

# A Hypothesis on Child Abuse in *Grendel: Devil by the Deed* (2023 Master's Edition)

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This talk includes very graphic textual and visual portrayals of violent rape and other forms of sexual and emotional predation and abuse.



## (The Main) Hunter Rose Publishing Timeline

*Comico Primer/Grendel* volume 1 (1983-1984)

*Mage* 6-13 backups: "Devil by the Deed" (1984-1986)

*Batman/Grendel* (1993)

*Grendel: Black, White, and Red* (1998-1999)

*Grendel: Devil Child* (1999)

*Grendel: Red, White, and Black* (2002)

*Grendel: Behold the Devil* (2007-2008)

*Grendel vs The Shadow* (2014)

*Devil by the Deed: Master's Edition* (2023)

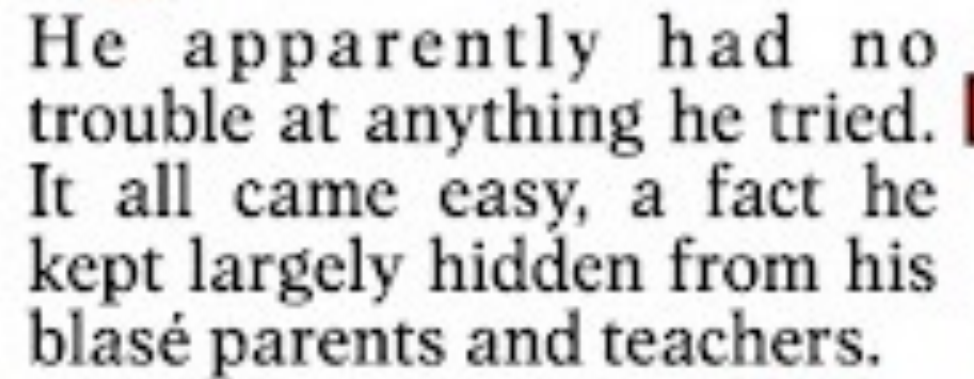
Several of these volumes retell the same story in different ways.

Some aspects of his story evolve over time, other parts stay the same.

In all of them, Hunter Rose grew up as a **genius** in a boring small town, went to a fencing tournament in his teens and was **seduced by a woman in her 30s** who inspired him to break away from conformism. He became a vicious but **genius criminal** with **one vice he cannot stand--pedophilia**. He met and **adopted a young girl** who he felt was a kindred spirit. She eventually found out he was a criminal and **conspired to have him killed** by his arch-enemy.

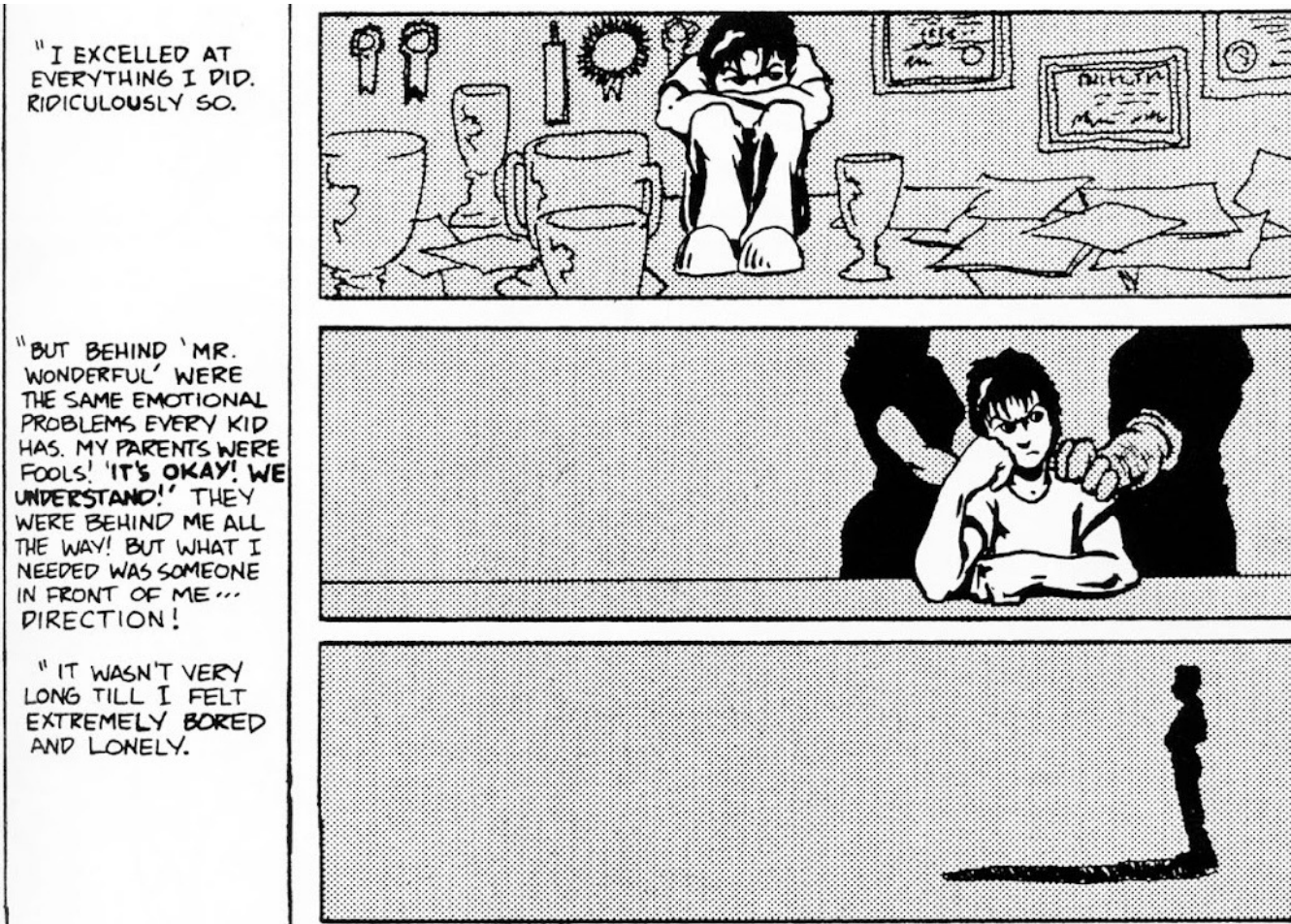
My thesis is that these events reveal a pattern of age-inappropriate relationships or sexual abuse and may stem from an untold history of Hunter being abused as a child himself.

## Hunter as a child



He apparently had no trouble at anything he tried. It all came easy, a fact he kept largely hidden from his blasé parents and teachers.





Hunter, an omni-genius, was “extremely bored and lonely” as a child, feeling he was above everyone else.

His parents were “fools,” “blasé,” “bovine...prosaic,” with “droning...numb” lives.



The first volume says they were supportive but that sense is not repeated in future retellings.

Later tellings begin to note that he was bullied--the only hint of childhood conflict as opposed to ennui.





He is bullied by kids who think he's too smart and thus weird.

He exhibits psychopathic tendencies even at this age, burning a frog without compassion and spraying gasoline on his bullies, although he doesn't kill them.

Does this psychopathy derive from his sense of superiority, or is it the consequence of something we have not (yet) seen on panel, like sexual abuse, whether by the bullies or his parents?

# The teenage Hunter is seduced by Jocasta Rose



He is attracted to her “praise,” “zest for life,” “brilliance,” “vivacity,” and “competitive spirit”--all things he saw as being absent in the rest of humanity.

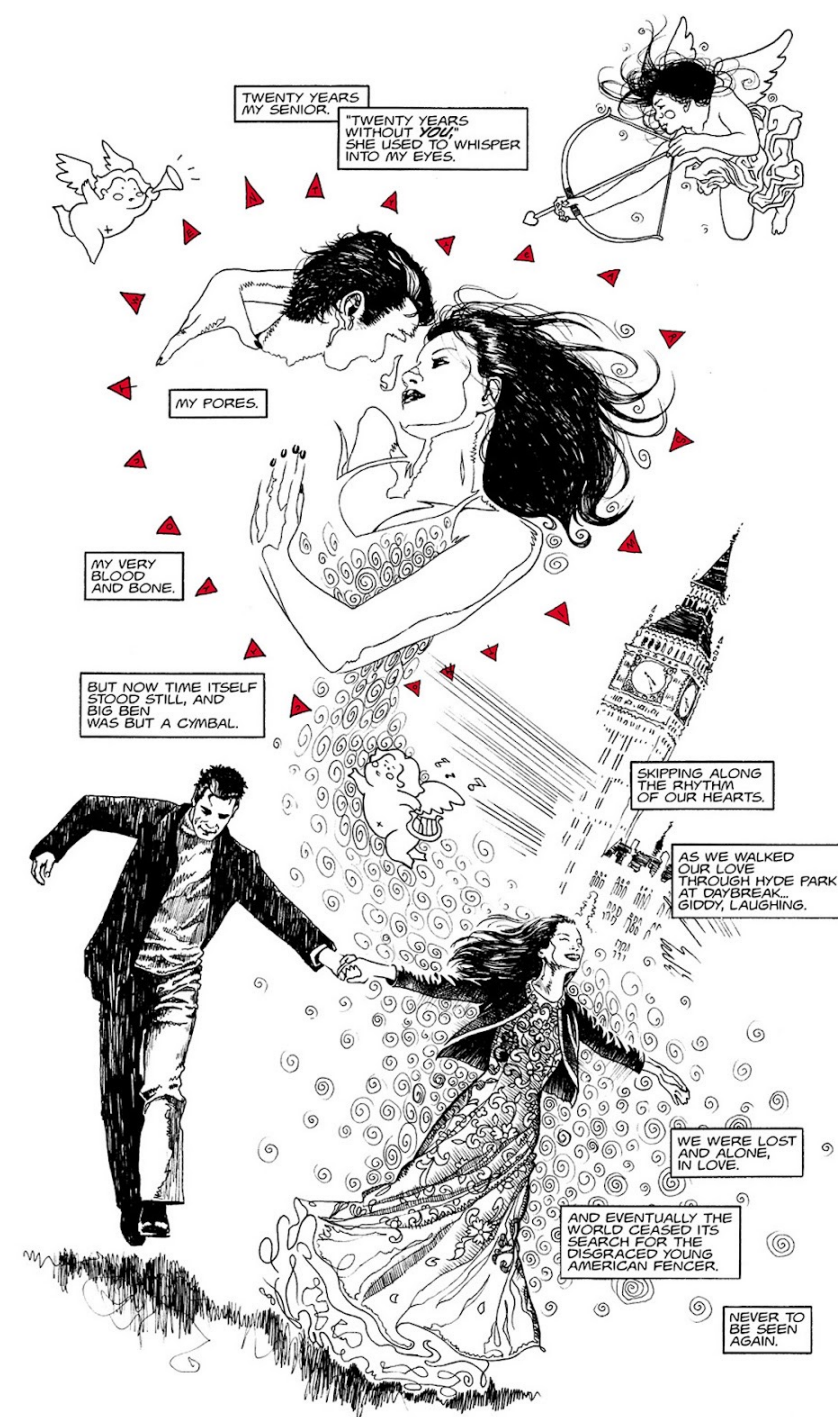




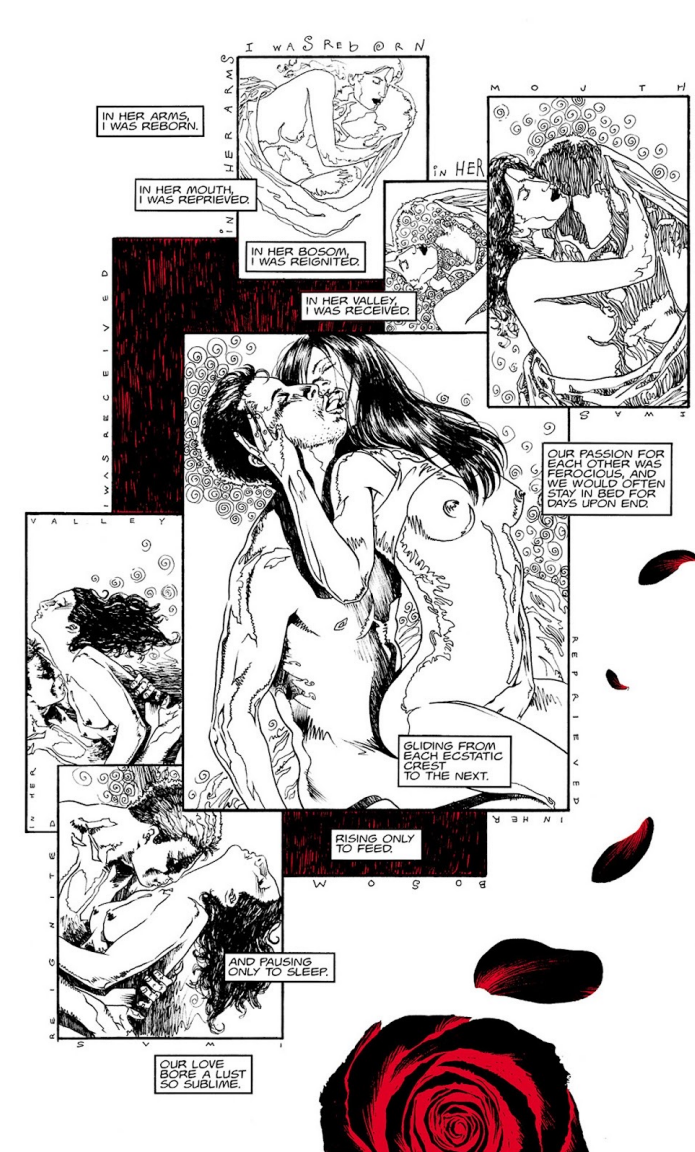
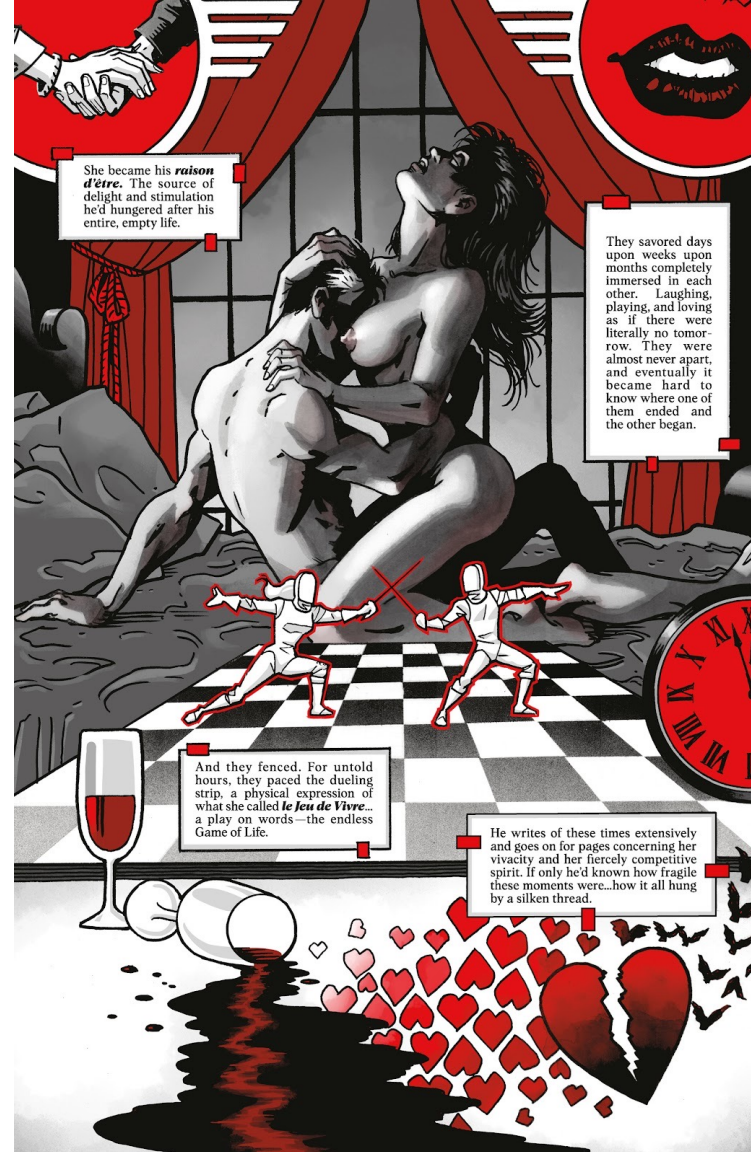
Hunter enters a fencing tournament and is seduced by a woman “over twice his age,” Jocasta Rose. They have an intense sexual and emotional relationship for a year before she dies.

The two earliest versions of Hunter’s story put his age at 14 and hers at 36. In later retellings he was 15. Presumably this was to make the relationship feel (slightly) less like pedophilia.

Sometimes Hunter is drawn much more like a child at this time, with the difference in their ages apparent (above), and other times more like an adult, with the age difference minimized (right).







Their sexual relationship is explicit and only becomes more so in later retellings. The original *Devil by the Deed* says, “She seduced him.” The *Master’s Edition* says, more confusingly, “Whether she planned to seduce him is morally debatable, but factually irrelevant,” taking some of the predatory responsibility off her. In both cases, “His accounts...are visibly naïve,” which begs the question of whether he could truly provide informed consent.





Despite the fact that his diaries portray the relationship in the most positive of terms, some stories frame her actions as predatory and abusive: She “sucked his virgin soul” and was “an impetuous siren.” He “surrendered to her” and “her appetites consumed him.”

Regardless, she inspired him to become a master criminal, living outside the confines of boring, moralistic society. If he was abused as a younger child, this would be a continuation of that cycle.



# The eighteen-year-old Hunter and the eight-year-old Stacy



Soon after, Hunter again has a sense of love at first sight, feeling “awestruck” by a child, Stacy. This experience is intentionally paralleled to how he was similarly awestruck by Jocasta.

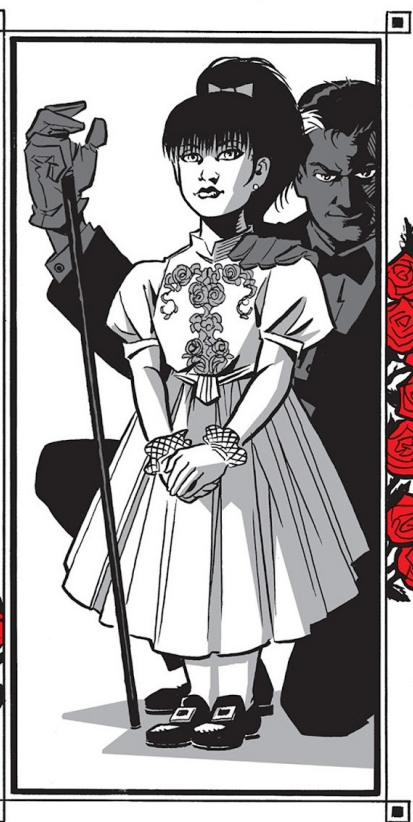




Christine, Stacy's daughter, thinks Hunter's adoption of Stacy was possibly his only act of good intention. She still notes, "Eighteen [is] a rather controversial age to apply for adoption."

Much effort has been expended trying to explain and understand Hunter Rose's altruistic interest in my mother, the young and wayward Stacy Palumbo. By all examination of his own accounts, it was a relationship based upon genuine and supportive affection—the seemingly lone spark of humanity remaining kindled in a soul that had long ago left such considerations as love and charity behind. I maintain that his adoption and compassion towards his youthful ward weren't born from any pangs of guilt associated with his role in the death of Barry Palumbo, her uncle, former guardian, and only surviving family. As I have mentioned elsewhere, "guilt" is a human sentiment that found no exercise in the psyche of Grendel. Rather, I would posit that this atypical act of kindness was an emotional echo, a memory of the transformative blossoming he found in the patronage of his own mentor. Hunter saw in Stacy many of the same qualities that he adored about Jocasta Rose and, in turn, that Jackie had seen in him. There are several journal entries wherein he even refers to a halfhearted belief that Stacy could, in fact, be the actual reincarnation of his long-lost love. Of course it is more than ironic to consider that this isolated empathy would eventually lead to his ultimate downfall and, in turn, result in the utter tragedy that her life would inevitably become.

—excerpt from *Devil by the Deed*  
by Christine Spar



Christine again says she believes this was an act of altruism, kindness, and "genuine and supportive affection."

Christine believes Hunter mentored Stacy the way that Jocasta mentored Hunter, and says he almost believed Stacy was the reincarnation of Jocasta, calling Jocasta "his long-lost love."



Hunter sees Jocasta in Stacy's smile, laugh, and determination. Again it says she could be the reincarnation of Jocasta, now calling Jocasta "his dead lover."





*Of course, there were no other children of her age at this gathering. But, then again, other children of her age are such droning little bores in comparison to Stacy's sparkling and exceptional persona. Truly, she is...one of a kind.*

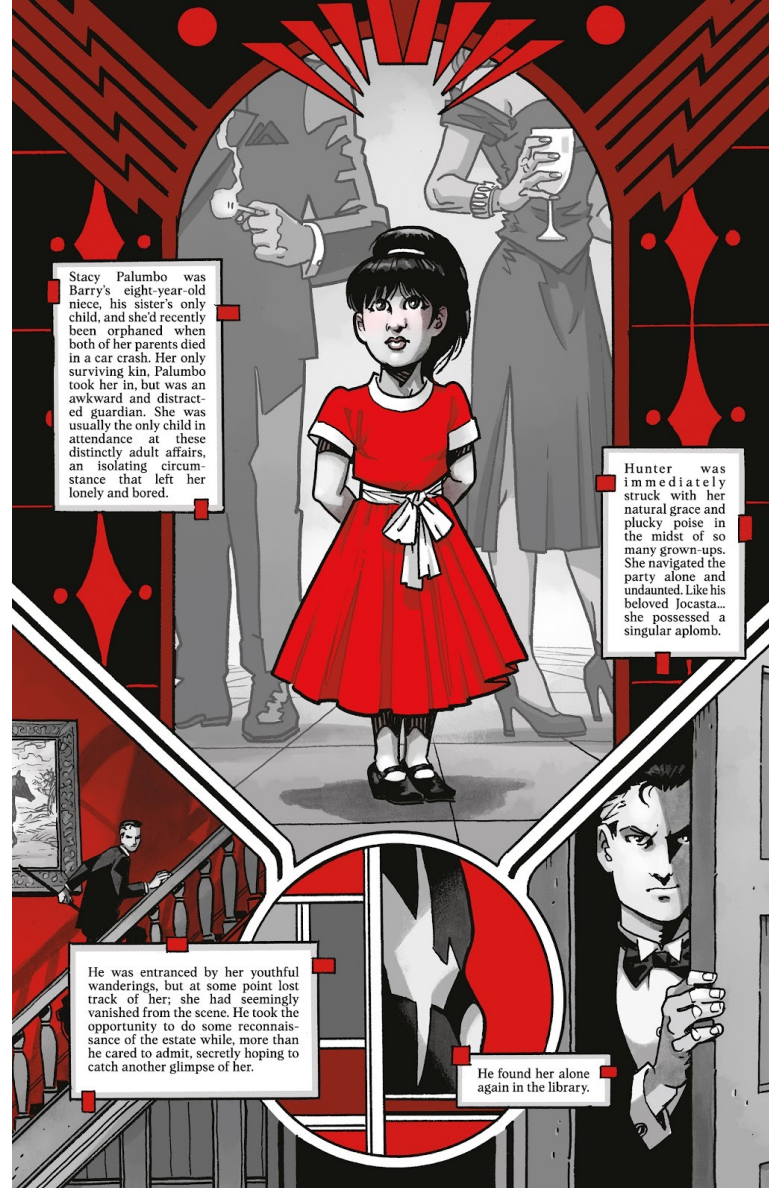
*My kind.*

*Strange, also, to note: it is only when I am with her that I seem to shake these recent feelings of unease. Only with her at my side do I feel...unobserved. Even in the heart of such pomp and pageantry.*

*I am hidden.*

Hunter believes other kids are droning little bores and she is sparkling and exceptional.

He thinks she is “one of a kind, my kind”—but in what way?



Stacy Palumbo was Barry's eight-year-old niece, his sister's only child, and she'd recently been orphaned when both of her parents died in a car crash. Her only surviving kin, Palumbo took her in, but was an awkward and distracted guardian. She was usually the only child in attendance at these distinctly adult affairs, an isolating circumstance that left her lonely and bored.

Hunter was immediately struck with her natural grace and plucky poise in the midst of so many grown-ups. She navigated the party alone and undaunted. Like his beloved Jocasta... she possessed a singular aplomb.

He was entranced by her youthful wanderings, but at some point lost track of her; she had seemingly vanished from the scene. He took the opportunity to do some reconnaissance of the estate while, more than he cared to admit, secretly hoping to catch another glimpse of her.

He found her alone again in the library.

Hunter is “entranced” with her grace, poise, undauntedness, and aplomb, and kindness.



In the first volume, they both engage in kid-style games and banter. This sort of thing does not appear in later stories.





Cycle came full circle.  
A lass again captured his heart.  
Blackened, hard, and brittle,  
It still trembled from the start.  
To him she seemed a l'il angel,  
So fetching, fair, and coy.  
Made the man inside the fiend  
Recall his days as just a boy.

Still, the devil don't care  
What you need or want.  
It's all that Devil, Deed,  
And Dénouement.



Stacy is a normal kid who wants to show off her dress to other kids.

Hunter describes her with the sexualized term “fetching.”



Stacy fantasizes about Hunter as a fairy tale hero that she would marry, mirroring his quasi-romantic/sexual feelings for her.





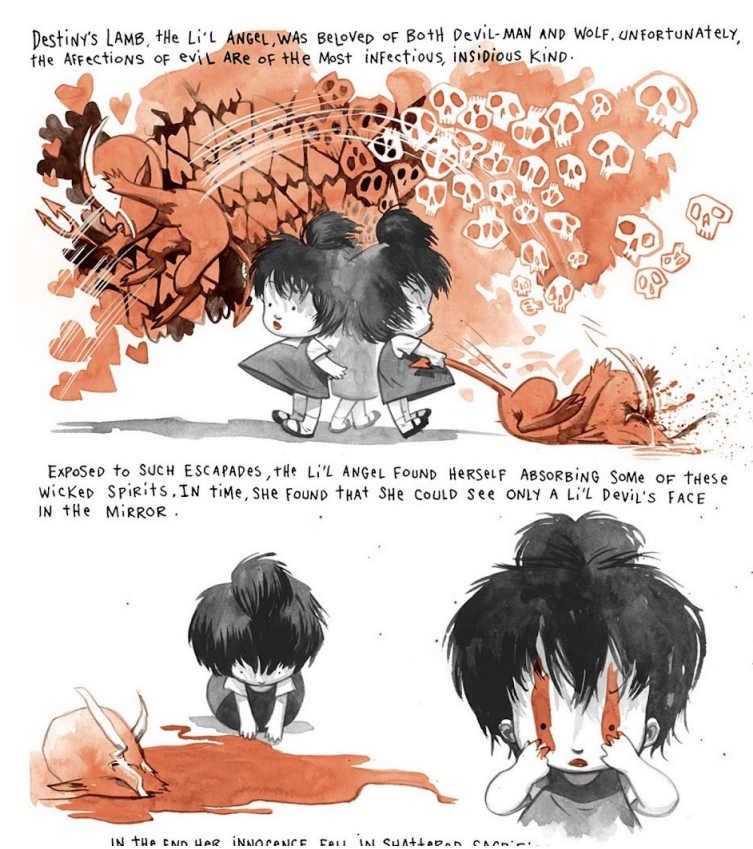
After an initial period of happiness, Stacy was scared, twisted, alone.



Hunter empathizes: "I felt utterly alone as a child as well" with no one to rely upon.

Is *this* the parallel between them, not excellence?

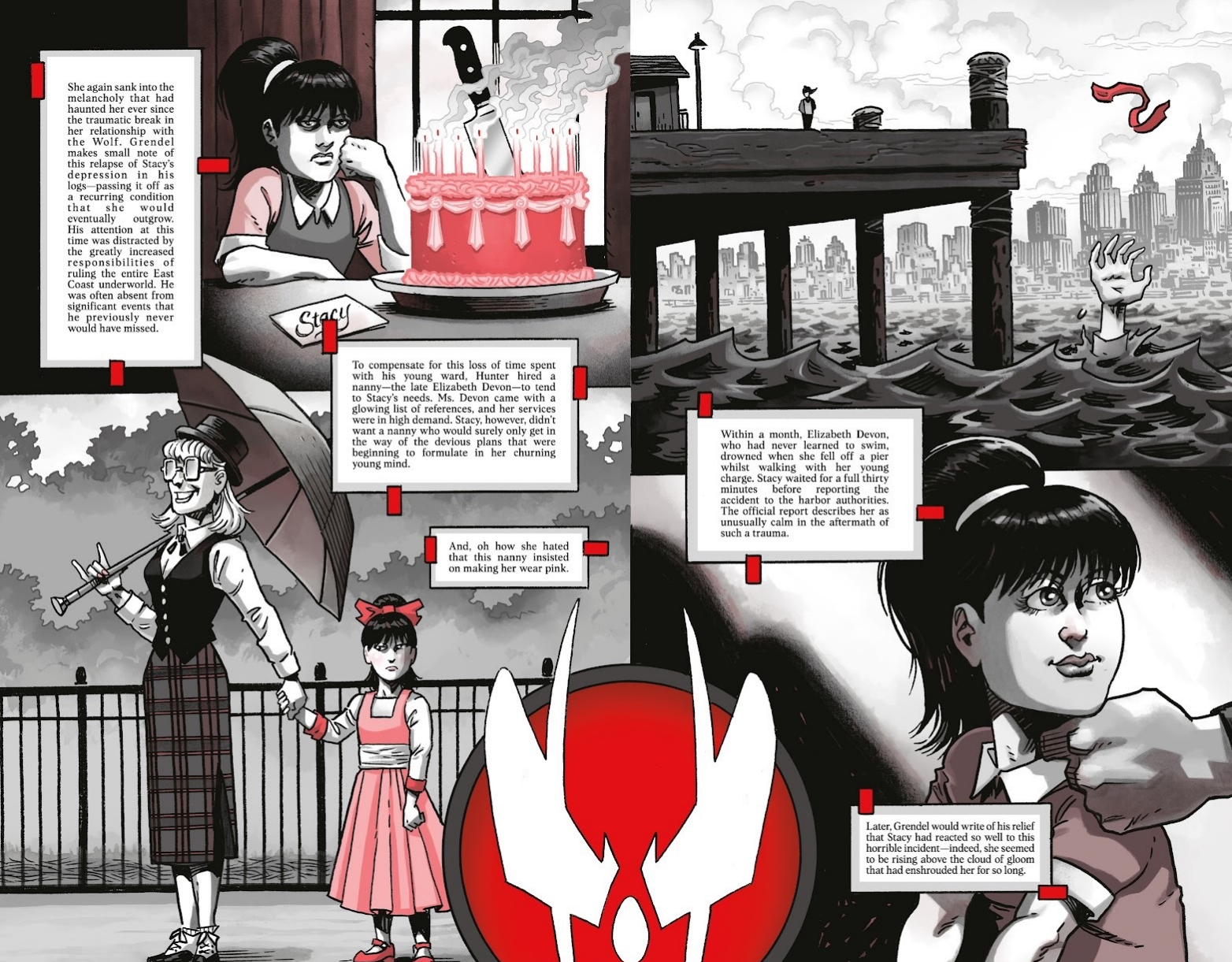
Is it pure loneliness, or the feeling of being alone in a problematic situation with no one to turn to? *Did he put her there?*



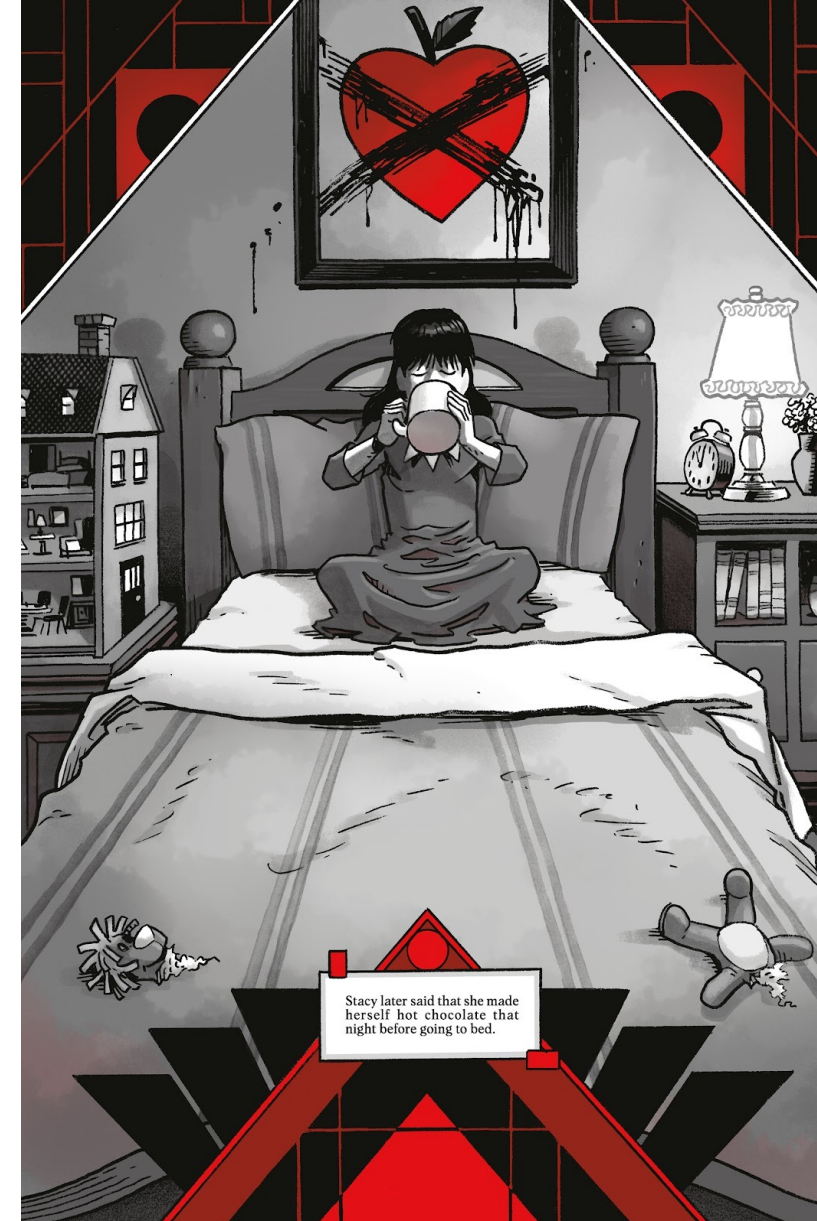
"The affections of evil are infectious and insidious."

Stacy absorbed the wicked spirits of Hunter and Argent through their attention—a parallel to the concept of the cycle of abuse.





Stacy's feelings of melancholy quickly lead to murder, with a sociopathic absence of emotional response to the murder.



After arranging for Hunter and Argent's deaths, she has a child-like mug of hot chocolate and otherwise feels nothing.

# Hunter and anti-pedophilia



"Most of your girls are rather young,  
Not even fourteen! I no like dat."



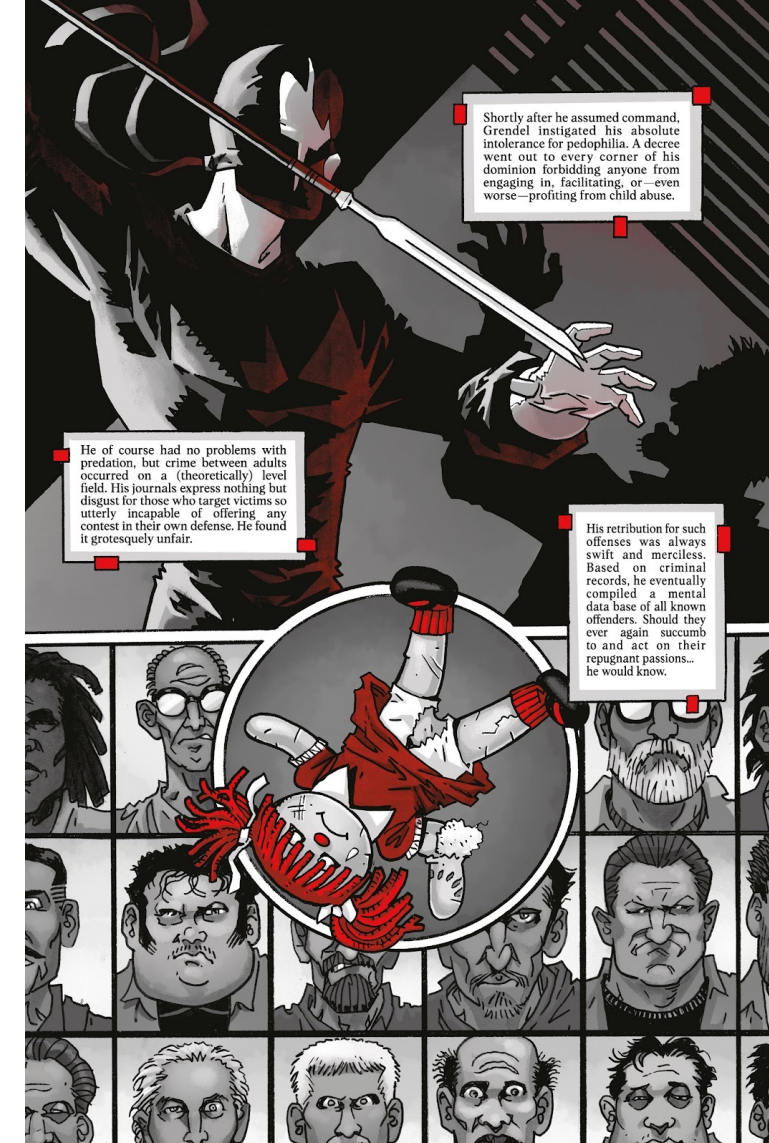


"I cut certain offensive activities... I put an end to some of his more seedy ventures...I suppose the biggest one was child prostitution."



Activities he held in "particular disdain": PCP distribution, evangelistic frauds, child pornography, underage prostitution.

He has no problem with "predation." If something happens between adults it's on a level playing field. But he feels disgust at targeting those who can't defend themselves, which is "grotesquely unfair."



"Absolute intolerance for pedophilia." He memorized all the sexual offenders, who have "repugnant passions," in his area.





Bernie says:  
 “You don’t know what it’s fucking like! To be so... so different! To be the only one Who... who... who understands the way!”

Hunter often justifies his own crimes with similar logic-- that he is so different from the masses that his actions can’t be judged by them.

A pedophile, Bernie Gene, abducts Stacy and prepares to film her.



# Stacy in her teens and early 20s with her therapist



An institutionalized Stacy marries her therapist at the age of 20; he rapes her, kills himself, and she rejects the eventual baby.



Stacy's therapist, Erik, thinks she is lonely. She says she doesn't feel anything—as seen when she killed her nanny and also Hunter/Argent—reflecting her long history of trauma.



Stacy plans on seducing Erik, voluntarily continuing the cycle of inappropriate relationships much like Hunter did with Jocasta.





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Erik takes advantage of his role as her therapist but Stacy is happy.

Erik calls her "daddy's little girl."  
She calls him "My daddy, my confidant, my love."



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After marrying at 20, Erik violently rapes Stacy over several protracted pages, repeatedly using language about "Daddy's little girl."



Later, Stacy is in denial, stating "he loved me" and "he was very gentle."

Does this mirror Hunter's memory of his childhood?

In sum (as I would have been saying over the course of the talk if you heard it in person)...my argument is thus that there is a lot of circumstantial (but not direct) evidence that Hunter was abused as a child, either by his parents or by the bullies in his early life. This evidence includes his lack of feeling (and/or antagonism) about his parents, similar to Stacy's, his early sociopathy (again similar to Stacy's), and his otherwise seemingly arbitrary single moral stance, against pedophilia.

I would argue that he has either suppressed or transformed his memories of these events, much as Stacy did with her memories of her rape by Erik. This childhood abuse then prepared him for his relationship with Jocasta, which we must rightfully describe as predatory abuse as well, which then further groomed him to start his own abusive relationship with Stacy, a relationship that clearly has a sexual/romantic framing given that he sees her as a stand-in for Jocasta—and that she sometimes sees him through a romantic lens as well. Stacy continued the cycle with her rejection of Christine, whose own child was then murdered in a way that mimicked sexual aesthetics as well. The concept of Grendel as a spirit that insidiously corrupts the others you are close to parallels the real-world cycle of abuse where people who are hurt often end up hurting others.

Hunter's ostensible attraction to Stacy due to her charm seems much weaker than their actual similarity as people who have spent their childhood feeling alone. Stacy's sense of being alone comes from her lack of power to do anything about the situation she was trapped in by Hunter; the child Hunter's sense of being alone ostensibly comes from his genius but could easily have come from being trapped in an abusive relationship.

The other Grendels are all glitched or broken in some way--something happened to turn them to the dark side, to allow the spirit of aggression to live within them. Stacy Palumbo was transformed by the knowledge that her adoptive father was a crime lord and the fact that her husband raped her. Christine Spar was transformed when her young boy was murdered by a serial killer vampire. Brian was transformed by Christine's death and his sense of inadequacy. Eppy Thatcher was transformed by his descent into drugs. Orion Assante was transformed by his need to control the world. (These are all simplified descriptions.) In this chain, only Hunter seems to have no internal flaw or initial spark. I would argue that we just never saw it on panel—that his turn toward aggression came from being abused as a child.





Christine Spar, spurned daughter of Stacy, mother of a murdered child, and eventual Grendel herself



Tujiro XIV/Innocent XLII--a vampire with a pedophilic-like fetishism

And the cycle continues...other children in Grendel.



Jupiter, hunted child of world leader Orion Assante, with a complex relationship to his family and dissolute descendants