


Something isn't *right*.
I can sense it.

The world within this Crater
is one of *connection*. Our Home
Tree's roots are spread far.
From Crater's Heart to Crater's
Edge, and into the lands of the
Tarsin and the Tieke, though
they do not know of its reach.

We are *all* born into
the web.

But while some merely
stride over its *surface*...

...others, *my kind*,
are *part* of it.



Our home tree is
more than it appears.
Its roots not only run
deeply, but widely.

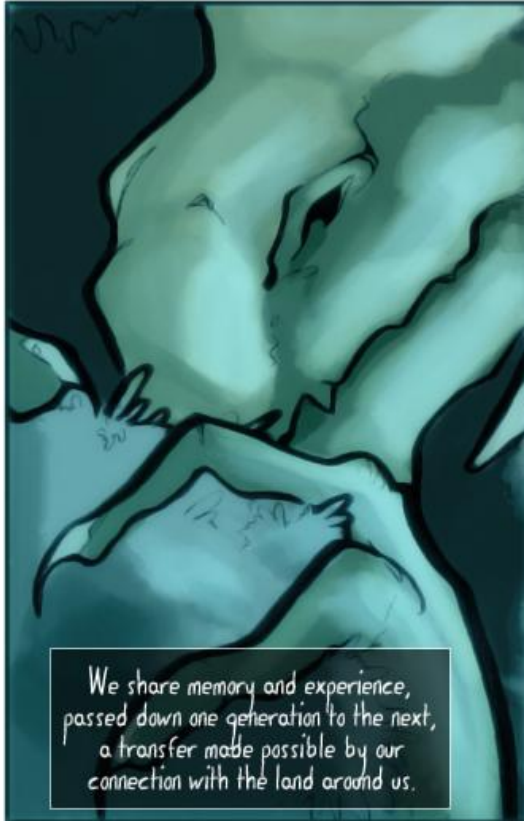
It is a sentry and spy,
tasting the water, testing
the air, studying those
who touch its branches
and its leaves.

Those of us who
know how to listen
can hear its voice.

The essence of our Eldest Ancestors tells us that we were born of that same tree, given sentience, given flight, and given responsibility.




Like the tree, we are many parts that make up a whole. Individuals connected by the same branches and roots that we live among.



We share memory and experience, passed down one generation to the next, a transfer made possible by our connection with the land around us.



We are one with the great tree. We are its guardians, born of itself to protect itself.



There is smoke to the east.
Intruders in the Crater.
They take the land we've
given them, and they
lay waste to it.

The *ti-ke-di*, as
they call themselves.

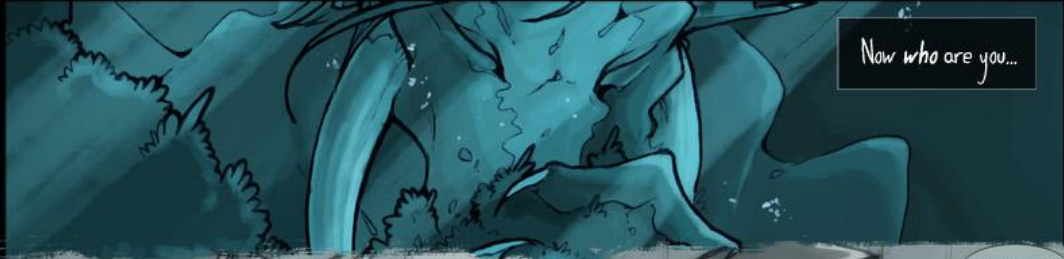
They believe that we're monsters.
The world is better for it when
that belief is so strong that it's an
all encompassing fear. It keeps
them at bay. They're not
ready for understanding yet.

Such strange creatures. Born of the world, as we were,
but not a part of the web. They rose from the ocean waters,
and, like the powerful tides, they're shapers of the world.

But without connection,
they have no guidance.

Without connection, we
have no common tongue.
We can offer nothing. We
can only deter until
a way is found.

That path is a slow one. I worry.



Now who are you...



...puppet? Spy?



LAYKAN!

AHH!



Ha ha!
I hear it again!

What...?
Oh, not *this*.
Not now.



You don't, do you?
It's like... a *whispering*.

And it's all in your head. The leaf's addled your mind. I told you.

I don't think so. I know *all about* being addled, but this feels like a *clarity*! Ha. You *really* can't hear it, then?



Jabber jabber jabber.

No. But then again, I'm also busy. We have a colony to build, Kalder, and we're on *borrowed time* as it is.

Or do you think the *tekk* will ignore us here forever?

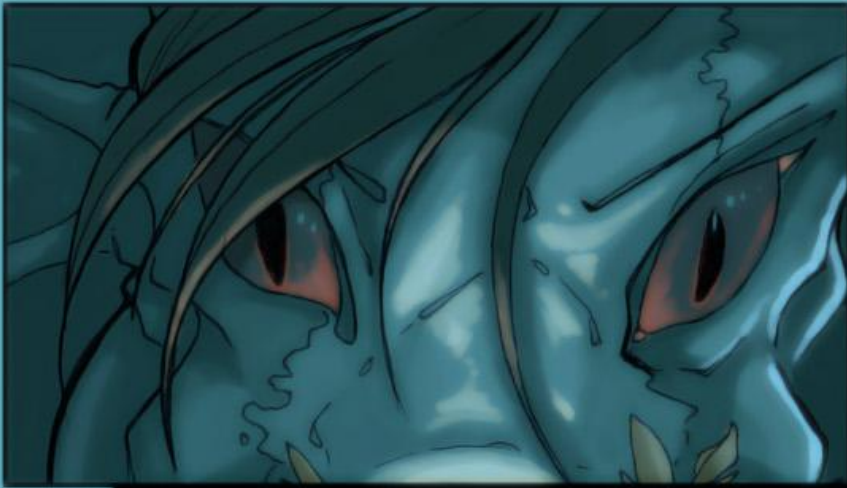
So much talk. Noise noise. But the puppet's *thoughts*, they tell me of... of...

Building.

Permanence?

Here?!

HERE?!



Impossible. He should
know about this.

I'm not the *only*
one who speaks with
the great tree.

He should *know*!



I must confront him.

The slow path
is *too* slow.



Shan'rekk,
my *beloved*...

How could
you allow this?





I must find him.

If he'd be anywhere...



...it would be at the top.



*Such a rush!
Did you see that?
What drives her?*



He would be at the top!
The seat of greatest
wisdom. It is our *most ancient*
old ones who he has been
seeking for advice.

But what has he
heard? Why would
he stall for so long?



They wouldn't have
advised him to wait and to
watch while our forests burn!



Would they?



Shan'rekk?

Shan'rekk, are
you here?



No.



He's not here.

I am sorry, Eldest Ancestors,
I did not mean to intrude.

I was simply...

...looking for answers.



But...

If you have those answers...

...then would you tell me?





LISTEN

