


Yatta-Ta of Ir Anis, there has never before been a Kivalian and only a handful in all of Erodenia who could have stood against me like you just did.

I'm strong today, rested and in good form - and I'm not ashamed to say I only barely beat you. I just wanted you to know that.

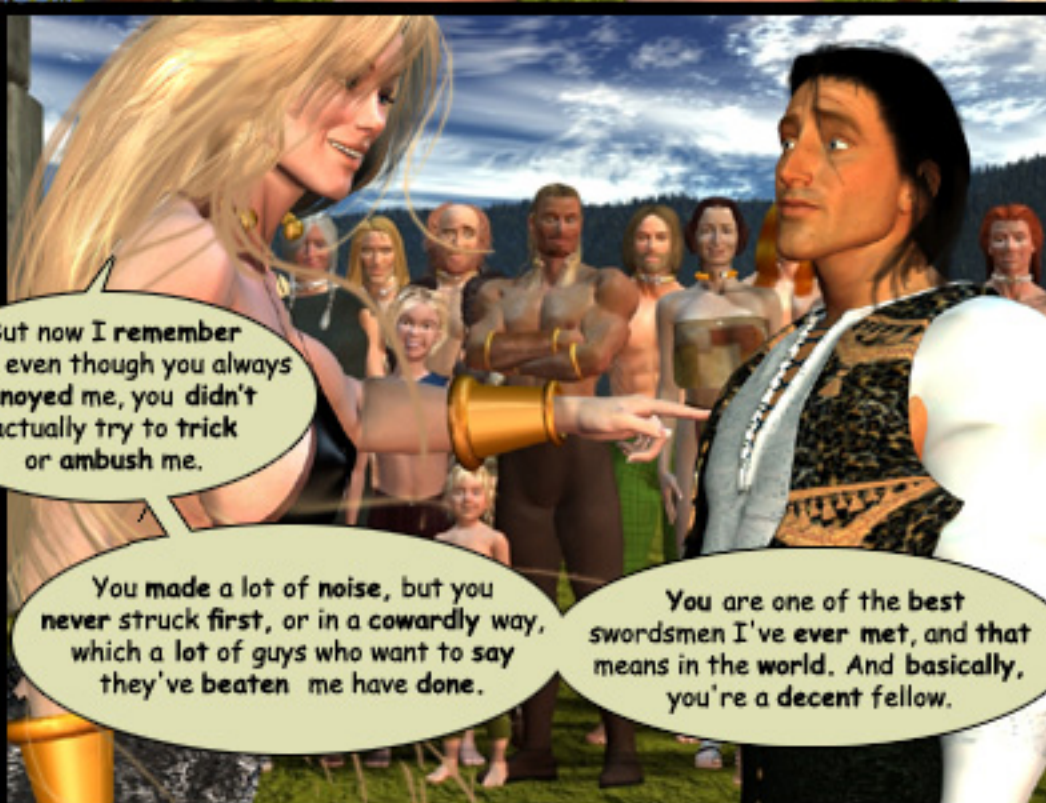
I also wanted you to know that I thought you were a crazy, egocentric, deluded maniac.

I didn't believe that you could be worthy of your own boast. I was wrong.

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I still think you're crazy ...




But now I remember that, even though you always annoyed me, you didn't actually try to trick or ambush me.

You made a lot of noise, but you never struck first, or in a cowardly way, which a lot of guys who want to say they've beaten me have done.

You are one of the best swordsmen I've ever met, and that means in the world. And basically, you're a decent fellow.




You're loony as I don't know what - but I think you're all right.



What do you think?

Mother?



I think I have not seen such a swordsman from Kivalia since King Kendrik himself, many years ago - and he fought your father to a standstill.

I regret that I don't have the authority to officially proclaim him the finest swordsman in Kivalia. Frankly, until I see better, that is how I'll refer to him.

Also, I believe he is a man of honor, after all, and he would be a welcome guest at our board - if he accepts a royal invitation.





Wow .. I ... I do accept -  
with humble thanks!

And ... and let me say  
that in all of my many, many glorious  
encounters, I have never known a  
greater spirit of honor and  
generosity among  
any people!



Even with all your quaint  
and primitive ways, you -

Son?  
Why don't you  
quit while you're  
behind?



Good idea.

**TO THE TABLES,  
EVERYBODY, AND STUFF  
YOURSELVES!**

Oh! I didn't mean -  
I was - I was just going  
to say - I mean ... I was --



Come on, let's fill that  
big mouth with something  
besides hot air.

Have you  
ever had Erogenian  
metheglin?





I'm telling you, Mentl, my boon companion, this is a bittersweet day.

"Boon?"

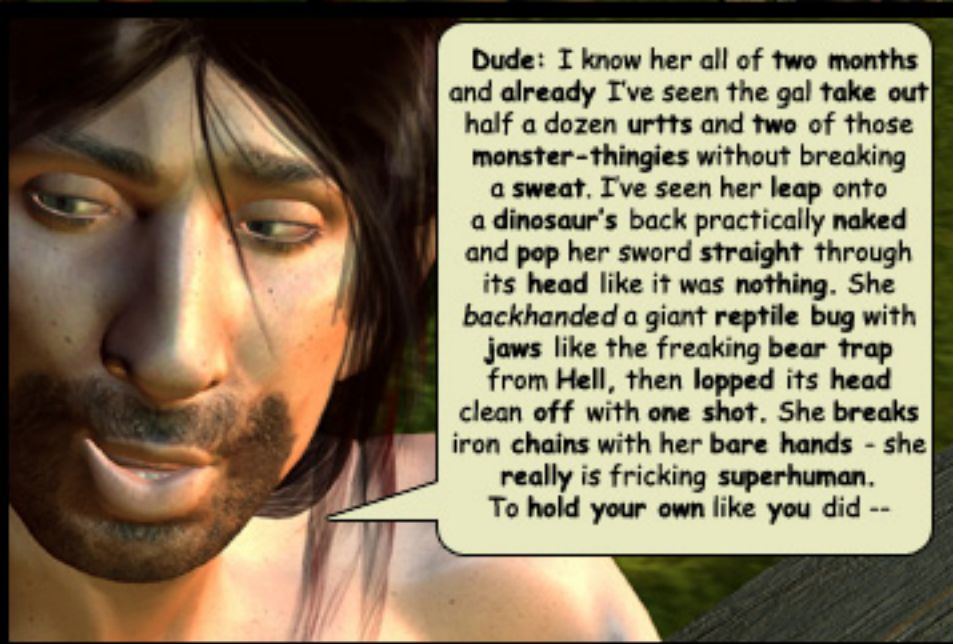
"Companion?"



What? You finally got what you wanted. She gave you a shot - you did great, and now you're a guest at the royal fricking shindig.

What the hell more do ya want?

I wanted ... I needed to win, man. It was all about ...



Dude: I know her all of two months and already I've seen the gal take out half a dozen urtts and two of those monster-thingies without breaking a sweat. I've seen her leap onto a dinosaur's back practically naked and pop her sword straight through its head like it was nothing. She backhanded a giant reptile bug with jaws like the freaking bear trap from Hell, then lopped its head clean off with one shot. She breaks iron chains with her bare hands - she really is fricking superhuman. To hold your own like you did --



That's it! I'm always just holding my own ...

Huh? Don't follow - or maybe I just don't want to.

No, man, I wanted to ... I mean ... aww, who'm I kidding? It doesn't matter anymore.

I mean -

I mean -

I mean -

I guess I knew she couldn't really be a virgin or anything.

What?! Then what was all that fuckin' noise before? What about the big-ass "challenge?"



I'm not stupid. I mean, I mean, I mean, I know you think I'm stupid. But I'm not stupid.

I mean, I just ... I mean, when I was training, he said ... I, uh, I heard about her. Heard about how she was this unbeatable champi-hicl-ion.

And I just - you guys don't get it. I have to be the best, ya know? I just .. and that's what she is, and ...

I can sort of see that, man, but Jesus, did you have to stalk her?

Well, how else was I going to meet her?

Hoo-boy.



And then I saw her, up close and ... and ... and ...

Is this going where I think it is?



I **MEAN** - she's the most **AMAZING** woman in the **WORLD!!**

Ee-yup. That's where it's goin', all right.









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DON'T YOU WISH REAL LIFE WAS LIKE THIS?







BLINK  
BLINK



... pardon?



The word you're  
looking for is "YES,"  
ya doof!

PAF!

"Yes?"

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Great! My place is this way.  
And don't worry - we'll  
sober you right up!

And hey -now I think  
of it, my friend Eria was  
asking about you.  
You like blondes?



God bless Erogenia.



Hm.  
Yeah.

AND ALL THAT SAIL UPON HER...





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SOMEBODY'S STEALING A N EXTRA NOM







Anyway -- anyway, like I said, I'm new, haven't even been here more than a couple months or so, but from everything I've seen about the place -

- well everything I have seen about this place is just ... it's really beautiful.

Your land is beautiful, your customs are really cool, your people -

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Well, the first one of your people I met I fell for like a ton of bricks.

-- but to me she's just the most beautiful of a family and a people that are the most beautiful I've ever seen in all my life.



I mean ... just ... thank you.

Thank you so much.

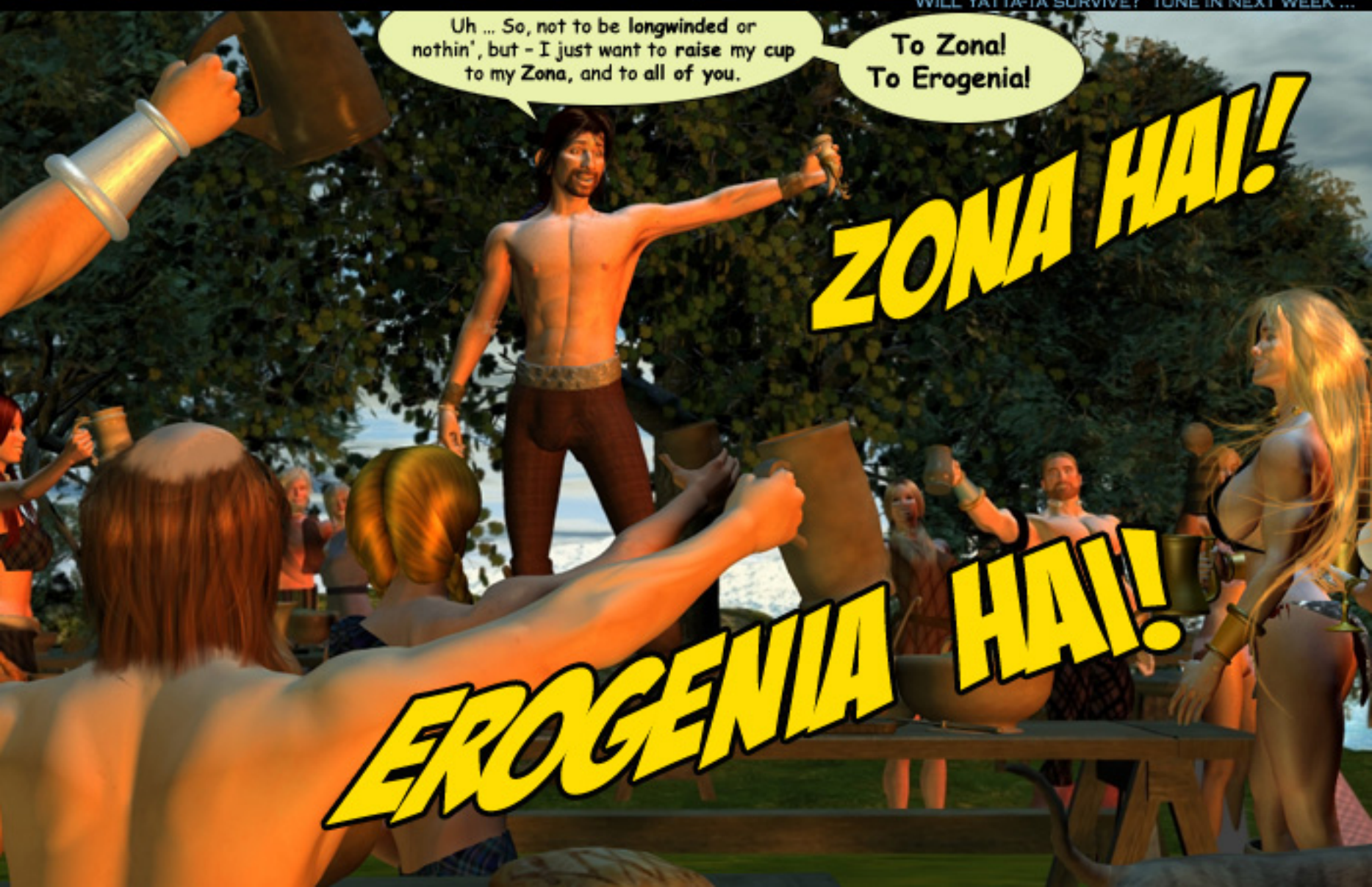


Hhhuhmm!!

HM-mm!

Uh -

WILL YATTA-TA SURVIVE? TUNE IN NEXT WEEK ...



Uh ... So, not to be longwinded or nothin', but - I just want to raise my cup to my Zona, and to all of you.

To Zona!  
To Erogenial!

**ZONA HAI!**

**EROGENIA HAI!**









rustle ...

scatter ...



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clang!

Toss!

rummage!



THE CUP USED TO BE A BAD GUY NAMED YAFU



Zona?

We're about to start the dancing, if you're interested.

**I KNOW!!**

Don't worry, dear, you look lovely.

What are you looking for?



**MY BELLS!**

Your bells.





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NO, YOU'RE NEVER GONNA SEE IT IN "HOT STUFF", EITHER.















... in First Dance tonight ...

Of course! I want to have a man tonight!

Are you dancing First Dance?

Who are you dancing for, First Dance?

... pulling out everything tonight at First Dance.

Well, of course! He's SO cute!



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Dude -

I'm new in town. What's the deal with the first dance? Why so special?

That's right, you're outsider, you wouldn't know ...



It's ... Wow, how do I describe it?

It's where all the women who want to have a partner sort of ... put themselves out.

They all dance around the fire.

Sometimes they dance to attract someone in particular, sometimes it's because they don't have anyone particular.

In the end, they're the ones that choose. But - believe me, you know if they're dancing for you.

VERY FEW WALLFLOWERS AT EROGENIAN DANCES ...



Oh. Wow.

And what? Do men dance Second Dance or something?

Oh, no. We dance First Dance, too! Just not around the fire.

Ya lost me, buddy. If we don't dance around the fire ...



We dance with this!









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KITTEH'S BORED NOW. NEED MORE NOMS.











You know something, Ment?



In this world I still basically don't know dick. What "something" do you mean?



I like you.

I'm glad you're with Zona.

I have a lot of cousins, -- a lot of cousins - but I never really had a brother.

Until you.

Well, I ... think you're pretty cool, too.

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Nice bells on your ankles, there.

That's because I am going to dance.

I think one dance is all I have in me, but I'm going to do it.

I could use a nice, lusty young man tonight - and I do give as good as I get.

Oh, I can believe it.

That guy I was talking about -

Yes?



He seems okay.

I know he is.

I can tell he's really diggin' on you.

"Diggin'?"

Likes you. A lot. And ... I mean, from at least my point of view, as a guy, you know, I think he's pretty good-looking.

I AM CASUAL. WITNESS ME BEING COOL, AND CASUAL.



I mean, *Jesus*, is there anybody in this tribe who isn't at least a nine?

"A Nine?"

A scale of one to ten. Attractiveness. *One* is a complete dog you wouldn't poke with a stolen dick, and ten is ...



Zona.

Ah ... well ...

For you.









Yeah.  
Oh, yeah. I love her  
something awful, buddy,  
lemme tell ya.

Never  
betray that.

Not in this lifetime.  
Really, really I'd rather die.  
No bullshit.



I  
believe  
you.

Zona's dancing,  
you know.

Yeah?

Yes.  
She's **very** good.  
It's been years since  
she's danced First Dance.  
She's dancing for  
you, tonight.



I ... okay.  
I hope ...

It's just  
been a little  
rough. I ... I  
haven't been  
able to...

I know.



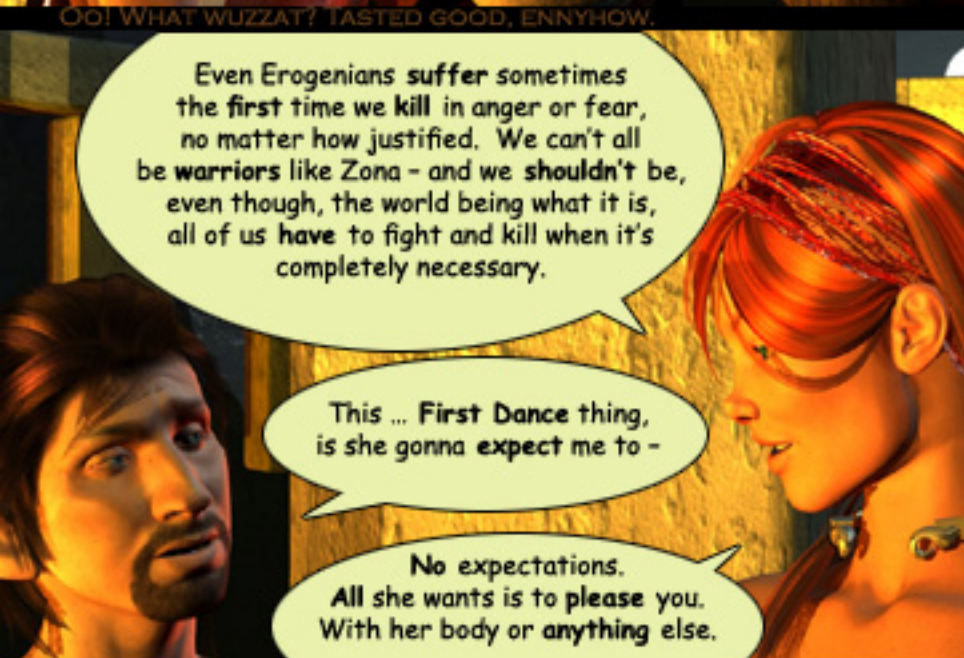
You do, huh?



She's my sister, Mentl,  
that is the sort of thing  
we talk about.

But we both know  
that you're in a  
kind of ... **shock**,  
from **everything**  
that's happened  
to you.

Suddenly to  
be in **another**  
world, surrounded  
by **everything**  
strange, all  
the **violence**  
you're not used to -  
especially the way  
**Ginsha** made use  
of you against  
your will, and  
what you had to  
do to **save**  
yourself.



Even Erogenians suffer sometimes  
the first time we kill in anger or fear,  
no matter how justified. We can't all  
be warriors like Zona - and we shouldn't be,  
even though, the world being what it is,  
all of us have to fight and kill when it's  
completely necessary.

This ... First Dance thing,  
is she gonna expect me to -

No expectations.  
All she wants is to please you.  
With her body or anything else.



That's ... not  
sure I know  
what to do  
with that.

Let yourself be  
pleased, if you can,  
that's all. Goddess, Mentl,  
don't worry about it!

This is a rare  
occasion where you  
can't do **anything**  
wrong unless you  
really try to.



I don't need  
to ask if you  
know how to  
use that drum,  
do I?

Pssh!

Thought so.

Dunno if I should,  
though, 'cause ...  
you know ...



Of course you  
should.

Don't worry -  
First Dance has its  
own magick. I think  
it can take care of  
itself - just as long  
as you don't try  
anything fancy  
on your own.

I'll blend.









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COME ON, BABY ... LIGHT MY FIRE.











GOJA TAN!

**BOOM!**  
**TAKA-TAKA-TAKA-TAKA-TAKA-TAKA-TAKA-TAKA!**



**BOOM!**  
**TAKA-TAKA-TAKA-TAKA-TAKA-TAKA-TAKA-TAKA!**

**BOOM!**  
**TAKA-TAKA-TAKA-TAKA-TAKA-TAKA-TAKA-TAKA!**

EVERYBODY WANTS CHUNG TO-NITE!



*Chehla nan ta n'amanh  
300'ja, 300'ja!*

*Chehla nan ta n'amanh  
Dihla pehlozh!*














Chehla nan ta n'amanh

ti zoo'ja, ni khranya

kele-kele mo charali amanh

**BOOM!**

**TAKA-TAKA-TAKA-TAKA! TAKA-TAKA-TAKA-TAKA!**

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DO YOU LOVE ME, NOW THAT I CAN DANCE?



HA-TARA-TARA-TARA

HARA-RA-TARA

**BOOM!**

**TAKA-TAKA-TAKA-TAKA! TAKA-TAKA-TAKA-TAKA!**



HA-TARA-TARA-TARA

HARA-RA-TARA ...

**BOOM!**

**TAKA-TAKA-TAKA-TAKA! TAKA-TAKA-TAKA-TAKA!**









tehl mu aya betan.

tehl mu aya biroj...

gladan amanh tu rezel in a cha

tehl mu chara ezton!











*When the characters in "Challenges Of Zona" sleep, it is common that they travel to the Otherwhen. The Otherwhen is a place of dreams, unreality and, often, a refuge for those who are between life and death. It is also a perilous place where beings who are real, half-real and unreal try, sometimes desperately, to assert their power and the legitimacy of their very existence by creating, influencing or destroying the real beings who are there by chance, magick and choice.*

*One of the beings stranded there is a writer, a semi-existent personality named Ray Candlemaker who contributes to a non-existent men's magazine called BayPloy. In order to make himself Real, he will attempt to interview somnolent spirits of real people travelling to the Otherwhen in unconsciousness. Recently, he managed to snag Zona Zonn Ipola, the princess and current champion of the Moon Tribe and of Erogenia itself.*

**RAY:** Thanks for consenting to this interview, Your Highness.

**ZONA:** Not really a problem, I guess. You said that you just had some questions?

**RAY:** Well, first, I guess a lot of our readers would be interested in knowing how it was, growing up in the Moon Tribe, as you did.

**ZONA:** Not Erogenian, are you?

**RAY:** No, nor our readers, hence the interest.

**ZONA:** Well, one thing that pisses me off is people not knowing what Erogenia is, not knowing our people or anything and then popping off with pronouncements or stupid questions that are just being asked on purpose to make us say stupid things. You're not going to do that, right?

**RAY:** No, no no. This is all about your side of the story.

**ZONA:** All right, then, well — growing up is never easy, right? Nobody ever has it easy. I guess I had it easier than some, and harder than others. A lot more is expected of you when your mother is Ipola. I mean, she's the queen, and she's a legend, right?

**RAY:** Your father also, correct? A legend.

**ZONA:** Yes.

**RAY:** I mean, observers say that, while you have inherited your mother's very beautiful face and some of her features ...

**ZONA:** Right, I've got her big tits, too.

**RAY:** Of course, but they say that you are much more your father's daughter, in most ways. In temperament, and in your physical strength —

**ZONA:** I don't remember Zonn. I was not even two years old when he decided to go away.

**RAY:** "Decided to ... ?"

**ZONA:** I'm sorry. That's probably unfair. It was during the war, and things happened and ... well, he was lost. Nobody knows what exactly happened. Mother says she sent out parties to search, and then she stopped.

**RAY:** Stopped? How long after he went missing?

**ZONA:** Ask her. I think it was about three months, just ... you know, from what other people have said.

**RAY:** Sounds like maybe you have issues with your father that haven't been resolved.

**ZONA:** What — "issues?" I —

**RAY:** Only that maybe you might be still angry at him for abandoning ...

**ZONA:** He got lost, okay? He's dead. Or, ... probably dead. It's been over twenty-five years, if he was alive, he should have come back by now, right? I ... I mean, he's dead. Definitely dead. He was killed by the Urtts, and he didn't "abandon" me. Talk about something else.

**RAY:** Going back to your childhood — you must have been difficult to discipline, just because of your strength. How did you mother manage it?

**ZONA:** Well, she didn't, not by herself. Erogenian kids get raised by the whole tribe, so it wasn't like she had to corral me alone, even if she had had the time to. I mean, yeah, when I was very little it was hard, because you don't understand things like limits and rules, and sometimes the only thing that gets through is a paddling or a thumping. It took usually two or three of my grown cousins to catch me and hold me down, and they knew they were going to get black eyes themselves or worse if they weren't careful. By the time I was eight or so I'd settled down enough to be able to accept a balancing when it was called for.

**RAY:** Were you a good girl?

**ZONA:** (laughs) Depends on how you define that. I mean, I never meant any harm, I like people, you know? I always have. But I did inherit my father's temper and for a long time it felt like I was in trouble every day for something or other. A lot of the boys, especially in some of the other tribes, didn't like mother being queen, and didn't think that girls should be fighting or doing other things. And they would say something stupid to me or about me, and then I'd do something stupid to them and then I'd have to balance the cha somehow, usually by doing some service, but there were times I just had to stand there and get hit.

**RAY:** That must have been hard.

**ZONA:** That was a picnic compared to the lecture.

**RAY:** Your mother — ?

**ZONA:** Oh, GODDESS, I'd rather get smacked any day. I would clean out fifty stables full of horse shit every day rather than have to stand there and TALK about what what I'd done wrong, and everyone elses' cha, and how did I feel about that, and couldn't I make a greater effort to consider the consequences of my actions ... Oh, shit, just kill me. Kill me outright and have done with it!

**RAY:** Sounds pretty normal, actually.

**ZONA:** You don't know, you have no idea how long she can go on, and how she can say the same thing in fifty different ways — and she STILL does it to me, even now.

**RAY:** Fans are interested in your latest love affair.

What can you tell us about —

**ZONA:** Mentl?

**RAY:** Yes, yes. Is he really —

**ZONA:** I started out saving his life, but he's ... like, so ... I just want to hug him to ... and he's ... ah ... I mean, I know he's not Erogenian, but that's not supposed to matter. He's so ... Oh, gods, he's just so cute!

**RAY:** Seems you're very ... taken ... with him.

**ZONA:** You know what you asked before? About growing up in the Moon Tribe?

**RAY:** Yes.

**ZONA:** Well, it's just that ... he's never had to be that. He doesn't have that expectation that everybody else does. It's ... he sees me like someone else. Like someone new. Like ... I don't have to be anyone with him, just me. And that's what he likes.

**RAY:** So, you think he accepts you — as you are, without judgment.

**ZONA:** Yes. I ... I mean, our people, my family, my kin, we ... we try to live that way. And we do, we mostly do. A lot more than other people. But ... well ... I mean,

I'm bigger than a lot of men, all right? And I'm stronger than any man I've ever met, all right? People don't ... you don't get treated like normal. All right, I mean, really, whatever "normal" is, it's not me, and ...

**RAY:** You've had boyfriends before, of course.

**ZONA:** Yeah. And girlfriends.

**RAY:** Oh ... yes, that, too ...

**ZONA:** Yeah, a lot. And ... okay. With most of them, it's like, wow, what a pair, and you're so big, and let me climb that mountain, right? And I can understand that. Everybody likes a challenge for fun. Fun is fun, and I've had a lot of fun. Hells, I've had a LOT of fun. And in the end, especially with men, it always seems to end with a fight. And I win, if you can call it that, but then it's over. Even with the women, it's like they want me to be something I'm not. They want to somehow turn me into something and someone that fits in with what they want a girl or a princess to be. But, with Mentl, it seems like more than that, or different in a way I don't ... I don't know. He's ... he's just special. I could break him like a toothpick, but at the same time I know if he needed to he could toss me across a couple of dimensions or something. And he's just so ... he's funny and he's so cute ... I ... I don't know.

**RAY:** Sounds very romantic.



*"...and then I'd have to balance the cha somehow, usually by doing some service, but there were times I just had to stand there and get hit."*



*"One thing that pisses me off is people not knowing what Erogenia is, not knowing our people or anything and then popping off with pronouncements or stupid questions that are just being asked on purpose to make us say stupid things."*



*"He doesn't have that expectation that everybody else does. It's ... he sees me like someone else. Like someone new. Like ... I don't have to be anyone with him, just me. And that's what he likes."*





Say, do any of you guys know how to *Madison*?

How to wh-?

Joke.  
Joke.

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Come on, dance with me!

I wish I could.  
I was just ... watching for a little bit.  
I have to get back to my post.



You have night duty?  
Since when?

Franduk wants to dance, and I said I'd take his duty for tonight.

I WAS DANCIN' WITH MY DARLIN' TO THE TENNESSEE WALTZ ...



You're too good, Rannik.

Still not good enough for some, I guess.

Gen turan.

Gen turan.



Hey!  
Dance with me!

Sure!



*E'er sharp Zonn's sight, his sword sun-bright*

*In darkness walked he as in light*

*Into the Eastern forests deep*

*He wandered where the Dragons sleep*

*And no man knows what there befell*

*The gods nor demons do not tell*

*In Otherwhen, or in the Deeps*

*He living or dead company keeps*

*Alas, 'tis here our knowledge fails*

*And great Zonn passes from our tales.*



CLAP-CLAPCLAPCLAP!

CLAP-CLAPCLAPCLAP!

AYAH!

HAI!

WELL DONE!

AA YAH!

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Uh - what  
do you think?



Well, you were  
fine in the dance.

Here: Just take  
some slow, deep breaths ...  
slow down your heartbeat  
and concentrate.

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Be in the moment  
right now - no future,  
no past.

No desire.

Let everything else  
but the idea of music  
drop away. Just plain  
music.

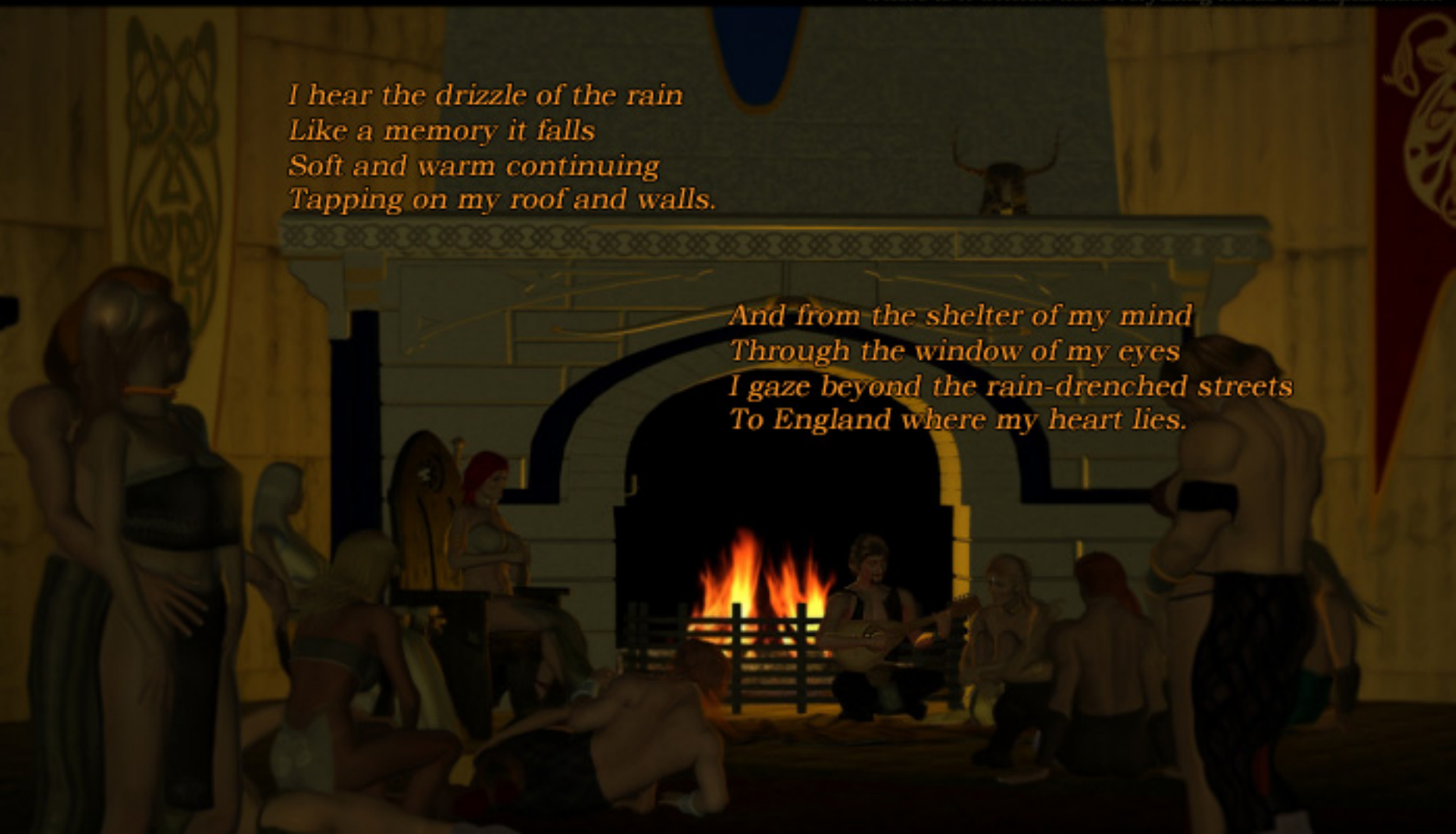


Okay. Okay.

Lemme see ... something  
fairly safe ... okay.

A little Paul Simon.  
Nice and gentle.


Where is it written that everything needs an explanation?



*I hear the drizzle of the rain  
Like a memory it falls  
Soft and warm continuing  
Tapping on my roof and walls.*

*And from the shelter of my mind  
Through the window of my eyes  
I gaze beyond the rain-drenched streets  
To England where my heart lies.*





My minds distracted and diffused  
My thoughts are many miles away

They lie with you when you're asleep  
And kiss you when you start your day.

And a song I was writing is left undone  
I don't know why I spend my time

Writing songs I can't believe  
With words that tear and strain to rhyme.

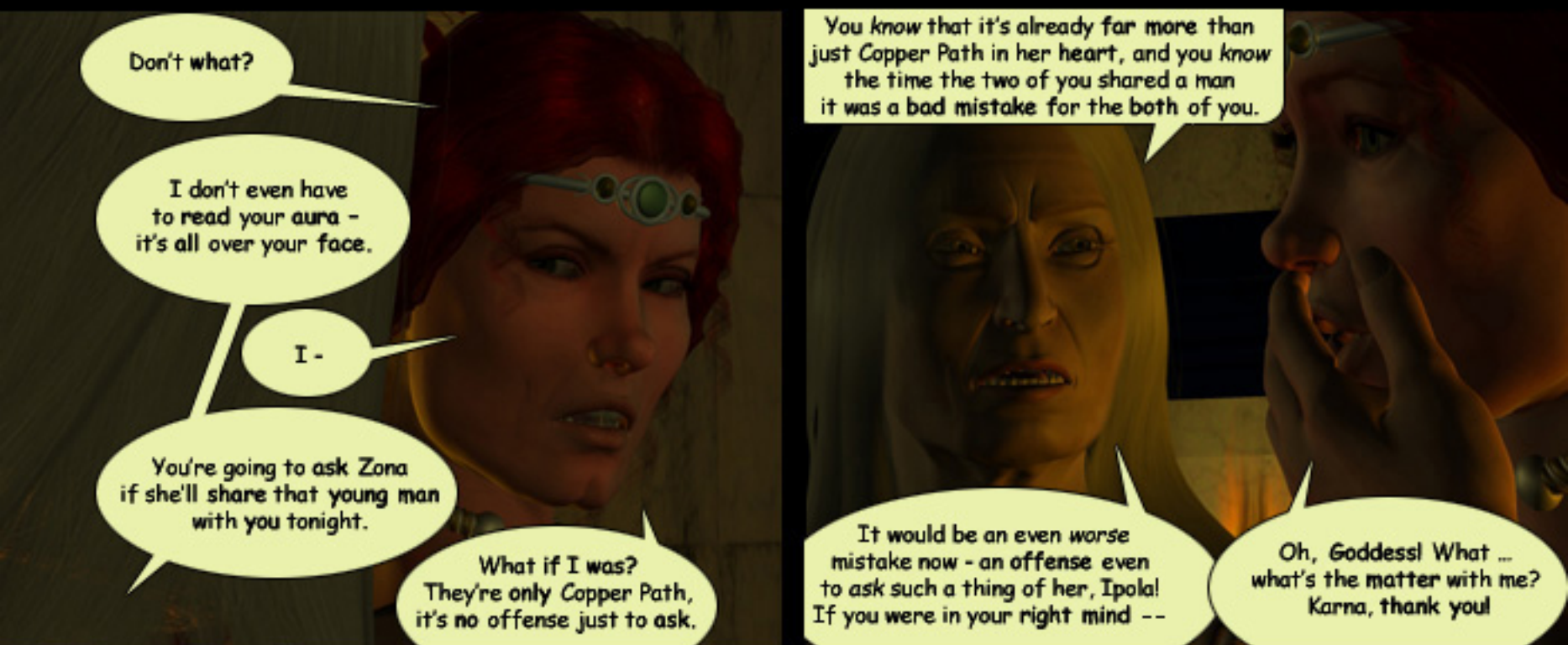
And so you see I have come to doubt  
All that I once held as true

I stand alone without beliefs  
The only truth I know is you.

And as I watch the drops of rain  
Weave their weary paths and die

I know that I am like the rain  
There but for the grace of you go I.





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Oh, this old thing? Got it in a pawn shop ...







Tonight it's official.

This is the coolest place ever, and  
I do not ever want to go home.





LUUUKE!

USE THE FORCE, LUKE!



!?

TRUST YOUR FEELINGS!



Vitol!



Shh, kid.  
No need to wake  
the little woman.



(You're very funny.)



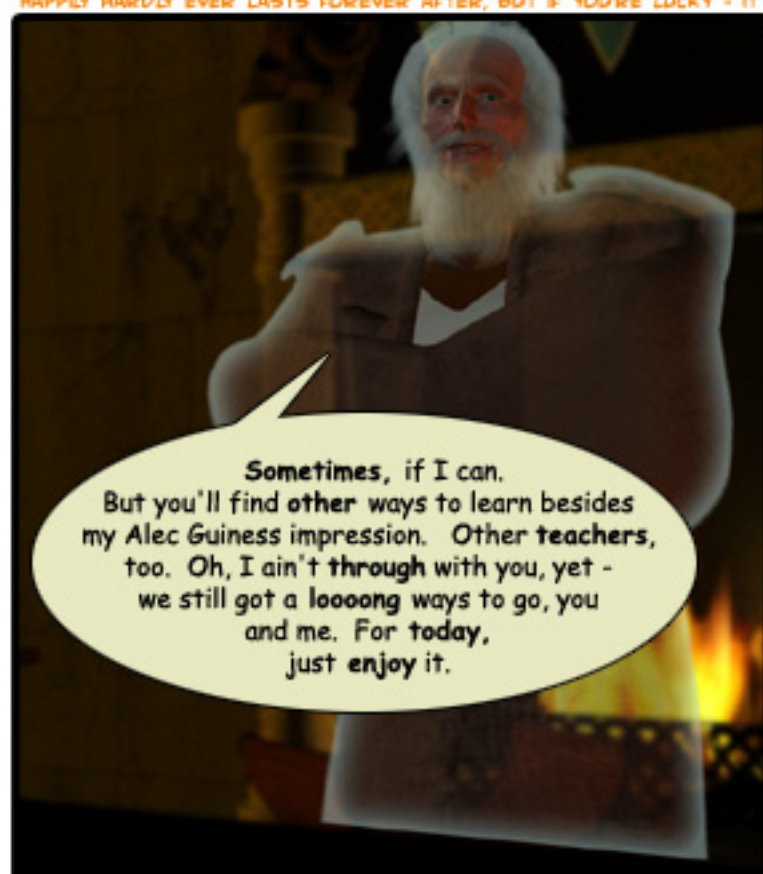
Yeah, but looks aren't everything.  
I just wanted to chat with you, that's all,  
while you're in the state of mind  
to see me.

And she's in the middle of a  
great dream - be a shame to spoil it.





HAPPILY HARDLY EVER LASTS FOREVER AFTER, BUT IF YOU'RE LUCKY - IT LASTS.











Ment!! Ment!!  
There you are!

Yes, Prince Myshkin,  
what can we do for you?

You are the only  
one I can ask this ...

Ask what?

Well, you've been ...  
I mean, travelling with them  
and ... I mean, everybody says  
a lot of things about Erogenians,  
but you know -- I mean ,  
I think --

Dude: Girlfriend  
waiting for me in  
nice, warm bed.  
Please be brief.

Well ... do Erogenian  
girls... I mean,  
when you've ...  
uh ...

I mean, do they  
ever ... like ...

Fake it?

Yatta-Ta, do you  
hava *any* idea how *stupid*  
that question is?

So -- No?

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Erogenians don't lie, chum.  
Specially about sex.

Really?

That's my  
experience.

Oh, GOD.  
Oh, MAN!

**I LOVE  
THIS PLACE!!**

You and me  
both, boychik.









OF COURSE SHE HAS A NEW GOWN. OF COURSE HER HAIR IS PERFECT.







Yes! Thrasu's blood, I'm sick to death of you!

You're always ready with that poison tongue of yours - always! Always insulting, always belittling! Always comparing me to Gudik!



But it wasn't me who led all those soldiers to Greymouth to get killed for fairy stories in a stupid book, is it?

Who is it that's left to mind things, huh? Who's the one who gives the orders, now, huh?

You?



Goddamn right it is! And I'll tell you another thing, Mother: I have your life in my hands, so you'd better ... you'd just better ...

Mind my manners?

Right! Goddamn right!

What -

Well, if you have my life in your hands, so to speak, let's have it done with, shall we?



That's a pretty dagger you're wearing, and I know it has a sharp blade.

Why don't you simply kill me right now?

Oh, don't worry, we can say it was self-defense or high justice or whatever lie you want and everyone who matters will believe you, at least officially.

I won't mind much - my life has become extremely tiresome, after all.

Mother, don't -

WEDDING SHALL WE MURDER TODAY AND OF ALL OUR MURDERS WHAT SHALL WE SAY?



Might I recommend you slit my throat just below the ear? Impossible to stanch the bleeding, and death is very quick.

Stop this!



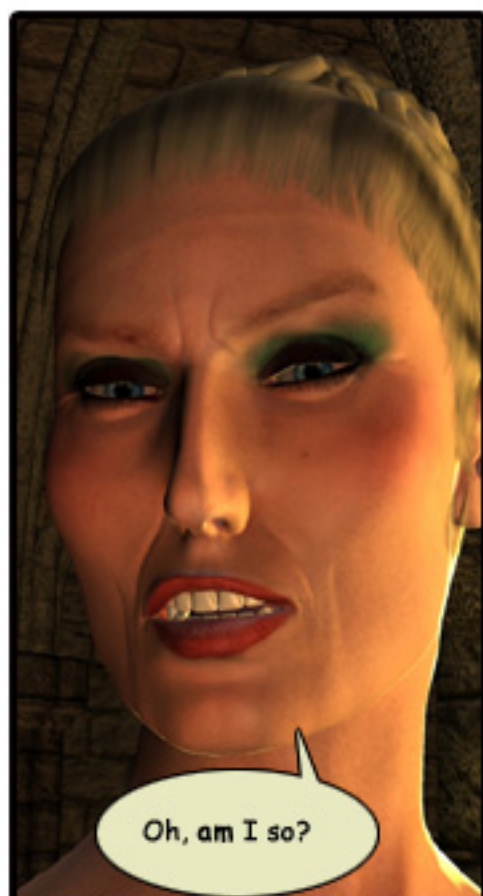
Isn't that my line, dear?

"Oh, please, stop! I'll do anything you say, sign anything!"

Or perhaps "Not that! Anything but that!"

You're mad!





Oh, am I so?



Is that how you justify all your offenses, my son? Mummy is mad, Mummy was oh so cruel to me, and so I'm not to be blamed for what I do?

Shut ... shut up!

Is this your latest outrage somehow my doing, then, not yours? But oh, yes, after all, it really isn't yours ... is it?



SHUT UP!!!

Who, then?! Who really pulls the strings here, my little prince? Just who **IS** master in this kingdom, now?!

SHUT UP!!!



Because as I am a true queen, I know -

It

Is

NOT

YOU!



SHUT UP!  
SHUT UP!  
SHUT UP!!

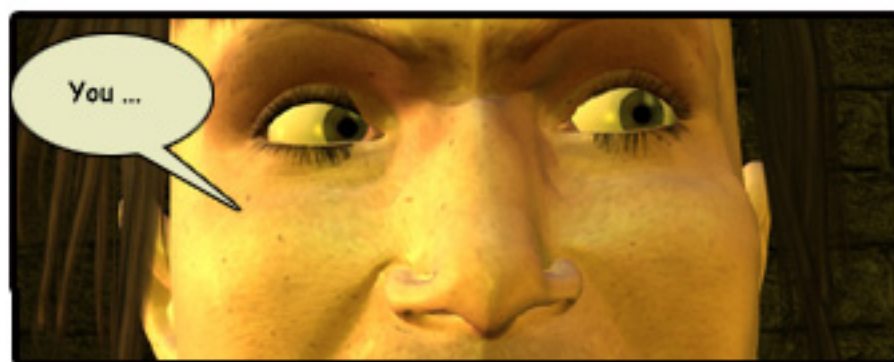


Very well, dear.

I suppose I just wanted to see if you had any spine at all.

Apparently not.





You ...



What  
an absolute  
disaster of a  
mother you  
are!



Yes.

Yes, at times  
I must be.

It is true,  
I've been no sort  
of mother to you.



It was always  
more important to be  
a queen, to try to whip  
you into being worthy of  
the throne, than to teach  
you ... softer things.

More  
human things

So, after all,  
I do bear my own  
share of blame  
for this.



What are  
you doing now?

You're trying  
to twist me around  
again, is that it?



No. Maldik, in all  
honesty, and for the love  
I do bear you, my flesh  
and blood:  
Stop this, now. It's  
not too late.

What --

Hate me  
all you wish -  
that's something  
I have earned.



But for all my plots, for all the blood  
and pain on my hands I have never betrayed  
this kingdom or its people.

Is that how  
you want to be  
remembered?



I -- you --

Maldik ...













Your "friends" have played you for a fool -

- not that that's terribly hard to do.

- But with my help we can turn this all to our advantage.

Now either you work with me or the best that happens is you die a traitor's death - to say nothing of what the filthy barbarians will want to do to you.



There's no third choice!



I - I'll have to think.

Certainly, your Highness. Please don't take too long.



Do remember, though, that my influence is considerable, as is that of my family.

If I may direct your Highness' attention to the name at the top of the list for special consideration?

Uh ... right, fine.



I look forward to hearing from your Highness very soon.

By tomorrow, I should think.

At the latest.





**SLAM!!**



**BANG!**

Rrrhh...

My lord?



Is something wrong?

I mean,  
is something wrong,  
Majesty?



You're just a whore,  
you know that?

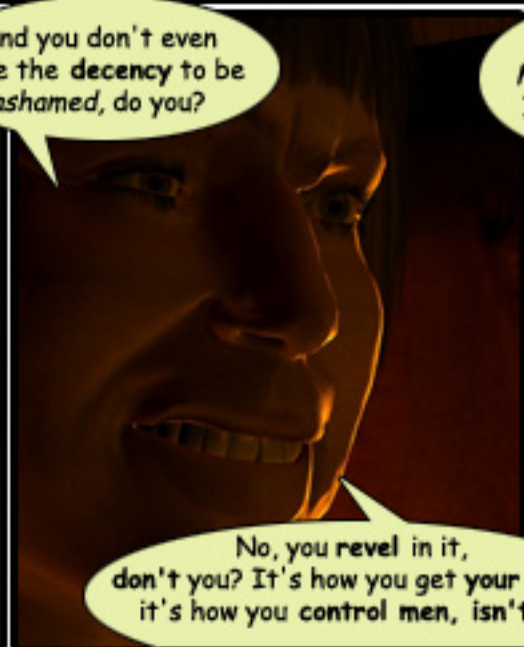


I -

Yes, I'm  
your Majesty's  
whore.



Do you  
want me  
to --



And you don't even  
have the *decency* to be  
*ashamed*, do you?

No, you revel in it,  
don't you? It's how you get your way,  
it's how you control men, isn't it?



I -- if your  
Majesty says  
I am, I am.

Shall I take  
my clothes off  
for you?



**BITCH!**

What, you  
think I'm *stupid*,  
is that it?!

**WHOP!**

Ye - I -- no!

No, Your Majesty!



Well, what if  
I say  
I **AM** stupid?

Is **THAT** how  
it is, too?  
Huh?!

**AGH!!**  
**AAAAH!!**

I ...  
I don't -  
know!

















MY LOVE IS VENGEANCE THAT'S NEVER FREE











"DON'T POINT THAT FINGER AT ME UNLESS YOU INTEND TO USE IT."







MANY A TEAR HAS TO FALL. BUT IT'S ALL IN THE GAME



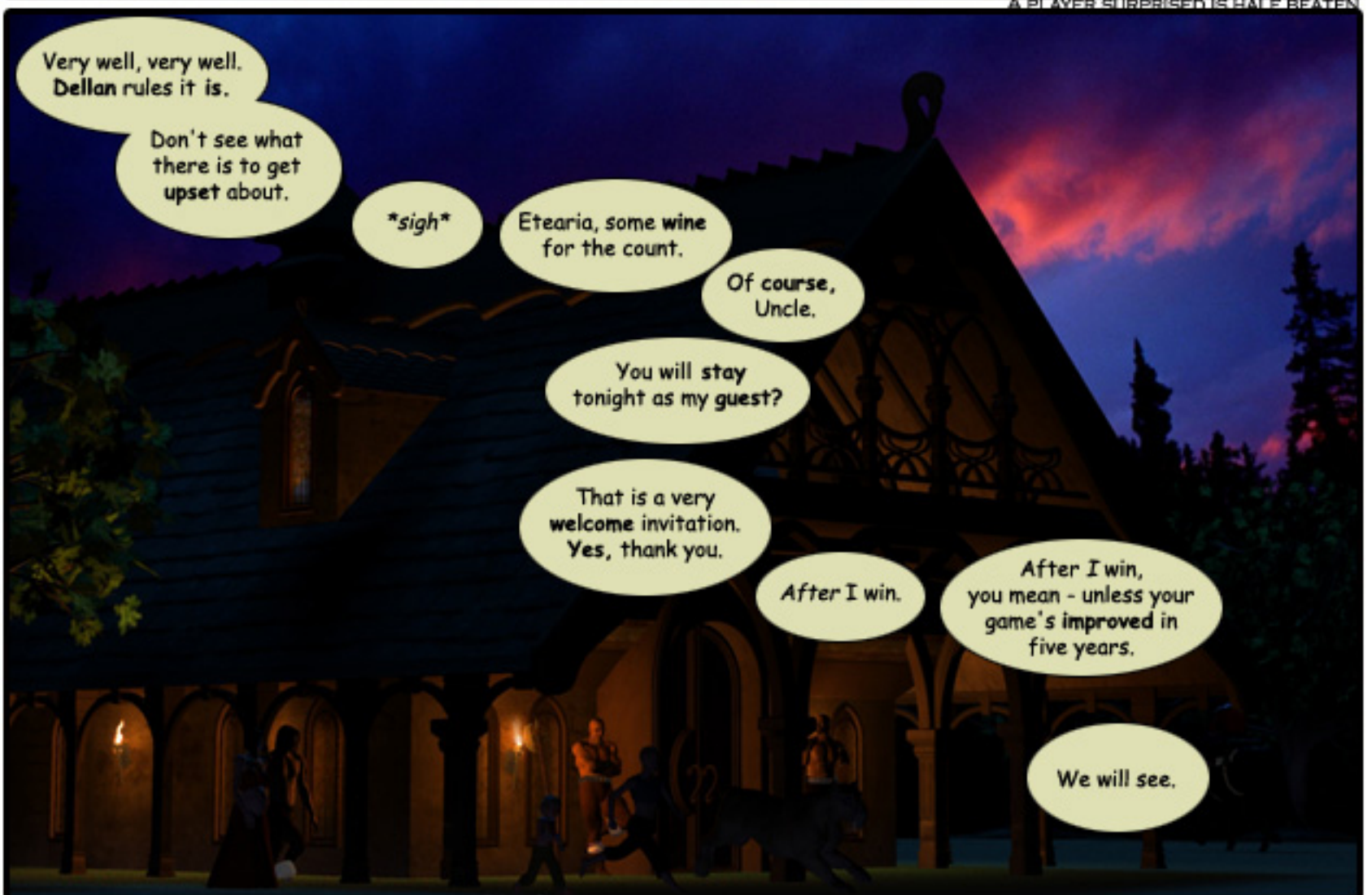
















OH SUSIE Q BABY I LOVE YOU, SUSIE Q.







Mentl, we know you're an enchanter - and with only a ... limited amount of experience.

Yeah, I ... I know I need training, Tula keeps reminding me.

She's given us a very good idea of your level, both in terms of ability and, most importantly, in terms of raw power.

Right, right. So, is that what this is about? Are we going to ...



Right now, nothing is decided, Mentl. Please understand that no one will try to impose anything on you against your will.

Well, yeah, but I have to start getting a handle on it, right?

It's a little more ... complicated than that.

How?



You've done us such service, and all from the heart. From a place of love and courage - I've made you our friend and I would never take that away.

I cannot - it would be an offense against the cha, and my own laws.

Thank you, Your Majesty. Please - where's this going?

I --



Mentl, how long have you been chanting this magick?



What - on purpose?

AND THE PENNY FINALLY DROPS.



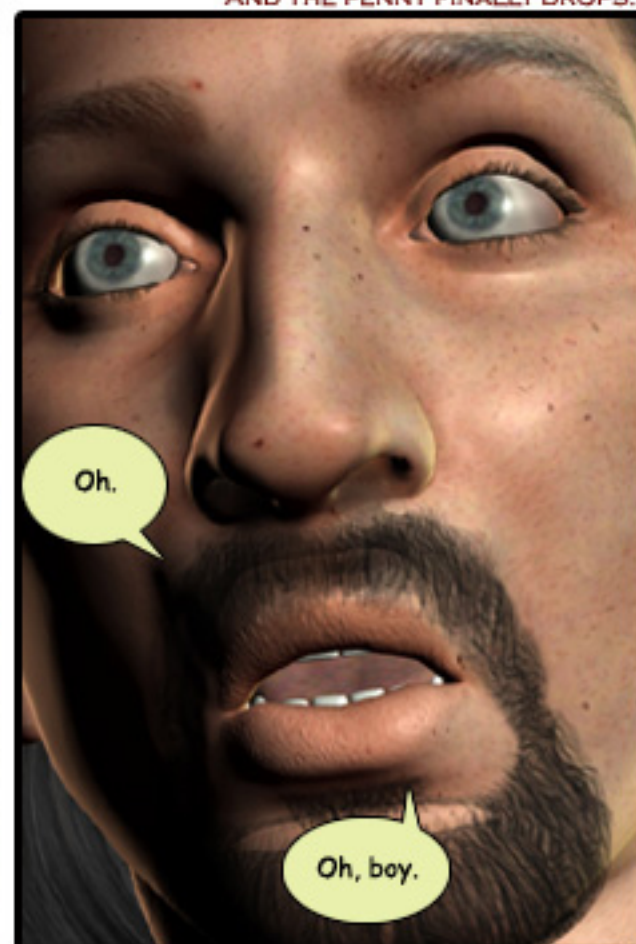
Let me be plain: How long have you been singing these love songs to Princess Zona?

Well - ah - since she gave me that lute, I guess. That first night a little more than two and a half months ago.

And how often have you been singing them?

Well, she likes them so much, so just about every ...

... night ...



Oh.

Oh, boy.



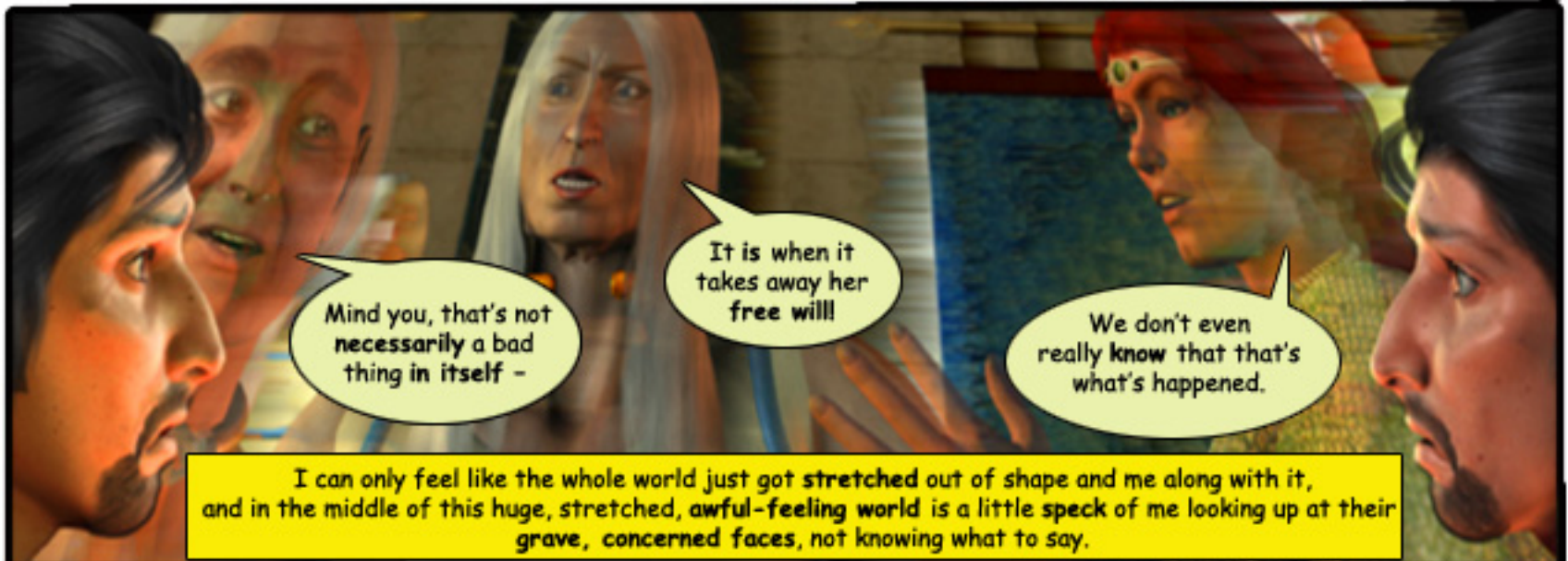


That's what I thought.  
I am afraid you may have  
laid a very powerful  
enchantment on her.



Oh ...

I can't feel my legs - I've  
gone all cold. There's a  
moment there where they  
all wait for me to say  
something else, but I can't  
think of anything.



Mind you, that's not  
necessarily a bad  
thing in itself -

It is when it  
takes away her  
free will!

We don't even  
really know that that's  
what's happened.

I can only feel like the whole world just got stretched out of shape and me along with it,  
and in the middle of this huge, stretched, awful-feeling world is a little speck of me looking up at their  
grave, concerned faces, not knowing what to say.

TO BE WISE, AND LOVE, EXCEEDS MAN'S MIGHT.



I want you to sing to me  
again tonight - please?

The love-song is like nothing  
I've ever heard! It makes me feel  
strange and wonderful ...

It's just a song ..  
I don't know why I  
forgot that for a moment.

Hah! The feelings  
seemed so real ...

I'm feeling  
things that  
aren't real ...

When you sang like that, and I ...  
it was like I wanted to ...  
be that woman.

I wanted to  
have the promise of always  
and forever like her - to belong with  
you to ... to be ...  
the love song.

I'm feeling  
things that  
aren't real ...

I mean, with the sort of  
thing that happens every time and  
you haven't figured out that something's  
a little odd?

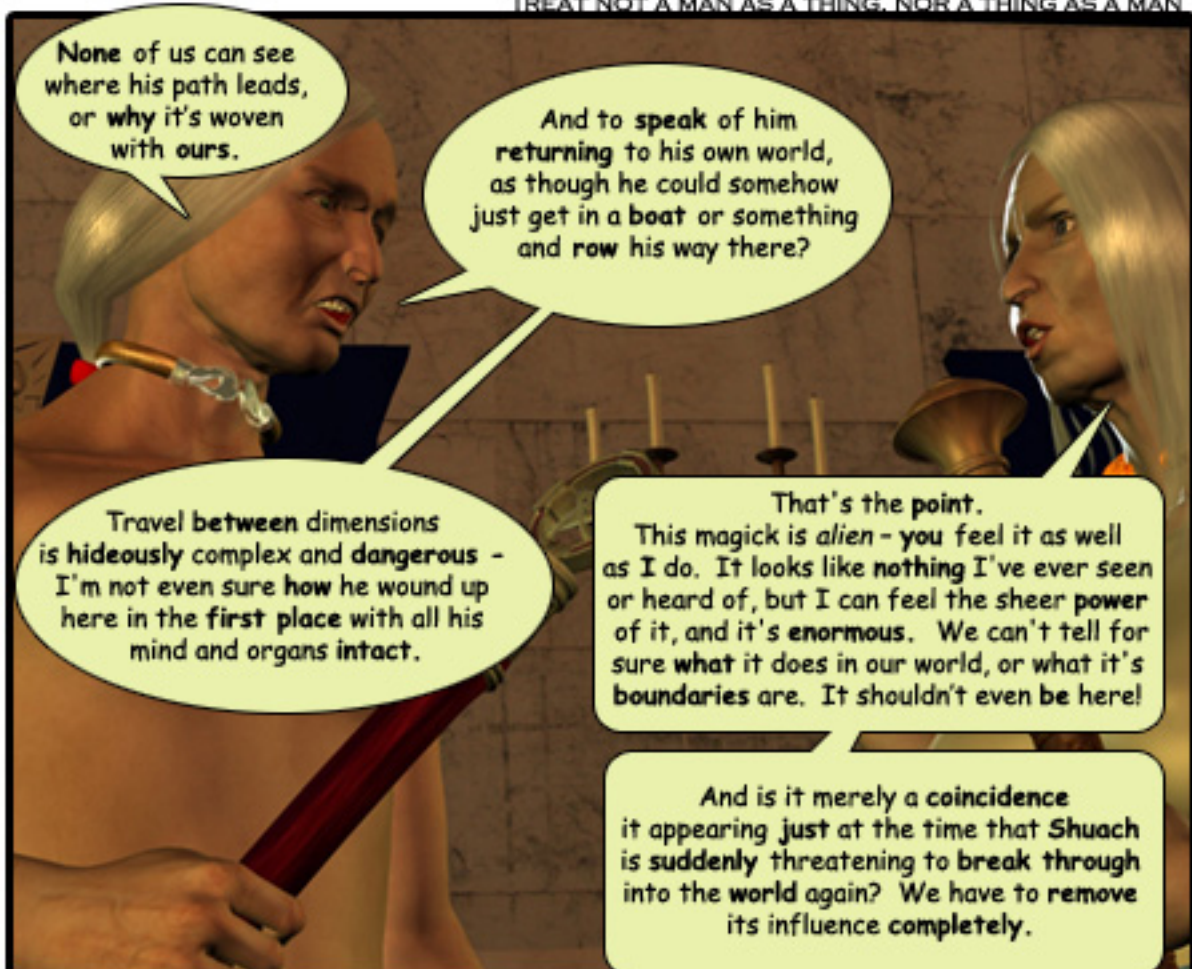








TREAT NOT A MAN AS A THING, NOR A THING AS A MAN





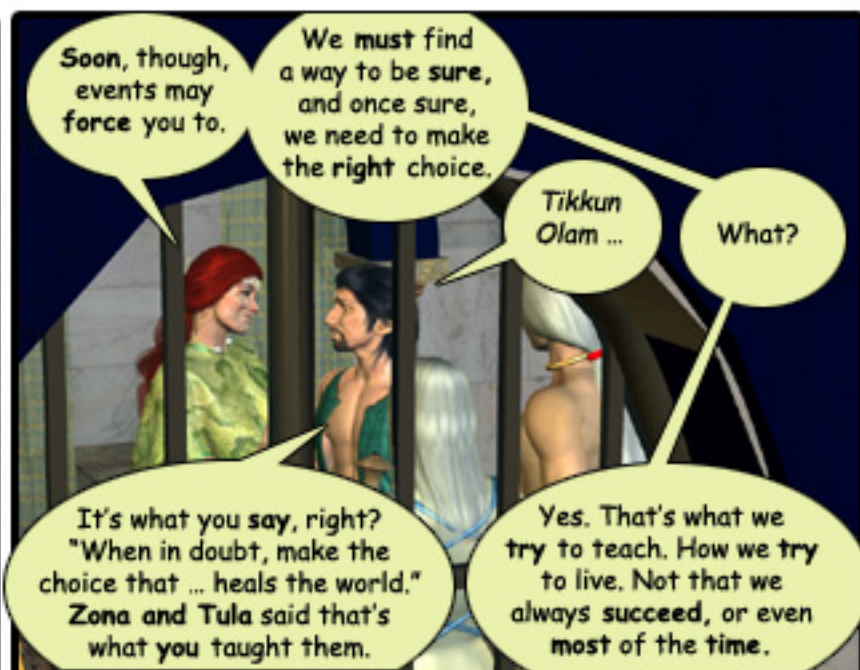


Thanks. I ...  
I know you mean well.

This is your home,  
your people. I don't  
blame you for ...  
anything.

I just ... I ... don't  
know what I'm  
supposed to do.

You don't have to do  
anything, Mentl, not yet.



Soon, though,  
events may  
force you to.

We must find  
a way to be sure,  
and once sure,  
we need to make  
the right choice.

Tikkun  
Olam ...

What?

It's what you say, right?  
"When in doubt, make the  
choice that ... heals the world."  
Zona and Tula said that's  
what you taught them.

Yes. That's what we  
try to teach. How we try  
to live. Not that we  
always succeed, or even  
most of the time.



Funny.

Yes?

In my tribe,  
back home, we have the  
same kind of thing.  
We say Tikkun Olam.  
"Heal the world."

It's what we call  
a mitzvah ... what you  
do because God  
would want you to.



Funny. It just  
occurred to me. Just  
now when you were  
talking about ...  
um ...

... choices.

"Tikkun Olam."  
I like the  
sound of it.

Sounds nice when  
you say it. And you never  
even went to Hebrew School.



Well ... I ...gotta go.

I've taken  
enough of your time,  
today. Ah ... thanks.

We'll talk  
again, soon.



Well, I've  
just shattered  
his happiness.

And Zona's.

I wish ...

That he'd  
never come?

I WISH, I WISH, BUT IT'S ALL IN VAIN, I WISH I WERE A MAID AGAIN;



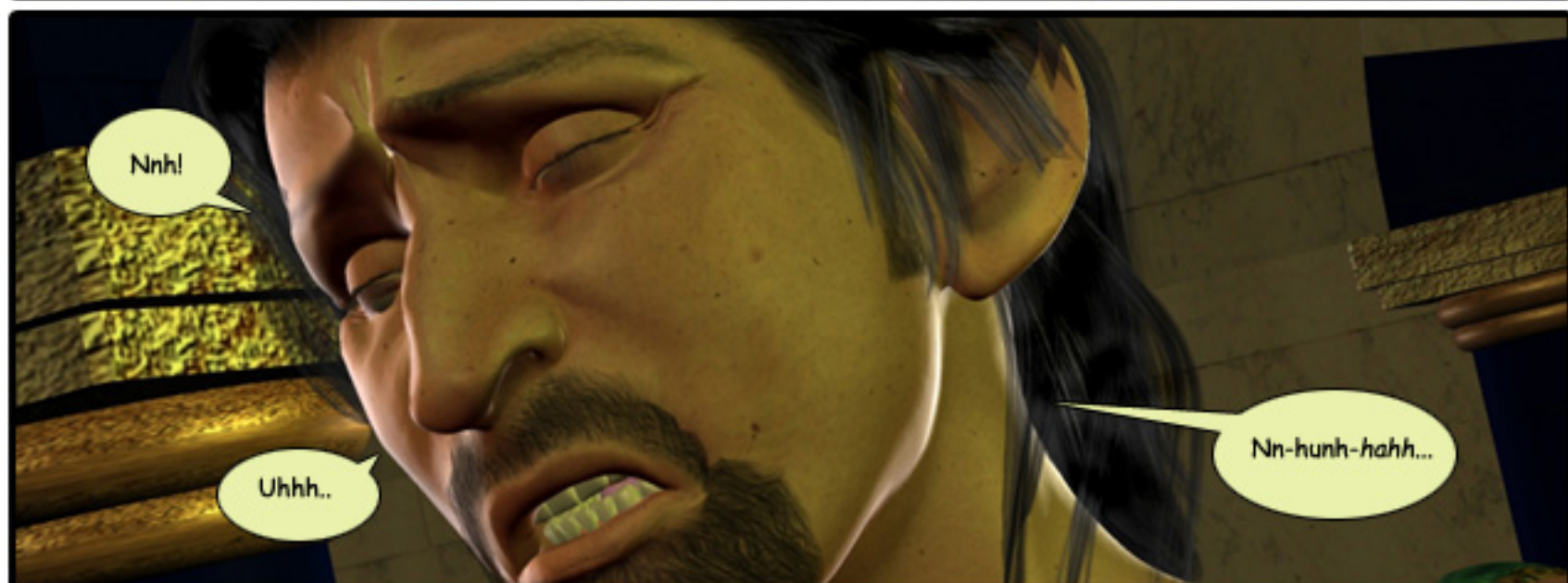
No.

I wish I was a  
fisherwoman in the  
Bear tribe.

Please leave me  
alone for a little.

And send in a  
bottle of brandy.









Asshole.

To think that somehow  
I was different here, that ... that...



Magick!

Magick was gonna  
change everything!

What a joke.



Shit. Shit!  
What a gaping  
anus-brain I  
was to think a ...

... a girl like that ...

... would ever ...  
could ever ... Omigod.



Omigod, Zona.  
How can I ever  
look .. in her eyes  
... again?

I ... made her lie.

About the  
most important  
thing in the world,  
and I ...

Stupid!



**STUPID!!**

**KRAKK!**

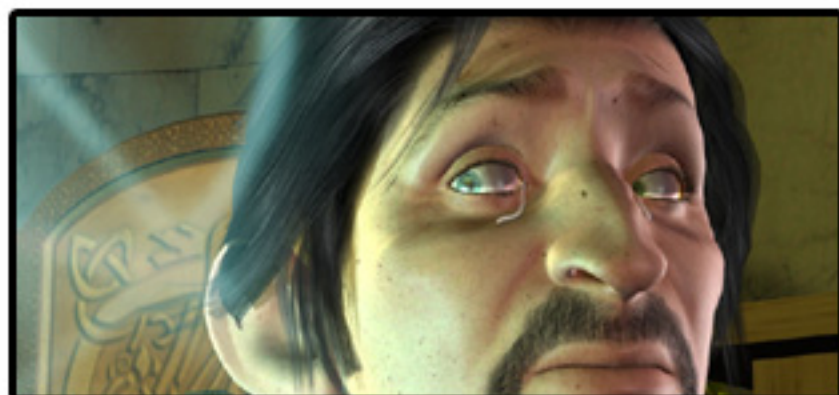
**FUCK!!**



**ALL A STUPID,  
FUCKING, STUPID,  
STUPID LIE!!**

**ALL A  
FUCKING LIE!!**













Ah!

Mentl?



Oh ... oh, boy.

Have you seen Mentl?  
Something's wrong. The  
room's a mess and his  
lute's broken!



I think ...  
you need to  
talk to Mother.



What? Why  
would I "need" to  
talk to Mother?

Go.  
Talk to her.



Oh, Mentl.

You idiot.







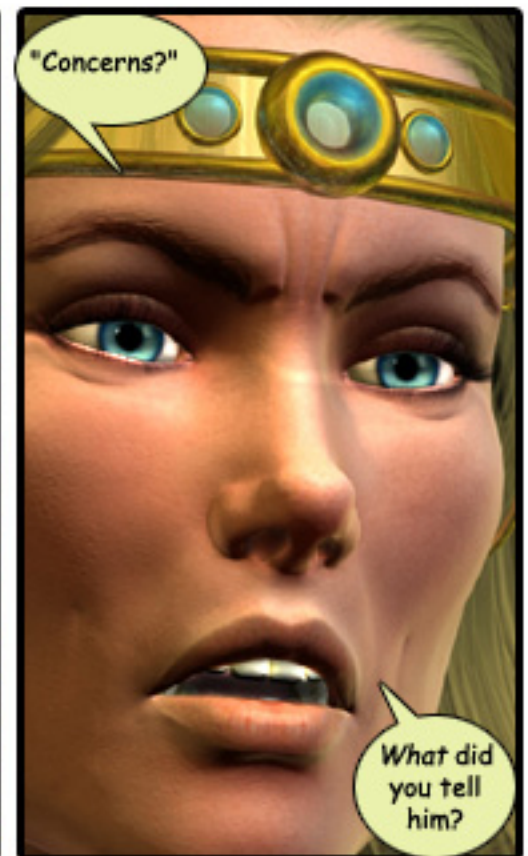


I didn't really expect this - not so soon or without help. To just summon a dimensional portal like that -- amazing!

Tell me what is going on!

Why has Mentl gone!? What -

Zona - he was here less than an hour ago. We spoke to him about some of our ... concerns.



"Concerns?"

What did you tell him?



You are not acting like yourself, Zona.

Wha -

**WHAT?!**



Zona, ever since you met this man, with his love songs and his enchantment, you've been ... strange. Everyone's noticed it. You've been ...changeable and moody.

Oh.

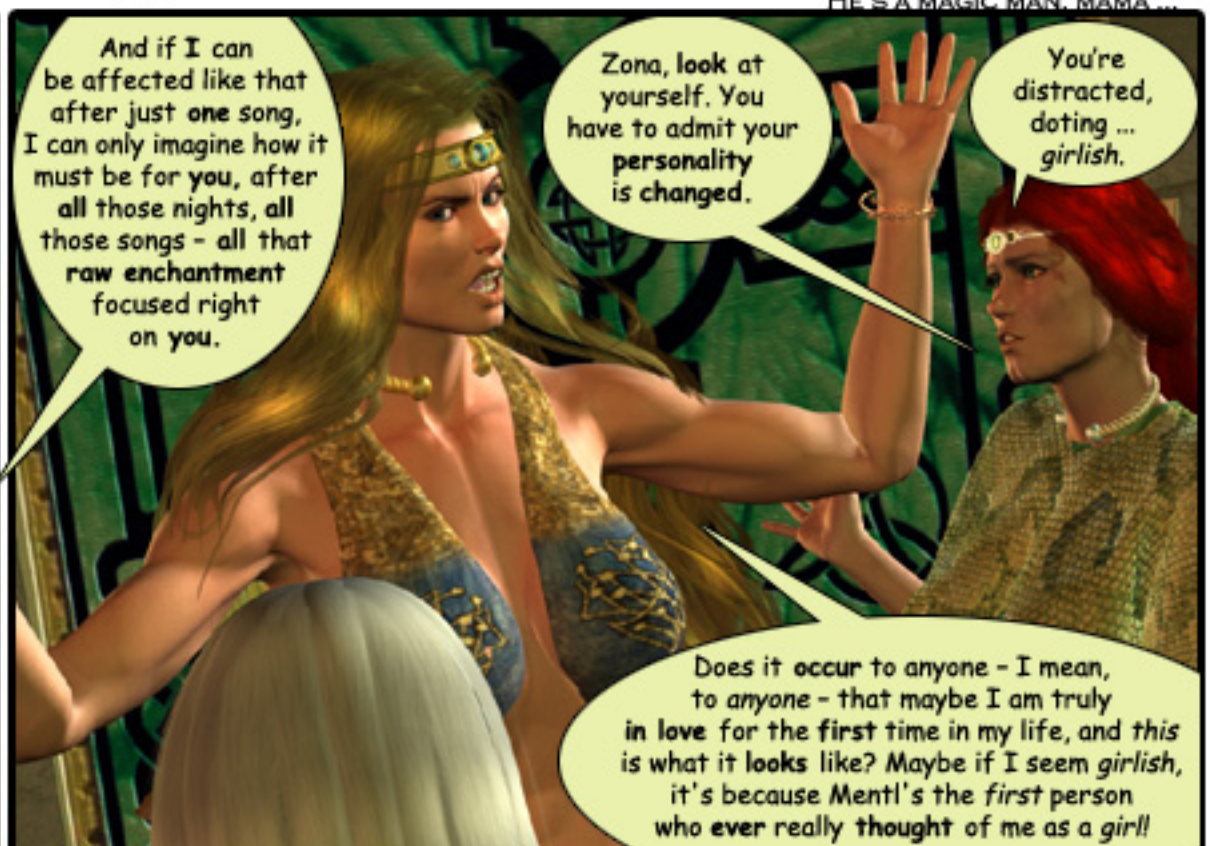
Really.

Tula says you've been jealous of him. You, Zona - jealous! You've told me yourself of being frightened by feelings you'd never experienced before. You ask for the music every night, and never tire of it.



And every time he sings, no matter what he seems to intend, people are affected by the magick.

Yes, even me. I literally started having fantasies about.... well, let's just say I am not used to my feelings being manipulated.



And if I can be affected like that after just one song, I can only imagine how it must be for you, after all those nights, all those songs - all that raw enchantment focused right on you.

Zona, look at yourself. You have to admit your personality is changed.

You're distracted, doting ... girlish.

Does it occur to anyone - I mean, to anyone - that maybe I am truly in love for the first time in my life, and this is what it looks like? Maybe if I seem girlish, it's because Mentl's the first person who ever really thought of me as a girl!

HE'S A MAGIC MAN, MAMA...









Mother!

Zona, calm down  
and listen to me.  
We have to --



I've heard enough.  
I don't care what  
it takes, I will  
find him.

Zona --

I'll find a sorcerer,  
a charm, a magick portal,  
some high priest -  
something, and I --



Zona,  
I *forbid* it!



You -  
you can't forbid me  
to follow my love.

Not even you can  
offend the cha  
like that.



Is he your love?  
We still don't really  
know for sure.

You mustn't try  
to follow him, Zona. It's far  
too dangerous.

And he left  
of his own free will -

HOLD ON THAR, BABA-LOUIE!



Because **YOU** poisoned his mind!

What? Were you  
jealous that I'd finally  
found a man who wasn't  
interested in

**YOU?!**









This. **THIS** is the reason!

When you get like this - *Agh!*  
**SO** like your father!

Never any thought for the bigger picture - always rushing into things, heedless of the consequences.



And gods forbid anyone should offend you!

Your personal cha is always the most important thing in the world! When you hurt, when you're **angry**, there's no getting through to you without a goddamn siege engine!

Your private will is always the first thing you attend, never mind the rest of us who have to live with what you do, have to fix what you break!



And what have I broken lately, Mother, that you've had to fix?!



I send you on a simple scouting mission, and you nearly cause an incident at Gudik's court with your bloody temper! If Yanora hadn't been there -

NEVER INSULT ANYONE BY ACCIDENT.



What? **Maldik?**!

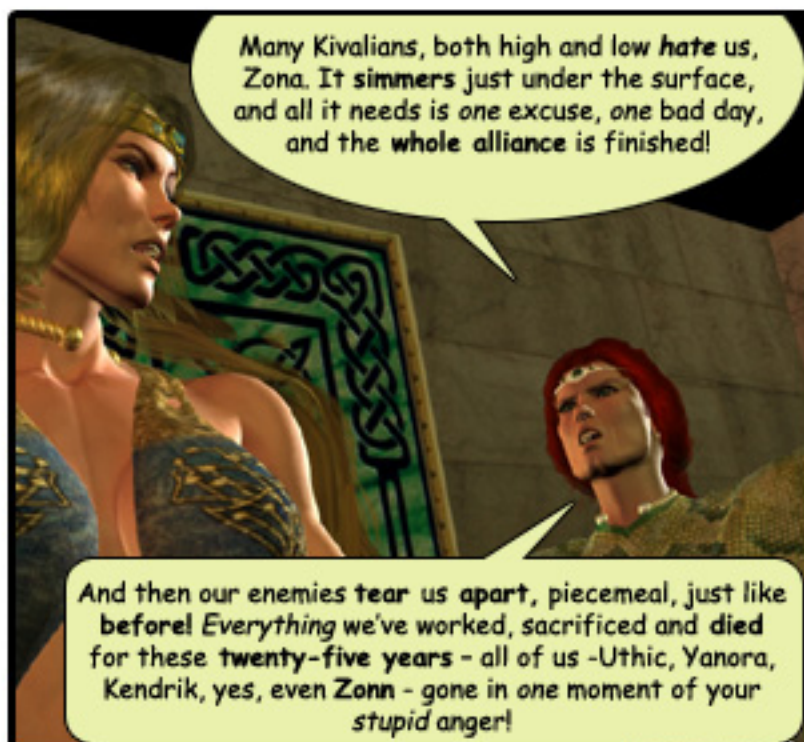
Am I supposed to take brazen insults from that ... fuckwit?!!

You keep it under control! You don't threaten to break the prince regent's face!

I didn't --

You made his guards so nervous that they tried to kill you!





Many Kivalians, both high and low *hate* us, Zona. It *simmers* just under the surface, and all it needs is *one* excuse, *one* bad day, and the *whole* alliance is finished!

And then our enemies *tear* us *apart*, piecemeal, just like *before*! *Everything* we've worked, sacrificed and died for these *twenty-five* years - all of us -Uthic, Yanora, Kendrik, yes, even Zonn - gone in *one* moment of your *stupid* anger!



And the worst part is I know you know that. And that's just the *latest* example, Zona. My child, I love you, but at your age you still don't really understand that we are *not* like other people.

Must you be so ... Erogenian?

You are the royal champion! You should be my right hand! Not just some Lion Tribe warrior riding around having *personal* adventures!



Just **ONCE** would it kill you to *think* before you *act*?!

I ... I ...



YOU TELL ME MISTAKES ARE PART OF BEING YOUNG



I'm sorry ...

Cha na amanh ...

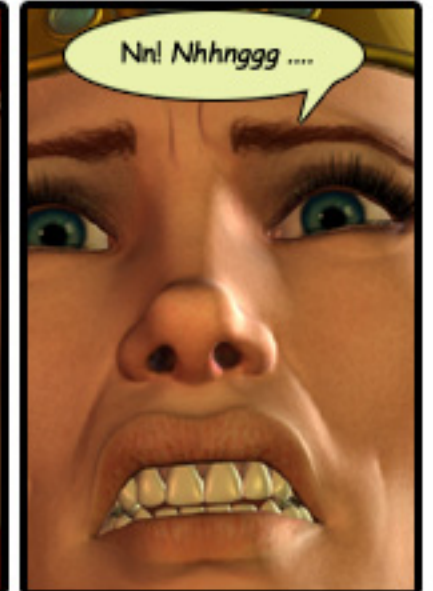
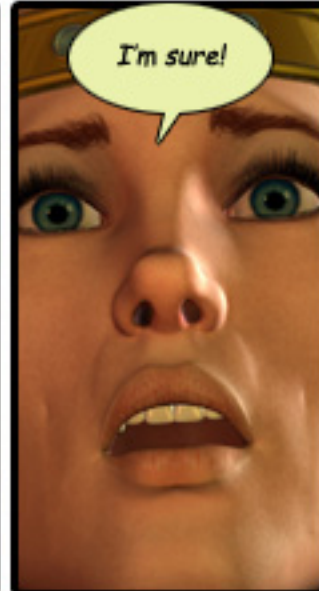
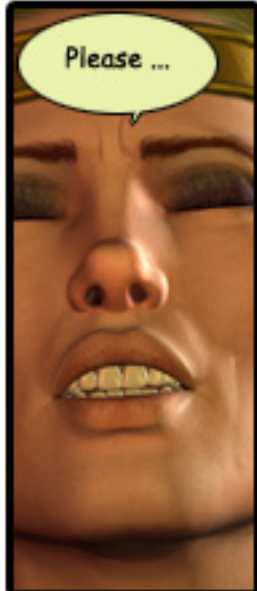
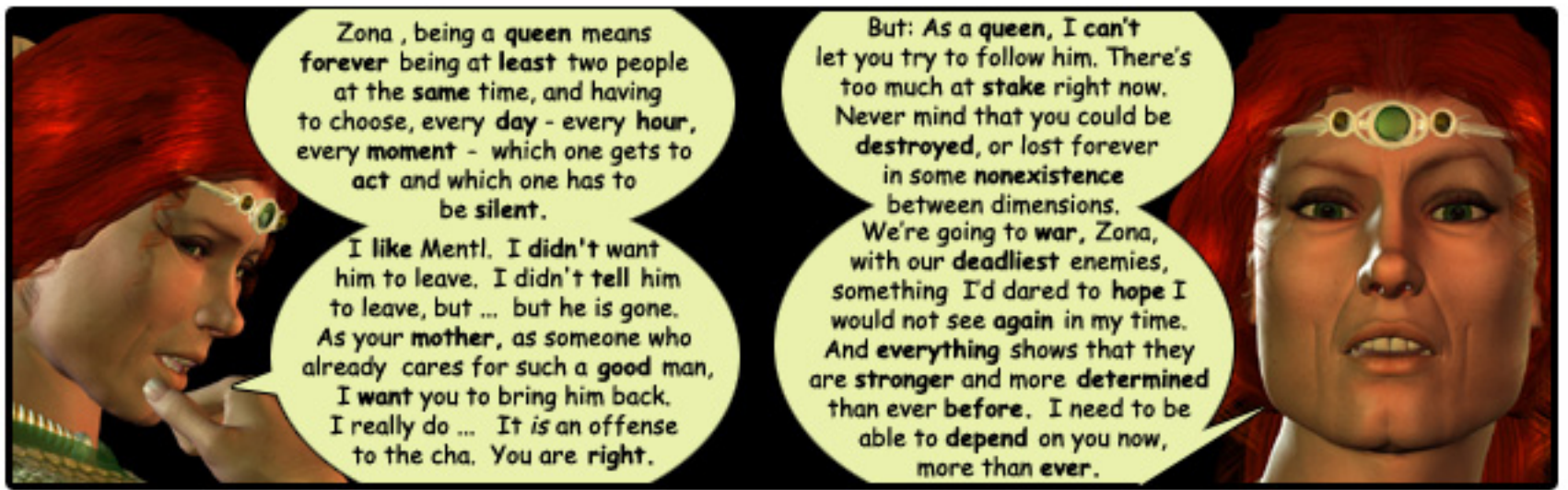




CHARACTER IS THE SUM AND TOTAL OF A PERSON'S CHOICES







YOU KNEW SHE HAD TO THROW SOMETHING - RIGHT?



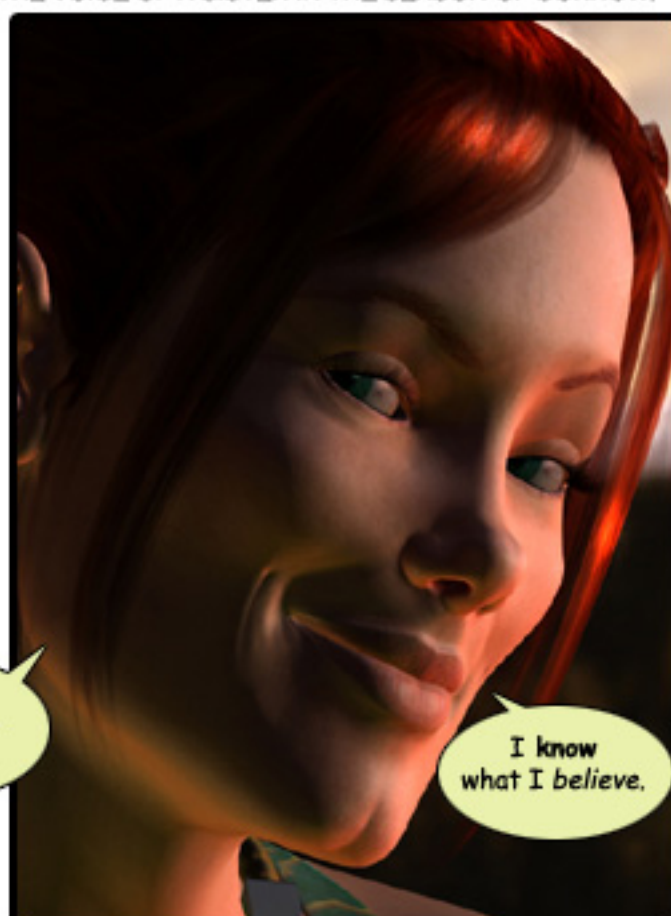








SWEET IS THE VOICE OF A SISTER IN THE SEASON OF SORROW.







What's the difference?

The difference is like you and me. I'm Princess Knowledge, see - I need to know things. Things that have touch and taste and form and energy that I can put in front of you and show you the reasons why. Knowing is certainty - it's right there true today and will be tomorrow.

You're Princess Belief - you believe things because of how you feel, things that come from inside you - in your heart.

But the heart can be tricky - it doesn't always lead us to the safe place. It can get us hurt and killed so easily. It can lead a whole people into error, like it did all those centuries ago. What's true today may not be true tomorrow. That's belief.

HALF OF BEING SMART IS KNOWING WHAT YOU ARE DUMB ABOUT.



Then why do people always say to follow your heart?

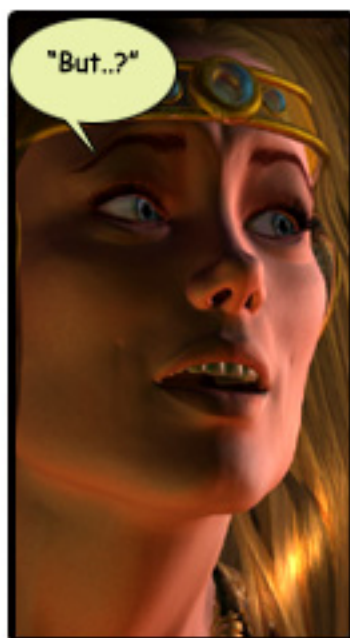
Because it's ... better, in some ways. It's warm, it's human - it cares about where it's going, it cares about what happens and why.

Knowledge doesn't care. It only knows what is - not for sure what is to be, or even what should be. Besides, knowledge may be certain, but certain knowledge isn't as easy to come by as people want. A lot of times we have to substitute belief for knowledge, because that's literally all we have to go on.



You're too smart for your own good, sometimes.









He's all alone, now. He doesn't have a house or even a bed of his own ... no job, no money. And his magick doesn't even work in his world, how is he gonna defend himself? He sleeps in his SeventyThreeDodge.

Do we even know what a SeventyThreeDodge is?

He tried to explain - it's like a magickal metal cart that goes by itself. Except he never takes it anywhere because it eats money and he's too poor. Sanberdino - it's ... a big city with hundreds of thousands of people in the middle of a desert, no forests or farms. You can't just grow your own food or go hunting or fishing, you have to buy everything with money. He had to sell his lute just so he could eat!

END OF CHAPTER



That sounds horrible.

He can't afford to get any skinnier! What's he going to do?

I don't know. What he does for now isn't up to us. We can only decide what it is we're going to do.

I'm forbidden to do anything ...



That's right. You're forbidden.

What do you mean?

"... the world you were meant to be in all along ..."



Huh?

Don't ask me anything - do you hear?

Nothing.



Tula -

I'm going to be very busy. Maybe for months. Maybe longer - I don't know. You probably will be, too, if it comes to that.

Right. Right.

In fact, I'm sure you will be. Mother's going to want you to lead a small advance group to make the Urtts' lives as difficult as possible while we organize the tribes into a proper army.

Somehow, I don't think I'll have a problem with that.



Wolf Cub - You're the best!

I know.









Okay - five thousand.  
Provided it's not ... uh ...

I mean, not like  
I'm gonna call the cops or anything,  
Michael, but not even for friendship  
can I take stolen goods.

Check it out, Van.  
I guarantee it won't show up at all.  
It's never been registered.

Why?

Private family quarrel.



And so, if I  
call your mom, she's  
gonna know about  
this?



She knows  
about it.



So - how  
is she these days?  
Better?

She had  
that ... that  
thing.

She's fine, doctor says  
it was mild cardiomyopathy.  
He gave her a prescription,  
she's back to her old self.

So, you're getting  
along now, finally?



Like I said, she's  
back to her  
old self.

But at least  
we're talking  
again.

We had another fight.  
The reason I need the money.  
She wants me to move back,  
I can't. I mean, I love  
her but we'd kill each  
other inside a  
week.

Sorry.







"...and in those days there lived in the land a shepherd's son who was fair of face and form and had the grace of the spirit kings about him so that he feared no thing that walked or flew or swam. He had eyes that made those that looked on him glad in his beauty and his virtues, and in all ways he sought to do that which was commanded of God. He was called ...?"

"Holy Georg."

Ma, can I please be excused?

IF YOU POUND HARD ENOUGH, A SQUARE PEG EVENTUALLY FITS A ROUND HOLE.

No, you may not.

We'll finish the chapter.

But I don't wanna be a Thrasan, Ma ...

Everybody has to go to church! You have to! It's the law!

Nuh-uhl! Not for us!

Balan ...

BUT IT ISN'T SQUARE ANY MORE

Isn't that right, Grandpapa? We don't have to go to church because we're Erogenian, right?

Well, they haven't bothered me about that since I married your grandmother.

Oh --

Oh, thank you, father.

What?





THIS SPACE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK.











No, it's not.  
Come here, child.

Hey ...



Please don't fight.

It's all right, sweeten.  
Grandpapa and I were just  
having a ... disagreement.



Mu amanhara  
Tarya ...

It's all right.  
Grandpapa's just  
an old idiot.

No!

Could've  
fooled me ...

No, you're not!  
Don't say stuff  
like that.

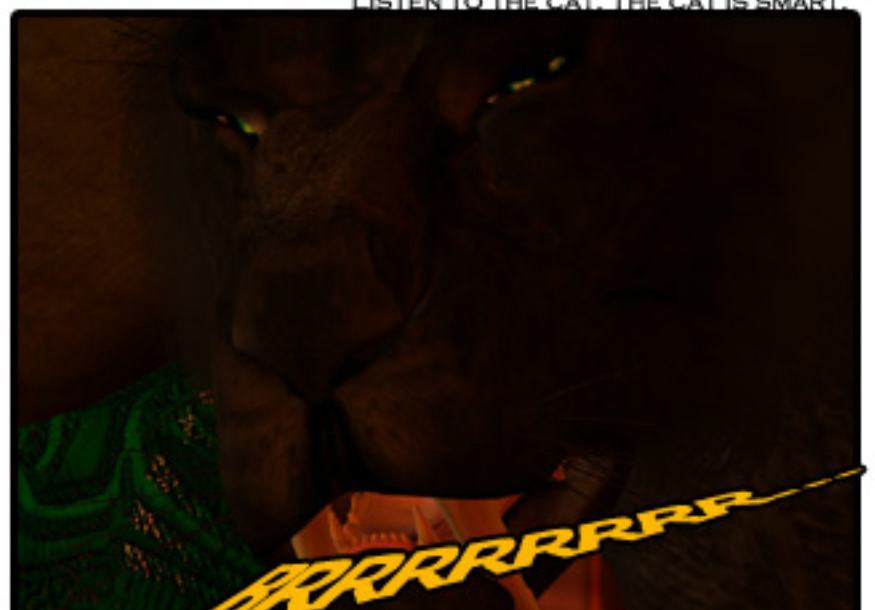


All right, all right.  
You're right.

We shouldn't be  
fighting each other,  
especially right now.  
Not over  
anything.



Who could that  
be at this time of night?



This is the home  
of Darvik Shen Bulana?

Yes.

And you're  
the daughter?

I'm Mora  
Darvik Emlaen.



Right, then.

You lot are  
all coming with us.





What? Why?

The prince doesn't need a why, girl.

He says you go, you go.

But, the children --

They're coming, too. All of you.



No, they're bloody well not!

You go back and tell that snotty master of yours that a prince of the Fox Tribe doesn't dance to his --



Oh, I don't have time for this, you old yergo fart! Get up and come along or you'll be made to be sorry!

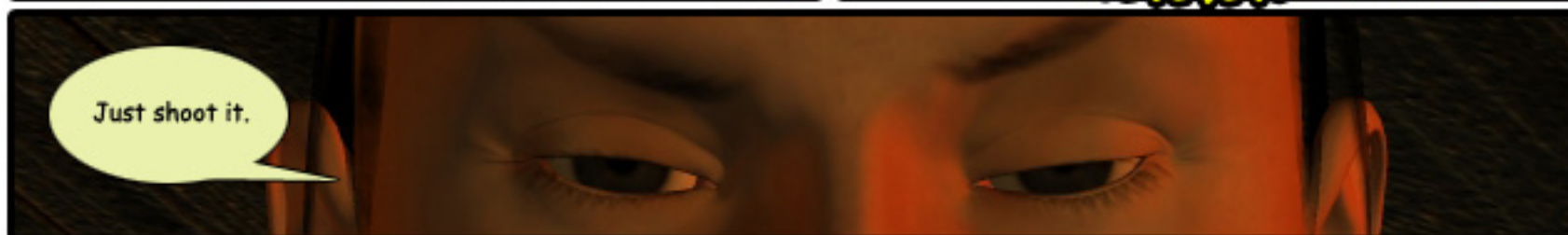
Stop this! He can't walk!



I wouldn't if I could, you arrogant prick! Lay a hand on any one of us and --

Bloody hell, Captain, nobody said anything about a --

RRROWRRRRR ....



Just shoot it.



**NO!**

**THUNK!**

**RR-OWA!**

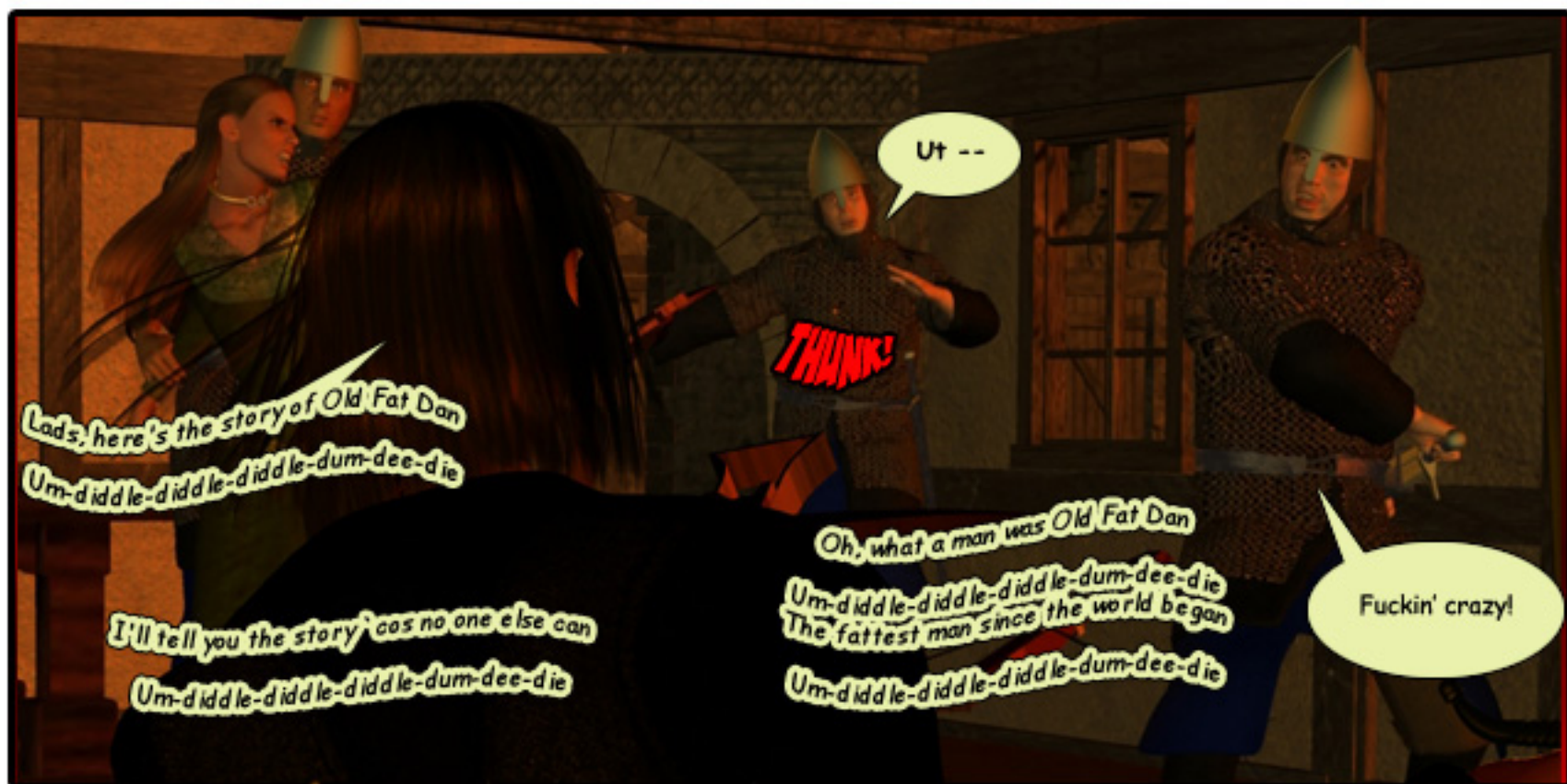




HERE COMES TROUBLE ON SILENT FEET.







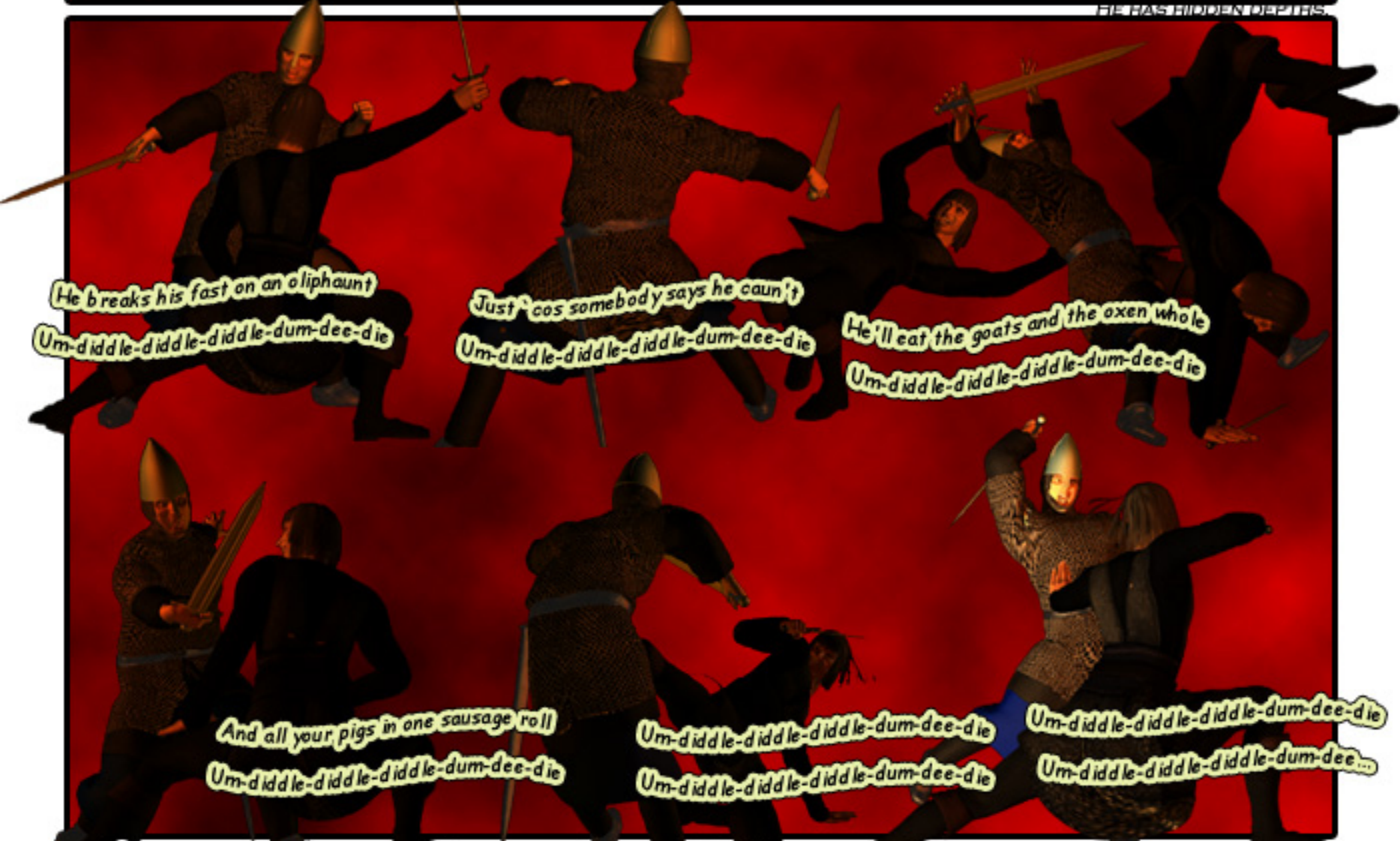
Lads, here's the story of Old Fat Dan  
Um-diddle-diddle-diddle-dum-dee-die

I'll tell you the story 'cos no one else can  
Um-diddle-diddle-diddle-dum-dee-die

Oh, what a man was Old Fat Dan  
Um-diddle-diddle-diddle-dum-dee-die  
The fattest man since the world began  
Um-diddle-diddle-diddle-dum-dee-die

Fuckin' crazy!

HE HAS HIDDEN DEPTHS



He breaks his fast on an oliphaunt  
Um-diddle-diddle-diddle-dum-dee-die

Just 'cos somebody says he can't  
Um-diddle-diddle-diddle-dum-dee-die

He'll eat the goats and the oxen whole  
Um-diddle-diddle-diddle-dum-dee-die

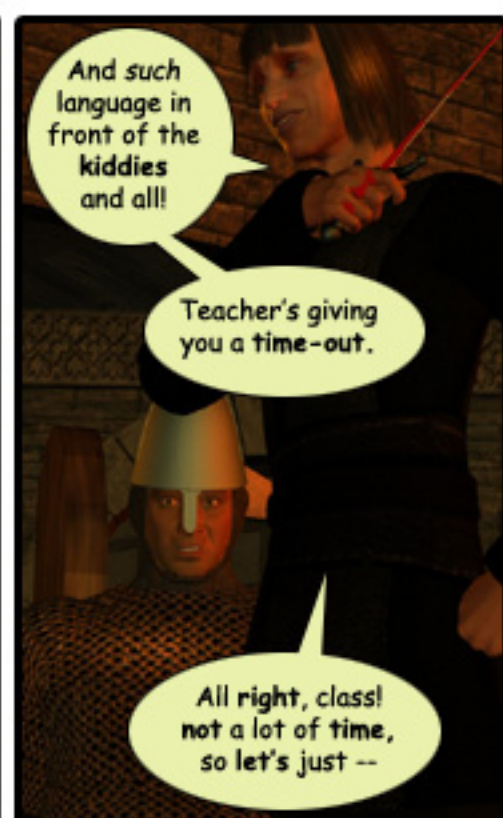
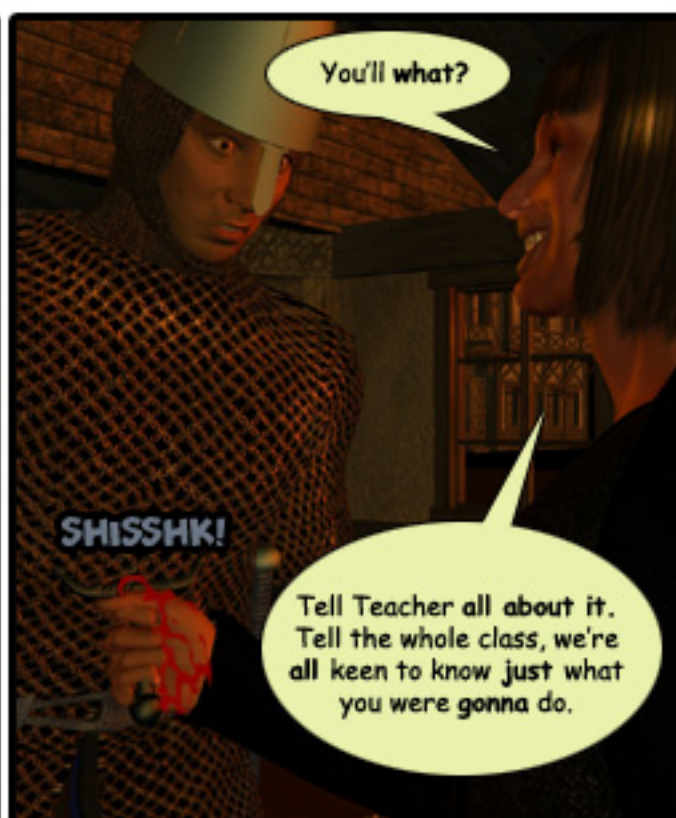
And all your pigs in one sausage roll  
Um-diddle-diddle-diddle-dum-dee-die

Um-diddle-diddle-diddle-dum-dee-die  
Um-diddle-diddle-diddle-dum-dee-die

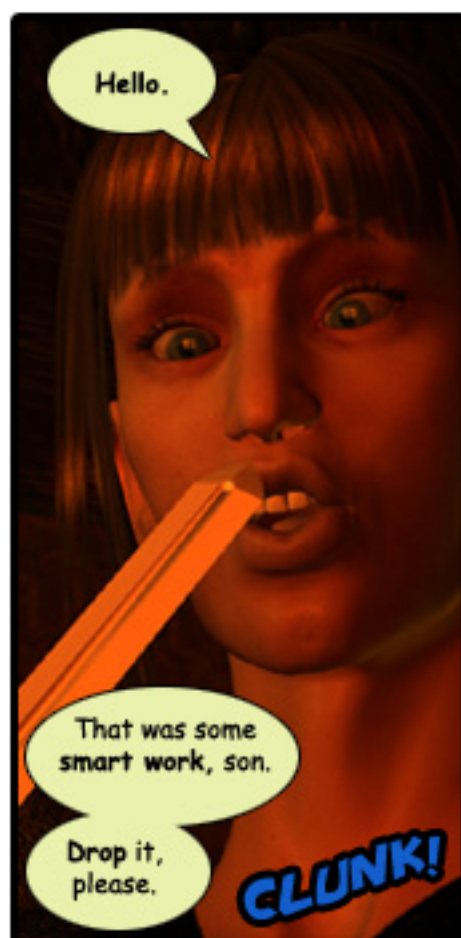
Um-diddle-diddle-diddle-dum-dee-die  
Um-diddle-diddle-diddle-dum-dee...







WELL, PROBABLY NOT.





The window was three thousand years old. Completely priceless and irreplaceable. I will have to send to Fuln to get glass that is a fraction of the quality the ancients made.



For now, my sun room has a great clumsy wooden shutter in it, the wall itself is torn and cracked at the edges where my daughter threw a three thousand year old table clean through it out into the Valley, taking the window, frame and hinges with it.

Thank the gods at least it didn't fall on anyone



But glass is just glass, no matter how well-made it is. A table is just a piece of wood.

Zona's my little girl, and she's hurting.

My "little girl?"



In twenty-six years, I'm not sure I ever really treated her like a girl, little or otherwise. I don't think anyone did. My fault.

It was always easier to treat her like ... something else. So tall and strong, so wild, so like the young boys.

It's how I always thought she was inside.



Mentl treated her like a woman, loved her like a man loves a woman.

Perhaps she's right - perhaps that's something she's always missed, her whole life. Put that together with all the other things about Mentl that Tula's said, or that I've seen with my own eyes, then of course she loves him - stupid to think otherwise.

It's an offense that they're not together. That's what Zona's mother says.



But the Queen says: "Are you sure? Are you completely sure? What if she's under a spell? What if they all are? What if Mentl's power actually comes from somewhere sinister?"

"The Urtts have powerful magick, now, straight from Shuach. And this sweet, wonderful little man with fire in his hands and enchantment in his voice appears at the same exact time. Just the sort of character that you'd welcome into your sacred places, into your confidence."

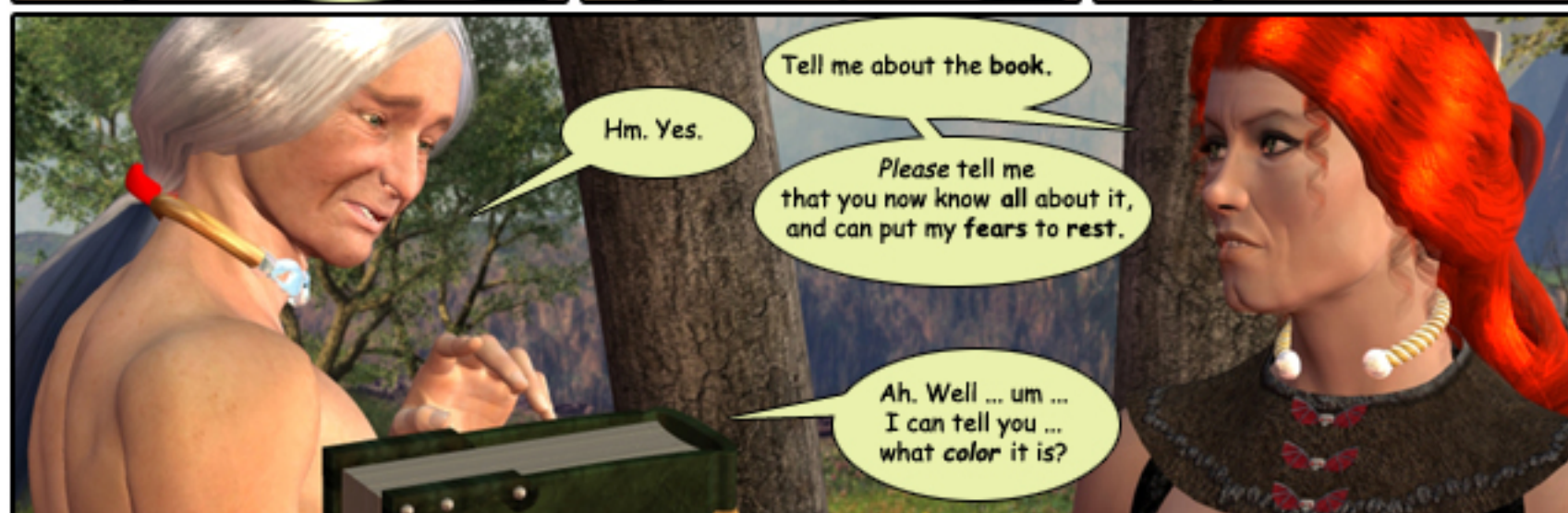
If I were the enemy and was going to send an assassin or a spy, wouldn't that be a brilliant disguise? He might not even know it himself. And my mind spins into a thousand more "What ifs," each worse than the one before.

**THUNK.**

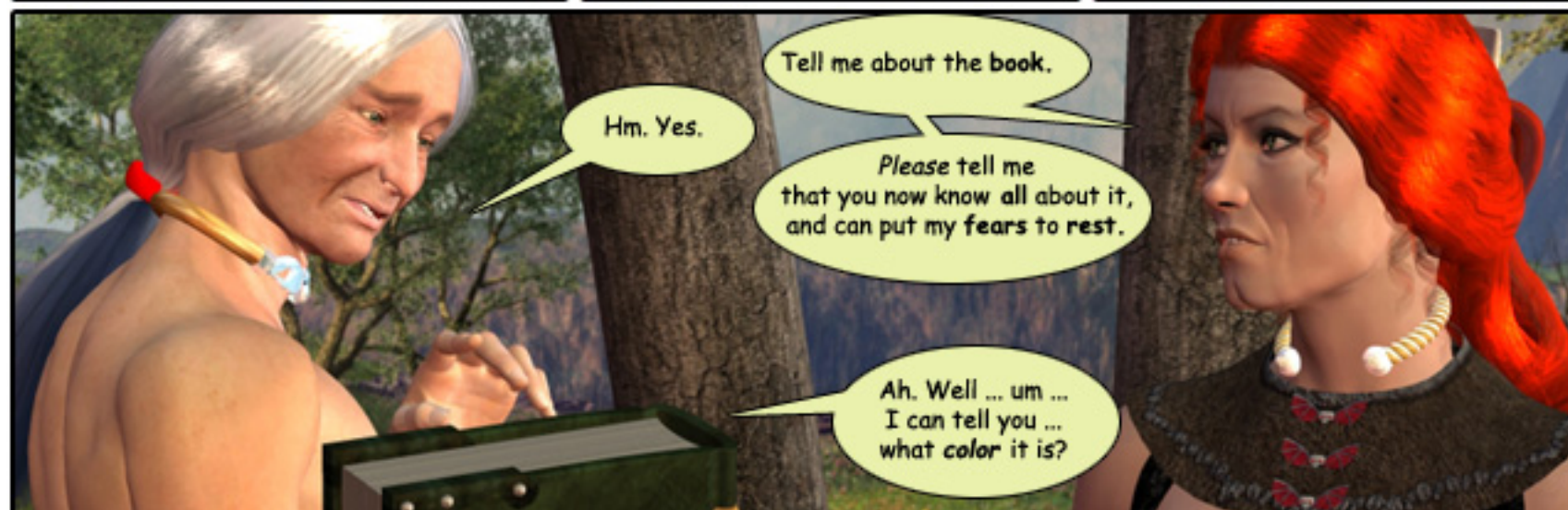


This is one of the things I hate about what I am.









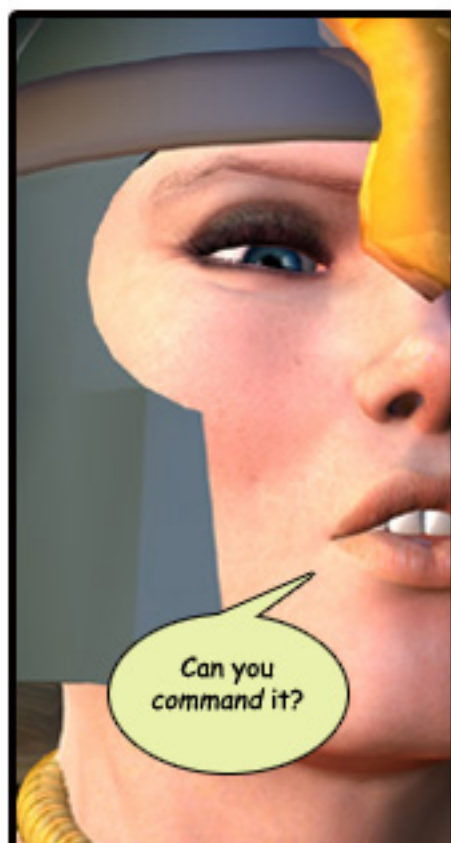




KNOWING WHEN TO LEAVE IS ONE OF THE SIGNS OF WISDOM.







CANST THOU, WHEN THOU COMMAND'ST THE BEGGAR'S KNEE.. COMMAND THE HEALTH OF IT?

