

Chapter 7

Instincts



After several hours...

It's getting pretty dark.

I think we should just set up camp now.

We'll get there in the morning.

This looks like a nice little clearing.

As long as we follow the stream, we shouldn't get disoriented tomorrow.

Flora, could you set up the lantern?

I'll get some wood for a fire.

Oh, could you also get some fresh water?

I think we're out.

Trace...?

Trace... I don't think we should camp out here.

Huh? What's wrong, Flora?

Keidran have been here... I can smell their scent.

Flora, trust me.
It'll be fine.

...yeah, I suppose.
The scent was
kinda old, anyway.

Trace, where did this
book come from?

You and I have been through
a lot in the last few days.
Let's just get some rest.

I'm sure we'll
be fine for one
night.. hm?

Hey, wait!
I can explain that...

What does it say?

Huh..? You don't...?

I... can't read.
I was never taught
as a slave.

Well, um.. don't worry
about this old thing.
It's just an old
story book.

Oh, it is?

Yeah, I found it at the house. Nothing
you'd be interested in, I'm sure.
Well, I'd better continue
setting up camp.

Okay... do you mind
if I go for a walk?

Flora, you said it yourself...
it's dangerous out there.

aw...

Don't worry about me.
This is my territory.

I guess if you really
want to.. but be careful.

I'll drag you back by the tail if
you get me worried about you.

I can smell... lots of scents here... one familiar.. but...

...none of them are recent...

Maybe there's some more over.. no, none here..

Wait.. what am i doing?

I should be happy I'm not finding anything... More Keidran is the last thing we need.

Sigh...

I'm happy with Trace.

Why would I want to put that at risk?

Why do I want to go home?

Is it just because I'm a Keidran?

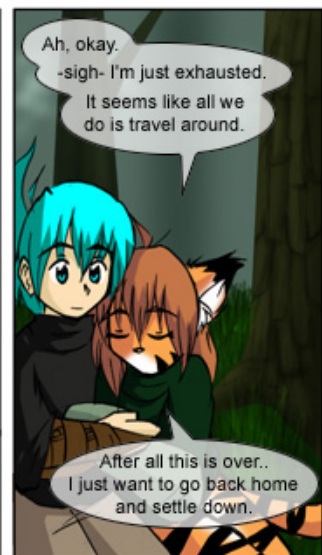
Meanwhile, in the trees...


<Flora... You've been a slave to the humans for too long, my dear.>

<Not used to these feelings, are you?>

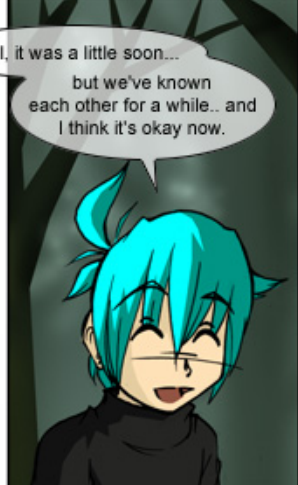
<Without the power from those Templar buildings, your instincts are slowly becoming unsuppressed.>







But... you always yell at me when I try to sleep in your bed...




Well, it was a little soon...

but we've known each other for a while.. and I think it's okay now.



Ah, okay...



Heh, I'm still not really sure what's going on.


I know this goes against everything the Templar teach.

But... I don't remember any of the hate I once had. and I don't want to.

It's about time, Trace.


I know. I don't want to be involved in this war. ...I love you, Trace.

I.. heh, um... I.. love you too, Flora. I really do.



...hey, Trace?

Hm, what's up?



Are we gunna.. you know...?

Heheh, um...



Huh, Trace?

Now where'd that stupid human go?

Ugh, finally.
Trace, it's your turn to go on watch. I'm exhausted.



Hm?

Sorry, sorry.. never done this before.. how about now?

Ow, hey, that's my tail, Trace!

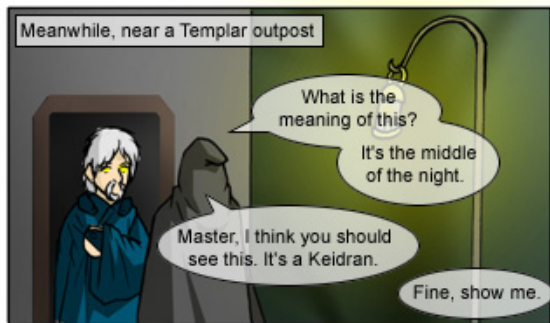
I know, me nei- eep!
mm.. that's nice..



...



On second though, I think I'll go scouting for.. a while...



Meanwhile, near a Templar outpost

What is the meaning of this?

It's the middle of the night.

Master, I think you should see this. It's a Keidran.

Fine, show me.



A dead Keidran? What does this thing have to do with me? Get rid of it!

He's not dead, though I don't know how. He has a huge stab wound.

I still don't understand why you needed me.



He mentioned your name. Your... other name. Do you recognize him?



Ah! It's... it's Euchre!

You know him?

Yes.. he was a slave.. from long ago...

Quick, get him inside.

Yes, Master.

It's been a long time, old friend.

Ow.. my head...

Where.. am I?

What the...?

My hand! I have... skin..?

What.. what's going on?

I'm... human!

I don't believe it!
I look like a human!

It is what you wish
you were, is it not?

Gah!
My feet.. what's going
on, I'm changing back!

Please, let me
stay human!

Why would you want to be
something that you are not?

I.. I don't want
to be an animal!

You are not an animal, Flora.

But neither are you human.

No!

You cannot change who you are.

You can't hide
your true nature..

..forever.

Oh.. thank goodness
Just.. a dream...

Merrr, Trace? Oh yeah,
I'm in Trace's bed.

I still can't believe
we actually did it...


Hm..? Are those claw
marks.. from me?

Oh, I hope I didn't
hurt him. I have to be more
careful next time.

Hm... claw marks...

Animal.. ah, now I
can't remember what
that dream was..






Welcome back,
Ephemeral.
It's been a while
since you've come
to this realm.

You've fallen apart.


Just like your little race.

It was a bold move, altering
the mind of my warrior.

You knew you couldn't kill
him. Against the rules, of course.



Instead you had him fall for
the enemy. Now that's clever.



Unfortunately, that little
Keidran fell in love as well.

When the time came, you
couldn't split them up.

Now, without Flora, the Tiger
and Wolf Clans have no alliance.

Already, the wolves have chosen
not to join the others, so sure that they
can defend themselves.

One by one,
the clans will fall.

Until only my race
shall rule this earth.

He may be speaking
the truth. The outcome lies
on the mortals now...

My powers are weakened. I
cannot risk attempting to enter the
world again for some time.

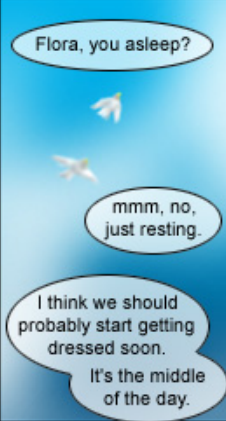
But perhaps there is something
I can do... there is another race...

One that I have not allowed
for many, many years.

I have no choice. I must ensure at
least some Keidran blood survives.

From this point forth...






Flora, you asleep?

mmm, no,
just resting.

I think we should
probably start getting
dressed soon.


It's the middle
of the day.



mmm, five
more minutes.

-sigh- Flora, do you think
what we're doing is wrong?

neh, there's nothing wrong
with sleeping in once in a while.




Flora, you know
what I mean.

The sex?

It's not just the sex, Flora.
This whole relationship. It's just
not.. you know, normal.

What if it just
doesn't work out?

Trace, I knew what I was
getting into when I chose you.




But where will we live?

And what about children?


We'll never be able to
experience parenthood.

There's so much
we'll miss!



Trace, are you
saying you don't want
me anymore?

What? No, no! I
didn't mean that...



Trace, I know... we'll have
to think about it eventually.

But I also know I love you.

And right now, the sound of your
heartbeat is all the assurance I need.

Everything else
will work itself out.



<You sent the Magi to kill Flora too? Why!?!>

<There's no need to shout. I may be old, but my hearing is fine.>



<Nephew, you know I have never liked this arrangement with the tigers. We wolves don't need help.>

<So, we have decided to take this opportunity to break off from them.>

<The tigers believe the girl to be lost. They will not miss her.>

<A-are you mad? The humans would destroy us without the tiger's aid!>

<You impudent youth! We do not need anyone's aid. The humans are no match for us!>



<And why do you seem concerned about the girl?>

<You always said you didn't like her anyway.>

<...yeah... I did say that...>



<Damn it, he's been sitting there all day!>

<The targets have been in their tent for hours!>

<Why doesn't he go in his?>



<Patience, brother.>

<I told you, he's a Basitin. Military people. They don't get tired like we do.>

<If we try to kill him here, it might attract the others. We can't risk being outnumbered.>



<But, there's always a weakness.>

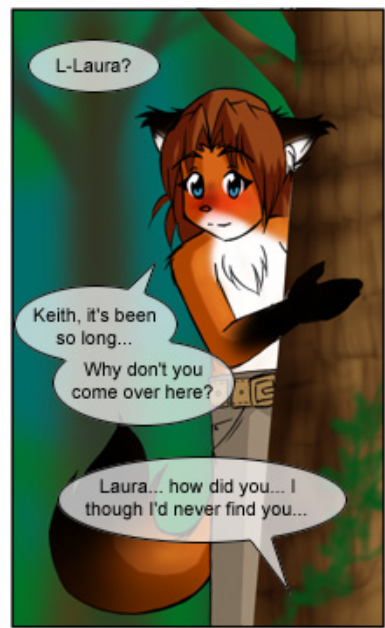
<We need to lure him away from the camp. I'm sure a little... persuasion will do the trick.>

<I'm curious to see what his heart's desire is.>



Keith?
Keith...?

huh?

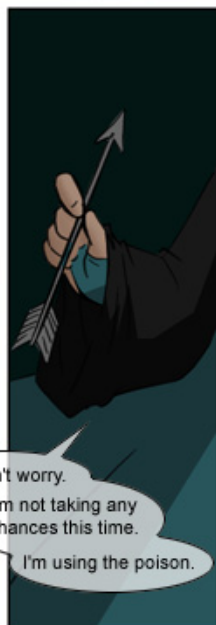
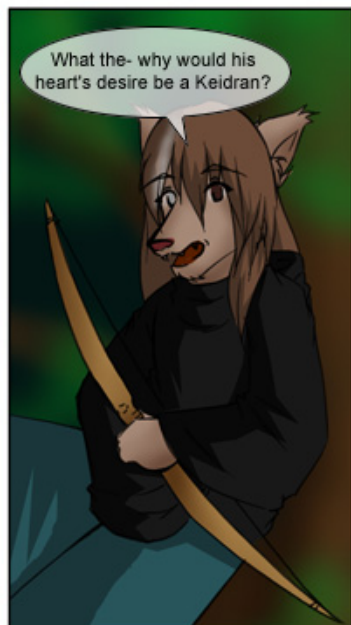


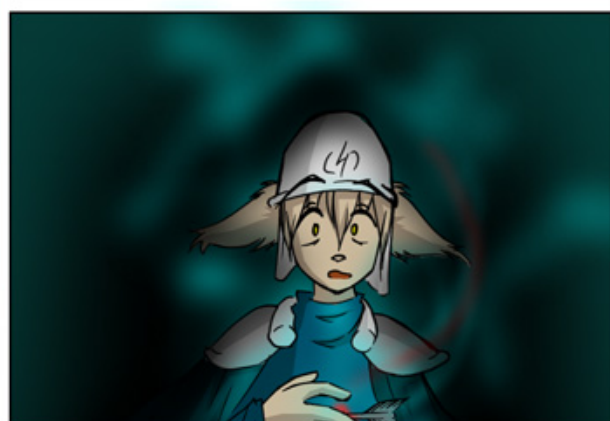
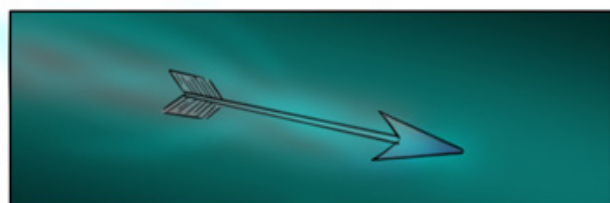
L-Laura?


Keith, it's been so long...

Why don't you come over here?

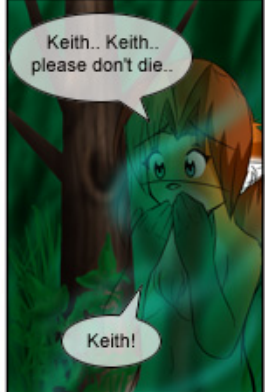
Laura... how did you... I though I'd never find you...








No, oh no!
Keith!




Keith.. Keith..
please don't die..


Keith!



Did.. you just
hear something,
Flora?




Yeah, that sounded
like a girl's voice..



<Good job, Natani,
that illusion of yours gave
us away for sure.>

<The illusion only stays until
the target is taken out.>

<If your "Instant Death" poison
worked better, the illusion would
have vanished sooner!>




Hello? Who's out here?


Keith? Where
are you?

Flora, stay in the tent.


I have a bad
feeling about this...



<Great, the crippled
Templar is on guard.>



<Heh, you know what?
I'm glad. I've always wanted
to see his power.>



<Nata- hey!>

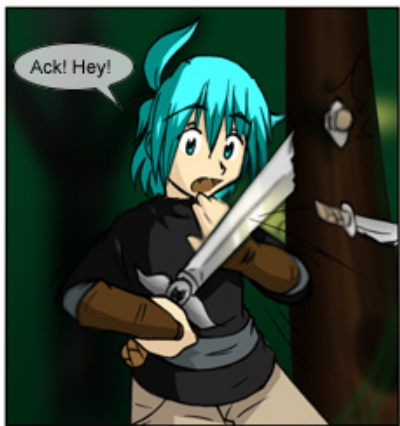
<Y-you idiot! We have
to fight together!>



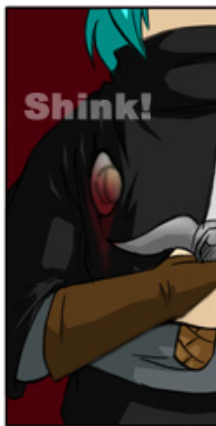
Keith...? Hey, whoever you are, show yourself.

....maybe my imagination's just getting the better of me.

Yeah, yeah.. no one's out here. No Keidran would dare cross me, anyway.



Ack! Hey!



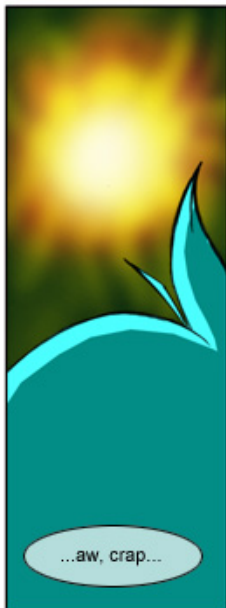
Shink!



Aaah! Those filthy- gaah!
Cowards! Throwing knives! Damn, that hurts!

It'll take a lot more the a few knives to-

Igniras!



...aw, crap...




Shield! Come on!
Shield!
SHIELD!



Graaah!

<So it's true!>
<Even without a reserve of mana, he can still obtain it almost instantly...>

<That's how the Templar do it, they're draining the mana right out of the ground.>



<Clever, Templar.
Very clever.>


<You have better control
of you power then I thought!>

Ugh....

I've got to heal
myself while I can...

<Not so fast, Trace!>

<Dispel magic!>



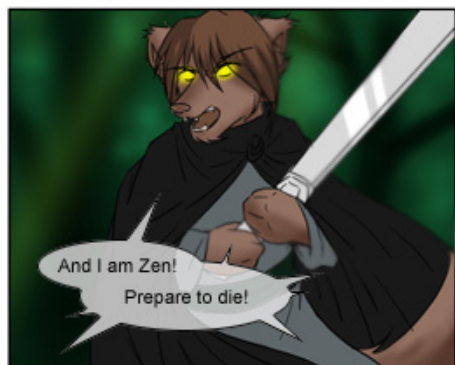
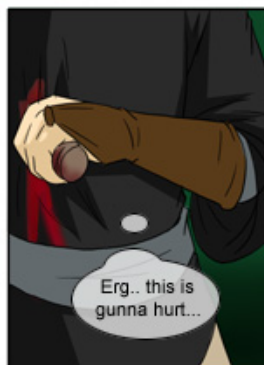
Ah-! I-it...
didn't work!

<Let's see how well you
fair without your magic!>

Ah...!

Gah-!

<Pretty clumsy without
your right hand, aren't you!>



(Shading and highlights will be added later, hopefully.)





Throughout my travels, I've heard a lot of things said about the Basitin.

Most of them weren't too flattering.

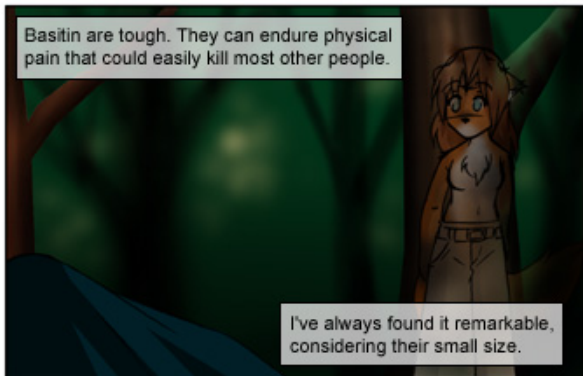


But after the battle in the forest, three things I knew were certain.

One...



Basitin are tough. They can endure physical pain that could easily kill most other people.



I've always found it remarkable, considering their small size.



Two, they are stubborn. Or thickheaded, as I like to say.



And probably most important of all, three. Either by a gift from the gods or simply from thousands of years of living on an island full of deadly toxins, Basitin are, in fact, immune to most poisons.

Oh, they also seem to have a bit of a temper when aggravated.









Trace, you have no idea how long I've wanted to do this.



This is for all of my people- my family that you murdered in cold blood.



Flora... Flora! Listen to me. I'm not going to kill you. I'm just going to make it look like I've killed you.



N-nya?



Listen, I know that spell is making you weak. Just be sure to lie still. I became an assassin to kill the humans, but I will not murder my own kinda.



This has to work. Flora must survive.

W-what about... Trace...

It's too late for him. Natani is about to finish him off. He's just a human anyway.



Prepare to die!



Gah!



Journal entry, May 9th, 477

Mana is the basis of all magic in this world.

ugh...

Unlike Keidran, who must use mana stored in stones...

Grrraah!

Templar have the unique ability to draw mana directly from the earth. However, once all the mana from one location is drained without time to replenish, it is the earth's life-energy that begins to be drawn out.

This is also known as black mana...

It is a very power energy... but most refuse to use it.

For there is always a consequence.

<Teleport!>

uggah...!

What the...?

You...

<How dare you harm my older brother. You'll pay for that, Basitin.>

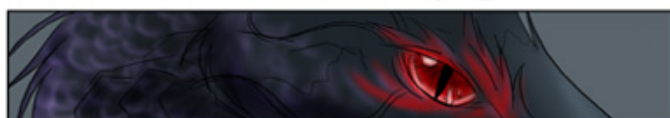
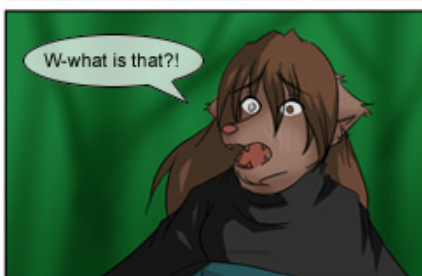
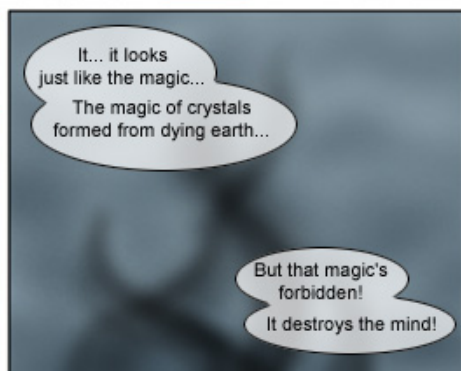
Need more... more mana...


<I took out the great Trace Legacy, I don't think you'll be much of a...>

<...what's this? Why is... the grass dying...?>


From what I've seen, taking life-energy from the earth often causes nervousness, violence, delusions, loss of memory, insanity and sometimes death. It worsens the more it's used. I must be careful how much I use, I can already feel some of these effects taking hold on me...

[scrawled on the side] I'm taking Saria to our house near the Border this afternoon. She always loves it down there.





Man, everyday is the same thing...



I get up, I work, and I go to bed.


It's so boring... I feel like the character in a storybook that only shows up in one scene,

doesn't have a name,


and is only used as a literary device in order to momentarily break-away from the action.

In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if a group of people are off fighting a dragon somewhere *right now*.

While I'm stuck here *working* in order to show another angle of the story.



This sucks...




Why can't something exciting happen to me for once in my life!




Gah!

BEZZAT!



Woah, what the heck was that...



Storm clouds?

But what's that moving in them?



Ah, there you are,
my dear Trace...

Into trouble as
always, I see.



A man-made
dragon...



heh, cute...



Trace, come on!

Snap out of it!
Before that thing
kills us all!

Trace!

Don't let it
control you...

T-they can't...
they can't win...



Fight it, Trace!
Can't you hear
me? It's me, Flora...



Uuh... F-Flora...

I'm here, Trace.

I'm right here
with you, always.



Meanwhile...

I-I just can't fight
something like that!
No amount of gold
is worth this!

I have to get
out of here...



Gah...!

Going somewhere?



Trace! Hey, get up!
You can't pass out now!
This is bad...!



I've got to do
somethi... huh?



Oh no, not
again...



<Going to finish
me, eh Basitin?>

<Then do it!>

There's no way
I can win against that
demon, but...

I've still got two mana
crystals left. If I can just
get away from here...

They're fighting again...

Keith, he's going to kill him...



Keith, stop it!

This is my fight,
Flora, stay out of it.
And tell Trace to
back off to, I don't need
his help to fight.



The dragon - Trace isn't in
control of it anymore!



<Didn't anyone teach you never to take your eyes off your opponent?!>



Igniras!

Agh-!



Actually no... they didn't have to...



That's instinct!





Huff... If I wasn't for the fact that I still need you for my mission...

Well...

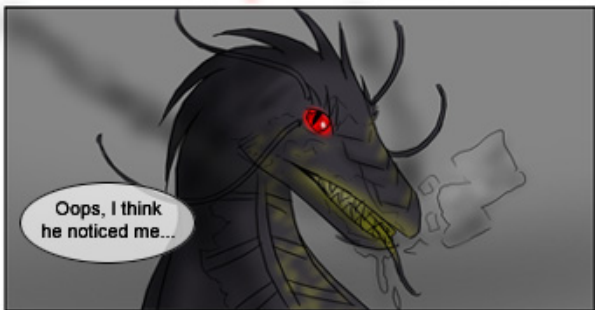
I'd probably still save your ass.

But then I wouldn't have an excuse for it.



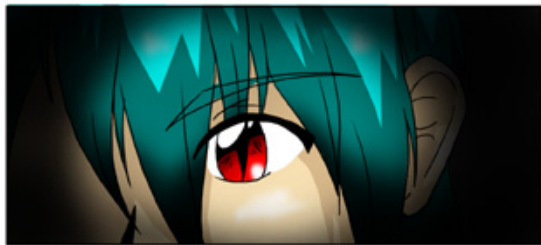
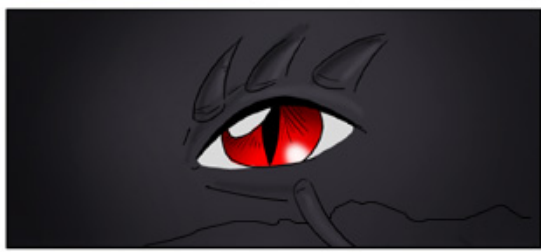
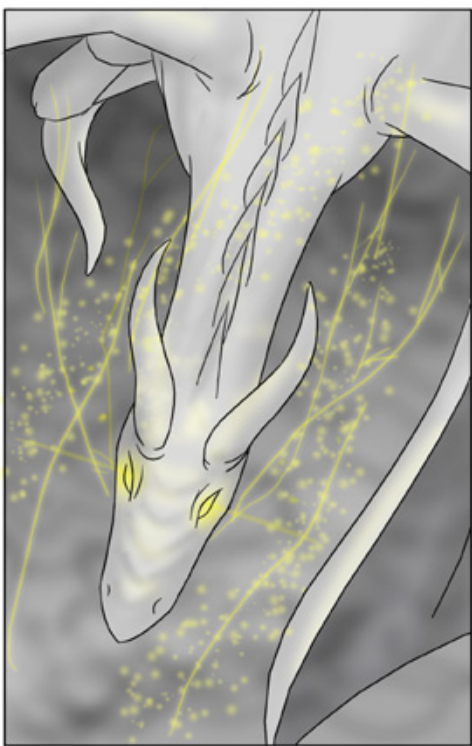
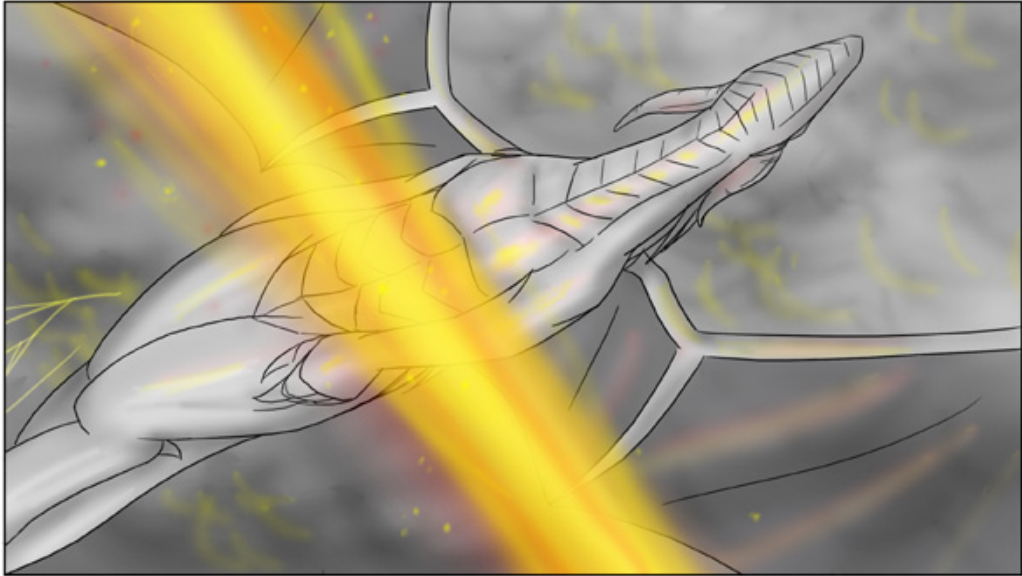
Hm... looks like I'm going to have to interfere...

Burning the barrier of trees between Keidran and human territories can't be good...



Oops, I think he noticed me...







Come on,
lets go!

The forest - my home,
it's burning!

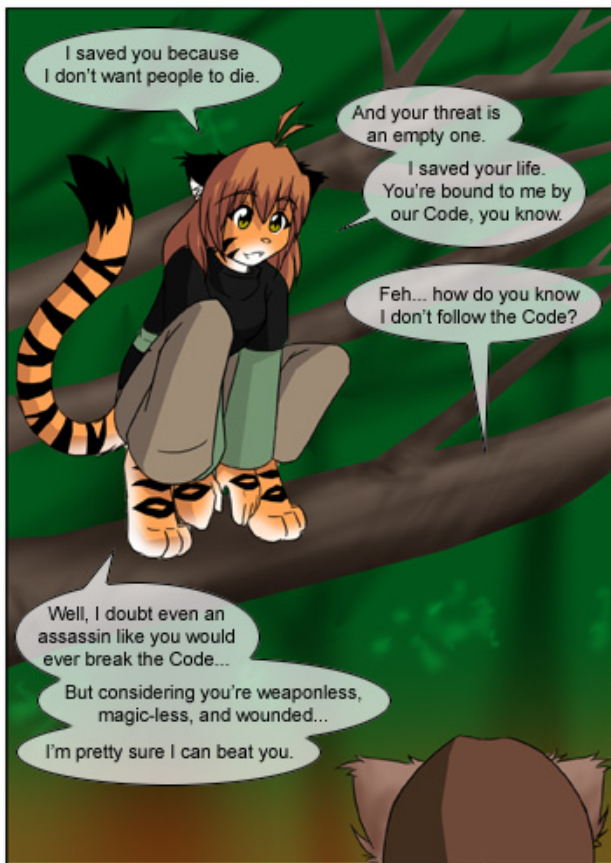
There's nothing we can do.
I see the river over here, come on!



Grr... why are you helping me?
You do know I can still
kill you at any-



Geh... where'd you go?



I saved you because
I don't want people to die.

And your threat is
an empty one.

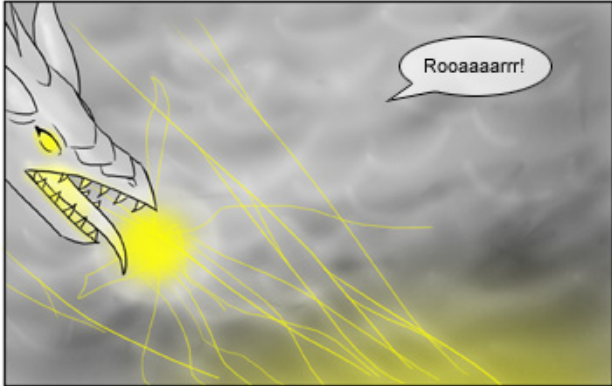
I saved your life.
You're bound to me by
our Code, you know.

Feh... how do you know
I don't follow the Code?

Well, I doubt even an
assassin like you would
ever break the Code...

But considering you're weaponless,
magic-less, and wounded...

I'm pretty sure I can beat you.



Rooooaarr!



Ahhhh!

Trace, what's wrong? Trace!



Heheh...



Keith, we're here!

Flora! You- why is he with you?!

<What'd he say?>

<Nevermind that now,> what's wrong with Trace?



Ugh...

I don't know, I can't get through to him, maybe you should try.

He seems to be in pain.



Trace, what's wrong?

Flora... where are you...



I... I can't see...



Finally, -huff- a break.

Now if only I could find that darn crystal, I could get out of this forest...

This wound is still bleeding... I need to hurry before those three notice I'm still here...



Ah, here it is!

I knew I had one left...

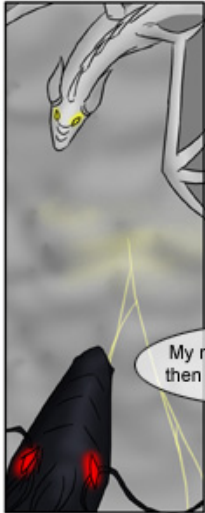


Now I can... transport myself...
I feel sorry for... her...
Such an odd group of people...



She'll most likely be killed out here... Not that I wasn't about to kill her anyway...

But considering they fought off both me and Zen, it's a shame they have to die now...

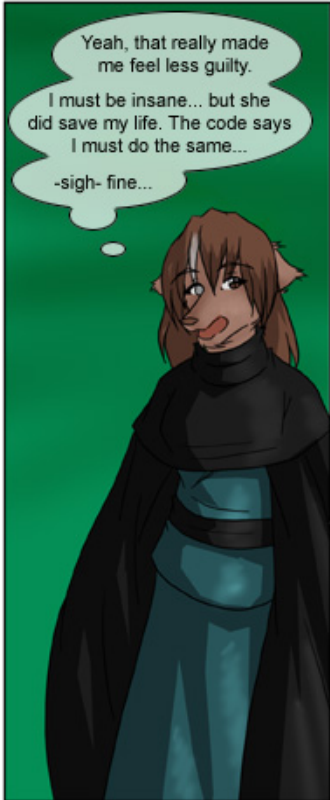


My magic might help, but then I'd be stuck here too!



No, no! I can't be feeling sorry for them now!

No, I'll just go home... They probably won't die in the fire anyway. They could just get eaten...



Yeah, that really made me feel less guilty. I must be insane... but she did save my life. The code says I must do the same... -sigh- fine...



Ah! What's happening to him, Keith?

It's that Keidran! I knew you should have left him!



<There, that should- >
<huh?>

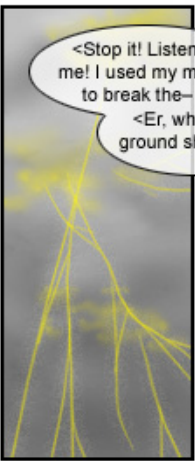


<Wait, what are you?>

Hey! Stop, I was helping you guys!>



<Like I buy that!>



<Stop it! Listen to me! I used my magic to break the- >
<Er, why is the ground shaking?>



<Probably has something to do with that lousy spell of y- woah!>



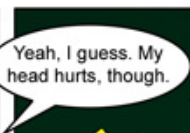
Ack!



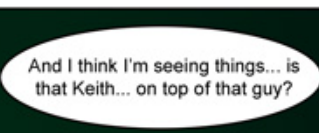
Uh...



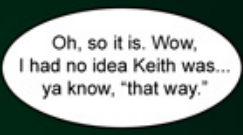
Trace, you're awake!



Yeah, I guess. My head hurts, though.



And I think I'm seeing things... is that Keith... on top of that guy?



Oh, so it is. Wow, I had no idea Keith was... ya know, "that way."



Hey, shut up! I'm not... erm... "that way!"



Hm, and I always thought he had a crush on me... But I guess that can't be possible...

What?! No, it can! I do!



Er... wait... no! I don't...

HA HA

Geh... I'm not gay!



<I can't understand a word they're saying, and something tells me I don't want to know...>

Shouldn't we still be worried about the dragons overhead?

What a wonderful day!

I've finally got that whole tower explosion incident under control and back on schedule.

And I hear they're serving beansprout soup in the kitchen today!

Where is he!?

Hey, get over here!

Where is he?

Where is who...?

You know who I'm talking about, you stupid, dress-wearing scrivener! Your master!

That fool you call the Grand Templar!

I... I'm not sure M-mr. Baron, sir.

I think he might still be in his chambers.

-crash-

Oh... I hope this doesn't have anything to do with Lady Nora. I told Master he shouldn't have employed that dragon.

Hm, I think I'll go have some of that soup now.



Merry Christmas!





Trace, what are you-

I need to concentrate!

I don't really know what I'm doing...
But if I cast that thing, I think I can take the energy back!



What's this? I sense more magic...

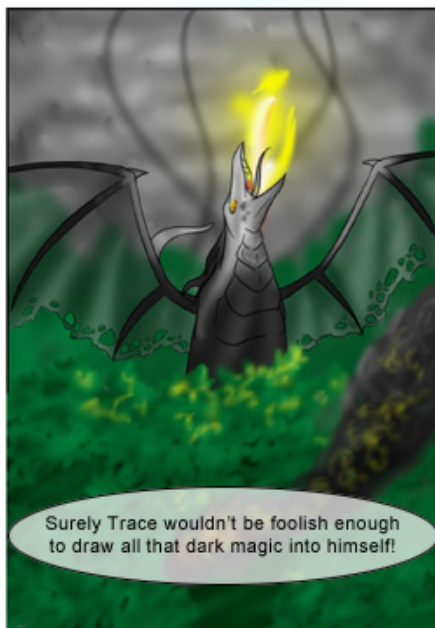
Trace's magic...



PAINTING IN PROGRESS



Something's happening!
The false dragon's energy is being drained... but where is it going? Surely...



Surely Trace wouldn't be foolish enough to draw all that dark magic into himself!



AH!

Trace, what's wrong?



Gah... I-I'm not sure...

It feels like I've been burned...



Trace, I'll finish him off!
Don't go overboard
like you usually do...!

Ah... Trace, did you...
hear that...?
Trace... th-there's another
dragon... and I think it just talked...

It's good to see you again, Euchre.

....

I think it's... landing...

Stay behind me!

As it is to see you, old master.

Please, don't call me that.

Even when you and Flora were on my farm, I never treated either of you like slaves.

Sorry, old habits die hard.

That was a serious wound you had. I'm still amazed how fast you recovered.

I'm old... I've learned to protect myself from such things as death. Though...

I am at the end of my life, one way or another.

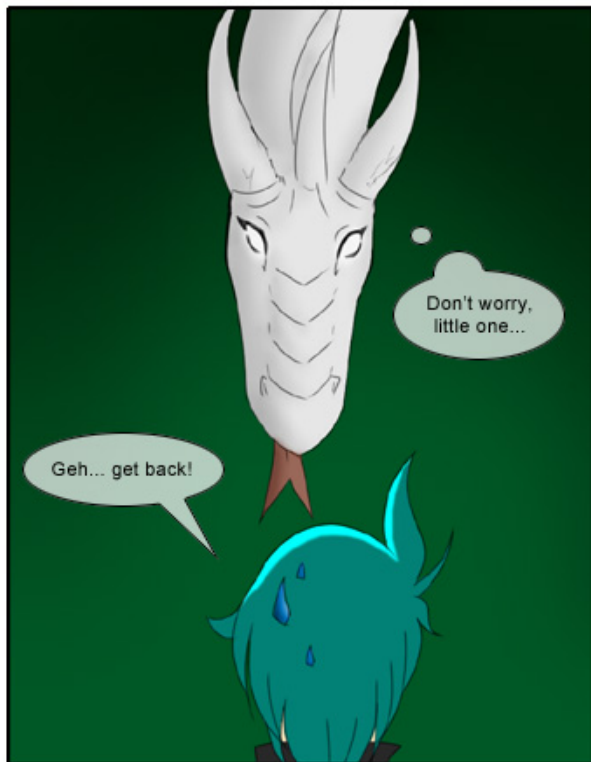
Yes... Aren't we all.

All of Keidran kind will be at its end if the final Tower is allowed to be completed.

Clever, you Templar are.

Using our own instincts against us... a great tragedy is approaching.

Yes, I'm afraid it is.







What's this.. oh, Flora.
Thank goodness.

I wonder where Keith is?

Well, Flora's here.
That's all that matters.

Trace!

Wha... who said that?

Good, you're awake! I went
hunting, I'll be right there, Little One.

I decided to transport you to
Haven Fields, just outside the forest.
Town is just beyond that hill.

Meanwhile...

I've found you at last,
Head Councilman.

So you have.

Herph, you Templar are all the same.
You think your magic puts you above the law.
Don't think we aren't aware of you!

Dragons in the west, fires along
the border, and war at our gates!

Have you forgotten that
you still serve under the King?

The Templar cannot
simply take action on its
own accord as it has!

The King will certainly
see to it that you-
...what is this thing
doing in here?

N-neh... food?

Does it *look* like I want
food right now?

nya... mehbeh...?

Please, don't mind her.

She hasn't been thinking
clearly since being exposed
to the Tower's magic.

Hmph, yes, the Towers.
Anyway, the King wishes
to see you immediately.

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