

## “PRIEST” (Comic Review)

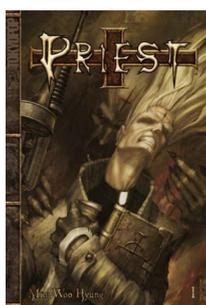
Written by Jorge Solis  
Monday, 11 April 2011 09:14

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In 1998, Min-Woo Hyung created *PRIEST* (Tokyopop), an intense combination of a horror Western with blazing nonstop action. In this Korean comic book manhwa, a lone gunslinger walks across the Western frontier with an arsenal of weapons. This undead cowboy just wants revenge for the death of his loved one. But as the cowboy kills each one of the fire-breathing demons and hideous creatures, he is also becoming an unstoppable monster himself. His thirst for blood will never be quenched until he finds those responsible for ruining his life.

Ivan Isaacs was a young priest with a growing passion for life. Ivan never thought his faith would break, until his beloved Gena was murdered. Fueled with anger and revenge, he sold his soul to the devil in order to hunt those responsible for Gena's death. With this pact made in hell, Ivan becomes an undead creature with superhuman strength. Beneath the cowboy hat, his forehead is marked with a cross and he continues to wear the sacred clerical collar around his neck.



Ivan wanders the desert valleys of the Wild West in search of his enemies. In each lawless town, he must battle the many disciples of the fallen archangel Temozarela. Ivan has to kill each disciple, before leading up to the confrontation with Temozarela. Even if it means burning the entire town down, Ivan will shoot his way through, ally or foe, just to get to his final opponent.

What's interesting about this series is the commentary about spirituality and the loss of faith.

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Temozarela fought for the side of good during the war against Lucifer. But, when mankind was created, Temozarela felt abandoned and wondered what his sole purpose in life was. This fallen hero fights a demonic war against mankind, spreading plagues and death. Father Isaacs lost his faith when Gena died and questioned why he followed his creed before. He fights a never-ending war against demons, spreading chaos and disease, much like Temozarela. Though these two see each other as antagonists, they share many personal qualities.

Undying love becomes a major theme throughout the ongoing series. Ivan even meets Lizzie, another outlaw, who happens to closely resemble Gena's face. This tortured soul would do anything to bring Gena back from the dead, even if the outcome meant turning her into a zombie. Haunted by images of her dying in front of him, he realizes he can't have her living empty in a shell. In order to let Gena go, Ivan watches his loved one die all over again and buries her in the ground.

The artwork by Hyung has a stylish black and white approach to the supernatural violence. The angular style presents the undead creatures, especially Ivan, as lean and bony characters. These aren't graceful and smooth attacks these individuals get themselves into. These are gritty and tough confrontations that will leave the winner extremely bloody. Heads are shot in the forehead, limbs chopped off, and bodies are burned alive at a wooden stake.

The illustrations capture the Western lifestyle, especially how some panels focus on the way the cowboys whirl their ropes around. To lengthen the monster transformation, Hyung uses just tight close-ups on the antagonist. In a series of extreme shots, the transformation starts off in the opponent's human form and finally turns into a demon. The splash pages are alive with detail on the blazing western landscape.

The movie version of PRIEST, starring Paul Bettany and Maggie Q, opens on May 13. Though the film diverges from the comic's timeline of events, LEGION director Scott Stewart keeps the Western and horror mythology, while expanding upon the concept with fresh ideas. The 3D film will explore the universe that Min-Woo Hyung created and bring the comic to a movie audience in color and special effects. You can see a preview in FANGORIA #303, on sale this month

PRIEST evokes the Western genre and mixes the premise with fantastic horror imagery. The soulless zombie is now a cowboy with itchy trigger fingers. Though this series is in another language, you don't need someone to translate the image of a gunshot to a zombie's head. Stake it out.

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