

MIKA, AFTER A BIT OF
EFFORT, UNTIED DANIEL
FROM THE TREE.

"THANK YOU, MISS," HE SAYS
GRATEFULLY. "THEY ALMOST DID
MY BACK IN..."

DESPITE HAVING LEFT HIM
FOR SO LONG, MIKA WAS GLAD
TO SEE DANIEL AGAIN, THE
SETTLER'S MANNERISMS
ENDEARING TO HER.





"ALRIGHT, TIME
TO LET THIS BOY
OUT."

KIIVA RELEASES
JABARO FROM HER
GUTS, THE CHEETAH
LANDING WITH A WET
SPLAT ON THE
GROUND.

HE STIRS SLOWLY,
HIS FUR UNKEMPT AND HIS
CLOTHES PARTIALLY
DIGESTED.





"MY GOD," DANIEL
HAS HIS EYES ON MIKA'S
GIANT STOMACH.

"I HOPE YOU'LL
FORGIVE ME FOR
STARING."

"I WOULDN'T
ASSUME YOU HAD
EATEN AN ENTIRE
FIELD'S WORTH OF
GRASS WHILE YOU
WERE AWAY?"

MIKA GIGGLED. "YEAH,
THAT'S WHAT IT IS! JUST
A BUNCH A GRASS IN HERE."

"WHAT CAN I SAY? I'M
A HUNGRY GIRL."

"I WON'T ARGUE
WITH THAT," DANIEL SAID,
BREATH TAKEN. "ERM...
YOU DON'T MIND IF
I UH..."

MIKA KNELT DOWN,
LETTING HER SLOSHING BELLY
SETTLE IN FRONT OF THE CURIOUS
RABBIT. DANIEL LOOKED UNCOMFORTABLE,
BUT LITTERLY FASCINATED AT
THE SAME TIME.

VERY GENTLY
STROKING MIKA'S STOMACH,
HE SAID,

"SO TALL. THIS IS
INCREDIBLE.

"I MEAN, I'VE
SEEN OTHER TRIBALS
THIS BLOATED, BUT
PREDATORS WHO
SWALLOWED
OTHERS ALIVE.

"I NEVER
THOUGHT I'D
SEE A RABBIT WITH
THIS LARGE OF AN
APPETITE."

HE SQUEEZED
MIKA'S BELLY
LIGHTLY.

"IS THERE
REALLY NOTHING
BUT GRASS IN
THERE?" HE ASKED.

"YOU STILL DON'T
BELIEVE I EAT MEAT,
HUH?" MIKA REPLIED
WITH A SEDUCTIVE
TONE.

"OH DEAR," DANIEL
BREATHED IN AWE. HE
REACHED INTO ONE
OF HIS POCKETS.



"I SHOULD JOT THIS
DOWN BEFORE I FORGET!"

DANIEL PULLED OUT A
NOTEBOOK AND PENCIL, STARTING
TO WRITE QUICKLY.

"WHAT IS THAT?"
MIKA ASKED.

"AH, IT'S LIKE A
BOOK. YOU EVER
SEEN ONE?" HE
INQUIRED.

"IT'S THE SORT
YOU CAN WRITE ON.
IT'S GREAT IF THERE
ARE THOUGHTS YOU
WISH TO BE REMINDED
OF IN THE FUTURE."

MIKA WAS INTRIGUED
BY THIS ITEM. SHE HAD SEEN
PAPER BEFORE, BUT NOTHING
LIKE A NOTEBOOK.

"SAY, IS THERE ANYTHING
ELSE YOU CAN DO?

"ASIDE FROM MEAT
EATING, PERHAPS YOU
CARRY SOME SPECIAL
SKILLS?"




MIKA GENTLY
PUSHES DANIEL'S
HEAD INTO HER
BLOATED STOMACH.

HE DOESN'T
SEEM TO RESIST
MUCH.

"SURE. YOU'VE
ALREADY SEEN IT. I'M
PRETTY CAPABLE AT
SWALLOWING.

"FEEL HOW SOFT
AND WARM IT IS? THERE'S
A LOT OF ROOM IN MY
STOMACH."





"MAYBE I CAN SHOW
YOU HOW I CAN
SWALLOW..."

"LOOK INTO
MY GULLET AND
SEE."

DANIEL STANDS UP
AND STEPS AWAY FROM
MIKA SUDDENLY.

CHUCKLING NERVOUSLY,
HE SAYS, "ALRIGHT, THAT'S
UH, QUITE ENOUGH, MISS!

"TH-THANK YOU. I'LL
MAKE SURE TO KEEP NOTE
OF THIS!"



MIKA LAUGHS, SAYING,
"DON'T WORRY, DANIEL.
I'M NOT GONNA EAT
YOU OR ANYTHING.

"I MEAN, THAT'D BE KINDA
WEIRD. WE'RE BOTH RABBITS! AND
YOU'RE KINDA CUTE."

DANIEL RESPONDS,
"SORRY, MISS. I DON'T
MEAN TO OFFEND, IT'S
JUST YOU TRIBALS TEND
TO BE RATHER...

"UNPREDICTABLE,
I SUPPOSE IS THE
WORD."



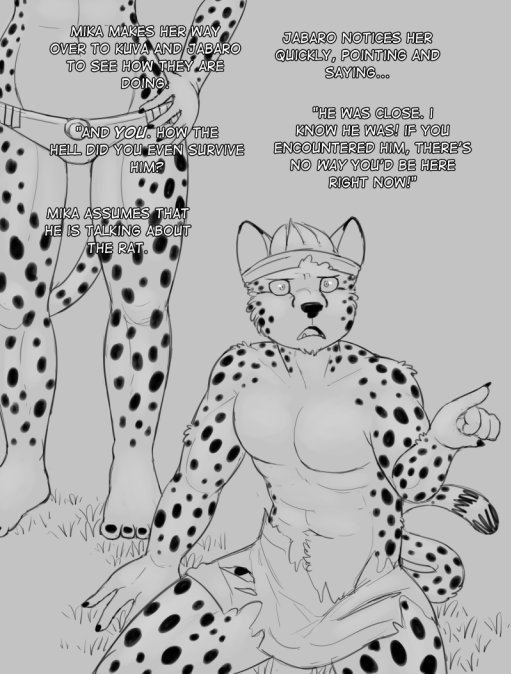
MIKA MAKES HER WAY
OVER TO KUVA AND JABARO
TO SEE HOW THEY ARE
DOING.

JABARO NOTICES HER
QUICKLY, POINTING AND
SAYING...

"AND YOU. HOW THE
HELL DID YOU EVEN SURVIVE
HIM?"

"HE WAS CLOSE. I
KNOW HE WAS! IF YOU
ENCOUNTERED HIM, THERE'S
NO WAY YOU'D BE HERE
RIGHT NOW!"

MIKA ASSUMES THAT
HE IS TALKING ABOUT
THE RAT.



"I'M NOT SAYING
ANYTHING," MIKA SAYS
FIRMLY.

JABARO LOOKS
BACK AT KUYA, BUT
SHE DOES NOTHING
EXCEPT GIVE HIM
A COLD, HARD
STARE.

JABARO BOWS
HIS HEAD, DEFEATED.

"WHAT DO YOU
WANT FROM ME
THEN?"

"TELL ME WHAT'S
UP WITH YOU," KUYA
SNARLS.

"WHAT ARE YOU
DOING WITH THAT RAT
AND WHY DID YOU
JUST IGNORE ME
BACK THERE?"

"ONE AT A TIME,"
JABARO SIGHS.

"LOOK, I WAS PARTNERS
WITH THAT GUY, IT'S TRUE.
I WAS WITH HIM ON A JOB TO
KILL THAT MONSTER."



"KUVA, LISTEN, IN THE END, I WANTED WHAT WAS BEST FOR US. BY KILLING THAT SNAKE, WE WOULD'VE GOTTEN A TICKET *OUT* OF THIS DUMP.

"FAMILY?" SHE BREATHES OUT.

"BUT WHERE DID YOU WANT TO GO?" KUVA ASKS, STILL SURPRISED AT HIS PROPOSITION.



"WE COULD'VE...STARTED A *FAMILY!*" KUVA WAS TAKEN ABACK BY THIS, BLUSHING A BIT.

"JUST US AND YOUR SIBLINGS. WE COULD'VE GOTTEN IT *GOOD!*"

"WITH THE SETTLERS, TO THEIR LAND. THEY HAVE A LIFE YOU WOULD'VE NEVER IMAGINED! IT'S SO MUCH BETTER THERE. YOU HAVE TO TRUST ME!"



"JABARO, THAT SNAKE
ISN'T THE MONSTER YOU
THINK SHE IS. SHE WAS GOING
TO GUIDE US BACK TO HER HOME
WHERE KIBWE WAS. HE WAS
SAFE BUT—"

JABARO INTERRUPTS, "I
DON'T CARE WHAT THE HELL
IT IS, MONSTER OR NOT! IT
WAS CAUSING TURMOIL ACROSS
THE ENTIRE LAND. SETTLERS
AND TRIBALS ALIKE. IT
HAD TO BE *DESTROYED!*"



"AND THE REWARD THE
SETTLERS OFFERED FOR IT...
IT WOULD'VE BEEN MORE
THAN ENOUGH TO LEAVE
THIS PLACE."





KUVA SUDDENLY
SIDES BY MIKA, BRINGING
UP, "WHAT ABOUT KIBWE?
YOU HAVEN'T MENTIONED
HIM ONCE! YOU DON'T
EVEN CARE!"

"OF COURSE I DO,
KUVA! I WANTED TO WRAP
EVERYTHING UP AS NEATLY
AS I COULD."

"DO YOU EVEN KNOW
WHERE HE IS?" MIKA
QUESTIONS.

"YES, I SAW THE
SETTLERS TAKE KIBWE.
THEY WON'T DO ANYTHING
TO HIM."

"THAT'S ENOUGH FOR ME THEN," MIKA SAYS, AND GOES TO TALK TO DANIEL, THOUGH HE ALREADY SEEMS LIKE HE'S PREPARING TO LEAVE. "DANIEL!"

"OH, MIKA, I'M SORRY, BUT I'VE BEEN AWAY FROM MY MATES FOR TOO LONG. THEY'LL THINK I'VE BEEN EATEN AT THIS POINT.

"THEY WOULDN'T BE HAPPY IF A SECOND RESEARCHER TURNED UP MISSING."

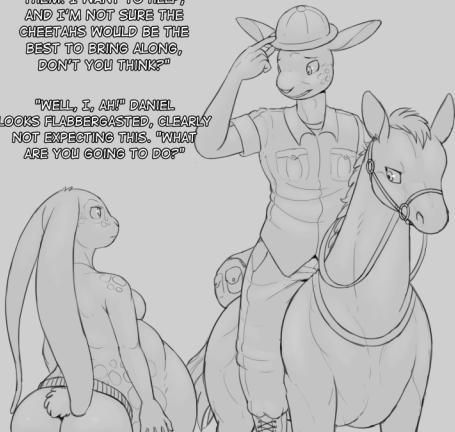
"LET ME GO WITH YOU."


"PARDON?"

"THEY HAVE KUYA'S LITTLE BROTHER. I SAW IT WITH MY OWN EYES," MIKA EXPLAINS.

"LET ME TALK TO THEM. I WANT TO HELP, AND I'M NOT SURE THE CHEETAHS WOULD BE THE BEST TO BRING ALONG, DON'T YOU THINK?"

"WELL, I, AH!" DANIEL LOOKS FLABBERGASTED, CLEARLY NOT EXPECTING THIS. "WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?"





"WELL, ON SECOND
THOUGHT," MIKA STARTS,
"MAYBE YOUR GUYS WOULD
BE BOTHERED BY THIS
GUT OF MINE."

"GETTING THERE WOULD
TAKE AROUND AN HOUR ON
HORSEBACK. LOOK, I'LL SPEAK
TO MY MATES AND SEE IF
THERE IS A CHEETAH IN
STOW. IF I FIND HIM,
I'LL BRING HIM BACK
AS QUICKLY AS I
AM ABLE."

GRRR RRMMBL

WITH THAT, MIKA WATCHES
AS DANIEL TROTS OFF.

SHE AIMS TO
FOLLOW HIM BACK STEALTHILY,
AND TRUSTS KIVA AND JABARO
WILL SORT THINGS OUT BETWEEN
THEMSELVES WHILE KEEPING
AN EYE ON THE REMAINING
SIBLINGS.



MIKA HAS FOLLOWED
DANIEL FOR ABOUT HALF
AN HOUR AT THIS POINT.

SHE HAS HAD TO KEEP
A GOOD DISTANCE SINCE
HER STOMACH HAS BECOME
QUITE LOUD IN REBELLION
AGAINST HER EXERCISE.

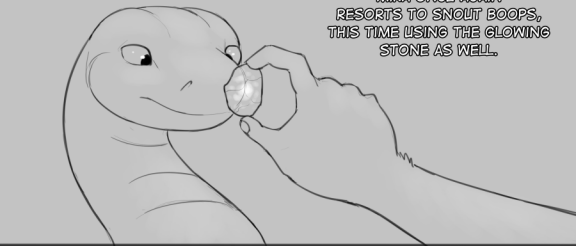
AT LEAST IT HAS HELPED
FURTHER LIQUIFY AND DIGEST
THE LIONESS, THOUGH THERE'S
PLENTY MORE OF HER TO
PROCESS.



SUDDENLY, MIKA NEARLY
GASPS ALOUD, AS A FAMILIAR
SNAKE APPEARS BEFORE HER.



MIKA ONCE AGAIN
RESORTS TO SNOUT BOOPS,
THIS TIME USING THE GLOWING
STONE AS WELL.



IT PROMPTLY EATS THE
STONE RIGHT OUT OF HER
HAND.




MIKA PREPARES TO
GO AFTER THE SNAKE AS IT
SLITHERS AWAY.

BUT IT STOPS AND THEN
LOOKS BACK AT HER, ALMOST
AS IF EXPECTING HER TO
FOLLOW.



MIKA FOLLOWS THE
SNAKE UNTIL THEY REACH
A FAMILIAR LARGE
FIELD.

IT WAS WHERE
JAVA'S HOME WAS.



ALL THAT WAS
LEFT OF IT NOW WAS
A SMOLDERING PILE
OF ASH AND WOOD.

PERCEPTION SUCCESS!

WHILE SHE AMBLES OVER TO THE SMOKING MOUND, MIKA COMES ACROSS A VERY LARGE RED STAIN ON THE GROUND.

THE SMELL IS FAMILIAR, AND MIKA REMEMBERS IT'S THE SAME STINK THAT CAME FROM JAVA'S *DARK SMOG*.

SHE NOTICES SOME THINGS SITTING ON THE STAINED GROUND.



MIKA GATHERS SOME
OF THE ITEMS TOGETHER,
INSPECTING THEM
CLOSELY.

ASIDE FROM THE
STRANGE METAL CYLINDERS,
MIKA RECOGNIZES ALL
THE REST AS ONCE PART
OF JAVA.

SHE NOTICES A PIECE
OF HER LOINCLOTH, FEATHERS
FROM HER HEADPIECE, AND
BEADS FROM HER NECKLACE.





MIKA LISTENS TO
HER SURROUNDINGS.

WHILE SHE CAN HEAR
THE SOFT RUSTLING OF
LEAVES AGAINST THE
GENTLE BREEZE...

SHE ALSO THINKS SHE CAN
HEAR SOME CRUNCHING OF LEAVES
AND TWIGS, THOUGH IT STOPS
JUST AS SHE RAISES HER HEAD.

MIKA TRIES TO ACT
NONCHALANT, BENDING DOWN
AS IF INSPECTING THE
ITEMS AGAIN.

AT THE SAME TIME,
SHE USES HER SUPER HEARING
TO LISTEN TO THE WOODS.

SHE CAN HEAR
THE *SCRAPING OF*
FINGERNAILS AGAINST
EARTH...

THE RUSTLING
OF CLOTH...

A SERIES OF
BREATHS WITH A
MASCULINE
TONE.




- PERCEPTION

KEEPING IT IN
MIND, MIKA THEN
STASHES THE ITEMS
AND GOES TO THE
SMOKING MOUND.

THERE IS NOTHING
BUT DESTRUCTION HERE,
A DEATHLY SMOKY
SCENT FILLING THE
AIR.





MIKA DISCOVERS
A LATTICE OF WOODEN
POLES, A BIG DARK HOLE
BENEATH IT.

THE POLES SEEM
RATHER STURDY DESPITE
WHAT HAPPENED TO
THE MOUND.

MIKA CAN'T
QUITE SEE ANYTHING
THROUGH THE DARKNESS
BELOW HER.

MIKA DROPS
A BEAD INTO THE HOLE,
LISTENING CLOSELY.

IN A SECOND AND
A HALF, SHE HEARS THE
SOFT PATTERN OF IT HITTING
EARTH...

BUT THEN MIKA
PICKS UP ANOTHER SOUND
FROM DEEPER WITHIN,
ONE THAT DISTURBED
HER.

IT SOUNDED LIKE A
MIX OF A CREEPY SERIES
OF WHISPERS AND A
LONG, MOANING
WIND.



MIKA, UNDETERRED,
LIFTS UP A LEG AND
BRINGS IT DOWN HARD
ON THE LATTICE.

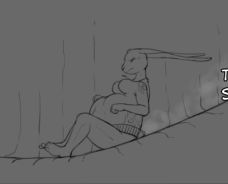


- VIGOR

THE LATTICE
COLLAPSES AND MIKA
FINDS HERSELF SPIRALING
DOWN INTO A DARK
TUNNEL.

THE GROUND
IS SLOPED AND
SLIPPERY, CAUSING
MIKA TO SLIDE DOWN
DEEPER UNDERGROUND
UNCONTROLLABLY.





ONCE REACHING
THE BOTTOM, MIKA
SPOTS SOMETHING
FRIGHTENING.



A MASSIVE
MAW LOOMS
OVER HER!

MIKA'S FIRST
INSTINCT IS TO DODGE,
BUT SHE CALMS DOWN
RATHER QUICKLY,
REALIZING THE CREATURE
DID NOT MOVE.



IN FACT, IT SEEMED
TO HAVE BEEN MADE
OF STONE RATHER THAN
FLESH!

THE RABBIT SLOWLY
APPROACHED THE GAPING
MOUTH, PEEKING INSIDE
OF ITS THROAT.

BY PEERING CLOSELY,
SHE THINKS SHE CAN
SEE A VERY FAINT
BIT OF LIGHT WITHIN.

MIKA TRAVERSES
DOWN THE SNAKE'S
GULLET, KEEPING AN
EYE ON THE OPENING
AHEAD.

AS SHE WALKS
THROUGH, MIKA FINDS
HERSELF STEPPING ON
STRANGE, TRANSPARENT
OBJECTS LITTERED
ACROSS THE GROUND,
CRUNCHING BENEATH
HER FEET.



EMERGING FROM
THE THROAT, MIKA IS
FLABBERGASTED AT WHAT
SHE SEES NEXT.

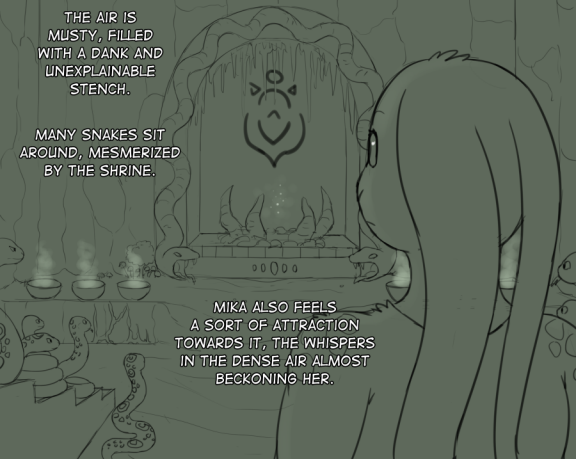
SHE STANDS BEFORE
SOME KIND OF STRANGE
ALTAR. SOMETHING ABOUT
THE PLACE DISTURBS HER...

LIKE SHE
ISN'T MEANT TO
BE HERE.

THE AIR IS
MUSTY, FILLED
WITH A DANK AND
UNEXPLAINABLE
STENCH.

MANY SNAKES SIT
AROUND, MESMERIZED
BY THE SHRINE.

MIKA ALSO FEELS
A SORT OF ATTRACTION
TOWARDS IT, THE WHISPERS
IN THE DENSE AIR ALMOST
BECKONING HER.



SHE TRIES TO FIND THE
SNAKE THAT ATE HER STONE,
BUT ALL OF THEM LOOK SO SIMILAR,
ESPECIALLY IN THIS DARKER
ENVIRONMENT.

MIKA BOWS DOWN
WITH RESPECT, ATTEMPTING
TO SHOW SHE DOESN'T
MEAN ANY HARM.

SHE OPTS TO INSPECT
THE ALTAR INSTEAD.

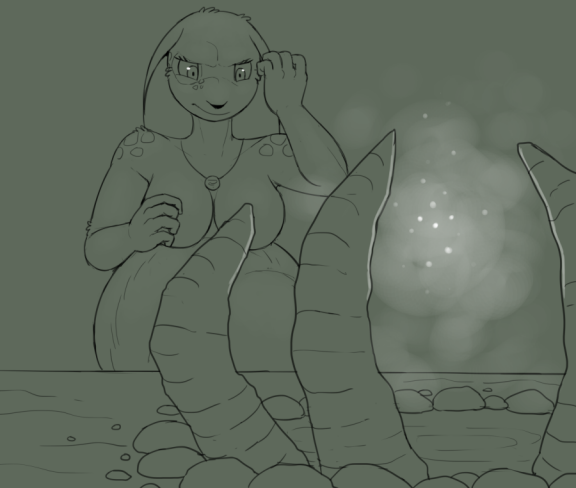



AS SHE APPROACHES IT, THE
WHISPERING IS EVEN LOUDER, BUT
SHE STILL CAN'T PICK UP WHAT
IT IS SAYING.

A SPOT ABOVE THE SHRINE IS
SHIMMERING WITH A STRANGE LIGHT,
AND THE CLOSER MIKA GETS TO IT,
THE MORE THE VOICES FILL HER HEAD,
BOUNCING AROUND HER SKULL.

IT STARTS TO GET PAINFUL,
HER HEAD POUNDING AND PRESSURE
BEING FELT BEHIND HER EYES. SHE
FELT LIKE THE LIGHT WAS PULLING
HER IN.

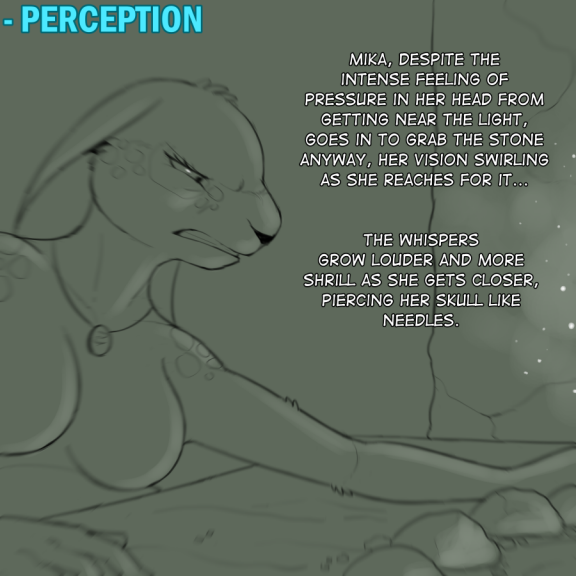
NEEDLESS TO SAY, MIKA CAN'T
GET HERSELF TO APPROACH THE
HYPNOTIZING LIGHT FURTHER.



A dark, monochromatic illustration in shades of gray. The scene depicts a rocky, uneven ground with several large, rounded stones. In the lower right, a small, glowing, multi-faceted object, possibly a gem or a small creature, is nestled between two rocks. The background is filled with faint, wavy lines suggesting a misty or watery environment. The overall mood is mysterious and somber.

JUST THEN, MIKA
NOTICES SOMETHING
ON THE SIDE OF THE
ALTAR.

- PERCEPTION



MIKA, DESPITE THE
INTENSE FEELING OF
PRESSURE IN HER HEAD FROM
GETTING NEAR THE LIGHT,
GOES IN TO GRAB THE STONE
ANYWAY, HER VISION SWIRLING
AS SHE REACHES FOR IT...

THE WHISPERS
GROW LOUDER AND MORE
SHRILL AS SHE GETS CLOSER,
PIERCING HER SKULL LIKE
NEEDLES.

ONCE SUCCESSFULLY
TAKING BACK THE STONE,
MIKA NOTICES THE SNAKES
ARE WATCHING HER
INTENTLY NOW

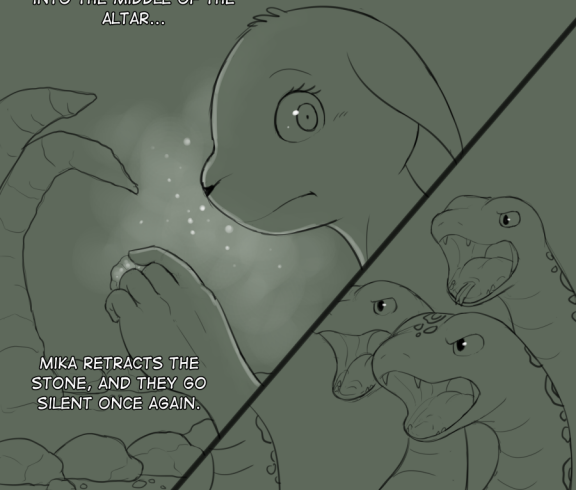
AS IF
ANTICIPATING HER TO
DO SOMETHING WITH
IT.

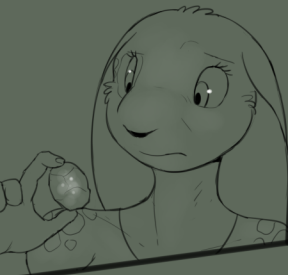


MIKA GETS READY
TO PLACE THE STONE
INTO THE MIDDLE OF THE
ALTAR...

BUT THE SNAKES CLEARLY DO
NOT LIKE THIS, AS THEY START
HISSING INCESSANTLY.

MIKA RETRACTS THE
STONE, AND THEY GO
SILENT ONCE AGAIN.





THE ONLY OTHER
THING ON MIKA'S MIND
IS TO SWALLOW THE
STONE.

SHE DOES SO AND
THE SNAKES DO NOT
OBJECT.

GLP

IT FEELS WARM
GOING DOWN HER
GULLET.



+ ???



MIKA LETS THE
STONE SETTLE IN HER
STOMACH A LITTLE
BEFORE SHE STARTS TO
FEEL A TINGLY SENSATION
CRAWL UP HER SPINE AND
INTO HER HEAD.

SHE DOESN'T FEEL MUCH
ELSE, BUT SENSES SOME-
THING HAS CHANGED
ABOUT HER...

MIKA ATTEMPTS
TO COMMUNICATE WITH
THE SNAKES.

THE SNAKES
DON'T SPEAK AND
ONLY GIVE PUZZLED
LOOKS.

"HEY, ANY OF
YOU KNOW WHAT
HAPPENED TO
ME?"



SHE THEN NOTICES
THE WHISPERS FROM THE
ALTAR ARE SOUNDING
AGAIN.

THIS TIME SHE THINKS
SHE CAN PICK UP SOME
FAMILIAR WORDS.

MIKA APPROACHES
THE ALTAR AND REALIZES
THE LIGHT HAS CHANGED,
A BRIGHT VERTICAL
LINE IN THE CENTER
OF IT.

HER HEAD NO
LONGER HURTS WHEN
SHE GETS NEAR IT.

SHE CAN HEAR A
FEW PHRASES AMID
THE WHISPERING...

"...SEE IT..."

"...CAN'T ENTER..."

"...FIND ME..."

"...MUST DIE..."



MIKA TRIES TO GET
CLOSER TO THE STRANGE
LIGHT, REACHING OUT
FOR IT.

SOME SORT OF FORCE
STOPS HER FROM MOVING
HER HAND IN TOO FAR.

"...CAN'T ENTER..."

"...MORE...
MATTER..."

"...EMBRACE..."

"...ASCENSION..."



JUST THEN, THE
RABBIT HEARS SOMEONE'S
FOOTSTEPS BEHIND
HER.

IT'S SHIN, CHARISMATIC
AS EVER. HE ALSO SEEMS
TO HAVE EATEN HIS FILL...

"AH, MIKA! HOW
INTERESTING THAT I
FIND YOU HERE!"

"YOU REALLY HAVE A
PENCHANT FOR EXPLORING,
DON'T YOU?"



"IT'S ENDEARING,
HONESTLY. BUT YOU'LL
LEARN MORE ABOUT
THE WORLD THAT WAY,
FOR SURE."

"OH, IT'S YOU! SHIN,
RIGHT? WE REALLY MEET UP
AT THE WEIRDEST TIMES," MIKA
SAYS, TRYING TO SOUND
INNOCENT ABOUT THE
WHOLE SITUATION.

SHIN SEEMS HAPPY
MIKA REMEMBERS HIS NAME.
"TELL ME ABOUT IT,"
THE RAT SAYS. "IT SEEMS
YOUR JOURNEY HAS LED YOU
TO A DEN OF SNAKES."

"POOR LOST RABBIT."

"YOU SEEM TO BE DOING
JUST FINE, REGARDLESS!"



THE SNAKES START TO NOTICE SHIN AND QUIETLY HISS IN DISAPPROVAL AT HIS PRESENCE.

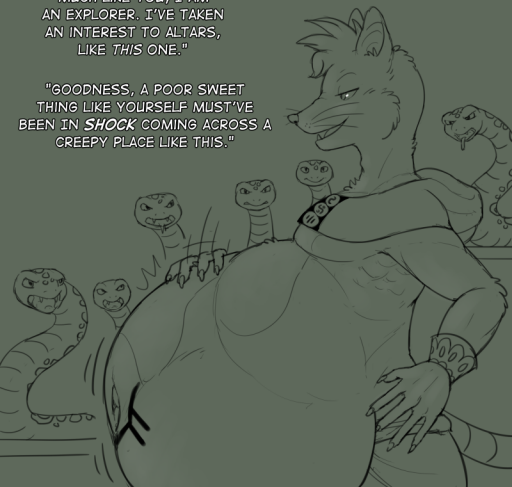
MIKA RAISES HER VOICE, "GOSH, YOU MUST'VE GOTTEN YOURSELF QUITE A CATCH!" SHE LOOKS DOWN AT THE RAT'S SLOSHING GUT. SHIN SMILES AND PROUDLY PATS HIS BLOATED STOMACH.

"JUST SOMEONE WHO WAS UNFORTUNATE ENOUGH TO BE IN MY PATH. NOTHING WILL BE LOST WITH HIM GONE, I CAN ASSURE YOU."

MIKA THEN ASKS, "SO WHAT BRINGS YOU HERE, SHIN?" THE RAT BEAMS, SEEMING TO ENJOY MIKA'S CURIOSITY.

"MUCH LIKE YOU, I AM AN EXPLORER. I'VE TAKEN AN INTEREST TO ALTARS, LIKE *THIS* ONE."

"GOODNESS, A POOR SWEET THING LIKE YOURSELF MUST'VE BEEN IN **SHOCK** COMING ACROSS A CREEPY PLACE LIKE THIS."



SHIN SLOWLY
APPROACHES MIKA,
A RATHER ALLURING
LOOK IN HIS EYES.

"BUT NO NEED
TO WORRY YOUR
INNOCENT LITTLE HEAD
OVER IT. THE **SNAKES**
SEEM TO LIKE YOU
AT LEAST."

SAID SNAKES
CONTINUE TO HISS IN
PROTEST, AND MIKA
FINDS IT HARD TO
LEAVE HIS GAZE.

"I NOTICED YOU
HAVE A *BELLY* YOURSELF.
I **LOVE** A GIRL WHO KNOWS
HOW TO EAT."





MIKA ATTEMPTS TO
CAPTIVATE SHIN, AS SHE
SENSES THAT IS WHAT THE
RAT IS TRYING TO
ACCOMPLISH HIMSELF.

"YEA, I'M PRETTY
GOOD AT IT. A GIRL'S
GOTTA WORK UP A GOOD
APPETITE TO GET THROUGH
THE DAY."

"SAY, I'D LOVE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THESE ALTARS. I'M NOT AS DUMB AS YOU THINK," MIKA SAYS, MAKING SURE TO GIVE HER VOICE A SEXY, SMOOTH DRAWL.

SHIN SEEMS AFFECTED BY THIS, STOPPING IN HIS TRACKS.

"WELL, I SUPPOSE I CAN ENTERTAIN YOU THIS TIME. I'D SAY YOU EARNED IT FOR UNCOVERING THIS ONE IN THE FIRST PLACE," HE BEGINS.

"YOU SEE, THESE ALTARS ARE PLACES OF WORSHIP FOR CERTAIN BEINGS. WHEN A CEREMONY OF WORSHIP TAKES PLACE, A UNIQUE ENERGY IS CONTRIBUTED TO THE ALTAR."

"THIS ENERGY IS FAITH, AND THAT'S WHAT THE **GODS** NEED TO FLOURISH."



CHARM SUCCESS!

SUDDENLY, SHIN APPEARS
SURPRISED. "WAIT A MINUTE,
HOW DID YOU HEAR THAT WORD
AND NOT..." HE CLEARS HIS THROAT,
HIS BELLY CLENCHING AND
BOUNCING.

WITH A CHUCKLE,
HE CONTINUES. "VERY
INTRIGUING. YOU REALLY
AREN'T AN ORDINARY
BUNNY."

BURRRP!

HE THEN BELCHES
LOUDLY, A SOGGY BANDANA
EXITING HIS GUTS.

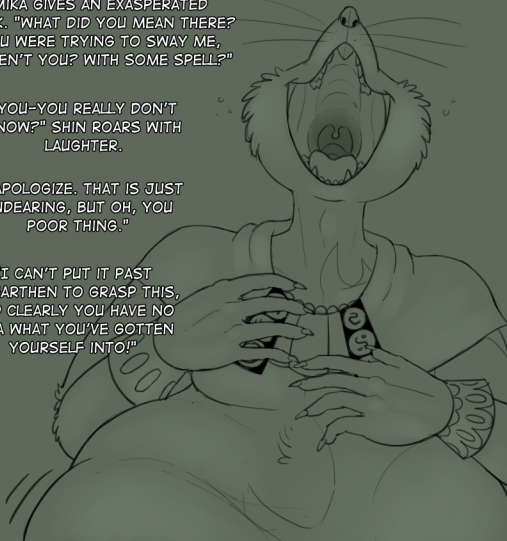


MIKA GIVES AN EXASPERATED
LOOK. "WHAT DID YOU MEAN THERE?
YOU WERE TRYING TO SWAY ME,
WEREN'T YOU? WITH SOME SPELL?"

"YOU-YOU REALLY DON'T
KNOW?" SHIN ROARS WITH
LAUGHTER.

"I APOLOGIZE. THAT IS JUST
ENDEARING, BUT OH, YOU
POOR THING."

"I CAN'T PUT IT PAST
AN EARTHEN TO GRASP THIS,
AND CLEARLY YOU HAVE NO
IDEA WHAT YOU'VE GOTTEN
YOURSELF INTO!"



MIKA, ANNOYED, TAKES A DEEP BREATH, CHANGING THE SUBJECT AND FOCUSING ON THE HEADBAND SHIN SPIT OUT.

"THAT BELONGS TO JABARO. SO YOU ATE HIM."

SHIN, COMPOSING HIMSELF, SMILES SEXILY. "SMART GIRL." HE SIGHS. "I GUESS THERE'S NO USE HIDING IT."

"HOW DID YOU GET HIM?" SHE ASKS.

"ISN'T IT OBVIOUS FROM HOW QUICKLY I FOUND YOU? THE DOPE WAS TAILING YOU."

"THOUGHT I'D TEACH HIM WHAT HAPPENS WHEN ONE DISAPPOINTS ME," HE SMIRKS.

"I THINK I DID YOU A FAVOR."



"I'M SURPRISED YOU ASKED.
I FIGURED YOU DIDN'T CARE FOR
HIM. YOU WANT HIM OUT? WELL,
LET ME INDULGE YOU
ON SOMETHING."

"YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT
YOU'VE DONE TO YOURSELF, AND
NOW YOU'RE IN FOR A FUTURE
FULL OF PAIN AND MISERY."

"PERHAPS I CAN RELIEVE
YOU OF THAT...WITH A TRADE,
PERHAPS? I'M STARVING, AND YOU
LOOK ABSOLUTELY DELICIOUS,
MY DEAR."

"YOU HAVE MY WORD THAT
JABARO HERE WILL BE FREE."

MIKA IS TAKEN ABACK BY
THIS INVITATION, BUT THEN
HEARS THE SOFT BUT SHRILL
WHISPER IN HER HEAD.

"EMBRACCCE... AFTERLIFFFE...
FFFIND... MEEE..."

SHIN CONTINUES, "YOU'LL
BE LULLED INTO A DEEP SLUMBER.
YOU WON'T FEEL A THING."



"OH YEAH? WELL, WHY AREN'T YOU AFRAID OF INHERITING THIS 'PAIN AND MISERY' AFTER EATING ME?" MIKA QUESTIONS.

"LET'S GET THIS OVER WITH, SHALL WE?" HE THEN SUGGESTS IMPATIENTLY.

SHIN SCOFFS, REPLYING, "THAT WAS THE PLAN. I DON'T CARE TO HOLD TWO INSIDE. KINDA WEIGHS ME DOWN."

"INHERITING? I'VE ALREADY INHERITED IT, SILLY BUNNY. I'VE LIVED WITH IT FOR A LONG TIME. NO NEED TO WORRY ABOUT THIS RAT," SHIN SAYS WITH A CHUCKLE.

MIKA HESITATES, THEN DEMANDS, "I WANT YOU TO RELEASE JABARO FIRST."

WITH THAT, SHIN'S STOMACH CHURNS AND WRITHES AS HE FORCES HIS MEAL BACK UP.

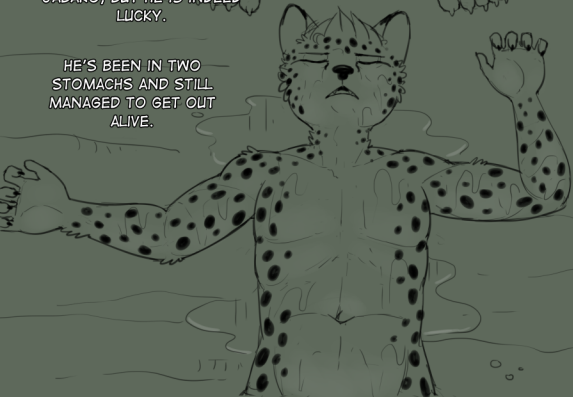



IT'S APPARENT SOON ENOUGH
THAT THE RAT WASN'T LYING, AND
IT WAS INDEED JABARO WHO WAS
IN HIS BELLY.

MIKA ALMOST PITIES
JABARO, BUT HE IS INDEED
LUCKY.

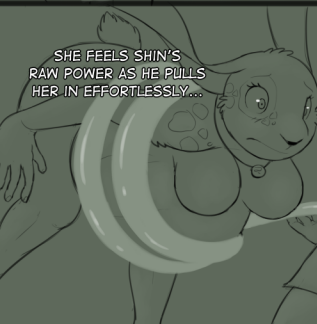
HE'S BEEN IN TWO
STOMACHS AND STILL
MANAGED TO GET OUT
ALIVE.

"THERE," SHIN SAYS. "SEE?
HE'S ALIVE AND WELL. HE
JUST MAY BE THE LUCKIEST
CHEETAH ON THE PLANET TO
HAVE SUCH A KIND BUNNY LIKE
YOU FOR A FRIEND."





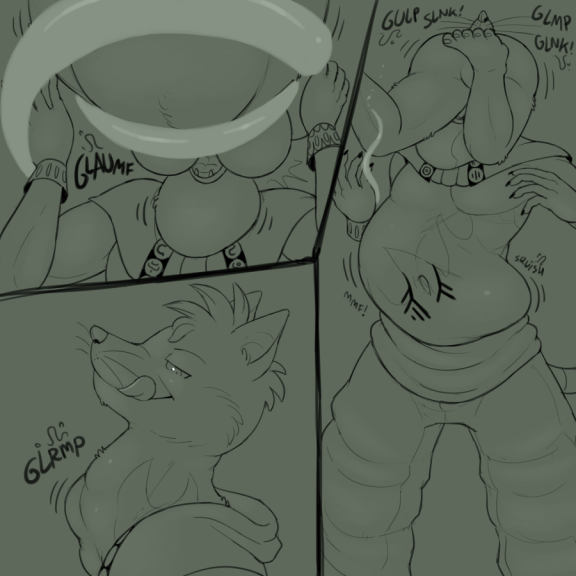
"NOW, OUR AGREEMENT!"
SHIN CASTS FORTH THE TENDRIL
THAT HE BOUND KUVA WITH
BEFORE, IT WRAPPING AROUND
MIKA WITH BLINDING SPEED.



SHE FEELS SHIN'S
RAW POWER AS HE PULLS
HER IN EFFORTLESSLY...



STRAIGHT TOWARDS
HIS DARK GULLET.



MIKA SLIDES INTO
THE BELLY OF THE RAT, A
POOL OF BUBBLING ACIDS
WAITING FOR HER.

SHIN SIGHS DREAMILY,
SAYING, "DELICIOUS
GIRL..."



HIS STOMACH CHURNS
AND GURGLES NOISILY,
HAPPY WITH THE REPLACEMENT
MEAL.

"YOU MAKE A BETTER
MEAL FOR SURE. I FEEL EVEN
FULLER," THE RAT SAYS WITH
A BELCH.

"WHY'RE YOU IN SUCH A HURRY TO EAT ME ANYWAY?" MIKA ASKS, WRIGGLING TO GET IN AS COMFORTABLE OF A POSITION AS SHE CAN.

"WELL, HOW ABOUT YOUR WEIRD LANGUAGE THEN? YOU CALLED ME AN EARTHEN. WHAT'D YOU MEAN BY THAT?"

"AN EARTHEN IS WHAT YOU ARE, AN AIMLESS WANDERER ONLY SLIGHTLY BETTER THAN A FERAL ANIMAL.

YOU SIT FAR, FAR DOWN ALONG THE FOOD CHAIN, MY DEAR, AND I'M HAPPY YOU UNDERSTAND YOUR PLACE!"

"EH, NO RUSH," HE ANSWERS. "WAS HARD TO TELL HOW MUCH LONGER THAT DUMB CHEETAH HAD BEFORE HE WAS A GONER."

SHIN LAUGHS, "EVEN ON THE VERGE OF BEING DIGESTED YOU ARE STILL SO CURIOUS. HOW UTTERLY ADORABLE.



A purple-toned comic panel. On the left, a character with short hair and a necklace is looking towards the right with a slightly annoyed or irritated expression. On the right, a very large, detailed foot is shown, appearing to be stepping on or about to step on the character. The background is a textured, wavy purple.


MIKA, IRRITATED BY THIS,
BRINGS BACK HER FOOT,

A green-toned comic panel. A character with fox-like ears and a headband is shown in profile, performing a powerful kick. The character is wearing a headband with a circular emblem and a wristband. Motion lines around the foot and the sound effect 'SO BLOMP!' emphasize the impact of the kick.

THEN LETS LOOSE A
POWER KICK!

SO
BLOMP!

- VIGOR



SHIN COUGHS A
COUPLE TIMES, BUT
LAUGHS HYSTERICALLY
AS IF HE WAS
TICKLED.

"I DIDN'T MEAN TO
HURT YOUR FEELINGS,
SWEETHEART! YEESH!"

NOT QUITE THE
REACTION MIKA WAS
EXPECTING OR HOPING FOR,
BUT IT WAS WORTH A TRY.



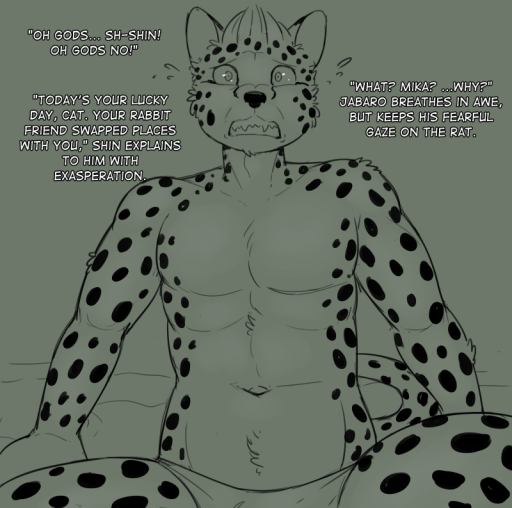
JABARO AWAKENS
FROM HIS MOMENTARY
SLUMBER.

"WHA...WHERE..."

"OH GODS... SH-SHIN!
OH GODS NO!"

"TODAY'S YOUR LUCKY
DAY, CAT. YOUR RABBIT
FRIEND SWAPPED PLACES
WITH YOU," SHIN EXPLAINS
TO HIM WITH
EXASPERATION.

"WHAT? MIKA? ...WHY?"
JABARO BREATHE IN AWE,
BUT KEEPS HIS FEARFUL
GAZE ON THE RAT.



"UGH! I'M TIRED
OF SEEING YOUR *STUPID*
FACE! GET OUTTA HERE!"

"AND TELL YOUR LADY
FRIEND ABOUT MIKA'S SELFLESS
SACRIFICE THAT SAVED YOUR
WORTHLESS ASS!"

JABARO ESCAPES
THE CHAMBER.

KRAK.



"WHEW, SORRY ABOUT
THAT. HM? GETTING SLEEPY?
I TOLD YOU IT'D WORK
THAT WAY."

"HEH. SOON YOU'LL JUST
BE BUNNY SOUP, SLOSHING
ABOUT IN MY BELLY."

"ANYTHING YOU'D LIKE
TO SAY BEFORE MY STOMACH
GETS TO WORK?"

PAT
PAT



"JUST...ONE THING..."


MIKA CAN HARDLY
STAY AWAKE, SHIN'S
BELLY CRADLING HER
TO A FINAL SLUMBER.

"THERE'S ALWAYS..."

"A BIGGER..."

"SN-SNAKE."





MIKA FINALLY
SUCCUMBS TO THE RAT,
DARKNESS OVERTAKING
HER.

AS HER BODY
FAILS, MIKA RECALLS
OLD MEMORIES,
SPECIFICALLY THOSE
WITH THE JACKAL
PRINCE.

TIME SEEMS TO SLOW
AS SHE CRAWLS GRADUALLY
TOWARDS DEATH, THE
SOUNDS AROUND HER
BECOMING MUFFLED.



THERE IS PEACEFUL
SILENCE...AND THEN...


"TAKE MY HAND."



BRIGHT SEPIA FILLS
MIKA'S VISION.

SHE FEELS SHE
IS BEING PROPELLED
FORWARD, AS IF SHE
WERE CAUGHT IN
RAPIDS.

SHE CAN SEE STRANGE,
FISH SHAPED SILHOUETTES
RIDING ALONG WITH HER.



MIKA LOOKS AROUND
FOR THE "HAND" SHE WAS
TOLD TO "TAKE," BUT
CAN'T FIND IT ANYWHERE
AT THE MOMENT.

THERE ARE ALMOST
COUNTLESS AMOUNTS OF
THE FIGURES SWIMMING
FORWARD.



SHE NOTICES A "FISH"
APPROACHES HER SIDE.

MIKA GETS A
STRONG URGE TO
INTERACT WITH THIS
STRANGE THING IN
SOME WAY.

MIKA ATTEMPTS
TO SPEAK TO THE FISH, BUT
NOTHING COMES OUT.

THE ONLY THING SHE
CAN HEAR IS THE MUFFLED
SOUND OF RUSHING WATER
ALL AROUND HER.

SHE NOTICES THAT THE
FISH DOESN'T PAY ATTENTION
TO HER DESPITE HER EFFORTS.



OVERWHELMED WITH
CURIOSITY, MIKA DECIDES
TO DEVOUR THE FISH.

SWIMMING IN FRONT OF
IT, MIKA OPENS HER SUPPOSED
MOUTH, LETTING THE FISH SWIM
RIGHT INTO IT.

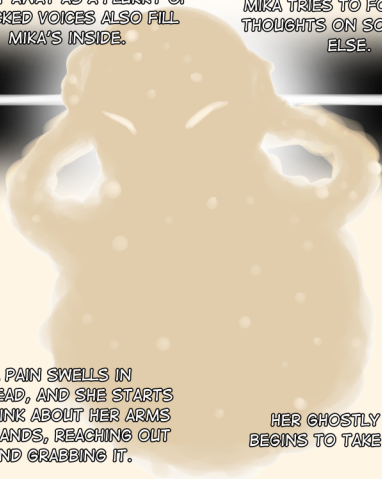
HER APPARENT STOMACH
FEELS LIKE IT HAS BEEN FILLED,
A FEELING OF SATISFACTION
WASHING OVER HER.


SOON, THAT SATISFACTION
IS CAST AWAY AS A FLURRY OF
PANICKED VOICES ALSO FILL
MIKA'S INSIDE.

DURING THE STRUGGLE,
MIKA TRIES TO FOCUS HER
THOUGHTS ON SOMETHING
ELSE.

A PAIN SWELLS IN
HER HEAD, AND SHE STARTS
TO THINK ABOUT HER ARMS
AND HANDS, REACHING OUT
AND GRABBING IT.

HER GHOSTLY FORM
BEGINS TO TAKE SHAPE...





IN TIME, MIKA SHAPES
HER FIGURE TO TAKE UP THE
ANTHRO FORM SHE ONCE
HAD.

HER LOP EARS, HER
FINGERS, HER LEGS AND
FEET...

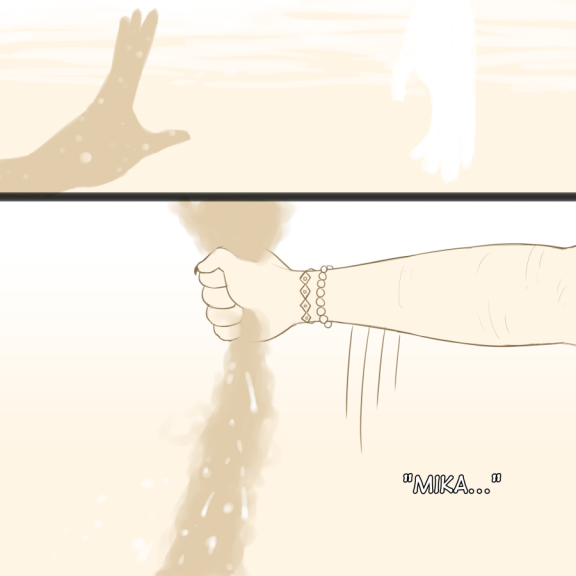
IT ALL GRADUALLY
STARTS TO COME
BACK, ALBEIT WITH THE
SAME GHOLISH
LOOK.

BUT IT WAS A BIG
IMPROVEMENT
NONETHELESS.

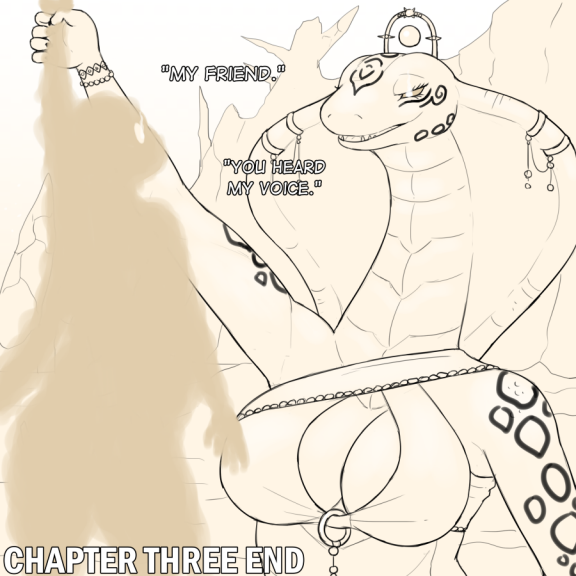


UP AHEAD, MIKA
NOTICES SOMETHING SHIMMERING
ABOVE HER.

SHE REALIZES THE BRIGHT
SILHOUETTE IS THAT OF A
HAND!



"MIKA..."



"MY FRIEND."

"YOU HEARD
MY VOICE."

CHAPTER THREE END