

THE JOURNAL OF ADAM OSIDIS

As we grow older, it's easy for entire swaths of memory to dry up and fade away. There are whole years, full chapters that I hold no recollection of. The faces of beloved friends and family blur into distortions or slip away altogether.

But when I sleep I still see my father. Meditating in the yard, with nails full of my family's blood neatly arranged around him. Mom and Peter lie dead at his feet, though they all passed many years apart. I never got to see what Pete would've looked like had he grown up, but somehow he's there, my little brother a grown man. Grown but still dead.

Father sits up, looking away from me, speaking in some old Mosak language, and as I get closer, I realize the sound isn't coming from his mouth, but from a hole in his chest. Now, the temple never held much appeal to me, and no one ever taught me the old tongues, but his meaning is clear enough. He asks me to leave.

And I always do.

My father was a proud man who'd stuck to his guns and been ruined for it. Even though it left him in a terrible spot, and our family right there with him, he wouldn't bend the knee to the growing power of Garils Sulm. The man you know as The God of Whispers. But around my house, he was only ever referred to as *the Mud King*.

Father believed that the rotting of all principles began with placing a single foot on the road to compromise, and while he was far from a perfect man, he never budged from that one perch.

His strident adherence to those principles was the reason he was cast out. The Mud King had come to him with a generous offer, as was his way, but old Zebadiah Osidis refused him and went to warn the other Mosak to do the same. He insisted they not hear the Mud King's offers, nor succumb to the fear brought on by his whispers.

But of course by then it was too late.

The Mud King had an eye in every house, a heart in every hearth and a tongue in every ear. And they'd been spreading cruel rumors, cursing my family name in hopes of crushing father for threatening to expose his lies. Everyone knew they were safer to bargain, placate and politic rather than risk what little was still theirs.

Everyone loves the underdog, provided they don't have to take his side in a brawl.

To live in a city was to live under the thumb of the Mud King, held in check by his campaign of whispers. And to do so one had to be willing to trade all freedom for that soft life and the illusion of safety. My father wasn't willing to trade his for any of it.

My folks fled back beyond the periphery of civilization, into the rich, green Voltk Mountains, the territory of the ancient spirits. And that's where they settled, where Peter and I were born, a thousand miles away from any the other two-legged creature.

And away from the war that my father had tried to stop.

The goblins have a saying: *Those who hide from war deserve a long life of sleepless nights.* We did not suffer this. We were cast out from our home, and my father would allow no Osidis blood to spill for a war he could've stopped.

No, the war was not ours to fight. But that didn't change that it was coming...



...THOSE WHISPERS
INCHING EVER CLOSER.

THE
TRICK
AIN'T TO
HUNT...



...BUT TO
LURE, LET
'ER COME
TO US.

SHE'S
AN'FUL
BIG.

AN' SHE'S BEEN
FEEDIN' FROM
OUR PENS, TWO
DEAR CHEVRE AND
WITH 'EM ALL THEIR
MILK FOR THE
SEASON.

IF SHE
MAKES THIS HER
GRAZING
PATTERN--



WE'LL
NEVER BE
FREE O'
HER.

GOT IT,
DAD.

WHEN A
BEAST SMELLS
BLOOD IT CAN'T
RESIST TO COME
LOOKING FOR
WEAK PREY.

SAME GOES
FOR PEOPLE.
EXPLOIT
THAT.



SNORK



SHE'S
ON THE
SCENT.

SHUFFLE
LOUDLY.

APPEAR
WEAK.

ALWAYS
HIDE YOUR
STRENGTH
FROM AN
OPPONENT.



SHE'S
COMING...

CONNECT
TO THE SEL.

SNORF!



HEAR ITS
MIND AN' ASK
TO LET YOU
DIRECT IT.

HARDEN
ITS SCALES.



ONCE
THROUGH
THE HIDE
YOU GUIDE
'ER
DOWN.

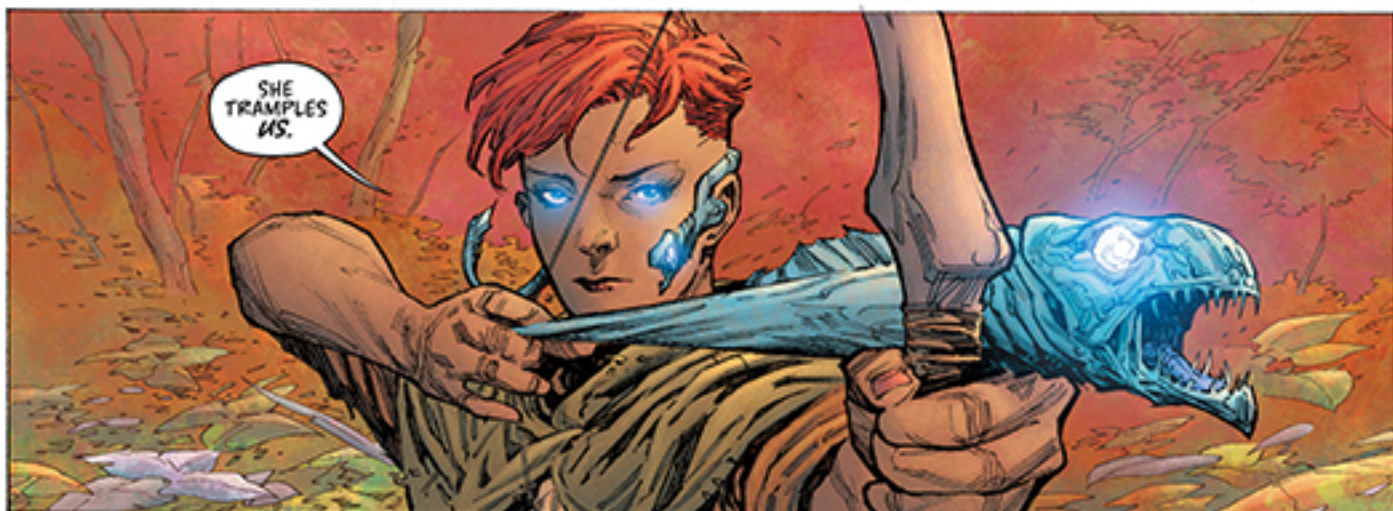
IF IT FAILS
TO POISON
HER HEART--



HURF!

SHE
TRAMPLES
YOU.

NO.



SHE
TRAMPLES
US.

