

Anansi dove into the portal he tore into the floor, plunging into the darkness. He had heard rumors of mages who went into the void and never returned, mages too strong and with too much support to have gotten lost in the sea of darkness. There had to be something keeping them there, something potent enough to cut their ties to the main world above. Something strong enough to seek out, and strong enough to bestow him said strength. He had to find it.

Anasi had contemplated tying a rope around his waist before going in, but given others were bound to have tried that before only to have not returned, it surely wasn't effective. Besides, he thought, I must be stronger than most who have gone in. I should be able to fend for myself, should I come face to face with something in the darkness. What's the worst that can happen?

As he sunk deeper into the sludge, Anansi felt the light from his entrance fade away, locking him in the void. He searched to try to gain his bearings, but couldn't figure out which way was up and which was down. He tried swimming through the muck, but all attempts seemed futile. He was stuck in place, as a beast is stuck in tar. Dread began creeping in; Anansi was trapped in an endless sea, unable to move, with no control over himself or his surroundings. He started to panic, realizing that those who he had conversed with, those who were skeptical of his theory were right. There was nothing in the darkness, no monster, no life, nothing but infinite amounts of sludge and death. Hope started to fade until...

Anansi found himself in a place that resembled his home in the Basin. It bore the same layout; his table was in front of a large window he would peer through for artistic inspiration, his rocking chair placed adjacent to the fireplace where he did his studies, his bookshelf next to the door filled with his arcana. Yet something about it was wrong. Everything in it, from the table and the chair, to the walls and the ceiling, even to the fire in the fireplace, was black. Everything

was made of a similar sludge to that of the sea he was just stuck within, down to the viscous nature of the material, which oozed down the furniture before coalescing with the floor.

When Anansi began to move towards the chair, he didn't decide to. It was as if something was pulling him, willing him towards it. He didn't resist. After slowly crossing the room, he reached the chair and sat down into it, and while it looked to be made of sludge, it was surprisingly sturdy. Anansi felt the same kind of comfort on it as he did with his real chair back at his home beyond this black sea. For a moment, he felt calm. For a moment, he felt at home.

From under the armrests sprang hands made of the same black material that surrounded him. They reached and clasped Anansi's forearms to the chair. Two black tendrils extended from the floor in front of him and bound his feet to the floor. They wrapped around his shins, binding them to the front legs of the rocker. Another came from the headrest and coiled around his neck. Anansi was helpless.

Then, a figure manifested itself from the dark fire of the fireplace. It crawled from the flames as if it were being born, clawing at the ground as it dragged itself forward. The abomination was bipedal in nature, and slowly rose on two legs. Seven calves extruded out at each knee, and it could only stand on five of them. The creature bore eight arms, with six stemming from various parts of the body; two of the arms were tied to the left bicep, three were tied to the shoulders, and the last extended from the left shoulder blade. Its face had nothing on it, save for a singular large eye that stood on end. The pupil was pitch black, and from it oozed a black liquid outwards in the sclera. The creature began to shamble towards Anansi, who was powerless to stop its advance. It started to extend one of its many hands towards the deep mage's face, which bore seven fingers. From the knuckles sprouted a second set of fingers, which moved independent from the rest.

As he faced down the creature, many thoughts crossed Anansi's mind: fear, horror, loss, acceptance of his fate. But as the hand was about to touch him, one thought overpowered the rest: awe. Anansi felt the raw power of the abomination that stood before him, and envied it. It had abilities he had never seen, bore a form so grotesque, yet so captivating that it had to be indomitable. He longed for the strength that thing possessed, and would do anything to gain it. Anything.

The creature paused just inches from Anansi's face. It lowered its hand and tilted its head slightly at the deep mage. Its singular eye stared straight through Anansi's eyes and into his soul, its gaze stopping all of his thoughts cold. It closed its eye and dissolved into the floor, leaving him alone, still bound to the chair. The walls of the house began to darken, the floor claimed the table and bookshelf, and the chair was ripped backwards into the void, plunging Anansi back into the deep black until...

Anansi stood on a long, empty road. Paved with the dark matter of his surroundings, it was only wide enough for him to stand on, and only led one way. At the end sat a large, obsidian-esque stone, and embedded within it was a sword of pure void, darker than anything he'd seen before. The sword beckoned to him; "Come, Anansi. Remove me from the stone, and gain the strength of eternal darkness. Retrieve me, and gain power beyond comprehension. Claim me, and become one with the Abyss."

This time when he moved, Anansi had full control. He slowly approached the weapon, his feet sinking slightly in the sludge of the path with each step. When he reached the sword, Anansi felt the tremendous aura of the artifact draining him of his thoughts, his vigor, his life. Yet he didn't care. He grabbed the hilt and tore it from the stone. Jubilation and pride had overtaken him as Anansi began chuckling, then laughing, then maniacally cackling within the

infinite dark. He had what he had come here for, a fragment of the power of the beast that he knew lurked within the deepest dark, even if no one believed him. He thrust the sword high above his head, for all the nothingness to see. In that moment, Anansi thought he was unkillable.

That thought was fleeting.

Anansi's feet began to sink into the path, as if he were stuck in quicksand. He tried to move, but found himself paralyzed yet again. His gaze, which was fixated on the blade of the sword, watched in horror as a large eye opened in the fuller of the sword, bearing the same cursed pupil as that of the monster from before. The hilt grew tendrils that coiled around his hand and forearm, and crushed it down to nothing. As Anansi sunk deeper, the sword fell upon him, slicing his skull down the middle and settling between the eyes. His thoughts raced yet again, running through every thought someone on the verge of death would think. Yet one thought, once again, silenced all others: awe. His final thought before the floor consumed him whole was of lust, for the powers of the sword, for a fraction of the creature's strength, for anything the beast could provide. Anansi was drowned in the darkness again until...

Anansi stood at the entrance to a large, black chapel. The windows, the ceiling, and the architecture moved upwards into sharp points. The main hall was massive, with the roof being at least four stories above his head. The windows, normally decorated by stained glass, shared the same image; the eye, now blackened with ooze moreso than before, filled each one, tracking the mage's every movement. The hall, like everywhere else he'd been, was made of the viscous filth that had surrounded him since the beginning. Anansi began walking, gliding towards the altar across the way, passing row after row of empty pews. Yet for some reason, he couldn't shake that he was being watched by more than the eyes. He felt that while every pew was empty, a presence

took rest in each seat. The presence of a mage lost to the dark corners of this unending sea, now settled in to bear witness to these proceedings, whatever they be.

When Anansi reached the altar, he knelt before it. From the podium, the creature he'd seen in the dark reflection of his room slowly materialized, dragging itself out with its many arms and many hands. It freed itself from the stand and rose again as it had before, staring through him with its singular, wretched, alluring eye. Then, it spoke, its multitude of voices echoing throughout Anansi's head.

"You came to us to seek power, to gain strength you cannot comprehend. Through terror and dread, your lust for it has silenced all other thoughts. You are a slave to it, bound to it, willing to sell everything for it. **WE** will give you that power. **BUT WE WILL TAKE AWAY EVERYTHING.** We will take your mind, your soul, **YOUR WILL.** We will erase your thoughts, your consciousness, and replace it with our own. You will serve as our puppet, unto eternity, converting the worthy and feeding us the rest. You will be our flesh, **OUR WILL**, above. **DO YOU UNDERSTAND?"**

Anansi, unable to speak through fear and awe, answered simply with a thought. "I will give you whatever you desire. Bestow upon me your strength, and let me become your vassal. I am yours."

The monster reached out its hand as it did before and covered Anansi's face. From the palm, tendrils extend in through his eyes and around through his ears into his skull. They tore away at pieces of his brain, inserted themselves into the crevices of his mind, and replaced the missing parts with black sludge. Anansi's brain, now modified by the Abyss, finally held the power he sought, but lacked all that made him who he was. His final independent thought was not of pain, but of pleasure. This time, he knew he was unkillable.

The tendrils retracted from Anansi's skull, their part now finished. ***“RISE NOW, ANANSI, FIRST CHILD OF THE ABYSS!”*** Anansi rose, without thought. The creature's many voices echoed throughout the halls of the Chapel of the Endless Night. ***“GO FORTH, CHILD. LET THE WRETCHED WORLD ABOVE HEAR OUR CALL! WE ARE ALIVE! WE WILL DROWN THE NONBELIEVERS IN THE ABYSS! YOUR FINAL RECKONING IS NIGH! OUR WILL SHALL BE DONE! SO ECHOES THE ETERNAL CHOIR!”***