BALTIMORE/CRIMINAL MACABRE (Dark Horse Comics) contains two terrific stand-alone issues of great storytelling and eye-catching artwork. In the first short story, a vampire hunter ends up in an abandoned village where monsters have taken over. In the next narrative, a pill-popping and trigger-happy private eye ends up taking the case of an undead client. First-time readers are given a chance to jump in and find out why comic book fans are talking about these two series

“A Passing Stranger,” the first story, is a twisted tale about survival and revenge. In 1916 Germany, in a small village, residents are forced to lock themselves up in the attic. The war to end all wars, a reference to World War I, has left homes in shambles and the streets deserted. Armies have thrown down their weapons and gone back home to their families. Without any solider at their post, no one is around to protect the villagers from the plague of evil.

When two young boys wander off after curfew, they suddenly find a stranger wandering the streets alone. They unknowingly follow Baltimore, the vampire hunter, to a nearby tunnel and uncover a spider’s lair. The nest is swarmed with giant spiders, hungry for flesh. Baltimore debates whether he should save the children or continue onto the path of his true mission.

Authors Mike Mignola (of HELLBOY fame) and Christopher Golden (BALTIMORE: THE PLAGUE SHIPS) have crafted an intense and intriguing antihero, who could care less about saving lives. The village clearly needs saving from monsters, but Baltimore coldly refuses to help. Baltimore’s only purpose in life is to find the vampire who killed his wife. The highlight of Ben Stenbeck’s artwork is when Baltimore tackles the giant spiders, shooting at them and gouging their eyes out.

Next story “Call me Monster!” is another addition to the Cal MacDonald mysteries. The private

detective is sleeping at his desk, hung-over and bitter, when his newest client arrives. Cal meets a colossal figure, who has been running for 200 years. Now this giant, but well-meaning freak wants to stop hiding. Like the character in Mary Shelley’s novel, the client calls himself Monster.

Rather than ask questions, Cal instead takes the money for the job. Gunther and Sophia Frankenstein believe the Monster is their sole property. They have tormented him over the years because of their selfish reasons. The siblings want the fame and fortune of revealing the Frankenstein Monster to the rest of the world. Cal and his ghoulish partner will do everything they can to stop them, even if means bringing in an army of zombies for reinforcement.

Author Steve Niles (creator of 30 DAYS OF NIGHT) is just having tremendous fun with his antihero. Toward the end, Cal has the best and unprintable line in the issue. The character design of the Monster by artist Christopher Mitten is an original take and perfectly on the spot. The colors by Michelle Madsen add a layer of intense shadows and bright blue hues.

BALTIMORE/CRIMINAL MACABRE is one helluva combo package of story and art. This issue contains two of the best and most memorable characters created in the comic book universe. This is supernatural horror at its finest!

{jcomments on}