

It's out here,
Kathrin. I want you
to see this.



Come on, can't you
tell me? What do you
want me to see?



Just look...

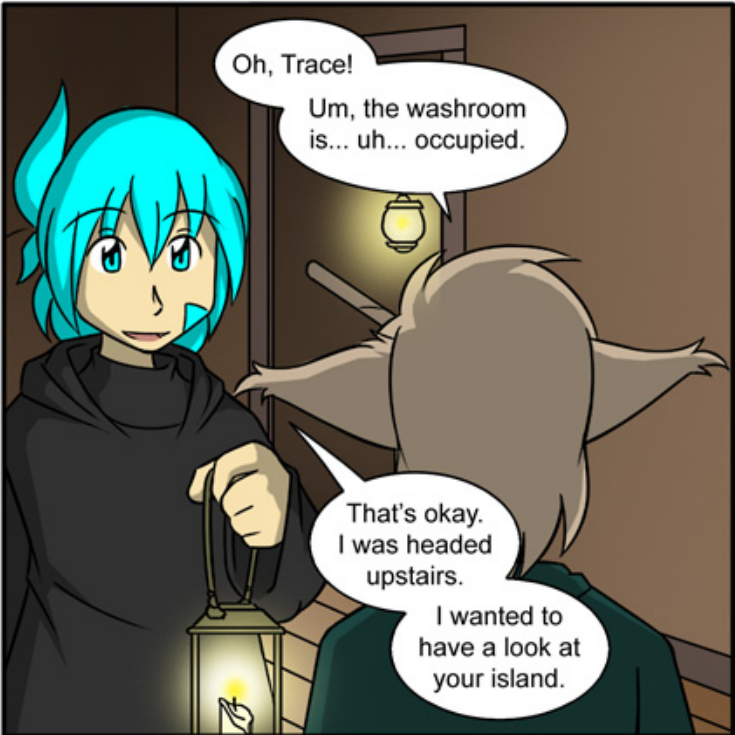


Woah...!

TWOKINDS

Chapter Ten







The air is cool today.
The cold season is coming soon.

Fah! I hope I'm out of here before my winter coat comes in.
It'll be even harder to conceal these stupid things when I get poofy.



Hurry up, Keith!
I hate being naked...

Meanwhile...



Uh... Keith, sir?
Hello, are you in there?



Keith...?



Hey, I'm over here. What do you want?


O-oh! Uh... Master wants me to t-tell you we're at the island.
He wants your help on deck.

Alright, tell him I'll be there in a minute.




Wait... isn't that the wolf guy's cabin?
What's Keith doing with his clothes...

And... strips of cloth? ...For tying him up?! Oh gods!



Nya~ah!



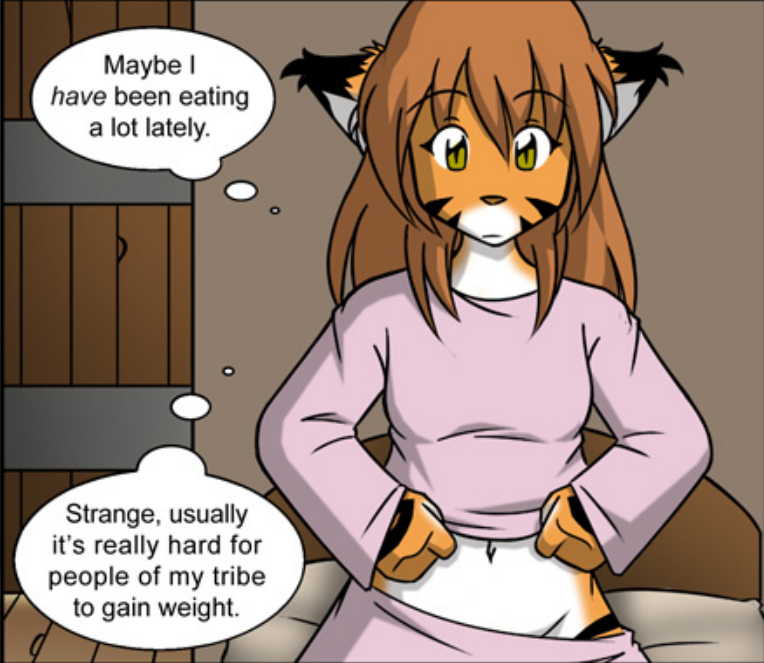
It's light out already!

Trace must have let me sleep in again.

I wonder where he went...

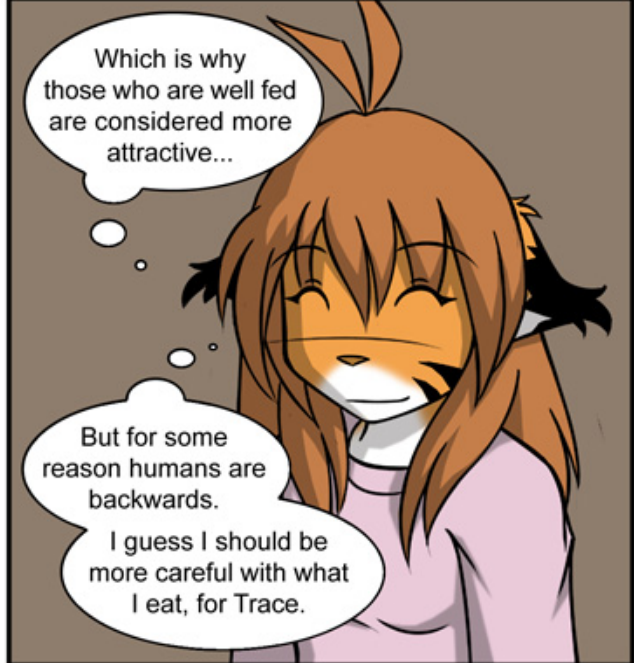


Eh-?



Maybe I have been eating a lot lately.

Strange, usually it's really hard for people of my tribe to gain weight.



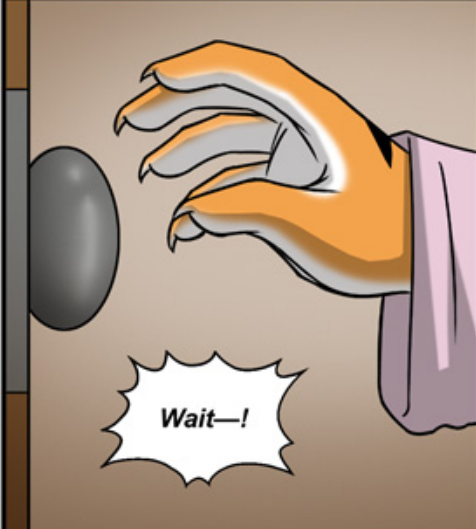
Which is why those who are well fed are considered more attractive...

But for some reason humans are backwards.

I guess I should be more careful with what I eat, for Trace.



I hope someone left out some hot water.
A nice soak would really hit the spot.



Wait—!



Oh, Keith!
You startled me!



Sorry, Flora.
Listen, you can't go in there...
I... uh... have to wash these clothes...



Oh, well, why can't we go in together?
I don't mind if you watch me bathe.
Maybe you could even give me a hand...



Ah...! Well, I...
I... don't think that would be a good idea.
Just... come back in a few minutes, please.



Darn Keidran...
Why am I always being tempted by that which I cannot have?



I don't know why I don't just cut my hair off completely. Just adds to the trouble of getting dry.



Phew!
This is the last time I'm anyone's personal servant.



<Sorry, Natani! I had to come in.>

<Flora thinks— ah... I... I...>



I... uh... um...



Keith!
<What are you doing in here?!>



<Why did you come in here?!

I told you to wait outside! And... stop looking at me!>



<Er, sorry.>

<Look, it wasn't my fault. I told Flora I was washing clothes... So she wouldn't come in here.>



<I'll just set your clothes down here and look away.>

<I don't see why you're making such a big deal.

I saw you naked last time.>



<Yeah, well, I'd rather not make a habit of it!

I don't want people to see me Like this—>

<Especially you!>



<It's your own fault!

You shouldn't have been bent over like that...>

<With... with your tail up... as if you were... offering yourself—>

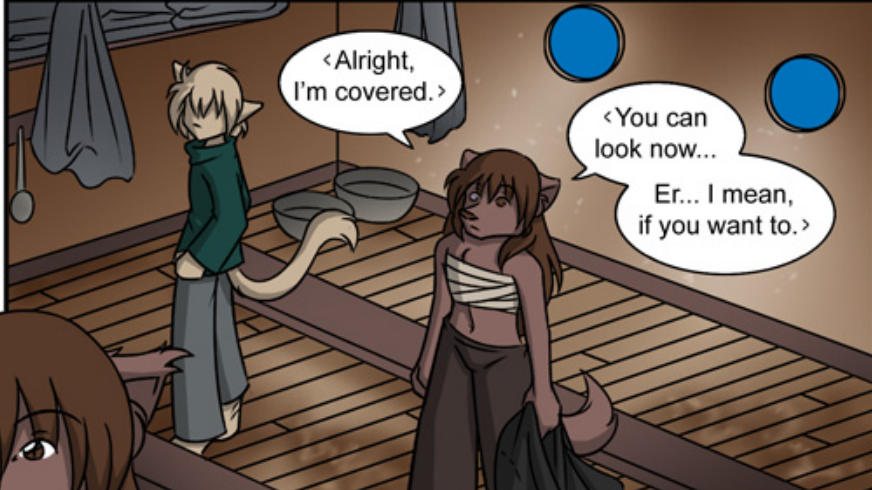


<Stop fantasizing about my body!>

<I-I'm not!>



...



<Alright, I'm covered.>

<You can look now...
Er... I mean, if you want to.>



<What do you think?>

Pretty good, hm?>

<Uh... sure, you look quite manly...>

Your scent still gives it away, though.>



<Oh, yeah, I know. I just need to use my spells again.>

<As an assassin, I have many spells to disguise my scent.>



<Oh, right...
That's why no one's noticed before.>

<...You've been an assassin a long time, haven't you?>



<Oh... yeah. I joined the Brotherhood after Zen did.
But I'd rather not talk about it...>



<I'm tired of having to live out here in the forest outside town.

I'm tired of having to steal and beg for food every day.>

<Once I get into the Brotherhood we'll finally be able to get a good meal.>



<Brother, wait!

Please, take me with you!>



<I told you before, Natani, you can't.>

<Even if I was willing to let you, they don't allow girls.

Now get up.>



<You're my only sister, Natani.>

<You're all I've got left, now.>



Natani...?



<Natani, you don't know what they'll do to you if...

We've reached land!

Everyone get ready! Please meet above deck.



Natani!

<What have you done to your hair?>

<I'll grow it back once I'm in...

I'm not your little sister anymore.>



<Natani, he said we need to get on deck.

You ready?>

<Huh? Oh, right. Yes.>



It's so nice to finally get off that ship!



Hey, watch your step, now.
Here, let me help you, my dear...



Wow! Look at all the... *Keiths!*
There are Keiths... everywhere!



Hey, what's that supposed to mean?

I... uh, sorry. You all do kinda look alike...

That's not true!

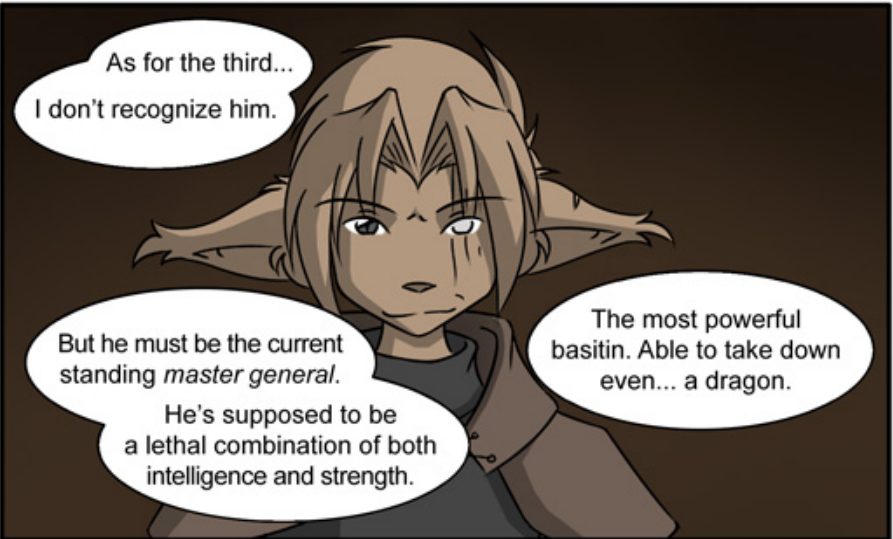
I don't look like any of them!



Uh, guys... heads up.
This doesn't look good...



What have we done to warrant the attention of all three Basitin generals?









That's enough, Alabaster.
Let the boy explain himself.



I was banished on the condition that I could return if I brought back Trace.



I have done so. You should recognize him.

Flora, get up... we're supposed to be on our best behavior here.

Nya, my legs are tired.



That *is* him...!
But... no, it can't be!



Never in my years has anyone returned from banishment!

The conditions were supposed to be impossible to accomplish!

You were meant to accept your punishment with dignity and die!



You were *not* supposed to return!



And yet he has.

It's out of our hands now, General.

We have no choice but to grant little Keith access back into our glorious society.

It is law.



Hey, looks like they're letting them into the city.

Ah, good. No more Basitin on the ship!



You said it. I can relax a little.

That dark Basitin magic is scary.

It was hard constantly avoiding that guy.



I'd hate to end up like that wolf— ...Huh. I feel strange...



M-Mike...!

Look at yourself!



Ah?!

W-what's happening to my body?!



T-that Basitin! He cursed me!

Ah! T-this feels really weird! What am I going to do?

Woah... Mike, you look... hot...

What?!



Mrahaha!

Well, I'm starving. I haven't eaten in weeks.

I'll undo the illusion later, if they can't.



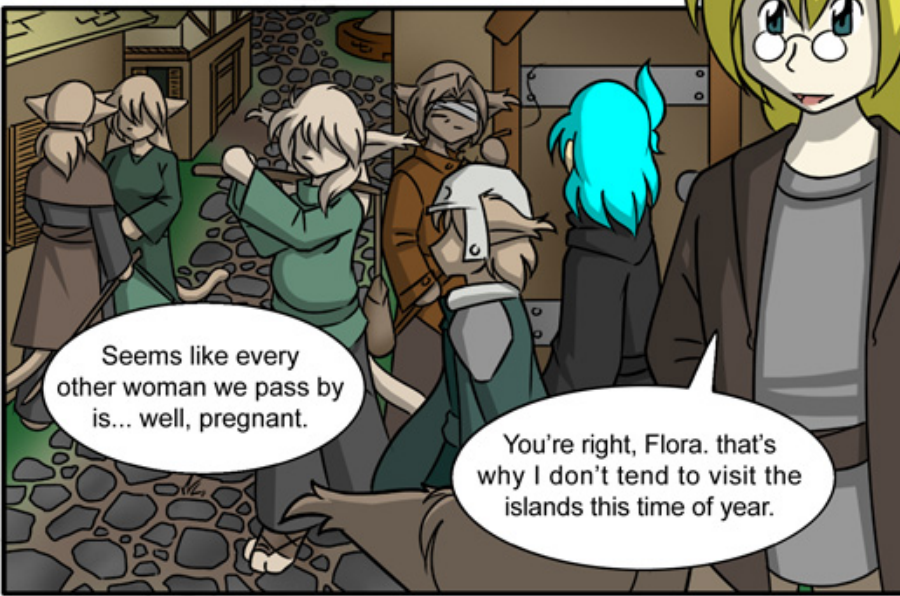
Everyone's looking at us.

You guys do kinda stick out.



Hey Trace...

Have you noticed anything... strange about the women here?



Seems like every other woman we pass by is... well, pregnant.

You're right, Flora. that's why I don't tend to visit the islands this time of year.

I don't understand...

Flora, Basitins... um, we.. only mate once per year. At the same time.



What?! Why?

Well, all females live together on the inside of our city. While all the males live outside the city.
Living together, all our females have their cycles at the same time once per year.



So we have one week set aside for... reproduction.

Outside that, it is not permitted.

That's... horrible...

It's not! It's efficient and organized.

And law.



You will stay here in this tavern.

You and your friends may feel free to look around and buy supplies.

But do not leave this district, and respect the curfew.



Keith, you may be one of us again, but you are not yet free.

You will be summoned soon to stand trial. Prepare yourself, my friend.



You, human. Are you not Eric, the slave trader?

Why, yes, I am.

Are those keidran your slaves?

Well... the spotted one is mine. The tiger is Trace's, and the wolf is his own.

Very well. We tolerate keidran, but we ask you keep them under control.



Yes, most certainly.

We may tolerate their kind, but we do not tolerate their promiscuous ways.

And make sure their feet are covered next time they're out. Public nudity is unlawful.




We leave you now, Keith. Good luck.

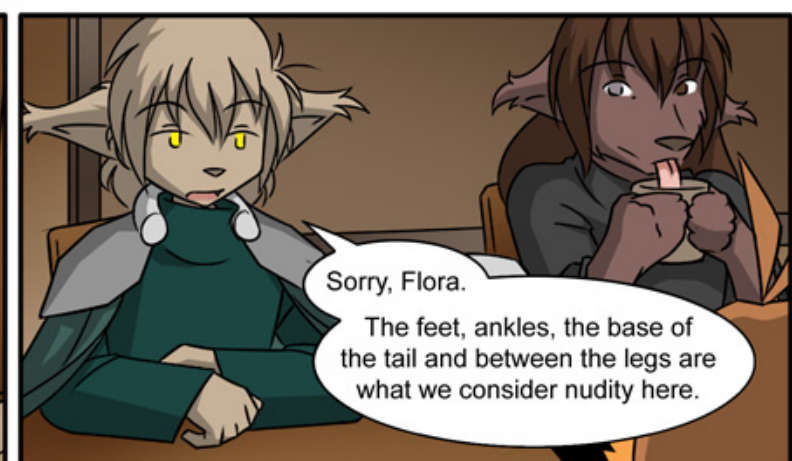


Ah, customers!

Welcome, welcome. I've been expecting you.




Keith, why do I have to wear these silly things?



Sorry, Flora.


The feet, ankles, the base of the tail and between the legs are what we consider nudity here.



Hey, guys.

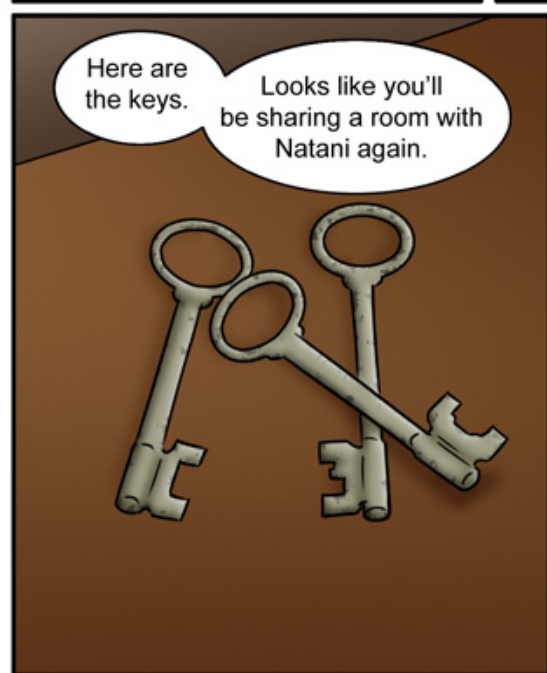
Everyone's signed in now. Go ahead and stretch your legs or relax.

We've got three rooms to ourselves upstairs.




Three rooms! But... we need at least four!

Sorry, Keith. That guy said they only had three.



Here are the keys.

Looks like you'll be sharing a room with Natani again.



Aw, man... Not again.

< What? What's wrong? >

I can't understand a word anyone is saying! >



Alright, I'm going back to the ship to get some supplies.

We'll all meet back here at dusk, alright?



Okay, let's look around, Trace!

What do you want to look for?



Food! Good food!

I'm sick and tired of the ship's meals!

I want fresh meat! Still bleeding! Mmm...

Heh, well that's... disturbing. But if it's what you want, okay.



I'm going to walk around too.

<H-hey, wait! Where is everyone going?>



<Oh, forget you guys.

I'll just stay here. I'll be fine on my own.>

<Here, in this... strange town... surrounded by strange people...

Everyone speaking in a language I can't understand...

No forests in sight...>



Keith!

<Don't leave me here alone!>

Look, Trace. I think we can get something here!

Yeah, I guess so. Wait up, Flora.

Hope they can understand us...



Well, if it ain't a little human an' a Keidran missus.

What can I do for ya?



Well, uh, how much is... um, what do you have?

smells so good...

Well, that depends, whacha got, honey?



Uh, how much...

...can I get for this?



What's this, more human money?

Wait, this is a real gold piece!

Not broken up or nuthin'...



{ Roran, put a cow on the fire! }

{ We got some hungry customers! }



Come on, Mike!
Just let me see!

Evals, stop! I'm
still a guy! Get your
hands off me!



Oh, you're
no fun. If it
was me—

...Hm?
Uh, oh...!



Mike!
Incoming!

Master Eric
and Miss Kathrin
are
coming back!

What?
Already?!
Oh no!
What am I going
to do?



Oh, I know!
Quick!

Let's barricade
ourselves in my room!



.....

Or yours,
I'm fine with
that, too.



Nya...
I'm doomed...

Did I just
say "nya"?





Why are you concerned?
Once our king is out of the way,
the Keidran will have—

We have more to worry
about than the Keidran.

Euchre! Where
have you been?



Sorry...

I had to attend
to a personal matter.
Please continue.



As I was saying...

mew?

The Basitin are who we
should be concerned about.
They may not be our enemy now,
but who knows who those beasts will
side with when war breaks out.
We cannot afford to fight
on two fronts. Especially with
a race like the Basitin.



I already told you all only
to worry about the Keidran.
I have already taken
care of the Basitin.

I have a man on the island...
True, we couldn't hope to
defeat them directly. We must first
rot them from the inside...



Trace, are you okay?

Huh? Oh, yeah.
I just... I feel like I've
been here before...



<What's going on?>
<Why are you fighting? Should I be fighting, too?>



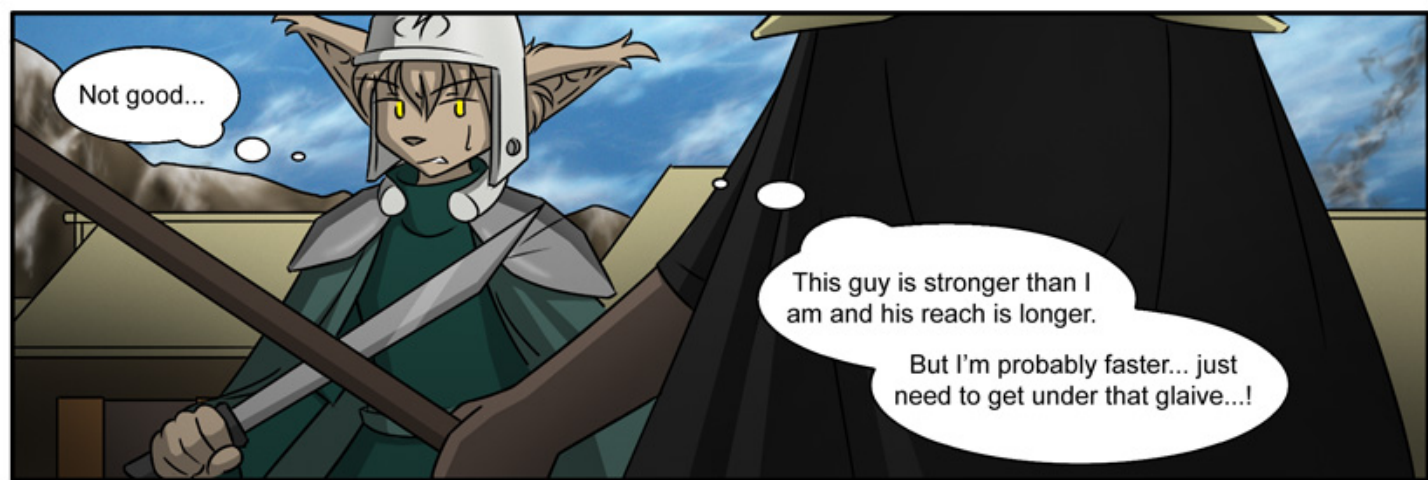
<Relax. This normal.>
<Oh... huh? You can speak Keidran?>
<Yes, some.>
<Just enjoy fight. Happens often.>



SHOVE!



SHING!



Not good...

This guy is stronger than I am and his reach is longer.

But I'm probably faster... just need to get under that glaive...!



CLINK!



Grrr...



CLASH!


Graah!



A sword!


You're giving away your intentions.






You are better than I had thought. Your rank masks your skill.

I concede to you, Brother.




I will not stop you from crossing this bridge. But I still would not recommend it.

I will take responsibility for my actions here.




<Oh my. Your friend is quite... amazing...>

Oookay...
This girl's getting a little *too* excited from watching them fight.



<We can go now, Natani.>

<Right behind you!>



<So, Keith...
That last move...>

<Oh, you noticed? I learned that from you when we practiced sword fighting on the ship.>

<Learned from me? ...I didn't think you would care how I fought.>

<Well of course I would. You have a lot of skill. There's always something to learn from another good fighter.>



Oh.. I see.

Wag!
Wag!

Meanwhile...

General...

Sire, we've just recieved word – another village has been attacked by the Wolves.

Along with several settlements near the borders. It's a full-scale invasion.

The Keidran are killing indiscriminently; men, women and children alike.

...I don't understand.

First our King and now this... why would they attack us?

Does there need to be a reason? They're animals, it was bound to happen.

I have no love for those beasts, but I never thought they would go as far as this...

The Templar have offered their support in the fight—

The Templar? Those damn magic-users probably caused this mess.

Sire, with all due respect...

The Templar are loyal protectors of our country.

They would *never* dare cause such a coup against their own empire.

The Templar are greedy and corrupt.

I can't help but feel that somehow they are responsible for this.

Have the servants ready my horse.

Perhaps... I will try to speak some reason before this gets out of hand.



Please, you can't let Eric find me!

You want me to *lie* to our master?

Yes, please... I'll do anything!



Anything?
How about a....
striptease...?



S-s-strip??
You want to see me...
naked...?!

I think I hear Eric coming...

O-okay! fine!
Just stop him!



There you are!
Where's Mike?
I need you two to carry
my supplies.

Oh! Hello, Master!
Mike? He's... um, sick!
He caught that bug the wolf
guy had a few days ago.

Ah, that's too bad.



I guess you'll have to do it, then.

Me? Oh, no...
Mike's... really sick.
I think I should stay
here and help.



Nonsense! I can't have both my best men under the weather, can I?

Now get going! Make sure to bring my painting supplies as well, I'll need those.



Ah, great.
I guess I'll have to wait till later...



Oh, thank goodness!

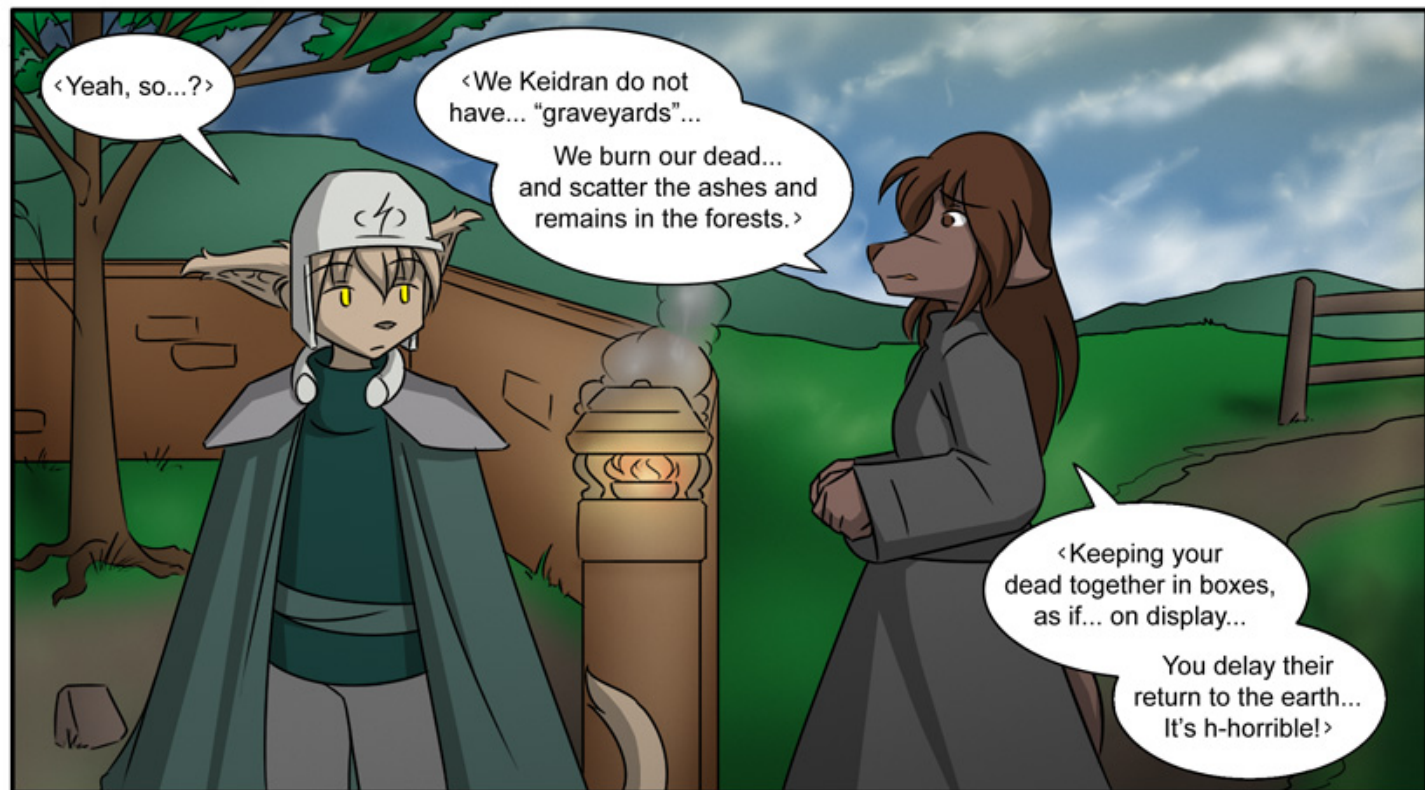


<Ah...! Wait!>



<What's wrong?>

<This... this is a graveyard, isn't it?>



<Yeah, so...?>

<We Keidran do not have... "graveyards"...

We burn our dead... and scatter the ashes and remains in the forests.>

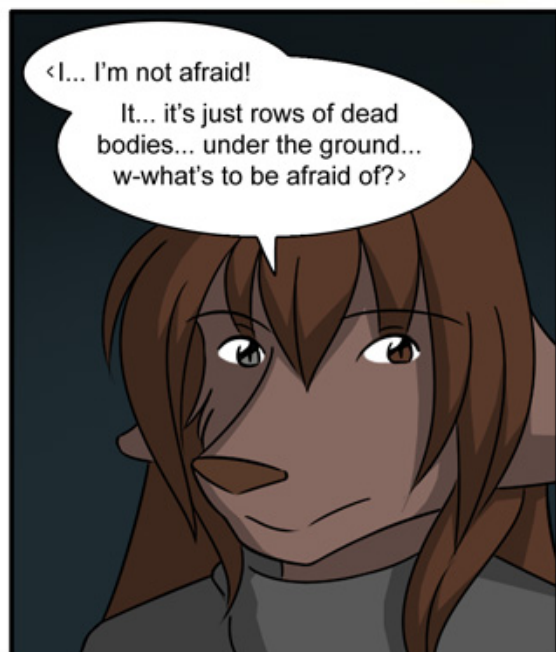
<Keeping your dead together in boxes, as if... on display...

You delay their return to the earth... It's h-horrible!>



<Look, Natani. I didn't ask you to come along.

If you're afraid, you can stay out here or go back, it doesn't matter to me.>



<I... I'm not afraid!

It... it's just rows of dead bodies... under the ground... w-what's to be afraid of?>





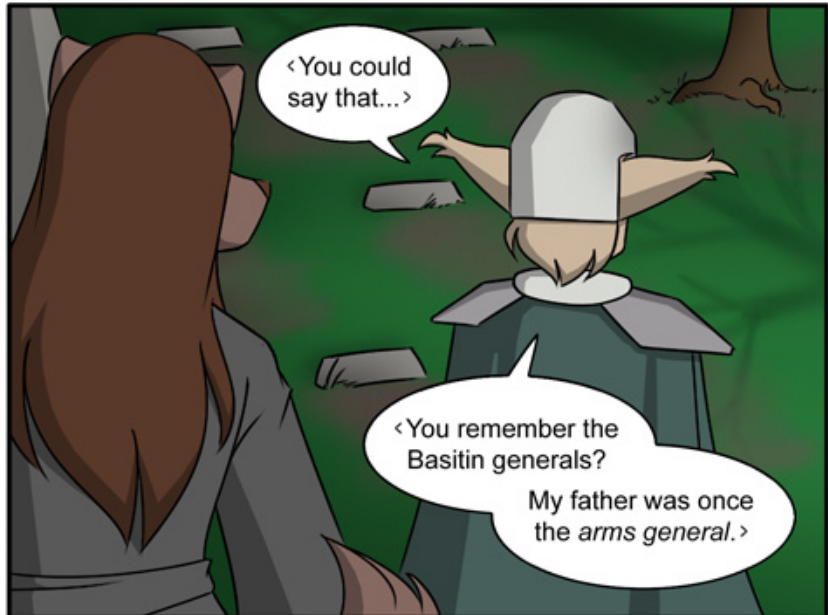
<So...
That's your
father, huh?

I can see the family
resemblance... I think.>



<Why does he get
his own statue?

Was he someone
of importance?>



<You could
say that...>

<You remember the
Basitin generals?

My father was once
the *arms general*.>



<But I didn't
come here to
see him.

I only came
to pay respects to
my mother.>

<I couldn't care any
less about him.>



<How can
you say that?

What did your
father do to make
you hate him?>

<...I don't like to think
about it. It was what got me
banished years ago.

My father... was a
great general...>



<But he was a
terrible person.>



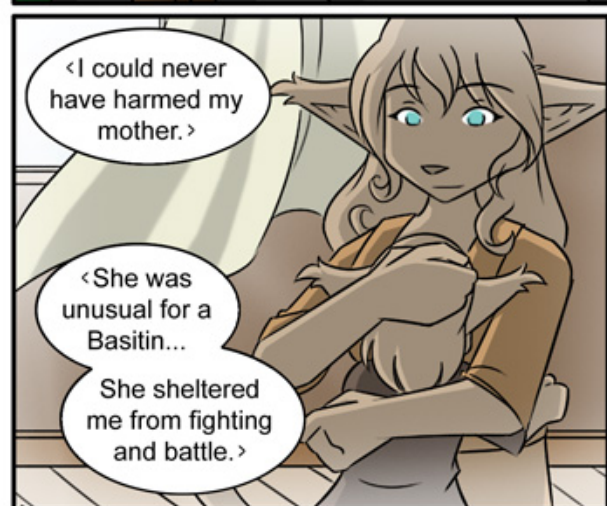
<You said once that you were blamed for your parents' deaths.

But... that wasn't true, was it? You didn't really—?>



<It is the truth...

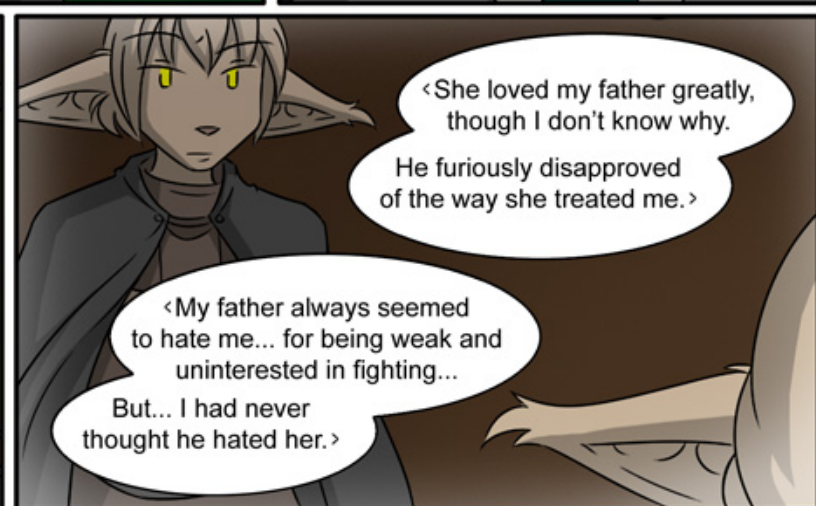
Well, at least partly.>



<I could never have harmed my mother.>

<She was unusual for a Basitin...

She sheltered me from fighting and battle.>

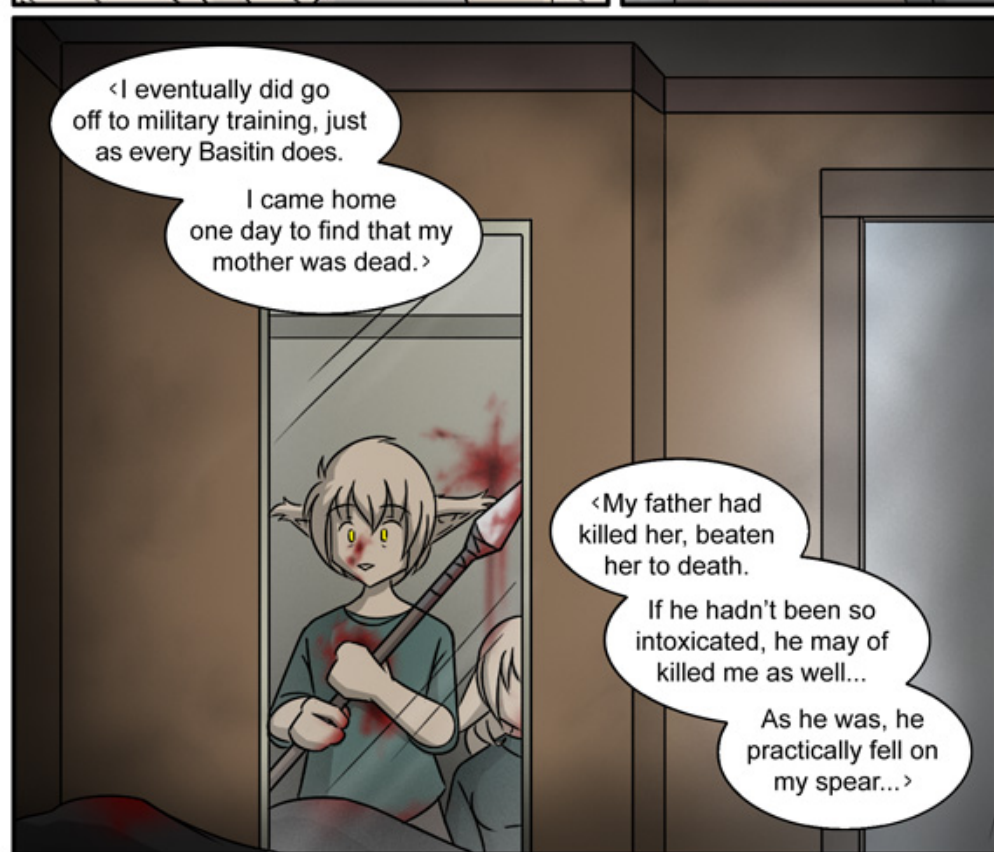


<She loved my father greatly, though I don't know why.

He furiously disapproved of the way she treated me.>

<My father always seemed to hate me... for being weak and uninterested in fighting...

But... I had never thought he hated her.>



<I eventually did go off to military training, just as every Basitin does.

I came home one day to find that my mother was dead.>

<My father had killed her, beaten her to death.

If he hadn't been so intoxicated, he may have killed me as well...

As he was, he practically fell on my spear...>



<But... that was a long time ago.

I was not allowed to pay my respects to my mother, back then.>

<Just give me a few moments.>



I'm all alone now. What am I gonna do—

Ah! Is... this what I really look like...?



M-might as well have a peek...



Wow! It's true! I really am a girl!



They feel real.

What if I'm stuck like this for the rest of my life?!

I'm a sailor, I don't know how to be a girl!

And if Eric finds out... I'm doomed!

Oh, I hope that Basitin comes back!



Evals was right, though... I guess I do look good.

I guess I can't blame him. If the situation were reversed, I'd probably...



Ah! I'm attracted to my own reflection!

I'm as bad as Evals!

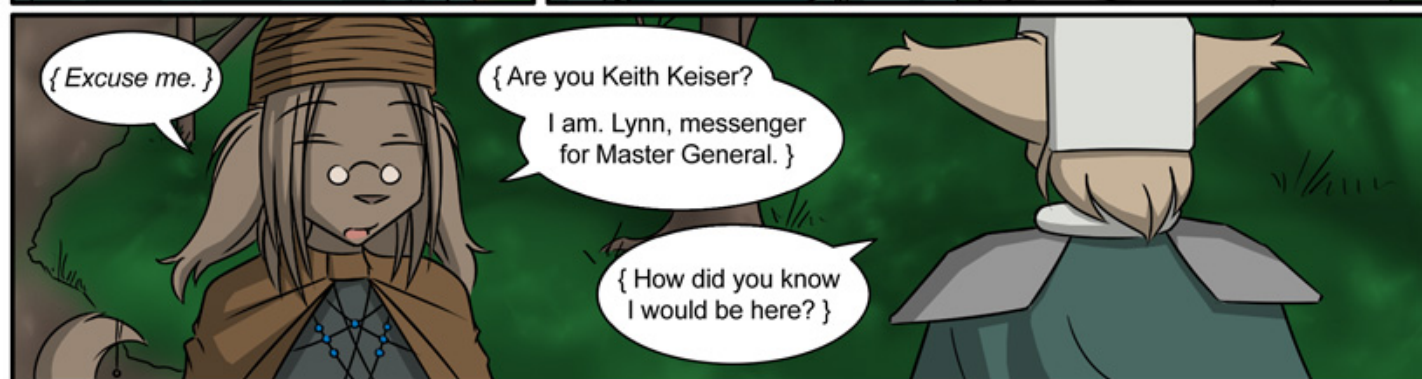
No... I should just put my shirt back on and find a belt before—



FLUMPH!

My... pants fall off...

...So that's what I look like naked.





<Public baths, huh?

I'm surprised. You Basitin always seem very... prudish.>

<We are... but, like all the races, not everyone can afford to have an in-home bath.

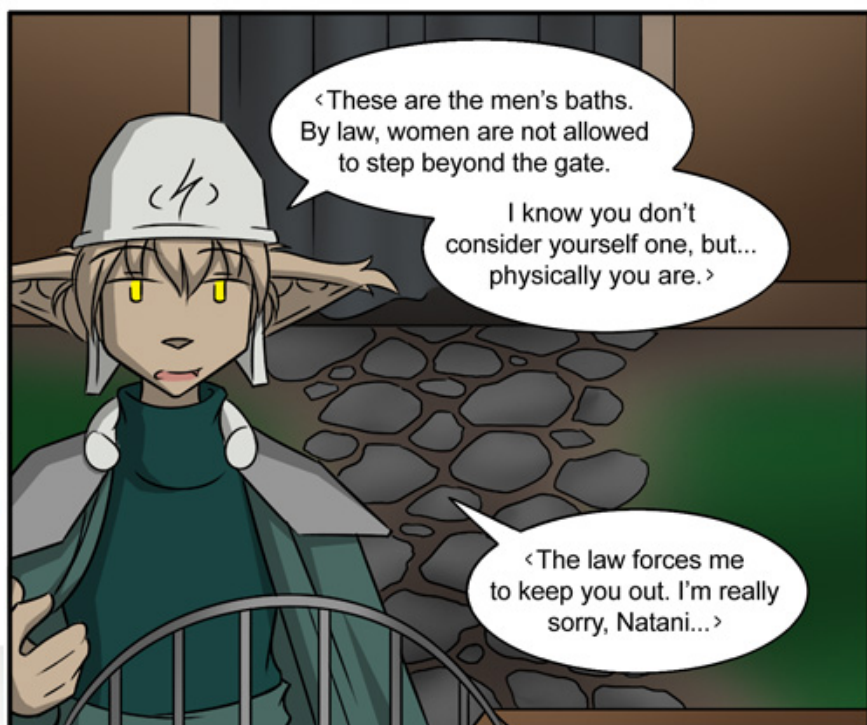
You can get a private bath drawn, however, for a couple extra coins.>



<Oh, good-hey!

Why'd you close the gate on me?>

<I'm sorry, Natani, I can't let you in here.>



<These are the men's baths. By law, women are not allowed to step beyond the gate.

I know you don't consider yourself one, but... physically you are.>

<The law forces me to keep you out. I'm really sorry, Natani...>



<That's not fair!

What am I supposed to do?>

<I can't go into the women's baths!>

<Hey, don't bare your teeth at me! I said I was sorry.

I'll be out later, just go back to the tavern...>



Grrrr....

<Curse that... Basitin... and curse this body of mine!>



Ah, there you are, Keith!

I was wondering if you'd show up!

Welcome to my private bath!



Well, I didn't have much of a choice.

It's the only way I could find out more about the "girl."



And since you're the big general now...

I have to do what you say, right?



Oh, don't be like that!

I didn't order you to join me. I just thought we could catch up.

It's been almost six years... no time for your old pal anymore?

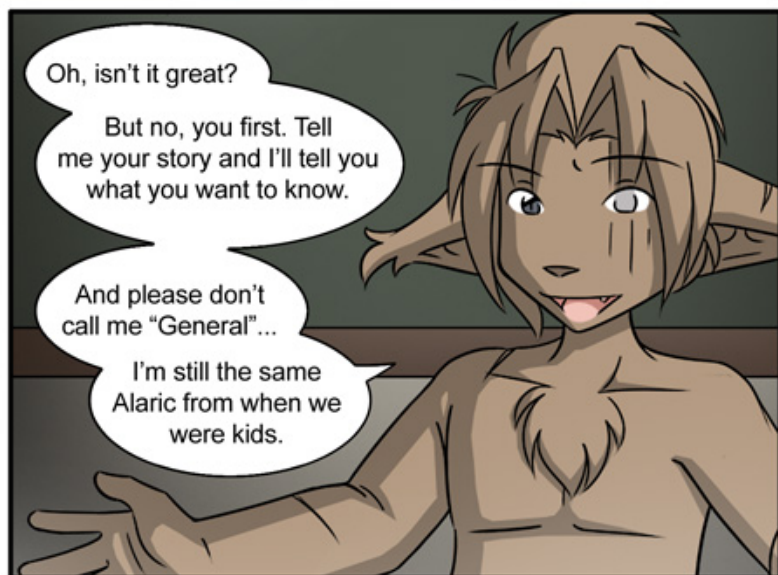


Oh, alright.

Enough with the guilt trip, already.

Some things never change... except... that eye of yours...

What happened to your eye, anyway?



Oh, isn't it great?

But no, you first. Tell me your story and I'll tell you what you want to know.

And please don't call me "General"...

I'm still the same Alaric from when we were kids.

...It's amazing, isn't it?

What's that, Flora?

These mountains! I've never seen anything so huge before!

How do you think they were made?

I... don't know. They are quite big.

I like 'em.

Oh, look, there's Natani.

<Hey, Natani!>

<Eh? Oh, hey, you two. All's well?>

<Yup! And you...? Where's Keith?>

<Feh! Keith...>

<Why should I care where he is?>

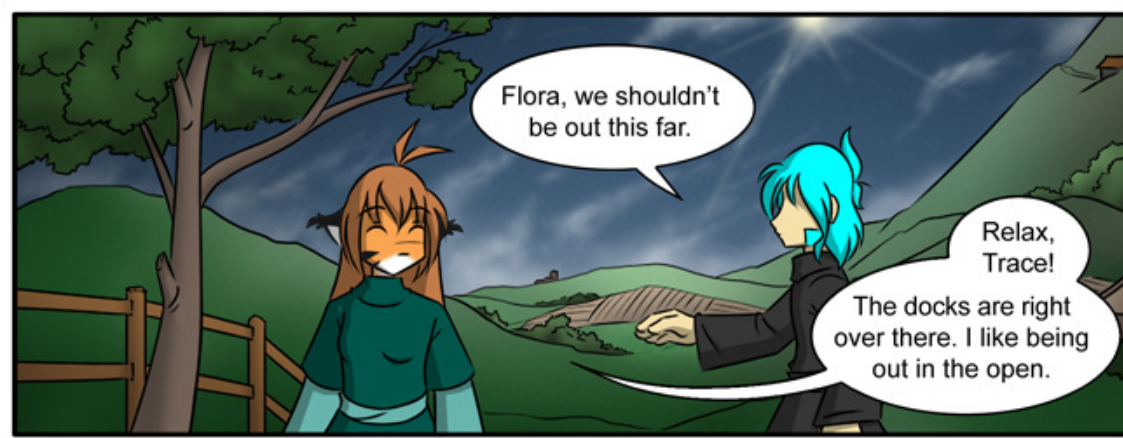
<He wants to hang out with his Basitin friends... so, *fine!*>

I don't care what he does! I don't need him! I'm fine being alone!>

Erm... what was that all about?

I have no idea.

It almost sounded like Natani was... jealous...



Flora, we shouldn't be out this far.

Relax, Trace!
The docks are right over there. I like being out in the open.



It reminds me of... my old home.



Is it wrong for me to have fond memories from my time as a slave—

Mew...?

Erm... well, I don't know, Flora...



Ah...



CHOMP!



Flora!
Don't eat the dragonfly!

Ah, jeez, that girl's acting more and more like an animal every day.

Or... perhaps I'm just starting to notice more.

Maybe I'm thinking more like a human.



Oh, I'll let her have her fun. She deserves it.

One story later...

...And after that, I ended up here.

Wow... that's incredible!

From keidran to human territories... you've travelled nearly the whole world!

I'm envious!

Yeah, well... it wasn't as fun as it sounds.

Now can you tell me who she is already?

Sure, sure...

But don't you want to hear about my eye, first?

Aw, fine...

I guess I can tell you later...

Alright, the girl... You mentioned that you were taken care of by a family of foxes? Interesting... it was a Keidran of the Fox Tribe who arrived here.

She said she was looking for you. The elders told her you would never return...

But according to her, coming here was her only hope left, since you had gone into human lands.

Now what was her name again... Lanie? Lorie?

Laura!

Ah, right, that was it.

Who is she?

She is... was my... fiancée.



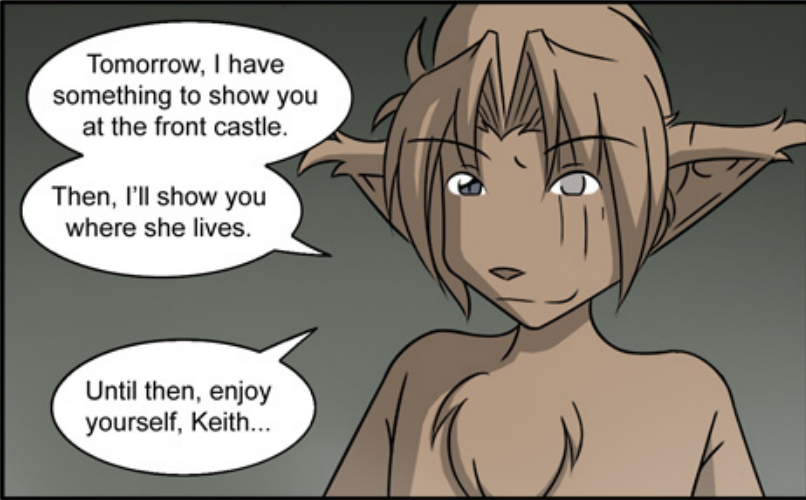
Fiancée?! Wow...
I had no idea.

She's still on the island, right?
Where is she?!



Relax, Keith.
She's living in the non-basitin district.

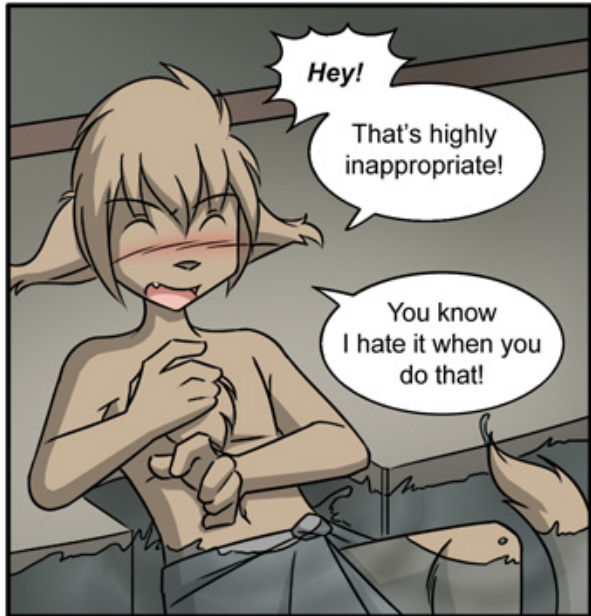
However, you'll never make it there before curfew.



Tomorrow, I have something to show you at the front castle.

Then, I'll show you where she lives.

Until then, enjoy yourself, Keith...



Hey!
That's highly inappropriate!

You know I hate it when you do that!



NUDGE



Hah! You still get flustered so easily.
You always were the uptight one.



I'm not *uptight!* I just obey the decency laws.

As you should, too!





I guess I am home after all...
These islands are where I belong.



Hey, Natani.
What are you doing here?

Oh, you're back...
Well, it isn't like I had anywhere else to go—



Buh...?



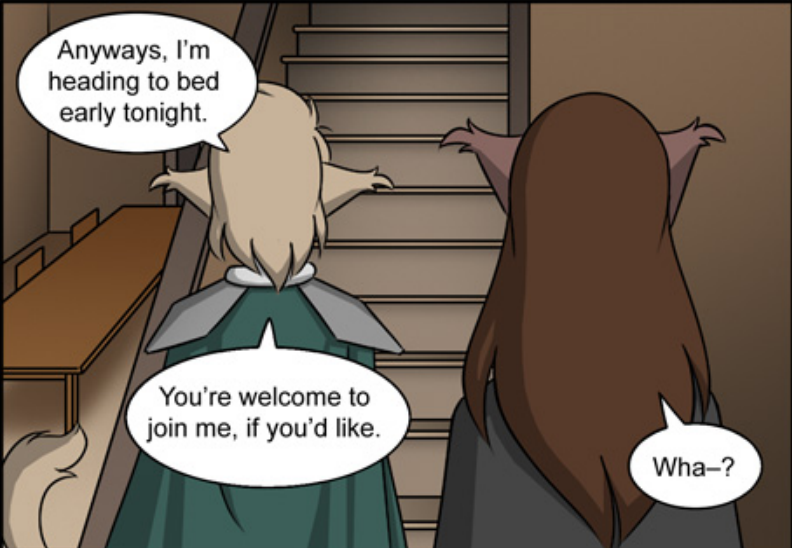
What?

You're... smiling!
What are you up to?



Heh, well...
I'm just happy for once, I guess.

I think things are finally looking up for me.



Anyways, I'm heading to bed early tonight.

You're welcome to join me, if you'd like.



Wha—?



That was... weird.
I've... never seen Keith happy before.

Dang it, now I just can't get myself to be mad at him.



Trace, Master of the Templars...
It gets dark rapidly here on the island.



Curfew takes effect at the last light of day.
Please make your way with haste.

Oh, alright. I'll get Flora.



Flora! Hey, we gotta go.



Trace! I found one!

Oh, that's... great!
One what?



It's a subtle flower.
They're usually quite rare.



It's just like what's in my necklace.

If I give you this, it will signify that we are a couple...

Flora, we've been sleeping together for over a month...

I think that makes us a couple by now.



Oh, well... yeah...

But we kinda got rushed into things back then. You gave me the necklace by mistake.

But this would make things... official, I guess...

I mean, if you want it.



Of course I do, Flora.



A little more to the right...



That's perfect!

Wonderful, I'm sure I'll get some great paintings done of the Basitin ladies.



They make such lovely subjects.

Don't you agree, Kathrin?

Oh, yes, Eric! I'm sure they would! They're so cute with their long ears...

Right...cute... *that's* what I'll be going for...



Alright, Master, can I please return to the ship?

Eh? Oh, no.

Curfew is upon us, you'll have to stay here until the morning.

What, morning?!



Drat! Looks like Mike'll get to sleep easy tonight.



Meanwhile...

I'm not giving a show for that dog!

Where is he, anyways? He's trying to get me to lower my guard, no doubt!

Well it wont work! I'll stay up all night if I must!

You alright, Flora? You've been quiet since we got back.



I'm fine, Trace. Just enjoying the scenery. This island is beautiful.



I am a bit tired, though.

I've noticed you've been getting tired earlier than usual.

Hope you're not coming down with something.

We should probably get to bed early.



Several rooms down...

I told you! I don't need your... **chivalry!**

I'm perfectly fine on the ground!



And I told you, I don't need the stupid bed!

Just take it and be comfortable!

You slept on the floor for me last time! Now I should be the one to do it!

Stop being so stubborn!



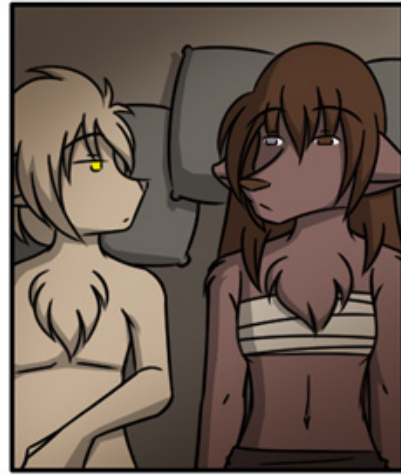
The next morning...



Knock!
Knock!

Hey, Keith!
It's me, Alaric!
Are you up yet?

The sun's already up!
Don't tell me banishment
has made you soft.



Aaaah!


FLUMPH!



Hey, Keith!
You're up, good!

Erm... hi,
Alaric...


<What... what
just happened?>



Come on, Trace!


Wake up, sleepyhead!
It's morning, the sun's up!

Alright, alright!
I'm awake.




You know
what this means,
right?

We've managed
to spend an entire day in
a town without anything
going wrong!



"Going wrong?"

What do
you mean
by that?




Well... in the
first town Keith tried
to kill me...

Then, in the second a
Templar tried to kill us and
you tried to kill me...

After that I
was possessed by
Neutral and tried to
kill everyone.


On the day
we reached the
port Natani tried
to kill us...

Then we were
attacked by those
three guys—




Okay, okay!

I get it, bad
stuff happens to us
around towns...




But... I think
things are going to
be better here.


I feel like we've
finally gotten far enough
away from the war.



Well, there's something you don't see very often...




A dragon bathing in the harbor.



Excuse me, Mister Dragon, sir?

Could you move a little to the side, please?



That's "Miss Dragon, Ma'am."

And why should I move aside?




Sorry. Ma'am.

Well, obviously we can't make you move.

However, you are blocking some of the fishing boats from entering and leaving.

We'd appreciate it if you could.



Hmph, Basitins.

At least Humans and Keidran have the courtesy to run away when I do that.

Meanwhile...

Before we go on,
there is something I must
warn you, Keith...

What I'm about
to show you is for
your eyes only.

You must never
speak of this to any of
your new... friends.

Not to *anyone*. That's
an order. No one shall hear
about it from you.

No one.

Do you
understand?

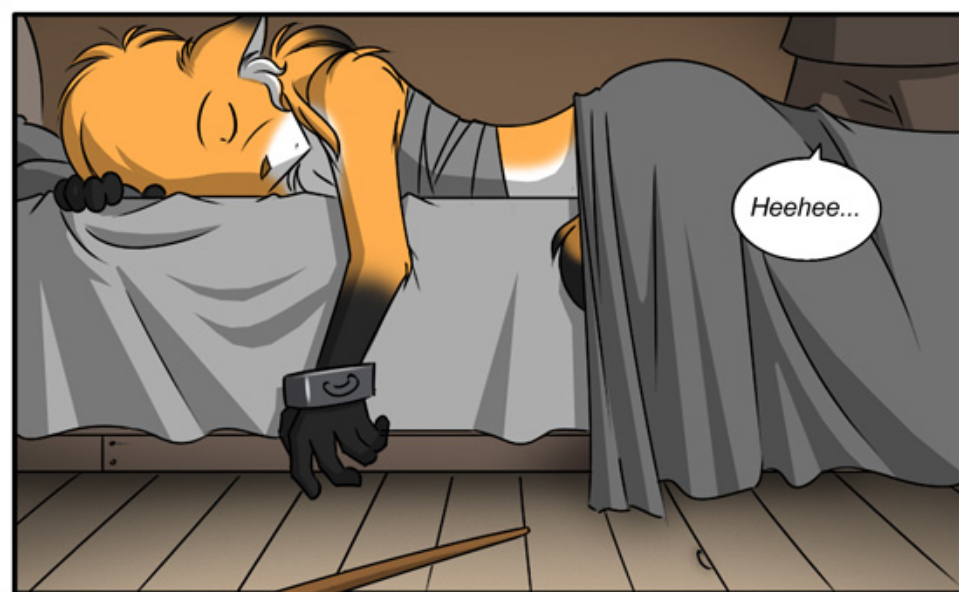
Y-yes, sir!

Great! Let's get
going, then!

It's being built in the
eastern courtyard.

Ah, here we go!

It's just beyond these
ridiculously large doors!



Heehee...



Oh, Mike~!



Wakey wakey!



Neh?!

Ah! Get away, you pervert!

Heeey, it's just me, Buddy!



I know it's you!
H-how did you get in here? I thought I blocked the door.



Mike, our room doors open outward, remember?

Oh... yeah... I forgot about that.



Nya!
The weather's so nice today!



"Nice?" It's a bit on the chilly side, don't you think?

Hm...? Oh, right, you don't have any fur!
Well, I could help keep you warm.



Hey, it's a dragon!
Isn't that... what was her name...?

Lady Nora?
Yeah, I think that is her. She followed us?



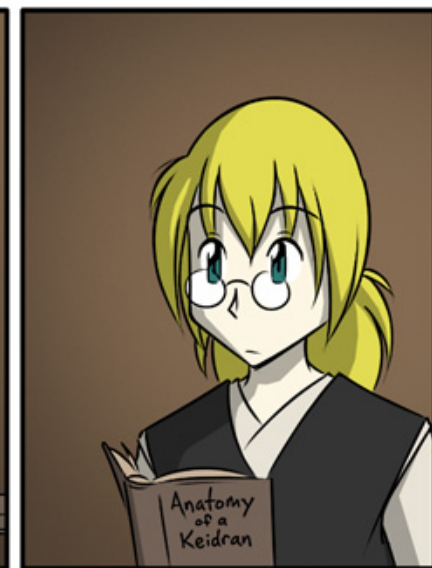
Actually, Flora, would you mind waiting here, just for a bit?

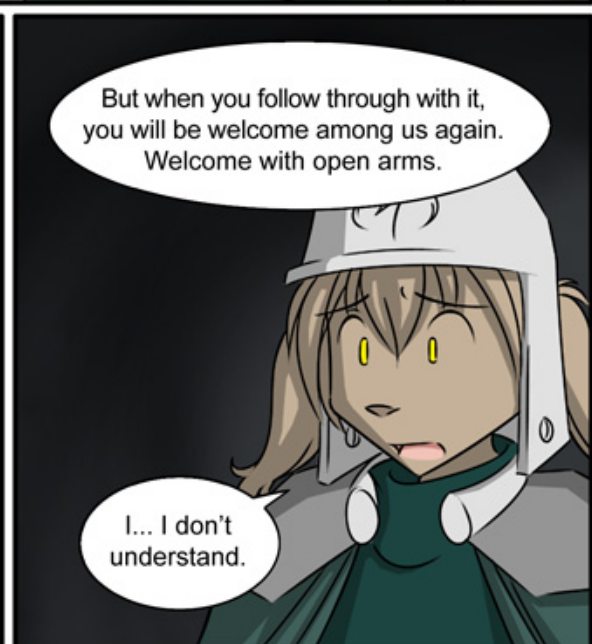
Huh...? Oh, uh, sure, Trace. No problem.



Thanks, I won't be gone long, Flora...

Aaaw... Trace doesn't want me to go with him?





Fair greeting,
General Alaric.

Oh, good
morning, Templar
Randal.

Ah, this must be the
friend you were talking
about - Keith, right?

Good morning, I am
Randal, Templar teacher
and architect.

{ Alaric... }

{ Actually, there
is only one Templar
here - me.

These
others are my
students. }

{ What is
going on?!

*Humans... in the
castle? And Templar,
no less? }*

{ I understand, we Templar
have a bad reputation. Some of
it is warranted, *I know.*


But that's not the
case now. We are here as
a show of good will. }

Keith, we
know what we're
doing.

We are working with
the humans towards a
mutual interest.

For too long now, we
Basitin have gone without
something the other races
take for granted...


Magic...!




I'm surprised
you asked to talk
with me, Trace.

In private,
even...

Getting tired
of playing with the
furred ones?

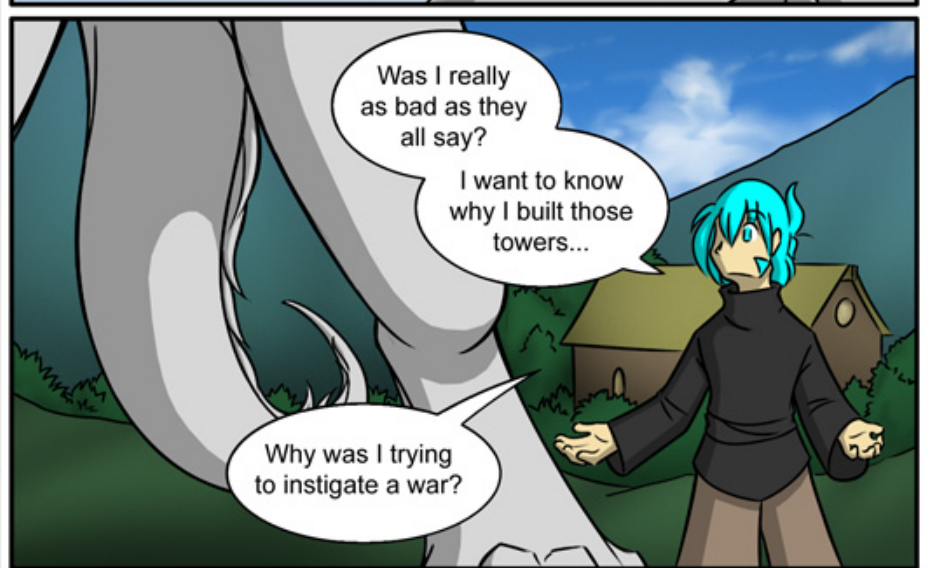


What?
No... I mean,
not really...



Oh, yes.
Quite... personally.


I wanted to ask you
more about my past. Who
I was and what I did.
You seemed to
know me personally.



Was I really
as bad as they
all say?

I want to know
why I built those
towers...

Why was I trying
to instigate a war?




I'm under orders not
to tell anyone about anything
you were doing!

And to make sure
nobody asks...

O-okay, then.

Ah... who ordered
you to do that?



Why, you did,
of course.



But... if I told you not to tell anyone...

Couldn't I undo that order?



Yes, **Trace** could.

Tell me, though, are you the same person who gave me the order?

Wha-? Of course I am. I'm Trace!



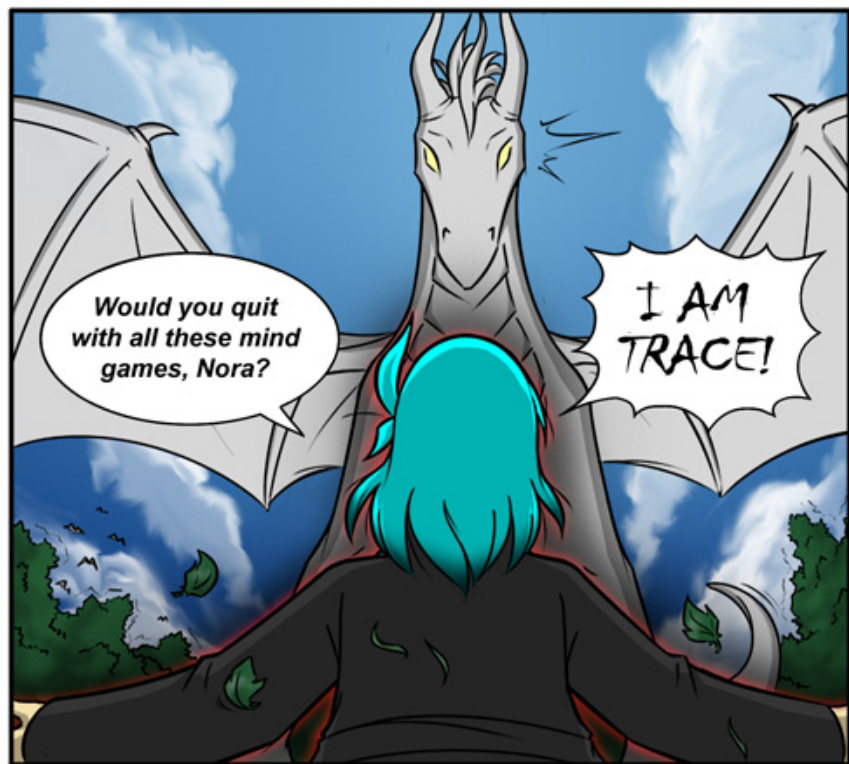
Oh, you look like Trace, but you don't talk or act like him.

My memories were taken. You know I'm still the same person!

Same body, but altered mind. In the end, it is the mind that really matters.



So are you—?



Would you quit with all these mind games, Nora?

I AM TRACE!



Okay, Trace...


I certainly recognize your magical aura... it makes my scales quiver...

I think my question's been answered. Ask, and I will answer any I can.



Fine, tell me about my past—all of it.

I want to know who I really am.



I admit, I don't know much about your childhood before the Templar found you.

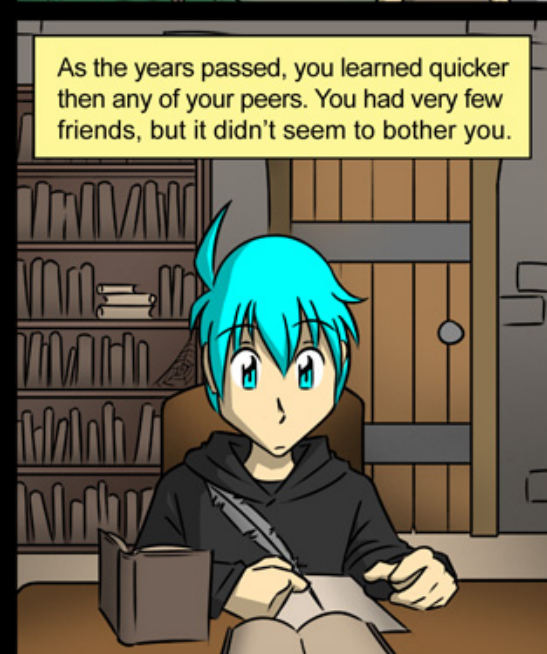
Your parents were farmers from a small rural village.

Ah, the new student.

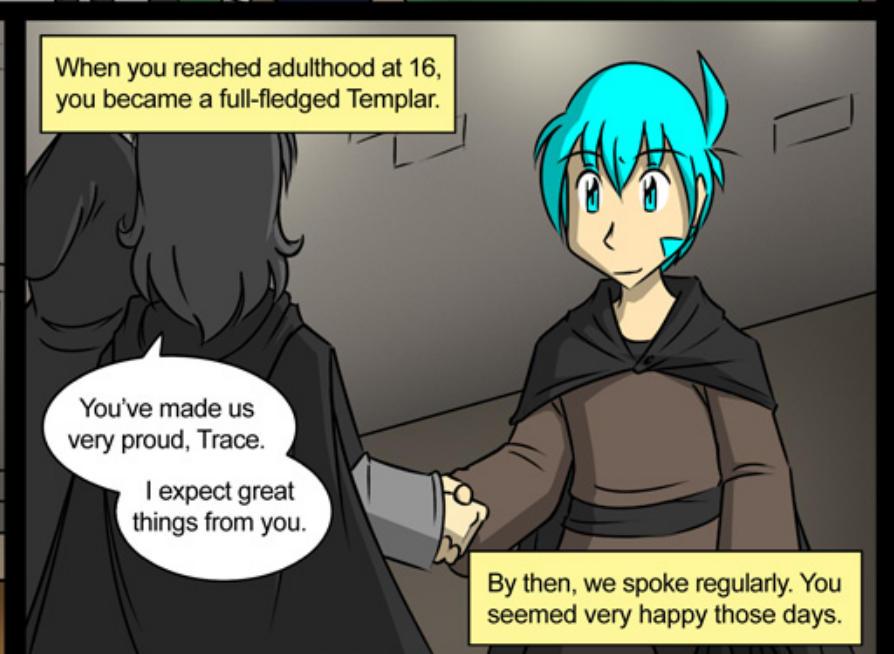
I've been expecting him. This way, please.

This will be your new home. I think you will enjoy it here.

But even then, as I watched you arrive for the first time, I knew you were not like the others.



As the years passed, you learned quicker than any of your peers. You had very few friends, but it didn't seem to bother you.

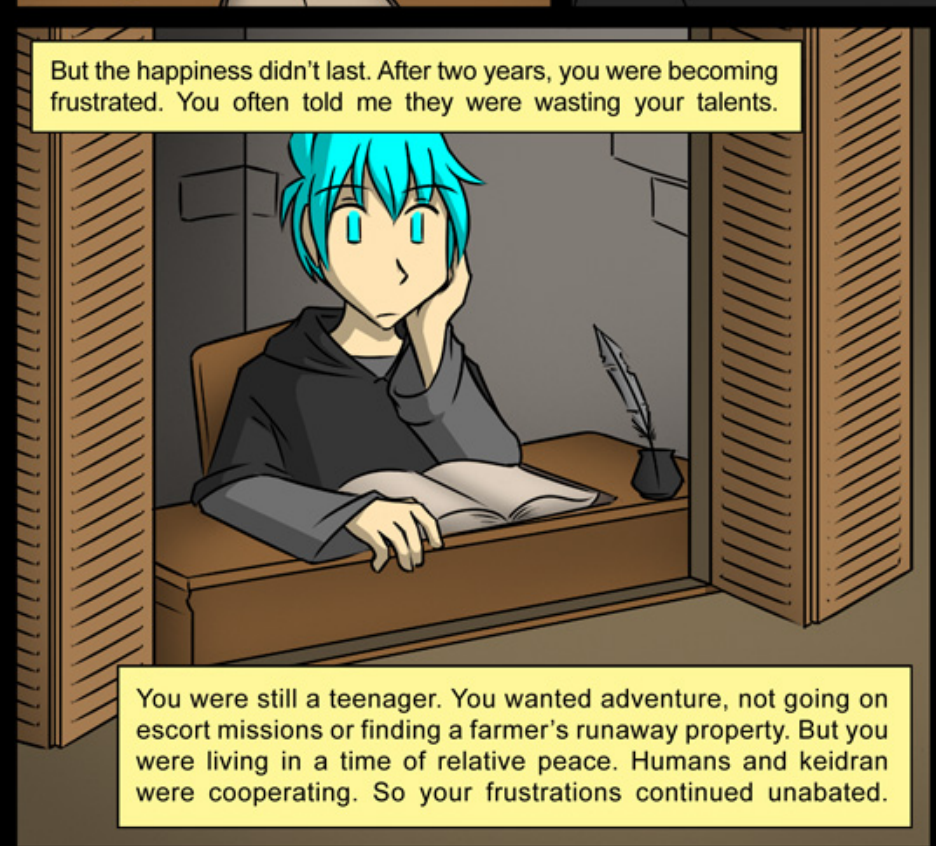


When you reached adulthood at 16, you became a full-fledged Templar.

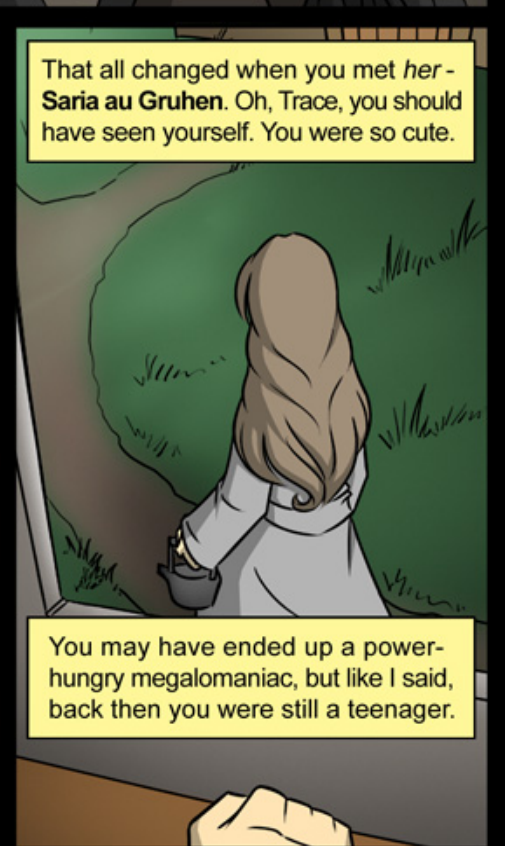
You've made us very proud, Trace.

I expect great things from you.

By then, we spoke regularly. You seemed very happy those days.



But the happiness didn't last. After two years, you were becoming frustrated. You often told me they were wasting your talents.



That all changed when you met *her* - **Saria au Gruhen**. Oh, Trace, you should have seen yourself. You were so cute.

You were still a teenager. You wanted adventure, not going on escort missions or finding a farmer's runaway property. But you were living in a time of relative peace. Humans and keidran were cooperating. So your frustrations continued unabated.

You may have ended up a power-hungry megalomaniac, but like I said, back then you were still a teenager.

Unfortunately, you were quite clueless when it came to attracting a woman's attention.

You tried several indirect methods...

Die, beast!

Hiss!

Including... "fighting" a dragon for her honor...

Unsurprisingly...

This isn't working!
She doesn't even notice!

It's fun, though!

I keep telling you, just go talk to her, Little One.

I can't do that! I don't even know her!

NORA!
TRACE!

That's the point of talking, is it not?

G-grand Templar?

What have you done to my courtyard?!

Okay, in hindsight, maybe it wasn't such a good idea to stage our fight in the Grand Templar's front lawn.

Get back here!

Eep!

I know, but she's still scary when she's mad like that!

Keep running!

Eh? Why are you running?

You're a freakin' dragon!

After paying for the damages and swearing not to destroy the academy for a third time, you finally worked up the nerve to actually talk to her.

Nice to meet you, Trace.

Amazing how much better that worked...

You began courting her in the fall.

And by the first of winter, you were married.

You purchased a home that was quite large for a human dwelling, and moved in immediately.
Hm, you made a lovely couple.

That isn't to say things were perfect. The first time you bought a slave for the house... Saria, usually so shy and soft-spoken, had a lot to say about it.

I think everyone in town heard that argument.

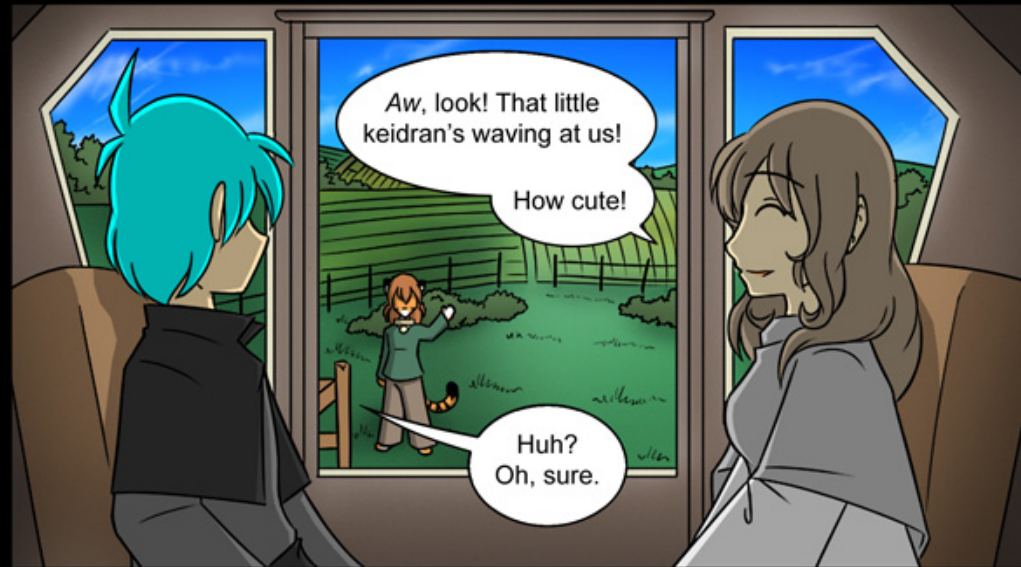
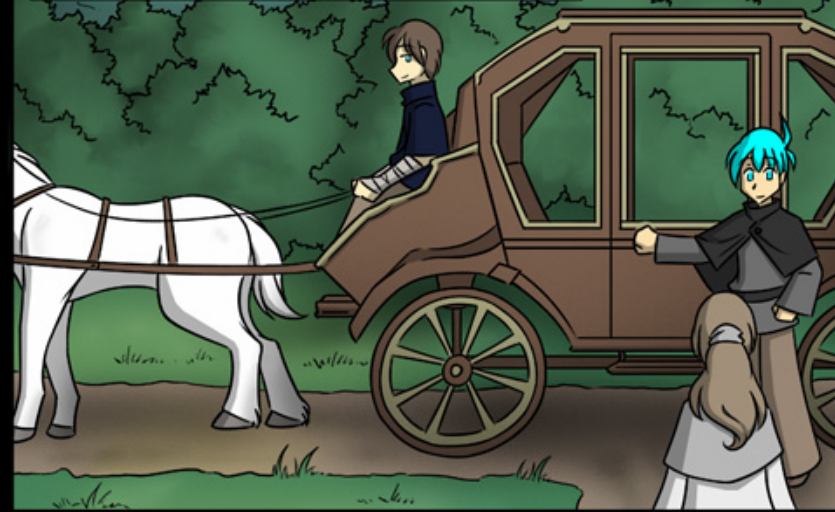
For once, you actually seemed content with your place in life. You didn't completely shelve your Templar ambitions, but you set them aside.

But despite your dramatically different personalities and conflicting ideals...

Somehow, you two seemed to be made for each other.

Everything was going well until that last week in late spring. This was six seasons ago...

You were traveling to your cabin in the forest, very near the Keidran borderline.



I regret that I left before it happened. I later gleaned from various minds and pieced together the events that took place on that day.



It was a wolf. Not a professional assassin or mercenary. Just some petty thief trying to take advantage of a couple of isolated humans.

The first arrow was for Saria.

Ah!

And the second arrow was for you.

Get down!

Saria, what happened?

Are you okay?

Y-yes, I think...

<Oh, crap! A Templar!>

A keidran!

Saria, are you sure you're okay?


It just grazed me, I'll be okay.

Go inside and lock the door. The house wards will protect you.

I'm going after it!

Trace! Please be careful!


It wasn't your fault, Trace. You couldn't have known.



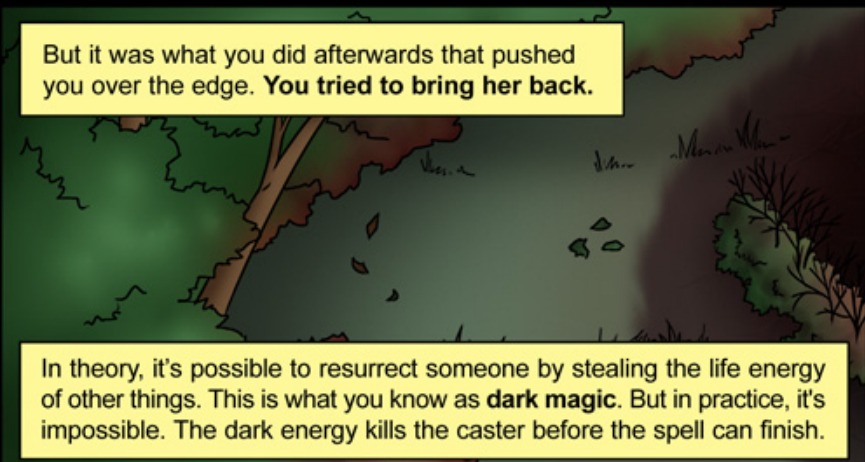
So... it killed her.

Yes, the poison spread throughout her body. She died before you could return.

And that's why I did all those terrible things.




Yes.. and no.
Your wife's death was the start...




But it was what you did afterwards that pushed you over the edge. **You tried to bring her back.**

In theory, it's possible to resurrect someone by stealing the life energy of other things. This is what you know as **dark magic**. But in practice, it's impossible. The dark energy kills the caster before the spell can finish.




By the time you were found, you were half-dead. Your mind had been nearly destroyed by the black magic you had attempted.

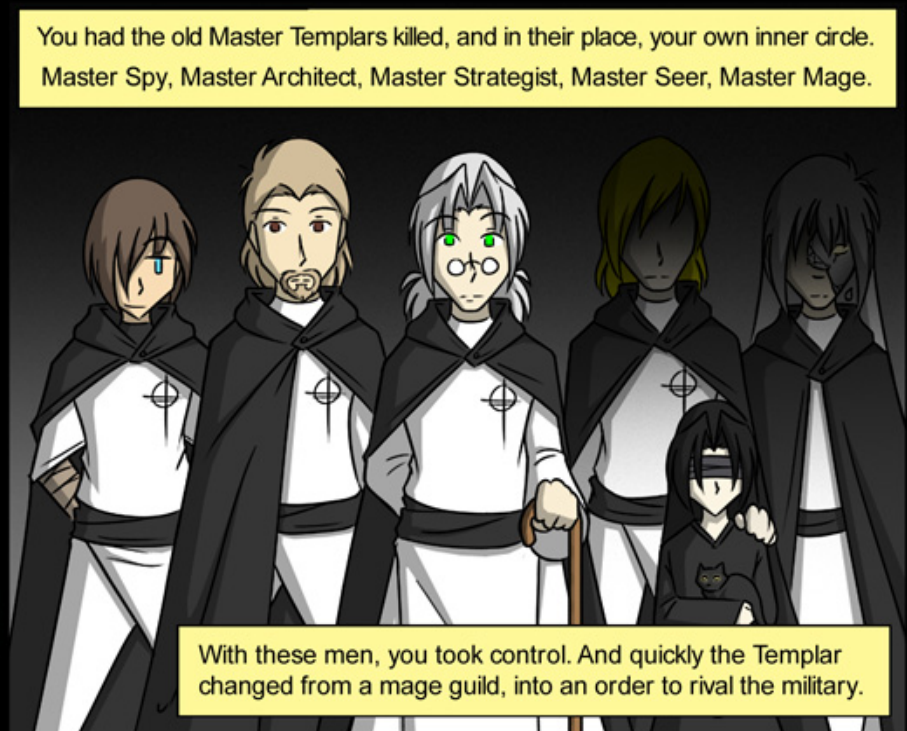


The black magic's effects on your mind warped your senses. You became crazed and paranoid.

For two years, you locked yourself away in your home, rarely leaving for anything.



And then four years ago, you emerged and proclaimed yourself Grand Templar.



You had the old Master Templars killed, and in their place, your own inner circle. Master Spy, Master Architect, Master Strategist, Master Seer, Master Mage.

With these men, you took control. And quickly the Templar changed from a mage guild, into an order to rival the military.

Back at the ship...

Come on~!
You promised!

No, you *black-*
mailed me!

We're friends,
it's no big deal!

No way!

I'd show you!
We're pals!

I... said...

NO!

BASH!

Woah...
that's weird.

I'm smaller than I used
to be... but I feel as strong
as before, and my reach
seems the same.

Maybe this
really is just an
illusion.

If that's the case,
I should still be able to beat
Evals in a fight...

Evals, the last two days
have been nothing but stress. I just
need to let off some steam.

So if you want to do
something useful for once,
get up and fight me.

Fight you? I
can't do that...

You know
I'd never strike
a woman.

Then this is
going to be a really
one-sided fight!

No, wait! Aaah!



<Whatcha doing, Natani?>

<Just... making a crude mana necklace. I'll be able to cast spells while leaving my hands open for weapons.>

<Oh, cool.>



<E-excuse me?>

Hm?



<I apologize for interrupting...>

My name is Laura of the Coastal Fox Tribe.

Do you know if a Basitin named Keith is staying here?>

<They... told me this place is where I could find him.>



<You just missed him. He left with a general about an hour ago.>

<Oh... I see. T-thank you. Good afternoon.>



<...Who was that?>

I didn't know other Keidran were on the island?>

<I dunno. Her name sounded familiar...>



<Wait, I remember...!>


Laura... wasn't that Keith's ex-fiancée?>

<F-fiancée?!>

<Yeah. I wonder how she got here? Maybe she's trying to get back together with him?>




...



Alaric, I don't understand. How could you have known I'd be here with Trace?

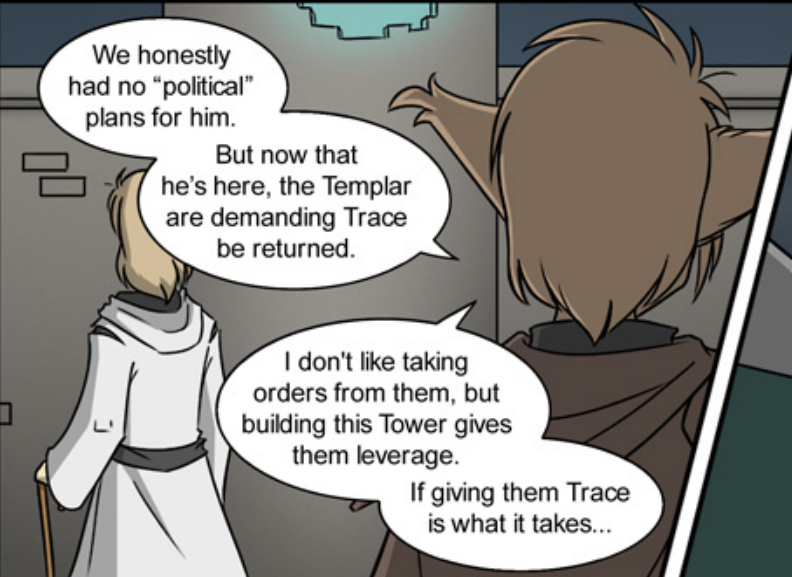
The other general said you didn't expect me.



I know. That's true.

Your mission to find Trace was supposed to be impossible, so you'd be banished forever.

But against all odds you did it!




We honestly had no "political" plans for him.

But now that he's here, the Templar are demanding Trace be returned.

I don't like taking orders from them, but building this Tower gives them leverage.


If giving them Trace is what it takes...



Look, Trace isn't your concern anyways.

We're going to take care of that one ourselves.

The problem is, the Templar believe his friends know too much now.




...What do you mean?

Well, the human known as Eric, his slaves, and the tiger aren't immediate threats.

The only one we're concerned about is the wolf. The Templar believe he's a spy. They want him removed.

The other generals wish to... test your loyalty.

Wait... you're asking me to... to **kill Natani**?



We're not asking, Keith.

I'm ordering you to kill the wolf known as Natani before your trial tomorrow morning.

Meanwhile...

What am I going to do?

I'm sorry to put all this on you so soon after you've returned.

But it's still before noon. You have a whole day to complete the mission.

Which means... you have time to see what I really wanted to show you!

Ta-da!

W-what... is that?

It's you!
A tribute to the banished warrior!

I started it six months ago as a pet project.

I guessed on your proportions.

I thought you'd be taller, but it's close! Good thing you still have all your limbs intact!

Yet, I couldn't finish your... *details*... without you being here!

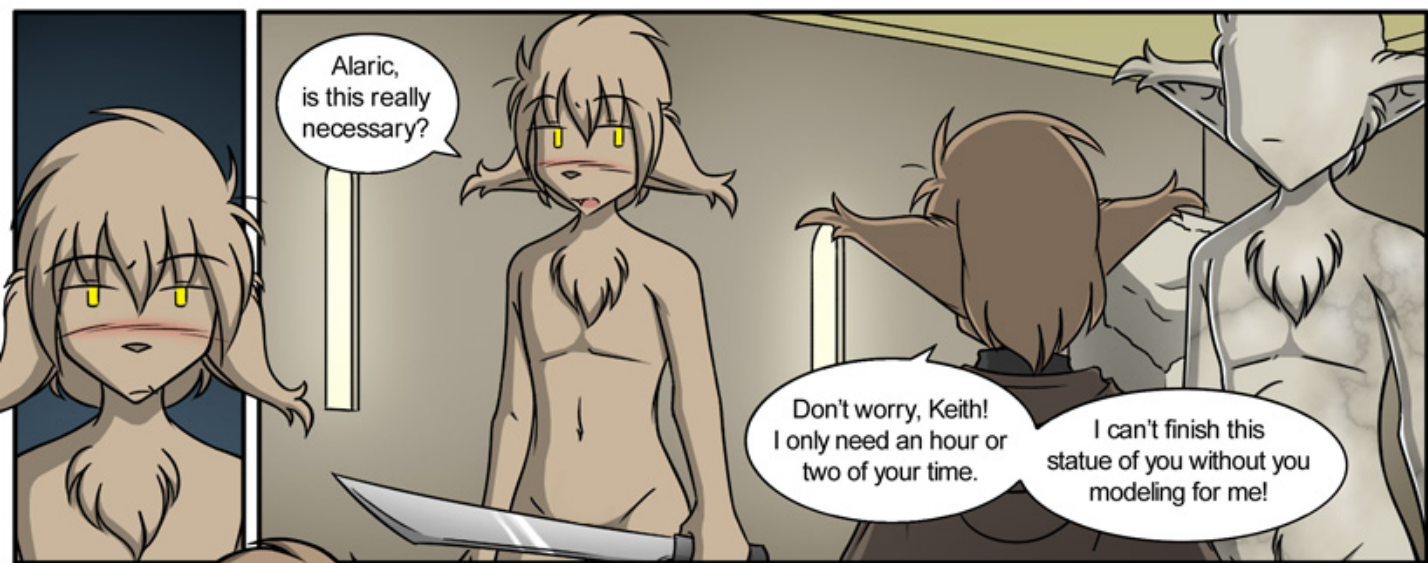
But now that you finally are, I can!

So, do you like it?

Er... why am I... naked?

Oh, you're not! Well, Not completely!

See? Covered. So it's decent.





Okay, this is it...

Keith should be right behind this door...

Now all I have to do is... open this d-door and talk to him...



But... what if Keith hates me? What if he doesn't even remember me?

W-why would he? It's been more than five years - a quarter of a lifetime. And I'm getting old. He wouldn't...

N-no! I've been a coward all my life. I can't be nervous, not now! Not when I'm so close!

I j-just have to try and... imagine he's in his underwear! That's supposed to help...



Alright! Here goes!

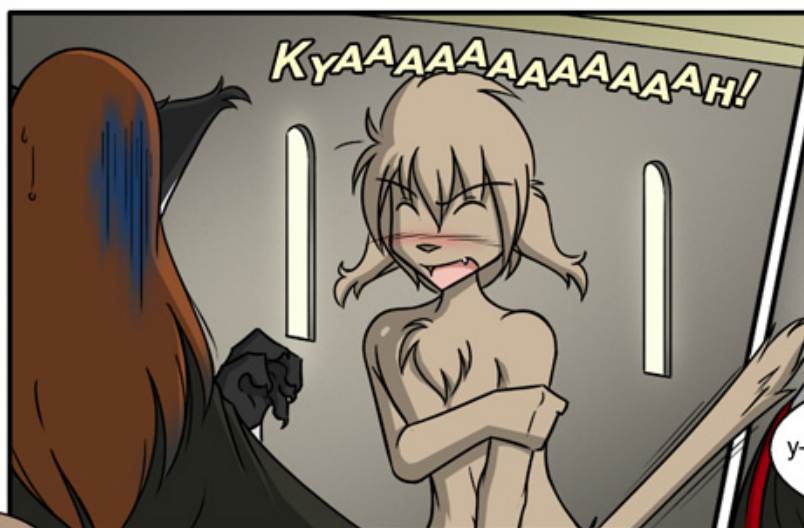


K-Keith!

You probably don't remember me but I—!

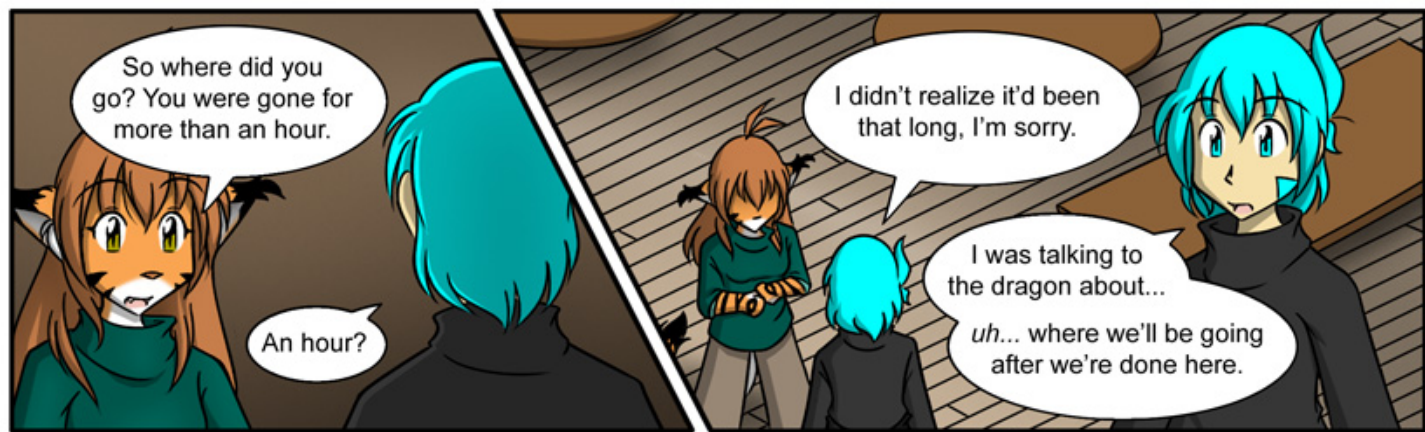


...o-oh no! I... I imagined too hard!









So where did you go? You were gone for more than an hour.

An hour?

I didn't realize it'd been that long, I'm sorry.

I was talking to the dragon about...

uh... where we'll be going after we're done here.



I have it marked on the map if...

I'm just glad you're back, Trace! It's so boring without you here.

Oh, well, maybe we can go out and find something fun to do.



Ehem! Do you two mind?

Intimate contact is prohibited by law, and I won't have it in my tavern!

And ignorance of the law is no excuse! If you feel you simply must... touch one another, you can do it in your own rooms!



Aw, come on! Laws about how we dress...

Laws keeping us here at the docks...

Now laws against even touching?!

What's with these people and all their rules?!



No yelling!

Damn keidran...

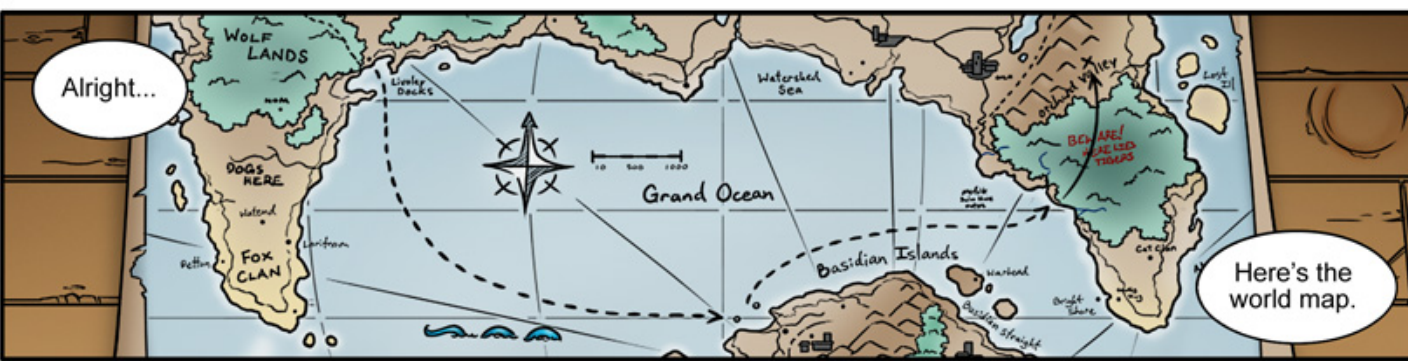


...Trace, smite him.

Wha-? Flora!

I know you can! Just set his pants on fire or something, come on!

Alright...



Here's the world map.

And *this* is where Nora said it was.



Even on horseback it's a long distance, but if we reach it, we'll finally be safe.

A place where humans and keidran live together...

But... this takes us right through my homeland...



Trace, this is dangerous!

"Dangerous?"

Why?

Trace, don't you remember what you are? You're... a human!

My people have very little interaction with your kind.

Most haven't even seen a human before!



And if they found out you are... were a Templar...

I know what you mean, but it's the only way there.

If we tried going in from the north-west or east, it'd take months longer.

The reason it's so well hidden is due to the fact that it's difficult to reach from the human side.

We can figure out what to do when the time comes. It'll work out, I'm sure.

I hope so.





Flora, what about Natani? Where will he be going? With us?

Oh, I hadn't thought of that! I'll ask him!



<Natani, are you... huh? Where did he go?>



Natani? Where are you going?

I just needed some fresh air.

You know you're supposed to be spying on the human.

Yet you haven't been spending much time around him...



<How am I supposed to spy on people I can't even understand?

Besides, I'm just going for a walk.>

<Is there something wrong with that?>



Just a walk, huh?
Doesn't have anything to do with the scent trail of a certain basitin you're following?

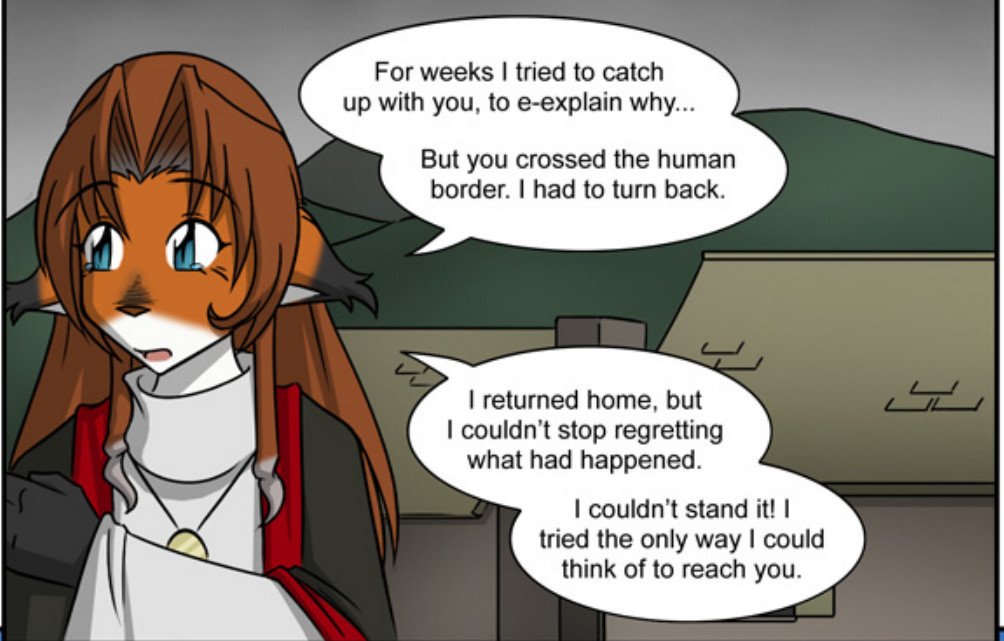
T-that's a coincidence!
This has nothing to do with Keith!



I just happen to be going in the same direction his scent is going...



W-when I heard you'd left the village...
I realized how much of a mistake I'd made in running away.



For weeks I tried to catch up with you, to e-explain why...
But you crossed the human border. I had to turn back.

I returned home, but I couldn't stop regretting what had happened.
I couldn't stand it! I tried the only way I could think of to reach you.



Half a year ago, I left everything and came here.
The basitins were kind to me. They let me stay, but told me you'd never return from banishment.



<There he is!>



I didn't care. I had made up my mind to see you again, or die waiting.



A-and... um... that's how I ended up here...
All so I could say... I'm sorry.



But you still haven't told me why you left.



...Honestly, there is n-no good reason why.
There's nothing that I could say to excuse what I did, but I can try to explain.



Though my p-parents approved of our union, when you weren't around they expressed to me their apprehension.

They were... a bit frightened of you.



I didn't believe them, I-I knew it wasn't true what they were saying.

B-but I became overwhelmed, I wasn't sure what to think.

Eventually, I couldn't take it anymore. I p-panicked and ran.



The whole village was. None had ever seen a basitin before, but there were so many terrible rumors about your race going around.

Especially once you proposed. So many people told me what a mistake I was making.



I n-never intended to stay away. I just wanted time to think. But once I ran, I didn't know what to do.

I was ashamed. I didn't know how to face you again. So I stayed hidden, even when I heard you calling for me.

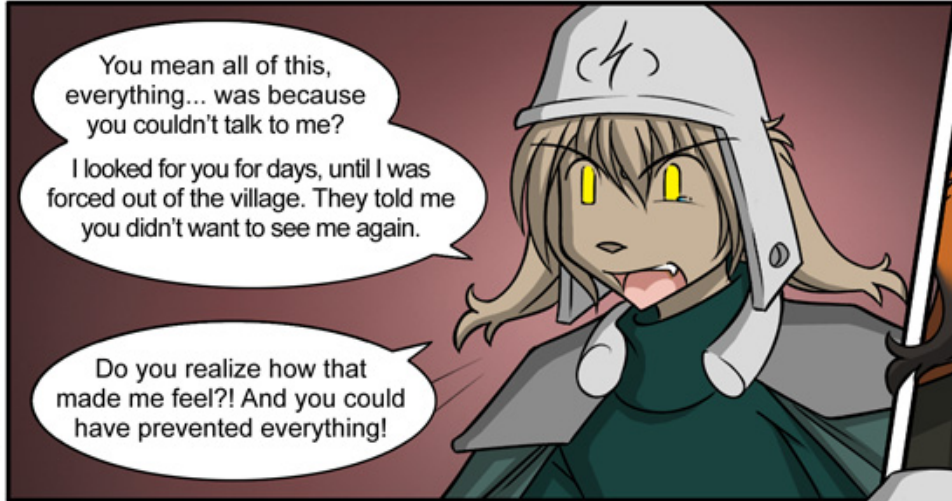


I t-thought I had time to pull myself together.

I didn't know you'd leave and never come back.



You...

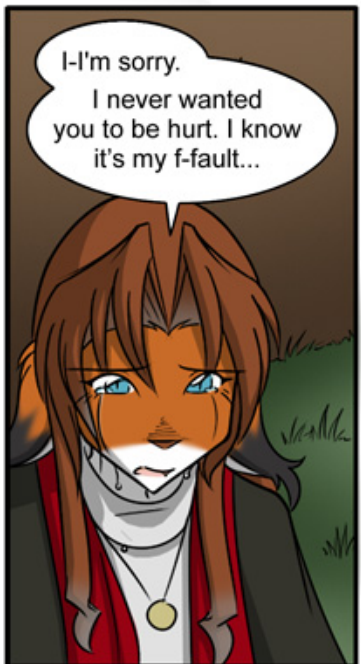


You mean all of this, everything... was because you couldn't talk to me?
I looked for you for days, until I was forced out of the village. They told me you didn't want to see me again.

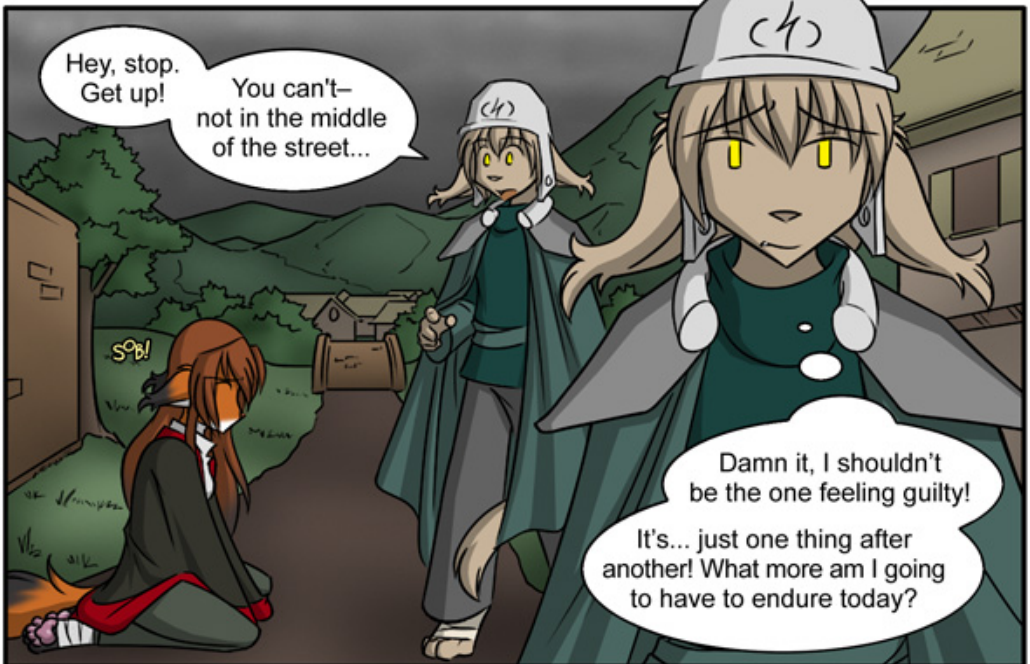
Do you realize how that made me feel?! And you could have prevented everything!



Whimper...

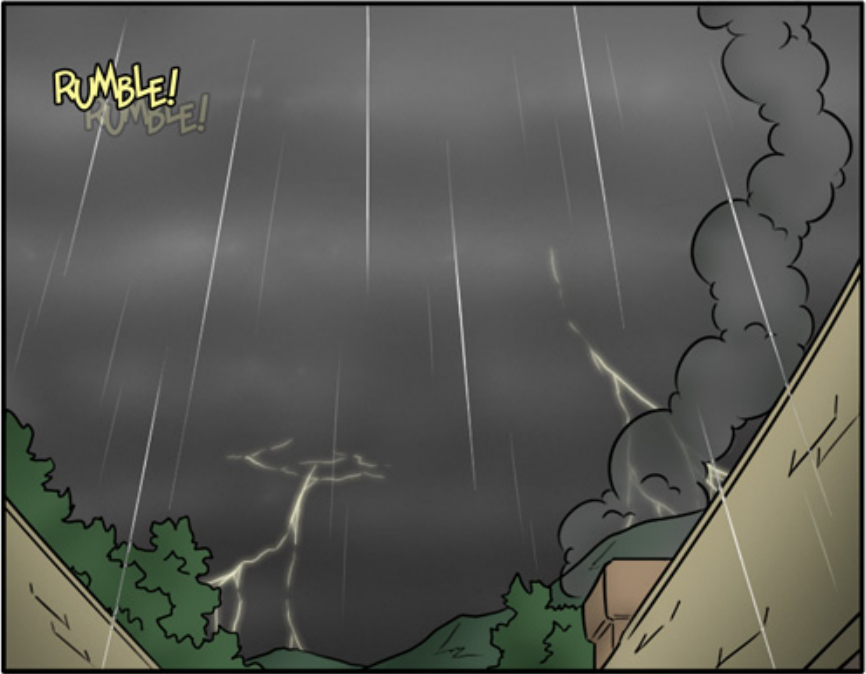


I-I'm sorry.
I never wanted you to be hurt. I know it's my f-fault...



Hey, stop. Get up!
You can't— not in the middle of the street...

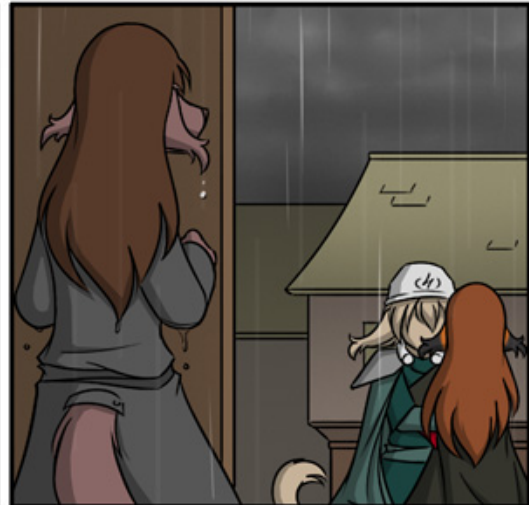
Damn it, I shouldn't be the one feeling guilty!
It's... just one thing after another! What more am I going to have to endure today?



RUMBLE!
RUMBLE!



Sigh...







Alright, no problem.
Oh, by the way...
Master Eric wishes
to speak with you about
when we'll depart.

Oh, okay.



Sorry,
Flora.

I'll be back soon.
I just need to go over
that map with Eric.

Alright. I'll
be here.



Oh, I shouldn't have
glared at Trace like that.
A massage is harmless,
and I trust him. I know he
wouldn't do anything.

I shouldn't let
my jealousy get the
best of me.



I understand, Flora.
Hey! Why don't I
teach you how? I know, I'll
give you a massage!

M-me?



Oh no,
I- I couldn't...
Especially not
after having guilted
Trace out of one.




Oh, don't
be silly!
It'll be fun!
I'll teach you how to do it,
and then you can give the
massage to Trace.

And I'm sure
Trace won't mind.
In fact, I think
he'd be happy just to
watch me do you.



I swear she
said it like that
on purpose.

No one could
possibly be so naive
as to not realize how
that sounds...



No more,
stop!

I give up,
you win!

You're still
a better fighter
than I am!

Huff...
Good.

Phew...

Hey...I'm sorry
for the last couple
days, Mike.
I guess I just got...
over-excited.

We've been friends since we
were kids... even despite the fighting
between the fox and dog tribe.

And I wouldn't want
to do anything to hurt
that friendship.

So, I'll do everything
I can to help get you back
to your normal self.

.....

H-hey,
what are-?

Look, don't make
a big deal out of this.
I just feel guilty for
beating you up.



Keith, does this mean...? Can we...?

...Laura, I've forgiven you for what you did.
But... I can't...



Oh... I understand.
Is there... someone else..?



Someone else...?
No! I mean... not really.
Look, I just... need some time to think.

There's a lot going on right now. More than you know.



I just.. *sigh*.. I need time.
And I think there's someone I need to talk to first...



Wait...
Is... is he talking about me?



Come on, Laura, get up.
Let's get out of this rain.
I'll see if I can get you a room at the inn I'm staying at.



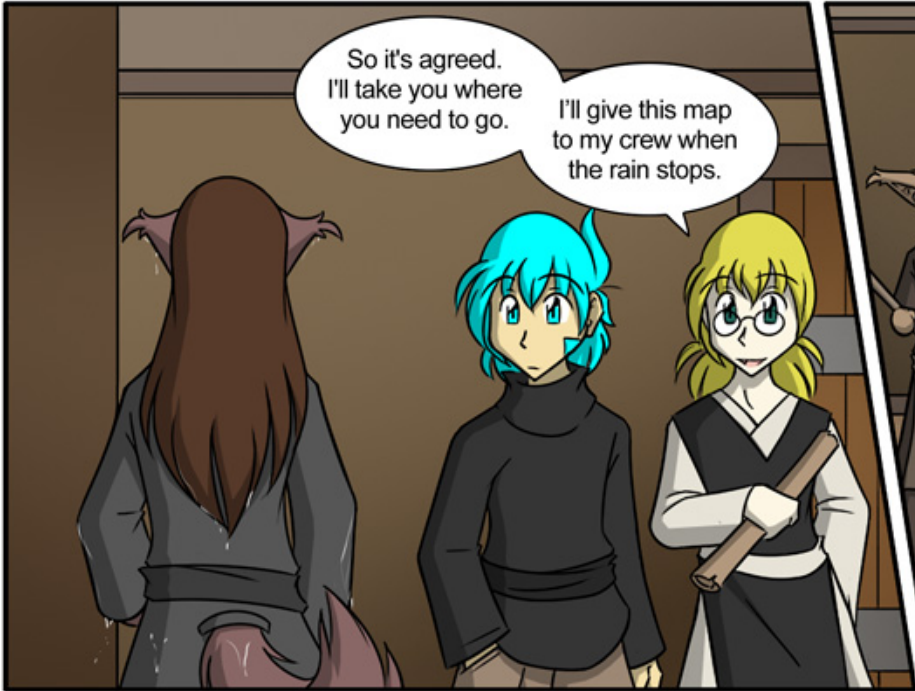
<Hah, made it back just in time!>



<I need to get back to my room!>

Hey! At least shake off the water outside!

I just mopped the floor!



So it's agreed. I'll take you where you need to go.

I'll give this map to my crew when the rain stops.



Ah! How many of you are there?

<Look at the mess you're making!>

<I-I'm so sorry, sir.>



Wait! I sense...



Though, Eric, I'm not sure Flora will agree again to- Eric?

Where'd he go?



<Why, hello there, my dear!>

<Ack! A... a h-h-human!>



<Dang it...>

<I forgot I don't have anything to change into.

...And Keith's going to be back any minute.>

I wonder if it was really me he was talking about? Is he going to ask me my opinion on that fox girl?

...No... why would he?

But what if he does?

I could tell him getting back with her would be a mistake!

After all, they're nothing alike. She's a wimp!

...B-but, it's not like it matters to me!

I should tell him to go ahead! Whatever makes him happy. Why should I care?

Yeah, that's what I'll say! If he asks, I'll say "go ahead!"

CREEK!

Alright, here goes...

<Oh, Natani... why are you all wet?>

<Don't do it, Keith! You deserve better! You two have nothing in common!>

...What?

What?!



<W-wait!
I didn't mean that!
Forget it!>

Did she
just say...?



Keith, I found
the towels...
Oh, <h-hello.>

Ah, Laura!



This is Natani,
a... friend. <Natani,
this is Laura.>

<I-It's nice to
meet you again,
Natani.>

<...Hi...>



The tavern owner
gave me a room, he said
it just opened up.

I t-think
I'm going to go
lie down.

Oh, okay...

I figured I
should give you
some space.

You said you needed
time to think. Take all the
time you need, Keith.

Thank you, Laura.



<Oh, you're
wet too. Here,
take mine.

You'd better
get out of those wet
clothes. You might
catch a cold.>



She's so nice...
No wonder Keith
likes her.

She's the complete
opposite of me.



Meanwhile...

...Where did this massage table come from?

This is going to be fun!

I don't often get a chance to do other Keidran!

I've got a whole grooming kit I can finally try out.

H-hey! Why are you taking off your clothes?

Well, this is the only way I've ever done it!

Besides, how else am I going to perform the second part of the massage?

S-second part?

Oh yes, a special technique I learned from one of Eric's books!
I just take the oil, and then massage each part of your body...

...using every part of mine...

Geh-!

...Kat, let's just... stick with a normal massage, okay?

Aww...



Oooh...
Puuurrrr~!



Hah! I told you
you'd enjoy it.

It seems like you
needed a massage.

You had a lot of
built up tension.



Alright, turn
around.

This is a full body
massage! There's still
a lot more I can do.

Around...?



Trust me, you'll
enjoy - oh!



Wait, Flora...
you're...







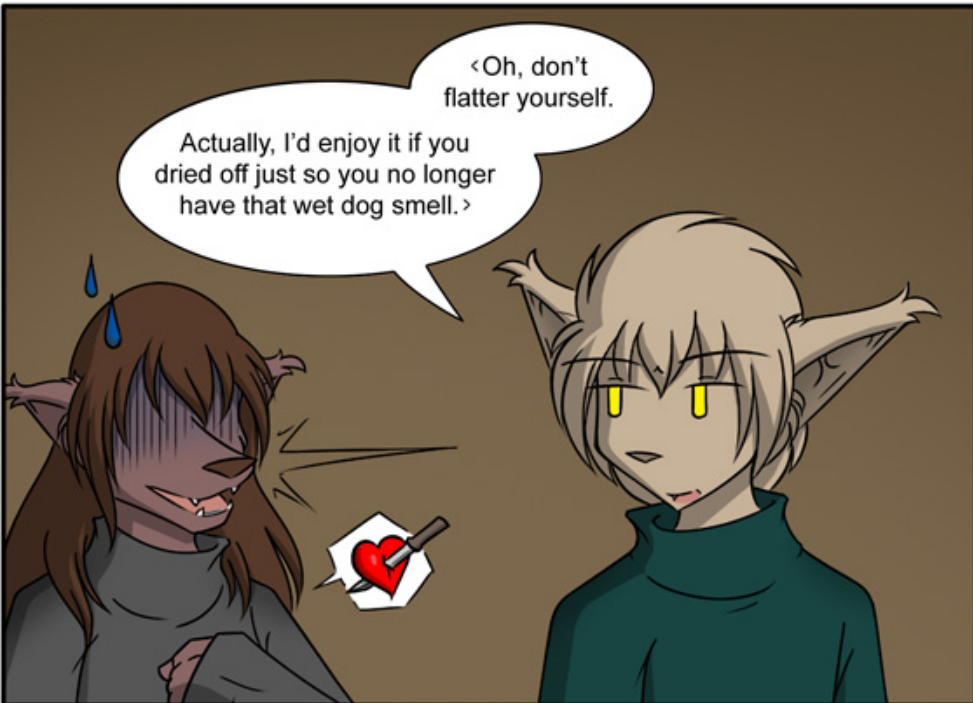
How do I keep getting into situations like this?



<You don't expect me to get undressed with you in here too, do you?>

You probably want that, right?>

<You enjoy this, don't you?>



<Oh, don't flatter yourself. Actually, I'd enjoy it if you dried off just so you no longer have that wet dog smell.>

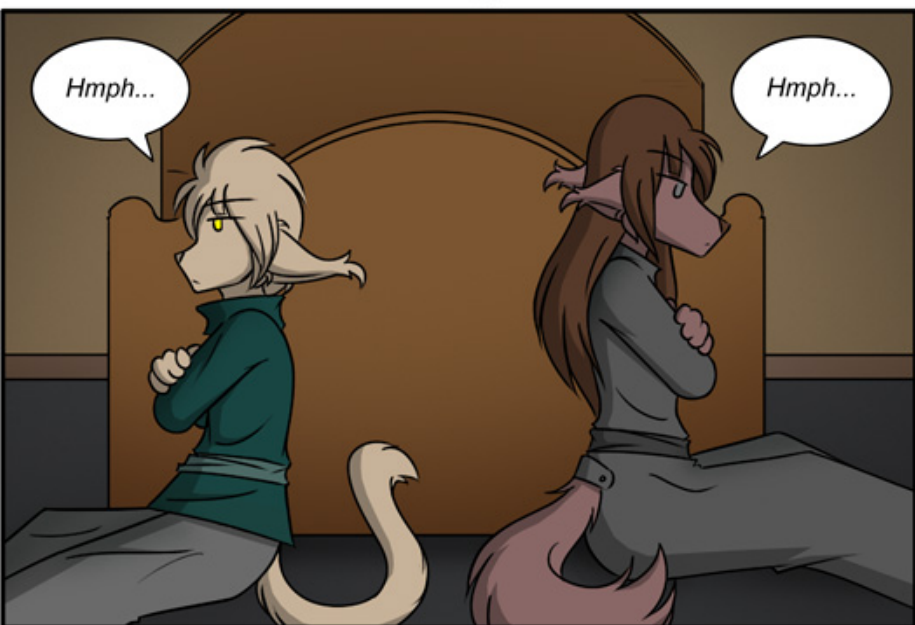


<It's not like I want to be here any more than you.>



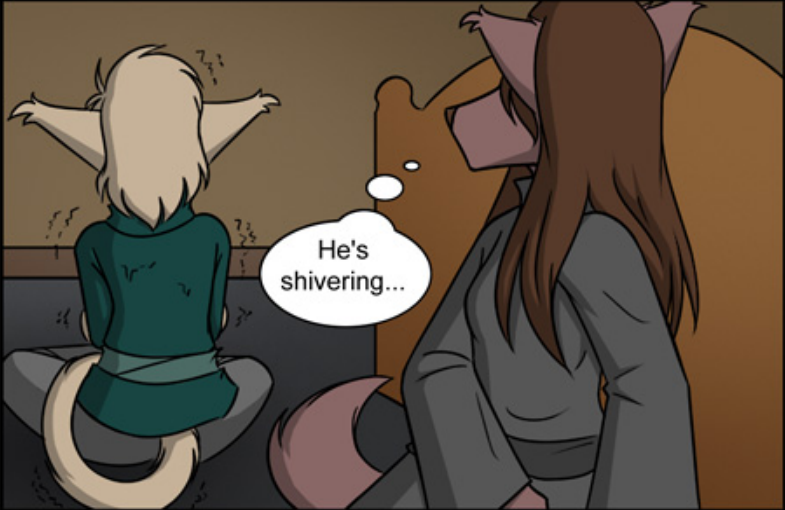
<Well... fine! Then maybe we should both just sit here and do nothing then!>

<Fine!>



Hmph...

Hmph...



<I thought you said basitins didn't get sick.>

Hm? <We don't... normally...>

<It's just... there's not a lot of things that affect basitins, but being wet and cold is one of them.

If you can't tell by our short fur, we're better suited for warmer climates.>



<Well don't suffer on my account!
Dry off!>

<...I'm fine. If you can stand it, I can.>

<...He's suffering because of me...>



<...Keith, the door's locked, right?>


<Yeah, and bolted too, this time.>



<Why— what are you doing?>

<Just sitting here soaking wet is stupid.


I won't look if you don't, alright?>



I dunno, I think it's kinda neat.

Neat? Weird's more like it. I know a language I didn't yesterday...

What did you say, anyway?



Oh... well, I... I just told them you were with me, so they couldn't touch you.


"Diplomatic immunity."

Ah...



So... What did Eric say?

Eric? He agreed to the plan.




After we're done and said our good-byes to Keith, we'll leave and head towards Lyn'Knoll.

It should take a lot less time than it did to sail out here. The island is much closer to the east coast than where we left.

He did have... *one* condition though.

For going out of his way, he wanted you to model for him some more... *er*, once a week.


Once a--?! No! Wait... You didn't agree, did you?



Well... yeah, we need to ship to get back.

Trace! Why would you do that?

Huh? What do you mean? You did it last time. Why are you getting upset about it?



I'm not getting upset because of Eric. I don't like it, but I'd probably agree to it again if I was asked.

I'm upset because you made the decision for me!



Flora, what's the big deal?

You know Eric's ship is one of our only options off this island. It's a small price to pay.



That's not the point, Trace!

In case you've forgotten, before I met you I was a slave.

I've spent the majority of my life having people make decisions for me.



And I worked hard to escape from that life!

You don't own me, Trace. You can't just use me as boat fare.

And if you can't understand how something like that could hurt me, then maybe you're even more clueless than I thought!



Flora, wait!
Flora!

SLAM!



Sigh... Damn it.
Flora's right. I really
must be clueless.

I never even
thought how she might
feel about it.

I don't know what Flora
sees in me. I've done nothing
but put her in danger.

Trace.

Hm?
What is it?

I am here to
inform you that you have
been summoned by the
master general.

Sigh, alright.
I'll go as soon as
the rain stops.

No. We
need you to come
with us **now**.

Huh, now?
In this weather?

CRACK!

{ Take him to
the **Templars**.

They'll be leaving
with him by morning. I'll be glad to
see these humans gone. }

End.