



ABSURDIST

#2 OF 5

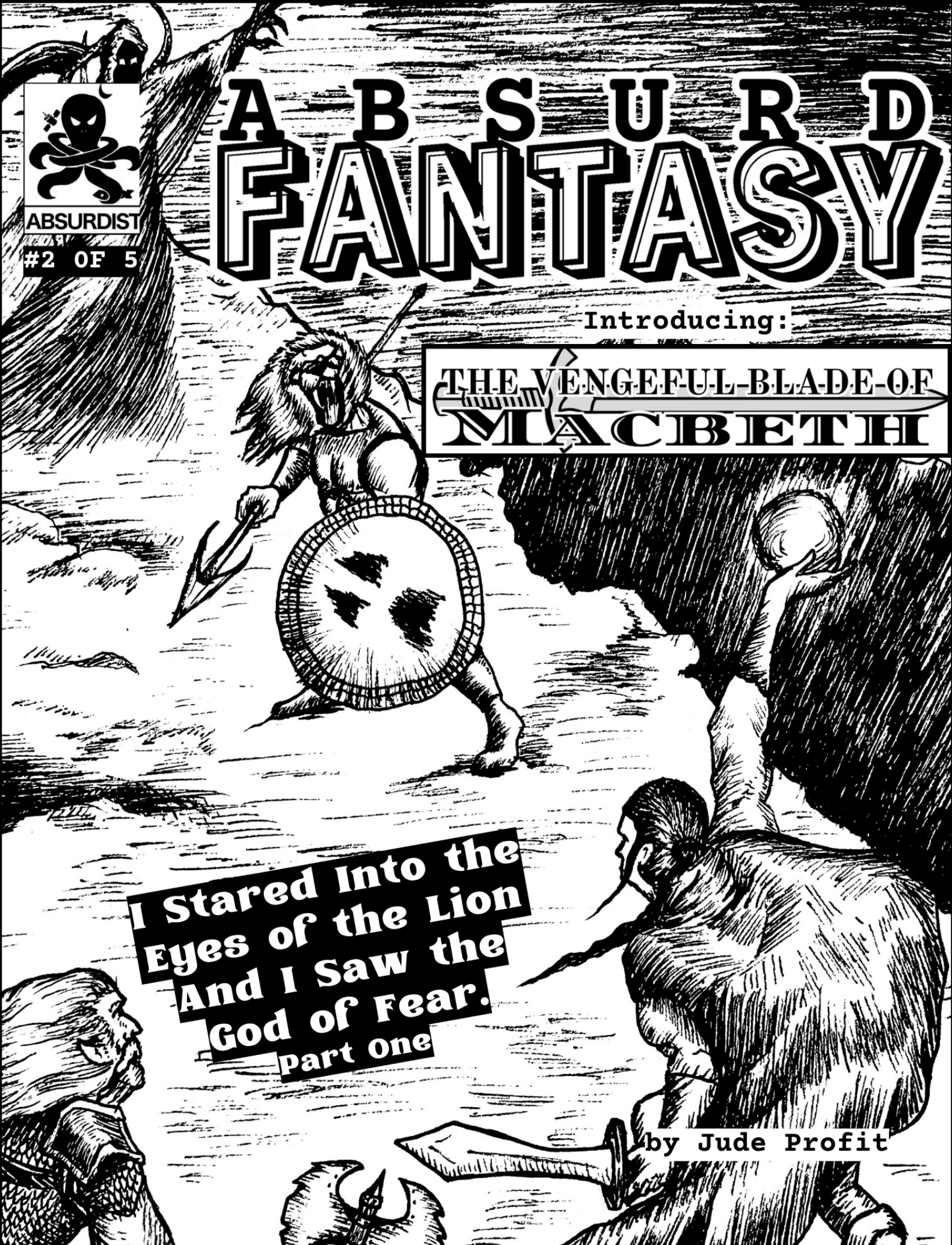
# A B S U R D FANTASY

Introducing:

THE VENGEFUL-BLADE-OF  
MACBETH

I Stared Into the  
Eyes of the Lion  
And I Saw the  
God of Fear.  
part one

by Jude Profit



WHAT ARE YOU DOING NOW?

i am creating. for it is what i was born to do.

WHY DO YOU CONTINUE THIS VENTURE, OLD FRIEND?  
YOU KNOW HOW THIS WILL END. ONE DAY, THIS QUAIN'T REALM  
YOU'VE BUILT WILL BE CONSUMED WITHIN ME.  
THERE IS NO ESCAPE.

i have a finite amount of time, yes, but that does not mean what i do is  
devoid of meaning. the building of this universe, these universes, is the  
meaning itself.

AH, YOU SAID THE KEY WORD. FINITE.  
REMEMBER THAT YOU DESIGNED THE GAME THIS WAY.  
YOU HAD THE OPPORTUNITY LONG AGO TO STOP ME.  
YET YOU DIDN'T.  
I HAVE A THEORY AS TO WHY.  
YOU KNOW I AM RIGHT.  
THE VOID IS THE ONLY MEANING.

and may i ask whatever it is that you bring to the proceedings, brother?  
war? famine? genocide? anger? fear? these things have no meaning.  
they are chaotic, just as you are.  
you have a random nature and it is my duty to seek meaning  
in the meaninglessness that you have wrought.

I CANNOT HELP IT.  
AS YOU SAID BEFORE,  
IT IS WHAT I WAS BORN TO DO.  
YOU SHOULD KNOW. WE WERE BORN TOGETHER.

and we shall die together. the first and the last, i suppose.

I SUPPOSE.  
WHAT IS IT THAT YOU ARE CREATING ANYWAY?

i don't know.

something.

A B S U R D  
FANTASY

ABSURDIST PRESS PRESENTS:

# THE VENGEFUL-BLADE-OF MACBETH

## *I STARED INTO THE EYES OF THE LION AND I SAW THE GOD OF FEAR PART ONE OF TWO*

Story by Jude Profit | Art by Kira Glass | Originally Published 2021 | First Printing 2024

Macbeth stood on the surface of the planet, dwarfed by the creature on the horizon. Its mere presence nearly blinded him. He held his ancient hand up to his youthful face to get a better look. About the size of a star, it glowed as sparks flickered through its gelatinous being. Suspended in the core, a white hot nucleus of pure energy. It had no face. It barely had a form. Expanding by the second, it twitched and seethed. An Hourglass Goliath. Nothing Macbeth hadn't seen before, but this one was massive. Small celestial objects began orbiting around it, thousands of tendrils came from its edges, a sea of arms reaching out into the void. The wizard's green and black robes bristled as winds of cosmic dust blew past him: tachyons. They were flying towards the Goliath. The horizon started to shift and morph. Large spires broke up into the skyline, quickly cut through with massive mountains, then crashing waves, then shimmering bursts of hot magma. The commotion sent beings of all shapes and sizes slowly coming into being only to crumble into dust a moment later. There was no question about it. Time was collapsing. And this big, glowing bastard was right at the

center of it. Macbeth levitated himself from the surface, his long black cloak flying wildly behind him. He attempted to construct an artificial atmosphere. He could feel the air seeping out of his lungs. He would have to generate air the whole time his plan would be executed. Luckily, the first school of magic he mastered was that of the elements.

"Really? You're gonna fly up to the thing?" A nagging voice came from Macbeth's hip. "If you ask me, we should be back at the Kilt drinking ourselves to death."

"I need to get close." The wizard spoke to his sword. "And I happen to like linear time. Being trapped in a collapsing timeline is a nightmare beyond depth."

"Speaking from personal experience?"

"No." Macbeth turned around to face the once desolate planet, now a mutating blob of everything it once was. He held both hands forward and the planet began to shrink, crushing down into a central, hot core with particles orbiting quickly around it. "But you hear...things." Macbeth found that he couldn't do both spells at once. He had to focus on the planet if it were to have any use to him. So he let go, trusting the air in his

lungs. He brought his right hand backwards. The planet pulled into a long needle of molten white plasma. Flames spilled around it, spinning into a green frenzy. The wizard turned around and, with all his will power, sent the celestial spear careening into the center of the Goliath. The nucleus at the center of its being split open, sending an explosion of energy throughout the cosmos. Macbeth tumbled through a sea of colors, his force field broken from the sheer force of the monster's demise. He promptly passed out.

"Hey!" the sword yelled. "We need to get out of here." Barely awake, Macbeth brought his middle fingers and thumbs into a point below him and threw his hands open. A glowing, purple portal opened up. He fell through and immediately hit a rotted wooden floor. A massive wave of glimmering particles and debris followed him as the portal closed.

"Macbeth!" The dwarven bartender bellowed. "You've finally returned!" The wizard had landed in the Tattered Kilt. Odd and colorful characters were getting wasted on the finest swill an extra-dimensional asteroid could offer. Using his sword as a cane, Macbeth got up and walked towards the bartender, pulling small bits of space rock out of his long, braided hair.

"How long has it been for you, Gilgrim?" Macbeth tapped his gloved hand on the counter twice. Gilgrim Hammerfist, the redheaded owner of the Kilt, started to pour him his usual: Olympian Wine with a slice of lime as a garnish.

"Aye, about three quarters, give or take. You?" Gilgrim's deep voice echoed throughout the tavern, cutting through the soft wall of drunken conversations.

"A few days." The wizard's accent was indecipherable, but it showed that Greek was the base of his understanding of speech. "It took me a long while to conjure the

energy, but I finally tracked down where that temporal anomaly was." Macbeth took half of his drink down in a swift gulp. The second he put it down, Gilgrim pounded the bar and the glass was instantly full again.

"Was it what I suspected? Did you bring me its blood?"

"I was too busy throwing Galabrea at it." Macbeth sucked down the last of his second drink. Before Gilgrim could pound the table again, the wizard stood up and walked behind the bar.

"Two drinks, really? For the man who once went shot for shot with Dionysus?"

"Dionysus is a lightweight. I need to clear my head. I'm going for a walk." Macbeth opened the farthest door to the left, painted with thousands of symbols that all combined together into a gelatinous blob of scribbles. Behind it was a staircase, covered in lights of all different kinds: torches, oil lamps, singular light-bulbs. There was even a fluorescent light Macbeth had stolen from the ceiling of a Walmart.

"I suppose the books are good scenery." Gilgrim cleaned a glass, a towel in his massive, stumpy hands.

"I'm not walking in the library, old friend. Tonight, I'm walking in the astral plane."

"Why yes! It is Thursday."

Macbeth's headquarters was the bottom of the Tattered Kilt. The whole bottom. You see, this wasn't just any tavern on any asteroid. It sat under a massive asteroid the size of a small moon, in a pocket dimension outside of space time. Outside of even existence itself. The whys and hows of this asteroid's placement lead to nothing interesting, just a happy accident. Given what the wizard usually does with his days, having something that could survive the collapse of

the multiverse was really in his drunken best interest.

It wasn't until around the 1950s when Macbeth started to carve out the inside of the asteroid, creating a labyrinth of shelved walls decorated with ancient and strange relics from over the years. The labyrinth did beget specific rooms, though, and one of those rooms contained the wizard, soaking in a hot bath, surrounded by candles, listening to a violin. The violin was floating and playing itself in the corner, but that's beside the point. Macbeth brought a straight razor up to his face to rid it of stubble. He cupped his hands and brought a swish of soapy water up to his face. The thing about space particles is that they tend to get everywhere. Once he had gotten a good scrub in, he stepped out of the tub, steam emanating from his body as a thin aura of flames surrounded him. He put his long, wavy hair into a bun and put on a pair of brown pantaloons and a grey tunic.

The wizard walked through the halls of his domain, running his fingers along his endless collection of tomes. After making it down a few loops in the asteroid, he came to a room with a small summoning circle in the middle of it. Macbeth held his hand up and mumbled a few ancient, powerful words, too sacred for mortal men. His eyes closed peacefully as the room lit up with bright yellow energy.

The ancient wizard opened his eyes and found himself standing in a city, fog covering the bright colorful lights in the horizon. The towers in front of him went up into the sky infinitely and the street before him was bustling with activity. Macbeth looked out of place, because he was the only one with a completely solid form. He was in the astral plane. Between the dominion of the living and the gods. Populated with any dead that didn't have a specific afterlife as well as

slain ethereal beings: angels, the Valkyries of Valhalla, Djinns, those sorts of things. Macbeth started walking, beginning his search for his lost friend. He lost Pierre in the snow of the Swiss alps a few years back. The wizard has searched through the records of every earthly afterlife and never found him. Now he just walks around this place, hoping one day to find him. It was going to be hard, as the astral plane was infinitely expanding, but he figured as long as he split it off into sections, he'd eventually cover the whole thing.

So he began his walk, cutting down different intersections as he saw fit. He brought a lot of turned heads along with him, giving him the opportunity to look into everyone's face. Because of his distinctly alive presence, most gave him ample room to walk by, other than a seraphim who knocked him to the side with an odd number of wings. Suddenly, another material being came into his presence. Aside from the nun get-up that accompanied her, her presence was familiar to Macbeth.

"Macbeth." The Oracle said dryly.

"Oracle." Macbeth looked down and away from her. "If you're looking for my help, you can see that I'm busy and you'll have to find somebody else."

"This is going to interest you, trust me."

"What?"

"I can't tell you here. Come to the convent. It'll be more private."

"Why did you go through all the trouble of coming here if you can't tell me what's going on?"

"I'm not the one who kicked me out of the Tattered Kilt, now am I?"

"You let a Leviathan loo- You know what? I'm not getting into it right now. I'll be at the convent in an hour. Happy?"

“Thank you. I’ll see you then.” The Oracle dipped her head back and took a deep breath. A beam of light shot down from the sky and enveloped her, quickly disappearing along with the nun. Macbeth followed suit, closing his eyes. As he opened them, his body was violently thrown back into the Infinite Library, knocking over a few candles in the process. He propped himself up on his elbows, breathing heavily as he slowly regained his composure. Having your soul suddenly thrown back into your body from another plane of existence is never a pleasant process.

It was raining in London when a flash of purple light suddenly lit up an otherwise desolate alleyway. Macbeth stepped through, clad in a standard three-piece suit, his sword at his hip and his cloak flowing behind him. He closed the portal and brought up the collar of his cloak against the wind. Walking into the crowded streets, he saw a news bulletin on a television in a bar he passed. Three people were murdered in Pittsburgh today\*. Typical. The wizard felt his sword shake ever so slightly as it began to speak to him.

“Ooo, can we stop by there?” The blade’s shrill voice echoed through Macbeth’s head. “Triple homicide is hard to come by these days. I bet if we do a quick stop in the Steel City, I could track the guy down in ten minutes.”

“Last time we searched for a murderer in Pittsburgh, we never found him.” The wizard replied in his standard, stoic tone. “You say you can spot an evil soul from thousands of miles away, but let’s be honest, you’re getting a little rusty. Plus, Pittsburgh is in good hands. We have more important matters to attend to.” Looking past his immediate surroundings, Macbeth could see glares from passersby. Nothing too strong, but

just enough that he was now aware that no one else could hear his sidearm.

“Who you callin’ rusty? And while we’re at it, what important business? You’re just seeing the old ball and chain. What was even the point of you splitting if she wasn’t going to stay the old ball and chain?”

“I know when the Oracle has something worthwhile to say. She understands the inner-workings of Earthly cosmologies even better than I do. If she thinks there’s something that I should deal with, I’ll take her word for it.”

“Why should you even trust her at this point? She’s lied to you before.”

“She’s been a nun for a few years now. Maybe people can change.” The wizard turned to his left and saw his destination across the street: St. Kevin’s Priory. “Stranger things have happened.” He saw the Oracle standing on the steps, holding a tall, black umbrella in one hand and a lit cigarette in the other. She cracked a familiar grin and waved at Macbeth. He lifted up a hand half-heartedly before crossing the street to meet her. “That’s a disgusting habit.”

The Oracle took a puff before blowing everything she could into the wizard’s face. “Cosmic awareness can give you some of the worst stress headaches, sue me.” She dropped the cigarette and stomped it out. “This is also hilarious coming from the drunkard.”

“What do you want?” Macbeth crossed his arms and grimaced.

“I told you, I can only speak about it in private.” She walked up to the front doors and held one open for him. “Please, come in.” Macbeth begrudgingly followed. This convent was falling apart. The wood that held up the once beautiful architecture was warped, one side dripping water into a bucket on the ground. Only a few candles were lighting the front of the chapel, doing a much

better job of the lights on the ceiling. The Oracle walked down one of the back pews, Macbeth following shortly behind her. They sat down and she grabbed his hands. Flinching, the wizard took them away quickly.

“Do you really need to touch me?”

“I need to show you what I saw. I sense a great disturbance in our near future.”

Macbeth’s sword rattled and its shrill voice rang in his ear “I see a great disturbance in your face if you don’t get to the point in the near future!”

“Fine.” The wizard agreed. “Just make it quick.” She grasped his hands as hard as she could. They both closed their eyes and their visions came together as one, the Oracle’s memories taking over. They saw a Korean city on fire, people running in various directions wailing and panicking. Sparks flew from electrical lines as a singular figure began to step into sight. It was a man, clad in ancient, rusted armor. The chaos seemed to spiral out of control, buildings slowly crumbling from the sheer power of his aura as he stepped closer and closer. He had no head. In one hand was a long wooden spear. In the other was the severed head of a lion, its jaw drooping down and its eyes glowing with a hot, white anger. The beams and lights from the lion’s eyes shone like a lantern through the ever-growing smoke. The figure stood for a few moments before attaching the lion’s head to his own neck, the jaw locking back into place as a black, fiery aura enveloped him. In an instant, he was gone, leaving a terrible and tragic scene behind him. Macbeth opened his eyes. Sweat dripped down his brow as he looked into the eyes of his former lover. The Oracle looked at him with concerned eyes.

“Now you can see why I wanted to tell you in private.” She explained. “The god of fear has returned.”

“Phobos.” Macbeth whispered. He stood up quickly and started towards the door. “I don’t believe you. I know that Zeus vaporized Phobos and Deimos for starting the War of the Roses. You’re just showing me some kind of illusion. Sending me on a wild goose chase. Frankly, I don’t have the time.”

“I don’t do things like that anymore. I’ve changed.”

“You’ve said that the last few dozen times you’ve felt guilty, but we both know where you return to once you get bored with the simple life. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have a universe to defend.”

“Macbeth!” The Oracle stood up and shouted, her voice echoing throughout the chapel. “I promise you, I’m not lying. I saw this when I was doing my sweep this morning. Please, you’re the only one that could possibly stop him.”

“I’m the only one?” Macbeth stopped and chuckled. “There’s a whole pantheon that you could be asking for your help, why come to me?”

“Our pantheon has barely had any power in this realm for years and you know it. But somehow, there are enough people worshipping Phobos to bring him back from the dead. Something is happening and as long as he has power on Earth, he is a threat. I thought that’s what you dealt with, love.”

“She thinks she can call you love?” Macbeth’s blade spoke and rattled. The wizard put his hand on it and sighed.

“When did that happen? Your vision.” Macbeth asked.

“Just this morning,” said the Oracle. “In Chongjin, North Korea.”

“Why North Korea?”

“What better place for a god of fear to gain power than a place where fear is the entire culture?”

“Fair enough. I’ll give the place a once over. If what you showed me happened this morning, then I doubt things are much different by now.” Macbeth looked to both sides before bringing his fingers into a figure eight point at his waist. “Can I go now?”

“I would ask that you do it in the alley,” The Oracle looked upon the empty chapel. “But our congregation has shrunk a little. You’re welcome, by the way.”

“That has never gotten anybody to say thank you.” The wizard opened a portal and fell through the ring of purple light into the streets of Chongjin. He would usually be more discreet about this, but he figured everybody’s already living out their actual nightmares. He was surprised to find no screaming people. Nobody rolling around on the floor or trying to break everything in sight. No. This street was completely silent. There were still sparks flying off electrical lines, and some buildings had a small amount of rubble fallen off of them. But it was a ghost town.

“So the bitch was lying?” The Sword asked.

“I’m not sure. Something definitely happened here. I can just feel the negative energy that something...” Macbeth noticed a man look out of a window at him. “or someone left here.” The man in the window quickly ran from back into his house and shut the blinds. Macbeth walked across the street and looked around the building. Everyone who noticed him would shut their blinds. “Maybe participant observation isn’t the play here.” He opened a portal on the wall of the building and walked through the threshold into the Tattered Kilt. Gilgrim Hammerfist

was pouring a mead for Q’onos Ortenza, a half-orc regular.

“You know you could just use the stairs.” Gilgrim said dryly.

“I went out for a bit. Could you come down to the library with me?” The wizard walked behind the bar and to the door of his lair.

“I’m busy with the tavern, my good friend. Why spend all my day looking at books when I could be looking at bottles?” Gilgrim’s voice boomed as he gestured freely with his hands.

“We’re going to fight a god.”

Gilgrim’s eyes widened as he stood in silence for a moment. He reached under the bar and brought an empty bowl onto the bar. “Honor system. Please pay for your drinks! Or don’t.” The two then headed down into the Infinite Library. A raucous cheer filled the tavern as they left. “What is this about? What god are we fighting? Can I bring my axe?”

“I wouldn’t ask you to join a fight if you weren’t allowed to bring your axe.” They walked down a seemingly endless spiral of loops. Macbeth walked as though he was walking down to the store. Gilgrim walked like he was walking through a labyrinth, which of course, he was. “To answer your first two questions, I’d first like to show you a book.”

“I’d rather not read, I’m a little out of practice.”

Macbeth stopped and pulled a thick, green tome out of the wall. A black title was emblazoned on the cover: *The Life and Death of the Pantheon*. “Luckily for you, I only need to show you a picture. This is the last book Athena wrote before she couldn’t leave Olympus anymore. She not only had a way with words, but a way with the brushstroke too.” He opened the book towards the end. There was a painting of a young Greek

warrior, locks of curly brown hair coming down around his helmet. He was clad in shiny, bronze armor. With one knee raised on a stone, he presented the severed head of a lion to a crowd of wounded soldiers. The piece was labelled "Phobos on the Hill". "He was a god in my day. The god of fear to be more precise. This was his first battle. The head became his totem after that. I thought he was dead, but enough people believe in him now to have brought back a freakish version of him."

"How freakish?"

"He still has the lion's head, but not his. He wears it as a false countenance." Macbeth put the book back in its place and turned to face his friend. "Except when he doesn't. Gilgrim, I have to warn you. His totem is very dangerous. I'm going to go in with a pendant that projects a psionic seal. I can give you one if you want."

"Jewelry doesn't spark my fancy, I have to say." Gilgrim said as the two continued down the halls of the library. "Why do you need a psionic seal?"

"His totem shows you your greatest fear. It leaves the victim in a panic state, barely able to do much for a few hours and forever twisting your mind. He would take it into battle and practically paralyze his enemies with it."

"Seems cruel."

"He is. That's why I need to stop him. If it even is him."

"You suspect it may be someone else?"

"I wouldn't rule it out. But there was something specific about the energy left at the scene, if it is Phobos, he's changed since I last saw him. He had a head before he died, which is the thing that perplexes me the most. I wonder what has changed."

"Death can do a lot to a man."

"Speaking from personal experience?"

"No," The two came into a massive room in the middle of the asteroid filled with various trinkets and wonders of the world. It was Macbeth's study. "I haven't really asked." Macbeth closed his cloak around his body, before quickly opening it again, changing his suit to his signature green and black robes.

He walked towards a globe in the side of the room, set in between an enchanting podium and an aquarium filled with fantastic creatures from his travels. Running his finger along the globe's equator, it began spinning, a sea of colors projected from its entire surface. This wasn't any globe. It was one of the only universe's cosmological globes. The wizard hovered his other hand over the globe. As he did so, some colors became more prominent than others. The sea had mostly devolved into greens, yellows, and reds. The latter of which scared away one of the tentacled creatures in his aquarium. "And what would you happen to be doing?"

"I'm looking through energy signatures from around the Earth at the moment I left." The wizard slowly adjusted the globe to stop in one place. Two dense spots of red light were focused on the surface. One in North Korea. Another on an Indonesian island. "Specifically godly energy. Godly powers are a kind of magic in the way that an atom bomb is a kind of bullet. They're really easy to track." He pointed toward Chongjin. "I was here, which means Phobos went to the other point after the city. That isn't good if he's doing what I think he's doing." Macbeth turned around and opened a portal above Gilgrim's head. A five foot, steel battle axe fell at Gilgrim's feet.

"Hey!" Gilgrim yelled. "Be careful with her!"

Macbeth opened a portal on the nearest wall. "We need to go. Did it break?"

Gilgrim inspected his axe. "No."

"Then why are we talking about it?"

The wizard stepped through his portal. On the other side was a dense rainforest. He turned to face his friend and nodded. Gilgrim followed him into the jungle. A light golden sheen surrounded Macbeth, slowly fading away as he scanned his environment. It left a slight shockwave, scaring away the flock of birds that was nesting in the trees. It was deathly quiet. The wizard pulled his sword from its hilt. He slashed the vines and vegetation in his path. "We need to be careful. We won't exactly have a welcome party when we arrive."

"I don't understand." Gilgrim copied his compatriot, using his axe to clear his way. "What was this Phobos going after?"

"I'm not sure. But if I had to guess, I'd say that he's visiting an old friend of mine."

"Which one?"

"Oh, you know." They came to a clearing in the middle of the dense jungle. A few acres of huts surrounding a massive mountain. "Obo, the 60 foot ape." Hundreds of eyes gazed at the duo as they made their way to the mountain. If they were visible from a doorway, they would scurry into a corner of the hut. These people were clearly not all of the same tribe. Some were locals, yes, but others were military personnel, still wearing their uniforms. Some were photographers and journalists, their broken equipment swinging from their necks. Others were scientists, time eaten away at their cheap clothing and broken glasses. The one thing they all had in common was they were avoiding even looking at their intruders.

"Of course Phobos was here." Gilgrim said. "These people are clearly under some sort of spell."

"That's not a significant change from how they usually are." Macbeth explained. "Obo just so happens to be psychic. He controls people and they provide his basic needs."

"And this is your friend?"

"More of a reluctant acquaintance. I know if I were to face him he could easily overpower me, one of the advantages of being the size of a skyscraper, I suppose. I would also have to deal with his horde of victims, so for those reasons, I usually leave him to his business. His psychic abilities are also advantageous to keep in my roster. The thing is, his people are usually so active. They work themselves stupid. Look at them now. The same force was here." Macbeth gripped his blade as tight as he could. "Let's hope we can stop him." The two came into a cave at the base of the mountain. It was lined with torches and filled with piles of food. In the center was a throne made of human skulls, about the size of a two-story house. Obo sat upon it, leaning onto his left hand, staring into the middle distance. His orange, golden hair glowed by the flamelight. "Obo!" The giant orangutan looked down at the adventurers and sighed. "What happened here?"

"You know he was here, Macbeth." Obo spoke in a soft, low tone. His voice just barely moved the ground on which he sat. "Phobos is alive." The ape moved his hand as a small portion of food hovered up to his mouth. He guffawed as juices flowed from his open mouth. "And you plan to use the Saber of Styx to defeat him? And you haven't even charged it. You might as well be using a mortal's blade"

Macbeth's sword, the aforementioned saber, flung its owner forward as it yelled

some choice expletives about the ape. The wizard caught himself and planted his boots into the ground. He did his best to put the vibrating blade back into its scabbard.

“So you saw him?” Gilgrim inquired, leaning on his axe.

“That I did, Sir Hammerfist.” Obo flipped up and used his feet to clench a large tree that was hanging from the ceiling like a trapeze bar. “And I’ve made a decision because of that. I’ve had what you might refer to as a change of heart.”

“What are you talking about?” Macbeth asked.

“Phobos showed me his totem and it gave me a vision. I saw my own citizens raiding this very cavern. They overpowered me, but they didn’t kill me. Instead they put me in chains. I always thought that Phobos showed you your greatest fears, but he simply showed me my future. I decided to do whatever I could to avoid it, so I’ve decided I’m done controlling people. I’ve put a mental dampener on my population for the time being. They will have some of their free will, but my vision won’t come true until I’ve already died. I’ll eat what I have left in the cave. And then that will be that. I’d say I’ve had a pretty good run. I’ve lived longer than certain civilizations. Who knows? Maybe they’ll find my body and be amazed. I’d be remembered as something great rather than the monster I’ve become. I could even come back in the cosmos one day.”

“Well, that sounds all fine and dandy.” Macbeth said. “But I still need to find Phobos.”

“You don’t have anything to say?” Obo asked, casting another portion into his mouth.

“Your death doesn’t exactly bother me. You’ve been a leach on this island for thousands of years. Good riddance. That’s not

important right now. I need to know where Phobos is going next. If he really gained control over your mind, then he’s getting more powerful by the second.”

“Don’t you see? Phobos isn’t a force of evil. He changed my life for the better, old friend.”

Macbeth brought a gust of wind up to hover at eye level with the ape. He stood on a swirling disc of dense cloud and held his arms outstretched. He twisted and turned his arms slowly as the cave began to collapse in on itself. The tree Obo was swinging on broke free from its rope, sending the ape tumbling onto his throne of skulls.

“What are you doing?” Obo yelled, reaching for the piles of food on the ground as quickly as he could.

“It’s a minor tectonic disruption. It took me a thousand years to learn, but I had another thousand to master it. Tell me where Phobos went.” As he twisted his arms, stalactites came down from the ceiling and the entire Earth was trembling beneath them. “Now!”

“Alright! Just stop.” At the command, Macbeth clapped his hands together and the earthquake stopped. The wizard dropped slowly to the ground. Gilgrim ran up to him, hyperventilating.

“Next time,” The dwarf panted. “Tell me to get out of the cave first.”

“Where did he go?” Macbeth asked.

“I don’t know exactly what his intentions are. Him being a deity, it’s hard for me to simply look into his mind. All I know is that he said something about. Oh, now what was it?” Obo put his hand to his chin before snapping in revelation. “Yes, he said. ‘Now that I have you, all it takes is the Spirit to build the perfect world.’”

Macbeth’s eyes opened as wide as they could. “The Spirit?” He gestured his

hands as he stepped closer to the ape. "Are you sure that's exactly what he said?"

"Macbeth, do you know me as one to exaggerate the truth?"

"Right." The wizard put his arms at his side and walked out of the cave. "We need to go." He cast a portal on the ground. The duo plummeted down into Macbeth's study. The wizard sealed the portal and walked to a cauldron in the center of the study. It held a constant, swirling vortex of red energy. If you leaned into it, you could hear thousands of distinct screams coming from its well. Macbeth took the Saber of Styx from his side and plunged it into the cauldron. The gemstone on the blade's hilt glowed red as the screams grew louder. He took it out and wiped a sticky, crimson residue off of the blade. "Obo was right, if I was going to face Phobos then I should've charged the sword. I'm fighting a god and I haven't given my enchanted sword the source of its power. It's a stupid move and I should've been thinking about it." The wizard walked quickly around his study, almost as if he was looking for something specific and nothing at all at the same time.

"Macbeth, what is wrong? Who is the Spirit?"

"The imperative question is not 'who is the Spirit?' but 'what is the Spirit?'. I suspect Phobos was talking about the Spirit of the Summit, and if he were to gain control over that, then it could be the end of life on Earth as I know it."

"What is so important about this Spirit of the Summit? Why can't you take control over it before the god of fear does?"

"It's not that simple. The Spirit of the Summit is an insanely powerful creature. It lives on the peak of Mount Everest, the highest mountain on my Earth. Most scientists estimate that there are hundreds of

bodies on it, but there are actually thousands. People from all over the world have been trying to reach the top of it for the longest time. Very few make it back because death has some sort of domain on that mountain. It's very hard for life to inhabit places like that. Only the strongest survive and all of that nonsense. Since so many people have died trying to climb that thing that legends spread to the far corners of the globe of a Spirit that sits atop it, sucking the air out of the lungs of whoever dares to climb it. You see, the reason the things I deal with happen, the reason anything happens really, is because of the universal feeling of belief. If enough cells can believe that they can come together to form an organism, it happens. If a fish believes that it can walk onto land, it can happen. So many people have believed in this thing that it has become real. There has been a wraith watching over the creatures of death on Earth for millennia. I think you see where I'm going with this."

"If Phobos controls the Spirit, he could be in the minds of people all over the world. And any creature of death that he wants." Gilgrim leaned on his axe, speaking like he was by a watercooler.

"Precisely. However, if he kills it, the shockwave of cosmological energy could envelope around two thirds of the planet. After that, he would be too powerful to stop. I'm afraid he's going to do so. Which is why this is an urgent matter." Macbeth ran his hands through the books laid about the walls. He scanned up and down with his eyes, moving quickly. "I think I have something here that could help us against him. I just need to find it and then we can go."

The dwarf's jaw dropped ever so slightly as he looked at his friend. "Do you mean to tell me you don't have all your spells memorized?"

The Saber cackled that echoed through Macbeth's head. "Oh, the things you learn about this bastard when you're strapped to him 24/7."

"Gilgrim, I've learned tens of thousands of spells throughout my life, should I be expected to memorize all of them?"

"Tens of thousands?! How can you even remember anything with all that in your head? Do you ever take a day off?"

"Muscle memory, mnemonic devices, and just plain luck if I'm being honest with you." Macbeth started swirling his hands, creating small gusts of wind that allowed the open book to hover. The Latin text started to grow as he quietly whispered, "Defendat hoc spiritu, de ira Dei de. Defendat hoc spiritu, de ira Dei de." He chanted the phrase twice more as he brought the book over his enchanting podium. A wave of cosmic beams shot from the text into Macbeth's clothes, almost lighting them on fire. The black of his robes were now a glowing maroon, the green a dark jade. He turned to face his friend, smirking a little. "And I don't have a job, every day is my day off." A silence fell between the two of them, mostly due to Gilgrim's dumbfoundedness. Macbeth motioned toward the podium. "I'm gonna need to do you too, so..."

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The Spirit of the Summit stood upon his domain. The wind howled as it looked over the curvature of the planet. It was a shadowy figure, about seven feet tall. Its misty persona was draped over with a thin, black shroud. A pair of shining blue eyes pierced through the darkness beneath its hood. The wraith held a giant, obsidian scythe in its right hand. The blade of the sidearm was rested in the snow

below the Spirit. The Spirit stood patiently. Knowingly. Gusts of wind twirled around it. A smokey, black aura came into being. Phobos stepped forth from it. He was clad in bronze armor that had clearly been broken in. He carried his spear in one hand and a shield in the other.

"You know, I've been expecting company." The Spirit of the Summit spoke, his voice was a whisper that bounced all around the peak of the mountain. "I sensed an evil deity, coming to reside with me."

"You should be rejoicing." Phobos spoke slowly, methodically, and proud. "I've come to take my rightful place as king of this planet. I am the son of Aphrodite. And my throne shall allow me to watch all of my beloved domain."

"This place is no throne, not for the likes of you." The Spirit lifted its blade to rest upon its shoulder. It turned to face its foe. "But I must admit, it's a glorious view." The wraith charged Phobos with the force of a freight train. With mere inches between the two, a portal opened in the air. Macbeth and Gilgrim dropped in, immediately jumping up into fighting positions. Gilgrim held his axe above his head. Macbeth wielded the Saber of Styx in one hand. The other held a spinning ball of glowing blue fire.

"Stop!" The wizard shouted. His flaming sphere doubled in size. "I'm not going to ask twice."

"Oh, you puny creature," Phobos taunted. "I have no quarrel with you. You simply lack perspective."

"I have enough perspective to see evil. You could end the world as we know it."

"'Tis the point, wizard. Sometimes you need to burn down a forest so it may start anew. Only then will it reach its full potential. My world will be utopia."

“Utopia where everyone is afraid. I’ve heard this before. Rhetoric like this never comes from the right side of history.”

“Everyone is already afraid. Why else do you think I can walk before you now? My return was inevitable. Fear has become what I’ve always wanted it to be. It used to be people were afraid of death, disease, famine. All this is still true, but a new fear has been born. The fear of failure. The fear of abandonment. People no longer trust their neighbors. They only do what they need to do to survive, never thinking those dangerous thoughts. Thoughts of hope. Thoughts of a day better than today. When I reign over this world, it will be utopia, because it will finally be safe.”

“I think you’re confusing safe with stagnant.” Macbeth threw his fireball at the god with tremendous force. Phobos deflected it with his shield. It fizzled out into nothing. The wizard pulled his hand up, creating another. “I told you I wouldn’t ask twice.”

“Neither will I.” Phobos charged forward. He thrust his spear, only to have it blocked by Macbeth’s saber. Bright, white sparks flew from their intersection. The god’s eyebrows raised. “How does that garbage still work? The River Styx ran dry some time ago.”

“Like me, it has the souls of a thousand dead.” The Spirit of the Summit floated above Gilgrim and Macbeth clashing weapons with the god of fear. “And he’s going to use it to chop off your head.” The wraith retreated to his original perch, keeping a watchful eye on the fight. Macbeth fired another blast at Phobos. He was distracted just long enough for Gilgrim to hook the blade of his axe onto the massive spear. Gilgrim ran towards the god, disarming him. Phobos brought his shield up, ready to strike it on the dwarf. Before he could even finish

recoiling, Macbeth dropped down from a portal above him. The Saber of Styx drove deep into Phobos’ forearm. His shield plopped down onto the snow as he let out a deafening yell. The ancient wizard used his free hand to strike the god across the face. Macbeth stood tall over his opponent, his cape flapping in the wind. Phobos got up onto one knee and laughed. Oozing, crimson blood dripped from the god’s arm as he reached for his head. He pulled it off. The jaw of the lion unhinged as the eyes began to glow. Soon all Macbeth could see was the blinding light coming from the lion’s eyes. The wizard put his hand up to his face and shut the god out. He could tell his psionic shield was cracking under the sheer force of evil magic. He shut his eyes as hard as he could.

Macbeth opened his eyes, quickly met by a cool breeze. He brought his hand down and saw green pastures and crisp, blue skies. The wizard looked around, inspecting his surroundings. He was still on the tip of a mountain, but this wasn’t Everest. This place was familiar to him. He walked down the facade and was met by singing birds, prancing goats, and butterflies. He could smell a saltiness in the air. He heard the crashing of waves in the distance. As he made his way down the mountain, he had a suspicion as to where he was. This suspicion was confirmed when he came to a small cottage at the edge of a cliff. It was about two stories with a thatched roof. There were several children playing in the open field. One came up to him, giggling. The child grabbed onto Macbeth’s cloak and led him to the other side of the house. Behind the cottage was a steep hill with a large fig tree on the top.

“Oh, no.” Macbeth whispered. As the child led him up the hill, the wizard looked back and forth, trying to find an escape. No

matter how hard he struggled against the child's grasp, they slowly made their way to the tree. The child stopped, tugged on Macbeth's cloak, and pointed forward. The wizard looked up and beheld the Saber of Styx, planted at the head of a shallow grave. Standing at the base of the grave was a woman in flowing white robes. Macbeth saw streaks of a familiar shade of auburn in her silver hair. She turned around to face him. It was the Oracle, with a face ravaged by time. She was holding a bouquet of orchids. She gave them to Macbeth. Tears rolled down his cheek.

"Don't worry," she said. "You died a good man." In that moment, Macbeth blinked and he was back atop Everest. Phobos moved the lion's head away from his eye line. The wizard collapsed to the ground, panting and leaning on the hilt of his sword. The god of fear picked up his shield and put it on his back before walking back for his spear. Gilgrim stepped forward, readying his axe.

"Fortunately for you, Macbeth," The dwarf bellowed. "I'm not afraid of anything." Phobos shined the lantern of his head into Gilgrim's view. His eyes went black for a split second before quickly regaining their previous green color. The dwarf let the head of his axe drop into the snow. "Oh, sweet angels. What have I done with my life?" Phobos picked up his spear and walked towards the Spirit of the Summit. The wraith already had his scythe ready for battle. Macbeth stood up and surveyed his surroundings. He ran over to Gilgrim and put a hand on his shoulder.

"We need to go." The wizard opened up a portal below the two. They fell into the Tattered Kilt. A round of joyous applause came from the drunken crowd.

Gilgrim shook his head slowly. "And to think this is my legacy. I let people slowly

destroy themselves. Free of charge, at that!" Macbeth walked behind the bar and took a bottle off one of the lower shelves. It was Evan Williams, peach flavored. He unscrewed the cap and took three uncanny gulps from it. The wizard put the bottle on the bar and stood back, staring off into space.

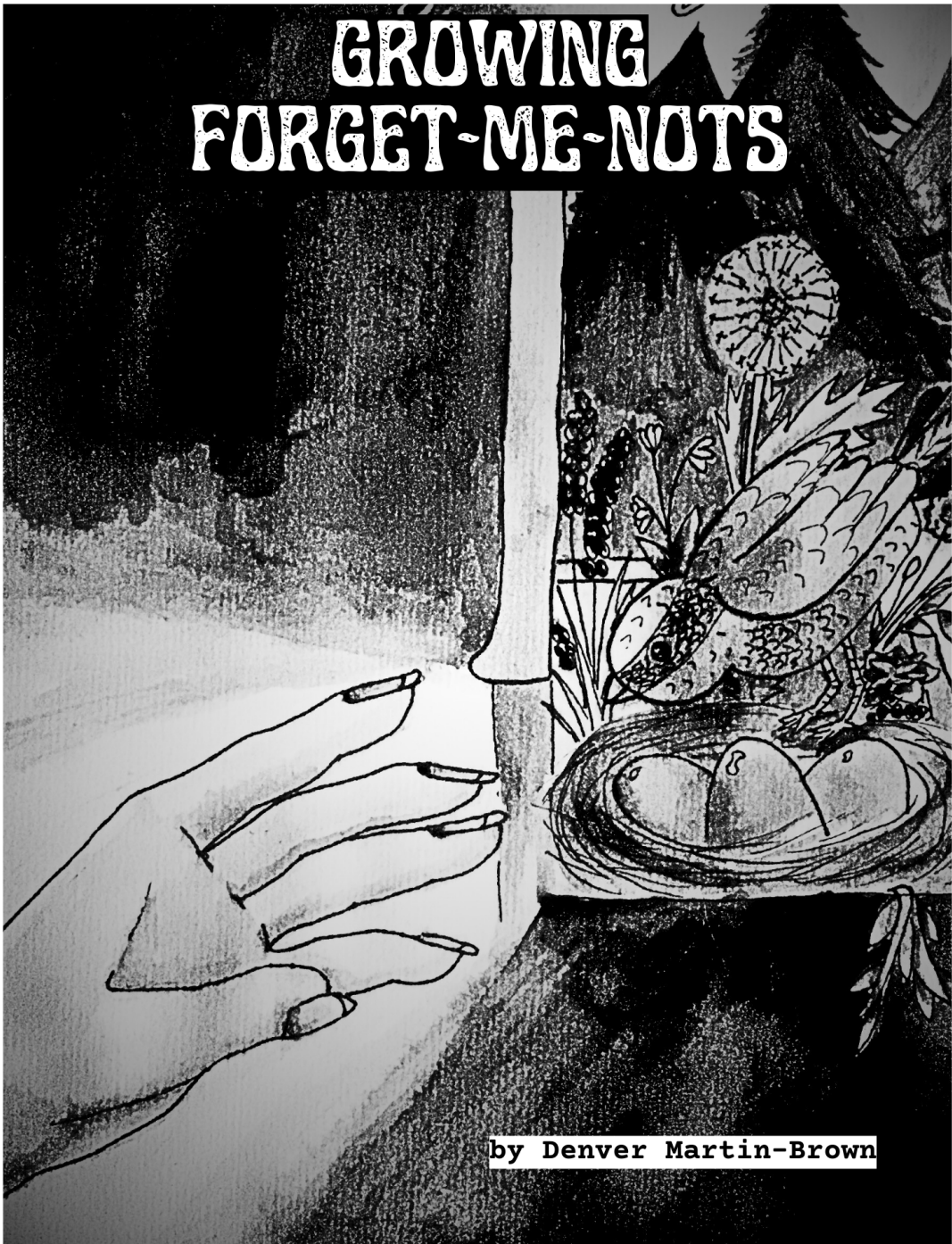
Macbeth said softly, "I don't know what to do."

**To be continued...**

MACBETH,  
THE MOST POWERFUL  
WIZARD IN THE UNIVERSE  
WILL RETURN

next issue:

# GROWING FORGET-ME-NOTS



by Denver Martin-Brown

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