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How Many Eyes?

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PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

Muggtoth huffed and winced with each stride. His body was not often made to run—even before it was stricken with necrosis. But necrosis was not the cause of his pain, or his flight. Necrosis was his normal, yet unnatural, state of being. The cause of his quickened pace and shortened breaths was altogether not normal.



Normally, Muggtoth avoided dangers. It was what he did. It was all he did. Yet somehow, this day, his eye had failed him.

"Eyes..." said Vissk to his pupil, pointing to his own, lightly closed. "Eyes are mostly symbolic. They are not what we use to actually see."

"Master?" asked Pinaphet, his own eyes crinkled in confusion.

"Everyone detects things with his eyes, the things that are plainly before him. But the truly wise, the *sighted*...see beyond the range of our little ivory orbs." Vissk touched lightly his closed eyelids. "We see beyond the mundane material of the now and into," he paused, and opened his eyes wide and bright, "the future."

"But how is it done?" pleaded Pinaphet. "How do I see beyond?"

"In time, young pupil, you will. You will become Magus. I have...seen it."

"How could I not see it!" spat Muggtoth, struggling to keep moving. "How did I not *see*?" With each agonizing step he could feel his body stiffening, his limbs constricting like hairs caught in a tightening knot. With each step he thought of his miserable lot in undeath.

Through some curse unknown to him, Muggtoth was given a second life. Every day of that life was a test of his will, and of his wit. Through his one stained eye Muggtoth would see the pitfall of his own end, and each time he would sidestep it. At first he thought himself gifted, a seer. As time wore on he became bitter, cursed to unending visions of his own demise. He hated to see himself in pain, broken, falling to a second death. He also hated being alive. He hated himself for being a coward. "Face the future, end this misery," he would say to himself just before sidestepping his fear, again.

Vissk led his apprentice through the impossible halls of his home. Pinaphet walked as close to his master as propriety would allow. Each turn was a wonder to him, stepping from hallway to ceiling to inverted staircase. They redefined up and down at every turn.

"Are we really walking on the wall, or do your eyes play tricks?" quizzed Vissk.

Pinaphet could hardly spare the concentration to consider the question. His every thought was on not falling off the wall.

"Always assume your eyes play tricks. Eyes are for fools. Eyes see what others aim to show you. My home is this way because I aim to confuse my guests, both wanted and unwanted. I find it makes for entertaining dinner conversation with the former and is effectively paralyzing to the latter. In your case, it makes a fine learning experience.

"Soon you will see through your eyes, not with them. Imagine each of them is a tiny crystal ball. To see truth, look into your eyes. To see trickery, look with your eyes."



The poison reached Muggtoth's arm and seized it. His walking staff slipped from his stiffened fingers and clacked upon the rocky ground. Moving would be even more difficult now. His own ineptitude angered him. He had seen countless deadly events and avoided them all. Falling rocks, loosed arrows, hungry beasts of all sorts. But today, he had seen no danger. No dark future that he would cowardly flee. Yet here he was, suffering a slow and agonizing death. "It serves you right, coward!" he blurted at himself. "You should have let an arrow strike, or a baloth take you." These deaths would have been quick and easy.

He felt deserving of this long doom, and of the ironic twist that it would come blindly. In defeat he slumped to the earth, closed his eye, and wept inky blackness. And then he saw it.

"One eye in the present and the other in the future? Come now, young Pinaphet, did you pick that up from an old ale-rat at the pub? Words like these are for fools—fools who try to comprehend what is beyond them. The truth, as I have been instructing you, is that eyes are not significant.

"Of course, we are aware of the present. It is a very important time. It is when we process the past and affect the future. But there is no one eye for this or one eye for that. Such words are the gushings of some struggling bard, tossing rhymes for refills.

Let me give you an example. This morning I saw the future, as I often do. I saw it as I read a book about poisonous flowers. What I saw was a dragon, long and lean, very fearsome, swirling within the two eyes that took in the print on the pages. At the very same time, my mind took note of the deadly beauty of both flower and dragon, and recreated an image from my past of an experience I once had with a firebreather. Past, present, future...all at once."

"How were you not confused? Seeing so much at once?"

Vissk chuckled. "Tell me, Pinaphet, are you confused by soup?"

"Soup?" Pinaphet's wrinkled brow indicated that he was more confused by this question.

"Yes, soup. You feel its welcoming warmth upon your face as your nose takes in the subtle scent of carrot. The clank of the spoon on the bowl reminds you of your mother, and you remember her. Then the hot spoon and froth touches your lips, and you slurp it in and savor the wonderful marriage of carrot, ginger, and cubal root. All at the same time.

No, Pinaphet, it is not confusing. In fact, it is quite...delicious."

There, lying in surrender upon the rocks, Muggtoth saw it: a vision, blue and rippling, of faces in horror and his flesh peeling from his hand before him. Behind the onlookers, towers he knew well.

Muggtoth sat up as quickly as his aching body could. So this pain, this torturous pain would not be his end. With renewed strength, Muggtoth turned eastward and was once again on the move.

"It is important for you to note, young one, that everyone can see beyond the now. Well, everyone with the wisdom to do so. What I speak of is the past. The past is your guide in the now. Do what you can now to avoid the pitfalls and recreate the boons of the past.

"Future sight takes wisdom as well. It, too can guide our actions in the present. With it, a Magus can prepare for what is coming. We can affect what will happen before it happens, redirect timelines that have not even begun yet. With a mind on the past, awareness of the present, and visions of the future, a Magus can see...all. All without reliance on an eye."

Pinaphet was wide-eyed and rapt by his master's words. He wanted, more than anything, to see the way his master saw. He fought hard the desire to rush the process, to cut corners and open his eye...to see. But he knew that the process was long and arduous. He saw, in his future, much, much study. But he was curious. "Master," Pinaphet asked sheepishly, "can you show me?"

Vissk knew the question was coming, and had been directing his lecture toward it all along.

"Oh, I think you've had enough to process for today. But, I guess I can show you...something. Go to my study and grab the mortar and pestle on the desk. Take care not to be startled by the mouse that will scurry across the ceiling. I don't want you to spill what's inside."

"Where are we going?" asked Pinaphet.

"Into the future," bellowed Vissk with drama and sarcasm. Pinaphet could tell he was not going to get a straight answer, so he just waited quietly until his master continued the lesson. "Fear not, young one, but we are going to see a dragon." Pinaphet stopped abruptly.

"A dragon?"



"Yes. The one I spoke of earlier. A time rift will open not far from here and from it will erupt the worm from the future. This will be a great opportunity for you—to see the future come into the now. Not exactly a 'sighting,' but exciting." The smirk on Vissk's face made it clear that he was pleased with his little rhyme. "The dragon will come out of the rift and let out a great roar. It will not strike immediately. I know, because I have seen it. And I have prepared for it.

"I told you about a dragon I encountered in the past. It should have killed me. I lived by luck alone. Now that I have survived this incident in the past, and researched greatly on the subject, I can, in the now, take actions that will safeguard us in the future. I have readied a possession spell that will put the beast under my control. That way, it can roar all it wants, but it won't hurt you. You can study it at your leisure, sense what the stuff of the future *feels* like. Then, in time, when you gain the sight, you will recognize the sensation. Then the time rift will close and I will send it back to whenever it came from."

The two walked a while in silence. Vissk wanted to give Pinaphet some time to ponder what was going to happen, to be prepared for the future the way he was. But, for the drama that he fancied so, he also wanted to wait for the right time to speak his next words.

"Pinaphet. Take this mortar and pestle," said Vissk, with the slow and methodical tone he employed to indicate the importance of his words.

"What is it.?"

"It is antidote for the poison of Viperwick pollen," replied the magus nonchalantly.

Pinaphet was about to speak when he was interrupted by shuffling and snorting in the thicket to their right. Out of the brambles stumbled Muggtoth. At the sight of the two men, the cyclops collapsed, groaning, upon the grassy ground.

"Don't worry, he's too sick to harm you," said Vissk. "Feed him some of the mixture in the mortar."

Pinaphet stood a moment, amazed at his master's power. He really could "see all." Vissk took a moment to let Pinaphet grasp what had just transpired. Then, after a self-congratulatory smile, Vissk barked out, "Pinaphet! The antidote. Be quick—the real lesson is about to begin."



The apprentice quickly shuffled over to the hulking creature and reached out with the goo-covered pestle. The cyclops opened its bony mouth slowly and took the antidote.

Muggtoth felt the poison, and the pain it caused, recede. His muscles limbered and his clouded vision cleared. He stood, and saw two men standing before him. They were talking to each other, but he could hardly hear them. They paid him no mind at all. He recognized the faces, but not their expressions. He recognized the towers in the distance, but something was different. He was too groggy to try and figure it out, or to move.

"Preparation, Pinaphet. It is what we do with our knowledge of the future. Now leave the creature," said Vissk, pointing out into the glen, "and have a look out here. Just seconds before the air turned cold, seconds before a sharp thunder pierced the quiet, Vissk boldly announced, "The rift. It opens."

Muggtoth saw the men grow wide-eyed as they were bathed in blue light. He heard his own voice speak softly in his mind, "It is here." He closed his eye and threw his arms wide.

Beyond the broad silhouette of the cyclops, Vissk and Pinaphet saw a bright blue line slice across the glen like a blade through a whaleskin. The thin now tore and split wide, releasing a blue glow and a shadow from the future.

"Worry not, Pinaphet," barks Vissk, "I have seen this. I have *seen*." The wavering shadow lurched forward, piercing the light, and took form. "It is the dragon, the dragon of my vision," said Vissk. The beast looked around at the unfamiliar landscape and at those standing before him.

"You stand?" bellowed the dragon. "Before **Ugin**?"

Vissk turned calmly to instruct his pupil. "The roar," said Vissk, as he readied his spell. "The roar is next." The face of the great worm contorted. It reared back and drew a long gulp of air. Pinaphet stood paralyzed with fear. To calm his apprentice, and display his control over the now, Vissk continued to announce what would happen next. "I will now..." The beast snapped forward with its jaws open. The air rippled and a blackened line was torched from the dragon's maw across the ground, through the Cyclops, to the men, and beyond. Both cyclops and human saw nothing, their five melted eyes tumbling down their blackened, fleshless faces. But they felt it, the moment of utter hell as their existence both inside and out was boiled away. Vissk burned out in anger, wondering "How, how did I not see," while Muggtoth burned out in peace, thankful for the end.

*Matt Cavotta has always been a fantasy goober. At various points in his gooberhood, he has used his nerdy knowledge to become a professional goober. He went from scribbling pictures of his own **D&D** characters to illustrating books and cards for his two favorite games; **D&D** and **Magic**. Then he channeled his inner 7th level Illusionist/3rd level Bard and landed himself a job at Wizards as a writer. He continues to cast his illusion spells each morning, lest they find out he's just another goober.*



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