

MANGA:

The manga was a project wherein various artists sent in their sketches after they read my excerpts.

THE EXCERPT for PRIMARY CHARACTERS

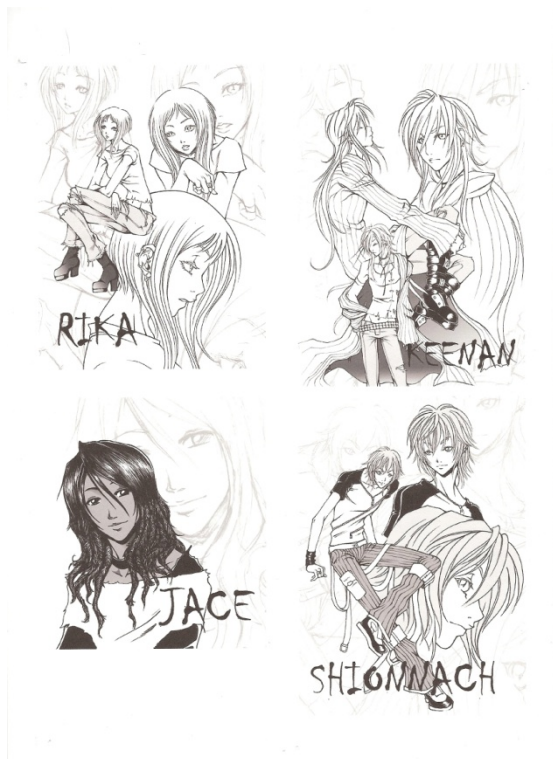
Rika: Her short hair is just long enough that it brushes her shoulder as her head tilts. We can see her multi-pierced earlobe. A bar runs horizontally at the top of her ear. She's not uber-girly. She's a jeans girl, tattered jeans, ripped by activity not design. She's not bulky, but not waif thin either. Her arms have the sort of muscles one gets when one hikes, rockwalls, et al. Thin, but firm. (NOTE: As established in WL, Rika is of Nordic ancestry. Blonde, blue-eyed, good cheek bones.)

Keenan: (quotes directly from *Wicked Lovely*) He glowed faintly all the time, as if hot coals burned inside him. His collar-length hair shimmered like strands of copper . . . tan and too beautiful to touch, walking with an swagger that said he knew exactly how attractive he was. He moved as if he were in charge of everyone and everything, seeming taller for it. But he wasn't really that tall. . . almost average in size, only a head taller than she was. . . From the hems of his faded jeans to his heavy wool coat, he was too up-town. He'd dulled his copper hair to sandy-blonde, hidden that strange rustle of summer, but even in his human glamour, he was too pretty to be real.

Jace: He has dreads-in-progress, not quite the tidy dreadlocks, but semi-formed. They are dark, dark brown, with a few dyed purple. Sometimes his hair is pulled back in a sort of ponytail at the base of his neck. Strands escape. It's casual. He has NO piercings or tattoos at all. Think granola-guy--unbleached cotton, jeans that are frayed at the bottom, battered rucksack with notebook, pen, water bottle. No ipod for him, he's a rockhound & hiker. He wears the approp layered clothing for milling about in the desert--tank (what is called a "wife beater" in slang), button up or tee over it, loose, casual clothes that can get tattered. Not into appearances.

Sionnach (Gaelic for "fox"): He has fox-ish features, short auburn hair, extra angular eyes (not Asian, but slightly larger, slightly elongated, odd pupils), extra pronounced features as if his cheeks are edged too sharply, quick, agile, just enough out of normal mortal proportions that you want too look at him longer, but not so Other that he is required to hide under a glamour. He calls for second glances though. Grinning/smiling like he's terribly amused by secrets no one else knows, hears jokes others don't . . . smart ass persona, with moments of sageness. Wiry, lithe, not bony but not at all bulky. He is called "Shy" because he *isn't*.

THE SKETCHES THAT I LOVED AND INSISTED HAD TO BE THE ARTIST:



MY VERY FIRST DRAFT

Rika is in a desert setting--not a Saguaro desert, but Mojave/Anza-Borrego, lovely rock faces & maybe Joshua Trees, some cholla cactus, flowering prickly pears (et al). It's stark, lovely, and solitary. Rika looks happy.

Keenan appears (as if he steps out of a swirling dust devil).

R: "Why?"

K: Why what?

R: *disbelieving expression* Why do you bother me?

Keenan, without arrogance but still irritating, makes a gesture and the sand forms into chairs as if they were in a shop. The chairs have striations. "Is it such a bother to talk to me?"

Rika steps further from him. She watches the sand lifting & shifting over the expanse of desert. She doesn't look at him. "Yes. I think it is."

"Even now?" Keenan sits down. Heat radiates from him, to him, as if his skin is breathing the extreme temperature in and out. "You're free of the--"

R turns to face him: "I dream of it. I wake up convinced that winter is still inside my veins. Did you know that? What you did--"

"I didn't *do* that to you." Keenan unpleasant expression.

"Did you choose me?" Rika has her head tilted as she looks at him. Her short hair is just long enough that it brushes her shoulder as her head tilts. We can see her multi-pierced earlobe. A bar runs horizontally at the top of her ear.

"I did, but--"

"Did I have to carry ice in my body for years, decades, because you made a mistake?"

"Yes, but--"

"So why wouldn't it bother me to see you?"

He pushes back his hair, frustrated. The copper strands are like solidified sunlight.

She sits down (one foot on the ground, one foot beside her knee on the chair, her bent knee up by her chest) finally, posture far more assertive now. (As she's been talking, getting angrier, she's more forward, less intimidated by him.) Her jeans are ripped in the knee.

FIRST DRAFT in paragraph form:

Rika is in a desert setting--**not** a Saguaro desert, but Mojave/Anza-Borrego, lovely rock faces and maybe Joshua Trees, some cholla cactus, flowering prickly pears (et al). It's stark, lovely, and solitary. Rika looks happy.

She's not uber-girly. She's a jeans girl, tattered jeans, ripped by activity not design. Her arms have the sort of muscles one gets when one hikes, rockwalls, et al. Thin, but firm. (NOTE: As established in WL, Rika is of Nordic ancestry. Blonde, blue-eyed, good cheek bones.)

Keenan appears, coming across the ground like he's moving out of a swirling dust devil.

Rika's expression is hurt, nervous at seeing him. "Why?"

"Why what?"

Rika has a disbelieving expression; her words are careful as she asks, "Why do you bother me?"

Ignoring her, Keenan makes a gesture and the sand forms into chairs as if they were in a shop. The chairs have striations. He isn't quite posturing, but he is clearly aware of his appearance. Then the sand around him stills as he asks, "Is it such a bother to talk to me?"

Rika steps further away from him. She watches the sand in the distance, lifting & shifting over the expanse of desert. She doesn't look at him. "Yes. I think it is."

"Even now?" Keenan sits down. Heat radiates from him, to him, as if his skin is breathing the extreme temperature in and out. "You're free of the--"

Rika turns to face him. She looks vulnerable. "I still dream of it. I wake up convinced that winter is still inside my veins. Did you know that? What you did--"

"I didn't *do* that to you." Keenan has an unpleasant expression, irritated that she is still acting like this.

"Did you choose me?" Rika has her head tilted as she looks at him. Her short hair is just long enough that it brushes her shoulder as her head tilts. We can see her multi-pierced earlobe. A bar runs horizontally at the top of her ear.

"I did, but--"

"Did I have to carry ice in my body for years, decades, because you made a mistake?"

"Yes, but--"

"So why *wouldn't* it bother me to see you?"

He pushes back his hair, frustrated. The copper strands are like solidified sunlight.

She sits down (one foot on the ground, one foot beside her knee on the chair, her bent knee up by her chest) finally, her posture is far more assertive. (As she's been talking, getting angrier, she's more forward, less intimidated by him.) Her jeans are ripped in the knee. "So, what do you want?"

"I thought I'd let you know that Donia's . . . the new Winter Queen." K's eye clouded. Rainclouds in the sky form and match his expression, a sudden summer storm rumble over the desert. The shadow of the clouds on the ground stretches and darkens.

"I know." Rika's anger lessens; her expression is almost gentle. "She'll be a good queen. . . and good at standing against you."

Lightening hits the ground behind her. Rika laughs. Keenan's pique was always more entertaining than his melancholia.

He looks at her, scowls, & stand. The chairs crumble back to sand as he moves. She doesn't bother moving, letting herself lean into the sand, watching the streams of sand flow over her leg, into the rips in her jeans. She grins up at him from the desert floor.

His face is emotionless, but lightening jags around them--revealing what his face doesn't. Still he is solicitous. "If you need anything, we are both there to call upon." The rain hits, soaking her, but sizzling to steam before it touched him. He adds, "Things will be unstable--"

Wet and sand covered, R sits on the desert floor and laughs at the Summer King. "Ya think?"

SCENE BREAK

After Keenan left, Rika walked. Even the desert sand, slipping over her skin from errant breezes wasn't warm enough. The heat in *his* presence was like standing before long-remembered fire grates. *Before*. Before the winter, before him, before she lost everything . . . Once she'd dreamed of love, of family, of so many things that were no longer in her reach. Perhaps they'd not have held up to the dreams she'd had, but she'd never know now. She'd fallen in love with a faery and lost her humanity in the process.

[NOTE: I don't know if imagery of this works for you. I'm going to keep writing her thoughts though with the expectation that you'll use what you need to convey the story.]

She shook her head. Thinking about the long line of mistakes that had led to her self-exile wouldn't improve her mood. In the distance she saw the mortals who lingered in the canyons with their motorcycles and hiking gear. She'd watched them often enough without their knowing. That was one of the few benefits of being not-human, of being faery. She could don a glamour or be invisible and inaudible to humans. That and her extra strength were gifts. The other, immortality, felt like more like a curse.

Joshua trees and soft desert colours were all around her. The typical desert highly defined clouds, casting shadows on the expanse of the desert floor, felt better than the confines of cities and the inevitable clutter of mortals there. She was faery enough to loath the steel in the cities.

While she invisible to the humans, she'd watched them--for far too many hours.

The faeries in the desert didn't come near her. They never did. She could see them as she walked. Like most desert dwellers, they were peering at her from where they were half-hidden behind the shelter of canyon walls, eyelet canyons, and caves or they were moving with that languid gait that says *time is infinite here*. Sionnach wasn't with them. That made her nervous. She might not trust the fox-faery, but he kept some loose rein



over them--not ruling, as solitaires had no proper courts by their choice or by their nature. They did listen to him sporadically though. She almost listened to him. He was the only one she talked to semi-regularly.

Rika thought, *He is probably off wooing mortals, lingering in some community college course, taking a stroll in search of trouble to start. Anything to keep his boredom in check*. He was everything she wasn't--comfortable with them, happy around them, AND around the fey. She, however, didn't reveal herself to the humans. Her life was as solitary as it had been when she was Winter Girl. *Except for Sionnach*.

The humans were atop a cliff. **[NOTE: I'm thinking of Rainbow Canyon, so I've included a snapshot above to make up for my inability to describe that sort of rock texture. It's not slick or just edgy, but it's a very specific texture.]**

Faeries scabbled up and across the rock face, like misshapen crabs--too harsh, too angular, too stark. They were almost human in their appearance, but with a worn meanness. Unlike her, they were too elongated, too angular. They had never been mortals. They were always something Other. These were the solitaires that retreated to the desert when the Winter Queen had reigned. They were too weak to live in the pervasive cold. They were too long in the desert to want to return to civilization now that Keenan was strong.

Then a word rang out, loud in the still of the desert. "Oopsy."

The mortal fell backwards.

Jace: He has dreads-in-progress, not quite the tidy dreadlocks, but semi-formed. They are dark, dark brown, with a few dyed purple. Sometimes his hair is pulled back in a sort of ponytail at the base of his neck. Strands escape. It's casual. He has NO piercings or tattoos at all. Think granola-guy--unbleached cotton, jeans that are frayed at the bottom. He wears the approp layered clothing for milling about in the desert--tank (what is called a "wife beater" in slang), button up or tee over it, loose, casual clothes that can get tattered. Not into appearances.

He shifted with surprisingly quick reflexes for a mortal. He was angling himself to take the impact with his hip and side. The fall would still damage him, but not as much as if he'd hit spine first.

Rika didn't think. She simply reacted. She caught him, and then realized as she did so that she'd become visible **and** that she looked too frail to catch a mortal in her arms.

After a brief hesitation, she let her legs give out from under her and toppled to the sand with the mortal atop her. Limbs tangled, they lay on the desert floor.

THE FINAL DRAFT (given to the editors & Irene):

Then she looks up in the same direction Jace had looked. The storm is close enough that she sees a swirling dust devil racing over the ground.

She looks alarmed.

Keenan is in it, coming across the ground in the midst of the dust devil. We see him in the midst of the sand before he is right up at her. Then he is touchably close. Spirals of wind and sand whip out around him even as he stops in front of her.

Rika's expression is hurt, nervous at seeing him. "Why?"

"Why what?" Keenan has stilled, but the air around him hasn't. Sand is uplifted.

Rika has a disbelieving expression; her words are careful. "Why do you bother me?"

Keenan makes a gesture and the sand forms into chairs as if they were in a shop. [The chairs look as solid as sandstone cliffs, like rocks with striations. They are at slight angles to each other, as if they were at a small two-person table in a coffee shop.] He isn't quite posturing, but he is clearly aware of his appearance. Then the sand around him drops as he asks, "Is it such a bother to talk to me?"

Rika steps further away from him. She looks to a rocky cliff in the distance, past the expanse of desert. "Yes. I think it is."

"Even now?" Keenan sits down. Heat radiates from him, to him, as if his skin is breathing the extreme temperature in and out. "You're free of the--"

Rika turns to face him. She looks vulnerable. "I still dream of it. I wake up convinced that winter is still inside my veins. What you did--"

"I didn't *do* that to you." Keenan has an unpleasant expression.

"Did you choose me?" Rika has her head tilted as she looks at him. Her short hair is just long enough that it brushes her shoulder as her head tilts. We can see her multi-pierced earlobe. A bar runs horizontally at the top of her ear. "Did you convince me that you loved me?"

"I did, but--"

"Did I carry ice in my body for years because of that mistake?" She steps closer.

"Yes, but--"

"So why *wouldn't* it bother me to see you?" She steps even closer and is in his space.

He pushes back his hair, frustrated. The copper strands are like solidified sunlight.

She stares at him up at him. She's tiny, but fierce. "Look at where we are. Cities are poisonous to me, Keenan. *Iron, steel*, it leaves me sick . . ."

He doesn't flinch or back away. "That's part of being faery. Almost all faeries have that limitation. It's not--"

She interrupts, "--fair, Keenan. It's not *fair*."

She turns her back and sits down in one of the chairs. (She has one foot on the ground, the other foot beside her knee on the chair so her bent is knee up by her chest) finally, her posture is far more assertive. (As she's been talking, getting angrier, she's more forward, less intimidated by him.) Her jeans are ripped in the knee.

"It's not *unusual*," he corrected. "I was going to say it's not *unusual*. Faeries are weakened by steel and iron. It's just the way we always have been."

"I wasn't always like this. I was human before you."

"A long time ago. I can't take it back." He reaches out as if he'd touch her. The sand-filled breeze looks ever-so-slightly like fingertips brushing her cheek. "I *did* love you."

"That was a long time ago too. And look where it left me . . ." We see the vast desolation of the desert around her. It's wide open and stark, and she's small in it.

With irritation, Keenan flicks his hand out. The sand sifts and myriad paths--like unpaved roads--form like patterns stretching across the desert. "So go. You're far stronger than you admit. You can leave."

She blushes as she looks away from him and at that distant cliff again. [This is where Jace is.]
"What do you want?"

"That's what I was trying to say before . . ." Keenan scowls. "I'd came to let you know that I'm un-bound and that Donia's . . . the new Winter Queen."

Keenan's eyes clouded. Rainclouds in the sky form and match his expression, a sudden summer storm rumble over the desert. The shadow of the clouds on the ground stretches and darkens.

"I know. We heard when it happened." Rika's anger lessens; her expression is almost gentle.
"She'll be a good queen. . . and good at standing against you. She never forgave you at all."

Lightening hits the ground behind her.

Rika laughs. Keenan's pique was always more entertaining than his melancholia.

"And *you* did?" He looks at her, scowls, & stands. The chairs crumble back to sand as he moves.

Rika doesn't bother moving, letting herself lean into the sand, watching the streams of sand flow over her leg, into the rips in her jeans. She grins up at him from the desert floor. "No, but I haven't loved you in forever. It makes a difference."

His face is emotionless, but lightening jags around them--revealing what his face doesn't. Still he is solicitous. "If you need anything, we are both there to call upon."

"Actually Sionnach is *here* if I need anything," she murmurs. Then she holds his gaze. "I'm solitary, Keenan. Those of us in the desert . . . we don't belong to you even now that you are so much stronger. That won't change."

"If you need me--"

"There would be a price." She is rueful. "I've paid my dues for your 'help.' I learn from my mistakes."

The rain hits, soaking her, but sizzling to steam before it touched him. He adds, "The Summer Court is stronger, but things will be unstable for now . . . even out here. Not everyone's happy with the power shift."

Wet and sand covered, R sits on the desert floor and laughs at the Summer King. "You think? We already know that. What do you really want?"

"To protect you."

She shakes her head; all signs of laughing are gone. "I don't need you."

"I--"

"Faeries don't lie, Keenan. I can't lie." She stands up, brushes the sand from her pants. "I don't need you. I don't want you in my life in ANY way."

"If you make a vow of fealty to me, I can keep you safe."

"A vow to you?" She gives him a disdainful look. "No thanks."

"Other solitaires have joined my court . . . It's not so odd." Keenan looks earnest, genuine, and eager. "You could talk the others out here and--"

"No. I won't ask them to join the Summer Court." She holds his gaze.

Keenan steps closer. Winds spins around them, so it's as if it's just the two of them. "I never meant to hurt you. You *know* me. It's a simple vow. Then my court can step in if anyone needs--"

"Your court isn't needed in my desert, Keenan." Rika gives him a dismissive look. "We handle things differently out here."

"You're being foolish, Rika. Letting grudges get in the way."

She makes a dismissing gesture with her hand and walks away from him, toward the cliff. She knows he's watching her, can feel the swirls of sand stirring as he resists his anger. Then in a gust of wind, he leaves.

Melodramatic as always, she thinks.

But she looks after him briefly. Even the desert sand, slipping over her skin from errant breezes isn't warm enough. She shivers.

Break

Rika is walking in the desert. *I hate seeing him*, she thinks. She shakes her head.

A couple of tears slide down her cheeks. She wipes them away angrily and looks towards the mortals in the distance. They are climbing up the rockwall of one of the canyons. Three motorcycles, two with saddlebags and camping gear strapped down, sit in the shadow of the canyon.

"At least they can't see me," she says as she walks towards them.

Joshua trees and soft desert colours were all around her. [Typical desert vista of highly defined clouds, casting shadows on the expanse of the desert floor.]

Rika walks across the sand, a soft smile starting as she looks at Jace. "Although if . . ." She stops herself. *He's nothing like Keenan.*

"It would be a mistake." But she still stares at him.

The faeries in the desert don't come near her as she passes them. They never do. She can see them as she walked. Like most desert dwellers, they peer from where they are half-hidden behind the shelter of canyon walls, eyelet canyons, and caves. Those out in the direct sun are moving with that languid gait that says time is infinite here.

They don't approach, but they do call out at her from various directions, making it clear that she is surrounded.

"Rika. Hey Rika."

"Come 'ere."

"No, over here."

Various faeries smile and beckon her nearer. Some smiles look friendly; others look menacing.

Rika tenses. "Where's Sionnach?"

She looks around, tracking where they all are. *Too many for me to handle if they attack me.*

"Shy's out playing." A faery [girl with sand-striated skin and short spiky hair] answered. Her face is expressionless. Her eyes are solid black, no irises. She has two inch long fingernails that make her already long fingers look eerily long. Everything about her is too long and thin and pointy.

Another faery, mostly hidden in shadows, said, "He's out wooing mortals."

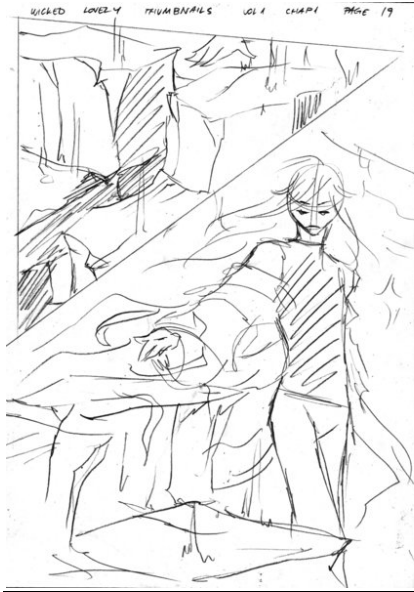
The thin faery grins then. Her lips are obviously too thin as well. "Not here. Not even near here."

She waves at a group of faeries just a bit further away--near the humans where they stand atop a small cliff.

The faeries scabble up and across the rock face, like misshapen crabs--too harsh, too angular, too stark. They were almost human in their appearance, but with a worn meanness. Unlike Rika, they are all too elongated, too angular. They had never been mortals. They were always something Other.

SOME OF IRENE and LAURA's (Xian Nu Studios) ART of these sections:





NOTE: Thumbnails, pencils, ink, & tones/final (All 3 stages are sent to the editors & to me for feedback & approval. This is done for each and every panel.)

