



## Criminal Macabre Omnibus Volume 1

*Ben Templesmith, Steve Niles, Kelley Jones (Artist)*

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In 2003 Steve Niles, creator of the *30 Days of Night* comics series, launched a series of occult detective stories featuring the monstrously hard-boiled Cal McDonald. A pill-popping alcoholic reprobate, Cal is the only line of defense between Los Angeles and a growing horde of zombies, vampires, possessed muscle cars, mad scientists, werewolves, and much more weirdness!

\* I literally screamed HOLY \$#@% when I put this book down. It is that good... Cal McDonald is truly one of the coolest characters in comics." —Ain't It Cool News"

## Criminal Macabre Omnibus Volume 1 Details

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Author : Ben Templesmith , Steve Niles , Kelley Jones (Artist)

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## **From Reader Review Criminal Macabre Omnibus Volume 1 for online ebook**

### **Michael says**

With artists like Ben Templesmith and Kelley Jones, the stories in this collection look amazing, but the real strength is the main character. Cal McDonald is a pathetic, lonely, drug-abusing loser, but Steve Niles clearly loves him and gives readers reason to love him too. McDonald's sorry state is a direct result of the horrors he's seen in the line of duty, so while he makes terrible choices, it's easy to understand why. And his obvious affection for his one and only friend, an undead ghoul, endears readers to Cal as well.

Not for the easily grossed out, but as many literal, disembodied hearts as it has, Criminal Macabre has a lot of metaphorical heart as well.

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### **Patrick says**

The rating is mainly for the artwork in the first half, which was cool but sometimes confusing. The stories were so-so. At some points I couldn't believe that vampires, werewolves and ghouls could be so boring.

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### **Roybot says**

A pretty uneven volume; the early issues are really good, but the later issues become a little muddled as different creative teams tackle the characters and their personalities shift all over the map. Worth checking out for the first story arc, and an interesting enough character that I'll be checking out the second volume.

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### **Cale says**

For those who think John Constantine is too tame, meet Cal McDonald. He sees monsters and solves problems with a shotgun and his best ghoul pal. This collection features three long stories (5 issues each), and a couple one-off issues. The first long-form story is the best, with Ben Templesmith's distinctive art perfectly suiting the mood and tone of the story, as Cal runs into a conspiracy between monster types to increase their strength. The two shorts are absurd in different ways (the slaughterhouse investigation is perhaps the most disturbing but also effective in its self-contained story). The art for the second multi-part story (the last train to Deadsville) introduces Cal's on-again, off-again love interest Sabrina Lynch and a new artist who goes with overboard colors and excessively sexualized imagery to push the story of an inadvertent demon possession causing much trouble. The writing's okay, but the overall story is borderline offensive to multiple parties. The final story, Supernatural Freak Machine, has a fun storyline about a possessed car, paired with an unpleasant story about a mad doctor who has a grudge out for Cal. The art is by Kelley Jones again, whose color work is more memorable than the actual artwork, and the climax of the story is very unpleasant. Cal McDonald's adventures aren't bad, but he's a pale imitation of Constantine - you're better off reading Hellblazer.

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### **Chuck says**

This was a great introduction to monster hunter, and pill popping extraordinaire, Cal McDonald. Loved every story within the collection plus the change-up between Ben Templesmith and Kelly Jones art, combined with the different pace of each story kept things very interesting. All an all it was a great read and I will be purchasing the second volume ASAP.

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### **Rick says**

Half of this omnibus is great supernatural noir... the other half is barely readable. It's strange, but when Niles is writing and Templesmith is doing the art the stories seemed eerie, menacing, and sardonically dark. When Jones is doing the art, however, it gets cartoon-ish (the art AND the writing) and cliched. I'm not sure if Niles was attempting to write to the artist's styles, but going forward he should only write Cal MacDonald stories if Ben Templesmith is doing the art.

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### **Jami says**

I've been a fan of Steve Niles for a long time and have loved/hated Mr Cal McDonald for quite some time. He is NOT a hero, tho he does often stumble into doing the right thing (along with a lot of wrong things). I always enjoy his adventures. The artwork in this collection is quite interesting as well.

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### **J. says**

I remember reading one of the Criminal Macabre short stories somewhere and loving it. I've forgotten where and when, unfortunately. The comic series doesn't have nearly the same magic to it. The art is solid, the premises are solid, but the whole thing just seems so...mediocre. (In fact, this is how I feel about almost all of Steve Niles work...promising, but never delivering.)

Anyway, the first story (Criminal Macabre) is alright. The art from Ben Templesmith is up to (or down to) his usual par. But the whole thing feels sort of derivative, as if there isn't really anything original in here.

The follow a couple of one-shots. Love Me Tenderloin is cute, but seems a little unconvincing.

Last Train to Deadsville has some good ideas in it, but in the end, it's just a bunch of ideas strung together, with no plot really manifesting. (And what's the deal with the title? I assume it's a reference to something specific?)

Finally, Supernatural Freak Machine starts to actually show what this series could possibly be, but then it spends the first half of the story on a haunted car which, while cool, is pretty much totally unrelated to the second half and real villain of the piece. So it's sort of a 2-parter and a 3-parter kind of smooshed together. Again, some nice moments (and a really strong ending), but it just leaves me feeling unsatisfied.

Overall, the whole thing kind of feels like a B-movie; one of those that is entertaining, but could have been really great if they had just spent a little more time on it.

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### **Colin says**

#### **An excellent horror fiction graphic novel!**

I've gone back to re-read this after a long time, and I find the characters and story as compelling as the first time, though the art is really hit-or-miss. The conceit of a private detective aware of a greater world of supernatural evil is not unique nor original, but it is handled quite well here . . . and some of the horrors are, at least, creative . . .

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### **J says**

These, like other titles with Steve Niles writing, certainly read easy and quick and fun. No idea what to expect when I started and became one of my favorite titles in the whole month's worth of reading horror fiction. Definitely recommended. The early issues have a painted gritty feel that gets a bit more slapstick when Kelley Jones takes over on the art, but the vibe is still offbeat and fun. Surprised this hasn't been picked up as a series or a movie yet.

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### **Hillingdon Libraries says**

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### **Stephanie Griffin says**

Dark Horse Digital Comics had a *Criminal Macabre* bundle (issues #1-5) on sale and it sounded like the perfect story; a strung-out ex-cop fights ex-humans in the sewers underneath Los Angeles. I loved it! This first story arc is a great beginning that introduces the world of Cal McDonald. I'm sure I'll like the following stories as well. The Volume 1 Omnibus only has issues #1-3, but this review also covers Issues #4 and #5 which appear in Volume 2.

Personally, I usually feel like I could scream if I hear about yet another book with 'zombies', but this book is different. No real zombies. Ghouls, yes. Werewolves, yes. Vampires, yes. Ghouls are in between life and death – they aren't alive so they don't need to aggressively attack things (e.g. humans) for food but they aren't completely dead either. They walk around looking, well, ghoulie. The main theme is not how werewolves and vampires are attacking people, it's about Cal's discovery that both kinds of monsters are actually grouping together and organizing the conquest of humans. He must stop them.

Cal's sidekick is Mo'Lock, a ghoul. Mo'Lock makes a few ghoul jokes, but my favorite character is the armless ghoul Tabitha. She makes a very brief appearance but has the best line of all. I won't spoil it for you. Ben Templesmith's artistic interpretation is a messy shadowy environment, perfect for creatures to come

leaping and snarling out of the dark. It seems to get messier as the story moves from Issue #1 through Issue #5.

Communication is brief between the characters but that's to be expected in a noir story. The characters are believable unless you don't believe in ghouls. Don't you?! As previously stated, Cal is an ex-cop, thrown off the force due to drugs and alcohol, which he still consumes in mass quantities. He's currently hunting down vampires, werewolves, and things that go bump in the night, to save Los Angeles from their mayhem. His friend on the force, Detective Lt. Brueger, doesn't have much personality; she mostly serves as another sidekick.

One thing that stood out wonderfully for me is the way Templesmith's art portrays violence. Sure there's blood, but in the scattered way the artwork is done it isn't realistically gruesome like Frank Quitey's work in We3 (which was a big detraction from enjoying that title). I really don't want to see every piece of gristle. I'd definitely recommend this book. Fun ghouls, talking heads, and an ex-cop who doesn't care if you don't like him; what's not to love?

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### **Nicola Mansfield says**

1. Criminal Macabre: A Cal McDonald Mystery - The first Cal McDonald graphic novel but chronologically it takes place after the first text novel, "Savage Membrane", as he is already in LA and it mentions how he moved there from DC. His girlfriend Sabrina is mentioned in passing but his female interest is a skeptic cop. Cal finds a vampire, werewolf and zombie at a meeting together which is strange since the three never mix and after several irregular attacks by said creatures he sets off to find out why they seem to be working together. He finds a mastermind behind a plot to create super-creatures to take over the world. A great first story and introduction to the monster hunter. Templesmith's art really suits the atmosphere and I like it but admittedly it is hard at times to make out exactly what is going on since it is so dark and ethereal but by the end of the story I was really into it. A great creepy beginning to this book. (4/5)

2. A Letter from B.S. - Very short piece in which Cal gets a letter from a dead guy and intrigued, he goes to meet him and ends up doing him a favour. Rather out of character for Cal but he gets a stash of weapons out of the deed so worth it in the end. OK. (3/5)

3. Love Me Tenderloin - This is a one-shot and a great Cal McDonald case of a ghost animating meat in a beef factory and as Cal puts it "She meant so much to you that you wouldn't die. Wow. If I was a big p\*ssy that would be real touching." Great story, fairly gross. Shows Cal's "sentimental side and the relationship between him and the Lieutenant is becoming more of a partnership with her less skeptical now with all she's seen. (5/5)

4. Last Train to Deadsville - First story with art by Kelley Jones which is much more stylized and preferable but it is a big jolt going from the dark, murky previous work to this. A demon possessed young man arrives at Cal's for help. Turns out he's been reading spells out of a book at the library and unleashed a succubus on his small town. Cal & Mo go to help but don't find out the succubus part until it's too late. Cal's girlfriend Sabrina turns up for the first time in this story and takes an active part by following them. Fun story. (4/5)

5. Supernatural Freak Machine - If you've read the stories, you'll know who Dr. Polynice is. Cal has met up with him a few times before and presumably this story takes place after them as it mentions the "last" time Cal met up with Polynice. Also chronologically this story takes place immediately after "Last Train..." as it refers to events from it as just having happened. This is the best story in the whole collection. It's a bit of a two-parter, first starting off with Cal getting his haunted car which would make this his 2nd one, since he had

one (though different) in the stories as well. Then comes the Polynice story which is extremely creepy and we get to see the emotional side of Cal. A big stunning end leaves things in quite a different state and Cal's world is going to be a bit different when we next see him in Omnibus 2. (5/5)

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### **Lou says**

Nice artwork. I like the main protagonist a swell kind of guy a pill swallowing paranormal aware detective guy. The story I liked the most was about a war was breeding with the ghouls vampires and werewolves someone is trying to transform everyone into the ancient original beings of lore the ones silver bullets kill. I like this detective and his side kick a Ghoul there is a fair share of black humor in most of the stories and plenty of blood and action.

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### **Sharon says**

<http://ismellsheep.blogspot.com/2011/...>

I've always liked graphic novels, you get the beauty of the art work and a kick ass story. So I was thrilled to get an ARC of the Criminal Macabre Omnibus from Netgalley and I absolutely loved it! I haven't read a lot of this type of graphic novel and I am not sure about the terminology I should use so please bear with me. I think this qualifies as Noir or Pulp. Since graphic novels are really the marrying of art and fiction, I will address each part separately.

Let's talk story. Steve Nile's Criminal Macabre Omnibus was my first introduction to Cal McDonald. He's a cynical, pill-popping, foul-mouthed, alcoholic private detective that has attracted supernatural creatures that the rest of the world doesn't know exists ever since he was a kid. As a result, everyone close to him usually ends up dead. His partner and best friend is a very polite and dry humored Ghoul named Mo. Mo, along with all the other ghouls, lives in the sewers. The stories have a pulp feel and the character dialogue is hilarious. Snarky witticism at its best. He is like a male version of Buffy The Vampire Slayer, only way more screwed-up and vulgar .

The first story Criminal Macabre is about a crazy man who has found a way to bring back the original monsters from legend, like werewolves and vampires, using a mutated form of the Bubonic plague and fleas to transmit it. You won't believe how Cal manages to defeat this guy .

The second is the short story A Letter From B.S. Cal helps a dead man find his dead girlfriend. This story is outright hilarious, especially they way the dead guy helps Cal "see" other dead people.

The third story is Love Me Tenderloin. A rogue spirit is possessing meat products. Oh, yeah .

The fourth is Last Train To Deadsville. Here we get meet Cal's sort of girlfriend and he has forgotten Valentine's Day, she is a good fit for him. Instead of the usual Valentine's Day date, they end up fighting possessed rednecks and a succubus.

The last story is Supernatural Freak Machine. Cal and Mo buy a possessed car and must track down an

escaped insane scientist named Dr. Polynice. This story has a more serious edge and is emotionally tough. Cal loses someone important to him, and it made me kind of sad. You end up seeing why Cal acts the way his does.

Some of my favorite Cal quotes:

“The crazy ghoul had abandoned trying to free himself. Instead he allowed his bones to be shattered so he could stretch his skin and reach what I needed. It was the coolest thing he’d ever done for me. But really f\*\*\*ing gross.”

“Every once in a while a case comes along that you don’t solve so much as it mows you down and drags you along until it’s over. This was going to be one of those cases. If I’d known at the time, I would have stayed on the f\*\*\*ing toilet.”

“Polynice is a grade A twisted F\*\*\*. He likes to play with dead things, Even if he has to make them dead to play with them.”

Now let’s talk artwork. The first 3 stories are illustrated by Ben Templesmith. I think his minimalist approach was a perfect fit for these stories. There isn’t a lot of detail in the art, but the facial expressions are priceless. The rest of the stories are illustrated by Kelley Jones. His work has a more “pop” art feel. It is completely different from Templesmith, with all the detail, but still a perfect fit for the characters. I didn’t prefer one over the other. Both were entertaining and added to the experience.

I give this Omnibus 5 monster killing Sheep!

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