

# SHATTERED REALMS & MENDED HEARTS



By Dante Von Carlo

# VALTHERIS: Shattered Realms and Mended Hearts

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Written by: Dante Von Carlo

Illustrations by: Dante Von Carlo


Lettering by: Dante Von Carlo

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THE EVENING FOG WRAPPED ITSELF  
AROUND THE MUSEUM OF QUARKS  
AND ODDITIES OF THE OLD WORLD.  
GASLIGHTS CAST A GOLDEN GLOW  
ONTO COBBLESTONE STREETS,

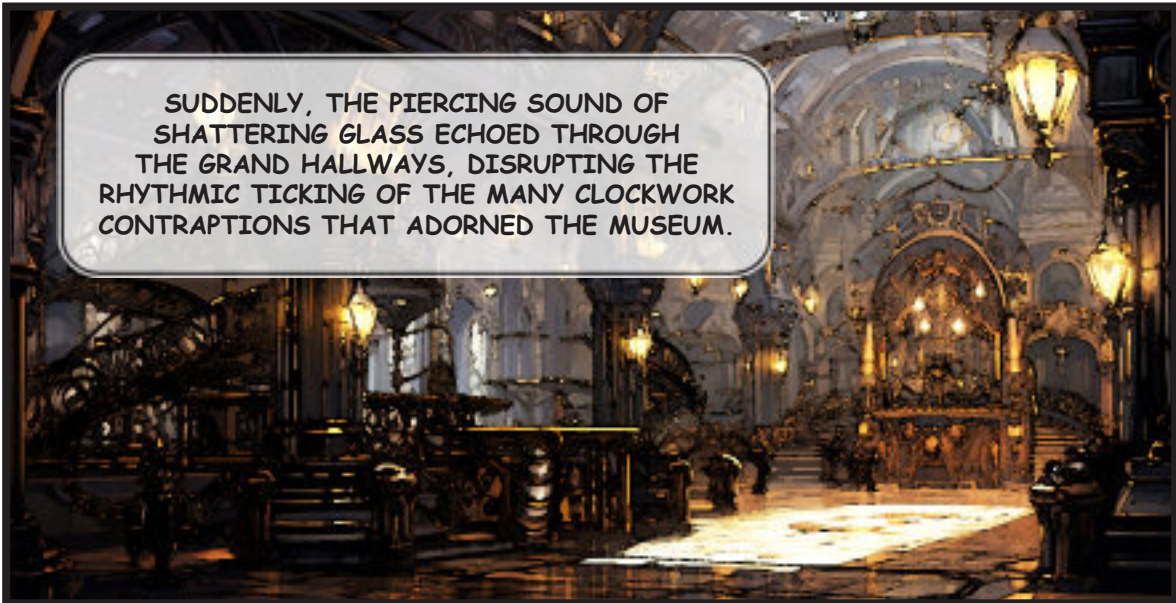
AS THE GENTLE HISS OF STEAM  
ESCAPING THE GRATES BLENDED  
SEAMLESSLY WITH DISTANT  
MURMURINGS OF LATE-NIGHT  
REVELERS AND CLATTERING  
HOOVES OF HORSES.



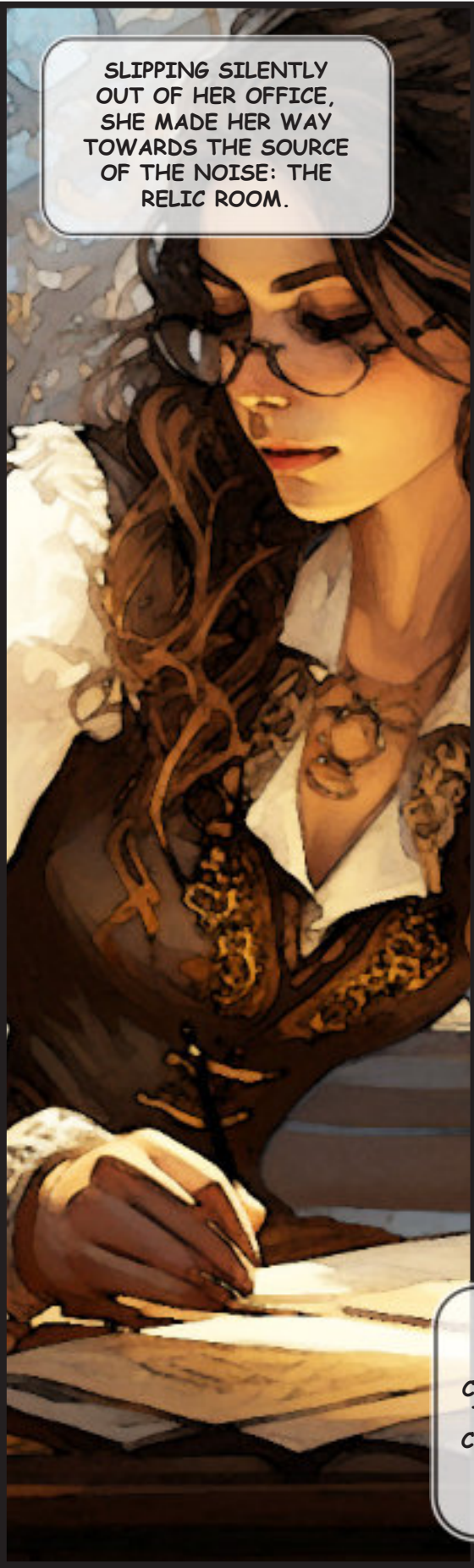
A detailed illustration of Cecilia Dawkins, a woman with long, wavy brown hair and glasses, wearing a dark jacket over a white shirt. She is seated at a desk in a dimly lit office, holding a quill pen over a glowing orb. The desk is cluttered with papers, sketches, and various mechanical devices. In the background, there are bookshelves and a large, ornate clockwork mechanism.

CECILIA DAWKINS, CURRENT CURATOR OF THE MUSEUM AND GRANDDAUGHTER TO ITS FOUNDER EMMETT DAWKINS, DILIGENTLY WORKED ON CATALOGING A NEW COLLECTION IN HER OFFICE.

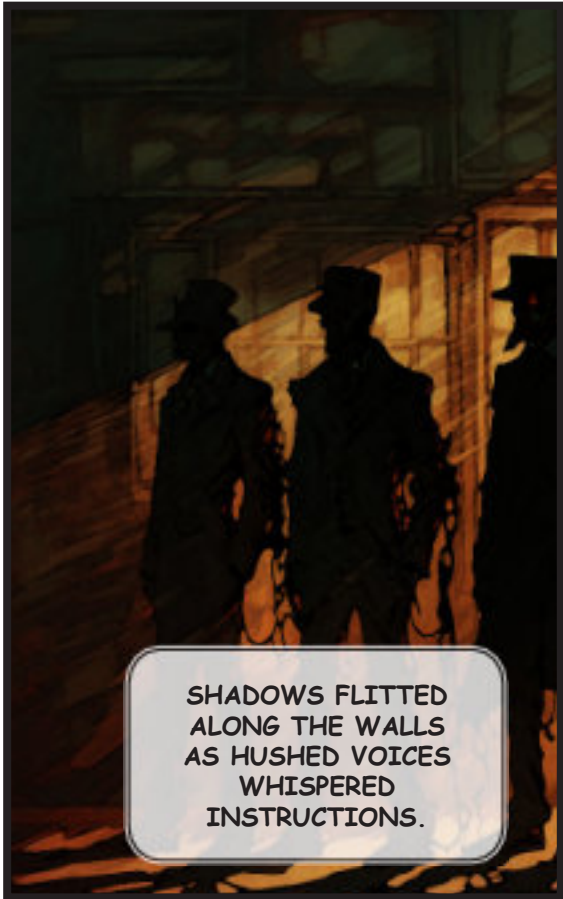
HER USUALLY METICULOUS WORKSPACE WAS SCATTERED WITH PAPERS, SKETCHES, AND A GLOWING ORB THAT SHIMMERED WITH IMAGES OF VARIOUS ARTIFACTS.

A wide-angle illustration of a grand, ornate hallways in a museum. The space is filled with intricate clockwork contraptions, including large gears and mechanical structures. The architecture features high ceilings, arched doorways, and ornate chandeliers. The floor is polished and reflects the light from the chandeliers. The overall atmosphere is one of mystery and historical grandeur.

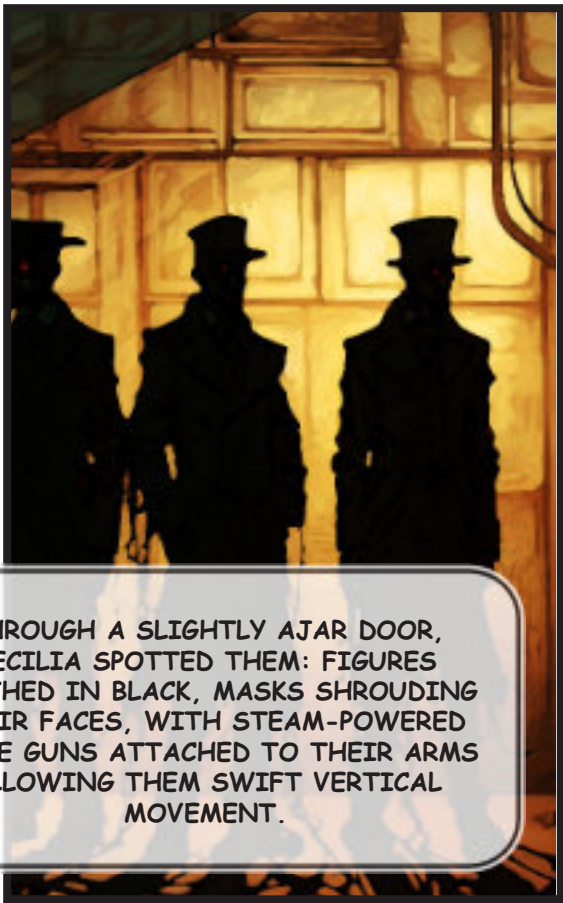
SUDDENLY, THE PIERCING SOUND OF SHATTERING GLASS ECHOED THROUGH THE GRAND HALLWAYS, DISRUPTING THE RHYTHMIC TICKING OF THE MANY CLOCKWORK CONTRAPTIONS THAT ADORNED THE MUSEUM.



SLIPPING SILENTLY  
OUT OF HER OFFICE,  
SHE MADE HER WAY  
TOWARDS THE SOURCE  
OF THE NOISE: THE  
RELIC ROOM.

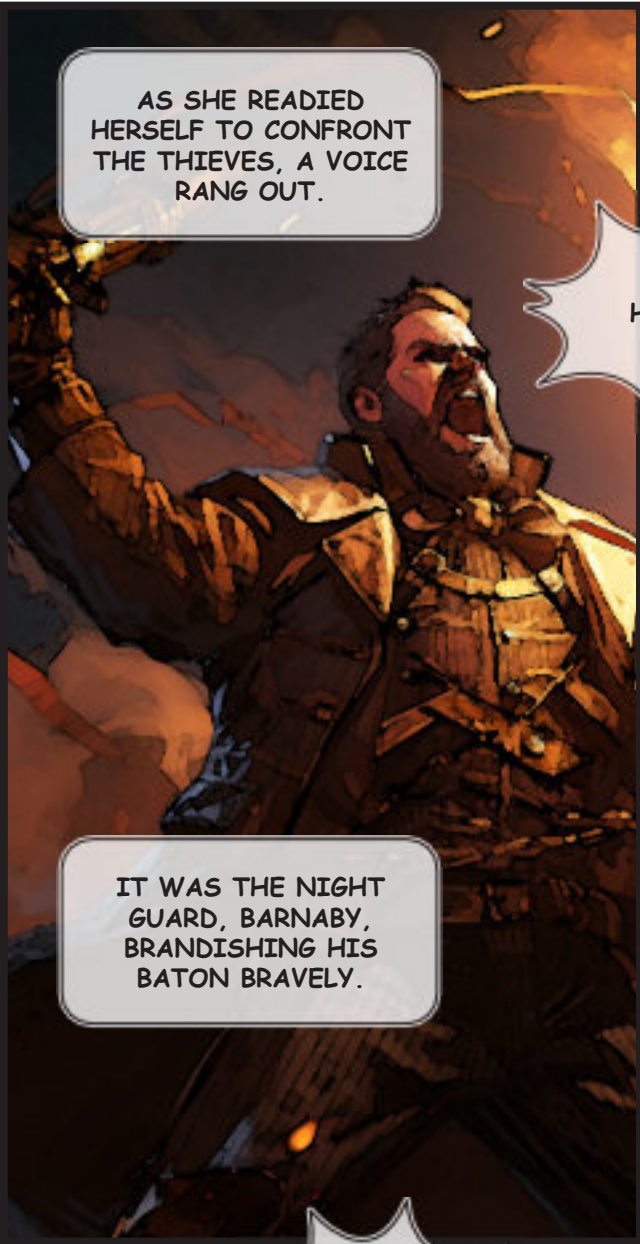


SHADOWS FLITTED  
ALONG THE WALLS  
AS HUSHED VOICES  
WHISPERED  
INSTRUCTIONS.



THROUGH A SLIGHTLY AJAR DOOR,  
CECILIA SPOTTED THEM: FIGURES  
CLOTHED IN BLACK, MASKS SHROUDING  
THEIR FACES, WITH STEAM-POWERED  
CABLE GUNS ATTACHED TO THEIR ARMS  
ALLOWING THEM SWIFT VERTICAL  
MOVEMENT.

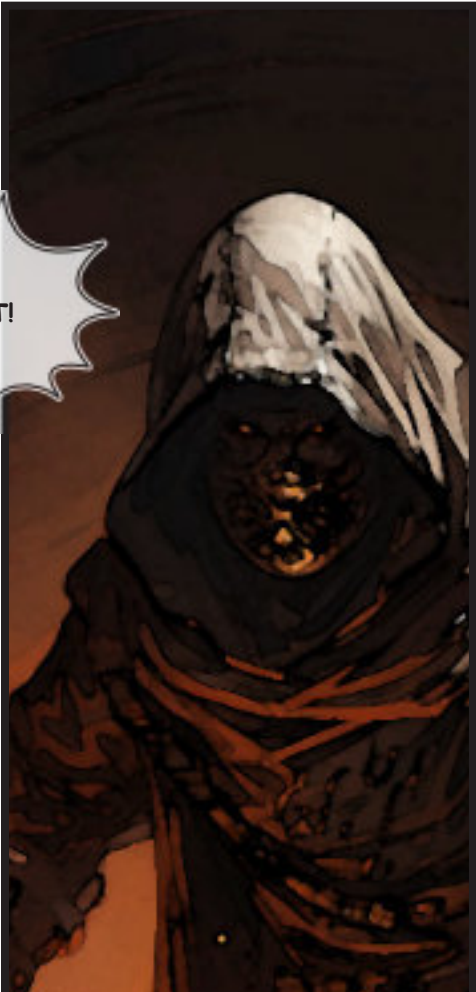




AS SHE READIED  
HERSELF TO CONFRONT  
THE THIEVES, A VOICE  
RANG OUT.

HALT!

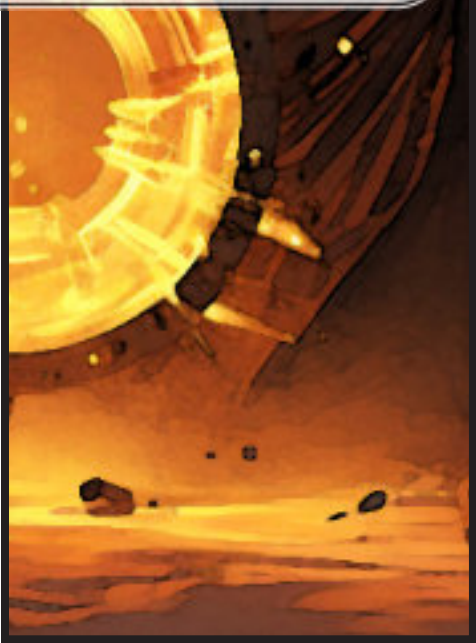
IT WAS THE NIGHT  
GUARD, BARNABY,  
BRANDISHING HIS  
BATON BRAVELY.

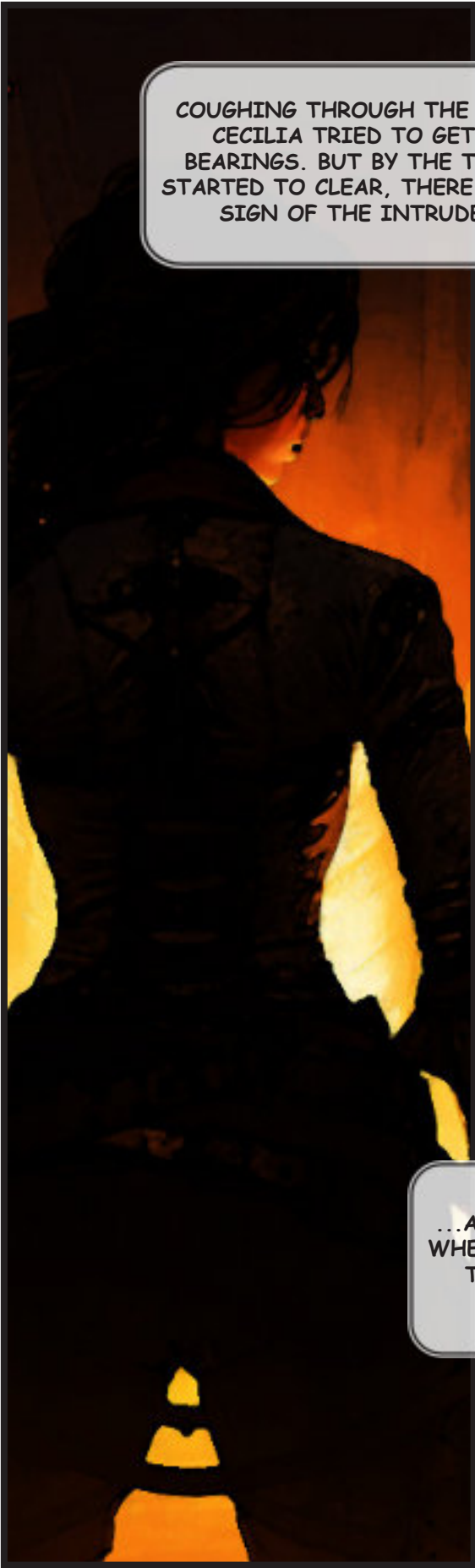


BUT BEFORE HE COULD TAKE  
ANOTHER STEP, A TALL, LEAN  
MAN EMERGED FROM THE  
SHADOWS, THROWING DOWN  
A CYLINDRICAL OBJECT.

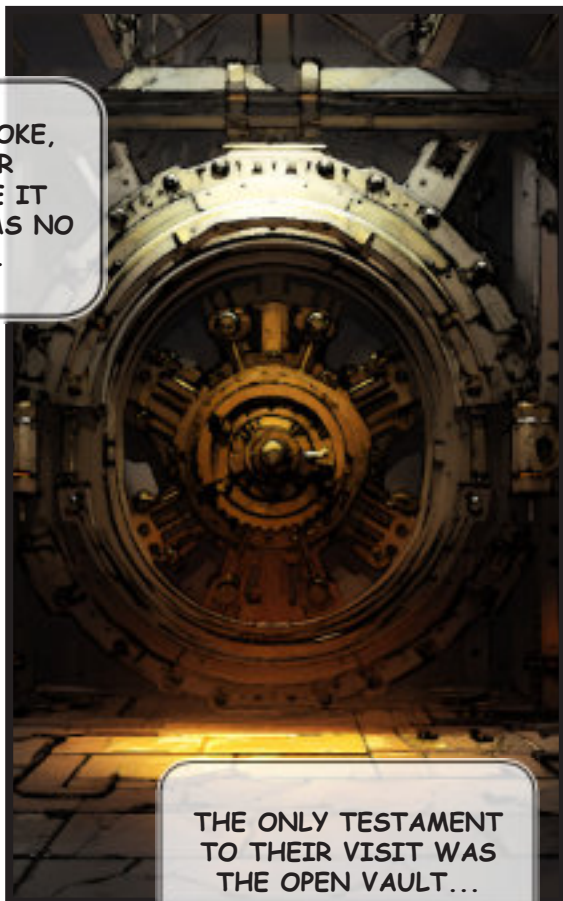


CECILIA!

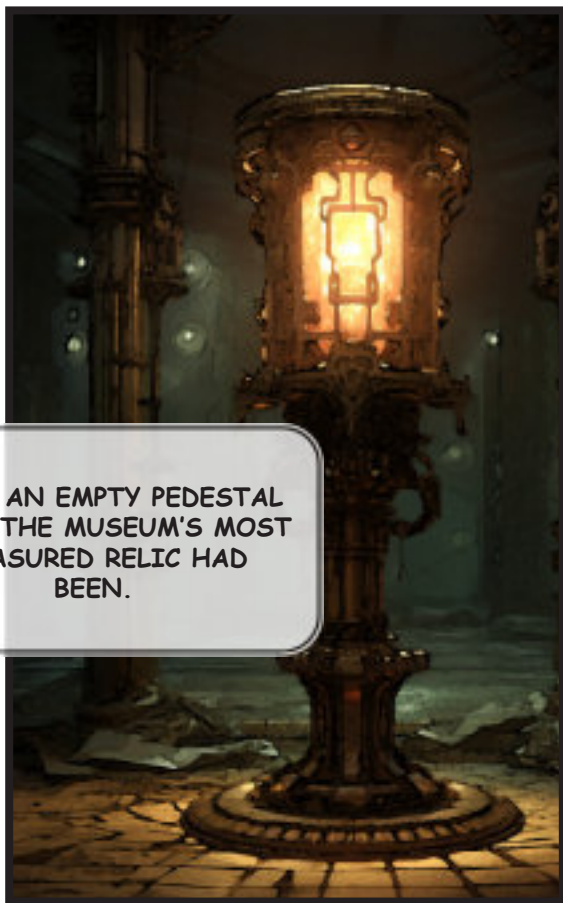




COUGHING THROUGH THE SMOKE,  
CECILIA TRIED TO GET HER  
BEARINGS. BUT BY THE TIME IT  
STARTED TO CLEAR, THERE WAS NO  
SIGN OF THE INTRUDERS.

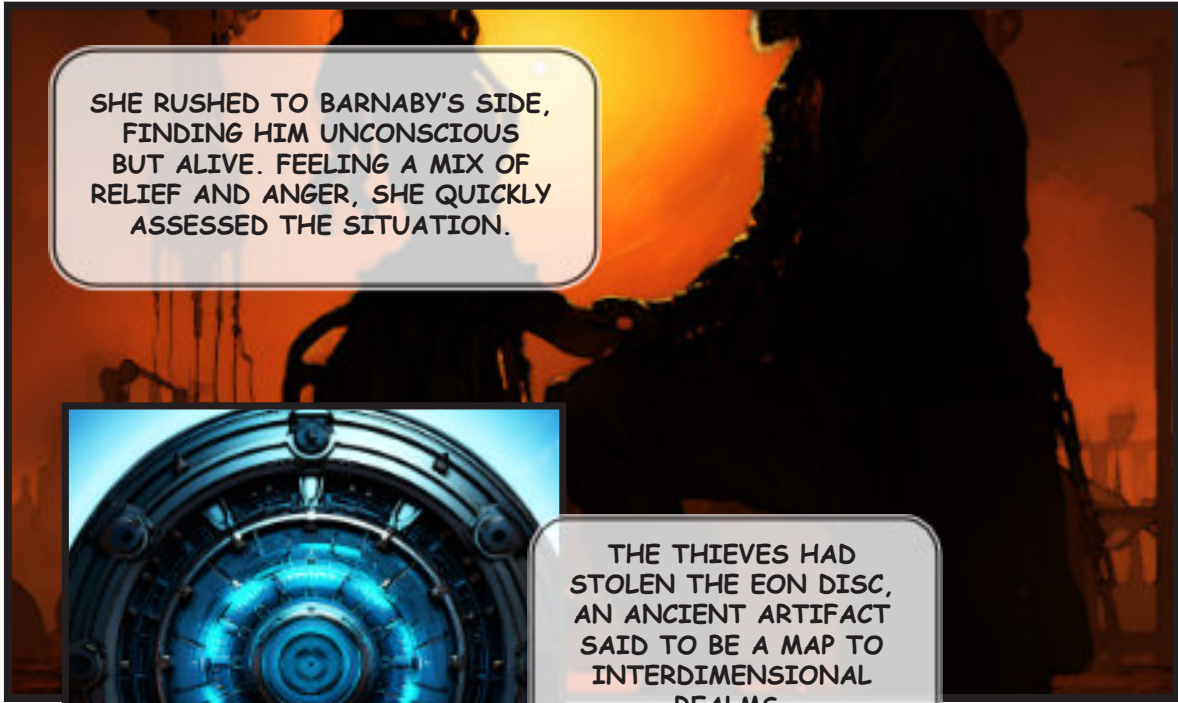


THE ONLY TESTAMENT  
TO THEIR VISIT WAS  
THE OPEN VAULT...

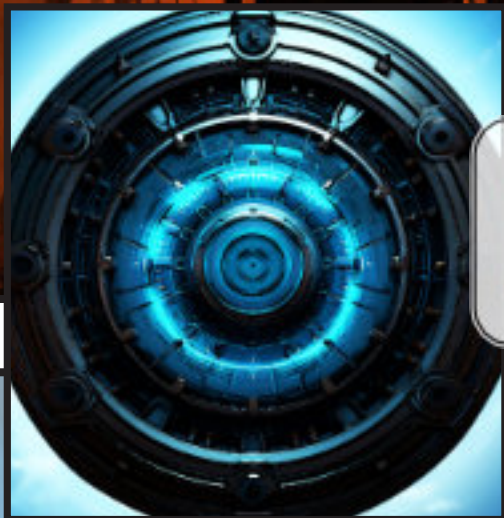


...AND AN EMPTY PEDESTAL  
WHERE THE MUSEUM'S MOST  
TREASURED RELIC HAD  
BEEN.






SHE RUSHED TO BARNABY'S SIDE, FINDING HIM UNCONSCIOUS BUT ALIVE. FEELING A MIX OF RELIEF AND ANGER, SHE QUICKLY ASSESSED THE SITUATION.



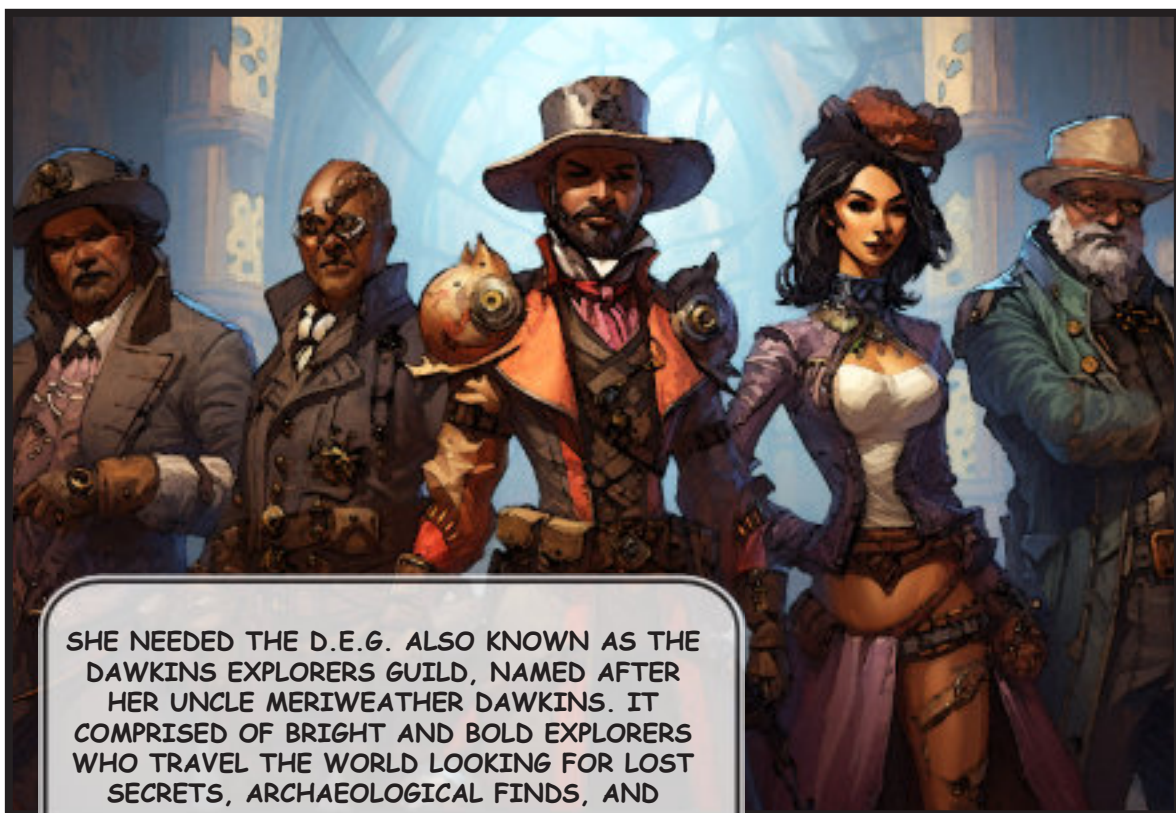
THE THIEVES HAD STOLEN THE EON DISC, AN ANCIENT ARTIFACT SAID TO BE A MAP TO INTERDIMENSIONAL REALMS.



HEARING SIRENS IN THE DISTANCE, CECILIA KNEW THE CITY'S POLICE AIRSHIPS WOULD SOON ARRIVE. BUT DEEP DOWN, SHE UNDERSTOOD THAT REGULAR LAW ENFORCEMENT WOULDN'T BE ENOUGH.

THE THEFT OF THE EON DISC REQUIRED EXPERTISE, A KNOWLEDGE OF THE OLD WORLD AND ITS SECRETS.





SHE NEEDED THE D.E.G. ALSO KNOWN AS THE DAWKINS EXPLORERS GUILD, NAMED AFTER HER UNCLE MERIWEATHER DAWKINS. IT COMPRISED OF BRIGHT AND BOLD EXPLORERS WHO TRAVEL THE WORLD LOOKING FOR LOST SECRETS, ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS, AND HIDDEN REALMS.



THE ORGANIZATION IS FUNDED BY THE NATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY MADE OF THE TOP SCHOOLS AND MUSEUMS IN THE NATION.

THE NEXT MORNING, A SIGN WAS PLACED ON THE MUSEUM'S GRAND ENTRANCE.






CECILIA PORED OVER THE SECURITY RECORDS AND FOUND SOMETHING INTERESTING. THE THIEVES' STEAM-POWERED CABLE GUNS LEFT BEHIND TRACES OF AN UNUSUAL OIL COMPOUND.

IT WAS A LEAD, ALBEIT A SLIM ONE. SHE PACKED HER BAG, ENSURING HER CROSSBOW AND SOME OTHER TOOLS OF THE TRADE WERE INSIDE.



STEPPING INTO THE BRISK MORNING AIR, CECILIA SET OFF. HER DESTINATION: THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE CAPITAL, TO MEET A MAN NAMED JULIUS NEMO LUSHINGTON. THE BEST TRACKER THE D.E.G. EVER HAD.






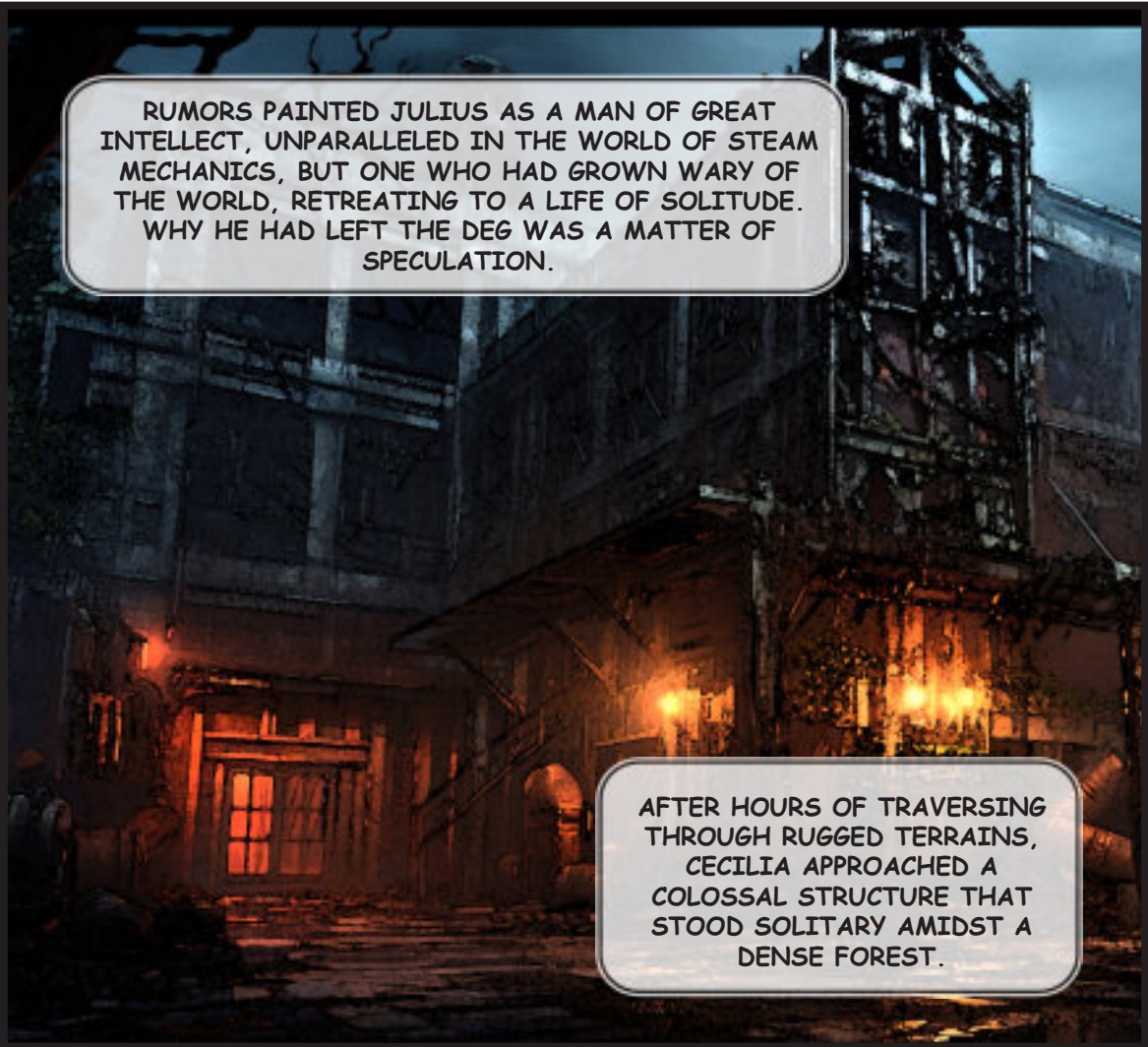
CECILIA'S STEAM-POWERED MOTORBIKE ROARED TO LIFE AS SHE VENTURED BEYOND THE CITY LIMITS, CUTTING THROUGH THE MISTY MOORS.

AS THE METROPOLIS FADED BEHIND HER, THE OPEN LANDSCAPES REVEALED A WORLD WHERE TECHNOLOGY AND NATURE FOUGHT A CONTINUOUS BATTLE.

HERE, WILD STEAM-POWERED CREATURES ROAMED, REMNANTS OF PAST EXPERIMENTS GONE AWRY.

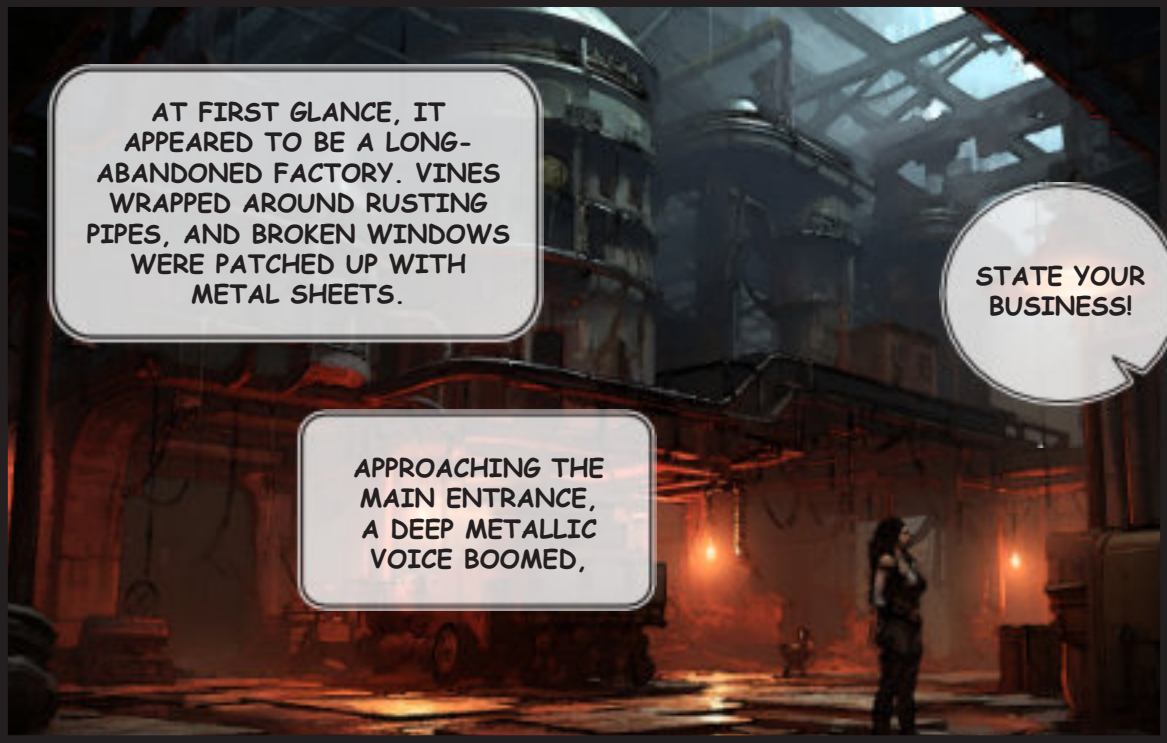


THE SUN HUNG LOW IN THE SKY, CASTING LONG SHADOWS ON THE PATH. CECILIA CONSULTED A SMALL MECHANICAL COMPASS SHE KEPT AROUND HER NECK. IT POINTED DUE WEST, STRAIGHT TO THE LOCATION WHERE JULIUS NEMO LUSHINGTON WAS SAID TO LIVE.



RUMORS PAINTED JULIUS AS A MAN OF GREAT INTELLECT, UNPARALLELED IN THE WORLD OF STEAM MECHANICS, BUT ONE WHO HAD GROWN WARY OF THE WORLD, RETREATING TO A LIFE OF SOLITUDE. WHY HE HAD LEFT THE DEG WAS A MATTER OF SPECULATION.

AFTER HOURS OF TRAVERSING THROUGH RUGGED TERRAINS, CECILIA APPROACHED A COLOSSAL STRUCTURE THAT STOOD SOLITARY AMIDST A DENSE FOREST.



AT FIRST GLANCE, IT APPEARED TO BE A LONG-ABANDONED FACTORY. VINES WRAPPED AROUND RUSTING PIPES, AND BROKEN WINDOWS WERE PATCHED UP WITH METAL SHEETS.

APPROACHING THE MAIN ENTRANCE, A DEEP METALLIC VOICE BOOMED,

STATE YOUR BUSINESS!





I'M HERE  
TO SEE  
JULIUS NEMO  
LUSHINGTON.  
MY NAME  
IS CECILIA  
DAWKINS.



THERE WAS A PAUSE, THEN  
A SERIES OF MECHANICAL  
WHIRRING. THE LARGE METAL  
DOORS CREAKED OPEN...



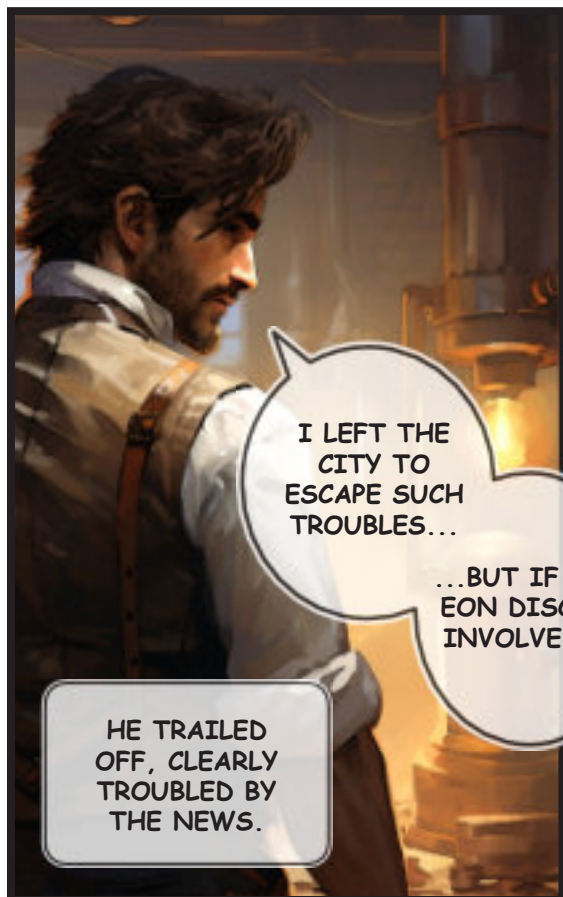
...REVEALING THE INNER SANCTUM.  
ILLUMINATED BY DIM GASLIGHTS,  
IT WAS A LABYRINTH OF CONVEYOR  
BELTS, STEAM ENGINES, AND  
BIZARRE MACHINES THAT SEEMED  
TO HAVE A LIFE OF THEIR OWN.



DAWKINS,  
YOU SAY? OF  
THE QUARKS  
AND ODDITIES  
MUSEUM?



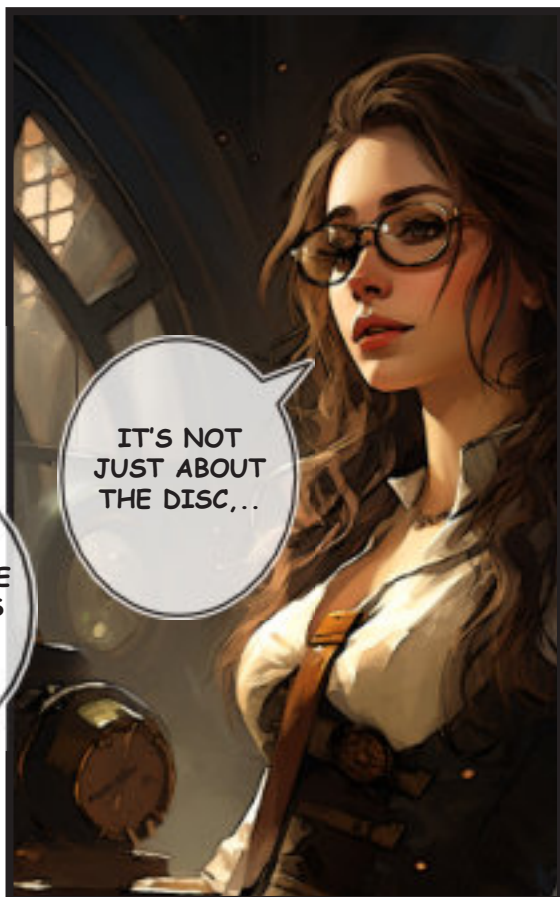
YES, I NEED  
YOUR HELP.  
THE EON DISC  
HAS BEEN  
STOLEN.



I LEFT THE  
CITY TO  
ESCAPE SUCH  
TROUBLES...

...BUT IF THE  
EON DISC IS  
INVOLVED...

HE TRAILED  
OFF, CLEARLY  
TROUBLED BY  
THE NEWS.



IT'S NOT  
JUST ABOUT  
THE DISC,...





THE THIEVES  
LEFT BEHIND  
A PARTICULAR  
RESIDUE FROM  
THEIR STEAM-  
POWERED CABLE  
GUNS. I'VE  
BROUGHT A  
SAMPLE



SHE HANDED HIM A VIAL.  
JULIUS INSPECTED IT, HIS  
EYES NARROWING.



THIS ISN'T  
JUST ANY OIL.  
IT'S ETHEREAL  
LUMINANCE,  
A RARE  
COMPOUND.

ONLY A FEW  
IN THE WORLD  
KNOW HOW TO  
REFINE IT.



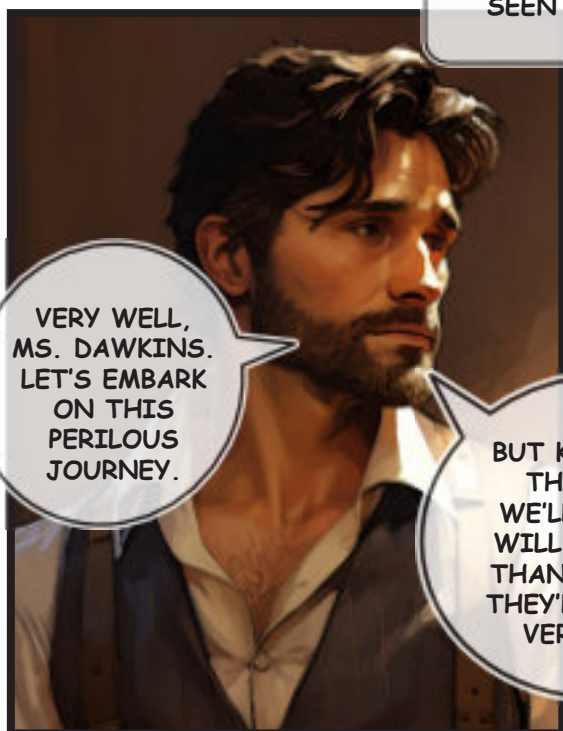
THERE'S AN  
OLD TALE OF  
A HIDDEN  
UNDERGROUND  
REALM...

...KNOWN AS  
THE ABYSSAL  
SANCTUARY,  
WHERE  
ETHEREAL  
LUMINANCE...

...IS SAID  
TO FLOW  
LIKE WATER.

BUT  
ACCESSING  
IT IS  
PERILOUS.

JULIUS' EYES  
REFLECTED A FIRE  
CECILIA HADN'T  
SEEN EARLIER.

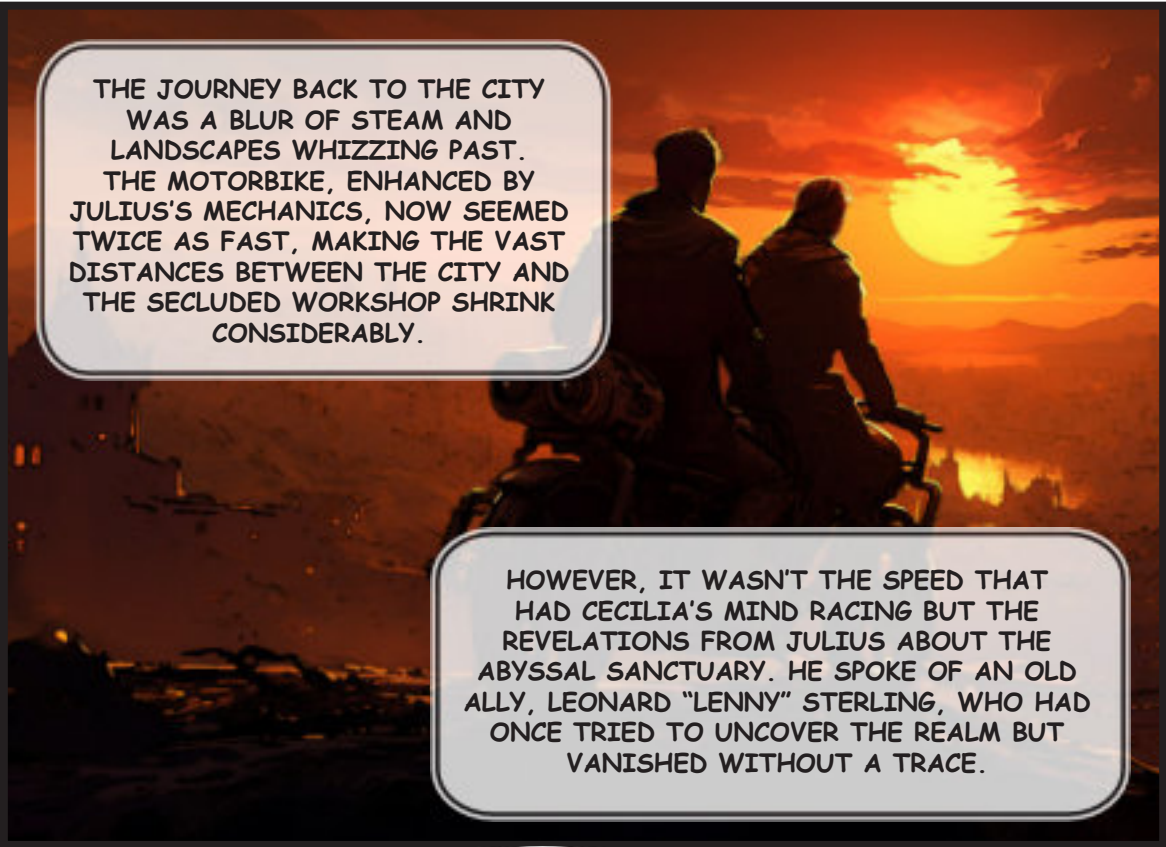


VERY WELL,  
MS. DAWKINS.  
LET'S EMBARK  
ON THIS  
PERILOUS  
JOURNEY.



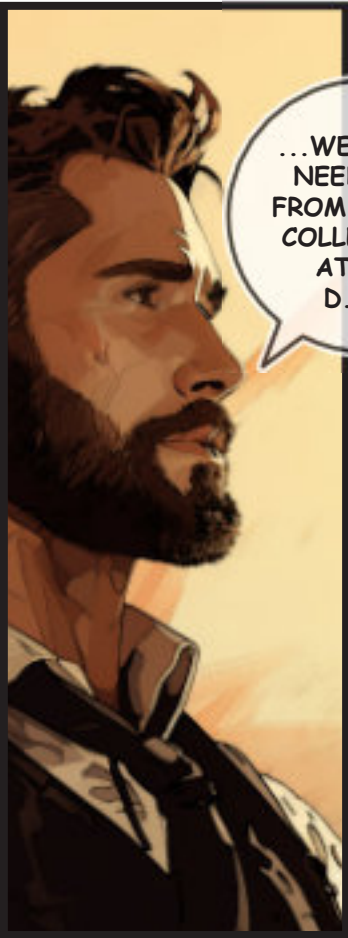
BUT KNOW THIS,  
THE REALMS  
WE'LL TRAVERSE  
WILL TEST MORE  
THAN OUR WITS.  
THEY'LL TEST OUR  
VERY SOULS.



A wide panel showing a man and a woman riding a motorbike away from the viewer towards a bright sunset. The sun is a large, glowing orb in the sky, casting a warm orange light over the scene. The landscape is dark and hilly, with some distant lights visible.

THE JOURNEY BACK TO THE CITY WAS A BLUR OF STEAM AND LANDSCAPES WHIZZING PAST. THE MOTORBIKE, ENHANCED BY JULIUS'S MECHANICS, NOW SEEMED TWICE AS FAST, MAKING THE VAST DISTANCES BETWEEN THE CITY AND THE SECLUDED WORKSHOP SHRINK CONSIDERABLY.

HOWEVER, IT WASN'T THE SPEED THAT HAD CECILIA'S MIND RACING BUT THE REVELATIONS FROM JULIUS ABOUT THE ABYSSAL SANCTUARY. HE SPOKE OF AN OLD ALLY, LEONARD "LENNY" STERLING, WHO HAD ONCE TRIED TO UNCOVER THE REALM BUT VANISHED WITHOUT A TRACE.

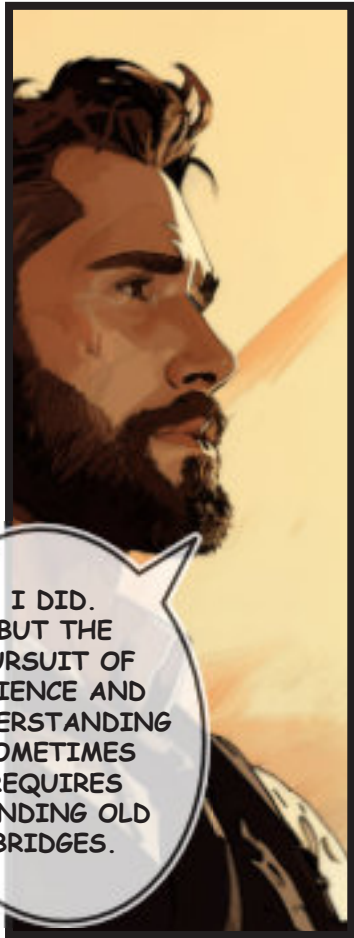
A close-up, profile view of a man with a dark beard and mustache, looking towards the right. He has a serious expression. The background is a warm, yellowish-orange glow.

IF WE'RE TO FIND THE SANCTUARY...

A close-up, profile view of a woman with dark hair and glasses, looking towards the right. She has a thoughtful expression. The background is a warm, yellowish-orange glow.

...WE MIGHT NEED HELP FROM MY OLD COLLEAGUES AT THE D.E.G.

BUT YOU LEFT THEM.

A close-up, profile view of the same man from the first panel, looking towards the right. He has a serious expression. The background is a warm, yellowish-orange glow.


I DID. BUT THE PURSUIT OF SCIENCE AND UNDERSTANDING SOMETIMES REQUIRES MENDING OLD BRIDGES.

THE METROPOLIS, WITH ITS MAJESTIC SPIRES AND BRIDGES, LOOMED AHEAD. THE DUO'S FIRST STOP WAS D.E.G.'S SPRAWLING HEADQUARTERS, A GRAND STRUCTURE RESEMBLING A MECHANICAL CATHEDRAL, ADORNED WITH ROTATING GEARS AND CLOCKWORK OWLS.




THE RECEPTION AT D.E.G. WAS COLD. MANY REGARDED JULIUS WITH SUSPICION, SOME WITH BARELY CONCEALED HOSTILITY. BUT THE GRAVITY OF THE EON DISC'S THEFT OPENED DOORS.






IN THE MAIN ASSEMBLY HALL, TOP ENGINEERS AND INVENTORS GATHERED. AT THE CENTER STOOD A LARGE HOLOGRAPHIC PROJECTOR WHICH, WHEN ACTIVATED, SHOWCASED A DETAILED MAP OF THE CITY AND ITS SURROUNDINGS.

WITH A FLICK OF A SWITCH, JULIUS HIGHLIGHTED THE AREAS WHERE ETHEREAL LUMINANCE RESIDUES HAD BEEN REPORTED IN THE PAST.



OUR THIEVES ARE NOT THE FIRST TO USE THIS COMPOUND. THERE'S A PATTERN HERE,

CECILIA STEPPED FORWARD, POINTING TO THE NETWORK OF UNDERGROUND TUNNELS AND OLD MINING PATHS.



IF THE ABYSSAL SANCTUARY EXISTS AND HAS THE COMPOUND FLOWING, IT MIGHT BE CONNECTED TO THESE TUNNELS.

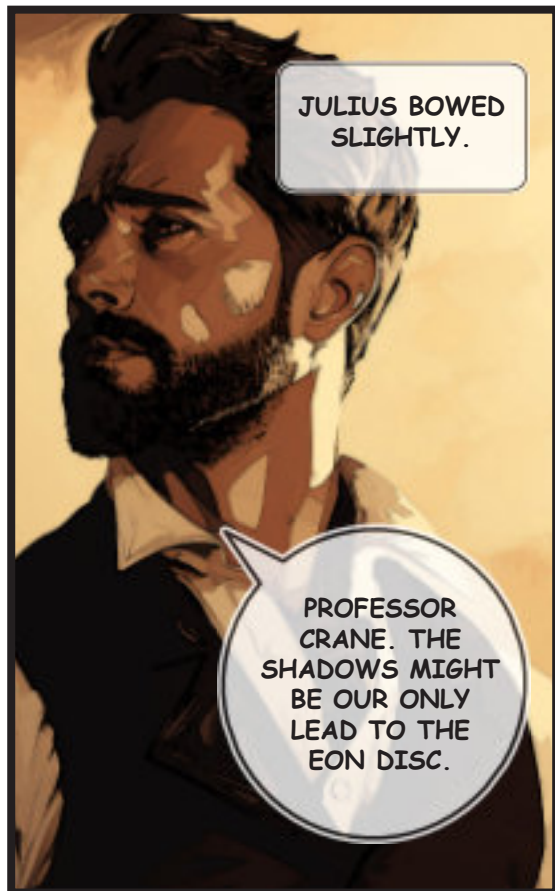
SILENCE FILLED THE HALL UNTIL AN OLD VOICE ECHOED FROM THE BACK



LUSHINGTON?  
IS THAT  
REALLY YOU?

CHASING  
SHADOWS,  
ARE WE?

A FRAIL OLD  
MAN, SUPPORTED  
BY A MECHANICAL  
WALKING STICK,  
EMERGED. IT  
WAS PROFESSOR  
ARCHIBALD  
CRANE, THE  
CURRENT HEAD  
OF DEG AND  
JULIUS'S FORMER  
MENTOR.



JULIUS BOWED  
SLIGHTLY.

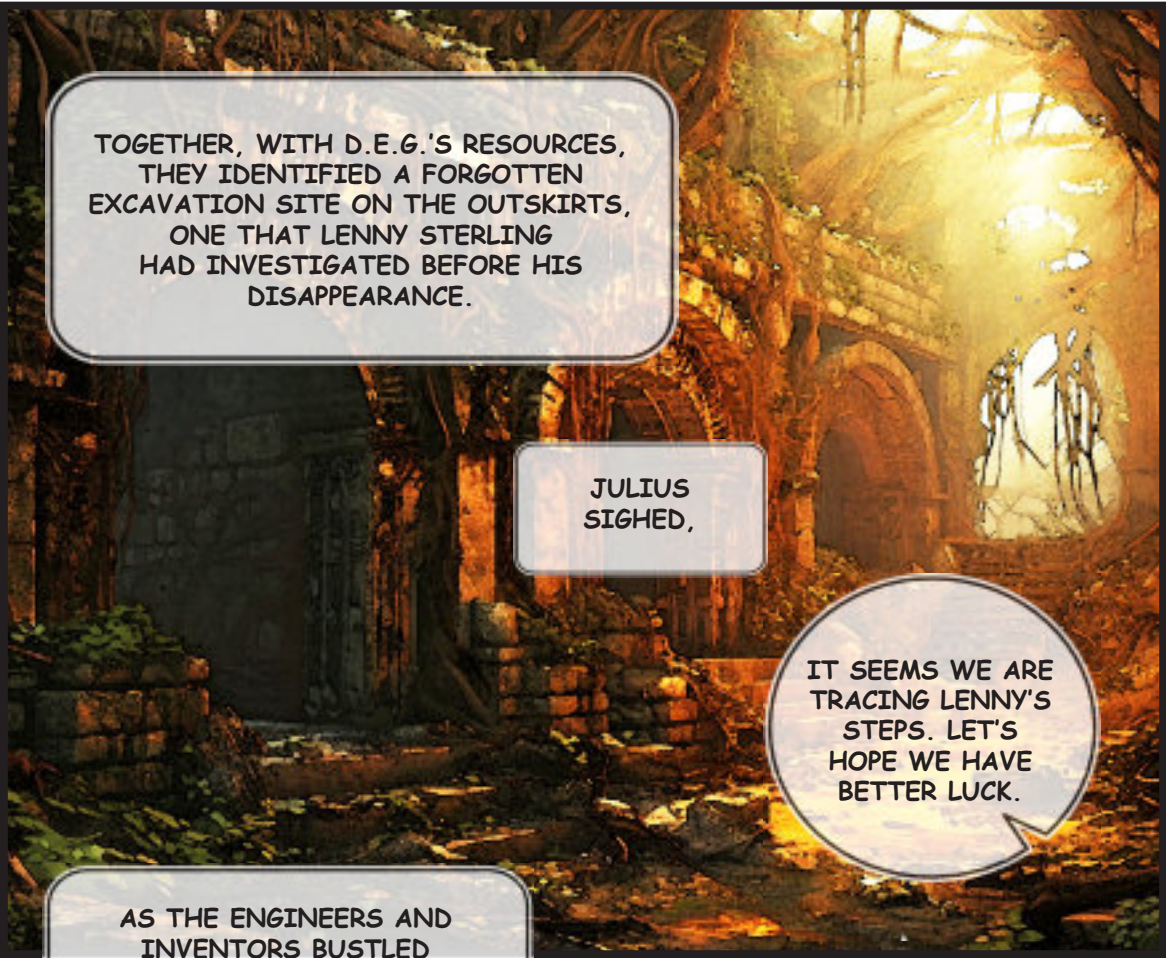
PROFESSOR  
CRANE. THE  
SHADOWS MIGHT  
BE OUR ONLY  
LEAD TO THE  
EON DISC.



ARCHIBALD  
STUDIED THE MAP,  
ADJUSTING HIS  
GLASSES.

I'VE SEEN THIS  
PATTERN BEFORE,  
BUT WE NEVER MADE  
THE CONNECTION  
TO THE SANCTUARY.  
MAYBE WE WERE  
LOOKING IN THE  
WRONG PLACE.





TOGETHER, WITH D.E.G.'S RESOURCES,  
THEY IDENTIFIED A FORGOTTEN  
EXCAVATION SITE ON THE OUTSKIRTS,  
ONE THAT LENNY STERLING  
HAD INVESTIGATED BEFORE HIS  
DISAPPEARANCE.


JULIUS  
SIGHED,

IT SEEMS WE ARE  
TRACING LENNY'S  
STEPS. LET'S  
HOPE WE HAVE  
BETTER LUCK.

AS THE ENGINEERS AND  
INVENTORS BUSTLED  
ABOUT PREPARING FOR  
THE EXPEDITION, CECILIA  
APPROACHED JULIUS.



THANK YOU  
FOR COMING  
BACK TO THIS  
CHAOS




FOR  
KNOWLEDGE,  
MS. DAWKINS.  
ALWAYS FOR  
KNOWLEDGE.

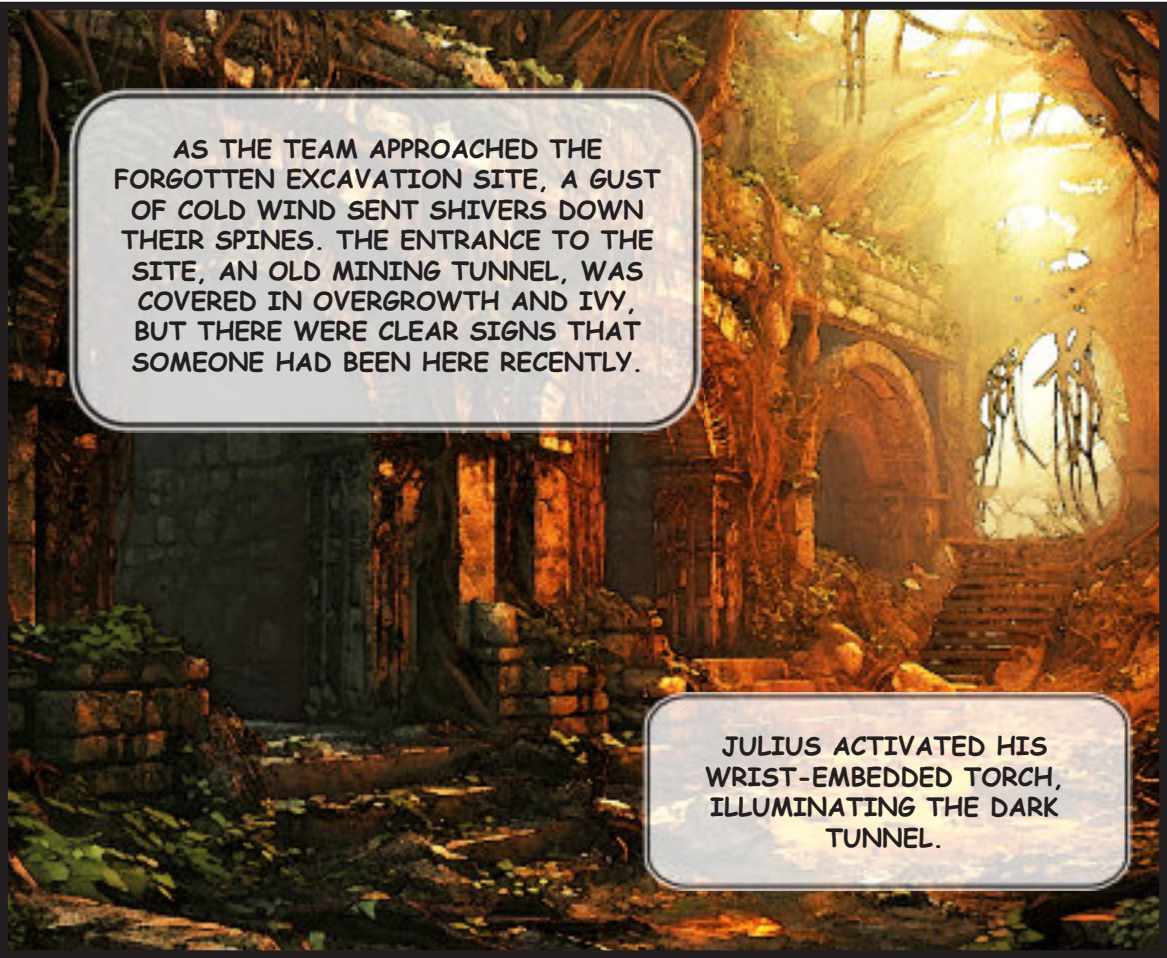


BUT AS THEY VENTURED TOWARDS THE SITE, AN UNSETTLING FEELING CREPT OVER THEM. THEY WERE NOT JUST BATTLING TIME TO FIND THE EON DISC, BUT POSSIBLY FACING THE UNKNOWN DANGERS THAT HAD CLAIMED LENNY STERLING.





THE SKY WAS AWASH WITH  
A FIERY ORANGE HUE, WITH  
DARK, BROODING CLOUDS  
GATHERING ON THE HORIZON.



AS THE TEAM APPROACHED THE  
FORGOTTEN EXCAVATION SITE, A GUST  
OF COLD WIND SENT SHIVERS DOWN  
THEIR SPINES. THE ENTRANCE TO THE  
SITE, AN OLD MINING TUNNEL, WAS  
COVERED IN OVERGROWTH AND IVY,  
BUT THERE WERE CLEAR SIGNS THAT  
SOMEONE HAD BEEN HERE RECENTLY.

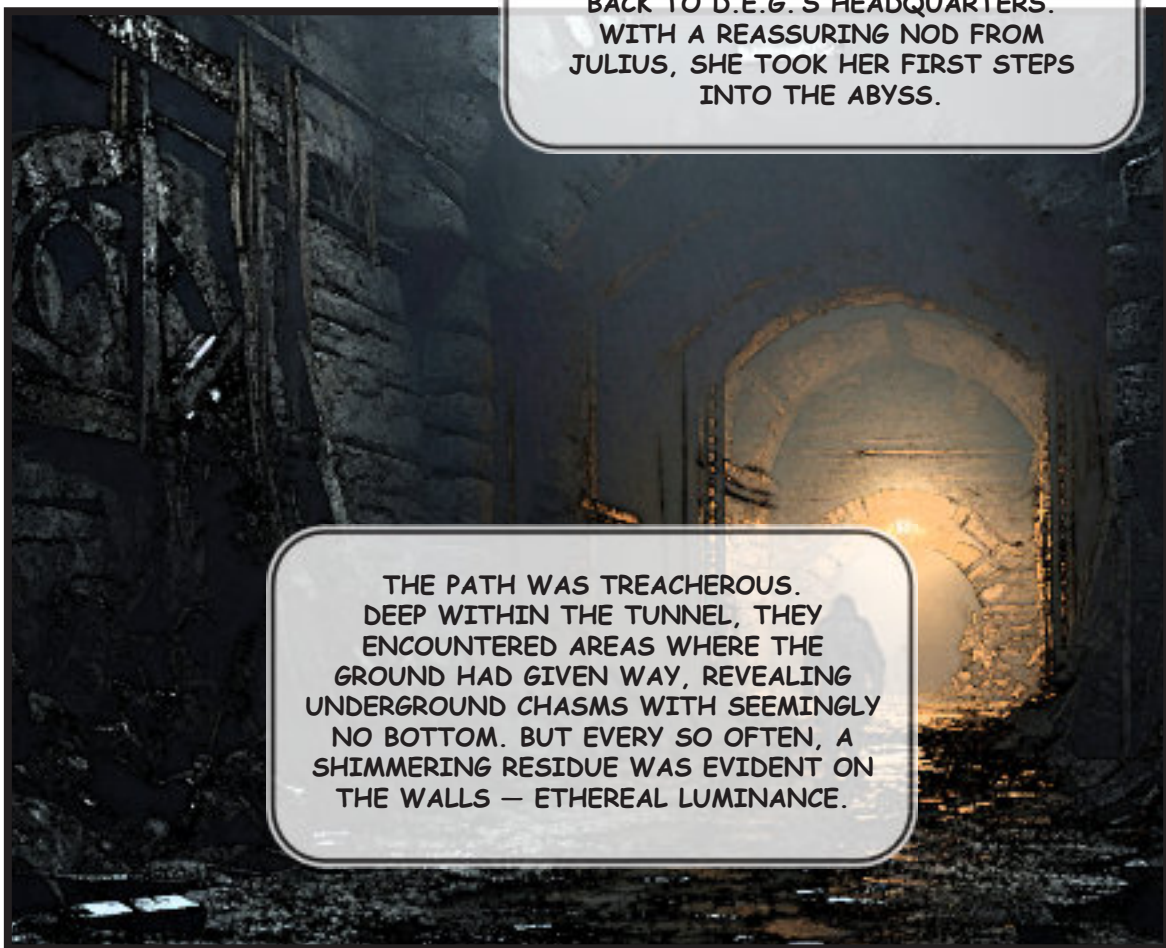
JULIUS ACTIVATED HIS  
WRIST-EMBEDDED TORCH,  
ILLUMINATING THE DARK  
TUNNEL.



EVERYONE,  
GEAR UP. WE  
HAVE NO IDEA  
WHAT WE'RE  
WALKING INTO



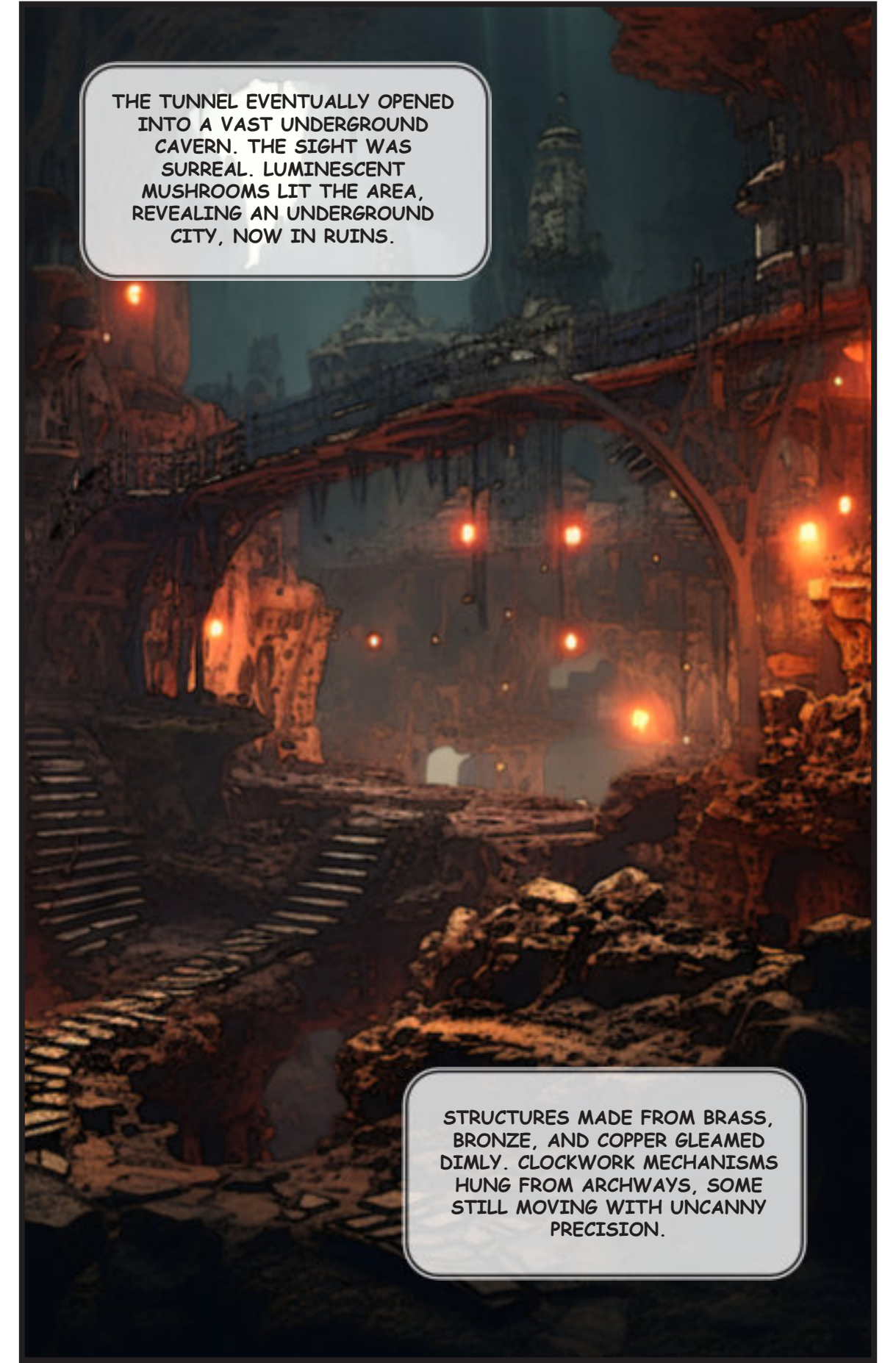
CECILIA CLUTCHED A MECHANICAL OWL  
JULIUS HAD GIVEN HER. IT WAS A  
COMMUNICATION DEVICE THAT COULD  
RELAY THEIR POSITION AND FINDINGS  
BACK TO D.E.G.'S HEADQUARTERS.  
WITH A REASSURING NOD FROM  
JULIUS, SHE TOOK HER FIRST STEPS  
INTO THE ABYSS.



THE PATH WAS TREACHEROUS.  
DEEP WITHIN THE TUNNEL, THEY  
ENCOUNTERED AREAS WHERE THE  
GROUND HAD GIVEN WAY, REVEALING  
UNDERGROUND CHASMS WITH SEEMINGLY  
NO BOTTOM. BUT EVERY SO OFTEN, A  
SHIMMERING RESIDUE WAS EVIDENT ON  
THE WALLS — ETHEREAL LUMINANCE.







THE TUNNEL EVENTUALLY OPENED  
INTO A VAST UNDERGROUND  
CAVERN. THE SIGHT WAS  
SURREAL. LUMINESCENT  
MUSHROOMS LIT THE AREA,  
REVEALING AN UNDERGROUND  
CITY, NOW IN RUINS.

STRUCTURES MADE FROM BRASS,  
BRONZE, AND COPPER GLEAMED  
DIMLY. CLOCKWORK MECHANISMS  
HUNG FROM ARCHWAYS, SOME  
STILL MOVING WITH UNCANNY  
PRECISION.






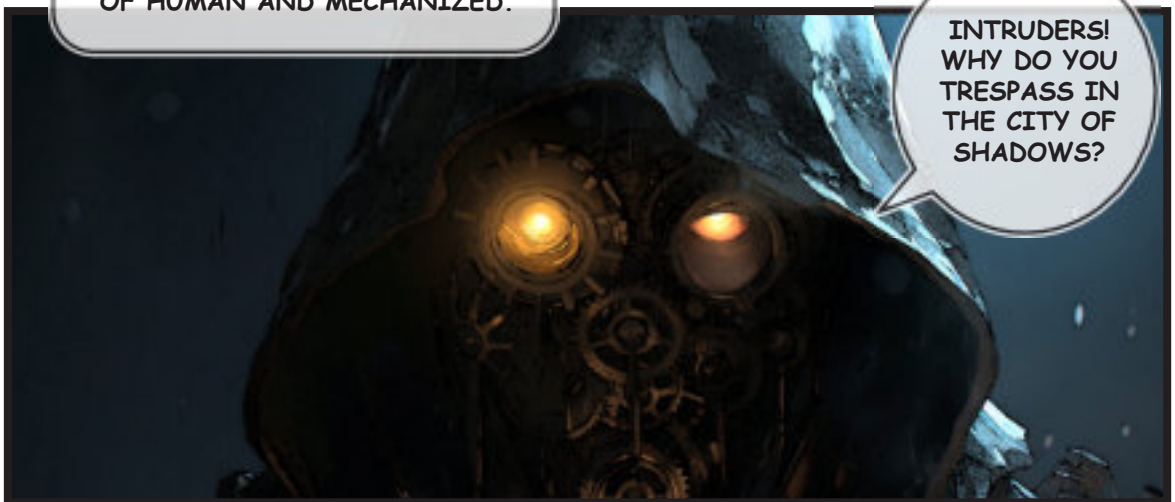
CECILIA'S BREATH  
CAUGHT IN HER  
THROAT

IT'S  
MAGNIFICENT!  
BUT...WHY  
WAS IT  
ABANDONED?

BEFORE ANYONE COULD ANSWER, A GROUP  
OF CLOAKED FIGURES EMERGED FROM THE  
SHADOWS, SURROUNDING THE TEAM.  
THE FIGURES WERE DRAPED IN TATTERED  
ROBES, BUT BENEATH THEM, THEIR BODIES  
WERE A FUSION OF FLESH AND MACHINE,  
REMINISCENT OF A BYGONE ERA.



ONE STEPPED FORWARD,  
REMOVING PART OF HIS HOOD.  
HIS EYES WERE REPLACED WITH  
GLINTING GEARS, AND HIS  
VOICE WAS A HAUNTING MIX  
OF HUMAN AND MECHANIZED.



INTRUDERS!  
WHY DO YOU  
TRESPASS IN  
THE CITY OF  
SHADOWS?

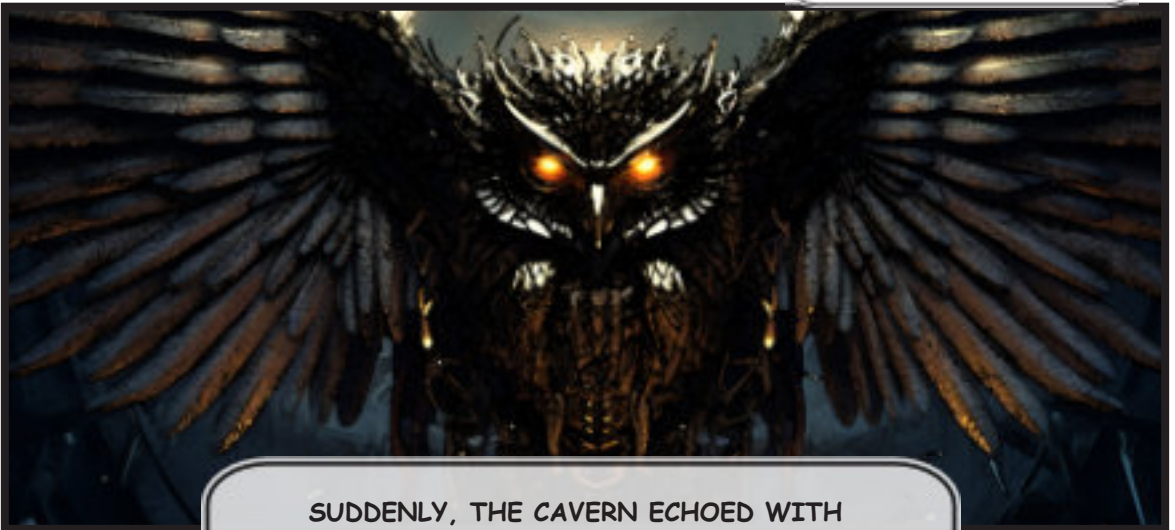


WE COME IN  
SEARCH OF  
THE ABYSSAL  
SANCTUARY  
AND THE  
STOLEN EON  
DISC.

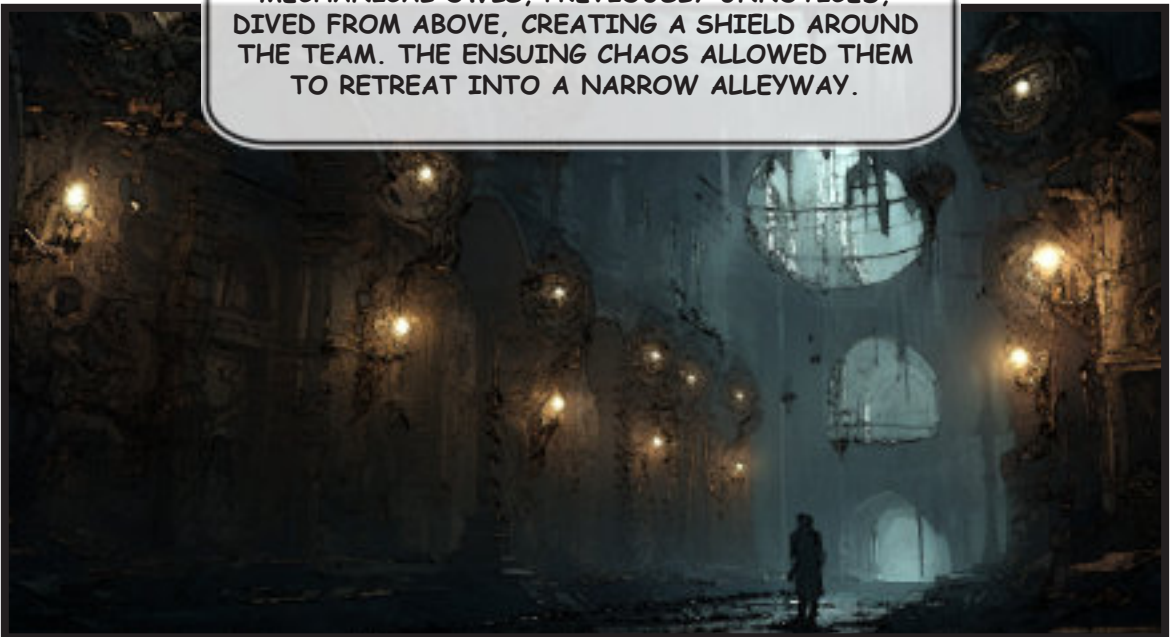


THE EON  
DISC?  
YES, ITS  
ENERGY WILL  
RESTORE OUR  
CITY. AS FOR  
YOU...

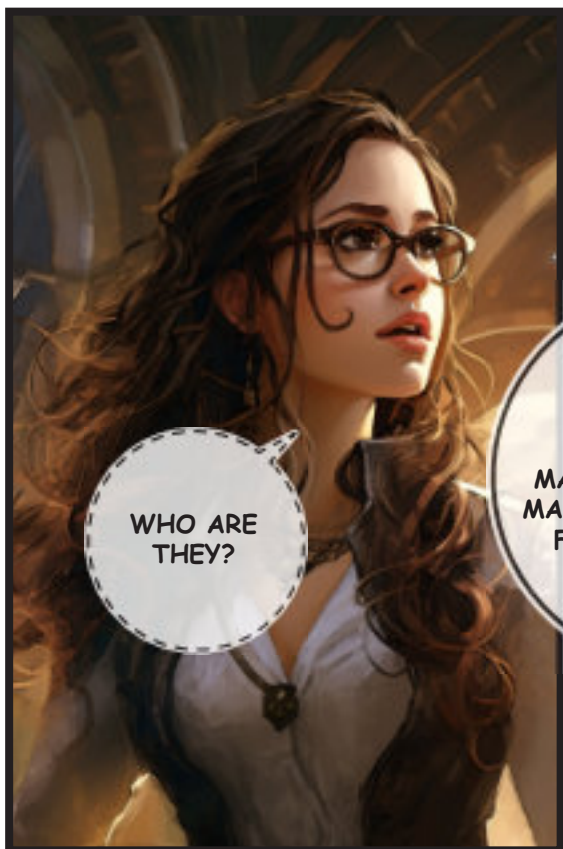
HE RAISED A METAL  
HAND, SIGNALING  
THE OTHERS TO  
CLOSE IN.



SUDDENLY, THE CAVERN ECHOED WITH  
THE RHYTHMIC BEAT OF WINGS. JULIUS'S  
MECHANICAL OWLS, PREVIOUSLY UNNOTICED,  
DIVED FROM ABOVE, CREATING A SHIELD AROUND  
THE TEAM. THE ENSUING CHAOS ALLOWED THEM  
TO RETREAT INTO A NARROW ALLEYWAY.







WHO ARE  
THEY?

DESCENDANTS OF  
THE ORIGINAL  
INHABITANTS,  
MAYBE? MERGED WITH  
MACHINERY OVER TIME,  
FORGOTTEN BY THE  
WORLD ABOVE



AND IT  
SEEMS THEY  
HAVE THE  
EON DISC.

A DISTANT  
RUMBLING  
INTERRUPTED  
THEM.



THE STORM'S  
REACHED THE  
SURFACE.  
IT MIGHT  
COLLAPSE THESE  
TUNNELS!

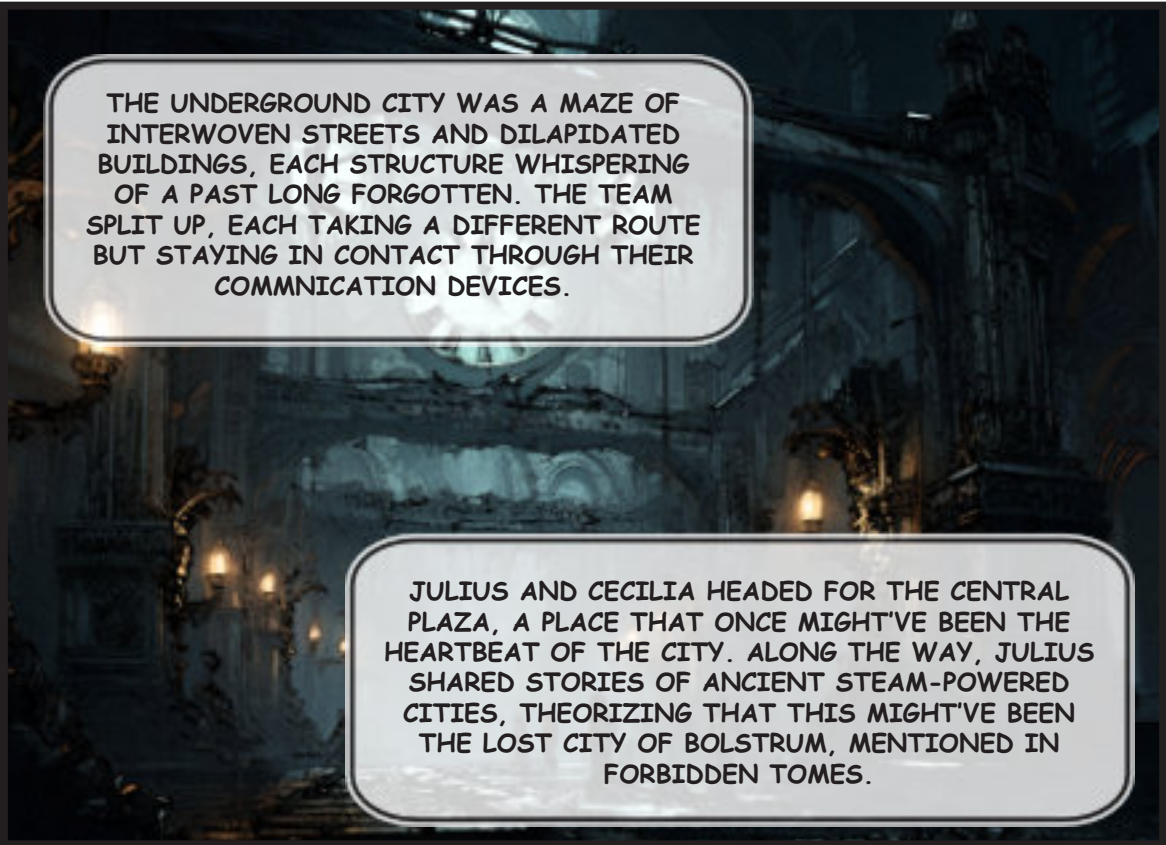


THEN LET'S  
FIND THE  
DISC,  
QUICKLY!



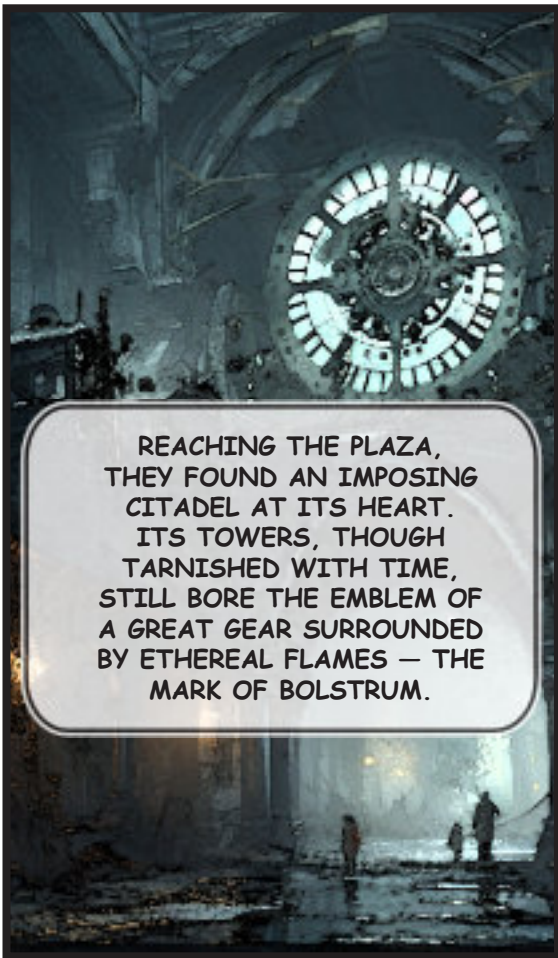
THE WEIGHT OF TIME, HISTORY, AND  
IMPENDING DANGER PRESSED ON THEM.  
THE STORM ABOVE MIRRORED THE  
TEMPEST OF CHALLENGES THAT LAY  
AHEAD IN THE ANCIENT DEPTHS OF THE  
CITY OF SHADOWS.






THE UNDERGROUND CITY WAS A MAZE OF INTERWOVEN STREETS AND DILAPIDATED BUILDINGS, EACH STRUCTURE WHISPERING OF A PAST LONG FORGOTTEN. THE TEAM SPLIT UP, EACH TAKING A DIFFERENT ROUTE BUT STAYING IN CONTACT THROUGH THEIR COMMUNICATION DEVICES.

JULIUS AND CECILIA HEADED FOR THE CENTRAL PLAZA, A PLACE THAT ONCE MIGHT'VE BEEN THE HEARTBEAT OF THE CITY. ALONG THE WAY, JULIUS SHARED STORIES OF ANCIENT STEAM-POWERED CITIES, THEORIZING THAT THIS MIGHT'VE BEEN THE LOST CITY OF BOLSTRUM, MENTIONED IN FORBIDDEN TOMES.



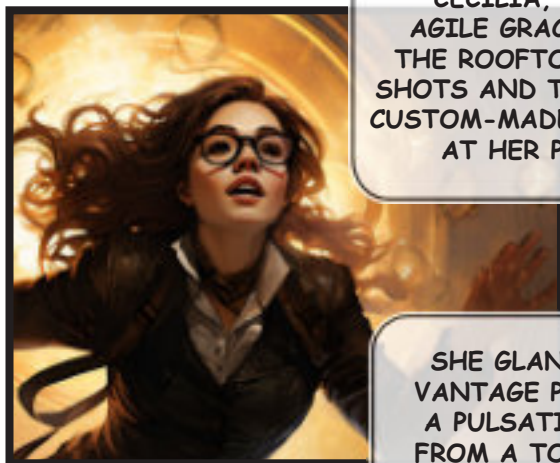
REACHING THE PLAZA, THEY FOUND AN IMPOSING CITADEL AT ITS HEART. ITS TOWERS, THOUGH TARNISHED WITH TIME, STILL BORE THE EMBLEM OF A GREAT GEAR SURROUNDED BY ETHEREAL FLAMES — THE MARK OF BOLSTRUM.



THE EON DISC HAS TO BE IN THERE.



JUST AS THEY PREPARED TO MOVE, A HORDE OF THE MECHANICAL-HUMAN HYBRIDS AMBUSHED THEM. THESE WEREN'T THE CLOAKED FIGURES THEY'D ENCOUNTERED BEFORE. THESE WERE WARRIORS, DONNED IN PLATED ARMOR, WITH BLADED ARMS AND STEAM-POWERED RIFLES.



CECILIA, WITH HER AGILE GRACE, TOOK TO THE ROOFTOPS, EVADING SHOTS AND THROWING HER CUSTOM-MADE GEAR-BLADES AT HER PURSUERS.

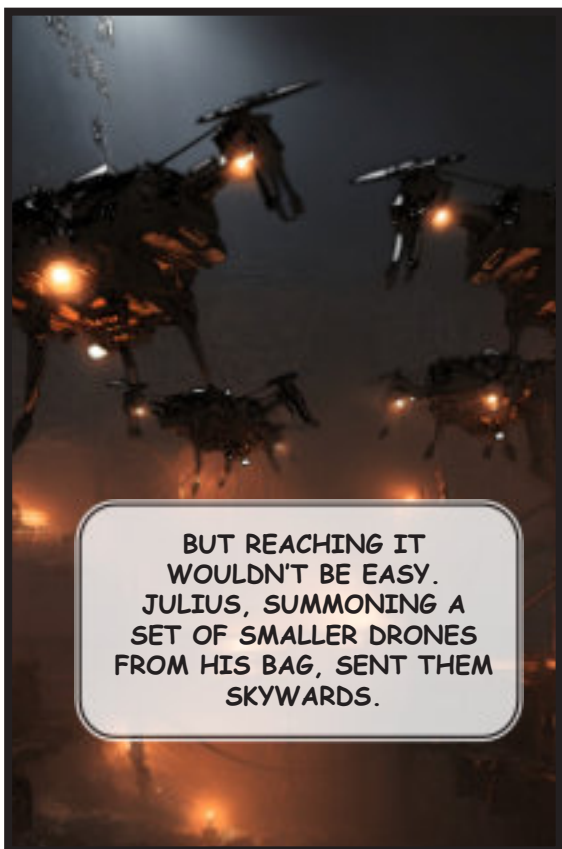


SHE GLANCED FROM HER VANTAGE POINT, SPOTTED A PULSATING BLUE GLOW FROM A TOWER ADJACENT TO THE CITADEL.



THERE!  
THE DISC!





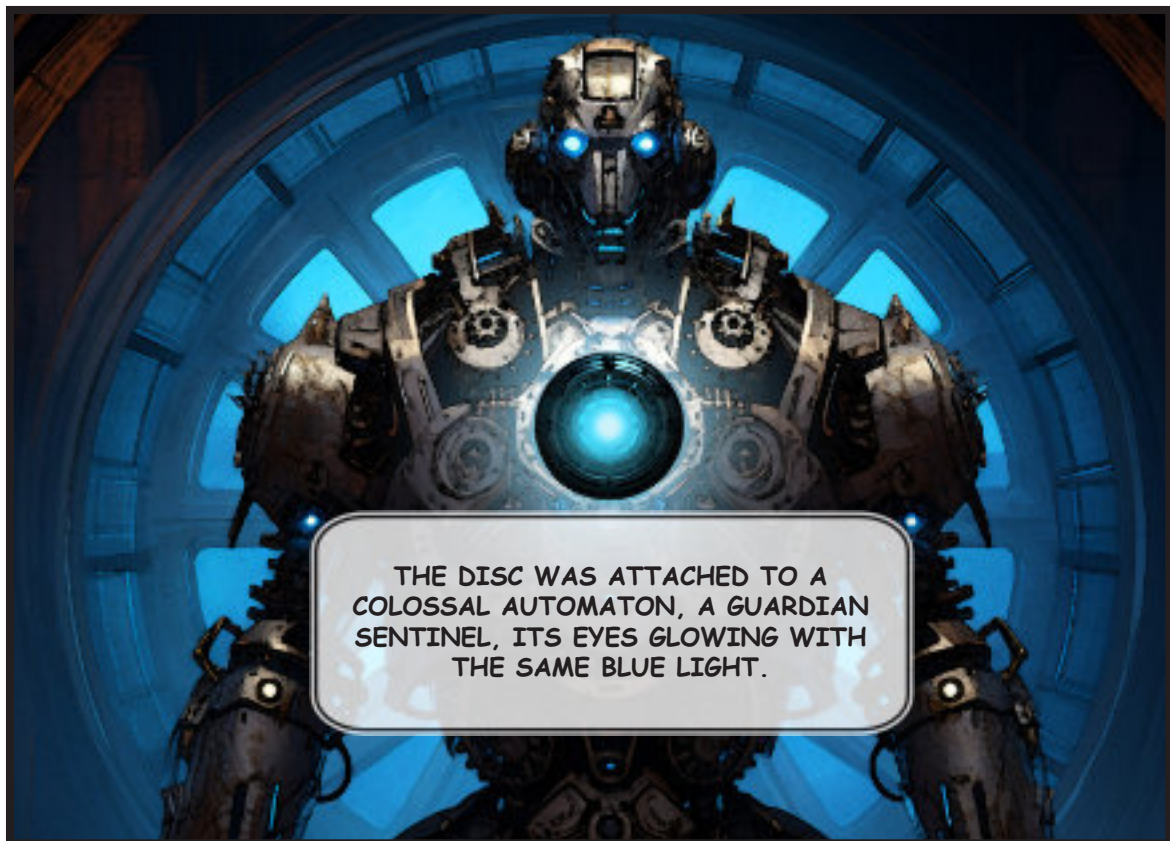
BUT REACHING IT  
WOULDN'T BE EASY.  
JULIUS, SUMMONING A  
SET OF SMALLER DRONES  
FROM HIS BAG, SENT THEM  
SKYWARDS.



THEY DOVE INTO THE  
ENEMY RANKS, CAUSING  
CONFUSION. TAKING THIS  
MOMENTARY DISTRACTION,  
HE SIGNALLED CECILIA, AND  
TOGETHER THEY SPRINTED.  
TOWARDS THE TOWER.



INSIDE, THE AIR WAS DENSE  
WITH A STRANGE ENERGY. AS THEY  
ASCENDED, THEY FOUND THE CHAMBER  
WHERE THE EON DISC WAS HELD. BUT  
IT WASN'T ALONE.



THE DISC WAS ATTACHED TO A COLOSSAL AUTOMATON, A GUARDIAN SENTINEL, ITS EYES GLOWING WITH THE SAME BLUE LIGHT.



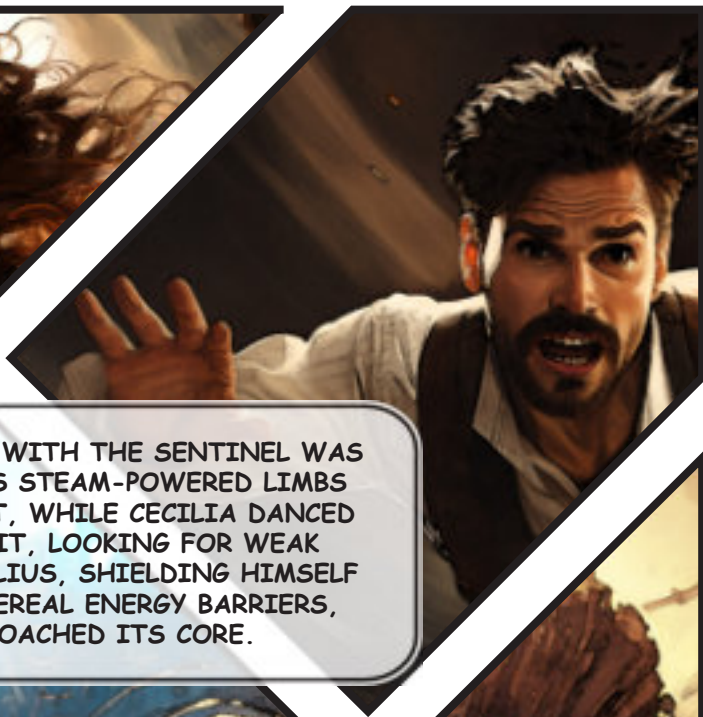
WE NEED A PLAN, JULIUS.

THE DISC IS ITS POWER SOURCE. IF WE CAN DISRUPT ITS CONNECTION, EVEN MOMENTARILY, WE CAN RETRIEVE THE DISC.

THIS WILL CREATE AN ENERGY SURGE. BUT IT'S SHORT-RANGED. WE NEED TO GET CLOSE.

DRAWING FROM HIS BAG, JULIUS REVEALED A DEVICE — AN ETHERIC PULSE EMITTER.

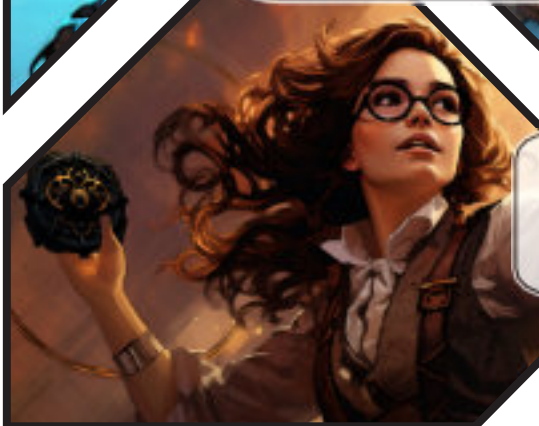




THE BATTLE WITH THE SENTINEL WAS FIERCE. ITS STEAM-POWERED LIMBS LASHED OUT, WHILE CECILIA DANCED AROUND IT, LOOKING FOR WEAK POINTS. JULIUS, SHIELDING HIMSELF WITH ETHEREAL ENERGY BARRIERS, APPROACHED ITS CORE.

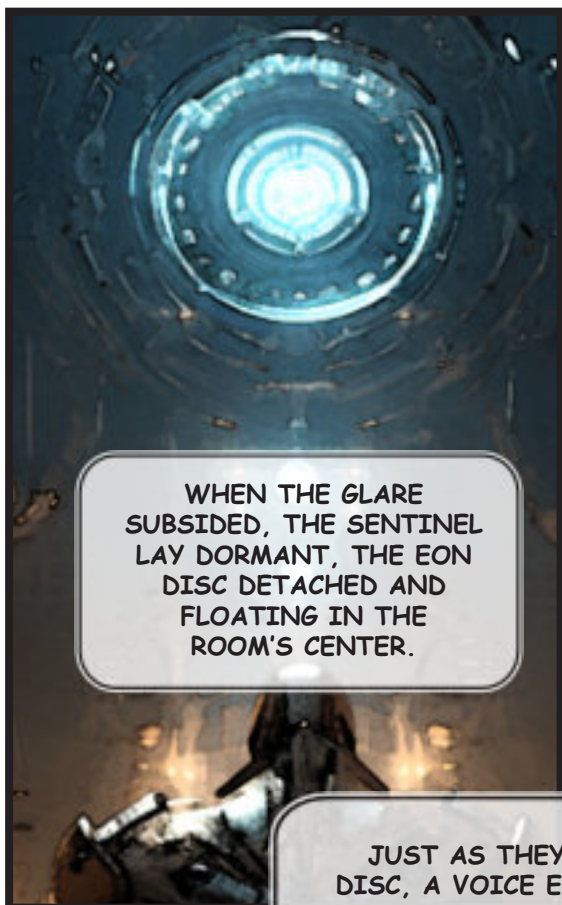


WITH A MIGHTY ROAR, THE AUTOMATON CHARGED ITS ENERGY, READYING A BLAST. CECILIA, WITH IMPECCABLE TIMING, THREW HER LAST GEAR-BLADE, JAMMING ONE OF ITS JOINTS. THE SENTINEL STAGGERED. JULIUS SAW HIS CHANCE, PLANTING THE EMITTER ON ITS CHEST.



THE PULSE WENT OFF, AND THE ROOM LIT UP IN BLINDING LIGHT.





WHEN THE GLARE  
SUBSIDED, THE SENTINEL  
LAY DORMANT, THE EON  
DISC DETACHED AND  
FLOATING IN THE  
ROOM'S CENTER.

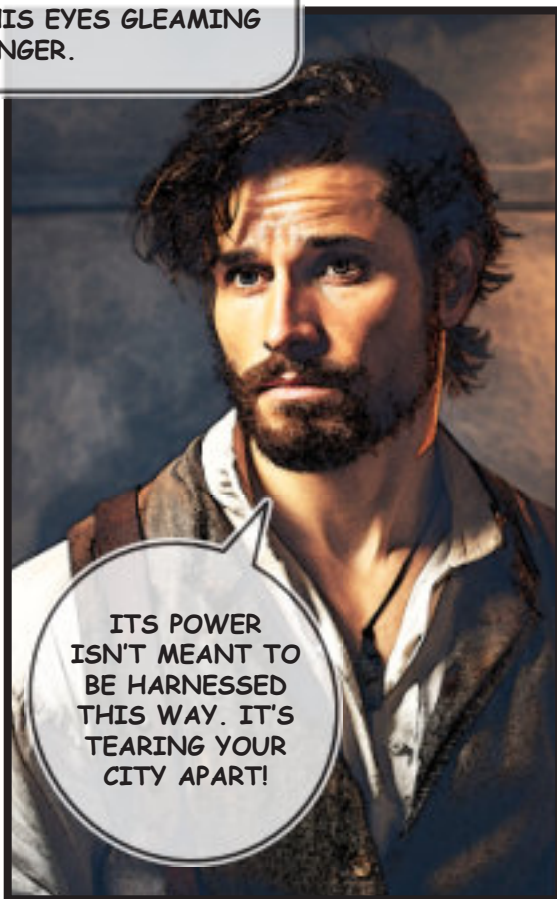


THAT  
WAS NICE  
TEAMWORK.

JUST AS THEY REACHED FOR THE  
DISC, A VOICE ECHOED THROUGH THE  
CHAMBER. THE LEADER OF THE CLOAKED  
FIGURES APPEARED, WITH HIS HEAD  
NOW EXPOSED AND HIS EYES GLEAMING  
WITH ANGER.

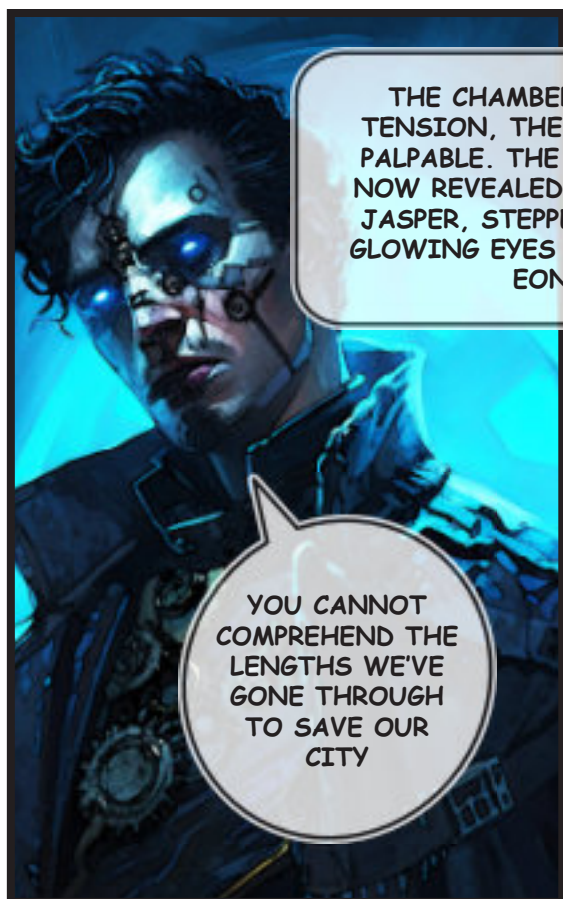


THE DISC  
IS OURS!  
THE CITY'S  
REVIVAL  
DEPENDS ON  
IT!



ITS POWER  
ISN'T MEANT TO  
BE HARNESSSED  
THIS WAY. IT'S  
TEARING YOUR  
CITY APART!





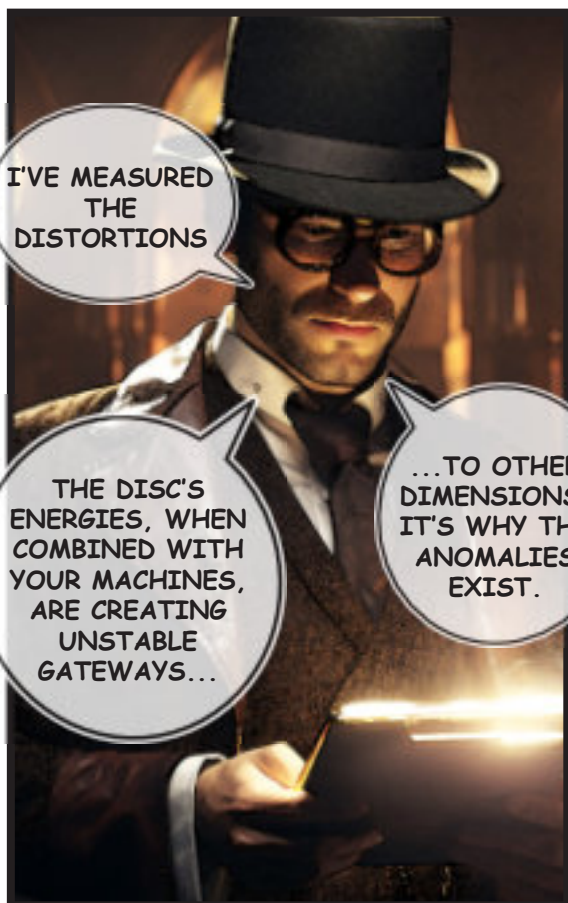
THE CHAMBER ECHOED WITH TENSION, THE SILENCE ALMOST PALPABLE. THE CLOAKED LEADER, NOW REVEALED TO BE KNOWN AS JASPER, STEPPED FORWARD. HIS GLOWING EYES LOCKED ONTO THE EON DISC.

YOU CANNOT COMPREHEND THE LENGTHS WE'VE GONE THROUGH TO SAVE OUR CITY



WE'RE NOT YOUR ENEMIES, JASPER. BUT USING THE DISC LIKE THIS...

IT'S RIPPING HOLES IN THE FABRIC OF REALITY.



I'VE MEASURED THE DISTORTIONS

THE DISC'S ENERGIES, WHEN COMBINED WITH YOUR MACHINES, ARE CREATING UNSTABLE GATEWAYS...

...TO OTHER DIMENSIONS. IT'S WHY THE ANOMALIES EXIST.

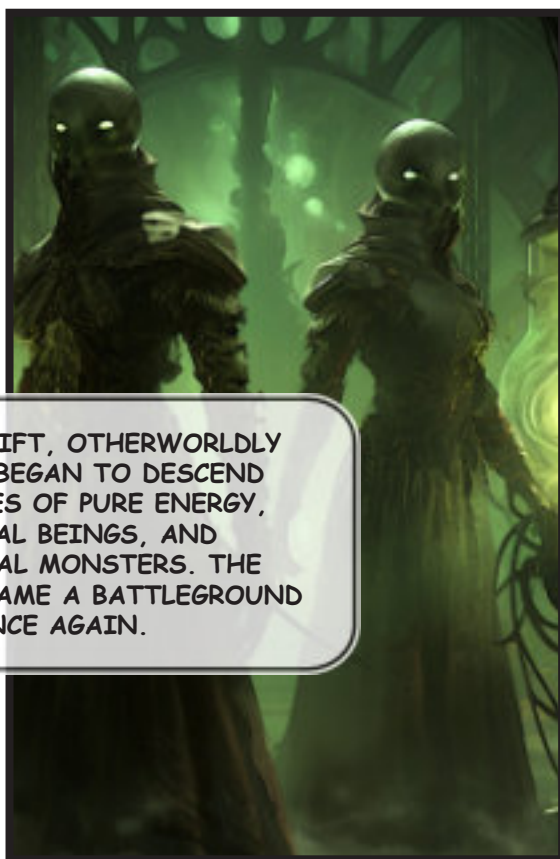


BOLSTRUM WAS DYING. ITS HEARTBEAT WAS FADING.

THE EON DISC WAS OUR SALVATION, A WAY TO MERGE THE BEST OF MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS AND RESTORE OUR FORMER GLORY!



A TREMOR ROCKED THE CHAMBER.  
CRACKS FORMED ON THE  
CEILING AS AN EERIE GREEN  
LIGHT FILTERED THROUGH. AN  
INTERDIMENSIONAL RIFT WAS  
OPENING RIGHT ABOVE THEM!



FROM THE RIFT, OTHERWORLDLY  
ENTITIES BEGAN TO DESCEND  
- CREATURES OF PURE ENERGY,  
SPECTRAL BEINGS, AND  
MECHANICAL MONSTERS. THE  
CHAMBER BECAME A BATTLEGROUND  
ONCE AGAIN.






CECILIA AND OSCAR BATTLED THE CREATURES, USING AN ARRAY OF GADGETS TO DESTABILIZE THEIR FORM AND SEND THEM BACK TO THEIR DIMENSIONS.



JULIUS AND JASPER, THOUGH INITIALLY ON OPPOSING SIDES, FOUND THEMSELVES FIGHTING BACK-TO-BACK AGAINST A COMMON THREAT.



AS THE BATTLE RAGED, AN IDEA FORMED IN JULIUS' MIND.

A close-up of Jasper, a man with dark, wavy hair and a beard, looking intensely forward with a determined expression. He is wearing a light-colored shirt. The background is dark and blurry.

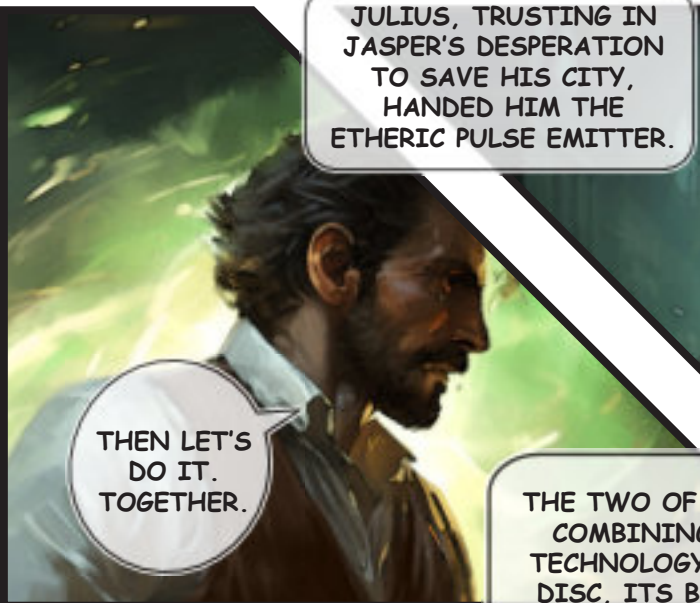
JASPER! WE  
NEED TO  
CHANNEL THE  
EON DISC'S  
ENERGY AND  
SEAL THE  
RIFT!

A close-up of Jasper's face, looking slightly to the side with a nod. The background is dark and blurry.


JASPER, HESITANT BUT  
SEEING THE GREATER  
DANGER, NODDED.

A close-up of Julius, a man with dark, wavy hair, looking intensely forward. He is wearing a dark jacket over a light-colored shirt. The background is dark and blurry.

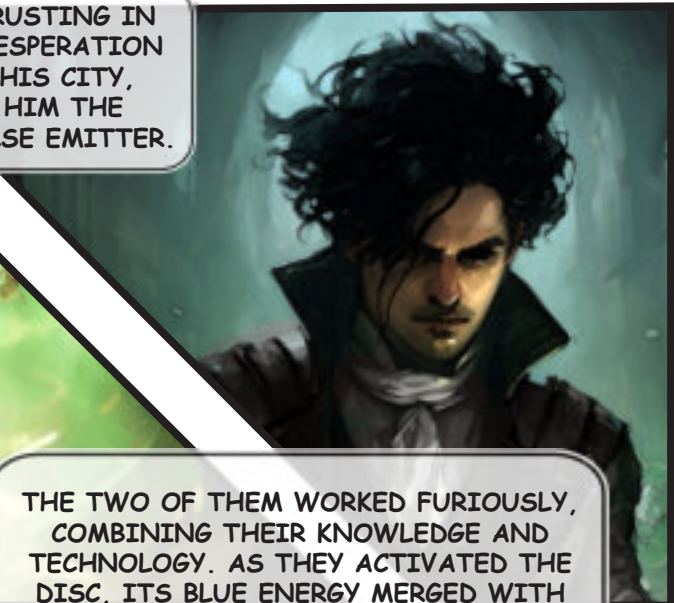
BUT IT  
REQUIRES  
BOTH OUR  
TECHNOLOGIES.  
YOURS AND  
BOLSTRUM'S.

A close-up of Julius's face, looking down at something he is holding. The background is dark and blurry.

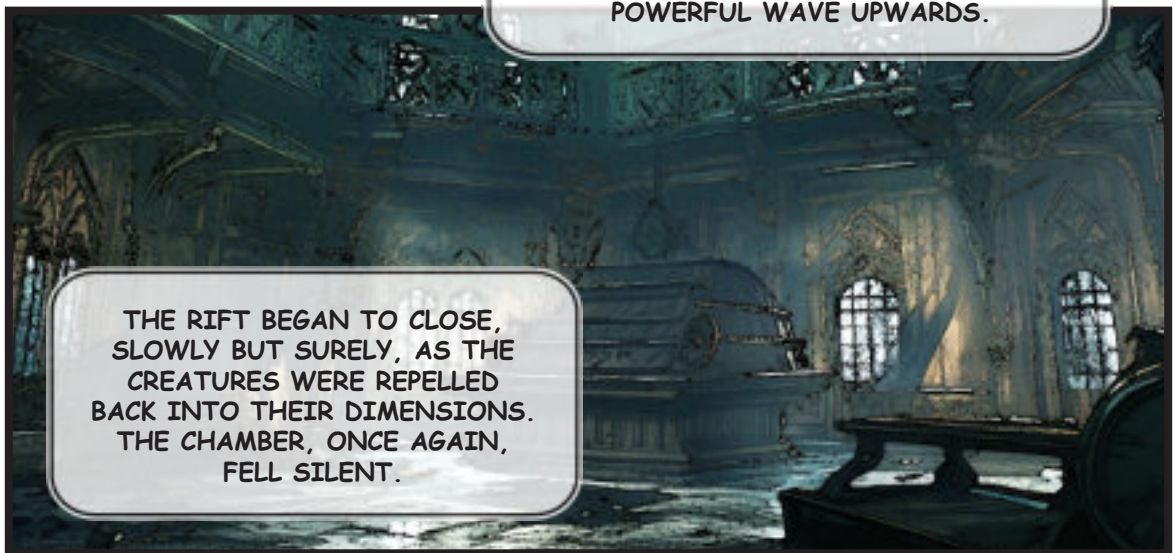
JULIUS, TRUSTING IN  
JASPER'S DESPERATION  
TO SAVE HIS CITY,  
HANDED HIM THE  
ETHERIC PULSE EMITTER.

A close-up of Jasper's face, looking down. The background is dark and blurry.

THEN LET'S  
DO IT.  
TOGETHER.

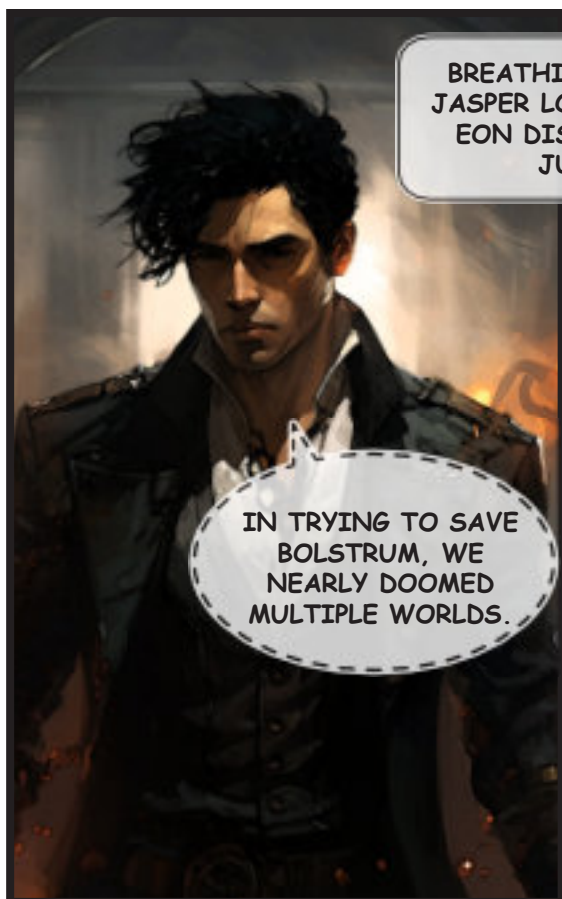
A close-up of Julius's face, looking intensely forward. He is wearing a dark jacket over a light-colored shirt. The background is dark and blurry.

THE TWO OF THEM WORKED FURIOUSLY,  
COMBINING THEIR KNOWLEDGE AND  
TECHNOLOGY. AS THEY ACTIVATED THE  
DISC, ITS BLUE ENERGY MERGED WITH  
THE EMITTER'S PULSE, SENDING A  
POWERFUL WAVE UPWARDS.

A wide shot of a large, ornate chamber with high ceilings and arched windows. The room is filled with various mechanical and architectural details. The lighting is dim, with light coming from the windows.

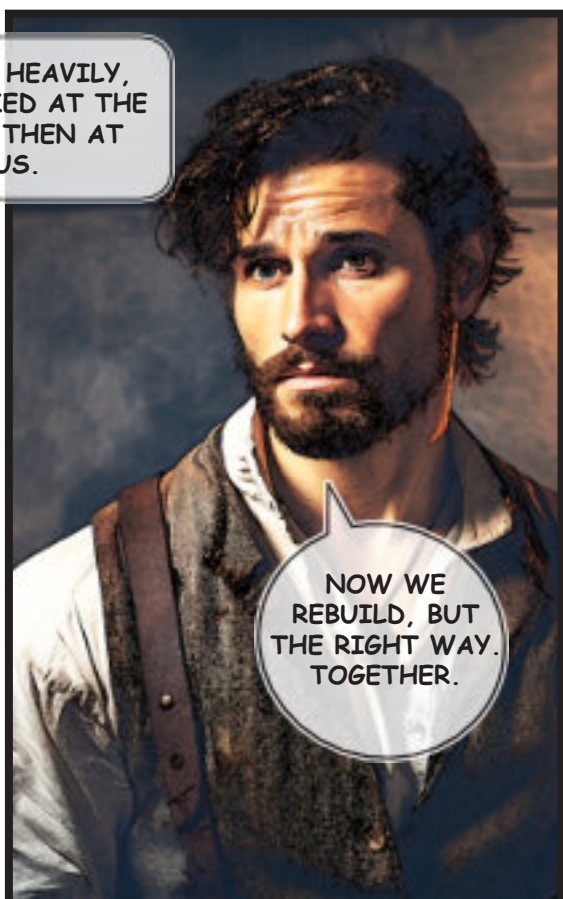
THE RIFT BEGAN TO CLOSE,  
SLOWLY BUT SURELY, AS THE  
CREATURES WERE REPELLED  
BACK INTO THEIR DIMENSIONS.  
THE CHAMBER, ONCE AGAIN,  
FELL SILENT.



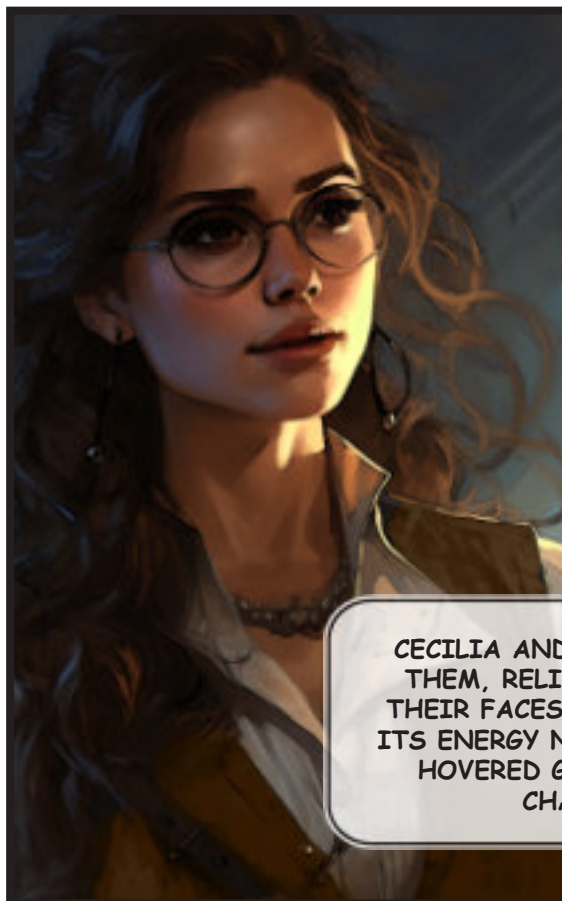


BREATHING HEAVILY,  
JASPER LOOKED AT THE  
EON DISC, THEN AT  
JULIUS.

IN TRYING TO SAVE  
BOLSTRUM, WE  
NEARLY DOOMED  
MULTIPLE WORLDS.



NOW WE  
REBUILD, BUT  
THE RIGHT WAY.  
TOGETHER.



CECILIA AND OSCAR JOINED  
THEM, RELIEF EVIDENT ON  
THEIR FACES. THE EON DISC,  
ITS ENERGY NOW STABILIZED,  
HOVERED GENTLY IN THE  
CHAMBER.

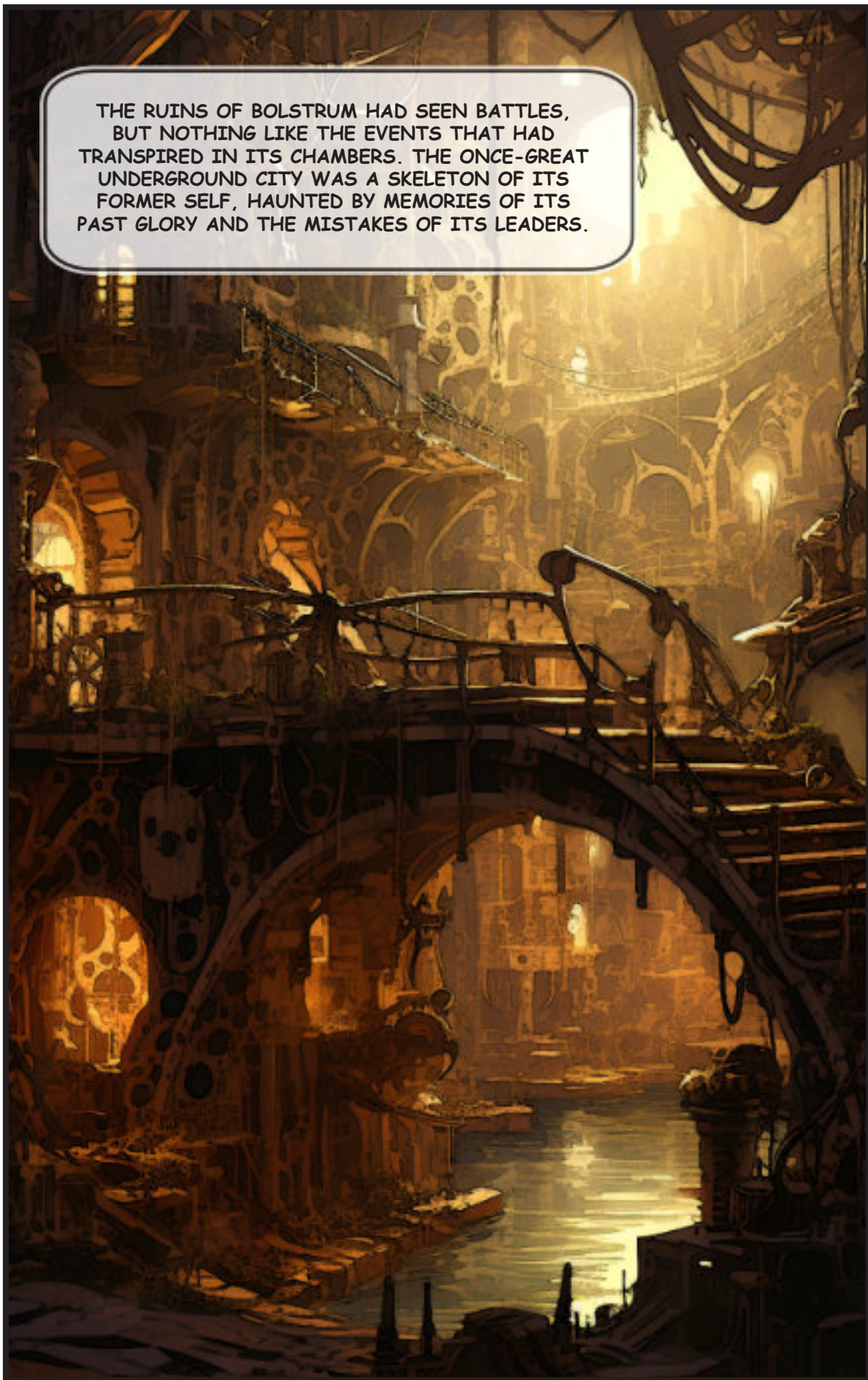




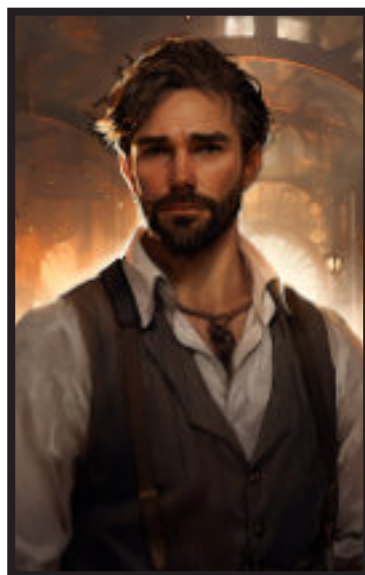
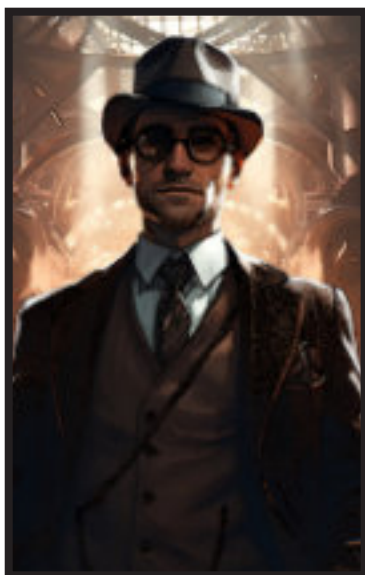
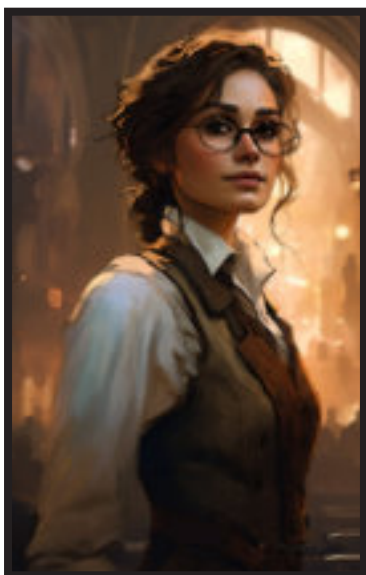
AND AS THE TEAM, WITH THEIR NEW ALLY JASPER, LEFT THE CITADEL, THE UNDERGROUND CITY OF BOLSTRUM AWAITED ITS TRUE RESTORATION, NOT FROM STOLEN DIMENSIONS, BUT FROM COLLABORATION, UNDERSTANDING, AND HOPE.



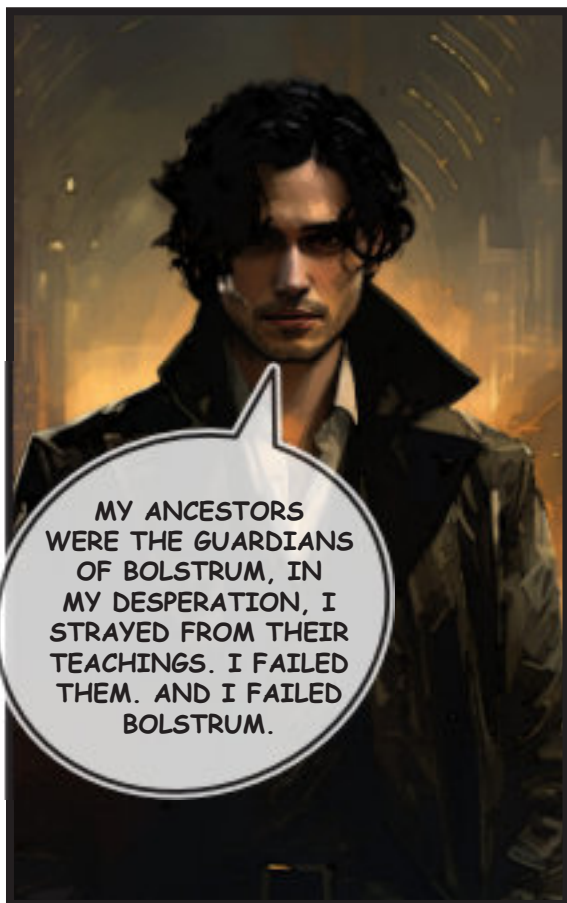
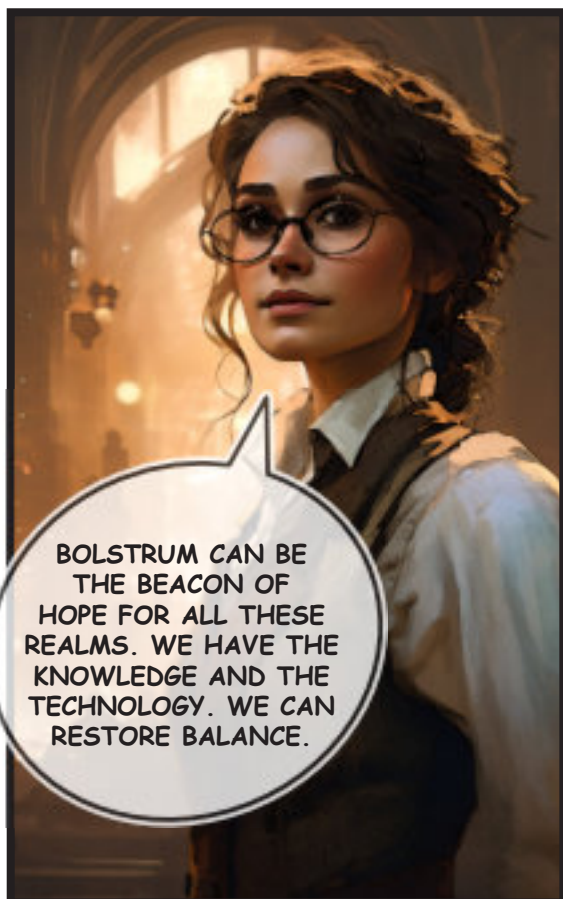
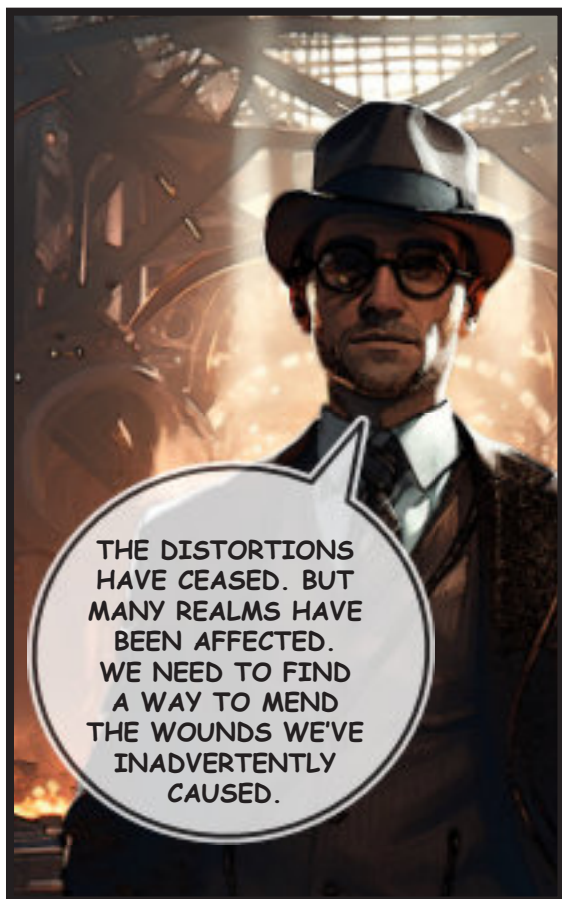
THE RUINS OF BOLSTRUM HAD SEEN BATTLES,  
BUT NOTHING LIKE THE EVENTS THAT HAD  
TRANSPIRED IN ITS CHAMBERS. THE ONCE-GREAT  
UNDERGROUND CITY WAS A SKELETON OF ITS  
FORMER SELF, HAUNTED BY MEMORIES OF ITS  
PAST GLORY AND THE MISTAKES OF ITS LEADERS.




CECILIA, OSCAR, AND JULIUS REGROUPED IN THE CENTRAL PLAZA, THE REMNANTS OF THE CITY'S ICONIC CLOCKTOWER LOOMING OVER THEM. THE EON DISC, THOUGH STABILIZED, CONTINUED TO EMIT A SOFT BLUE GLOW, ITS ENERGIES STILL RAW AND POWERFUL.










A CROWD HAD BEGUN TO GATHER, THE CITIZENS OF BOLSTRUM, WEARY BUT HOPEFUL, LISTENING INTENTLY. THE ENERGY OF THE EON DISC SEEMED TO RESONATE WITH THEM, FILLING THEM WITH RENEWED PURPOSE.

JASPER ADDRESSED THEM



I ONCE THOUGHT LEADERSHIP WAS ABOUT STRENGTH AND ASSERTING DOMINANCE. I WAS WRONG. IT'S ABOUT UNDERSTANDING, COMPASSION, AND THE COURAGE TO ADMIT ONE'S MISTAKES

BOLSTRUM NEEDS A NEW LEADER, ONE WHO UNDERSTANDS THE WEIGHT OF THIS RESPONSIBILITY.





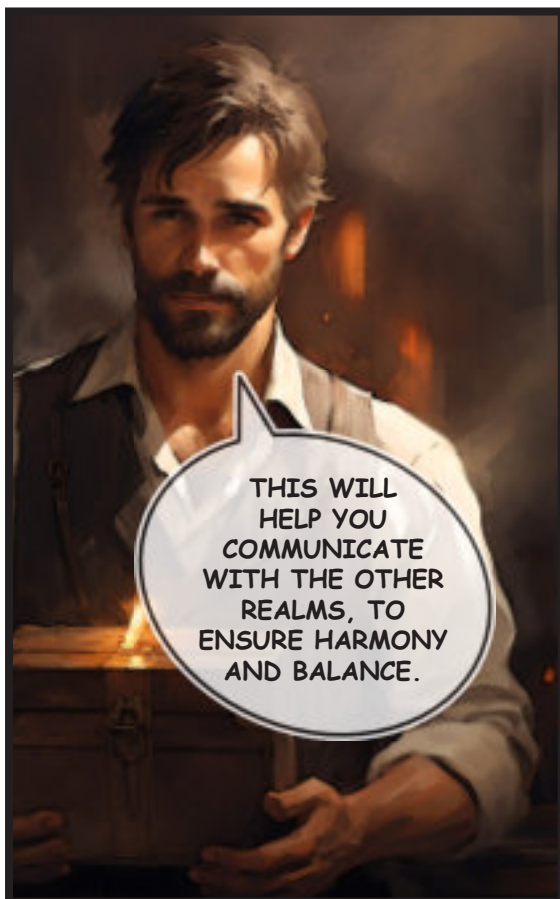
FROM THE CROWD, A YOUNG WOMAN STEPPED FORWARD. HER ATTIRE WAS SIMPLE, BUT HER EYES HELD A FIRE THAT CAPTIVATED ALL WHO LOOKED UPON HER.

MY NAME IS ANASTASIA, I AM A DESCENDANT OF BOLSTRUM'S FOUNDERS.


I'VE WATCHED OUR CITY SUFFER, AND I'VE SEEN THE POTENTIAL FOR ITS REVIVAL. WITH YOUR GUIDANCE, I AM WILLING TO LEAD.



THE CROWD MURMURED IN AGREEMENT, SOME EVEN CHEERING. IT WAS EVIDENT THEY WERE READY FOR A NEW DAWN.









THE SKYLINE OF BOLSTRUM HAD CHANGED,  
BUT ITS SPIRIT REMAINED UNBROKEN.  
VAST STEAM-DRIVEN AIRSHIPS FLOATED  
ABOVE THE CITY, THEIR MAJESTIC FORMS  
CASTING SHADOWS ON THE REJUVENATED  
STREETS BELOW.

THE ICONIC CLOCKTOWER,  
ONCE A SENTINEL OF  
DESPAIR, NOW GLEAMED WITH  
HOPE, ITS HANDS TURNING IN  
PERFECT HARMONY.





IN A COZY CORNER OF THE CITY,  
CECILIA'S MUSEUM OF ANTIQUITIES  
WAS BUSTLING. CHILDREN AND ADULTS  
ALIKE MARVELED AT THE ARTIFACTS,  
EACH TELLING A STORY OF HEROISM  
AND REDEMPTION.



THE CENTERPIECE, HOWEVER,  
WAS THE DEACTIVATED  
EON DISC, NOW SAFELY  
ENSCONCED IN A PROTECTIVE  
CASE, ITS HISTORY DETAILED  
FOR ALL TO SEE.

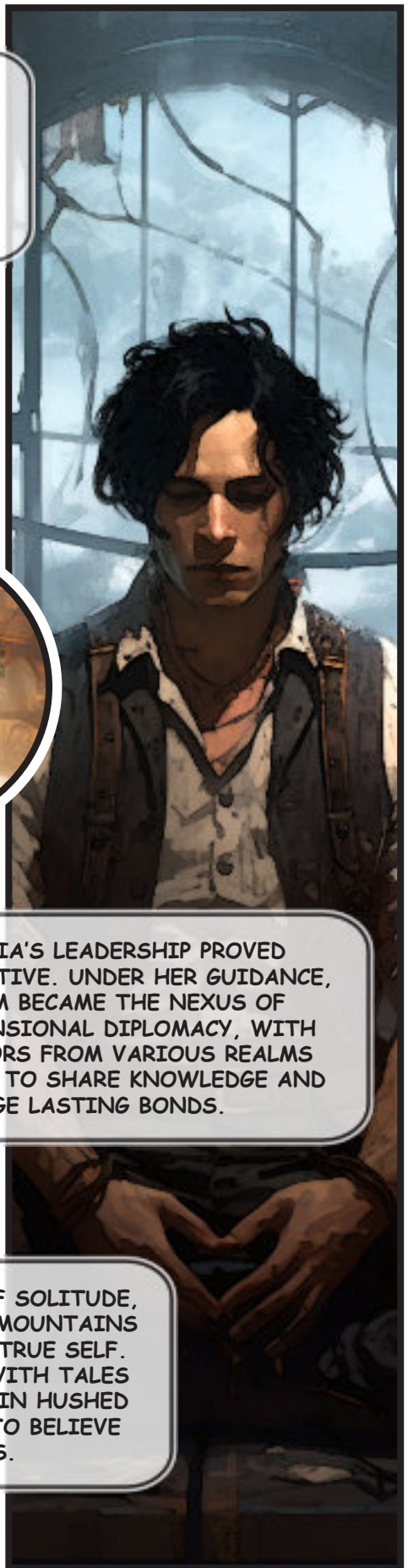



OSCAR AND JULIUS, HAVING RETURNED TO THEIR RESPECTIVE REALMS, MAINTAINED CLOSE TIES WITH BOLSTRUM. REGULAR INTERDIMENSIONAL SUMMITS WERE HELD, ENSURING PEACE AND COOPERATION AMONG THE ONCE-FRACTURED REALITIES.



ANASTASIA'S LEADERSHIP PROVED TRANSFORMATIVE. UNDER HER GUIDANCE, BOLSTRUM BECAME THE NEXUS OF INTERDIMENSIONAL DIPLOMACY, WITH AMBASSADORS FROM VARIOUS REALMS CONVERGING TO SHARE KNOWLEDGE AND FORGE LASTING BONDS.

JASPER HAD CHOSEN A LIFE OF SOLITUDE, VENTURING TO THE DISTANT MOUNTAINS TO MEDITATE AND FIND HIS TRUE SELF. YET, HIS LEGACY LIVED ON, WITH TALES OF HIS REDEMPTION SHARED IN HUSHED TONES, INSPIRING OTHERS TO BELIEVE IN SECOND CHANCES.





CECILIA SAT IN HER FAVORITE CHAIR IN THE MUSEUM'S ATRIUM, A CUP OF STEAMING TEA IN HAND. THE SOFT CHIMES OF THE RESTORED CLOCKTOWER REACHED HER EARS, A COMFORTING LULLABY THAT SPOKE OF TIME'S ENDLESS CYCLE.

SHE CLOSED HER EYES, TAKING A MOMENT TO REFLECT. THE JOURNEY HAD BEEN FRAUGHT WITH PERIL, BUT THE BONDS FORGED AND THE LESSONS LEARNED WERE INVALUABLE. IN THE INTRICATE DANCE OF GEARS AND COGS, CHAOS AND ORDER, CECILIA HAD DISCOVERED AN UNDENIABLE TRUTH - THE HEART, MUCH LIKE TIME, COULD BE MENDED.

WITH A SIGH OF CONTENTMENT, CECILIA WHISPERED TO HERSELF, "THE REALMS MAY SHATTER, BUT HOPE, LOVE, AND DETERMINATION WILL ALWAYS PIECE THEM BACK TOGETHER."

AND AS THE HANDS OF THE CLOCKTOWER CONTINUED THEIR RELENTLESS MARCH, THE REALMS STOOD UNITED, THEIR FUTURES BRIGHT AND INTERTWINED.





## **Shattered Realms and Mended Hearts**

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