

“MOTEL HELL” #1 (Comic Review)

Written by Michael Koopmans
Saturday, 27 November 2010 11:14



It's safe to say that Vincent and Ida Smith are my favorite pair of schizoid siblings to ever grace the silver screen. So you'd probably guess that my first reaction to IDW Publishing's announcement of its four-issue MOTEL HELL comics miniseries was a positive one. If nothing else, it will draw attention to the original film, and that's fine by me. Still, I had absolutely zero expectations going into this one—and let me tell you, I was not let down.

The setup involves six paper-thin characters who are given all-expense-paid weekend passes to the Motel Hello Spa & Resort in “beautiful wine country” (a.k.a. the middle of nowhere). Vintner Vincent Smith's wine sells for \$5,000 a bottle, and no one knows its secret ingredient (fans of the film know where this is going). The group consists of some unfamiliar faces, yet slightly relevant personalities: a famous football player who served time for dogfighting; a blonde, airheaded rich-girl celebrity who hasn't worked a day in her life; a millionaire who was fired for his mishandling of mortgages, thus ruining many lives; a rock star whose main success derives from being the son of famous actor parents; a slimy old oil corporation CEO; and finally, our “final girl” (one assumes), reporter Holly Bell, who's doing a write-up on the world-famous vineyard for her newspaper.



An old jalopy of a plane piloted by Vincent and his sister Ida scoops the gang up and brings them to the resort. En route, we get a brief insight into each of our players, learning that all, with the exception of Holly, are complete and total jerks and huge winos to boot. After landing (and a bit of a tongue-lashing from Vintner Vincent), the crew explore their rooms, while the proprietors secretly dispose of the plane and one of the group's members who gave Vincent some lip earlier. This issue wraps up with a slight sense of foreboding as Holly glances out the window and gets a quick glimpse of a portly “monster” wearing a pig mask.

I certainly would not label this a terrible read by any stretch, since it did have enough elements from the film to keep a purist fan at bay. Although not much happens during this initial offering, the setup does show a glint of gruesome promise for the remaining three issues. Writer Matt Nixon does a decent job of keeping Vincent's dialogue in the same vein as his onscreen

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counterpart's, and succeeds in making the fodder characters as irritating as possible. There are a few odd scene transitions that made me wonder if I was missing a page here and there, but the story is so one-dimensional that the experience isn't hindered a bit.

Artist Chris Moreno's contributions, however, leave much to be desired. Tim Bradstreet did an amazing job with his truly creepy collage work on the cover, which makes you want to grab it off the shelf and read it right there in the shop. But saying the interior art pales in comparison is the understatement of the century. The line work is simple, the colors are boring and the scans are, at times, a bit blurry and pixilated. This really kept me from having as much fun with this one as I would have liked.

Nowhere near as entertaining as the film, MOTEL HELL the comic still manages to do a good job of mimicking the unique elements and tone that lifted the original a pig's snout and shoulders above its peers, making it the cult classic it is today. I'm not counting this series out yet; I'll assume the pace will be drastically picked up in the next issue and (hopefully) we may even get a modernization of that iconic chainsaw battle.



{comments on}