

No Scrying

By: Josh Sortelli

<http://www.noscrying.com>

I am a big fan of *No Scrying* and Sort's work in general, but I'll do my best to give an honest review and not gush about how much I love this comic.

Note: *No Scrying* has a lot of mystery elements to it and this review may contain a few spoilers. So if you plan to read the comic, do it before you read this review. In fact, you should go do it right now, it's worth it.

Overview

No Scrying is basically a cop drama set in *D&D*. It follows Jors (a Paladin) and Ariandre (Mage) as they work to solve a murder. It's a cool setup that I haven't seen done before and is one of the comics strongest attributes.

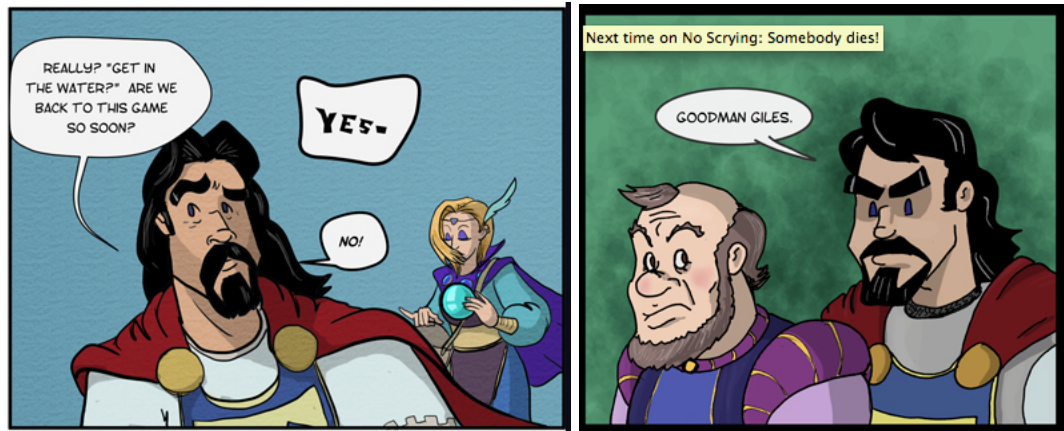
The world also has a lot of backstory and unique rules. I've gotten to be in a few LiveDraws where Sort has gone into some of the detail of everything, so I've heard more about it than other readers, and it's clear that Sort has put quite a bit of thought and research into his comic, which both hurts and helps the story (I'll get into that more later).

It's got a lot of great characters and the interactions between them are where the comic really shines. The plot is great and everything, but the characters are interesting enough on their own that they could be grocery shopping or watching TV (or a crystal ball or whatever) and it would still be fun.

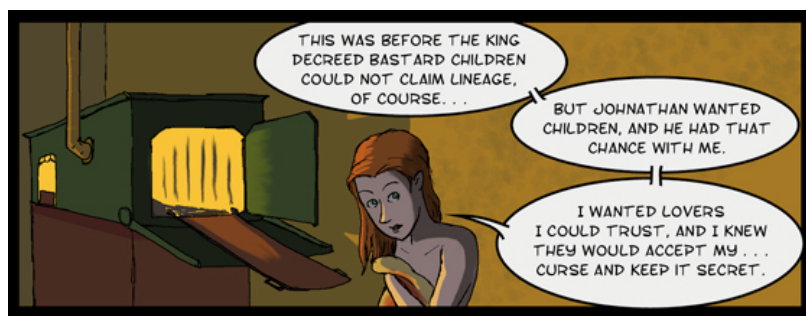
Art

I love Sort's art. He has a solid cartoon style that has a lot of energy and is very expressive. His character designs are very well done with a nice variety of body types and silhouettes which make each character distinct and easily recognizable.

Unfortunately, almost everything outside of his character design is lacking. His backgrounds stand out as the weakest part of the comic. A lot of the time they are just flat color or a texture pattern.



And when he does put backgrounds in, they are often distractingly crude and rushed looking or overly simplistic.



They look like the sort of thing a first year art student would do for perspective practice, with the absolute minimum amount of detail. It seems like Sort is much more interested in drawing his characters and does the backgrounds as quickly as possible just to get through them. Putting a higher level of detail into the environments would go a long way toward enhancing the setting. Right now it feels like it's taking place in a coloring book version of Generic Fantasy Land.

Another shortcoming in the art is the crude linework. Lines are often shaky, wispy and lack thick/thin variation. It looks like basic pencil lines that got colored without ever being inked. The coloring is very good, but without it the linework wouldn't stand up on its own. It's most obvious on [this page](#), where it looks like the coloring got rushed and there was only time to do the flat colors and not the shading. It's one of the most dramatic moments in the comic and it's largely ruined by the art looking unfinished.

The thick/thin variation has gotten better in recent pages, but it's still not quite there yet in my opinion. Having a greater variation in the thicks and thins, and working on a larger canvas and then shrinking down the final comic are two simple things that I think would greatly improve the look of Sort's linework.

Writing

The writing in the comic is also generally quite good. The characters are all well rounded and have distinct, developed personalities. I love Jors especially. The plot moves along at a good pace, and the mystery is sufficiently intriguing to keep readers coming back to find out what happens next.

That said, there are a few major pitfalls in the writing that I think hurt the comic over all.

First, there is occasionally some tone whiplash, where the comic jumps from super serious to oddly jokey from page to page. Jors has a few oddly violent outburst that don't seem in keeping with his usual level headed character. [This page in particular](#) is a good example of the tone shifting, where in the first panel we have Jors threatening to kill two people for what was a fairly minor insult, and the last panel is a weird, out of place anachronistic rap joke.

Now to be fair, I doubt Jors would have gone through with his threat. And it has been established that he can resurrect people, so killing them wouldn't really be "killing" them. But it was still a shockingly violent threat to make against some people who were only mildly rude. [This page](#) also has Jors throwing a man bodily from a building for the purpose of a gag, despite the fact that the man was being extremely reasonable in his objections to what Jors was planning (and was later proven right and forced to clean up Jors' mess).

In fact, character's in general seem to have emotional reactions that don't always fit the situation. [Like Ariandre's emotional outburst](#) when she accidentally kills Melody. In real life this would be devastating, but in a world where she can just be brought back to life, the scene has no punch. And it's not like Ariandre doesn't know Melody can be brought back to life, so her outburst feels overly dramatic.

There is also a scene where a goblin named Pitz gets [really, really angry really fast](#) and then [immediately cools down](#) on the next page.

Sort also has a tendency to gloss over [plot holes with dialogue](#) (second to last panel). And info-dumping important world building elements, like [here](#) where the explanation of what revenants are and how they are dealt with, something that should be a really big deal, is explained all through text and then just dropped in favor of a (admittedly hilarious) sight gag. And the problem itself gets dealt with completely off camera. It feels like Sort came up with this really cool idea about how resurrecting the dead would work, but didn't have the patience to actually work it into the story, so he just explained it through text.

And it's this overindulgence in his headcanon that causes one of the comics most baffling scenes. Those other complaints were just minor nitpicks, but there is one scene in the comic that just blows my mind with how out of place it is: the "[Special Drink](#)" scene.

I really don't get what this scene was supposed to achieve, other than Sort shoehorning in an idea he had while doing research for the comic. What was the point of any of this? Why did Jors ask Mixli for a "special" drink? Was he expecting her to make something poisonous, or did he just want a strong drink? And what did he need the drink for? As a medium for the werewolf antidote? We've already seen that it can be [drunk straight](#). And it's obvious that the drink is extremely poisonous and volatile, but Jors just goes ahead and uses it anyway. He says he wants to use it to "knock out our werewolf," but Blackmane wouldn't *be* a werewolf anymore after drinking the potion, so couldn't Jors just arrest him like he would any other human? Plus Jors' fists were already doing a pretty good job of knocking out Blackmane, why would he need to get him drunk and/or sick to finish the job? Was Blackmane supposed to drink the drink and pass out unconscious like in some Buggs Bunny cartoon? Did Jors think it would be easier to deal with a prisoner who is vomiting uncontrollably? And was Jors expecting him to drink the potion willingly? Or was he going to try and force that whole mug down his throat? Wouldn't putting the antidote in deadly, burning poison make either of those options much, much harder? Was he hoping to kill Blackmane and resurrect him later? Why not just stab him? Why kill him in the slowest, most painful way possible?

(Sorry for the rant, but that scene just really confused me.)

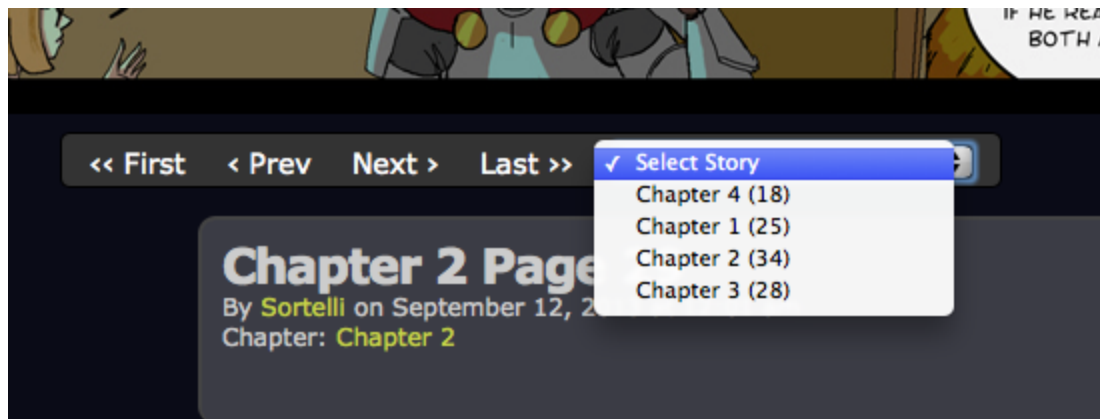
My final complaint would be the lack of any closure in the story. We're already 4 chapters in and none of the mysteries have been solved. Like I said at the beginning, the comic has the feel of a cop drama like *Law and Order* or *CSI*, but part of what makes those shows work is their episodic nature. Each week you get to see a crime get solved. I would have expected each chapter of *No Scrying* to be a new crime, maybe with an overarching plot to string them all together. But to date we just have mysteries piling up with no conclusions.

Anyway, the writing overall is really good and well thought out. I look forward to seeing where the story goes from here.

Site

The site is probably the weakest part of the comic. The design itself is nice enough, if a bit spartan. The problem is navigation, there is no archive page, making finding specific pages very frustrating, especially since the pages seem to load fairly slowly, at least on my end. And considering WordPress can generate an archive page automatically, there isn't much excuse for this. Sort might also want to look into installing a cache plug-in on his site to help with the loading times.

There is a "chapter jump" drop down menu, which is miss-ordered.



Conclusion

Like I said, I really like this comic. The main problem with it is it feels unpolished. It's pretty clear there are parts of comic making that Sort enjoys, and parts he doesn't enjoy, and the parts he doesn't enjoy tend to get glossed over.

Right now the comic feels very much like something he's just doing as a hobby, which is fine if that's what he wants it to be. But I think his comic would benefit a lot just from putting a little more time into the elements I mentioned above.