

Crete, Home of Europe's First Civilization: The Minoan

Characters

RENALUS, a Minoan
merchant
ARIAD, his wife

LATIK, a copper merchant
SEJJ, a tin merchant

Scene I: Merchant's home, Phaistos, Crete, c. 1455 B.C.

- RENALUS:** Dear, I'm bringing home two very important clients next week. They'll be staying with us for a few days.
- ARIAD:** What? How could you? The house is a disaster with all the painters coming and going.
- RENALUS:** By the way . . . how are the new frescoes coming along?
- ARIAD:** You must be kidding. Have you forgotten, or is your mind only capable of thinking in terms of exports and imports?
- RENALUS:** Dearest wife, what are you talking about?
- ARIAD:** Before you left for your last business trip we still couldn't agree on the frescoes.
- RENALUS:** Yes, now I remember. I wanted pictures of bull-leaping and boxing. You wanted dolphins swimming in the bright blue sea. What's the verdict?
- ARIAD:** We don't have one!
- RENALUS:** Then, let's compromise . . . and you take care of the details.



- ARIAD:** Fine. Now, about your guests coming . . .
- RENALUS:** I know it's a great bother and inconvenience, but this is very, I mean, *very* important.
- ARIAD:** I think I've heard that one before.
- RENALUS:** Dear, you know how crucial bronze is to our Minoan economy . . . and that we have no copper or tin in Crete.
- ARIAD:** And these two are very, I mean, *very* big suppliers.
- RENALUS:** That's right!
- ARIAD:** So cultivating their goodwill with hospitality is smart—and necessary business.
- RENALUS:** Spoken like a true Minoan merchant's wife.
- ARIAD:** Will they be staying only here while in Crete?
- RENALUS:** No. They want to see our capital.
- ARIAD:** And so do I! I'll have the house ready for them. But just remember . . . you're not going to Knossos without me. I have some serious shopping and sightseeing to do there myself.
- RENALUS:** Anything else, dear?
- ARIAD:** Have you checked all the pithoi lately? We'll need plenty of food, drink, and oil for our guests.
- RENALUS:** We can't be low already. I just had those jars filled, and they're all taller than I am.
- ARIAD:** Very well. If we run out when your very important clients are here, don't blame me or the servants.

Scene II: Days later.

- RENALUS:** Dear, our guests have arrived. This is Latik from Cyprus, and Sejj from Asia Minor.



- ARIAD:** It's an honor to open our home to such important visitors.
- LATIK:** The honor is all ours. Here is a gift in appreciation of your generous hospitality . . .
- SEJJ:** And a tribute to your great beauty.
- ARIAD:** You are both so kind and thoughtful. Thank you.
- LATIK:** It is a rare and great pleasure for us to socialize with a woman.
- SEJJ:** Where we come from, the sexes are always separated.
- RENALUS:** Not in Crete. You'll see women everywhere.
- LATIK:** So we have observed. Tell us, why do your women have such fair skin and wear beautiful clothes, while your men look like the copper I sell, and dress rather plainly?
- RENALUS:** I suppose because we're always hard at work.
- ARIAD:** Watch it, dear husband.
- SEJJ:** I'm sorry . . . we did not intend to stir up a hornet's nest.
- ARIAD:** Nothing of the kind. We debate all the time and keep on good terms. Now, let me show you two the house and where you'll stay.
- LATIK:** House? This is a palace! It's beautiful!
- ARIAD:** Compared to the great homes of Knossos, this is rather modest.
- SEJJ:** Ha! Our homes on the mainland are primitive huts compared to this.
- LATIK:** How did your builders achieve such engineering feats . . .



- SEJJ:** As this staircase and three stories?
- ARIAD:** They've had lots of practice.
- LATIK:** What do you mean by that?
- RENALUS:** My wife is referring to our frequent earthquakes. A few hundred years ago earthquakes destroyed all our great palaces.
- ARIAD:** Instead of moving elsewhere, we Minoans simply built them more grand.
- SEJJ:** Your interior walls are so bright and beautiful! This painting of dolphins is so colorful, so fresh and natural looking.
- LATIK:** By comparison, our art seems dull and stiff.
- ARIAD:** Why, thank you. These are special paintings called "frescoes."
- RENALUS:** Hmm. Dear . . . where are my pictures of boxers and bull-leapers?
- ARIAD:** Oh . . . Follow me, please, to the men's bathroom.
- RENALUS:** I just knew she'd have them painted there!
- SEJJ:** What's this? I've never seen anything like it!
- RENALUS:** Here's where the water comes in . . . and there are the pipes that drain it away. We're very proud of our plumbing system.
- LATIK:** Do you mean you can bring fresh water into this room, and drain it away after using it? In my home we have to haul it to and fro in earthen jars. It's a back-breaking job.
- ARIAD:** See for yourself. We Minoans love beautiful things, but above all, we love what is practical and efficient.



- RENALUS:** Some people say our ships and plumbing best represent our culture.
- ARIAD:** I'd say it's our art and architecture.
- SEJJ:** What about your leisure and entertainment activities?
- RENALUS:** They tell a lot about us, too. When we're in the capital, you'll see bull-leaping at its best. It's our favorite amusement. I've already reserved our seats.
- ARIAD:** I hope you can still count to four. Don't forget who's coming along

***Scene III: Royal palace, Knossos,
Crete, days later.***

- LATIK:** Your capital is immense! How many inhabitants?
- RENALUS:** At least 80,000.
- SEJJ:** Amazing! It must be the greatest city in the world!
- RENALUS:** I'll leave that judgment to others . . . but I believe you'll find our entertainment as graceful and pulse-stopping as our great city.
- LATIK:** You mean the bull-leaping? What exactly is it?
- RENALUS:** Once we're in our seats we'll explain. Follow me.
- (They enter the stadium.)*
- ARIAD:** What do you see in the ring?
- LATIK:** Three very trim and athletic-looking youths. Two females and one male, each about 16 years old.



- SEJJ:** Now they're all doing flips and somersaults. I can't believe how agile they are!
- RENALUS:** They're just warming up. Now, all is ready!
- ARIAD:** When the bull is loose, one of the team will dive between its horns, do a half flip onto the bull's back, push off with her hands, and make another half flip into the waiting arms of the catcher.
- RENALUS:** All in about one second.
- LATIK:** No! Impossible! Unless the bull remains still it can't be done!
- RENALUS:** Just watch!
- SEJJ:** That bull won't stay still. Look at him charge!
- LATIK:** I can't look.
- SEJJ:** She did it! Right through the horns of the charging bull!
- ARIAD:** The three will now switch roles—leaper, catcher, and next leaper—and do it again.
- LATIK:** Amazing! Do they ever get hurt?
- ARIAD:** Yes, when they are not careful.
- SEJJ:** Speaking of being careful, don't you Minoans worry about the growing power of the mainland Mycenaeans?
- RENALUS:** I don't follow you.
- SEJJ:** You have such a prosperous and advanced culture . . . a most inviting treasure to foreigners.
- LATIK:** But we've seen no walls protecting your cities. The great fort at Mycenae looks like giants built it!



- SEJJ:** Yes. It's the one with the Lions Gate.
- ARIAD:** The great cliffs of our island serve as fortress walls. We are not anxious.
- LATIK:** But the Mycenaeans are very aggressive, very warlike. You Minoans live for beauty and refinement. Mycenaeans live for conquest!
- RENALUS:** Have you forgotten about our great fleet? It is most formidable and experienced.
- ARIAD:** It's kept out invaders for many, many years.
- RENALUS:** And cleaned the Aegean of pirates who used to threaten our merchant ships.
- ARIAD:** Besides, why should the Mycenaeans want to invade us? We've traded peacefully with them for a long time.
- RENALUS:** In fact, many of them live here. We interact with them all the time.
- SEJJ:** All the same, I don't trust them. They remind me of the bull we just saw. They'll take advantage of any weakness . . . so be on your guard!
- RENALUS:** Enough serious talk. Let's eat!

