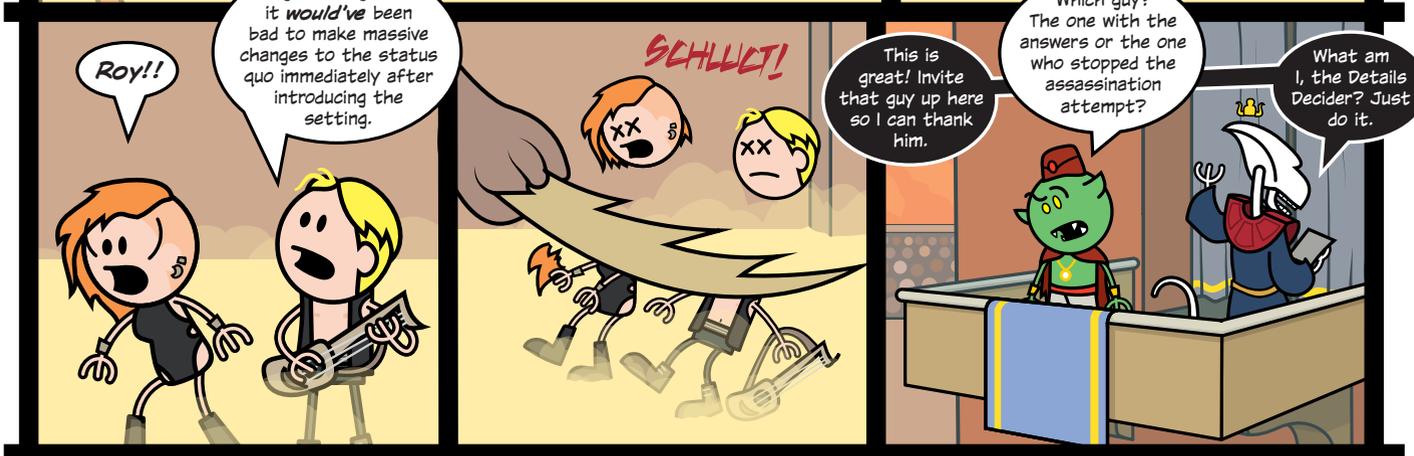
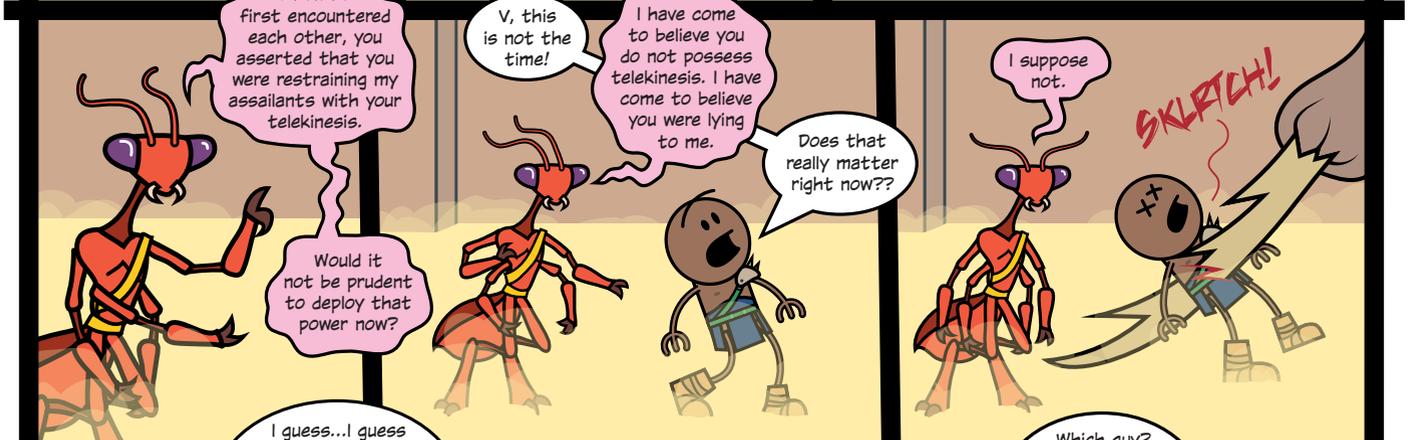
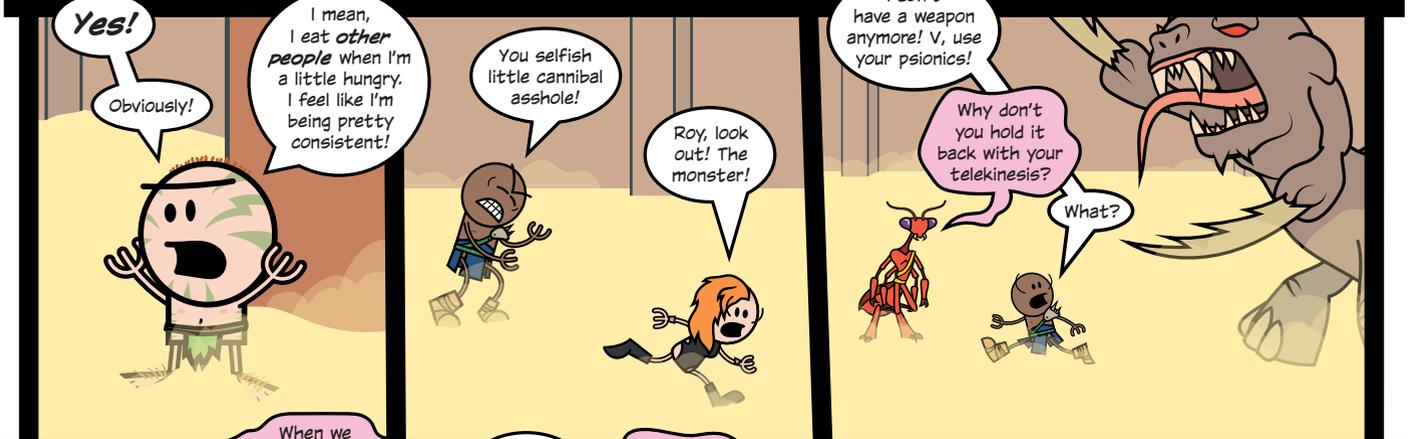
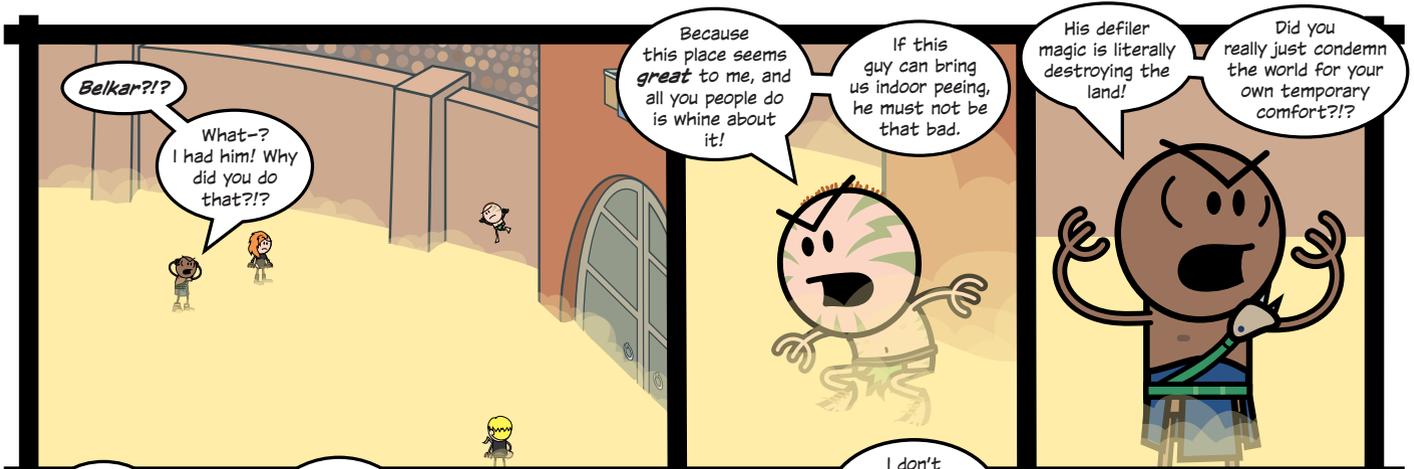
Huh. For some reason I was really expecting a half-orc.

What's a half-fork?

Probably some crazy gladiator utensil.





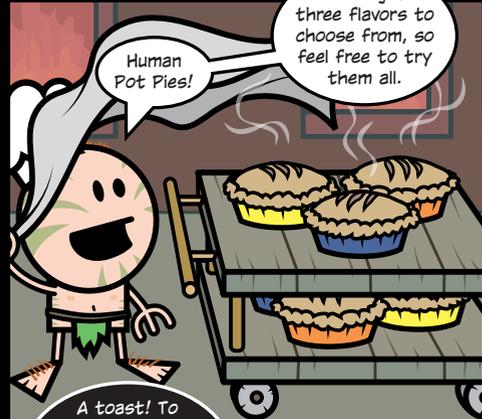




Dinner is served!



On this special occasion, I've used your state-of-the-art indoor fireplace to develop an original recipe:



Human Pot Pies!

We've got three flavors to choose from, so feel free to try them all.



Oh, Oona will be feeling bad about this tomorrow, but today they are smelling delicious!

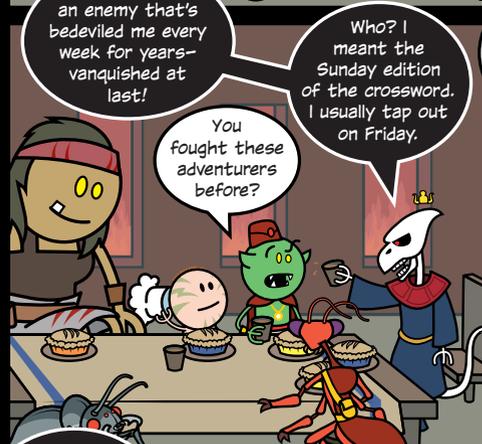
But wasn't Oona seeing a dwarf with them?

He's in the soup. Trust me, he'd be so much madder about that.



I still can't believe you gave this guy a job.

He's my new executive chef! Emphasis on executing!



A toast! To an enemy that's bedeviled me every week for years—vanquished at last!

Who? I meant the Sunday edition of the crossword. I usually tap out on Friday.

You fought these adventurers before?



Well, I for one would like to say that thanks to the intel our new employee gave us—

—we were able to detain dozens of members of the so-called "Veiled Alliance," a known dissident organization.

I don't think we're going to be hearing any more from this "resistance" any time soon.



Their leadership even included a number of preserver wizards.

Ugh. A bunch of goody two-sandals who think their spells don't stink, just because they don't drain the land's lifeforce.



Well, we'll see if we can't increase their carbon footprint by the time we're done with them.

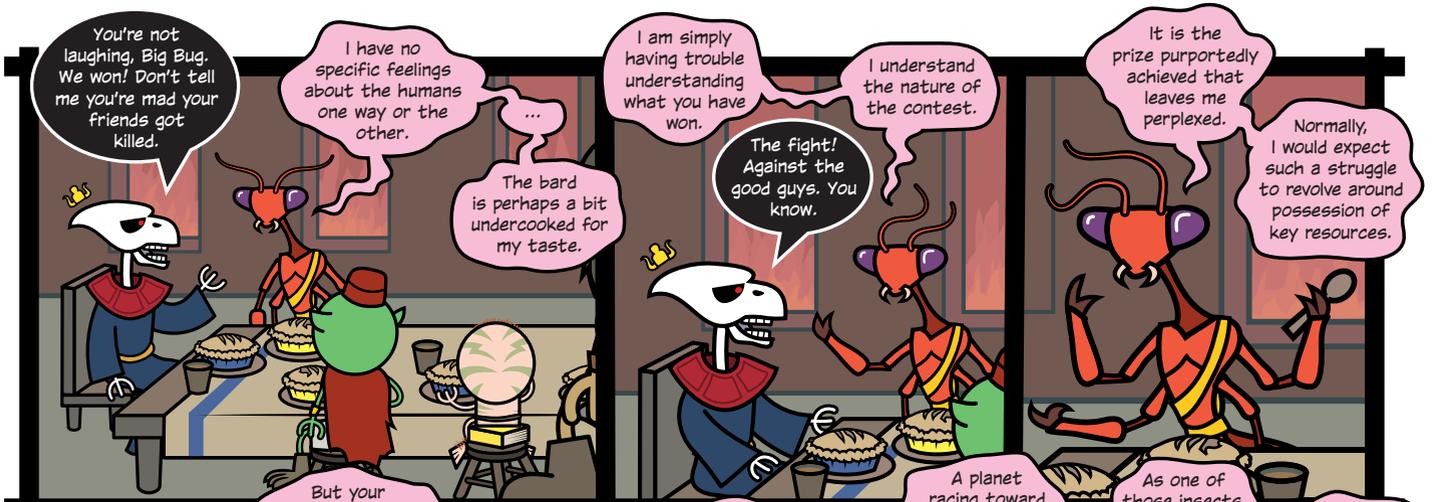
Are we... going to teach them defiler magic?

No, we're going to set their feet on fire.



Ha ha ha ha ha ha!

Why aim for carbon neutral when you can go all the way to carbon evil, am I right?



You're not laughing, Big Bug. We won! Don't tell me you're mad your friends got killed.

I have no specific feelings about the humans one way or the other.

...
The bard is perhaps a bit undercooked for my taste.

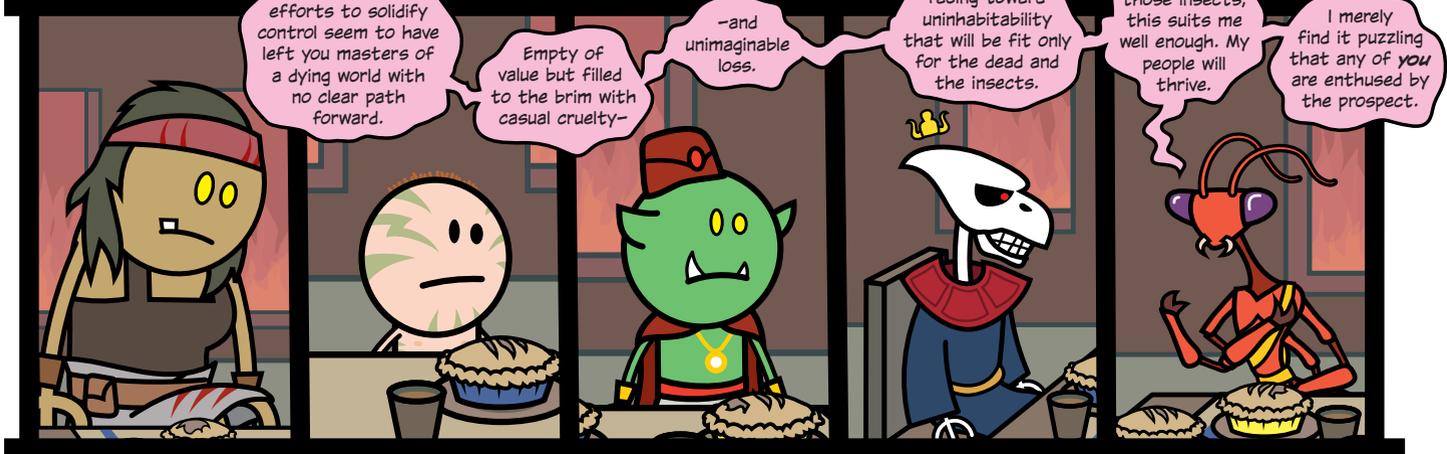
I am simply having trouble understanding what you have won.

The fight! Against the good guys. You know.

I understand the nature of the contest.

It is the prize purportedly achieved that leaves me perplexed.

Normally, I would expect such a struggle to revolve around possession of key resources.



But your efforts to solidify control seem to have left you masters of a dying world with no clear path forward.

Empty of value but filled to the brim with casual cruelty-

-and unimaginable loss.

A planet racing toward uninhabitability that will be fit only for the dead and the insects.

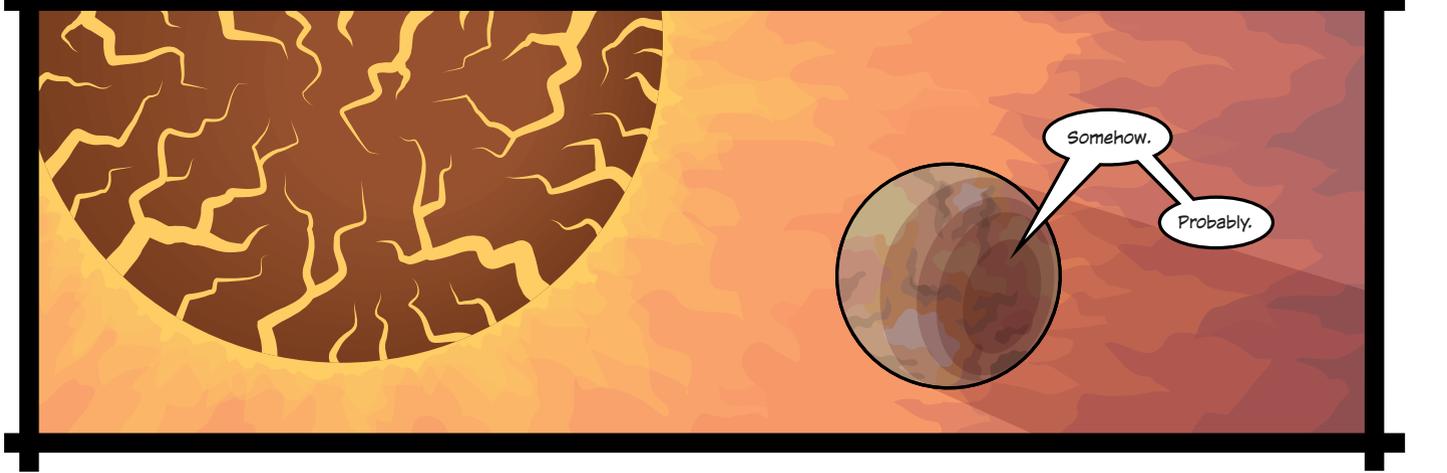
As one of those insects, this suits me well enough. My people will thrive.

I merely find it puzzling that any of you are enthused by the prospect.



No worries.

Is all working out just fine.



Somehow.

Probably.