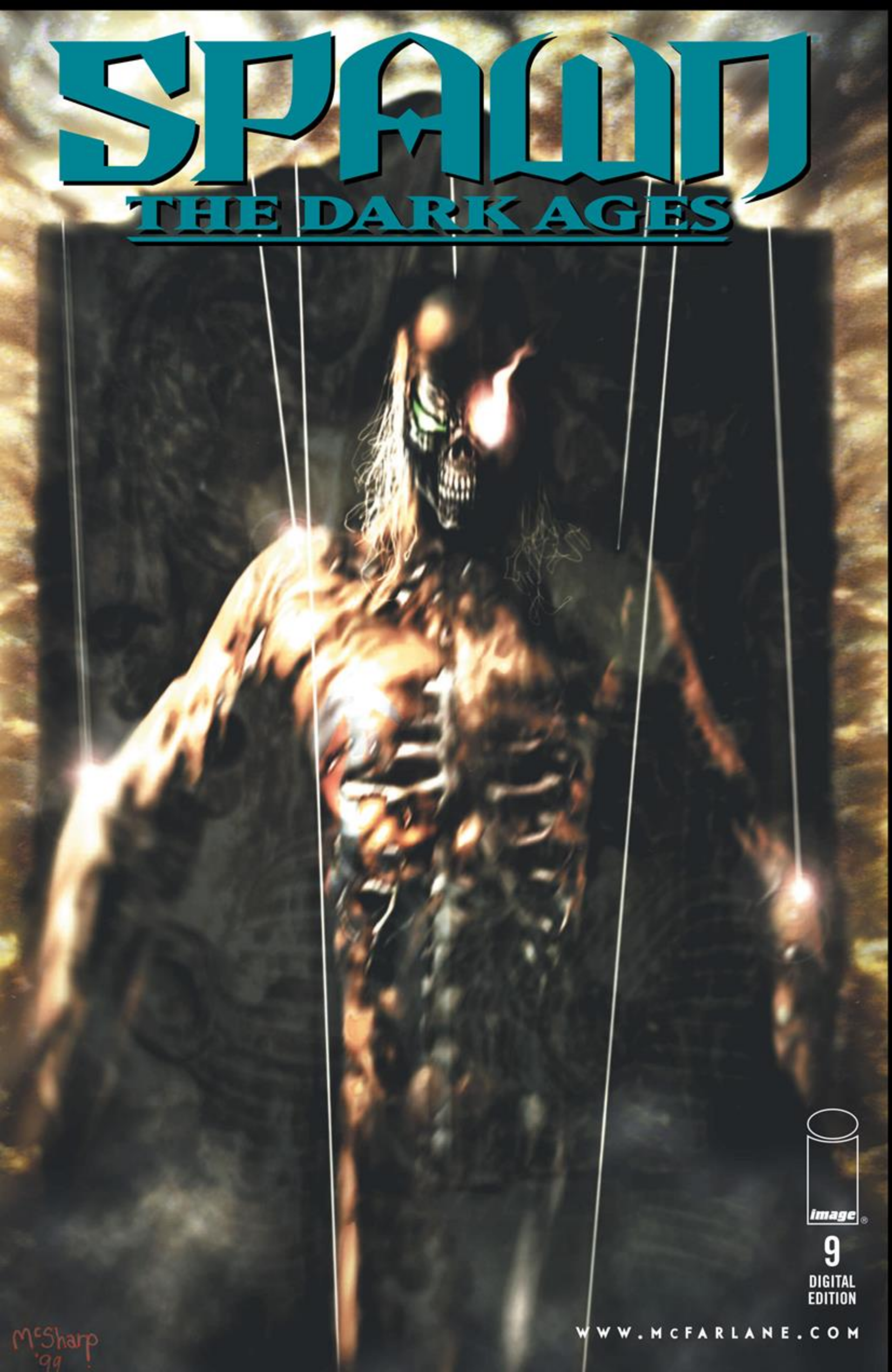


SPAWN

THE DARK AGES



9

DIGITAL
EDITION

WWW.MCFARLANE.COM

McSharp
'99

Todd McFarlane & Image Comics Present

A Child's Crusade Prologue A Merry Round Of Cheer

Dedicated to Joseph Campbell

STORY

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ART & COVER

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EDITORIAL NOTE: In last month's issue, we failed to credit Danny Miki for the fine job he did in assisting Liam in inking the book. Our apologies to Danny, along with our thanks for helping out.

SPAWN DARK AGES 8 SUMMARY:

Covenant faces Immaculata, the assassin angel. Although confused by Covenant's inaction, Immaculata is determined to engage the HellSpawn in battle. While taunting Covenant, Immaculata sees flames in the distance, and they both realize the Abbey is burning. The fire, started by DuBlanc, threatens to consume the Abbey and its inhabitants, including Reynard's wife and child. Both Immaculata and Covenant enter the burning Abbey. Immaculata finds Reynard's child and gives it to Covenant to save, while she remains inside to perish at the hands of Cogliostro.

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TODD MCFARLANE
PRODUCTIONS



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Rye, England. The Maiden Head Tavern.

It is a night of revels, an evening of merriment and cheer. Tonight, the Players have come to town.

Loud, boisterous, and more than a little drunk, it is a motley crowd gathered here: Sailors, soldiers, and merchants. Pilgrims en route to Canterbury...

But one figure moves through the crowd with solemn stride: The Hellspawn.



There is a... performance this eve?

Aye, sir. 'The Sad Tragical Story of Maeve the Innocent.' Tuppence a head, if you please.

And... perhaps... Milord would be happy seated in the back... away from the rabble as it were.





A fine crowd! A very fine crowd indeed, old boy.

How is Osling? Has he learnt his line?

Lines?! Phah! Who cares? Let him strut around like a yardcock and give them something to hiss at.

The Sad Tragical Story of Maeve the Innocent. The mere words make his heart weigh heavy. Who knew the tale would live so long, grow so great in scope?

That she would be so well remembered and his part in the matter be long forgotten. But it is better that way.



Lord Covenant was a man once, but that was many lifetimes ago. The dust of a hundred years clings to his mantle. But, some things can still move him to tears.



Do you know the tale, friend?

Eh?

The tale. Do you know it? Maeve the Innocent? My grandfather told me stories about her when I was but a lad. Tales of her bravery, and how she was finally betrayed.

My name is Goodson, by the way. I say, I hope they have a grand strumpet to play the girl, don't you?

I mean for a Tuppence we don't want to be looking at a hag all evening, am I right? Ha! They are about to start...

Welcome
friends, both old and
new, And warmest greetings
extend to you, This tale told
is old, but true. Of brave
fair Maeve and her
retinue.

The bloody
fields where heroes fell...
The haunted caves of
Tintagel... The Devil's Closet
in darkest Hell... This
humble stage shall
stand for all!

We bid you
now, please lend an ear,
While into misty past we
peer If you should find our
offerings dear -- Pass the
glass and shout 'Here!
Here!'

Let us raise a
Merry Round
of Cheer!

Huzzah!

Huzzah!

Huzzah!



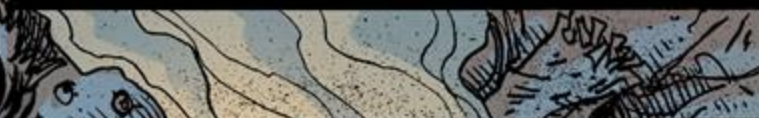
Behold! The young maiden Maeve! A fetching fawn, in the first full flower of youth. A beauty, is she not? Aye, but no more than a child, scarce three and ten!

In child-like frolic she has stumbled upon a doleful sight! Blood and bile of her kin, spilt upon fields of clover!

But hark! One of the slain speaks...



Maeve... is that you child?



Father!



He whispers words to her that we are not privileged to hear. On that dark and despised day, sweet maiden Maeve's childhood is swept away...

...And her doom
is sealed!

By the blood
of my father and my
fallen kin, I shall bear their
standard and avenge their
fate! By the wounds of
our Saviour I
swear it!

You
can raise my
standard,
luv!

Bollocks!

Shew us
yer teats!



What say you, friend? Do you not enjoy the play? She is an ample young thing, you must admit!



It is a mockery. An offense to a poor lost child who deserves better than this... this drive!



But it is an historical production, friend. Well researched and documented. I understand. They could not portray it thus if it were not so.

What makes you think they are making mock?
Because I was there.

"Sigh"
Why do I also have to sit next to the loon? Right bleeder. I was there. Hangh. A hundred odd years ago? Not bloody likely.



God has charged me with a Holy Quest. Our fathers thus slain, it has fall'n upon our shoulders to avenge their ghosts. I shall make an army out of you.

But how? What chance have we?

I will show you.



Peter, take this arrow and snap it in two.



Now... take this bundle and do the same.




What? I cannot!



We shall be as these arrows. Apart, we are fragile. Together we shall not be broken. This is the message that God has sent me.

'God has sent me.' The words wound him like a knife.





It was so long ago. She was a just a ragged little girl, leading a ragged little band of children.

They were babes in the woods, playing dress up and following the vaguest of causes.

But when Maeve spoke, the children listened. She told them of the words that filled her head when she closed her eyes, and of the light of a thousand candles that poured into her brain.

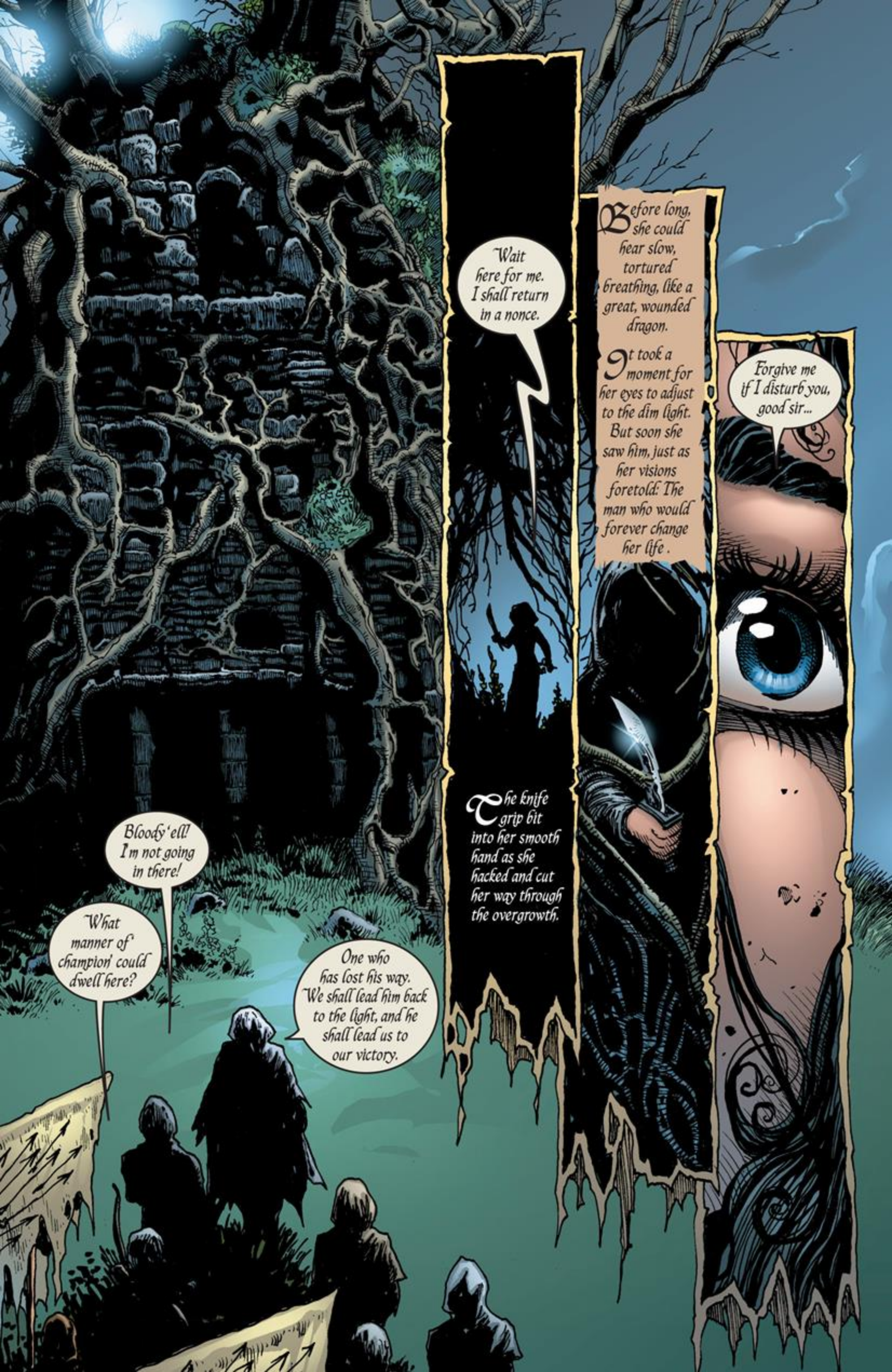
She told them what God had told her.

Where are we going, Maeve?

To find someone to train us, so that we may do God's work. To find a champion.

I see no market for heroes around here.

He is near. When I close my eyes, I see the way.



Wait
here for me.
I shall return
in a nonce.

Before long,
she could
hear slow,
tortured
breathing, like a
great, wounded
dragon.

It took a
moment for
her eyes to adjust
to the dim light.
But soon she
saw him, just as
her visions
foretold: The
man who would
forever change
her life.

Forgive me
if I disturb you,
good sir...

Bloody'ell!
I'm not going
in there!

What
manner of
champion
could dwell here?

One who
has lost his way.
We shall lead him
back to the light, and he
shall lead us to
our victory.

The knife
grip bit
into her smooth
hand as she
hacked and cut
her way through
the overgrowth.



"But God has sent
me to fetch you."




Who...
who... are
you?

His throat aches, parched and
split and ringed with dust.
How long has it been since he has
spoken, since he has seen sunlight?

Years certainly. Decades perhaps. All
that time, bound to unforgiving rock like
Prometheus of old. Unable to die, unwilling to
use his hellborne powers to free himself.

His own private purgatory,
a fool's penance offered
up to an unblinking God.

I am called
Maeve, good sir.
The lord has led me
to you, so that you may
aid me in my
quest.



But he has.
He comes to me in
dreams. He told me where
to find you. You are to join
my cause and in exchange,
God will grant you
salvation.

I am
afraid you are
mistaken, child. God
has no kind uses for
me, of that I am
certain.

We have
much to speak
about. But first, we
must get you down
from there.

And for the first time in his
dark existence, the Hellspawn
allows the faintest flicker of hope
to grow inside him.

Such a long time ago. And now, this travesty...



Brilliant!

Take that, ye bugger!

More! More!

Right in the eye!

Hah!

More!



It goes well, it goes very well! I believe we have scored a 'hit'.

A lot of action, a bit of proud speech thrown in -- That's what they like. Could stand a little more blood, don't you think?



Well, yes. They could all use more blood.


Well played, William. A death worthy of achilles.

Thank you, Fox. You were brilliant as well.



Ah... Osling is ready for his turn. Have you learnt your lines Osling!

Bugger off! You'll make me forget. As such traffic... um... betwixt day and night... uh... such as traffics betwixt day and night... damn it!



They laugh at these little pantomimes of war. But they do not know the truth.

They do not understand the bloody spectacle of real battle.

The sound of steel plunging in flesh, of bones snapping and great men wailing in agony.

The fetid stench of death that can never be washed away, but lingers, like a ghost, forever.

A man who has known war sees the world with different eyes.

He understands the madness that it brings.

Now it turns the world upside down... pitches friend against friend... brother against brother...

... teacher against pupil.

*This is
madness, Cogliostro.
I will not abide it. Call
off this nonsense before
it is too late.*

*If you don't
like it, you are free
to walk away, Covenant.
Go back and hide in your
cave and wait till
doomsday.*

*But the
sun rises and
sets even without
you, my
friend.*



*Why are
you doing
this?*

*Because
I can.*

urk!



I can end this now. I can snap your ancient neck like kindling. Where would you be then, "friend"?

you --
ugh -- can't stop
this from happening --
hauch -- neither
of us can...

Very well.
If you want a fight,
so be it. But know this:
I could have killed you
today. Tomorrow I shall
not be so kind.

As the Hellspawn rides off, the thunder peal of horse hooves echoing through the mountains, portents of clashing swords to come.

There is no turning
back now.

The green grass of the valley, the white chalk of the hills and the clear crystal of the rivers, by tomorrow, will all be painted red.



Hear me,
Oh Lord, in my
darkest hour. Let not my
sins be the undoing of
others. Send forth an escort
from thy heavenly
shores...



Hark! The
sparrow calls
from yonder knoll. I
shall descend and
snatch a soul!

From
dawn of time it
has been my right, to...
uh... traffic betwixt
both day and night.
Yes!

Do not
look so surprised,
my darling. You
must have known I
would come for
you.

Boo! Hissss Boo! Boo!



What is
this?

The maiden
Meave's downfall, of
course. trafficking with
the Devil! Please, I
thought you were
"there."

This is
wrong.

"This is a lie."



Such a kind
and beauteous... uh...
thing you are. So pure and
well- made. Your fertile
field has yield up such
um... apples of
temptation.

And, um,
rather fine
apples they are!
Heh.

You are
Eden reborn,
and once again I
shall undo
Paradise....



But what is
this? My hand
shrinks from her bosom!
She is too pure! It is
I who am
undone!!

To think
that I, the Father
of Lies, have led her
to her doom, only to
have my prize --

Enough!



Good sir,
please... we mean
no offense. This is
but a jest, a mere
diversion. There is
no harm in it.



Although,
you are free,
of course, to
disagree.



Get out!



Get out,
all of you. This
pageant of lies will
not continue. The
show is over!
Go!



Well,
this show
has taken an
unexpected
turn.

He's good.
I quite like the
shouting. Good
shouter.

His blood seethes with anger. Anger at the travesty he has witnessed, anger at the fools who applaud such slanders...

And anger at himself for a wrong he cannot never right.

Lies! Lies!
It is all lies! you
don't understand!
none of you!

Right.
That's enough
I think.

Get outta
my way!

I want
my bloody
money back!



A lone among the ruins of make-believe, among a sea of tattered curtains and sundered backdrops, the cruel ghost of memory haunts the Hellspawn's heart.

There are some wounds which will never heal.

They don't understand. That's not how it happened.

