

No Keidran!

I'm so bored!

Karen, stop it.

It's been over a month.
You need to get over this
wanderlust of yours.

We're not adventurers. Our
place is here in this inn.

But it's so boring!
It feels like we
haven't done anything
in four years!

Didn't you have fun chasing
Trace around all the time?

Yeah, well,
now it's over.
So get used
to it already.

Augh...

Come on... something...
anything exciting happen...

SLAM!

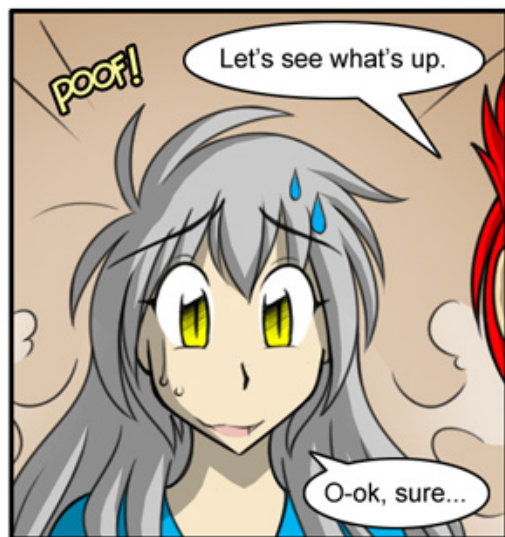
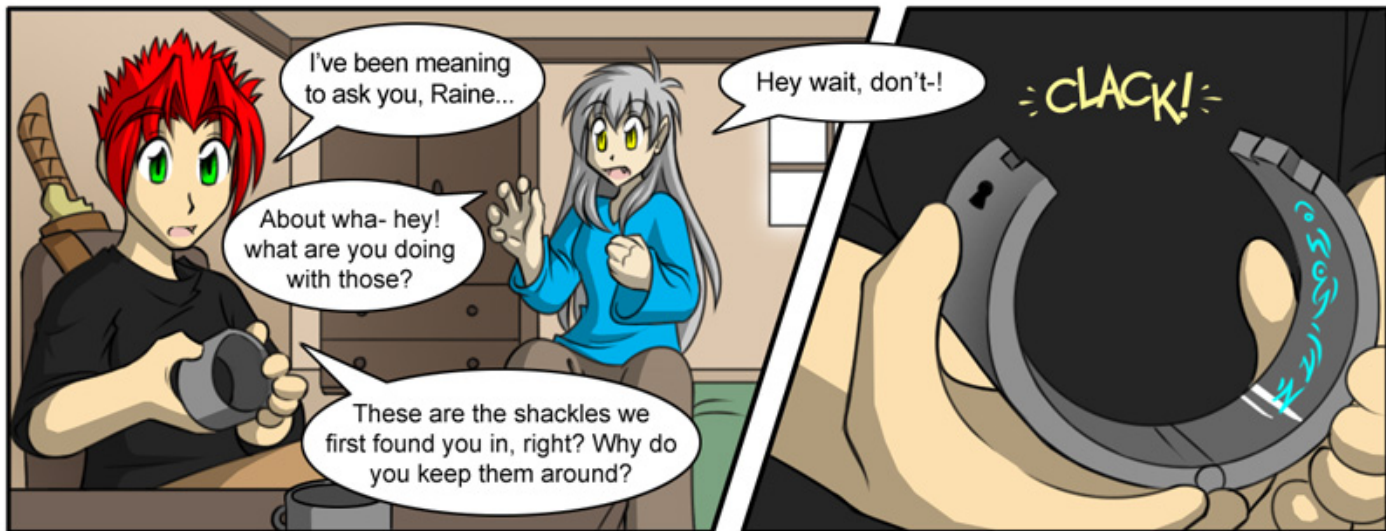
Keidran!

Wolves are attacking
the village!! They're trying
to kill everyone!

Hurray!

H...hurray?!









Not only are you a traitor... you... mated with one of these hairless apes?!



Karen, why are you antagonizing the Keidran?

Because it's fun...
And now Sythe can't weasel out of coming with us!



I-It's a lie! I swear!
She... she's five years older than me!



Enough of this!
Kill them all!

There's no need for violence! We haven't done anything to you! Please...



Let us go!



Oops...

Cool!

What the--?
Stop them!






TWO KINDS

Chapter Thirteen



EMBARKING AGAIN






Work together?
With a wolf? Feh!


It's not like there's
anything we can do for him,
anyway. We're going inland,
away from the Keidran.

He can go
where ever he wants
for all I care!



Besides, now that
we're at war with the wolves,
traveling around with a wild
one isn't a good idea...

Though I suppose
we could pretend he's
our slave...




I am no
one's slave!

It was just
a suggestion!

Oh, forget it!
Let's just go!

Uh... guys...

Come on,
Maren! He's
stranded!

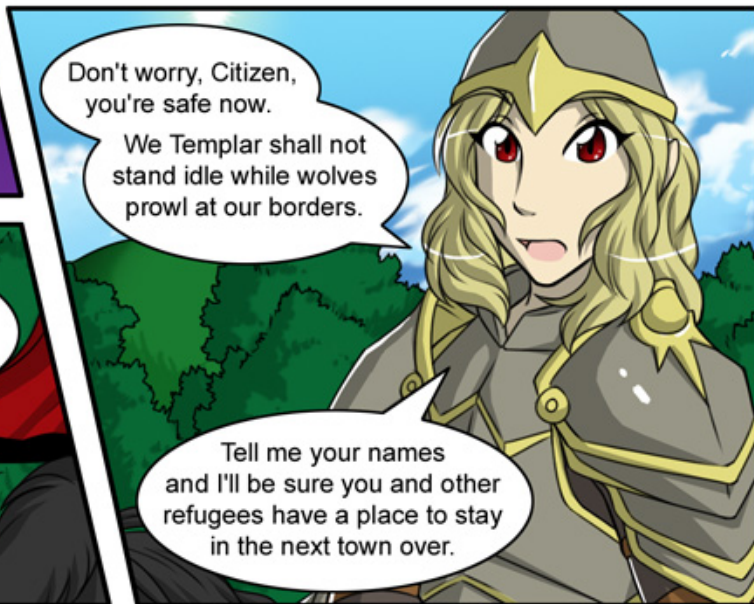


H-hey... **guys!**
There's... a lot of...
well, just look!



Oh, thank the gods!
It's the Templar!

We're saved!



Woah woah woah!

Don't jump to conclusions!

There... there could be a perfectly reasonable explanation for why we're traveling with a Keidran soldier...

Well... is there?



Traitors! I knew it!

We must stop them!



No... let them go.

We must continue our mission.

Master Seer? But they may be spies...

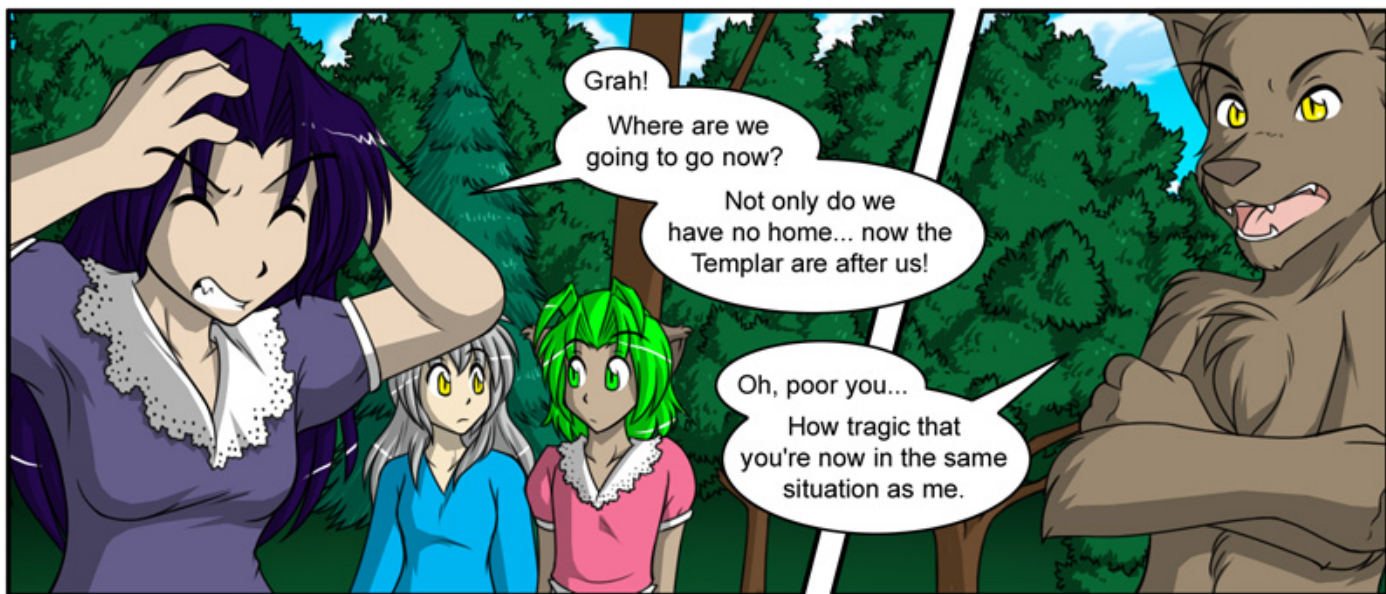
They are of no consequence. Continue the march.

...Very well.

Alright men, let's keep—
Wait...

Have... you been there this whole time?

It's... rather awkward knowing I've been... riding you.





Lyn'knoll?

I've heard the story before. That village is just a myth, though!



Oh, no!

I assure you, it's a real place!

I lived there with my mother for quite a while during the new Templar regime.



What's a "Lyn'knoll"?

Heck if I know.

I've just heard it's a secret village hidden somewhere that's home to both our kind and Keidran.

Oh yeah, I remember...

There's a huge bounty offered by the Templar for its location...



N-no!

You can't tell anyone about it! They were nice to my mother and me, and I can't betray them!



Alright, relax!

I was just sayin'... well, what do you guys think?

Bah!

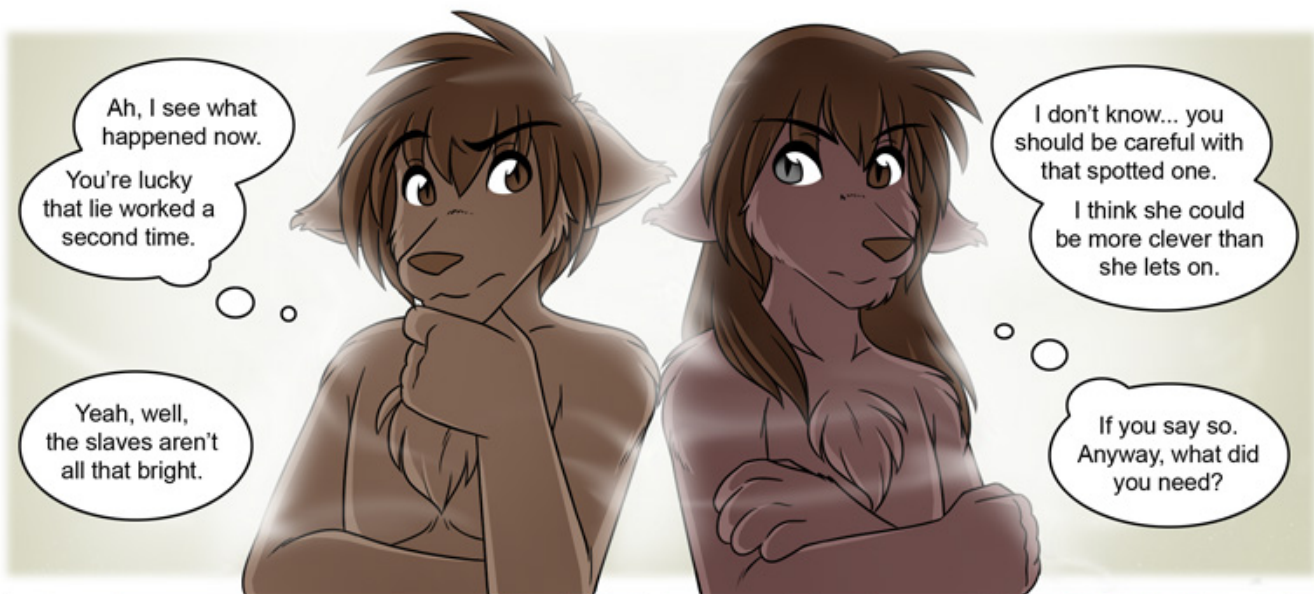
I guess we don't have much of a choice. ...might as well.

And I suppose the furball can tag along if he wants...



Sigh...
It's going to be a long walk...

Adventure!





I can't believe we had to sell our dresses for these supplies.

I feel like I'm wearing a burlap sack!

It's the best we can do right now.

It wasn't as though we had time to grab a coin purse while running for our lives.



Well, why didn't you sell that sword of yours?

I'm sure *that* would have fetched far more coin.

Hey, we need this sword!



These are dangerous times, especially in the wilderness.

Who knows what might be lurking out there!

You saw what happened to our village!



Yes, I know... I still can't believe what happened.

The village... the tavern! All gone.



But Sis, you always said you hated that tavern.

Well, yes, but it was MY tavern! It was our family's tavern!

Our family name is **Taverndatter**, for crying out loud!

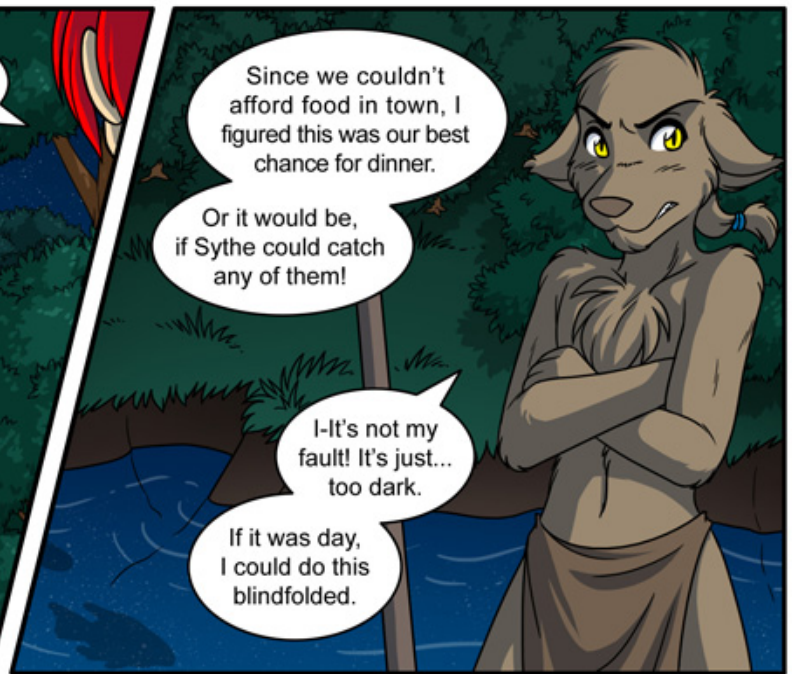


Why, without the tavern, all I am is...

Maren Datter!









You don't really believe that, do you?

I know why you don't like Sythe, but all Keidran?



You saw what they did to our village.

They were killing an' burning everything in their path.

That's always the kind of experience I've had with Keidran in my life.



...Not all Keidran are like that.

Well I guess I can't speak for them all.

I just know I'll never be able to trust anybody with fur and a tail.



I see...

Well I'm sorry you feel that!



Kyaaa!

Huh? What's wrong?!



I-it's nothing! Don't look!

You yelled at nothing? Then why can't I look?

It's just that... My... um... my top came off!

...Kinda wanna look now.

No!





Did you hear that?



What the—?



Someone's in trouble. Come on, Raine, I want you close to me.

I... I'll be right behind you...



Maren?

Hang on, I'm coming!



Maren!



Maren, what happened? Come on, wake up!



Get your hands off her!

Huh?

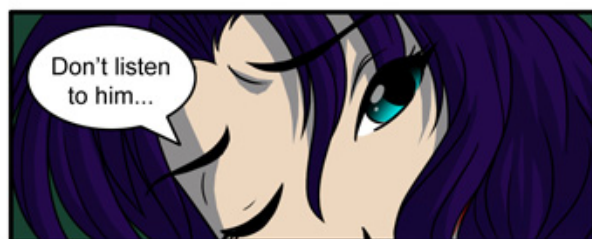


I knew you couldn't be trusted!

Keidran... it's only a matter of time!

What?! I'm not responsible for this!

Ngh...





Oh no... not a muzzle, too!

It's no use, I can't stop it! There's nothing human left of my body now.



The shackle... it's broken, and with it... the suppression enchantment.



Which means I... I could be stuck like this! What am I going to do?!

There's no way I can hide it from them... and I can't will myself to shift back with my emotions like they are.

I don't even know if I can shift back when calm.



I guess... I have no choice. I knew I couldn't keep it secret forever.

Maybe it's best it comes out now, before... regrets are made.



I'll kill you!

Huh?



What's going on?



Why are they fighting? And Maren! what happ—



GASP!



That... that's not Maren!



No!!

Huh?
Who said--?

I won't let
you hurt him!

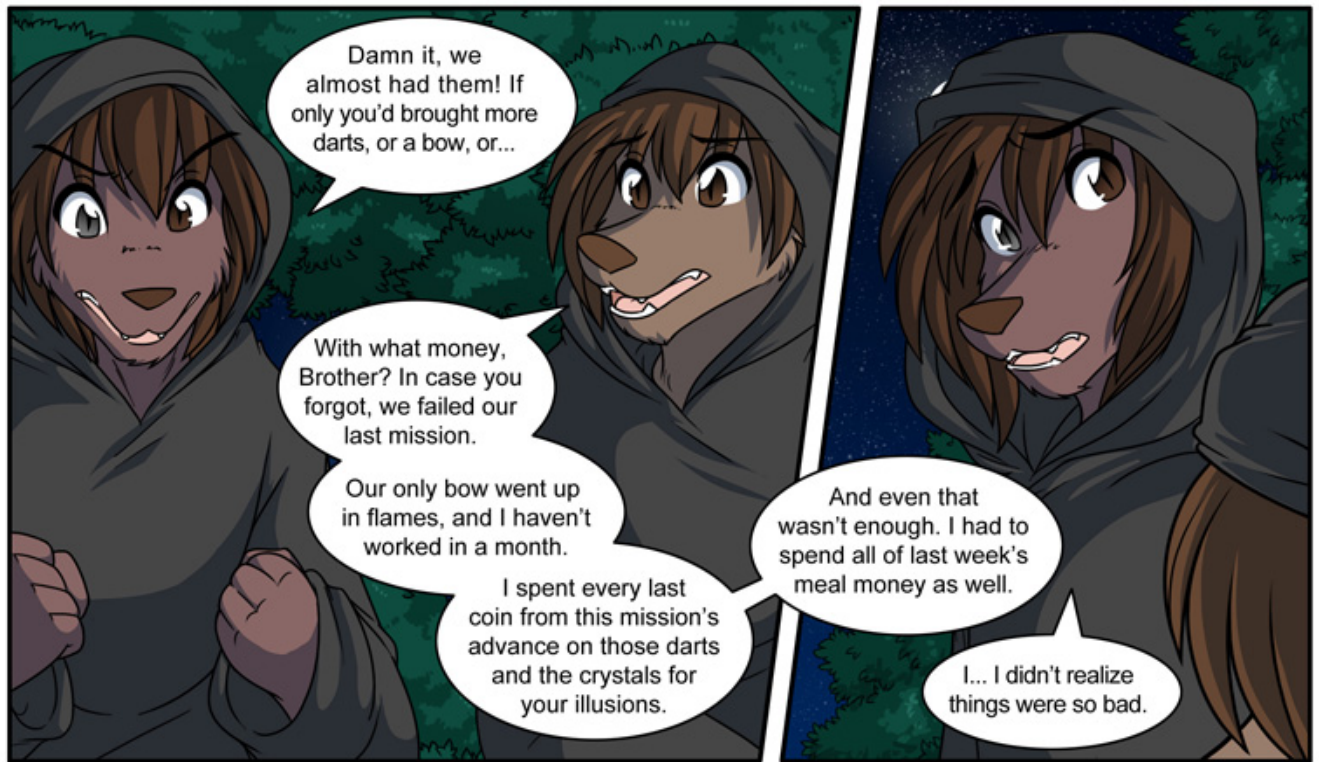
CRASH!

Wha-! Who
the hell is this?!











TWO KINDS

Chapter Sixteen



CONFESSIONS



Uurgh...

Hey, I think she might be waking up...



I-is someone there? Erg... what happened?



Hey, Raine. Don't worry, you're okay.

Try not to move around too much. The cut wasn't bad, but you lost some blood.



Luckily, "Red" isn't as good with a sword as he thinks he is. Still, it probably hurts like a bi- er, ah... like heck.

It does... but I... I'll be...



...I'm still covered in fur, aren't I?



Yeeeah, I didn't want to start pointing it out or nothin', but...

Well, for a human, you're looking pretty wolf-ish right now.



You're probably going to have to explain that one to us at some point.

Yes... yes, I know, and I will.

Ngh, where are the others?

Well...

Maren and Karen... they haven't woken up yet. We're not sure what's wrong with them.



As for Red, he's just outside the tent. I think he's still in denial.



"Red?" Why do you keep calling him that?

Because it ticks him off, and I think it's hilarious!

Anyway, I'll send him in now. And if it's any consolation, I think the new look suits you!





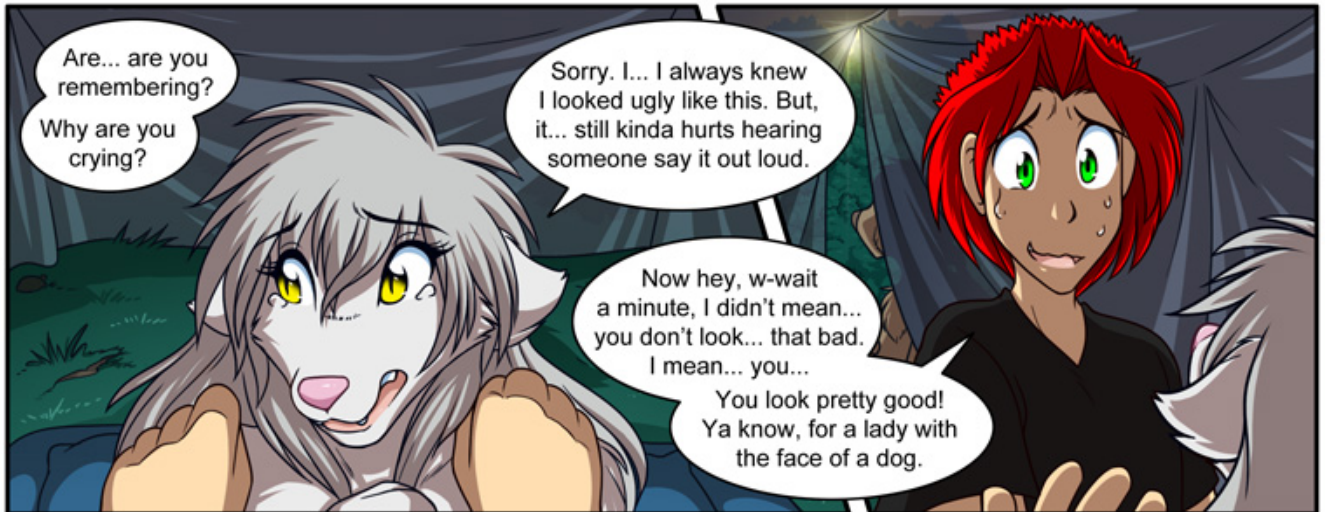
Oh no!

It's already started to affect your mind!



Raine! Remember who you were! You were a human, not this... *hideous beast!*

Hideous?



Are... are you remembering?

Why are you crying?

Sorry. I... I always knew I looked ugly like this. But, it... still kinda hurts hearing someone say it out loud.

Now hey, w-wait a minute, I didn't mean... you don't look... that bad. I mean... you...

You look pretty good! Ya know, for a lady with the face of a dog.



No, no, wait! That came out wrong too!

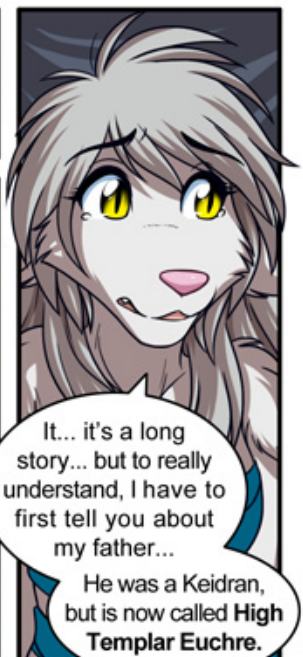
I'm sorry...



D-don't cry. Please, let me try again. Just... look me in the eyes.



It's true, this really is you, isn't it? But how?



It... it's a long story... but to really understand, I have to first tell you about my father...

He was a Keidran, but is now called **High Templar Euchre**.



Even as a young man, my father was gifted in magic. But what made him unique was not his power, but a natural ability that most mages could never hope to learn, let alone master...



Flawless Transformation.



Unlike typical illusions, his ability allowed him to physically **become** human, down to the smallest detail.



Don't move, Human!



Eek!

Rose? Roselyn!
I... I'm not a human!
It's me, Euchre!

Don't stab me!



Yeah, I know it's you, cousin. I'm not an idiot. You, on the other hand...

Why do you keep doing this? Sneaking off into that human village is going to get you collared one day.

You're not as clever as you think you are.



Oh no? I certainly seemed to fool the Templar when I applied to join their college in Edinmire.

You... *did what?!*

Are you insane? Why would you do that?!

Rose, you know how much magic means to me. Think of all the knowledge I could gain from them!

What the Humans are doing with magic is incredible. They have theories, formulae... their magic is an art! And their college is the only place I can learn it.



Now if you'll excuse me, I need time to prepare for my inauguration!



When the Templar catch you, the only thing you'll be getting is an execution!

But Rose was wrong - Euchre was not caught. In fact, I'm told he thrived at the college.

In Keidran form, Euchre voluntarily arranged to become an indentured servant on a farm at the edge of town.



This gave him a place to rest outside the college, and legitimized his presence in the village, on the off chance he was ever discovered in his natural form.

It was at the college that Euchre first met my mother, Mary Silverlock. She was not yet Grand Templar, but was well on her way.

I don't know much of their relationship. My mother never went into detail, I think it was too painful for her. All I know is that she did not know the truth of Euchre even after they had become intimate.



Hold on! You're telling me Euchre never told your mother what he was, even after they started sleeping together?!

Yeah... she had no idea.



That's kinda messed up.

From what my mother described, Euchre was a brilliant man, but he was also... manipulative, and self-serving. I get the impression he would have never told my mother the truth, if it hadn't been for...

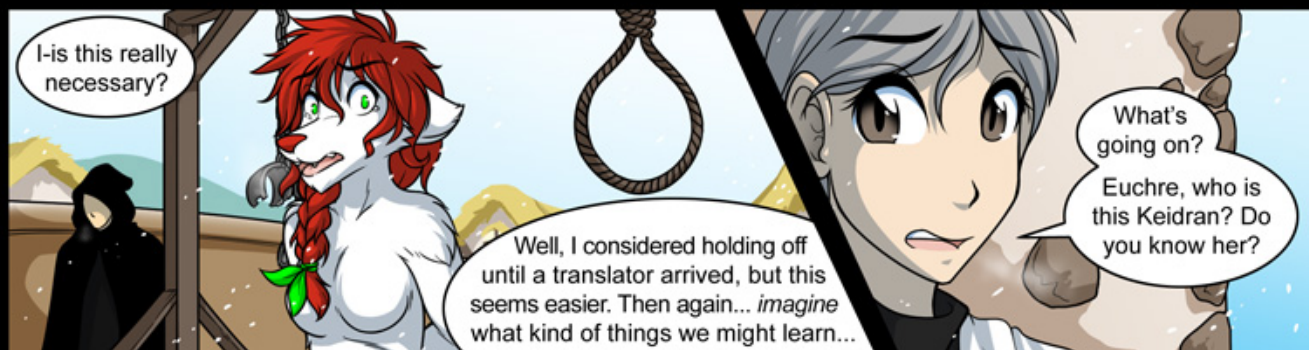
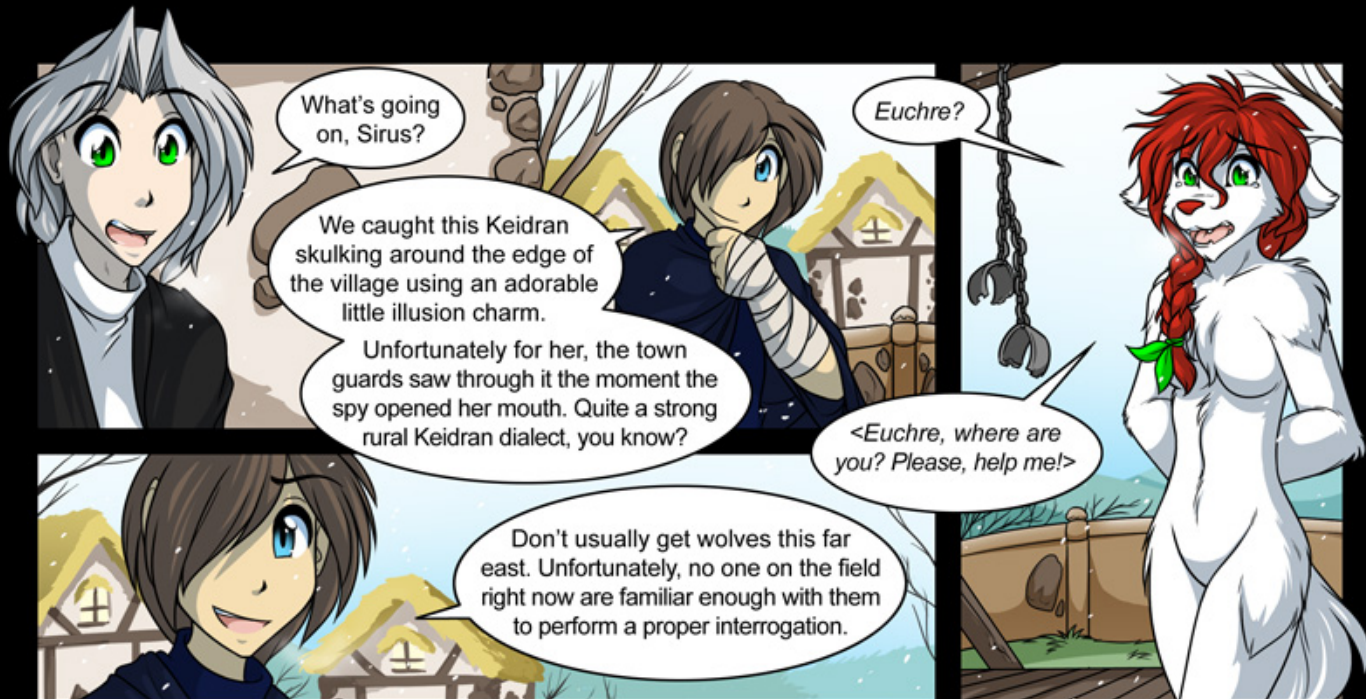
Master Euchre! There you are. I was told I could find you in Ms. Silverlock's room.



Oh, erm... yes, what is it, boy?



There's a Keidran, Sir. It's calling your name from the gallows.





...



Hangman, stop.

Eh?



What? May I ask... why, Headmistress?



If this Keidran is a spy as you say, I'd like to question her. I think she knows something.

Well... if that is what you wish. However, like I said, it will take quite some time in order to find someone who can—

I wish to do it myself.



Forgive me, but you are not an interrogator, and I know you aren't fluent in Keidran.

It's my duty to handle spies, not yours.

Thank you, Sirus, but I am head of this college, and I'll decide for myself what my duties are.



And as head mage, I have ways of communicating without using words.

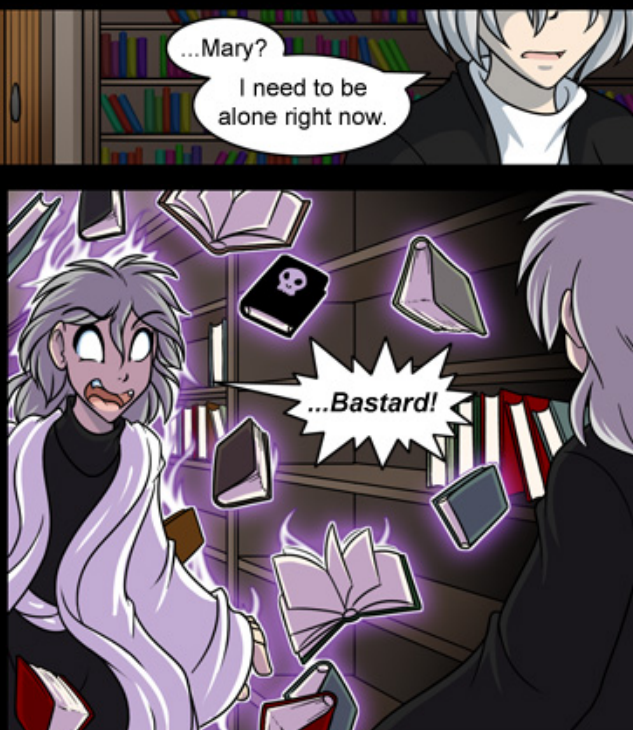
Now do as I command.

...As you say... Mistress.



Euchre...

You...



...Mary?

I need to be alone right now.

...Bastard!



You lied to me...
this whole time!

I don't know
what you're t-

No! No more lies,
Euchre! I questioned Rose.
I looked into her mind. She
couldn't lie to me.



R-Rose? Rose
is still alive?



Don't pretend to care
now! I don't know which is
more disgusting -

That you never planned to tell
me what you really were, or that you
were willing to sacrifice your own *cousin*
to make sure it was never found out!



I-it's not like that!

It's Sirus! He was
trying to trap me - to
gauge my loyalties.

He left me no choice!

He knew I couldn't be
caught connected with a
magic-using Keidran.



You had a choice! You
could have run! Taken
her and left this place.

You used her, just
as you used me.



I never meant for any
of this to happen. I wasn't
trying to use anyone.

Then why...
why pretend
to care about
me, if not to
use me?

I wasn't pretending!
I... I just... hadn't plan
for it to happen...



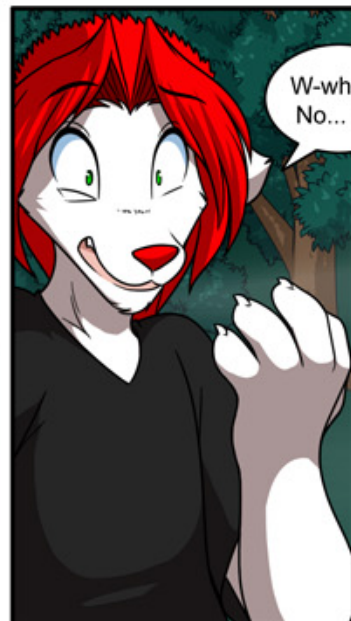
You didn't seem
to care enough to
tell me the truth
before bedding me.
All that time we
were together...



Would it have
turned out any better
for me if I had?

It's *your* people just
now who were preparing
to murder an innocent girl
they simply *suspected*
of being a spy.

It might not excuse what
I've done, but are you honestly
surprised I'd keep what I am
a secret from you?





So, then what happened?

I don't actually know. All I know is that eventually, she let him go.



What? Just like that? Why?

Well, I can only say what my mother told me.

She claimed it was because exposing him might have ruined her chances of being chosen as Grand Templar.



But... I don't know if I believe that.

If she really wanted to, I think she could have had him... "removed" quietly.

I think a part of her still loved him. But maybe that's naive wishing on my part.



No, I get that.

I mean, I grew up an orphan, but I can understand the desire of wanting parents who don't hate each other.

Though, I gotta say... I wouldn't blame your mom if she did.

plop!



Either way, I am thankful for my mother's mercy. As you've probably guessed, by then she was already pregnant with me.

It was a shock for everyone.

My conception was made possible due to my father's transformation. However... the gods do not look kindly on those who thwart their laws.



Ah!

I was born cursed - I inherited my father's gift, but none of his control. I'm not sure which form I was born with, but I was either a Keidran from birth, or changed soon after, because I'm told the midwife fainted.

My existence was kept a secret from almost everyone. A High Templar giving birth to a Keidran would have been a scandal.



I was given a locket to wear which kept my magic at bay, and then sent to live in a cabin far away from civilization. There were years of my childhood where I wouldn't see another soul, save for my caretaker. It was a lonely time in my life.



Your mother just... abandoned you for years?

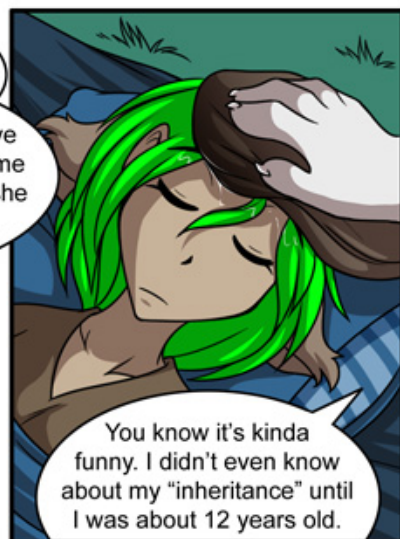
Man, that's rough.

Looking back, I think I understand now. I was a living reminder of what Euchre did.

She couldn't stand to have me around, but at the same time, I was still family. So she kept me at arms length.

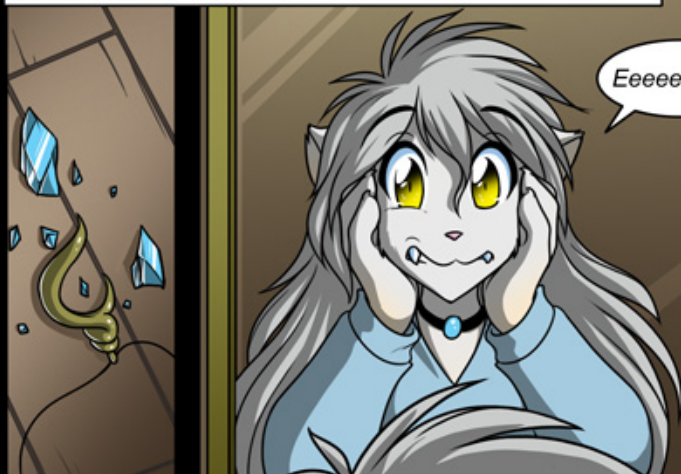
It wasn't so bad, though.

My caretaker doubled as my tutor, and once I learned how to read, I spent most of my free time in books.



You know it's kinda funny. I didn't even know about my "inheritance" until I was about 12 years old.

If you think you were surprised, imagine how I felt as a young girl when I accidentally stepped on my locket and began sprouting fur. I'd never even seen a Keidran before!



Eeeeeeee—!



Rainy, what's wrong? You haven't eaten anything all day. Let me in!

No! Keep away! I might eat you!

I remember being terrified, thinking I'd turned into a werewolf. I guess that's not too far off the mark, is it?



And... that's about it.

Years later, Euchre helped Trace lead a coup d'état against the Templar, in exchange for sparing mother's life.

Trace used a painful, forced version of my father's spell - *Imperfect Transformation* - to make my mother like me. His idea of a cruel joke, I guess.

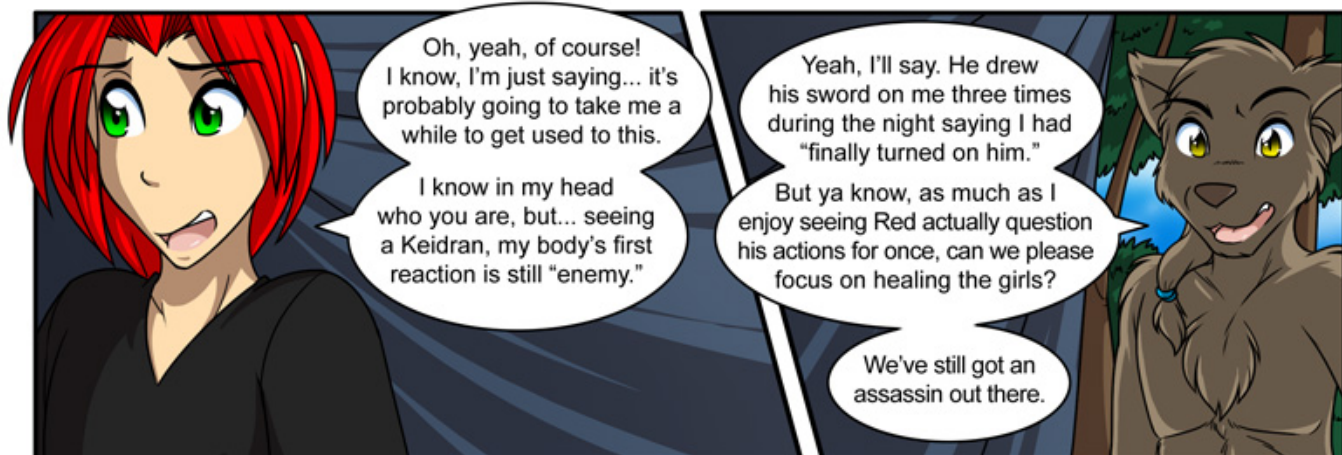
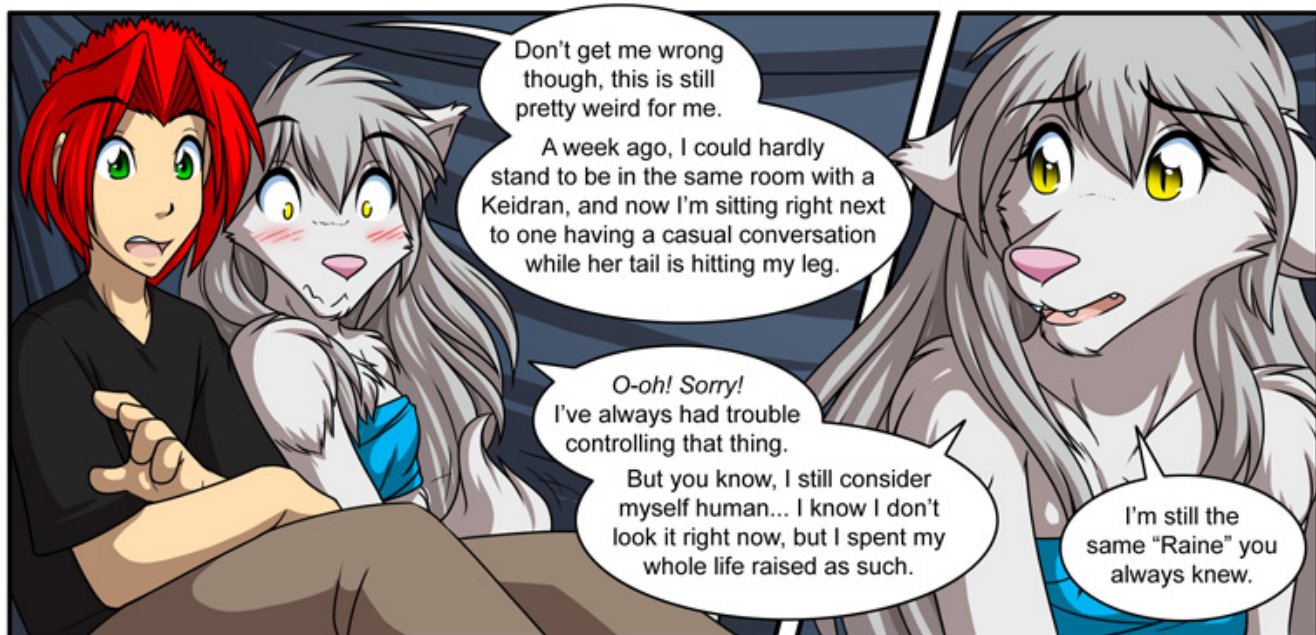


Look out!

Ack!

We became separated while on the run, and... that's when I ran into you guys.





Twokends



CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

STRANDED





What we need to do is think up a plan!

A plan, from you? Now I know we're doomed.

Be careful not to strain yourself.

Shut it, furball.

Raine! Your mother was the former Grand Templar! You must have powerful magic!

Right?



Well, yes... I... I do have magic, but like I said, I was never trained.

And it wouldn't matter anyway.



As long as I'm trapped in this Keidran body, I'm stuck with all the biological issues that comes with being Keidran.

I can't cast magic without mana crystals!



Well, what about this shackle thing?

It turns you human, right? Then you can use magic without crystals.



This doesn't "turn me human."

This is a **magic suppressor**. It keeps my curse in check.

But it also cuts off my magical abilities.

If I managed to fix it, I then wouldn't be able to use magic voluntarily.

It's lose-lose, either way.



Well, alright, maybe...
Maybe the two of us could just carry the girls?

Okay, first, *how*?

We can't exactly defend ourselves while carrying two women.

And Raine can't carry them. Not for miles.

Second, *where*?

The nearest villages are either the one that was destroyed or the one who's neighbour was just destroyed... **by wolves.**

Which, if you hadn't noticed, two of us currently are!



Oh, believe me, I've noticed!
I've also noticed I'm the only one making any suggestions here!

While all you do is complain!

Yeah? Well so far my complaining seems to be about as effective!

Maybe I wouldn't need to poke holes in your plans if they weren't all stupid!

Would you two cut it out!

We're all tired and stressed, but this arguing isn't helping any of us!
So knock it off!



Hmph. Fine. Whatever.

I'll just stand guard in silence, then, since that's all I'm good for.

Maybe if I'm lucky, that assassin will have an extra sleep dart waiting for me.

You do that, fleabag.

Tch! Keidran!

What did I do to deserve being stranded out here with these animals?



"Animal..."

Mother was right.
Once people see me like this,
it's all they ever see.



But she also said if I tried
hard enough, I could learn to
control it like Euchre could!

So why isn't
it working?!

Come on!
Change back!



Change
back already!



You really
are a moron, ya
know that?

I thought you
said you were going
to stay quiet.



Maybe you ought to
take your own advice!

Raine's already uncomfortable
enough being Keidran without you
using Keidran slurs around her!

Wha-? She knows
I wasn't referring to *her*!
I only meant *you* and the
bastard hunting us!

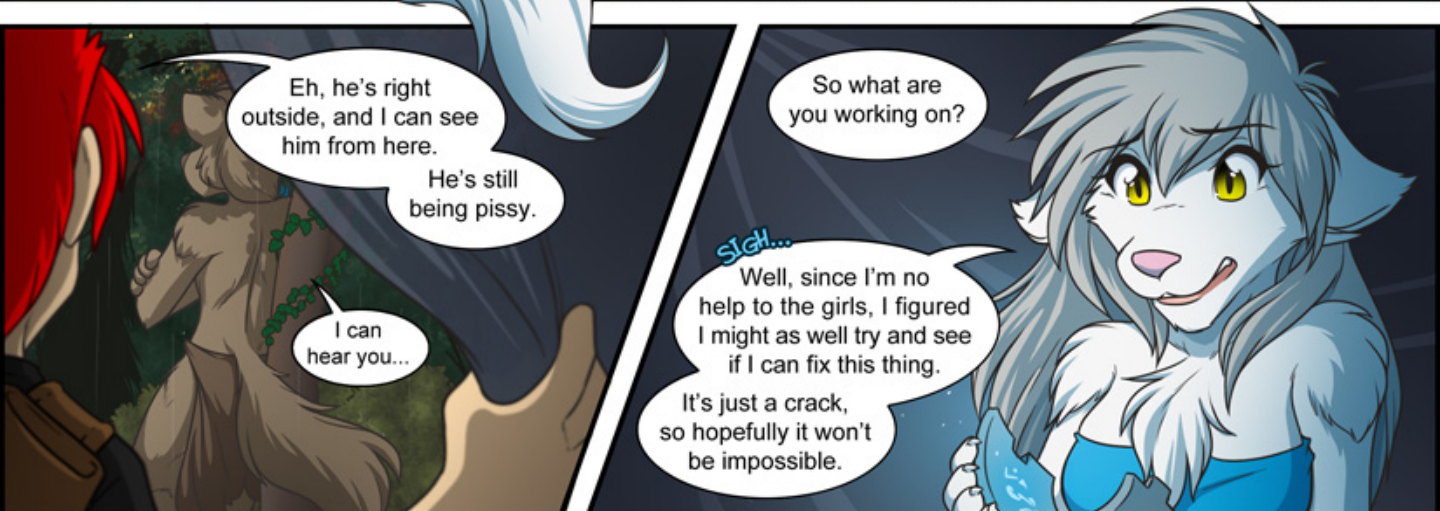
Somehow, I don't
think that's how she
interpreted it.
But fine, keep doing
what you're doing.



Maybe it'll help convince
her she'd be better off with...
someone of her own kind.

H-hey!
She's not one of
your kind, no matter
how she looks!
Don't get
any ideas!

Perhaps you
should be telling
her that, then.







Thanks.
I know how you normally
feel about... non-humans,
so that means a lot.

Even if I'm not
sure I believe it...



Are you sure
you're alright?
You still don't
seem like it.



Huh? N-no,
I'm fine, why?

Well, I'm no
expert on Keidran facial
expressions, but...

Your ears...

Oh.



Right, these
stupid things.

Don't mind them. They
don't listen to me.



...They only listen
for you, right?

Snrk!

Get it? Because
they're ears.



Aw, now
they're back
down again!

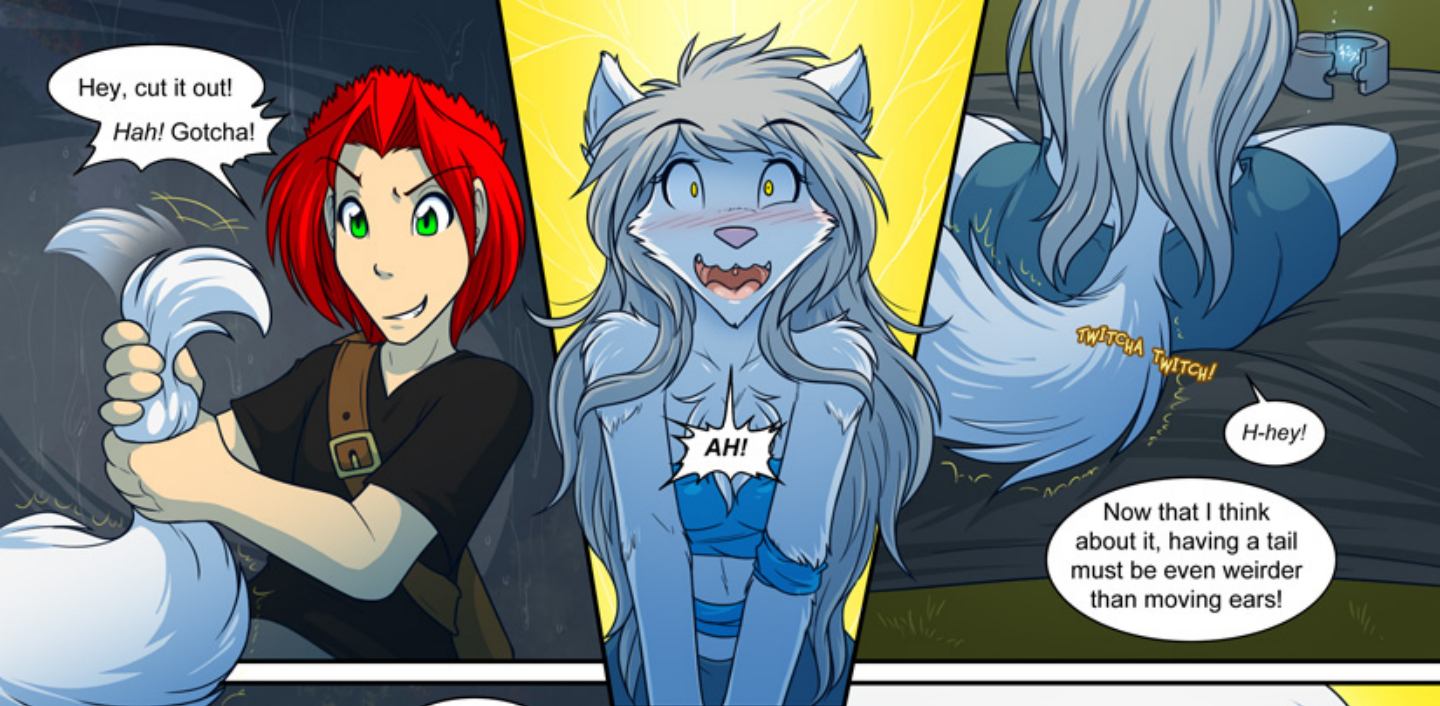
That's
kinda cute.



WOOMP!!

Ack!

Sorry, sometimes
my tail has a mind
of its own too.



Hey, cut it out!
Hah! Gotcha!

AH!

TWITCH! TWITCH!

H-hey!

Now that I think
about it, having a tail
must be even weirder
than moving ears!



C-could you
please not...

We already have ears,
but tails are a completely
new limb altogether!

N-no really,
you shouldn't-

SWIRLWIRL!

Eep!

Can you really
control how it moves?
I can't even imagine how
that would feel.



You know, despite my
misgivings about other races,
I admit I've always wondered
just how you can

Stop!

SLAM!

THUD!

Are you sure you're alright?

Just a bit winded, eheh.

Sorry for the tail thing.

How can those two fool around at a time like this?

We're stuck out here in this hopeless situation and they're still acting like we're on a picnic in the woods.

Meanwhile, there's an assassin lying in wait, just looking for an opportunity to strike.

Where are you?! Why don't you just get it over with, coward!

Hoping I drop my guard, no doubt. Well it ain't happening!

I am the embodiment of vigilance... constantly on alert. He could be anywhere...

He could be lurking in the trees... He could be hiding in the bushes...

He could even be...

Right behind me!



Ugh... keep it together, Sythe. You're really losing it.



Unless...

You're not another one of his illusion tricks, are you?

BOOP!

Well, you could still be one of his minions. I'm watching you.



Feh! What does it even matter?

This is my life now apparently. What am I doing out here?

Standing around in the rain waiting to be attacked while defending people who hate my guts.

.....

Well, okay, maybe not all of them. Raine's alright.

We're certainly not "friends" though. So why am I risking my life for humans who don't even appreciate me?




Um, i-is he talking to that... squirrel?

Yep. Wolf boy's finally snapped.



Hey Nutcase, what's going on?


I don't think I can take any more of this.



I hope he can talk some sense into Sythe... and not start another fight.


Hmph...

It's strange.




I was so sure once the truth was out, my friends would end up turning on me.

And yet... one of the most anti-keidran of people I've ever met now knows... and he's still attempting to be nice to me!




Sure he doesn't look at me in the same way as before, but he is *trying*, I can tell.

And if he of all people can act civil...



Maybe... maybe mother was wrong.

Maybe there is hope for humans and keidran to coexist!



**THAT'S IT!
I'VE HAD IT!**

CRACKOOW!



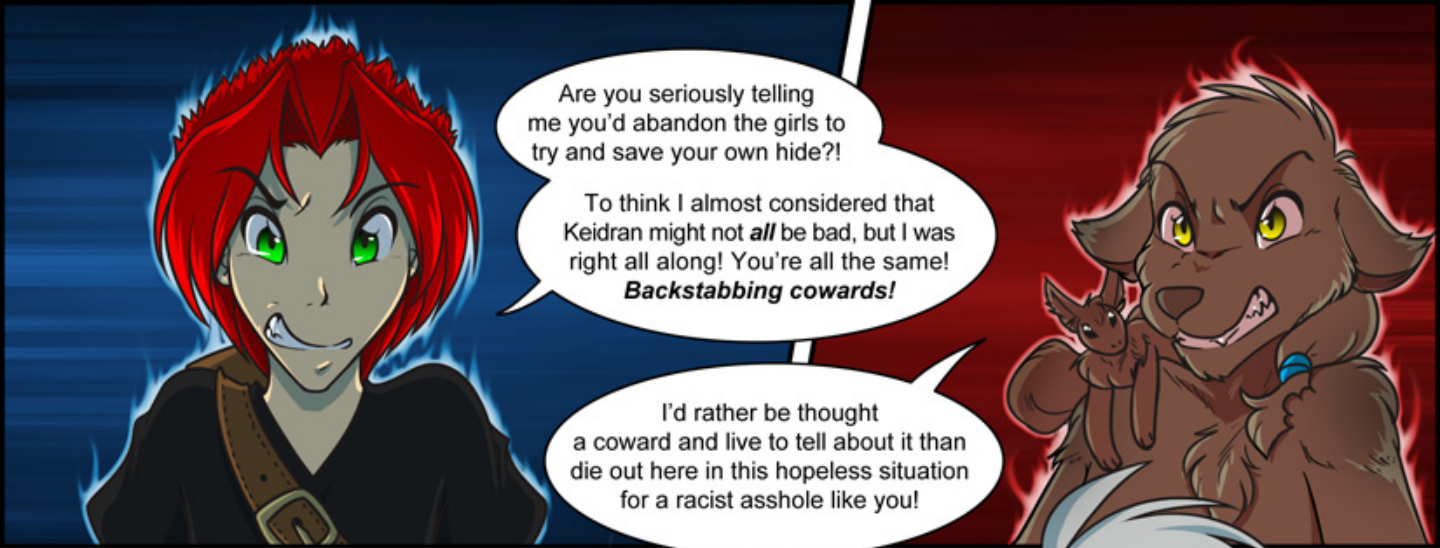
Hey!

Where you do think you're going? We had an agreement!

We agreed to a *truce*! But so far you've *still* done nothing but treat me like dirt!

Well I'm done!
I'm out of here!

You're leaving **now**? What are you, a moron? You **can't**!



Are you seriously telling me you'd abandon the girls to try and save your own hide?!

To think I almost considered that Keidran might not *all* be bad, but I was right all along! You're all the same! **Backstabbing cowards!**

I'd rather be thought a coward and live to tell about it than die out here in this hopeless situation for a racist asshole like you!



What did you call me!?

Stop! Something's not right! Sythe, what's gotten into you?

You can't go! What about Maren and Karen? They need you!

And leaving will just make everyone an easier target! You know that!

...Yes. I know. Leaving will make an easier target... out of both of us.

And I'm sorry, Raine. But if I had to choose between your lives and mine...

Well...



...It's every wolf for himself.

Sythe!



Hey! I don't need you sitting there silently judging me!

I know this is crazy!

But you saw what it was like back there. This was the only choice!

Still...

Maren... Karen...

Sure, they were both irritating, but they don't deserve to be left defenseless.

SPLASH!

THUMP!

THUMP!

THUMP!

And without me... if the assassin decides to come back...

No!

I can't let myself think like that! I made up my mind and there's no going back!

I just have to keep running and—



FWWWIIIIIPPP!

Eek!

Eek!



A few minutes later...

Ah, that's better.
Thanks, Raine.
And you too,
little one.

Is he going
to be okay?

He'd better be
if we're going to get the
antidote out of him.

I can't believe you
two planned that whole
fight back there!

Yeah, well I can't believe it
actually worked. I was sure Red's
acting would give us away.

Pretending to be
angry at a Keidran wasn't
exactly a challenge.

Besides, back when I
was a trainee, I was in the
Templar theatre troupe!

Yeah, well...
wait, what?!

What?

The Templar had
a *theatre troupe*? And
you were in it?!

Yeah... why?

Well, it's just...
you don't seem like
the type, is all.

Hey. I love the
theatre. You better not
be dissing it.

No, no, I was
just... you know what,
nevermind.

NIBBLE!
NIBBLE!

NUZZLE!

Meanwhile...

Sooooo...
How long do
you think he's going
to be out?

You hit him
pretty hard. The rock
may have given him
a concussion.

Well I had
to be sure he'd
stay down.

Yeah, better
safe than sorry.

Still, we need him to
tell us what kind of poison
he used on the girls, so he
can't die on us yet.

You know, I expected
an assassin to be a lot scarier
in person, but he's actually kind
of cute, for a wolf boy.

Raine! Don't go
complimenting the guy
trying to kill us!

I know. I'm not
being serious.

It's just nice to finally
feel safe again! We make
a pretty good team.

Especially now that
you two have put aside
your differences.

We're all
friends now!

Well, we're friends
with you, but I don't think
Sythe and I will

Friends!

Alright, alright!
For now...

Huh?

Raine,
you're—!



You're changing again! Look!

Huh?
I am?

I am! I'm finally turning back into me again!

It's just like mom said, if I stay calm, I can change back even without the suppressor!

This is the best day ever!



Well... it was.

Sigh...

Back to being the only keidran in the group again. It was fun while it lasted.



Now for the rest!



Uh...
Raine?



Aw, come on!

What's wrong now?! I can't be stuck like this! It's worse than before!



Hey, look on the bright side, at least you don't have the face of a—nmph!

What?

Nothin'!

Caught it that time.



Sigh...

It... it's really not that bad, you know? If you ignore the legs, it kinda looks like you're wearing a Keidran costume.

Heh. Yeah.

I'm sorry for spoiling the mood. I'm still glad we're safer now.

It's just a little frustrating, is all. But you guys don't have to worry about me, I'll be okay.

If you're sure.



YAWN!

Well, I don't know how long that guy's going to be out.

But this is the first chance we've had to get some sleep. I think now's a good a time as any.

Red, why don't you and Raine get some rest. We'll take first watch.

"We?"



I don't think so. How about I watch him while **you** get some sleep.

What?!

Seriously, after all that happened, you still don't trust me? Because I'm a wolf?



No, I don't trust you because you just referred to that rodent like it's a person.

Hey! You leave Mrs. Nibbly out of this!



Hey, boys! Hello?

I'm still here, and I've actually slept recently. Why don't I watch him?





I shouldn't feel bad. I know they're just trying to shield me.

It's just a little hard not to feel hurt.

I might be a little naive sometimes, but I understand the situation we're stuck with.



It would be a bad idea to give this guy another opportunity to try and trick us again in the future.

And I'm all too aware of how dangerous someone with magic can be.



Meanwhile...

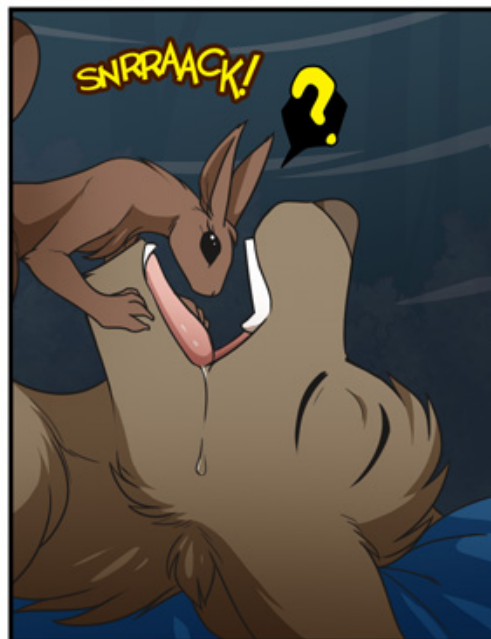
Wow.

Now that was... something.

Yes... quite.

I am never going to hear the end of this from Zen whenever he decides to finally wake up today.

Thank goodness his mind still seems to be asleep at the moment.





Raine!

What's wrong?
Did he escape?! Are we
under attack?!



Oh...

Everything
okay, Raine?

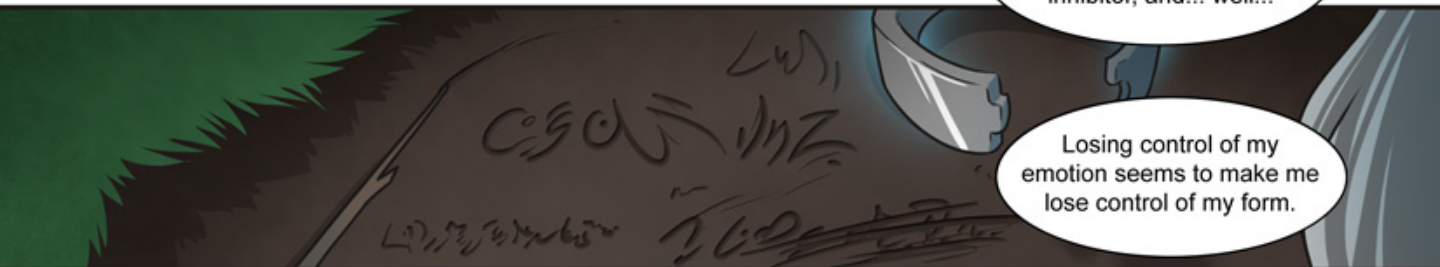


I have a
muzzle again.

Ah... yeah.
So you do.

Mmmgh...

I was getting frustrated
trying to fix this stupid magic
inhibitor, and... well...



Losing control of my
emotion seems to make me
lose control of my form.



Still, I appreciate
you keeping an ear
out for me.

Sorry to wake
you for nothing but
my problems.



Don't worry about
it, Raine. I'd already
been woken up.



I'm glad to see our "friend" is still here.

Yes. He hasn't moved since last night. Lots of drool, though.



Hm?

Hey, what are they doing out here?



Oh, I decided to move the girls out here so I could care for them while keeping an eye on him.

I'm worried. They haven't had anything to eat or drink in over a day.



Don't worry. I'll make sure this bastard tells us how to wake them up.



I hope you're right.

Thank you for staying with us. I know the others hadn't exactly been... grateful.

But if it weren't for you, we'd all be dead back when our village was attacked.



Oh! Uh...
thanks!

It's not really
a big deal. I couldn't
let you guys die.



It is a big deal!

It's because of us
you were labelled a traitor!

We haven't been very kind
to you in return. Yet you're still here
caring over two human girls.

You're a
good person,
Sythe.



Thanks.
I appreciate that,
Raine.



Though, to be
honest, the choice
wasn't as hard as
you might think.

Oh?

I wasn't exactly
thrilled to be on the front
lines acting as fodder in
the first place.

Believe it or not,
before all this war nonsense
got started I had my hopes
of being a diplomat.



A diplomat?
Really?


Is that so hard
to believe?

Well... I mean, you
must admit, most of the
times I've seen you, you've
been in a loin cloth.



Hah! I see
your point.

I guess I don't quite
look the part. But I wasn't
always like this!




When I was young, I was fascinated by human culture. I wanted to get to know everything about our weird hairless neighbours.

Even spent a summer living in a human village once, if you can believe it. This was back when the borders were more open, of course.

Even just a decade ago, things were lot friendlier between our kind and theirs.

Er... I mean, b-between **my** kind and theirs! Not... of course you aren't...

Sorry.



It's alright, Sythe.


Honest mistake.

Ahem! Anyway...

I learned everything I could about humans.

That's **not** to say I didn't care about my own culture, mind you!


I am a proud wolf, through and through!



But there were certain things I admired about humans. Freakishly long lives, education... attitudes regarding women.

Even my name. Originally, it was the Keidran word for the same tool, but humans couldn't pronounce it.

So I changed it to the human equivalent:



Uh... Sythe... you know it's spelled wrong, right?

W...what?

It normally has a "c" in it. S-c-y-t-h-e.

N-no, no it doesn't! It...

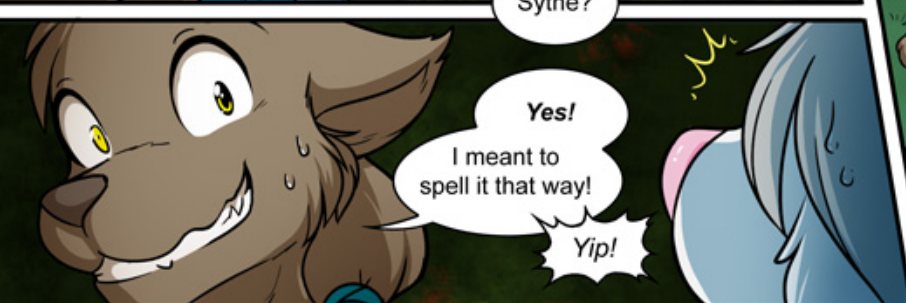




Then again,
it's your name. If you
wanted to spell it that
way, it's fine.

Are... you
alright, Sythe?

Sythe?



Yes!

I meant to
spell it that way!

Yip!



Sorry...

Uh... where
were we?

Y-you being
a diplomat?

Did I just
bark?



Right, right.

Well, not much
else to say. Obviously
it didn't pan out.

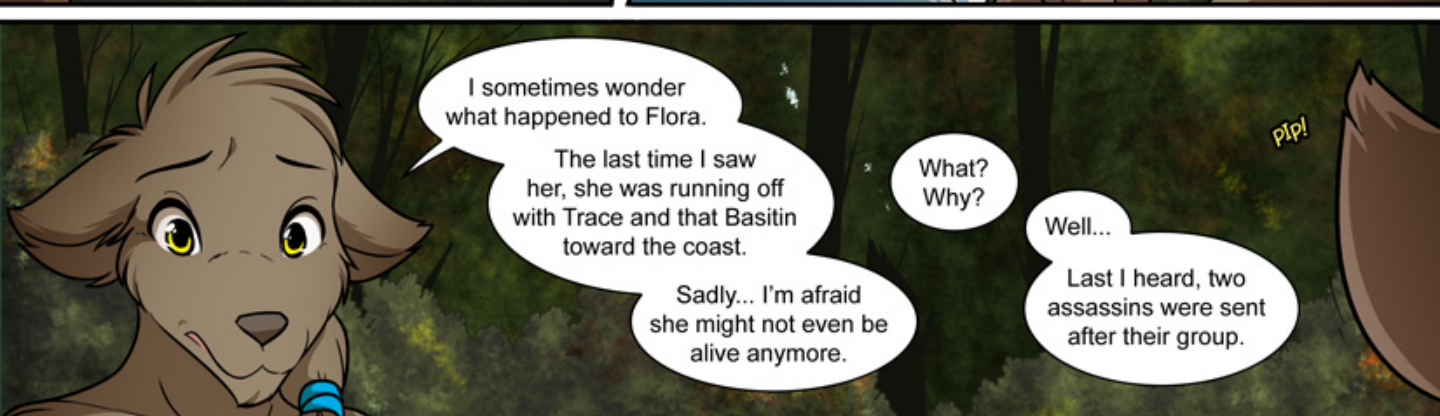
Templars had a coup.
borders were closed. I got
sent off on an arraigned
marriage with a tiger.



You mean
that girl who ran
away with Trace,
right?

Yep, that
was her.

Heh. She must
have really hated
me. Guess I can't
blame her.



I sometimes wonder
what happened to Flora.

The last time I saw
her, she was running off
with Trace and that Basitin
toward the coast.

Sadly... I'm afraid
she might not even be
alive anymore.

What?
Why?

Well...

Last I heard, two
assassins were sent
after their group.



<Wait a minute!>

<You guys are
talking about Keith's
group of friends!>



<You were awake this whole time?!>

<It was your fiancée we were sent after?!>

<You were one of the assassins my uncle sent to kill Flora?!>

<Your uncle sent assassins after your own fiancée?!>

Hey! Guys!

Calm down!

What's he talking about, Sythe? You're both speaking Keidran too fast for me to keep up.



This is the guy!

When Flora ran off with Trace, the wolves thought the humans might be forging an alliance with the felines in secret.

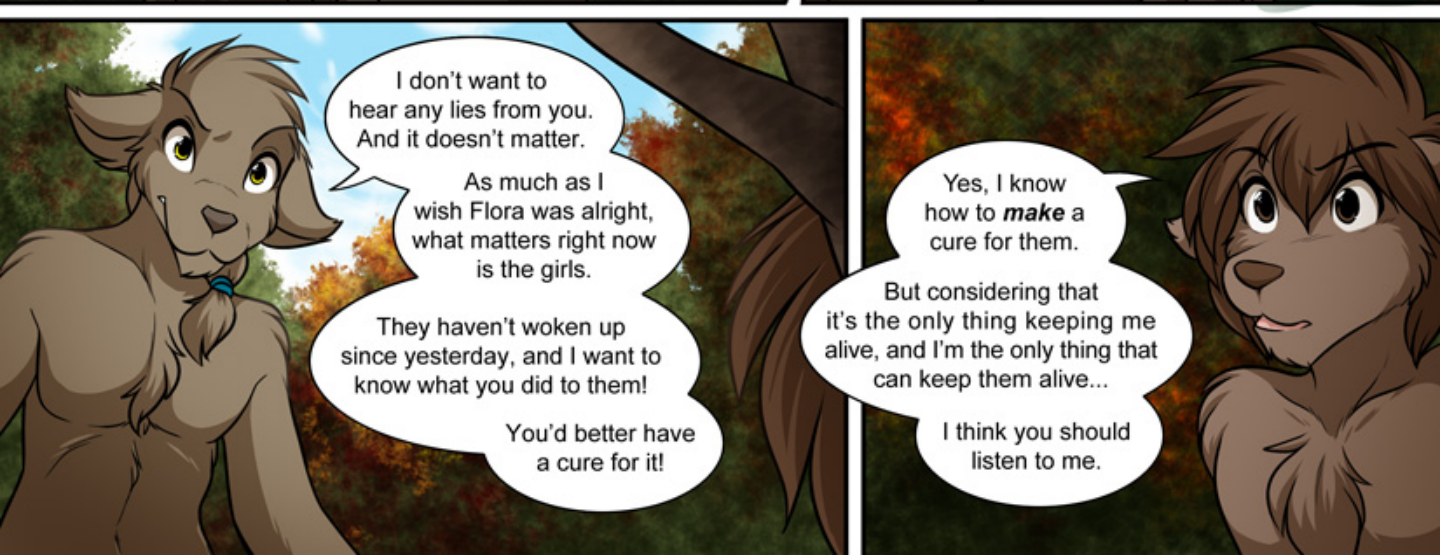
This is one of the bastards they sent to kill her!

"Kill"?

<No, wait! We did not kill them!>

<I can explain—>

Save it!



I don't want to hear any lies from you. And it doesn't matter.

As much as I wish Flora was alright, what matters right now is the girls.

They haven't woken up since yesterday, and I want to know what you did to them!

You'd better have a cure for it!

Yes, I know how to **make** a cure for them.

But considering that it's the only thing keeping me alive, and I'm the only thing that can keep them alive...

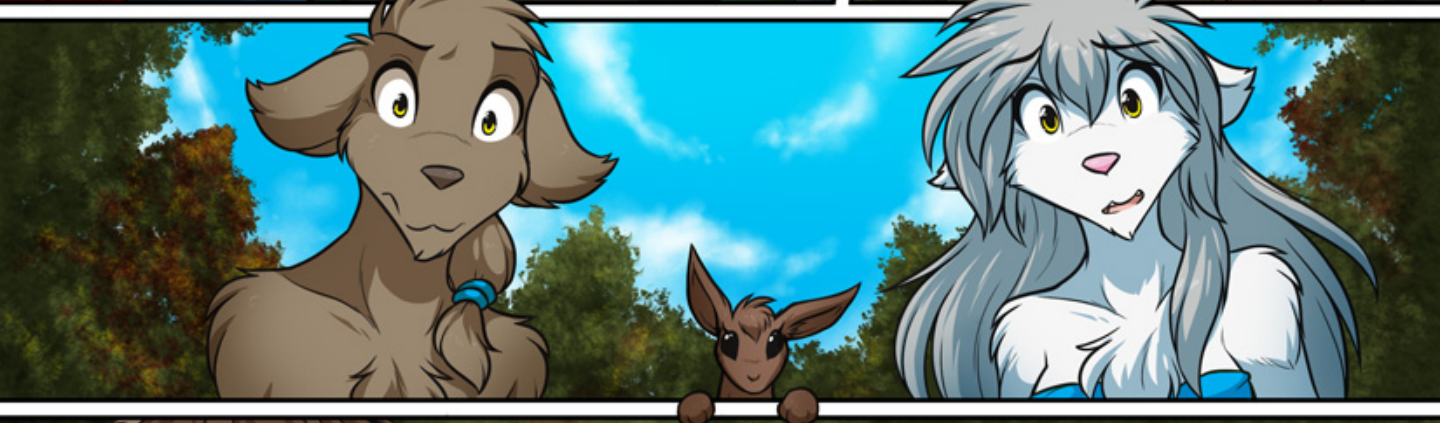
I think you should listen to me.



<...And then, the white dragon flew off after defeating the shadow dragon! That's when my brother joined up with your friends.

From there, they stumbled upon a guy who happened to have a ship to sail them across the ocean to the lands of the Basitin!>

<And I know all of this because of the special telepathic mental connection that my brother and I share!>



<Okay, that... didn't sound quite as good as it did in my head.>



I... suddenly have the strangest urge to hit my ex-fiancé.

<It sounded **completely insane!** Did you honestly expect us to buy that nonsense?

Your brother joining them doesn't even make sense!

Think about it: what kind of complete half-wit would just let a guy join them right after that person tried to **kill** them?

That person would have to be pretty stupid. Like, **really** dumb.>



Argh!

Oh, Zen!
H-hey! Listen, I
can explain...

Whatever it is,
it can wait! I'm in a bit of
a bind at the moment...

...literally.



What do you mean?
What's been going...



Snrk...

Natani, don't...



Well well well, look
who's finally lost his
clothes this time!

Oh,
har har!

Fine, I deserve
that! But how 'bout we
save it for when I'm not
in mortal danger?




Mortal danger?
Why didn't you call
for me sooner?!

I didn't want you
to worry unless you
could help.
It'd take too long
to explain, look through
my memories. But for now
I need to talk to someone
through you! Quickly!




Flora, wait!



I know this is going to be really weird, but I need you to help me with something, quickly!

Yeah, sure, Natani. What is it?


And... wait, didn't one of your eyes used to be grey before?



That... nevermind that. Just listen!

I forgot how cute Flora was in person.


Focus, Zen.



Great. Now he's just staring off into space.

I don't know what he hopes to gain from this act.


He probably just wants a reason for us not to hurt him.



A crazy story about imaginary friends isn't helping his case.

He's a magic-user. He's dangerous.

Sure, we only found drained mana crystals in his stuff, but who knows what else he might have hidden?




Wait! You found mana crystals when you searched him?!

Well... yeah, but they were dead. Why?

Even an "empty" mana crystal is useful! The crystal itself can be ground up for runecrafting, circles...

I might be able to fix my shackle! I'll be right back!



Well... at least she's happier. But it still doesn't help our current situation!

Maybe I should just wait and let Red handle this guy. I'm sure he'd love to...

Your ponytail looks stupid!



Alright, *that's it!*
I've had it with that
attitude of yours!

I was
quoting Flora.

W...what?

Wait, wait!

That wasn't me!

It's what she
said, wasn't it?

When you two first
met. She was angry at the
arranged marriage.

She called your
ponytail stupid.

But that...
y-you could have
guessed that!



She also says the whole
way back she tried knocking
it off your shoulder when you
weren't looking.

And that the first night,
she stole your fancy clothes
and made you go the rest of
the way in a loincloth. Guess you
still haven't found them?

Alright, stop it!

How could you
possibly know that?!

Did you torture
her for information before
you killed her?



Oh, yeah, sure!

We always ask our targets
irrelevant trivia questions about their
pasts before we take them out.

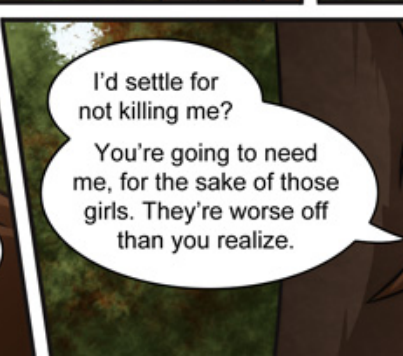
It's in the assassin's
handbook, under "pointless".



Enough with
the sarcasm!

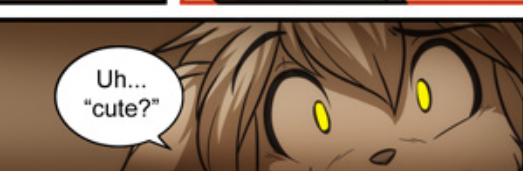
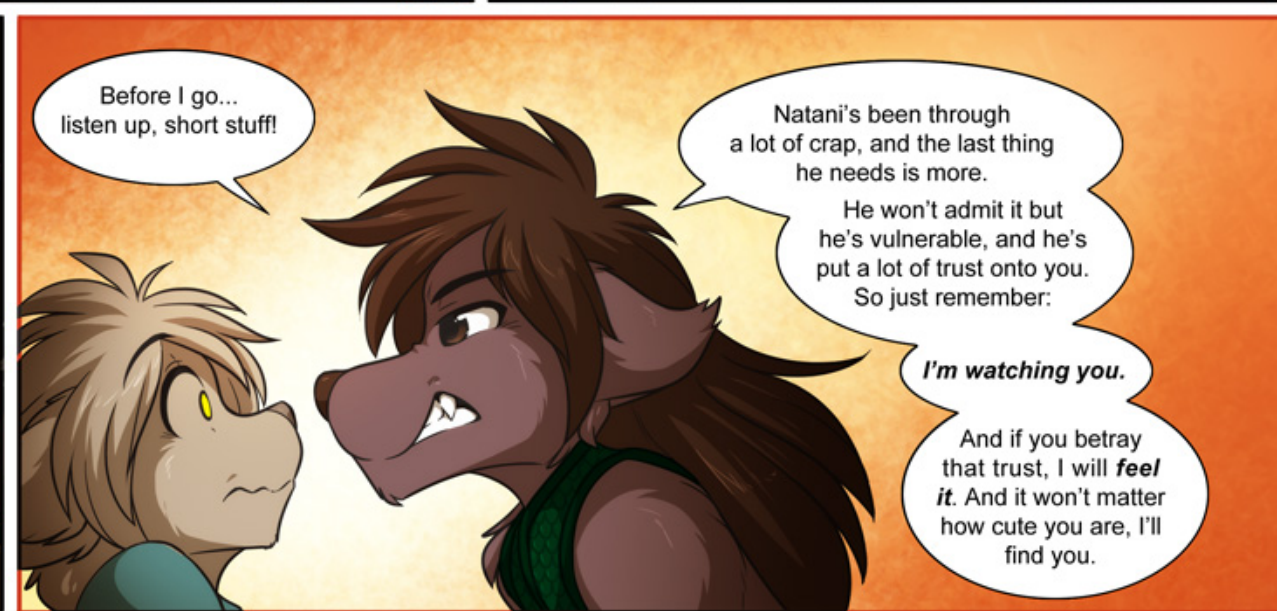
Even if there's
some truth to all of this,
you still attacked us!

Do you expect me
to just let you go?!



I'd settle for
not killing me?

You're going to need
me, for the sake of those
girls. They're worse off
than you realize.



Some time later...

YAAAWN!

Man!

I slept like
a rock!

Ah! You out
here, fur-face?

Did I miss
anything while
I was out?

...

He's awake
and you didn't
tell me?!

Uh...
Morning.
Coffee?

And you untied
one of his hands to
give him *coffee*?!

Relax, Red.

He told us where
to find his stuff nearby,
including the coffee.

And his hand is
only untied because he
just finished making what
we needed.

Wait, you
mean...?

Yeah. Raine's over
with the girls treating
them right now.

What, really?!
He just gave it up
just like that?!

I can't believe it!
I was sure we'd have to
beat it out of him!

What a sucker!

Now we can take
care of this guy and finally
get on the road again!

No. We can't
yet. There's a new
complication.

Huh? What
do you mean
by that?

He's made some odd
claims while you were out. He
says he knows our friends, but
more importantly...

This guy - Zen - claims
the poison he used on the girls
isn't something that can just be
fixed with some plants.

They need
a real healer.

While his quick fix will wake
them up for now, unless they continue
to take it regularly they won't wake up
again by the next morning.

In other words,
we need him.





I wish I knew what was in this stuff I'm giving them.

I've read books on botany, but this... I have no idea what this is.

SNIF
SNIF

Smells funny. But everything smells funny with this nose.

...

Now I can't stop noticing the giant dog nose constantly in front of my face.



Ah!

Uuuurgh...



I-it's working!

Maren?

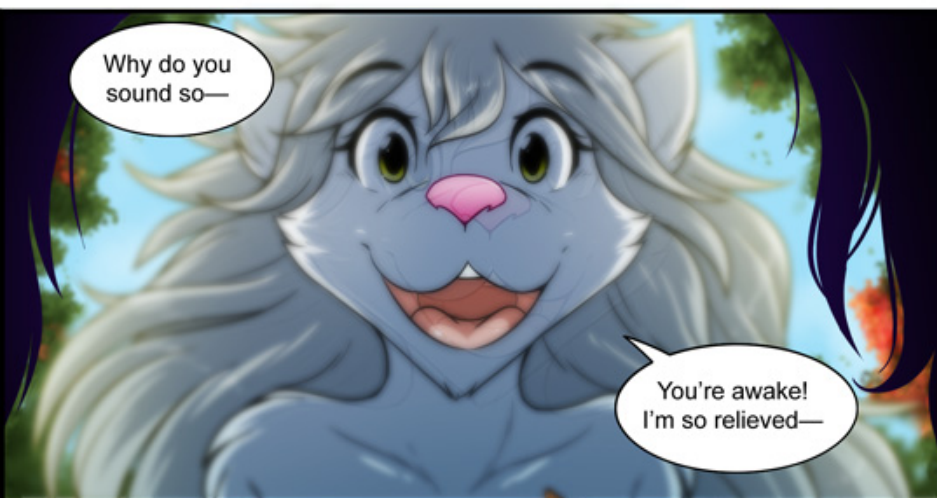
Ugh~!
My head...

What did I drink last night? And why does it taste like I just chewed on a bag of tea leaves?

Just relax, Maren. Take it slow.



Raine?
Is that you?



Why do you sound so—

You're awake!
I'm so relieved—



Maren, wait!

Get back!
Back! You filthy beast!

Think you can sneak up on us?!



I'll teach you to try and

Woah woah woah!
Relax! She's okay!

"Raine"?

You expect me to believe that?

I know it sounds crazy...

But just look at her!

The frumpy blue clothes?
That weird accent?

And do you know anyone else with freakishly long silver hair?

It's Raine!

It's true.

I'm sorry I didn't tell you before. You were the first friends I ever had.

I was afraid of how you'd react if you knew I was really like... this.

I had so much fun travelling with you guys. I... I'd hoped

WAAAAAHHH!

Eh?

DOGGY!!

BLARG!

Karen!

Look at how fluffy she is! Can we keep her?!

No, you can't keep Raine! She's not a pet!

So you admit it's her.

Even her tail is floofy!

Karen, no! Don't grab that! Trust me!

See, she's nice, Maren. And we owe her.

She saved all of us, seeing through that assassin's illusion.

And she took care of both you girls while you were poisoned.

Eh, fine. Whatever.

Wait... We were poisoned?

Yeah, if it weren't for Raine stepping in, you two probably would have been left out here to die.

D... die?



Well, I'll let you girls freshen up.
I'm sure you need it.



What's that supposed to mean?

Er, uh...
I didn't mean...



No, you're right.
We'll be back.

Come on,
Karen.



Well... That went better than expected.

I don't know...

Maren barely looked at me after you explained the situation.



I don't think things will ever be the same between us.

Nah! That's just how Maren is.

Emotional one minute, distant the next.

Don't take it personally. She's always been like that since Tan— er...

Since... we were kids.



Really?

I knew you guys grew up together in that village. You've known each other a long time.



...Were the two of you ever...?

What? Together?

Ah-hahaha!
Me and Maren!
A couple!

I can't even picture that! That would just be... weird!



Plus, I'm pre-e-etty sure we're cousins.



Cousins?!

Probably. It was a small village.

But even if we're not... I could never look at her in that way.



I see.

I'd wondered why you've never shown any interest. Especially since I've always thought Maren was pretty attractive.

Attractive?

Pfff, I guess. In a sort of Ice Queen kind of way.

Eugh.





Raine, you don't have to do that.

If we just keep the guy away from crystals—

—Even without crystals, **black magic** is *always* an option for the desperate.

And besides...

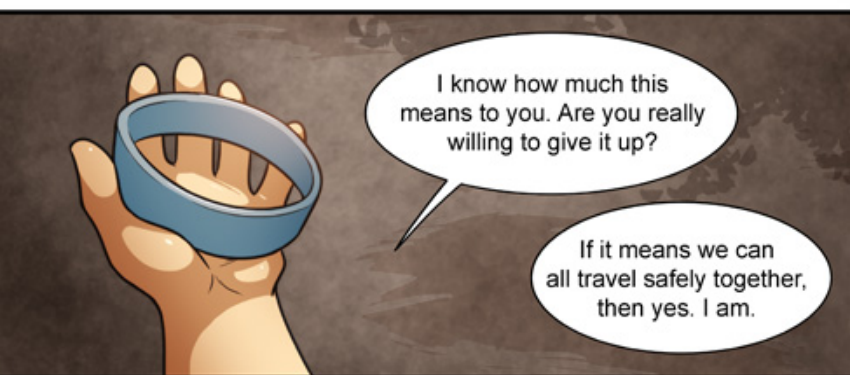


...Maybe this way, it'll be safe enough to let him live.



SIGH...

You really are too nice, even when it comes to someone who doesn't deserve it.



I know how much this means to you. Are you really willing to give it up?

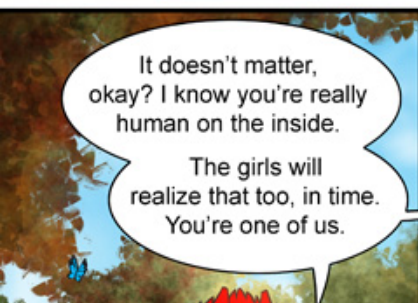
If it means we can all travel safely together, then yes. I am.



You're a braver person than me.

Being stuck as a Keidran... I don't think I'd be willing to do the same.

Listen Raine...



It doesn't matter, okay? I know you're really human on the inside.

The girls will realize that too, in time. You're one of us.



We won't think less of you just 'cause you've got some fur and a tail now. And if anyone does, I'll beat some sense into them, alright?



Now come on, no moping.

Let's go tell the others to pack up. I think it's about time we finally hit the road again.



Hey! We're back!
And it worked!

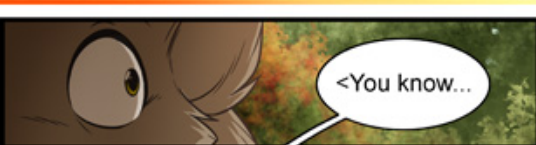
The girls are
washing up now. I think
we're just about ready
to leave this dump.

How's our
"guest" doing?



He's hasn't given
me any trouble.

In fact, he—



<You know...



You guys *really*
need to learn how
to tie a rope.

That, and keep
better track of your
squirrels.>



Wha-?!

Mrs. Nibbly,
you traitor!



Don't
move!



<Hey, relax!
I could have run,
but I didn't!
As I said
before, I have every
intention of travelling
with you!
I just saved
you the trouble of
untying me!>

<The whole point
of taking this job was so I
could afford safe passage
to reach my brother.
But since we're
all going the same
direction, there's no
need now!>



I still think breaking
free was stupid. They'll
trust you *less* now.

You'd be surprised.
A little roguish charm can go
a long way towards building
trust in the long run.



Zen?!

SNAP!
SNAP!

Ah...!

Hey! What's
the matter?

Natani?

THUMP!

CRASH!!

Natani!

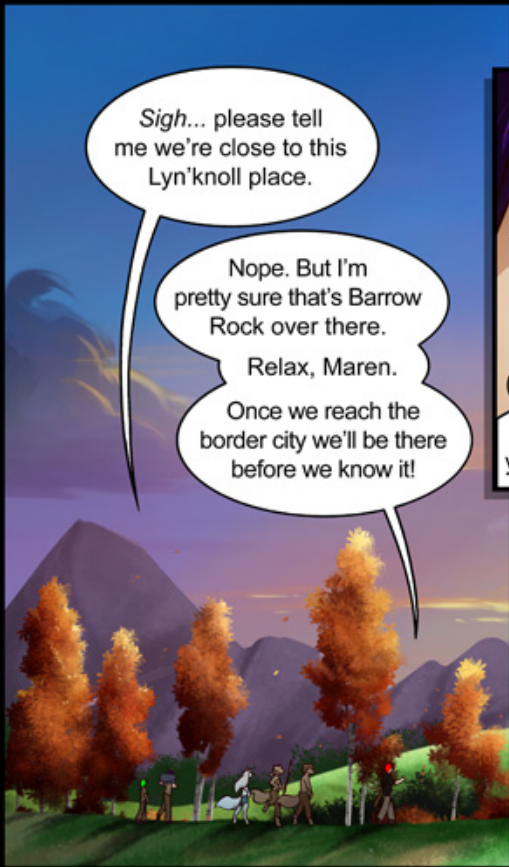
End.

TWOKINDS

BEWARE
OF
WOLVES!



Chapter 19
REUNIONS



Sigh... please tell me we're close to this Lyn'knoll place.

Nope. But I'm pretty sure that's Barrow Rock over there.

Relax, Maren.

Once we reach the border city we'll be there before we know it!



You're not the one lugging around all the camping supplies!

Ngh...

Easy for you to say...



Hey! Keep your voice down! Soldiers sometimes patrol these roads.

Need I remind you, our group is currently 50% wolf right now!



'Sides, Sythe and I already had a turn, it's too heavy for Karen, and Raine's still injured.

Don't worry. We're going to rest in... three more miles!

Grrr...

One more!



Say, Raine. I wanted to ask about your shape shifting...

Hm?

That cut on your stomach... would it still be there if you were to turn human again?

Er, yes, I think any changes remain.

Oh... okay.



... So say you got with Sythe and then changed back. Would you have humans or puppies?

Karen!
Don't ask stuff like that!





Ow!

I wish my shoes still fit. How do Keidran stand walking barefoot all the time?



You get used to it.

Aaah~!

But I must admit, it's nice to take a load off.



Ugh. I don't know if I'll ever get used to it.

It's still so strange to see you this way, with all that... fur.



Sorry. I know it bothers you.

But believe me, if you think that's awkward, try being the one who has to wear the f—

BRUSH!



Eep!



Maren! W-what are you doing?

Brushing you.

Your fur is tangled and matted all over. You clearly don't know how to care for it.

Don't take this the wrong way, but I used to have a dog I groomed all the time.



Dishevelled fur is kind of a pet-peeve of mine.

It's why I try to avoid looking at Sythe.

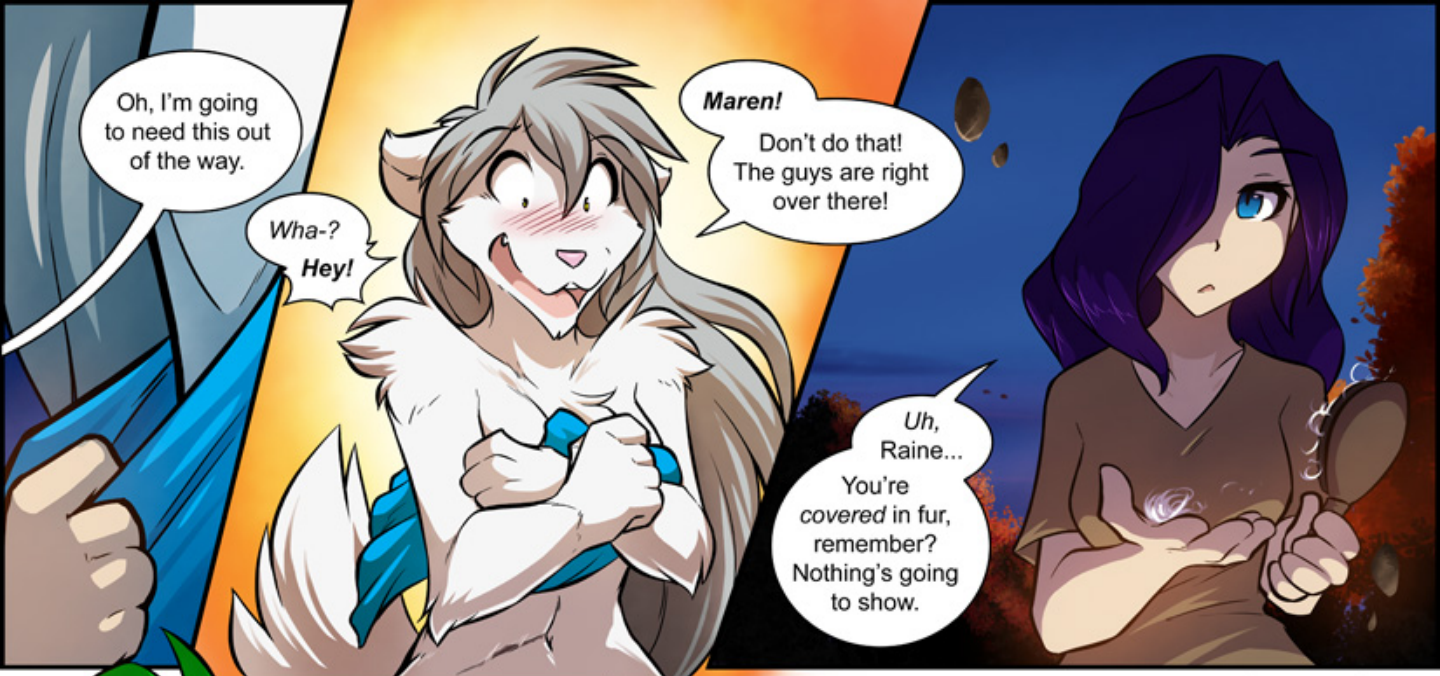
You know you love it!

So hold still and let me know if this hurts.



N-no...

This... this is nice.



Oh, I'm going to need this out of the way.

Wha-?
Hey!

Maren!

Don't do that!
The guys are right over there!

Uh,
Raine...
You're covered in fur,
remember?
Nothing's going to show.



Yeah! Besides,
how are you going to get in the spring otherwise?

Relax, we're all friends here!

Well, except the moody wolf over there.



I... I know.
Modesty's kind of silly at this point.

Especially with all the time we've spent camping together.

I'd just... prefer to keep it on for now.
It helps me feel a little more... human.



Hey,
don't sweat it,
Raine.

It's fine.
Whatever makes you comfortable.



Although, even with the top...

You know there are also rows going down her stomach under that fur, right?

Pff!

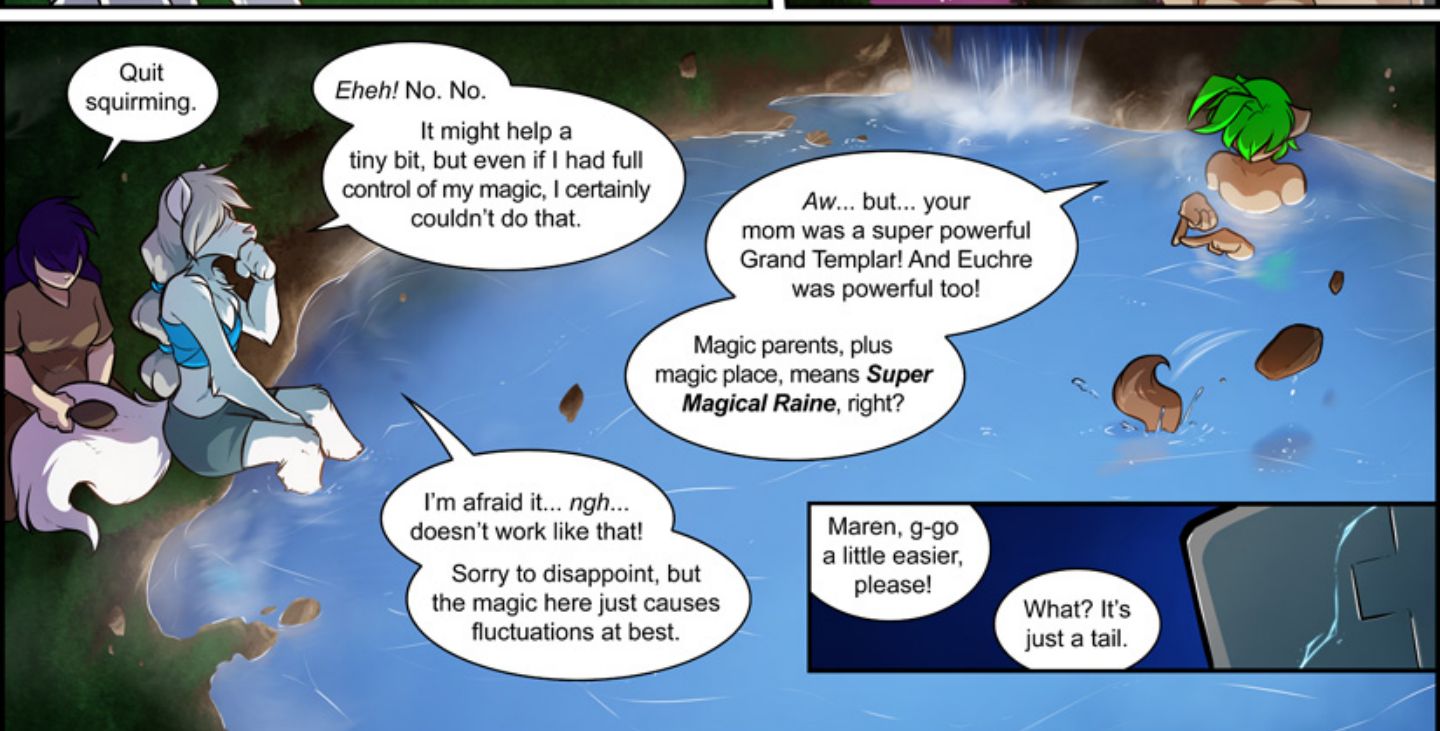


On me too, technically.

I know you're lying just to mess with me!

Hey, I just figured if you're still interested in Raine, you should know all the... perks.

Shut up!





Sigh...

Hey, Natani.
Another update.

Still no luck getting
this thing off without
them noticing.

Rocks make
a lot of noise.



Thought again
about running for it, but as
much as it pains me to admit,
I do need these guys.

They have my map
and supplies. They know
the way and they know
Trace and Flora.

They can get me
to you if I can just keep
being patient.

I just wish I knew
what was happening
on your end.

I keep telling
myself this stupid thing is
just blocking your thoughts
from getting through...

But...



But... what
if I'm wrong?

What if I'm talking
to no one? What if I can't
hear you because this thing
severed the link?

What if I get
it off just to find
out you're...

That you're...

Rrrraaah!
«Natani! Please!
Just say something!»



Zen?

Hey! I don't
know what you just
said, but pipe down
over there!





Meanwhile...

Mwahaha...

S-squee?



Eek!

Ah! Sythe!
Your pet squirrel
is so cute!
I could just
eat her up!

Eek!!



Ew! Karen,
put that thing down!
You don't know where
it's been!

Honestly, where
did that thing even come
from, anyway?

No normal squirrel
hangs around a bunch
of predators. It **must**
be diseased.

Right,
Raine?



Snnrx-!
Huh? Wha-?

Oh. I dunno.
I think we'd notice
by now if it was.

YAWN!

She was probably
someone's pet, maybe.

Although... hm... I've read
that baby dragons shapeshift
into other creatures in order to
experience the world.



PADDLE!
PADDLE!

Dragon?



Is that it, Nibs? Are
you actually a fierce,
fire-breathing dragon
under that fur?!



BOOP!

Well, if it's true,
at least she's a
friendly dragon!

Euck!

Whatever it is,
just keep it away
from me.





Aaand...
done.

I wish I had the
rest of my old grooming
kit. I'd like to be able to
do your nails too.

I have to admit,
this was... fun.

It brings me back to
the days when I wanted
to be a groomer.



At least until...
well, with a name like
Taverndatter, I didn't have
much ch- h-hey!

Ngh...

Raine!

Aw, poor girl.

Us wolves need less
sleep than humans, but once
we're out, we're out.

I think
she's got the
right idea.

I'm headed
to bed too.
Later, sis.

As am I. Looks
like you've been
volunteered first
watch, Maren.



Wha- hey, wait!
Give me a hand with
her, I'm pinned here!
She weighs a ton!



Guys?! This
isn't funny!

Eep-! Raine!
No nuzzling!



The next morning...

Ngh...

Mmph...

Wow, I haven't
slept that well in
ages...

Huh?
Maren?

What are
you doing in
my tent?

Yiiip!!

Maren! I-I'm so sorry!
I don't even remember
falling asleep!

Why didn't you
just push me off?

You were
very heavy.

And she wouldn't
let us wake you up.

She cares more
than she lets on.

Shut it,
fleabag!

Whatever you
say, ice queen.





It's over here, too!

It goes all the way around the hot spring!

What the hell's going on?



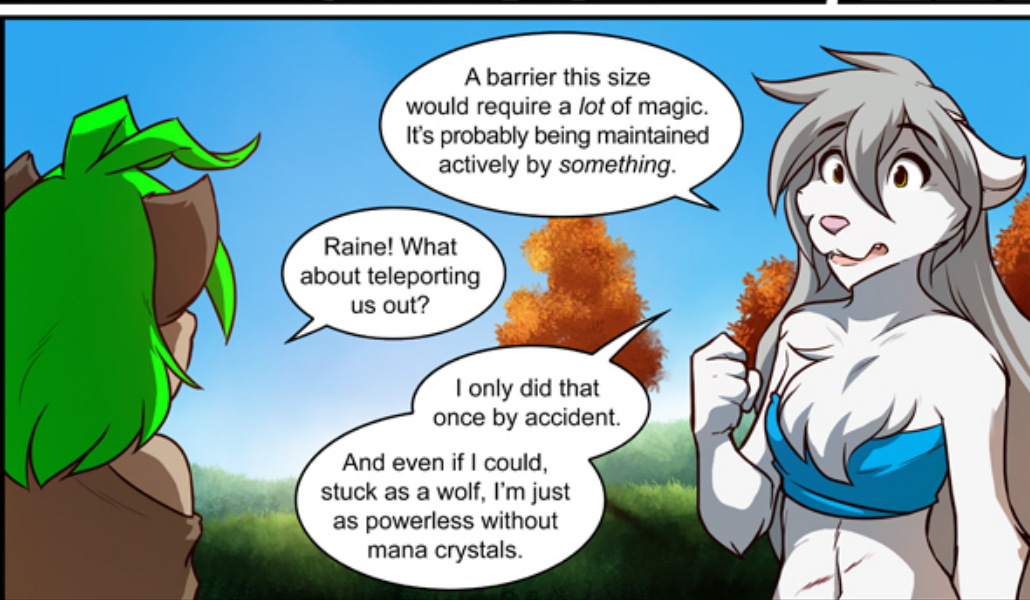
Are you trying something, wolf?!

What?! Come on!

<I'm a Keidran with no mana crystals and wearing a magic suppressor.>

Get real.

...What?



A barrier this size would require a *lot* of magic. It's probably being maintained actively by *something*.

Raine! What about teleporting us out?

I only did that once by accident.

And even if I could, stuck as a wolf, I'm just as powerless without mana crystals.



Hey! You're all forgetting someone!

Alright, stand back!



I may have flunked out of the Templar, but I still know how to blow stuff up!

Wait, you moron! Maybe we should think about thi-



Okay... maybe I should have stood back a little too. :Cough!:




Hahaha!

clap!
clap!
clap!

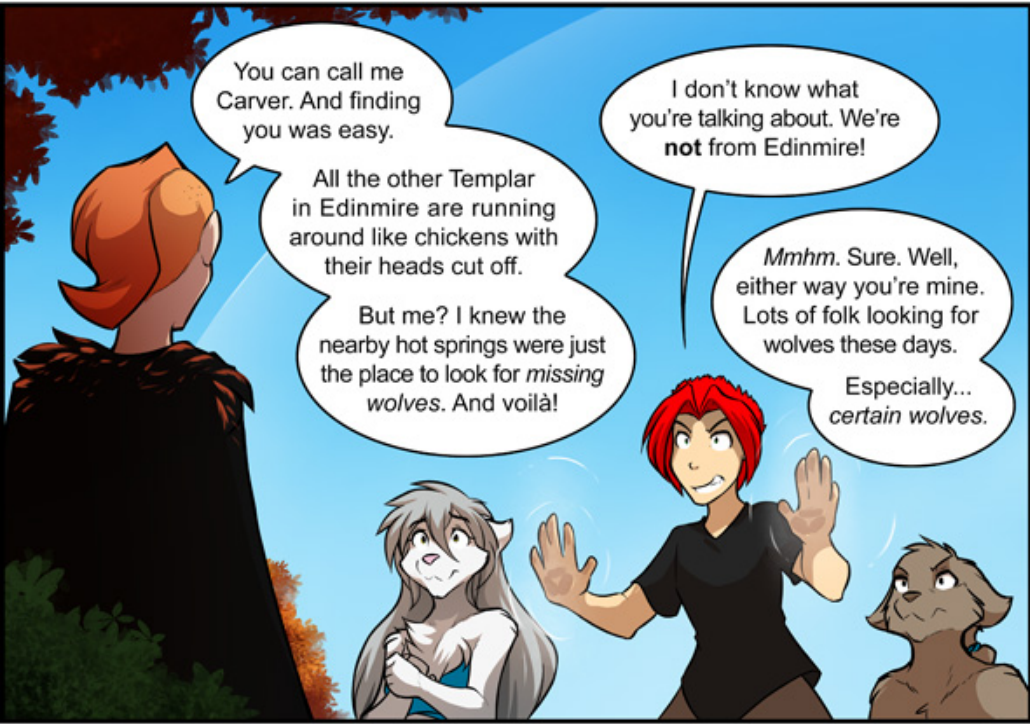
Bravo!
Well done!

It's no wonder
you flunked out of
the Templar.



Not that many of
my, er... colleagues
are much better.

Who the hell
are you?! How did
you find us?



You can call me
Carver. And finding
you was easy.


All the other Templar
in Edinmire are running
around like chickens with
their heads cut off.

But me? I knew the
nearby hot springs were just
the place to look for *missing*
wolves. And voilà!

I don't know what
you're talking about. We're
not from Edinmire!


Mhmm. Sure. Well,
either way you're mine.
Lots of folk looking for
wolves these days.

Especially...
certain wolves.




You can't
keep us in here
forever!

You'll have to let
us out eventually if you
intend to capture us!



Nah! I'm just
going to wait until all
your air runs out!

Why you little—!



Honestly, at first
I was hoping that you
wouldn't find the barrier
until it was too late.

But seeing the
looks on your faces is
so much more fun!

...Huh...



When I get out of here, I'm going to wipe that smirk off your face, you little twerp!

Hey! Quit yelling! We'll be out of air even faster!

I don't think that's likely...

Huh? What do you mean, Raine?



Something doesn't add up here... why is the bubble so big?

It would take ages for the six of us to run out of air, even without the trees.

If he really wanted to suffocate us, he could have put it *just* around our camp. But it's not.

Maybe he's just an idiot?

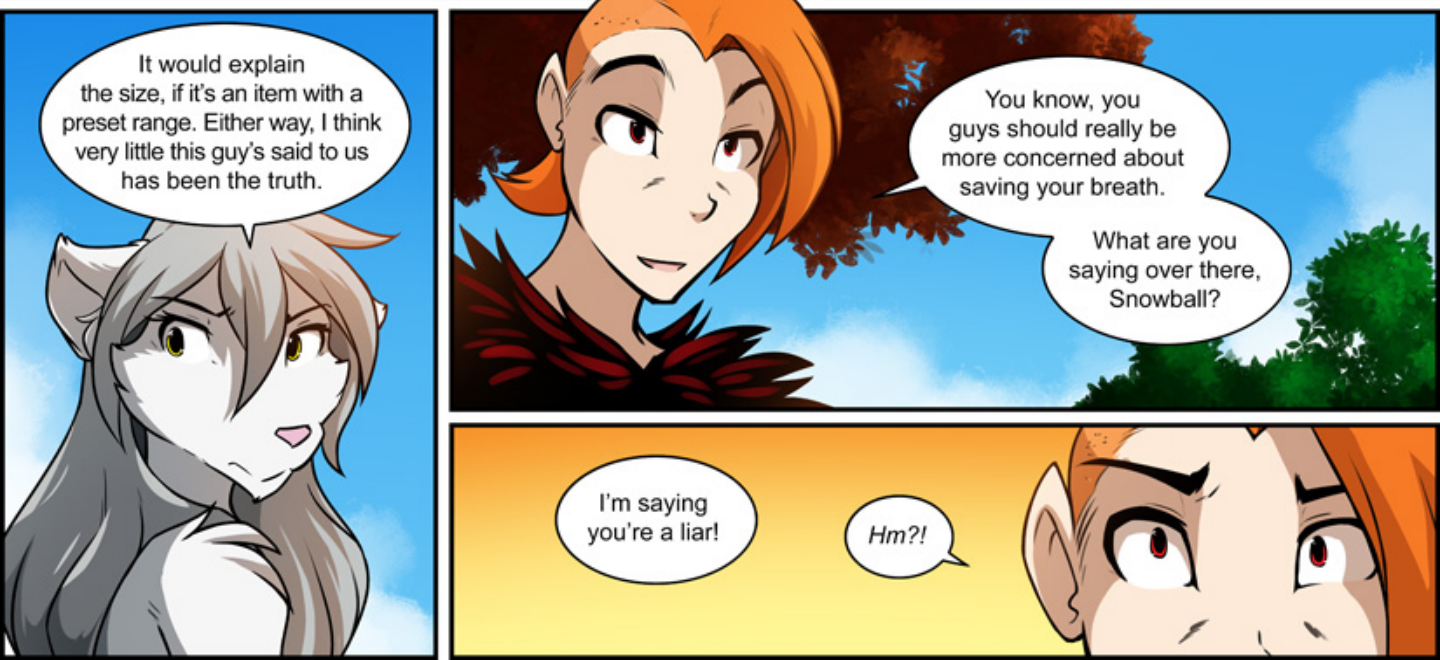
YAAAAA4444H!!

Maybe. But I think it's more likely he's trying to keep us distracted.

Like I said, a barrier this large should be a **huge** strain. But he seems fine.

So someone else is making it then?

That, or Something.



It would explain the size, if it's an item with a preset range. Either way, I think very little this guy's said to us has been the truth.

You know, you guys should really be more concerned about saving your breath.

What are you saying over there, Snowball?

I'm saying you're a liar!

Hm?!



You've been lying to us this whole time.

In fact, I know you're not a real Templar at all!



Oh? Now **that's** a bold claim. Why would you say that?



Because I've been able to see the **real** you since you first appeared!

Huh?!



It's a trick I've seen before – an illusion spell.

Isn't that right... **fox**?

Which makes me think you didn't just find us by coincidence.

Huh...



Well, shoot. To see through *my* magic... hm. What an unusual girl. The boss might be interested in you.



So you were a Keidran all along? Damn it, again! I should have known!

Why are you really after us?!

Pfff!

I don't care about **you** at all. Like I said, I'm hunting for wolves. Certain wolves.



Wolves like... **you**.

Wha-?! Why me?



Let's just say, you left a lot of loose ends back at the guild.

And the person I work for has been very eager to get their hands on **you** again.

"Clovis"?

Who the hell is that?
Another assassin?

<He's the only guy I can
think of who might have sent
this little twit after me.

But no. Clovis isn't an
assassin. He's worse.>

Worse than an
assassin? What's
worse than that?

In *human*,
please!

A rich asshole!
One I ..erm.. used to
<owe money> to.

He's... well, he
likes to call himself the
<**Prince of Greed.**>
He uses his gold
to force.. <desperate>
to work for him.

The.. mind link I told
you about, between me
and my brother—

Supposed
link.

—He helped
create it.

So... you
owe this **Clovis**
your life?

<Eugh! Don't
remind me.

The thought of that
slimy bastard poking
around in my head...>

And you say you
did jobs for him?

<Not by choice!>

<And before you ask, no,
I don't work for him anymore, or know
what he's up to now. We haven't
crossed paths in years.

In fact, last I heard, he
pretty much up and disappeared.
Odd, considering how much of a
playboy he was. I'd hoped he'd
been offed by somebody.

But I can tell you if he is
here, it's only because he has
something to gain.>

And that
means trouble...



<Aw, I'm sure Clovey will be pleased you still remember him!>

<I am disappointed that your little sibling isn't here with you.

Don't worry, though, we'll catch that one too. And believe me...>

<Clovis has special plans for *her*.>



<I won't let any of you lay a hand on Natani, you son of a bitch!>

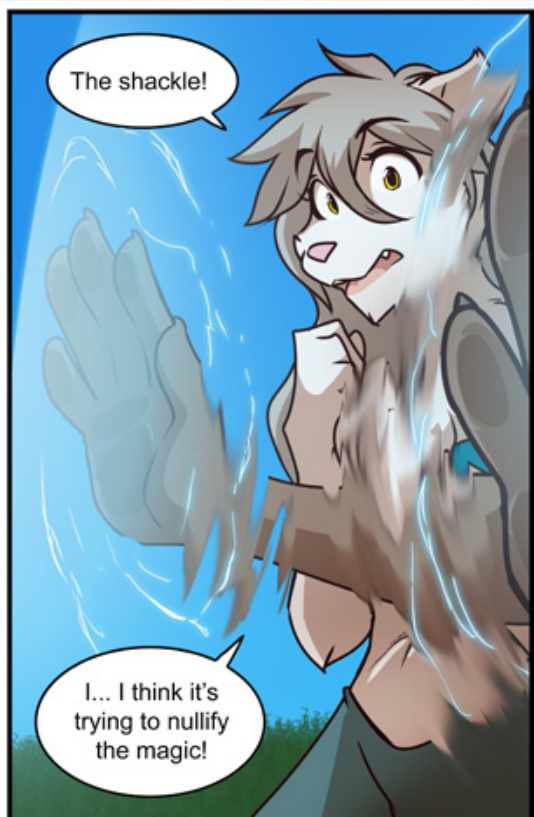


BZZZT!

CRACKLE!



<What the-?>



The shackle!

I... I think it's trying to nullify the magic!



<A magic suppressor? Well isn't that just bloody inconvenient.

Still, it'll take you ages to get through like that. And I could just keep refreshing this barrier all day...>



<But I think it's time to stop fooling around and wrap this up already!>

That it! That's what's holding up the barrier!

Hah! I like you, snowball!
For a woman, you're pretty clever!
All book-smarts, I can tell.

But I have a surprise for you!
Remember when you thought
I was bluffing about the air?

SPARK!

FWOOSH!

Ah!

What's going on?

I was going to wait
until you realized it had been
draining, but I figure it's time
I sped things along.

THUD!

Not to worry
though, my dear!

You're going with Zen!
I'll have you both gift-wrapped
and on your way to Clovis by
the time you wake up!

But as for the
rest of you, well...

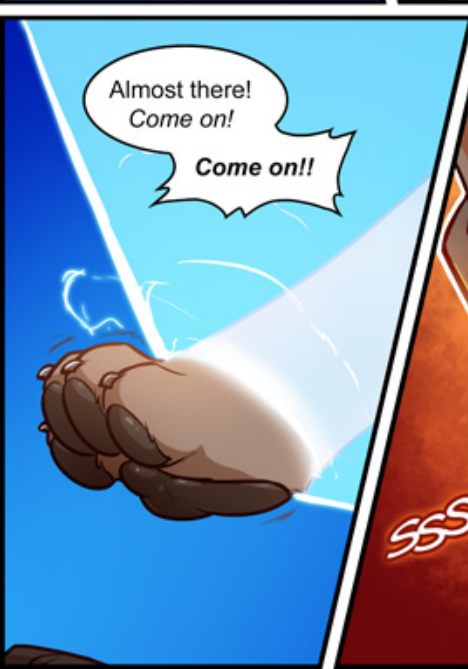
Wait,
is that-?!

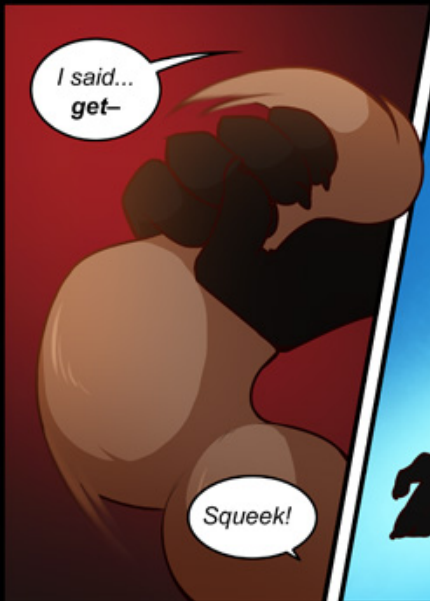
...I suppose this
is goodbye!

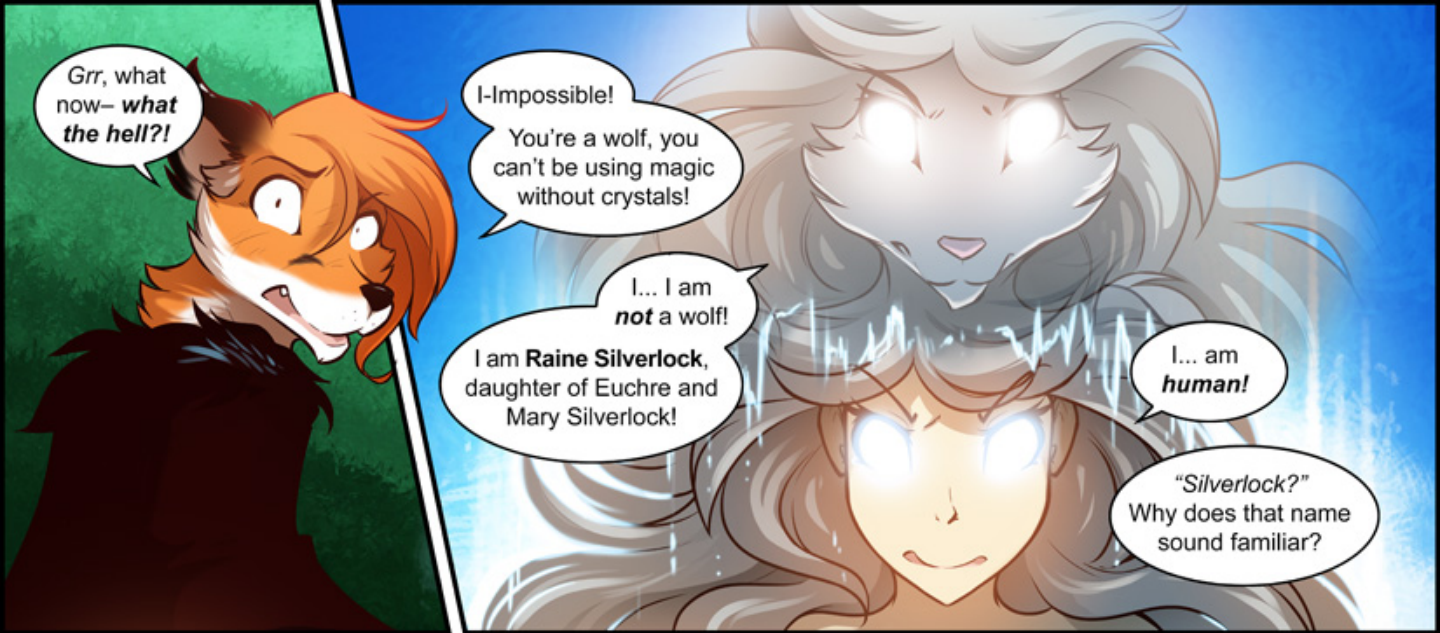
Screeeeee—!

Wha-AUGH!!

Nibbly!







Grr, what now— **what the hell?!**

I-Impossible!

You're a wolf, you can't be using magic without crystals!

I... I am **not** a wolf!

I am **Raine Silverlock**, daughter of Euchre and Mary Silverlock!

I... am **human!**

"Silverlock?" Why does that name sound familiar?



Wait... *Oh crap!*

Welp, this fox knows when it's time to bail...

No.

You won't.

Hey, what—

—Gah!

POP!

See ya, girly! I-I'll be back for you all later!



Raine! You're human again! You alright?

Jeez, you straight up **disintegrated** that guy! That was awesome!

Ow...

I didn't *disintegrate* him! Urgh... I couldn't stop him teleporting, so instead I gave him a little push... with all of my magic.

I don't think he's going to end up where he intended.

So where is he going to end up?

Somewhere a lot farther than **ten meters** this time.





Raine! You need to come quick!
It's bad...



Oh, gods...

He passed out. What do we do?



Uh... Maren, get my bag. I've got herbs that might help.

Alright.

Karen, get as much water from the spring as you can carry.

O-okay.



Look, I don't mean to always be the callous one here, but...

You all **do** remember who this guy was right?

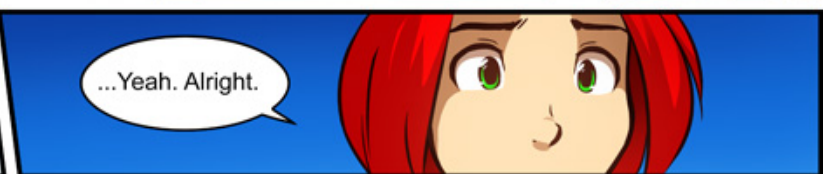
He's the one—



—Who **saved all of our lives** taking down the barrier.

And we're not going to stand around and let him die.

Could you help me by tearing up some bandages? *Please*.



...Yeah. Alright.



There.

That's all I can do.



But unless he gets some proper care I don't know what his chances are.

U-uh, guys? I think there's a bigger problem headed our way!





Look!

I told you!
There it is again!
A dragon!

Do you think
it's after *us*?

Maybe it's just here
for the hot spring?



Karen!

Get out of
the open before
it spots you!

I can't believe
this. First an assassin,
now a **dragon**?

I think it's wearing
armor too. It **must** be
from the Templar!

Fates! How are
we going to get out
of this one?



M-maybe we can
try... talking our way out?
Dragons are usually pretty
reasonable creatures.

...A-at least
from the stories
I've read.

Wait... is it just me or does
that thing look like it's coming
in a little... too fast?

Get down!

WOOSH!

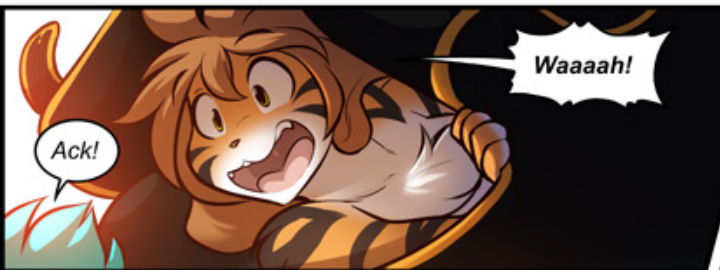


R-rregh!

Graurgle!



SLAM!



Waaaah!

Ack!



YAAAAHHH!



THUD

Oof!

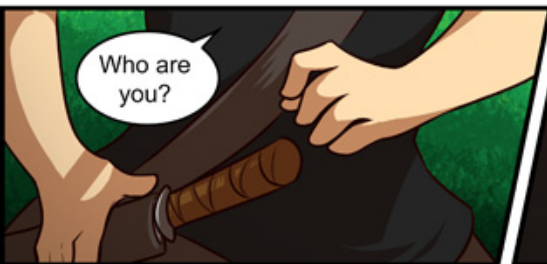


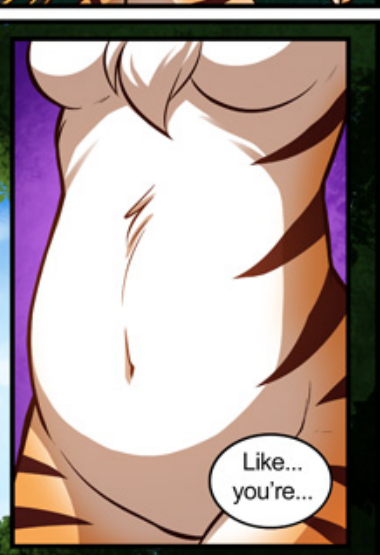
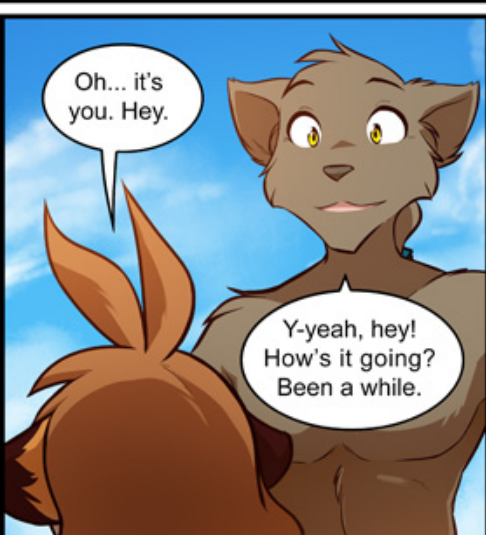
Uuurgh...



WUMP!

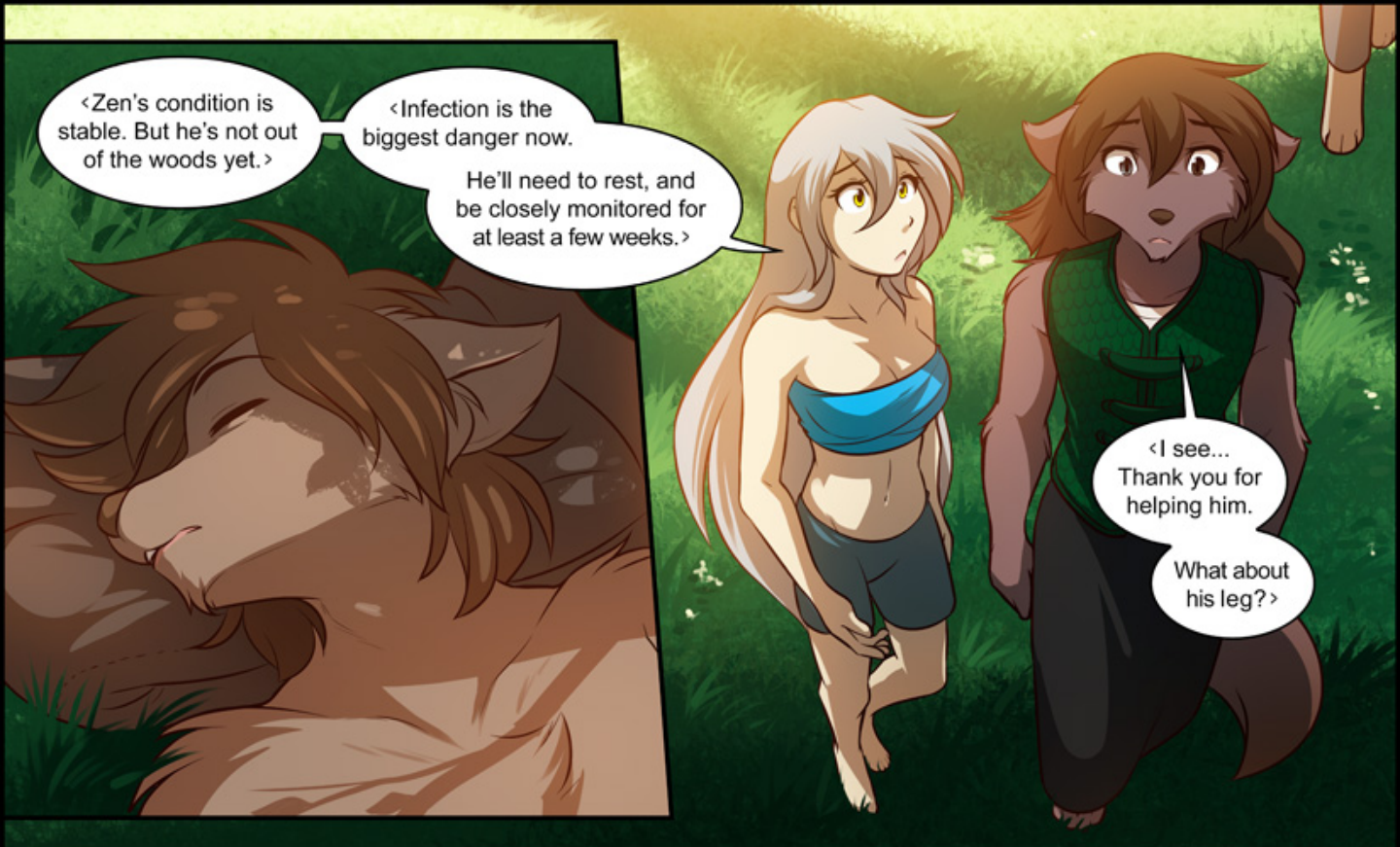












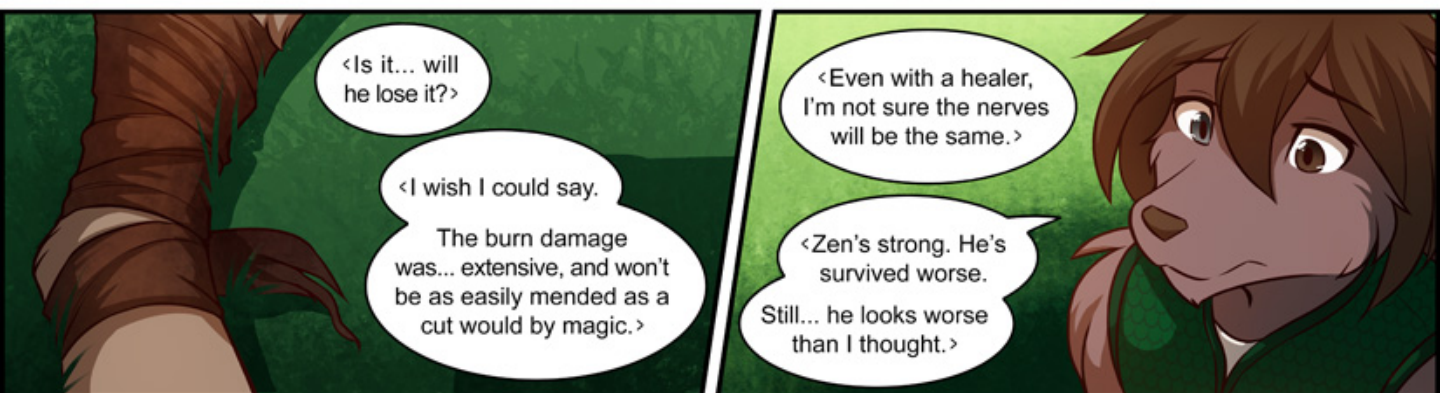
<Zen's condition is stable. But he's not out of the woods yet.>

<Infection is the biggest danger now.

He'll need to rest, and be closely monitored for at least a few weeks.>

<I see... Thank you for helping him.

What about his leg?>



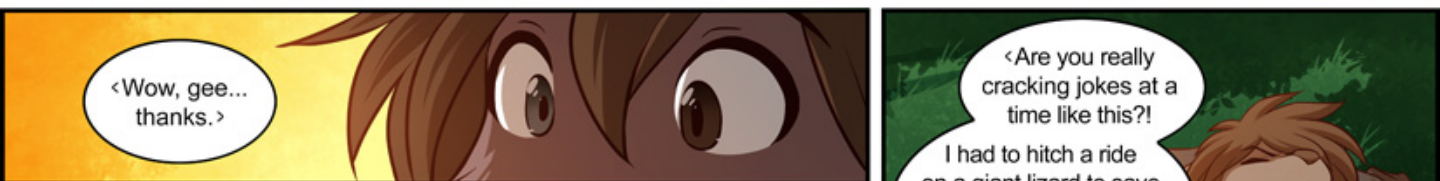
<Is it... will he lose it?>

<I wish I could say.

The burn damage was... extensive, and won't be as easily mended as a cut would by magic.>

<Even with a healer, I'm not sure the nerves will be the same.>

<Zen's strong. He's survived worse. Still... he looks worse than I thought.>



<Wow, gee... thanks.>



Zen!

<Gone for months... and the first thing you do when you get back is... insult how I look.

I see. You're just jealous. I was always the pretty one, and now you're afraid a pegleg will just make me sexier.>

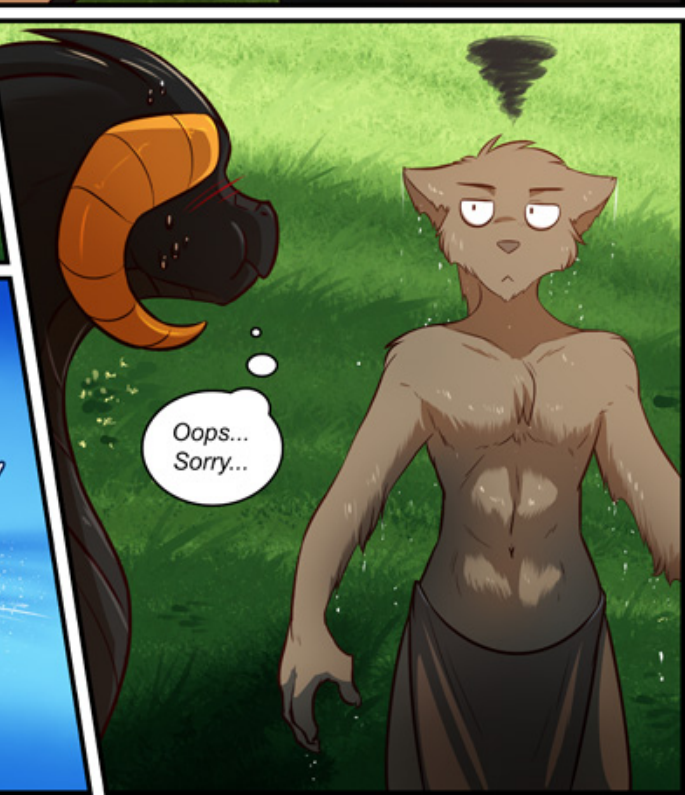
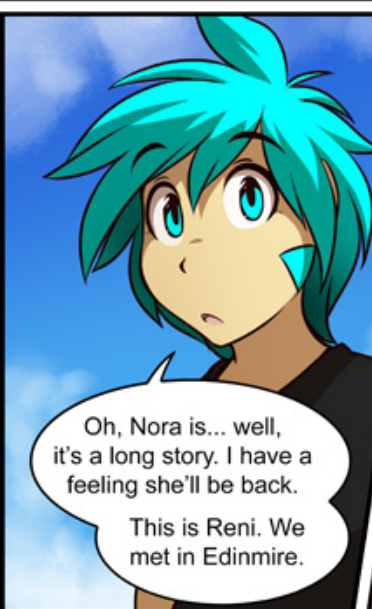
<Are you really cracking jokes at a time like this?!

I had to hitch a ride on a giant lizard to save your ass, you know! You could at least be more serious about it!>

Hahaha! Ow! Heh...

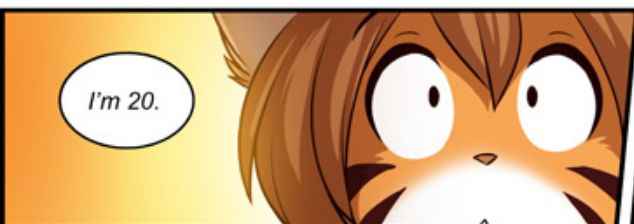
<Glad to see you too, Nat.>













Oh! Right,
let's see...

...Which
compartment
was it...

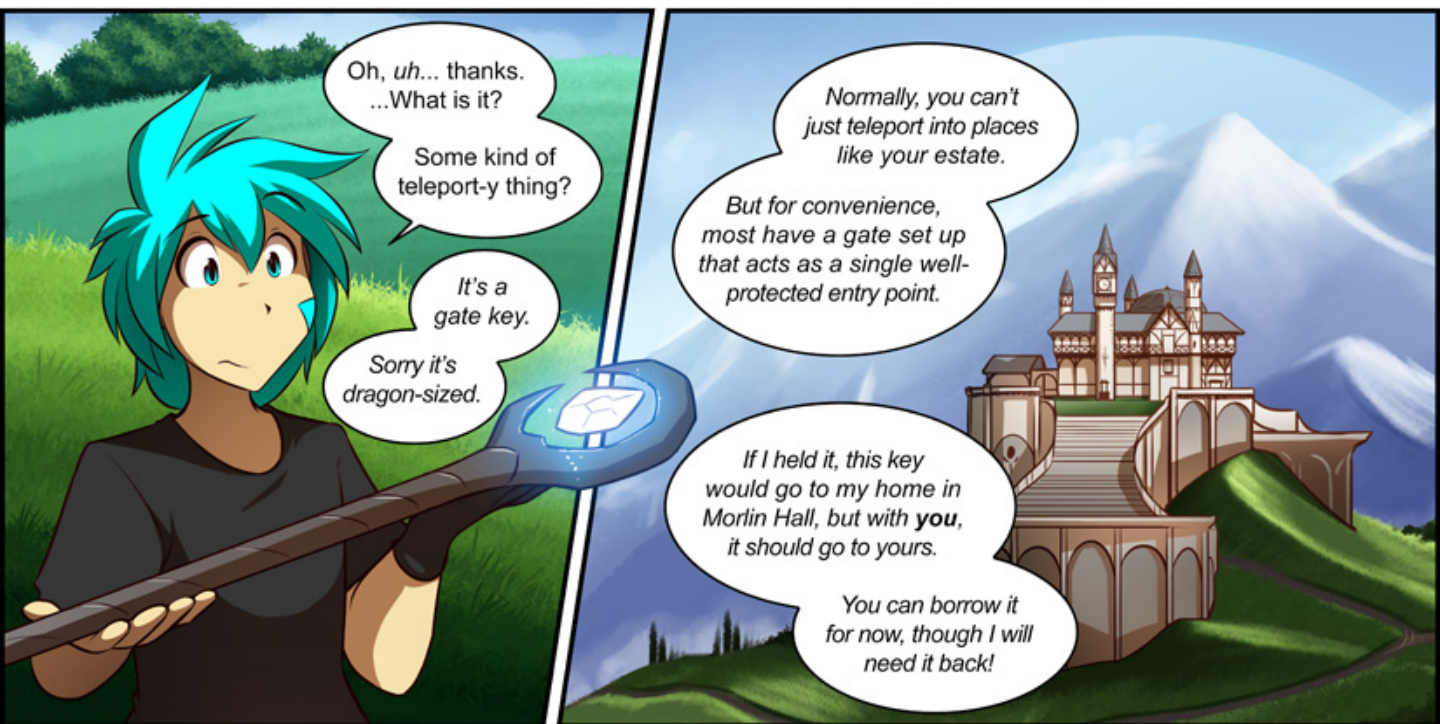
Everything's
mixed up from
the crash...

Here? No.
Oh! Wait...

Got it!

While I might not
know much magic yet,
I do come prepared!

Here, Trace.
This should work.



Oh, uh... thanks.
...What is it?

Some kind of
teleport-y thing?

It's a
gate key.

Sorry it's
dragon-sized.

Normally, you can't
just teleport into places
like your estate.

But for convenience,
most have a gate set up
that acts as a single well-
protected entry point.

If I held it, this key
would go to my home in
Morlin Hall, but with **you**,
it should go to yours.

You can borrow it
for now, though I will
need it back!



I... actually collect magic
stuff like this as a hobby.
I think they're neat.



Hang on! Does
that mean we aren't
going to get to ride on
a dragon?!

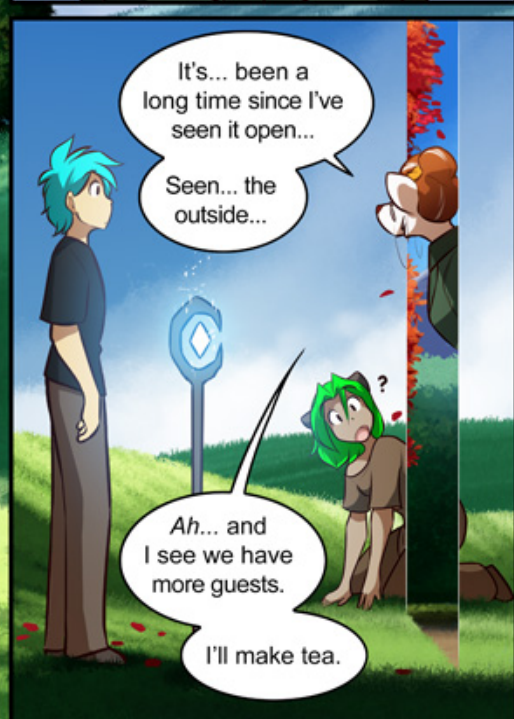
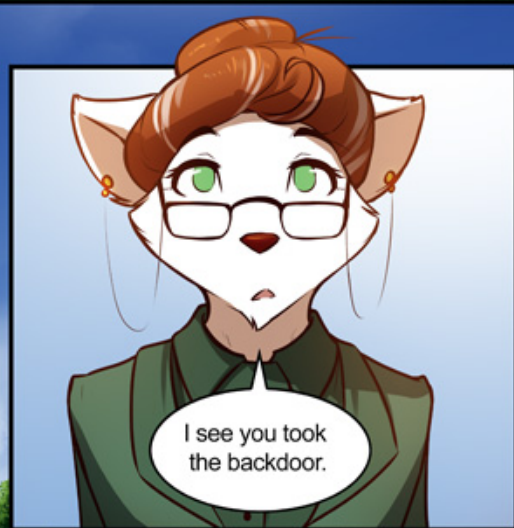
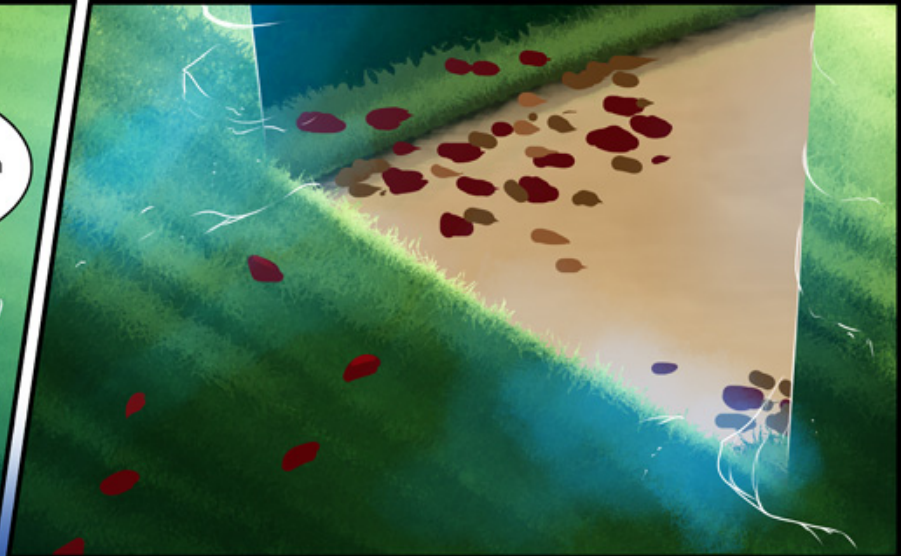
Er... It'd be very
hard to carry so many
people. Sorry.

Aaaww~!



Okay, so
how do I—

CRICK!





Hey hey hey!
Back off!

Natani!
<Help!>

Snrk!



Miss Reni? Are
you going to be able
to fit through here?



I'm not coming.
The gatekey can't go
through itself.

I will take the long way
back. Now that this is done,
there's other things I need to
check up on, anyway.

I'll return again
in the evening to see if
either wolf has regained
consciousness.

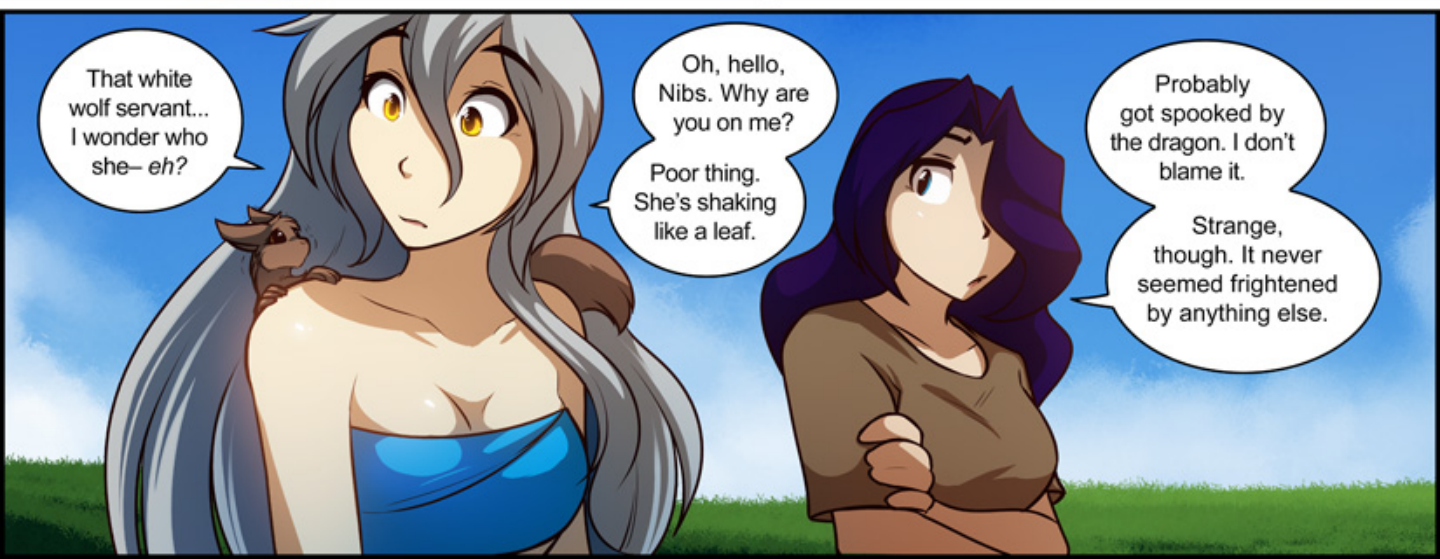
Oh, okay.
Well, thanks for
your help.



Huh? Oh! Shoot,
I wanted to ask her
about Mrs. Nibbly!

Where'd
she go?

"Mrs...
Nibbly?"



That white
wolf servant...
I wonder who
she- eh?

Oh, hello,
Nibs. Why are
you on me?

Poor thing.
She's shaking
like a leaf.

Probably
got spooked by
the dragon. I don't
blame it.

Strange,
though. It never
seemed frightened
by anything else.



What a strange group of people Trace has collected.

The estate hasn't been this crowded in years.

So many guests...



And some *less welcome* than others...



Come out. I can sense you lurking.

You're worse than Brahn's pet.



Hello, Rose.

Nice to see you again after so long, cousin.

Spying, are we, Euchre?

Just watching over family. That's my daughter down there, you know.



Really? How thoughtful.

You should come visit in person then! Instead of projecting yourself like that.

I'd be interested to know if that "*perfect transformation*" of yours can fix being cursed into a barnyard animal.



I think I'll keep my distance, thank you.



Why are you *really* here, Euchre?



<You know, it's very odd to hear you speak without your drawl.>

<Just get on with it!>

<Alright...

I'm sure by now you've noticed that Trace is not the man he once was.

I've been working to keep it that way, and I'd like your help.>

<Oh? Do the other Master Templars know you're doing that?>

<Only Sirus. He knows my true nature, but he's an ally... for now.

Brahn, on the other hand, is doing everything he can to draw Trace out.

He's taken to calling himself the **new Grand Templar** now, but so long as Trace still lives, the order remains divided.>



<So Trace is a game of keep-away between the two of you, hm?

What exactly do you want me to do about that?>

<Nothing. Brahn may find a way to bypass the manor defenses eventually, but for now this place is as safe as any other.

I'm more concerned about you.>

<Me?>



<You, and this place. For my work to succeed, I need Trace to remain as he is - happy and ignorant, for now.

I don't want him to keep prying into his past.

I'm sure you know secrets buried here. Keep them buried, please. For the good of everyone.

And whatever's in that room on the third floor, *don't let him see it.*>

End.

Epilogue

Wait. Miss...
Raine, was it?

Gah!

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

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

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

Honestly,
he could be
anywhere...

SWOOSH

Urgh...

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

Silverlock...
related to former
Grand Templar
Silverlock?

Well, that's
just not fair.

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

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

Where am I,
anyway?

Halt!

Basitins?

What are
you doing on our
island, fox?!

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

Island?!



TWO KINGS

Chapter 20

Stories of the Estate





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



<You're
looking more
coherent.

Nice to
finally meet you
in person.

I'm Kat.>

<Uh... Zen.

So... what's
the damage?>

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



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

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

<That explains
the headache.

How long
was I out?>



<Over a day!

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



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

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

Uh...



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

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



<N-no!
Nothing!>

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



<Thank you.>

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

Their magic is dulling the pain.

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



<You have been.

I didn't just mean for this.

I wanted to thank you for helping Natani.>



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

I keep screwing up.

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

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

Especially regarding...>

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



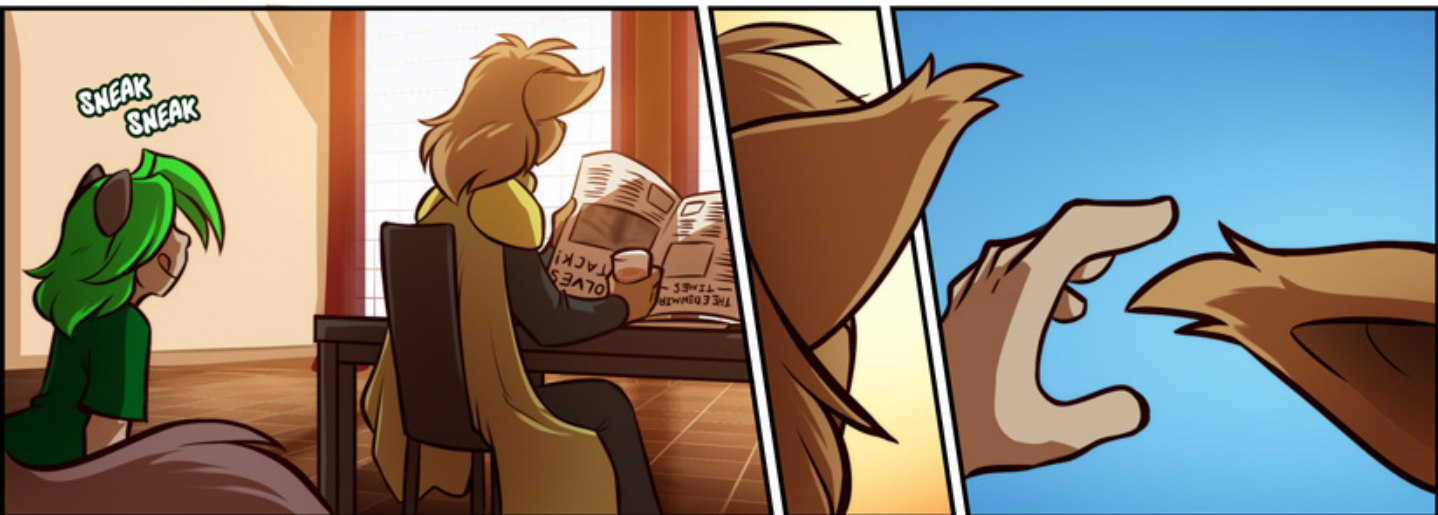
<Not exactly something I was qualified for.

So... you have my thanks.

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




<...Happy to help.>












Oh, yeah.

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


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

Well... the secret's out.



Woah, seriously?!


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



Yeaah. Pretty much.

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

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




Wow... I can't believe it.

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

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

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




So... how did people react?

Oh, well...

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

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

Especially the Basitins and Blondie's ship hands.



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

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





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

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

Ah-haha!

<Y-yeah, ridiculous!>

Just gunna... suppress that memory.



Oh...

<Right, there is...

...one more thing you should know, before he gets here...>

Hm?

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

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

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



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



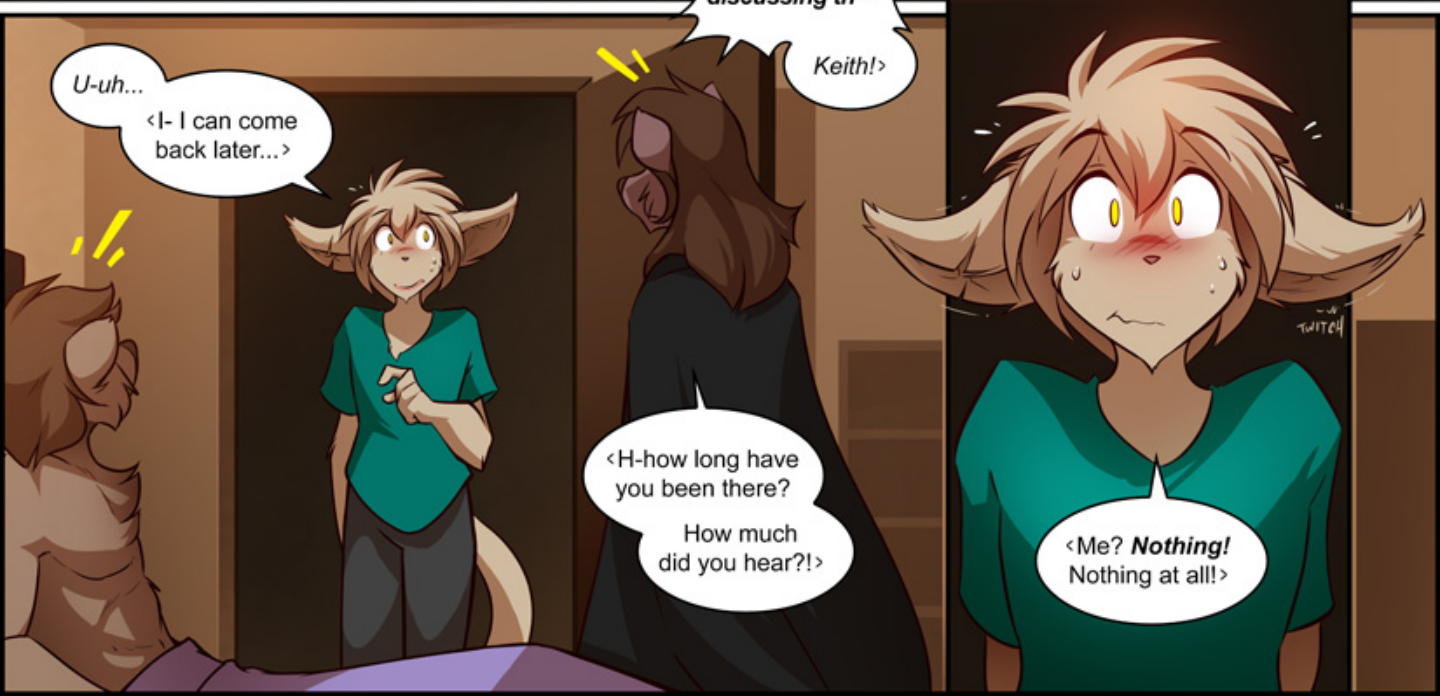
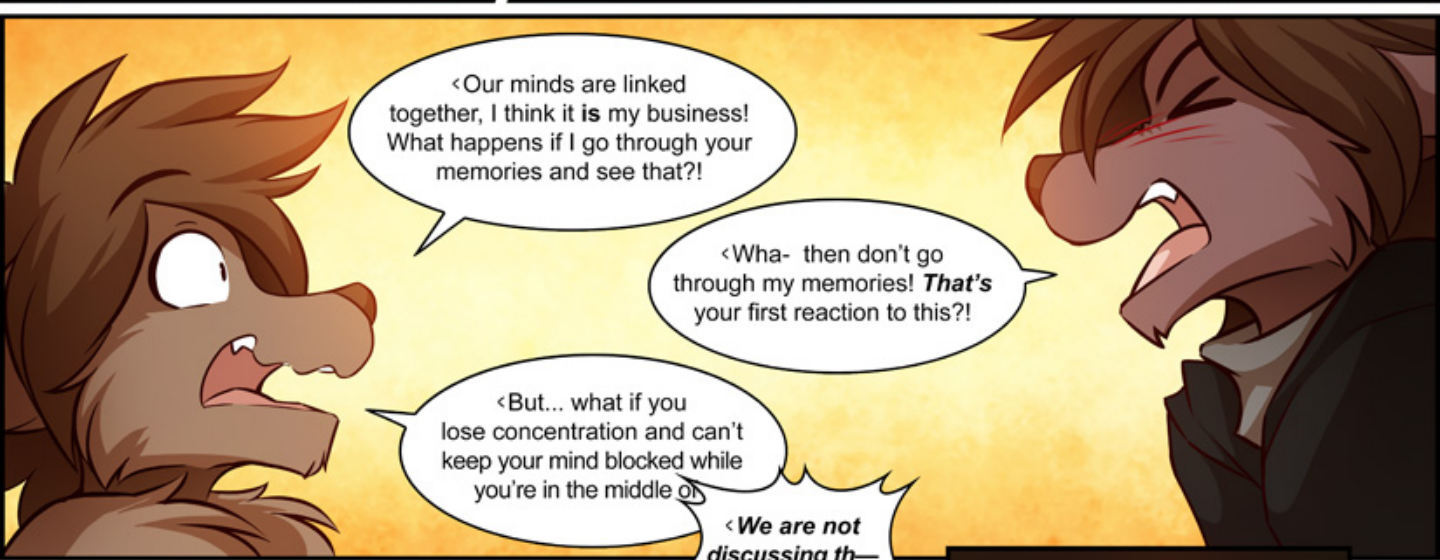
<What?! No!! Of course not, you idiot!>

<Not in the way you're thinking!>


<Oh...>



<Not... yet, anyway.>








Man, this is the life, huh?

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

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



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


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



WAAAAAAHHHH!

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

I never said that!



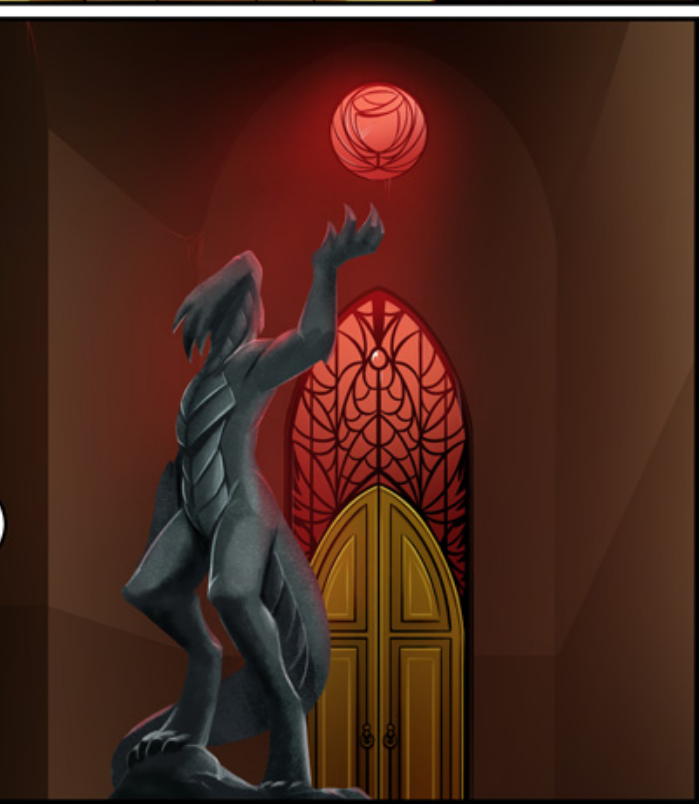
Ah... I'm gunna miss this when we all start going our separate ways.




Eh, Mike?

...Yeah.

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





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

Weird.

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

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

This one's a lot less fancy, though.

Trace always did have a thing for dragons.

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

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

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

Relax, I just want to look.





Run!!

ROOOAAAR!

Yaaah!

SMASH!

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

Maddie!
Something's wrong!

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





Hey Scaly!
Over here!

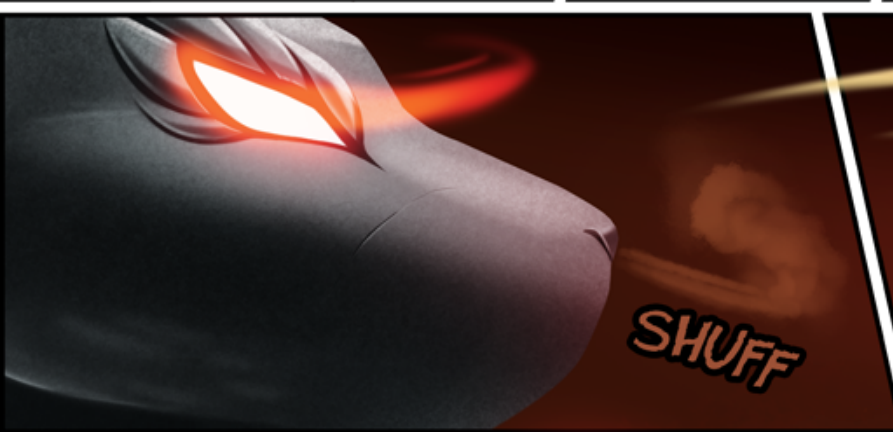
Yaaaaah!!



CRACK



Ow!
Ow!
Ow!



SHUFF



SHOCKS!!

Wah!

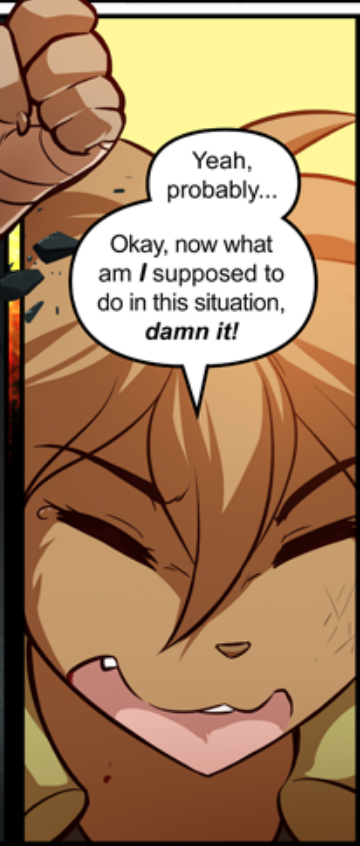


Karen... you idiot, just run!

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

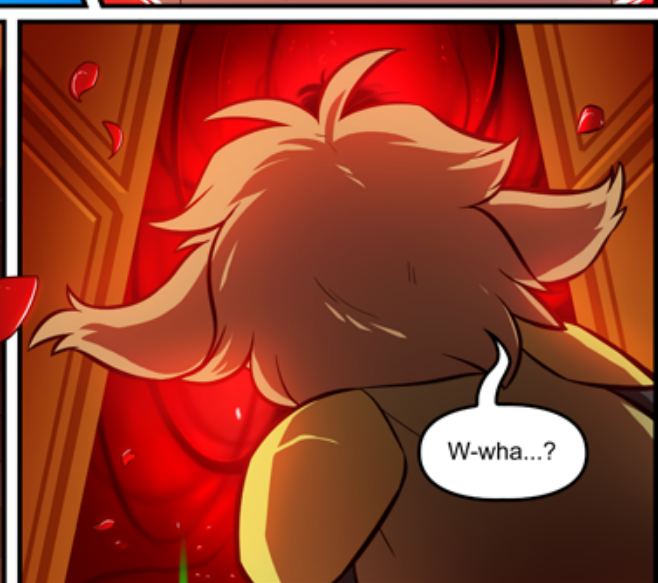
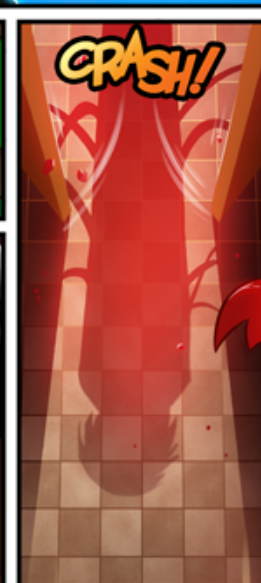
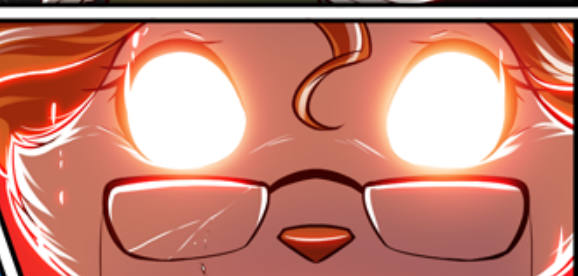


HRAAAAAAH!!



Yeah, probably...

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





Ngh...

Eugh... what happened?

Where are we?

COUGH

And why is it so cold and dusty in here?



Ah! Maddie!

Oh no... Wake up-!

I am awake, dummy.

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

But you got hurt...



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

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

...

You're *not* a Basitin.

You wouldn't understand.

I can try.



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

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



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



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

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

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

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



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

My mother was twice my size at my age.



17? You're a year older than me?

Pretending to be younger isn't hard.

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

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

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

People often let their guard down around cuteness.



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

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

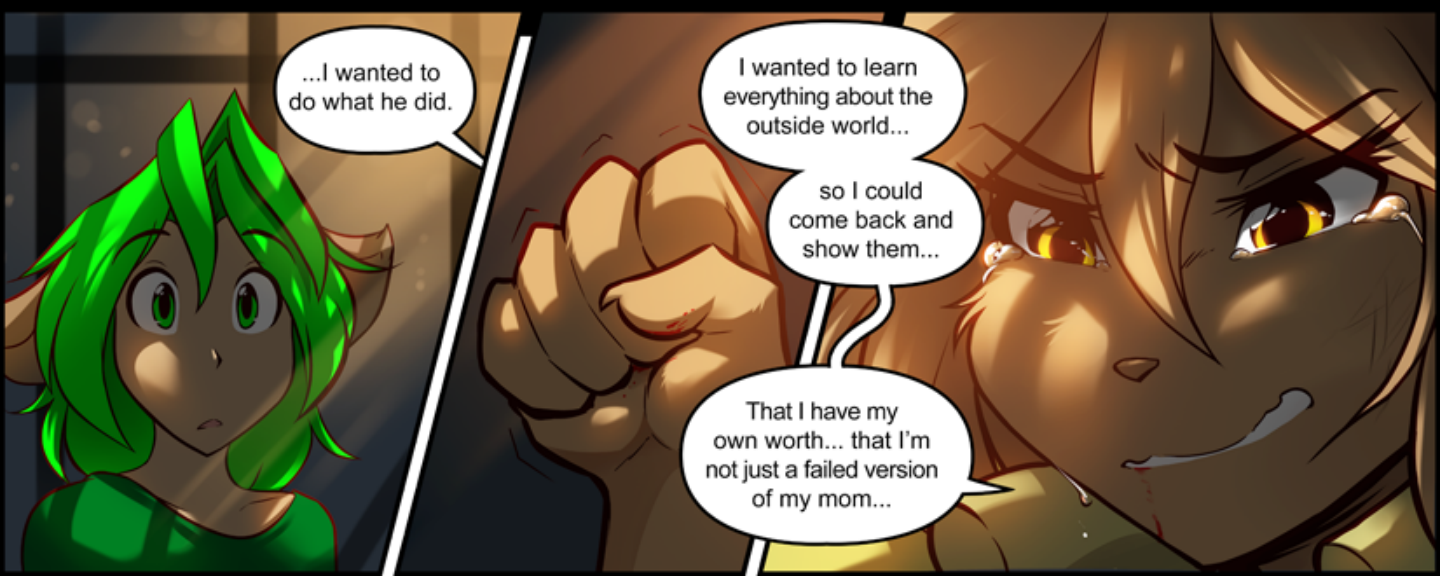
And I'm good solo, but I don't have the battle tactics of an Alaric.

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

But then...

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

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

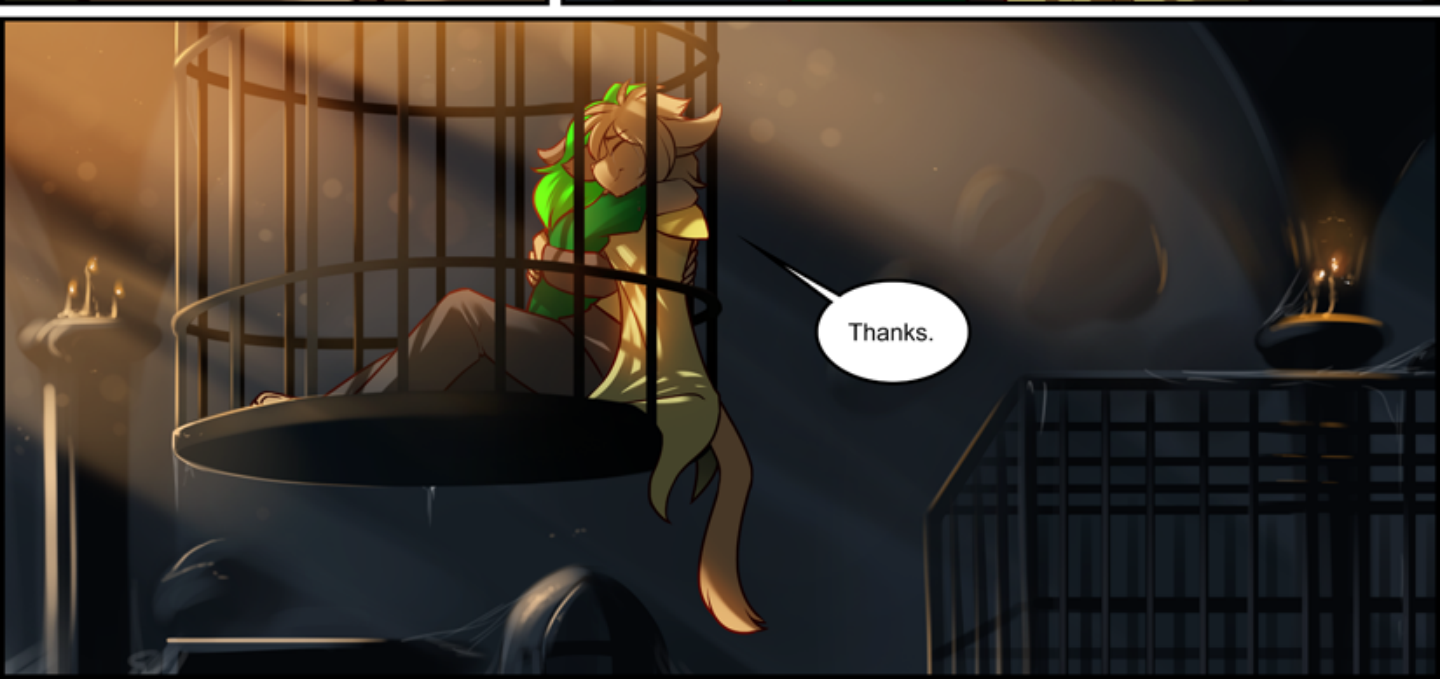
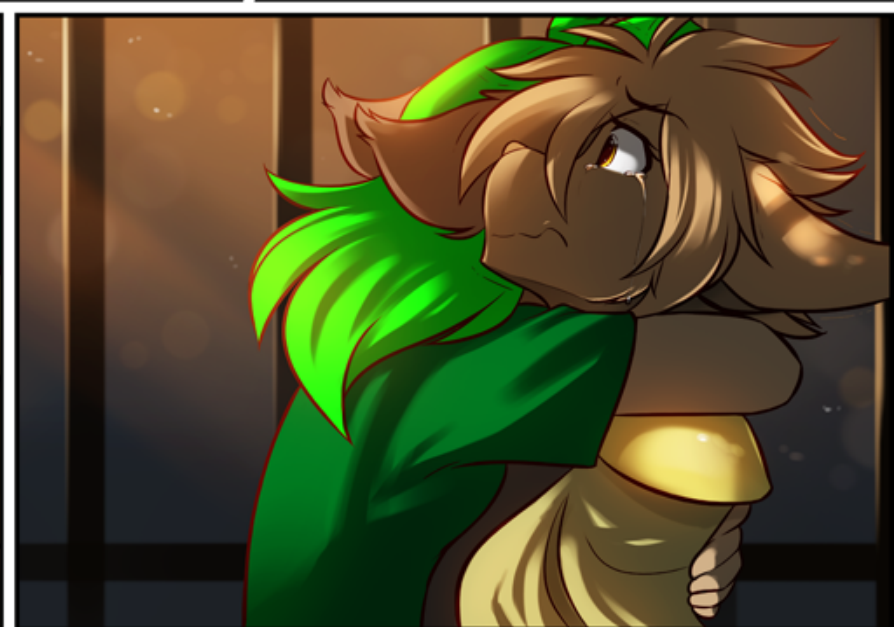


...I wanted to do what he did.

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

so I could come back and show them...

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





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

Hello? Is this the wrong door?

Hey, Red.

Looking for Raine?

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

What's with the getups?



Didn't you hear?

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

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



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

CREAK

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



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

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

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

Hey, don't jinx it!

What? I'm just being realistic.

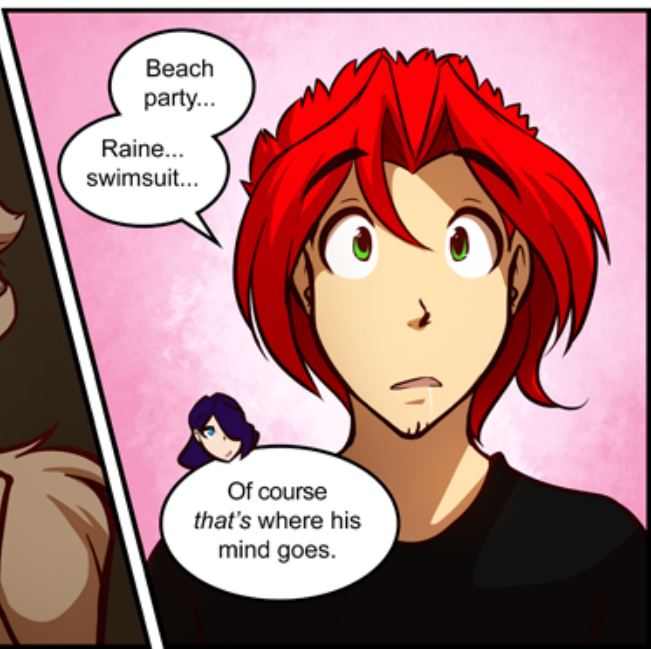
Simply staying in the same house as Trace paints a giant target on our backs.



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

You have a point.

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



Beach party...

Raine... swimsuit...

Of course that's where his mind goes.





I'm just going to stay in my room.

I can't go out like this.

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



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

Besides, this place is already a man-agony!

A... what?

You know... lots of creatures?

Uh... wait, a menagerie?

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



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

But it matters to **me**!

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



"Fleabags"?

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

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



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

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

What if it keeps getting worse?

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

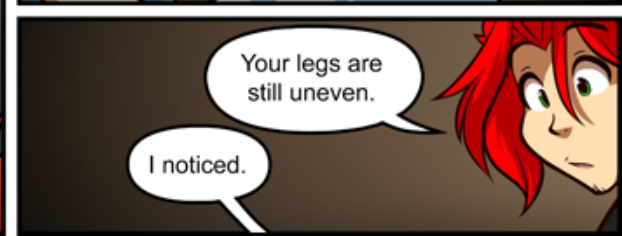


I could end up becoming more and more like a wolf! Until eventually I'm just an animal who doesn't even remember who she was anymore much less...

Raine!

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

You just need to learn more control.





Look,
you just wait
here.

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



Be right b—

...Wow,
I'm good.



Eh, hullo,
m... ma'am? My
name is—

I know who
you are.

Wha— huh?
Have we met?

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

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

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

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

Right, Trace?

Uh... yeah,
whatever.



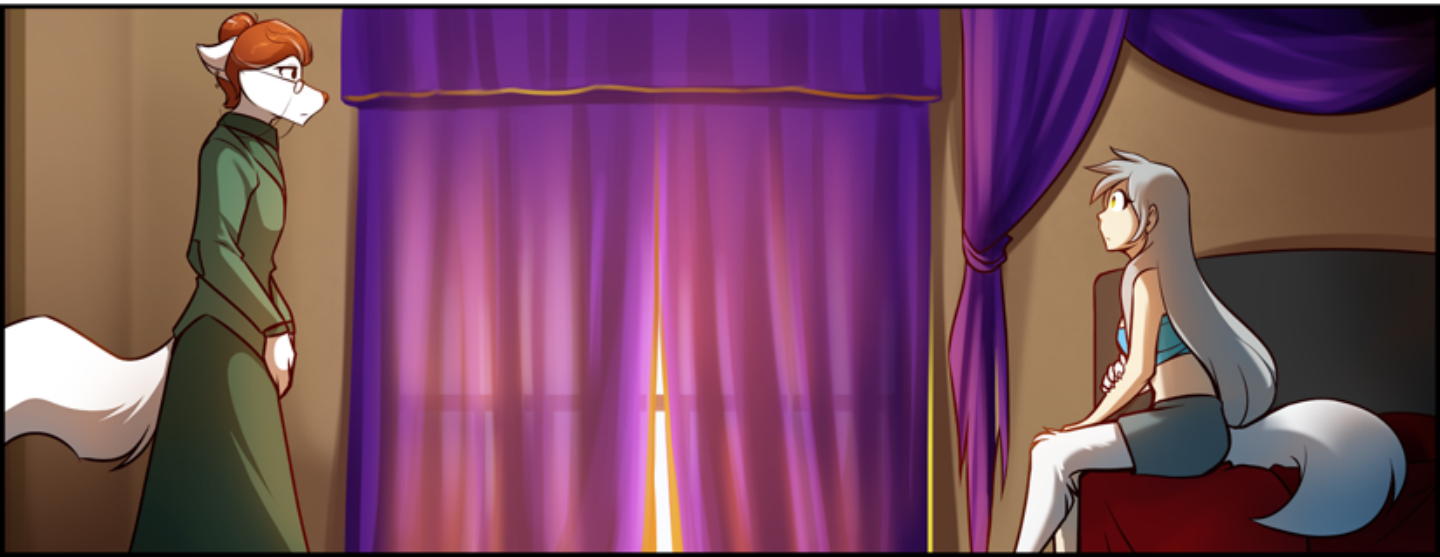
Well, like you
said, that was... a
long time ago.

Anyway, this
isn't about me!

It's my friend,
Raine, She's—

CLUNK

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









Alright... carefully...

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



Woah, freaky...



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

Out.

Sorr-- ack!



Hey, did you hear that?

Tch! The nerve of that pervert.



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

Sigh... back to dog legs.

I guess it is better than being unable to walk.



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

Fascinating... was it painful?

No, never. It does kinda itch sometimes.

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

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



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

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



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

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



I don't care what it is.

I've lived in fear of this curse my whole life...

That is the problem.

The way you talk about your ability...



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

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

It does kinda feel that way sometimes...

But it's not.



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

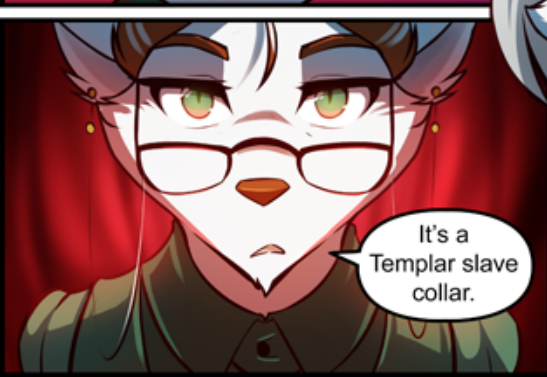
But I do think the first step is to conquer this subconscious wolf you've made in your mind.

Here...



If you're truly willing, wear this.

Okay... what is it?



It's a Templar slave collar.



Ah!

Are you out of your mind, old wolf?!

Why would I ever wear one of these?!

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

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

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





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

Could such an evil device really help?

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



...I can't.



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

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

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

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

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



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

Wait, was I not supposed to?



Lesson one: Slap yourself.

Huh?

Wah! What the—?!



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

You told me to!

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

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

We're family, though!



Especially family!

Out of anyone family can...



...can...

Er, sorry. Nevermind.



You're talking about my father, aren't you?

I'm... so sorry for what he did—

Don't be.

Just try to be more cautious. Everyone has an agenda.

That's a little... pessimistic.



Well... the collar's on now. So, how does it help me?

Hm...

Hold out your left arm, please, until I say stop.



Woah!

Do you feel the magic influencing you?

Yeah!

It's like my arm has a mind of it's own.

Freaky!

Your problem is you never naturally learned to shift as a child.

Straining aimlessly trying to change back won't do anything if you don't even know what to feel for.

Instead, I want you to try and resist the collar. Use its magic to help you focus your effort.



Go ahead.

Just... lower my arm?

Easy enough...



Nrgh...

I said...



Easy...

enough...

Rgh!!



Stop.

Heugh... Thank you.

Not easy, is it?

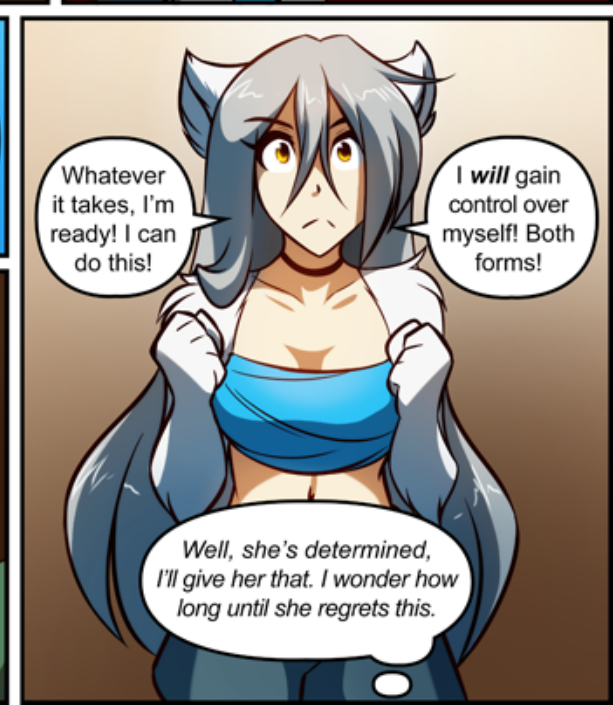
My hope was that by practicing to actively control it, this exercise would help you develop a better feel for your wolf form.

But if you can't resist even a little, I do think this is a bit too much for you.

No! I want to keep trying! Having something to focus on... I think it does help!

...You sure?

You know it won't simply be holding out your hand. It's only going to get more difficult.



Whatever it takes, I'm ready! I can do this!

I **will** gain control over myself! Both forms!

Well, she's determined, I'll give her that. I wonder how long until she regrets this.







Wait, you're awake?!

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

What?!
Ew, no!



<But she might if you don't talk!

H-hey!

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

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

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



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

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

He likes that I don't bother with questions.

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

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



...

<Whoops.>



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

Augh!

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

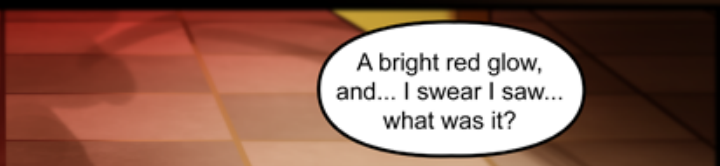


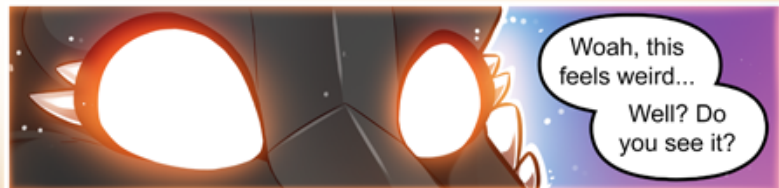
A-alright, that's enough! You two can't just interrogate the prisoner like this!

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

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

...and maybe find some pants.





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



I...

Sorry, I'm afraid not. I saw the door, and the fight...

But y-you... must have been pretty dazed. I couldn't see it either.

Aw, man! All that trouble for nothing.



Oh well.

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

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

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

(That's dark magic. Troubling.

What could be going on in this place?)



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

Oh, hey there, sis!

Karen.

Staying out of trouble, I hope?

Nope!



What about you?

Going to spend the day on the beach with Syyyythe?

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

Naked!



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

Wait, Reni!

Come party with us!

...beg your pardon?

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



M-me...?









Actually, your friend is right.

It's *has* been a while. I think that's enough for today.

A-already?!



But...

I haven't managed to change back to human yet!

I thought we were going to keep going until—



You aren't going to master shapeshifting in one afternoon.

And I have many other duties I must attend to...

...such as mending the damage you've done to these curtains.

We can try again another day.



Speaking of which...

That top of yours... it's made from a torn up sweater, am I correct?

Hand it over. I'll mend that as well, when I have the time.



Oh, yeah, some of it was used for bandages back when I was—

Wait...!





R-Raine?

Aah! No!
My hands—!

Rose!
Rose, take
it back!



Back?

Don't worry,
I'll make sure your
top gets back to you
good as new.



No, that's
not— **ah!**

TWITCH!

B-bad hands!
Let go of that!



Eep!

SLIP!



Oh no!
Come on!

Ngh... I...
have to stop
myself!

I won't
do it!



CRICK!

Ngh—!

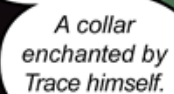
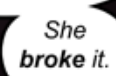
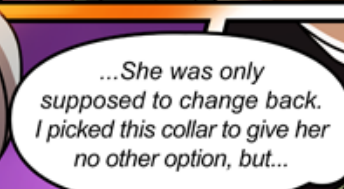


SNAP!

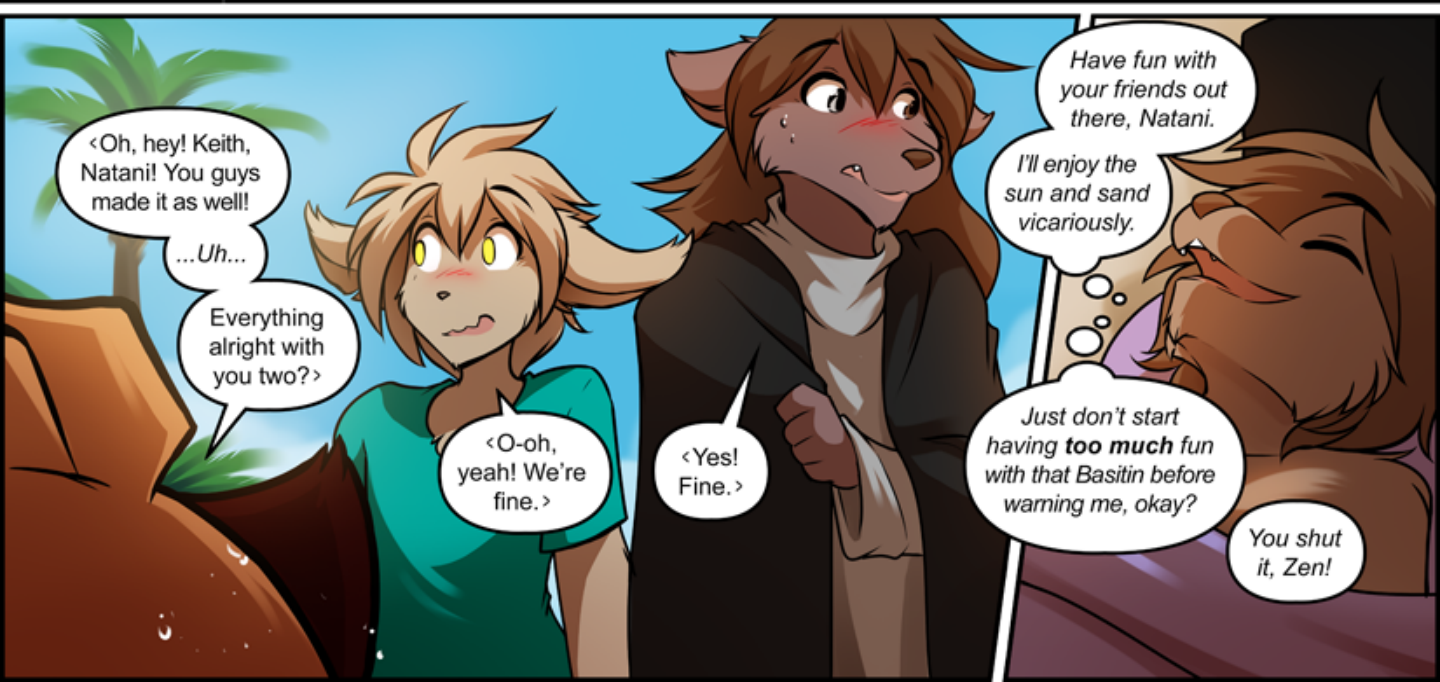


Good...

I... am...
in control!









Hey!

<Guess who brought lunch?>

(It's me!)

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

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



<Natani and Keith left already?>

<You know... it's funny.

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

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

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

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

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



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

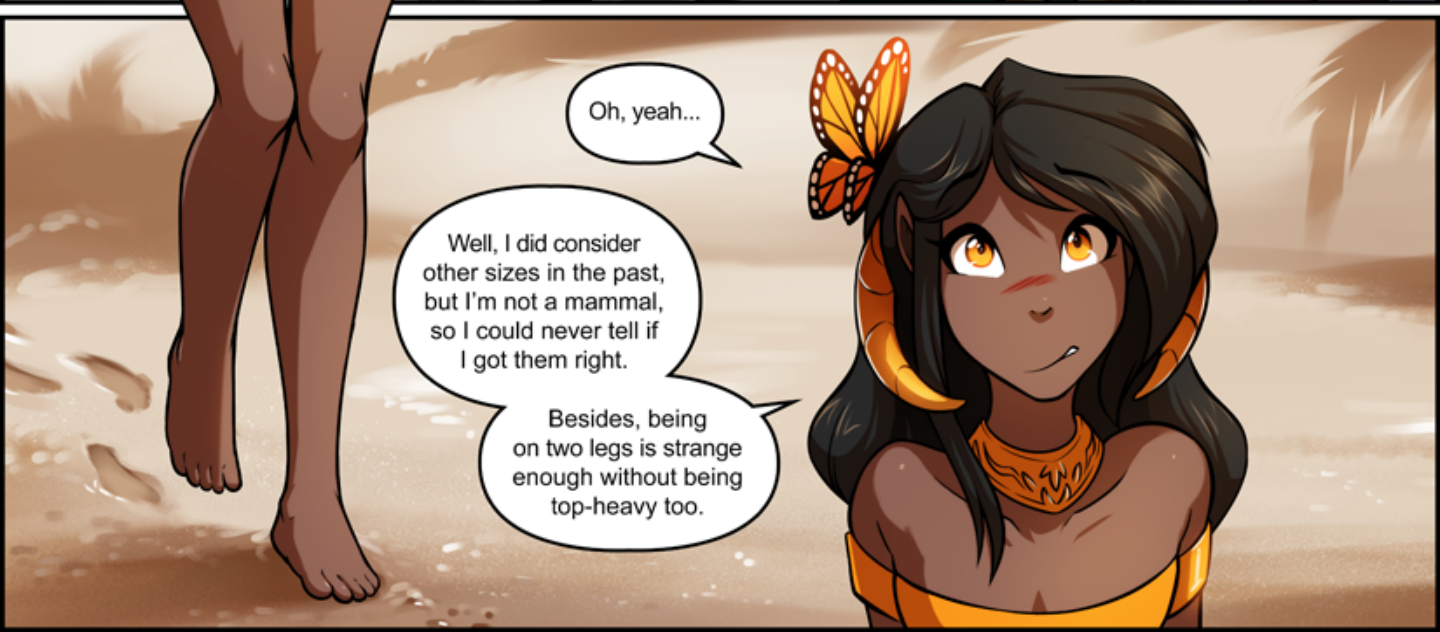
But you'll always be family.>

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

<Our pack, huh? Hm...

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







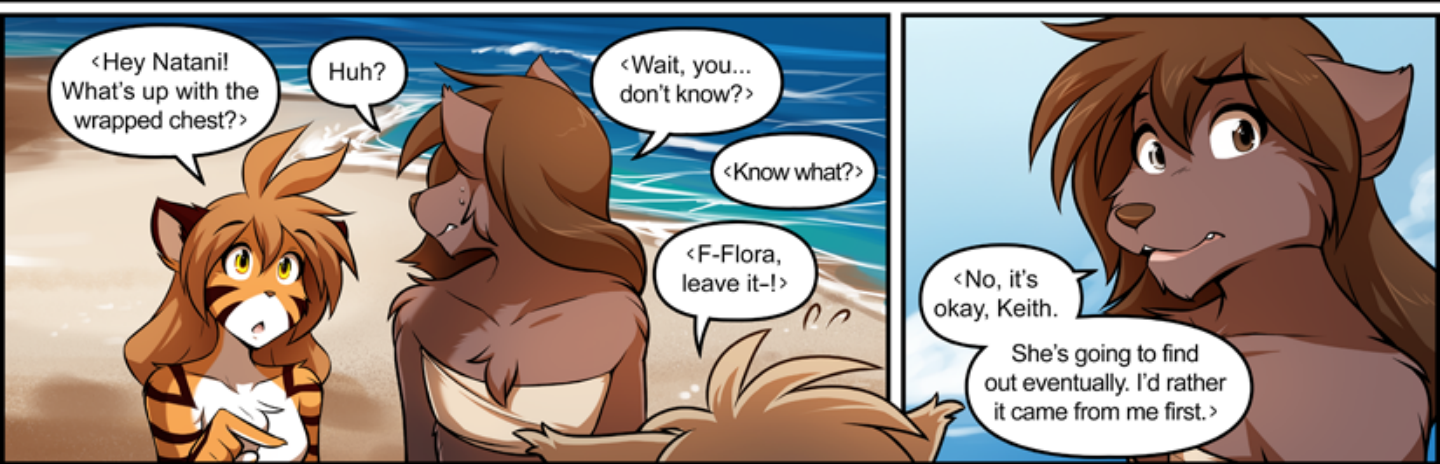
<Natani?
You're...>

Are you okay
being like that?>

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

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

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



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

Huh?

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

<Know what?>

<F-Flora,
leave it-!>

<No, it's
okay, Keith.

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



<Hm? Wait...
what?!>

<You...
Huh?!>



<Really?>

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



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

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

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

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



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

It's time
to *party*!

Let's go!

CLINK!

THWAP!

SMACK!

OASIS ROOM

Thup!



Some time later...

Hey,
Maren!

Hungry?



Where in the
world did you
get this from?

Magic
table.

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

Oh! Yeah...



Hey!

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

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

Come on,
it's a party.

Mmm...

SPLASH!



...NOM



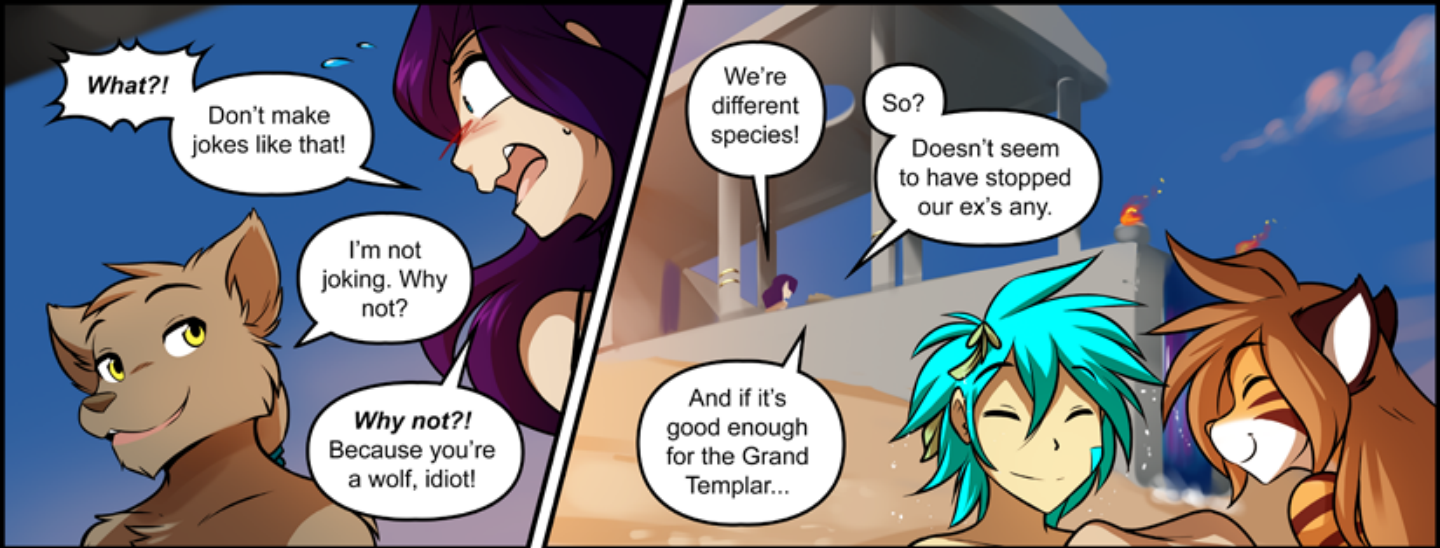
Hey,
Maren.

Hm?



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

GULK!



Meanwhile...

Ah-hah!
Gotcha!

BAWK!
BAWK!
BAWK!

BE-KAW!!

CHOMP!

Yeeeeeeow!!

Mmfff?
Templar?

It's me,
Roan, you
stupid idiot!

...Why were
you a chicken,
Roan?

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

So thanks for
trying to eat me,
you moron!

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

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

Or... ?



There's the table.

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

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



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

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

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



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

I know humans don't go this fast.

We can just take it easy.



Ngh...

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

Uh... huh? In what regard?

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



Um, I'm not really sure?

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

So...



Drinks! Yes! Need drinks!



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

...Hello?

You actually have to put your hand on it first.

Oh.



Okay? Whiskey!

...!



It's... her!

She's here?



Maren.

She's finally here! It took long enough.



She really **does** look like her.

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



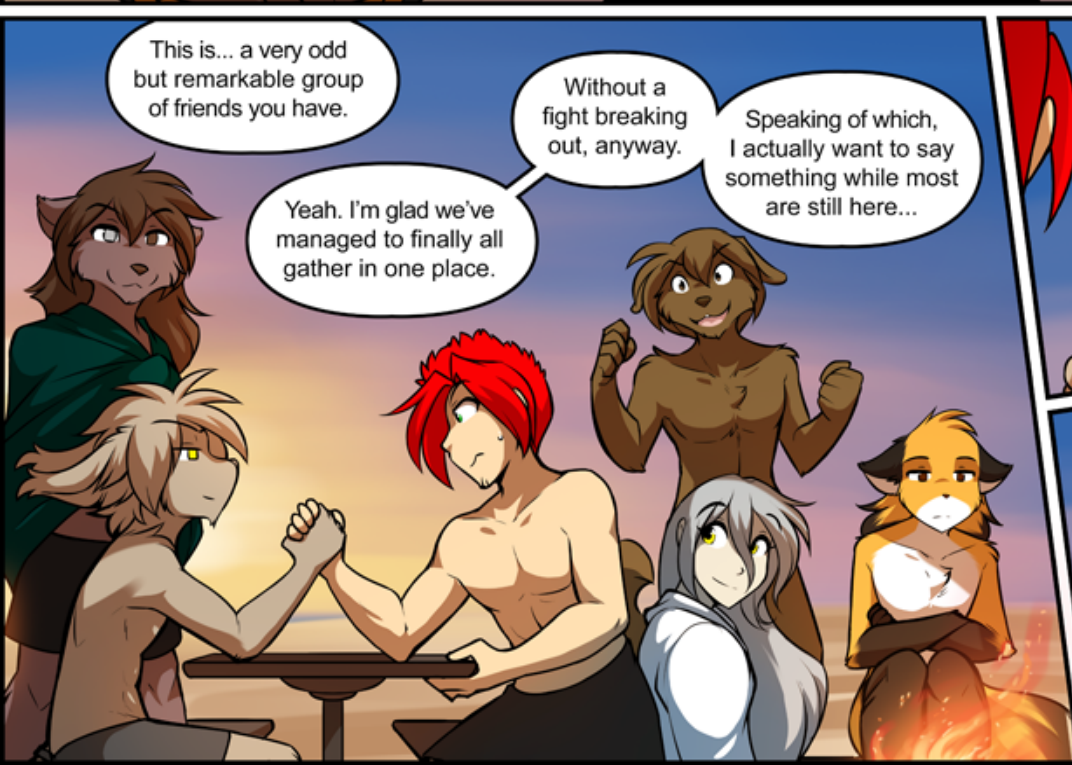
Uh...

Did I do it wrong?



Ah! Is that supposed to be happening?

Huh?!





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

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

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



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

Flora...



Yes, Trace?



Let's get married!

GEH!



What?!



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

...It's not?



Oh?

Oh!

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

I don't have anything to give, or—

It's okay, Trace. You already did.

Just ask me the question.

O-ok!

Flora...

Will... you marry me?

Yes.



Aaaaww!

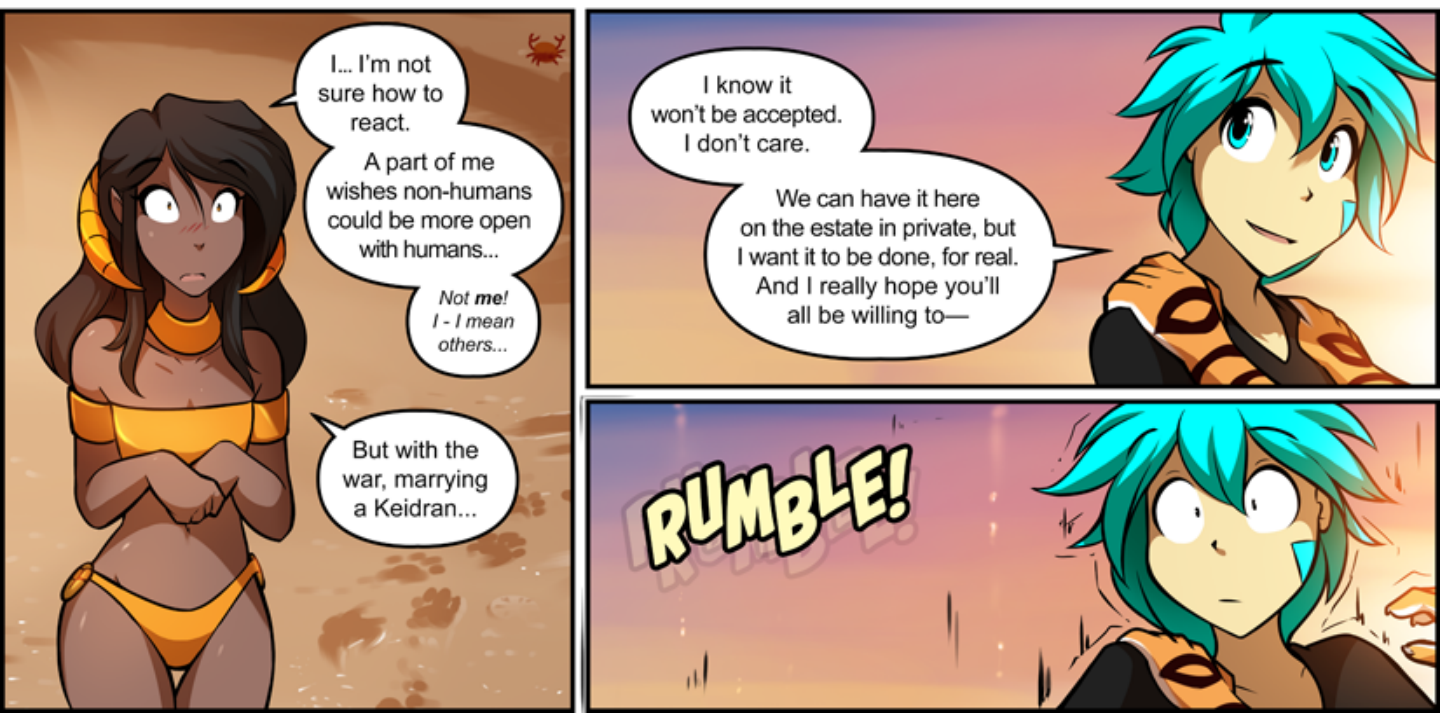
What?!

No no no!
This is crazy!

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

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

Yes I will.



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

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

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

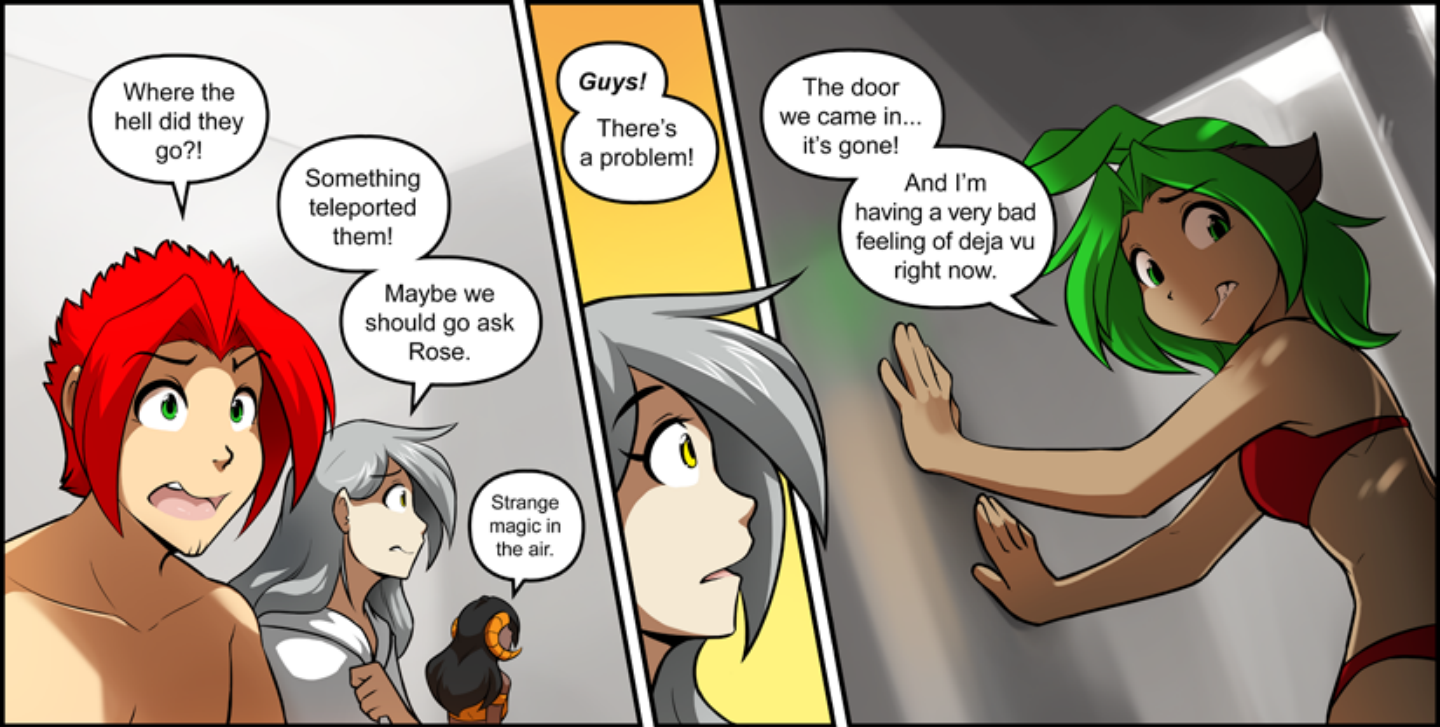
But with the war, marrying a Keidran...

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

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

RUMBLE!





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.

FWOOOSH!



Aaah...

Can we please start breaking things now, Ms Reni?

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!

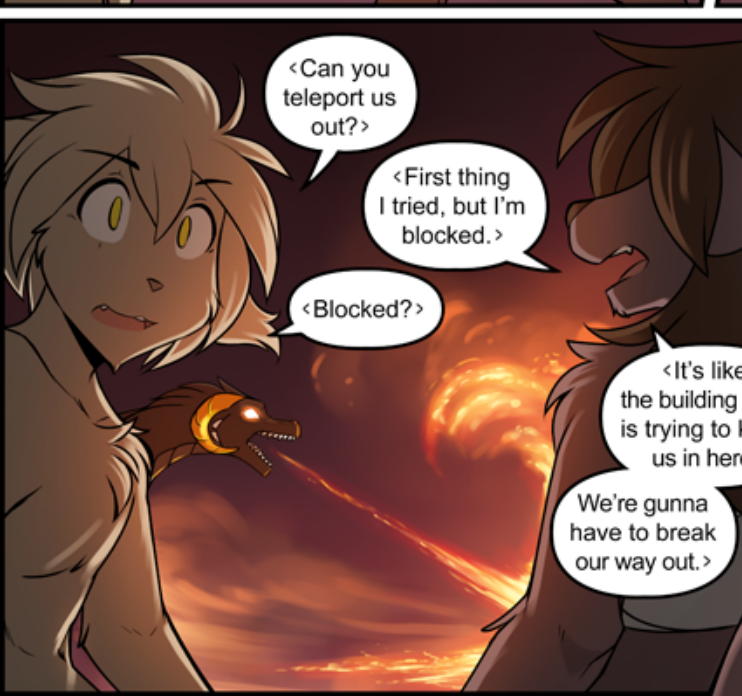
THUD!

THUD!

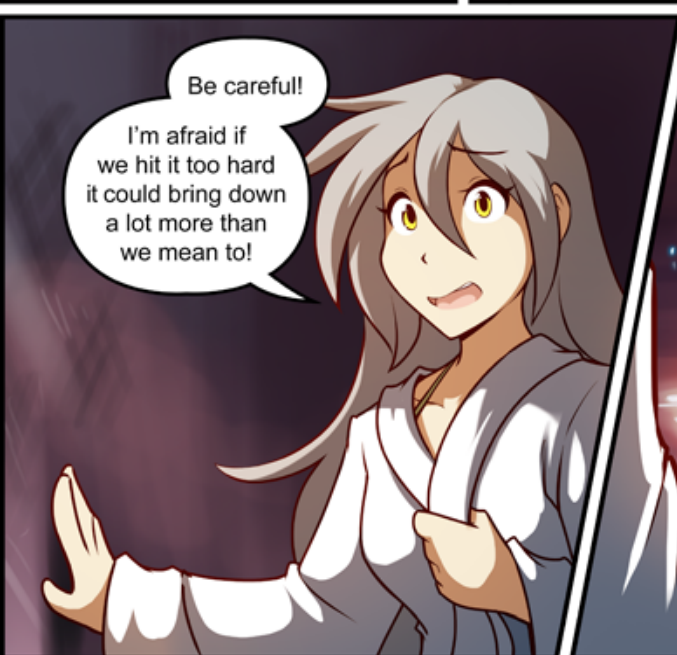
Erg... hard way, then.

Everyone stay back!

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









<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.

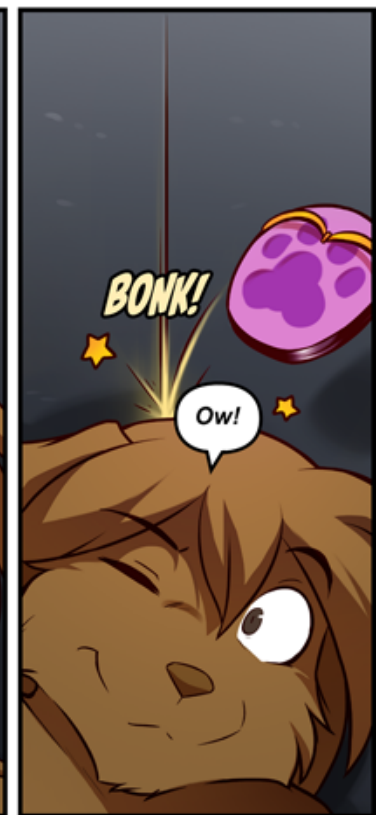
<Yes.>
To-geh-ter.



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

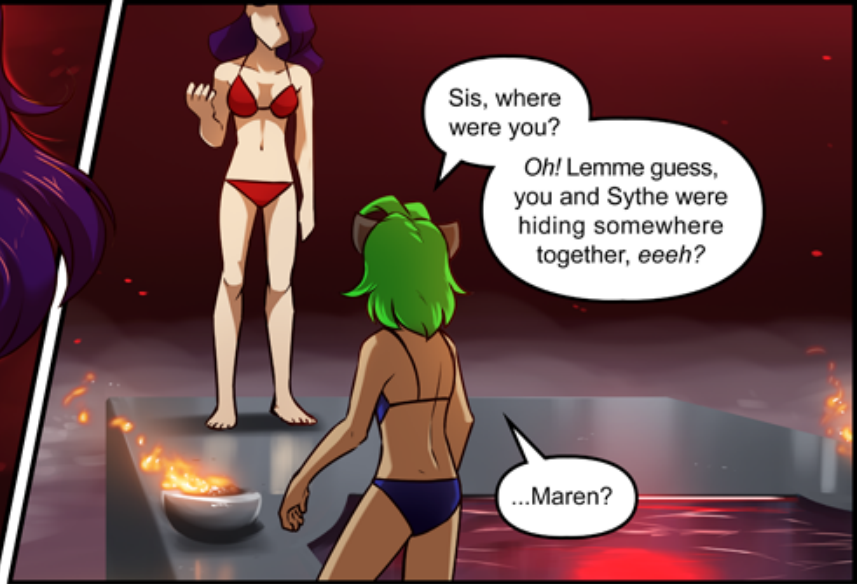
Rose... Rose
might know.
Where is she?

...Detritus...





Karen...



Sis, where were you?

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

...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—



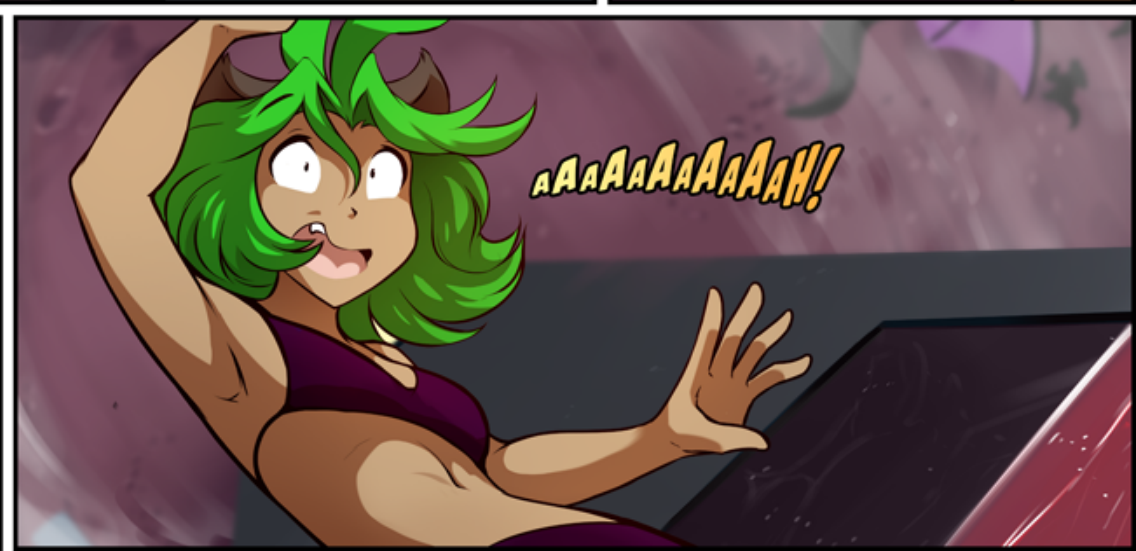
Eh?!



Whaaaa?!



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



AAAAAAAAAAAAH!



Wha-gah!!



Eep!

GASP!

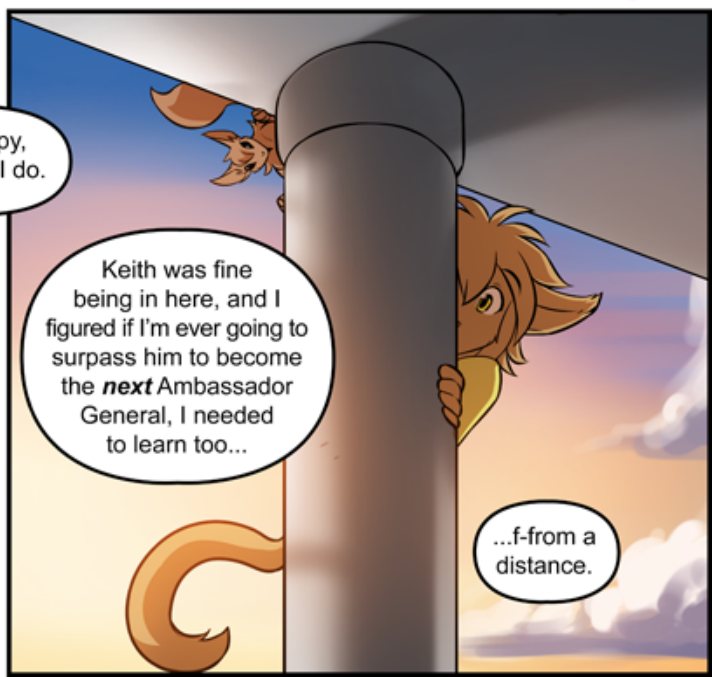
SPLASH!

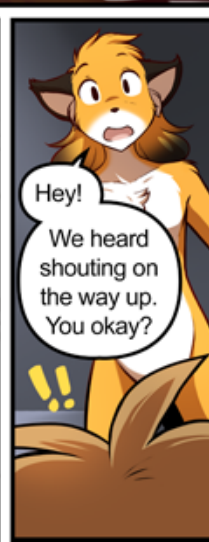
Wow, I almost died... that was awesome!

Maddie!
You saved my li—

...Waaaaait
a minute...

Maddie?
What are *you*
doing here?







Maren!



Maren?

What's with the lights?

Hello?!
Anyone!

Maren just disappeared!

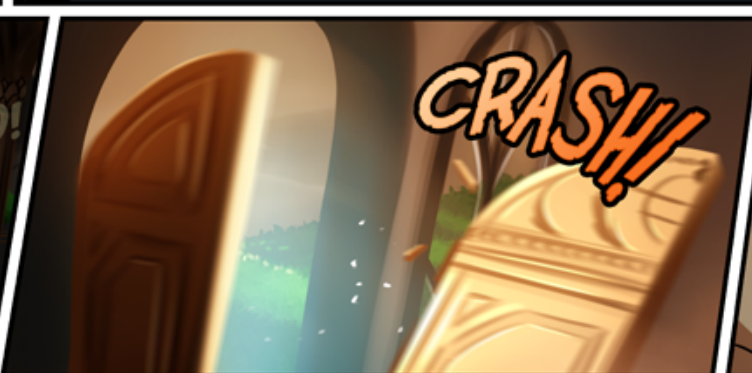
THUD!
THUD!



Huh?!



THUD!



CRASH!



Hello.

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

I'll just let myself in.



STEP



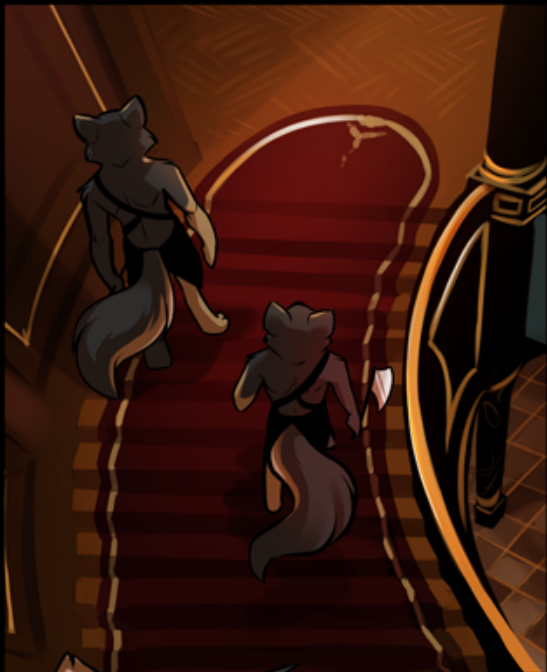
BZZZZZOT!



TCH
Aw.

Good try.







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!







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.

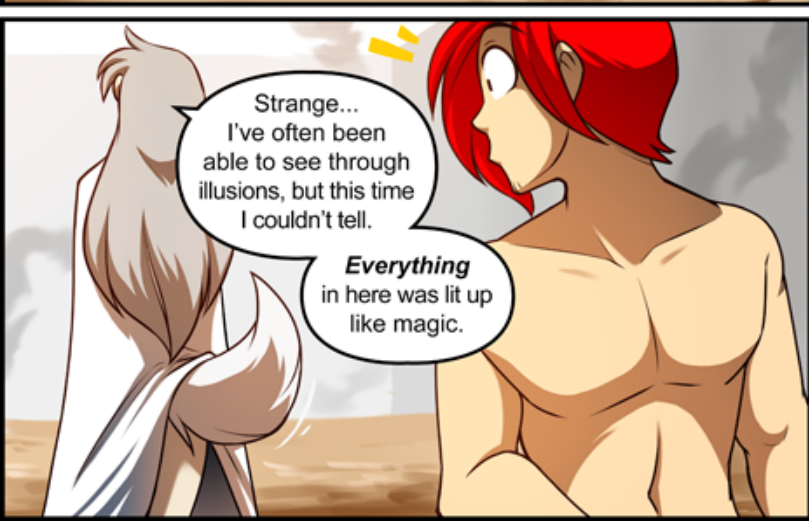
Oh, the doors back!



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!

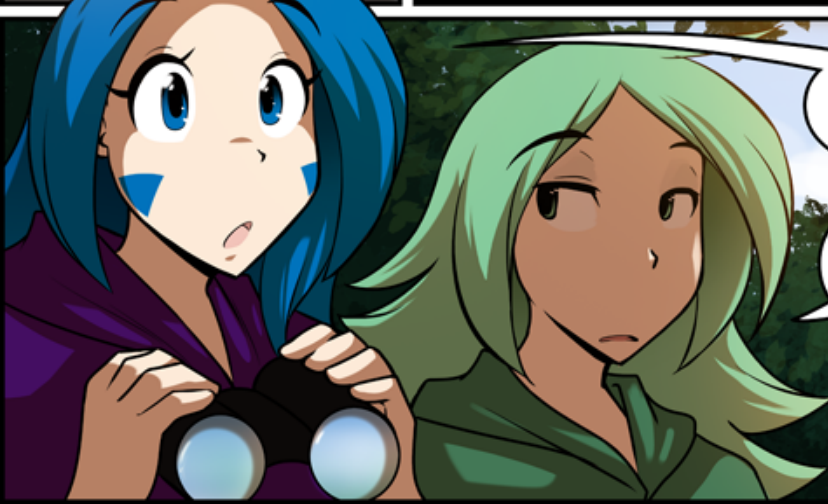
I'll be fine.
I am a dragon.



...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!

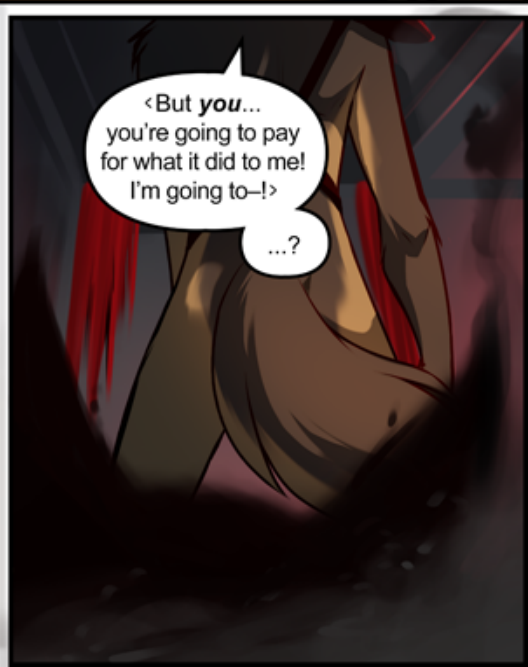
And she's
naked!

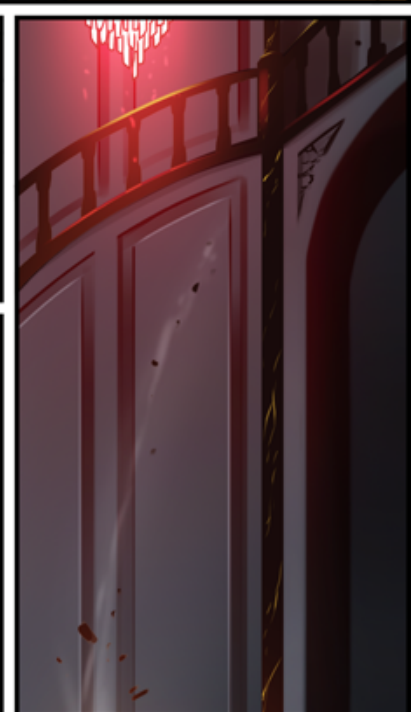
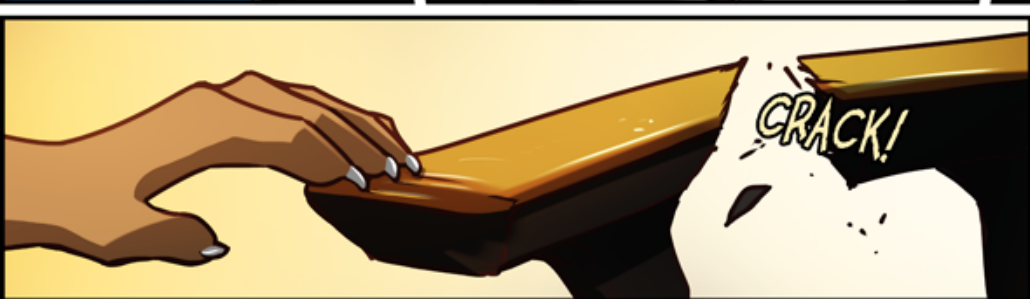
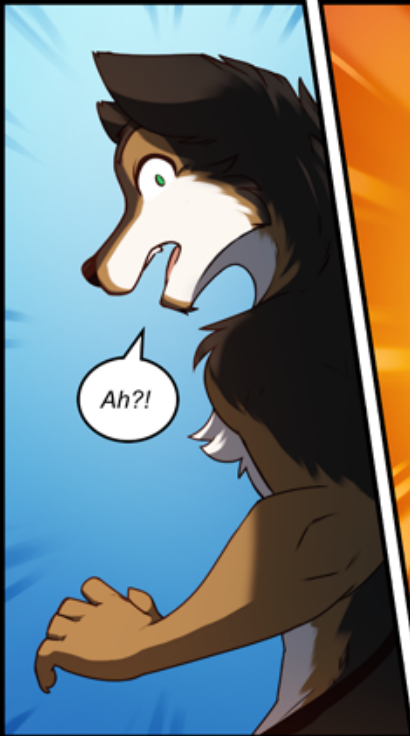
Sealeen... she's
a dragon. That's...
not weird.

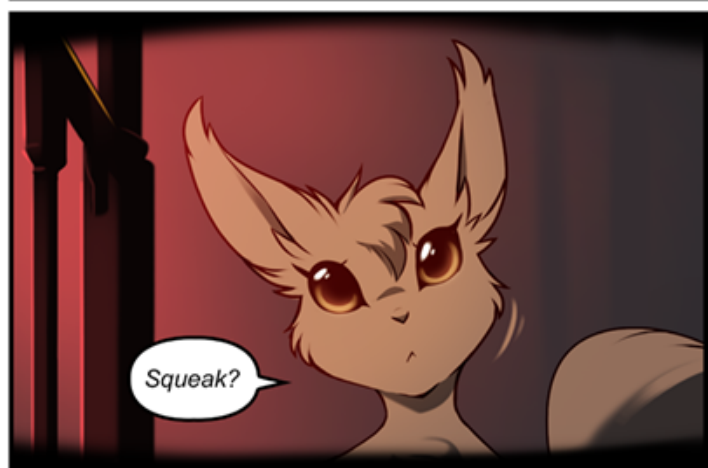
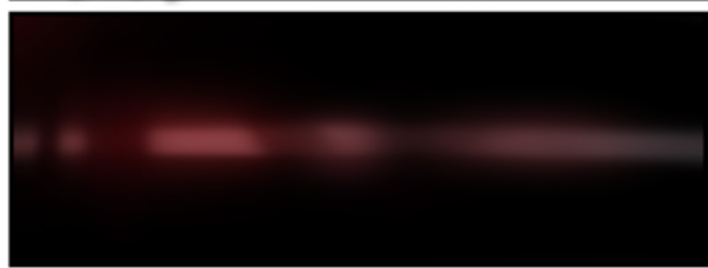
I know! I've just
never seen her without
her regalia. I bet Sarah
would've loved this.













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!



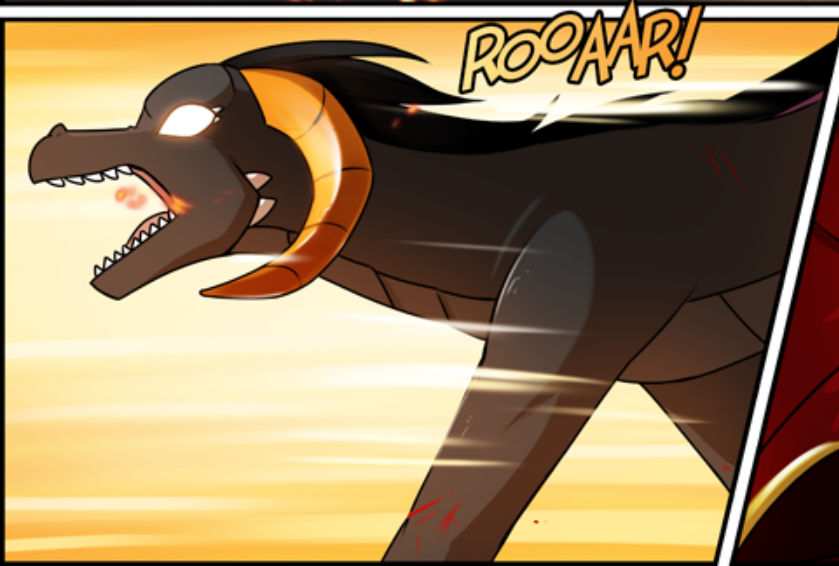
Nothing!



SMASH!

Ah?!

ROAR!





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.

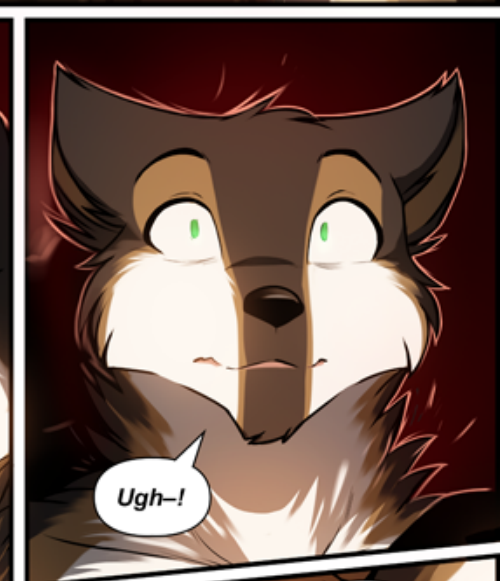
Maybe one day you'll get Clovis like you did me!

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?

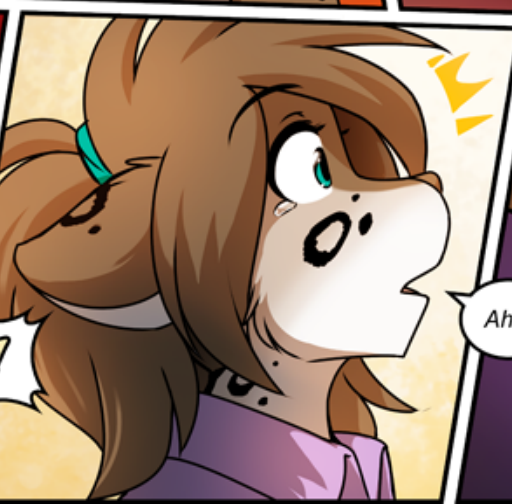


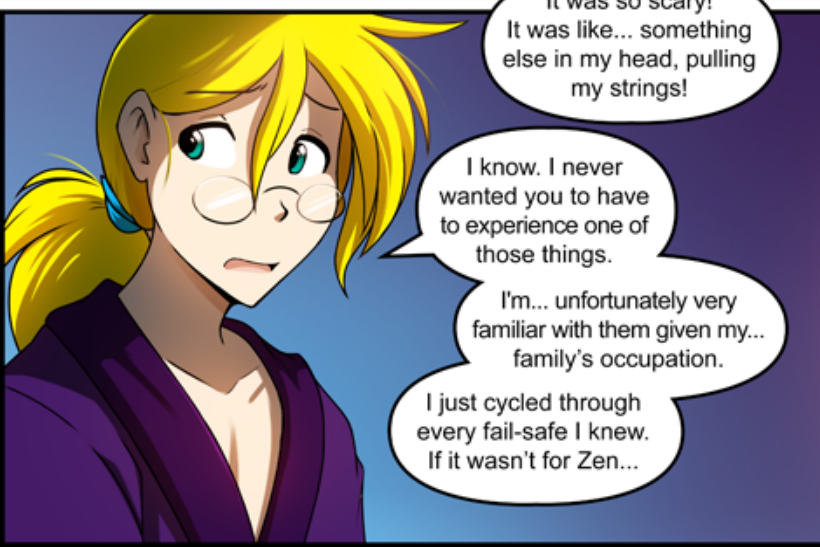
Ugh-!



Noted.

Z-Zen...!









Uh...

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

Is the house
rumbling...?



SNIFF
SNIFF



SWOOP!



What
the hell?!

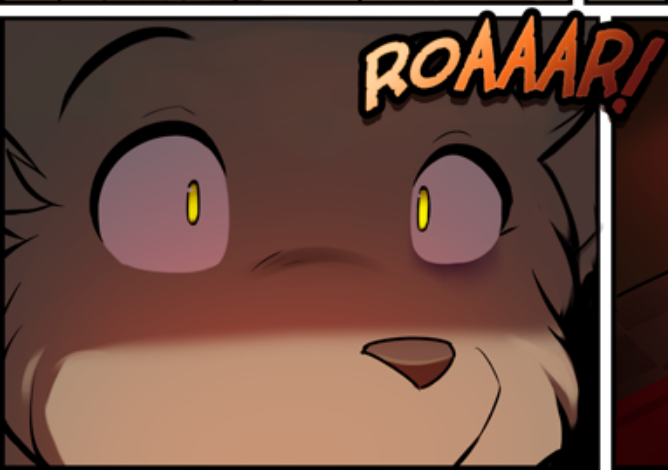
Nibs!



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.





Reni!
Are you okay?!

What happened?







I should
be able to free
her now...

One
moment...



Huh?



What's
going on?

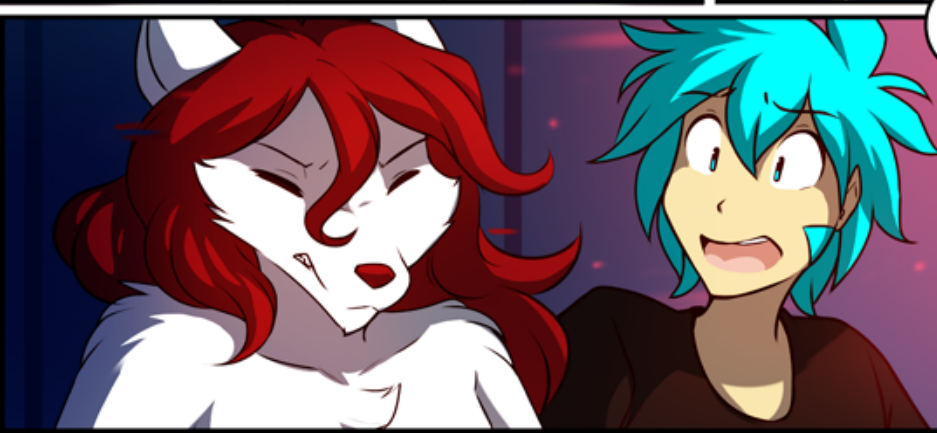


Eurgh...

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!

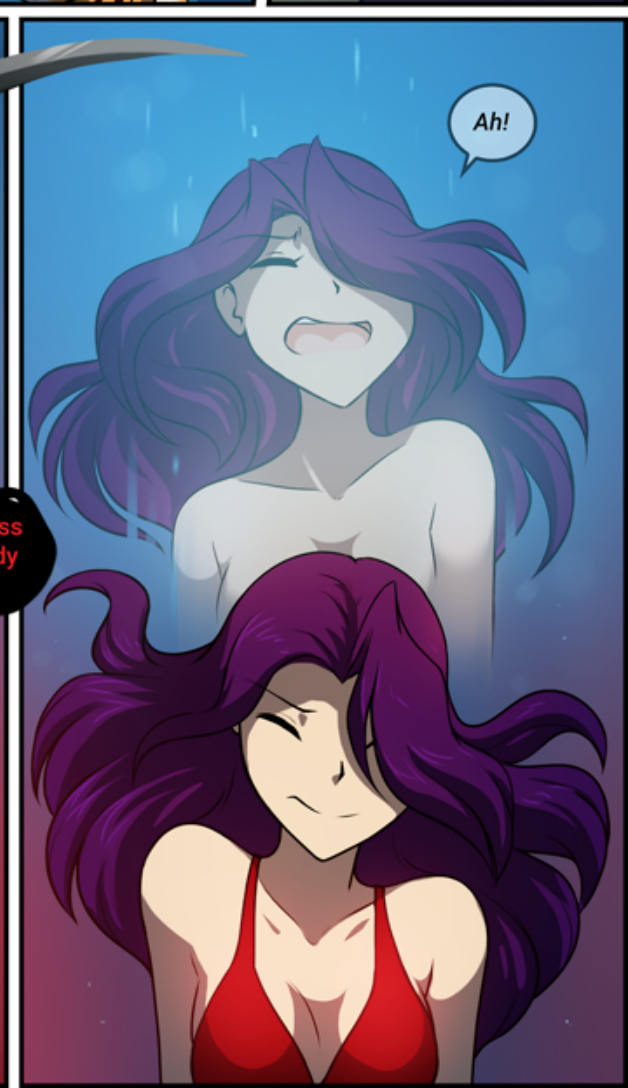
Grah!

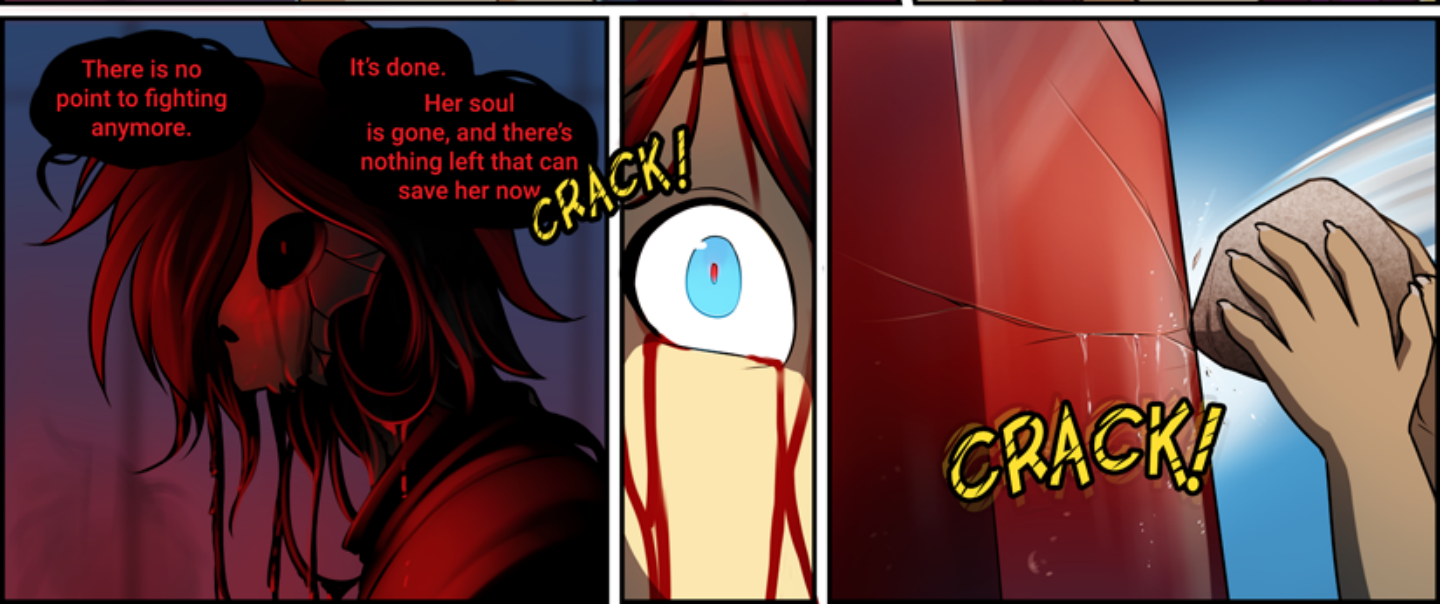
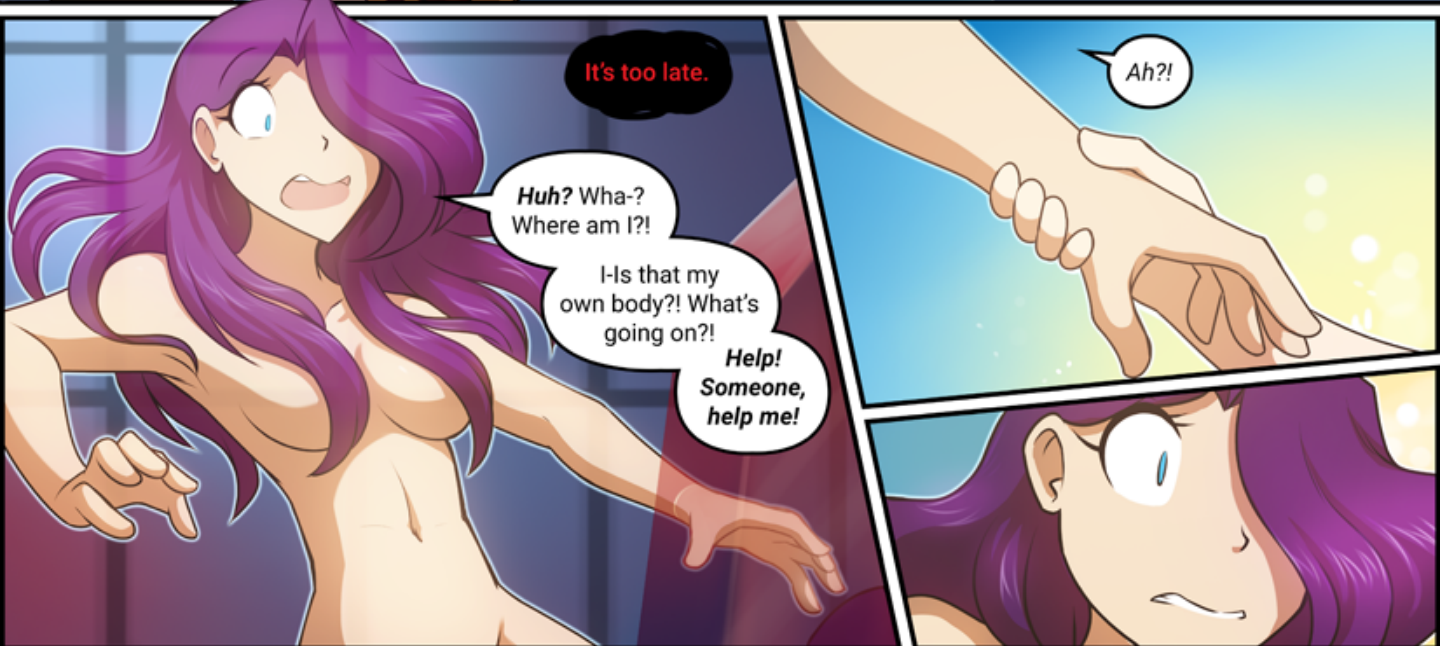


NO!

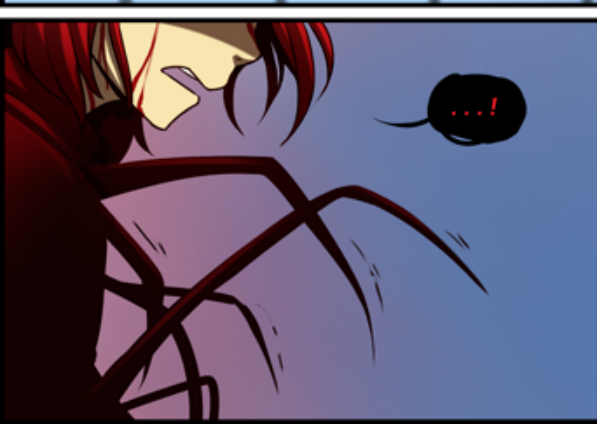
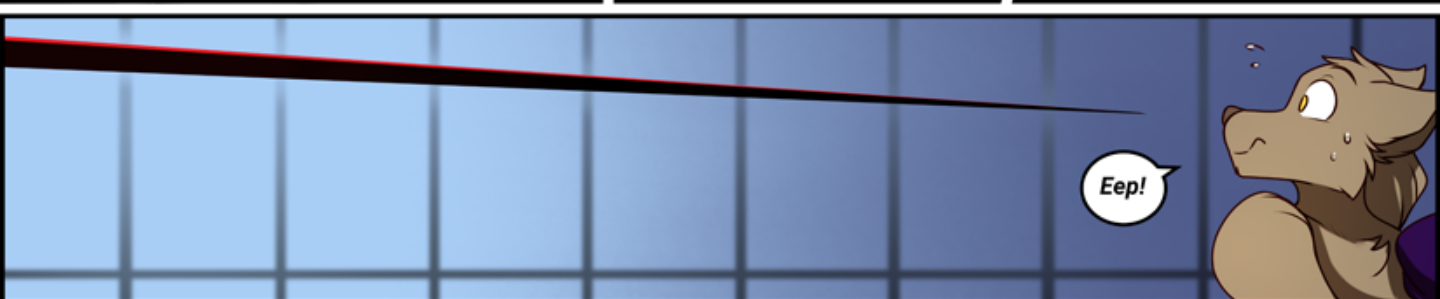
SHHHINK!













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.



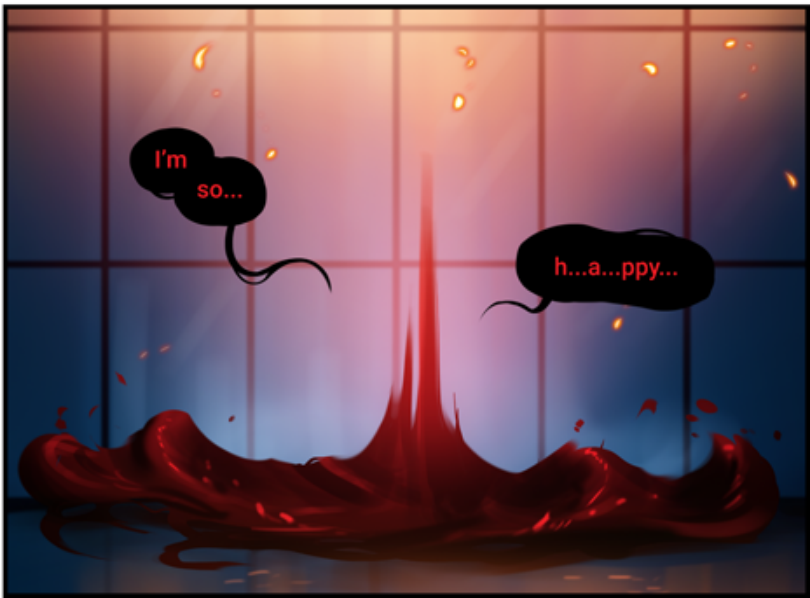
It doesn't matter.

I did it.

I brought you back...

I finally saved you...

It's over...



I'm so...

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



SIGH...



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.



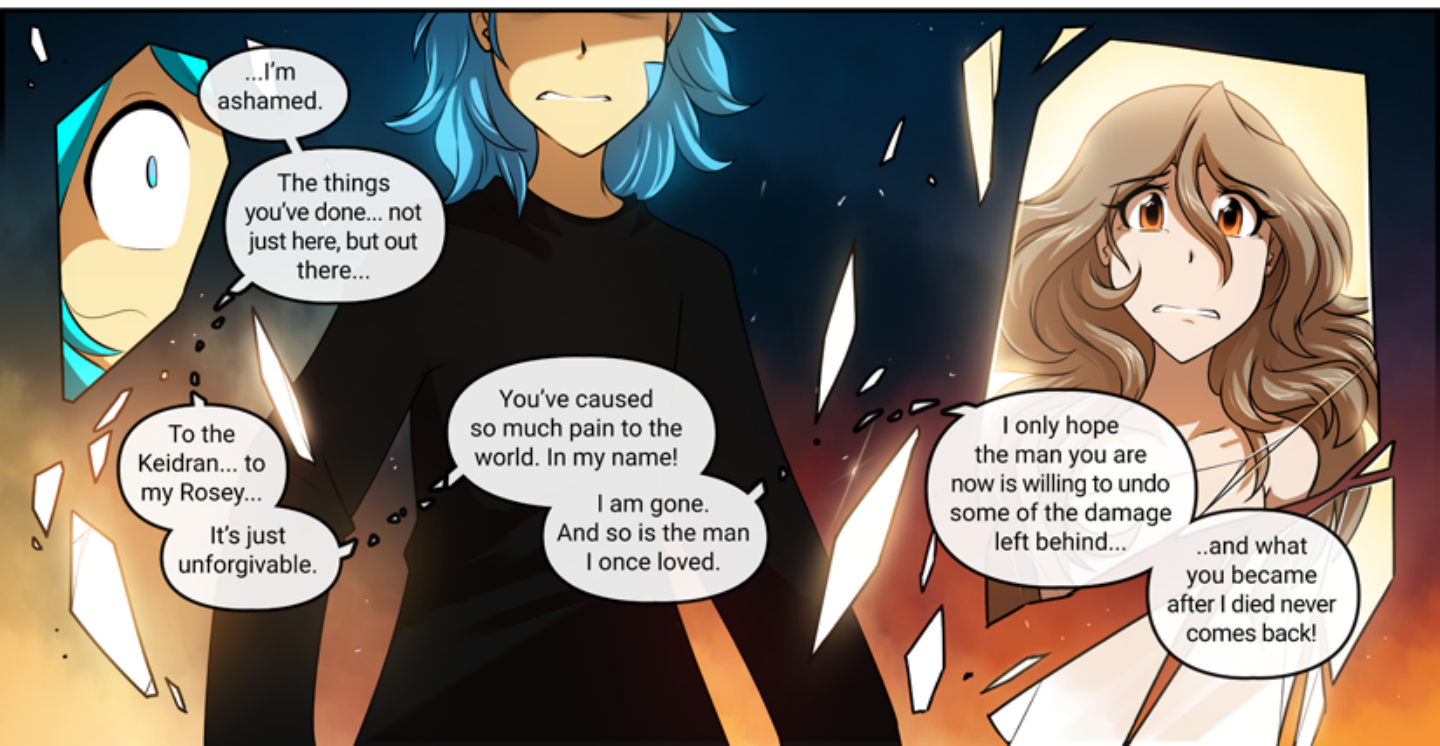
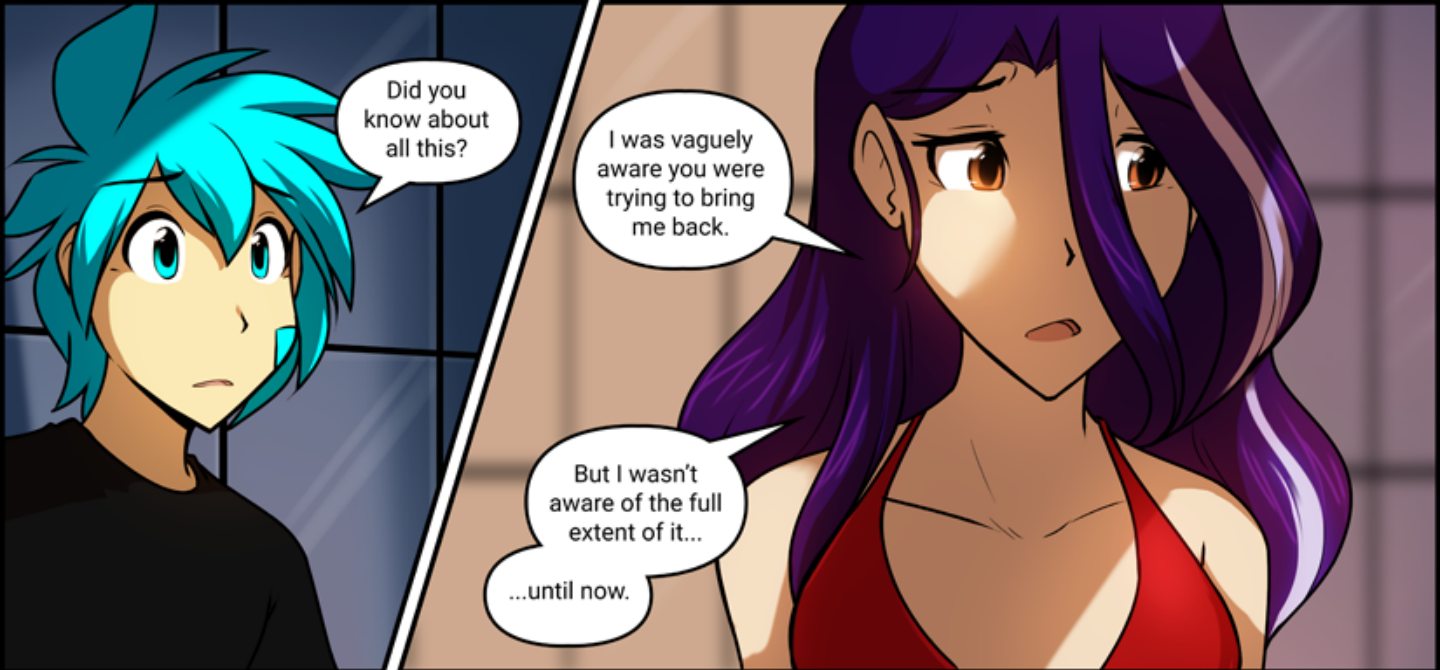
You told me
back then, when we
parted ways, that you
weren't my wife.

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.





Saria!

Of course it did. I loved my Trace.

I wish dearly we could have had more time together.

Is that really all you have to say?

Did what we have together mean anything to you?

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

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...



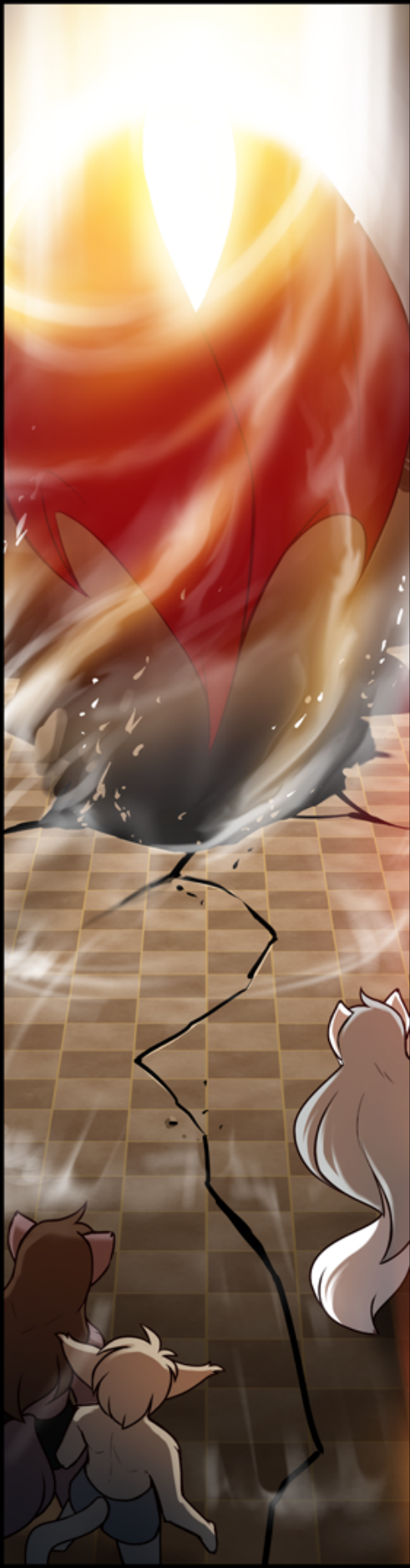
WOOOOSH



Woah! I've got you.

Ugh...





End.



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...

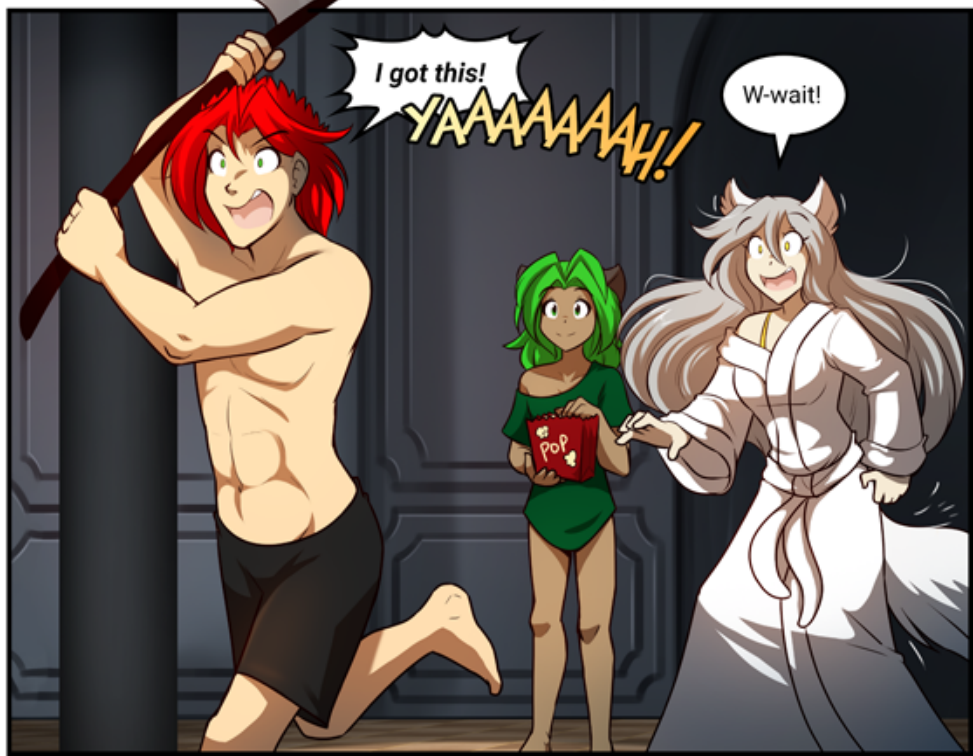


...a... link
between it
and Reni.



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

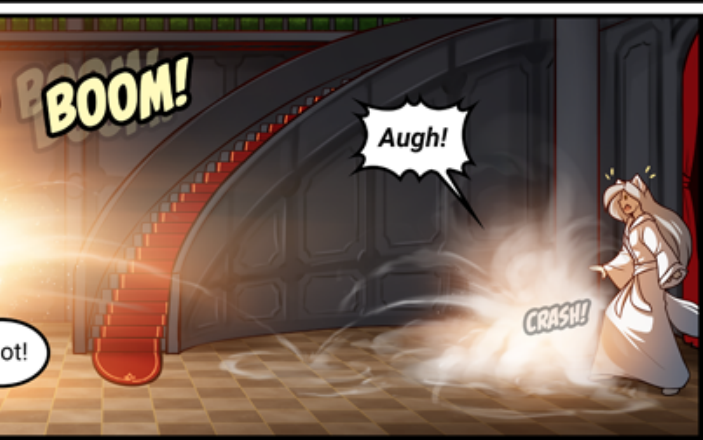
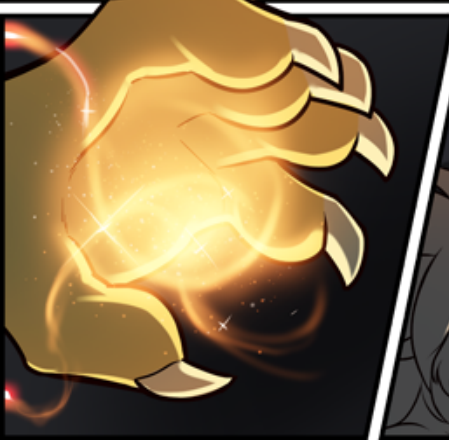
Break it?



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.»

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.»

You're alright. »

«I live to serve.»

OASIS R



Alright, Maddie, this is your chance!

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

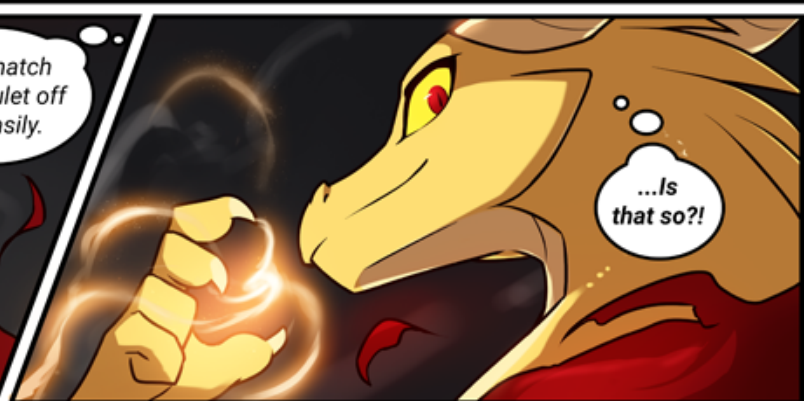


I just have to wait for him to land.

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!

BZZZT!

!?

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.



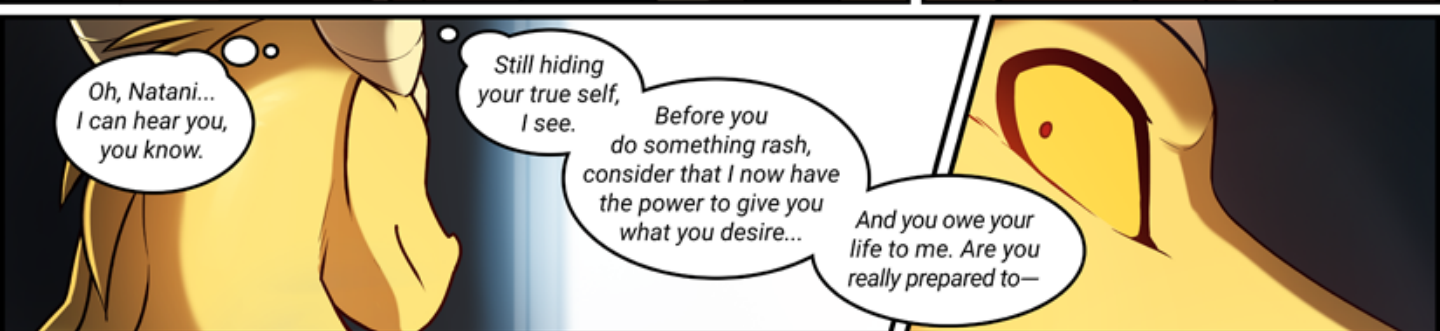
Assassins...

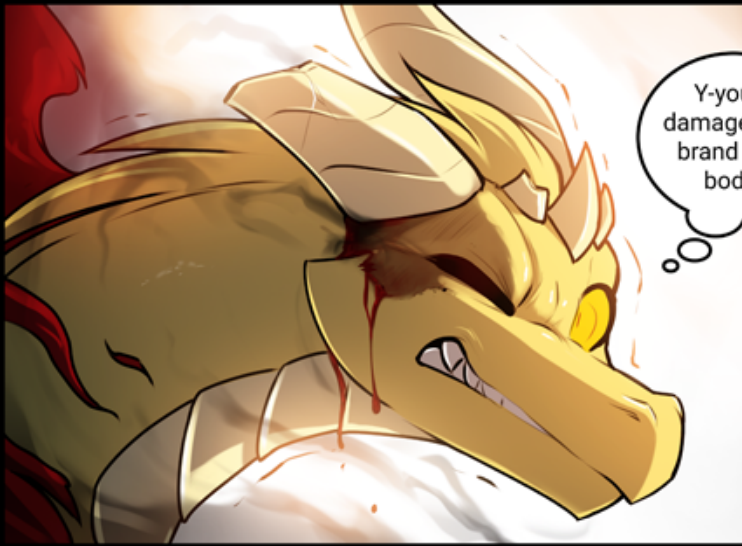
Thugs...

Even... Brutus...

None of it matters anymore.

Twitch





Y-you...
damaged my
brand new
body!



Come on...!

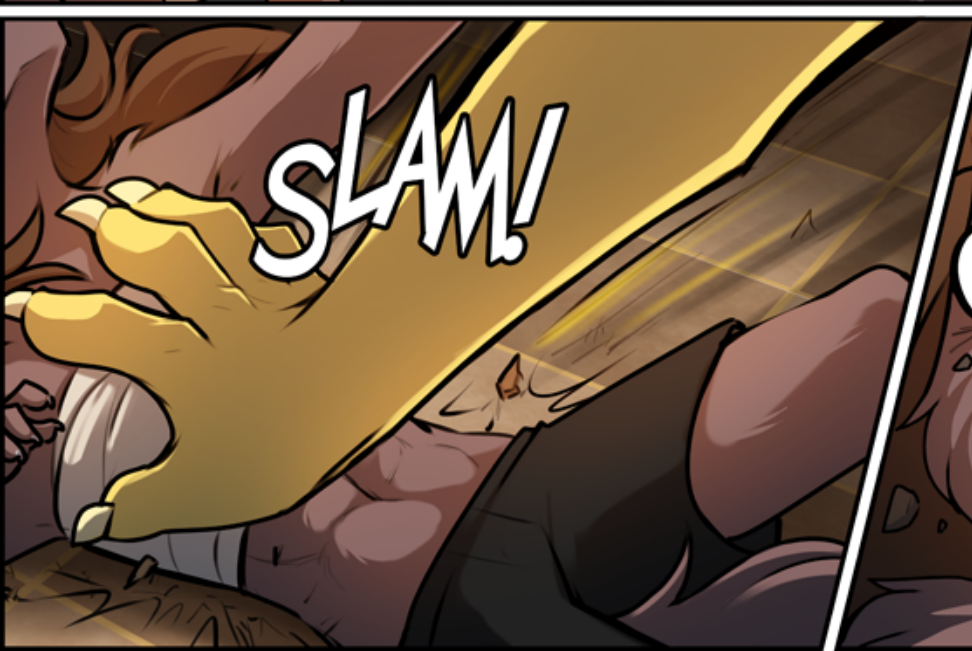
FIZZLE



RAAAAAAH!

FfST!

Ah!?



SLAM!



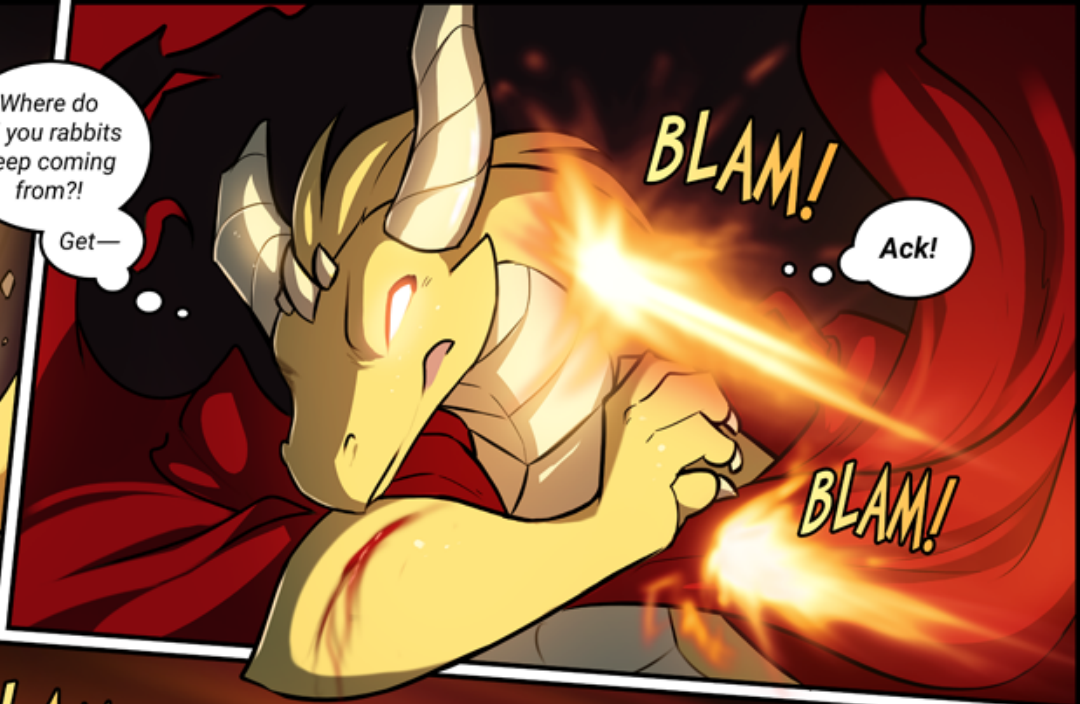
Gah!!





Where do
all you rabbits
keep coming
from?!

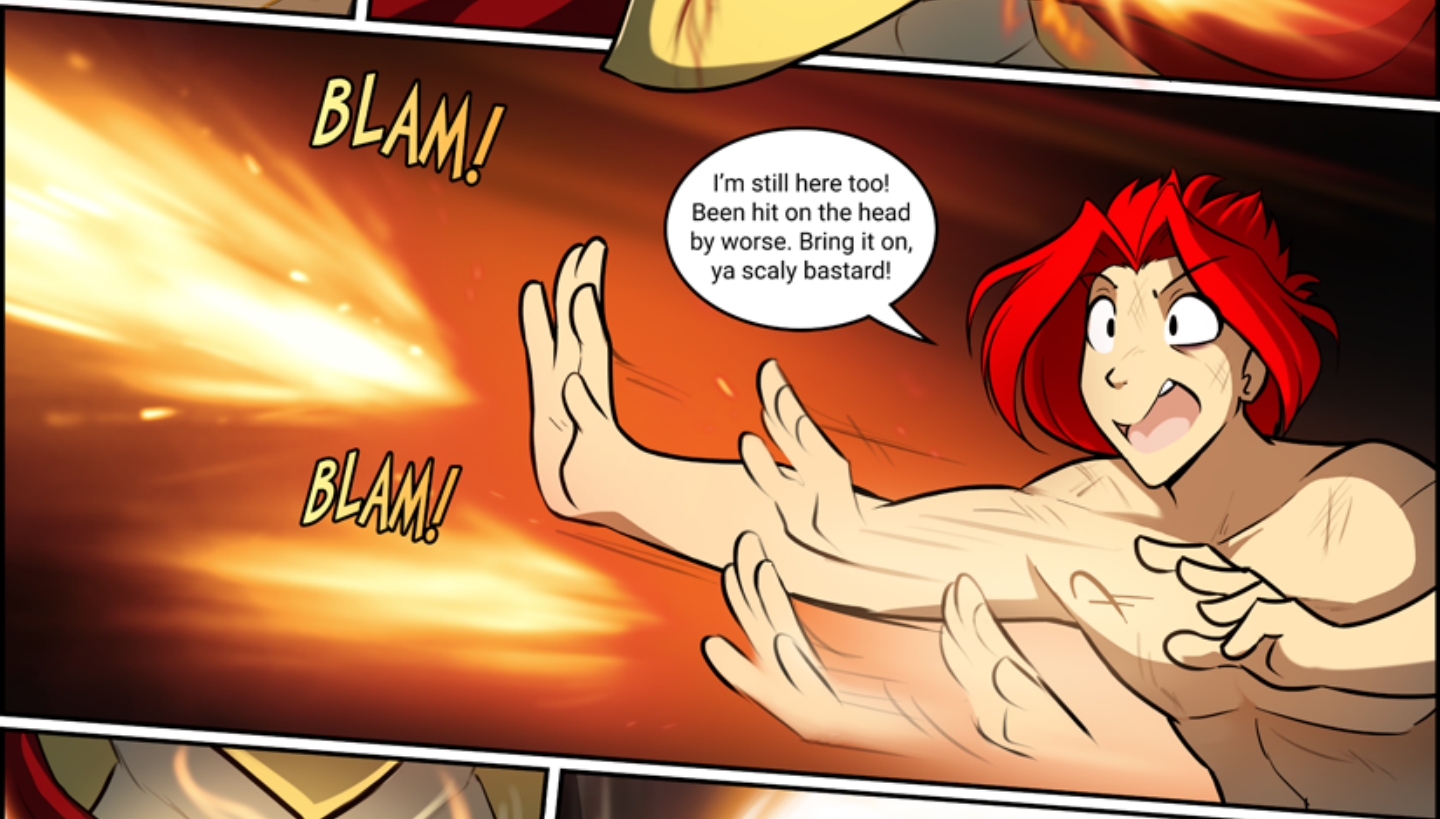
Get—



BLAM!

Ack!

BLAM!



BLAM!

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

BLAM!



GRAAAAH!



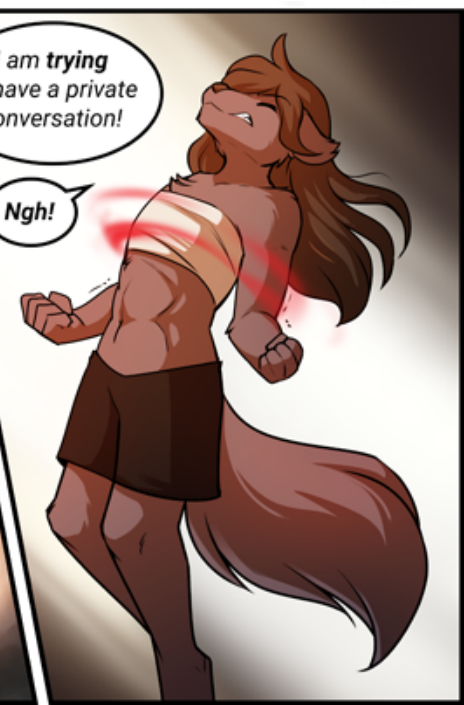


Enough!



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!



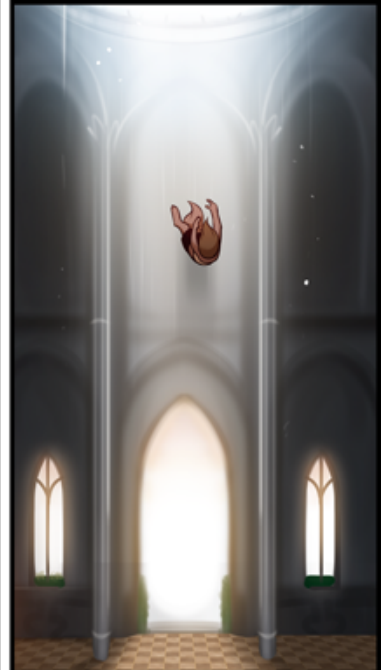
You...
H-how-?!



Heh...



Ugh...



Natani!



FWOOSH



Ah!
Nice catch,
Raine!

Gah!

I... don't think
I'm the one who
did that.



Trace...!

NGH...



PHW...
...Thank
you.

You're
alright, Nat.
I gotcha.



So, he
finally
shows.

Saving
the life of
a wolf.

Truly, my
old master has
fallen far.



How? How
did she do it?!

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

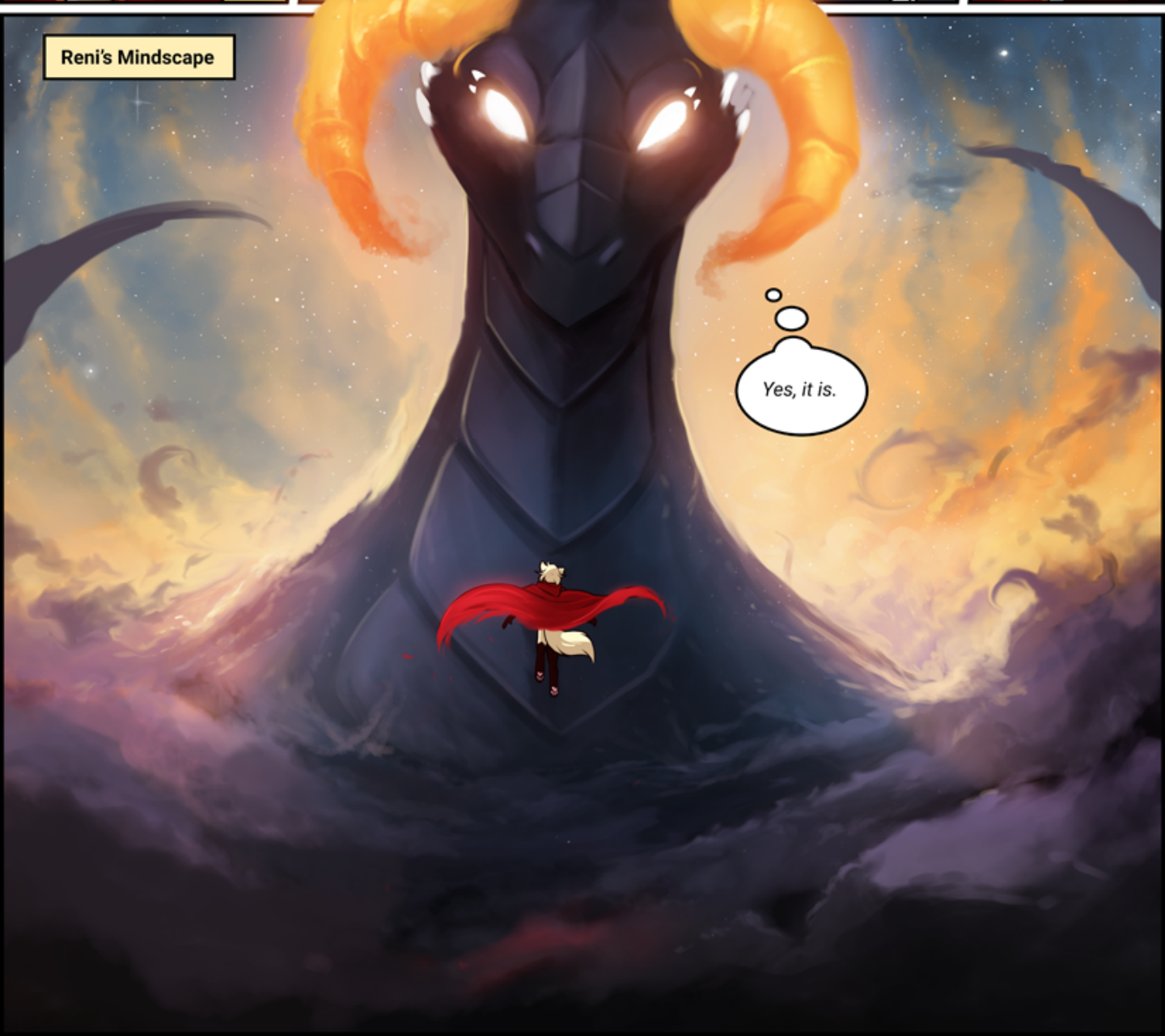


CRASH!



U-uh...

Reni's Mindscape



Yes, it is.



FWOOOOSH!

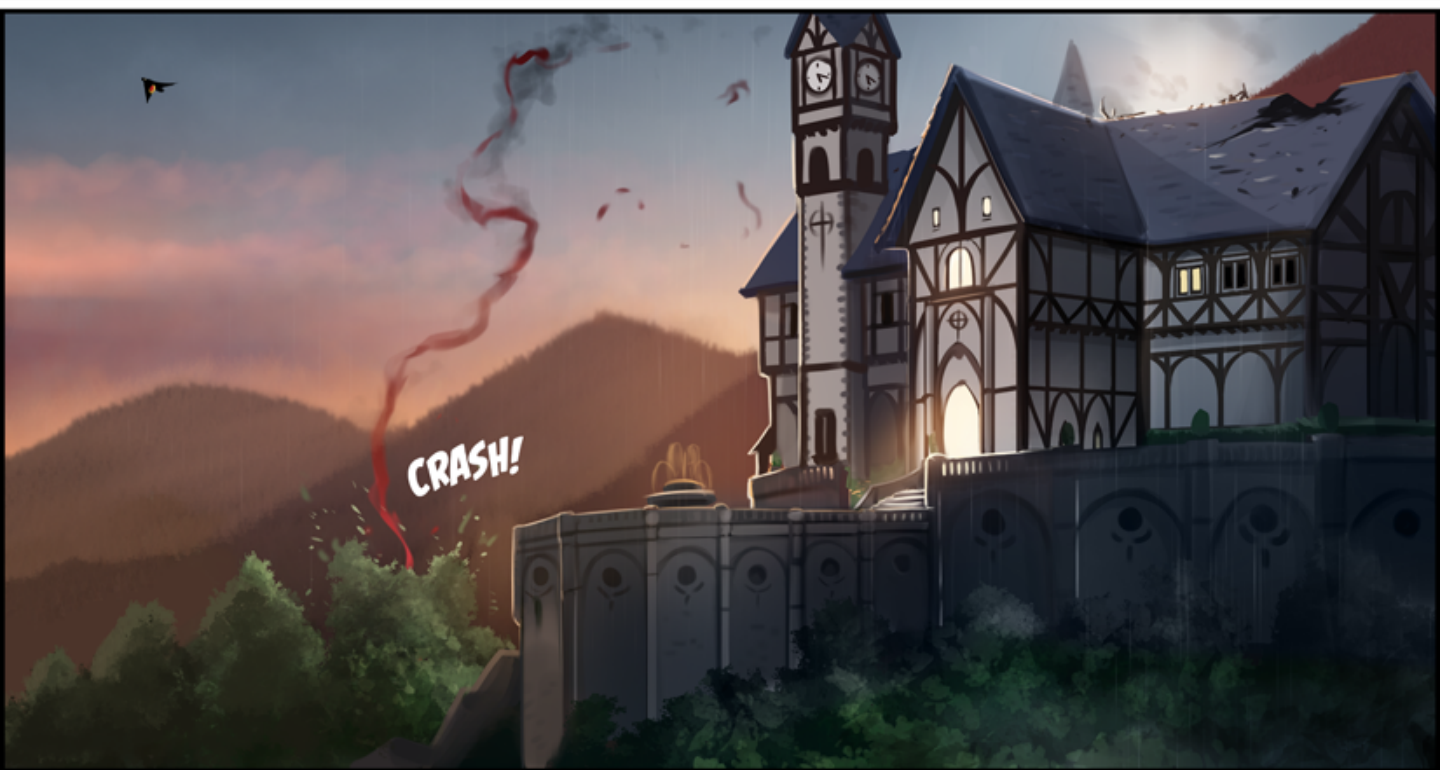
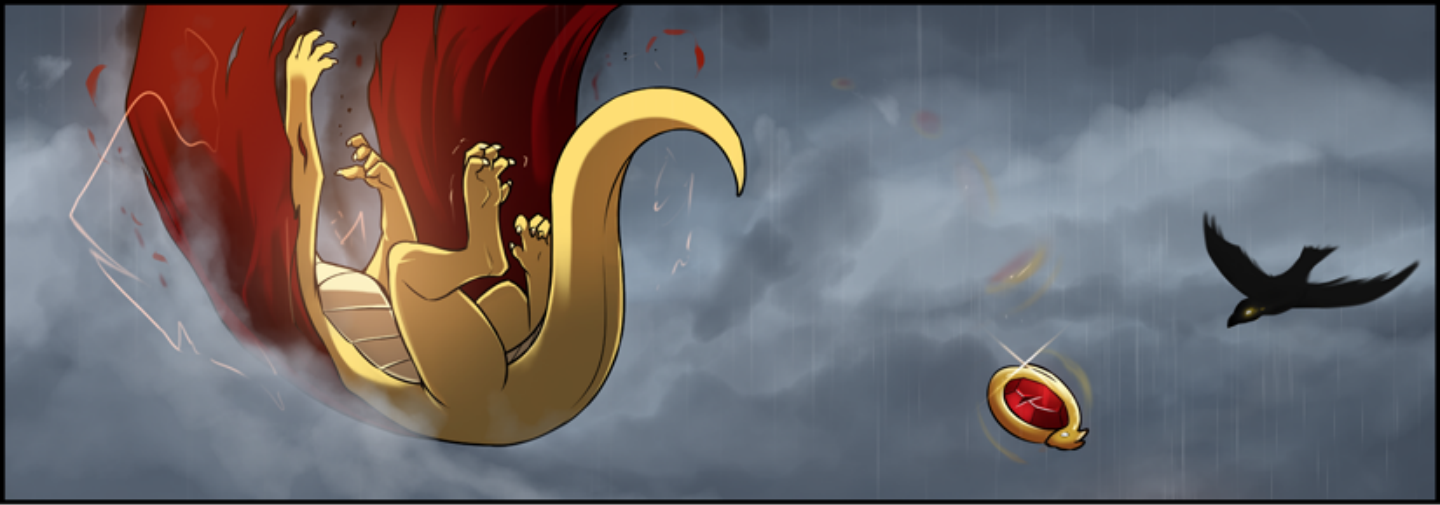


Gah!

My head!
Stop!

No, no, no—!
I... I can't....

GRAH!







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.

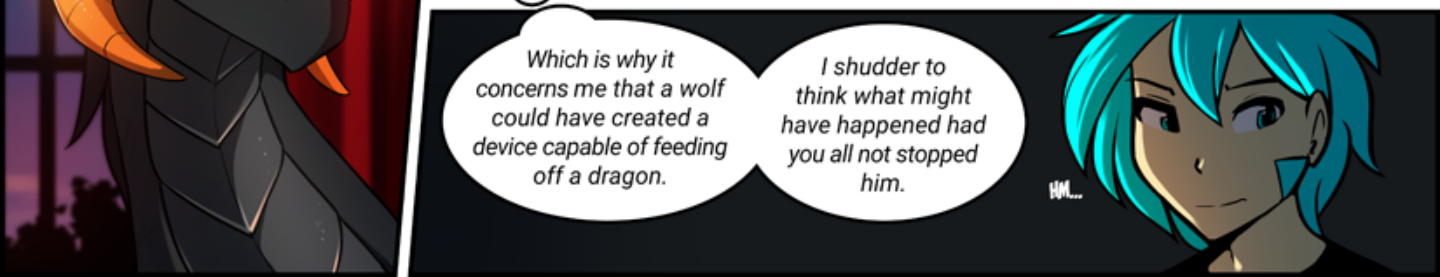
Something about being drained when the tower exploded.

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.



URGH!

What'd I miss?

Oh, hey, buddy!
Ya finally made it to the party!

Wow!

The old goats told me humans weren't durable.

Can some of you resist magic like us Basitins?

Nah, he's special. I've seen him blow himself up *lots* of times.

I think he's built up an immunity.

GRAB

To explosi-meep!



KYAAAHH!

Let go of my tail, you [deviant]!

You grabbed mine first!

Excitement always seems to follow you, Trace.

Though, no offense, you could've shown up a *little* sooner.

Yeah, what happened?

Last we saw, you and Flora disappeared from the oasis.

Then it was like the estate was attacking us.

It was this thing called Detritus!



Detritus? What's that?

Another piece of my past coming back to haunt me.

Literally.

We were teleported up to the third floor and then preoccupied with a different problem.

I'll explain everything.

Though we should make sure everyone is accounted for first.



Oh! Sythe and Maren!

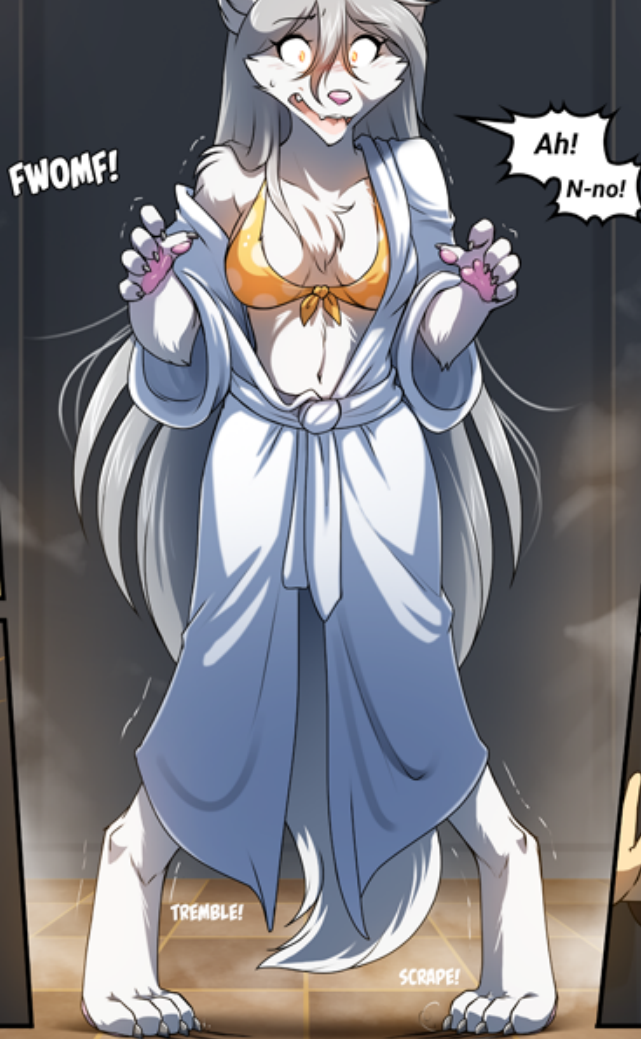
They went missing from the oasis too!
And Miss Roselyn! Did you see her up there?

Uh...

What?

That's... part of what I need to explain.

There's something you should know.







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.





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!



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.



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.



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
here 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
gunna 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.>



«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.