

“VICTORIAN UNDEAD” (Graphic Novel Review)

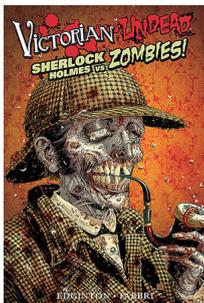
Written by Rich Mallery

Saturday, 28 August 2010 09:16



A comet crashes into the earth and sparks a zombie infestation in a mid-19th-century London neighborhood. After the government regains control, they destroy all of the evidence, blaming the mass deaths on a cholera outbreak.

Forty years later, the evil Professor Moriarty discovers a way to harness the power of the undead for his own malevolent purposes. Becoming a walking stiff himself, but keeping his mental faculties, Moriarty creates his own zombie army and unleashes a devious plan to take over the world. Standing in his way, of course, is his lifelong nemesis, the brilliant detective Sherlock Holmes.



It's difficult to say exactly when zombies became pop-culture mainstays, but these days, they're the only horror figures more overused than vampires. Whether it's George A. Romero tarnishing his legacy with another uninspired DEAD film, or another droll comedy headed straight to DVD, or even a best-selling novel, the walking dead are everywhere, and while there have been a few fun exceptions (ZOMBIELAND is a clever enough ride, and Max Brooks' WORLD WAR Z is entertaining), the thought of having to deal with another ghoulish-related product was not something this reviewer was excited about.

Personal reservations aside, writer Ian Edginton and artist Davide Fabbri's VICTORIAN UNDEAD (previously published by Wildstorm as a six-issue miniseries, coming as a graphic novel in October) puts a somewhat new spin on the genre, not only via setting the mayhem in turn-of-the-century England, but also by making the protagonist the legendary literary genius Sherlock Holmes. Having had minimal exposure to the world of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's famed detective (aside from falling asleep during the boring Robert Downey Jr.-starring blockbuster), this writer can't truly gauge whether VICTORIAN UNDEAD stays true to Doyle's creation.

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Nevertheless, the writing is user-friendly enough to quickly catch up even those unfamiliar with his history.

Rife with slang and period language, the dialogue is safe, and sometimes laughable, but Edginton does a fine job setting up the characters and the impending doom of their situation. Unfortunately, too much time is spent on the setup, and the real action doesn't start until halfway through the six-issue chronicle. Once the who, what, when, where and why are established, there isn't much time for anything but the climax, and even though VICTORIAN UNDEAD is a comics saga and not an epic novel, it would've been interesting to have more things happen than villain creates zombie army, hero stops villain, the end. The pacing is fast enough that casual readers won't be disappointed, but those looking for something more than a doctor's-office waiting-room read, will put this title back on the shelf, muttering, "That's it?"

That said, a comic is truly only as good as its art, and the illustrations here fit the storyline perfectly. While Fabbri doesn't create anything innovative, and nothing leaps off the page, his work is clean, colorful and doesn't distract from the reading experience. The ghouls are menacing and the heroes full of expression, even if there's nothing that hasn't been seen before.

While "Sherlock Holmes vs. zombies" might've sounded like an interesting idea when it was pitched to WildStorm in the wake of best sellers like PRIDE AND PREJUDICE AND ZOMBIES and ABRAHAM LINCOLN, VAMPIRE HUNTER, the mashup idea as it's used here is nothing more than a gimmick. Sherlock Holmes doesn't do anything you or I wouldn't do if faced with a similar situation. Aside from using CSI techniques to trace minerals in dirt, the famed sleuth basically just shows up at the right time to solve the case and save the world. In the comics medium, where anything is possible, VICTORIAN UNDEAD could've been filled with creative ideas on every page, setting itself apart from the hundreds of other horror comics out there. Instead, while passable, it's just another comic about zombies. Edginton and Fabbri are two talented individuals who deserve a second look, however—and maybe they'll reward it when their and Wildstorm's follow-up, VICTORIAN UNDEAD II: SHERLOCK HOLMES VS. DRACULA, debuts in November.



{comments on}

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