


Many changes had come to pass since Lady Tomo had taken her rightful place as ruler of Naka Kon.

After being vanquished by Lord Byakko, the Tiger God, her followers resurrected the phoenix by gathering her ashes.



Reborn from the remnants of her former self, she and her warriors drove the invading forces from Naka Kon. Unfortunately, their peace was all too short.

The following year trouble arrived in the form of a messenger named Yamato who had been sent on behalf of Inarisama, the Fox God whom Lady Tomo had requested aid from.




Rather than offering aid, however, Yamato offered tricks and challenges.

He required that Tomo and her supporters prove themselves worthy of his master's assistance by completing a series of trials that varied from feats of courage to exhibitions of strength.

If Tomo and her followers had failed to overcome even one of Yamato's tests, then all future aid would have been forfeit.

It almost seemed as if hope was lost...



But in the end the brave warriors of Naka Kon proved themselves more than worthy matches for Yamato's tasks.

As promised, the defeat of Yamato had been accompanied by the arrival of Inarisama.



Sadly, the assistance the Fox God offered was not what the phoenix expected.

While Lady Tomo hid her feelings with a smile, her followers knew her too well. If she asked for aid with defensive strategies she was directed to meditate.

If she wished to begin preparations for the grand ball she was inevitably directed to spar. While she retained the outward picture of serenity, her followers could see the frustrations beneath the surface.

They were growing frustrated with the Fox God's persistently contrary nature, as well.



Thank you for meeting with me today, Inarisama.

How could I not? The terms of the challenge last year were clearly stated.

You won the bet, and in doing so you earned the rights to my assistance.



I appreciate all that you have done for me, but...

I appreciate that, Inarisama. That is exactly what I wished to speak with you about.



But when do you start actually helping?



Aiko!

What? It's true!

Last week Inarisama gave Lady Tomo a book called "Goddling for Dummies."

I apologize, Inarisama. Aiko means well,

But I believe that she has grown somewhat... *frustrated.*

Have you not grown frustrated, Little Bird?

Yet you've never opened your beak to complain.

Not even once.

I've seen how your feathers have begun to wilt. They no longer glisten as they once did, and your eyes have lost their spark.

I don't have that luxury any longer, do I? We've been invaded once, and it could happen again.

You can help me become stronger...

What's this? The Little Bird has some fight left after all!

if you would only choose to do so.

Have you not approved of my methods?

Frankly? No.

Inarisama, I requested your help, yet you've openly mocked me and my people. At the very least I want the stone.

The stone? Are you certain that you are willing to take such a risk? The legends say that those who receive the stone are either granted their wish or insanity.

Do you desire to become a true ruler so badly that you'd risk your mind?

Yes. With them I am strong enough.

Inarisama, I challenge you to a battle of wits.



For the stone?



Yes.



To insanity?



Yes.



I accept.

You're dangerously close to showing some backbone, Lady Tamo.

Would you care to join me for some tea?

It depends. What are you going to face it with this time?



Only your reflection,
Little Bird.

I knew that the
mangy mutt
was nutty!

We should
have called
that dragon
god for help.

Now dragons
really know their...



I assure you,
Generals, that
I'm quite sane.



As for you, Tomo, I
mean for you to face
your greatest enemy.

The foe you see every
day in the mirror.

The one who knows your
every doubt and insecurity.
Can you overcome her?
Is the risk worth the stone?

It is.

The stone is worth any risk
if it keeps my people safe.




Lady Tomoi

Uh...

What did you do to her?

Gulp



Exactly what she asked.

She'll have to face her true self, and she may not recognize who that person is.

I wonder if any of you will recognize her.

Joining us?

I'm not going anywhere until Lady Tomo is well.

Tell me, are your comrades still waiting outside? No matter. They'll be joining you soon.

Not sure that's what he means, Hansuke.

I swear, if you hurt her I'll...

Thud

I'll...





They must love you.

To be so connected that they'd follow you into such a spell without meaning to.

Are you sure you even need the stone, Little Bird?



Uhh...

Wh-- what happened?

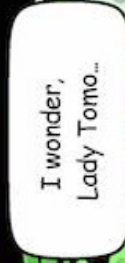
My clothes...

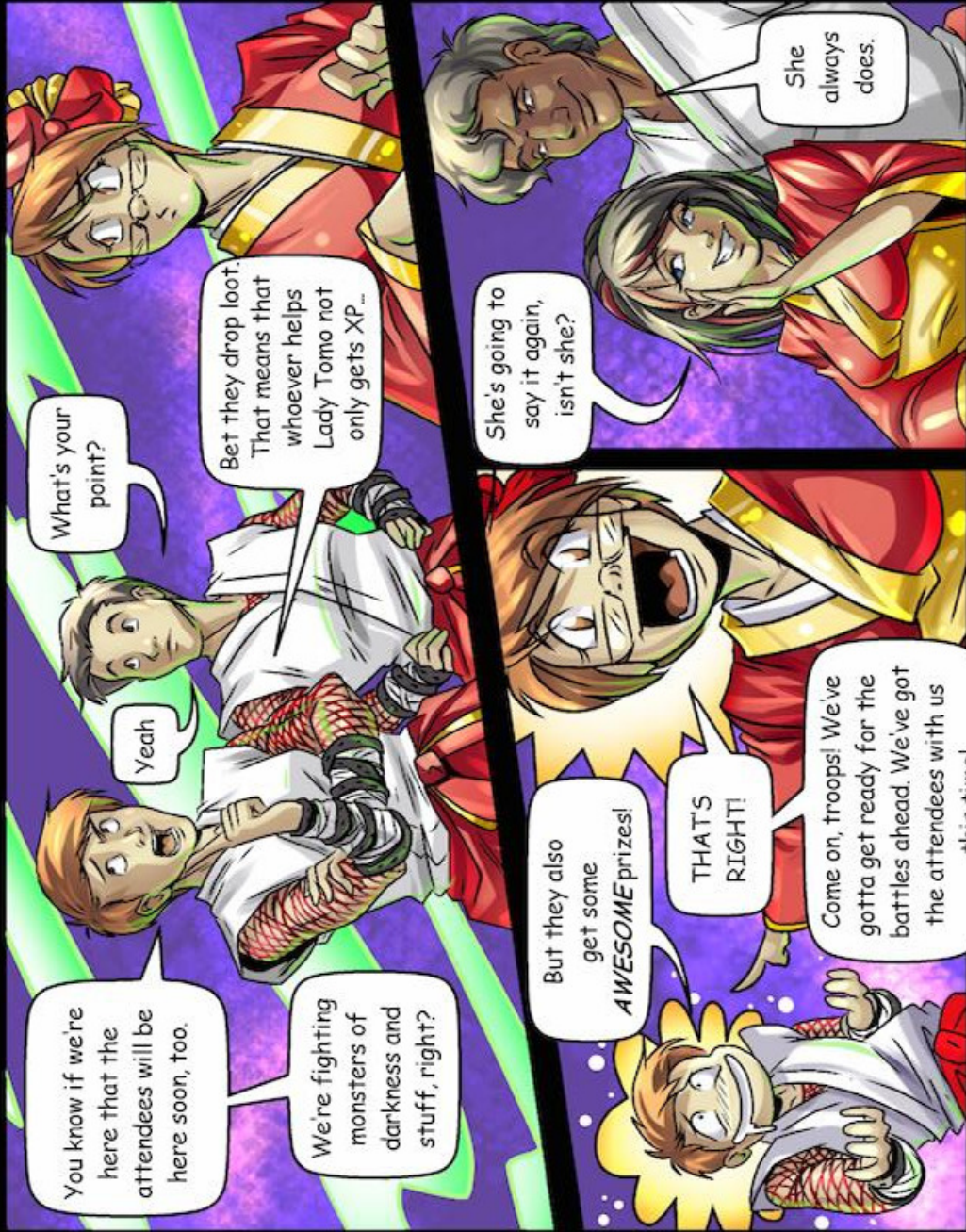


My hair...

Where...

Where ARE we?





You know if we're here that the attendees will be here soon, too.

We're fighting monsters of darkness and stuff, right?

Yeah

What's your point?

Bet they drop loot. That means that whoever helps Lady Tomo not only gets XP...

But they also get some **AWESOME** prizes!

THAT'S RIGHT!

Come on, troops! We've gotta get ready for the battles ahead. We've got the attendees with us this time!

She's going to say it again, isn't she?

She always does.



FOR

NAKA KON!

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