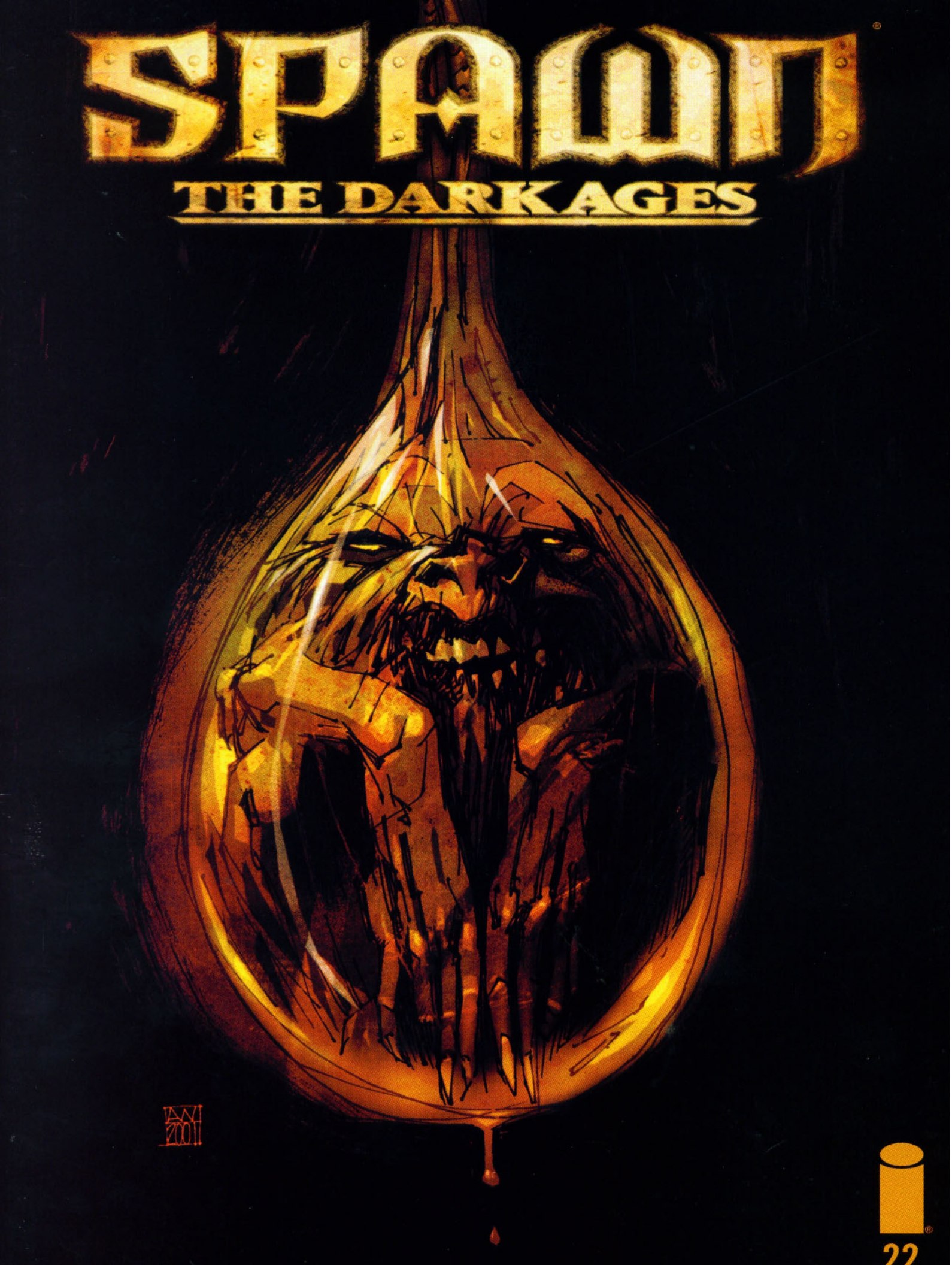
SPAWN

THE DARK AGES



22

TODD McFARLANE AND IMAGE COMICS PRESENT

THE SEEDING

STORY STEVE NILES

PENCILS NAT JONES

INKS KEVIN CONRAD

COVER ASHLEY WOOD

LETTERING RICHARD STARKINGS
AND COMICRAFT'S
OSCAR GONGORA

COLOR TODD BROEKER

PRESIDENT OF
ENTERTAINMENT
TERRY FITZGERALD

ART DIRECTOR
BRENT ASHE

DESIGNER
BOYD WILLIAMS

MANAGING EDITOR
BRAD GOULD

PUBLISHER FOR
MAGE COMICS
JIM VALENTINO

SPAWN CREATED BY
TODD McFARLANE

SUMMARY

Having completed the rape of Rhyll that was started by the Beast of the Black Wood, the Vikings have taken all they can and prepare to leave. Harald, the Viking leader, has taken a liking to Rhyll's only survivor, young Alek, and plans on taking the boy with him. Meanwhile, back in Turnbold, Spawn has found an unusual way to deal with Leech and Marcellus, and escapes Turnbold with not only his life, but with a sense of his place in the world; with a new perspective on his life. In the deepest part of the forest, life is not so calm for Gareth. While he guards the Necroplasm, something is lurking in the woods.

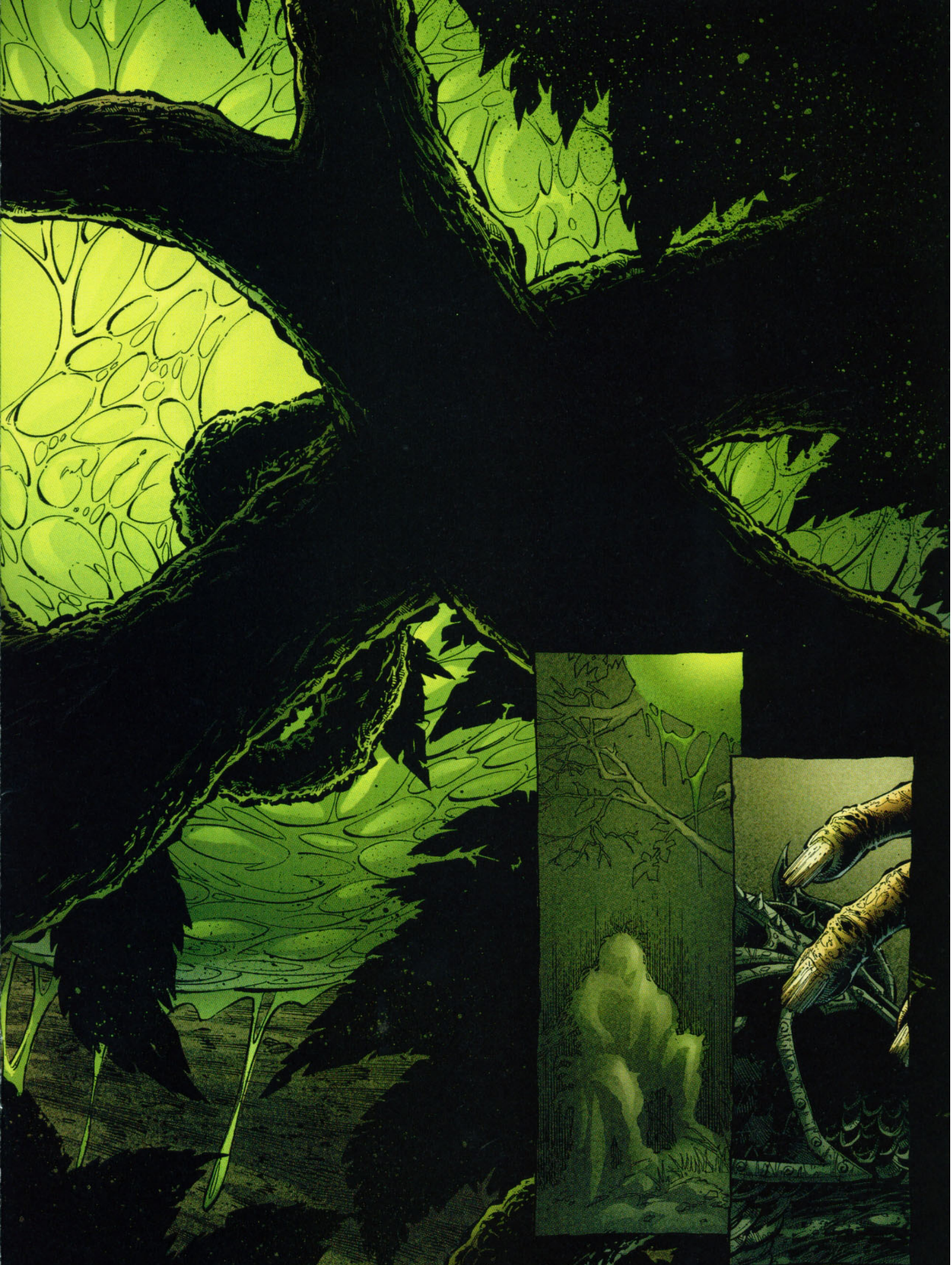
TODD McFARLANE PRODUCTIONS

SPAWN The Dark Ages #22 January 2001. First Printing. Published by IMAGE COMICS 1071 N. Batavia St., Suite A, Orange, CA 92867. $2.50 USA/$4.00 CAN.

Spawn, its logo and its symbol are registered trademarks 2001 of Todd McFarlane Productions, Inc.

Sleep for a Hellspawn is rare and intense when it comes. It is a time for regeneration, hibernation and for the harvesting of raw evil.
But this Hellspawn is different.
This is Iain Covenant.
He was Hellspawn, pure and dark, but then his Necroplasm was extracted from the very fiber of his being.
Now, Covenant is neither man nor Hellspawn, but something in between.
Something unknown.
For this unknown entity, this shattered Spawn standing on the lip of reality, sleep is a journey into the core of his tormented mind and fragmented soul.
Sometimes the excursion is a nightmare.

But sometimes... waking up is worse.



Never in life or death has Covenant seen such a thing.
For one fleeting, hopeful moment he thinks that it might be an illusion.
But this is not to be.
It lives, this thing of nightmares.
Its eyes, the eyes of Hellspawn, yet pathetic somehow, unformed, incomplete.
No... This... cannot... be... how it begins...
You live... you speak. What manner of creature are you?!
Covenant? You live!
Yes, I live, but who are you? How do you know who I am? Answer me!
Can you not see what I am to be? I am the next. I am your successor.
I am Hellspawn.

A familiar scent wisps by Covenant's nostrils and he has all the proof he requires. The creature within the membrane speaks the truth. It is the scent of lies, hate and fear.
It is the scent of Malebolgia.
Why are you here? How did you find me?
An unfortunate mistake. You have fouled the plans of the Damned, Covenant. They thought you dead. They thought you defeated.
There was an attack. I lost that which gave me power, but I am still here.
An unexpected twist to an otherwise perfect scheme. The masters of bile will be most displeased when they discover you have ruined their plans. Most displeased.
You are helpless. I can see this, but why? Explain to me how we have come to this meeting. Explain to me this mystery.
Only one can exist on the soil of earth at a time. That is the law. I will hang here until your death.
It is because there are other forces at work. This coward's war has caught the interest of others. Now, tell me what brought you here, creature.
I see no reason why I should not tell you my tale. Listen and learn how it is done, Covenant.
Taste what you could have been.

"As the old religions faded and the new faith took hold of the world, the system of Hell began to take shape."
"Nearing the end of the first millennium only three Hellspawn had been successfully created."
"Hundreds of thousands of early attempts were made and of these mistakes, a legion of lower demons unlike any before were created."
"But they did not suit the purpose of the war that would be waged one day on earth between darkness and light. Hell needed a soldier. A commander to lead the armies of the damned."

"And so, Malebolgia proposed the Hellspawn. Scour the world of the flesh and find its most brilliant killers, its most hideous, immoral offenders."
"When they, these offenders of the flesh, die, offer them a second chance with one caveat to the bargain."
"They will be Hellspawn and they must live and breathe under two mandates: kill to harvest souls for the army of damnation, AND accept the role of leader, of Hellspawn."
"Live, grow and become a mighty leader."

"Now, of the original Hellspawn, one escaped the hold of Malebolgia, one failed to live up to the expectations of the darkness, and the third, a man named Covenant had seemingly disappeared."
"Now the truth is known."
"You, the Hellspawn named Covenant, lost the fluid of his creation and with that loss came Hell's only reliable tool in tracking you on the clay of earth."

These are new times for the dark lords of the pit of bile and suffering. Though well learned in the sanctioning of torment and fear, they are still novices at creating earth born Hellspawn.
Thinking you, Covenant, lost forever, Malebolgia sought out the next candidate for Hellspawn, and he found his gem on a small island of the coast of Britain.
I was a killer, a thief, a defiler, a liar, and I relished in my evil. For I did not, and do not see it as such. This is what set me apart from all candidates before me.
His name was Yagher Dien.
That is me. I am Yagher.
I was not a fool, who had killed in life, not realizing the errors of his ways.

"I killed, molested, stole and deceived for the sole reason that I wanted to. Because it gave me the things in life I required. Things I demanded."
"I was not insane. I am not insane to this day."
"My mind has always been as sharp as the most brilliant. I, Yagher, was simply an outcast who had realized at a very young age that I held nothing but contempt for the species to which I belonged."
"I killed a man before I had ever killed an animal. At the age of eleven I think it was."
"I held my youngest brother's head beneath the water of a pond."
"I had good reason for this action. Perfectly logical."

"You see, if he were dead then there would be more food at the table for me."
"But, to be honest, if I may, there was another reason... several really."
"I enjoyed the feeling as my brother struggled, but I savored the sensation as my brother died and his body went limp in my grasp."
I felt the death and loved it.
Feeling his life drain from his body brought me joy.
And from this first death I formed my life.
I killed if threatened, insulted or the moment suited me. I killed for lust, for greed and for enjoyment. Once I'd entertained the idea, murder filled every gap in my life I'd ever experienced.
I found, that death was the answer to everything.

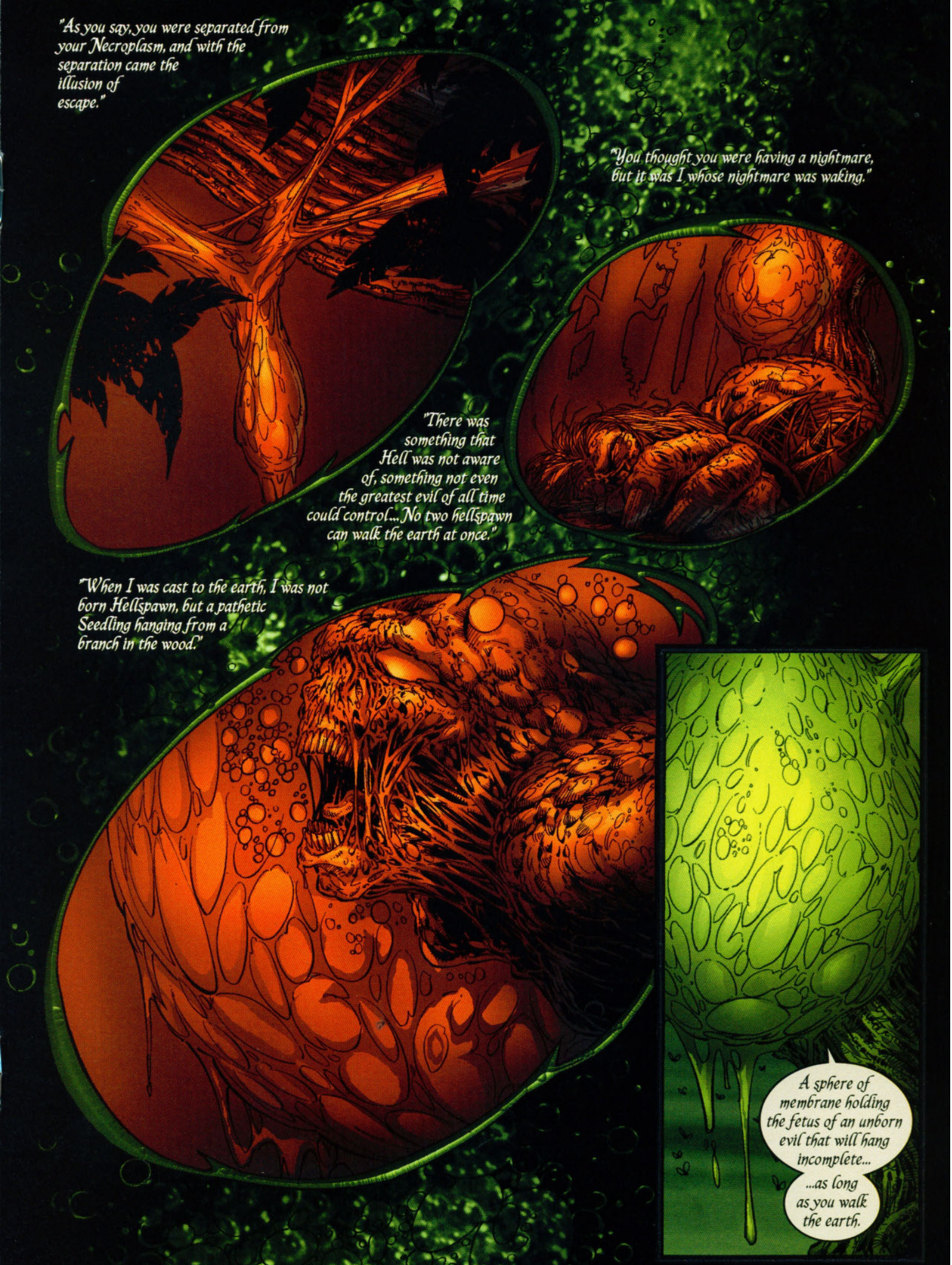
"This idea led me through life. I grew to be a vicious, uncompromising man and came to rule a small village of fools and peasants in southernmost Ireland."
"And rule I did. For well over a decade. Those sheep called people, they craved the power I yielded."
"In the time I governed, I released the souls of over seven thousand men, women and children."
"I took their lives, their honor and their food and wealth."
"Why, you ask?"
"That is the easiest question of all to answer."
"Because I could. Because it was mine to take. Because it brought me joy."

"And never, not once during all of the killing and devastation did it ever enter my mind that what I was doing was wrong."
"I never had a pang of guilt or remorse. Not one moment of regret.
"I was a perfect candidate in the eyes of Hell, and I suppose somewhere inside me I knew."
"I would be the one who would relish the role of Hellspawn."
"I would harvest the damned for pleasure and lead the army of darkness against the hordes of heaven for sheer love of my work."

Now you, Covenant had seemingly fallen off the face of the earth.
It was time for a new Hellspawn to be created, and right at this time I fell victim to a mob of angry, long tormented villagers.
It seems that they had finally had enough of my reign.
"They dragged me into a field."
"They stabbed me."
"Burned me."

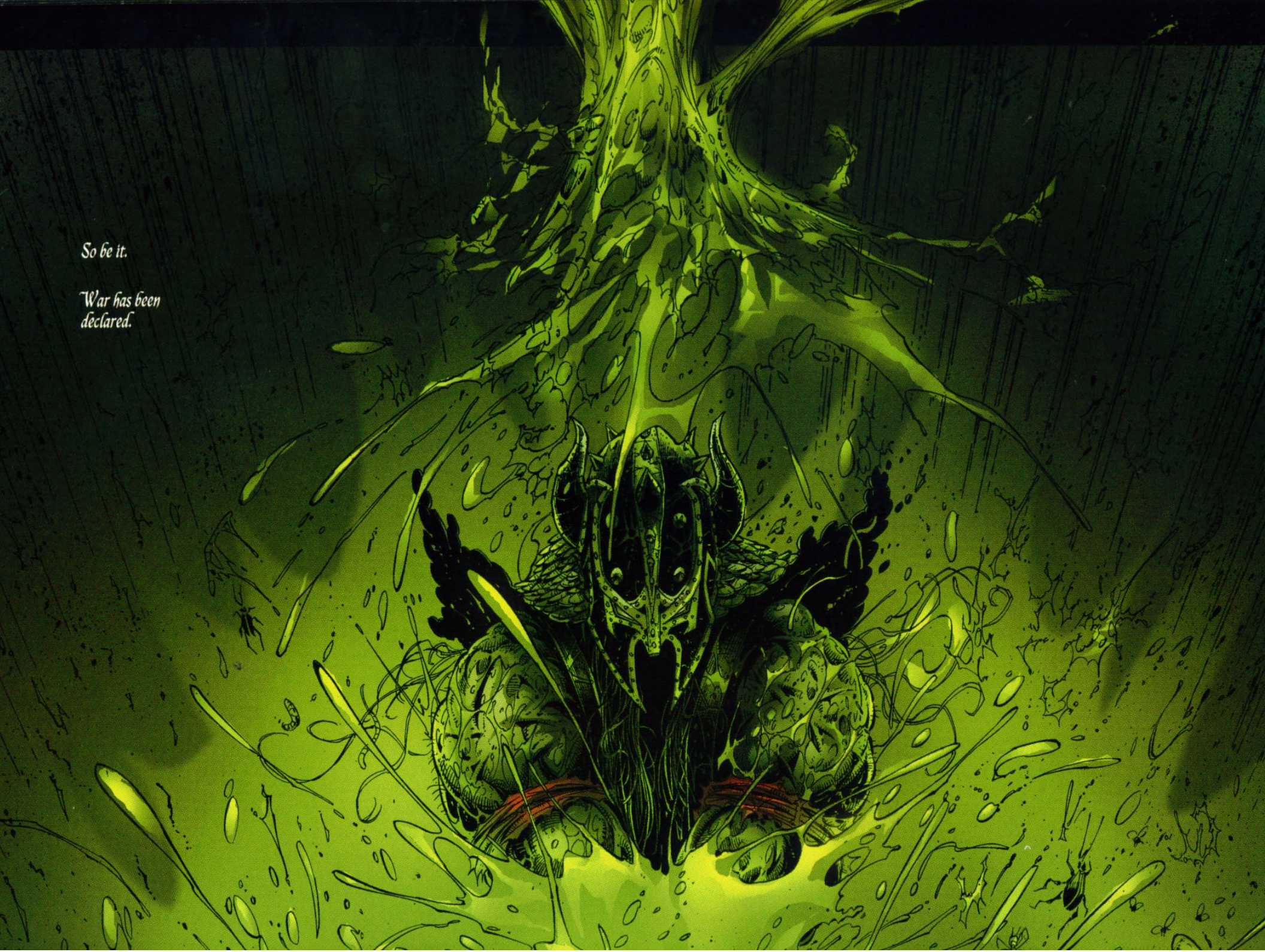
"And before my last breath was gasped, they fastened my limbs to horses..."
"...and tore my body into pieces."
"I remember thinking, as my flesh tore, that I felt pride for my people. I had taught them the pleasure of pain, the release of torture, and the absolution of the kill."
"If only for a single moment, they felt what it was to be me. They felt what I felt when I killed. They became me. They used murder to fill a gap of pain."
"They became the damned."
"I had already done a great service to the Underlords and I did not even realize."

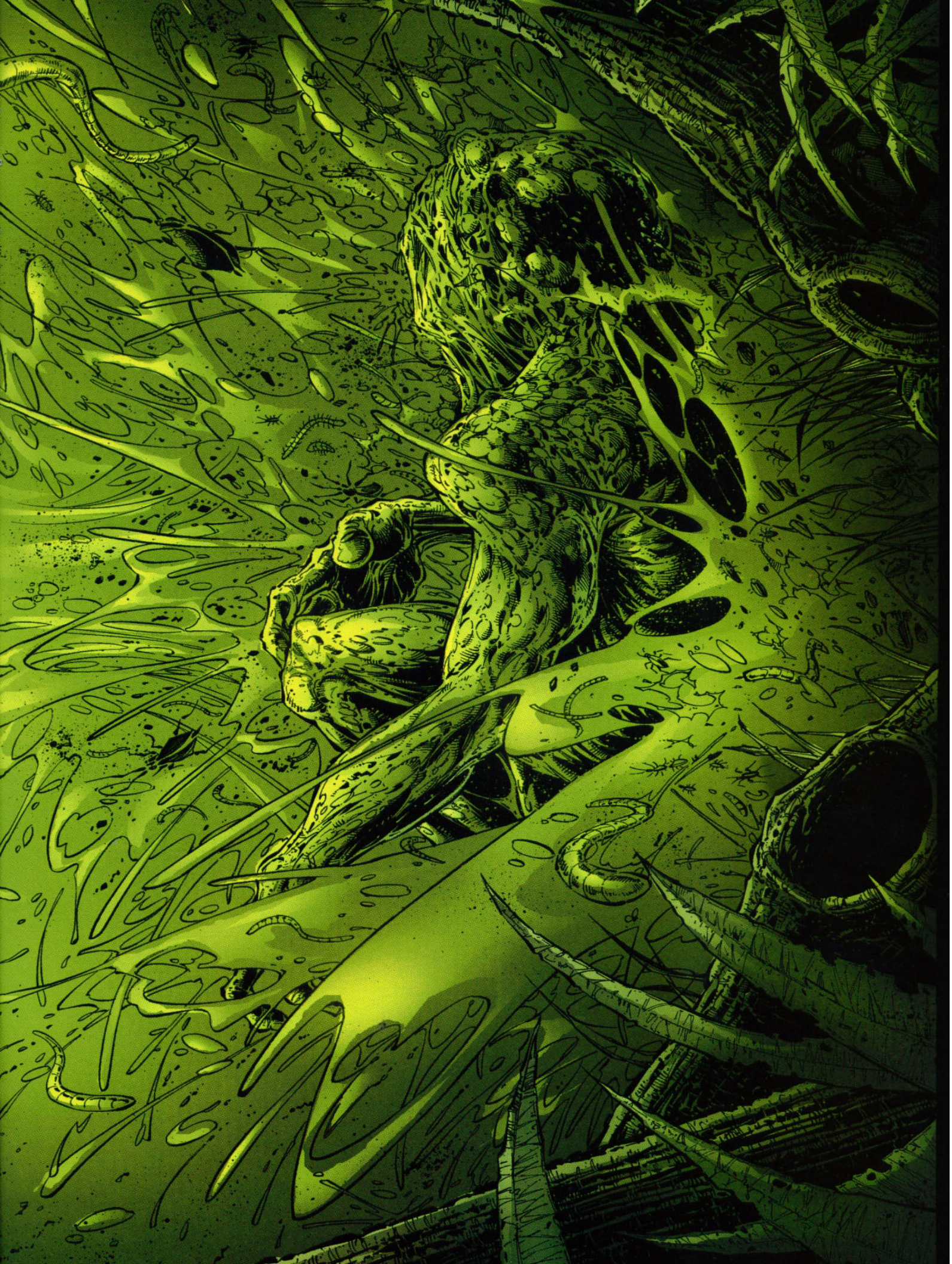
"Malebolgia waited, eager as a child with a new toy. He took my soul and he dragged it through the pus and bile and severed every nerve with blade and flame, and when it was concluded and the tortures had run their course, I looked up at my master and said..."
Make me your soldier and I will serve you well.
"The perfect Hellspawn had been found at last."
"All that remained was to deposit me upon the earth."
"But there was an unexpected complication. You, Covenant were not gone from the earth."


"As you say, you were separated from your Necroplasm, and with the separation came the illusion of escape."
"You thought you were having a nightmare, but it was I whose nightmare was waking."
"There was something that Hell was not aware of, something not even the greatest evil of all time could control... No two hellspawn can walk the earth at once."
"When I was cast to the earth, I was not born Hellspawn, but a pathetic Seedling hanging from a branch in the wood."
A sphere of membrane holding the fetus of an unborn evil that will hang incomplete...
...as long as you walk the earth.

Covenant knows the importance of the seedling to the dark one. He could sense the passion felt for the Beast. The perfection of its evil.
This was what he had been meant to be, and Cog before him. This was a human cut from a cloth of pure, raw depravity.
Spontaneously, Spawn begins a strange ritual, the meaning of which he is not entirely aware.
Slowly he circles the seedling taking it in from every perspective, and he feels his breathing slow to a rasping crawl.
Covenant imagines what would happen if this monster were unleashed on the world instead of himself.
Many would die. The planet would be a wasteland of humanity, a playground for the damned, a blood-soaked sphere.
What are you doing?

That was what he, Covenant, had been meant to achieve; mass murder, massacres, lies, deceit and cruelty.
But Covenant had other thoughts, other realizations.
Brother... please...tell me what you plan to do!
He learned that there were reasons to live and to let others live... there was the boy, Alek, and Shiann, and William and Brodi and the farmer and his wife Karl. Each of those souls was a reason to not be what this thing would surely become.
You call me brother? You forget, you told me what comes of those who call you brother.
And now Covenant knew that as long as he walked the earth, there would be no other like him. He held the reins, not Malebolgia.
How perfect. How simple and perfect.
You can not destroy me. I am evil's child. I am the future of the war!
Covenant knows to destroy the seedling will be his final undoing.
He knows if he takes the life of Malebolgia's perfect pet that he would be declaring war on Hell.
If you kill me you will only be alerting them to your presence!
Yes... I know.


So be it.
War has been declared.



This was the moment to turn back. Save the evil and live as before.
Kill the evil and declare war on his creators.
So be it.
A line was drawn that day just a few decades short of the first millennium.
A Hellspawn stood against the lords of darkness and said no.
Somewhere in the ether, seven thousand souls collectively wept and laid their heads in peace, and relief.
It is a new day.
For Covenant, another in a long series of endless days, on a journey down a road built with good intentions.