



TIME TO GO TO BED, EMMA! YOU'VE GOT A BIG DAY AHEAD OF YOU!

IS THERE GOING TO BE A BOUNCY CASTLE AT MY BIRTHDAY PARTY?

YOU'LL HAVE TO WAIT AND SEE, YOUNG LADY...



IS GRANDMA COMING TO MY PARTY?

OF COURSE, SWEETIE.

AND AUNT JENNY?

YES.

IS DADDY GOING TO BE THERE?

UMM... WE'LL.... SEE...



I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY...SHE KEEPS ASKING IF HER DAD IS COMING...

HOW DO I TELL HER THE REASON HER FATHER CAN'T BE AT HER BIRTHDAY PARTY IS BECAUSE HE'S MIXED UP WITH SOME CRAZY CULT--?



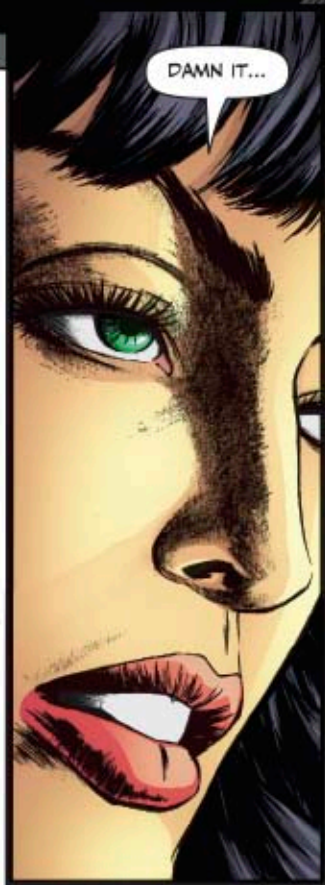
EVERYTHING'S READY FOR NOON, TOMORROW. I PICK UP THE CAKE AT 10, AND THEY'RE SETTING UP THE BOUNCY CASTLE AROUND 11--

HOLD ON, SIS--I JUST HEARD SOMETHING--I THINK EMMA'S OUT OF BED AGAIN.



I KNOW YOU'RE EXCITED ABOUT TOMORROW, SWEETIE, BUT YOU KNOW THE RULES: NO PLAYING AFTER LIGHT'S OUT!

NOW GET BACK TO BED--





YAWN! THIS BETTER BE GOOD, MONSIGNOR. YOU'RE INTERRUPTING MY BEAUTY SLEEP.

YOU KNOW I WOULD NOT DISTURB YOU AT SUCH AN HOUR, MY DEAR, UNLESS IT WAS IMPORTANT.

WE NEED YOU TO LOOK INTO SOMETHING FOR US. A CHILD WAS KIDNAPPED THE OTHER NIGHT. HER FATHER BELONGS TO A CULT, AND HIS EX-WIFE BELIEVES HE INTENDS TO USE THE GIRL IN A BLOOD RITUAL...

THAT'S AWFUL-- BUT IT SOUNDS MORE LIKE A JOB FOR THE FBI TO ME...

YOU DIDN'T LET ME FINISH. THE CHILD'S FATHER'S NAME IS WILLIAM BAXTER, BUT HE RECENTLY CHANGED IT TO...



ETHAN SHROUD.

YOU'RE RIGHT: THIS IS A JOB FOR ME.

SEND ME THE INFO.

GOOD GIRL: THAT'S WHAT I WANT TO HEAR.



TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE, AND I FEAR THIS POOR CHILD DOES NOT HAVE MUCH MORE TO SPARE...

EMMA BAXTER'S BIRTHDAY COINCIDES WITH THE FEAST OF SHADOWS, ONE OF THE CULT OF CHAOS' DARKEST "HOLY" DAYS...



"YOU, MORE THAN ANYONE, KNOW
WHAT SHROUD IS CAPABLE OF."

Ethan Shroud...

*Her memories may still be a jumble
of lies and misdirection, but one thing
she knows is true: the high priest of
the Cult of Chaos is bad news.*

*For as far back as she can remember, the warlock
and his followers have been an unwanted part of her
life; like something stuck to the bottom of her shoe...*

*She thought she had
finally seen the last of
that evil zealot...*

*But if there is one
truth in her life, it is
that her enemies are
often resourceful, if
not immortal...*

No matter how hard she tries, it seems as if she will never escape her past...

So she might as well embrace it.

SIGH
WHY FIGHT IT?



THE BAXTER RESIDENCE,
THREE HOURS LATER:



I'M HERE. THE HOUSE IS WRAPPED
IN CRIME SCENE TAPE. AND ACCORDING
TO THE DOSSIER YOU FORWARDED
TO ME, THE GIRL'S MOTHER WENT
INTO SHOCK AND HAD TO
BE HOSPITALIZED.

THAT MEANS
IF I'M GOING TO
INVESTIGATE, I HAVE
TO BE...



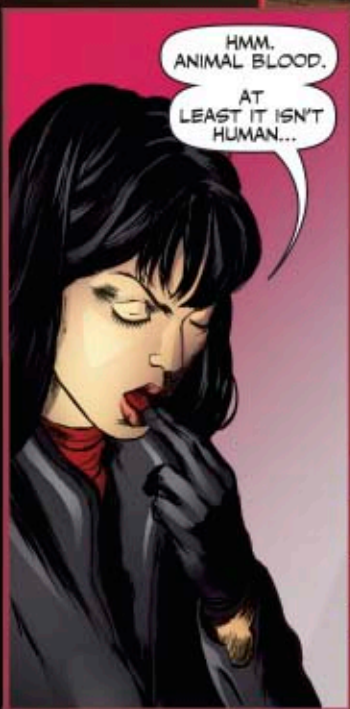
CREATIVE...



REAL SUBTLE,
SHROUD...



HMM.
ANIMAL BLOOD.
AT
LEAST IT ISN'T
HUMAN...

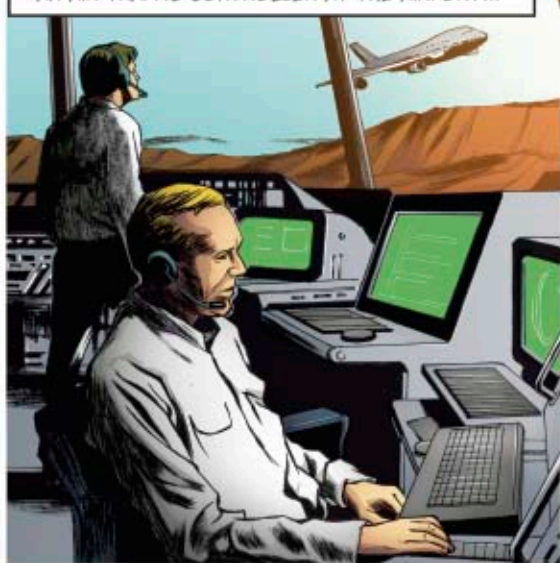


WHO
ARE YOU?!?
WHAT ARE
YOU DOING IN
MY DAUGHTER'S
ROOM?!?





"BILL USED TO BE A NICE, NORMAL GUY. A REAL SWEETHEART. HE HAD A DECENT JOB, WORKING AS AN AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLER AT THE AIRPORT..."



"HE LOVED BEING A HUSBAND, AND HE ADORED BEING A FATHER. AS FAR AS HE WAS CONCERNED, THE SUN ROSE AND SET ON EMMA..."



"ALL THAT CHANGED WHEN HE FOUND THAT AWFUL BOOK AT THE ANTIQUARIAN BOOK STORE. BILL COLLECTED OLD BOOKS, YOU SEE. THE OLDER THE BETTER."



"AND THIS BOOK, THE CRIMSON CHRONICLES, WRITTEN BY SOME OCCULTIST CALLED ETHAN SHROUD, WAS THE OLDEST ONE YET..."

"HE BECAME FIXATED WITH THE DAMNED THING! HE SPENT HOURS, EVEN DAYS LOCKED IN HIS STUDY, READING IT OVER AND OVER. I'D NEVER SEEN HIM LIKE THAT BEFORE."



"HE STOPPED BATHING, SHAVING, EATING, GOING TO WORK..."

"HE BECAME SO OBSESSED HE EVEN SOUGHT OUT THE CULT OF CHAOS IN REAL LIFE!"

"WHEN HE FINALLY FOUND THEM, THEY BOWED BEFORE HIM AND SAID HE WAS THE REINCARNATION OF THEIR HIGH PRIEST!"





"WHEN HE STARTED CALLING HIMSELF 'ETHAN SHROUD,' THAT WAS THE FINAL STRAW. IT BROKE MY HEART TO MAKE HIM LEAVE, BUT I COULDN'T ALLOW THAT KIND OF MADNESS NEAR MY DAUGHTER.



"IT'S BEEN TOUGH ON US EVER SINCE. I'M MAKING ENDS MEET, BUT EMMA MISSES HER DADDY SO MUCH..."

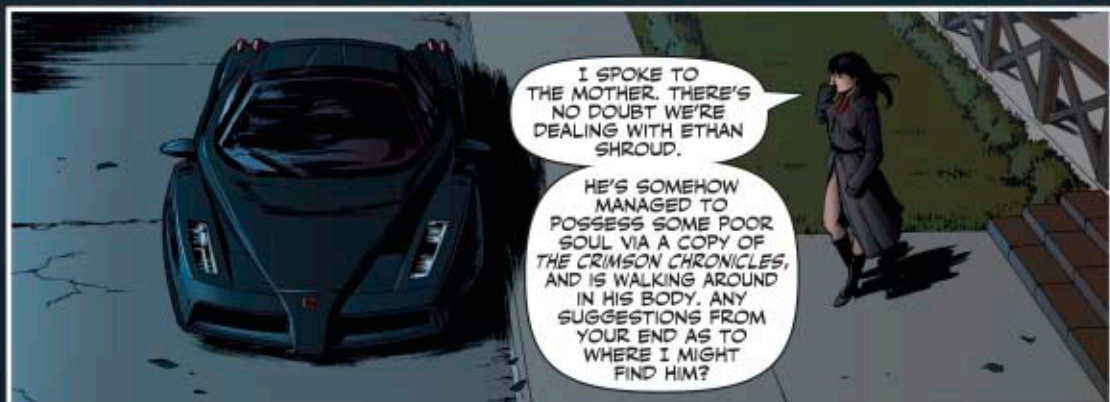


I ONLY WANT THIS NIGHTMARE TO END...

AND TO HAVE MY DAUGHTER IN MY ARMS AGAIN.

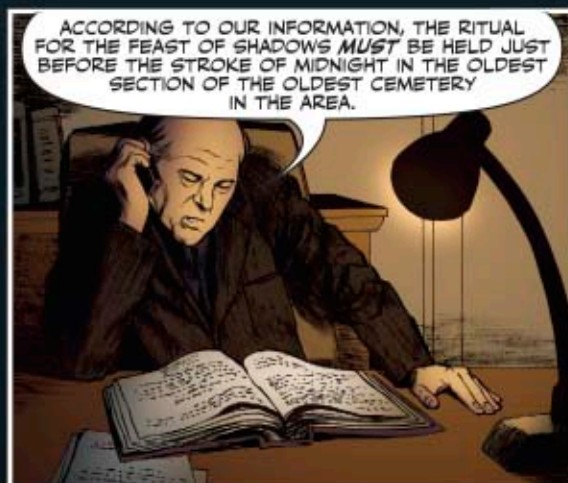
I WILL DO EVERYTHING IN MY POWER TO BRING EMMA BACK TO YOU, MRS. BAXTER.

I PROMISE YOU THAT!



I SPOKE TO THE MOTHER. THERE'S NO DOUBT WE'RE DEALING WITH ETHAN SHROUD.

HE'S SOMEHOW MANAGED TO POSSESS SOME POOR SOUL VIA A COPY OF THE CRIMSON CHRONICLES, AND IS WALKING AROUND IN HIS BODY. ANY SUGGESTIONS FROM YOUR END AS TO WHERE I MIGHT FIND HIM?

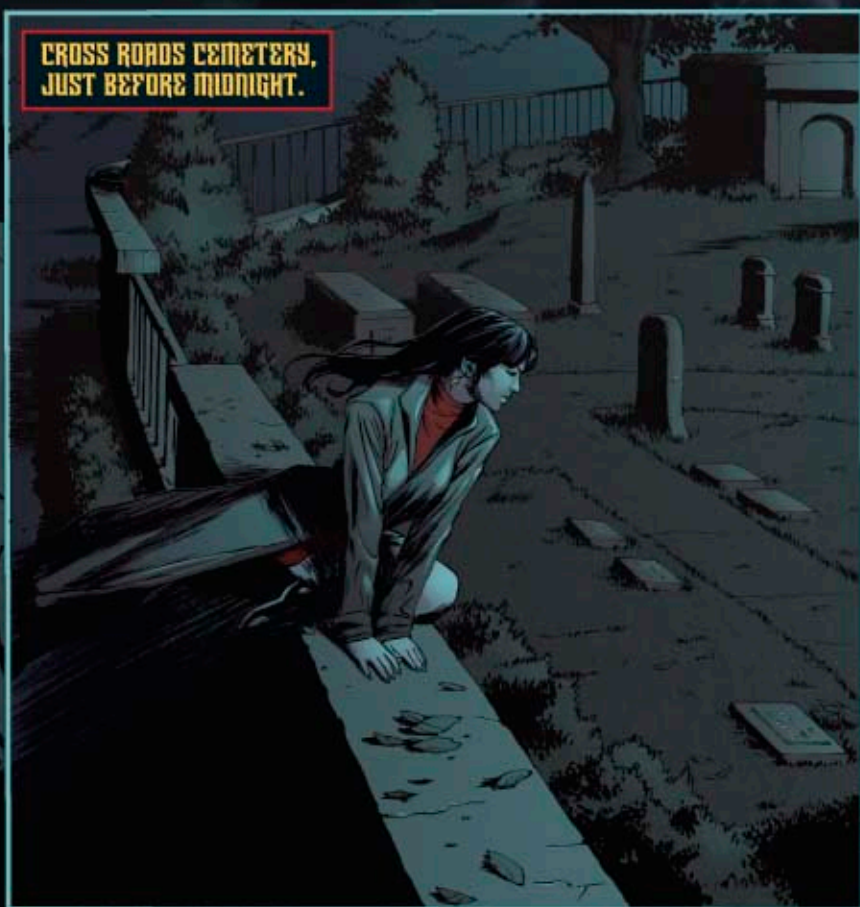


ACCORDING TO OUR INFORMATION, THE RITUAL FOR THE FEAST OF SHADOWS **MUST** BE HELD JUST BEFORE THE STROKE OF MIDNIGHT IN THE OLDEST SECTION OF THE OLDEST CEMETERY IN THE AREA.



THANK YOU, GOOGLE...

CROSS ROADS CEMETERY,
JUST BEFORE MIDNIGHT.



ACCORDING
TO THE RECORDS
I FOUND ONLINE,
THIS IS THE OLDEST
CEMETERY IN THE
STATE...



DARK
MOTHER!





AND THE OLDEST
SECTION SHOULD BE
ON THE OTHER SIDE
OF THIS RISE...

AND I AM
TOTALLY **NOT**
TALKING TO MYSELF
BECAUSE I'M
NERVOUS...



PRAISE
THE GREAT GOD
CHAOS!

PRAISE TO
THE BRINGER OF
FEAR, WHO MAKETH
MEN FLEE!

PRAISE CHAOS!
FOR ALL ACTS AND
PASSIONS ARE A HYMN
IN HIS HONOR!

PRAISE
CHAOS!

PRAISE
CHAOS!

PRAISE
CHAOS!

PRAISE
CHAOS!

PRAISE
CHAOS!

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CHAOS!

PRAISE
CHAOS!



MIGHTY
ART THOU,
WHOM HATH
NO FORM!

MIGHTY
ART THOU,
THE VAST AND
ETERNAL-

SHROUD!



VAMPIRELLA!



I DON'T KNOW
HOW YOU MANAGED
TO RETURN, BUT I'M
NOT GOING TO ALLOW
YOU TO HARM AN
INNOCENT CHILD!



AND THAT
GOES DOUBLE FOR
YOUR BRAINWASHED
FOLLOWERS!