



This is the nerdiest thing ever.
Nerrier than our usual game nights?
Like, times a hundred.

Worried your cool friends will see you, Clyde?
Don't worry, you don't have any.

Hey there, Polks! Yes, it's Hallowe'en once again! Time sure flies, doesn't it?

You may remember Isabelle and Marcia, over in the next panel, from two years ago. We missed them last year.

Let's see what kind of mischief they've got planned for our party of adventurers here. I bet it's going to be a very interesting night.

* CONTAINS LESS THAN TWO PERCENT ACTUAL TRUTH



Welcome!
You're just in time--you're the last group we're letting in tonight.

Come on in, don't be shy! Let's get you set up so you can get right into the action!



The first thing you'll need to figure out is how you want to play.

This is some very strange decor.

You mean, like a character class?

Sort of, but we don't do it that rigidly. More like a style. Do you like to get in close and hack at things? Fight at range? Sneak around?

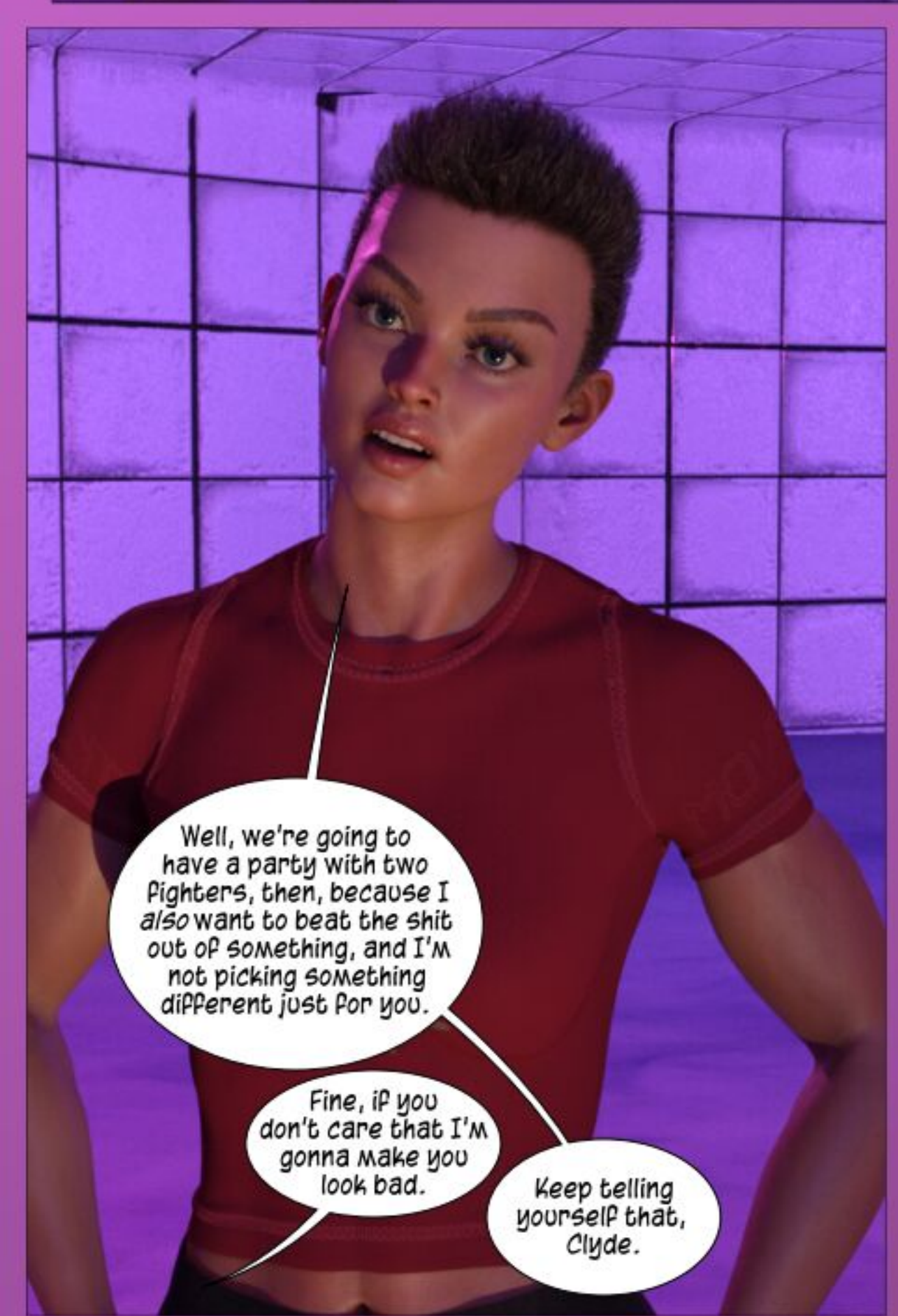


I wanna be a barbarian warrior! I like to get in close and beat the snot out of enemies!

And everybody died of shock.

Aw, bite me, Del.

Easiest to do. And you should be able to handle the bigger weapons, too.



Well, we're going to have a party with two fighters, then, because I also want to beat the shit out of something, and I'm not picking something different just for you.

Fine, if you don't care that I'm gonna make you look bad.

Keep telling yourself that, Clyde.



I think rogue would probably suit me best ...

We don't have that as such. Like I said, not really classes. If you like to sneak, sneak. There are no rogue skills or abilities ... how well you actually can sneak or detect traps or so on is what you get.

Hmm. Then I may need to be a caster instead.

That also might not work the way you think. Marcia was about to explain that.



Anybody can try to cast any spell they learn. The spells all have ... well, something you have to do. Make specific gestures, or recite something that may be tricky to say. It'll make more sense once you try to cast one.

They're designed to be hard to do while fighting; we want you to have to concentrate on what you're doing.

If you do want to specialize in casting, then we can set it up so you get an advantage on spells but do less well in physical fights. That's as close as we get to a 'caster class.'

Oh, OK. Think I'll just dabble then.



Which leaves me doing support again.

As usual.

You don't have to ...

Somebody has to, Stee. Especially if those two are going to be changing all over the place.

It's OK.

All right, everyone into the changing rooms, please ...

You really think you can outfight me? I've got fifty pounds on you ...

Yeah, and that's why you move like a pregnant yak. Size isn't everything, Clyde.



I think you're going to have fun anyway, Beth ...

I hope so.



You gave this guy a sword that big?

Watch where you swing that thing, now.

Hey! What happened to you?

It's called "makeup," Clyde. Marcia told me there were three playable races, and I decided I wanted to be an orc.

Despite certain penalties.

Looks good ... least you can get away with not wearing anything. I look ridiculous!

And I'm going to go into fights almost naked? I thought I'd get some armor!



You're a barbarian, Clyde. Ever see Conan wearing armor?

Well, I, uh ...

It's OK. We can probably pick up something better for you as we go.

Is everybody ready?



Now, this is important.

Our, ah, special effects are really good. Immersive. Some things are probably going to happen that startle you.

Just go with it. Act as if it's all really happening and don't worry too much about how it's happening. OK?

Everything in here is temporary. No death, damage or any other ... conditions you might incur will stay with you. It goes away when the scenario's over.



... Mostly.

Mostly.



OK, wow, she wasn't kidding about the effects ...

A village? Boring!

Clyde's got a point. Isn't there supposed to be a quest or something? How do we start?

Let's try the tavern. All the best scenarios start in the tavern.



You! Orc!
We don't want your kind in here! Get out!



Hey, now--!

S'all right. Marcia warned me this might happen.

I'll deal with it.



How about we all not make trouble for each other, and you serve us some ale, and I don't cut you into little tiny bloody pieces?

Ooh!
Bravo!

Uh ... Yes. Right. That sounds good.

TWENTY MINUTES LATER.



I didn't agree to this just to watch them get drunk.

Yeah, I know. I was hoping a mission would turn up. We may have to drag them out.



I see you staring at Del. You think she looks hot like that, huh?

I don't know. I guess, maybe.

You guess? Like, you're not sure.

You don't know what you like all the time either, Stee.

It doesn't matter. Del's not interested.



Well, sure, not if you don't ever say anything to her about it--

Uh-huh. How come you don't tell Clyde you'd love to climb him like a tree?

... he would never speak to me again.

Ah, pardon me ...



You two are clearly the, ah, upright and sober members of your party.

Might I, ah, ask your business in our lovely little village?

Depends who's asking.

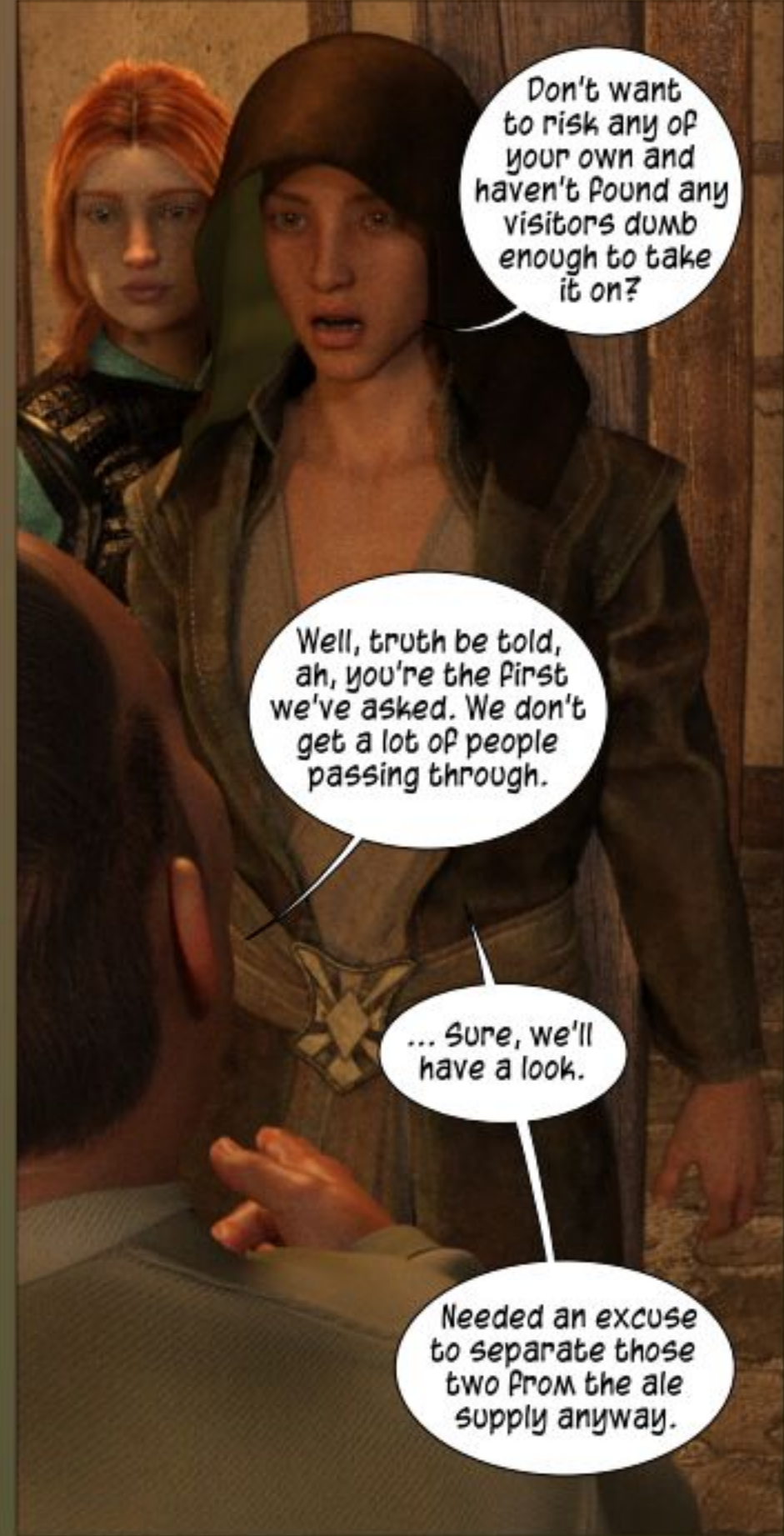


Name's Fluke. We're too small to have a mayor, but if we did, I'd be him.

I was only asking to see if you had any, ah, obligations. If you don't, I wonder if you'd look into a, ah, problem.

The young women in this area, they've been, ah, disappearing. They go into the woods, or get taken in--we're not sure--and they don't come back out.

There's some old ruins in the forest. We think that may be the, ah ... well ... we'd like someone to investigate. And, of course, bring them back if they're, ah ...



Don't want to risk any of your own and haven't found any visitors dumb enough to take it on?

Well, truth be told, ah, you're the first we've asked. We don't get a lot of people passing through.

... Sure, we'll have a look.

Needed an excuse to separate those two from the ale supply anyway.



I was having fun ...

You wanted to beat something up, didn't you? Not too likely in there.

Oh ... yeah, OK. Hey, are we getting a reward for this?

The weird little man offered fifty guilders.

What about a reward from the women we're rescuing?

Pig.

I'm not! That's the way it works, isn't it? When they say "rescue the damsel and win her hand in marriage," that's what it's really about.

Uh ... OK, point.

I don't know, Clyde. I guess you'll have to ask them. If we find them.



Just ran out of path ... and it's getting darker ...

Yeah.

So something's gonna jump us any second now.

Yeah.



And there we are.

Eww, gross.



RAAAAAAR!

Clyde, wait!



JIIIIII

Next time, attack the side that isn't pointy, idiot ...

OK, let's try this casting thing.



THE ABOVEGROUND RUINS CONTAIN NOTHING OF INTEREST, SO OUR HEROES HEAD BELOW.



There's a whole *dungeon* down here or something!

Be careful. If there was one trap there'll be others.

I'm'a have to be. I can't see shit.

Let me squeeze past you. I'll make a light.



Yep. Definitely *dungeon-y*.

Hey, Clyde, there's some armor for you.

Ha, ha.



Hmm, nasty. Don't fall in any of those holes, Clyde.

Dungeon for short people ...

Yeah, we might not be able to pull your ass back up.

Not one damned bit of loot anywhere in here, either ...



Finally!

Clyde, hang on --



Woauihhh!



Clyde, you *dumbass*!

Aaaagh!

Ask 'em if they'll "reward" you, Clyde ...



Get them off me! Get them off!!

Del?

Trying! -- umph --

They're ignoring physical! My axe just goes through them! *Shit!!*



btch ndtur isghrben houk arcrcsth!



... Wow.

Honestly. That didn't look suspicious to you? If they'd turned you into one of them I might not have been able to get you back, you know.

I know there's no Detect Trap, but could you please Detect Curse or at least Detect Magic first?

I didn't take either of those ...

Well, then let Del or Stee check something before you open it!

Ah, actually ...

Me neither.



No one else took Detect Magic or Detect Curse?

Did anyone else take any dispels?

What about heals? Am I the only one with heals?

I didn't take any spells. I wanted to Pocus on Fighting.

Same.

And mine are all combat stuff.



-- sigh -- Fine.

Let's keep moving.

I was kidding Clyde, but ... what if those were the missing women?

Then we're done with that and we might as well keep exploring anyway, I guess.



What was this? A barracks?

Looks kinda like it ...

Who would put a barracks underground?

Who'd put any of this underground?

Maybe there were dwarves once.



Surely they had more light than just these candles ... these aren't going to do a thing ...

Uh ... Beth?

It it OK to open some of these chests?



This one's clean.

I'll go check the others.

... Thank you for asking.



Empty.

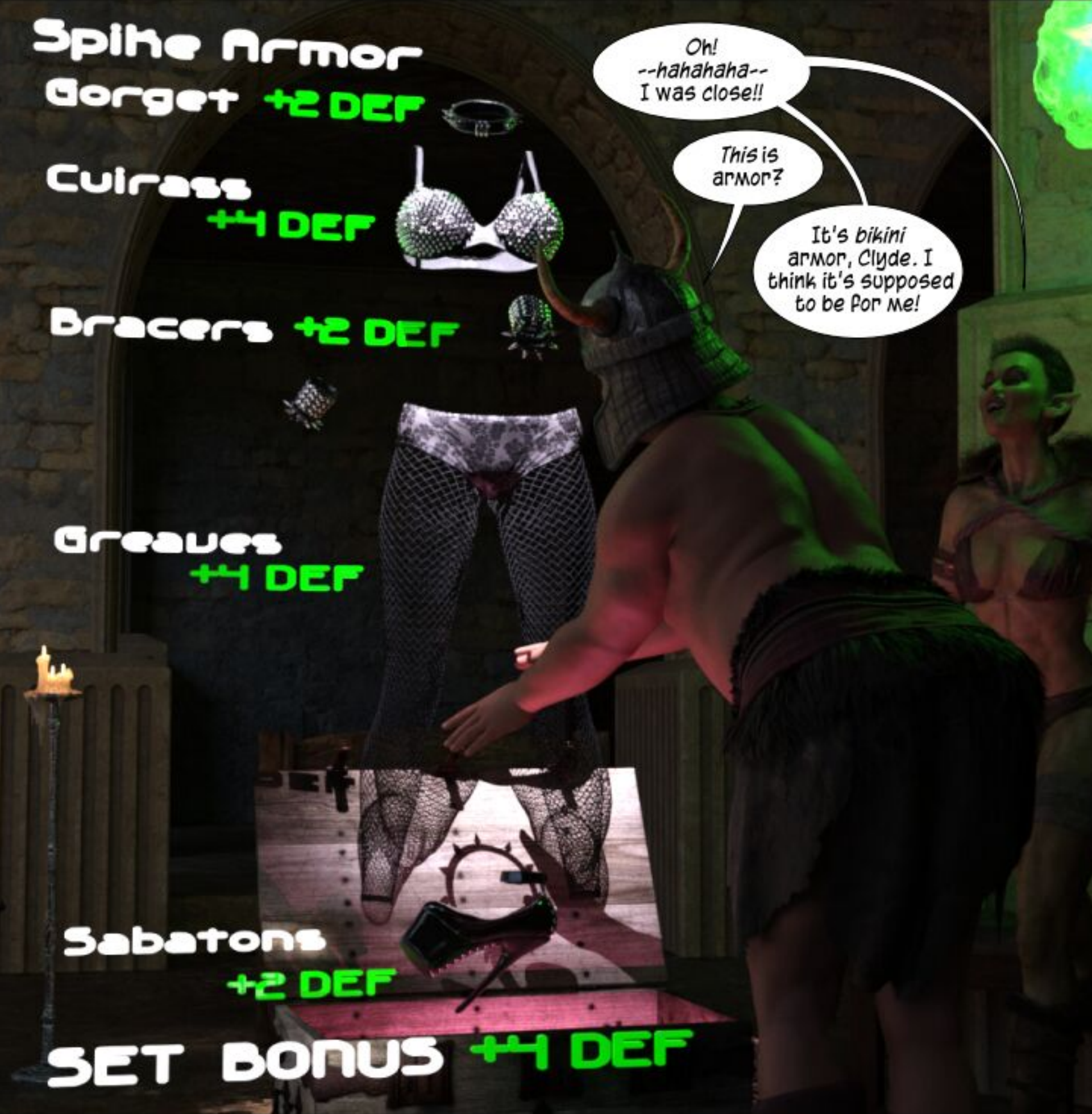
You know, it's not real loot, Clyde.

Yeah, but I mean, the loot and the Pights are the fun part, and so far ...

I checked all the other chests, Clyde. They're Pine. Knock yourself out.

Oh, hey, this one's got something! And it's armor! ... I think.

Probably turn out to be Mordenkainen's Bikini of Lust ...



Spike Armor +2 DEF

Gorget +2 DEF

Cuirass +4 DEF

Bracers +2 DEF

Greaves +4 DEF

Sabatons +2 DEF

SET BONUS +4 DEF

Oh! --hahaha-- I was close!!

This is armor?

It's bikini armor, Clyde. I think it's supposed to be for me!



Well, too bad. If I'm the one who's got to tank, I'm the one who needs the armor ...

You know, a guy putting on bikini armor might be a bad idea--

Don't try to talk me out of it. And, see? It fits just Pi--

--iiiiiii???

No one's making you tank, Clyde. You charge in. It's your own fault.

But whatever. I wasn't going to wear it anyway.

That's if you can even manage to get it on ...



AAAAAGH! That's impossible! How did that happen???

WAAAAAAAAAAAA!

I warned you!

Don't you know how bikini armor works? I guess you guys don't have to deal with it, do you?

It improves your defense rating by distracting everybody with your boobs!

Omigod! We've got to fix this!!



You said that chest was clean! You've got to use Remove Curse!

--hahahaha--

That chest was clean. And Remove Curse won't do any good. There's no curse.

Del's right. That's just what that armor does. That's what it's supposed to do.

You could take it off, but I bet that won't undo the changes, so you might as well get the armor benefits ...

Just live with it. It's only going to last until the end of the campaign anyway ... and it's not really bad, you're not, y'know, missing an arm or something ...

Gonna go for the set bonus, Clyde?

Hell, no! The tits are bad enough ... I'm not letting those panties anywhere near my dick.

The collar and the bracelets should be safe though, I hope ...

I'm going to scout some of these passages real quick. Try not to get into trouble.

Oh, yeah, that's better ... got a little more muscle back now ...

Wait, did that just change my helmet?

Yep! It's a good look.



Yeah, I guess you're more into me like this, huh? If Stee and Beth weren't here, maybe we'd ...

Don't kid yourself, Clyde.

First off, I don't do dick.

And second, I only pool around with people who are interested in me and don't just want to get into my pants.

Hey! I'm interested in you. We've been friends for how long now?

That's not what I mean, and you know it. You're not interested in being in a relationship with me.

Yeah, OK, fair.

But if you feel like that, how come you never did anything with Beth? She's looking for that kind of thing, and I know she's interested in you ...

Beth?

Beth is, like, the most basic person ever. I don't even know how she ended up in with us.

I mean, maybe she's got something interesting going on in there, but if she does, nobody even gets to see it.

I don't think anybody's ever going to be with Beth. They'd die of boredom.

SOME TIME LATER, OUR HEROES EMERGE FROM THE DEPTHS ...



Good. I was getting really tired of keeping up that light spell.

Don't get too happy. We might need it again soon. I think we're about to run out of daylight.

We're back in the Forest? All that just to get back to the Forest? Who wrote this thing?

Which way now?

No idea. We could try following that little stream to see if it leads somewhere useful ...

That's not going to take us very far. It ends at this little pond up here.

... Wow, that's a lot of Fireflies. Never seen so many ...



Fireflies? Don't fireflies only light after dark?

I think so. Darker than this, anyway, right?

Yes.

Hey, Clyde ...

Clyde?

So many lights ... So pretty ...

uuuuh!



You know, he doesn't do this kind of thing in our paper campaigns.

Everything takes longer there. He has time to use his brain.

He does have one. I'm pretty sure.

... He's not coming up.

I'm not a good enough swimmer to get him.

I think I can take care of that. Hang on.



Levitation! Nice. You said you only took combat spells.

... Well, I thought it might be fun to use on enemies, see.



He's not breathing!

Hope that's a special effect ...

Beth, can you do something?

Like what? Cure Moderate Death?

I know you took Resurrect, because of course you did.

-- sigh --

Give me some space. The ritual looks complicated.



ONE COMPLICATED RITUAL LATER.

--urrrgh--

OK, what just happened?

You two fill him in. I'm done with his shit.



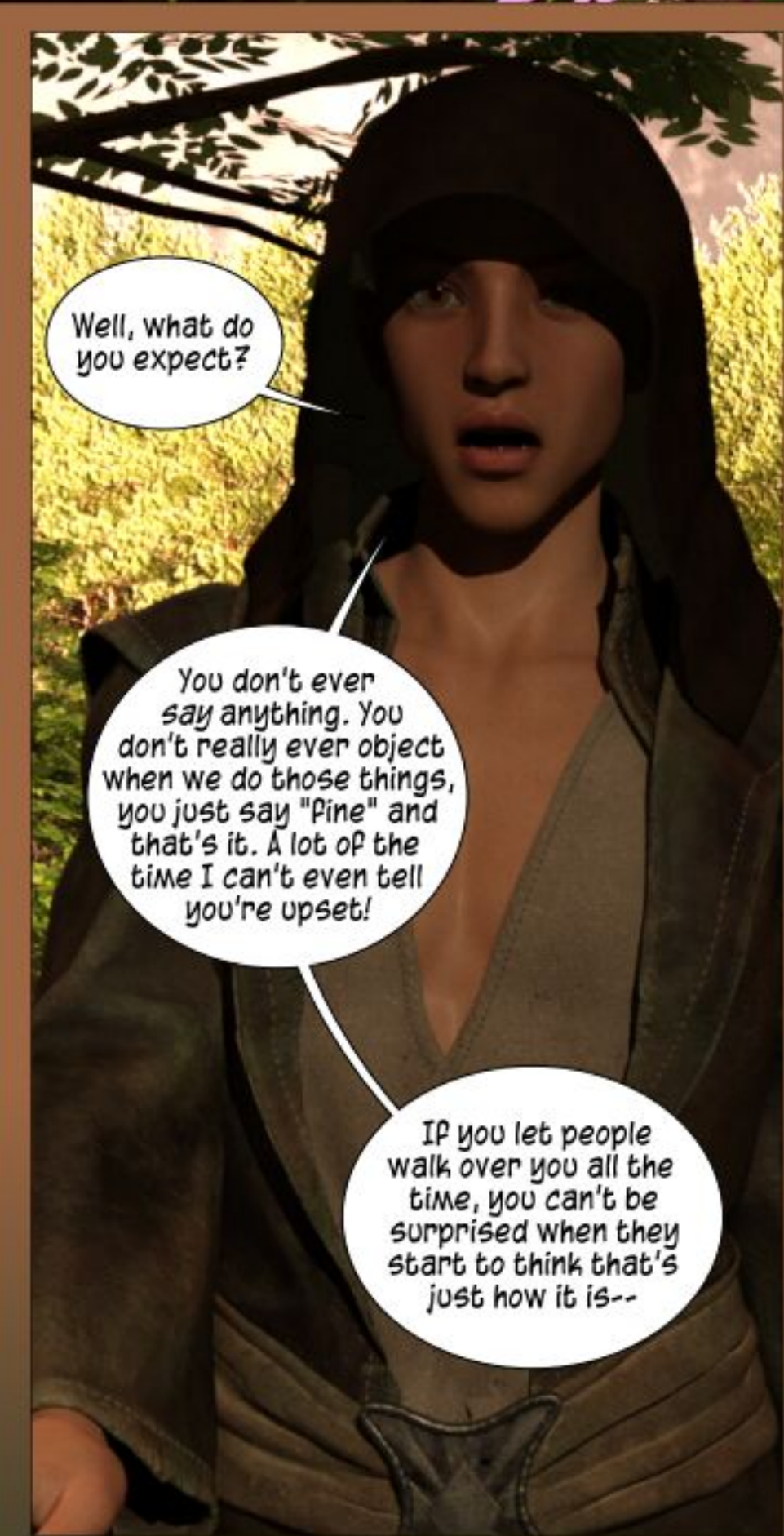
Are you OK?

No, Stee, I'm not.



I'm tired of always being support. I'm tired of always saving your butts. Especially Clyde's.

I'm tired of being taken for granted when you need me, and being ignored the rest of the time. Or being told I'm boring!



Well, what do you expect?

You don't ever say anything. You don't really ever object when we do those things, you just say "Pine" and that's it. A lot of the time I can't even tell you're upset!

If you let people walk over you all the time, you can't be surprised when they start to think that's just how it is--



And I thought you were my friend, Stee!

I thought you were on my side! I knew the other two weren't, but you--!

You can just go to hell.



Beth, wait ...

Forget it, Stee. I am not having Pun, and I don't want to do it anymore.

I don't think I can get out of the campaign until you all do, so I'm going to go sit and wait somewhere until it ends. Probably when you all die.

Since none of you have any heals, I don't guess it'll take too long.



... I guess she really meant it. I keep hoping she'll just show up all of a sudden ...

She might yet. Beth's too smart to wander around in here in the dark.

If we can spot that village up ahead, so can she. For all we know she's already there.



Anyway, we have to stop here overnight, because we shouldn't be wandering the Forest in the dark either.

I hope they're friendly.

Overnight? How long's this campaign supposed to last?

Not sure. But I don't think we're running on real time anyway, so I'm just going with it, like the lady said.



Intruders!

Make them back off, lady, or I'm going to cut them up and have them for dinner!

Ghibanes! Down! Move away!

Uh ... Stee ...
I'm not sure they're friendly.



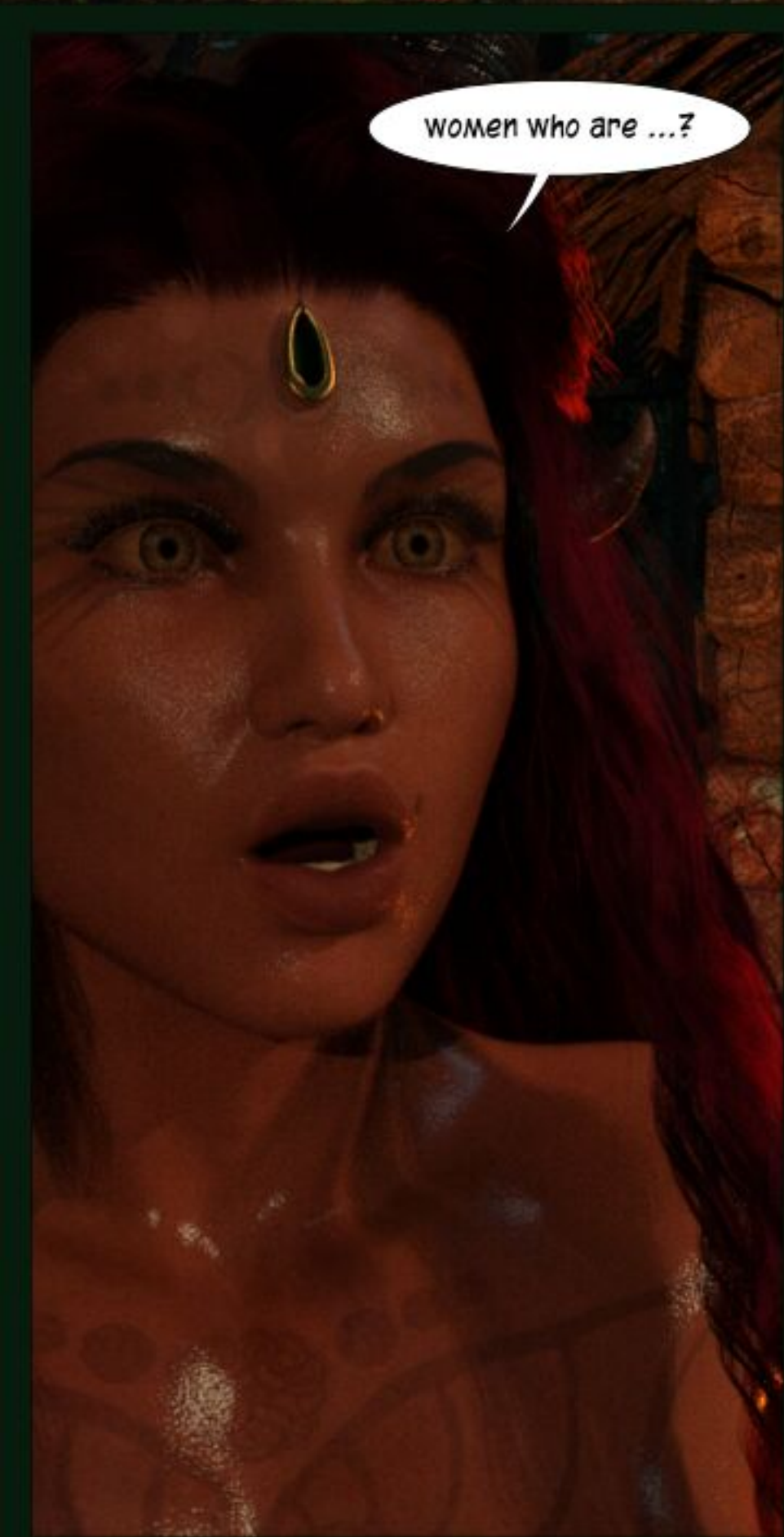
You must forgive us for assuming the worst.

There are no friends in this forest, especially not after dark.

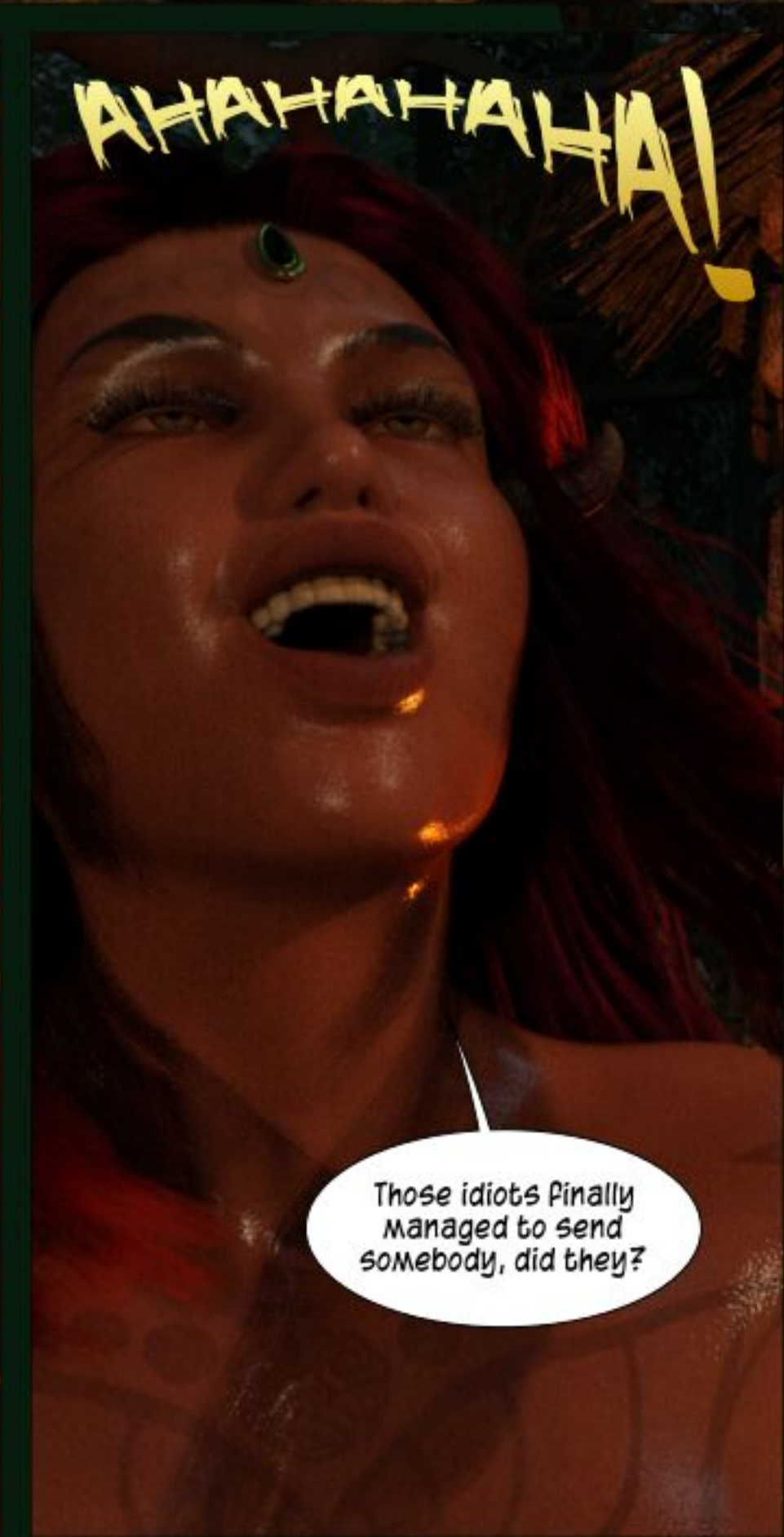
That's why we'd like to beg shelter for the night.

Don't try to stare me down, or I swear I'm going to cut your goddamned nose off.

We're trying to find and rescue some women who have gone missing from the township to the west. We can't continue safely until sunrise.



Women who are ...?



AAAAHAHAHA!

Those idiots finally managed to send somebody, did they?



We are the women you seek. Only no longer.

Congratulations! You've found us. Your quest is ended.

And now you must be prevented from ever returning to tell our secret. Ghibanes, I suppose. I think that'd probably be best.

Hold on! Can't you just, uh, swear us to secrecy or something?



Forget it, Stee. They're never going to trust us. Let's just take them apart.

Ah, yes! The orc is true to form! Murder and violence is all your kind knows.

I've got news for you, lady: I don't know about any other orcs around here, but I've already heard enough of you to know you're full of shit.

You expect me to just stand still and let you turn us into those things? Forget it. My axe says no.



HMM. Perhaps there is another way.

Your kind have a settlement not far from here. They attack us constantly. We have been able to fend them off, so far, but much desire an end to this.

An orc could enter their settlement without causing suspicion. Then, if you were to kill their chieftain ...

What? No way! I'm not going to go murder somebody for you!

You would gain our trust? I can think of no better way.

I don't care if you trust us! I'd just as soon sink an axe in your skull.

Del ...



We need not settle this before morning.

Mor, the orc will lodge with you. Bring Skadi as well; the big one will use her bed in the bunkhouse.

Alessia, Sera, show her, please. I will accommodate this one.

Get your hands off me! I wasn't finished!

Oh, hush. You'll like my house. I have the best bed here.

Ooh, she's got a good butt ...

Hey!



See? I told you it was a nice house.

I bet you're actually a lot of fun when you're not all hostile ...

Don't touch me!

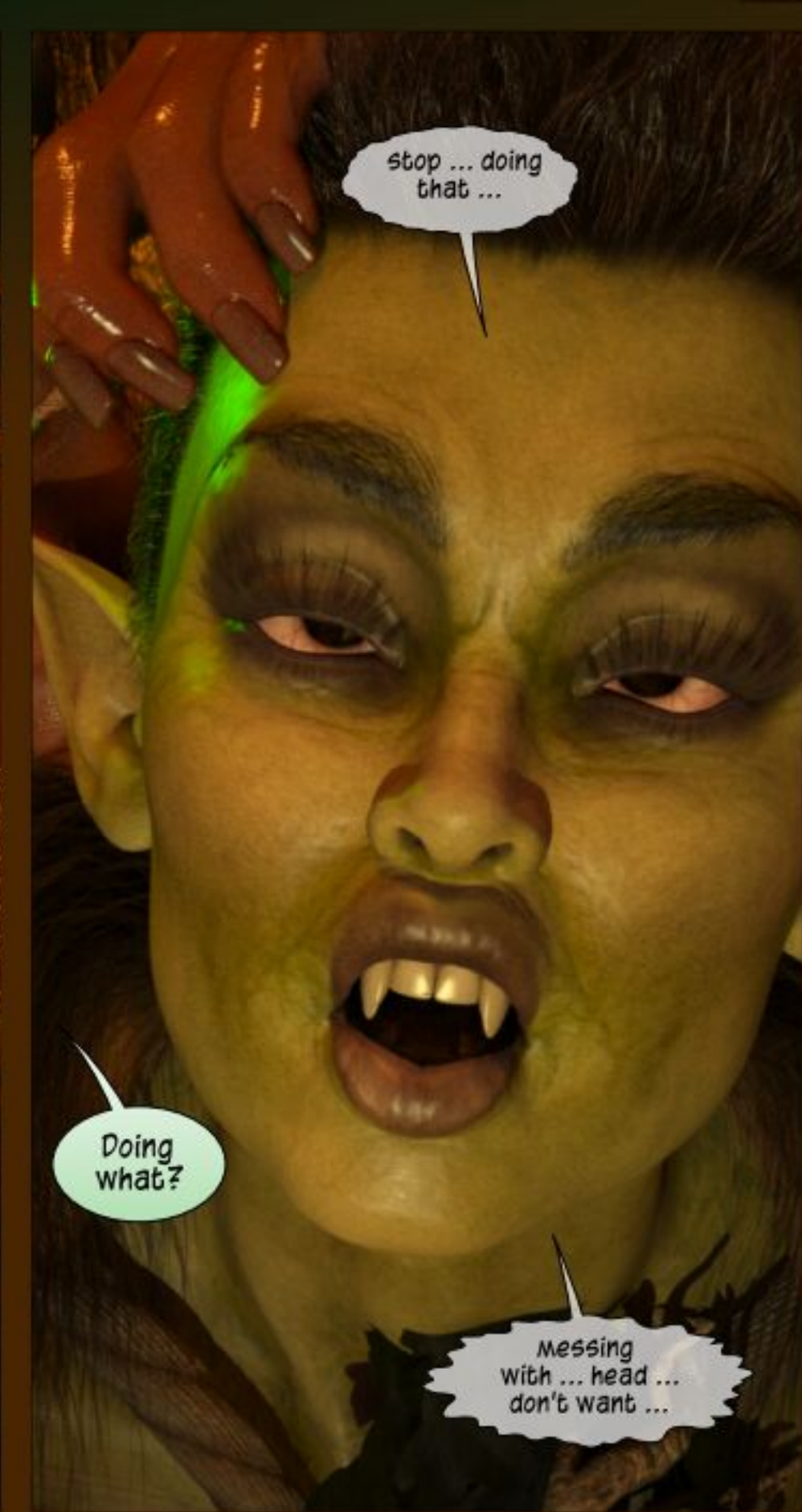
I don't want you near me. I'll go out and sleep with the ghibanes, damn it!



Violaine would say that's no more than you deserve.

But I think better of you than that.

I think you just need to relax and enjoy yourself for a while ...



stop ... doing that ...

Doing what?

Messing with ... head ... don't want ...



You don't like it? I'm a little hurt.

And Skadi's so good with her hands, too ... --MMMh-- I've been teaching her, you know ...

uuuuuh

That's right. Just give in. Feels so good, doesn't it?

By morning, you'll worship us.

OOUUUUH!!!



There! Isn't it nice to be able to put down that big sword for a while?

And to take that silly helmet off ...

oooh ...

Let's get you out of the rest of this and then you'll be much more comfortable.



She's got a surprise!

Ooh! Another big sword! -- giggle --

This'll be fun!



-- Mooooaaannnn --

Mmm, you taste good ...

You like that? Sounds like you do ...

Go on, let it all out!



-- MMMH -- When we're done with you, you won't have a thought in your head!

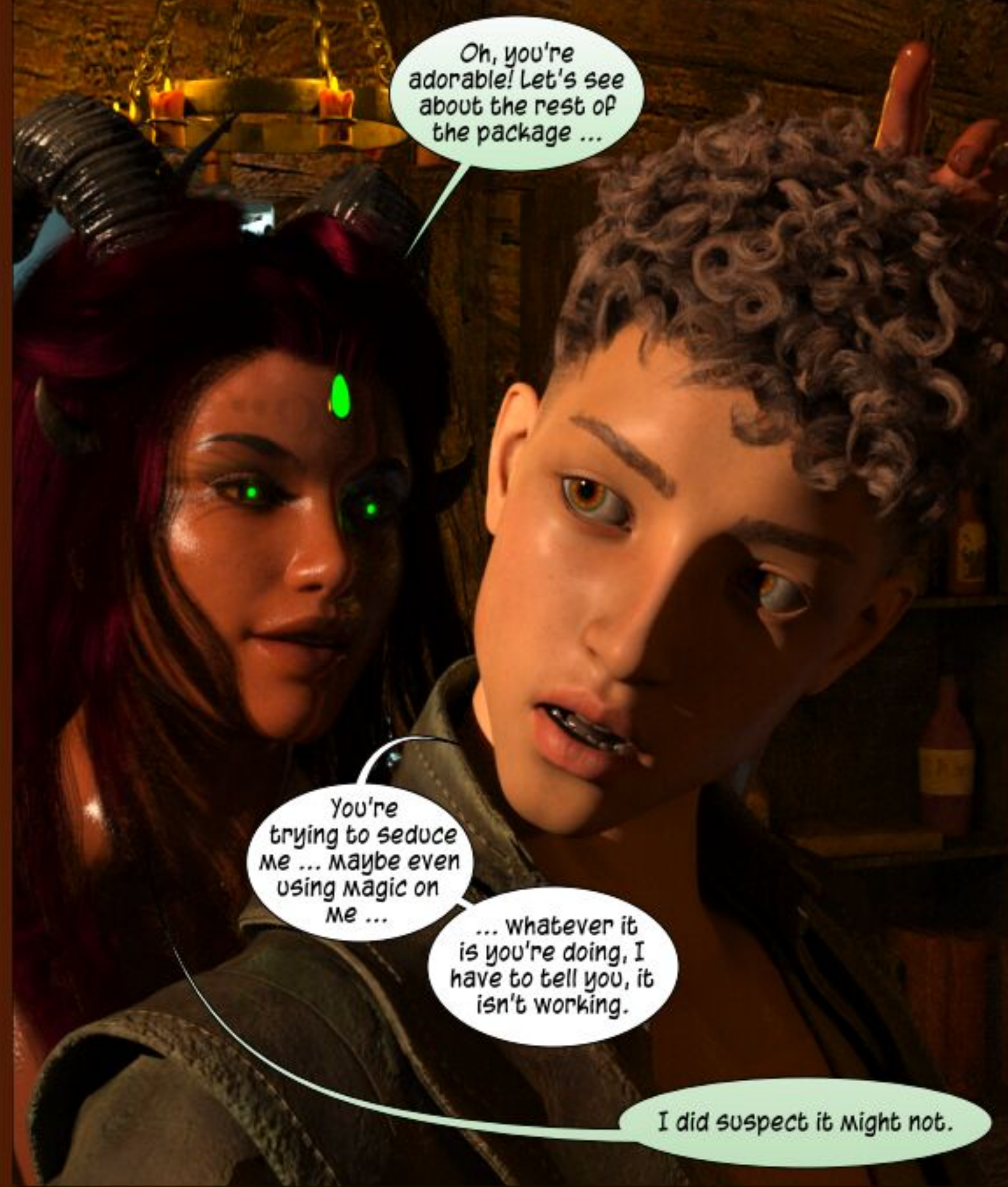
I think she's already there.



Now I get to see what you look like with that hood off ...

Two people can't fit in that little bed.

That depends on how close they're willing to be.



Oh, you're adorable! Let's see about the rest of the package ...

You're trying to seduce me ... maybe even using magic on me ...

... whatever it is you're doing, I have to tell you, it isn't working.

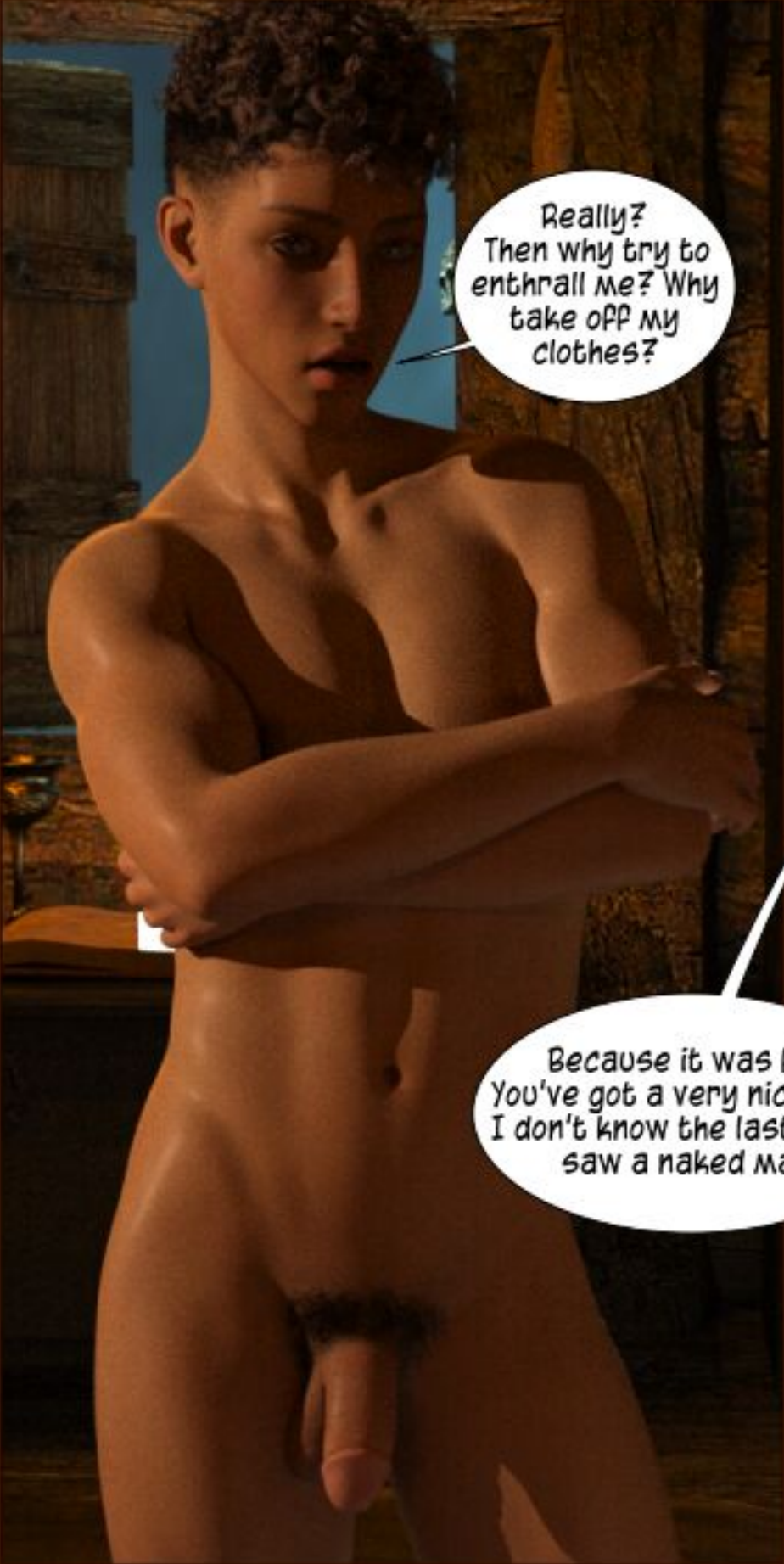
I did suspect it might not.



You did?

Yes, there was something about you ... I had a Peeling.

You're obviously more intelligent and level-headed than your two Friends. I chose you to spend the night with me so that we could have a purposeful talk about the situation.



Really? Then why try to enthrall me? Why take off my clothes?

Because it was Fun! You've got a very nice body. I don't know the last time I saw a naked man.



We can play first, and have the conversation afterward ...

No, thank you.



-- sigh -- All right, if you must be all business ...

Let me tell you the history. I came here nine years ago.

I Pled because there was nothing for me there. I'd have ended up wed to some Farmer covered in manure, or to the local lord as landgeld. No other choices offered.

I learned some magic. Gave myself power. Now I go back through the ruins every so often and rescue other women in the same situation.

We're all very happy here and we just want to live in peace, but those orcs will not leave us alone.

We can't do what needs to be done. Only an orc can get into their settlement unchallenged. Your Friend is a rare opportunity.

OK, but Del wouldn't go in there alone even if you convinced her it was a good idea. She's not that reckless. She'd want help.

Ah! I have a solution for that. We simply change you and your big Friend into orcs!



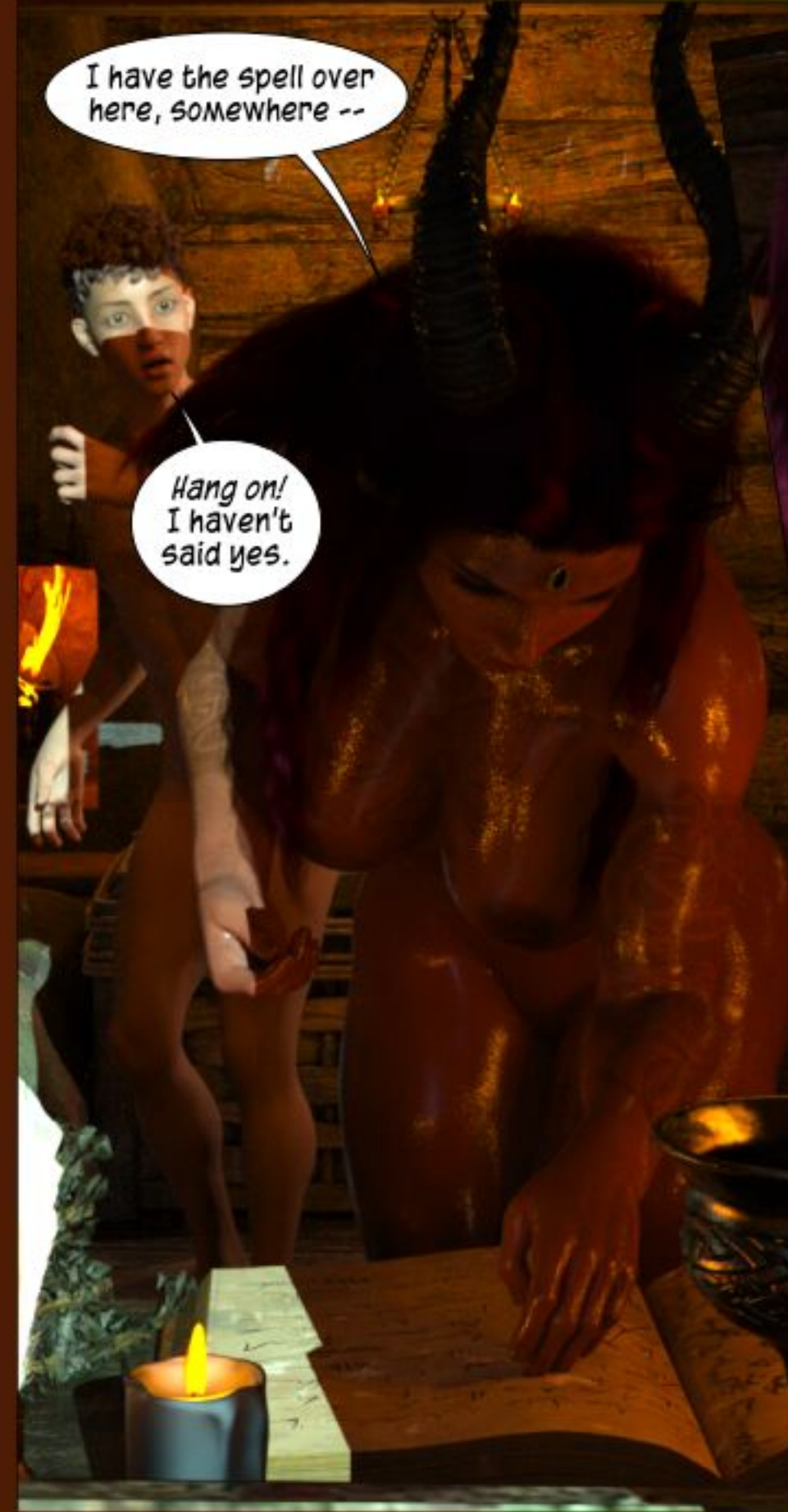
What? I don't want to be an orc!

It wouldn't be permanent. Just a polymorph. It can be reversed easily.

If you can do that, why haven't you done the mission yourselves?

Well ... We've come to hate those orcs so much, I don't think any of us would be willing to pose as them, even temporarily. And I don't peel like I can ask.

But you have no such constraints!



I have the spell over here, somewhere --

Hang on! I haven't said yes.



Wauughh!

You understand that you have very few options? I need to know I can trust you. If you won't do this, then we will have to turn you all into ghibanes.

... All right. Fine.

Excellent! Hold still, now ...



Woooh ... that's some special effect ...

Oh, it made you into one of the small ones! Interesting.

Probably because you weren't very bulky ...



Sure, but why did it make me female?

All the orcs are female. I assumed you knew that.

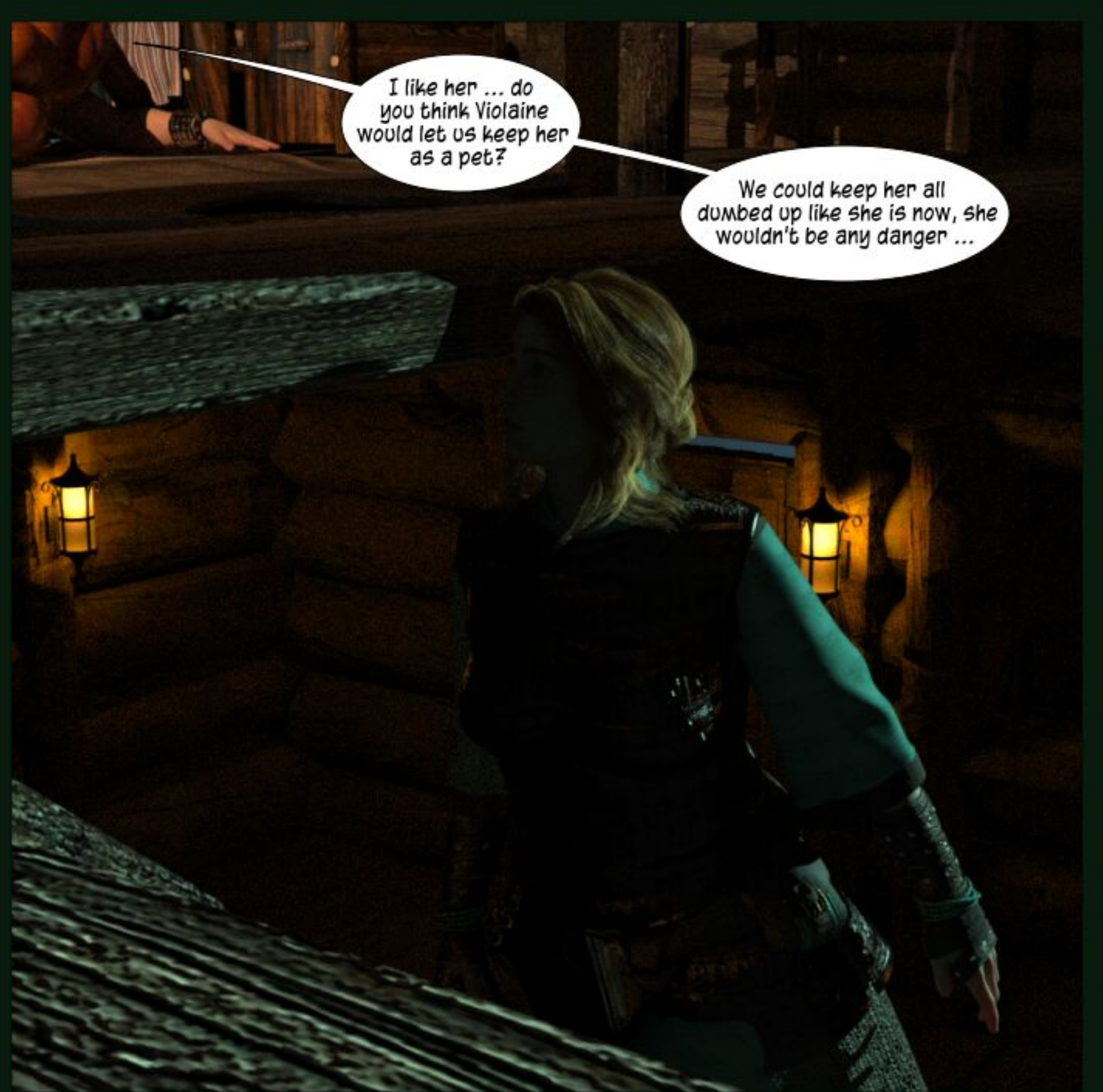
Huh. How's that even work?

I have no idea. Perhaps once you get into the settlement, you can find out.

Hmm.

We can't send you out until morning ... should we use the time to help you become more familiar with your new form?





I like her ... do you think Violaine would let us keep her as a pet?

We could keep her all dumbed up like she is now, she wouldn't be any danger ...



Not going to happen. It's a shame. I think she's fun, too. It'd be nice to keep her to play with. But the risk's too great.

But if they take the mission to the orcs, and succeed--

That won't matter. I've been around Violaine longer than you have.

If they fail, then the orcs deal with them and they won't be a threat to us. If they succeed, and come back, she'll turn them into ghibanes anyway. No matter what she told them.

She simply won't trust them to keep quiet any other way.



What do I do?

I can't get them out of there right now ... maybe in the morning when they go on whatever that "mission" is ...

What is all that noise?



Charge!

YII!

Whee!



Raid!!

Everybody, wake up!

Ghibanes! Get them!!

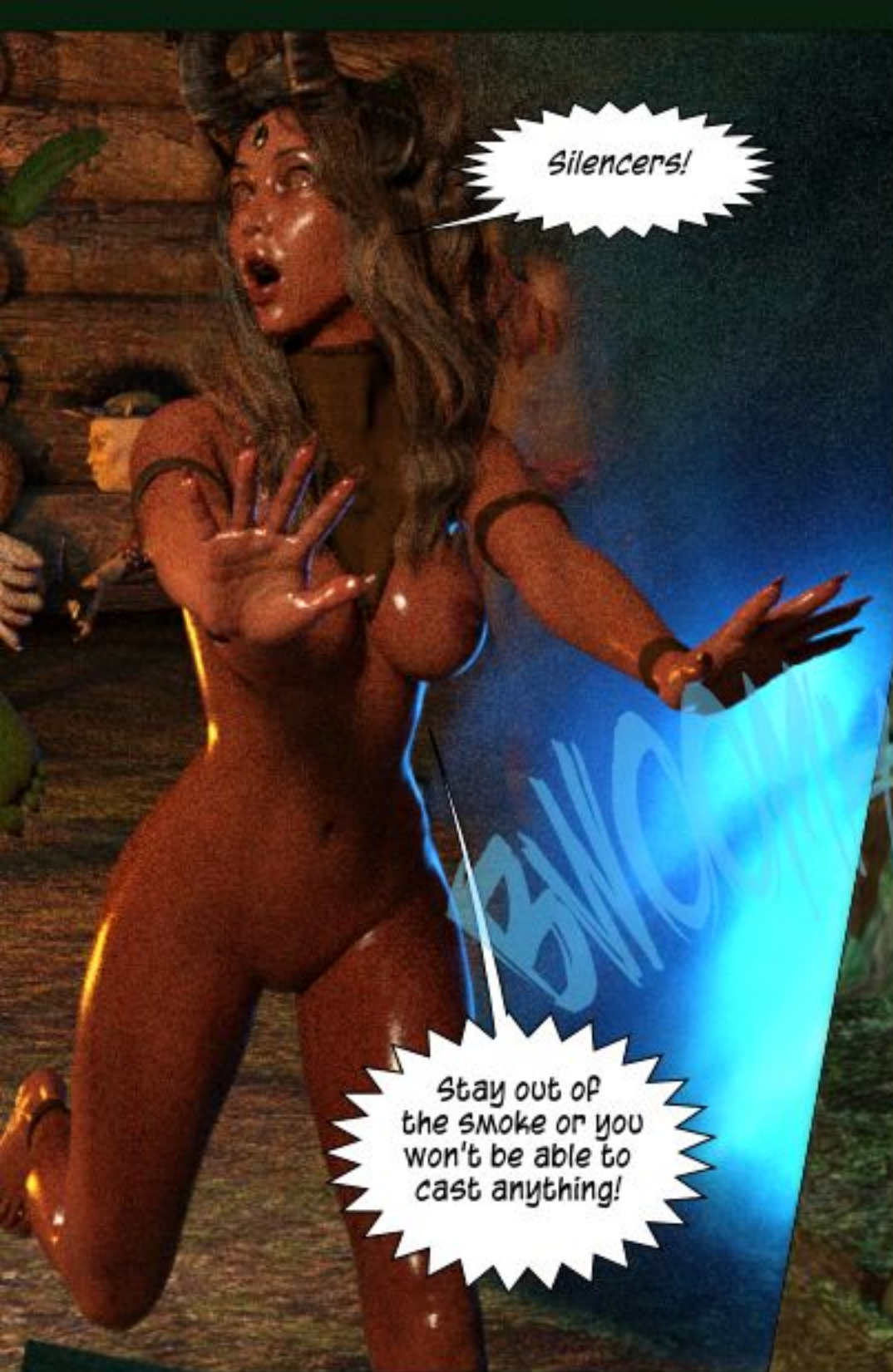


Eat this, bitch!



Use the attack spells I taught--

BLOOM!



Silencers!

Stay out of the smoke or you won't be able to cast anything!



What a mess.

I've got to get clear, or I might not survive to do anything useful--



Nasty little creature.

Trying to sneak your way into something, eh?

Wait! I'm not one of them!

The smoke! Oh, no--

I know just what to do with you.



Much better.

Now go chew up some of your former friends for me.



yrah sPb baretu!

Aahh!!

The net! Quick!!

Have at you!

Gotcha!!



Is that the last of them?

Think so.

All right, everybody, head out!



Hey! Come back here with those!



They belong to us--



Sera? 'Lessia? ... Where y'go? ... Wan' play some more ...



This isn't one of the witches ...

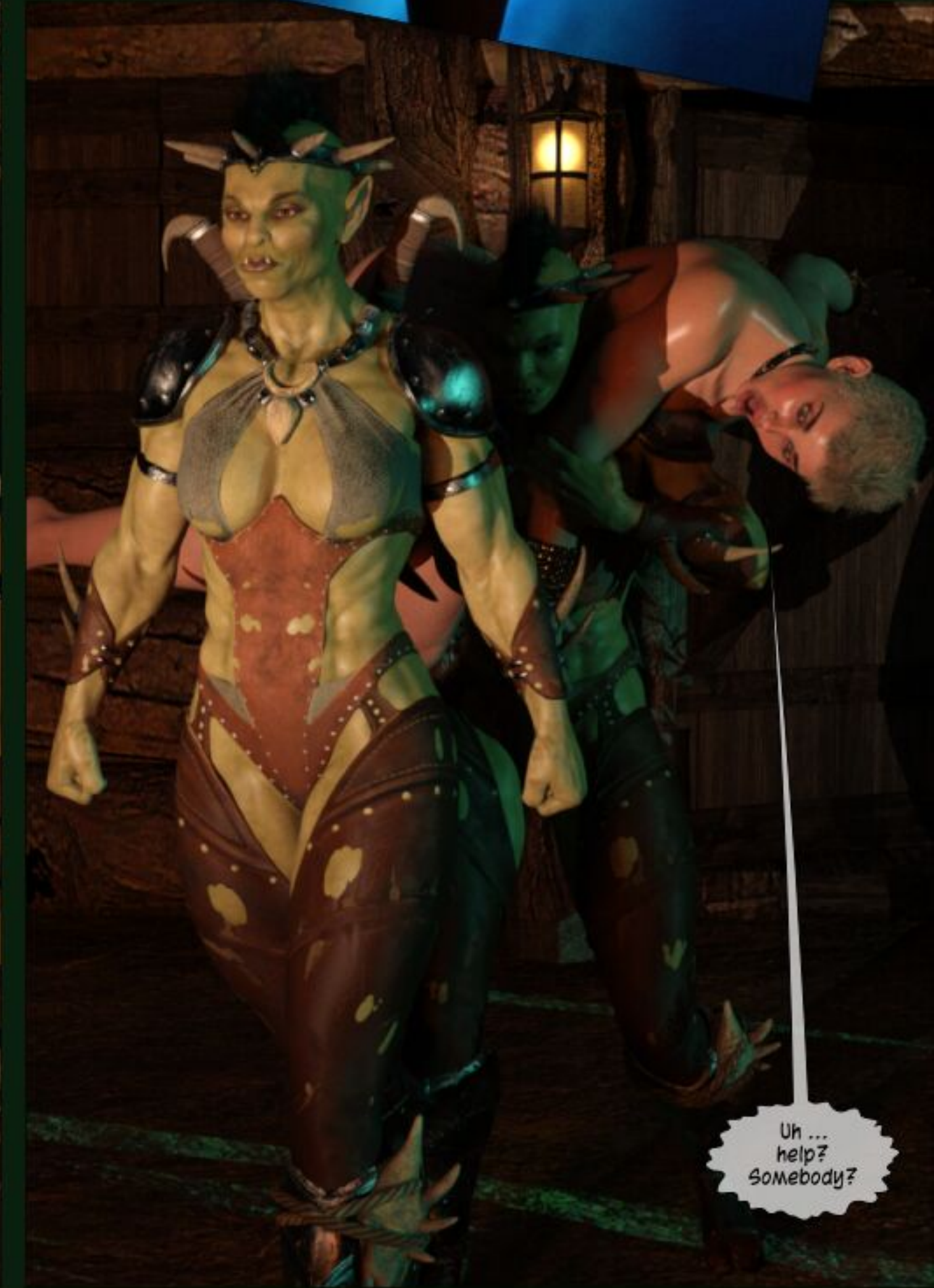
Not yet, anyway. New recruit, maybe ... or a captive ...

Big one, isn't she?

Mh-hm. And has a surprise, too.

Think the chief would like her as a present?

You read my mind.



Uh ... help? Somebody?

DAWN, NOT LONG AFTER THE ORCS LEAVE.



Well, that was humiliating.

I didn't know they had those silencers. Those are going to be a real problem.

What do we do now? The ghibanes were our main protection ... I don't think we can raid them, not with that stockade ...

Why are you all standing around nude? Where are the ghibanes? ... What happened?

I'm sorry I wasn't here to help ...

How did you manage to sleep through all that?

Well, uh ... We kept going a long time last night ...

It's true, they did. I went up to sleep in the loft. I don't have her stamina anymore.

It might have been to our advantage that you weren't.

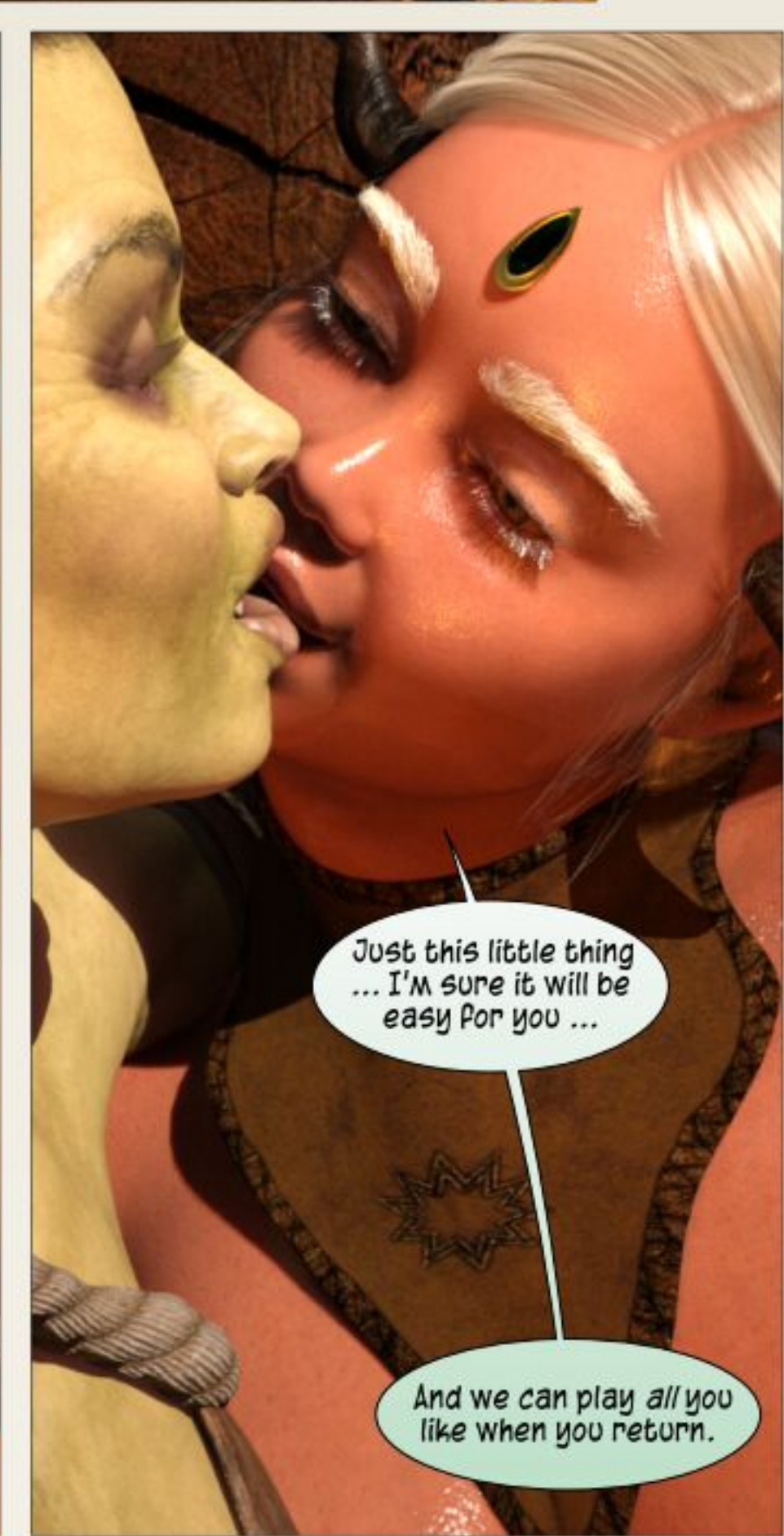
Orc, your friends have been captured. Only you can enter their fort. So only you can rescue them.

Of course, in order to do that, you'll likely need to kill their chieftain ...



But I don't want to go to the orcs ... I want to stay here with Skadi ...

Oh, but you would do this for me, wouldn't you?



Just this little thing ... I'm sure it will be easy for you ...

And we can play all you like when you return.

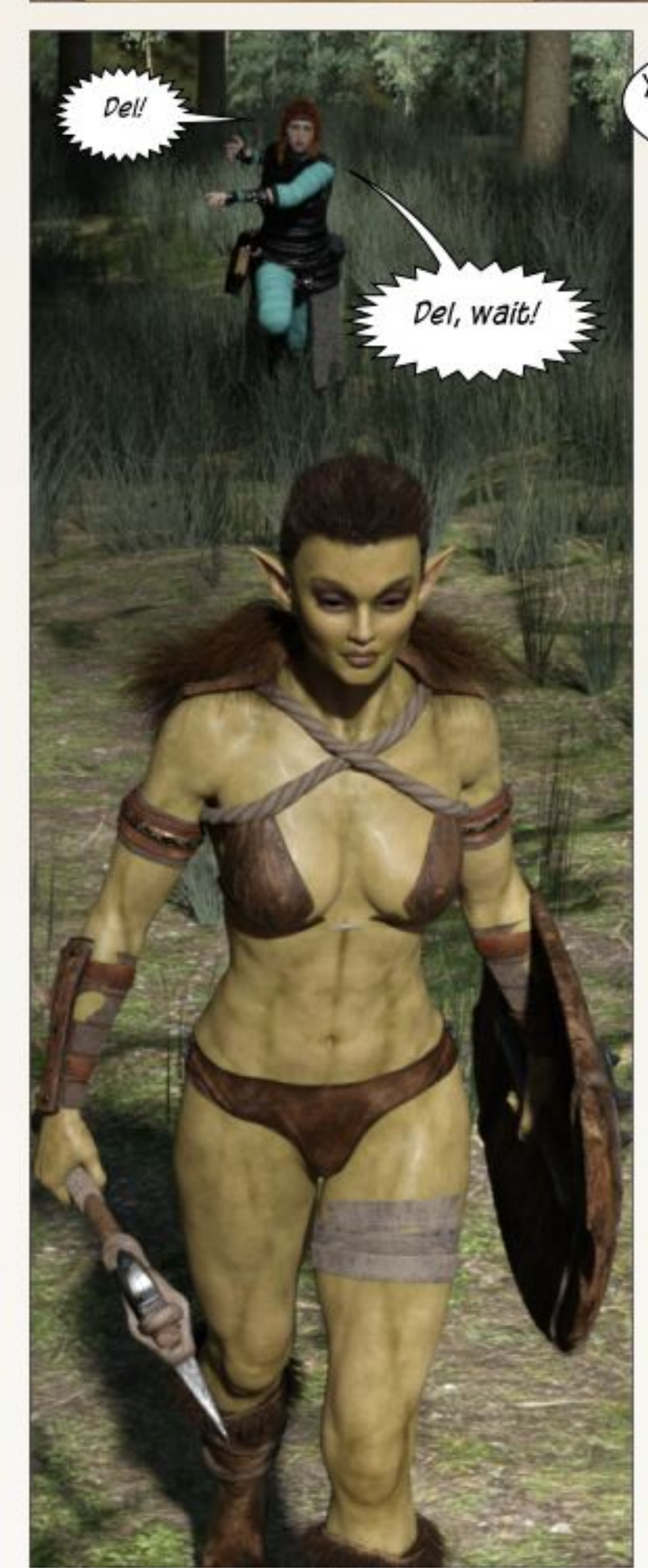


It's a shame though. She was Pun.

So was the big one.

Now, you both know perfectly well we couldn't have risked keeping them around.

Let's have some food and consider our next steps. I don't really expect her to succeed.



Del!

Del, wait!



You're heading to the orcs, aren't you?

You know killing their chief isn't going to fix anything--not to mention there's no way you can do it alone ...

Who says I can't?

Skadi wants me to do it. That's good enough for me.

And she says when I get back we can play as much as I want.

Del, they're using you. If you make it back, they're just going to turn you into a ghibane anyway. I heard them talking about it--



You just don't want me to have any Pun! You never want anybody to have any Pun!

Well, I'm going to do this, and you better not try to get in my way!

ooh!

srтч tgr hfttrth anyoi Peharit!



What the hell was that?

A dispel. Feel any clearer?

Uh ...

Yeah. Sorry about that.

I didn't get all of it, because I got there after you did, but I guess they said they'd let you go if you did this? They're lying, Del.

I think they're lying about a lot of things. I think the only reason the orcs cause trouble with them is because they catch orcs and make them into ghibanes. I'd get pretty pissed off about that too.

Maybe so ... But, Beth, the orcs have Clyde and Stee. So even if we don't kill the chief ... I mean, we have to go rescue them, right?



I don't know what we have to do. At this point I'm just trying to figure out what has to happen for this damned thing to end.

Not enjoying it, huh?

Hauling around doing nothing but saving Clyde's butt? What's not to enjoy?

Maybe if I'd screwed around with those orange witches too, that might have been Pun--

Hey now! We got enthralled. It wasn't voluntary.

... didn't suck tho.

Yeah, I know. Sorry. Just ... hasn't been a lot in it for me so far, y'know? I'd like something.



You want me to take off all my clothes?

No, stranger! What have you there?

oof. That's ... a lot bigger than I thought it would be.

And tons of open space. They'll see us coming as soon as we're out from behind this tree.

I don't see another way for me to get in ... and I can't get in the gate ...

Told you you wouldn't like it.

Look, I really do think we need that to make it convincing. I can use the ties from my boots ...

Actually, I had an idea about that. But you're not going to like it.

And anyway it's kind of par in this place, isn't it? I mean, look what I'm wearing.



I found her outside that village of witches.

I believe she's one of them. I thought you might find her useful. Useful enough to get me a meal and a bed.

Not too many places an orc can call shelter in these lands.



We'd have offered you shelter anyway, most like, but a gift well-given is never amiss.

I'll take her where she belongs. Ber will show you in.



Fore we can do aught for you, the chief must give her say.

Not to worry, though, you look all right.

Better than that, if I'm honest.

Come along. I know where she must be right now.



Is it a party?

Ah, we just a bit ago got all our own back from those damned witches, so we're celebrating.

The chief's the big one back in the corner.



Chief, we have a stranger here who seeks our hospitality--

No time for it now, Ber.

The raid brought me something back, and I'm keen to inspect it.

You set her up with the necessaries for now. She looks all right.



Well, that's a yes until she says otherwise.

Now, let's get us a meal and a pint or two, and I'll show you a spot to kip ...

... then, if you like, we could see about making some entertainment for ourselves.

Ah ... Sounds like a fine plan.



Shouldn't need to keep the bar on. That was just to keep her out of mischief 'til you got here.

I'll see you're not disturbed.



My!

Now, I deem that a very thoughtful gift indeed.



All right, ready?

Get the gate up a little more quickly this time, if you can. I don't want another near miss.

CRASH

Almost lost an eye back there on the second one.

aaaaand ... now!



ZWON!



There we are! Right as rain.

Oh, thanks very much ...

Glad to have you back. You'll find something to put on in the storehouse over there.



Not sure I know her. Do you?

Not a bit. But they might well have caught up a few who aren't ours. No matter. She's welcome if she behaves.

Sure not going to tell them that this isn't my actual form ...

Lot safer to be an orc until I can find a way out of this place.

And then hope that witch is willing to change me back. I think her bargains aren't worth much.

Come on, shake a leg. I want to be done before sundown and we've got five to do yet.



You left her in here tied up? Did you think she would break the cage?

Well, no, chief ... but she's supposed to be one of them witches ... don't know what she can do ... just seemed safer is all.

She's not one, though. Not yet, at least. They change their skin when they join up. Haven't you seen one?

I'll hold the gate. You go in and take that gag off her.



All right now, you.

Tell me what you know about those witches and we'll see if it's good enough to earn you something better than a cage.

But I don't know anything!

I don't, honestly! I'd only just come to join them the other day! They hadn't even decided whether to let me in yet!



Look, if you let me go, I promise, I'll go away and never come anywhere near you or the witches again! It's not worth it!

I'll give it thought.

Loose her bonds, Chel. And make sure you bring her water and food.



She's no threat.

You believe her, then?

Knew she wasn't one of them just from looking at her. Like I said.

Now, as to what to do with her ... can't risk letting her go ... she's far too scrawny to make a good mount ...

Suppose we could try to put some meat on her bones ...



Does make me think, though, that we may not be done with those witches even yet. I have a feeling.

I'll consider that tomorrow. I have more pleasant things to do tonight.





Wasn't sure if you were coming back ...

Wasn't sure if I'd find you trying to make trouble.

Bit surprised you didn't.

Trouble? I know a good thing when I see it.

How long have we got?



Well, how many rounds do you think we can get out of this?

I've got all night.

Uooooh



I've got to find a place in here to hide. The gates are already closed for the night, I can't get out until tomorrow ...

Ever seen her before?

No. Kit said the witches got some strays. Bet she's one of those.

She's cute, don't you think?

Definitely.

And I can't just mingle; they'll know I'm a stranger, and they'll ask questions I don't want to answer ...



Hey! You're new here, aren't you?

Uh ... yes ... guess I'm just passing through ...

Well, you don't have to just pass through!

We're sure you're very welcome here.

We'd like to be your welcoming committee!

We want you to feel comfortable around us.

Very comfortable.



Uh, thanks ... I appreciate the hospitality ...

... but I think I had better not.



Del was supposed to come let me out by now. I hope she hasn't run into trouble.

I don't think I should wait until they decide what horrible thing they're going to do to me ... but how to get out?

I don't have any spells that will help me with this ...

Oh, except ...



Yep. That'll work.

Water and food. Like the chief asked.



Will you thank the chief for me?

And, actually, I have a message for her. If I tell you, do you think you'll remember it?



brghn diste ysdrda orpit arash etrbor!



Why don't you come in here so we can be a little closer?

... closer ...



MMM ... that's right ...

Now I think you should take all your clothes off.



... What now ...?

Be good and wait quietly and patiently!

I'm sure someone will come along to let you out very soon.



Hm. So much for wearing her clothes. They'd fall right off me.

There are a lot of boxes and chests in here ... maybe I'll get lucky ...



Orc Hedge Witch Robes

Top +1 AWC

Bottom +1 AWC

Affects behavior SET BONUS +2 AWC

"Affects behavior"? That could mean anything. It's not cursed, so it's something considered a normal effect ...

I think I'm going to have to risk it. I'm sure not likely to find anything else with those bonuses around here.



Hmm. Well, my behavior doesn't feel affected so far ...

Other than peeling half-naked, of course ...



ZZXKXZ



unrrgh.

I mean, I figured playing along was the best way to go, and it's not like it wasn't fun ...

... but, goddamn, I can barely walk.

Gotta find some clothes and then a place where I can crash for the rest of the night without anybody noticing.



What the hell, Del?

Ah, Ber ... you go on ahead, 'k? I'll catch up in a second.

I'm sitting there in a cage wondering if something horrible's happened to you because you didn't show up, and here you are just pooling around with some orc?

Beth, ssh! ... not so loud ...

We have a job to do here, remember?



Yeah, about that ...

I like these people. They're fun.

They're sure a lot better than those orange women. They don't try to mess with my head or turn me into a monster.

I'm not gonna go any further with this. I'm good where I am. You can do what you want, but I'm letting my part of the game play out right here.

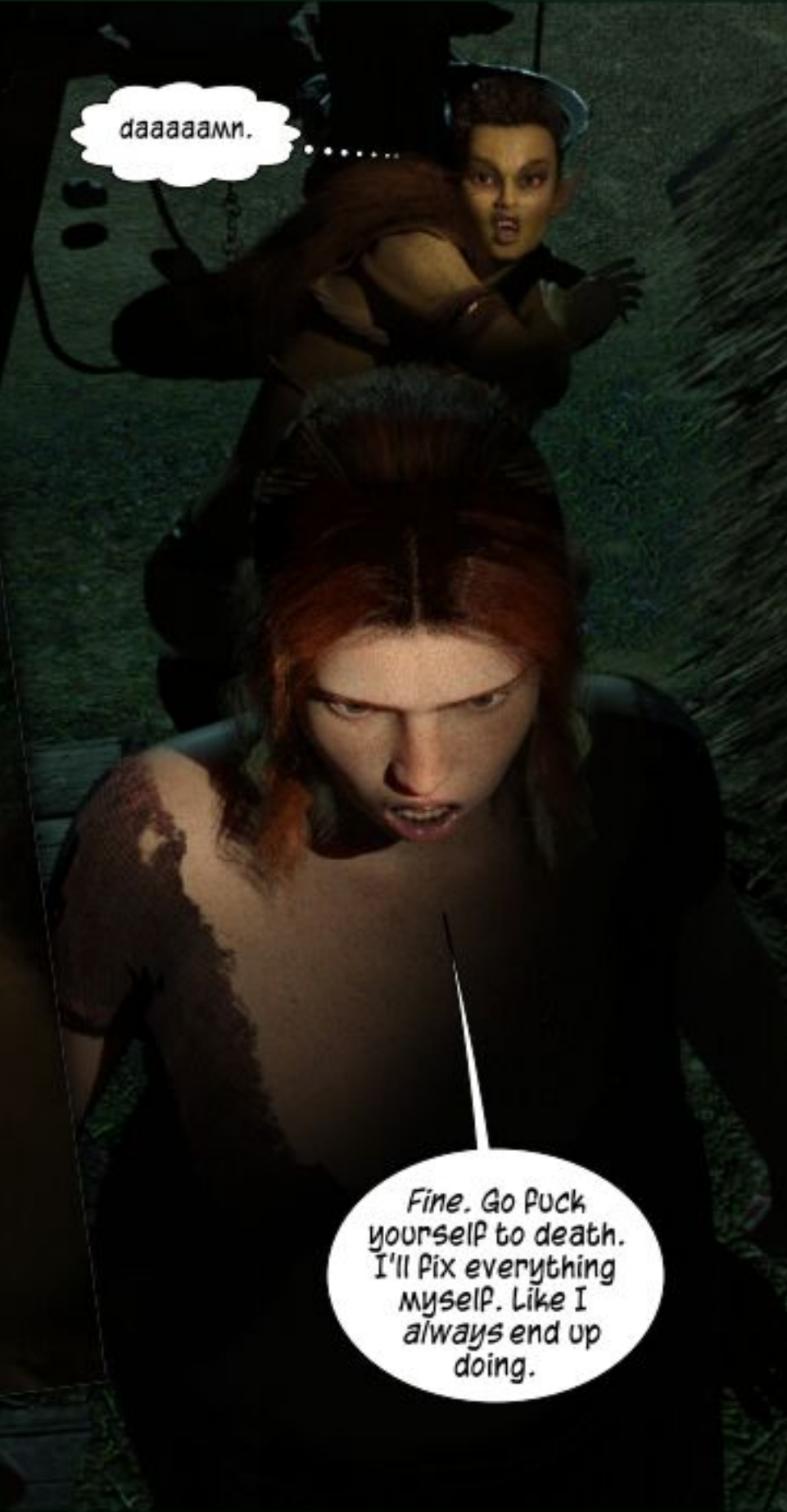


You selfish little bitch!

You've got what you want, so you're just going to let Clyde and Stee rot wherever they are? You'll just drink and Puck and not worry about any of that?

What if we have to figure out this situation to bring this damned thing to an end? Did you think about that? Do you care?

...!



daaaaaamn.

Fine. Go Puck yourself to death. I'll fix everything myself. Like I always end up doing.



Can't see shit ... What's this building? Too dark to tell ... Maybe that means it's a good place to hide ...

Is that some kind of storeroom in there?



Huh. Baskets of food mostly ... what about those chests in the back? Those might be worth a look ...



Chest +1 CON +2 DEF

Head +1 CON +1 DEF

Legs +1 CON +2 DEF

SET BONUS IMMUNE TO Knockdown

Damn, this game's got some weird-ass armor.

But the stats are good, and it's better than walking around nude ... well, a little better ...



Take that back. This might be worse than going around nude.

Not going to get the set bonus because no way am I putting that hood on my head ... and I don't know how you walk in those boots ...



Hey! I didn't do that! What's going on?

Set-locked? Shit! That's a dirty trick!



Nooo!

Not the hood ... Not the--

WhmmP!



Armor of Stable Action

Chest +1 CON +2 DEF

Head +1 CON +2 DEF

Legs +1 CON +2 DEF

Set-locked



Huh?

Now, how did you get in there, eh?



Hunting for carrots, were you?

Come along now. Let's get you back into your stall.



There we are.

Hmm, and someone put you in for the night without taking out your bit ... probably didn't latch the gate either ... sloppy.



hwhnn

No, no carrots. It's too late at night for that. You'll colic.

Hold still, now ... you'll be more comfortable without this.

You'll get ped in the morning. You've got plenty of water.

Go to sleep.



...hwhnn?





Spread out!
Stay out of the smoke!



Shoot them all down!!

YAAA!

Come on,
Clyde, let's
make a break
for it ...

aaaah!

yrah sft
baretu!



All right, you
nasty little thing,
time to change
teams ...



thrs urtb
swegh!

AAAAGH!!

Mor!!



They got Mor!

I saw.

You said they
didn't have any
casters!

I didn't think they did.
Don't lose Pocus!
We still have this ...



AUGHH!

Hey!
Don't you hurt her!!
I'll cut your eyes out!

Well, well.





Hang on, is that ...

It is! Run, Clyde!

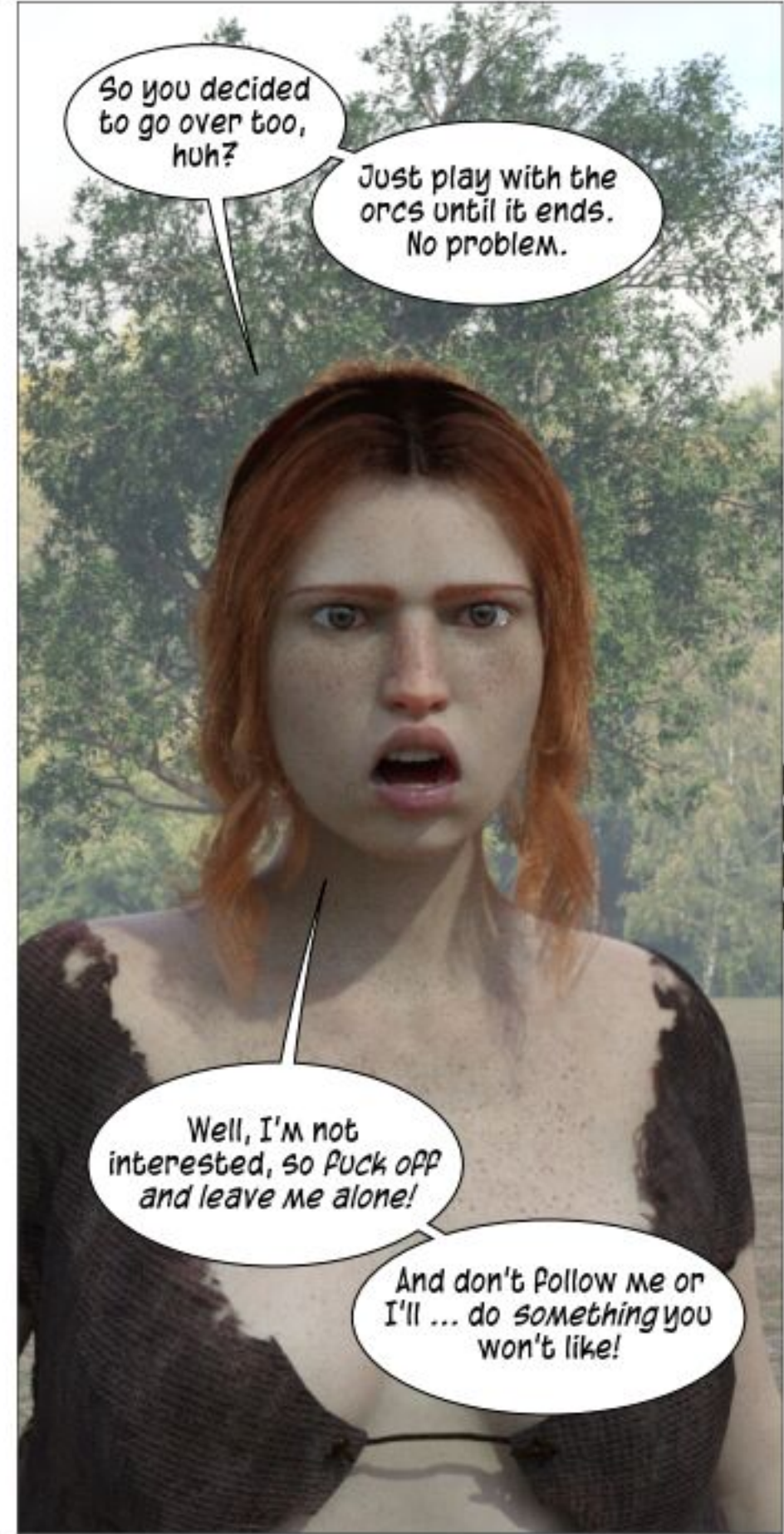
Beth! Wait!!



Get away from me!!

Beth, it's us! It's Clyde and Steel!

Stee ...?



So you decided to go over too, huh?

Just play with the orcs until it ends. No problem.

Well, I'm not interested, so Puck off and leave me alone!

And don't follow me or I'll ... do something you won't like!



Beth, I don't know what you-- That's not what--

Shit.

Should we follow her anyway, you think? Or--



YAAAAA!!

Wait ... Del? Is that you?



STEE?

WHRR HR RRR ...?



RRRGR

RRRGR

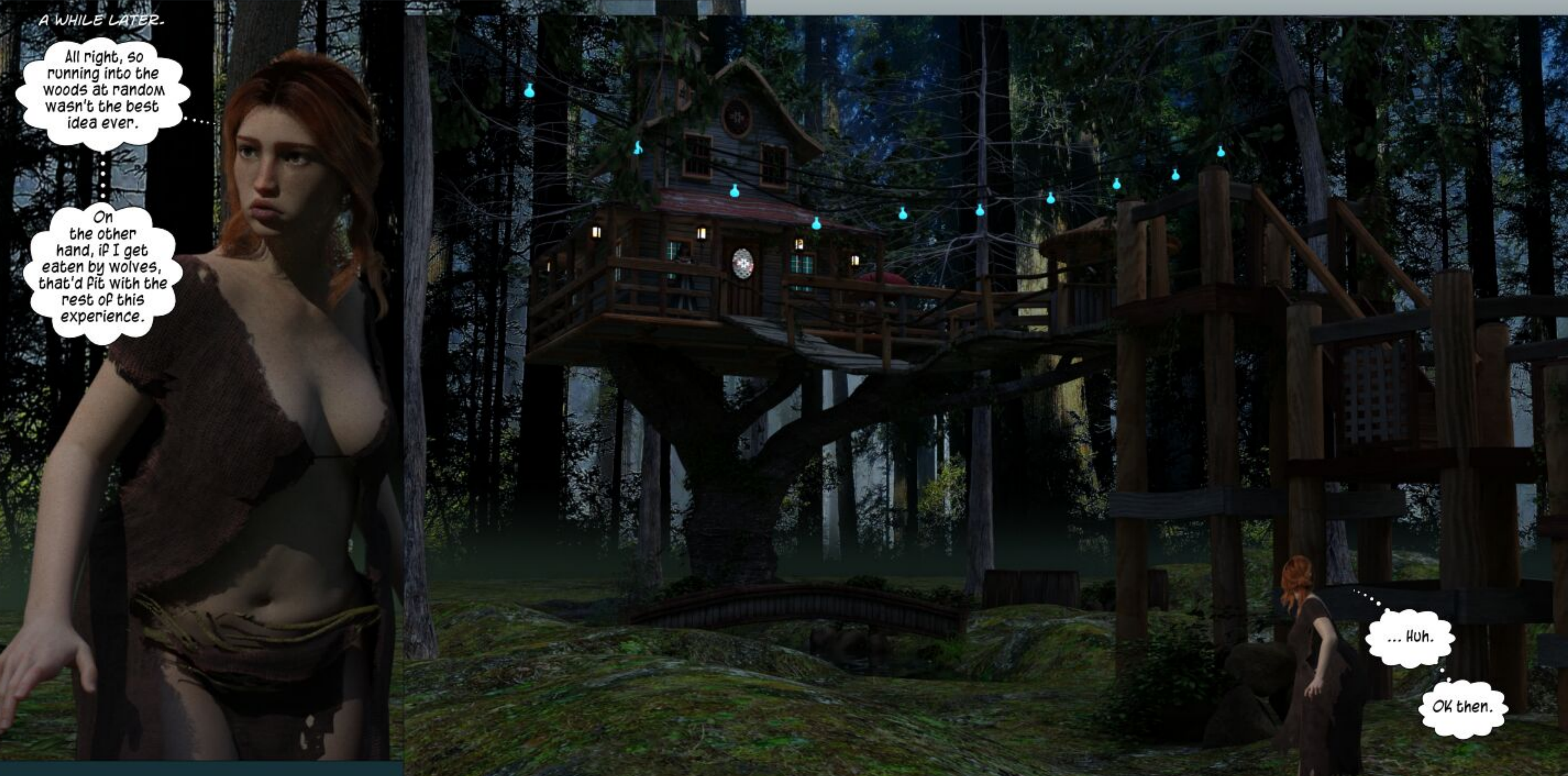
Del, wait! What happened?

OK, I think we definitely need to follow--



hrrrrrrrr!

yrah sft baretu!



A WHILE LATER.

All right, so running into the woods at random wasn't the best idea ever.

On the other hand, if I get eaten by wolves, that'd fit with the rest of this experience.

... Huh.

OK then.



There you are! I was worried you'd gotten lost!

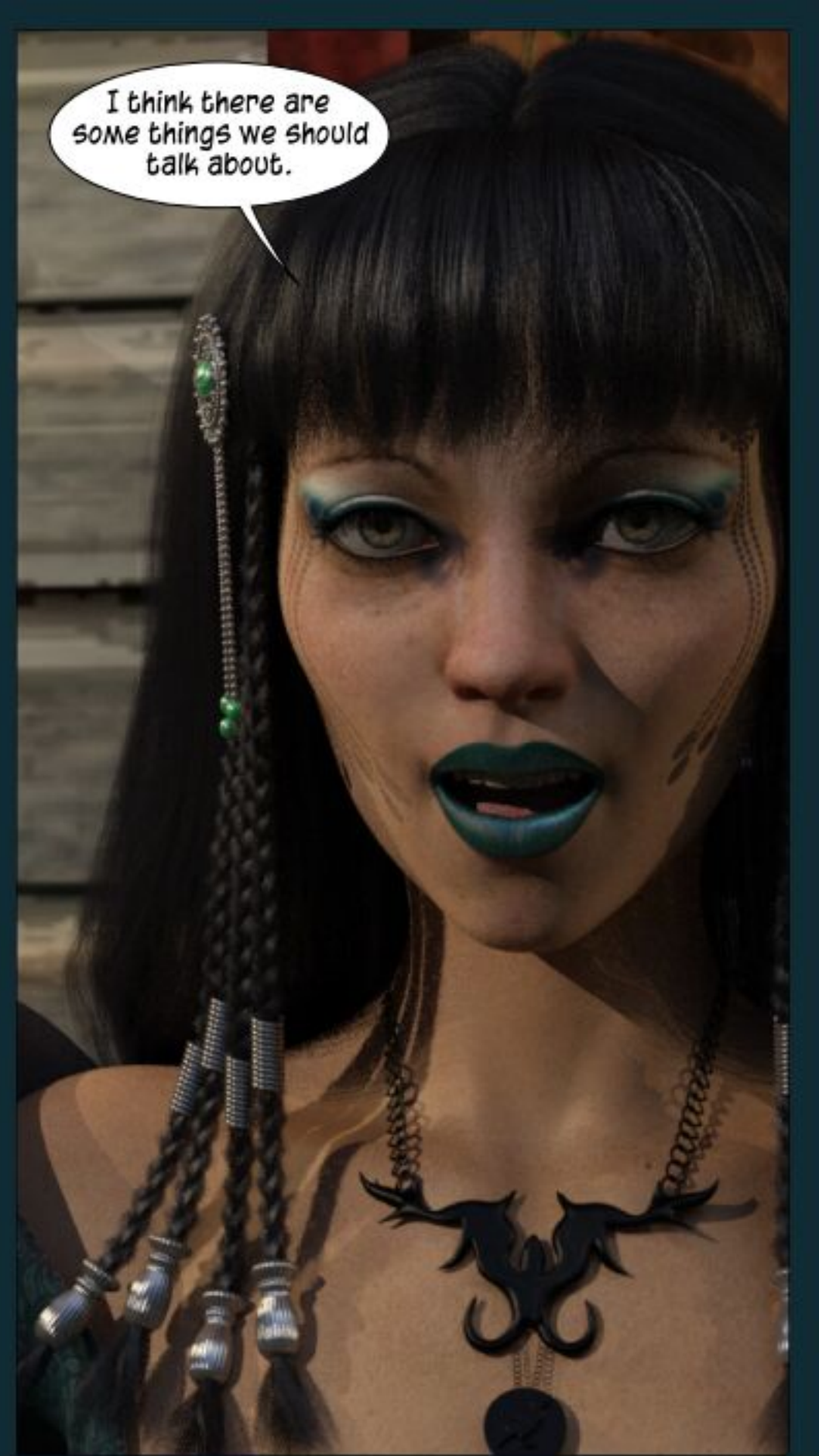
Well, don't stand around down there ... come on up!



You sound like you were expecting me.

I was! If anyone wanders into this part of the forest, I know about it ... and, frankly, either they end up coming to my house or they really are lost. No one comes around here for any other reason.

But also I have been ... keeping track of you, a bit.



I think there are some things we should talk about.



Have a seat.

I'll get us something to drink.



So you and your friends set out to have an adventure ... but they're all enjoying it and you're not?

I mean, I don't know if they're enjoying it ... a lot of weird things are happening ... I don't think Clyde wanted to be a horse ...

But, yeah, they seem to be, y'know, going with it, and I'm not ... I don't know why ... usually it isn't a problem ...

And it's getting to me, I think ... I yelled at Stee and Del, I don't ever yell at people ...



Well, some of that comes from wearing orc clothes. Orcs yell a lot ... Though that may not be all bad. Maybe they needed to be yelled at a little.

Yeah, maybe ... I hate that they take me for granted ... on the other hand, why wouldn't they? Stee's right ... I never actually stick up for what I want ...

There's an interesting question. What do you want?

... I wish I knew.



HMM! You know, I might be able to help with that a little.

You can tell me what I want?

No.



UHHHHH!!!



It's hard to come up with what you want if you've never encountered it ...

You know it when you see it, but what if you never see it?



But I do think one of the things you want is to be wanted.

I can at least show you what that feels like.



MUCH LATER.



Wolves?

There aren't any wolves in this forest.



Werewolves.

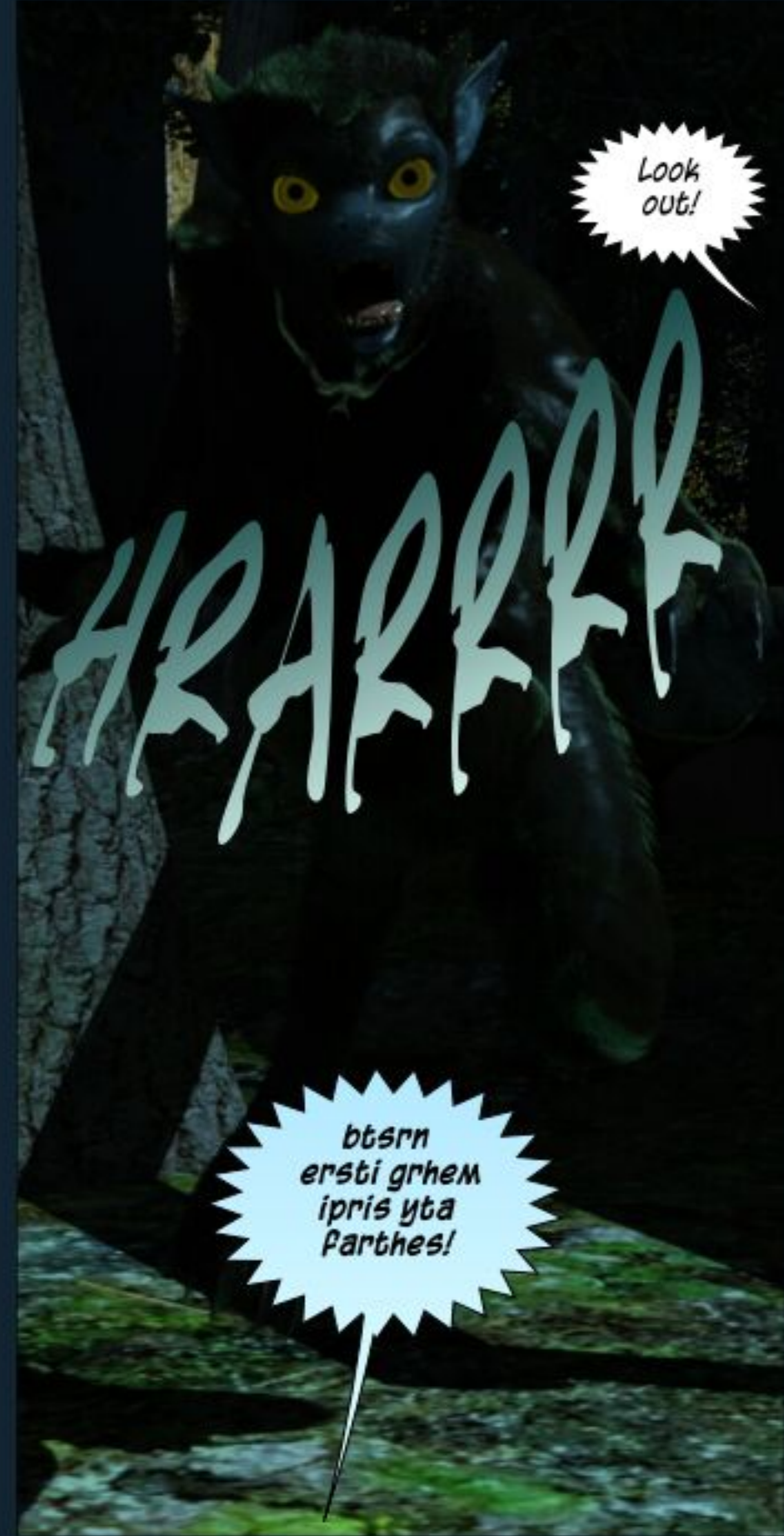
No. That's a person who's been transformed.

OWOOOOOO



Can you help them?

I don't know.



Look out!

HRARRRR

btsrn
ersti grhem
ipris yta
Parthes!



What was that?

Calm Animal.

But it's not an animal, is it?

She's becoming one. The bestial nature is overtaking her.

That's why she attacked even though she came here to seek your help.

My help?

Oh, yes. I'd imagine she followed your scent.



BRRR ...

HEER ...
MRR HER ...

Dei?



Is it a curse? Can we remove it?

Yes. And no. The collar she's wearing is the source. It's a Collar of Dogged Determination. A very powerful artifact.

It's turning her into a dire wolf. A fearsome force. Once the change is complete it will be impossible to reverse.

But the curse is too strong for me to undo.

Which I guess means it's definitely too strong for me.

We can't do anything?

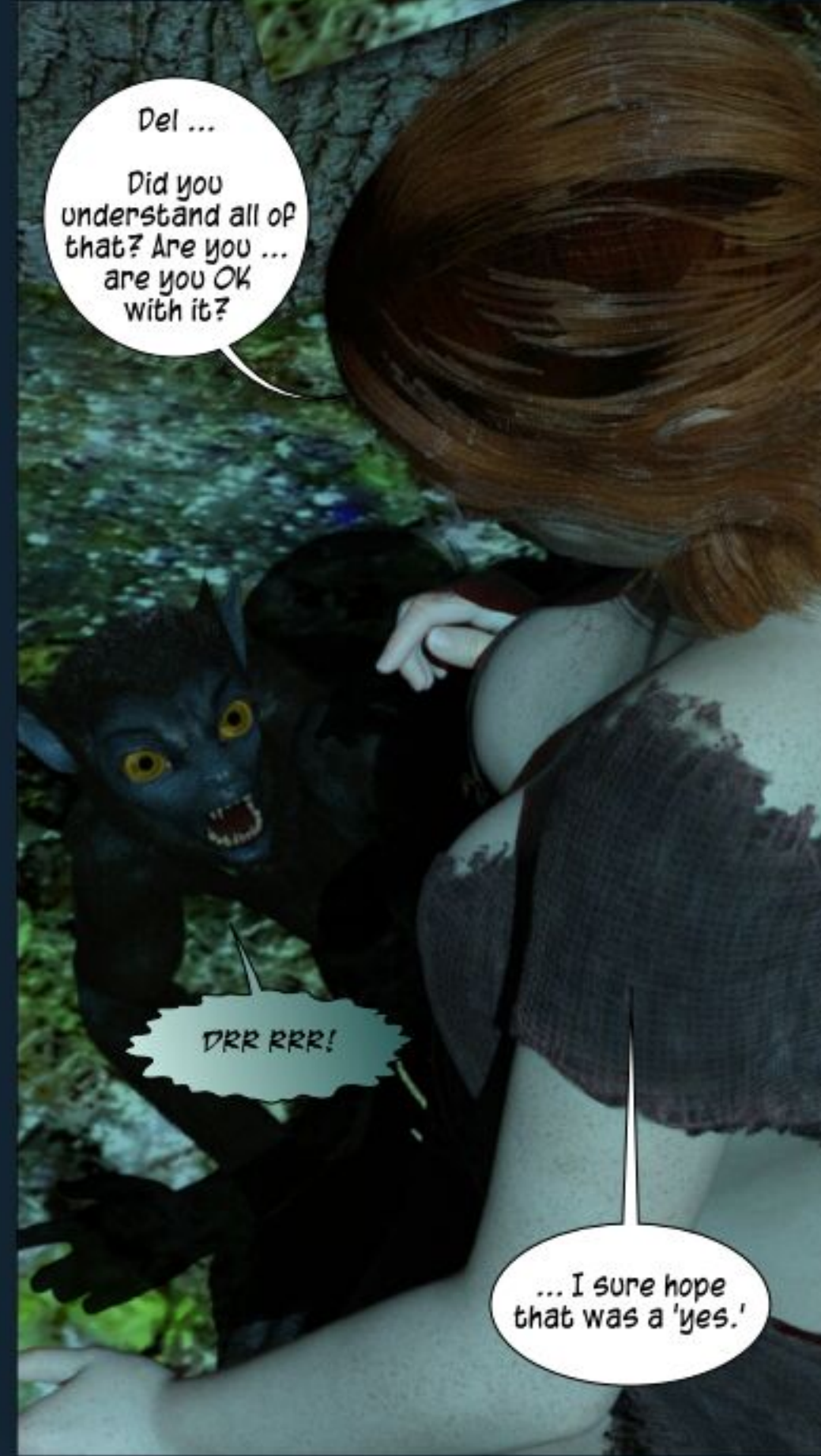


I can ... ameliorate it.

See the curse through to its end, but altered. She'll become a wolf, but will be able to keep control of her actions.

But there's a cost. To do that, she'll need to be linked to someone whose mental influence will guide her.

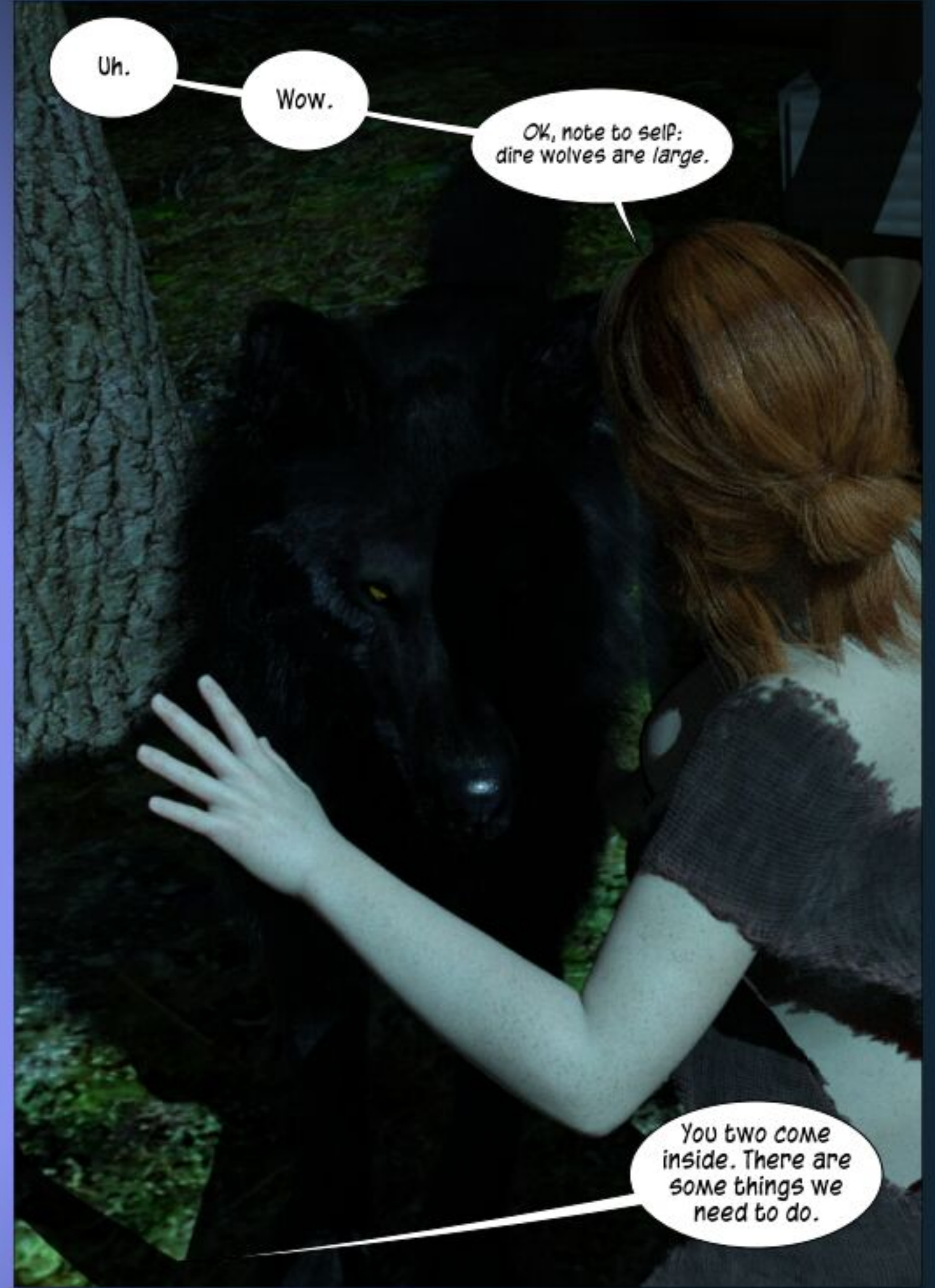
In short ... well ... she'll have to become your pet. She will think of you as her owner.



Dei ... Did you understand all of that? Are you ... are you OK with it?

DRR RRR!

... I sure hope that was a 'yes.'



Uh.

Wow.

OK, note to self: dire wolves are large.

You two come inside. There are some things we need to do.

NOT TOO MUCH LATER.



You're a quick study. I thought you might be. Those spells I just taught you should be what you need.

You know, it's just as bad to go in with no offensive spells as with no support spells ...

I also want to give you some different clothes. Orc armor is just not suited for humans.

I've had this lying around for a while ...



Looks good on you. What do you think?

I think I like it ... I didn't get a chance to see its stats, though ...

Oh, it's got the ones you'd expect. Nothing spectacular, but you don't need it. The ability to bring this to a conclusion isn't going to come from your clothes or even your spells. It's going to come from you.

Well, about that ... I don't really know what to do next. I mean, I can't fight them all. And I don't like either side over the other anyway.

Agreed on both. I was thinking diplomacy.



They're not likely to listen to me ...

Probably not. But there are other approaches.

Did you know that the succubus leader and the chief of the orc tribe have never actually met one another? The chief never goes out on raids herself, and Violaine has never gotten far enough into the Port to see her.

Isn't that interesting?



How'd it go?

Very well, I think. She didn't need much. Just a little nudge.

You'd better get back into costume. We have two groups about to finish up.



I'm just worried! We don't have any ghibanes, and there's a good chance they'll come and try to take these captives back ...

I know that! But if we don't get Mor back, we can't make any ghibanes. She's the only one who can do it.

Does she look like the big woman from the other night to you?

I don't know. I went to bed with the orc, remember?

We have to figure out how to get her back. That's the most important thing now.



You'd better figure it out fast, before they come tear you to little pieces!

I'm going to enjoy watching you witches suffer!



I still say this one knows something. Just let me ask her a few questions ...

No! The little ones are the casters. She stays gagged and her hands stay barred.

Maybe we can do an exchange of prisoners ... I wonder if that would work ...



I think you have the right idea there ...

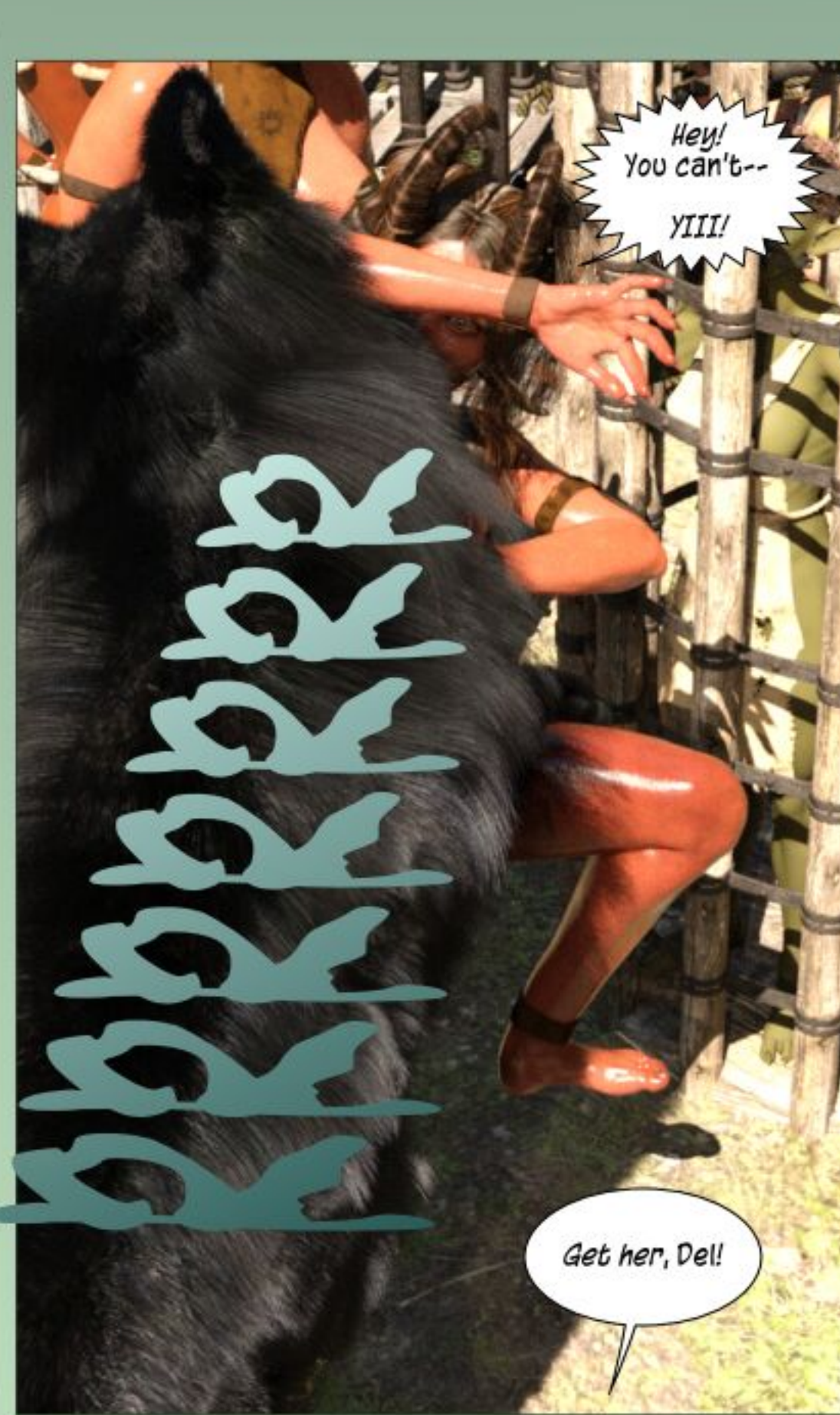
... just not the right prisoner.

Who the hell are you?



AAAH!

A neutral.



Hey! You can't-- YIII!

Get her, Dell!



Good girl, Del. Keep an eye on them.

Hi, Stee. Somehow, I knew you and Clyde would be ones they caught.

Beth ... I wasn't joining the orcs. The witch over there changed me so I could infiltrate, and the other orcs thought I was one when they raided ...

Let's get you out of that. I need the gag for the lead bitch over there.

I know. I realized later you had to have gotten caught up in it. I'm sorry, Stee. I was a little grouchy yesterday.

So ... Del likes you. That's a good sign.

We're going to go solve a problem. We could use your help, if I can trust you to absolutely behave yourself and do what I say.

Or I can leave you in there, and you can see what the witches do when they wake up pissy with their leader gone.

... I'm in.



OK, Clyde ... I think I can undo this curse and get you your brain back ...

brtag hyr idse optr noso!

Better?

I mean, you do pretty well as a horse, but it'd be nice to be able to communicate ...

Much. Thanks.

I don't know if we should try to rig something like a sling or a stretcher to take her, or just carry her ...

How far are we going? My village?

Yes.

Oh, we can just carry her. Save the time.



ugh ...

Violaine's gone! They took her and the prisoners!

Get up, you two! We have to go after them!

No, we don't.

Skadi, come on ...

If it wasn't for Violaine, we could be in bed right now. Having Fun.

And how long would that last?

We need her, Skadi. And they're taking her to the orcs. If they get her past that wall, we can't get in with just the three of us. We have to catch them before then.

C'mon, run!!



Damn, she's squirmy, isn't she?

mgrrhemmm!!

Clyde ... I'm sorry about, y'know, having to ... ride you.

Oh, it's okay! I liked being your horse.

... You did?

Sure! It's nice to Peel like you're being usePol. You know, doing something real.

And it was Pun, once I got used to the shoes.

Guess it's understandable. No sympathy from me, though. Just keep a good grip on her. We're almost there.

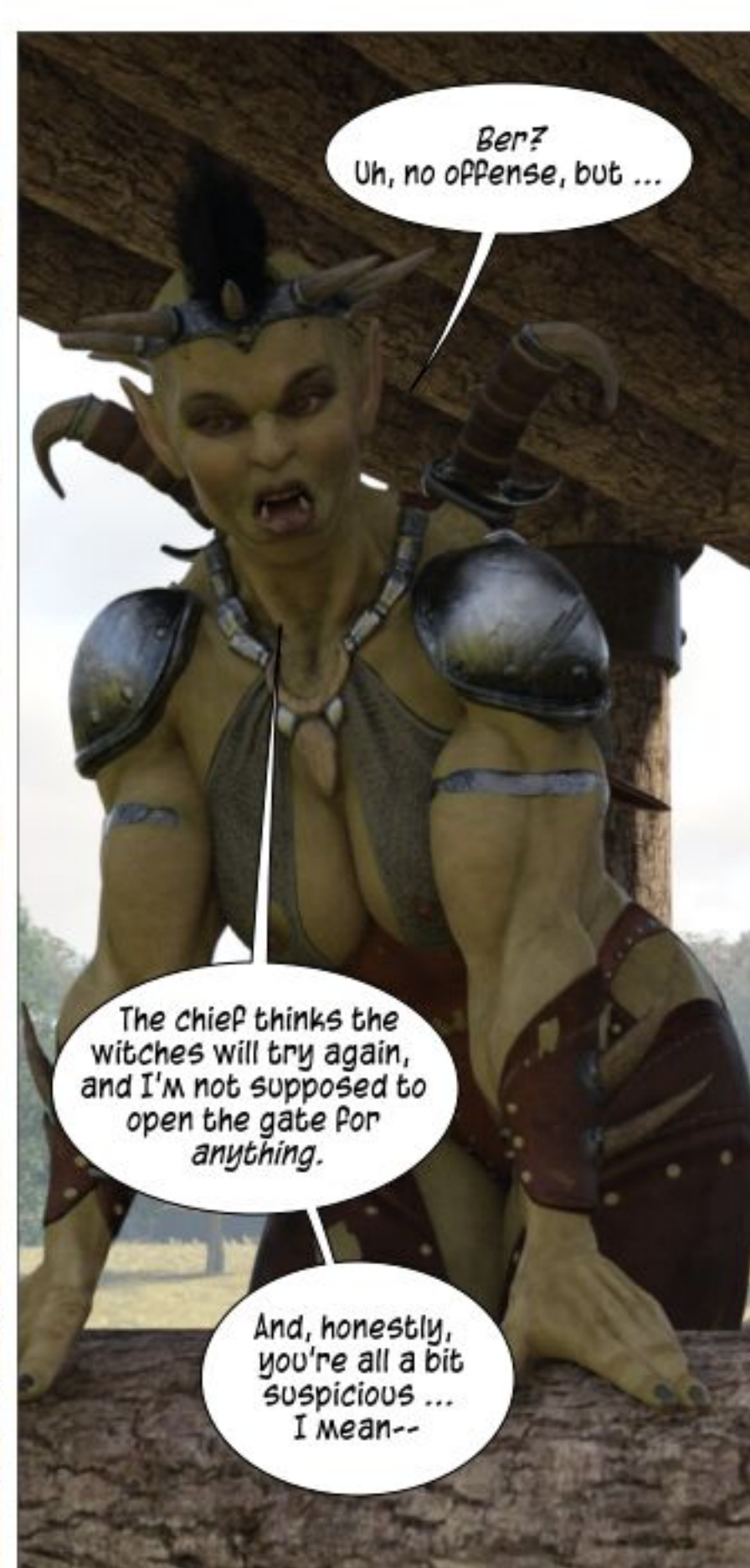


What the--

Ah ... who goes there? State your business.

We want to see your chief. We have someone here she needs to talk to.

Hoy, Prad! It's OK.



Ber? Uh, no offense, but ...

The chief thinks the witches will try again, and I'm not supposed to open the gate for anything.

And, honestly, you're all a bit suspicious ... I mean--



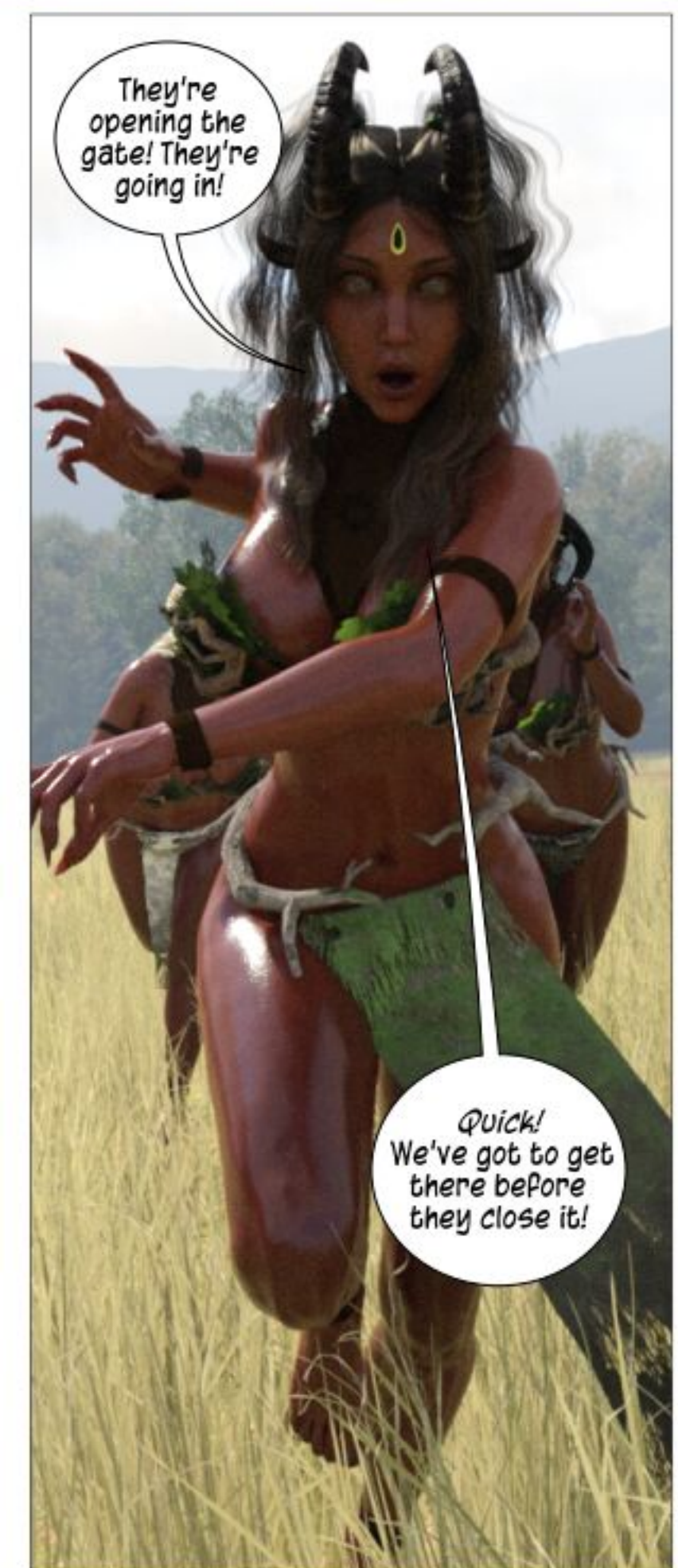
Let me put it a different way.

If you don't let us in, I'm going to blast that gate off its hinges. And then I'm going to zap every orc that comes between me and your chief.

So you can do this with or without a lot of extra damage.

Damn, Beth ...

I've had it, Stee.



They're opening the gate! They're going in!

Quick! We've got to get there before they close it!



I knew it!

It's an attack!

Close the gate! Man the walls! Sound the alarm!



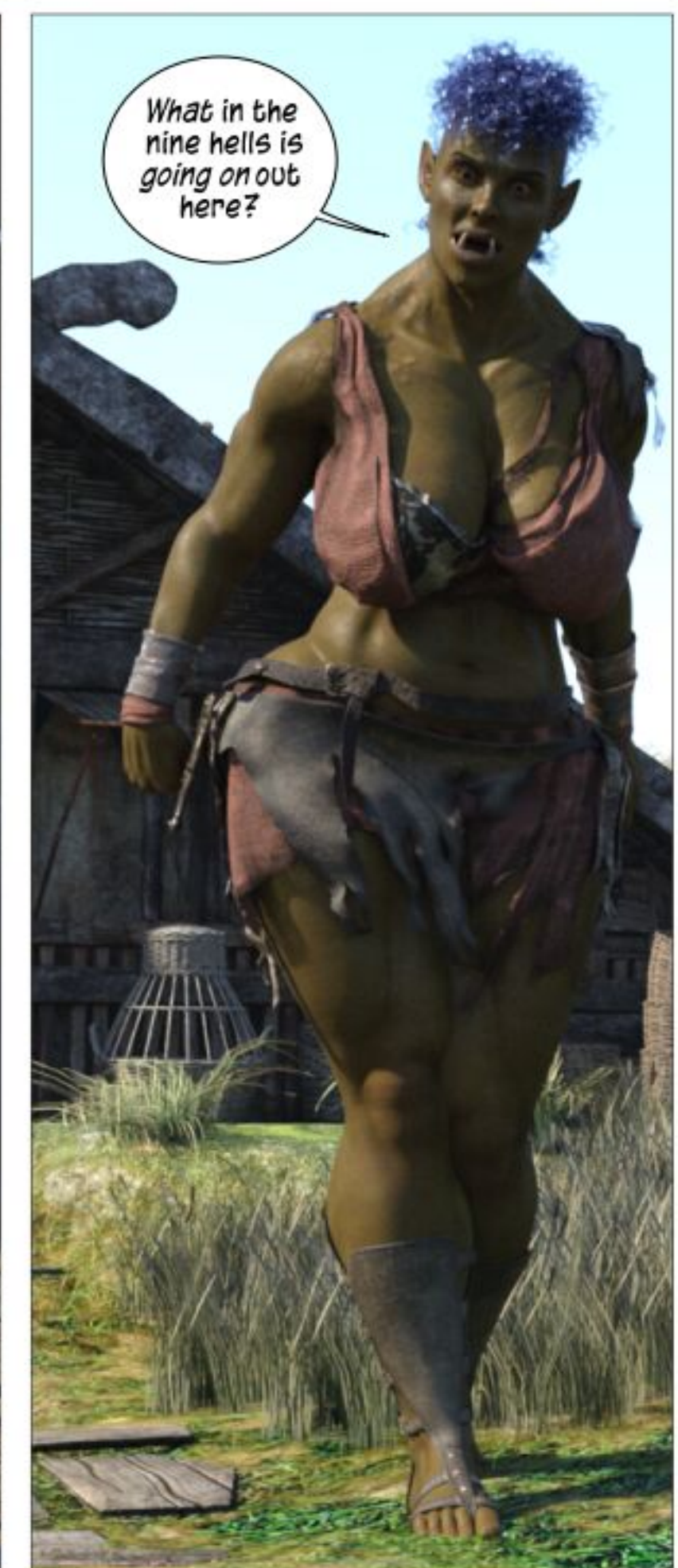
Oh, Por--

Would everybody please calm down?

We are not here to attack.

We're not responsible for those three, but honestly, how much of a threat are they? Grab them and put a hand over their mouth or something.

We might actually get somewhere if everybody could just keep their shit together for thirty seconds!



What in the nine hells is going on out here?



I've brought somebody to see you.

What I figure, nobody else wants to keep this up. Her witches just want to have Pun and be left alone, your orcs just want to have Pun and be left alone ... so it's really just the two of you causing the problem.

I don't care if you talk it out or fight to the death or what, but fix it.



Insolent girl! When I finish with this orc, I'll deal with you next, and it will not be--

... uh.

You know, you're ... ah ... I wasn't expecting ...



So you're the one who's been causing all of this, eh?

I'll be sure to give you a fate you--

... hmm.

They didn't tell me you were so ... well-built.



I think we should reconsider the situation. Carefully.

Couldn't agree more.

Say ... do you have ... problems with your lovers tapping out after, oh, the first three hours or so?

Oh god yes.



I guess an armistice has been declared?

Looks like it.

So what do we do now?



You go home, I suppose!

Congratulations! You successfully completed your quest. Well done!



Yay for Beth!

Yeah, that was all you at the end. Great job!

I'm just glad none of them realized I was blupping.



Huh, it's earlier than I thought! Barely ten ... we could still go do something else ...

Like what?

That club on Carlton Street's having a costume contest tonight ... that's only a couple of blocks from here ... Beth, what do you think?

You know I'm a horrible dancer ... but we're already in costume ... seems a shame to waste it ...

Yeah!



... Do you all feel like something is ... uh ... different? Like, something changed?

Yeah. Clyde's got bigger tits now.

I do not!!

I think it's just that was so intense, Stee. Kinda messes with you, y'know?

We should definitely do it again next year ...



I don't want to stay out too long. Stee's going to ride me later!

Toooooo much information!

Oh, like you two don't overshare all the time ...

Woop.

Heh.



I think that was an evening well-spent, don't you?

-- oop -- Oh, yeah, definitely. Got a lot accomplished.

But did you have fun? After all, it was your idea ...

I did. I'm just exhausted. I didn't realize it was going to be this much work.

Next year I'm going back to letting you plot. You know a lot better than I do how much effort these things take.



So you're completely exhausted?

Oh, well ... no, not completely ...

What did you have in mind?

Heh. Wait and see.

... Evil.

HAPPY HALLOWE'EN, Y'ALL! -T