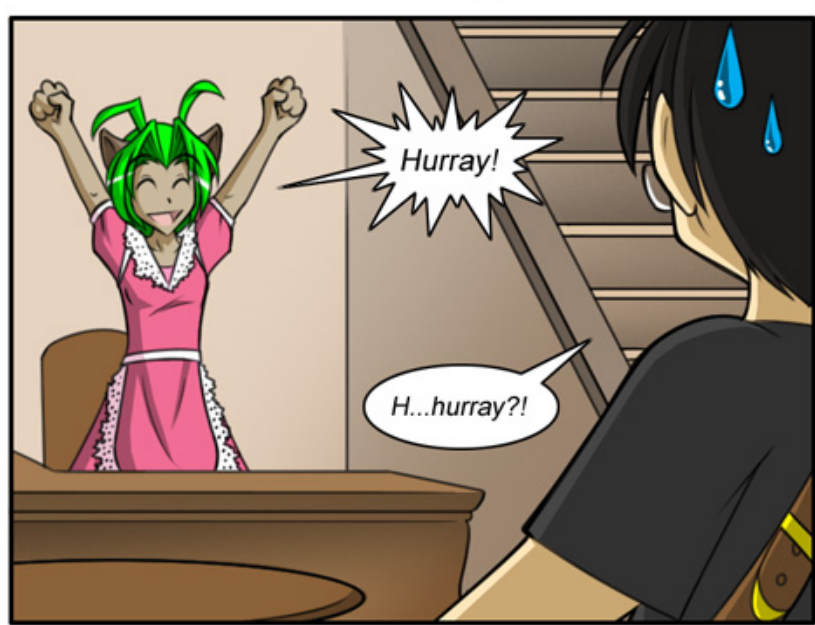


# TWOKINDS

## Chapter Twelve



THE MORNING





Ack! They're here!

W-wait! Can't we talk about this-?



Die, Human!

CRACK!



Alright, the rest of you are ne-



Eh?



Oh, no, not you guys again...

Oh, hey, Mr. Sythe!

Karen, get down!



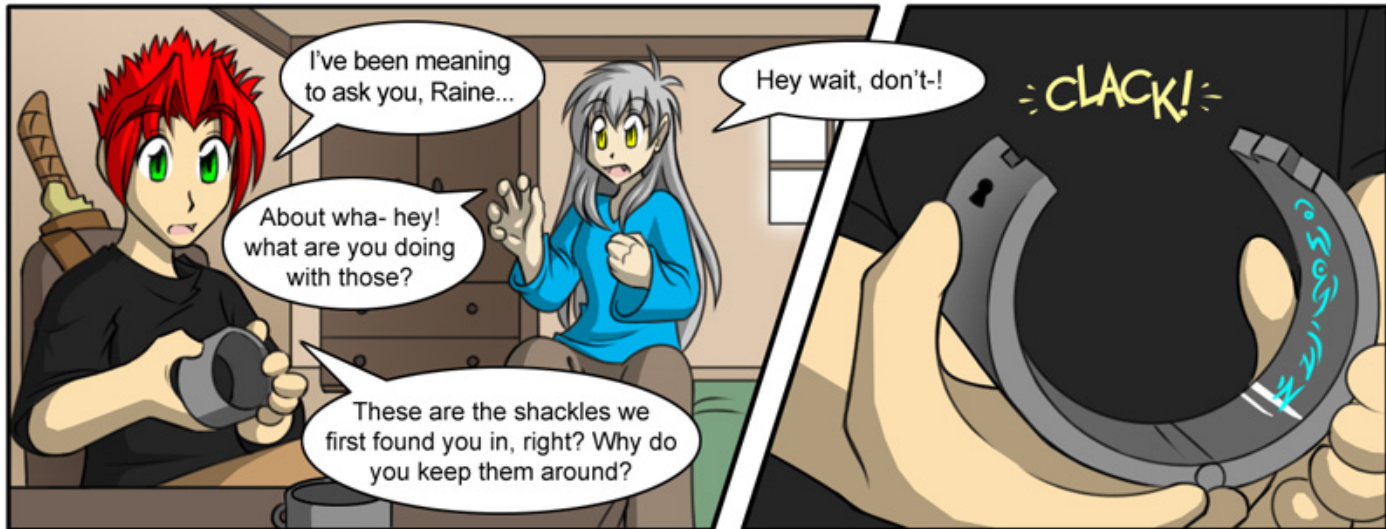
Damn it, why did it have to be them?  
The only Humans I actually know...

From that night in the tavern...



Look... you guys should get out of here. The others won't hesitate to kill you.

Huh?



I've been meaning to ask you, Raine...

Hey wait, don't-!

About wha- hey! what are you doing with those?

These are the shackles we first found you in, right? Why do you keep them around?

CLACK!



POINK!

It seems weird to still wear something from your time in slavery...



Erg... Damn those Keidran! It makes me sick to think that those animals enslave human beings.

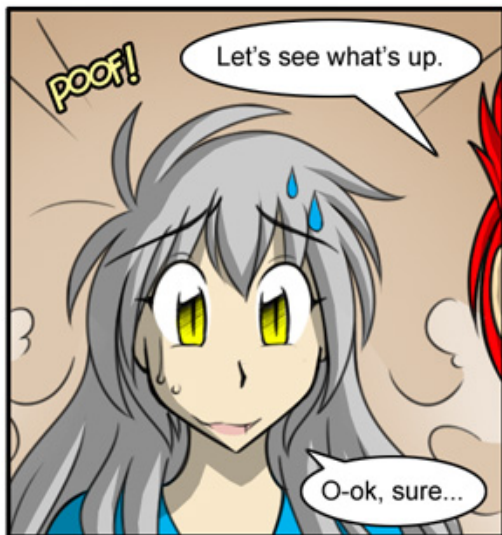
Those beasts... I tell you, if I had my hands on one right now...!



Hey, guys!! Get down here, we've got a problem!



CLICK!



POOF!

Let's see what's up.

O-ok, sure...





Not only are you a traitor... you... mated with one of these hairless apes?!



Karen, why are you antagonizing the Keidran?

Because it's fun...  
And now Sythe can't weasel out of coming with us!



I-It's a lie! I swear!  
She... she's five years older than me!



Enough of this!  
Kill them all!



There's no need for violence! We haven't done anything to you! Please...

Let us go!



Oops...

What the-?  
Stop them!

Cool!



Urg... jeez, Raine. How about a little warning next time?



Sorry!

I didn't know you knew magic!

Do it again!



I don't! I mean, not really... My mother was the Grand Templar before Trace, and I inherited magic from her.

But I never had any formal training. It usually happens by accident.



Uh, guys...



We're only ten meters away from where we just were...

Hey! They're right over there!



Run!



Should we go after them?

No. We still have orders to carry out.  
Mage, contact the others and tell them to send the assassin.



They won't get far...



Yes, we just received news from the front.

The traitor's name is Sythe. Apparently, he eloped with a Human.

Unfortunately, he's also the nephew of someone important, so they want him returned alive if at all possible.  
Just make sure they're all silenced one way or another.

Deserter?



I hope you haven't gotten rusty since your injury.

...Zen?



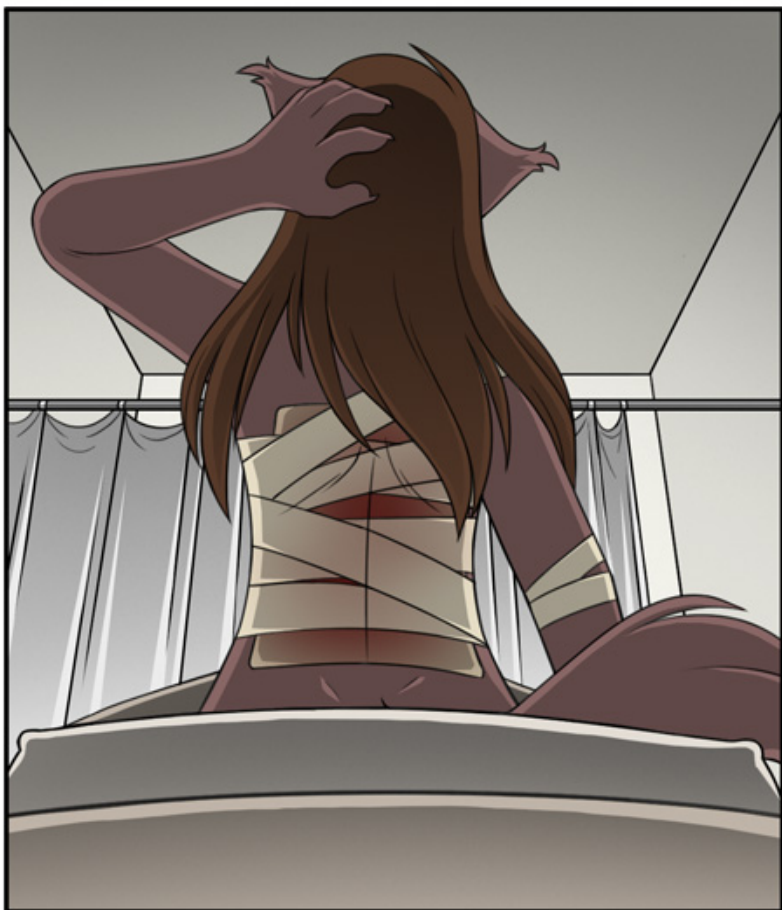
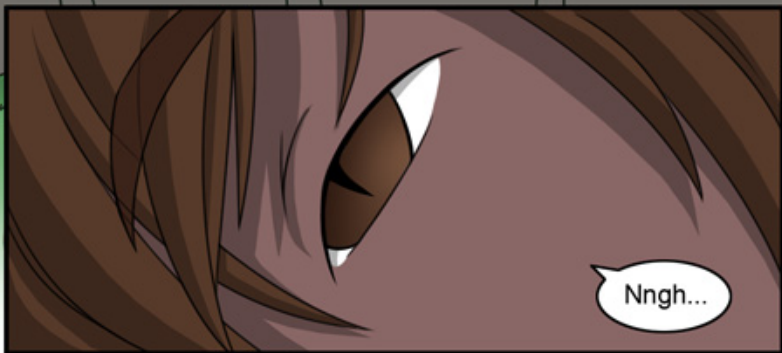
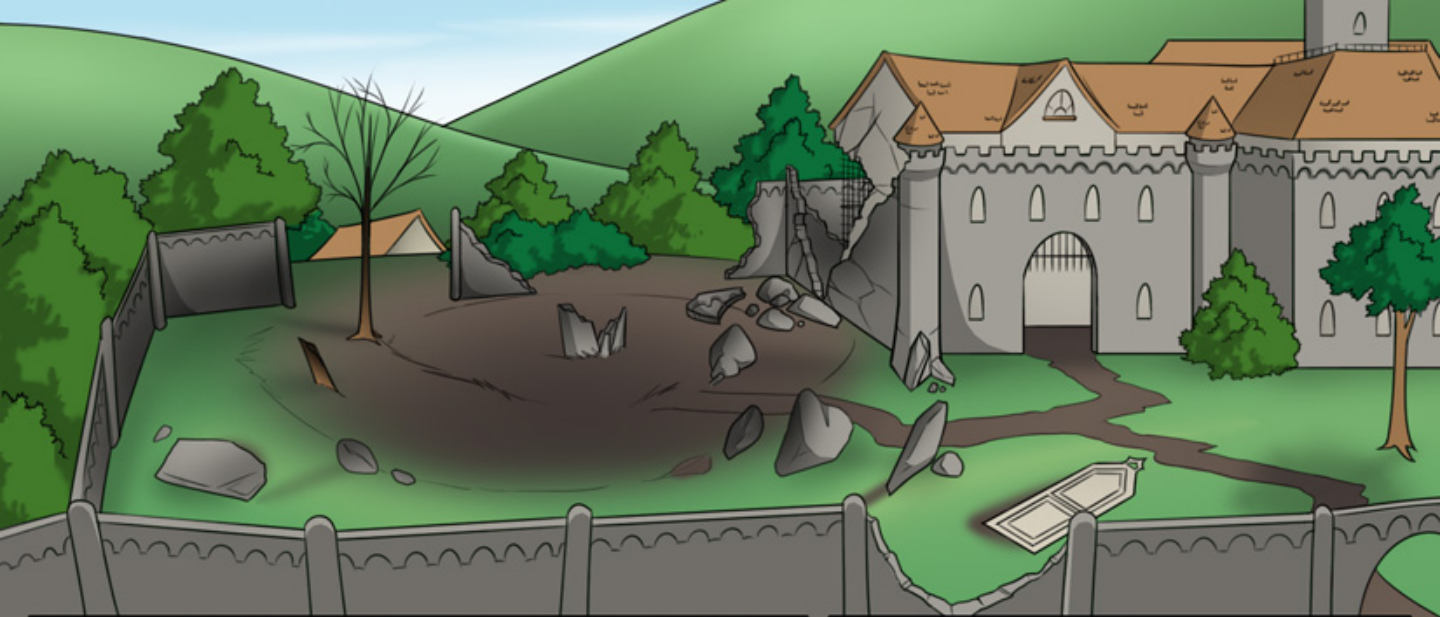
Zen, are you listening to me?

Huh? Oh, right. No problem!



*SIGH*  
Natani, where are you? Why can't I hear your thoughts...







I've gotta get out of here.. augh!

Damn it, I can barely move...

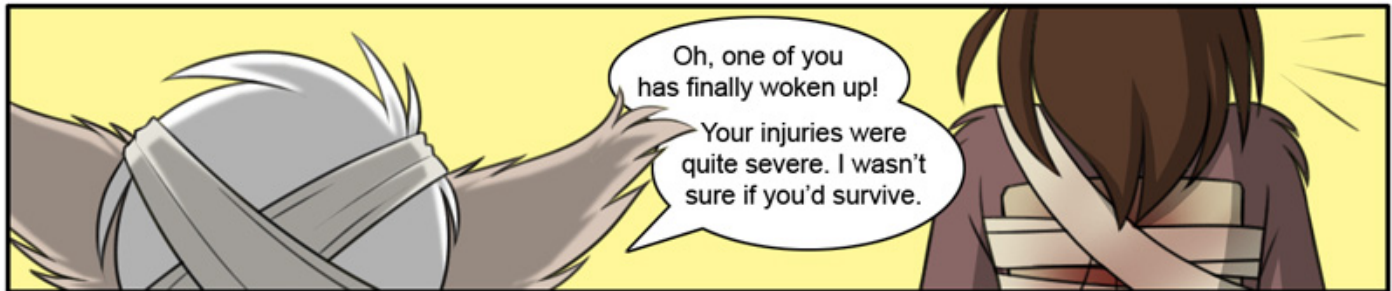
How long was I out? Did any of the others see me like this?



Eh...?



Oh, come on! Why cover my feet and nothing else?



Oh, one of you has finally woken up!

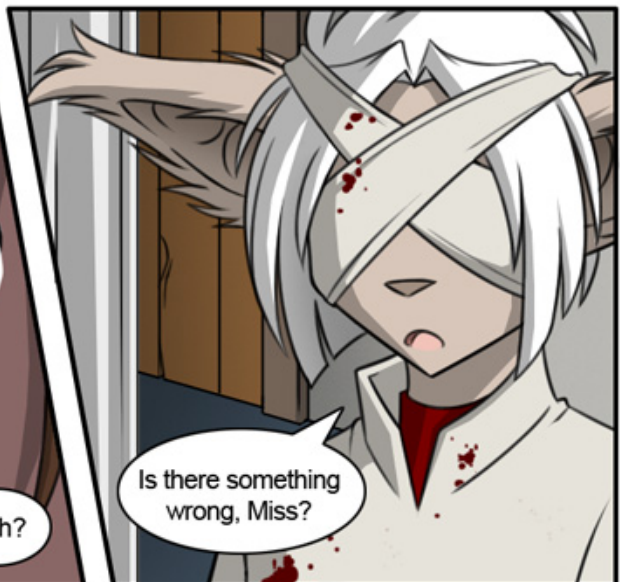
Your injuries were quite severe. I wasn't sure if you'd survive.



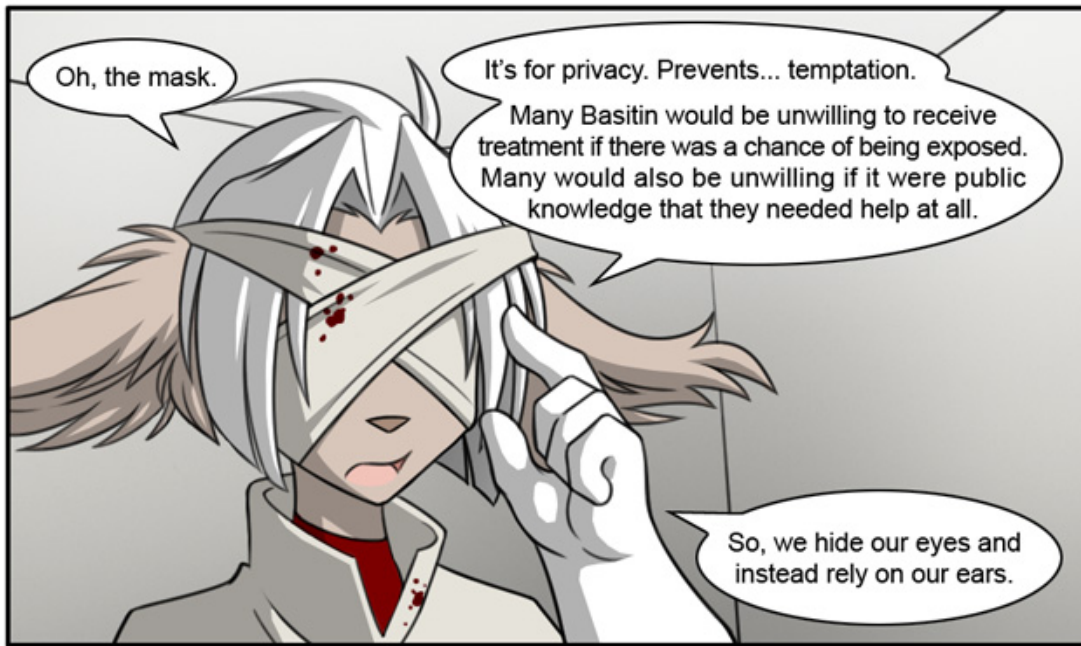
So you were the one who—!



Huh?



Is there something wrong, Miss?



Oh, the mask.

It's for privacy. Prevents... temptation.

Many Basitin would be unwilling to receive treatment if there was a chance of being exposed. Many would also be unwilling if it were public knowledge that they needed help at all.

So, we hide our eyes and instead rely on our ears.



So... you don't know who I am?



Well, I can tell you're a Keidran. And I... noticed you were female once I began examining you.

But beyond that. I don't have information about your identity.

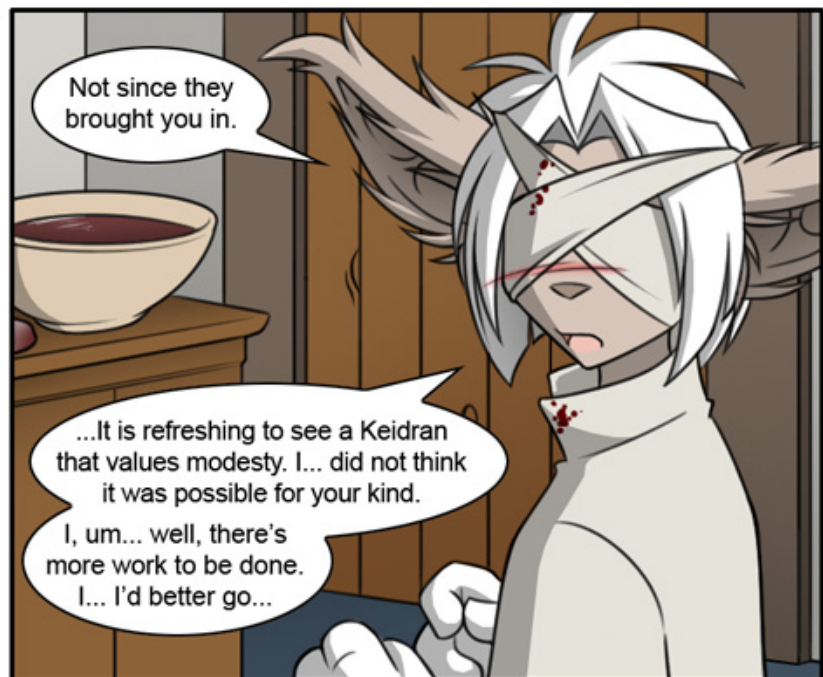
My Lord!  
This man is horribly disfigured! I...

Oh...  
...Oh my...



Phew...

And no one else has been in here?



Not since they brought you in.

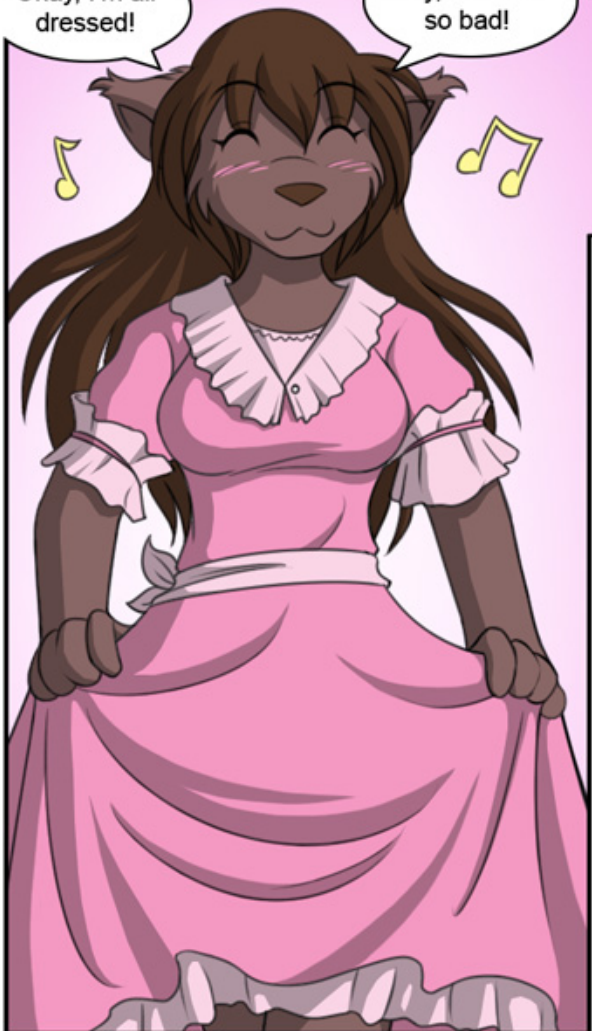
...It is refreshing to see a Keidran that values modesty. I... did not think it was possible for your kind.

I, um... well, there's more work to be done. I... I'd better go...



Okay, I'm all dressed!

Hey, this isn't so bad!



No, no, no!

I can't wear a dress! I won't!



W-well you can't go around *naked*!

This dress was the only thing we had on-hand that fit someone of your stature!

It was made for Adelaide when she was younger.



What happened to the clothes I was in?

Uh... all the possessions from when you arrived were taken to the storeroom.

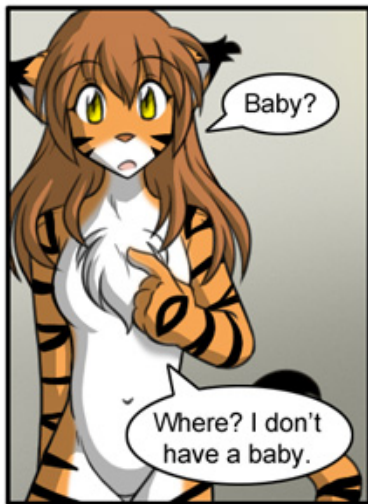


It's one floor down from here. Why do you ask?

...Miss?







Baby?

Where? I don't have a baby.



Oh, I'm sorry. I thought you knew.  
I discovered you were pregnant while I was checking you.



P-pregnant?!



Hey, you must have the wrong person!

I'm not pregnant! It wouldn't be possible, I've only been with Trace.



No, I am certain I can hear a second heartbeat within you.

But you're right, it's impossible with a Human...

Well... I suppose it's not surprising that you don't know the father.

From what I've heard about the Keidran...

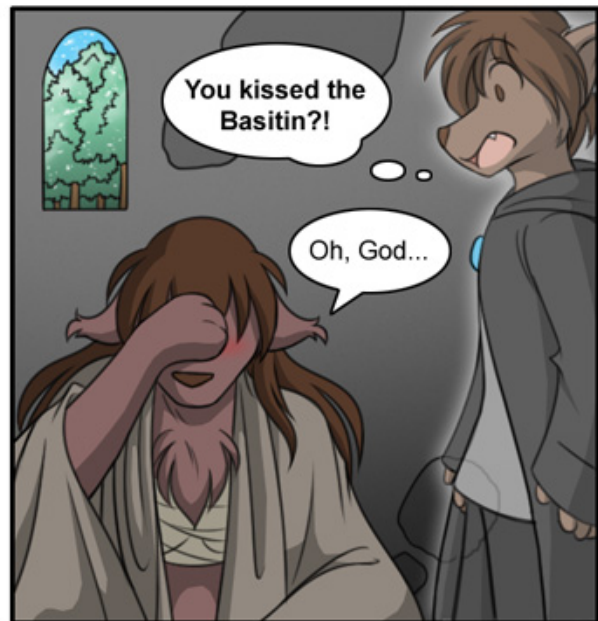


It was probably some random Keidran you met along your travels...



What are you implying?!

Ack! Mood swings!







Look, it didn't mean anything... I...

Snrk...



I was under a lot of stress, and... ng...

Nmmhm...



Oh, it's so nice to finally see my little brother growing into a young woman!

~ Oooh, Keith. You're so dreamy! I want to feel your warm, sandy fur against mine. ~



**Grrraah!!**

If you weren't a thousand miles away I'd kill you!

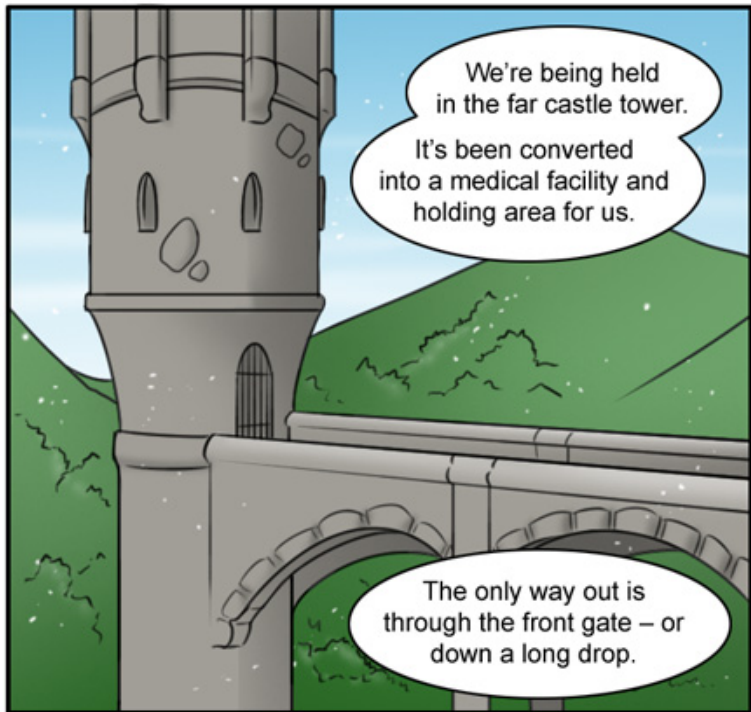
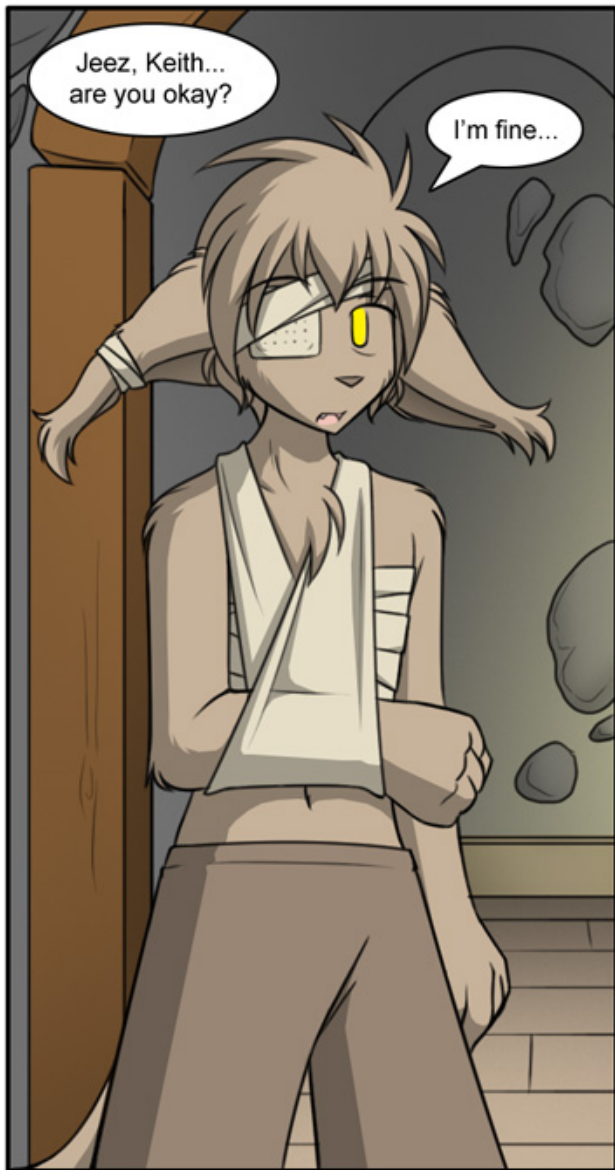


Hey, Natani.

Talking to yourself again, eh?



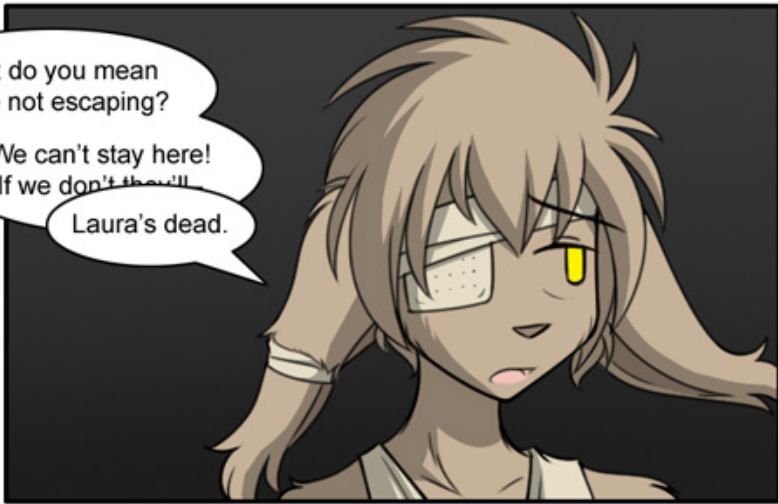
Keith!



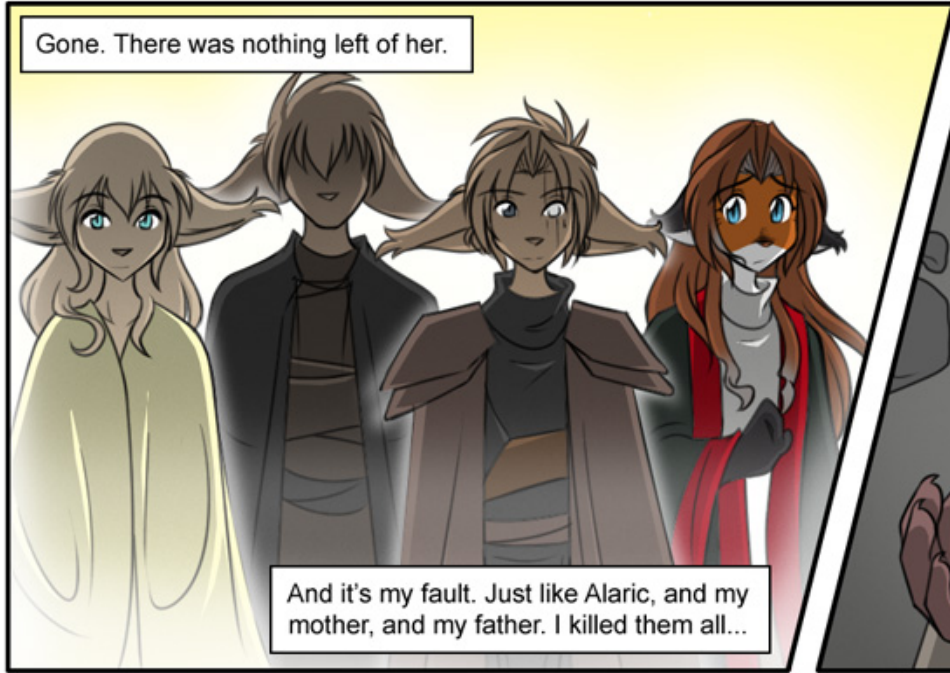


What do you mean you're not escaping?

We can't stay here! If we don't they'll... Laura's dead.



S-she's...!



Gone. There was nothing left of her.

And it's my fault. Just like Alaric, and my mother, and my father. I killed them all...



Keith, that's not true! You can't just give up!



I didn't say I was!

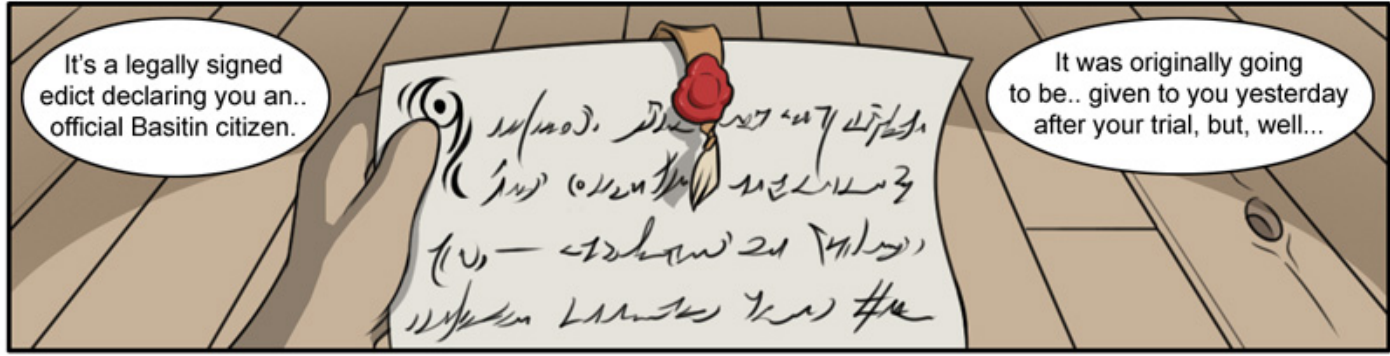
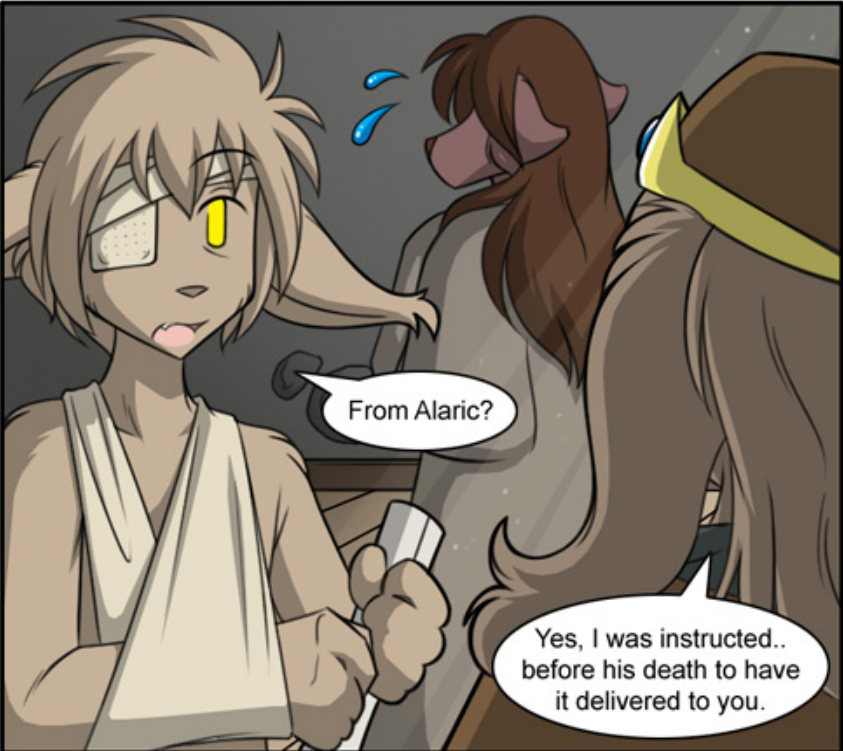
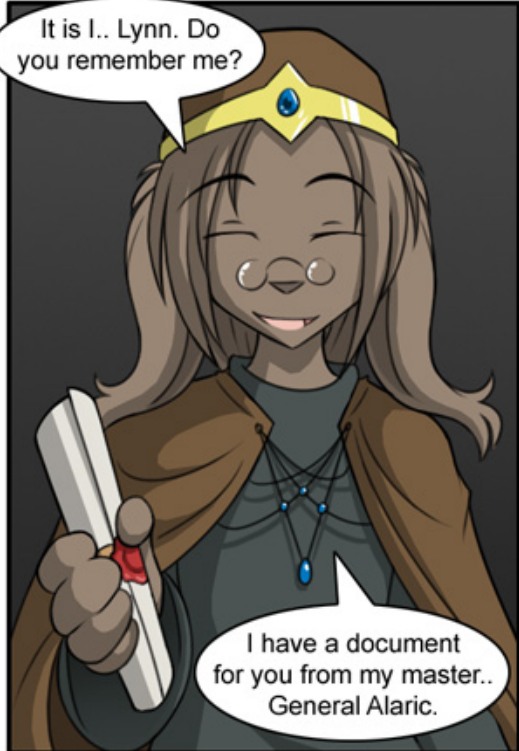
I just have no reason to leave anymore. This place is my home, like it or not.

I might have given it up again for Laura, but now that she's gone...

I will accept the consequences of my actions from the new king.



Then perhaps you are in luck.









But what about the others? Are they here?



Sorry, Trace. I could only make... one trip...

Rrrgh...



Nora? What's wrong?



Trace...

When the tower exploded, it drained and consumed all the magic on the island.

Unfortunately, we dragons are creatures of magic. It fed on my life while I was looking for you.

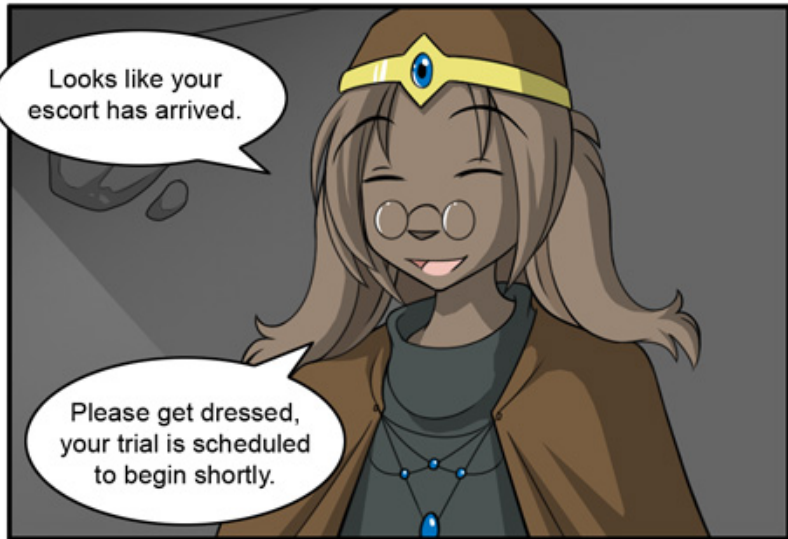


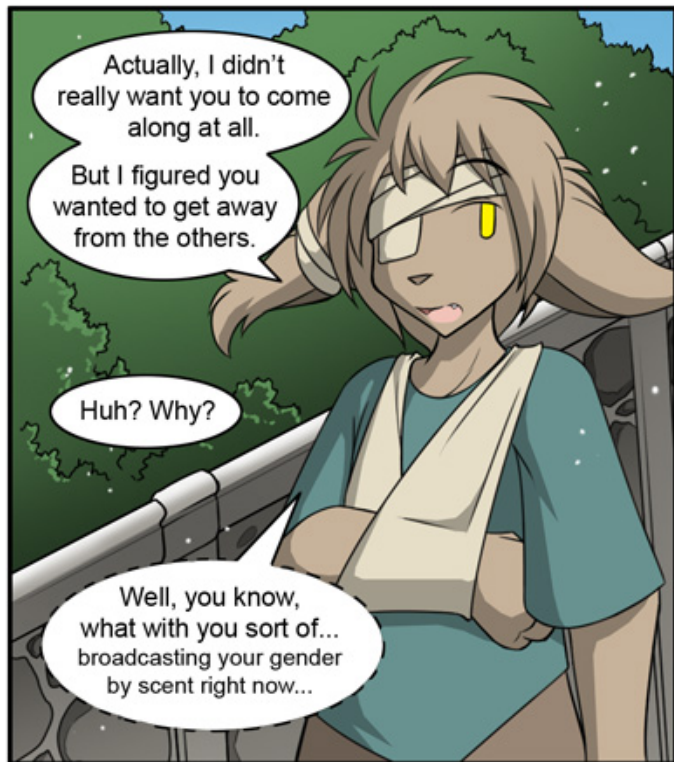
It took most of my strength to carry you back, and the rest to heal your wounds.

Now that I'm sure you're okay, I must sleep... for a very long time.







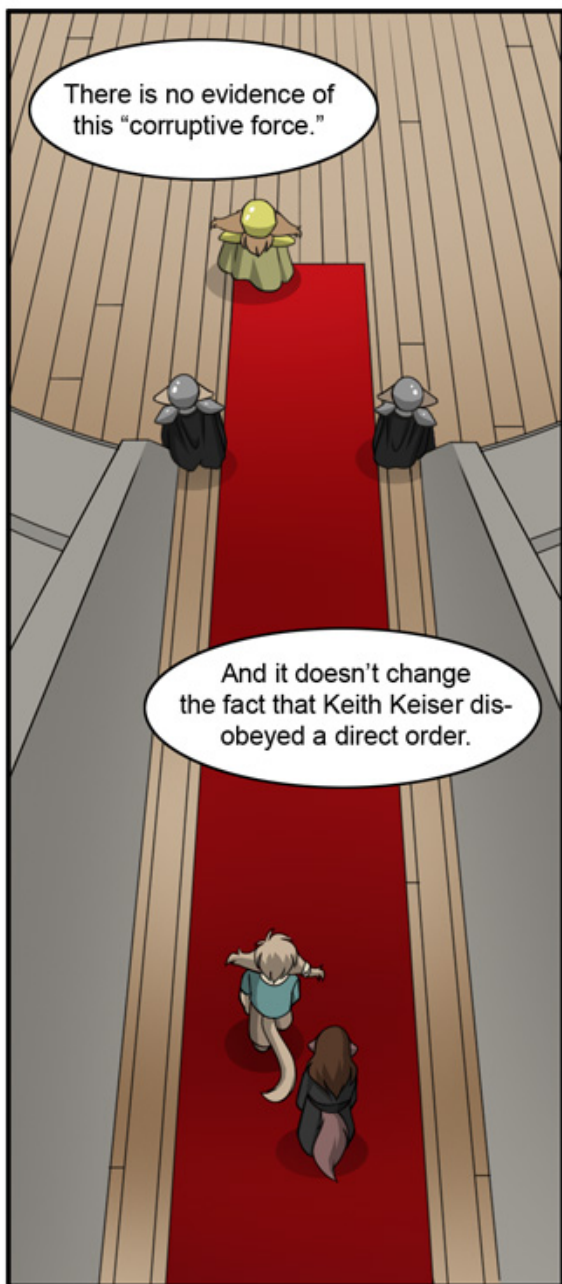




This trial is a farce!

Keith Keiser was helping the Basitin people by destroying that tower!

It was corrupting all who used it!



There is no evidence of this "corruptive force."

And it doesn't change the fact that Keith Keiser disobeyed a direct order.



That order was never legal!

Keith was only required to bring the Templar to regain his citizenship, nothing else!

Alabaster was out of his mind when he ordered that assassination!



Enough. It's time for the boy to speak for himself.

Keith Keiser, for the second time you stand before this court accused of a heinous crime.

We five have been chosen to determine your guilt, if any, in accordance with Basitin law.



You are charged with the following:

Disobeying a direct order from a superior... trespassing on royal grounds... destroying royal property... committing treason against the Basitin government... and breaking curfew.



Do you understand the charges against you?

Yes...



Then I, Alabaster, hereby bring this court to order.



D-did you just say "Alabaster"?



That's right. I am Lieutenant Alabaster...

...son of the late General Alabaster.

I see you've brought the Keidran with you as well... the one you were ordered to kill.

No, of course not...

Are you mocking us by flaunting your disregard for the law in here?

Then tell us, Young Man, why exactly did you disobey your orders?

Did you have a legitimate reason? A legal precedent?

No, I had no 'legal precedent'.

I didn't follow the orders because... I couldn't do it.

That Keidran, Natani, is the closest thing I have to a friend right now.

There's no way I could kill him.

Ngh...

*Sigh...*

You were right, Alabaster. Our predecessors should have seen this coming.

The boy's just too much like his mother.

Wha-?

What does my mother have to do with anything?



Oh please...

This trial is going to be long enough without a history lesson.

Let's just get on with it!

I disagree!

If it has relevance on the case, I'd like to hear about it!



I believe it does. Knowing Keith's lineage may explain why he has caused so many problems for us.

When my father died, his belongings were passed down to me - including several personal documents.

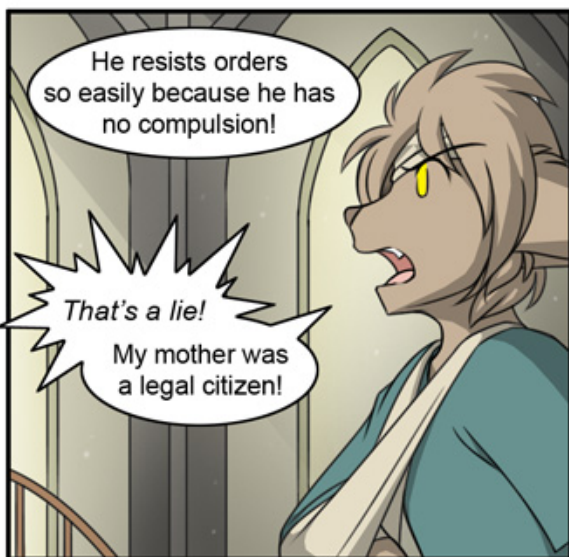
The contents of some were... revealing...

Keith Keiser, your mother, Cathleen, was a **Western Basitin**.



Wha-?! Really?

That explains it!



He resists orders so easily because he has no compulsion!

*That's a lie!*

My mother was a legal citizen!



No, it's the truth. Your father kept it hidden, forging papers after conceiving an illegitimate offspring - you.

But the secret couldn't be kept forever. When rumor spread, your father confided in mine.



...I need to leave this place, Albion.



What are you talking about, Cornelius? Leave where?



I'm going to leave the island... with Cathleen.

What?!

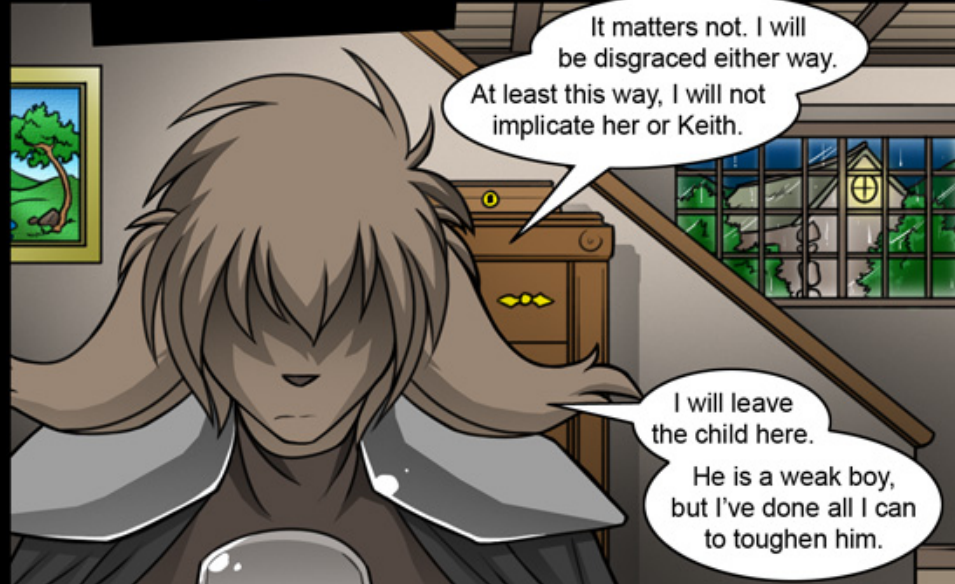
Suspicions about her origins have been growing. Any day now I'll be questioned, and I won't be able to answer falsely. But... maybe if we went to human lands we

Listen to yourself! Leave the island?!



It's the drink talking, you can't be serious!

You'd be disgraced! Forever labeled a traitor!



It matters not. I will be disgraced either way. At least this way, I will not implicate her or Keith.

I will leave the child here. He is a weak boy, but I've done all I can to toughen him.



No...! I can't let him destroy himself! Not for a Western harlot!

Hello?

Let me in, Cathleen.

General Alabaster?  
It's passed curfew, Sir. It wouldn't be decent...

THUD!  
THUD!  
THUD!

And what would you know of decency?

SLAM!

I knew it was a mistake the moment I forged your papers, but I did it for Cornelius' sake...

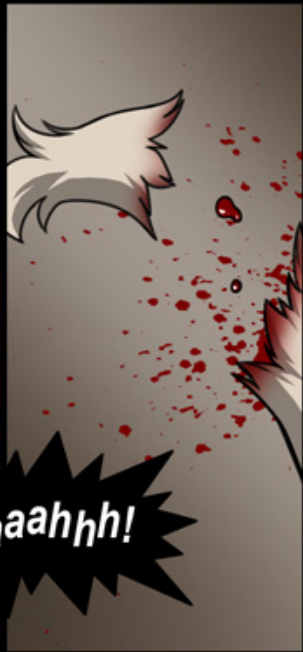
But now he's planning to throw his whole life away because of the mistake he made with you!

Well I won't allow it!

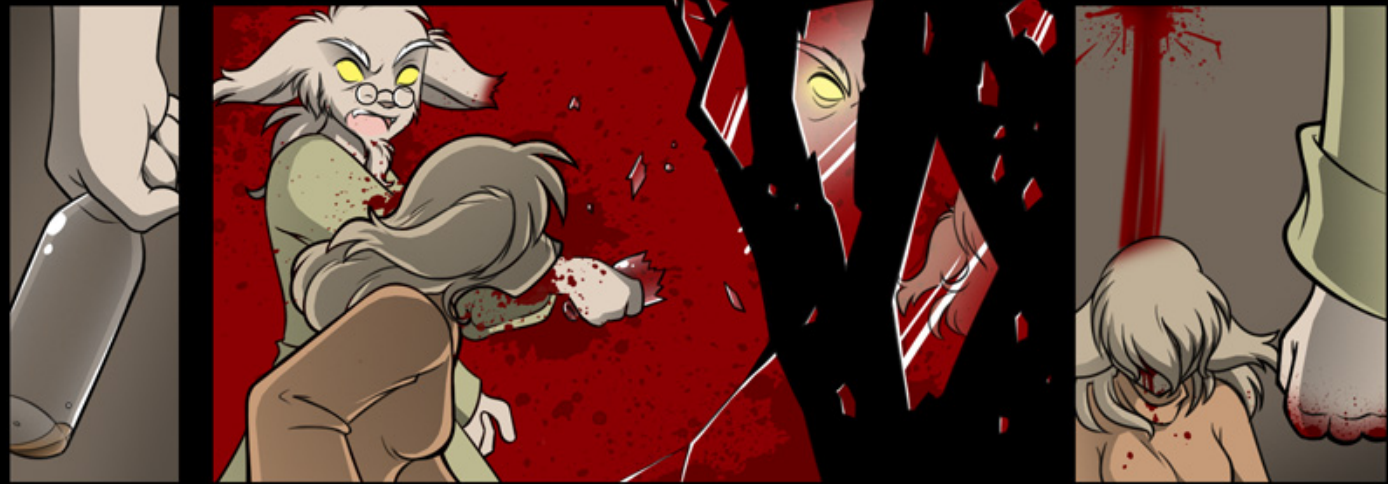
Ah!

Let go of me!

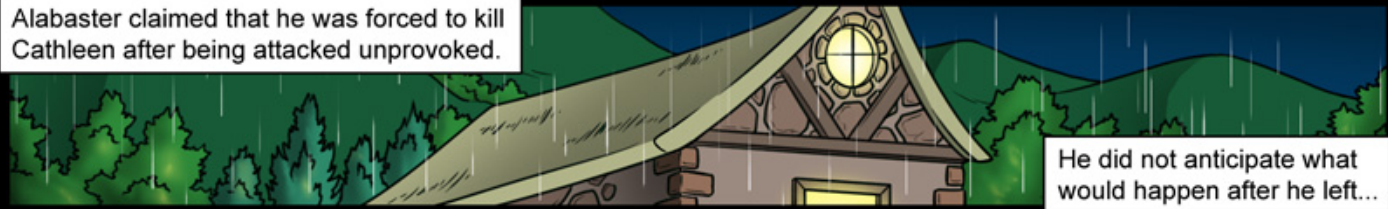
Aaaaaahhh!





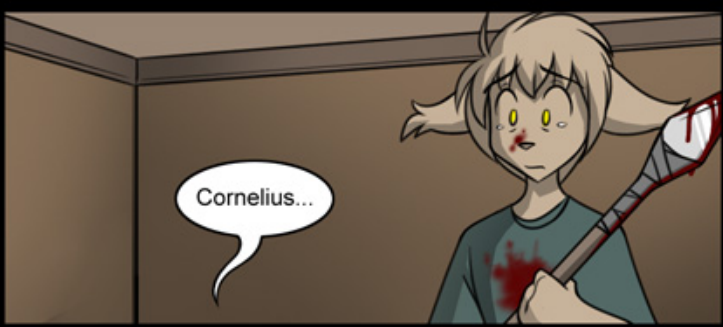


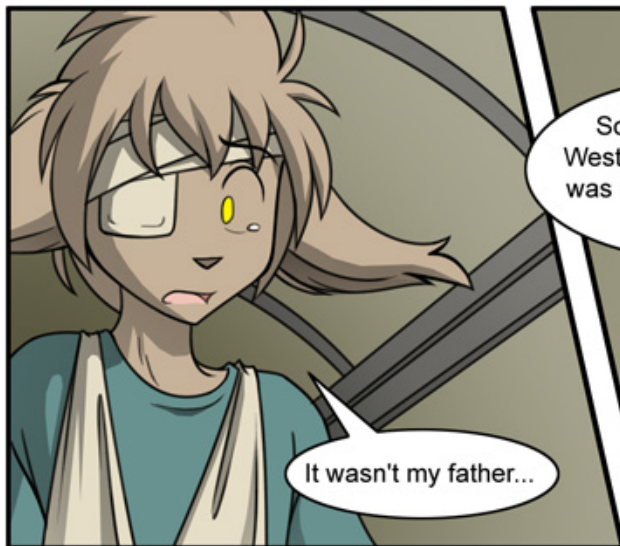
Alabaster claimed that he was forced to kill Cathleen after being attacked unprovoked.



He did not anticipate what would happen after he left...

He did not witness what lead up to Cornelius' death, but his last note detailed the aftermath.





It wasn't my father...



So Keith Keiser is a Westerner, and Alabaster was responsible for what happened.

But what does that mean in regards to this trial?



It shows how Keith is able to act independently.  
However...

It also gives motive behind my father's recent actions.

Manipulating Keith's orders, burning down a tavern...

My father hated Keith for what he was, and for killing Cornelius. He was willing to go to any lengths to get rid of him for good.



Keith, are you alright? What did they say?



I think we should recess.

Agreed. We will return after the counsel has had time to deliberate.

Meanwhile...

The whole ship is crawling with Basitins.

I told you we should have taken off when we had the chance!

What were we supposed to do?

It's a shame about Kat, I know. But... The control spells are gone, I can feel it.

If we just took the ship and left... we could be free!

We couldn't just abandon everyone on the island...

Free...?

Did you check everywhere?

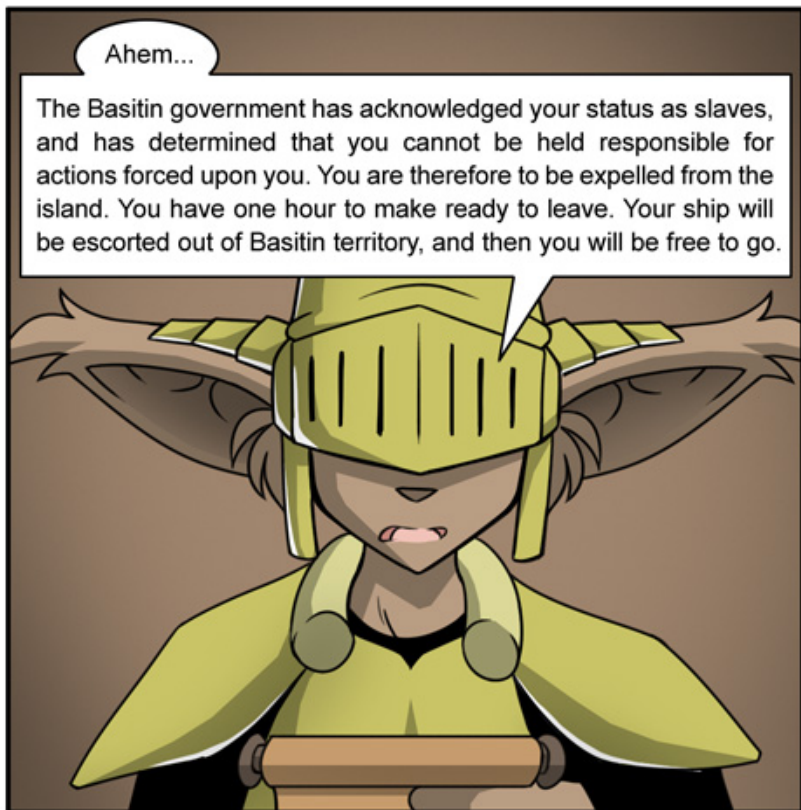
Yes, we've cleared the ship. Everything has been accounted for.

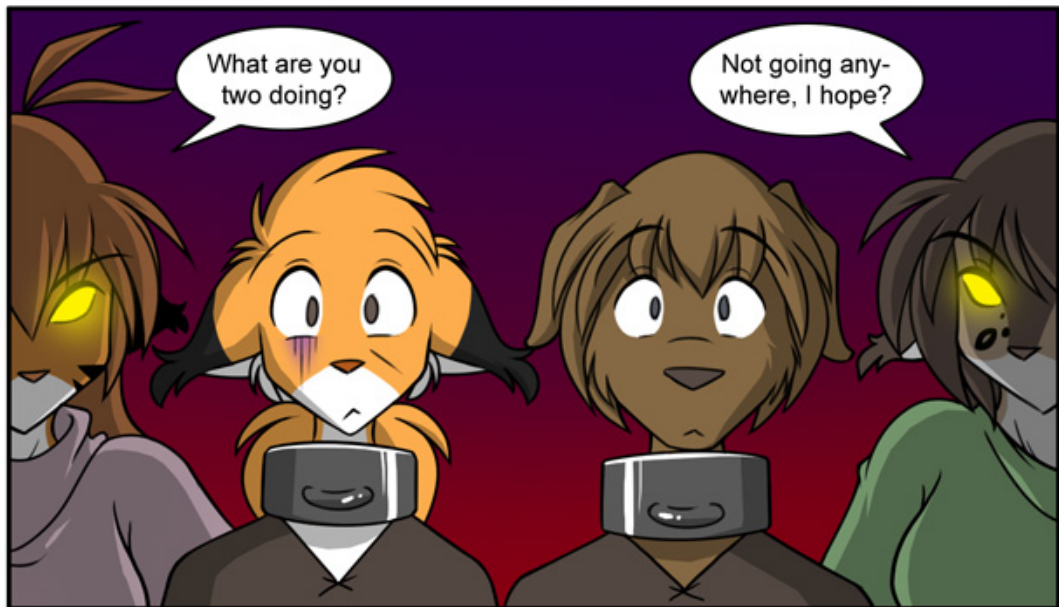
PHEW...

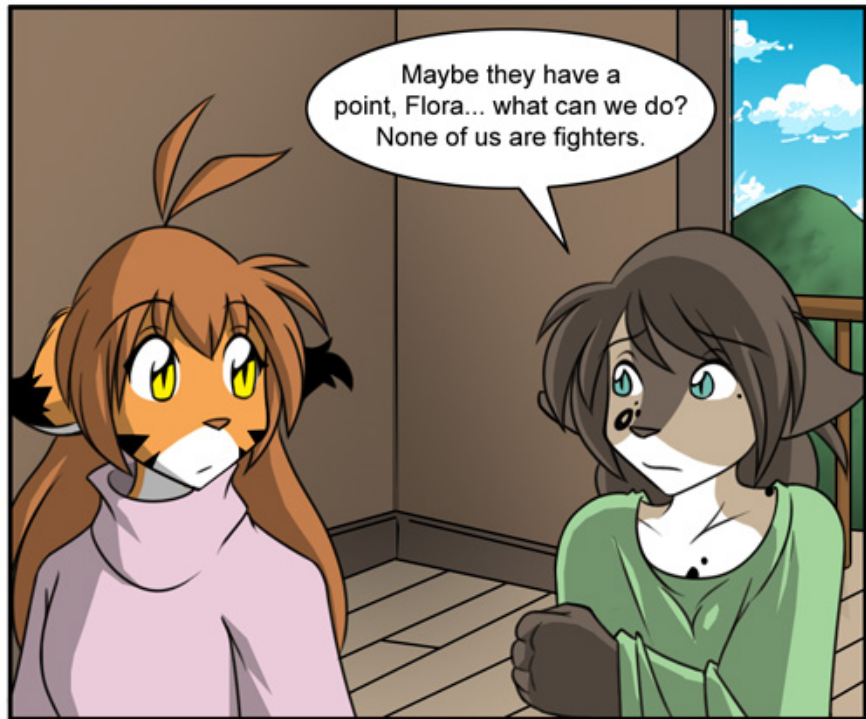
The only things left are those two Keidran talking under the floorboards.



Don't kill me!









Our control spells are gone. We hold no loyalty towards Eric anymore.

So why should we risk our lives and our freedom just to satisfy your... your...

Human fetish!



I do not have a "human fetish"!



But...



You're right.

I... I can't ask you to just give up your freedom.



I have painful memories of my own escape attempts when I was a slave.

I can understand the desire for freedom.

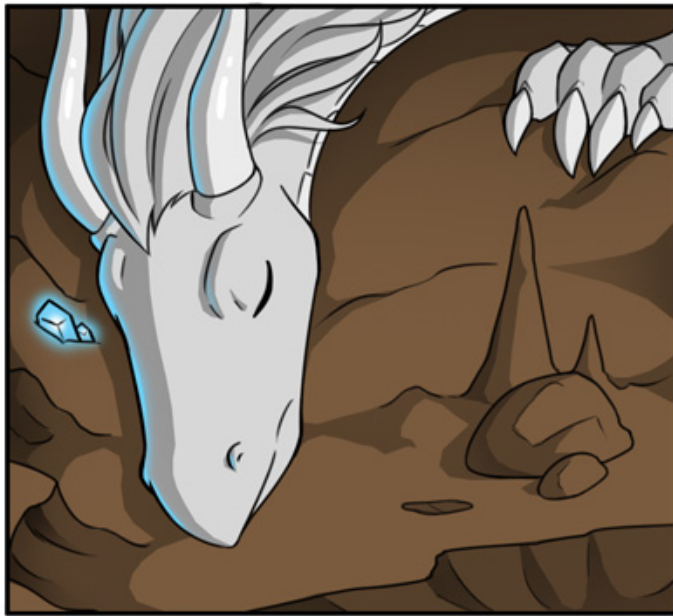


Wait, wait, wait...

"When you were a slave?"  
You're not one now? Isn't that Templar guy your master?









Sigh...

There's a passage at the back of the cave which leads to an old mine.

If you stay left, it'll lead you right to the shore.



There's... you knew about that all along? Why didn't you tell me before I nearly ran off the cliffs?



I was going to!

But you were in such a hurry to abandon me, I figured you could find your own way off the mountain!

Hmph!



Well, I didn't... I didn't mean it to come across like that.

My mind was focused on Flora and the others.

But I honestly did not mean to hurt your feelings. I didn't even know a dragon's feelings could... er...



...it's alright. I know, you have new companions now. I can't expect you to forsake your friends for... someone you don't remember.



So, Nora...



How long does this "long sleep" usually last?



Trace? Why are you still here? I told you the way out.

I know...



But I wasn't lying when I said I wanted to keep you company. I might not remember, but it seems like you were an important part of my past.

I think I'd regret it if I didn't stay, at least for a little while.



...



Wait, I changed my mind!

Blarg!



We are prepared to render judgement.



Keith Keiser, you have committed serious crimes that we cannot ignore.

You may have been acting in the best interests of our people when you destroyed the tower...

But the means at which you achieved it cannot go without consequences.



However... we must also acknowledge that these are unusual circumstances.

In lieu of recent... revelations, I am prepared to grant you leniency.



?

rather than execution, your citizenship will simply not be reinstated.

You are once again banished from these islands; this time, without any opportunity to return.

You shall be escorted out the way you arrived, along with the Keidran slaves.



However, this leniency does not extend to the outsiders!

An attack on our people cannot be forgiven.

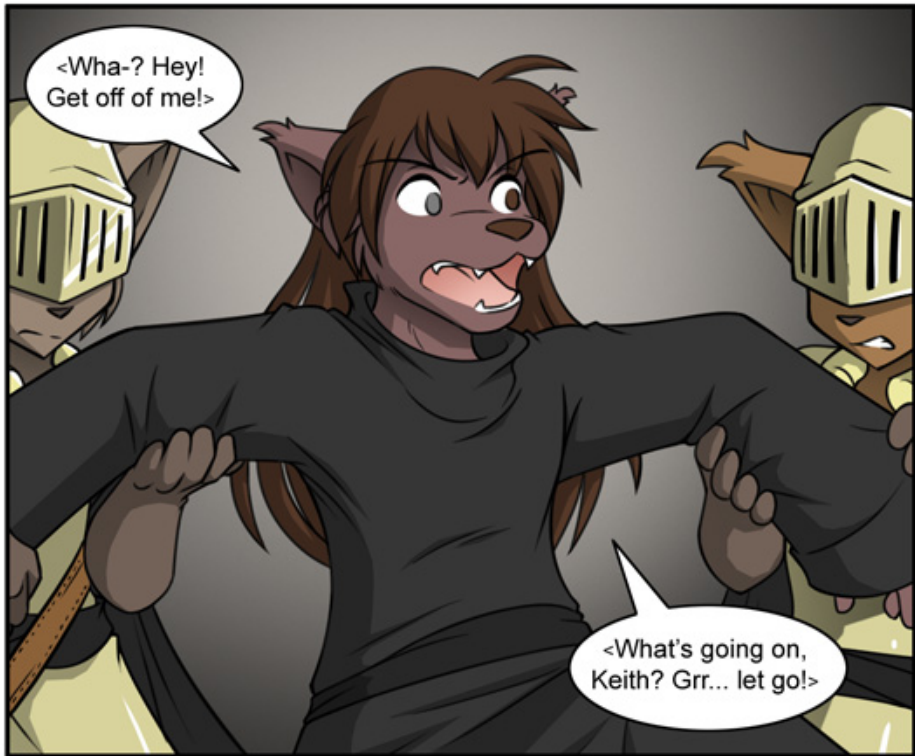


Therefore, your companions are sentenced to death.

What?!



Take the Keidran away.  
And escort the exile to the docks.



<Wha-? Hey!  
Get off of me!>

<What's going on,  
Keith? Grr... let go!>



You haven't  
given them a trial!

They destroyed the  
tower for the good of  
the Basitin people!  
That should count  
for something!

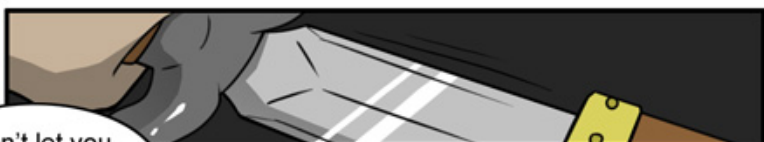


We are not  
obliged to give trials  
to outsiders.

Under the law, destruction  
of government property is a  
crime punishable by death.



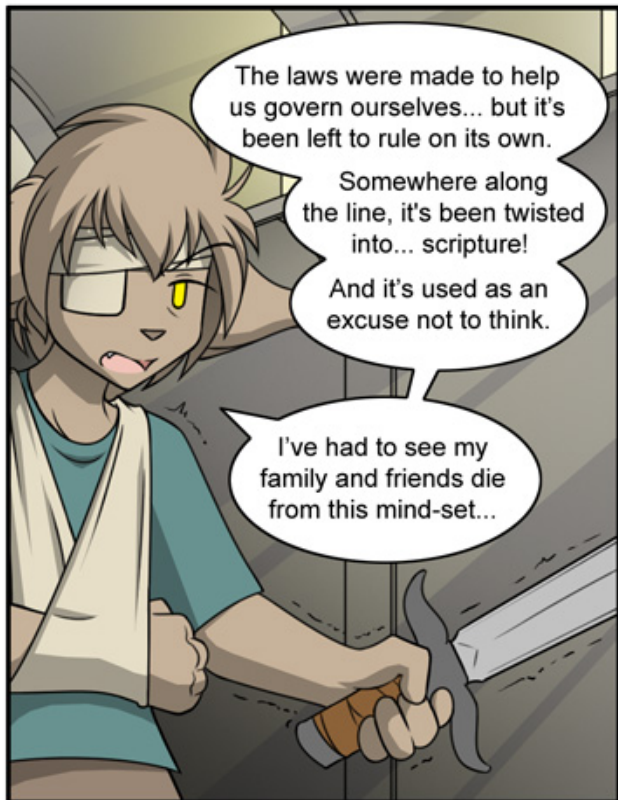
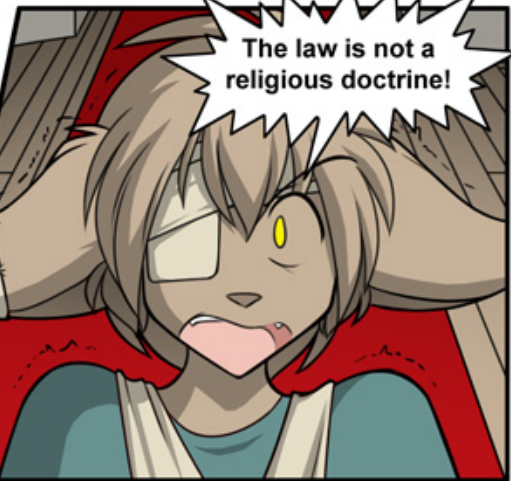
Ngh...  
Don't you  
have any minds  
of your own?!



I won't let you  
do this! The laws  
are wrong!



...is this still part  
of the trial?





->Gasp!<-



Natani...

Huh?

This way.

Oh.



Erm... was that dramatic enough?  
I was told to make it as dramatic as possible...



Messenger Lynn!  
This is an active courtroom. Get out of he- ERK!



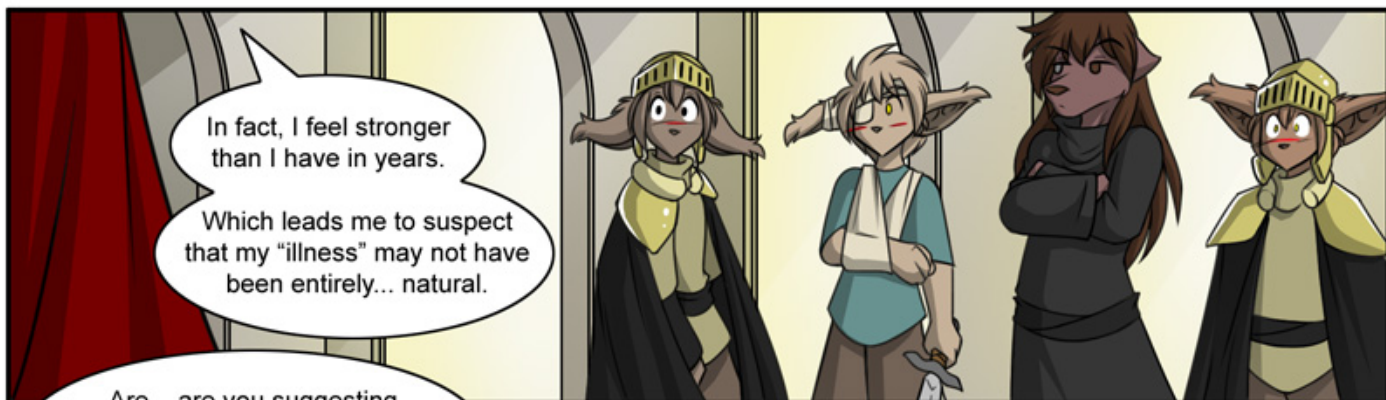
Y-your Highness!

Magistrate.  
Lynn has informed me that he has important information in regards to this trial. I am here to ensure that it gets heard.



Yes.  
I have a document written by the late General Alaric.







"Don't have the authority?"

Your Highness, a lot has changed since you were injured. If you are not aware...

All three of our generals have been killed, my father included. Alaric's body is still being recovered from the bottom of the gorge.



Since the power vacuum, nearly every officer on the island has been competing to determine who should fill the void.

So far, I have defeated all challengers for the honor of ascending to the position of general, so that I may preside over this trial. Tell me, who has greater authority to rule over these matters than I?



Oh! Well... According to Alaric, that would be...




Keith.



...






I don't understand...

Is this a joke?  
Keith Keiser has no  
rank or title.


He is not even  
a legal citizen.



Oh, but that's just not true.

When Alaric discovered  
Alabaster's manipulation, he granted  
Keith's citizenship himself.


And since Keith is the only living  
Basitin to return from the outside world,  
Alaric decided his experience would  
make him worthy of promotion.



That's not how it works!

Rank is not something you're  
handed! It can only be earned through  
strength of body or will of mind!


And Keith Keiser has neither!



I think you underestimate  
our wayward brother.

But you are correct.

The law states rank  
can only be earned through  
succession or combat.



However, if you can recall the  
conditions of General Alaric's death...

What... th...  
that doesn't  
count!

Keith Keiser defeated Nickolai Alaric  
in single combat on the western bridge.



I won't accept it!

That challenge cannot be considered legitimate! No one witnessed it happen!  
For all we know, *the Keidran* murdered Alaric with sorcery!



I witnessed it!



Erk! You?



Yes, I was asked to document everything. I gave it to the wolf.

<Excuse me, Confused Wolf...>  
<Do you happen to still have the document you were given?>

<Huh?>



<I have no "document.">



<Well, unless you mean this thing.>



On the 28th of August, Year 482, I, Lieutenant Madelyn Adelaide, witnessed a duel between Keith Keiser and Nickolai Alaric... and it was awesome! You should have seen it. At first, Keith was all like "oh noes!" but then he



This is insanity...  
Can't you people see what's going on? Alaric is making a mockery of our government just to get Keith into power!

We cannot allow this!



No, I cannot allow this!

Keith Keiser, I challenge

Stand down, Alabaster.



But.. it's my right...

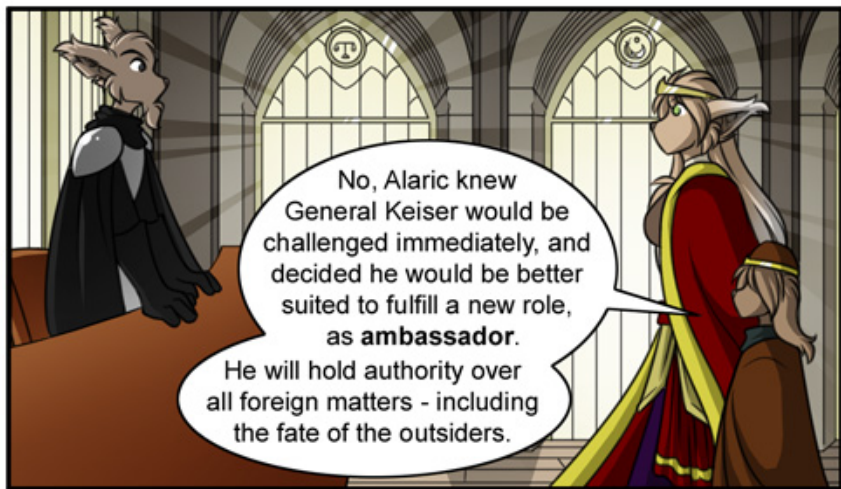
You can't challenge the boy while he's injured. It wouldn't be valid.



Besides, he's not taking away your position.

...He's not?

...You're telling me this runt... this bastard child of a Westerner... the boy who helped murder my father *just yesterday*, is now going to represent our entire civilization to the rest of the world?!



No, Alaric knew General Keiser would be challenged immediately, and decided he would be better suited to fulfill a new role, as **ambassador**.

He will hold authority over all foreign matters - including the fate of the outsiders.



Yep.

Your Highness, how can you stand there and allow this?



Because I happen to agree. Our society cannot remain isolated forever. The outside world is being stirred up more every day. Perhaps an ambassador is just what we need.



However, if you feel so strongly opposed to my decision, you're more than welcome to challenge *me*.



I... I submit to the wisdom of the king.



There. You see? I told you everything would work out.

I don't understand...



How could Alaric do all of this?

He couldn't have known what would happen.



He planned for many things.

Though I'm sure he hoped it wouldn't come to this.

Do you think this is the only document he had made?



The day you were banished, Alaric devoted himself to avenging you. He drafted hundreds of documents that exploited every loophole in the system. It was the very reason he became a general. He was obsessed with bringing you back, and the idea that those who had cast you out would one day be forced to acknowledge you.

But... why? Why do all this for me?



Because you were his friend, and he wanted to see you happy.





It's that girl from the tavern. How did she end up here?

Hello?



She was in your arms when I found you, but I don't know why. Maybe you tried to save her. It's too late though.

I took care of her external wounds, but internally, she is slowly bleeding to death.

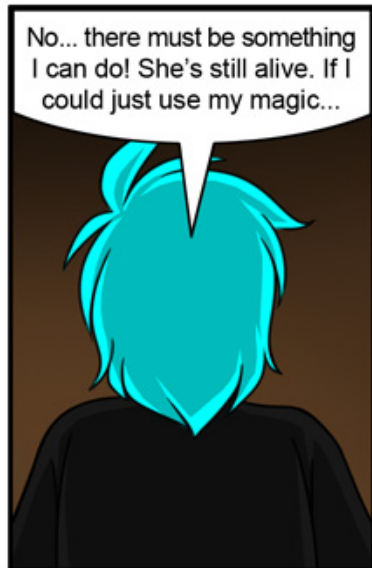


Why didn't you tell me she was here from the start? She needs a doctor!



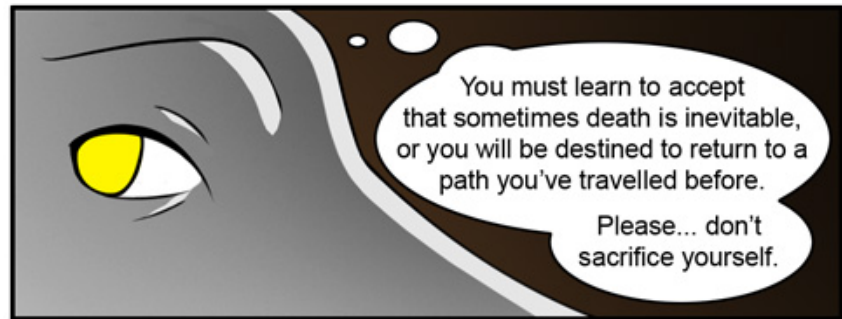
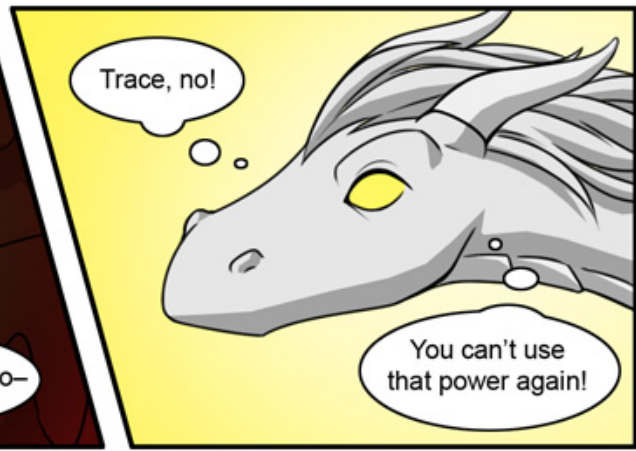
I didn't know who she was. It wouldn't have mattered anyway. No amount of medicine can heal those injuries.

The best thing I could do for her is induce sleep. Her death will be slow, but painless.



No... there must be something I can do! She's still alive. If I could just use my magic...







Sigh...  
What should I do?

I want to save her... but what if Nora's right?



...why?

Huh?



Why do you keep helping me?

At the tower... from the Basitin... and even the first time I saw you...

Five years ago, when I was captured by a group of wolves while trying to find my fiancé. They were going to sell me into slavery, but then... you came. You slaughtered them all... but spared me.



You said I wasn't one of them... that I reminded you of "her."



Why?

I... I don't know...

That was a different me. I just want to help.



Ngh... can you help me find a Basitin named Keith?



I'll try.





Flora, the guards say our time is up! We can't stall any longer!



Don't worry, we found the weapons!

Ah? Weapons?! None of us know how to use a sword!

What's to know?



You just swing it!

Nya!

I can't lift mine!



Flora, I told you, we're not fighting the Basitins. And you can't take on the whole army by yourself!



Grrr... just watch me! I'm going out there!  
1... 2...



Excuse me! Sorry for interrupting your assault, but I've just been informed that your friends have been released. They'll be here shortly.

Oh.  
Uh... thanks.

No prob.



Your Highness, I must protest!



The slaver I can understand, and maybe even the Keidran Spy, but releasing the Templar?

You saw all the destruction he caused first-hand! He cannot be allowed to go unpunished!



Enough, General.

Keith Keiser explained that the human was just as manipulated as we were.

I saw the chains and the look in his eyes, and I'm inclined to believe that. He was a man possessed by evil magic.

Now let it go.

Ngh...



Sir!

Huh? Me?

We've just received word that a human has been spotted on the outskirts of the city.

Should we apprehend him?

Human? Trace?

Uh... no, just escort him to the ship, I guess.



Yes, Sir. Shall we do the same for the vixen he is carrying?

What?!





W-what do you mean? I'm.. totally a guy.



Really? Your scent suggests otherwise, but I could be mistaken.

Our noses are not as sensitive as yours.

Er, yeah! you must be mistaken...



At least that's what I'd say if I didn't already know four females were treated at the infirmary.

It's not that hard to figure out we're missing one.

D'oh!



So, erm... I don't suppose you're going to tell anyone?



Of course!

Blarg!

But I am curious...



Keidran culture is something we do not make efforts to understand, and I feel it is a shame.

Is there a reason why you pretend to be male?



I'm not pretending! but... it's a long story...



Well, perhaps you can tell me. And perhaps I might be too busy to correct the error in our records.



Erg... not sure how long I can keep going...  
She's getting heavy...

Strange though... I don't feel her weight at all through my left arm...



Look, Laura!  
We're almost there!

...Laura?



...she's not going to make it, and I can't help her at all...  
I'm sorry, Laura.  
It's all my fault. I should be able to do more.

I'm sorry...



Don't...

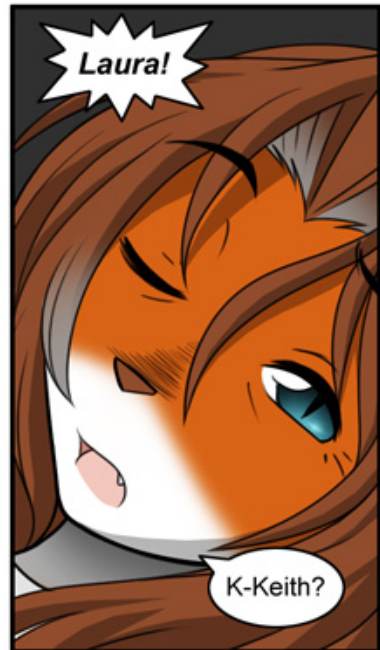


Don't be...

Don't live with regret. I spent my whole life dwelling on... what could have been.

I wouldn't wish it on anyone else.

Ngh... I only hope I did not cause the same feelings of regret for-



**Laura!**

K-Keith?





