AGE OF BRONZE™

THE STORY OF THE TROJAN WAR

by Eric Shanower

The following pages are excerpted from the comic book series *Age of Bronze* issues #16 (March 2003) and #17 (June 2003) published by Image Comics, Inc. These pages also appear in the book *Age of Bronze: Sacrifice,* a collection of *Age of Bronze* issues #10 through #19.

Age of Bronze is a comprehensive retelling of the Trojan War legend, distilled from the many versions of the famous story and set against the archaeologically correct backdrop of the 13th century BCE.

Story so far: The Trojan prince Paris has run away with Helen, the beautiful wife of Menelaus, king of Sparta. Menelaus's brother is Agamemnon, king of Mycenae and High King of the Achaeans. Menelaus persuades Agamemnon to declare war on Troy in order to recover Helen. Agamemnon gathers the Achaean kings along with their men and ships in to a massive army. These forces gather on the beach at Aulis, ready to sail to the attack. But obstacles keep delaying the army from reaching Troy. As this excerpt begins, Agamemnon and a group of men are hunting in the woods above the bay where the army is beached.

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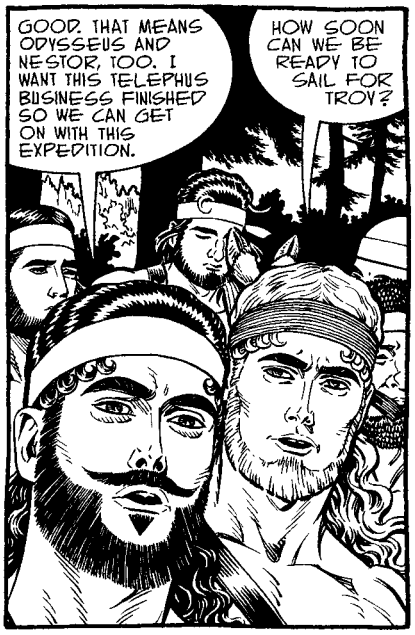
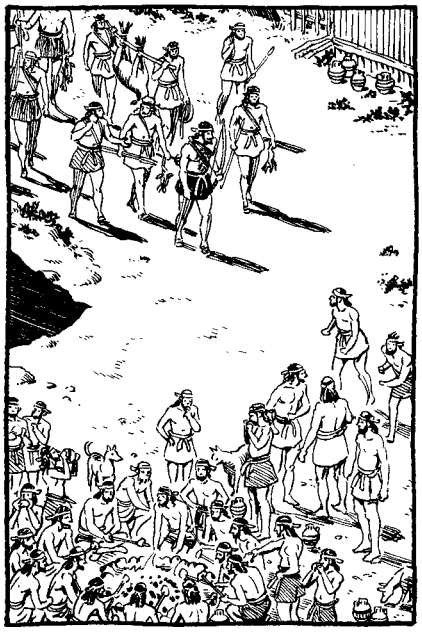
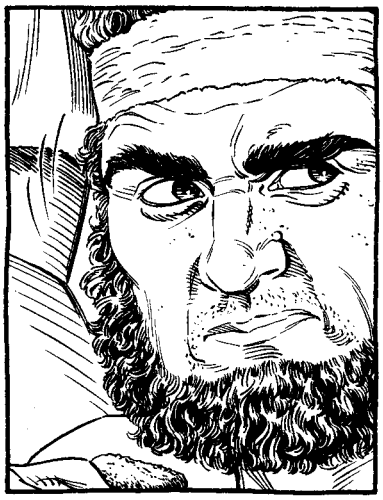
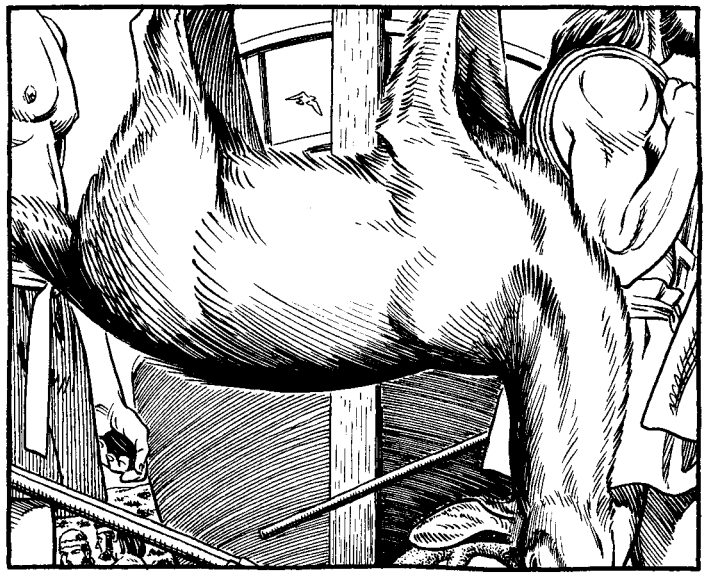
AULIS.
THOSE SHIPS ENTERING THE BAY--ARE THOSE ACHILLES'S?
YES, I BELIEVE SO.

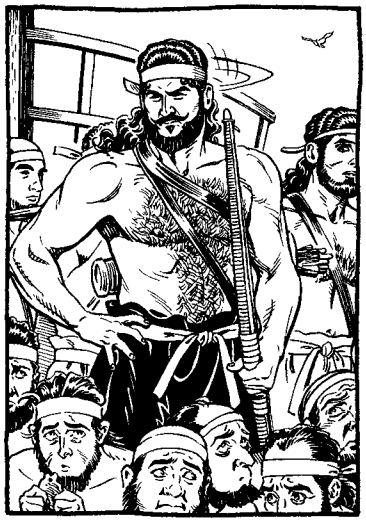

GOOD. THAT MEANS ODYSSEUS AND NESTOR, TOO. I WANT THIS TELEPHUS BUSINESS FINISHED SO WE CAN GET ON WITH THIS EXPEDITION.
HOW SOON CAN WE BE READY TO SAIL FOR TROY?

MONTHS YET. WE'RE STILL WAITING FOR MORE SHIPS. RIGHT NOW WE'RE BARELY HALF THE STRENGTH OF LAST TIME.
WE'LL NEED MORE STRENGTH THAN LAST TIME IF RUMOR'S RIGHT AND THE TROJANS ARE CASTING FAR AND WIDE FOR ALLIES.

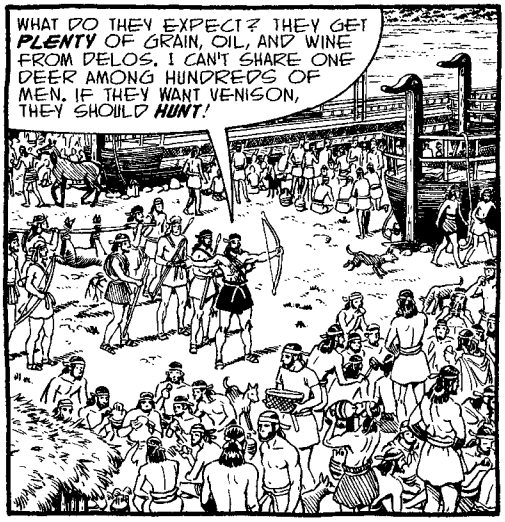


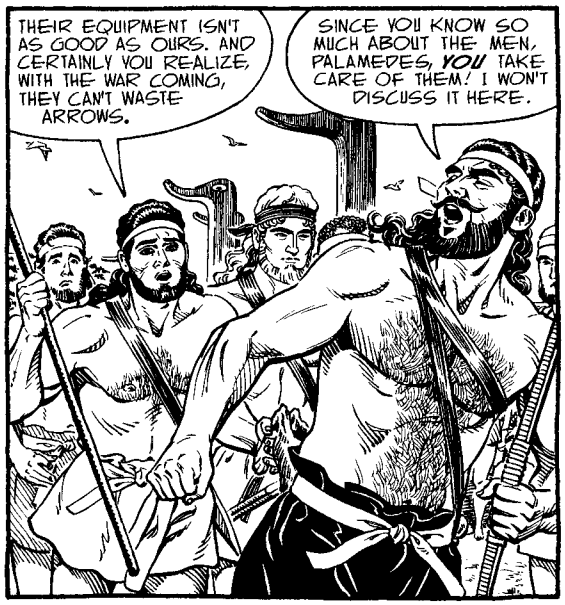


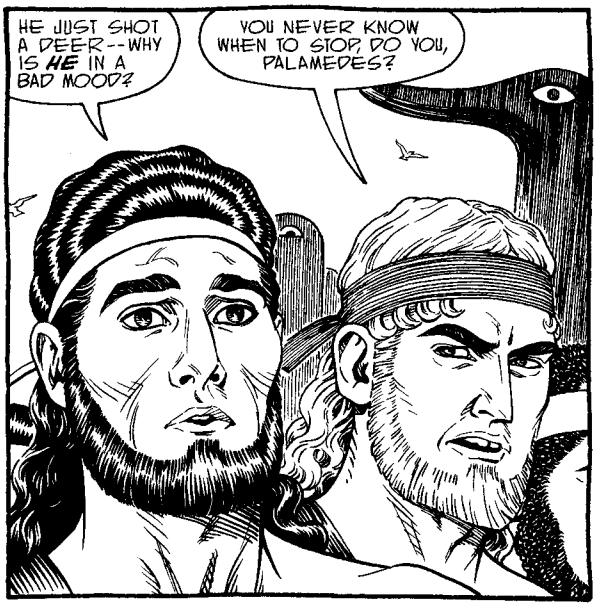


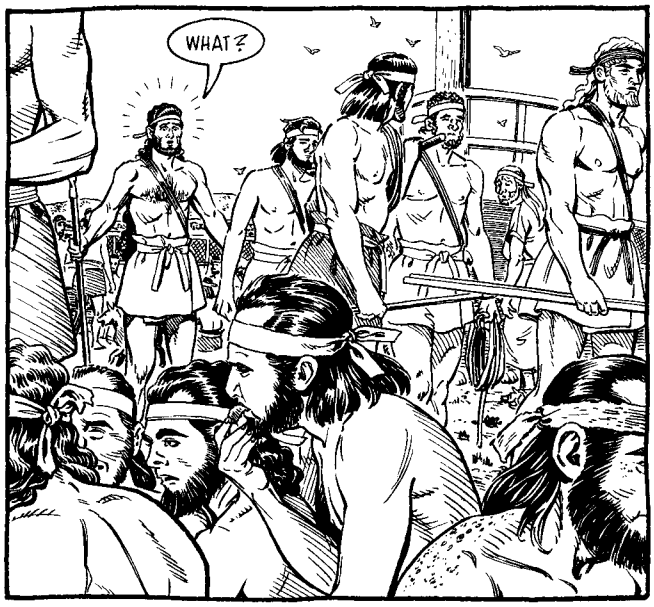


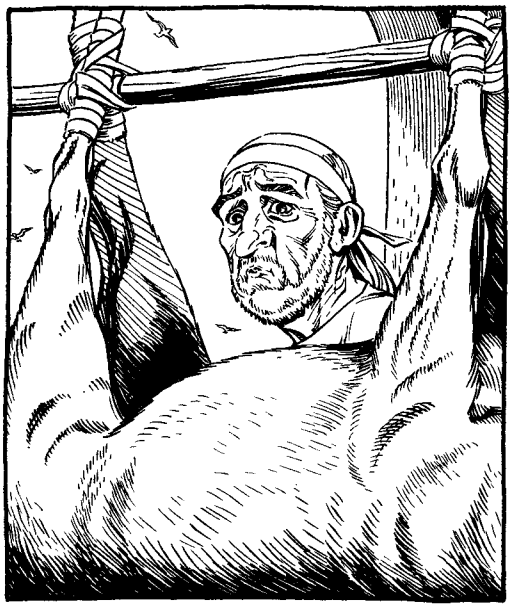
I THINK IT'S THE DEER, AGAMEMNON. NONE OF THEM IS GETTING FOOD HALF SO--


WHAT DO THEY EXPECT? THEY GET PLENTY OF GRAIN, OIL, AND WINE FROM DELOS. I CAN'T SHARE ONE DEER AMONG HUNDREDS OF MEN. IF THEY WANT VENISON, THEY SHOULD HUNT!


THEIR EQUIPMENT ISN'T AS GOOD AS OURS. AND CERTAINLY YOU REALIZE, WITH THE WAR COMING, THEY CAN'T WASTE ARROWS.
SINCE YOU KNOW SO MUCH ABOUT THE MEN, PALAMEDES, YOU TAKE CARE OF THEM! I WON'T DISCUSS IT HERE.


HE JUST SHOT A DEER--WHY IS HE IN A BAD MOOD?
YOU NEVER KNOW WHEN TO STOP, DO YOU, PALAMEDES?

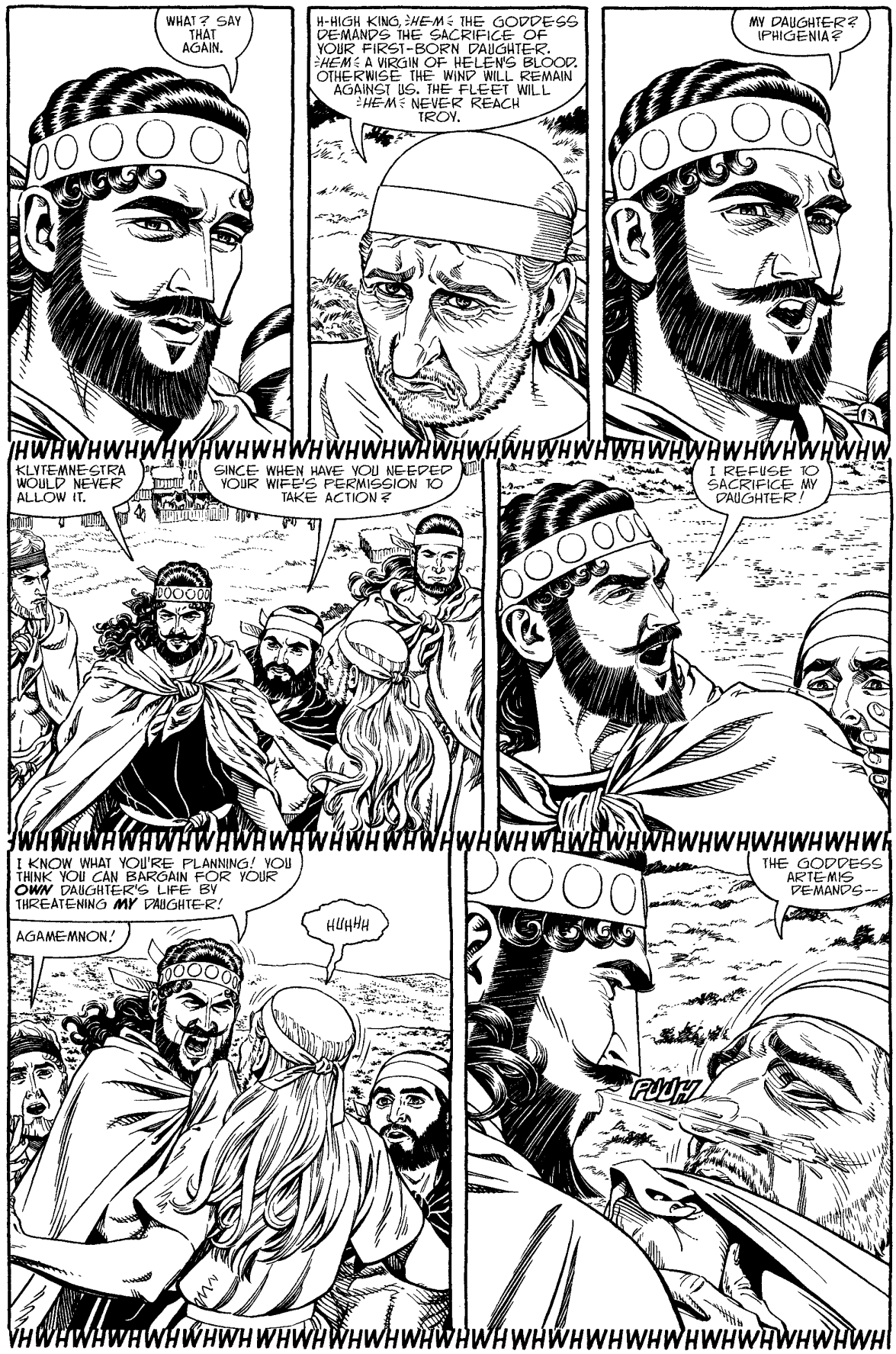

WHAT?



...AND JUST WAIT TILL YOU SEE THE BREASTS ON HER! ONWARD TO TROY!
TROY!
TO TROY!
TROY!

...AND FROM ALL INDICATIONS, SARPEDON OF LYKIA FAVORS THE TROJAN SIDE. MONTHS HAVE PASSED SINCE THE LAST SHIPS JOINED US. WE SEEM TO BE AT FULL STRENGTH. WHO ELSE ARE WE WAITING FOR?
YOU KNOW WHY WE'RE WAITING, IDOMENEUS--FOR THE WIND TO DROP. NO SHIP CAN SAIL OUT OF THE BAY AGAINST THIS WIND, AND WITH THE REVERSIBLE CURRENT, ROWING IS TOO DANGEROUS.
ON CRETE WE'D BE SACRIFICING BULLS CONTINUALLY, ENTREATING THE GODS TO TURN THE WIND IN OUR FAVOR.
THIS ISN'T CRETE. WHILE WE'RE WINDBOUND, BLOOD SACRIFICES WILL BE HARD TO FIND. BUT I HAVE INSTRUCTED KALCHAS TO FIND OUT WHY THE GODS HAVE SET THE WIND AGAINST US.
HIGH KING, KALCHAS BEGS YOU TO COME TO THE ALTAR.
AND IT SEEMS WE'LL SOON HAVE THE ANSWER. ODYSSEUS, MENELAUS...
FIRST THEY ALL GRUMBLED BECAUSE THEY DIDN'T WANT TO SAIL FOR TROY AGAIN. NOW THEY ALL GRUMBLE BECAUSE WE'RE NOT SAILING FAST ENOUGH.

KALCHAS! KALCHAS, DO YOU KNOW WHY THE GODS HAVE SENT THIS WIND TO DELAY US?
Y-YES, HIGH KING... HEM HEM
THEN TELL ME! GO ON!
Y-YES, HIGH KING. HEM WELL, IT'S LIKE THIS...
THE GODDESS OF THE HUNT IS HEM ANGRY BECAUSE, WELL, HEM BECAUSE YOU SHOT HER SACRED DEER... AND, UH, YOU BOASTED ABOUT IT. AND LONG AGO YOUR FATHER ATREUS WITHHELD A GOLDEN LAMB HE'D PROMISED HER.
HEM
IS THERE A WAY TO APPEASE THE GODDESS?
AND DON'T TELL US TO OFFER THE GOLDEN FLEECE OF MYCENAE--THAT'S BEEN GONE FOR YEARS.
Y-YES, HEM SHE WANTS SO-SOMETHING HEM SP-SPECIFIC--A BL-BLOOD S-SACRIFICE... D-DON'T W-WORRY, HEM IT'S NOT THE--THE GOLDEN LAMB... UH... UH...
JUST TELL ME!
SHE DE--HEM SHE DEMANDS THE HIGH KING'S... HEM...
SHE DEMANDS YOUR FIRST-BORN DAUGHTER.

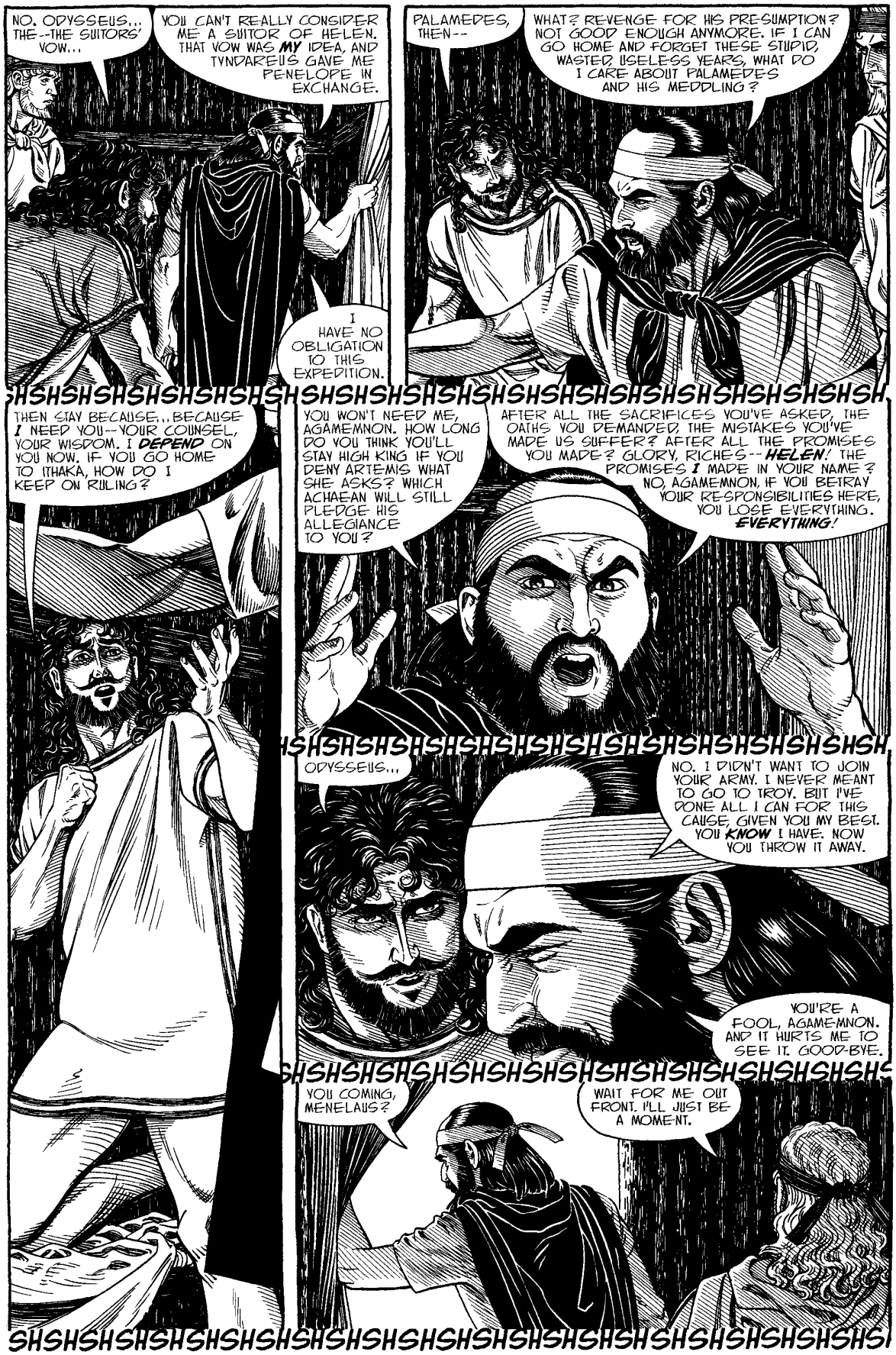

WHAT? SAY THAT AGAIN.
H-HIGH KING, =HEM= THE GODDESS DEMANDS THE SACRIFICE OF YOUR FIRST-BORN DAUGHTER. =HEM= A VIRGIN OF HELEN'S BLOOD. OTHERWISE THE WIND WILL REMAIN AGAINST US. THE FLEET WILL =HEM= NEVER REACH TROY.
MY DAUGHTER? IPHIGENIA?
KLYTEMNESTRA WOULD NEVER ALLOW IT.
SINCE WHEN HAVE YOU NEEDED YOUR WIFE'S PERMISSION TO TAKE ACTION?
I REFUSE TO SACRIFICE MY DAUGHTER!
I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE PLANNING! YOU THINK YOU CAN BARGAIN FOR YOUR OWN DAUGHTER'S LIFE BY THREATENING MY DAUGHTER!
AGAMEMNON!
HUHHH
THE GODDESS ARTEMIS DEMANDS--
POWH

SHOULD'VE ASKED FOR THE GOLDEN LAMB, KALCHAS! YOU'LL GET THAT LONG BEFORE MY DAUGHTER!
AGAMEMNON, WAIT!
HEY! THAT'S OUR GAME!
THE HIGH KING!
WHO CARES ABOUT YOUR GAME?!
I WAS ONLY--IT'S JUST--EVERYONE IS PLAYING IT...
MENELAUS, DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THIS GAME?
WHO DOESN'T? THANKS TO PALAMEDES, EVERYONE'S WAITING FOR THE FINAL TOURNA--

PALAMEDES?!
WELL, HE INVENTED THE GAME--
WHAT?
YOU ASKED HIM TO KEEP THE MEN OCCUPIED, SO HE DID--THE ARMY'S BEEN RELATIVELY CONTENT FOR MONTHS--NOT MUCH FIGHTING--SIGNIFICANT DROP IN DESERTIONS--CAN YOU IMAGINE WHAT THIS ENDLESS WAIT WOULD'VE BEEN LIKE WITHOUT THE GAME?
BUT NOW THAT WE KNOW HOW TO STOP THIS WIND--AGAMEMNON!
WHAT--?
HEY!
LET HIM GO, MENELAUS. GIVE HIM A LITTLE TIME.
YOU'RE RIGHT. WHEN HE'S IN THIS MOOD, HE WON'T LISTEN TO ANYONE--ESPECIALLY HIS YOUNGER BROTHER.
IT'S JUST THAT WHENEVER I THINK OF THAT FILTHY TROJAN RAPING MY WIFE--I JUST...
EASY, THAT'S ENOUGH, DON'T THINK ABOUT IT--
YARRH!
HEY!

SON OF ATREUS, COME IN. AND YOU, TOO, SON OF LAERTES.
HOW IS HE?
MAYBE YOU CAN COAX HIM OUT OF THIS MOOD. HE HASN'T EATEN IN DAYS. HE WON'T SPEAK TO US, JUST LIES THERE IN THE DARK--
AGAMEMNON!
AGAMEMNON?
THE ARMY'S RESTLESS. THE OTHER KINGS ARE STARTING TO ASK QUESTIONS.
YOU HAVEN'T TOLD THEM--WHAT... WHAT KALCHAS SAID.

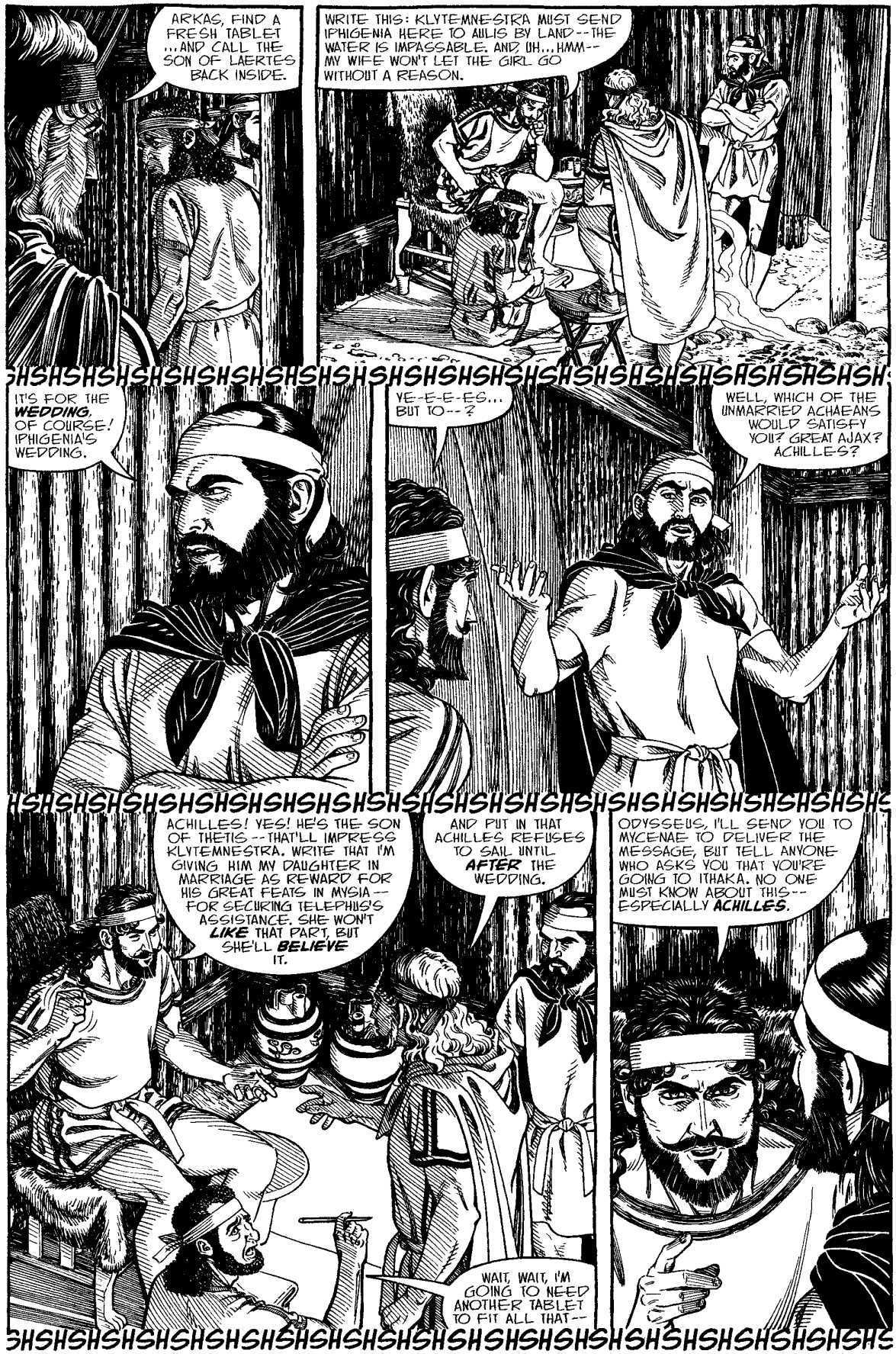
NO, OF COURSE NOT.
NOT YET. BUT THIS WIND IS WEARING AWAY THE ARMY'S PATIENCE. THEY'RE GRUMBLING AND ANXIOUS TO SAIL. BUT WHERE'S THEIR LEADER? MENELAUS AND I CAN'T COVER FOR YOU FOREVER. THEY'LL TURN AGAINST YOU IF YOU DON'T ACT SOON.
I'M HIGH KING...
AND KINGS OF THE ACHAEANS WITH BLOOD JUST AS ROYAL AS YOURS WAIT ON THIS BEACH AT YOUR COMMAND. THEY'RE WILLING TO SHED THEIR BLOOD WHEN YOU ASK, BUT YOU BALK AT SHEDDING A LITTLE BLOOD WHEN THE GODS ASK.
IF TELEMACHUS LAY BEFORE THE ALTAR, DON'T TELL ME YOU WOULDN'T THROW YOURSELF BETWEEN HIM AND THE KNIFE.
THIS IS YOUR DECISION, NOT MINE. DO YOU WANT TO KEEP YOUR POWER OR DO YOU WANT TO KEEP YOUR DAUGHTER?
SEND TALTHYBIUS TO ME. I'LL HAVE HIM ANNOUNCE TO THE ARMY THAT I'M RESIGNING MY COMMAND. MENELAUS, YOU CAN TAKE CHARGE -- OR IDOMENEUS -- OR ANYONE ELSE WHO WANTS IT.
EVEN PALAMEDES? BECAUSE THAT'S WHO THE ARMY WILL WANT. YOU'LL LET PALAMEDES'S NAME LIVE IN MEMORY AS VICTOR OVER TROY INSTEAD OF YOURS?
I... ...CAN'T KILL MY DAUGHTER.
FINE. IT'S OVER. MENELAUS, I WISH YOU WELL IN REGAINING YOUR WIFE AND SON. I'M GOING HOME TO MY OWN WIFE AND SON.


NO. ODYSSEUS... THE--THE SUITORS' VOW...
YOU CAN'T REALLY CONSIDER ME A SUITOR OF HELEN. THAT VOW WAS MY IDEA, AND TYNDAREUS GAVE ME PENELOPE IN EXCHANGE.
I HAVE NO OBLIGATION TO THIS EXPEDITION.
PALAMEDES, THEN--
WHAT? REVENGE FOR HIS PRESUMPTION? NOT GOOD ENOUGH ANYMORE. IF I CAN GO HOME AND FORGET THESE STUPID, WASTED, USELESS YEARS, WHAT DO I CARE ABOUT PALAMEDES AND HIS MEDDLING?
THEN STAY BECAUSE... BECAUSE I NEED YOU--YOUR COUNSEL, YOUR WISDOM. I DEPEND ON YOU NOW. IF YOU GO HOME TO ITHAKA, HOW DO I KEEP ON RULING?
YOU WON'T NEED ME, AGAMEMNON. HOW LONG DO YOU THINK YOU'LL STAY HIGH KING IF YOU DENY ARTEMIS WHAT SHE ASKS? WHICH ACHAEAN WILL STILL PLEDGE HIS ALLEGIANCE TO YOU?
AFTER ALL THE SACRIFICES YOU'VE ASKED, THE OATHS YOU DEMANDED, THE MISTAKES YOU'VE MADE US SUFFER? AFTER ALL THE PROMISES YOU MADE? GLORY, RICHES--HELEN! THE PROMISES I MADE IN YOUR NAME? NO, AGAMEMNON, IF YOU BETRAY YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES HERE, YOU LOSE EVERYTHING. EVERYTHING!
ODYSSEUS...
NO. I DIDN'T WANT TO JOIN YOUR ARMY. I NEVER MEANT TO GO TO TROY. BUT I'VE DONE ALL I CAN FOR THIS CAUSE, GIVEN YOU MY BEST. YOU KNOW I HAVE. NOW YOU THROW IT AWAY.
YOU'RE A FOOL, AGAMEMNON. AND IT HURTS ME TO SEE IT. GOOD-BYE.
YOU COMING, MENELAUS?
WAIT FOR ME OUT FRONT. I'LL JUST BE A MOMENT.

ODYSSEUS IS RIGHT, AGAMEMNON. IS THAT WHAT YOU WANT--TO LOSE EVERYTHING? AND EVEN IF YOU THROW AWAY ALL YOU'VE GAINED, WILL ARTEMIS RELENT?
DOOM AND MISERY--THE PRICE OF BEING BORN INTO THIS FAMILY.
YOU AND I HAVE STRIVEN THROUGH SO MUCH PAIN TO GIVE OUR CHILDREN HAPPINESS AND SECURITY. WILL YOU DOOM ALL YOUR CHILDREN TO MISERY--MAYBE DEATH--TO SPARE ONE DAUGHTER FOR A LITTLE WHILE?
IT'S THE CURSE, MENELAUS--THE CURSE ON OUR FAMILY. IT'S CAUGHT ME.
I THOUGHT I COULD ESCAPE IT IN OUR GENERATION. I THOUGHT IT HAD SUNK ITS TALONS INTO YOU--AND I WAS GLAD IT HAD MISSED ME.
HOW STUPID COULD I BE?
IT WAS JUST BIDING ITS TIME, LYING IN WAIT, SNICKERING--PREPARING TO DEMAND THAT I KILL MY OWN DAUGHTER.
IT'S SO CLEAR NOW--OUR FAMILY HISTORY IS FULL OF EACH GENERATION PREYING ON THE NEXT. HOW DID I EVER IMAGINE I'D ESCAPE?

TANTALUS FED HIS SON TO THE GODS, GAVE HIM TO THEM TO EAT.
KATREUS WOULD HAVE KILLED HIS DAUGHTER, OUR MOTHER--IF NAUPLIUS HADN'T OFFERED TO BUY HER.
OUR OTHER GRANDFATHER LET LAIUS RAPE OUR UNCLE CHRYSIPPUS UNTIL OUR FATHER KILLED THE BOY AT OUR GRANDMOTHER'S DIRECTION.
UNCLE THYESTES RAPED HIS DAUGHTER AND THE SHAME DROVE HER TO SUICIDE.
THEN THAT BASTARD OFFSPRING OF THEIRS MURDERED OUR FATHER IN REVENGE FOR THE TIME FATHER SLAUGHTERED OUR COUSINS AND FED THEM TO THEIR FATHER--
SHSHSHSHSHSHSHSHSHSHSHSHSHSHSHSHSHSHSHSHSHSHSHSHS

STOP! STOP, I CAN'T BEAR IT!
AND BEYOND WHAT THEY DID TO THEIR CHILDREN, WHAT THEY DID TO EACH OTHER--
NO! DON'T, AGAMEMNON, JUST DON'T!
FORGIVE ME, MENELAUS. I HAVEN'T ALWAYS BEEN KIND TO YOU. THE TORMENTS WHEN WE WERE BOYS...
BUT I ACTUALLY BELIEVED I COULD ESCAPE THIS CURSE!
HOW BLIND COULD I BE? THERE'S NO ESCAPE...NO ESCAPE...
HOH... WELL...
I'LL SEND A MESSAGE TO KLYTEMNESTRA-- A WRITTEN MESSAGE.


ARKAS, FIND A FRESH TABLET ...AND CALL THE SON OF LAERTES BACK INSIDE.
WRITE THIS: KLYTEMNESTRA MUST SEND IPHIGENIA HERE TO AULIS BY LAND--THE WATER IS IMPASSABLE. AND, UH...HMM--MY WIFE WON'T LET THE GIRL GO WITHOUT A REASON.
IT'S FOR THE WEDDING, OF COURSE! IPHIGENIA'S WEDDING.
YE-E-E-ES... BUT TO--?
WELL, WHICH OF THE UNMARRIED ACHAEANS WOULD SATISFY YOU? GREAT AJAX? ACHILLES?
ACHILLES! YES! HE'S THE SON OF THETIS--THAT'LL IMPRESS KLYTEMNESTRA. WRITE THAT I'M GIVING HIM MY DAUGHTER IN MARRIAGE AS REWARD FOR HIS GREAT FEATS IN MYSIA--FOR SECURING TELEPHUS'S ASSISTANCE. SHE WON'T LIKE THAT PART, BUT SHE'LL BELIEVE IT.
AND PUT IN THAT ACHILLES REFUSES TO SAIL UNTIL AFTER THE WEDDING.
ODYSSEUS, I'LL SEND YOU TO MYCENAE TO DELIVER THE MESSAGE, BUT TELL ANYONE WHO ASKS YOU THAT YOU'RE GOING TO ITHAKA. NO ONE MUST KNOW ABOUT THIS--ESPECIALLY ACHILLES.
WAIT, WAIT, I'M GOING TO NEED ANOTHER TABLET TO FIT ALL THAT--

ARKAS, BRING A FRESH TABLET.
UH?

READY, HIGH KING.
WRITE THIS: DISREGARD THE PREVIOUS MESSAGE.
ACHILLES REFUSES TO MARRY UNTIL TROY FALLS.
IS THAT ALL?
YES, YES! NOW LET ME SEAL IT --THERE. ARKAS, YOU'RE LOYAL TO ME, ARE'N'T YOU?
Y-YES, HIGH KING!
I'M SENDING YOU TO MYCENAE. HURRY AND TAKE THIS MESSAGE TO MY WIFE. DON'T STOP--AND DON'T LET ANYONE STOP YOU. DON'T SPEAK TO ANYONE.

I WON'T, HIGH KING, BUT--
ONLY, IF YOU MEET MY DAUGHTER WITH HER ESCORT ON THE ROAD, MAKE THEM TURN BACK. TAKE THE REINS IF YOU HAVE TO.
I WILL, HIGH KING, BUT --BUT WHAT REASON WILL YOUR DAUGHTER HAVE TO TRUST THAT I'M CARRYING OUT YOUR WISHES?
MY SEAL IS ON THE TABLET--AND HERE ... HERE IS THE SEAL-RING, TOO. KEEP IT SAFE! SHOW THE RING AND THEY'LL BE SURE TO OBEY YOU.
NOW, GO! GO! DAWN IS NEARLY HERE!
YOU WOMEN! WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
OH!
WHA--?
WHO?

PLEASE, SIR, WE'VE ONLY COME TO SEE THE SIGHTS--
COME FROM WHERE?
FROM CHALKIS, SIR, CLOSE ON THE SHORE OPPOSITE-- YET WE HAVEN'T DARED COME BEFORE.
THOUGH THE FLEET'S WINDBOUND, A SMALL BOAT CAN MANEUVER; WE THOUGHT IT SAFE ENOUGH TO SEE THIS GREAT ARMY SUCH AS THE WORLD'S NEVER SEEN BEFORE.
WE BROUGHT HOME-BAKED BREAD--FOR OUR HUSBANDS AND SONS AND BROTHERS --A TREAT FOR THEM --AN EXCUSE FOR US.
THEY'RE WITH THE ARMY THEMSELVES, SIR, FIGHTING MEN, EVERY ONE OF THEM.
WE HAD TO COME BEFORE THE FLEET SAILS, HAD TO SEE IT FOR OURSELVES.
IN YEARS TO COME WE'LL TELL IT TO OUR CHILDREN AND OUR CHILDREN'S CHILDREN.
YES, I SEE. BUT--
MAY THE GODS BLESS YOU AND ALL YOUR FAMILY.
THIS IS NO PLACE FOR UPSTANDING WOMEN! GO ON, GO HOME--
PLEASE, SIR, WE WON'T STAY LONG-- JUST TO CATCH A GLIMPSE OF THE ACHAEAN KINGS COME FROM FAR OFF.
WHAT ABOUT THIS ONE? LOOK AT HIS OILED HAIR, AND THAT CLOAK IS AWFULLY FINE-MADE.
DO YOU--DO YOU THINK MAYBE HE'S A GOD IN DISGUISE?

OH, THE SHIPS! THE SHIPS!
A THOUSAND OF 'EM, THEY SAY!
TOO MANY TO COUNT!
GO HOME!
AGAMEMNON!
WHO--?
LOOK WHAT I FOUND LEAVING CAMP WHILE I WAS WATCHING THE ROAD FOR ANY ARRIVALS FROM MYCENAE.