



Chapter 22

# SEVERANCE



Yes! It worked!  
I can feel it! The soul  
of a dragon beats in  
my chest!  
Immortality!  
Transformation!

Male, female...  
what does it matter?!  
I can be anything!



Raine, please  
tell me that's an  
illusion!

I... I don't  
think it is!

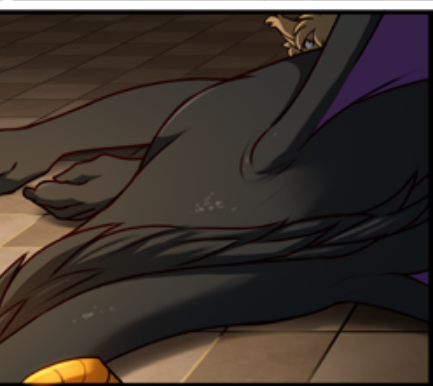
But my eyes  
do see something  
strange...



It's that  
gem around  
his neck...

...a... link  
between it  
and Reni.

...I can  
see a glowing  
thread...



I think we need  
to find a way to break  
that connection before  
it's too late!

Break it?

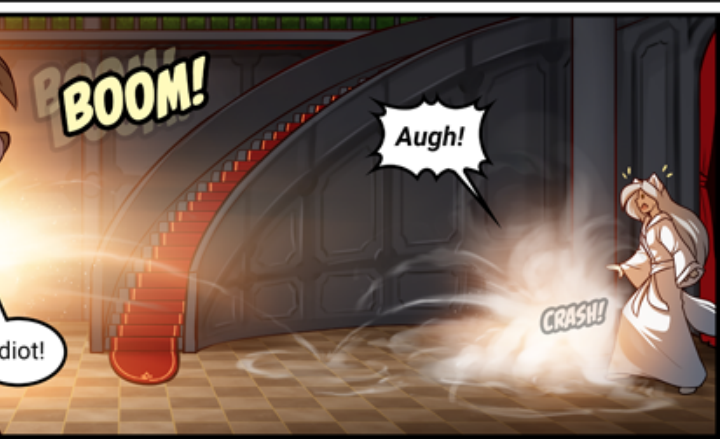


I got this!  
**YAAAAAAH!**



W-wait!







<You could have mentioned your old boss was a **dragon!**>

<He **wasn't!** That bastard! It's that gem. He always cheats at magic.>

<What's the plan?

Damn it, all our equipment is still up in our room!>



<We'll never get past him.>

<I'm not sure what good weapons would do anyway.

You saw what happened to Red just now.>

<Yeah, but I'd still feel better if I had **anything** more than a bathing suit between me and... **that!**>



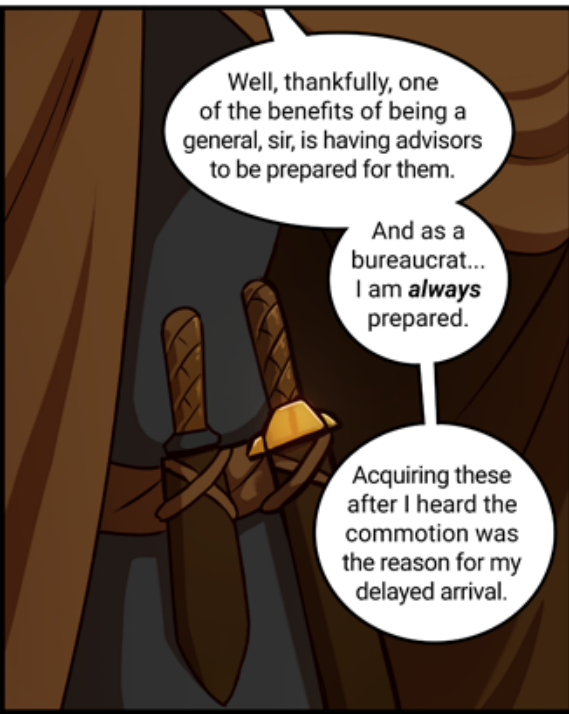
[*"A good Basitin should be prepared to go into battle under any circumstance."*]

Precepts of Albion.



Quotes from old Basitin texts aren't very helpful right now, Lynn.

I doubt anyone could have anticipated two giant lizard attacks in the middle of a beach party.



Well, thankfully, one of the benefits of being a general, sir, is having advisors to be prepared for them.

And as a bureaucrat... I am **always** prepared.

Acquiring these after I heard the commotion was the reason for my delayed arrival.



Lynn!



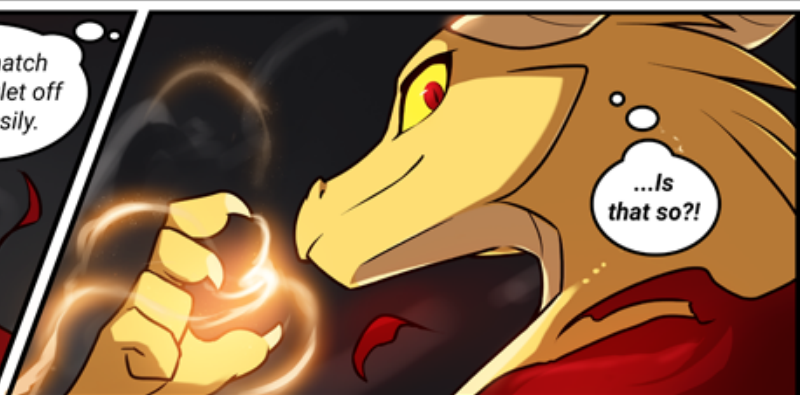
<You know what, Floppy-ears...>

You're alright.>

<I live to serve.>

OASIS R





**BZZAP!**

Karen,  
you idiot!

I was  
about to  
dodge it!

URG!

Sorry!

I just wanted  
to save your life  
after you saved  
mine...

Wha-? Wait,  
how are you fine?  
What did he do?

I don't  
know...

WIGGLE

**GASP!**  
**TAIL!!!**

It's real!  
Oh, thank you,  
Mr. Clovis!

Karen,  
don't thank  
him!

Hmm...  
not exactly my  
intention.

I was trying  
for a full animal  
transformation.

I suppose I'll  
need more practice  
with the power of  
this magic.





Listen, I'm not here to fight any of you.

I've already got what I came for.

And you're all suddenly so beneath me.



I'm just going to go now.

With the power of this new form, no one will be able to challenge me anymore.

...or humiliate me again...

No longer will I be forced to depend on the strength of others...  
...from allies who would happily stab me in the back if they could.



Assassins...

Thugs...



Even... Brutus...  
None of it matters anymore.

TWITCH



No!

Natani, don't!  
You're already  
burned out!

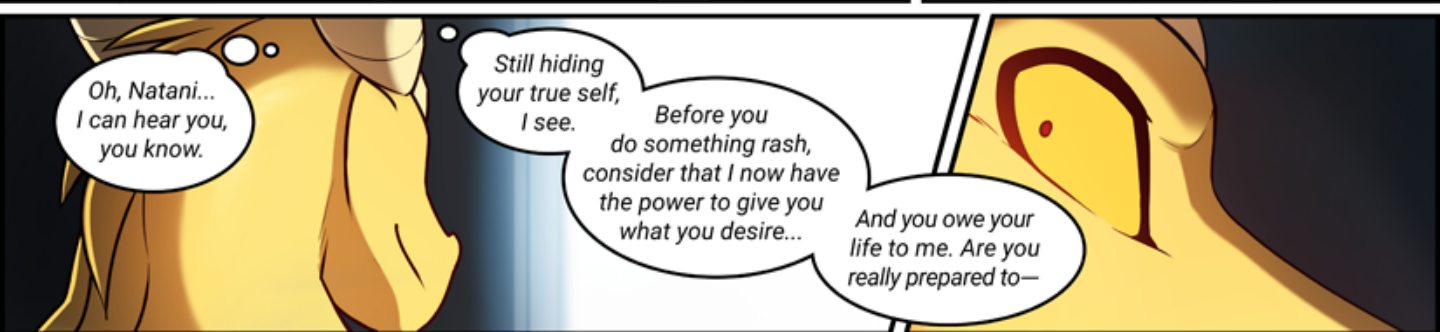
I don't  
care!

I know Clovis. He's  
petty. He won't ever  
really let us go.

He just wants  
time to build up his  
new power.



And I'm not  
going to give that  
bastard the chance  
to get away!

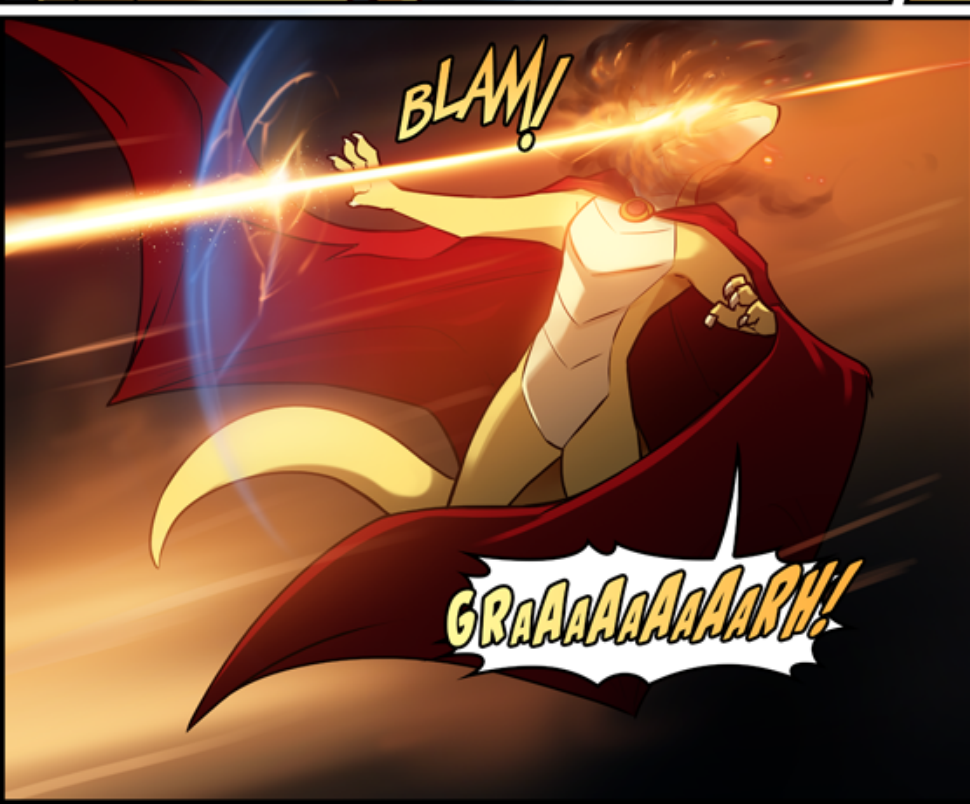


Oh, Natani...  
I can hear you,  
you know.

Still hiding  
your true self,  
I see.

Before you  
do something rash,  
consider that I now have  
the power to give you  
what you desire...

And you owe your  
life to me. Are you  
really prepared to—



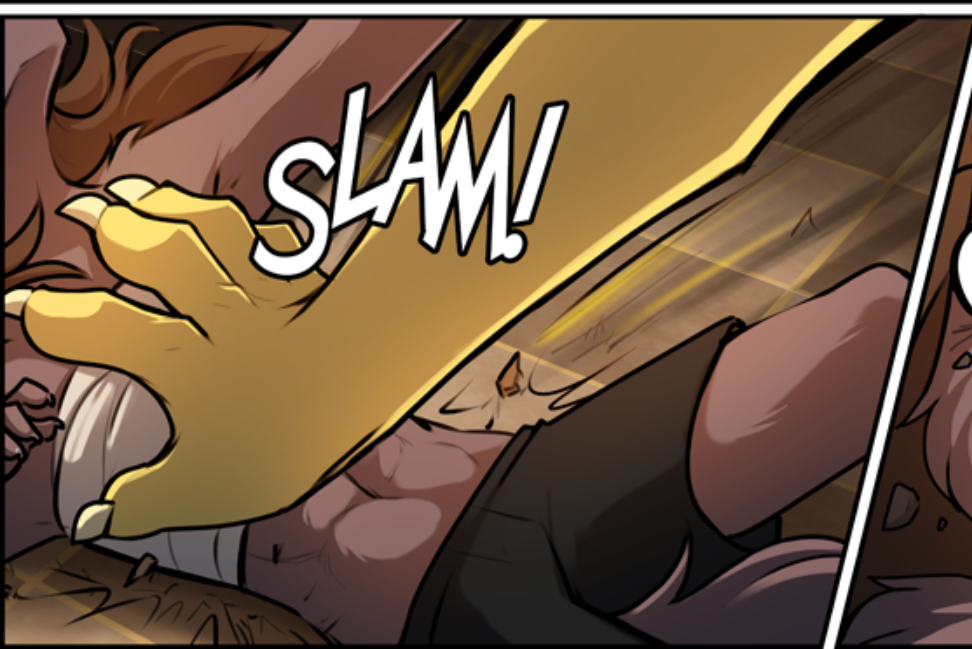
**BLAM!**

**GRAAAAAAARH!**



Y-you...







**Augh!**



Zen what's wrong?!

My ribs...  
The link...

Can't you block it out?!

No! I'm.. taking.. the pain for Natani.

What?! Stop it! You're already hurt!

I don't care!  
It's all I can do!



Zen's bratty little sister...

How dare you attack me... I gave you your link!

You're only alive because of me!



**SHINK!**

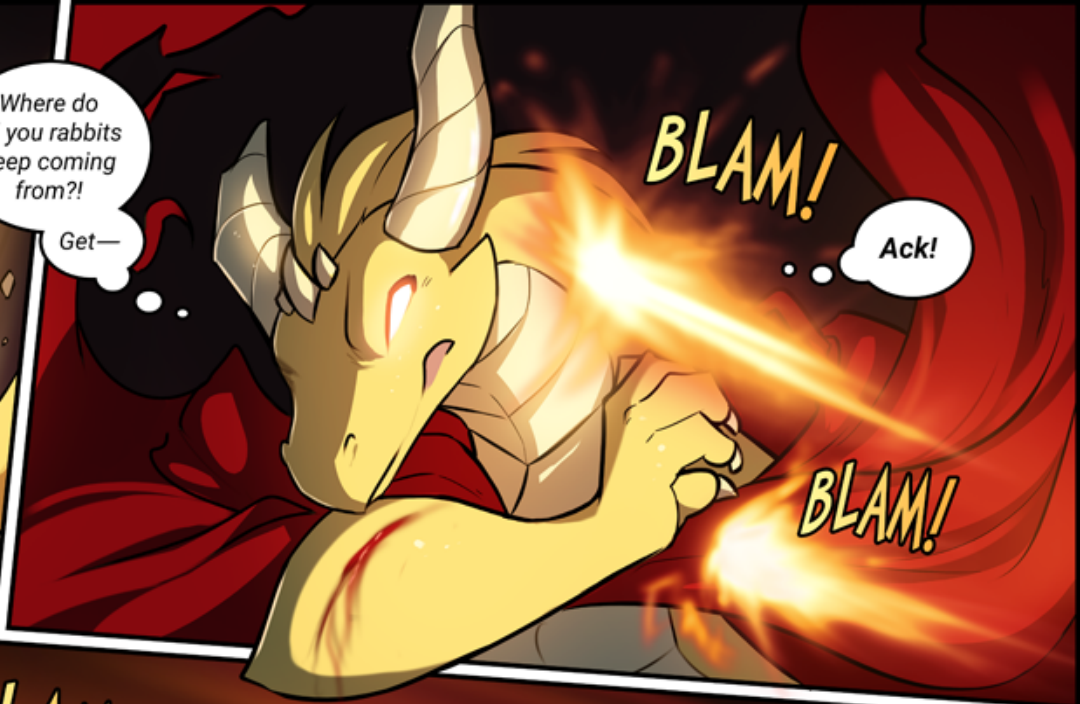
**GRAH!**

**SLICE!**





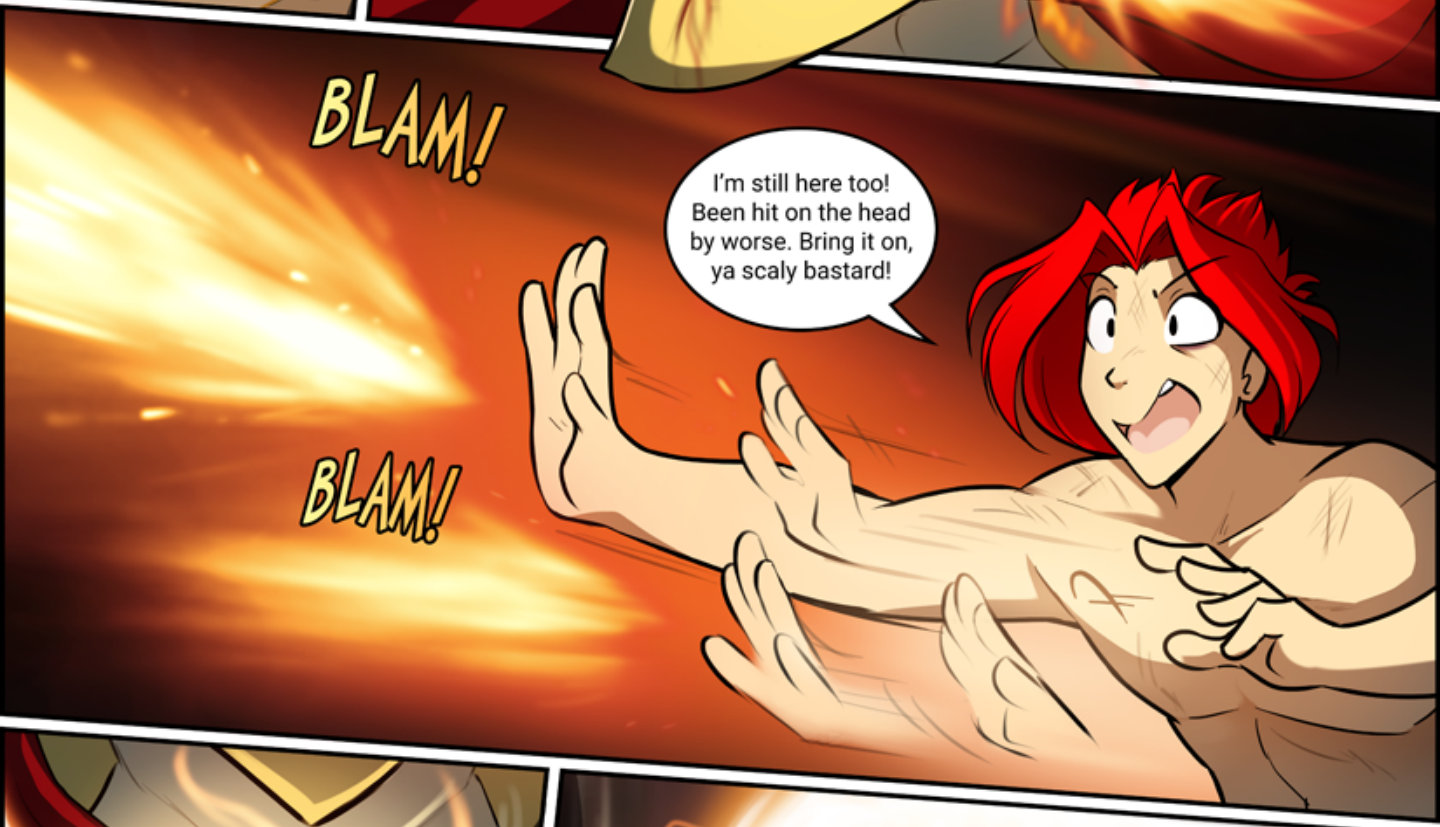
Where do all you rabbits keep coming from?!  
Get—



**BLAM!**

Ack!

**BLAM!**



**BLAM!**

I'm still here too!  
Been hit on the head by worse. Bring it on, ya scaly bastard!

**BLAM!**



**GRAAAAHH!**





Augh!



Enough!



TRSCCH!



FWOOM



I am trying to have a private conversation!

Ngh!







FLAP

There, that's better.

you're coming with me.

Urgh!



FIZZLE

<Oh? What's wrong?

Already burned yourself out with that one attack?>

<Keep that up and you'll risk burning out your magic for good.

Wouldn't want that, would we?>



<If it meant killing you, gladly.>

<...You know, you're awfully ungrateful to the man responsible for saving your *miserable* life.

If it weren't for my magic, you'd still just be the empty, soulless shell you were when your brother first brought you to me.

Everything you've had since that day is thanks to *me!*

And now...>



...I think it's time I took that gift back!

AUGH!

Nata-!!

SNAP!

Zen?

Zen?

The link...

...The mindscape...

...It's gone!



I can't feel it  
at all anymore...

I can't feel...

...anything.




Without the  
link...

I'm back to...  
...nothing...

Hey!

Not  
this time.



We don't need the link anymore, remember?

You don't understand.

Even when the link was blocked, it wasn't like this.

I've spent so long with Zen in my head... to have him suddenly gone...

I *know*. It's going to be tough.

But we survived without it before. We can do it again. Together.

I don't want to lose myself...

You won't. I promise.

You're about to be more yourself than you've ever been.

But no matter what happens, you're always in control.

You'll always be you.

...

Okay.







<There...  
Like a puppet  
with its strings  
severed.>

<Anything  
to say, Natani?  
Not so defiant now  
without my gift,  
are you?>



**Natani!**  
<No...>



<Don't worry,  
Zen. She's still  
alive.  
Just a broken,  
empty vessel  
once again.>

<This is what  
becomes of those  
who don't pay their  
debts.  
If you want her  
back, you'll have to  
come to me.>



<Now then,  
Natani, it's time  
you and I headed  
back to—>



I can feel it...  
...after so long...



The missing part of my soul...

**MNRGH!!**

**GRAUGH?!**



**BIPOOSH!!**



...And my magic!

Wha-?



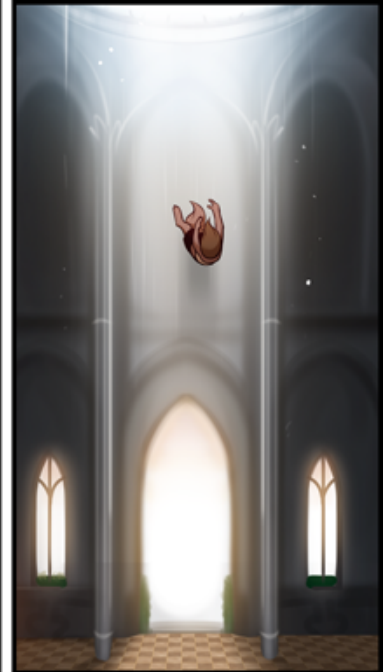
Eh?!

**CRACK!**

**CRACK**

**CRACK!**







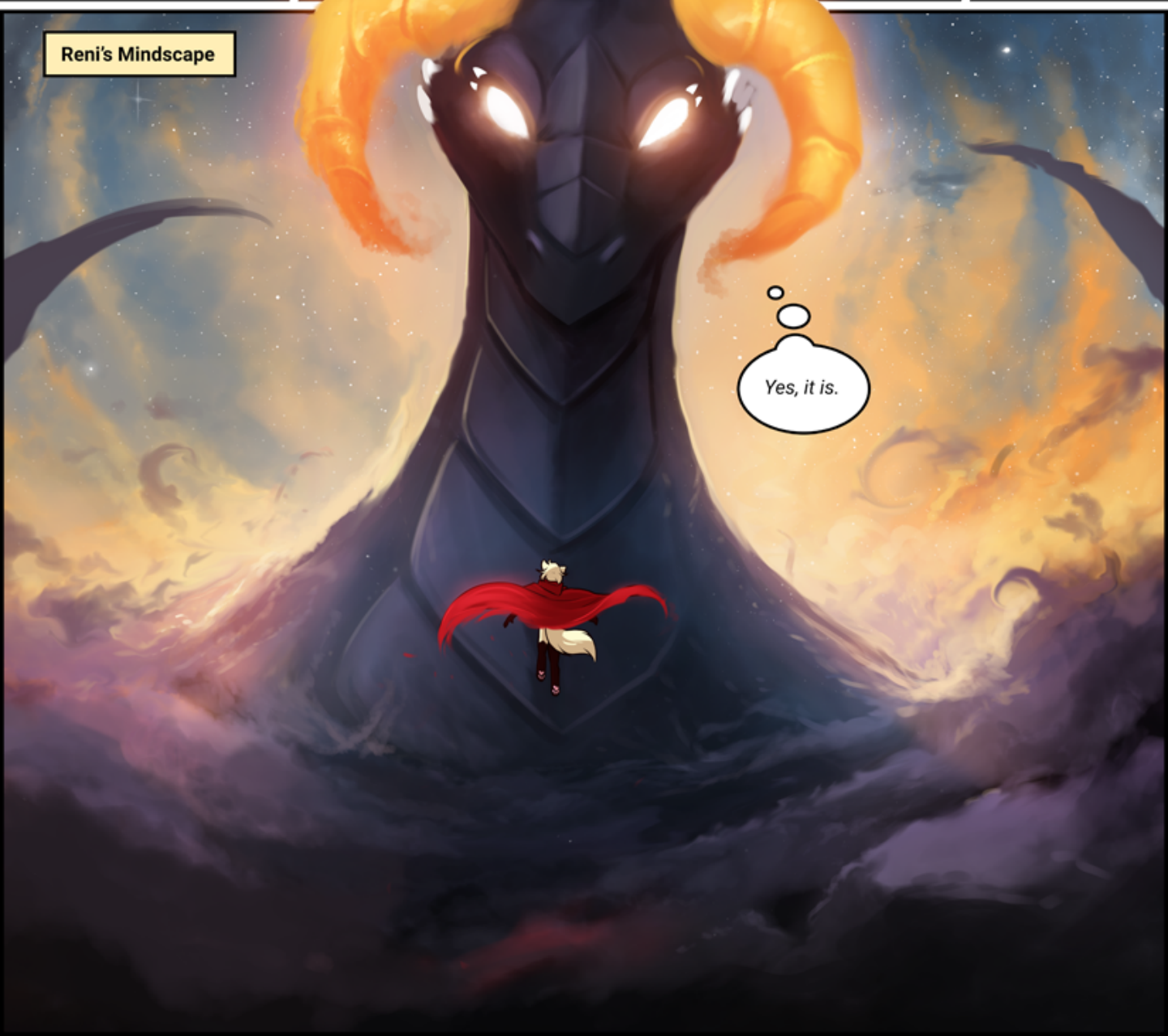
How? How did she do it?!

Her soul was shattered! *Ergh—!*  
And now the Templar.  
Damn it. Looks like time's up...

U-uh...

CRASH!

Reni's Mindscape



Yes, it is.



**FWOOOSH!**



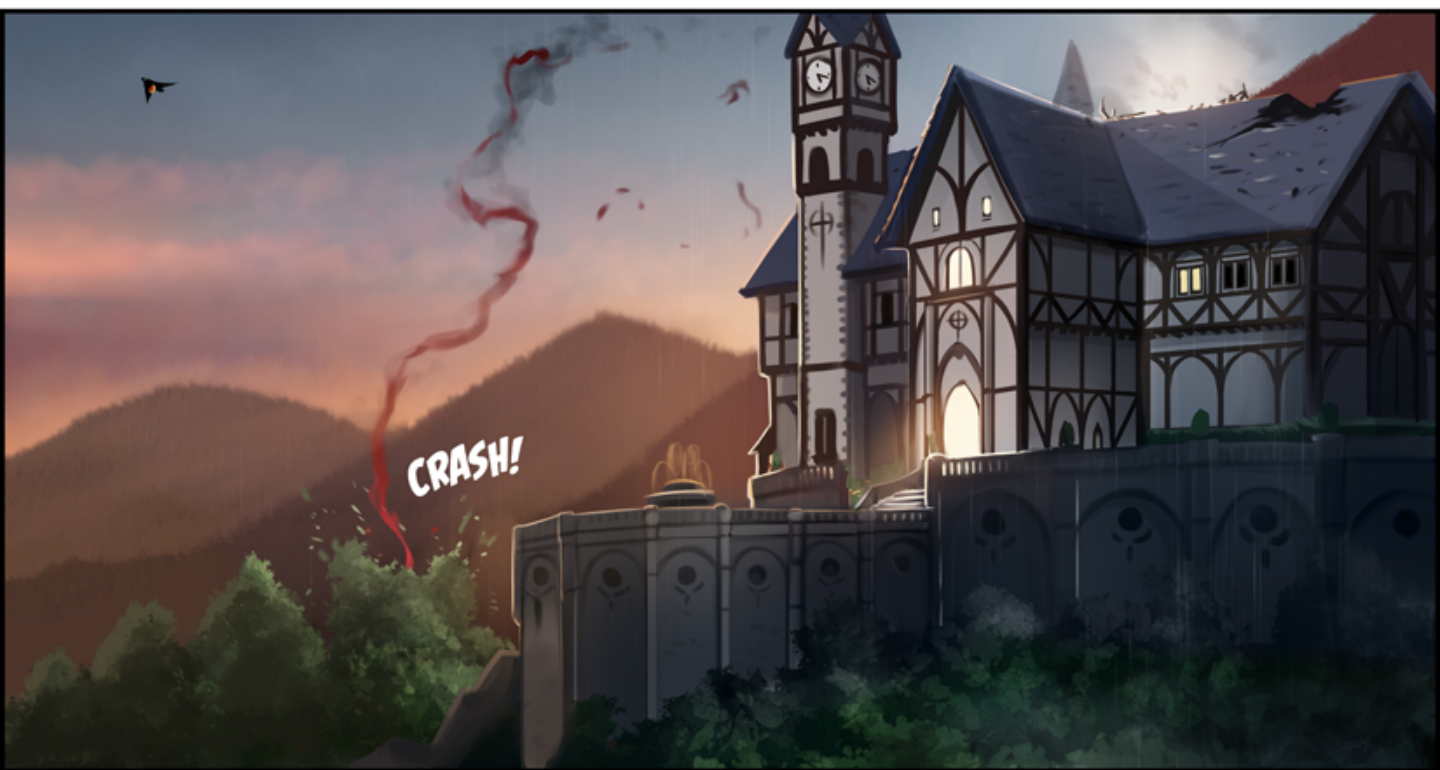
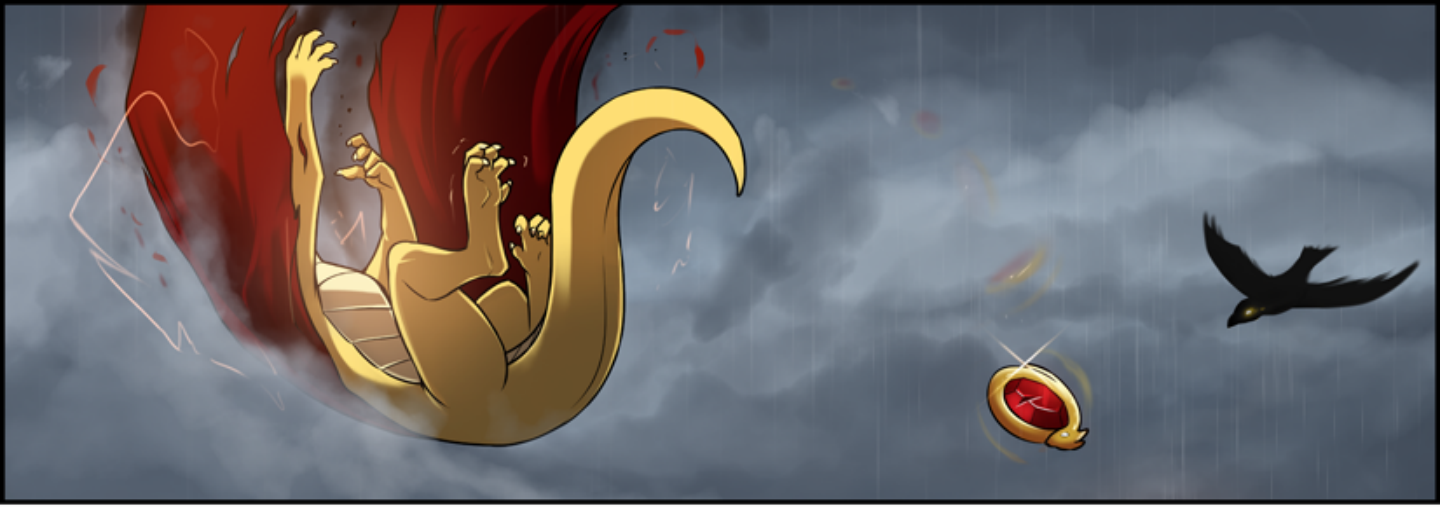
Gah!

My head!  
Stop!

No, no, no—!  
I... I can't....

**GRAH!**









Look! She's waking up!

NRGH~

TWITCH



Ren!

Are you okay?  
One roar for "yes"  
two for "no".

Ow, my head...  
Ngh... It's alright.  
My magic has returned,  
as has my telepathy, so  
I can speak again.

Oh!  
Great!

....Could you  
do a little roar  
anyway?

...  
RAURG!



Karen,  
get off her!

Wah!  
My tail!

Is it safe  
to come out  
now?

UGH  
I could use  
a nice healing  
spa after all  
this...

Wait... Karen,  
did you... always  
have a tail?

Nope!

I got it after  
that foxy guy turned  
into a dragon and  
cursed me!

Also I saved  
Maddie's life.

You  
didn't save  
my life!



That amulet  
he had seemed to be  
using you as a source  
of power.

Yes, I could  
feel him leaching  
off me. I tried to  
fight it...



I'm so sorry!

I've yet to learn  
transformation magic,  
but I swear I'll find a  
way to fix it.

No way!  
You leave my  
tail alone!

W-wha...?

But... don't you want  
to go back to normal?  
You won't be able to  
fit in like that.

Tsh! Who  
cares! Tails  
are cool!

Is everyone  
else alright?



Huh.  
Looks like it's over.



I wish we could've helped somehow.  
Maybe they'd have paid us?  
It might've been enough for Sera's bail!

Meh...  
I wasn't fighting that.



Fight what?  
What are we fighting?  
Sera!  
You're back!  
Oh, your hair's out.

Yeah, they took all my Adrakist stuff.  
So I'm not rocking the dragon mane for now.  
Did you break out again?  
Yep!  
Sigh...  
There goes another town we can't go back to.  
So what'd I miss?



Oh, Sera, you missed it all! There was a dragon!  
Wh... what?  
Yeah! A gold one! And there was a dragon battle. Magic was going everywhere!



**What?!**  
And earlier, Reni went crashing through the roof of the estate from the inside!  
And she was *naked!*



**NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!**  
**IT'S NOT FAIR!!**  
At least now we can finally leave.





Reni, let me take a look at those injuries. Some of them look pretty bad.

It's okay. I'll be fine, really.

Are you sure? Those stone things did a number on you.

Especially that shoulder.

It is only superficial.

I will heal quickly, especially if I conserve my energy by spending time in a smaller form.

Smaller form?

Yes.

We dragons are creatures of magic.

Our bodies are real, but our maximum size depends on how much magic we have.



Honestly, whatever Clovis used did more harm than any of those stone things did. It's actually a little straining for me to maintain this size right now. Only time will heal that.



Nora said something like that back on the island.

Something about being drained when the tower exploded.

That's why she had to sleep. Though she didn't get any smaller.



Dragons as old as Nana Nora tend to keep themselves smaller than natural at all times for convenience.

I suspect if I had been near that exploding tower... there'd be little left of me.



Which is why it concerns me that a wolf could have created a device capable of feeding off a dragon.

I shudder to think what might have happened had you all not stopped him.

WHL...

TWOKINDS IS AT ANTHROCON  
THIS WEEK!



I RETURN ON MONDAY.  
PAGES WILL RESUME AFTER  
I RECOVER NEXT WEEK!





SORRY FOR TAKING SO LONG!

UPDATES WILL  
RESUME SHORTLY!









Rose is...  
...dead?



Yes... or something close to it.  
But... she's been here.  
Her soul was bound to the estate.  
An experiment at preserving life, apparently.

So Miss Roselyn was a... a ghost this whole time?

Uh oh...



Raine, remember what Rose said. Stay in control!

Rose...  
Rose is...  
**NGH!**



**FWOMF!**

Ah!  
N-no!

TREMBLE!

SCRAPE!



Wha?!

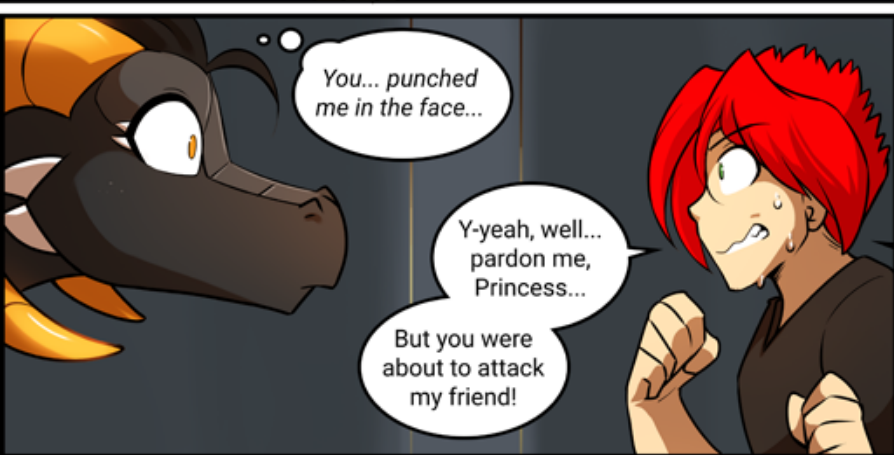
Raine's another wolf imposter?!



Stop her!

Wait!  
She's okay!

Raine!  
come back!  
**Raine!**







Erg...

I'm such an idiot!

I can't stay in control of myself.

What's the matter with me?



SIGH...

I thought I'd finally found someone who could help me with this... this part of myself.

But I can't! It's hopeless. And Rose... she was never even really here with me. Just a ghost...

...like the rest of my family.



...Huh?



FLUMPH

My sweater... she fixed it.



*Raine:  
Take better care of this next time, okay?  
-Rose*

She must have left it here while we were all in the Oasis Room... before... everything...

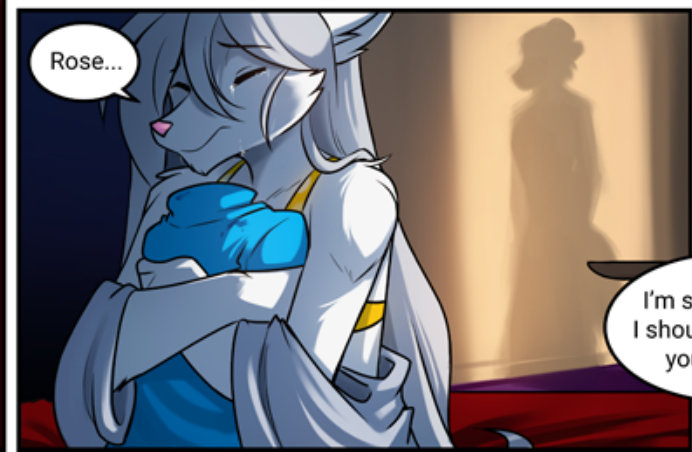


I should be used to this by now... family leaving.

Mom... dad... they always left me behind, and it never bothered me... much.

So why...

...why does this time feel worse? I...



Rose...



I'm sorry, Raine. I should have told you sooner.







You've never spoken to me my whole life.

Why now?





I've been suppressing my magic my whole life!

I don't want to just keep locking this part of myself away anymore!

Rose said with practice I could learn to control it.

I want that!  
I want control over my own self!

You know this ability better than anyone!

Please! Stay!  
**Teach me!**



I... I'm sorry. I cannot. There are things in motion. Things bigger than you.

The Templar are on the move... now that Brahn has what he needs. I must be elsewhere.



Templars? Brahn? What do you mean?

I can't say. Literally. I'm not being evasive, I'm magically bound to maintain the secrets of the other Masters.

...Could you at least tell me how you managed to perfect Flawless Transformation the first time yourself?

Maybe I could... do the same things.

I'm afraid not. Because the truth is, I never had to.



I've **always** had perfect control over my shapeshifting, ever since I was young. It was as natural to me as breathing. I did not train, nor did I ever transform without meaning to, as you do. Yours is simply... unstable.



You may gain more control over it in time... but I suspect it's something you'll always have to deal with.

And I'm afraid you'll have to figure it out on your own.





Just tal  
to r!

Forget it

RUN

ork well  
together

Trace

Sarif

shape  
the wor

Yeah, whatev

Take he

You basta

Forget her.

Forget.

...wake up...  
...wake up...  
...wake up...



Huh?





*Fine*, then I will!  
I'll figure out how to control my ability on my own!  
Like I've always been!

And I won't use *this*!

I'm not going to keep suppressing what I am anymore!



I don't *want* you to have to suppress yourself, Raine.

I was just trying to make you happy.

I thought it was what *you* wanted. To be human.



I *am* human.  
But without my magic, I'm just...  
...I'm always half of myself.

And I have no one to...  
...



...I'm sorry.  
I wish things could have been different.  
Had I known you existed earlier, maybe I could have helped ease you into this.

Or trained you as I... did with Trace.



I won't lie, it's a dangerous time to be a Keidran right now.

But you're a talented girl, with strong magic like your mother.

My ability may be more stable than yours, but I've never been able to stay partially transformed like you can.



Perhaps in time you'll find a way to master it in ways I never could.





Natani?

Urgh...

Ngh...

Natani!

Thank goodness, you're awake.

Ugh... What happened?

Where am I?

You passed out. I brought you back to the room.

I was really worried... I didn't know what Clovis did to you. Zen says he messed with your heads.

Your... eyes are different! Are you... okay?



Wait...

...Who are you?

And what's with the freakishly long ears?



H-huh? Oh no...

N-Natani! It's me! I'm your... I'm Keith!

Remember? **Keith!**



Natani?



SNRK



**Natani!** That's not funny!

**HAHAHA!** Ow, my ribs!



<Tch! Well, at least you're okay enough to make jokes.>

<How long was I out?>

<Just a few minutes.

Seriously, how do you feel?>

<Like I got stepped on by a dragon.>

Ergh!

<Hey, don't get up! You pushed your body to its limits!>



<Ugh... I'm fine! What do I look like, a dainty woma—>



<Wow, Keith.

Wasted no time getting me out of my bindings, I see.>

TSK TSK!

<Wha- no! T-that wasn't me!>



<That was me!

Sorry!>

Ah! <Oh... it's just you, Kat.>

<Keith asked me to take a look.

I couldn't tell if you broke any ribs, but your lungs sounded okay.

Still, best not to have your chest restricted for now.

You know, I think your magic bindings actually saved you from damage to your... uh... you know.>



<Oh, wonderful. So all the damage went to my ribs, but at least my tits aren't bruised.

What a relief!>



<I know, right?

And don't worry, Keith was a gentleman. He covered his eyes while I examined you.>



<Seriously, Keith?! You covered your eyes?>

<Wha—I was being respectful!>

<Man, you are *such* a Basitin.>

<What's that supposed to mean?>





**Eugh!**  
Gross.  
 <Quit flirting with your Basitin in front of me.>



Zen!

<What are you still doing up on your bad leg?! I told you to rest!>

<I'm standing guard!

I'm not resting until I'm sure Nat is safe.>

<What can you do with one leg?

And what good will you be to anyone if you end up getting gangrene?>

HOP  
HOP



<Hey, I was good enough to get a leg up on ol' Rom.>  
 <Heh... leg up.>

<Zen...? I... I didn't know... you were there.>



Zen?  
 Can you hear me?  
 Are you still in here?



<You tried it too, didn't you?>

<So Clovis really did it. The link... it's really gone.>

<It seems like it...>



<Damn... after all this time... Guess we're gonna have to get used to talking to each other like normal people now.>

<What a pain. But... well, maybe it's for the best. You don't need it anymore.>



<And hey, we won't have to put up with each other's weird thoughts all the time now. Some privacy at last, right?>

<Yeah... I guess.>



Merry  
Christmas!







<How did you survive what Clovis did to you?

I thought without the link, you'd... you know... *die*.>



<...Or at least spend the rest of your life as a mindless husk.

Do you think he was lying about that all along?>

<That certainly sounds like something Clovis would do.

But who knows.>



<Safe to say that wasn't the normal way to end that spell.>

<He wasn't exactly gentle when he tore out the link.>



I'm pretty sure if it wasn't for the week I spent blocked from you, I really would have died back there. I'd already experienced it once before, so it was less of a shock.

As the link snapped, I merged with that other version of myself.

Though I still just feel like...

Me.



<Merged? So you've... changed?>

You *do* seem a little different.>

<I do? How?>

<I dunno, more... self-confident?>



<I don't notice any difference. Honestly, I—

Wait... I...!>







<Mom...

Dad...>



<Huh?  
Mom and  
dad? What's  
wrong?>

<It's memories!  
Ones I didn't know  
I'd forgotten a long  
time ago.

Of mom  
and dad.>

<I remember their  
faces... the scents...  
it's so clear!>

<What?  
How?>

<I think the  
fragments of my  
mind that broke off  
had some of my old  
memories.

They never  
faded from age.>



<Really? I wish I  
could see it too. I can't  
remember them very  
clearly anymore.>

<Well just look in  
my mind right now!  
You... oh... right...>

<I know!  
I'll show you!>



**Natani!**

**You idiot!**

Wha-!?



<Are you crazy?!

Don't you remember how that spell was **killing me?**>

<You *literally* just passed out from overworking your magic!>

<Mana burn can cause permanent damage you know!>

Just what I need, Keith and my brother teaming up to nag me.

Seems I have two moms now.



<I wasn't going to cast the **Hearts Desire** spell! Just a basic illusion.>

<Even still, take it easy, Natani!

You spent over a week unconscious not long ago. We were all worried sick it would happen again.

Please don't take unnecessary risks.>

Make that three moms...



<Alright, alright... I'll rest, okay?>

<And no magic!>

<Yeah, I know! I'll take it easy, promise.>

These three...



<And you too! **Bed**, now!>

<Uh... guess I'm going now.

I'll be back! Rest well, Nat.>



<Hey, watch the leg!>

HOP!  
HOP!

...What a strange family I've ended up with since then...





There.

I've disabled the enchantment.

It's now simply a **very** over-engineered mana necklace.

Useful for casting magic whenever you're stuck as a Keidran.

And if you still do not want it, I understand, but I hope you'll keep it handy just in case.



I only want you to stay safe, Raindrop.

I... thank you.

He's right, I should keep mana on me.

I was helpless back in the forest without it.

So was mom, back when she was cursed.

She had so much power, but as a keidran she suddenly couldn't use any of it.



I'm sorry I threw the gift back in your face like that.

It wasn't about the training. I was just upset you had to go again so soon.

Maybe if things ever do calm down someday, and we find where mom went, we'll be able to sit down as a family and talk for real.



Do you think that would be possi—



...Oh.



Alright!  
Enough moping,  
Raine!



I can't just  
keep hiding in  
here feeling sorry  
for myself.

I'm sure...  
well... I *hope* Reni  
is a reasonable  
dragon.



I've been  
in this room  
long enough!



I don't care  
what my father  
says...

I *will* figure out  
a way to master  
both my forms.

One day...



What if I had  
ulterior motives?

Everyone  
is capable of  
betraying you!

Especially  
family!

