

Threadbare

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Can you see it? That red dot high in the night sky? It's a harbinger of destruction. There's not much in this mad world you can rely on. But if I am certain about one thing, that red dot is headed straight for me.

I am an emissary of pain. I've survived countless battles, seen generations pass into dust, and watched mighty kings tumble into history. I have been tortured and cursed... yet I have survived. I have experienced things that would make most fall to their knees weeping in despair. Yes, I have endured.

Not long ago, in the midst of the Slaughter of the Arches, I had a revelation. I was knee deep in the blood and muck of a rain-soaked battlefield. For hours, men and beasts had raged against each other in furious combat. Thunder crashed around me, nearly drowning out the howls of pain and fury. Suddenly, I was overcome with an overwhelming sense of unfairness. If I had a mouth, I would have screamed to the heavens: "Absurdity! Is it all vain absurdity?"

In that instant, a golden blade pierced my belly. Staring down at the gilded sword in my gullet, I was struck by a moment of clarity in an insane world. Suddenly, I had to know: Was I made to suffer?



Stuffy Doll | Art by David Rapoza

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After I slogged my way to higher ground, I set out on a quest to find answers. I sought out great mages in illustrious academies of learning. I implored monks in their stark towers to share their hidden knowledge. I fell at the feet of philosophers debating the foundations of life itself. None had answers for a doll in the midst of an existential crisis... just more questions and, inevitably, attempts to harness me for their personal ambitions.

For a time, I wandered the back roads and byways in search of a purpose. The sight of a happy peasant family through a cottage window sent me spiraling into despair. Am I alone in the world? Yes, everywhere I look there are other people, but sometimes it feels like no one else can relate. It's like an invisible barrier prevents me from really connecting with anyone else. Pain is ever present. In the end, someone always gets hurt. And I'm hell to be around when I have a guilty conscience.

A few months ago, I was kidnapped by bandits and sold to an evil toymaker. He had a stuffed-bear minion who was possessed by the spirit of murdered man. Finally! I believed I was among my own kind and no longer relegated to the punishing whims of a mage. But alas, the stuffed-bear lacked my resilience and was incinerated in his first battle with the villagers. The villagers arrested the toymaker, and I was out on the streets, left to my own threadbare devices.



Mist Raven | Art by John Avon

The ravens mocked me as I set out, alone again. You reach a certain age, and you find yourself asking, *am I more than the sum of my parts* ? Surely I have an essence beyond mere burlap and cotton. With as much torment as I've suffered, am I not entitled to something greater?

Soon, the thud of galloping hooves shook the ground. A caravan of nomads rumbled into sight, their tattered banners the last remnants of a kingdom now passed into the enemies' hands. As I was plucked from the roadside and shoved into a shaman's pack, I wanted to rage at the heavens. If I had a fist, I would have shook it at the sky. Do I not have free will? Alas, given my self-destructive tendencies, this has proven to be the least fruitful line of philosophical inquiry of all.



Knight of Glory | Art by Peter Mohrbacher

Today, I'm the follower of a mighty nomad shaman. She is yet another contender in the epic struggle for power that plays out over the epochs and changing borders. Tonight, we're locked in battle with a legion of knights, as she pits herself against a famous crusader. I can see him on the ridge overlooking the battlefield. His great helm flashes silver as lightning crashes across the sky. Yet for all his glory, he is oblivious to the red dot, growing larger by the second.

Life marches ever onward, and I perambulate an endless road. Despite the battle raging around me, I take a moment to pause and reflect. If I had a spine, I would lift my head toward that beacon of destruction. My fate is vengeful toil, and acceptance is the path of least resistance. After all, I know what's bearing down on me, and how in just seconds, the battle will be over.



Shivan Meteor | Art by Chippy

Over for the crusader anyway. Me? It's just another day, another meteor, and no closer to the meaning of life.