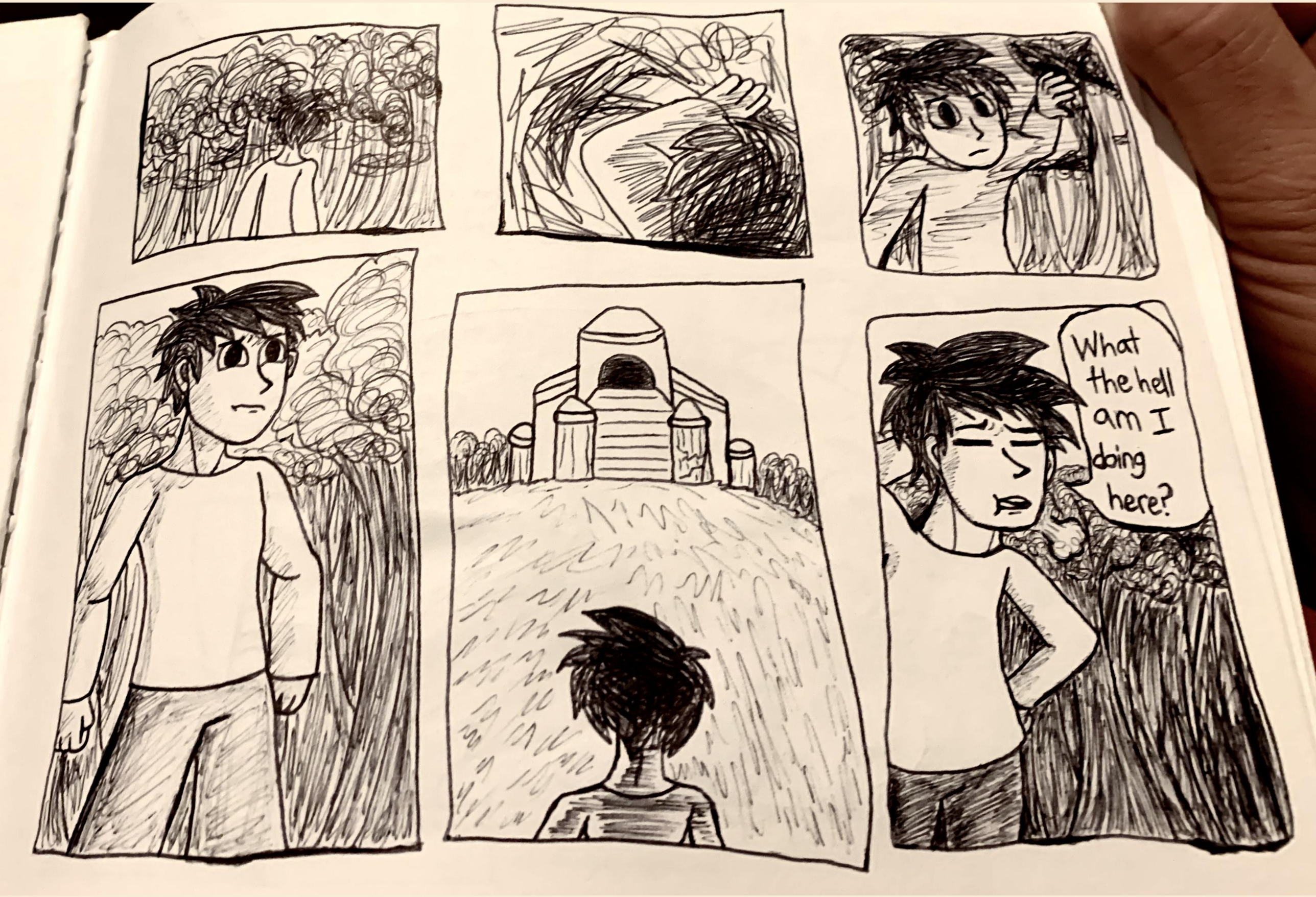

What the hell am I doing here?

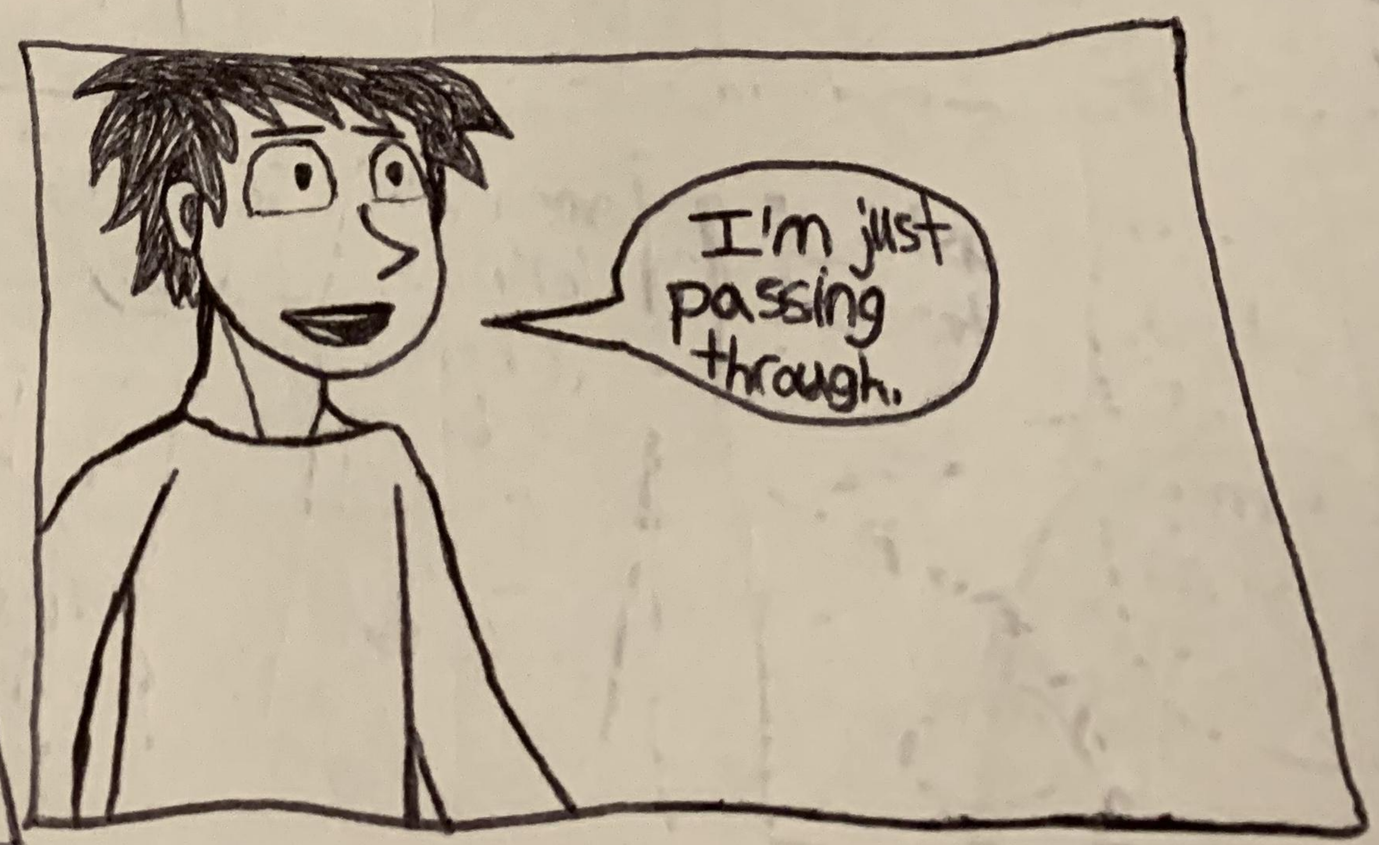
Well, I guess I'll figure that out.

What the- is someone there?!
!

Alright, I'm coming down.

What the hell are you doing here?

Okay. I haven't figured it out yet. I can fix this.


I'm just passing through.

We're surrounded by nothing but miles of forest. Where could you possibly be "passing through" to?

I work here.

You work... in the miles of nothing but forest?

I'm a lumberjack.

Is that so? Where are your tools, then?

Oh, I always just go at my wood with my bare hands. It's more satisfying that way.

You must know how to handle a sturdy trunk.

Well, I've been doing it every day since I was twelve.

Really? I've never seen you here before.

Well, I can't really get going when people are watching. I try to do my business in private.

That's surprising.

I wouldn't expect a guy who can lie to my face so easily to get stage fright.

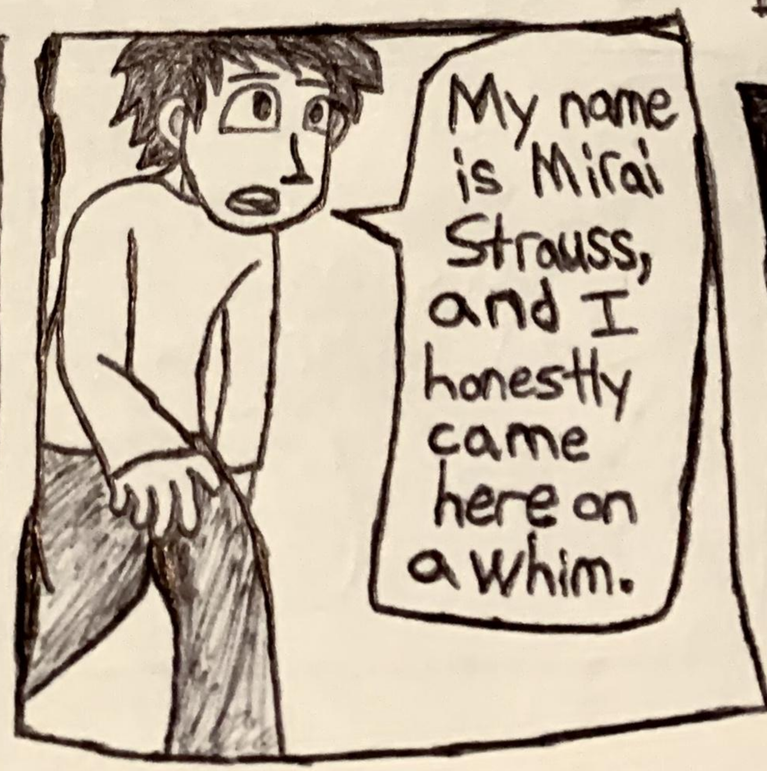
What?! I'm not lying! I love jacking the old stump

I have so much to live for! I have...

... um ....

Alright I'm lying I'm sorry don't kill me please!
Well, I'm sure I'll find something to live for eventually.

Alrightly then. Let's try this one more time. Who are you and why are you in my shrine?


My name is Mirai Strauss, and I honestly came here on a whim.

I think that... something drew me here.

Okay, I don't buy that for a second, but still. That's way more reasonable than that whole tree punching thing.

Well, whether you believe it or not, it's the truth. I was just scared to give you such an unsatisfying reason. You looked pretty mad.

I was and I still am. What you [redacted] presence alone is doing to the spirits of this shrine is practically criminal.

The spirits? You mean the flooty white stuff all over the floor and ceiling? Didn't really know what that stuff was about. I just assumed you'd been jacking some lumber of your own or something.

I wouldn't expect someone like you to understand.

What, can only people with corn chip ears like yours understand?

My... What?

What, do those samosas on the sides of your head have too much beef filling to hear properly?

Wh- How can you... see my true form?

...Am I not supposed to do that?

You must have the sight, so you could be some sort of demon, or....

Let me check something.

Well... I guess this is how I die.

?

What's the matter? If that was a drug test, you should know I only tried it once back in 8th grade and I

You're... a god.

...
Huh?
You... just who are you, anyway?
Mmmirai... Strauss?—
NO!
Oh, okay.
Quit jerking me around and tell me who you really are!
You're right. I suppose it's time to come clean.
I actually am a lumberjack.
Do you think this is funny?
Honestly, I have no idea what's going on.
You... really don't know that you're a god, do you?

No, I don't even know what means. Would you mind telling me What's happening?

Alright, listen. Gods watch over and control the world. Some live at shrines like this one, while some live in other dimensions like heaven or hell. You somehow have a divine energy exactly like theirs, as I just found out.

Whew. Any questions?

Yeah, one. Who are you and why do you know all this?

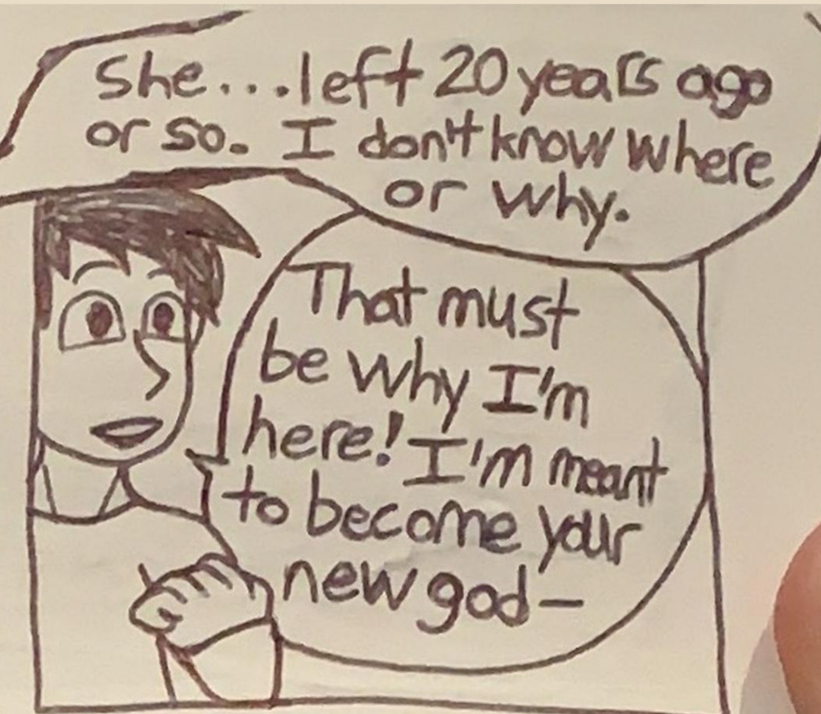
That's two questions, actually.

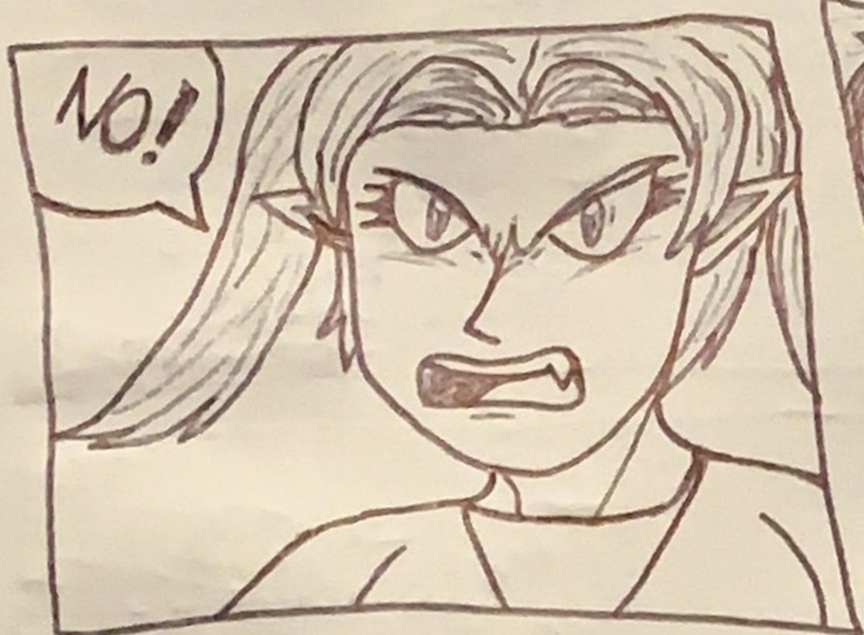
But I'll oblige. You can call me Akane. I'm a familiar and this shrine's caretaker.

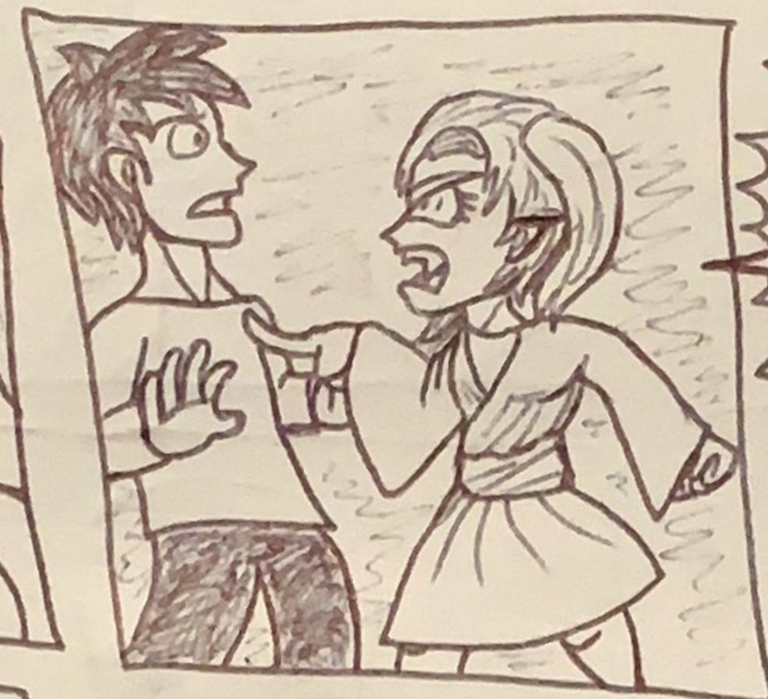
What is-

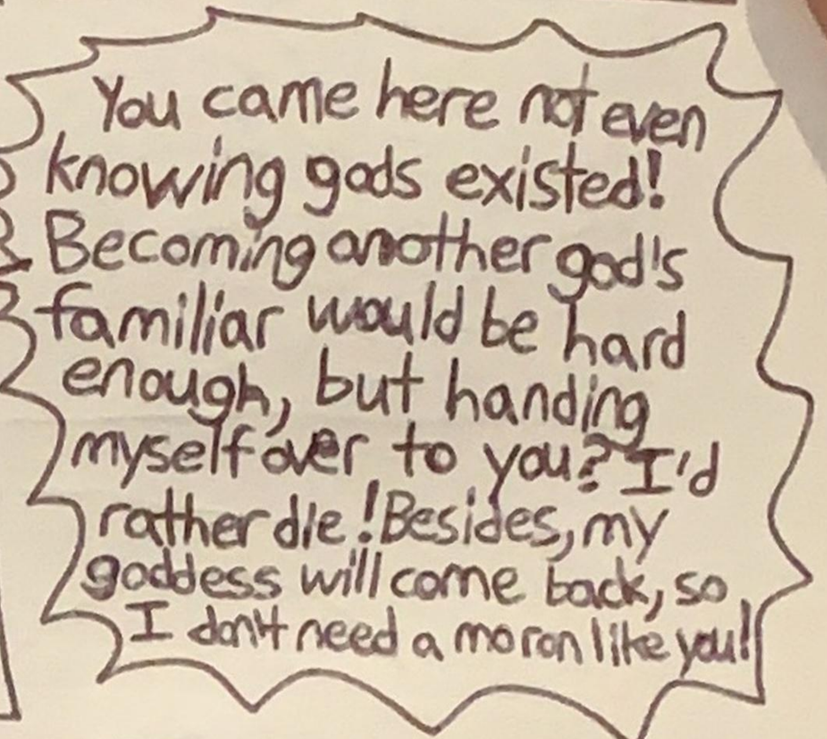
A familiar is a god's right hand and faithful servant. Satisfied?

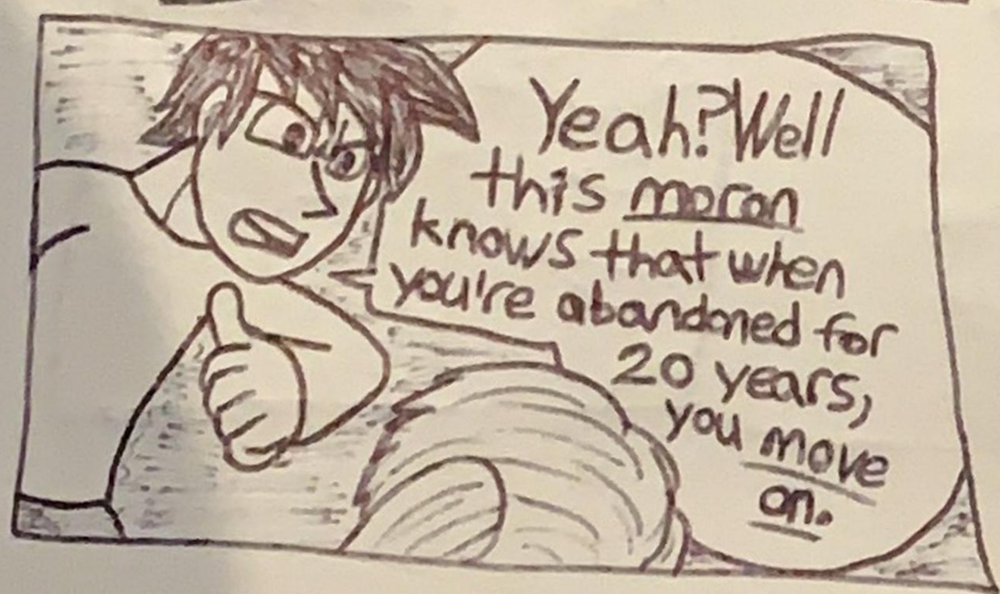
But then ... where's your god?


She... left 20 years ago or so. I don't know where or why.
That must be why I'm here! I'm meant to become your new god—

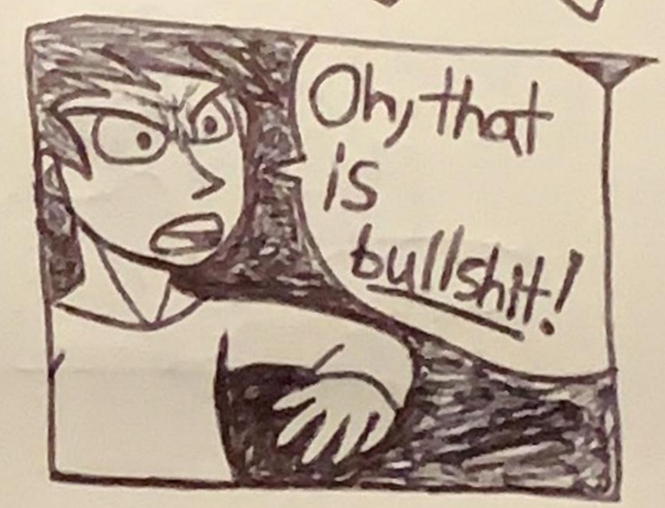

NO!

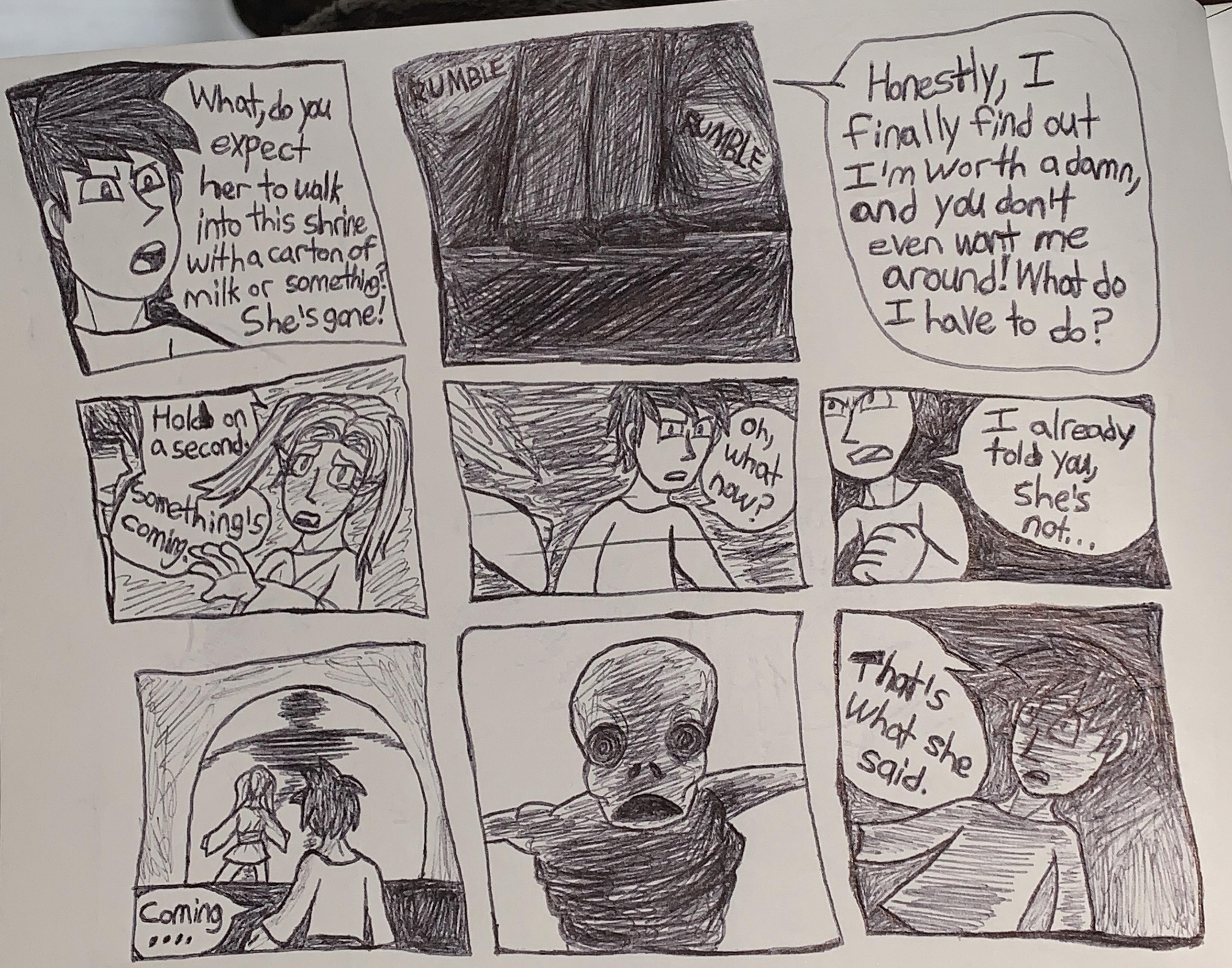


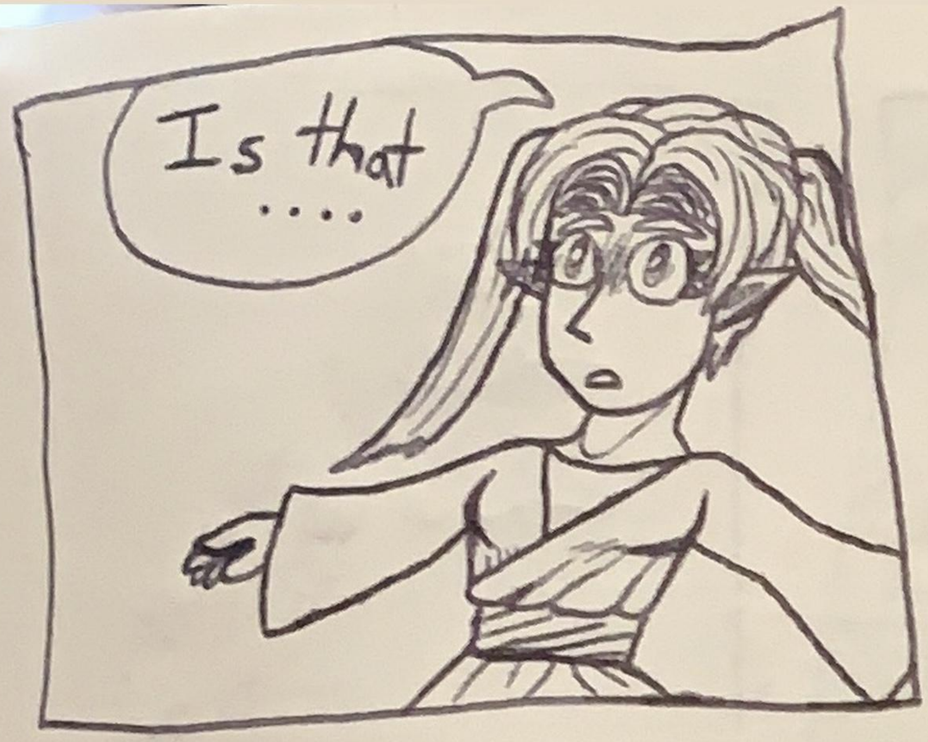

You came here not even knowing gods existed! Becoming another god's familiar would be hard enough, but handing myself over to you? I'd rather die! Besides, my goddess will come back, so I don't need a moron like you!

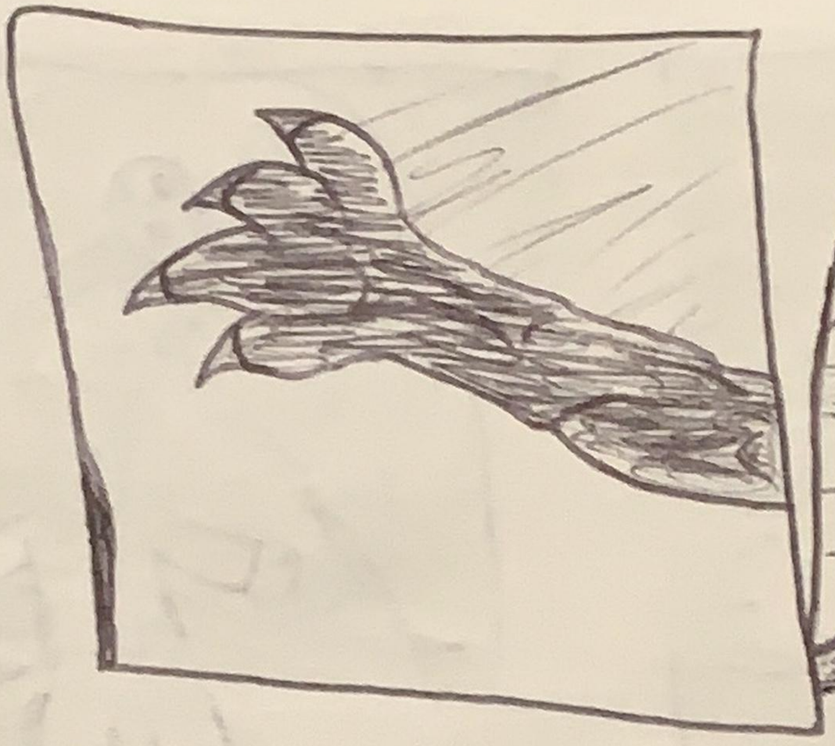

Yeah? Well this moron knows that when you're abandoned for 20 years, you move on.

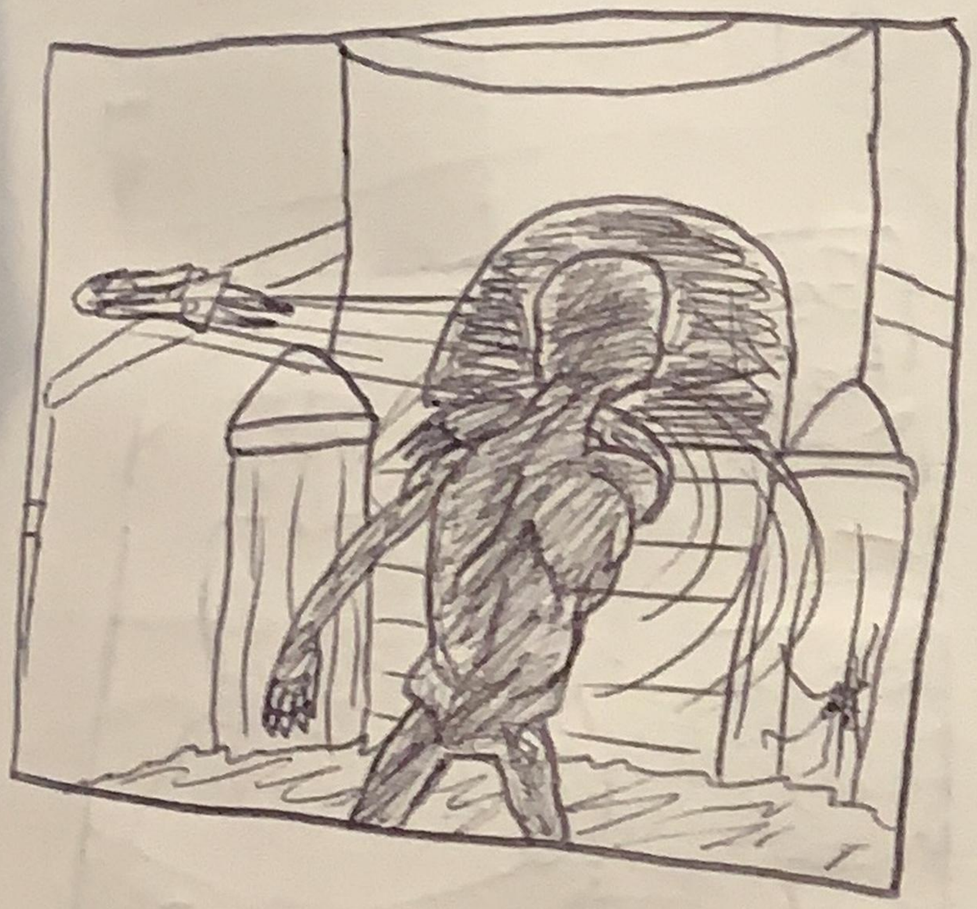
She didn't abandon me, you—

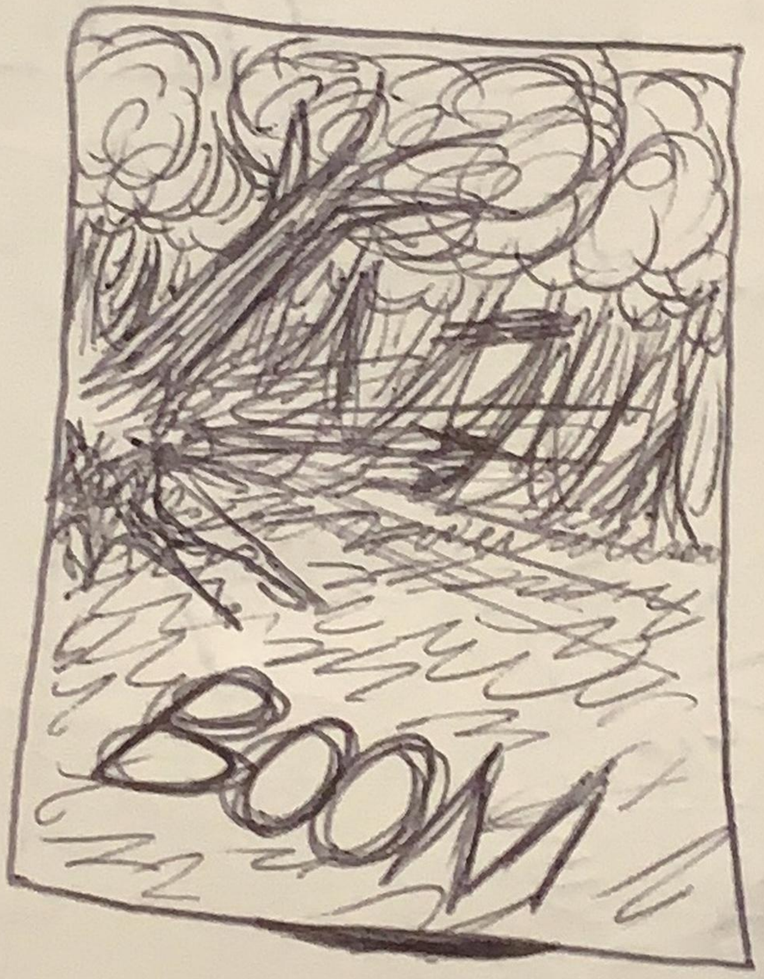

Oh, that is bullshit!

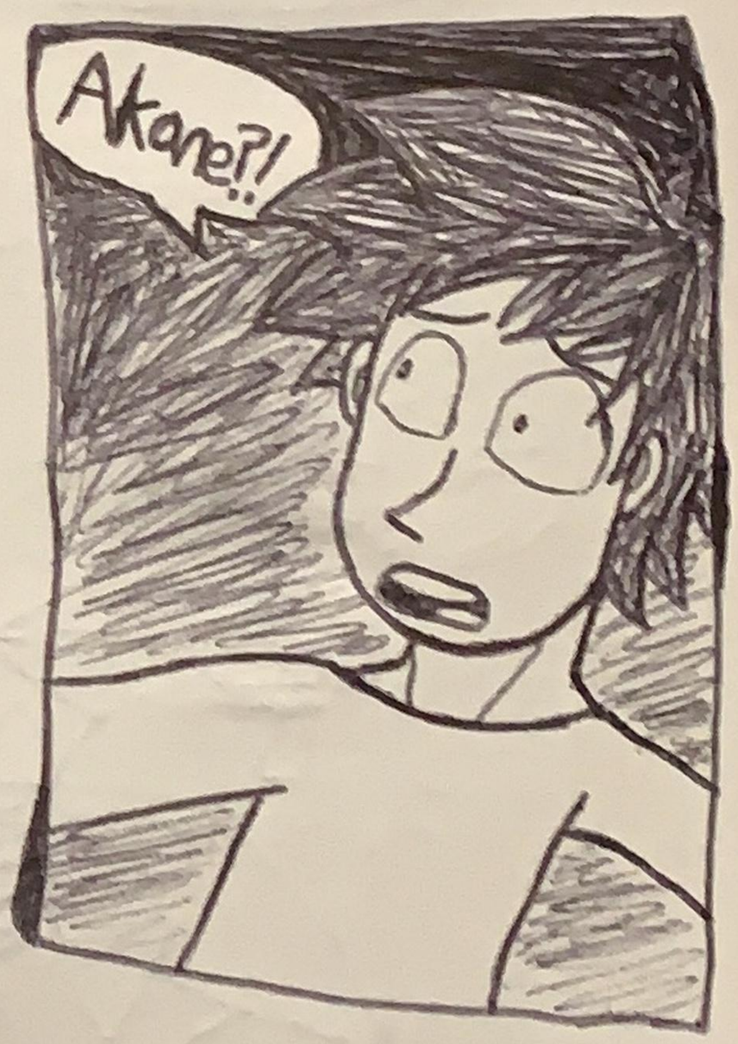

What, do you expect her to walk into this shrine with a carton of milk or something? She's gone!
RUMBLE
RUMBLE
Honestly, I finally find out I'm worth a damn, and you don't even want me around! What do I have to do?
Hold on a second.
Something's coming.
Oh, what now?
I already told you, She's not...
Coming....
That's what she said.

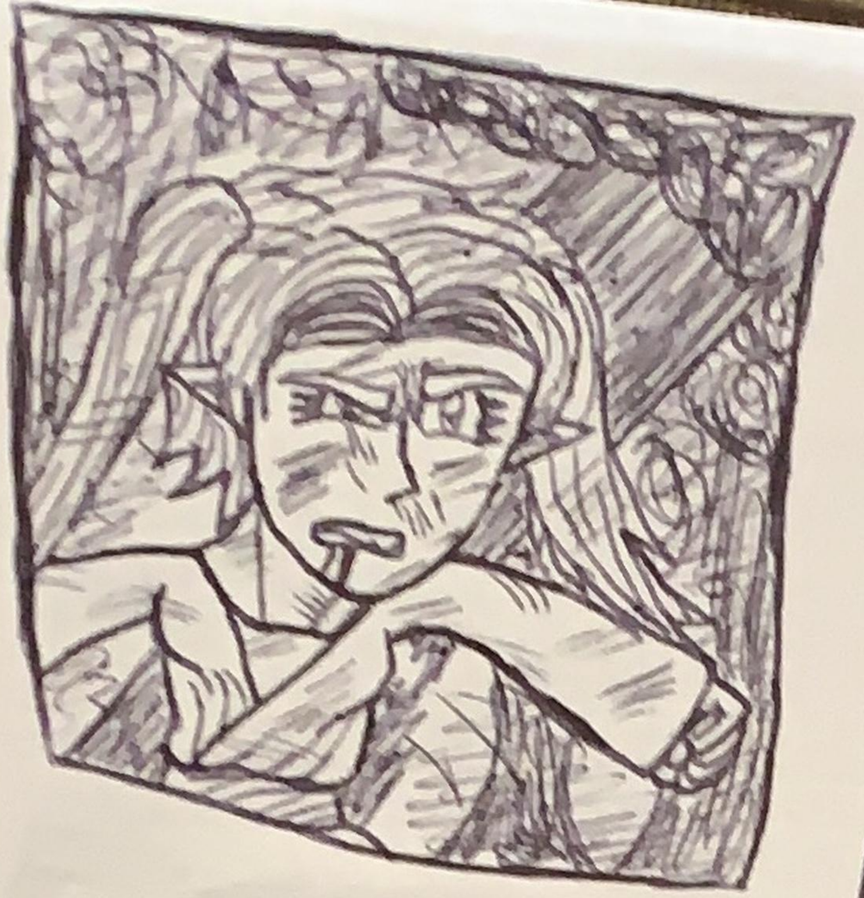

Is that
....

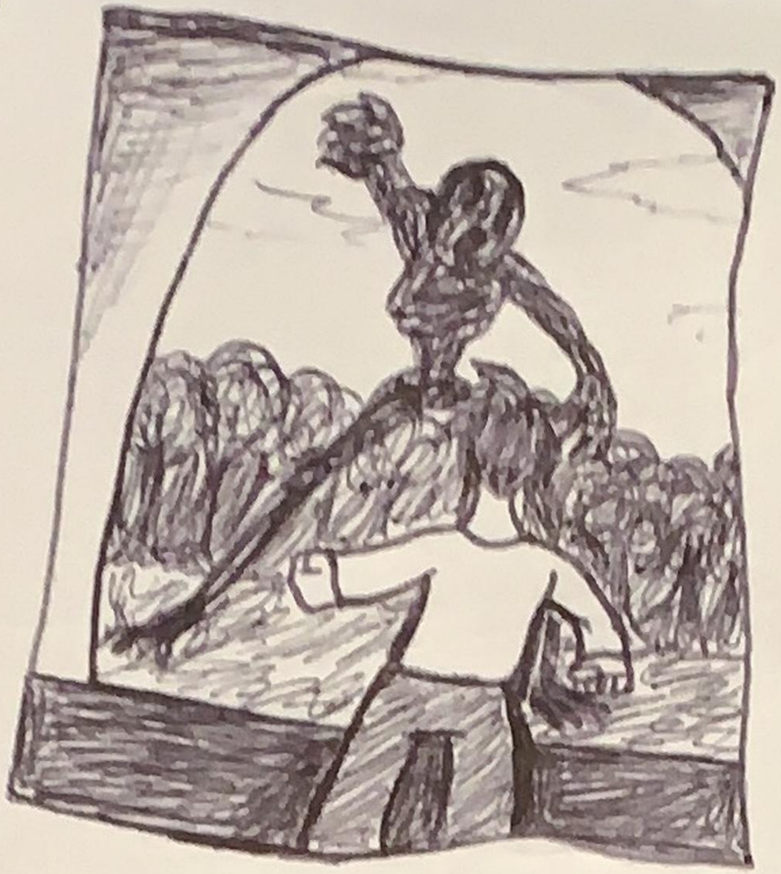





BOOM

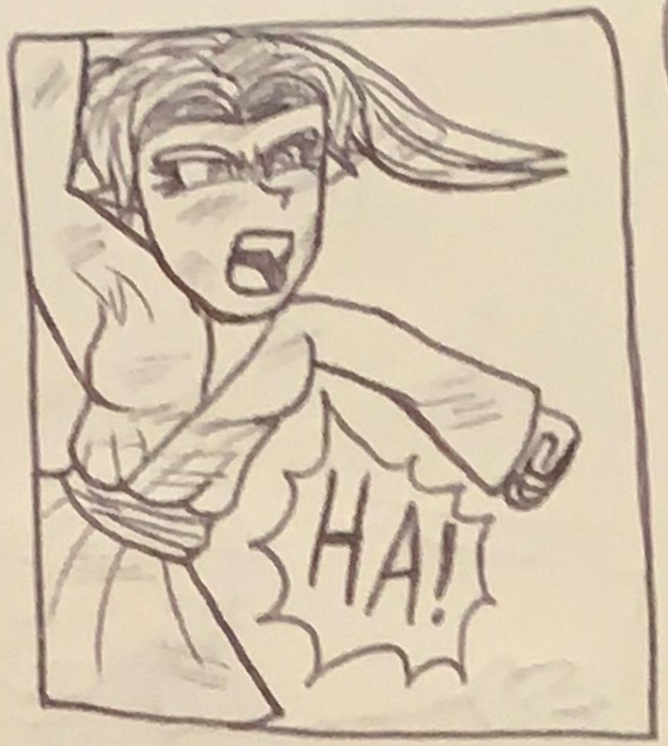

Akane?!

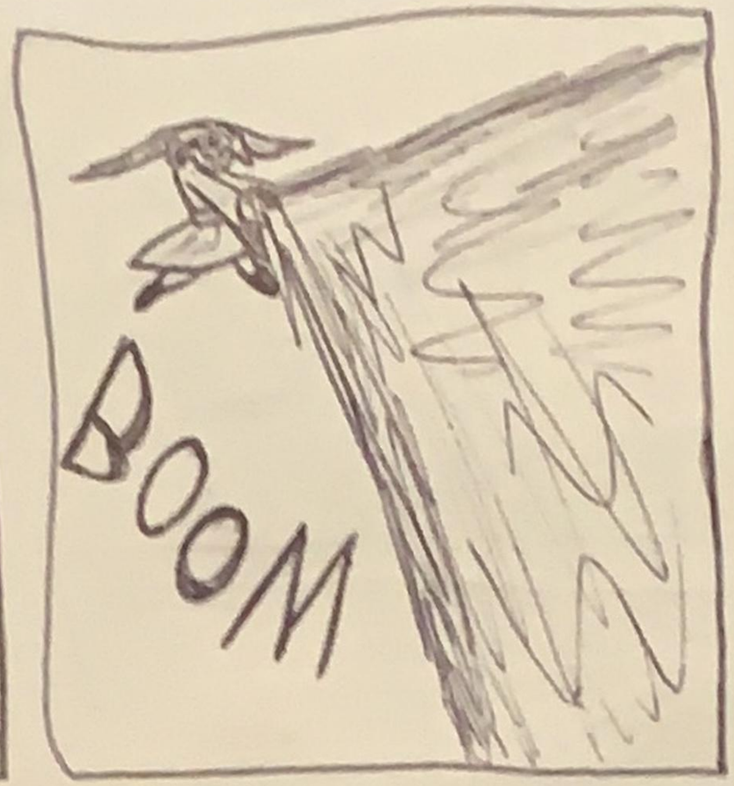


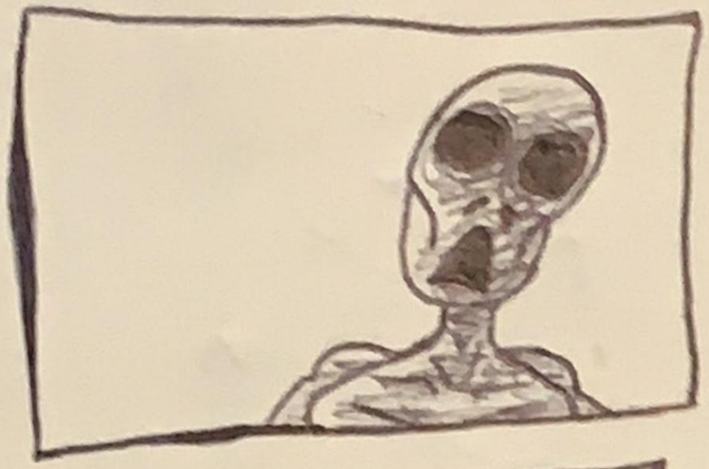


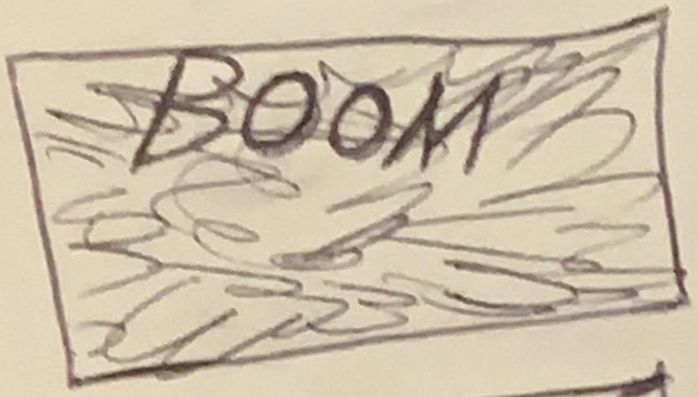
BOOM

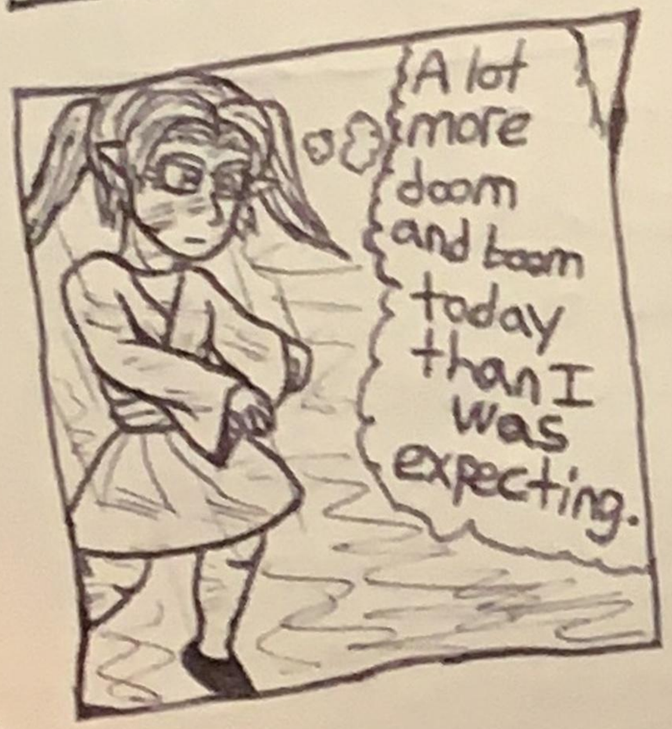
Get out of here, now!


HA!

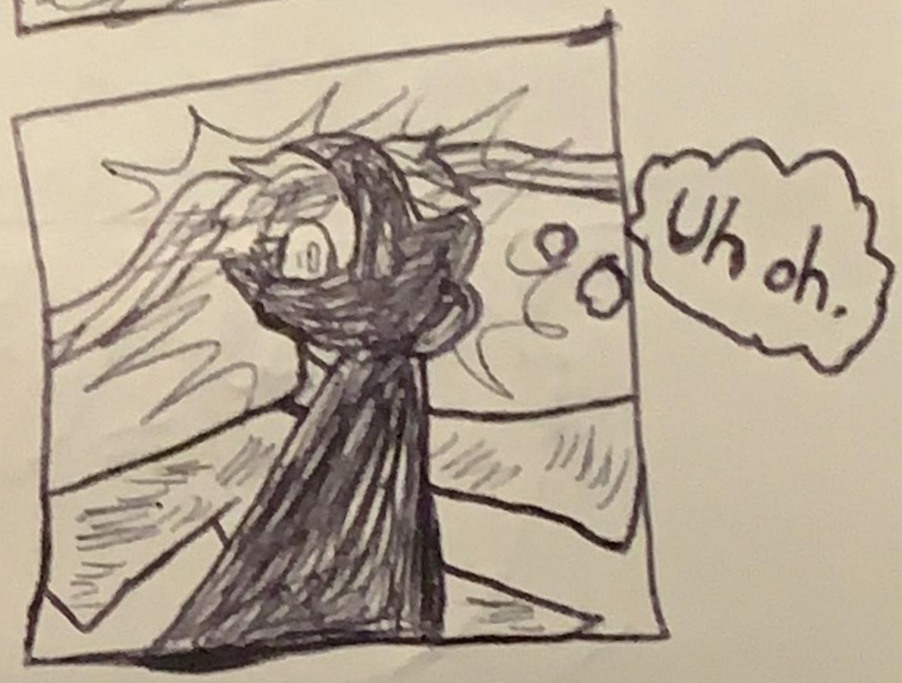

BOOM

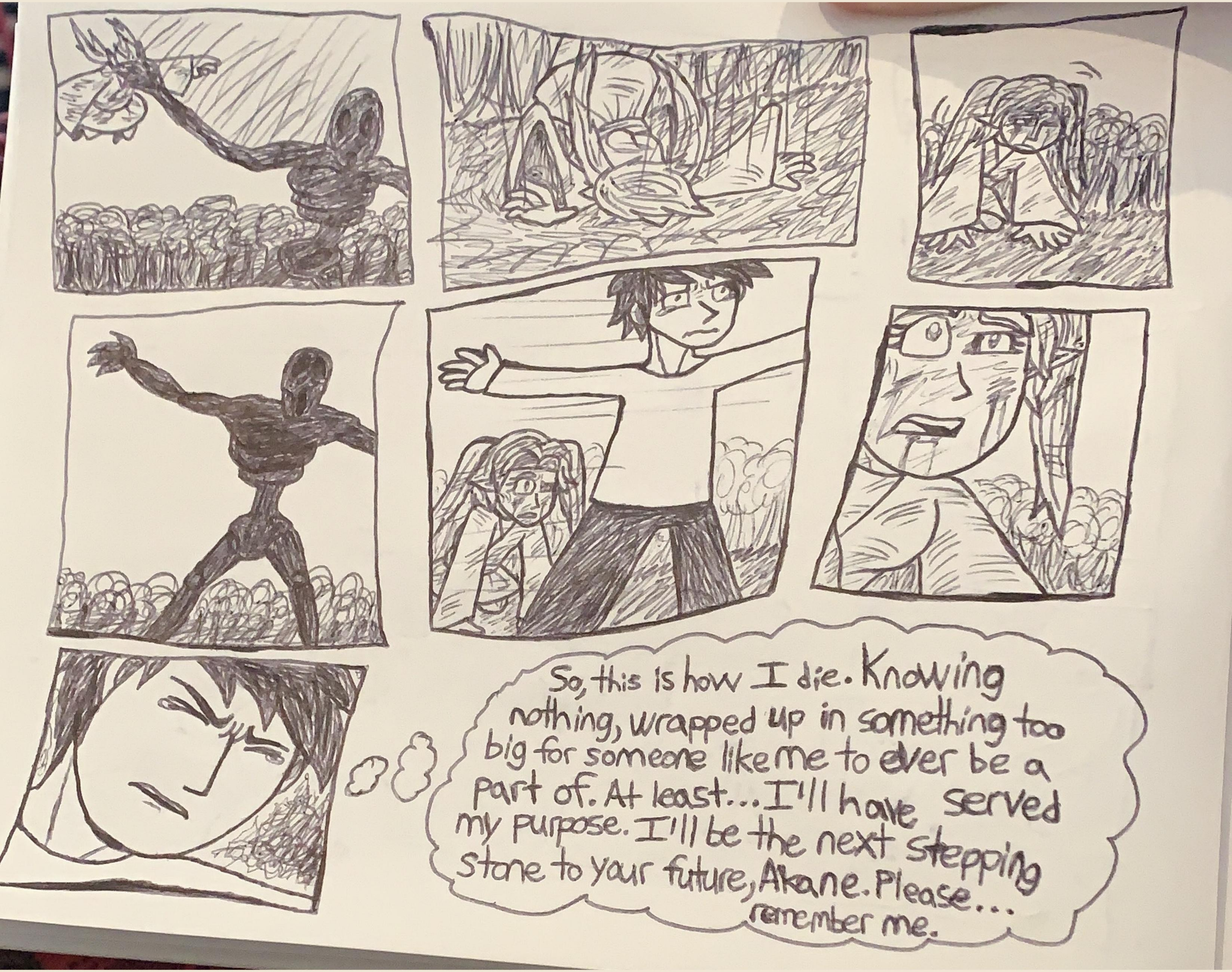



BOOM

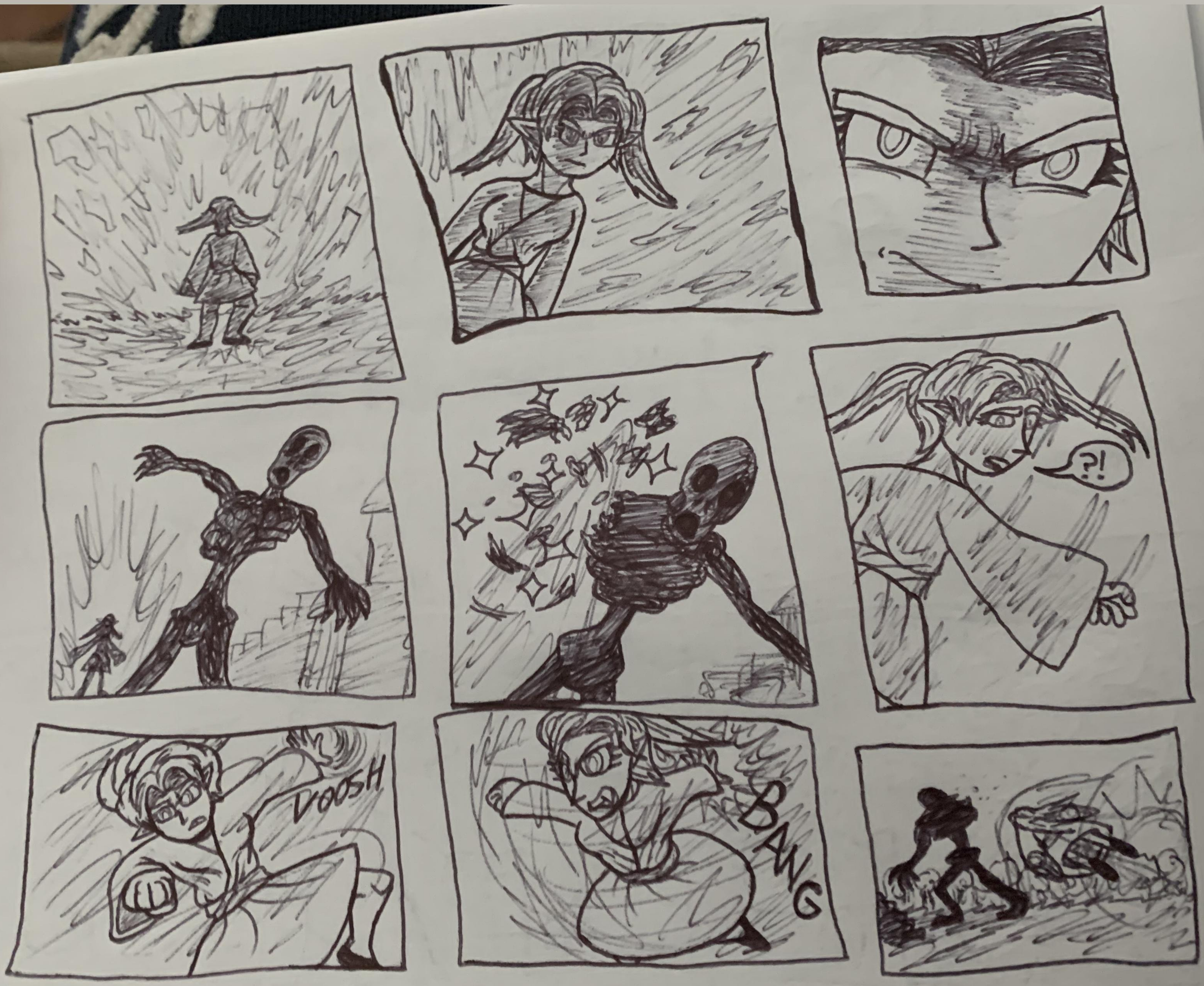

A lot more doom and boom today than I was expecting.

?!

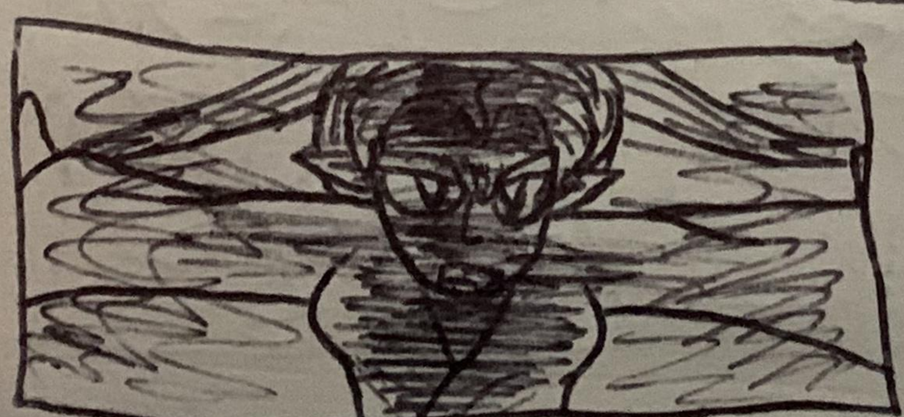

Uh oh.


So, this is how I die. Knowing nothing, wrapped up in something too big for someone like me to ever be a part of. At least... I'll have served my purpose. I'll be the next stepping stone to your future, Akane. Please... remember me.

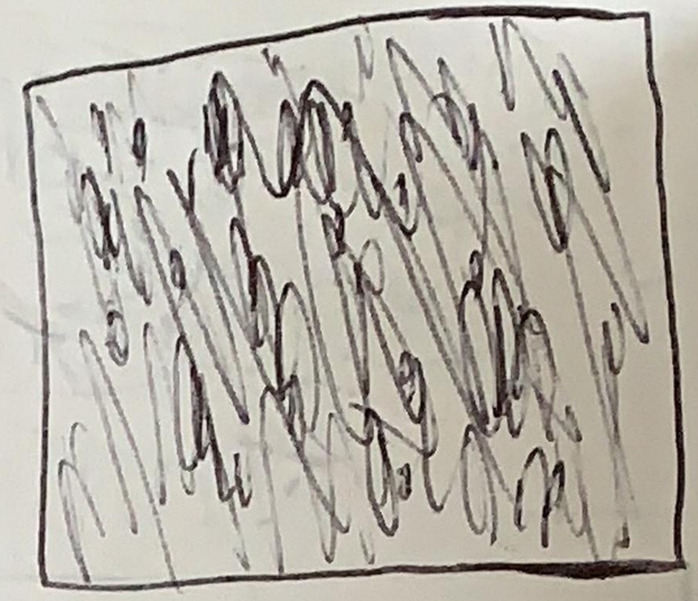
BOOM
Huh?
Mirai! Repeat after me!
Wh-
"I grant Akasuki Ronin the divine position of my familiar."
Wait-
JUST SAY IT!
I grant Akasuki Ronin the divine position of my familiar.... Okay?
I... devote myself to your service.

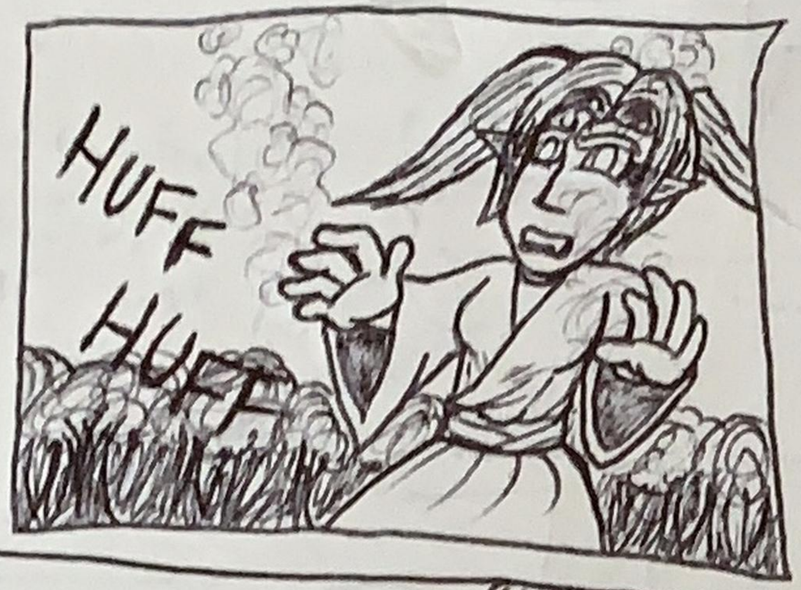

?!
VOOSH
BANG

CRAK



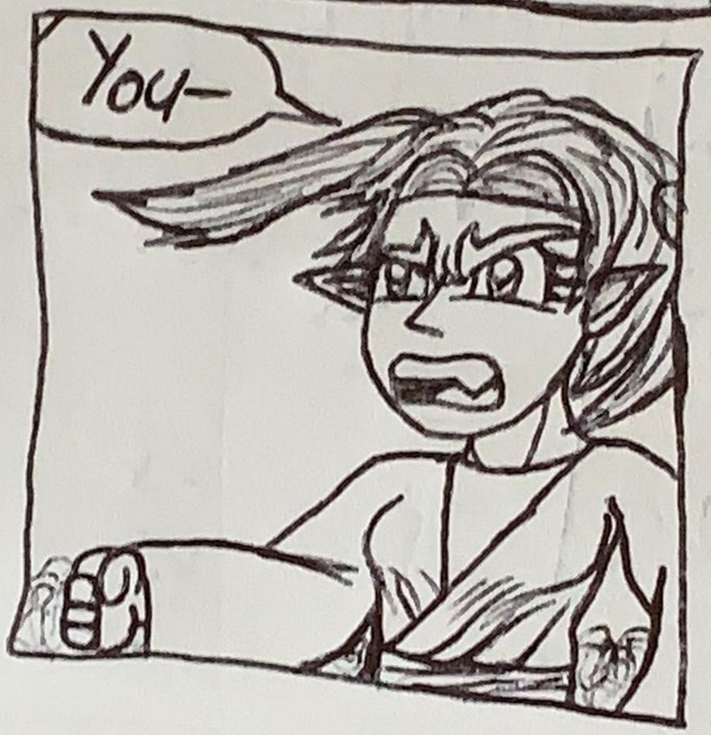
FWOOSH

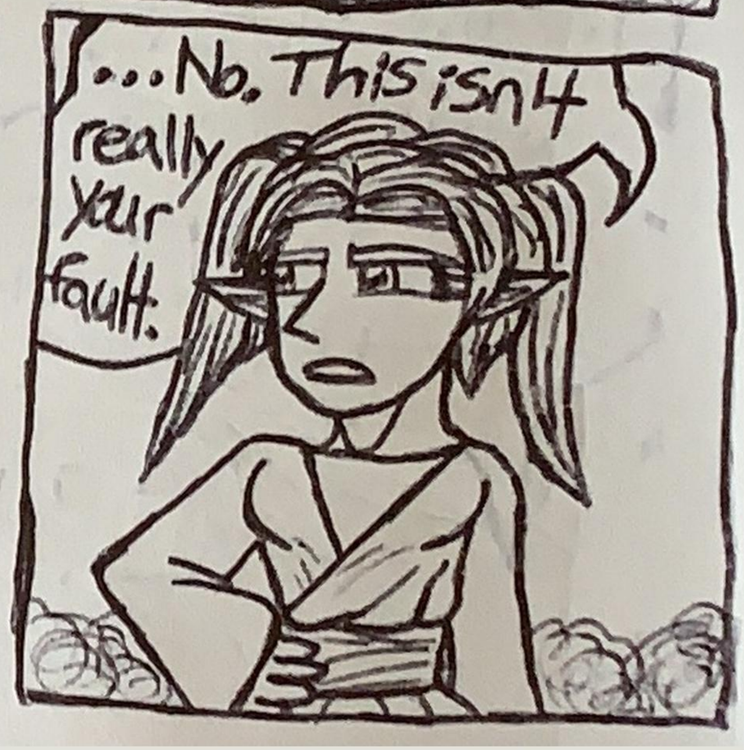



HUFF
HUFF

HUFF
HUFF

You....
Why did you ...?


You-


...No. This isn't really your fault.

You never should've came here, but neither of us could have predicted that... thing.

That huge thing came without warning and it was all over you.

It must've been a demon, but why would a demon attack us?

That's not normal? You made pretty quick work of it.

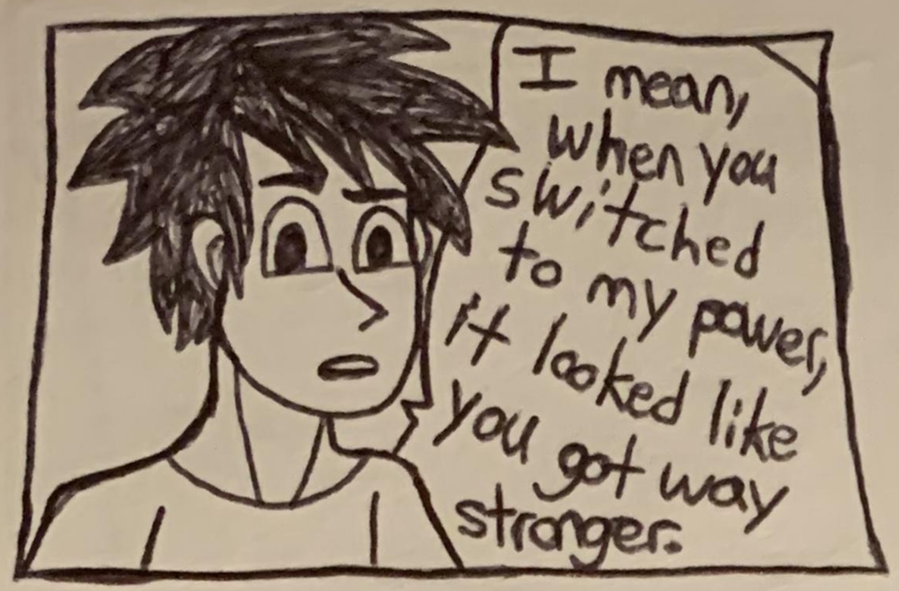
I almost died! I was only able to destroy that thing by...

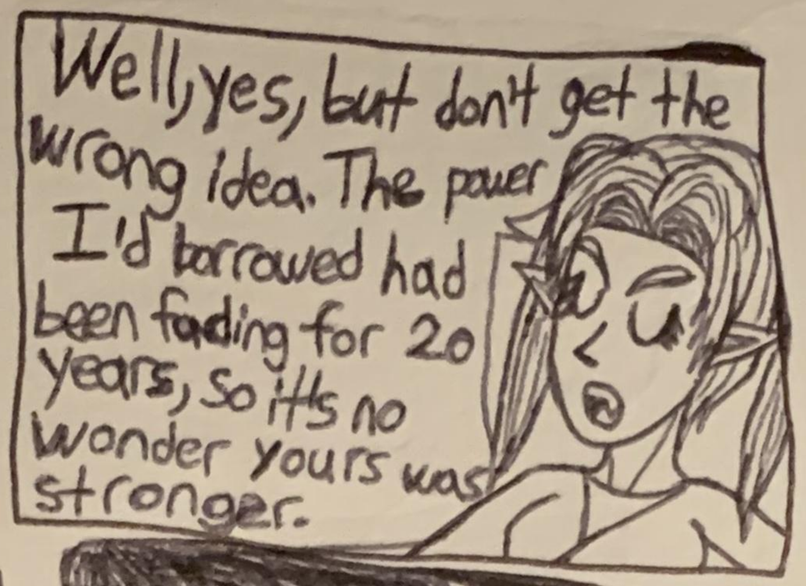
forfeiting myself to you and thereby borrowing your power.

My power? If I've got that kind of power, why can't I use it?

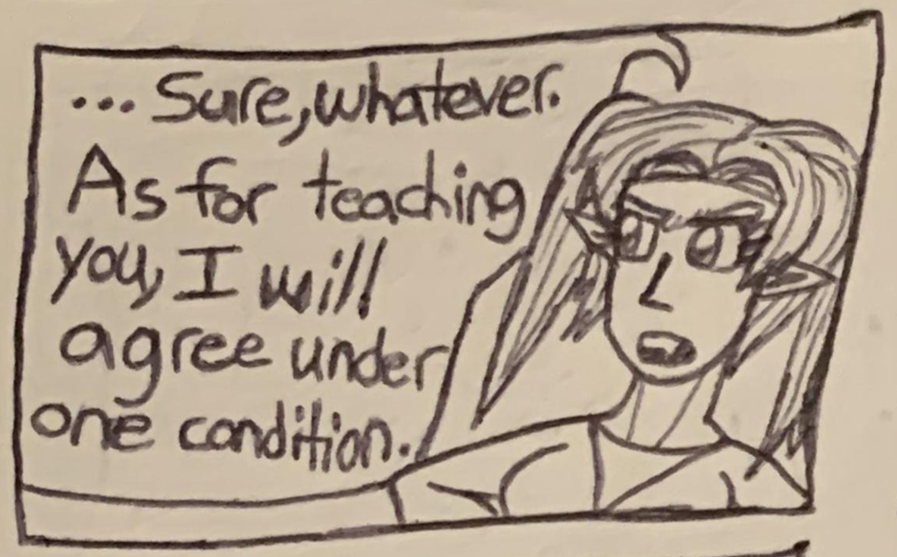
I have no idea. I still hardly understand any of this myself. I've never heard of a god not knowing they're a god.

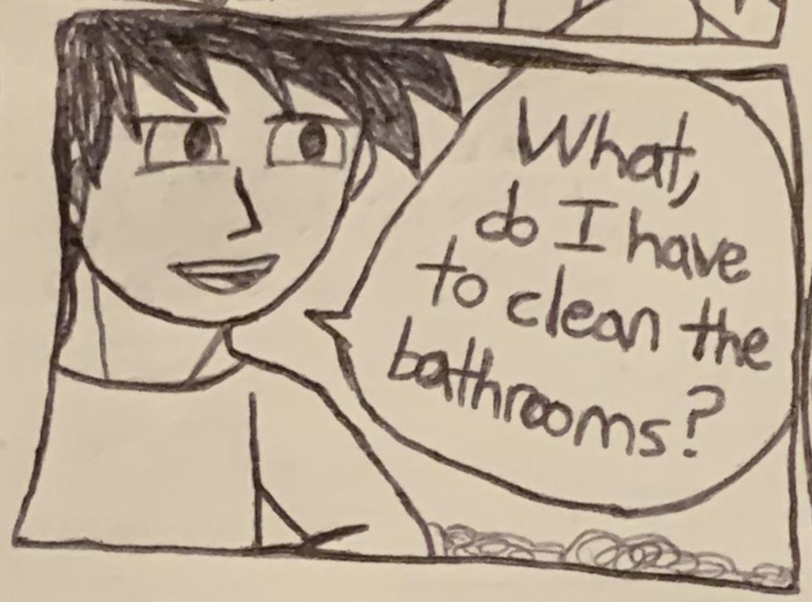
Well... do you think you could teach me how to use my power?


I mean, when you switched to my power, it looked like you got way stronger.


Well, yes, but don't get the wrong idea. The power I'd borrowed had been fading for 20 years, so it's no wonder yours was stronger.

Hell yeah, mine's bigger.

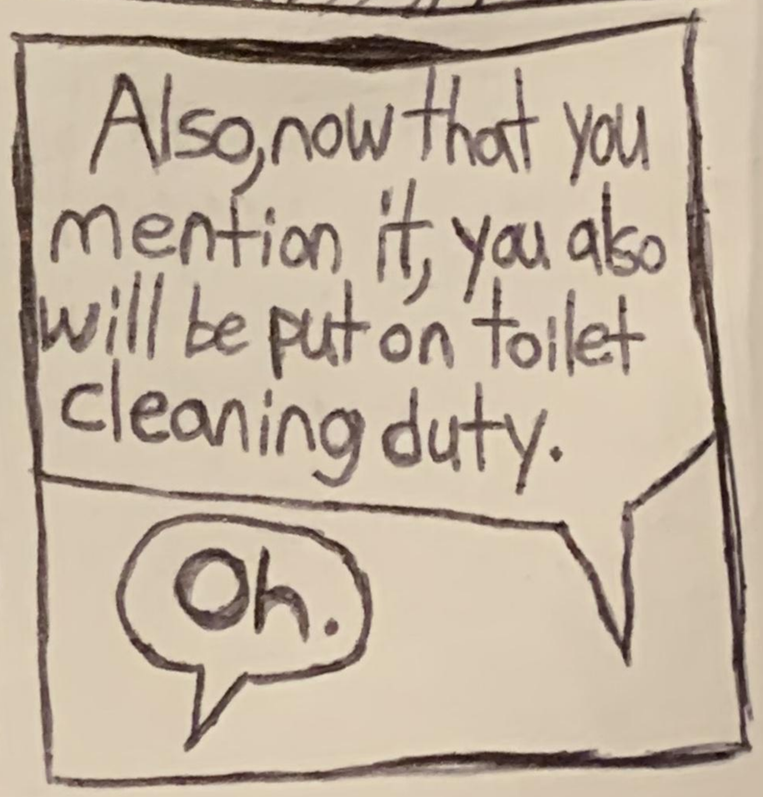

... Sure, whatever. As for teaching you, I will agree under one condition.

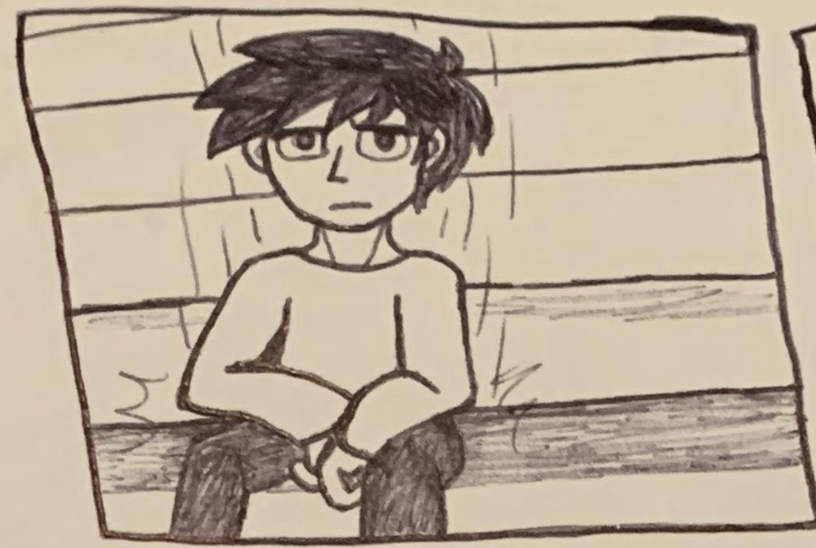

What, do I have to clean the bathrooms?

I want you to promise me you won't leave.

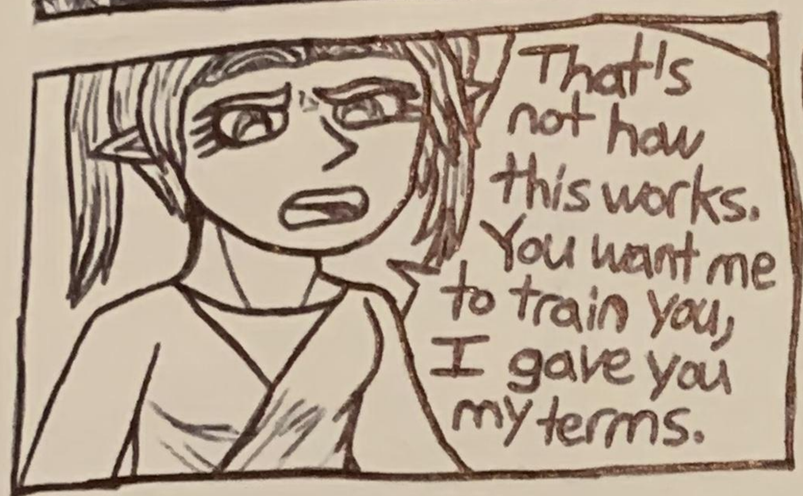
Oh.

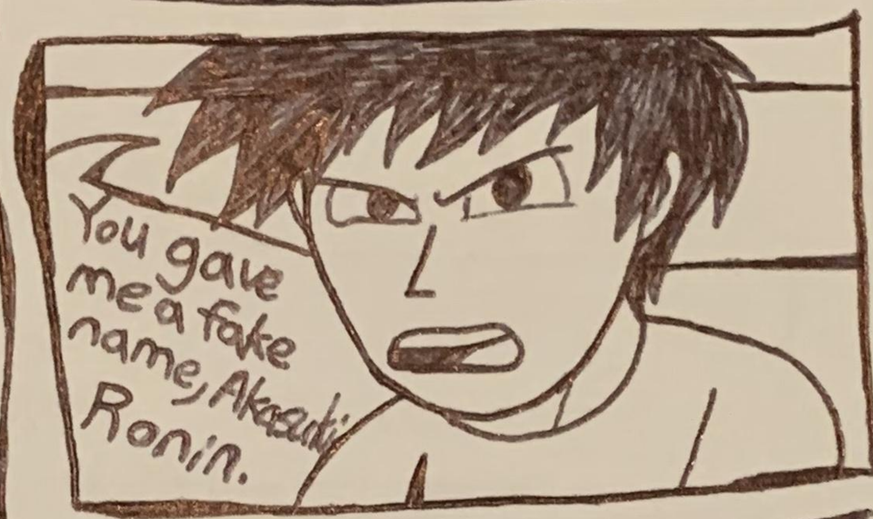
...


Also, now that you mention it, you also will be put on toilet cleaning duty.
Oh.

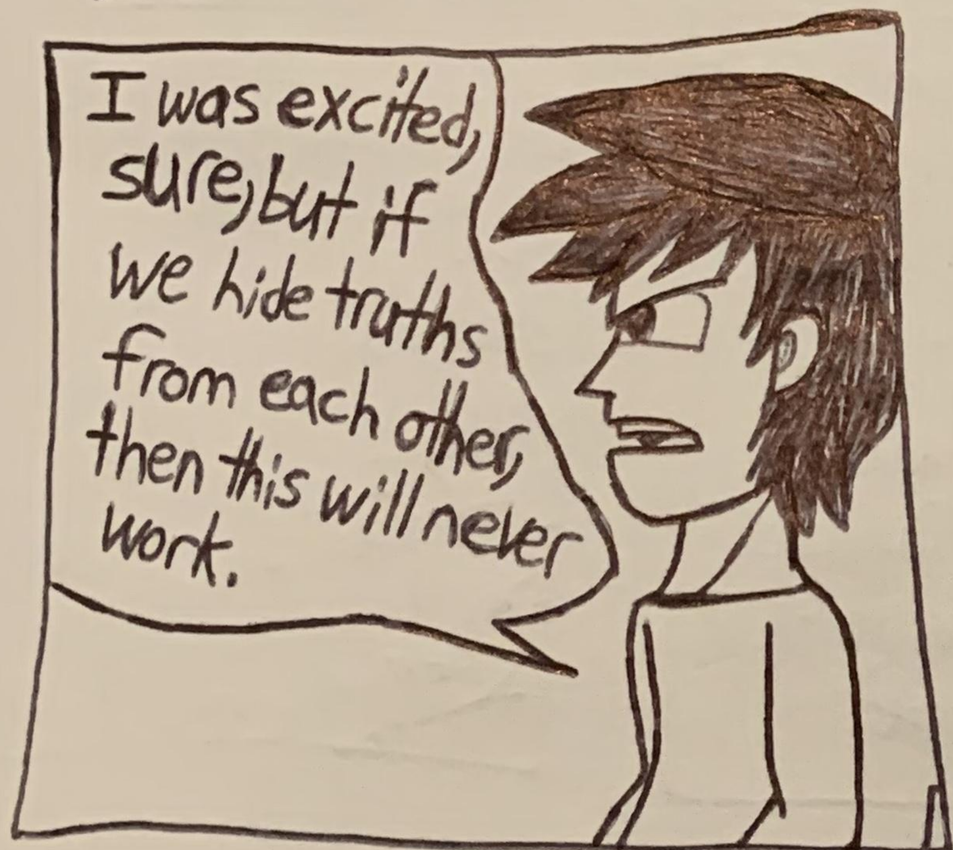


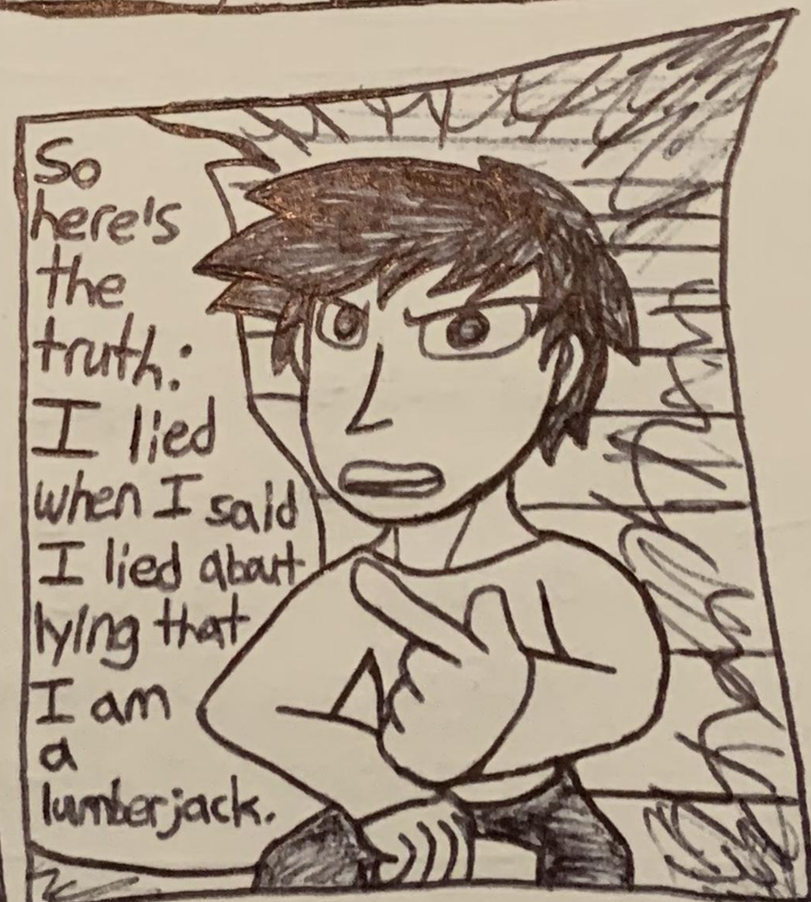
If you want to put me to work here, I want answers first.


That's not how this works. You want me to train you, I gave you my terms.


You gave me a fake name, Akasuki Ronin.

Neither of us trust each other, you didn't want me here, and now I'm your god.


I was excited, sure, but if we hide truths from each other, then this will never work.


So here's the truth: I lied when I said I lied about lying that I am a lumberjack.

Ugh.

Fine. What do you need to know?

Look, A-Akane? Is... I'm just gonna call you Akane. I have a million questions about why and how, but this is already a lot to process.

So... why don't you just tell me how you feel about all this?

Mirai, I've been alone in this forest for over 20 years, as I said.

Today, a god wanders into my shrine, followed by a demon minutes later. That cannot be coincidence.

You think I brought that thing to kill you.

I considered that possibility at first.

Killing me doesn't seem to be your intention, so my current theory is something about your power is upsetting the nearby demons and drawing them here. Perhaps this shrine is drawing their attention to that power.

But you said the how and why can wait.

The important part is that if you leave, I can't borrow your power, so if another strong demon came....

Just a burden again... all I am is a-

You know, Mirai...

I never got a choice when it came to being a familiar. It was just... what I was supposed to do.

I loved my god, but I was still just her servant. I had no freedoms. I rarely left the shrine.

That sounds awful. Why do you want her back so badly?

It beats being all alone.

But now you're here, and I didn't have any say in that either, so what difference does it make?

...

Wait. Have you been slipping in jokes about your dingaling this whole time?!

Heh. "Slipping in."

Akane.

What?

I accept your terms. I promise not to leave.

No matter how long or hard it gets.