



Chapter 2 The Fissure



a comic by

purplebirdman



...PARDON ME, SIR AVALON?

THE ROAD IS LONG, AND I AM CURIOUS

WHY ARE YOU VISITING THE LORD OF GOLD?

I'VE NEVER MET ANYONE WHO HAD BUSINESS WITH A LORD!

AH, THAT?

DESPITE THE LAMBKIN'S PROTEST, THE STORY IS NOT LONG, NOR INTERESTING

TO THE WEST, THERE IS A CITY, BUILT AROUND A GRAND LIBRARY

MY DEAR FRIEND WAS BORN AND RAISED IN THIS LIBRARY, AS A STEWARD

HE AND I HAVE BEEN CHARGED WITH FINDING A STONEMASON--

--ONE CAPABLE OF REPAIRING DAMAGE TO THE LIBRARY'S UNIQUE MASONRY

GOOD CRAFTSMEN ARE HARD TO COME BY THESE DAYS!

WE HAVE HEARD THE LORD MIGHT BE ABLE TO HELP

SO, TO THE LORD WE GO!

AH!

IT MUST BE A GRAND LIBRARY!

TO INSPIRE SUCH EFFORT!



AS GRAND AS SUCH A THING CAN BE, I SUPPOSE

IT IS CERTAINLY AMBITIOUS, TO TRY AND KNOW ALL THAT CAN BE KNOWN

THE LIBRARY HAS USE FOR ME, BUT I HAVE LITTLE USE FOR THE LIBRARY

--APART FROM WHAT THEY PAY ME!

WHAT DO THEY PAY YOU FOR?



TO SEARCH OUT NUGGETS OF KNOWLEDGE

INVESTIGATE NEWS OF THE OUTER WORLD

NOW, TO LEAD THIS GREAT LAMB AROUND, AND KEEP HIS NOSE OUT OF THE DIRT--

HAH!

AND YOU CAN'T EVEN DO THAT, CAN YOU?

OLD MAN!



I THOUGHT
YOU WERE
SLEEPING!

I WAS
YOU ARE
BOTH LOUD



I'M SORRY!

IT'S JUST
SO EXCITING,
I FORGET TO
BE QUIET

YOU MUST
HAVE SEEN LOTS
OF BOOKS, AT THIS
GREAT LIBRARY
OF YOURS

I KNEW YOU
WERE WISE,
THE WAY YOU
TALK!



WELL, I'VE
READ MANY
BOOKS...

...BUT WISDOM IS
MORE THAN FACTS,
AND A LIBRARY IS
MORE THAN A PLACE
TO KEEP BOOKS

APHAELIA...

...IS ALSO
MY HOME,
AND HOLDS
EVERYTHING
THAT I VALUE
IN THIS
WORLD

IT IS THE
LIGHT THAT
GUIDES MY
HEART

IT IS WHY
I AM HERE
NOW



HOW
FAR AWAY
IS IT?

I SHOULD
LIKE TO
VISIT!

I DOUBT
YOU WILL

I TRAVELLED
TWO HUNDRED
AND TWENTY
DAYS TO GET
HERE

A JOURNEY
LIKE THAT MUST
HAVE **SOME**
PURPOSE





YOU'RE
TERRIBLY FAR
FROM HOME!

BETTER THAN
MAKING SUCH A
TRIP ALONE!

BUT AT LEAST
YOU HAVE EACH
OTHER!

...INDEED
I AM
TERRIBLY
FAR FROM
HOME



HAD I KNOWN
THE EXTENT OF
OUR JOURNEY...



...PERHAPS
I WOULD NEVER
HAVE AGREED
TO MAKE IT



...WHAT...

...WHAT
STARTED ALL
THIS, ANYHOW?

...IF YOU
DON'T MIND ME
ASKING...?



...AH
WELL

THERE
WAS A
STORM

FOR TWO DAYS
AND TWO NIGHTS,
THE BAY OF PALMS
WAS A **TEMPEST**

THREE THOUSAND
SHIPS WERE SMASHED
ON THE BUTTRESSES
OF THE SEAWALL

THE
RAIN **LASHED**
AT THE WALLS,
THE WIND **WAILED**
AT NIGHT

THE TOWER
STOOD STRONG,
BUT...



...IT
WAS A
STORM
LIKE NO
OTHER...



The Fissure

...AND IT
SHOOK
THE GREAT
TOWER OF
APHAELIA
TO ITS VERY
ROOTS



WELL...

...ACCORDING
TO THE HEAD...

...THE BAY
MUST BE CLEARED
IMMEDIATELY

IT WAS A
BAD STORM,
NO MISTAKE

ONE
FOR THE
RECORDS!

BUT IT
COULD HAVE
DONE WORSE



THE SAILORS'
DORMITORY IS
UNTOUCHED

MOST OF
THE WESTERN
MARINA IS
INTACT

IT WILL TAKE
A WEEK OR TWO,
BUT WE HAVE
ENOUGH MANPOWER
TO CLEAR THE
BAY

...WHAT
ELSE? I'M
WRITING A
LIST

...UM...

...WHAT ABOUT
THAT?

THAT
WASN'T
THERE
BEFORE



...MMM
...MM

...SORRY TO
BOTHER YOU,
HEAD BALTHUS

I WASN'T
SURE IF **THIS**
IS WORTH
YOUR TIME--



NO, NO,
YOU DECIDED
CORRECTLY--

...400
METERS...

...0.5 RADIANS
FROM PLUMB
NORTH...

--THERE HAS
NEVER BEEN A
CRACK IN THE
TOWER'S BASE

IT IS A
NOTEWORTHY
EVENT--



...A FINGER'S
WIDTH AT THE
BASE...

...NO WIDER
THAN A HAIR
FOR...

...350
METERS...

--BUT EVERY
FOUNDATION CRACKS
EVENTUALLY

THE TOWER
IS, AFTER ALL,
JUST A BUILDING



OH, HEAD,
IT IS NO MERE
BUILDING!

HOW CAN
YOU SPEAK
LIKE THAT?

WELL, IT
IS OUR HOLY
WORK, OUR
HOME...

...BUT IT
IS STILL A
BUILDING

AND ALL
BUILDINGS
FALL IN
THEIR TIME



HOWEVER!

DO NOT
DESPAIR, MY
YOUNG FRIEND

THIS
FISSURE IS NOT
STRUCTURALLY
SIGNIFICANT

CLEAN UP THE
BAY OF PALMS, AND
DO NOT CONCERN
YOURSELF WITH
THE WALL

THE CITY
IS ANXIOUS FOR
COMMERCE TO
RESUME

NOW,
TAKE US BACK
UP, PLEASE

I AM
NEEDED
ELSEWHERE



...SO THE
ROOT ARCHIVES
HAVE FLOODED
ENTIRELY

QUITE A
SHAME, QUITE
A MESS

WE SHALL
NEED TWO HUNDRED
MEN WORKING DAY
AND NIGHT FOR A
WEEK TO CLEAR
THIS FLOOR ...

THE WATER
HAS STOPPED
RISING, YES?

YES,
HEAD
BALTHIUS

THE WATER
STOPPED RISING
FIVE HOURS AGO

I AM TOLD
IT IS NOW LEVEL
WITH THE BAY

I WAS NOTIFIED
TWENTY HOURS AGO
BY AN ARCHIVIST WHO
REPORTED WATER,
BUT HE DID NOT
KNOW WHERE IT WAS
COMING FROM

THE STORM,
OF COURSE, WAS
OCCUPYING OUR
ATTENTION

...TRAGEDY

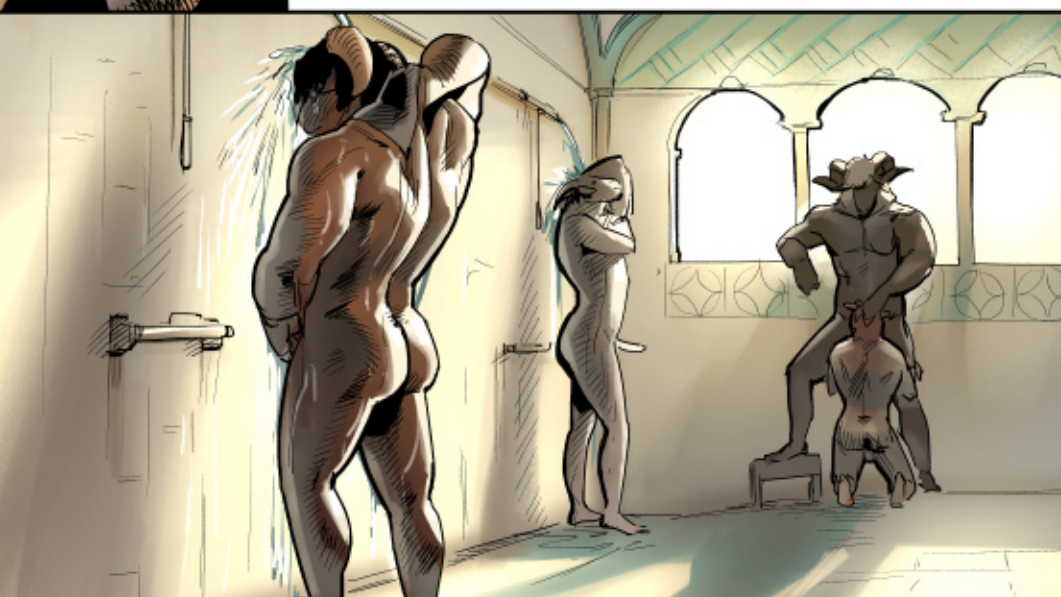
MARIUS,
FIND THE
ENTRYPOINT OF
THIS WATER
IMMEDIATELY

TAKE AS MANY
BODIES AS YOU
NEED

GIVEN THE VOLUME
OF WATER AND RATE
OF EQUILIBRIUM, THE
ENTRYPOINT WILL BE
NO LARGER THAN
A FEW SQUARE
CENTIMETERS...

EL'S GRACE,
I PRAY THIS IS NOT
AS SERIOUS AS IT
APPEARS TO BE







YOU'VE GOTTEN
QUITE **ROUND** SINCE
WE SPOKE LAST YEAR,
YOUNG ROSHIM

DOES THE
SEDENTARY LIFE
AGREE WITH
YOU?

I HAVEN'T
JUST BEEN
SITTING ABOUT,
OLD MAN

I MOVE THE
GUILD CARVINGS
AND WORKSHOP
SCULPTS...

I UNLOAD
STONE AT THE
MARINA...

I WORK IN
THE VIVARIUM
EVERY DAY...

AND I EAT
HEARTY!

HAHA!

HAPPY COMING-
OF-AGE, MY FRIEND,
EL'S BLESSING
UPON YOU

HAVE SOME TEA,
WOULDN'T YOU?

I'M BREAKING IN
A NEW POT; AUGUST
GOT IT FOR ME, ON HIS
LAST EXPEDITION

FOOLS IN RESEARCH
WANTED TO TAKE IT
APART TO STUDY THE
ENAMELING!



THANK YOU, SIR,
YOUR TEA IS
ALWAYS A TREAT

I'VE TAKEN
YOUR ADVICE
SERIOUSLY,
THOUGH I'M AFRAID
I STILL TEND TO
SCORCH THE
LEAVES A BIT

YOU'VE BEEN
TAKING TEA
WITH ME FOR
QUITE SOME
TIME NOW,
EH?



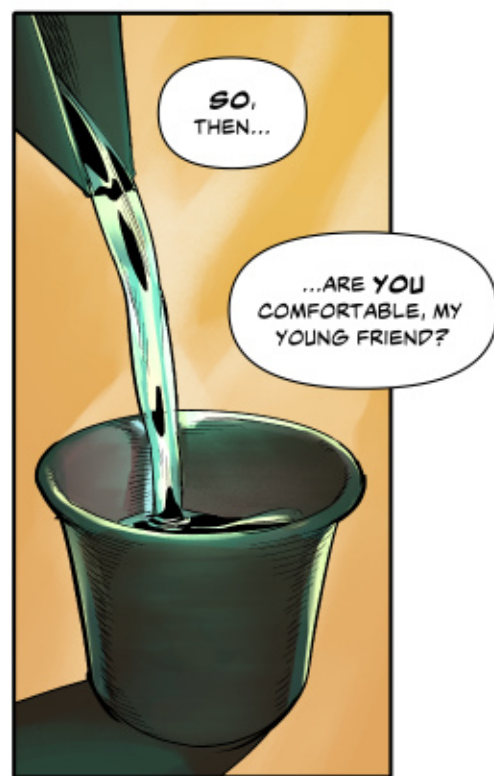
I SUPPOSE SO!

TWELVE
YEARS NOW...?

LONG
ENOUGH THAT YOU
CONVINCED ME TO
GIVE UP HONEY IN
MY TEA

CHILDREN LOVE
HONEY, BUT ADULTS
KNOW THE SECRET
TO LIFE IS SAVORING
BITTERNESS

COMFORT IS A
CURSE; IT MAKES ONE
RESENT ANYTHING THAT
ISN'T COMFORTABLE, AND
MUCH OF THE WORLD IS
UNCOMFORTABLE



SO,
THEN...

...ARE YOU
COMFORTABLE, MY
YOUNG FRIEND?



AH...

...I SUPPOSE
I AM, IN A WAY

I'M--

AS YOU
KNOW, I'VE PAID OFF
MY RETENTION DEBT,
AND SUBMITTED MY
APPLICATION FOR
JUNIOR LIBRARIAN

I KNOW I AM
NOT THE BRIGHTEST,
YET I FEEL I CAN
HAVE A PLACE HERE,
AS I HAVE THUS
FAR...



WHAT WOULD
YOU DO IF YOUR
APPLICATION WAS
REJECTED?

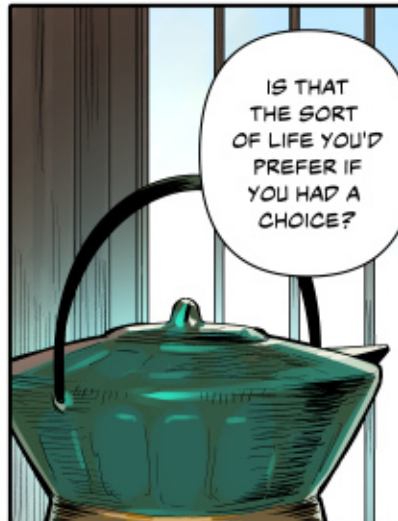
TELL ME



I--

I WOULD
LIVE IN THE
CITY, TAKE
TO TRADE

I MAY
BE A POOR
LIBRARIAN,
BUT I CAN
SMITH AND
PLANT--



IS THAT
THE SORT
OF LIFE YOU'D
PREFER IF
YOU HAD A
CHOICE?



WELL,
NO

I WOULD
RATHER STAY
HERE, SIR



BUT
WHY?

YOUR
RECORDS
DON'T SHOW
A PARTICULAR
PASSION

YOUR FOCUS
OF STUDY
CHANGES

WHY STAY
AT THE
LIBRARY?

THIS
IS NOT A
CRITICISM,
MERELY A
QUESTION

I WANT TO
UNDERSTAND
WHAT DRIVES
YOU



AH--

WELL--

THERE
IS A BOY

CRISTIO

HE'S
BEEN MY BEST
FRIEND SINCE
CHILDHOOD

WE SHARED
THE SAME
CLASS,
AND--

HE IS--

HE WORKS
IN AGRICULTURE, HE
SCORES QUITE HIGHLY,
AND HE HAS ALREADY
BEEN INFORMALLY
ACCEPTED

HE WANTS
TO STAY HERE



YOU DO NOT HAVE TO ANSWER ME, BUT...

...IS THIS A ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP?

...YES!



AHH, TO FEEL THE FIRES OF YOUTH AGAIN!

DO NOT BE ASHAMED

ALL THAT IS DONE OUGHT TO BE DONE FOR LOVE

SO YOU WOULD STAY FOR CRISTIO, THEN?



...I WOULD



WELL, YOU COULD HAVE WORSE REASONS

INDEED, WITHOUT LOVE, WHAT WOULD BE THE POINT OF ALL THIS DEAD KNOWLEDGE?

EVEN THE STRANGER ACTED OUT OF PITY, AND PITY IS THE SHADOW OF LOVE

WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE, I ALSO HAD MALE RELATIONS, HAD MY FLIGHTS OF FANCY

NEVER MARRIED, DID MY DUTY WITH A MOTHER

I WISH YOU BETTER LUCK IN YOUR PURSUIT OF LOVE



NOW!

LET US TALK ABOUT YOUR APPLICATION, BECAUSE I THINK WE CAN HELP EACH OTHER

I WOULD BE HAPPY TO GUARANTEE YOUR ACCEPTANCE, AS IS MY RIGHT AS THE DEPARTMENT HEAD...

...BUT IN EXCHANGE FOR AN EXPEDITION, SOMETHING A BIT MORE DELIBERATE THAN THE USUAL DISCOVERY



...AN EXPEDITION?

I'VE NEVER--

YES, YES, I'M AWARE OF YOUR INEXPERIENCE, BUT...



THIS IS...

...THIS IS A STRANGE TIME, ROSHIM

YOU'VE HEARD OF THE FISSURE?

THE GREAT CRACK IN THE FOUNDATION OF THE LIBRARY?



A SENIOR MENTIONED A **FLOOD** IN THE ROOT ARCHIVES?

DAMAGE FROM THE STORM LAST WEEK?



...YES, A **FLOOD**

WE HAVEN'T THE Gnosis TO SAFELY REPAIR THE FISSURE

SENIOR STAFF ARE DIGGING THROUGH WHAT'S LEFT OF THE ROOT ARCHIVES IN HOPES WE'VE OVERLOOKED USEFUL DATA

I FIND THE FISSURE ITSELF LESS DANGEROUS THAN THE GAP IN OUR KNOWLEDGE OF OUR OWN LIBRARY

WHEN EXPOSED, IT'S BEST TO FILL THESE IN, IF WE CAN

...HAVE YOU KNOWLEDGE OF THE CREATION OF THE TOWER LIBRARY?



IT WAS TAUGHT IN PRIMARY SCHOOL

NOT IN GREAT DETAIL

DID THE **HEAVENLY HOST** SET THE FOUNDATION?

NO, THE HOST HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH IT. THE HEAVENS WERE SEALED LONG BEFORE THE LIBRARY'S FOUNDATION WAS LAID

AT THE DAWN OF THE SECOND AGE, A GREAT KING OF MEN RESOLVED TO GATHER ALL KNOWLEDGE OF THE EARTH, ALL OF THE WRITTEN WORD, INTO ONE PLACE

IT IS WRITTEN THAT HE COMMISSIONED THE **ARCHMASONS**, THE EXILED HOST, FOR A LIBRARY THAT COULD HOLD ALL THE BOOKS THAT WOULD EVER BE WRITTEN, SO THAT KNOWLEDGE WOULD BE FRUITFUL AND MULTIPLY

THE **DEMIMEN**, OUR FATHERS, WERE CHARGED BY THE ARCHMASONS WITH STEWARDSHIP OF THIS LIBRARY, AND GENERATION TO GENERATION, IT GREW UPWARDS INTO A MIGHTY TOWER, AND BECAME KNOWN AS A HOLY PLACE

BEFORE LONG, OTHER GREAT KINGS AND LEADERS BEGAN TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE LIBRARY, AND THE CITY **APHAELIA** WAS BUILT AROUND IT, AND BECAME A PLACE FOR LEARNING, FOR EXCHANGE OF THOUGHT--

FOR THREE HUNDRED GENERATIONS, APHAELIA HAS RISEN, ITS ORIGINAL DESIGN EXPANDING ALONG WITH OUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE EARTH, AND OUR HOLY MISSION HAS BEEN TO CONTINUE, TO RAISE MANKIND OUT OF THE DARKNESS OF IGNORANCE INTO THE LIGHT OF KNOWLEDGE, AND SO--

--MY YOUNG FRIEND, YOU ARE **PRIVILEGED** TO BE A PART OF THIS **GREAT WORK**--



--WHEW!

EXCUSE ME, FOR A MOMENT I FELT AS IF I WAS GIVING A SPEECH TO A CLASS OF NEOPHYTES!

OLD HABITS!



NO, NO, YOU TELL STORIES WELL, IT IS MY PLEASURE TO LISTEN!

BUT YOU FAILED TO MENTION WHAT IS REMARKABLE ABOUT THE FOUNDATION, SPECIFICALLY



AH, WELL
THE
FOUNDATION
IS--

--WAS A
SINGLE SOLID
PIECE, AS IF
VOLCANIC
GLASS

THE
ARCHMASONS
LAID THE
FOUNDATION
SOMEHOW, AND
THEY ARE
GONE NOW

TWO HUNDRED
GENERATIONS AGO,
THEY WENT **EAST**,
AND THAT IS THE
LAST WE KNOW
OF THEM...

...AND TODAY, WE
ARE FINALLY IN NEED
OF THOSE OLD MEN,
OR THEIR **GNOSIS**,
THEIR **TOOLS**...



...AND BY
EXTENSION,
WE NEED **YOU**,
MY YOUNG
FRIEND

...IT MUST
BE QUITE A
JOURNEY

SURELY
IF THIS WAS AN
EASY TASK IT
WOULD HAVE
BEEN DONE

PERHAPS,
PERHAPS NOT!

DO NOT
UNDERESTIMATE THE
PERSUASIVENESS
OF PRACTICALITY!

THE
FOUNDATION,
AS IT MIGHT BE,
WAS SOMETHING
WE COULD
RELY ON

IT IS DIFFICULT TO
ARGUE FOR SOLUTIONS
TO FUTURE PROBLEMS
WITH MORE PRESSING
CONCERNS AT HAND



AND IF I
ACCEPT THIS
MISSION, MY PLACE
IN THE LIBRARY IS
GUARANTEED?

DEAR
BOY...

...IN LIEU OF
ABILITY, LOYALTY
CAN SUFFICE

I CAN GUARANTEE
YOUR POSITION WITHIN
MY DEPARTMENT,
AND YOUR CONTINUED
LIFE AT THE LIBRARY

YOU NEED NOT
LOSE YOUR DEAR
CRISTIO



THEN I
ACCEPT,
ABSOLUTELY

THANK YOU,
OLD FRIEND,
FOR THIS
CHANCE TO
PROVE
MYSELF



ROSHIM

YOU'VE BECOME A
FINE MAN, AND A PILLAR
OF OUR COMMUNITY, SO
YOUR PEERS TELL ME

WE ARE GLAD
YOU WOULD CHOOSE
TO STAY WITH US



SO THEN!

SHALL I
GO ALONE?

HEAVENLY
HOSTS,
NO!

YOU OUGHT
TO KNOW THAT
EXPEDITIONS
ARE ALWAYS
IN TWOS

SURELY
YOU HAVE SOME
PEERS WHO HAVE
SHARED THEIR
EXPERIENCES

Y-YES,
BUT--

--THEN,
WHO IS MY
PARTNER?



YOUR PARTNER
IS ON THE ROAD
TO APHAELIA

SOMEONE
FAMILIAR WITH
THE PATH NOW
BEFORE YOU

HE SHALL BE
WITH US IN A
FEW WEEKS

IN THE
MEANWHILE, DO
WHAT YOU MUST
TO PREPARE
FOR YOUR
JOURNEY

HAVE
PATIENCE,
ROSHIM...

...AND SOME
MORE TEA!

ALL
COMFORTS
SHOULD BE
ENJOYED WHILE
THEY LAST



HMM...

BIG
GUY

YEAH,
YOU

HOLD
TH' AXLE
LIKE--

WHILE
I KNOCK THE
PIN OUT--

--THERE!



HOW
BAD
IS IT?

...NOT
BAD, NOT
GOOD...

DAMN THING'S
SHAKIN' ITSELF
APART

GOTTA
PATCH IT
AGAIN

A COUPLE
HOURS...



IT'LL BE DARK
LONG AFORE
WE CAN REACH
SUMAKISH

BEST
STAY THE
NIGHT HERE

DEMIMAN'S
LUCK, EH?



...SUPPOSE SO

AH, DON'T
BE GRUMPY,
LAMBKIN!

WE'LL HAVE
A QUIET NIGHT,
AT LEAST

LET'S
MAKE THE
MOST OF
IT





...ROSHIM?

...MM?



WHAT'S THAT YOU'RE WRITING?



...MY JOURNAL...

...WHEN I RETURN, IT WILL TAKE ITS PLACE ON THE LIBRARY SHELVES...

...AND I WILL TAKE MY PLACE AMONG MY PEOPLE

ONE AMONGST MANY

I GREW UP READING MY ELDERS' JOURNALS



OH

WHAT SORTA THINGS DO YOU WRITE DOWN?



ANYTHING NOTEWORTHY

EVENTS, PLACES, MY THOUGHTS

IT IS A TOOL TO REFLECT

AND PERHAPS ILLUMINATE MYSELF TO OTHERS

WILL YA READ SOME OF IT TO ME?



NOT NOW

PERHAPS TOMORROW

FAIR ENOUGH!

OH, MAKE SURE YA GET PELLA'S FACE IN THERE!

WRITE ABOUT HOW GREASY 'N UGLY HE IS

EVERYONE OUGHT TO KNOW!



...ALL RIGHT





...DON'T YOU
TRUST ME TO
KEEP WATCH?



I DON'T
TRUST YOU
TO TAKE THIS
SERIOUSLY

I DO
NOT WANT TO
STUMBLE ON
THE THRESHOLD

THRESHOLD,
INDEED

THE
DANGEROUS
PART OF THIS
JOURNEY HAS
NOT BEGUN

I **PROMISED** I
WOULD CARRY YOU
THROUGH IT...

...AND HERE
YOU ARE, NONE
THE WORSE FOR
WEAR--

NO!!

**QUITE A
BIT WORSE
FOR WEAR!**

I WASN'T
SCARRED LIKE
A PIT FIGHTER
WHEN WE LEFT
APHAELIA



AND THAT IS
WHY I AM AWAKE
RIGHT NOW!

I CAN'T **SLEEP**
WHILE YOU'RE ON
WATCH!

I CAN'T TRUST
THAT YOU WON'T
WANDER OFF!

LIKE LAST
NIGHT!

I WAS
ALONE--



YOU'RE
GOING TO
BREAK MY
WRIST

IS THAT
WHAT YOU
WANT?



...**NO,**
I DON'T

...**SORRY**

I DID NOT
MEAN TO
HURT YOU



I
SUPPOSE
WE SHALL
BOTH KEEP
WATCH

...I
SUPPOSE
WE WILL



DOWN
THERE?

I
CAN KEEP
WATCH JUST
FINE FROM
HERE



IS THAT
THE...?

I THOUGHT
WE WERE **OUT**
OF THAT WEED



I FOUND IT
LAST NIGHT,
SEARCHING FOR
SPARE COIN

HAVE YOUR
PIPE OUT!

THERE
IS ENOUGH
FOR ONE
LAST BOWL



...MY PIPE
BROKE AT
THAT RIVER
CROSSING

I CRUSHED
IT UP AGAINST
THE BOAT





...IT HAS BEEN SOME TIME SINCE I WAS LAST HERE

HAS IT CHANGED A GREAT DEAL?

WHEN WE REACH MIRIAH, I WILL KNOW

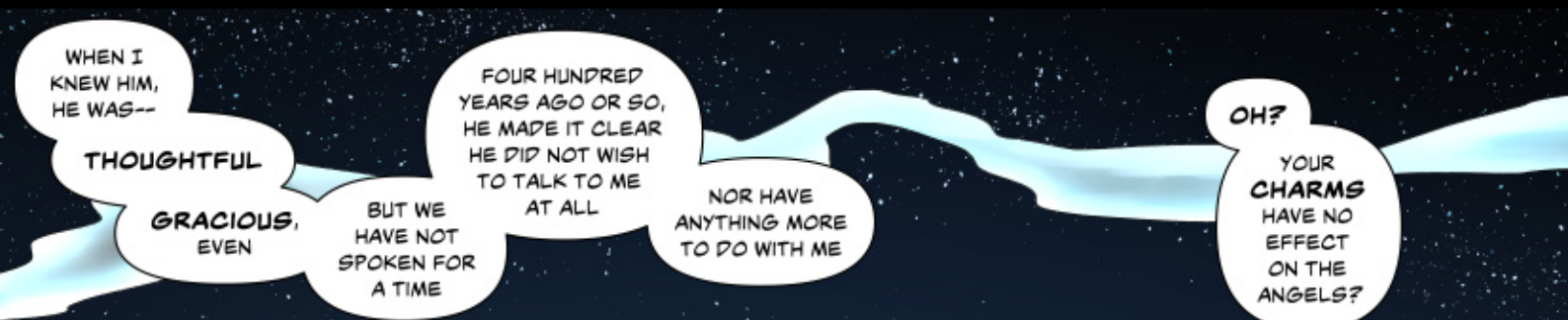
SOME THINGS DO NOT CHANGE AT ALL

BUT UNALLOYED GOLD IS SOFT

IT HAS NO COMMITMENT TO SHAPE

YOU'VE SPOKEN TO THE LORD HERE

WHAT'S HE LIKE?



WHEN I KNEW HIM, HE WAS--

THOUGHTFUL

GRACIOUS, EVEN

BUT WE HAVE NOT SPOKEN FOR A TIME

FOUR HUNDRED YEARS AGO OR SO, HE MADE IT CLEAR HE DID NOT WISH TO TALK TO ME AT ALL

NOR HAVE ANYTHING MORE TO DO WITH ME

OH?

YOUR CHARMES HAVE NO EFFECT ON THE ANGELS?



HAH!

HAH HAH!

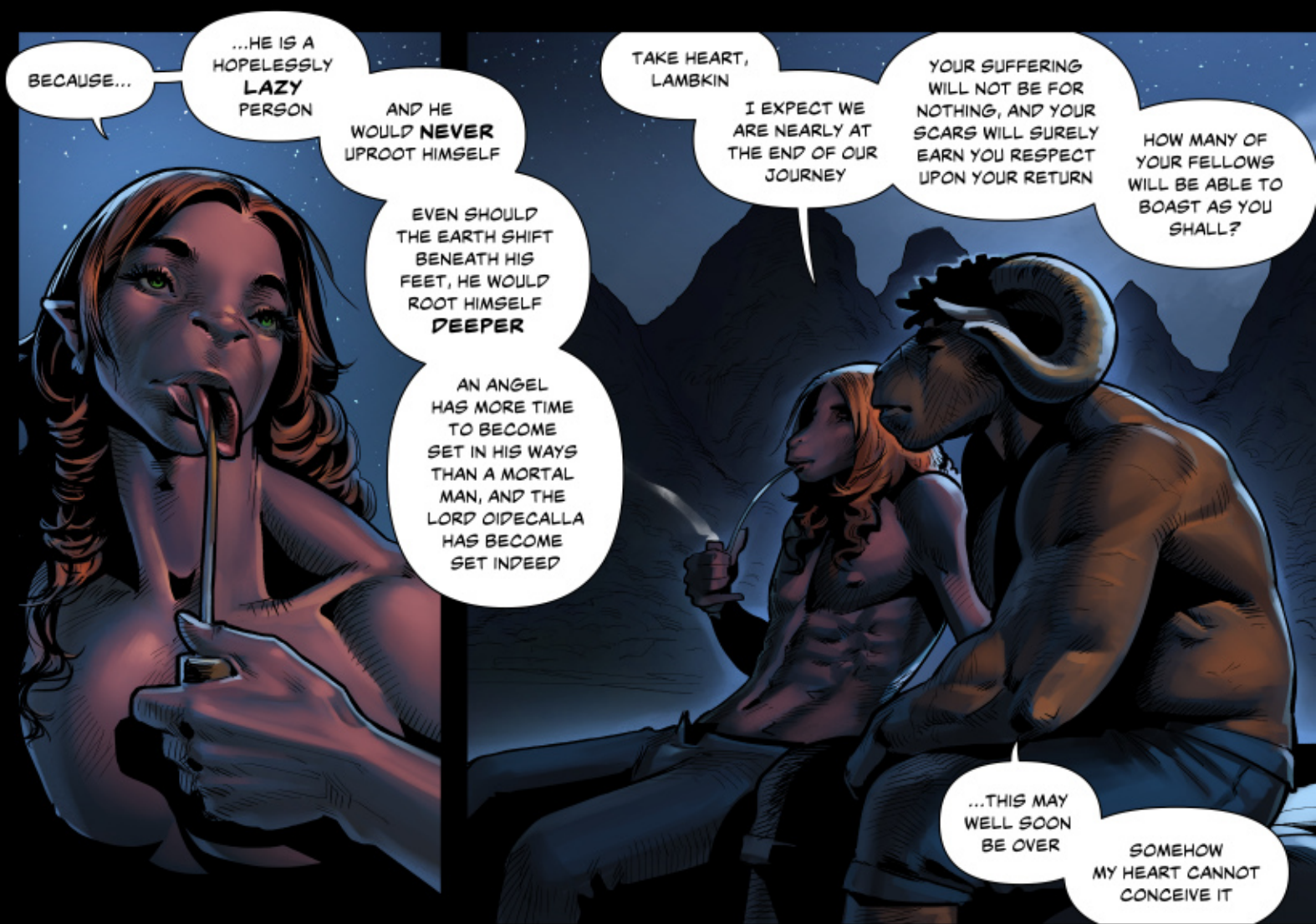
NOT ON THAT ANGEL, I'M AFRAID!

BUT I AM GLAD TO HEAR THAT I HAVE SOME!

MMM

...FOUR HUNDRED YEARS, EH?

HOW DO YOU KNOW HE WILL BE THERE IN MIRIAH?





...I
FEEL MYSELF
SINKING INTO
THE PAST

SOMETIMES,
I THINK--

--I WAS
STRONGER
BEFORE THIS
JOURNEY

**YOU DON'T
NEED ME
HERE**

I CAN DO
NOTHING
FOR YOU

EVERYTHING
I TRY TO DO
ON MY OWN
ENDS IN
FAILURE

**HE
DOESN'T
NEED ME,
EITHER--**

**CRISTIO
KNOWS I AM
A WEAK MAN**

BUT THAT
BOY, **LEILY**

HE THINKS
I AM **STRONG**,
AND IT **SCARES**
ME--

IT **SCARES**
ME HOW MUCH
I NEED TO SEE
THAT IN HIS
EYES

WHEN I
PROTECTED
HIM, HE REALLY
BELIEVED--

--THAT I
AM **STRONG**



...I TOLD
THE BOY THAT
YOU ARE MY
BODYGUARD

...AH?

HAH,
WHY?



IT WAS NOT
A **TOTAL LIE**

I SHOULD NEVER
DARE STAND BEFORE
LORD OIDECALLA
WITHOUT YOU

WHAT IS MORE,
I CANNOT PLEAD
ON BEHALF OF
YOUR **KIN**

I HAVE
SHOULDERED
THE BURDEN OF
BRINGING US HERE,
BUT NOW YOUR
PEOPLE MUST
RELY ON **YOU**

LAMBSKIN,
THE **STRONG**
NEED NOT **FEEL**
STRONG

THE
STRONG
DO WHAT THEY
CAN WITH WHAT
THEY HAVE

THE
WEAK
DO NOT
EVEN TRY

NINETEEN
YEARS
AGO--

--NINETEEN
YEARS AGO, THIS
EXTRAORDINARY
GROUP OF PEOPLE WAS
BROUGHT TOGETHER

BRIGHT
YOUNG CHILDREN,
EAGER TO LEARN
AND GROW

UNDER THE
WATCHFUL LOVE OF YOUR
HOUSE MOTHER LISAY,
I HAD NO DOUBT THAT
EXTRAORDINARY ADULTS
WOULD DEVELOP...

...BUT I COULD
NOT HAVE IMAGINED
A BETTER OUTCOME
THAN YOU!

YOU ALL
HAVE MADE US
PROUD IN YOUR
OWN WAYS,
BUT TONIGHT,
SPECIAL
HONOR IS
DUE TO THESE
BROTHERS:

DOMITRUS

ROSHIM

RAMI

LACIM

HAMMON

CEPHUS

IT IS ALWAYS MY
JOY AND PRIVILEGE
TO ADDRESS YOU ALL,
AND ESPECIALLY WHEN I
AM GAZING UPON THE
NEXT GENERATION OF
OUR ORDER--

THIS WEEK,
THESE BROTHERS
WILL LEAVE BEHIND
THE GRACE OF OUR
BELOVED APHAELIA,
TAKING THE JOURNEY
THAT DEFINES OUR
PEOPLE...

...AND WHEN
THEY RETURN,
THEY WILL RETURN
AS MY EQUALS

FULL MEMBERS
OF OUR LIBRARY

BRINGERS
OF NEW
KNOWLEDGE

PRESERVERS
OF OUR
CULTURE

SCRIBES
OF THIS
SACRED
WORK

MY BROTHERS,
I THANK YOU, ON
BEHALF OF THE
LIBRARY!

THE
STRANGER'S
BLESSING GO
WITH YOU!

NOW PLEASE,
EVERYONE EAT,
CELEBRATE, AND
MAKE MERRY AS
YOU WOULD, FOR
TONIGHT IS
YOURS

MAY
KNOWLEDGE
BE FRUITFUL
AND MULTIPLY!



HELLO,
ROSHIM!

EL'S
BLESSING
UPON YOU!

CRIS!

AH, I'M
GLAD YOU
CAME!

OH, I
HAD TO!

WHAT AN
UNEXPECTED
THING THIS
IS!



WE WERE
ALL SHOCKED
TO HEAR IT!

YOU, WHO
SWORE TO NEVER
SET FOOT OUTSIDE
OF THE CITY?

AH!
STOP IT!

I DID
NOT SAY
THAT...

RAMI IS
RIGHT!

WHAT
COULD HAVE
CHANGED
YOUR MIND?



THE OLD
MAN WILL APPROVE
MY APPLICATION
UPON MY RETURN!

I DON'T
WANT TO LEAVE
YOU, MY DEAR
FRIENDS

INDEED...



...I WILL
DO WHATEVER
I MUST DO TO
BE WITH YOU







AND WE ARE
DELIGHTED
FOR YOU TO
BE BACK!

ROSHIM,
THIS IS THE
EVER-LUMINOUS
AVALON

PLEASE
TREAT HIM
HOSPITABLY IN
MY STEAD!

I WILL
SEE YOU BOTH
TOMORROW
AT OUR
MEETING!

EL'S
BLESSING



WELL,
ROSHIM!

IT SEEMS
I SHALL BE
TRAVELING
WITH THE BEST
OF THE LOT!

IS HEAD
BALTHIUS
YOUR
FATHER?

YOUR
HORNS ARE
SIMILAR

WELL-MET,
AVALON!

AH...

HERE WE
DO NOT KNOW
OUR BIRTH
PARENTS

HEAD
BALTHIUS
IS AS LIKELY
TO BE MY SIRE
AS ANYONE
ELSE

HE TOLD ME
YOU WERE FAMILIAR
WITH MY PEOPLE; I
AM SURPRISED YOU
WOULD ASK



I HAVE
LIVED LONG
AND SEEN
MUCH

YOUR OWN
PEOPLE MAY
SURPRISE YOU

NOT LONG
AGO WHEN I
STOOD AMONG
YOU, A **MOTHER**
AND A **FATHER**
RAISED A
CHILD

TODAY, YOUR
PEOPLE RAISE
CHILDREN IN
COMMON

TOMORROW,
WHO KNOWS?



SO IT'S
TRUE!

BALTHIUS
SAID YOU ARE
BLESSED WITH
THE THIN BLOOD
OF THE HOST!

BLESSED,
INDEED!

...I
THOUGHT
THE SEED
OF ANGELS
WERE MIGHTY
WARRIORS...

DO I
NOT SEEM
A MIGHTY
WARRIOR?



PLEASE
FORGIVE OUR
QUESTIONS,
AVALON

WE ARE
FLUSH WITH
WINE AND
GOOD FOOD

MY
FRIENDS DO
NOT **DOUBT**
YOU

BUT WE HAVE
NEVER **MET** A
CHILD OF THE
HOST

WE HAVE
ONLY HEARD
STORIES

STORIES
OF **GIANTS** AND
WARRIORS AND
BATTLES BETWEEN
MIGHTY FORCES OF
HEAVEN



APHAELIA
HAS BEEN
BREEDING MEN
BIG AND
STRONG

A FEW
GENERATIONS
AGO, I WAS
TALLER THAN
ALL YOUR
ANCESTORS

PERHAPS
THEN I
APPEARED AS
A **GREAT**
WARRIOR

BUT
ALAS!

HERE
WE ARE!





NOW,
IF YOU CAN
PEER PAST MY
SHOULDER--

YOU'LL
GLIMPSE THE
MAIN SHAFT OF
THE TOWER

SEE THE
READING
BALCONIES
ON EACH
FLOOR?

YES,
I DO RECALL
THIS **SPIRAL
SHAPE**

THOUGH
I DO NOT
REMEMBER IT
BEING QUITE
SO **VAST**

I GUESS
YOU'RE USED
TO SEEING
SUCH **SCALE!**

I
SUPPOSE
I AM!

AH, WE'RE
PASSING
THROUGH
THE PUBLIC
SECTOR

IT'S LEVEL
WITH THE CITY,
WHERE ANYONE
MAY ENTER AND
ACCESS OUR
LIBRARY

ONLY A
FEW SHORT
MINUTES TIL
WE REACH THE
BOTTOM OF THE
TOWER--

--NOT TOO
SQUASHED,
ARE YOU?

RATHER
ENJOYING
MYSELF

WOULDN'T
MIND BEING
SQUEEZED
A LITTLE
MORE

AH,
**VERY
BOLD!**

DO YOU
LIKE **BOYS,**
ROSHIM?

I LIKE
BOYS

AND I
CAN GET
**MUCH
BOLDER...**

...IF YOU
WANT ME TO
REINTRODUCE
MYSELF,
WHEN WE'RE
ALONE

AHEM...

...SO WHAT
DOES THIS
BLESSING
ENTAIL?

OH, IT
IS A **RITUAL**,
FOR MEN AND
WOMEN LEAVING
APHAELIA ON
THIS JOURNEY

EACH PAIR
GOES OUT TO
BRING BACK NEW
KNOWLEDGE,
ADDING TO THE
LIBRARY...

... BUT **FIRST**,
WE STAND AT
THE CREST OF
THE FOUNDATION,
AND THINK ON THE
PRINCIPLES THEY
LEFT US

YOU'VE SEEN
IT BEFORE,
HAVEN'T YOU?

BEHOLD!

WHAT BETTER
FOUNDATION
FOR ALL OF
APHAELIA?

AN IMMUTABLE
REMINDER OF OUR
MISSION, OUR
CULTURE--

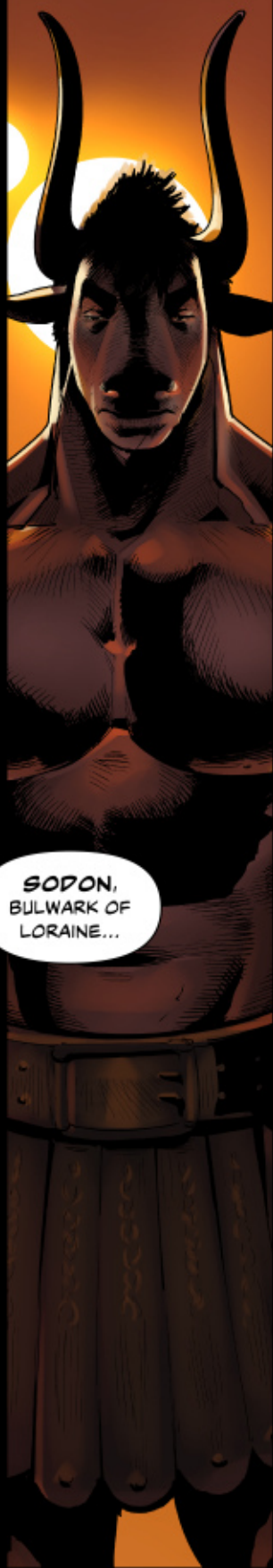
--THE
FIRST
BOOK,
ENGRAVED
IN STONE!

RECORDS
OF CREATION,
DEEDS OF THE
ARCHMASONS,
AND THEIR
ETERNAL
BLESSING!

RHODOWYN,
THE KING
OF KINGS...



SODON,
BULWARK OF
LORAINÉ...



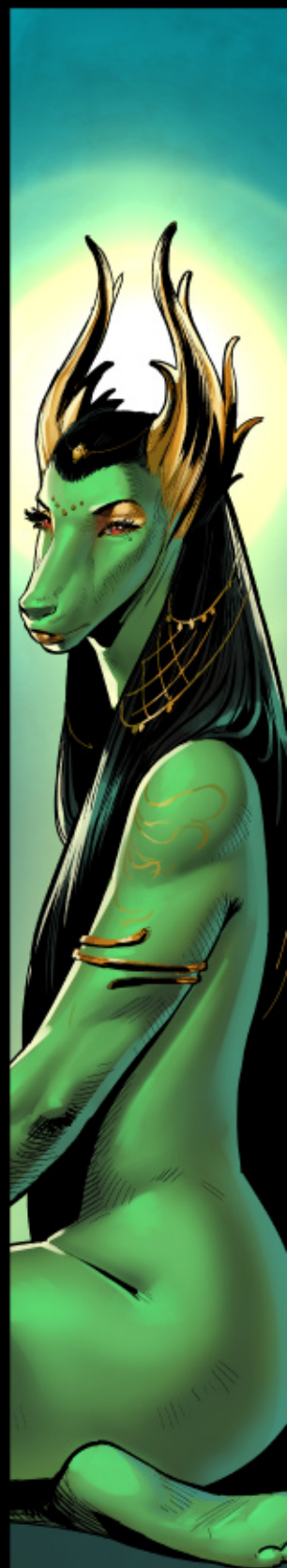
THE HEALER
LAURIENTUS...



WISE AND HOLY
ASTHEOPITHICUS...



...AND
OIDECALLA,
THE GOLD SAGE





INDEED, IT IS
MAGNIFICENT

A
BLESSING,
YOU SAY?

WELL, OF
COURSE!



THE ARCHMASONS
KNEW HISTORY WAS
BEST WRIT INTO
STONE

A PEOPLE
WITHOUT A
PAST HAS NO
FUTURE

THEY DID THEIR
BEST TO GUIDE
US FROM AFAR,
TO GIVE US A
CENTER...

...AND
IT IS THAT
GUIDANCE
WE SEEK
HERE

COME
JOIN US,
AVALON

EVEN
ANGELS
MUST PRAY,
YES?

OH, IT
CERTAINLY
CAN'T HURT!



IN TIME...

...MAY WE
COME TO KNOW
THE **WORLD...**

...THE
INNOCENT
BOUNTY

IN TIME...

...MAY
WE COME TO
KNOW **GOD THE**
STRANGER...

...ON
WHOSE PATH
WE WALK, EYES
OPEN



IN TIME...

...MAY
WE COME
TO KNOW
GOD THE
TYRANT...

...OUR
ENEMY, THE
DEVOURING
CREATOR



SO
THAT YOUR FEET
WILL NOT STUMBLE,
AND YOUR EYES WILL
BE STEADFAST ON
YOUR JOURNEY...

...LET
US REVISIT THE
GNOSIS OF THE
FIRST BOOK

LET US
REMEMBER,
TOGETHER--

--THE
WISDOM
OF STONE

--THE
SACRAMENT
OF
FIRMAMENT

--THE
PROTECTION
OF SILVER

--THE
STRENGTH
OF IRON

--AND THE
GLORY
OF GOLD



GOODNIGHT,
GOODNIGHT
ALL!

EL KEEP
YOU!

I HOPE
THIS HASN'T
BEEN
TOO MUCH
EXCITEMENT,
AVALON!

YOU
MUST BE
WEARY

BALTHIUS
HAS A ROOM
PREPARED
FOR YOUR
STAY

I'LL
ESCORT
YOU--



YOU ARE A
GENTLEMAN,
INDEED

BUT I WOULD
LIKE TO SEE
YOUR ROOM
FIRST...



...IF
THAT'S ALL
RIGHT



WELL,
WELL

IT'S ALL
YOUR OWN
SPACE?

NO
BUNKMATES?

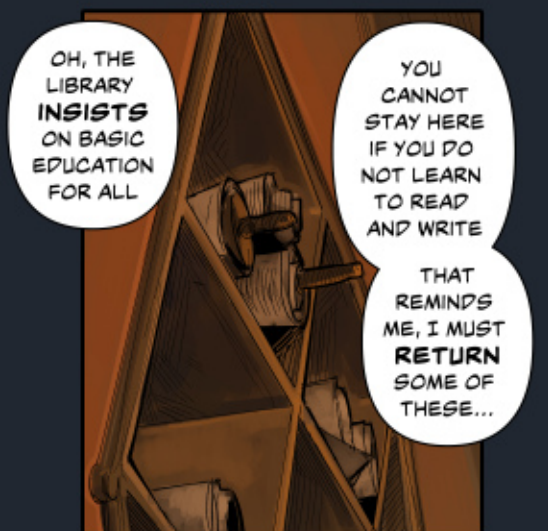
AH, NO

AFTER OUR
RENTENTION DEBT
IS PAID, WE CAN
MOVE INTO OUR
OWN ROOMS

THIS
ONE HAS BEEN
MINE FOR A YEAR
NOW

QUITE
A FEW
BOOKS
HERE

YOU
ARE A
LEARNED
MAN,
ROSHIM



OH, THE
LIBRARY
INSISTS
ON BASIC
EDUCATION
FOR ALL

YOU
CANNOT
STAY HERE
IF YOU DO
NOT LEARN
TO READ
AND WRITE

THAT
REMINDS
ME, I MUST
RETURN
SOME OF
THESE...



YOUR
OWN
WORK?

YES I DO--

--A LOT OF
WORK FOR THE
LIBRARY; MASONRY
AND EMBOSsing,
MOSTLY

NEVER
WAS GOOD
AT FIGURE
CARVING...

...BUT I
KEEP COMING
BACK TO IT

I DON'T
KNOW WHY



...OH?

MAY I
PICK THIS
UP?

GO
AHEAD!

GORGEOUS,
AREN'T THEY?



...AMAZING

THE
COLOR HAS
NOT FADED
AT ALL

IT
ALMOST
LOOKS
ALIVE

MY FRIEND,
CRISTIO--

HE GAVE
THEM TO ME

HE'S IN THE
AGRICULTURE
PROGRAM

I THINK
THEY ARE
HIS FORM OF
SCULPTURE



THE
GOLDEN-
HAIR
ED BOY
WHO
LED THE
PRAYER?



YES

I DON'T
KNOW HOW
HE DOES IT

...HE'S
JUST
AMAZING

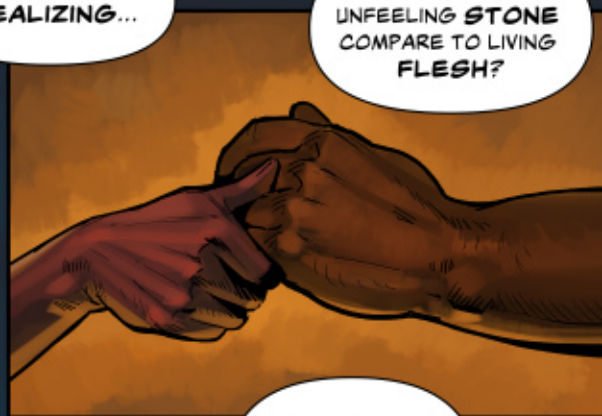


THERE'S
SOME HUMAN
FASCINATION WITH
PRESERVING
THINGS

I SUPPOSE
YOUR STATUES
AND BOOKS ALL
SERVE THE SAME
PURPOSE...

...CRYSTALLIZING,
IDEALIZING...

...BUT HOW CAN
UNFEELING **STONE**
COMPARE TO **LIVING
FLESH?**



HOW CAN
DRY SCRAPS
OF PARCHMENT
CONTAIN THE **JOY**
OF **LIVING?**



WELL, AH...

...I SUPPOSE
THEY ARE NOT A
SUBSTITUTION

IT IS OUR
WAY OF PASSING
VALUE TO THE NEXT
GENERATION

WE ARE NOT
ALL GRACED WITH
LIFE AS YOU ARE,
CHILD OF HEAVEN

BALTHIUS WOULD
SAY THAT OUR BOOKS
ARE THE TRUE BRICKS
OF THE TOWER

SPOKEN
LIKE AN
OLD MAN!

ONE
MUST LAY ASIDE
ONE'S BOOKS AND
EXPERIENCE
THE WORLD!



OH...
...I HAVE
PLENTY
OF
EXPERIENCE
TO SHARE!

...YOU DON'T
MIND ME BEING
BOLD AGAIN,
DO YOU?

AHHH...

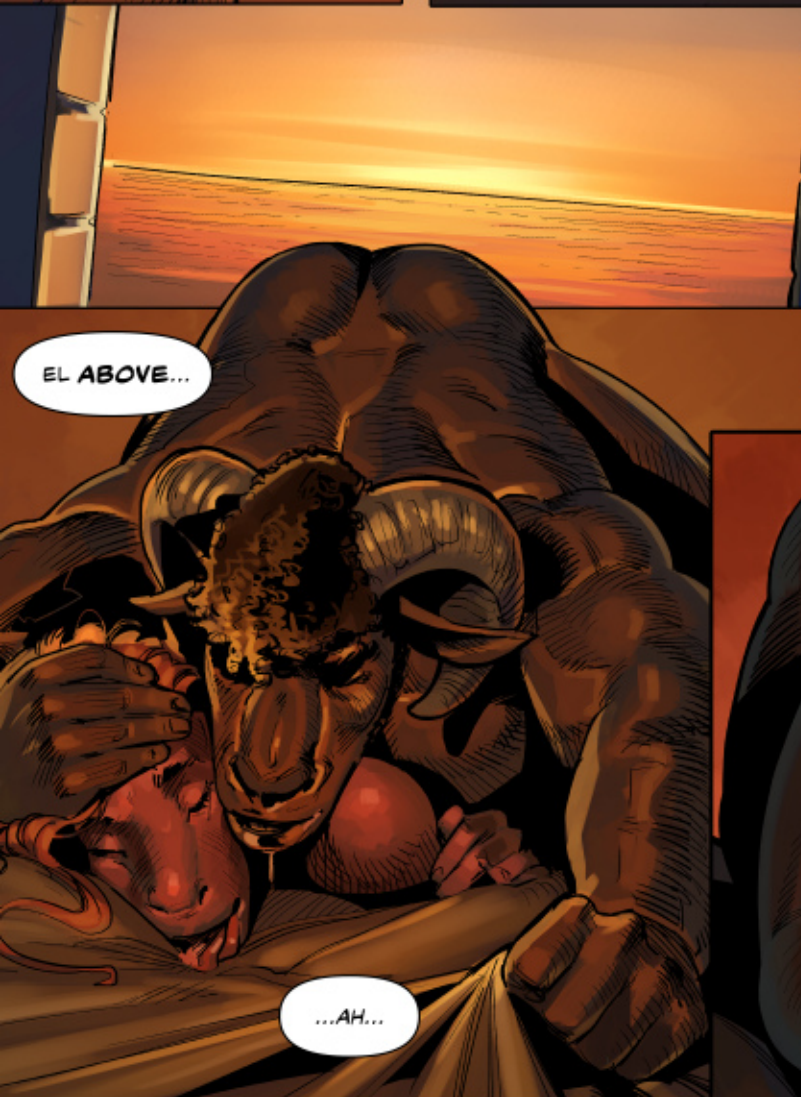
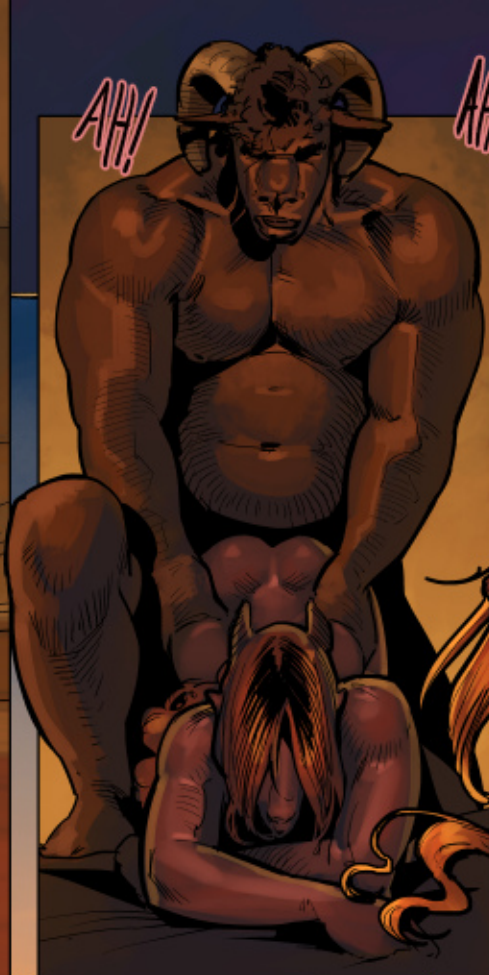
DO AS
YOU WILL TO
ME, LAD!

THE
BOLDER,
THE
BETTER!





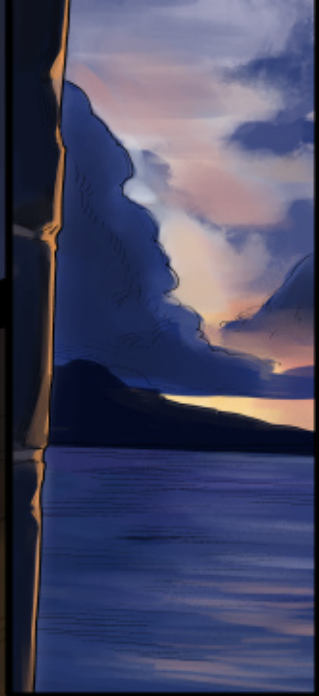




EL ABOVE...

...AH...

...WELL
DONE,
LAMBKIN



AVALON...

...IF THIS IS
BUT A PREVIEW
OF OUR JOURNEY
TOGETHER...



...I FEEL THE
ARCHMASONS
HAVE INDEED
BLESSED US



...
DO YOUR
BOOKS TELL YOU
WHAT BECAME
OF THE
ARCHMASON'S?



NO--
WELL--

IT IS
WRITTEN THAT
THEY JOURNEYED
EAST, AFTER
THE TOWER
WAS BUILT



INDEED

PERHAPS
THEY HAD **BETTER**
THINGS TO DO

DID
BALTHIUS
TELL YOU,
THEN?

WHY HE
ASKED **ME**
TO ACCOMPANY
YOU ON YOUR
EXPEDITION?



AH, NO

...
I HAVE
SERVED YOUR
PEOPLE FOR
MANY YEARS

BEFORE THAT,
I SERVED THE
KINGDOM OF
GOLD

IT HAS
FALLEN TO
RUIN...

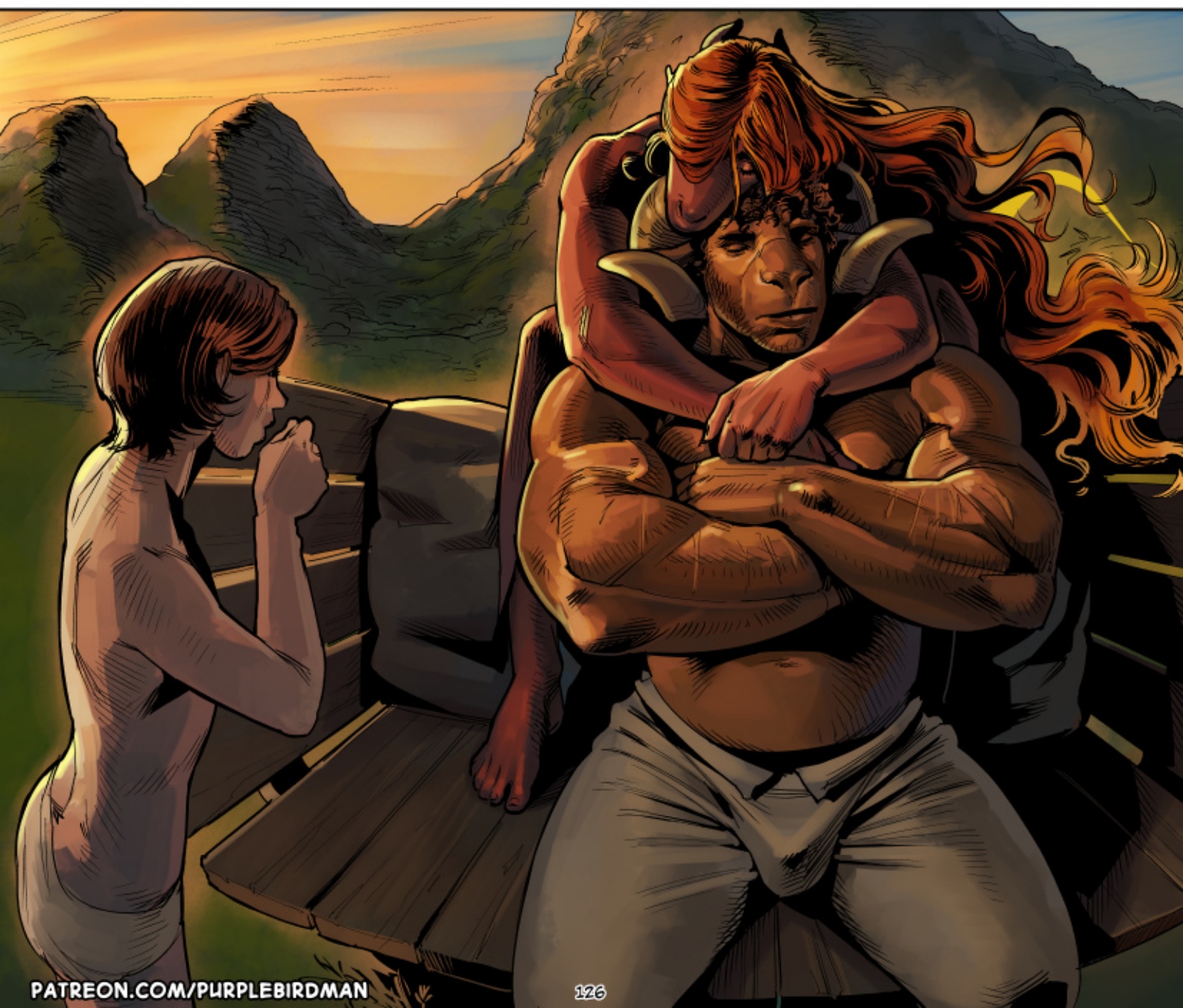
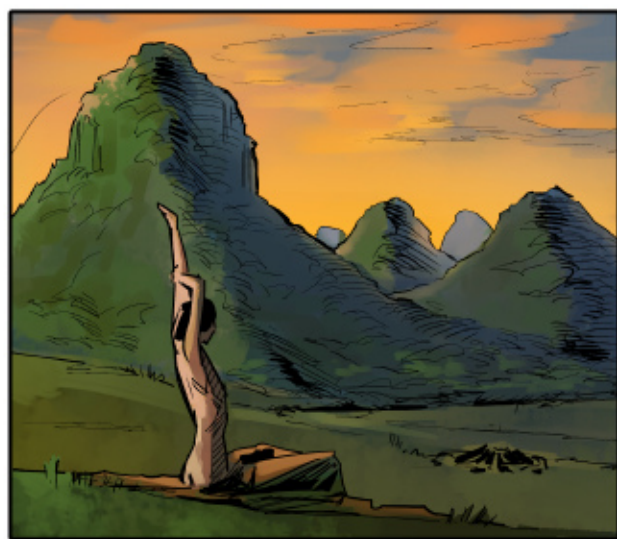
...YET
THE TEMPLE
OF **CARCOSA**,
CROWN OF THE
CARCOS MOUNTAINS,
REMAINS ABOVE THE
CITY **MIRIAH**

THERE
RESIDES YOUR
LORD OF
GOLD

DIMINISHED, YET
UNTARNISHED

I WILL
GUIDE YOU
TO HIM...

...PERHAPS
HE WILL FORGIVE
ME FOR IT





OH...

...HERE
AGAIN



SOFT SEEDLINGS,
SMELL OF GRASS

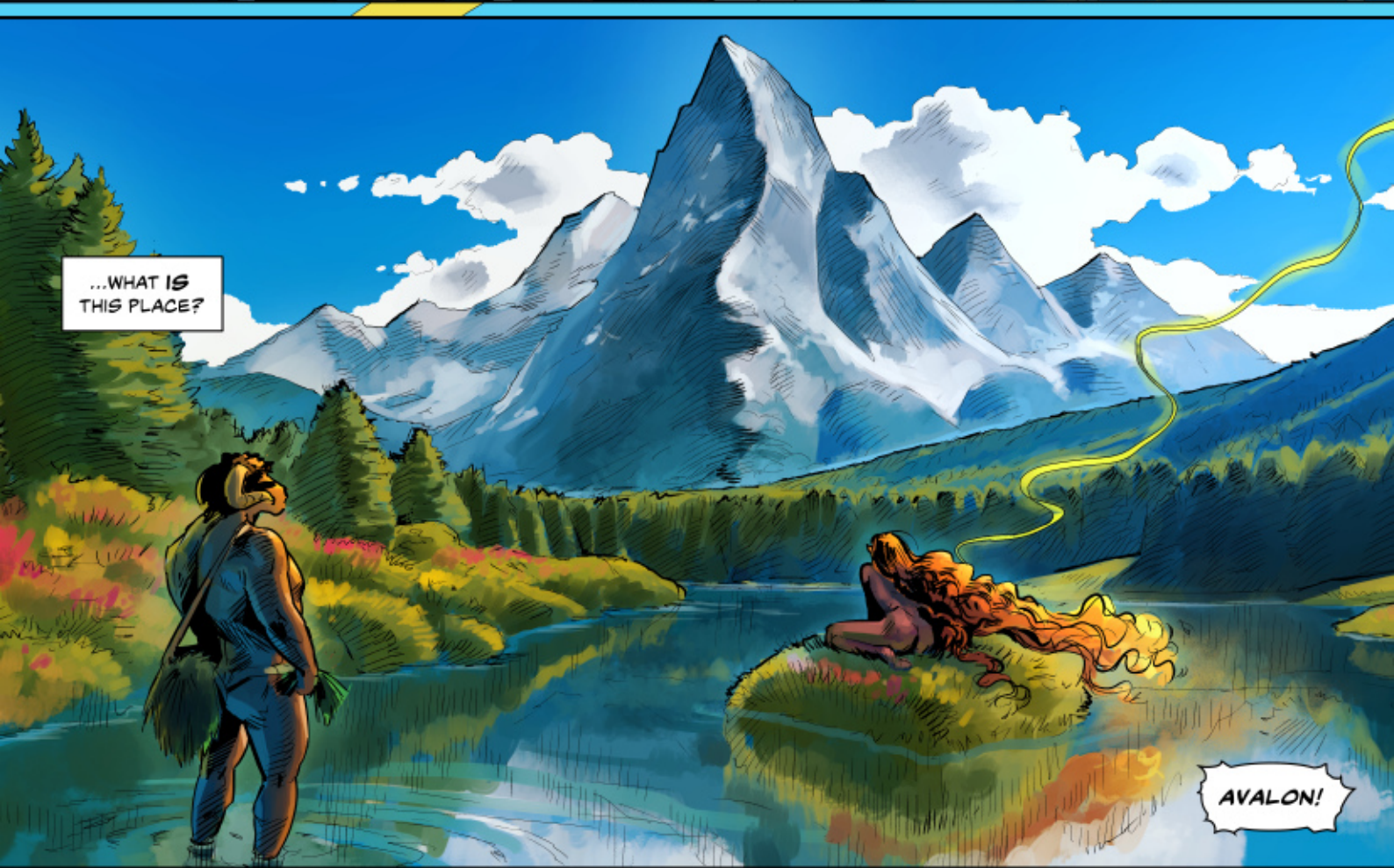
HOT SUN
ON MY BACK



COOL WATER
AROUND MY
ANKLES

MY HOME

WAIT... NO...



...WHAT IS
THIS PLACE?

AVALON!



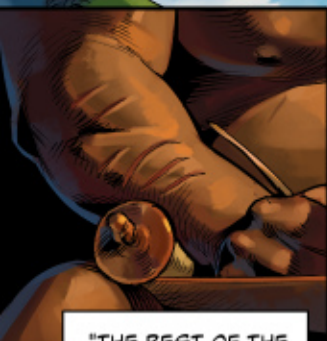
ROSHIM!

WAKE
UP!



COME, MY
FRIENDS...

...THE
ROAD TO
MIRIAH
AWAITS!



"THE REST OF THE JOURNEY PASSED WITHOUT INCIDENT, EL BLESS LEILY"



"HE WAS PLEASANT ENOUGH COMPANY ON THE ROAD, AND A WELCOME DISTRACTION..."



"...THOUGH PERHAPS THAT IS AN **UNKIND** EVALUATION OF A VERY **KIND** MAN"

...OI!

GOT YER **BRETH**ER, SAH!

GOT YER **BRETH**ER!

HAW HAW!

OH, I DON'T THINK SO--

YES, HE'S MUCH **HANDSOMER** THAN YOU, ROSHIM



BLESS YOU FOR DELIVERING MY SON TO ME, **BLESS** YOU!

DO YOU--

DO YOU WANT SOME **FOOD**?

OR DO YOU PREFER TO EAT **GRASS**?

OH MOTHER, YOU SOUND LIKE SUCH A **BUMPKIN**!

HE'S A **MAN**!

GET HIM A PROPER MEAL!

"MAYBE I'VE PLACED TOO LITTLE VALUE IN SIMPLE **KINDNESS**"



"WHEN WE LEFT HIS HOUSE, HE SAID:"

"I WILL ALWAYS REMEMBER YOU; THE MAN WHO CHOSE ME OVER HIS GOLD, WHO SHELTERED ME, AS A TREE SHELTERS A BIRD IN A STORM..."

"LET ME **REMIN**D YOU..."

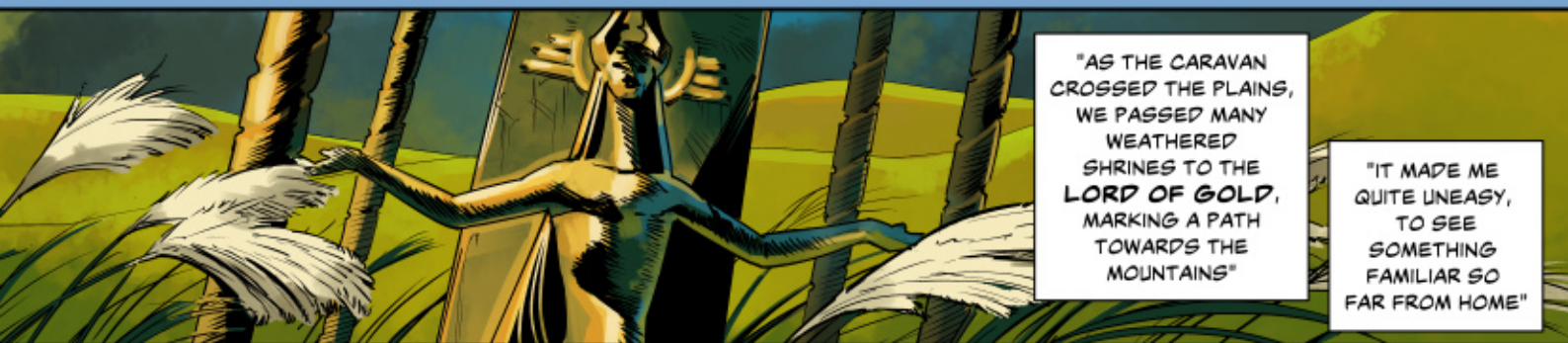
"...TO **BEND** IS NOT THE SAME AS TO **BREAK**"

"YOU ARE A **CHAMPION**, INDEED"

"AND SO, WE CONTINUED TO **GREEN MIRIAH**, CITY OF MERCHANTS, AT THE FOOT OF THE **CARCOS MOUNTAINS** AND DELTA OF THE RIVER **HALI**"

"AVALON SAYS OIDEALLA HAD SOME HAND IN FOUNDING THE CITY THAT GREW FROM THE RUINS OF **CARCOSA**, BUT THE LORD SEEMED TO LOSE HIS INTEREST IN MINISTRY, AND BECAME A **TOTEM**"

"NOW, THE PEOPLE CARRY ON WELL ENOUGH WITHOUT HIM, BUT WITH A LINGERING RESPECT AND REVERENCE OF THE PRESENCE OF **OLD CARCOSA**"



"AS THE CARAVAN CROSSED THE PLAINS, WE PASSED MANY WEATHERED SHRINES TO THE **LORD OF GOLD**, MARKING A PATH TOWARDS THE MOUNTAINS"

"IT MADE ME QUITE UNEASY, TO SEE SOMETHING FAMILIAR SO FAR FROM HOME"

...WELL, THEN...

...KEEP READY YOUR LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

I CANNOT SAY WHAT SORT OF **WELCOME** AWAITS US ATOP THE MOUNTAIN...

...BUT THE **VICEROY** HERE SHALL RESPOND TO IT, ONE WAY OR ANOTHER

LET US SEE WHAT PATH OPENS BEFORE US



I HAVE IT HERE

PERHAPS THERE ISN'T A **VICEROY** WHAT THEN?

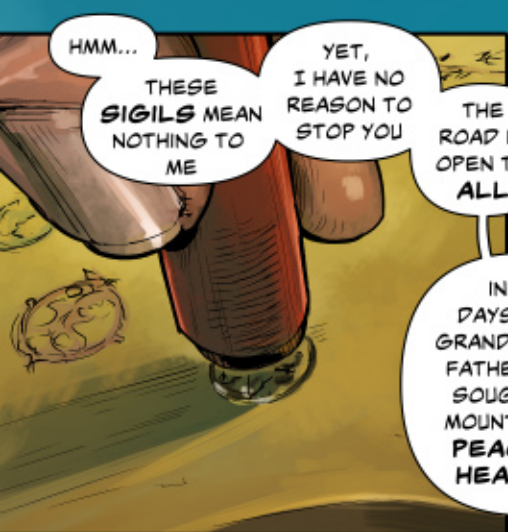


YOUNG MAN--

A LORD SHALL **NEVER** WILLINGLY GIVE UP POWER

EVEN IF HE THINKS IT NO LONGER INTERESTS HIM





HMM...
THESE
SIGILS MEAN
NOTHING TO
ME

YET,
I HAVE NO
REASON TO
STOP YOU

THE
ROAD IS
OPEN TO
ALL

IN THE
DAYS OF MY
GRANDFATHER'S
FATHER, MANY
SOUGHT THE
MOUNTAIN, FOR
PEACE, FOR
HEALING...



...BUT NO
LONGER

PILGRIMS
STILL **ASCEND**
DURING THE FESTIVALS,
STILL PAY **TRIBUTE**
TO OUR **LORD**...



"...BUT SOME
WHO WALK THE
PATH OF GOLD
DO NOT RETURN
TO US"

"AND FROM THOSE
WHO DO, I HAVE
HEARD **REPORTS**
THAT NOT ALL IS WELL
IN **OLD CARCOSA**"



"THE **LIGHT**,
THEY SAY,
HAS BECOME
OPPRESSIVE"

"I PRAY IT REMAINS
CONFINED TO THE
MOUNTAINS"



REJOICE, PILGRIM,
FOR RELIEF IS NEAR
AT HAND!

ASCEND AND LAY
DOWN YOUR BURDEN,
FOR THE GRACE OF
CARCOSA AWAITS!

WE MUST BE CAREFUL...

...THE LORD'S PRESENCE EFFUSES THIS FOREST

THE TREES, THE BRANCHES, THEY BOW IN AWE

DO YOU FEEL IT?

...WHAT?

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT

THESE WOODS ARE PLEASANT ENOUGH

THE VERY AIR IS HEAVY

DO YOU NOT FEEL THE PRESSURE OF THE LIGHT?

ALL I FEEL IS THIS INCLINE

YOU SAID THERE WAS NO DANGER HERE

YES

THERE WAS NO DANGER

BUT THE LORD IS DANGEROUS

WELL, ROUSE ME IF THERE'S TROUBLE

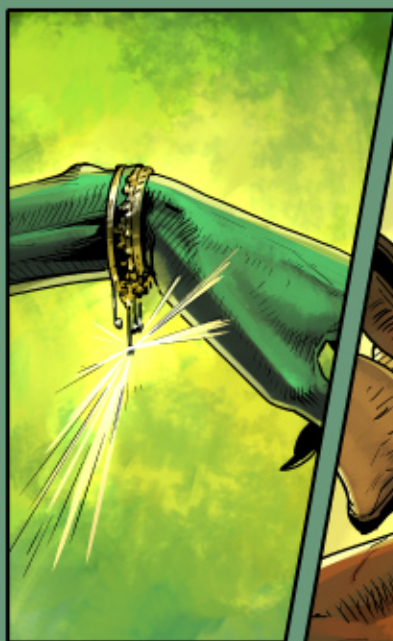
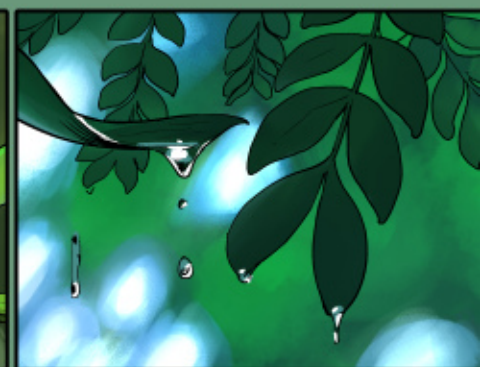
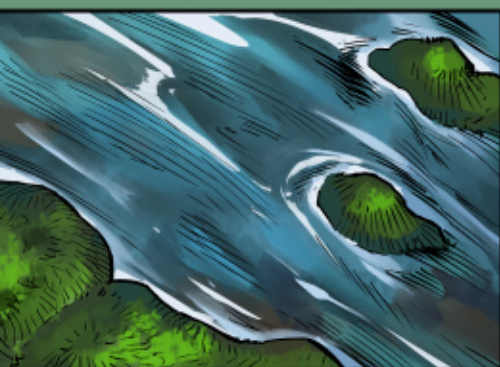
I MUST REST A MOMENT

FINE

REST, BUT DO NOT SLEEP

I FEAR HIS REGARD IS ALREADY UPON US...

...AND I CANNOT PROTECT YOU HERE





...OH,
DEAR
FLAME...

...WHY
MUST THEE
ALIGHT ONCE
MORE ON THIS
SANCTUARY...



...AND
BURDEN
MY WEARY
HEART?

WAUGH--!!



HUSH,
CHILD

DO NOT
BE AFRAID

HARM
WILL ONLY
BEFALL THOSE
WHO BRING IT
HERE

PERHAPS,
PERHAPS
YOU SHALL
BE SPARED



STAY
WHERE YOU
ARE, YOU
AND THE
OTHER...

...AND
MY AUGUR
SHALL COME,
TO BRING YOU
BEFORE ME

THEN--



-- WE
SHALL
SPEAK
ABOUT WHAT
YOU HAVE
DONE



...I TOLD
YOU NOT TO
FALL ASLEEP



ROSHIM

WHAT DID
THE LORD
SAY?



AH...

INDEED,
I HARDLY
DARED
HOPE...

...BUT
ONLY YOU COULD
HAVE ROUSED MY
LORD TO SUCH A
FRETFUL STATE

WELCOME
HOME,
BELOVED



COME
ALONG WITH
US, TO THE
HOUSE



...I DID NOT EXPECT THE LORD TO ALLOW ME ONTO THE GROUNDS

OH, HE HAS FORBIDDEN IT, OF COURSE

HOWEVER, I WILL ALLOW IT

THE LORD WILL CEDE TO ME ON THIS MATTER

OUR HOUSE HAS ALWAYS BEEN A REFUGE, AND IT WILL NOT TURN AWAY THE PENITENT WHILE I STILL LIVE

...NOW, THERE IS ANOTHER--

GOODNESS, AND A HEARTY LAD YOU ARE!

I AM ADAMUS, COMPANION TO THE LORD

WHAT BRINGS YOU HERE IN SUCH DIRE COMPANY, YOUNG MAN?



UH--

THIS PERSON IS MY GUIDE

ON BEHALF OF MY PEOPLE, WHO WERE STEWARDED BY HIS WORDS IN TIMES LONG PAST...



...I'VE COME TO SPEAK TO THE LORD, TO ASK FOR HIS HELP

MY MISSION, AS EXPLAINED BY MY ELDERS...



"...WELL..."

"...THIS IS SOMETHING MY LORD WILL WANT TO SEE"

"COME, YOU TWO"

"THE COURT AWAITS US"



...STOP

YOUR
COMPANION SHALL
NOT PASS THE COURT
GATES, ROSHIM

HE SHALL
WAIT IN YOUR
LODGING

I WILL
PRESENT
YOU TO THE
LORD

UH...

...WILL
YOU BE ALL
RIGHT?

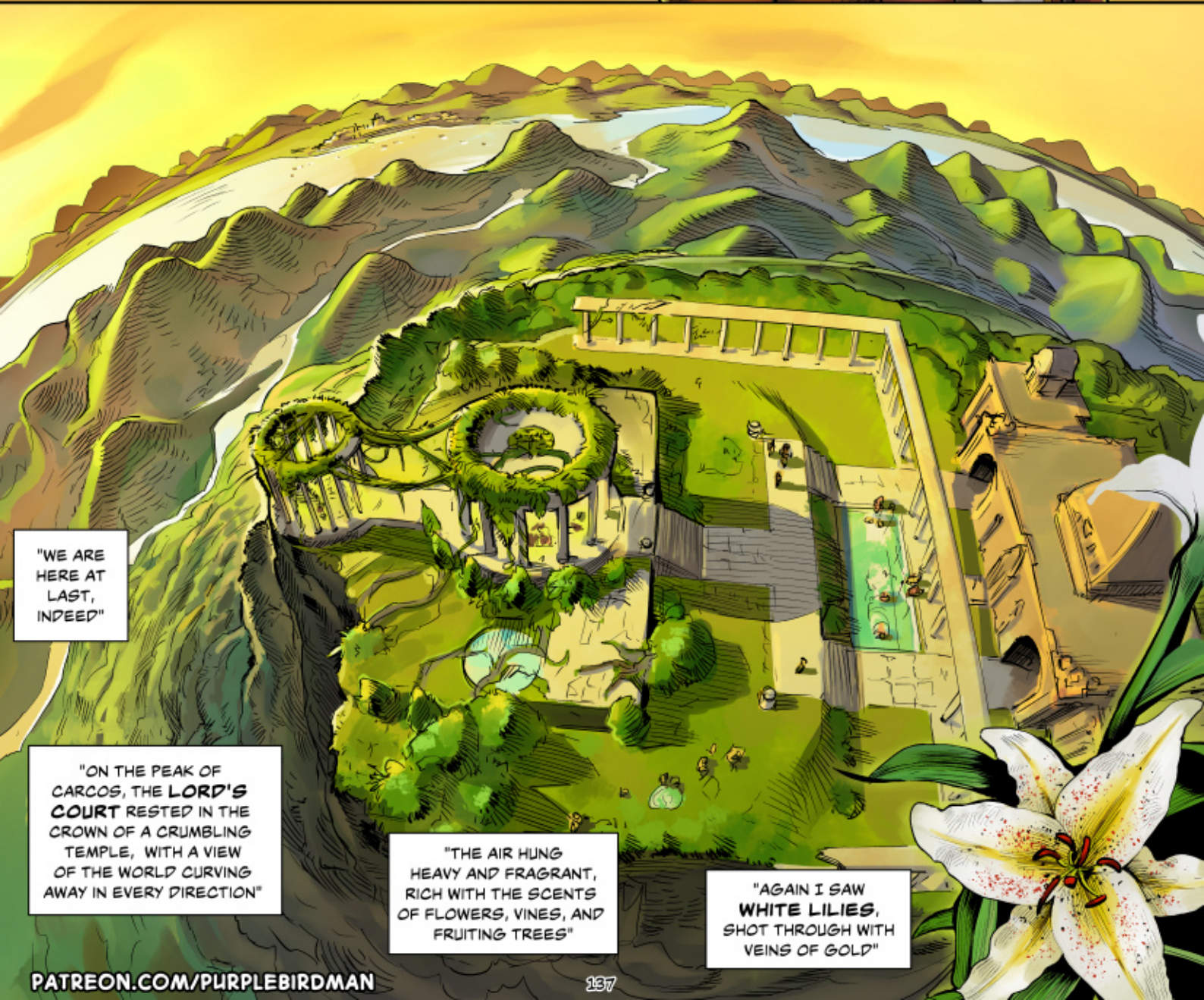
OH,
LAMBKIN!

I NEVER
EXPECTED TO
PASS THESE
GATES ALIVE

GO,
AND DO
NOT WORRY
ABOUT ME

THIS
IS YOUR
MOMENT,
IS IT NOT?

WE
ARE HERE
AT LAST



"WE ARE
HERE AT
LAST,
INDEED"

"ON THE PEAK OF
CARCOS, THE LORD'S
COURT RESTED IN THE
CROWN OF A CRUMBLING
TEMPLE, WITH A VIEW
OF THE WORLD CURVING
AWAY IN EVERY DIRECTION"

"THE AIR HUNG
HEAVY AND FRAGRANT,
RICH WITH THE SCENTS
OF FLOWERS, VINES, AND
FRUITING TREES"

"AGAIN I SAW
WHITE LILIES,
SHOT THROUGH WITH
VEINS OF GOLD"



...I KNOW
WHAT YOU ARE
THINKING,
ROSHIM

"WHAT A
RUIN I HAVE
COME TO!"

WELL,
CARCOSA
HAS SEEN
BETTER
DAYS

BUT
THE LORD
PREFERS
THINGS THIS
WAY

AH...

...IT IS A
STRANGE
PLACE TO
FIND THE ONE
I IMAGINED

MORE
GREEN
THAN
GOLD

CARCOSA
WAS ONCE
QUITE A
SIGHT

WHEN I
FIRST ARRIVED,
THE GOLD-WASHED
LIGHT COULD FAIRLY
BLIND ONE, AND THE
STEEPLES OF THE
COAST **BLAZED**
LIKE TONGUES OF
FIRE...

TODAY, I
FIND IT RATHER
EASIER ON
THE EYES

HAHA!



SO...

...THESE
ARE HIS
COURTIERS?

COURTIERS?

THE COURTIER OF THE
LORD ARE THE **SICK**, THE
SUFFERING, AND THE
WORLD-WEARY

INDEED,
MANY COME FROM
AFAR TO PASS THEIR
FINAL DAYS HERE,
AMIDST THE **GREEN**
PLENTY

MY LORD
IS, IN HIS OWN
WAY, QUITE
KIND...



...AND
HE HAS
ALREADY
DONE A
FAVOR
FOR YOU

HE
SLEEPS
MUCH
THIS
TIME OF
YEAR...



...BUT SINCE
HE FORESAW
YOUR ARRIVAL,
HE HAS STAYED
AWAKE
FOR THIS
AUDIENCE...



...IT IS A
COURTESY
HE SELDOM
GIVES



NOW...

...APPROACH,
BUT STAY
BEHIND ME

MY DEAR
LORD...

...I
PRESENT
TO YOU OUR
GUEST



BEHOLD,
ROSHIM--

--THE GLORY
OF GOLD!

HOPE OF THE
HOPELESS...

...MY
GRACIOUS LORD
OIDECALLA

FOR
TEN DAYS...

...I HAVE
WATCHED A
BRIGHT FLAME
APPROACH ALONG
THE RIVERBANK

ITS LIGHT PIERCES
WATER AND GROVE,
FIRMAMENT AND
FLESH...

APHAEL,
FLAME OF
THE WEST

I SAID TO
MINESELF, SURELY
THIS IS THE **FINAL**
CHALLENGE
TO THE REIGN
OF GOLD...

...AND YET,
I HAVE YOUR
LETTER

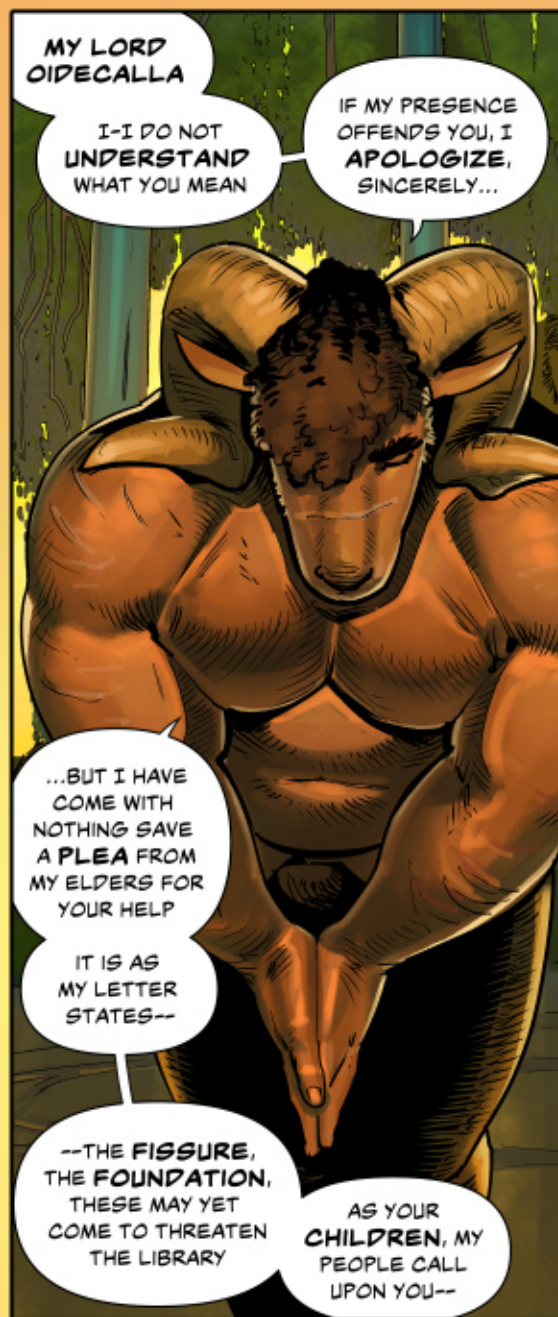
IT IS **ODD**
THAT YOU WOULD
CHOOSE TO GREET
ME WITH SUCH A
THREAT...

...BUT...

...PERHAPS,
PERHAPS--

IS THIS
A **THREAT**,
O TORCH-BEARER?

OR IS THIS
IGNORANCE?



MY LORD
OIDECALLA

I-I DO NOT
UNDERSTAND
WHAT YOU MEAN

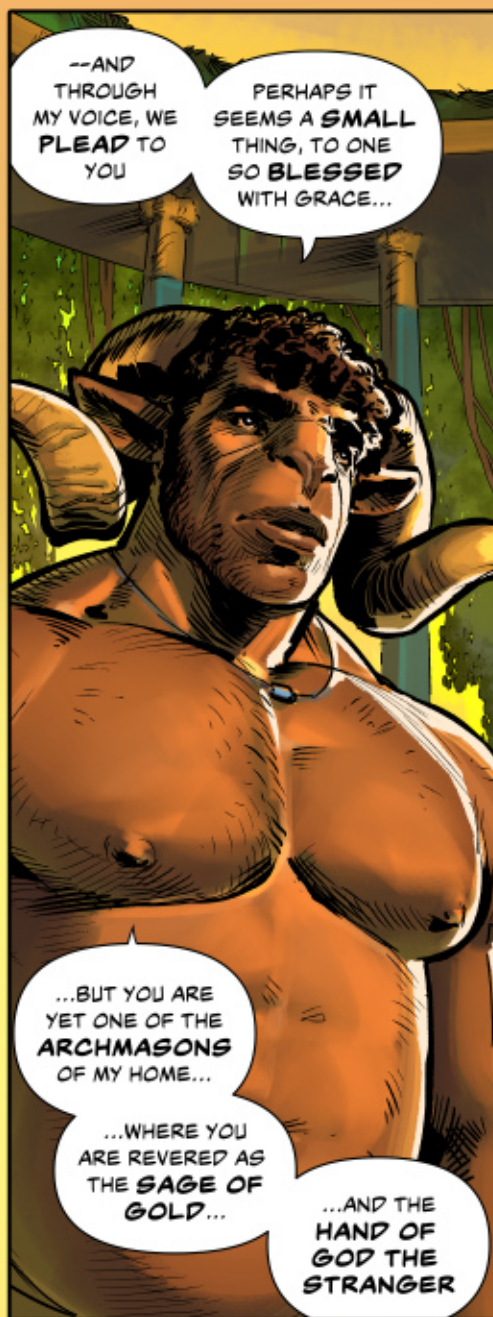
IF MY PRESENCE
OFFENDS YOU, I
APOLOGIZE,
SINCERELY...

...BUT I HAVE
COME WITH
NOTHING SAVE
A PLEA FROM
MY ELDERS FOR
YOUR HELP

IT IS AS
MY LETTER
STATES--

--THE FISSURE,
THE FOUNDATION,
THESE MAY YET
COME TO THREATEN
THE LIBRARY

AS YOUR
CHILDREN, MY
PEOPLE CALL
UPON YOU--



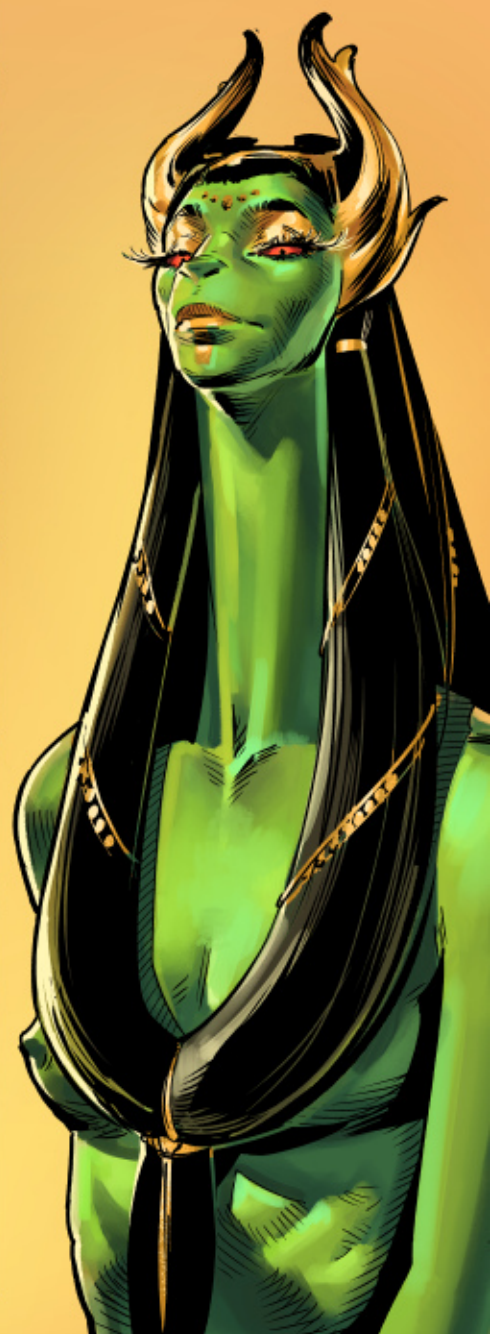
--AND
THROUGH
MY VOICE, WE
PLEAD TO
YOU

PERHAPS IT
SEEMS A SMALL
THING, TO ONE
SO BLESSED
WITH GRACE...

...BUT YOU ARE
YET ONE OF THE
ARCHMASONS
OF MY HOME...

...WHERE YOU
ARE REVERED AS
THE SAGE OF
GOLD...

...AND THE
HAND OF
GOD THE
STRANGER



OH
WELL,
THEN

COME
CLOSER,
CHILD OF
THE TOWER

LET ME
LOOK YOU
IN THE EYE



TELL ME,
ROSHIM...

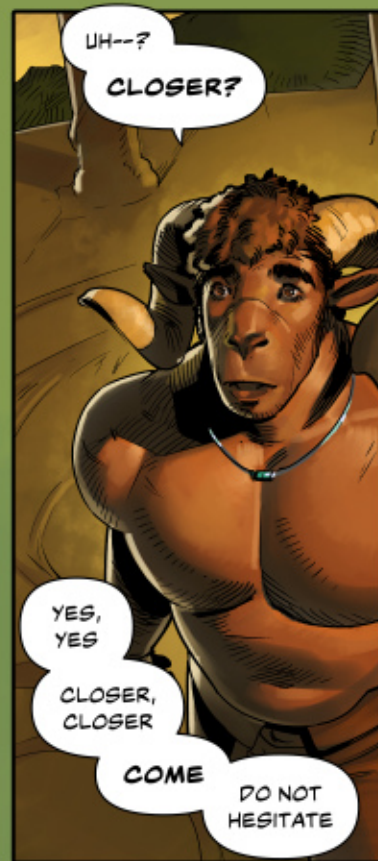
...KNOWLEDGE
HAS NEVER ALTERED
THE COURSE OF A
SINGLE **STAR**...

...NOR
SWAYED A
SINGLE **LEAF**
OF A TREE...

...NOR
PREVENTED A
SINGLE **DROP** OF
RAIN FROM
FALLING

SO THEN,
WHAT USE IS
KNOWLEDGE?

COME
CLOSER, AND
ANSWER



UH--?
CLOSER?

YES,
YES

CLOSER,
CLOSER

COME

DO NOT
HESITATE



THAT'S
CLOSE
ENOUGH

NOW:
LOOK
AT ME

SEE
THE **LINES** IN
MY CHEEKS,
THE **BONES**
BENEATH?

FEEL
MY BREATH
ON YOUR
FACE

TOUCH MY
HAND; FEEL
MY FLESH

I AM NO
RELIC

WE ARE
ALL MADE OF THE
SAME **STUFF**

WHATEVER
YOU HAVE BEEN
TAUGHT...



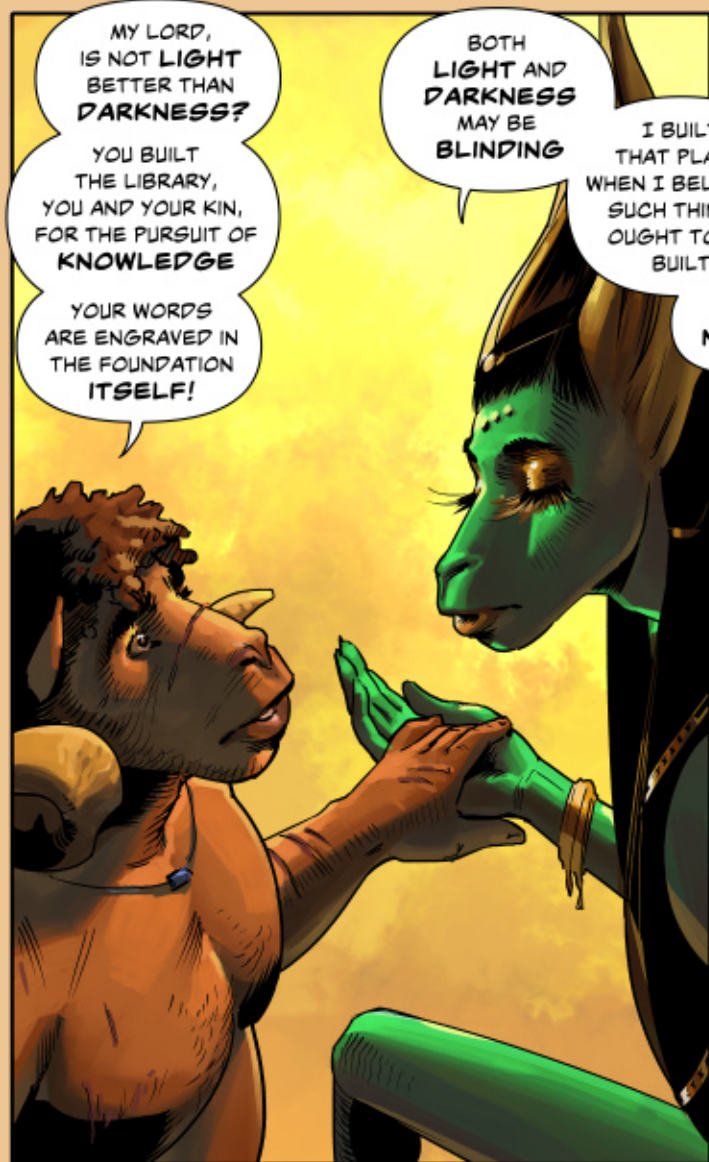
...AN ANGEL
MERELY BURNS
BRIGHTER
WITH THE FIRE OF
CREATION THAN
A **MAN**

WE ARE
ALL FLAME,
VEILED IN
FLESH

NOW,
AGAIN--

--I ASK,
AS ONE MAN TO
ANOTHER:

WHAT USE IS
KNOWLEDGE?



MY LORD,
IS NOT **LIGHT**
BETTER THAN
DARKNESS?

YOU BUILT
THE LIBRARY,
YOU AND YOUR KIN,
FOR THE PURSUIT OF
KNOWLEDGE

YOUR WORDS
ARE ENGRAVED IN
THE FOUNDATION
ITSELF!

BOTH
LIGHT AND
DARKNESS
MAY BE
BLINDING

I BUILT
THAT PLACE
WHEN I BELIEVED
SUCH THINGS
OUGHT TO BE
BUILT

BUT
NOW...

...LOOK
AROUND
YOU

HALF-
SWALLOWED
BY GREENERY,
THIS HOUSE IS
ALL THE MORE
BEAUTIFUL
FOR IT

I SAY TO YOU,
KNOWLEDGE IS
ON THE ROAD TO
VAINGLORY

THE WORLD
SHALL UNDO ALL
THAT MEN HAVE
BUILT; TO SAY
OTHERWISE
IS VANITY

YOU MUST
FIND YOUR
PEACE
WITH THAT



BUT THE
LIBRARY HAS
LASTED A
THOUSAND
YEARS!

IT CONTAINS
MILLIONS OF
DOCUMENTS,
FRAGMENTS OF
KNOWLEDGE
DISTILLED FROM
THE SEA OF
CHAOS

IT'S
ALIVE!

IT MUST BE
PRESERVED!



IS THIS
HOUSE NOT
ALIVE?

WHY FORCE
YOUR **WILL** UPON
THE WORLD?

LET IT
GROW AS
IT WILL,
AND **FALL**
AS IT WILL

ALL
KNOWLEDGE
IS **FORGOTTEN**,
REDISCOVERED,
IN PERPETUITY

YOUR LIBRARY
IS NOT THE FIRST,
OR THE LAST



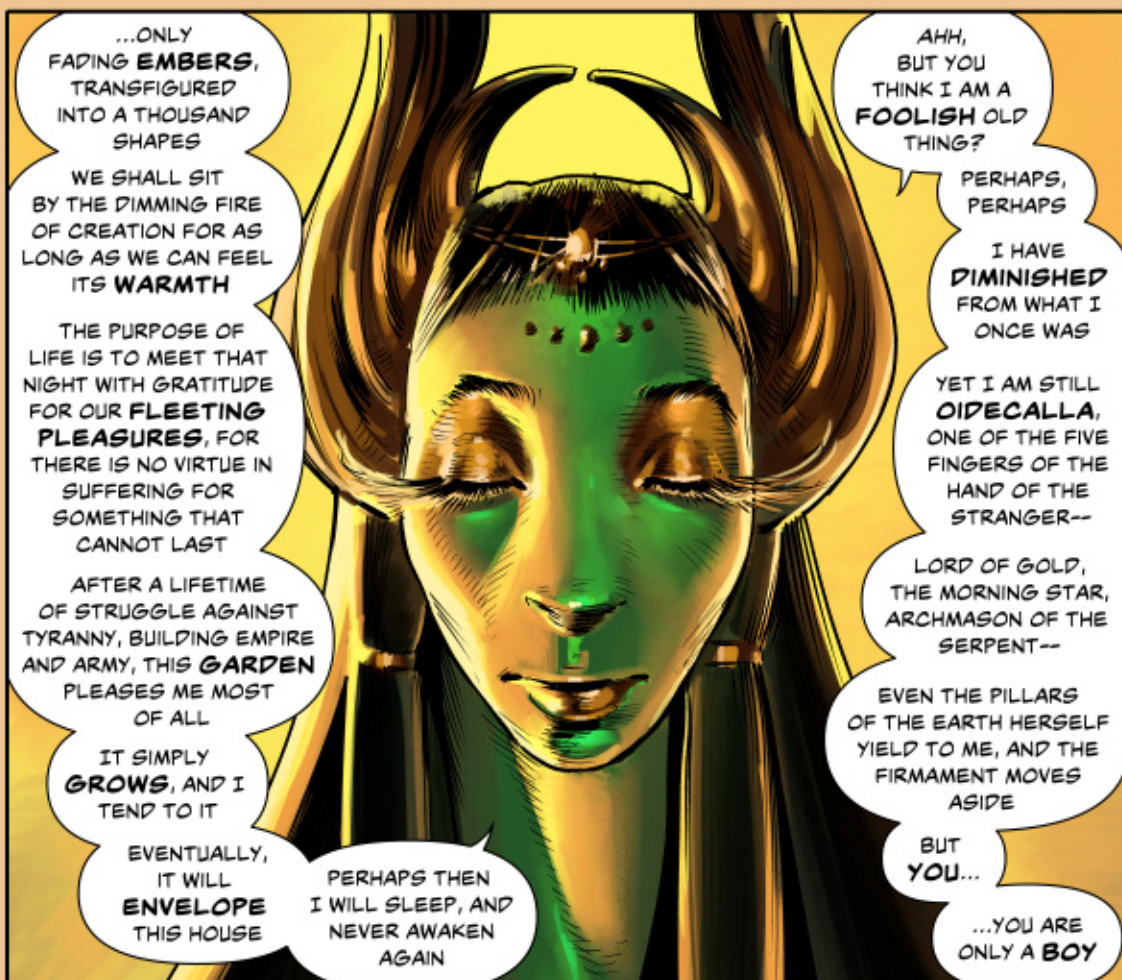
BUT THAT IS
THE **PURPOSE**
OF THE LIBRARY!

YOUR
LIBRARY! TO ENSURE
NOTHING GOING
FORWARD WILL
BE LOST!

NOTHING
CAN BE LOST,
YOUNG MAN

EVERYTHING
WILL BE **REMADE**,
ENDLESSLY

THERE IS
NO FINALE,
NO GLORIOUS
END...



...ONLY
FADING **EMBERS**,
TRANSFIGURED
INTO A THOUSAND
SHAPES

WE SHALL SIT
BY THE DIMMING FIRE
OF CREATION FOR AS
LONG AS WE CAN FEEL
ITS **WARMTH**

THE PURPOSE OF
LIFE IS TO MEET THAT
NIGHT WITH GRATITUDE
FOR OUR **FLEETING**
PLEASURES, FOR
THERE IS NO VIRTUE IN
SUFFERING FOR
SOMETHING THAT
CANNOT LAST

AFTER A LIFETIME
OF STRUGGLE AGAINST
TYRANNY, BUILDING EMPIRE
AND ARMY, THIS **GARDEN**
PLEASES ME MOST
OF ALL

IT SIMPLY
GROWS, AND I
TEND TO IT

EVENUALLY,
IT WILL
ENVELOPE
THIS HOUSE

PERHAPS THEN
I WILL SLEEP, AND
NEVER AWAKEN
AGAIN

AHH,
BUT YOU
THINK I AM A
FOOLISH OLD
THING?

PERHAPS,
PERHAPS

I HAVE
DIMINISHED
FROM WHAT I
ONCE WAS

YET I AM STILL
OIDECALLA,
ONE OF THE FIVE
FINGERS OF THE
HAND OF THE
STRANGER--

LORD OF GOLD,
THE MORNING STAR,
ARCHMASON OF THE
SERPENT--

EVEN THE PILLARS
OF THE EARTH HERSELF
YIELD TO ME, AND THE
FIRMAMENT MOVES
ASIDE

BUT
YOU...

...YOU ARE
ONLY A **BOY**



...NOW,
THEN--

ADAMUS,
IF YOU
WOULD--

...MY
LEG WAS
SHATTERED
SOME TIME
AGO

THANK
YOU

AH...

...OF
COURSE

CARCOSA
WELCOMES YOU,
ROSHIM OF THE
LIBRARY

BUT ALAS,
I DO NOT THINK
I CAN GIVE YOU
WHAT YOU
SEEK

I MUST
SLEEP NOW;
ADAMUS WILL
LOOK AFTER
YOU

--HELP
ME **STAND**,
ROSHIM

IF YOU
DON'T MIND,
AFTER ALL
THAT

CERTAINLY,
DEAR LORD



BUT...

SO THEN,
**LISTEN
WELL**

BUT I
MUST SAY, I
RESPECT
YOUR AMBITION

IN AGES PAST,
WHEN THE EARTH
STILL RESONATED
WITH THE STRANGER'S
PROMISE OF
GRACE--

THEN, I REACHED
FOR MY GLORY, IN
DEFIANCE OF OUR CREATOR,
TO EMPOWER THE SEED OF
HEAVEN AND EARTH TO
RESIST OUR **CURSE--**

BUT THE STARS
ARE SILENT NOW, AND
THE **CONQUORER GOD**
GROWS IN STRENGTH
AND INFLUENCE

THOSE
WERE DAYS
OF HOPE

EVEN WE **FIVE**,
WHO CALLED OURSELVES
THE HAND OF THE STRANGER,
WE HAVE HEARD NO WHISPER
OF GRACE SINCE THOSE
EARLY DAYS

EVEN
WHEN YOUR
FOUNDATION
WAS LAID, IT WAS
OUR OWN ACT OF
FAITH

I FEAR THE
LONG YEARS OF
MY LIFE HAVE BEEN
UTTERLY SPENT,
AND I HAVE NO
MORE TO GIVE
THIS WORLD

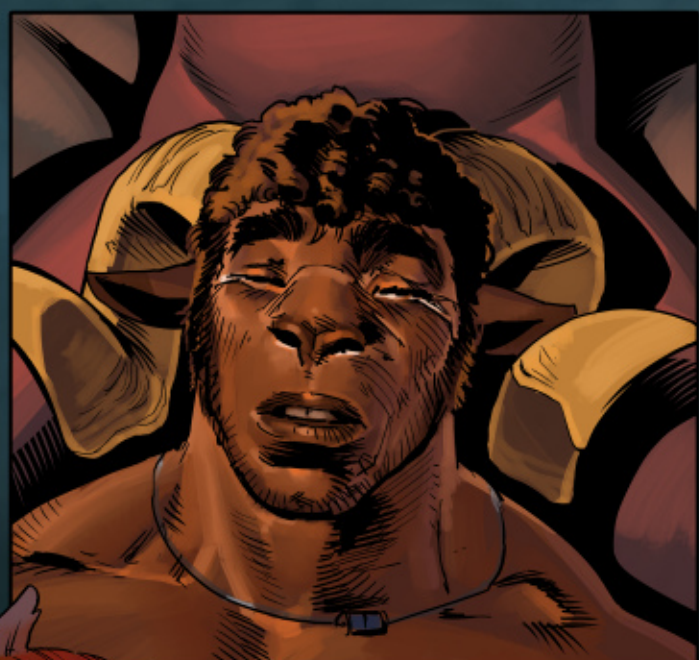
I SHALL
LEND MY REMAINING
STRENGTH TO MY
CITY, MY GARDENS

OF COURSE,
YOU ARE WELCOME
TO SHELTER HERE

BUT SPEAK NO
MORE TO ME OF THIS;
IT OUGHT TO REMAIN IN
THE PAST, A CHILDISH
FAITH OF MINE

GO IN PEACE





HOT SUN ON
MY FACE

COOL WATER
AROUND MY
ANKLES

A SWEET,
CLEAR RINGING,
LIKE BELLS IN
THE WIND...

...AND
AGAIN, THIS
UNFAMILIAR
MOUNTAIN

...AVALON?

...OH

HELLO



HERE
AGAIN

I DO NOT
KNOW THIS
PLACE...

...YET IT
HAS BEEN MY
RECURRING
DREAM AS OF
LATE

IT IS
NOT **YOUR**
DREAM,
LAMBKIN

OH?

WHY DO
YOU BRING
ME HERE?

I DO NOT
MEAN TO
BRING YOU
HERE

YOU HAVE
FOLLOWED
ME, SUCH AS
IT IS

I SUPPOSE
I HAVE LEFT
SOME DOORS
OPEN THAT
ARE BETTER
SHUT

WELL,
WHAT IS
THIS PLACE
TO YOU?

IT'S
BEAUTIFUL



AS WE
BATHE IN THE
GOLDEN LIGHT OF
CARCOSA, MY SOUL
YEARNS FOR MY
SANCTUARY

AND IN MY
DREAMS, MY MIND
FLEES TO IT

THOUGH BUT
A **MEMORY**...

...THIS IS
AVALON, MY
KINGDOM

A
KINGDOM
OF ONE...

...BUT A
KINGDOM
NONETHELESS

THE ADVENTURE
CONTINUES
IN CHAPTER 3!

AUTHOR'S NOTE

THANKS FOR READING MY COMIC!

THOUGH THIS WAS ONE OF THE MOST PRODUCTIVE AND HAPPY COUPLE OF YEARS OF MY LIFE, UNFORTUNATELY THE COMIC HASN'T PERFORMED WELL. THE REST OF IT IS DRAFTED, BUT TO KEEP MY FINANCES IN SHAPE, I'VE GOTTA MOVE ONTO MORE CROWD-PLEASING IDEAS UNTIL I CAN FIGURE SOMETHING ELSE OUT.

STILL IT'S NOT ALL BAD. THERE'S BEEN A LOT OF ARTISTIC IMPROVEMENT, AND "AVALON" HAS GIVEN ME VALUABLE EXPERIENCE IN PRODUCING COLOR AND LEARNING WAYS THAT COLOR CAN COMPLIMENT MY WORK. I'LL BE SITTING WITH THE LESSONS OF PRODUCING IT FOR A LONG TIME AND I'M PLANNING TO BUILD ON TOP OF THEM AND COME BACK WITH EVEN BETTER MATERIAL.

THANKS TO EVERYONE WHO SUPPORTED ME DOING THIS!

-PURPLEBIRDMAN

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink. It features a large, bold 'P' and 'B' that are interconnected, with a horizontal line extending from the left side of the 'P' across the page.