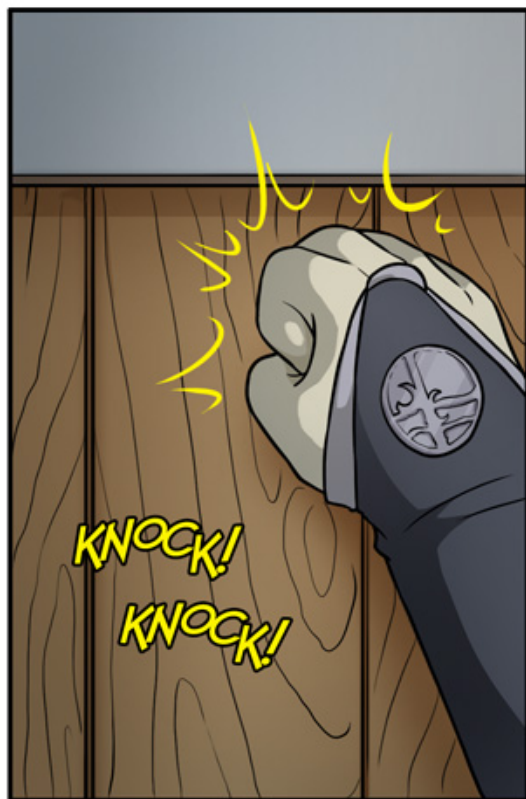
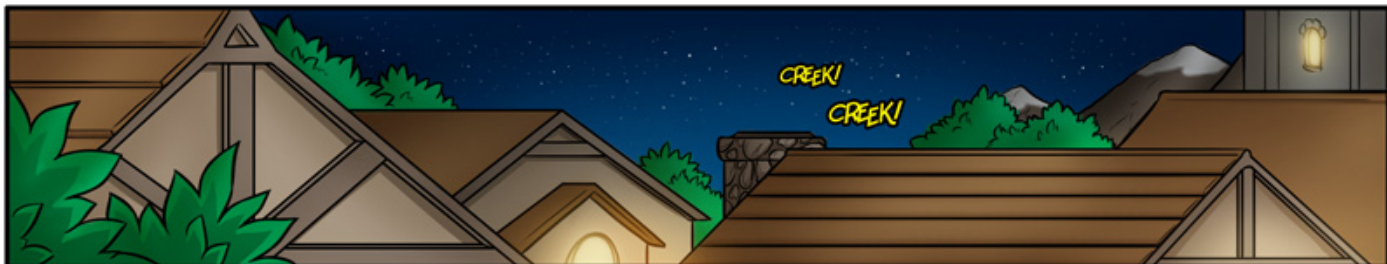


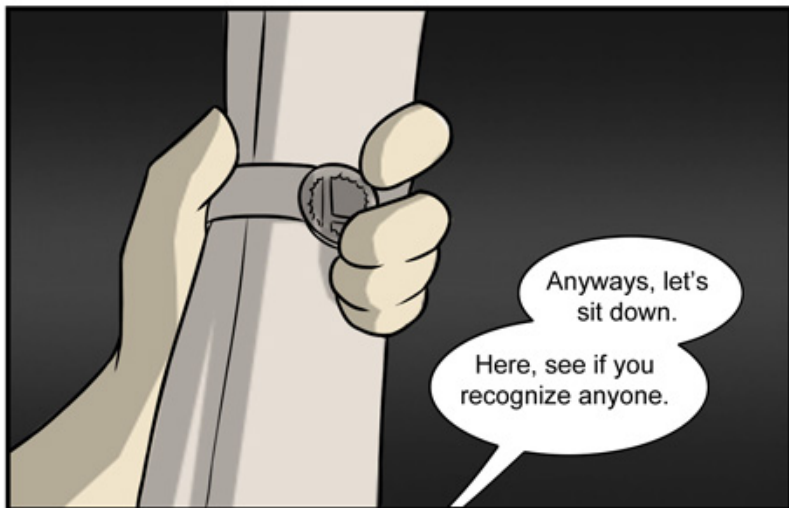
TWO KINDS

Chapter Nine









We don't have a lot of info on the second pair...

But it turns out the blue-haired guy is Trace Legacy, the former Grand Templar himself.

It's strange, I never knew what he looked like before now.

For the last four years he's generally been working in the shadows.

We suspect he's been captured and brainwashed by the striped Keidran.

Here's your drink, sir.

Heh, thanks kid.

N-no problem.

I can't believe this...

Those four are all wanted by the Templar.

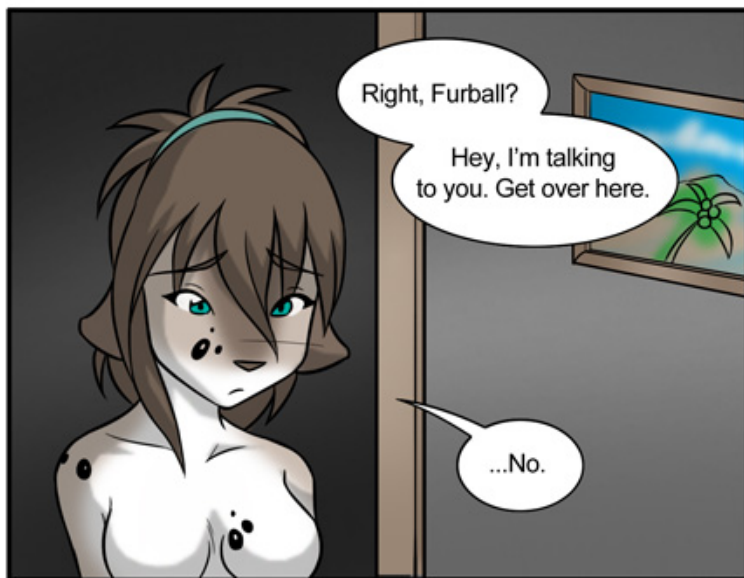
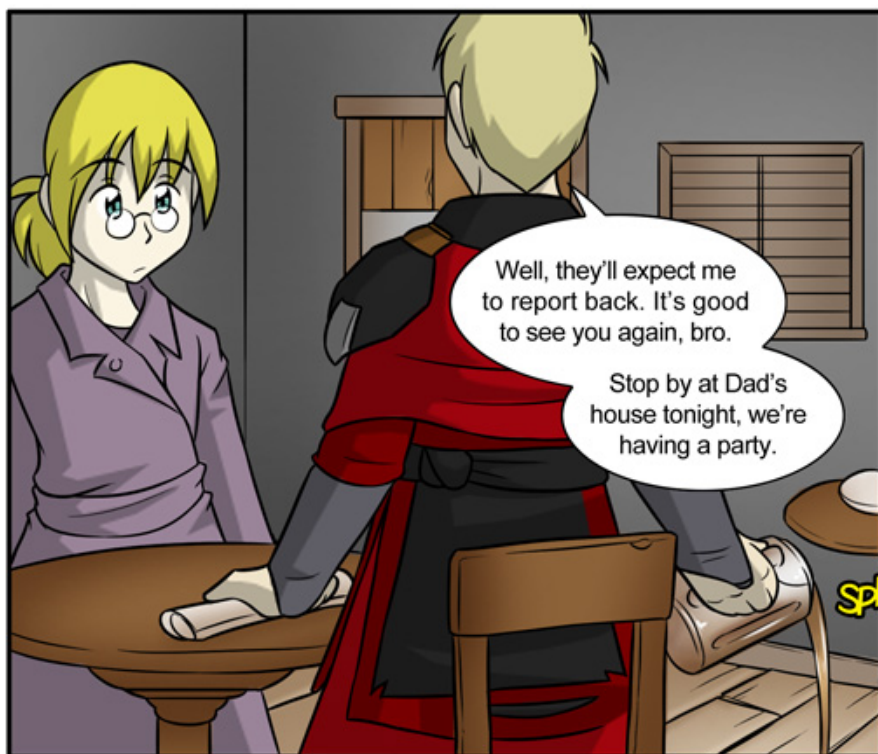
But... how could Flora commit these crimes.

She didn't seem capable of it. Were they tricking me? Should I tell Rod?

Bleh!

What the heck is this? It's piss warm!

I-I'm sorry... We have no ice or magic to cool it.





"No" huh...



Eric, you're aware of the Templar laws.

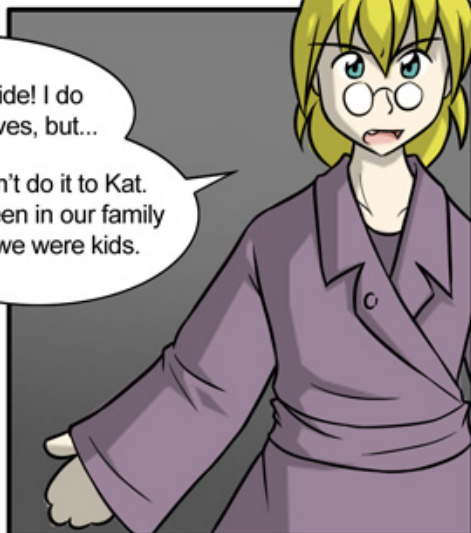
So what is this?



You know that it's against the law for traders to have slaves not bound by control spells.

She shouldn't be able to say "no."

I'm aware of the laws, Roderick. I also know what they do to Keidran!



It kills them inside! I do use it for my slaves, but...

I couldn't do it to Kat. She's been in our family since we were kids.



Since **you** were a kid. Sigh... I'm not going to argue with you.

Run your business how you want. I've got to get going.

Just be careful Eric, other Templar might not let you off if they notice.

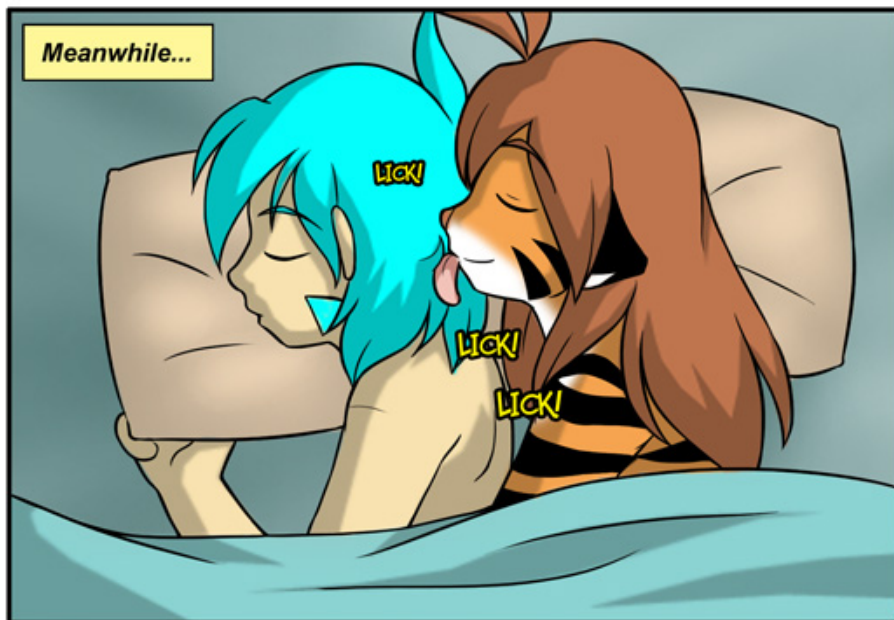
Oh, and Kat...



I've known you for 9 years, and that's the first time I've heard you speak up for yourself.

I hate to admit it, but I'm honestly impressed.

Meanwhile...



Geh...?

What's licking
my hair...?



Flora, what
are you doing?

Neh...?



Eep!

Oh no!
I didn't mean
to do that!



Flora, I told
you! You don't have to
suppress your instincts
around me.

But... I don't
want you to think
that I'm weird.

Trust me, Flora,
it's fine! I realize you're a
Keidran, and it doesn't
bother me.

I... if you
say so.



KNOCK!
KNOCK!

Hey Keith, Natani.
I know it's early, but we
need to get going.

We want to get on
the boat before ten.

<Natani, Trace is just
saying to wake up. Don't worry,
we're not in a hurry.>

Meh...

<M'kay... I'm up...>

<Hey... guy...>

Wake up...>

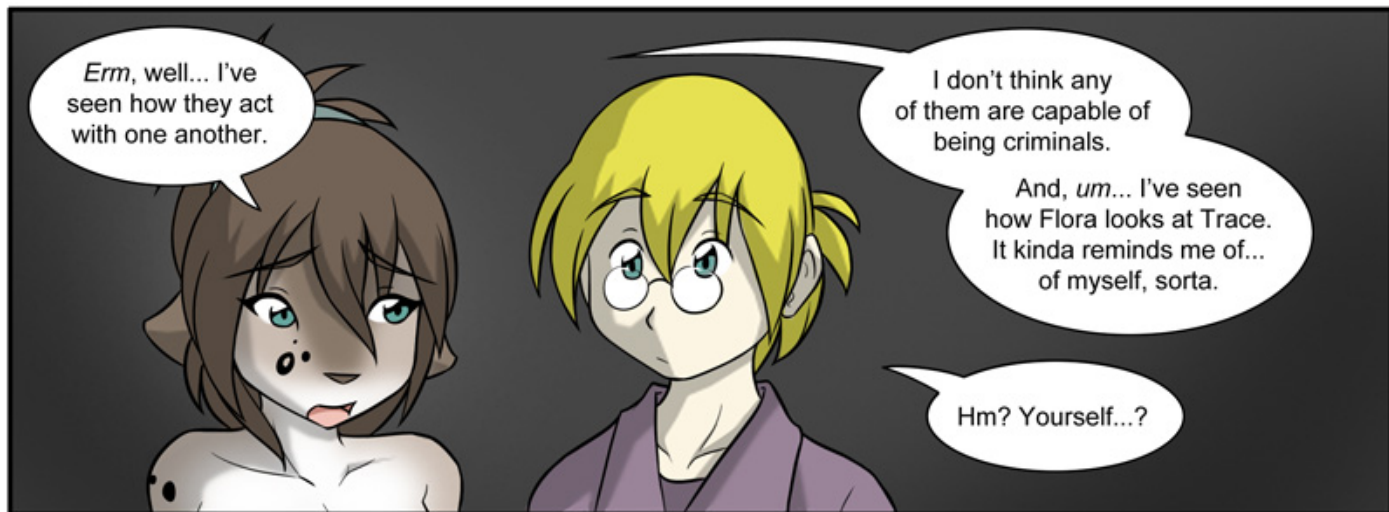
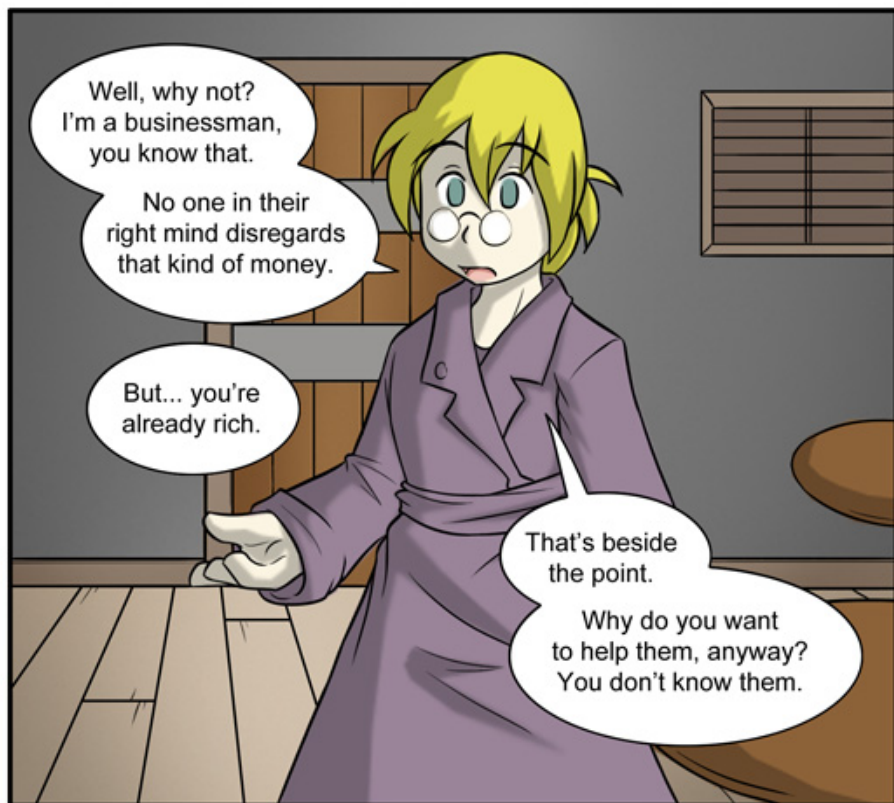
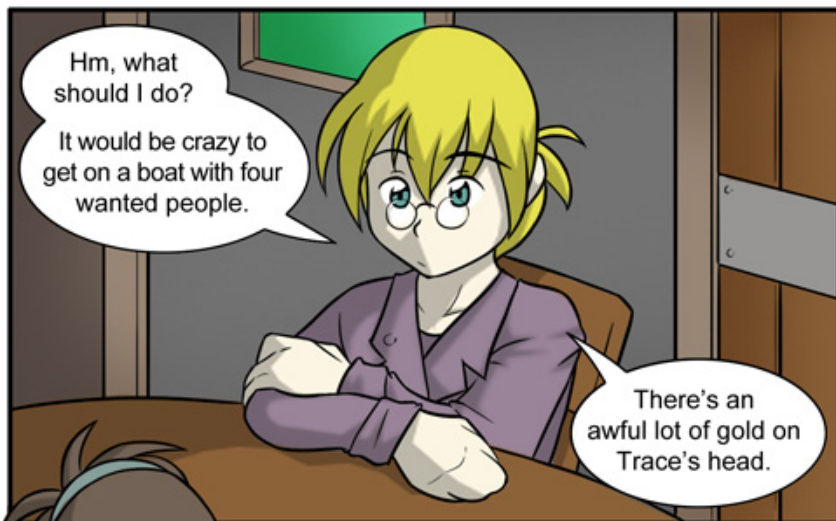
<Hey, wake up.>

<Neh, I hate
mornings...>

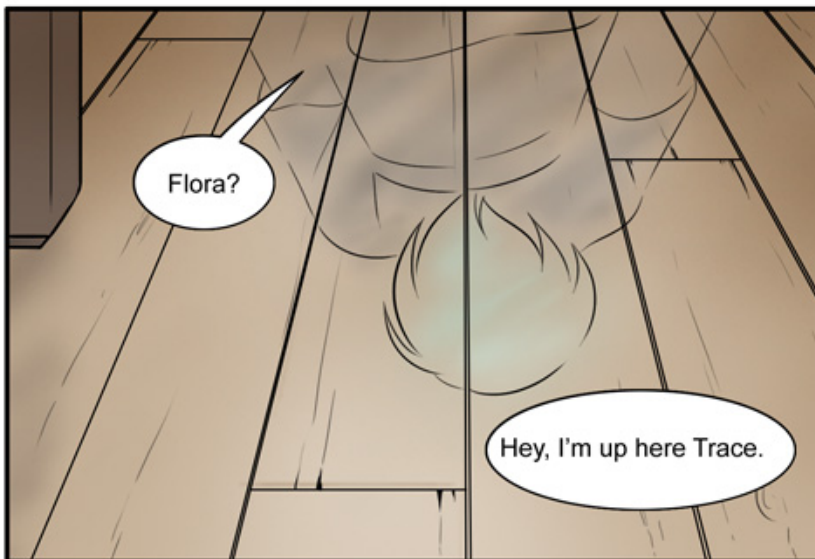
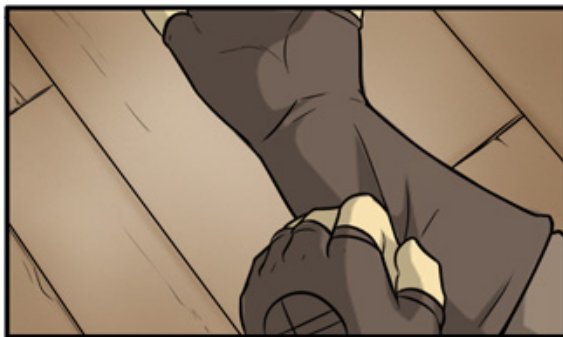
Huh? Hey!
Get off me!

Ah, great...

This is going to
end up being my
fault somehow.









You two enjoying the sunrise?

Oh, yeah. It's amazing up here.



Eric wanted me to give you these. You'll want to wear these robes on the way.

It's going to be... uh... cold once we get out on the ocean.



Hm, these robes will be good so we're not detected...

But why do they want us to wear them on the way?

Do... they know we're wanted? Is this a trap?



W-why are you staring at me?

You... want those services now?



Meanwhile...

<Can I talk with you for a second... uh... Keith?>

<Can we just... forget about yesterday and start over?

Forget about me trying to kill you, and you trying to kill my brother, and...>



<You know...>

<That whole...ugh, bath incident?>

<Um, sure.>

<Cause... I don't want more people thinking that I am... you know...>



<...You honestly believe you're a guy, don't you?>

<I am a guy! Truly!>

<...Please don't make me show you the difference.>



Many years ago...

Sniff...

<Where
are they?

Mommy, Daddy,
where are you?

Please,
come back...>

<They can't be gone...
where did they go?

Mommy, come back...>

<Would you just
shut up, Natani!>

<Don't you
get it?!

Mom and Dad
are **dead!**>

<And they're never
coming back!

Stop being such a
girl about everything!

C-crying about it isn't
going to get us anywhere!

We've only got each other now,
and we have to keep moving. >

Sniff...

I don't want to cry...

I just want the
pain to go away.

I wish I was like
you, Big Brother.

Don't worry Zen. I won't
let my emotions control me.







What are they doing now?



They've just boarded the ship, Father.



Good, good, keep a watch on them. Be sure to get aboard as well.

I will, Father.



Mrrrow?



Hey there, Templar Kitty. Why don't you take a break for a while?

Follow Lady Nora...



F-father! I... I can no longer control him.

What? Why not?

He was ambushed by a... talking cat...

They're doing... bad things now.



It'll be another hour or so until my crew is ready.

Feel free to have a look around meanwhile.

Thanks a lot, Eric.

We really appreciate you taking us along.



Eh, no problem. I was planning on sailing anyway.

The Basitin Islands are as good a place as any.

Just don't forget that deal we had. I get Flora to pose for my artwork on the way there.



Speaking of Flora... I have to ask...

This trip is going to take nearly a month.

Flora's not in any danger of... you know, going into heat during the trip?

What?! Eh... no, she's not.

She went through *that* a while ago.



Ah, good. Kathrin's safe too. That rules out all female Keidran.

Yup, all females here.

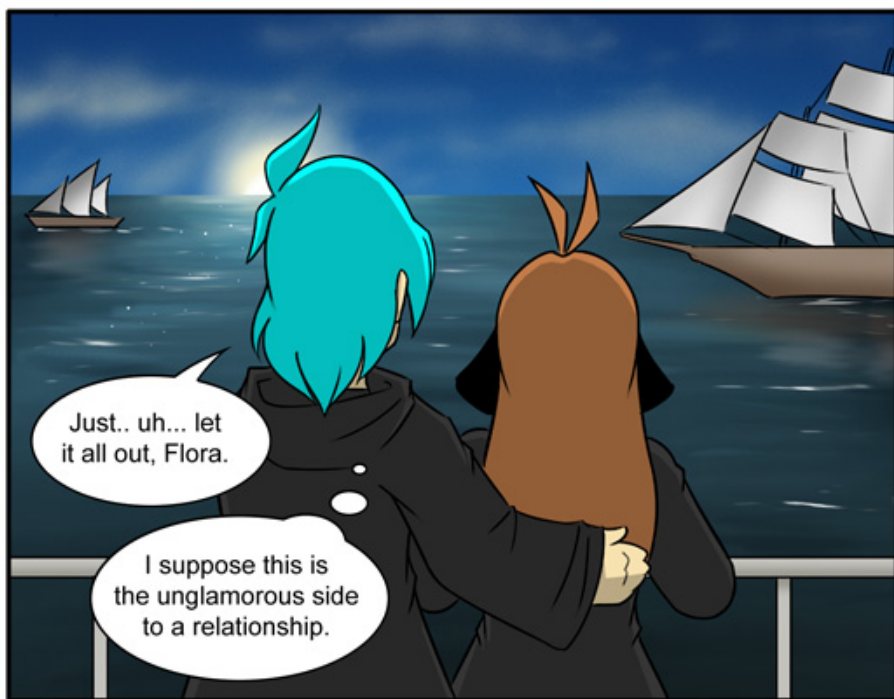
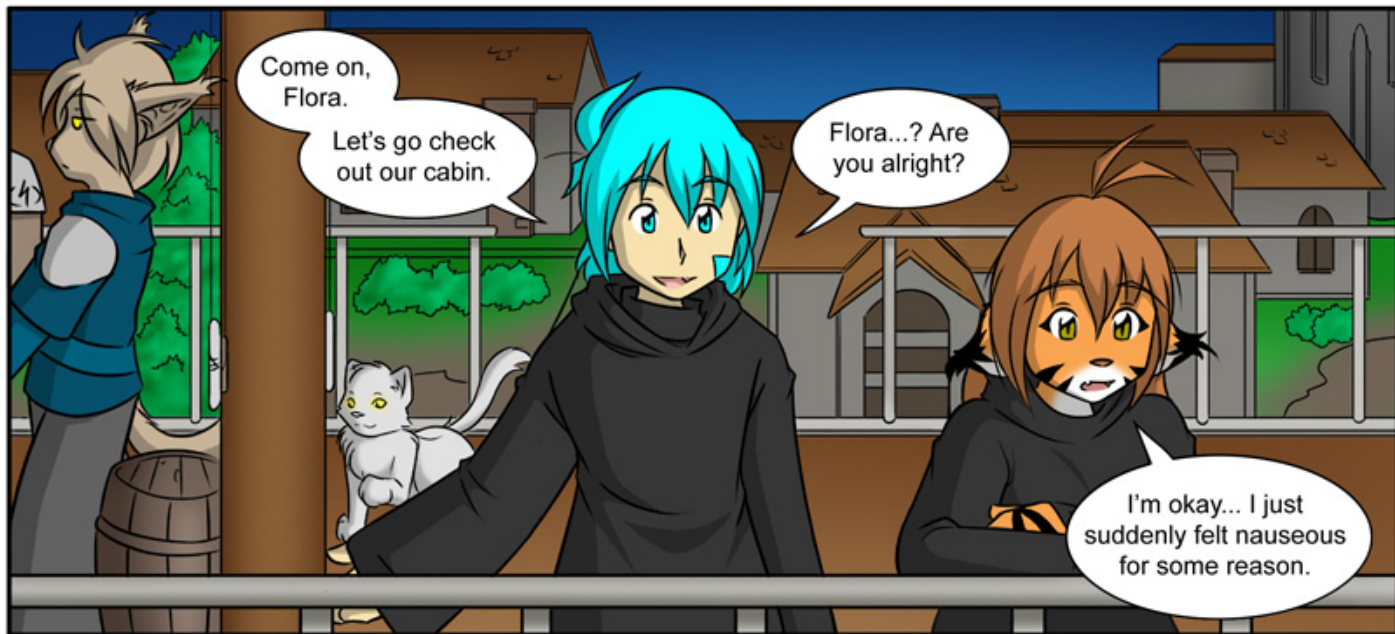
Indeed. Just the two.

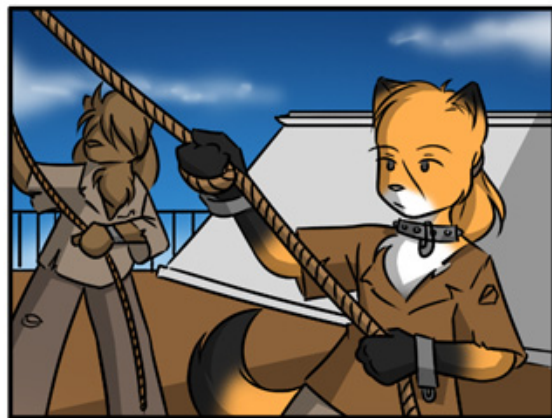
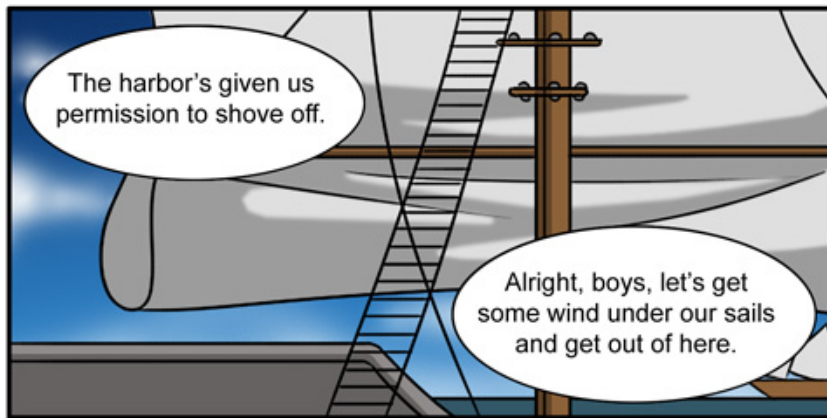


But why does it matter?

Trust me, it's just not a good idea.

In a small area like this ship, it effects everyone.





One week later...

Everything seems to be going well.

It's been smooth sailing so far. If we keep this up...

I think this will be a very uneventful trip.

So tell me, Trace, how is Flora doing?

Oh, she's alright.

The first few days were a little rough on her.

But she hasn't gotten sick lately.

Ah, good, good!

I'm glad. I've been waiting for a chance to paint her.

Do you think, perhaps, she could be available this evening?

Oh, right, the paintings...

I'd almost forgotten about that deal.

I suppose... um, tell me...

You're not going to have her pose... lewdly, are you?

Aw come on...

Do I seem like a pervert to you?

Just have her stop by my cabin in an hour, and I'll have everything set up.





You're turned around, right?

Yeah, yeah, I'm not looking...



Directly, anyways...

...eh?



Hey!!

SMACK!
SLASH!

Kidding, kidding!
Ow, ow, hey!



Already, let's get this over with.

Flora, what's the big deal, anyways? I've seen you naked many times in the last week.

Sigh... It's not the nude thing, I don't care.

It's just... it makes me nervous when you're watching me undress.

You really come across as a creepy pervert sometimes.

Especially with that... sex slave of yours.



What are you talking about? Kathrin? She's not like that...

I've never taken advantage of her.



Wait, you've... never...

No, not at all.

But... you sleep in the same cabin!



Now, don't get me wrong, Flora. I have spent...

"quality time" with several of the servants I own.



But... when our family acquired Kathrin, she was just a kitten.

I was only ten at the time.

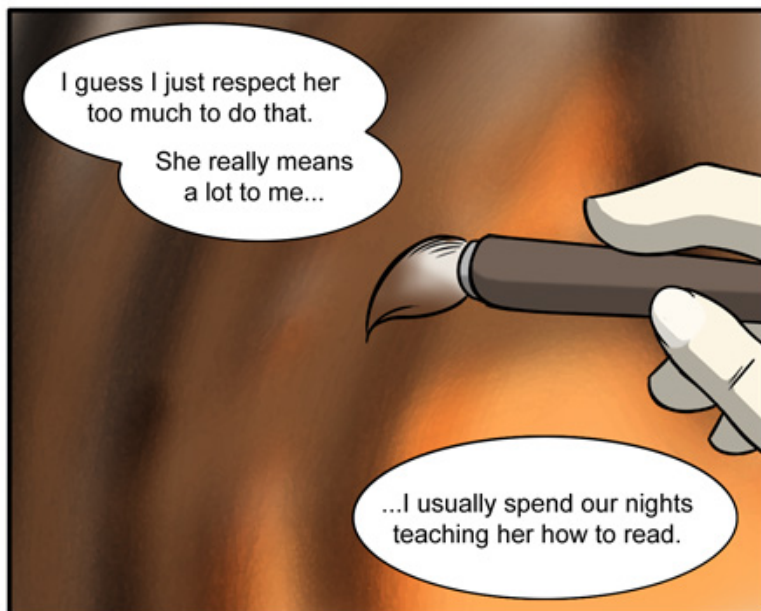


At first she was almost like a pet. But we got older...

I won't deny that we fooled around occasionally, we were kids after all. We were curious.



But...



I guess I just respect her too much to do that.

She really means a lot to me...

...I usually spend our nights teaching her how to read.



Huh... maybe I had this guy all wrong.

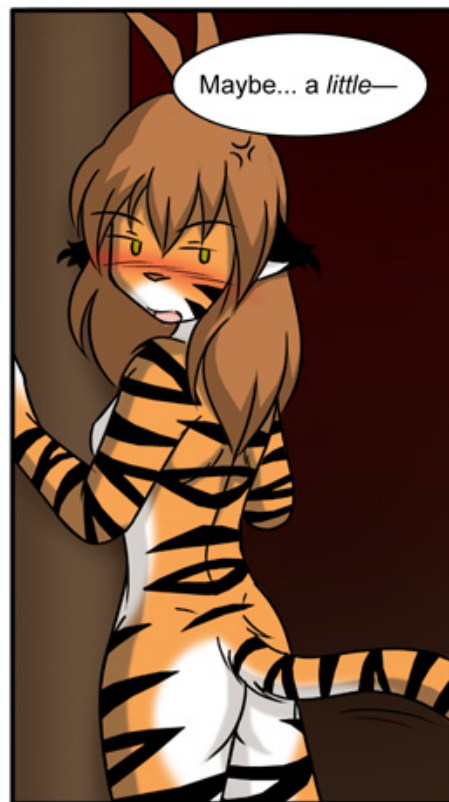
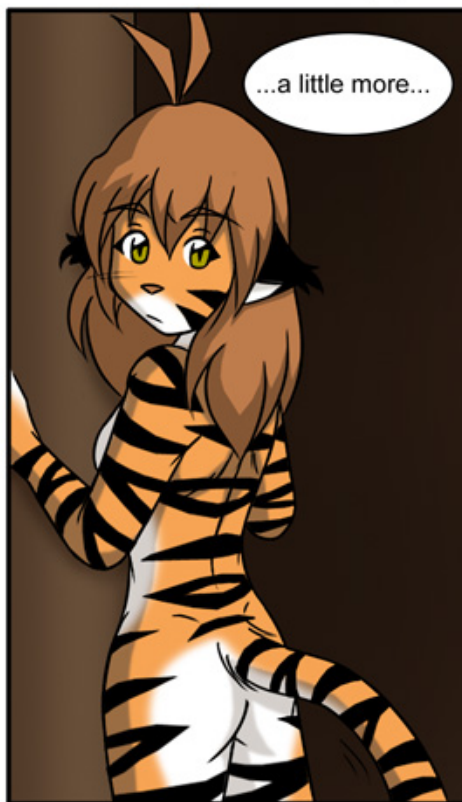
Maybe he isn't such a pervert after all...

Well, enough about my past...

Hm... I think this is a good enough warm up...



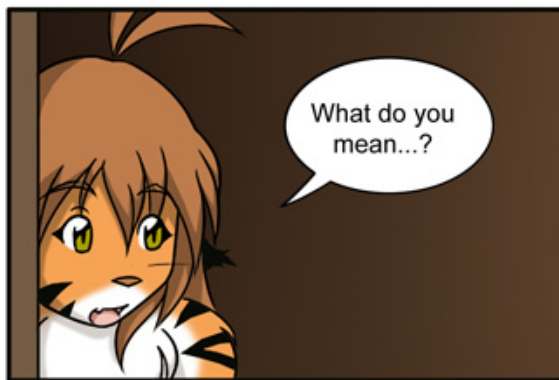
Now please take off your robes and bend over against that pole over there.



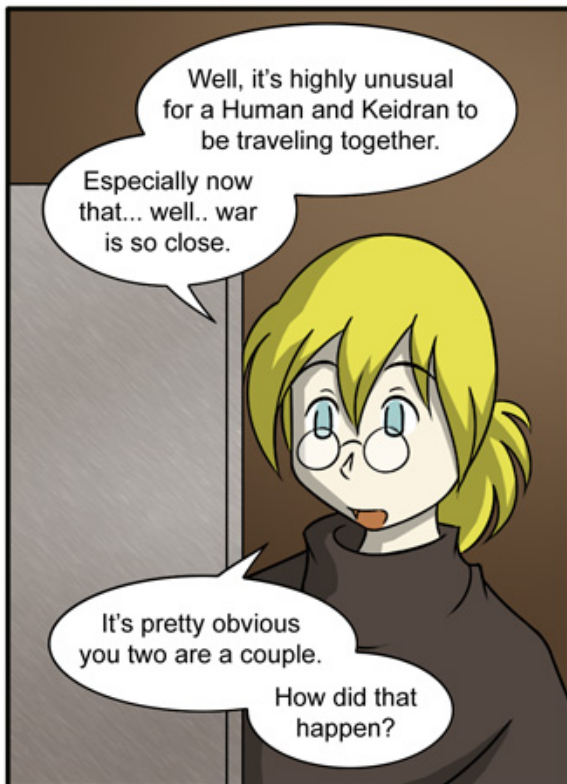


Hm... so tell me, Flora...

How did a Keidran like yourself end up traveling with Trace, a Human?



What do you mean...?



Well, it's highly unusual for a Human and Keidran to be traveling together.

Especially now that... well.. war is so close.

It's pretty obvious you two are a couple.

How did that happen?



Huh... it's been so long...



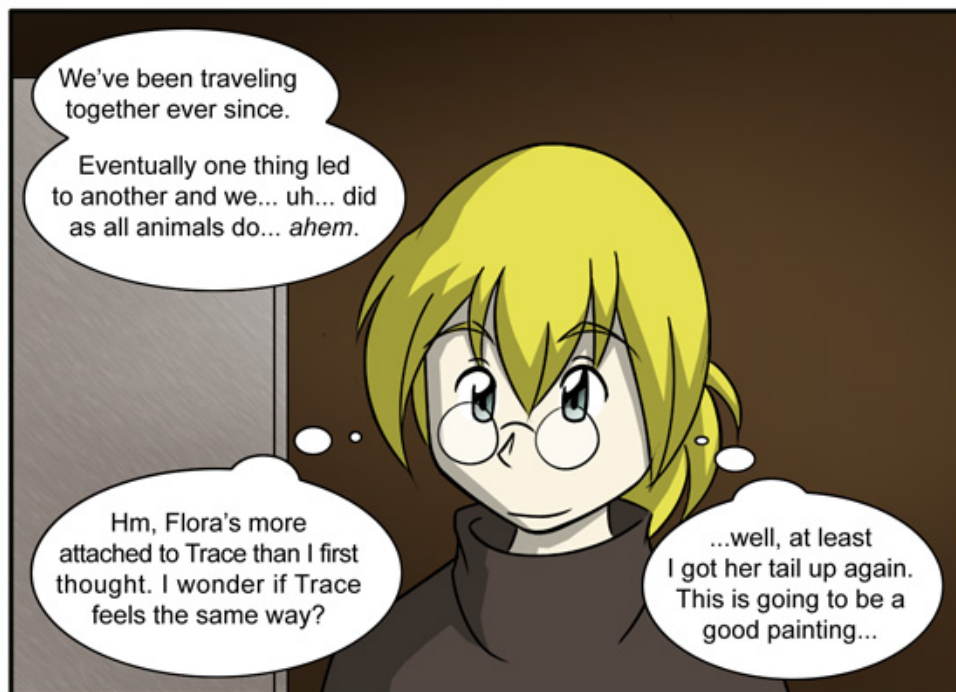
Trace... he saved my life, when we first met.

I was a runaway.

I was scared of him at first, too. I feared he would turn me in. But he never did.



And... I guess I loved him for that.



We've been traveling together ever since.

Eventually one thing led to another and we... uh... did as all animals do... *ahem*.

Hm, Flora's more attached to Trace than I first thought. I wonder if Trace feels the same way?

...well, at least I got her tail up again. This is going to be a good painting...

Meanwhile...

<Alright, no magic
or weapons, just hand-
to-hand combat.

You ready?>

<Ready when you are.>

<And don't even think about
holding back against me.>

<After this is
over you're going
to wish I did!>

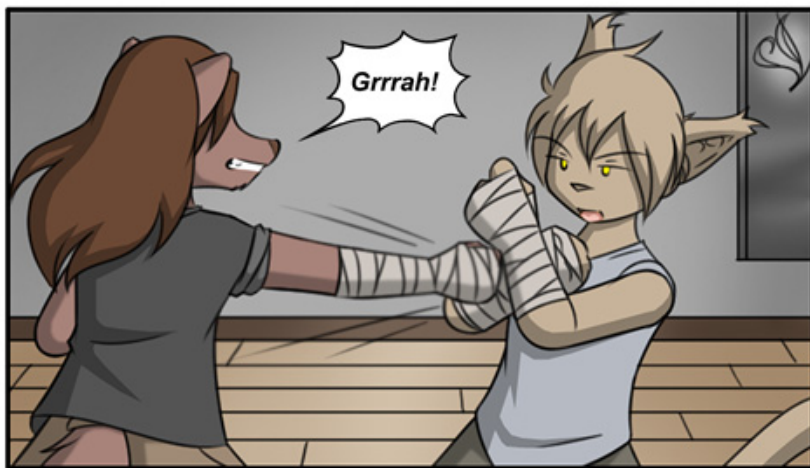
Hey, check
it out.

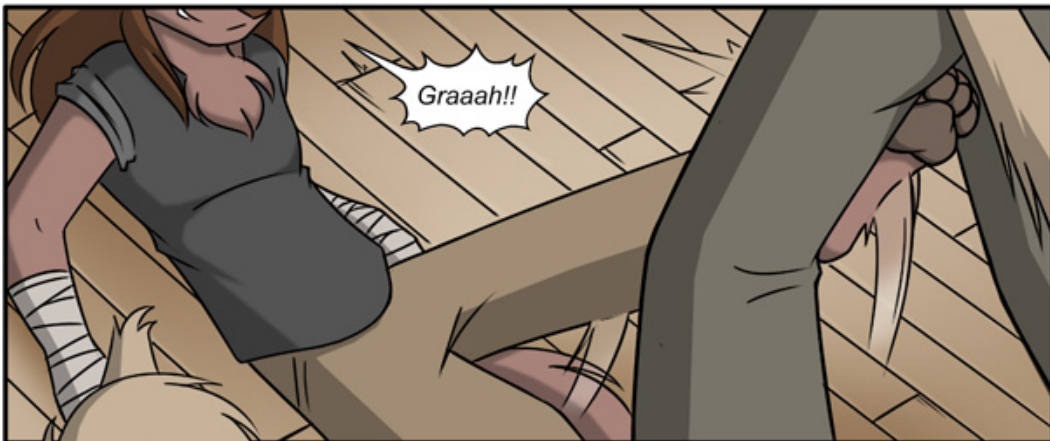
Hm? Oh,yeah,
they've been training
down here for the last
couple days.

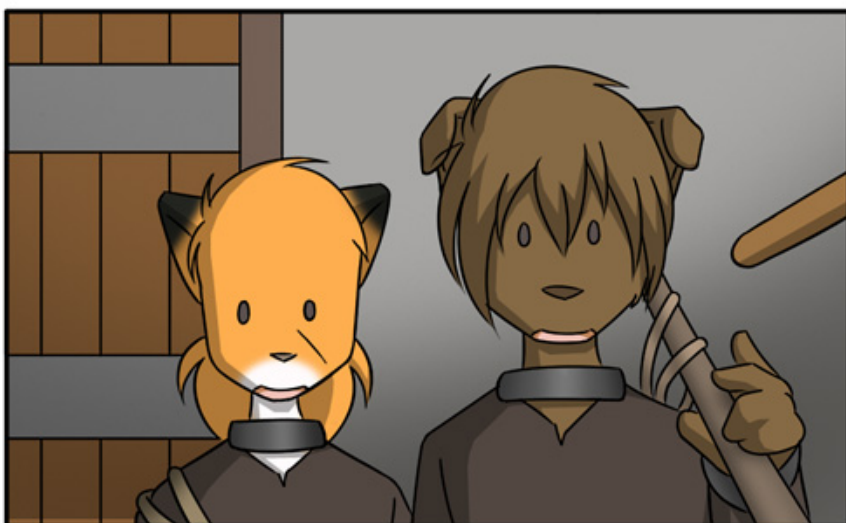
Never seen 'em
fight though...

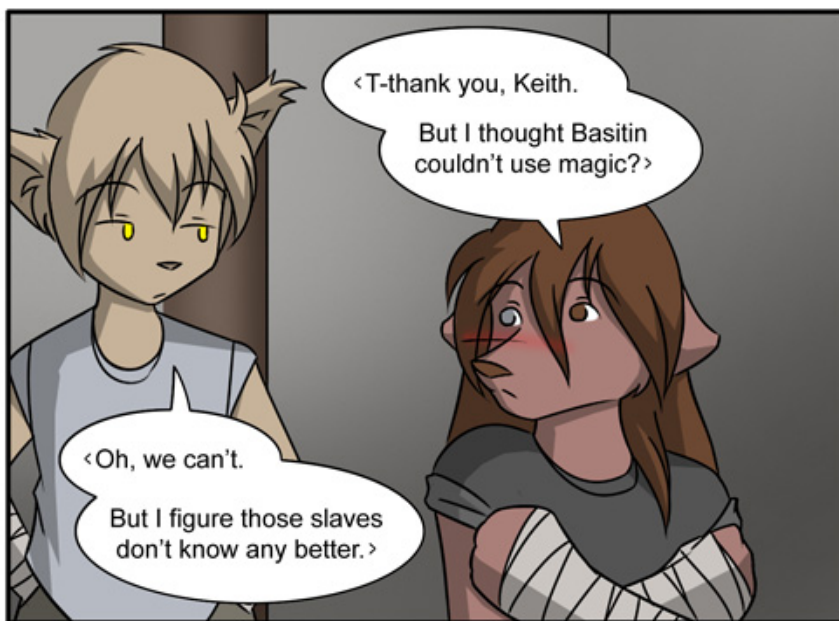
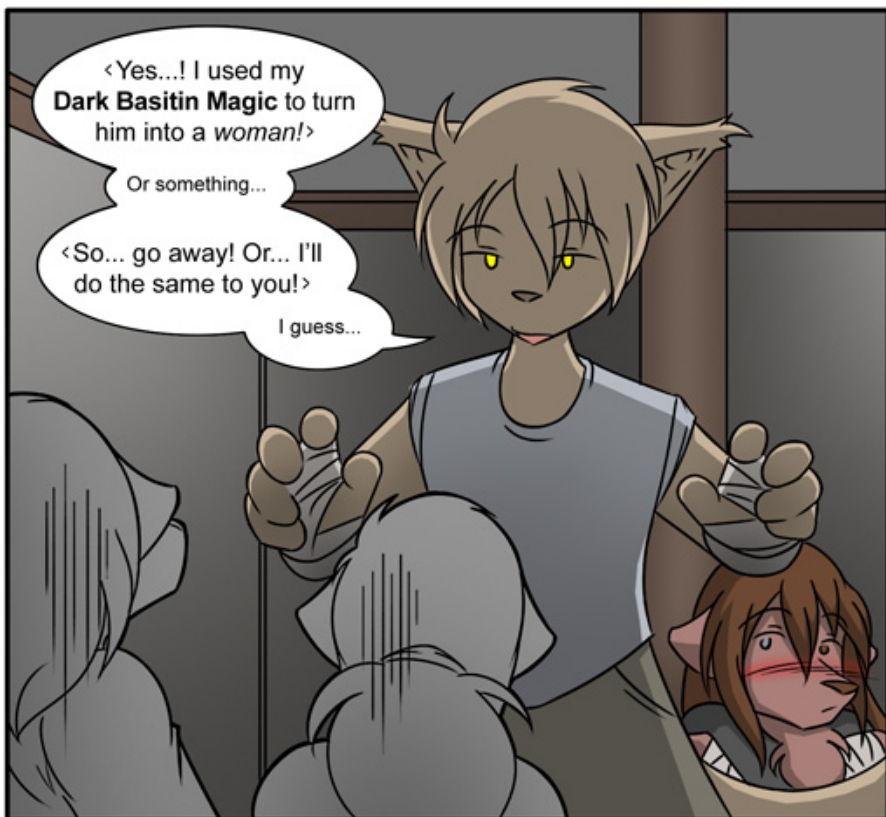
<Is that right...
...my next meal says
the wolf guy wins.>


<You're on.>













I know I shouldn't be writing in this journal.




I should just throw it out. But I fear I'm losing myself. I'm irritated more often, and I don't know why. Maybe if I record my thoughts, I can better hold onto them. I do not want to end up like I once was.

I must focus...



Trace, I'm back!

Oh, am I... interrupting?




Flora, of course not.

How did it go?

It... was interesting.

He acted as I expected.


But it wasn't that bad. He's... a polite pervert. I'm just glad to be back.



So, you don't feel sick?

Nope! I still feel fine.

That's great! After all you've been through, I'm happy you're finally feeling well.



'Cause you know...

You haven't been in the mood all week!



FWOOMP!



Week two...

<I can't stand this...>

<I feel like I've been on this wretched boat for two eternities.>

Natani...?

<What are you doing up here?

Please tell me you're not howling at the moon.>

<No, I'm not howling!>

<I thought we were going to practice tonight. Anything wrong?>

<Wrong? What do you think?!

I'm wet, I'm cold, and I'm hungry! We're in the middle of an endless sea of water!

Just get away from me and leave me alone!>

<I... er, wait, Sorry.

I didn't really mean that. I've just been frustrated lately and I'm not sure why.>

<It's alright.>

<I'm staying up for a few more hours.

If you change your mind, come to my cabin and we can go at it.>



Is that your third serving?

Mmhm. I've been so hungry recently. I'm not really sure why.



You've also been pretty quiet. Anything wrong?

Mmmm, nope.



Well, actually...

I've been thinking... We've known each other for a long time now, right?



Heh, it feels like it. It's only been a few months, though.



Well, that's a long time for us Keidran, and well... I've been wondering...

I mean, even though it would be impossible to do... have you ever thought about... well... um...




...Marriage?

CLINK!



Trace...?






Alright, so Flora's starting to talk about marriage, huh?

It's not impossible. You can hold an unofficial ceremony if you like.


So what's the problem?



We're not the same species!

Even if it's unofficial, marriage is still a serious commitment, right?


And we could never have children. I don't know.



It's just... she's not human, you know?


She's... well, an animal! Would it even be right to do?

How is it going to work out with her the way she is...?



What would people— ah!

GRAB!

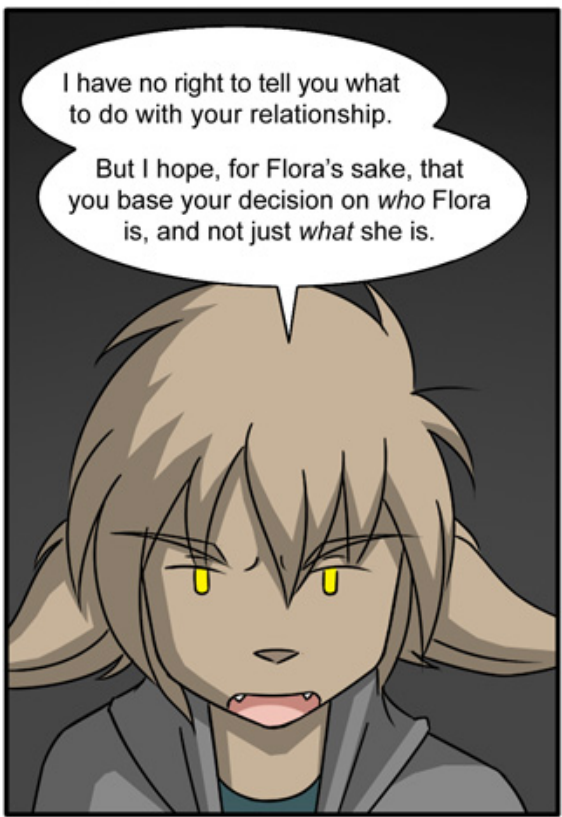


Hey, what are you—?

Are you listening to what you're saying?


What makes you any less animal than us, huh?

What makes you humans so high and mighty?




I have no right to tell you what to do with your relationship.

But I hope, for Flora's sake, that you base your decision on *who* Flora is, and not just *what* she is.



Get off me!


You're overreacting...
I didn't mean it like that!



Oh, I think you meant it exactly as you said, whether you realize it or not.

To be honest, I don't trust keidran any more than the next guy.


But Flora... she's different.
I don't want her hurt.



I... don't want her hurt either.

I guess... you're right. I was wrong to say such things.

But I don't know what to do...




Well, like I said, I can't tell you what to do.

But if you want my advice, I suggest you wait until you figure out who you really are.




Nya!



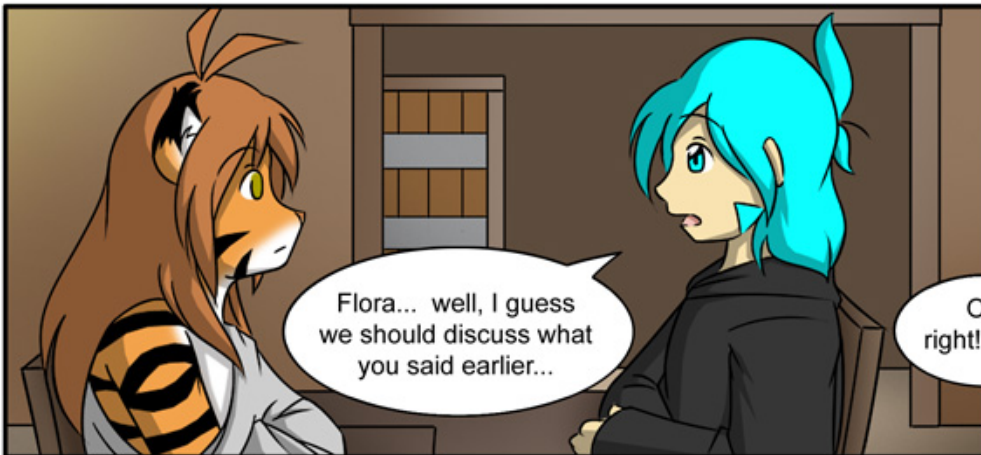
Hey Flora, I'm back.

Hey, that was quick.

Did you get that fresh air you wanted?



No... I didn't get what I wanted.
But... I think I got what I needed.



Third week...

CRACK!!

Hurry up,
you idiots!

The storm's upon
us! Take everything
down, now!

Flora, maybe you
should keep resting—

I rested
all yesterday.

My stomach
stopped hurting
hours ago.

It was probably
just all that food—

Hey, guys. Have you seen
Natani around lately?

Oh yeah, I think
he's sick or something.

He locked himself in
his room two days ago.

He asked me to bring
down some food for him.

He didn't open
the door, though.

Just told me to
leave it there.

It's been a while
since I've gotten him
any more, though.

Eh, I guess I'll get
it for... um... him.





Uh... Natani?



What the—? There's a strong scent in here.

Strange, I can't tell what it is, though. I swear I recognize it from somewhere...



<Thank goodness, it worked. I can mask the scent magically.

But I don't know how long I can hold it...>

<His scent is... ah, no, don't think about it!>



<Keith, haven't you ever heard of "privacy"?

I told you I don't want anyone in my room!>

<Why did you barge in here?>



<You... were really concerned about me?>

<Well yeah, I guess. Why not?>

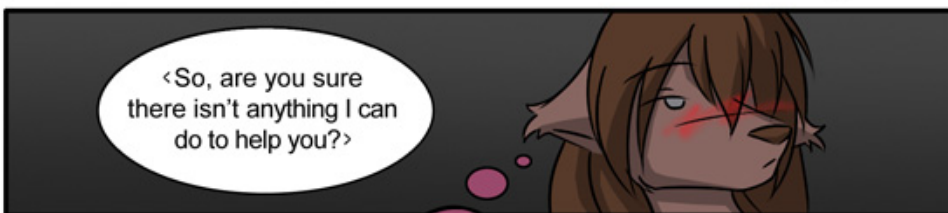
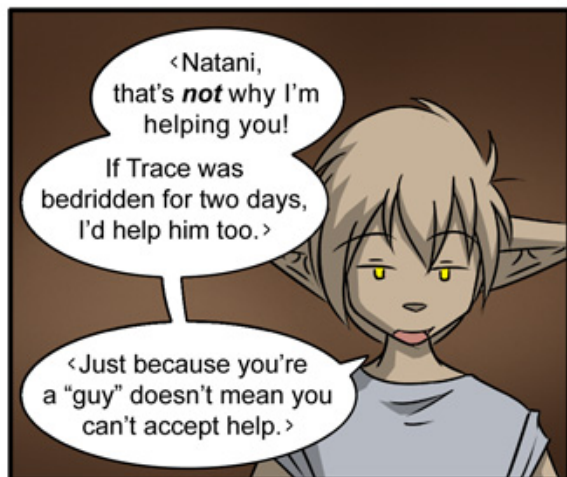
<I... don't know. I'm an assassin. Only my brother's ever cared about me.>



<I just wanted to make sure you were okay!

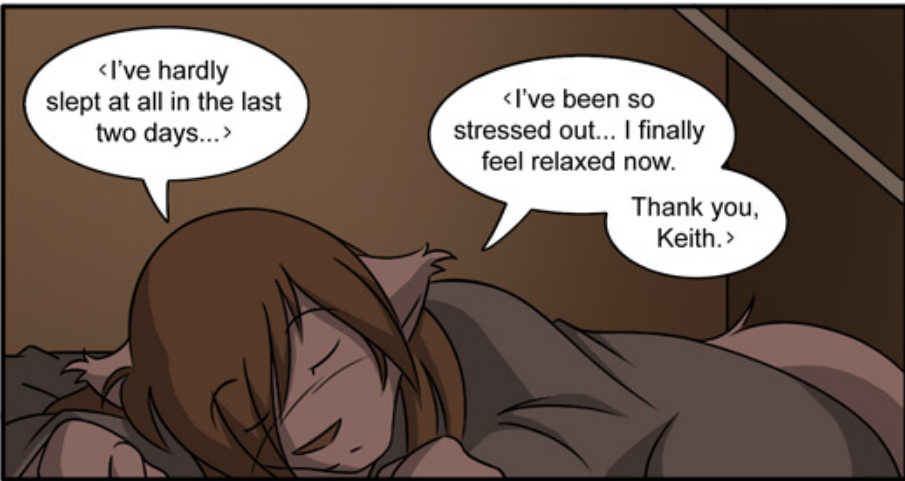
Believe it or not, I usually enjoy talking with you.>


<But if you don't want my help, then fine, I'll leave.>











<I didn't mean it like that...


I don't want you to... you know...>

<I just don't like... feeling vulnerable.>



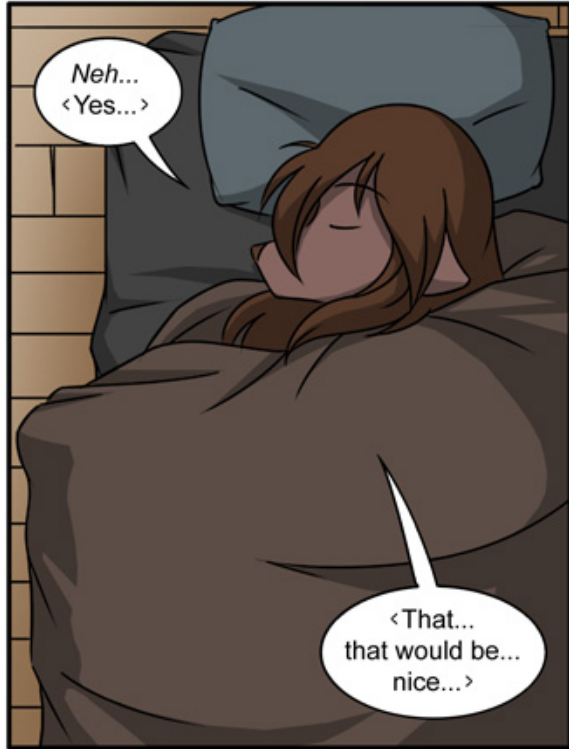
Erg...

<I just want to relax...>




<Well... I don't think it would be a good idea for me to stay in here.

But, uh, if you want... I can stand outside your door for you, I guess.>



Neh...
<Yes...>

<That... that would be... nice...>



Huh, she's really out of it... I wonder if she'd be mad if I *did* stay...?

Erg, no, I can't think that way! I gotta get out of here...



<Sleep well, Natani.>

The storm's getting rough. Will it slow us down?



Only a little. But we've made good time.

Winds have been at our back for most of the trip.



Ah, that's good...

Hey, Eric, I have a question for you.

Ask away.

You know that Flora and I are a couple, right?

Is that... strange?

Hah, I think you're asking the wrong guy.

You know that I have a certain affinity for Keidran.

But yes, it is rather unusual to find someone who appreciates Keidran in the way I do.



But, I don't! It's just Flora I care about.

You mean like, a serious relationship? I've never heard of such a thing working out.

What? Why?

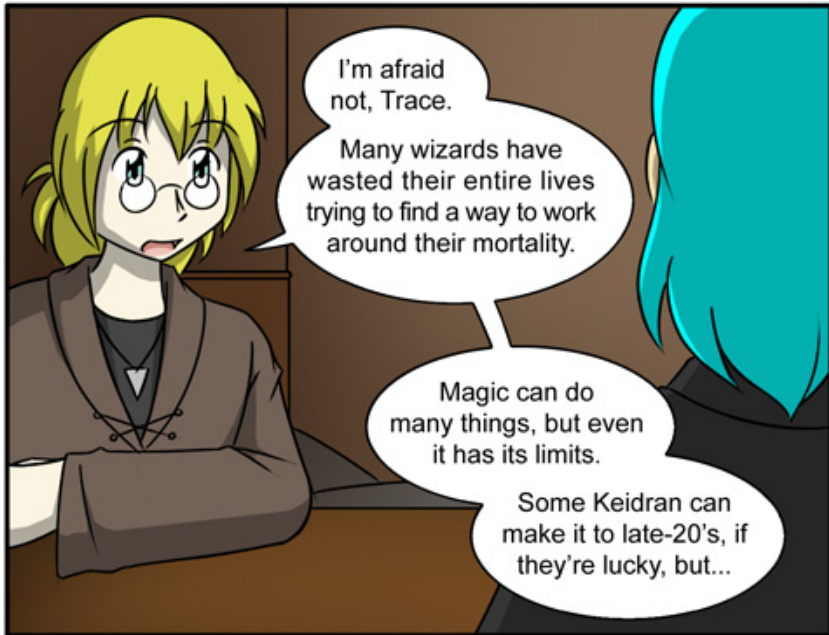
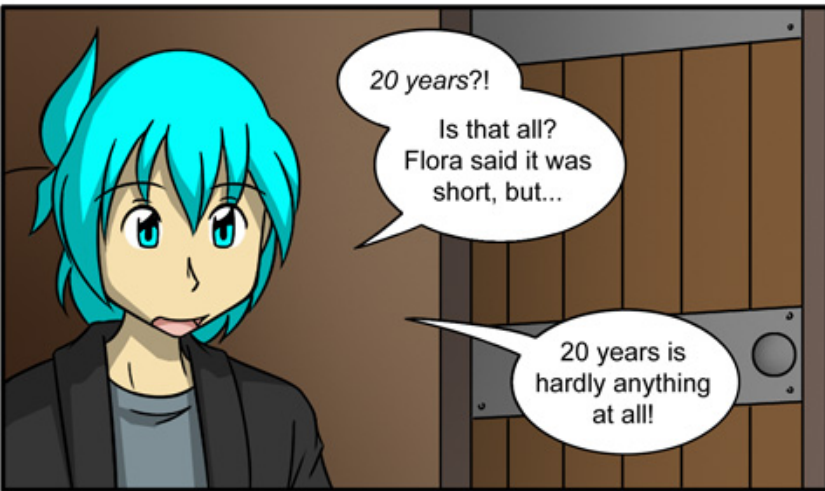
Well, don't you know about their life span?

Keidran only live to be about 20 years old. By the time you're in late 30's, she'll probably be close to the ends of her life.





Merry Christmas!





I hope this storm doesn't slow us down.
I'm getting sick of this boat.



Hm, I've never been down here... oh, no, it's the hussy again.



Oh! Hi, Flora!
What's up?



Look at her, acting all innocent.
I wonder what she's really thinking...



Oh, hey, it's Flora!
Hi, Flora!
I wonder what's up with her?



What are you up to? Is that a human book?

Oh, yeah, I was just practicing my reading.

If you want to read, feel free to take any book you like off the shelf. Eric won't mind.



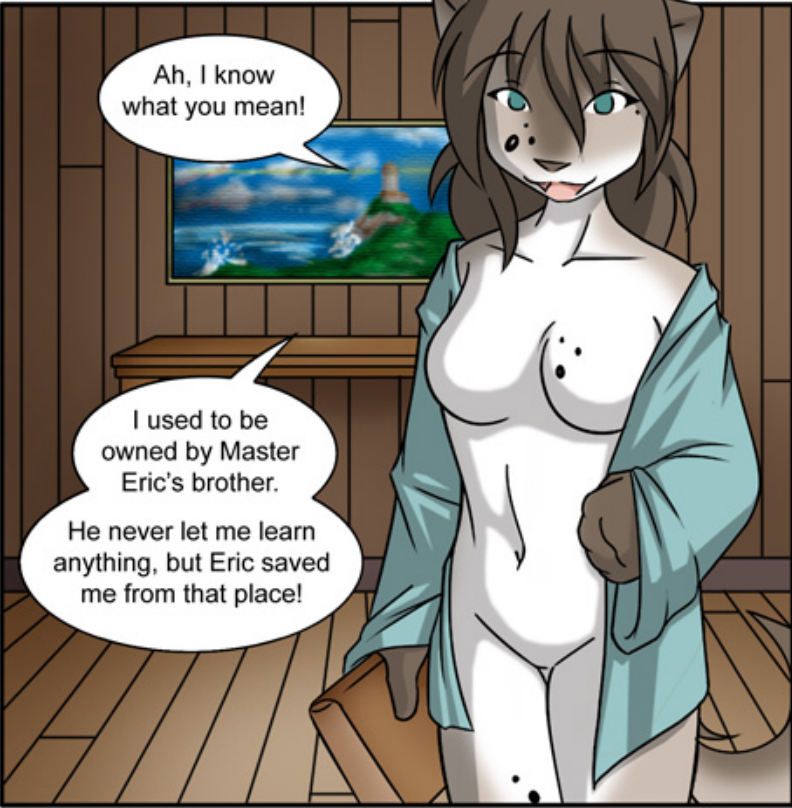
Well, um, actually...
I... can't read...
It was illegal when I was a slave to learn how.



You can't read?
That's not good!
I thought Mr. Trace
seemed nice...



Oh, no, it wasn't Trace.
It was my... *former* owners
who didn't teach me.



Ah, I know
what you mean!

I used to be
owned by Master
Eric's brother.
He never let me learn
anything, but Eric saved
me from that place!



Huh, that must be why
she likes Eric so much...
...yeesh... I wonder if
Kat has back problems...

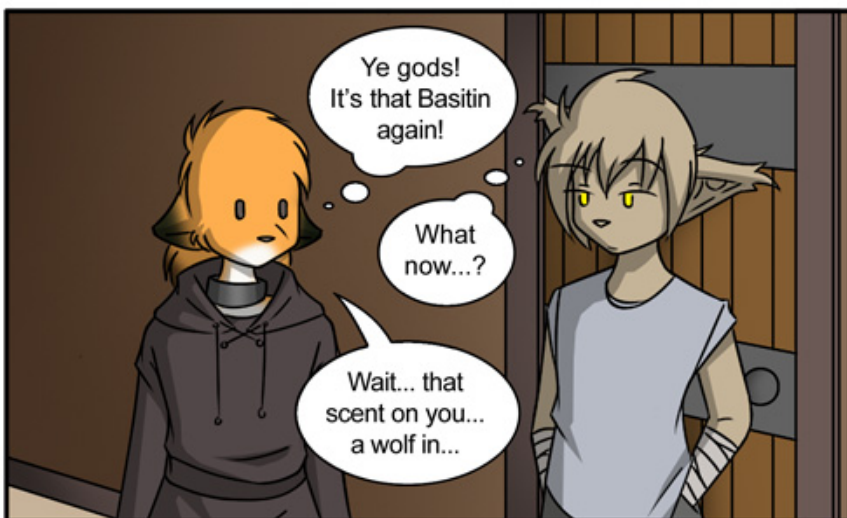
Anyway, I can't read
well, but I can show you
what I know...
I usually read
the ones with pictures,
they're easier.



Wait, pictures?
Let me see this...



What the-? This book
is just filled with perverted
Keidran artwork!
Grah! Eric,
you perv!!



Later...

R-r-reh...

Jeez that water's cold.

At least I've finally gotten Natani's scent out of my fur.
...and stopped being perpetually excited...

Kat, bring the iodine—

Oh, sorry, Keith.

It's alright, I was leaving.... what happened to you?

Honestly I'm not sure.

One minute I'm drinking tea, the next Flora's telling me not to corrupt Kathrin.

Then I reassure her with a *harmless* pat on the rear, and... this happened.

Oh, while you're here...

I've heard word that you know some... Basitin magic...?

If it's true...

Hey, wait...

Where are ya going?

Change Mike! I need a new fox girl!





Bah, I just don't understand enough of this magic...
I need to remember...



Why?



Why? Because if I don't, Flora will die in only a few years...

Is that all?



Well... part of me really wants to know more about my past, too.

Look at what you're doing.

You're fighting to extend Flora's life, so you can spend more time with her later.



Yet by working too much, you're wasting the time you have with her now.

The future is never certain.

Enjoy the time you have at present.



Sigh...



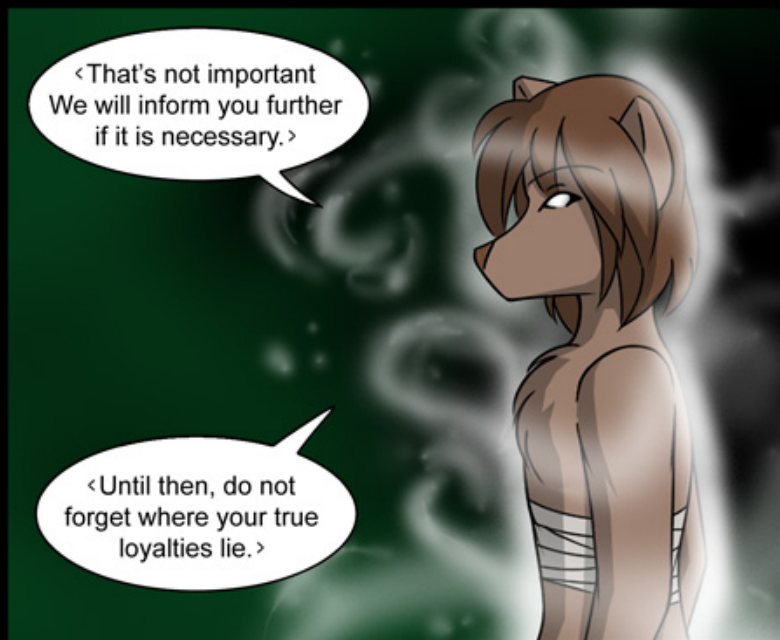
Hm? Oh, change your mind, Trace?

Yeah, I guess I... talked myself out of the work.



Mrrr, that was easy.

Now the entertainment begins... ah, to be young and full of energy...



4 days later...

Land on the horizon!

Mike, let the others know we've spotted the island.
We'll likely locate the harbor by evening.

And by 'others' I mean all of them, the Basitin included.
He's been complaining that you're all avoiding him.

Aye, Master...

Meanwhile...

<Zen, I'm fine. I'm almost over with this... problem.
Quit changing the subject on me. What is this war...?>

<Relax, little brother.

The king knows what he's doing. The humans are not as strong as we believed.>

<Five days ago, their king was assassinated.>

<Assassinated by our tribe? Is he crazy?!
We can't hope to fight the humans by ourselves!>

<Natani, Natani, you overestimate the humans' power.

Assassinating their king was apparently easy.>

<And without a king to control them, the Templar cannot hope to function.>

