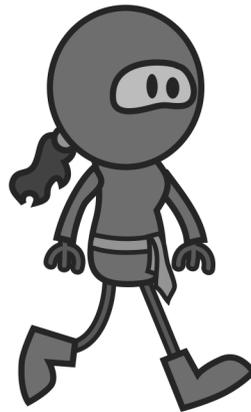


The  
**Order** of the **Stick**<sup>™</sup>

presents

# Spoiler Alert

starring Therkla<sup>™</sup>



by Rich Burlew

**GIANT** in  
the  
**PLAYGROUND**<sup>™</sup>

---

©2015 Giant in the Playground. All rights reserved. THE ORDER OF THE STICK, OOTS, THERKLA, GIANT IN THE PLAYGROUND, as well as all characters featured in this work, the distinctive likenesses thereof and related elements, are trademarks of Giant in the Playground. Thanks to all the Kickstarter backers who made this possible, and special thanks to the backer who requested this story. Please don't distribute this file, OK? Thanks.



I got your secret message, my love. What's wrong? Is the Warlock Queen on her way?

If only it were such a mundane matter, Eneth.

No, I have summoned you here because there is something I need to tell you, my sweet love.

Something that I have hidden from you through the many full moons that I have cast off this toned and sculpted man-shape to run free as the wolf my spirit demands I be.

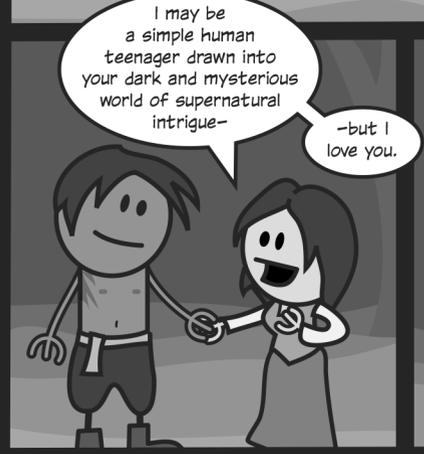
One thing that, if you knew it, could change your feelings about me forever.

No, Fernazio—nothing can change my feelings.

Whatever it is, we can overcome it together.

We stood up to Pack Leader Unzio together—

—and braved the Test of Soul-Pairing when even your own sister sent the Five Fated Assassins against us.



I may be a simple human teenager drawn into your dark and mysterious world of supernatural intrigue—

—but I love you.

You are my jewel in the night, sweet Eneth.

Very well. What I have needed to tell you—

—is that Daimyo Kubota requests your presence in his study.



Immediately, so get your green butt moving posthaste.



QARR!

Don't contact me telepathically while I'm reading!!

Don't get mad at me, I've been knocking on your door for like twenty minutes!

You have very tiny fists, I thought it was the wind.

Uh huh. What were you reading that's so important, anyway?

If you must know, it's the fifth volume of the Dark Primal Bloodlines trilogy.

That new werewolf romance novel everyone was talking about last week?

Yes. Except one: it's a complex tale of loyalty and desire that only happens to have *some* romance aspects.

And two: I didn't get paid until yesterday so I just started reading it.

Well, you're probably wasting your time, since I heard Bao-yu say that it-

No, I'm just saying she thought it was pretty-

Do you know how hard it's been around here? Every woman on this estate finished it days ago!!

But I've been waiting for this book for fourteen months and I want to experience every moment of it for myself, thank you!

I don't want to know what happens, and I don't want to know what Bao-yu or Jia-li or Pakpao or anyone else thinks about what happens!!

So just stick an infernal cork in it, Garr, got it??

BAH!!! No spoilers!

SHUT IT!

I finally have a day off and I'm not leaving my room until I've read every last page.

Alright, alright! Fine, read your stupid book to the end. It's just a bunch of made-up stuff anyway.

Shoo! Shoo! Go desecrate something.

Daimyo Kubota, you sent for me?

Ah, Therkla, yes. I have a very simple mission for you.

I would like you to break into the estate of Lady Kin-Hu and steal a ceremonial fan of some small historical significance. It was once owned by the sorcerer Mik-Guh.

You will bring it to me tonight.

T-tonight? Um, Daimyo Kubota, today is my day...I was planning...I mean, I had other-

Is there a problem with carrying out my orders in a timely fashion?

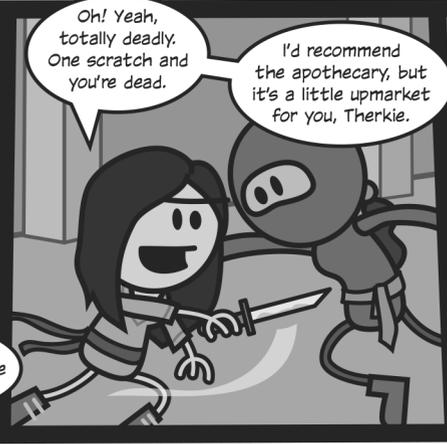
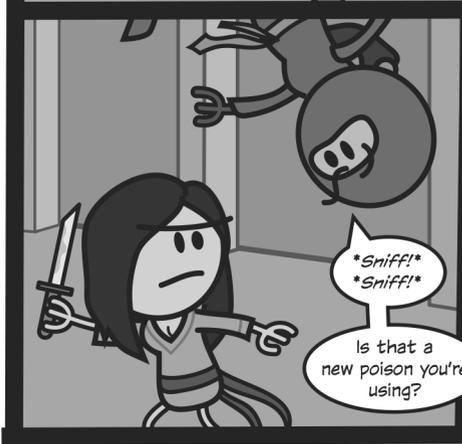
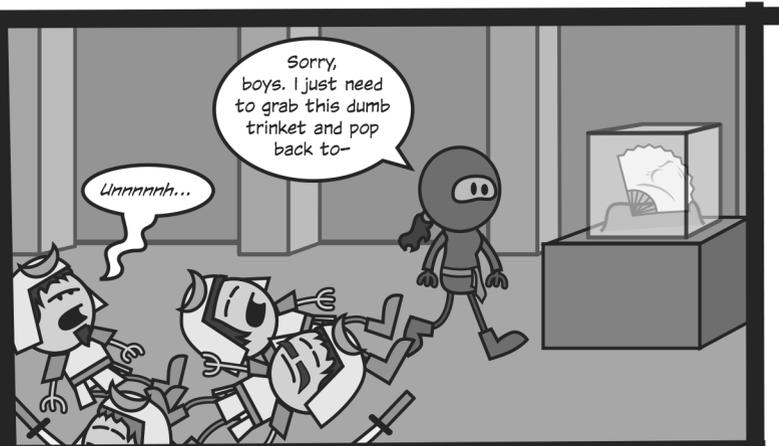
Uh, no sir. No problem. I'll bring it back tonight.

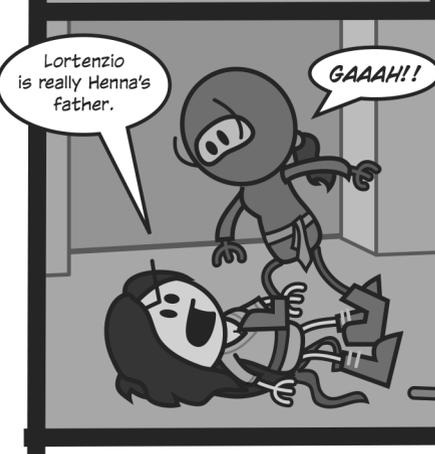
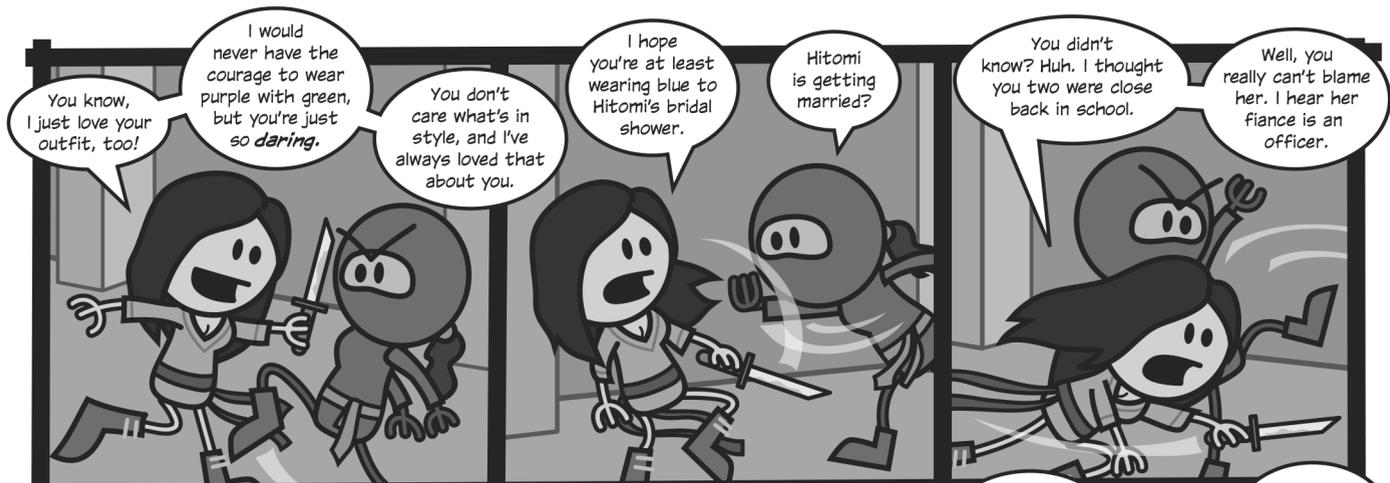
Excellent. That will be all.

See? Who needs fiction? I got a complex tale of loyalty and desire right here!

"She wants to read, but she cannot-**BUT SHE MUST!**"

Shut up, Garr.





But then it turns out that Unzio is really a were-BAT, so-

SHUT UP!  
SHUT UP!!

THONK!

Kllrrrch!

Nnnnh... looks like we're at an impasse, Therkie.

I DON'T CARE WHAT THEY DID IN THE GRASS WITH A TURKEY!

Impasse!  
IMPASSE!  
TRUCE!!

No spoilers? Because I'm totes OK with knocking out your pretty square teeth.

No spoilers, promise. In fact, I'll make you a deal for the fan.

There's this spice merchant who lives on Cerulean Street that my mistress wants killed.

Why?

How should I know? Noble stuff.

I just know she owns like 500 cats that I'm super allergic to.

Every time I try to sneak in, I end up sneezing my head off.

If you slip over there, kill her, and bring back proof, I'll let you walk off with this ugly fan.

You'll just hand it over? Why? Won't you get in trouble with your new boss?

Why would I? Protecting it was those guys' job.

I just like ninja fights.

Ugh, figures. Fine, wait here and I'll return before dawn.

Oooo, that's just like when Fernazio tells Eneth to wait while he goes to fight-

BUH BUH BUH!!

Everytime I don't shatter your jaw, I immediately regret it.



Should I send for more tea, my love?

No thank you, dear. If I drink any more I'll be up all night.

I was just thinking about the day we met. How nervous you were!

Of course I was! You were so handsome, and I-

Hey.

AAAAHHH!



So, not to alarm you-

Too late!

-but I'm a ninja who's been sent here to kill you.

\*Gasp!\* It's that damn Lady Kin-Hu again!

I'm not going to, though, because my lord didn't order it, and who cares what someone else wants? I'm just in it for the fun anyway.

Plus, you're all cute and in love and everything, so I'm going to let you go.

I can give you directions to some hidden caves you can hide in until you can get yourself out of town.

The only thing is that I'll need you to hand over your signet ring, so I can "prove" I killed you.



My ring? But that's the sacred proof of my noble birth! What if I refuse?

Well, then I'd probably have to kill you, but I'd really rather not.

One of my peers sorted you into my Needs Killing pile, and I'm giving you a chance to get out of it.

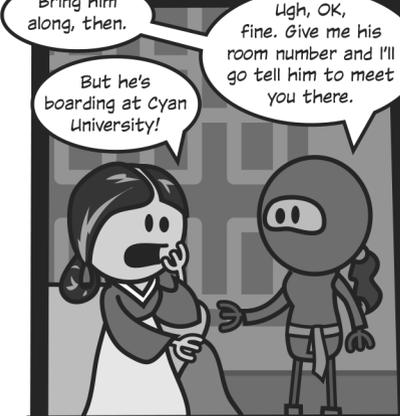
I strongly recommend taking that chance.

Honey, forget the ring. We don't need to be nobles to be happy. All that matters is that we're still together.

I suppose you're-Wait! What about Haru?

Who?

Our eldest son!



Bring him along, then.

Ugh, OK, fine. Give me his room number and I'll go tell him to meet you there.

But he's boarding at Cyan University!



I'll ask the servants to look after the cats.

I'm surprised you were able to sneak in without my little darlings reacting.

Oh, they reacted. But I brought along a pair of secret ninja weapons to get past them.



WAAAAAA!



Leaving town? Tonight? No way!

I'm pretty sure I mentioned the part with the ninja assassins, but: There are ninja assassins.

Look, you said they were after my mom, not me. I should be safe.

Wow, what an incredibly naive view of how this stuff works.

Five minutes after the other ninja realizes I let your parents escape, she'll be on your doorstep to squeeze you for information.

And Kohaku squeezes hard.



Great, fine, whatever, get her on the proverbial wagon 'cause it's leaving tonight.

Well, I'm not going anywhere without my girlfriend.

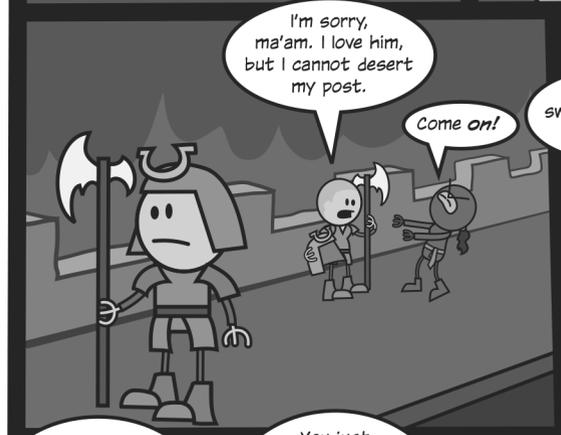
I can't. She's in the army. I can't even get near where she's stationed.

Hey, but you're a ninja. You could sneak in and-

Yes, I see where this is going. I'll go tell her to join you in the caves, since I obviously don't have anything better to do tonight.

I don't suppose you're willing to break it to my mom that I happen to be dating a commoner while we're at it.

Just stay here until I get back.



I'm sorry, ma'am. I love him, but I cannot desert my post.

Come on!

I have a sworn duty to protect-

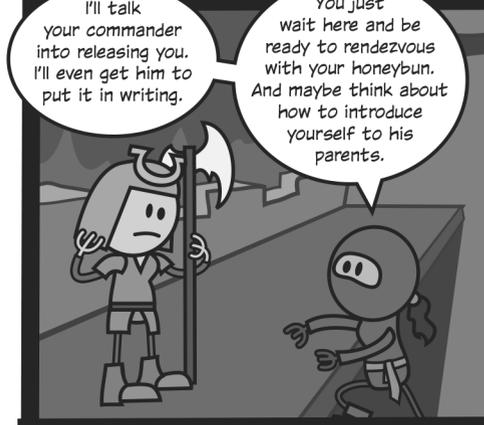
Protect from what? This is the safest place in all the Southern Lands!

Perhaps, but it's the principle of the thing.

I cannot leave my post-much less the city-without being formally discharged.

Huh?

Done!



I'll talk your commander into releasing you. I'll even get him to put it in writing.

You just wait here and be ready to rendezvous with your honeybun. And maybe think about how to introduce yourself to his parents.

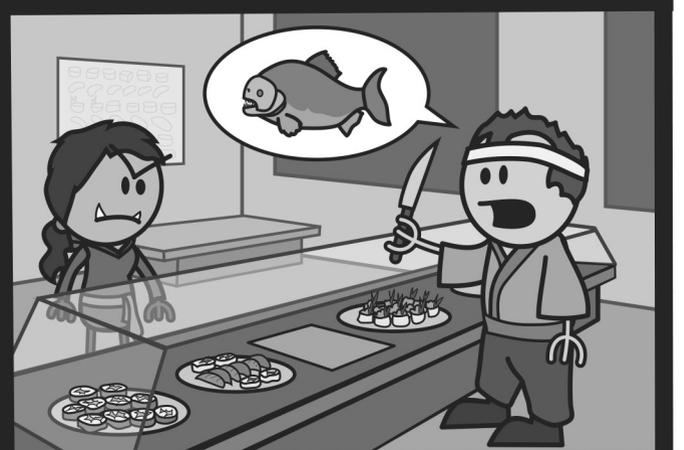
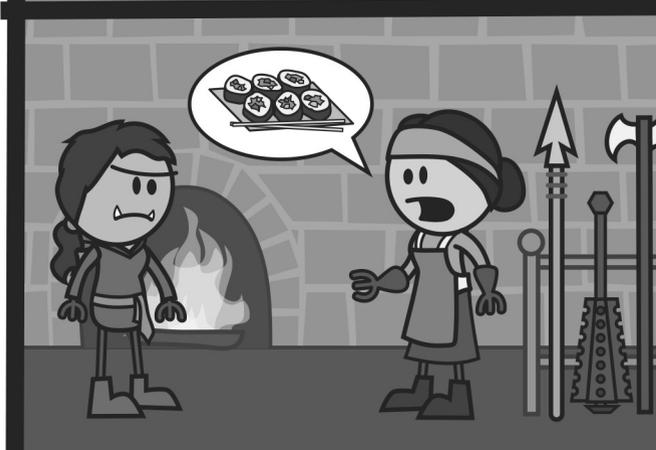
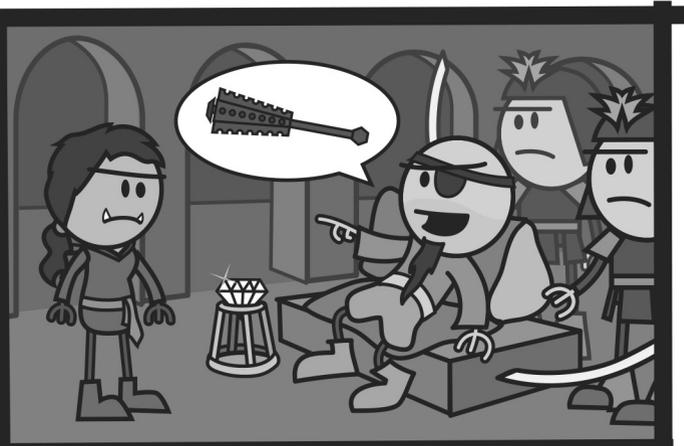
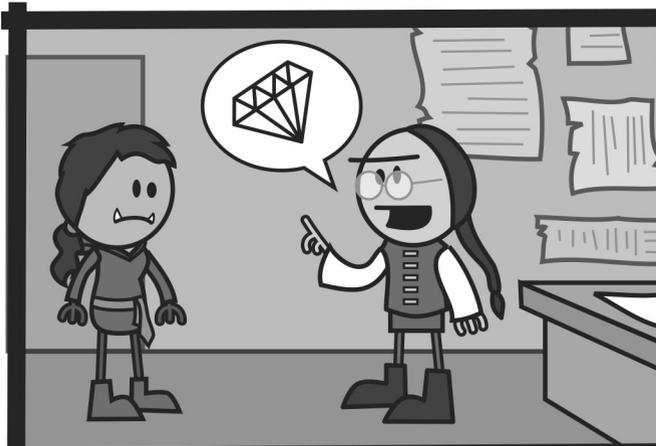
OK, this is good. I can get ahead of this now.

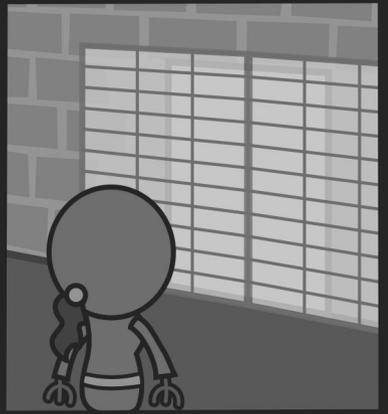
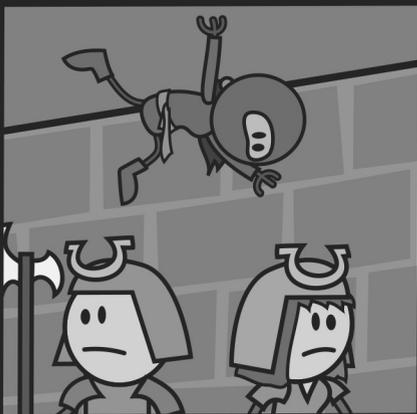
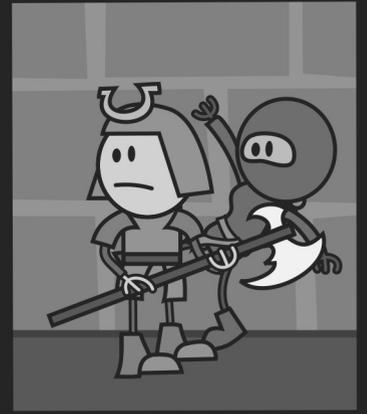
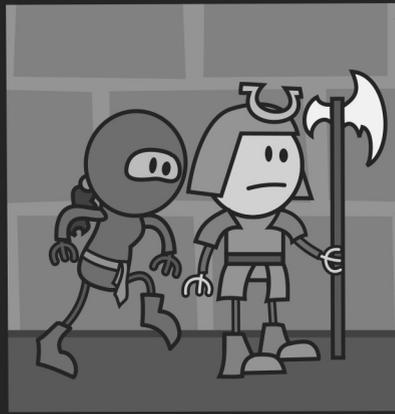
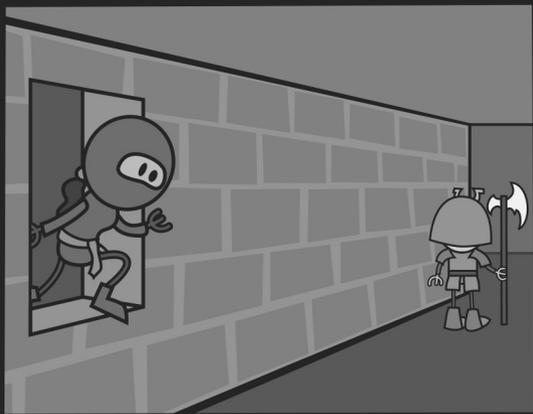
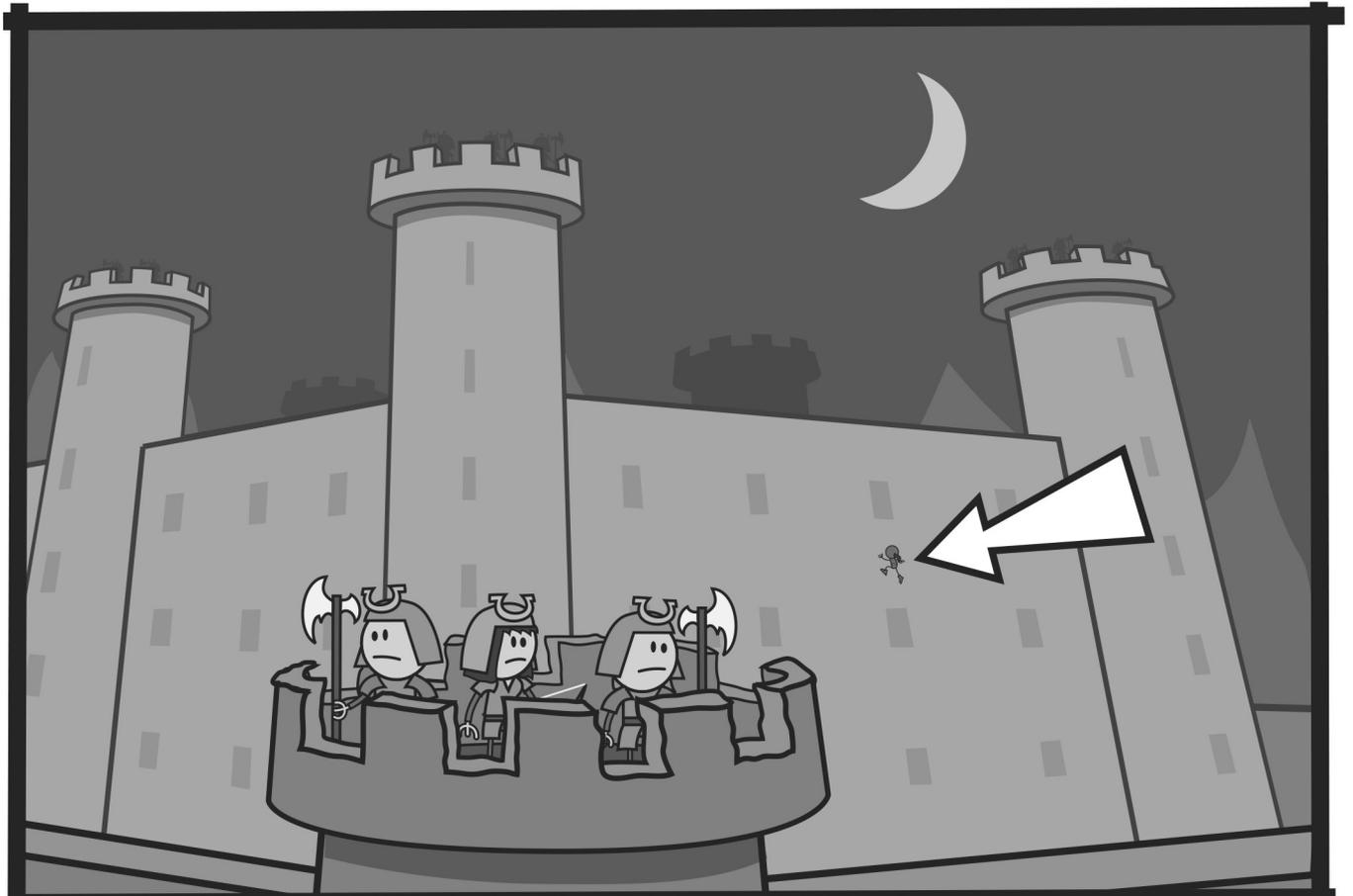
All I need to do is get Fong the Forger to whip me up some phony discharge papers and I'll be able to go home and finish reading my-

Sure, but I'll need you to do a favor for me first.

\*sigh\*









That cup is for you, Therkla.



Whuh-?  
I poured that cup of mekhong for you.  
How do you know my name? How did you even know I was here??

Don't worry, I have no intention of alerting the guards.  
Thanks? I guess?  
I need a nirja refresher course. I just failed to sneak up on a blind woman playing music.



I knew you were coming. You're here for one of my numerology codices.  
Uh, yeah. The guy with the teeny tiny trees wants a list of auspicious dates for his son's wedding.

You're giving it to me?  
Yeah. It will.  
That's all I need to know.  
It will help save the life of a merchant and her family, will it not?

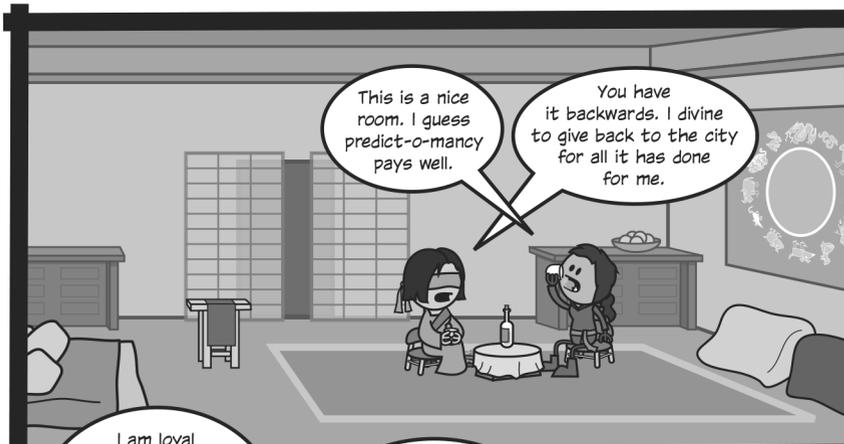
So, you see the future? Or something? You're some kind of oracle?  
Nothing so powerful. Or reliable.



I'm a diviner. I use a combination of wizard magic and numerology to make predictions.  
Though some mornings, Lord Rooster blesses with true visions of what is to come.

They are fleeting, though. I cannot control them.  
Uh huh. And you had one of these fleeting visions about me?  
I did. Please, sit and talk with me.

You haven't by any chance read the new werewolf book, have you?  
The braille edition will not be released until next month.  
OK, good. I mean, you know, good for me. No, I mean, not that you having to wait is good, just-  
I'll sit down.



This is a nice room. I guess predict-o-mancy pays well.

You have it backwards. I divine to give back to the city for all it has done for me.



Yeah? Do all blind people get fancy digs in the castle, or only the ones that know the future?

That's sorta what I thought.



I am loyal to the patron that gave me support when others would have shunned me. A trait we have in common, I think.



That's why when I saw the day of your death, I was so troubled by-

WHOA!

Hold on! Back the wagon UP, girl!!



You don't want to hear your final fate?

Heck no, I don't want to hear my final fate! Who would?



Many people, actually. It's one of the most common questions I receive.

Well... that's probably 'cause you're used to reading rich folks who want to know when the party's ending.



For some of us, the only thing keeping us going is the hope that things'll get better before we check out.

And since it almost certainly *won't*, a little bit of blissful ignorance is all we have.



Besides, I've read enough paranormal teen romance to know that trying to beat a prophecy never works.

I'm not gonna run around trying to do the opposite of whatever I would normally do in order to dodge it. I don't like dancing on anyone else's strings.



That does make sense. Still, it seems odd to have had a vision about you and not share it.

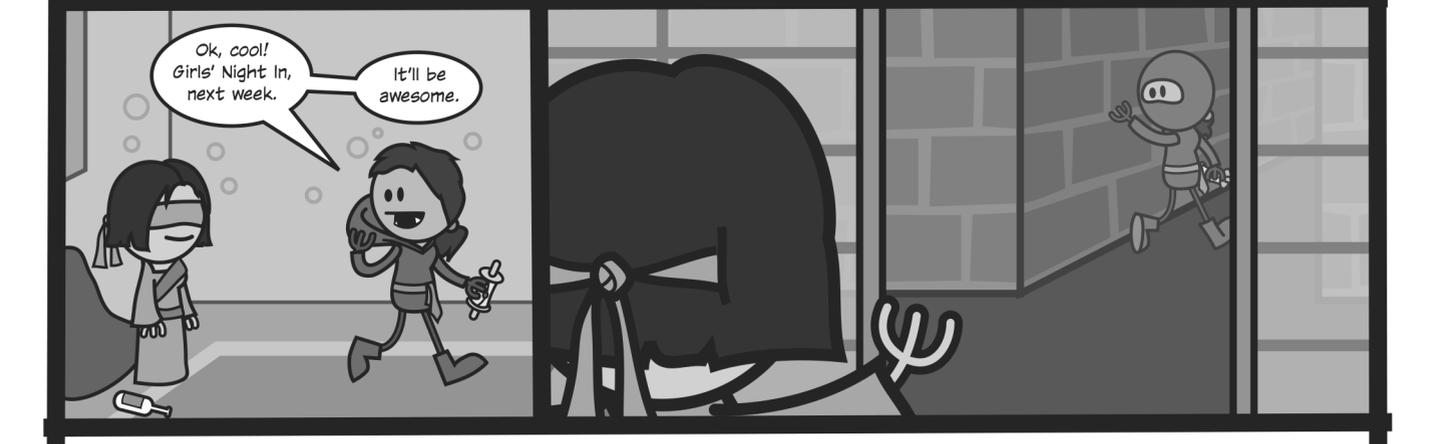
Maybe...maybe the point isn't that I know. Maybe the point is that I decided *not* to know.



If we're gonna get all philosophical and stuff, we're gonna need a *lot* more booze.

There are three more bottles under the table.





-but because of my tusks, I used to pronounce "j" sounds like "sh" when I was little.

So whenever I asked my teachers about *jujitsu*, they'd think I was chasing off a small fluffy dog!

"Shoo, shih tzu! Shoo!"

How about you? Divine poultry ever tell you 'bout your own future?

No. But then, he doesn't need to.

The same condition that took my eyesight when I was a girl will take my life, likely before I turn thirty.

It is an accident of birth, the clerics tell me. They have no cures.

Ha ha ha ha ha!

The only question is: Will it be a long slow deterioration, or will it happen overnight?

Perhaps this is the whiskey speaking, but I confess that I have already had my fill of everyone's pity for this life.

I hope when it is my time, no one sees it coming.

Now see that...*that's* what I'm talkin' 'bout. I c'n relate.

Here's to damaged goods, goin' out on our own terms.

I will drink to that.

CLINK!

Well, as cheerfully morbid as this conversation has been, I gotta get goin'.

There's this whole convoluted chain I need to backtrack before dawn.

So, uh-

Sangwaan.

So, Sangwaan... would it be too weird if I showed up with a bottle of something next week and we, like, hung out?

I, uh, don't have a lot of friends.

Me neither. I'd like that.

Ok, cool! Girls' Night In, next week.

It'll be awesome.





Unnnnnhhh...

Hey, Holy Dozen-if **today** is the day I die, can we maybe hurry it up a bit?



Therkla, my dear! Well done, I knew you would not fail me.

Oh! Daimyo Kubota! You're... in my bedroom.

No, no, don't struggle to stand. You've had a rough night.



I'm glad I was able to help you with...whatever you needed that fan for.

The fan? Oh, I didn't need it for anything. I'm giving it back later this afternoon.



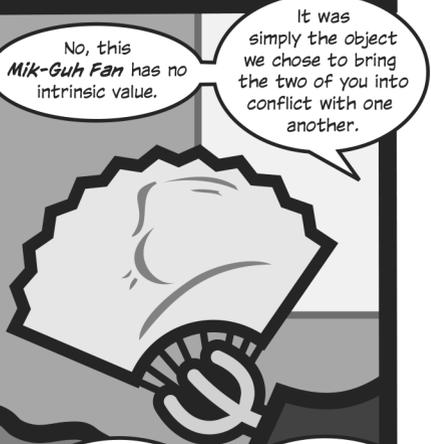
What? But I mean, we-

The fan was never the point, dear Therkla.



Lady Kin-Hu and I arranged for you to steal it as a test of loyalty and prowess, both for you and for her newest employee.

My understanding is that you passed while she failed...somewhat permanently.



No, this **Mik-Guh Fan** has no intrinsic value.

It was simply the object we chose to bring the two of you into conflict with one another.



Oh.

Well, glad to be of service, then. I guess.

Indeed. Further, you have managed to impress me greatly with your cleverness this evening.



After healing your injuries, our staff cleric informed me that the poison to which you were exposed would have been immediately lethal-

-were it not for the specific combination of herbal compounds and alcohol in your system at the time.



I was not aware that you had received any training in advanced antitoxin techniques such as that.

But from this point forth, your compensation will reflect your greater breadth of knowledge.



Just be certain to hand in a list of which poisons you have studied, for our records.

Uh, sure! You know, I bet I could learn even more about resisting poison, if that's something you think-

No, that won't be necessary.



rumble. rumble. rumble.

Hmmm. Sounds like it might rain.



Rest now, child. I will have no further need of your services until three days hence.

OK, thank you, Daimyo Kubota!



Chapter 3:  
Black Moon  
Rising!

Sounds  
ominous!



**Therkla!**

What the  
hell??? At least  
the imp knows  
how to knock!

Some paladin  
just murdered  
Lord Shojo!

**What???**

His nephew  
Hinjo is gonna be  
crowned king  
today-

-and  
there's apparently  
a huge army of  
hobgoblins and stuff  
marching to attack  
the city!



Daimyo Kubota  
sends his apologies,  
but he needs you to head  
to the docks to secure  
his personal galleon in  
case we need to  
evacuate.

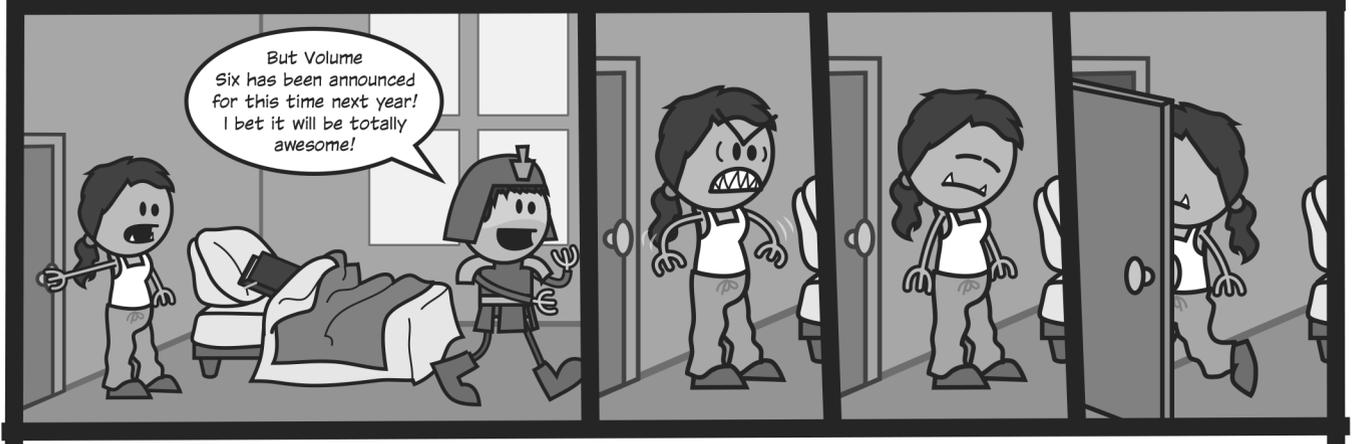
Yeah, OK.  
Absolutely. I  
understand.

Tell him  
I just need to get  
dressed and I'll be  
on my way.

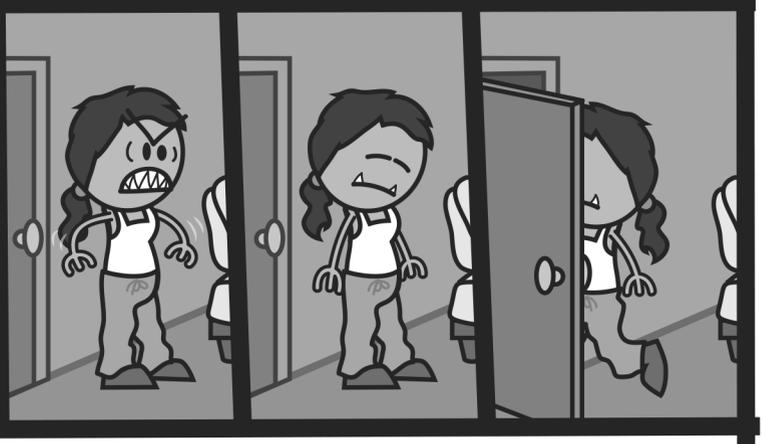
I can  
finish reading  
later.

Oh hey,  
Dark Primal  
Bloodlines!

When it turns  
out the whole thing is  
really just Eneth's spirit  
dream, it sorta makes  
this entire book kinda  
pointless, if you  
ask me.



But Volume  
Six has been announced  
for this time next year!  
I bet it will be totally  
awesome!



35 hours later

