



TWO KENDS

Chapter 21

SACRIFICES OF THE PAST



Ngh...

Urgh... What happened?

Flora? Are you okay?

Yeah, I think so.



I saw you teleport away. I grabbed on just in time.



Where are we?

It looks like we ended up in a hallway.

That's weird. I wonder if I messed up where it was trying to send you.

Maybe...

Rose?

Hello? Are you there?



Strange. Usually she always seems to pop out of nowhere when her name is.... huh?



WARK!

AH!



Erg!

WARK



Get off him you... rock... lizard thing!

Flora, wait! I think it's okay!



LIIICK!

Huh?



HISsssSsss!

Ah!

Woah woah! You too! Stop!



Listen to me! Flora... is our friend. Okay?

I know she's a Keidran, and... that might sound strange coming from me...

But she is. *Do not* hurt her.

In fact, don't hurt anyone unless I say so.

...Understand?



Eh-heh... Hello...



LICK!

Ack!

You want *what*?

Absolutely *not*!

Nora...

No. Caricatures of dragons acting as your personal guard dogs?

It's insulting! And a waste of my magic.

It's not for me! It's for *her*.

I made a few attempts myself, but they just don't have the spark of life you could give it.

Dragons! Made of stone, for protection. Think of it!

Nora... please?

Rawgh! I... suppose I could make you...

A lizard.

Not a dragon!

And just the one! You want more, you're on your own.

This counts as my gift for the birthday.

Thank you, Nora.

You take advantage of me, you know that, right?

You say that like you don't want me to.

Snrk! Cheeky. Just don't push it, little one.

Trace, it's following us.

Are you **sure** this thing is safe?

Yeah, I'm sure. I remember... Nora made him for me.

Stoneward.

I left him here to protect something.

I also recall— wait a minute...

I *specifically* recall ordering you not to jump on me like that again!

Didn't I?

Stoney... look at me...

Meanwhile...

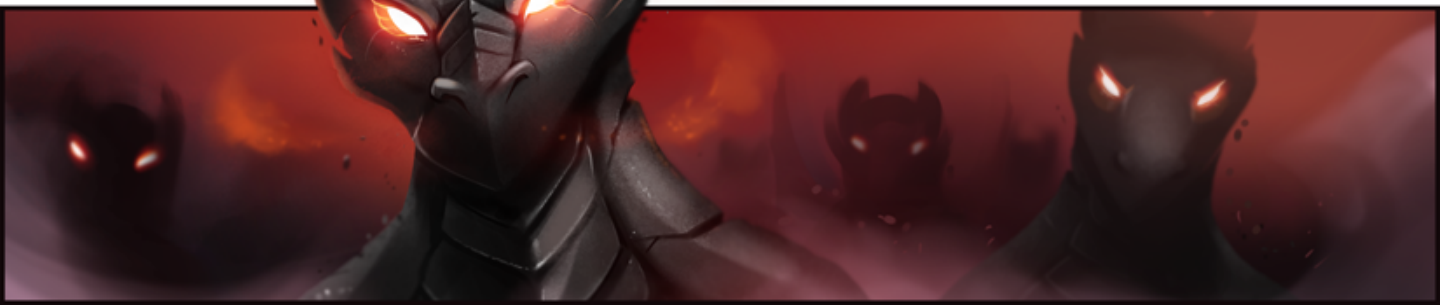
This door behind the waterfall is nothing but a bunch of beach junk!

There's no way out.

Reni! Go dragon! Bust down a wall!

H-hang on! Let's not be hasty!

It could be just a simple malfunction. I can't go right to destroying property before knowing if we're actually in any real danger.



Listen!

I don't know what you are, but I am Princess Reni!

These people are under royal protection! I order you to st—



GRRAGLH!

Ugh!



Reni!



RAAAAAA!
SMASH!



THUD!

THUD!



Erg... hard way, then.

Everyone stay back!



I really don't want to fight like this, but... no time for modesty.





It's just an old bedroom.



Darn, I was hoping for a way out...





No! Ngh--!

Trace?!
What's wrong?
Talk to me!

Was
Saria...?



Saria...!
She'd just
learned...

I remember!
We made plans...
a trip to the cabin
to celebrate.

When the
wolf... the filthy
Keidran scum!



Trace, you have to
stay in control! Listen to me!
It's in the past. I'm here
with you now!



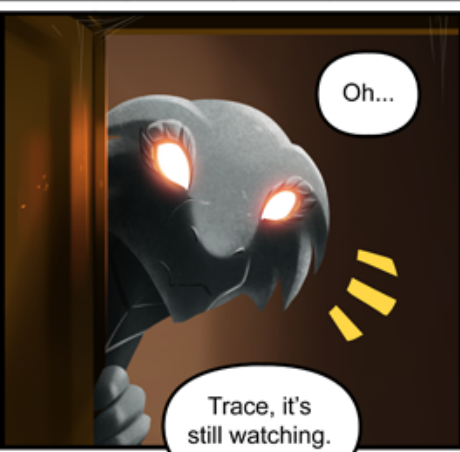
Trace...
please...



Flora...
I'm sorry.

The memories...
they came so much
stronger this time.

But I'm okay. Oddly,
I don't feel the other part
of me trying to get out this
time. I think even he would
rather not be here.





SNAP!



Gah!



RAAAH!!

A little help!



TSSSCH!!



HAAH...

<Claws off my Basitin.>

HUFF...

Natani?!

<How are you using magic without mana crystals?>



<I'm not, see?>

When I realized that table could spit out crystals, well...

I stashed as many as I could fit in... erm... here.>



<Can you teleport us out?>

<First thing I tried, but I'm blocked.>

<Blocked?>

<It's like the building itself is trying to keep us in here.>

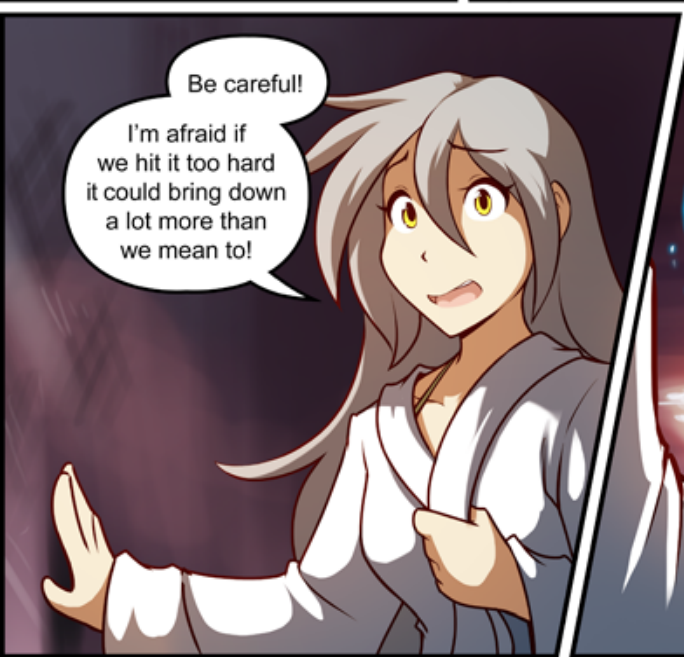
We're gunna have to break our way out.>



<Thankfully...>

For the first time in my life, I don't have to worry about running out of mana.>







<That's it? Just a tiny crack?>

That same magic took a chunk out of those lizards a minute ago!

It nearly took a chunk out of me!



Didn't you hear what Raine said? You could have hit her, you idiot!

Natani doesn't know human!

<I know what "idiot" means!

You got something to say, Red?!

Uh... guys?!



The moment you chipped that wall, every statue turned to look our way! I think we've got their attention!

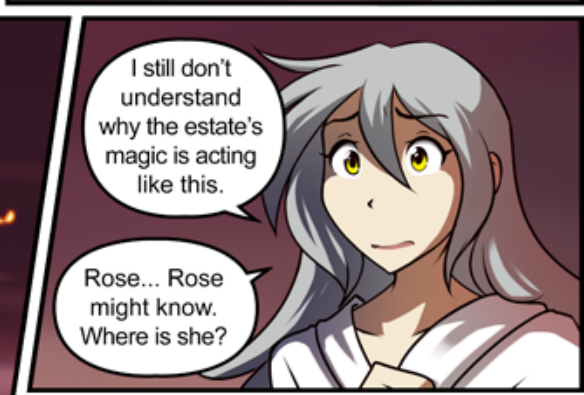
<Hey! That's the one I killed!>

Shit! Well, just means we're on the right track.



We'll smash any that get past the dragon and take out this wall together.

<Yes.> To-geh-ter.



I still don't understand why the estate's magic is acting like this.

Rose... Rose might know. Where is she?



...Detritus...



Are you sure you're okay now, Trace?

I'm alright. Don't worry.



Oh! I didn't notice this painting here before.

It's another of Miss Roselyn, like the one in the foyer.

Ah, yeah. Saria's work again.

It seems like she enjoyed painting Rose a lot. They must have been good friends.

Saria's death had to have been devastating to her as well.



I wonder if Rose was planning to be the nanny, had Saria lived?

I don't remember, but... yeah, probably. She acts like a stern old wolf now, but somehow I get the feeling back then she'd have been just as excited.

SIGH

Come on, we should get out of here.

I don't like this place. Too many old...

Hang on.
Something's
not right.

What's
the matter,
Trace?

Look at
the dust.

Everything in
this room hasn't been
touched in years.

But it almost looks like
someone set this painting
down here recently.

Huh? You're right.
It was probably on a wall
somewhere before,
like the others.

It must have
been Rose who
moved it.

But... why would
she take a painting of
herself off a wall and
hide it in here?

Unless...



A-AH!



Flora?!

Flora, what is it?!
What's wrong?



Trace...
look at the
painting.



What? It's
just a painting.
I don't see...

GASP



ROSELYN

SENESCHAL OF THE LEGACY ESTATE
454 - 480



Rose...?

Yes...
master?



Rose?!
Huh...?
I heard her.

Flora, stay here, I'll—



No way!
You're not leaving me alone in this haunted place!



Stoney? Stay close. Protect Flora, okay?

NOD
NOD

Good boy.



Trace...
Detritus....

Rose! What's going on?! You can't really be... a-are you... dead?

Dead...?
Not entirely. But I am... less than I was.

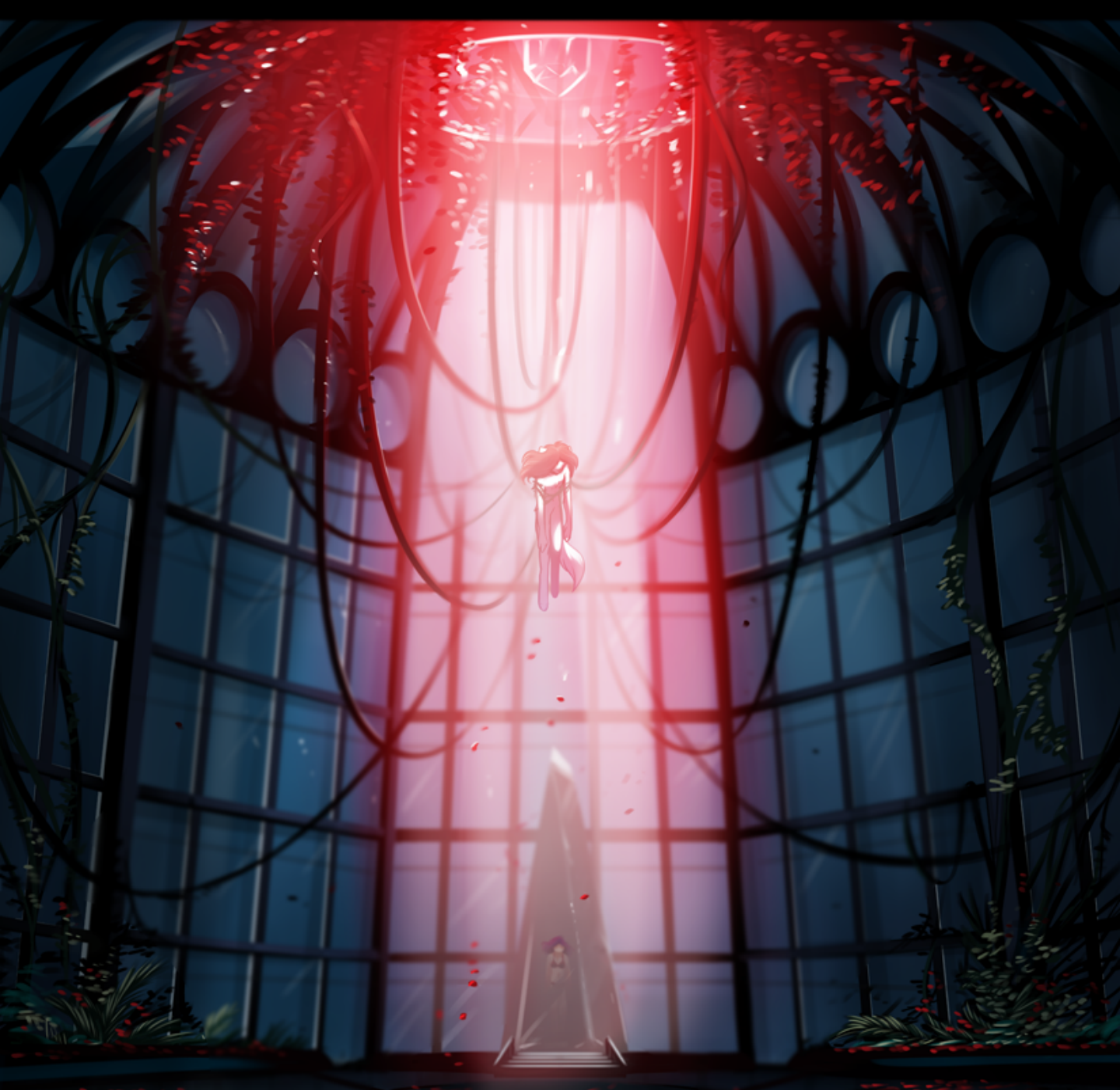
And more, I suppose. You'll see.



Not long ago, death was your obsession.

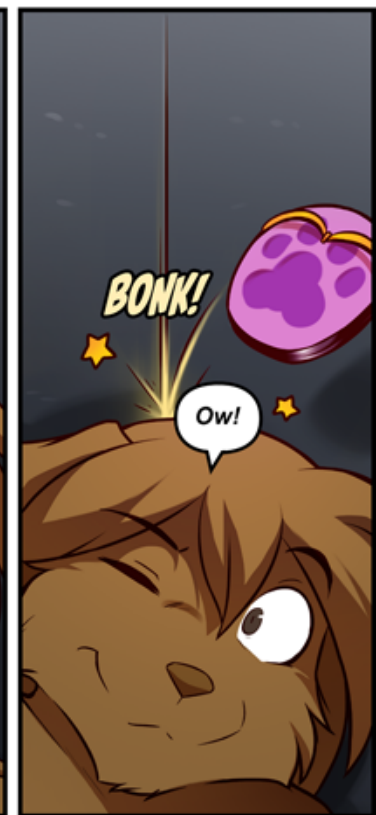
Researching ways to extend life, and bring it back.

You needed someone to test your work on, and I was all you had left. So when I got old and my time drew near...



You used me.







Karen...



Sis, where were you?

Oh! Lemme guess, you and Sythe were hiding somewhere together, eehh?

...Maren?



Well, come on!

As long as we keep our heads down, we've got a great view of Reni fighting from way up he—



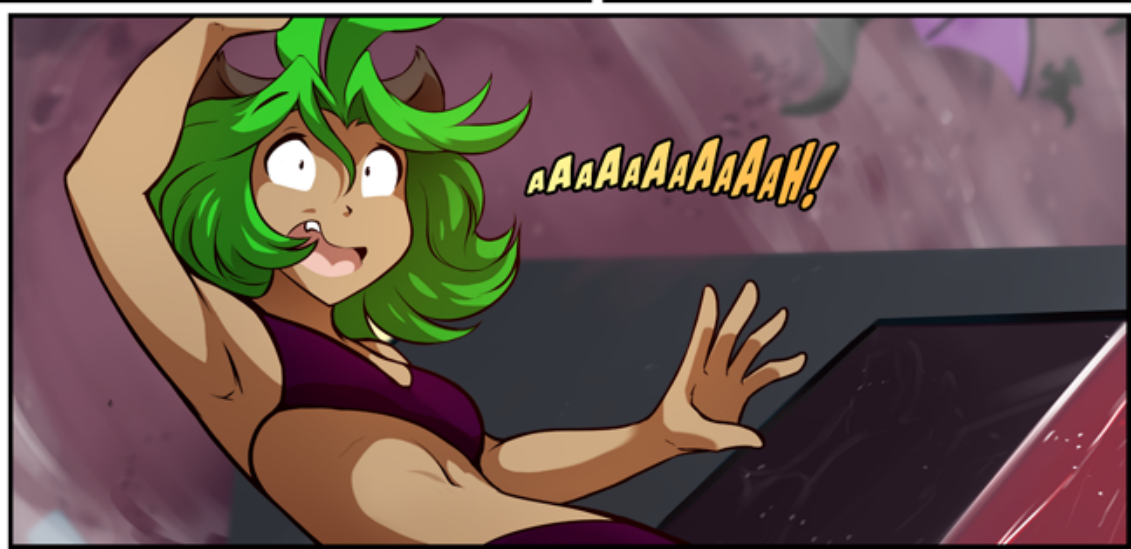
Eh?!



Whaaaa?!



...g..green.. house...



AAAAAAAAAAAAH!



Wha-gah!!



WOOSH!

Eep!



GASP!



SPLASH!

Wow, I almost died... that was awesome!



Maddie!
You saved my li—

...Waaaaait
a minute...

Maddie?
What are *you*
doing here?





I-it doesn't matter why I'm here.

The point is, I saw Maren leave the oasis earlier, so that couldn't have been her!

She wasn't here in the room when the door vanished.



But neither were you...

If the estate is making illusions to trick us, how do I know **you're** not a trick too?



Quick! Tell me something only I would know!

Huh-? I just met you today. And if the house really is out to get us, it could have overheard anything I told you.



Oh, right...



Quick! Tell me something I wouldn't know!

Wha-?

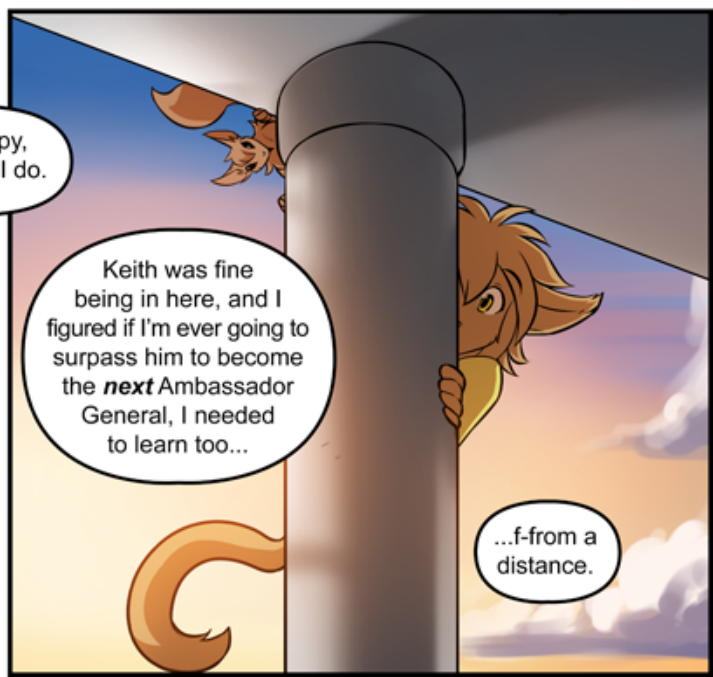


Then how would you know if it's true or not you idiot!



Listen, I just snuck in earlier, okaaaay?

I'm a spy, it's what I do.



Keith was fine being in here, and I figured if I'm ever going to surpass him to become the **next** Ambassador General, I needed to learn too...

...f-from a distance.



So where's the real Maren?

I saw her leave the oasis with that wolf guy a while ago.

Oh! She's missing this. At least she's out of danger, then.



Wait, wolf guy? Sythe... with Maren? Where'd they go?



They said they were headed to the rooms.

Mentioned something about a "hook up"... whatever that means.



WHAT?!

They really said that? Are you absolutely sure?!

Eep!
Y-yes? Why?



Oh my gosh... this is the best day of my life.



You literally almost died a minute ago.



Hey!
We heard shouting on the way up. You okay?



Augh!
We're in the middle of a battle, put some pants on already!

Okay, now I believe it's really you.



Maren!



Maren?

What's with the lights?

Hello?! Anyone!

Maren just disappeared!

THUD!
THUD!



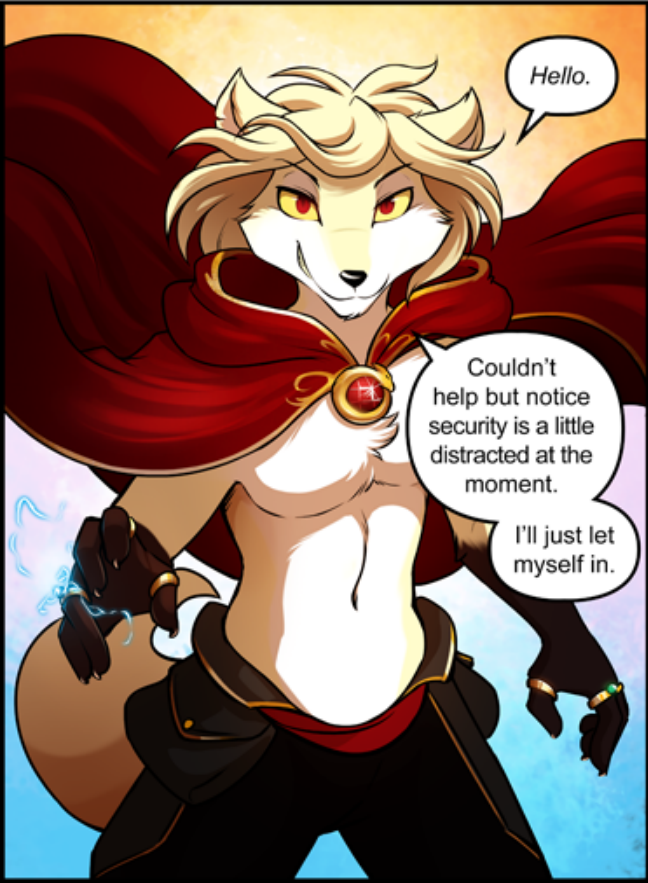
Huh?!



THUD!



CRASH!



Hello.

Couldn't help but notice security is a little distracted at the moment.

I'll just let myself in.



STEP

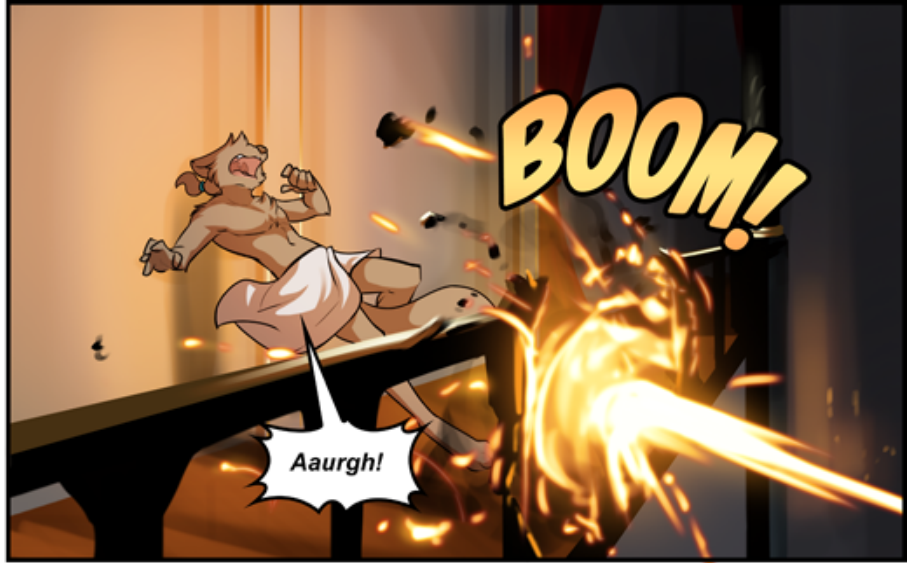


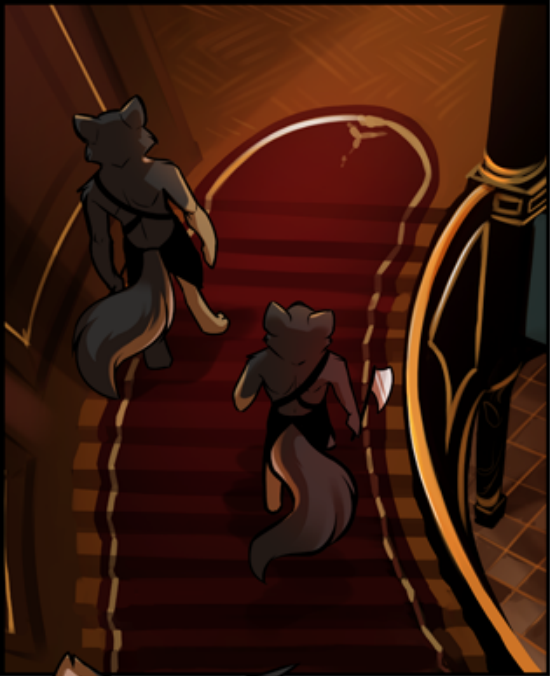
BZZZZOT!



Tch Aw.

Good try.





Hey!

That guy!
He's gone!

I was just
gunna gut 'em
real quick.



You heard
Clovis, he's not
the target!

Come on,
let's just grab
Zen and go!

You go. It'll
only take me
a minute.

He couldn't
have gone far.



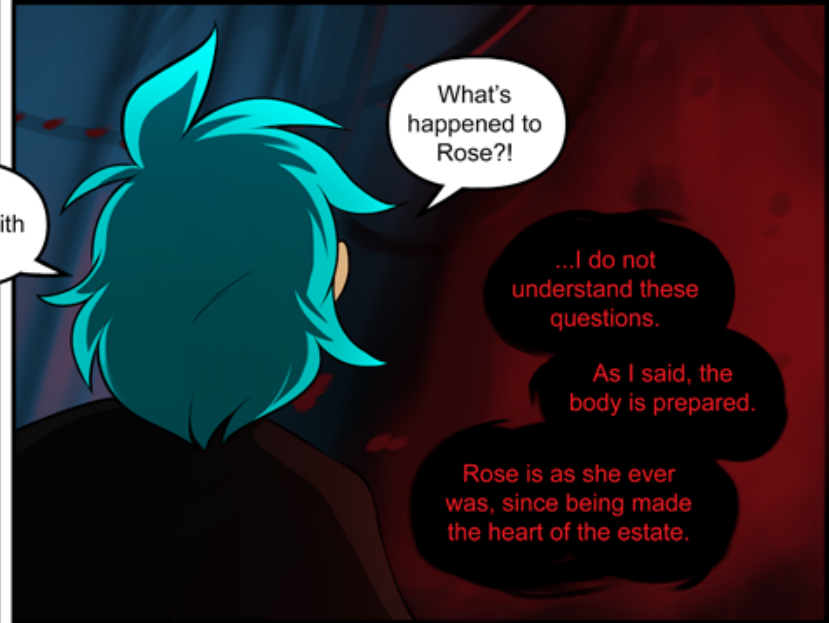
Ngh...



It's been so long, but we can finally proceed.

Who's there?!

What are you doing with Maren?



What's happened to Rose?!

...I do not understand these questions.

As I said, the body is prepared.

Rose is as she ever was, since being made the heart of the estate.



You set me to awaken in the event that Rose should ever break free from her restrictions,

I have activated the guardians to ensure nothing interrupts the ritual.



I... you what?! Whatever this is, it needs to stop!

Who are you?!



...
So, it's true. Our memories *have* been tampered with.

...No matter.

I was another experiment of ours. A contingency. One... not quite successful.

You called me Detritus.



Now, I must attend to Saria's new body.

Saria's...?!
Are you saying...

The only reason I dated Maren was for... *this*?

She was one of several candidates.

We searched so long for the right match.



A beautiful woman. A face much like hers.

But this girl... such an impudent personality.

An obnoxious tavern wench from a tiny village.

No one would miss her. It was perfect.

You left to go retrieve her, but then... you disappeared. And I slept. But no matter, she's here now.



This is insane! Stealing other people's bodies... was this really how twisted I became?

It doesn't matter. This has to stop! Hear me? This isn't what I want anymore!
I order you to stop!



The three of us had a pact: to see Saria alive again. We sacrificed for this. All of us.

...You are not Trace.

You're no longer even a shadow of him, as I am.

He once called me a failure.

"Too dangerous." He questioned whether a monster imbued with his own mind could ever truly stay loyal.

How ironic.

Now it seems I am the only one willing to continue with the plan.

Trace would *never* abandon Saria! I will never abandon Saria!

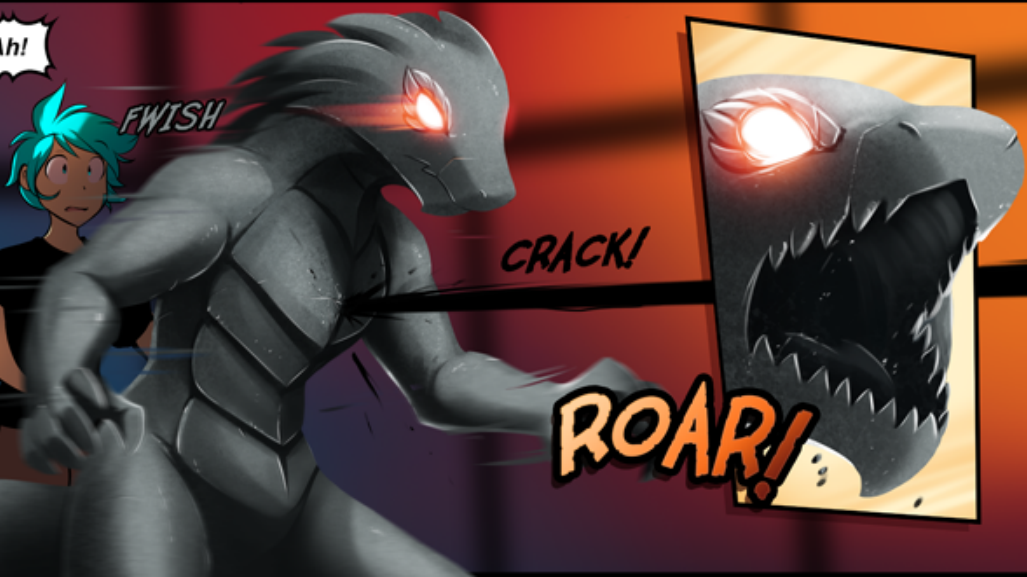
I am more worthy of the name Trace than you!



Ah!



FWISH



CRACK!

ROAR!





SMASH!!

Ngh!

Natani!
what's wrong?

I dunno. Never felt like this before... but I've never been able to use this much magic at once before either.

Take it easy, please!

You're still recovering from last week.



Grah! This... stupid... wall!

Am I even getting anywhere? I swear this thing is healing itself!

Urgh!

Why in the world did they build these walls so thick?



W-well... the room is huge. The walls would need to be sturdy.

It probably goes all the way to the roof with how tall it is, and there aren't any interior pillars for the ceiling, so all the weight is... is...



Raine, I appreciate you're trying to help, but that was a rhetorical question!



No, wait!
The ceiling!

It's flat, but it has no
columns. It's probably held up
by supports from the roof above.
If so, there's no way it's as thick
and heavy as these walls.

At least
I... I think...



Look!
There!

That's not
a star!



It's a hole!

That must be from
when Natani's magic
got deflected!



GRR-ACK!

SLAM!



FLUMP



SHOOOF!



GROAAAAAR!



FWOOM!



CRASH!

CRASH!



She did it!
She's out!

WAG
WAG



Wait, look,
the walls!

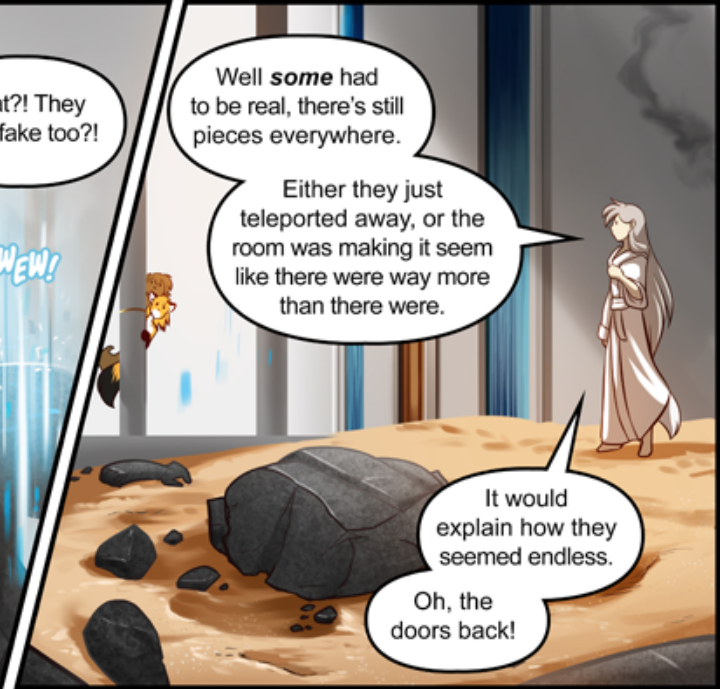


We must have caused enough damage to knock out the whole room's magic.

Huh? What's happening...

What?! They were fake too?!

FWEW!



Well **some** had to be real, there's still pieces everywhere.

Either they just teleported away, or the room was making it seem like there were way more than there were.

It would explain how they seemed endless.

Oh, the doors back!



Ack! And the wall's gone! Was everything in the room a lie?!



Oh, yeah... the room was using illusions against us. I probably should have mentioned that earlier... my bad.



Strange... I've often been able to see through illusions, but this time I couldn't tell.

Everything in here was lit up like magic.



Raine! Tail!

Hm...? **Ack!**



URRGH...

Everyone okay down there?



Stick together,
get to a safe location,
and stay down.

I must go check
on the grounds and
the dungeons!



Reni, you're
hurt! And you must
be exhausted!

You should
rest yourself
first!



Afterwards! For now,
I must fulfill my duties!

I'll be fine.
I am a dragon.



...I'm honestly
more concerned about
walking around outside
without any clothes on.

Ack! I'm
streaking!

...At least no one
can see me.



Woah! Did you see that,
Landy?! Reni's attacking the
Grand Templar's house!

And she's
naked!

Sealeen... she's
a dragon. That's...
not weird.

I know! I've just
never seen her without
her regalia. I bet Sarah
would've loved this.



D-did you hear that?
It's the dragon, I know it!
Argh, we're so screwed!

Don't worry!
The boss'll get us
out, you'll see!

You moron!
The boss doesn't care
about me or you!

Clovis doesn't care
about anyone but himself.
...And that weird vendetta
against those two assassins,
for some reason.



That's not
true. He sent
you to get me
out.

He didn't send us!
Sam and I only tried to get
you out 'cause we figured
there'd be extra coin in it.

We knew you
were the boss's
favourite tool.



But he's not
coming back for us. That
pompous prick would sooner
let us all die than risk his
own powdered ass!



Well, it's
good to know
how you really
feel, Roan.

Ah!
C-Clovis?!

Boss!



I- I was just runnin' my mouth! It's good to see you!

Is it? I'm not sure I can say the same.

I seem to recall ordering my men to simply **watch** the estate.

Tell me, is my memory wrong?



No... i-it was Sam's idea! He got us cursed!

I dunno where he went, but he'd tell ya—

Ah! Yes, Sam. We already got him. He was in the fields out back.

You did? If he says it's my fault, he's a liar!

Oh, he's not very talkative at the moment...



The boys had quite a laugh draggin' him back to the rift.

Honestly, I think it's an improvement. At least as a dairy cow he's finally contributing.



Say, why weren't *you* changed?

He was! Roan was a chicken!

Brutus!

Until I tried to eat 'em!

Is that so?

We'll have to take good care of Sam.

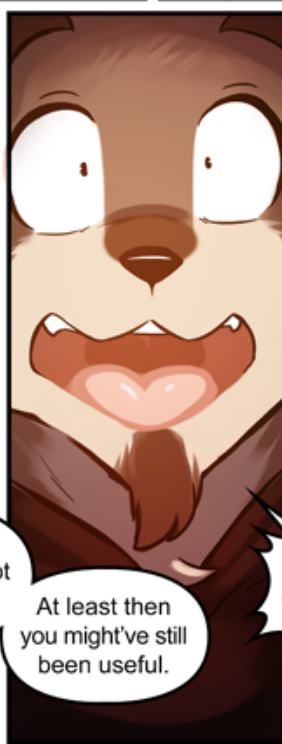


Wait, you're... not going to change him back?

Why should I? It's funny.

Let him be stuck with udders from now on. See how **he** likes it.

As for you, it's a shame you're not a hen anymore.



At least then you might've still been useful.



W-wait! Clovis— **FWOOSH!**



H-hey boss...
I... uh.... I'm glad
to see you too.



Brutus... Why
are you looking at
me like that?

There's no
need for you to
be scared.



I know how
you feel about
being burned.

It's a painful way
to go. I would never
kill you that way.

Oh!
That's a
relief!

You don't
look injured.

No! I'm
fine!



When that
dragon hit you and
you fell from the wall,
I assumed you'd
been killed.

I was sad... but I had
my amulet. I told myself
it was meant to be. A tidy
end to a rotten era.



But then I learned you
were alive, and... despite the
amulet, my very first thought
was getting you out.

It made me
realize just how
much I'd come
to value you.

To the point where
I'd even consider risking
my own... substantially
more valuable self.

...Boss?

Brutus... You've
always been my
most loyal friend.



A weakness
I've allowed myself
to tolerate.



Aw, Boss!

You've always been my best friend! The others said you don't care, but I always knew it!

...You were right. I do.



Oh, that's funny... I feel really tired all of the sudden...

Don't mind it, Brutus.



You've been through a lot.

Rest now.



Oh, can we get something to eat once we get back? We can celebrate your success! I'm... starving...



I can't wait... to get back home.

I never doubted you'd come back for me. I... Clovis...

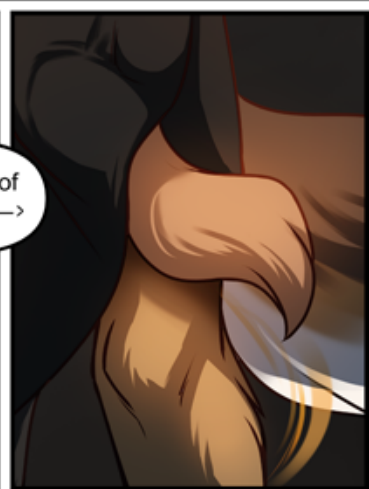


Clovis...

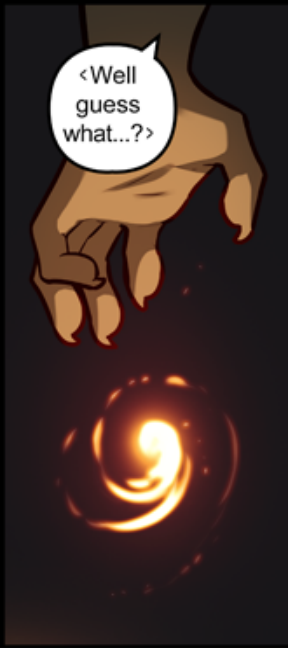
I can't...



...Goodbye, Brutus.







<Well guess what...?>



<You're not as clever as you think you are!>

FWOSH!



Nibs!



BOOM!

Argh!



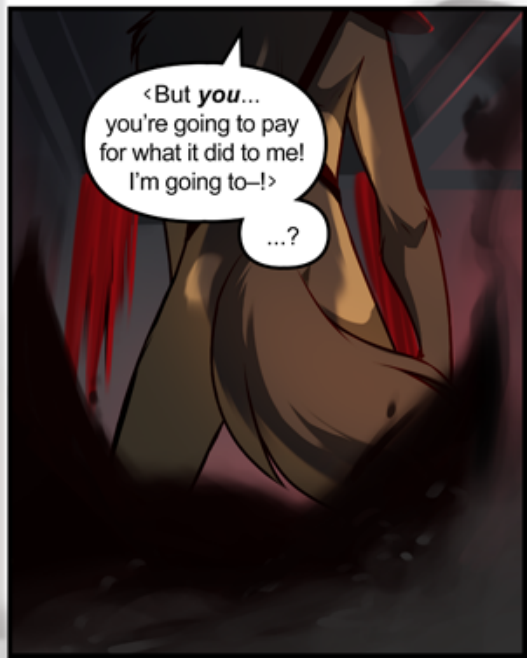
<What kind of amateur do you take me for?!>

Urgh...



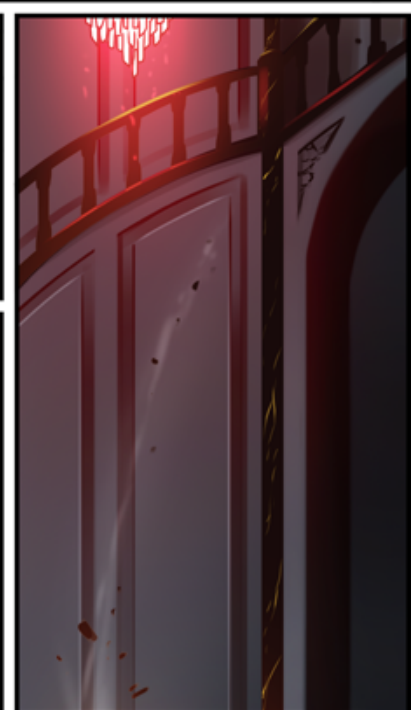
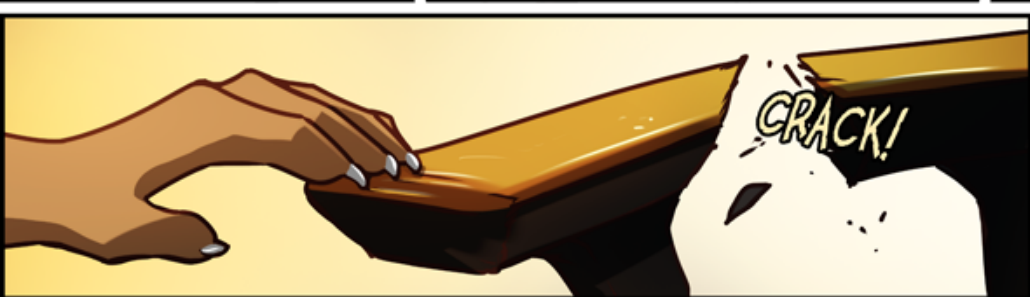
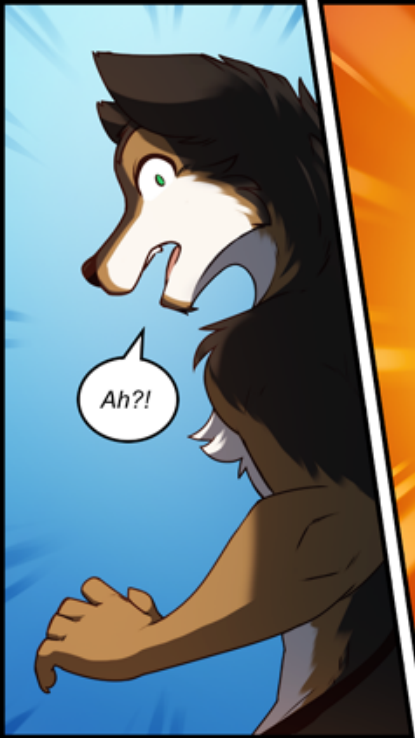
<You think there's anyone in the guild who doesn't hide mana in case of an emergency?>

Agh!
<That stupid rat! A quicker death than it deserved...>



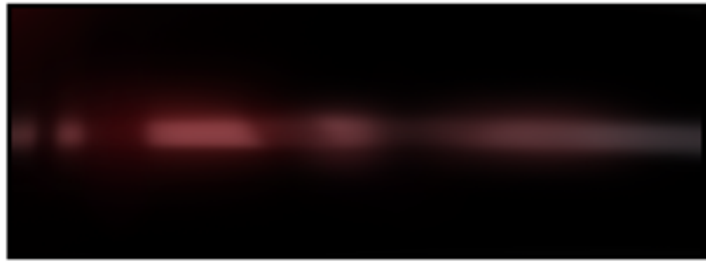
<But **you**... you're going to pay for what it did to me! I'm going to—!>

...?





Nib...bly?



Squeak?



Oh, hey, there you are, beautiful.

For a sec, you looked... well, I must have hit my head harder than I thought.

Heh, yeah, yeah, I'm okay. I'm glad you are too.

BOOP

Thank goodness his aim was as lousy as he was clumsy. Still, you're one oddly tenacious squirrel...

I feel like I should be questioning this more... but I also feel like I might have a concussion right now.



We better get out of here, in case that guy isn't as dead as he seems!

The other one said the name "Clovis."

That means it's the same group as that fox that attacked us on the road.

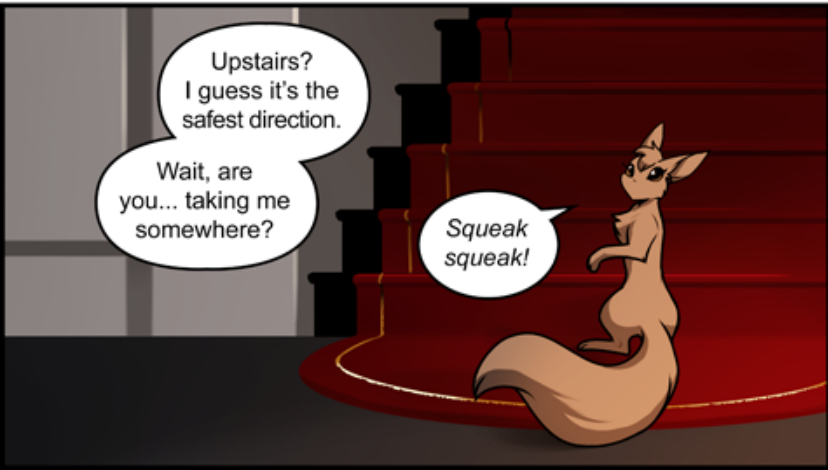
But he got blasted. How did they catch up with us? Ugh...

I'm in no shape to fight. I have to go warn the others.

But what I really need is to find Maren. Why did she vanish? Is it related to all this?



Huh?
Hey, Nibs! Where you going? Don't run off!



Upstairs? I guess it's the safest direction.

Wait, are you... taking me somewhere?

Squeak squeak!



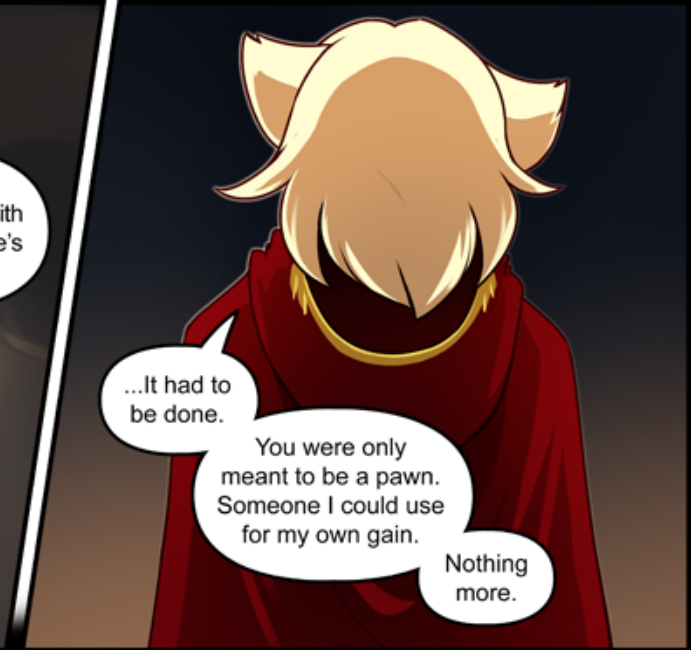
Welp, that settles it. I definitely have brain damage.

Danger all around, and I'm following a squirrel.



You're a big wolf, but even this should be enough.

At least I could ensure with this poison, there's no pain.



...It had to be done.

You were only meant to be a pawn. Someone I could use for my own gain.

Nothing more.



HEW HEW!



Nothing!



SMASH!

Ah?!



ROAR!



Urgh!

SLAM!



Dragons...
It's always
dragons...

So you're the one
behind these attacks!
I recognize you from
the memories.

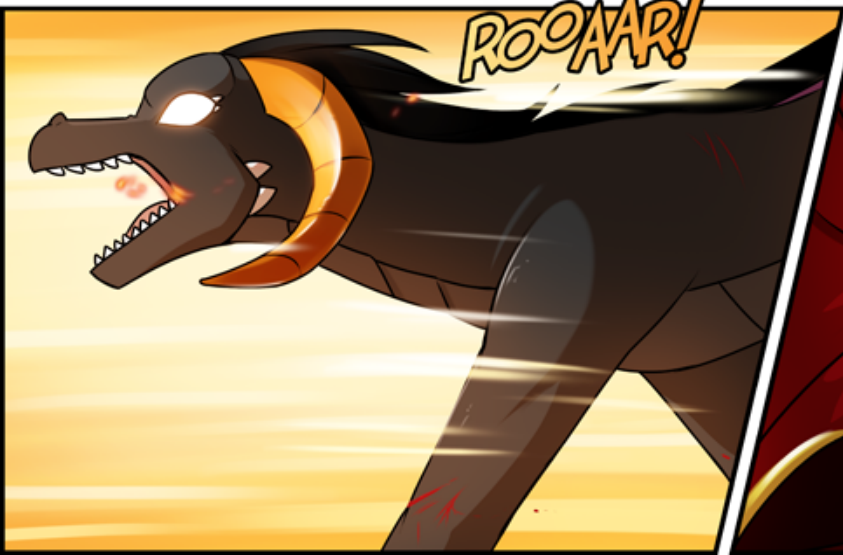
Surrender,
now!

You
Insufferable,
self-righteous
creature!



You and your kind
have been the bane
of my existence!

Interferring
with my plans!
With my life!



ROOAAAR!



But not
this time!



SIGH
Not sure if I can get this blood out, though...

I know Rose said we didn't have to...
But I'd feel bad leaving all this work for her.



I'm worried about Zen. He puts on an act, but his infection is getting worse.

He's got to stop sneaking out of bed and reopening the wounds.

He needs to take it easy.

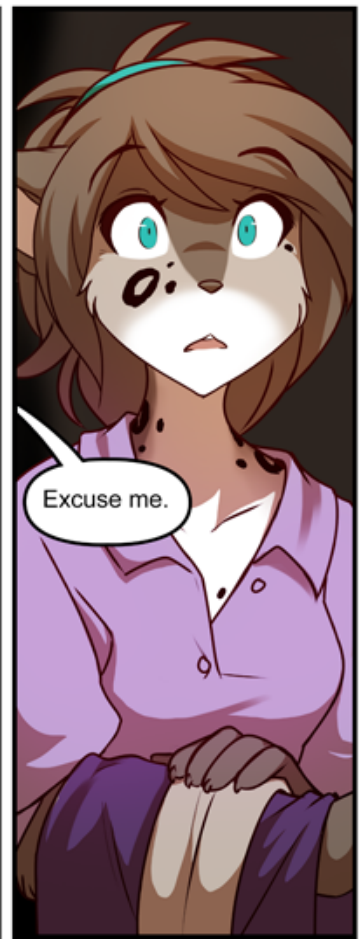


RUMBLE!

Huh?
What was that?
I wonder if Natani and the others are training.



They should take it easy too!
Natani *just* recovered. Tsk, those two really are siblings.



Excuse me.



I'm sorry, it seems I'm a bit lost.

Could you please direct me to Zen's room?

The name's Romulus, by the way.



Well?
Nothing?
Shame.

I don't take
any joy in killing
innocent girls...

But I have
a job to do, and
I just don't have
time to

Steak!

-to...
what?

Steak?

POP!

CLINK!

What
the—?!

SHINK!

AUGH!



Help!

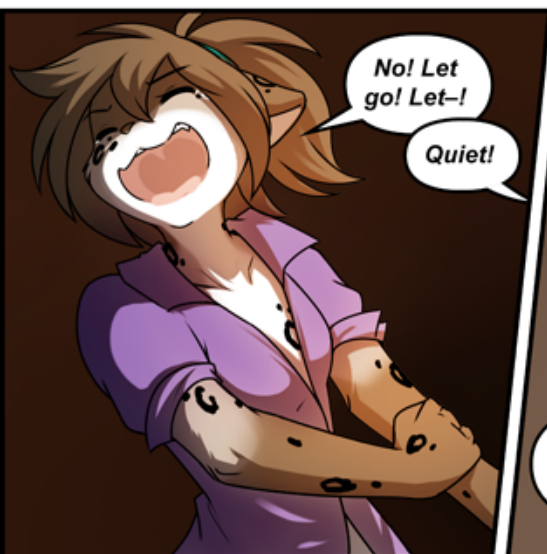
There's someone here!

Help!



CLINK!

Not so fast!



No! Let go! Let-!

Quiet!



There... that's better.

I gotta admit... I dunno how you did that, but you really got me! Nice one!

But enough games. Let's try this again:

Tell me **exactly** where Zen is. Now.



Zen... Zen isn't in this hall, he's in the next wing, f-first door on the left...



Good girl.

Huh? W-why-?



This was supposed to be my gift for Zen.

But if he's so injured, I doubt he'll put up much of a fight, anyway.

And I have a feeling the boss will like you.



Don't bother trying to take it off.

Not even I can.

You're property of Clovis now.



No...
I don't belong to anyone!

Hey, I said no lying.

Someone clearly put a lot of work into you.

It's obvious just from the way you look what you are.

Now, be a good girl and head over to the terrace.

The estate is still warded, but once you're outside, it'll send you to some friends of mine.



N-n...

O-okay.

Keep up that spirit, though.

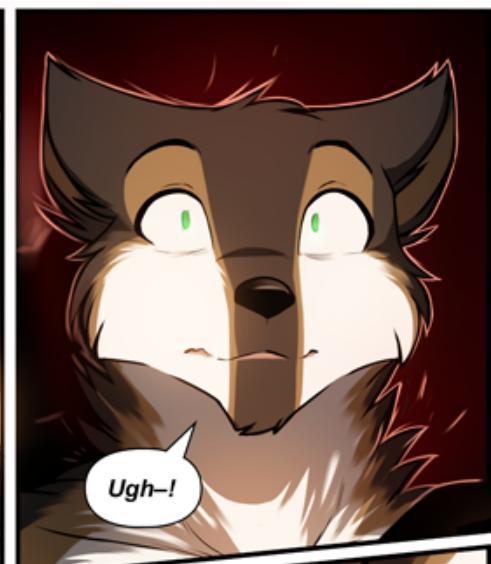
Maybe one day you'll get Clovis like you did me!

HA HA



If so, word of advice... if you're gunna get the drop on someone...

Maybe try and make sure you hit something more vital next time?



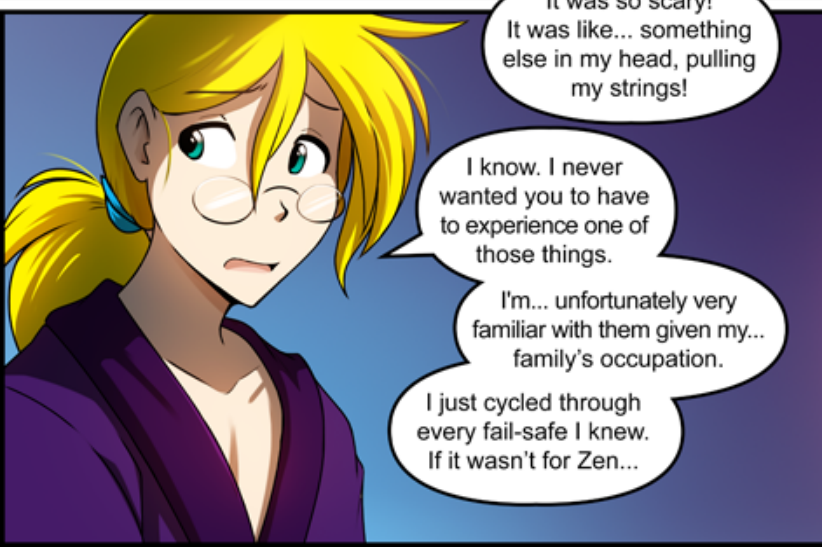
Ugh-!



Noted.

Z-Zen...!







Zen! Are you there? I felt more pain, what happened?

Did you run into the lizard rocks too?

Natani!

No, I'm fine, I just... uh, did you just say lizard rocks?

Yeah, the beach party got a little more exciting than expected. We were attacked.

What?!
Why didn't you contact me?!

I couldn't! Until I stepped out of the room, I couldn't reach you at all.



It'll be faster if we just traded memories. I'm fine, though.

Just overexerted myself a bit with magic protecting Keith.

Hey!
We're headed to the foyer to regroup.



Okay, but be careful!

I ran into **another** of Clovis' goons up here.

One of the twins. There may be more.

Uh...



I... think I found the other one.

Guess the dragon must have got to him first. She did run ahead to check things out.



Uh...
Hey, Nibs,
slow down a little,
would ya?

Is the house
rumbling...?



SNIFF
SNIFF



SWOOP!



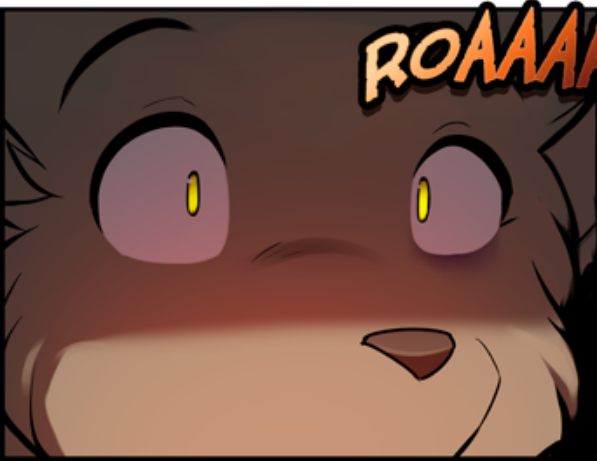
What
the hell?!
Nibs!



How did
you... huh?

...It's a
hallway!

Why did I think
it was a wall a
second ago?



ROAAAR!



And now
suddenly I wish
it still was.

...Also wish
I'd grabbed some
pants first.



Trace!

What are we going to do?!

I don't know!
Stay behind me, I'll think of something!

ROAR!!



Malfunctioning creature.

Why do you not obey me?



Wark!



I have taken over all security functions of the estate.

You were designed to obey, like the other guardians. To serve the will of the estate.



I am that will.

Now do what you were designed for and **serve me**.



SMASH!

Grah!

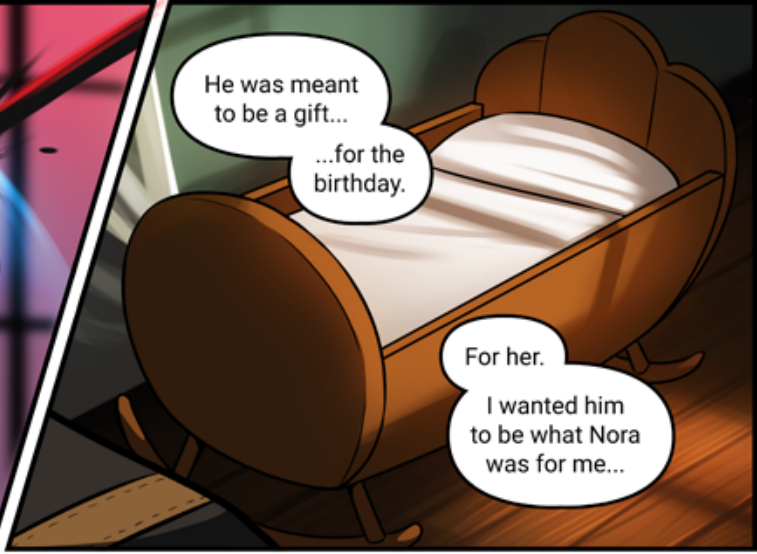


That's not going to happen!

...Did you just throw a crate at me?



Stoneward won't listen to you because he wasn't built to serve the estate!

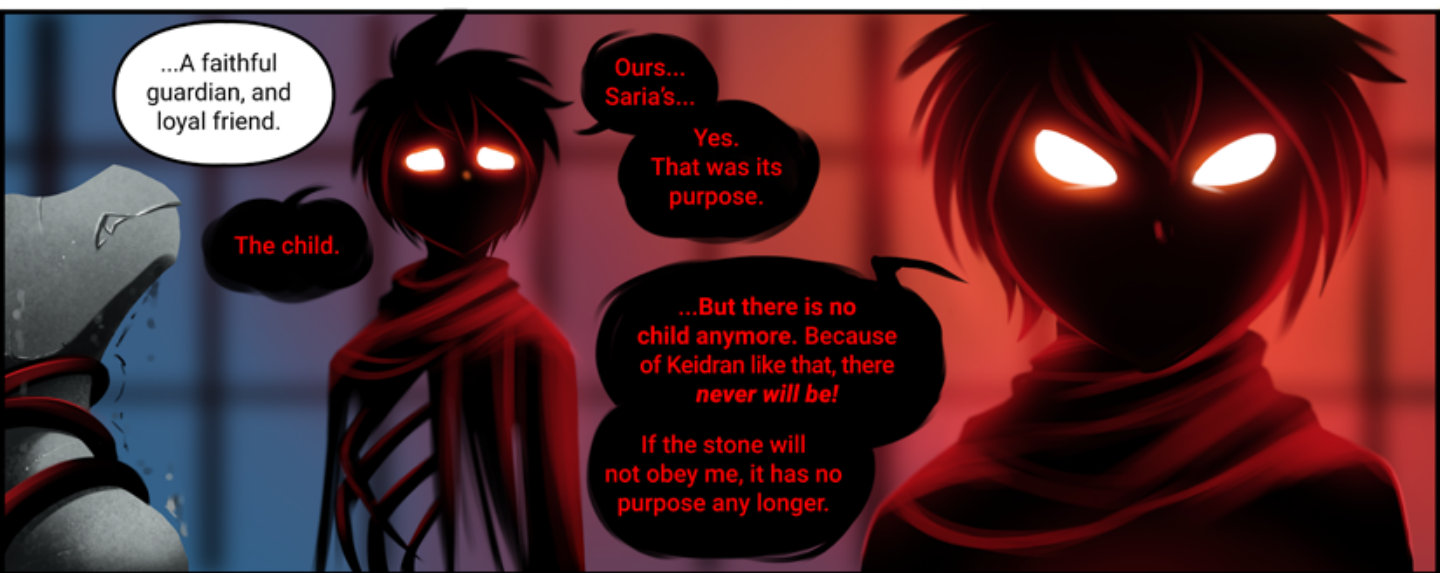


He was meant to be a gift...

...for the birthday.

For her.

I wanted him to be what Nora was for me...



...A faithful guardian, and loyal friend.

The child.

Ours... Saria's...

Yes. That was its purpose.

...But there is no child anymore. Because of Keidran like that, there never will be!

If the stone will not obey me, it has no purpose any longer.



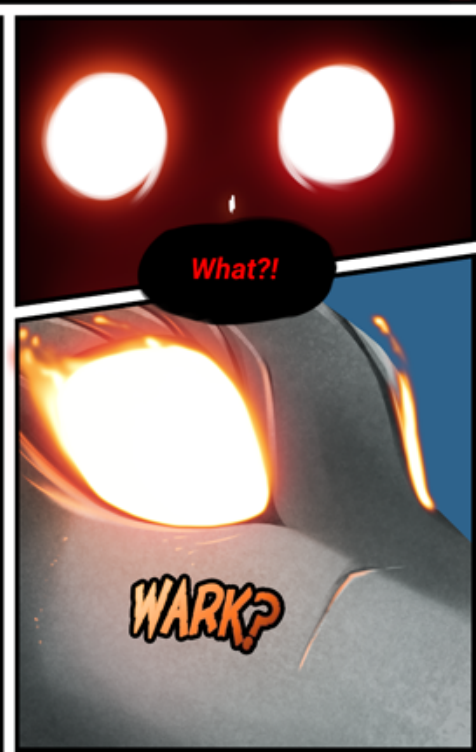
You're wrong.

He does still have a purpose!



Because this Keidran here is my fiancée.

And there *is* still a child!



What?!

WARK?



Stoney, now's your chance to finally do what you were made for!

Protect the child!

I... no!
What is this?
Lies! Lies!

How dare that animal disrespect the memory of Saria by trying to take her place?!

How dare you be so naive to believe it?!

I will not allow this! I will destroy her!

Her, and her illegitimate—!



RRROOOAR!



SNAP!



FWOOSH!

Aaargh!



I see him, father.
It is as you foresaw.

Yes.
I knew that fool would not pass up an opportunity to use the amulet.



And as anticipated, it only took the smallest push to manipulate him how we needed.



So much ego, greed, and paranoia, it was all too easy.
His men... even his right hand wolf... and soon, he will join them.



You're playing a dangerous game, Brahn.

Mage.

Even you can't anticipate everything.

And we all know your so-called "gift" to foresee the future has never been...

...entirely reliable.

Watch your tone.

This time is different.

This time, I am certain.

Oh!



BOOM!

MRRAAA!



Ah!

What was that?

RUMBLE!



Sounded like it came from the dungeon!
Maybe we should go help Miss Reni!
Or at least go watch...

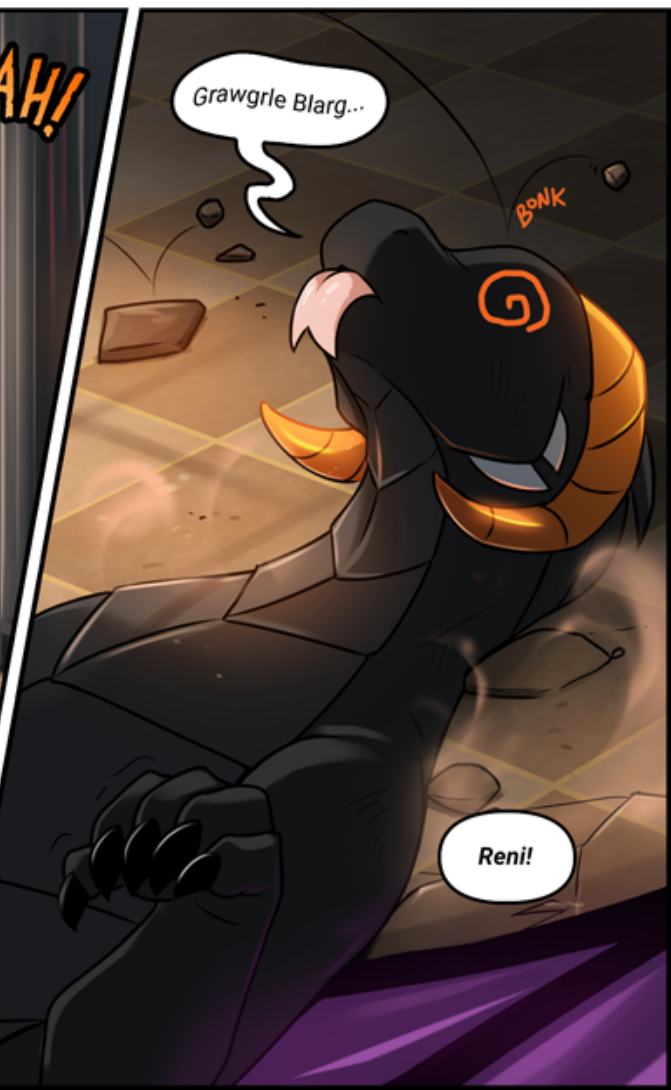
Are you crazy? What are we supposed to do to help?
She's a giant fire-breathing lizard, I'm sure whatever it is, she's fine!



BOOM!

AAAAHHH!!!

GRAH!



Grawgrie Blarg...

BONK

Reni!





I... I've done it.

Fire from the gods...

What?
Who said that?


Oh... can you hear me?
My apologies.

H-how can you—?

You have my thanks, Dragon.

You don't know it yet, but you're about to help me with an indignity I've been working to rectify for a very long time...

You see, the truth is, I didn't actually come here today just to get that prisoner of yours.



I'm here for **you**.



GRAAHHHH



Wow, that actually worked!

Good boy, Stoney! You did it!

Wark!

Is it really dead?

Come on, let's go get Maren out of that thing!



Trace...



After all this time...

Are you really willing to turn your back on Saria?



Would you let all this effort go to waste?

Rose...

This is insane! I'm not allowing any of this if it means sacrificing the life of someone else!



Lives have already been sacrificed.

It doesn't matter! Nothing justifies this!

I'm sorry for what I did to you. I can't change that! But I can put a stop to this now!



You only say that because you don't remember her. Would you say the same if it was your *new* fiancée?

You know how long Keidran live. Even if all goes well, you will have to watch her grow old and wither one day, as I have.



Soon, you will be in the same situation again. It's inevitable.

This soul forge could extend her life, just as it could for Saria.



Have you really changed that much?

If you lost Flora right now, can you tell me you wouldn't make the same choices again?



Trace...

You humans live such long lives.

I wish I could too.

I want to be with you for as much of it as I can.

But if something does happen, I hope you know I wouldn't want this.

Flora...



And I'm certain Saria wouldn't either!



Don't speak for him!

How would you know what Saria would have wanted?



We met her.

You... w-what?



Or... rather, a spirit of her. On our travels, in the place where she died.

When we parted ways, she told me she wasn't my wife.

I only realized later, after Nora explained how she'd died, that she probably just wanted me to move on.



You... really saw her?

I think she was afraid I'd repeat the same mistakes if I did remember.

But I don't intend to.

I'm ready to let go this time, Rose.



If that's true...

...then you really have changed.

...I'm relieved.

I just wish... I wish I could have been there to see her too...



Ah-?!



Sorry.

I know I'm probably the last person in the world you'd want a hug from.

But I am sorry.

...



I admit... this is really weird coming from you... but thank you.

Honestly, I half expected to pass right through you.

Heh... heh-heh...



I think this is the first time I've felt anyone since Saria died.



So...

Does... does this mean you'll help us?



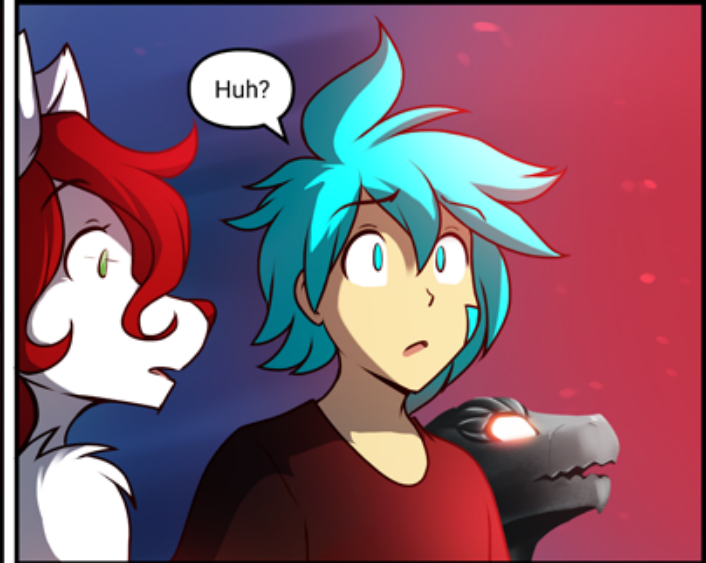
Yes.

I just had to be sure.

We both lost Saria that day... but you're right, it's time to move on.



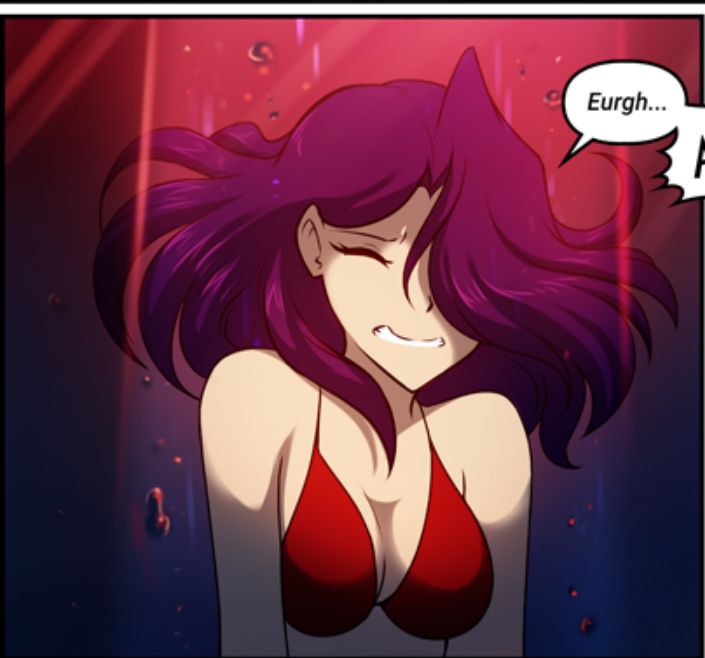
I should be able to free her now...
One moment...



Huh?



What's going on?

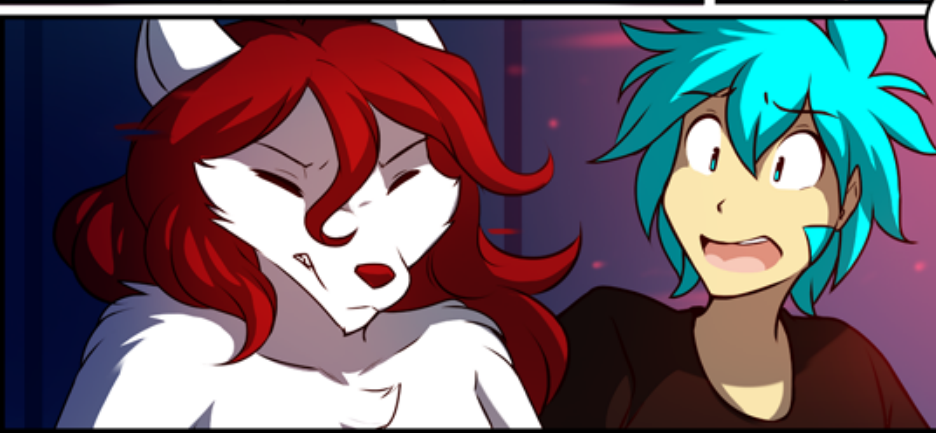


Eurgh...

AAAAAH!



Rose! What are you doing?!



It's not me!
Detritus already started it! I can't... I can't make it stop!



Can we break the crystal?!

Yes, but hurry!

Stoney!

We need to get her out of there!

Get it open!

Grah!



NO!

SHHHINK!





You cannot stop it now.
The process has already started.



Trace!
Your hand!

Ngh!
I'm fine...

But the moment
I drop this shield, he'll
go after Flora again...



Rose!

There's nothing
I can do! I have no
control over it.

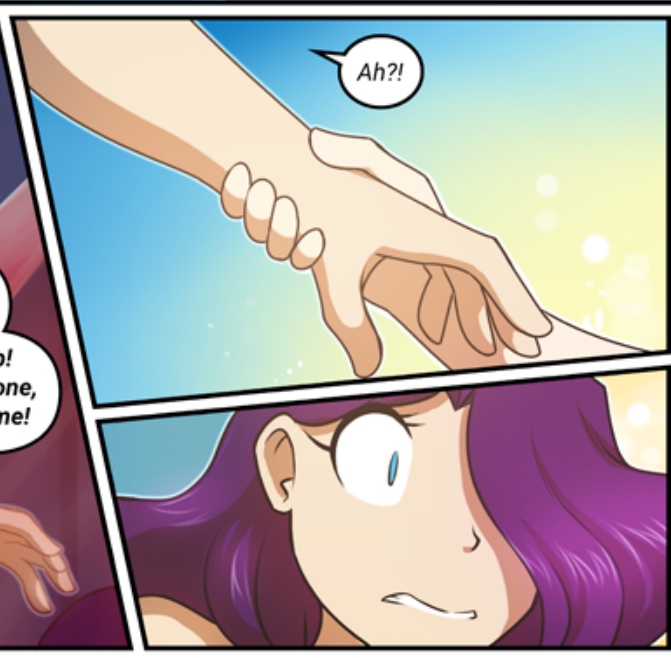


It's too late.

Huh? Wha-?
Where am I?!

Is that my
own body?! What's
going on?!

Help!
Someone,
help me!



Ah?!

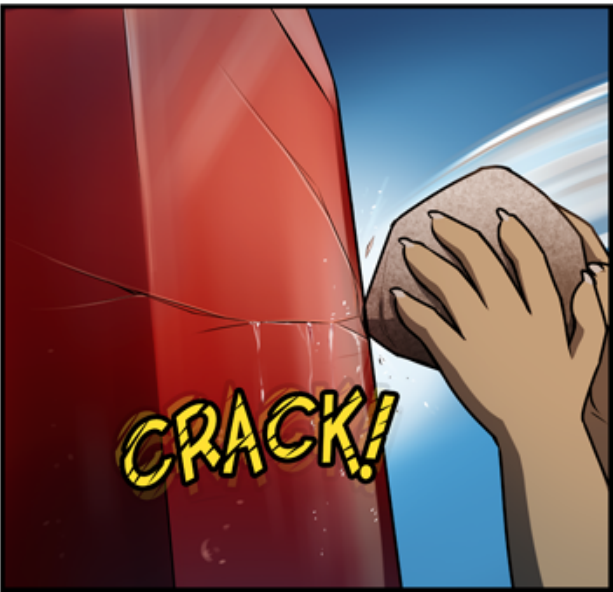


There is no
point to fighting
anymore.

It's done.
Her soul
is gone, and there's
nothing left that can
save her now.



CRACK!



CRACK!



Sythe!

Ngh!

CRACK!

Erg!

CRASH!



No!

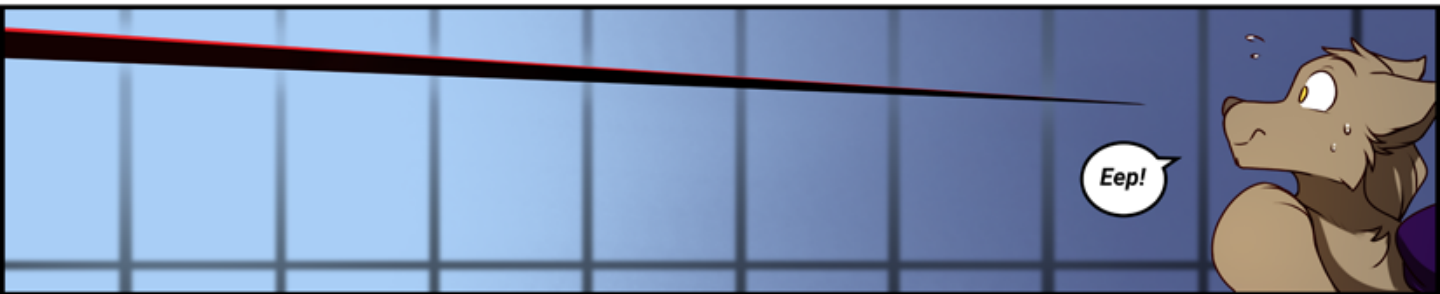
Saria...

Maren!

Hang on...

Saria...

Taken from me... by a wolf... again...?!



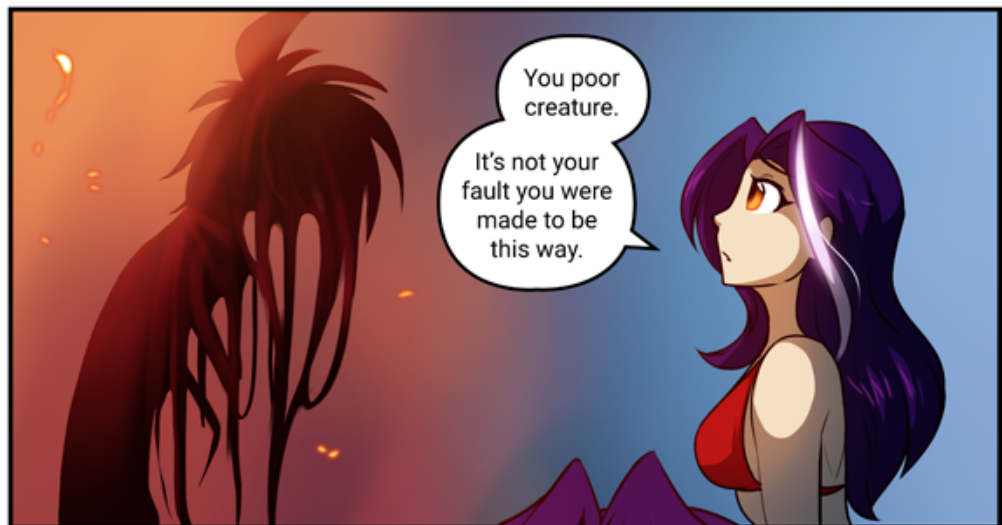


Saria...

My Saria...
You're back...



After so long...



You poor creature.

It's not your fault you were made to be this way.



You're in so much pain.

I'm sorry.



It doesn't matter.

I did it.

I brought you back...

I finally saved you...
It's over...



I'm so...

h...a...ppy...



What have you done to Maren?!

Ah!

Sythe, calm down!

No, she stole Maren's body!
Get out of her right now!

Leave her alone!

Shut up, this is your fault!
Killing Maren to-

WAIT!



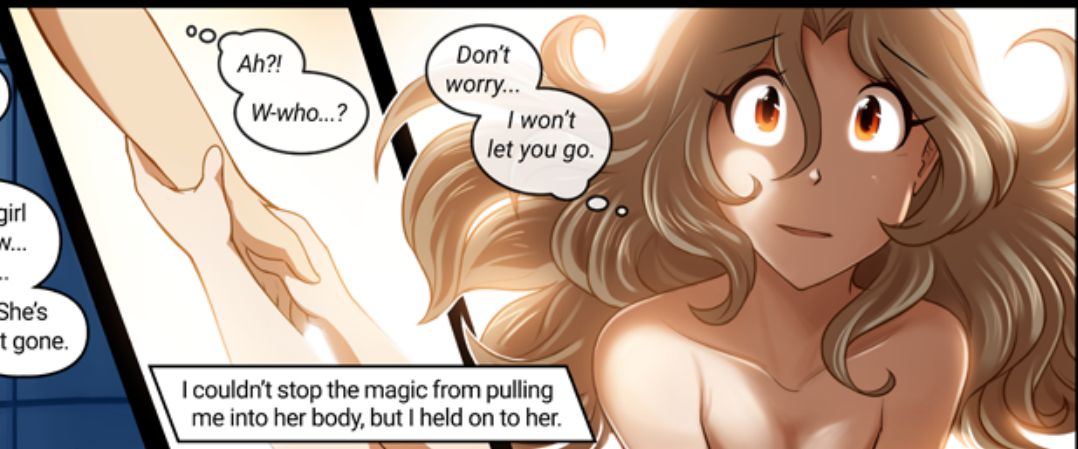
Please, calm down!
I can explain!



Yes, I...
I am Saria.

But this girl I'm in now...
Maren...

She's not gone.



Ah?!
W-who...?

Don't worry...
I won't let you go.

I couldn't stop the magic from pulling me into her body, but I held on to her.



Still, it's good you broke the crystal when you did.

I'm not sure how long I could keep her here.

So, this... possession thing... it's not permanent... is it?

No.
It was thankfully stopped in time.



I have no intention of stealing this poor girl's body.

I've already lived my life, and Maren deserves to have hers.

You will have her back. I promise.



Saria...

Hello, Trace.

And hello to you, Flora.

It's good to see you both again.

I see you two are still travelling together.

I'm glad. I.....



Uh... So, you *are* the same Saria we met a couple months ago?

Months? Has it really only been months since all that?



I can't explain, but from the outside, it felt to me like it was... *many* years ago.

And yet... also strangely like the blink of an eye.

But yes. That Saria and I are one and the same.



You told me back then, when we parted ways, that you weren't my wife.

I had to learn the full truth later, from Nora.

I'm sorry for lying. I was trying to spare you from the burden.

I had hoped that you'd be able to move on from me.. from all this...

But I suppose it was inevitable for you to end up back here.



Did you know about all this?



I was vaguely aware you were trying to bring me back.

But I wasn't aware of the full extent of it...
...until now.



Trace... I don't have much time left...

I know you're not the same man I knew. But if any part of him is still left in you...

...There's something I'd want to say to him...



Trace...



...I'm ashamed.

The things you've done... not just here, but out there...

To the Keidran... to my Rosey...
It's just unforgivable.

You've caused so much pain to the world. In my name!
I am gone. And so is the man I once loved.



I only hope the man you are now is willing to undo some of the damage left behind...

...and what you became after I died never comes back!



Saria!

Is that really all you have to say?

After all this time... all I did for you?

Did what we have together mean anything to you?

Of course it did. I loved my Trace.

I wish dearly we could have had more time together.

But you're not him.



My Trace died the day I did, trying to bring me back the first time...

...his mind poisoned by black magic in the process.

Only to be purified once his memories were wiped away.



No!
I'm still here! I can save you! I can find a new body, just stay with me for now! Saria!



I'm sorry. My time in this world is over, as is yours.

Please... stop this. Let me go, I beg you.

As my dying wish...

Let them be happy...

Set things right...

Trace?
Trace??



Trace?!
Are you still in there?



Flora, you're smooching my face...



Trace! You had a scary look for a minute. I thought other you was going crazy again!

No, I... I'm fine, Flora.
Strangely, I feel better than ever.



Huh?



Oh.
It seems my time here is growing close to an end.

I won't resist it, though I feel I could. This girl... Maren... she will be changed as it is. I won't risk more.



Saria, I heard what you said to... me.

I promise, I will do everything I can to make things right again...

Thank you... I have faith you'll do better this time.
I wish you both well.
But before I go, there's one last thing...



Rose... I can still sense that you're here.

Are you really going to let me leave without saying anything?



...Saria...



My beautiful Rose... you look so young!

I haven't seen you like this in a long time.

I know. This isn't mine either.

This... isn't my real body.



Saria... I'm so sorry.

I was scared to face you again.

And... now there's no time left! I wasted it! I—



Shhh...!



It's okay, Rosey.

Souls don't experience time. A second can last as long as we want it to.

I know you've been through so much...



Take as long as you need.

Saria... I missed you...



WOOOSH



Ugh...

Woah! I've got you.

Shepherd Square

Matriarch Dahlia!

I heard you turned away my men. With respect, I must insist you allow an escort.

My men know the city better than any of yours.

And I must insist that my own guarrds are sufficient.

So far I have seen nothing but incompetence from your men.

You are lucky we have not left yet and simply abandoned this diplomacy.

However, the high matriarchs are still hopeful for a peaceful resolution if it means an end to the hunts on our people.

Please, Ma'am, I assure you, my men are some of the most well trained, disciplined—

Sir! Sir!

Daniels!

Why are you not wearing pants?!

I... was in a rush. There was an emergency at the barracks!

What?! Wolves?!

No, no, sir! You know that weird lizard woman we had in lock up?

The Adrakist? Wha... oh no, don't tell me...

SHEPHERD
GUIDE & PROTEC
ツツツツツ



"Escaped"?
How?!

I wasn't there,
sir, but from what
I heard, she just...
broke out.



SLAM!

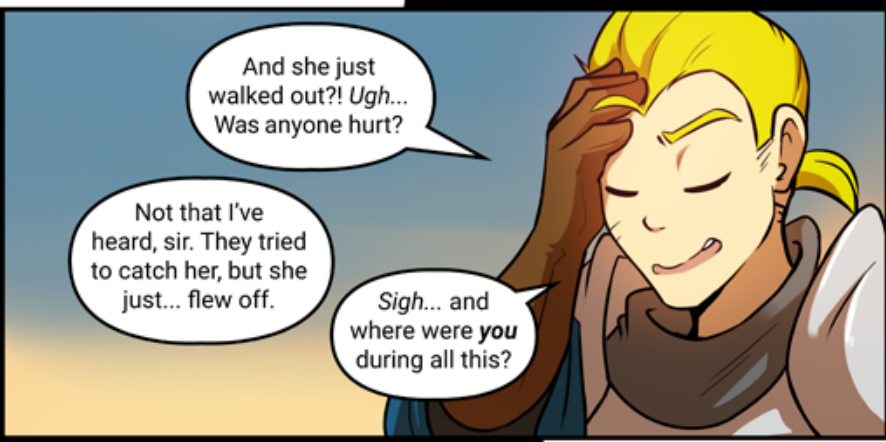


Nyrah!
Thanks for
the stay! Definitely
one of the nicer jails
I've napped in.

Hey!

Stop right
there!

Apparently, the magic suppressor
didn't affect her strength at all.



And she just
walked out?! Ugh...
Was anyone hurt?

Not that I've
heard, sir. They tried
to catch her, but she
just... flew off.

Sigh... and
where were **you**
during all this?



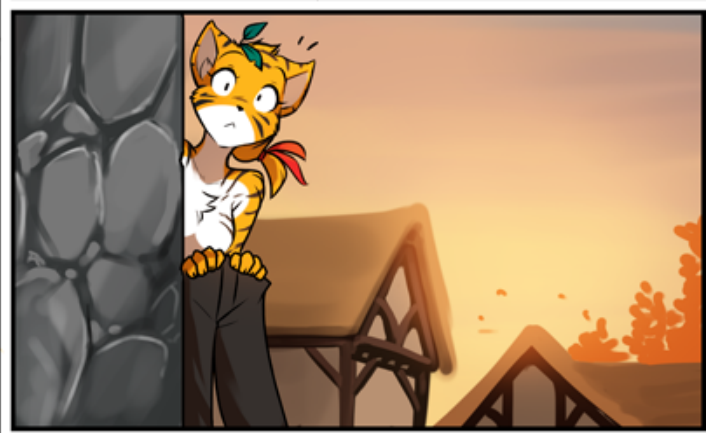
Me? Uh...
I... I was...



**RUSTLE
RUSTLE**



...Off duty.



...Right.



Well, go inform the watch to keep an eye out.

Yes, sir!



And get your pants back first!

Y-yes sir!



<Ah, to be young again.>

Lady Dahlia, I apologize for the indecency of my soldier.



"Indecency"?

You know captain, in tiger lands it's customary to be *naked* when first meeting with a matriarch.

Honestly, this is a refreshing change of pace from all the formality so far.

I... see.



Well, I'm glad you're not upset.

If you'll excuse me, I need to make a report.

I understand.

Good day, captain.



Sigh... At least one of us is doing well at diplomacy.

Can't imagine what the matriarch is thinking right now...



Hi, mom.



Sigh... At least one of us is doing well at diplomacy.



Oh!

There you are, Captain!



We've got a situation!

It's okay, I already know about the breakout.

No, not that! There's *another* problem!



Alice, I've been putting out fires *all day* today.

Some literal.

Can it wait until tomorrow? I really need—



TWITCH



Lieutenant Reed...

Why do you have a tail?



That's the other problem, sir...



Welcome to my mindscape.
Tell me, dragon...

...What do you think about being the small one for once?

I'd say this speaks to the size of your ego.

I don't know what magic this is, Keidran... but I promise it won't end well for you!

Oh yeah? Relax, your highness, I'm not here to hurt you. I need you, after all.

For what?

Power, of course. And what better use for a creature literally made of magic?

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

First, allow me to introduce myself officially. I...

...am **Clovis!**

The Prince of Greed!

Are... are you sure it's not Princes-

Don't you say that word!

It's prince! I... wanted you to see that! To show you what you dragons did to me!



Tsch!

You're not the first of your kind I've encountered.

Years ago, I met another dragon.

An evil creature who enjoyed toying with the lives of innocents for her own amusement!

Nana Nora?



She cursed me for no reason at all! That's the tyranny of a dragon!

Lording over those below them with power they're simply born with!



Well *I* was born with **nothing** in a brothel to a worthless fox whore!

I had to **earn** every bit of **my** power! I had to claw my way up to where I am by **myself**!

And she tries to knock **me** back down?! Humiliate **me**?! **Prince Clovis**?!
Well all she did was show me what true power looks like!

Power that I deserve!

ROOAAAAR!

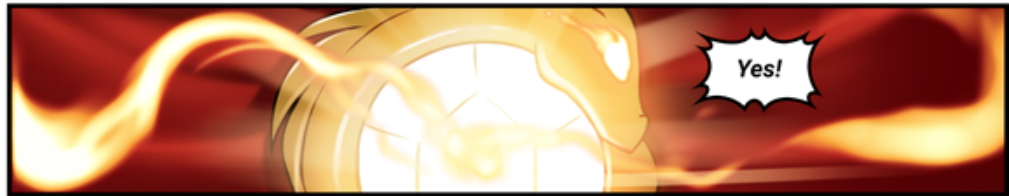
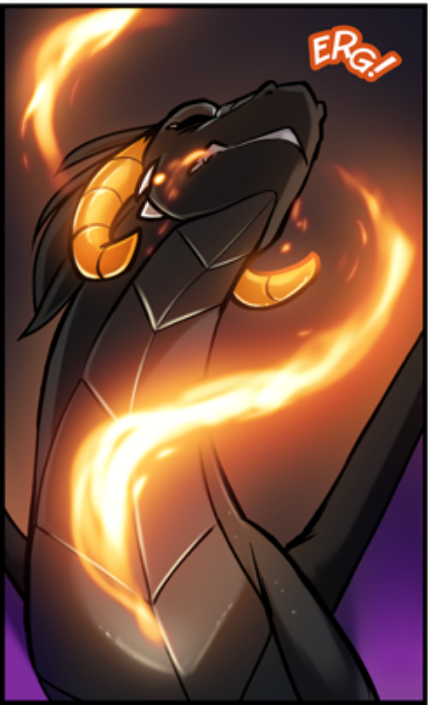
You're nothing but a raving lunatic!

Whatever Nora did to you, I'm sure it was deserved!

And you'll soon regret this as well!

Enough of that! Hm! There, that's better.

THUNK!





Uh, guys?

Reni just went unconscious.

Aw, she's tired!



[Ah! There you are, sir.]

[Oh, everyone here is.. rather... underdressed.]

Lynn?

[Where have you been?]



[I was in my room scribing.. letters for the homeland.

At first, I thought the noise might be training...]

[But then when I heard the.. crash, I felt I should see if you needed any assistance.]

[Oh, well, thanks, but you're a little late, Lynn. I don't think we're in any more danger.]

RUMBLE!

<Hey, you two quit with the weird Basitin talking for a second...>

What is that?!>



EGAAAAHHHHH!



That... that's a lot of magic!

What the hell?!



AAAAAAHHHHH!

Woah!

