

THE ELIXIR



ONCE UPON A TIME...

GULMAKANE WAS ONE OF THE FOUR KINGDOMS ON THE CONTINENT OF MALENNOR, AND APART FROM ITS UNUSUALLY HIGH BADGER POPULATION, IT WAS A KINGDOM NOT SO DIFFERENT TO ANY OTHER.

ALTHOUGH THIS FACT HAD NEVER STOPPED THE OCCASIONAL WAR BETWEEN SOME OR ALL OF THE FOUR KINGDOMS, THERE WAS SUCH A THING AS TRADITION, AFTER ALL.

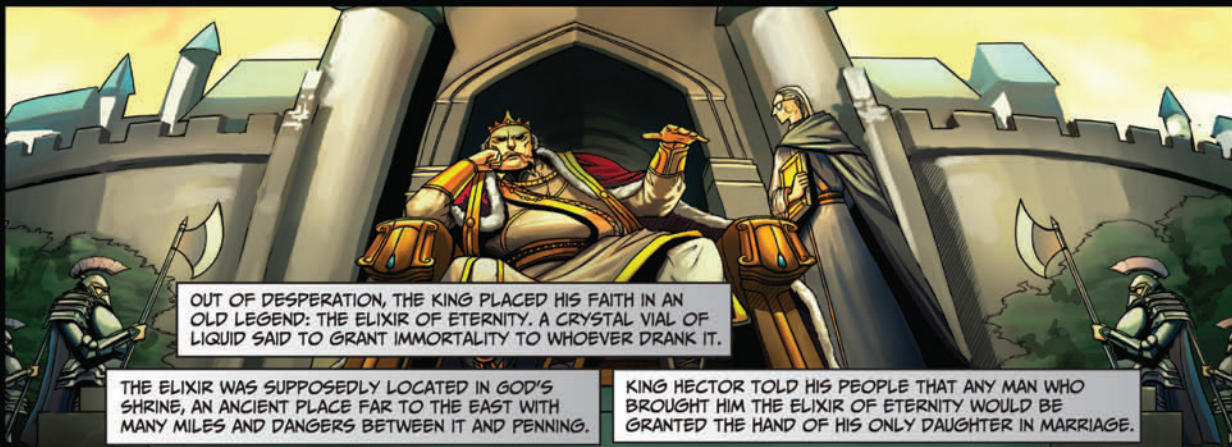
SITUATED NEAR GULMAKANE'S WESTERN COAST WAS ITS CAPITAL CITY, PENNING.

THE CITY WAS HOME TO THE RICH AND THE POOR, THE JUST AND THE UNJUST ALIKE. (THE JUST WOULD HAVE TOLD YOU THAT THEY WERE OUTNUMBERED BY THE UNJUST, IF THEY WEREN'T SO BUSY BEING PUSHED AROUND, ROBBED AND KILLED BY THEM).

AT PENNING'S CENTRE STOOD CASTLE GRANVILLE, HOME OF THE CURRENT RULER OF GULMAKANE, KING HECTOR GRANVILLE III.

A MAN WHO, FOR THE LAST FOUR WEEKS, HAD BEEN WRACKED BY FEVER AND SICKNESS.

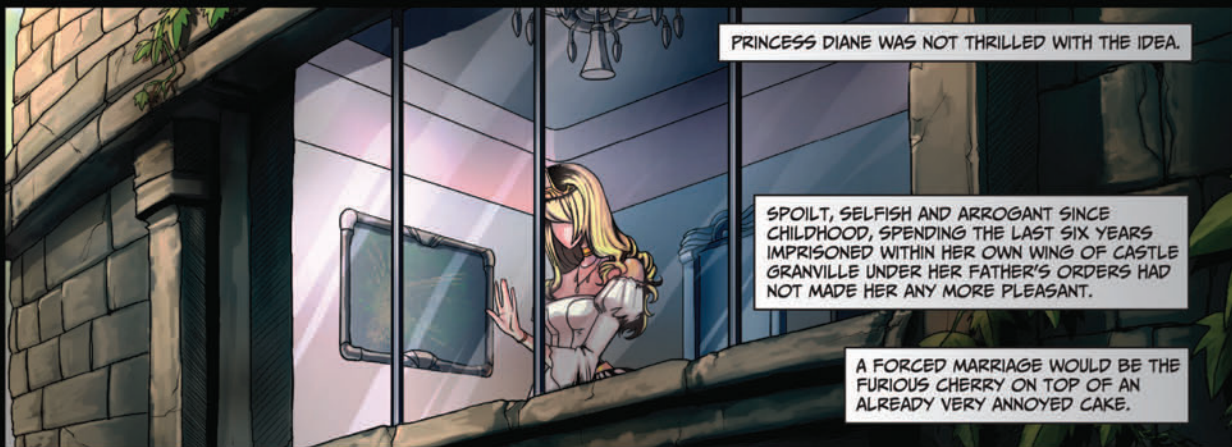
DESPITE THEIR EFFORTS, THE ROYAL PHYSICIANS FOUND THEMSELVES UNABLE TO CURE THE STRANGE, STUBBORN MALADY THAT HAD BEFALLEN THEIR KING.



OUT OF DESPERATION, THE KING PLACED HIS FAITH IN AN OLD LEGEND: THE ELIXIR OF ETERNITY. A CRYSTAL VIAL OF LIQUID SAID TO GRANT IMMORTALITY TO WHOEVER DRANK IT.

THE ELIXIR WAS SUPPOSEDLY LOCATED IN GOD'S SHRINE, AN ANCIENT PLACE FAR TO THE EAST WITH MANY MILES AND DANGERS BETWEEN IT AND PENNING.

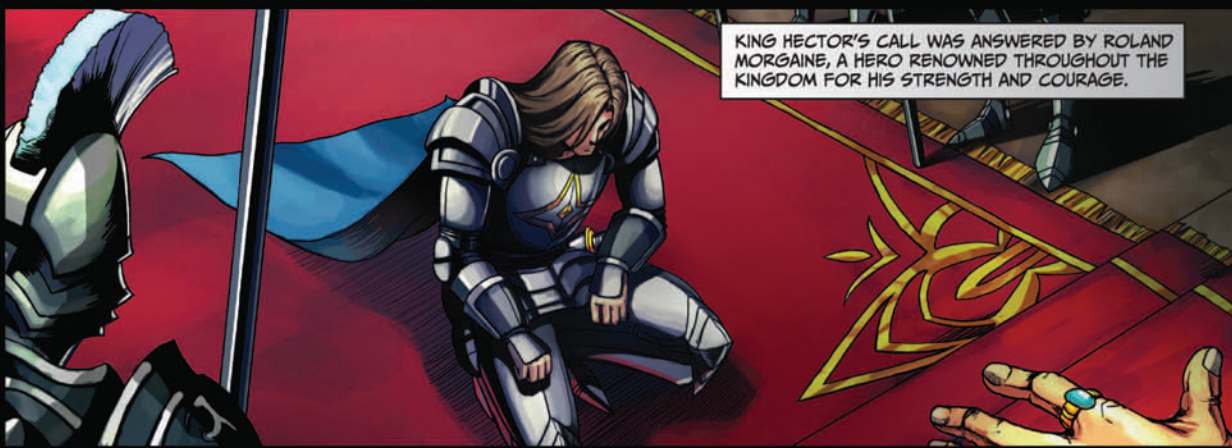
KING HECTOR TOLD HIS PEOPLE THAT ANY MAN WHO BROUGHT HIM THE ELIXIR OF ETERNITY WOULD BE GRANTED THE HAND OF HIS ONLY DAUGHTER IN MARRIAGE.



PRINCESS DIANE WAS NOT THRILLED WITH THE IDEA.

SPOILT, SELFISH AND ARROGANT SINCE CHILDHOOD, SPENDING THE LAST SIX YEARS IMPRISONED WITHIN HER OWN WING OF CASTLE GRANVILLE UNDER HER FATHER'S ORDERS HAD NOT MADE HER ANY MORE PLEASANT.

A FORCED MARRIAGE WOULD BE THE FURIOUS CHERRY ON TOP OF AN ALREADY VERY ANNOYED CAKE.



KING HECTOR'S CALL WAS ANSWERED BY ROLAND MORGAINÉ, A HERO RENOWNED THROUGHOUT THE KINGDOM FOR HIS STRENGTH AND COURAGE.



ROLAND WAS ADMIRER AND RESPECTED AS A MAN WHO BATTLED EVIL WHEREVER IT REARED ITS HEAD (OR OTHER BODY PARTS) -



- AND WHO FOUGHT FOR TRUTH, JUSTICE AND THE GULMAKANIAN WAY.



WHAT PEOPLE *DIDN'T* KNOW ABOUT ROLAND, HOWEVER, WAS THAT HE WAS ACTUALLY AN UTTER BASTARD.



-SO WHOEVER FINISHES 'IS DRINK LAST GETS A BOOT IN THE TWIG AN' GIGGLE-BERRIES FROM ALL THE OTHERS, ALRIGHT?

-AND THE FISHMONGER SAYS, "THAT'S NOT A THIMBLE, MADAM! THAT'S MY WIFE!" GET IT? HA HA HAAH!

-GO ON THEN, JUS' ONE MORE -

-I T-TELL THEE, THAT G-G-GRANVILLE, HE'S A C-C-COMPLETE F-F-



ANYWAY, TO CUT A LONG STORY SHORT, I KILLED THE TROLLS, SAVED THE ORPHANAGE AND RETURNED THE KITTENS TO THE CHILDREN ALIVE AND WELL.

BUT I JUST DO WHAT I CAN...



-ANYONE'LL FIND THAT ELIXIR, IT'S HIM.

-THERE'S A REAL HERO-

SAINTS BLESS YEH, SIR, YEH'RE A CREDIT TO TH' WHOLE KINGDOM!

THANK YOU, YOU'RE TOO KIND.



FRANK TIMBER AT YOUR SERVICE. THE LEAST A LOWLY PEASANT SUCH AS MYSELF CAN DO IS BUY YOU A DRINK IN YOUR HONOUR.

I KNOW I AM NOT WORTHY TO STAND IN YOUR PRESENCE, SIR, BUT SINCE YOU LEAVE ON YOUR QUEST TOMORROW, PLEASE...

...I INSIST.

UGH. WOULD IT KILL THESE PEOPLE TO WASH OCCASIONALLY...?

BRAVE SIR ROLAND!



GOOD EVENING, YOUR MAJESTY.

... MR. THESEUS.

I SEE THE ONLY THINGS THAT PRECEDE YOU ARE SILENCE AND YOUR REPUTATION.



ANY TROUBLE GETTING IN? MY GUARDS, YOU DIDN'T... UH...

TWO OF YOUR MEN WILL WAKE UP IN A FEW HOURS WITH WHAT FEELS LIKE THE WORST HANGOVER THEY'VE EVER HAD. BUT NO PERMANENT DAMAGE.

I APPRECIATE IT. MILITARY FUNERAL COSTS, YOU UNDERSTAND...

MR. THESEUS, I'M SURE YOU ARE AWARE OF ROLAND MORGAINÉ'S QUEST TOMORROW.



YES.

GOOD. BECAUSE THAT IS THE REASON I CONTACTED YOU.



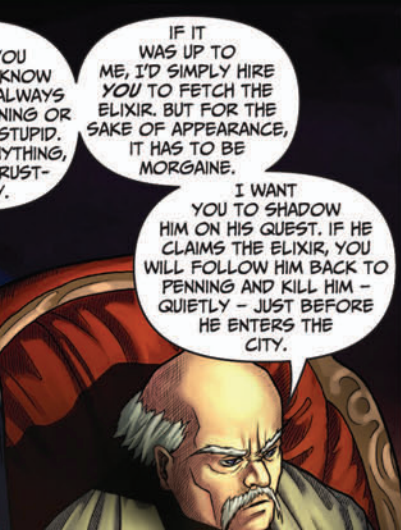
IT IS A PECULIAR RULE THAT THE HIRING OF ASSASSINS BY KINGS MUST BE KEPT SECRET FROM THE MASSES, LEST THE ROYAL IMAGE BE TARNISHED.

PECULIAR, OF COURSE, WHEN CONSIDERING THAT DEALINGS BETWEEN OUR KINDS HAVE BEEN GOING ON FOR CENTURIES.

BUT NO, THE PEOPLE NEED THEIR HEROES. MEN LIKE ROLAND MORGAINÉ.



EVEN THOUGH YOU AND I BOTH KNOW HEROES ARE ALWAYS VAIN AND PREENING OR VIOLENT AND STUPID. MORE THAN ANYTHING, THEY'RE UNTRUST-WORTHY.

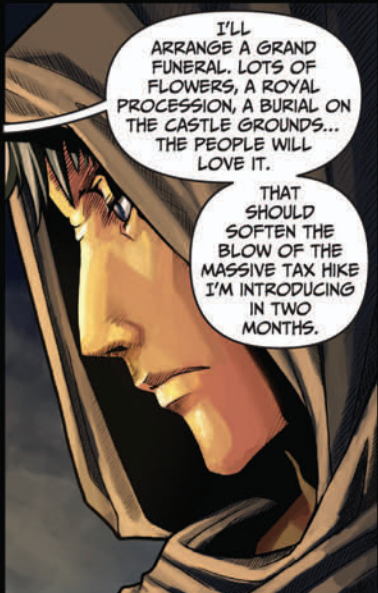


IF IT WAS UP TO ME, I'D SIMPLY HIRE YOU TO FETCH THE ELIXIR. BUT FOR THE SAKE OF APPEARANCE, IT HAS TO BE MORGAINE.

I WANT YOU TO SHADOW HIM ON HIS QUEST. IF HE CLAIMS THE ELIXIR, YOU WILL FOLLOW HIM BACK TO PENNING AND KILL HIM - QUIETLY - JUST BEFORE HE ENTERS THE CITY.



THE OFFICIAL STORY WILL BE HE WAS GRAVELY WOUNDED ON HIS QUEST AND EVENTUALLY SUCCEEDED TO HIS INJURIES BEFORE HE COULD HAND ME THE ELIXIR PERSONALLY.



I'LL ARRANGE A GRAND FUNERAL. LOTS OF FLOWERS, A ROYAL PROCESSION, A BURIAL ON THE CASTLE GROUNDS... THE PEOPLE WILL LOVE IT.

THAT SHOULD SOFTEN THE BLOW OF THE MASSIVE TAX HIKE I'M INTRODUCING IN TWO MONTHS.



THREE-HUNDRED GOLD PIECES. HALF NOW AND HALF UPON COMPLETION.

IF AT ANY POINT YOU BELIEVE MORGAINE INTENDS TO DRINK THE ELIXIR HIMSELF, KILL HIM. IF HE IS PUTTING THE ELIXIR AT UNNECESSARY RISK, KILL HIM.

TWO OF MY MOST TRUSTED MEN WILL BE ACCOMPANYING MORGAINE AND HAVE BEEN GIVEN THE SAME ORDERS AS YOU. ALTHOUGH THEY WON'T BE INFORMED OF YOUR PRESENCE.



IF THEY MAKE IT BACK TO PENNING, I WOULD APPRECIATE IT IF YOU WOULD DISPOSE OF THEM AS WELL. LOOSE LIPS AND ALL THAT...

IF NECESSARY, MORGAINE'S BODY CAN ROT WHERE IT FALLS AND I'LL CREATE ANOTHER STORY FOR THE PUBLIC. JUST AS LONG AS THE ELIXIR IS MINE.



I AM CERTAIN I CAN COUNT ON YOU TO BE THE SOUL OF BOTH DISCRETION AND PROFESSIONALISM, MR. THESEUS.

SO... DO WE HAVE AN AGREEMENT...?



YOUR MAJESTY--
SIR ROLAND MORGAIN!



YOUR MAJESTY, YOUR LOYAL SUBJECT ROLAND MORGAIN KNEELS BEFORE YOU READY TO RETRIEVE THE ELIXIR OF ETERNITY IN YOUR NAME.



SIR ROLAND, YOU ARE AWARE IT IS CUSTOMARY FOR A KNIGHT TO REMOVE HIS HELMET WHEN ADDRESSING HIS KING?

YES, SIRE. BUT I SEEM TO HAVE ACQUIRED A TERRIBLE SKIN CONDITION ON MY FACE AND NECK.

VERY CONTAGIOUS. I'M AFRAID I'M FORCED TO WEAR THE HELMET AT ALL TIMES.



PHYSICIAN'S ORDERS.

TAK TAK

I SEE. AND THE ARMOUR? YOU LOOK... SLIGHTER IN BUILD THAN WHEN WE LAST SAW YOU.

AH, NOW THAT WAS MY FAULT. TWO DAYS AGO I MADE THE MISTAKE OF SAMPLING THE SLUG AND MANGO STEW AT MRS. DRIPPING'S CAFE.



SINCE THEN MY BOWEL MOVEMENTS HAVE BEEN SOMEWHAT... NIGHTMARISH.

MM. WELL, YOU'RE NOT THE FIRST MAN TO FALL FOUL OF MRS. DRIPPING'S OFFERINGS.

FRANKLY, I'M AMAZED YOU'RE STILL ABLE TO SEE.

I HAVE DECIDED TO GRANT YOU SOME ASSISTANCE ON YOUR QUEST IN THE FORMS OF CAPTAIN PEGG AND SERGEANT BROWN, TWO OF MY FINEST MEN.

YOU WILL FIND THEY LACK NEITHER SKILL NOR COURAGE.



I'M GRATEFUL, SIRE, BUT THAT'S REALLY NOT NECESSARY.

DO YOU DENY YOUR KING...?

WELL, I... OF COURSE NOT. THANK YOU, YOUR MAJESTY.

THEN THE HOUR HAS COME.

MAY THE SAINTS SMILE UPON YOU, ROLAND MORGAINÉ.

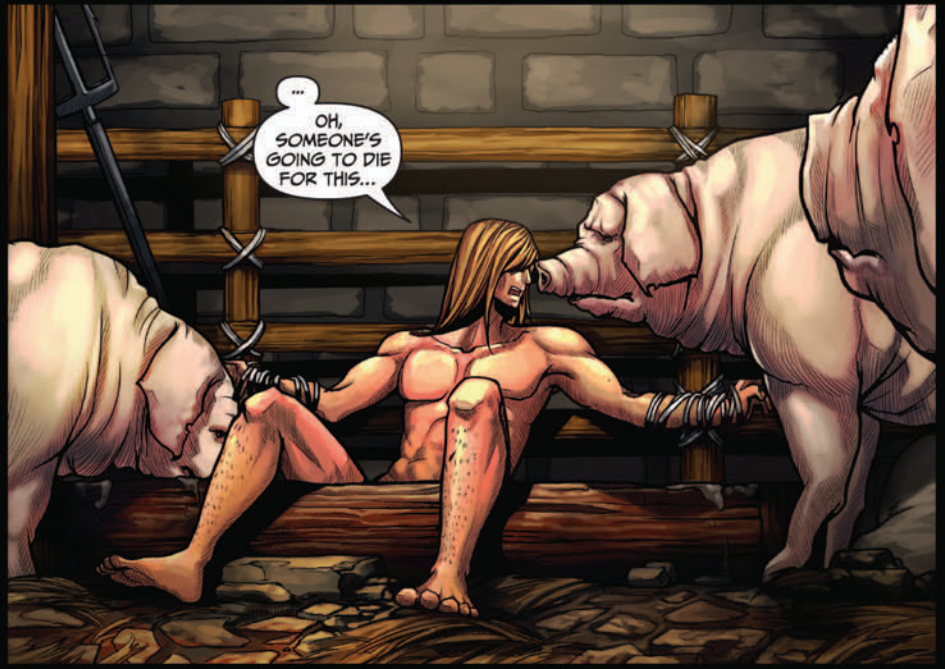
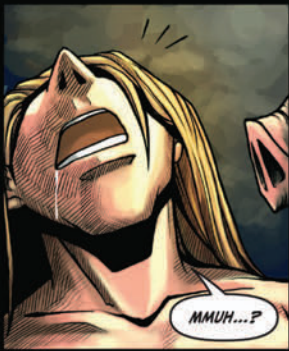


GOOD LUCK, LAD!

WOOOOHH! YEAH!

-BE IN MY THOUGHTS, BRAVE KNIGHT!

'ERE, SOMEONE'S 'AD ME BLOODY WALLET...!





THERE WEREN'T AS MANY UNGUARDED WASHING LINES AS I WOULD HAVE LIKED, ALRIGHT?

OH, AND I OVERHEARD THAT APPARENTLY I SET OUT FOR THE ELIXIR OF ETERNITY THIS MORNING - A FACT THAT CAME AS SOMETHING OF A SURPRISE TO ME.



IT WAS HIM. HE DRUGGED ME, STOLE FROM ME AND NOW HE'S PRETENDING TO BE ME.



YOU HAVE TO TELL THE KING!



DON'T BE STUPID, JULIET, I'D BE A LAUGHING STOCK. I'VE WORKED HARD TO EARN MY REPUTATION AND I'M NOT ABOUT TO LOSE IT ALL NOW.

SPEAKING OF THE KING, HOW GOES IT AT THE CASTLE?

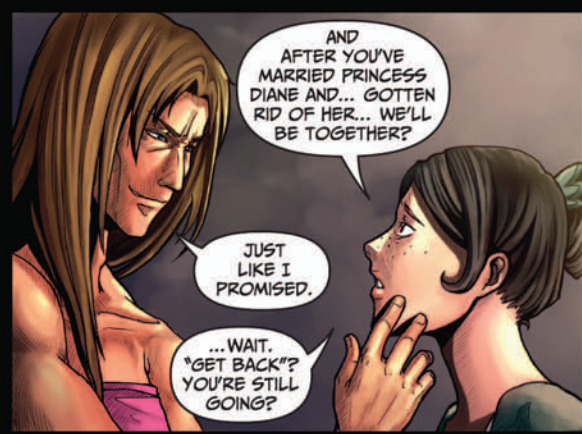
WELL, I'M STILL PUTTING THE POISON IN HIS FOOD LIKE YOU WANTED. I DON'T THINK ANYONE SUSPECTS, BUT...

ROLAND, HOW MUCH LONGER DO I HAVE TO DO THIS? I'M SCARED.



NOT MUCH LONGER NOW. JUST KEEP KING HECTOR SICK LIKE YOU'VE BEEN DOING UNTIL I GET BACK.

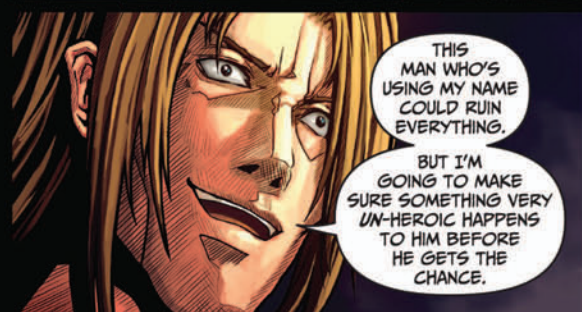
THEN I'LL GIVE HIM THE FAKE ELIXIR AS PLANNED AND YOU CAN STOP SLIPPING HIM THE POISON. HEY PRESTO: THE KING GETS BETTER AND I BECOME A PRINCE.



AND AFTER YOU'VE MARRIED PRINCESS DIANE AND... GOTTEN RID OF HER... WE'LL BE TOGETHER?

JUST LIKE I PROMISED.

...WAIT. "GET BACK"? YOU'RE STILL GOING?



THIS MAN WHO'S USING MY NAME COULD RUIN EVERYTHING.

BUT I'M GOING TO MAKE SURE SOMETHING VERY UN-HEROIC HAPPENS TO HIM BEFORE HE GETS THE CHANCE.



NOT A BAD FIRST DAY, EH, LADS?
HOW ABOUT WE MAKE CAMP HERE FOR THE NIGHT?



NATURE CALLS, SO I'LL LEAVE YOU TWO TO SORT THINGS OUT. START A FIRE, GET SOME FOOD ON THE GO... YOU KNOW THE DRILL.

THE HORSES COULD PROBABLY DO WITH A DRINK AS WELL. SEE TO IT, WILL YOU?



Y'KNOW, MY OL' DAD WOULD'VE HAD A PROUD TEAR IN HIS EYE IF HE COULD'VE SEEN ME RIDING WITH ROLAND MORGAINÉ.

BUT TO BE HONEST, CAPTAIN, THE BLOKE SEEMS LIKE... WELL...

A BIT OF A TOSSER, SERGEANT?

YEAH.

CHIN UP, MAYBE WE'LL GET LUCKY AND HE'LL TRY TO DRINK THE ELIXIR.



AAAAHH...

I DUNNO WHAT ALL THE FUSS IS ABOUT...



THIS HERO STUFF IS A PIECE OF -

BOO.