



Friday, October 9, 2009 Jesse Karp

What's Scary?

So, what's scary? With Halloween in shouting distance, it seems like a fair question to ask. Speaking for myself, I'll say this. Something jumping out of the dark is good for a shock, and exploding eyeballs (for instance) are always good for a gross-out, but what's actually scary is what you almost see, the things that disappear around a corner before you can focus on them, the things just beneath the surface of the world; the things that, if you did see them, would show you that the world we know is merely covering something vast and dark and horrible.



It's been nearly a year since I talked about the first Hatter M book here, and when I received the second I guess I'd forgotten just how much fun it was. The second one, Mad with Wonder (by Beddor, Cavalier and Makkonen), has actually ratcheted up the fun factor and has an even more wicked sense of humor. Royal Bodyguard Madigan is still on a quest through 19th Century Earth for the lost Princess Alyss, but this time he's splitting his time between Europe and Civil War America, has acquired an enjoyably nefarious archenemy, and winds up with an assorted array of the truly mad in an insane asylum (though the true lunatics appear to be the doctors). Meanwhile, that hat of his has gotten

even cooler – whirling its blades, deflecting bullets and managing to escape on its own from capture – and seems to be developing a rudimentary consciousness of its own. What's this got to do with scary, exactly? Well, the heart of this baby is the weirdness of its profoundly strange art. The atmosphere, especially in the asylum, and the figural work are so beautifully stylized that they scratch the malleable surface of the surreal at times, making for a deep and at times deeply disturbing experience that feels like actually being shanghaied into a different world. There's an uneasiness at the periphery of every panel, madness beneath the smiles of every figure, a sense of true darkness lingering at the edge of every action and motive. Scary enough?

Posted by Jesse at 12:01 AM