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DESERT EYE - By Sarah Katz  
Volume I  
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Summary:

The story Desert Eye occurs in the Middle East inspired by ancient Canaanite myth meeting the modern Israel-Palestine conflict. Current affairs and the apparent history of the region and notably a stone statue of a Canaanite goddess unearthed in the Gaza Strip. The figure is of an ancient goddess of beauty, love, and war. In Israel, an ex-Orthodox Jewish software engineer named Maya forges a fragile alliance with an Arab conservationist to investigate a mysterious desert presence only visible through augmented reality.

Background:

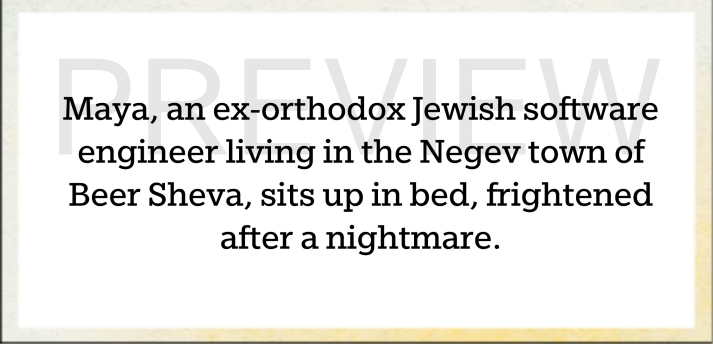
Palestinian archaeologists say that the head of the Canaanite deity, Anat, dates back 4,500 years to the late Bronze Age. A farmer discovered the figure of Anat while digging his land in Khan Younis, south of the strip.

Some Gazans interacting on Social Media make wry comments suggesting the goddess's association with war seems apt. They have seen a series of devastating flare-ups in the conflict between Israel and militant groups in Gaza, which Hamas governs.

However, the discovery of this limestone statue is a reminder of how the strip - part of an important trade route for successive ancient civilizations - was originally a Canaanite settlement.

A silhouette of head and shoulders  
low to the ground sits stark against  
the horizon of the Negev Desert  
sunset.





PREVIEW

Maya, an ex-orthodox Jewish software engineer living in the Negev town of Beer Sheva, sits up in bed, frightened after a nightmare.

These dreams!



PREVIEW

Maya is at her office headquarters speaking  
with her boss.



The Ayin product has officially entered beta.  
This latest augmented reality app will  
significantly enhance the stargazing experience!  
We should be ready for beta testing soon and  
then we can present it to the board.



Well done, Maya! You've proven  
your skills in engineering these past  
few years. But you look tired. Why  
don't you get some rest tonight and  
celebrate?



PREVIEW

Maya reads news headlines about  
members of an alleged cult of the dead  
prowling around ancient ruins all over the  
Levant region.

Hmm...Cult of the  
Dead.....



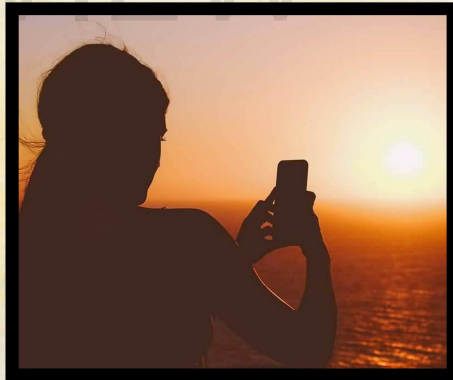
PREVIEW

Maya calls her estranged Father.

I heard about the bomb warnings near your town. That death cult has been making threats.

Hi Dad, thanks for taking my call..

What? I just finished work and haven't....







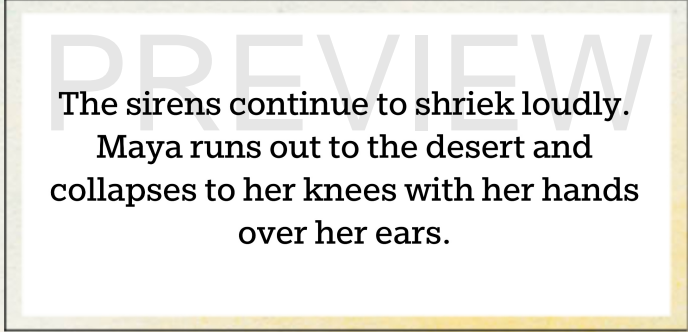
I have to go now, aba.



PREVIEW

Terrified, Maya grabs her bag and runs to the  
local shelter to find it overcapacity.





PREVIEW

The sirens continue to shriek loudly.  
Maya runs out to the desert and  
collapses to her knees with her hands  
over her ears.

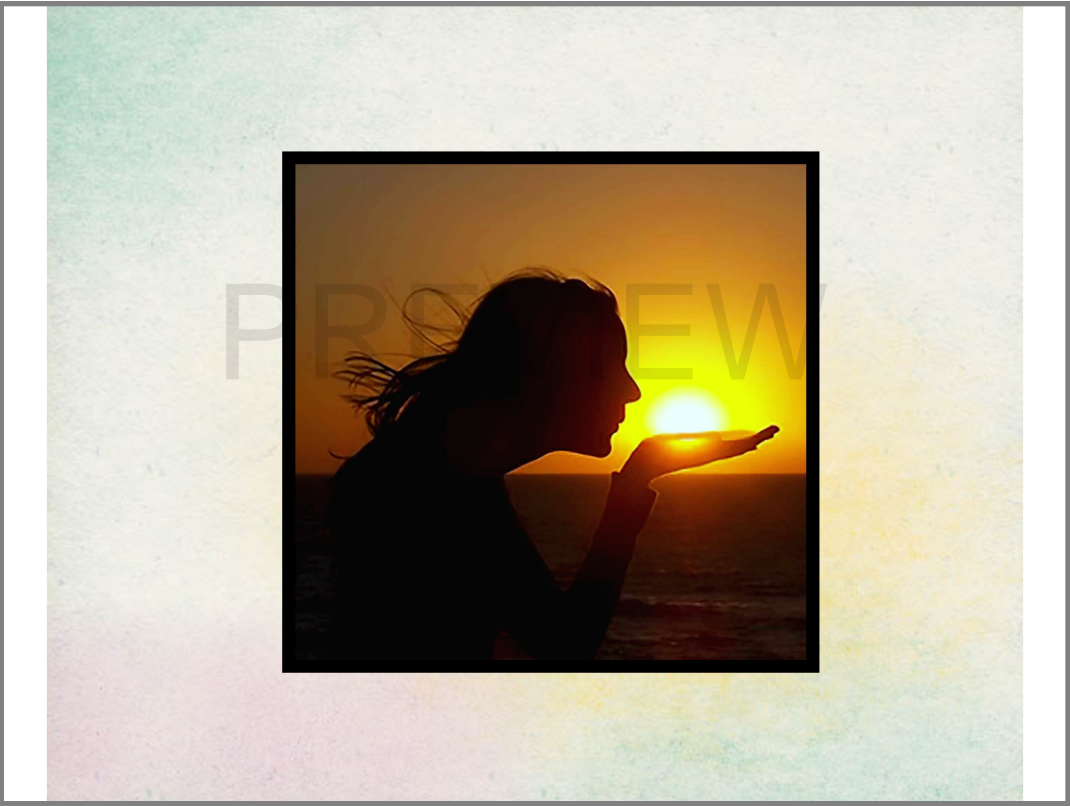
Calm down, everything's fine.





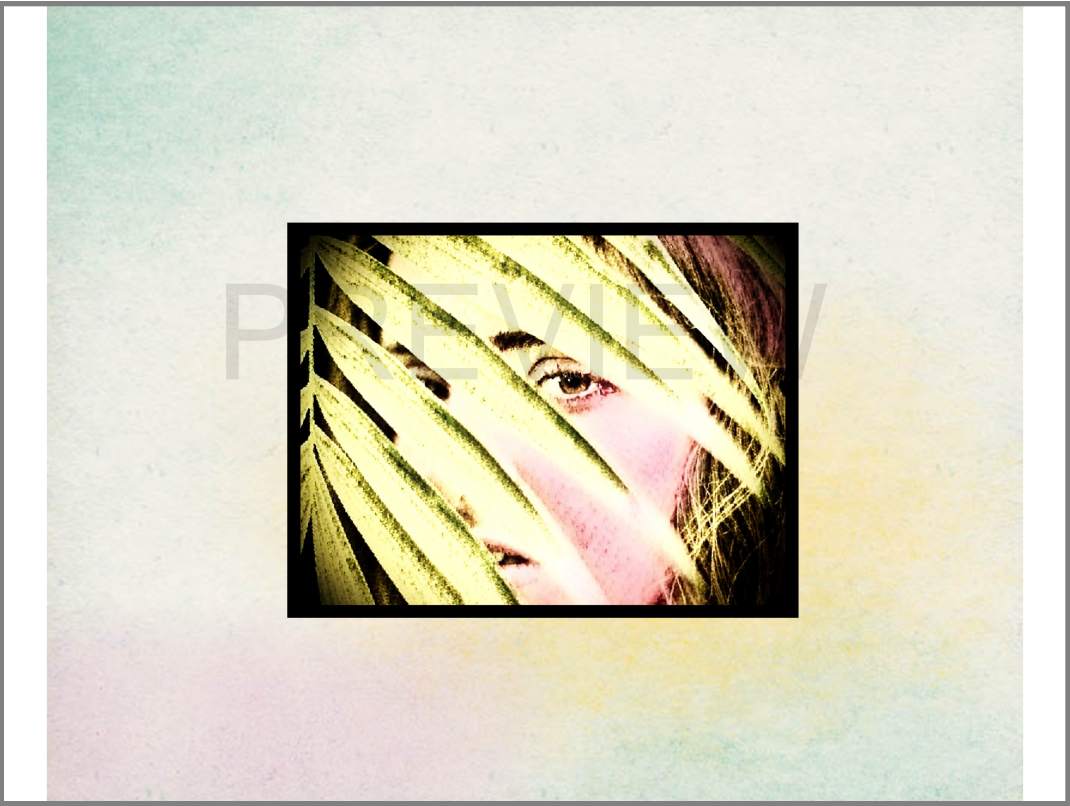
PREVIEW

In the silence that follows, Maya takes out her phone and activates the Ayin on her cellphone to stargaze.



PREVIEW

Maya crouches behind a nearby shrub,  
as two men approach.



Any casualties from the attack?



Only one, evidently. Those damn sirens warn everyone. There wouldn't have been enough left in that market to bring back at all, let alone empowered.



And what about that statue of  
the Canaanite war goddess  
they found in Gaza?





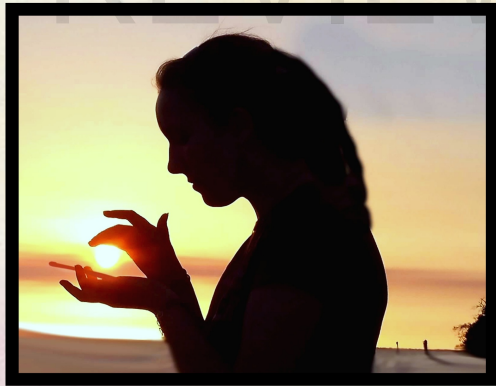
Just a trinket. The Cult of Judah feared  
Anat for a reason. But anyone with a  
basic knowledge of history knows she  
supported war just as much as love.  
She could be useful. If you even  
believe in all that.

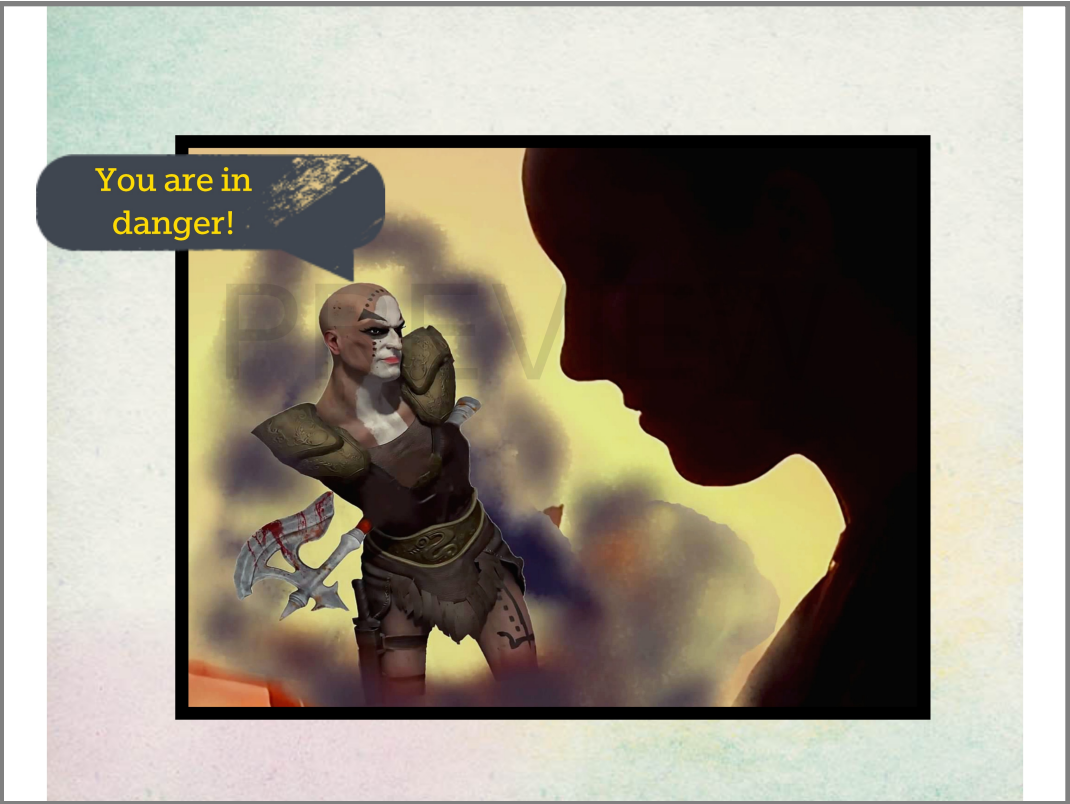


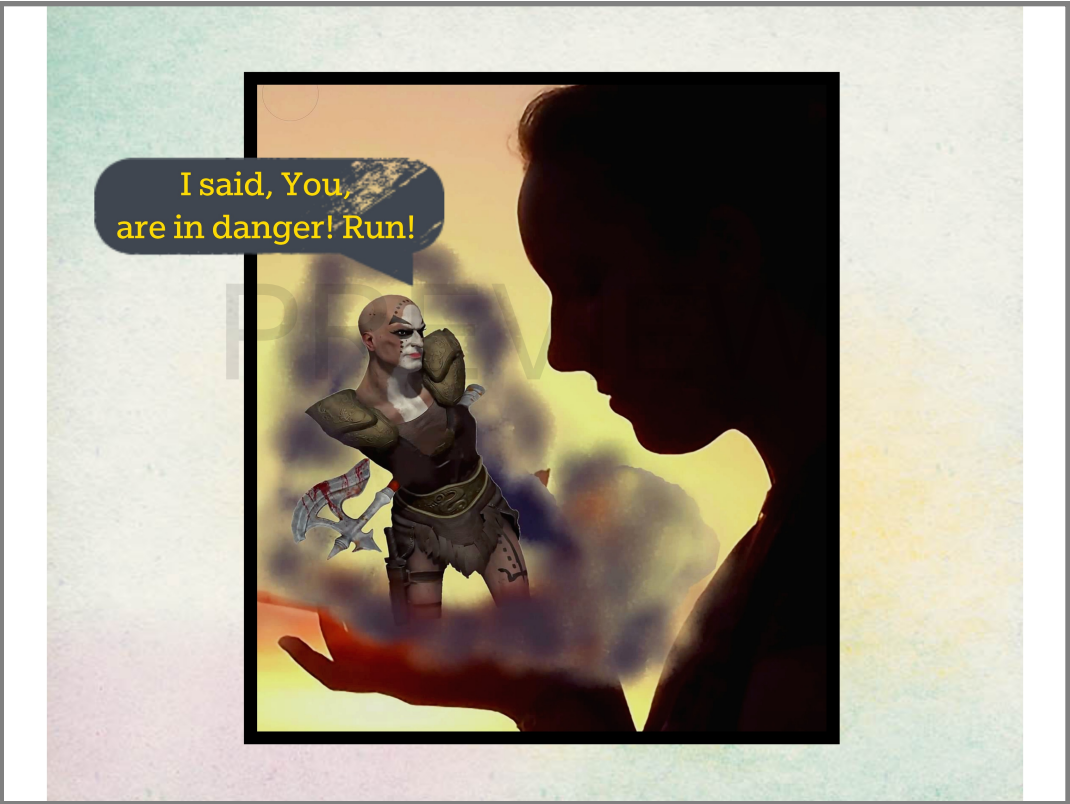
A rustling behind Maya startles  
her. Glancing back, she finds  
nothing.



A voice sounds from nowhere - the voice of Anat, just as a dark figure appears on the screen of Maya's cellphone amidst the view of the stars.

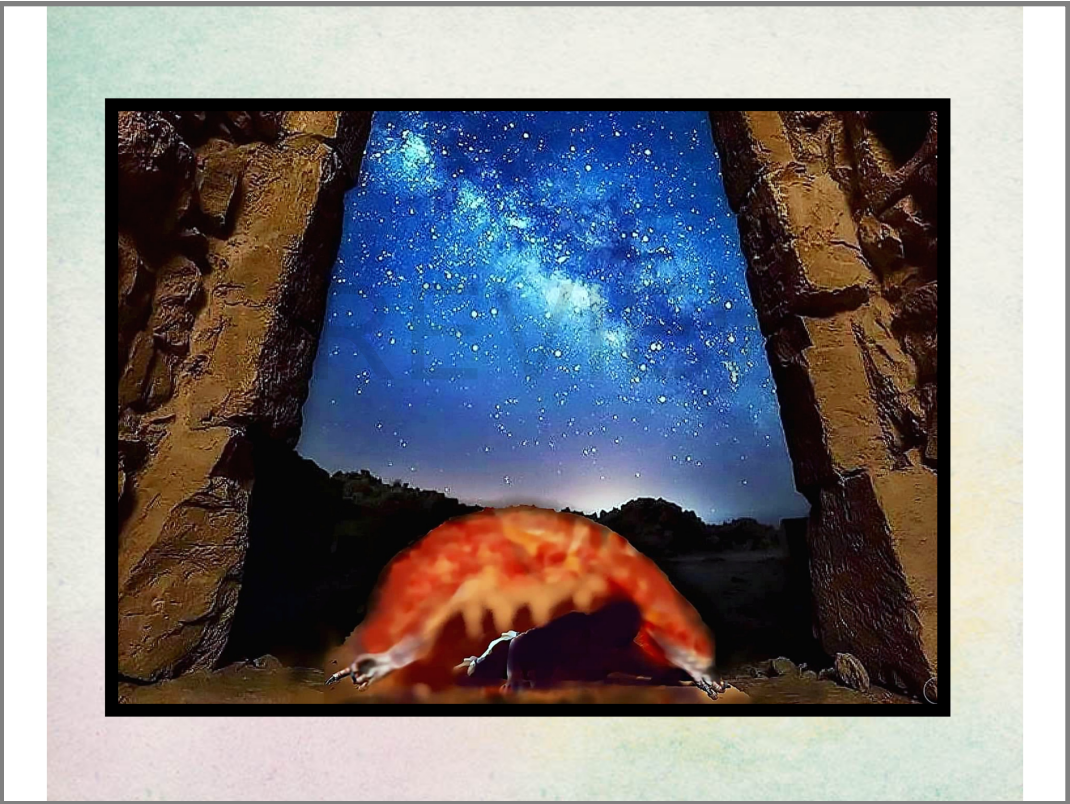












Maya scarcely gets to her feet to turn around before a devourer looms up from the desert, a creature her size in width, with a form composed of mainly a head and a gaping maw supported by the elbows of skinny arms that undulate as the beast approaches. The devourer swallows up one of the men as his partner bolts. Maya follows suit.

Maya cowers in her bedroom.

I must be going crazy!

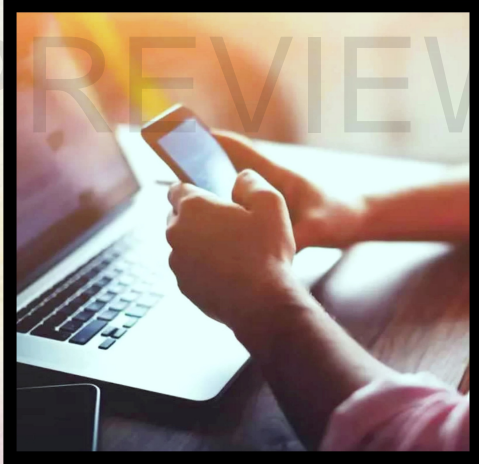


Maya calls the Israel Nature and  
Parks Authority (INPA) to report the  
following day.

Yes, hello, I'd like to report some strange  
animal on the outskirts of Beer Sheba.



OK, we will send someone to investigate.





The following evening, Maya and the INPA conservationist, Rym, a Palestinian living in Israel, meet by Ryms jeep in the desert.







The women sit inside the jeep. Rym pulls out a cigarette which Maya eyes with distaste. Rym gingerly takes Maya's cellphone as Maya offers to show Rym her company's new app called Ayin.

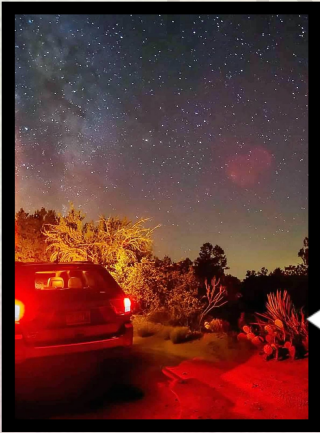
Eye? We call it that in Arabic too, Maya



Yes! A shared word. I remember that from Arabic lessons in high school. Anyway, Ayin lets you use your cellphone to see the night sky despite light pollution.

Maya and Rym are startled  
by a "thump" behind the  
jeep.

Did you hear that Maya?

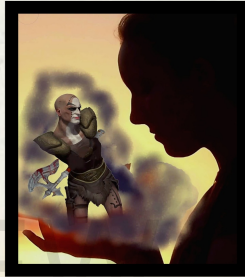


When I was out  
here the other  
night, two men  
were talking  
about the  
recent  
bombing. I  
think they were  
part of that  
death cult  
that's been on  
the news.

Death  
cult?

I looked into it,  
and apparently,  
they want to  
wipe out  
masses of  
people. They  
believe that  
resurrection  
will give  
powers to the  
risen dead.

A louder "thump" sounds.  
Anat speaks from Maya's  
cellphone. Behind you,  
Maya!



Rym, reverse the vehicle now! Something  
is tracking us, run it over!

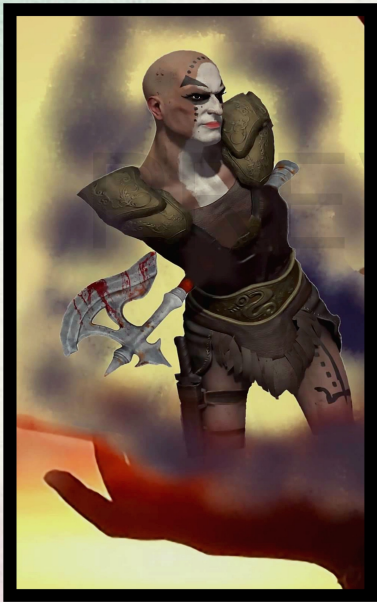
Maya glances in the rear-view  
mirror to see a devourer  
looming.

Terrified, Rym reverses  
over the devourer, and  
sand scatters.

What was that?  
What are you up to  
out here?

Rym, Nothing, I swear!



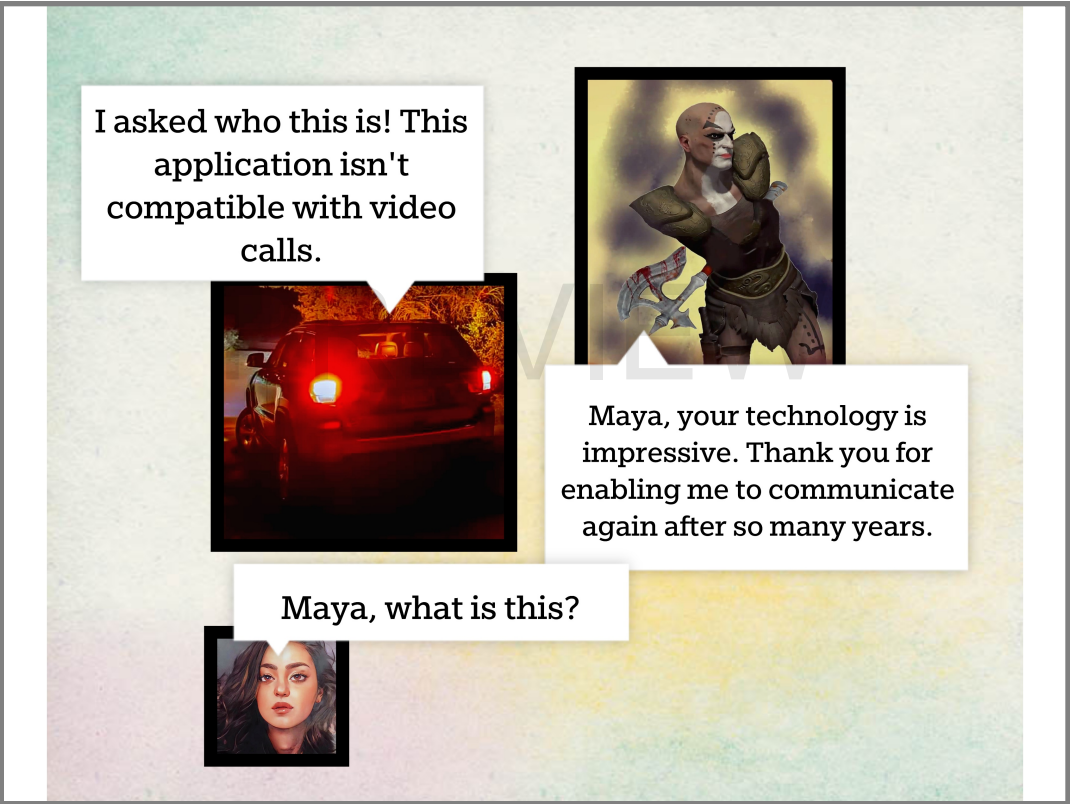



Anat's complete form now appears on Maya's cellphone screen via the Ayin app amidst the night sky as Maya holds it up again to the open sunroof.

VIEW

Ladies, no need to look so frightened. I hope you don't mind me using the English colonial language to communicate. As lovely as Hebrew and Arabic are, I am not about to take sides.



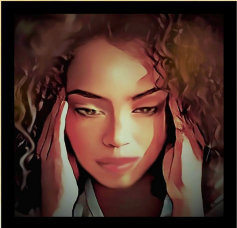


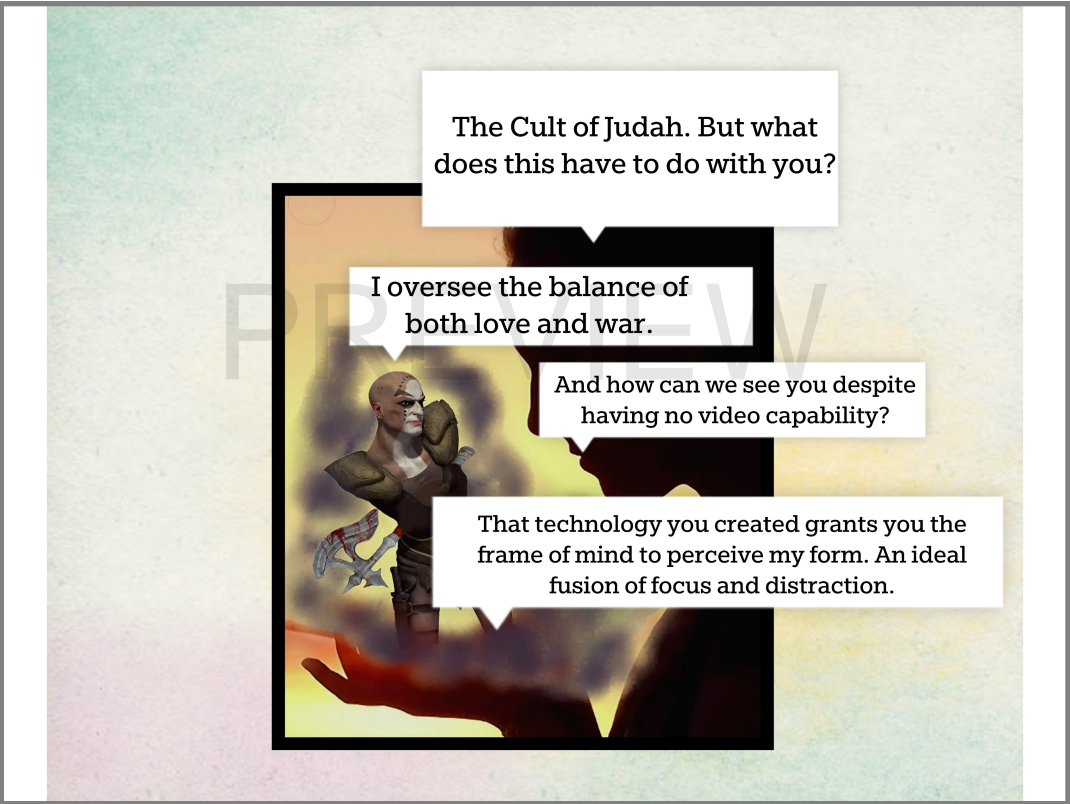


The only joke was both of your people were imposing a single deity on the region, along with a deluge of blood and war. Tell me has your invisible savior stopped the conflict that plagues your land? The rise of the desert devourers suggests not. That creature you saw last night didn't appear by chance.

Desert fury incarnate, spurred on by humans seeking to murder each other while destroying the terrain. Now that your technology enables you to see our plane, in our dimension, they have manifested again.

Those things we saw!





What's going on?



We learned about this in an engineering course on quantum mechanics. The theory goes that information isn't sure. When two people observe the same phenomenon at different times, that phenomenon is technically in a state of uncertainty between the first and second observers witnessing it. But why hide in the shadows?

Hmm, do we have a warrior?  
Very well.



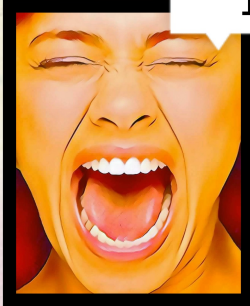


Anat shows herself now to both Maya and Rym, her form manifesting from the shadows as a grey-skinned, lithe yet androgynous figure with no arms and an ax embedded from the shoulder through the hip.

Terrified, Maya shuts off Ayin  
and shouts at Rym.

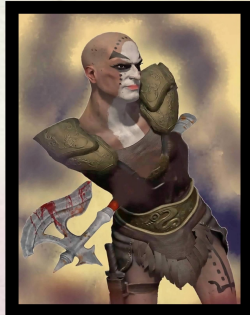
PREVIEW

DRIVE!!!!

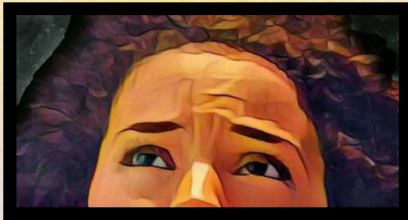
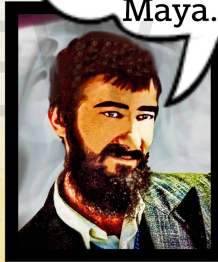


Back safely in her bedroom that night, Maya dreams of her Father.

Anat's silhouette appears, and Maya wakes startled.



Your mother wants you to come home, Maya.





PREVIEW

PREVIEW