



From the very beginnings of being, the huge ash tree Yggdrasil rode the crests of time. At its roots rose the Spring of Knowledge where the three Norns tirelessly spun the strands of fate, weaving them into an enormous tapestry. Worlds adorned the tree like heavy fruit: Helheim, realm of the goddess of the earth Erda; frigid Jotunheim, realm of the mighty giants; Nibelheim in whose bowels Nibelung dwarves mined gold and silver; Asgard where gods dwelt, and amid it all Midgard, the world of men.



The most coveted and terrifying treasure across all Yggdrasil shone atop a rock amid the powerful current of the mighty Rhine: a lump of gold that was a fleck from the eye of Ymir. Three mermaid sisters guarded it, together with an improbable curse: only he who had renounced love could hold it in his hand. He would have to uproot love from his very soul. Many had perished because of the passion for the rock, or the Rheingold; indeed, not a day passed without a desperate drowning, for the gold also promised an immeasurable prize: Legend had it that a ring made of it would allow its holder to govern all worlds, subjecting them to its will. Oft had Wotan, the supreme god, sighed after the might the Father Rhine washed in his waves.

Another who also sighed after the gold was Alberich, King of Nibelheim and all Nibelungs. He was an exceptional metalsmith and unsurpassed sorcerer renowned far and wide. Yet, he knew no peace since the day Wotan had told him of the Rheingold.

In his underground realm, he hoarded treasure uncounted, yet he wanted much more: both gold and power. And so great were his avarice and yearning, he succeeded where all others had failed.



Now, why would the god share secrets of the Rheingold and the ring with me..?

Oh, He and Loge have cheated me so many times!

"You lose nothing if you tear it away from your heart!,"... Well, true enough: no hole would be left in your soul.

"Love is greatly overestimated, my friend!," said he.

"To have dominion over all... Not to have anyone question your word... Not to even need your word..." are worth many times more than trifling emotions like love...



But why would Wotan tell me that truth?

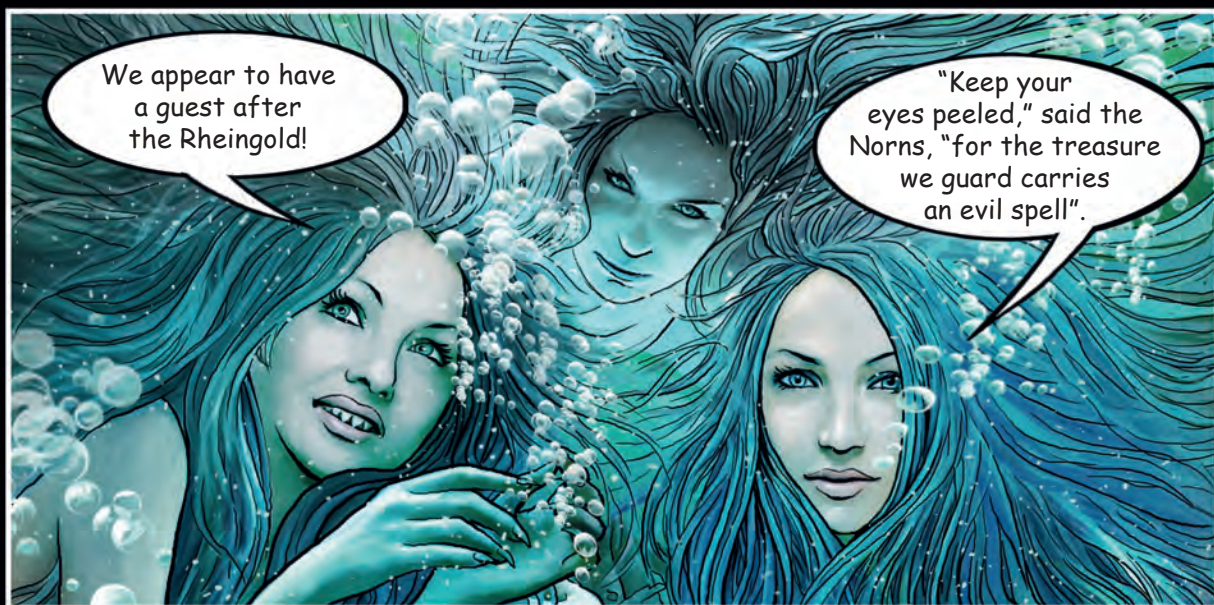
Day after day, he tirelessly trod down any love in his soul and armoured his heart against friendship and goodness... And once he was entirely certain that gold alone held worth in his soul, he left the gates of Nibelheim and descended the slope to the foaming Rhine.



The dwarf lurched down the twisting path between the riverbank rocks, slipping all the while and threatening to fly into the river at each step.



Alberich might have been King of the Nibelungs, but was completely devoid of any nobility in his looks, despite his renown as unsurpassed sorcerer and skilled jeweller.





But just look what
I've brought you,
me beauties!

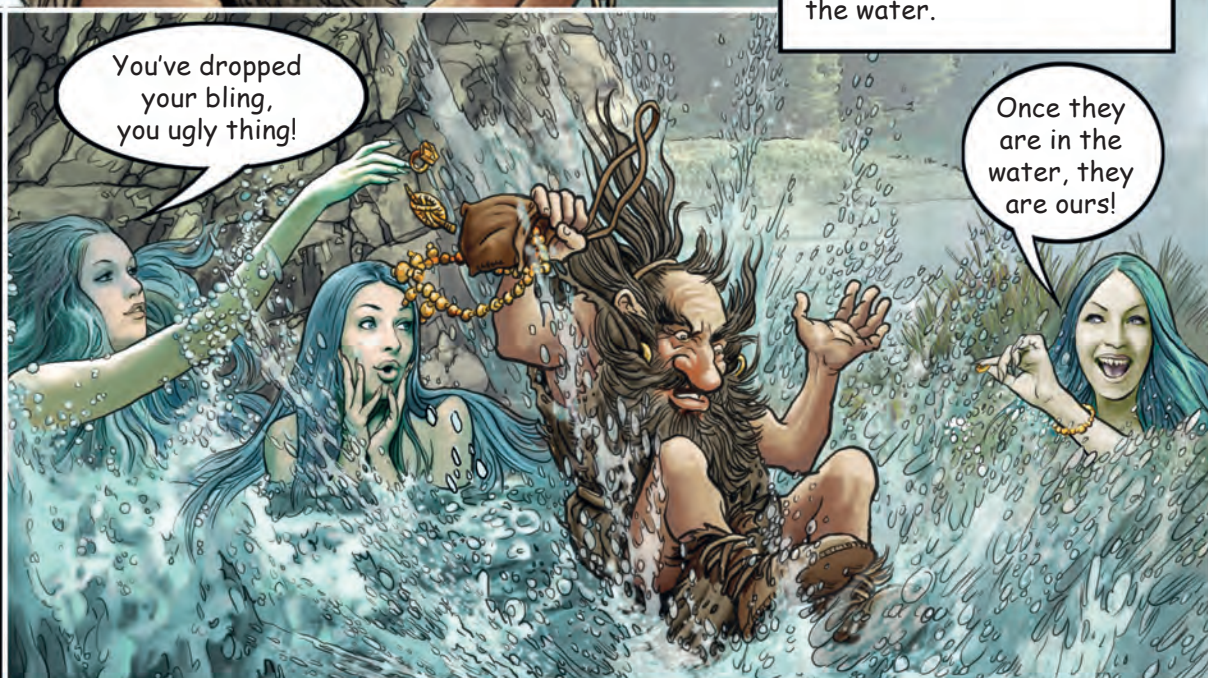
Let me just touch you
with the tip of me finger and
to stroke your silken hair
and your marble skin!

You've come to bribe
us with baubles again,
eh?



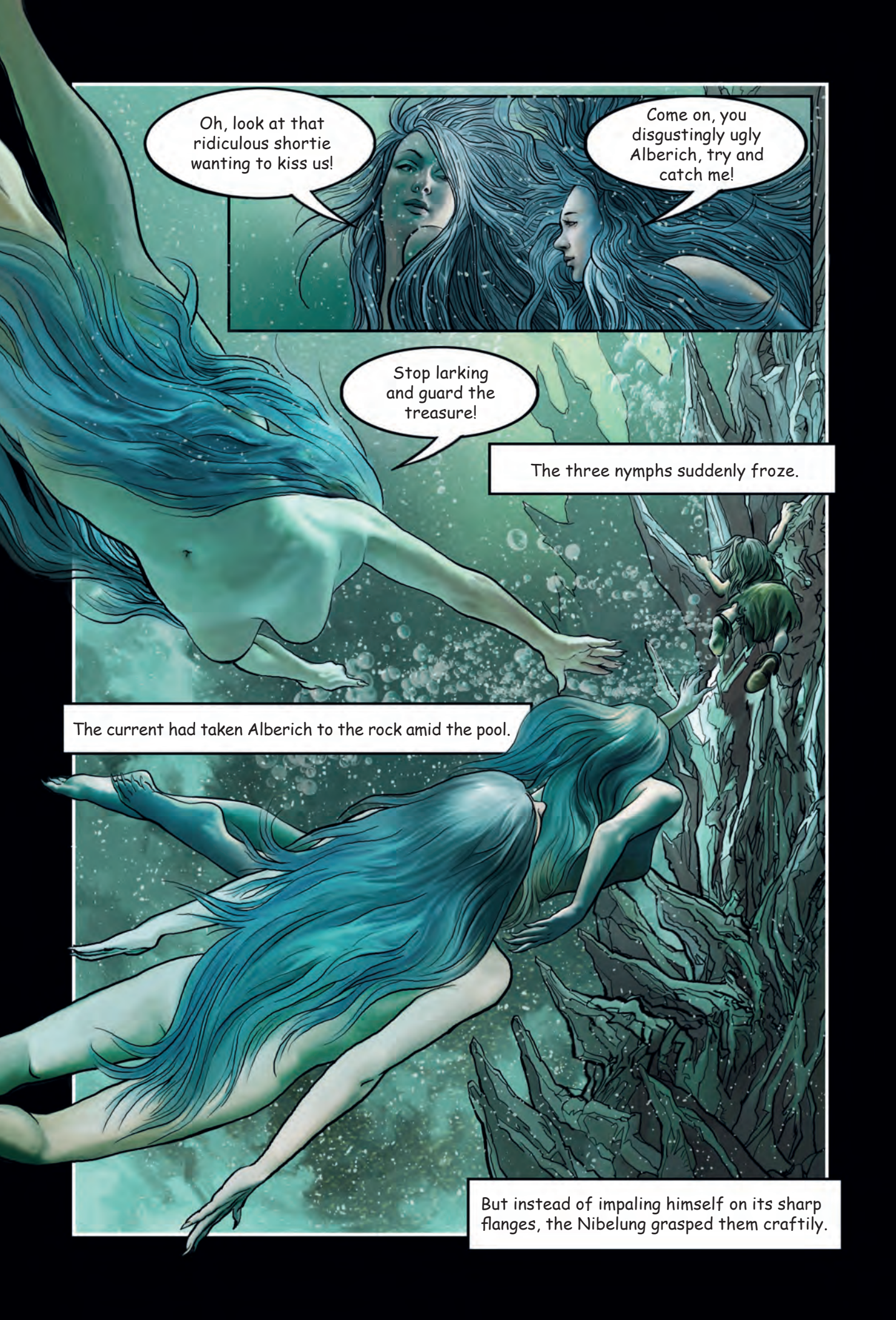
Who? I?
Why, just look at them
beauties I have brought
you, all in exchange for
but one kiss!

Alberich slipped, slid along
his back and plopped into
the water.



You've dropped
your bling,
you ugly thing!

Once they
are in the
water, they
are ours!



Oh, look at that ridiculous shortie wanting to kiss us!

Come on, you disgustingly ugly Alberich, try and catch me!

Stop larking and guard the treasure!

The three nymphs suddenly froze.

The current had taken Alberich to the rock amid the pool.

But instead of impaling himself on its sharp flanges, the Nibelung grasped them craftily.

Flop, flap, and he was clear of the water.

Ugly, eh?!
Disgusting, eh?!
A disgustingly repellent visage, you say?

Flop, flip, and he had reached the hollow.

You silly self-loving fish-heads!
Well, I spit on your love!
Little do I need it!

Flip, flap, and he grasped the Rheingold in both hands ...

How much is love worth, compared to the world, eh?

The Rhine foamed, sending white-crested waves to stretch and grab the defiant thief at the rock. All in vain: sorcery guarded the Nibelung and not a drop wet him.



I renounce love!
Unto eternity, I uproot this
useless weed to the last
trace!

I exchange it with
joy at dominion over
the entire world!

You shall only now
learn who Alberich,
King of the Nibelungs,
really is!

The evil deed done, the following instant the dwarf
disappeared.