



Top Cow Productions Presents...

FINE PRINT Volume 1

Created by Stjepan Sejic



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FINE PRINT Volume 1

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For Top Cow Productions, Inc.

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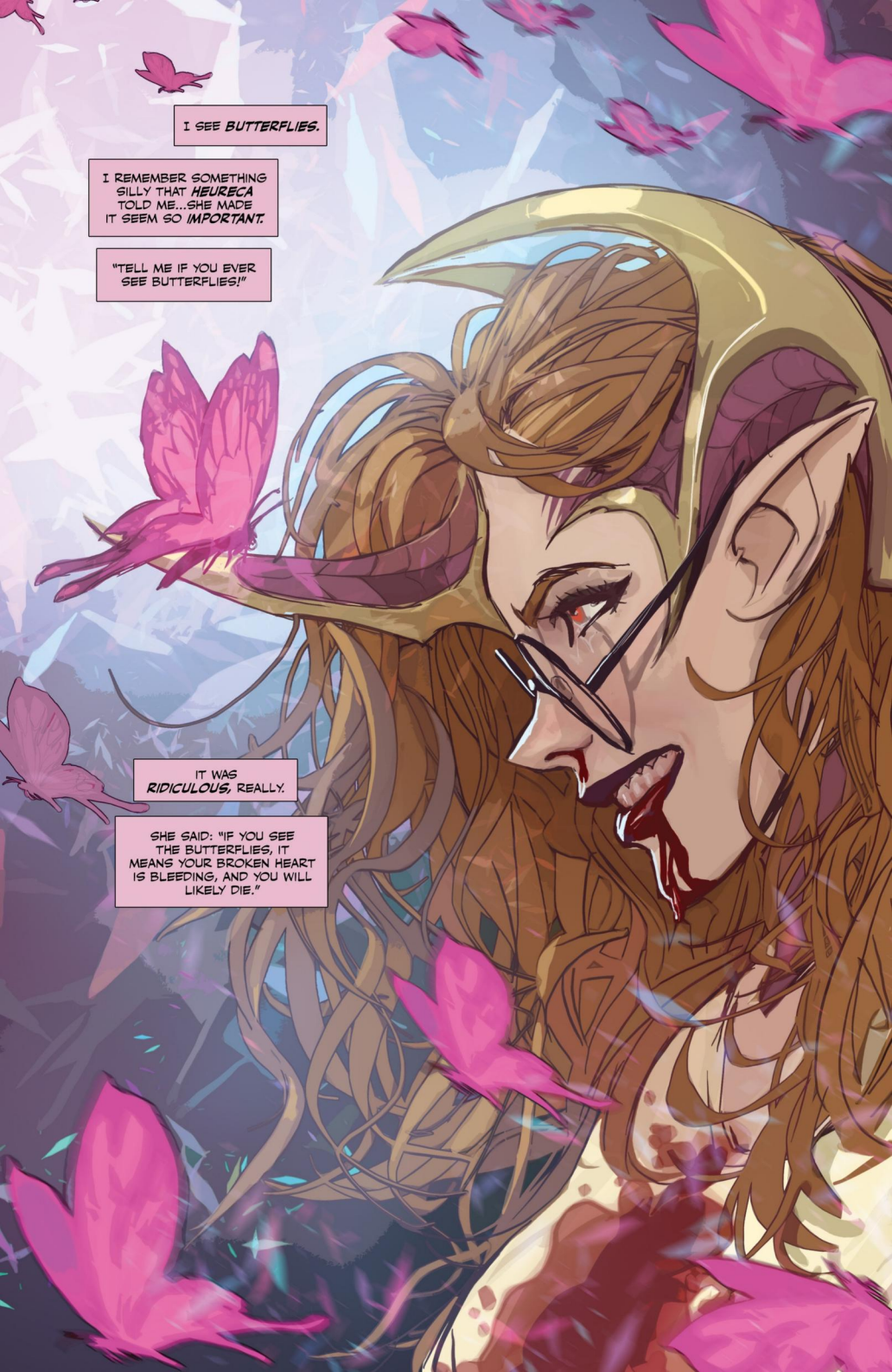
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Prologue

The butterfly
that started
the storm





I SEE *BUTTERFLIES*.

I REMEMBER SOMETHING
SILLY THAT *HEURECA*
TOLD ME...SHE MADE
IT SEEM SO *IMPORTANT*.

"TELL ME IF YOU EVER
SEE *BUTTERFLIES*!"

IT WAS
RIDICULOUS, REALLY.

SHE SAID: "IF YOU SEE
THE *BUTTERFLIES*, IT
MEANS YOUR BROKEN HEART
IS BLEEDING, AND YOU WILL
LIKELY DIE."



I SAID: "I THOUGHT BUTTERFLIES WERE SUPPOSED TO BE IN YOUR STOMACH."

"NO," SHE SAID.

"HEARTBURN COMES FROM YOUR STOMACH. BUTTERFLIES COME FROM YOUR HEART."



IT WAS THE *DUMBEST* THING I'VE EVER HEARD.



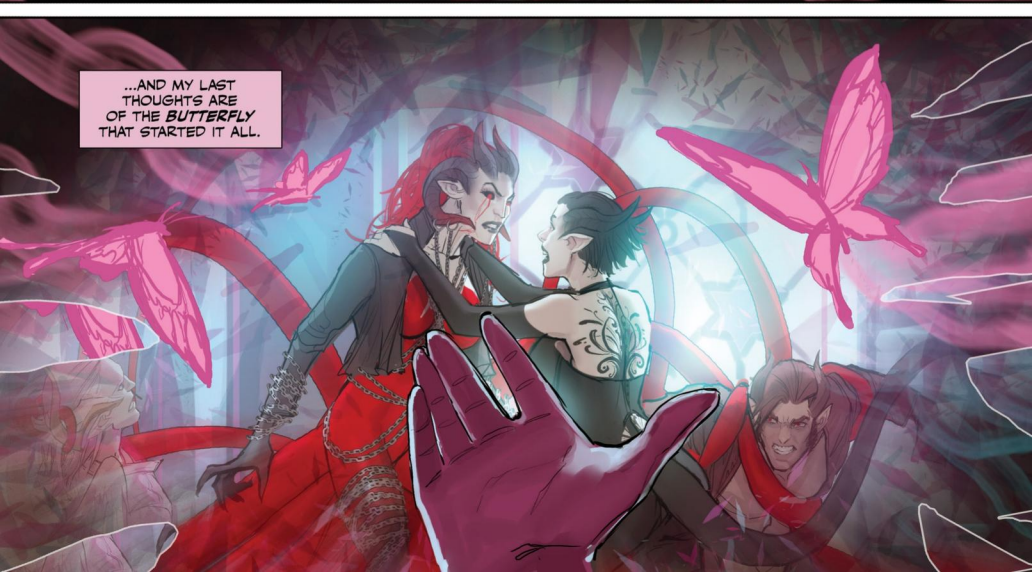
NEVER EVEN OCCURRED TO ME IT COULD BE *TRUE*.



AS THE *DELIRIUM* KICKS
IN, I REMEMBER THAT
OTHER THING ABOUT
BUTTERFLIES...

THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT --
YOU KNOW, WHERE ONE FLAPS
ITS WINGS ON ONE SIDE OF THE
WORLD, AND IT STARTS A
CHAIN REACTION THAT CAUSES
A HURRICANE ON THE OTHER
SIDE OF THE WORLD.

WELL.. HERE I AM, DYING
AT THE EYE OF THAT
HURRICANE...



...AND MY LAST
THOUGHTS ARE
OF THE *BUTTERFLY*
THAT STARTED IT ALL.



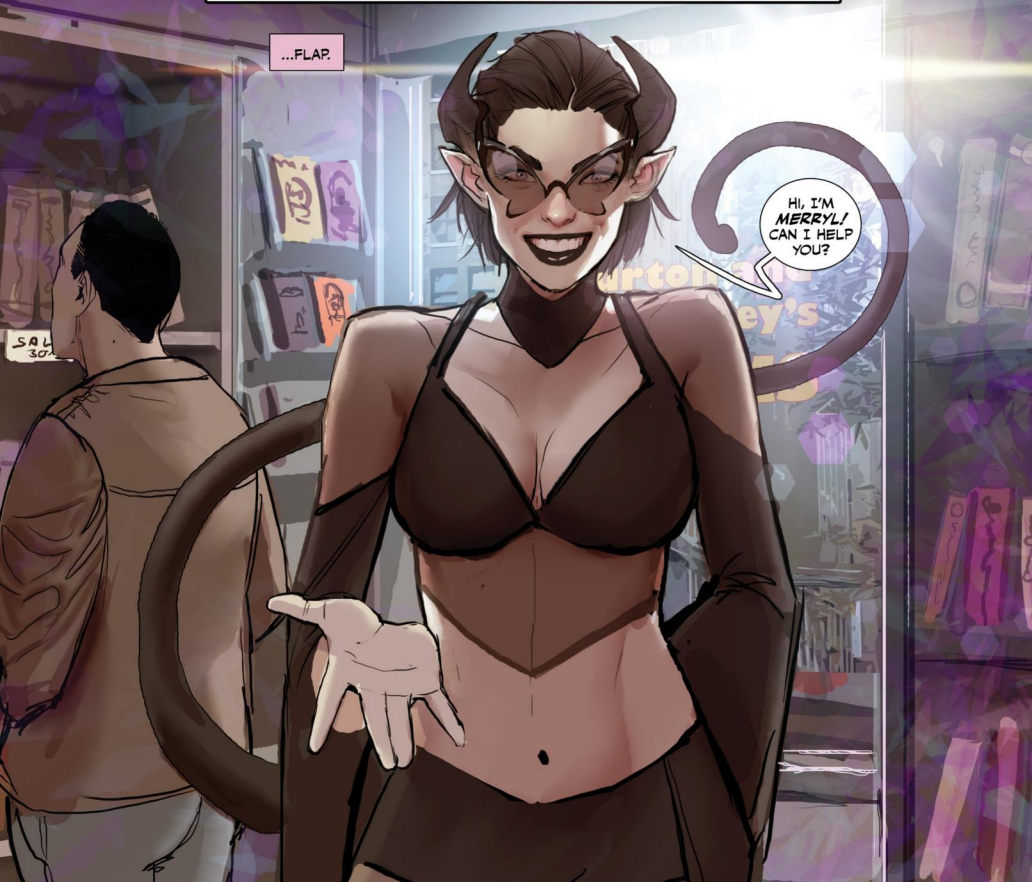
THE STORM OF
A LIFETIME,
BIRTHED BY ONE...



...SIMPLE...



...INNOCENT...



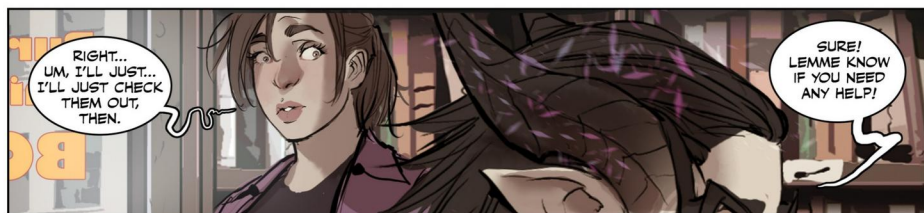
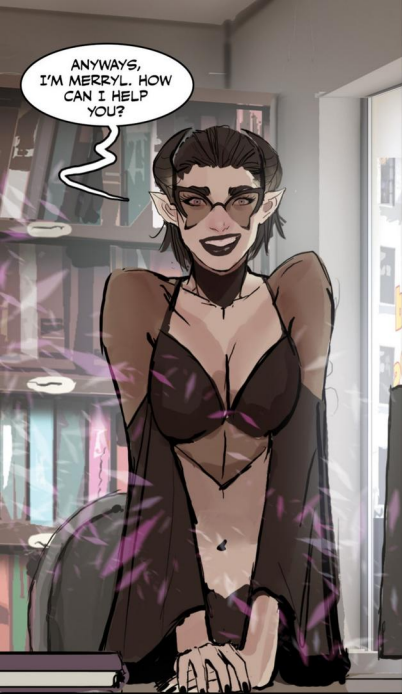
...FLAP?

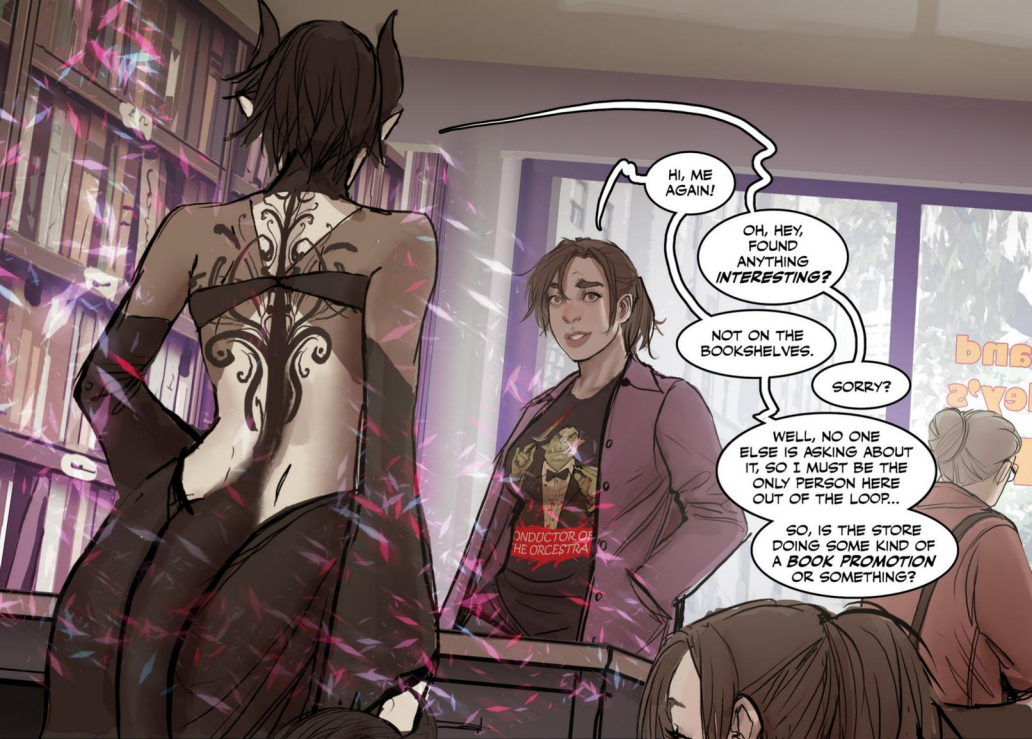
Hi, I'm
MERRY!
CAN I HELP
YOU?

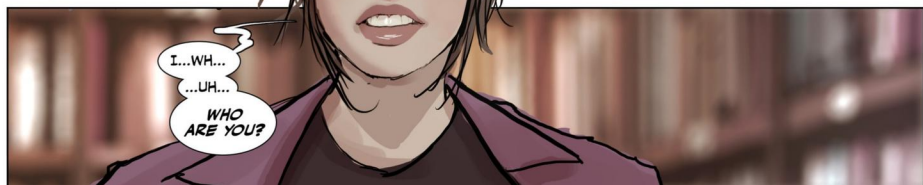
SAL
30

Burton's

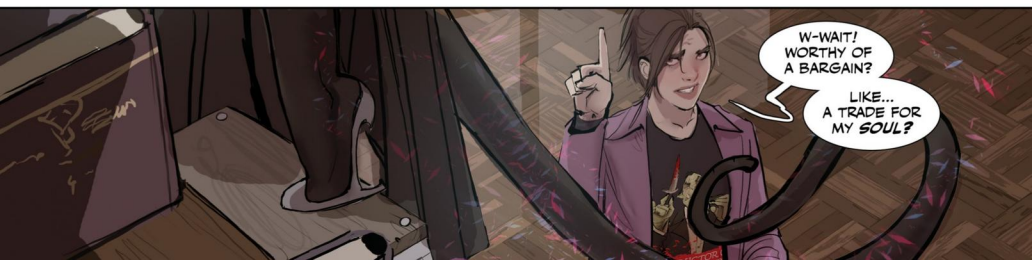
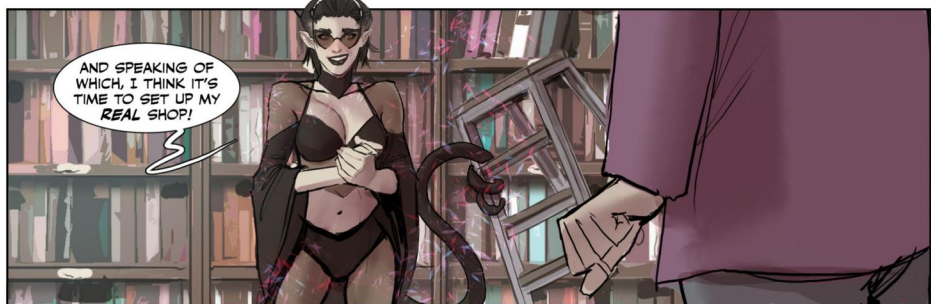
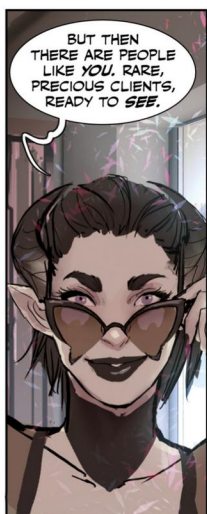


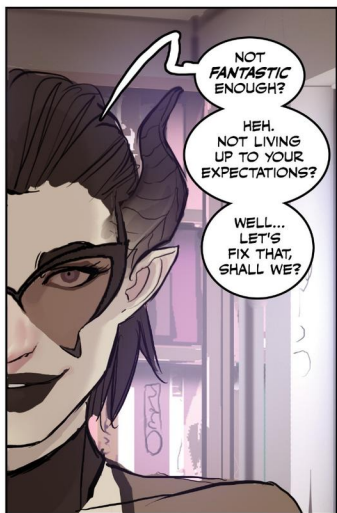
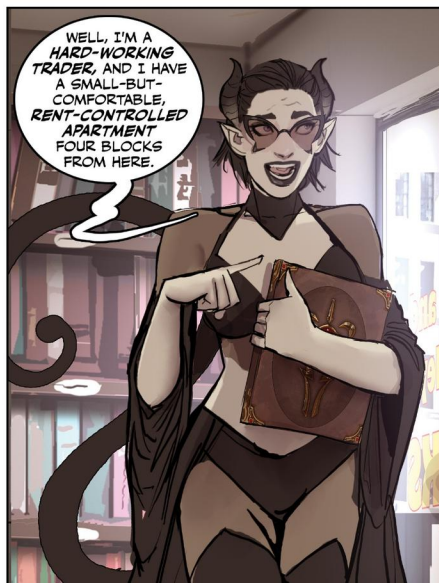
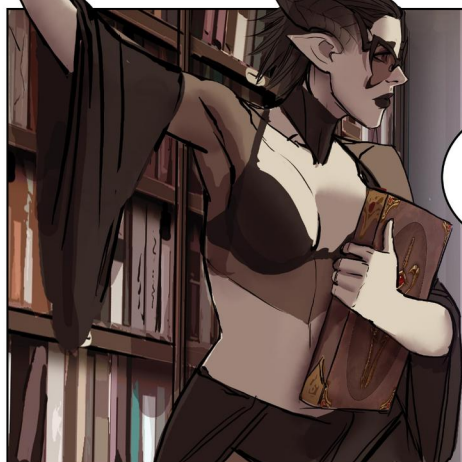


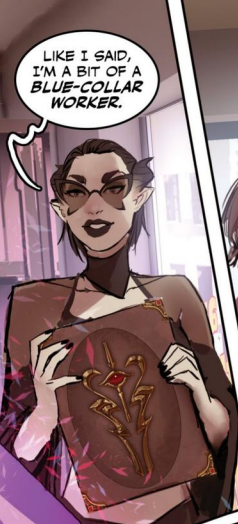












LIKE I SAID,
I'M A BIT OF A
**BLUE-COLLAR
WORKER.**



BUT IF YOU
WANT **GLAMOUR?**



IF YOU WANT
**BLISS AND
MAGIC?**



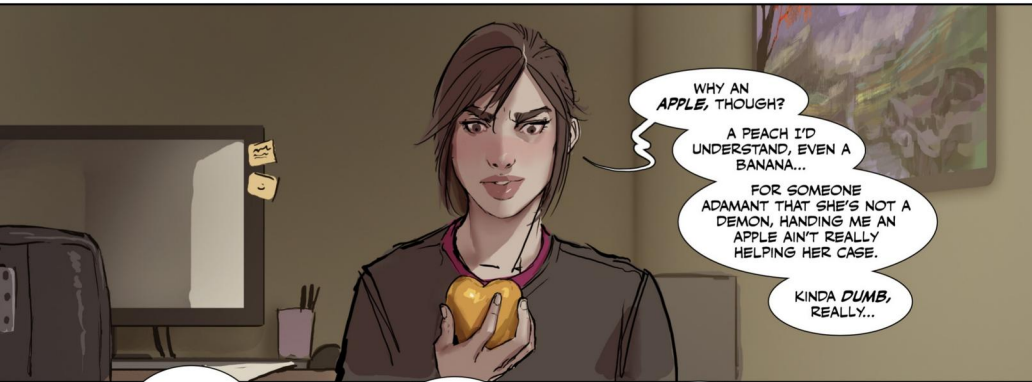
WELL, I GUESS
WE COULD WORK
SOMETHING
OUT!



3 DAYS LATER.
RACHEL'S APARTMENT.



OKAY! NOW,
THE FRUIT OF
DESIRE...



WHY AN
APPLE, THOUGH?

A PEACH I'D
UNDERSTAND, EVEN A
BANANA...

FOR SOMEONE
ADAMANT THAT SHE'S NOT A
DEMON, HANDING ME AN
APPLE AIN'T REALLY
HELPING HER CASE.

KINDA DUMB,
REALLY...

THEN AGAIN...
WHO AM I TO
CALL ANYONE
DUMB?

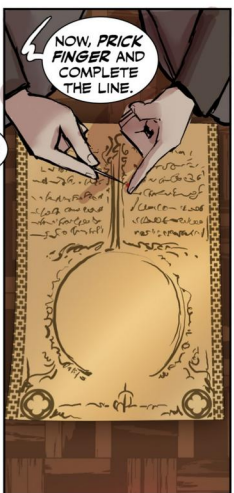
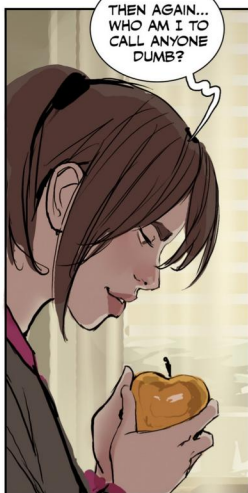
AFTER ALL,
I'M THE ONE
EATING IT.

OKAY.
EAT MAGICAL
TEMPTATION
FRUIT.

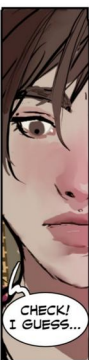
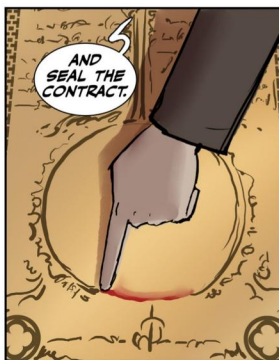
GULP

CHECK!

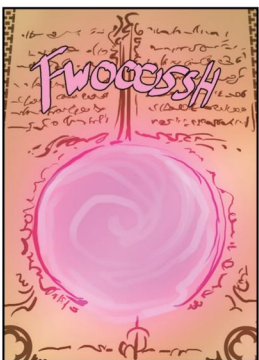
NOW, PRICK
FINGER AND
COMPLETE
THE LINE.



AND
SEAL THE
CONTRACT.



CHECK!
I GUESS...







MY NAME IS
CALE MORNINGSTAR,
AND I AM HERE TO
FULFILL WHAT HAS
BEEN PROMISED.

ARE YOU...
OKAY?

WHAT? YEAH,
NO! SORRY, I JUST
WASN'T READY FOR THE
SHINE AND THE FLASH
AND...UH, THE
FOLIAGE.

UH-HUH...ALSO
KINDA UNPREPARED
FOR THE ATTRACTIVE,
HALF-NAKED MAN WITH
BUTTERFLY WINGS IN
MY APARTMENT!

HAH! I ASSURE
YOU, THAT WILL
GO AWAY.

NOW, *THAT*
MIGHT JUST BE
HERE TO STAY!



RIGHT...
UH. CAN I...CAN I
OFFER YOU SOMETHING?
COFFEE? UH...A NICE,
WARM SWEATER?

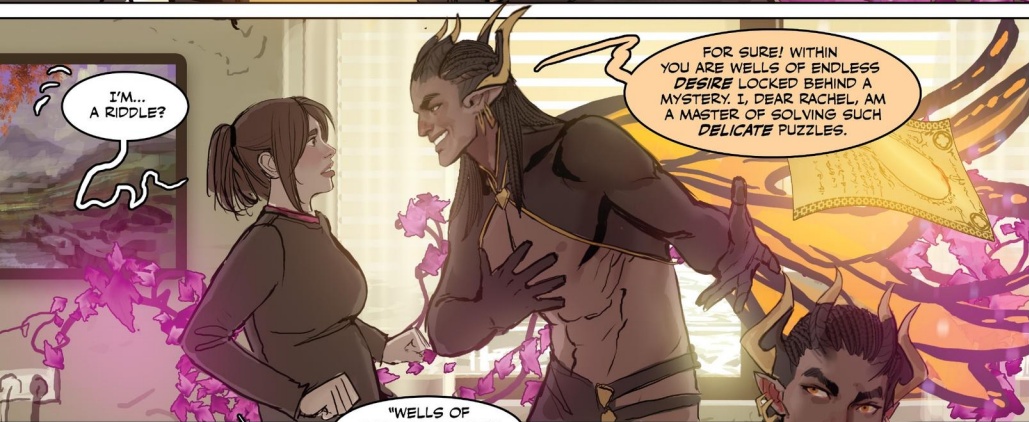
NO. I THINK
THE MORE PERTINENT
QUESTION HERE IS, WHAT
CAN I OFFER TO YOU?



AFTER ALL, YOU
WERE GIVEN THE
GOLDEN CONTRACT!

IT'S BEEN SO LONG
SINCE I'VE LAID MY EYES
ON ONE OF THESE.

PEOPLE WORTHY
OF THESE ARE
PRECIOUS RIDDLES.



I'M...
A RIDDLE?

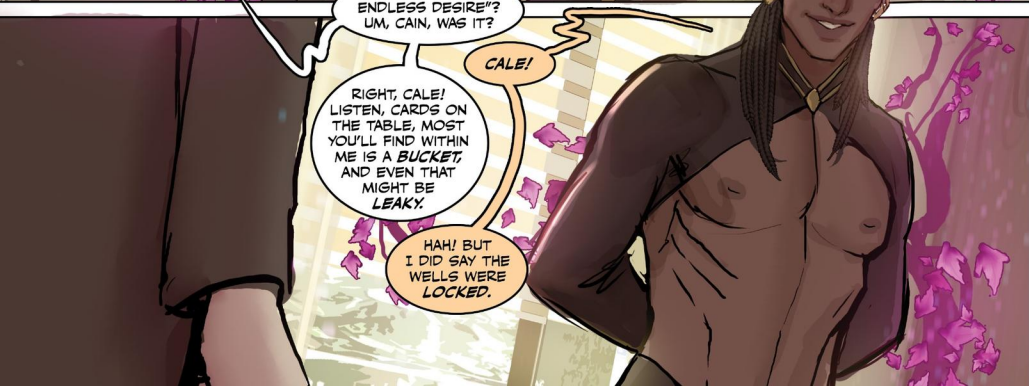
FOR SURE! WITHIN
YOU ARE WELLS OF ENDLESS
DESIRE LOCKED BEHIND A
MYSTERY. I, DEAR RACHEL, AM
A MASTER OF SOLVING SUCH
DELICATE PUZZLES.

"WELLS OF
ENDLESS DESIRE"?
UM, CAIN, WAS IT?

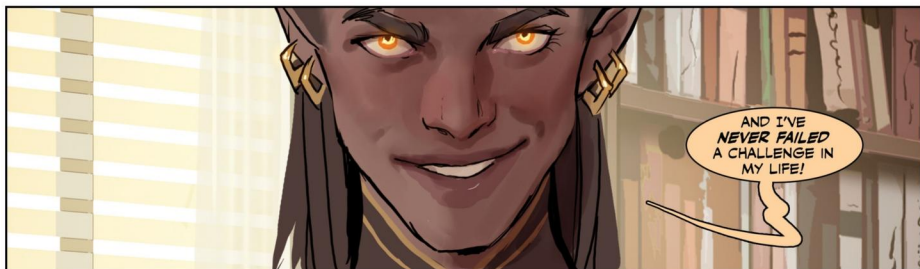
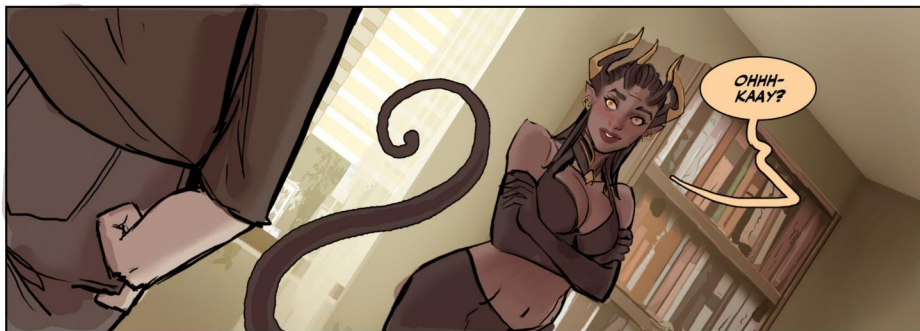
CALE!

RIGHT, CALE!
LISTEN, CARDS ON
THE TABLE, MOST
YOU'LL FIND WITHIN
ME IS A **BUCKET**,
AND EVEN THAT
MIGHT BE
LEAKY.

HAH! BUT
I DID SAY THE
WELLS WERE
LOCKED.







**GODREALMS:
OLYMPUS
REBORN.**

TWO
YEARS HAVE PASSED
SINCE CALE MORNINGSTAR
WAS LOST TO US.

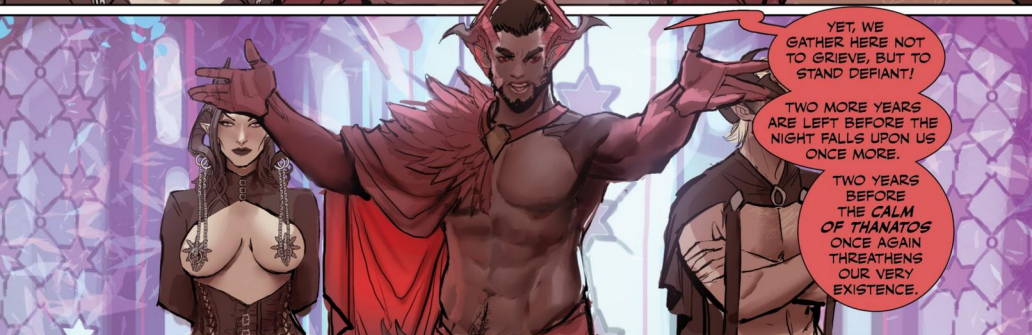
I HAVE LOST A
SON, BUT WE CUBI LOST
A CALLER OF THE
HIGHEST ORDER.



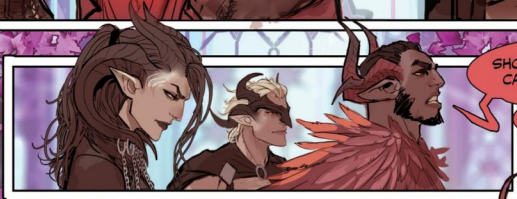
YET, WE
GATHER HERE NOT
TO GRIEVE, BUT TO
STAND DEFIANT!

TWO MORE YEARS
ARE LEFT BEFORE THE
NIGHT FALLS UPON US
ONCE MORE.

TWO YEARS
BEFORE
THE CALM
OF THANATOS
ONCE AGAIN
THREATENS
OUR VERY
EXISTENCE.

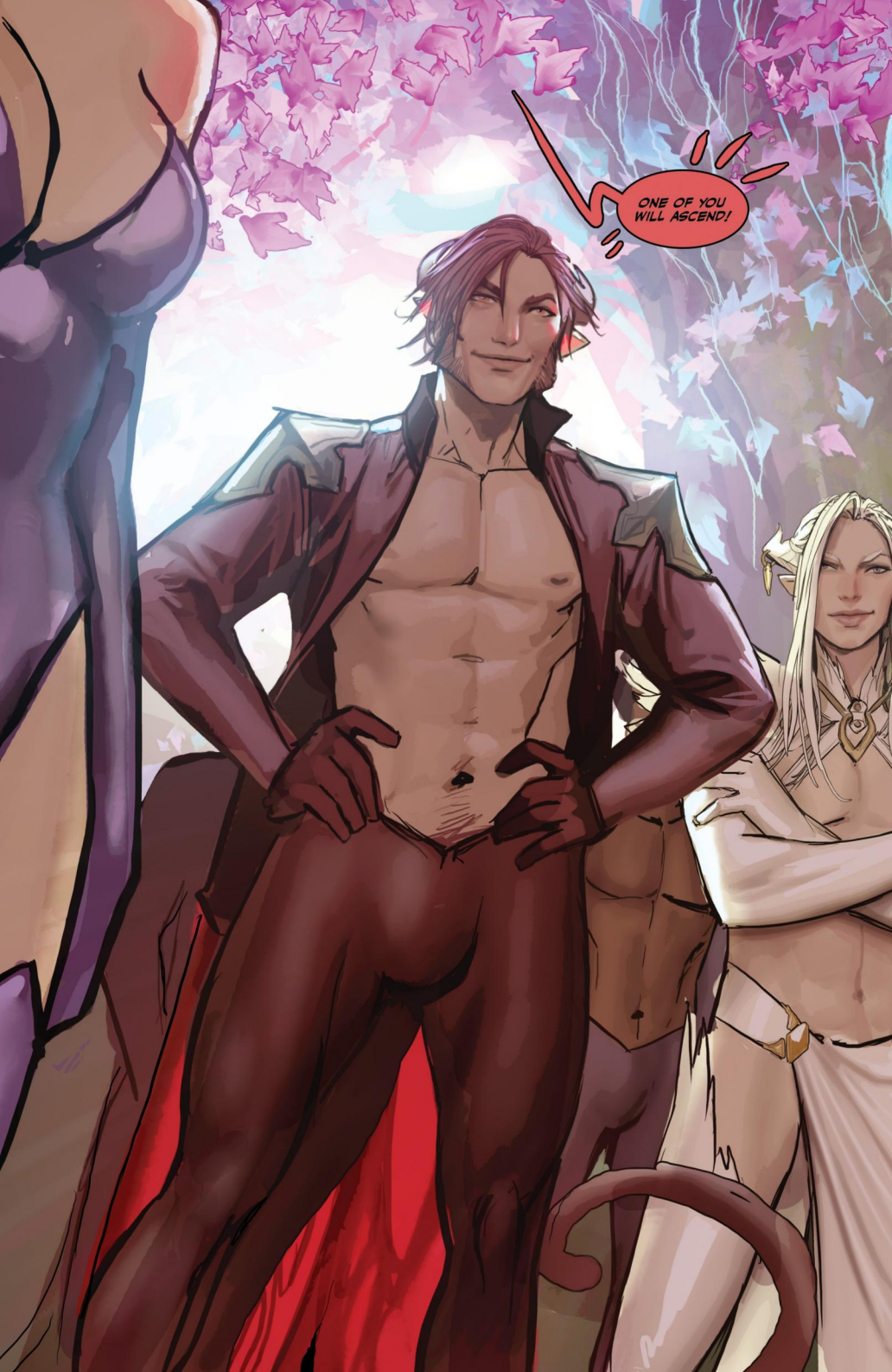


THE TIME IS
SHORT. INCOMPETENCE
CAN NO LONGER BE
TOLERATED.
EXCELLENCE, HOWEVER,
WILL BE REWARDED.



ONE OF YOU WILL
HAVE A CHANCE TO CLAIM
CALE'S PLACE AS THE
HIGH CALLER.





ONE OF YOU
WILL ASCEND!



Chapter 1

The one that
got away



YOU KNOW, **MAGICAL CONTRACTS** AND **SUPERNATURAL BEINGS** ASIDE, FOR ME, THIS WHOLE THING STARTED SURPRISINGLY **SIMPLE.**

I'LL SEE YOU TONIGHT. OKAY?

IT STARTED WITH A **GUY.**

A VERY SPECIAL GUY, MIND YOU.

LOOK OUT, ON YOUR LEFT!

OH!

'SCUSE ME!

UH, RIGHT!



MY GUY.

MATTHEW...

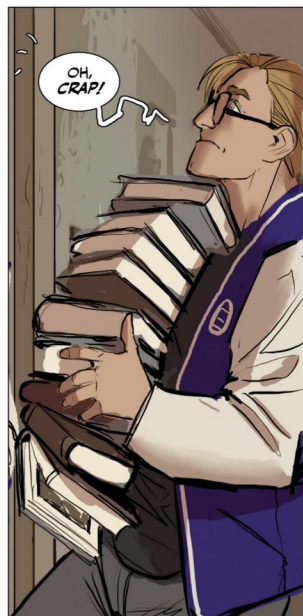
WAH!

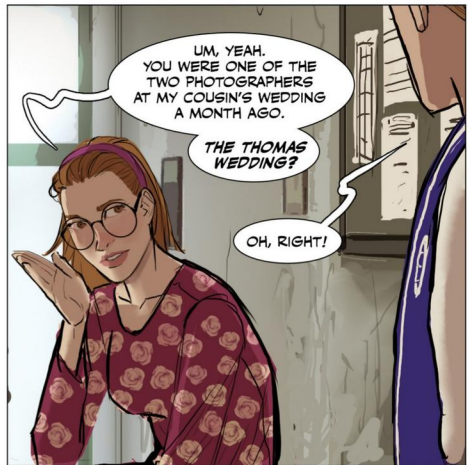
OH,
SORRY!

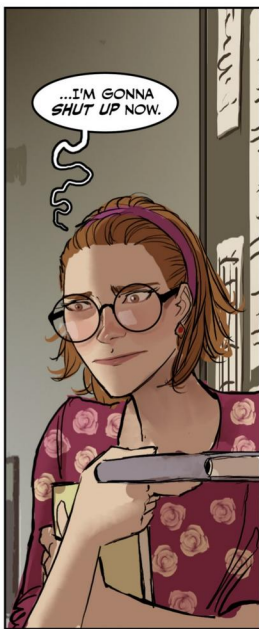
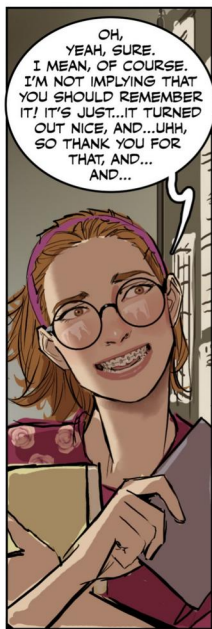
DIDN'T
SEE YOU
THERE!

OH, HEY!
NO, IT'S
FINE!

IT WAS MY FIRST
DAY OF COLLEGE,
AND IT WAS NICE
SEEING A FAMILIAR
FACE.









SO, YOU
ACTUALLY
REMEMBERED
ME FROM THE
WEDDING,
HUH?



WELL, I
MEAN, YOU
DID KINDA
FLIRT
WITH ME.



OH, THAT
WASN'T
FLIRTING.



IT...
WASN'T?



UH...
IT KINDA
LOOKED LIKE
IT, THOUGH.



YEAH...IT'S
ACTUALLY SOMETHING I
LEARNED FROM WORKING
WITH *MY DAD*. HE CALLS IT
"MELTING THE CHEESE."



WHAT?



YOU KNOW,
WHEN PEOPLE DO
THE "*CHEESE*" FACE WHEN
TAKING A PHOTO? THE
STRETCHED GRIN AND
THE WEIRD, PANICKY
EYES...

SO WHAT
WE DO IS, WE TAKE
THAT "*CHEESE*" PHOTO
FIRST...AND THEN WE
CHAT WITH PEOPLE AND
DISTRACT THEM, IN ORDER
TO *MELT THE CHEESE* AND
TAKE THE PHOTO THAT
TRULY CAPTURES
THEM.



YOU TOOK
SOME *EFFORT*...

BUT IT WAS
WORTH IT. YOUR
HONEST SMILE
WAS...WELL, *IS*
BEAUTIFUL.



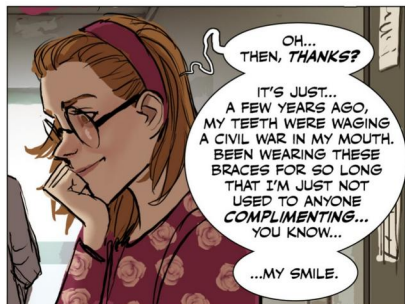
YEAH,
RIGHT.



NO, I
MEAN IT!

I DON'T
JOKE AROUND
WHEN IT COMES
TO PHOTOGRAPHY.

IN FACT,
IT'S PROBABLY
THE REASON I DON'T
HAVE MANY FRIENDS.
I'VE BEEN TOLD I GET
A BIT *OBSESSIVE*
ABOUT THIS
STUFF.



OH...
THEN, *THANKS*?

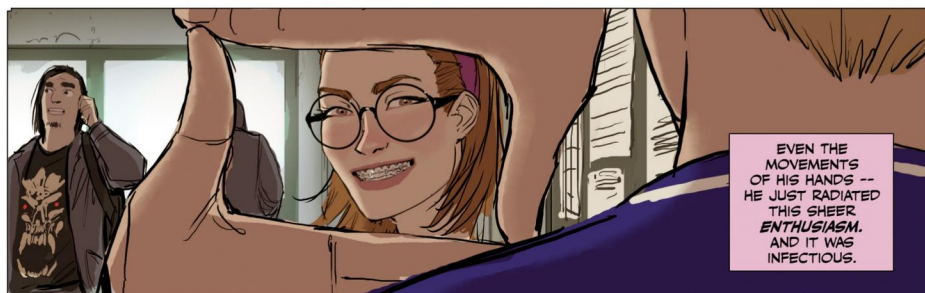
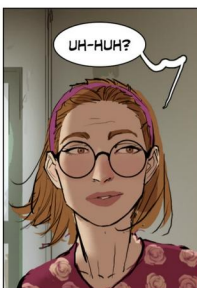
IT'S JUST...
A FEW YEARS AGO,
MY TEETH WERE WAGING
A CIVIL WAR IN MY MOUTH.
BEEN WEARING THESE
BRACES FOR SO LONG
THAT I'M JUST NOT
USED TO ANYONE
COMPLIMENTING...
YOU KNOW...

...MY SMILE.



WELL, THEN
I'LL TAKE IT A
STEP FURTHER.

IF YOU'RE UP FOR IT,
I'D REALLY LIKE TO TAKE
SOME MORE PHOTOS
OF YOU.









POINT IS...ALL MY LIFE,
I HAD ISSUES ACCEPTING
COMPLIMENTS, AND EVEN
BIGGER ISSUES WITH
JUST SMILING...

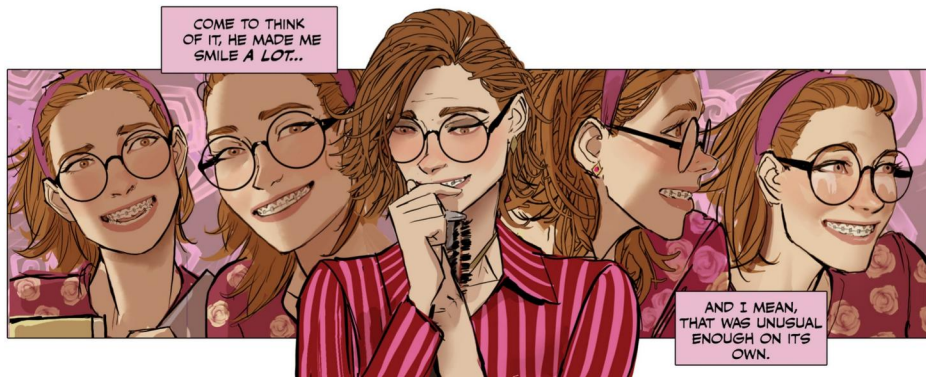


BUT THEN HE CAME...THIS
CUTE PHOTOGRAPHER AT
A WEDDING. HE JUST STARTED
TALKING TO ME AND HE
WAS SMILING, AND...

HE MADE
ME SMILE.

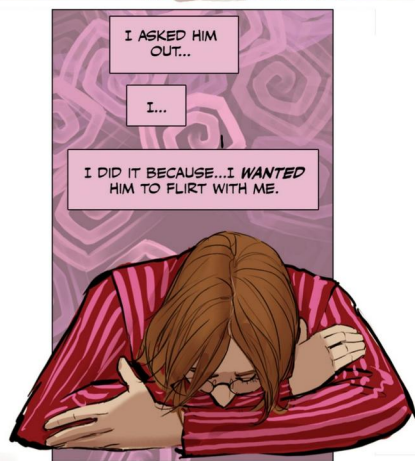


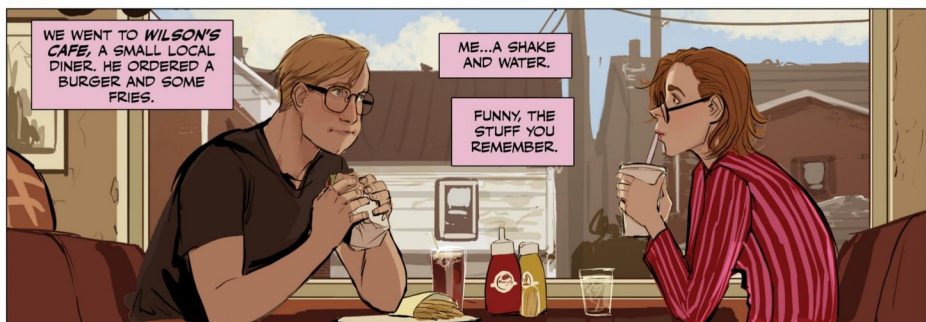
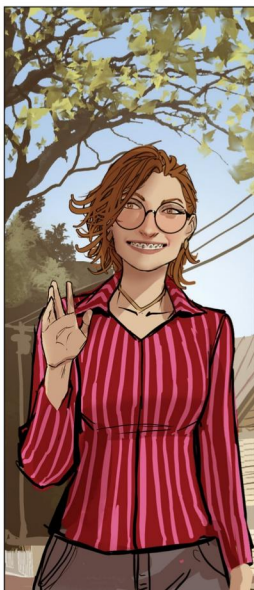
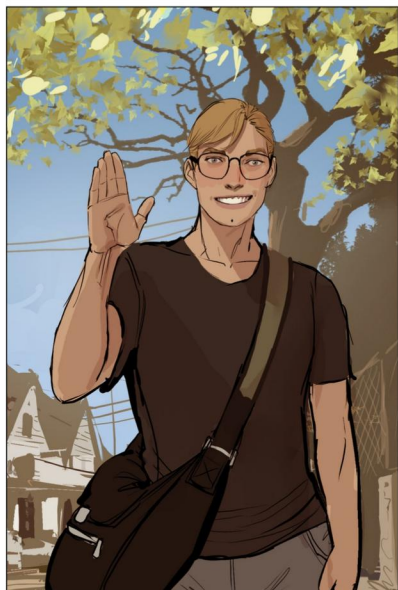
MATTHEW
COLLINS...

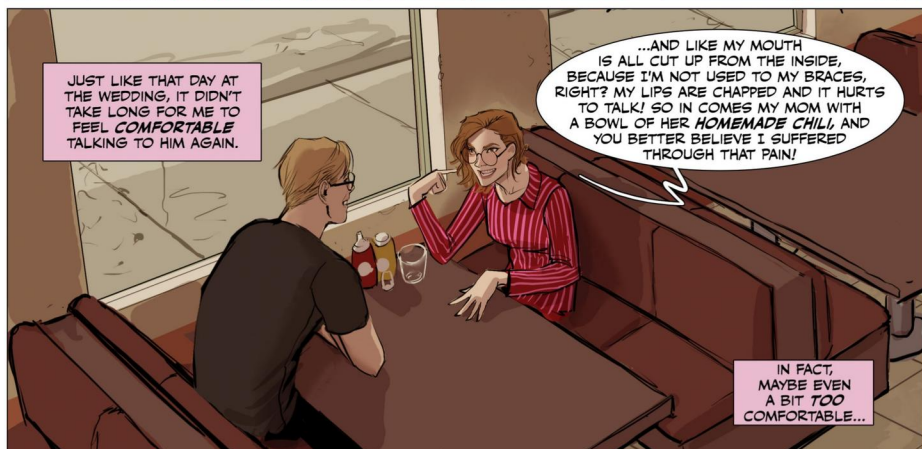


COME TO THINK
OF IT, HE MADE ME
SMILE A LOT...

AND I MEAN,
THAT WAS UNUSUAL
ENOUGH ON ITS
OWN.







AND I THOUGHT TO MYSELF,
"I WOULD FOLLOW HIM
AS WELL."

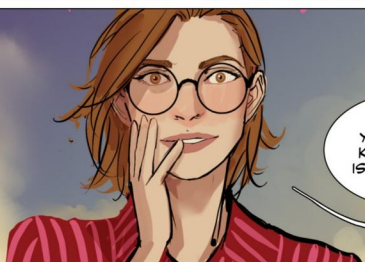
NOT JUST IN
CONVERSATION...



BUT TO SILENT
PLACES...

SECRET PLACES...

PLACES WE COULD
CALL OUR OWN...



OKAY,
YOU WEREN'T
KIDDING. THIS
IS WONDERFUL.

HEY,
I TOLD YOU
IT WOULD BE
WORTH IT.

I FOUND THIS
PLACE A YEAR AGO.
ALWAYS WANTED TO
TAKE SOME PICTURES
HERE, BUT EVEN IN
THE GOLDEN HOUR
SOMETHING
WAS MISSING.

UH-HUH...
THAT SOMETHING
BEING ME?

MAYBE.

WOW...

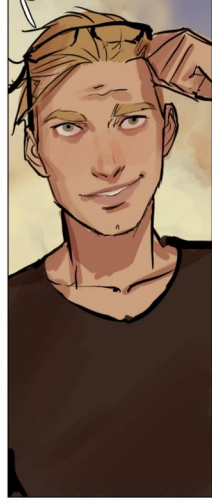
WHAT?

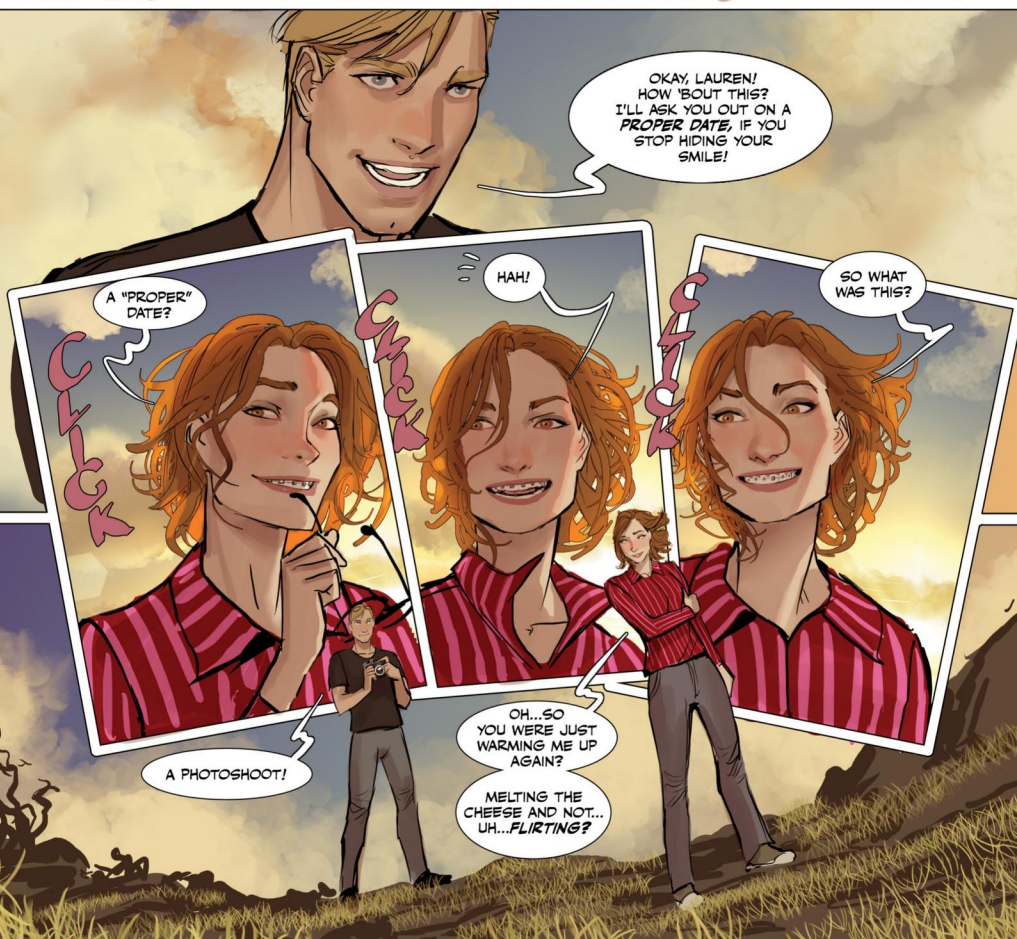
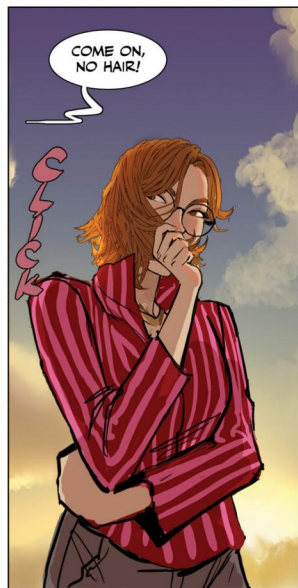
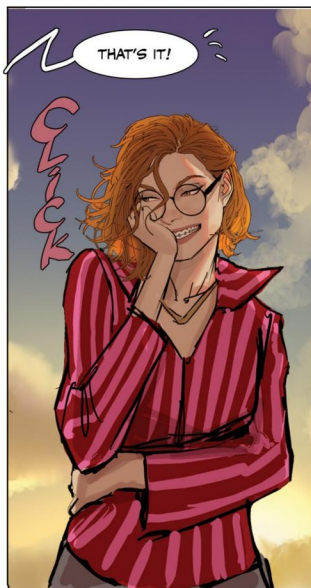
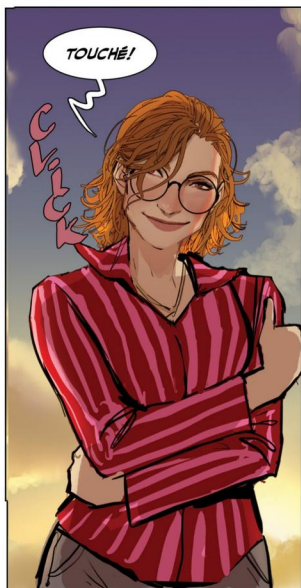
FOR SOMEONE
THAT DOESN'T LIKE
THE "CHEESE" FACE,
THAT WAS
CHEESY!

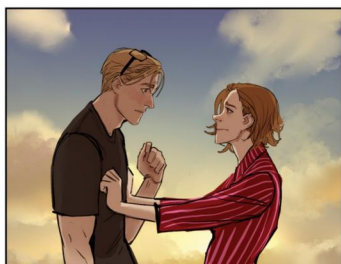
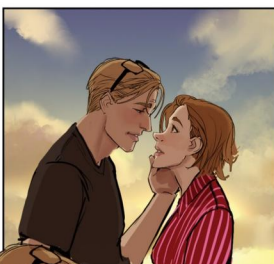
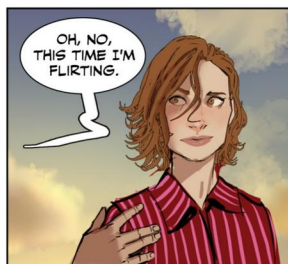


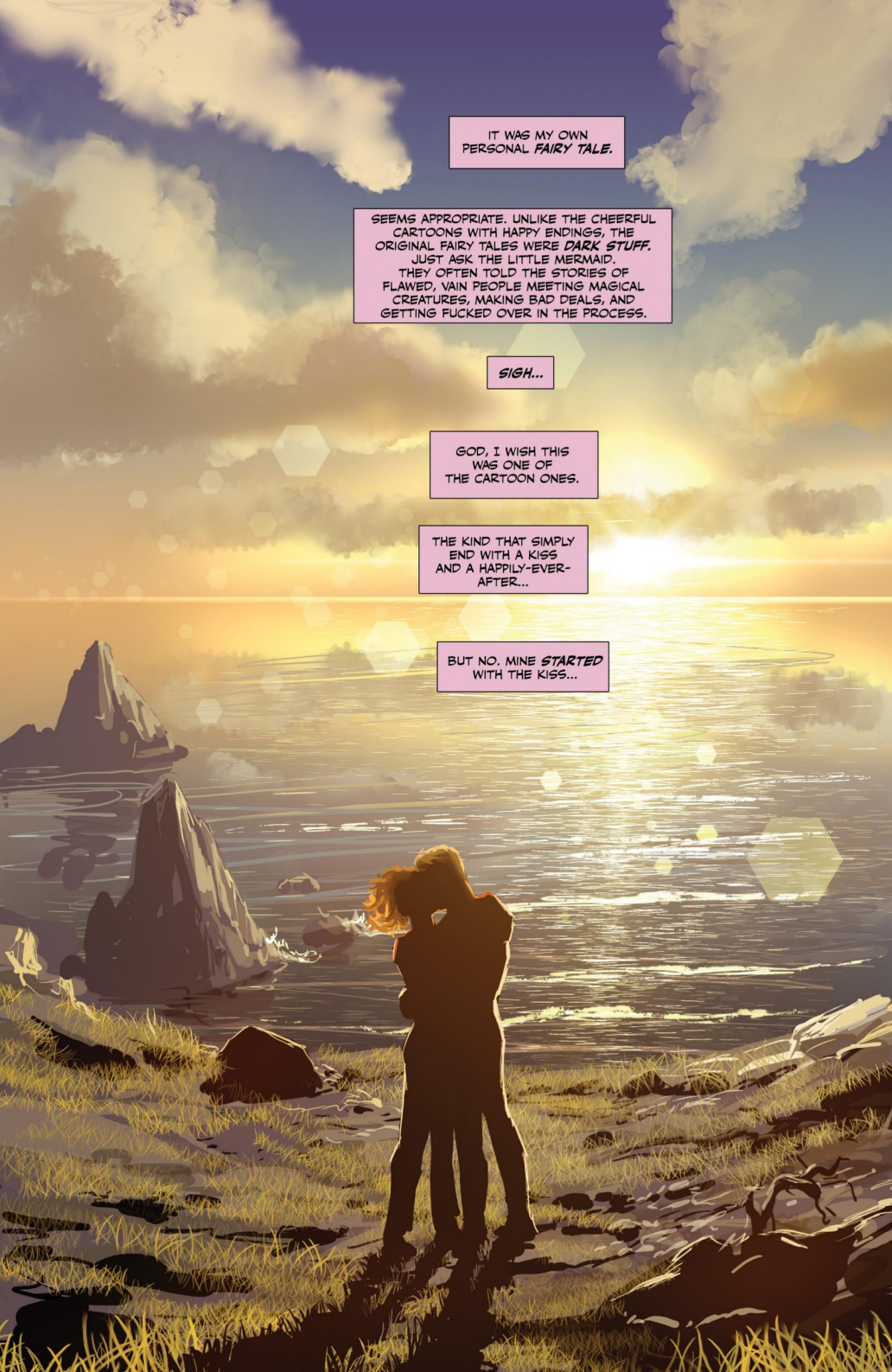
I MEAN...

IT GOT
YOU TO SMILE,
DIDN'T IT?







A romantic couple is shown from behind, embracing on a rocky, grassy shore. They are looking out at a vast ocean under a dramatic sunset sky filled with large, billowing clouds. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright, golden glow that reflects off the water. In the distance, there are jagged rock formations and small waves breaking. The overall mood is nostalgic and romantic.

IT WAS MY OWN
PERSONAL *FAIRY TALE*.

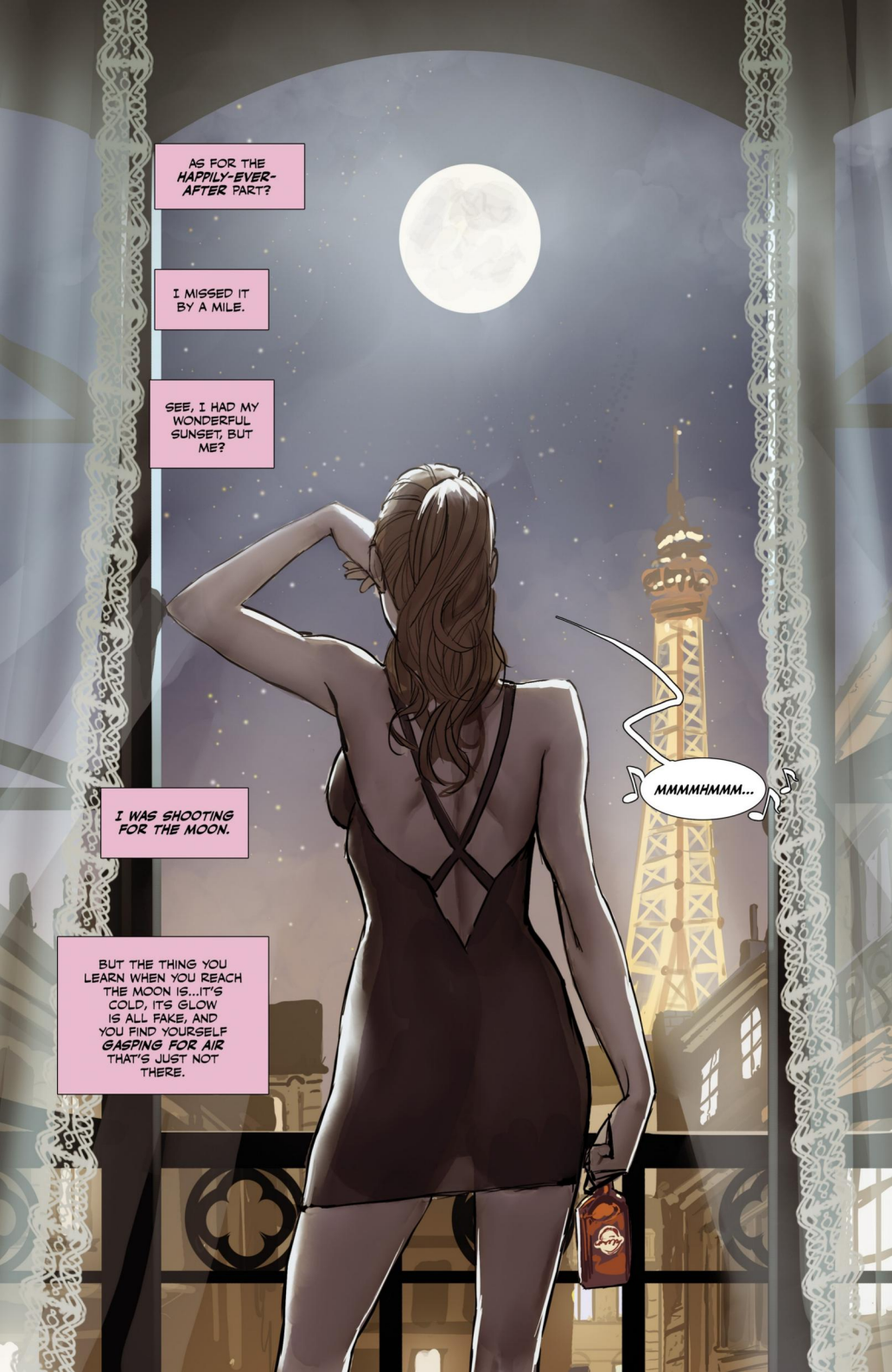
SEEMS APPROPRIATE. UNLIKE THE CHEERFUL
CARTOONS WITH HAPPY ENDINGS, THE
ORIGINAL FAIRY TALES WERE *DARK STUFF*.
JUST ASK THE LITTLE MERMAID.
THEY OFTEN TOLD THE STORIES OF
FLAWED, VAIN PEOPLE MEETING MAGICAL
CREATURES, MAKING BAD DEALS, AND
GETTING FUCKED OVER IN THE PROCESS.

SIGH...

GOD, I WISH THIS
WAS ONE OF
THE CARTOON ONES.

THE KIND THAT SIMPLY
END WITH A KISS
AND A HAPPILY-EVER-
AFTER...

BUT NO. MINE *STARTED*
WITH THE KISS...



AS FOR THE
HAPPILY-EVER-
AFTER PART?

I MISSED IT
BY A MILE.

SEE, I HAD MY
WONDERFUL
SUNSET, BUT
ME?

I WAS SHOOTING
FOR THE MOON.

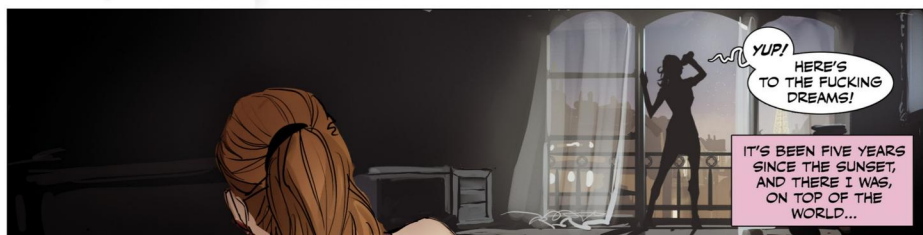
BUT THE THING YOU
LEARN WHEN YOU REACH
THE MOON IS...IT'S
COLD, IT'S GLOW
IS ALL FAKE, AND
YOU FIND YOURSELF
GASPING FOR AIR
THAT'S JUST NOT
THERE.

MMMMMMMM...



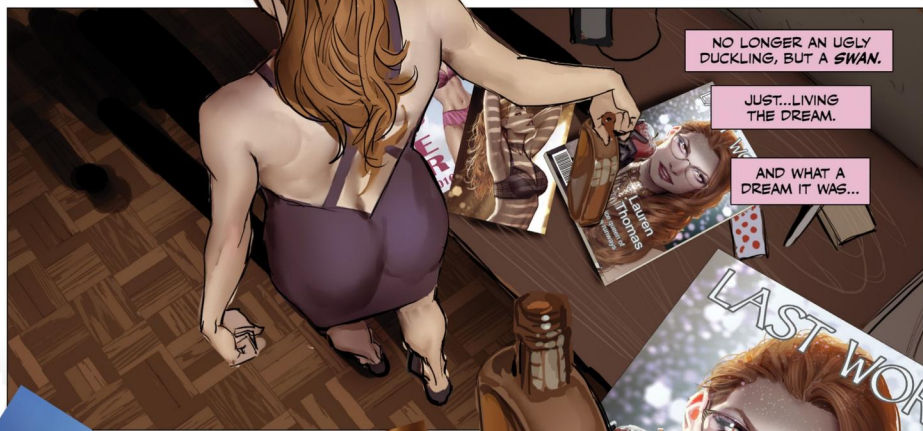
I'M SITTING
ON THE TOP OF THE
WORLD, BUT IT FEELS
LIKE **ROCK BOTTOM.**

I LET GO OF YOUR HAND
WHILE CHASING THE DREAMS,
NOW I'M ALL ALONE, BUT
I'VE CAUGHT THEM...



YUP!
HERE'S
TO THE **FUCKING**
DREAMS!

IT'S BEEN FIVE YEARS
SINCE THE SUNSET,
AND THERE I WAS,
ON TOP OF THE
WORLD...



NO LONGER AN UGLY
DUCKLING, BUT A **SWAN.**

JUST...LIVING
THE DREAM.

AND WHAT A
DREAM IT WAS...



IN THIS DREAM
OF MINE, I WAS
ADMIRER.



DESIRED.



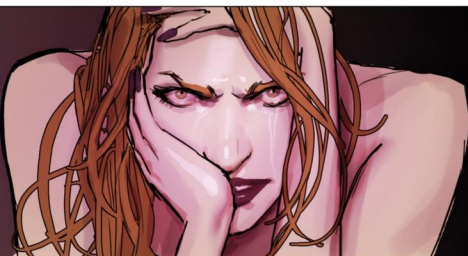
Lauren Thomas
Ice queen of
the runways

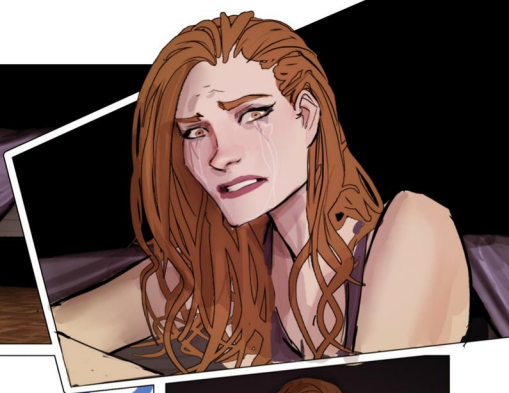
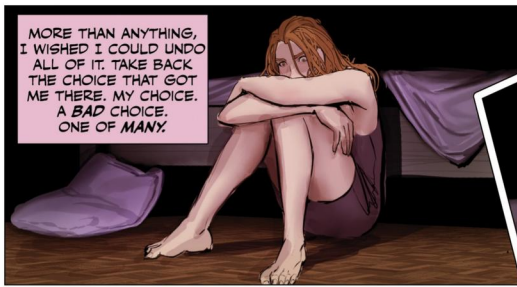
ALONE...



IT'S NOT OFTEN EASY
TO PINPOINT THE WRONG
TURN THAT *DERAILED*
YOUR LIFE, BUT I HAD NO
PROBLEM FINDING MINE.

IT'S NOT
SOMETHING I CAN
EASILY FORGET.

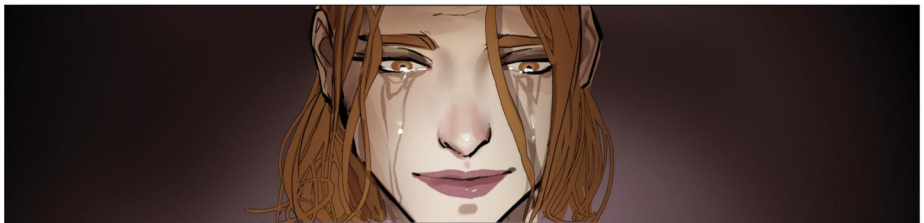




Mathew Collins

works at: Anders marketing research g
New York City

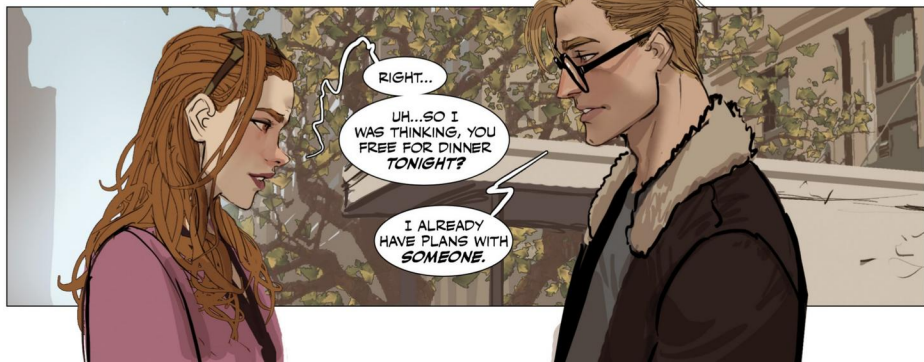
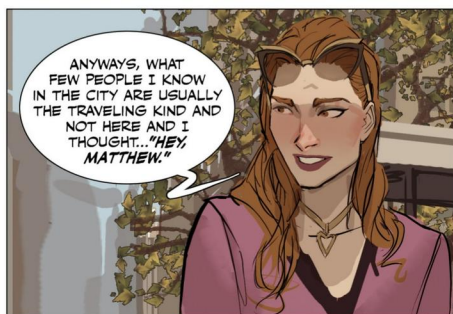
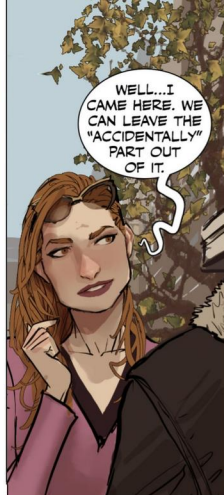
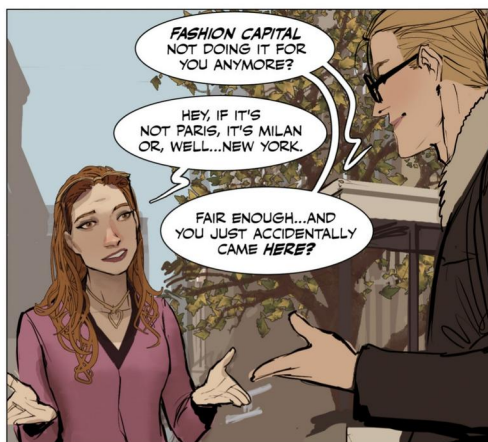
♥ in a relationship with: [Erika Schmie](#)

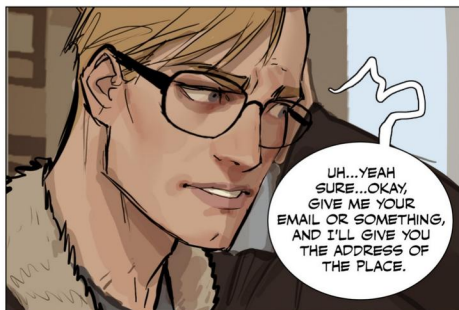
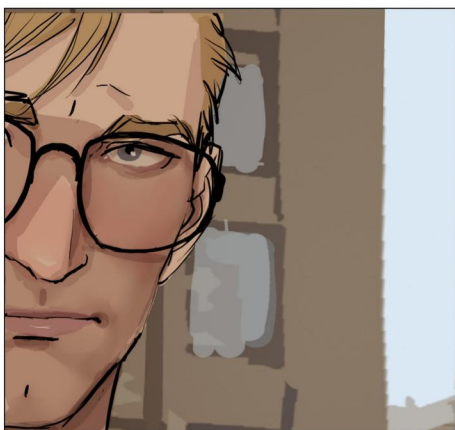
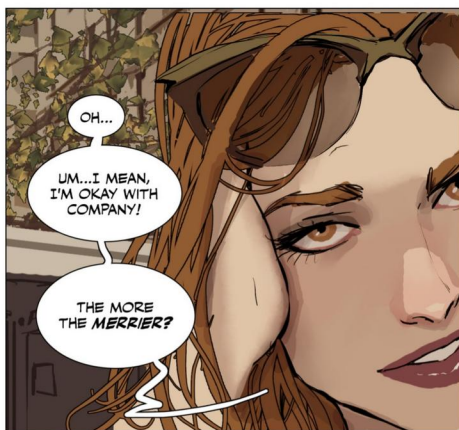


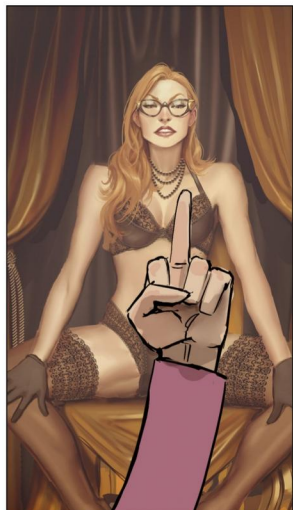
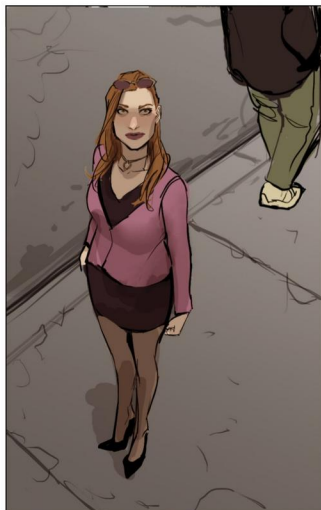


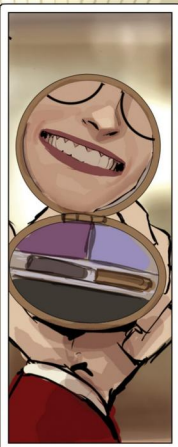














AH...THE DINNER...IT'S KINDA FUNNY ACTUALLY. BACK WHEN WE WERE A COUPLE, MATTHEW AND I WERE BIG ON WATCHING MOVIES TOGETHER. ME, I WAS A BIG FAN OF JULIA ROBERTS.



AND THAT DAY, I COULDN'T SHAKE OFF THE FEELING THAT I WAS LIKE HER IN MY BEST FRIEND'S WEDDING. TRYING TO RECLAIM THE LOVE OF MY LIFE BY SABOTAGING HIS ENGAGEMENT...



...AND I TOO WAS LOSING TO AN INCESSANTLY CHEERFUL BLONDE!



OH, GOD! I'M SO SORRY, I'M BEING SUPER RUDE!

IT'S JUST, I KNOW HE USED TO DATE SOME BIG MODEL, IT'S JUST, I DIDN'T EVER EXPECT TO MEET HER!

WELL, TO MEET YOU.

IT'S FINE. I JUST MET HIM BY ACCIDENT AND FIGURED WE'D CATCH UP...BEEN A WHILE.

YUP, OVER THREE YEARS NOW, RIGHT?



YEAH, ABOUT THAT...I KNOW YOU TWO WERE IN LOVE BACK THEN AND...YOU TOLD ME THAT MUCH...

SO WHAT HAPPENED?

I MEAN... IF IT'S NOT TOO PAINFUL, OR SOMETHING?

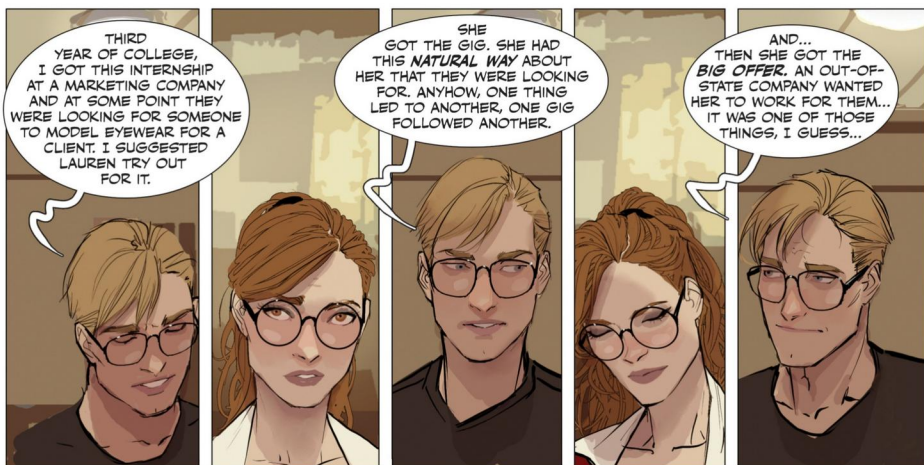


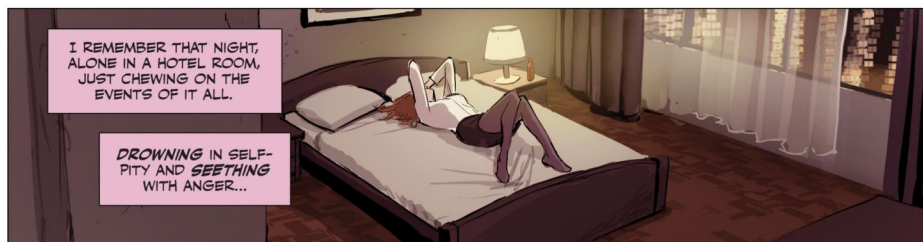
PAINFUL? NO, IN FACT THERE'S NOT MUCH OF A STORY TO IT.

LAUREN, YOU WANNA TELL IT, OR SHOULD I?



ALL YOU!





I REMEMBER THAT NIGHT,
ALONE IN A HOTEL ROOM,
JUST CHEWING ON THE
EVENTS OF IT ALL.

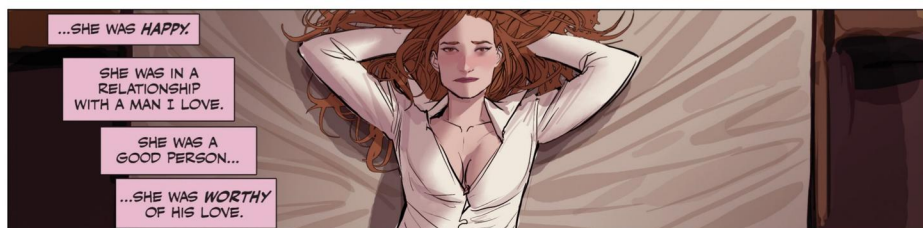
DROWNING IN SELF-
PITY AND *SEETHING*
WITH ANGER...



THIS FUCKING GIRL!

THIS ERIKA SCHMIDT...

I *HATED* HER! I HATED HER
BECAUSE SHE *WAS*
EVERYTHING I *WAS NOT*...



...SHE WAS *HAPPY*.

SHE WAS IN A
RELATIONSHIP
WITH A MAN I LOVE.

SHE WAS A
GOOD PERSON...

...SHE WAS *WORTHY*
OF HIS LOVE.



AND ME...I WAS NOW
THE OTHER WOMAN.
SCHEMING, PLANNING,
CONNIVING...

...I WAS AN ANGRY
BITCH WITH
A FAKE SMILE.



BUT I WAS
ALSO
A STUBBORN
BITCH!



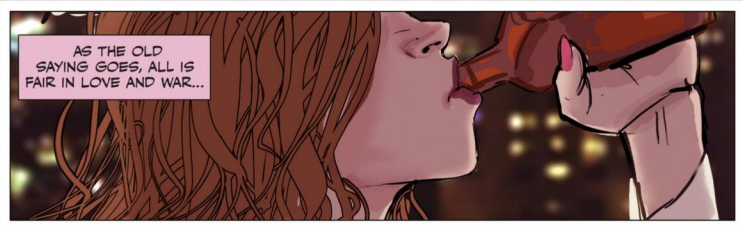
I TOOK MY MEDICINE,
BITTER THOUGH IT WAS,
AND I BOUNCED BACK!



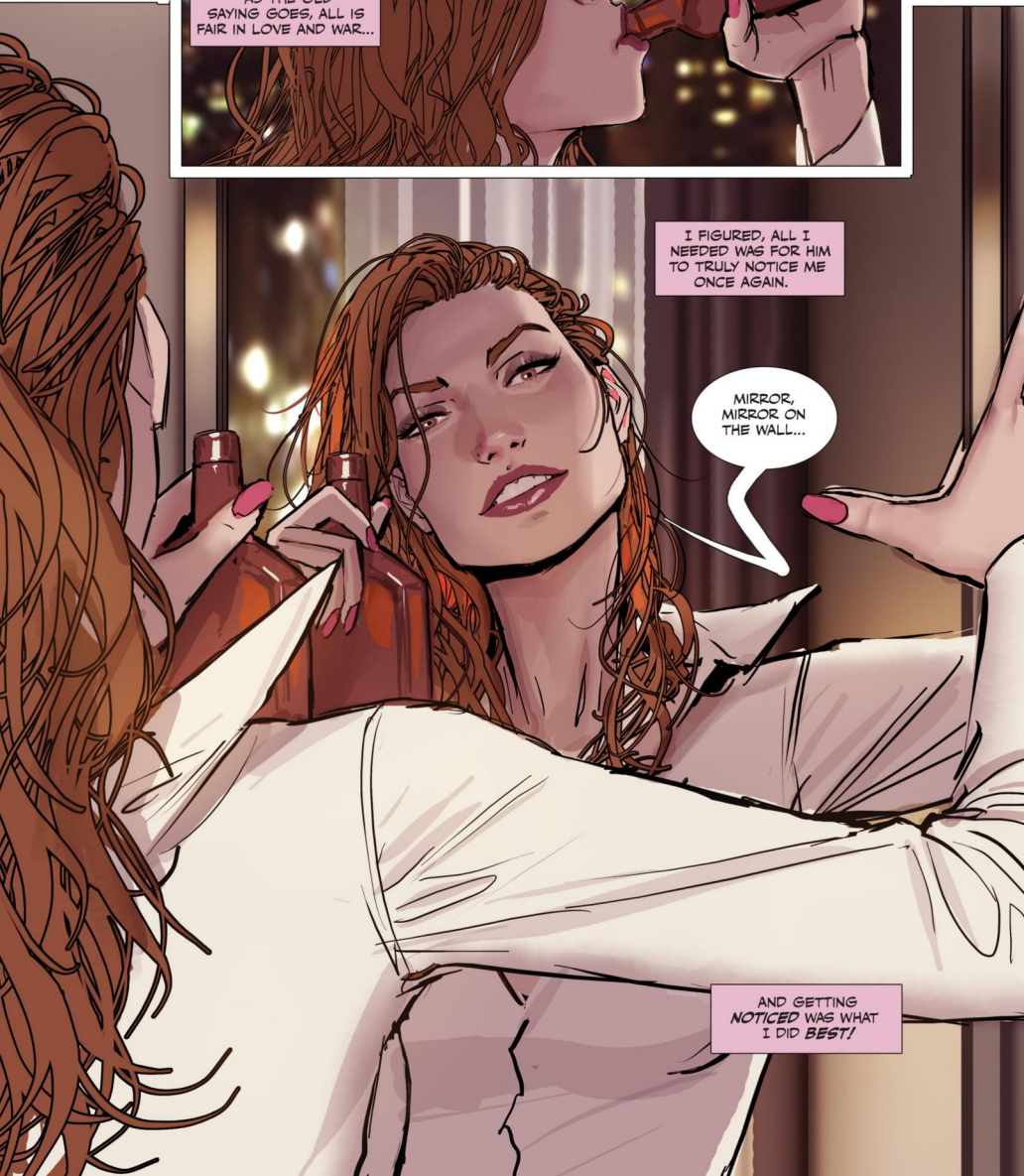
AFTER ALL, MAMA
THOMAS DIDN'T
RAISE A *QUITTER*.



NO, I WAS GONNA FIGHT
FOR MY HAPPY ENDING,
AND IF I HAD TO FIGHT
DIRTY, *SO BE IT!*



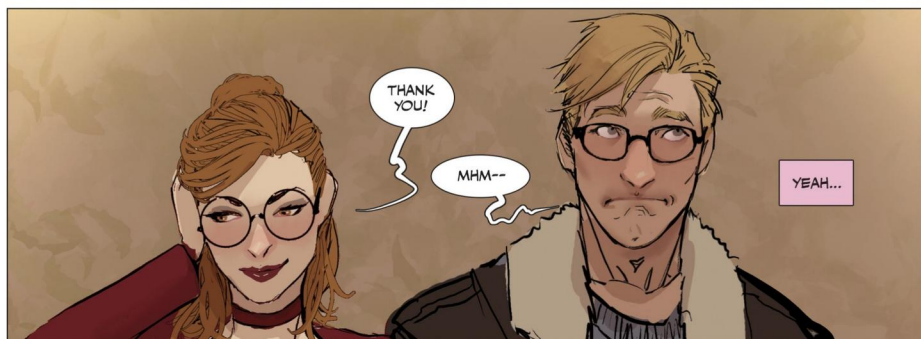
AS THE OLD
SAYING GOES, ALL IS
FAIR IN LOVE AND WAR...



I FIGURED, ALL I
NEEDED WAS FOR HIM
TO TRULY NOTICE ME
ONCE AGAIN.

MIRROR,
MIRROR ON
THE WALL...

AND GETTING
NOTICED WAS WHAT
I DID *BEST!*



SPEAKING OF MOVIES, IF
MY STORY WAS ONE, I GUESS
TECHNICALLY I WOULDN'T BE THE
GOOD-NATURED PROTAGONIST...

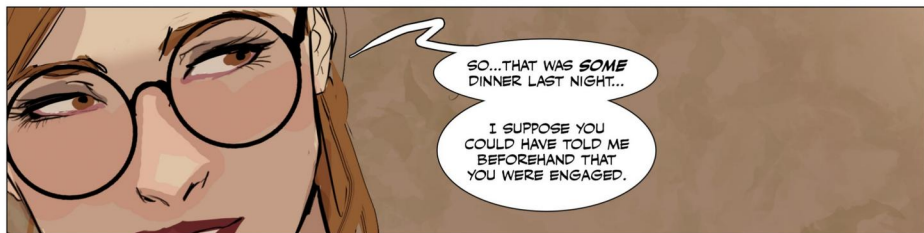
NO, TURNS OUT I WAS
MORE LIKE THE ONE
THAT DIES IN THE END,
AND EVERYONE CHEERS.

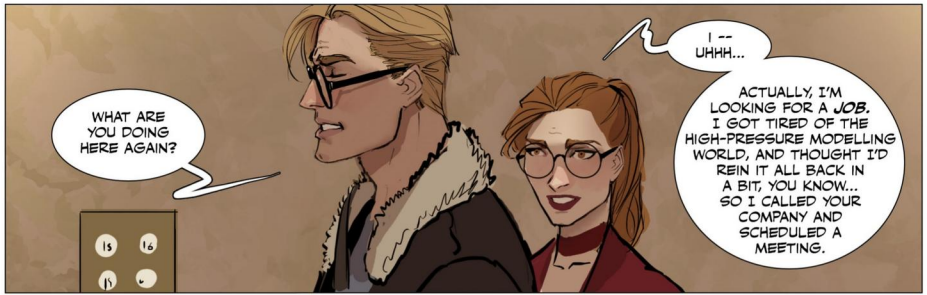
Y'KNOW...
A FUCKING
VILLAIN.

SURPRISINGLY
HOT TODAY,
HUH?

UH,
YEAH...







WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE AGAIN?

I --
UHHH...

ACTUALLY, I'M LOOKING FOR A **JOB**. I GOT TIRED OF THE HIGH-PRESSURE MODELLING WORLD, AND THOUGHT I'D REIN IT ALL BACK IN A BIT, YOU KNOW... SO I CALLED YOUR COMPANY AND SCHEDULED A MEETING.



MHHM...HELPS BEING *YOU*, I GUESS. THIS IS ME, YOU GOT FLOOR SEVEN.

SEE YOU AROUND, LAUREN.

I COULD HEAR MY OWN *PULSE* RUSHING THROUGH MY HEAD.

A SURGE OF ADRENALINE CAUSED BY *PURE DESPERATION*.



THIS WAS NOT IT.

THIS WASN'T WHERE IT ALL ENDS!



I WOULDN'T ALLOW IT!



MATTHEW, WAIT!

?

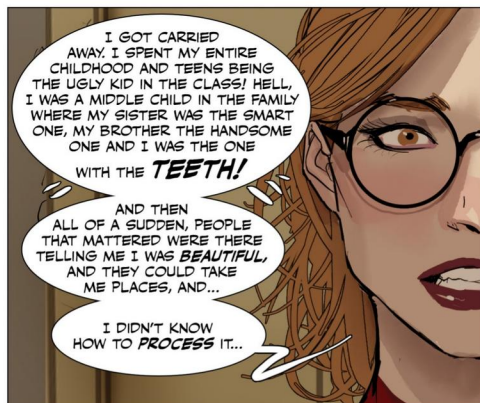
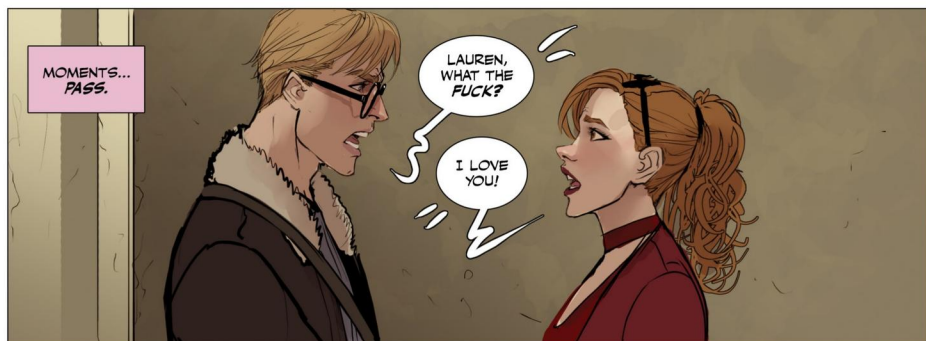


FOR A MOMENT, IT'S THERE. THAT *SPARK* BETWEEN US. THAT *WARMTH* THAT I FELT AS OUR HEARTS BEAT TOGETHER.

MY ONE TRUE LOVE IN MY ARMS...

AND FOR A MOMENT, I *KNEW* HE FELT THE SAME.

BUT MOMENTS ARE BRIEF...





OKAY,
STOP!

YOU THINK
THIS IS SOME FUCKING
EGO TRIP FOR ME? THAT
I HAVE TO BE *RIGHT* AND
EVERYTHING WOULD
BE *FINE*?



LAUREN, YOU
LEFT ME, AND I
BARELY SURVIVED THE
BREAKUP.



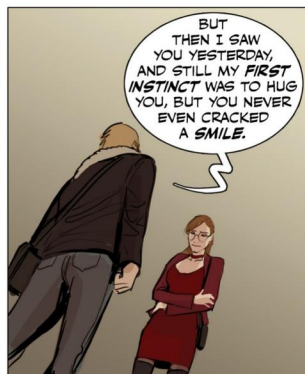
I SPENT MY NIGHTS
SLEEPING WITH RANDOM
GIRLS THAT REMINDED ME OF *YOU*
IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, AND THEN...
THEN I DID THE SAME WITH ERIKA,
AND YOU KNOW WHAT? SHE DIDN'T
LEAVE. SHE SAW THE MESS YOU
LEFT BEHIND AND
FIXED IT, AND...



HONEST TO GOD,
FOR THE *FIRST TIME* IN AGES,
I WAS DOING FINE!



I WAS
OVER YOU.



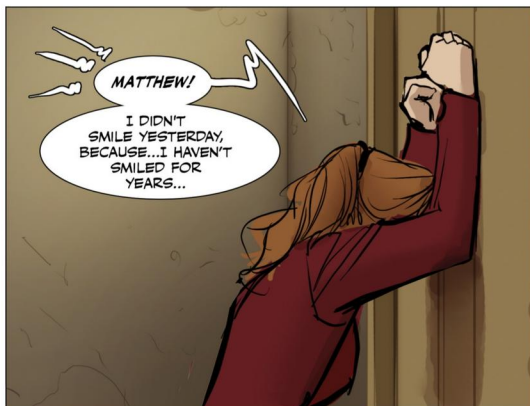
BUT
THEN I SAW
YOU YESTERDAY,
AND STILL MY *FIRST*
INSTINCT WAS TO HUG
YOU, BUT YOU NEVER
EVEN CRACKED
A *SMILE*.



AND THAT
SNAPPED ME
OUT OF IT.

THEN AGAIN, YOUR
EVERY SMILE *SINCE* HAS
BEEN A FAKE. I WOULD
KNOW...

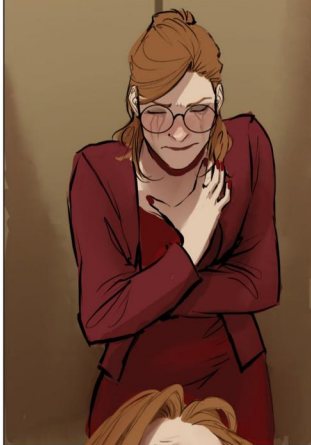
I'VE SEEN
YOUR *REAL*
ONES!



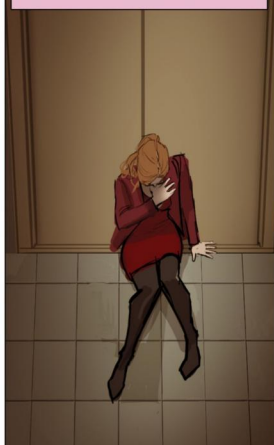
FUCKING
PATHETIC...



I DO REMEMBER THE PAIN, HOWEVER.
NO, NOT JUST THE EMOTIONAL
ANGUISH. THIS PAIN WAS **PHYSICAL**.
REAL. A CHEST PAIN AND LOSS
OF BREATH THAT THEN AND
THERE MADE ME WONDER IF
A PERSON COULD **DIE** OF A
BROKEN HEART.

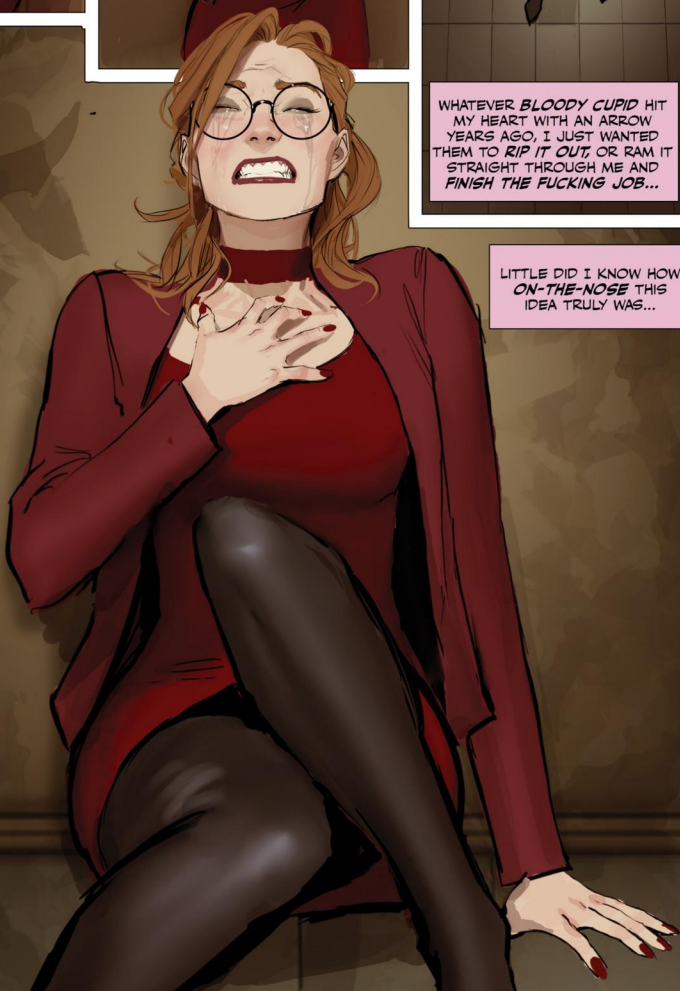


I COLLAPSED ON THE FLOOR
THAT DAY, GASPING FOR AIR, WITH
THE **STRANGEST THOUGHT**
RUNNING THROUGH MY BRAIN.



WHATEVER **BLOODY CUPID** HIT
MY HEART WITH AN ARROW
YEARS AGO, I JUST WANTED
THEM TO **RIP IT OUT**, OR RAM IT
STRAIGHT THROUGH ME AND
FINISH THE FUCKING JOB...

LITTLE DID I KNOW HOW
ON-THE-NOSE THIS
IDEA TRULY WAS...



Chapter 2

The hidden crown





FUCKING HELL,
STOP *FLUFFING*
ME ALREADY!

RAM IT IN
ME SO I CAN
LOVE YOU!!!!

FOR HEAVEN'S
SAKE, *LELIAH...*

CAN YOU NOT
DESECRATE THIS
FOR ME?

JUST ONCE?

**GODREALMS:
THE UNDERWORLD OF HADES
(DECOMMISSIONED).**

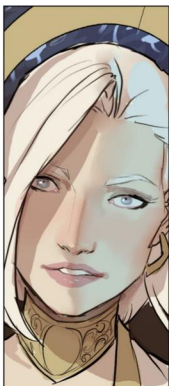
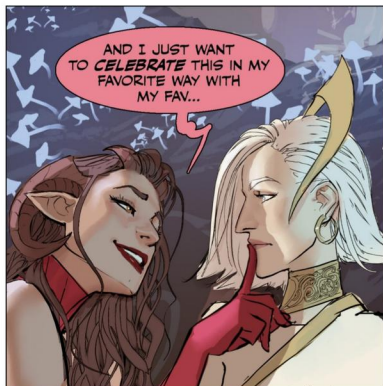
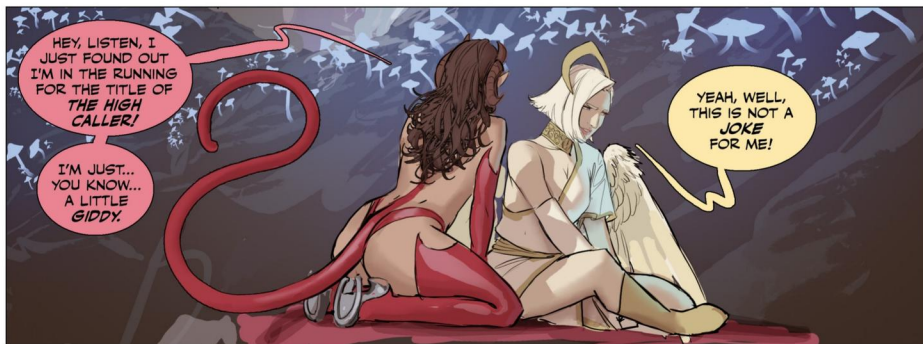
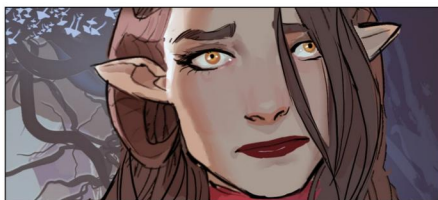


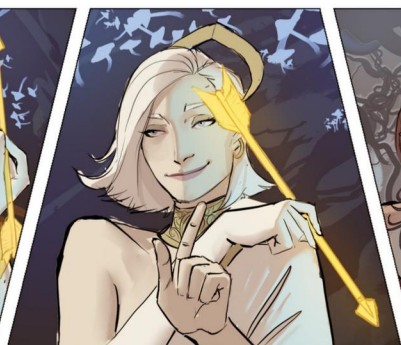
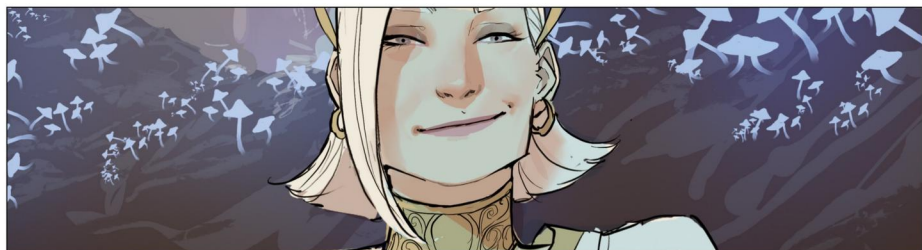


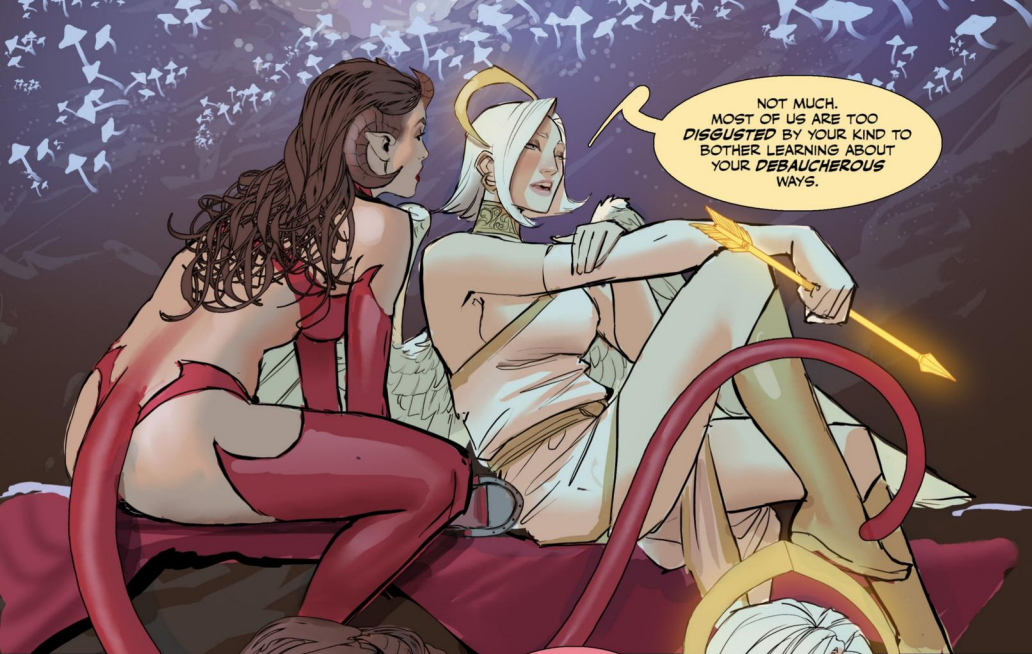
HEURECA, WE'RE IN THE
ASSCRACK OF HADES' UNDERWORLD
RIGHT NOW, WHERE EVEN THE
DEAD SOULS DON'T WANDER
ANYMORE!

WE'RE SURROUNDED
BY CRAWLING THINGS AND OTHER
DEGENERATES LIKE US, DOING THE
EQUIVALENT OF WHAT HUMANS WOULD
CALL *SHOOTING HEROIN!*

WHAT ABOUT OUR
CURRENT SITUATION SEEMS
IN ANY WAY *SACRED*
TO YOU?





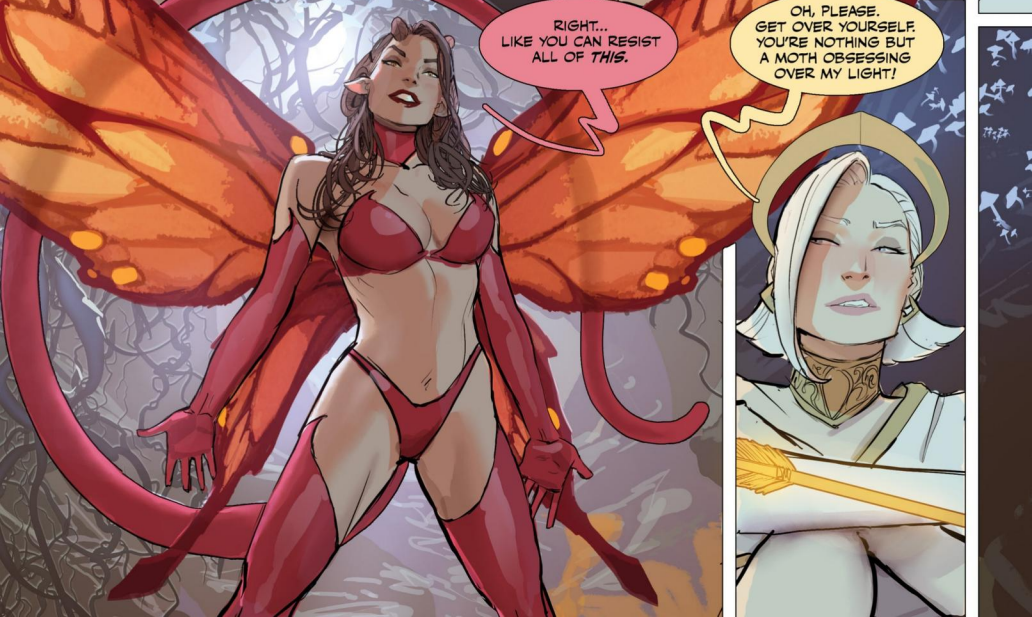


NOT MUCH.
MOST OF US ARE TOO
DISGUSTED BY YOUR KIND TO
BOTHER LEARNING ABOUT
YOUR *DEBAUCHEROUS*
WAYS.



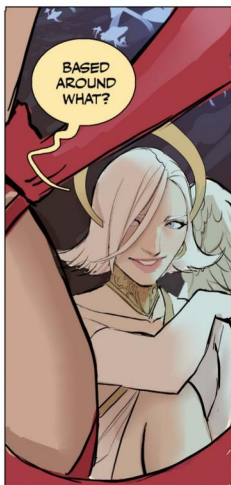
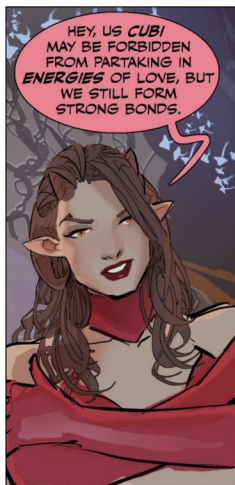
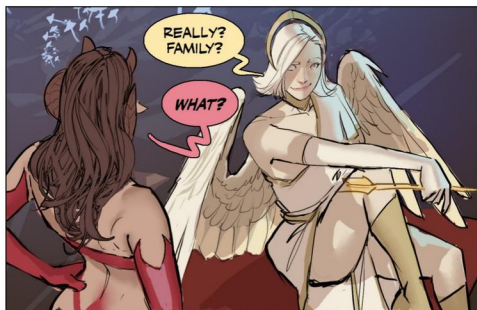
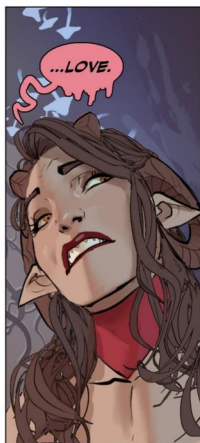
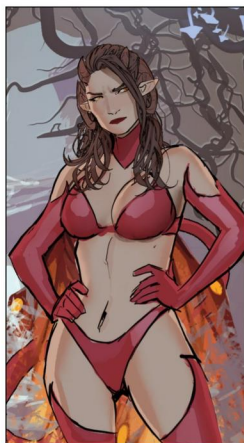
UH-HUH,
THAT'S WHY
YOU MEET ME IN
SECRET TO FUCK
MY BRAINS
OUT, HUH?

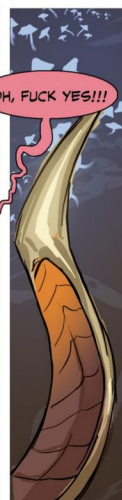
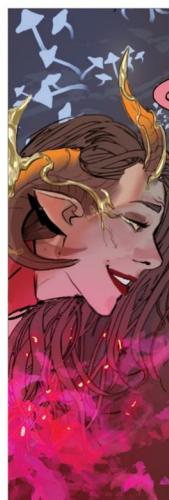
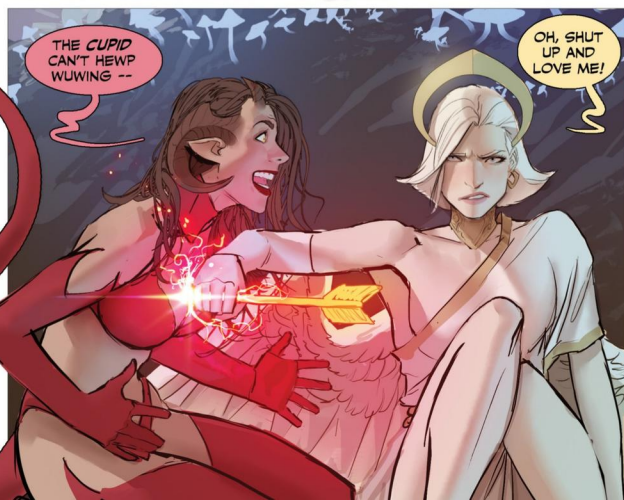
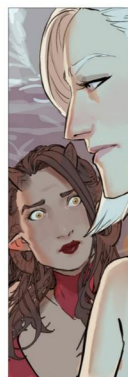
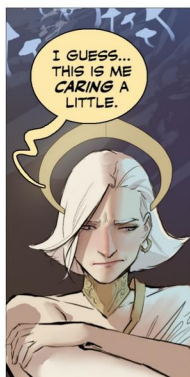
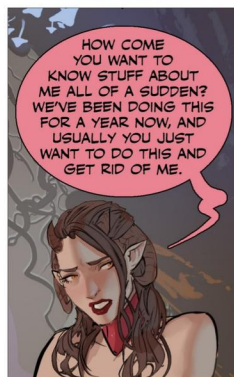
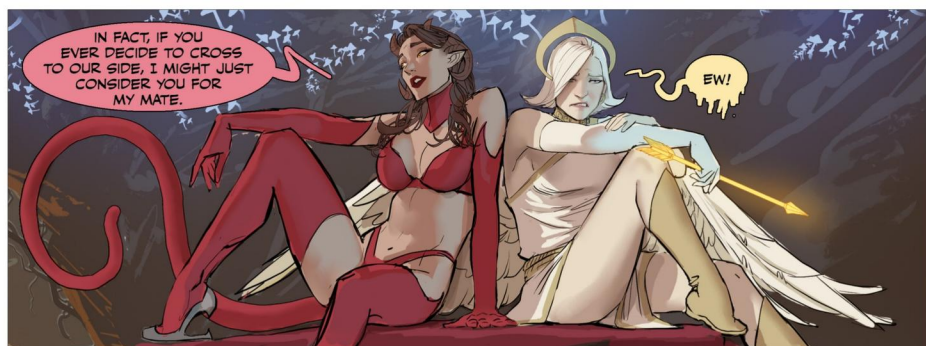
YOU KNOW VERY WELL
I'M NOT HERE BECAUSE
OF YOU.



RIGHT...
LIKE YOU CAN RESIST
ALL OF *THIS*.

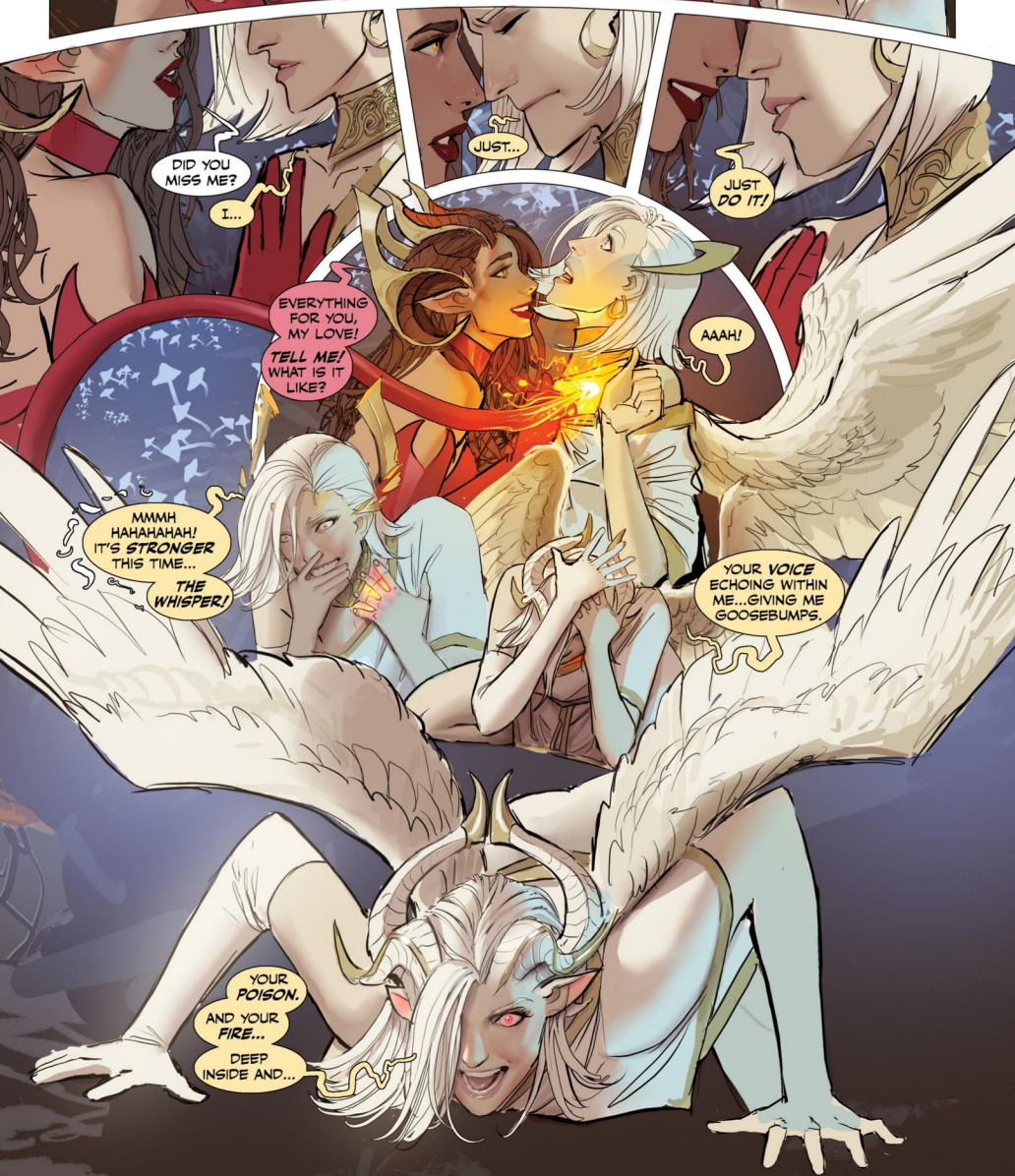
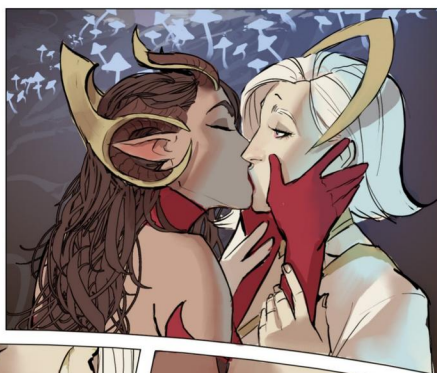
OH, PLEASE.
GET OVER YOURSELF.
YOU'RE NOTHING BUT
A MOTH OBSESSING
OVER MY LIGHT!







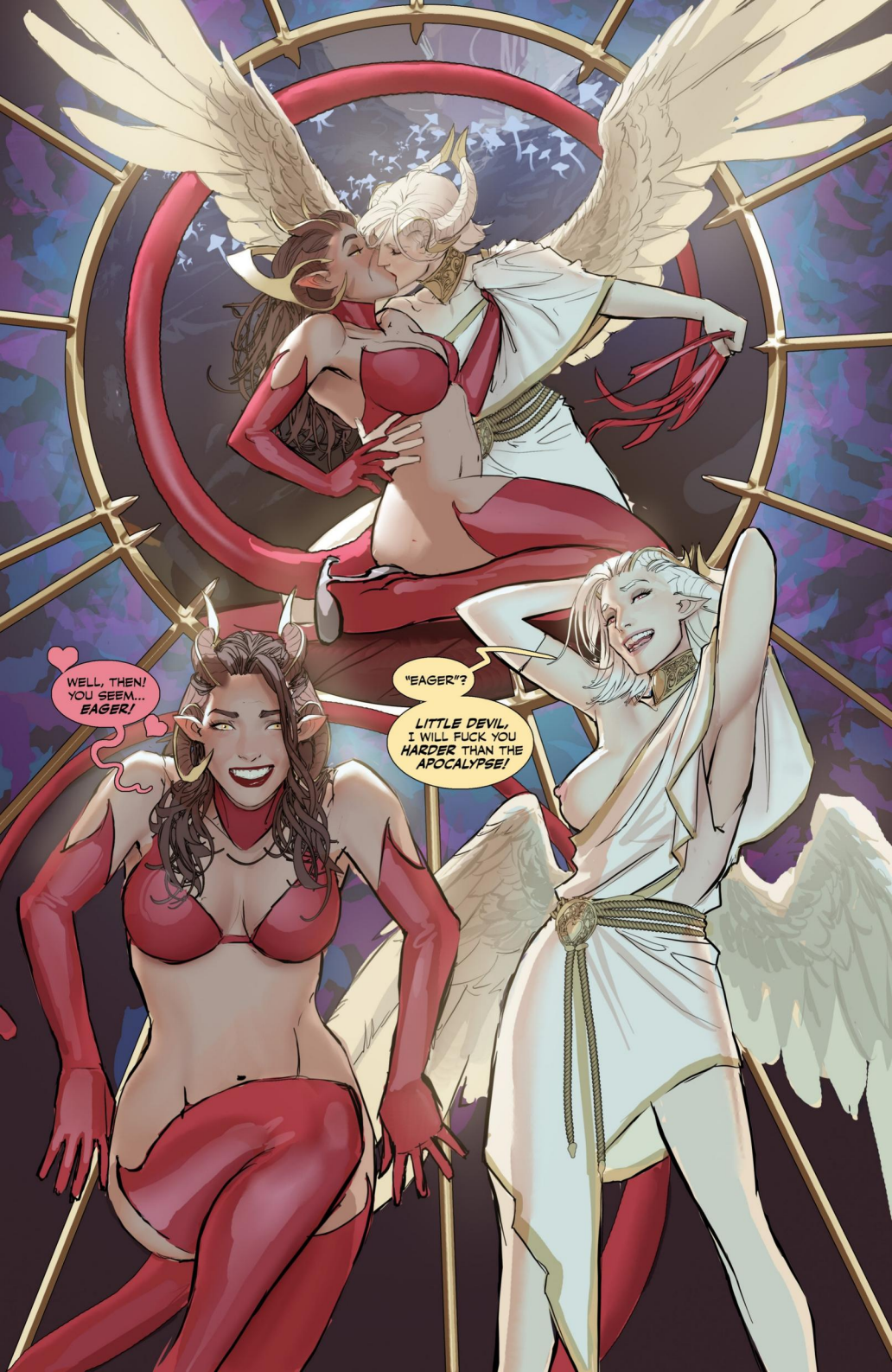
THERE YOU
ARE, MY WONDER OF
WONDERS.





AND I WANT
MORE OF YOU!

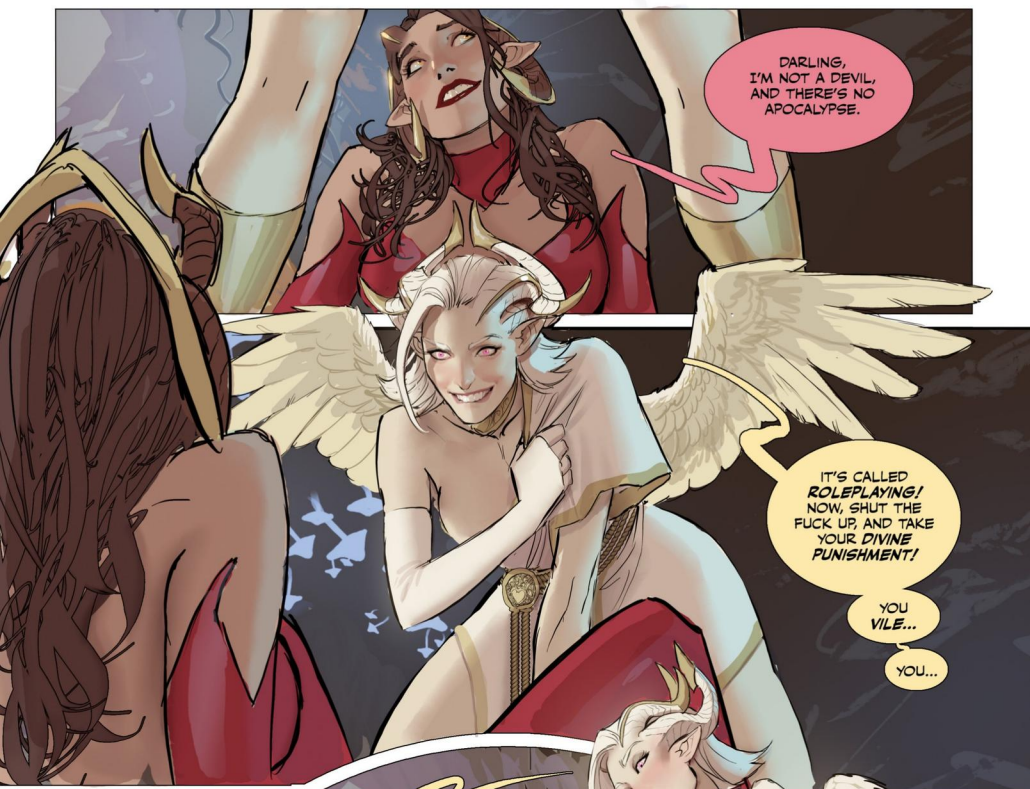
I WANT ALL
OF YOU!



WELL, THEN!
YOU SEEM...
EAGER!

"EAGER"?

LITTLE DEVIL,
I WILL FUCK YOU
HARDER THAN THE
APOCALYPSE!



DARLING,
I'M NOT A DEVIL,
AND THERE'S NO
APOCALYPSE.

IT'S CALLED
ROLEPLAYING!
NOW, SHUT THE
FUCK UP, AND TAKE
YOUR **DIVINE**
PUNISHMENT!

YOU
VILE...

YOU...



LIGHT OF
OLD, HELP ME...
THE LOVE IN YOUR
EYES IT...IT ALMOST
FEELS REAL.

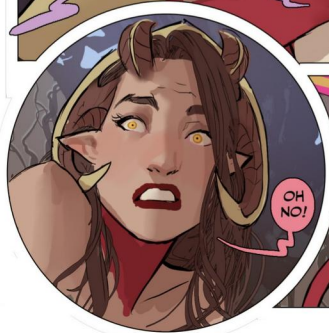
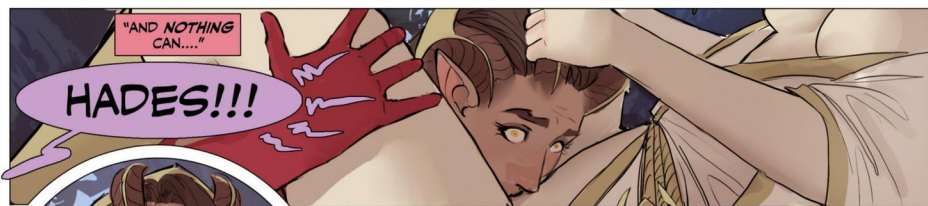
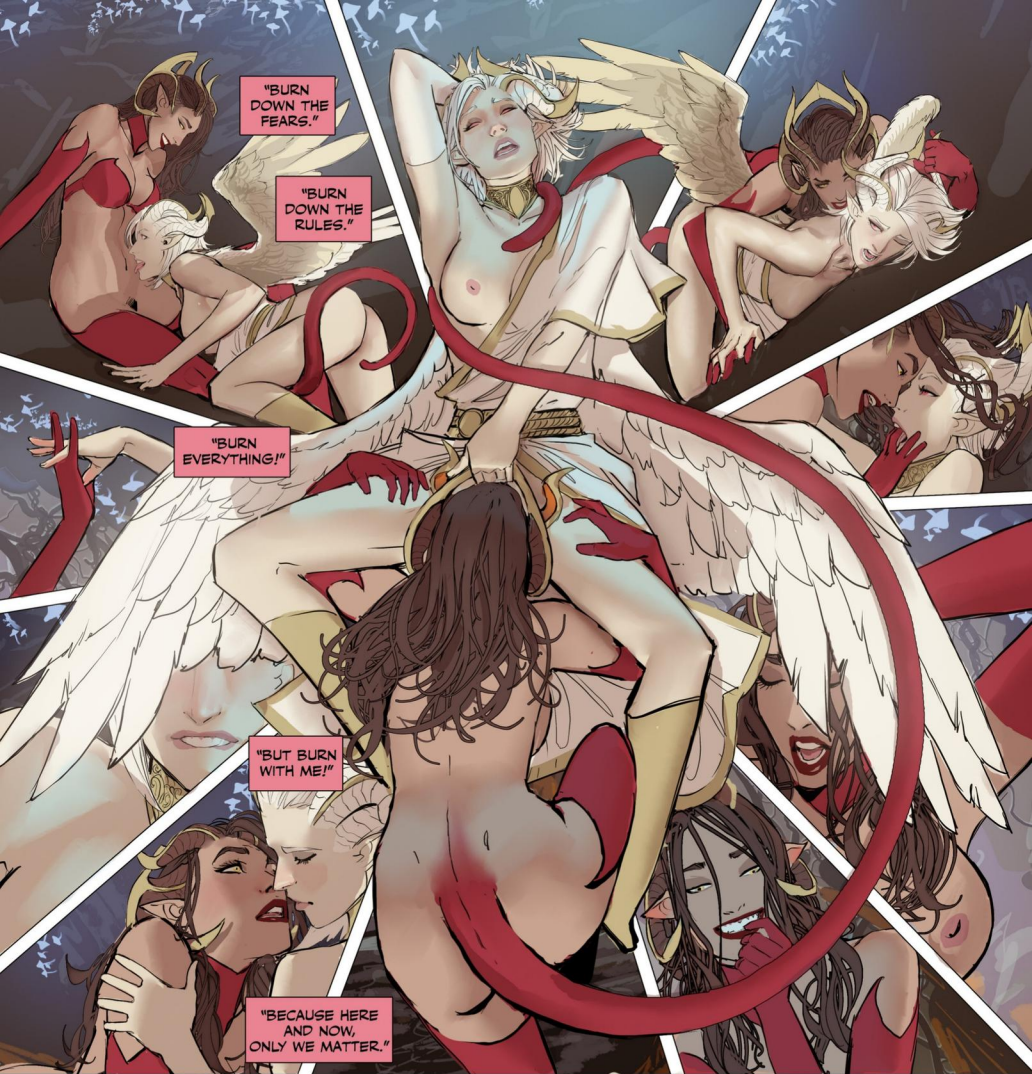
LIKE A
WARM
FIRE...

Y-YES...

IT'S...

IT'S
CALLING TO
MY OWN
FLAMES...

THEN
BURN
WITH
ME!





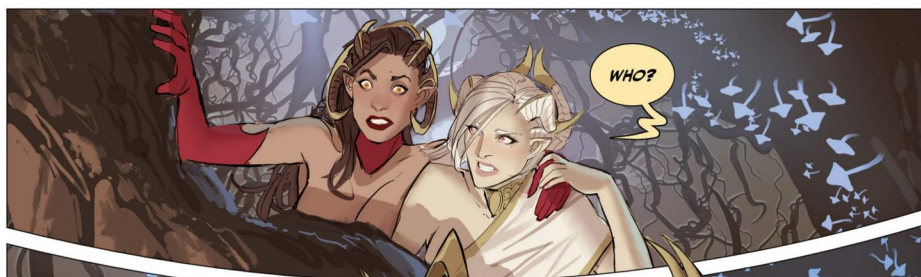
WHO...

SHHH!!!

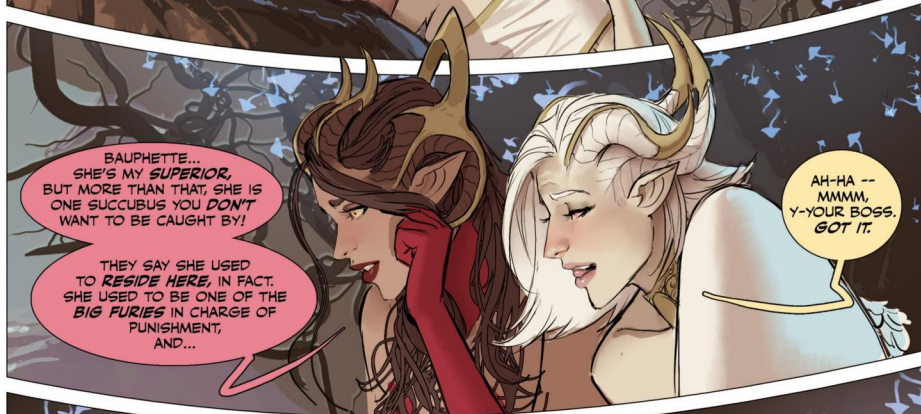
IT'S HER!

BAUPHETTE
ALARIS!

HAIDES,
SHOW YOURSELF, YOU
GHOSTLY SON OF A
BITCH!!!



WHO?



BAUPHETTE...
SHE'S MY **SUPERIOR**,
BUT MORE THAN THAT, SHE IS
ONE SUCCUBUS YOU **DON'T**
WANT TO BE CAUGHT BY!

THEY SAY SHE USED
TO **RESIDE HERE**, IN FACT.
SHE USED TO BE ONE OF THE
BIG FURIES IN CHARGE OF
PUNISHMENT,
AND...

AH-HA --
MMMM,
Y-YOUR BOSS,
GOT IT.



QUINQUY!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
SORPANTING

SHHH,
ALMOST THERE!



OH, COME
ON!

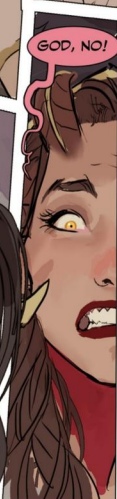
YOUR
ESSENCE IS
STILL **BURNING**!
I HAVEN'T
FINISHED!



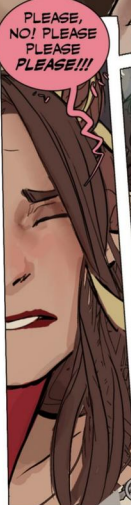
ARE YOU FUCKING
NUTS? A SUCCUBUS CAN
SENSE AN ORGASM
FROM A MILE AWAY!

NOW, BE
QUIET!!!

MIWAH!



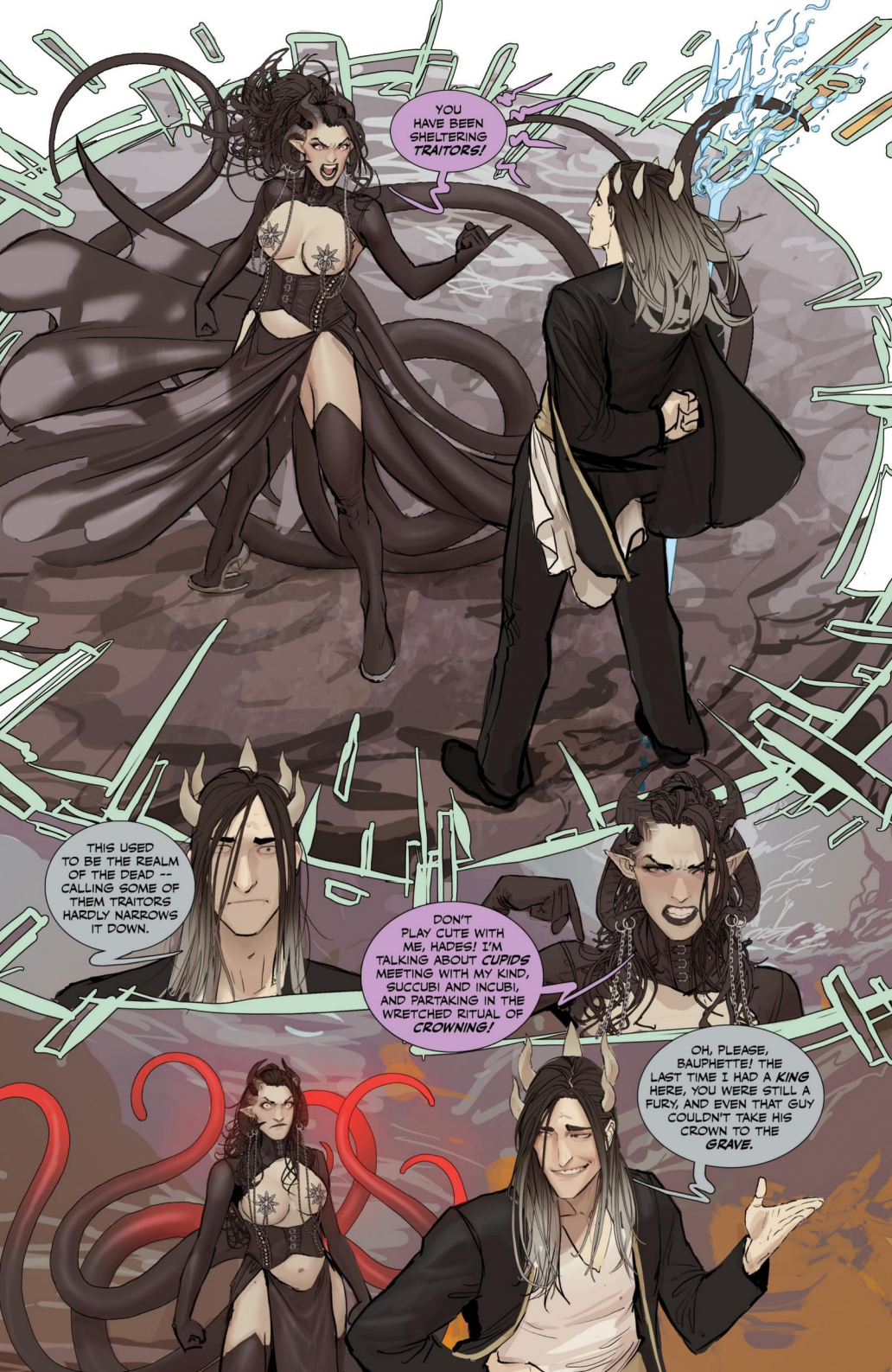
GOD, NO!



PLEASE,
NO! PLEASE
PLEASE
PLEASE!!!





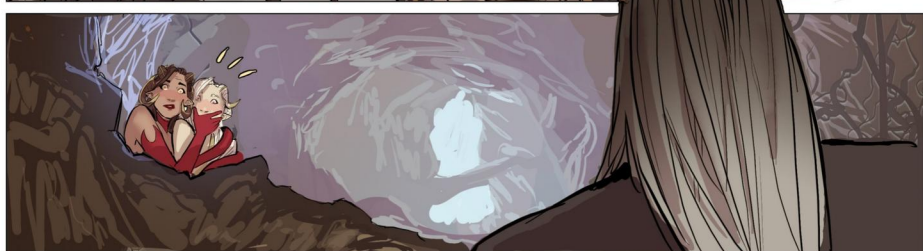
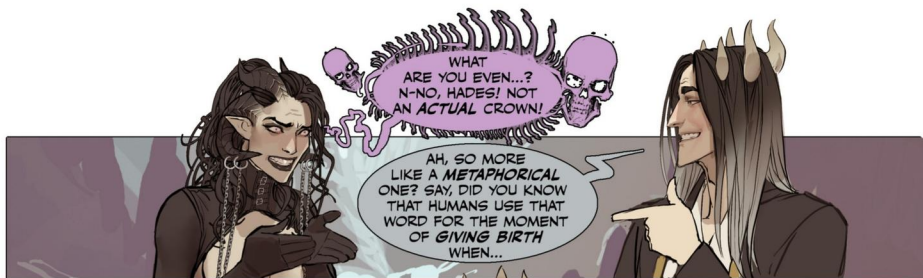


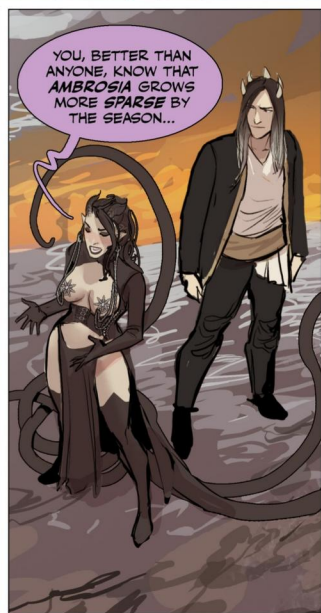
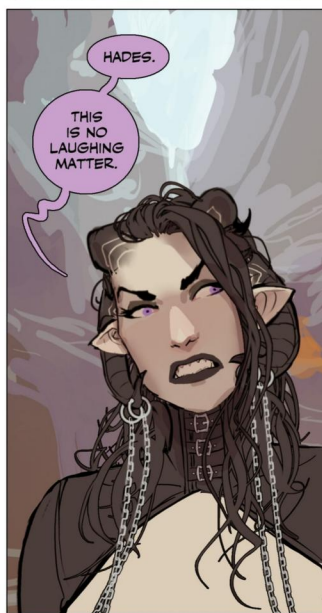
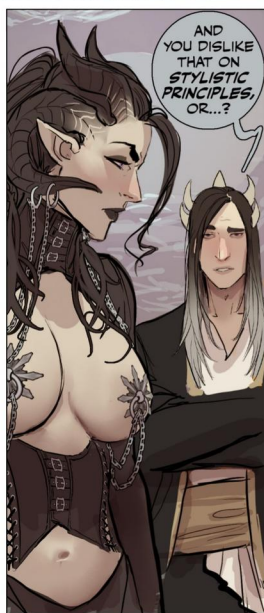
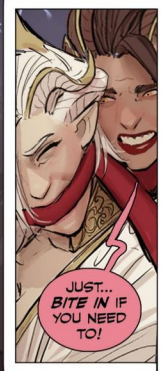
YOU
HAVE BEEN
SHELTERING
TRAITORS!

THIS USED
TO BE THE REALM
OF THE DEAD --
CALLING SOME OF
THEM TRAITORS
HARDLY NARROWS
IT DOWN.

DON'T
PLAY CUTE WITH
ME, HADES! I'M
TALKING ABOUT *CUPIDS*
MEETING WITH MY KIND,
SUCCUBI AND INCUBI,
AND PARTAKING IN THE
WRETCHED RITUAL OF
CROWNING!

OH, PLEASE,
BAUPHETTE! THE
LAST TIME I HAD A *KING*
HERE, YOU WERE STILL A
FURY, AND EVEN THAT GUY
COULDN'T TAKE HIS
CROWN TO THE
GRAVE.







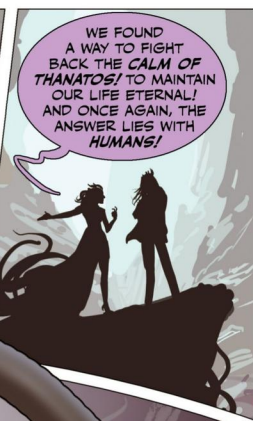
I AM
AWARE...



SOME HAVE
TAKEN THIS AS A SIGN,
THAT THE **TIME OF
GODS** IS AT AN
END...



THE CUBI
WILL **NOT** STAND
FOR THIS!



WE FOUND
A WAY TO FIGHT
BACK THE **CALM OF
THANATOS!** TO MAINTAIN
OUR LIFE ETERNAL!
AND ONCE AGAIN, THE
ANSWER LIES WITH
HUMANS!



IN THE PAST,
THEIR **FAITH** IN US
EMPOWERED THE
BLESSED AMBROSIA.

HOWEVER, THE
OLD WAYS OF TEMPLES
AND SACRIFICES ARE GONE.
WE HAVE FOUND A MORE
DIRECT APPROACH.

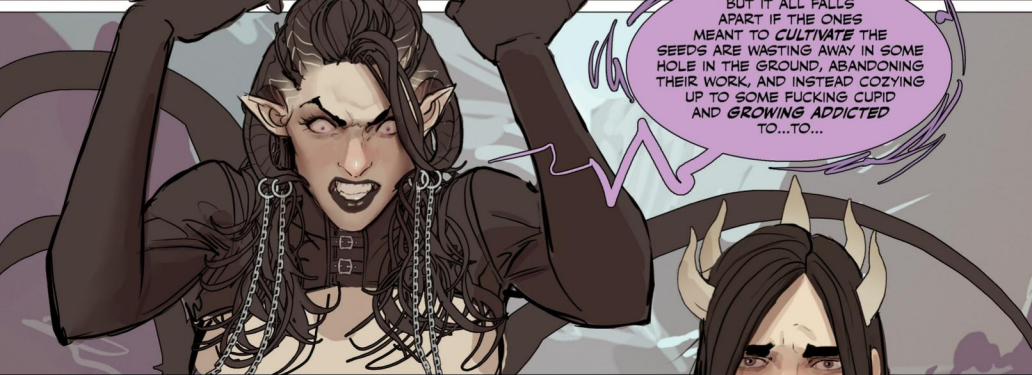
WE SEND OUR
SEEKERS AMONG THEM
TO FIND THE **WORTHY
ONES.**

TO
THEM WE OFFER
A **CONTRACT**. WE GRANT
THEM ALL THE PLEASURE
OUR **CALLERS** CAN
PROVIDE...

...AND IN RETURN, THEIR
DESIRE CULTIVATES FRESH,
EMPOWERED **AMBROSIA
SEEDS** FOR US.



THIS WORKS,
HADES! IT KEEPS
AWAY THE CALM,
IT KEEPS US FED, AND
IT KEEPS US ALIVE!



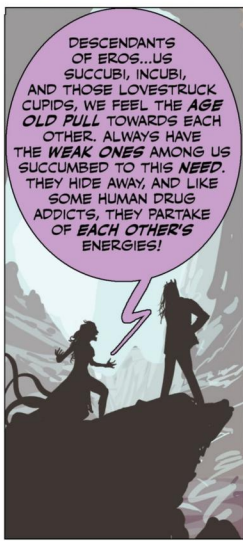
BUT IT ALL FALLS
APART IF THE ONES
MEANT TO CULTIVATE THE
SEEDS ARE WASTING AWAY IN SOME
HOLE IN THE GROUND, ABANDONING
THEIR WORK, AND INSTEAD COZING
UP TO SOME FUCKING CUPID
AND GROWING ADDICTED
TO...TO...



LOVE?



YES!



DESCENDANTS
OF EROS...US
SUCCUBI, INCUBI,
AND THOSE LOVETRUCK
CUPIDS, WE FEEL THE AGE
OLD PULL TOWARDS EACH
OTHER. ALWAYS HAVE
THE **WEAK ONES** AMONG US
SUCCEMBED TO THIS **NEED**.
THEY HIDE AWAY, AND LIKE
SOME HUMAN DRUG
ADDICTS, THEY PARTAKE
OF **EACH OTHER'S**
ENERGIES!



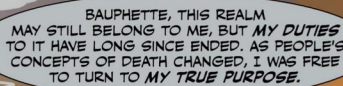
IT IS **DANGEROUS**,
IT IS **ADDICTIVE**, AND IT HAS
RUINED TOO MANY PROMISING
CALLERS. I AM HERE TO STOP THIS,
AND IF I HAVE TO **PUNISH** THOSE THAT
DO IT, AND MAKE AN EXAMPLE OF
THEM THAT ALL OTHERS WILL
FEAR, THEN **SO BE IT!**



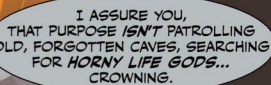
HM...YOU MAY BE
BAUPHETTE NOW, BUT
I CAN'T HELP BUT NOTICE
THERE IS STILL SO MUCH
OF THE *OLD ALECTO*
IN YOU...



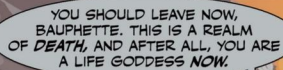
PERHAPS, AND AS ALECTO, I IMPORE YOU, FOR THE SAKE OF OUR OLD FRIENDSHIP...DON'T SHELTER THE GUILTY ONES.



BAUPHETTE, THIS REALM MAY STILL BELONG TO ME, BUT MY DUTIES TO IT HAVE LONG SINCE ENDED, AS PEOPLE'S CONCEPTS OF DEATH CHANGED, I WAS FREE TO TURN TO MY TRUE PURPOSE.



I ASSURE YOU, THAT PURPOSE *ISN'T* PATROLLING OLD, FORGOTTEN CAVES, SEARCHING FOR HORNY LIFE GODS... CROWNING.



YOU SHOULD LEAVE NOW, BAUPHETTE. THIS IS A REALM OF *DEATH*, AND AFTER ALL, YOU ARE A LIFE GODDESS NOW.



ARGH!!!
FINE!

JUST A BIT
MORE!

THERE!
SHE'S GONE!

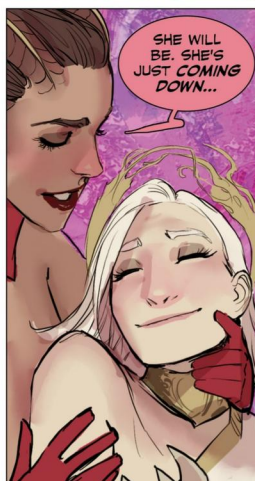
LELIAH,
I'M BURNING!!!

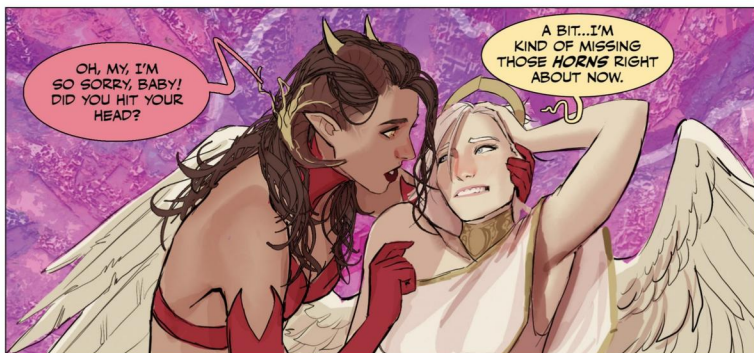
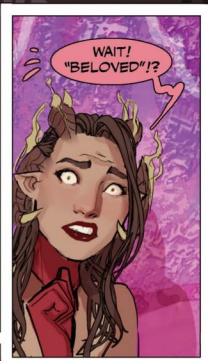
I KNOW!

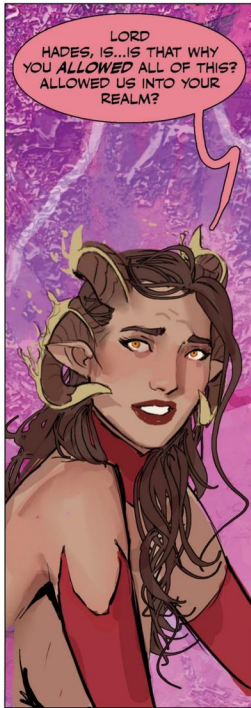
THAT'S IT,
RELEASE IT ALL!
LET IT OUT!

WHOA!

Fwoooooom





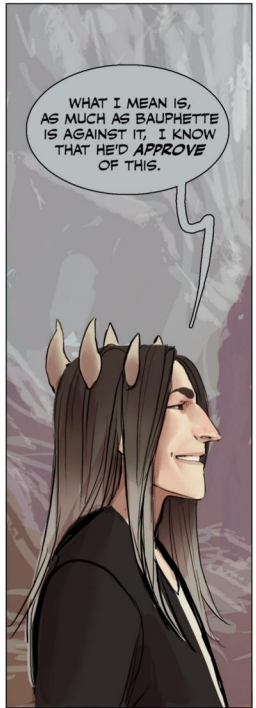


LORD
HADES, IS...IS THAT WHY
YOU *ALLOWED* ALL OF THIS?
ALLOWED US INTO YOUR
REALM?



YES. THAT'S ONE
REASON FOR IT.

BUT BEYOND
THAT...I KNEW *EROS*
QUITE WELL, BACK IN
THE DAY, AND I ALWAYS
FIGURED I *OWED HIM* THIS
MUCH.

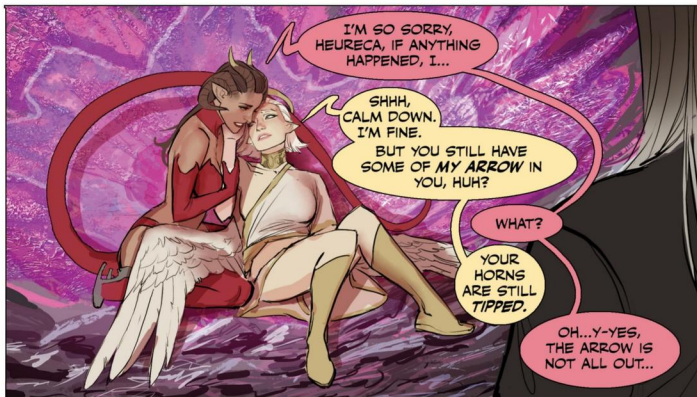


WHAT I MEAN IS,
AS MUCH AS BAUPHETTE
IS AGAINST IT, I KNOW
THAT HED *APPROVE*
OF THIS.



SPEAKING OF
BAUPHETTE...

NEXT TIME, TRY THE
LOWER SECTIONS OF THE REALM.
SHE IS WAY TOO *FAMILIAR* WITH
THIS WHOLE AREA, AND....



I'M SO SORRY,
HEURECA, IF ANYTHING
HAPPENED, I...

SHHH,
CALM DOWN.
I'M FINE.

BUT YOU STILL HAVE
SOME OF *MY ARROW* IN
YOU, HUH?

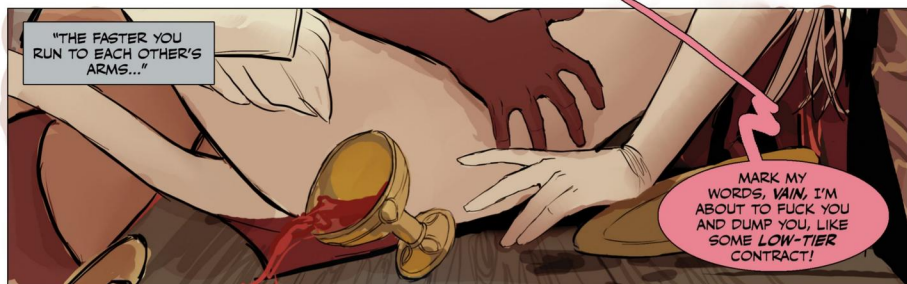
WHAT?

YOUR
HORNS
ARE STILL
TIPPED.

OH...Y-YES,
THE ARROW IS
NOT ALL OUT...



HEH...CHILDREN
OF EROS. THE MORE YOU
TRY TO *ESCAPE* FROM
EACH OTHER...

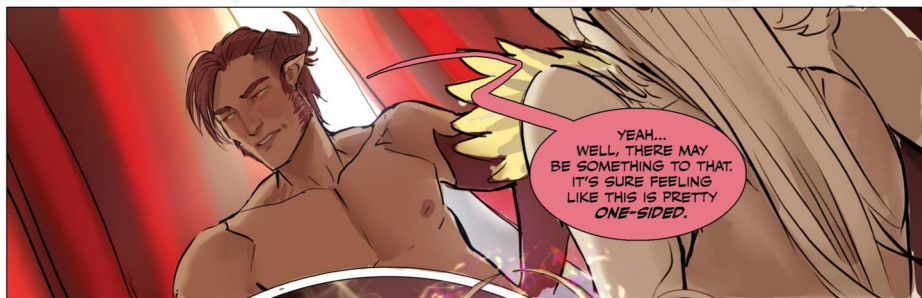




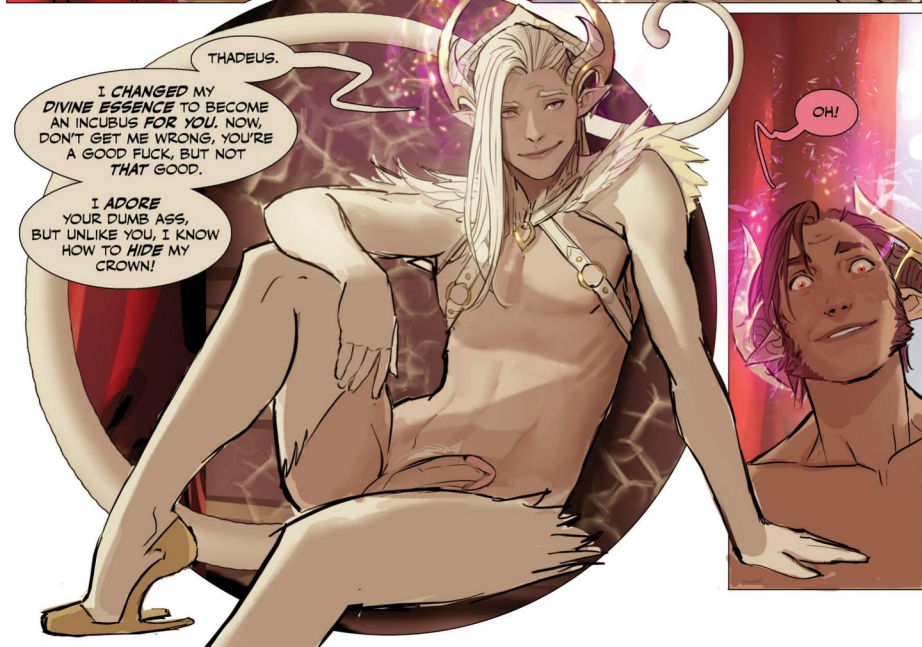
BUT WAIT,
HOW COME YOUR
CROWN DOESN'T
POP OUT?



AWWW, I GUESS
YOU JUST HAVE
ENOUGH LOVE
FOR THE *BOTH*
OF US, HERE.



YEAH...
WELL, THERE MAY
BE SOMETHING TO THAT.
IT'S SURE FEELING
LIKE THIS IS PRETTY
ONE-SIDED.

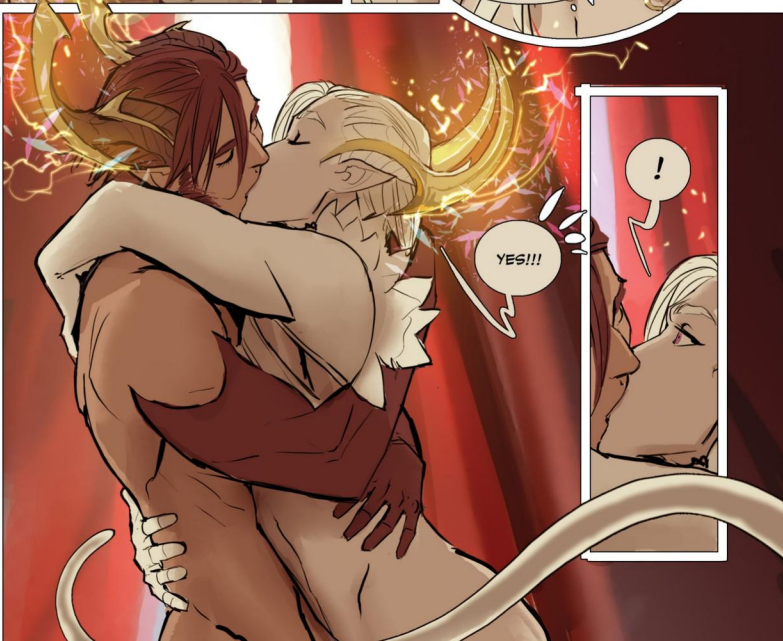
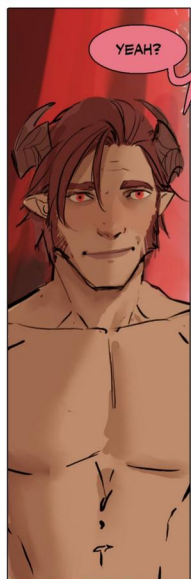
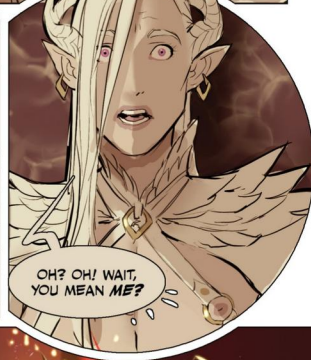
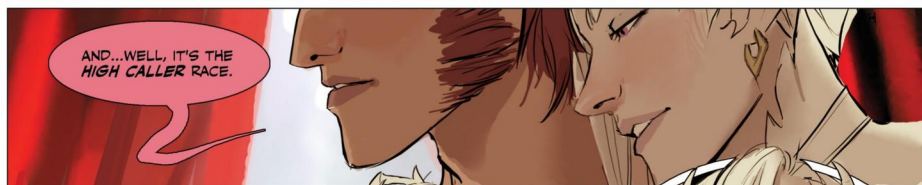
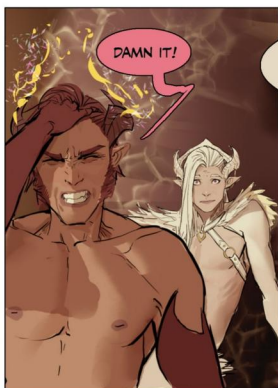
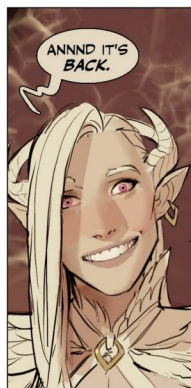


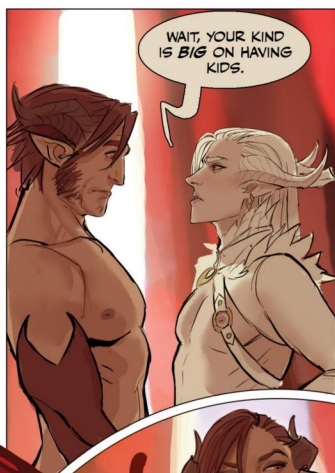
THADEUS.

I *CHANGED* MY
DIVINE *ESSENCE* TO BECOME
AN INCUBUS *FOR YOU*. NOW,
DON'T GET ME WRONG, YOU'RE
A GOOD FUCK, BUT NOT
THAT GOOD.

I *ADORE*
YOUR DUMB ASS,
BUT UNLIKE YOU, I KNOW
HOW TO *HIDE* MY
CROWN!

OH!





WAIT, YOUR KIND IS **BIG** ON HAVING KIDS.



I MEAN... TECHNICALLY, IT'S **OUR** KIND NOW, BUT YEAH.



NOPE! I DID NOT SIGN UP FOR **CHILDBEARING!!**



OH, DON'T WORRY, I CAN BE THE **MOTHER**, AND YOU GET TO HIT **THIS!**

EW!



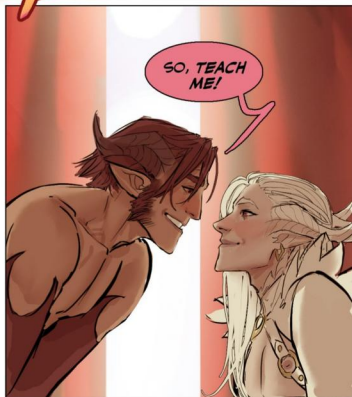
HAHAHHAHA

FWOP

SERIOUSLY, THOUGH, WHAT WORRIES ME IS, SAY I **DO** WIN THIS. I BECOME AN **ARCUBUS**, WE'RE THERE FOR THE BINDING CEREMONY, I SEE YOUR FACE ALL **CHARMING** AND SHIT... THEN THE CROWN POPS OUT, AND **BAM!** WE'RE BANISHED!



WHAT'S THIS **"WE"** BUSINESS? YOU'RE THE ONE WHO CAN'T CONTROL HIS **EMOTIONAL BONER!**

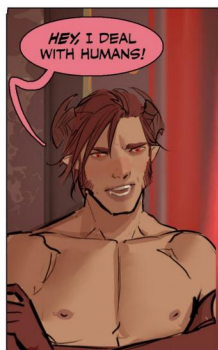


SO, TEACH ME!

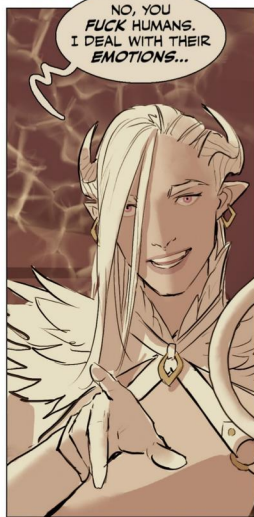


HOW
DO YOU
HIDE IT?

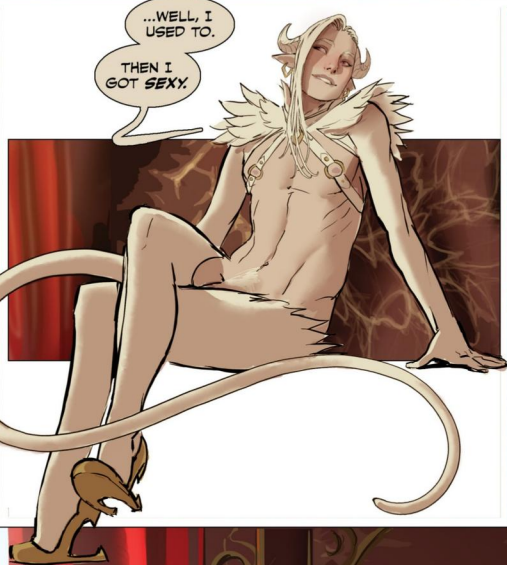
WELL, FIRST
OF ALL, UNLIKE YOU, I HAVE
CENTURIES WORTH OF EXPERIENCE
WITH LOVE. AS FOR HIDING IT, I
GUESS I LEARNED *THAT* FROM
DEALING WITH HUMANS.



HEY, I DEAL
WITH HUMANS!

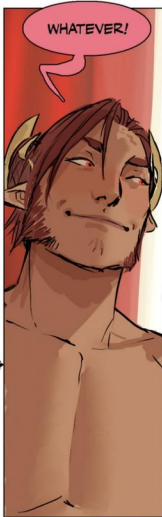


NO, YOU
FUCK HUMANS.
I DEAL WITH THEIR
EMOTIONS...



...WELL, I
USED TO.

THEN I
GOT *SEXY*.



WHATEVER!



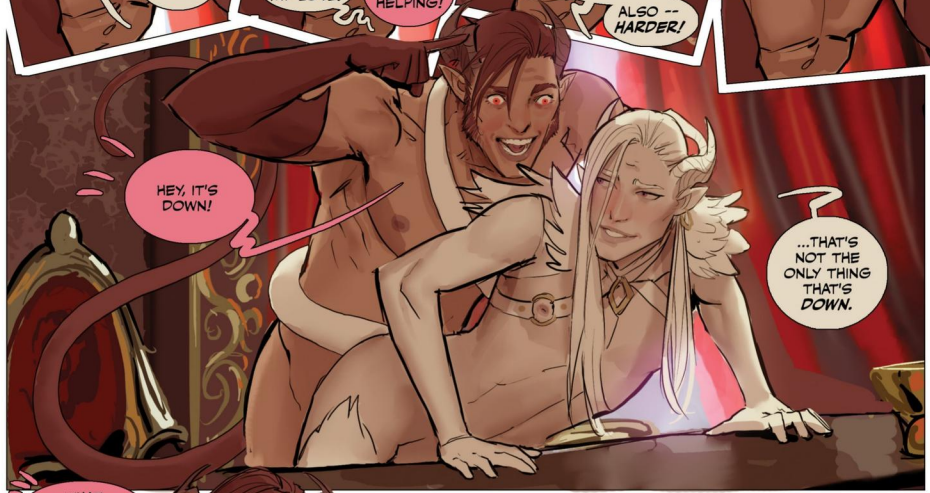
OKAY,
BUT SERIOUSLY, THIS
ISN'T SOME SECRET *ARROW*
AND *TAIL* SHIT LIKE WE USED TO DO
WHEN I WAS A CUPID. WE, MY LOVE,
ARE DEALING WITH THE *REAL THING*.
AND THAT DOESN'T GO AWAY
WITH A NIGHT OF GOOD
FUCKING!

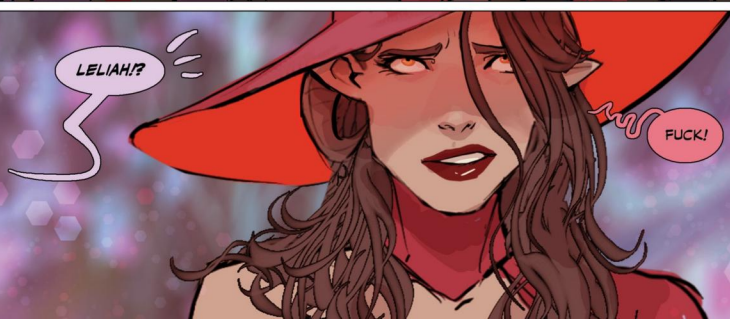
YEAH, I
FUCKING
NOTICED.

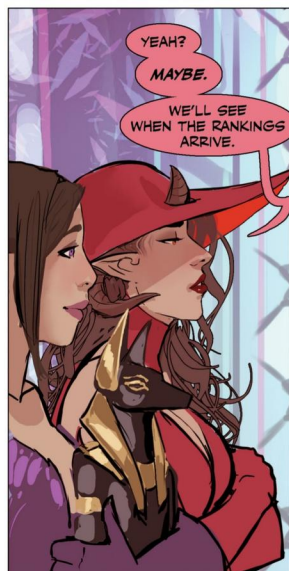
SO, IN ORDER TO
CONTROL IT, I THINK MAYBE
YOU SHOULD TRY DOING
WHAT HUMANS DO!

I NEVER DEALT
WITH HUMAN LOVE.

NONONO --
I MEAN, WHAT DO
HUMANS DO WHEN THEY
DON'T WANT TO *COME*
TOO FAST?









LELIAH
ASHEN.



OH, AND OF
COURSE YOU
BROUGHT YOUR
LITTLE *CROSSLING*
BITCH, VAIN!



HEY!

I GOT
THIS.



ONE: I MAY BE A
FORMER CUPID, BUT I'M HARDLY
THE ONLY *CROSSLING* HERE. SO UNLESS YOU
WANT TO SAY THE SAME SHIT TO *BAUPHETTE*
ALARIS, I'D ADVISE YOU TO KEEP YOUR
FORKED TONGUE TO YOURSELF.

AND TWO: CUPIDS,
EVEN *FORMER* ONES, CAN SMELL
THE EFFECTS OF A *LOVE ARROW* ON
ANYONE. EVEN DAYS LATER...



SEE,
THADEUS MAY
TALK LOUDLY,
BUT HE'S A BIG
SOFTIE. *ME*, I TALK
SOFTLY, BUT I CARRY
A BIG FUCKING
STICK.



SO, WE
GOOD?



Y-YEAH.



'KAY THEN.
I'LL LEAVE YOU
TWO TO BUTT
HEADS NOW.

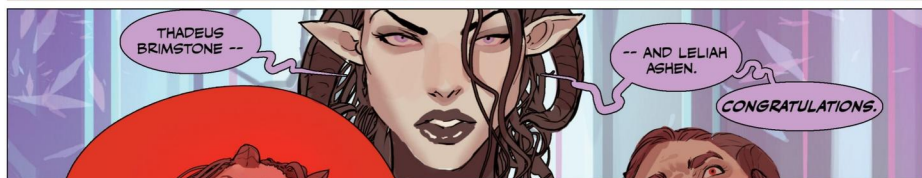
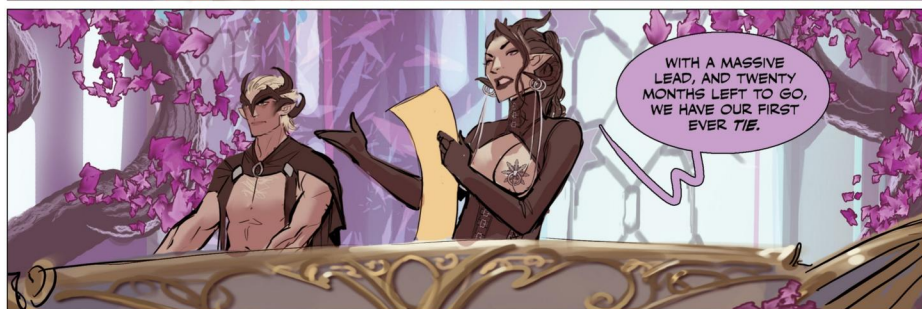
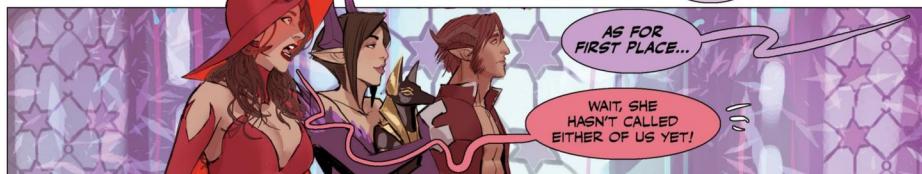


VAIN
LUCIS,
RANK 9.

OH!
YAY, ME!

SO...HE'S
THE BUTCH,
THEN?

FUCK OFF!



Chapter 3

The escapist



"TOO BAD THOSE
ARE DAMN NEAR
IMPOSSIBLE TO FIND."



IT'S BEEN A BIT
OF AN ODD
YEAR FOR ME...

BUT YOU
KNOW WHAT?

NINE MONTHS
AFTER MATTHEW
DUMPED ME IN
THAT HALLWAY...

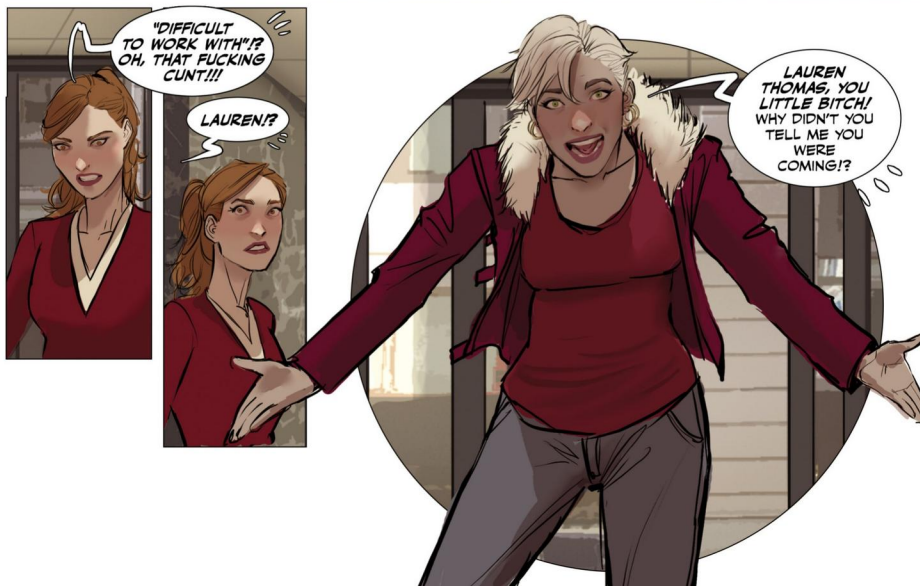
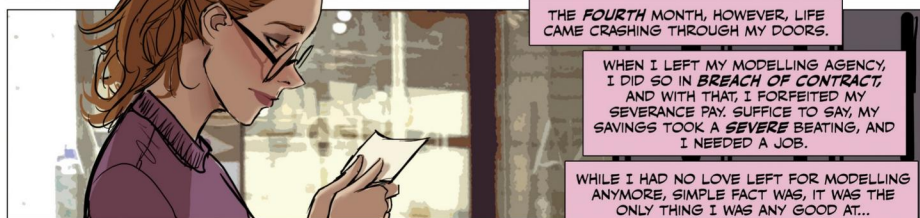
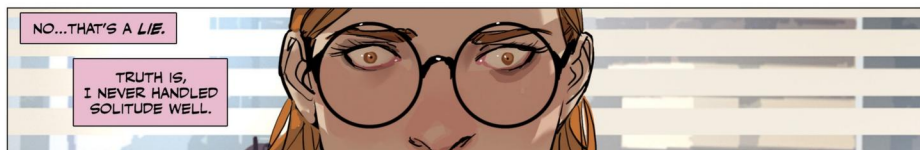
AND I WAS DOING
GREAT!

LIVING MY BEST
LIFE, MEETING NEW
PEOPLE...

YEAH!

NEXT TIME, I
WANT YOU TO HURT
ME MORE.

I WAS DOING
JUST FINE!



SAMANTHA SAWYER...
SAM WAS THE BEST FRIEND I EVER HAD, AND THE **ONLY** FRIEND I MADE DURING MY MODELLING YEARS.



WE HAD QUITE THE **HISTORY** TOGETHER... IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE.



WHAT CAN I SAY? SHE WAS A **HANDSY** DRUNK, AND I WAS BAD WHEN IT CAME TO LONELINESS.



SAM ENDED UP BEING MY **LIFELINE** IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE, TOO. SHE SAVED MY ASS THAT DAY, TOOK ME UNDER HER WING --- HELL, TOOK ME IN AS A ROOMMATE FOR A FEW MONTHS, AND EVEN TAUGHT ME ABOUT A **WHOLE NEW WORLD** OF BUSINESS OPTIONS.

SO YOU DRESS UP IN **FETISHY OUTFITS** FROM CARTOONS AND VIDEO GAMES, AND PEOPLE PAY YOU?

HEY, IT'S NOT **THAT** DIFFERENT FROM WHAT WE USED TO DO.

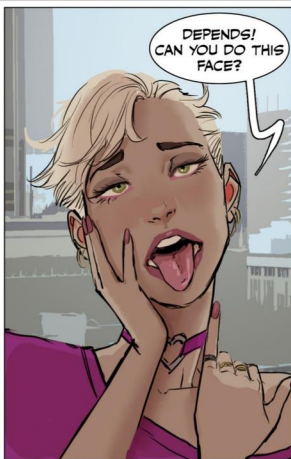
IT PAYS THE BILLS, AND AT LEAST YOU DON'T HAVE TO DEAL WITH SOME EGOMANIACAL PHOTOGRAPHER THINKING HE'S MAKING **FINE ART** BY TAKING PICS OF YOU HOLDING SOME NEW CELLPHONE.



YOU THINK I COULD DO THAT?



DEPENDS! CAN YOU DO THIS FACE?



WHAT THE **FUCK?**

SAM, ARE YOU OKAY?

DID YOU JUST HAVE A STROKE?



HAHAHAHA.

YEAH, IT'S A BIT GOOFY, BUT YOU'D BE SHOCKED AT HOW MANY PEOPLE LIKE THAT STUFF! STILL, I THINK WE'LL START YOU OFF WITH A SIMPLE, HONEST **SMILE**.

COME ON!



OH, SWEET, MERCIFUL JESUS.

OKAY, FINE... I WAS STILL PROCESSING A LOT OF MY EMOTIONAL SHIT.



BUT SAM HELPED WITH THAT IN THE BEST WAYS SHE COULD.

AND YOU WATCH **CARTOONS** LIKE THIS EVERY DAY?

SHHH!
IT'S **BUSINESS RESEARCH!**

I'M JUST SAYING. THERE'S A LOT OF **BUTTSHOTS** IN YOUR RESEARCH.

SOON ENOUGH, I FELT **GENUINELY** BETTER. SAM GOT ME INTO HER WORLD OF **ONLINE MODELLING** AND **COSPLAY**, AND SHE WAS ALWAYS THERE TO ANSWER ANY OF MY QUESTIONS.

UM, SAM? I GOT CALLED A "THOT." WHAT'S A **THOT**?

IT STANDS FOR "I'M UNABLE TO FORM RELATIONSHIPS BECAUSE OF MY **UTTER LACK** OF CHARM OR ANY REDEEMABLE PERSONALITY, AND I NEED TO TRY AND MAKE THAT INTO **YOUR PROBLEM**."

CURIOUSLY, DUE TO MY INABILITY TO FAKE A SMILE TO SAVE MY LIFE, I WAS STUCK ON "COSPLAYING" **GRUMPY CHARACTERS**. AT LEAST, THAT'S WHAT SAM TOLD ME.

SHE LOVED HER WORK. SHE LIVED IT. ME? WELL, I FIGURED IT WASN'T THAT DIFFERENT FROM WHAT I WAS USED TO. PLUS, SAM ALWAYS TRIED TO KEEP THINGS FUN, AND IT PAID THE BILLS -- SO IT WAS **GOOD**. I WAS DOING FINE...FOR A WHILE.

...BUT THEN, DURING ONE OF OUR SHOOTS...I DON'T KNOW. I GUESS IT WAS THE **SOUND** OF THE **FUCKING CAMERA** THAT JUST BROKE SOME **EMOTIONAL DAM** IN ME. IN A SINGLE MOMENT, IT BROUGHT THIS FLOOD OF MEMORIES. THE GOOD ONES OF MATTHEW, AND...THE BAD ONES OF MY OLD JOB...

HARD TO SAY WHICH ONES HURT **MORE**.



SAM DID HER BEST TO SNAP ME
OUT OF IT. THAT NIGHT, SHE
TOOK ME OUT TO HER
FAVORITE CLUB...



I DRANK.



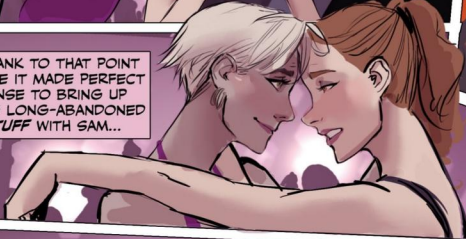
I DANCED.



I DRANK
MORE.



TOO
MUCH!



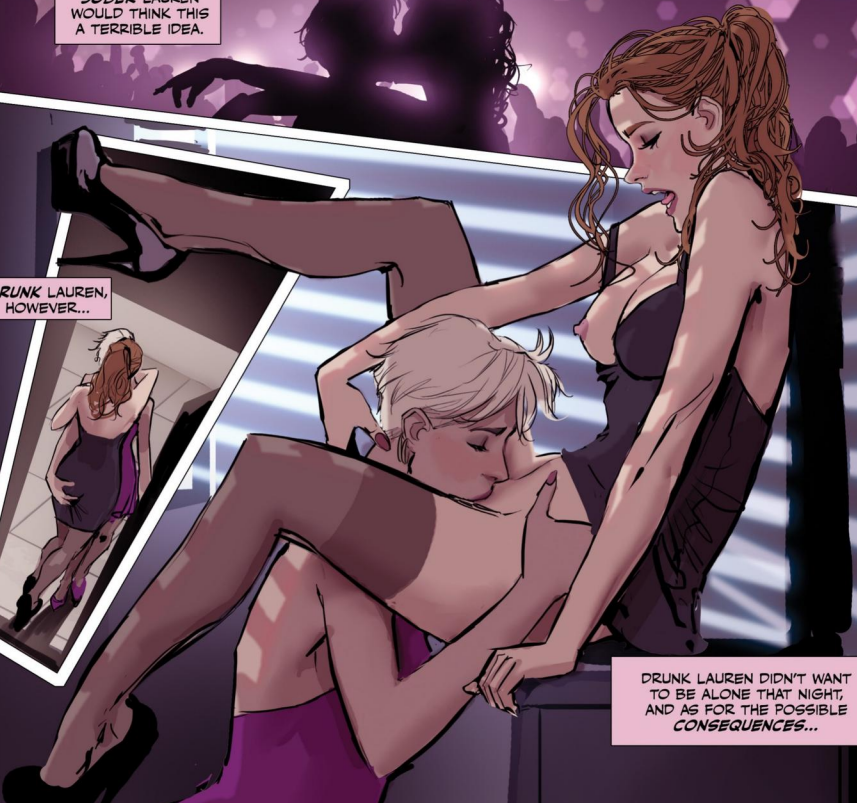
I DRANK TO THAT POINT
WHERE IT MADE PERFECT
SENSE TO BRING UP
SOME LONG-ABANDONED
STUFF WITH SAM...



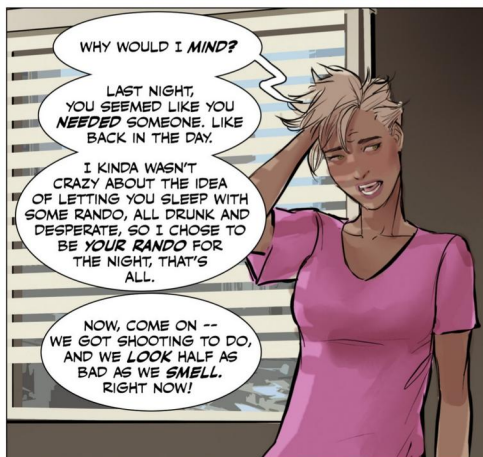
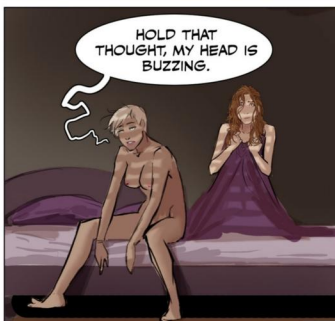
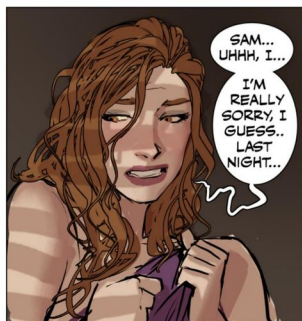
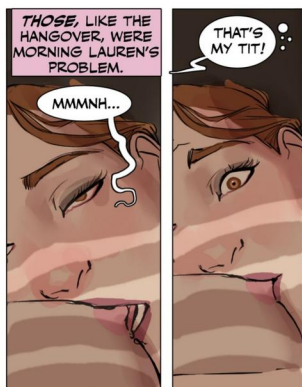
SOBER LAUREN
WOULD THINK THIS
A TERRIBLE IDEA.



DRUNK LAUREN,
HOWEVER...



DRUNK LAUREN DIDN'T WANT
TO BE ALONE THAT NIGHT,
AND AS FOR THE POSSIBLE
CONSEQUENCES...



FROM THEN ON, I MADE IT MY BUSINESS TO GET BACK UP ON MY OWN TWO FEET, AND NEVER MAKE SAM DEAL WITH MY BULLSHIT AGAIN.

AND THIS IS YOUR EARNINGS WITH YOU MAKING THE SAME **BLOODY FACE** ALL THE TIME!

NOW IMAGINE IF YOU STOPPED BEING SUCH A **ZOOLANDER** AND ACTUALLY SMILED IN SOME OF YOUR PICS!

EVER SINCE OUR NIGHT TOGETHER, I COULD FEEL THIS...**MOOD** AROUND HER.

SHE SEEMED MORE INTENSELY PREOCCUPIED WITH **ENTERTAINING ME**. GETTING ME TO GO OUT, MEET NEW PEOPLE...

BUT FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER, I NOTICED IT. AFTER ALL, I WAS THE **QUEEN** OF FAKE SMILES AND HER SMILES WERE NOTHING BUT A STRETCHED GRIMACE OVER A WORRIED FACE.

WORRIED! ABOUT ME!

IN THE END, IT WAS THE KICK IN THE ASS I NEEDED TO TRY AND GO OUT THERE ON MY OWN AND **RECLAIM MY LIFE**.

FUCKING ANYTHING GOES WRONG, YOU CALL ME! OKAY?

I WILL.

I MEAN IT. YOU GET EVEN A **BIT** SAD, YOU KNOW WHERE I AM!

"YOU GET EVEN A **BIT** SAD..." I WONDERED ABOUT THOSE WORDS. TRUTH WAS, EVER SINCE OUR NIGHT IN THE CLUB, SHE'D BEEN WALKING ON EGGSHELLS AROUND ME...

DID I DO SOMETHING? SAY SOMETHING TO HER THAT...**SCARED** HER? I GUESS I WAS TOO DRUNK TO REMEMBER.

IN THE END, I DISMISSED THE THOUGHT. I DIDN'T FEEL LIKE DEALING WITH THE PAST ANYMORE.

NOT WHEN THE **PRESENT** FINALLY STARTED LOOKING OKAY. I RENTED A SMALL APARTMENT. IT WASN'T TOO FAR AWAY FROM SAM, AND IT EVEN FELT KINDA COZY.

AND HONESTLY, FOR THE FIRST FEW WEEKS, I FELT **FINE**. KEPT MYSELF BUSY.

BUT OVER TIME, THE **SOLITUDE** STARTED DOING ITS THING AGAIN. WITH SOLITUDE CAME SILENCE, AND **SILENCE** HAS ITS WAYS OF FILLING THE ROOM WITH VOICES. OLD VOICES, OLD REGRETS...

I DID WHAT I COULD TO **HIDE** FROM IT. TO DROWN IT OUT. BUT IT WAS ALWAYS THERE, **WAITING**...

WAITING FOR THE NIGHT. YEAH...NIGHTS WERE **BAD**. AT NIGHT, I'D OFTEN FIND MYSELF SITTING ON THE CORNER OF MY BED, BATTLING THE **BAD MEMORIES** OF MY MISTAKES.

AND WHEN I COULD NO LONGER FIGHT THE **BAD MEMORIES**, IT WAS THE **GOOD ONES** THAT CAME TO FINISH THE JOB. THE **GOOD MEMORIES** OF THE SUNSET THAT WAS, AND THE **LOST SUNSETS** THAT COULD HAVE BEEN...AND FOR A MOMENT, I WAS ONCE AGAIN SURE THAT MY **BROKEN HEART** WOULD ONE DAY **KILL ME**.

ONE NIGHT, I **ESCAPE** IT ALL -- I TAKE SAM'S ADVICE. I GO TO A CLUB, GET DRUNK, AND HOOK UP WITH **SOME GUY**.

I LIKED HIS **GLASSES**...REMINDED ME OF MATTHEW...

I DON'T EVEN REMEMBER HIS **NAME**. HE OFFERED ME HIS NUMBER... HE WAS AWKWARD ABOUT IT. EVEN KINDA **SWEET**.

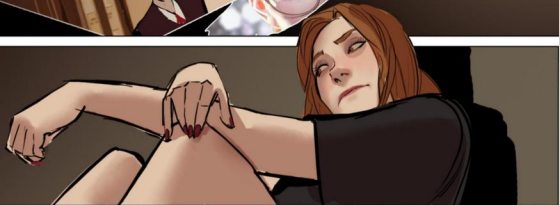
JUST THINK OF THIS AS A **FUN NIGHT**.

I REMEMBER FEELING **BETTER** THAT WEEK.



IT...DIDN'T *LAST*.

I CONSIDERED CALLING *SAM* FOR A NIGHT OUT, BUT... I DIDN'T WANT HER TO HEAR MY SHAKING VOICE TRYING TO EXPLAIN WHY SUDDENLY I NEEDED SOMETHING *HARDER*. I JUST... DIDN'T WANT HER TO WORRY.



SO I WENT TO A CLUB. ALONE, AGAIN. THIS, HOWEVER WAS A *SPECIAL CLUB*.

SAM HAD TOLD ME ABOUT THE PLACE, AS SHE UNPACKED SOME CUSTOM-MADE *LATEX OUTFIT* FOR A PHOTOSHOOT. "THERE, YOU CAN HOOK UP AND RENT A *SPECIAL DUNGEON ROOM*, IN WHICH A NAUGHTY GIRL LIKE YOU CAN GET PUNISHED."

SHE *LAUGHED* WHEN SHE SAID IT.

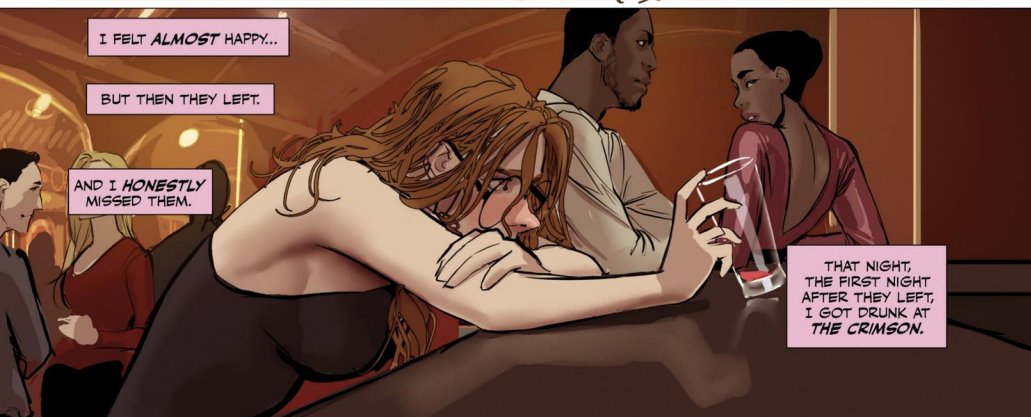
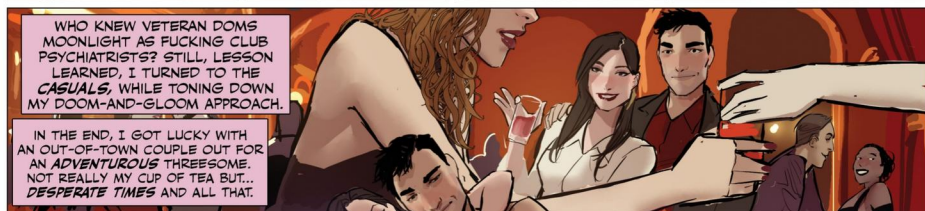
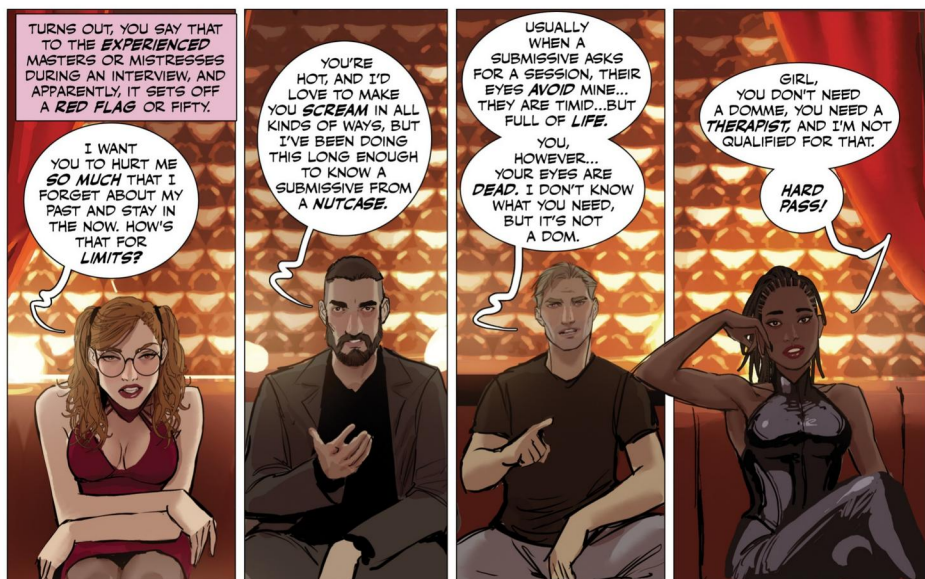


THAT NIGHT, HOWEVER, THERE WAS NOTHING FUNNY ABOUT THE IDEA. I FOUND THE ADDRESS ONLINE, AND I WENT THERE TO GET *PUNISHED*.

SEE, THE WAY I SAW IT, MY IDEA MADE PERFECT SENSE.

I NEEDED SOMEONE TO *HURT ME* BEFORE I *HURT MYSELF*.





IN FACT, I DRANK SO MUCH
THAT **THE BARTENDER**
HAD TO CUT ME OFF.
COINCIDENTALLY, THAT WAS
WHEN I NOTICED THAT HER
DEMON GIRL OUTFIT HAD
A VERY WELL-DONE TAIL.



IN FACT, ITS MOVEMENTS
WERE SO **LIFELIKE** THAT
EVEN IN MY BUZZED STATE, IT
TRIGGERED A KIND OF
PROFESSIONAL CURIOSITY...



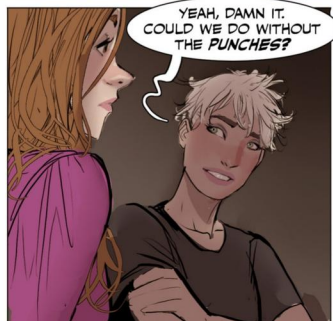
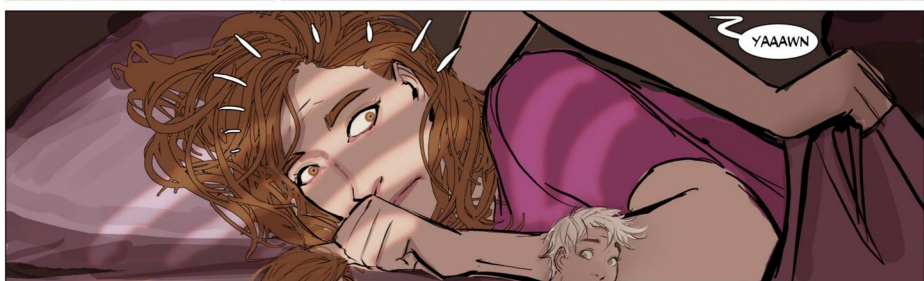
HEY! 'SCUSE
ME! WHERE
DID YOU GET
THI--

WAH!!!

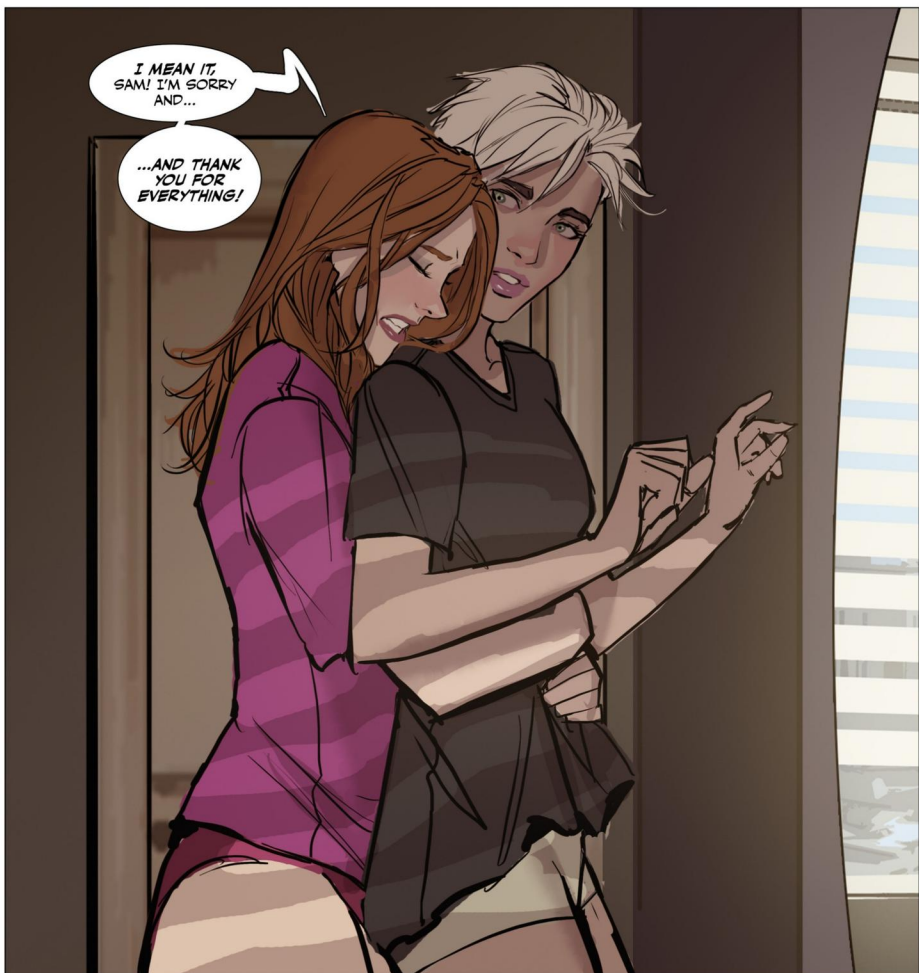
THAT WAS THE
NIGHT I MET **HER**
FOR THE VERY
FIRST TIME. THE
BRINGER OF MY
DOOM...

**MERRYL
FUCKING
ALARIS!**



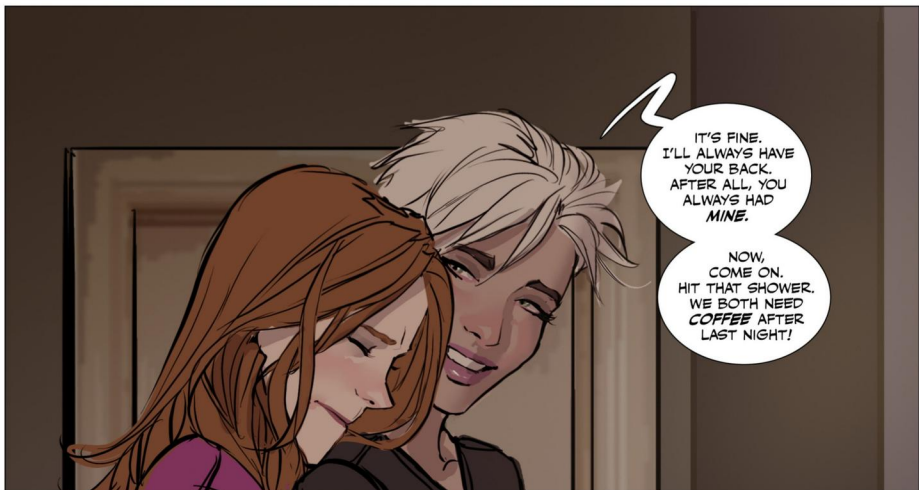






I MEAN IT,
SAM! I'M SORRY
AND...

...AND THANK
YOU FOR
EVERYTHING!



IT'S FINE.
I'LL ALWAYS HAVE
YOUR BACK.
AFTER ALL, YOU
ALWAYS HAD
MINE.

NOW,
COME ON.
HIT THAT SHOWER.
WE BOTH NEED
COFFEE AFTER
LAST NIGHT!

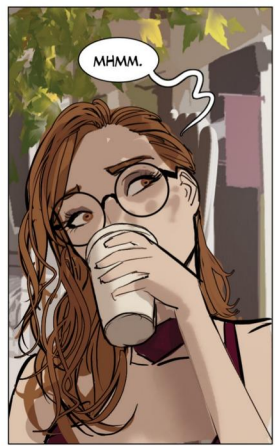


FEELING
BETTER NOW?



YEAH...
KINDA **OVERDRESSED**
FOR THE POST-BLACKOUT
HANGOVER...BUT OTHER
THAN THAT I'M
FINE.

HEY, IT
WAS THIS OR
THE **COSPLAY**
STUFF.



MMMM.



SOOO...



I DON'T KNOW
WHAT HAPPENED,
OKAY???



ALRIGHT...
IT'S JUST,
YOU WERE OUT
THERE YELLING ABOUT
DEMONS AND STUFF.
I WAS **WORRIED**.



I KNOW,
BUT I JUST DON'T
REMEMBER ANY OF
IT CLEARLY!

I THINK...
THE BARTENDER
WAS WEARING
SOME KIND OF
A **DEVILGIRL**
OUTFIT.



SHE WAS
DRESSED
PRETTY NORMAL
WHEN I CAME.



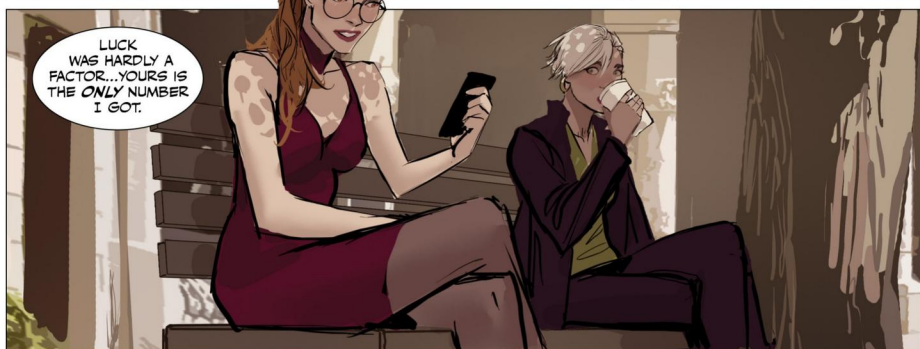
WELL, EITHER
SHE CHANGED HER
CLOTHES, OR I WAS **THAT**
FUCKING DRUNK!



MY MONEY'S
ON **DRUNK**.

STILL,
AT LEAST YOU
WERE SOBER ENOUGH
TO TELL THE BARTENDER
TO CALL ME.

EITHER THAT,
OR SHE JUST GOT
REAL **LUCKY** PICKING
A RANDOM NUMBER
FROM YOUR
PHONE.



LUCK
WAS HARDLY A
FACTOR...YOURS IS
THE **ONLY** NUMBER
I GOT.

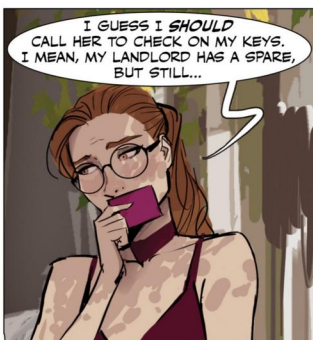


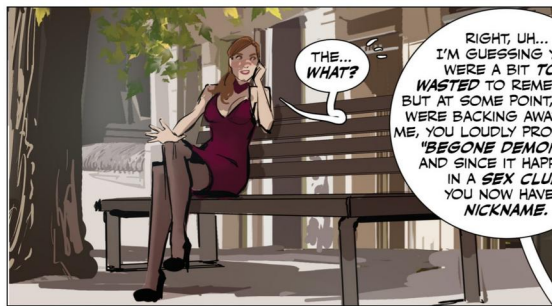
AWWWWWW.

I'M GENUINELY
NOT SURE IF THAT'S
ADORABLE OR KINDA
SAD.

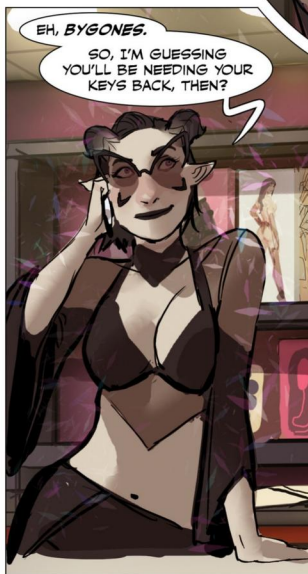
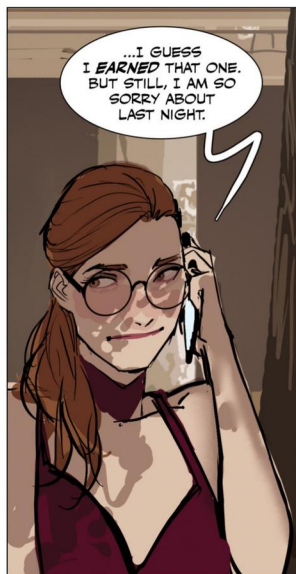


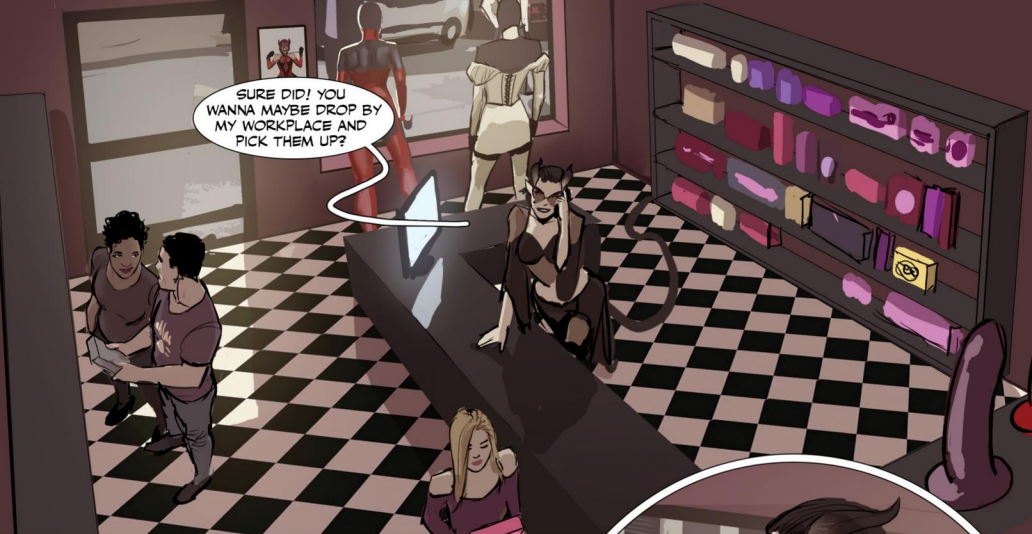
OH, SPEAKING
OF PHONE NUMBERS,
HERE IS THE
BARTENDER'S!

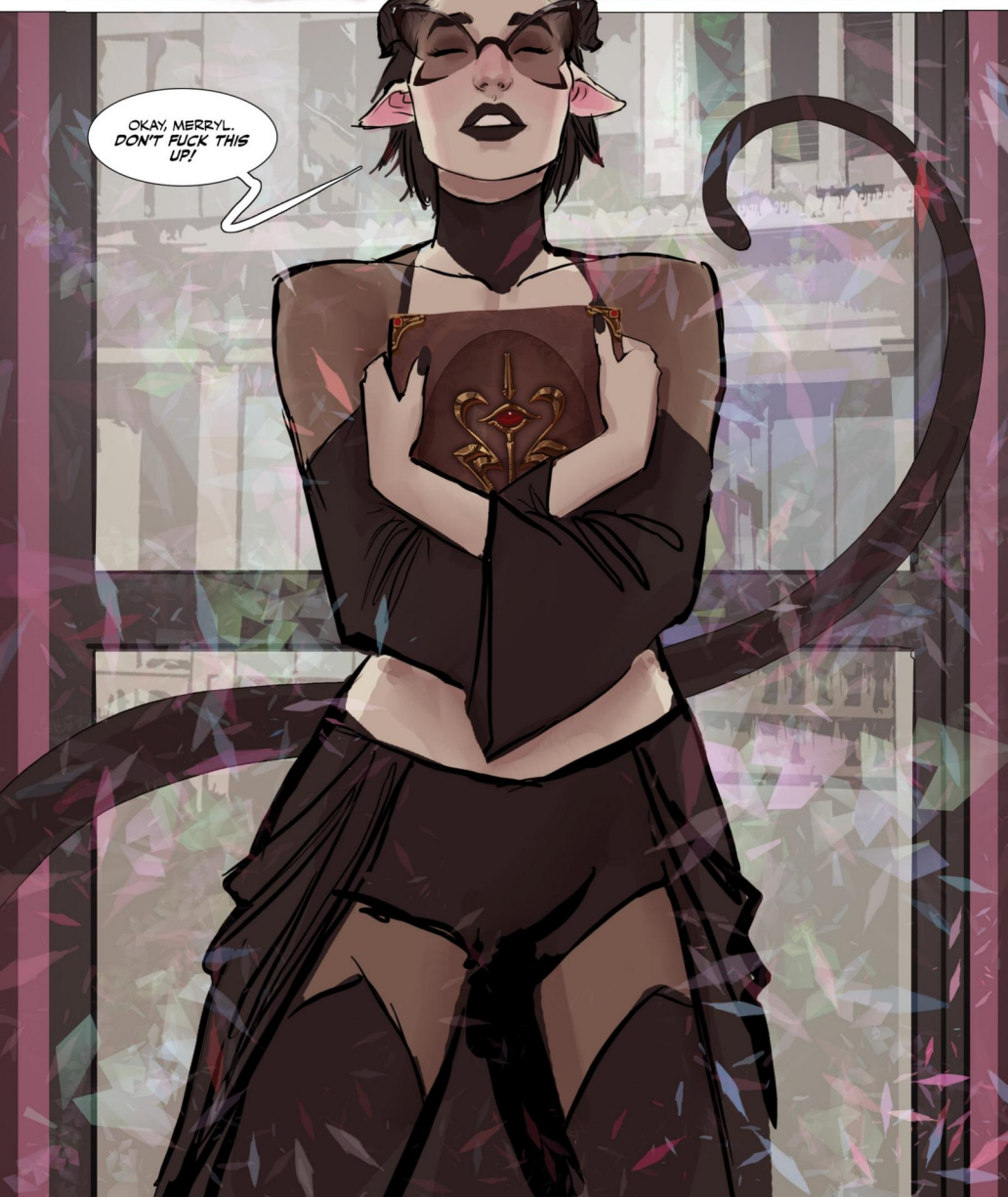
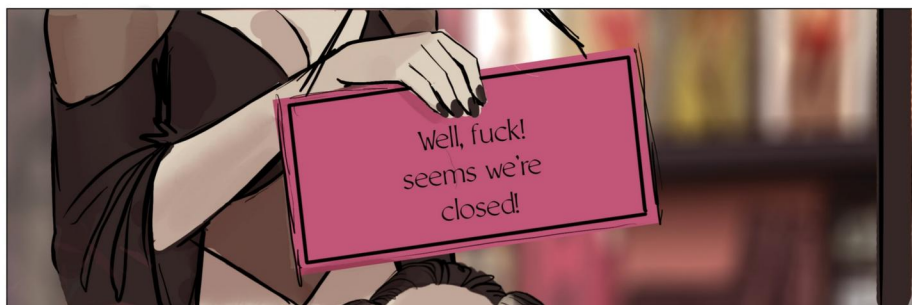




RIGHT, UH...
I'M GUESSIN' YOU
WERE A BIT TOO
WASTED TO REMEMBER,
BUT AT SOME POINT, AS YOU
WERE BACKING AWAY FROM
ME, YOU LOUDLY PROCLAIMED:
"BEGONE DEMON!" --
AND SINCE IT HAPPENED
IN A SEX CLUB,
YOU NOW HAVE A
NICKNAME.



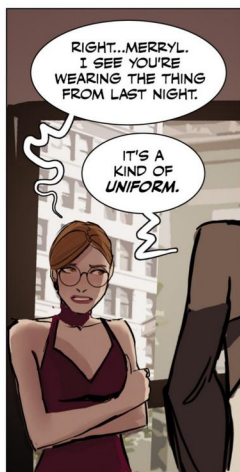
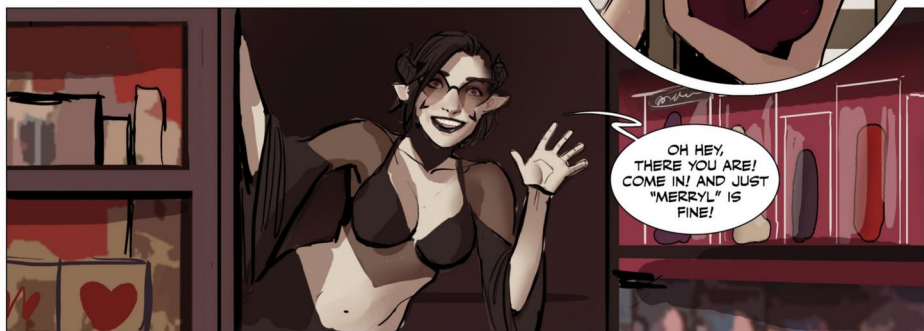


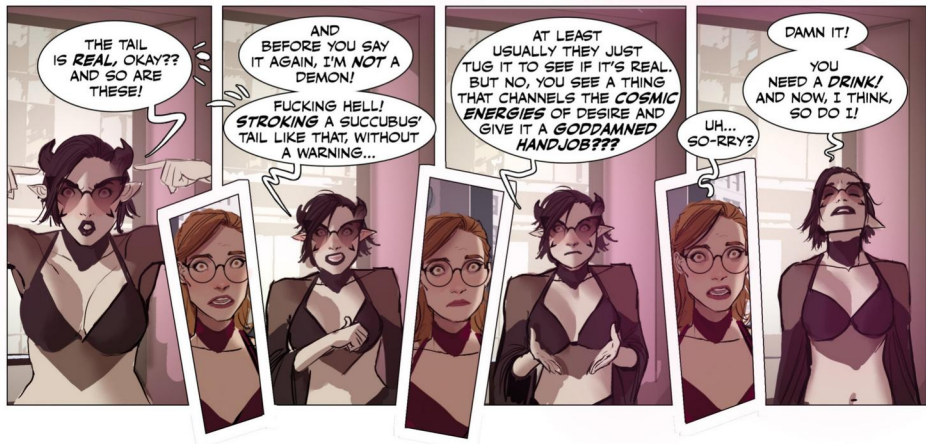
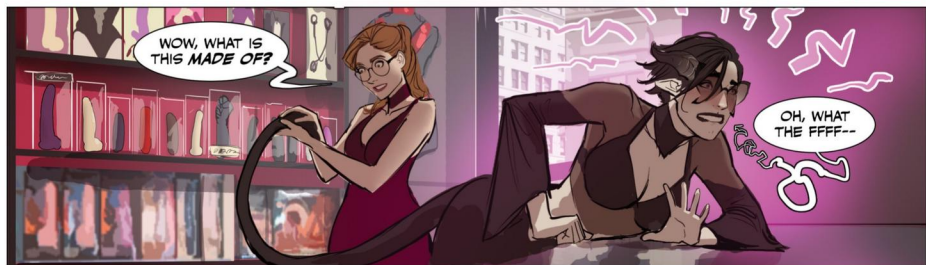


Chapter 4

The Fine print

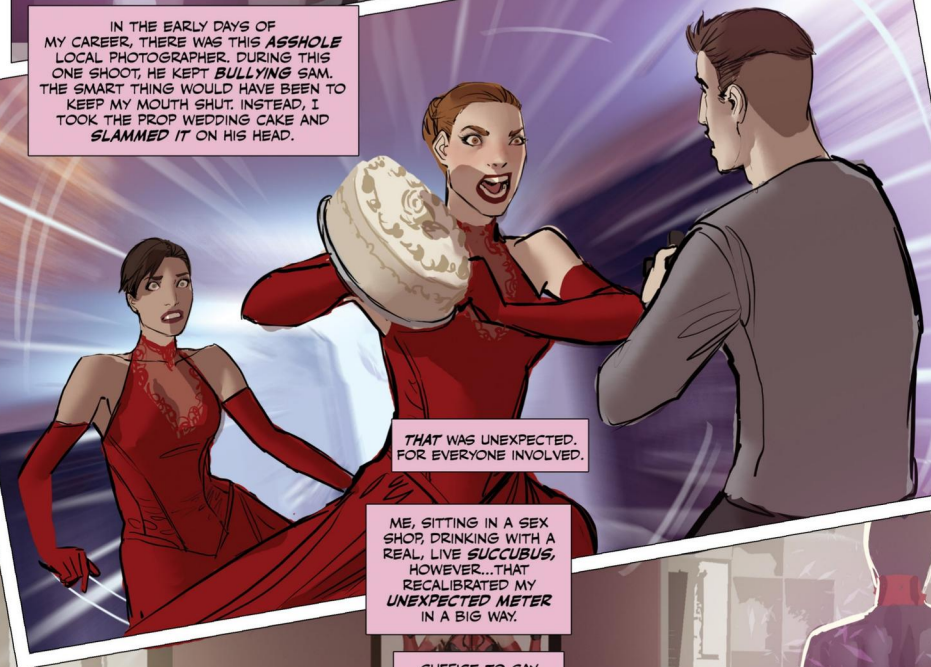








SURE,
THERE'D BEEN
SURPRISES IN
MY LIFE BEFORE.
THINGS THAT JUST
FELT BEYOND ALL
EXPECTATION.



IN THE EARLY DAYS OF
MY CAREER, THERE WAS THIS **ASSHOLE**
LOCAL PHOTOGRAPHER. DURING THIS
ONE SHOOT, HE KEPT **BULLYING** SAM.
THE SMART THING WOULD HAVE BEEN TO
KEEP MY MOUTH SHUT. INSTEAD, I
TOOK THE PROP WEDDING CAKE AND
SLAMMED IT ON HIS HEAD.

THAT WAS UNEXPECTED.
FOR EVERYONE INVOLVED.

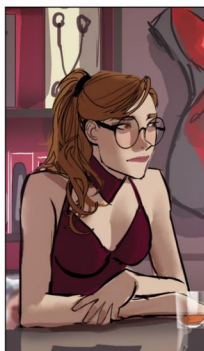
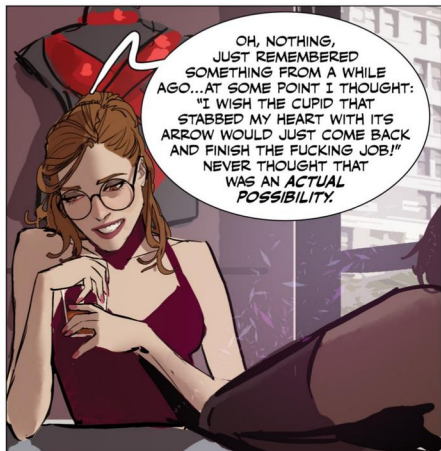
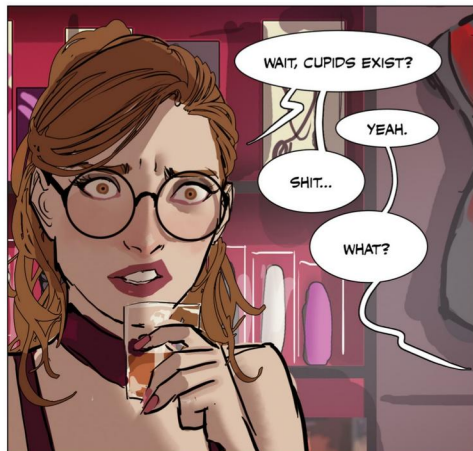
ME, SITTING IN A SEX
SHOP, DRINKING WITH A
REAL, LIVE **SUCCUBUS**,
HOWEVER...THAT
RECALIBRATED MY
UNEXPECTED METER
IN A BIG WAY.

SUFFICE TO SAY,
ALCOHOL **HELPED.**



SO, NOT
A DEMON?







SEE...I WORK PLACES THAT ARE LIKELY TO HAVE PEOPLE WITH A **STRONG LEANING** TOWARD THE GREAT ENERGIES OF DESIRE. LIKE... IMAGINE THERE ARE **CUPS OF EMOTIONAL ENERGIES** WITHIN YOU, AND FOR SOME REASON OR ANOTHER...



...SOME OF YOU HAVE AN **OVERFLOW** OF ONE OF THESE ENERGIES.



IT'S MY JOB TO FIND THOSE WITH AN **OVERFLOW** OF DESIRE AND OFFER THEM THE **DEAL OF A LIFETIME**.

OH.

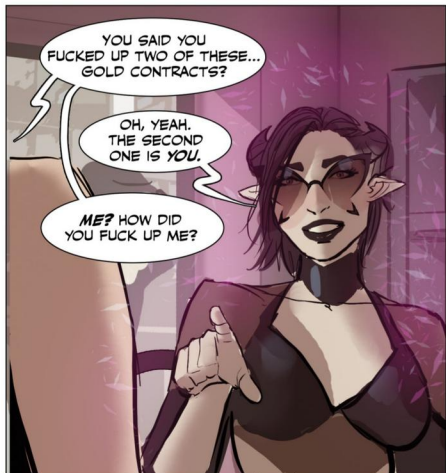


BUT LIKE I SAID... I **SUCK** AT MY JOB. TWICE IN MY LIFE, I'VE ENCOUNTERED PEOPLE WITH A POTENTIAL SO VAST THAT THEY MERITED A **GOLDEN CONTRACT**, AND I FUCKED IT UP BOTH TIMES! IT TURNS OUT THAT THE **FIRST ONE** WAS SO COMPLICATED THAT NOT EVEN OUR BEST FIELD AGENT COULD FIGURE HER OUT...WHICH LEFT HIM **STRANDED** ON EARTH, AND ME ON THE **HIGH CASTES** SHITLIST.



AND THE **SECOND ONE**?

HUH?



YOU SAID YOU FUCKED UP TWO OF THESE... **GOLD CONTRACTS**?

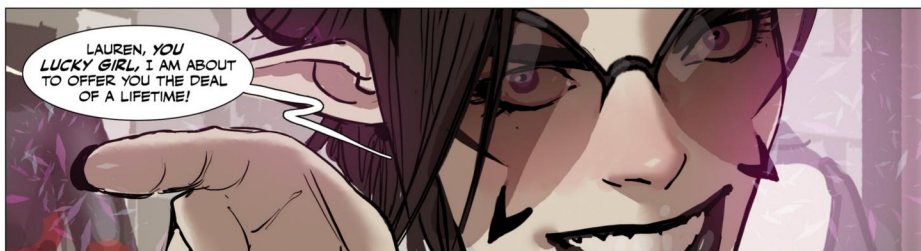
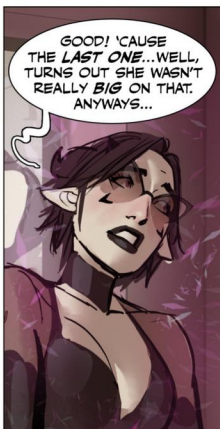
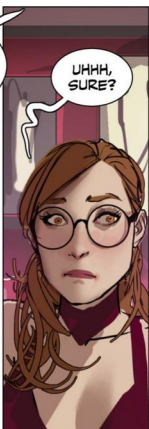
OH, YEAH. THE **SECOND ONE** IS YOU.

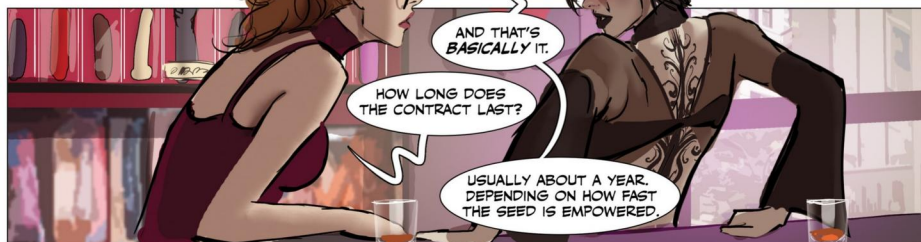
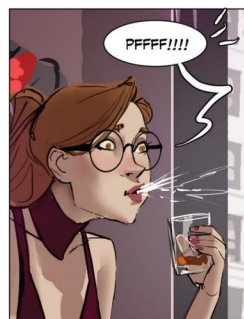
ME? HOW DID YOU FUCK UP ME?



WELL, I WAS SUPPOSED TO **EASE** YOU IN, GET YOU NICE AND RELAXED BEFORE I **REVEALED** MYSELF. THAT'S WHY I DRAGGED MY TAIL ON THE GROUND PRETENDING IT WAS A **BLOODY** COSTUME. DIDN'T WANT YOU TO **FREAK OUT** LIKE LAST NIGHT.

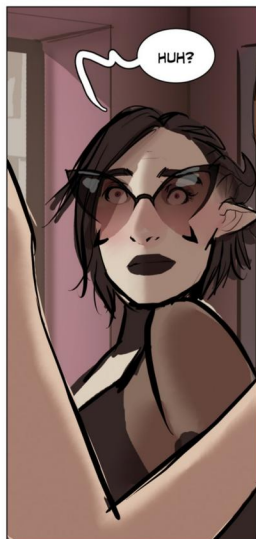
THEN I WAS SUPPOSED TO GIVE YOU THE WHOLE CAR SALESMAN **SPILL**, BUT INSTEAD, YOU END UP RUBBING MY TAIL, AND MY UNTRAINED ASS ALMOST STARTS **CONVULSING** ON THE FLOOR. SO I REVEAL MYSELF IN AN **UNDIGNIFIED MANNER**, AND NOW HERE I AM, DRINKING MY EMBARRASSMENT AWAY.







AND
WHAT'S THE
FINE PRINT?



HUH?

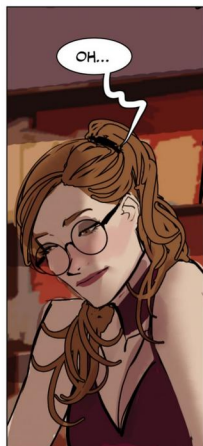


THERE'S ALWAYS A
CATCH TO THINGS THAT
SOUND TOO GOOD
TO BE TRUE.

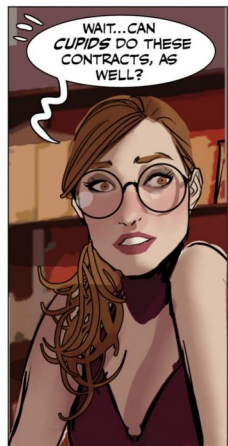
JUST SOMETHING
I LEARNED THE
HARD WAY...



NOT MUCH OF
A CATCH. UH...THIS WHOLE
THING IS A MATTER OF CHOICE,
REALLY. THERE IS ONLY ONE LASTING
CONSEQUENCE. AFTER OUR TIME
WITH YOU, YOUR ABILITY TO **FEEL CARNAL
PLEASURE** WILL HAVE PERMANENTLY --
AND QUITE DRASTICALLY -- INCREASED.
BUT YOUR ABILITY TO **FEEL LOVE**,
WELL...THAT'LL BE PRETTY
MUCH GONE.



OH...



WAIT...CAN
CUPIDS DO THESE
CONTRACTS, AS
WELL?



YEAH,
BUT...UM...
HOW DO I PUT
THIS? YOU
CAN SEE
ME, **HORNS
AND ALL**,
RIGHT?

YES?



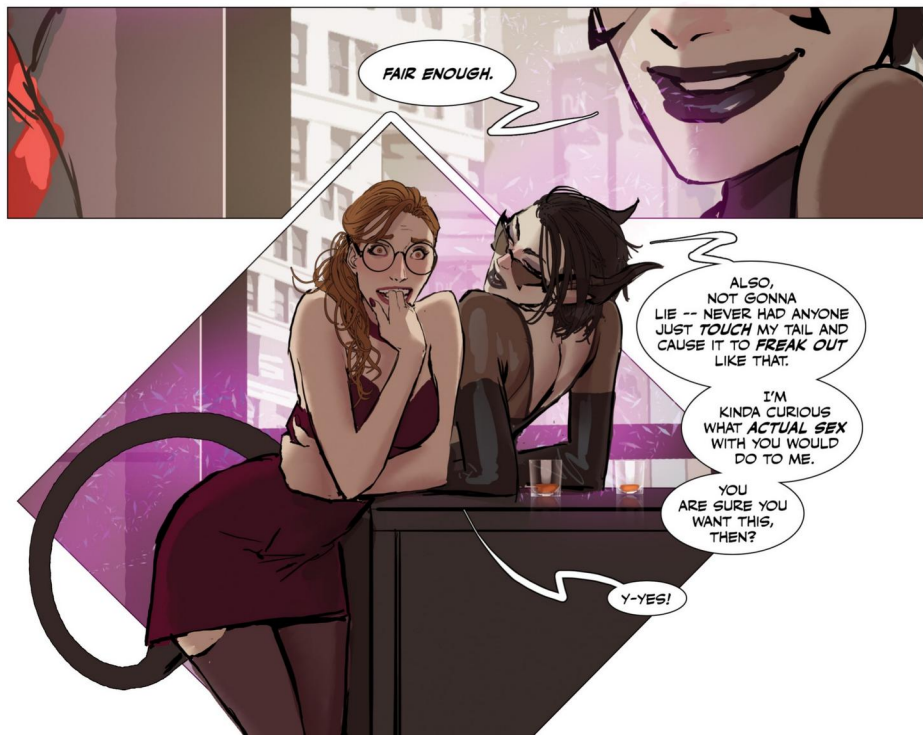
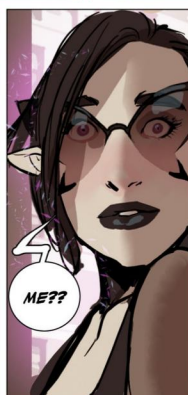
THIS MEANS THAT, FOR
WHATEVER REASON, THE
DOMINANT ENERGY IN YOUR
LIFE IS DESIRE.

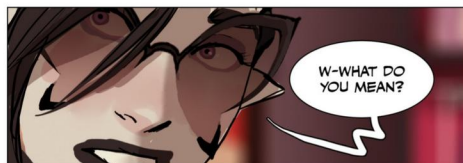
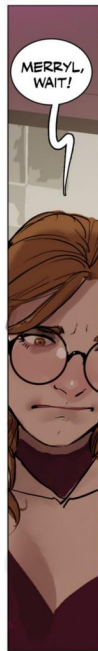
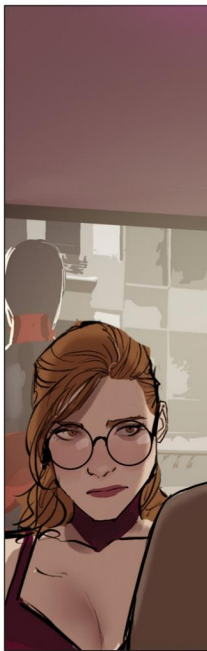
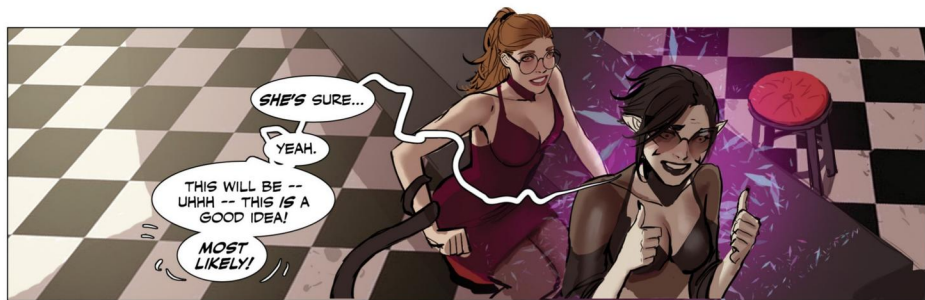
IF THE DOMINANT
ENERGY IN YOUR LIFE
WAS LOVE, **TRUST ME**, A CUPID
WOULD HAVE FOUND YOU!
THEY ARE OBNOXIOUSLY
PERSISTENT.

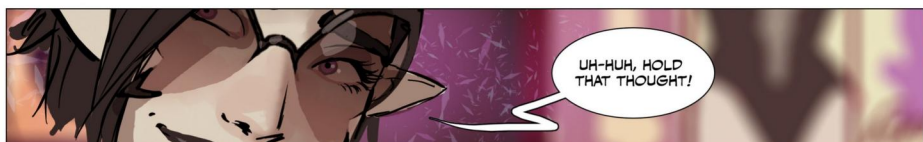


OH...
SO I GUESS I'M NO
GOOD FOR LOVE, THEN...

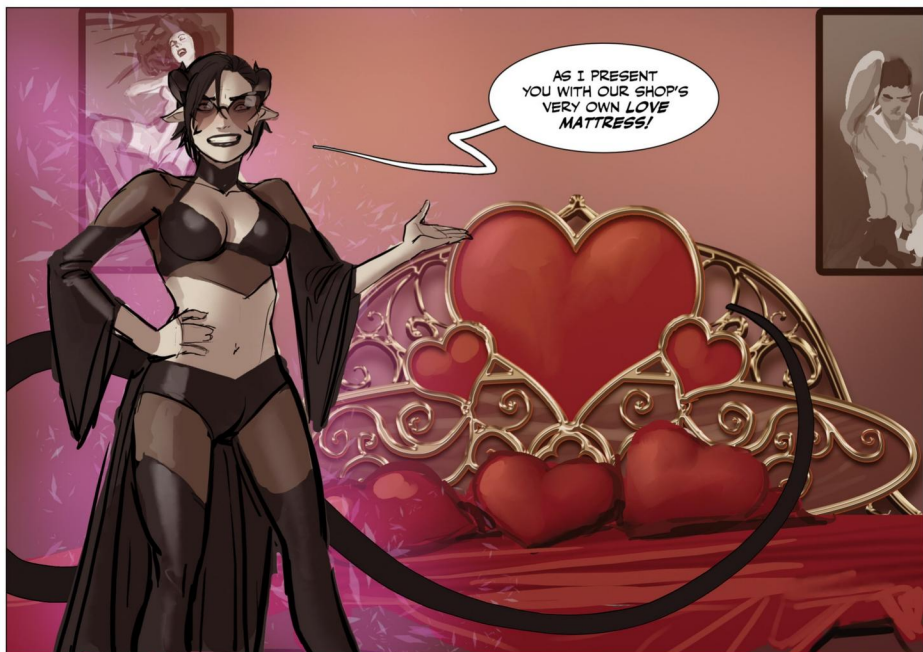
FIGURES.



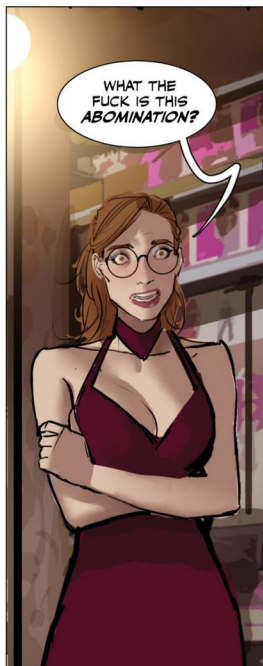




UH-HUH, HOLD
THAT THOUGHT!



AS I PRESENT
YOU WITH OUR SHOP'S
VERY OWN **LOVE
MATTRESS!**



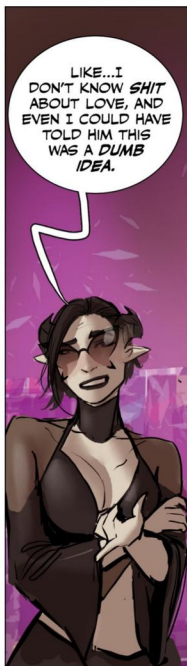
WHAT THE
FUCK IS THIS
ABOMINATION?



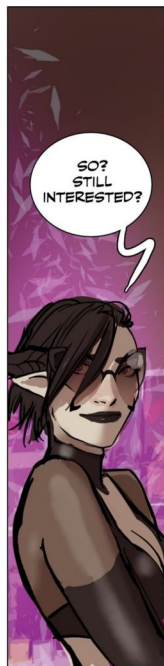
OWNER'S FAILED
ATTEMPT AT **STORE
PROMOTION**...HE HAD THIS
IDEA THAT COUPLES WOULD
TAKE PHOTOS
ON THE BED.

IN A SEX
SHOP.

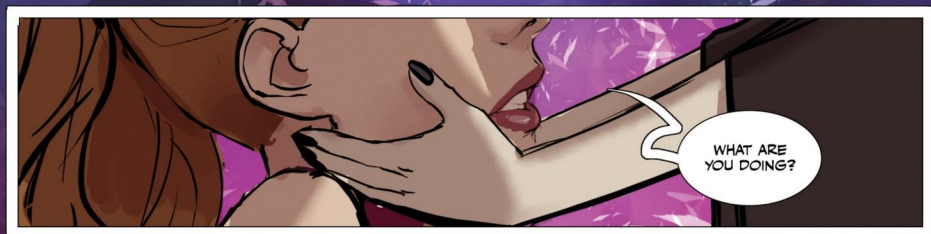
ON
**VALENTINE'S
DAY.**

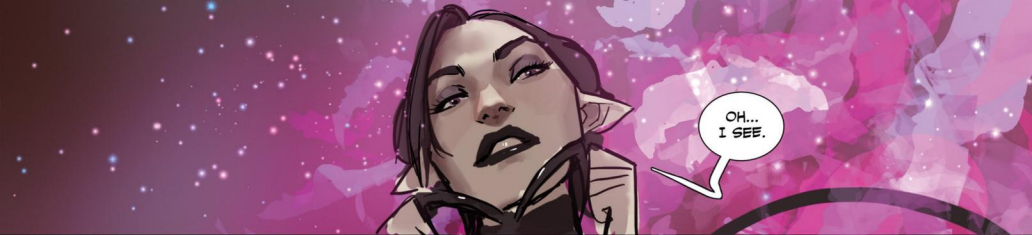


LIKE...I
DON'T KNOW **SHIT**
ABOUT LOVE, AND
EVEN I COULD HAVE
TOLD HIM THIS
WAS A **DUMB
IDEA.**



SO?
STILL
INTERESTED?





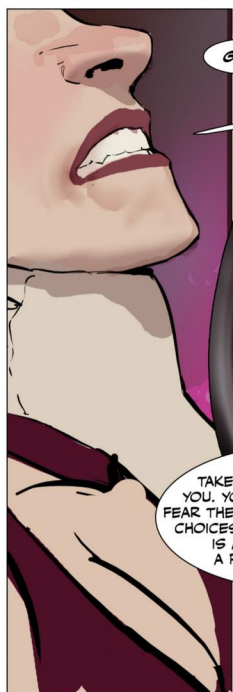
OH...
I SEE.



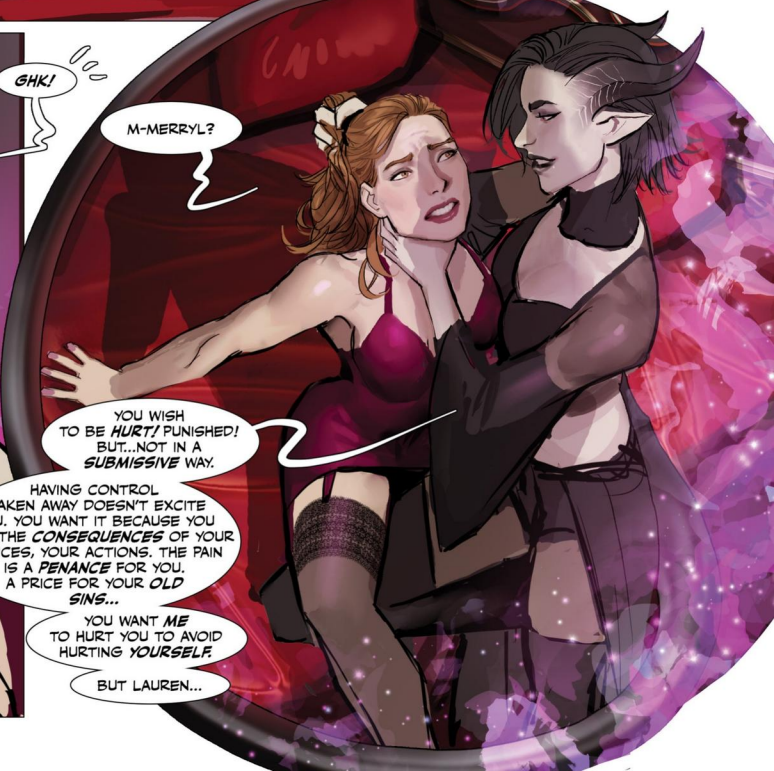
YOU ARE
A BIT OF A MESS,
AREN'T YOU,
LAUREN?



I --
WHAT?



GHK!



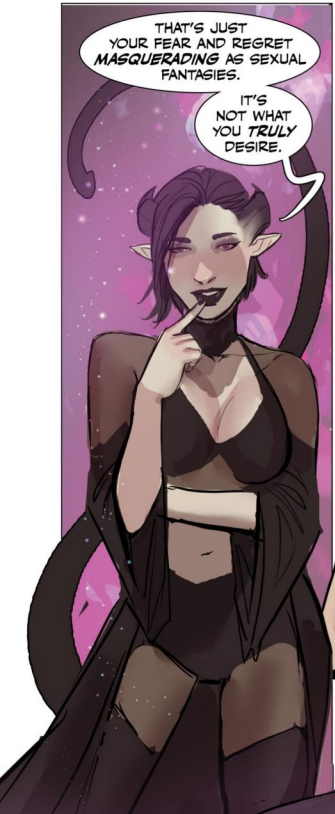
M-MERRY?

YOU WISH
TO BE HURT! PUNISHED!
BUT...NOT IN A
SUBMISSIVE WAY.

HAVING CONTROL
TAKEN AWAY DOESN'T EXCITE
YOU. YOU WANT IT BECAUSE YOU
FEAR THE *CONSEQUENCES* OF YOUR
CHOICES, YOUR ACTIONS. THE PAIN
IS A *PENANCE* FOR YOU.
A PRICE FOR YOUR OLD
SINS...

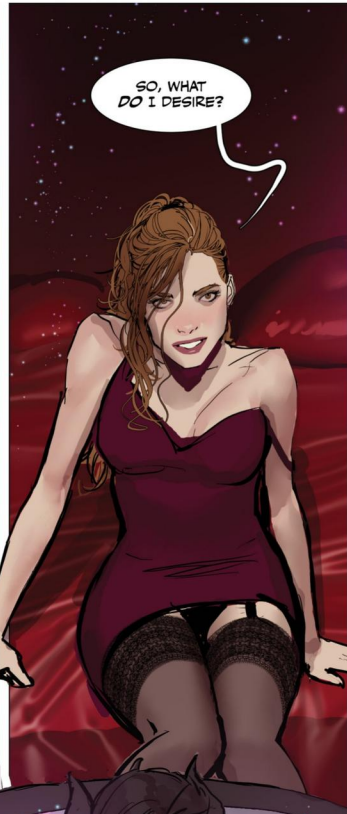
YOU WANT *ME*
TO HURT YOU TO AVOID
HURTING *YOURSELF*.

BUT LAUREN...

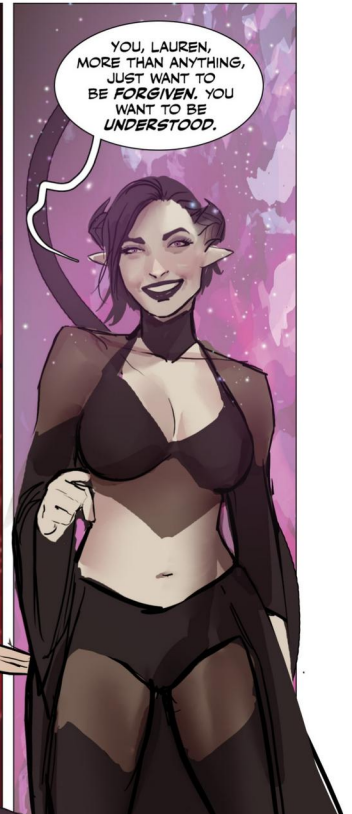


THAT'S JUST
YOUR FEAR AND REGRET
**MASQUERADING AS SEXUAL
FANTASIES.**

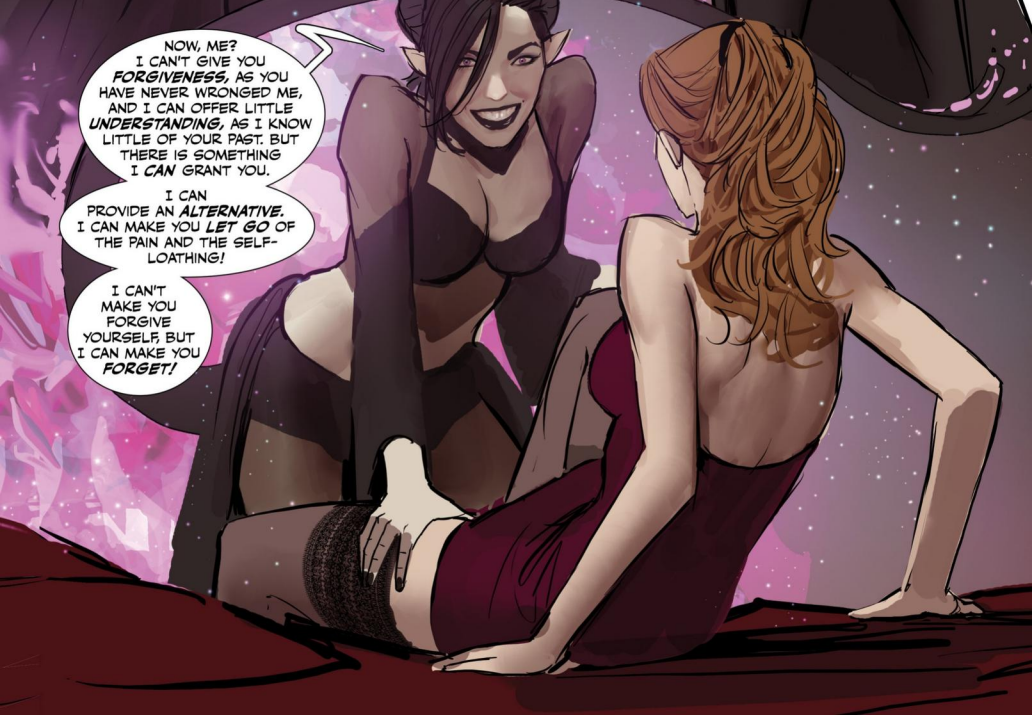
IT'S
NOT WHAT
YOU **TRULY**
DESIRE.



SO, WHAT
DO I DESIRE?



YOU, LAUREN,
MORE THAN ANYTHING,
JUST WANT TO
BE **FORGIVEN**. YOU
WANT TO BE
UNDERSTOOD.



NOW, ME?
I CAN'T GIVE YOU
FORGIVENESS, AS YOU
HAVE NEVER WRONGED ME,
AND I CAN OFFER LITTLE
UNDERSTANDING, AS I KNOW
LITTLE OF YOUR PAST. BUT
THERE IS SOMETHING
I CAN GRANT YOU.

I CAN
PROVIDE AN **ALTERNATIVE**.
I CAN MAKE YOU **LET GO** OF
THE PAIN AND THE SELF-
LOATHING!

I CAN'T
MAKE YOU
FORGIVE
YOURSELF, BUT
I CAN MAKE YOU
FORGET!



OF COURSE
I SAID YES.

SHE PROMISED A LOT, I
THOUGHT, AS WE GOT INTO IT.
I WOULD HAVE SETTLED FOR
A FRACTION.

AND AT FIRST, IT FEELS LIKE
A FRACTION IS EXACTLY WHAT
I WAS GONNA GET. IT FEELS
ALMOST DISAPPOINTINGLY
NORMAL, AND A PART
OF ME CONSIDERS
DISMISSING THE WHOLE
THING.

BUT THEN A NEW
SENSATION STRIKES,
AS HER *TAIL* BEGINS TO
COIL AROUND ME,
IMPOSSIBLY *FLEXIBLE*
AND RELENTLESSLY
STRONG.

ALL OF A SUDDEN
I FEEL THIS *CONNECTION*...
A SPARK OF HER *DIVINITY*
RADIATING THROUGH ME.

IN THAT MOMENT, I'M
CONNECTED TO SOMETHING
PRIMORDIAL, AND THE IDEA OF
AN ALMOST-COSMIC ENERGY
OF DESIRE MAKES *PERFECT*
SENSE TO ME.

IT IS WARM, JOYOUS...
LIFE-AFFIRMING POWER
THAT PROMISES
PLEASURES *UNIMAGINABLE*.

IT IS *LIFE ITSELF*, ASKING
YOU NOT TO GIVE UP!
AND FOR THE FIRST TIME
IN A LONG TIME, I FEEL
LIKE *LISTENING* TO IT.



I FEEL THE
WORLD AROUND ME
FADE, AND I AM PULLED
INTO A DIFFERENT
REALM...

MY SENSATIONS
INCREASE TENFOLD.

MERRYL?

PLEASE, LAUREN!
WHATEVER YOU
DO, KEEP LOOKING
AWAY.



AND THEN...
WELL, SHE DID SAY
THINGS WERE
ABOUT TO
GET WEIRD...

WAIT!
S-SOMETHING
IS WRONG!

FUCK!
NONONONONO!

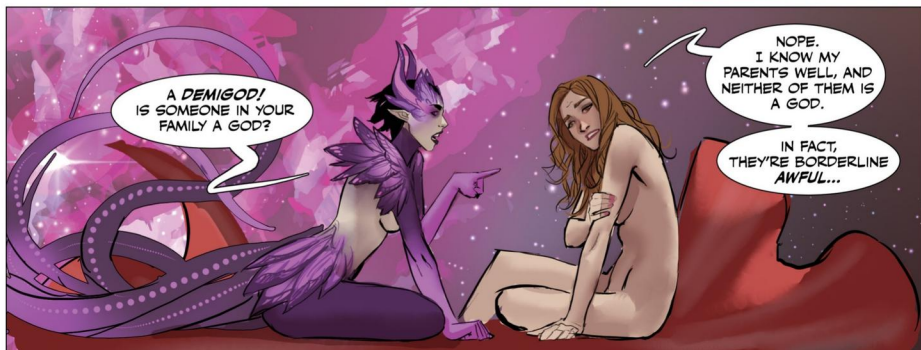
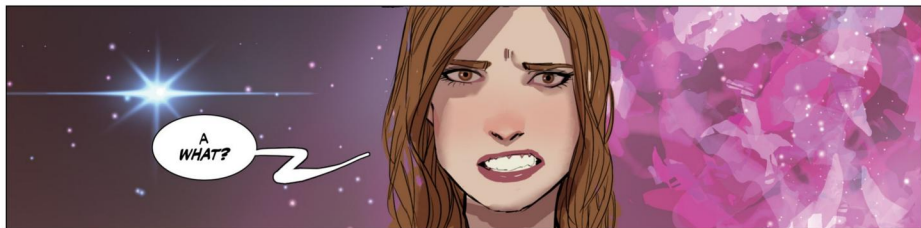
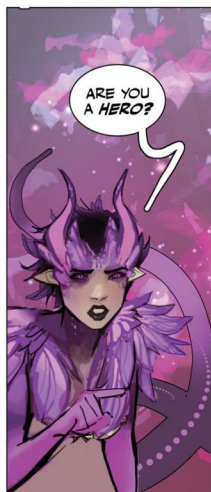
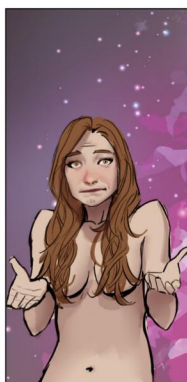
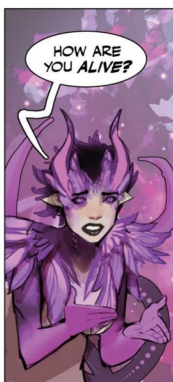
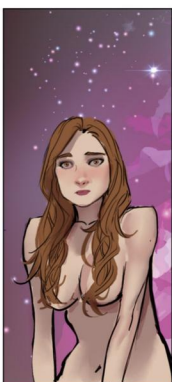
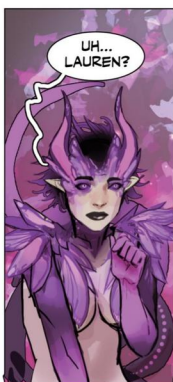
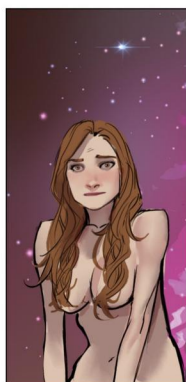
LAUREN!
LOOK AWAY!
IF YOU VALUE YOUR
LIFE, DON'T LOOK
AT ME!!!

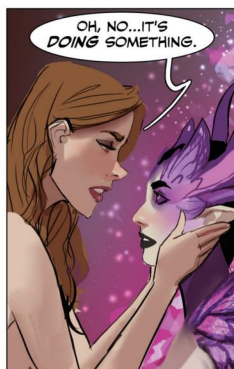
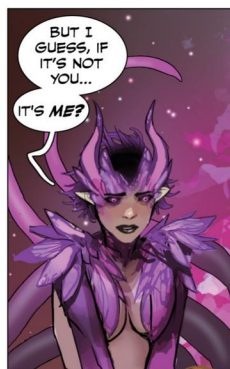
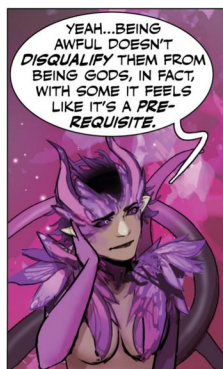
NNNN--AAAAA!!!!

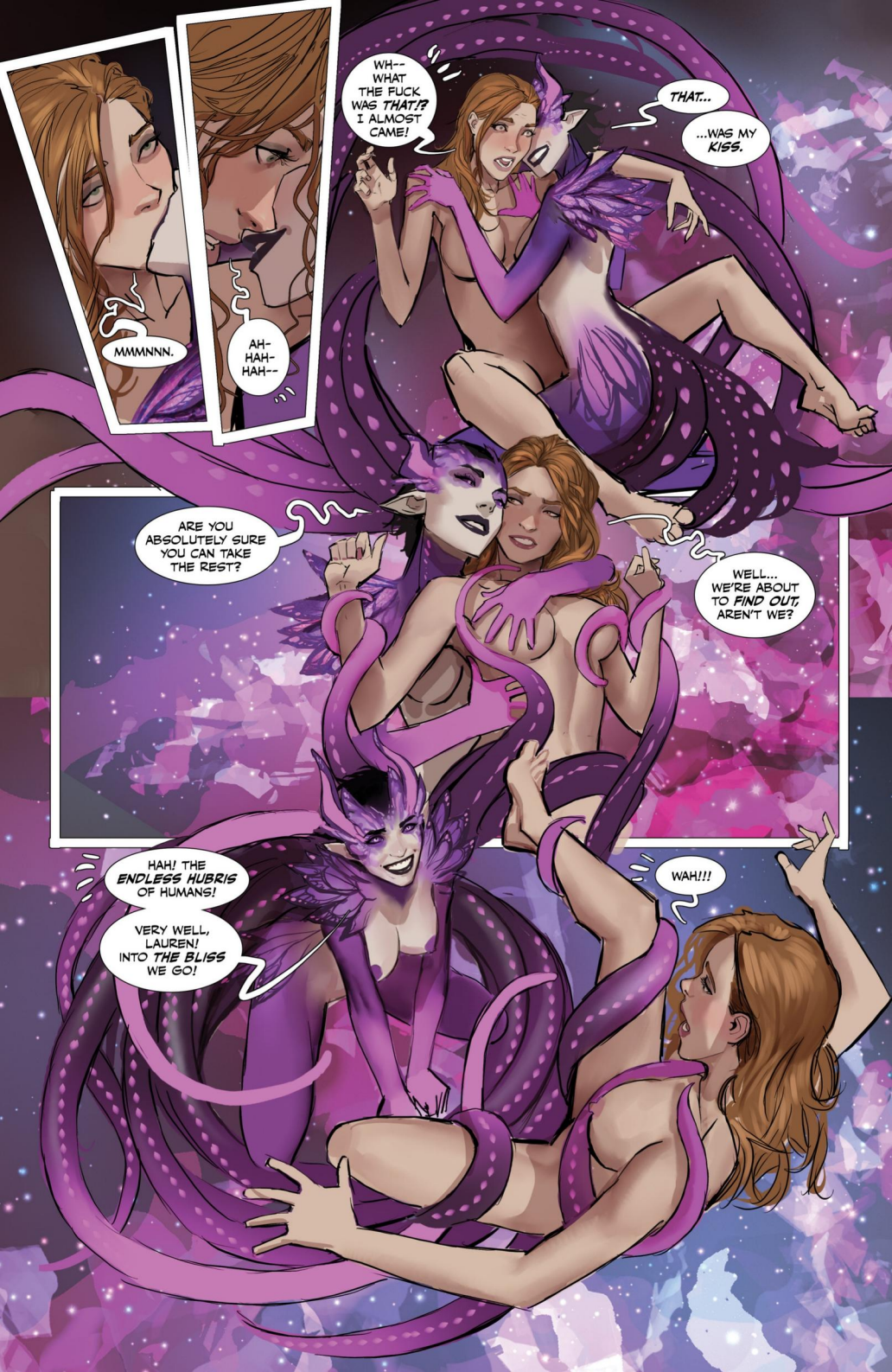
I'M SO SORRY!
I'M A TERRIBLE GODDESS.
I AM SO WEAK THAT YOUR
PASSION PULLED MY DIVINITY
INTO THE OPEN AND...

I COULD
HAVE...

YOU ARE
BEAUTIFUL!







WH--
WHAT
THE FUCK
WAS THAT!?
I ALMOST
CAME!

THAT...

...WAS MY
KISS.

MMMMNN.

AH-
HAH-
HAH--

ARE YOU
ABSOLUTELY SURE
YOU CAN TAKE
THE REST?

WELL...
WE'RE ABOUT
TO FIND OUT,
AREN'T WE?

HAH! THE
ENDLESS HUBRIS
OF HUMANS!

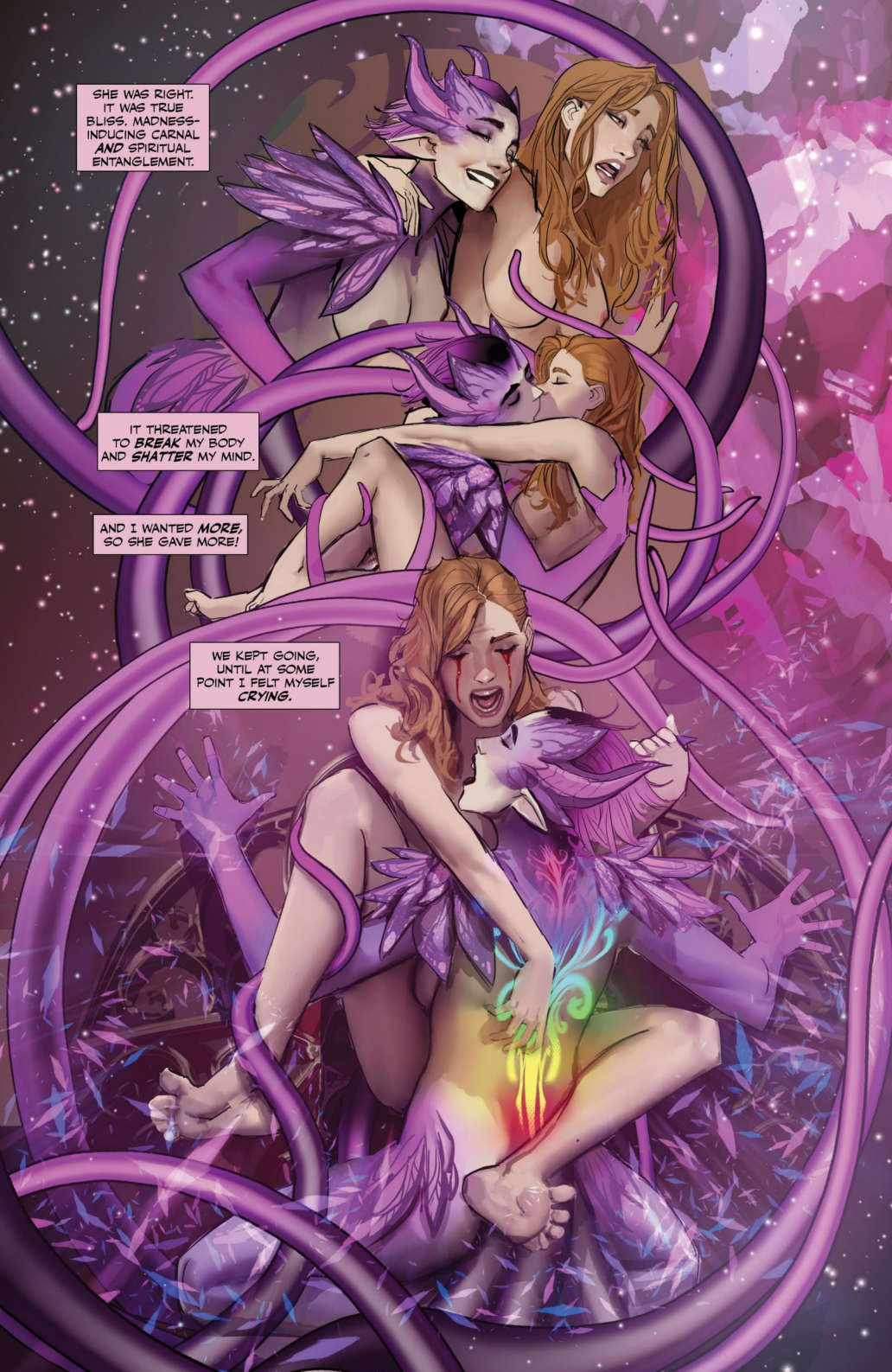
VERY WELL,
LAUREN!
INTO THE BLISS
WE GO!

WAH!!!



HANG ON TO
SOMETHING!!!

M-ERR--
AAAH!!!

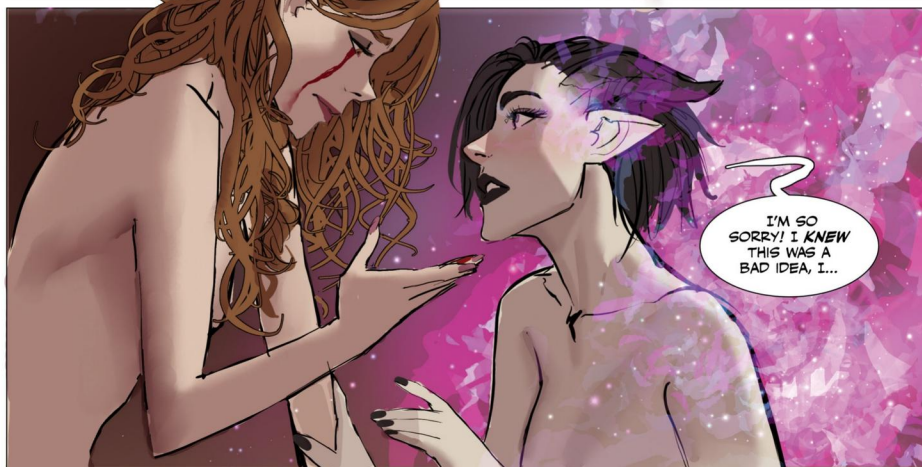
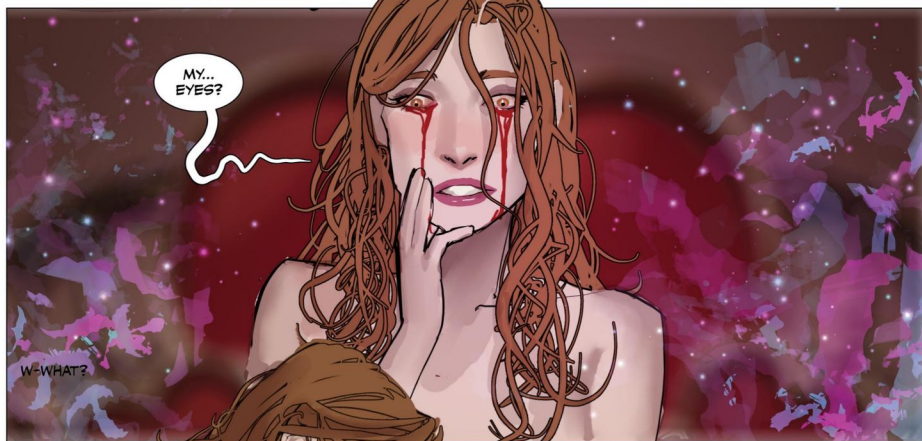
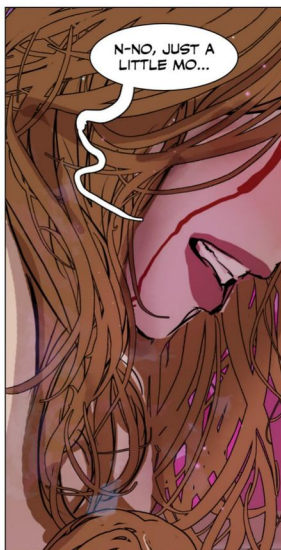


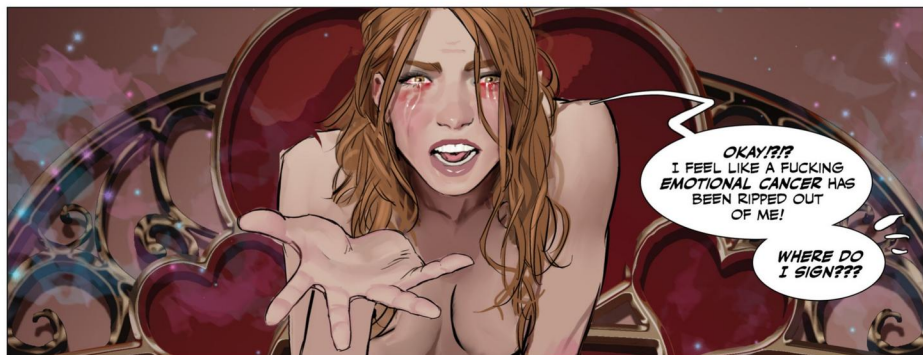
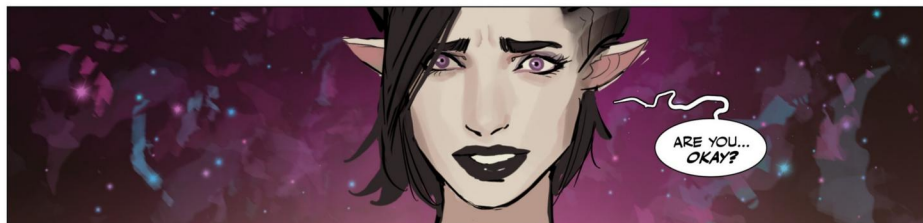
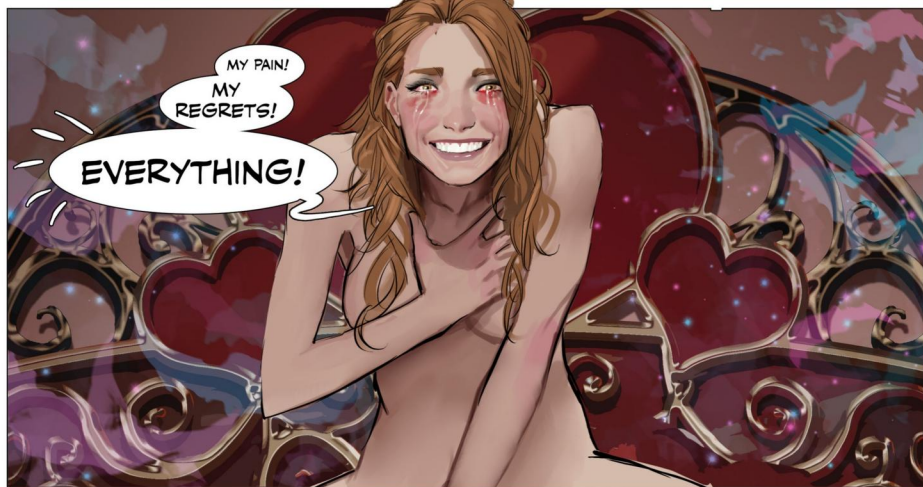
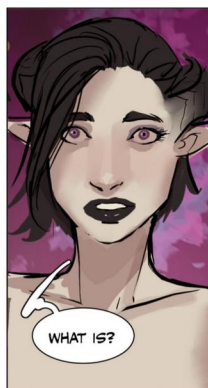
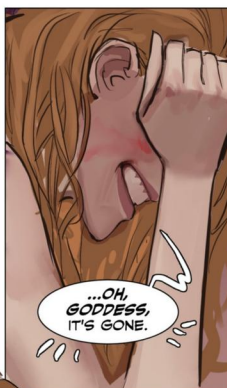
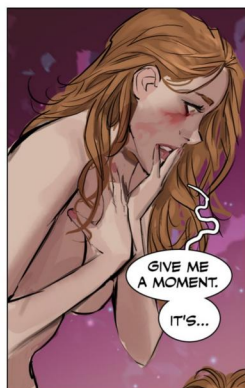
SHE WAS RIGHT.
IT WAS TRUE
BLISS, MADNESS-
INDUCING CARNAL
AND SPIRITUAL
ENTANGLEMENT.

IT THREATENED
TO *BREAK* MY BODY
AND *SHATTER* MY MIND.

AND I WANTED *MORE*,
SO SHE GAVE MORE!

WE KEPT GOING,
UNTIL AT SOME
POINT I FELT MYSELF
CRYING.



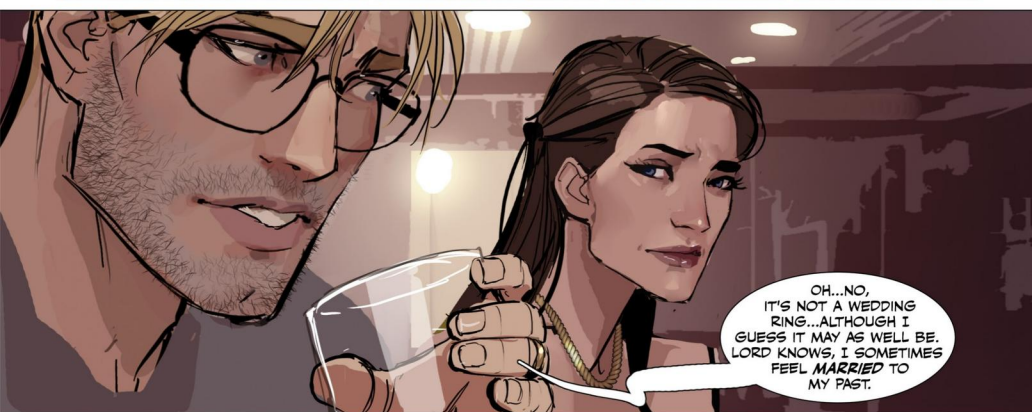
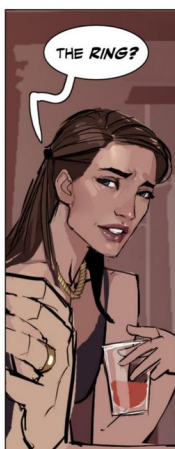


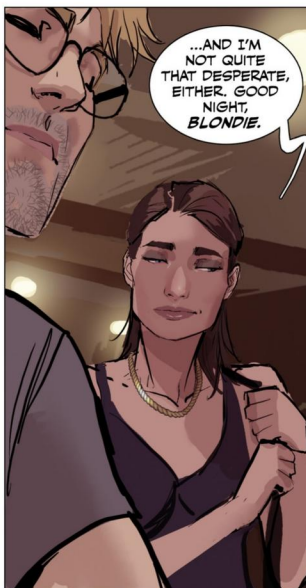
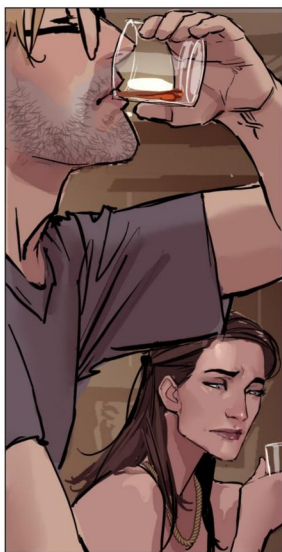
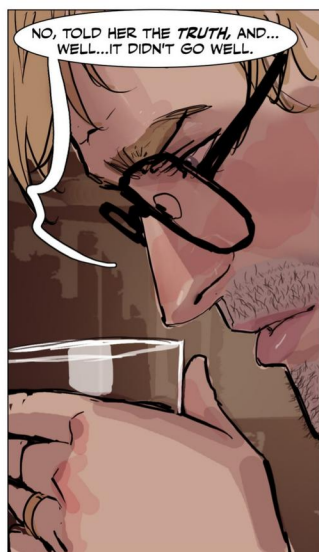
Chapter 5

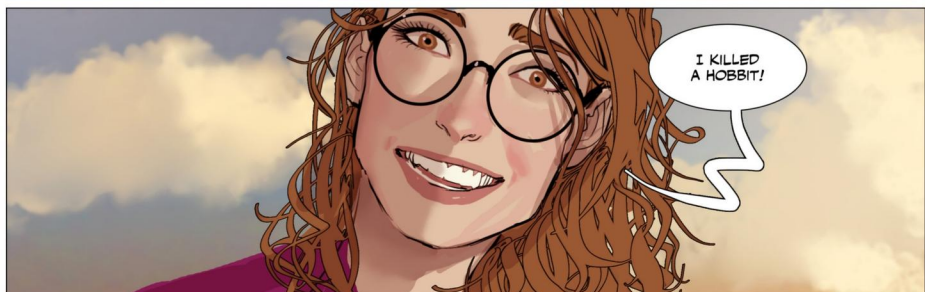
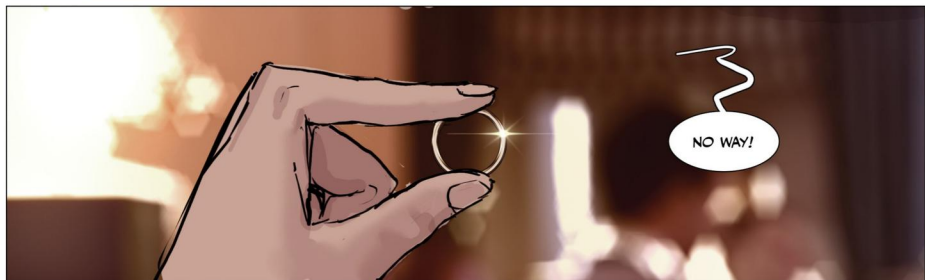
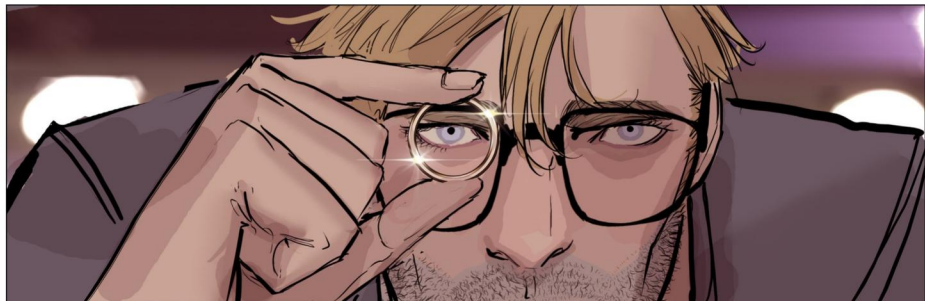
The crossroads

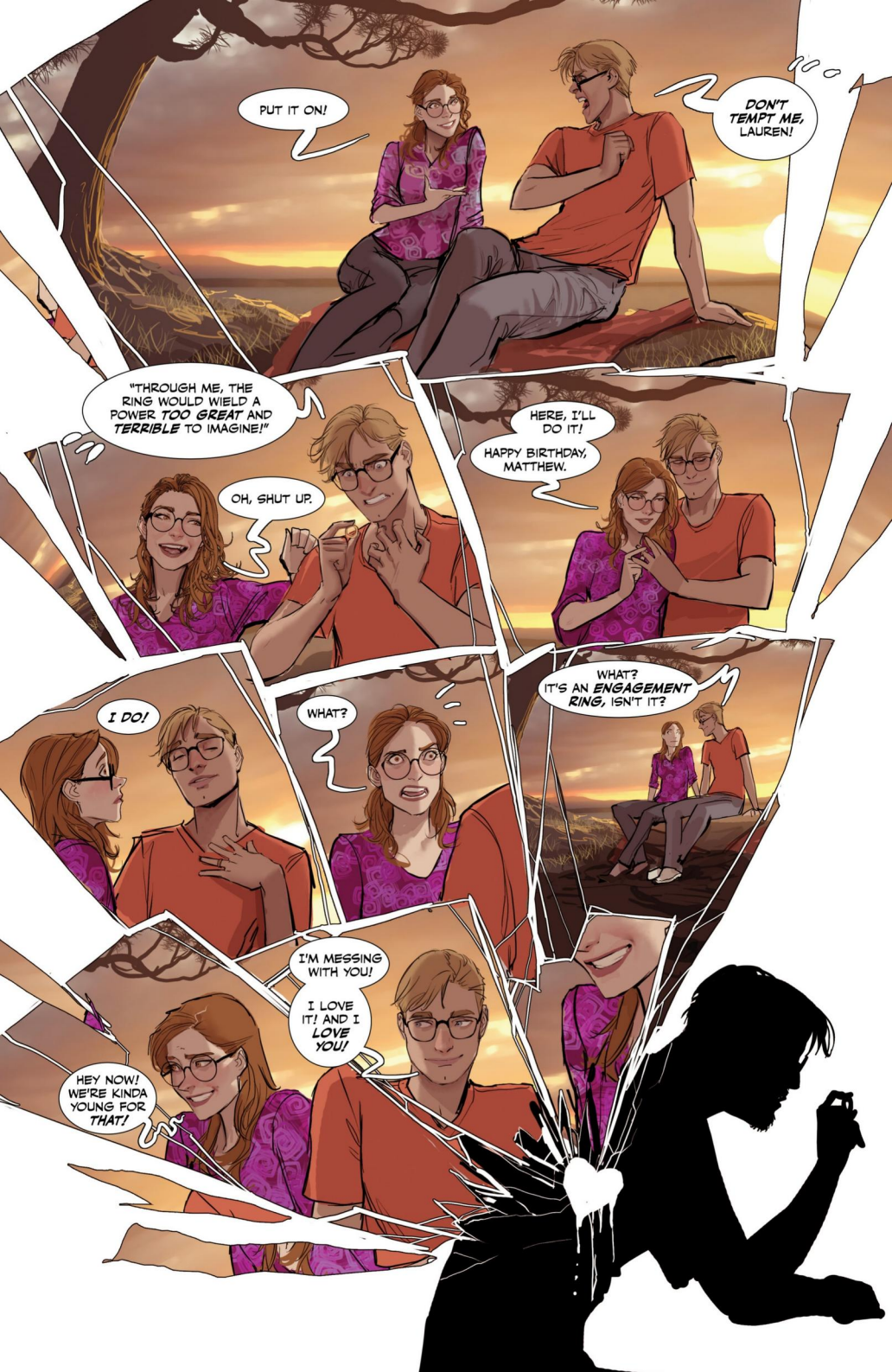












PUT IT ON!

DON'T
TEMPT ME,
LAUREN!

"THROUGH ME, THE
RING WOULD WIELD A
POWER *TOO GREAT AND
TERRIBLE* TO IMAGINE!"

OH, SHUT UP.

HERE, I'LL
DO IT!
HAPPY BIRTHDAY,
MATTHEW.

I DO!

WHAT?

WHAT?
IT'S AN ENGAGEMENT
RING, ISN'T IT?

I'M MESSING
WITH YOU!

I LOVE
IT! AND I
LOVE
YOU!

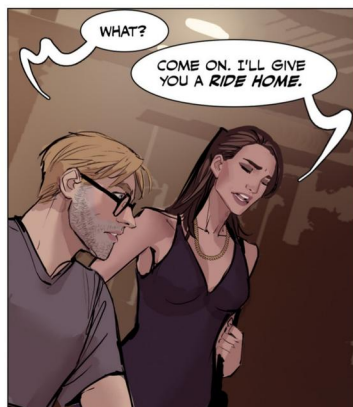
HEY NOW!
WE'RE KINDA
YOUNG FOR
THAT!



SIGH...FRODO WAS RIGHT.
IT *DOES* GROW HEAVIER OVER TIME.

BARTENDER, KEEP
THEM COMING!

BARTENDER,
DON'T!



WHAT?

COME ON. I'LL GIVE
YOU A *RIDE HOME*.



BUT
WHY?



BECAUSE FOR A
SAD PILE OF WRECK, YOU'RE
STILL *CUTE*. THEN AGAIN, IT'S PAST
MIDNIGHT, AND MY STANDARDS
ARE...*DECLINING*.

YOU COMING,
OR WHAT?



I'M
FLATTERED...
BUT LISTEN,
YOU REALLY
DON'T WANT
ANY OF MY
BAGGAGE.



I'M NOT
LOOKING FOR
A *RELATIONSHIP*,
BLONDIE.

AND
EVERYONE
HAS BAGGAGE.



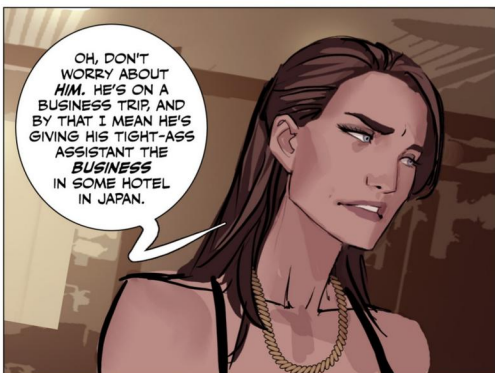
YEAH, WELL THIS IS MINE!
I SEE YOU, AND I'M THINKING THIS WOMAN
IS HOT, AND KINDA REMINDS ME OF THE
WOMAN WHO GAVE ME THIS RING.

I'VE BEEN DOWN THAT
SELFISH ROAD BEFORE.
CHASING MEMORIES...THERE'S
NOTHING BUT PAIN AND
DISAPPOINTMENT AT THE END
OF IT...AND I DON'T WANT TO
BE *THAT GUY* ANYMORE.

I...DON'T
WANT TO
HURT YOU.



CUTE. I'M HERE CHEATING ON MY HUSBAND.



OH, DON'T WORRY ABOUT HIM. HE'S ON A BUSINESS TRIP, AND BY THAT I MEAN HE'S GIVING HIS TIGHT-ASS ASSISTANT THE **BUSINESS** IN SOME HOTEL IN JAPAN.



DO YOU STILL **LOVE** HIM?



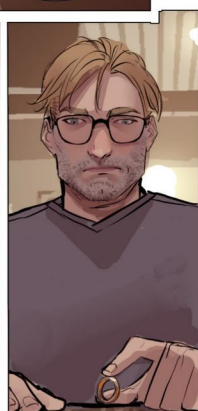
I USED TO...I STILL DO... SOMETIMES.



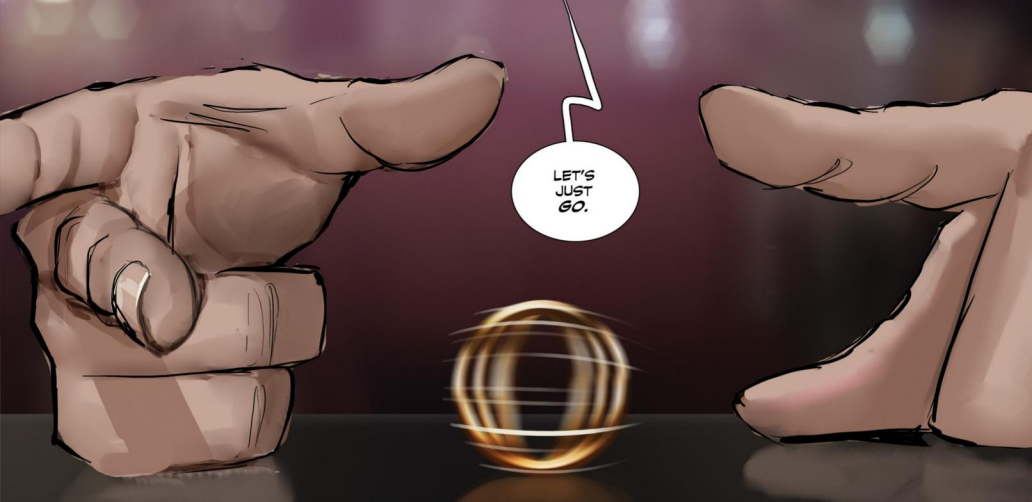
THEN, HONESTLY...DON'T LET HER TAKE HIM. **FIGHT** FOR HIM.



DID YOU FIGHT FOR THE ONE WITH THAT RING?



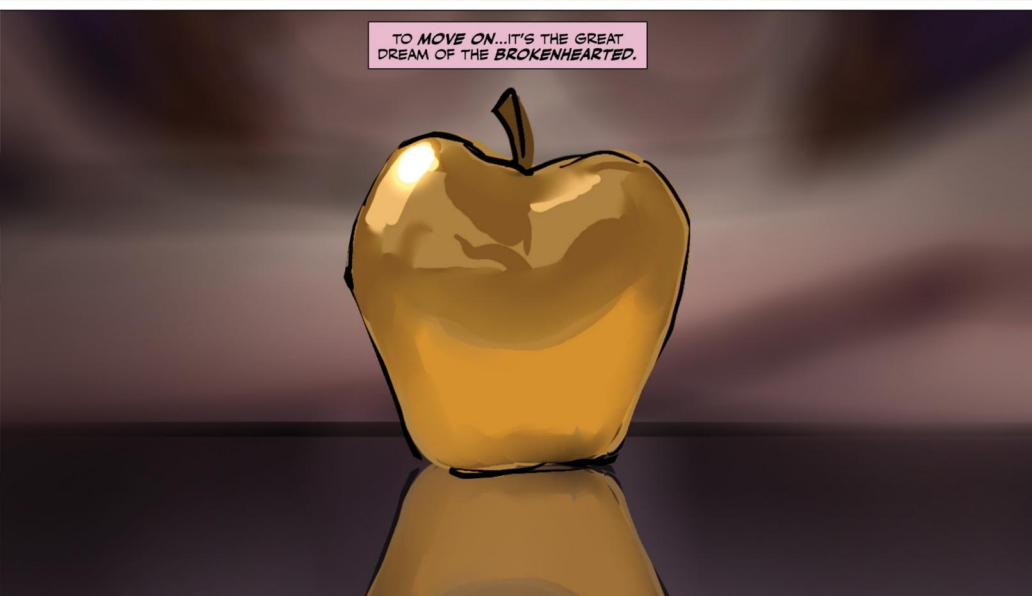
SIGH...
FINE...



TO LET GO...



TO MOVE ON...IT'S THE GREAT DREAM OF THE BROKENHEARTED.





SO WHY THEN, WITH ALL OF MY EARLIER ENTHUSIASM, DID I STILL HESITATE?

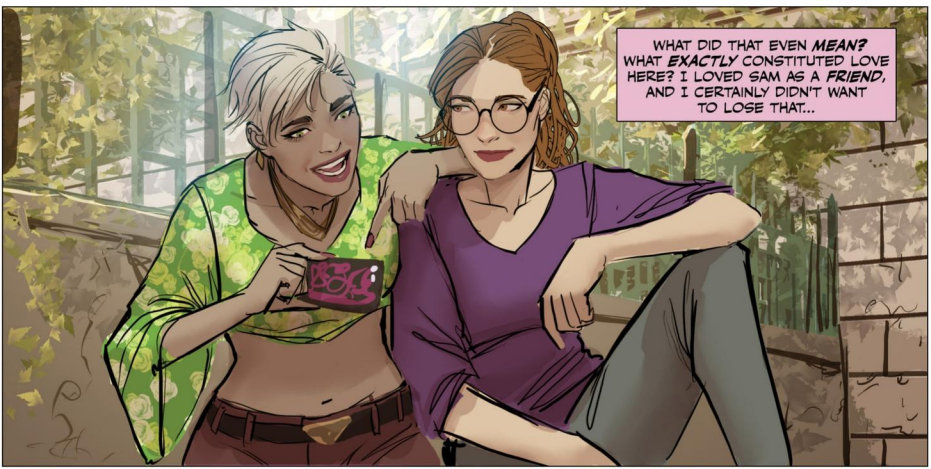


I MEAN... HISTORICALLY SPEAKING, *WOMEN* AND *MAGICAL APPLES* NEVER REALLY MIXED WELL. PLUS, THE LAST TIME I SIGNED A CONTRACT, I LOST MY SMILE *AND* MY SOUL...

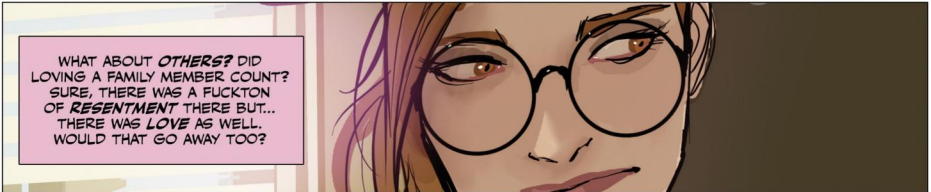


ALSO, MERRYL TOLD ME THAT HER ESSENCE WOULD KEEP ME EMOTIONALLY *NUMB* FOR A FEW DAYS, AND I SHOULD TAKE THAT TIME TO THINK IT ALL THROUGH BEFORE SIGNING. HELL, SHE SEEMED EVEN MORE *HESITANT* ABOUT THE WHOLE THING THAN I DID.

BUT THE TRUTH WAS, THE PRICE OF IT ALL *WAS* STEEP. TO GIVE AWAY MY *LOVE* FOR THE SAKE OF *DESIRE*...



WHAT DID THAT EVEN *MEAN*? WHAT *EXACTLY* CONSTITUTED LOVE HERE? I LOVED SAM AS A *FRIEND*, AND I CERTAINLY DIDN'T WANT TO LOSE THAT...



WHAT ABOUT *OTHERS*? DID LOVING A FAMILY MEMBER COUNT? SURE, THERE WAS A FUCKTON OF *RESENTMENT* THERE BUT... THERE WAS *LOVE* AS WELL. WOULD THAT GO AWAY TOO?



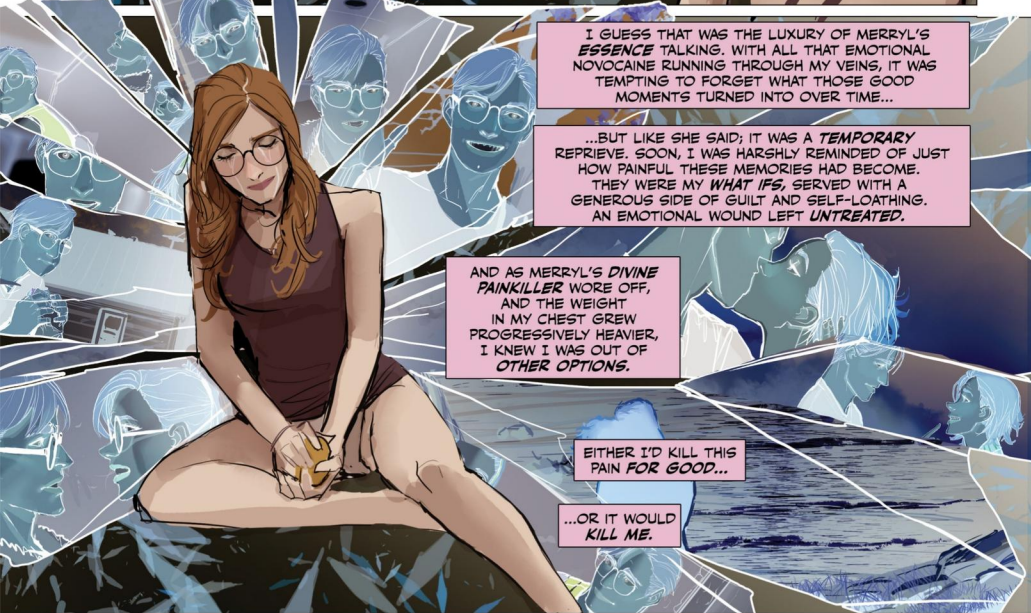
BUT MORE THAN
ANYTHING ELSE,
STARING AT MY
WAY OUT,
I WONDERED
ABOUT HIM.



WOULD I SIMPLY
FORGET MATTHEW?

FORGET US?

IN MY HEART
OF HEARTS, I DIDN'T WANT THAT.
I WANTED THE *PAIN* TO GO AWAY,
BUT NOT THE *GOOD MEMORIES!*



I GUESS THAT WAS THE LUXURY OF MERRYLY'S
ESSENCE TALKING. WITH ALL THAT EMOTIONAL
NOVOCAINE RUNNING THROUGH MY VEINS, IT WAS
TEMPTING TO FORGET WHAT THOSE GOOD
MOMENTS TURNED INTO OVER TIME...

...BUT LIKE SHE SAID; IT WAS A *TEMPORARY*
REPRIEVE. SOON, I WAS HARSHLY REMINDED OF JUST
HOW PAINFUL THESE MEMORIES HAD BECOME.
THEY WERE MY *WHAT IF*S, SERVED WITH A
GENEROUS SIDE OF GUILT AND SELF-LOATHING.
AN EMOTIONAL WOUND LEFT *UNTREATED*.

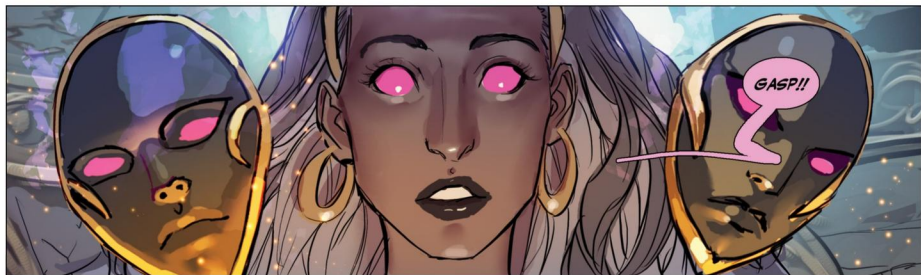
AND AS MERRYLY'S *DIVINE*
PAINKILLER WORE OFF,
AND THE WEIGHT
IN MY CHEST GREW
PROGRESSIVELY HEAVIER,
I KNEW I WAS OUT OF
OTHER OPTIONS.

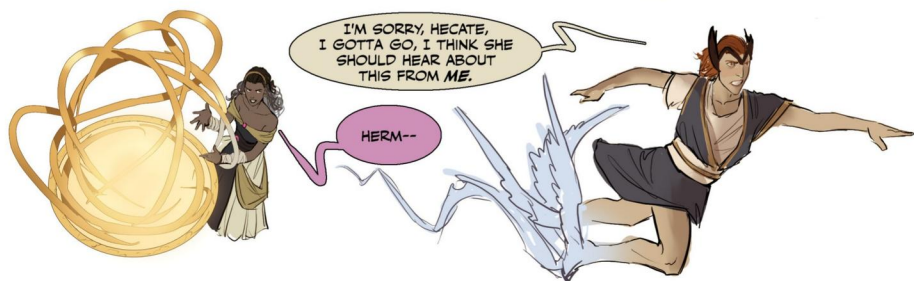
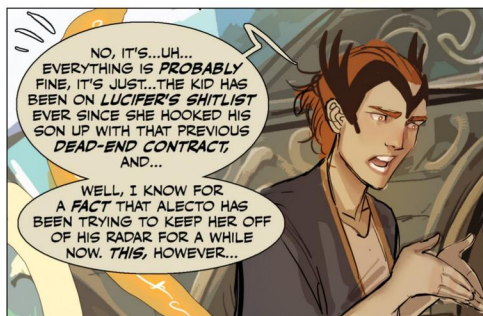
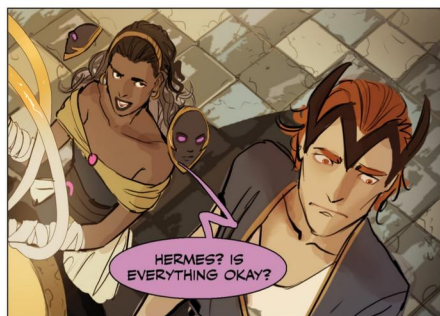
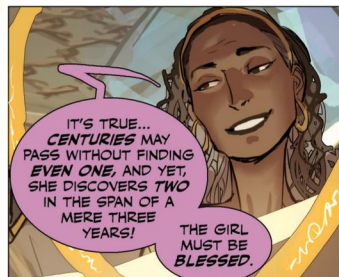
EITHER I'D KILL THIS
PAIN FOR *GOOD*...

...OR IT WOULD
KILL ME.



IN THE END, IN A DESPERATE
ACT OF SELF-PRESERVATION,
I *CAST AWAY* MY FEARS OF NOT
LOVING MY FRIEND, MY FAMILY,
OF FORGETTING MATTHEW...





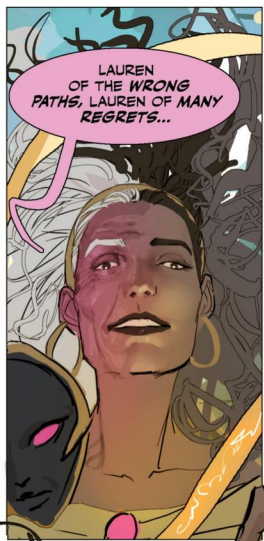


AH, WELL.
HE'S PROBABLY OVERREACTING...
STILL...THE POWER OF THE SHIFT
IN THIS CONTRACT IS...**IMMENSE**.

I SUPPOSE
I COULD TAKE A
PEEK INTO HER
FUTURES...



OH!
OHhhh,
THE **CROSSROADS**
OF YOUR LIFE ARE **MADE** OF
TROUBLE, LAUREN
THOMAS!



LAUREN
OF THE **WRONG**
PATHS, LAUREN OF MANY
REGRETS...



LAUREN THE
FATEBREAKER!

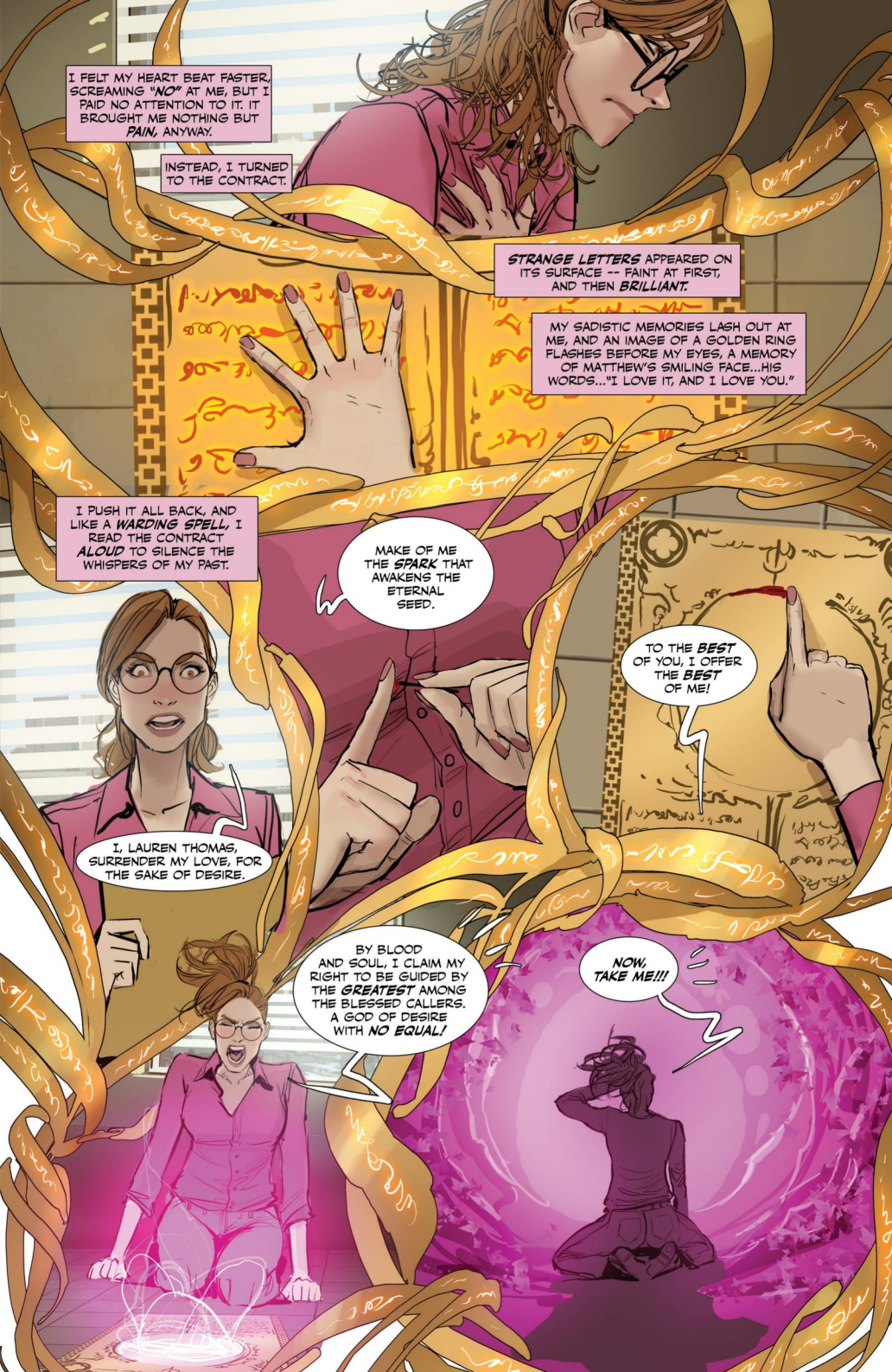
OH, YES!
I **GRANT** YOU THIS
BINDING AGREEMENT!
AND MAY YOU LIVE TO SEE
THE OTHER SIDE OF
THE STORM!

BY **BLOOD**
SEALED, BY
SOUL BOUND!!

"I, LAUREN THOMAS,
SURRENDER MY LOVE, FOR
THE SAKE OF DESIRE."



FIRST, I FELT A WARM TINGLE, TRAVELING
THROUGH ME LIKE A PLEASANT
SHUDDER...AND THEN I SAW THE **GLOW**.



I FELT MY HEART BEAT FASTER, SCREAMING "NO" AT ME, BUT I PAID NO ATTENTION TO IT. IT BROUGHT ME NOTHING BUT PAIN, ANYWAY.

INSTEAD, I TURNED TO THE CONTRACT.

STRANGE LETTERS APPEARED ON ITS SURFACE -- Faint at first, AND THEN BRILLIANT.

MY SADISTIC MEMORIES LASH OUT AT ME, AND AN IMAGE OF A GOLDEN RING FLASHES BEFORE MY EYES, A MEMORY OF MATTHEW'S SMILING FACE...HIS WORDS..."I LOVE IT, AND I LOVE YOU."

I PUSH IT ALL BACK, AND LIKE A **WARDING SPELL**, I READ THE CONTRACT **ALoud** TO SILENCE THE WHISPERS OF MY PAST.

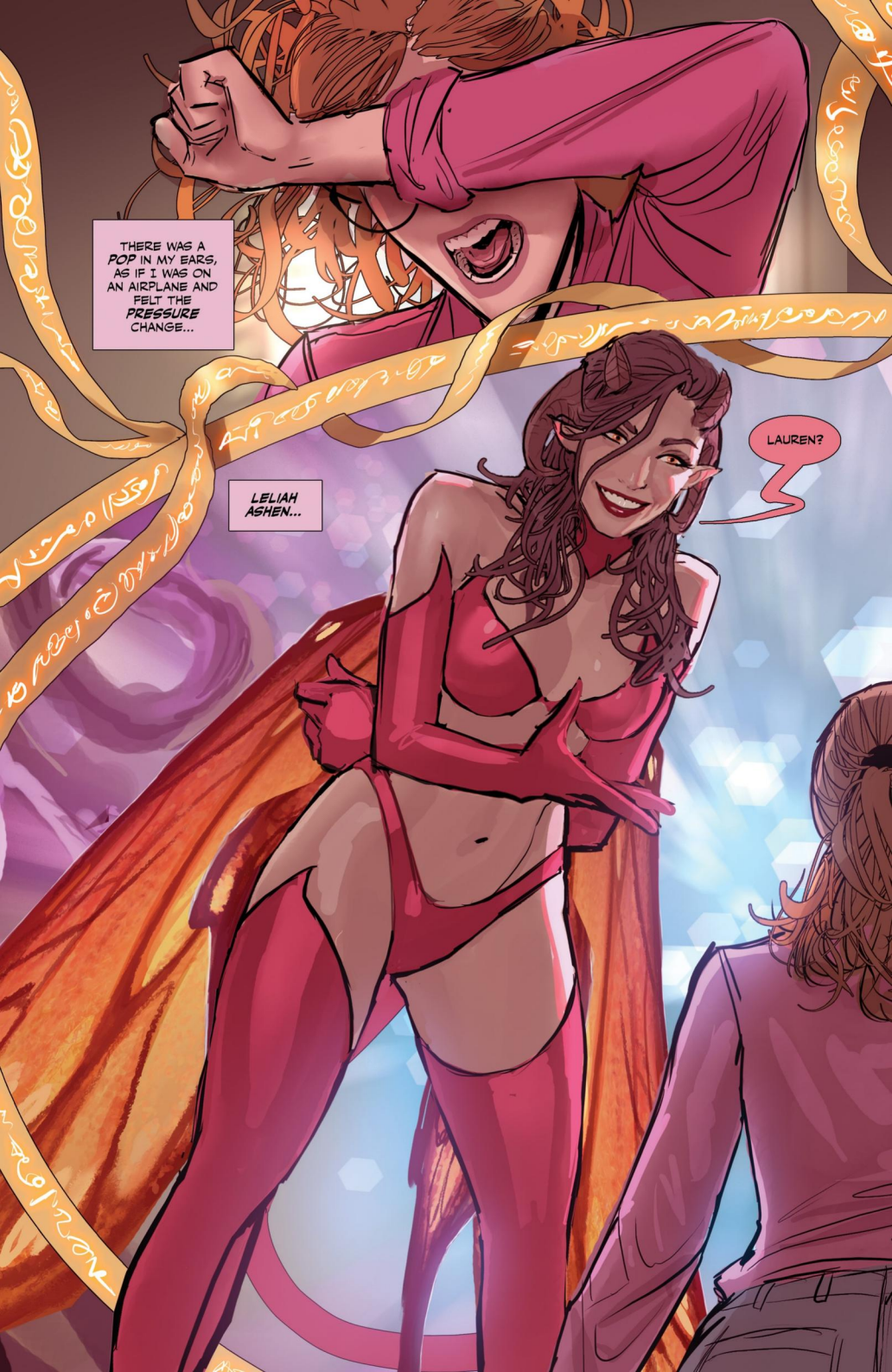
MAKE OF ME THE **SPARK** THAT AWAKENS THE ETERNAL SEED.

TO THE **BEST** OF YOU, I OFFER THE **BEST** OF ME!

I, LAUREN THOMAS, SURRENDER MY LOVE, FOR THE SAKE OF DESIRE.

BY BLOOD AND SOUL, I CLAIM MY RIGHT TO BE GUIDED BY THE **GREATEST** AMONG THE BLESSED CALLERS. A GOD OF DESIRE WITH **NO EQUAL!**

NOW, TAKE ME!!!



THERE WAS A
POP IN MY EARS,
AS IF I WAS ON
AN AIRPLANE AND
FELT THE
PRESSURE
CHANGE...

LELIAH
ASHEN...

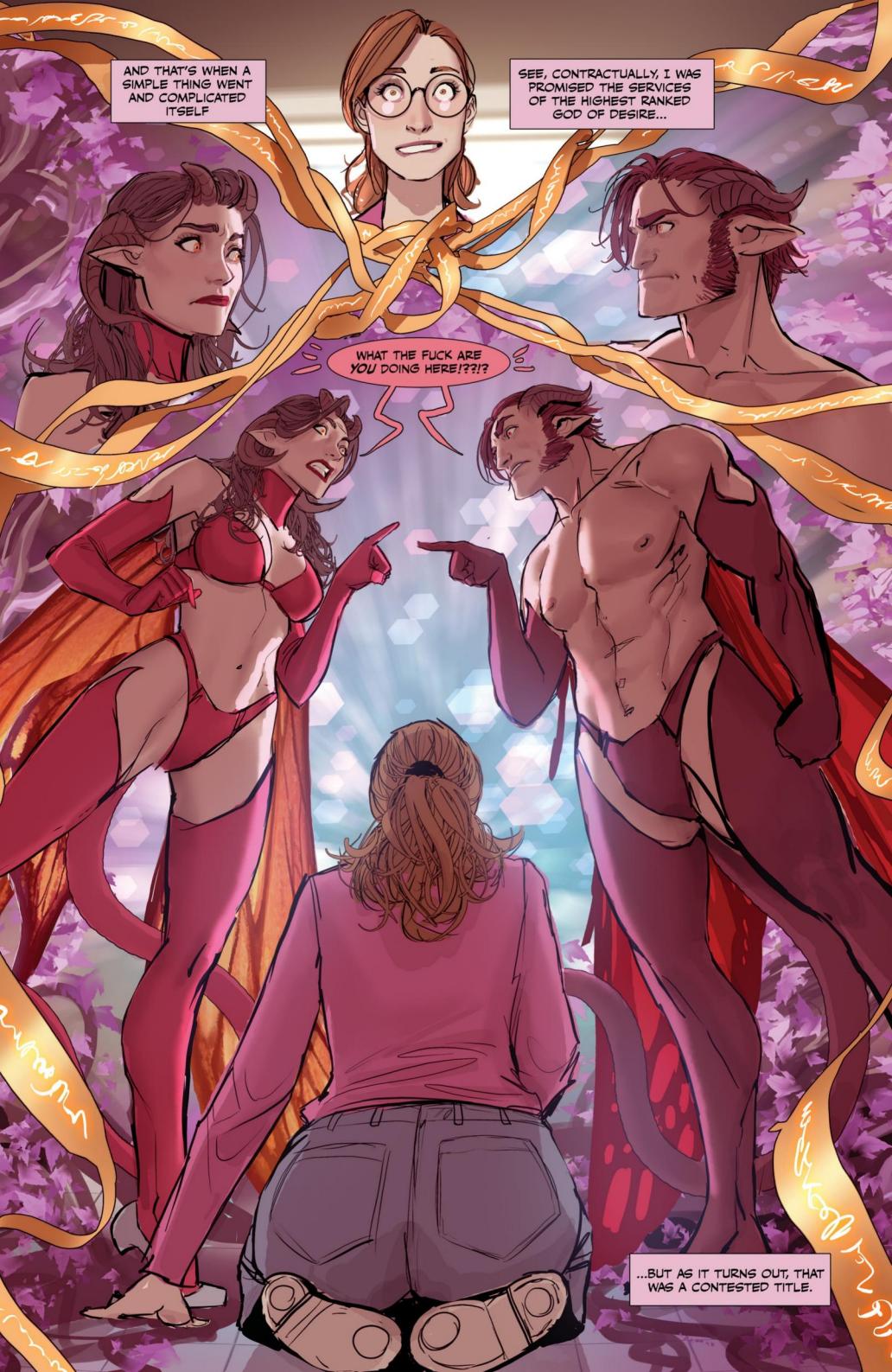
LAUREN?



...AND JUST
LIKE THAT,
THEY WERE
HERE.

MISS THOMAS?

...AND THADEUS
BRIMSTONE.



AND THAT'S WHEN A
SIMPLE THING WENT
AND COMPLICATED
ITSELF

SEE, CONTRACTUALLY, I WAS
PROMISED THE SERVICES
OF THE HIGHEST RANKED
GOD OF DESIRE...

WHAT THE FUCK ARE
YOU DOING HERE!?!?

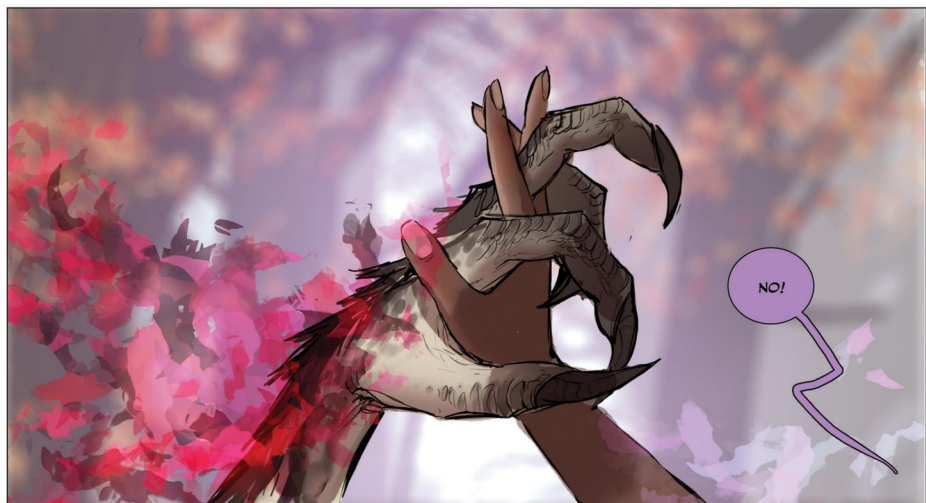
...BUT AS IT TURNS OUT, THAT
WAS A CONTESTED TITLE.

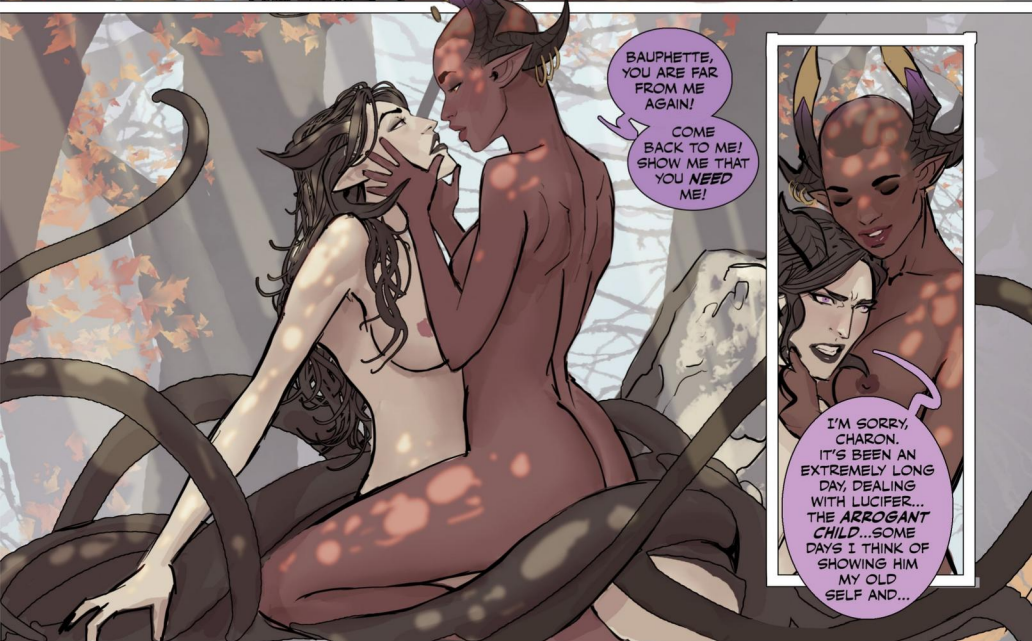
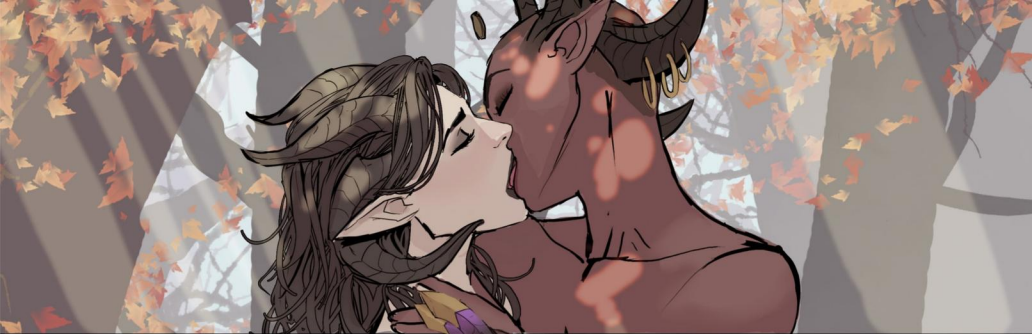
Chapter 6

The last moments
of calm...



GODREALMS:
SHIMMERWOOD.





BAUPHETTE,
YOU ARE FAR
FROM ME
AGAIN!

COME
BACK TO ME!
SHOW ME THAT
YOU **NEED**
ME!

I'M SORRY,
CHARON.
IT'S BEEN AN
EXTREMELY LONG
DAY, DEALING
WITH LUCIFER...
THE **ARROGANT**
CHILD...SOME
DAYS I THINK OF
SHOWING HIM
MY OLD
SELF AND...

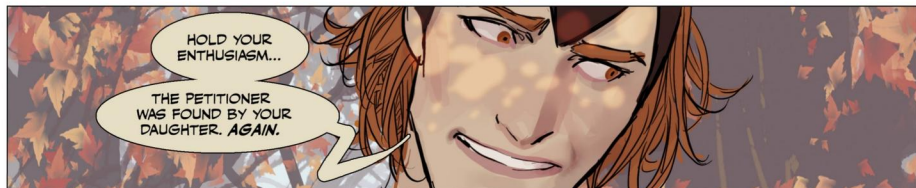
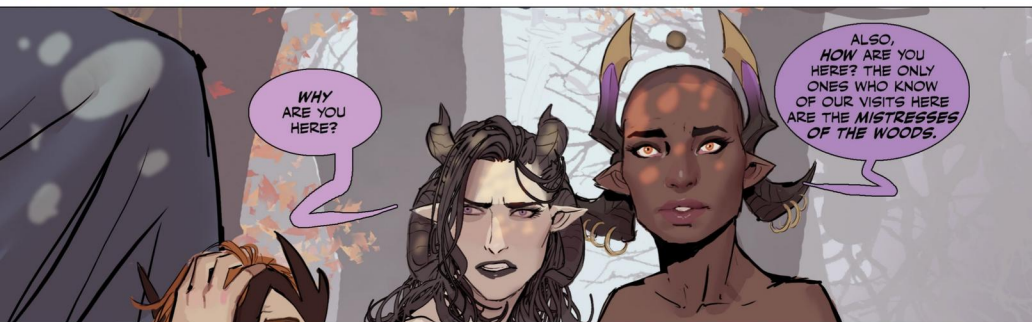


ALECT--OH.

UH, HI,
CHARON!

HERMES???

HERMES???





MERRYL?

OH, FATES!
PLEASE, NO!



...BAUPHETTE?



SOOO,
YEAH, ANYWAYS, I'LL LET
YOU TWO DEAL WITH
THIS, AND I'LL BE --

HERMES.

HUH?



THE
PETITIONER FOR THE
CONTRACT. DO YOU KNOW
THEIR NAME?

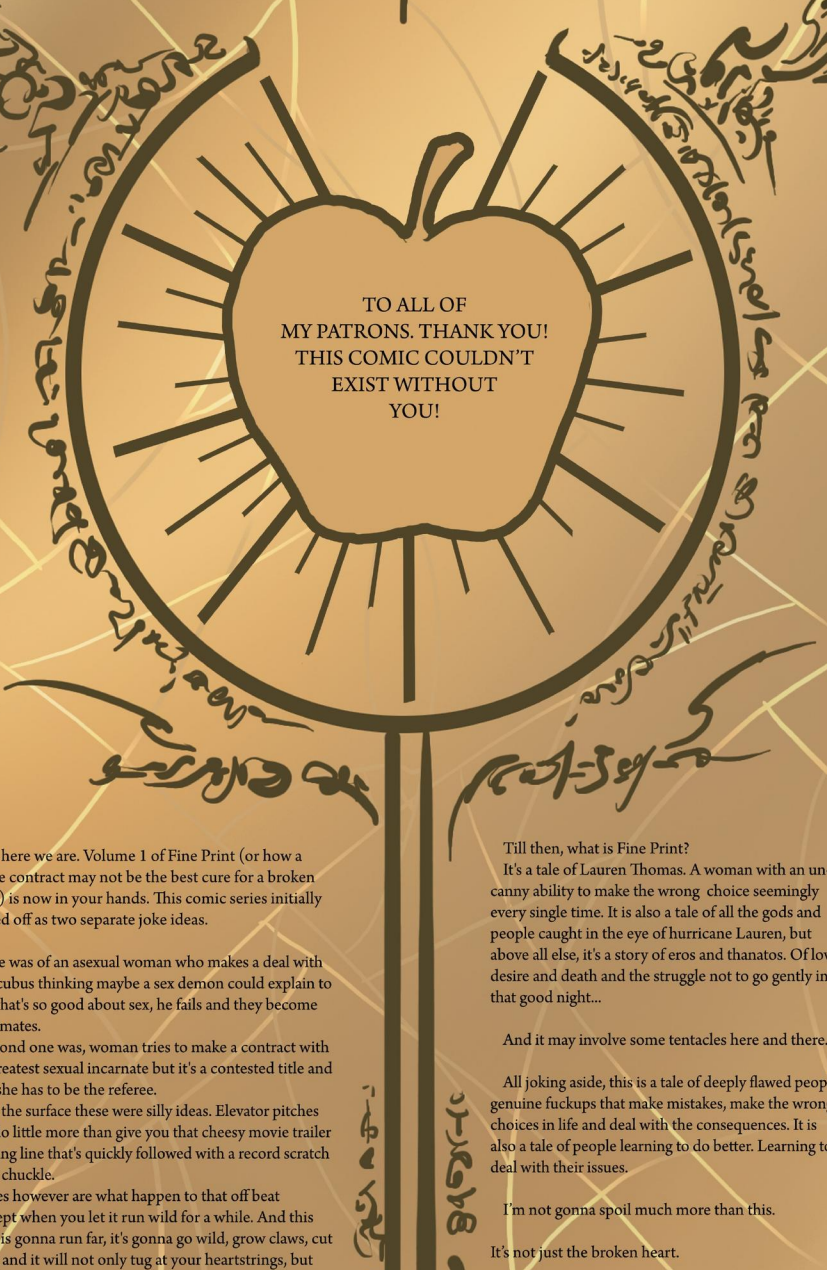


UM, HECATE
DOES.





OKAY, I
CAN EXPLAIN
THIS!



TO ALL OF
MY PATRONS. THANK YOU!
THIS COMIC COULDN'T
EXIST WITHOUT
YOU!

Well, here we are. Volume 1 of Fine Print (or how a divine contract may not be the best cure for a broken heart) is now in your hands. This comic series initially started off as two separate joke ideas.

One was of an asexual woman who makes a deal with an incubus thinking maybe a sex demon could explain to her what's so good about sex, he fails and they become roommates.

Second one was, woman tries to make a contract with the greatest sexual incarnate but it's a contested title and now she has to be the referee.

On the surface these were silly ideas. Elevator pitches that do little more than give you that cheesy movie trailer opening line that's quickly followed with a record scratch and a chuckle.

Stories however are what happen to that off beat concept when you let it run wild for a while. And this story is gonna run far, it's gonna go wild, grow claws, cut deep, and it will not only tug at your heartstrings, but will actively try to tear them apart.

You think i'm exaggerating? well, Maybe... I am a writer after all.

Till then, what is Fine Print?

It's a tale of Lauren Thomas. A woman with an uncanny ability to make the wrong choice seemingly every single time. It is also a tale of all the gods and people caught in the eye of hurricane Lauren, but above all else, it's a story of eros and thanatos. Of love, desire and death and the struggle not to go gently into that good night...

And it may involve some tentacles here and there.

All joking aside, this is a tale of deeply flawed people. genuine fuckups that make mistakes, make the wrong choices in life and deal with the consequences. It is also a tale of people learning to do better. Learning to deal with their issues.

I'm not gonna spoil much more than this.

It's not just the broken heart.

Anyway, enough of my rambling. Here's some samples of things that were, things that are and things that will be. See you in the next one!



In volume 2, things will heat up as Lauren, Thadeus and Leliah seek arbitration over the rights to Lauren's contract and Bauphette Alaris takes personal interest in the case. Things are gonna get intense is what I'm saying.



As for the story beyond
volume 2?
It's gonna be absolutely
divine ;)

One of my favorite aspects of Fine Print is that the series is a part of a shared universe of stories. Some mine, some by my wife, Linda Sejc. We have a simple rule with our stories. While they are in continuity you don't need to read one to understand another.

With that out of the way, here are some samples of Linda's comic, Punderworld. Volume 1 is already in print and it's a story of Hades and Persephone's romantic adventures. It may involve some familiar faces.





That's all for now!
See you in volume 2!



(Or how a divine contract may not be the best cure for a broken heart.)

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Thomas, the path of her
life's choices is a tale of wrong turns.
Somewhere along this path, she had lost
it all— her smile, her soul, and the love of her
life. Now she seeks any way to dull the pain of
her broken heart, and while mundane solutions provide
nothing but a temporary reprieve, she may just find the
solution to her problem with the divine. A contract with
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broken heart. From Stjepan Sejic, creator of
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