



Lemme see. Lemme see!

Emmer! Don't!

We was here F -

Ooo. What's him?

We was figurin' on that, 'fore we was innerRUPted.

Poli says he's a bear, but I says where's his pelt an' Poli says he got sheared an' I says bears don't get sheared an' anyhow he don't look like -

I can talk, Lim. Din't say he was a bear either, said mebbe.

Maybe he's a nape, like inna jungles. I seen pictures.

Napes got hair too, an' don't get sheared neither.

Panther?

Panthers is like poomers an' mountain lines. He look like some cat, wi' those ears?

He's a manatee.

A what?

Manatee. Got no wool, no fur, no lizardy scales. 'S a... a sea creature, like.

Sea creature? In Erries?



An Among the Trees

by
**ALIZ
BOUGON**

ILLUSTRATED BY
DIPREMA TODASH

The town of Erries was unremarkable. And even if it weren't, there were few to remark on it.

Even the name was ordinary. Sheeptowns dotted hills and plains, wherever there was water for a mill and land not quite fertile enough for other tribes to take it from them. And often, they were named Erries. Or Arris, Urry, Harriz or any of a dozen variations.

It was a sheeptown name, and they liked it that way.

The rest was no different. Buildings made of local wood, of daub-and-wattle walls, roofed with thatch and snug within. A few important buildings of stone—the

village hall, the brewery, the main granary, the mill. Visitors could be excused for confusing it with other sheeptowns.

Not that many visited to be confused. More than a small span of miles from Erries, few even knew it existed, aside from the occasional peddler trading metal goods and glass for thick, soft, Erries-made blankets, wool thread or a few barrels of the sweet malty ale they brewed. But when did a peddler let others know where his goods came from?

And the seasons turned and life changed little. And like all sheepclans, those of Erries were content. They had their ways, and their ways were fine.

Or so it went, until it went so no longer. But there were visitors, then...



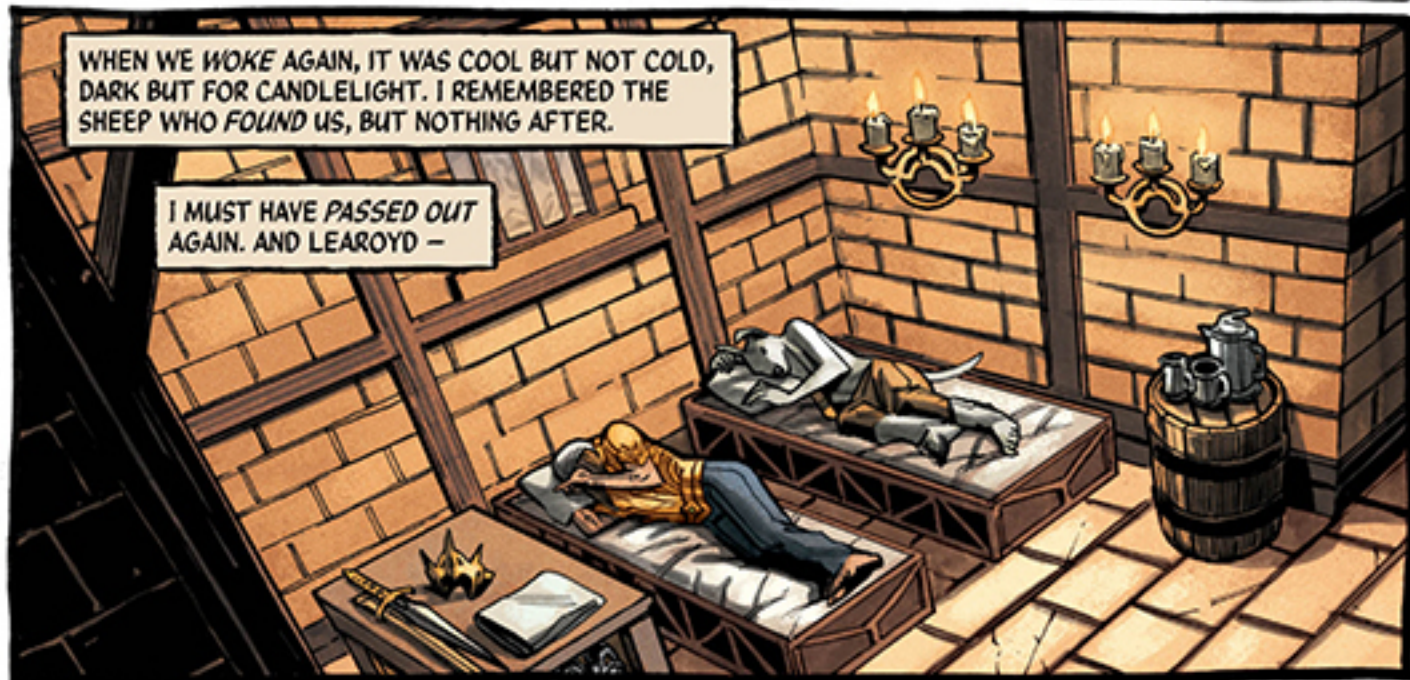


Y'mean mermaids.

An' there ain't no such thing, parson says.

Like he'd know. When's he ever see'd a sea?

When has you?



WHEN WE WOKE AGAIN, IT WAS COOL BUT NOT COLD, DARK BUT FOR CANDLELIGHT. I REMEMBERED THE SHEEP WHO FOUND US, BUT NOTHING AFTER.

I MUST HAVE PASSED OUT AGAIN. AND LEAROYD -



Ah, ye're awake!
Excellent!
Ye are wizards, aren't ye? Please say so.

Whuh. Where...?

Back in barracks, or...?



Nope, nope. Sheep in a hat. Still here.

Hey.

Allow me t' make yer acquaintance. I am Tavisher, clan chief o' this village. I had y' brought here. Ye'd fallen, from a height.

An' the crystal the young hound wears, it gives us hope, Magister...?

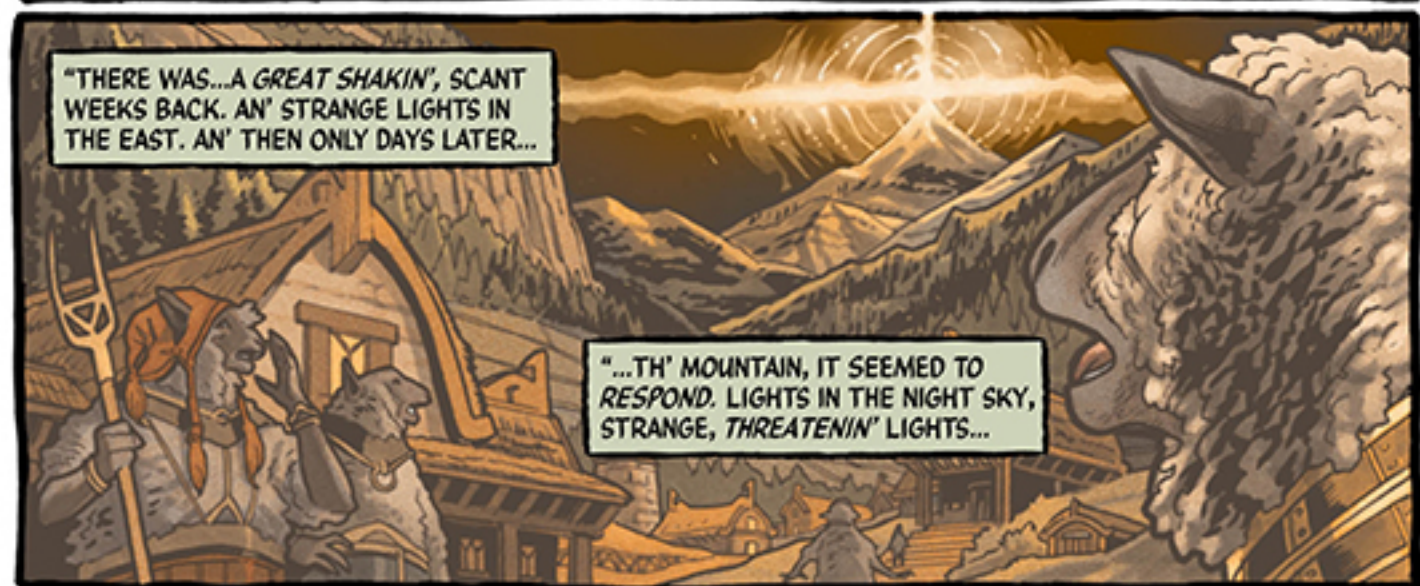


Learoyd. He's
Dusty.

And okay, I'll bite.
Just exactly why do
you need a wizard
so bad?

Well, it's th'
mountain,
y'see.

There's
summat going on.
Summat *there*. An'
we fear that...that
we angered it
somehow...



"THERE WAS...A GREAT SHAKIN', SCANT
WEEKS BACK. AN' STRANGE LIGHTS IN
THE EAST. AN' THEN ONLY DAYS LATER...

"...TH' MOUNTAIN, IT SEEMED TO
RESPOND. LIGHTS IN THE NIGHT SKY,
STRANGE, THREATENIN' LIGHTS...



"...AN' THEN THE SICKNESS
COME, STRIKIN' OUR BEASTS OF
BURDEN, OUR OLD AN' INFIRM...



...e'en our
childern!
See! See
how bad
it is!