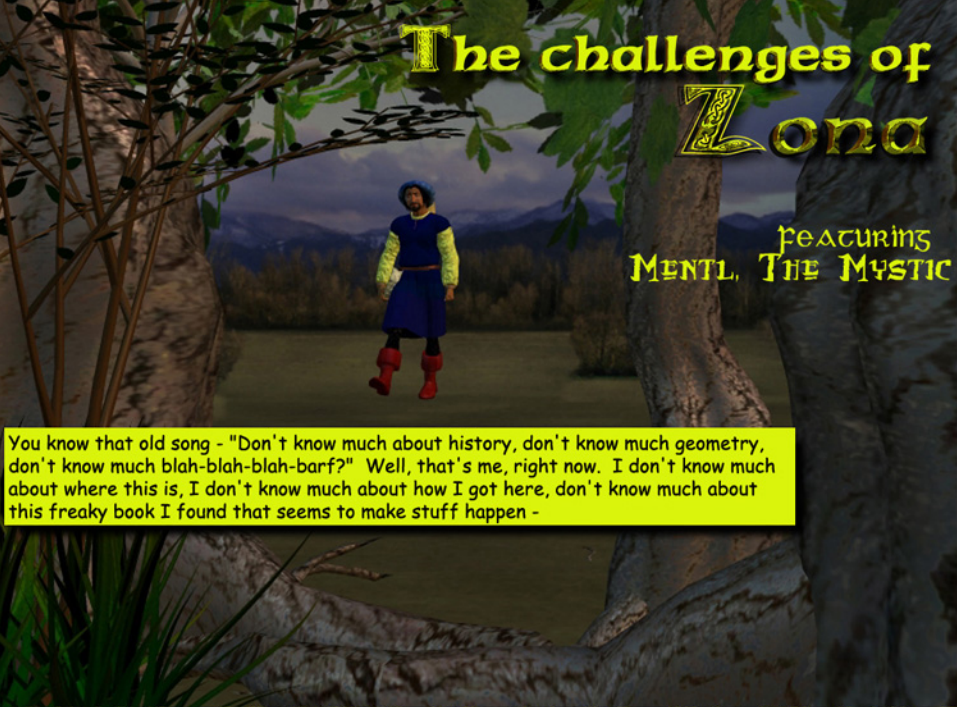


# The challenges of Zona

featuring  
MENTL, THE MYSTIC



You know that old song - "Don't know much about history, don't know much geometry, don't know much blah-blah-blah-barf?" Well, that's me, right now. I don't know much about where this is, I don't know much about how I got here, don't know much about this freaky book I found that seems to make stuff happen -

All I do know is that I've been here - wherever "here" is - for a couple days, I know I stole some clothes so the local inhabitants will quit trying to burn me at the stake, and I know that, somehow, this freaky old book is responsible for all my troubles - and hopefully, also a way home --



I also know I'm REALLY hungry.



Hey --\*sniff-sniff\*  
Somebody's cooking something.



Please ...  
please let them be  
wandering Amish folk in a  
mood to be charitable to  
poor strangers ...

Hey! Umm -- Excuse me!  
I don't mean to disturb you, but could you spare some ...



Meat ..



Holy -

SHIT!



No-no -- please,  
don't bother to get up!  
I can see you're really busy --  
It's fine, I really wasn't  
all that hungry ---

I'll just be ... you know,  
toddling off ...



RRRAGHKA IMLUKK!\*

\*"Fresh Meat!"



Oh, jesus, this is it!  
I'm gonna be killed and turned into a meal  
for a lizard in a loincloth!



I'm too young to die!  
I've never had twins!  
Hell, I never even had April Popenhager  
from next door ...



Get back.

These demons have had their **last** meal.





So - a six-foot plus blonde goddess with a Ms Olympia body steps out of the woods and begins tearing through these lizard-guys that were ready to make a New Jersey cutlet out of me. And I actually started giggling,--watching her chop off body-parts.

More than a bit disturbing, if you think about it.

I mean, don't get me wrong: It's not like I'm some bloodthirsty nutcase. Hell, I don't even like WWF. It's just that the whole thing was so goddamn Surreal!



I was in some kind of shock, I guess.



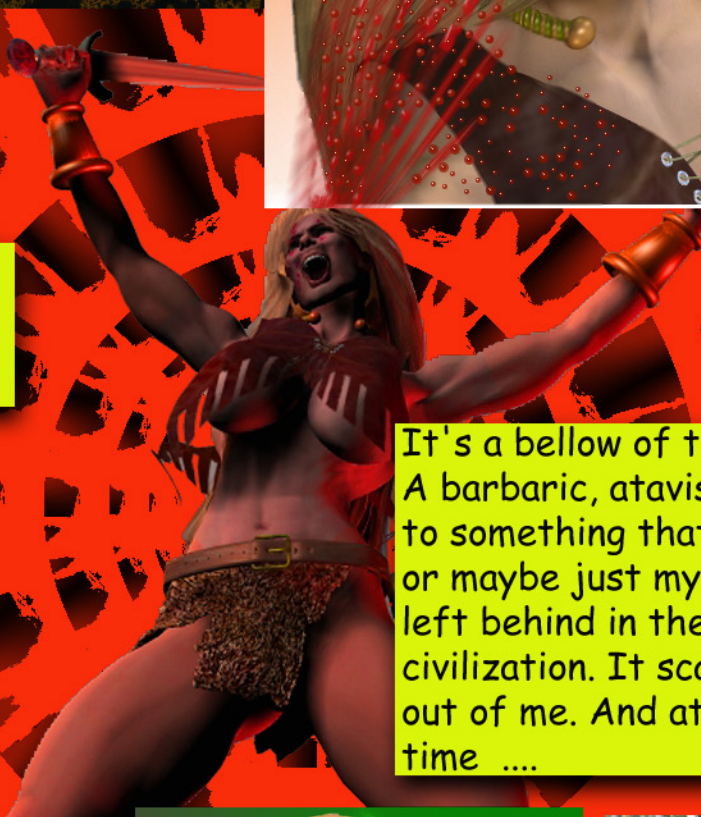
Blondie Biceps, on the other hand, had no such problem. I was in awe, man. Fricking awe.



And so she finishes the last one off, like Sandahl Bergman, fricking cutting his heart like some wild beast, but with this, I dunno - a kind of artistry, a homicidal artistry of butchery. It was truly amazing.



And then she ...  
She kind of ...  
Screams.



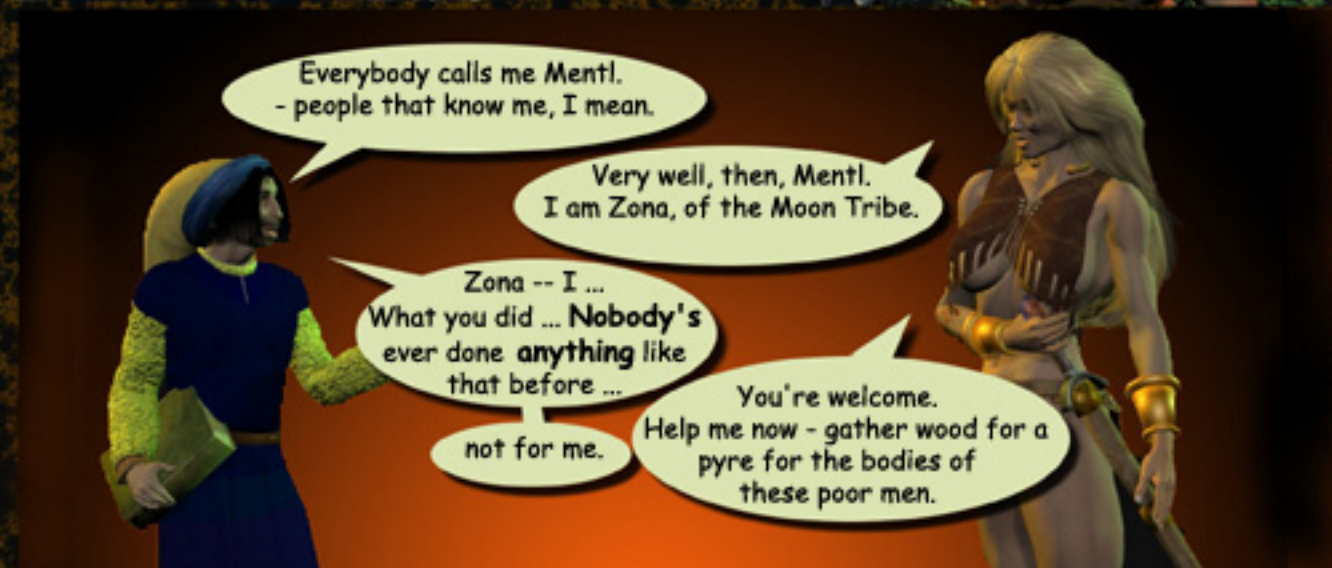
It's a bellow of triumph,  
A barbaric, atavistic ululation  
to something that the world -  
or maybe just my world - had  
left behind in the dawn of  
civilization. It scared the shit  
out of me. And at the same  
time ....



At the same time --  
Jesus, I was in love.



You're not  
from around here,  
are you?



So, she chops up the lizard-guys - "Urtts" I guess you call them - stakes them out and hangs their bodies up as crow-fodder for a warning. And as it gets dark, we make a huge bonfire to cremate the two poor shmucks that they slaughtered. Zona said it was necessary, not so that their spirits would be appeased or something, but because of what she calls "cha."

They may not have been of my tribe, or even of my people, but as much as we can, we need to balance the cha that the Urtts disturbed. Urtts - they kill with no respect for cha, selfishly, stupidly, wastefully.

Their very existence is an offense to the cha.

Yeah ...okay.



You have no idea what cha is.

Not a clue, actually.



You know, I shouldn't be the one to explain this - my sister is a priestess, she can explain it much better. But Cha is ... well, cha is ... everything. The Kivalian folk - the ones who dress like you're dressed - worship their gods and make their priests into little gods among them. They bow and call them "father" and "revered one" whether they deserve it or not. They pretend there's no such thing as cha, that the sun and the moon and the sky and water and land don't have any cha. That people don't have any cha. That all things are just toys of their gods, and we live just because it pleases the gods to have made us. Erogenians know that everything touches everything else, and it affects everything.



What we do, who we help,  
who we hurt, it all moves the cha  
one way or another, and we try to ...  
to balance the cha.  
You understand?



It's like ... like karma?


Who?

No, not a who, a what -  
like what you do in life comes back  
to you over and over,, and you have  
to work out karma from this lifetime  
to the next and stuff until you,  
y'know, get to - uh --  
"Nirvana."



I don't know.  
Maybe that's a word for it where you come from,  
but it doesn't sound exactly like cha.  
Where do you come from? You're not an Erogenian, that's for sure.  
You don't sound like a Kivalian, and you don't look like a Sandak.






How can you be from nowhere, Mentl?  
Only nobodies come from nowhere.  
I don't believe in nowhere - or in nobodies.

Are you hungry?

Uh -- yeah.



Come on, then. We're done here.  
I've got food at my campsite.



So, it was weird. I see this old guy getting mugged in a n alley, right? And before I can get to him, he gets knifed, and both the assholes who were mugging him get swallowed up in this, like, lightning.



And there's nothing left but this book.the old man was carrying. When I touched it, I wound up here, being chased by a bunch of people who never saw a guy in Nikes before and wanted to burn me at the stake.



So I lifted a bundle of clothes to fit in, and I took a walk-- and that's when you ... met me. And my scaly buddies.

Anyway - you probably think I'm crazy, now - or a liar. I guess I can't blame you.

I don't think you're crazy, and you don't strike me as a liar. On the other hand, I don't really know what sort of a man you are.

What sort of a man are you?


And when she looked at me like that, all of a sudden I got this feeling that she would know if I was lying. That she would know if I was keeping something back. What do you say to someone like that?



What do you say to someone who's some kind of warrior goddess or princess or something, who's just saved your life? Do you pretend to be something you're not - or for once in your life do you play it completely straight?

What kind of man am I? Oh, God ... not much of a man, I guess. I mean, not much of anything. I've never been able to stick at anything, never kept a job, never had a real girlfriend or ... I dunno, Zona, I'm just me. Back where I come from, I'm living in my car because I got fired from my job at Yogurt Hut. I was going to go to L.A., and try to get a band together, or be a studio musician -- or something.





Ah - so you're a **musician**.

Not **really**. I mean, I can count the paying gigs I've had on **one hand**. I tell you, though, back in High School we had a **garage band** that was **pretty good**.

We used to do all the old covers, all the old rock and roll. Y'know, sixties, seventies, eighties. We got some **gigs** and did a lot of **dances**. People used to **really dig** the stuff when we played it. Only time in my life I felt like I was **something**.

Fascinating.

Oh, it wasn't all **that great**. We **broke up**, like bands **always do**.

No, I mean I'm only understanding about **half** of what you're saying. The way you **talk** - it's **fascinating**, like you **really are** from **another world**.

Oh.



But I do understand that you're a musician.  
Can you play this?

Wow.

It belonged to one  
of the men who were killed by  
the urtts. I think he was a  
traveling minstrel.

I'd actually had to hock my  
guitar about a month ago so  
I could eat. It had felt like  
I'd amputated my arm - I  
kept reaching for it, for-  
getting that it wasn't there  
any more. And this - well, it  
was a sweet thing.

It had a nice sound to it. Soft,  
but resonant. Good tone. The  
guy had kept it in good shape,  
but it had obviously seen a lot  
of use. I tuned it up and my  
hands just automatically  
started to pick out the  
first thing that came in my  
head.

Oh ... that's so beautifull What is the song?  
Is it a dance, or a ballad?

It's an old Beatles tune



"Beetles?"

Well, of course you don't know - it's - it's a love song, that's all.

A "love-song?"

You've never heard a love song?

I ... don't know.

Our songs are for worship, or for telling stories and histories. Or else, they're for ceremonies or dancing. But I suppose I've made love when there was very good music. Is that what it's for? Do you want to ---


No!

I mean, well, not "no," but .... I ... I ... I mean, it's not not for that, but it's ...

It's what, then?

It's ... about love.

It can be a story, I guess, but it's not always. Sometimes it's like ... ah ... Hang on. Let me just show you, okay? This is an old one, one of my Mom's favorites.



*I give her all my love  
That's all I do  
And if you saw my love  
You'd love her too  
I love her*

*She gives me ev'rything  
And tenderly  
The kiss my lover brings  
She brings to me  
And I love her*

*A love like ours  
Could never die  
As long as I  
Have you near me*

*Bright are the stars that shine  
Dark is the sky  
I know this love of mine  
Will never die  
And I love her*

Well? What ... uh ...

What do you ... uh ...

...think?

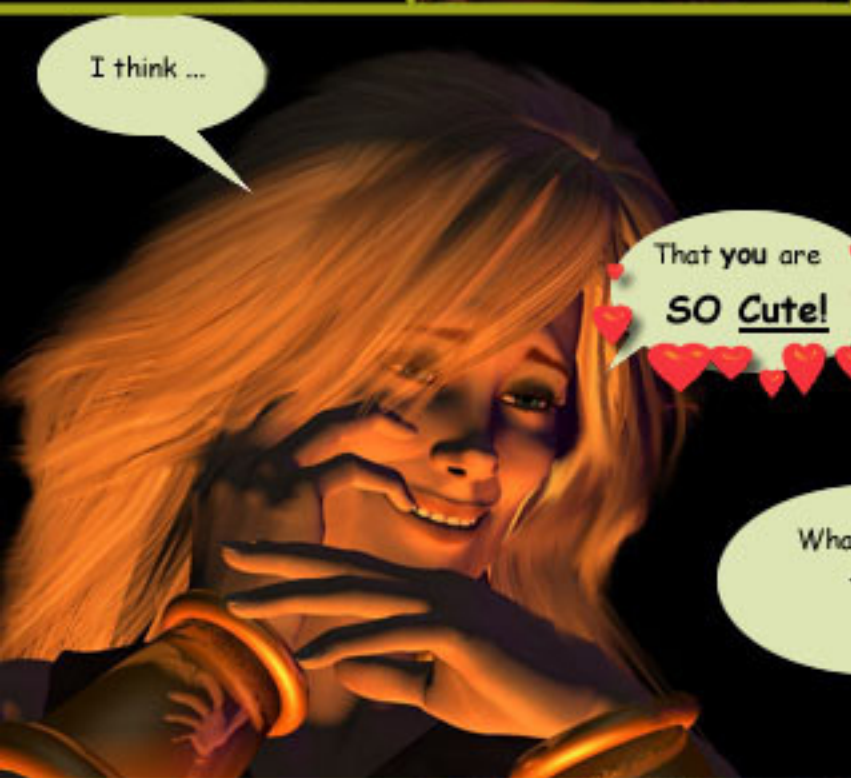


I think ...

That you are

**SO Cute!**

Wha ...  
... ME?!!



Yes.

You.





... Uh ..., thanks!  
I mean, I - heh! Don't quite  
know what to say. I mean, it's  
... **flattering**, and ---

Uh --  
What are you doing?



Whoa.



Mentl,  
do you like me?

Zona,  
there's no one ...  
and **nothing** ... in the world ...  
like you.



You are so sweet!  
But -  
Do you want to make love?



Um ... Y-

All I can say is,  
**God Bless Lennon and McCartney.**

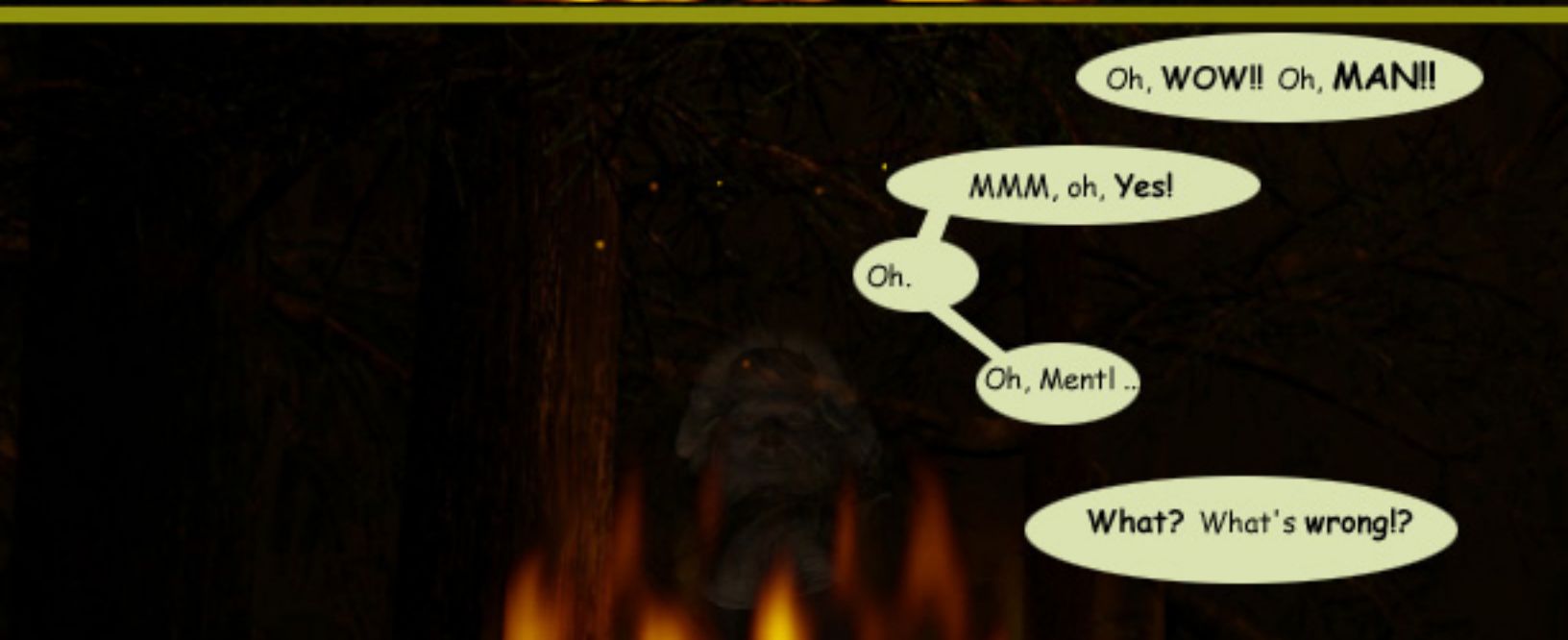


Oh, My God, Zona ...

Mmm..

Oh, GOD! I've never ...

MMM!!




Oh, WOW!! Oh, MAN!!

MMM, oh, Yes!

Oh.

Oh, Menti ..

What? What's wrong!?



Nothing. \*heh!\*  
Nothing at all.

I just never  
guessed you'd be so ...  
Impressive.

Oh, baby ... Oh, God ...

Jesus! I'm so glad  
now that I found that  
book!