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The Horror! The Horror!: Comic Books The Government Didn't Want You To Read (with DVD)



Synopsis

The Horror! The Horror! uncovers a rare treasury of some of the most important and neglected stories in American literature—the pre-Code horror comics of the 1950s. These outrageous comic book images, censored by Congress in an infamous televised U.S. Senate subcommittee investigating juvenile delinquency in 1954, have rarely been seen since they were first published—and are revealed once again in all of their eye-popping glory. Jim Trombetta, in his commentary and informative text, provides a detailed history and context for these stories and their creators, spinning a tale of horror and government censorship as scary as the stories themselves. Bonus DVD—Confidential File, a rare 25-minute TV show that first aired on October 9, 1955, about the "evils" of comic books and their effect on juvenile delinquency is included with the book. Please note that the enclosed DVD begins with a 58-second test pattern, followed by the tv show. Praise for The Horror! The Horror!: "In addition to offering a generous helping of controversial comics . . . Trombetta's book provides insightful history." —New York Times Book Review

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Author Jim Trombetta dissects various facets of the horror comics (the werewolf, war, crime, etc.) using quite a bit of psychology. Usually that throws up a red flag for me. While there are several instances where I questioned the logic of the author, there are an equal number when a lightbulb went on over my dim cranium and I actually looked at a story differently. Trombetta's prose is

scholarly but not academic (read: not boring). I would question whether such in-depth analysis is due a story about a young couple who buy a new house, quickly discover bottles of blood in the basement and then decide against moving out. When the "bloodman" (rather than the milkman) comes calling for "empties" and takes the couple along with him, I thought "what a couple of dopes" rather than look for any Freudian overtones. According to Trombetta, "Skeletons perform any number of lonely personal revenges, but they most often appear less as the mirror of human self-hatred than as a quorum." Huh? Just tell me how they can speak without vocal chords! A little far fetched is this description of the cover of Mysterious Adventures #18: "Here a superb Hy Fleischman skeleton grabs his ex-wife and demands that she join him in the grave. What ups the ante is that the ex-wife's boyfriend is also on the scene - molested, prison-style, from behind by another skeleton." Does anybody really see in this cover, even squinting, a skeletal version of Deliverance? There are 16 strips here, several of which are dopey fun. (I'd love to own a set of Dark Mysteries, with titles like "The Terror of the Hungry Cats," "Terror of the Unwilling Witch," "Vampire Fangs of Doom," "Terror of the Vampire's Teeth"). My favorite of the batch for sheer goofiness would have to be "The Eyes of Death."

As a long-time collector of EC and pre-code horror comics, I was really looking forward to this book. I was hoping for a well-researched tome, one that might turn over some new stones and shed some light on the (still mostly unknown) second-string creators and companies whose comics captivated kids and horrified their parents in the staid 1950's. Or perhaps a volume with loads of stories that would convey the essence of these forbidden comics. What we have is a book with only 16 stories (boo!), lots of single pages and panels (ok), and loads of covers (Hurray!) It could serve as an introduction to the horror-comic genre for newcomers, with way too much psychological analysis heaped on top. The history is mostly a few oft-repeated stories (The Senate hearings, the Comics Code, Gaines' fight in defense of the story JUDGMENT DAY). You know all these by heart if you are anything more than a very casual fan. There is nothing new or very revealing about the industry or the guys who turned this stuff out. Instead we have reams of Freudian analysis, much of which reads like a parody of itself. Some of it is so off-base, in attempting to make a dubious point, that I sputtered out loud. (Note to future comic book analysts: LET ME DECIDE MYSELF WHAT I SEE IN A COMIC.) Examples? The comic BATTLE CRY showed, in its logo, a soldier screaming- issuing a "battle cry". The author sees this: "The logo of BATTLE CRY, with its bawling GI head... suggests that it's all right for grown men who have lost their buddies, who have suffered the "heartbreak" of a brutal engagement, to break down and cry... the conventional war comic is the male equivalent of a

romance comic." HUH? A page later we have this, in search of phallic symbolism: ...

The first shocker for me from "The Horror! The Horror!" came on page thirty-one, where it is pointed out that EC published only about three percent of the huge output of horror books available during 1950-1955. Almost everything that I have ever read about the pre-code horror books focused exclusively on EC. "Tales from the Crypt." "The Vault of Horror." "The Haunt of Fear." These I know. The other 97% of horror titles, like Master Comics' "Dark Mysteries." Fawcett Publications' "Beware! Terror Tales." Farrell Comics' "Haunted Thrills."...not so much. Which is why I got so much out of this book. Even after having read books like Seal of Approval: The History of the Comics Code and The Ten-Cent Plague: The Great Comic-Book Scare and How It Changed America (not to mention actually owning a copy of "Seduction of the Innocent") I really didn't get the idea of scale. So many books pit the Comics Code as a private war waged against Bill Gaines to try and take away his market share, when it was more than that. With "The Horror! The Horror!" I finally got an idea of what the newsstands must of looked like during that Golden Age of 1950-1955 when almost every comic on the pile was a horror comic, outdoing themselves for blood and gore, for monsters and mayhem. Really a coffee table book, "The Horror! The Horror!: Comic Books the Government Didn't Want You to Read" is mainly a collection of pictures and stories.

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