

## Writer/artist talks “HOTWIRE” graphic novel

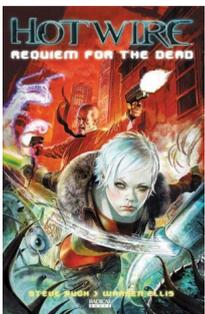
Written by Chris Alexander  
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Writer/artist Steve Pugh is already master of his four-color domain. Said domain includes etching adventures of popular characters who have inhabited the Marvel, DC and Dark Horse universes; in the process, Pugh has become a celebrated hero of the comic-book/graphic-novel medium, one whose more-often-than-not dark imagination knows no bounds.

Perhaps closest to his black-inked heart, however, is *HOTWIRE: REQUIEM OF THE DEAD*, the four-part miniseries he co-created with iconic comics scribe Warren Ellis. The series tells the tale of flamboyantly arch antiheroine Alice Hotwire, a misanthropic “detective exorcist” called in to track down and destroy a lethal, spectral strain of evil ghost dubbed the Blue Lights that are plaguing her city. Alice is the ultimate bad-girl action figure: post-punk haircut, impossibly tight clothes, gun locked, loaded and ready for action. She’s like something out of an old *HEAVY METAL* pulp magazine and just as darkly, fantastically delicious.



Previously available as individual issues, the complete, outlandish supernatural adventure will be available next month in a 136-page, full-color “director’s cut” trade paperback from [Radical Comics](#), which will also include newly remastered adventures and fresh painted artwork. It’s the ultimate love letter to the delectable but deadly femme fatale Ellis and Pugh created—though the latter is somewhat loath to label his leading lady as either a hero or a villain.

“For Alice, people are a mystery and an annoyance,” Pugh says of the not terribly accommodating character. “She’s written as being an outsider: sarcastic, overeducated, belittling to others. I think she’d hate having any real power, because she’d feel compelled to behave better. I tried to keep the entire story free of simple good-and-evil tropes, from being

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‘hate this guy’ or ‘love this guy.’ ”

REQUIEM FOR THE DEAD evokes a strange, frightening alternate world where the living and the dead openly share the same space. Ghosts flit freely about in dazed states, rarely infiltrating the natural world except by accident. Like George A. Romero’s ghouls, the dead drift around based on foggy memories of what it means to be human, though as Pugh explains, the original concept wasn’t so vague. “In the original HOTWIRE treatment, there was a very specific reason for the ghosts to be around,” he reveals. “I felt it was a weak point in the story, a little contrived. Having regular ghosts attracted to the buzz of the cities seemed a much purer idea. They had to be interesting, sympathetic, not mad monsters; otherwise, why would they be tolerated? I like the tension they generate—the kind of deep, gut-burning guilt that the homeless and the mentally ill can evoke in us—but also the underlying fear that they’ll all someday realize that they got the crappy end of the stick and turn ugly.”

And of course, turn ugly is exactly what they do, hence the involvement of comely, no-nonsense ghostbuster Alice. Initially, her role is to meander through the city streets, keeping the peace between man and phantom, a role that turns on a dime when the specters start gunning for blood. Think CSI meets CAPTAIN KRONOS: VAMPIRE HUNTER, and you get a vague sense of the arch world on display, the blend of Gothic classic and urban contemporary that Ellis and Pugh sought to create.

The original version of HOTWIRE was penned by Ellis in the early 1990s, and as Pugh explains, it was with great trepidation and humility that he approached rewriting the notoriously controlling writer’s material, including the task of radically redesigning the character of Alice herself. “An old pro doesn’t need his stuff coming back to bite him,” Pugh laughs. “But there was always something about HOTWIRE’s central concept that had me hooked. I basically pestered the poor sod until he let me work up a ‘reimagining’ of the original. Warren’s not the autocrat that he loves to paint himself as, but only because he’s already got everything pinned down, thought out and damn near perfect already.”

{comments on}