

“BEFORE WATCHMEN: RORSCHACH” #1 (Comic Review)

Written by Jorge Solis

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Putting vigilantism under a microscope, **BEFORE WATCHMEN: RORSCHACH**, DC Comics' new prequel to Alan Moore's classic saga (debuting tomorrow, August 15), is a darkly gritty and terrifically edgy read.

A psychotic killer known as The Bard is loose on the mean streets of New York City, threatening the lives of everyday women, using a scalpel as his pen and carving poetic lines on the flesh of his murdered victims. His enigmatic messages send a chill down the spines of the detectives investigating the gruesome case. Enter Rorschach, the masked vigilante, the self-appointed executioner of every criminal. Hiding behind his mottled mask, Rorschach shows no remorse as he viciously cripples and tortures those whom he deems to have done wrong. Heartless and brutal, he is just another rabid animal in the neverending jungle, surrounded by savages.



Just as he was in the magnificent **100 BULLETS**, author Brian Azzarello is incredibly comfortable here writing amoral and unethical characters. Azzarello hits some rough spots capturing Rorschach's haunting voice as established in Moore and Dave Gibbons' masterpiece, but he never strays far from the foundation; Rorschach's opening narration comes from the mind of a traumatized, self-destructive loner.

Azzarello is faithful to the **WATCHMEN** mythology, and is especially interested in exploring the original themes. In his descent into darkness, Rorschach accepts that he can never get out of his personal hell. Because he chooses not to escape, Rorschach wants to drag everyone else, whether innocent civilians or guilty criminals, deep into his hellhole.

If you enjoyed Lee Bermejo's glossy art in **BATMAN: NOEL**, you will surely appreciate his work here. His panels are quite cinematic, especially in the opening pages. Hinting at a connection

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between the serial killer and the vigilante, the Bard’s carvings are eerily similar to the black inkblot expressions on Rorschach’s mask. When Rorschach takes a violent and bloody beating from a group of rough gangsters, Bermejo’s illustrations are wonderfully detailed in their muscular poses; at one point, the images are upside down, as seen from Rorschach’s point of view. Barbara Ciardo’s colors are exceptionally vibrant, bringing ’70s New York to life. In the opening splash page, there is an epic bird’s-eye view of a city in trouble, succumbing to its decadence, and Ciardo’s lively colors enrich the pages as Rorschach stalks a drug dealer across peep shows and porn shops.

A promising introduction, BEFORE WATCHMEN: RORSCHACH #1 is a solid revenge thriller. By the time readers reach the last page, they will undoubtedly be wanting more. If the remainder of this miniseries stays focused on the connections between Rorschach and The Bard, this could be a standout. RORSCHACH is just one of seven interconnected BEFORE WATCHMEN prequel miniseries; just as in the original WATCHMEN, there is a bigger picture involved here. Readers will be missing out on the grand scale if they skip an issue, and the other installments, such as Darwyn Cooke/Amanda Conner’s SILK SPECTRE and Azzarello/J.G. Jones’ COMEDIAN, are also recommended. For more information on the complete BEFORE WATCHMEN prequel catalog, go to DC’s [official website](#) .

