

Epilogue

Wait. Miss...
Raine, was it?

Gah!

I just wanted him
as far away as possible,
but my magic surges are
unpredictable.

Honestly,
he could be
anywhere...

One last thing. That
fox, Carver... do you know
where he ended up? I'd like
to find him, if possible.

Oh...
I'm afraid
I don't know.

SWOOSH

Urgh...

Damn...
What a trip.
That girl...

Silverlock...
related to former
Grand Templar
Silverlock?

Well, that's
just not fair.

Hm, I need
to get back and
tell the boss.

...Leaving out
the part where I was
defeated by a woman
and a squirrel...

Where am I,
anyway?

Halt!

See, sis? I told you
there was a Keidran
on the beach!

What are
you doing on our
island, fox?!

Basitins?

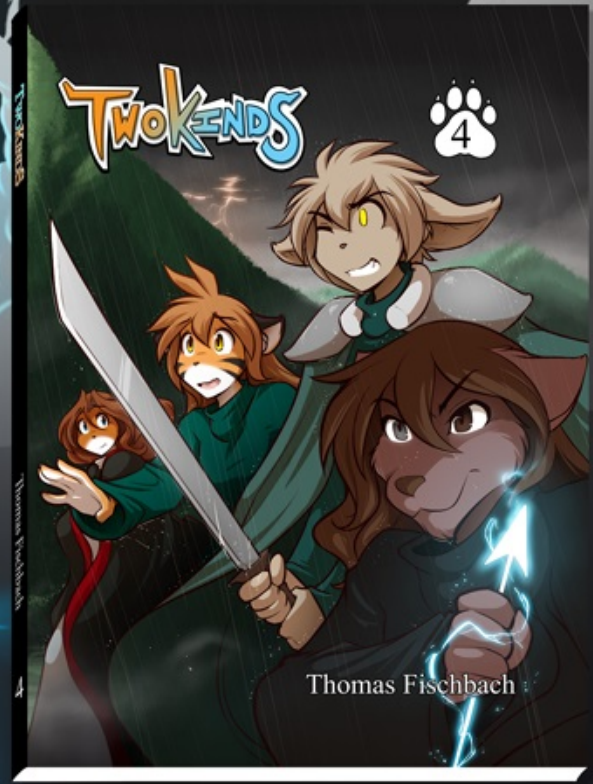
Island?!

TWOKINDS: VOLUME 4

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TWOKENDS

Chapter 20

Stories of the Estate



Urgh...
My head...



Oh, hey,
look who it is.



Welcome back
to the land of the
living, big bro.



Wah! Who...
Natani?

Why did you
make yourself
look younger...
and a girl?



Uh, I'm
over here.

That's... well...
basically a piece of
myself from before
the link.

Man, Zen,
you got ripped!
Nice abs!

It's a long
story. How are
you feeling?



Well, my head hurts.
Leg hurts too, now that
I think about it.

Also, I might
be hallucinating.
... Two Natani...

You were hurt
pretty bad. Kat can
explain more.

Huh? Kat?

Open your
eyes, idiot.



Oh.



<Oh, hello!
The infamous
brother, awake
at last.>



<You're
looking more
coherent.

Nice to
finally meet you
in person.

I'm Kat.>

<Uh... Zen.

So... what's
the damage?>

<Well, you'll be happy
to know you haven't
lost your leg yet!>



<But... I am afraid
you won't be walking
any time soon.

You have
an infection, and a
fever. You'll need to
stay in bed.>

<That explains
the headache.

How long
was I out?>



<Over a day!

Miss Raine
kept checking in on you.
Whatever she gave you
was strong stuff.>



<You... were
actually in and out
a few times, but you
weren't... well...>

<Hm? I don't
remember. I didn't
do anything weird,
did I?>

Uh...



<Ah... extra
pillows... thank you
Raine...>

**I'm not
Raine and
those aren't
pillows!**



<N-no!
Nothing!>

...But now I've got
a shirt, just in case!



<Thank you.>

<Raine and the others are the ones you should be thanking.

Their magic is dulling the pain.

I'm just... well, to be honest, with my sewing room sunk, I'm just trying to stay useful.>



<You have been.

I didn't just mean for this.

I wanted to thank you for helping Natani.>



<Ever since our folks died... I've tried to be the brother dad told me to be. But I just... I don't know.

I keep screwing up.

Our minds are joined again, but... Natani almost seems better for having been apart from me.>

<I think it's helped, having other people to open up to for once. Especially regarding...>

<You know... the girl side of things. The "girl talk.">



<Not exactly something I was qualified for.

So... you have my thanks.

I'm glad Natani found friends to lean on when... you know, I get my leg burnt off and can't be leaned on.>



<...Happy to help.>



<Zen's up.
I gotta go.>

<Want me to
come with?>

<Uh... yeah,
but go ahead and
finish eating. I want
a minute first.>

<Sure, no
problem.>

Mree
hee hee~!



SNEAK
SNEAK



THWAP!

EDINNM
TI

Yah!



No. Touching.
The ears.

Aw...
Why not?



Keith let
me touch **his**
ears once.

W-what?!



I did not
"let" you!



Listen, human—

Karen!

Karman, you can't just go around grabbing Basitin ears!

But why? What's the big deal?

You **just** can't, Alright? Now go on, kid, we're eating.



Hmph...



...Is it a sex thing?

KPLEK!



No, it's not a "sex thing"!

...Are you **suuure?**

Yes!
I-it's not like that!



Well... usually...

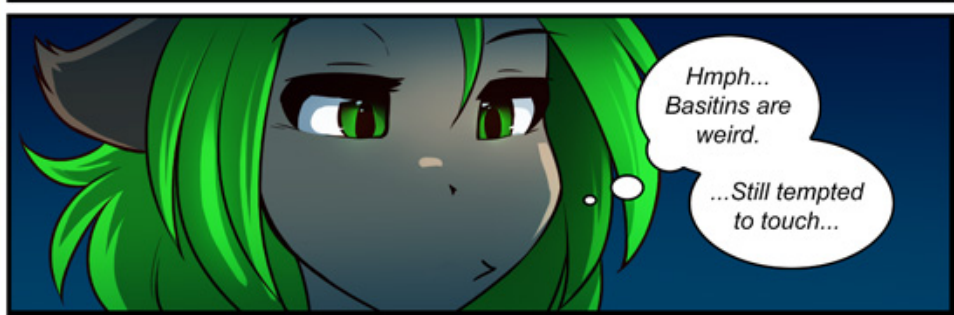
I-I mean it feels nice... but not like how you're thinking! It's just... calming... affectionate.

It's only ever done between close family, like a parent to a young child, or...

...you know... someone special.

And certainly not between two girls!

That'd be... inappropriate.



Hmph... Basitins are weird.

...Still tempted to touch...



So what's the deal with that weird looking Basitin?

Why is his ears all floppy and—

What?

How... where did everyone go?

One Floor Higher...



Hm? Flor— Oh, Hey, Keith.

Have you seen Flora around?

Nope, sorry.

She's not in the dining room.

She wasn't in bed when I woke up...

Maybe you could try asking your servant?



Eugh... please don't call her that. It's awkward... I hate the idea of someone... belonging to me.

Besides, I don't know how to find Rose either, even if I wanted to ask her.



Stop doing that!

My apologies, master.

And please, stop calling me master.

Just use Trace.

I... well... if you insist.

Do you know where Flora is?

I know where everyone is. I can show you to her.



Ask me what?

Gah!



Miss Roselyn...

I... was actually hoping for a chance to talk with you, alone.

...Oh?

"Miss"?
Ech, weird...



I'm sure by now you've noticed that I've lost my memories.

Well... I did think at first it might have been an act. Feigning ignorance in order to lure those guests in for some purpose.

But evidently not.



You truly remember nothing?

Just... bits and pieces.

Flora wants me to leave the past behind, but I think ignoring it is a mistake.

Wait, but don't you... *want* to return to your former self?

No! Of course not!

I want to know who I was, so I understand what it is I'm fighting against! And *hopefully* fix some of the problems I caused!

I was hoping you could help.



I... See.

I'm not sure how much I can tell you - you were *quite* paranoid by the end - but tell me what you do remember, and I can try to fill in the gaps.



The last time I saw you was in the spring.

You'd left in an awful hurry, but I didn't think anything of it at the time.

You'd often be away for weeks or months on Templar business.

I only learned you were missing when some of your... friends began poking around, looking for you.

I see. That makes sense.



The first thing I can remember is waking up in an empty field. I think it was spring.

Do you remember where?

Uh... it was just a forest.

Maybe Flora might know.



Your... tiger?

She was there?

Yes! She's been with me from the very start.

We've travelled together ever since. I'm not sure where I'd be right now without her.

I...

...I'm sorry, forgive me for asking, but...

What... exactly is the nature of the relationship between you and that... young lady?



Oh, that... I mean, it must be obvious...

Flora and I are together.

T-together?! But... not seriously, right?

Uh, yeah, it's pretty serious.

In fact, since everybody's finally here in one place, and I'm not sure how long that'll last, I've actually been thinking...

Maybe now might be the right time for me to finally... propose.



GASPI!
What?!



...Should I have not said that?

Y...you... YOU...?!



Ngh...



Mmph!

Wha...?
Ms. Roselyn?!
Are you okay?

I didn't mean
to upset you... Look.
forget I said anything
about marria—



Marriage!
Ah-hahahaha!
You?! With... with
a Keidran?!

The Templar
Tyrant... and a
tigress...

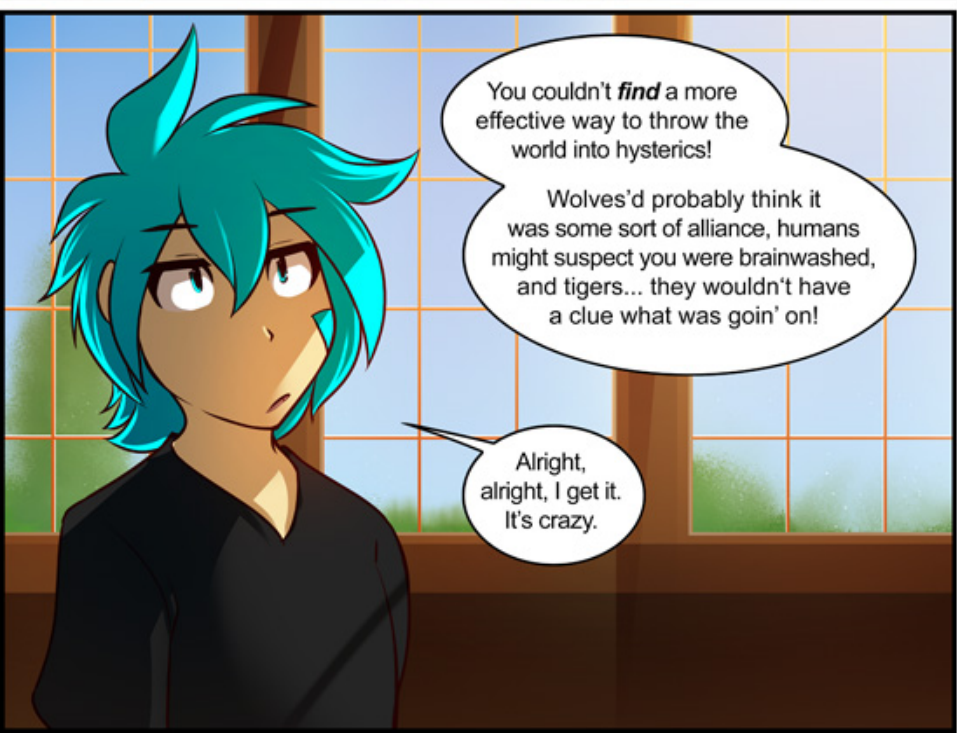
The Fates truly
do have a sense
of humors!



Gods, of
all people...

And it'd be
the *second* Grand
Templar in a row!

Though
no one would
know it...



You couldn't *find* a more
effective way to throw the
world into hysterics!

Wolves'd probably think it
was some sort of alliance, humans
might suspect you were brainwashed,
and tigers... they wouldn't have
a clue what was goin' on!

Alright,
alright, I get it.
It's crazy.



Oh, it's brilliant!

What Ah wouldn't give
to see the heads of those
stuffed-shirts and Templars
explode from the news!



From everything I've heard about my old self, working for me couldn't have been easy.

If I ever hurt you, I'm sorry.

I don't want you to be afraid to speak your mind to me now. I won't get mad, I swear.

And I promise, I'll do whatever I can to make up for the things I've done.

U-uh...



You... have **no** idea how weird it is to hear you talk like that. You really aren't the old Trace I knew.

Over the years, I've learned to never get my hopes up, but..

...What the heck. Call me Rose.

Although, as long as we're being honest, just between you and me... The "act"...

Secretly... Ah kinda get a kick outta it. You know, playin' the stern old lady.

It's usually the only fun I can get, so I'd like it if you didn't let on otherwise.

Oh, o-of course! ...Rose.



<Oh, good.
My dear brother
has arrived.>

Huh?

<He's on the other
side of the door trying
to think up leg puns.>



Pfff,
<killjoy!>

<Hey, Kat.
Nice shirt.>



<Oh right,
that... *mind-
thingy*.>

<Eheh...
T-thanks,
Natani.>

Zen's
looking good
so far. Just a
mild fever.>



<I know it's been
a while. I'll leave you
two to catch up.

Call for me if you
need anything!>

<Thanks!>

Erg!



You know
hitting me in here
doesn't actually do
anything.

Yeah, well...
I'd feel bad **actually**
hitting you while you're
already injured.

That's for being
an **idiot**, getting that
damn **shackle** put on
in the first place.



<Yeah, I know,
I know, believe me.

I messed up,
I'm sorry.>

<But... it all
worked out in the
end, right?

So, are you going to
fill me in on what I missed?
Your memories are... more
closed off than usual.>



Oh, yeah.

There's been... quite a few changes recently you missed out on.

If Kat didn't tell you, I guess the biggest one would be that...

Well... the secret's out.



Woah, seriously?!

You mean... everyone knows that you're...?



Yeaah. Pretty much.

Well, actually, I'm not sure if Stripes or her human actually saw it, but...

While they're both a little dense, even if they didn't notice my scent that day I'm sure word has spread.



Wow... I can't believe it.

You really didn't know? You usually root through my mind right away for this stuff.

No, like I said, your memories are closed off to me. I figured you were keeping me out.

I could have pushed, but I didn't want to pry.



Huh, weird. I wonder if the link is weaker... or if my mind is stronger, now?



So... how did people react?

Oh, well...

I'm not sure. I'm still kinda waiting for the blowout from it.

No one's said anything to my face yet, but I can tell some of them look at me different, now.

Especially the Basitins and Blondie's ship hands.

I hate that they act different. What does it matter to them whether or not I have breasts?



<Don't sweat it, Natani. It's just new for them. They'll get over it eventually.>

Hmph.
<Yeah, sure.>



<Do people who care ever really just "get over" tits?>

Ah!
<I forgot about you.>

<Natani, how long is this thing going to be in here?
Can't you... dismiss her or something?>



<Hey! A little respect!

If it weren't for me, we'd both be charred wolves by now.>

<But relax, bro. I'm not a separate person - just a tiny fractured bit of our subconscious.

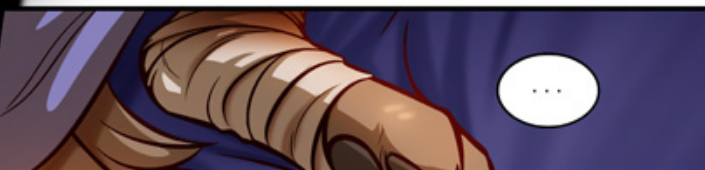
I won't get in the way... promise.>



<Oh yeah, that's encouraging.

Hrmph... I still feel like I'm outnumbered in my own head now. Don't exactly like that.

But... if it means your life isn't as tied to the link as it was, then... that's good, at least.>



...



<So... I know we usually avoid the subject, but this other you... does she... change things?>

About... you know...?>

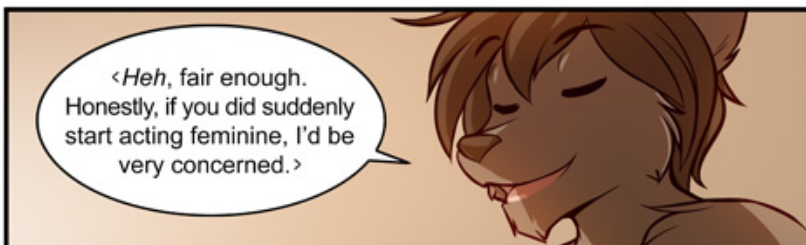
<Are you asking if this means I've given in to the girly side?>



<Pfff, nah.>

<I mean, I do feel less self-conscious about my body. ...At least in front of **one** person...
But I do still think of myself as a guy.>

<So don't expect me to start acting dainty or wearing women's clothing all of the sudden.>

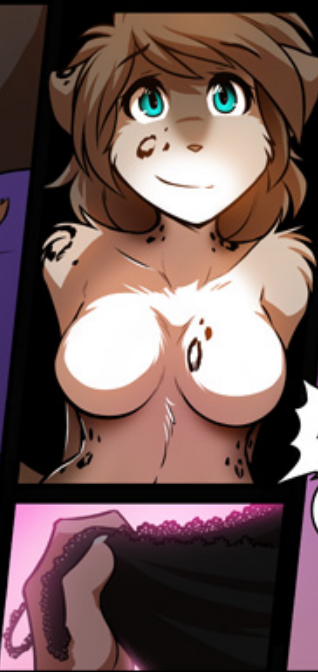


<Heh, fair enough. Honestly, if you did suddenly start acting feminine, I'd be very concerned.>



<Well, good to know the more things change, the more they stay the same.>

<The thought of you owning anything frilly... *hah!* That'd be the day!>



Ah-haha!

<Y-yeah, ridiculous!>

Just gunna... suppress that memory.



Oh...

<Right, there is...
...one more thing you should know, before he gets here...>

Hm?

<There has been... developments you missed, regarding Keith, which I'm sure you'd find out sooner or later.>

<Ever since the ship fire, we've... kinda been a little more honest with ourselves, and... more open about it.>

<So, I guess you could say we're... well... y-you know...>



<Oh gods, did you sleep with the Basitin?!>



<Not... yet, anyway.>



<What?! No!! Of course not, you idiot!>

<Not in the way you're thinking!>



<Oh...>



<Not yet?!>

<Y-you're not seriously, considering it, are you?>



<I don't know! ...Maybee?>

<It's not like I'm making plans or anything. It's just... the way things've been going... I'm... thinking about it.
I mean... It's not really any of your business, but—



<Our minds are linked together, I think it **is** my business! What happens if I go through your memories and see that?!

<Wha- then don't go through my memories! **That's** your first reaction to this?!

<But... what if you lose concentration and can't keep your mind blocked while you're in the middle of

<**We are not discussing th—**
Keith!>



U-uh...
<I- I can come back later...>



<H-how long have you been there?
How much did you hear?!>



<Me? **Nothing!** Nothing at all!>



Hm...

Alright, let's try this again...

One, two, three, four, five...

Six?
Six rooms in the second floor east wing...



Why am I having so much trouble mapping this place out?

The count's not changing, but... it doesn't feel right.

It's like my eyes aren't seeing something...



There's something off about this place... I can sense it...



...Just like I can sense someone trying to sneak up on me again—



...Karman!

It's... Karen...

What'cha up to, Madness?

Basitin military business! Go bother someone else, kid.



"Kid"?

I'm sixteen. Aren't you supposed to be younger than me?

What's a little girl doing in the military, anyway? I thought Basitins were all supposed to be tough warriors.



You're kinda... shrimpy.


...Shrimpy...



GREETINGS
FROM KOREA!

MY FAMILY AND I ARE CURRENTLY VISITING OUR EXTENDED FAMILY IN KOREA!

I PLANNED TO TRY AND UPDATE WHILE HERE, BUT HONESTY, IT'S UNLIKELY I'LL FIND ENOUGH FREE TIME. SO, FOR NOW, THE COMIC WILL BE TAKING A BRIEF REST, AND TWOKINDS WILL RETURN TO REGULAR UPDATES IN TWO WEEKS, ON OCT 5TH! THERE'LL BE A LOT TO SHARE WHEN WE GET BACK, SO SEE YA THEN! :)



Man, this is the life, huh?

No work to do, sleeping in as much as we want...

I don't think we should get too used to it...

I always knew being free would be great, but I never imagined it'd be this good!


But yeah, compared to the ship, it's definitely a lot more peaceful around here.



WAAAAAAHHHH!

I'll teach you to call me a pint-sized excuse for a Basitin!

I never said that!



Ah... I'm gunna miss this when we all start going our separate ways.

Eh, Mike?

...Yeah.

Anyway, I've heard there's a grand spa bath somewhere in this place. That's what I need!

OASIS ROOM



Wow!

"Oasis" is right!
What is this? Are
we outside?

Can't be.
It was snowing, and
the manor's nowhere
near a beach.

But I can smell
the ocean... and it
feels warm...

BUBBLE
BUBBLE



Rawr I'm a
tiger shark!!

Baaaugh!

Can't say I have.
Thanks for soaking
my new robes, by
the way.



Oh, it's just
you two. Sorry,
I thought...

Have you
seen Trace
lately?

EV



Ah... ♥

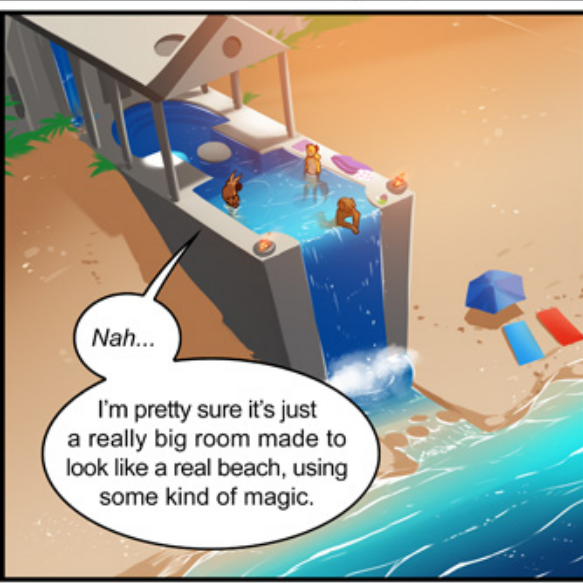
Man, now *this...* **this** is freedom.

I could stay here forever.



I'm still a little confused where "here" even is.

Did we actually leave the estate?



Nah...

I'm pretty sure it's just a really big room made to look like a real beach, using some kind of magic.



Don't try to run **too** far down the shore. You **will** hit a wall.

...Don't ask me how I know that...

Heh...



It feels real enough to me.

I don't see why Trace even bothered with all the tyrant stuff when he could have been kicking back in his own personal paradise at home!



Well...

He did end up losing the one person he'd hoped to enjoy it with.

TWOKENDS



HAPPY HALLOWEEN!





What's up, Mike?

You've been down practically since we got here.



I've just been thinking.

Mostly about where we're going from here.

This might be the last time we see...
...A lot of us.



Yeah, I guess, but why worry about it?

There's still plenty of time. It's not like we're in any rush.

I, for one, can't wait to head for home.

Pff, no. I've heard your plans.

Wait... you're not planning to continue on with us?

I don't intend to go traipsing through tiger territory chasing after some mythical village where everyone supposedly lives in harmony.

But dog territory is on the other side of the world. How are you going to get there?



By sea, of course.

Eric's got contacts. He told me he might be able to pull some strings once the port's fixed.

Eric?!

We just freed you from him, and you're going back to him for help?

I thought you didn't like Eric?

I don't like Eric. But as much as I hate to admit it, I trust him more than I would any other random captain out there.

Eric's a lot of things, but he's not a liar. When he says he knows a gal who can smuggle me home safe, I believe it.

Home... I'm as far as I've ever been, but I've never felt closer.





Evals, I'm glad you're happy.

But I think you should be careful not to get your hopes up too high.

Huh?

I've been where you are. When I first escaped, I went back to my people too.

But I had no friends, and I never found any of my family.



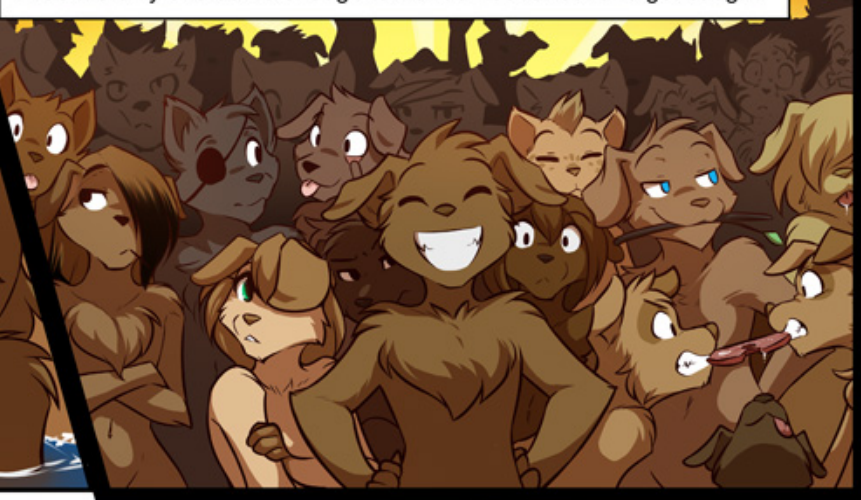
I was just... alone. It didn't turn out like I'd hoped it would.



Yeah, okay, but then everything worked out for the best, right?

I'll be fine! I don't know how tigers are, but we dogs are communal. We stick together!

Back home, I had over two dozen brothers and sisters, and twice as many cousins! Everyone was family. And I *know* they're still out there, somewhere. I was the only one dumb enough to wander too far out and get caught.



You know, Mike...

I can put in a good word for you with some of the lady dogs!

I'm sure they'll all come to love you like I do.

Trust me, it'll be great! You'll be a part of the family in no time.



Uh...

Evals... I'm not going to be there.

What? Of course you will be!



Evals,
I'm not going
with you.
I told you before,
I don't have a place in
Keidran society.

Of course
you do! You'll be
with me!



Dogs
hate foxes.

What? N-no!
They... eh... n-not
all of them...

...I don't.



Mike, would
you really rather risk
trekking through tiger
lands than go back
home with me?



Home is where
you make it! It's
family!

Evs...

And who
knows if you'll
find that over
there!



SLURP

That's not
the point. The
point is it's **not**
home for me
over there.



Mike... you're
my family too.
We're a pack!
We dogs stick
together!

Evs...



I know going back
has been your dream
since we were kids.
I don't want
anything to stand in
the way of that.

But... I need a
place where I belong
too. I'm sorry.

Once we leave...
it's probably going to
be the last time we
see each other.



THUNK!

This is the north tower study.

CREEEEAAK

For information about your past, you might find some of it in here.

Much of it is from back when you made your plans to overthrow Grand Templar Silverlock.



COUGH!

Wow, compared to the rest of the estate, this room hasn't seen a broom in a while, has it?

O-oh...



...Apologies, Master.

I would have, but...

You specifically made this one of the areas out of bounds to me. I can go-



Rose! Calm down!

Not old Trace, remember? It's fine, relax.

And please, don't call me Master. Just Trace.



R-right, sorry!

Force of habit. It's going to take a long time to get used to this.

EW-NEW!



Ah! Here, sir—

Trace.

Trace...
You should hold
on to this.

Gate Key.

It will open a
doorway back to the
gate in the garden from
wherever you are.

It's a lot
smaller than
Reni's.

They're
not normally
that large.

Keep in mind,
the gate only opens
for you, and only for
a limited time.



After which, it takes
a long time to recharge.
So I suggest saving it for
an emergency.

Thanks, Rose. I
can see how this might
come in handy...



...How safe
are we here?

Well...



The estate is
protected by many
enchancements *and*
dragon magic.

It is one of the
safest places in the
world to be...

But...?

...*But* your former
associates are quite
crafty and insidious.

I fear nothing will
stop them from eventually
finding a way in, or drawing
you out, given time.



That's what
I figured.

I think Flora
and I should have the
ceremony as soon as
we can, then—

Ah!

Rose? Are
you okay?



*Someone is
not where they
should be!*

Huh? What
do you mean? How
do you know?



Haha! Can't catch m—

Aaahh!!

Rah!



Oof!

Ow...



Hah!

Haa... haah...

See?

Being a Basitin warrior doesn't just mean brawns.

No one's as fast or as agile as me. I don't need to be huge, no matter what anyone says!

I don't need to be like my—



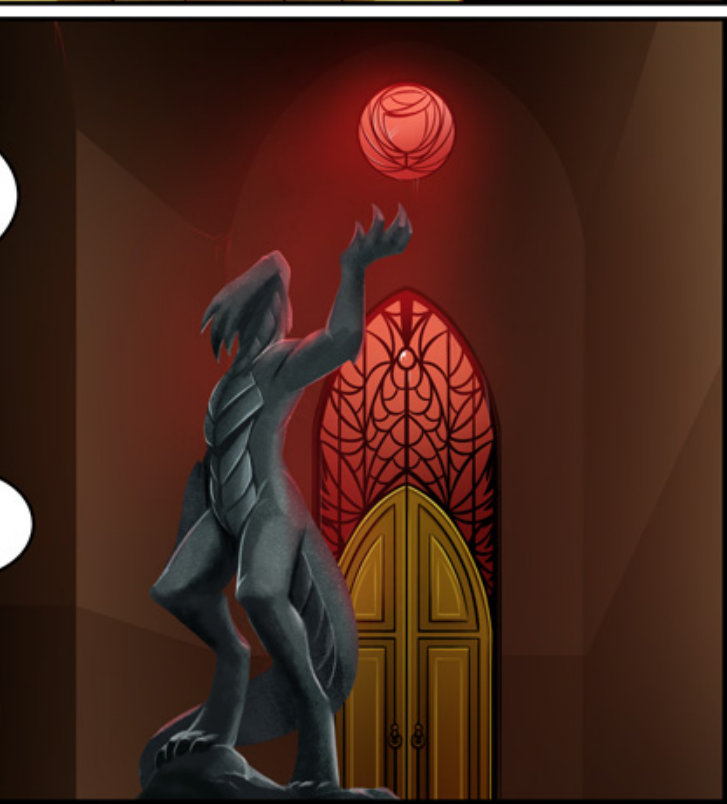
Huh?




What the...

Okay, I know for a fact that this hallway wasn't on any of my maps...

Cool!






How could I have missed an entire wing of the estate?


Weird.

Air smells stale... I don't think anyone's been here in a long time.




Hm... there's another door at the end of this side passage.

This one's a lot less fancy, though.



Y-you know, Maddie, I'm really not usually the cautious type, but...

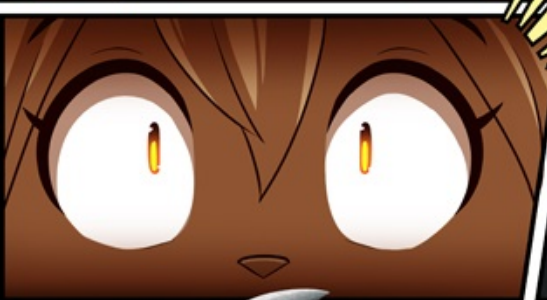


I'm kinda getting a bad feeling about this place...

Relax, I just want to look.

Trace always did have a thing for dragons.

No wings on this statue though. It's more like... a lizardfolk.



RAAAAAAAAAH!





Run!!

ROOOOAAAR!

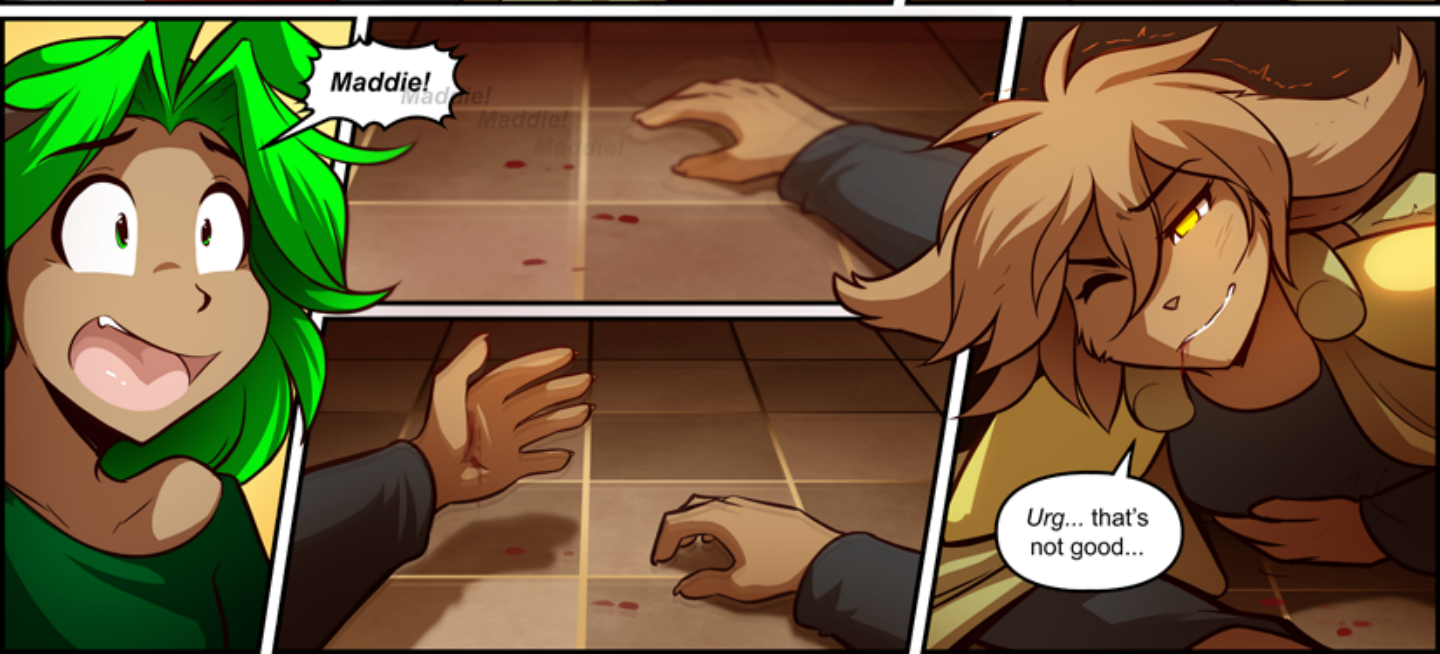
Yaaah!

SMASH!

This was a mistake! Let's get out of here!

Maddie! Something's wrong!

The way we came from... it's a dead end!





Hey Scaly!
Over here!
Yaaaaah!!



CRACK



Ow!
Ow!
Ow!



SHUFF



Wah!

!SHOONS!



Karen... you idiot, just run!
Ergh, think, Maddie! This trap wouldn't stop mom. What would she do in this situation?



HRAAAAAAAAH!!



Yeah, probably...
Okay, now what am I supposed to do in this situation, damn it!



Rose! Talk to me, what's wrong? Who's in danger?

Ngh!



Trace, there are places in the estate I have no influence over!

You didn't trust me with free reign everywhere!

Influence? What are you talking about?



There's no time!

I can explain later, but if you really care about the lives of the others, I need to have access to all rooms of the estate, now!

O-okay? Sure! Go ahead!

You have to say it!

Say that you lift the restrictions you placed on me!



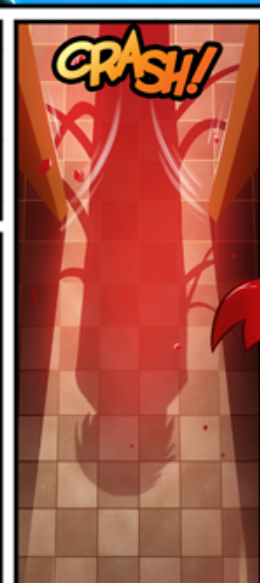
Fine! I...

NO!

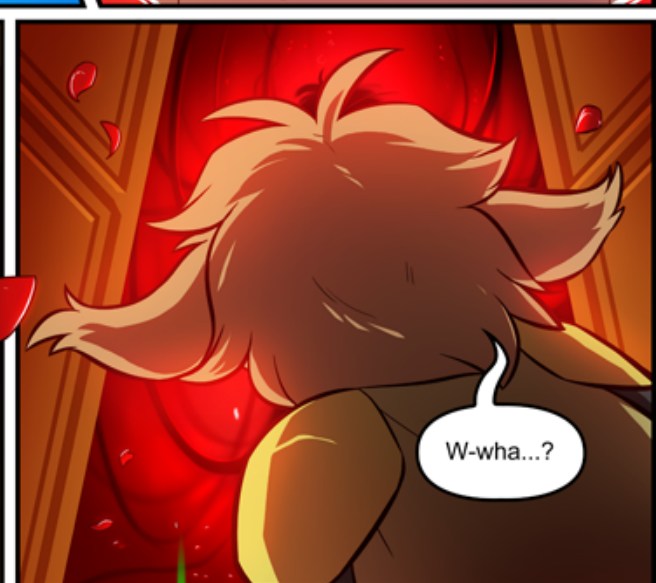
I remove your restrictions!



Ah!



CRASH!



W-wha...?



Karen!



FSST!

Ah!



FSST!

Wah!



SMASH!



Ngh...

Eugh... what happened?

Where are we?

COUGH

And why is it so cold and dusty in here?



Ah! Maddie!

Oh no... Wake up-!

I am awake, dummy.

We're in a dungeon. I'm fine.

But you got hurt...



I said I'm fine. It's just bruised ribs. I'm a Basitin.

You don't sound fine to me. What's wrong?

...
You're *not* a Basitin.

You wouldn't understand.

I can try.



When I was born, the old goats were so excited. A *new* Adelaide.

My mother was already a living legend by then. The embodiment of what it means to be a Basitin.

But as I grew up, it quickly became obvious I wasn't going to end up like her... "What a waste." They'd say. "Maybe next time." No matter how much I excelled in other ways, I was always seen as a disappointment.



And the old goats were right. Cunning can only take you so far.

I wasn't strong enough to help you. Or myself.


Madelyn, *anyone* would have had trouble with that big lizard.

And you're just a kid. You could still grow to be like her one day!



Karen, I'm not actually a kid. I'm seventeen.


My mother was twice my size at my age.



17? You're a year older than me?

Pretending to be younger isn't hard.


I don't act much. With my personality, it comes natural.



And it's not as though looking young hasn't been useful. Working for the intelligence branch, I infiltrated Western Basitin villages many times.

Excuse me! Can you help? I'm lost!

People often let their guard down around cuteness.




It's not exactly a tactic that garners a lot of respect, but it was my only real option.

I don't have the strength of my mother, or the raw intelligence of an Alabaster.

And I'm good solo, but I don't have the battle tactics of an Alaric.


There just wasn't a path for someone like me to go any further. There was no getting out from under her shadow.

But then...




Keith... an ordinary Basitin, with nothing special about him, became the first in living memory to return from banishment.

I watched him act in ways I'd never seen... even defying the generals, and with the help of Alaric, becoming one himself. A **new** one. And I realized, he didn't have to be super strong or smart. Being an ambassador... it was another path for me.



...I wanted to do what he did.



I wanted to learn everything about the outside world...

so I could come back and show them...

That I have my own worth... that I'm not just a failed version of my mom...



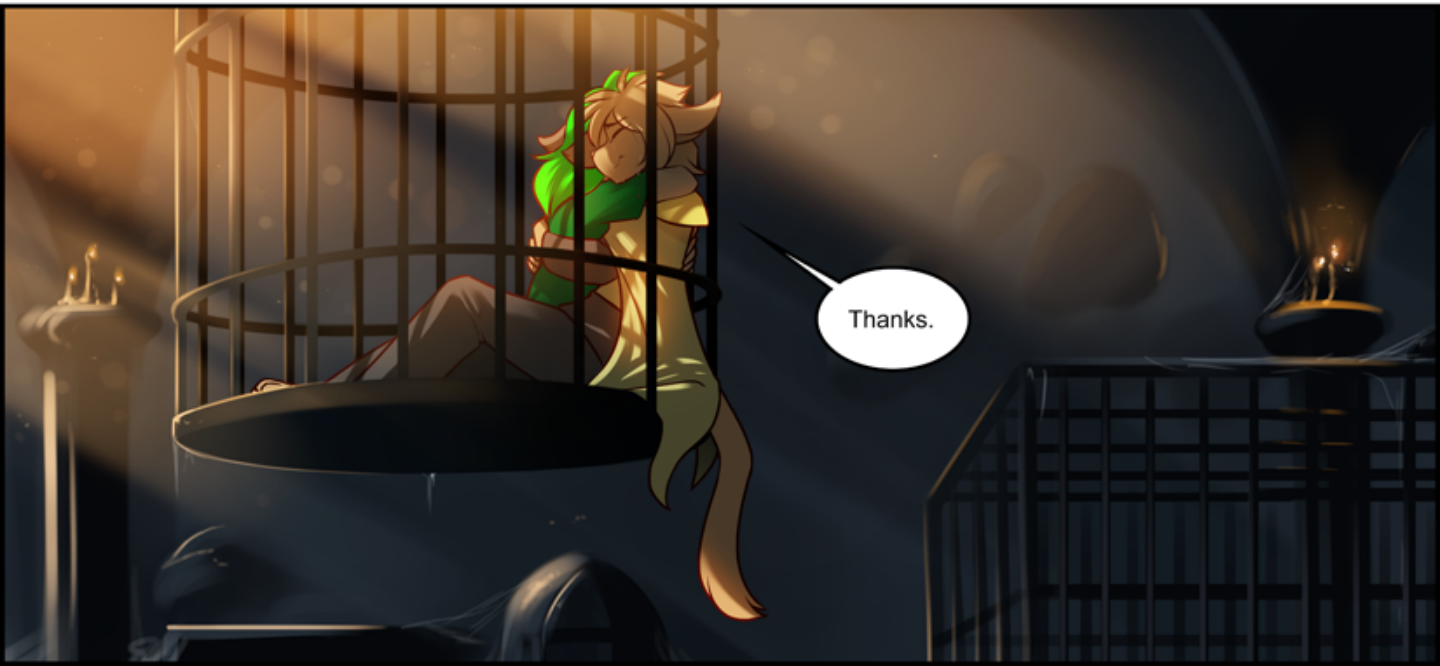
W-what are you doing, you weirdo?

Get off me! We're not family. Hugging... isn't appropriate!



You said you wanted to learn everything about the outside world.

Well this is just what humans do when we see that someone's sad.



Thanks.

NEXT PAGE WILL BE UP ON SATURDAY!
SORRY FOR THE WAIT!





Rose?

Is everyone safe now?

I...

I'd almost forgotten.

This feeling... it's like a veil was lifted... one I wasn't even aware of.

I can see now... That's where that thing was kept...



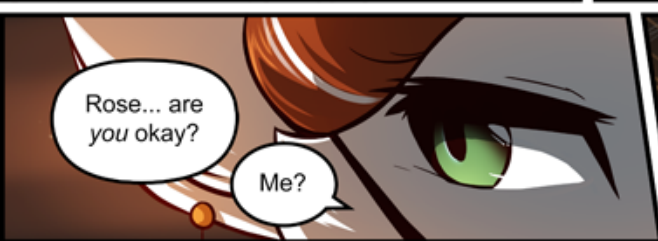
Rose!

Yes. They're safe now. I sent them to the dungeons.

The... dungeons?!

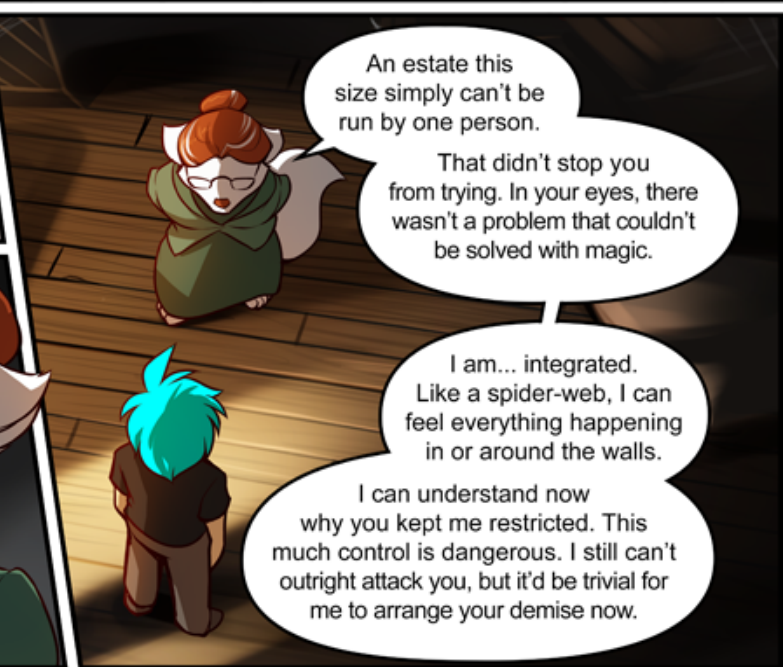
It was the default place. I didn't have time to think about it once the restrictions were lifted.

I could send them elsewhere now, but I figure they deserve a time out.



Rose... are you okay?

Me?



An estate this size simply can't be run by one person.

That didn't stop you from trying. In your eyes, there wasn't a problem that couldn't be solved with magic.

I am... integrated. Like a spider-web, I can feel everything happening in or around the walls.

I can understand now why you kept me restricted. This much control is dangerous. I still can't outright attack you, but it'd be trivial for me to arrange your demise now.

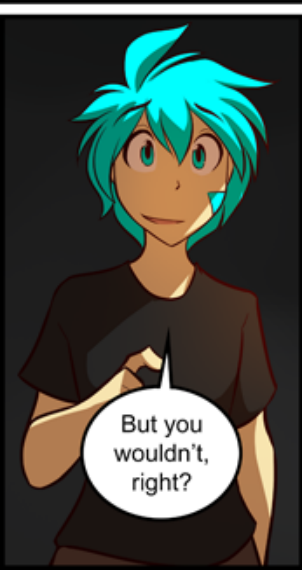


Yes... sorry.

This is just... a bit disorienting.

What is?

...As you may have guessed, I'm not a normal servant.



But you wouldn't, right?



...No, of course not.

Why did you hesitate like that?!



I had to think about it.



Raine?
You up yet?
It's already past noon!

Hello? Is this the wrong door?

Hey, Red.

Looking for Raine?

Yeah, she must have been really tired after what went down yester- huh?

What's with the getups?



Didn't you hear?

Apparently there's a fancy magic beach in the manor.

I figured after all that went down, we deserve to have a little fun and relaxation.



You know, a "thank the gods we're still alive" party.

CREAK

I hear the others survived something the other day too so its fitting!



Honestly, I'm just glad to get out of that potato sack I was wearing.

Not exactly sure how I feel about wearing the clothes of Trace's dead ex-wife, but I can't really afford to be picky.

I want to enjoy the stay here as much as possible before this whole place explodes or something.

Hey, don't jinx it!

What? I'm just being realistic.

Simply staying in the same house as Trace paints a giant target on our backs.



And given our track record, well... I'll take whatever I can get.

You have a point.

So you coming, Red? I mean, there'll probably be other Keidran there, and I know how you feel about that, so...



Beach party...

Raine... swimsuit...

Of course that's where his mind goes.



Have to be around a bunch of fleabags...

But get to chill on a beach with Raine...

Fleabags... Raine...

Don't strain yourself. Later.



Huh?



Raine!



Raine? Aren't you coming out?

I... can't...

Why? What's wrong?

It's... I don't want to say. It's embarrassing.

Raine, it's okay! You can talk to me!

Is... is it a wolf thing again?



...



Sigh...

I... didn't want you to see me like this.

Oh!



That's... different.

Raine, what happened?



I don't know!

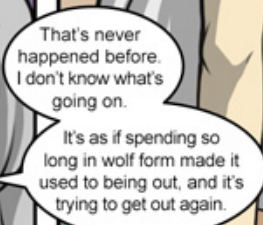
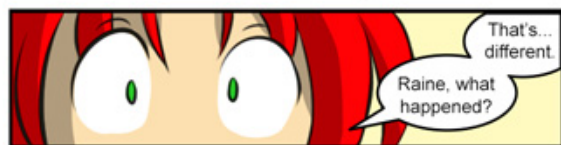
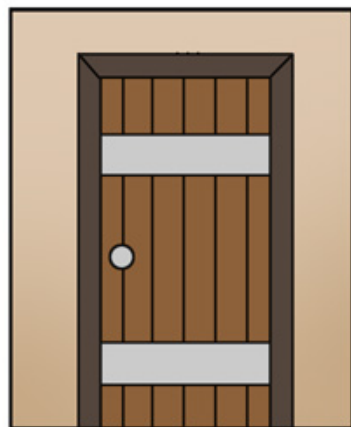
I thought maybe after yesterday I finally had more control, but then this morning I woke up like this, and my room was torn up.

I think I was sleepwalking.

That's never happened before. I don't know what's going on.

It's as if spending so long in wolf form made it used to being out, and it's trying to get out again.







I'm just going to stay in my room.

I can't go out like this.

Even if I do change back, I could shift again at any time.



Raine, it's not... that bad.



Besides, this place is already a man-agony!



A... what?

You know... lots of creatures?

Uh... wait, a menagerie?

That it! There's wolves, tigers, basitins, even a bloody **dragon** living here...



It's not going to matter to anyone how you look.

But it matters to **me!**

And it seems to still matter to you. I heard you talking outside...

"Fleabags"?

What? No! That's not... I didn't mean... you...

Damn it, I did it again! I need to watch what I say...



How I look isn't what I'm most worried about, anyway.

The sleepwalking... it scares me. What if it's just the beginning?

What if it keeps getting worse?

You've heard of feral Keidran, haven't you? Losing my body is one thing, but losing my mind...!

I could end up becoming more and more like a wolf! Until eventually I'm just an animal who doesn't even remember who she was anymore much less...

Raine!

Listen to me: you are **not** going feral! I promise.

You just need to learn more control.





I *can't*. I don't know how. My father is the only one who ever did.

You know... I had a thought about that.

Quite a coincidence, don't you think?

The story you told me about your father... you also mentioned he had a cousin named Rose, right?

Maybe?

I couldn't help but notice the caretaker of the estate also happens to be a white wolf like you... named Roselyn.

I had the same thought when I saw her, but she'd have to be pretty old for a Keidran to be the same wolf.

Well let's just go ask her!



I guess she might. Though if it *is* her, she may not want to have anything to do with me.

If she knew your dad, maybe she knows something about his abilities, too?

I am the daughter of the wolf who left her to die, after all.

Raine, you can't be afraid to ask or you'll never know!

Just be confident!

I wish it was that easy.



Pfff! Being confident *is* easy!

You just have to speak your mind and don't care if you look foolish!



Well, you certainly do that a lot.

Yeah, I— hey!

Heheh!



You know what... you're right!



I'm not solving anything moping around here!

I need to learn to stand on my own two— *wah!*



BLARG!



Your legs are still uneven.

I noticed.





Look, you just wait here.

I'll go find Rose, wherever she is, and bring her here as fast as possible!



Be right b—

...Wow, I'm good.



Eh, hullo, m... ma'am? My name is—

I know who you are.

Wha— huh? Have we met?

No, but I was aware of you. Long ago.

Master's childhood cohort. You were quite the bully, if I recall. One of the reasons why I didn't like Saria associating with Trace, considering the company he kept.



Man, I can't wait until we get to be full-fledged Templar!

Then we'll crush those filthy fleabags! And anyone else who gets in our way!

Right, Trace?

Uh... yeah, whatever.



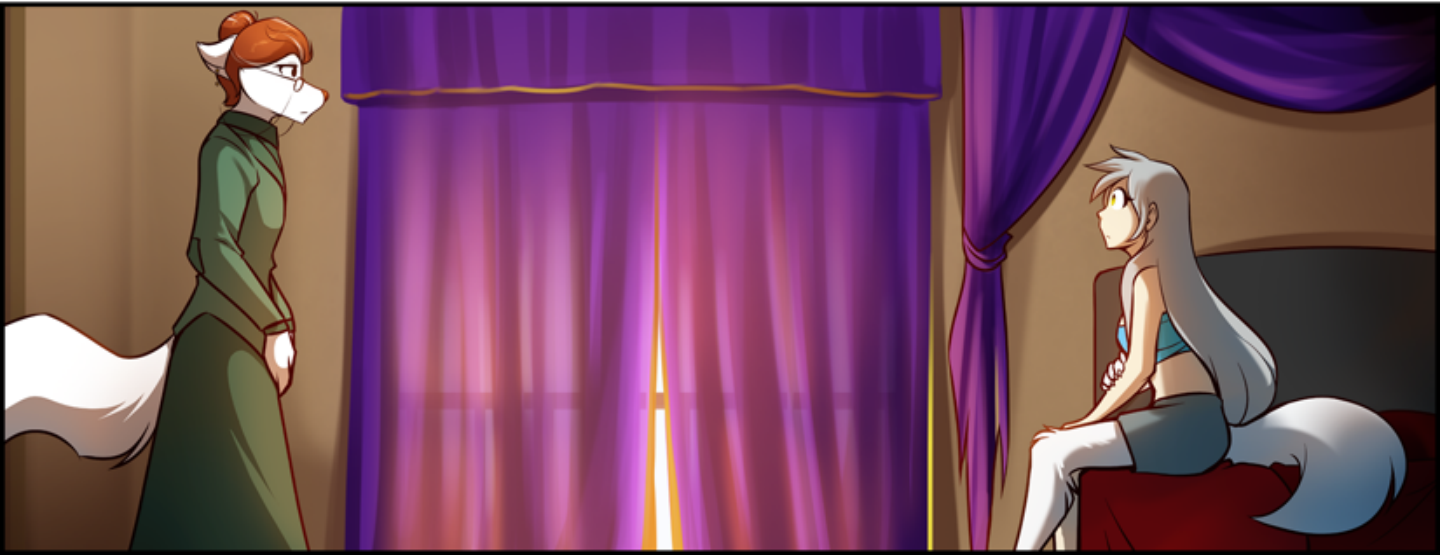
Well, like you said, that was... a long time ago.

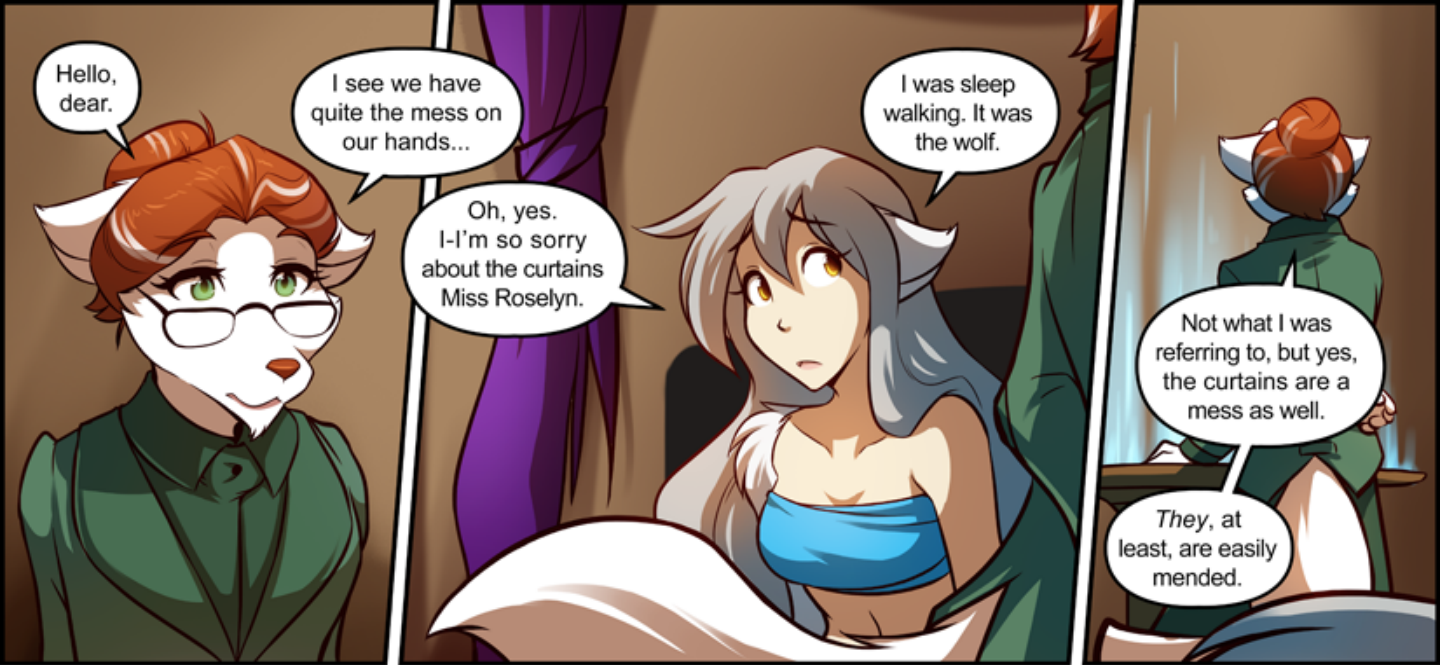
Anyway, this isn't about me!

It's my friend, Raine, she's—

CLUNK

Uh... okay, I guess I'll wait out here then.





Hello, dear.

I see we have quite the mess on our hands...

Oh, yes. I-I'm so sorry about the curtains Miss Roselyn.

I was sleep walking. It was the wolf.



Not what I was referring to, but yes, the curtains are a mess as well.

They, at least, are easily mended.



FLUMPH!



Oh!

That's fascinating!

I saw the runes on the table and wondered how they worked!

I couldn't read a lot of it, but I could tell it was very elegant runecrafting. It's not *making* the objects, right? It must be some sort of complex summoning circle, but all networked together, sourcing from a central storage room catalogue. It's brilliant! I'd—

WAG! WAG!



I'd... er, s-sorry...



You like magic, do you?

Well, I have no *real* training, but I loved *reading* about it.

I've read everything I could get my hands on.

....You really are your father's daughter.



So... you know who I am! You *are* the same Rose!

Does that mean you know about my father's abilities Anything that could help me?

Sigh... It's shameful that neither my cousin nor your mother was willing to guide you in magic...



But yes...



I can help teach you control. We are family, after all.



You have the same ability?!

It runs in the family.

Though your father's adaptation was unique.

For me, it requires mana. For your father... and now you, it comes naturally.

I'd hardly call *this* "naturally."

Only because you were never allowed to grow into it!



Your parents stunted your growth - *the bastards* - but you're an adult now. You make your own choices.

So... you wanna learn or not?

Y-yes, ma'am!

Very much so! Uh... So, w-what do we do first?



Well, we could start by evening you back up.

It'll be hard to train you if you can't even walk.



Well... I've tried!

If I knew how, there wouldn't be a problem!

But no matter what I do...

...It just won't go back to normal.



I see... well, why not try making the other one wolf too, then?

O-oh. That... might work. But if I do, then...

You don't want to lose more of your human self? Or are you afraid you might end up full wolf again?

...Both.



I understand your feelings, but if you want my help, I must insist.

I need to see you transform for myself.

Ah... o-okay. I guess I can try...

Good. Learning may not be easy...

But I promise I will help you be more whole by the end of this.



Alright... carefully...

Don't shift all the way... **Don't** shift all the way...



Woah, freaky...



Gah! Don't watch me while I'm changing!

Out.

Sorr-- ack!



Hey, did you hear that?

Tch! The nerve of that pervert.



Eh... well, it worked, I think.

Sigh... back to dog legs.

I guess it is better than being unable to walk.



The other arm changed too, though. I couldn't stop it.

Fascinating... was it painful?

No, never. It does kinda itch sometimes.

Hm, good. Painless means it truly is the same ability as Euchre's.

Though I've never seen it stopped halfway like this. Strange.



I think I know of a way to help you gain more control over your wolf side... but you're not going to like it.

In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if you outright refused, once you learn what it'll take.



I'm willing to try **anything** to fix this!

You shouldn't say that before you know what it is.



I don't care what it is. I've lived in fear of this curse my whole life...

That is the problem. The way you talk about your ability...



"It's trying to get out"... "It was the wolf."

You act as though it's your wolf form itself that you're fighting against... as if it were alive.

It does kinda feel that way sometimes...

But it's not.



Your Keidran shape is just that: a shape, an ability, a skill that requires training like any other.

But I do think the first step is to conquer this subconscious wolf you've made in your mind.

Here...



If you're truly willing, wear this.

Okay... what is it?



Ah!

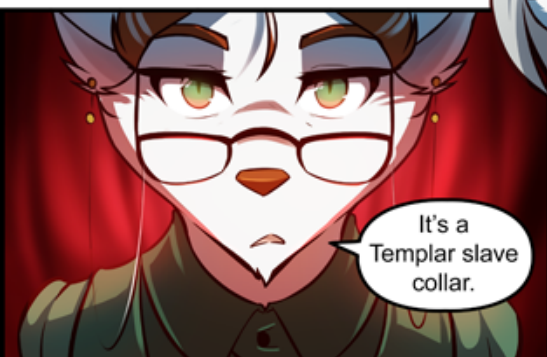
Are you out of your mind, old wolf?!

Why would I ever wear one of these?!

Because... it only works on **Keidran**.

As a human, it shouldn't have any effect on you at all.

But if it does, well... I guess you'll have no choice but to overcome the wolf and change back, now won't you?



It's a Templar slave collar.



I'm desperate to master this ability, but using this seems so... *dangerous*.

Could such an evil device really help?

I should refuse... but if it will, then...



Well, like I said, I'm not surprised.

If you won't do this, there **are** easier ways we can try first.

They won't be as effective, but you **will** get results in time.

Honestly, I picked the most drastic method I could think of first to see how you'd react.

I'm glad there's a cautious mind in that head of yours. That's good. You'd be a fool to just blindly—



...I can't.



Uh... actually, I already put it on.

Wait, was I not supposed to?



Lesson one: Slap yourself.

Huh?

Wah! What the—?!

SLAP!



You told me to!

That's for putting it on! ...And calling me old!

Yes, but you didn't even question it! What if I had ulterior motives?

You can't trust **anyone** so recklessly! **Everyone** is capable of betraying you!

We're family, though!



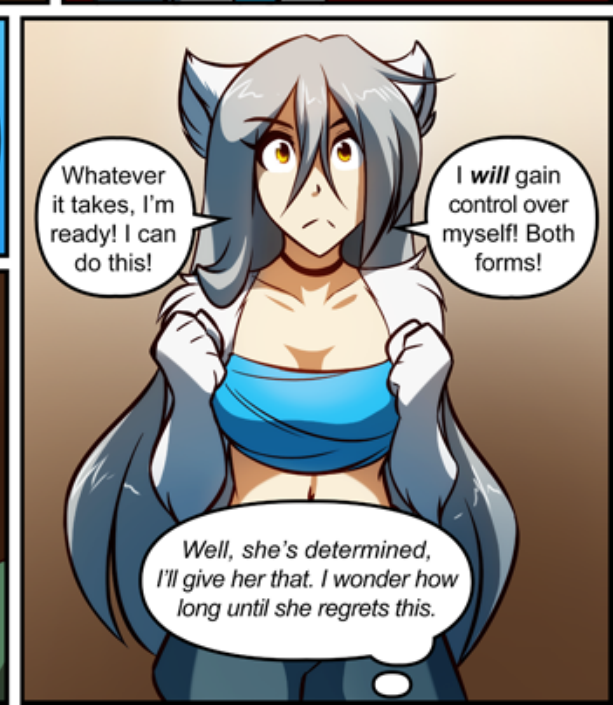
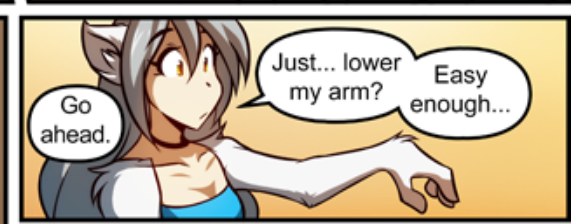
Especially family!

Out of anyone family can...



...can...

Er, sorry. Nevermind.





Wow, that was cool, Maddie!

How did you learn to pick locks like that?

Eh, it's no big deal.

Just a skill I needed as an infiltrator.



THUD!

THUD! THUD!

Wait, what's that sound?



THUD!

Something's coming down the hall!

THUD!

THUD!

The statue!
It's back!

AAAAAAAAAAAAHHH!



What in the world is going on down here?

Statue?



Renii!

Oh, thank goodness. It's just a dragon.





Wait, you're awake?!

<...You're not going to eat me, are you?>

What?!
Ew, no!



<But she might if you don't talk!

H-hey!

So, who you workin' for? Where? What's his plan?>

<U-uh... I work for the boss... Clovis. And the rest... I dunno?>

<Don't play dumb! You must know something! What's your rank?>



<Rank? Well... I am Brutus! The boss's personal bodyguard!

And... I - I just do whatever the boss says!

He likes that I don't bother with questions.

In fact, he once told me when drunk that I'm the one wolf he enjoys having around most!

Though he did make me swear later never to tell anyone he said that. >



...
<Whoops.>



So? What'd he say? What'd he say?!

Augh!

I dunno! I couldn't pay attention. He's not wearing any pants!



A-alright, that's enough! You two can't just interrogate the prisoner like this!

Lt. Reed needs to be here for a proper, legal questioning.

In the meantime, I'm going to escort you both back to the manor.

...and maybe find some pants.



...Then I tried to distract it, and that big dumb lizard almost squashed me!

Er... no offense.

None taken.
You two are very lucky to have survived a stone guardian!

OASIS ROOM



I guess it was partially our fault for snooping where we shouldn't have.

Oh, speaking of which, Maddie! Didn't that weird door open?

Did you get a look at what was in there?

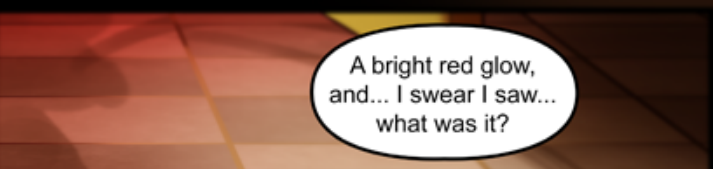


Oh, yeah! I almost forgot.



I was pretty disoriented, but I did see it.

There was... something.



A bright red glow, and... I swear I saw... what was it?



I... can't remember.

Maddie!



Your nose, it's bleeding.

Hm?

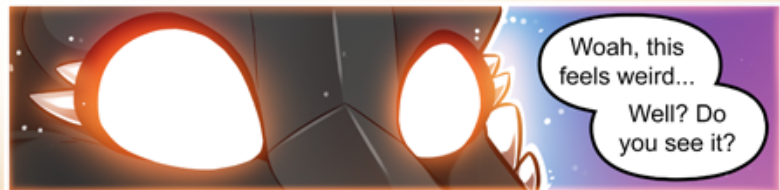
Huh... yeah. Guess I was a little more beaten up by that dumb rock than I thought.



.....

Would you mind if I took a look for myself?

Huh?



Woah, this feels weird...
Well? Do you see it?



I...
Sorry, I'm afraid not. I saw the door, and the fight...
But y-you... must have been pretty dazed. I couldn't see it either.

Aw, man!
All that trouble for nothing.



(...It was just as I thought, the memory was removed.

And not just the memory, but even the idea of trying to go back again.

It simply won't occur to either of them.)

Oh well.

(That's dark magic. Troubling.

What could be going on in this place?)



(Something sinister... I can smell it.)



Karen.
Staying out of trouble, I hope?

Oh, hey there, sis!

Nope!



What about you?

Going to spend the day on the beach with Syyyythe?

I don't like how you just put that, but yes.

Naked!



Well, you two seem to have found your friends, So I guess it's time I took my leave for now—

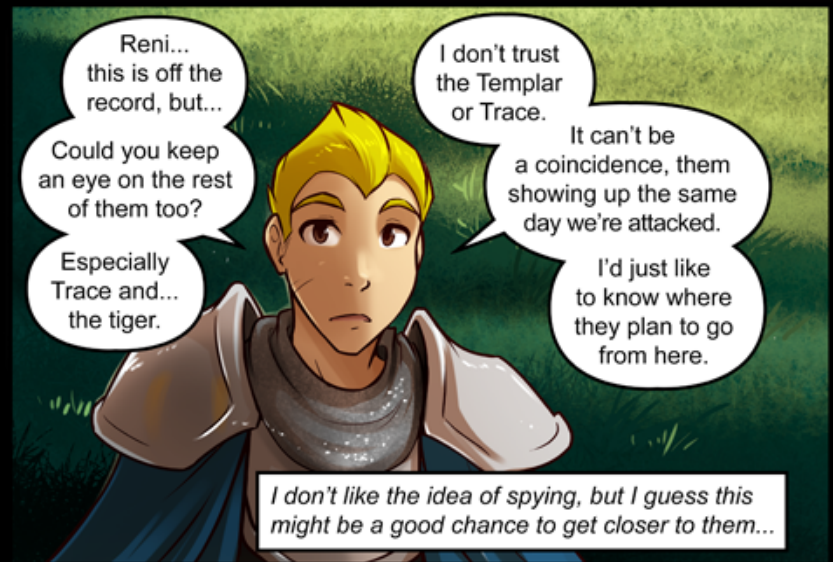
Wait, Reni!
Come party with us!

...beg your pardon?

We're all going to the magic beach! You should come too! It'll be fun.



M-me...?





I get how you feel, Mike.

I do. I just...

I always thought we'd stick together.

If it was anything else, I-I would...



Hey... don't worry about it! I know. You've talked about going home since we were kids.

I don't want to spoil the mood.

Let's... just enjoy partying these last few days! ...While we can.



Damn! Get a load of this place.



Oh, thank the masks, more people.

I don't even care that it's our ex's, just save me from this awkwardness.



Wow, there really is a beach!

Though I'm surprised **you're** surprised. Wasn't Trace your boyfriend?

Hmph.

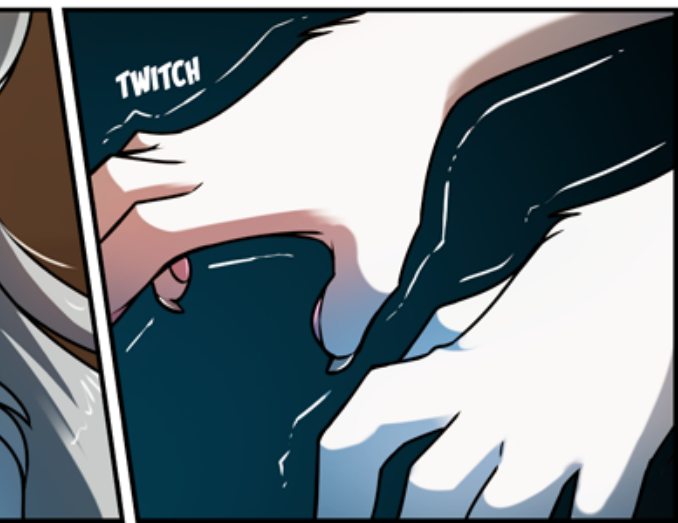
He was. Though I'm not sure what I was to him.

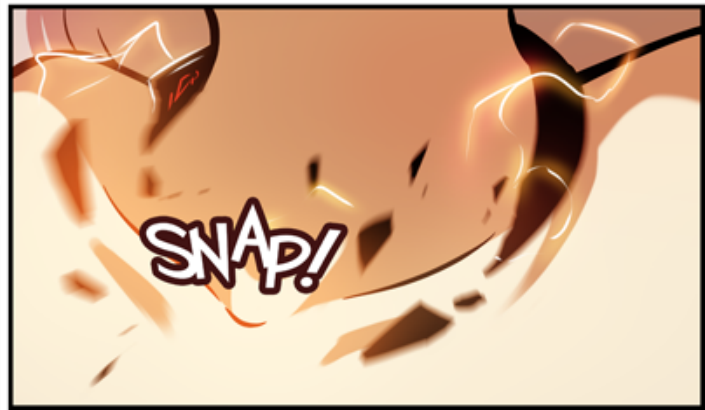


Suffice it to say, he never invited me here before.

Huh.











Thank you, Ms Roselyn.

Although that **was** a pretty mean trick.

Desperation can be a good motivator.

And little embarrassment never killed anyone.

But for what it's worth, if you'd failed... I could have wiped his memory of it.

What?!
You're bluffing!

Then again, it does sometimes damage the mind, and it doesn't seem like he has much mind to spare.

Hey!



Anyway, I was serious when I said it's going to take more than one lesson to master your gift.

But you have... *potential*. How would you feel about me teaching you magic?

Teach me? Like... as your student?

...It's not going to be as intense as this every time, is it?

No, no.

We'd start from the ground up. The basics. Just a few lessons, while you're staying here.



I... I'd like that. I'd like that a lot!

I've always wanted formal magic training, outside of books.

Good. We'll start tomorrow, then.

But for now, go on. Have fun with your friends. I have work to do.

O-okay! Thank you so much again, Ms Roselyn!

...*Potential*, indeed.



So, this must be the place.

...Huh...

It's turning cold outside, but in here it's like summer! Cool!

THUMP! THUMP! THUMP! THUMP!

But where's—

Oh no.

Grawr!

Blarg!

WUMPH!

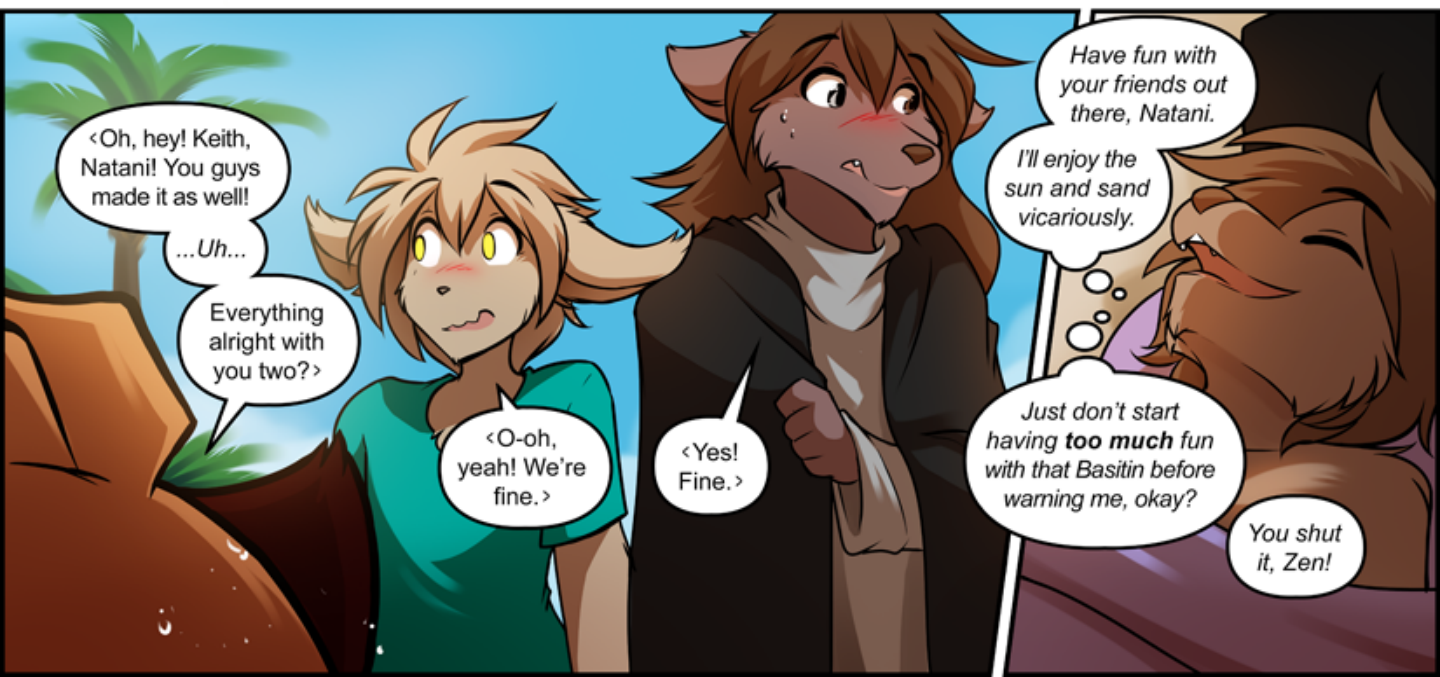


Hi.

Flora. Don't you think you should take it a little easier?

Why? Just cause I'm carrying a baby? Tigress mothers stay active right up until we're due! We're not delicate like you humans.

Hrmp.



<Oh, hey! Keith, Natani! You guys made it as well!

...Uh...

Everything alright with you two?>

<O-oh, yeah! We're fine.>

<Yes! Fine.>

Have fun with your friends out there, Natani.

I'll enjoy the sun and sand vicariously.

Just don't start having **too much** fun with that Basitin before warning me, okay?

You shut it, Zen!





Hey!

<Guess who brought lunch?>

(It's me!)

<Oh, Kat! You don't have to do that. You should be down at the party with the others.>

<I will, later, but I wanted to do this first.>



<Natani and Keith left already?>

<You know... it's funny.

This isn't exactly how I pictured our reunion. I thought things would kind of just... go back to the way they were. The Assassin Brothers, together again!

<Yeah, but it's fine. With a mental link, we're never **really** apart.

But seeing them together, it's started dawning on me that... Natani's been building a new life.

And... they've got their own stuff going on now.>

And I'm... not really part of it anymore.>



<Don't say that. Things are going to change, it's a part of life...>

But you'll always be family.>

<Keith's just... a part of your pack now too!>



<Our pack, huh? Hm...>

Never thought I'd have one of those. Never in a million years thought it'd be **Natani** to start one before me.>



Yo!

We made it!
And it looks like everyone else did too.

Sorry for the wait.

Well, you didn't miss anything.



We haven't started mingling yet. Honestly...

I'm not really sure how to interact with any of Trace's new... friends.

You were right though, this place really is a zoo.



Wow, no kidding.

It's almost like Trace went out of his way to collect one of every breed of fleab-



Er... f... furred... folk!

But, you know. It's... whatever.



...Did sword-for-brains just... think before talking for once?

I don't even know how to react to that.

Trace dating a Keidran is one thing, but this...

This is truly a sign of the apocalypse.



Seems like everyone's here. I'm gunna go find a drink.

Hang on! Reni's not back yet!

Erm... I'm here.

Huh? Wha... Reni?

H-hi...



This... is the current version of my human form.

It's still a work in progress!

Woah, that's *so cool!*

I thought dragons could only turn into animals?

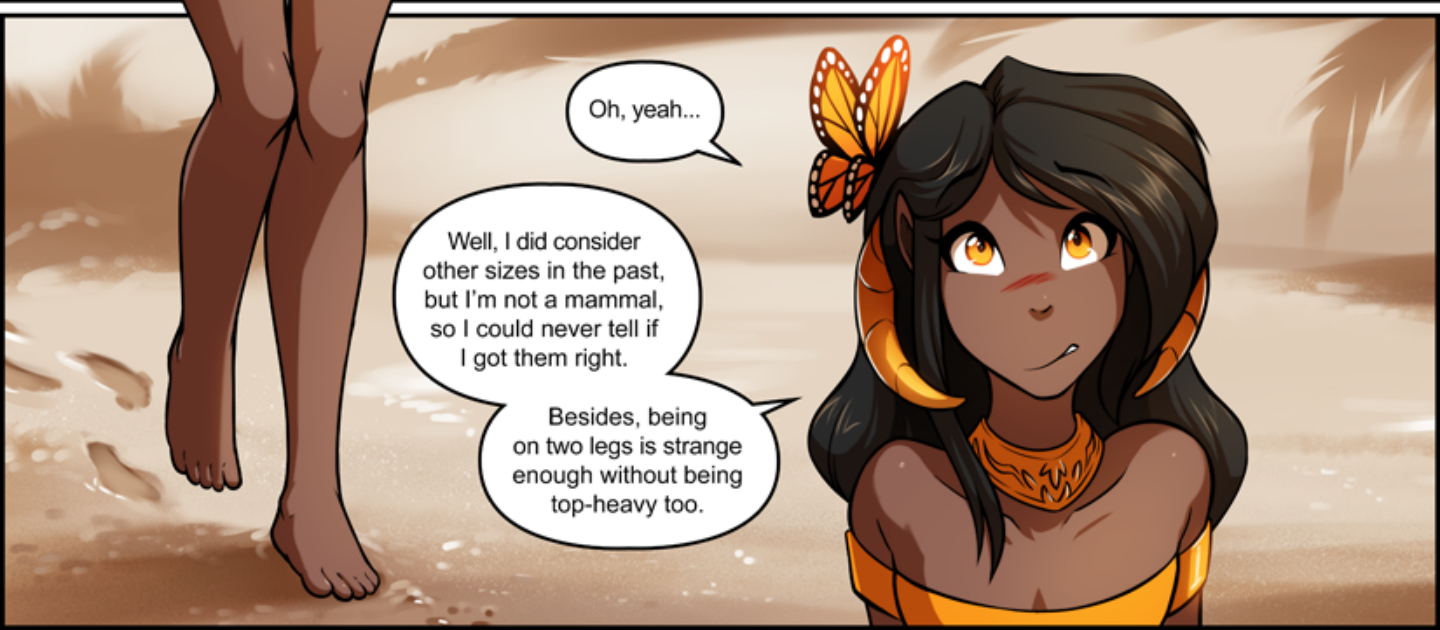
We can be human, though it's hard not to look off in some way.

Most just don't out of pride, I think- eh?!

You forgot two things.

Karen!
Boundaries!

POKE!
POKE!



Oh, yeah...

Well, I did consider other sizes in the past, but I'm not a mammal, so I could never tell if I got them right.

Besides, being on two legs is strange enough without being top-heavy too.



<Natani? You're... Are you okay being like that?>

<Well, it's too hot for a sweater in this place!

And... I... want to be here with everyone. I've never been able to do stuff like this before.

Ngh... so, I guess I'm just... seeing how this goes...>



<Hey Natani! What's up with the wrapped chest?>

Huh?

<Wait, you... don't know?>

<Know what?>

<F-Flora, leave it!>



<No, it's okay, Keith.

She's going to find out eventually. I'd rather it came from me first.>



<Hm? Wait... what?!>

<You... Huh?!>



<Really?>



<Wow. So, under there... huh...>



<Well, they can't possibly be very big if you can hide them so well like that!

And that means, with Reni, there's now **two** people here with breasts smaller than mine! Sure it's a guy and a dragon, but I'll take it! **Victory!**>

<...Seriously, Flora? **That's** what you think of first?>

<I'm fine with this! Don't correct her!>



Alright, enough with the yappin'! We're all here!

It's time to party!

Let's go!

CLINK!

THWAP!

SMACK!

OASIS ROOM

Tlop!



Some time later...

Hey, Maren!

Hungry?

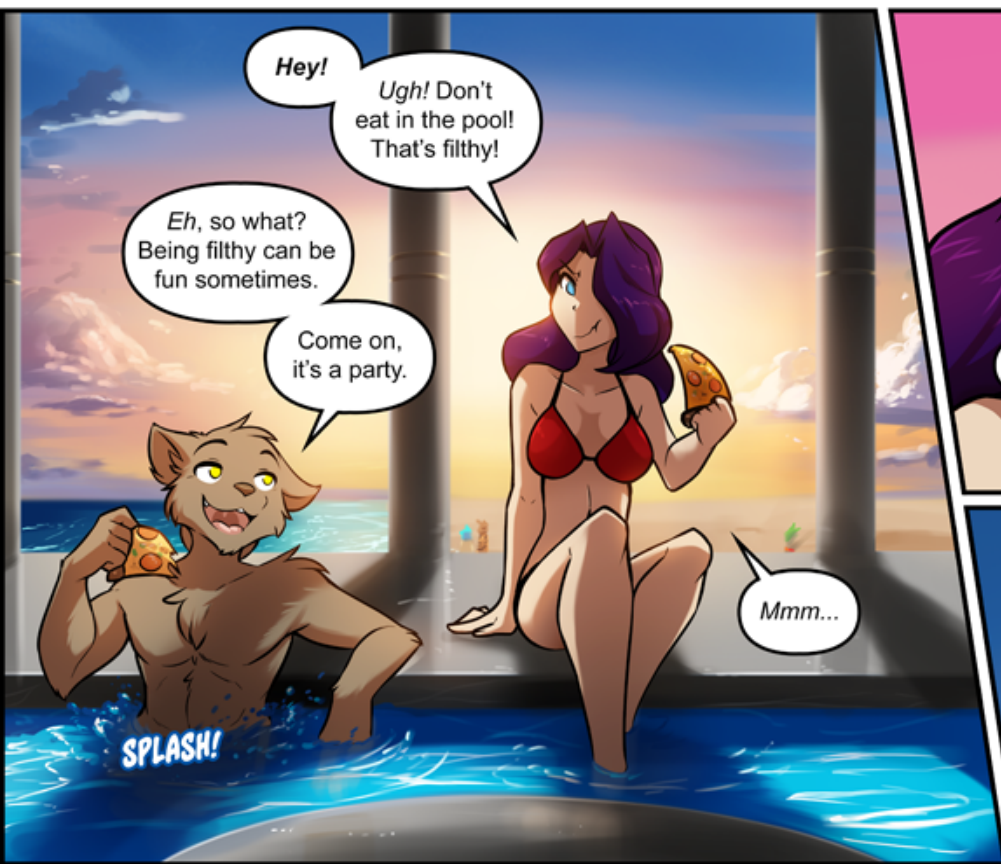


Where in the world did you get this from?

Magic table.

It reminded me of the first night we met. Remember?

Oh! Yeah...



Hey!

Ugh! Don't eat in the pool! That's filthy!

Eh, so what? Being filthy can be fun sometimes.

Come on, it's a party.

Mmm...

SPLASH!



...NOM



Hey, Maren.

Hm?



...What do you say the two of us head back to the rooms and hook up, right now.

GULK!



What?!

Don't make jokes like that!

I'm not joking. Why not?

Why not?! Because you're a wolf, idiot!



We're different species!

So?

Doesn't seem to have stopped our ex's any.

And if it's good enough for the Grand Templar...



Why would *you* even want a relationship?

Aren't humans... disgusting to you?



No, no, no! The whole world might be turning upside down, but I'm not going along with it!

Okay! Okay! Fair enough.

If you don't want it, that's fine!



Oh, come on, Maren. Fur or not, you're anything but disgusting.

And it wouldn't be something so serious as a *relationship*.

Just a way to, you know, feel things out. Satisfy curiosity.



I thought you might be curious too, but maybe not. It's cool. Don't worry about it.

...I...

I need to get a drink.



Oh, okay, sure. There's a table down by the beach.



...Is there one in your room?

Meanwhile...

Ah-hah!
Gotcha!

BAWK!
BAWK!
BAWK!

BE-KAW!!

CHOMP!

Yeeeeoow!!

Mmfff?
Templar?

It's me,
Roan, you
stupid idiot!

...Why were
you a chicken,
Roan?

Me and Sam
were caught by the estate
security looking for a way
to break **you** out!

So thanks for
trying to eat me,
you moron!

Oh... sorry.
I'm glad you're
okay. Uh...

Say... just asking,
but... are you going
to eat that egg?

Or... ?



There's the table.

Just ask it for whatever you want and it appears! If they have it.

Huh... handy. Could have used this at my tavern.



Gods... am I *really* actually considering this?

He said it wouldn't be serious, so it doesn't have to mean anything.

But still! He's a Keidran! Am I crazy?



Maren, not to shoot myself in the foot, but I told you, it's okay if you're uncomfortable.

I know humans don't go this fast.

We can just take it easy.



Ngh...

Tell me, Wolfboy! Just how different *are* you from a human?

Uh... huh? In what regard?

You *know* what I mean! How do you... compare?



Um, I'm not really sure?

But... I mean, I'm not wearing any pants right now...

So...



Drinks! Yes! Need drinks!



Table! I order you to make me a red wine... er, actually make that whiskey... a whole bottle!

...Hello?

You actually have to put your hand on it first.

Oh.



Okay? Whiskey!

...!



It's... her!

She's here?



Maren.

She's finally here! It took long enough.



She really **does** look like her.

Good. At last, we finally have **the body**.



Uh...

Did I do it wrong?



Ah! Is that supposed to be happening?

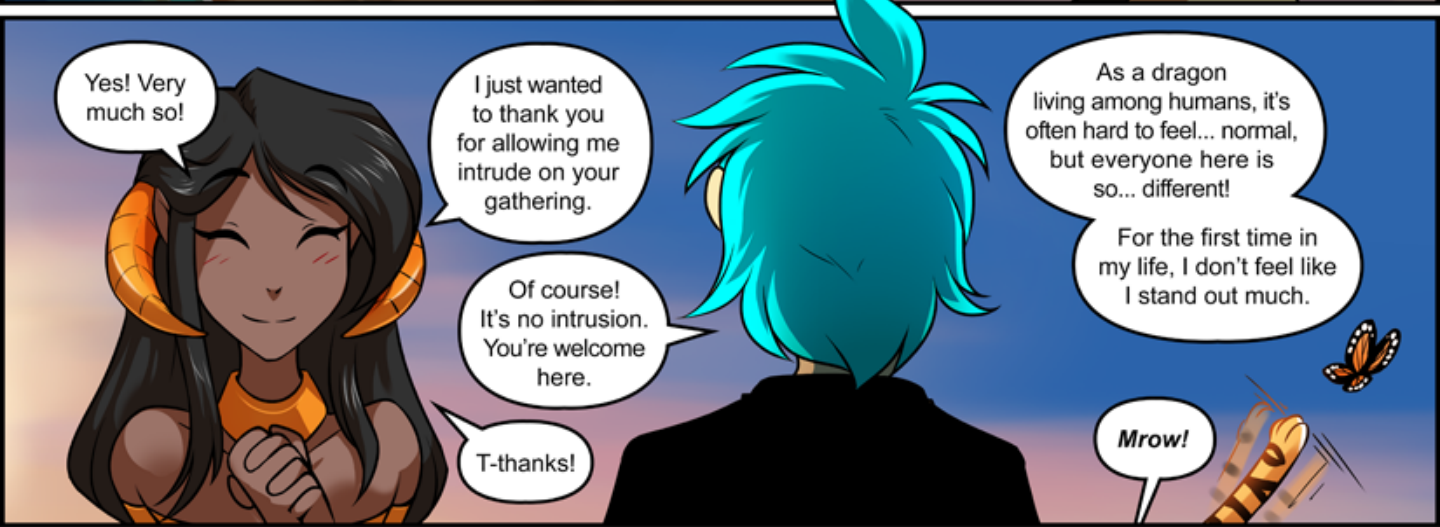
Huh?!



Trace!



Oh!
Hey, Reni!
Everything alright?



Yes! Very much so!

I just wanted to thank you for allowing me to intrude on your gathering.

Of course! It's no intrusion. You're welcome here.

T-thanks!

As a dragon living among humans, it's often hard to feel... normal, but everyone here is so... different!

For the first time in my life, I don't feel like I stand out much.

Mrow!



This is... a very odd but remarkable group of friends you have.

Yeah. I'm glad we've managed to finally all gather in one place.

Without a fight breaking out, anyway.

Speaking of which, I actually want to say something while most are still here...



Could I interrupt everyone for a sec?

Hm?



THUMP!

Hey!
Not fair!



I know many of us will be going our separate ways soon enough.

Some of you are headed home... and others are continuing on with us.

But we're all here together now. And while we are...



There's one thing I'd like to do, before we get scattered again...



Flora...



Yes, Trace?



GEH!

Let's get married!



Trace! That's not the way you're supposed to ask that!



What?!



...It's not?



Oh?

Oh!

S-sorry, I didn't know there was a procedure!

I don't have anything to give, or—

It's okay, Trace. You already did.

Just ask me the question.

O-ok!

Flora...

Will... you marry me?

Yes.



Aaaaww!

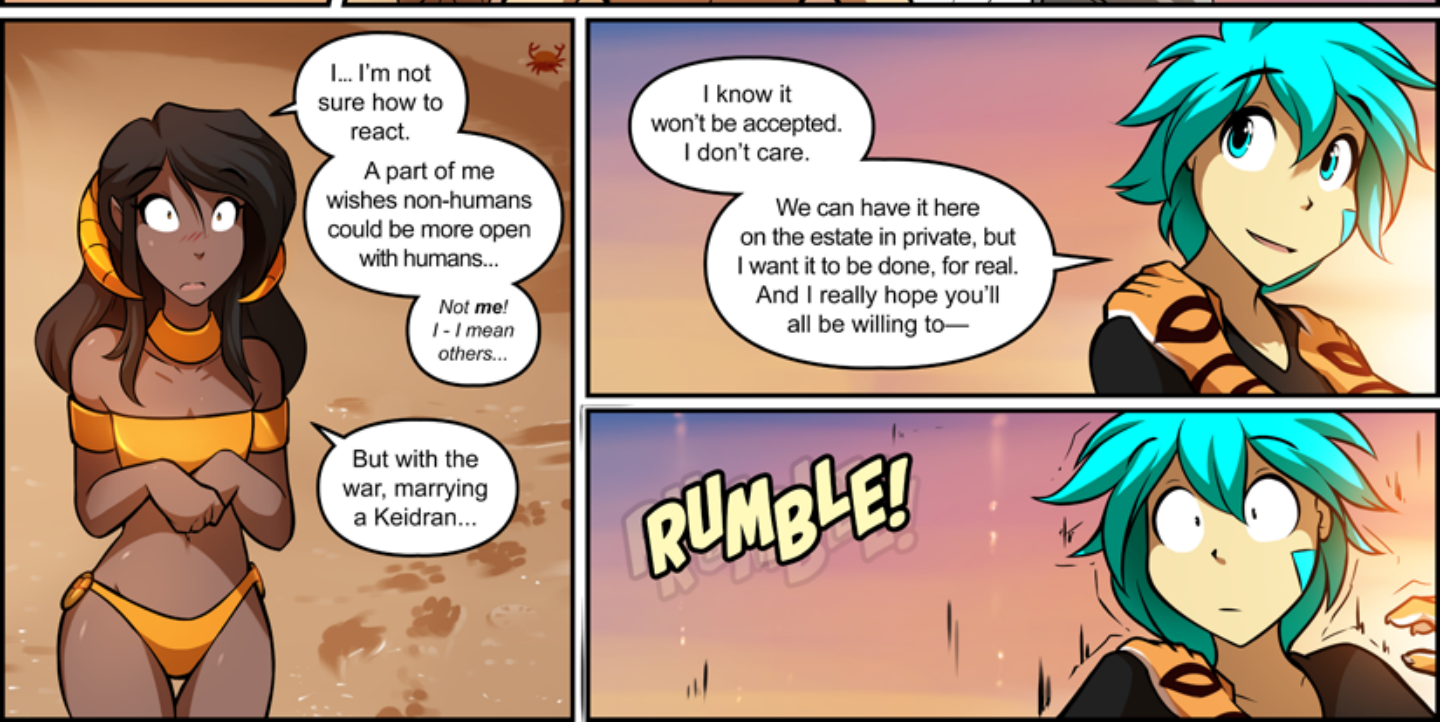
What?!

No no no! This is crazy!

Fooling around is one thing, but... **marriage?!**

Y-you can't **do** that!

Yes I will.



I... I'm not sure how to react.

A part of me wishes non-humans could be more open with humans...

*Not me!
I - I mean others...*

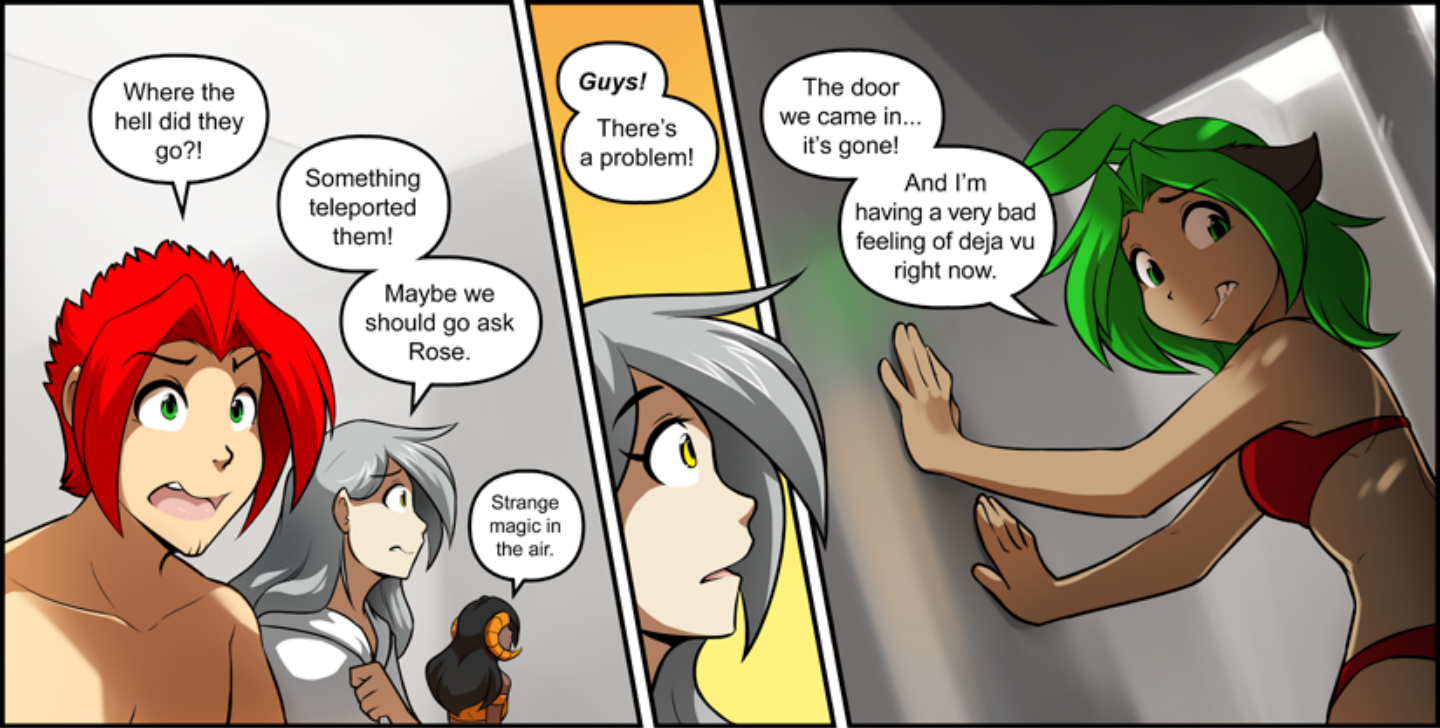
But with the war, marrying a Keidran...

I know it won't be accepted. I don't care.

We can have it here on the estate in private, but I want it to be done, for real. And I really hope you'll all be willing to—

RUMBLE!





Epilogue

Huh?

**KNOCK
KNOCK**

Are you Adira?

Yes?
Can I help you?

The guard is investigating the recent wolf attack on the city.

And anyone who may have been in connection with it.

I'm afraid we have word they came through this tavern.

You will need to come with us.

What?!

Mom!

CRASH!