

“THE MOLTING” #5 (Comic Review)

Written by Chris Alexander

Tuesday, 02 November 2010 15:11



FANGORIA already did an in-depth profile of multihyphenate talent Terrence Zdunich (of REPO! THE GENETIC OPERA) in issue #294, specifically targeting his dark American Gothic comic-book series THE MOLTING, so if you really want to get into the guts of both the man and his work, go back into the vault and dig that issue up. Those already familiar with Zdunich's eerie, slow-burning, four-colored, panel-framed nightmare should be advised that the fifth issue is available now, and it's another dark, quiet slice of domestic horror and another stellar entry in this serpentine graphic serial.

If you haven't been following THE MOLTING, let's bring you up to speed: A gentle, sweet little boy and his loving little sister are tragically orphaned and sent to live with their loutish, despicable aunt and uncle. After suffering endless abuse at the fists and tongues of their lowlife wards, a horrible chain of events leads to the little girl wandering alone into the unknown, toward an unavoidably dark future.



The central events of Zdunich's domestic horror show pick up decades later, with said little girl now grown and living in semi-squalor with her virtually useless ex-hippie husband and her two teenage children, one of them the gentle, artistically inclined Joe. As Joe tries to make sense of his own broken home life and the crime-ridden, vermin-infested low-rent sprawl surrounding him, his mother slips deeper and deeper into darkness.

The fifth installment, titled “Mother's Day,” is just the latest example of the narrative sophistication and raw power of Zdunich's world. It opens on Halloween as various costumed children pound on Joe's door and are ignored by the damaged mother. Zdunich has an uncanny way of making even the most benign situations malevolent without ever slipping into obvious sensationalism (which may surprise those only familiar with the bombast of his REPO! play and

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film). For example, as Mom sits in the dark at the kitchen table, wearing a filthy robe and sipping coffee, Zdunich makes two aesthetic choices: He draws her word bubbles jagged and her captions staggered; he also whites out her eyes, exemplifying how utterly soul-dead and empty she really is. Meanwhile, as the title dictates, allegorical cockroaches scuttle in every crevice and across every stained surface, watching this family slip and slide down the spiral like disease-ridden sentinels.

If you haven't already picked up on this, I'm a fan of Zdunich's world. I applaud his ability to stretch tension over the span of so many issues. Reading this series is like being trapped in an unbearably claustrophobic coffin with a sustained violin bow-drag for musical accompaniment; it's suffocating, intense, difficult to endure. It's a cauldron on a gas stove, boiling and boiling, its greasy contents threatening to bubble out at any minute. And its very, very cinematic...hint hint, Hollywood.

Zdunich writes, illustrates and self-distributes THE MOLTING, making this quasi-confessional tale all the more personal and valuable. If you're looking for a comic book that exemplifies craft, narrative discipline and psychological terror, you *must* read THE MOLTING. Go to www.terrancezdzunich.com for more information on how to order.



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