

THE TRUE STORY OF ODYSSEUS, ONCE KING OF ITHACA
- BY HIMSELF -

----- BOOK 2 -----
IN THE LAND OF LOTUS EATERS



Panko





THE TRUE STORY
OF ODYSSEUS
ONCE KING OF ITHACA
- BY HIMSELF -

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SCRIPT AND ILLUSTRATIONS BY PANKO

MIDNIGHT PUBLISHING

ΤΩΝ Δ' ΟΣ ΤΙΣ ΛΩΤΟΙΟ ΦΑΓΟΙ ΜΕΛΙΗΔΕΑ ΚΑΡΠΟΝ, ΟΥΚΕΤ'
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Homer, "The Odyssey", ix 94-97

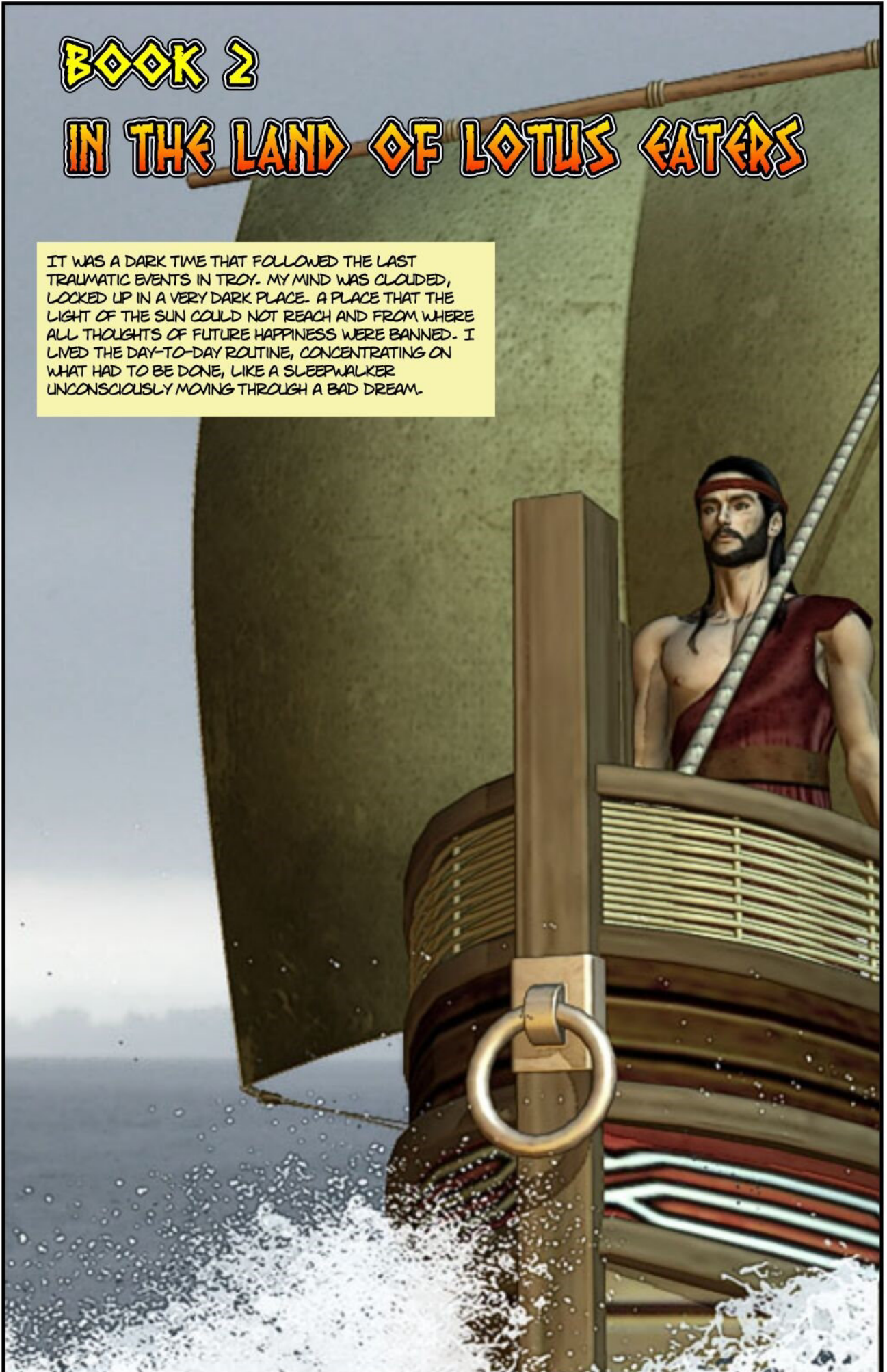
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P.O. Box 26 Hydra 18040
Greece
email: panflynn@otenet.gr



BOOK 2

IN THE LAND OF LOTUS EATERS

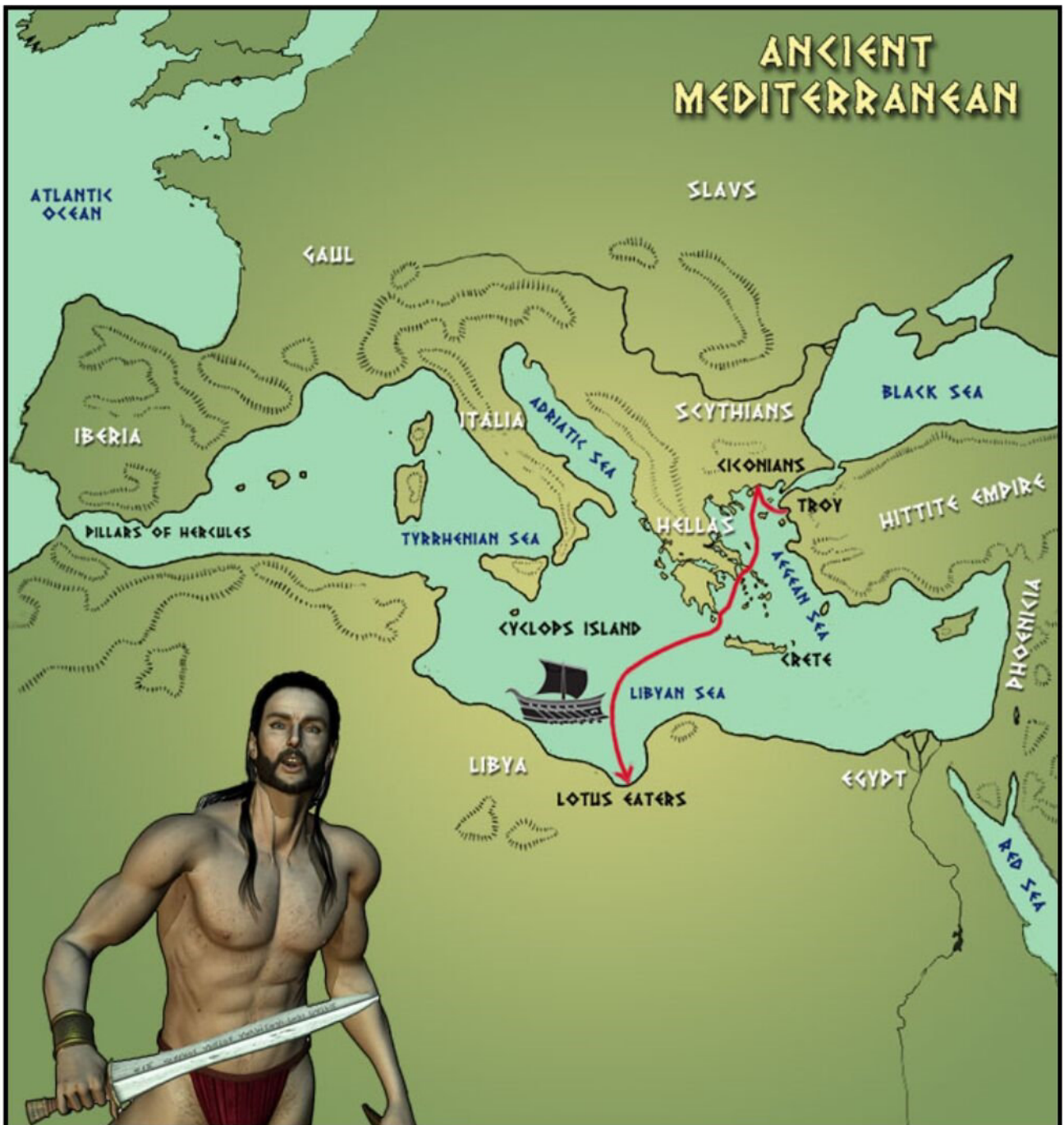
IT WAS A DARK TIME THAT FOLLOWED THE LAST TRAUMATIC EVENTS IN TROY. MY MIND WAS CLOUDED, LOCKED UP IN A VERY DARK PLACE. A PLACE THAT THE LIGHT OF THE SUN COULD NOT REACH AND FROM WHERE ALL THOUGHTS OF FUTURE HAPPINESS WERE BANNED. I LIVED THE DAY-TO-DAY ROUTINE, CONCENTRATING ON WHAT HAD TO BE DONE, LIKE A SLEEPWALKER UNCONSCIOUSLY MOVING THROUGH A BAD DREAM.



MY GREEDY MEN, NOT SATISFIED WITH THE RICHES THEY HAD AMASSED FROM THE PLUNDER OF TROY, INSISTED THAT WE SHOULD RAID A PLACE CALLED ISMARUS, THE LAND OF THE CICONIANS, WHO HAD FOUGHT IN TROY ON THE SIDE OF THE TROJANS.

I LET THEM DO AS THEY PLEASED -I COULDN'T CARE LESS. AND SO WE LANDED IN THE THRACIAN LAND AND ONCE AGAIN THEY APPLIED THEMSELVES TO DO WHAT THEY KNEW BEST: KILLING, BURNING, PILLAGING AND RAPING. IT WAS ONLY WHEN THE CICONIAN WARRIORS FELL UPON THEM AND CAUSED THE DEATH OF SOME 70 MEN, THAT THEY AGREED TO GET BACK TO THE SHIPS AND RESUME OUR TRIP BACK HOME.

BUT WHEN WE REACHED THE CAPE MALEAS WE CAME ACROSS STRONG NORTH WINDS THAT PUSHED THE FLEET FURTHER AND FURTHER SOUTH SOUTH-WEST AND BROUGHT US TO A STRANGE, SUNNY LAND.



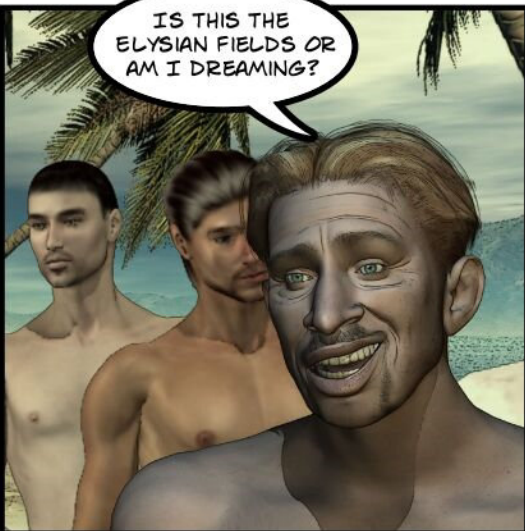
THE LAND IN WHICH THE ADVERSE WINDS PUSHED US WAS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL PLACE ANY OF US HAD EVER SEEN. WHITE SANDS, SHADY TREES, CLEAR, BLUE SKIES AND MIRROR CALM WATERS WERE PROMISING A PLEASANT REST FOR THE WEARY TRAVELLER.



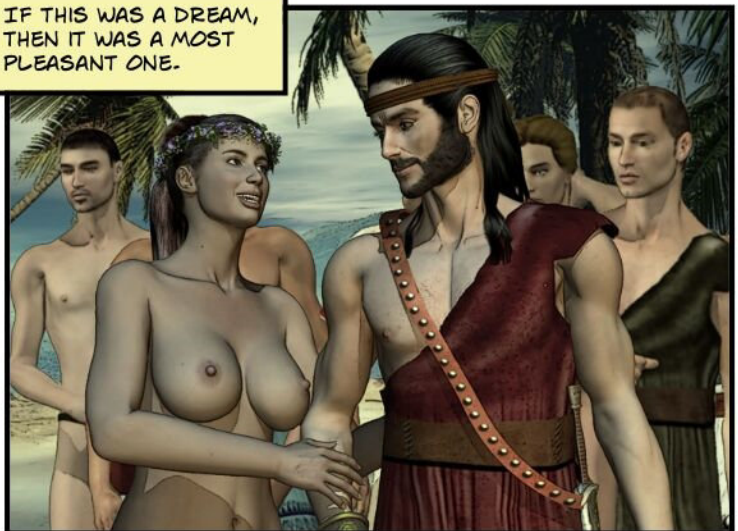
THE PEOPLE WERE BEAUTIFUL AND FRIENDLY AND THEY RECEIVED US WARMLY.



IS THIS THE ELYSIAN FIELDS OR AM I DREAMING?



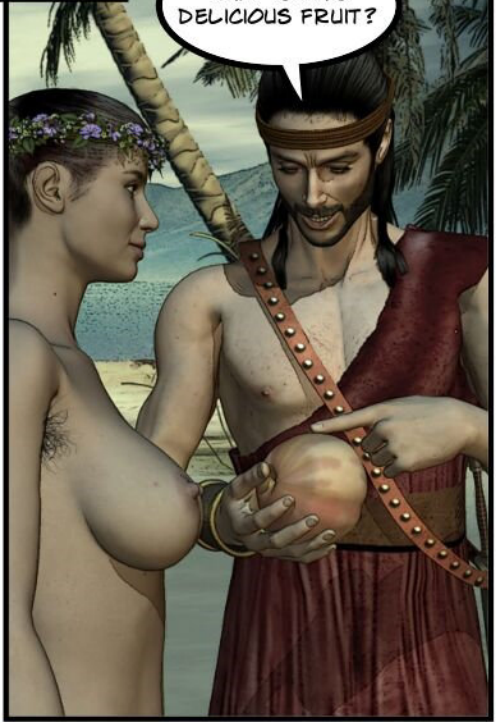
IF THIS WAS A DREAM, THEN IT WAS A MOST PLEASANT ONE.



THE PEOPLE, MOSTLY WOMEN, BROUGHT US FRUITS AND PALM-TREE WINE FOR US TO EAT AND DRINK. THIS FOOD WAS UNLIKE ANY I HAD EVER TASTED.



WHAT IS THIS DELICIOUS FRUIT?



IT IS CALLED THE LOTUS. FOOD OF THE GODS.



YES, FOOD OF THE GODS! IT MADE YOU FEEL RELAXED AND IN PEACE WITH THE WHOLE WORLD.



THE DARKNESS WAS DISSIPATING QUICKLY.

FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE TROY I FELT WELL.



I'VE HEARD TALES FROM OLD MARINERS ABOUT THIS LAND, WHERE THE PEOPLE LIVED IN PERPETUAL BLISS, WITHOUT THE SLIGHTEST WORRY IN THE WORLD, BUT I NEVER BELIEVED THEM.



NOW, I WAS ABOUT TO FIND OUT THAT THESE STORIES WERE TRUE.



I LET MYSELF TO SINK DEEPER AND DEEPER IN THE PLEASURES OFFERED BY THIS BLESSED PLACE.



EATING LOTUS FRUITS, DRINKING PALM-TREE WINE, MAKING LOVE TO THOSE BEAUTIFUL GIRLS...



...WAS ALL I COULD ASK FROM LIFE AT THIS TIME.

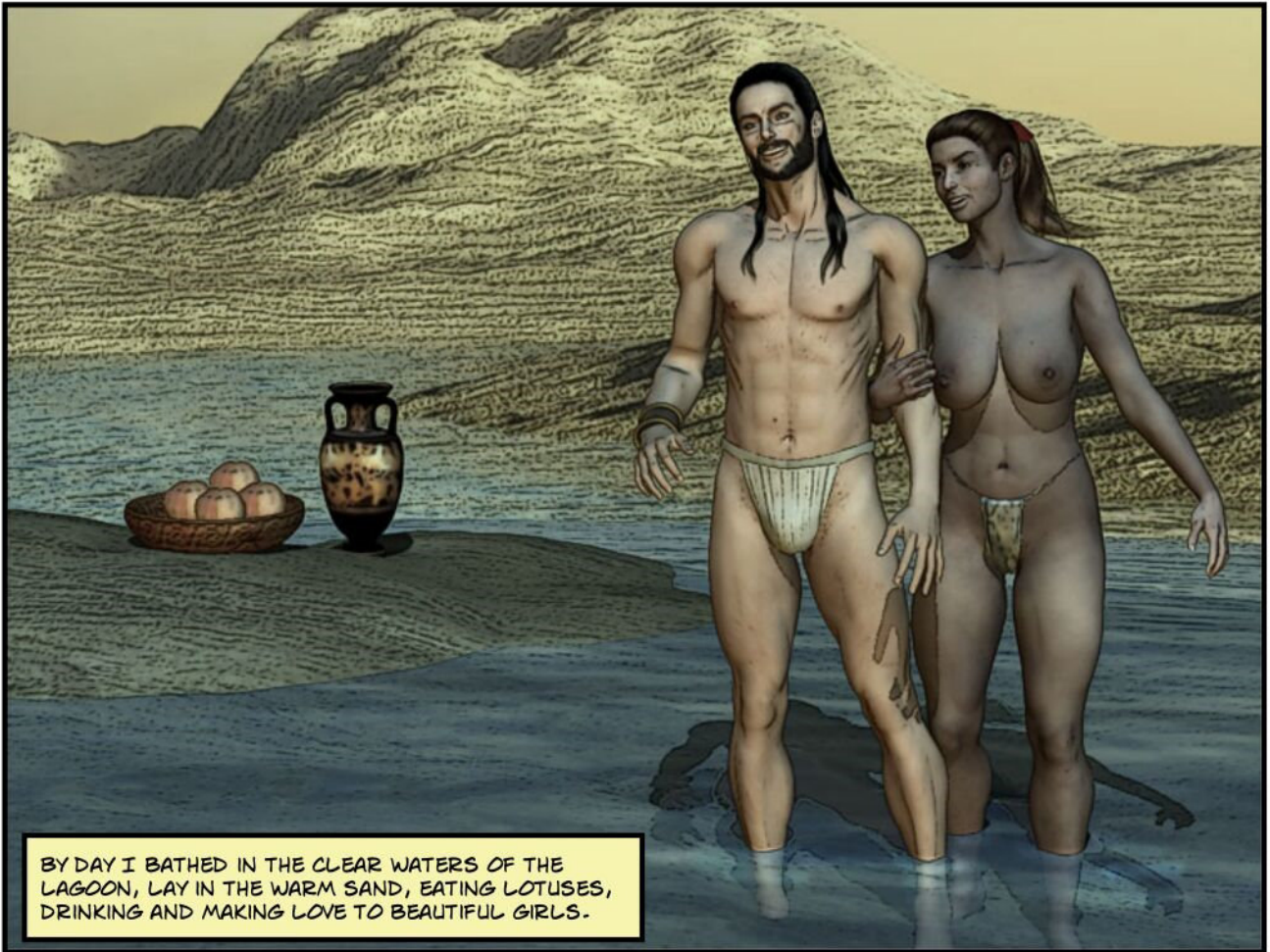


ONLY WISHING THAT THIS BLISS WILL NEVER END.



PERHAPS I HAD ALREADY DIED AND GONE TO THE ELYSIAN FIELDS. I COULDN'T CARE LESS, ONE WAY OR ANOTHER.





BY DAY I BATHED IN THE CLEAR WATERS OF THE LAGOON, LAY IN THE WARM SAND, EATING LOTUSES, DRINKING AND MAKING LOVE TO BEAUTIFUL GIRLS.



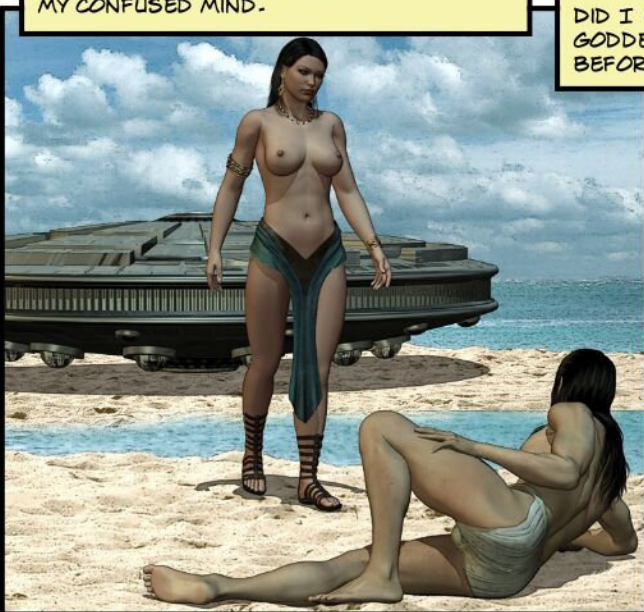
BY NIGHT I SLEPT UNDER A STAR SPARKLED SKY IN THE ARMS OF MAIDENS I HADN'T EVEN BOTHERED TO ASK FOR THEIR NAMES. I WAS DYING A HAPPY DEATH.

THEN, ONE DAY, I SAW ONE OF THE FLYING SHIELDS OF THE GODS SETTING DOWN ON THE SANDY BEACH.



THE WONDERFUL WOMAN WHO CAME OUT OF IT STIRRED SOME CLOUDED MEMORY IN MY CONFUSED MIND.

DID I KNOW THIS GODDESS? HAD I MET HER BEFORE? WHERE?



SHE CAME TO STAND OVER ME.

WHAT A NICE PICTURE
YOU'RE PRESENTING,
ODYSSEUS!





THE SOUND OF HER MELODIOUS VOICE TRIGGERED A FLASH OF A MEMORY.

ATHENA...?



SHE SAT BESIDE ME SMILING.

YOU STILL REMEMBER ME THEN...



SHE TOOK A LITTLE FLASK OUT OF HER BELT AND FORCED IT ON ME.

DRINK THIS. IT WILL CLEAR YOUR MIND -FOR A WHILE AT LEAST.



I OBEYED AND SHE WAS PROVEN RIGHT. THE VEIL OF HAZE LIFTED SLOWLY. I APOLOGIZED TO HER.

I'M SO SORRY...

YOU SHOULD BE. WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO DO? KILL YOURSELF?



I WANT TO FORGET, ATHENA. THE HORRORS...

THE GOOD MOMENTS TOO? FOR THERE HAVE BEEN SOME GOOD MOMENTS, WORTH REMEMBERING.



YOU ARE RIGHT OF COURSE...

OF COURSE I AM. LISTEN... THIS LOTUS STUFF IS A DANGEROUS AND VERY ADDICTIVE THING. IT COULD TURN YOU INTO A MINDLESS PULP ON LONG USE.



THE PEOPLE
HERE CALL IT
"FOOD OF THE
GODS".

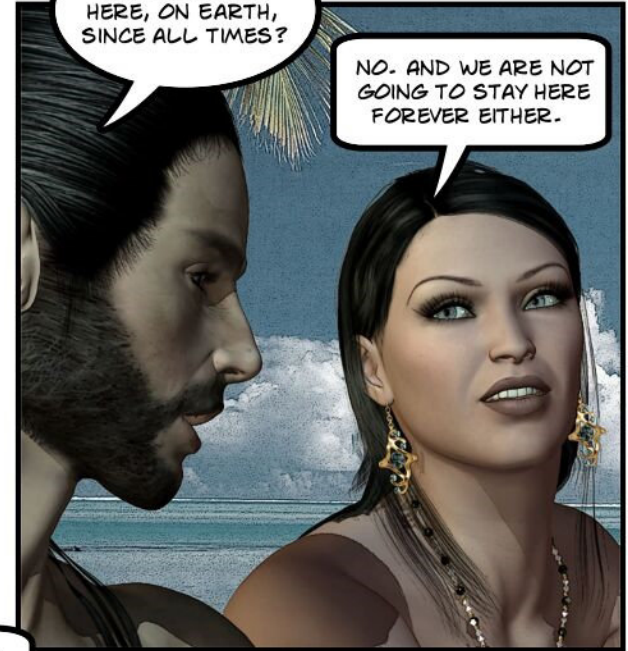
YES, WE USE IT
OURSELVES, BUT IN
COMBINATION WITH OTHER
SUBSTANCES, NOT
STRAIGHT AS IT COMES.

AND BESIDES... OUR
CONSTITUTION IS VERY
DIFFERENT FROM THIS OF
YOU, HUMANS. WE MAY
LOOK PRETTY MUCH ALIKE
BUT WE ARE NOT.



WHAT ARE YOU
EXACTLY THEN,
ATHENA?

MAYBE YOU'LL FIND
OUT, IN TIME.



HAVE YOU BEEN
HERE, ON EARTH,
SINCE ALL TIMES?

NO. AND WE ARE NOT
GOING TO STAY HERE
FOREVER EITHER.



WHERE DID
YOU COME
FROM?

IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT
FOR YOU TO UNDERSTAND.
LET'S SAY... FROM
"ELSEWHERE".



TELL ME
AT LEAST THE
REASON THAT
BROUGHT YOUR
PEOPLE HERE.

YOU COULD SAY THAT IT WAS
BY WAY OF NECESSITY.



WE SPENT THE NIGHT TOGETHER ON EACH OTHER'S ARMS UNDER THE STARLIT SKY.



AND IT WAS LIKE OLD TIMES AGAIN -AT LEAST SO FAR AS I COULD REMEMBER. MAGICAL AND TENDER.



I WOKE UP FEELING LOUSY. I WAS SHIVERING AND MY HEAD ACHE. ATHENA GAVE ME A PASTE MADE OF LOTUS FRUITS MIXED WITH SOMETHING ELSE AND ALMOST AT ONCE I FELT BETTER.

YOU NEED TO GET OUT OF HERE AS QUICKLY AS YOU CAN.

WHAT ABOUT ITHACA? YOUR WIFE?...

I HAVE NOWHERE TO GO, ATHENA.

WHERE TO? I HAVE NOWHERE TO GO.

BUT YOU MUST LEAVE THIS PLACE. OR YOU'LL DIE.

SO WHAT?

STUPID HUMAN! STUPID!

SHE APPEARED TO BE THINKING FOR A MOMENT.

I THINK I HAVE THE SOLUTION TO THIS PROBLEM, BUT YOU MUST DO AS I SAY.

WHAT PROBLEM?



AN HOUR LATER WE WERE RECEIVED BY ATHENA'S AUNT.

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नiece !

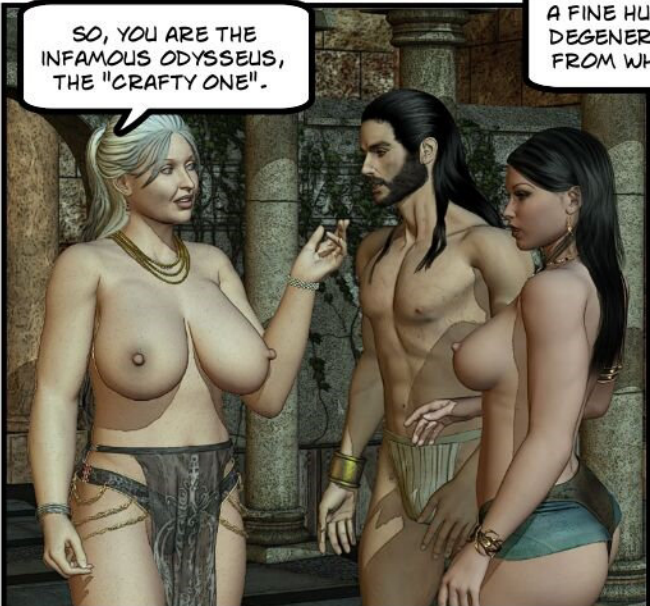
हैलो, auntie.



I WAS INTRODUCED.

SO, YOU ARE THE
INFAMOUS ODYSSEUS,
THE "CRAFTY ONE".

A FINE HUMAN SPECIMEN,
DEGENERATING RAPIDLY,
FROM WHAT I CAN SEE.





THE TWO GODDESSES CHATTED AMONG THEMSELVES FOR A LONG TIME IN THIS OUTLANDISH TONGUE OF THEIRS THAT I COULD NOT UNDERSTAND.

THEN ATHENA CAME TO ME.



I'LL COME TO CHECK ON YOU IN A COUPLE OF MONTHS. DO AS YOU ARE TOLD AND ALL WILL BE WELL. DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

YES, MY BELOVED GODDESS.



SHE KISSED ME GOODBYE AND LEFT.



HESTIA CAME TO SEE ME THE NEXT MORNING. SHE WAS MIDDLE-AGED, BUT, IN SPITE OF THE MARKS OF TIME ON HER BODY, STILL BEAUTIFUL. I WAS PUZZLED FOR I WAS UNDER THE IMPRESSION THAT THE GODS NEVER GREW OLD.

ALL BEINGS AGE, ODYSSEUS, EVEN GODS.

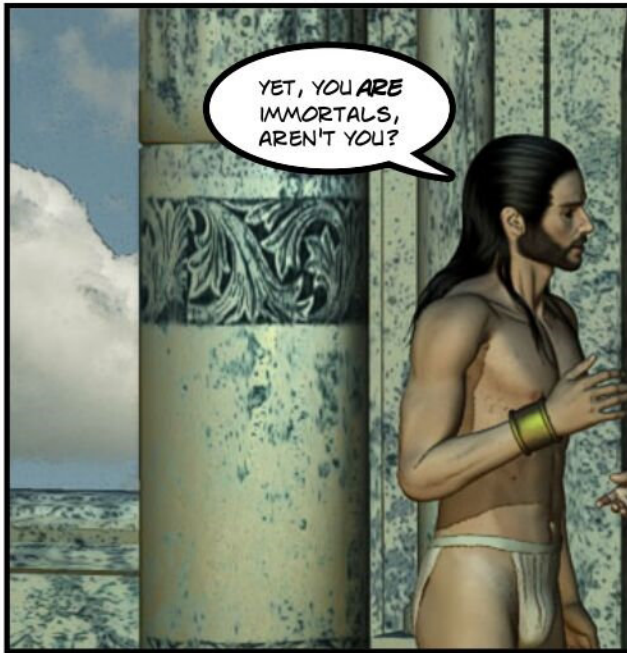


SHE MUST HAVE GUESSED (OR READ?) MY THOUGHTS.

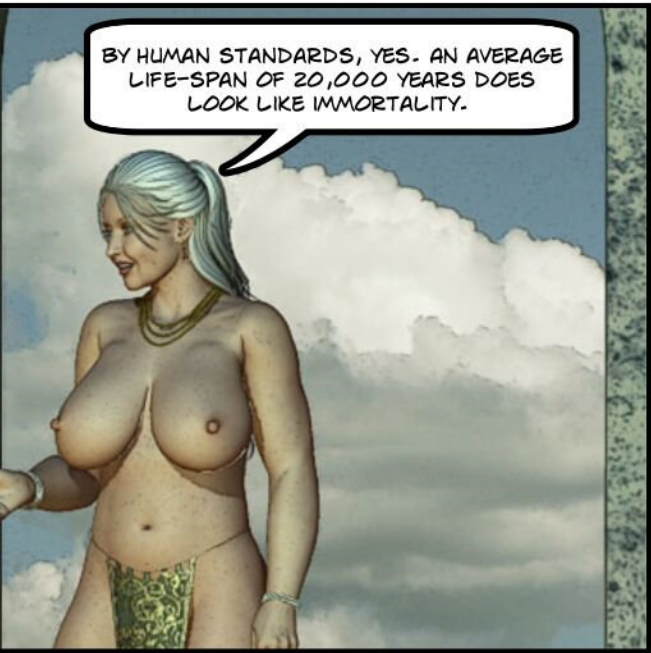
I DIDN'T MEAN TO OFFEND YOU, MY GODDESS.



YOU HAVEN'T. YOU, HUMANS, CONFUSE A LONG LIFE WITH IMMORTALITY AND IMMORTALITY WITH PERPETUAL YOUTH.



YET, YOU ARE IMMORTALS, AREN'T YOU?



BY HUMAN STANDARDS, YES. AN AVERAGE LIFE-SPAN OF 20,000 YEARS DOES LOOK LIKE IMMORTALITY.



20,000 YEARS! IT'S INCREDIBLE!

YES, IT CAN BE LONG. SOMETIMES TOO LONG.



YOU SOUND WEARY, MY GODDESS.

WELL, YOU KNOW... THE MIND IS GETTING TIRED FIRST.



YES, IT DOES. AT TIMES IT IS UNBEARABLE.

LIKE IN YOUR CASE FOR EXAMPLE?

YOU MAY SAY THAT YOU FEEL TIRED OF LIFE, HESTIA, BUT YOU STILL ARE A VERY BEAUTIFUL WOMAN.

ATHENA WARNED ME THAT YOU HAVE A WAY WITH WORDS. BUT, THANK YOU ALL THE SAME.



IT'S NOT A COMPLIMENT. I'M STATING THE OBVIOUS.

SHE LOOKED AT ME AS IF SHE WAS SEEING ME FOR THE FIRST TIME.

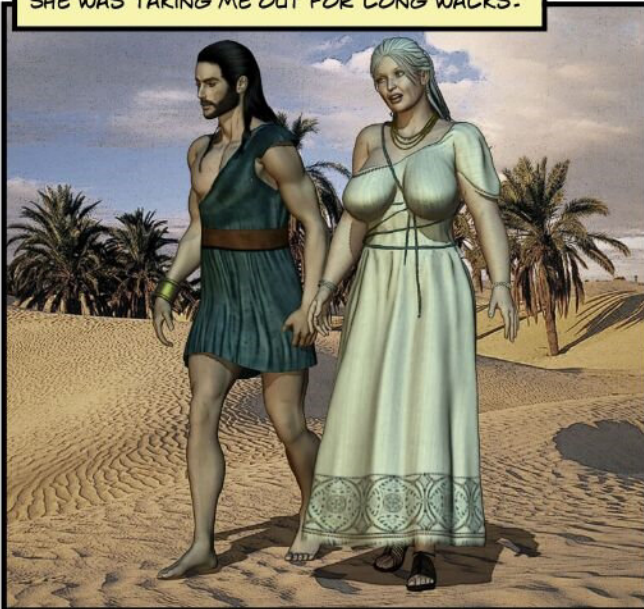
I UNDERSTAND NOW WHAT ATHENA SEES IN YOU. I THINK THAT YOUR STAY HERE WOULDN'T BE HALF AS BAD AS I FEARED.



THE DAYS THAT FOLLOWED WENT ON SMOOTHLY. HESTIA HAD ALTERED MY DIET, GRADUALLY REDUCING THE AMOUNT OF LOTUS WITH EACH MEAL, UNTIL I STARTED FEELING MYSELF AGAIN.



SHE WAS TAKING ME OUT FOR LONG WALKS.



AND TO SECLUDED BEACHES, TO BATH, AWAY FROM THE HAPPY CROWD OF THE LOTUS-EATERS AND MY COMPANIONS.



IN THE EVENINGS WE SAT BY THE FIRE AND TALKED UNTIL LATE.



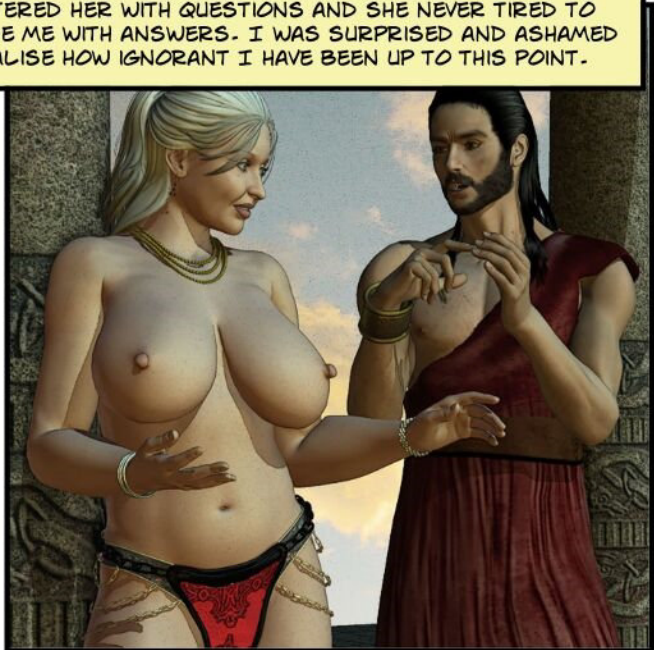
THEN I SLEPT LIKE A BABY, WITHOUT ANY DREAMS, GOOD OR BAD.



I PESTERED HER WITH QUESTIONS AND SHE NEVER TIRED TO PROVIDE ME WITH ANSWERS. I WAS SURPRISED AND ASHAMED TO REALISE HOW IGNORANT I HAVE BEEN UP TO THIS POINT.



HESTIA PROVED TO BE AN EXCELLENT COMPANION AND A SOURCE OF INEXHAUSTIBLE KNOWLEDGE.



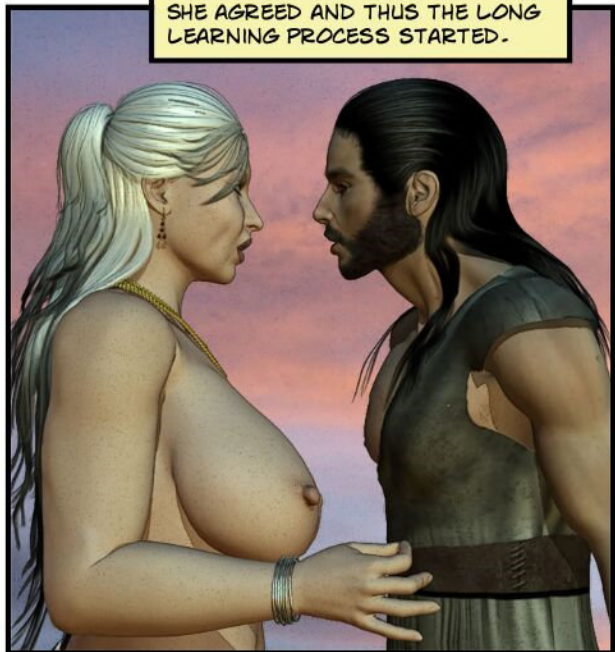
ONE DAY I ASKED HER TO TEACH ME THE LANGUAGE OF THE GODS.

WHY?

BECAUSE I'M CURIOUS.



SHE AGREED AND THUS THE LONG LEARNING PROCESS STARTED.



SHE ALSO TOLD ME ABOUT THE STARS, THE EARTH AND THE PLANETS. ONCE AGAIN I WAS STUPEFIED TO FIND OUT THAT OUR EARTH WAS BUT AN INSIGNIFICANT SPECK OF DUST IN THE ENDLESS UNIVERSE.

ONLY WHEN I BROUGHT UP THE SUBJECT OF THE ORIGIN OF THE GODS SHE WAS EVASIVE.



WE'LL TALK ABOUT THIS WHEN YOU ARE READY TO ABSORB THAT KIND OF INFORMATION. DON'T BE HASTY.





THE TRUTH IS THAT I WAS BECOMING MORE AND MORE ATTACHED TO HER WITH EVERY DAY THAT PASSED. IT WAS PUZZLING, FOR THIS WOMAN COULD EASILY BE MY GRAND-MOTHER -OR WORSE.



SHE UNDERSTOOD THIS OF COURSE, BUT SHE WAS TOO GENTLE AND TOO CONSIDERATE TO REBUKE ME.



ENCOURAGED BY HER ATTITUDE, ONE NIGHT, I MADE A BOLD MOVE.



WHY DID YOU DO THIS?

I COULDN'T HELP IT...



I'M SO FOND OF YOU!

YOU SHOULDN'T... WE SHOULDN'T...

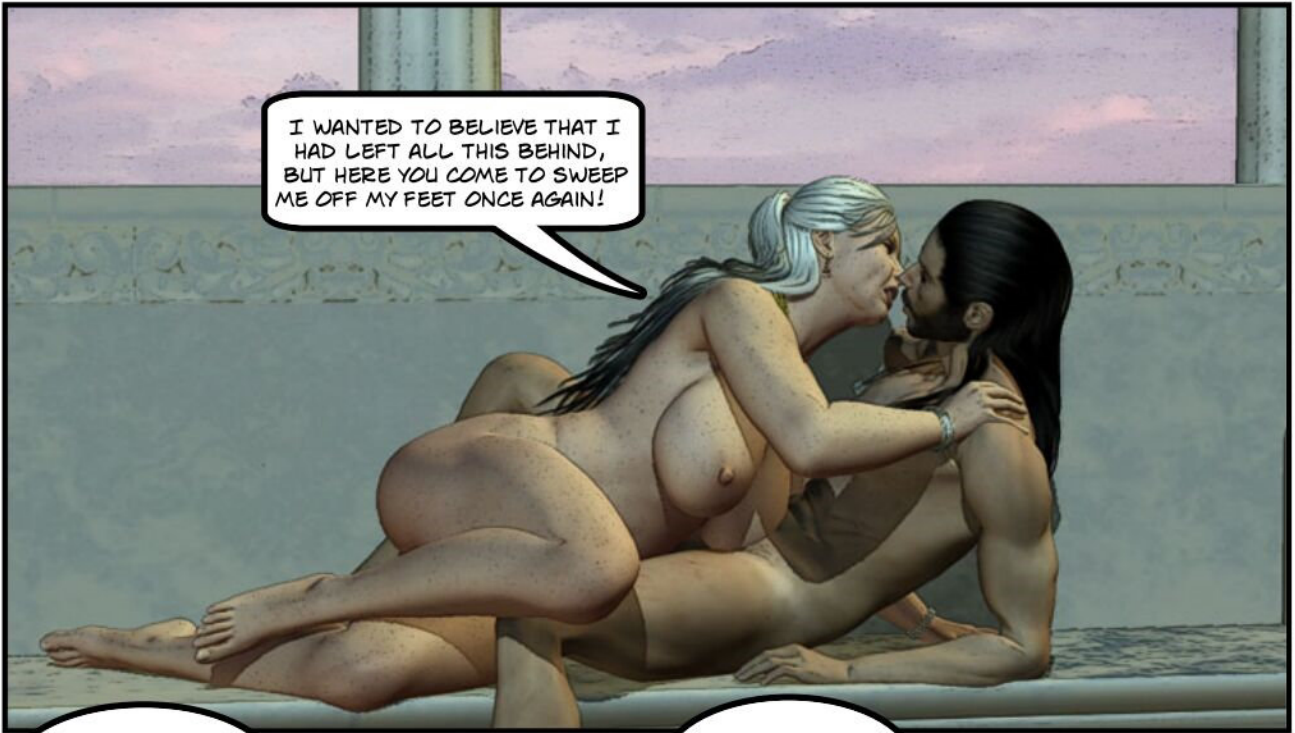
BUT I WAS LONG PAST REASON. I KISSED HER AGAIN.



AND THIS TIME THE GODDESS RESPONDED WITH SURPRISING ARDOUR.

WE SPENT THE NIGHT IN THE TERRACE, MAKING LOVE UNTIL THE FIRST LIGHT OF THE DAY LIT UP THE FAR HORIZON.





I WANTED TO BELIEVE THAT I HAD LEFT ALL THIS BEHIND, BUT HERE YOU COME TO SWEEP ME OFF MY FEET ONCE AGAIN!



YOU SPEAK OF LOVE AS IF IT WERE A BURDEN.

BUT IT IS! IT CAN BE A REAL TORTURE.

PLEASE, LIE TO ME. SAY THAT YOU DON'T REGRET IT.



ALSO A MOST BEAUTIFUL THING -LIKE TONIGHT.

OH, ODYSSEUS! YOU... MINDLESS, WONDERFUL MAN!



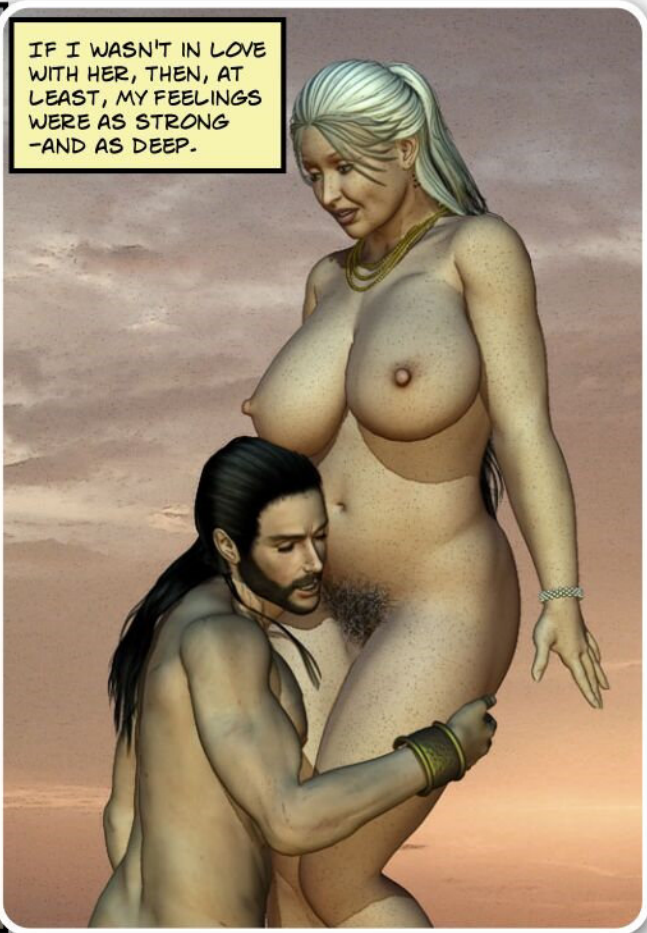
I DON'T NEED TO LIE. I'D NEVER REGRET THIS.



THEN STAY WITH ME. LET ME LOVE YOU.



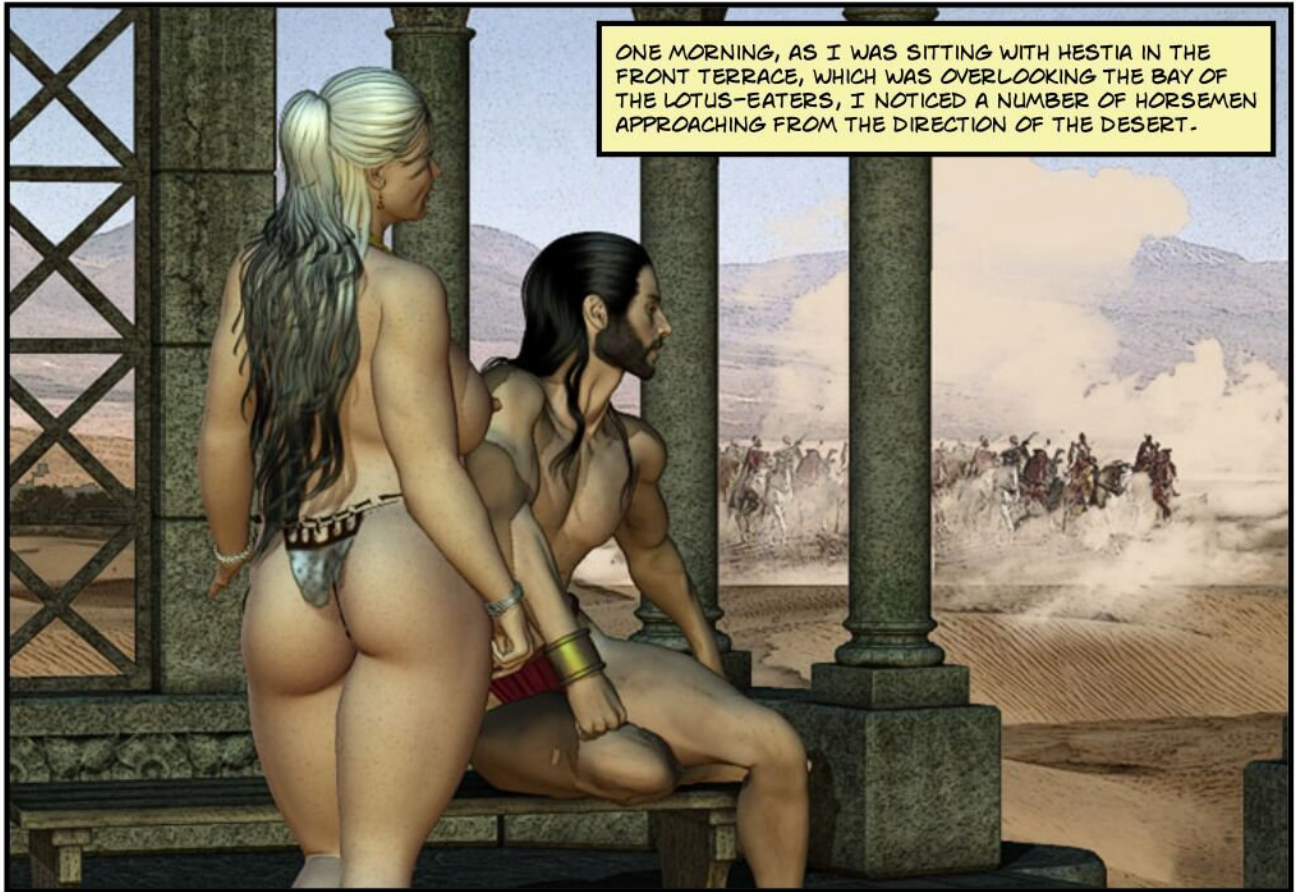
FROM THAT NIGHT ONWARDS MY LIFE WITH THE AGEING GODDESS WAS A HEAVENLY BLISS.



IF I WASN'T IN LOVE WITH HER, THEN, AT LEAST, MY FEELINGS WERE AS STRONG -AND AS DEEP.



I HOPED THAT THIS WOULD GO ON FOREVER, BUT FATE HAD DECREED OTHERWISE.



ONE MORNING, AS I WAS SITTING WITH HESTIA IN THE FRONT TERRACE, WHICH WAS OVERLOOKING THE BAY OF THE LOTUS-EATERS, I NOTICED A NUMBER OF HORSEMEN APPROACHING FROM THE DIRECTION OF THE DESERT.



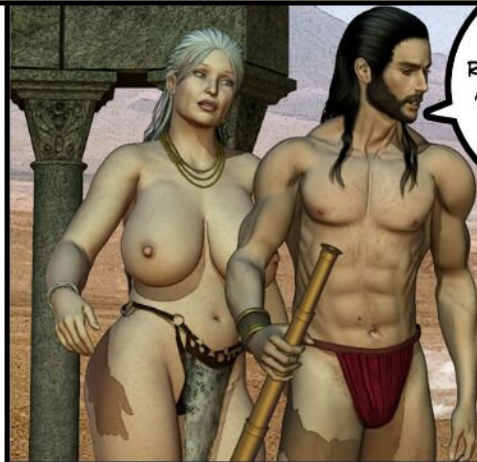
AMAZON WARRIORS, CLOSING IN FAST!

PEERING THROUGH A STRANGE DEVICE OF THE GODS THAT WAS BRINGING FAR OBJECTS CLOSE, I FELT A COLD SHIVER RUNNING DOWN MY SPINE.



THIS MUST BE MAXIMO, THE DAUGHTER OF PENTHESILEIA. THEY ARE COMING FOR THEIR ANNUAL COLLECT OF MATES.

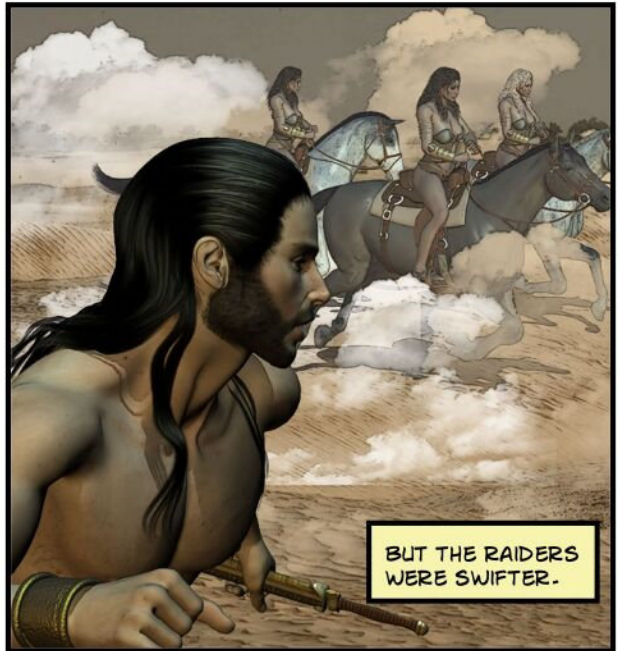
SHE EXPLAINED THAT ONCE A YEAR THE AMAZONS WERE COMING TO CHOOSE MEN FROM AMONG THE PEACEFUL LOTUS-EATERS IN ORDER TO MATE WITH THEM.



AND THIS TIME THEY'LL HAVE IT REAL EASY, WITH ALL MY MEN BEING DOWN THERE, DROGUED OUT OF THEIR MIND.



I GRABBED MY SWORD AND IGNORING HESTIA'S PROTESTS DOWN THE HILL I RAN IN A DES-PERATE ATTEMPT TO REACH THE BAY BEFORE THE AMAZONS.



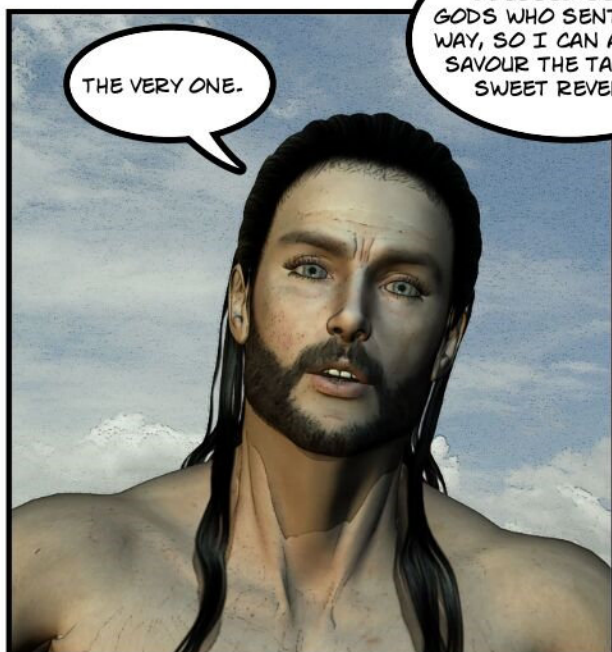
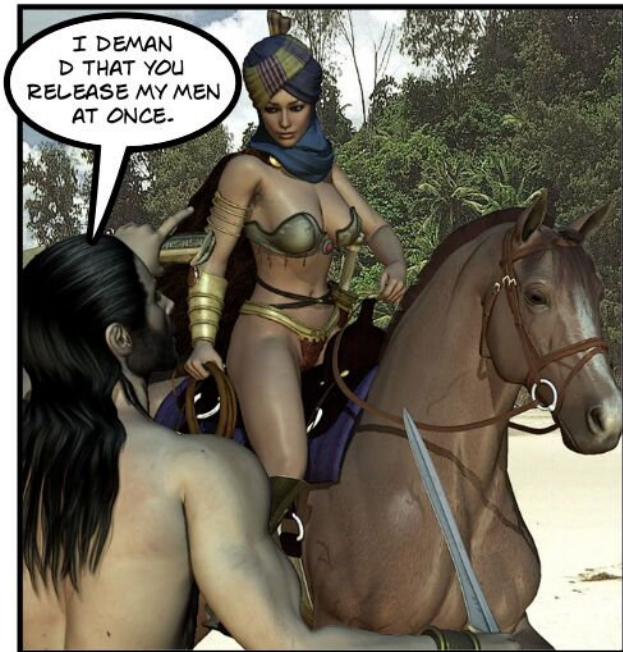
BUT THE RAIDERS WERE SWIFTER.

AS I REACHED THE GATHERING WITH SWORD DRAWN THEIR CHIEF NOTICED ME AND TURNED HER HORSE AROUND TO FACE ME.



AS SHE REMOVED HER VEIL I FELT ANOTHER SHIVER RUNNING DOWN MY SPINE, FOR THIS YOUNG WOMAN LOOKED EVERY INCH LIKE THE LATE QUEEN PENTHESILEIA, WHO FELL IN TROY BY THE HAND OF ACHILLES.





BLESSED BE THE GODS WHO SENT YOU MY WAY, SO I CAN AT LAST SAVOUR THE TASTE OF SWEET REVENGE!

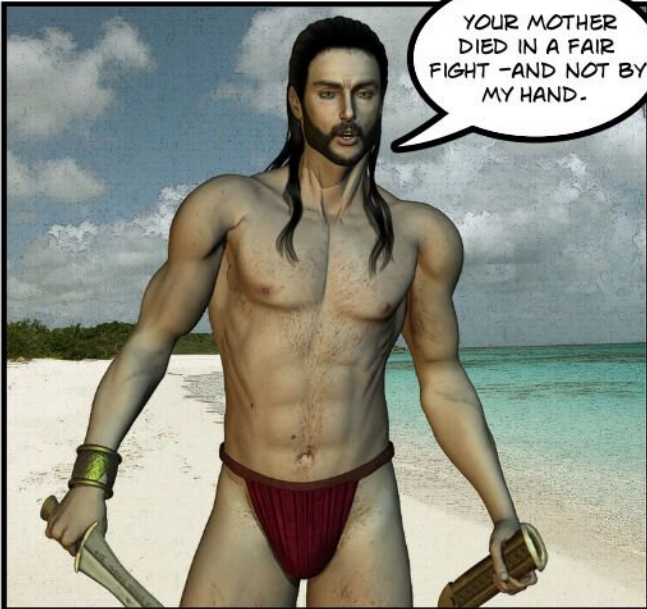


SHE DISMOUNTED AND WALKED TOWARDS ME.



PREPARE YOURSELF TO DIE, ACHAEAN. LIKE MY MOTHER DID IN THE PLAIN OF TROY.

YOUR MOTHER DIED IN A FAIR FIGHT -AND NOT BY MY HAND.



A FAIR FIGHT I'LL GRANT YOU THEN, ACHAEAN.



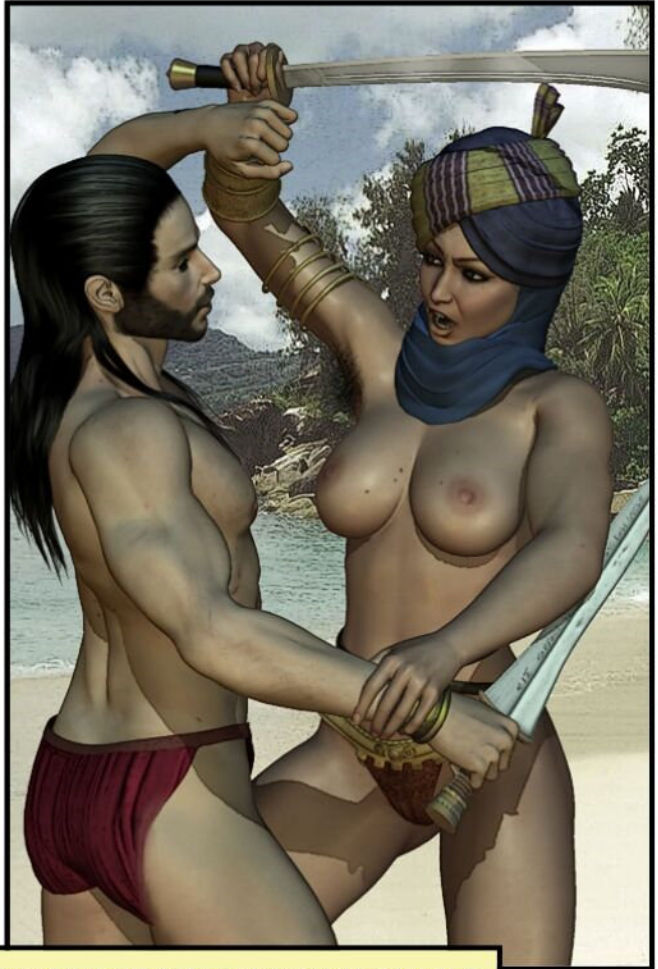
SHE DROPPED HER BREAST PLATE AND PROTECTIVE LEGGINGS AND FACED ME.



SHE WAS AS BEAUTIFUL AS A GODDESS FROM OLYMPUS!







I AM AN EXCELLENT SWORDSMAN, BUT I MUST ADMIT THAT I HAD GREAT TROUBLE KEEPING UP WITH THE WOMAN'S SKILLS AND STUBBORN DETERMINATION.



ON AND ON THE FIGHTING WENT, BUT IT WASN'T AN EQUAL MATCH AS I FELT RELUCTANT TO USE ANY OF THE USUAL DIRTY TRICKS THAT I WOULD BE USING AGAINST A MAN.



AT LAST I SAW A LUCKY OPENING ON HER GUARD AND HASTENED TO TAKE ADVANTAGE.



WITHOUT WASTING A SECOND I JUMPED ON THE UNARMED AMAZON.





TAKING ADVANTAGE OF MY HESITATION SHE PULLED A SWIFT MOVE AND, BEFORE I KNEW IT, I FOUND MYSELF LYING FLAT ON MY BACK -DISARMED.



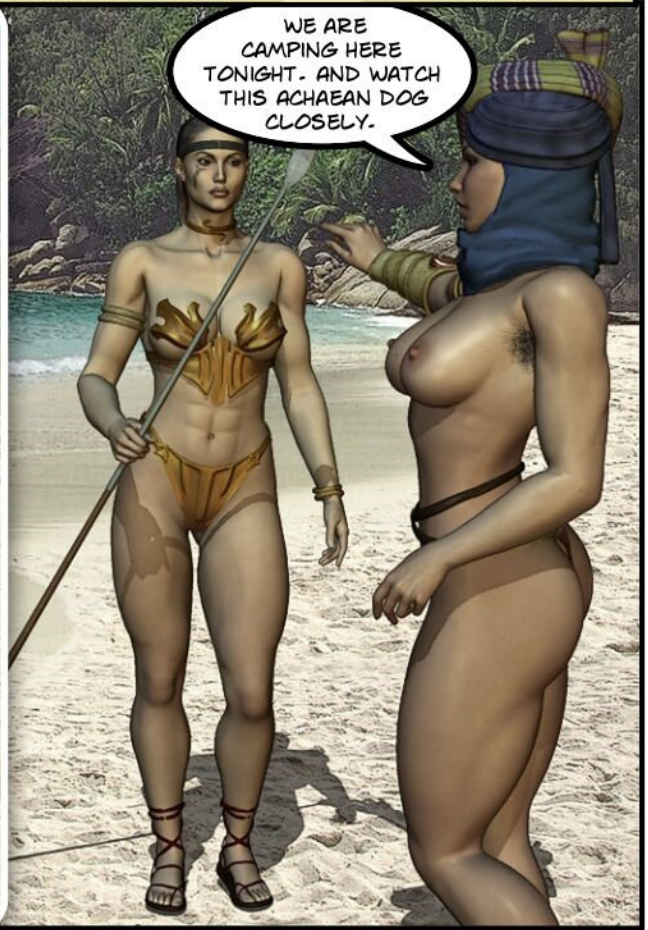


SHE STOOD THERE FOR A MOMENT, LIKE DEATH HIMSELF, WITH HER SWORD RAISED TO STRIKE.



THEN, UNEXPECTEDLY, SHE LOWERED HER SWORD AND STOOD UP.

TURNING TO HER WARRIORS SHE SHOUTED AN ORDER.



WE ARE CAMPING HERE TONIGHT. AND WATCH THIS ACHAEAN DOG CLOSELY.

LATER IN THE EVENING I WAS BROUGHT TO HER. THE AMAZONS DIDN'T BOTHER TO TIE MY HANDS.



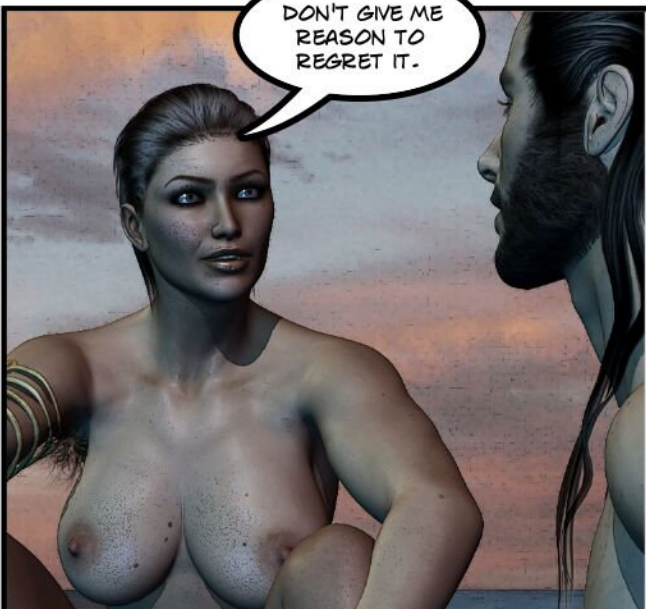
WHY DIDN'T YOU KILL ME WHEN YOU HAD A CHANCE?



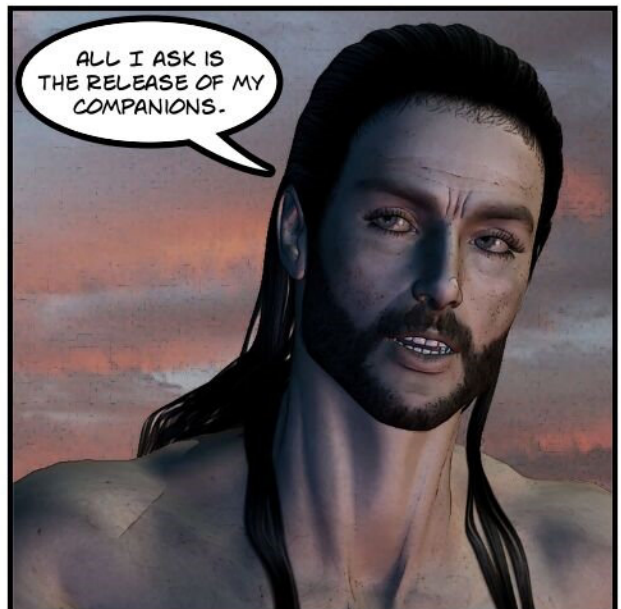
FOR THE SAME REASON YOU DIDN'T KILL ME?



DON'T GIVE ME REASON TO REGRET IT.



ALL I ASK IS THE RELEASE OF MY COMPANIONS.





SHE IGNORED MY

TELL ME ABOUT MY MOTHER. WAS IT REALLY IN A FAIR FIGHT THAT SHE DIED?

YES. ACHILLES WENT MAD WITH GRIEF, FOR HE HAD FALLEN IN LOVE WITH HER.



I CAN SEE GRIEF IN YOUR EYES AS WELL. HAVE YOU ALSO LOST A LOVED ONE BACK THERE?

YES.



AN ACHAEAN?

NO, A TROJAN.



SHE REACHED OUT AND TOUCHED MY SHOULDER LIGHTLY WITHOUT SAYING A WORD.



WE SAT THERE FOR A LONG TIME, SILENT, EACH LOST IN PRIVATE THOUGHTS AND MEMORIES.

SHE SUDDENLY TURNED HER FACE TOWARDS ME.



AND NOW? DO YOU HAVE ANYWHERE TO GO?

NO, BUT MY MEN DO.



YOU CAN TAKE THEM. THEY ARE OF NO USE TO ME ANYWAY - A MINDLESS RABBLE.

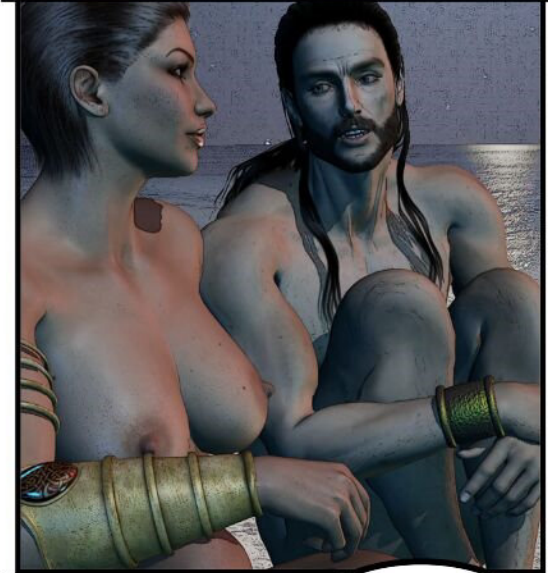
THANK YOU, MAXIMO.



HOW COME YOU ARE NOT AFFECTED BY THE LOTUS FRUIT EFFECTS?

I HAVE BEEN...

I TOLD HER THE STORY OF MY RESCUE BY HESTIA, OMITTING TO MENTION ATHENA'S INVOLVEMENT - FOR SOME STRANGE REASON.



SO, YOU LIVE WITH A GODDESS...

SHE HAS BEEN VERY KIND TO ME.



DO YOU LOVE HER?

I DO HAVE FEELINGS FOR HER.

WE SPENT MOST OF THE NIGHT TALKING ABOUT OUR LOVED ONES, OUR HOPES AND FEARS.



THEN WE SLEPT IN A TENDER EMBRACE, NOT AS LOVERS DO, BUT AS FRIENDS.





I WENT UP TO THE HOUSE ON THE HILL TO SAY GOODBYE TO HESTIA. SHE WAS WAITING FOR ME.

IT IS TIME, HESTIA.

I KNOW... YOU ARE LEAVING.

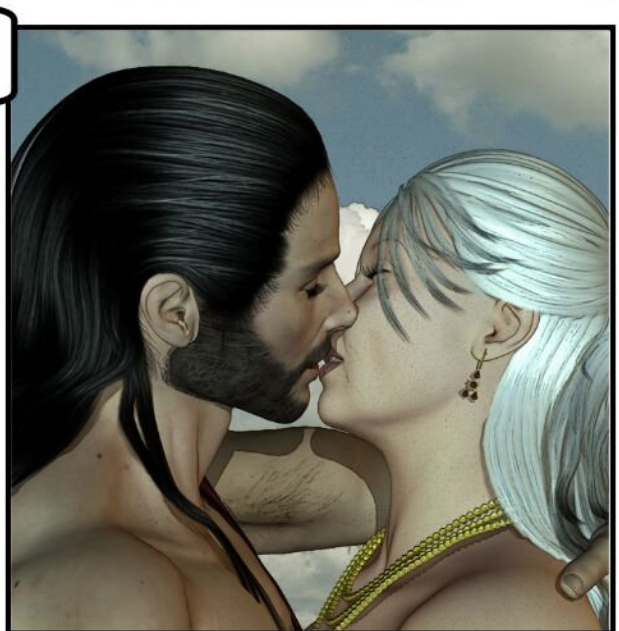


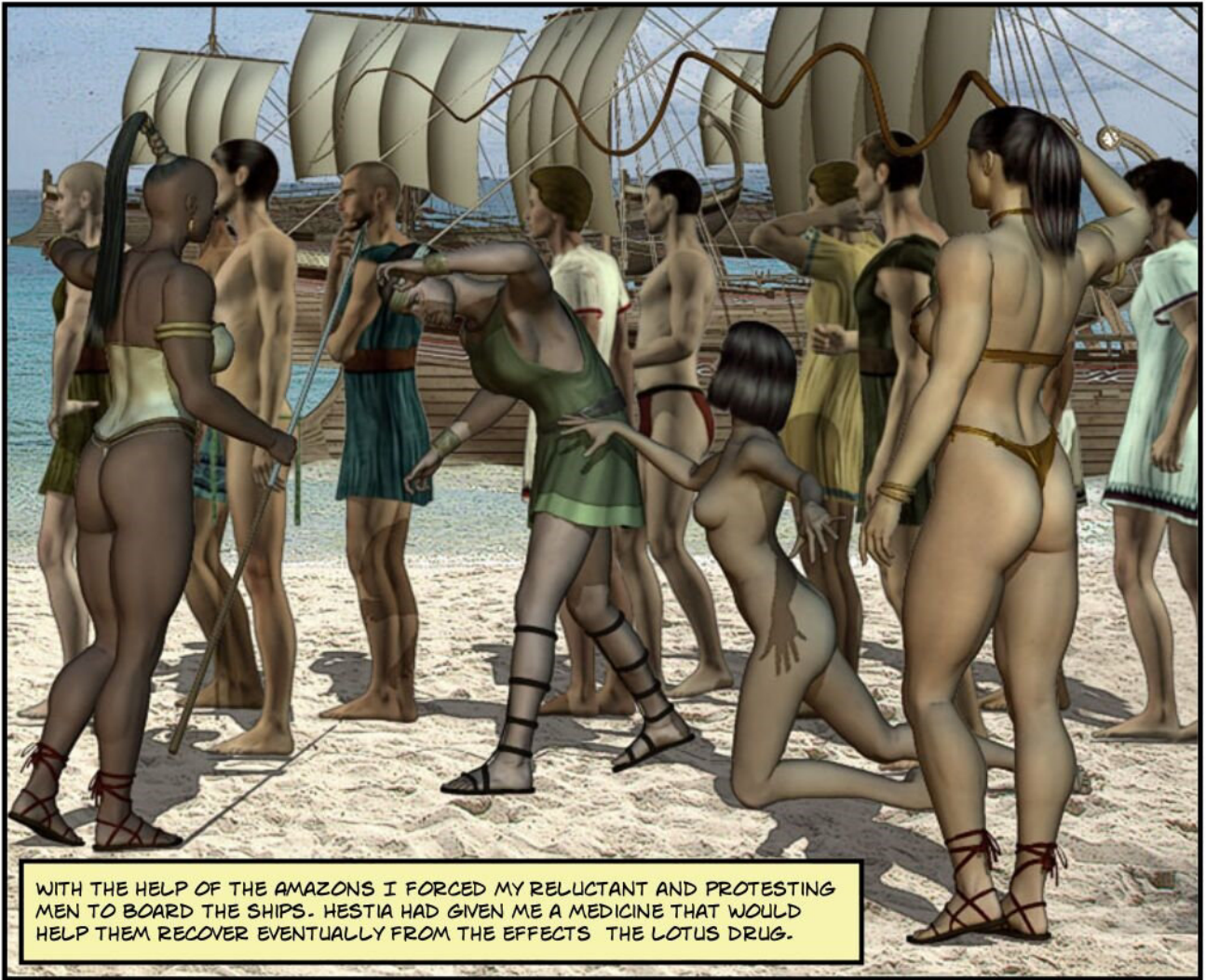
IT WAS MEANT TO HAPPEN ONE DAY...

THANK YOU. YOU SAVED MY LIFE.



AND YOU GAVE ME MINE BACK.





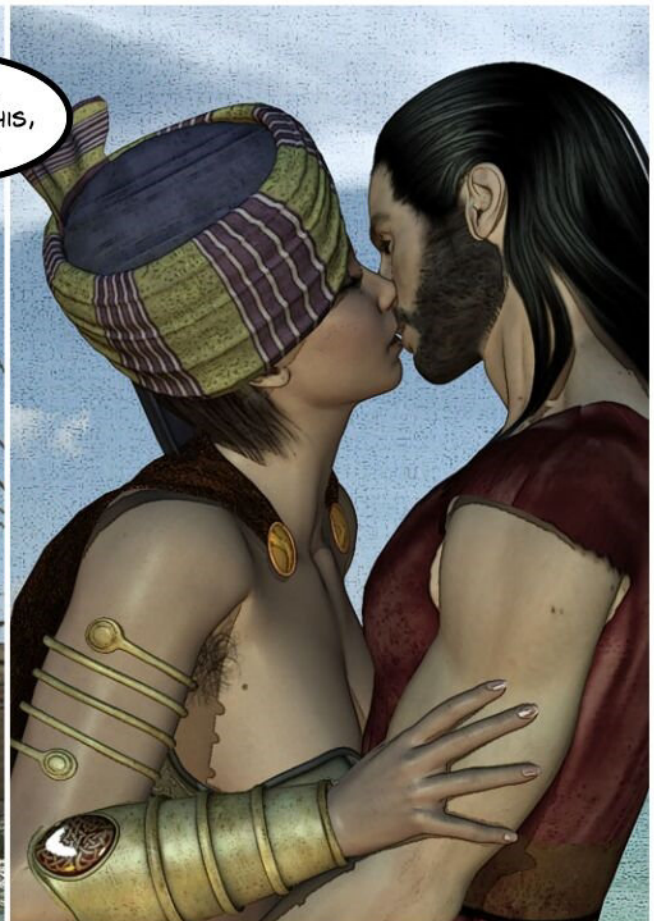
WITH THE HELP OF THE AMAZONS I FORCED MY RELUCTANT AND PROTESTING MEN TO BOARD THE SHIPS. HESTIA HAD GIVEN ME A MEDICINE THAT WOULD HELP THEM RECOVER EVENTUALLY FROM THE EFFECTS THE LOTUS DRUG.

IT WAS TIME TO SAY GOODBYE TO MAXIMO.



IF YOU EVER NEED A HOME YOU'D BE WELCOME IN MINE, ACHAEAN.

I SHALL REMEMBER THIS, MAXIMO.



AS WE SET SAIL I THOUGHT I SAW A TALL FIGURE UP IN THE HOUSE ON THE HILL WAVING HER HAND IN FAREWELL. AND HIGH ABOVE THE MASTS OF MY SHIPS A NOW FAMILIAR FLYING SHIELD HOVERED FOR A MOMENT AND THEN TURNED AND SHOT EASTWARDS, VANISHING IN THE FAR HORIZON.



END OF BOOK 2



