

"KING OF THE FLIES VOL. 1: HALLORAVE" (Graphic Novel Review)

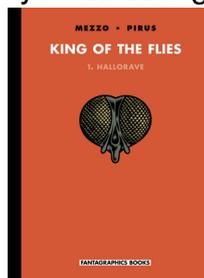
Written by Freddie Young
Sunday, 28 March 2010 11:01



KING OF THE FLIES VOL. 1: HALLORAVE (Fantagraphics), written by Michel Pirus and illustrated by Pascal (Mezzo) Mesenburg, is a dark tale that takes place in the titular town, where the suburban mundane is just a cover for the depravity, drug culture and sex that occurs daily. The story is told from the perspectives of many of the main characters, but the story mostly centers around Eric, who calls himself the King of the Flies (and wears a fly mask to make that point clear), and is not a wholesome citizen.

He's addicted to popping pills, supplied by either his friends Damian and Sally, his dealer Denis or his own mother. He has trouble maintaining a job. He lives with his mom and is totally dependent on her while attempting to maintain some sort of independence. And his sex life involves stealing his best friend's girlfriend or sleeping with an underage virgin. Eric seems to be the center of the Hallorave universe, as seen not only through his eyes, but those of the other characters as well.

KING OF THE FLIES is a very surreal and unsettling tale. Pirus does a wonderful job creating a horror-driven universe that could really happen in real life, making readers second-guess the characters they invest 64 pages in. Who are these people? What are their goals? How are they all even related to each other in the larger picture? We don't get those answers until toward the end, but the ride there is always interesting. An ominous tone is maintained throughout, even during the funnier moments.



The narrative isn't scary in the "boo" sense; it's the way the characters behave that makes the story chilling. We have here people who dress like skeletons and attack random folks because it's considered fun, only to suffer the deadliest of consequences. Others use violence, sex and drugs to cope with grief. There's a moment where Eric and one girl have sex at a crime scene, and others where a young woman is "forced" to have sex with a much older man for money (she wonders if his penis is as spotted as the rest of his body), and is eventually videotaped during the act by Eric. Another character is an alcoholic and relies on an imaginary alter ego named Jimmy to do the dirty work for him. It's almost like something David Lynch would come up with.

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KING OF THE FLIES may not be a frightening tale, but it will make you somewhat uncomfortable.

Mezzo's illustrations are noirish in nature and quite nice to look at. They're dark, creepy and mature. The drawings enhance the text very well, and reading KING OF THE FLIES is like watching a film, but in book form. I could see this easily being turned into some sort of cult animated feature, if Prius and Mezzo were interested in doing so.

This volume is intended to be the first of a trilogy, although it's unclear if its characters will pop up in later installments (particularly Vol. 2, currently subtitled THE ORIGIN OF THE WORLD and set to debut in November). Either way, KING OF THE FLIES VOL. 1 left me wanting more, and left me very interested in reading this team's prior and future work. My only quibble: it was too short for me! This book isn't for young readers, with its foul language and sexually graphic illustrations and themes, or for the faint of heart, but it's definitely worth picking up if you enjoy dark tales of the human psyche.
