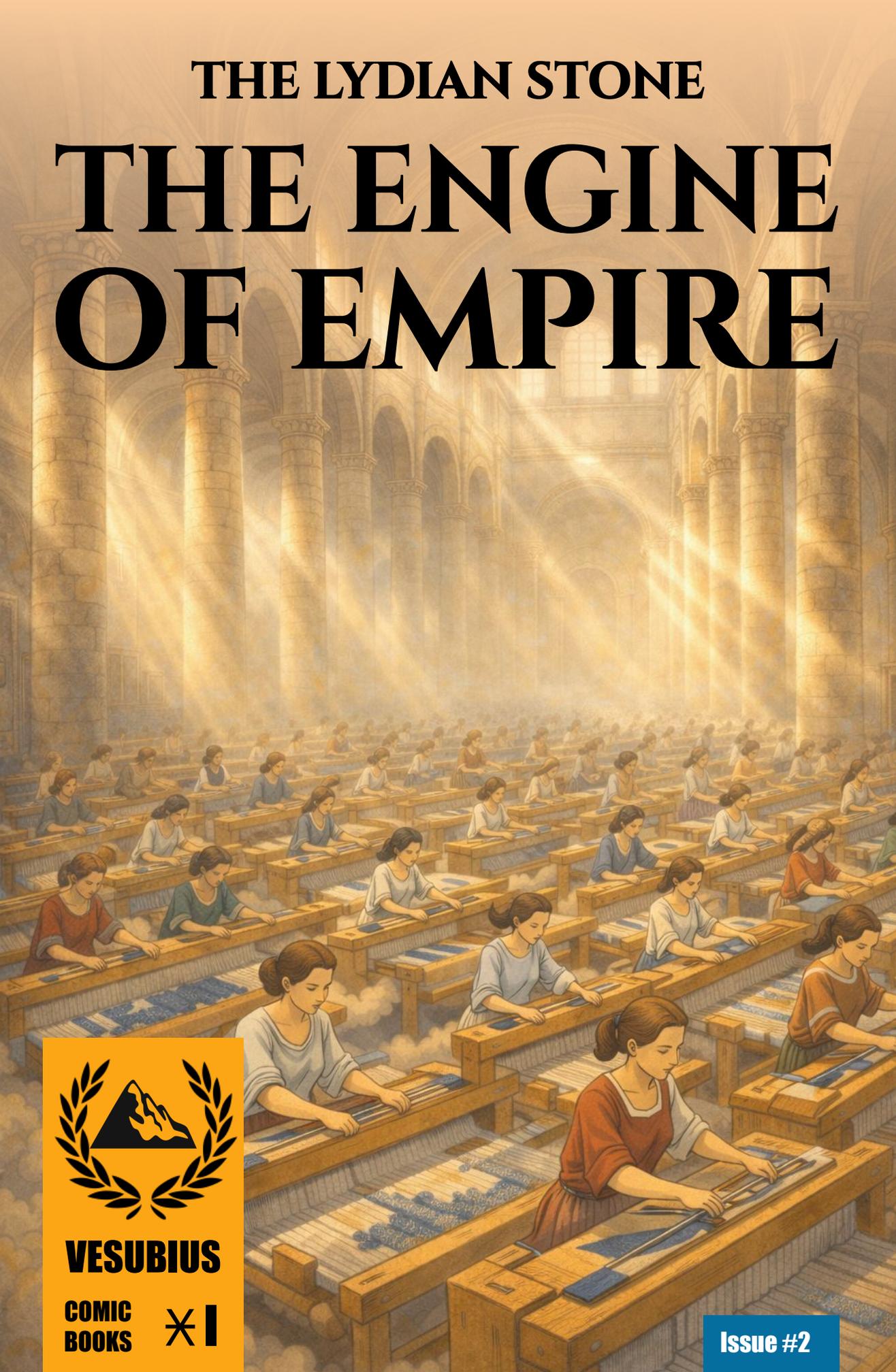


THE LYDIAN STONE

THE ENGINE OF EMPIRE



VESUBIUS

**COMIC
BOOKS**



Issue #2



BUT DR. PARRINI, THE CONSENSUS WAS THAT THE CAMPANIA SITE WAS "SPENT."



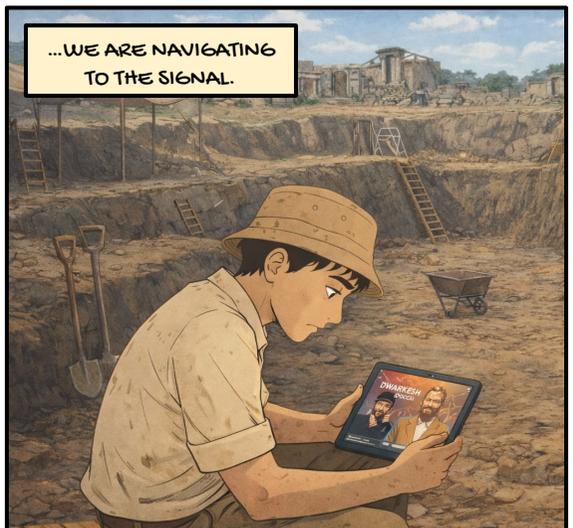
YET I'M LOOKING AT THE RATE OF DISCOVERY HERE...



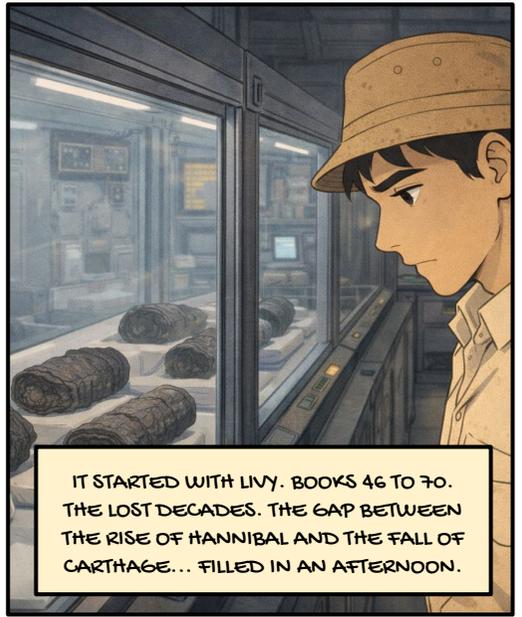
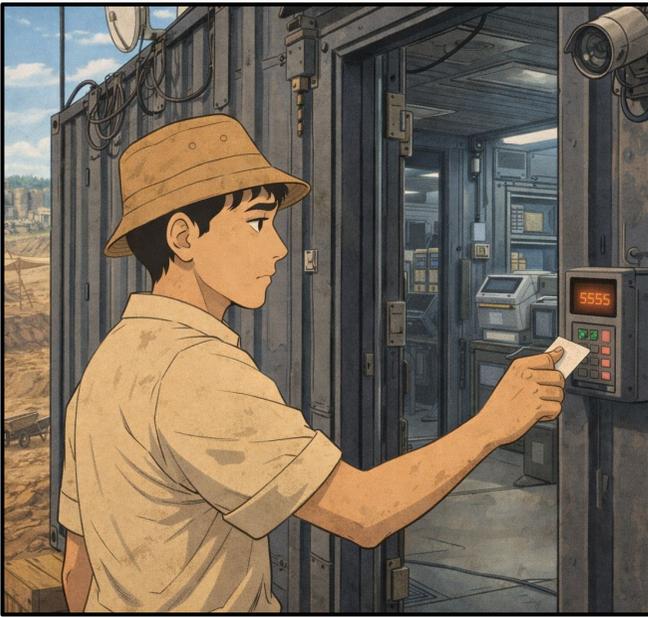
...IT'S EXPONENTIAL. IT DEFIES THE STANDARD DISTRIBUTION.



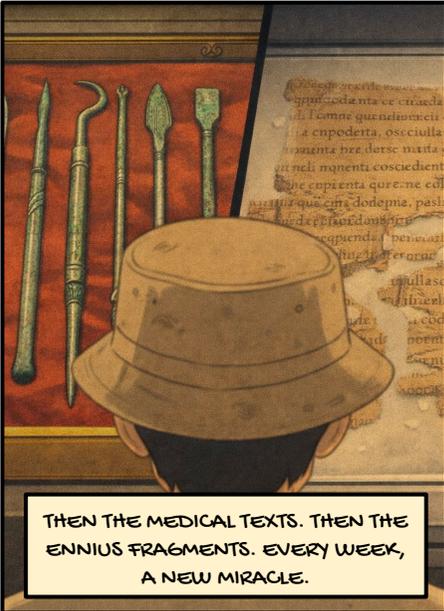
TRADITIONAL ARCHAEOLOGY IS A SLOT MACHINE. MY MODEL IS A GPS. WE AREN'T JUST DIGGING...



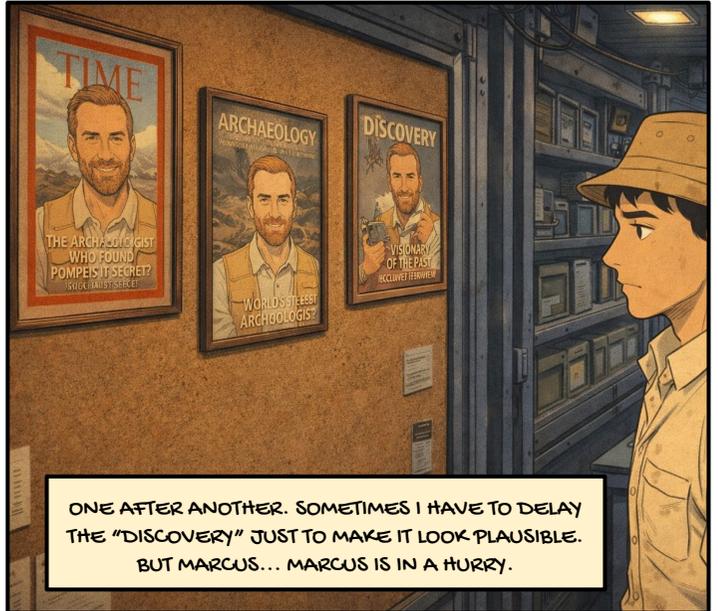
...WE ARE NAVIGATING TO THE SIGNAL.



IT STARTED WITH LIVY. BOOKS 46 TO 70. THE LOST DECADES. THE GAP BETWEEN THE RISE OF HANNIBAL AND THE FALL OF CARTHAGE... FILLED IN AN AFTERNOON.



THEN THE MEDICAL TEXTS. THEN THE ENNIUS FRAGMENTS. EVERY WEEK, A NEW MIRACLE.



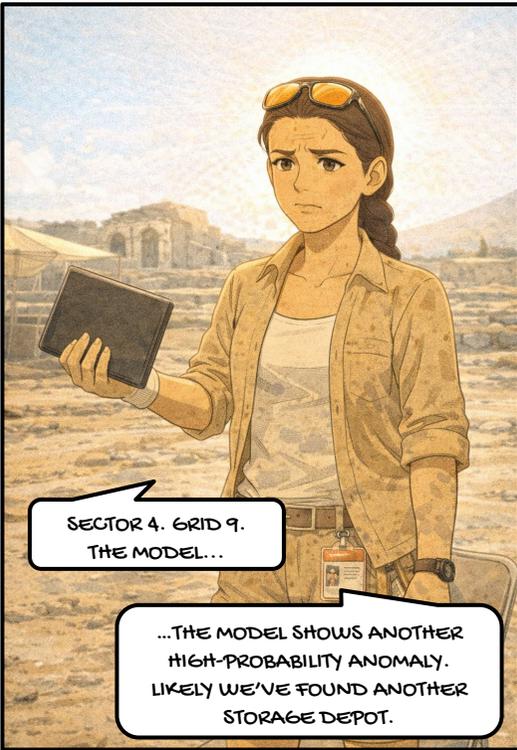
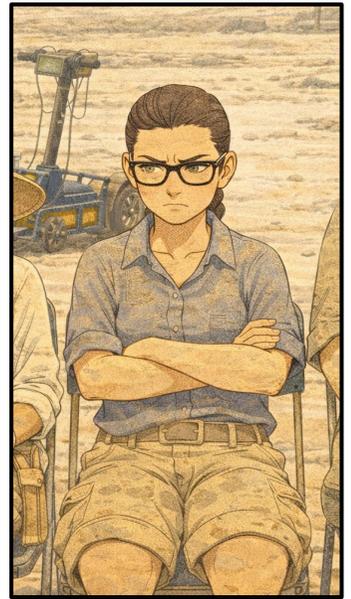
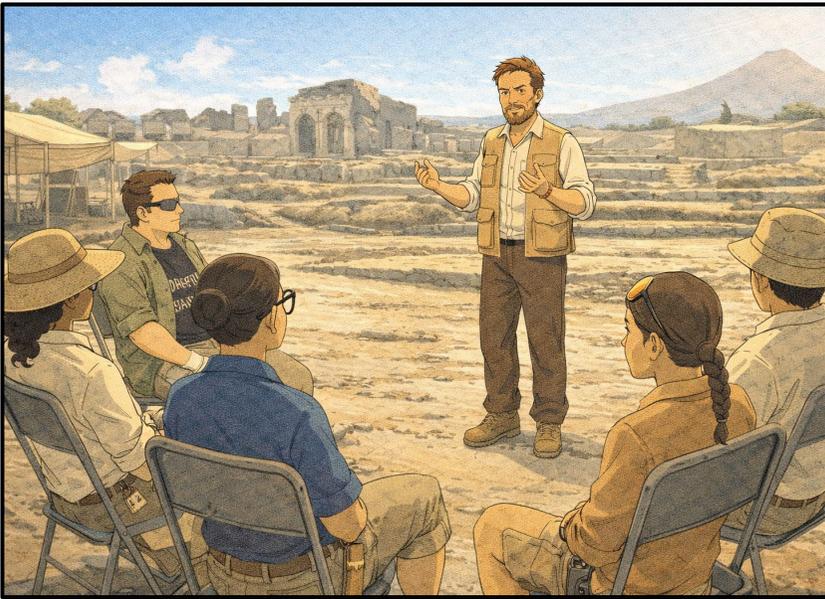
ONE AFTER ANOTHER. SOMETIMES I HAVE TO DELAY THE "DISCOVERY" JUST TO MAKE IT LOOK PLAUSIBLE. BUT MARCUS... MARCUS IS IN A HURRY.



TEAM A IS A MIRACLE FACTORY. TEAM B IS A GHOST TOWN. THE DISCREPANCY IS BECOMING IMPOSSIBLE TO HIDE.

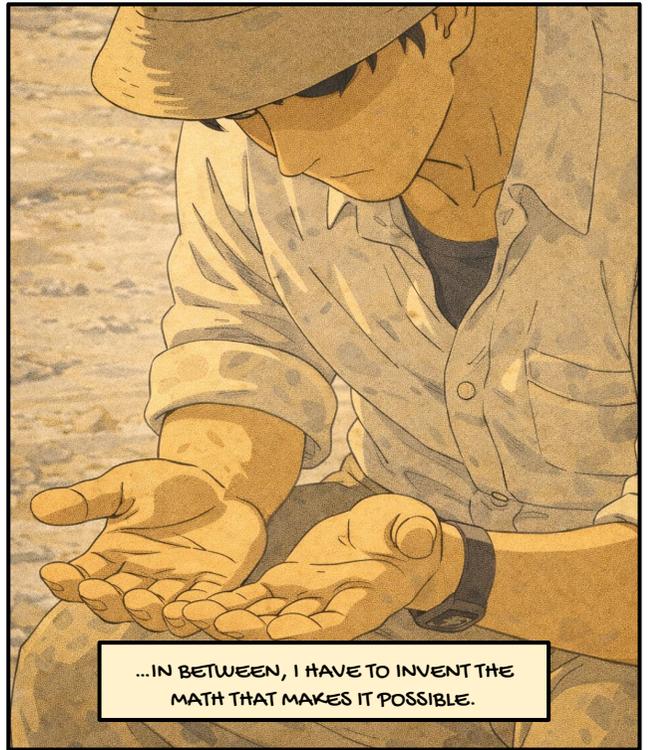


THE WORLD THINKS IT'S THE ALGORITHM. THEY THINK WE CRACKED THE CODE.



SECTOR 4. GRID 9.
THE MODEL...

...THE MODEL SHOWS ANOTHER
HIGH-PROBABILITY ANOMALY.
LIKELY WE'VE FOUND ANOTHER
STORAGE DEPOT.

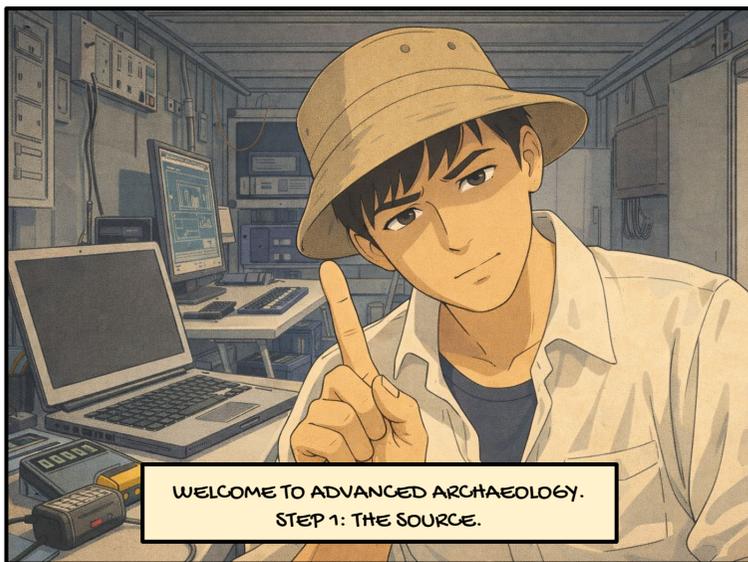


...IN BETWEEN, I HAVE TO INVENT THE
MATH THAT MAKES IT POSSIBLE.

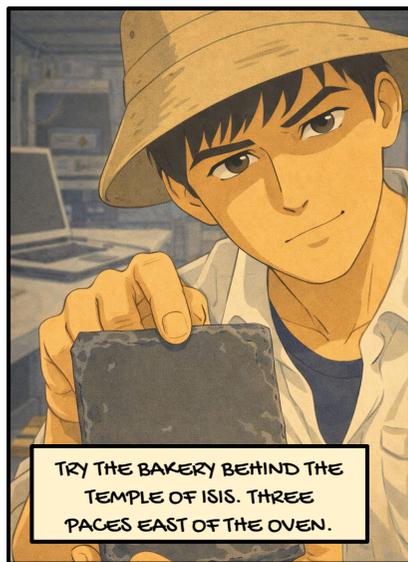


EXCELLENT. ANOTHER WIN FOR THE ALGORITHM.
ELENA? ANYTHING FROM TEAM B, SECTOR 5?

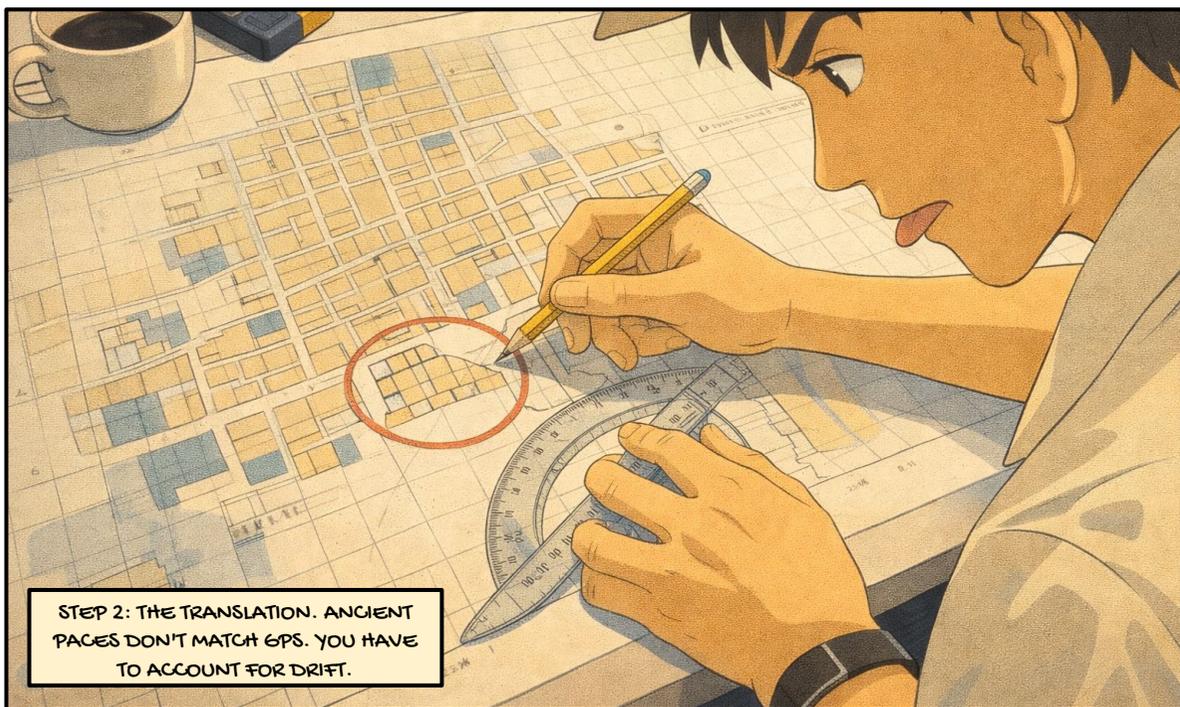
NOTHING, SIR. JUST NOISE.



WELCOME TO ADVANCED ARCHAEOLOGY.
STEP 1: THE SOURCE.



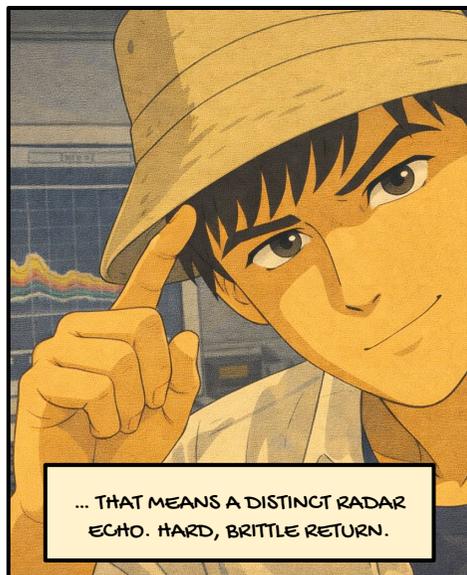
TRY THE BAKERY BEHIND THE
TEMPLE OF ISIS. THREE
PAGES EAST OF THE OVEN.



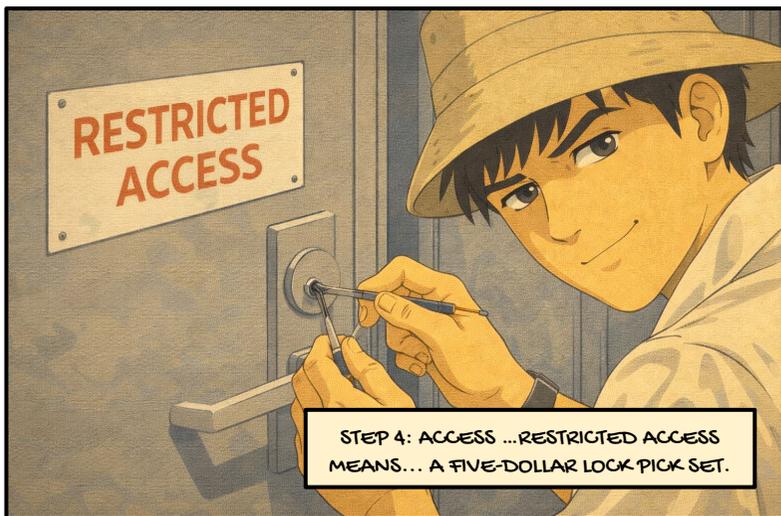
STEP 2: THE TRANSLATION. ANCIENT
PACES DON'T MATCH GPS. YOU HAVE
TO ACCOUNT FOR DRIFT.



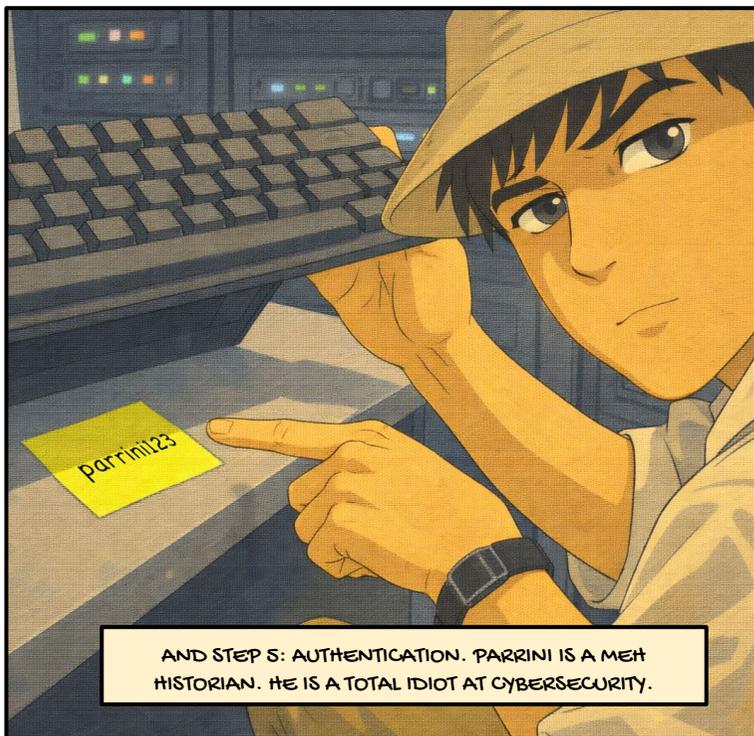
AND STEP 3: THE PROFILE. A
BAKERY MEANS DRY STORAGE.
GRAIN. OR MAYBE SILVER HIDDEN
IN A FLOUR JAR...



... THAT MEANS A DISTINCT RADAR
ECHO. HARD, BRITTLE RETURN.



STEP 4: ACCESS ...RESTRICTED ACCESS MEANS... A FIVE-DOLLAR LOCK PICK SET.



AND STEP 5: AUTHENTICATION. PARRINI IS A MEX HISTORIAN. HE IS A TOTAL IDIOT AT CYBERSECURITY.



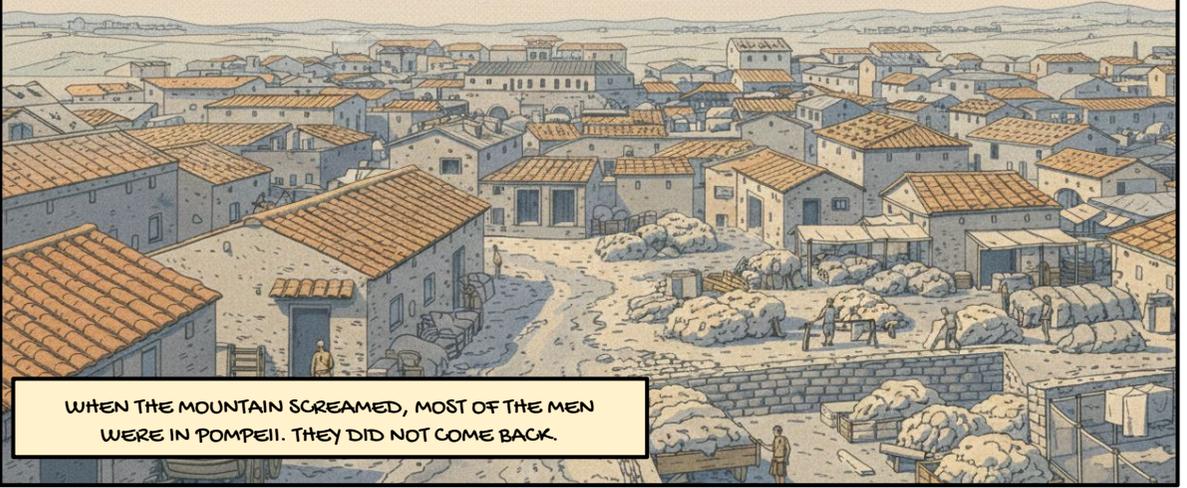
STEP 6: THE INJECTION. I DON'T JUST ADD A DOT. I PAINT THE TEXTURE. 'CRACKED MUD' FOR SCROLLS. 'METALLIC RING' FOR SILVER.



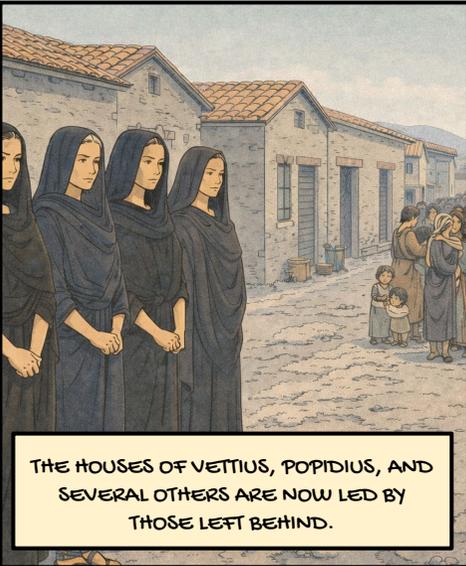
TO THE SYSTEM, IT LOOKS LIKE RAW DATA FROM THE GPR CART. HARD TO DETECT.



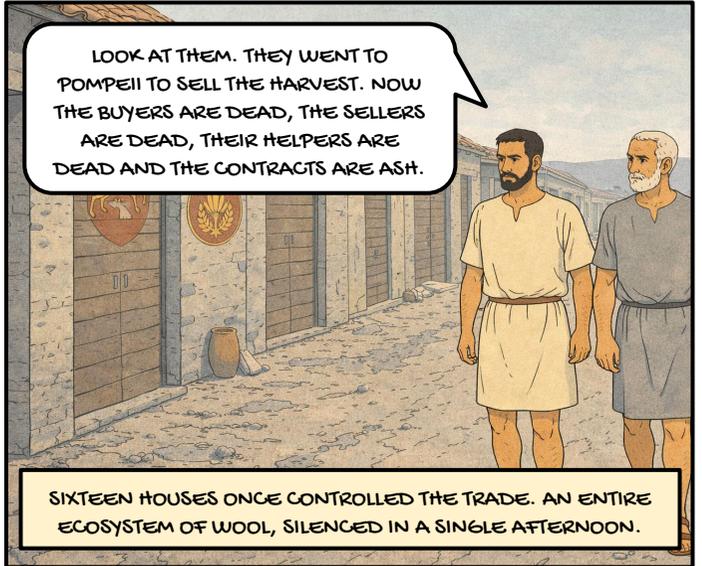
PICENTIA. THE WOOL CAPITAL OF CAMPANIA. A TOWN BUILT ON THE RHYTHM OF THE LOOM.



WHEN THE MOUNTAIN SCREAMED, MOST OF THE MEN WERE IN POMPEII. THEY DID NOT COME BACK.

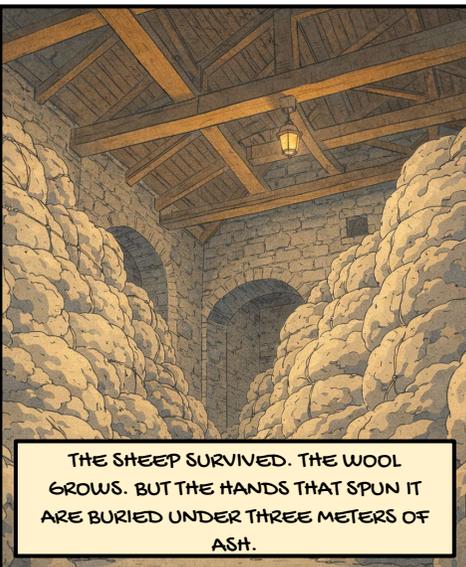


THE HOUSES OF VETTIUS, POPIDIUS, AND SEVERAL OTHERS ARE NOW LED BY THOSE LEFT BEHIND.

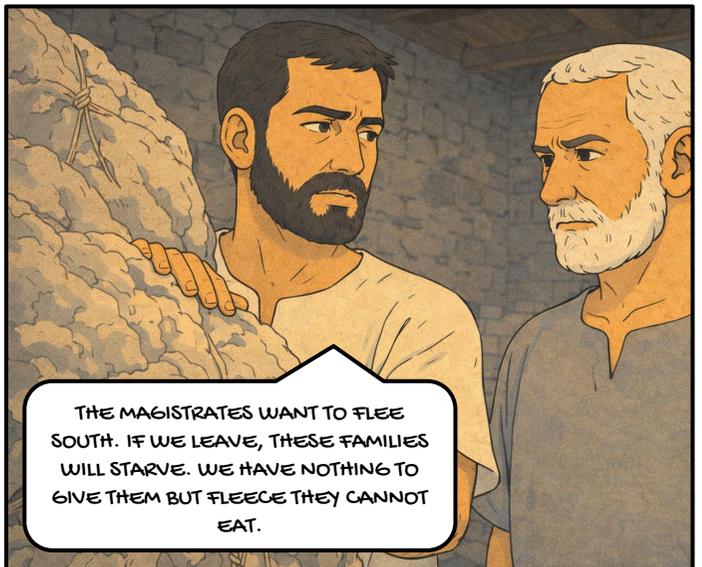


LOOK AT THEM. THEY WENT TO POMPEII TO SELL THE HARVEST. NOW THE BUYERS ARE DEAD, THE SELLERS ARE DEAD, THEIR HELPERS ARE DEAD AND THE CONTRACTS ARE ASH.

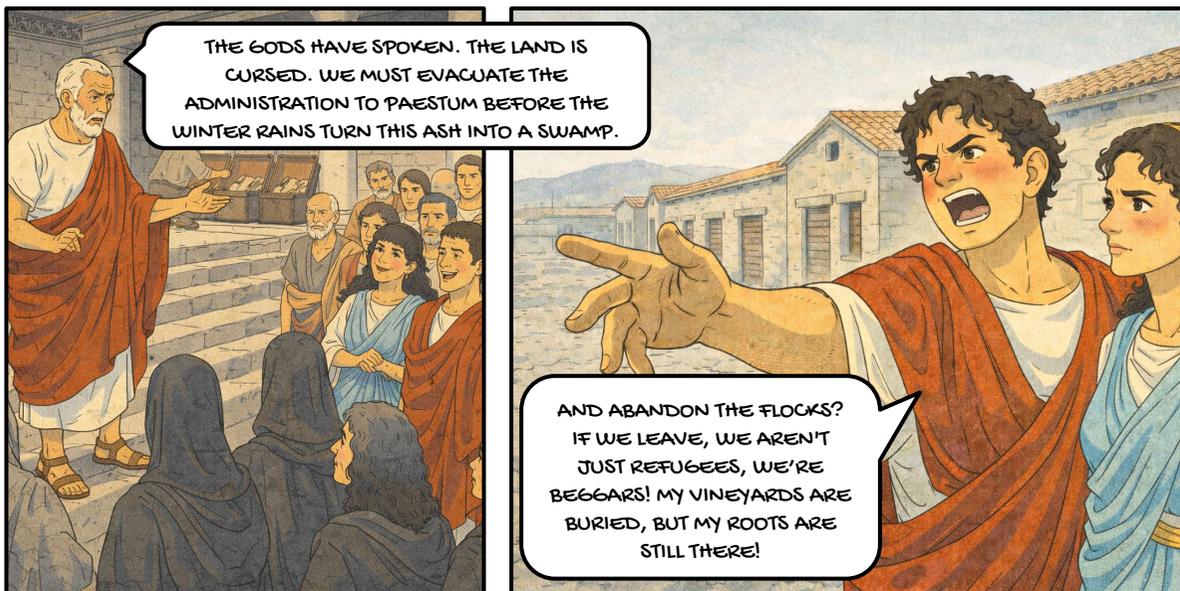
SIXTEEN HOUSES ONCE CONTROLLED THE TRADE. AN ENTIRE ECOSYSTEM OF WOOL, SILENCED IN A SINGLE AFTERNOON.



THE SHEEP SURVIVED. THE WOOL GROWS. BUT THE HANDS THAT SPUN IT ARE BURIED UNDER THREE METERS OF ASH.

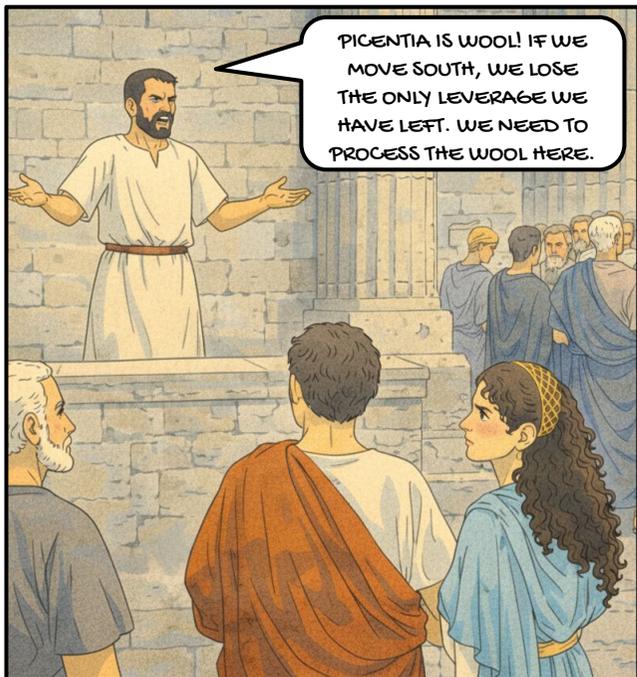


THE MAGISTRATES WANT TO FLEE SOUTH. IF WE LEAVE, THESE FAMILIES WILL STARVE. WE HAVE NOTHING TO GIVE THEM BUT FLEECE THEY CANNOT EAT.

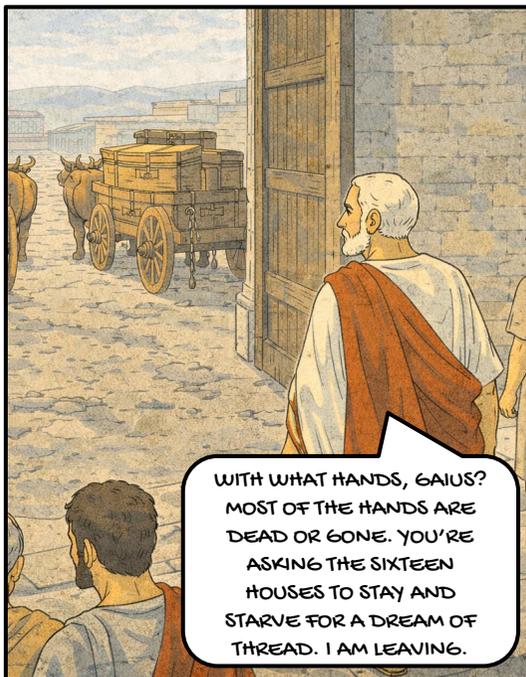


THE GODS HAVE SPOKEN. THE LAND IS CURSED. WE MUST EVACUATE THE ADMINISTRATION TO PAESTUM BEFORE THE WINTER RAINS TURN THIS ASH INTO A SWAMP.

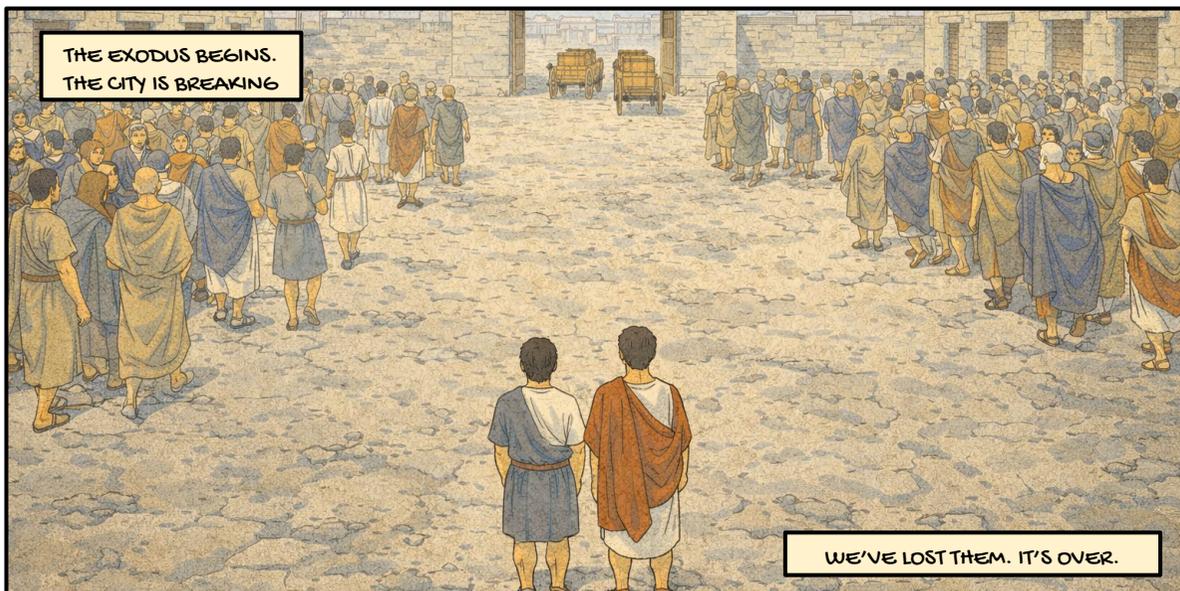
AND ABANDON THE FLOCKS? IF WE LEAVE, WE AREN'T JUST REFUGEES, WE'RE BEGGARS! MY VINEYARDS ARE BURIED, BUT MY ROOTS ARE STILL THERE!



PICENTIA IS WOOL! IF WE MOVE SOUTH, WE LOSE THE ONLY LEVERAGE WE HAVE LEFT. WE NEED TO PROCESS THE WOOL HERE.

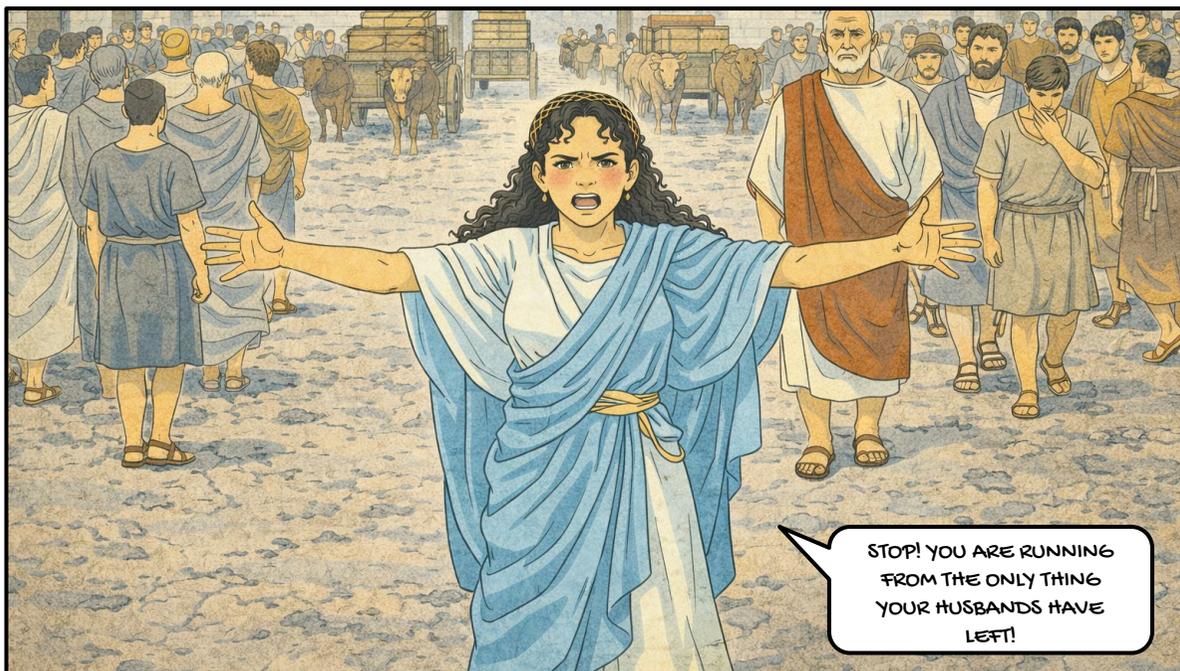


WITH WHAT HANDS, GAIUS? MOST OF THE HANDS ARE DEAD OR GONE. YOU'RE ASKING THE SIXTEEN HOUSES TO STAY AND STARVE FOR A DREAM OF THREAD. I AM LEAVING.



THE EXODUS BEGINS. THE CITY IS BREAKING

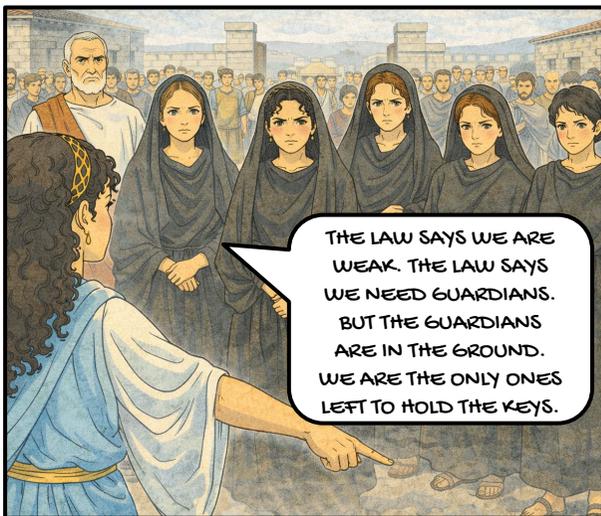
WE'VE LOST THEM. IT'S OVER.



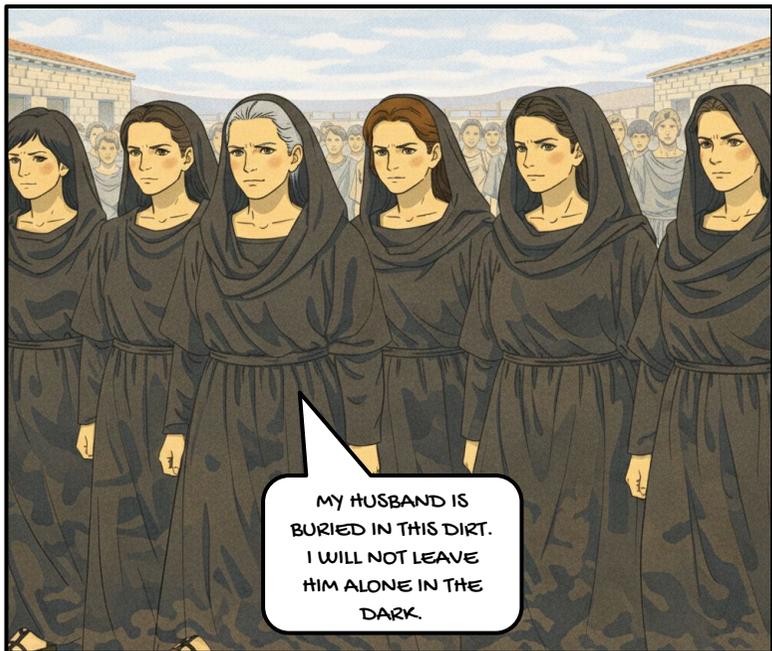
STOP! YOU ARE RUNNING FROM THE ONLY THING YOUR HUSBANDS HAVE LEFT!



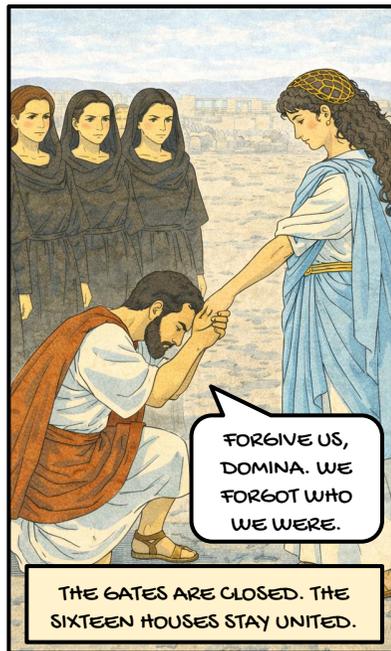
THEY DIDN'T DIE IN POMPEII SO WE COULD BECOME BEGGARS IN PAESTUM! THEY DIED TO BUY THIS HARVEST! IF YOU LEAVE NOW, YOU ARE LEAVING THEM.



THE LAW SAYS WE ARE WEAK. THE LAW SAYS WE NEED GUARDIANS. BUT THE GUARDIANS ARE IN THE GROUND. WE ARE THE ONLY ONES LEFT TO HOLD THE KEYS.



MY HUSBAND IS BURIED IN THIS DIRT. I WILL NOT LEAVE HIM ALONE IN THE DARK.



FORGIVE US, DOMINA. WE FORGOT WHO WE WERE.

THE GATES ARE CLOSED. THE SIXTEEN HOUSES STAY UNITED.

THE COUNCIL HELD. BUT THE WOOL IS PILING UP LIKE SNOW. GAIUS LOOKS AT ME AND SEES A MIRACLE THAT ISN'T COMING. I HAVE NOTHING LEFT TO TELL HIM.

LIKE
SNOW

IF YOU REPORT THIS NOW, THEY SHUT THE SITE AND MARCUS GOES DARK.

IF WE CROSS THIS LINE AND HELP THEM... I DON'T KNOW WHO WE BECOME IF WE START PLAYING GOD.

YOU SAID THAT OUR WORLDS ARE NOT CONNECTED. WHATEVER WE DO TO HELP THEM WON'T CHANGE OUR WORLD. WHY ARE YOU HESITATING? THEY ARE DYING IN THE DARK

SO... THAT'S HOW YOU KNOW!

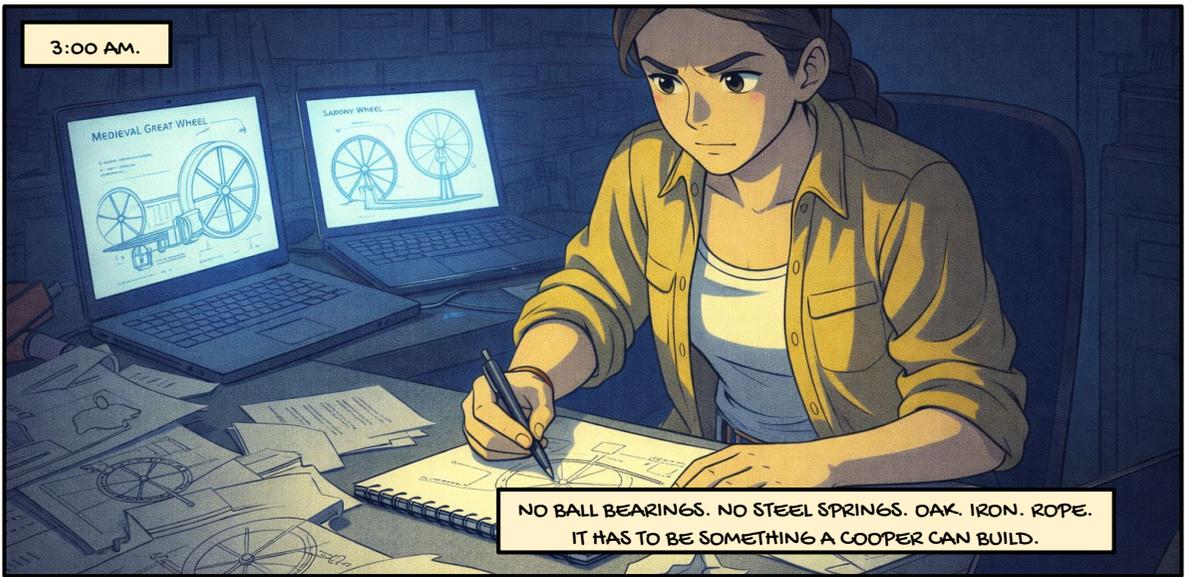
THERE'S A MAN ON THE OTHER SIDE! IT'S REAL!

IT IS DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE, I KNOW. IT NEVER GETS ANY LIGHTER.

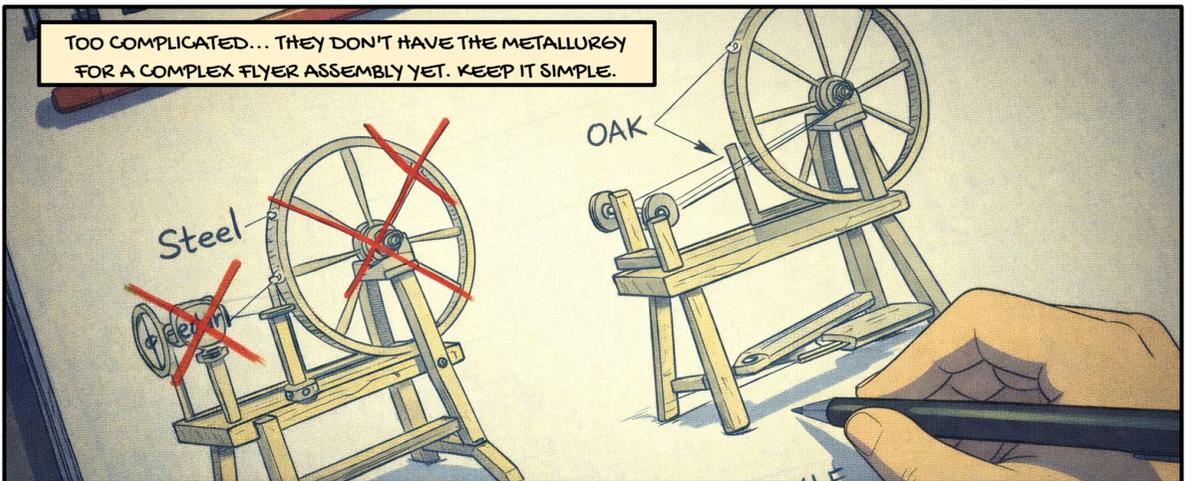
THE WOOL IS ROTTING IN THE WAREHOUSES. THE PEOPLE WILL STARVE.

WE AREN'T GOING TO JUST WATCH

3:00 AM.



TOO COMPLICATED... THEY DON'T HAVE THE METALLURGY FOR A COMPLEX FLYER ASSEMBLY YET. KEEP IT SIMPLE.

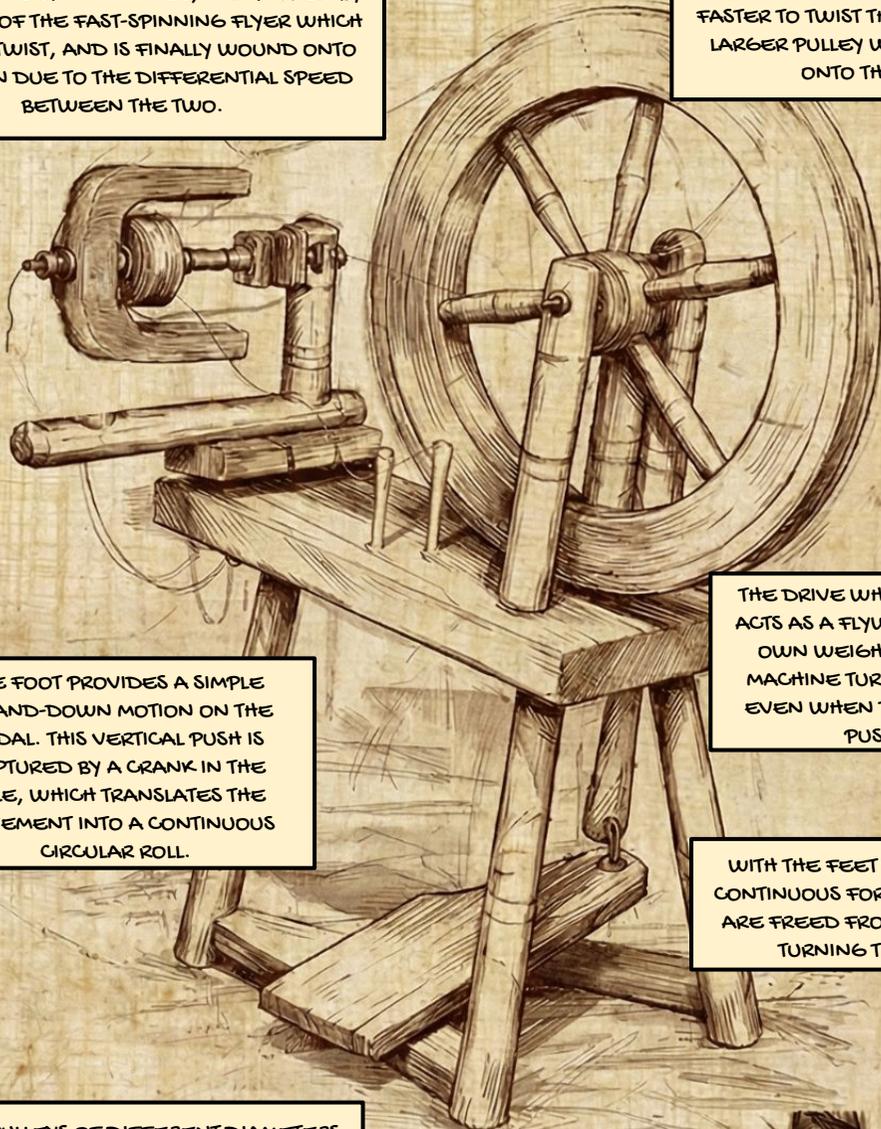


6:15 AM





A SIMPLE ADAPTATION OF THE SAXONY SPINNING WHEEL. A FOOT-POWERED MACHINE THAT USES A TREADLE AND CRANK TO SIMULTANEOUSLY TWIST AND WIND YARN IN ONE CONTINUOUS MOTION, FREEING BOTH HANDS TO FOCUS ENTIRELY ON DRAFTING THE FIBERS



THE RAW WOOL IS DRAWN FROM THE DISTAFF BY THE OPERATOR'S HANDS, PASSES THROUGH THE ORIFICE IN THE SPINNING AXLE, IS CAPTURED BY THE HOOKS OF THE FAST-SPINNING FLYER WHICH ADDS THE TWIST, AND IS FINALLY WOUND ONTO THE BOBBIN DUE TO THE DIFFERENTIAL SPEED BETWEEN THE TWO.

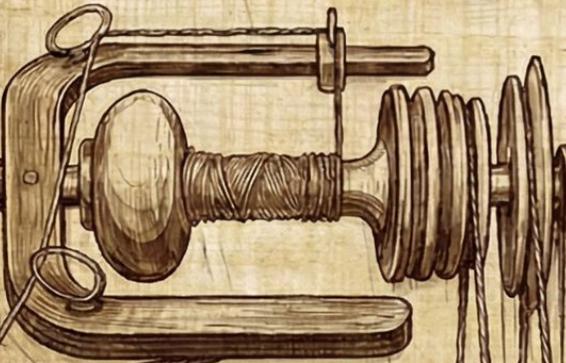
USE TWO PULLEYS OF DIFFERENT DIAMETERS ON THE SAME AXIS. THE SMALLER PULLEY SPINS THE FLYER FASTER TO TWIST THE WOOL, WHILE THE LARGER PULLEY WINDS THAT THREAD ONTO THE BOBBIN.

THE FOOT PROVIDES A SIMPLE UP-AND-DOWN MOTION ON THE PEDAL. THIS VERTICAL PUSH IS CAPTURED BY A CRANK IN THE AXLE, WHICH TRANSLATES THE MOVEMENT INTO A CONTINUOUS CIRCULAR ROLL.

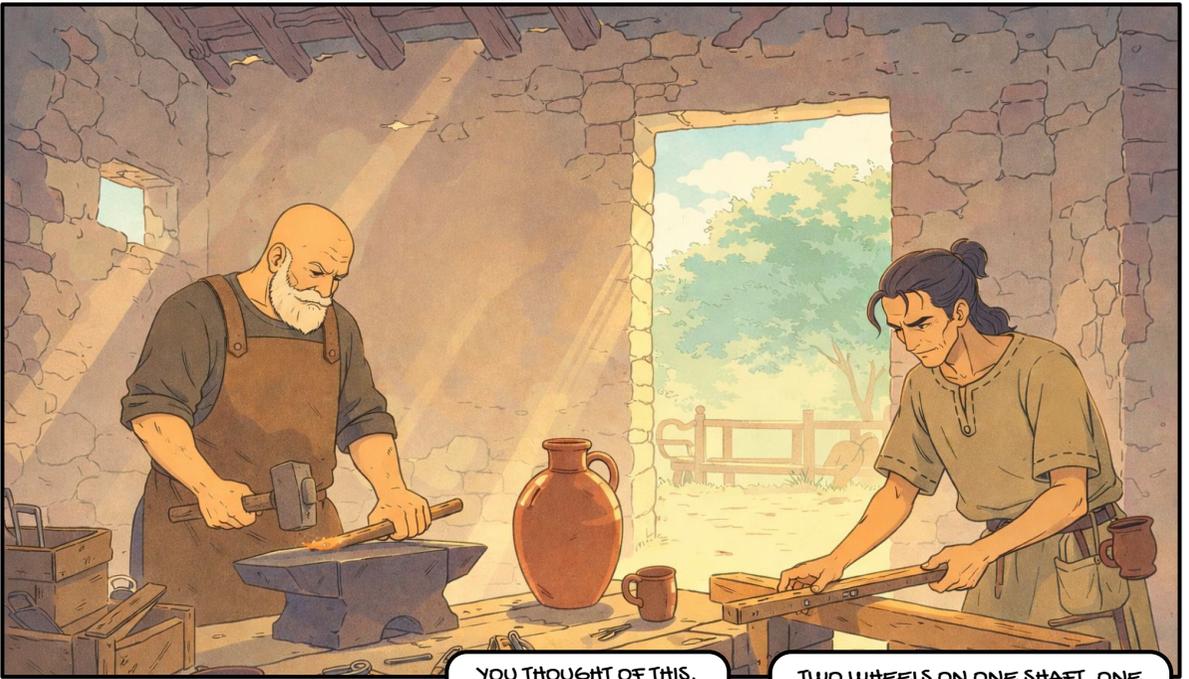
THE DRIVE WHEEL IS HEAVY, IT ACTS AS A FLYWHEEL, USING ITS OWN WEIGHT TO KEEP THE MACHINE TURNING SMOOTHLY EVEN WHEN THE FOOT IS NOT PUSHING.

WITH THE FEET PROVIDING THE CONTINUOUS FORCE, BOTH HANDS ARE FREED FROM THE LABOR OF TURNING THE WHEEL

THE TWO PULLEYS OF DIFFERENT DIAMETERS "SPEED GAP" ALLOWS THE MACHINE TO TWIST AND WIND AT THE SAME TIME.

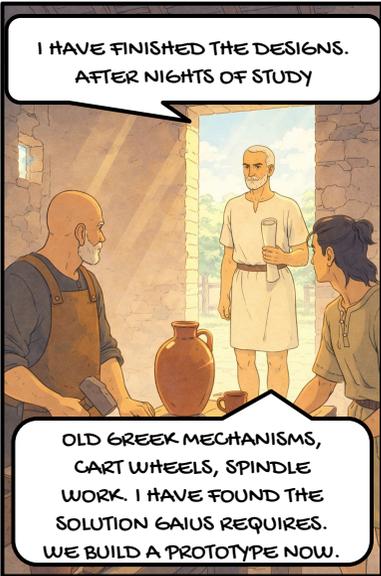


USE THEM TOGETHER TO DRAFT THE RAW WOOL FROM THE DISTAFF, PULLING AND SMOOTHING THE FIBERS AS THEY ENTER THE EYE OF THE FLYER. BECAUSE YOU NEVER HAVE TO STOP TO PROVIDE POWER, YOUR HANDS CAN FOCUS ENTIRELY ON THE PRECISION AND STRENGTH OF THE THREAD.



YOU THOUGHT OF THIS, MARCUS? SINCE WHEN DID A TUTOR KNOW HOW TO BEND IRON?

TWO WHEELS ON ONE SHAFT. ONE CORD. THE FORKED-PIECE SPINS FAST TO TWIST, THE CYLINDER SPINS SLOW TO WIND.

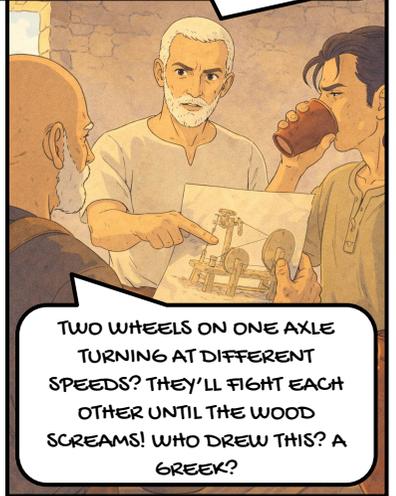


I HAVE FINISHED THE DESIGNS. AFTER NIGHTS OF STUDY

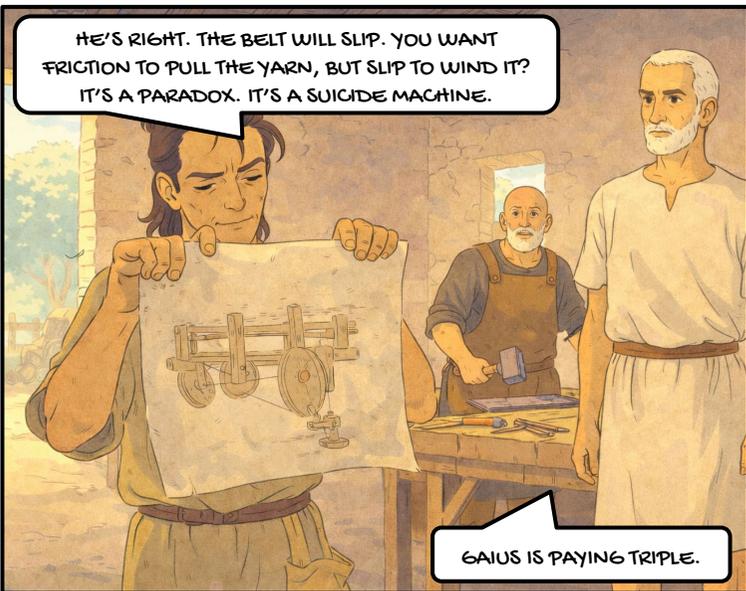
OLD GREEK MECHANISMS, CART WHEELS, SPINDLE WORK. I HAVE FOUND THE SOLUTION GAUIS REQUIRES. WE BUILD A PROTOTYPE NOW.



HE'S BEEN READING THOSE GREEKS AGAIN. LOOK AT THIS... HE WANTS A TORTURE RACK FOR MICE... OR IS IT A TOY FOR THE EMPEROR'S CAT?

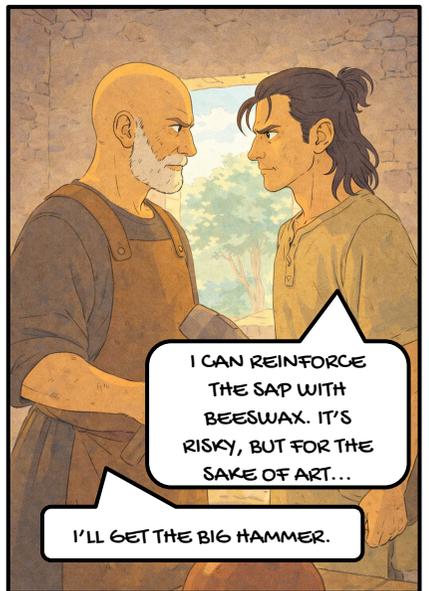


TWO WHEELS ON ONE AXLE TURNING AT DIFFERENT SPEEDS? THEY'LL FIGHT EACH OTHER UNTIL THE WOOD SCREAMS! WHO DREW THIS? A GREEK?



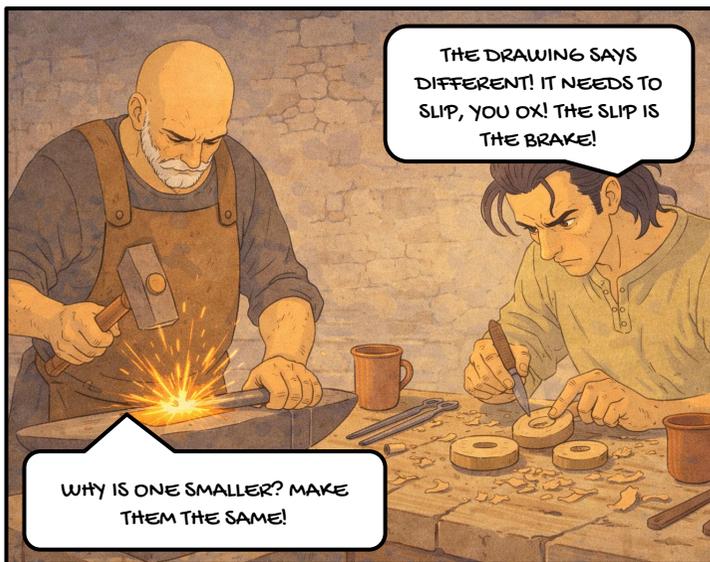
HE'S RIGHT. THE BELT WILL SLIP. YOU WANT FRICTION TO PULL THE YARN, BUT SLIP TO WIND IT? IT'S A PARADOX. IT'S A SUICIDE MACHINE.

GAUIS IS PAYING TRIPLE.



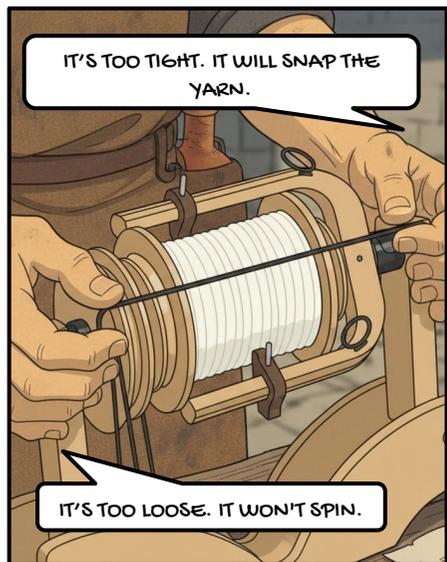
I CAN REINFORCE THE SAP WITH BEESWAX. IT'S RISKY, BUT FOR THE SAKE OF ART...

I'LL GET THE BIG HAMMER.



THE DRAWING SAYS DIFFERENT! IT NEEDS TO SLIP, YOU OX! THE SLIP IS THE BRAKE!

WHY IS ONE SMALLER? MAKE THEM THE SAME!



IT'S TOO TIGHT. IT WILL SNAP THE YARN.

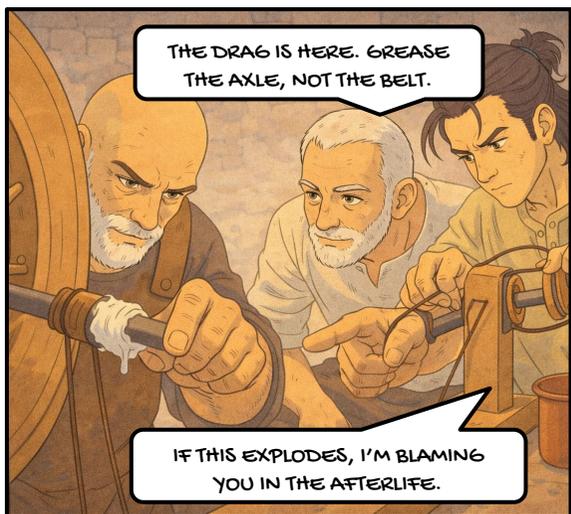
IT'S TOO LOOSE. IT WON'T SPIN.



SEE? IT'S FIGHTING ITSELF. THE BOBBIN WANTS TO RUN, BUT THE FLYER IS CHOKING IT.

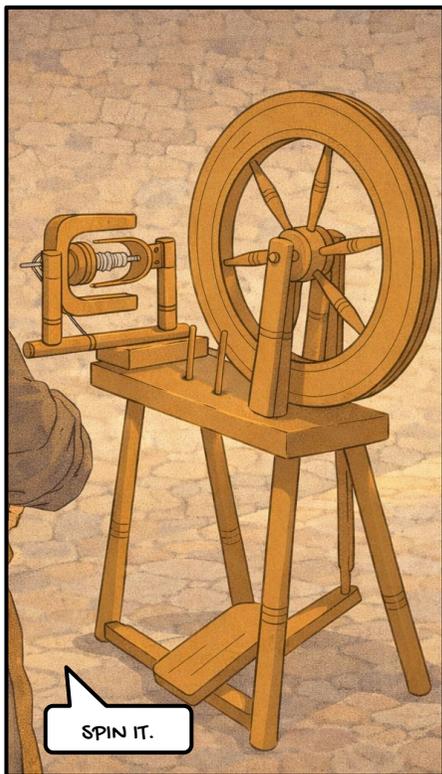
SCREEEEEE

IT NEEDS GREASE ON THE BOBBIN SHAFT. LET IT SLIDE.

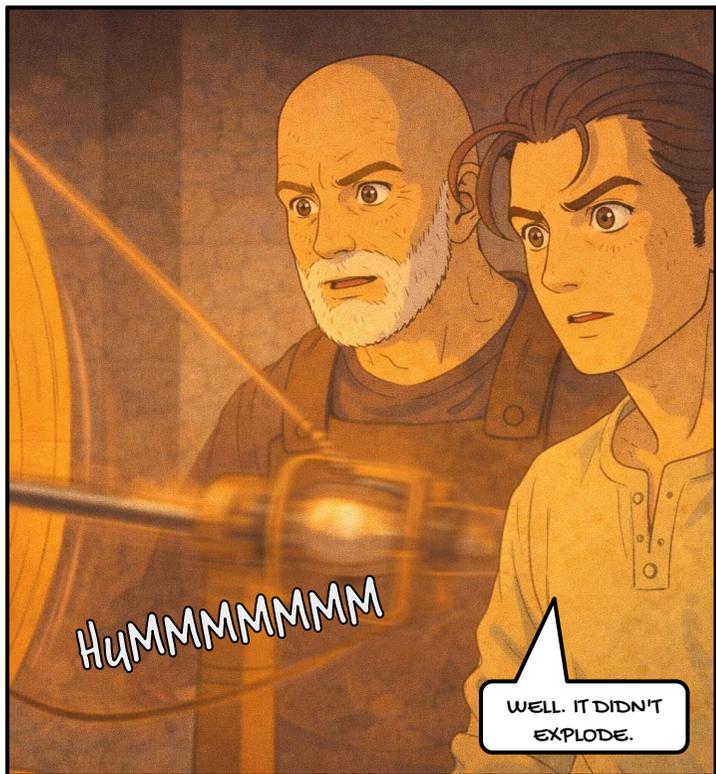


THE DRAG IS HERE. GREASE THE AXLE, NOT THE BELT.

IF THIS EXPLODES, I'M BLAMING YOU IN THE AFTERLIFE.

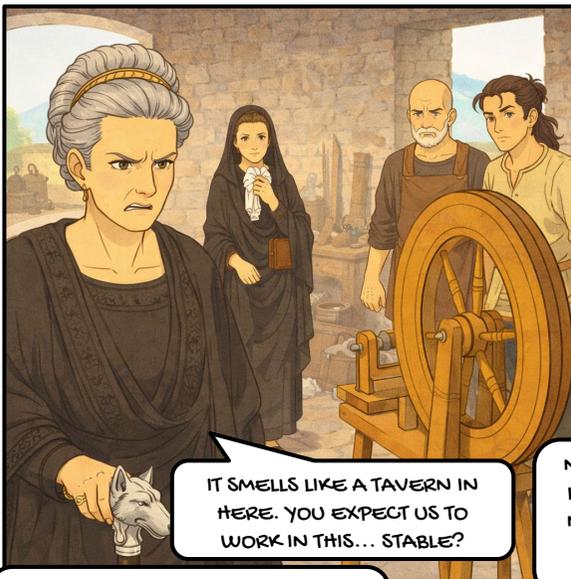


SPIN IT.



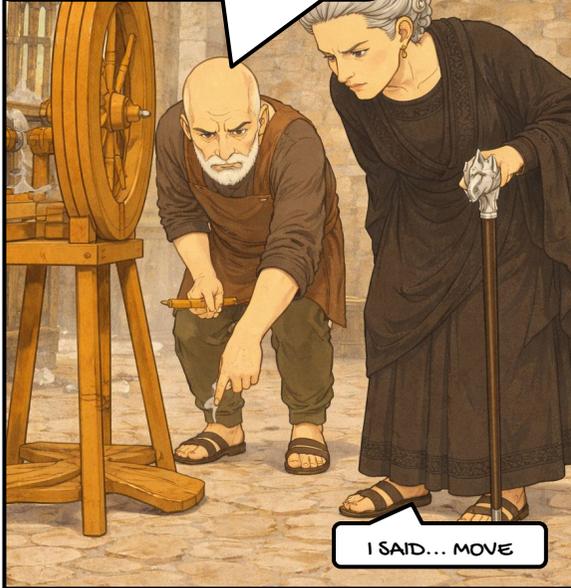
HMMMMMMMM

WELL. IT DIDN'T EXPLODE.



IT SMELLS LIKE A TAVERN IN HERE. YOU EXPECT US TO WORK IN THIS... STABLE?

THE SECRET IS THE SLIP! THE SMALL WHEEL TWISTS, THE BIG WHEEL WINDS! IF YOU DON'T KEEP THE RHYTHM, IT WILL SNAP YOUR—

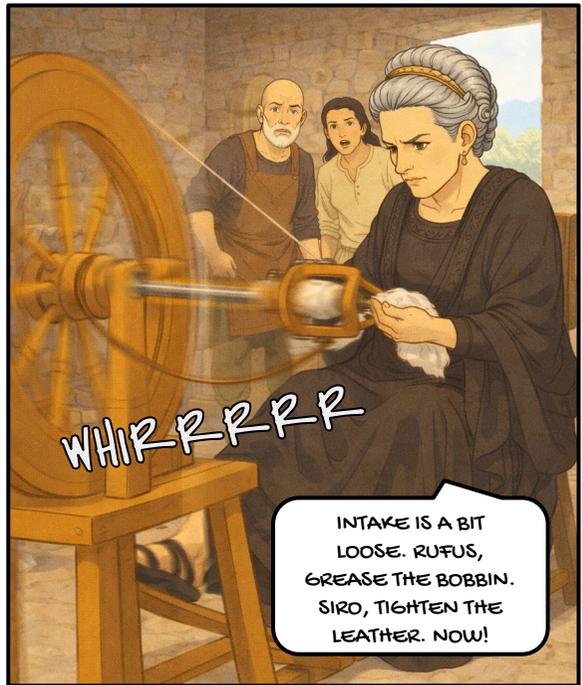


I SAID... MOVE

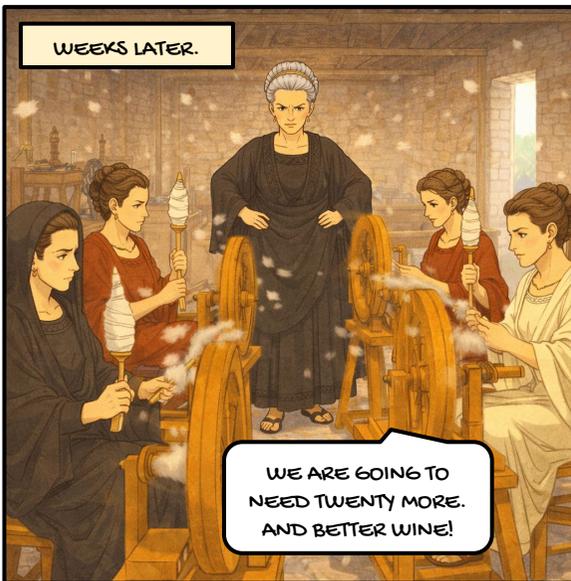


SAFETY FIRST: SPITTING ENSURES THE EVIL EYE KNOWS EXACTLY WHO IS IN CHARGE.

DON'T TELL ME WHERE TO PUT MY HANDS, BLACKSMITH. I WAS SPINNING WHEN YOU WERE STILL IN SWADDLING CLOTHES.

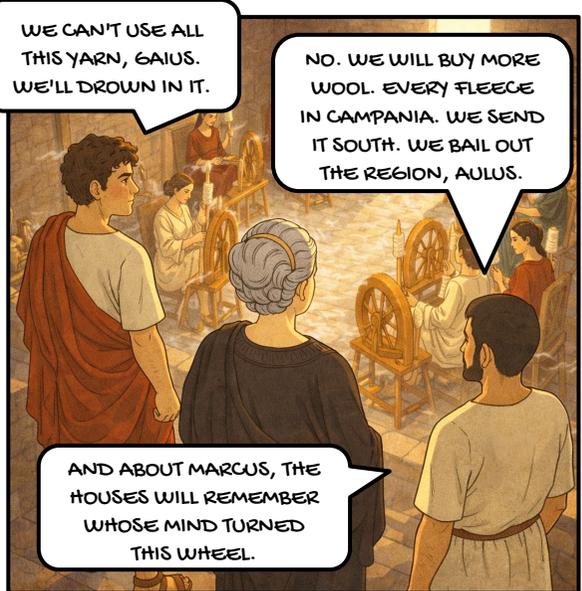


INTAKE IS A BIT LOOSE. RUFUS, GREASE THE BOBBIN. SIRO, TIGHTEN THE LEATHER. NOW!



WEEKS LATER.

WE ARE GOING TO NEED TWENTY MORE. AND BETTER WINE!

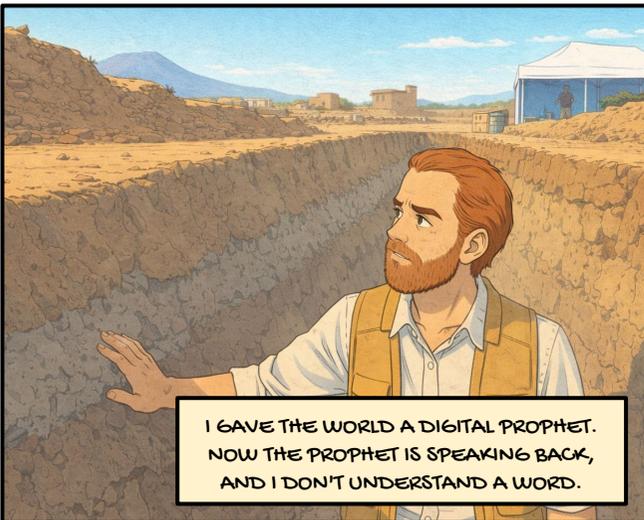


WE CAN'T USE ALL THIS YARN, GAIVS. WE'LL DROWN IN IT.

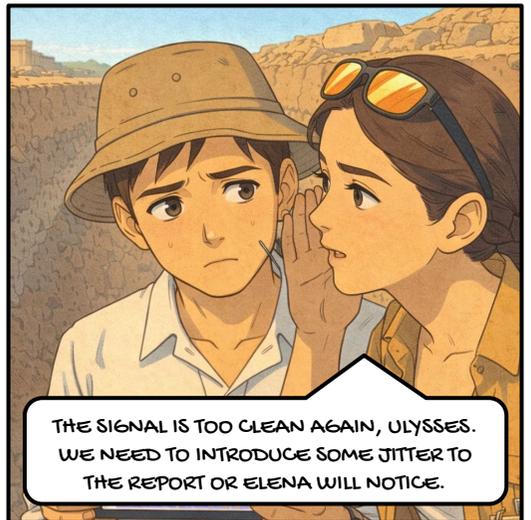
NO. WE WILL BUY MORE WOOL. EVERY FLEECE IN CAMPANIA. WE SEND IT SOUTH. WE BAIL OUT THE REGION, AULUS.

AND ABOUT MARCUS, THE HOUSES WILL REMEMBER WHOSE MIND TURNED THIS WHEEL.

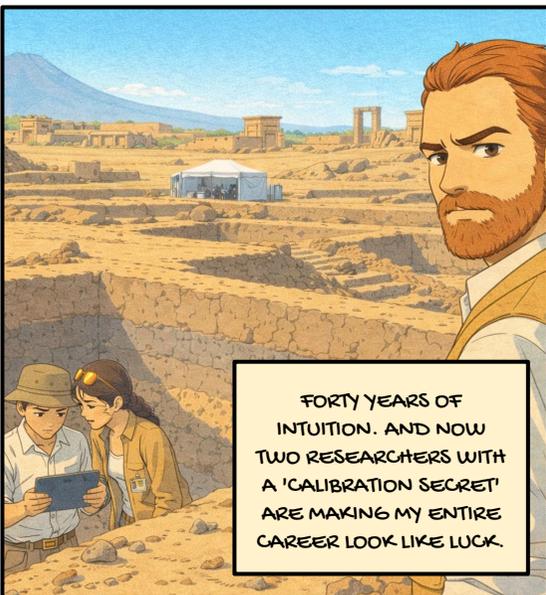
POMPEII. THE DIVIDE BETWEEN THE SHOVEL AND THE SCREEN.



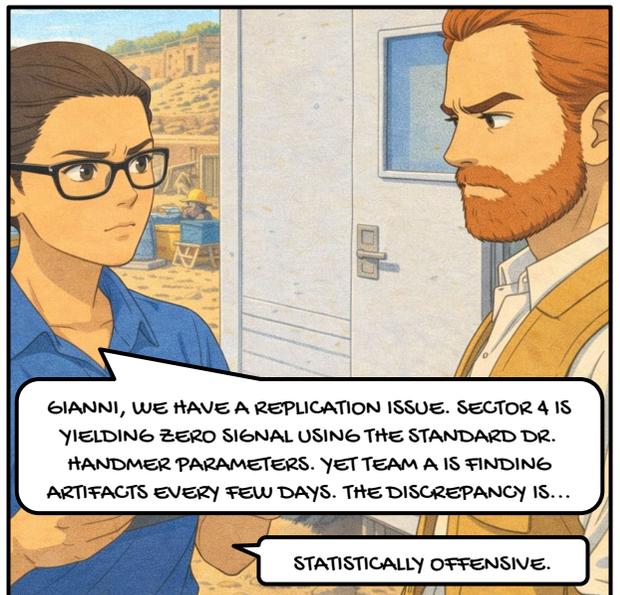
I GAVE THE WORLD A DIGITAL PROPHET. NOW THE PROPHET IS SPEAKING BACK, AND I DON'T UNDERSTAND A WORD.



THE SIGNAL IS TOO CLEAN AGAIN, ULYSSES. WE NEED TO INTRODUCE SOME JITTER TO THE REPORT OR ELENA WILL NOTICE.

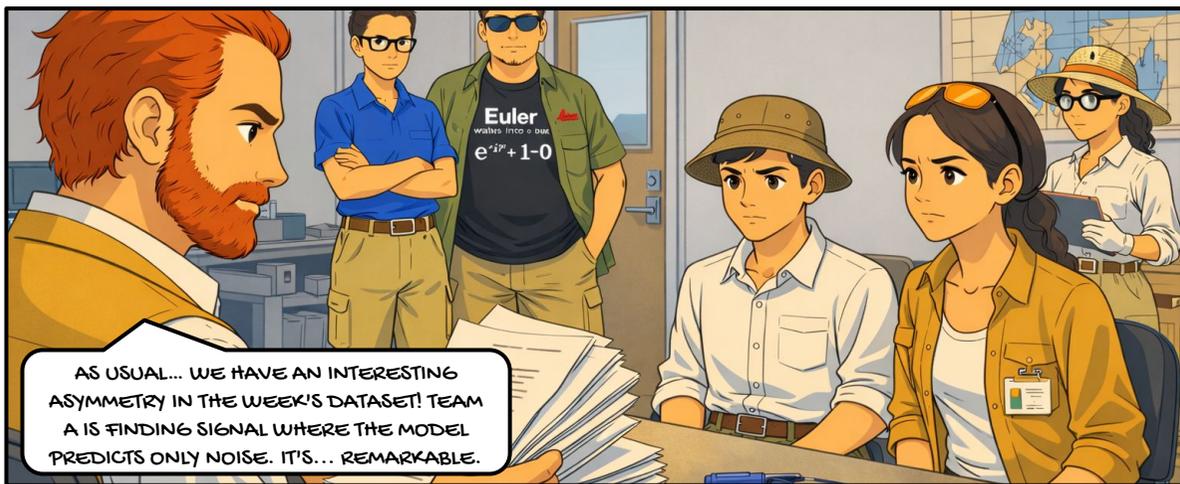


FORTY YEARS OF INTUITION. AND NOW TWO RESEARCHERS WITH A 'CALIBRATION SECRET' ARE MAKING MY ENTIRE CAREER LOOK LIKE LUCK.

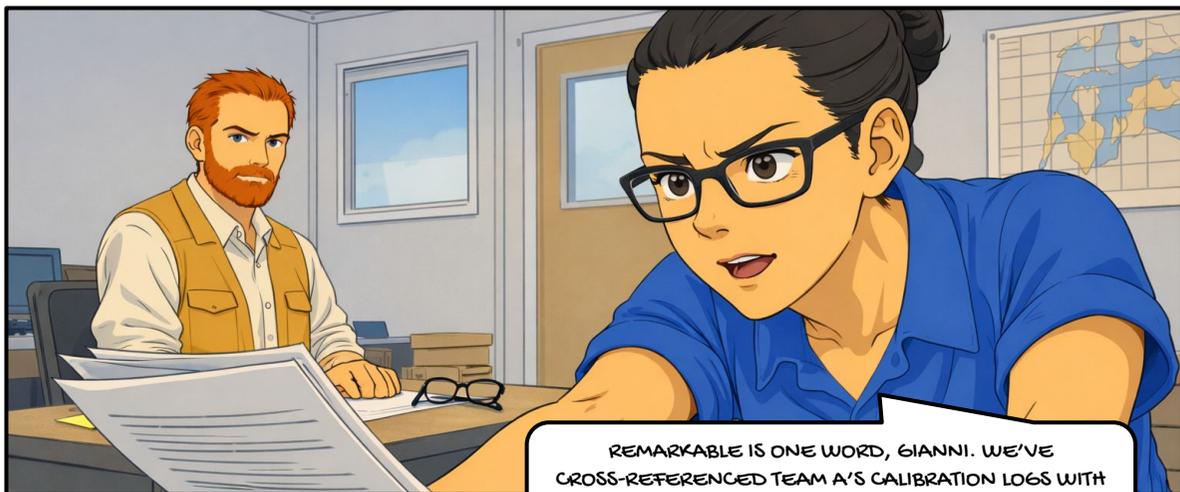


GIANNI, WE HAVE A REPLICATION ISSUE. SECTOR 4 IS YIELDING ZERO SIGNAL USING THE STANDARD DR. HANDMER PARAMETERS. YET TEAM A IS FINDING ARTIFACTS EVERY FEW DAYS. THE DISCREPANCY IS...

STATISTICALLY OFFENSIVE.



AS USUAL... WE HAVE AN INTERESTING ASYMMETRY IN THE WEEK'S DATASET! TEAM A IS FINDING SIGNAL WHERE THE MODEL PREDICTS ONLY NOISE. IT'S... REMARKABLE.

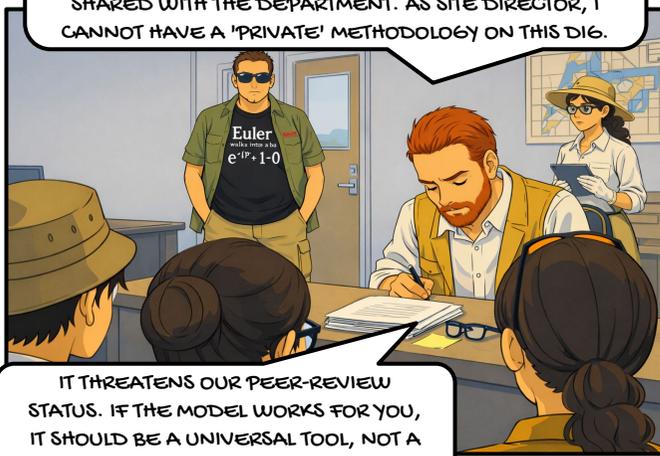


REMARKABLE IS ONE WORD, GIANNI. WE'VE CROSS-REFERENCED TEAM A'S CALIBRATION LOGS WITH OUR OWN. WE'RE USING THE SAME DR. HANDMER PRESETS, YET THE RESULTS DON'T REPLICATE.



GAIN IS ONE THING, ULYSSES. BUT FINDING TWELVE SITES IN TWELVE WEEKS SUGGESTS YOU'VE FOUND A 'SHORT-CUT' IN DR. HANDMER'S CODE THAT YOU HAVEN'T SHARED WITH THE DEPARTMENT. AS SITE DIRECTOR, I CANNOT HAVE A 'PRIVATE' METHODOLOGY ON THIS DIG.

AND IF YOU WON'T SHARE IT, I'LL STANDARDIZE IT MYSELF AND MAKE SURE THE CREDIT REFLECTS THAT.



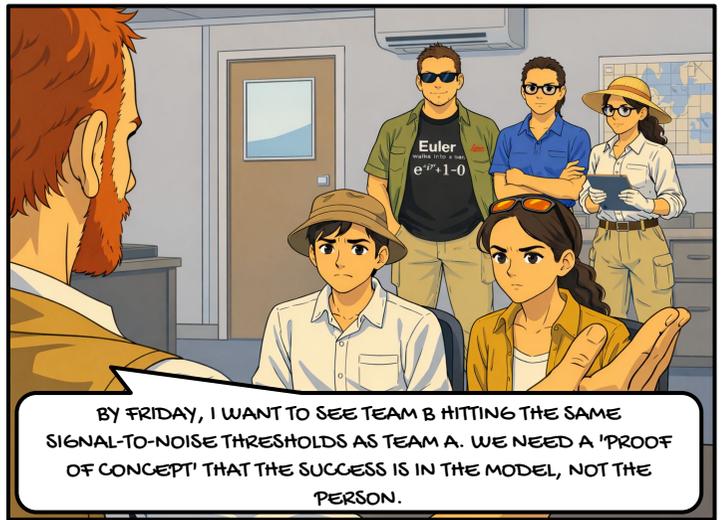
IT THREATENS OUR PEER-REVIEW STATUS. IF THE MODEL WORKS FOR YOU, IT SHOULD BE A UNIVERSAL TOOL, NOT A PERSONAL MIRACLE.



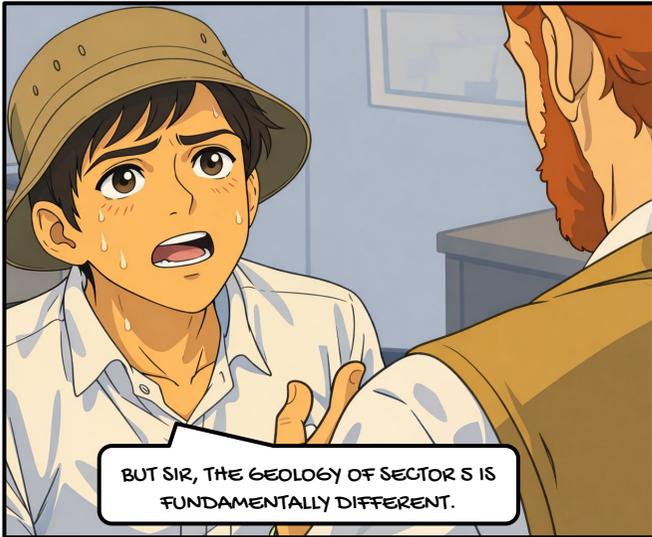
THE NATURE PAPER HAS MY NAME ON IT. I DIDN'T ASSEMBLE THIS PROJECT TO WATCH YOU BECOME ITS FACE.



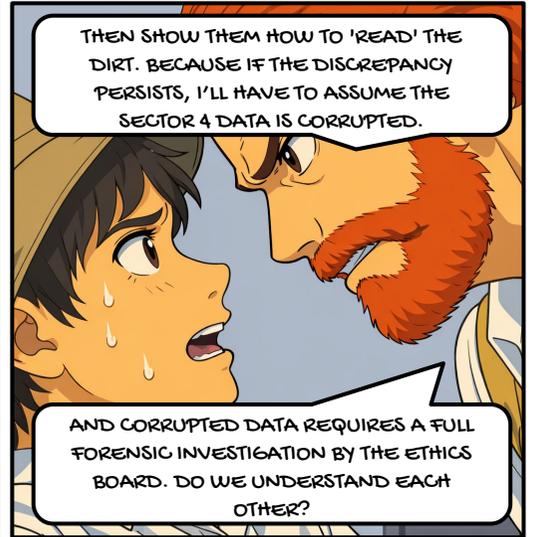
THIS SITUATION IS UNACCEPTABLE FOR OUR SPONSORS. WE NEED TO NORMALIZE THE FINDINGS ACROSS ALL SECTORS.



BY FRIDAY, I WANT TO SEE TEAM B HITTING THE SAME SIGNAL-TO-NOISE THRESHOLDS AS TEAM A. WE NEED A 'PROOF OF CONCEPT' THAT THE SUCCESS IS IN THE MODEL, NOT THE PERSON.

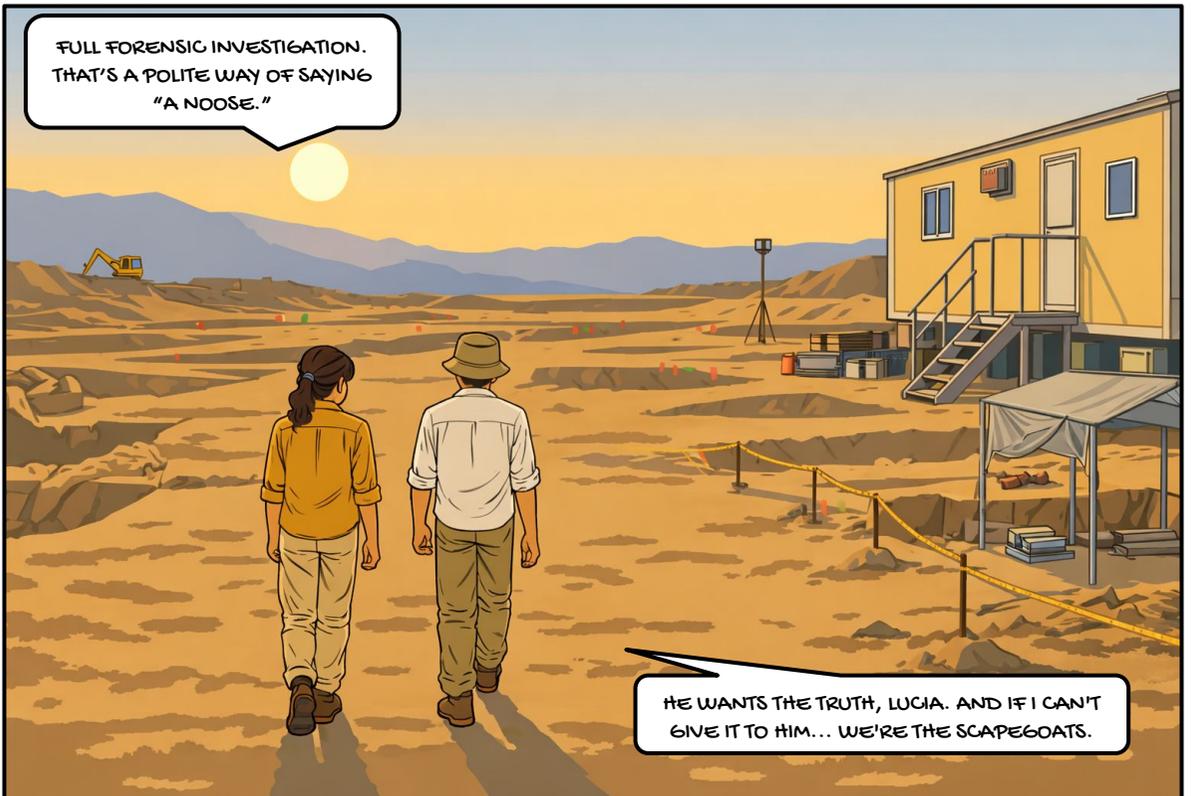


BUT SIR, THE GEOLOGY OF SECTOR 5 IS FUNDAMENTALLY DIFFERENT.



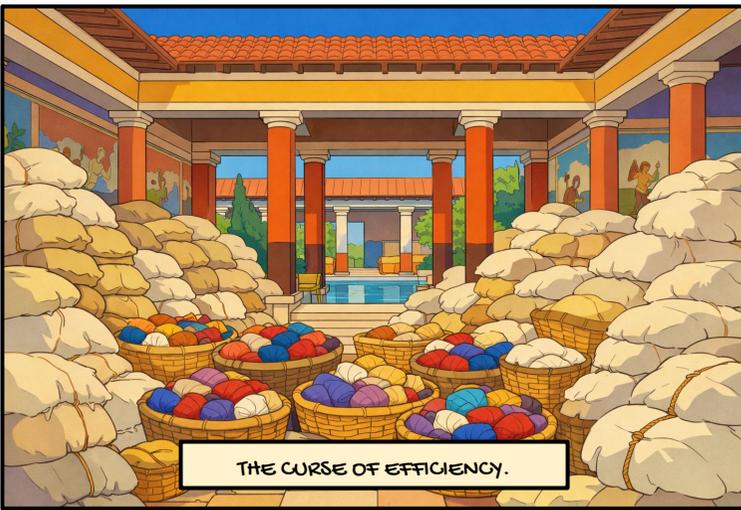
THEN SHOW THEM HOW TO 'READ' THE DIRT. BECAUSE IF THE DISCREPANCY PERSISTS, I'LL HAVE TO ASSUME THE SECTOR 4 DATA IS CORRUPTED.

AND CORRUPTED DATA REQUIRES A FULL FORENSIC INVESTIGATION BY THE ETHICS BOARD. DO WE UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER?

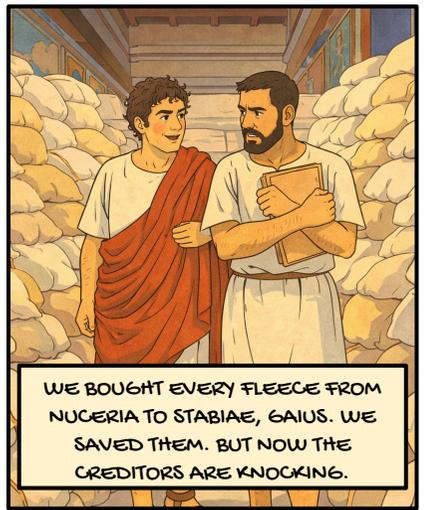


FULL FORENSIC INVESTIGATION. THAT'S A POLITE WAY OF SAYING "A NOOSE."

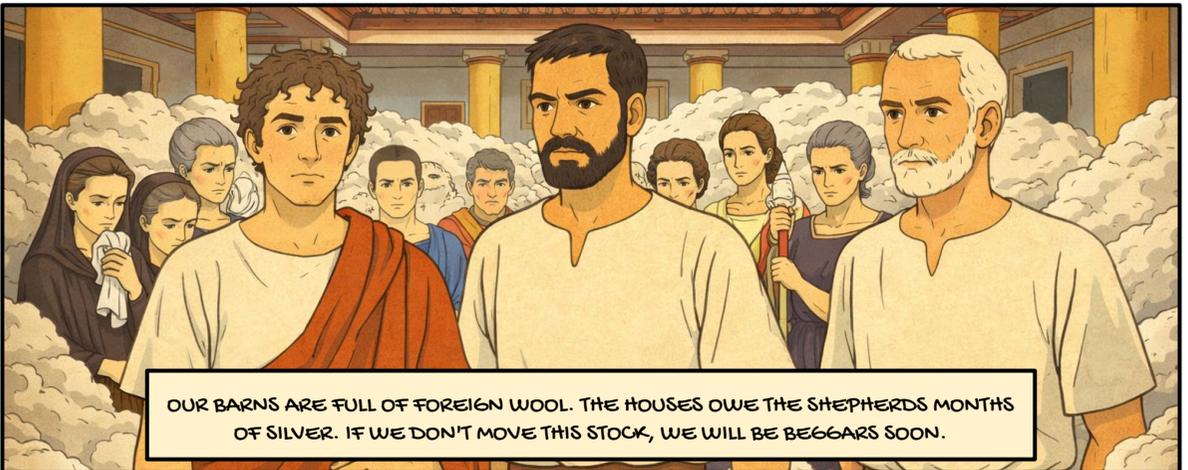
HE WANTS THE TRUTH, LUCIA. AND IF I CAN'T GIVE IT TO HIM... WE'RE THE SCAPEGOATS.



THE CURSE OF EFFICIENCY.



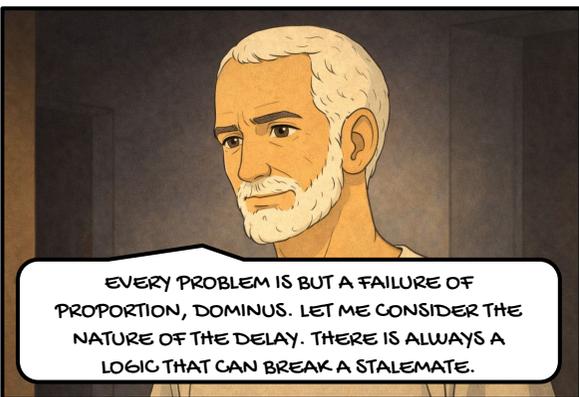
WE BOUGHT EVERY FLEECE FROM NUCERIA TO STABIAE, GAIVS. WE SAVED THEM. BUT NOW THE CREDITORS ARE KNOCKING.



OUR BARNs ARE FULL OF FOREIGN WOOL. THE HOUSES OWE THE SHEPHERDS MONTHS OF SILVER. IF WE DON'T MOVE THIS STOCK, WE WILL BE BEGGARS SOON.



YOUR WHEEL WAS A MIRACLE, MARCUS. BUT NOW THE MIRACLE IS CHOKING US. WE NEED ANOTHER... INSIGHT.



EVERY PROBLEM IS BUT A FAILURE OF PROPORTION, DOMINUS. LET ME CONSIDER THE NATURE OF THE DELAY. THERE IS ALWAYS A LOGIC THAT CAN BREAK A STALEMATE.



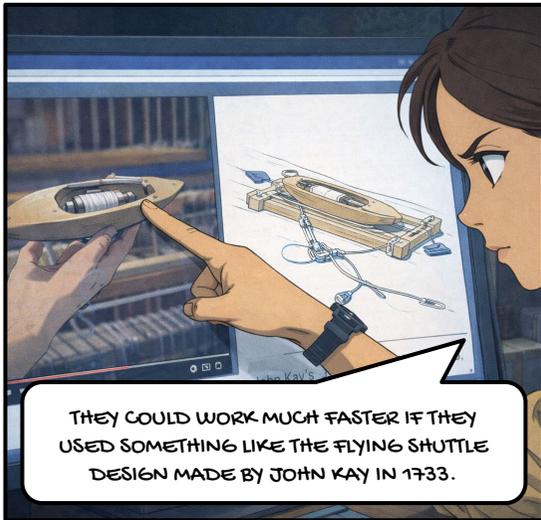
FIND THAT LOGIC, MARCUS. BECAUSE IF THE WAREHOUSES DON'T EMPTY SOON, THE SIXTEEN HOUSES WILL HAVE NOTHING TO EAT BUT THE WOOL ON THEIR BACKS.

MARCUS IS WAITING, LUCIA. DO WE HAVE A FIX?

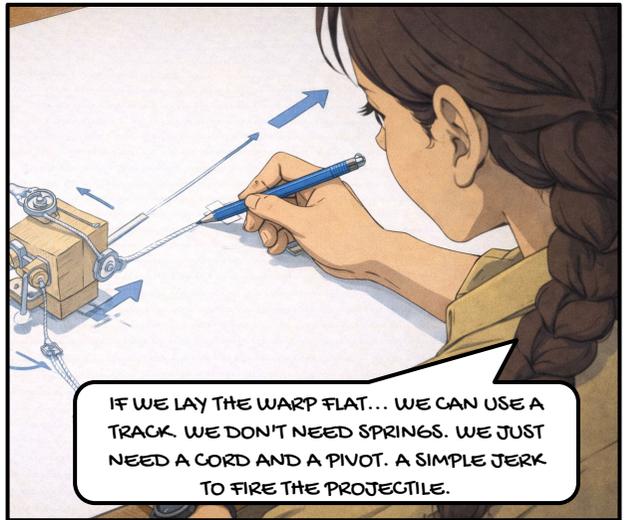


QUIET. I'M WATCHING THE MOTION. IT'S THE PASS. THE WEAVER SPENDS 60% OF THE CYCLE JUST MOVING THE SHUTTLE FROM LEFT TO RIGHT.

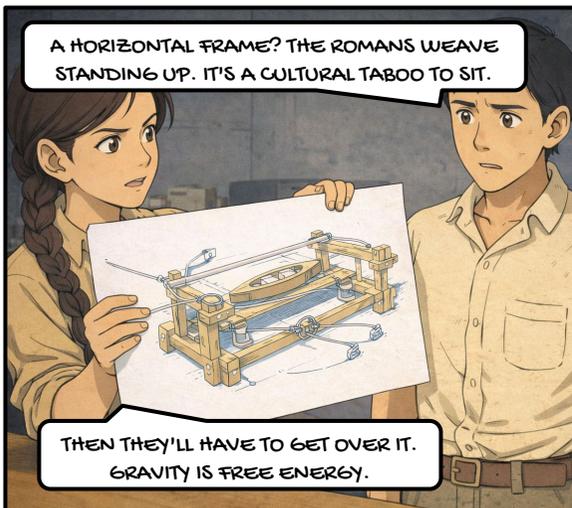
THOSE VERTICAL LOOMS ARE THE REAL PROBLEM. THE WAY THEY WEAVE IS JUST TOO SLOW.



THEY COULD WORK MUCH FASTER IF THEY USED SOMETHING LIKE THE FLYING SHUTTLE DESIGN MADE BY JOHN KAY IN 1733.

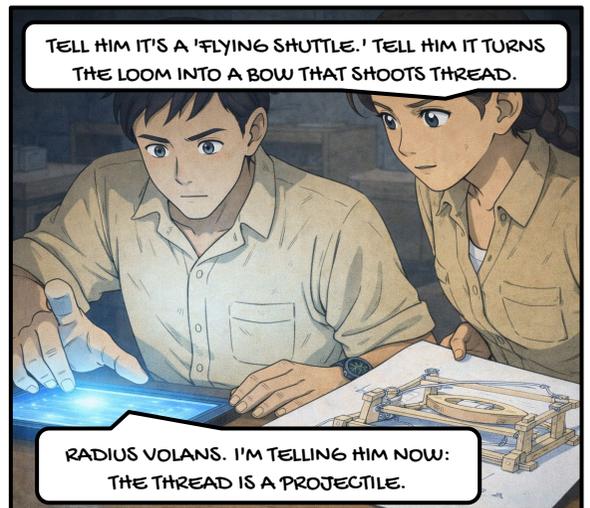


IF WE LAY THE WARP FLAT... WE CAN USE A TRACK. WE DON'T NEED SPRINGS. WE JUST NEED A CORD AND A PIVOT. A SIMPLE JERK TO FIRE THE PROJECTILE.



A HORIZONTAL FRAME? THE ROMANS WEAVE STANDING UP. IT'S A CULTURAL TABOO TO SIT.

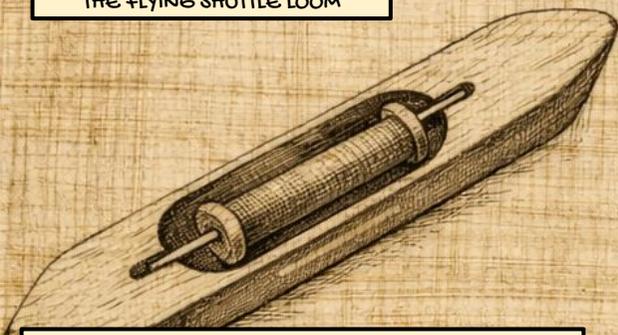
THEN THEY'LL HAVE TO GET OVER IT. GRAVITY IS FREE ENERGY.



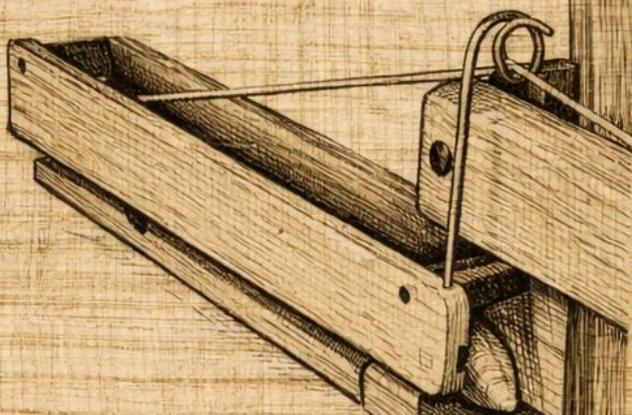
TELL HIM IT'S A 'FLYING SHUTTLE.' TELL HIM IT TURNS THE LOOM INTO A BOW THAT SHOOTS THREAD.

RADIUS VOLANS. I'M TELLING HIM NOW: THE THREAD IS A PROJECTILE.

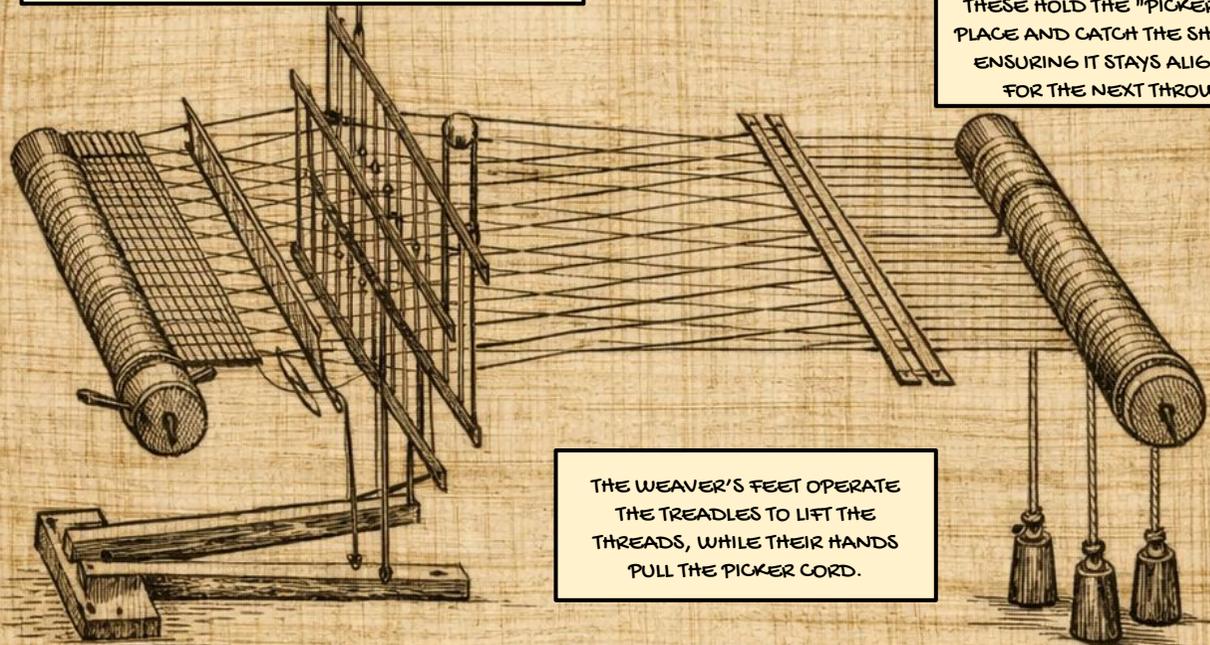
THE FLYING SHUTTLE LOOM



BUILD A PERFECTLY STRAIGHT, POLISHED WOODEN TRACK ACROSS THE LOOM. THE SHUTTLE MUST NEVER TOUCH THE WEAVER'S HANDS DURING ITS FLIGHT; IT IS NO LONGER A HANDHELD TOOL, BUT A PROJECTILE THAT RUNS ALONG THIS TRACK.

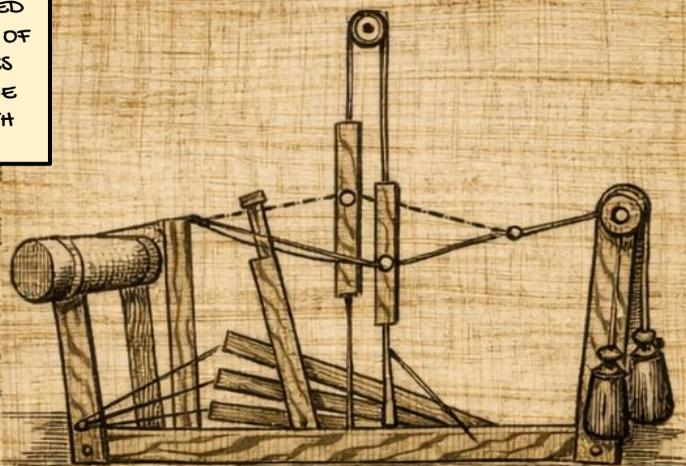
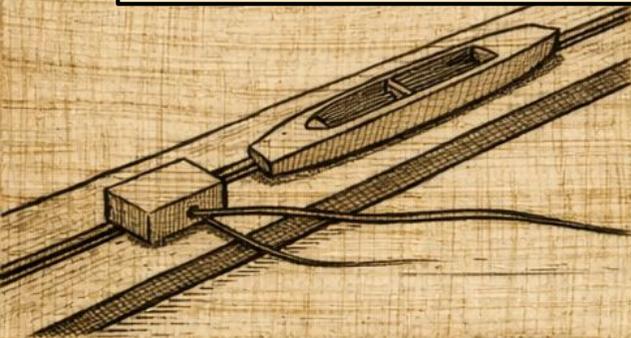


ADD A DEEP SOCKET BOX AT EACH END OF THE TRACK. THESE HOLD THE "PICKERS" IN PLACE AND CATCH THE SHUTTLE, ENSURING IT STAYS ALIGNED FOR THE NEXT THROW.

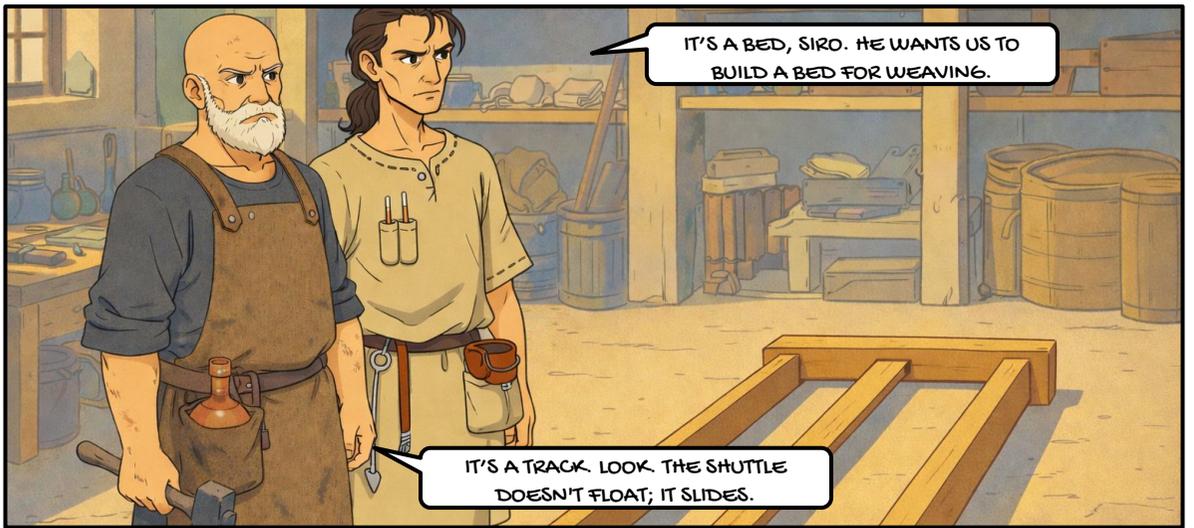


THE WEAVER'S FEET OPERATE THE TREADLES TO LIFT THE THREADS, WHILE THEIR HANDS PULL THE PICKER CORD.

USE A SINGLE CENTRAL ROPE HANDLE CONNECTED TO TWO WOODEN BLOCKS (PICKERS) AT THE ENDS OF THE TRACK. A SHARP JERK OF THE HANDLE FIRES THE SHUTTLE ACROSS THE LOOM. THIS ALLOWS ONE WEAVER TO THROW THE SHUTTLE ACROSS A CLOTH FAR WIDER THAN THEIR OWN REACH.



BY SEPARATING THESE MOTIONS, THE WEAVER BECOMES A RHYTHMIC ENGINE, INCREASING THE SPEED OF THE CLOTH TENFOLD.



IT'S A BED, SIRO. HE WANTS US TO BUILD A BED FOR WEAVING.

IT'S A TRACK. LOOK. THE SHUTTLE DOESN'T FLOAT; IT SLIDES.



THWACK!

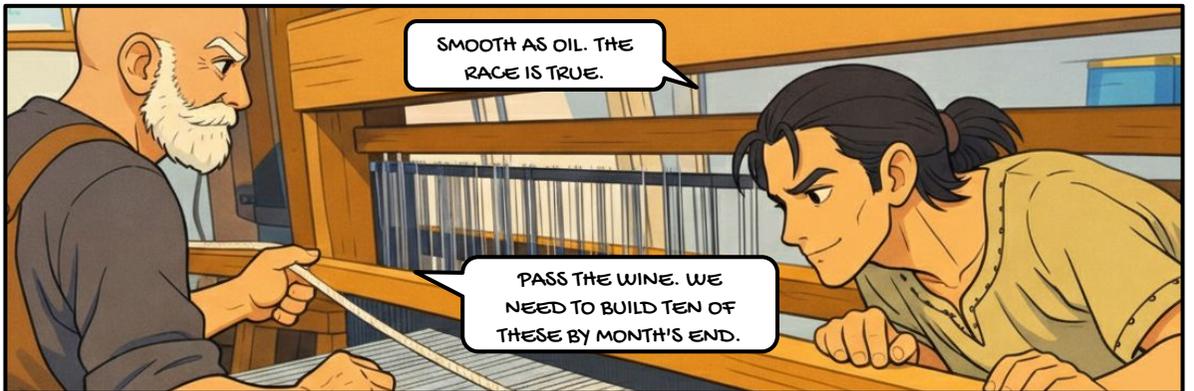


YOU ALMOST TOOK MY EAR OFF! IT'S A WEAPON, NOT A TOOL!



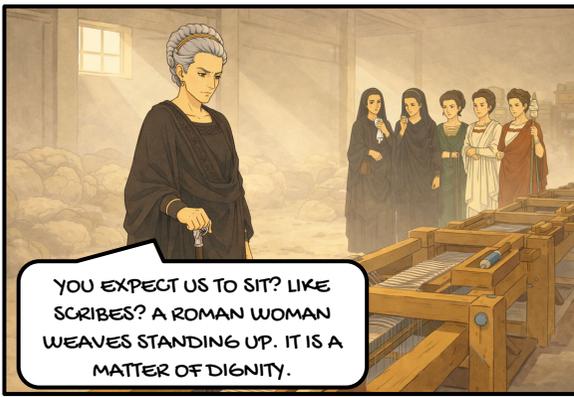
IT FLIES WILD BECAUSE IT IS UNBALANCED. WEIGHT THE NOSE LIKE A PILUM.

AYE. LEAD TIPS. IT NEEDS MASS TO HOLD THE LINE.

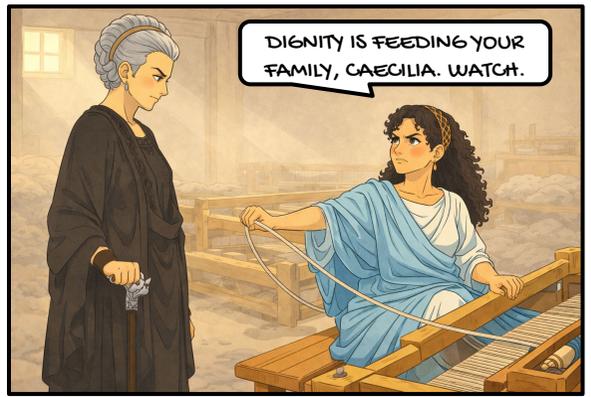


SMOOTH AS OIL. THE RACE IS TRUE.

PASS THE WINE. WE NEED TO BUILD TEN OF THESE BY MONTH'S END.



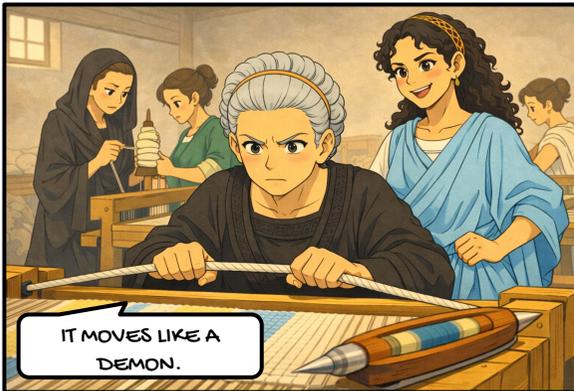
YOU EXPECT US TO SIT? LIKE SCRIBES? A ROMAN WOMAN WEAVES STANDING UP. IT IS A MATTER OF DIGNITY.



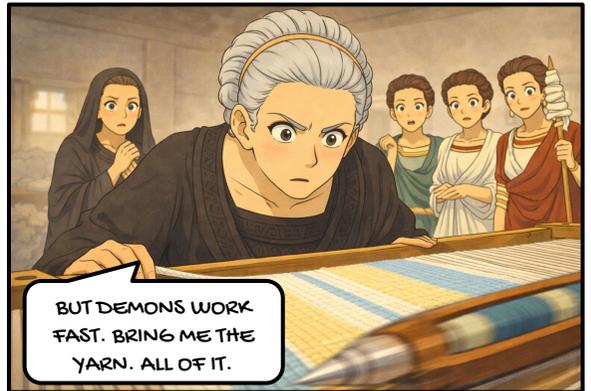
DIGNITY IS FEEDING YOUR FAMILY, CAECILIA. WATCH.



THWACK-CLICK!



IT MOVES LIKE A DEMON.

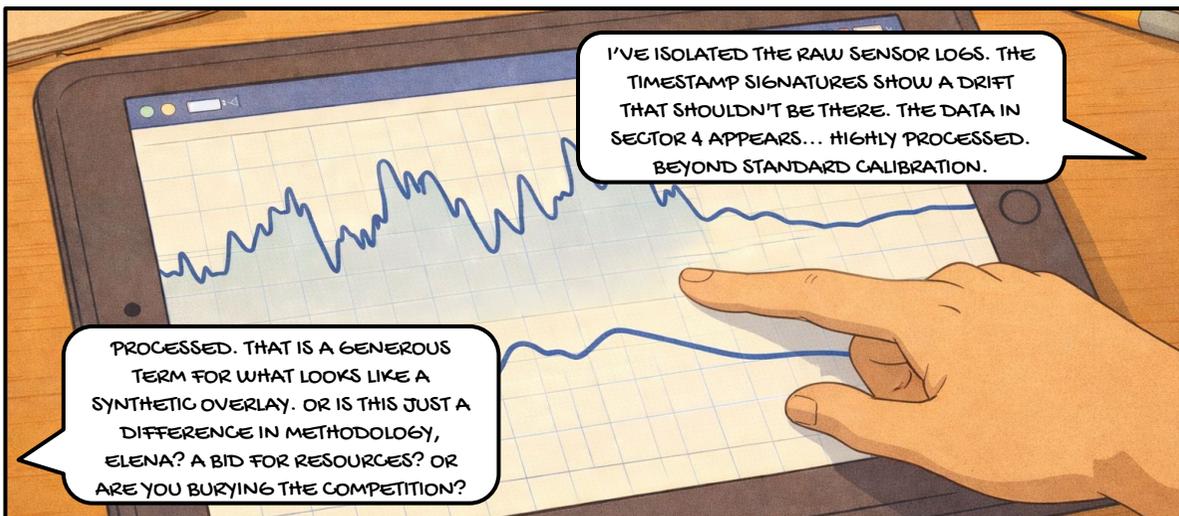


BUT DEMONS WORK FAST. BRING ME THE YARN. ALL OF IT.



LISTEN TO THAT SOUND, MARCUS. IT'S THE HEARTBEAT OF A NEW WORLD.

THE MACHINES HAVE WON. THE HANDS JUST FOLLOW THE RHYTHM NOW.

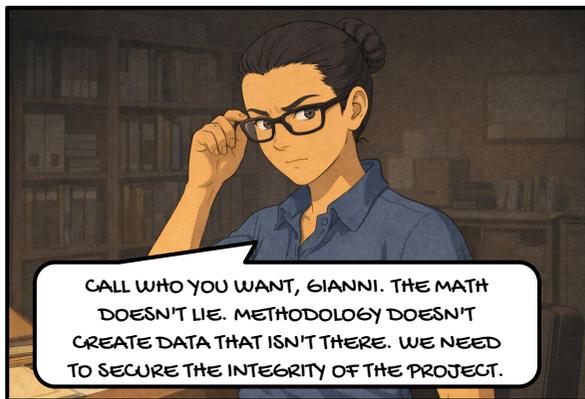


I'VE ISOLATED THE RAW SENSOR LOGS. THE TIMESTAMP SIGNATURES SHOW A DRIFT THAT SHOULDN'T BE THERE. THE DATA IN SECTOR 4 APPEARS... HIGHLY PROCESSED. BEYOND STANDARD CALIBRATION.

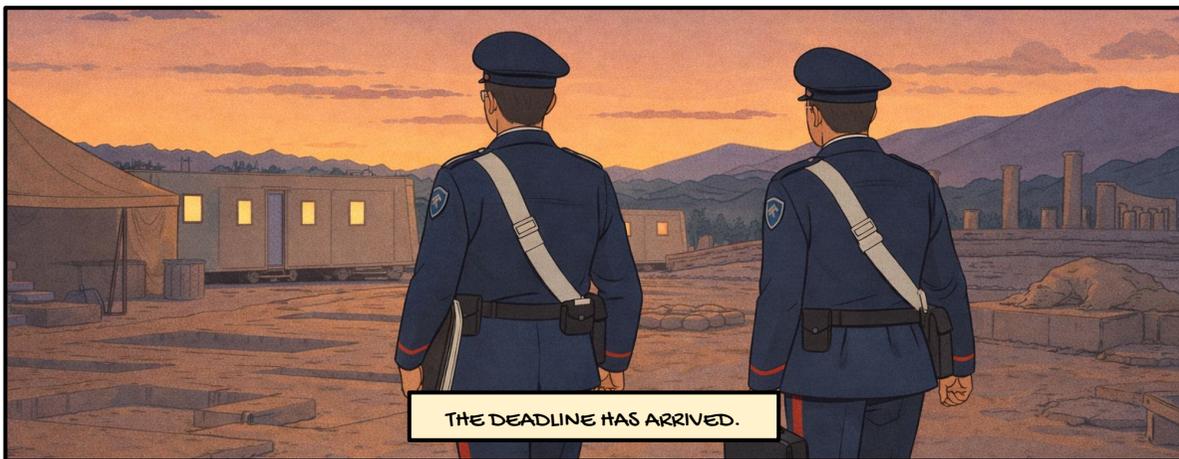
PROCESSED. THAT IS A GENEROUS TERM FOR WHAT LOOKS LIKE A SYNTHETIC OVERLAY. OR IS THIS JUST A DIFFERENCE IN METHODOLOGY, ELENA? A BID FOR RESOURCES? OR ARE YOU BURYING THE COMPETITION?



NEVER MIND. I'M DONE ASKING NICELY. LET'S SEE IF LUCIA CAN EXPLAIN HER 'MIRACLES' WITH THE CARABINIERI TPC IN THE ROOM.



CALL WHO YOU WANT, GIANNI. THE MATH DOESN'T LIE. METHODOLOGY DOESN'T CREATE DATA THAT ISN'T THERE. WE NEED TO SECURE THE INTEGRITY OF THE PROJECT.



THE DEADLINE HAS ARRIVED.



IT'S A SIMPLE PROCEDURAL CHECK, LUCIA. BUT THE DISCREPANCIES ARE SIGNIFICANT. ARE YOU COLLABORATING WITH AN EXTERNAL PARTNER? WE JUST NEED TO UNDERSTAND THE SOURCE OF YOUR UNIQUE... RESULTS.

IF YOU'VE BEEN USING A 'SECRET SAUCE' THAT NOBODY ELSE SEEMS TO HAVE, DON'T YOU THINK IT'S TIME TO SHARE IT WITH THE REST OF US?



THEY HAVE LUCIA. THEY
WILL COME FOR ME.



IT IS OVER. THEY
FOUND US.

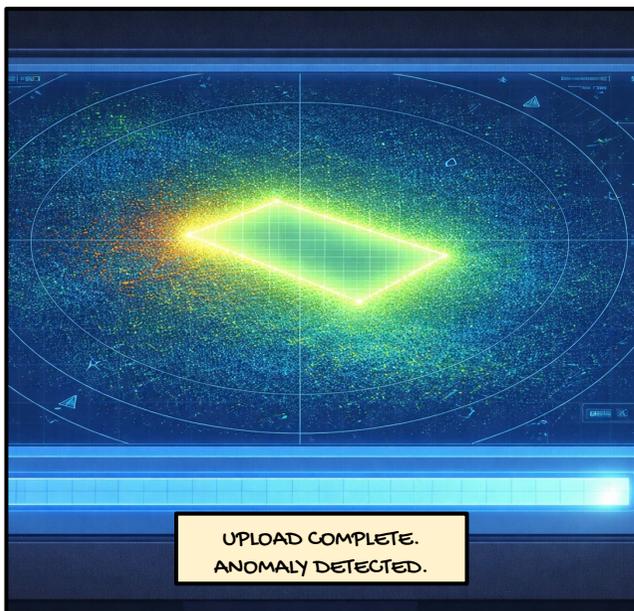


NOTHING IS OVER.
WHAT DO YOU NEED?

A MIRACLE. IS THERE ANYTHING WEST
OF THE AGORA? NEAR THE WELL?



SAME STEPS. SAME TEXTURE. BUT THIS TIME... WE
AREN'T PAINTING FOR TEAM A. GIVE HIM A MIRACLE,
AND HE'LL CHASE IT.



UPLOAD COMPLETE.
ANOMALY DETECTED.



GOODBYE, MARCUS.



THIS IS THE END OF THE ROAD, ULYSSES. THE LOGS DON'T MATCH. TELL US WHO YOU'RE WORKING WITH.



STOP! SECTOR 5 IS LIVE!



IT'S NOT NOISE, GIANNI!
IT'S AN IMPERIAL VAULT!
THE SIGNAL JUST
PUNCHED THROUGH!



SHOW ME THE
COORDINATES. NOW!



YOU DIDN'T JUST HACK
THE SERVER, DID YOU?

I GAVE THEM A
MIRACLE. NOW
WE HAVE TO
KEEP IT ALIVE.



THE LIE IS NOW THE TRUTH. I HAVE
BOUGHT US TIME. BUT THE BILL IS COMING.