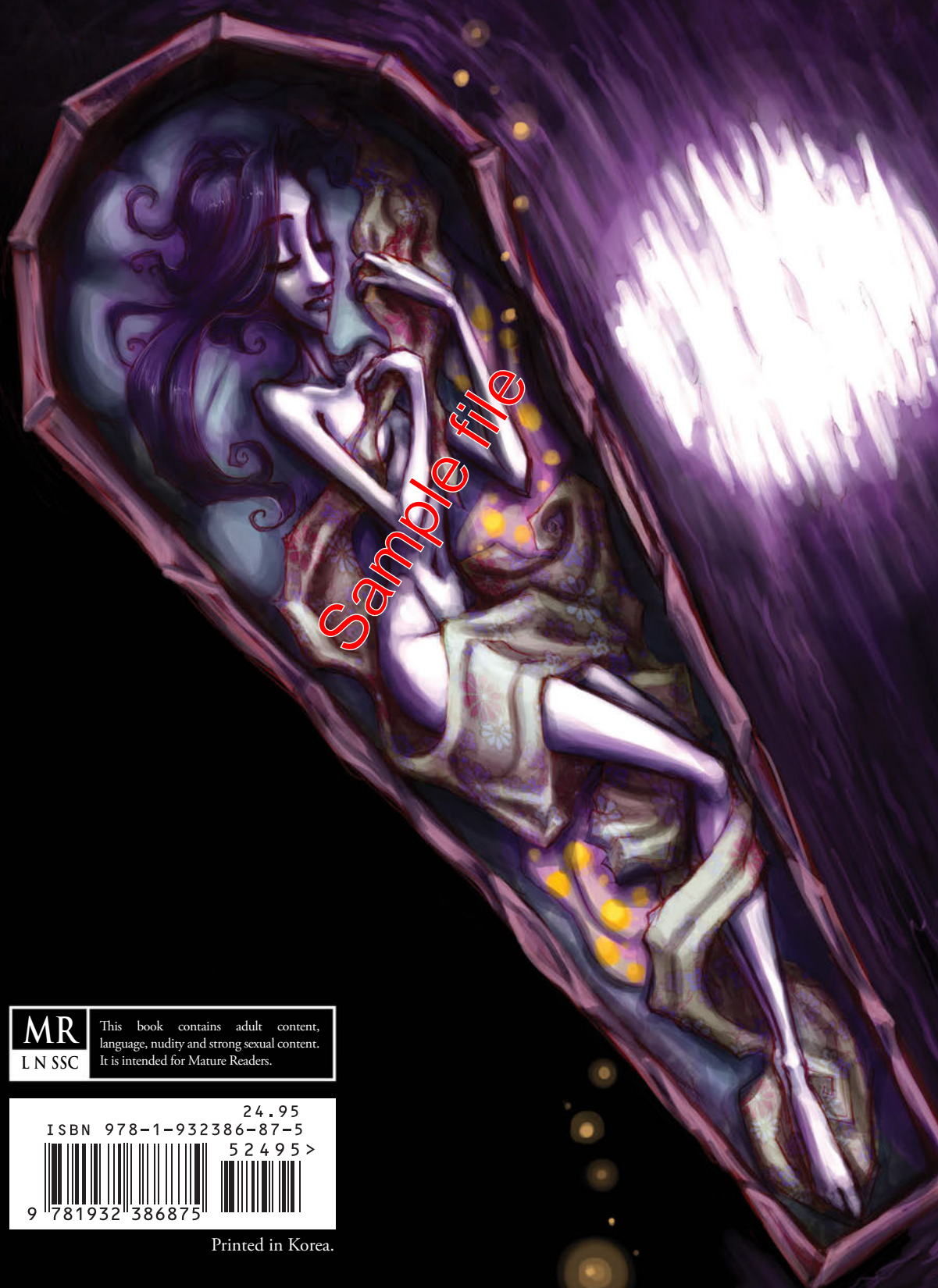


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Her Death Was His Beginning.

Stricken with grief from the death of his girlfriend, Sith, Guy Salvatore struggles to make sense of his world. Enter a strange old man who shares with Guy a story of two Gods who govern all of existence; two Gods who took Sith away, and left her to wander aimlessly in and out of the dimensional planes known as the "Dream Worlds."

Join Guy as he begins to unravel the truth about the world he lives in, and learns what really happened to Sith!



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THE GOD MACHINE™

WRITTEN & ILLUSTRATED BY
CHANDRA FREE

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To my beloved husband Jim,

*thank you for believing in me,
and for all of your support.
I couldn't have done this without you.*



&

To Justin,

for being my real life Evil God to my Good God.

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Foreword

I knew the sounds of Chandra's screams long before I knew the sweeter tones of her speech. I recall it all too well. As if it were just yesterday, or as if it were a dream from which I've just awoken, still drenched in the sweat of its aggressive torment.

According to the hatch marks I had dug into the hard earth with a hand that I no longer felt but knew to end my wrist, 125 days of absolute blackened silence had passed. The sound of my own constricted labors and the tremendous thumping of my heart were the only sounds I knew. Strangely, I resented the sound of my heart more than the eery tinkling of my irons. Cruel is the desire for survival. That sick, sad need to live became my true oppressor, and in private rebellion I would spend hours trying to stop my heart by will alone. Not unlike a child refusing to breathe 'till his mother buys him the squirt-gun, I would hold my breath and beg the hand of death to come and lead me from my prison. Yet always did I end the futile exercise with a gasp, drawing in air that smelled only of my defecations and misery. Death refused my hand, but howled in my ears. Death? Could I now hear her? Yes, her! These were the sounds of a female. Oh, and they were real. Sound! I could hear sound!

Screams seeped through my stone walls. Trails of agony. Sweet, wonderful vibrations of pain. Colored by the stones, the sound of another's torment became the lilting sound of one of Benjamin Britten's oboes. I was not alone! This revelation was enough to alter my reality to one of hope. Her song of anguish was my waltz, and in my battered and sick mind I saw her 'round; both she and I were dressed to the nines as we danced in a fever of ways. As we swayed in our eternal never.

I needed to connect. Deepen our union. I was the selfish lover leaning back and letting the shrieking succubus devour my sexuality. So, by degrees, I cracked open the dry hole that I once called a mouth. Lips splitting like snow under a boot, the moisture I felt on my tongue was metallic and stale, and I knew it at once to be blood. I drew in the heat and held it in my lungs as if it were a gift. Constricting my neck, in an attempt to tighten my vocal chords, I let lose the captured sirocco. A hissing at first, as my parched tunnel let the air free. I constricted the entirety of my frame. My entire body became the reverberating strings of a gruesome viola as the sound sharpened and became audible. The foul ascent of my love song rose to heavens through the thick stone walls. Soon, yet slowly, it became apparent she had heard me, for her screams matched mine and harmonized in a ghastly choir that filled my heart with what can only be likened to mirth.

Every night, 'till the day of my escape, I shared my torment with my lover in the next room. Never did we, or more aptly, "could we" shout in words or thoughts. For there was nothing to say, and less to hear other than our mutual and epic distress. Like a den of imprisoned wolves we howled in unison. This was what we had. This was our song.

Years later in a Marrakech bazaar, as I haggled over the price of some bauble I never wanted, I heard something that sent my heart deep into my throat. It was the sounds of the girl that I moaned and wailed to nightly in mutual misery. But now the sounds she issued were those of nervous laughter. In a panic I threw sixty dirhams at the vendor simply to end our transaction, and headed in haste toward the sweetly strange laughter.

A girl, as tall and as spindly-frail as myself, stood before a cart of hand-carved boxes. She haggled in English about the value of a plain black case. Giggling nervously as she waived the cash she felt to be the worth of the object. Opening and closing it to show the loose hinges and mediocre workmanship to the indifferent proprietor. I soon reached the cart, and interjected in French, a language that was only slightly more appropriate, and haggled with the merchant on her behalf. Eventually I won her the box for a third of what she was waiving in the air. She introduced herself. The tormented songstress had a name.


Together, Chandra and I walked through the bazaar as new friends. Again, because of our situation, we needed each other. I asked her if she knew me. If there was something familiar about me. "Wait! You're the Venture Brothers guy! I love that show!" And she was correct. I was that guy. And life had led me down roads I never dreamed of when I was a captive. She too had become more than a survivor, and, in trust, showed me the drawings she had been working on. Of course she was an artist. What else would my angel be? She produced drawing after drawing for me, each with the exquisite hand and determined flow of a superior draftsman. I would inspect and marvel at them, and as I returned each to her dainty hand, she would slip them into the wooden case we had purchased together.

We spent the rest of the day talking about art. Chandra flattered my oil paintings with her knowledge of their existence, and told me of "The God Machine" and the unknown troubles with getting it published. She let me remind her to soldier on, and make her art. It was valid, beautiful, necessary, and true. Her passion was as rich as when she shrieked in absolute torment back when we were "we". But never once did she make mention of her captivity. Doubt set in. Was I mistaken? Is it possible that she was not my feathered darling? It mattered not. We were bound again, or only in that new moment's makers of beautiful objects. When and where our bond became cemented was no longer an issue. We were bound. That is what mattered.

As the sun slipped into the hot sand, we made our goodbyes. Chandra thanked me for the inspiration, I thanked her for letting me see the wonderful images that slipped from her head into the pages stuffed into our wooden case (and eventually into these very pages). Exchanging hugs and promises of later meetings, we started on our way. Hands in my pocket, I turned and lumbered towards my hotel, my head filled with puzzles and the salty Moroccan dust. It was then she shouted "Doc!" and I turned my head to her. The setting sun shown through her dress and made of it a flowing ghost that danced round her body. Her mouth opened and her eyes closed. After an eternal silence, she let out a deathly shriek that filled the air with demons and tempests. Echoes upon echoes, I again heard her song.

Tuesday Evening,
Doc Hammer

Doc Hammer is the co-creator, a writer, and the voice of far too many characters for TV's The Venture Bros. He is also the uncomfortable front-man for the band WEEP, and a painter of oils that are not really meant for everybody.



*Dreams within dreams.
Does an end really have a beginning?*

*Conscious. Are we really ever
Existence. Like a dream with no beginning...*

God, is she conscious of her existence?

*Dreams within dreams-
is SHE all but a dream?*

What is God?

God, dream a little dream of me...

PROLOGUE:
**WHEN ENDINGS BECOME BEGINNINGS,
OR IS IT THE OTHER WAY AROUND?**