

WAYWARD
RAVEN

#1

THE ASCENDANT



HAWKEYE

read 050530



THE ASCENDANT

MOST HAVE NO IDEA WHAT TRULY LURKS IN THE SHADOWY WORLD THAT EXISTS ALONGSIDE THE LIGHT OF DAY. OR WHAT TAKES PLACE IN THOSE BRIEF MOMENTS WHEN THE RIGHTEOUS FALTER. WHEN SINNERS AGONIZE OVER DEATH AND AFTERLIFE. WHEN DEMONS WALK THE EARTH. THERE IS ONE WHO DANCES AMIDST THAT INDISTINCT PLANE OF LIGHT AND DARK. CAIL, A DUKE OF HELL, RISES FROM HIS BRIMSTONE BIRTHPLACE SEEKING SALVATION. HELL HELP ANY SOUL THAT STANDS IN HIS WAY...

**WAYWARD
RAVEN**

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4:15 AM, ROME.

I DIDN'T
FIGURE YOU FOR A
HOLY MAN HALSTEIN. WHY
DO YOU WORK YOUR
MISCHIEF HERE?





MY DEAR DOGE, IT IS MORE **FUN** TO CORRUPT THE INCORRUPTIBLE. **YOU** OF ALL PEOPLE SHOULD **KNOW** THAT, CAIL.



ALL MEN HAVE FLAWS. WHAT DOES EXPOSING THEM BRING YOU?

KRUNCH



HALSTEIN HITS PRETTY HARD. MUST BE ALL THE EXTRA SKIN HE'S BUILT UP.

PLEASURE, RELIEF FROM BOREDOM.



I BELIEVE YOU TOLD ME THE **SAME** ONCE.

WHAT DOES **SAVING** THEM BRING **YOU** CAIL?



EVEN THIS EARLY IN THE MORNING, SOMEONE IS **ALWAYS** WATCHING IN THE ETERNAL CITY.

AHHHH!!

I CAN HEAR SHOUTS IN THE DISTANCE, MAYBE EVEN A SIREN.



THE SOUNDS ARE GETTING CLOSE NOW.

LUCKY SHOT. SOUNDS LIKE PLAY TIME IS OVER. I'LL GET YOU **NEXT** TIME, DOGE OF THE DARKENED REACHES. MAYBE YOU'LL ANSWER MY QUESTION THEN.



HE WAS RIGHT,
I GOT LUCKY.

HALSTEIN IS TOUGH AND
I WASN'T PREPARED FOR
AN ESCAPEE LIKE HIM.

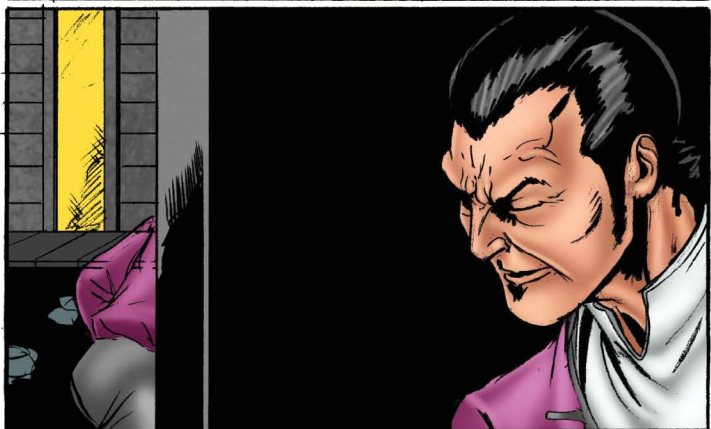
WITHOUT RESEARCH, I COULD EASILY
TAKE A BONE KNIGHT OR A BARONET,
BUT NOT YET THE EARL OF THE BLEAK
ISLANDS.



IF IT WEREN'T FOR THIS BLADE
AND A FEW NOSY PEOPLE, I
MIGHT BE IN TROUBLE.

THAT'S ONE
OF THEM RIGHT
THERE!

YOU THERE!
STOP!





I LIKE IT HERE.

IT'S PEACEFUL. COMPLETELY
THE OPPOSITE OF HOME.



HOME.

THE PLACE I
WAS BORN.

A PLACE I LEFT WITHOUT
LOOKING BACK.



THEY SAY YOU CAN'T
GO HOME AGAIN.

THAT'S FINE
BY ME.





NICE PLACE
YOU'VE GOT
HERE.
REEKS
OF LIBRARY
STACKS AND
CIGARS.

I DON'T
RECALL **ASKING**
FOR YOUR COMPANY,
YOU CAN ALWAYS
LEAVE. AND
SINCE WE'RE
ON THE SUBJECT, TO
WHAT DO I OWE THE
PLEASURE?

NOT COMING TO
COLLECT ANYTHING,
I HOPE.



YOU MADE
NO **DEAL** WITH ME.
SO LONG AS YOU DO
NO HARM, I DON'T SEE
WHY I SHOULD SEND
YOU BACK TO
HELL.

NO, I'VE
DONE NO HARM.
ALL I WANT ANYMORE
IS TO READ MY BOOKS
AND BE LEFT
ALONE.



MAKE
SURE IT **STAYS**
THAT WAY.

IN THE
MEANTIME, I NEED
YOUR **HELP.**



I SUSPECTED
AS MUCH. THE SECOND
I CAUGHT A WHIFF OF
YOU, I SHOULD HAVE
ESCAPED FOR THE
COUNTRYSIDE.

GO AHEAD,
TELL ME WHAT THIS
IS ABOUT.



I'M NOT
THE ONLY ONE
STALKING THE
CITY.

HALSTEIN
IS HERE TOO AND
HE MAY WANT TO
COLLECT THAT
DEBT.

HELP ME
AND I WILL SEND
HIM BACK TO HELL
BEFORE HE
DOES.

THE WEE HOURS OF THE MORN ERE THE
SUN RISES AND THE MOON SHRINKS TRY
A MAN'S HEART.

YOU
ALWAYS SEEM TO
FIND THE *NICEST*
PLACES.

QUIET
OR THEY WILL
HEAR YOU.

THIS ISN'T
THE ONLY PASSAGE
TO THE SECRET TEXTS,
BUT IT IS THE ONLY ONE
THE PRIESTS DON'T
KNOW ABOUT.

THE IMMORAL REVEL IN THE HOUR AS THE
SAINTLY SLEEP BEATIFIC DREAMS. IT IS A
TIME I DISCOVER MYSELF MOST ALERT.

NONE BUT
THE *WICKED* STIR AT
THIS HOUR.

IT IS THE
WICKED ONES
I *FEAR*.

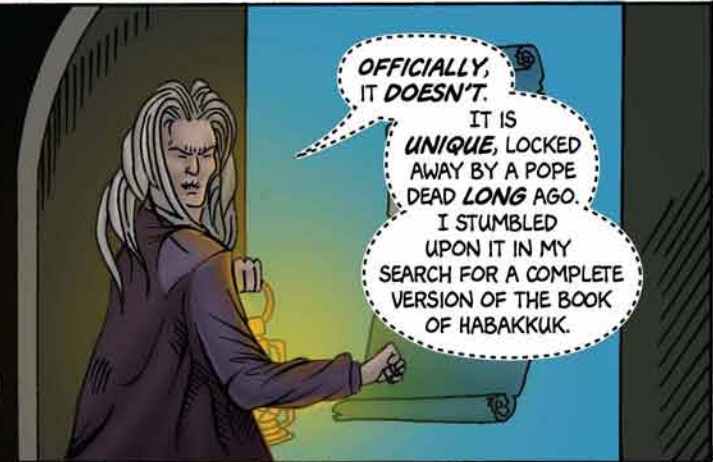
NOW
BE SILENT, THE
WAY LOOKS CLEAR BUT
I CANNOT BE SURE UNTIL
I OPEN THE
DOOR.



THERE IT IS,
THE GREATER KEY OF
SOLOMON.



I DIDN'T
THINK IT ACTUALLY
EXISTED. I'VE HEARD OF THE
LESSER KEY, EVEN **SEEN**
A FEW COPIES.



OFFICIALLY,
IT **DOESN'T**.

IT IS
UNIQUE, LOCKED
AWAY BY A POPE
DEAD **LONG** AGO.
I STUMBLED
UPON IT IN MY
SEARCH FOR A COMPLETE
VERSION OF THE BOOK
OF HABAKKUK.



NO TIME,
THAT GUARD MAY
COME BACK. TAKE IT.
IF NO ONE NOTICED
IT WAS GONE
BEFORE--



--WHY WOULD
THEY NOTICE IT
NOW?







EVERYTHING
YOU TOUCH
BURNS.
NOW I'M
BARRED FROM
THE GREATEST SECRET
LIBRARY IN THE
WORLD.

YAWN

THERE
ARE **OTHER**
LIBRARIES.



BUT THE PAPAL
COLLECTION...

SO WAIT A
DECADE OR TWO,
TRAVEL THE
WORLD.

IT
ISN'T LIKE YOU
WILL SUDDENLY
DECAY.

WHY NOT
SPEND A FEW
YEARS IN THE
AMERICAS?

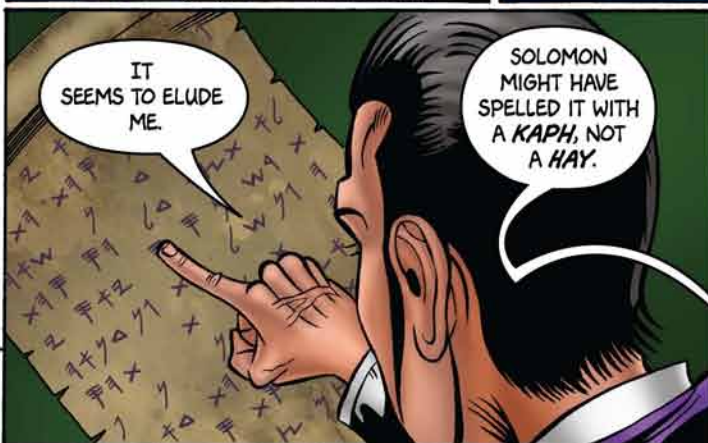
YOU'RE
TOO **PREDICTABLE.**
IT WAS EASY FOR ME TO
FIND YOU HERE, A STONE'S
THROW FROM THE VATICAN,
DROOLING OVER THE
CHURCHES' SECRETS.



I SEE
THAT **YOU** MADE
THE LIST.



THEN I SUPPOSE
I'LL HAVE TO KEEP
THIS ONCE WE ARE
DONE HERE. NOT
SOMETHING FOR THE
GENERAL PUBLIC.



IT
SEEMS TO ELUDE
ME.

SOLOMON
MIGHT HAVE
SPELLED IT WITH
A **KAPH**, NOT
A **HAY**.



THEN
YOU FIND IT,
YOU'RE THE
SCHOLAR.

FAUSTUS REVELS IN DETAILS, HE CAN FIND FAULT IN ANY WORK.

SHAKESPEARE PROBABLY
HATED HIM.

THE *TEDIUM* OF LISTENING TO
FAUSTUS YAMMER ABOUT THE
DIFFERENT DEMONS AND DEVILS
OF HELL CAUSES MY MIND TO
WANDER.

PLEASE...
PLEASE, *HELP*
ME.

NOT MY
PROBLEM. THERE'S
A *REASON* YOU'RE
HERE.

THEN
KILL ME.

Nooooooooo...

EVEN THE *TOUGHEST* MEN
EVENTUALLY BREAK IN HELL.

I WAS NO EXCEPTION.



THERE WAS NO *SIN*
THAT I HADN'T SEEN.



AND *EVENTUALLY* NONE THAT
I HADN'T *COMMITTED*.



BUT IN THE DARK, EVEN A *SLIVER*
OF LIGHT IS A *BEACON*.



ALTHOUGH I WAS BORN A CREATURE OF THIS DARK AND VILE
CESSPOOL, I HAD NO DESIRE TO CONTINUE MY EXISTENCE
IN IT. I HAD HEARD OF *OTHERS* ESCAPING THE PIT.



PERHAPS I COULD AS WELL.



I CLIMBED FOR *DAYS*. RESTS WERE
RARE AND TO BE SAVORED.









THE FAINT ODOR OF *SULFUR* LINGERS HERE.



IT HEADS IN A DIRECTION THAT SHOULDN'T SURPRISE ME.

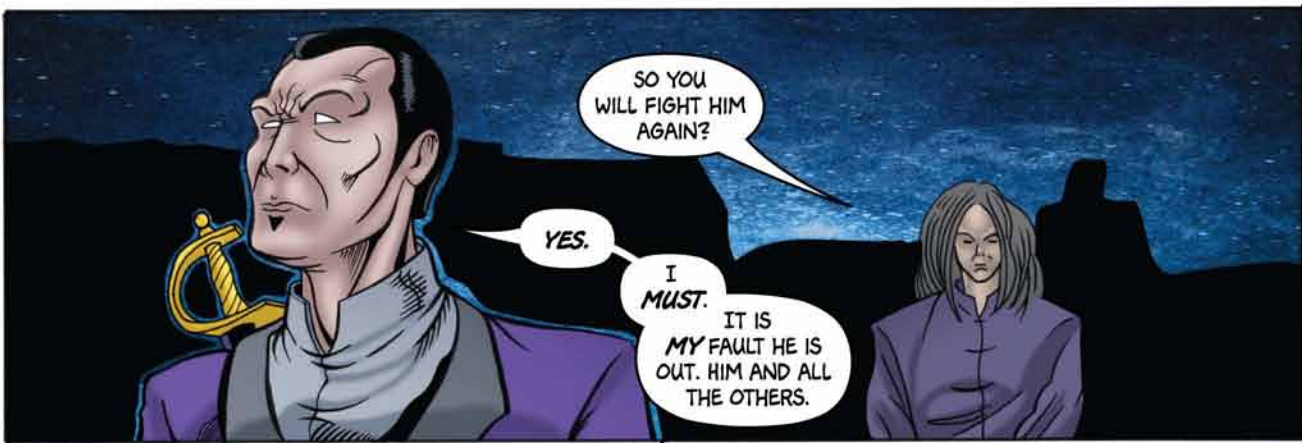


HE IS IN THERE SOMEWHERE OR PERHAPS IN ONE OF THE PITS USED TO HOLD THOSE ABOUT TO DIE.

IT IS TOO *EARLY* YET, TOO MANY PEOPLE.



I'LL *WAIT*. IT IS WORTH WAITING FOR.





YOU KNOW THE **BEGINNING** ANYWAY.
EVERYONE DOES.

MY DEAL
WITH THE DEVIL FOR
KNOWLEDGE.

MY **SOUL** FOR
KNOWLEDGE, ARCANES
AND CARNAL.



GRETCHEN, SWEET
GRETCHEN.

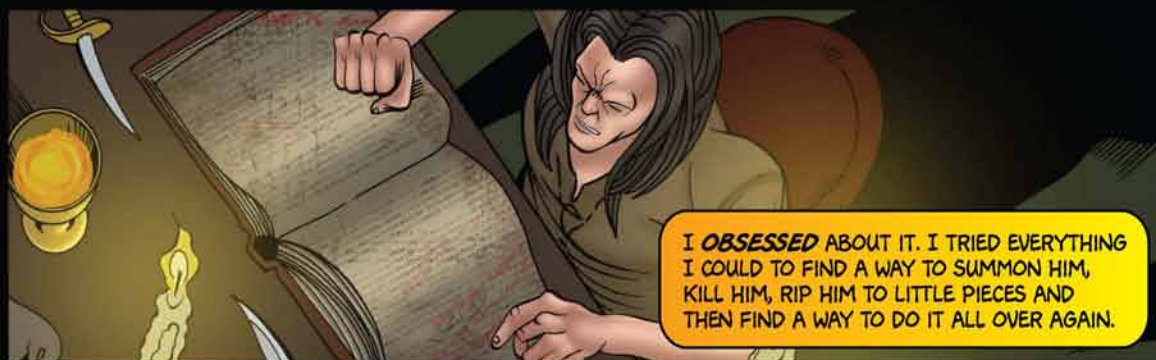
TOO **DUMB** TO QUESTION ANYTHING,
TOO **BEAUTIFUL** FOR ME TO CARE.

SHE **SAVED** ME.



I WAS SUPPOSED TO BE THERE THAT DAY,
THE DAY HE WAS SENT TO **COLLECT**.

I OFTEN WONDERED WHY HE
TOOK **HER** AND NOT **ME**.



I **OBSESSED** ABOUT IT. I TRIED EVERYTHING
I COULD TO FIND A WAY TO SUMMON HIM,
KILL HIM, RIP HIM TO LITTLE PIECES AND
THEN FIND A WAY TO DO IT ALL OVER AGAIN.



BUT IT
DIDN'T MATTER,
BECAUSE NOTHING
I LEARNED GAVE ME
THE **COURAGE** TO
DO ANYTHING.

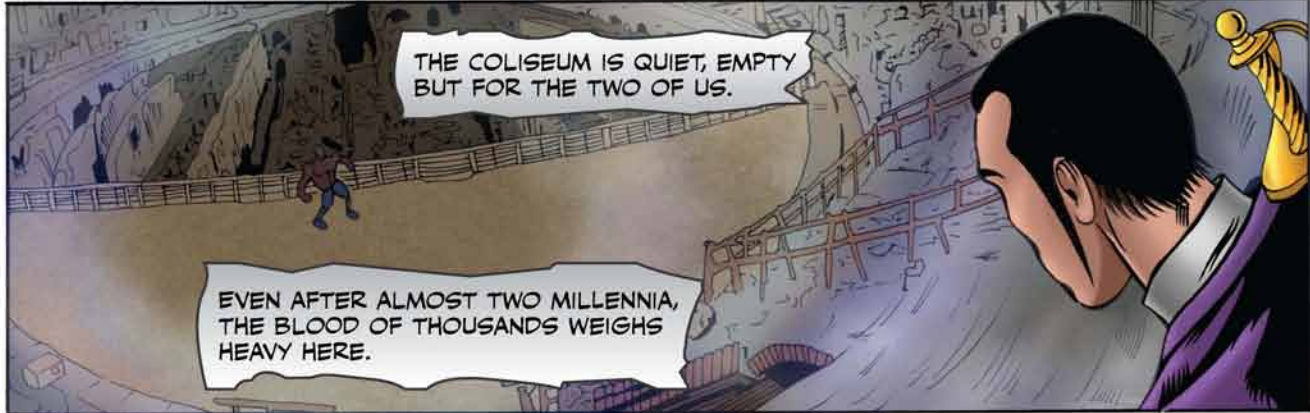


HERE.
MAYBE **YOU**
CAN DO WHAT I
CANNOT.

THIS
CONTAINS THE
FIRST RAY OF LIGHT
AFTER A FULL
ECLIPSE.

IT IS VERY
VOLATILE, SO BE
CAREFUL.





THE COLISEUM IS QUIET, EMPTY BUT FOR THE TWO OF US.

EVEN AFTER ALMOST TWO MILLENNIA, THE BLOOD OF THOUSANDS WEIGHS HEAVY HERE.



IT CALLS OUT, *DEMANDING* TO BE RECOGNIZED.

THERE IS MUCH POWER HERE. IT IS PROBABLY WHY HE CHOSE THIS SPOT FOR OUR DUEL.



IN MY *FIRST* LIFE, I FOUGHT HERE...KILLED MANY MEN AND BEASTS HERE. WAS *CHEERED* HERE, LOUDER THAN ANY OTHER GLADIATOR OF MY ERA.

RETURNING TO THE SCENE OF THE *CRIME* THEN? I DIDN'T PIN YOU FOR THE SENTIMENTAL TYPE.



I *DIED* HERE TOO, BUT ONLY AFTER FACING INSURMOUNTABLE ODDS.



BATHING IN YOUR BLOOD IN ONE LAST VICTORY WILL BE EXHILARATING.

WHAT, NO
SALUTE.

WHACK

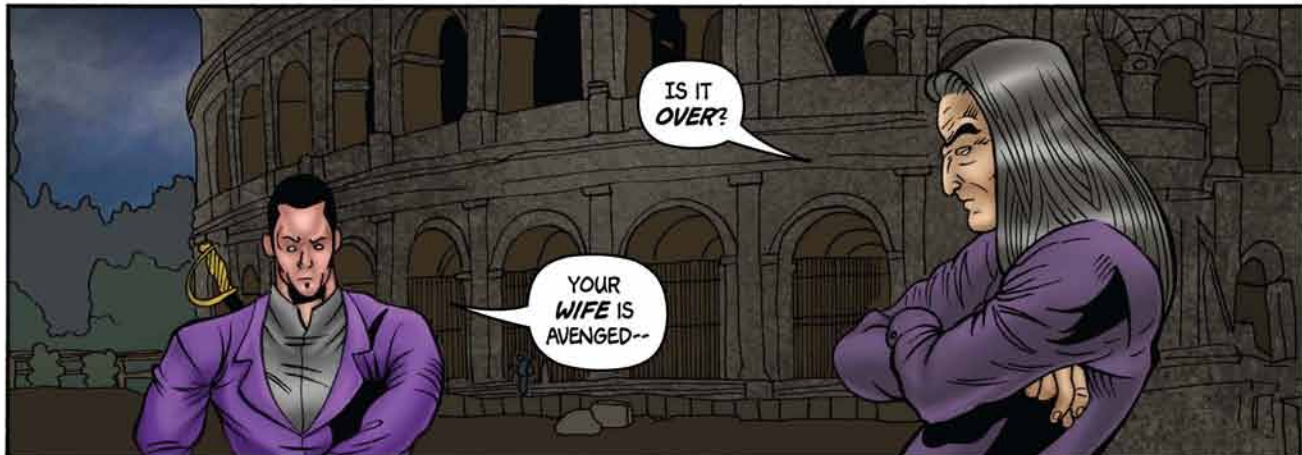
I'M
NOT ABOUT
TO DIE.



FOOL. EVEN
THAT CURSED SWORD
CAN'T PUNCTURE MY HIDE.
I SEWED THE SKINS OF EVERY
CREATURE I SLEW IN HELL TO MY
BODY, LAYERED MORE **DEMON**
FLESH UPON MYSELF THAN
YOU CAN *IMAGINE*.









MAKING COMICS IS HARD WORK NO MATTER HOW YOU BOIL IT DOWN, BUT HAVING FOLKS WHO BELIEVE IN US AND SUPPORT OUR EFFORTS ALONG THE JOURNEY HELPS IN SO MANY WAYS. TO GIVE BACK TO THOSE FOLKS, EVEN JUST A LITTLE BIT, WE'D LIKE TO GIVE SPECIAL RECOGNITION TO THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE:

SARA CHIARILLI
MARGARET MCKAY
FRED FRANKEL
JOAN FRANKEL
JAMES GROSSO
JAMES MANNING
SPENCER RAYMOND
TIM MACKLIN

WE COULDN'T HAVE COME THIS FAR WITHOUT YOU!

THANKS!