



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...

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

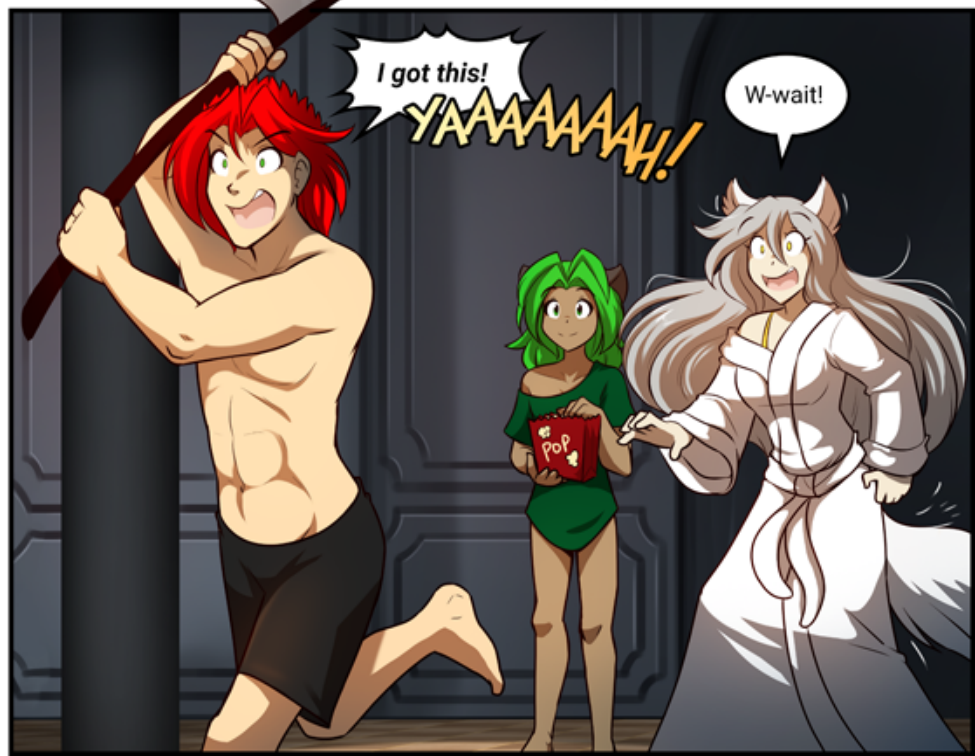


...a... link
between it
and Reni.



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

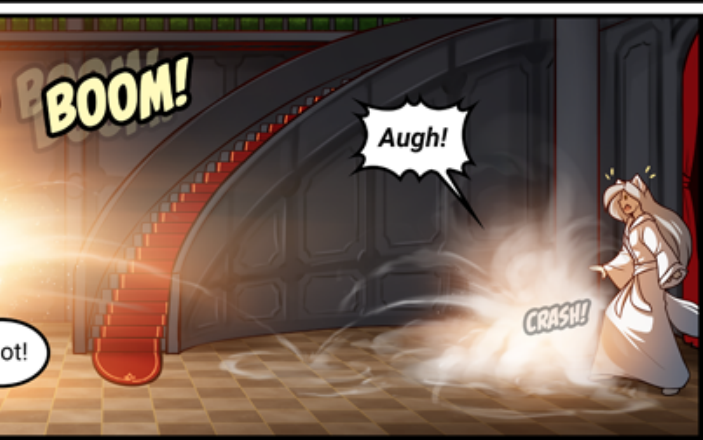
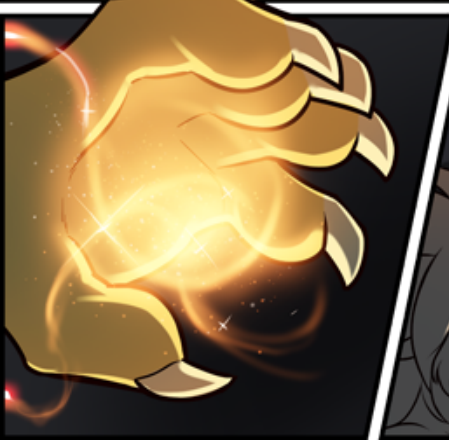
Break it?



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.»



Alright, Maddie,
this is your chance!

If you can take down
a dragon, the old goats
will **have** to consider you
a worthy Adelaide!

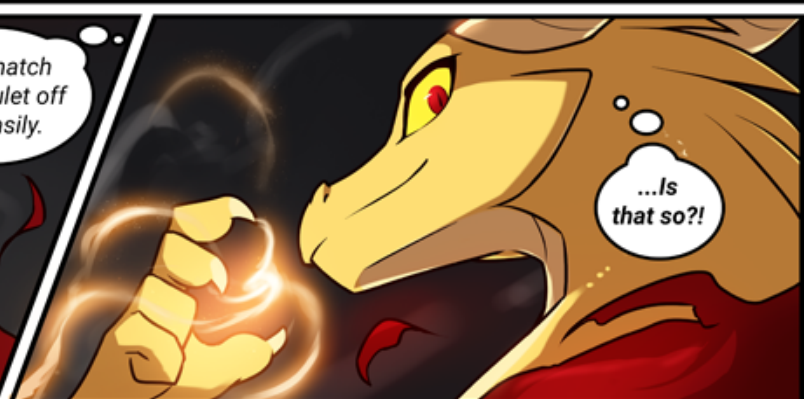


I just have
to wait for him
to land.

While he's
distracted by
the others...



I can snatch
that amulet off
him easily.



...Is
that so?!



Try this on
for size, little
Basitin!

BZZZZT!

How-? Did
he just read
my mind?!

!?



Y-you think
you can hit **me**?!

Not good!
Have to...!



Maddie
I'll save you!

Wha-?!





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.



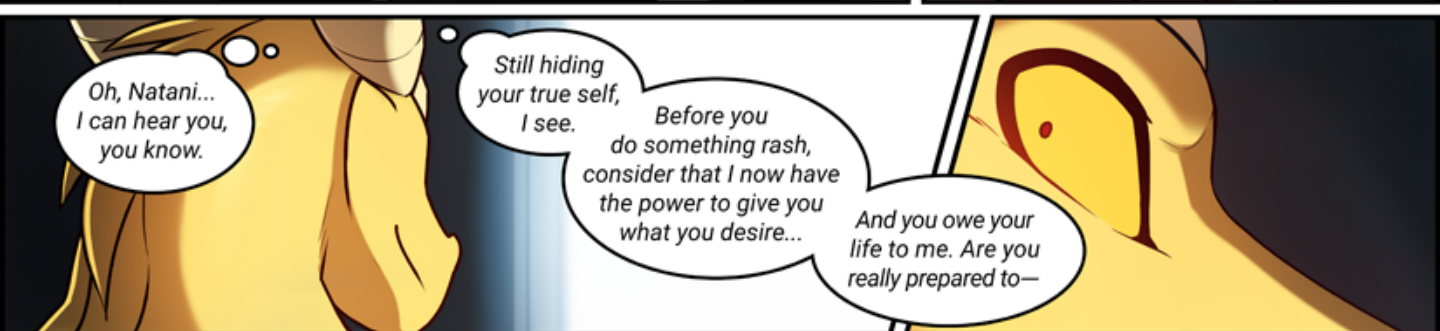
Assassins...

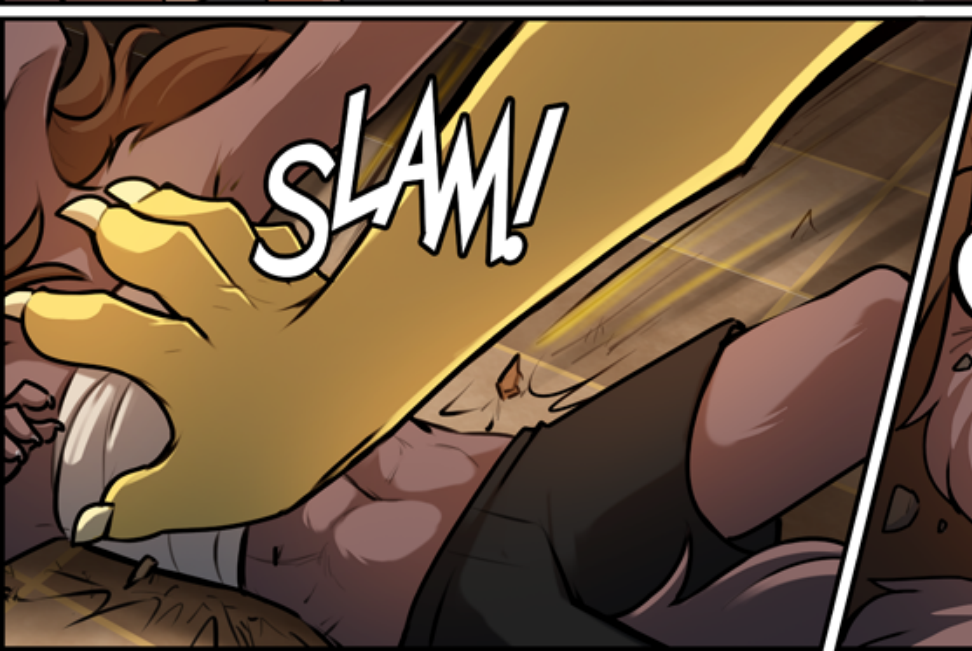
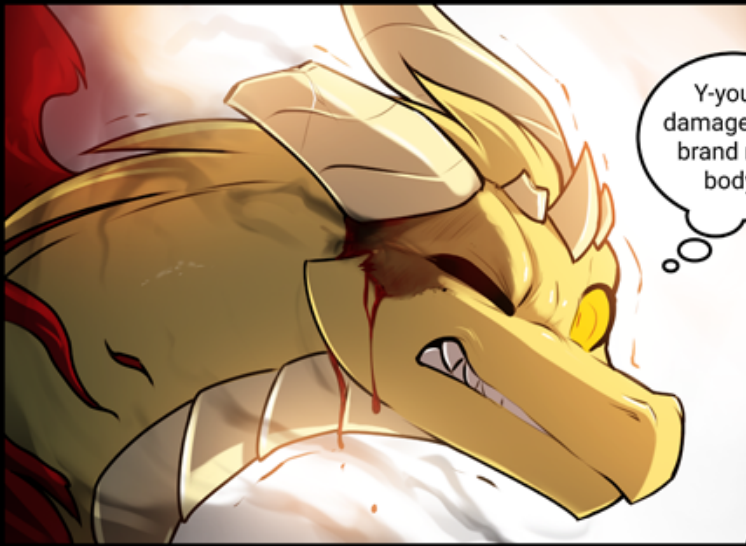
Thugs...

Even... Brutus...

None of it matters anymore.

Twitch









Where do
all you rabbits
keep coming
from?!

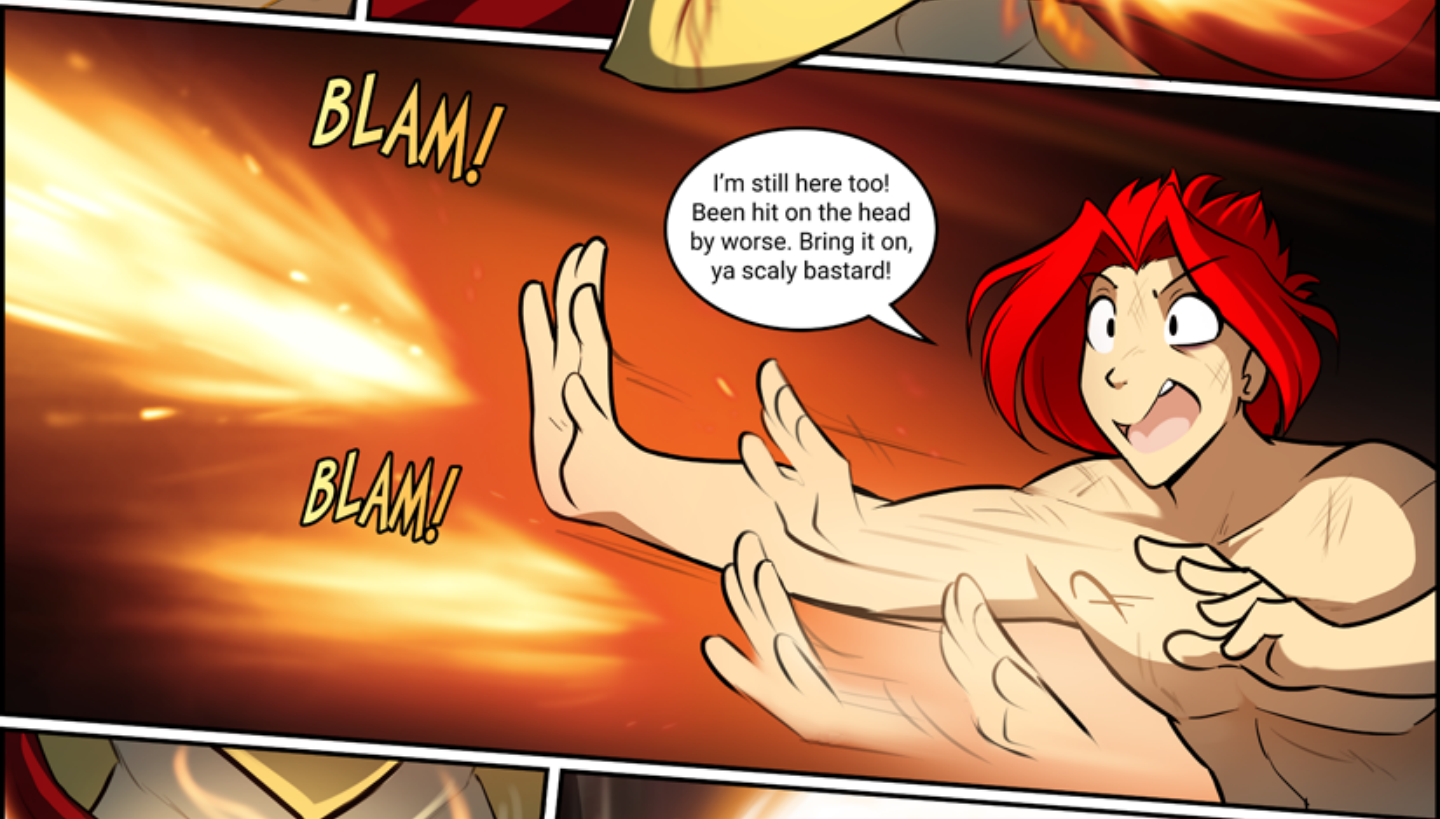
Get—



BLAM!

Ack!

BLAM!



BLAM!

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

BLAM!

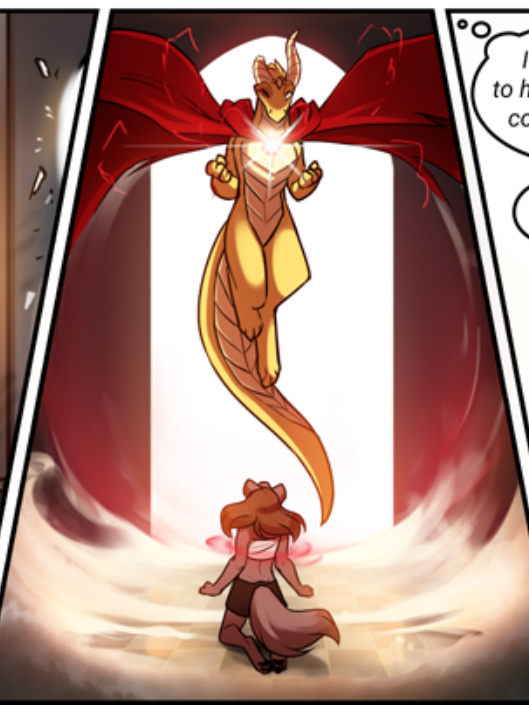


GRAAAAHH!





Enough!



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...

NNRGH!!

GRAUGH?!

BWOOSH!!

BZZT!

...And my
magic!

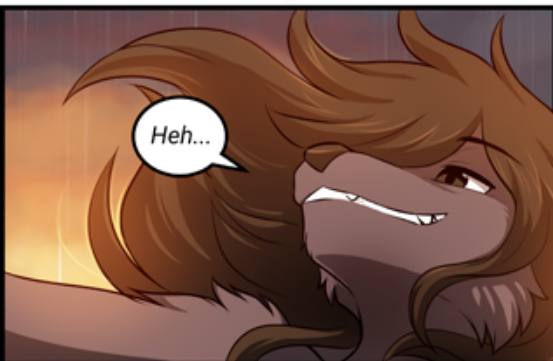
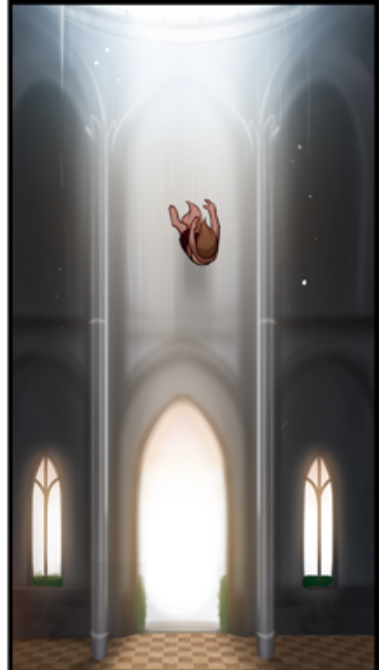
Wha-?

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...

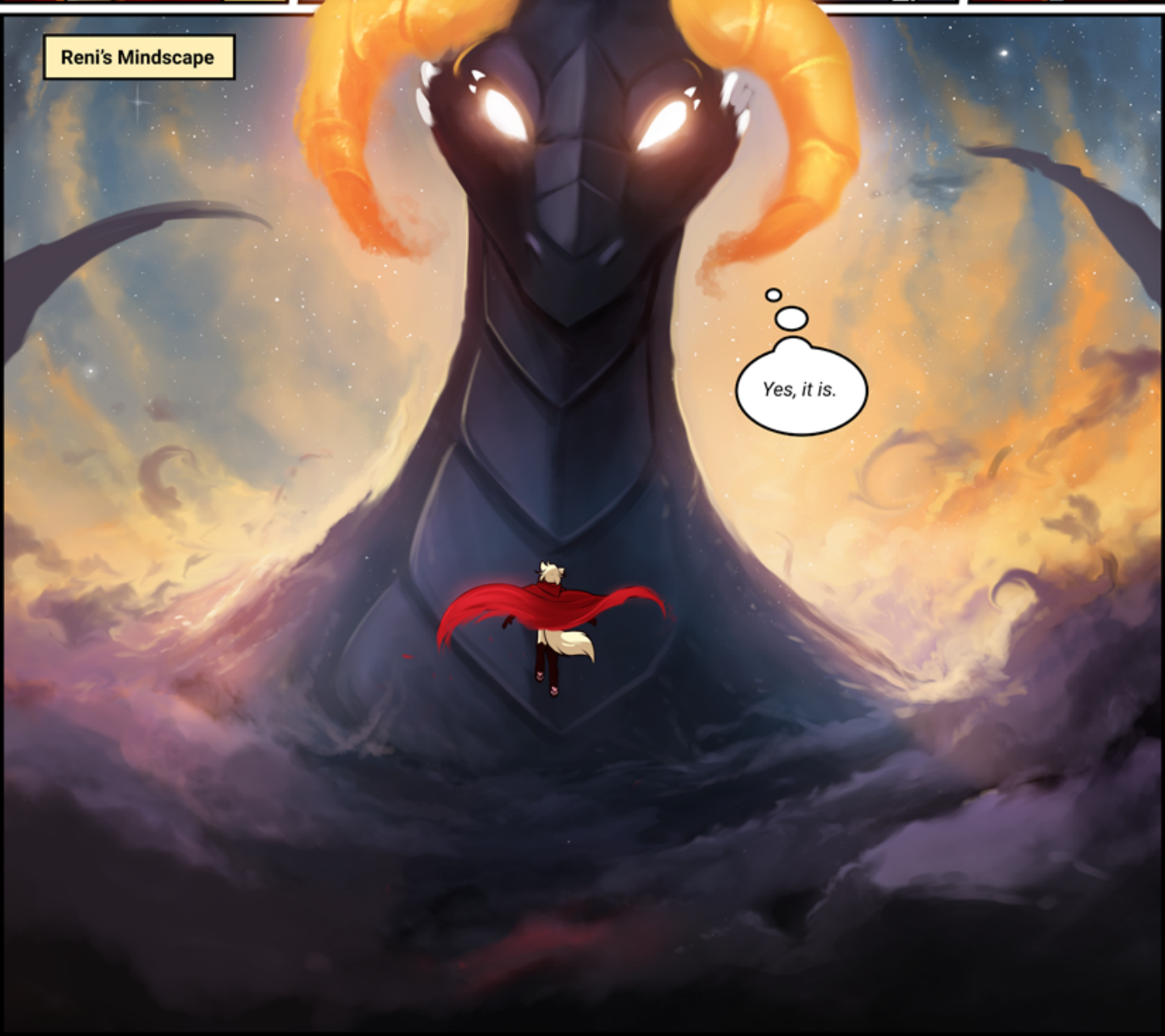


CRASH!



U-uh...

Reni's Mindscape



Yes, it is.



FWOOOOSH!

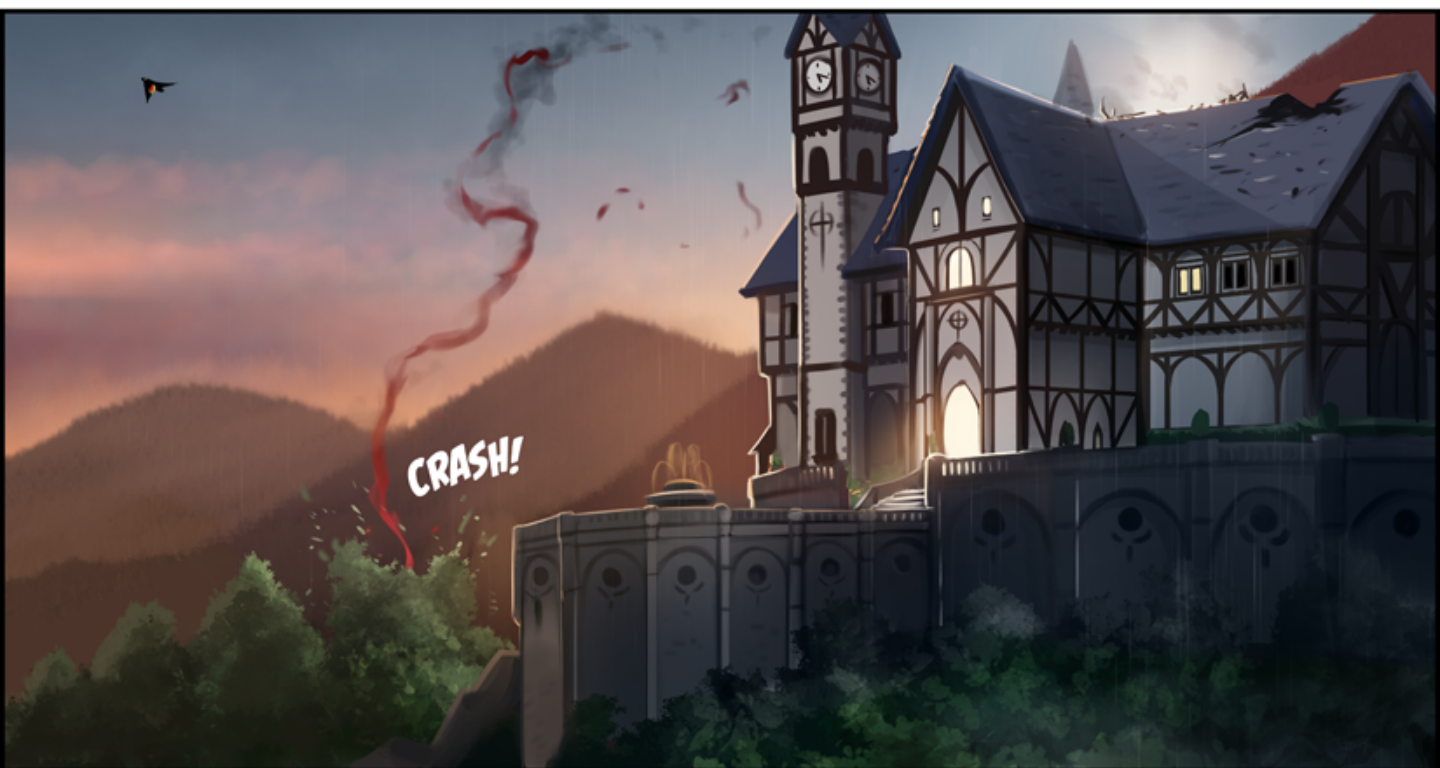
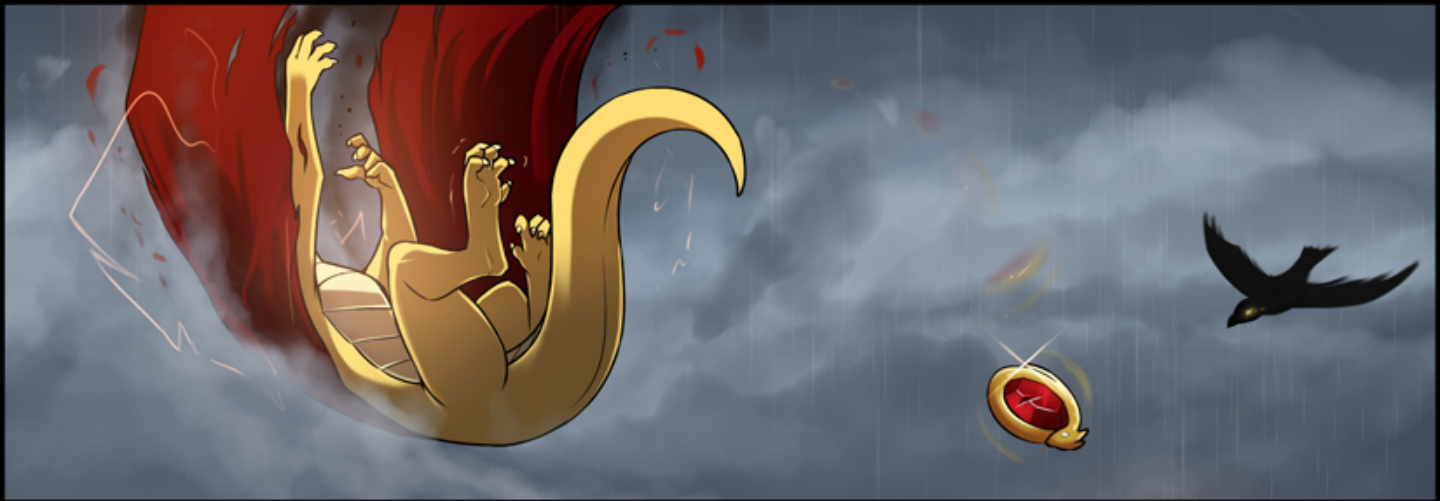


Gah!

My head!
Stop!

No, no, no—!
I... I can't....

GRAH!







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.

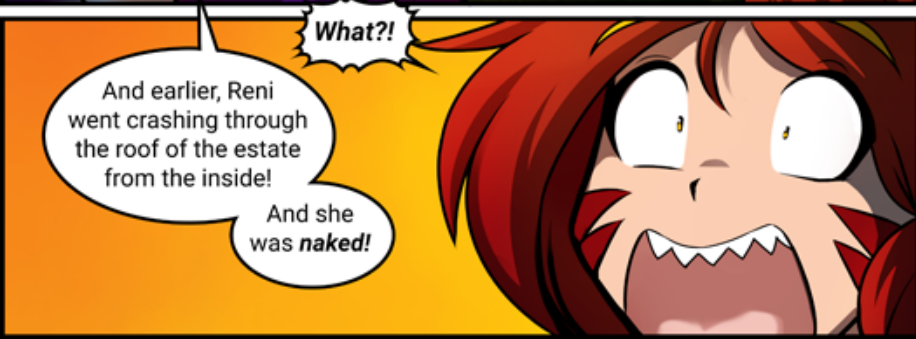
So what'd
I miss?



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*!



NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

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.

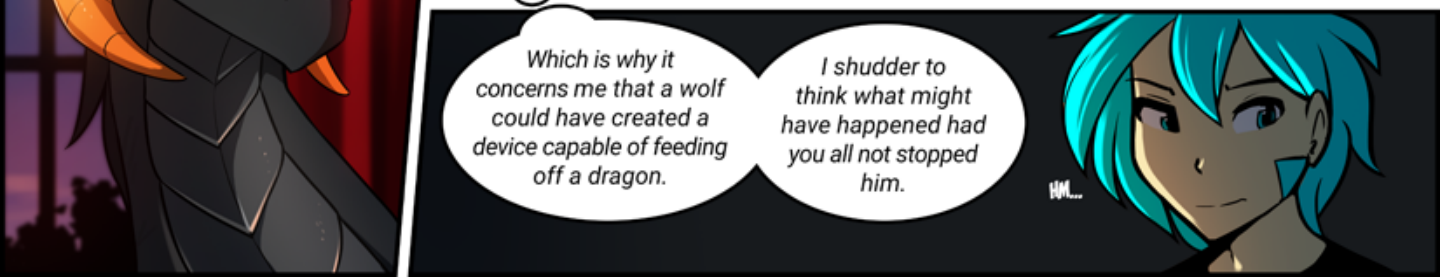
Something about being drained when the tower exploded.

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.

TWOKINDS IS AT ANTHROCON
THIS WEEK!



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

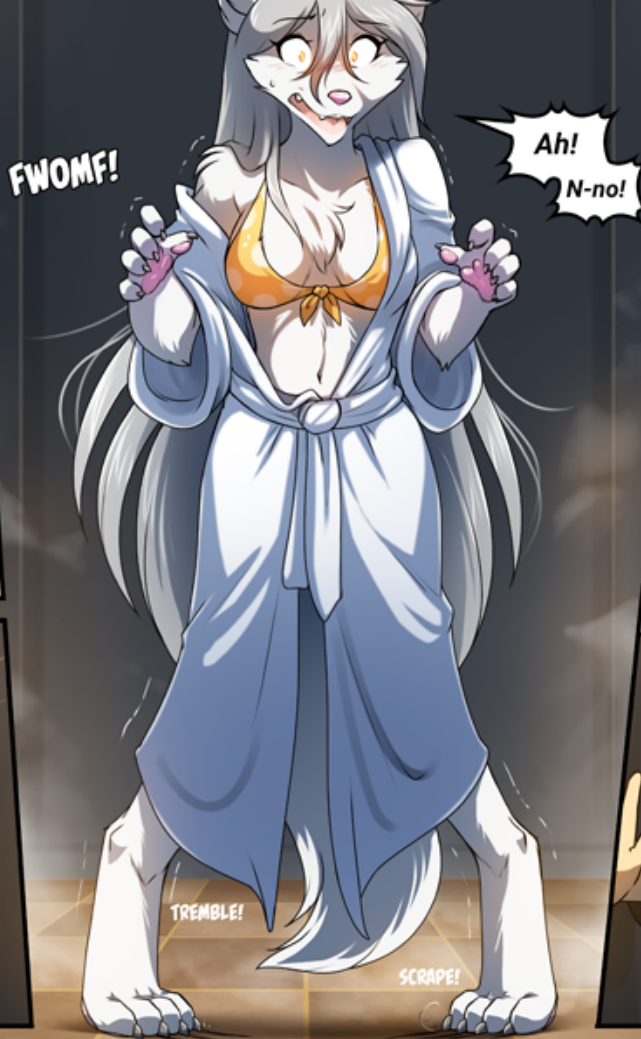


SORRY FOR TAKING SO LONG!

UPDATES WILL
RESUME SHORTLY!











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...

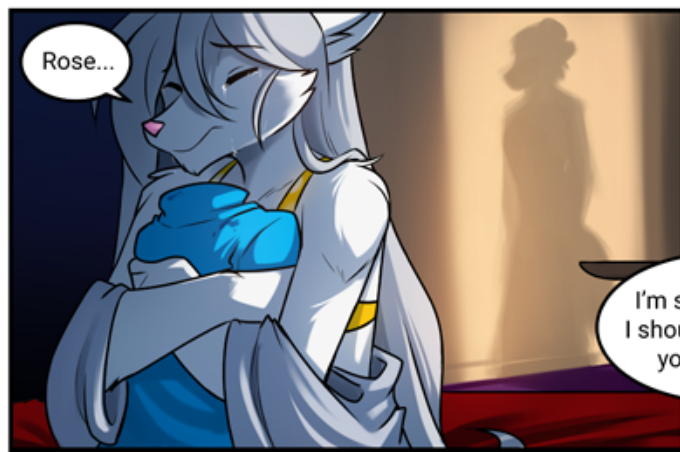


I should be
used to this by now...
family leaving.

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

So why...

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



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





I'm just...
confused.
I don't
even know
you.

You've never
spoken to me my
whole life.

Why now?



To be fair,
for a long time I didn't
know you existed.

Your mother tried
to keep you a secret
from everyone.

After I learned of
you, well... truthfully,
I wasn't sure how to
approach you.

Or if I should.



I'm guessing
your mother told you
not to trust me.

...She told me
you don't do anything
unless it's part of some
scheme of yours.

Is this one
of them? Giving
me this?



Yes.

Wha—?
You're just
admitting it?!



I'm not going to
lie to you, my daughter. I am
trying to hedge my bets a little.
But it's not against you.

I understand if
you don't trust me.

I really do care about
you, though... as much
as I can for anyone.

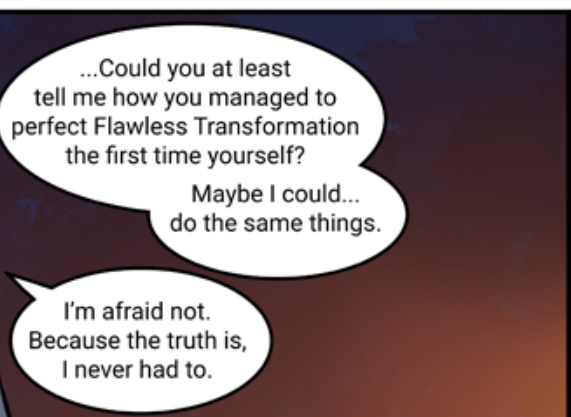


But I suppose
I have overstayed
my welcome.

Huh? You're
leaving again?
Already?!

I have a feeling this
estate will not be pleased
to have me here much longer,
once the security magic
is fully restored.

Dad, wait!







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.





«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?>



<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*.»

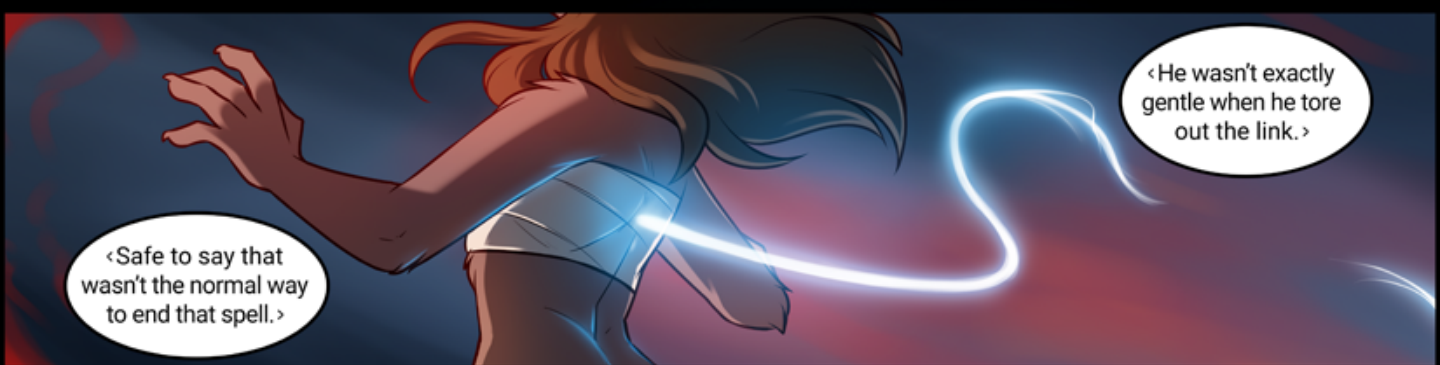


«...Or at least spend the rest of your life as a mindless husk.

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...



የላቦ ጋሊኒያ
ንግድ ስራ ማድረግ
የሚችል የሆነ



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.