

"HELLBOY IN MEXICO" (Comic Review)

Written by Samuel Zimmerman
Wednesday, 05 May 2010 15:53



On this glorious day of celebratory drinking, there may be no comic-book character whom superhero geeks and horror fans alike would want to hang with more than Hellboy. He's funny, outspoken and highly appreciative of Tecate, and thus the concept of a special "Hellboy heads to Mexico" issue (from Dark Horse) released on Cinco de Mayo sounds like a pretty sweet treat—and thanks to the ever-reliable Mike Mignola, it is. What's more, it wonderfully goes above and beyond being simply just gimmicky and fun (not that there's anything wrong with that).

The issue begins with a framing device set in the dry Mexican landscape, where Hellboy and Abe Sapien come across an abandoned abode filled with deteriorating photos—one of which contains a band of masked luchadors posing happily with Big Red himself. Curious, Abe looks to Hellboy for some sort of explanation, and sits down to hear the tale that makes up the bulk of the issue. In 1956, Hellboy and two agents were sent to Mexico to deal with "a lot of trouble down there." This trouble stems from a cave in the center of the Earth where the devil resides, and every hundred years releases a stink that draws all the evil things in the world, prodding them to go out and perform terrible deeds. Hellboy's accompanying agents flee after witnessing the incredible amount of destruction, death and blood surrounding them, and our hero crosses paths and joins up with three brothers/former Mexican wrestlers who gave up the sport for monster- and demon-hunting after a divine intervention.



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The best thing about this issue is how well it showcases Mignola's skill for blending horror, adventure and a sense of humor. None of these elements hinder each other, nor do the comedic aspects ever lower the stakes. When the boys first band together, there are a whole bunch of pages of rollicking good times as they divide their attention between destroying zombies, ghouls and monsters and drinking heavily at night. When things take a much darker turn, however (one of the brothers with whom Hellboy has become quite close is taken by demons), the gravity isn't lost, and in addition to Mignola's writing, a lot of that is due to Richard Corben's art and how well it plays with the setting.

There's something immediately effective and haunting about the macabre placed in Mexican environments. The barren land coupled with the heavy religious and supernatural imagery the culture is steeped in make for an ominous pairing, and Corben's work here showcases that amongst an abundance of dark shadows and nights colored by the blackest of blacks. Even the daytime panels, filled with sand, dust and bones, give off a "hell on Earth" vibe that meshes quite well with horrific happenings below the border.



As the remaining siblings and Hellboy set off to find their lost member, they get even nastier and more violent with the hellspawns they face, but a bit of humor pops back in for a climactic battle that gives Hellboy a shot at the country's national pastime, wrestling. Seeing him take on a giant monster luchador-style is nothing short of awesome, and a great way to end the story.

Even if you're not a regular reader of Big Red's adventures, HELLBOY IN MEXICO is a self-contained little yarn that you can easily get into, and really warrants picking up today—along with a six-pack, of course.



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