

THE JOURNAL OF ADAM OSIDIS

I remember being irritated that first week Peter's cough came on. It kept me up all night. By the time a month had passed, when he could no longer get up out of his bed, somehow that irritation had turned into anger.

Anger meant he wasn't really dying.

Pete had always made life on the far side of the world endurable for me. His Mosak gift was charm, and beyond that he was just naturally so damn funny, and not in a cruel or sarcastic way that most folks fall into. He had a lot of love in him. He could always make a bad time feel okay.

And to my eyes, he was quitting on me when I needed him most.

I couldn't think of anyone but myself. How it would affect me if he left. So, as my kid brother lay dying, I goaded him to get up, to come play outside. I think he could see how much I needed it, and so, sick as he was, he did.

We ran deep up the north bluff where he used his Mosak charm to call up the old spirits of the woods, truly beautiful things that had been lost in the past cataclysm. In the evening light, we chased iridescent memories of ancient creatures, persuaded to visit by a dying boy's light. I saw him running and laughing, I didn't see the struggle in every step. I didn't want to.

That was the last time I saw my brother smile.

It wasn't until he buckled over and began puking up blood that I realized what I'd done, how the running had exacerbated his condition. Pa had put out a call weeks earlier to the nearest temple that had a healer, but they'd never responded. With no more time to wait, he threw us in the wagon, and we rode out straight away.

The ride to the temple was one week in good weather, a fortune we did not count on, but received nonetheless. On the road, I asked Pa what he'd do when we got there, what his plan was. He told me he'd plead on his knees for aid from the people who'd cast us out and shunned us. He'd turn himself over to their courts. He'd give his life if need be.

Because that's what you do when you have a family to care for...



...YOU DO ABSOLUTELY ANYTHING.

AND THE GOBLIN KING SAID TO HIS WIFE, "WHISPERS ARE DEADLY."

"THINK ABOUT WHAT PEOPLE WHISPER--ANGER, HATRED, SECRECY AND FEAR."



BUT THE QUEEN WOULDN'T BELIEVE HER SON HAD FALLEN SO LOW THAT HIS WILL WAS ONLY TO CONQUER AND DOMINATE.

SO, WHEN HER SON'S SERVANTS CAME TO TAKE THEM TO THE SWAMP, SHE PUT UP NO FIGHT.

HE'S HEARD THIS STORY A HUNDRED TIMES, MA.



WE REPEAT IT SO WE NEVER FORGET WHAT WE'RE STANDING AGAINST, ADAM.

I LIKE TO THINK IT COMFORTS HIM.



IF THOSE IDIOT PRIESTS ARE SO ROTTEN, WHY'RE WE TURNIN' TO THEM, MA?

THE MOSAK HAVE A HEALER.

A SAGE WHO CAN CURE PETER.



SAME PEOPLE REFUSED TO SEND HELP?

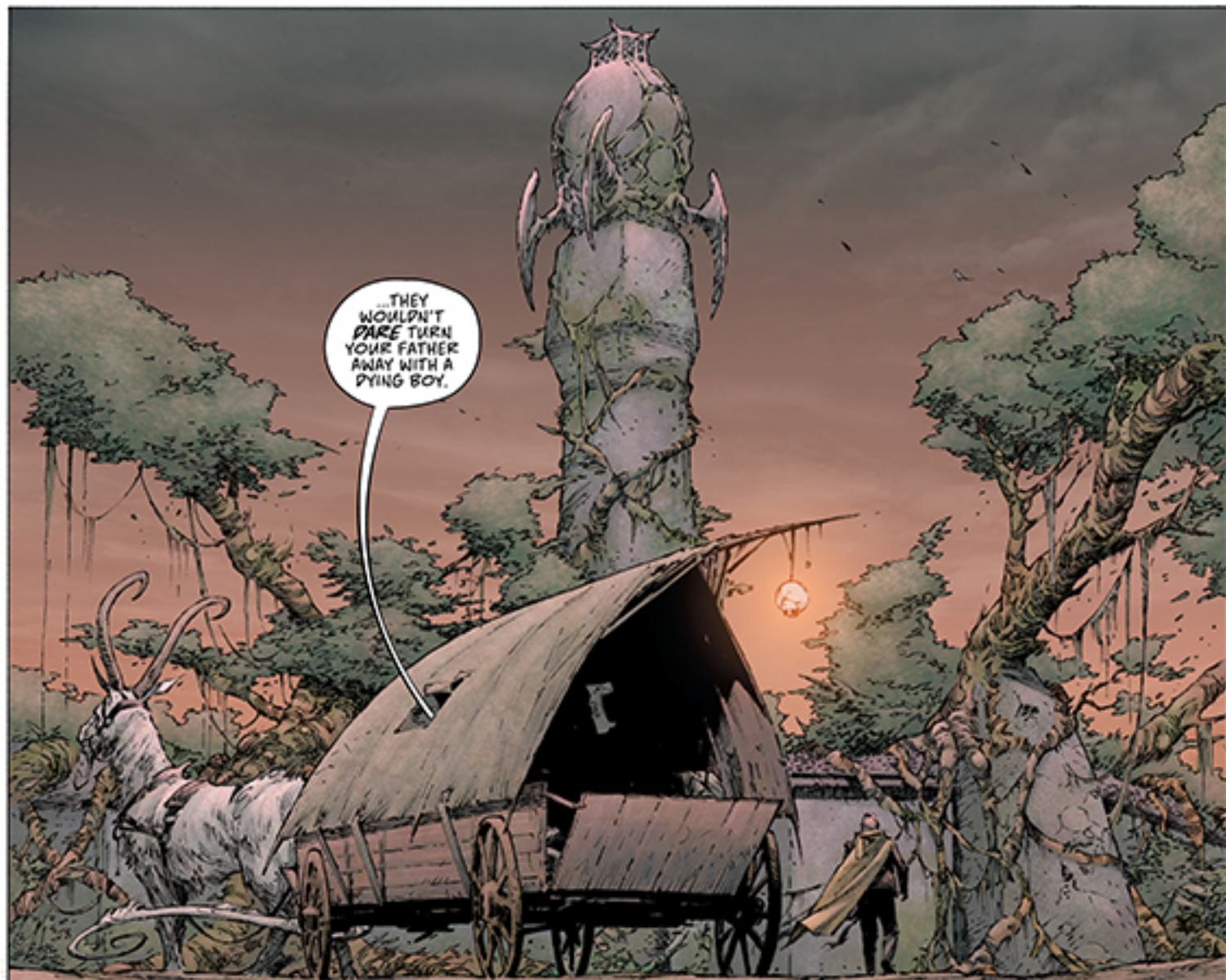
YES.



WHEN THE TIME CAME TO DO RIGHT AND STAND BY YOUR FATHER NONE HAD THE COURAGE.

BUT BY NOW THEY'VE BEGUN TO SEE HE WAS RIGHT. THEY MUST.

AND EVEN IF THEY DON'T...





"...THERE WON'T BE ANY MOSAK LEFT."

PETER, MY BEAUTIFUL BOY, YOU'VE SERVED YOUR TIME IN THIS PAINFUL PLACE AND NOW JOIN THE WELL.

I TAKE COMFORT IN KNOWING THAT ALL ENERGY IS BORN FROM LIFE. LIFE FUELS REALITY.

IT MEANS WE WILL HEAR YOUR LAUGH IN THE TREES, SEE YOUR EYES IN THE STARS, AND YOUR GENTLE SPIRIT SHALL FLOW WITH THE STREAM AS YOU MOVE THE WORLD FROM DAY TO NIGHT.



WE LEAVE YOU IN THE CARE OF ALL MOTHERS IN THE WELL OF ZHAL.

WE LOVE YOU SO MUCH.



IT'S DAD'S FAULT THEY LET PETE DIE.

A REEP BENDS, OR IT SNAPS, ADAM.

ONCE BENT IT CAN'T EVER TAKE ITS FORMER SHAPE.



THEY HATE HIM BECAUSE HE MAKES THEM REMEMBER WHO THEY ONCE WERE.

AND WHAT THEY HAVE BECOME.



YOUR FATHER LOVED PETER MORE THAN LIFE ITSELF.

IT'S NOT HIS FAULT THEY REFUSED HIM.

I CAN'T HEAR HIM ANYMORE, MA.

PETE'S REALLY GONE.



I MADE YOU A NAIL OF HIS BLOOD.

WHEN YOU'RE READY, HE'LL SPEAK TO YOU AGAIN.



WHEN ALL OTHERS HAVE COMPROMISED WHO THEY ARE, WHEN YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE LEFT STANDING FOR WHAT IS RIGHT, YOU'D BE A FOOL NOT TO WONDER IF YOU WERE WRONG.

BUT IF YOU LISTEN TO THAT VOICE INSIDE YOU, YOU'LL ALWAYS KNOW THE TRUTH.



A REEP MUST GROW STRAIGHT WHILE IT'S STILL GREEN, ADAM.

AND ONCE IT HAS IT MUST CHOOSE HOW TO WEATHER THE HARD WINDS...



"... DOES IT BEND OR DOES IT BREAK?"

I HEARD NO OFFER.

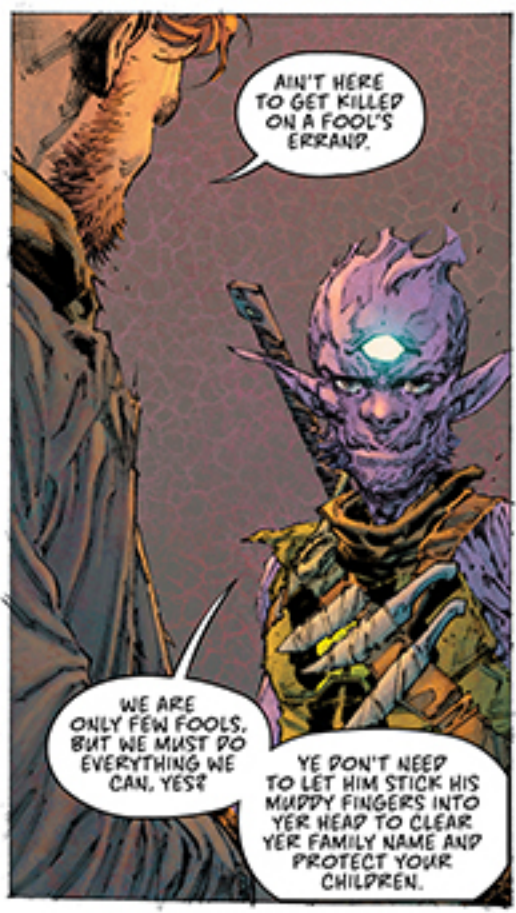
BUT WHAT ANY OSIDIS DOES OR DOESN'T DO-- AIN'T THE CONCERN OF A CLAN OF MOSAK FOOLS.

NOT ENTIRELY TRUE, ME BOY.

THINGS AS THEY ARE-- WE NEED YE.

HE'LL KNOW.

HE'LL KNOW IT WAS ME...



AIN'T HERE TO GET KILLED ON A FOOL'S ERRAND.

WE ARE ONLY FEW FOOLS, BUT WE MUST DO EVERYTHING WE CAN, YES?

YE DON'T NEED TO LET HIM STICK HIS MUDDY FINGERS INTO YER HEAD TO CLEAR YER FAMILY NAME AND PROTECT YOUR CHILDREN.



THEY SAY BETRAYAL IS IN YER BLOOD-- PROVE 'EM WRONG.

HELP US FIGHT.



THIS AIN'T MY PROBLEM.

THANKS TO YOU MOSAK, THE TIME TO FIGHT THIS IS PAST.

EVEN IF YOU COULD, YOU KILL 'IM NOW AN' YOU KILL EVERYONE EVER LET 'IM IN THEIR HEAD.



WE AIN'T HERE TA KILL 'IM, YE PONCE.

WE'RE TAKIN' 'IM TO THE POISON ISLES OF THE WIZARD TORGGA SHE'LL DISCONNECT 'IM FROM ALL HIS AGENTS--FREE THE LAND OF HIS INFLUENCE ENTIRELY.

AND THEN, AYE...



"...WE'LL PROBABLY KILL 'IM."

WILL SOMEONE PLEASE EXTERMINATE THIS DAMNED PEST SO I CAN CONTACT SOME ASSISTANCE!



NO HELP IS COMING.

I CAN USE YOUR REGENERATIVE GIFTS TO RETURN YOUR FAMILY TO YOU, PATCHWORK.



WITH MY HELP YOU CAN HAVE THEM BACK!



FINE. AS I EXPECTED.



SO, I'VE HEARD YOUR OFFER.

SHWLUKK



NOW HAVE MY ANSWER--