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Clean Room (2015-2017) Vol. 1: Immaculate Conception



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Synopsis

Fan-favorite Gail Simone’s (BATGIRL, WONDER WOMAN) debut Vertigo series begins here! Journalist Chloe Pierce had no idea that her fiancÃƒÂ© Philip’s decision to pick up a book by enigmatic and compelling self-help guru Astrid Mueller would change her life forever-by ending his! Three months after reading Mueller’s book, Philip had blown his brains out all over Chloe’s new kitchen-and something in that book made him do it. Now, Chloe will stop at nothing as she attempts to infiltrate Mueller’s clandestine organization to find the truth behind Philip’s suicide and a "Clean Room" that she’s heard whispers of-a place where your deepest fears are exposed and your worst moments revealed. Collects CLEAN ROOM #1-6.

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Customer Reviews

The art is solid. There are some atypical arrangements of panels, and they work very well. Visually this is nicely done.On the plus side of the ledger: Ms. Simone has talked about how female character deaths are often used to help develop/explain male hero/protagonist behavior. She has turned that upside down with this series. It’s well done and appreciated.I have no strong feelings for or against nudity, sex, violence, or obscenities in comics or other forms of entertainment. I do have

strong feelings about their application. If they are there to enhance the story and they work well, then I am in their favor. If they are there for cheap titillation and shock value, then it’s just a lazy attempt to win over an immature audience.The bigger flaw is in the writing. The concept is simple: a journalist fails at suicide after her fiance killed himself. She decides to investigate the cult/self-help guru that he had been studying right before his death. The cult is modeled very much after Scientology, so far as having clean rooms in which to do their work (in Scientology, practitioners hope to "go clear"...the word similarity is certainly intentional). The bits about the celebrities involved with the guru’s program is absolutely modeled on Scientology and are the best part of this book. But those are simple to do. Ms. Simone could have made this more interesting and eminently more readable if this were a direct take down of Scientology. Instead, there are demons and spirits and a variety of other creatures that appear of out nowhere in a plot that Ms. Simone hopes we stick around long enough for her to eventually explain. One gets the idea that she is making this up as she goes along, rather than having carefully thought and plotted it out (to be fair, most comic writers are not doing this, hence the high percentage of terrible books on the market).It’s all a bit confusing and a lot of work and not a fun ride.

I don’t find the Entities (which still aren’t entirely clear to me) nearly as unsettling as I find the motivations and choices made by the human characters. There’s a visceral heft to the consequences of any given turning point that makes these characters realer than a lot of those who appear in comics, even those conceived for the same mature readership as CLEAN ROOM. Things *matter* here.I started reading CLEAN ROOM when its first issue was published in October, 2015. I’ve been a fan of Gail Simone’s for several years, and found myself intrigued by what little I knew about the book going into it. I’ve got a few mental health diagnoses, which is only relevant to this review in that I was made squeamish at times early on by some startling imagery and uncouth dialogue pertaining to suicide. It’s a recurring theme of the book, but once I understood that, I found it easier to acclimate and not be so triggered by it.I can’t say how this first arc reads in collected form, though I should imagine it plays well. As I said, I’ve been reading the monthly floppies, and one of the things I most appreciate about Simone’s writing is that by time I finish any given issue she’s written, I’ve been left with a feeling of desperately wanting to read the very next issue immediately. Readers of this collected edition will be spared the agony of those four week intervals, which may be more gratifying, though I feel it may also cheat them out of a certain part of the suspense that makes CLEAN ROOM so captivating.Astrid Mueller has quickly become my favorite complex character in all of fiction since Tony Soprano. As of the writing of this review, there are

three issues beyond what is collected in VOL. 1: IMMACULATE CONCEPTION. I can tell you that my feelings about her have changed, but I don't think she's actually changed at all from the very first time we met her. And that, to my mind, is the hallmark of a well-crafted character.Lastly, Jon Davis-Hunt deserves recognition for the cleanliness of his art aesthetic for the book. At times, it almost looks antithetically cheerful, which somehow makes the story being told all the more sinister. It would be easy (and lazy) to push a cliched "dark" look for this book. Davis-Hunt's choices are outright refreshing for the genre.

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