



Annotated
Grayling
2

by
Arbyk

Here it is, the second chunk of Annotated Grayling.

There are just so many things going on in this arc, and so many eyebrow raising moments, it's hard to string together words about it. I was hitting a stride with the writing, had a lot of ideas to bounce around, and had no idea how to do any of it. There's certainly still quite a lot to enjoy, but that makes the parts that don't work stand out all the more.

But what's done is done! That's both a weakness and a strength for a webcomic. I thought frequently about going back and redoing the comic before it was actually finished particularly because of this arc, but gritted my teeth and tried to keep going instead.

This arc is also when the comic started becoming marginally popular. It was (and still is) embarrassing to deal with the fact that the comic was taking off when it was particularly obnoxious, but I guess that says something about webcomics culture in general.

I still get people who comment to me that they read the comic and thought it was going to be typical puerile yaoi trash, but they persisted for some reason and were surprised to find that it became something else. I'm sure there are dozens more people who won't read the comic simply because the style reeks of BL and they're not interested in the genre. The derision towards yaoi is a whole topic unto itself that I won't go into here for now.

Re-reading old Grayling with a critical eye and actually taking notes is definitely helping me remember it better. I have always had some memory problems, so doing this is kind of a new journey for me. My attitude has changed so much from this time in so many ways, not least of all in terms of how I regard webcomics.

I still really like webcomics and I think it's a promising and innovative genre, accessible and flexible and so many other good things. I love how many webcomics are free to read and offer really unusual topic matter and can talk about literally anything. But it's also sometimes embarrassing, especially in terms of the community and financial issues.

My wife is a big Pictures for Sad Children fan, and what went down for Janet Harbinger, and how other "successful" webcomics people treated her over it, solidified a lot of vague concepts I'd internalized about webcomics culture for a long time. There's a lot of

exploitation and abuse within internet communities - the expectation that you "give it your all," that you have an obligation to fulfill your dreams at the expense of your health (regardless of how well you're paid), all these social pressures to overwork and "prove yourself." Everyone was volunteering to work themselves to death, as long as it was for "art."

Only now are people finally unpacking this, and it's very validating in a way - but also a huge downer. The industry has normalized and wildly exploited these attitudes for a very long time, and it's horrible to see. Comics aren't worth killing yourself over. It's weird to struggle for so long trying to get into the thick of things, knowing it may never happen because you're a weirdo making weird products, and then realize that you've been trying to break into a prison this whole time.

So, the idea of being a "real artist" making a living off my drawing is a really complicated and upsetting topic for me anymore. I think I'm most comfortable relegating my creative outlets as hobbies and keeping my finances separate. But that means I have to sacrifice a lot of my life to work a dayjob. I'm a low-energy person who can only handle a certain amount of activity a day and no more - I can't go to school AND work, for example. I just get too tired. So my life has been pretty limited in that respect. But I'm doing pretty well for myself and I'm happy to be supporting and helping my friends. There's a lot for me to look forward to.

- Arby

May 2018

Of all nights, he picks one during a fucking HURRICANE.

I can hear his heartbeat -- we're close.

There he is!

Where?!


On the ground.

I love stick-Smoke here.

WHY THE HELL MUST YOU SLEEP THROUGH EVERY CRISIS?!

Not helping, Fern.

In this page, Fern's coat looks incredibly impractical. He'd be soaked. It's definitely a "fashion" duster.



I was easing into drawing smaller eyes at this point. I also put a lot of effort into the cinematic quality of this page, since it was Curtis' "swan song," complete with stupid lyrics.

I must have been born under a bad sign.

Heh.

Rae is spooky. I wouldn't want to run into him in a dark, dank alley way. Especially without pants on.

Darcy was a character belonging to a friend, who dated Lem in our text roleplay. It wasn't so much a deliberate choice on my part, just something that grew organically. Lem was never supposed to be gay & Darcy will be a girl in the new comic. Darcy will still be a vampire, however. I'm looking forward to depicting Faidian vampires. I love vampire stories & always wanted to develop my own definition & rules for the creature. I think there's a lot of potential for vampires, but it's not really explored much for whatever reason.

I used to love drawing landscapes at dawn or sunset with Tower in them. For me, the image of Tower is really iconic for the story, and would feature heavily if it was ever animated.

This is a cat ownership joke. I never had anything specifically in mind, but I can think of a few examples...My family cat, Jerry, once delicately placed a single drop of icy liquid snot on my eyelid as I lay in my bed. A cat I live with nowadays, Gil, performs "the Gil Chill," wherein he smears his nose & licks an area of your skin, & then breathes on it, chilling the area and making for an incredibly unpleasant experience. This is the kind of thing Smoke is doing to Lem.





Well, now that you've gotten me up at the crack of dawn, are you going to clue me in as to why you're here? I certainly hope it's not just because Cal passed out again. He does that for attention half the time, you know.

Call Mayaner, Lem. You both need to answer some questions. Now.

Fern ~handling the situation~

This scene is so anti-climactic considering the importance of what's happening. I hadn't really put together how significant this was for the story yet, so it's pretty cringey for me. Even though the art was getting a bit better, in a few ways (certainly not all ways...they look very gaunt)



All right, done.

This was the early aughts, & coming off the Whedon 90s, "humorous" writing was of course snarky mcsnarksnark forced-negativity traded barbs, forever, for no reason. I guess Lem has plenty of excuses to be annoyed here, but this kind of bland snarkiness isn't really appropriate for what's happening. I'm trying to make it serious by having them pretentiously lecture each other, but there's no emotional insight to this scene.

I ended up not exploring this much, but Lem has an affinity for insects.

If this is another thing like the locust incident, I'm leaving you.

Well, Cal and Lem coexisting in the same room without violence. This is a rarity.

You called?

Yes indeed, Fern has something to ask us.

Herp derp we're serious now so we have to talk like weird bitchy robots

I had sooo much trouble controlling facial shapes & it took me a very long time to even get any variance going. May is supposed to have a round face! I was trying but failing. I still have trouble with this, though.

I also could NOT draw May's hair the way I wanted. I admit, my inability to draw her pixie cut turned me off of drawing her for a really long time. It's silly looking back now...

You know, we'd always thought Cal had a split personality. Often when he hit his violent episodes, his eyes would turn a different color, his voice would change... We weren't really sure what to call him then. But it seems that his personality wasn't split -- he was two personalities smashed together.

I had a nightmare where I y, put something over it

could sense it a mile off, and it was far from good.

A brave effort of a panel establishing what Lem's apartment looks like, but there's way too much text in this panel.

I may be only a lowly secondary, but it's my task to look out for the safety of my primary. So I think you two owe me an explanation.

See, May? I always thought your idea was stupid and now look what's happened.

Are you asking to get smacked? You say that as though you had nothing to do with

This line is pretty true to Lem's character, though I would probably draw him with a funnier expression, now. It took me a long time to loosen up and do goofy faces, too. Even though I loved doing jokes in my comics, I was still struggling to do "serious" looking art so I could do a range of dramatic situations. I also started trying to avoid doing things that felt too "anime" because I felt like I couldn't pull it off. Being self-conscious, though, made things kind of stiff.

I definitely don't think May would even jokingly threaten Lem with violence, now. She'd be less quick to anger too.

This is intolerable, May! If he gets into Faidia, you realize what the repercussions could be?! You have to go NOW and lock him up again!

You can tell that this is important dialogue because of how small it is, and how it's disappearing into the background color.

Wow, it sounds so simple when you put it that way. I'll just go politely ask him to return to our brother's chest, then.

You KNOW what I mean! Isn't there some way we could get rid of him permanently?!

Be quiet, all of you.

Oh good! Cal, you shared a mind with him for a long time. You should know how to destroy him, right?

No, I mean it. Shut up.

Another weird thing about my style at this time was the flared cuffs & pant legs. It wasn't just Fern who was getting a ballooning effect. This was a wonky thing I didn't even like, but I got into a habit of doing it & didn't control it at all.

None of you knows what you're talking about.

We're the people responsible for this situation, and therefore, we are the people who are going to perform the search.

And Lem, you are not so much as to TOUCH him, is that understood?

This is such forced dialogue. Lem shouldn't have to tell the others this; they freakin' know! It's just there to explain what's going on to the audience.

I still like the idea of the elementals having stupid thematic outfits, but I never felt like I made it land. Like I need to make them stupider and go full camp, or stop trying altogether. I'd try & do it, then feel kind of embarrassed because it was so goofy. In the end I think I'd still like to play with various stupid outfits & address changing fashions more frequently, but also the animal & "specter" forms should cover the function of these robes anyway. This is something based entirely on the childhood game that Grayling is based on - the various characters wore robes that matched their element. Kind of like a video game thing.

Lem definitely has one of the weakest outfits. Is he wearing a brown t-shirt under there? I still have trouble drawing suits - they just end up looking like bathrobes.

I do still like May's outfit a lot.

Not like I reasoned this out at the time, but it is kind of smart for Lem to have a sword here. If they don't want to engage in a magical battle and risk polluting the city, they're better off using mortal style weapons. At the time though I just thought it was cool & then got embarrassed because it was so trite. Even tiny story choices like this can put you through all kinds of emotional roller coasters...

Cal's line here... ugh. The sentiment of this is accurate, but the way I wrote this line is awful. This is like stuff people would shout during a bad LARP.

Everyone split up .. Raise a call if you find him, and remember, don't provoke him.

Yes, yes, I heard you the first time...



Get away from there, honey..➤

Momma...? I think there's a
hurt kitty down there...

Yeah, sure...Rae is a
"kitty." A cute kitty.
Who is terrible

Now that Curtis is dead, I guess it's time
to show Rae in a sympathetic light. I
mean a pathetic light. I mean this is
some silly hurt/comfort trope stuff. I was
nuts about that stuff for a time. Now it
makes me wanna hurl.

“*gah*”

A lot of the items on this list were actually things that guys said to me, or said to my friends. W

Why don't you pay attention to me?
You HATE me don't you? You don't
support my projects, you just pretend
to, why are you such a bitch? I don't
understand girls. They're supposed
to be soft and smell nice and tell
me I'm wonderful like mom does
but then they go and have personalities
and make me feel bad about myself..
Which is really awful because you
know I have really low self esteem
high high high high high high high

Dyenitael ce, gja sooc'fi koo
supporé ce? lo isa elive hestelé.

I had written that Faidian glossary, I was gonna use it.

What a strange introduction for Mid! In one of the B-plot b&w strips. Doing some kind of fish out of water thing. I kept doing this - this is just a slightly tweaked version of Cal's introduction. The character being oblique, confusing, & putting up walls in the way of communication on purpose for no reason. This was an easy way for me to quickly and cheaply add interest to characters and make it "rewarding" once the protagonists figure out how to talk to them, a holdover from text roleplay.

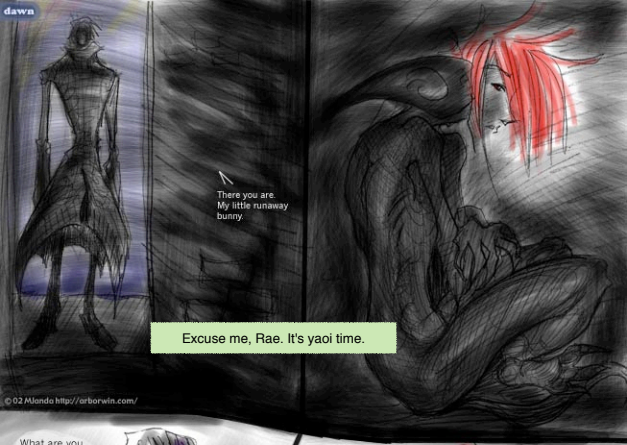
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Faguem

WOW! An attractive, strangely colored, ignorant foreign girl! SHE'LL understand me!

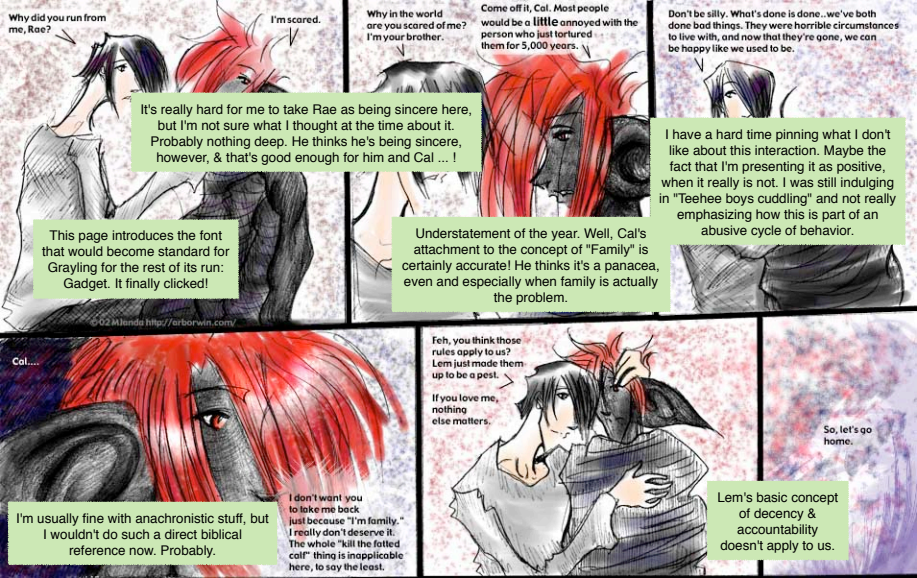
Oh brother.

This is definitely commentary about Megatokyo. I had realized it was bad.



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Why did you run from me, Rae?

I'm scared.

Why in the world are you scared of me? I'm your brother.

Come off it, Cal. Most people would be a little annoyed with the person who just tortured them for 5,000 years.

Don't be silly. What's done is done...we've both done bad things. They were horrible circumstances to live with, and now that they're gone, we can be happy like we used to be.

It's really hard for me to take Rae as being sincere here, but I'm not sure what I thought at the time about it. Probably nothing deep. He thinks he's being sincere, however, & that's good enough for him and Cal ... !

This page introduces the font that would become standard for Grayling for the rest of its run: Gadget. It finally clicked!

Understatement of the year. Well, Cal's attachment to the concept of "Family" is certainly accurate! He thinks it's a panacea, even and especially when family is actually the problem.

I have a hard time pinning what I don't like about this interaction. Maybe the fact that I'm presenting it as positive, when it really is not. I was still indulging in "Teehee boys cuddling" and not really emphasizing how this is part of an abusive cycle of behavior.

Cal....

I'm usually fine with anachronistic stuff, but I wouldn't do such a direct biblical reference now. Probably.

I don't want you to take me back just because "I'm family." I really don't deserve it. The whole "kill the fatted calf" thing is inapplicable here, to say the least.

Feh, you think those rules apply to us? Lem just made them up to be a pest.

If you love me, nothing else matters.

So, let's go home.

Lem's basic concept of decency & accountability doesn't apply to us.



Whatever you wanted to show me, Fern,
it'd better be good.

I found
the remains
of one of your
minions, Curtis.

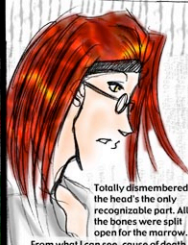


Eeck.

The cute kitty did something fucked up! I don't remember if there was really motivation to this beyond showing that Rae is dangerous & doesn't value other people unless they benefit him. Also, I guess he was hungry. Even so, this is really over the top. He didn't really have any reason to hate Curtis this much. It was also a convenient way to get rid of Curtis, but it backfired because killing him made people like him like a million times more.

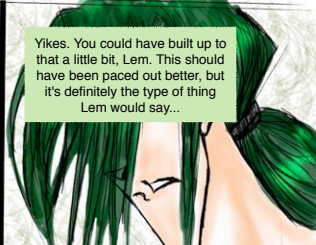
Fern...what happened to your legs...
I was a little too ambitious with the
anatomy I could handle here.

Where is Fern pointing?
Where is Fern looking?



Totally dismembered...
the head's the only
recognizable part. All
the bones were split
open for the marrow...
From what I can see, cause of death

Yikes. You could have built up to
that a little bit, Lem. This should
have been paced out better, but
it's definitely the type of thing
Lem would say...



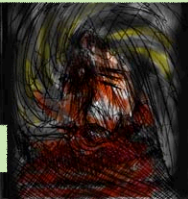
Given the next page,
this rushed page was
supposed to book-
end the whole
"wander around the
city" episode. It ends
with a bit of a fart,
doesn't it? I was
definitely losing
control of the
narrative at this point.
I was juggling a lot of
different threads and
it all kinda came
tumbling out in a
gnarled mess.

It's strange, Fern. As parents, we
all like to believe we start out with
the best for our children... our goal
is to raise them to be independent.

But all we end up wanting is to
protect our own interests to make up for
something to control, something
to OWE us something.

The children society tells us we
become nothing but tools, and
their flesh is thrown to the dogs.

We're done here. Burn what's left.



What a hardass, eh? Annoying, stubborn, unfair, callous...that's life for you, and that's also a good sum up of my "social interaction" as a secondary elemental ... "Do this, or I'll hurt you very, very badly."



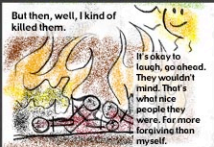
Cut to a bizarrely disembodied internal monologue from Fern talking directly to the audience about the nature of violence among elementals? What?

I think this was me realizing I needed to re-center Fern as a main character after getting rid of Curtis.

I used to live with much more amiable people.



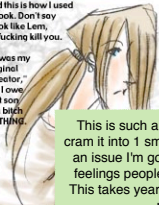
But then, well, I kind of killed them.



It's okay to laugh, go ahead. They wouldn't mind. That's what nice people they were. Far more forgiving than myself.

And this is how I used to look. Don't say I look like Lem, I'll fucking kill you.

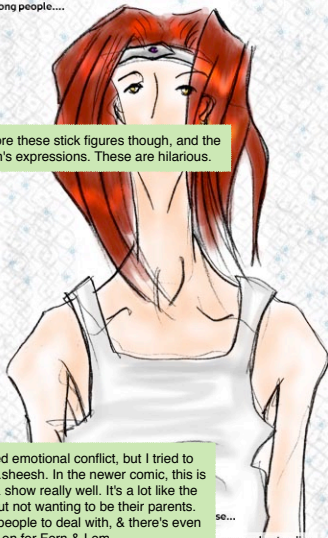
He was my original "creator," but I owe that son of a bitch NOTHING.



This is such a complicated emotional conflict, but I tried to cram it into 1 small panel...sheesh. In the newer comic, this is an issue I'm going to try & show really well. It's a lot like the feelings people have about not wanting to be their parents. This takes years for most people to deal with, & there's even more going on for Fern & Lem.

It's strange how depravity works among people....

I adore these stick figures though, and the sun's expressions. These are hilarious.



So...

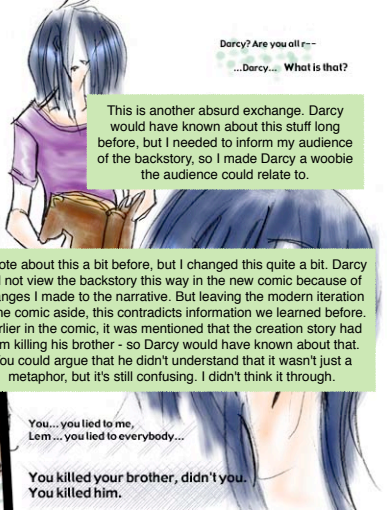
even understanding "means."



S'that you, Darc?

I'm home...
everything's
straightened
out...

Lem, that's not true.
There's nothing straight
about this comic.



Darcy? Are you all r--

...Darcy... What is that?

This is another absurd exchange. Darcy would have known about this stuff long before, but I needed to inform my audience of the backstory, so I made Darcy a woobie the audience could relate to.

I wrote about this a bit before, but I changed this quite a bit. Darcy will not view the backstory this way in the new comic because of changes I made to the narrative. But leaving the modern iteration of the comic aside, this contradicts information we learned before. Earlier in the comic, it was mentioned that the creation story had Lem killing his brother - so Darcy would have known about that. You could argue that he didn't understand that it wasn't just a metaphor, but it's still confusing. I didn't think it through.

You... you lied to me,
Lem ... you lied to everybody...

You killed your brother, didn't you.
You killed him.



anything....?

Mid loves sugar
and can't turn
down a treat.

Uh... Fletcher...
you do realize...

I blacked out so much of this
stuff from my memory. I forgot
Curtis mistook Mid for a girl. I
want to forget again...

I will get you anything, my
mom will pay for it!

A cinnamon
bun would
be nice.

scuttle

Well, it looks like I've blown
my cover. No worries,
you're the one I needed to
speak to anyway. You're
Morse, right? Cals' new
friend?

Mid's "cover," of talking
in a language no one
understands...ok.

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HERE'S YOUR
THING! LOVE ME NOW?????

I like
Morse's
dialogue
here

Listen, I don't know
anything, and at this
point, I don't WANT to
know anything.
Please...just...leave
me alone, okay?

Ah, I remember a
time when I would
say something to
that effect every
single day. Didn't
get me anywhere,
though.

It's... it's
beautiful!

She's
talking about
me!!!!

Oooooohh...

I am SURROUNDED
by weirdos.

WILL YOU TAKE CARE OF ME LIKE MY MOM DOES???

Of course! Ah, Delye, perfect timing.

Hola! Here I am. You said you needed me? >

Indeed I did ^^
Would you mind entertaining this gentleman for a bit? He's VERY lonely.

ANOTHER HOT GIRL ???

The supply of feminine-looking boys that pop out of nowhere must be quite high where you come from.

Isn't it convenient? He just got out of the mental ward, too.
Come on, we have serious work to do.

Erm.... Right.

... and where'd the laptop come from?

My pants?

Duuhh...

Mmm, of course.
My, my, aren't you a definitive example of masculinity...

This will definitely not happen in the new comic. Lem is not like this. I was pretty bent on making him a villain in the old comic, but I disagree entirely with this characterization now. Domestic abuse makes him totally repulsive. I just thought this kind of thing was angst fodder when I was 19, but now I find it stomach-churning. It's something I only got perspective on as an adult.

I told you not to touch t

Stop it, Lem --

I TOLD you!

I need to know the truth! You won't tell me what's wrong. What do you think I'd just sit aside like an idiot while you --

SHUT UP.

Lem ... -- LEM! STOP IT! YOU'RE HURTING ME! -- LEM --

Don't bother, it'll heal in a few minutes.

Sir, here's the water you requested

This is also gross because this exchange is also to show "Darcy is strong!!!" This didn't need to happen to show that Darcy's strong. It's really bad romance novel grade nonsense. I must have been feeling wangsty so I did a scene like this.

Sir... Sir... Lemanerial, he --

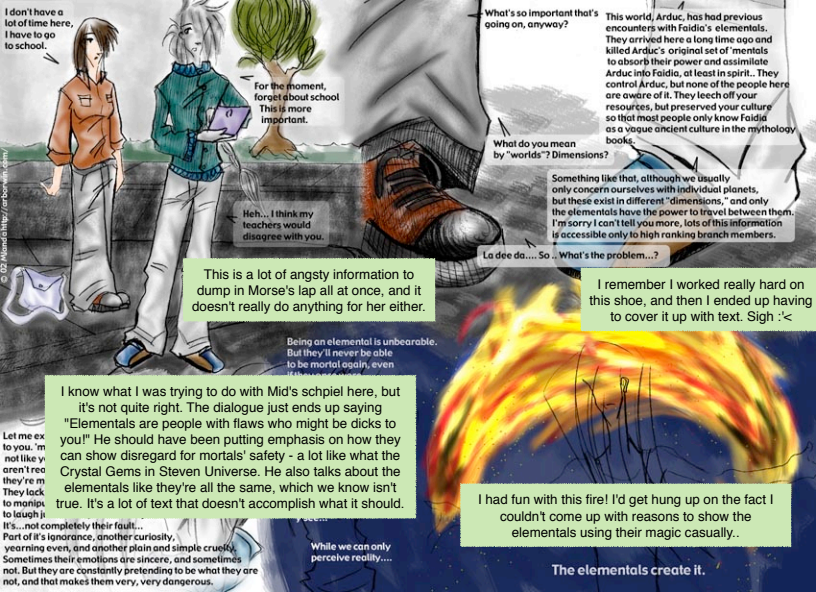
No, I don't want to hear it. Just tell me where he went.

....
I'm going out for awhile.

He left without telling anyone

Sir.. you're badly hurt... Should I call the doctor?

This should be Morse's job! In fact, I have to do some silly *deus ex machina* stuff later on in the comic to explain why Morse even knows the same information! More mistakes with characters' roles and the flow of information.



I don't have a lot of time here, I have to go to school.

For the moment, forget about school. This is more important.

Heh... I think my teachers would disagree with you.

This is a lot of angsty information to dump in Morse's lap all at once, and it doesn't really do anything for her either.

Being an elemental is unbearable. But they'll never be able to be mortal again, even if they want to.

What's so important that's going on, anyway?

This world, Arduc, has had previous encounters with Faidia's elementals. They arrived here a long time ago and killed Arduc's original set of 'mentals to absorb their power and assimilate Arduc into Faidia, at least in spirit.. They control Arduc, but none of the people here are aware of it. They leech off your resources, but preserved your culture so that most people only know Faidia as a vague ancient culture in the mythology books.

What do you mean by "worlds"? Dimensions?

Something like that, although we usually only concern ourselves with individual planets, but these exist in different "dimensions," and only the elementals have the power to travel between them. I'm sorry I can't tell you more, lots of this information is accessible only to high ranking branch members.

La dee da.... So .. What's the problem...?

I remember I worked really hard on this shoe, and then I ended up having to cover it up with text. Sigh :<

I know what I was trying to do with Mid's schpiel here, but it's not quite right. The dialogue just ends up saying "Elementals are people with flaws who might be dicks to you!" He should have been putting emphasis on how they can show disregard for mortals' safety - a lot like what the Crystal Gems in Steven Universe. He also talks about the elementals like they're all the same, which we know isn't true. It's a lot of text that doesn't accomplish what it should.

Let me ex to you. I'm not like y aren't rea they're m They lack to manipi to laugh j

It's...not completely their fault... Part of it's ignorance, another curiosity, yearning even, and another plain and simple cruelty. Sometimes their emotions are sincere, and sometimes not. But they are constantly pretending to be what they are not, and that makes them very, very dangerous.

While we can only perceive reality....

I had fun with this fire! I'd get hung up on the fact I couldn't come up with reasons to show the elementals using their magic casually..

The elementals create it.

It's not a sure thing... but from past experience, we know that the kind of behavior they've been displaying lately is a good recipe for disaster....

Our elemental of evil, or chaos, depending on how you look at it, has just been let loose after 5,000 years of imprisonment. For now, it seems he's taking a break, but he'll be back to Arduc to finish what he started.

And what is it he started?

We don't know. That's why we need your help. Whatever it is he wants, you're a key factor in finding it.

I don't know how... I'm just a kid...

I have a cousin I haven't seen since we were little... he was supposed to have gone schizophrenic or something, because the last I heard of him, he was in an institution.

It always seemed odd... nobody wanted to talk about it...

I didn't really know them that well, so it didn't seem like a big deal.

That sounds like a lead to me! Now we're getting somewhere.

Don't worry about it. It's probably something you'd never even suspect. Let's start off this way... Is there anything unusual in any way whatsoever about your family or its history? Involvement in wars, strange deaths, mental illness, congenital defects, that sort of thing.

uh..Jeez... no... Well.. except for mental illness.. I guess there's some depression on my mother's side.. but...

....Did you just plug the computer into your neck? Isn't that bordering on the eccentric?

Hey, you're the one with the crazy relative.

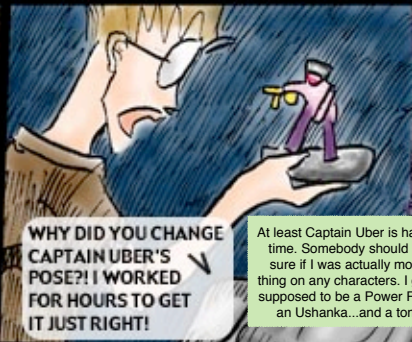


MOM IS MAKING US SNACKS! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!

The length of Delye's dress changed.

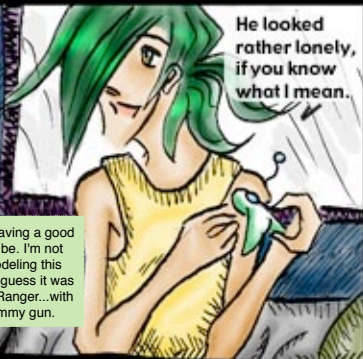
You have so many neat things in your room!!! What's this toy plane do?

OH MY GOD YOU TOUCHED MY PRECIOUS THINGS??!?!?!?



WHY DID YOU CHANGE CAPTAIN UBER'S POSE?! I WORKED FOR HOURS TO GET IT JUST RIGHT!

At least Captain Uber is having a good time. Somebody should be. I'm not sure if I was actually modeling this thing on any characters. I guess it was supposed to be a Power Ranger...with an Ushanka...and a tommy gun.



He looked rather lonely, if you know what I mean.

WHY IS MY POSTER STRAIGHTENED??
OMG YOU CLEANED UP THE DUNE
OF GARBAGE ON MY DESK!

AND THAT'S NOT JUST A TOY PLANE,
IT'S A T-35923
3492495
COOKIE 5323
ROADSKY
RANGER
SPECIAL
EDITION!
BLAH BLAHE
BLAH BLAHE
BLAHBLAHBA
BHALFDetc.



Fletcher shouldn't have a chulhu doll. Maybe it's from an anime. He doesn't strike me as the Lovecraft type.



munch munch

While I was & am a big anime fan, I dated someone in HS who was obsessed with Sailor Moon & was a total bore. Sailor Moon was a lot more fun and more interesting than they made it out to be, but I was in Delye's position here quite a lot of the time. Though I didn't eat any models.

don't want to make the impression that they're horrible people...none of them are, at heart. Especially Cal. But they've had hard lives, and it shows.

Cal was never anything but kind to me...

<I'm not surprised...Cal is a sweet person.

Here's my house...

Nice, nonsensical backpedal there, Mid.
"These horrible people aren't all that bad, really"

This is your cousin?

Umm.. Yeah, that's him.
That's an old photo, though.
He's about three years older than me, so he should be 19 by now.

Heh, yeah, we both resemble our dads. My dad and uncle are twins.

I absolutely did not remember I made Rhodes and Morse' fathers twins. That's a weird detail I made up on the spot while doing this page and never used it again.

name?

Rhodes.
Dunno why they named him something so weird...

I can't tell her this yet... But the aura around this photo is mangled beyond repair. He's undergone a transformation worse than death...which means...

Where is he being kept?

I forgot I even did this! Photo auras! I don't know if it would ever occur to me to do something like this again. Spectral photography isn't something you should make canon and then never use again. Most of the magic I think of for this world has to do with peoples' conscious and subconscious thoughts. It's a little more ephemeral and flexible than more tactile magic like spectral photography. I don't mind the idea, it's just something I would have to be more consistent about for it to work.

The records show that when the branches invaded Arduc and assimilated its elemental power, all of the native elementals were destroyed and their power absorbed by their Paidian counterpart.



Mid's report: "That sounds like bullshit, but I believe it."



But Arduc, unlike many other worlds assimilated by Paidia, possessed a native elemental of evil. Paidia's elemental of evil, Raenerial, was not available to absorb the power of Arduc's evil elemental, and so it escaped destruction as the only living member of the Arducian branches. Raenerial, newly freed of his imprisonment, is now searching for this elemental in order to collect his due.

I have good reason to believe

This entire line of inquiry of Mid's isn't going to appear like this in the new comic. The idea of there being no equivalent elementals to Rae in these other worlds, and Rae fixating on Sutyenner for this reason, is absurd to me now in light of other developments I've made to the way all of this works.

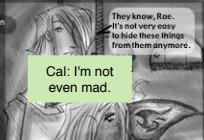
But, y'know, it won't explain the motives or actions of the character.



The power this elemental Raenerial's strength. It not fall into Raenerial

A full dispatch of Call requested to assuage the the mortals involved, a of the possessed mortal effects of malignant el human mortals is little Respectfully submitted, Toogaro Callanerial (Mid

(Edonalokce, or "diamond palace" Callanerialian hold)

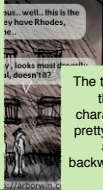


They know, Rae. It's not very easy to hide these things from them anymore.

Cal: I'm not even mad.

What IS interesting about this report is that Mid, by divesting this information to all of the elementals, is doing something that's still accurate to his character: though he's Cal's minion, he is actually beholden to all of the elementals under certain circumstances. He's obligated to serve in all of the elementals' best interests, even if it means a "betrayal" to Cal. If something poses a threat to the elemental structure, Mid has an obligation to inform everyone about it, regardless of branch allegiances. The establishment of this arrangement will receive more attention in the new comic. I'm surprised to see that I had enacted it this early. Mid is a weird character magically - an "elemental of elementals" in a way.

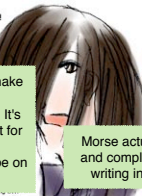
...ces like
sons, so
ess the
ne was not
e for life
ause that
ms
blems
es' parents
home" to
ng people



The text flow in this panel is reversed. I still make this kind of mistake, because you have a character on the left but who speaks second. It's pretty easy to mess this up. I had to stare at it for a few seconds before I realized I read it backwards. Morse's dialogue should at least be on the bottom half of the panel.



Isn't he an elemental? You all warn me against coming



Morse acts and compl writing in

Okay, okay! I'm sorry! You don't have to be scared of Fern, he's a secondary, which means he was a mortal once.



Smoke, Fern, and I were assigned to protect you.

Hmph.



We're here. Hey Mid.... Oh, yay, another nuthouse with barred windows. How convenient.



We can put Smoke in it. The mangy furball nearly smothered me last night.

Oh, Fern. You need to calm down. This is serious.

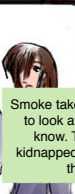


I'll be serious, right after I shove that ratly flea-infested---

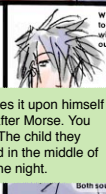
Shhh... You know he's just after the body heat.

If heat's what he wants I'll acquaint him with the microwave.

SHHHH!



Smoke takes it upon himself to look after Morse. You know. The child they kidnapped in the middle of the night.



Would you like to break into the hospital with them, or stay outside with me?



Both sound so appealing.



Anyway, what am I burning today? Where? When? Are fireworks legal here?

Ahahahaha... FERN...

In the modern comic pyromaniac. It's a tr



Yes?

I'm sorry to disturb you, ma'am... but I'm your brother Lem's boyfriend, Darcy. I was wondering if you could tell me the truth about your brothers... what happened, and all ...



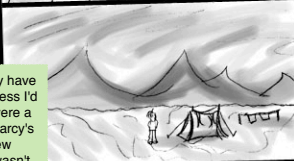
Why the heck does Darcy have to introduce himself? I guess I'd decided May and Lem were a lot more distant or that Darcy's relationship was a new development that May wasn't aware of because of her hermit lifestyle. This is silly though.

Here it comes - I think this is my most embarrassing info dump!

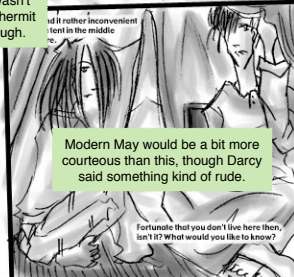
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Okay. Take off your shoes and come in.



and it rather inconvenient tent in the middle here.



Modern May would be a bit more courteous than this, though Darcy said something kind of rude.

Fortunate that you don't live here then, isn't it? What would you like to know?

Our parents are the dietties Sun and Universe. Cal and I were fraternal twins. He was born first, making him the oldest and most powerful entity of Faidia.

Our father wasn't faithful, and had another child awhile after with the Moon. The Sun was horribly jealous, and wanted the child destroyed. He was our half-brother, Raenerial.

Moon brought the child to Cal to keep safe. Cal raised him like his own. They were very close.

Then, for reason of us and the Sun c Universe another Lemone our brother c later to become the Sun's favorite child.

Even then I had very little interest in what was going on. Rae and Cal didn't have what you would call a normal sibling relationship, but there was no one else BUT us back then. There were no societal taboos or anything of that sort... Lem made up all that stuff later.

Not long after Rae left, the Sun decided suddenly she was interested in Lem again, and took him away. It was easy enough to do. Cal didn't seem as wonderful anymore to Lem, especially now that he was grieving after the missing child. The Sun offered him power... taught him how to build his own little world to control... How to use his power to

The Sun had no interest in raising babies, so Lem was dumped on Cal, too. Rae was a teenager by the time Lem arrived, and for awhile, if I remember correctly, they were all very happy together...but Rae began to feel excluded... I doubt Cal did it on purpose... Lem is the type of person who demands a lot of attention. It's in his nature. Rae used to be such a shy boy because of his appearance, easily swept under the carpet. Cal was so busy raising Lem, Rae felt unwanted. He ran away. Cal was crushed. You have no idea how much those two adore each other... it's uncanny...

He didn't have to deal with what he thought was Cal's nagging anymore... no more parental figure telling him what to do. HE was in charge now, HE was running the show. Little did he know the Sun was the one with all the cards. Cal was never a nag, never hard to deal with. He would have given anything to those boys. They were spoiled rotten, and weren't even aware of it. Unlike the Sun, Cal loved them, and would never have done ANYTHING to hurt them.

Needless to say, without proper instruction, Lem's first generation of living things failed. All the plants died and rotted in the ground. Faidia itself was covered in reeking slime. It was very ugly. Lem, pissed as all hell, went looking for answers, and the only one he got was conveniently provided by Rae. "It's all Cal's fault," was the answer, and m? I don't think either of them looking is an ugly, blind sort I over Cal as much as they still love them just as much. other, not like the Sun, had creoled. together. They had no was. They literally n't TRIUMPH over death, as y--he helped bring it into se went absolutely mad. He prophecy, and became He would have annihilated izing what he'd done to Cal. I the scene. I locked Rae

into Cal's gaping chest. God, I can still see the blood splattered everywhere...They played in it like children with fingerprints.

We all have some blame in this situation... I could have helped Cal raise those two, or stepped in somehow. But there were no rules back then. We didn't know bad things could happen. Hah, unbelievable now how quillible we were... I doubt we've much changed. Rae, Lem... they're like overgrown children. I'm sorry you have to deal with him, but I'm also glad he has someone willing to love him despite what he is, because I highly doubt he's capable of loving himself.



Christ, it's dark in here.

At this point, I'm pretty sure I was using a nib pen to ink the comic, instead of just pencils. It's still quite grainy but there's any discernible line variation.

Lower your voice...
but yeah... it's
unusually dark
for a hospital...
there should be a
night light
somewhere at least...

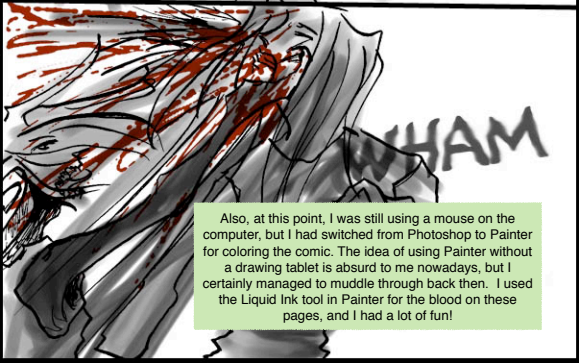
The computer says he's in
room 217. We should be able
to find it soon... we're on the
right floor....

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OW! Fern,
What---

MID... RUN, NOW!



WHAM

Also, at this point, I was still using a mouse on the computer, but I had switched from Photoshop to Painter for coloring the comic. The idea of using Painter without a drawing tablet is absurd to me nowadays, but I certainly managed to muddle through back then. I used the Liquid Ink tool in Painter for the blood on these pages, and I had a lot of fun!



It's so weird that I went immediately from some of the most artless info-dumpage in comic history to my most kinetic scene in the comic yet. I ... have no explanation for this. I remember I was definitely excited to depict some senseless violence, however. This was a scene I actually imagined ahead of time with some level of choreography and visuals, and the backstory was kind of like, "Well I already drew this for the dream sequence so I don't want to do that again, right? So I'll just have May explain it." Except it took like 5,000 words on a single comic page to do that. Oops.

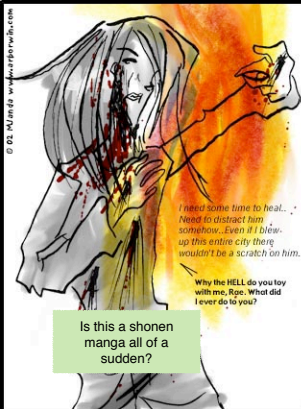
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We haven't even started yet, sir.

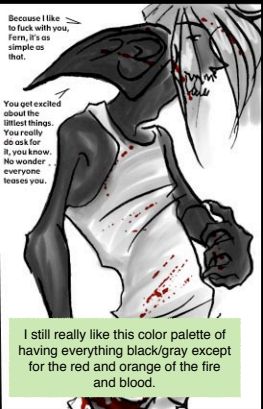
Hurhur, Rae talking like a super villain is actually hilarious to me. He's such a dingus.

Ah, how I've dreamt of smashing your head in with my very own hands, Moranerial. You've stood in my way one too many times. But I must say, I'm disappointed. Aren't you being a little easy?

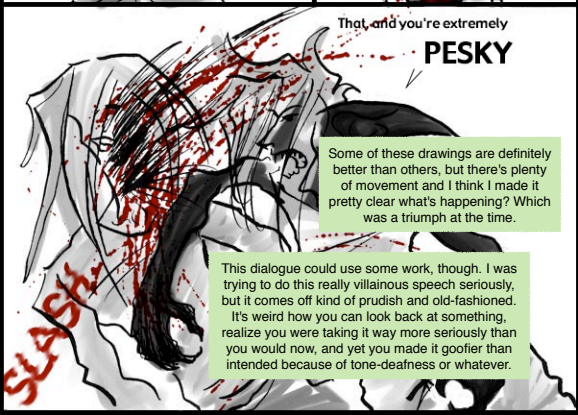
That's more like it. C'mon, you little midget, give me all you got.



Is this a shonen manga all of a sudden?



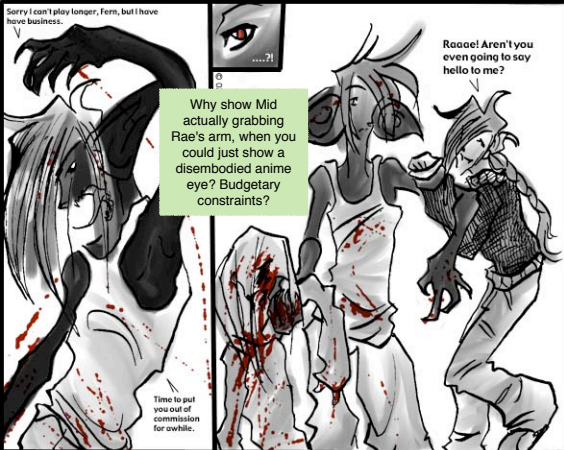
I still really like this color palette of having everything black/gray except for the red and orange of the fire and blood.



This dialogue could use some work, though. I was trying to do this really villainous speech seriously, but it comes off kind of prudish and old-fashioned.

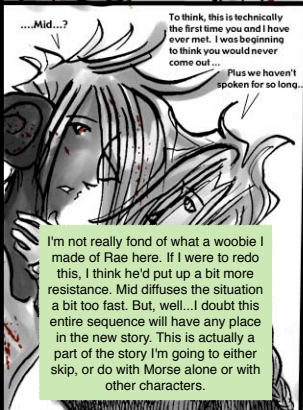
It's weird how you can look back at something, realize you were taking it way more seriously than you would now, and yet you made it goofier than intended because of tone-deafness or whatever.

Sorry I can't play longer, Fern, but I have
have business.

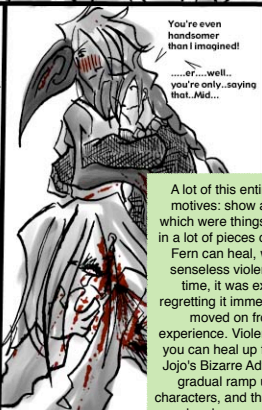


Why show Mid actually grabbing Rae's arm, when you could just show a disembodied anime eye? Budgetary constraints?


Time to put you out of commission for awhile.



I'm not really fond of what a woobie I made of Rae here. If I were to redo this, I think he'd put up a bit more resistance. Mid diffuses the situation a bit too fast. But, well...I doubt this entire sequence will have any place in the new story. This is actually a part of the story I'm going to either skip, or do with Morse alone or with other characters.



A lot of this entire motives: show a which were things in a lot of pieces of Fern can heal, v senseless violer time, it was ex regretting it immed moved on fro experience. Violer you can heal up fr Jojo's Bizarre Adv gradual ramp u characters, and tha and make you c



Sick fuck. I'll have to thank
Mid later.
My head is spinning...where
the hell are my glasses?
All healed up -- I have
to get find that kid NOW.
Rae won't fall for it for long.

Reading this now as an adult,
this dialogue somehow
reminds me of a Sonic comic,
and now I'm imagining an
echidna version of Fern and I
want to die.



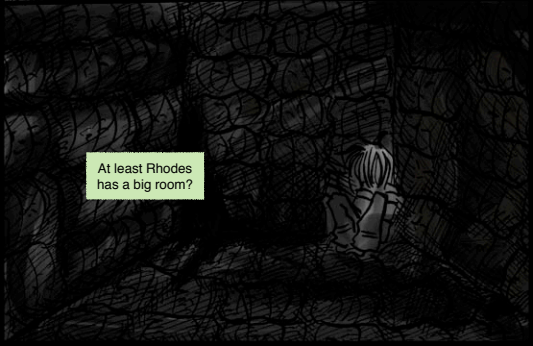
There's something wrong with this place...It
looks abandoned in parts, but it's being used
for SOMETHING... we need to get out of here...

Ah, here it
is.

I wanted to hint that
there might be magic
shenanigans going
on in Arduc, too, with
Fern's comment
here. I never followed
it up though.

screee

Hello?



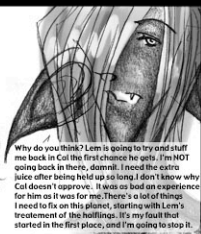
At least Rhodes
has a big room?



Rae.. Why'd you attack Fern? I know you two don't like each other... but it's not necessary...

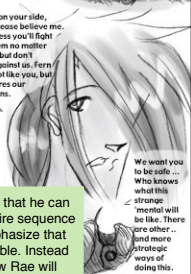
Bah. That was just a love tap. And he WAS getting in my way. You two want to keep that boy away from me.

Why do you want the power so badly, anyway?



Why do you think? Lem is going to try and stuff me back in Cal the first chance he gets. I'm NOT going back in there, dammit. I need the extra juice after being held up so long. I don't know why Cal doesn't approve. It was as bad an experience for him as it was for me. There's a lot of things I need to fix on this planet, starting with Lem's treatment of the halfings. It's my fault that started in the first place, and I'm going to stop it.

We're on your side, Rae, please believe me. Doubtless you'll fight with Lem no matter what... but don't fight against us. Fern may not like you, but he shares our concerns.



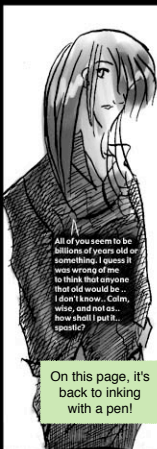
We want you to be safe ... Who knows what this strange 'mental' will be like. There are other... and more strategic ways of doing this.

I switched back to pencils for this page, and filled in the characters. I was still struggling to figure out what look I liked best for the art. Honestly I think I'm resigned to changing my techniques up on the regular as a matter of course to keep myself interested, albeit in less noticeable

So Rae's motive here is so seize power so that he can resist Lem. I think a better touch for this entire sequence would have been to have the siblings emphasize that they think Rae is mindless and uncontrollable. Instead there's some weak statements about how Rae will inevitably destroy the world, when in fact Rae is kind of necessary by the logic of the elemental system to restore balance to the world. Once he pops out, he's unstable, but he'll come over to your side of things if you convince him it's in his best interest. It's kind of underwhelming. I mean, Mid isn't the sharpest knife in the drawer, and he manages to control him immediately. I guess part of this is that I'm trying to make Lem look like a hysterical liar, but on the other hand, Rae DID actually threaten to destroy the world. The whole thing is rather awkward. In the new comic I haven't fleshed out all of these details yet, but I can say that balance is going to come up a lot more as a very important concern of the elementals, and Rae's absence is a big problem for that balance.

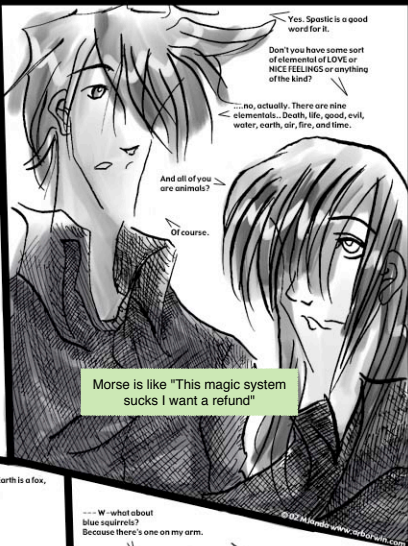


Just doing my job...



All of you seem to be billions of years old or something. I guess it was wrong of me to think that anyone that old would be... I don't know... Calm, wise, and not as... how shall I put it... spastic?

On this page, it's back to inking with a pen!



Yes. Spastic is a good word for it.

Don't you have some sort of elemental of LOVE or NICE FEELINGS or anything of the kind?

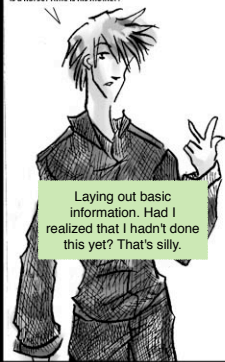
...no, actually. There are nine elementals... Death, life, good, evil, water, earth, air, fire, and time.

And all of you are animals?

Of course.

Morse is like "This magic system sucks I want a refund"

Death is a crow, Life is a snake, Fire is a snake, Good is a swan. Air is an albatross, Earth is a fox, Time is a winged horse. Mid, by the way, is a horse. Time is his mother.



Laying out basic information. Had I realized that I hadn't done this yet? That's silly.

--- W-what about blue squirrels?
Because there's one on my arm.



Oh... that'd be Vivianerial, elemental of water.

What do SQUIRRELS have to do with w-
Oh, nevermind. Is he dangerous?

Depends on your

I always think of this scene as being VERY early in the comic, but it's actually way in here. Wow, the cross hatching on Morse's shirt in this panel actually looks pretty good except for a couple of spots. Viv is more of a Faidian musk rat in the new comic. I'm designing a new creature for him, but it will still functionally be a squirrel. He'll still be blue, of course, but unfortunately not a maril because I don't want to get sued by Gamefreak.

Tch. My apologies, Miss.

Stop scaring the natives,
Viv.

sigh
Morse,
meet
Folanerial,
elemental
of air. He's
one of Lem's
secondaries,
if that means
anything to you.

They're really coming out
of the woodwork, aren't
they...

Just in time, Fola
and Viv arrive with
some Fresh Anime
Bullshit.

Wow. I love this drawing of
Viv. There's just something
about it. He makes a cute
mascot animal.

you want,

Fola heard there was going to be some
elemental action and he ran over here to spoil
it. Most of the motivations for anyone being
anywhere are pretty weak in this story for a
long time. I had a lot of trouble resisting the
urge to just introduce characters one after
another out of enthusiasm and wanting to
hurry the story along.

I'm here for the same
reason you are, Smoke.
Everyone's talking about it.
I don't know why this little pest
came, though. He never
actually DOES anything.

I had probably only drawn Fola's hair like this a few times
at this point and it was really awkward and hard for me to
draw. All of the characters are "hard" for me to draw at
this point, but Fola was particularly difficult for me to be
happy with. The things you get hung up on...

Well, for now
water back

cheeeee n_n

Because of my social circle at the time and some abusive
dynamics that were going on all up in there, I was not able to
come right out and say this until now, more than 10 years
later: Fola is ace. I thought of him as ace when I was drawing
this page and it stuck. Viv of course is a silly oversexed
character and this is an inappropriate joke in a lot of ways, but
Fola and Viv are best friends and they have a really amazing
and close relationship. I wanted to depict an ace character
who was very close to someone else without it being sexual.
As deep as I was in the yaoi times, I really wanted to see a
character dynamic like this, so I made it happen.

Hmm, well I --
Oh for the love of
god, stop HUMPING me!

Oh man, you can tell how DONE I am with Fletcher. I did not even try. I don't know why I had to kill him. I dropped him with no explanation, but I felt this compulsion about what I'd started or whatever. There are parts of the explanation entirely but I guess this just had to go down like Lem having a sword was like bringing a gun to a gunfight. I'm on my head to make good on all the talk that the earth is dangerous to mortals, too. But since Fletcher is a god, he doesn't really accomplish anything of true importance.

There he is.

Are you listening to me, you little shit?
I know you can hear me.

Melted through those locks like
they were wax

Nothing you could ever do, hmm?

Suti's dialogue is a strange digression from the usual flow of the comic. He's omniscient in Arduc, so he's kind of just sensing out the Faidian elementals, while at the same time not quite grasping what's happening yet. He has his plan of revenge but it's desperate and unlikely to succeed because of how disgustingly strong the elementals have gotten from devouring other worlds. Suti has gotten far by intimidating Rhodes but he's just a kid.

There's something wrong with
this one ... I can't wait to
see more ...

There's a room in his head ... a lot like this
one. Dark, rotten, guilty ...

What's that? You don't want to?
Well, you don't really have a choice in this
matter, DO you.

Yes.. something deeply wrong here.

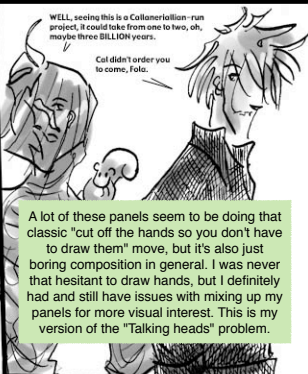
He's perfect.

Yeah, mortal kid, go steal that
elemental's wallet and make
me great again

You know what you need to do.



It's been awhile... I hope they're all right. How much longer do you think they'll be in there, Smoke?



WELL, seeing this is a Callaneriaillian-run project, it could take from one to two, oh, maybe three BILLION years.

Cal didn't order you to come, Fola.

A lot of these panels seem to be doing that classic "cut off the hands so you don't have to draw them" move, but it's also just boring composition in general. I was never that hesitant to draw hands, but I definitely had and still have issues with mixing up my panels for more visual interest. This is my version of the "Talking heads" problem.



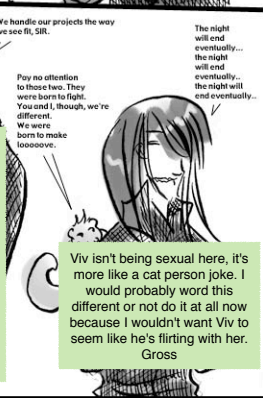
If it wasn't for YOU people we wouldn't have to be doing this in the first place! I won't be surprised if something doesn't get BLOWN UP before tonight is finished, you bunch of hamhanded

We handle our projects the way we see fit, SIR.

Pay no attention to those two. They were born to fight. You and I, though, we're different. We were born to make loooooove.

The night will end eventually... the night will end eventually... the night will end eventually...

Class-trash was something I always wanted to include in the comic, because the branches are supposed to have a lot of history with each other, lots of infighting and historical resentments. But it was surprisingly difficult for me to write and make it sound sincere. Fola's sniping is pretty weak and half-hearted, he's not referring to anything specific because I hadn't actually fleshed it out enough, and Smoke is only vaguely annoyed. Fola would still be a nitpicky weirdo nowadays but I think his dialogue could definitely stand to sound like it's actually based on something, showing the resentment instead of just trying to tell the audience "there's something here!" when there clearly isn't. Not enough nuance.



Viv isn't being sexual here, it's more like a cat person joke. I would probably word this different or not do it at all now because I wouldn't want Viv to seem like he's flirting with her.

Gross

Okay, kiddo... Usually, I don't really care for my face, but since it's already been ripped off once tonight, if you're going to maul me, I wonder if you could focus on some other part of my body. I doubt you're in this strait jacket for nothing, huh?

Let's see how we can get you out of this thing

This is some strange dialogue from Fern. For some reason I never remember that he says he doesn't like his own face here.

Suti is selectively blocking Rhodes' senses to control him, but I would not have Fern just blurt out in his face "you're deaf" now. There's no reason that he would be able to pick up on that except just ~magical bullshit~ explanations. But there's really no reason for Rhodes to be considered properly deaf in general. He's cursed and unresponsive, and that's generally all that needs to be established.

nothing

ing,

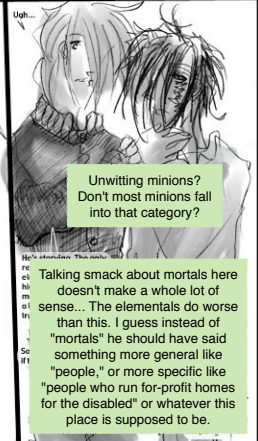
Tch... you've been through hell, haven't you. Black scars under your eyes.. Heh, we have something in common then. I used to have a black scar... nasty, aren't they?

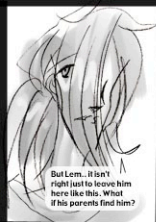
Hum.

... Come on, I'll take care of you.



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But Lem... it isn't right just to leave him here like this. What if his parents find him?

If the parents have any brains they'll celebrate their new-won freedom with a bottle of wine and a bonfire fueled by his stupid belongings.



Eee... He may have been the new face of evil, but I'm sure his parents care about him ... I'm sure he wasn't really aware of what he was doing wrong...

It's ... just so sad. So young, and he didn't even have a chance to change his ways...



Oh, all RIGHT.



Wow, I absolutely forgot this page even exists. Necco Fletcher wasn't something that stayed with me.

There, he's a necco. Happy now?

Yay! I get to keep him?

Mm hm. I'll leave a note for the parents saying he ran off with gypsies.

Now

My parents always threatened our cats with being sold

away when they were bad.



Leeeeeem!
I found Smoke!
And Fola, and
Viv, and Miss
Morse.

Terrific. What is this, an
international conference?
How long have you been
waiting?



It's no matter. Here they come.

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Fola must be standing on a box to
be taller than Smoke here



Well.. We're in deep shit now.

Ah..Rae..
Please remember
the nice non-violent
behavior I asked you about..

Everybody's finally together.



WHY DON'T YOU GO BACK
WHERE YOU CAME FROM,
YOU DISGUSTING FREAK
DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA
HOW HARD I'VE WORKED
AND YOU JUST STROLL
IN AND DESTROY
EVERYTHING YOU
IRRESPONSIBLE
UGLY STUPID
IGNORANT
UNEDUCATED HYPOCRIT
MONSTER YOU THINK
I WOULD EVER
CONSIDER YOU A
BROTHER? WE
RELATED TO A FREAK
LIKE YOU? I DON'T
THINK SO DON'T YOU
PAID BLAME THAT ALL
THINGS ON ME, YOU WERE
AT THE ROOT OF EVERYTHING
I AM THE INTIMATE SON OF A WHORE
THAT YOU ARE

NEVER HAVE I SEEN A MORE SPON-GE
BRAT THAN YOU, LEM YOU SIT UP THERE
IN YOUR LITTLE CASTLE AND PRETEND
EVERYTHING IS JUST FINE AND YOU BREED
A BUNCH OF SHEEP WHO'LL DO WHATEVER
YOU SAY AND RUN LIKE THE CHICKENSHIT
THAT YOU ARE BECAUSE YOU'RE A WEAK
SHITTY FREAK A BOY WHO'LL NEVER
GIVE UP TO REALITY AND EXCUSE ME
BUT YOU WERE THE ONE WHO HIT CAL
YOU STOPPED AS MUCH AS I, I LOVED
CAL BUT HE DIDN'T YOU SHOULD BE
GRATEFUL HE EVEN PAID ANY SORT OF
ATTENTION TO YOUR PALE SKINNY LITTLE
YOU ARE SO FULL OF SHIT LEM, YOU
SOME FUCKING PARASITIC LITTLE WORM,
GET OFF THIS PLANET AND ALL YOUR
FUCKING RELATIONS RUNNING AROUND
TRYING TO PICK UP FLICKING MORTALS
WHAT
YOU JUST
TOLD US ALL PAID FOR
NOT YOUR OWN
DID YOU EVER FELT YOU OVER
JUST LIKE EVERYBODY ELSE YOU
ROTTERED HERE A BITCH AND I
MEAN THAT LITERALLY

You can certainly see the family resemblance, eh?

Fola stays classy and
steps out

drawn anime style. We ALL
dated.

They're not going to...
blow up anything,
are they?

I think it's time for
Viv and I to take
our leave.

Some of these jokes, I read them and
I'm like, well that's me but it's a past
me...But this joke about "Anime Style" ...
I might have made this today

I don't think so. They
consider this sort of
thing bonding.

We have to get Rhonda home,
Fern. Can you handle this?

This tone of, "lets put the fun
back in dysfunctional" type
humor, is definitely no longer
something I'm into.

God, Rho..
what happened
to you...

Don't sweat it...
They're not ready
to fight for real
yet. I think they're
both scared out
of their minds, frankly..

Scared?
Primaries?
Maybe

Viv and Fola
are gone. We
better leave.

ding dong

Don't use the bell, idiot, I
have the key someplace...

You never remember your key.

Yes, right here...one sec... Sez YOU....Mid, do you have yours?

Hold on a minute-- Where are we?! We were just outside the hospital!

It's called "teleportation" kid. This is our house.

But WHERE are we?! This isn't even my TIME zone!

"thud" OW! GODDAMNIT! WHO put this WALL here?!

Oops... Smoke, get the light... It was a simple enough question...I'm tired and hungry and cold, I want to go HOME!

Pus-snorting scumbag. Larvae munching savage. Trial?! What is going ON?!

Oh, REAL good comeback... Mid, can I have pudding? n.n

Yes, yes, all the pudding you want... Stop FIGHTING you two!

My nose--bloody hell!-- fucking wall!--

Well you've lived here 5,000 years, I'd think you'd know where the walls are by now!

I DO know where they are ~ This one... attacked me.

Delye! Don't EAT that! But I LIKE wax fruit; ;

Why is it so dark in here...? AAH! Something brushed my leg!

Better put some newspaper. I just KNOW can't be housetrained

Your MON SHUTUP

The whole gang comes back to the house. Cal's in his boudoir drinking wine like a goth AOL chat room

CRAShtinkle tinkletinkle

Oh my god... was that the Vernerian vase?! Cal is going to KILL us!

No problem then, because we're already dead.

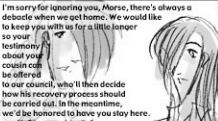
Haha, smartass.



Cal is a crow, so he collects tons of things and clutters the house with them. I wanted to illustration his nest-lining habit with this room.



Smoke, you seem relatively sane. Can YOU tell me what's going on?



I'm sorry for ignoring you, Morse, there's always a debacle when we get home. We would like to keep you with us for a little longer so your testimony about your cousin can be offered to our council, who'll then decide how his recovery process should be carried out. In the meantime, we'd be honored to have you stay here.



Uh... m...



It looks...charming.

yaaaawwwwn



Oh, good he-he. We would bottomless p all this stuff. cleaned last It's like this n

I sure hope you're not thinking I'll be Snow White to your seven dwarves.

Wow, I'd love to keep this stupid dialogue about dwarves. This is like something my wife and I would say now.

I doubt Morse has ever been in a house like this one. I imagined her family as pretty strait-laced.

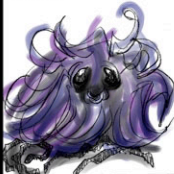


I was just a joke, ern.

Huh? What? Dwarves? We keep dwarves now? They better not have gone in my room.

...Oh. Yeah, I knew that.

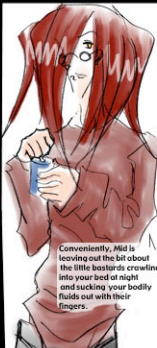
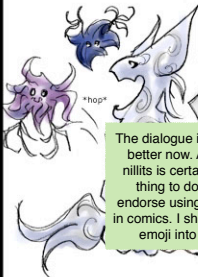
Pardon me for asking... but what
is this thing?



Aheheh, don't be scared, that's
just a nillit. Cal has a habit
of welcoming strange
creatures into our house. They
come here because no one
else will take them in.



There are lots of nillits, most of the time
they're hiding in the walls. They're scared
of light, so if you don't want them to bother
you, you can just turn the lamp on.



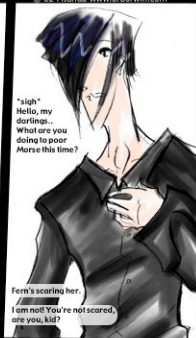
Conveniently, Mid is
leaving out the bit about
the little bastards crawling
into your bed at night
and sucking your bodily
fluids out with their
fingers.

XX Ferns' exaggerating, Morse,
they are equipped with a
natural anaesthetic so you
don't feel a thing. They're quite
friendly, loveable animals, really...

Yeah, especially
when they find
someone unconscious
or injured. They don't
stop feeding until
everything's gone,
then.

= = Fern.

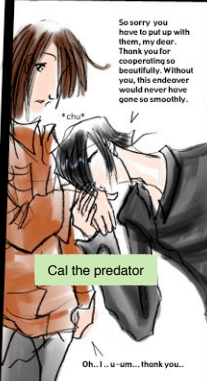
What?



"sigh"
Hello, my
darlings..
What are you
doing to poor
Morse this time?

Fern's scaring her.

I am not! You're not scared,
are you, kid?



So sorry you
have to put up with
them, my dear.
Thank you for
cooperating so
beautifully. Without
you, this endeavor
would never have
gone so smoothly.

chu

Cal the predator

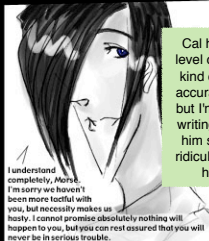
Oh.. I .. u-um... thank you..

The dialogue is flowing a little bit
better now. Asking about the
nillits is certainly a reasonable
thing to do. And I still fully
endorse using anime emoticons
in comics. I should probably work
emoji into New Grayling.



Cal, I can't thank you enough for the kindness you've shown me... I don't think I've ever been treated as well as this by an adult, or... anybody, really. But I'm hoping that, as an adult, you can also understand how... um... Confused and scared I am right now.

Morse sits uncomfortably in this no doubt very musty museum grade chair



I understand completely, Morse. I'm sorry we haven't been more tactful with you, but necessity makes us hasty. I cannot promise absolutely nothing will happen to you, but you can rest assured that you will never be in serious trouble.

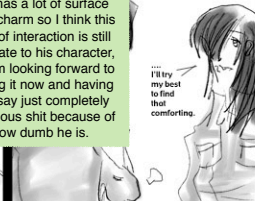


It's not to say it's because of you or anything. It's just.. I'm only a kid, I've barely been out of my home town in my entire life.. and now suddenly I'm in the company of ageless beings in another world.

You're my friend and I trust you.. but... this is getting harder and harder for me to swallow...all these weird people, appearing and disappearing, fighting, it's all so confusing, I barely know what's going on, and whether I'm doing the right thing ...

Remember, as a mortal, you're special, protected. It's we elementals who have to put up with the evil villains and so forth, and we're

Cal has a lot of surface level charm so I think this kind of interaction is still accurate to his character, but I'm looking forward to writing it now and having him say just completely ridiculous shit because of how dumb he is.



.... I'll try my best to find that comforting.

hours later...

I'm sure I'll still make light of how petty these two can be in the new version of the comic, but betterer

Are they still

Mid doing little household work things. I'm not sure that's a trait that will carry over to the new Mid.

Yes... Everyone else is in bed. They can't fight all night, can they? I set up a bed for Rae but I don't know if he'll want --

Who's that at this hour?

I'll get it...

Darcy! Are you all right? You're so pale...

I just need to feed, that's all. I'll be fine.

Is Lem here?

Gotta chug some of that primary juice

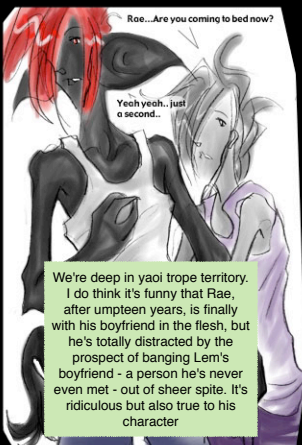
Yes... over here in the living room..

Darcy... You --

I guess Lem can just tell by looking at him, but the way this is worded is comically abrupt

What's this ...? Little brother has a boyfriend, hmm?

What could Rae be thinking!?



Are you all right?

Yes...
You?

Darcy is so mother henny here. I think it's that yaoi trope of the uke doing feminine things. I guess Lem could use some spoiling or whatever right now, but isn't Darcy famished or whatever?

I got the story from May, Lem. I would've expected you and Rae to have blown up the universe or whatever by now. I'm surprised...glad, but surprised.

I don't want to blow up the universe, HE does. Well, actually, I don't have a bloody clue what he wants.

Of course.
The situation's in control...at least for the moment...

So your assumptions about your brother were wrong...

My assumptions were PRACTICAL. I just want to protect Faidia, damnit. I don't see what's so wrong about that.

You should try to get along with your brothers.

Yeah yeah...

Cal didn't do anything to you,
Lem...he cares about you..

Nothing's right, not even the people have any confidence in me anymore... I'm all washed up. Too many mistakes... I've cut off all my supports without even realizing it.

"I'm stupid" Lem yelled into Darcy's eyeballs

You think I don't know it? I can't make it better, Darcy.

Lem's depression and poor self esteem will definitely make a comeback in the new comic, and then some!

Lem.. Lem don't talk that way...it's not like you at all. Where in the world are you getting these ideas from?

I especially hate how Darcy's comforting him after that absurd sequence where Lem hit him. But this was the standard of the time - gotta maximize the angst >_<
How else will my teen ass get high

Lem!
Spoilers!

I'm dying.

Now you're just being melodramatic. You can't die, you're elemental of LIFE.

You all usually complain that you've been alive too LONG.

This should have been a major plot point, actually shown in the actions and scenes of the comic. Instead I just plopped it down here. It occurs to me that part of the problem with Old Grayling is that it's basically just note-taking. I always considered it a "draft" and therefore "notes" on that level, but there are definitely much larger chunks like this one that make it unsuitable for an actual audience.

at this rate, I'll be too weak to keep a physical form...

It's amazing reading this dialogue nowadays because I totally disagree with this. I was trying to be "adult" about these concepts and excuse abusive peoples' bad behaviors like, "Maybe someone abused me, but I'm just as bad, so it's okay." Absolutely not.

And this boy, Rhodes... Nothing good will come of him. I have a bad feeling...

Lem, please

At least this scene reminds me I am really enjoying the chance to redo Lem's character and get it right this time in New Grayling.

Quiet, you.
You're not going anywhere. I'll make sure of it.

I was leveling up and used some Photoshop brushes in the background here. Except for the vacuum of empty space (where I'm putting this note now) this isn't the worst. Lets you really soak in those yaoi rays.....

Heh... Darcy...

Oh how SWEET. They
fixed you up a bit.
Well, it's no matter.

This place
we're in..it's a
lab, not a hospital.
in their basement...
how curious...

Because you're an ignorant
mortal, you probably think
these people will SAVE you.
They're a lot like me,
actually...But worse.
They're all killers, you know.
They have a nice little facade
going here, but I won't be
fooled a second time.

go away Suti..

They're all killers! I really put way too much emphasis on the killing in the dialogue. Probably because I struggled to get these concepts across in the art. Now I can just fill an entire page with blood instead of repeating myself.


Now who's giving orders?
I told you not to do that.
It pisses me off royally.
I'm tired.. please let me sleep..

Trying to make Suti sound as villainous as I could, even though Suti isn't really that villainous a character? Well, he's the bad man and we're supposed to be scared of him, so I thought I had to have him say these things. Suti has a reason to be a jerk, but not quite as messy and long-winded as this. I don't think he'd have to continuously bully Rhodes to stay in control. At this point, I haven't really fleshed out how I'm going to do this part of the story in the modern iteration, because I have a lot more things I need to do first before getting to this - the story being in chronological order now and all. I definitely want to give Suti more nuance in the beginning so his character isn't so back-loaded.

And that's it for now! I hope you enjoyed all the words I had to say to my past self, and I hope you'll hang in there for the next segment of The Annotated Grayling! <3

to these Paidians' level.. they killed my
only friends and left me to ROT.

too
fucking
bad.



I was easing into drawing smaller eyes at this point. I also put a lot of effort into the cinematic quality of this page, since it was Curtis' "swan song," complete with stupid lyrics.

I must have been born under a bad sign.

Heh.

Rae is spooky. I wouldn't want to run into him in a dark, dank alley way. Especially without pants on.

*ding d

dingdong
dingdong

Hi Fern, how are you?
V

Oh, just dandy. Where's Lem?
V

Darcy was a character belonging to a friend, who dated Lem in our text roleplay. It wasn't so much a deliberate choice on my part, just something that grew organically. Lem was never supposed to be gay & Darcy will be a girl in the new comic. Darcy will still be a vampire, however. I'm looking forward to depicting Faidian vampires. I love vampire stories & always wanted to develop my own definition & rules for the creature. I think there's a lot of potential for vampires, but it's not really explored much for whatever reason.

I used to love drawing landscapes at dawn or sunset with Tower in them. For me, the image of Tower is really iconic for the story, and would feature heavily if it was ever animated.



Lem, honey, I think



Well...you know how he is.

This is of the utmost importance, Darcy. You need to wake him up.

He won't listen to me... Once he's asleep, he won't wake up for anybody.

This is a cat ownership joke. I never had anything specifically in mind, but I can think of a few examples...My family cat, Jerry, once delicately placed a single drop of icy liquid snot on my eyelid as I lay in my bed. A cat I live with nowadays, Gil, performs "the Gil Chill," wherein he smears his nose & licks an area of your skin, & then breathes on it, chilling the area and making for an incredibly unpleasant experience. This is the kind of thing Smoke is doing to Lem.



IM AWAKE IM AWAKE! STOP IT! HAVE MERCY

Mmpph...
...Smoke? What are you doing in here? ... Hey! Stop that! HEY! NO! NOOOO! ANYTHING BUT THAT! OH GOD! NOT THERE! AAAAHH!!!

He did that to me once.

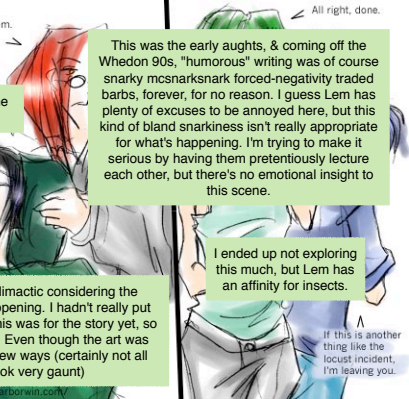


Well, now that you've gotten me up at the crack of dawn, are you going to clue me in as to why you're here? I certainly hope it's not just because Cal passed out again. He does that for attention half the time, you know.

Call Mayaner, Lem. You both need to answer some questions. Now.

Fern ~handling the situation~

This scene is so anti-climactic considering the importance of what's happening. I hadn't really put together how significant this was for the story yet, so it's pretty cringey for me. Even though the art was getting a bit better, in a few ways (certainly not all ways...they look very gaunt)



All right, done.

This was the early aughts, & coming off the Whedon 90s, "humorous" writing was of course snarky mcsnarksnark forced-negativity traded barbs, forever, for no reason. I guess Lem has plenty of excuses to be annoyed here, but this kind of bland snarkiness isn't really appropriate for what's happening. I'm trying to make it serious by having them pretentiously lecture each other, but there's no emotional insight to this scene.

I ended up not exploring this much, but Lem has an affinity for insects.

If this is another thing like the locust incident, I'm leaving you.

Well, Cal and Lem coexisting in the same room without violence. This is a rarity.

You called?

Yes indeed, Fern has something to ask us.

Herp derp we're serious now so we have to talk like weird bitchy robots

I had sooo much trouble controlling facial shapes & it took me a very long time to even get any variance going. May is supposed to have a round face! I was trying but failing. I still have trouble with this, though.

I also could NOT draw May's hair the way I wanted. I admit, my inability to draw her pixie cut turned me off of drawing her for a really long time. It's silly looking back now...

You know, we'd always thought Cal had a split personality. Often when he hit his violent episodes, his eyes would turn a different color, his voice would change... We weren't really sure what to call him then. But it seems that his personality wasn't split -- he was two personalities smashed together.

I had a nightmare where I y, put something over it

could sense it a mile off, and it was far from good.

A brave effort of a panel establishing what Lem's apartment looks like, but there's way too much text in this panel.

I may be only a lowly secondary, but it's my task to look out for the safety of my primary. So I think you two owe me an explanation.

See, May? I always thought your idea was stupid and now look what's happened.

Are you asking to get smacked? You say that as though you had nothing to do with

This line is pretty true to Lem's character, though I would probably draw him with a funnier expression, now. It took me a long time to loosen up and do goofy faces, too. Even though I loved doing jokes in my comics, I was still struggling to do "serious" looking art so I could do a range of dramatic situations. I also started trying to avoid doing things that felt too "anime" because I felt like I couldn't pull it off. Being self-conscious, though, made things kind of stiff.

I definitely don't think May would even jokingly threaten Lem with violence, now. She'd be less quick to anger too.

This is intolerable, May! If he gets into Faidia, you realize what the repercussions could be?! You have to go NOW and lock him up again!

You can tell that this is important dialogue because of how small it is, and how it's disappearing into the background color.

Wow, it sounds so simple when you put it that way. I'll just go politely ask him to return to our brother's chest, then.

You KNOW what I mean! Isn't there some way we could get rid of him permanently?!

Be quiet, all of you.

Oh good! Cal, you shared a mind with him for a long time. You should know how to destroy him, right?

No, I mean it. Shut up.

Another weird thing about my style at this time was the flared cuffs & pant legs. It wasn't just Fern who was getting a ballooning effect. This was a wonky thing I didn't even like, but I got into a habit of doing it & didn't control it at all.

None of you knows what you're talking about.

We're the people responsible for this situation, and therefore, we are the people who are going to perform the search.

And Lem, you are not so much as to TOUCH him, is that understood?

This is such forced dialogue. Lem shouldn't have to tell the others this; they freakin' know! It's just there to explain what's going on to the audience.

I will exercise any measure I see fit, Cal. You seem to have an unnaturally great deal of sympathy towards a creature who has the ability to unravel everything in this world.

Not like I reasoned this out at the time, but it is kind of smart for Lem to have a sword here. If they don't want to engage in a magical battle and risk polluting the city, they're better off using mortal style weapons. At the time though I just thought it was cool & then got embarrassed because it was so trite. Even tiny story choices like this can put you through all kinds of emotional roller coasters...

I still like the idea of the elementals having stupid thematic outfits, but I never felt like I made it land. Like I need to make them stupider and go full camp, or stop trying altogether. I'd try & do it, then feel kind of embarrassed because it was so goofy. In the end

I think I'd still like to play with various stupid outfits & address changing fashions more frequently, but also the animal & "specter" forms should cover the function of these robes anyway. This is something based entirely on the childhood game that Grayling is based on - the various characters wore robes that matched their element. Kind of like a video game thing.

Cal's line here... ugh. The sentiment of this is accurate, but the way I wrote this line is awful. This is like stuff people would shout during a bad LARP.

Lem definitely has one of the weakest outfits. Is he wearing a brown t-shirt under there? I still have trouble drawing suits - they just end up looking like bathrobes.

I do still like May's outfit a lot.

Everyone split up .. Raise a call if you find him, and remember, don't provoke him.

Yes, yes, I heard you the first time...



Get away from there, honey..>

Momma...? I think there's a hurt kitty down there...

Yeah, sure...Rae is a "kitty." A cute kitty. Who is terrible

Now that Curtis is dead, I guess it's time to show Rae in a sympathetic light. I mean a pathetic light. I mean this is some silly hurt/comfort trope stuff. I was nuts about that stuff for a time. Now it makes me wanna hurl.

“*son*”

A lot of the items on this list were actually things that guys said to me, or said to my friends. W

Why don't you pay attention to me?
You HATE me don't you? You don't
support my projects, you just pretend
to, why are you such a bitch? I don't
understand girls. They're supposed
to be soft and smell nice and tell
me I'm wonderful like mom does
but then they go and have personalities
and make me feel bad about myself..
Which is really awful because you
know I have really low self esteem
high high high high high high high

Dyenitael ce, gja sooc'fi koo
supporé ce? lo isa elive hestelé.

I had written that Faidian glossary, I was gonna use it.

What a strange introduction for Mid! In one of the B-plot b&w strips. Doing some kind of fish out of water thing. I kept doing this - this is just a slightly tweaked version of Cal's introduction. The character being oblique, confusing, & putting up walls in the way of communication on purpose for no reason. This was an easy way for me to quickly and cheaply add interest to characters and make it "rewarding" once the protagonists figure out how to talk to them, a holdover from text roleplay.

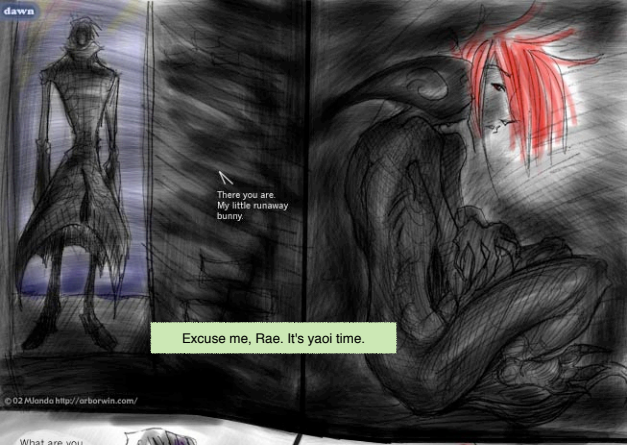
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Faguem

WOW! An attractive, strangely colored, ignorant foreign girl! SHE'LL understand me!

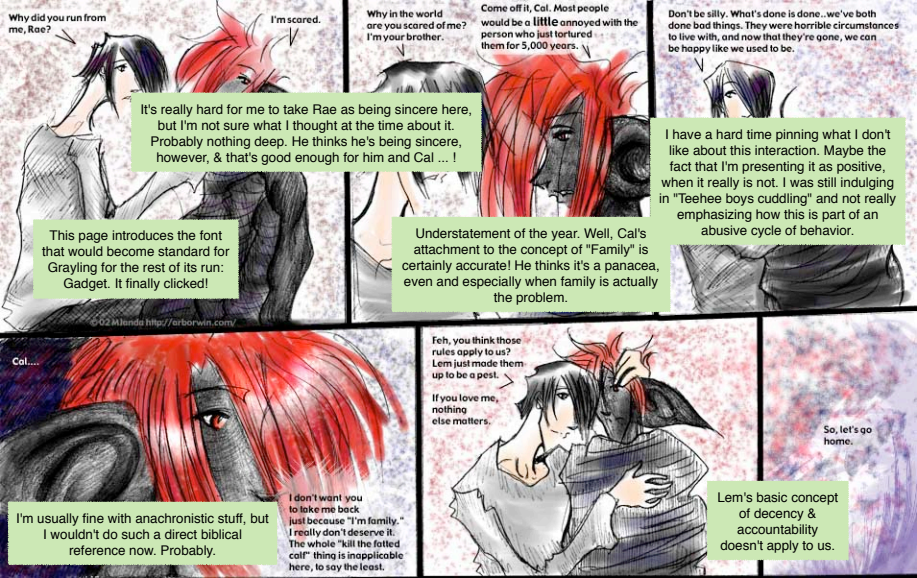
Oh brother.

This is definitely commentary about Megatokyo. I had realized it was bad.



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Why did you run from me, Rae?

I'm scared.

Why in the world are you scared of me? I'm your brother.

Come off it, Cal. Most people would be a little annoyed with the person who just tortured them for 5,000 years.

Don't be silly. What's done is done...we've both done bad things. They were horrible circumstances to live with, and now that they're gone, we can be happy like we used to be.

It's really hard for me to take Rae as being sincere here, but I'm not sure what I thought at the time about it. Probably nothing deep. He thinks he's being sincere, however, & that's good enough for him and Cal ... !

This page introduces the font that would become standard for Grayling for the rest of its run: Gadget. It finally clicked!

Understatement of the year. Well, Cal's attachment to the concept of "Family" is certainly accurate! He thinks it's a panacea, even and especially when family is actually the problem.

I have a hard time pinning what I don't like about this interaction. Maybe the fact that I'm presenting it as positive, when it really is not. I was still indulging in "Teehee boys cuddling" and not really emphasizing how this is part of an abusive cycle of behavior.

Cal....

Feh, you think those rules apply to us? Lem just made them up to be a pest.

If you love me, nothing else matters.

So, let's go home.

I'm usually fine with anachronistic stuff, but I wouldn't do such a direct biblical reference now. Probably.

I don't want you to take me back just because "I'm family." I really don't deserve it. The whole "kill the fatted calf" thing is inapplicable here, to say the least.

Lem's basic concept of decency & accountability doesn't apply to us.



Whatever you wanted to show me, Fern,
it'd better be good.

I found
the remains
of one of your
minions, Curtis.



Eeck.

The cute kitty did something fucked up! I don't remember if there was really motivation to this beyond showing that Rae is dangerous & doesn't value other people unless they benefit him. Also, I guess he was hungry. Even so, this is really over the top. He didn't really have any reason to hate Curtis this much. It was also a convenient way to get rid of Curtis, but it backfired because killing him made people like him like a million times more.

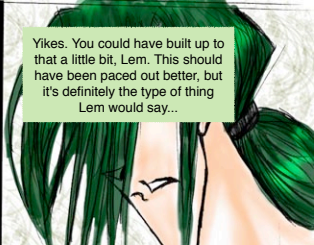
Fern...what happened to your legs...
I was a little too ambitious with the
anatomy I could handle here.

Where is Fern pointing?
Where is Fern looking?



Totally dismembered...
the head's the only
recognizable part. All
the bones were split
open for the marrow...
From what I can see, cause of death

Yikes. You could have built up to
that a little bit, Lem. This should
have been paced out better, but
it's definitely the type of thing
Lem would say...



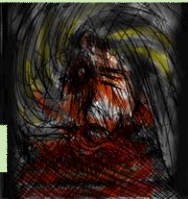
Given the next page,
this rushed page was
supposed to book-
end the whole
"wander around the
city" episode. It ends
with a bit of a fart,
doesn't it? I was
definitely losing
control of the
narrative at this point.
I was juggling a lot of
different threads and
it all kinda came
tumbling out in a
gnarled mess.

It's strange, Fern. As parents, we
all like to believe we start out with
the best for our children... our goal
is to raise them to be independent.

But all we end up wanting is to
protect our own interests to make up for
something to control, something
to OWE us something.

The children society tells us we
become nothing but tools, and
their flesh is thrown to the dogs.

We're done here. Burn what's left.



What a hardass, eh? Annoying, stubborn, unfair, callous...that's life for you, and that's also a good sum up of my "social interaction" as a secondary elemental ... "Do this, or I'll hurt you very, very badly."



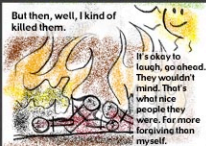
Cut to a bizarrely disembodied internal monologue from Fern talking directly to the audience about the nature of violence among elementals? What?

I think this was me realizing I needed to re-center Fern as a main character after getting rid of Curtis.

I used to live with much more amiable people.



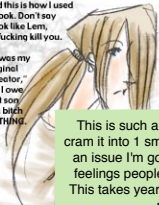
But then, well, I kind of killed them.



It's okay to laugh, go ahead. They wouldn't mind. That's what nice people they were. Far more forgiving than myself.

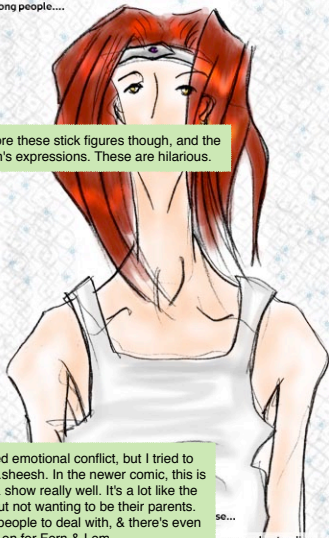
And this is how I used to look. Don't say I look like Lem, I'll fucking kill you.

He was my original "creator," but I owe that son of a bitch NOTHING.



It's strange how depravity works among people....

I adore these stick figures though, and the sun's expressions. These are hilarious.



This is such a complicated emotional conflict, but I tried to cram it into 1 small panel...sheesh. In the newer comic, this is an issue I'm going to try & show really well. It's a lot like the feelings people have about not wanting to be their parents. This takes years for most people to deal with, & there's even more going on for Fern & Lem.

So...

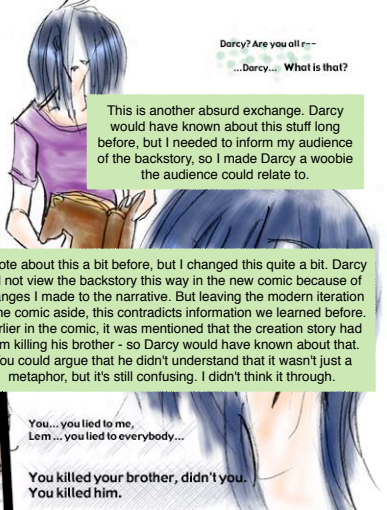
even understanding "means."



S'that you, Darc?

I'm home...
everything's
straightened
out...

Lem, that's not true.
There's nothing straight
about this comic.



Darcy? Are you all r--

...Darcy... What is that?

This is another absurd exchange. Darcy would have known about this stuff long before, but I needed to inform my audience of the backstory, so I made Darcy a woobie the audience could relate to.

I wrote about this a bit before, but I changed this quite a bit. Darcy will not view the backstory this way in the new comic because of changes I made to the narrative. But leaving the modern iteration of the comic aside, this contradicts information we learned before. Earlier in the comic, it was mentioned that the creation story had Lem killing his brother - so Darcy would have known about that. You could argue that he didn't understand that it wasn't just a metaphor, but it's still confusing. I didn't think it through.

You... you lied to me,
Lem ... you lied to everybody...

You killed your brother, didn't you.
You killed him.



anything....?

Mid loves sugar
and can't turn
down a treat.

Uh... Fletcher...
you do realize...

I blacked out so much of this
stuff from my memory. I forgot
Curtis mistook Mid for a girl. I
want to forget again...

I will get you anything, my
mom will pay for it!

A cinnamon
bun would
be nice.

scuttle

Well, it looks like I've blown
my cover. No worries,
you're the one I needed to
speak to anyway. You're
Morse, right? Cals' new
friend?

Mid's "cover," of talking
in a language no one
understands...ok.

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<http://carborwin.com/>

HERE'S YOUR
THING! LOVE ME NOW?????

I like
Morse's
dialogue
here

Listen, I don't know
anything, and at this
point, I don't WANT to
know anything.
Please...just...leave
me alone, okay?

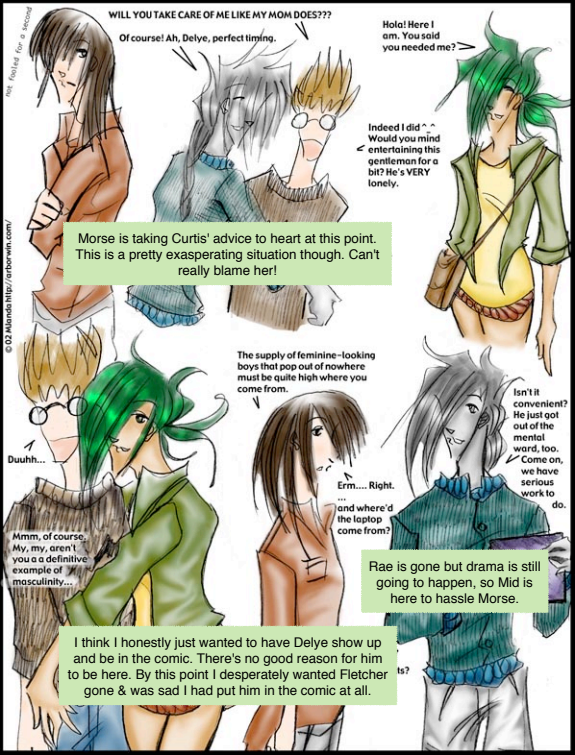
Ah, I remember a
time when I would
say something to
that effect every
single day. Didn't
get me anywhere,
though.

It's... it's
beautiful!

She's
talking about
me!!!!

Oooooohh...

I am SURROUNDED
by weirdos.



WILL YOU TAKE CARE OF ME LIKE MY MOM DOES???

Of course! Ah, Delye, perfect timing.

Hola! Here I am. You said you needed me? >

Indeed I did ^^
Would you mind entertaining this gentleman for a bit? He's VERY lonely.

Morse is taking Curtis' advice to heart at this point. This is a pretty exasperating situation though. Can't really blame her!

The supply of feminine-looking boys that pop out of nowhere must be quite high where you come from.

Duuhh...

Mmm, of course.
My, my, aren't you a definitive example of masculinity...


Erm.... Right.

... and where'd the laptop come from?

Isn't it convenient? He just got out of the mental ward, too.
Come on, we have serious work to do.

Rae is gone but drama is still going to happen, so Mid is here to hassle Morse.

I think I honestly just wanted to have Delye show up and be in the comic. There's no good reason for him to be here. By this point I desperately wanted Fletcher gone & was sad I had put him in the comic at all.



This will definitely not happen in the new comic. Lem is not like this. I was pretty bent on making him a villain in the old comic, but I disagree entirely with this characterization now. Domestic abuse makes him totally repulsive. I just thought this kind of thing was angst fodder when I was 19, but now I find it stomach-churning. It's something I only got perspective on as an adult.

I told you not to touch t

Stop it, Lem --

I TOLD you!

I need to know the truth! You won't tell me what's wrong. What do you think I'd just sit aside like an idiot while you --

SHUT UP.

Lem ... -- LEM! STOP IT! YOU'RE HURTING ME! -- LEM --

Don't bother, it'll heal in a few minutes.

Sir, here's the water you requested

This is also gross because this exchange is also to show "Darcy is strong!!!" This didn't need to happen to show that Darcy's strong. It's really bad romance novel grade nonsense. I must have been feeling wangsty so I did a scene like this.

Sir... Sir... Lemanerial, he --

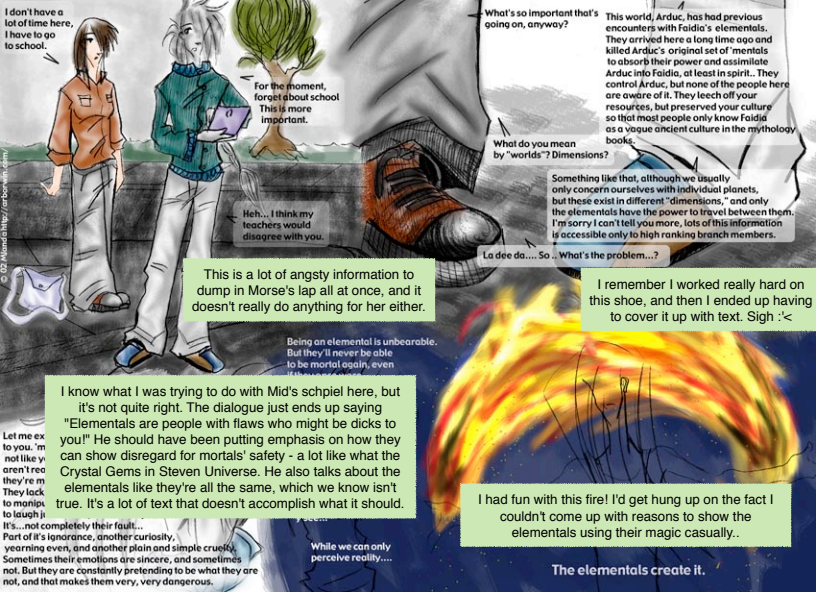
No, I don't want to hear it. Just tell me where he went.

....
I'm going out for awhile.

He left without telling anyone

Sir.. you're badly hurt... Should I call the doctor?

This should be Morse's job! In fact, I have to do some silly *deux ex machina* stuff later on in the comic to explain why Morse even knows the same information! More mistakes with characters' roles and the flow of information.



I don't have a lot of time here, I have to go to school.

For the moment, forget about school This is more important.

Heh... I think my teachers would disagree with you.

This is a lot of angsty information to dump in Morse's lap all at once, and it doesn't really do anything for her either.

Being an elemental is unbearable. But they'll never be able to be mortal again, even if they want to.

I know what I was trying to do with Mid's schpiel here, but it's not quite right. The dialogue just ends up saying "Elementals are people with flaws who might be dicks to you!" He should have been putting emphasis on how they can show disregard for mortals' safety - a lot like what the Crystal Gems in Steven Universe. He also talks about the elementals like they're all the same, which we know isn't true. It's a lot of text that doesn't accomplish what it should.

Let me ex to you. I'm not like y aren't rea they're m They lack to manipi to laugh j It's...not completely their fault... Part of it's ignorance, another curiosity, yearning even, and another plain and simple cruelty. Sometimes their emotions are sincere, and sometimes not. But they are constantly pretending to be what they are not, and that makes them very, very dangerous.

While we can only perceive reality...

What's so important that's going on, anyway?

This world, Arduc, has had previous encounters with Faidia's elementals. They arrived here a long time ago and killed Arduc's original set of 'mentals to absorb their power and assimilate Arduc into Faidia, at least in spirit.. They control Arduc, but none of the people here are aware of it. They leech off your resources, but preserved your culture so that most people only know Faidia as a vague ancient culture in the mythology books.

What do you mean by "worlds"? Dimensions?

Something like that, although we usually only concern ourselves with individual planets, but these exist in different "dimensions," and only the elementals have the power to travel between them. I'm sorry I can't tell you more, lots of this information is accessible only to high ranking branch members.

La dee da.... So .. What's the problem...?

I remember I worked really hard on this shoe, and then I ended up having to cover it up with text. Sigh :<

I had fun with this fire! I'd get hung up on the fact I couldn't come up with reasons to show the elementals using their magic casually..

The elementals create it.

It's not a sure thing... but from past experience, we know that the kind of behavior they've been displaying lately is a good recipe for disaster....

Our elemental of evil, or chaos, depending on how you look at it, has just been let loose after 5,000 years of imprisonment. For now, it seems he's taking a break, but he'll be back to Arduc to finish what he started.

And what is it he started?

We don't know

Why doesn't Mid just ASK Rae? I guess because Mid read the script. We have to interact with Morse and make her a part of the story so just make do! Is it assumed that Rae's attraction to Arduc is a subconscious magical magnetism? That's basically the biggest motivator in the entire comic and it's so vague.

Don't worry about it. It's probably something you'd never even suspect. Let's start off this way... Is there anything unusual in any way whatsoever about your family or its history? Involvement in wars, strange deaths, mental illness, congenital defects, that sort of thing.

Congenital defects? Like halflings? Halflings popping up in Arduc would have been pretty crazy.

uh..Jeez... no... Well.. except for mental illness.. I guess there's some depression on my mother's side.. but...

I have a cousin I haven't seen since we were little... he was supposed to have gone schizophrenic or something, because the last I heard of him, he was in an institution.

It always seemed odd...nobody wanted to talk about it...

I didn't really know them that well, so it didn't seem like a big deal.

That sounds like a lead to me! Now we're getting somewhere.

....Did you just plug the computer into your neck? Isn't that bordering on the eccentric?

Eccentric, Morse? Is that really the word you want to use?

Hey, you're the one with the crazy relative.

Mid's one to talk about crazy relatives

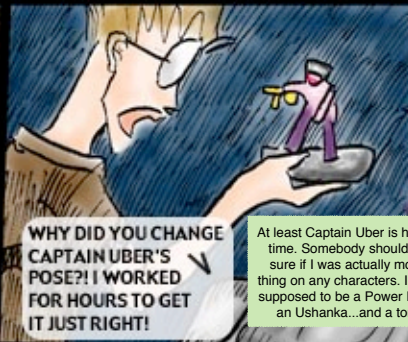


MOM IS MAKING US SNACKS! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!

The length of Delye's dress changed.

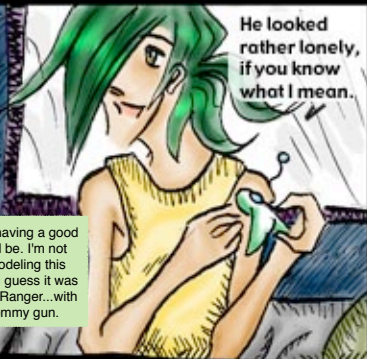
You have so many neat things in your room!!! What's this toy plane do?

OH MY GOD YOU TOUCHED MY PRECIOUS THINGS??!?!?!?



WHY DID YOU CHANGE CAPTAIN UBER'S POSE?! I WORKED FOR HOURS TO GET IT JUST RIGHT!

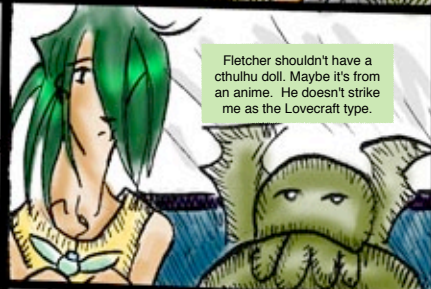
At least Captain Uber is having a good time. Somebody should be. I'm not sure if I was actually modeling this thing on any characters. I guess it was supposed to be a Power Ranger...with an Ushanka...and a tommy gun.



He looked rather lonely, if you know what I mean.

WHY IS MY POSTER STRAIGHTENED??
OMG YOU CLEANED UP THE DUNE
OF GARBAGE ON MY DESK!

AND THAT'S NOT JUST A TOY PLANE,
IT'S A T-35923
3492495
COOKIE 5323
ROADSKY
RANGER
SPECIAL
EDITION!
BLAH BLAHE
BLAH BLAHE
BLAHBLAHBA
BHALFDetc.



Fletcher shouldn't have a chulhu doll. Maybe it's from an anime. He doesn't strike me as the Lovecraft type.



munch munch

While I was & am a big anime fan, I dated someone in HS who was obsessed with Sailor Moon & was a total bore. Sailor Moon was a lot more fun and more interesting than they made it out to be, but I was in Delye's position here quite a lot of the time. Though I didn't eat any models.

don't want to make the impression that they're horrible people...none of them are, at heart. Especially Cal. But they've had hard lives, and it shows.

Cal was never anything but kind to me...

<I'm not surprised...Cal is a sweet person.

Here's my house...

Nice, nonsensical backpedal there, Mid.
"These horrible people aren't all that bad, really"

This is your cousin?

Umm.. Yeah, that's him.
That's an old photo, though.
He's about three years older than me, so he should be 19 by now.

Heh, yeah, we both resemble our dads. My dad and uncle are twins.

I absolutely did not remember I made Rhodes and Morse' fathers twins. That's a weird detail I made up on the spot while doing this page and never used it again.

name?

Rhodes.
Dunno why they named him something so weird...

I can't tell her this yet... But the aura around this photo is mangled beyond repair. He's undergone a transformation worse than death...which means...

Where is he being kept?

I forgot I even did this! Photo auras! I don't know if it would ever occur to me to do something like this again. Spectral photography isn't something you should make canon and then never use again. Most of the magic I think of for this world has to do with peoples' conscious and subconscious thoughts. It's a little more ephemeral and flexible than more tactile magic like spectral photography. I don't mind the idea, it's just something I would have to be more consistent about for it to work.

Mid's report: "That sounds like bullshit, but I believe it."

I have good reason to believe that this elemental has been possessing mortals since the invasion, too oppressed by the surrounding Faidian presence to physically manifest himself. This elemental is now in the possession of a 19 year old boy

(Edonalohee, or "diamond palace" the Callanerialian stronghold)

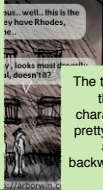
They know, Roe. It's not very easy to hide these things from them anymore.

Cal: I'm not even mad.

This entire line of inquiry of Mid's isn't going to appear like this in the new comic. The idea of there being no equivalent elementals to Rae in these other worlds, and Rae fixating on Sutyenner for this reason, is absurd to me now in light of other developments I've made to the way all of this works. But, y'know, it works well enough to explain the motivations behind the actions of the characters thus far.

What IS interesting about this report is that Mid, by divesting this information to all of the elementals, is doing something that's still accurate to his character: though he's Cal's minion, he is actually beholden to all of the elementals under certain circumstances. He's obligated to serve in all of the elementals' best interests, even if it means a "betrayal" to Cal. If something poses a threat to the elemental structure, Mid has an obligation to inform everyone about it, regardless of branch allegiances. The establishment of this arrangement will receive more attention in the new comic. I'm surprised to see that I had enacted it this early. Mid is a weird character magically - an "elemental of elementals" in a way.

...pieces like
asons, so
ess the
ne was not
e for life
ause that
ms
problems
es' parents
home" to
ng people



The text flow in this panel is reversed. I still make this kind of mistake, because you have a character on the left but who speaks second. It's pretty easy to mess this up. I had to stare at it for a few seconds before I realized I read it backwards. Morse's dialogue should at least be on the bottom half of the panel.

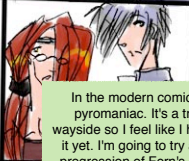


Isn't he an
elemental?!

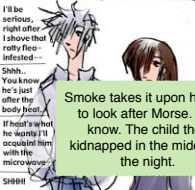
You all
warn
me
against
coming



Okay, okay! I'm sorry! You don't have to be scared of Fern, he's a secondary, which means he was a mortal once.



Morse actually coming out and complaining about the writing inconsistencies.



Smoke takes it upon himself to look after Morse. You know. The child they kidnapped in the middle of the night.

In the modern comic, Fern will still be a bit of a pyromaniac. It's a trait that tends to fall by the wayside so I feel like I haven't properly characterized it yet. I'm going to try and demonstrate the natural progression of Fern's character more clearly in the new comic, but it's kind of challenging because he's that trope of a character who wants and tries to be good, but tends to overindulge the senses. I don't want him to be like, zany, but he kind of is.





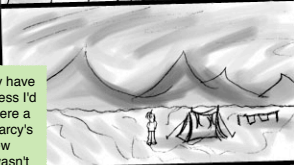
Yes?



I'm sorry to disturb you, ma'am... but I'm your brother Lem's boyfriend, Darcy. I was wondering if you could tell me the truth about your brothers, what happened, and all ...



Okay. Take off your shoes and come in.



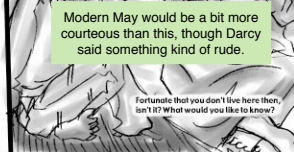
Why the heck does Darcy have to introduce himself? I guess I'd decided May and Lem were a lot more distant or that Darcy's relationship was a new development that May wasn't aware of because of her hermit lifestyle. This is silly though.



and it rather inconvenient tent in the middle here.

Here it comes - I think this is my most embarrassing info dump!

Modern May would be a bit more courteous than this, though Darcy said something kind of rude.



Fortunate that you don't live here then, isn't it? What would you like to know?

Our parents are the dietties Sun and Universe. Cal and I were fraternal twins. He was born first, making him the oldest and most powerful entity of Faidia.

Our father wasn't faithful, and had another child awhile after with the Moon. The Sun was horribly jealous, and wanted the child destroyed. He was our half-brother, Raenerial.

Moon brought the child to Cal to keep safe. Cal raised him like his own. They were very close.

Then, for reason of us and the Sun and Universe another Lemonei our brother came later to become the Sun's favorite child.

Even then I had very little interest in what was going on. Rae and Cal didn't have what you would call a normal sibling relationship, but there was no one else BUT us back then. There were no societal taboos or anything of that sort... Lem made up all that stuff later.

Not long after Rae left, the Sun decided suddenly she was interested in Lem again, and took him away. It was easy enough to do. Cal didn't seem as wonderful anymore to Lem, especially now that he was grieving after the missing child. The Sun offered him power... taught him how to build his own little world to control... How to use his power to

The Sun had no interest in raising babies, so Lem was dumped on Cal, too. Rae was a teenager by the time Lem arrived, and for awhile, if I remember correctly, they were all very happy together...but Rae began to feel excluded... I doubt Cal did it on purpose... Lem is the type of person who demands a lot of attention. It's in his nature. Rae used to be such a shy boy because of his appearance, easily swept under the carpet. Cal was so busy raising Lem, Rae felt unwanted. He ran away. Cal was crushed. You have no idea how much those two adore each other... it's uncanny...

He didn't have to deal with what he thought was Cal's nagging anymore... no more parental figure telling him what to do. HE was in charge now, HE was running the show. Little did he know the Sun was the one with all the cards. Cal was never a nag, never hard to deal with. He would have given anything to those boys. They were spoiled rotten, and weren't even aware of it. Unlike the Sun, Cal loved them, and would never have done ANYTHING to hurt them.

Needless to say, without proper instruction, Lem's first generation of living things failed. All the plants died and rotted in the ground. Faidia itself was covered in reeking slime. It was very ugly. Lem, pissed as all hell, went looking for answers, and the only one he got was conveniently provided by Rae. "It's all Cal's fault," was the answer, and me? I don't think either of them is an ugly, blind sort I over Cal as much as they still love them just as much. other, not like the Sun, had creoled. together. They had no was. They literally n't TRIUMPH over death, as y--he helped bring it into se went absolutely mad. He prophecy, and became He would have annihilated izing what he'd done to Cal. I the scene. I locked Rae

into Cal's gaping chest. God, I can still see the blood splattered everywhere...They played in it like children with fingerprints.

We all have some blame in this situation... I could have helped Cal raise those two, or stepped in somehow. But there were no rules back then. We didn't know bad things could happen. Hah, unbelievable now how quillible we were... I doubt we've much changed. Rae, Lem... they're like overgrown children. I'm sorry you have to deal with him, but I'm also glad he has someone willing to love him despite what he is, because I highly doubt he's capable of loving himself.



Christ, it's dark in here.

At this point, I'm pretty sure I was using a nib pen to ink the comic, instead of just pencils. It's still quite grainy but there's any discernible line variation.

Lower your voice...
but yeah... it's
unusually dark
for a hospital...
there should be a
night light
someplace at least...

The computer says he's in
room 217. We should be able
to find it soon... we're on the
right floor....

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OW! Fern,
What---

MID... RUN, NOW!



WHAM

Also, at this point, I was still using a mouse on the computer, but I had switched from Photoshop to Painter for coloring the comic. The idea of using Painter without a drawing tablet is absurd to me nowadays, but I certainly managed to muddle through back then. I used the Liquid Ink tool in Painter for the blood on these pages, and I had a lot of fun!



It's so weird that I went immediately from some of the most artless info-dumpage in comic history to my most kinetic scene in the comic yet. I ... have no explanation for this. I remember I was definitely excited to depict some senseless violence, however. This was a scene I actually imagined ahead of time with some level of choreography and visuals, and the backstory was kind of like, "Well I already drew this for the dream sequence so I don't want to do that again, right? So I'll just have May explain it." Except it took like 5,000 words on a single comic page to do that. Oops.

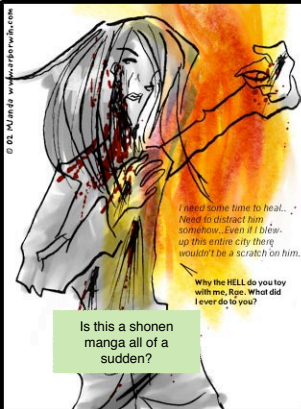
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We haven't even started yet, sir.

Hurhur, Rae talking like a super villain is actually hilarious to me. He's such a dingus.

Ah, how I've dreamt of smashing your head in with my very own hands, Moranerial. You've stood in my way one too many times. But I must say, I'm disappointed. Aren't you being a little easy?

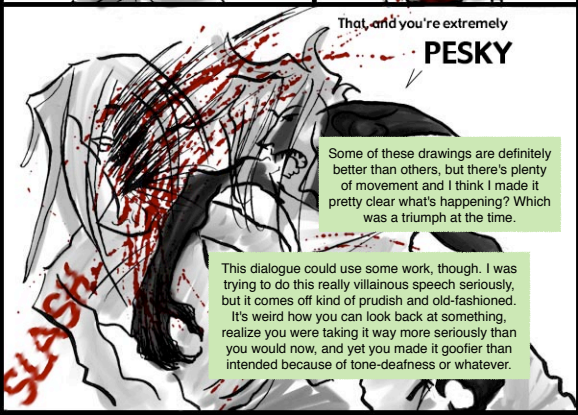
That's more like it. C'mon, you little midget, give me all you got.



Is this a shonen manga all of a sudden?



I still really like this color palette of having everything black/gray except for the red and orange of the fire and blood.



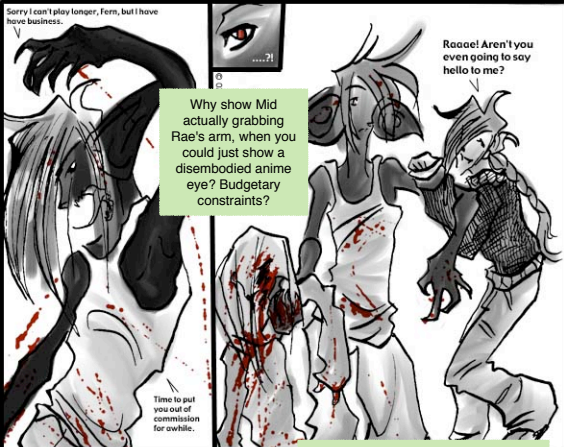
That, and you're extremely
PESKY

Some of these drawings are definitely better than others, but there's plenty of movement and I think I made it pretty clear what's happening? Which was a triumph at the time.

This dialogue could use some work, though. I was trying to do this really villainous speech seriously, but it comes off kind of prudish and old-fashioned.

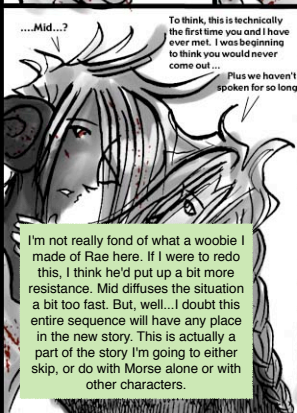
It's weird how you can look back at something, realize you were taking it way more seriously than you would now, and yet you made it goofier than intended because of tone-deafness or whatever.

Sorry I can't play longer, Fern, but I have
have business.



Why show Mid actually grabbing Rae's arm, when you could just show a disembodied anime eye? Budgetary constraints?

Time to put you out of commission for awhile.




To think, this is technically the first time you and I have ever met. I was beginning to think you would never come out ...

Plus we haven't spoken for so long

I'm not really fond of what a woobie I made of Rae here. If I were to redo this, I think he'd put up a bit more resistance. Mid diffuses the situation a bit too fast. But, well...I doubt this entire sequence will have any place in the new story. This is actually a part of the story I'm going to either skip, or do with Morse alone or with other characters.

A lot of this entire scene is subsumed into basic motives: show adorable yaois, and show blood, which were things that just went together somehow in a lot of pieces of media at the time. I figured, hey, Fern can heal, what would it hurt for there to be senseless violence? I think people liked it at the time, it was exciting! But I remember kind of regretting it immediately because how expediently I moved on from it kind of trivialized Fern's experience. Violence is still really fucked up, even if you can heal up from it. If this were something like Jojo's Bizarre Adventure, at least there would be a gradual ramp up to the healing abilities of the characters, and that tension would help fuel the story and make you care about the characters ("I don't want anything bad to happen to this person"). I kind of just don't do this again, at least not for a really long while. It's just here for the indulgence of it (and to show Rae is an asshole).



Sick fuck. I'll have to thank
Mid later.
My head is spinning...where
the hell are my glasses?
All healed up -- I have
to get find that kid NOW.
Rae won't fall for it for long.

Reading this now as an adult,
this dialogue somehow
reminds me of a Sonic comic,
and now I'm imagining an
echidna version of Fern and I
want to die.

Where is that room ...

There's something wrong with this place...It
looks abandoned in parts, but it's being used
for **SOMETHING**... we need to get out of here...

Ah, here it
is.

I wanted to hint that
there might be magic
shenanigans going
on in Arduc, too, with
Fern's comment
here. I never followed
it up though.

screee

Hello?

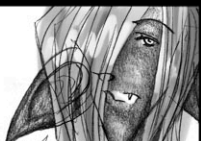
At least Rhodes
has a big room?



Rae.. Why'd you attack Fern? I know you two don't like each other... but it's not necessary...

Bah. That was just a love tap. And he WAS getting in my way. You two want to keep that boy away from me.

Why do you want the power so badly, anyway?



Why do you think? Lem is going to try and stuff me back in Cal the first chance he gets. I'm NOT going back in there, dammit. I need the extra juice after being held up so long. I don't know why Cal doesn't approve. It was as bad an experience for him as it was for me. There's a lot of things I need to fix on this planet, starting with Lem's treatment of the halfings. It's my fault that started in the first place, and I'm going to stop it.

We're on your side, Rae, please believe me. Doubtless you'll fight with Lem no matter what... but don't fight against us. Fern may not like you, but he shares our concerns.



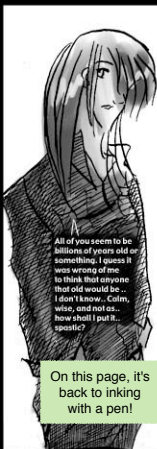
We want you to be safe ... Who knows what this strange 'mental' will be like. There are other... and more strategic ways of doing this.

I switched back to pencils for this page, and filled in the characters. I was still struggling to figure out what look I liked best for the art. Honestly I think I'm resigned to changing my techniques up on the regular as a matter of course to keep myself interested, albeit in less noticeable

So Rae's motive here is so seize power so that he can resist Lem. I think a better touch for this entire sequence would have been to have the siblings emphasize that they think Rae is mindless and uncontrollable. Instead there's some weak statements about how Rae will inevitably destroy the world, when in fact Rae is kind of necessary by the logic of the elemental system to restore balance to the world. Once he pops out, he's unstable, but he'll come over to your side of things if you convince him it's in his best interest. It's kind of underwhelming. I mean, Mid isn't the sharpest knife in the drawer, and he manages to control him immediately. I guess part of this is that I'm trying to make Lem look like a hysterical liar, but on the other hand, Rae DID actually threaten to destroy the world. The whole thing is rather awkward. In the new comic I haven't fleshed out all of these details yet, but I can say that balance is going to come up a lot more as a very important concern of the elementals, and Rae's absence is a big problem for that balance.

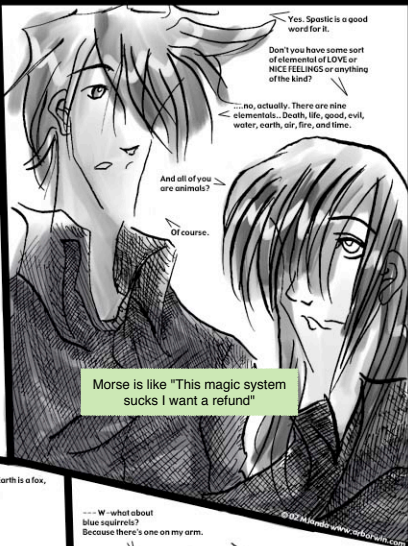


Just doing my job...



All of you seem to be billions of years old or something. I guess it was wrong of me to think that anyone that old would be... I don't know... Calm, wise, and not as... how shall I put it... spastic?

On this page, it's back to inking with a pen!



Yes. Spastic is a good word for it.

Don't you have some sort of elemental of LOVE or NICE FEELINGS or anything of the kind?

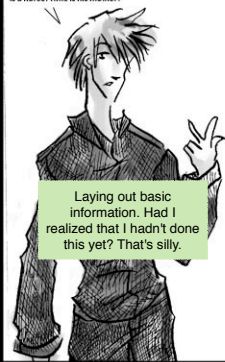
...no, actually. There are nine elementals... Death, life, good, evil, water, earth, air, fire, and time.

And all of you are animals?

Of course.

Morse is like "This magic system sucks I want a refund"

Death is a crow, Life is a snake, Fire is a snake, Good is a swan. Air is an albatross, Earth is a fox, Time is a winged horse. Mid, by the way, is a horse. Time is his mother.



Laying out basic information. Had I realized that I hadn't done this yet? That's silly.

--- W-what about blue squirrels?
Because there's one on my arm.



Oh... that'd be Vivianerial, elemental of water.

What do SQUIRRELS have to do with w-
Oh, nevermind. Is he dangerous?

Depends on your

I always think of this scene as being VERY early in the comic, but it's actually way in here. Wow, the cross hatching on Morse's shirt in this panel actually looks pretty good except for a couple of spots. Viv is more of a Faidian musk rat in the new comic. I'm designing a new creature for him, but it will still functionally be a squirrel. He'll still be blue, of course, but unfortunately not a maril because I don't want to get sued by Gamefreak.

Tch. My apologies, Miss.

Stop scaring the natives,
Viv.

sigh
Morse,
meet
Folanerial,
elemental
of air. He's
one of Lem's
secondaries,
if that means
anything to you.

They're really coming out
of the woodwork, aren't
they...

Just in time, Fola
and Viv arrive with
some Fresh Anime
Bullshit.

Wow. I love this drawing of
Viv. There's just something
about it. He makes a cute
mascot animal.

you want,

Fola heard there was going to be some
elemental action and he ran over here to spoil
it. Most of the motivations for anyone being
anywhere are pretty weak in this story for a
long time. I had a lot of trouble resisting the
urge to just introduce characters one after
another out of enthusiasm and wanting to
hurry the story along.

I'm here for the same
reason you are, Smoke.
Everyone's talking about it.
I don't know why this little pest
came, though. He never
actually DOES anything.

I had probably only drawn Fola's hair like this a few times
at this point and it was really awkward and hard for me to
draw. All of the characters are "hard" for me to draw at
this point, but Fola was particularly difficult for me to be
happy with. The things you get hung up on...

Well, for now
water back

cheeeee n_n

Because of my social circle at the time and some abusive
dynamics that were going on all up in there, I was not able to
come right out and say this until now, more than 10 years
later: Fola is ace. I thought of him as ace when I was drawing
this page and it stuck. Viv of course is a silly oversexed
character and this is an inappropriate joke in a lot of ways, but
Fola and Viv are best friends and they have a really amazing
and close relationship. I wanted to depict an ace character
who was very close to someone else without it being sexual.
As deep as I was in the yaoi times, I really wanted to see a
character dynamic like this, so I made it happen.

Hmm, well I --
Oh for the love of
god, stop HUMPING me!

MY RETAINER AND THAT'S MORE IMPORTANT THAN ANYTHING

There he is.

Are you listening to me, you little shit?
I know you can hear me.

Melted through those locks like
they were wax

Nothing you could ever do, hmm?

Suti's dialogue is a strange digression from the usual flow of the comic. He's omniscient in Arduc, so he's kind of just sensing out the Faidian elementals, while at the same time not quite grasping what's happening yet. He has his plan of revenge but it's desperate and unlikely to succeed because of how disgustingly strong the elementals have gotten from devouring other worlds. Suti has gotten far by intimidating Rhodes but he's just a kid.

There's something wrong with
this one ... I can't wait to
see more ...

There's a room in his head ... a lot like this
one. Dark, rotten, guilty ...

What's that? You don't want to?
Well, you don't really have a choice in this
matter, DO you.

Yes.. something deeply wrong here.

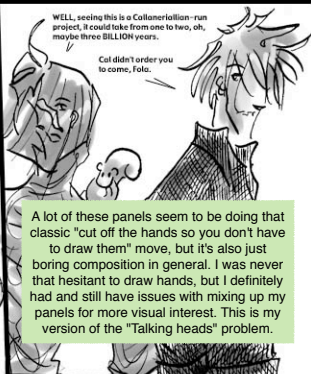
He's perfect.

Yeah, mortal kid, go steal that
elemental's wallet and make
me great again

You know what you need to do.



It's been awhile... I hope they're all right. How much longer do you think they'll be in there, Smoke?



WELL, seeing this is a Callaneriollian-run project, it could take from one to two, oh, maybe three BILLION years.

Cal didn't order you to come, Fola.

A lot of these panels seem to be doing that classic "cut off the hands so you don't have to draw them" move, but it's also just boring composition in general. I was never that hesitant to draw hands, but I definitely had and still have issues with mixing up my panels for more visual interest. This is my version of the "Talking heads" problem.



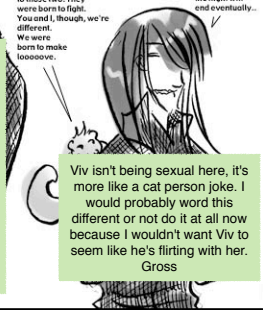
If it wasn't for YOU people we wouldn't have to be doing this in the first place! I won't be surprised if something doesn't get BLOWN UP before tonight is finished, you bunch of hamhanded

We handle our projects the way we see fit, SIR.

Pay no attention to those two. They were born to fight. You and I, though, we're different. We were born to make loooooove.

The night will end eventually... the night will end eventually... the night will end eventually...

Class-trash was something I always wanted to include in the comic, because the branches are supposed to have a lot of history with each other, lots of infighting and historical resentments. But it was surprisingly difficult for me to write and make it sound sincere. Fola's sniping is pretty weak and half-hearted, he's not referring to anything specific because I hadn't actually fleshed it out enough, and Smoke is only vaguely annoyed. Fola would still be a nitpicky weirdo nowadays but I think his dialogue could definitely stand to sound like it's actually based on something, showing the resentment instead of just trying to tell the audience "there's something here!" when there clearly isn't. Not enough nuance.



Viv isn't being sexual here, it's more like a cat person joke. I would probably word this different or not do it at all now because I wouldn't want Viv to seem like he's flirting with her.

Gross

Okay, kiddo... Usually, I don't really care for my face, but since it's already been ripped off once tonight, if you're going to maul me, I wonder if you could focus on some other part of my body. I doubt you're in this strait jacket for nothing, huh?

Let's see how we can get you out of this thing

This is some strange dialogue from Fern. For some reason I never remember that he says he doesn't like his own face here.

Suti is selectively blocking Rhodes' senses to control him, but I would not have Fern just blurt out in his face "you're deaf" now. There's no reason that he would be able to pick up on that except just ~magical bullshit~ explanations. But there's really no reason for Rhodes to be considered properly deaf in general. He's cursed and unresponsive, and that's generally all that needs to be established.

nothing

ing,

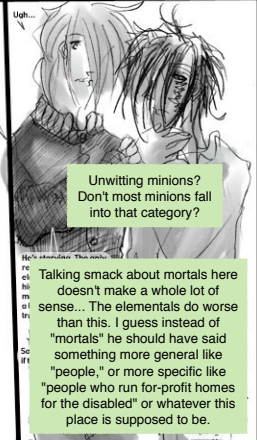
Tch... you've been through hell, haven't you. Black scars under your eyes.. Heh, we have something in common then. I used to have a black scar... nasty, aren't they?

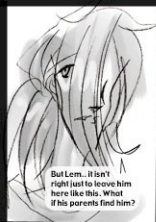
Hum.

... Come on, I'll take care of you.



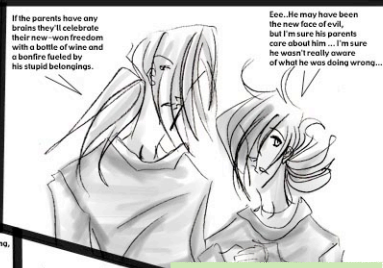
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But Lem... it isn't right just to leave him here like this. What if his parents find him?

If the parents have any brains they'll celebrate their new-won freedom with a bottle of wine and a bonfire fueled by his stupid belongings.



Eee... He may have been the new face of evil, but I'm sure his parents care about him ... I'm sure he wasn't really aware of what he was doing wrong...

It's ... just so sad. So young, and he didn't even have a chance to change his ways...



Oh, all RIGHT.



Wow, I absolutely forgot this page even exists. Necco Fletcher wasn't something that stayed with me.

My parents always threatened our cats with being sold to gypsies when they were bad, so this was just something in my vocabulary. Wouldn't include this now because it is racist.



Mm hm. I'll leave a note for the parents saying he ran off with gypsies.

Ooh. I like gypsies n_n

Now let's get moving and join the others.



Leeeeeem!
I found Smoke!
And Fola, and
Viv, and Miss
Morse.

Terrific. What is this, an
international conference?
How long have you been
waiting?



It's no matter. Here they come.

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Fola must be standing on a box to
be taller than Smoke here



Well.. We're in deep shit now.

Ah..Rae..
Please remember
the nice non-violent
behavior I asked you about..

Everybody's finally together.



WHY DON'T YOU GO BACK
WHERE YOU CAME FROM,
YOU DISGUSTING FREAK
DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA
HOW HARD I'VE WORKED
AND YOU JUST STROLL
IN AND DESTROY
EVERYTHING YOU
IRRESPONSIBLE
UGLY STUPID
IGNORANT
UNEDUCATED HYPOCRIT
MONSTER YOU THINK
I WOULD EVER
CONSIDER YOU A
BROTHER? WE
RELATED TO A FREAK
LIKE YOU? I DON'T
THINK SO DON'T YOU
PAID BLAME THAT ALL
THINGS ON ME, YOU WERE
AT THE ROOT OF EVERYTHING
I AM THE INTIMATE SON OF A WHORE
THAT YOU ARE

NEVER HAVE I SEEN A MORE SPON-GE
BRAT THAN YOU, LEM YOU SIT UP THERE
IN YOUR LITTLE CASTLE AND PRETEND
EVERYTHING IS JUST FINE AND YOU BREED
A BUNCH OF SHEEP WHO'LL DO WHATEVER
YOU SAY AND RUN LIKE THE CHICKENSHIT
THAT YOU ARE BECAUSE YOU'RE A WEAK
SHITTY FREAK A BOY WHO'LL NEVER
GIVE UP TO REALITY AND EXCUSE ME
BUT YOU WERE THE ONE WHO HIT CAL
YOU STOPPED AS MUCH AS I, I LOVED
CAL BUT HE DIDN'T YOU SHOULD BE
GRATEFUL HE EVEN PAID ANY SORT OF
ATTENTION TO YOUR PALE SKINNY LITTLE
YOU ARE SO FULL OF SHIT LEM, YOU
SOME FUCKING PARASITIC LITTLE WORM,
GET OFF THIS PLANET AND ALL YOUR
FUCKING RELATIONS RUNNING AROUND
TRYING TO PICK UP FLICKING MORTALS
WHAT
YOU JUST
WANT TO MAKE US ALL PAY FOR
THE MISTAKE YOU MADE NOT YOUR OWN
DID YOU THINK I FLEW YOU OVER
JUST LIKE THAT? EVERYBODY ELSE YOU
ROTTERED BECAUSE OF A BITCH AND I
MEAN THAT LITERALLY

You can certainly see the family resemblance, eh?

Fola stays classy and
steps out

drawn anime style. We ALL
dated.

They're not going to...
blow up anything,
are they?

I think it's time for
Viv and I to take
our leave.

Some of these jokes, I read them and
I'm like, well that's me but it's a past
me...But this joke about "Anime Style" ...
I might have made this today

I don't think so. They
consider this sort of
thing bonding.

We have to get Rhonda's money,
Fern. Can you handle this?

This tone of, "lets put the fun
back in dysfunctional" type
humor, is definitely no longer
something I'm into.

God, Rho..
what happened
to you...

Don't sweat it...
They're not ready
to fight for real
yet. I think they're
both scared out
of their minds, frankly..

Scared?
Primaries?
Maybe

Viv and Fola
are gone. We
better leave.

ding dong

Don't use the bell, idiot, I
have the key someplace...

You never remember your key.

Yes, right here...one
sec... Sez YOU....Mid, do you have
yours?

Hold on a minute-- Where
are we?! We were just
outside the hospital!

It's called "teleportation" kid. This is
our house.

But WHERE are we?! This isn't even
my TIME zone!

"thud" OW! GODDAMNIT! WHO put
this WALL here?!

Oops... Smoke, get the light..
It was a simple enough question..I'm
tired and hungry and cold, I want to
go HOME!

Pus-snorting
scumbag. Eee...It's okay, Morse,
we need to keep you
around until the trial
is over ---

Larvae
munching
savage. Trial?! What is going ON?!

Oh, REAL good
comeback. Mid, can I have pudding? n.n
Yes, yes, all the pudding
you want... Stop FIGHTING
you two!

My nose--bloody hell!-- fucking wall!--

Well you've lived here 5,000
years, I'd think you'd know
where the walls are
by now!

I DO know
where they
are ~ This
one... attacked
me.

Delye! Don't EAT that!
But I LIKE wax fruit; ;

Why is it so dark in
here...? AAH!
Something brushed
my leg!

Better put some
newspaper
I just KNOW
can't be
housetrained

Your MON
SHUTUP

The whole gang comes back
to the house. Cal's in his
boudoir drinking wine like a
goth AOL chat room

*CRAShtinkle
tinkletinkle*

Oh my god..
was that the Vernerian
vase?! Cal is going to
KILL us!

No problem then,
because we're
already dead.


Haha,
smartass.



Cal is a crow, so he collects tons of
things and clutters the house with
them. I wanted to illustration his
nest-lining habit with this room.



Smoke, you seem relatively sane. Can YOU tell me what's going on?



I'm sorry for ignoring you, Morse, there's always a debacle when we get home. We would like to keep you with us for a little longer so your testimony about your cousin can be offered to our council, who'll then decide how his recovery process should be carried out. In the meantime, we'd be honored to have you stay here.



Uh... m...



It looks...charming.

yaaaawwww



Oh, good he-he. We would bottomless p all this stuff. cleaned last It's like this n



I sure hope you're not thinking I'll be Snow White to your seven dwarves.

Wow, I'd love to keep this stupid dialogue about dwarves. This is like something my wife and I would say now.

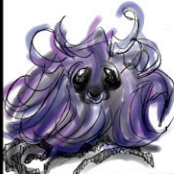
I doubt Morse has ever been in a house like this one. I imagined her family as pretty strait-laced.



Huh? What? Dwarves? We keep dwarves now? They better not have gone in my room.

...Oh. Yeah, I knew that.

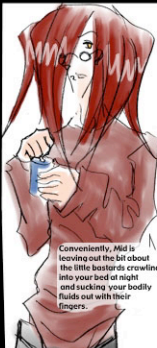
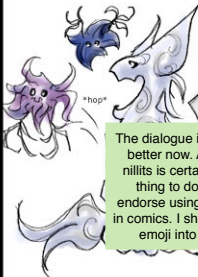
Pardon me for asking... but what
is this thing?



Aheheh, don't be scared, that's
just a nillit. Cal has a habit
of welcoming strange
creatures into our house. They
come here because no one
else will take them in.



There are lots of nillits, most of the time
they're hiding in the walls. They're scared
of light, so if you don't want them to bother
you, you can just turn the lamp on.



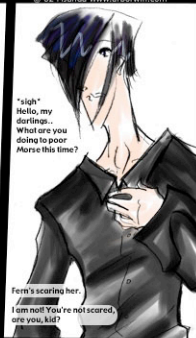
Conveniently, Mid is
leaving out the bit about
the little bastards crawling
into your bed at night
and sucking your bodily
fluids out with their
fingers.

XX Ferns' exaggerating, Morse,
they are equipped with a
natural anaesthetic so you
don't feel a thing. They're quite
friendly, loveable animals, really...

Yeah, especially
when they find
someone unconscious
or injured. They don't
stop feeding until
everything's gone,
then.

= = Fern.

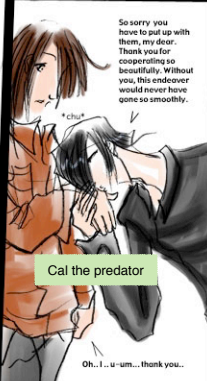
What?



"sigh"
Hello, my
darlings..
What are you
doing to poor
Morse this time?

Fern's scaring her.

I am not! You're not scared,
are you, kid?



So sorry you
have to put up with
them, my dear.
Thank you for
cooperating so
beautifully. Without
you, this endeavor
would never have
gone so smoothly.

chu

Cal the predator

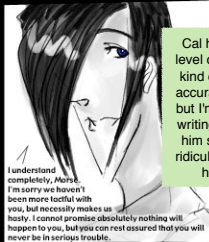
Oh.. I... u-um... thank you..

The dialogue is flowing a little bit
better now. Asking about the
nillits is certainly a reasonable
thing to do. And I still fully
endorse using anime emoticons
in comics. I should probably work
emoji into New Grayling.

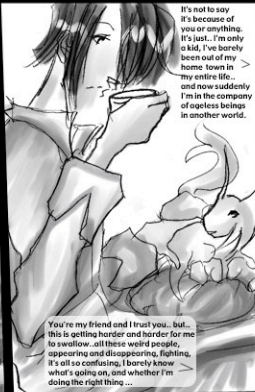


Cal, I can't thank you enough for the kindness you've shown me... I don't think I've ever been treated as well as this by an adult, or... anybody, really. But I'm hoping that, as an adult, you can also understand how... um... Confused and scared I am right now.

Morse sits uncomfortably in this no doubt very musty museum grade chair



I understand completely, Morse. I'm sorry we haven't been more tactful with you, but necessity makes us hasty. I cannot promise absolutely nothing will happen to you, but you can rest assured that you will never be in serious trouble.

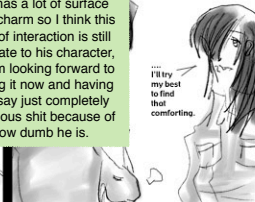


It's not to say it's because of you or anything. It's just.. I'm only a kid, I've barely been out of my home town in my entire life.. and now suddenly I'm in the company of ageless beings in another world.

You're my friend and I trust you.. but... this is getting harder and harder for me to swallow...all these weird people, appearing and disappearing, fighting, it's all so confusing, I barely know what's going on, and whether I'm doing the right thing ...

Remember, as a mortal, you're special, protected. It's we elementals who have to put up with the evil villains and so forth, and we're

Cal has a lot of surface level charm so I think this kind of interaction is still accurate to his character, but I'm looking forward to writing it now and having him say just completely ridiculous shit because of how dumb he is.



.... I'll try my best to find that comforting.

hours later...

I'm sure I'll still make light of how petty these two can be in the new version of the comic, but betterer



I just need to feed, that's all. I'll be fine.

Is Lem here?

Gotta chug some of that primary juice

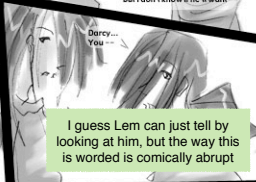
Darcy! Are you all right? You're so pale...

Yes... over here in the living room..



Mid doing little household work things. I'm not sure that's a trait that will carry over to the new Mid.

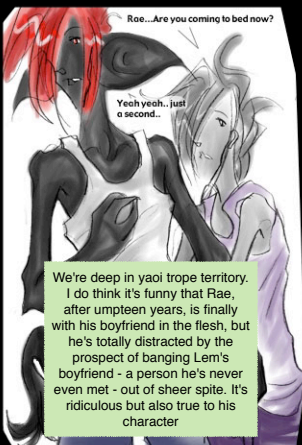
Yes... Everyone else is in bed. They can't fight all night, can they? I set up a bed for Rae but I don't know if he'll want...



I guess Lem can just tell by looking at him, but the way this is worded is comically abrupt



What could Rae be thinking!?



Are you all right?

Yes...
You?

Darcy is so mother henny here. I think it's that yaoi trope of the uke doing feminine things. I guess Lem could use some spoiling or whatever right now, but isn't Darcy famished or whatever?

I got the story from May, Lem. I would've expected you and Rae to have blown up the universe or whatever by now. I'm surprised...glad, but surprised.

I don't want to blow up the universe, HE does. Well, actually, I don't have a bloody clue what he wants.

Of course.
The situation's in control...at least for the moment...

So your assumptions about your brother were wrong...

My assumptions were PRACTICAL. I just want to protect Faidia, damnit. I don't see what's so wrong about that.

You should try to get along with your brothers.

Yeah yeah...

Cal didn't do anything to you,
Lem...he cares about you..

Nothing's right, not even the people have any confidence in me anymore...
I'm all washed up. Too many mistakes...
I've cut off all my supports without even realizing it.

"I'm stupid" Lem yelled into Darcy's eyeballs

You think I don't know it? I can't make it better, Darcy.

Lem's depression and poor self esteem will definitely make a comeback in the new comic, and then some!

Lem.. Lem don't talk that way....It's not like you at all. Where in the world are you getting these ideas from?

I especially hate how Darcy's comforting him after that absurd sequence where Lem hit him. But this was the standard of the time - gotta maximize the angst >_<
How else will my teen ass get high

Lem!
Spoilers!

I'm dying.

Now you're just being melodramatic. You can't die, you're elemental of LIFE.

You all usually complain that you've been alive too LONG.

This should have been a major plot point, actually shown in the actions and scenes of the comic. Instead I just plopped it down here. It occurs to me that part of the problem with Old Grayling is that it's basically just note-taking. I always considered it a "draft" and therefore "notes" on that level, but there are definitely much larger chunks like this one that make it unsuitable for an actual audience.

at this rate, I'll be too weak to keep a physical form...

It's amazing reading this dialogue nowadays because I totally disagree with this. I was trying to be "adult" about these concepts and excuse abusive peoples' bad behaviors like, "Maybe someone abused me, but I'm just as bad, so it's okay." Absolutely not.

And this boy, Rhodes... Nothing good will come of him. I have a bad feeling...

Lem, please

At least this scene reminds me I am really enjoying the chance to redo Lem's character and get it right this time in New Grayling.

Quiet, you.
You're not going anywhere. I'll make sure of it.

I was leveling up and used some Photoshop brushes in the background here. Except for the vacuum of empty space (where I'm putting this note now) this isn't the worst. Lets you really soak in those yaoi rays.....

Heh... Darcy...



Oh how SWEET. They
fixed you up a bit.
Well, it's no matter.

This place
we're in..it's a
lab, not a hospital.
in their basement...
how curious...

Because you're an ignorant
mortal, you probably think
these people will SAVE you.
They're a lot like me,
actually...But worse.
They're all killers, you know.
They have a nice little facade
going here, but I won't be
fooled a second time.

go away Suti..

They're all killers! I really put way too much emphasis on the killing in the dialogue. Probably because I struggled to get these concepts across in the art. Now I can just fill an entire page with blood instead of repeating myself.

Now who's giving orders?
I told you not to do that.
It pisses me off royally.
I'm tired.. please let me sleep..

Trying to make Suti sound as villainous as I could, even though Suti isn't really that villainous a character? Well, he's the bad man and we're supposed to be scared of him, so I thought I had to have him say these things. Suti has a reason to be a jerk, but not quite as messy and long-winded as this. I don't think he'd have to continuously bully Rhodes to stay in control. At this point, I haven't really fleshed out how I'm going to do this part of the story in the modern iteration, because I have a lot more things I need to do first before getting to this - the story being in chronological order now and all. I definitely want to give Suti more nuance in the beginning so his character isn't so back-loaded.

And that's it for now! I hope you enjoyed all the words I had to say to my past self, and I hope you'll hang in there for the next segment of The Annotated Grayling! <3

to these Paidians' level.. they killed my
only friends and left me to ROT.

too
fucking
bad.

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