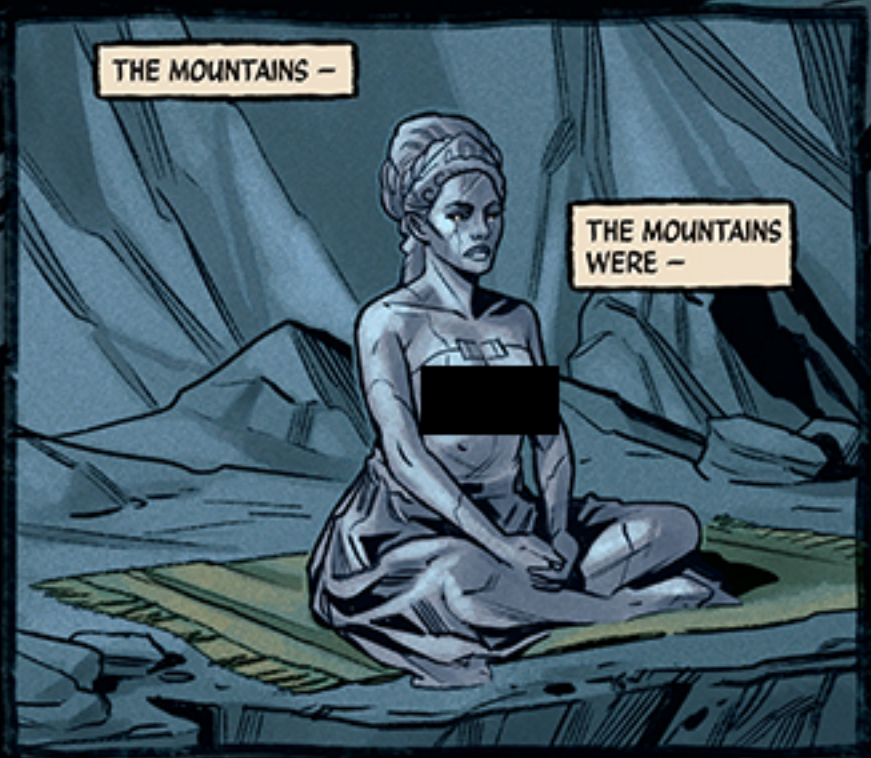
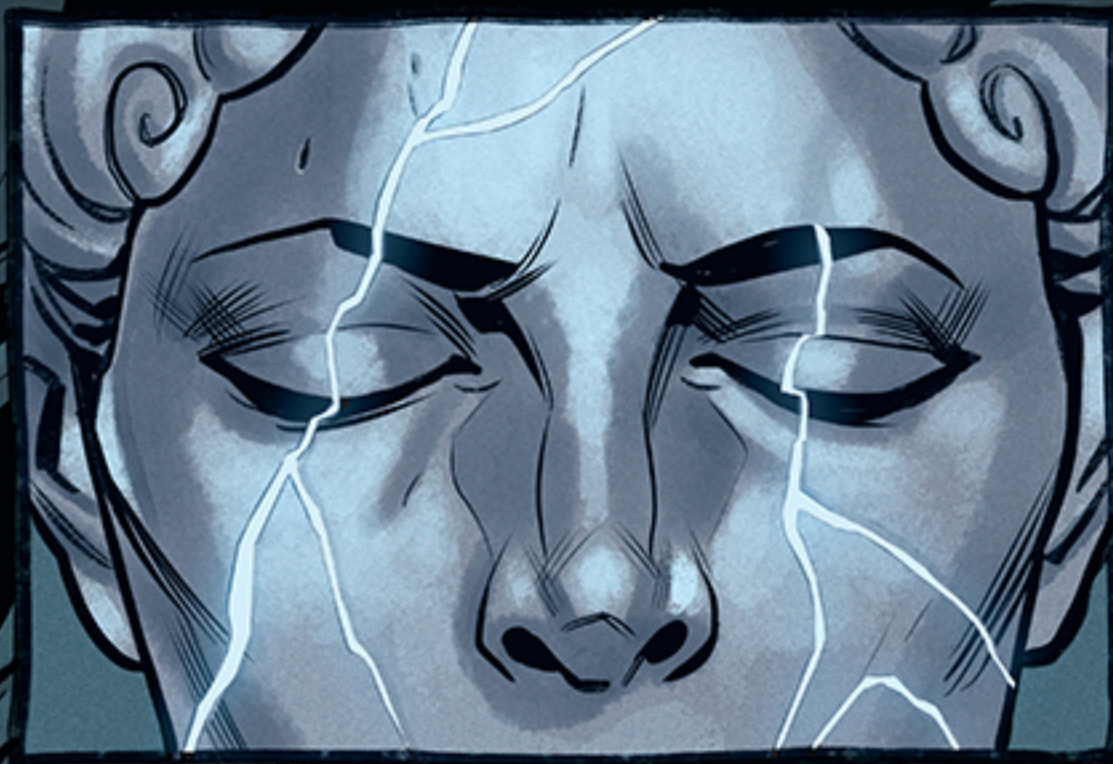




THE MOUNTAINS -



THE MOUNTAINS
WERE -





The BONES of the LEARTH

by
RENCAR INTERRA

The mountains were old, the oldest known places in the Autumnlands. Not all mountains, it is true—there were young mountains, raw mountains, thrust up from below by chaos and the wars of the gods. But these mountains, and many others, were ancient. From before the Summerlands, before the Dawning Lands. They had been old even in the time of legends, and they had seen much.

They had seen cataclysm, fire, the ur-energies of creation sweeping over the hills and plains and valleys below, over rivers and seas. They had seen the world reshaped, time and again, and they watched, silent and undisturbed, protecting their secrets.

There were those who believed they were bones, their long ranges the spines of leviathans long dead, monsters that once roamed the earth—fought, devoured, bled and died. And those who said they were merely rock, but rock the gods had walked before they were gods. Rock they had huddled in for refuge from greater forces even than they.

Whatever they were, they had seen much. Endured much. And sheltered much. Many said they still did. Ancient things, powerful things. Sacred and demonic things. Those who braved their peaks had to be brave themselves, and those who sought their secrets at least a little foolish.

For those who returned from the peaks brought dark tales. And many never returned at all...

ILLUSTRATED BY ROGAR



THE MOUNTAINS HELD MUCH THAT WAS UNKNOWN TO ME, THOUGH I HAD LOOKED AT THEM FROM ABOVE ALL MY LIFE.

THE WIND, THE DAMP, THE UNENDING, WEARYING SLOPES. AND THE SHADOWED FORESTS THAT HID ONLY THE GODS KNEW WHAT -

Hllllllllll - !

LEAROYD HAD GONE TO GATHER BREAKFAST. I SAW TO THE WATER -

DUSTY!
Hey!

What're you doing, kid?

The stream - look to your right!

Huh? It's just -
GHAH!

THEY WERE - CHANGED, MUTATED, MONSTROUS -

What - what -



Wildlife and fisheries! They're -

The forest's full of [redacted] like that. No animals fit to eat.

The water's [redacted] tainted, kid. It's not safe to drink - you're the one pointed that out in the first place.



Yes, but -



- I can clean it.

Well, [redacted] me running - it scans as pure. Really pure. Another handy-dandy magic spell?



It's VanDahl's All-Purpose Purification. We use it for - well, everything.

Cleaning clothes, preparing food, keeping injuries from festering...

It's how I kept your bandages clean, from your shoulder wound.

Huh.

