



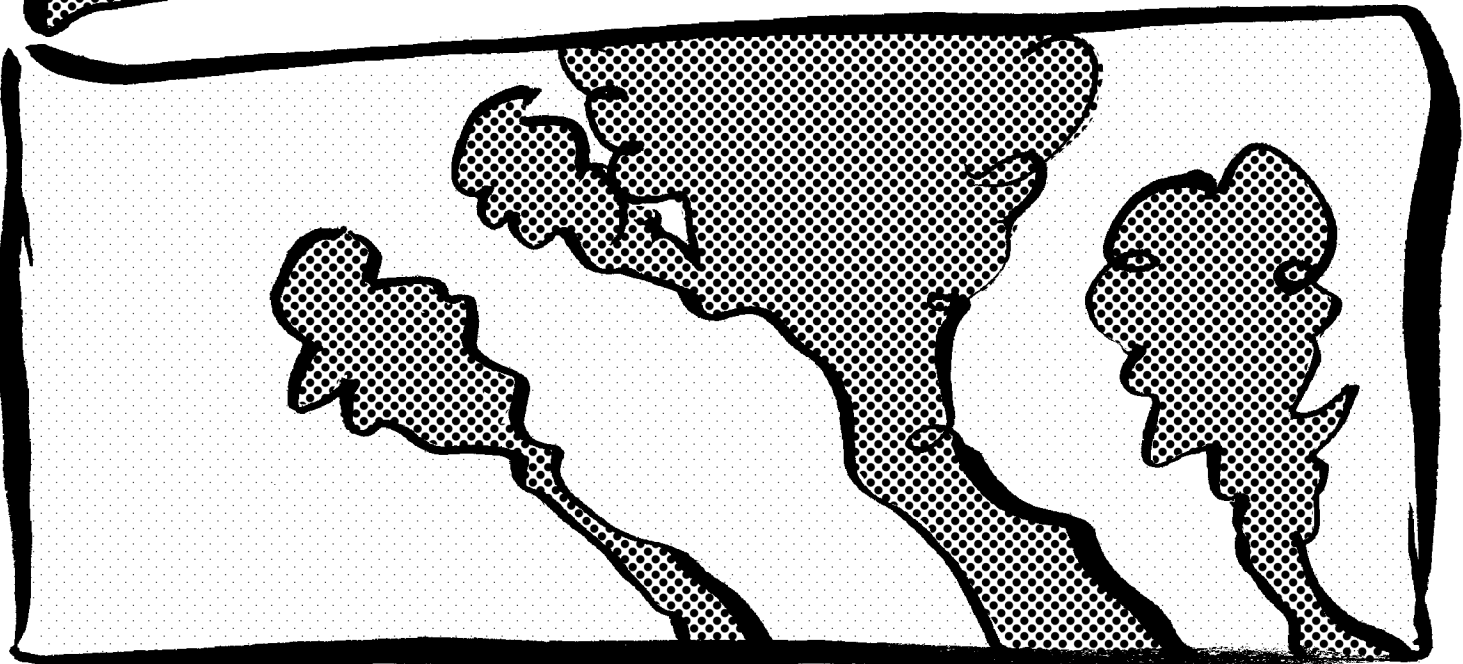
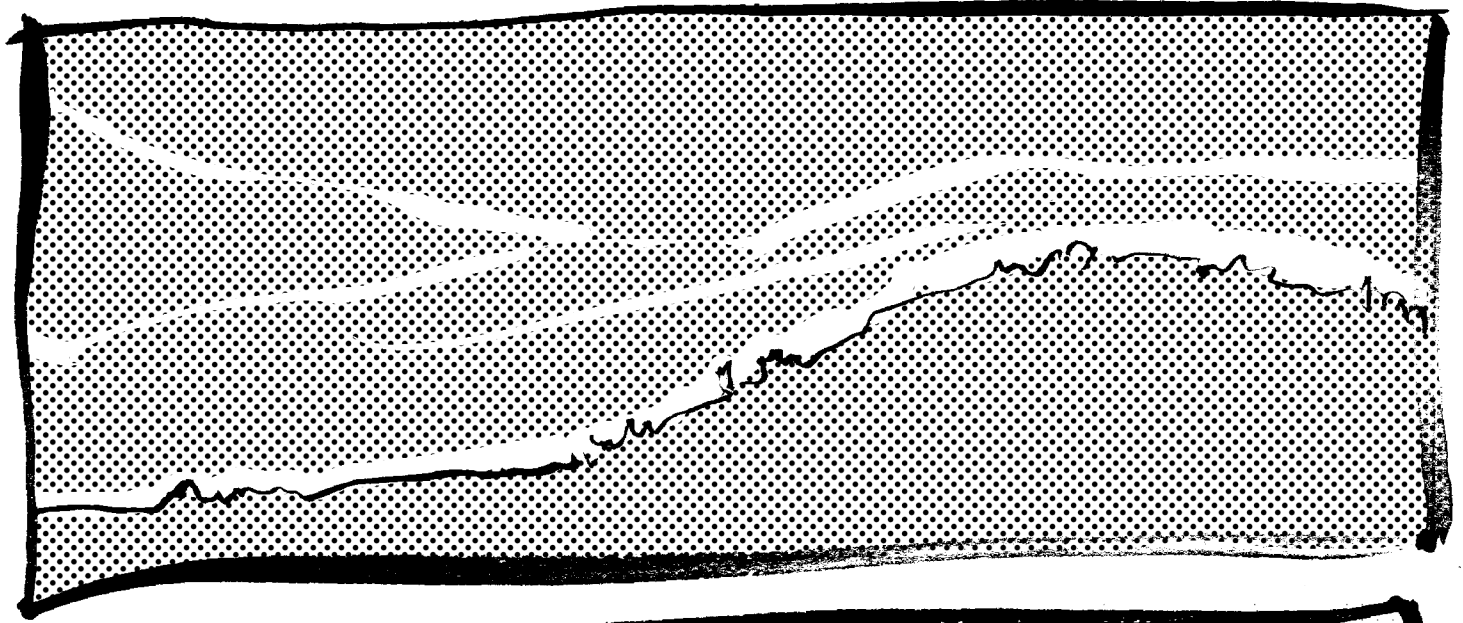




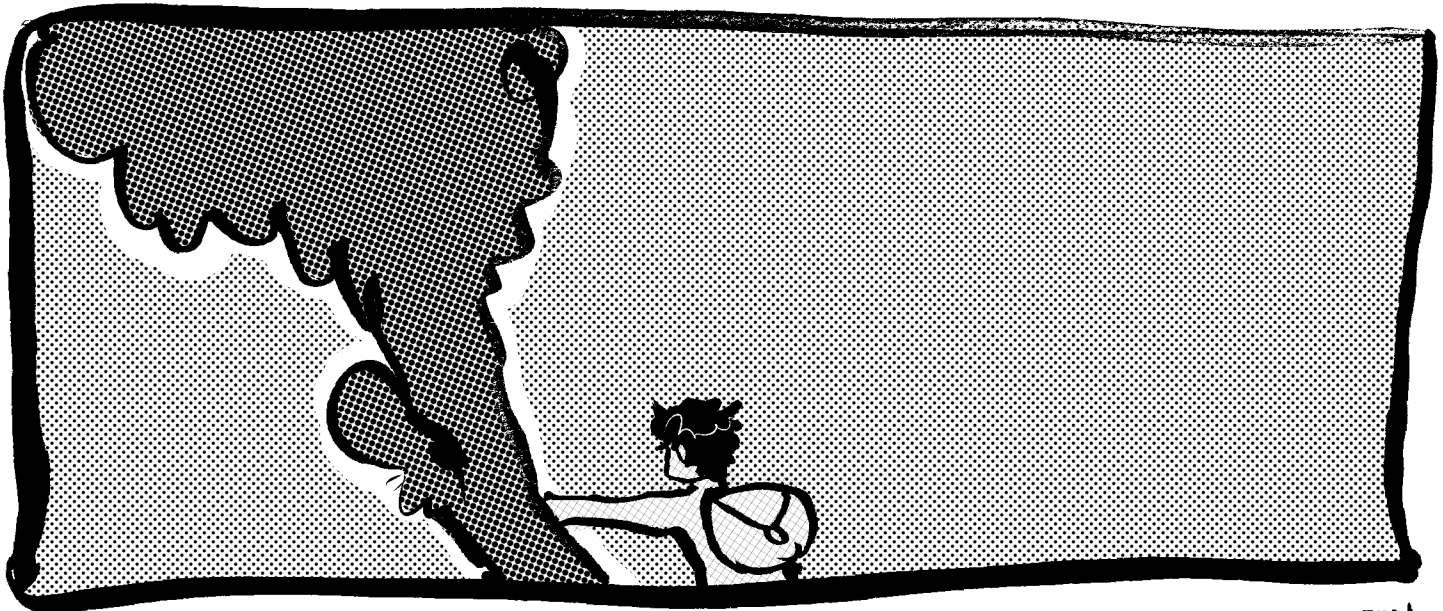
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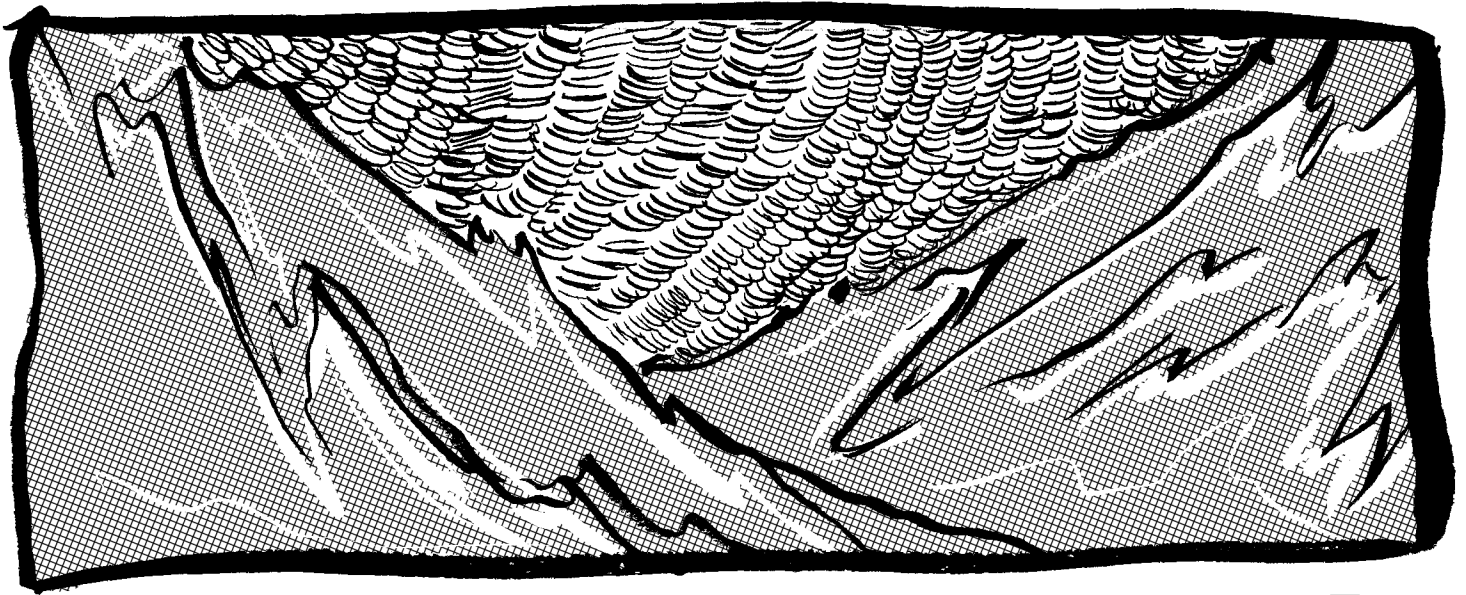










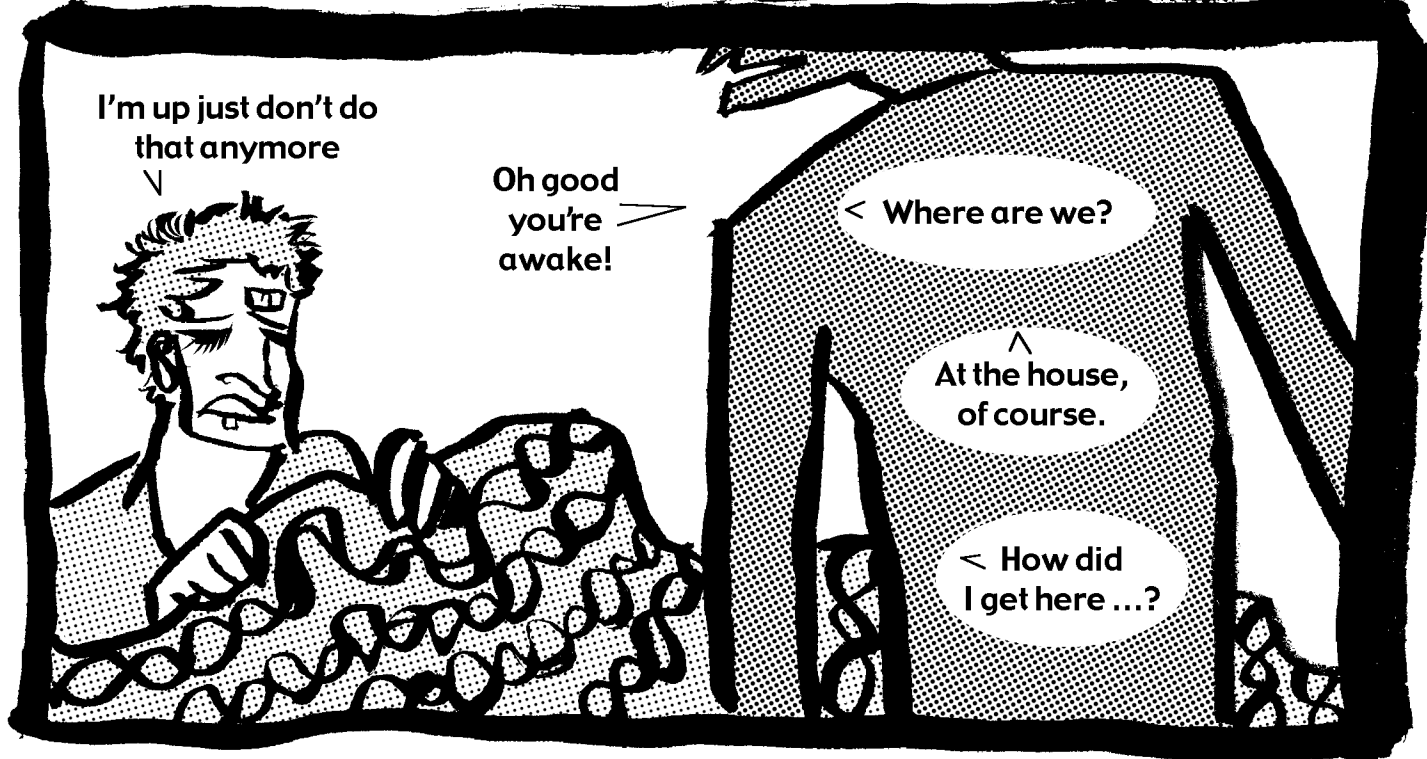
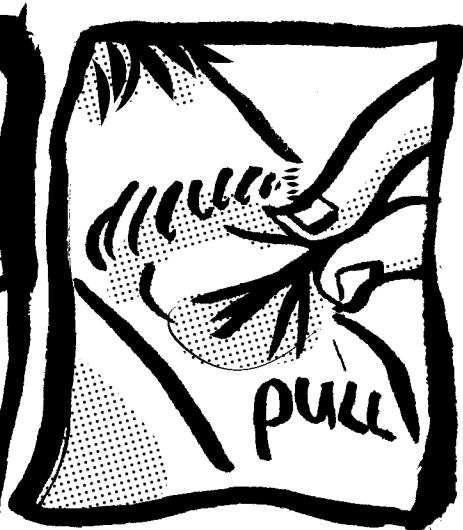
















An Asize hospital  
called Tower to  
have you picked up.

✓

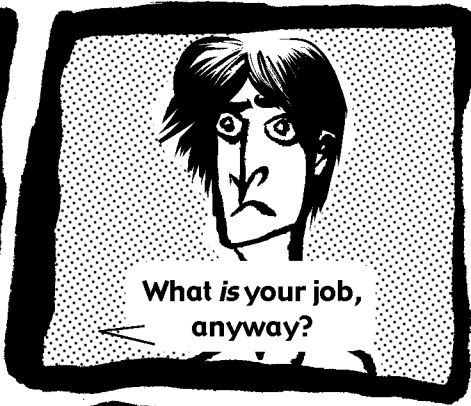
Then Lem called ME,  
and yelled at me very  
rudely about taking  
you home...

...and something  
about starting  
doing my job  
or something  
like that.

1  
Something about  
considering  
you a danger  
to other patients.



Your job ...



What is your job,  
anyway?



Mm...



I figure out  
magic stuff.

But what's the  
deal with the  
element you  
represent?

Do you really  
have any  
business  
asking?

What is "death" magic?  
How's it work?

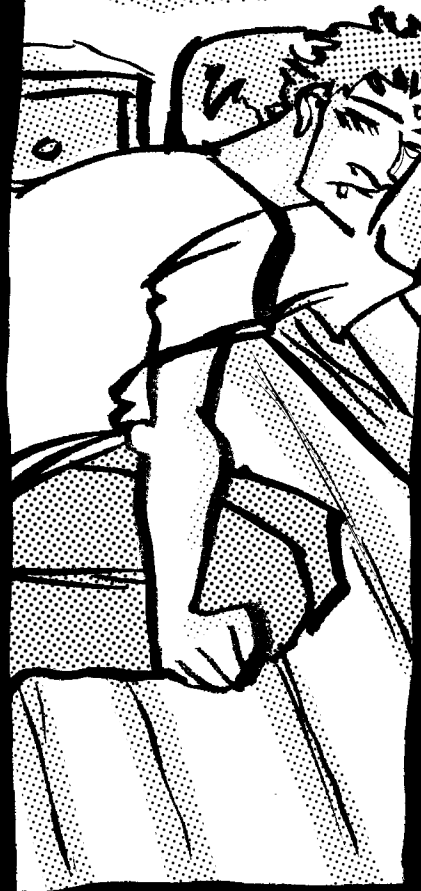
Look, whatever. Get up and do your  
food thing so we can resume your  
training. I wanna get this over with.



Oh and you're  
banned from  
drinking alcohols.



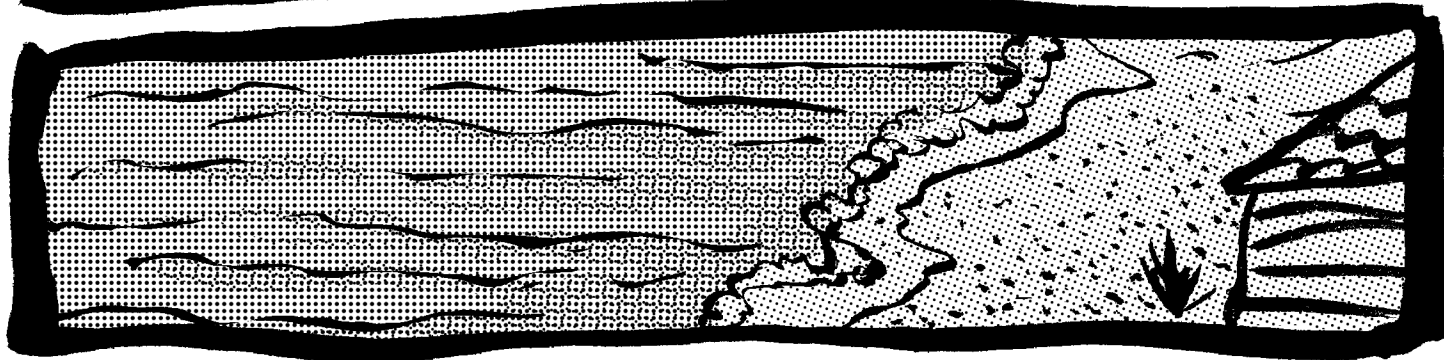
Ugggghh

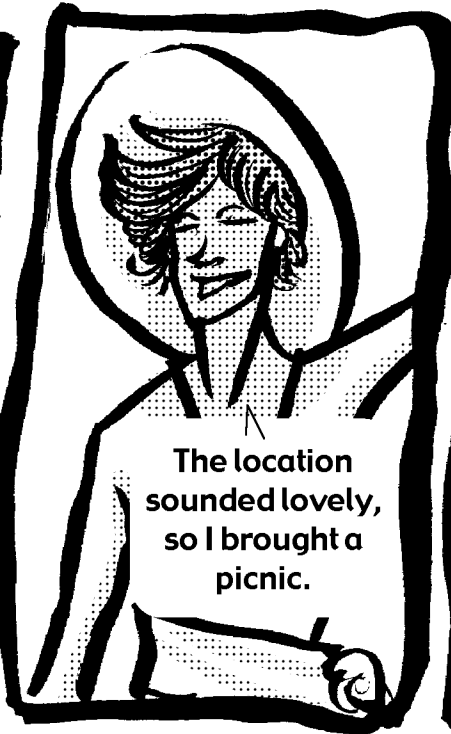


Bingo.









Now listen up.

Thanks to Viv and his crews,  
each of you has a cabin  
to stay in.

This location was selected for its  
proximity to a variety of climate  
conditions...and its isolation.


None of you  
are leaving  
this retreat  
until certain  
objectives  
are met.

Here's how  
it's going  
to be.





**Everyone go get your swimsuits on  
and meet back here.**



**I guess I should mention that  
the information I'm going to  
tell you isn't going to make  
a whole lot of sense at first.**

**But hopefully by the time I'm done today,  
you'll get the general idea.**

**I will do my best to tell you everything I know  
on this retreat. No more dancing around the truth.  
If I don't know something, I'll tell you. I will be as  
open as I possibly can, for a simple reason:  
there's no more time to waste.**

Aren't  
these  
secrets

secret  
for a  
good  
reason?

No.  
It takes  
a long  
time to  
explain

and my  
brothers  
are lazy.

I believe it.

Yep.

But what's  
your  
motive for  
teaching  
us?

I have  
a vested  
interest in  
the operation  
of our world

and a big  
part of that  
operation

involves us.  
Elementals.





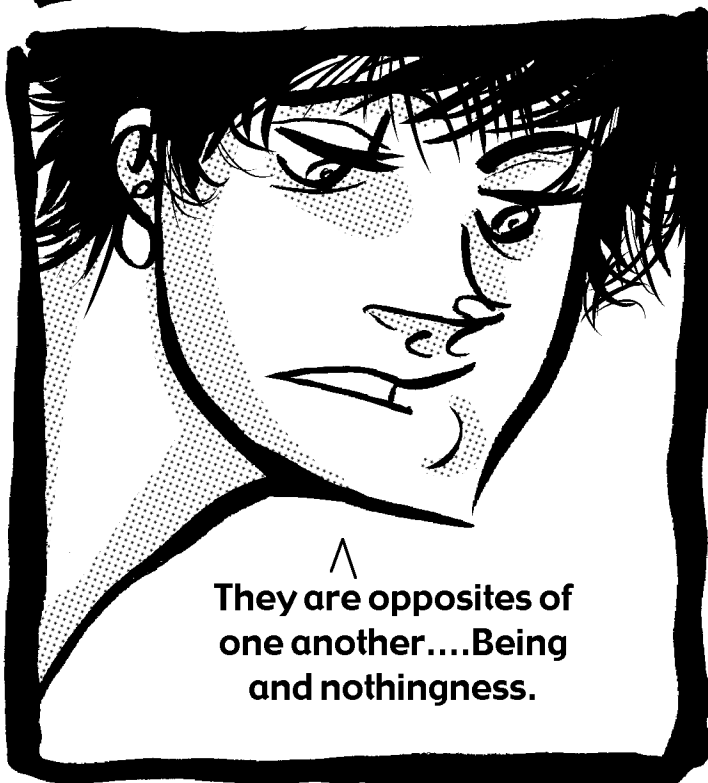
I'll try to draw  
here in the sand  
to illustrate.

You're all familiar with  
the Sun and Universe,  
entities responsible for  
the world's creation.



The Sun isn't just  
an astronomical  
body. It's better  
to think of her  
as representing  
all matter.

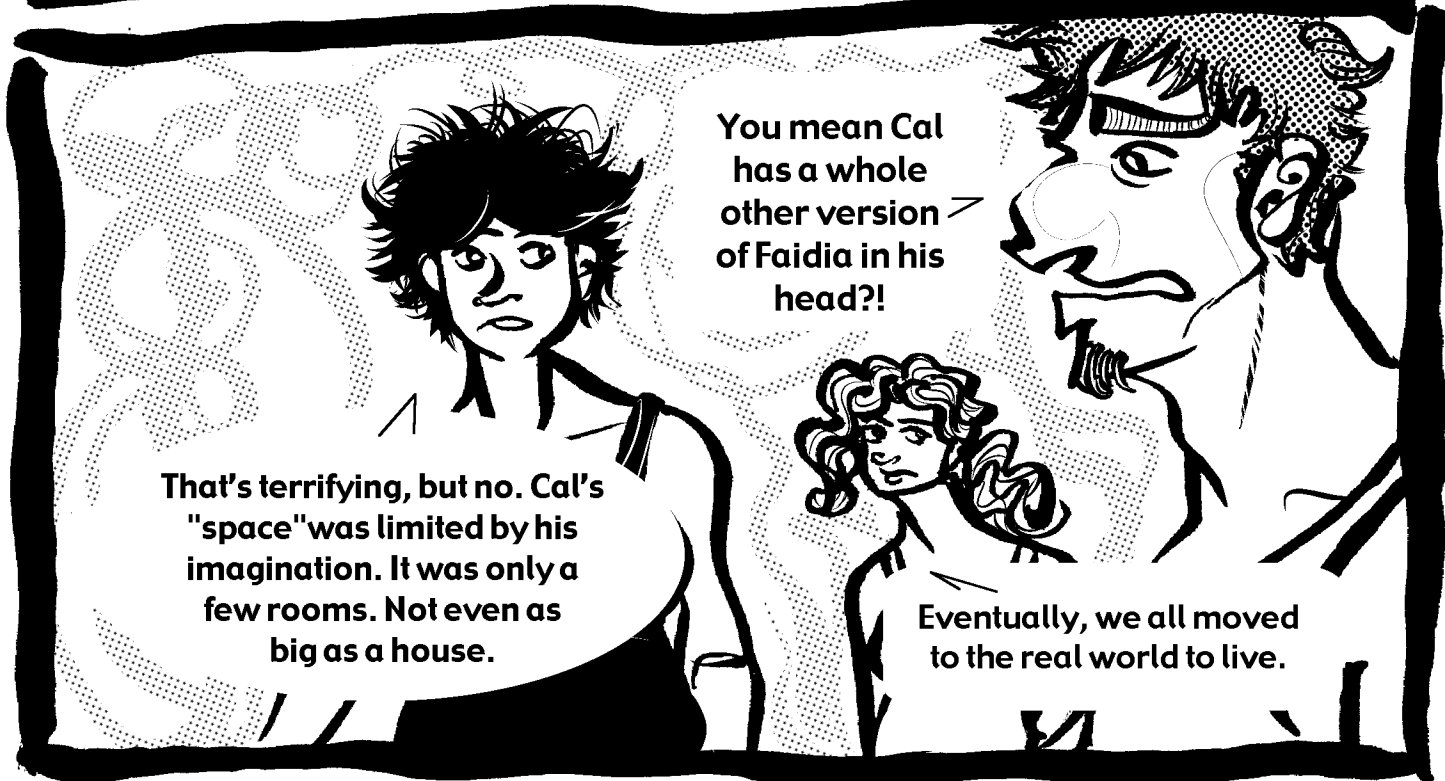
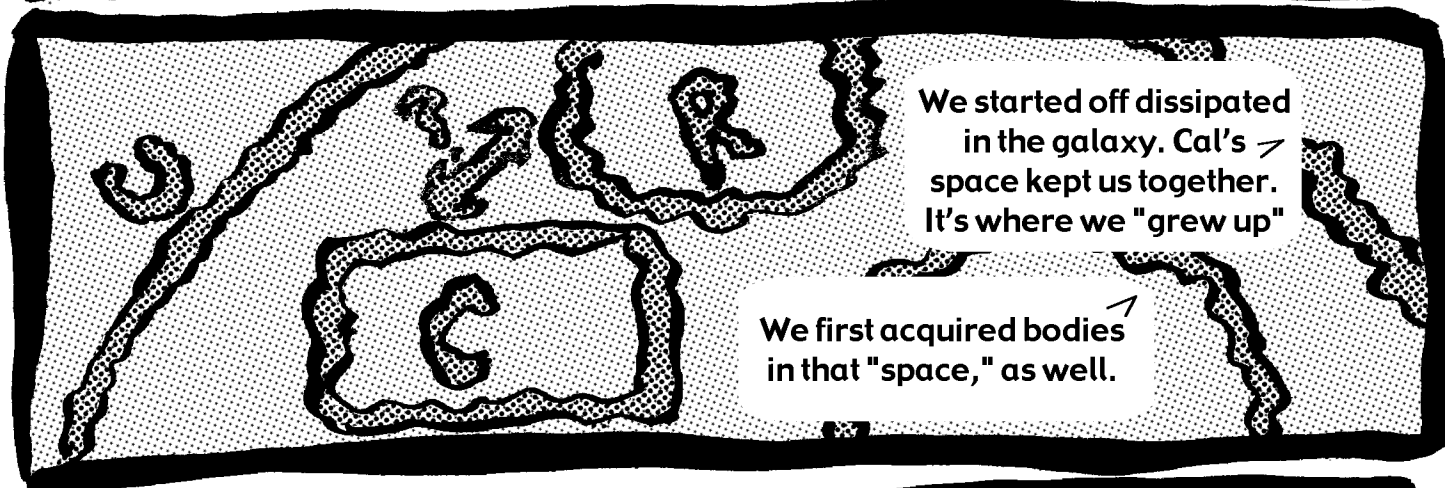
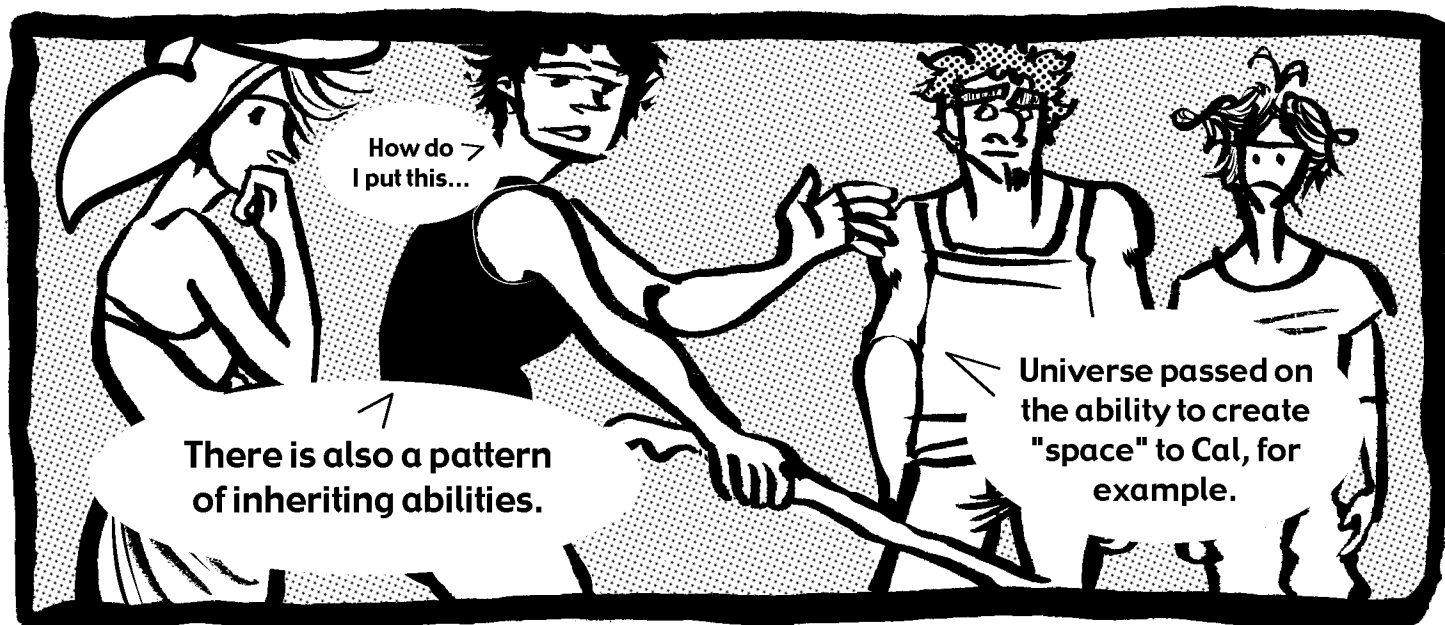
Universe represents  
the void where our  
world exists.



They are opposites of  
one another....Being  
and nothingness.



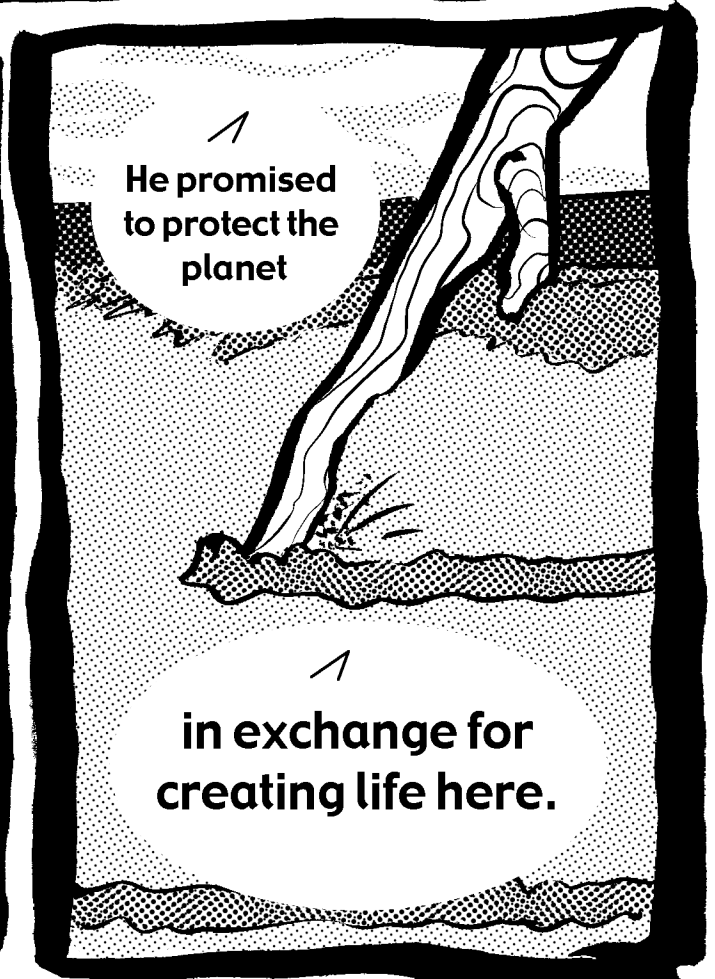
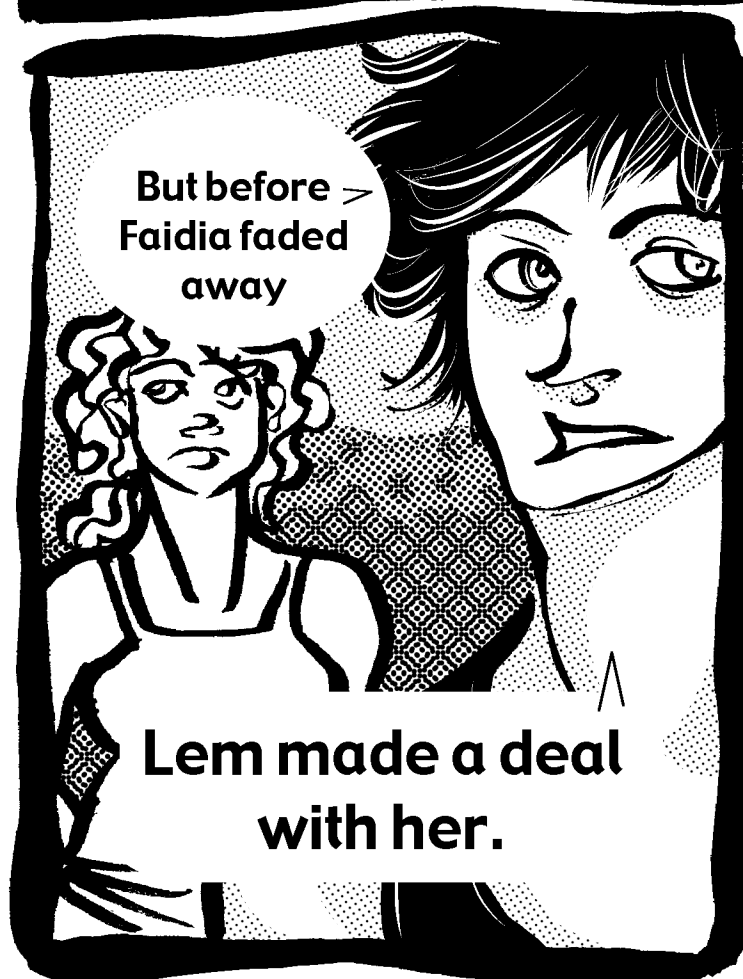
This pattern of  
paired opposites  
is the first of  
many I have  
found repeated  
throughout  
existence.





They were all once sentient beings, but they have now lain dormant for thousands of years.

Another pattern...Age destroys your sentence.

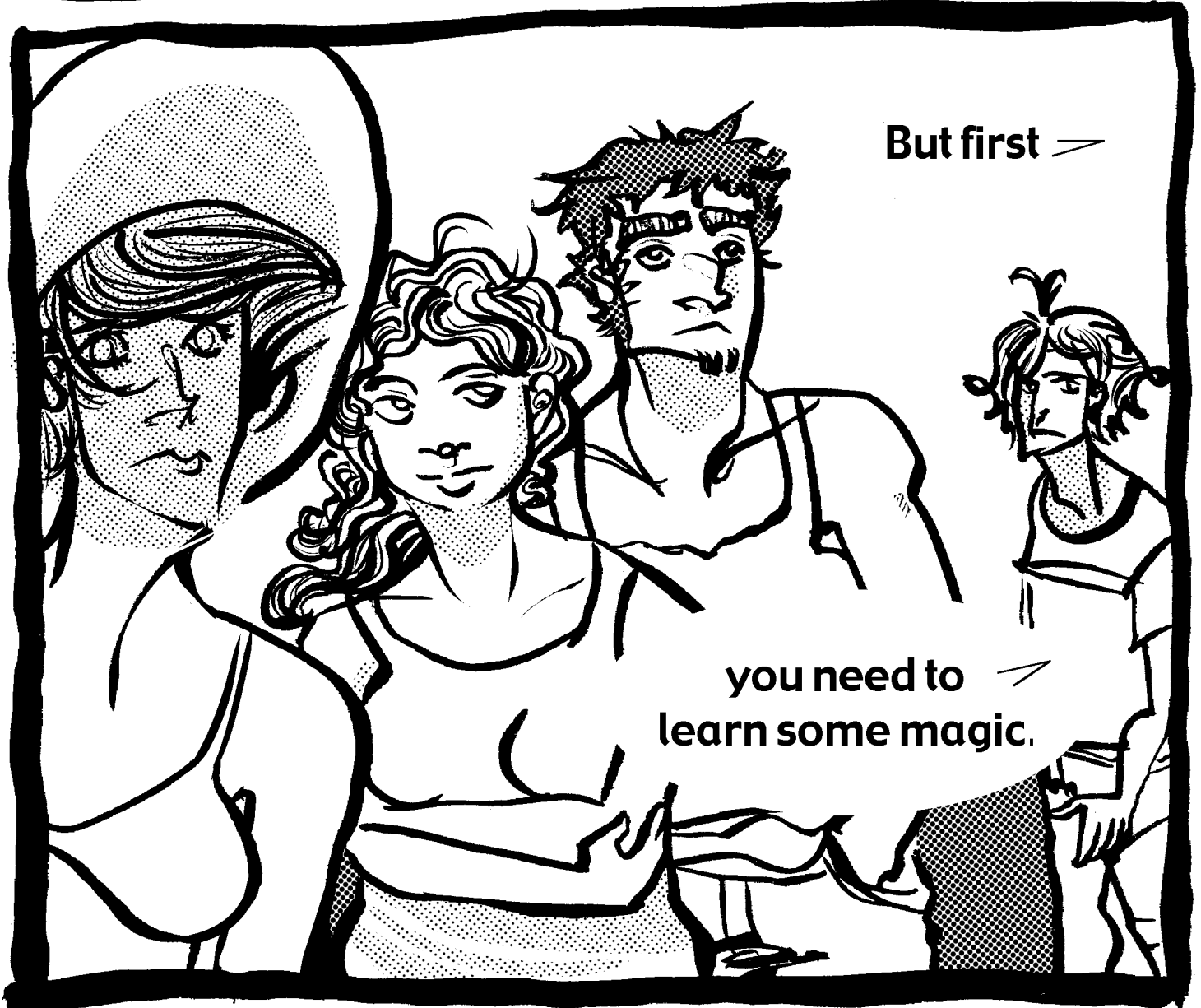






An agreement we have yet  
to make good on.

As I will  
show you.



But first ➤

you need to ➤  
learn some magic.



I will demonstrate.

Stand back,  
everybody.  
This isn't  
dangerous,  
but it's weird.



This is a very  
dramatic example  
of an elemental  
specter.



It's a form you take  
on to use magic  
safely, without  
risking damage  
to your fragile  
mortal bodies.



WE CAN DO THAT?



Dude,  
chill out.



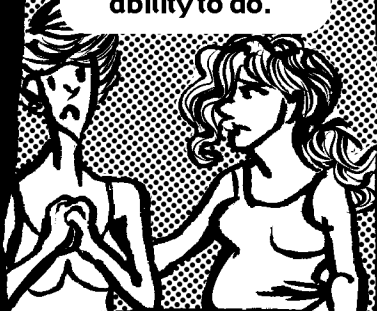
Are we going to have  
epic magic battles???

Well, in a way they'll  
be like battles...

Sure, >  
why not?

Gaaaaaaahhhhd damn it

Changing forms  
is something >  
you all have the  
ability to do.



But to make a  
functioning specter,  
you'll need practice.



You should be  
well-rested  
and focused.



You can make a form solely out of  
your own element, but in truth, you  
can draw on small amounts of all  
the elements to make any kind  
of form you choose. This is what  
we do when we form your mortal  
bodies on your behalf.



Um...What  
if there's a  
problem?



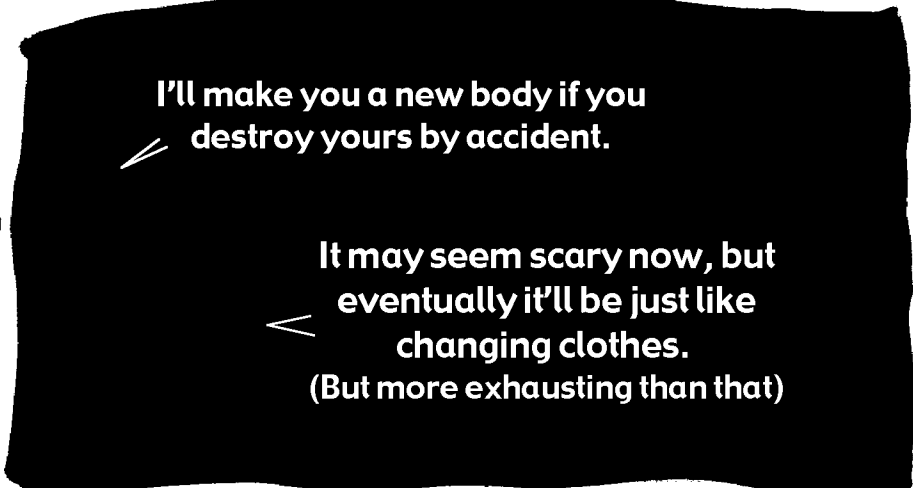
What if we screw up  
and lose our body?

Not a  
problem.  
I'm here  
to prevent  
accidents.

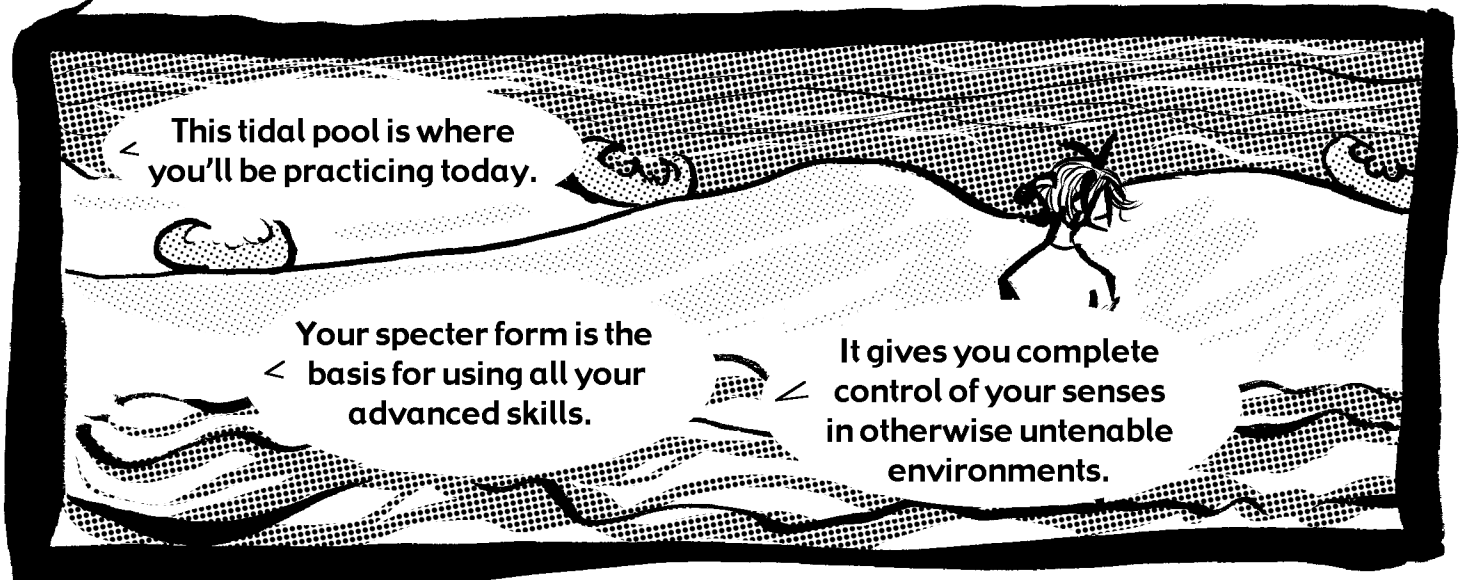


I'll make you a new body if you  
destroy yours by accident.

It may seem scary now, but  
eventually it'll be just like  
changing clothes.  
(But more exhausting than that)








This tidal pool is where  
you'll be practicing today.


Your specter form is the  
basis for using all your  
advanced skills.

It gives you complete  
control of your senses  
in otherwise untenable  
environments.

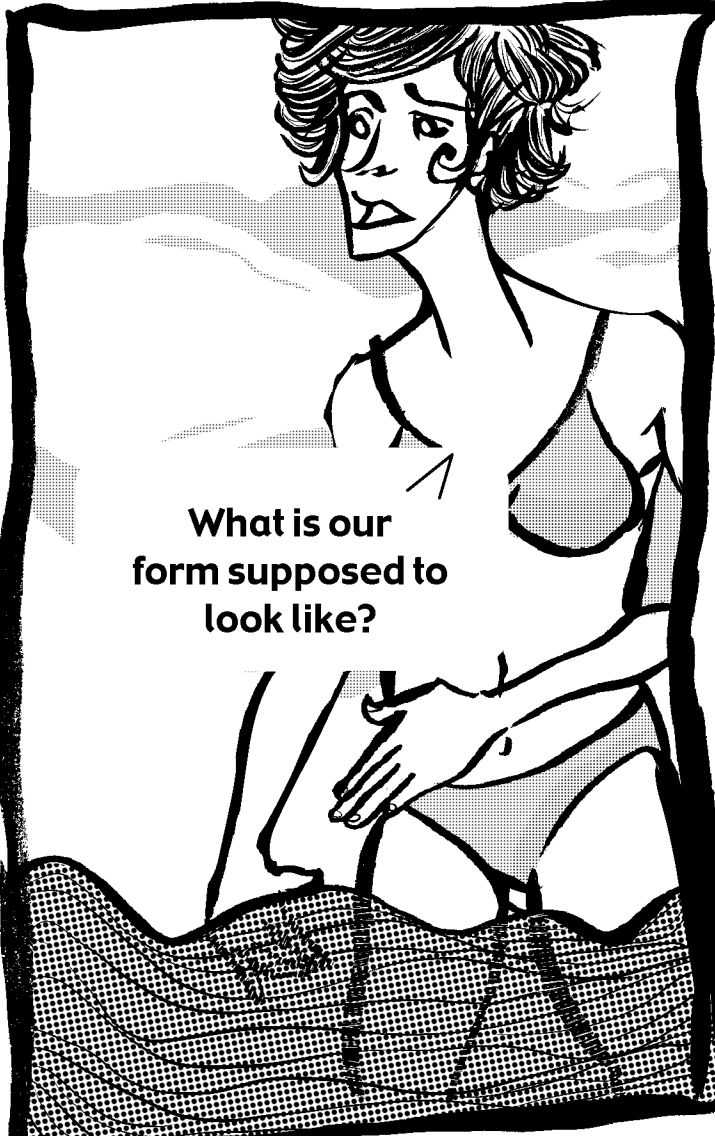


But I can't throw you into an  
unsafe environment before you've  
mastered the ability. So, finally, I can  
explain why you're all in swimsuits.

Your first exercise is  
to go swimming...and  
not get wet.



And no  
cheating, Viv.



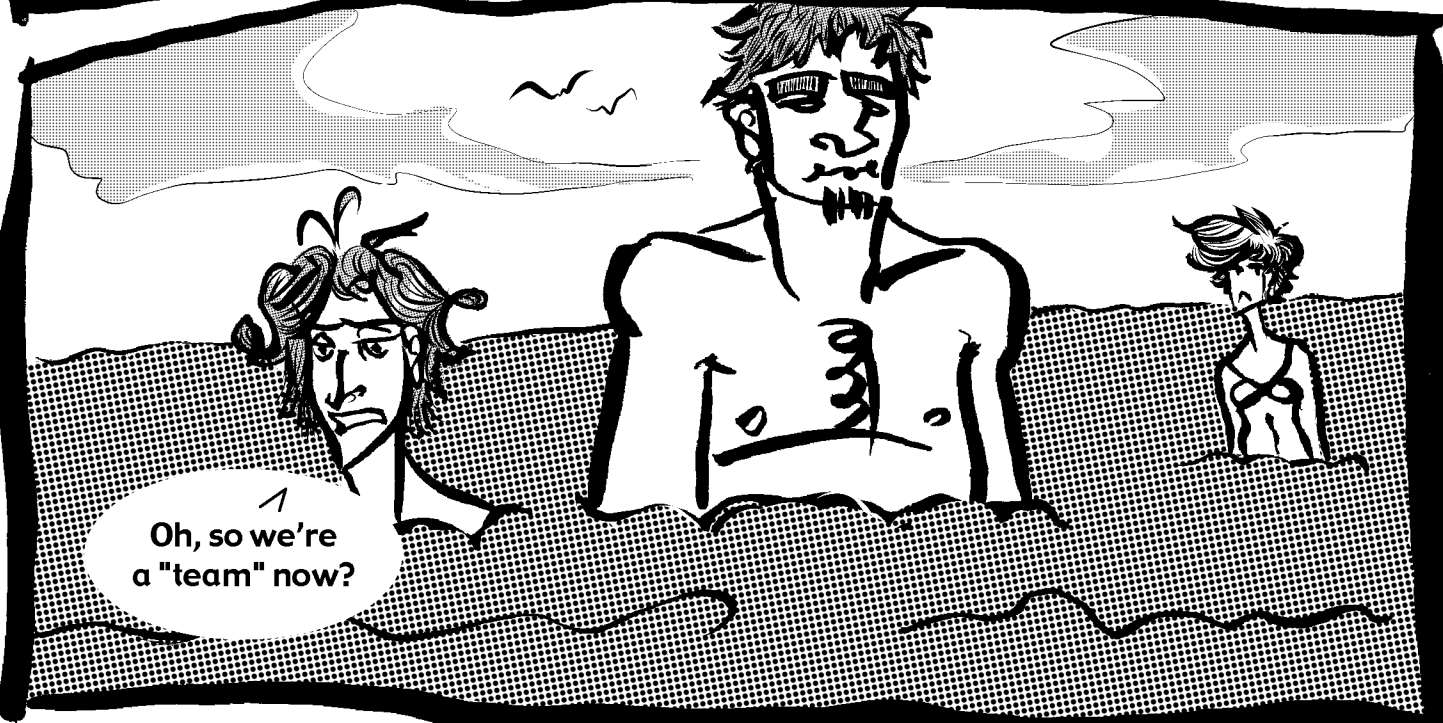
What is our  
form supposed to  
look like?



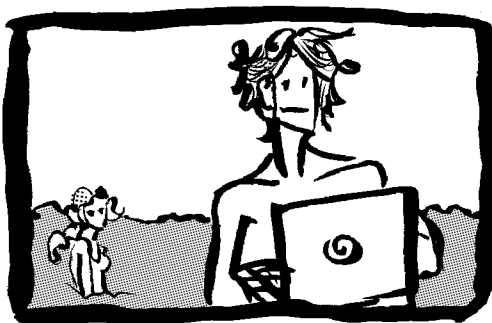
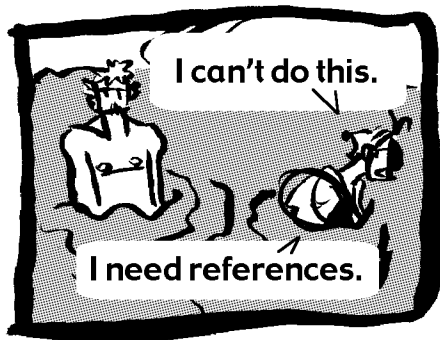
Whatever.

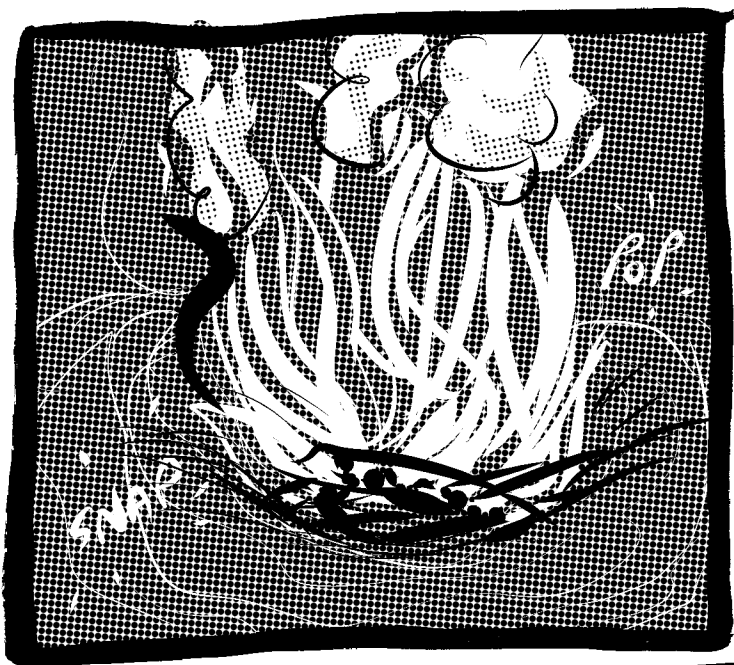
You can base it on  
your animal form  
if you want

^  
Just make it distinct in  
some way. It should be  
visually obvious to  
your team.



Oh, so we're  
a "team" now?







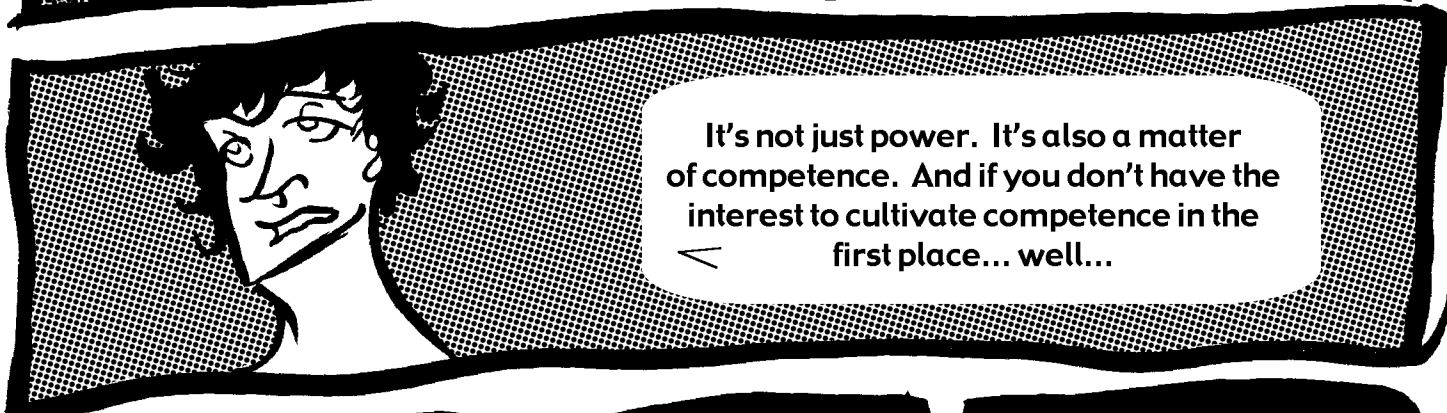




Lem. >

Whoa, really??  
v

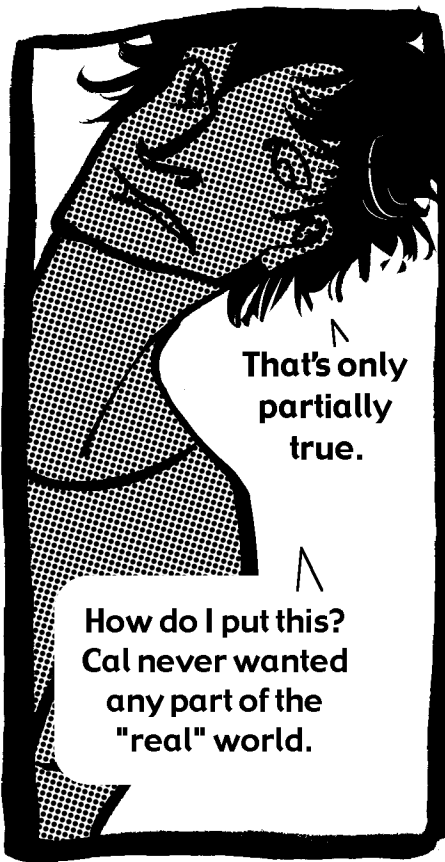
Isn't Cal  
the strongest?  
v



It's not just power. It's also a matter  
of competence. And if you don't have the  
interest to cultivate competence in the  
< first place... well...

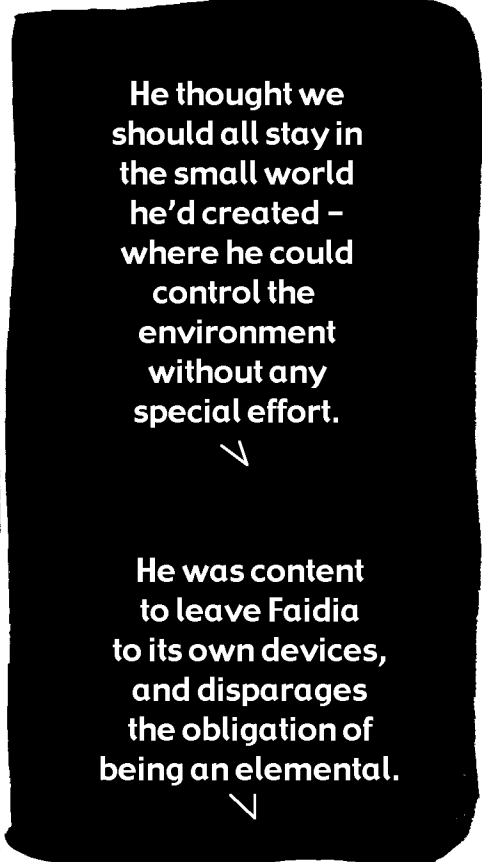


So, Cal hasn't  
used his powers  
because he's  
been sick?  
v



That's only  
partially  
true.  
v

How do I put this?  
Cal never wanted  
any part of the  
"real" world.



He thought we  
should all stay in  
the small world  
he'd created -  
where he could  
control the  
environment  
without any  
special effort.  
v

He was content  
to leave Faidia  
to its own devices,  
and disparages  
the obligation of  
being an elemental.  
v

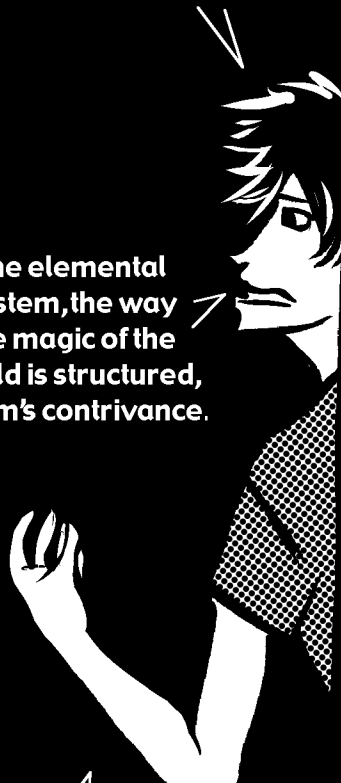
I find that hard  
to believe.

Why wouldn't Cal  
want to tap into his  
full potential?



You're missing the point.

The elemental  
system, the way  
the magic of the  
world is structured,  
is Lem's contrivance.



We did not start out  
thinking of ourselves  
this way.



I'm not  
saying  
Cal's a  
joke,  
magic  
wise.



But don't take  
Lem for granted.

Lem's element is unique and not well  
understood by anyone besides him.

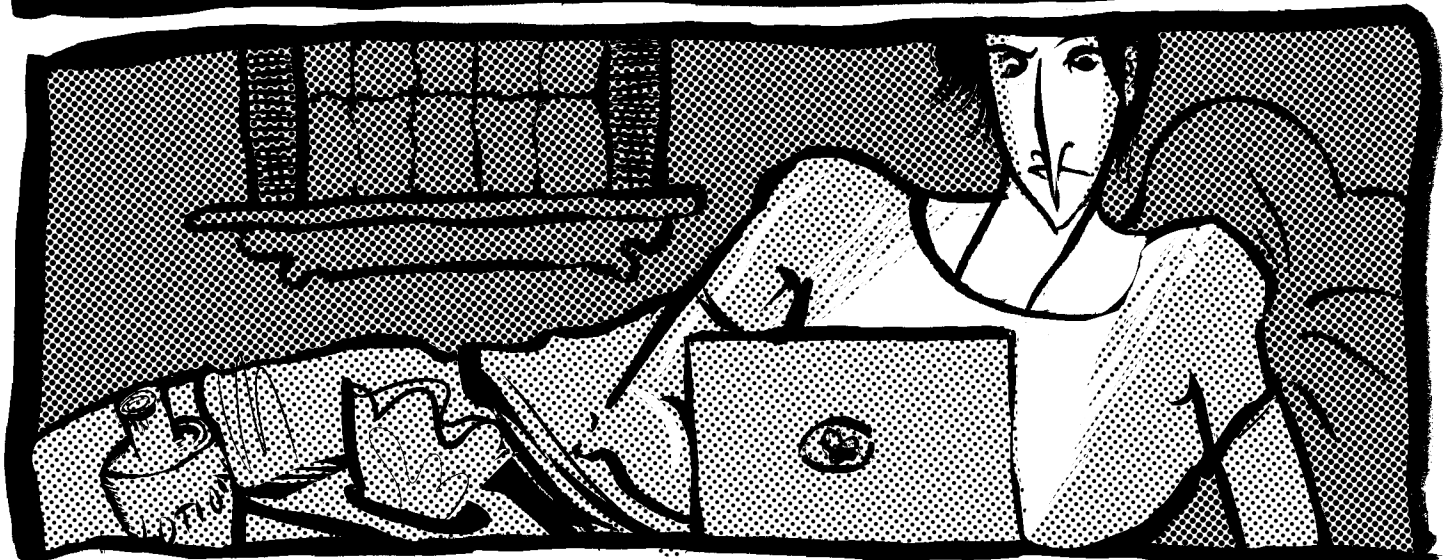


Don't let his  
personality  
fool you.





That's easier  
said than done...





Cal

Cal

Whu huh



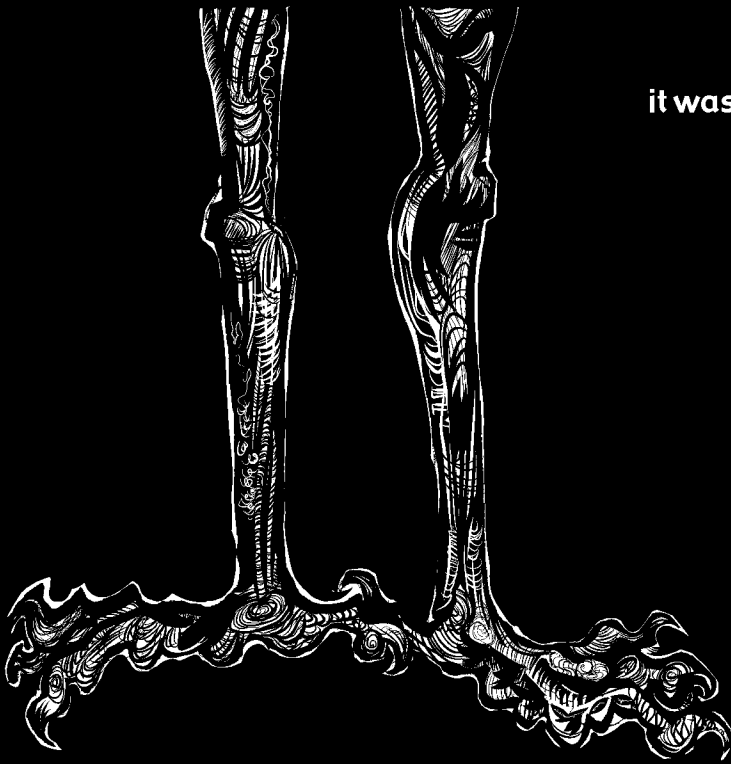
Who is calling



I'm trying to sleep



it wasn't me I didn't do it



I was called  
here too



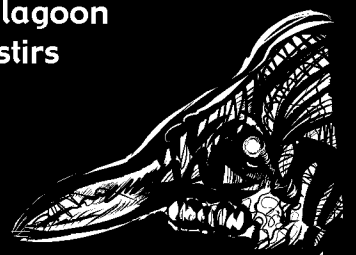
this is unacceptable



the lagoon is not a toy

wait

the lagoon  
stirs



oh

oh no





what is that

how can it be in the lagoon



you  
idiots

I called you here

who else would  
do such a thing



Lem

how did you  
get so large

but how



Silence



I have realized that some

*reiteration*

may be in order

a certain duty



is yet  
neglected

and a certain trespass  
is yet repeated





but I would  
never

**don't**



I inhabit the  
lagoon

**I see  
you**

**you will stop  
loitering here**



as for  
you



**remains unfulfilled**

many have died but  
their energy has not  
been returned to me



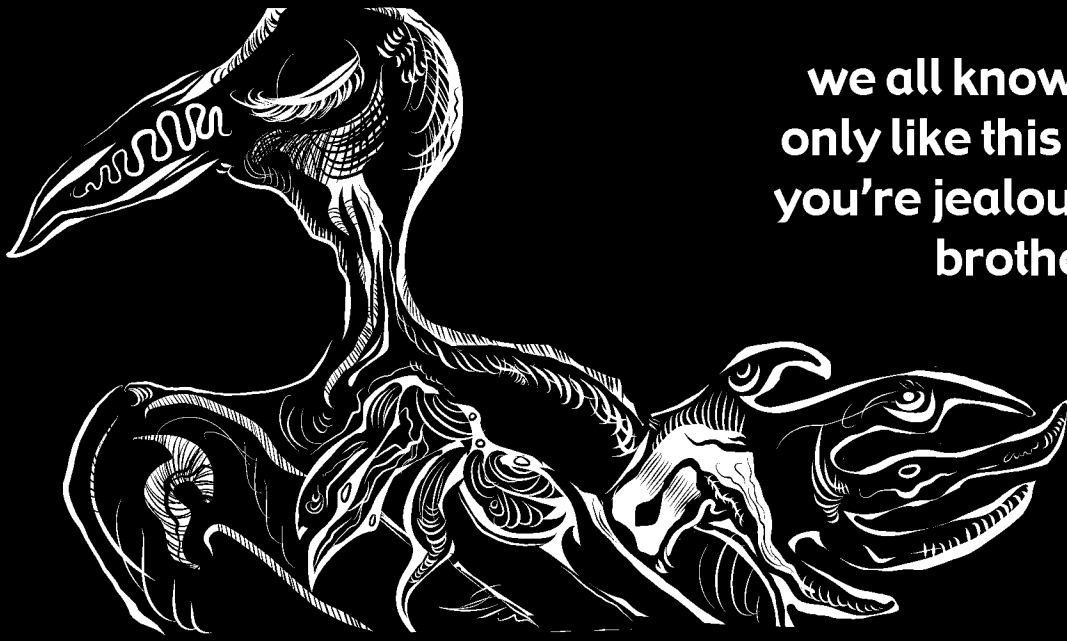
I want what  
is mine



I know  
what this  
is really  
about



**we all know you're  
only like this because  
you're jealous of your  
brother**



**you thought you could run  
away from your problems by  
leaving your family behind**



**but you're still just  
a petulant child!!!**

**yeah what  
he said**

**if you want it  
so bad  
you do it**



**before you  
criticize others**



**maybe you should  
take a look at yourself**

**WOW**





**I have known you  
two longer than  
anyone else**

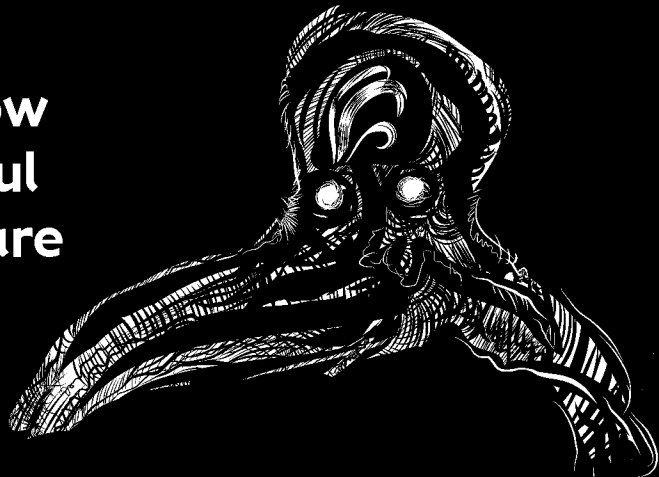


**but every time I have to interact with you**

**I am struck again by a  
fresh and searing horror**



**at how  
awful  
you are**



**it's my own fault**

**like some kind of fucking savage**

**I permitted you to speak**

**how can you talk to your family like this**

**it's so funny to me  
that power is the  
only thing you  
canonically  
understand**

**yet when someone  
wields it against you**

**suddenly you can't  
recall the concept**



**look I could stay here and talk to you  
about what you have to say or whatever**



**but I'm not going to**



**instead why don't you think about  
what I had to say before you tried  
to distract me which I'm pretty sure  
had something to do with you being  
fundamentally bad and wrong  
i.e. shit**



**whatever**

**look at me I'm a centaur  
of every animal**

**I'm pretty sure I mean business so**

**just skip the claptrap  
and do as I say**

**oh and Rae**

**I'm still in here, you know**

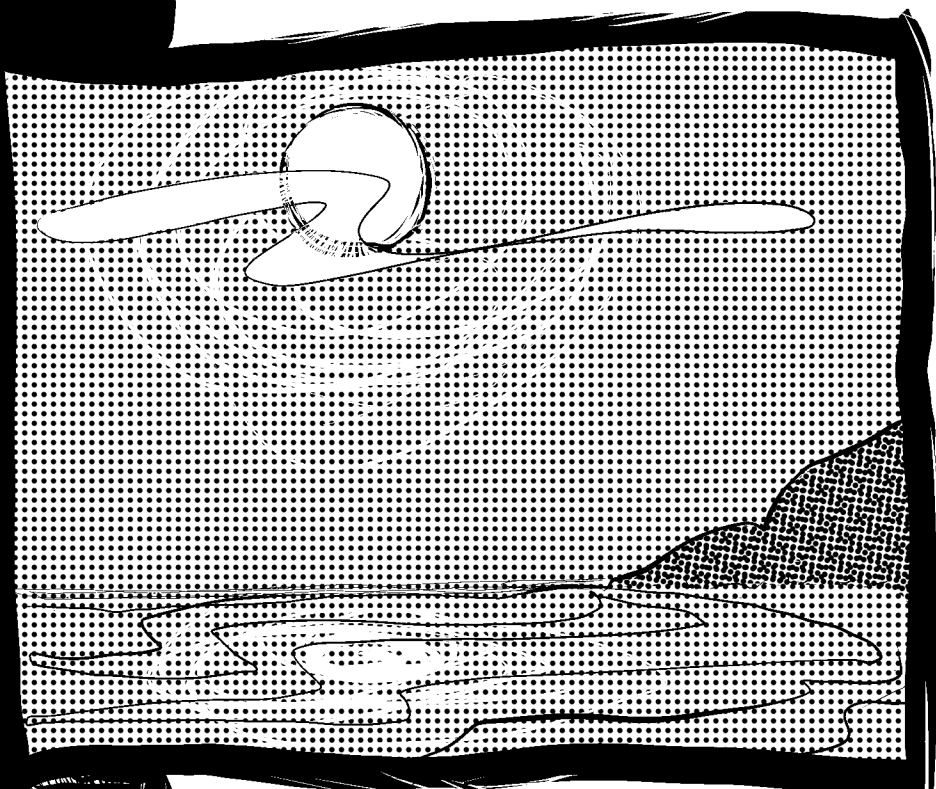
he's gone

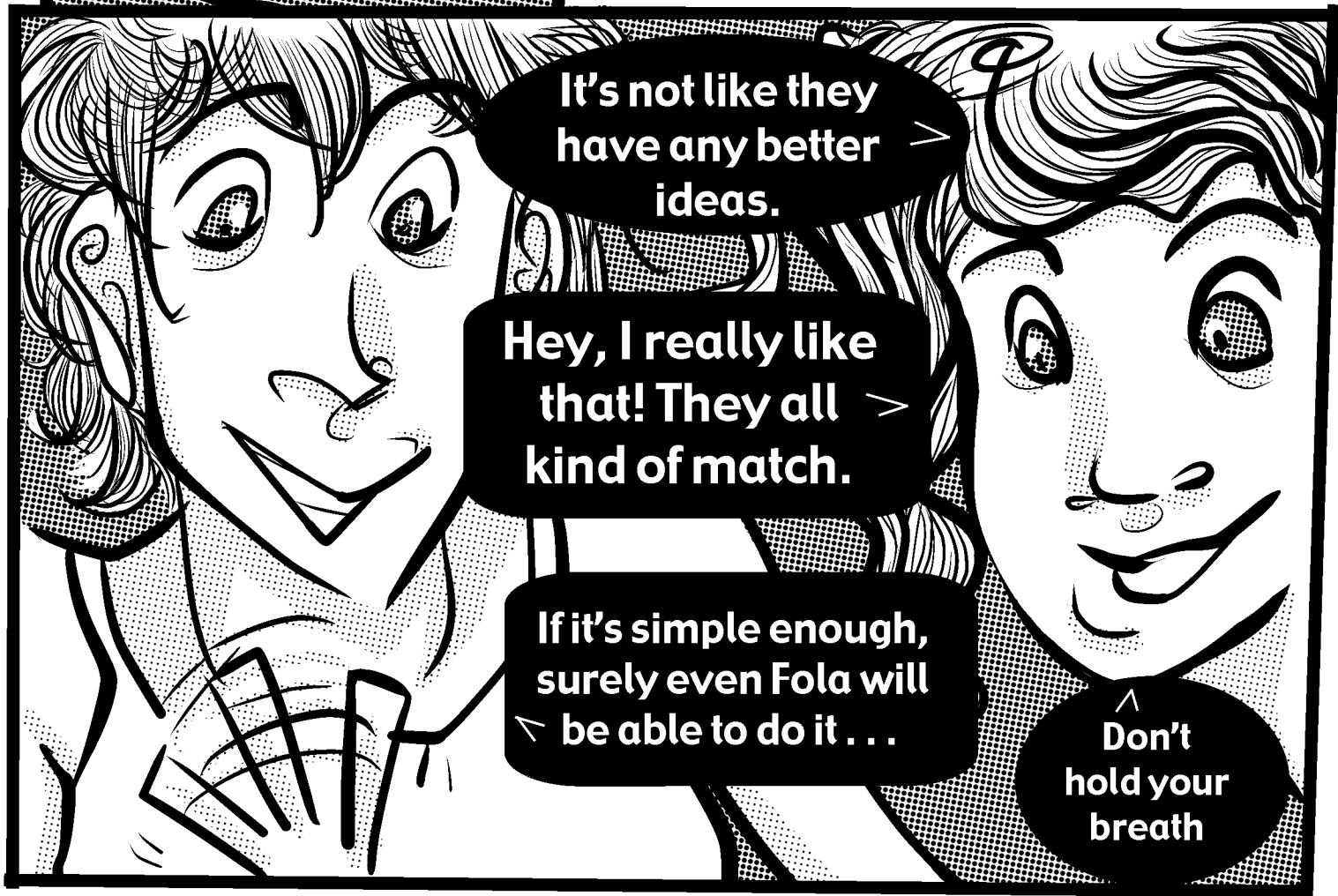


what are you  
going to do

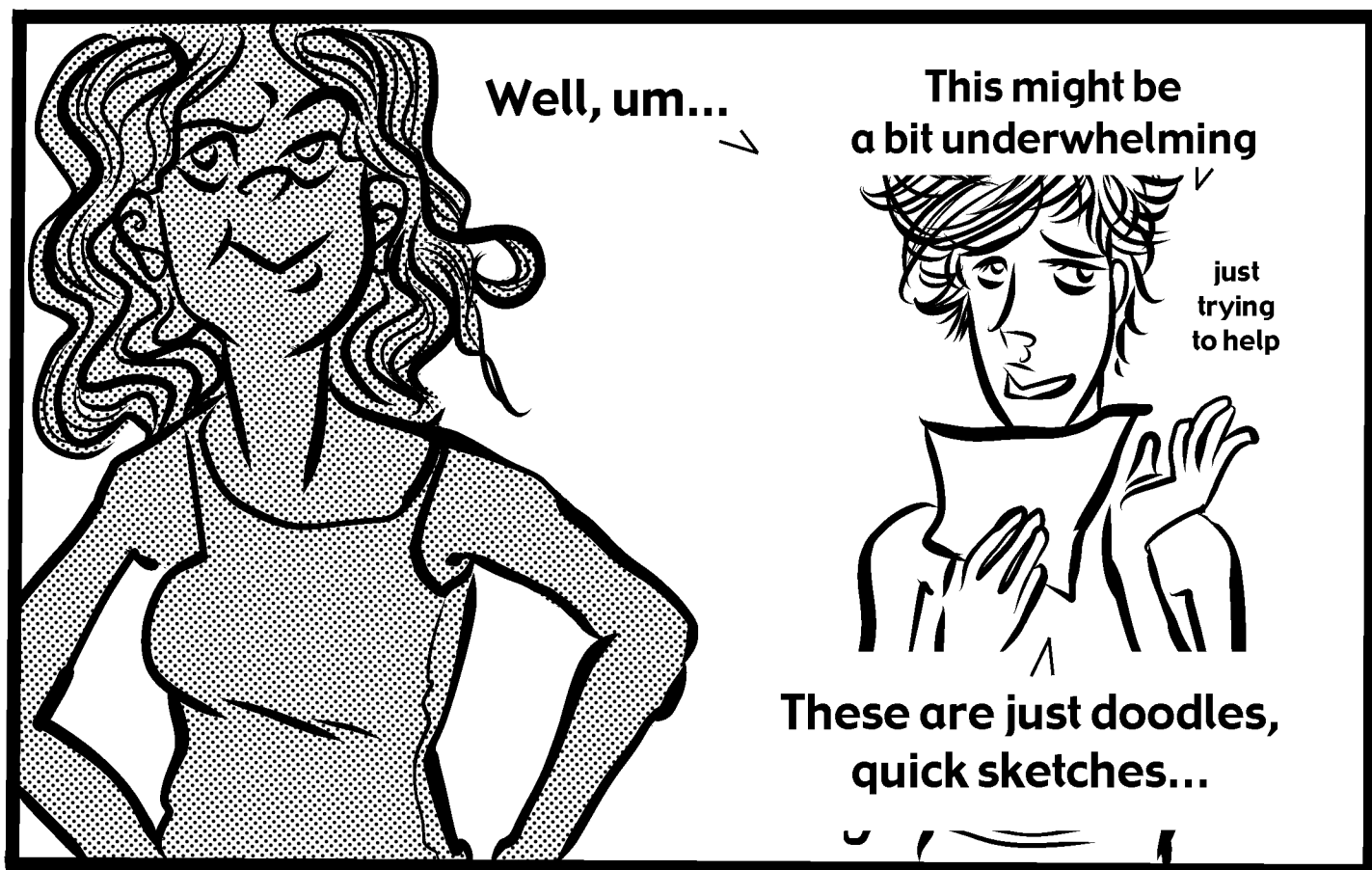
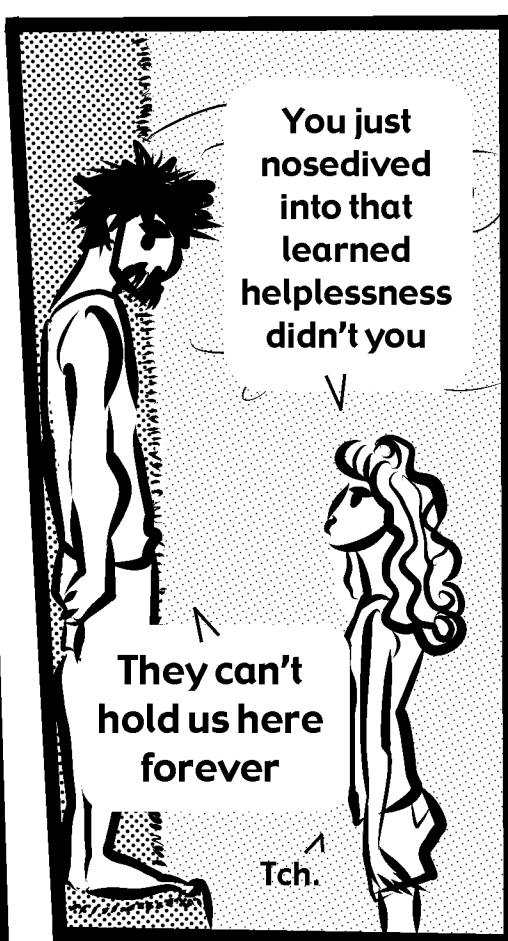


I dunno

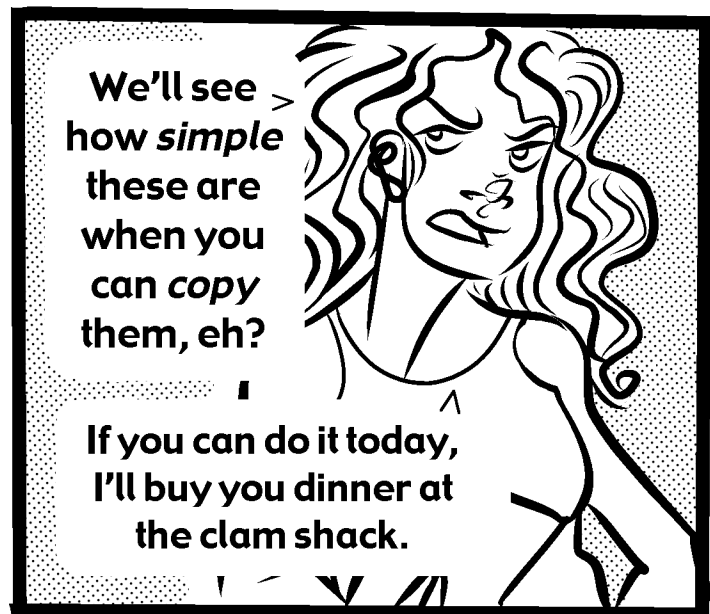
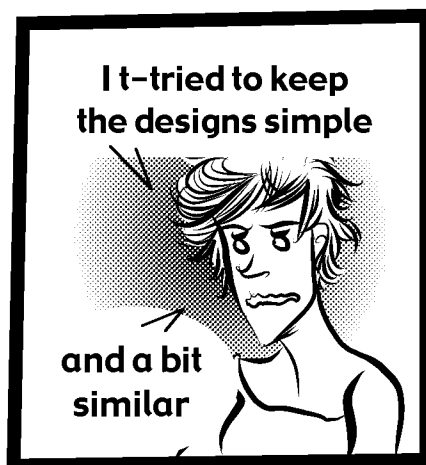
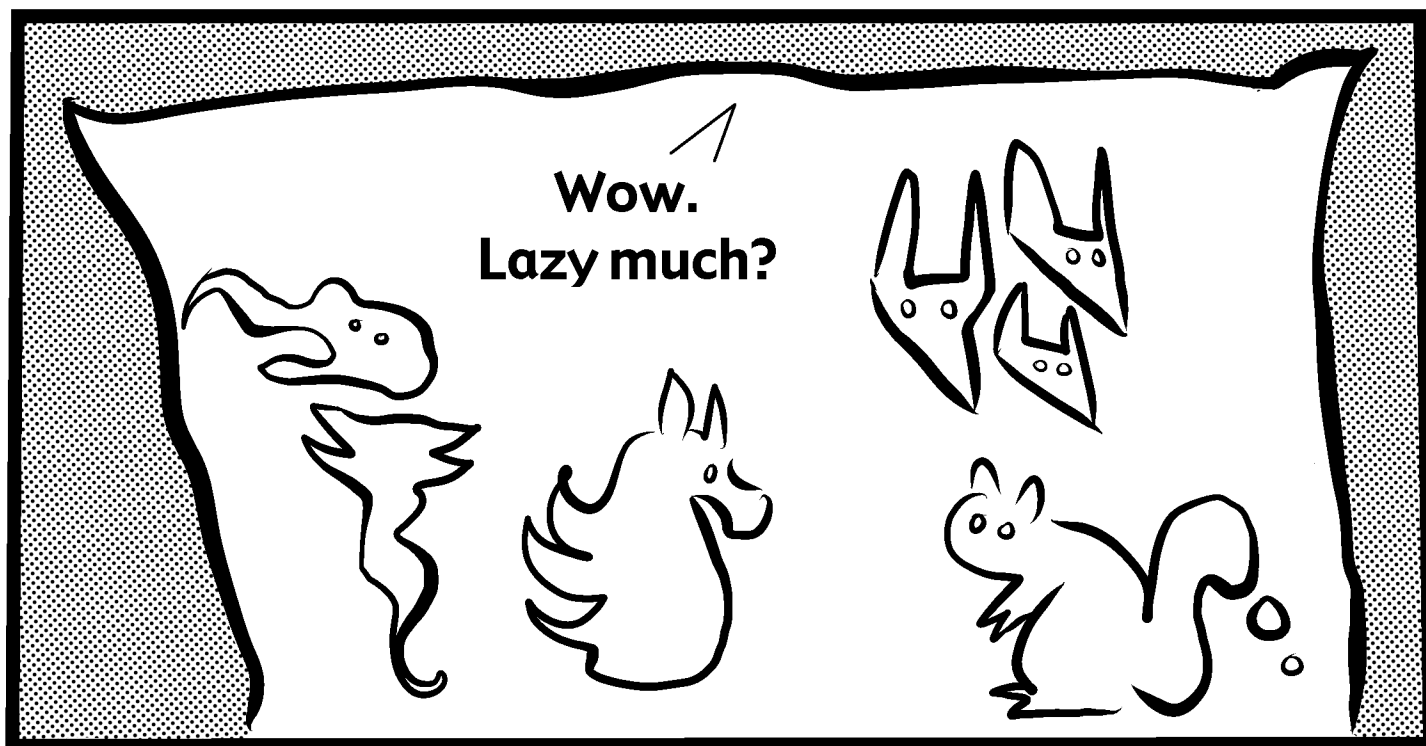


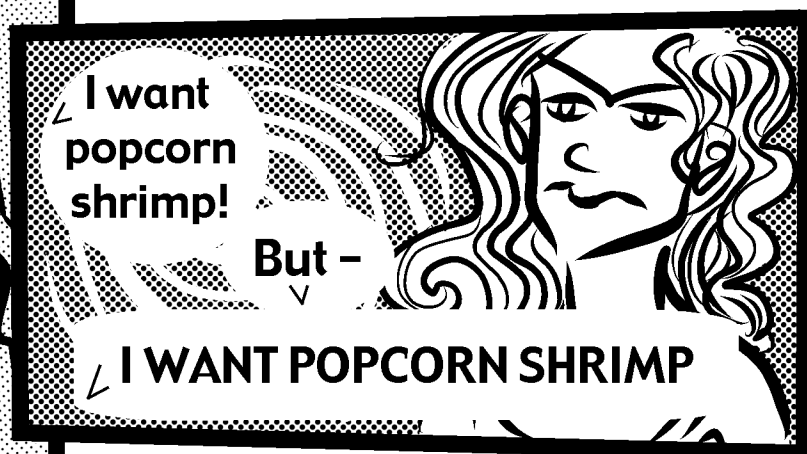
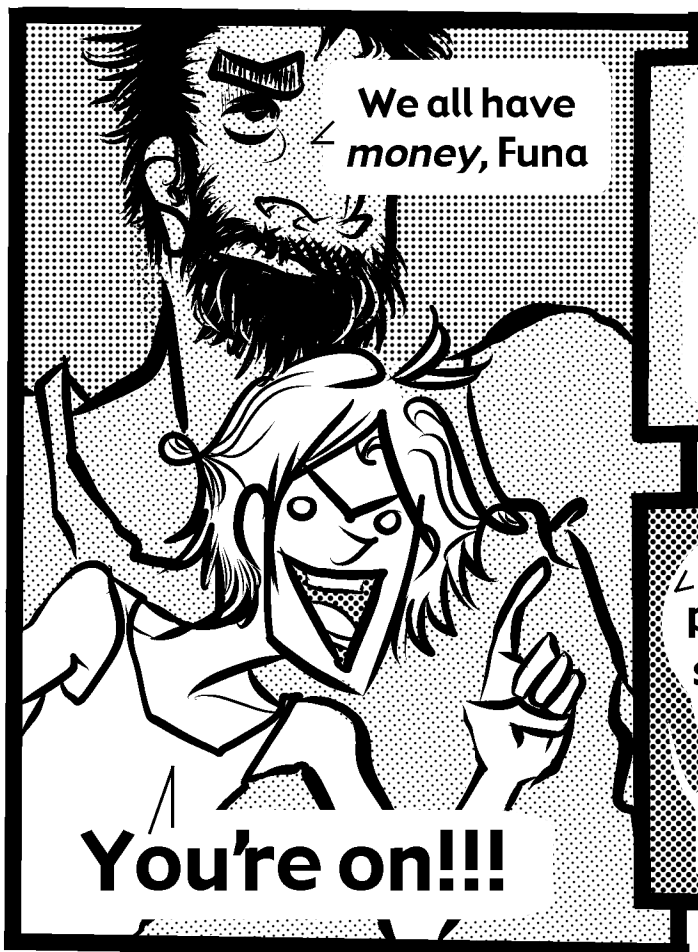


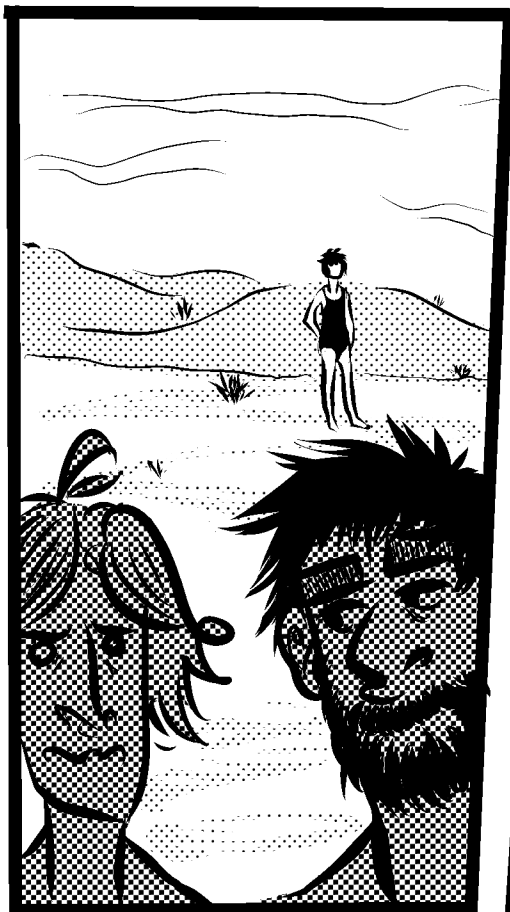
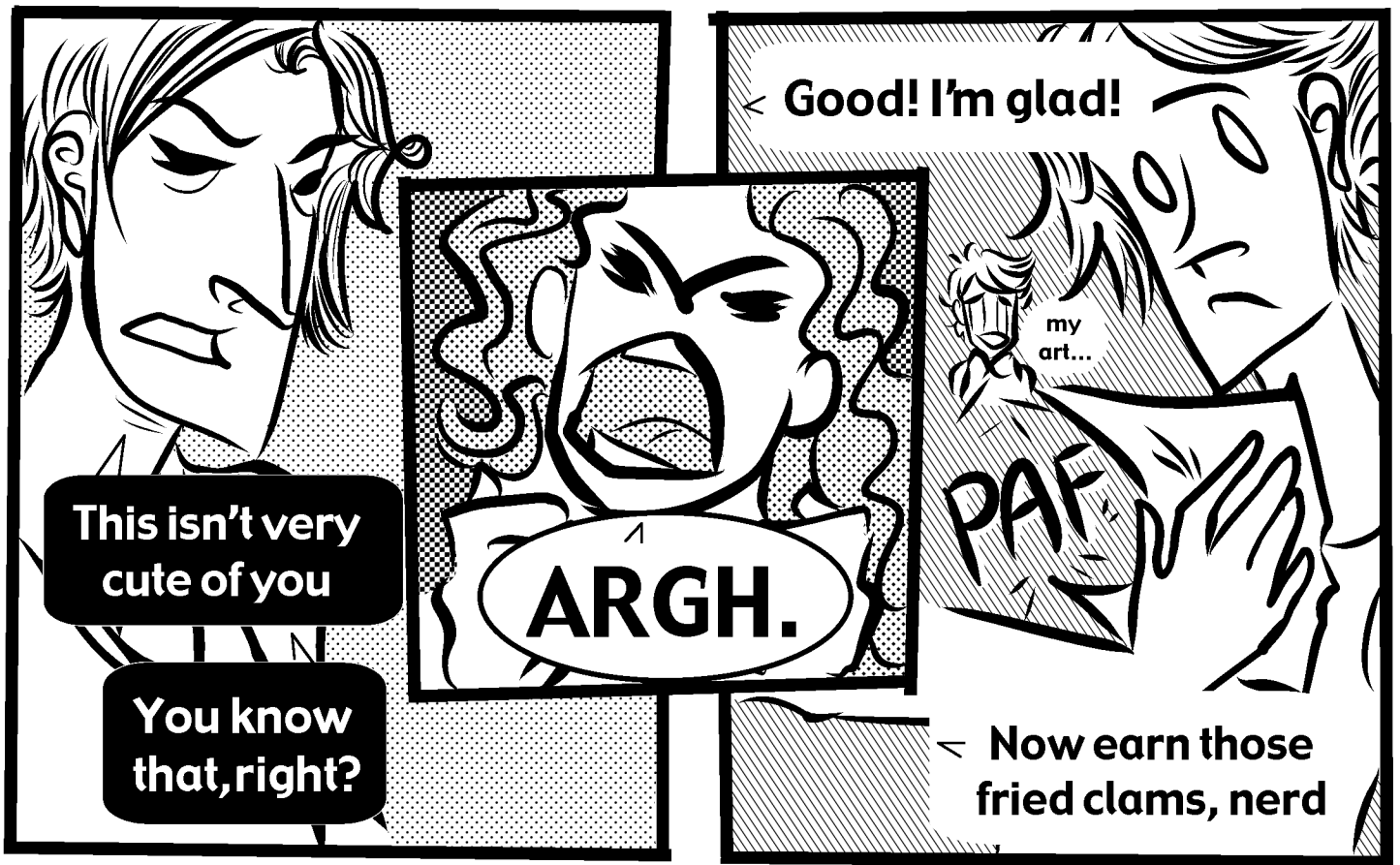






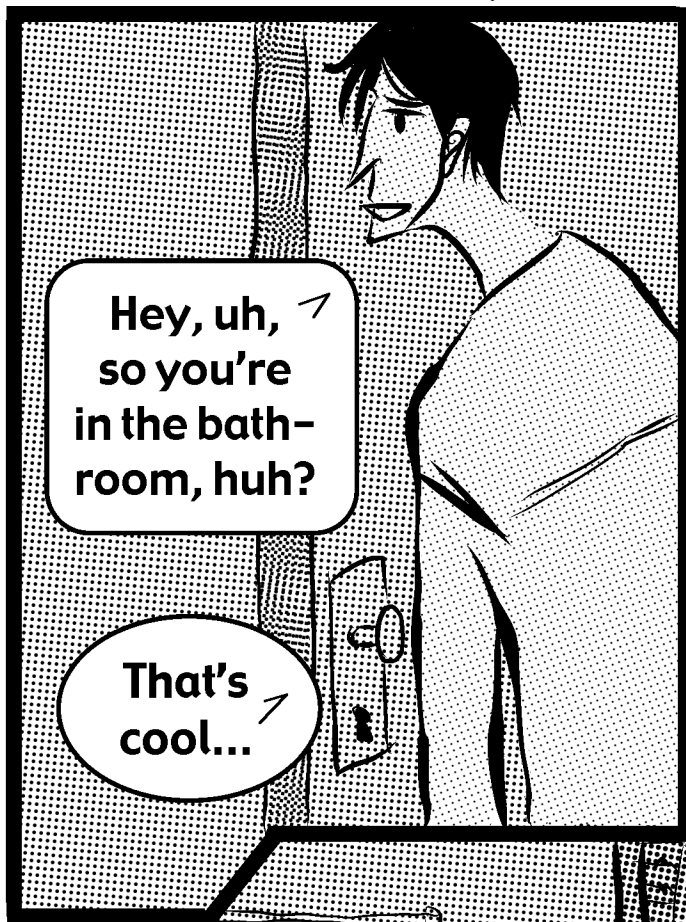












Hey, uh, 7  
so you're  
in the bath-  
room, huh?

That's  
cool... 7



Think you'll  
come out  
today, >  
maybe?

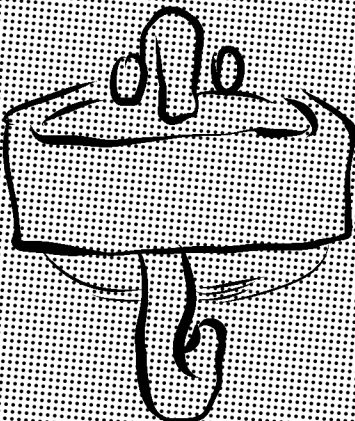
We could  
train... 7

... or eat butter like you like, ^  
y'know, whatever....

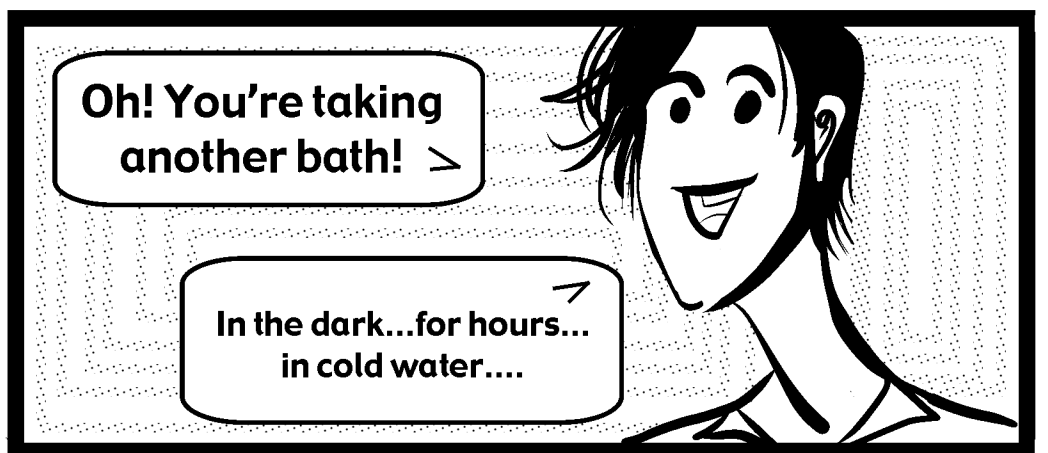
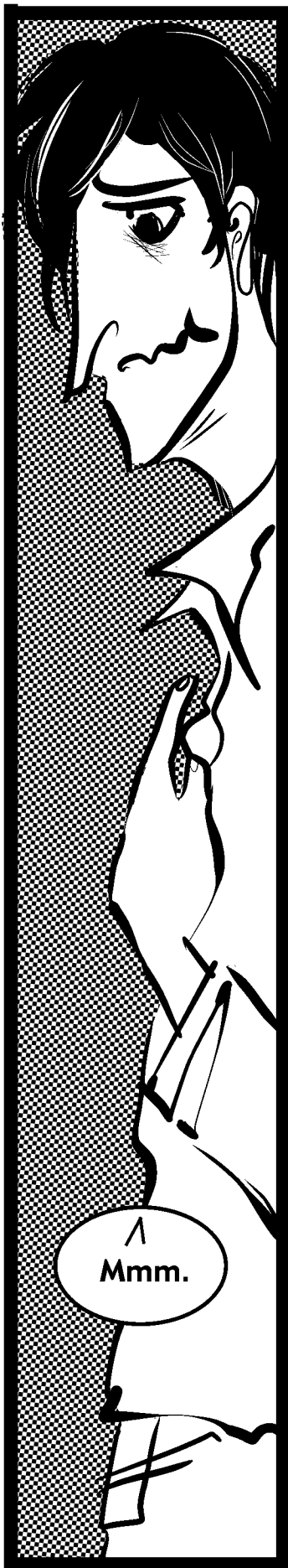


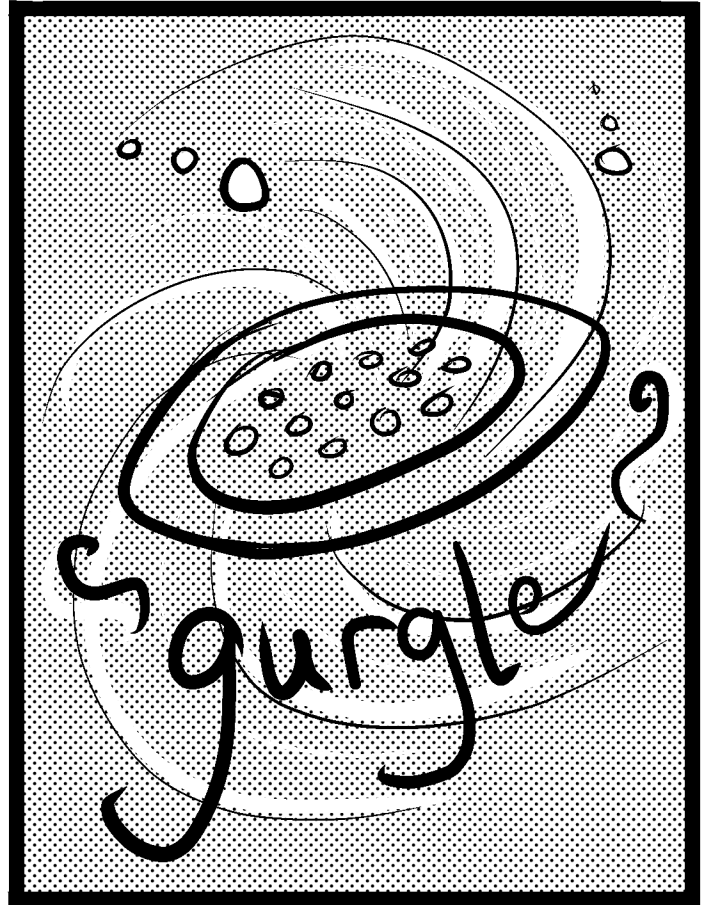
Um. 7

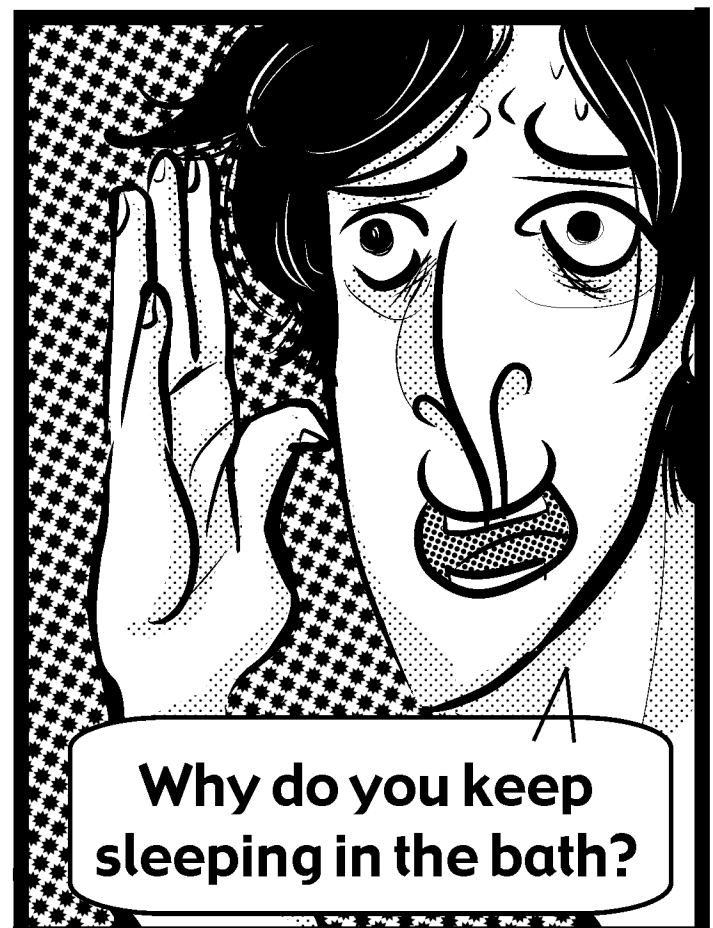
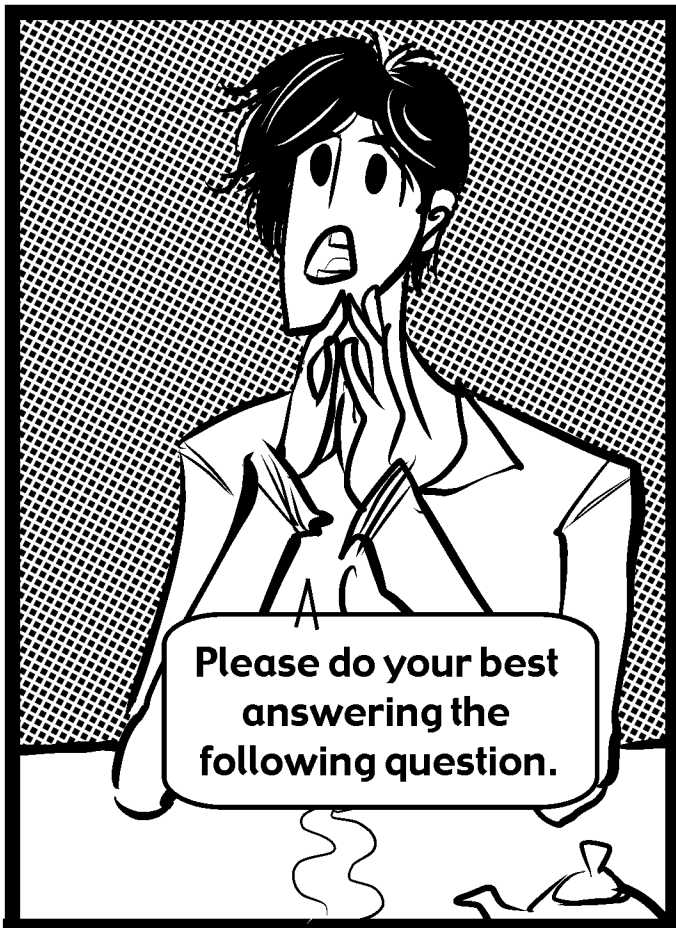
Are you in there? 7





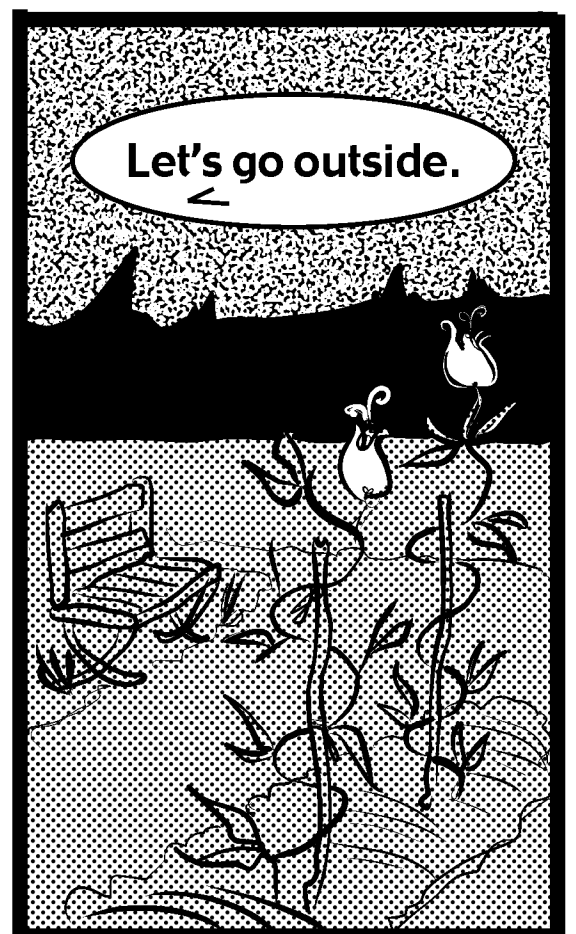
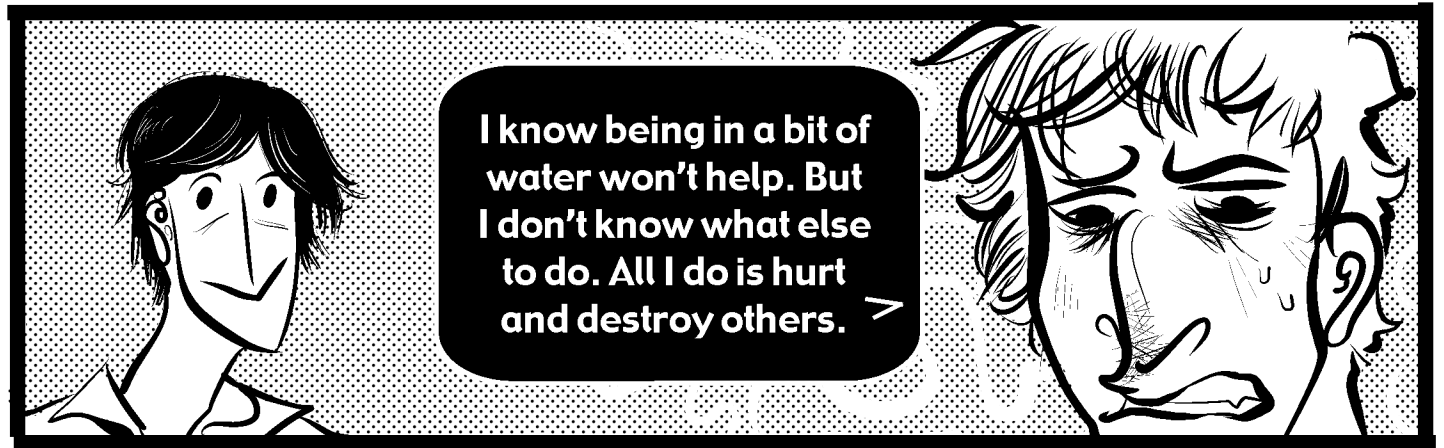


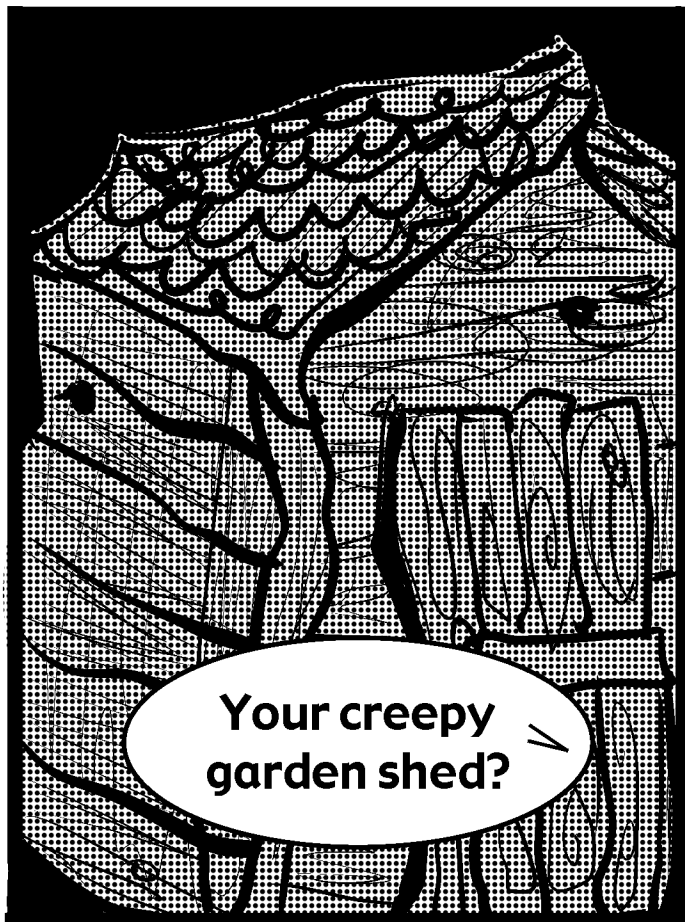
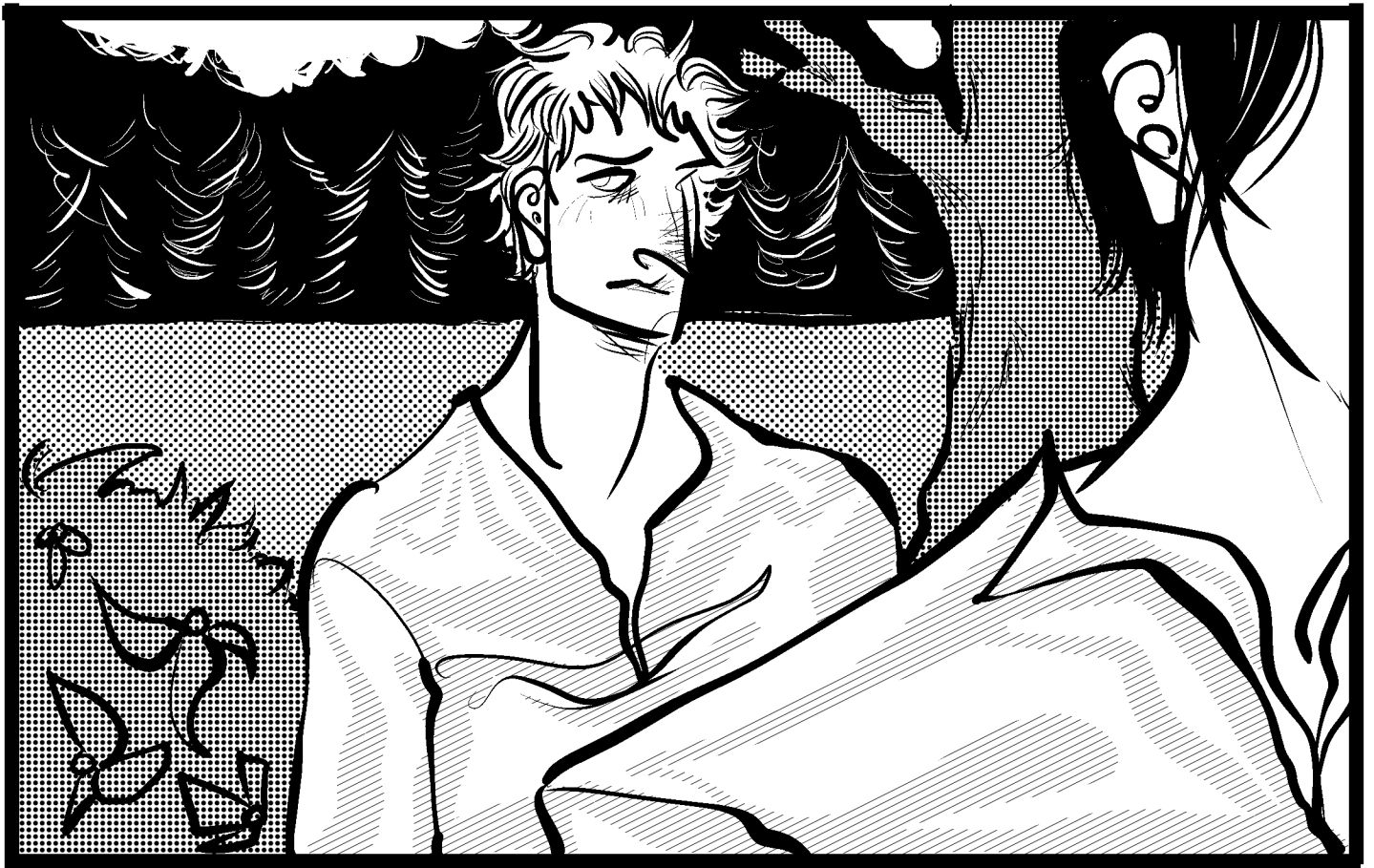


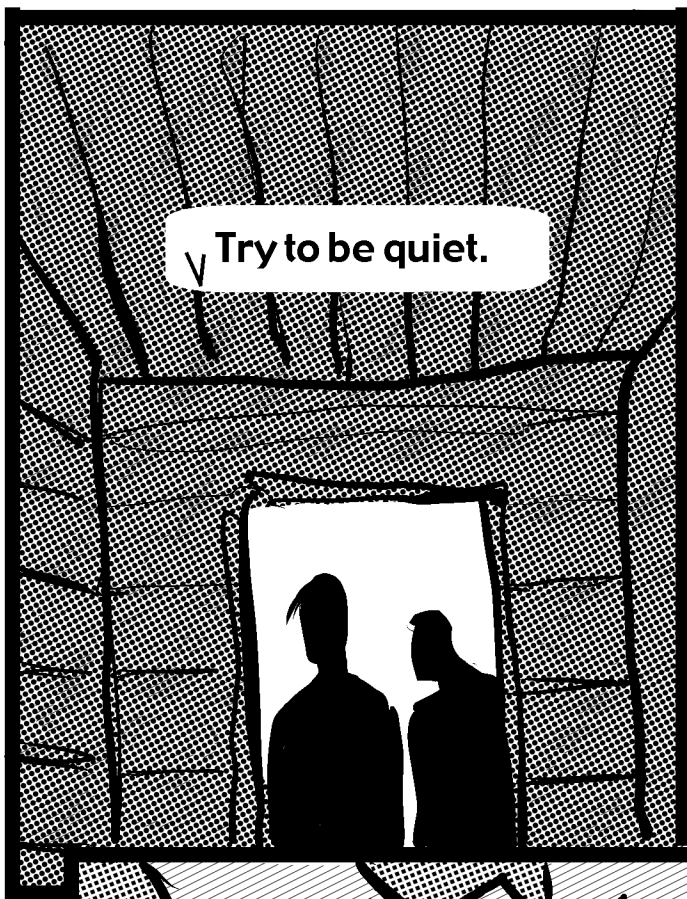




I can't get over how  
I burned that town.  
I'm scared I'll lose  
control again.





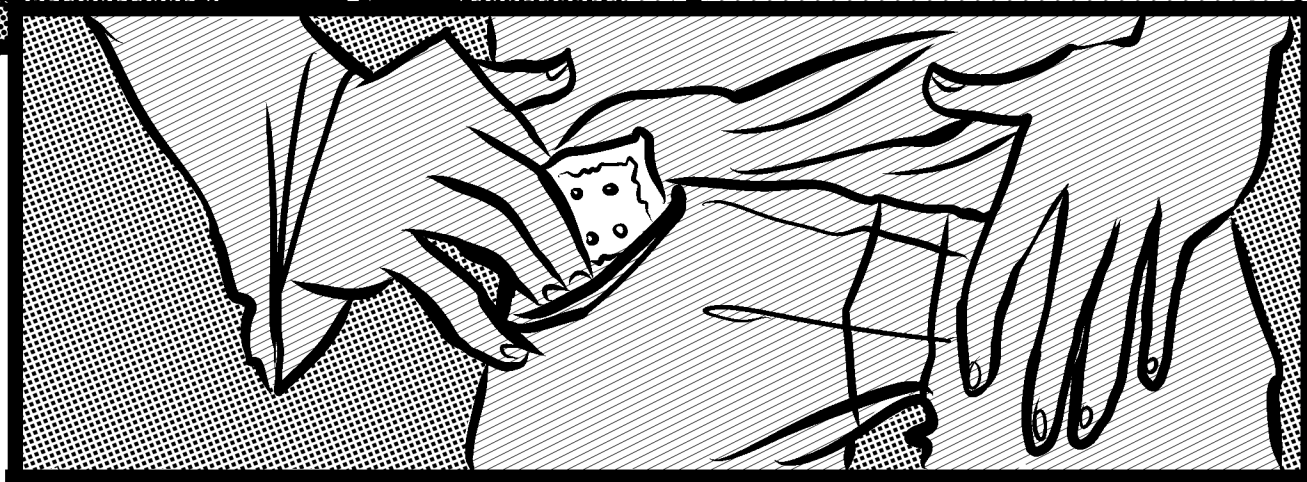


Try to be quiet.  
v



Sit down >  
over here.

If we don't  
startle her,  
she'll be out  
soon.



Pst, pst!  
v

I brought  
< treats!



Here she is!



A mouse?

Have you held a mouse before?

What has this got to do with anything?

Just hold her.

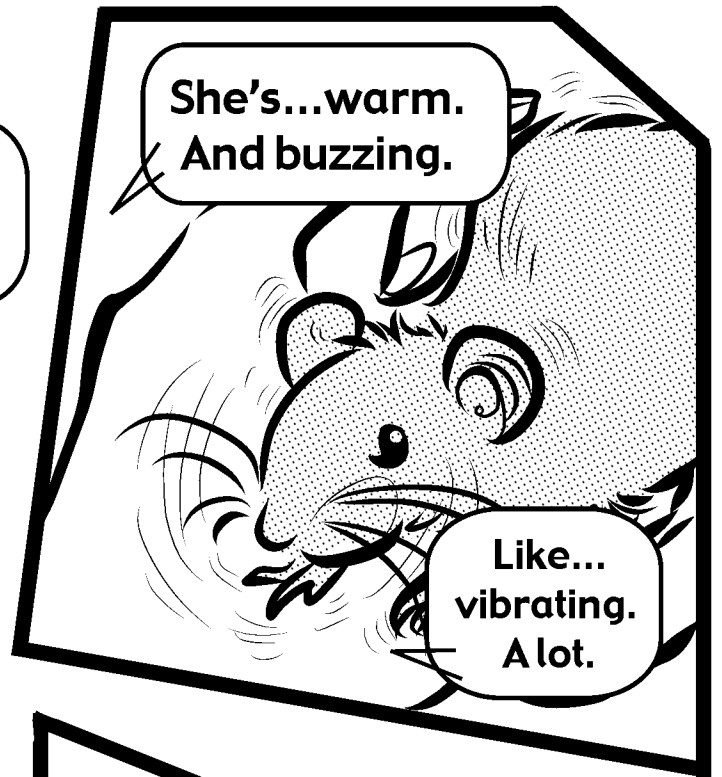
She's an old friend. Don't embarrass me.







So?  
How does  
it feel?



She's...warm.  
And buzzing.

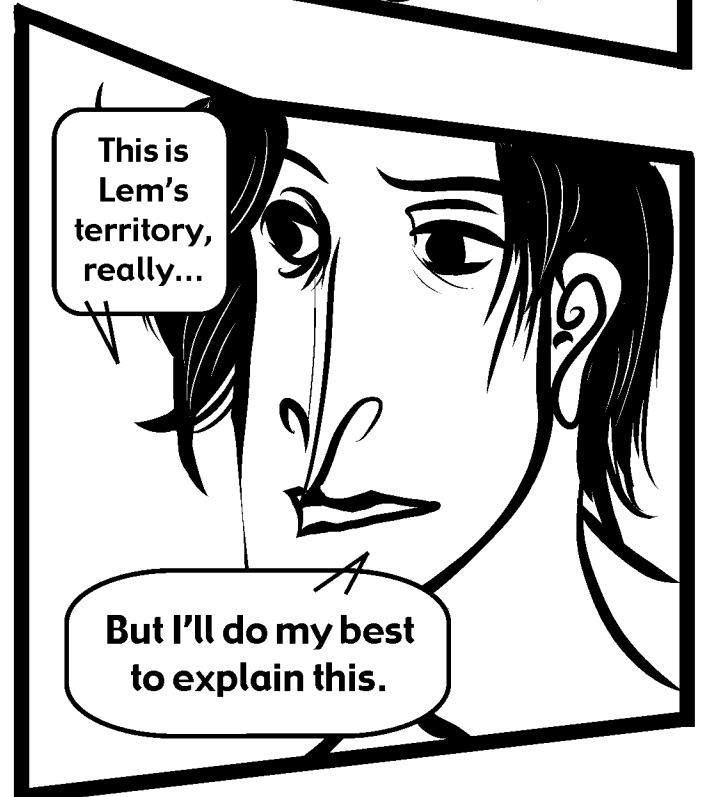
Like...  
vibrating.  
A lot.



Is that normal?

Yes, it's fine.

Her heart beats much  
faster than ours do.

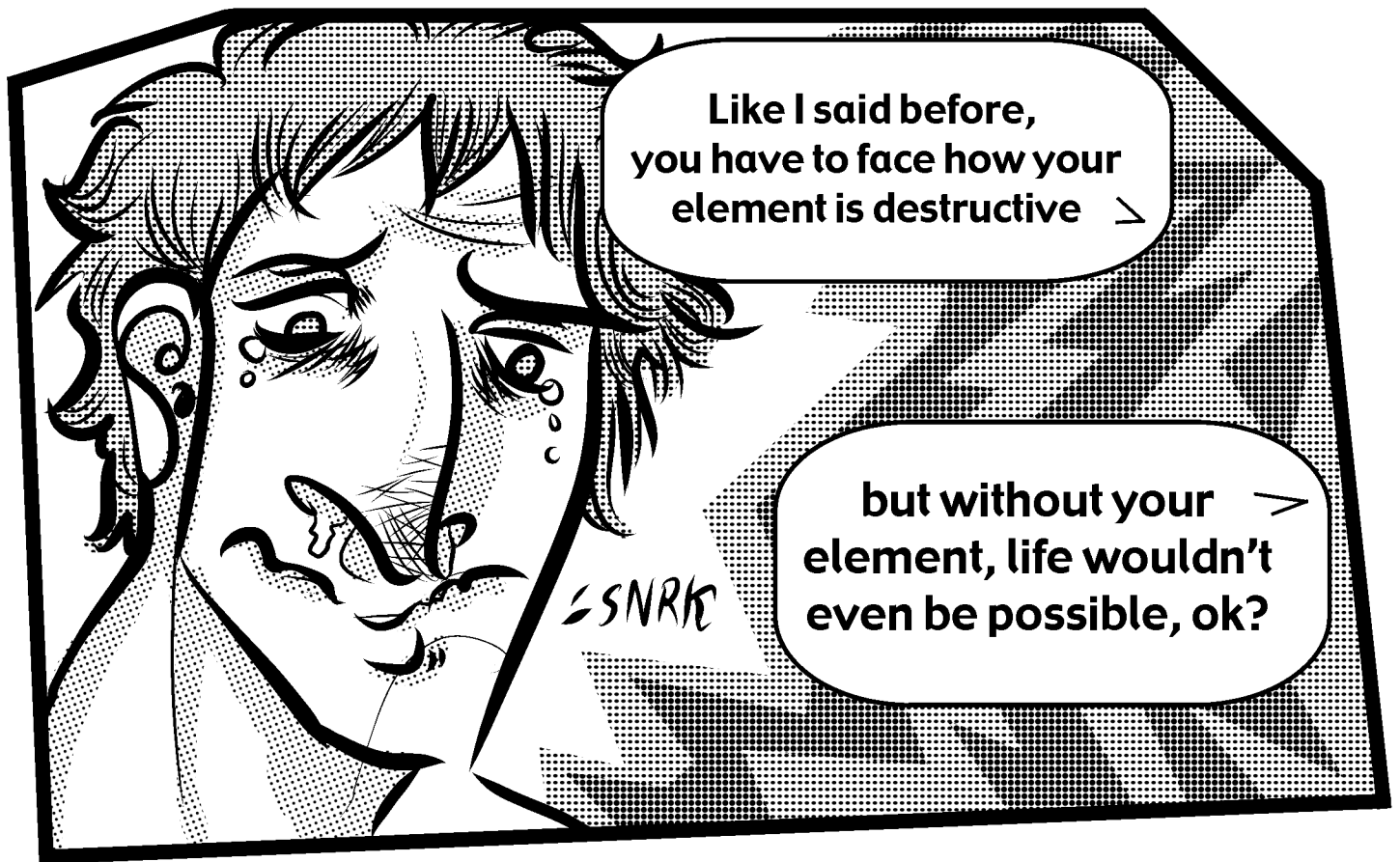


This is  
Lem's  
territory,  
really...

But I'll do my best  
to explain this.

Your element is not  
just simple fire, but  
the spark of life itself.

That warmth, that "vibration,"  
is a result of her *burning energy*  
in her cells to sustain her life.



Leave her be and we'll go back  
to the house.

I'm  
cold.

Why...

Why are you  
being so nice  
to me?



I'm not  
being nice

I just want  
to get the  
job done!



< Hahaha...



Maybe... >

Maybe  
you're not  
such a bad  
guy after  
all... <

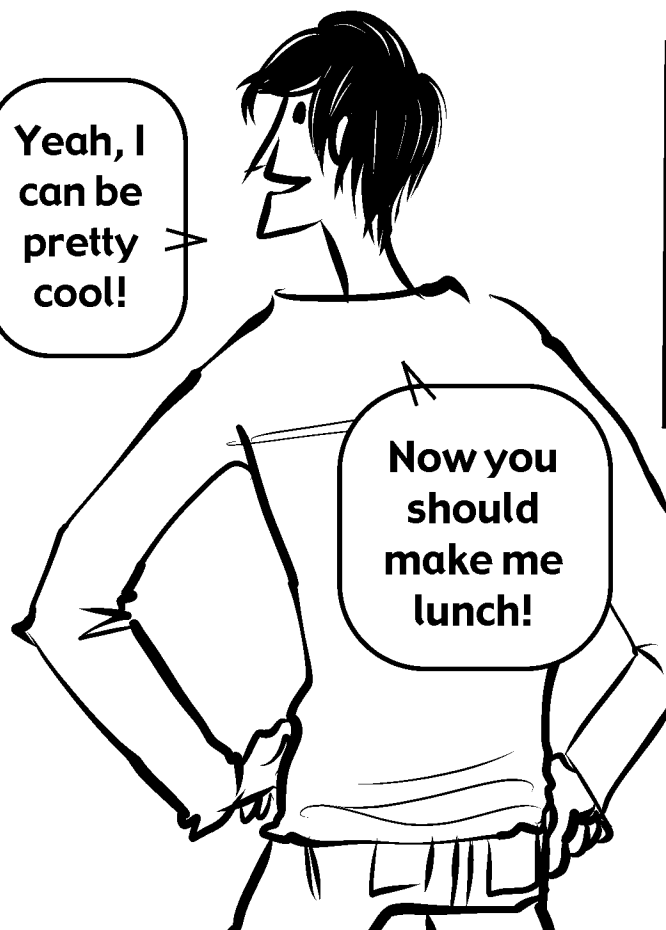


Thanks. ^



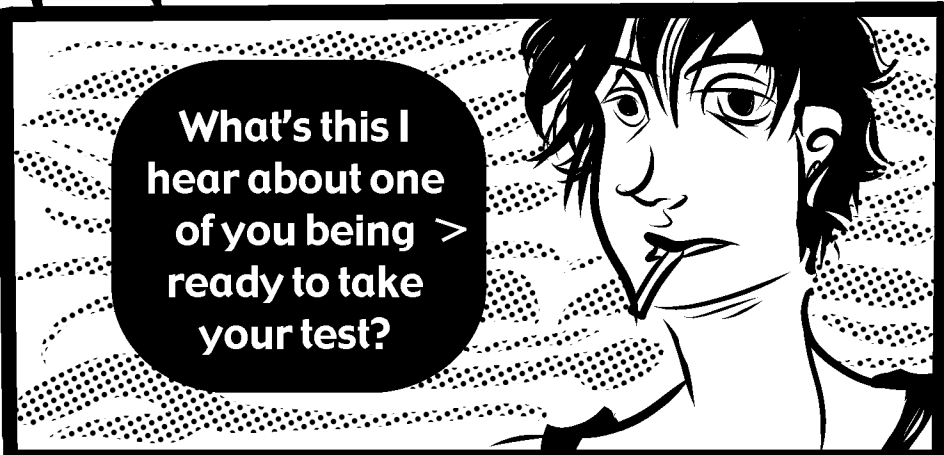
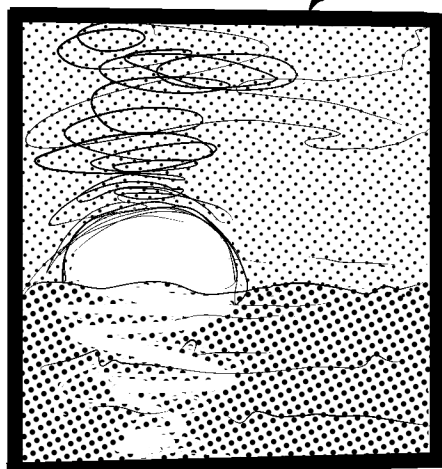
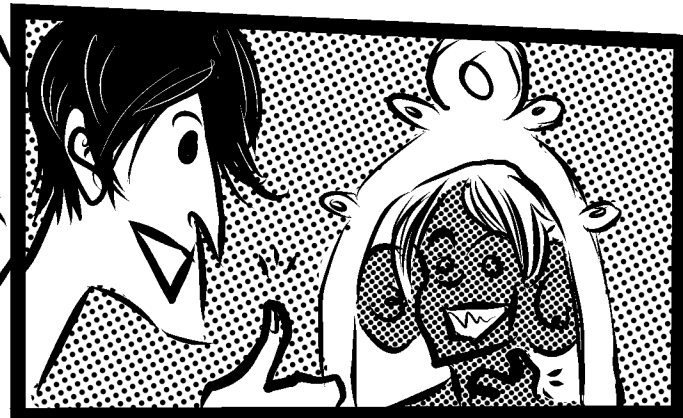
.... >

Ok.... ^




Yeah, I  
can be  
pretty  
cool!

Now you  
should  
make me  
lunch!



What's this I  
hear about one  
of you being  
ready to take  
your test?



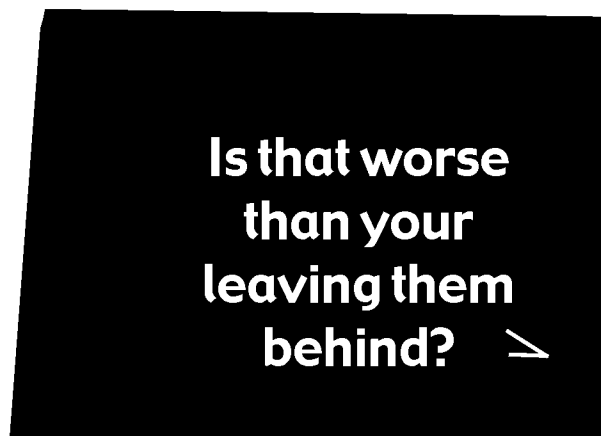
Funa's  
ready!

Go Funa!



Yeah.

Let's  
do this!



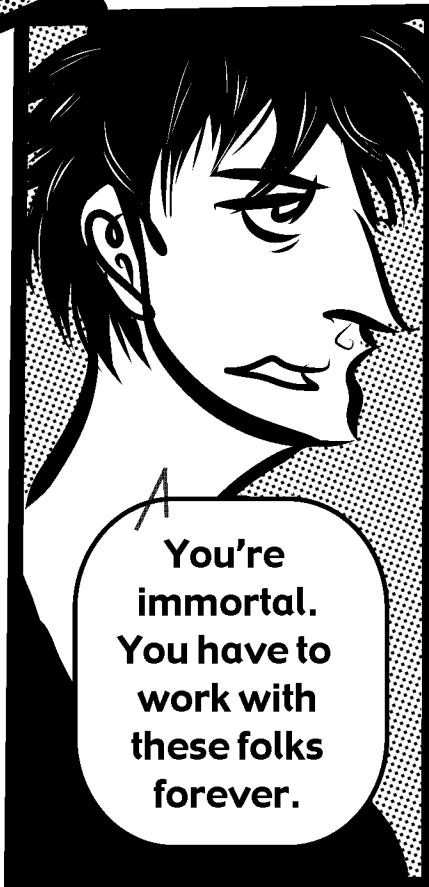


Am I the only one who  
thinks this training is a bit  
contradictory? Do well,  
but not *too* well?

Why am I to be punished  
for being competent?

If you are  
not unified,  
the planet will  
never achieve  
balance. ➤

Outside the  
group, your  
merits have  
no value. ➤

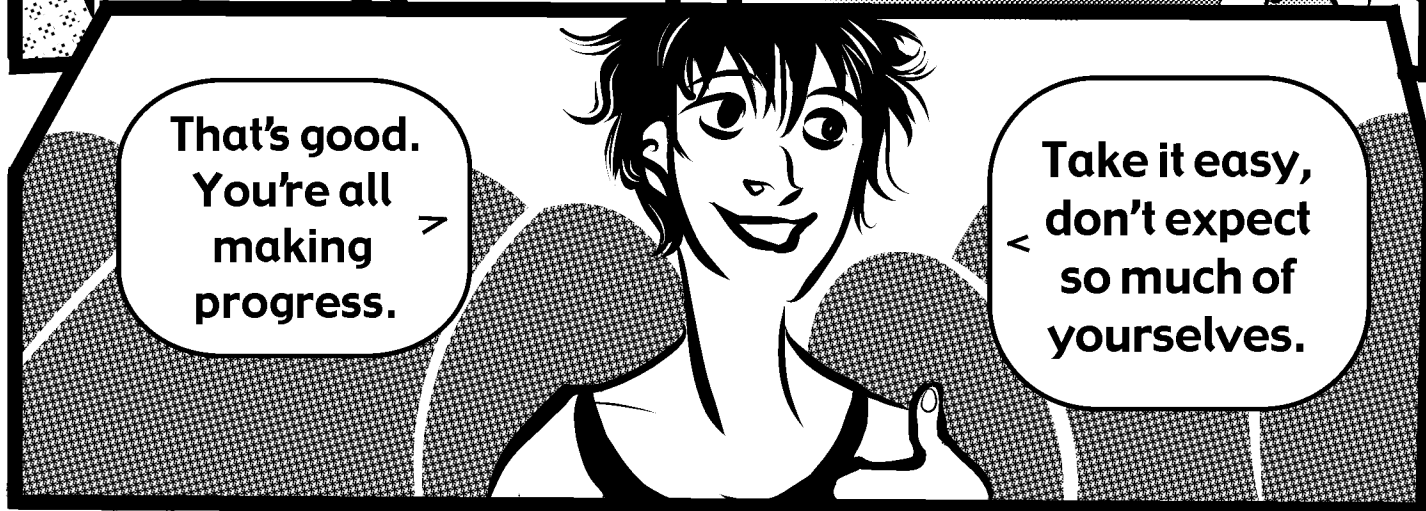
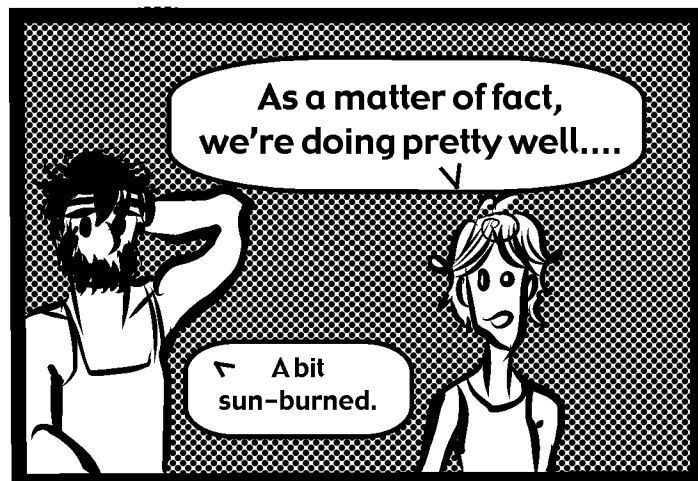


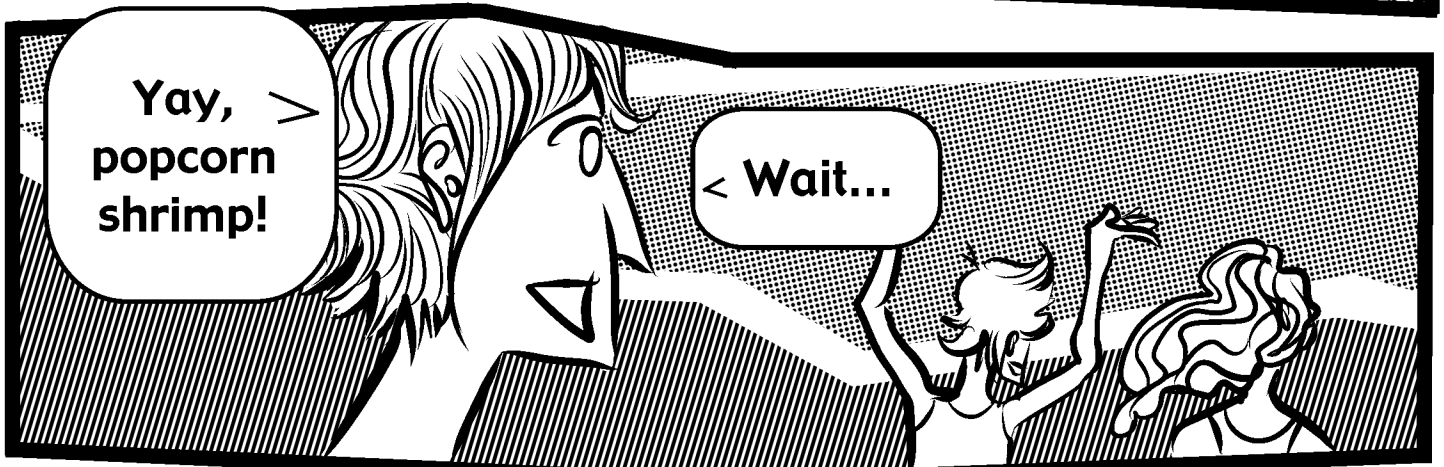
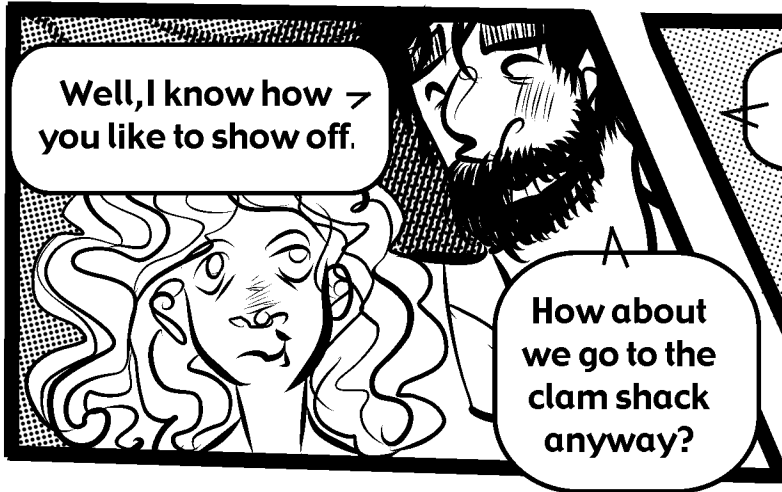
You're  
immortal.  
You have to  
work with  
these folks  
forever.

If you run  
ahead of  
them, you  
*will* find  
➤ yourself  
stuck,  
waiting  
for them  
to catch up.

➤ It will  
be very  
irritating.









Why are you  
sucking up to  
her suddenly?

✓

Aren't you still  
scared about  
the magic stuff?

✓



Well...yeah.

✓

Of course.



Yeah, Funa's being bossy  
✓ or whatever...so what?

We should be  
helping each  
✓ other...like I  
helped you!



^  
But seeing Funa get  
lectured like that  
reminded me of  
some things I heard.

^  
It's just not right.

Funa grew up in the colonies. She's been through some shit.



I don't really know what that means...



I don't know the whole story, but she worked for land dragons.

Land dragons are tough.



It couldn't have been easy on her.

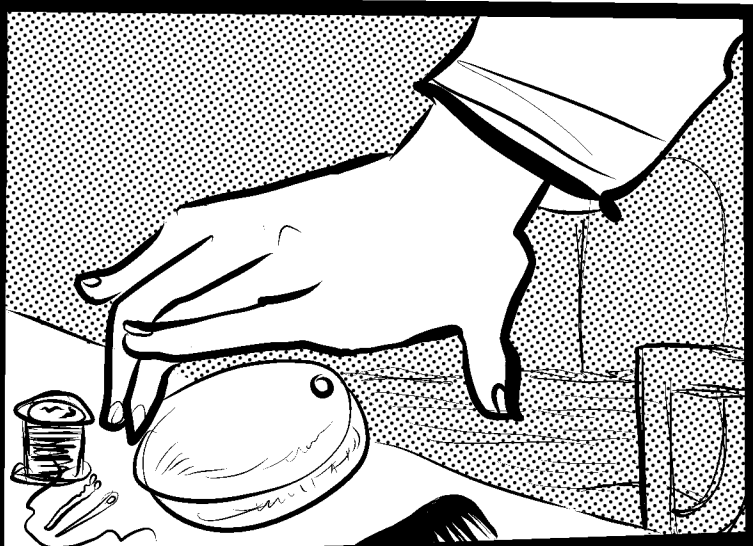
I'm scared, yeah, but I'm also ashamed. The others are putting themselves out there for us. > It's time to start giving back.



Yeah. Yeah!



Let's do our best from now on!





This whole thing is starting to freak me out.

It's too easy!



That's not really a problem, Cal.

I don't understand what you mean.



He's so into me and I barely did anything yet!

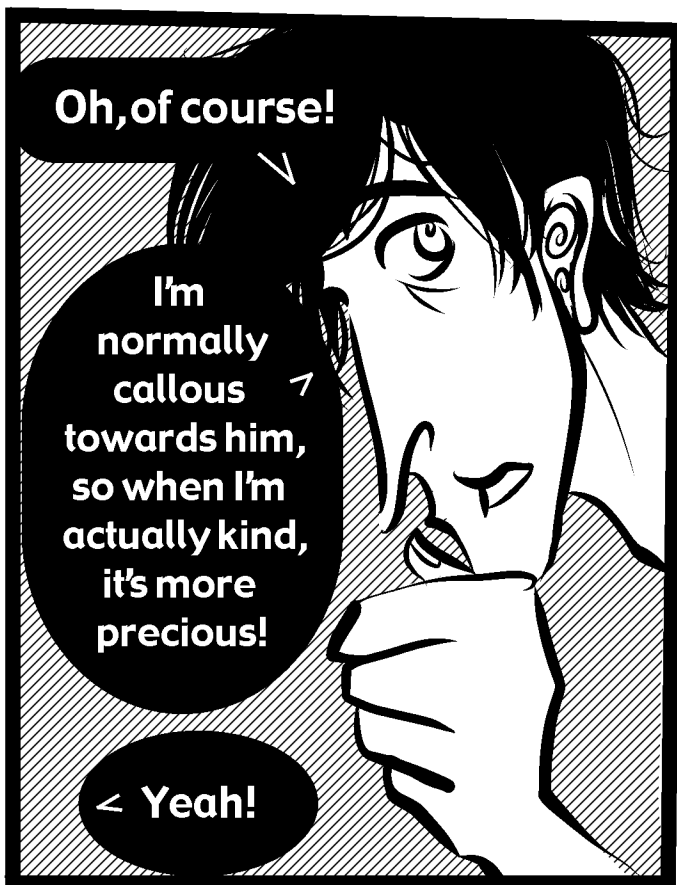
It's creepy!





It's probably because  
you're usually being a  
dick to him, right?

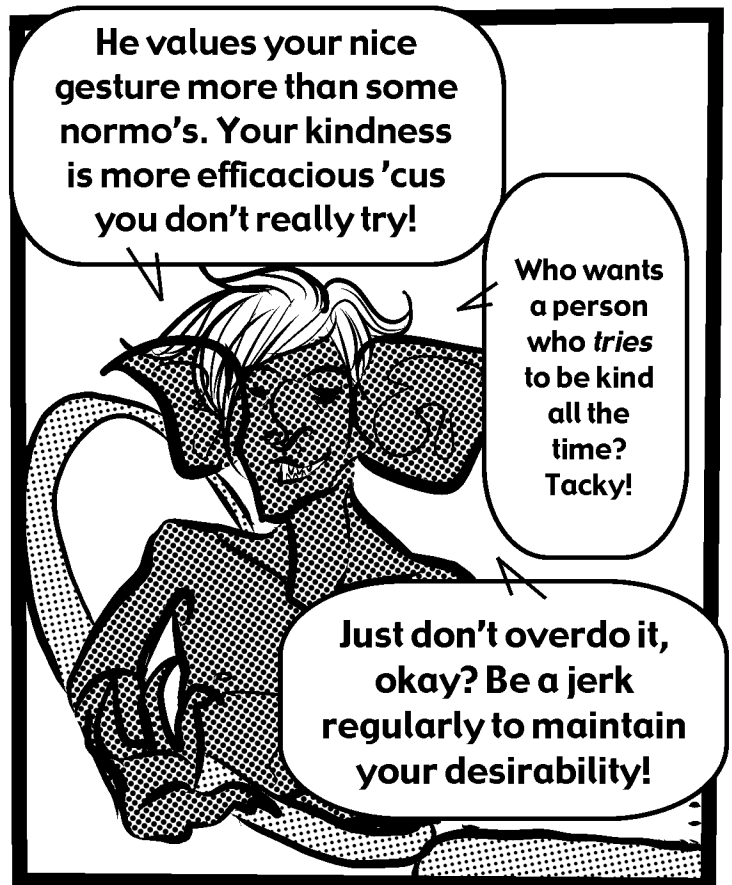
Everyone knows that  
kindness from someone  
who's usually mean is  
more valuable, right?



Oh, of course!

I'm  
normally  
callous  
towards him,  
so when I'm  
actually kind,  
it's more  
precious!

< Yeah!



He values your nice  
gesture more than some  
normo's. Your kindness  
is more efficacious 'cus  
you don't really try!

Who wants  
a person  
who *tries*  
to be kind  
all the  
time?  
Tacky!

Just don't overdo it,  
okay? Be a jerk  
regularly to maintain  
your desirability!





I'm relieved.

I was worried I would have to grow and change to nurture relationships with other people.

But as long as I focus on reaping the rewards of *secondary* benefits, I don't have to change a thing about myself!



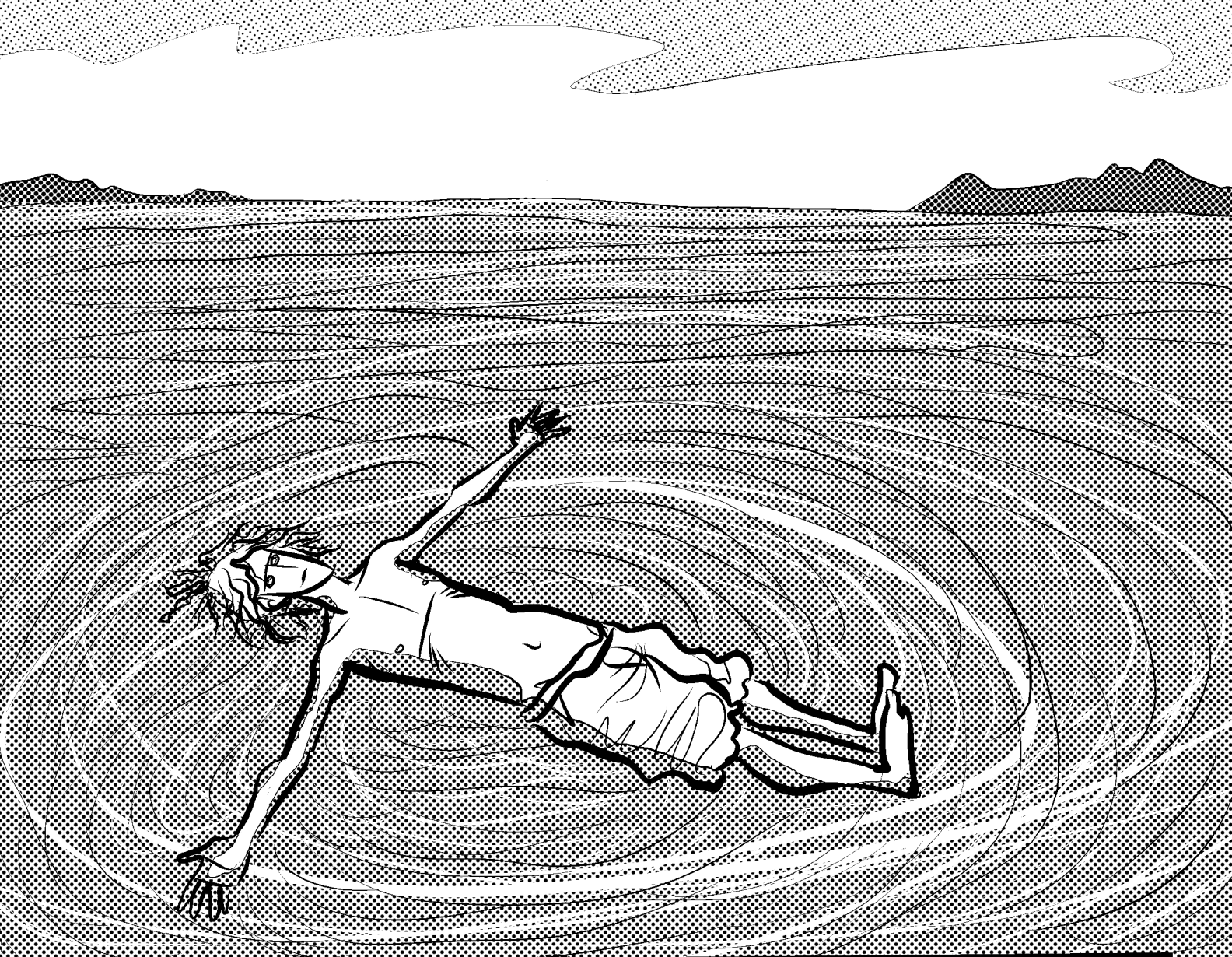
What'd I tell ya?

Getting laid is easy!  
You got this!



I'm gonna date everyone!!

just boys, Cal  
no girls ➤



Hey, >  
Fola!

< hmmm



Viv found  
a cool cave. >

We're going to explore  
it and maybe grill some  
food for dinner. 7

> Wanna  
come?



Why would I want to  
look at a cave, Funa?!

I dunno, Fola



We thought it might  
distract you from your  
paralyzing anxiety >

< Hm.

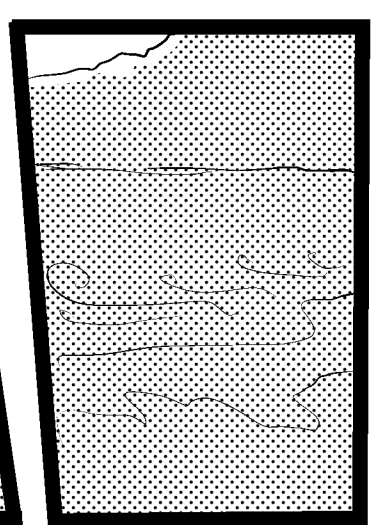
< Ok.

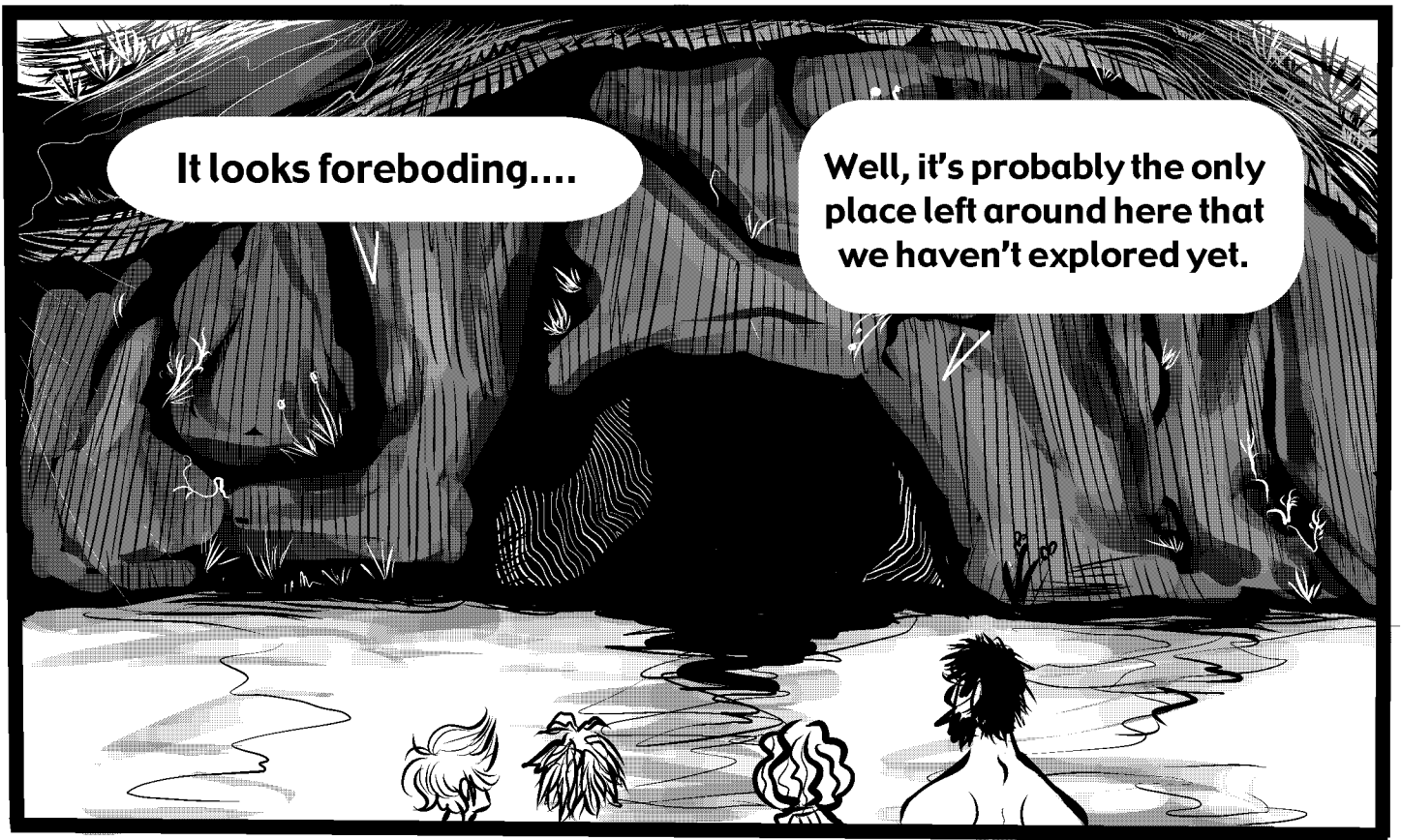


Sorry.



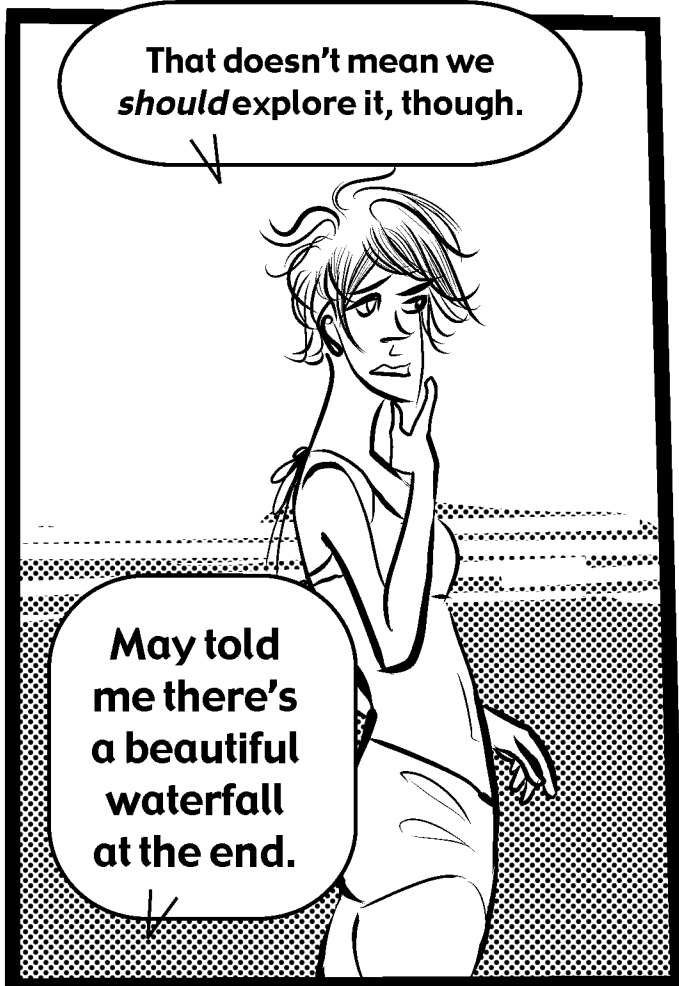
< It's a bit of a hike.





It looks foreboding....

Well, it's probably the only place left around here that we haven't explored yet.



That doesn't mean we *should* explore it, though.

May told me there's a beautiful waterfall at the end.



She recommended we take a lunch and make a day trip of it.

I also came prepared!



At least we  
won't be  
in the dark!

Except  
figuratively,  
of course.

Am I the only one with  
the balls to say it?!



We're doing this  
because of ME!

Oh, here  
we go.....



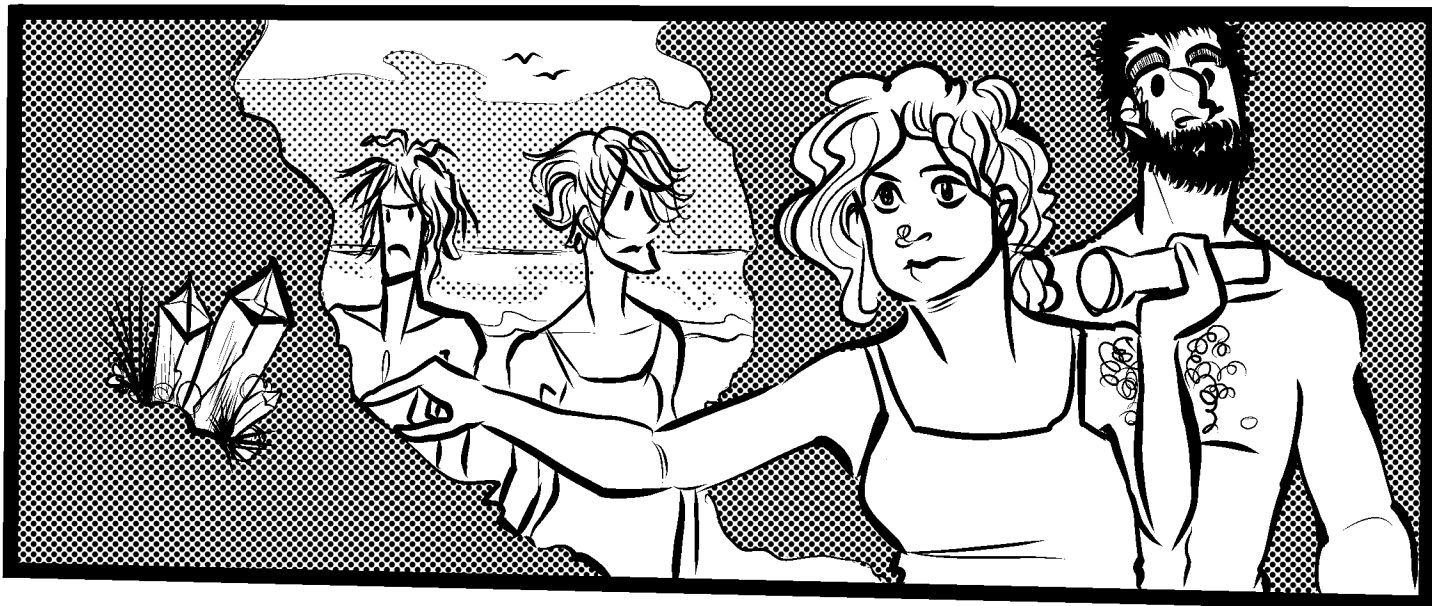
You're all such  
pussies! It's  
always up to  
me to cut  
through the  
bullshit!

We're just trying not to rub it in,  
Fola. That urge you're feeling  
to "do something" is probably  
what the rest of us would call  
"shame."

All you're accomplishing is  
self-flagellation in front of a  
trapped audience, please stop  
making this weirder than it  
already is for us.







Hmm. I wonder  
what Fern is doing  
right now. √

I doubt his training is much  
better than this, if that's  
what you're thinking.

I guess  
that's true. √

Then I wonder how  
the rest of the world  
is doing. It feels like  
we've been here  
for an eternity. √





I know that  
you're ready  
for that kind of  
responsibility,  
Funa, but ... ➤



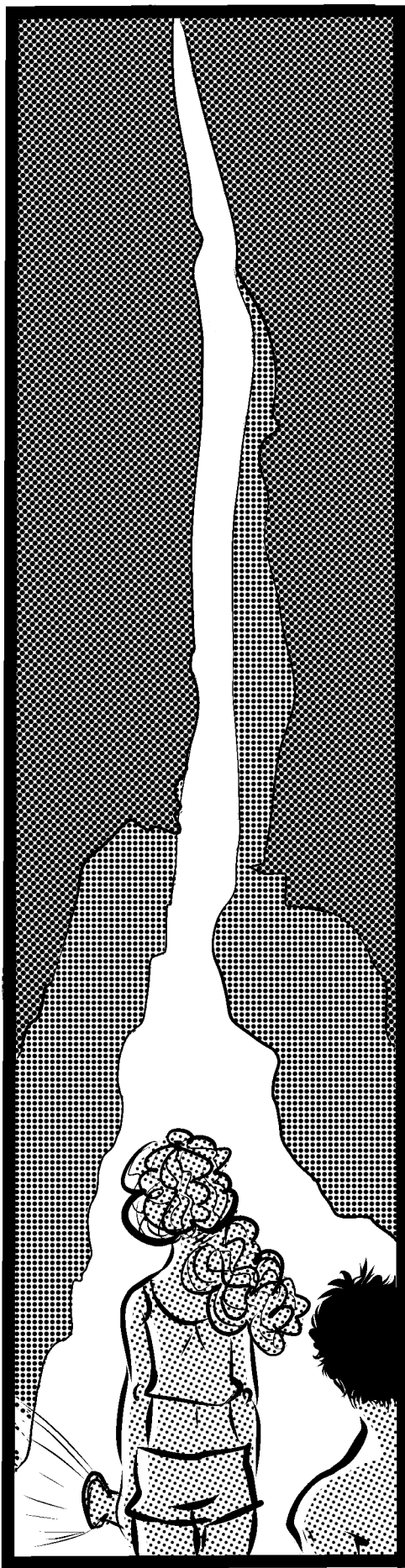
What about the fact mortals  
will start religions about us?  
It's not really just a job then,  
▼ is it?

To think of what people  
are going to do for us, because  
▼ of us, or in spite of us....



↗  
We're definitely going to  
hurt people, just like  
Fern did. Maybe it'll  
be more indirect, but...

↗ Shouldn't  
we talk  
about that?  
Is it really  
useless?



Hey, do you  
hear that,  
everyone?



You mean the  
sound of my voice  
a minute ago?



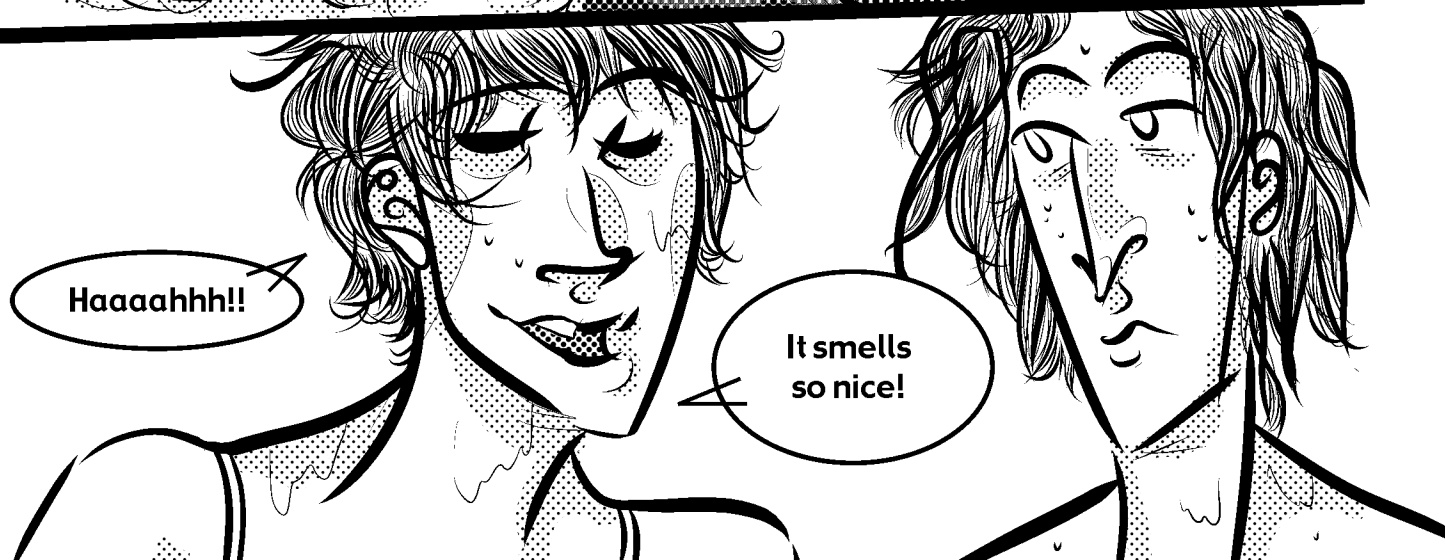
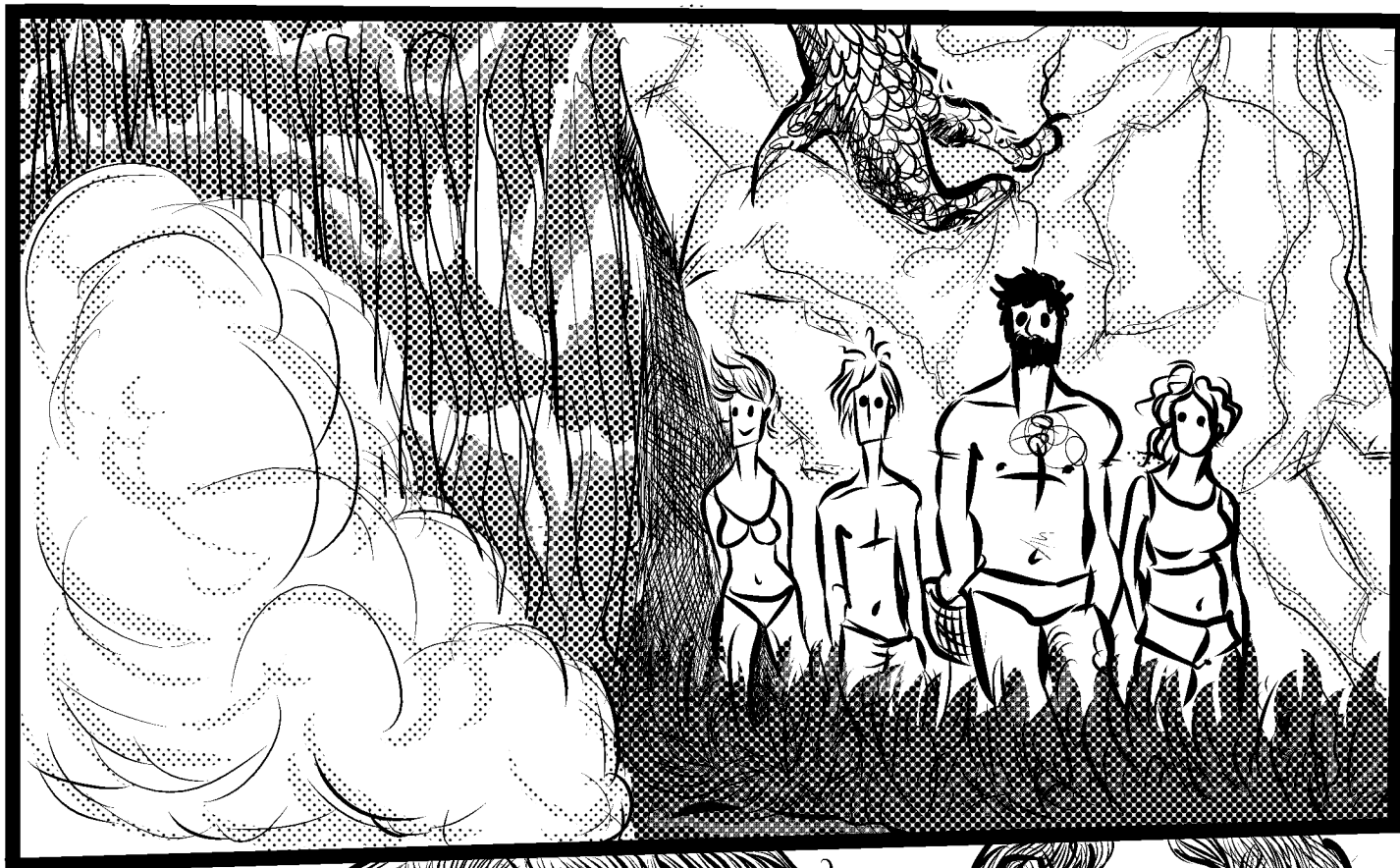
Oh ... No, Ell.  
I wasn't listening  
to you.

I'm talking about  
that roaring sound.

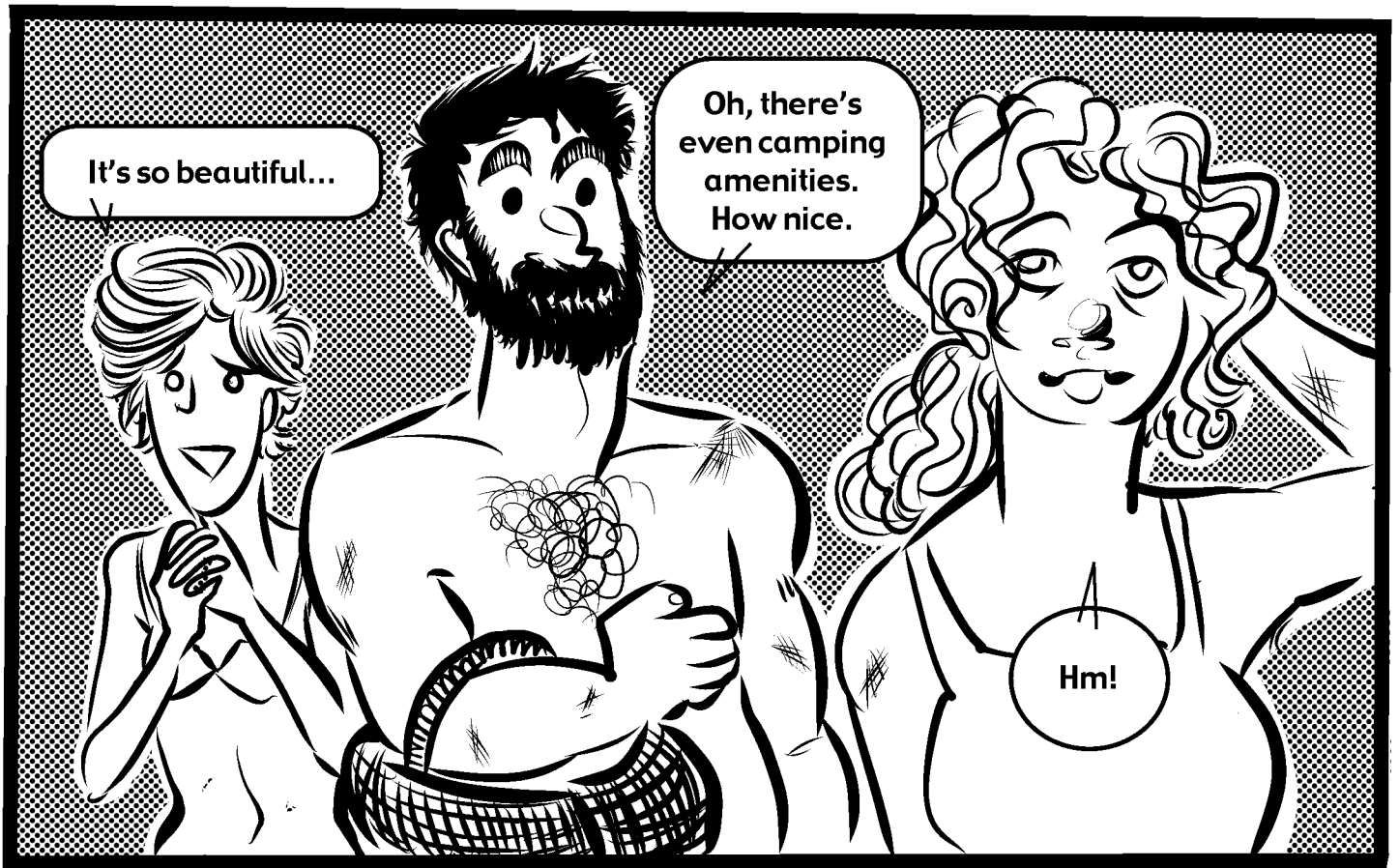
It must be the  
waterfall.













First one's almost ready.

✓



Ell, grab me a plate, will you?

Sure.

Um, so, am I wrong, or has this whole day been kind of...  
How do I put this...metaphorical?



Oh Ell, it's not metaphorical at all. What's happening isn't that deep.









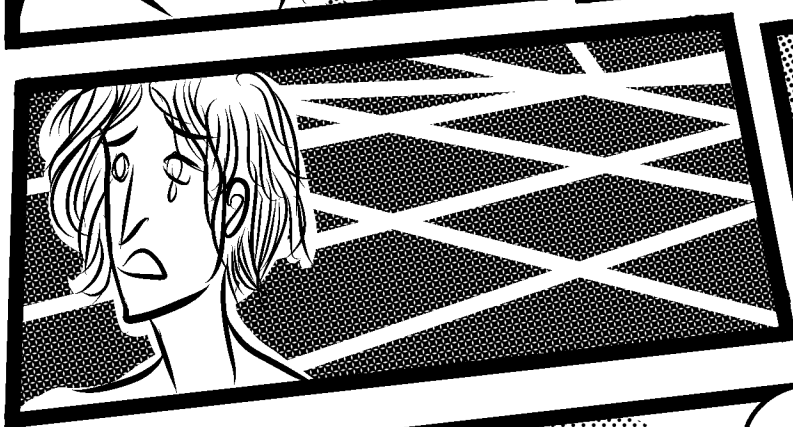
Yeah, you're right. Sorry  
I'm being so cynical.  
We have a shared goal,  
and I should concentrate  
on that. It's not like I can  
do this by myself!

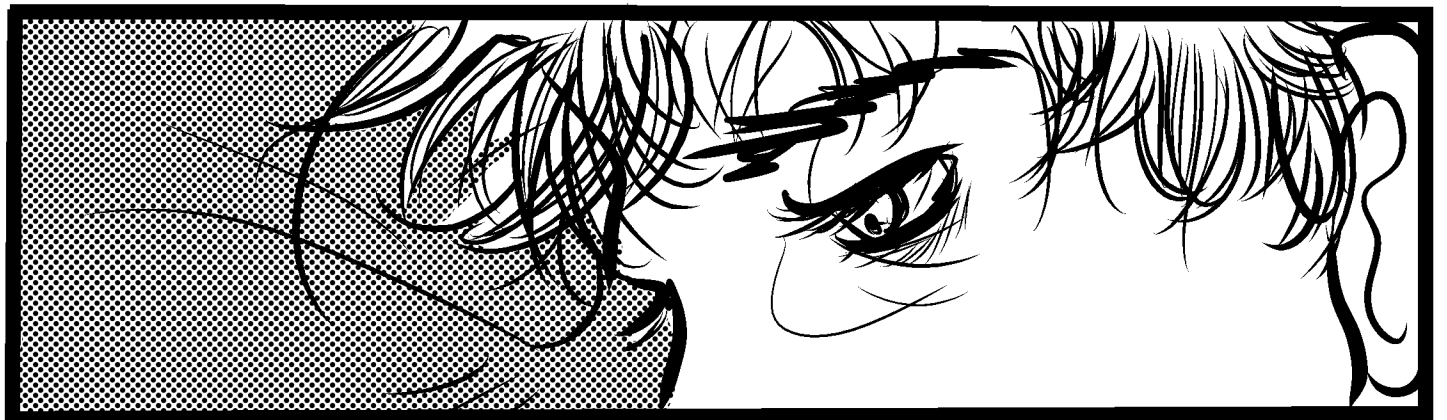


We should all do our  
best for the planet!!

For Faidia!

Whoa.





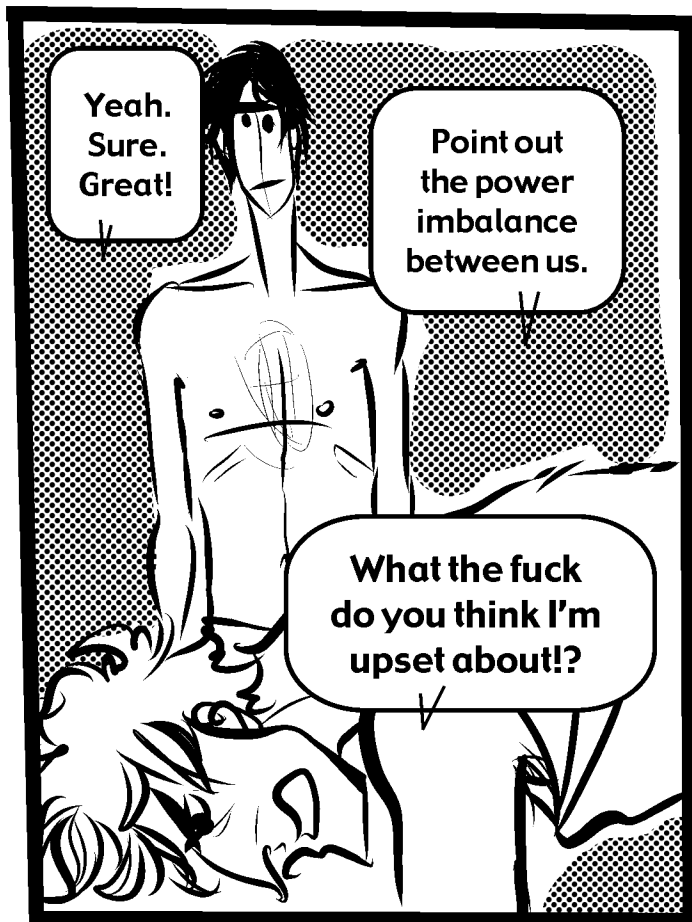
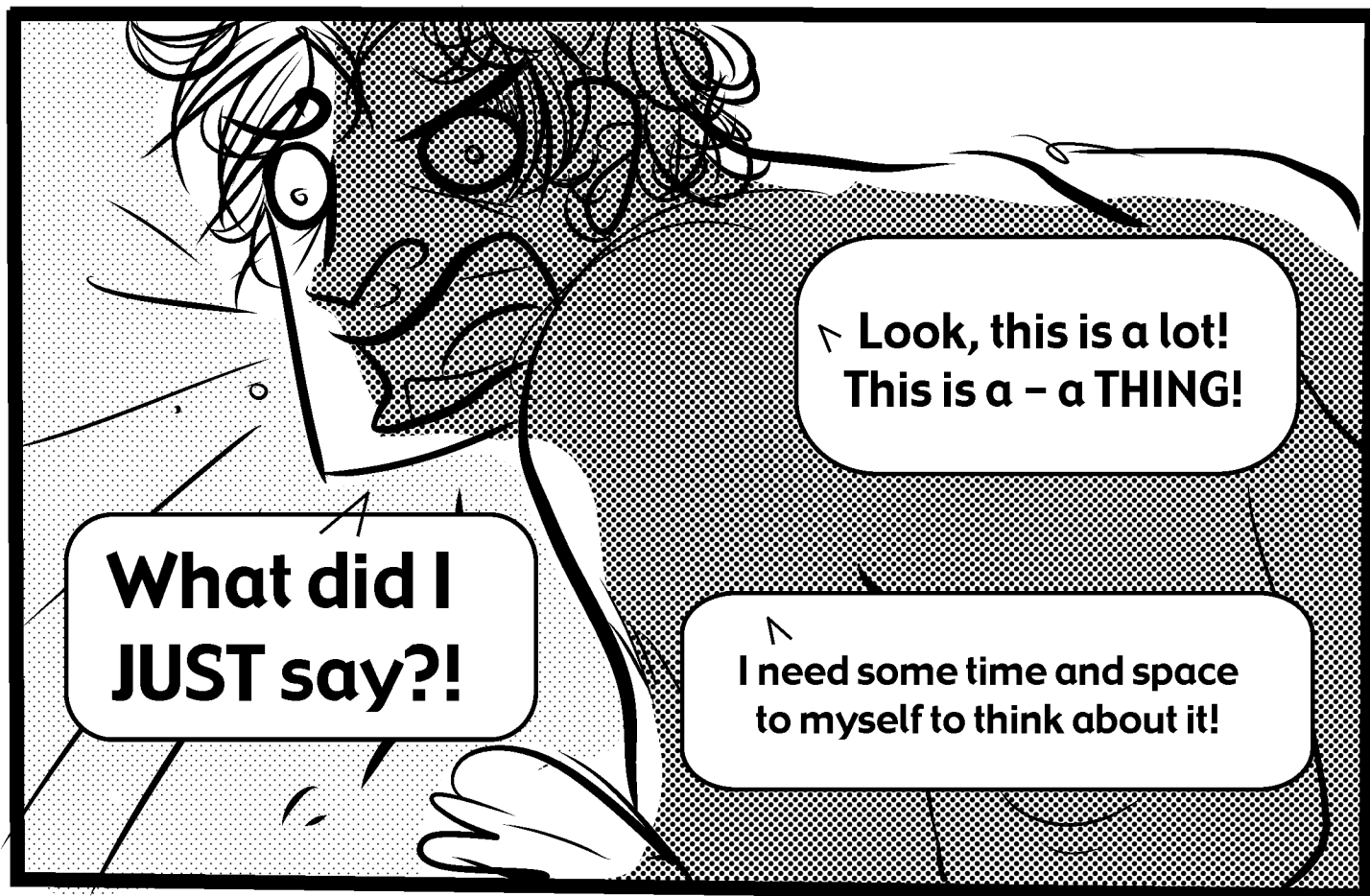


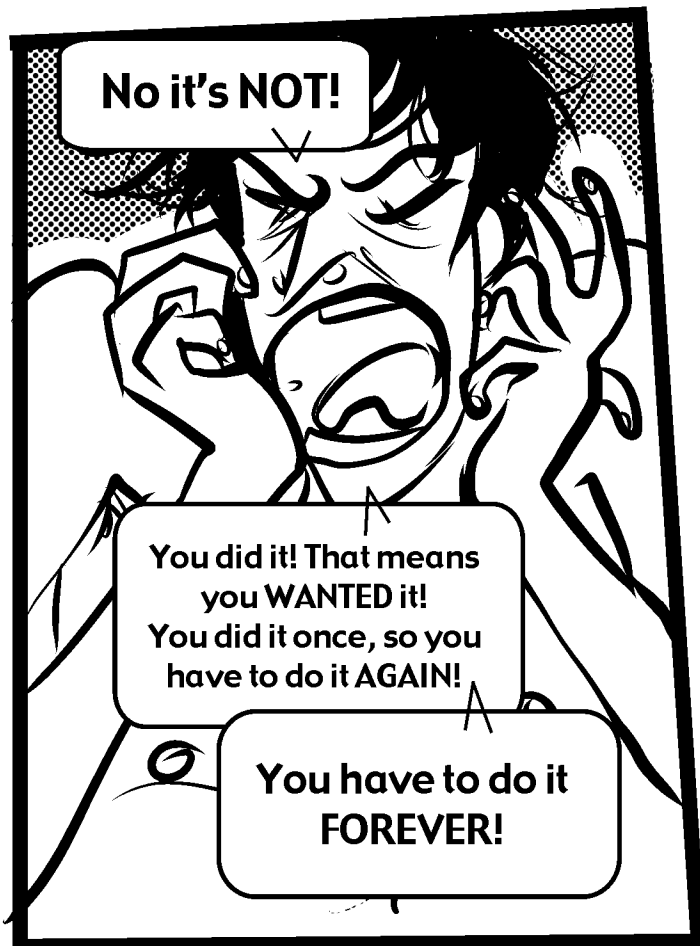
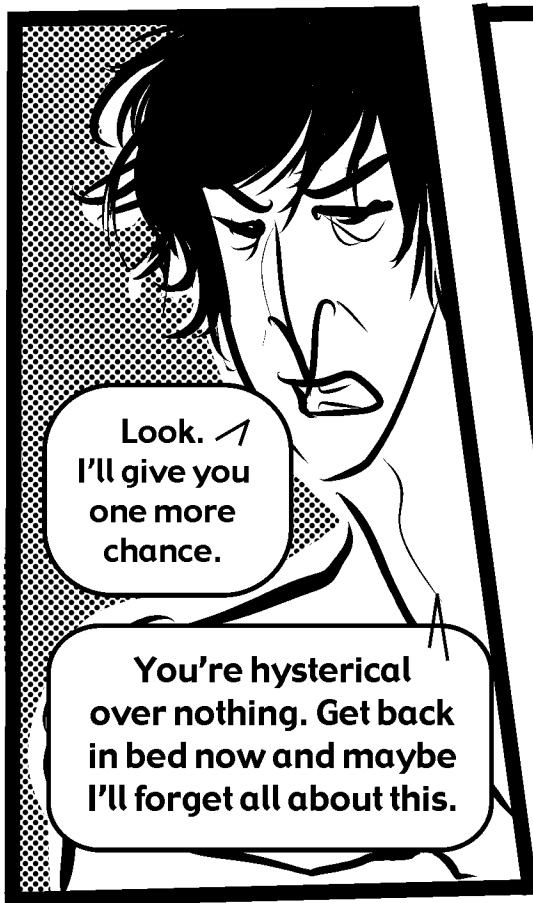


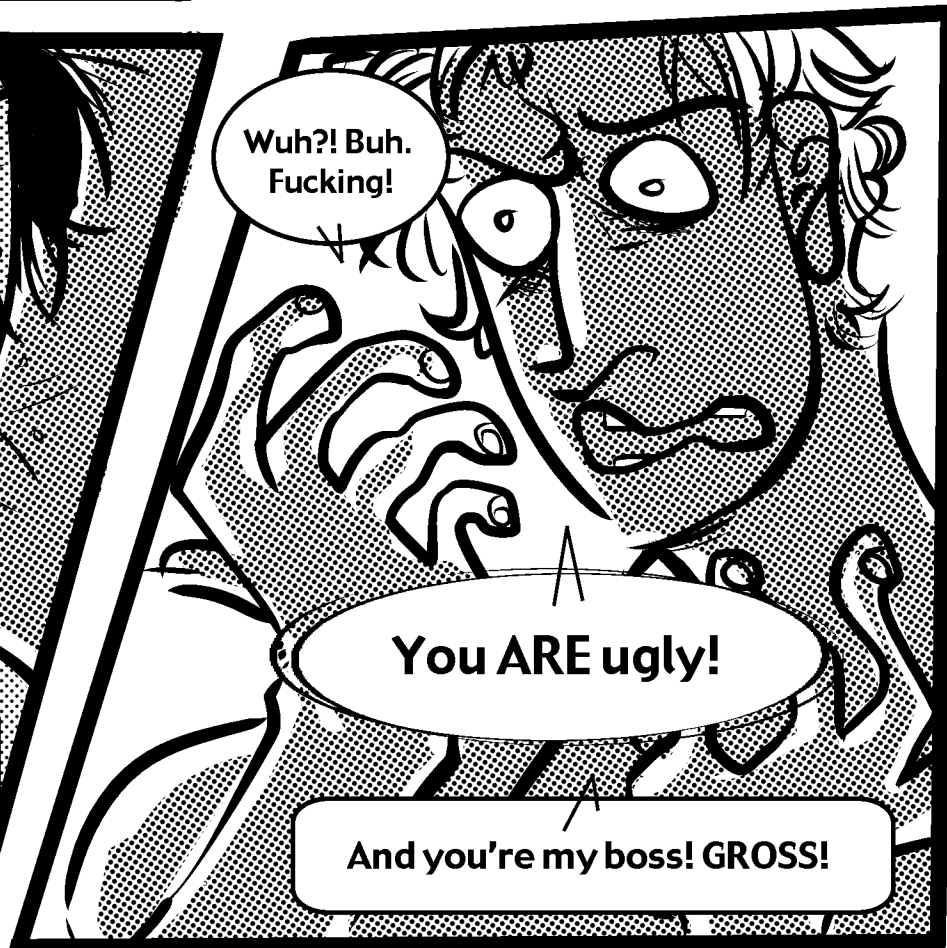
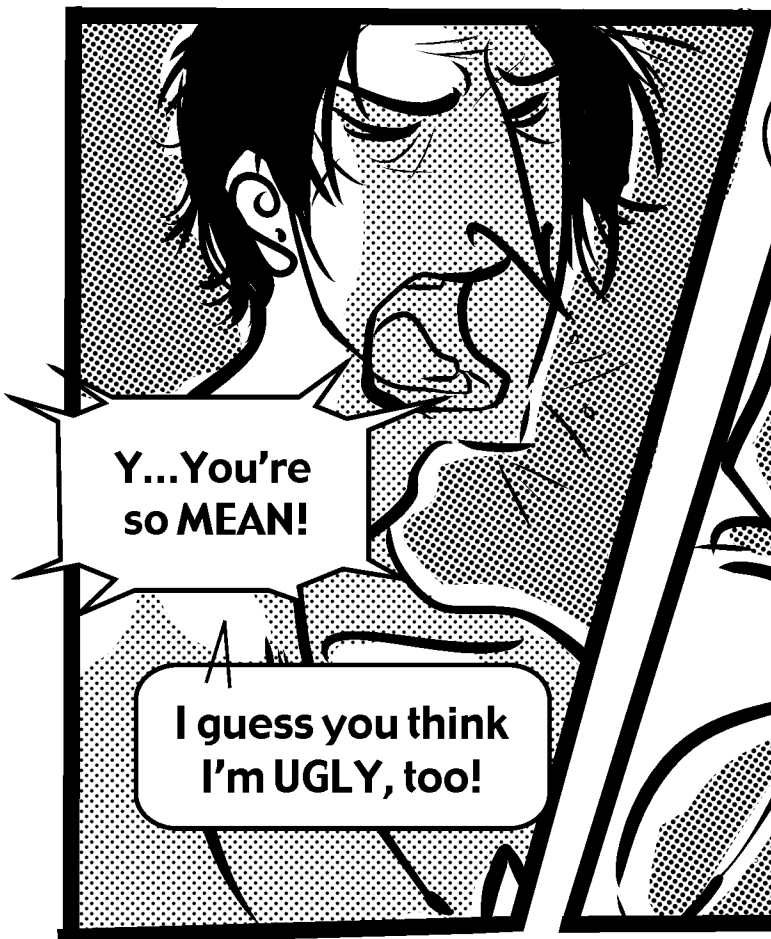

















Has it occurred to you that sometimes you have to do things you don't like?



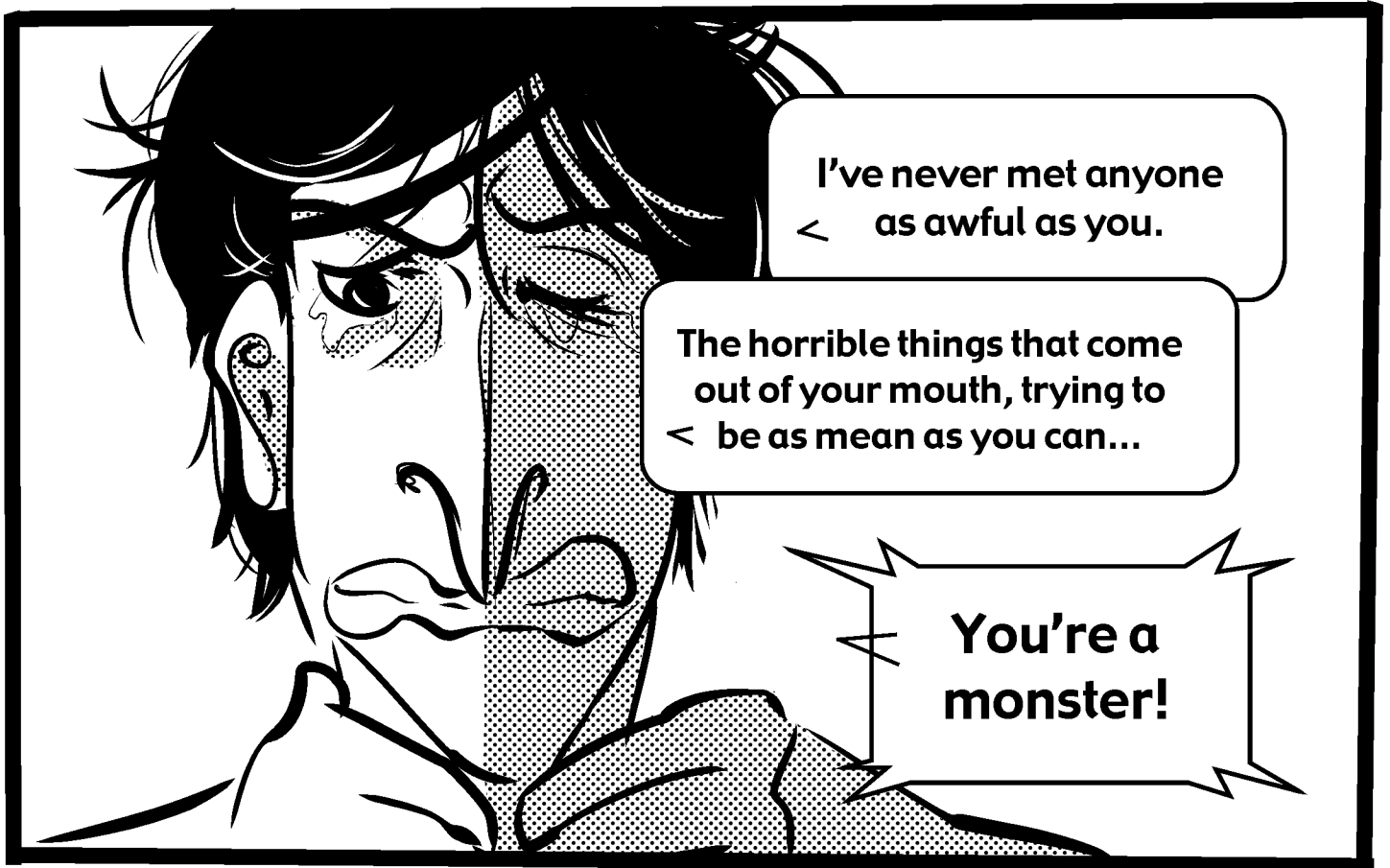
Maybe if something feels bad, you're **OBLIGATED** to do it! That's what *good* people do. They make sacrifices!



Funny you should say that. This whole argument is only even happening because you couldn't bear the discomfort of letting me have some time to myself.



*Maybe* you should be lecturing yourself! Maybe it's *you* whose behavior needs to change and improve.





**I'm leaving.**

**And not just  
for a break, now.**

**I'm not  
coming  
back.**



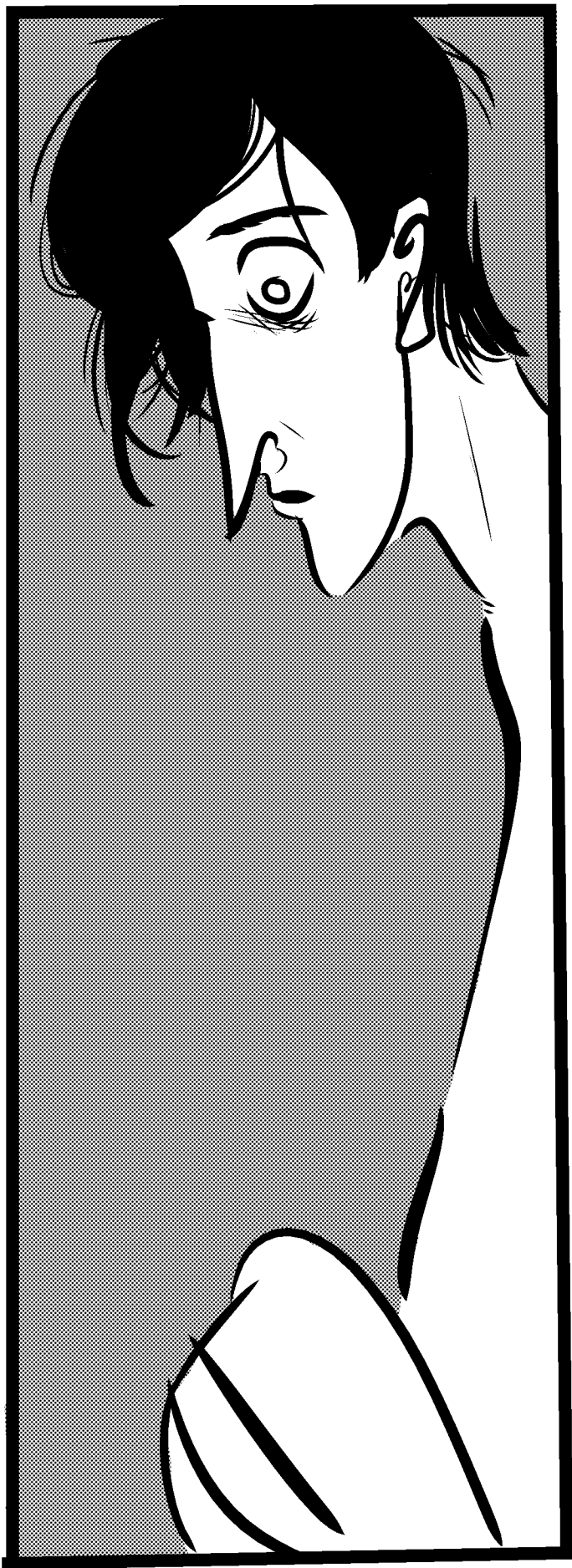


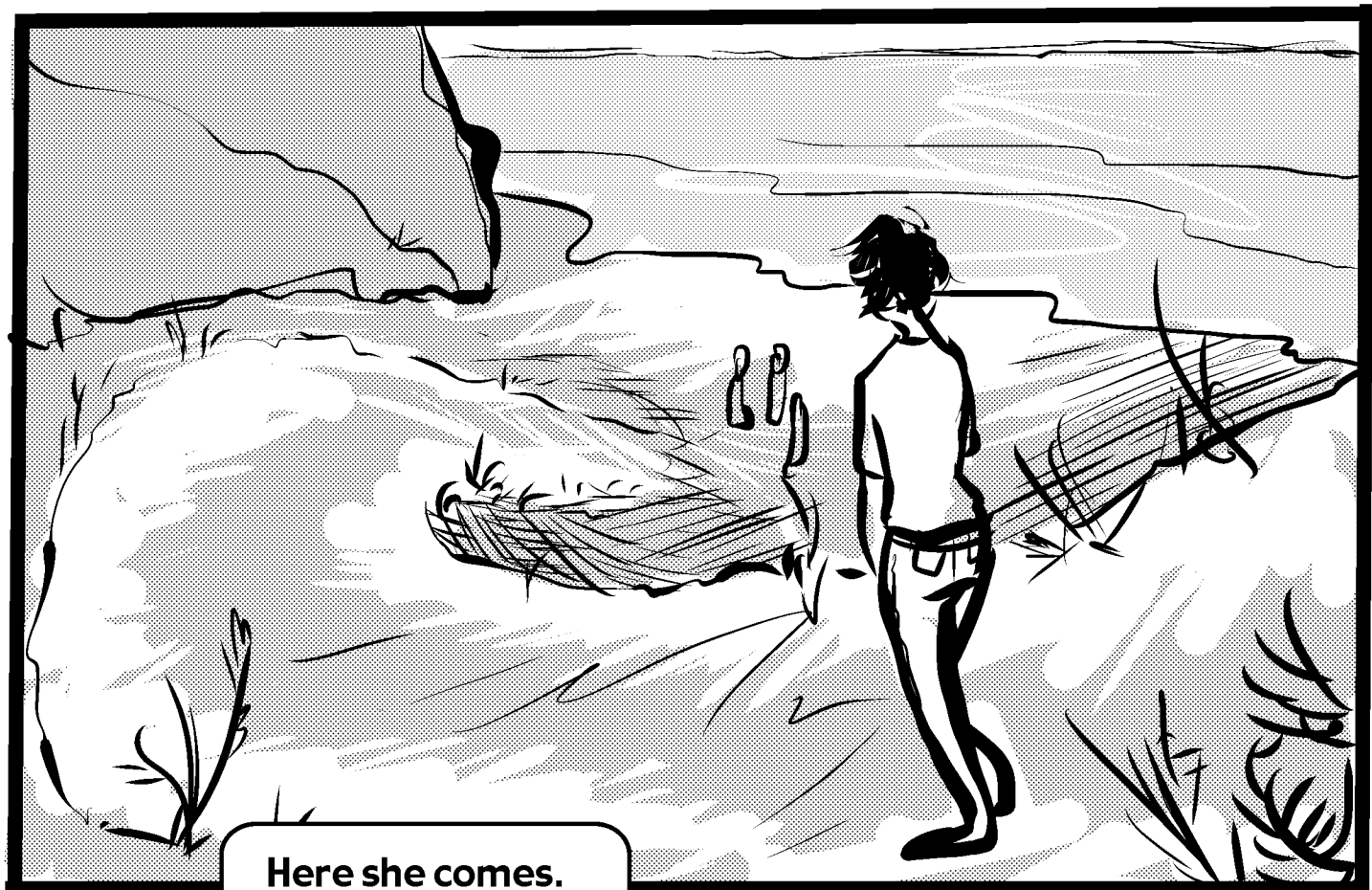
You can't. >

< Can't I?

Your brother  
wanted to own  
me or whatever,  
right?

Maybe I'll  
take him up 7  
on that.





Here she comes.  
Are you sure  
you're ready??



Yeah yeah. I can do it!  
Don't nag me!! >

< Guys, chill.



Ready to give  
it another go, ey?



Yeah! >

Once I put my mind  
to it, it was easy!

Ok. Show me and we'll do a water test.  
Unless you're excessively sweaty like Viv,  
this should only take a couple minutes.

Hey, I'm trying  
to forget that. >

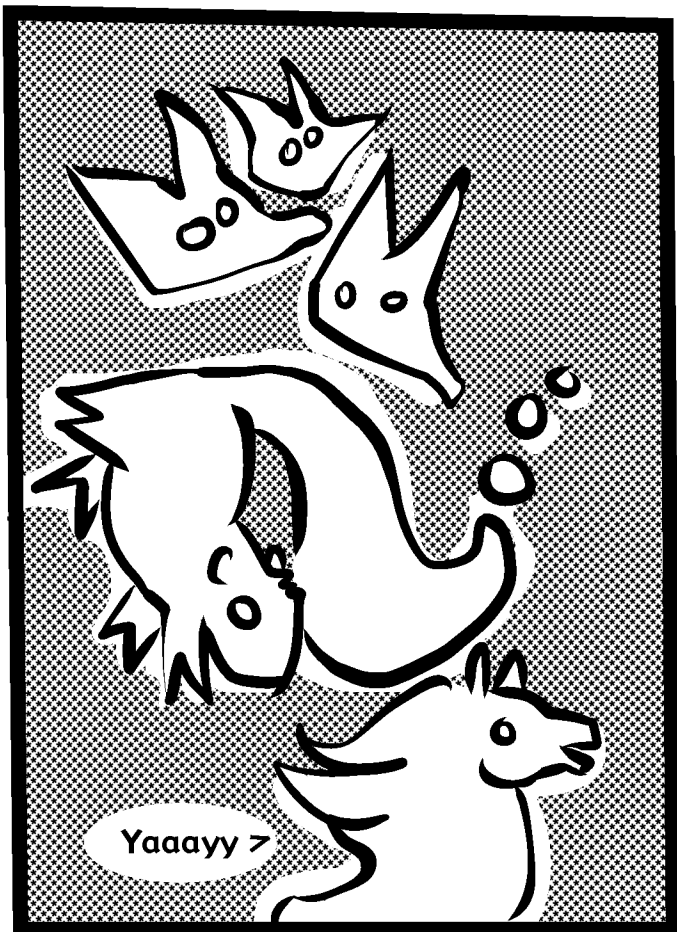
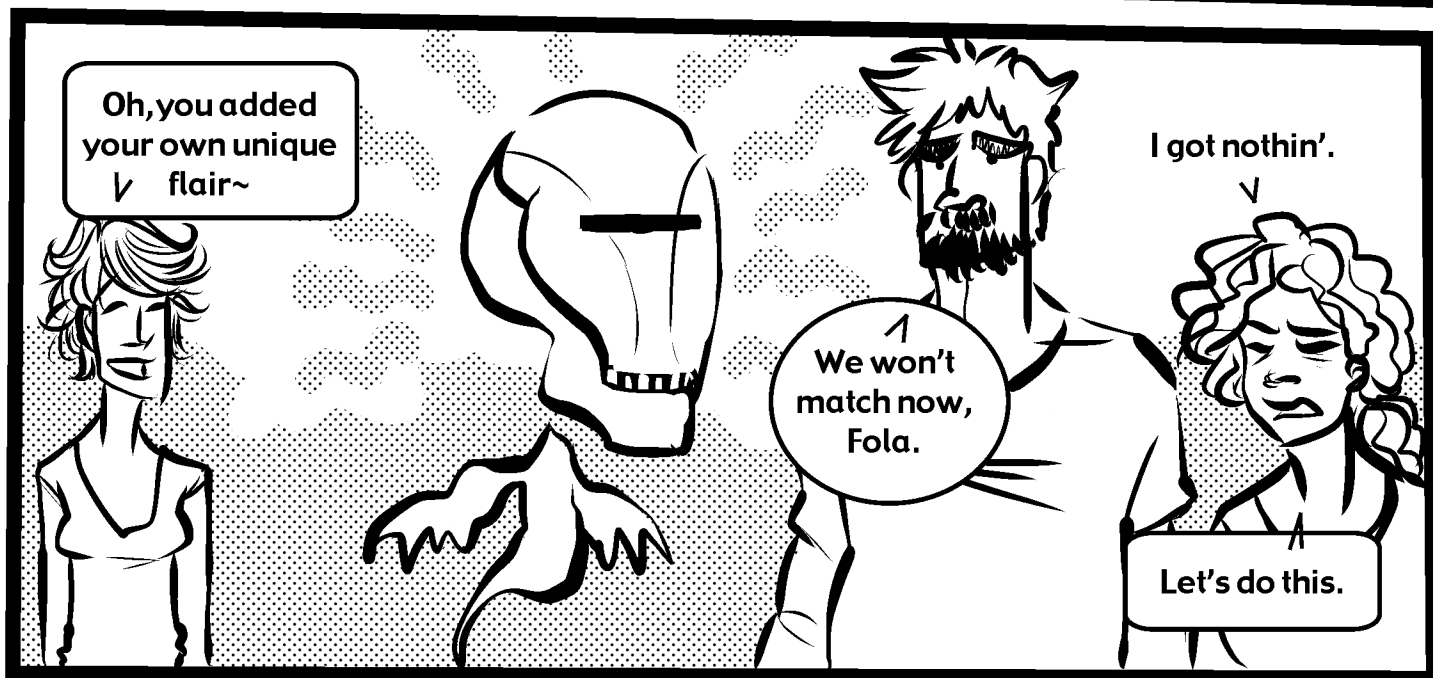
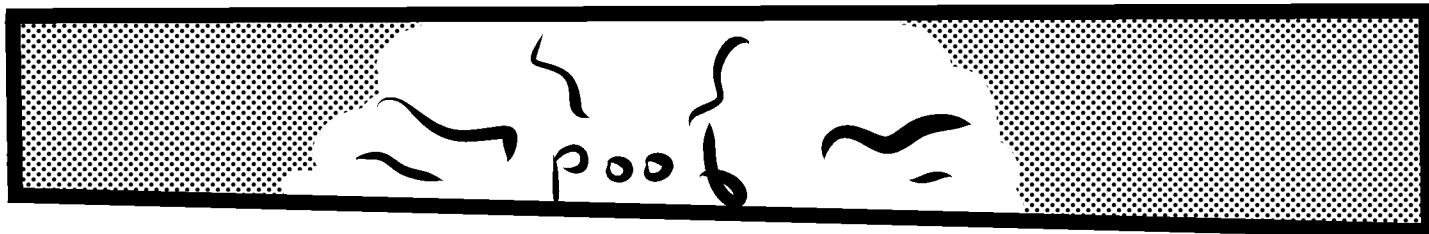


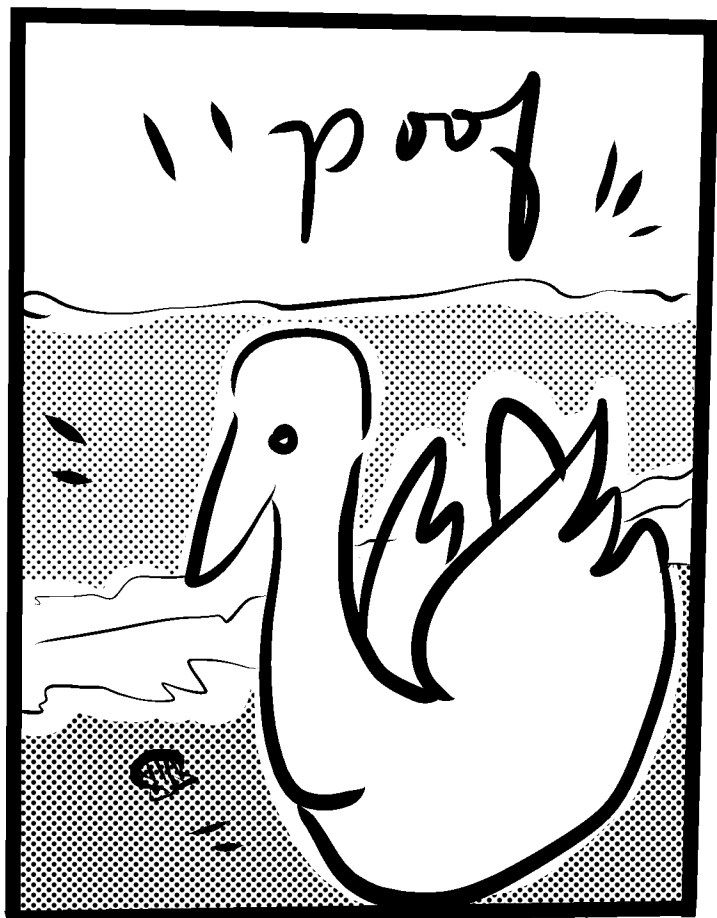
OH.  
Show you? >  
Uh.

Isn't this sudden?

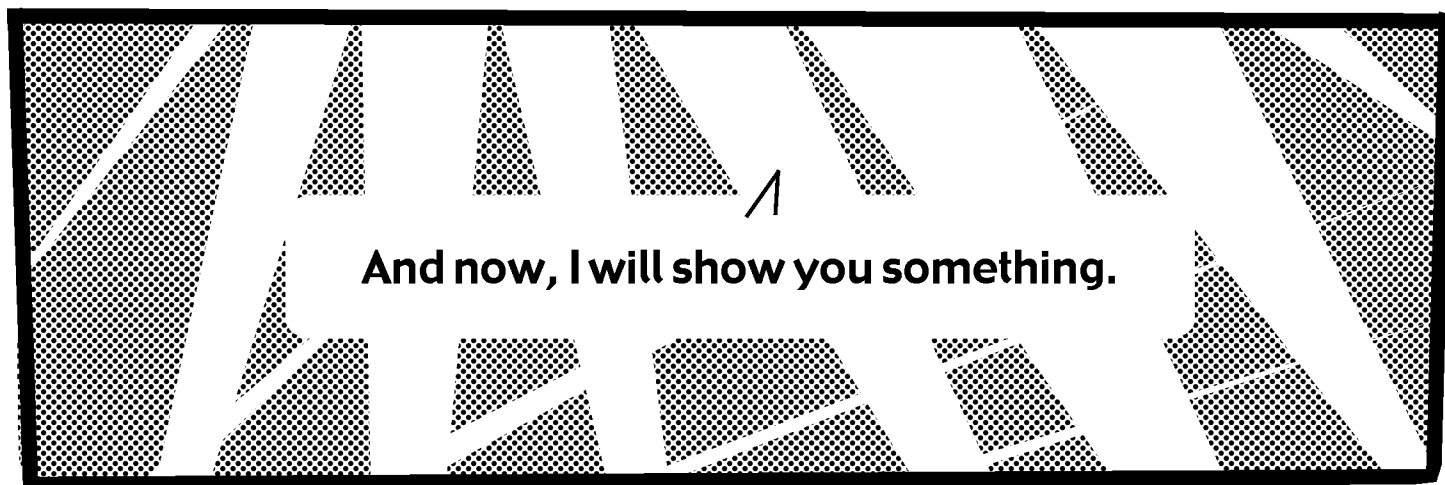
Lots of pressure...

Are you  
fucking  
kidding me >

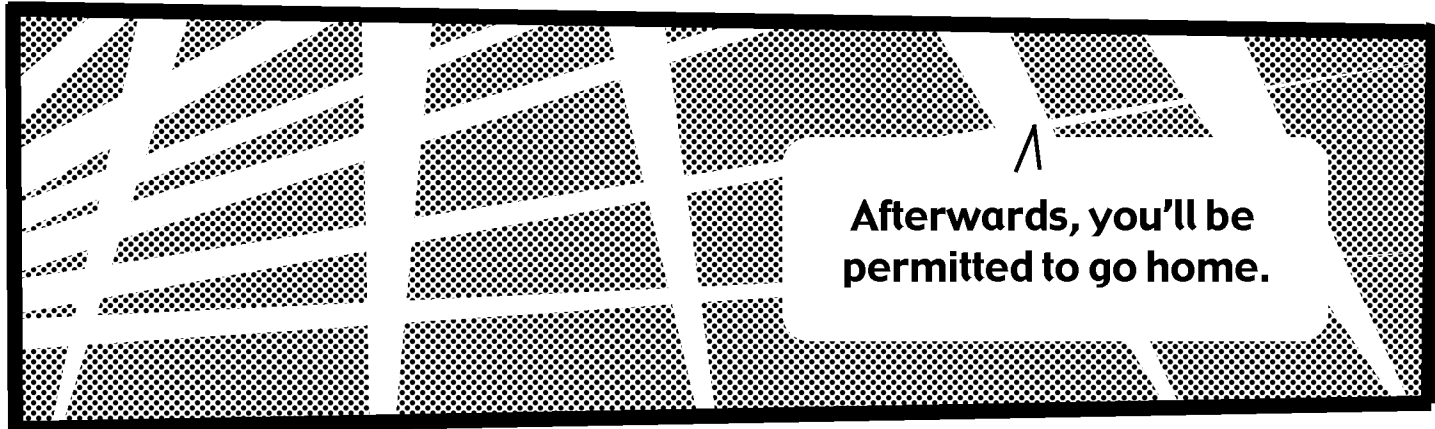




I was kind of showing off the first time - I tend to favor simple forms like this myself! So convenient.



And now, I will show you something.




Afterwards, you'll be permitted to go home.



W-wait, just like that?  
Can't we talk about this first?



Shut up, Viv!  
Enough talking!  
I want to go home!



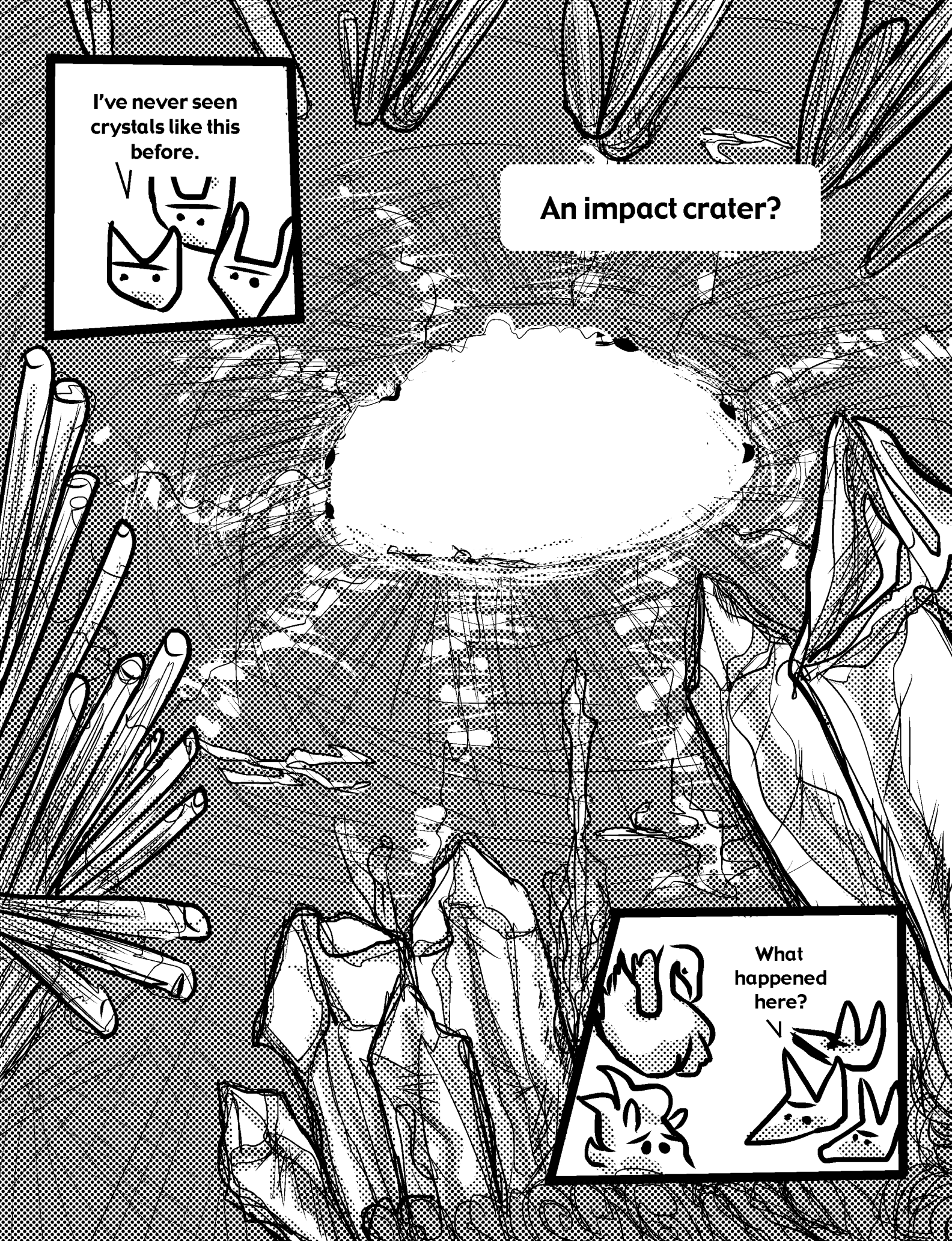
But where  
are we  
going?

< The Southern  
Continent.







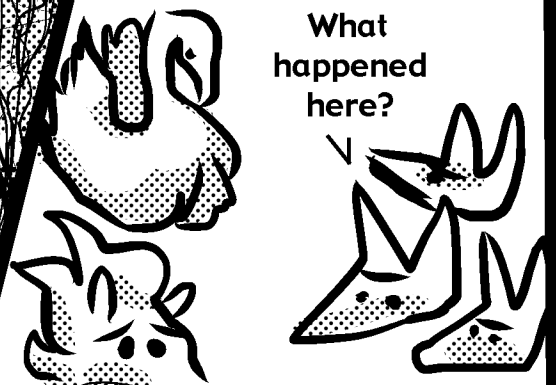


I've never seen  
crystals like this  
before.



An impact crater?

What  
happened  
here?





This is where I took on a physical  
form for the very first time.

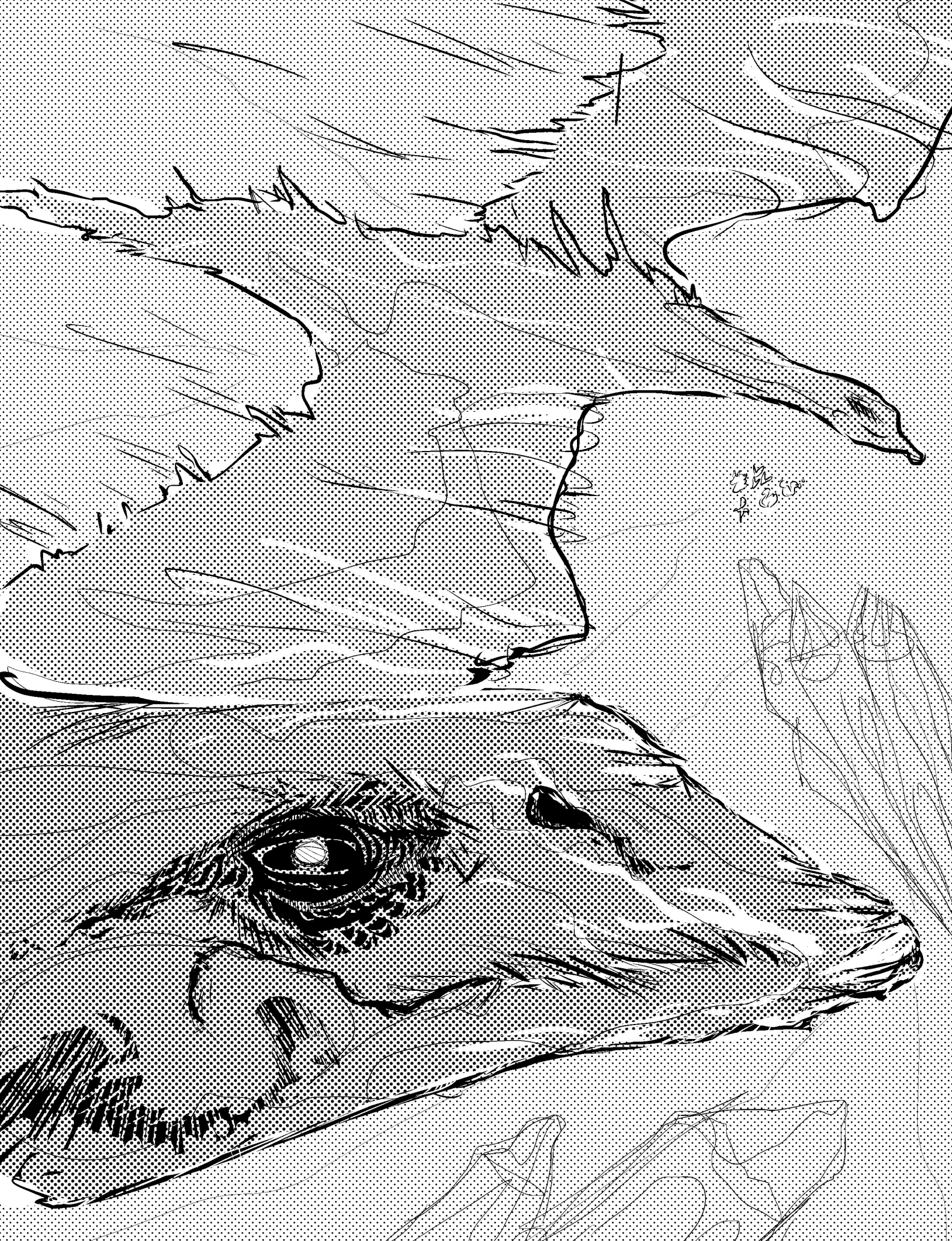
I did not take the  
appropriate  
precautions.



Inadvertently,  
I exposed the planet  
to a blast of pure  
elemental magic.

Ah, look up,  
everyone.





What the hell is that?! >

These are a species of dragon you won't be familiar with. >

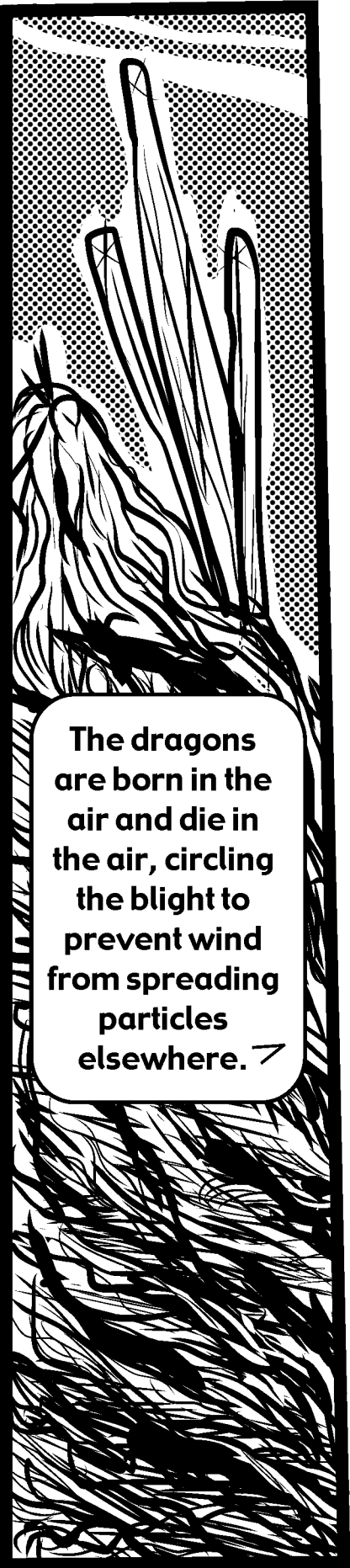
This is the only place in Faidia where you can find them, and no one else can survive being here. They're not common knowledge.

Exposure to my raw element 1 has had a devastating effect on the planet. It crystallizes and destroys everything it touches.


We have no proper magical counter to the blight.

It is also very aggressive. The blight would spread across the entire planet if permitted.


Instead, the focus has been to keep the energy isolated to this area.



The dragons are born in the air and die in the air, circling the blight to prevent wind from spreading particles elsewhere. ➤

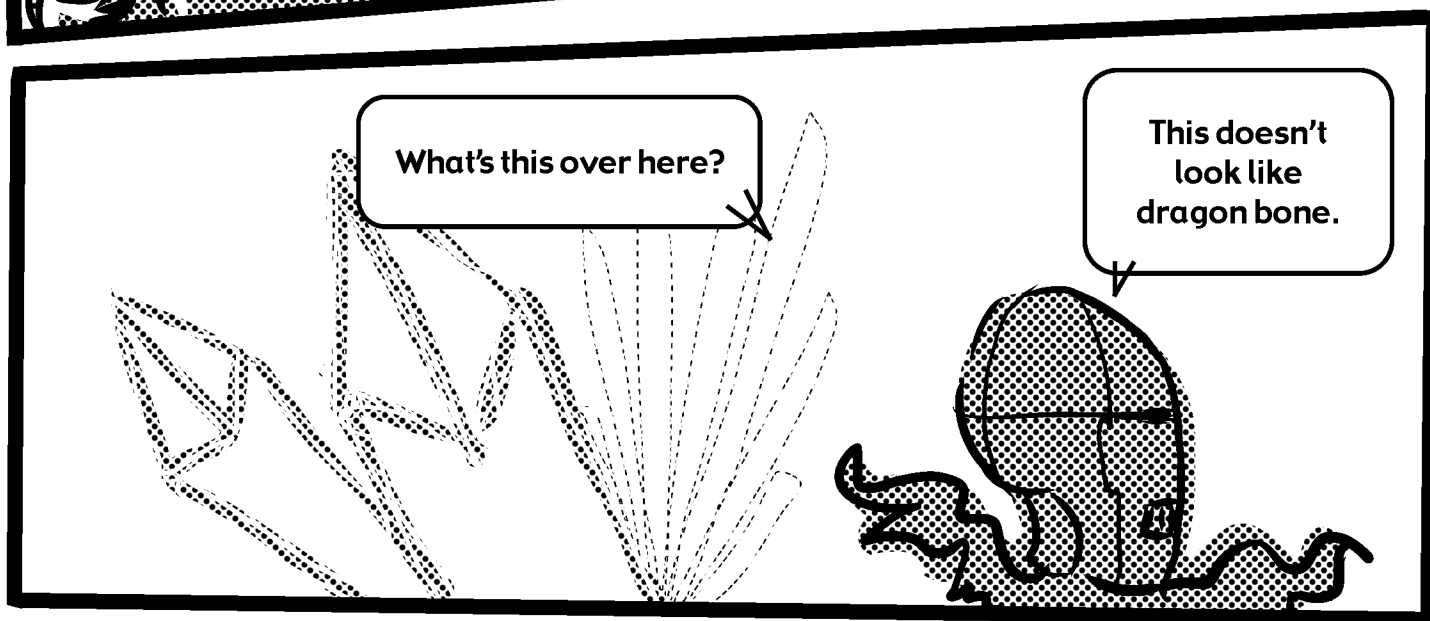
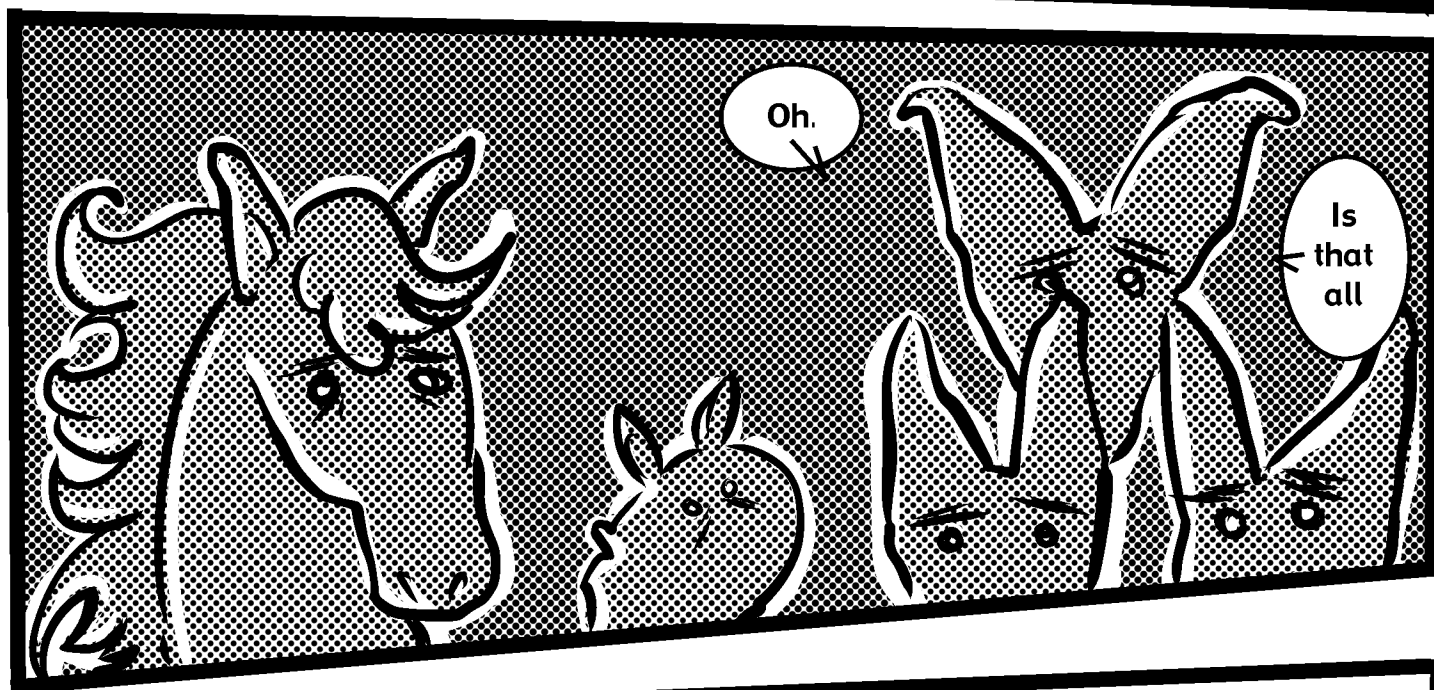
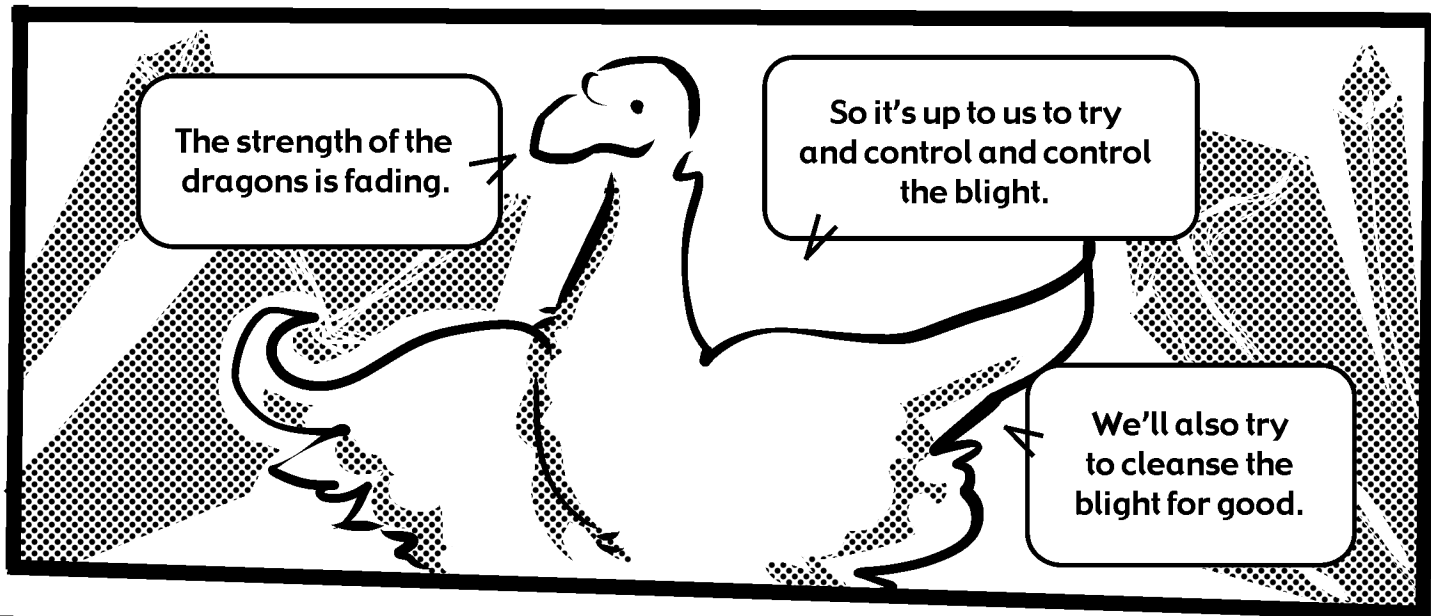


Their bodies become overladen with crystals, they fall from the air, and their corpses serve to further bury the blight.



But their sacrifice has not been enough to stop the blight entirely.



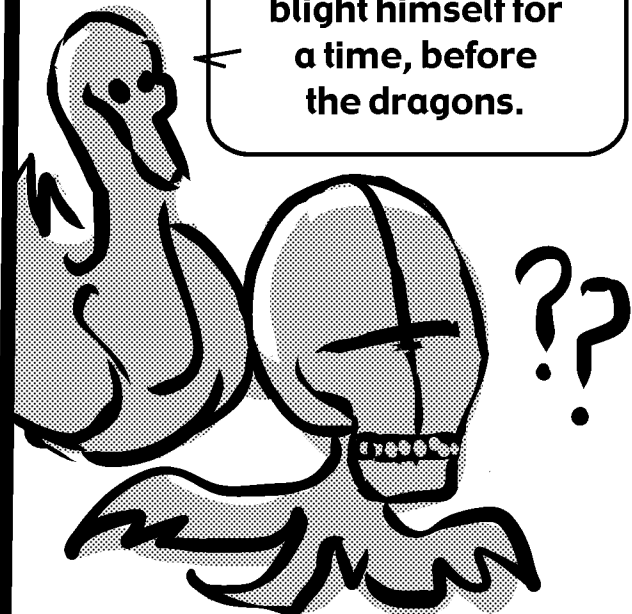


Oh, those?

Those are  
Lem's.

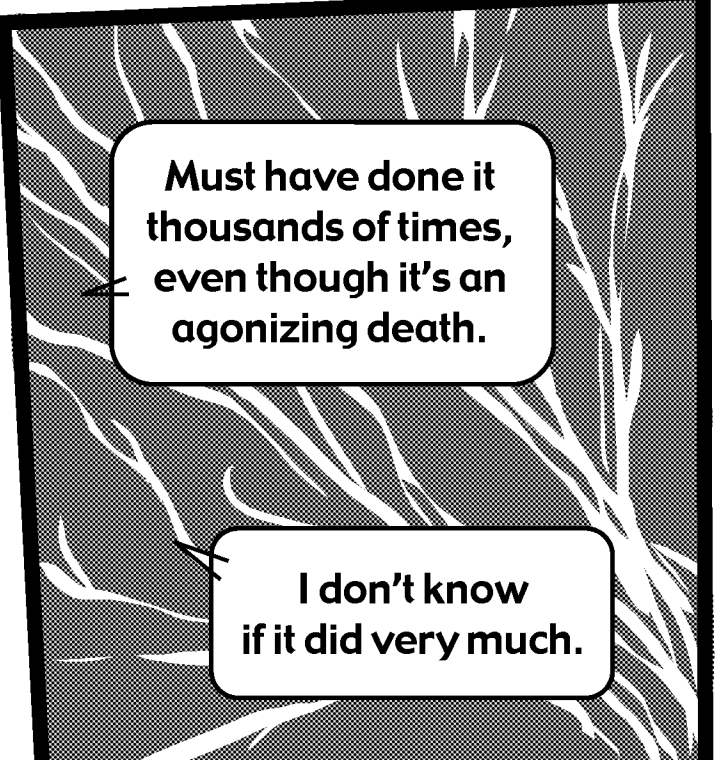


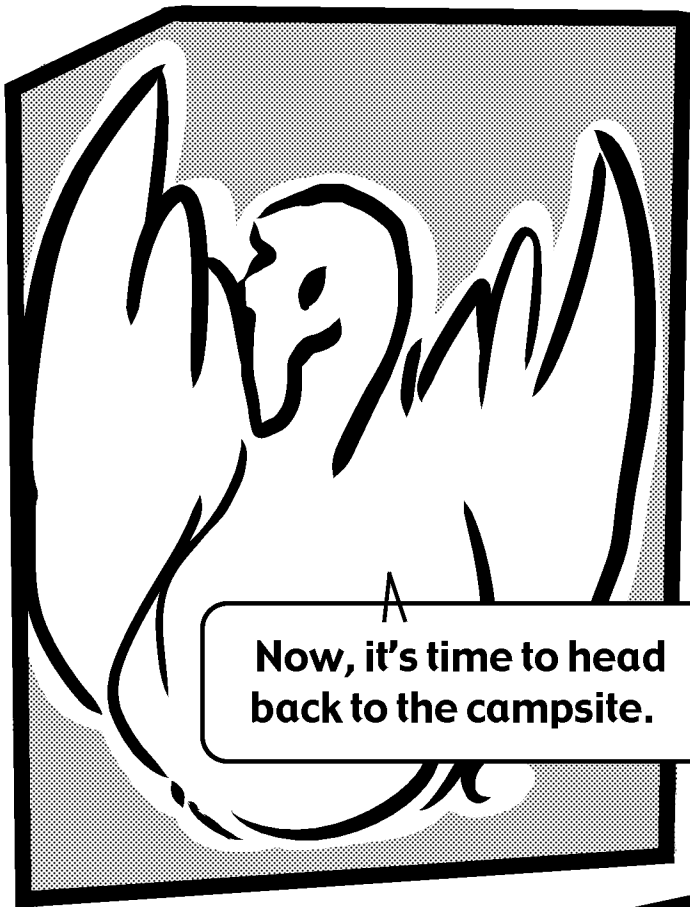
He tried burying the  
blight himself for  
a time, before  
the dragons.



Must have done it  
thousands of times,  
even though it's an  
agonizing death.

I don't know  
if it did very much.





Now, it's time to head  
back to the campsite.



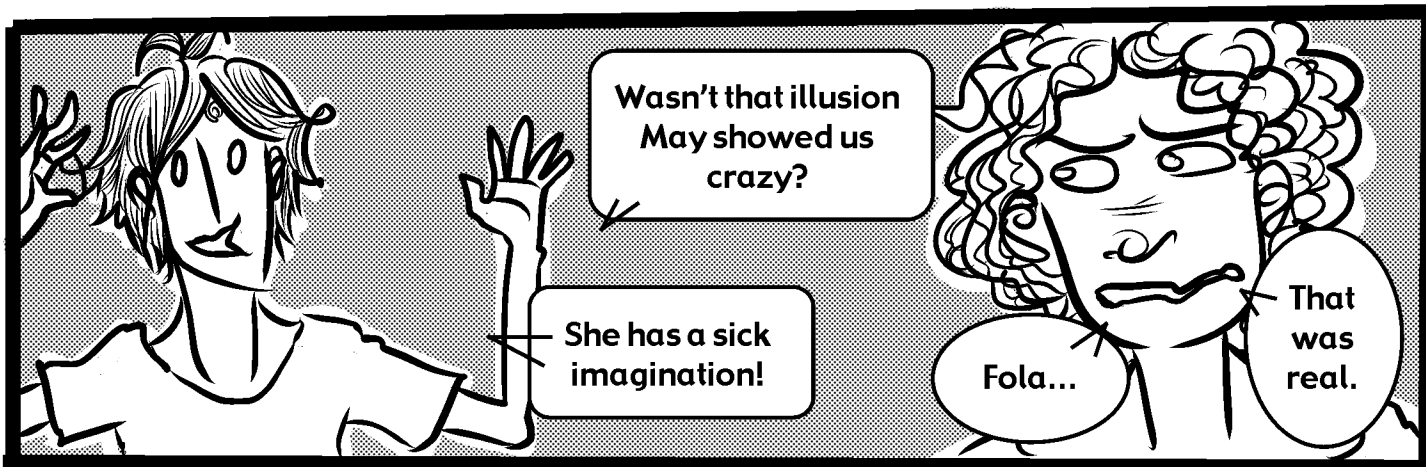
It's dangerous to  
linger here even  
with protection.

It's a very  
unstable  
environment.

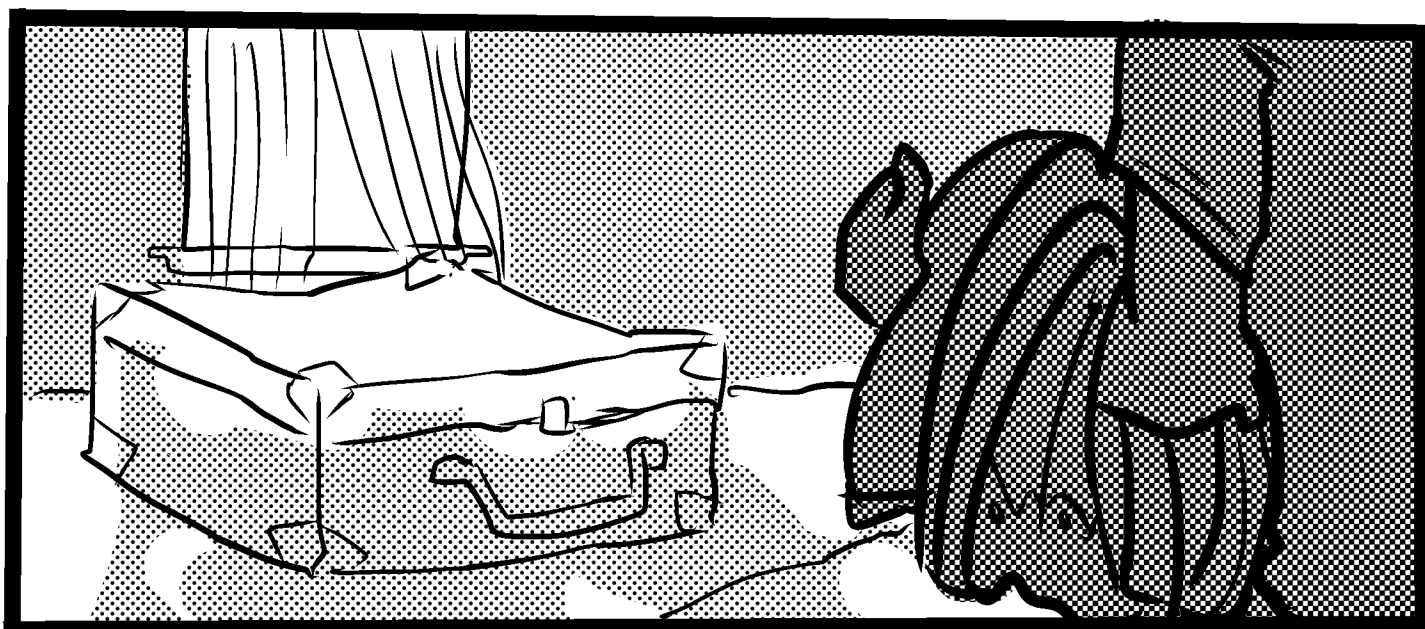
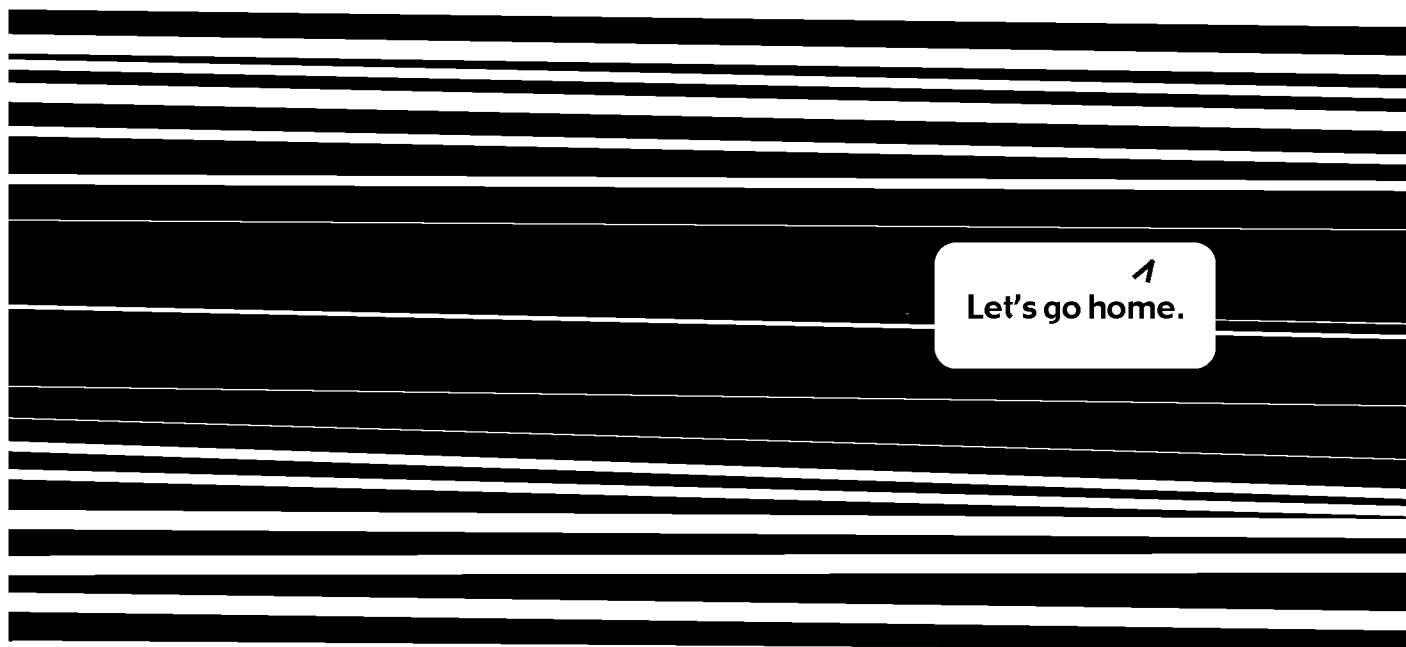


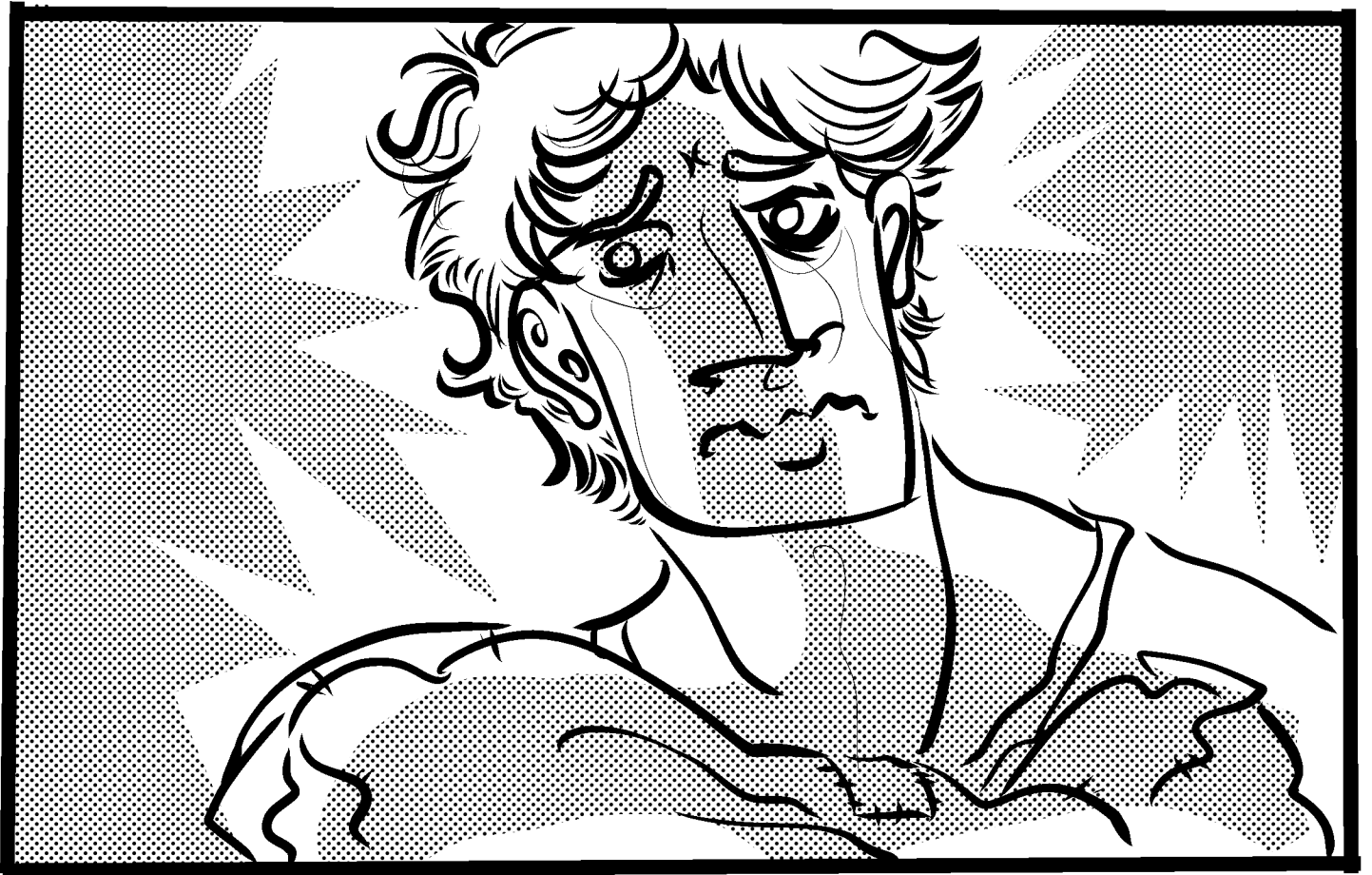
This concludes the retreat.  
You're all free to go home now.

Good work.



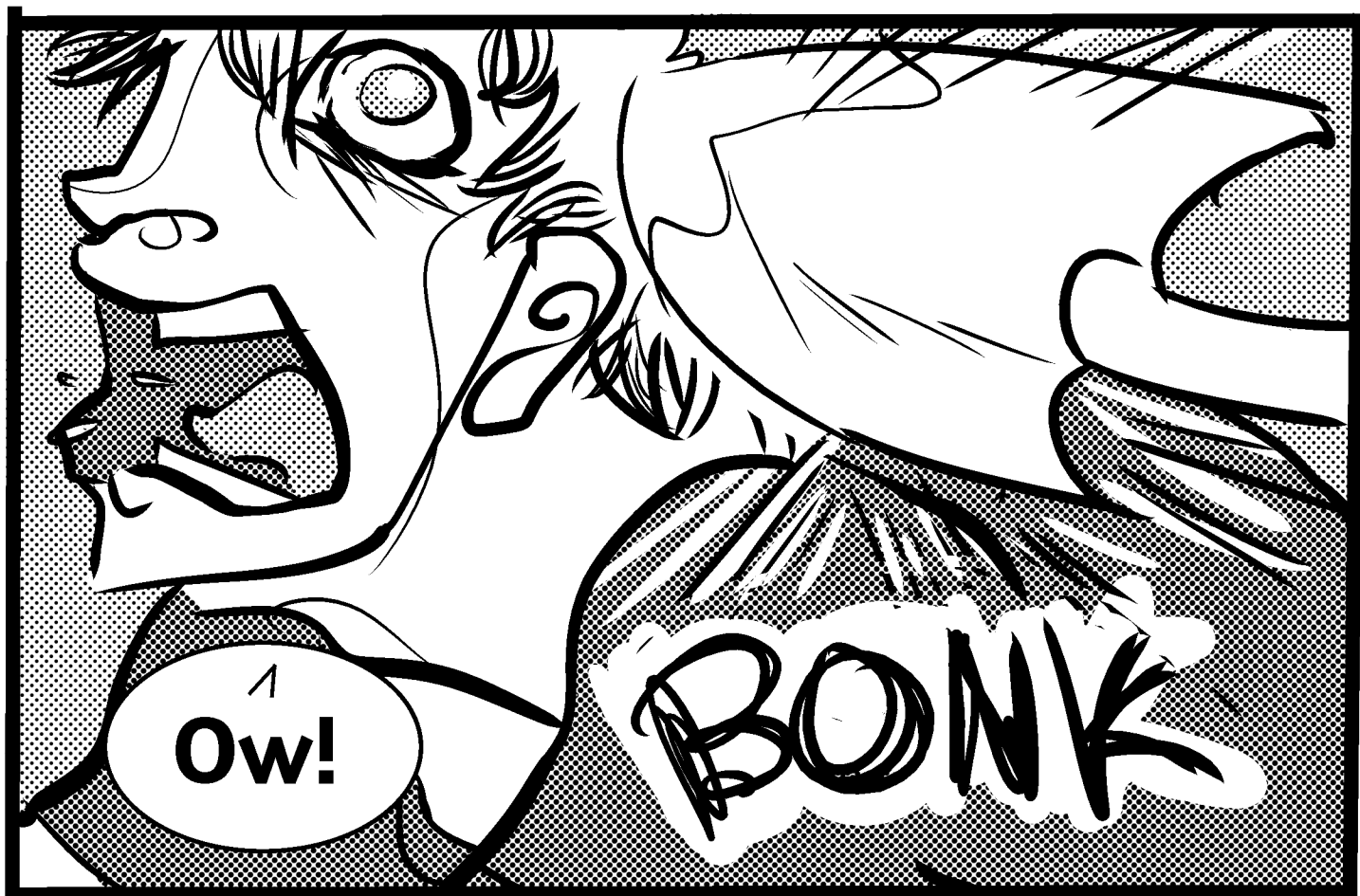
















**I'm not giving  
up on you!**



**Hurting me won't  
change my mind!**

**I will *never*  
give in to you!**









