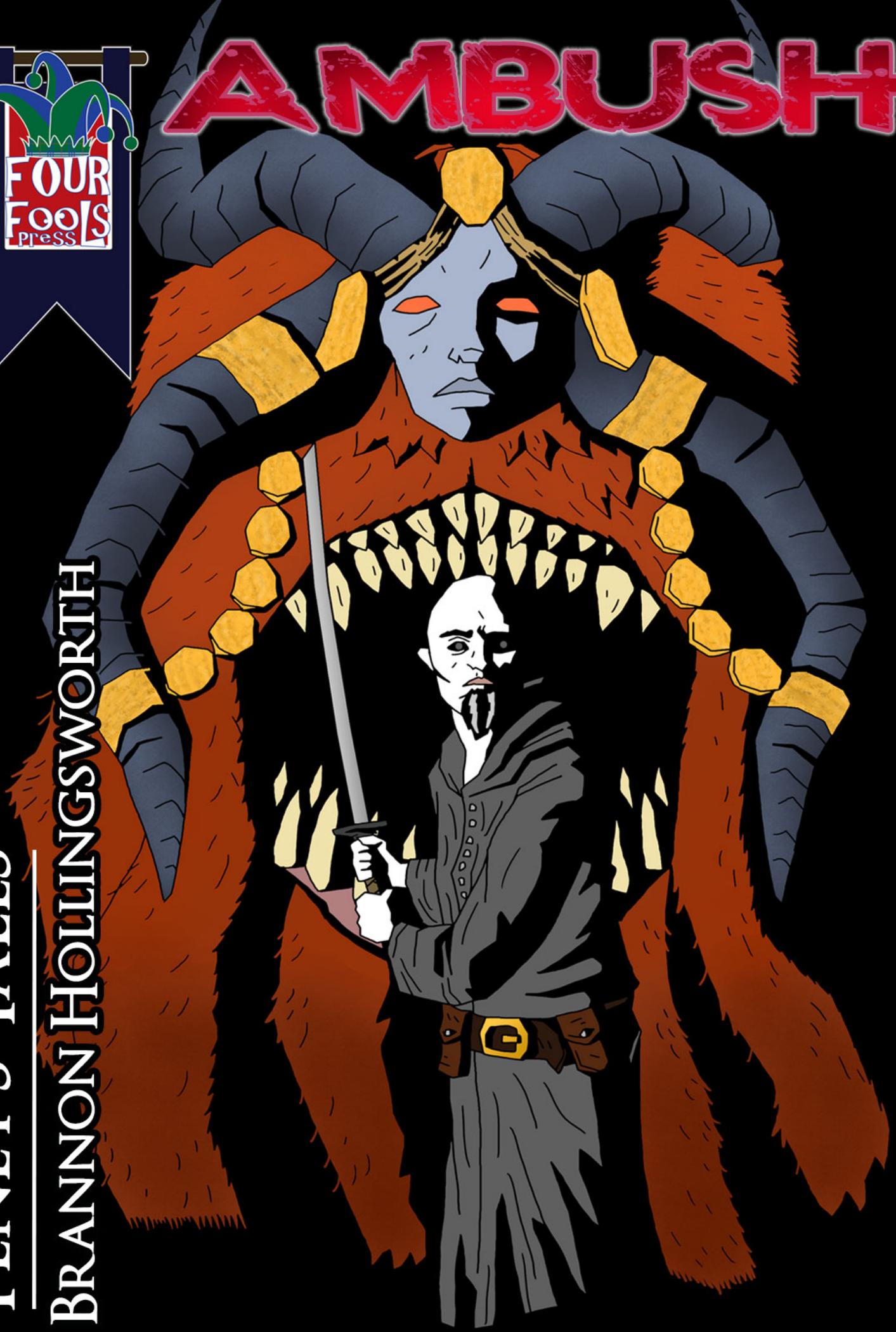


AMBUSH



TENET'S TALES

BRANNON HOLLINGSWORTH



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In the midst of a mission to save a young man from a shadowy supernatural threat, Tenet is stranded and in trouble. What seems like an ordinary, daily problem quickly transforms into a nightmarish battle against horrific threats from *Beyond*...threats laid as a deadly ambush for the unsuspecting hero.

The second in a series of action-packed, supernaturally-laced stories known as Tenet's Tales, *Ambush* is sure to please fans of *The Dresden Files*, *The Sandman Slim Series*, and *The Secret Histories*.

"If your attack is going too well, you're probably walking into an ambush."
- U.S. Army Infantry Journal



"Please state your name, Sir." The reporter tried to level his green-eyed gaze at me, but he simply did not have it in him. The kid was young and inexperienced. With his explosion of downy, curly red hair and peach fuzz on his chin, he looked like someone trying to get me to buy lemonade at his stand, not grill me for his campus newspaper. I doubted he'd had much experience with getting angry with the subjects of his interviews before.

I deadpanned, "I'd rather not."

Emerald orbs fluttered, and lips spluttered. "Ah. Um. Ok. Well, this is Timothy Hammer, reporting with the *New Dawn* magazine. It is April 13, 2001 and we're sitting in the Padre Hotel in Bakersfield, California - reportedly one of the Golden State's most haunted sites. I'm speaking with Mr. X, a purported expert in things paranormal, in response to last night's explosive Coast-to-Coast radio show. What *New Dawn* readers and listeners would like to know, Mr. X, is what can you tell us about Shadow People?"

I knew that the recording would likely not even take. Devices like that simply do not mix well with those of my ilk. It did not matter, however; I knew what I had to say was for this man, if for no one else. I know the Truth, and I'm bound to speak it--forever.

I glanced to my right, and Áine was nodding vigorously. Her blue eyes were gone, replaced with blackened, still-smoking sockets, and she was screaming. "TELL HIM WHAT HE IS! TELL HIM WHO THEY ARE! YOU DIDN'T TELL ME, TENET! TELL HIM, YOU BAST-!"

"Sir, are...are you well?" Timothy asked, his voice panicked. I could only imagine what my pale face looked like, faced with Áine's rants. My heart ached for my long lost love—killed at my own hand—and her accusations against me.

Of course, Timothy could not see her. Áine, still screaming and ranting as she was, was my own personal revenant with which to deal.

I massaged my temples and sighed. "Believe me...you don't want to know what they are. What they are is the sort of thing that will scare a sane person so badly as to cause them to run screaming to their beds, pull the covers over their heads, and never, ever come out. That doesn't change the fact that they are absolutely real, that their greatest desire is to create massive amounts of fear, suffering, and confusion, and that they definitely are not, by any means, "people". Far from it, actually."

Timothy looked like he was shocked that I could string so many words together all at once. I could not blame him. I'd probably not spoken more than five words in a row to him since we'd met over a year ago, in this very hotel, in fact.

"So, where do these...things come from? What are they?" he asked.

"We will continue calling them Shadow People for now. Of all the things we could call them, this gives them the least amount of power. Despite what you might have heard, Shadow People have been around since shortly after the Fall, which is also their origin."

Timothy looked perplexed. "The Fall? Do you mean the fall of Man, as mentioned in the Bible?"

I nodded, stroking my black and silver-streaked chin beard. "Yes, as detailed in the third chapter of Genesis-"

The reporter lad laughed aloud. "Mr. X, surely you do not expect me, or the readers of the New Dawn, to accept the Bible as a credible source? That is preposterous!"

I arched a brow. "Really? What, then, do you think that Zebul was referring to when he spoke to Gaal?"

The look on Timothy's face was priceless. It was the same as if I'd just told him that his breakfast was made of manna -- complete confusion and utter bewilderment. I spared him and continued speaking, "Judges, chapter 9, verse 36: 'And when Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, "Look, people are coming down from the tops of the mountains!" But Zebul said to him, "You see the shadows of the mountains as *if they were* men.'"

The young reporter scrunched up his face. "So...so, what are you saying?"

"Simply that. These things that you refer to as Shadow People have been amongst us for quite some time."

"You've still not told me what you think these things are, Mr. X."

A scowl passed over my pale features, and while Áine screeched into my ear like a banshee (unheard by the other Padre patrons) I contemplated my next words carefully. "I KNOW what these things are, Timothy...but I shall not tell you, not yet. You would not believe my words, at least not until you see with your own eyes. Suffice it to say that there is a Sect, or a Faction among these Shadow People that are tied to — and seeking revenge upon — Berith and the Sons of Hamor."

I watched the blood drain from Timothy's face.

"H-H-Hamor?" he stuttered.

"Yes", I nodded. "Your ancient ancestors. These Shadow People whom you so desperately seek, they are actually seeking you."

It looked as if the young lad was going to faint; he was a white as a sheet — as white as me, actually, beneath his peach fuzz. I placed a steadying hand