

THEN...

LADY ALAZNIST, I TRUST YOU'LL PARDON THE INTRUSION.

THE HOUR IS AT HAND. THASSILON FALLS TODAY.

HOW DARE YOU VIOLATE MY SANCTUM, XANDERGHUL? YOUR VAUNTED PRIDE HAS LED YOU TO YOUR DEATH AT LAST.

YOU ARE NOT WELCOME HERE, RUNELORD.

SILENCE YOUR CREATURE, ALAZNIST, LEST I BE FORCED TO BANISH IT. YOUR COUNCIL CHAMBER CAN SCARCELY IMPRESS ME...

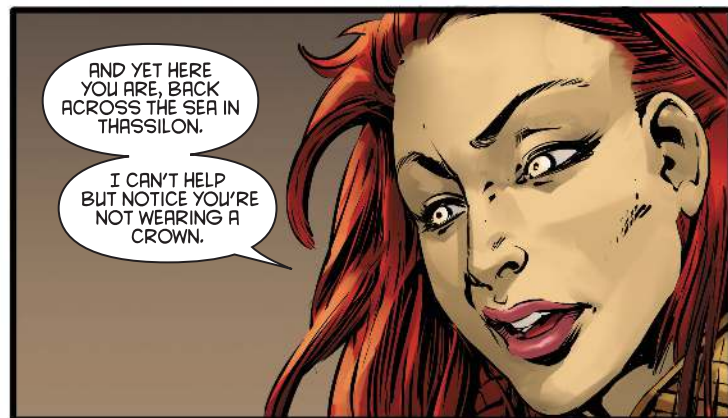
I'VE JUST RETURNED FROM THE THRONE ROOM OF THE EMPEROR OF AZLANT HIMSELF.

AZLANT? YOU WOULD RETURN TO THOSE WHO CAST US OUT, LIKE A KICKED DOG TO HIS MASTER? I KNEW YOU FOR A SELF-IMPORTANT FOOL, XANDERGHUL, BUT I NEVER THOUGHT YOU A TRAITOR.



AZLANT IS IN SHAMBLES, A MOCKERY OF ITS FORMER GLORY. THE EMPEROR GROWS OLD AND *Feeble*. HE *Begged* ME TO TAKE HIS PLACE UPON THE THRONE OF GLASS.

I MUST ADMIT, IT'S GOT A CERTAIN RING TO IT: XANDERGHUL, EMPEROR OF AZLANT.



AND YET HERE YOU ARE, BACK ACROSS THE SEA IN THASSILON.

I CAN'T HELP BUT NOTICE YOU'RE NOT WEARING A CROWN.



THAT CULT HERO *Aroden* RUINED IT. HE CLAIMED THE *Sword of Rulership* FOR HIMSELF, AND A GREAT CHAOS THUNDERED ACROSS THE SKIES.



Veiled Masters RULE THE EMPIRE NOW. I SUSPECT THEY ALWAYS DID. WHEN THE SUCCESSION DIDN'T GO THEIR WAY, THEY CALLED DOWN STONES FROM THE SKIES THAT SMASHED THE PALACE APART, SHATTERING THE THRONE INTO A MILLION FRAGMENTS.

AZLANT IS *DEAD*. SOON THASSILON WILL FOLLOW.




YOU WERE ALWAYS MY FAVORITE, ALAZNIST. LET THE OTHER RUNELORD'S ROT--YOU AND I SHALL SECLUDE OURSELVES FROM THE COMING STORM. WHEN THE DESTRUCTION HAS PASSED, WE WILL RE-EMERGE, AND YOU CAN AID ME IN RESTORING THASSILON TO GREATNESS.

IT'S *TIME*, ALAZNIST. ENTER YOUR *RUNEWELL*, AND PREPARE FOR THE LONG REST. IT WILL BE MANY, MANY YEARS BEFORE WE MEET AGAIN.




WE SHOULD HAVE KILLED HIM.

IN TIME, MY DEAR CASTELLAN. IN TIME. BUT HE'S RIGHT--I MUST DEPART. AND YOU MUST WATCH THE FORTRESS UNTIL MY RETURN.



WHEN THE THUNDERING IS DONE, AND THE SHATTERED REMNANTS OF THASSILON AWAKEN FROM THE LONG NIGHT TO COME, I SHALL EMERGE FROM MY RUNEWELL TO BUILD THE EMPIRE ANEW.



USE THE KEY I'VE GIVEN YOU TO PROTECT THIS FORTRESS. THE NEW AGE WILL REQUIRE A PROPER SEAT OF POWER. BEND THIS PLACE'S INHABITANTS TO YOUR WILL. LET THEM NEVER FORGET THE RULE OF RUNELORD ALAZNIST!

YOUR WILL BE DONE. HOW LONG WILL YOU BE GONE?



DON'T WORRY.

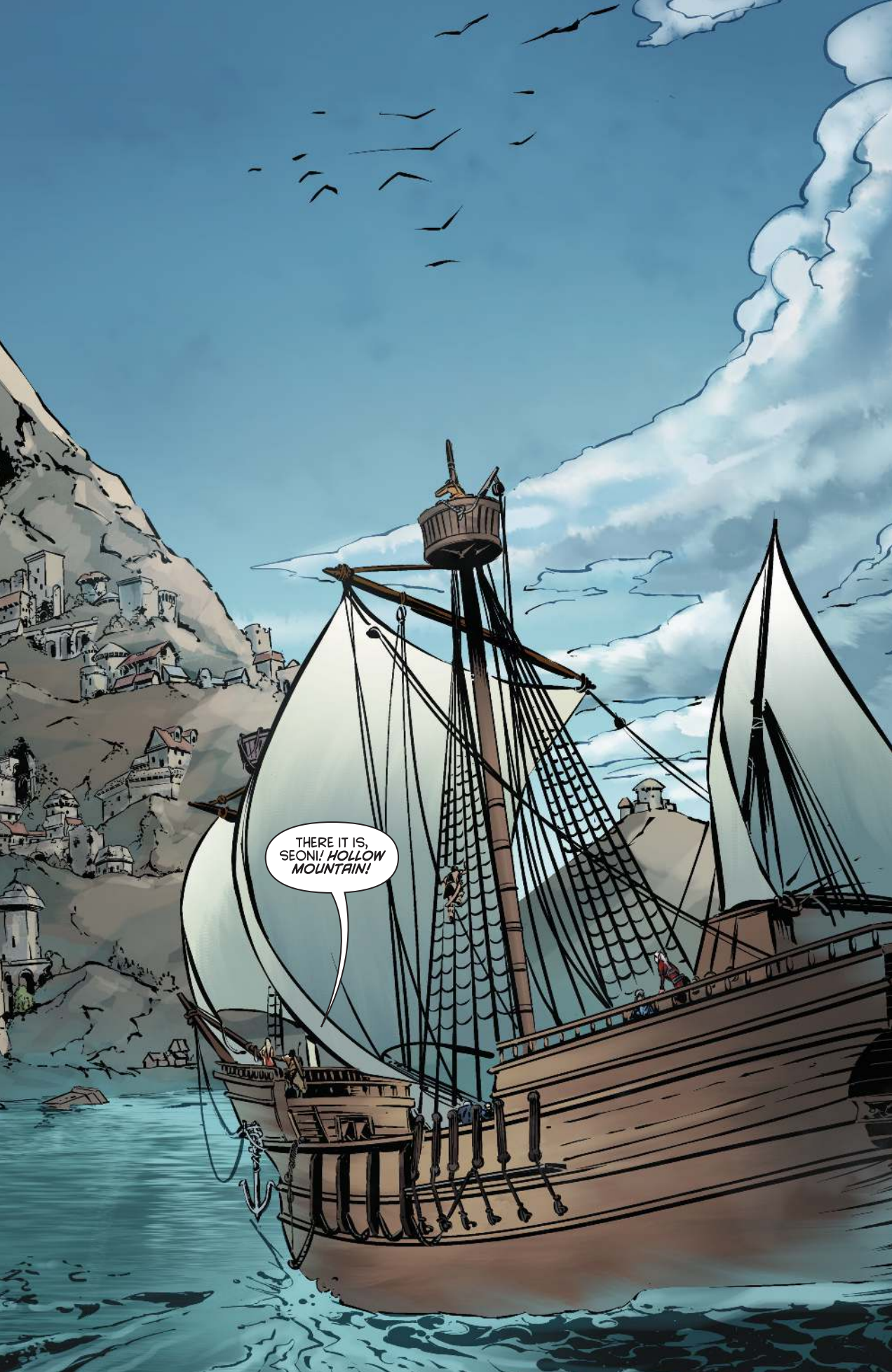
IT SHOULDN'T TAKE MORE THAN A FEW THOUSAND YEARS.

NOW...



PATHFINDER[®] **HOLLOW MOUNTAIN** **FRESH MEAT**

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THERE IT IS,
SEONI! *HOLLOW*
MOUNTAIN!