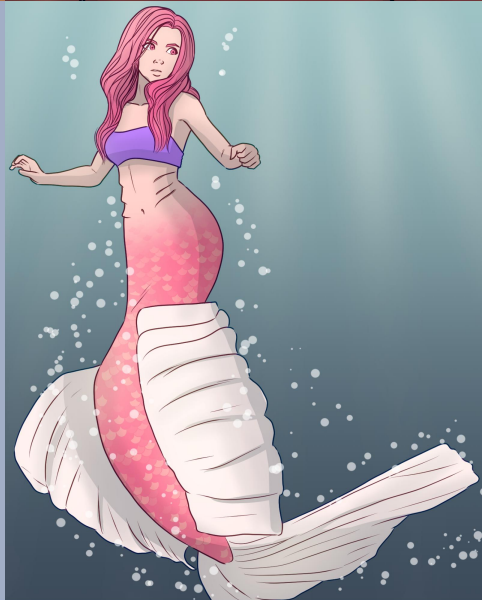
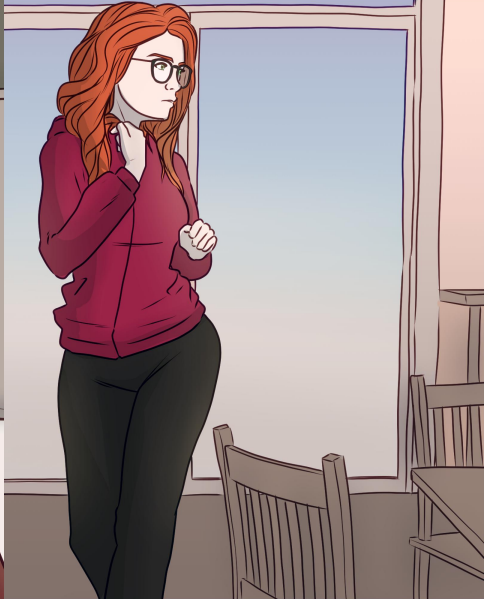
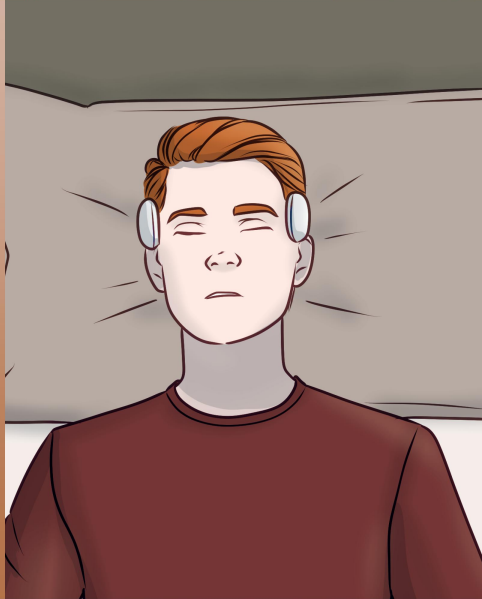
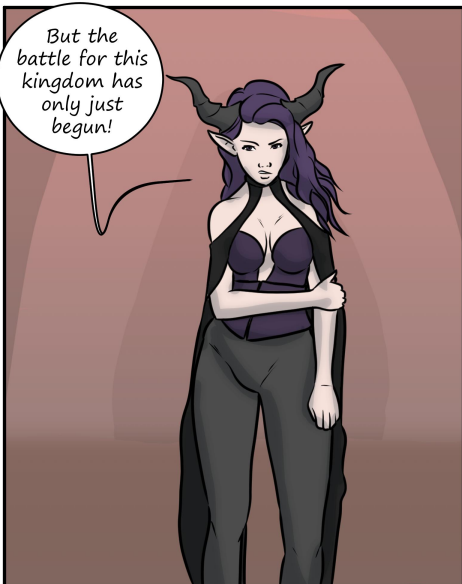
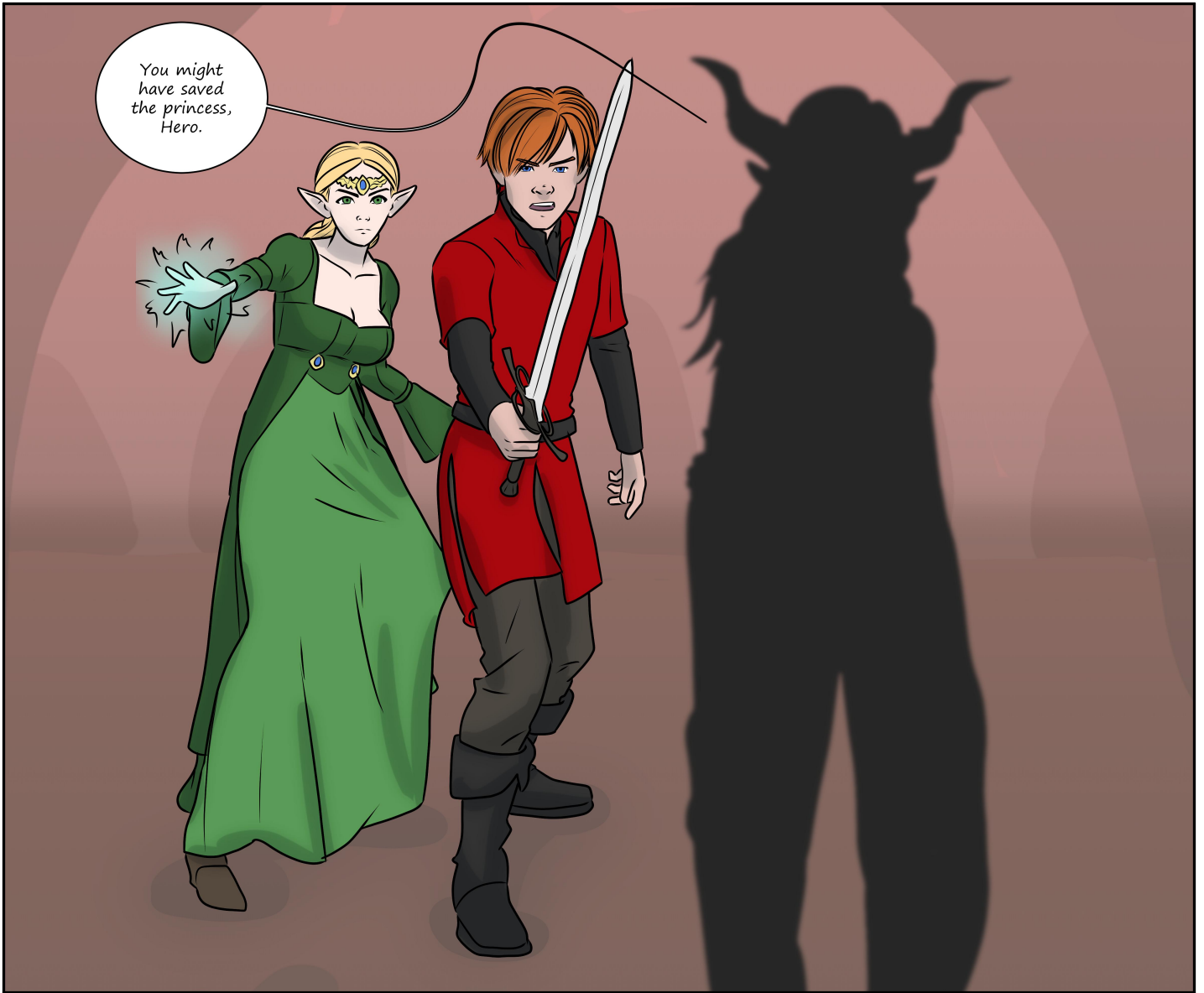


BEING FIONA

ISSUE 1







Do you ever have one of those dreams where after you wake up...

...the dream feels like a real memory?

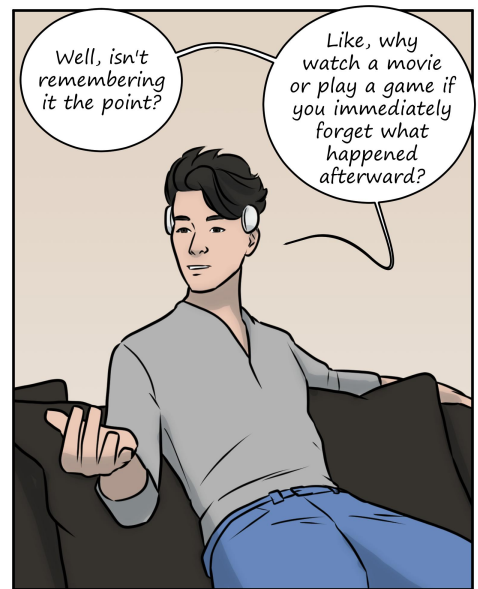


Using the Dreamband felt like that.

Even though the whole time I was fully aware of you sitting next to me...

It also felt like I was the game's hero in the flesh. I was him, living his life.

And now after opening my eyes, his life still feels like a vivid memory!



Well, isn't remembering it the point?

Like, why watch a movie or play a game if you immediately forget what happened afterward?



Because with those, you are on the outside looking in.

With this, you are on the inside, living the experience as if it's happening to you!

This is fucking dangerous!

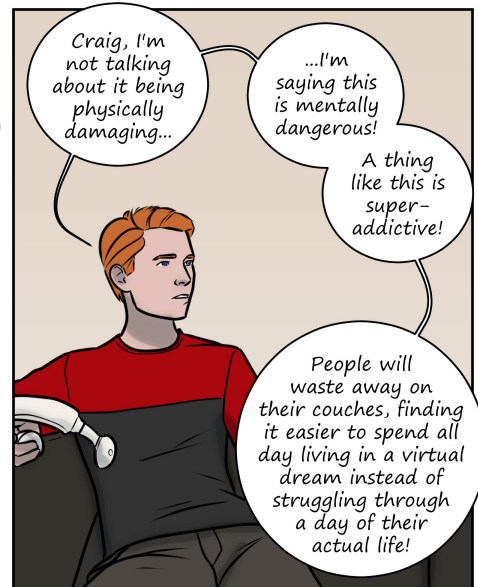


Oh come on, Felix!

I've read all the research... The Dreamband is totally safe!

It can't damage the brain.

It can't rewrite your memories or send a copy of your mind to the CIA.



Craig, I'm not talking about it being physically damaging...

...I'm saying this is mentally dangerous!

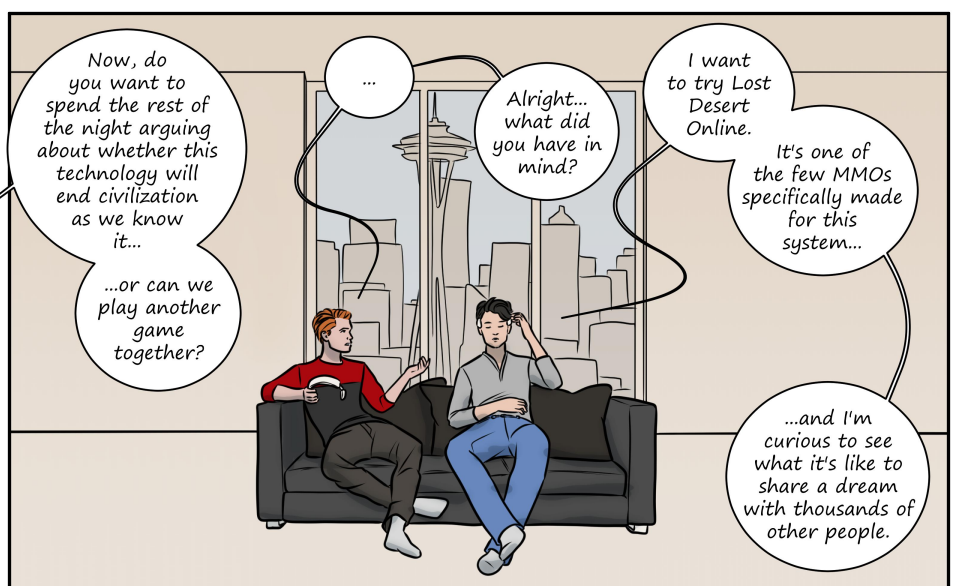
A thing like this is super-addictive!

People will waste away on their couches, finding it easier to spend all day living in a virtual dream instead of struggling through a day of their actual life!



Yeah, but the same has been said of books, television, comics, and videogames!

It might happen to a few, but the rest of us will be fine!



Now, do you want to spend the rest of the night arguing about whether this technology will end civilization as we know it... ..or can we play another game together?

...

Alright... what did you have in mind?

I want to try Lost Desert Online.

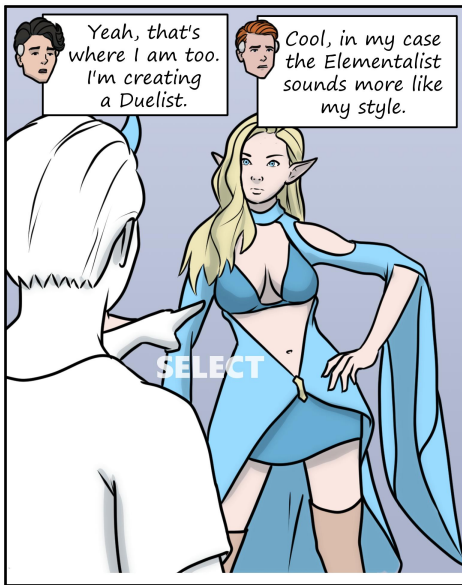
It's one of the few MMOs specifically made for this system...

...and I'm curious to see what it's like to share a dream with thousands of other people.



Okay, the game's loaded and I'm in character creation now.

What about you?



Yeah, that's where I am too. I'm creating a Duelist.

Cool, in my case the Elementalists sounds more like my style.

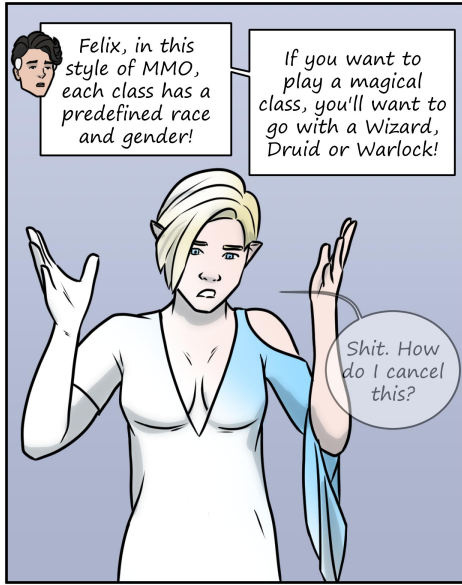
SELECT



Really? You prefer to play as one of the female classes?

Uh... what do you mean by female class?

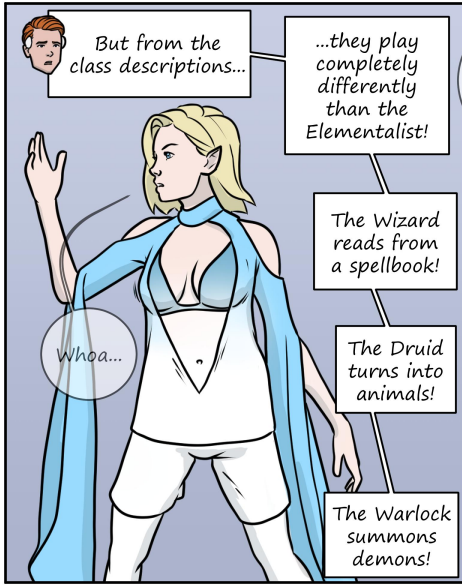
Don't I get to choose my character's race and gender after this?



Felix, in this style of MMO, each class has a predefined race and gender!

If you want to play a magical class, you'll want to go with a Wizard, Druid or Warlock!

Shit. How do I cancel this?



But from the class descriptions...

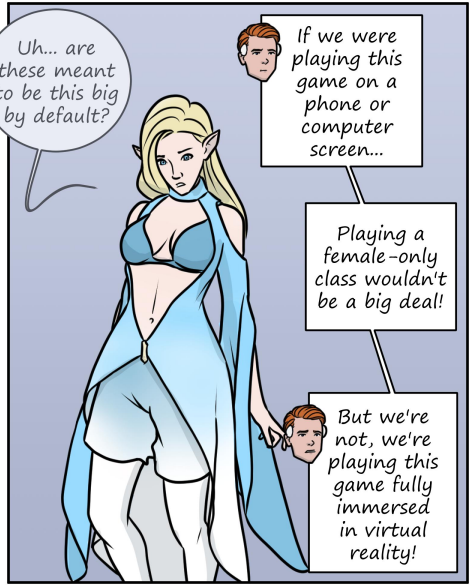
...they play completely differently than the Elementalists!

The Wizard reads from a spellbook!

The Druid turns into animals!

The Warlock summons demons!

Whoa...

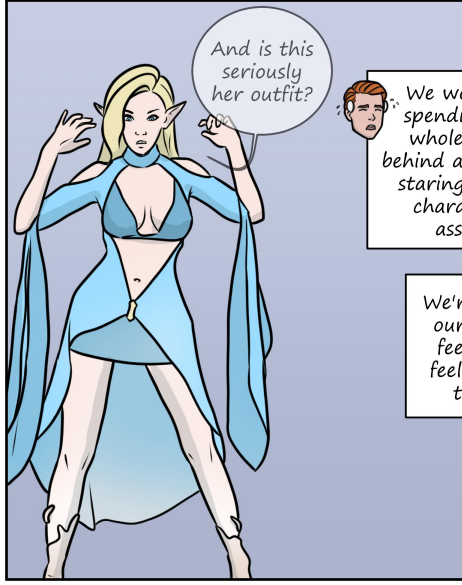


Uh... are these meant to be this big by default?

If we were playing this game on a phone or computer screen...

Playing a female-only class wouldn't be a big deal!

But we're not, we're playing this game fully immersed in virtual reality!

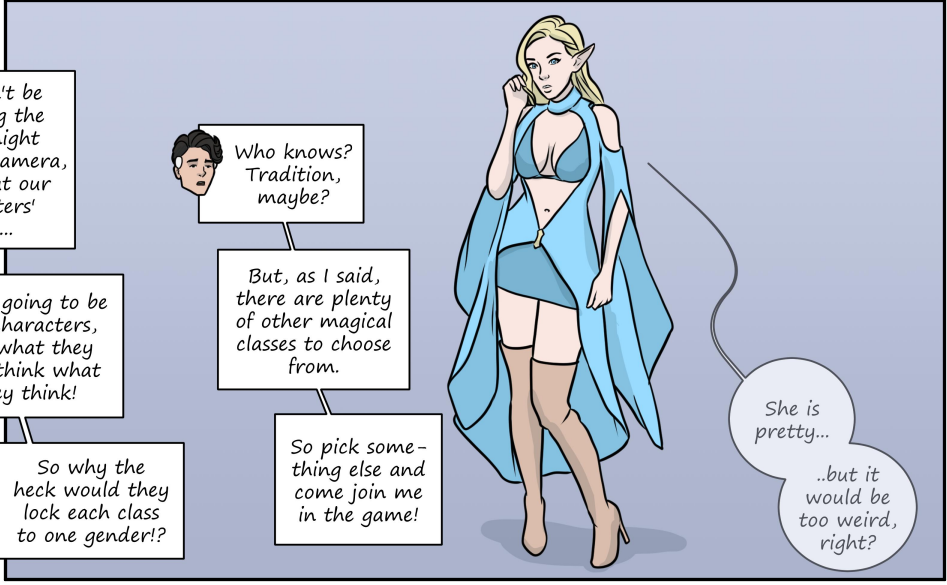


And is this seriously her outfit?

We won't be spending the whole night behind a camera, staring at our characters' asses...

We're going to be our characters, feel what they feel, think what they think!

So why the heck would they lock each class to one gender!?



Who knows? Tradition, maybe?

But, as I said, there are plenty of other magical classes to choose from.

So pick something else and come join me in the game!

She is pretty... ..but it would be too weird, right?



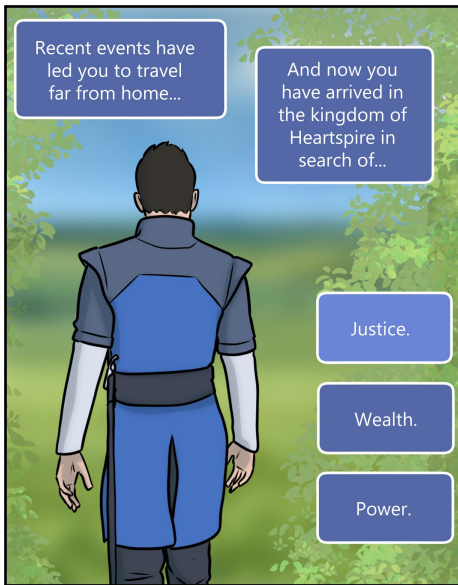
You are **Kestrel Silverblade**, master of the Sword.

You are widely known throughout your homeland as the...

Hero of Westbrook.

Thief with a heart of gold.

Assassin of Hodrick.



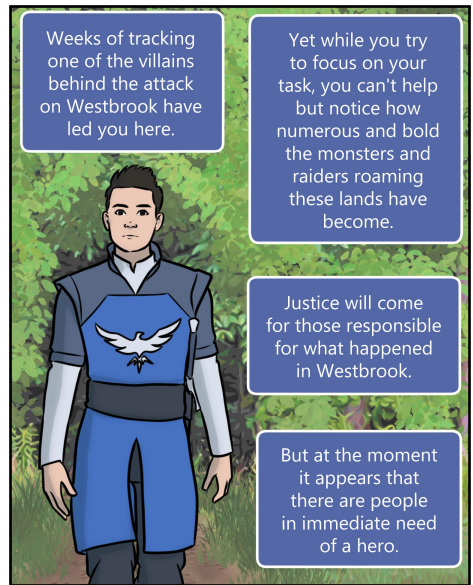
Recent events have led you to travel far from home...

And now you have arrived in the kingdom of Heartspire in search of...

Justice.

Wealth.

Power.



Weeks of tracking one of the villains behind the attack on Westbrook have led you here.

Yet while you try to focus on your task, you can't help but notice how numerous and bold the monsters and raiders roaming these lands have become.

Justice will come for those responsible for what happened in Westbrook.

But at the moment it appears that there are people in immediate need of a hero.



Well, with all the players swarming around here...

...they're going to be overrun with heroes...

Hey, Felix, have you reached the starting area yet?

Not yet. I'm just finishing up in the Character Creator.



Come on, Felix, I've been waiting here for like ten minutes now...

The character creator for this game isn't that fancy, just pick a haircut and get in here!

Alright, alright, I'm done and going through the intro scene now!

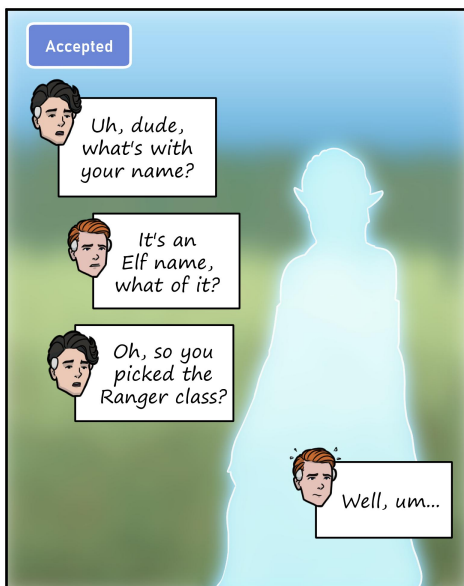
Tell me your character's name and I'll join your party.



Tanathil Avaris would like to join your party.

Would you like to accept?

Yes, please! Finally!



Accepted

Uh, dude, what's with your name?

It's an Elf name, what of it?

Oh, so you picked the Ranger class?

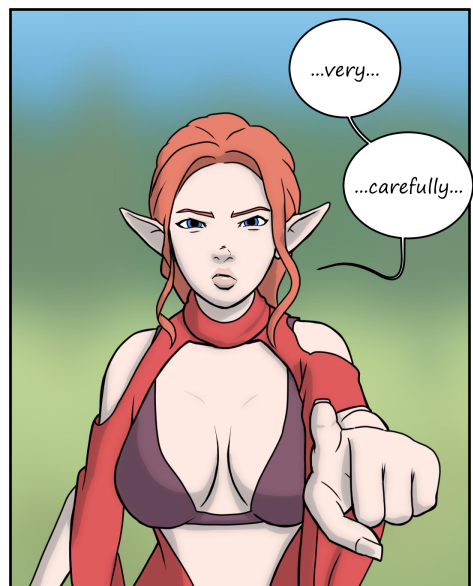
Well, um...



Whoa...!

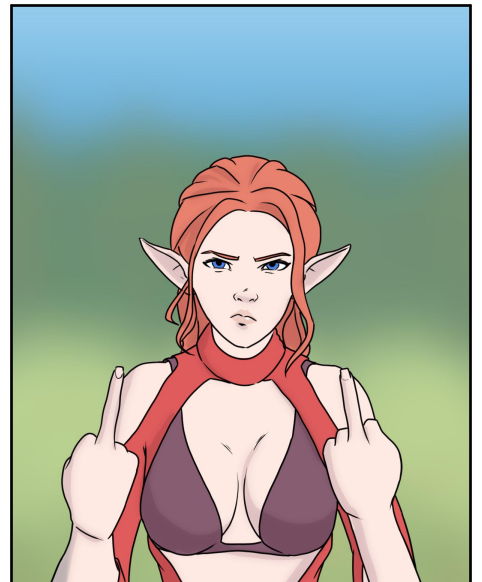
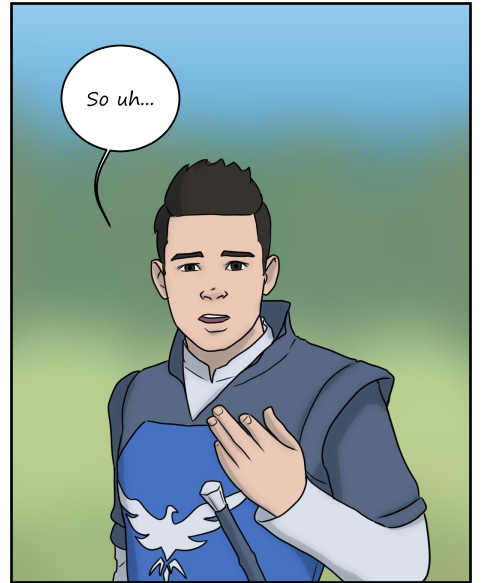
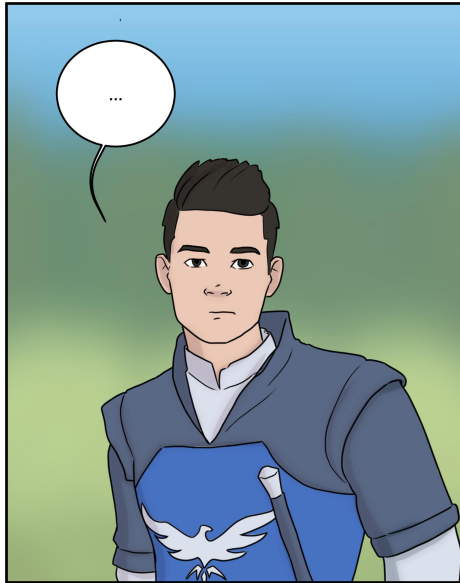
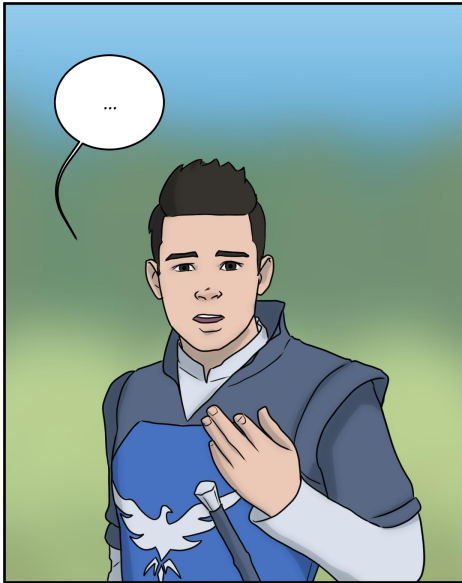
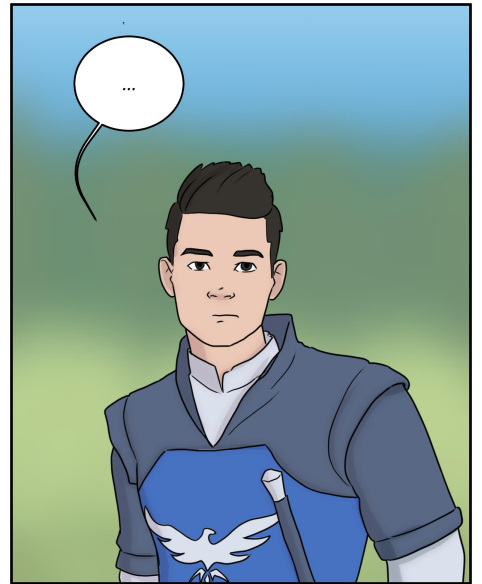
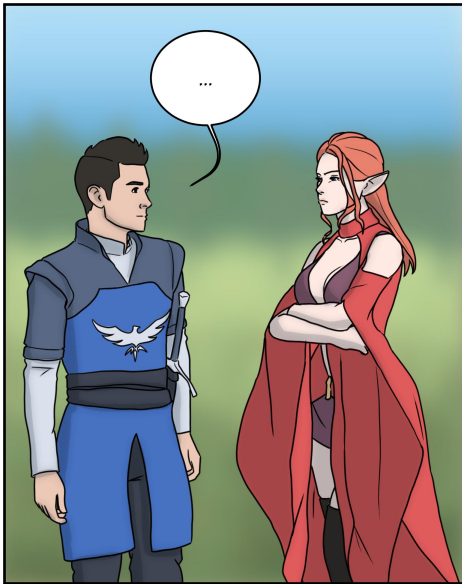
Craig... ..before you say anything...

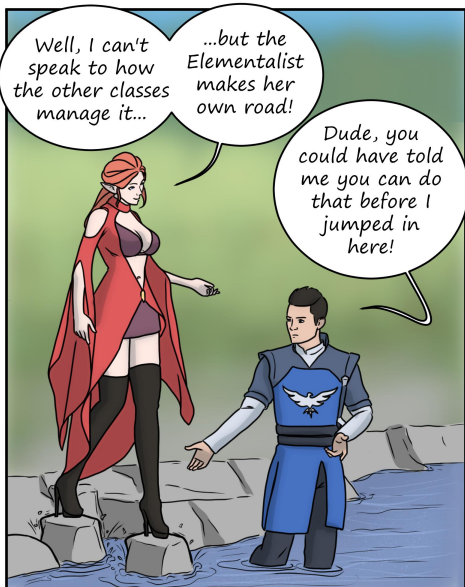
...choose your next words...

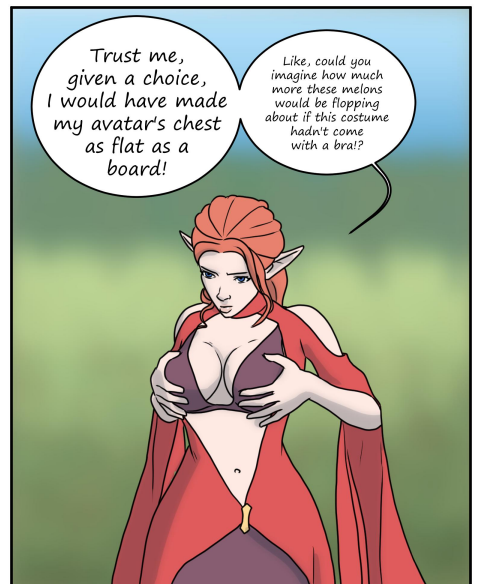
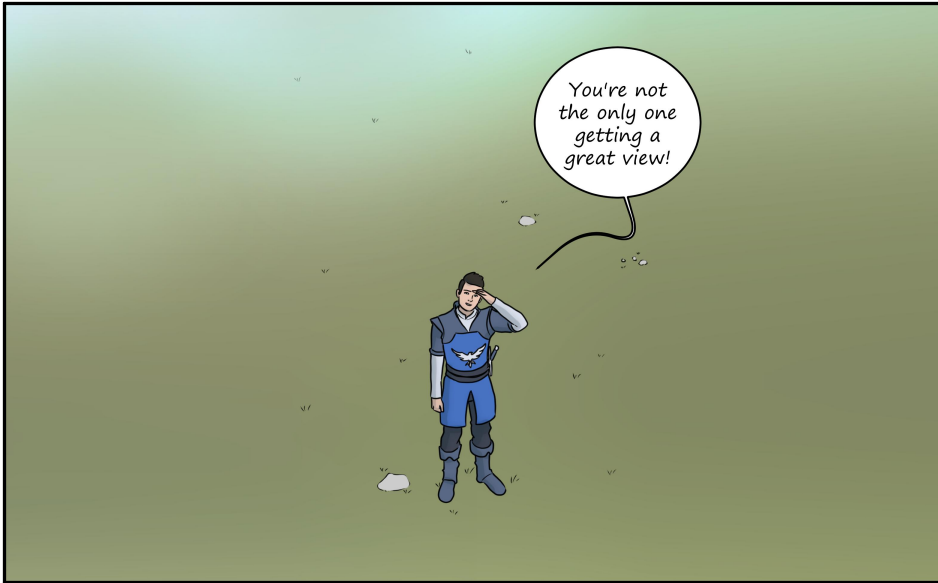
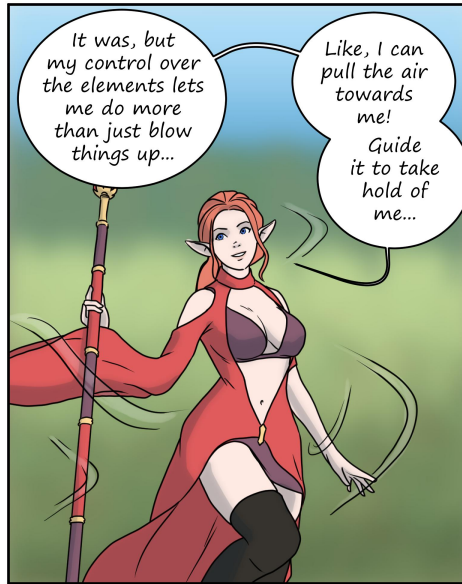


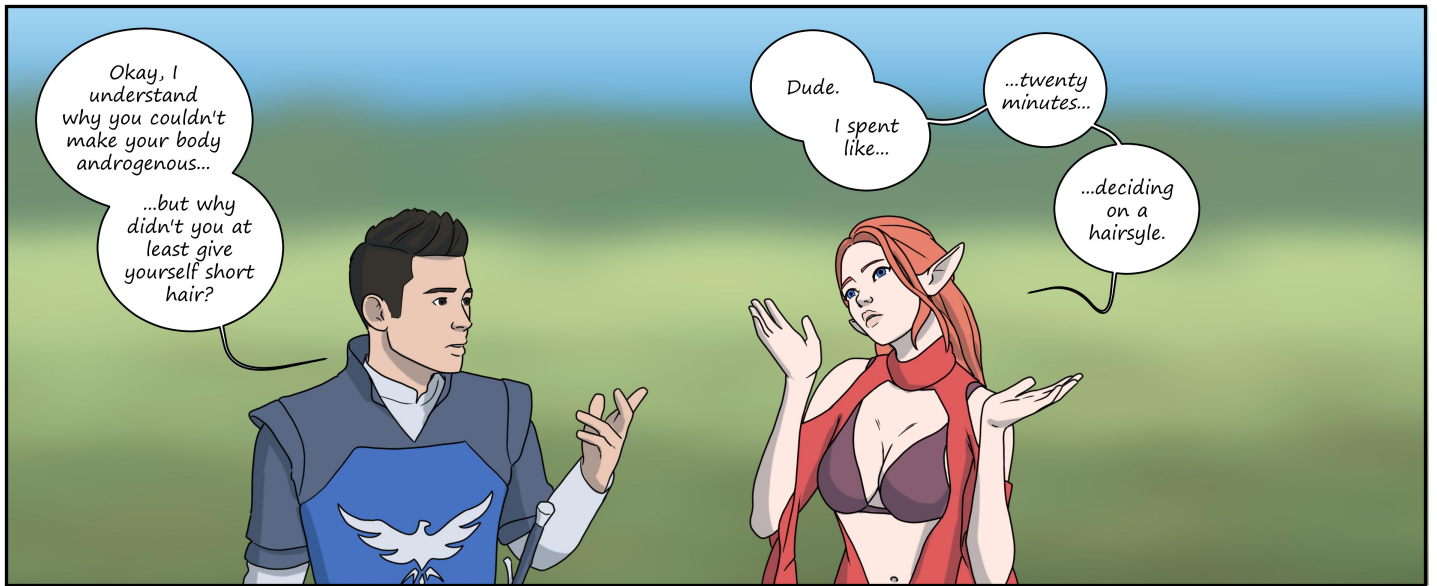
...very...

...carefully...









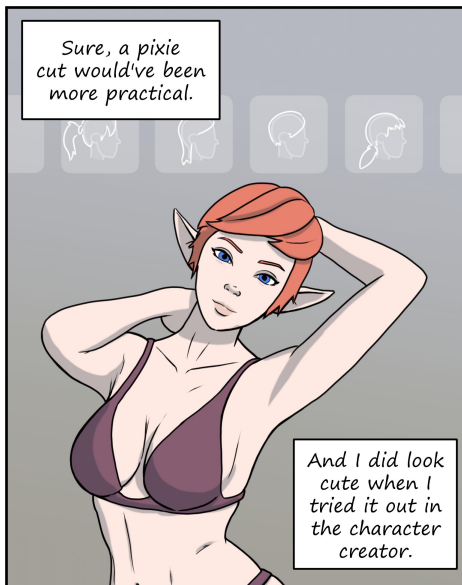
Okay, I understand why you couldn't make your body androgenous...

...but why didn't you at least give yourself short hair?

Dude. I spent like...

...twenty minutes...

...deciding on a hairstyle.



Sure, a pixie cut would've been more practical.

And I did look cute when I tried it out in the character creator.



But I look so much prettier with this hairstyle!



On another topic...

...you know, one thing that always breaks immersion for me in this kind of game...

...is seeing all of the other players running around working on the same quests.



Like, an NPC asks us to defend their village from an incoming horde of monsters...

...so we go out the front gate and clear out the entire horde.

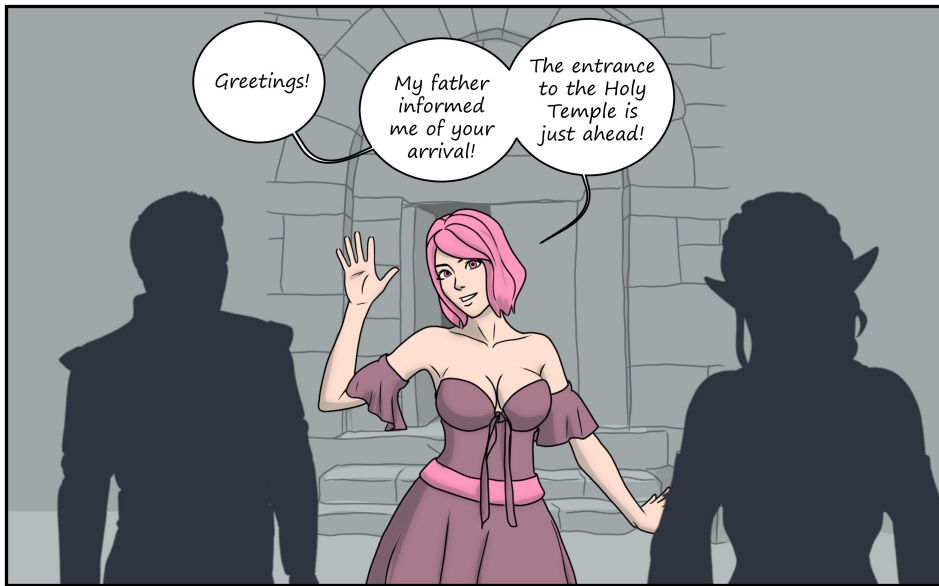


And then five minutes later the horde reappears, waiting for the next batch of players to defeat them!



We thank you for your aid, brave adventurers!

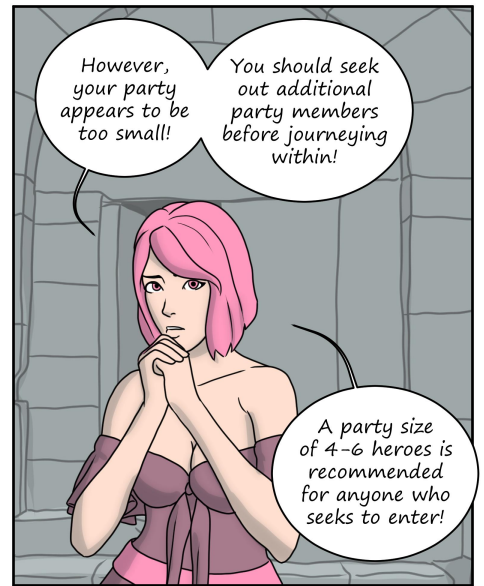
There's no sense of permanence!



Greetings!

My father informed me of your arrival!

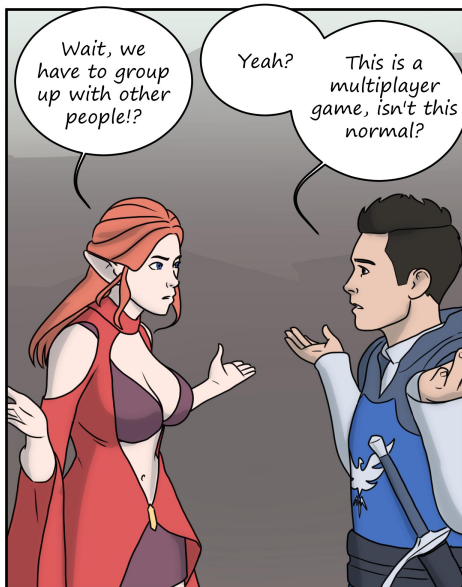
The entrance to the Holy Temple is just ahead!



However, your party appears to be too small!

You should seek out additional party members before journeying within!

A party size of 4-6 heroes is recommended for anyone who seeks to enter!



Wait, we have to group up with other people!?

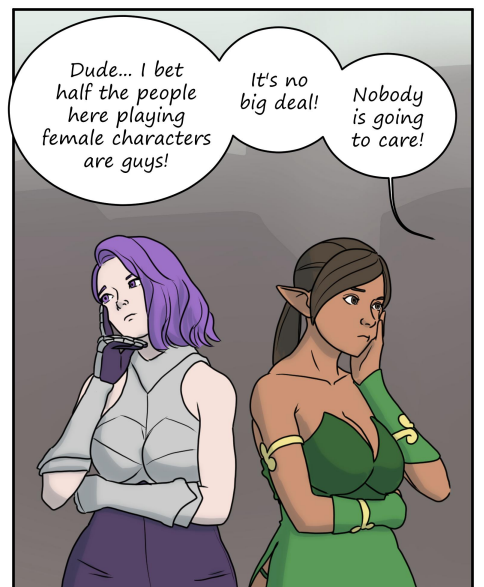
Yeah?

This is a multiplayer game, isn't this normal?



True, but I can't group up with other people...

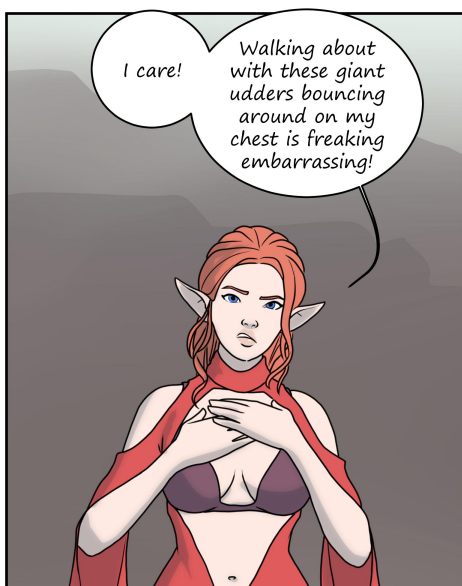
...not when I look like this!



Dude... I bet half the people here playing female characters are guys!

It's no big deal!

Nobody is going to care!



I care! Walking about with these giant udders bouncing around on my chest is freaking embarrassing!



Well, I'm sure all the other guys playing as girls feel the same way!

Look, to get through this next part, we need to find a group.

Just suck it up, and this will be over before you know it.



Fine, but whatever you do, don't tell anyone that I'm a guy!

You know...

...I don't think anyone would believe me if I told them...



What the fuck is that supposed to mean...?



All I'm trying to say is that for a guy who's constantly complaining about being stuck as a girl...

...it's kind of scary how good you are at acting like one.



Dude! I'm not acting this way because I want to... It's this stupid avatar!

It makes me act like a natural girl the same way your avatar makes you naturally talented with a sword!



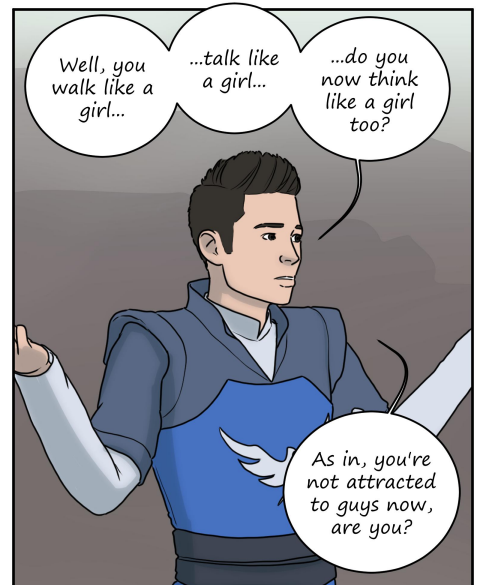
Like, do you really believe that this whole time I've been standing like this on purpose!?



So um... if all of your girlish behavior is because of your avatar...

...how deep does that go?

What do you mean?

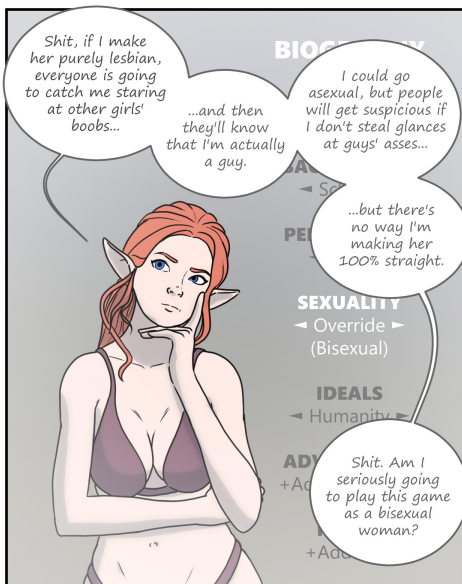


Well, you walk like a girl...

...talk like a girl...

...do you now think like a girl too?

As in, you're not attracted to guys now, are you?



Shit, if I make her purely lesbian, everyone is going to catch me staring at other girls' boobs...

...and then they'll know that I'm actually a guy.

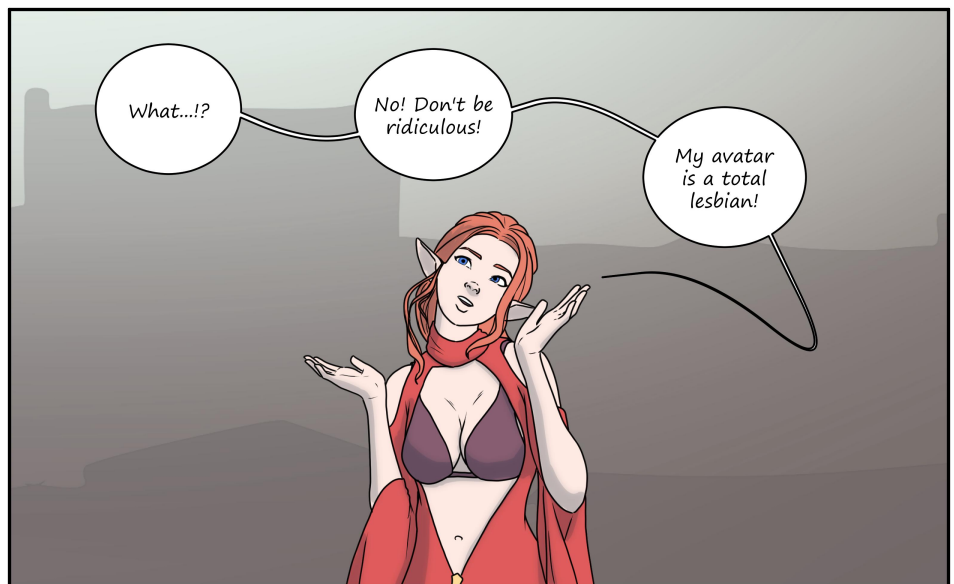
I could go asexual, but people will get suspicious if I don't steal glances at guys' asses...

...but there's no way I'm making her 100% straight.

SEXUALITY
← Override →
(Bisexual)

IDEALS
← Humanity →

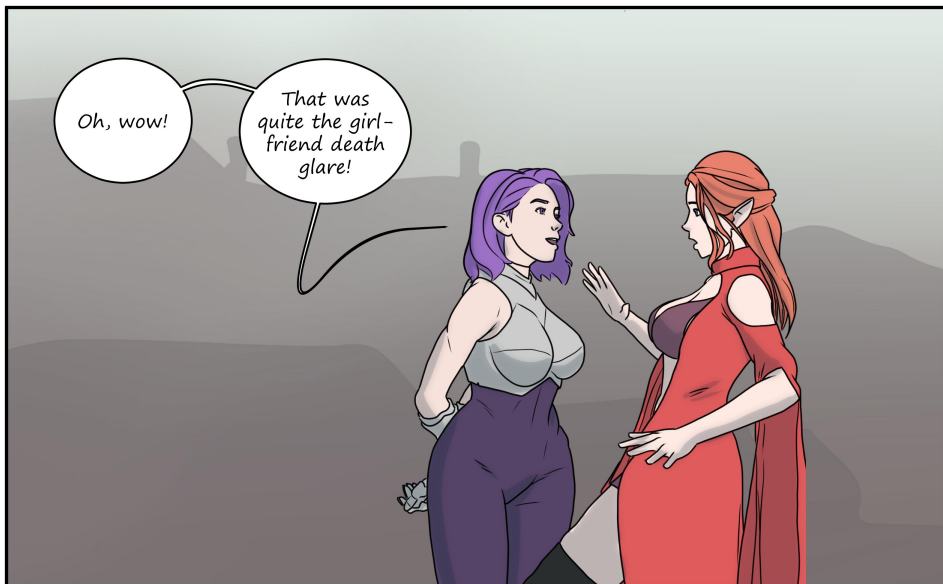
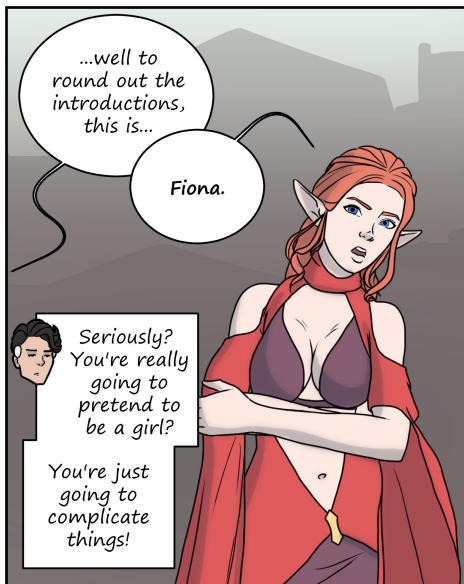
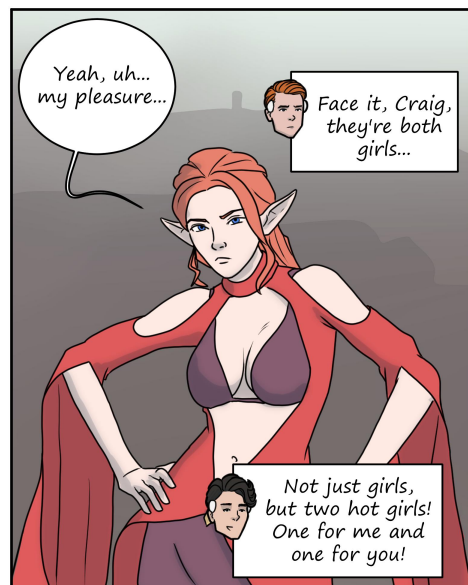
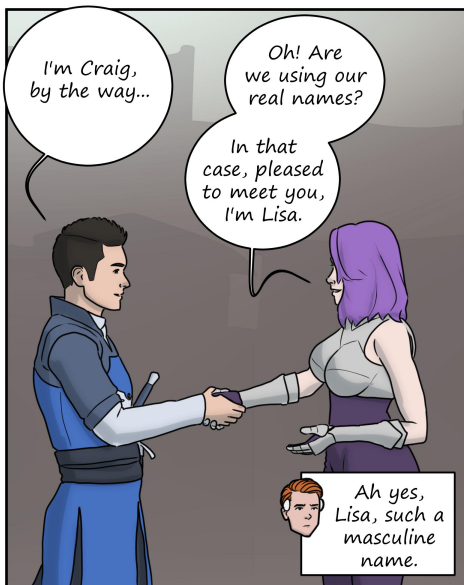
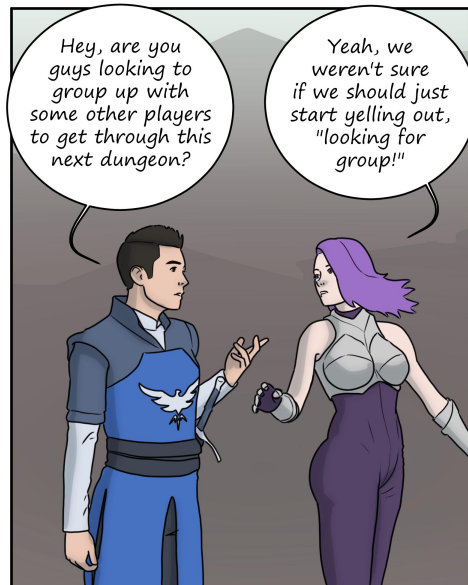
Shit. Am I seriously going to play this game as a bisexual woman?

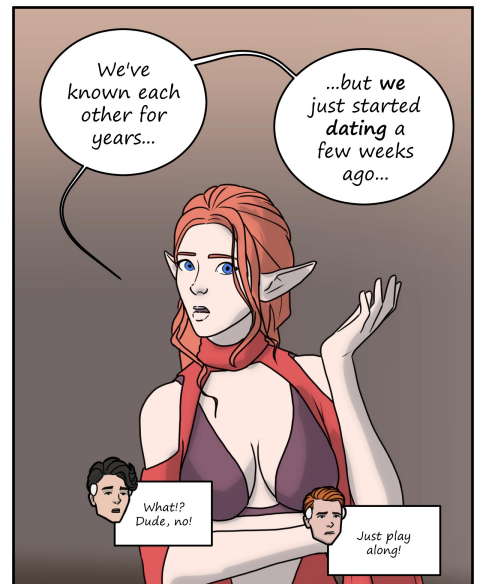
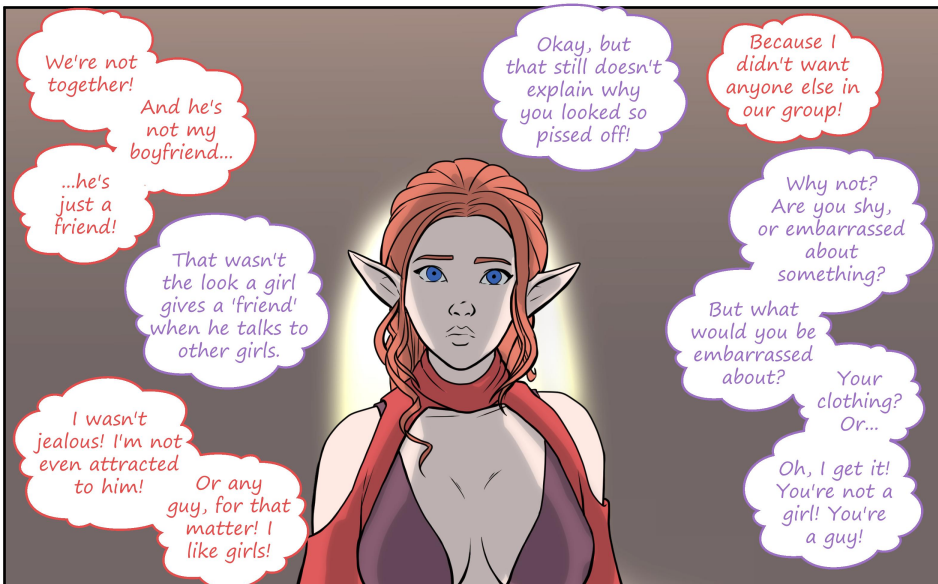
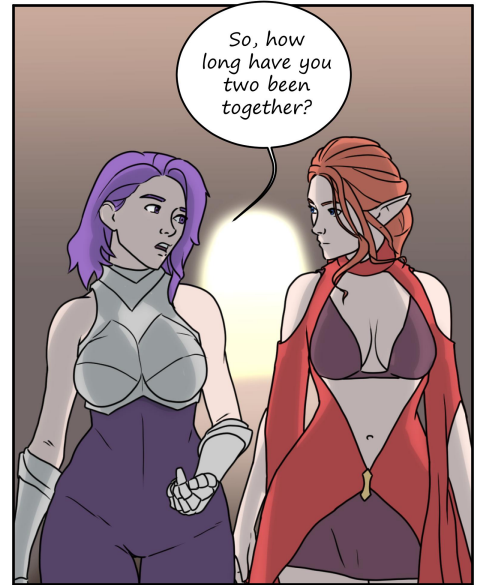
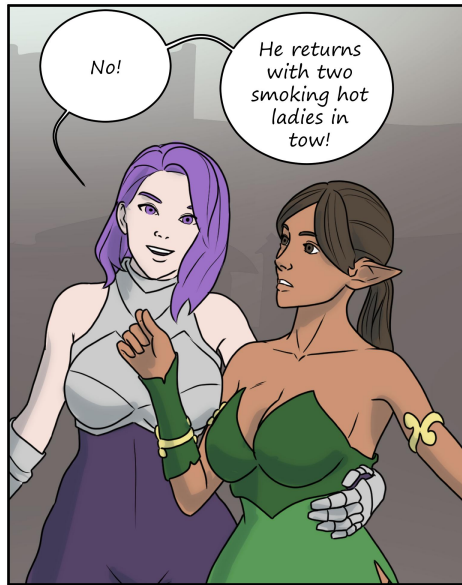
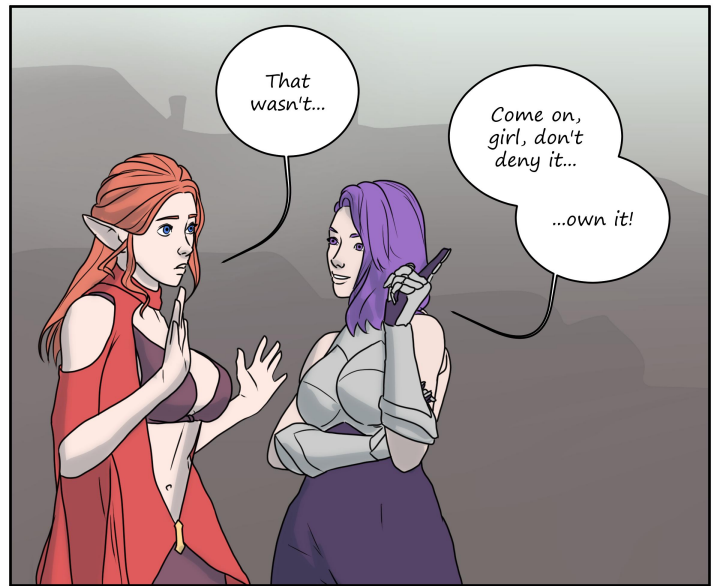
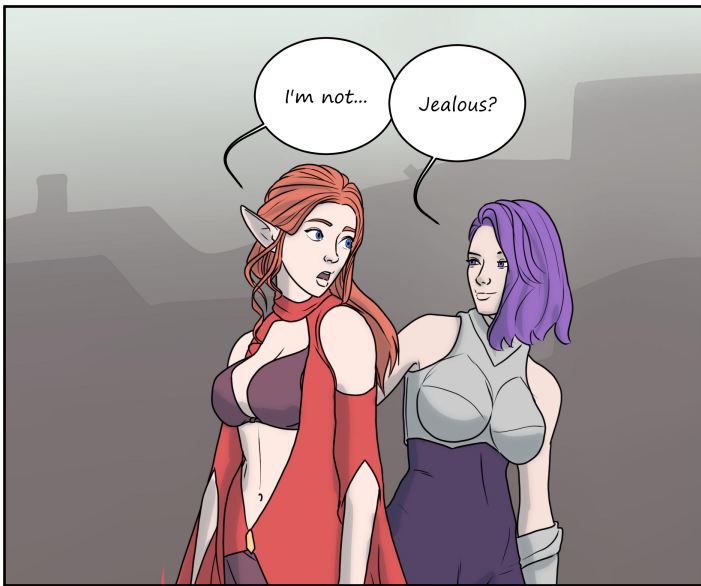


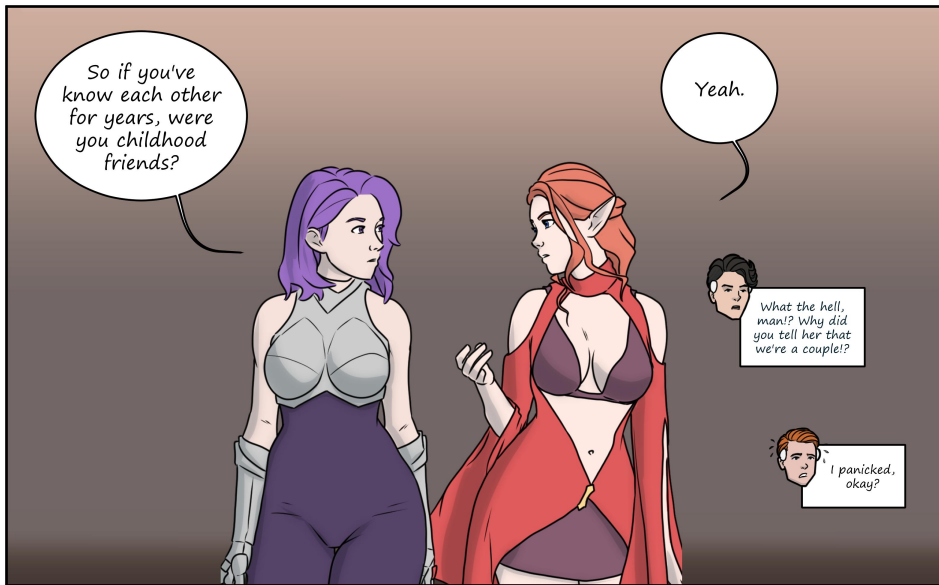
What...!?

No! Don't be ridiculous!

My avatar is a total lesbian!





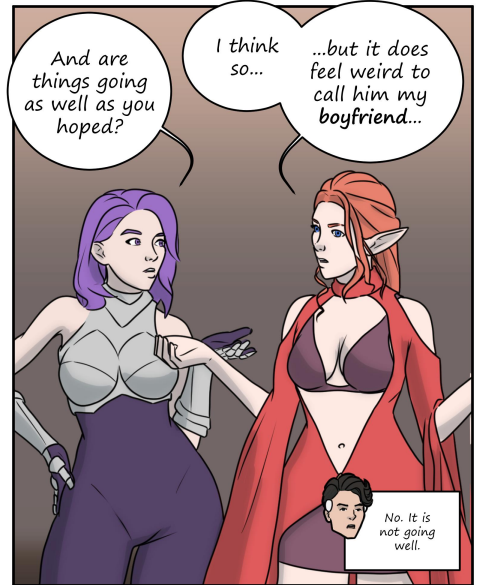


So if you've know each other for years, were you childhood friends?

Yeah.

What the hell, man? Why did you tell her that we're a couple!?

I panicked, okay?

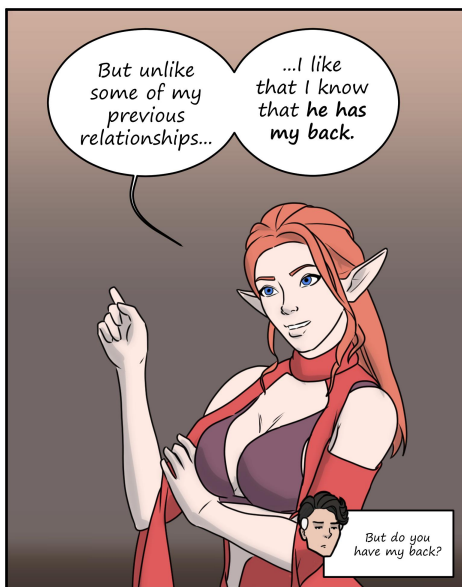


And are things going as well as you hoped?

I think so...

...but it does feel weird to call him my boyfriend...

No. It is not going well.



But unlike some of my previous relationships...

...I like that I know that he has my back.

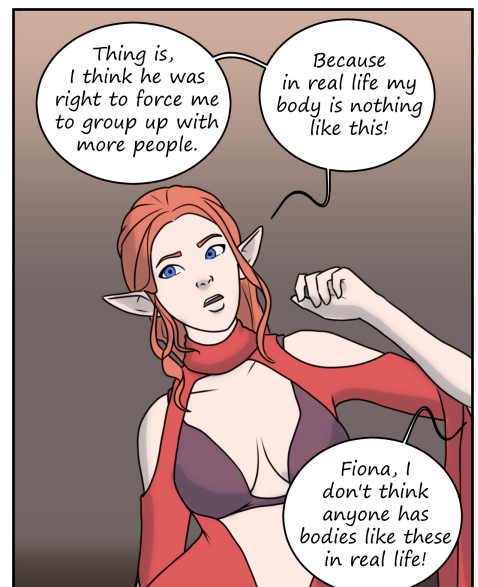
But do you have my back?



Well, I mean, he usually does...

...because on occasion he will do a boneheaded thing like invite two hot girls into our party.

Because I'm pretty sure I'm not the one who's screwing things up for their friend right now...



Thing is, I think he was right to force me to group up with more people.

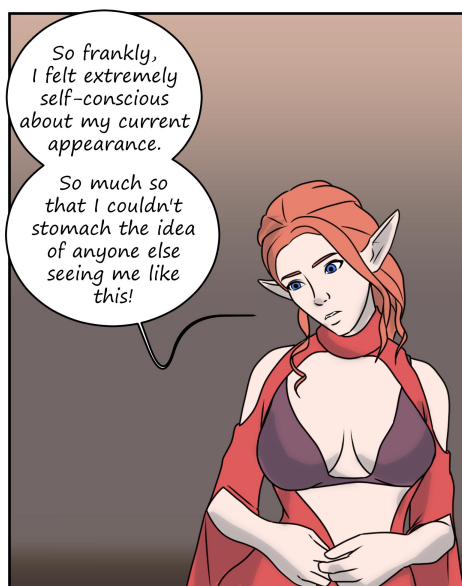
Because in real life my body is nothing like this!

Fiona, I don't think anyone has bodies like these in real life!



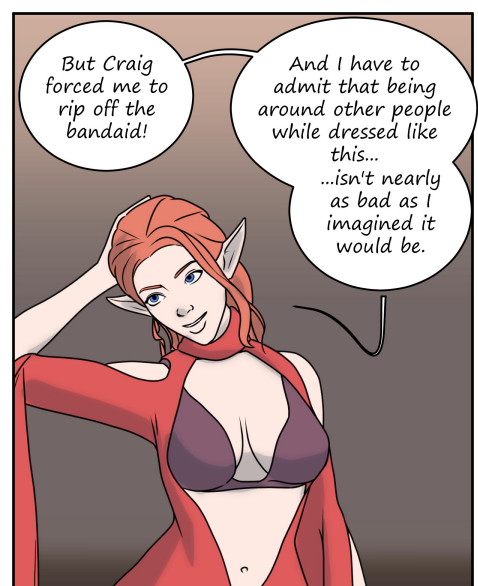
And I never dress in anything as...

...um, ...revealing as this...



So frankly, I felt extremely self-conscious about my current appearance.

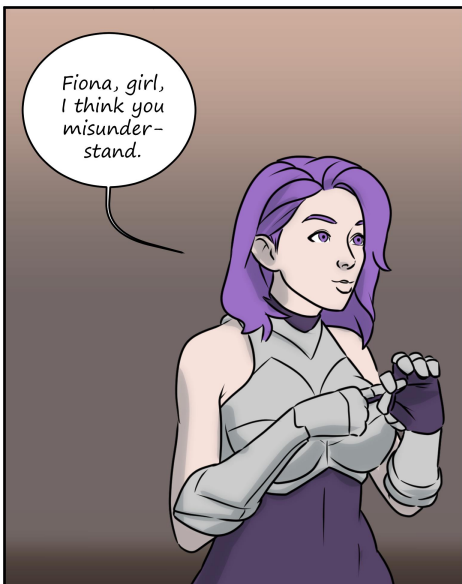
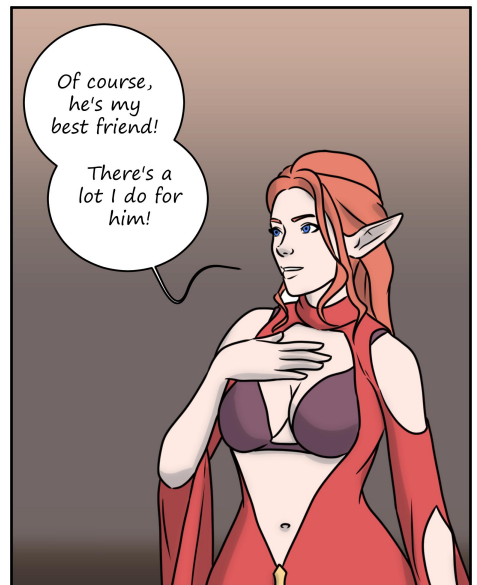
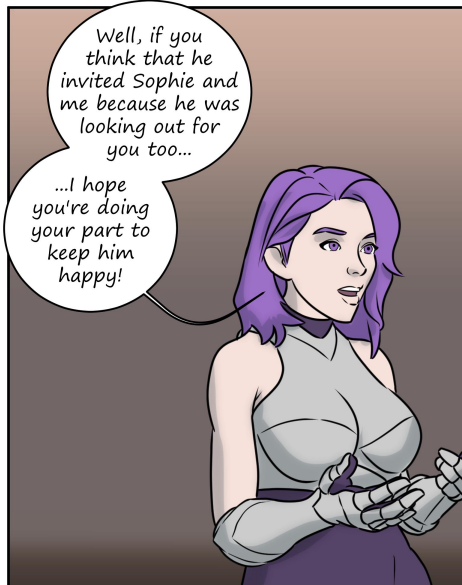
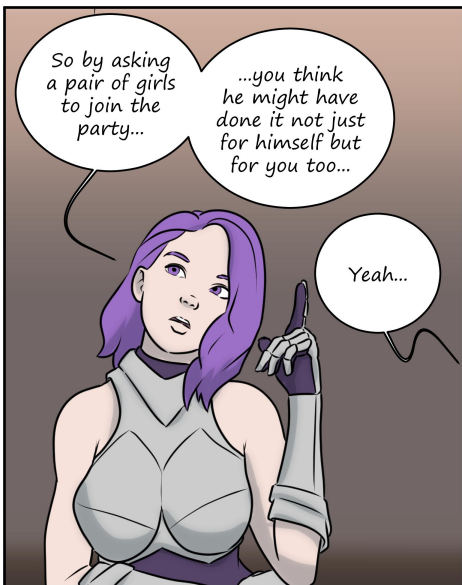
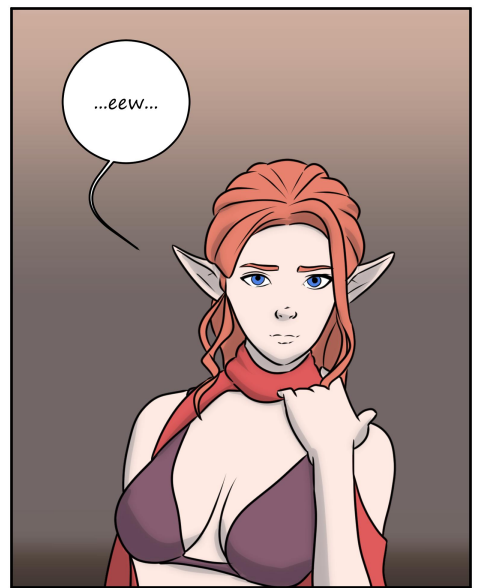
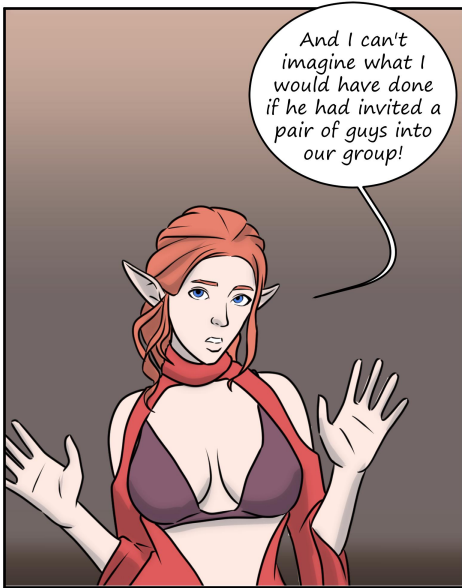
So much so that I couldn't stomach the idea of anyone else seeing me like this!

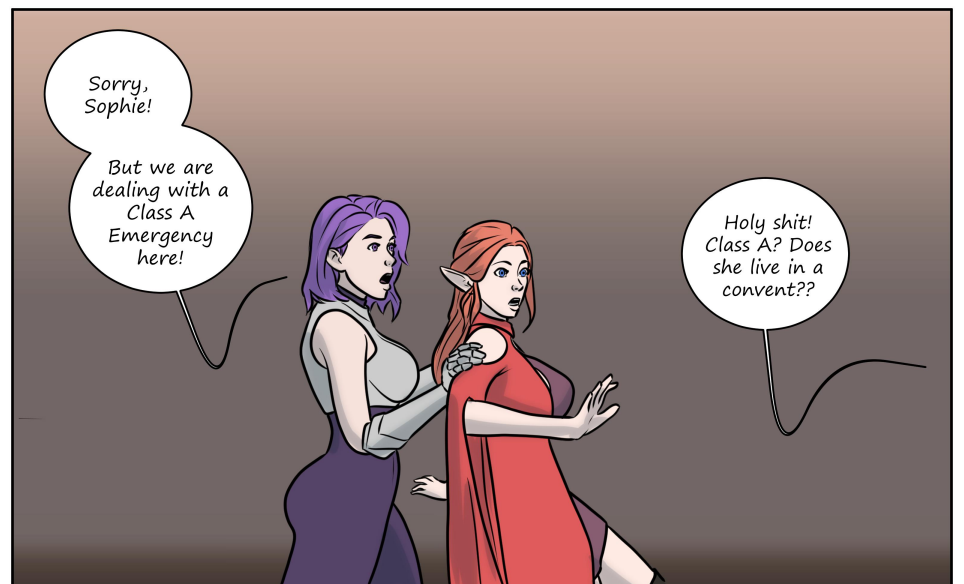
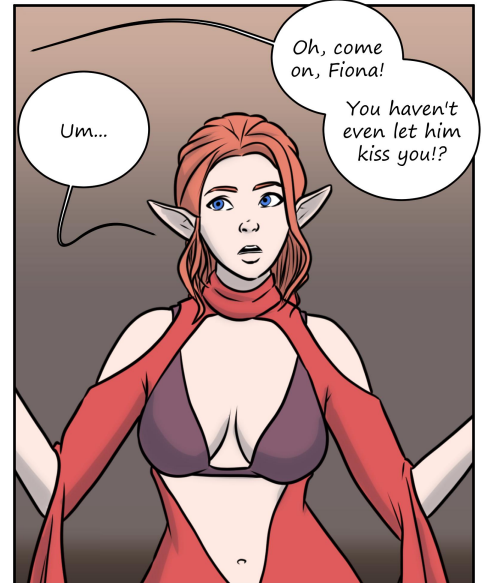
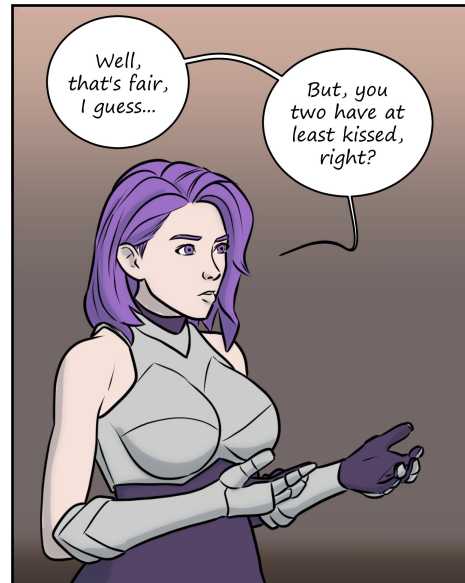
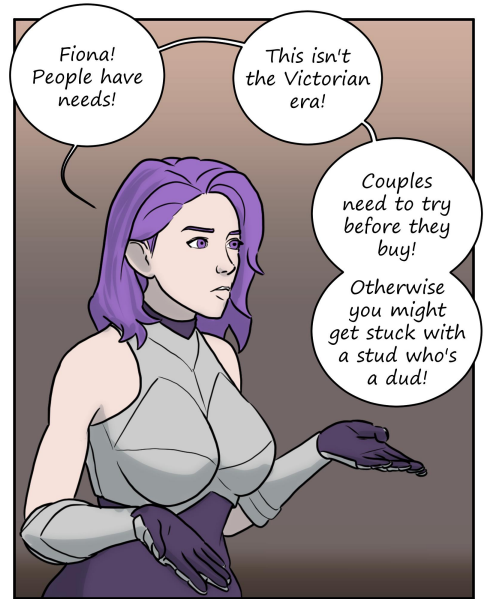
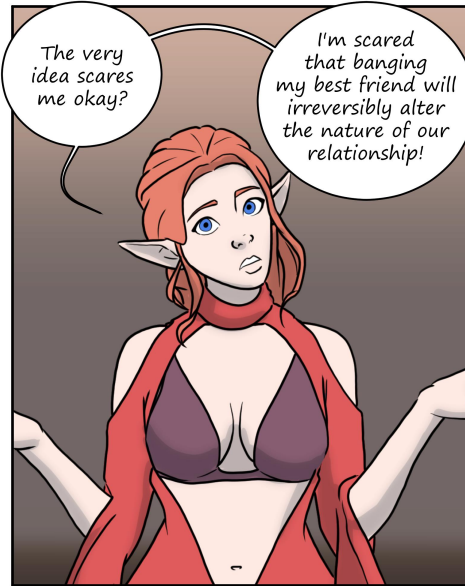
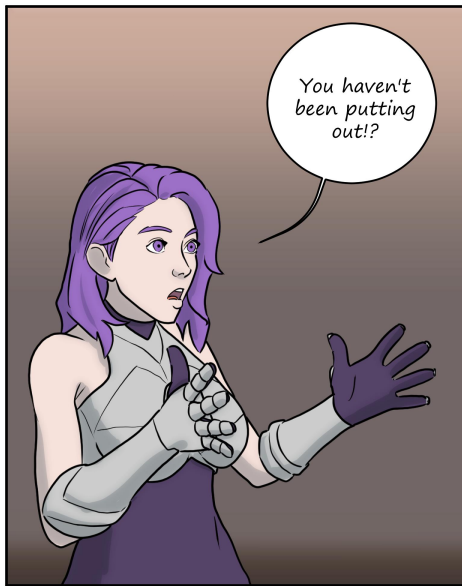


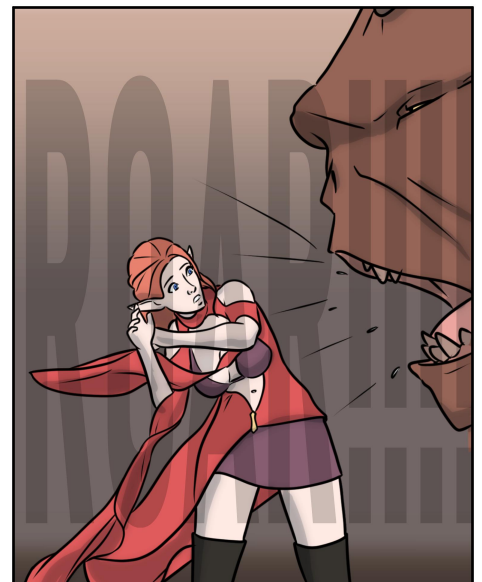
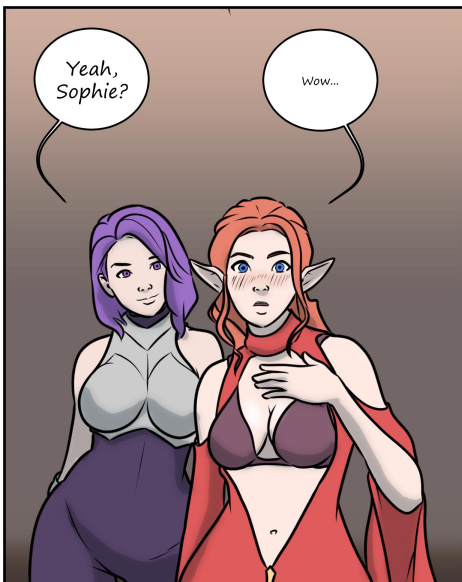
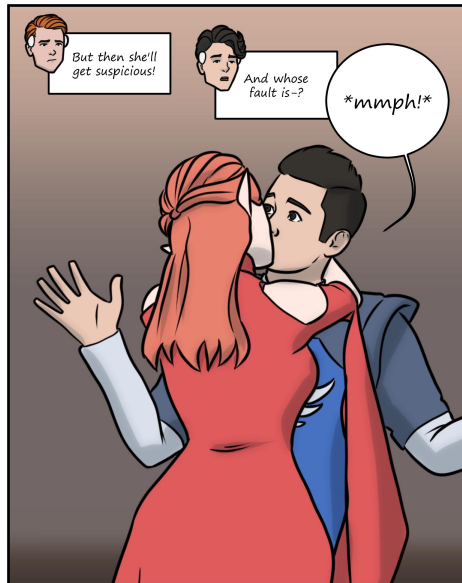
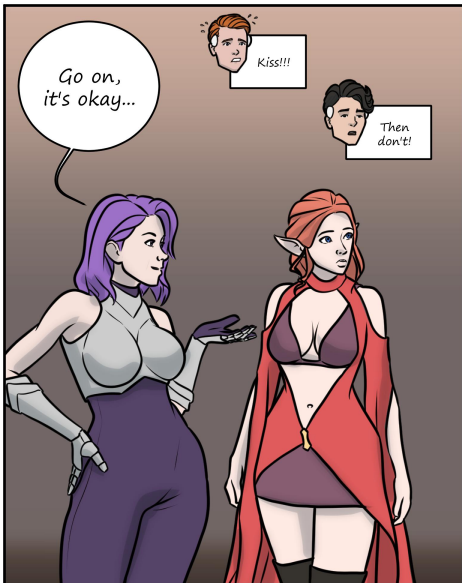
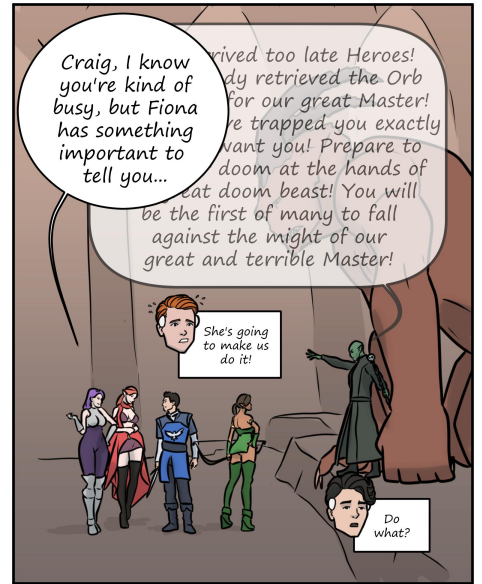
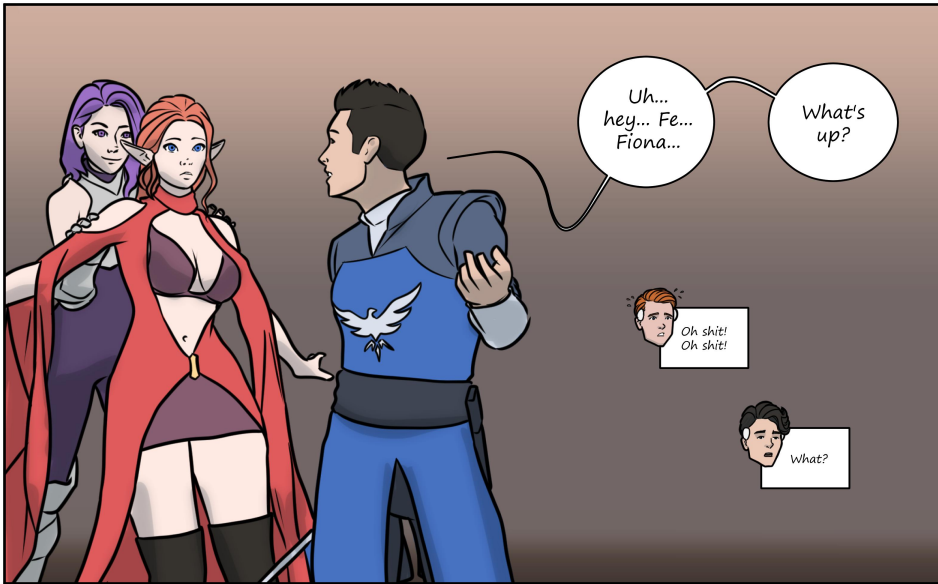
But Craig forced me to rip off the bandaid!

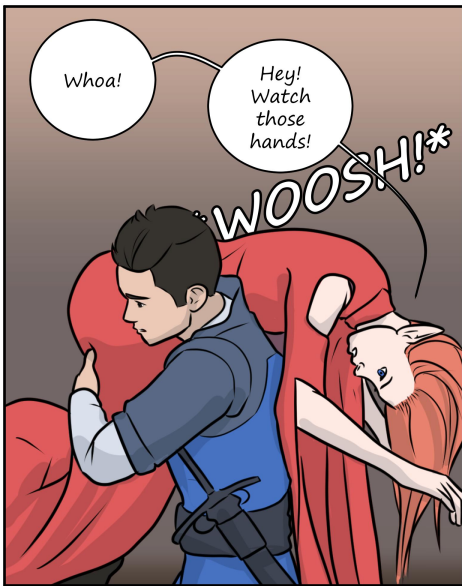
And I have to admit that being around other people while dressed like this...

...isn't nearly as bad as I imagined it would be.









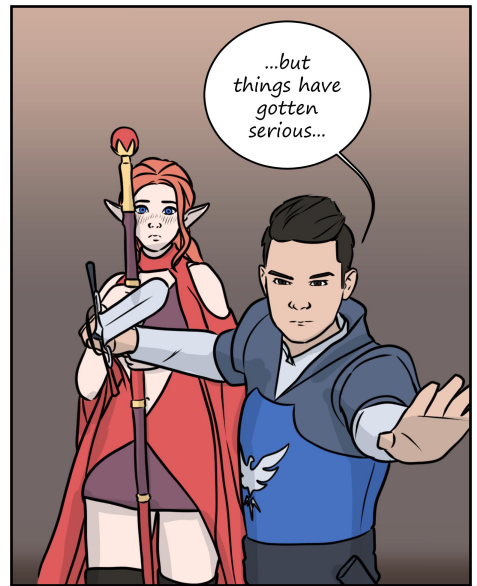
Whoa!

Hey! Watch those hands!

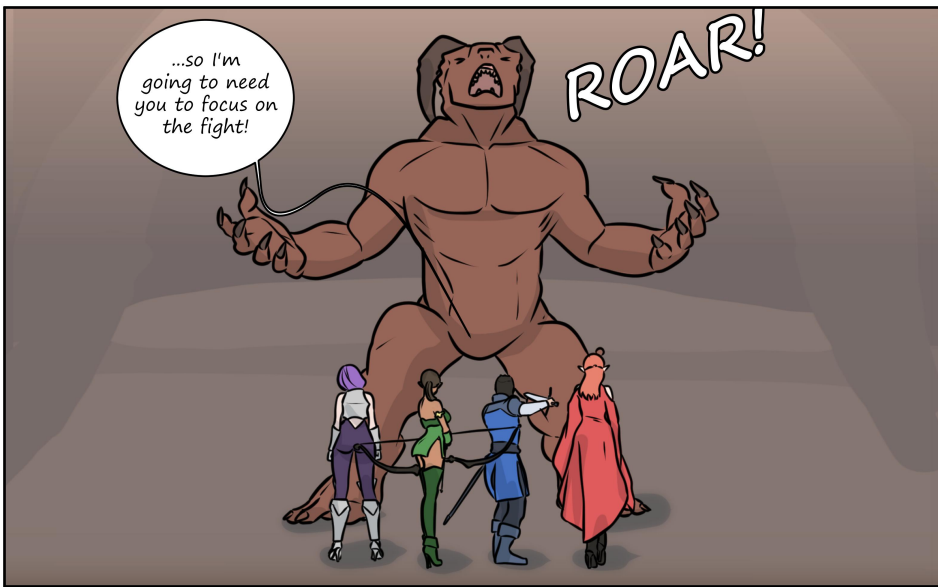
WOOSH!*



Okay, you've had your fun fooling around with Lisa...

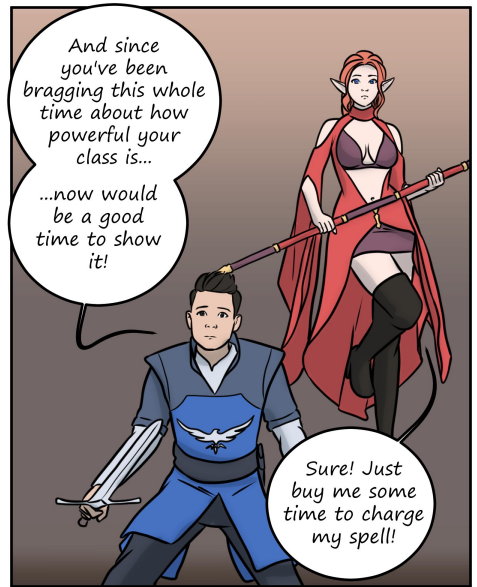


...but things have gotten serious...



...so I'm going to need you to focus on the fight!

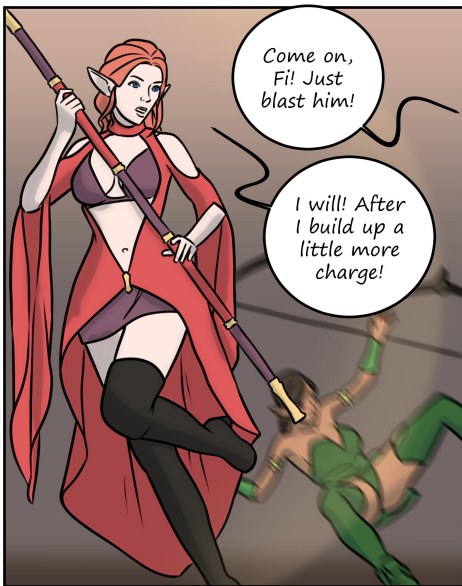
ROAR!



And since you've been bragging this whole time about how powerful your class is...

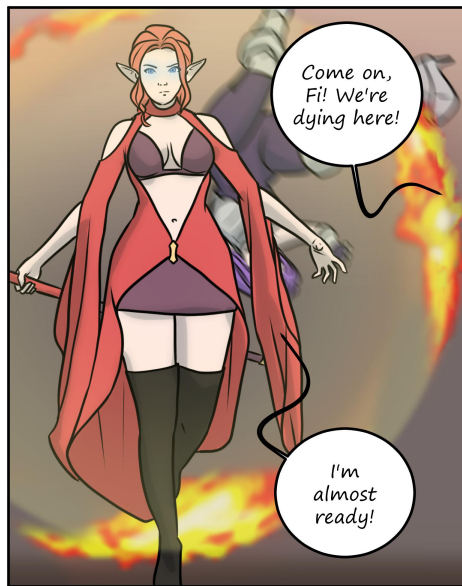
...now would be a good time to show it!

Sure! Just buy me some time to charge my spell!



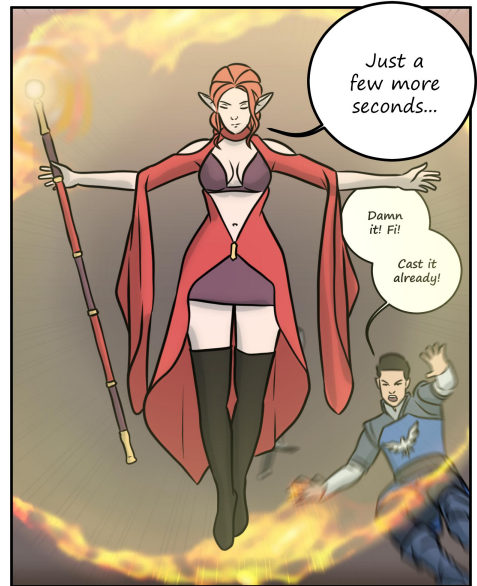
Come on, Fi! Just blast him!

I will! After I build up a little more charge!



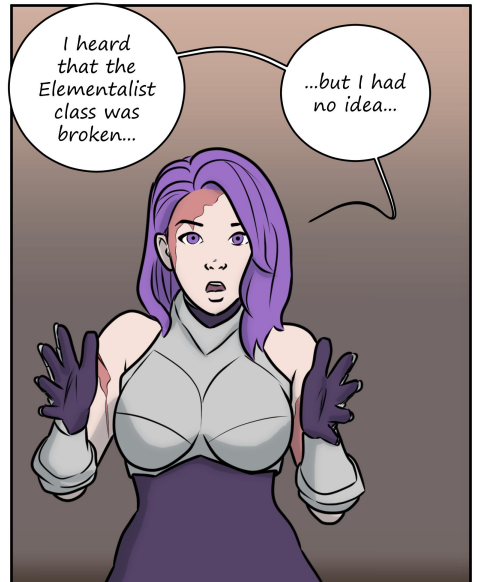
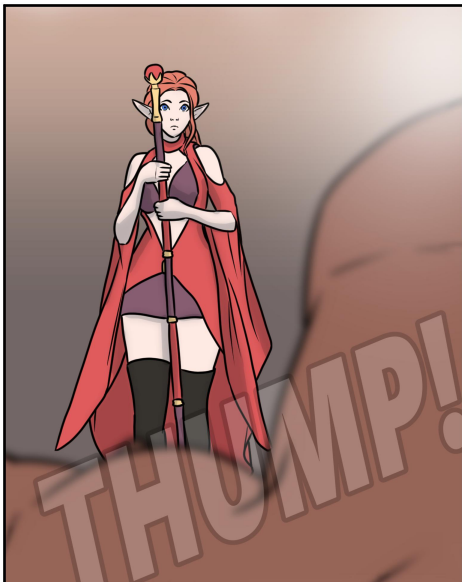
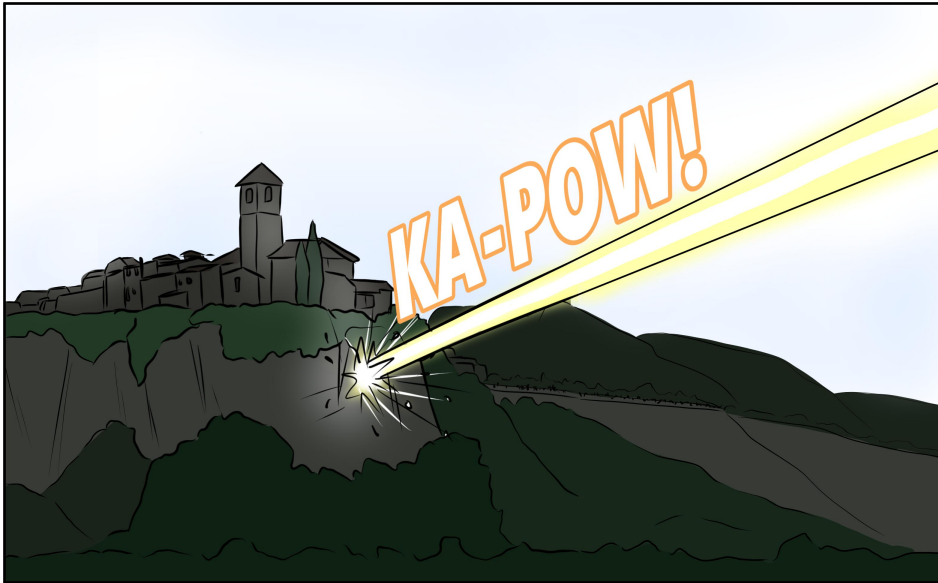
Come on, Fi! We're dying here!

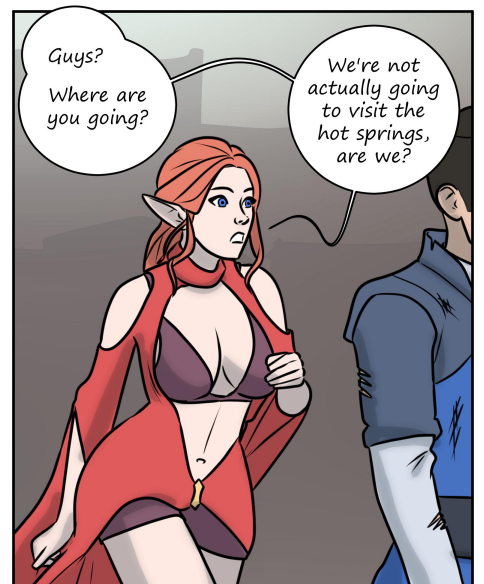
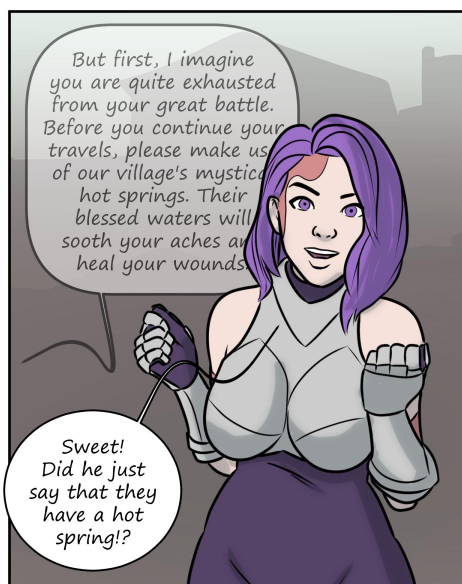
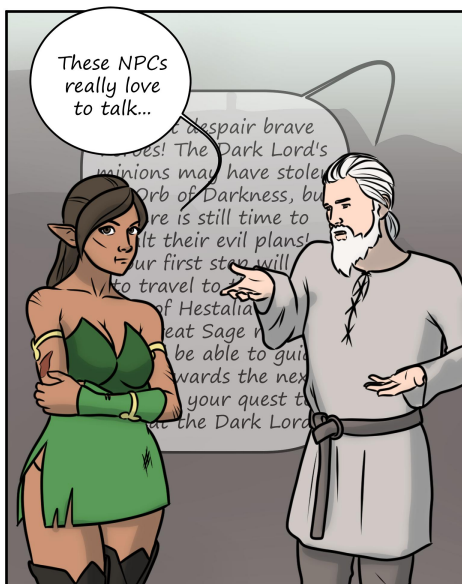
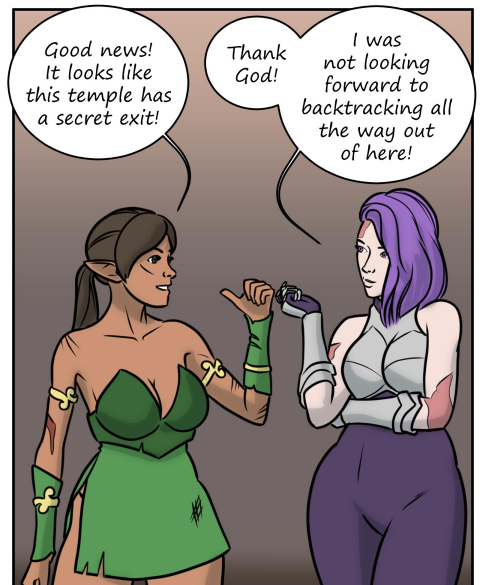
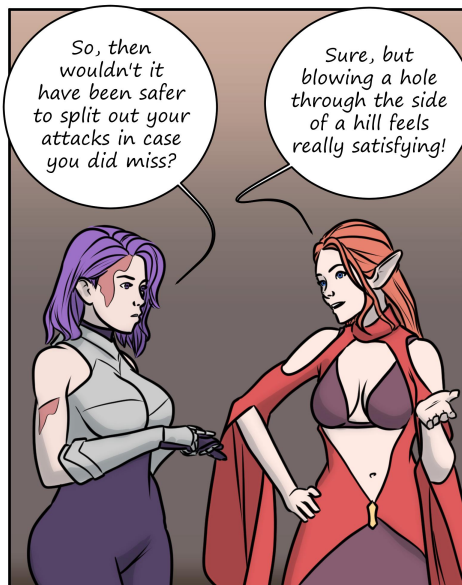
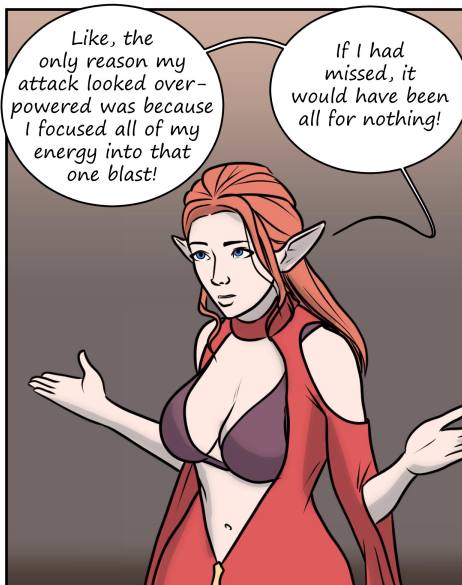
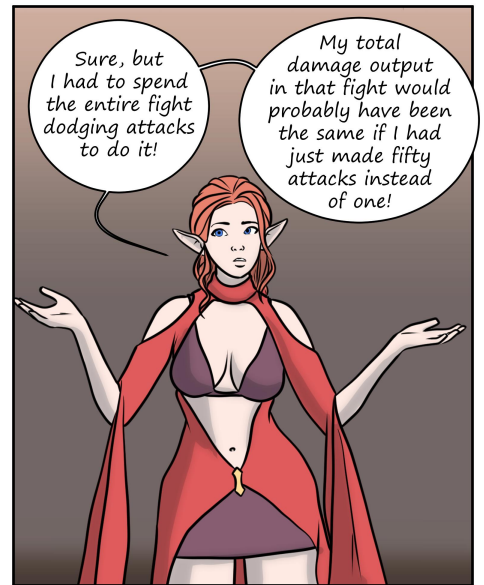
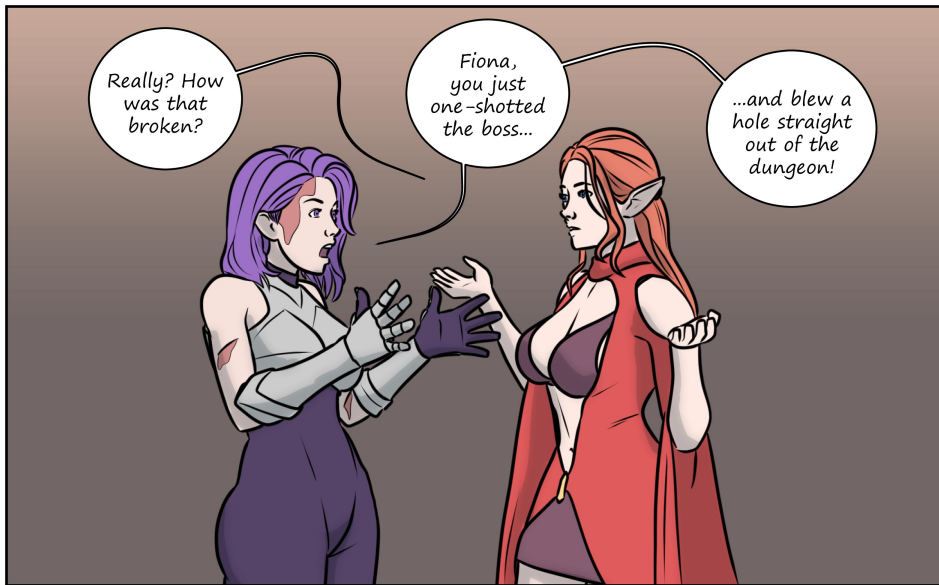
I'm almost ready!

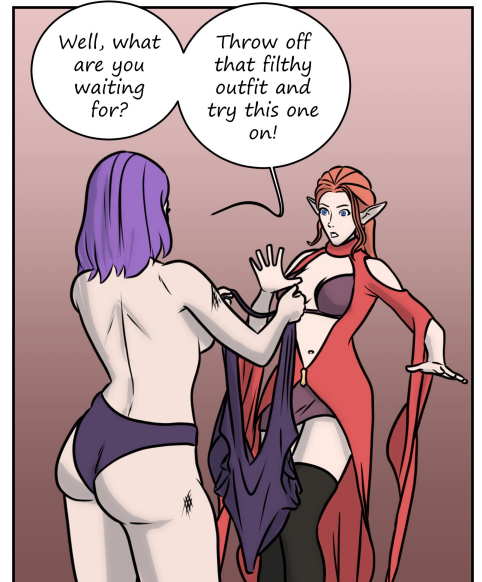
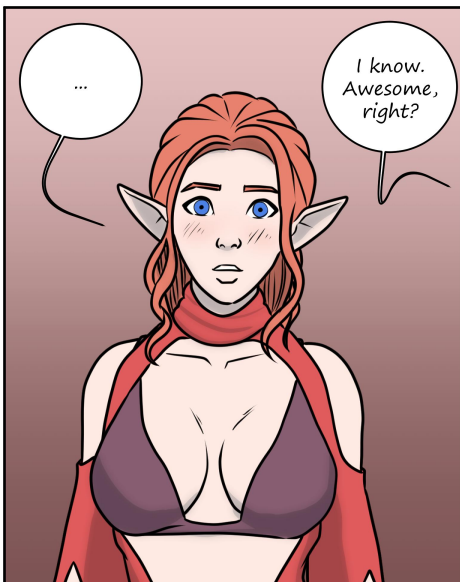
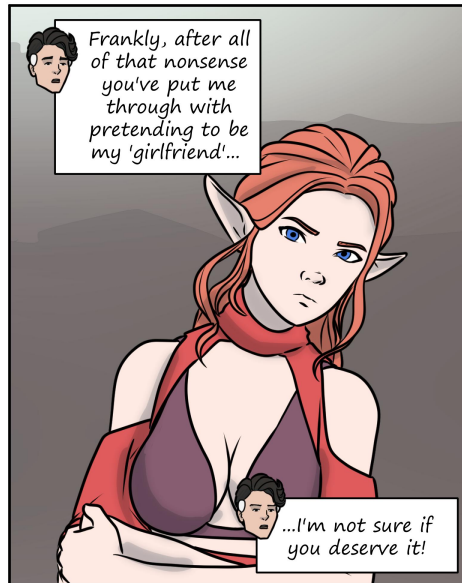
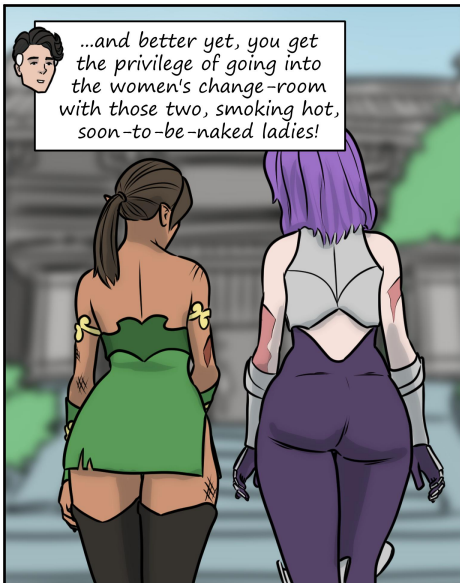
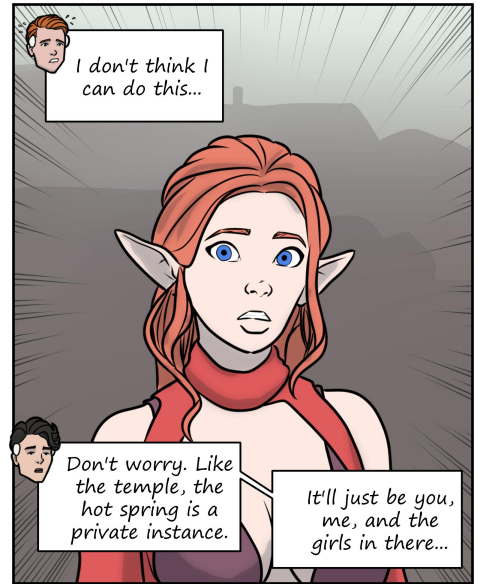


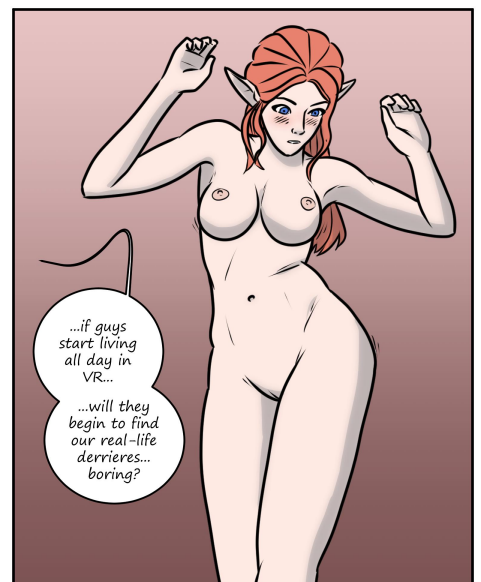
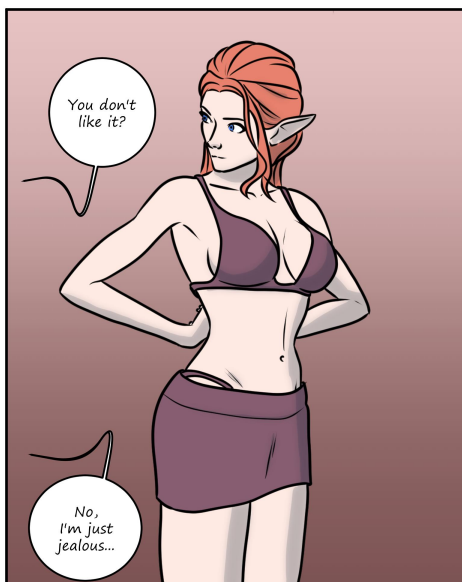
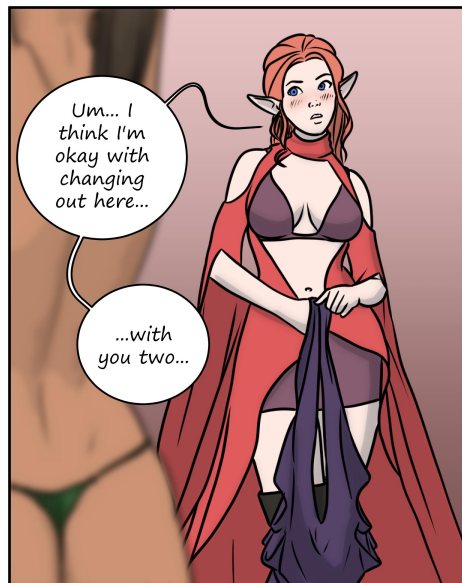
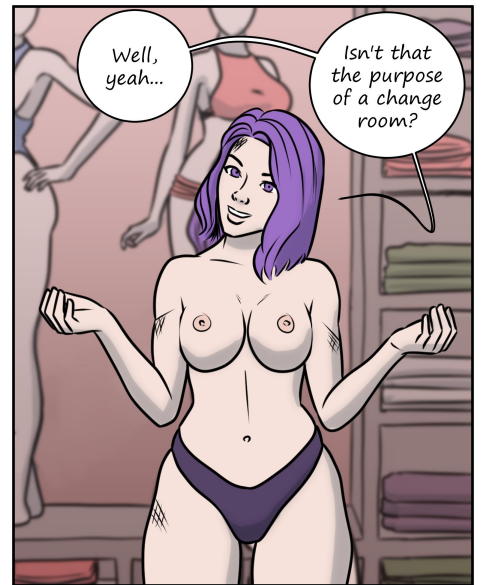
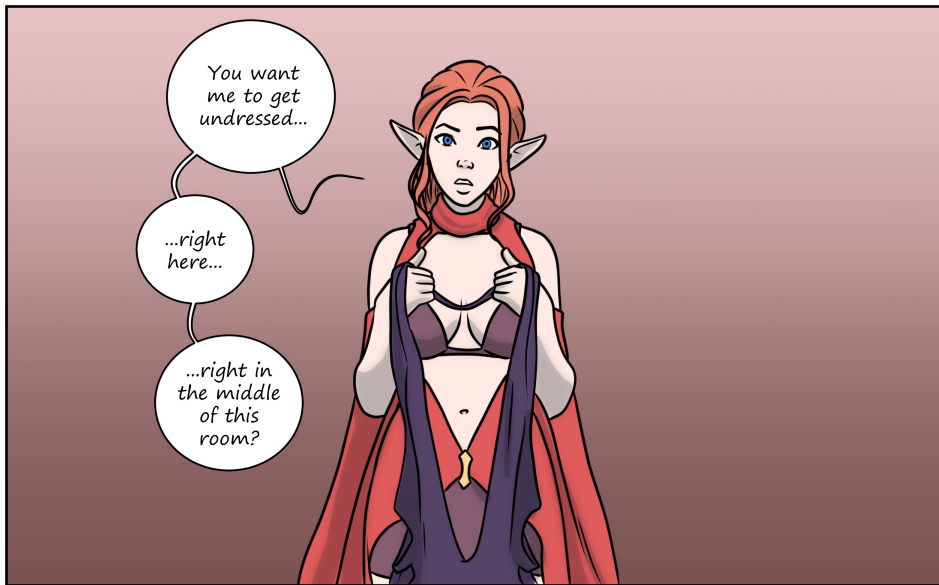
Just a few more seconds...

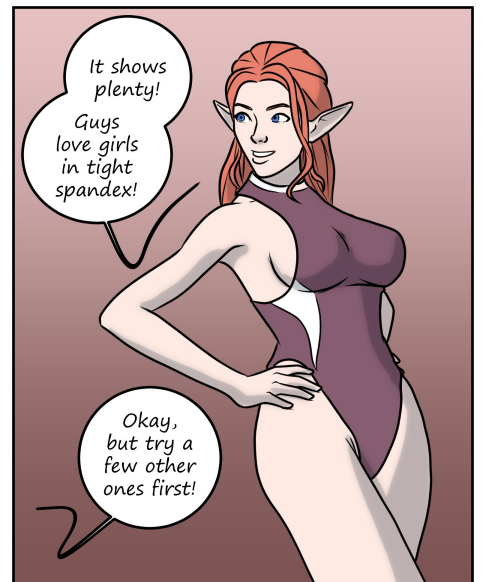
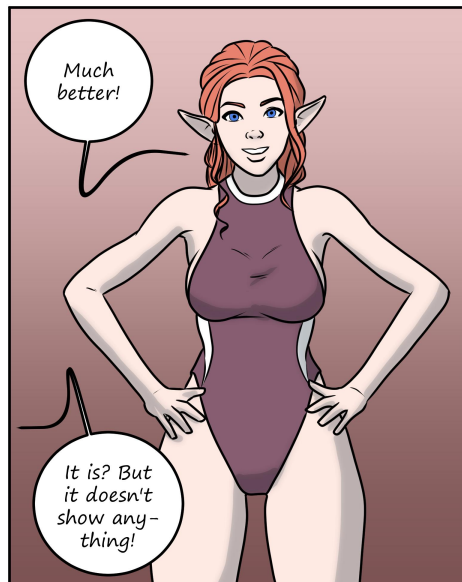
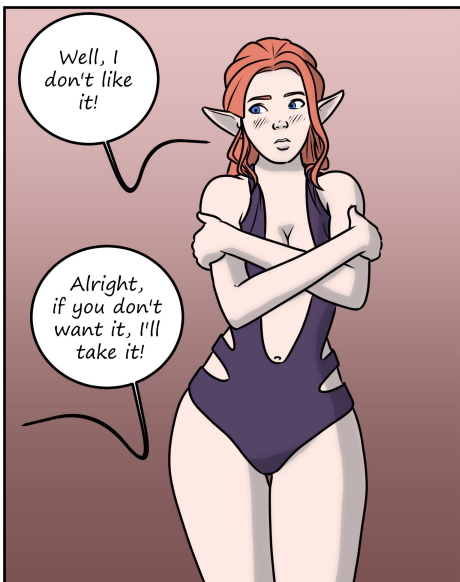
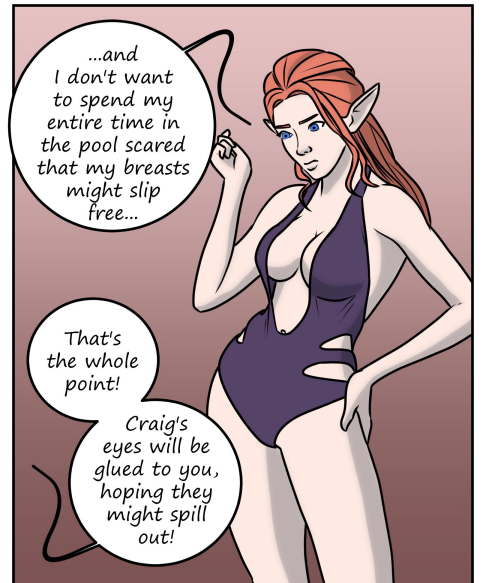
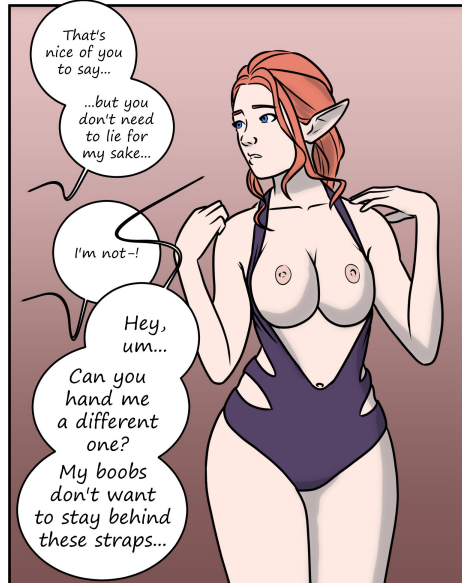
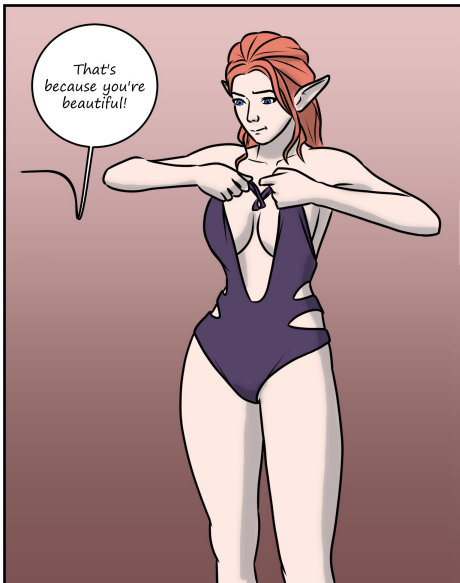
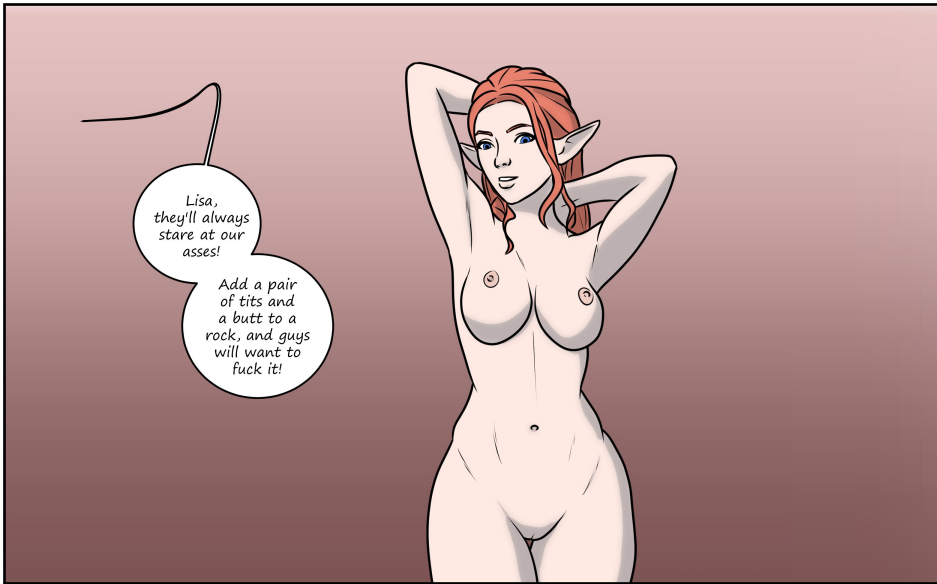
Damn it! Fi! Cast it already!

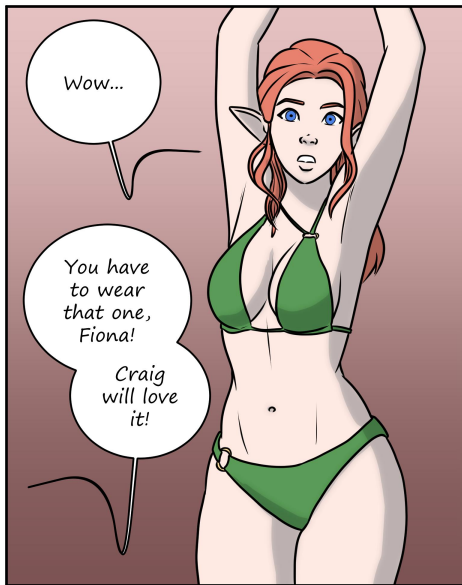








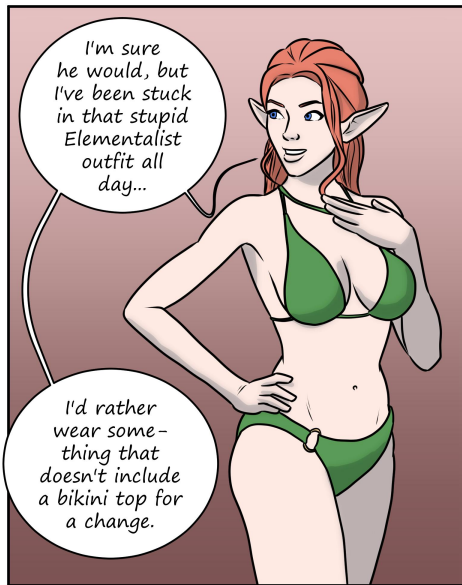




Wow...

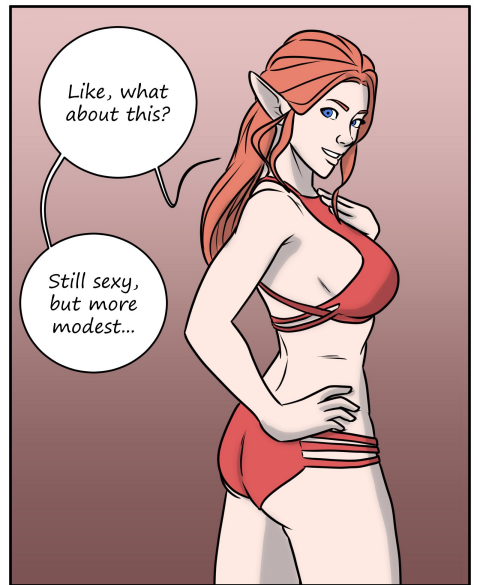
You have to wear that one, Fiona!

Craig will love it!



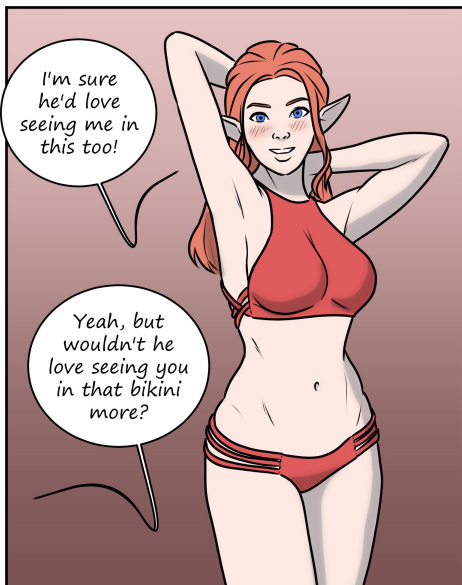
I'm sure he would, but I've been stuck in that stupid Elementalist outfit all day...

I'd rather wear something that doesn't include a bikini top for a change.



Like, what about this?

Still sexy, but more modest...



I'm sure he'd love seeing me in this too!

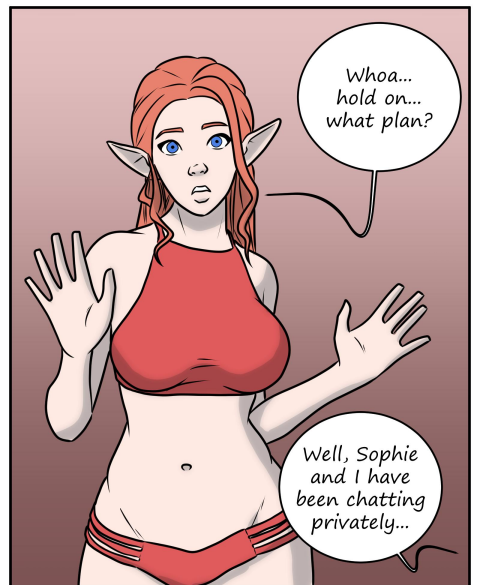
Yeah, but wouldn't he love seeing you in that bikini more?



Oh, come on, Lisa...

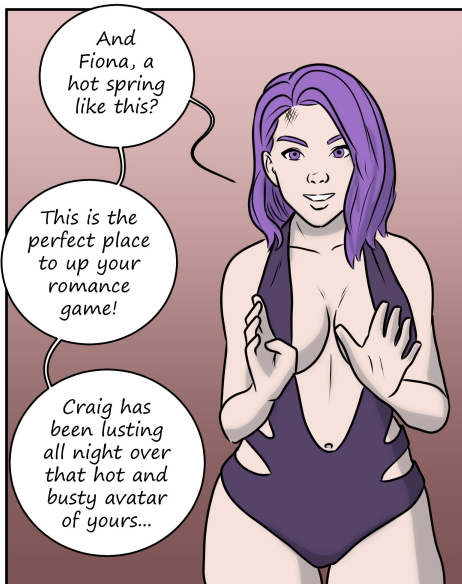
Just let her wear whatever she likes.

Your plan won't work if she feels too embarrassed about her outfit to do anything else.



Whoa... hold on... what plan?

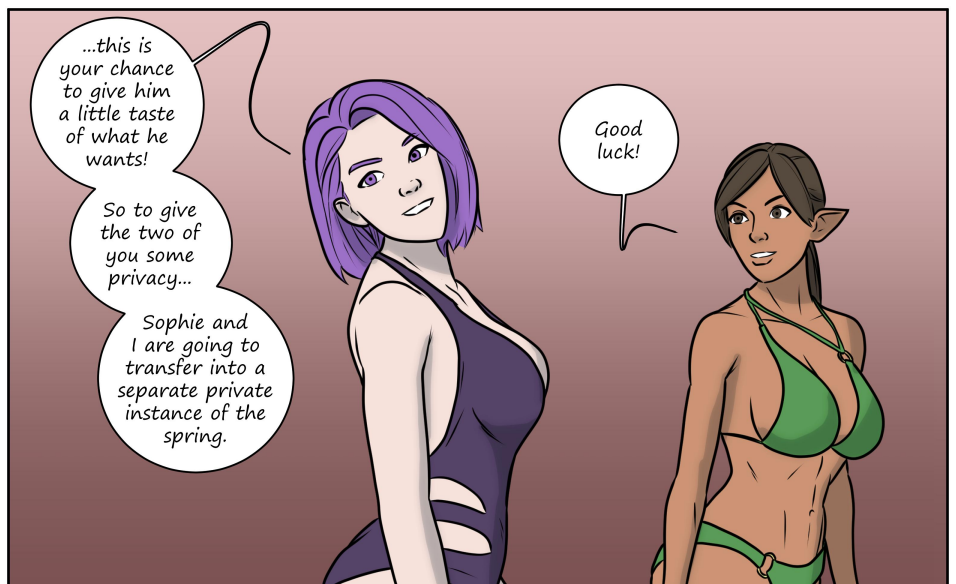
Well, Sophie and I have been chatting privately...



And Fiona, a hot spring like this?

This is the perfect place to up your romance game!

Craig has been lusting all night over that hot and busty avatar of yours...



...this is your chance to give him a little taste of what he wants!

So to give the two of you some privacy...

Sophie and I are going to transfer into a separate private instance of the spring.

Good luck!

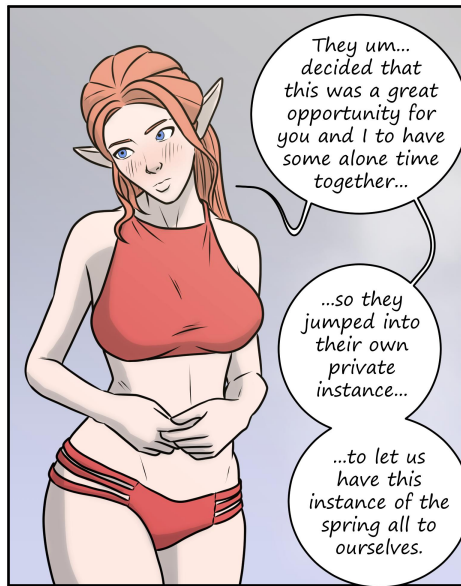


Oh, hey!

There you are!

I was beginning to worry that you and the girls had ditched me!

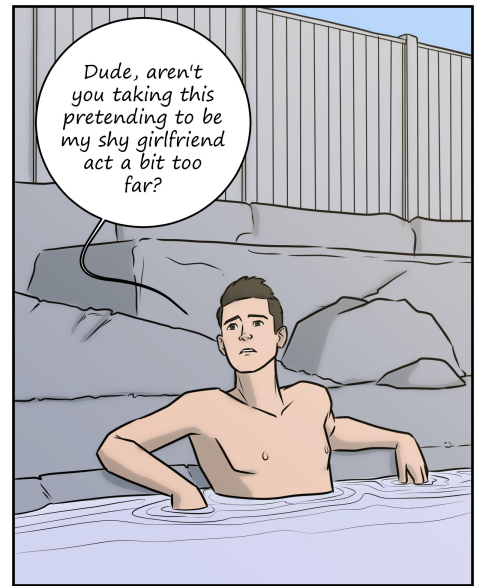
Where are they, anyway?



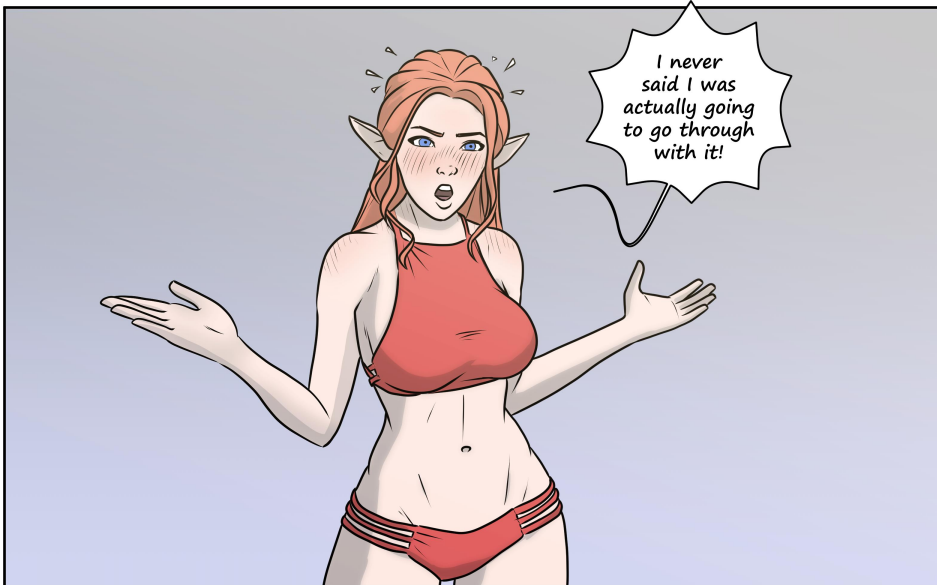
They um... decided that this was a great opportunity for you and I to have some alone time together...

...so they jumped into their own private instance...

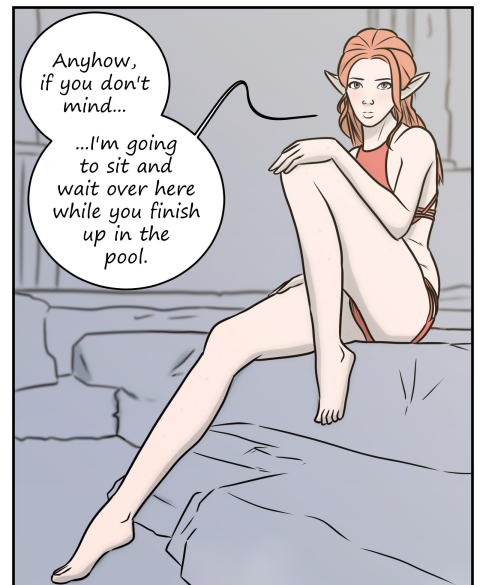
...to let us have this instance of the spring all to ourselves.



Dude, aren't you taking this pretending to be my shy girlfriend act a bit too far?



I never said I was actually going to go through with it!



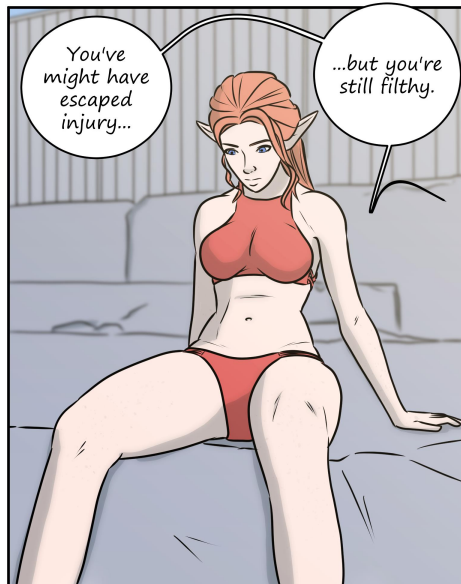
Anyhow, if you don't mind...

...I'm going to sit and wait over here while you finish up in the pool.



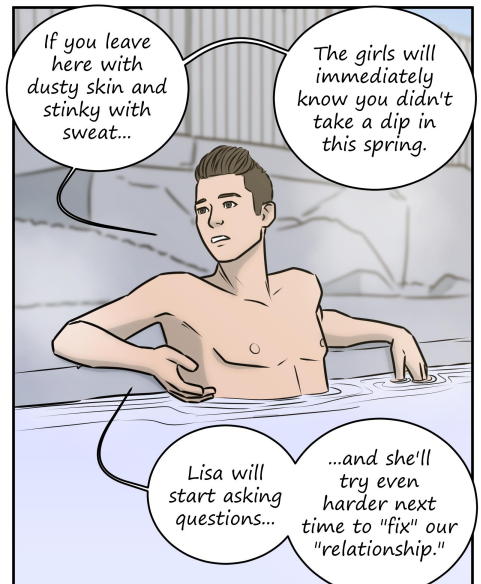
That's not going to work, Felix...

What's not going to work?



You've might have escaped injury...

...but you're still filthy.

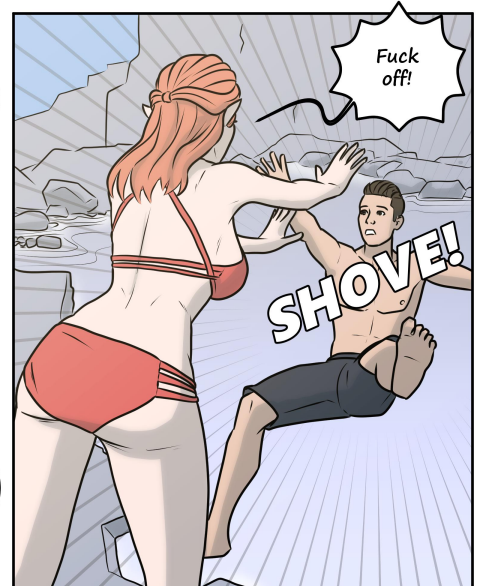
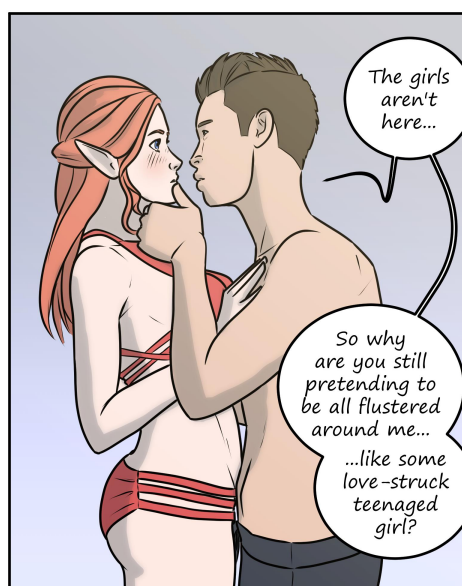
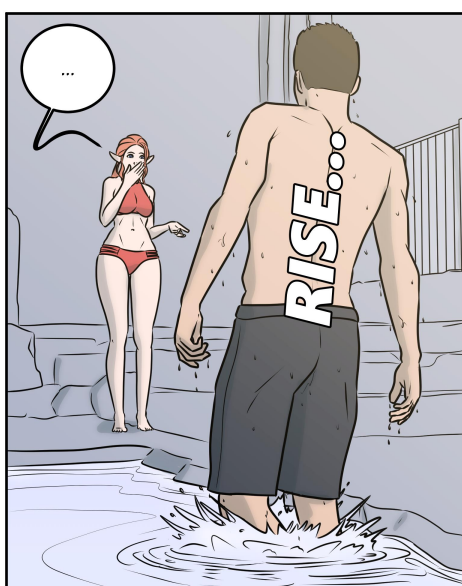
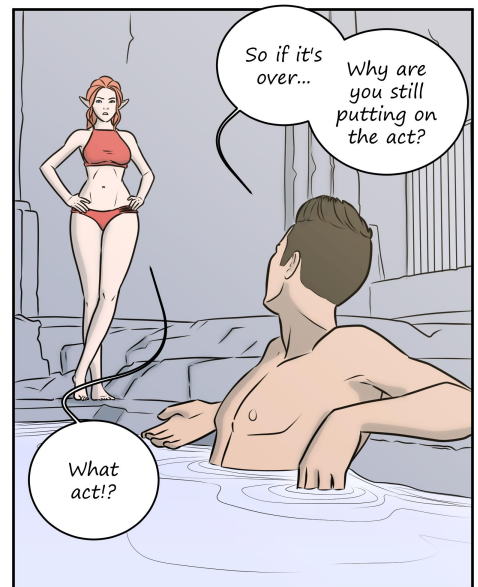
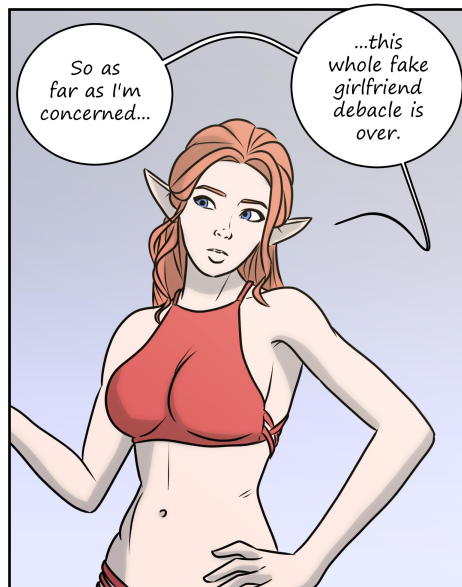
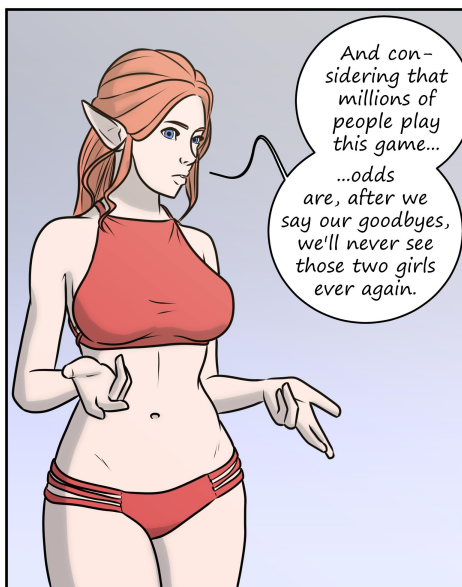
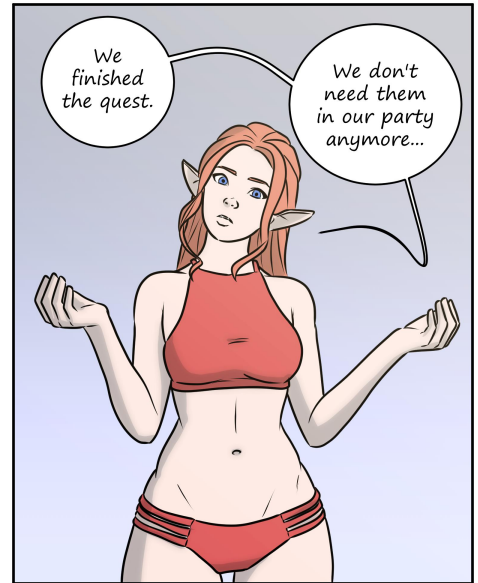
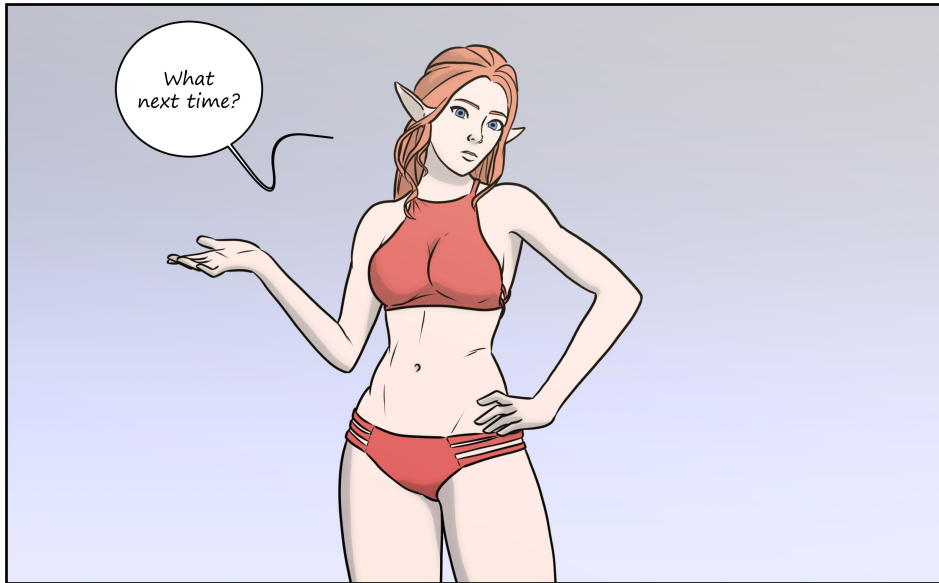


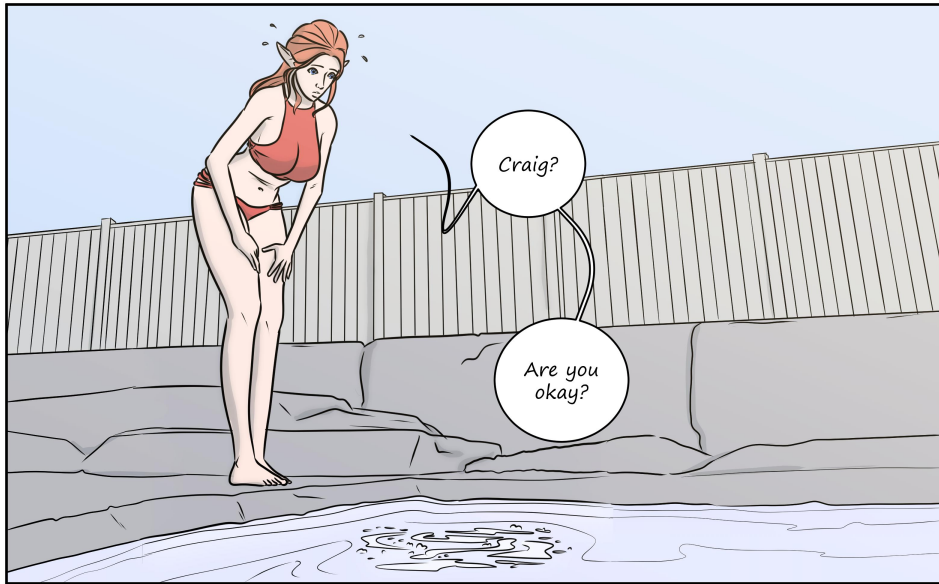
If you leave here with dusty skin and stinky with sweat...

The girls will immediately know you didn't take a dip in this spring.

Lisa will start asking questions...

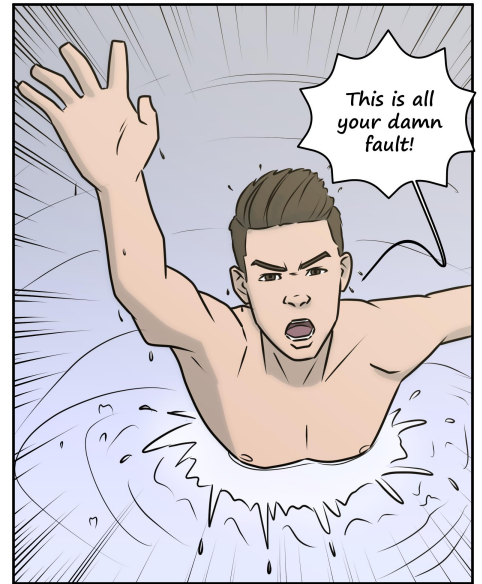
...and she'll try even harder next time to "fix" our "relationship."



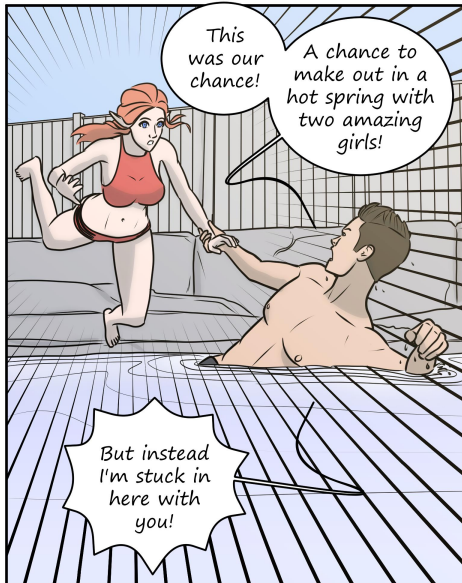


Craig?

Are you okay?



This is all your damn fault!



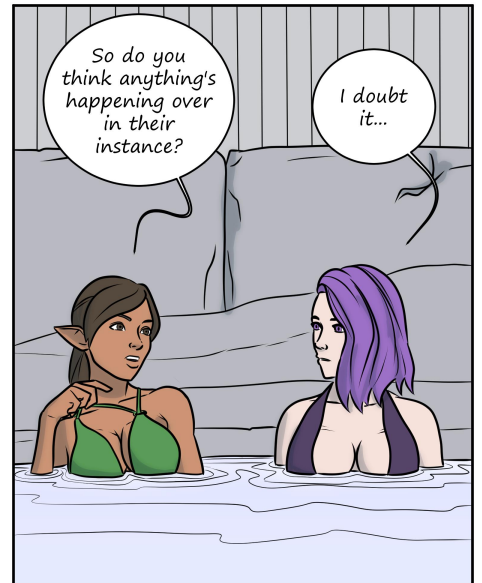
This was our chance!

A chance to make out in a hot spring with two amazing girls!

But instead I'm stuck in here with you!

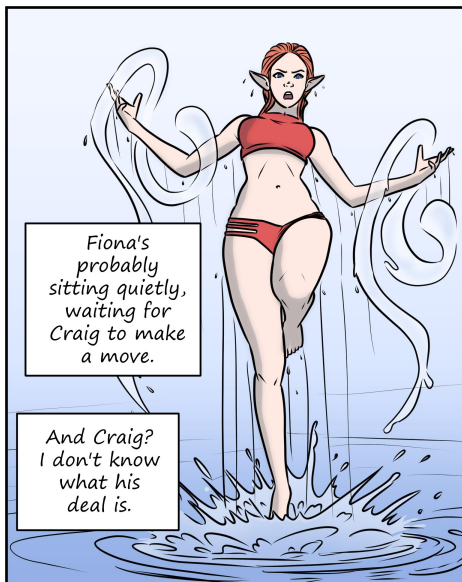


SPLASH!



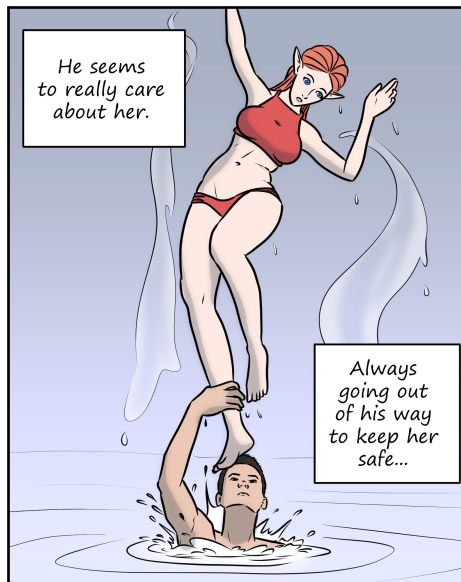
So do you think anything's happening over in their instance?

I doubt it...



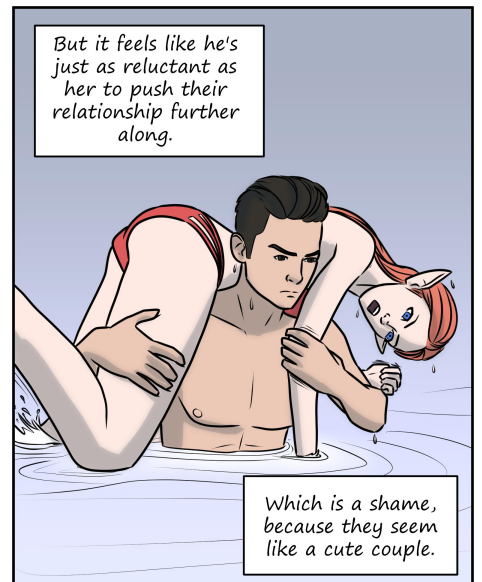
Fiona's probably sitting quietly, waiting for Craig to make a move.

And Craig? I don't know what his deal is.



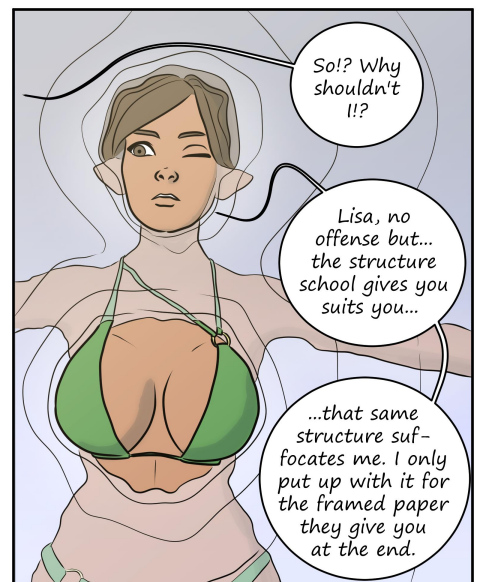
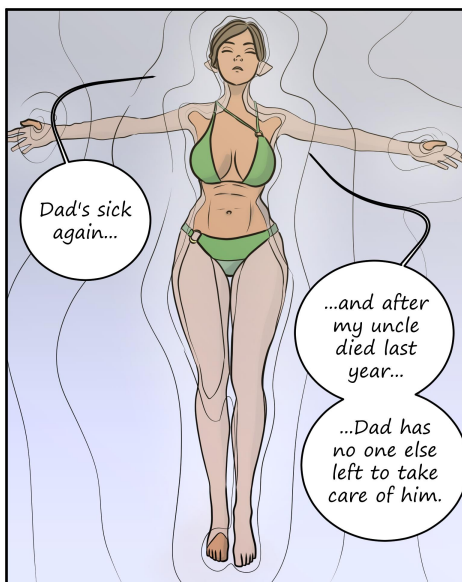
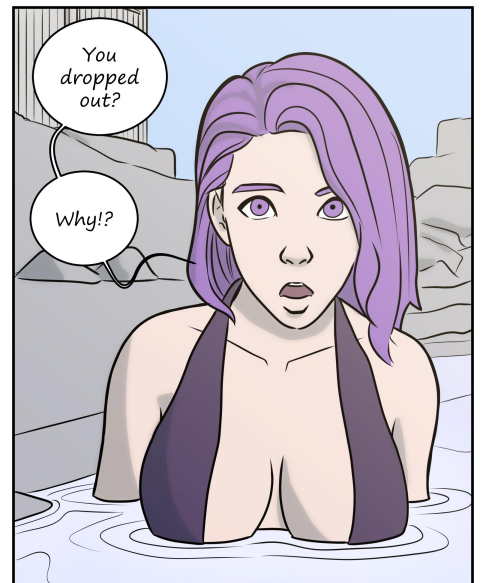
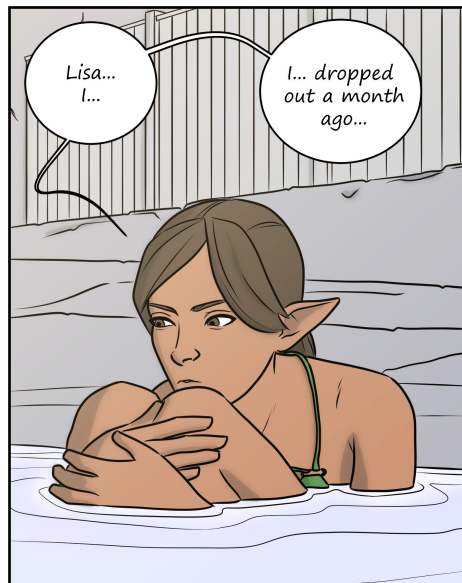
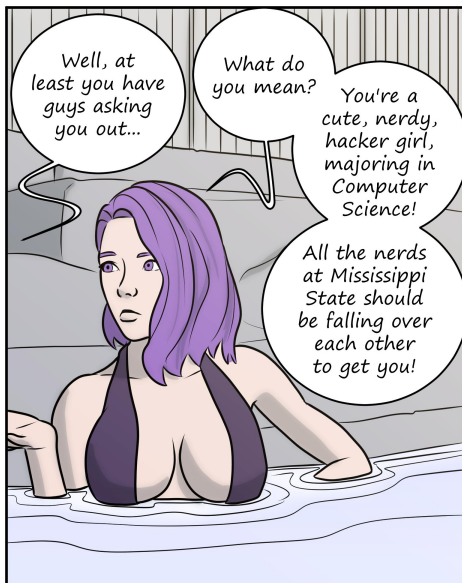
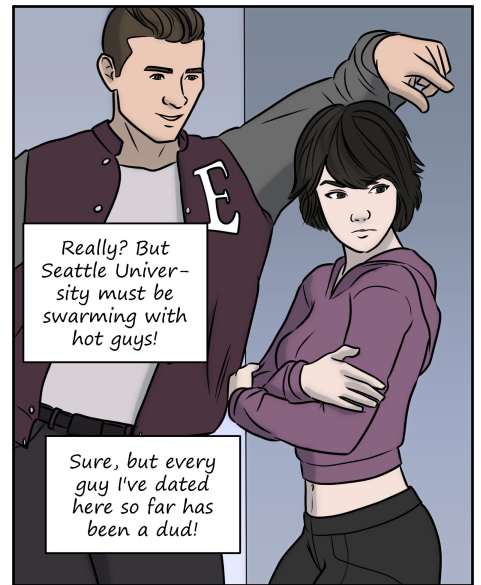
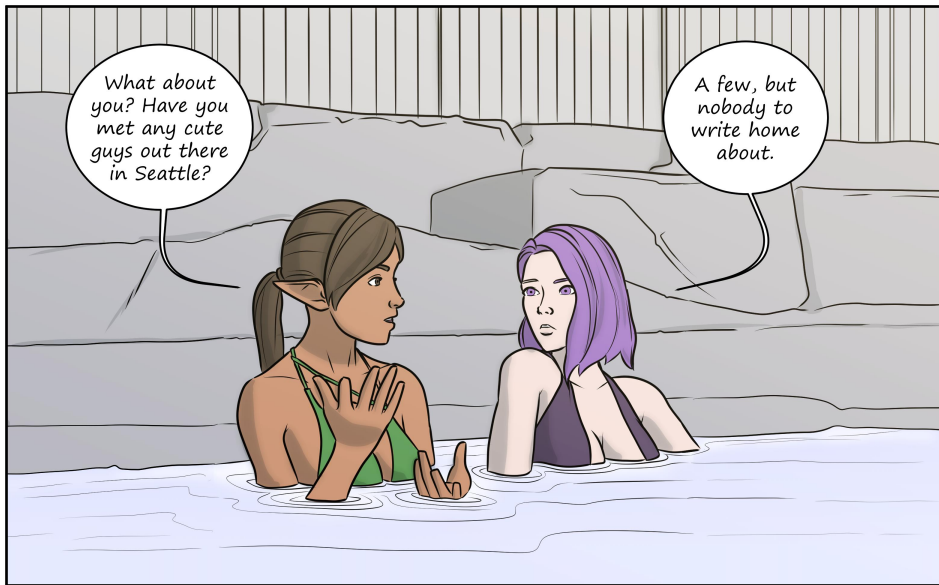
He seems to really care about her.

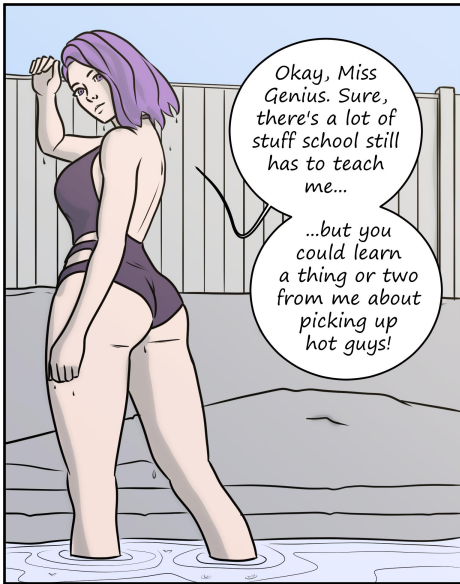
Always going out of his way to keep her safe...



But it feels like he's just as reluctant as her to push their relationship further along.

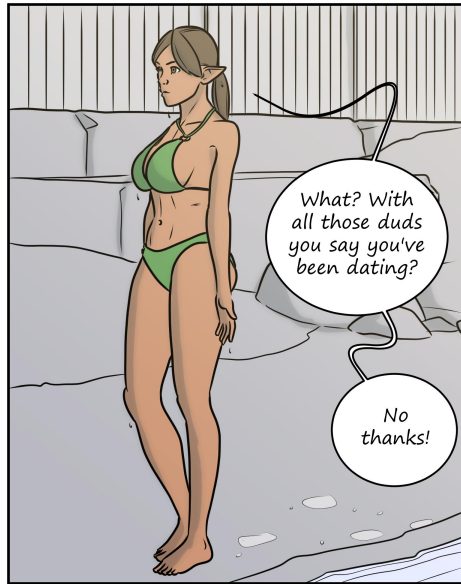
Which is a shame, because they seem like a cute couple.





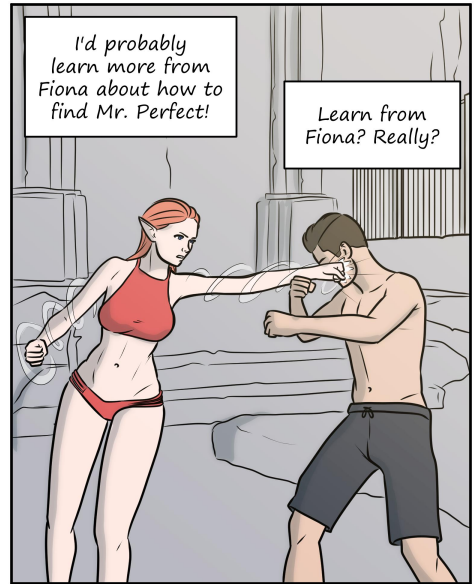
Okay, Miss Genius. Sure, there's a lot of stuff school still has to teach me...

...but you could learn a thing or two from me about picking up hot guys!



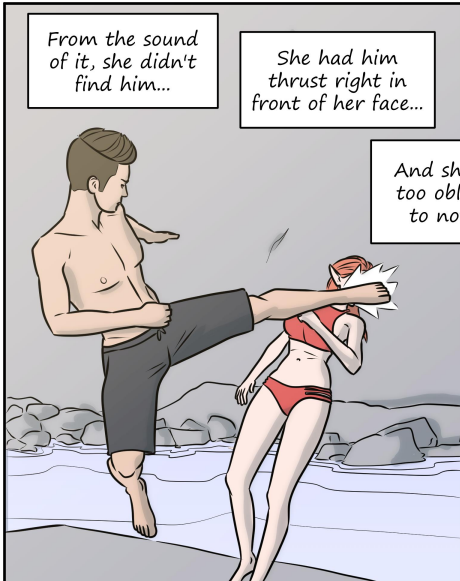
What? With all those duds you say you've been dating?

No thanks!



I'd probably learn more from Fiona about how to find Mr. Perfect!

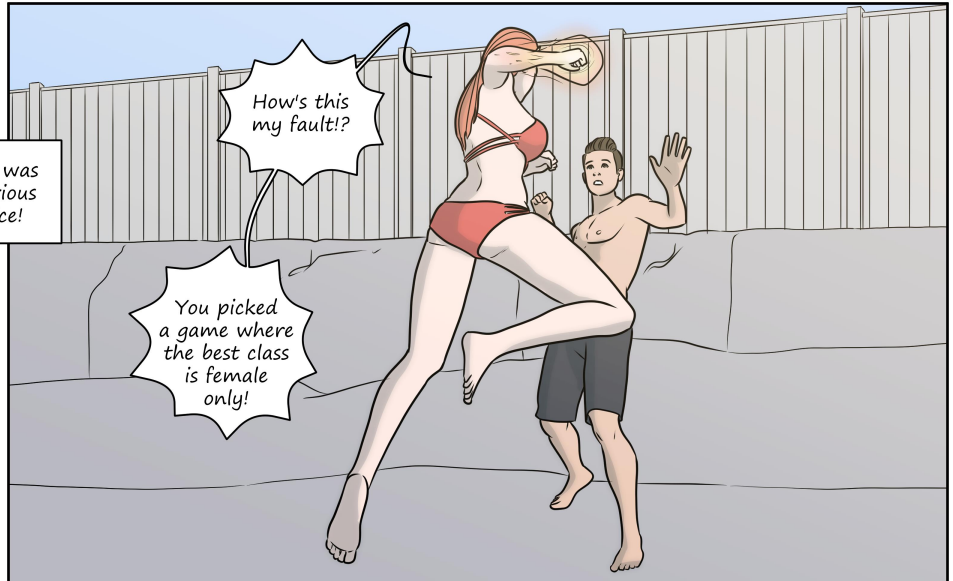
Learn from Fiona? Really?



From the sound of it, she didn't find him...

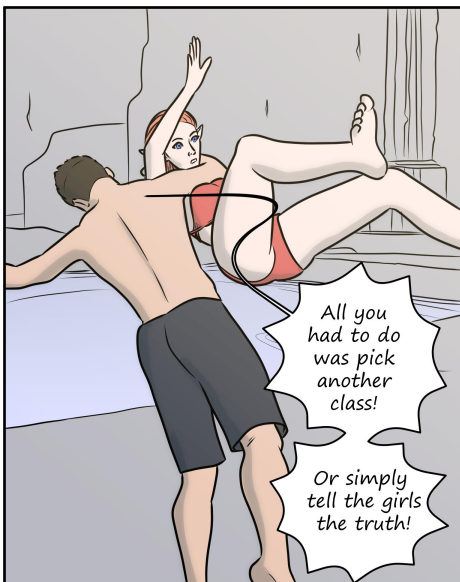
She had him thrust right in front of her face...

And she was too oblivious to notice!



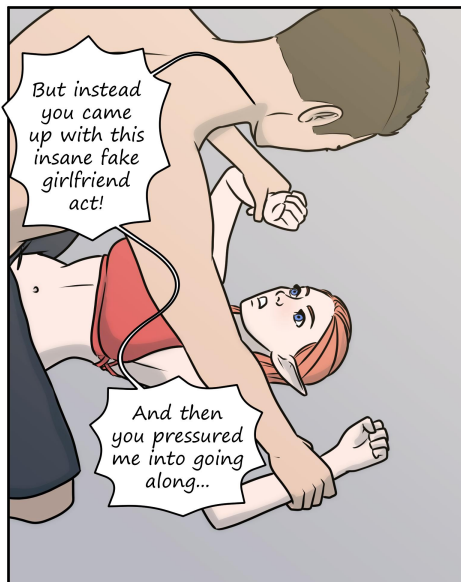
How's this my fault!?

You picked a game where the best class is female only!



All you had to do was pick another class!

Or simply tell the girls the truth!

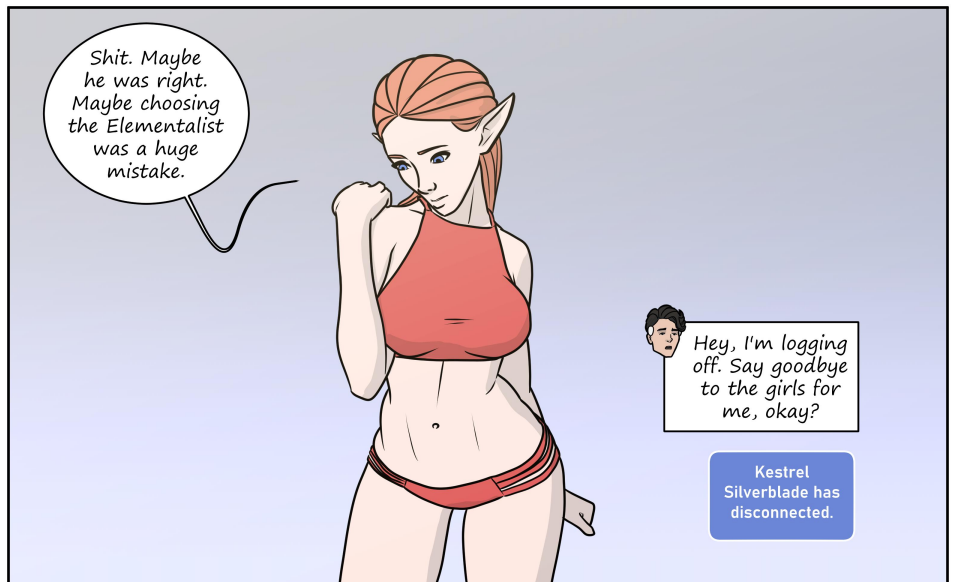
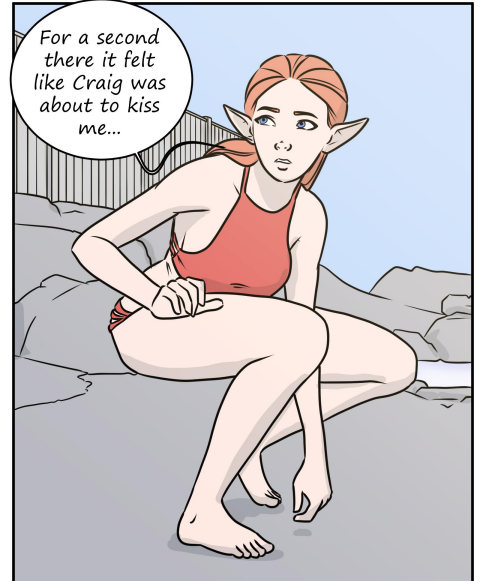
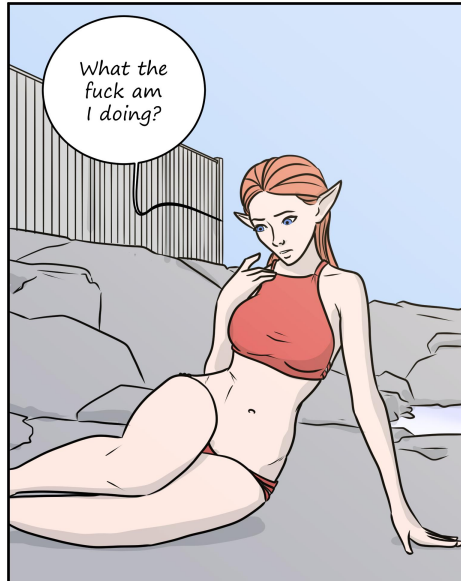
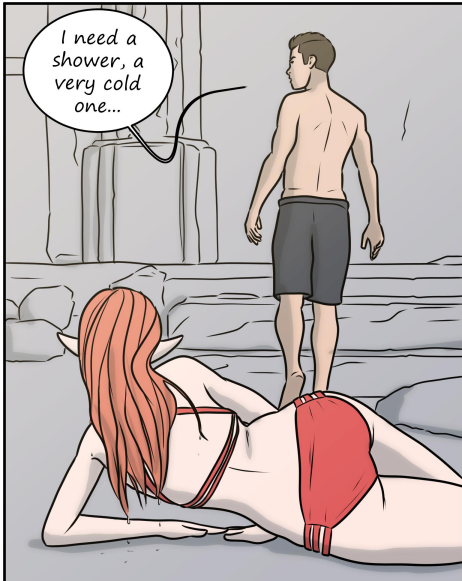
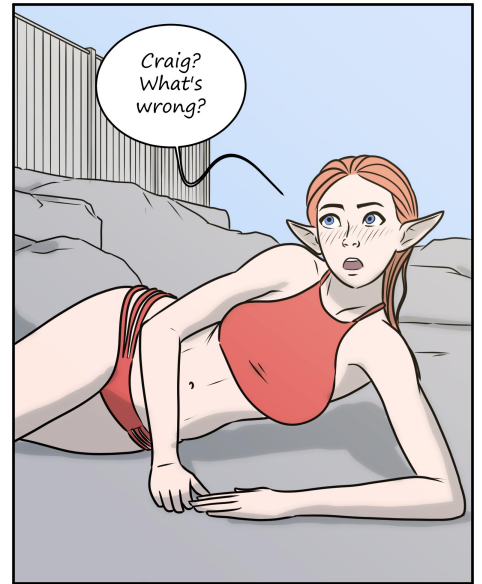
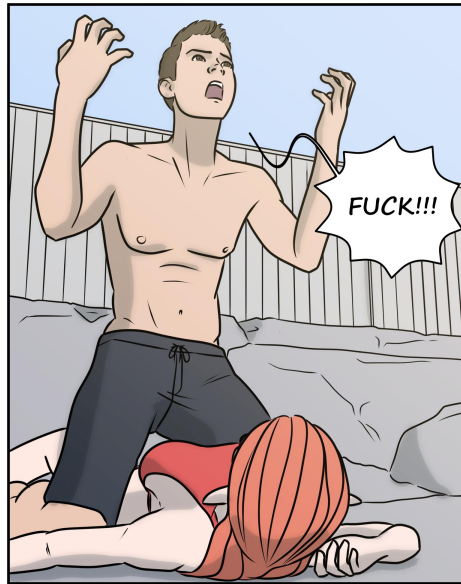
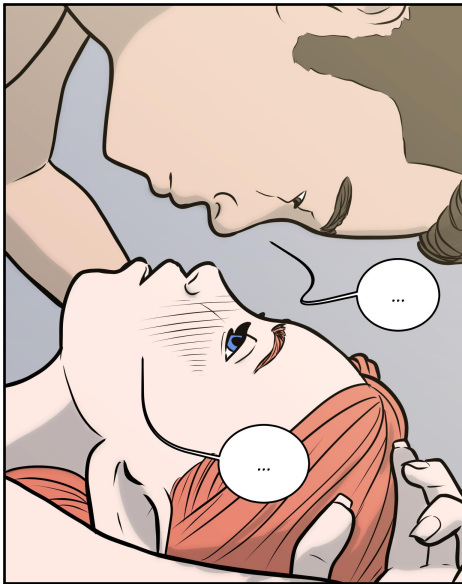


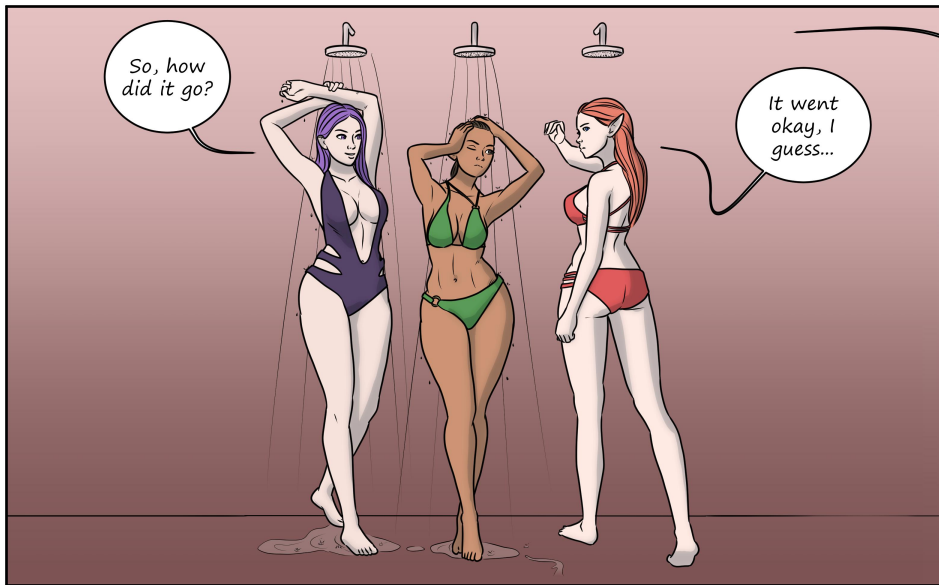
But instead you came up with this insane fake girlfriend act!

And then you pressured me into going along...



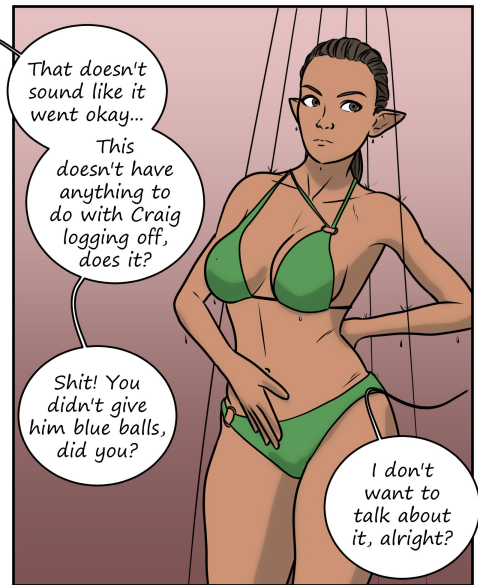
...with-





So, how did it go?

It went okay, I guess...

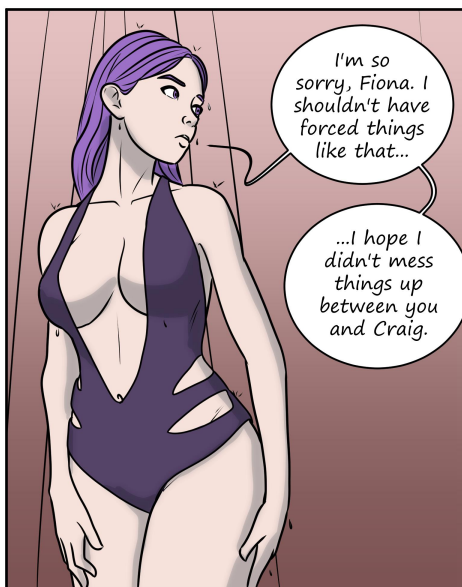


That doesn't sound like it went okay...

This doesn't have anything to do with Craig logging off, does it?

Shit! You didn't give him blue balls, did you?

I don't want to talk about it, alright?



I'm so sorry, Fiona. I shouldn't have forced things like that...

...I hope I didn't mess things up between you and Craig.



No, don't worry, you didn't... what you did wasn't any worse than anything I... well...

...let's just say that Craig and I will work it out.

We always do...



A few minutes later

Sigh

I wish this change room's swimsuit shop sold ordinary clothing too...



You don't like your outfit?

I hate this outfit!



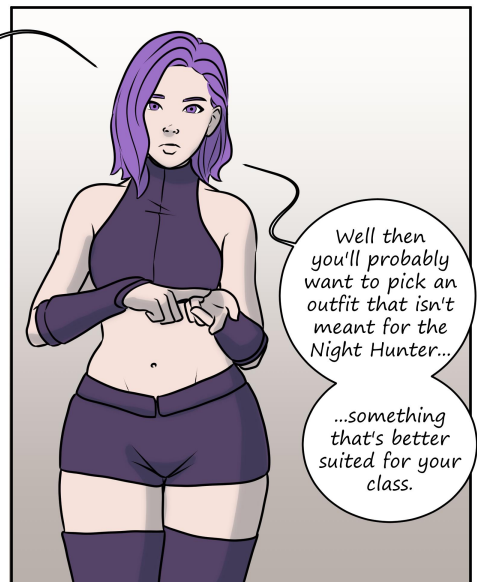
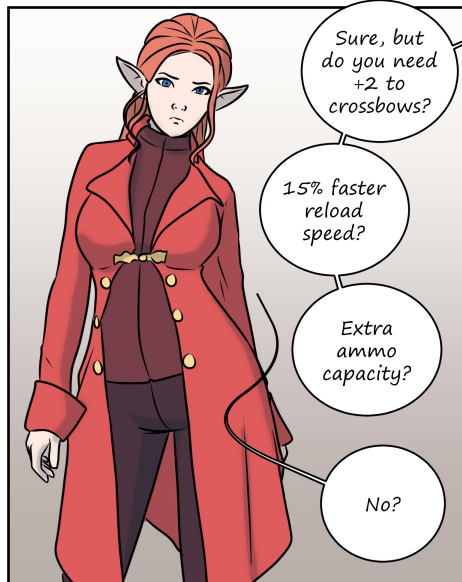
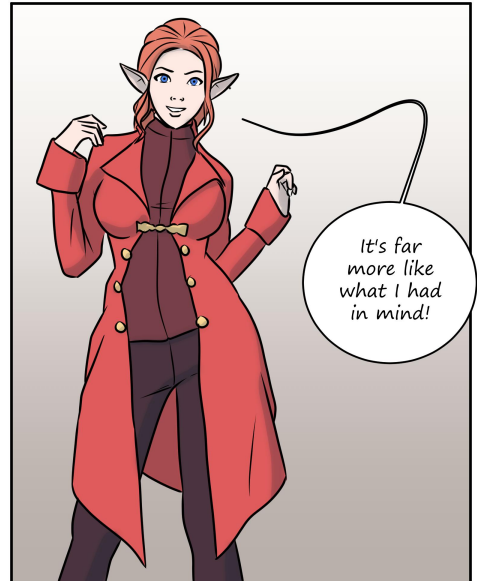
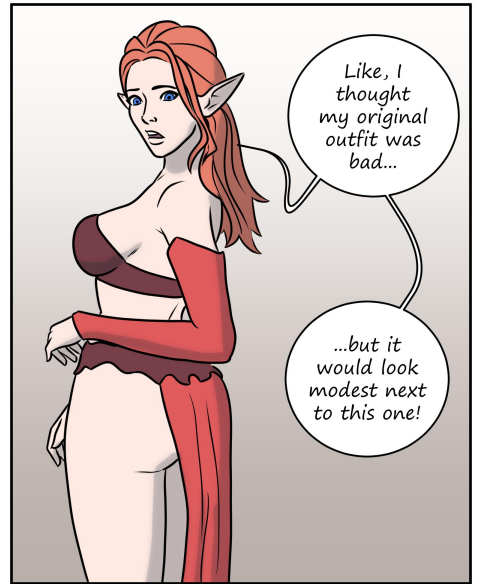
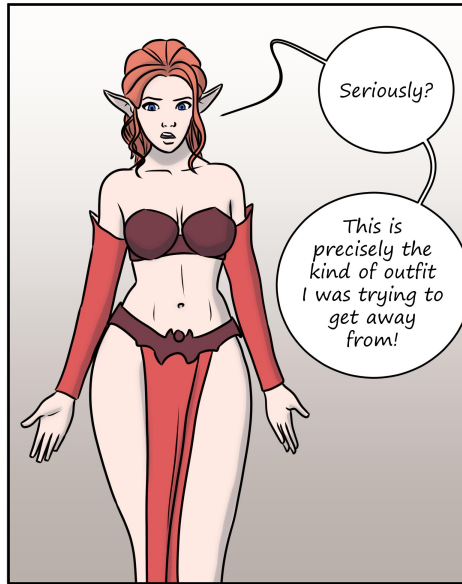
Well, if you hate it so much, why didn't you visit one of the clothing shops when you first arrived in town?

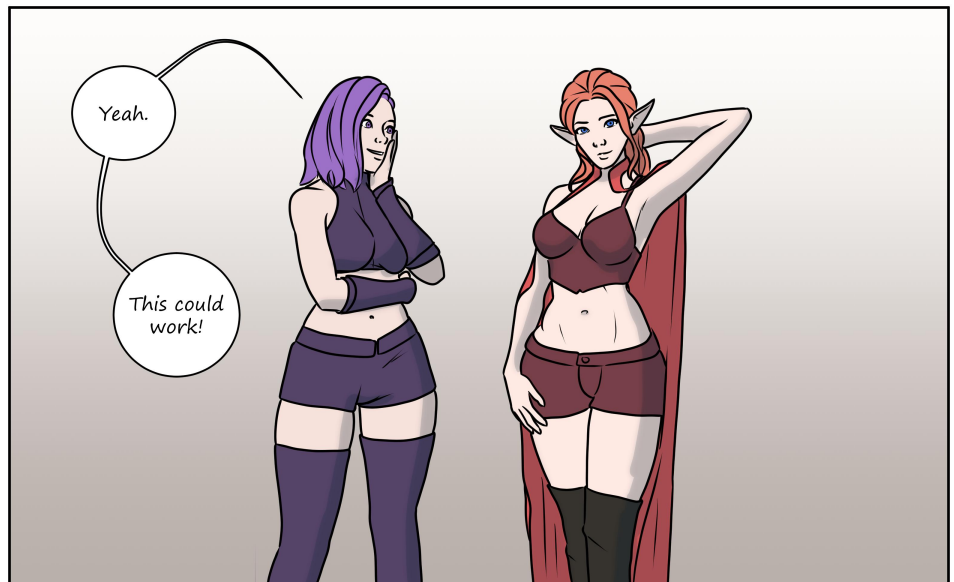
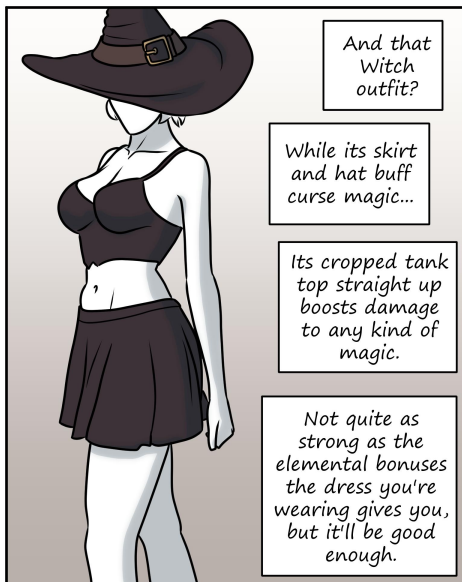
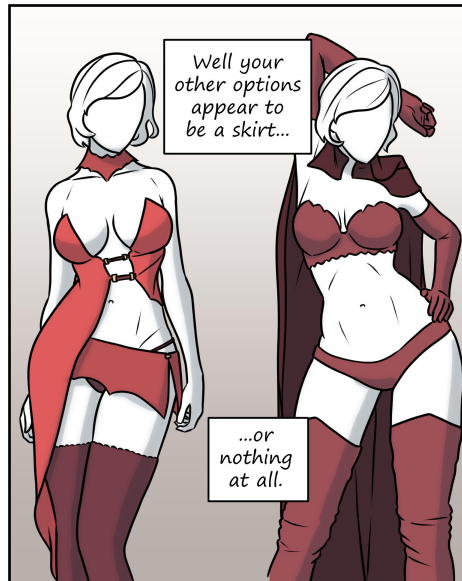
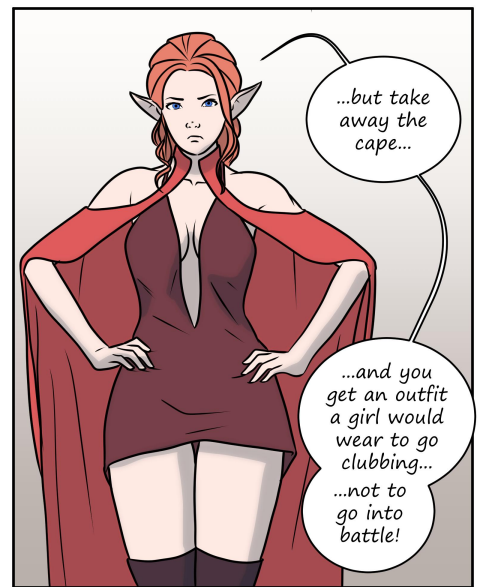
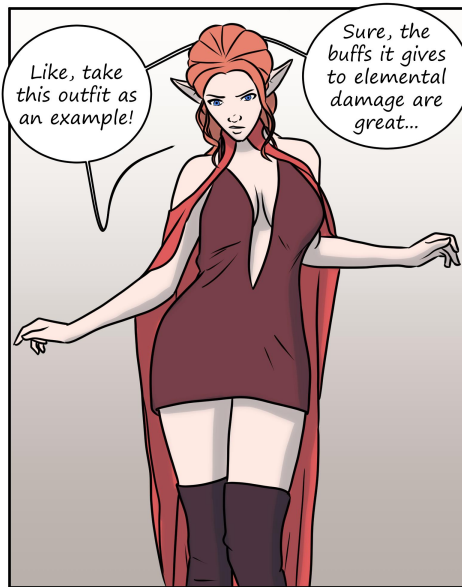
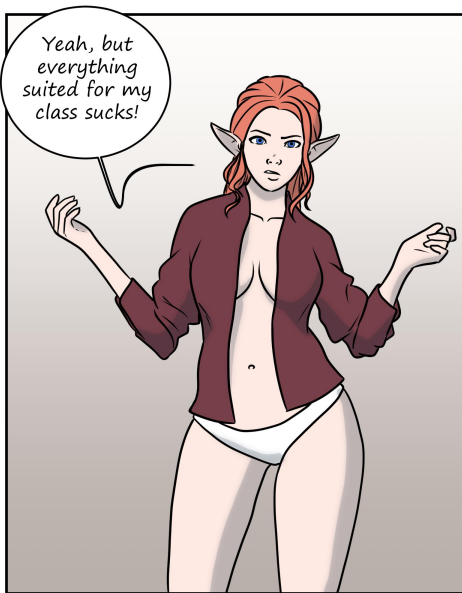
This town has clothing shops!?

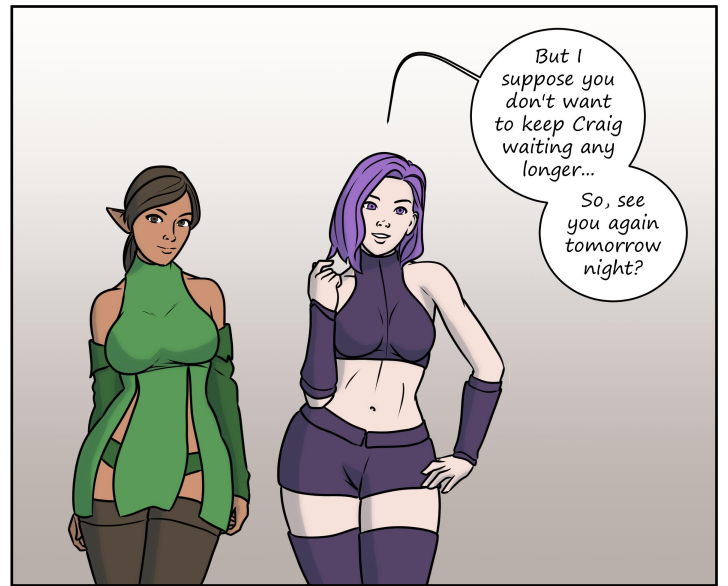
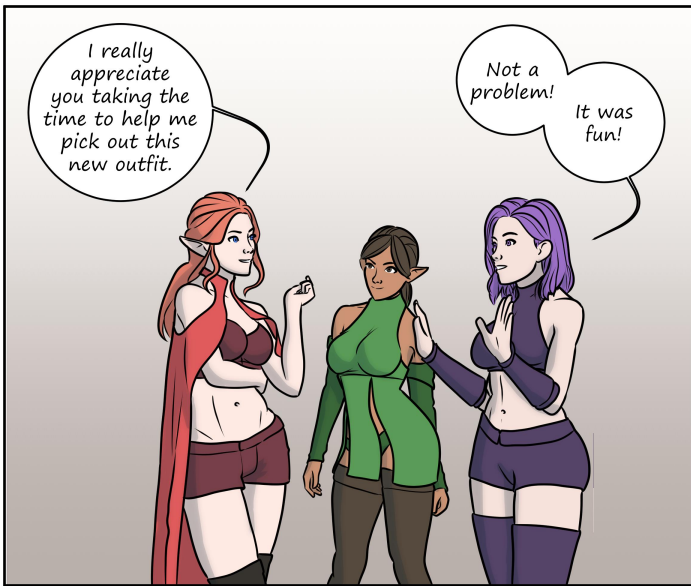


Ooh... are we going to blow all of our quest reward money on a shopping spree?

Count me in!







To be continued...