'Life's not all fun and games'

*Masters of the Nefarious, Mollusc Rampage,* Pierre La Police, translated by Luke Burns (New York Review Comics)

The New York Review of Books book list is an intriguingly diverse and surprising one, but I had no idea they also had a comics imprint. 'Something to investigate,' I thought, and as if by magic, here is the review copy I requested. It's a beautiful, glossy-wrapped, full colour 165 page paperback, full of surrealism and silliness.

It kind of hangs on a digressionary and irrelevant plot, where twin investigators of the paranormal, accompanied by their best friend, but I don't think the narrative – or what little there is – is actually the point of this book. Each page is a single image with a short text at the bottom, each a surreal moment frozen in time, often with little to link it to the page before or after. Characters, events, ideas and locations come and go as Chris & Montgomery, accompanied by their friend Fongor, engage with the fallout from a tsunami, giant mollusks and the appearance of what the blurb calls 'an ominous quadrilateral UFO', not to mention 'a mysterious villain' in the shadows.

There are aliens, insects, animals, skin diseases, sports, phobias, abnormal births, mutants, deaths and alcoholic interludes. Montogmery 'receives a message from an ice cube spirit informing him that 'it's something about prehistoric times', but eventually most things are returned to some sense of what passes for normal here.

I have to say that the art work doesn't engage me, and the book seems like a series of surreal jokes rather than a graphic novel or comic strip. I'm reminded of Glen Baxter, although Baxter's British take on the surreal I find far more engaging and laughable. La Police's drawings seems somewhat naive (I was going to say amateur but that would be harsh), and reliant upon the filled-in colours (along with the attached texts) for their effect.

Luke Burns' 'Translator's Note' confidently talks about 'absurd humor', and – in addition how difficult translating absurd sentences was – how 'La Police deploys the tropes and conventions of mysteries, adventure stories, and superhero comics', setting up readers' expectations so that he 'can then demolish them'. However, he regards the book as laugh-out-loud stuff, which isn't my experience I'm afraid. Whilst the odd phrase here and there, such as 'the couscous world cup' and Fongor's 'steerable staircase' (the image of which is on the front cover) raised a wry smile, that was pretty much it. There's little of the originality, creativity or originality I was expecting evidenced in this volume. I'm bemused rather than amused.

Rupert Loydell