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Radical Publishing’s ABATTOIR hooks its readers from the first page of the first issue and never lets go, continuing to hook readers with its engaging storytelling and surrealistic artwork. Created by filmmaker Darren Lynn Bousman (of SAW sequels and REPO! THE GENETIC OPERA fame), it follows a real estate agent investigating the twisted history of a haunted house—and entering a downward spiral into complete madness.

Issue #1 of this six-part miniseries opens on a bright and sunny morning as Andy Mitchell happily celebrates his 9th birthday. His adoring mother is holding a wonderful party in the backyard, filled with presents, children and neighbors—but it takes a drastic turn for the worst when Andy witnesses his docile father suddenly turning into a maniac, slicing off the party clown’s fingers with a brush-cutter and driving a weed-whacker straight into a neighbor’s chest. Amidst the screams, Andy runs into the house, hoping to hide in his bedroom, but his cold-hearted dad slowly marches up the stairs with a knife in hand…

The small town seems to be stuck in time, unable to move forward after this gruesome massacre. Real estate agent Richard Ashwalt understands that no one is interested in buying the notorious Mitchell house, especially with the economy struggling, but if he doesn’t find a bidder soon, he will definitely lose his job. Yet a surprised Richard finds himself with an interested buyer: The mysterious Jebediah Crone, who prowls in the shadows and reeks of embalming fluid. This creepy old man is obsessed with owning the abandoned property, and offers a large amount of money, with no questions asked. Richard is suspicious of Crone, wondering why he wants the haunted home so badly.

Writers Robin Levin and Troy Peteri stealthily set up this premise in ABATTOIR’s first issue.

What starts off as one story surprisingly veers toward another—a character piece. They develop a likable protagonist in Richard, who clearly loves his daughter Claire while struggling to keep his marriage with his wife Vanessa together. At the workplace, Ashwalt’s banter with his co-workers feels realistic and relatable.

The sinister atmosphere and eerie conception of Jebediah Crone, meanwhile, are augmented by talented artist Bing Cansino. In his close-ups, Crone’s intense facial expressions are drawn with scary detail, and Cansino illustrates the pages with realism and precision. The gorgeous artwork on both the cover and pages definitely catches the reader’s eye.

When Crone interrupts Richard’s family dinner to offer him a large sum of money for the house, the offer at first tempts Richard. But during their conversation, Crone lays his skeletal and icy-cold hands on Claire’s shoulders, and Richard abruptly ends their business, as if afraid to close this Faustian deal. Just because you are promised great things doesn’t mean there isn't a hefty price to pay… But as the second issue goes on, Richard’s life suddenly spins out of control. He finds himself running from the law, framed for a murder he didn’t commit. Is Richard an innocent man caught in the web of a deadly conspiracy, or did he actually commit the crime? The answers await inside the abandoned Mitchell house.

Levin and Peteri continue to explore the central relationships in #2, portraying Richard sympathetically and allowing readers to become invested in him; you want him to take control and fight back. The writers subtly hint at the marital difficulties between Richard and Vanessa, the unexplained rift between them allowing a mystery to develop. What is lost here, though, is the social commentary of the previous issue, in which the authors discuss the present state of the economy before through the characters’ banter.

Considering Bousman’s involvement, it’s no surprise that this comic series definitely feels ready for the movie screen. The well-written script is aided by the cinematic panels, with the dinner scene between Richard and Crone, just for one example, building to a suspenseful climax. The dialogue-driven confrontation is layered with subtext and atmosphere, held together by interesting compositions. Cansino and colorist Andrei Pervukhin digitally paint their people with lifelike brushes, then fully establish a bizarre environment through washed-out hues.

ABATTOIR is a tense and frightening experience so far, presenting a fresh take on the haunted-house genre. Readers will be anxiously awaiting for the third issue thanks to second installment’s gripping cliffhanger. For more on ABATTOIR, check out Radical’s official website

and the title’s
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