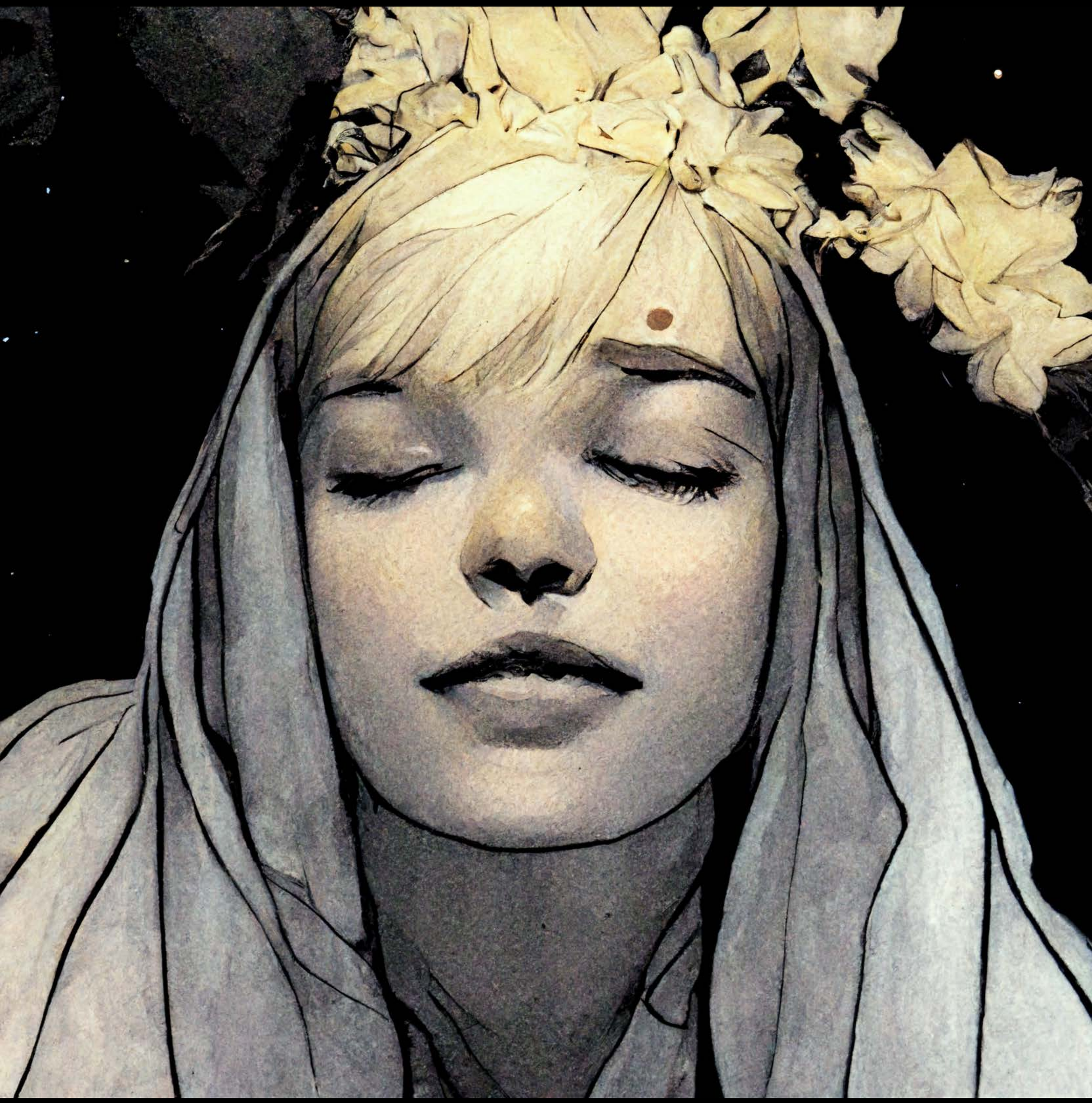
SUMMER ISLAND

The shocking truth behind this remote community

FESTIVAL OF THE SEA GOD

Read the photo essay that shook the World



Summer Island #1, August 2022. Published by Campfire Entertainment LLC, Suite C2 561 4th St, Brooklyn NY 11215. Summer Island™ © 2022 Steve Coulson. All inquiries: scoulson@campfirenyc.com. Names, characters, places, and incidents featured in this story are fictitious. Any resemblance to persons living or dead is coincidental. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License. https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/ Dedicated to Pamela Coulson (1935-2022).

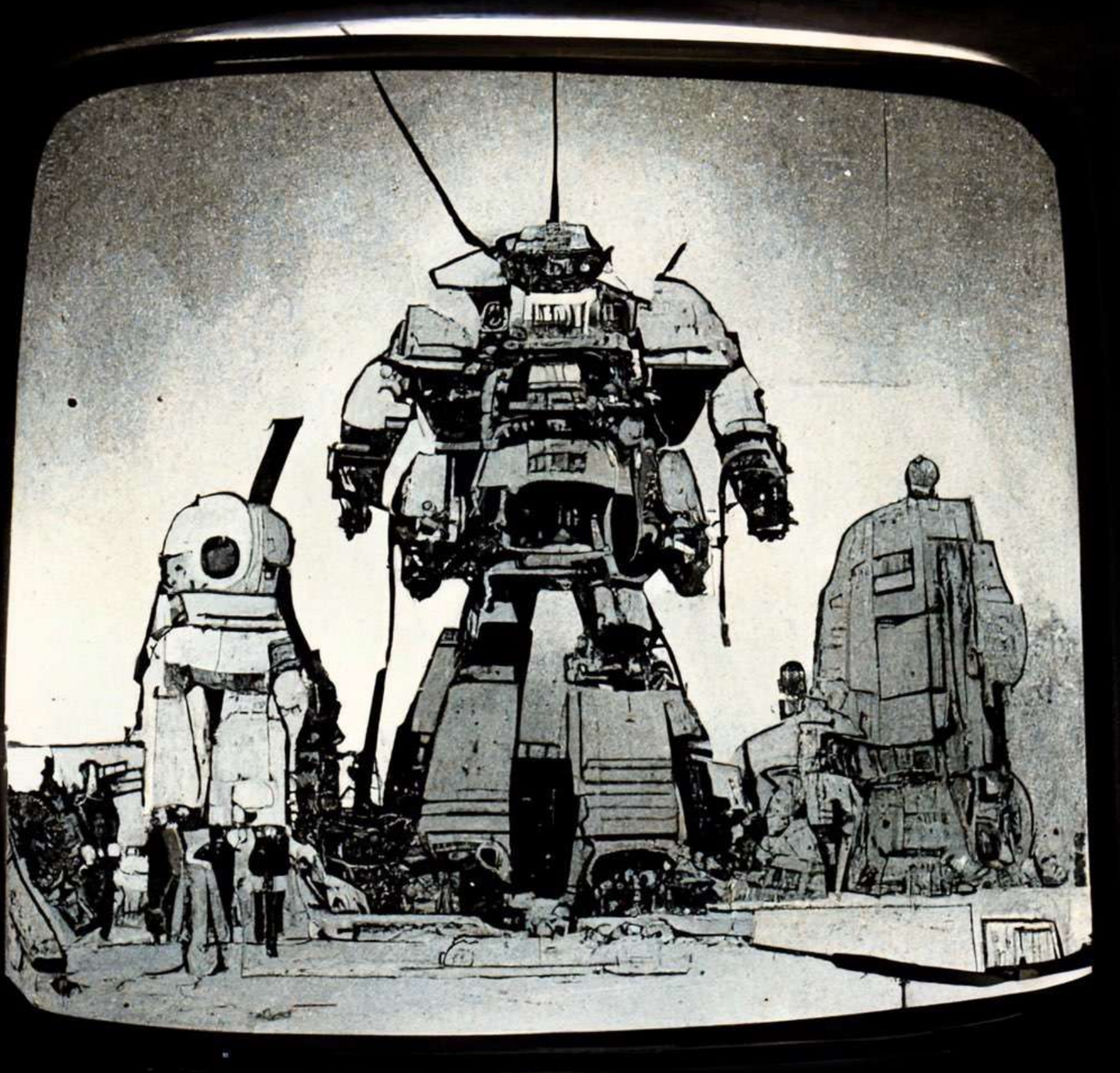
In **1954,** The United States Navy detonated a dry-fuel nuclear device on **Bikini Atoll** in the **Marshall Islands.**

But scientists miscalculated the yield. The resulting explosion was **1,000 times** more powerful than both **Hiroshima** & **Nagasaki.**

Soon after, the **Monsters** arose.

They began to **lay siege** to cities on both the **Atlantic** and **Pacific** seaboard.

Millions perished.



The cities responded by investing **heavily** in advanced defense systems using **military-grade technology.**

Smaller coastal communities, however, were left to fend for themselves...

SUMMER ISLAND

STORY BY
STEVE COULSON

ART BY
MIDJOURNEY

It's 1973. I'm working as a freelance photographer for **Life Magazine**.

I've been invited to **Summer Island**, a remote, isolated community in the Outer Hebrides.

The fishermen here trawl for Arctic Char in the frigid waters of the North.

It takes two flights and a boat to reach this lonely place.

The boat sails once a week, and it's the only way on or off the island.

Electricity first arrived here ten years ago.

A sign on the lone telephone reads "**For Emergencies Only**".

Nine o'clock in the morning, and it's **unnerving** to find the place **deserted**.

As I'm walking, I'm shooting. It's **force of habit**, born out of years on location.

Something's not right.

So when **IT** finally appears, I'm ready. Because it's **true** what they say - **the camera never lies.**

And here, in this place, **The Gods** walk among us.

A **silent finger** points the way.

In the distance, I see **villagers** walking.

I follow.

The further I go, the more I find signs of **celebration**.

Or perhaps **worship**. It's **hard** to be **sure**.

Along the way, the crowd grows - a **procession** with **purpose**. We're definitely headed **somewhere**.

I grew up in a small English village a lot like this one. Every year a traveling fair would arrive and set up in the High Street. Bumper cars, candy floss, shooting galleries.

They called it "**Feast Week**" although to be honest, I have no idea why.

When "**The Feast**" came, the whole **village** participated. On opening night, I remember we'd all walk through the streets towards it, as one.

I haven't thought about that in years.

But this feels the **same**.

Finally we turn a corner and their "**Feast**" is **revealed**...

Welcome to
The Festival of
the Sea God.

As good as I am at what I do, I already know that these photographs will **never** truly capture the **intensity** of what I'm experiencing.

Smoke from small bonfires fills the air, along with the scent of **incense** and **spring flowers**.

Then there's the **song** and **laughter** of children at play.

And the costumes - **spectacular** - home-made, **primal**, channeling visions of **dream** and **nightmare**.

And - of course...

...the **monsters.**

They're a friendly lot, and more than happy to pose for a portrait and shake my hand.

To be honest, I'm starting to feel like the guest of honor.

I'm **snapping** like a **maniac**, exposing roll after roll of **Tri-X**, **fascinated** by this community, whose **ancestors** long ago made these **remote islands** their **home**.

They're a people seemingly with their own made-up **religion**. But then, who am I to **judge**?

After all, aren't **all** religions made up? A reflection of our **collective experience**? A shared understanding of the world, created by ancient priests in an attempt to impose **order** on the **primordial chaos?**

Certainly **the Monsters could** be seen **as Gods** walking the Earth, in all their destructive wonder. So why sh**ouldn't** these simple people be allowed to **worship** them from afar without **scorn**?

And **then**, in this **moment**, I **see** her...

...The Bride of the Sea God!

But not just **one** Bride.

In an open field next to the Festival, I start to see **more** and **more**. A **dozen** at least.

All dressed **alike**, all with the same **Blonde locks**. Twins? Sisters? Cousins?

And, in stark contrast to the **revelry** of the **crowd**, all have the same air of **resigned melancholy**.

The Brides are kept isolated from the crowds, behind a rope barrier.

And then, **they rise**, as if triggered by some unseen **command** or event, and start to make their way out of the village.

I once photographed a **bullfight** in **Portugal**. Unlike those **Spanish heathens**, the Portuguese let the bull **survive**, and get it out of the ring by herding in **cows**, which the bull **blindly follows**.

And it's like that **now**, as we all head out of the village.

Summer Island has only a few hundred residents, but there must be **over a thousand** here.

Where did all these people **come from**? Did they **all** make the pilgramage here **just** for this festival?

Why? What's the **draw**?

What's the **main attraction**?

Oh. Oh God.

It's constructed of branches and reeds and must stand 100 feet tall.

And the congregation stands before it in silence.

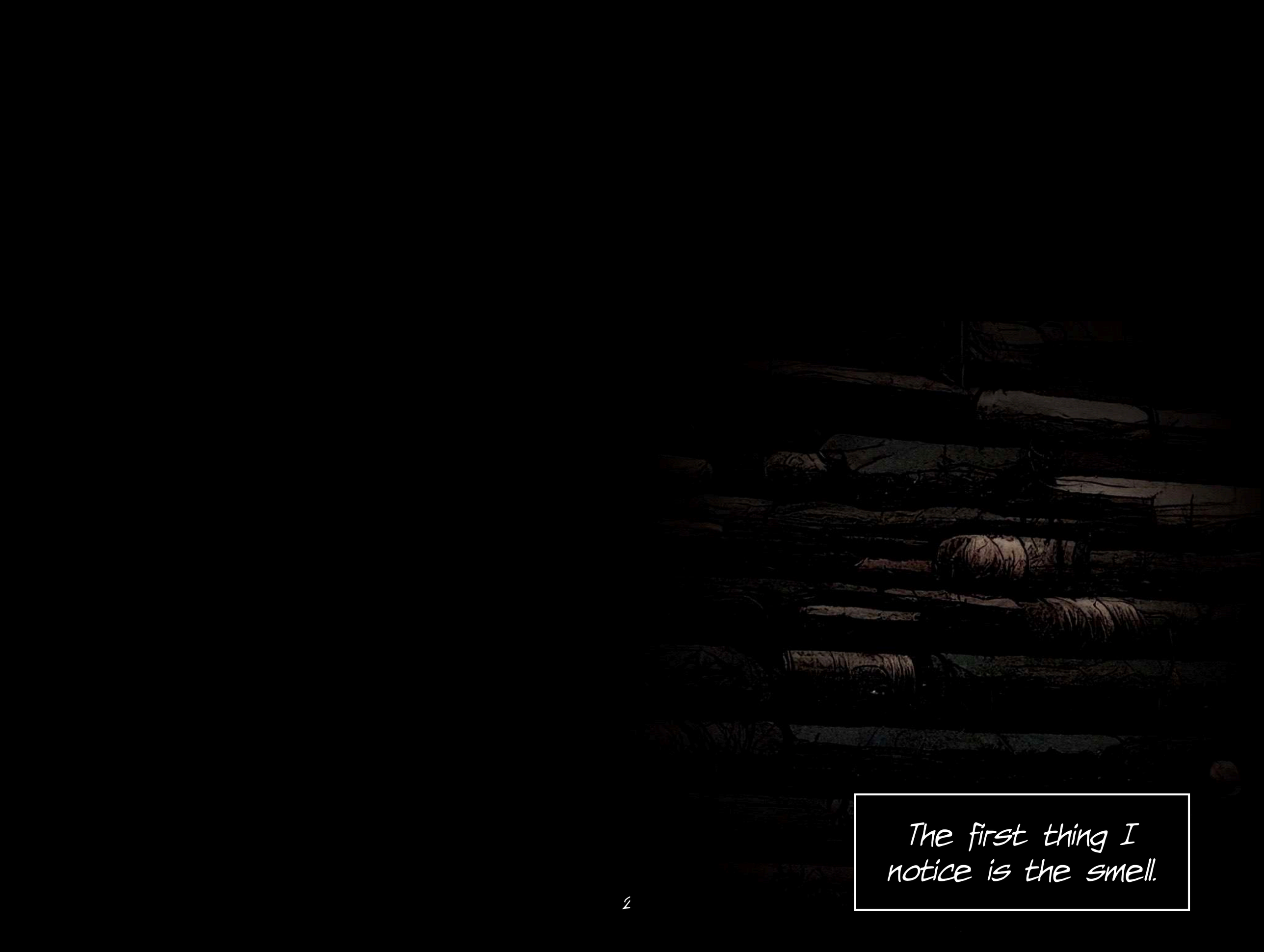
There's a quiet reverance in the air. A sense of anticipation.

Like they're all waiting for something to happen.

And then it hits me.

THUD!

Literally.....



The first thing I notice is the smell.

Earth, damp straw, tree sap. And... something else...

...something acrid.

My hands and feet are tied.

Oh God, they've put me in the belly of that Beast. Those fucking lunatics!

I just... I just need to get free... and get to that damn phone box.

"Hello? Help! Somebody! HELP!"

"HELP ME! PLEASE!!"

"IS ANYBODY OUT THERE...?"

Fuck, now I know what it is...

...that smell...

...creosote...

...petrol...

...and smoke!

Oh Jesus.

Jesus Christ!

=koff=

oh god

"Our Father... =koff= ...Who art in heaven... =koff=... =koff= ...hallowed be Thy name..."

"Thy Kingdom come...=="

To this day, **Summer Island** has never been attacked by **giant sea monsters.**

I've loved comics - and been an avid reader - since I was five. Now I'm 57.

So it's taken me half a century to get around to creating my own comic story. And they say you can't teach an old dog new tricks!

The problem has always been - I can't draw, which is a bit of setback in a visual medium. And I had no friendly artistic collaborator who trusted me enough to take on a project like this (wisely).

But now there's MidJourney, one of the new crop of Artificial Intelligence image generators. All the illustrations in this story were created by MidJourney, based on written prompts I supplied, and while I've tweaked a few things here and there in Photoshop, what you see here is basically what you get (if you ask it nicely.)

The story itself started life as a photographic exploration, using Midjourney to create an essay in the style of the 1973 movie, The Wicker Man (which you can also see in the following pages).

After I'd finished the essay, I wondered - could I use MidJourney to tell the same story in a completely different visual and narrative style?

SUMMER ISLAND is the result.

Do I think MidJourney will replace the comic artists I grew to love over the years? No, of course not. Those geniuses have an eye for dramatic composition and dynamic narrative that I strongly doubt machine learning will ever be able to match.

But as a visualization tool for non-artists like myself, it's a hell of a lot of fun. And when MidJourney spit out some of these panels, I found myself doing a double-take at the quality it could already produce. And as a good friend of mine used to say "And Steve - this is the WORST it will ever be!"

I hope you enjoyed your visit to ***SUMMER ISLAND.*** It's just one small corner of a world grappling with a monster problem. So perhaps we'll return one day. Meanwhile, I'd love to hear what you think. - SC

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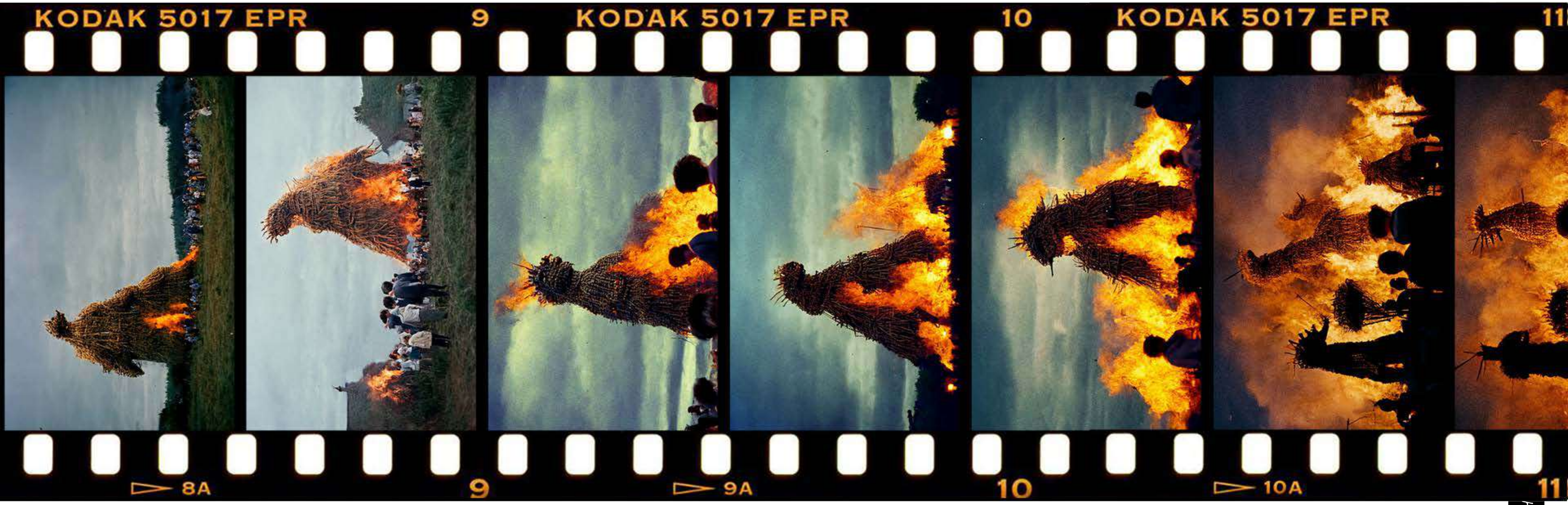
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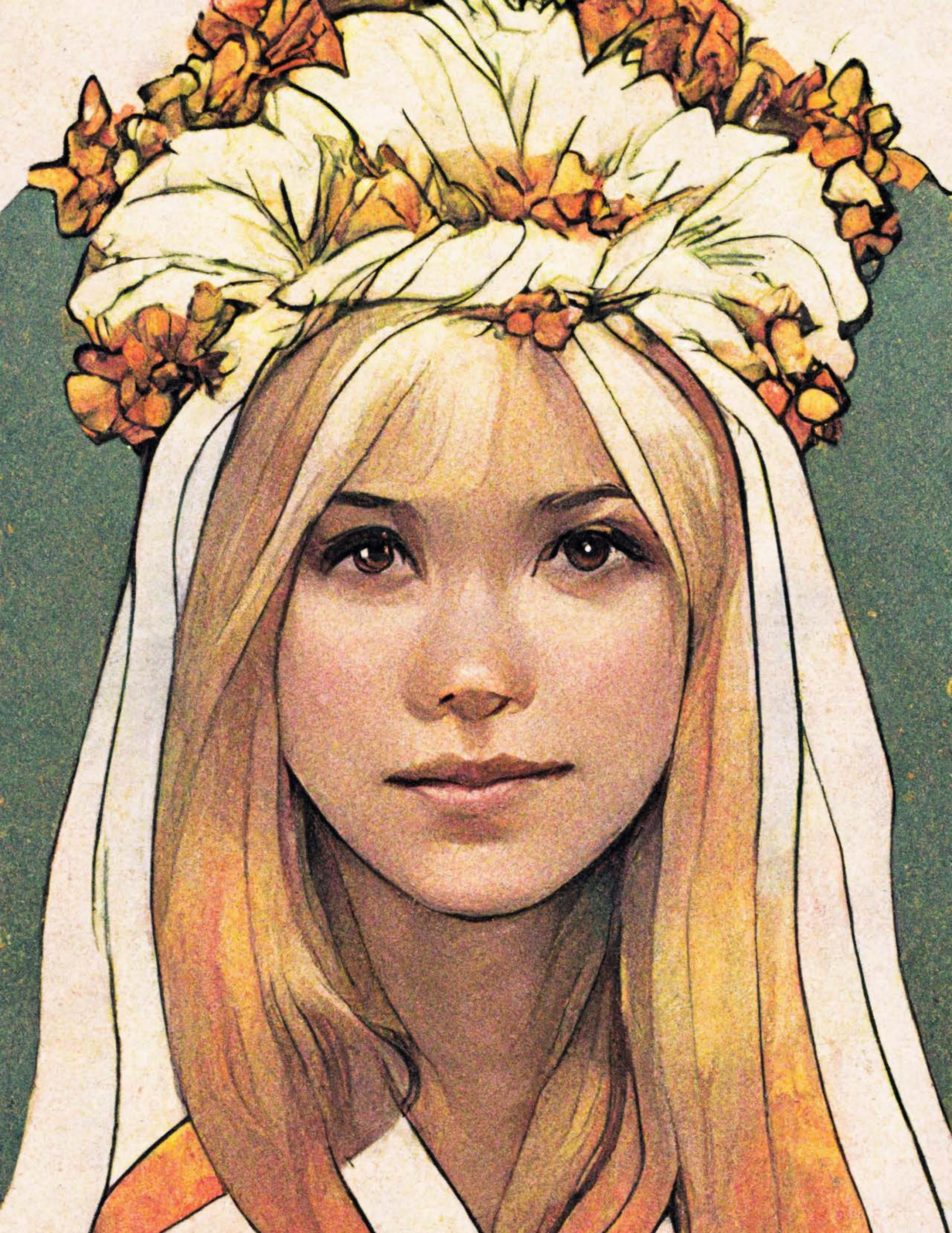

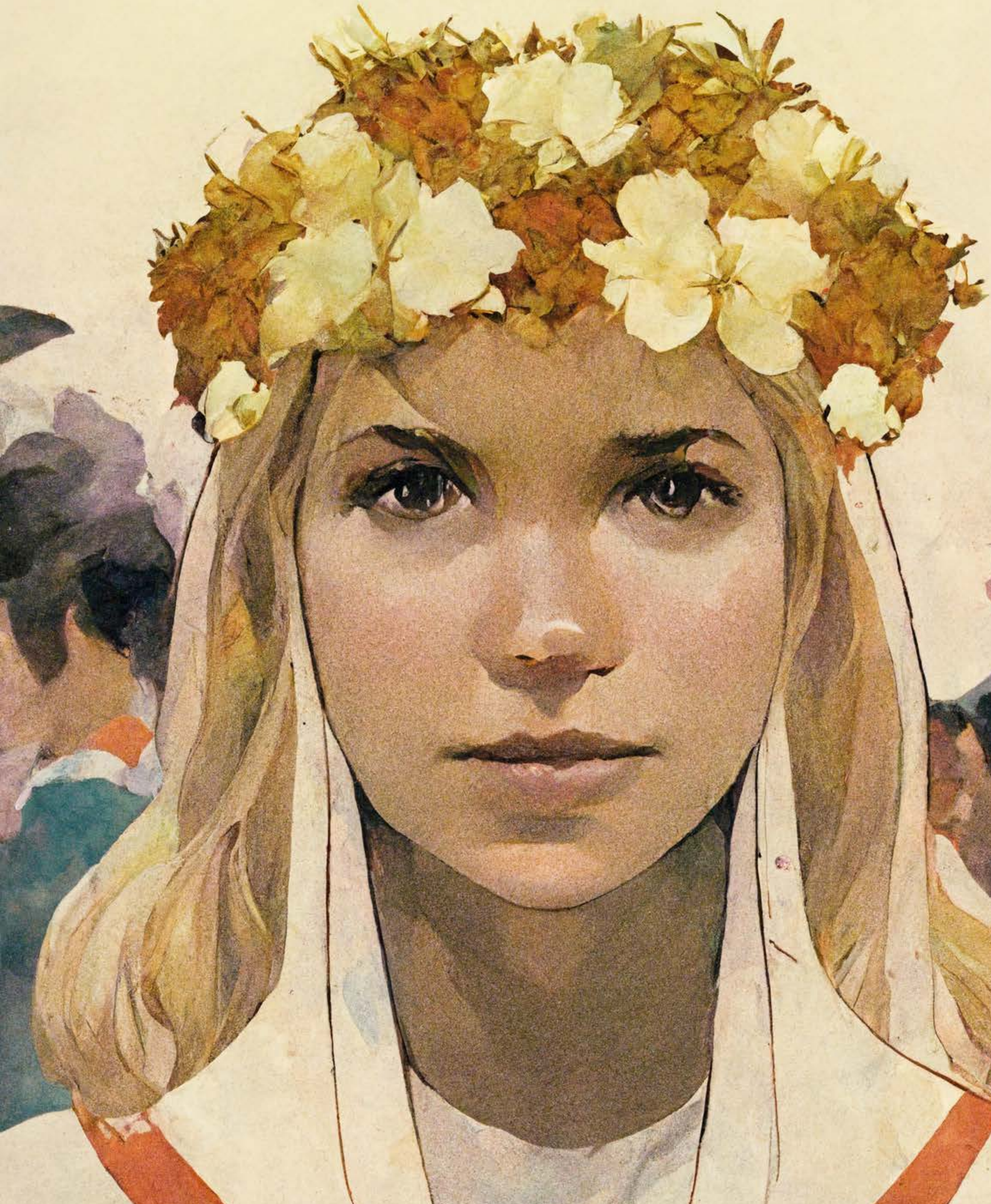

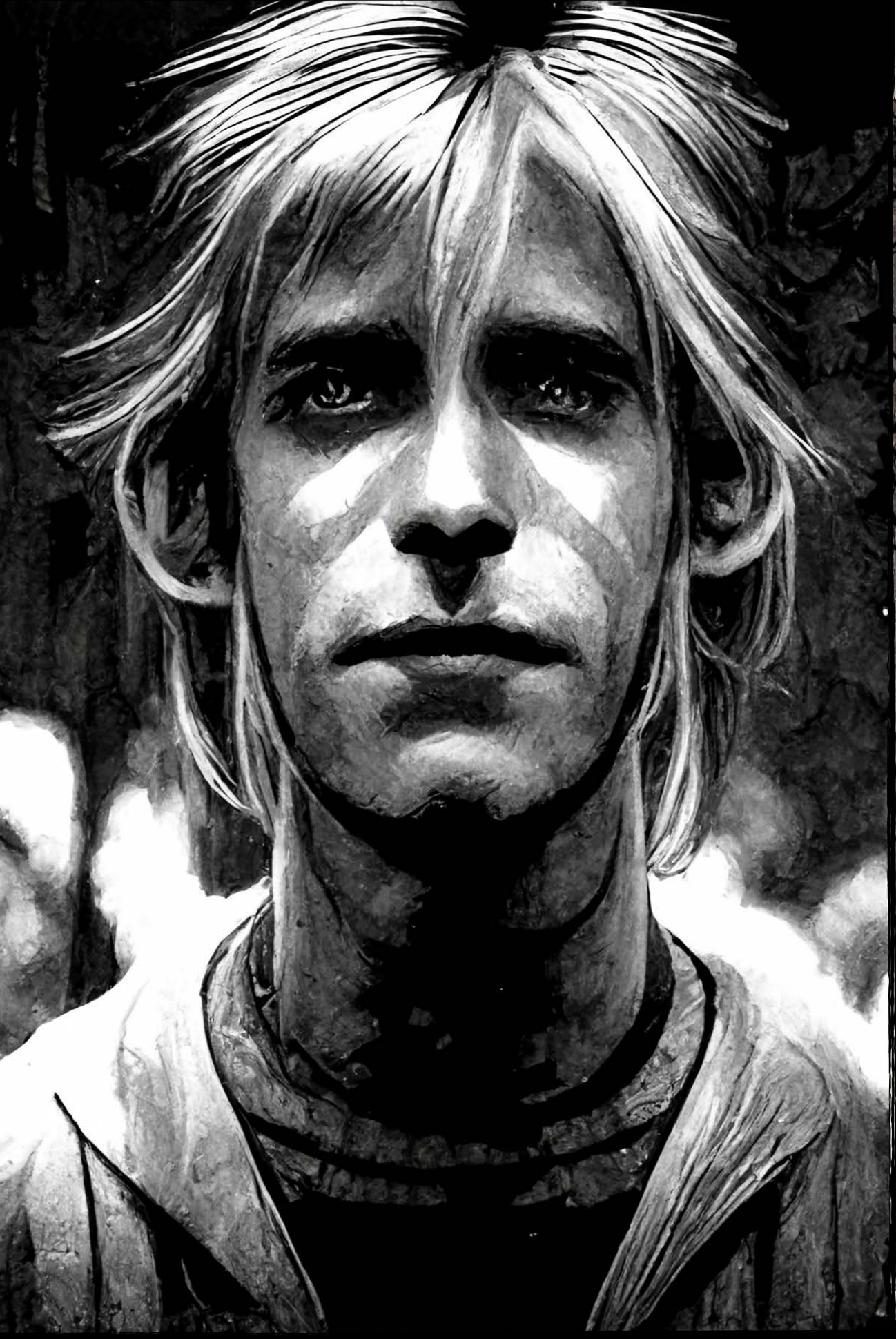

STORY & ART
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And here, in this place, **The Gods** walk among us.