

MetaZoo

MetaZoo™ CRYPTID NATION



CH. 4

Book #1



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1ST PRINT

Michael Waddell

PONCHO

Sebastian

Botello

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Siobhan

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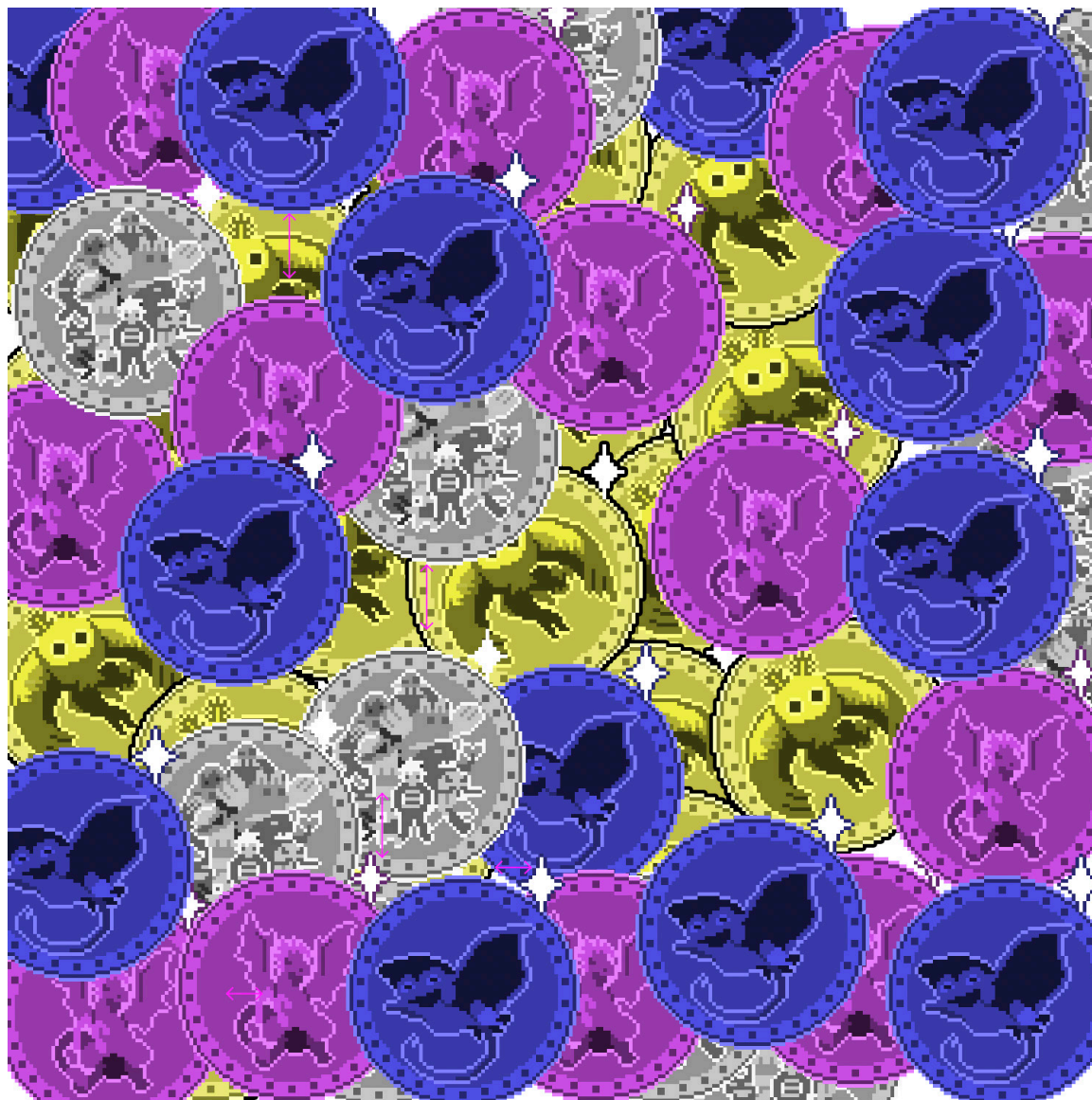
Andy

Mourat

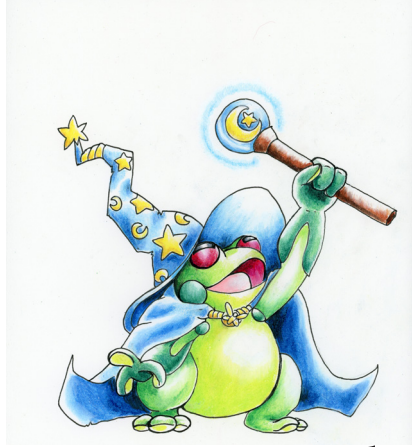
MetaZoo



A NEW STRUGGLE...
A NEW FRIEND!



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A New Friend?

It wasn't until Sam saw their faces and heard their voices that he understood the true extent of his danger.

Except, he didn't exactly *hear* their voices.

Rather, they reverberated in his head like mad drums in the distance. Upon the hilltop the night before, the voices had been far away enough to have dulled the effect. Sam supposed that with their faces removed by M's magics, the veil in Point Pleasant did more than keep the Spirits' physical presence from pouring into the town, however. Whatever veil prevented the Spirits from trespassing on the Loveland Castle's grounds didn't appear to be nearly as effective as M's had been.

So here, this close to so many frenzied Spirits, Sam's mind was laid bare.

Samantha... forgive me.

Oh god, why is it so dark?

Can somebody help me? I can't find my glasses and it's awfully red in here. I'm scared.

Blood..., why is there so much blood?

With each passing thought, a face appeared in the darkness of Sam's mind like a flashing light and then was gone, leaving a ghostly afterglow. With each passing moment, Sam could feel the tendrils of his sanity slipping away. Were all Spirits left to roam the earth following the shattering of the Veil doomed to such anguish? Was there not a Spirit in... good spirits among them? Or were those happy few the ones that passed on?

Don't you dare touch me!

Where is the light? There was supposed to be a light.

Mommy?

Sam... Sam is that you?

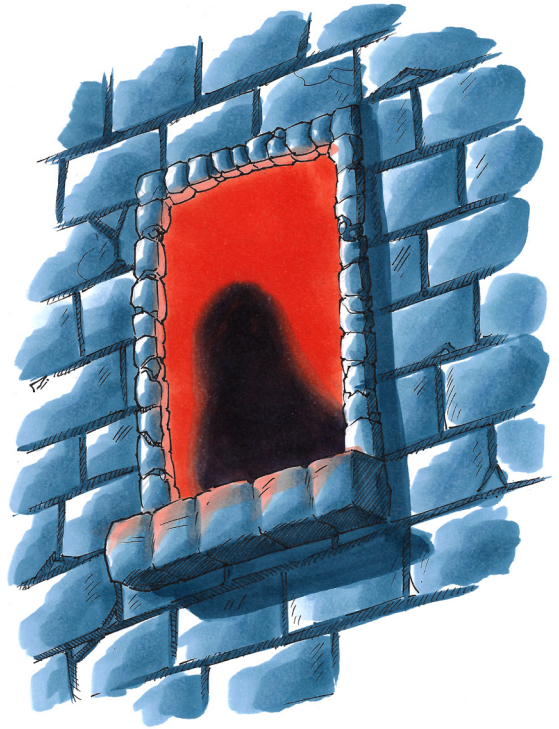
Come in, boy, hurry!

Sam's eyes, glazed no more, snapped into focus. That last thought was significantly stronger, and without the liquid, thick terror that coated each of the Spirits' thoughts like tar.

In a mad scramble, Sam looked up toward the window of the tallest tower and once again saw the figure hidden by the shadows looking down at him. Is it possible that the voice came from this figure? And if it had, would Sam really be interested in facing the figure that had summoned Mothman with such apparent ease?

Despite his current predicament, Sam found himself lost in his thoughts for a brief moment: If this figure had summoned Mothman, was he the one responsible for destroying Point Pleasant and responsible for... what happened to M?

All thoughts of the Spirits harassing his mind fled as red anger replaced their voices. More nuanced and reasoned thoughts concerning his inability to actually face such a powerful Caster, or the rumors he had heard in Unity City that Mothman had gone rogue in the past few days, were nowhere to be found.



Before he could gain his senses, his body had somehow moved him to the front entrance of the Loveland Castle.

BAM... BAM... BAM!

Sam's fists slammed into the oak door that looked wild in the pinks of the Spirit Storm encroaching outside the castle walls. Had Sam been a little more stable in that moment, he would have remembered that his baseball bat was still sheathed in his backpack and likely would have been more effective... and less painful. He paid no mind though, and soon the iron studs that nailed the door's iron bands in place mixed red with pink.

Banging... banging... and banging...

...and then the door began to open with a soft creak. Before the door fully revealed the inside of the castle's Entrance Hall, Sam had enough time for one last thought:

Ah crap - now what?

But then it was too late to back down. Sam finally remembered to unsheath his bat, threw his backpack to the side, and steeled himself to face whatever was inside.

The Entrance Hall was drowned in darkness, but only for a moment. The unlit torches along the double-sided staircase bloomed into life, revealing a baroque interior that seemed to have been transported through the ages. Somehow, the top of the staircase was left obscured in the shadows... unnaturally obscured.

Sam jumped as the door shut with a *THUNK* behind him, and before he could catch himself, a voice boomed inside the hall.

“ARE YOU THE CASTER THAT DESTROYED MY BEAUTIFUL MOTHMAN?”

HIS Mothman, Sam frantically repeated to himself. So, this was the Caster that had destroyed Point Pleasant after-all! Sam’s grip on the baseball bat tightened as he stepped forward, revealing more of himself in the hall’s torchlight.

He wasn’t exactly sure what he would do, or how he would do it, but without the Caster’s Mothman to aid him, Sam believed he stood a chance. If he could get in close enough, maybe he could just beat the damn guy into a bloody pulp. But, once properly pulped, Sam had questions he wanted to ask. Yes, Sam had many questions.

Right or left? Sam thought, but before he could pivot in either direction, the voice boomed out again, louder than before.

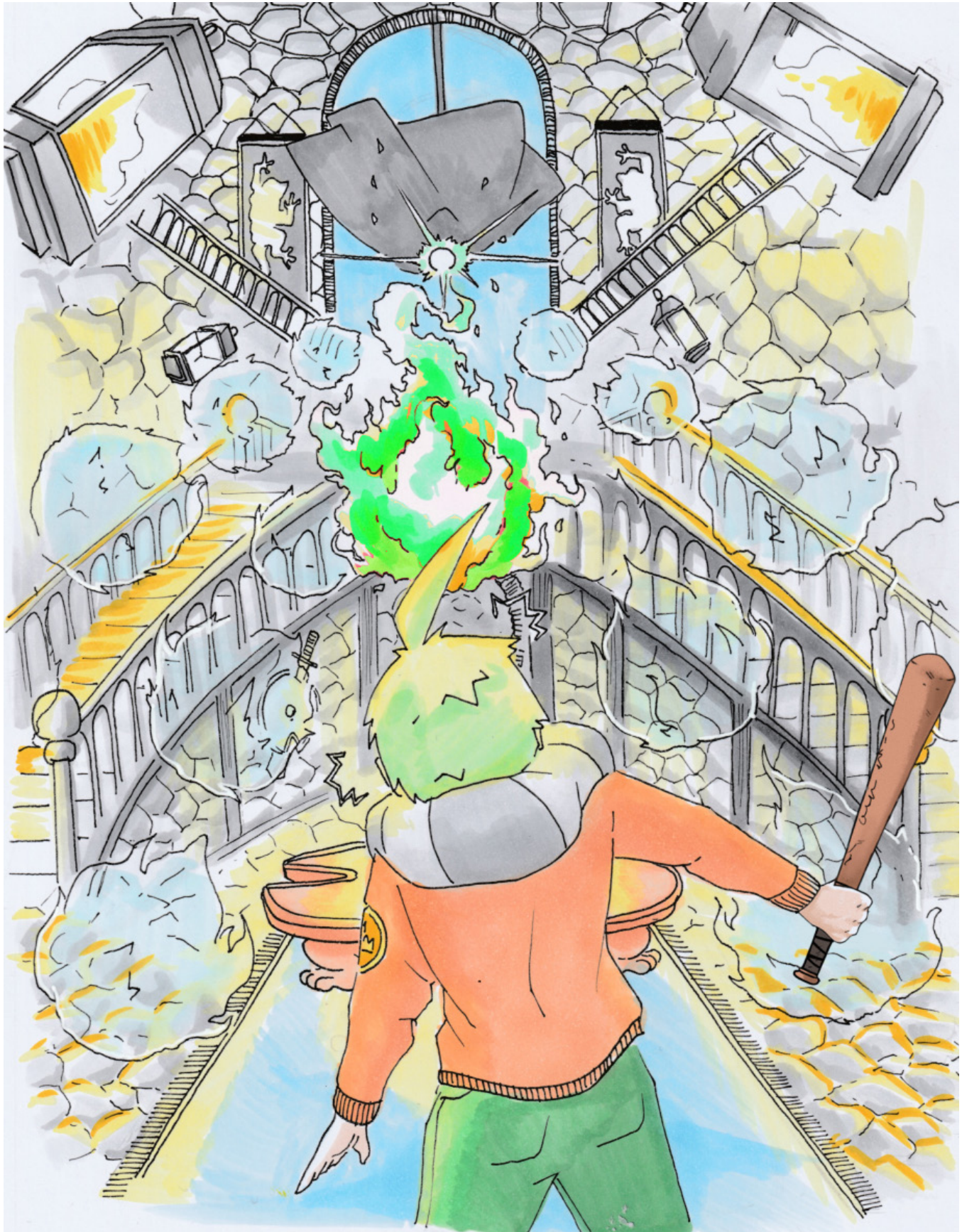
“NO... NO YOU’RE FAR TOO WEAK TO HAVE DONE THAT!”

The sound reverberated around the stone walls and set Sam’s teeth a-chatter, paralyzing him in place. Paralysis not by some force of magic, but by pure shock and terror. And now more quietly, almost as an afterthought, the figure spoke again:

“No, you’re most likely just another Squonk-of-a-Caster after my Spell-books. Let’s take a look, shall we?”

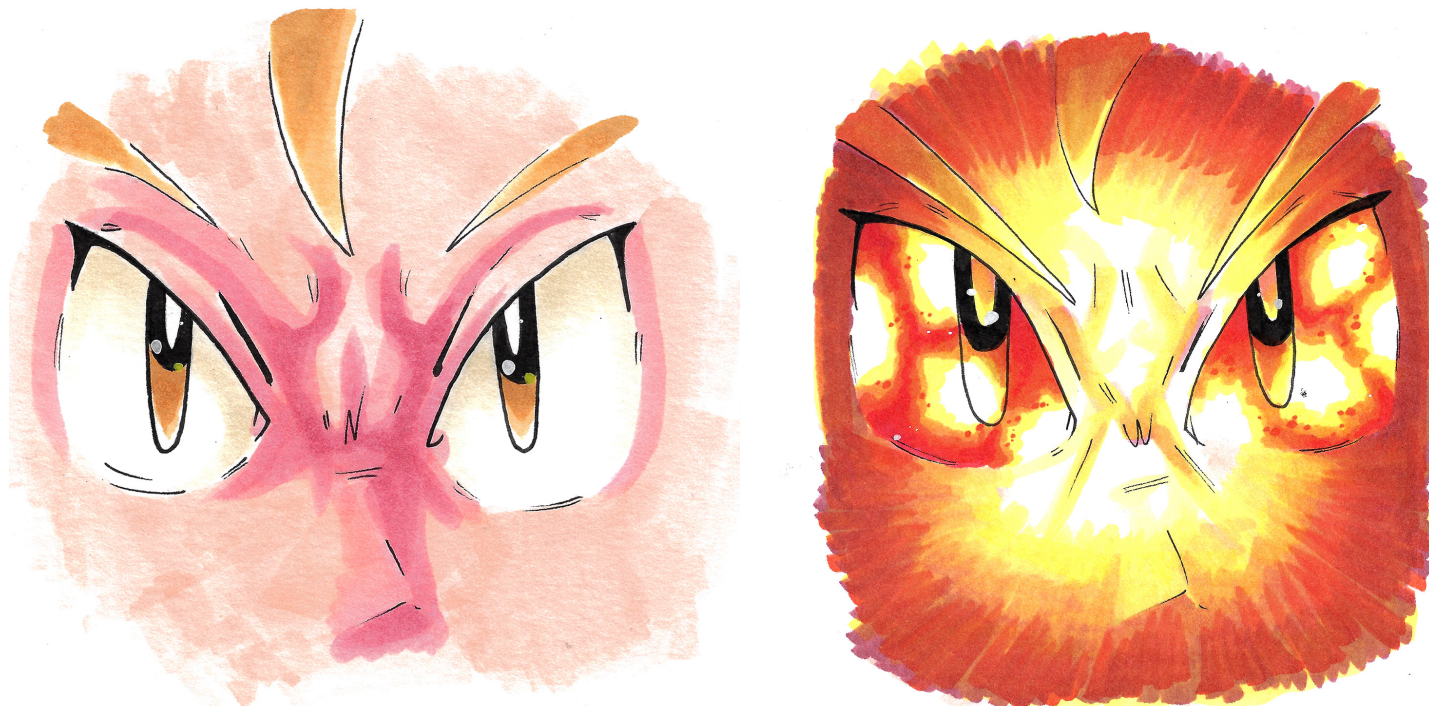


And with that final question, delivered in a raspy, croaky voice that didn't sound entirely too human, Sam observed the shadowy figure lift something and bring it down on the marbled ground of the staircase with a tremendous *THWACK!* followed by a green ball of fire that shot forth, towards Sam. Even in the flame's light, the figure remained hidden.



Sam broke from his temporary paralysis and tapped into the power that he and Adam had called his Intuition - a power that only ever triggered when he felt as though he were truly in danger.

Unbeknownst to Sam, but visible to the mysterious figure atop the staircase, Sam's eyes turned a deep and luminous gold... and in this gold Sam saw every pathway the fireball would take, and which path was most likely.



Teeing up in the direction the fireball would take (long before it reached its destination), Sam gritted his teeth, dug in his feet, and swung. His bat connected with the fire with such momentum that the ball exploded into a fireworks' display of all shades of green, traveling along all the possible pathways the fireball could have taken. As his eyes turned back to their normal blue, Sam huffed and puffed as though he had just sprinted back and forth across the Grand Hall. There was a moment of silence. Sam felt as though he could almost see the look of surprise on the shadow's face.

"*huff*... That's right... *puff* That's right you bastard. Anything you throw at me I'm gonna hit right back at you." Sam said, catching his breath.

"Ah... not every day you see an Abstract Power. You're quite special, kid. Let me guess, you can somehow see the pathways of a projectile or attack before they actually hit, giving you enough time to counter?" the shadow's voice rasped.

Abstract Power? Does he mean my Intuition? There's a name or... classification for it? And just who is this guy? He only saw it once... Sam puzzled.

"But there's a fundamental flaw with Abstract Powers." The Caster continued, "They're often too powerful for their Caster's own good." the voice croaked almost in a lecturing tone, the shadow now pacing back and forth along the bannister.

"Often, these Abstract Powers become crutches to the Caster's progression in Aura development and training..." a pause and then:

"Better to just show you, eh? There are six ways I can defeat your Abstract Power, if I've guessed it right, right off the top of my head. Don't believe me? Allow me to demonstrate."

“Number One: Exhaustion. Abstract Powers to the untrained are more draining than ordinary casting.”

THWACK!

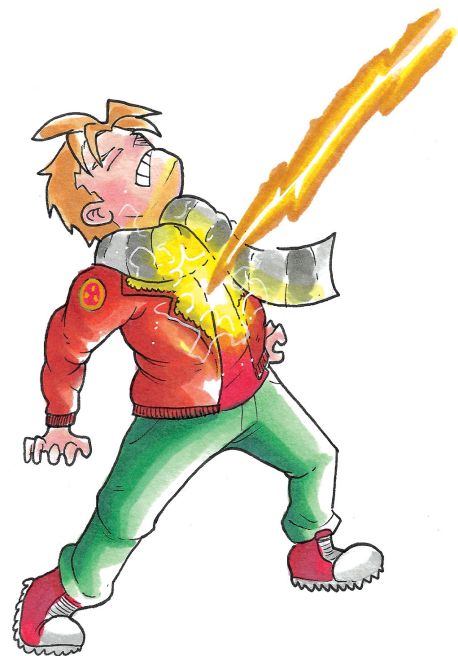
With the sound ringing through the hall once more, another green fireball erupted from the shadows, although this one was many times larger. Sam’s golden eyes flickered on and off as he struggled to activate his Intuition. he finally succeeded just in time to bat away the fireball (but not succeeding in blowing it up with the might of his swing as he had before). It flew into the wall, turning the stone momentarily molten before being sucked into the torches lining the staircase. For a brief moment, their flames flickered emerald before settling again.

Sam collapsed to his knees, vision blurring as pellets of sweat pocked the marble beneath him, and almost puked from exhaustion. It took everything in Sam’s power to keep his Intuition activated.

“Number Two: Speed. It doesn’t matter if you can see the pathways if you can’t react in time!”

THWACK!

An orange bolt of lightning sprung forth into being, but moved so fast that it had already stuck Sam full on in the chest before he had a chance to even process what was happening. Sam’s shirt was singed from where the bolt had struck, and he thought he felt a molar on the left side of his mouth crack as his jaw clenched from the jolt.



“Number Three: Multiple attacks, multiple directions.”

THWACK!
THWACK!
THWACK!

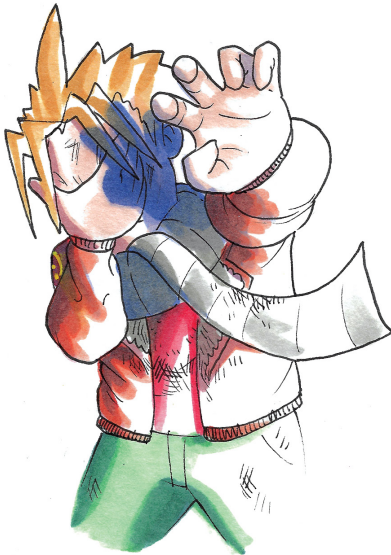
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Sickly, purple ruptures in the air opened up all around Sam, far too many to count, and from each tear a staff topped by a beautiful blue and gold orb shot forth and collided with Sam with frightening force - cracking several ribs with the final bash thwacking his solar plexus and knocking the air out of him.

“Number Four: Randomization. If the attack takes a truly random pathway, how could one be more likely than another? What use is your ability then, boy?”

THWACK!

Once again, a bolt of lightning shot forth from the shadow, but instead of shooting straight through Sam it zigzagged all across the room. Try as he might, Sam’s golden eyes could only see several dozen paths, each one just as bright and probable as the other. The bolt finally shot past his right shoulder. Sam attempted to leap left before it stopped dead in its path and fired directly into his back. Sam stumbled forward, this time successfully losing his Sinclair Sandwich from earlier in the day. Another molar cracked as more than sweat fell onto the castle floor.



“Number Five: Area of effect.”

Oh no, please sto-

THWACK!

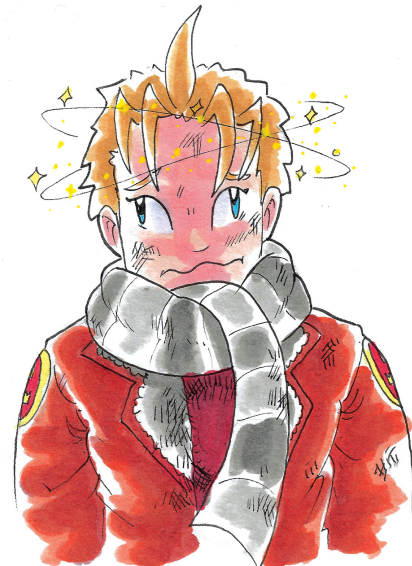
A blinding light, so bright that it reminded Sam of the videos on nuclear tests he used to watch on YouTube before the internet went completely belly up, filled the room. Sam’s sight left him.

“And finally, Number Six: Attacks from wi...*thinnnnn...*”

THWAaaaaaAAAACKKKKKK!

In the darkness of Sam’s stolen sight, a great fire was lit impossibly far away, and it was moving towards him. Flying towards him. In Sam’s confusion, the fiery Mothman was upon him before he could fully make out its shape. But then it was too late.

And Sam was on fire.





M

Sam awoke with a start, and then was immediately met with the sensation of a thousand stinging needles as pain washed over him. Gritting his teeth and bracing against the pain (which introduced all sorts of new pain in his cracked molars), Sam took in his surroundings. He was in a dark room lined with hundreds of books, lit only by a warm, crackling fireplace. The air smelled of earth and old things he couldn't quite put names to but somehow remembered. Sam figured he must have still been in the castle by the type of stone peeking through the ancient hanging tapestries and the oaken bookshelves. Sam was laid out on a divan, an antique type of couch that he had only ever seen in photos.



Someone (Could it have been the mysterious figure that had attacked him?) had wrapped his fresh and various wounds from the battle with a slimy bandage that stunk of moss and swamp. Taking extra care not to tear the tender cuts that miraculously seemed to be rapidly healing, Sam slowly turned his head to get an even closer look around the hearth.

And that's when he saw... it.

Sequestered away in the shadows of the room, barely touched by the light from the fireplace, hunched a hulking mass of robes.

It was a monster. Some sort of green Beastie covered in human clothing, clothing that seemed more ancient than the oak lining the walls. In a fevered moment of panic, Sam concluded it was a Beastie summoned to finish him off by the Caster who had defeated him, and that the dressings on his wounds were just that... dressing to a final meal.

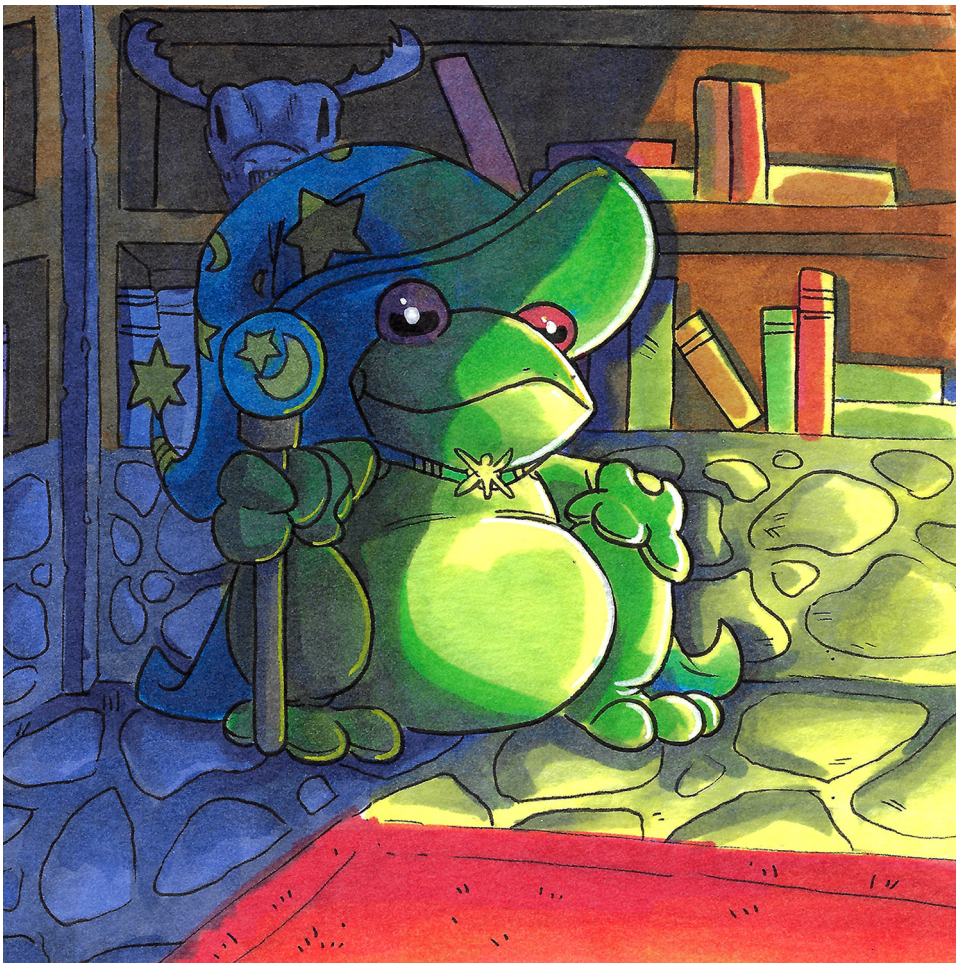
"Hey! Look -" Sam squeaked out, pushing himself back on the divan, not paying mind to the wounds he was opening up in his struggle.

The shadowy mass of cloth moved forward.

Thwack.

Thwack.

Thwack.



In his mind's eye, Sam saw not his past flash before his eyes, but rather his future. He saw the journey stretched out in front of him, like the evergreen roads of his father's stories told in his youth, cut short in the darkness.

"Please! Please don't eat me!" It was a childish notion from a mind made childish once more from panic. Eat him? Like this thing can even understand me Sam thought in a rush.

Thwack!

"Eat YOU?! Ha! You should be so lucky."

Following a moment of abject surprise mixed with terror, mixed with amusement - an interesting combination of emotions Sam had never felt - Sam said, "You spoke."

And from the shadows the figure finally fully emerged, revealing a large frog dressed as a wizard, like something out of a children's book. In his right arm he carried a staff topped with a beautiful orb - the same beautiful orb responsible for Sam's cracked ribs.

“Wha- what the hell is going on, a talking Beastie?” Sam had heard of certain spells that increased the intelligence of Beasties, but never to the point of outright speaking like a normal human. What was much more likely was that a Caster had found some way to transform himself into a frog... for reasons that Sam’s shocked brain couldn’t quite figure out on the spot.

“Beastie?! You think I’m some sort of cryptid?” the frog-man wheezed with laughter that sounded more and more like a croak as it echoed off the stone walls. And then it hit Sam.

“YOU! You’re the Caster who -”

“The Caster that kicked your butt. Surprisingly easy, considering how confident you were busting down my door.”

The frog-man Caster continued his shuffled walk to Sam’s side, who instinctively recoiled up the back of his divan even more, wincing at the pain the sudden movement brought him.

“Easy - HEY! Take it easy kid, I’m not going to hurt you,” the frog-man lifted his arm and stretched out a palm to show he meant no harm. Sam noticed that within the palm of his hand the shape of a heart, which surprisingly went a long way in easing his nerves.

“That’s better. The name is Love.” The frog-man said, putting his hand back onto the staff that had caused Sam so much pain before he was knocked out. Leaning on it like a crutch, the strange Caster stared at Sam, waiting. If Sam could properly pair a frog’s expression with a human one, he might have gone so far as to say that Love was looking at him with amusement.

“...Love.” Sam repeated.

“That’s right, Love. And you are...” Love said, still staring.

“Forget about who I am. Why did you attack me? Where am I? Why did you attack me and then not only not finish me off, but take care of my wounds?!” Sam said somewhat louder than he had intended, his voice cracking towards the end. Remembering that it was Sam himself who had broken into Love’s castle looking for a fight, Sam blushed.

“Ah, that reminds me.” Love continued, ignoring Sam’s questions and turning around to rummage through a cabinet beneath one of the bookshelves. Sam heard an assortment of squishy sounds that made him queasy, and then the clinking of plates and silverware, which made him queasier.

Love turned around and revealed a mound of worms, bugs, and an assortment of other ghastly cuisine that made Sam recoil in disgust.



“You need to eat this in order to finish the spell and complete your healing process, otherwise I will have wasted a lot of valuable saliva on those bandages of yours.”

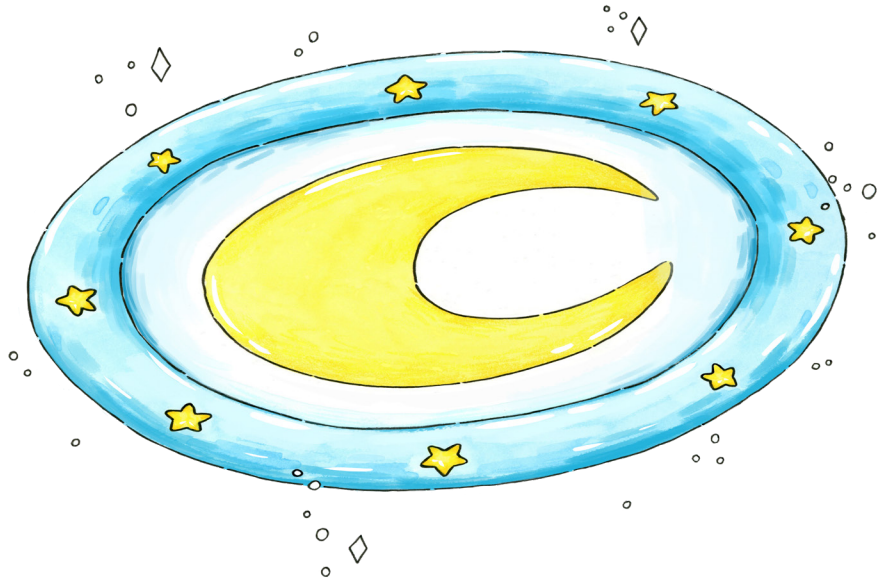
Sam looked down in horror at the bandages wrapping his body and felt a shiver run through his body almost as powerful as the electricity from the bolts with which he had been hit. Sam

groaned, and then finally gave into the situation. Sighing, Sam sank farther into the divan. He was too tired and too hurt to do anything other than listen to what Love had to say.

“Fine. This is all very weird, but... fine. But, there’s no way in hell that I’m eating that.” Sam said, eyeing the mound that was doing its best to slither off of the plate.

“Oh, this? I forgot how picky you normal humans are. No accounting for taste, I suppose.” Love said, turning back to the cabinet. He rummaged through the cabinet once more, finally finding what he was looking for.

“AHA!” Love exclaimed, “A Platter Adorn. My own invention. Here hold this.” Love handed Sam a plate that looked like a flattened version of the orb that sat atop Love’s staff.



i-



Love continued, “The Platter Adorn takes any food, no matter how squirmy and delicious, and turns it into the food that you want the most. All while retaining the nutrition of the original food. Observe.” And with that, Love plopped the swampy concoction onto the Platter Adorn. It stood there, quivering for a moment, before a shimmer of light revealed a steaming, juicy Sinclair Sandwich.

“A Sinclair Sandwich!” Sam exclaimed. Love, who had turned around to place the first dish back into the cabinet, stopped in his tracks.

“Sinclair, eh?” Love said, without looking back. His voice, while still more croak than anything, had grown deep, almost as though he were reminiscing.

“Yes, Sam Sinclair!” Sam muffled in between bites of the suspiciously well made Sinclair Sandwich. As he finished the last bite, Sam could feel the slimy bandages around his body grow cold as they did, he could only assume, their healing work.

He couldn’t help himself. It didn’t occur to Sam that he was eating a magical meal that moments ago was a mound of maggots and worms from a Caster shaped like a frog. A Caster shaped like a frog that had beaten him to a pulp earlier that night and possibly summoned the terror that was Mothman to kill not only M, but countless others.

Sam doubled over as he tried to make himself upchuck the sandwich... or whatever it was. Love snapped out of his reminiscing trance and whirled around, whacking Sam on the ribs with his staff and stopping him.

“Cut that out, boy! If I wanted you dead, I would have just finished you off in the hall!” Love bellowed.

Catching his breath and rubbing the spot that the staff hit (and apparently already rapidly healing), Sam responded, “Well, why didn’t you?”

Love began to pace back and forth in front of the fire, head tilted upwards to the ceiling and occasionally twirling his staff. He spoke and moved like a professor giving a lesson.

“As I was rummaging through your things, looking to see if you had any tasty morsels to steal before I threw you down the trash hole, I found... this.” Love stopped and brought his staff down onto the marble floor, briefly creating a flash inside the orb. In the distance, a bookcase rattled, and a book flew from its shelf. The book fluttered its cover like wings and flew into the outstretched hand of Love.

It was M’s Spellbook.

Oh god, not again, Sam thought to himself in a brief panic as he searched for, and luckily found, the rest of his possessions in his backpack at the side of the divan. Turning his attention back to Love and staring daggers at him, Sam spat out, “So you saved my life because of some old, empty Spellbook? After killing so many, some pieces of parchment saved my life?!”

Love, now looking deeply offended, bubbled out, “Pieces of parchment? Now you listen here, boy. I have many Spellbooks on my oaken shelves. I have magics all the way from the mystics of River Tigris to the Green Thumbs of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. I have darker Spellbooks bound in the skin of a Lesser Seal. But none of those Spellbooks... NONE!... are as-”

Love, who was using both his staff and M's Spellbook as batons to punctuate every word he was saying, stopped in his tracks, looking more confused and more frog-like than ever. "Wh-wait what do you mean after killing so many people? It's been decades since... Never mind that! Spit it out, boy, what do you mean!"

Sam, finding that he now had enough strength to sit up without wanting to cry, leaned forward to really drive the knife home. "What do you mean, what do I mean, *toad*? You summoned the damn Mothman and thousands of people have died as a result! Good thing we put an end to that... thing tonight!"

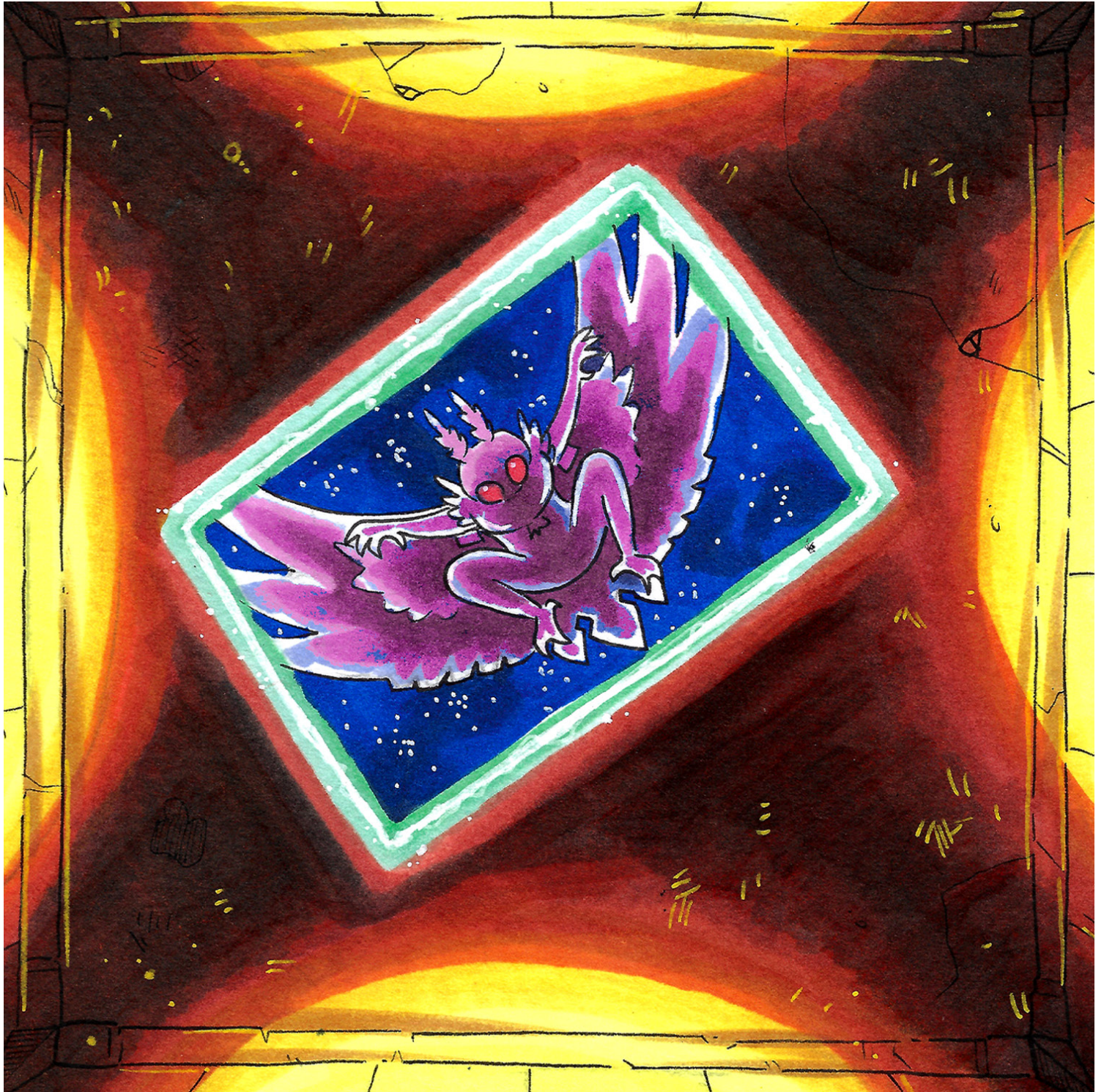
Love stood in silence with what Sam could only describe as shock on his amphibian features. And then the lips that were already pulled far too back on his face... pulled back even farther. The frog-man was smiling, and it was maddening.

Looking up once more with just his eyes, Love used his staff to point toward the ceiling and said, in a voice barely above a whisper, "Oh, you mean that?"

Sam's head shot up so fast that the bandages around his neck snapped from the pressure. At the top of the hearth's tower a magical window opened up into the night. And flying above the castle, as though all of the ragtag army's efforts were for not, flew Mothman in his full, terrifying splendor.

"No... no my boy you didn't destroy it." The frog-man almost cooed.



"And that's not Mothman."





EXTRA!
Strange man-cryptid thing seen
in the swamp!
EXTRA!

THE CASTER CORNER

 Quimbly's nightbeams filled the sky this past week - what strange weather phenomenon were they studying?
 Loveland Castle Forecast: 40+ degrees F

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A REMARKABLE DISCOVERY!

TALKING FROG BEASTIE FOUND DOING LAUNDRY?!



EW...

With the shattering of the Veil, we are no strangers to the weird and uncanny! However, ever day it seems like we uncover a new and terrifying **BEASTIE DISCOVERY!**

This week is no different, and we are doing our best to make sense of reports we've heard of a strange frog-like Beastie that was found doing laundry in the swamps of Ohio. The most remarkable part, you ask? The strange Beastie supposedly speaks!

We interviewed a young Caster, Jessica Jade, a recent graduate from Quimblys, who saw the Beastie this past Saturday.

"Oh my gawd (sic), it was so gross and slimy. My friends and I saw this naked frog thing the size of a large dawg doing its laundry in the swamp of all places, can you believe it?"

When asked if she confronted the strange Beastie, Jessica Jade had the following to say:

"Ew... so like, when we asked if it could cover up, it screamed 'Cover up?! You're in MY d*mn swamp, missy!' We were so scared!"

HAVE YOU SEEN THIS FROG? Notify thecastercorner@metazoogames.com!

NEXT TIME...



M

Man, Sam just can't catch a break. Hopefully all this beating up teaches him a few lessons about just how much hard work he has ahead of him. So, what do you think? Friend or foe? Who is this Love, what's his backstory? What role will he play in Sam's journey moving forward, if any? And... just how powerful is he?!

On another note, you'll notice that these past two chapters have been shorter and... I guess the word would be episodic? My plan moving forward is to have at maximum 2-3 weeks in between each chapter. The first chapter was published in March... we should definitely be further ahead in the story and chapters by this time in 2021 (you may even be reading this in 2022 by the time it hits shelves!

I promise that I will be better about getting these chapters out there more consistently. This story is such an important cornerstone of MetaZoo's future. From this story flows our intended TV show, our movies, and our video games. Without this story as a linchpin, MetaZoo has no direction. TRUST that I am therefore taking the writing of this seriously.

I will (hopefully) see you all in another note just a few weeks after this one... here's to hoping!

Sincerely and happily yours,

INNI

MetaZoo™

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