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**HORROR
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OF THE FEARFUL
1950s



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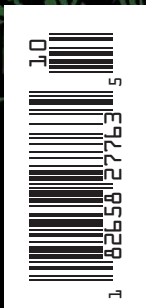
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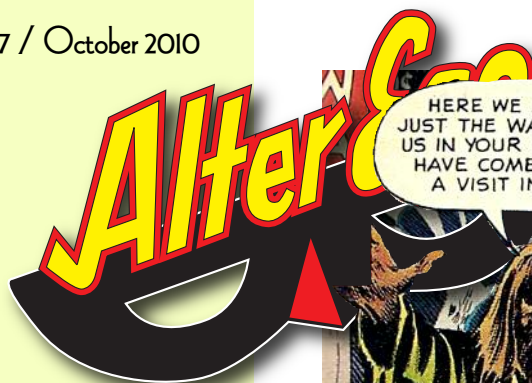
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On Our Cover: *Alter Ego* is generally centered around comic book characters and their creators rather than on individual, stand-alone stories—while the latter were the stock and trade of most 1950s horror comics artist. What's more, A/E covers which showcase super-heroes usually outsell those that don't. So we tried to split the difference: **Bill Everett's** macabre splash panel from *Menace* #5 (July 1953), recently reprinted in the hardcover *Marvel Masterworks: Atlas Era Menace*, gave the world a still-enduring horror-hero by introducing the later star of *Marvel's* black-&-white mag *Tales of The Zombie*, beginning with #1 in 1973. For more info, see p. 15. [©2010 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

Above: This partial-cover from *Trojan Publishing's Beware* #11 (1954), drawn by *shockmeister* (and later *schlockmeister*) **Myron Fass**, depicted what might have been the nightmare of every vintage horror comic artist. Aw, those two ghoulies are probably just Dr. Wertham and Senator Kefauver in disguise! (See pp. 31-32.) Thanks to Mike Benton. [©2010 the respective copyright holders.]

This issue is dedicated to the memory of
Howie Post & Marvin Stein



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Did Horror Comics Really Follow The "New Trend"?

That's the question Lawrence Watt-Evans posits in this issue's "The Other Guys," which examines the 1950s horror comics published by companies besides William M. Gaines' fabled EC (Entertaining Comics) and its "New Trend" trio of *Tales from the Crypt*, *The Vault of Horror*, and *The Haunt of Fear*.

Lawrence's answer to his own question may well surprise—even anger—some readers.

We don't want to give away his thesis in advance—nor is it our place here to agree or disagree with it. But we felt it deserved to be aired, and *Alter Ego* at Halloween-time seemed as good a place as any to do so.

In the course of expounding his views, of course, LWE surveys both the history and the variety of horror comics in that decade that began sixty years ago. Which is precisely what I asked him to do, when I sent out feelers, a year or so ago, for a study of the non-EC terror tales of that pre-Comics Code period. For, too often, as Lawrence writes, the history of that genre in four colors is treated as if it were synonymous with EC... or at least as if all other horror comics were de facto inferior to what was produced by Gaines, his editors Al Feldstein and Johnny Craig, and their writers and artists.

Now, let there be no misunderstanding: In my not-too-humble opinion EC's straight horror (and related crime and science-fiction comics) were indeed some of the finest publications that the comics industry ever produced. But other companies had their moments, as well... and some of those moments were stretched out to a considerable length.

Harvey's horror titles were analyzed in last Halloween's issue (and as regards that company, we'll admit up front that our judgment differs from

Lawrence's)... we've touched on Timely/Marvel/Atlas' myriad macabre mags before (though never at length—and even here, there's only room to scratch the surface of what Stan Lee and his 1950s bullpen wrought in that arena)... *A/E* #61 dwelt on both the pre- and post-Code horror comics published by the American Comics Group... and, even earlier, issue #41 went into some detail about Dick Briefer's several contrasting approaches to Mary Shelley's Frankenstein Monster.

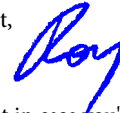
But what about—as Lawrence puts it—"The Other Guys"?

In this issue you'll run the gamut from "A" to "Z." From Avon's *Eerie Comics* #1, which could lay claim to launching the horror genre in comics, to Ziff-Davis and its short-lived spook spree behind tastefully painted covers. From Ace's *Web of Mystery* to the zombies of Superior Comics that came shambling down across the border from Canada. In between, you'll even meet a few *series* characters who traversed the genre—the aforementioned Frankenstein, of course, but also Hillman's Heap and Toby's perambulating Purple Claw.

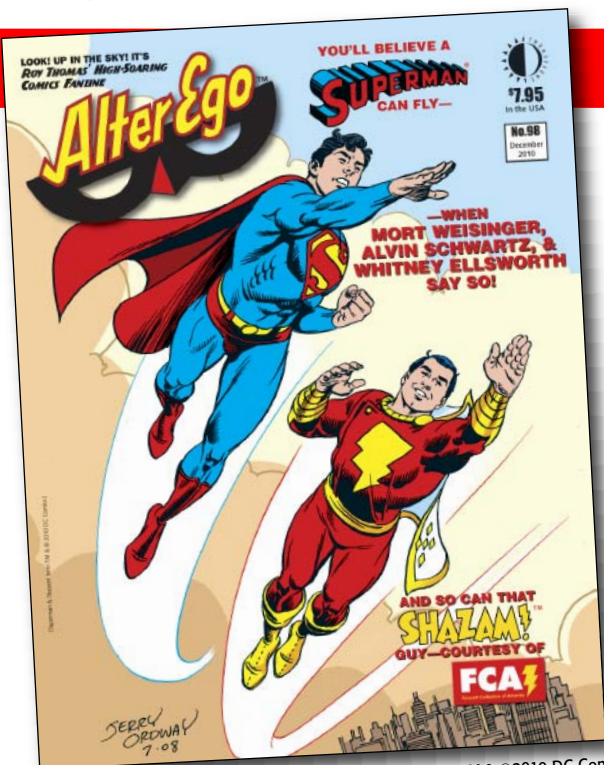
And if you're a die-hard EC fan—well, not to worry. We did manage to work in a brief but artful homage to the "New Trend," on pp. 35-37.

So now, enjoy. This Halloween, as always, we promise you tricks... and, we hope, treats as well.

Bestest,



P.S.: Oh, and just in case you're wondering—we titled this issue's lead article long before we even *heard* of any upcoming movie starring Will Ferrell.



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The Other Guys

A Gargoyle's-Eye View Of The Non-EC Horror Comics Of The 1950s

by Lawrence Watt-Evans

"Had All The Horror Comics Of The 1950s Been Published By EC?"

When I was a kid in the 1960s, most of the comics I read had this little white seal on them that said: "Approved by the Comics Code Authority." Dell and Gold Key comics didn't have it, but DC and Marvel and ACG all did. I didn't know what it meant; no one I *knew* knew what it meant. It was just there.

I missed this first clue entirely.

When I was a teenager, I came across a book in a store in Cambridge, Massachusetts—a great big book, just out from Nostalgia Press. On the front cover was the title *Horror Comics of the 1950's*. (On the spine it said "The EC Horror Library of the 1950's," instead—I don't know why.) It looked pretty nifty; the cover art showed a man locked in a mausoleum where a rotting corpse was climbing out of its coffin. I opened it to the title page and read again: "These were the terrible, shocking, sensational, appalling, forbidden... but simply wonderful HORROR COMICS OF THE 1950'S."

I had no idea what it was talking about. Horror comics? All I knew about were the mystery comics like *House of Mystery*, or the monster comics like *Tales to Astonish* before the super-heroes took over. (I'd really liked *Tales to Astonish*, though; #13, the first monster comic I ever read, gave me nightmares. I liked that one a lot.)

That was my second clue to the existence of a whole lost era in comics history.

The book was \$19.95. I had maybe five bucks on me at the time, and I wasn't that interested in old comics at that point anyway. I liked Kirby's *Fourth World* and Marvel's *Conan the Barbarian*, but I wasn't a collector yet. I didn't buy it.

But a couple of years later, when the Nostalgia Press volume was out of print, I was a collector. My interest in completing my run of *Conan* had led to other things; I'd picked up a couple of Golden Age books at flea markets, and now I wanted to know more about comics history. Among other things, I wanted to know what had come between the Golden Age in the 1940s and the Silver Age in the 1960s.

So I picked up *All in Color for a Dime* and *The Comic Book Book*, two hardcover volumes both edited by Dick Lupoff and Don Thompson, and I got Les Daniels' *The Comix*, and I found a few other books and articles here and there, and I learned about the legendary EC comics. All the experts talked about how wonderful EC was in its prime, how great it was to buy *Tales from the Crypt* or *Haunt of Fear* or *Weird Science* off the newsstand for a dime. I realized that this was what had been in that big book I couldn't afford—EC stories.

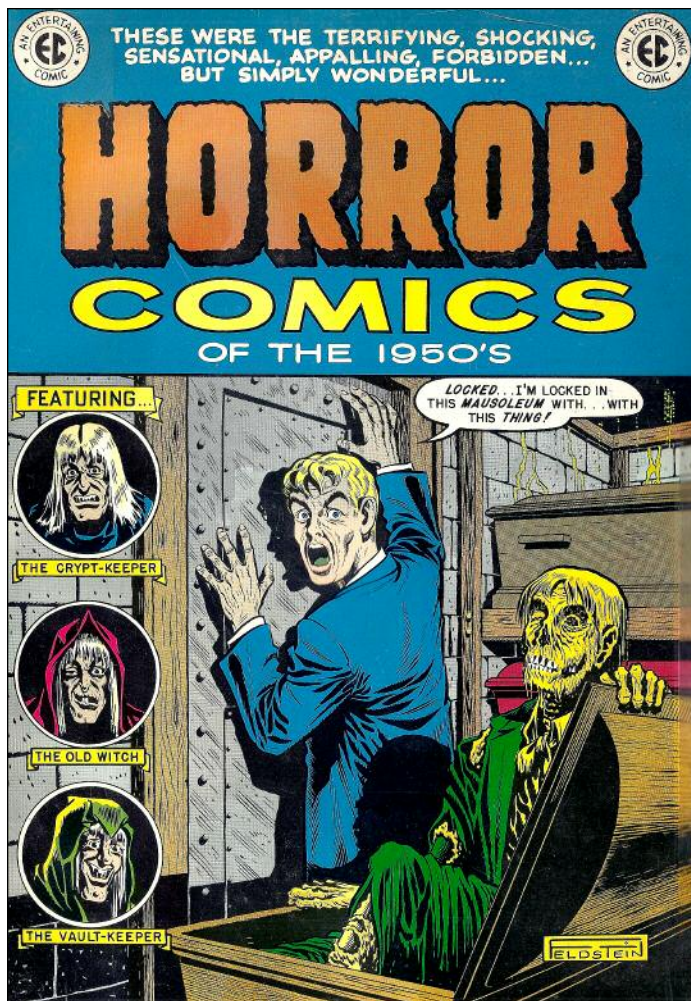
But... *but...* had *all* the horror comics of the 1950s been published by EC? Those were the only ones anyone talked about, but surely there had been others?



And They Think *Baby Seals* Got Problems!

The famous/infamous Comics Code seal of approval gets terrorized itself on this Sam Kwasikin-drawn cover for *Timely/Atlas' Adventures into Terror* #17 (March 1953)—a fairly neat trick, since the seal only began appearing on comics covers at the very end of 1954. Okay, we admit it—we had *A/E* layout guru Chris Day doctor the cover just a bit to get our point across. Thanks to Dr. Michael J. Vassallo for the scan of the actual cover.

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EC Street

This very first collection ever of EC horror comics—which didn't acknowledge that there'd even *been* any other ones *but* EC's—was published in hardcover in 1971 by one-time comic book writer & artist Woody Gelman (then a Topps Chewing Gum exec) and his Nostalgia Press. The tome was edited by Ron Barlow and Bhub Stewart, and its cover utilized Al Feldstein's for *Tales from the Crypt* #23 (April-May 1951). Gelman had wanted to use a Wally Wood cover, but EC publisher Bill Gaines insisted that a Feldstein cover be utilized: "He's the one who made me all the money." And, given the success under Feldstein's editorship of EC's 1950s horror/crime comics and later the black-&-white *Mad*, it's hard to argue with that line of reasoning! [Art ©2010 William M. Gaines, Agent, Inc.]

In "The Spawn of the Son of M.C. Gaines," Don Thompson's chapter on EC in *The Comic Book Book*, EC's competitors get one paragraph:

"I searched newsstands. I bought some godawful horror comics, the kind that blazoned on the cover: 'We dare you to read these stories!' They were nauseating—dealing in things like giant crabs stripping bodies until they looked like the diagrams of human musculature you see in the encyclopedia, and mummies

Weird Tails

Many of the "horror" pulps of the 1930s, such as the now-legendary *Weird Tales*, seemed more interested in showing bare female flesh than in depicting fearful supernatural menace. This cover by noted artist J. Allen St. John fronted the Oct. 1936 issue, which featured the C.L. Moore "Northwest Smith" moody space opera "The Tree of Life," future *Psycho* author Robert Bloch's Lovecraftian tale "The Opener of the Way," and the final installment of Robert E. Howard's Conan novella *Red Nails*. Few today remember that trio's fellow author Lloyd Arthur Eshbach, but apparently *his* offering that issue contained what the editor considered the best cover possibilities. (Admittedly, a spicy encounter between Conan's nude ladyfriend Valeria and a predatory princess had graced *WT*'s July cover.) From Ye Editor's personal collection. [©2010 the respective copyright holders.]

that sucked the guts out of people through their mouths (sorry to share that latter memory with you but I've been stuck with it for 20 years and maybe this will unload it)—nauseating but not frightening. I must have bought a couple dozen of these things, all of them dreadful."

That was the longest mention of other horror comics I found anywhere; most writers dismissed them all as sleazy imitations of EC. The accepted wisdom was that Bill Gaines and Al Feldstein, inspired by radio suspense shows like *Lights Out*, had invented horror comics out of whole cloth in 1950; that EC's three horror titles had been immediate roaring successes so big that everyone else had slavishly but ineptly imitated them; that the entire censorship flap of the early 1950s, led by Dr. Fredric Wertham, was aimed at EC; that the Comics Code, the comics industry's self-censorship mechanism introduced in the fall of 1954, had been specifically designed to kill EC.

That still seems to be the accepted wisdom.

There's just one problem. It's not true.

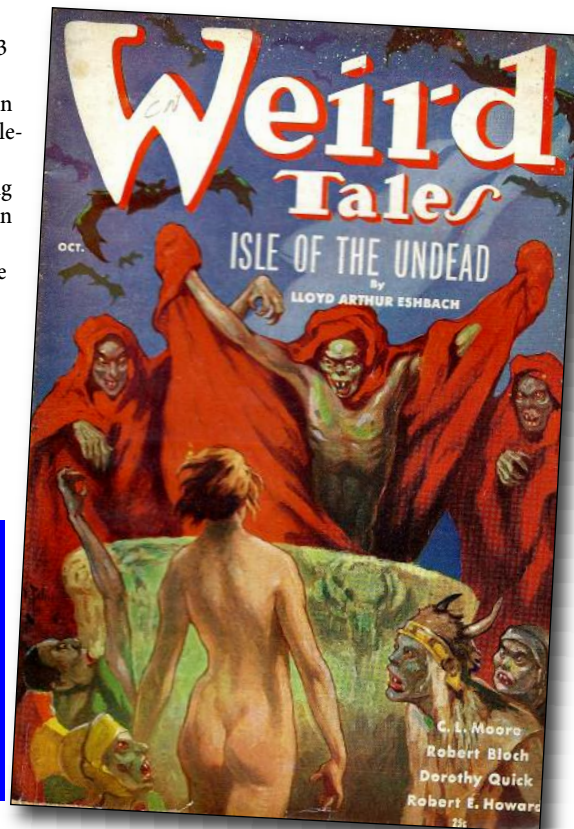
It took me a while to realize this, but it eventually sank in, as I collected horror comics of all sorts and continued to study their history, that none of that was exactly what happened. The problem was that all the history had been written by EC fans; every single author who had published anything about the horror comics of the 1950s had been a devoted acolyte of William M. Gaines, and accepted what Gaines said as the true history of horror comics. Which it wasn't, quite.

I don't blame Gaines; he told his story as he remembered it. He was, however, biased, since he'd seen everything from the point of view of EC's publisher. And he'd never bothered to study up on any of this; after all, he'd been there, he'd seen it first-hand.

Ask any cop about how reliable eyewitness accounts are. Especially a decade or more after the fact.

So here's what did happen, as I've pieced it together through twenty years of collecting horror comics and reading everything about them that I could get my hands on.

Comic books started out in 1933 with humor and adventure strips. In 1936 the first single-genre comics appeared, featuring detective stories. In 1938 came the super-heroes. True crime arrived in 1942. By then there were hundreds of titles being published, and dozens of publishers, so a



lot of experimentation was going on; super-heroes and detectives still dominated the scene, but there were funny animals, humor strips, straight adventure, jungle stories, science-fiction, and any number of other genres represented. Comic books were clearly taking a great deal of their inspiration from the pulp magazines; generally, if something sold well in the pulps, it would turn up in comics not long after.

Comics were surprisingly slow to pick up on two categories from the pulps, though. One was romance, which eventually arrived on the four-color page in the late '40s; the other was "weird menace," which we would now call "horror."

Actually, in that era, "weird menace" was a particular sort of formula horror, featured in pulps such as *Terror Tales*, *Horror Stories*, and *Dime Mystery*, where some unearthly menace would threaten pretty women before being defeated and revealed to not be supernatural after all. Since it had a very definite element of sexual sadism, perhaps it isn't too surprising that it didn't make the jump to comics. Comics were for kids.

There don't seem to have been any pulps that featured just plain horror stories as their only fare; besides the "weird menace" titles there was *Weird Tales*, but *Weird Tales* carried as much fantasy as horror.

Those Frightful '40s

At any rate, there were no horror comics as such in the earliest days.

The first real horror series seems to have been the

"Frankenstein" feature by Dick Briefer, in *Prize Comics* (from the company of the same name); it began in #7, dated December 1940, and ran until the title was cancelled in 1948. *Prize Comics* was originally a super-hero title, featuring "The Black Owl," "The Green Lama," and the like, except for this one aberration.

"Frankenstein" didn't stay unique, though. No, no other horror strips were added; instead, "Frankenstein" changed premises. The monster was turned into a good guy, and became a virtual super-hero, fighting the Nazis.



And then, as World War II neared its end, super-heroes began to go out of style, and *Prize Comics* gradually replaced its masked do-gooders with humor strips.

"Frankenstein" wasn't replaced; the feature was converted to a comedy, which it remained from 1945 until 1952. It was successful enough that *Frankenstein Comics* began in 1945, and outlasted the original *Prize Comics*.

So much, it would seem, for horror comics.

In late 1943 it looked as if horror might have another chance. An outfit called Et-Es-Go, which later became Continental Magazines, put out *Suspense Comics* #1, featuring The Grey Mask and other detective heroes. In the course of twelve quarterly issues, *Suspense Comics* worked in a good many horrific images and stories; most of the covers didn't show the



Frankenstein—From Horror To Har-Har!

Splash (above) from writer/artist Dick Briefer's "Frankenstein" as a horror feature the first time around, from *Prize Comics* #9 (Feb. 1941)—and the cover of *Frankenstein Comics* #4 (Oct. 1946), after the humorous version of the feature had won its own mag. But that's hardly the end of the story—see p. 18! Thanks to Al Dellings (via Manuel Aua) for the *Prize Comics* scan. [©2010 the respective copyright holders.]

usual hero fare, but instead depicted horror imagery such as spiders, eyeballs, devils, etc.

In September 1944 someone named E. Levy started a super-hero title called *Yellowjacket Comics*; in the course of ten issues and two years it switched ownership twice, first to Frank Comunale, and then to Charlton Comics.

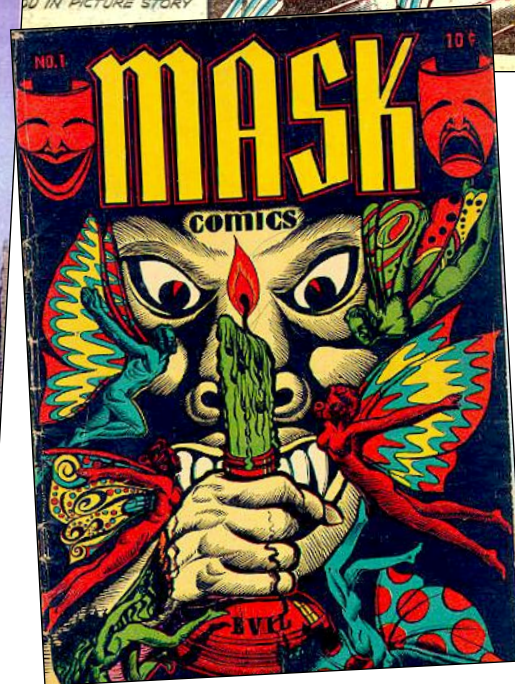
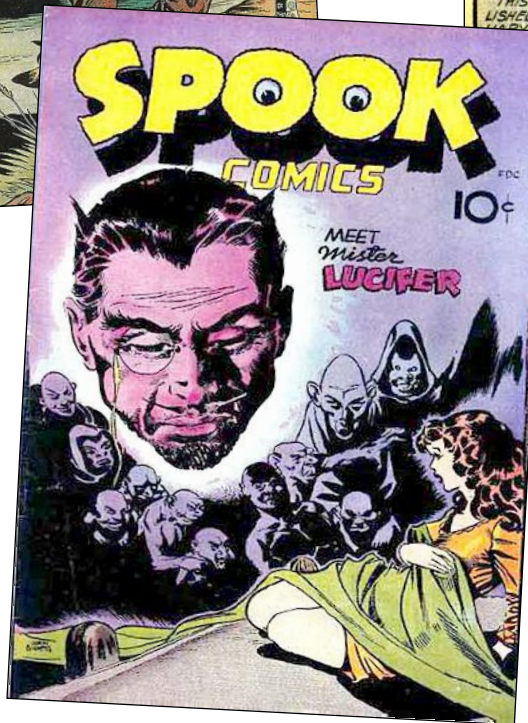
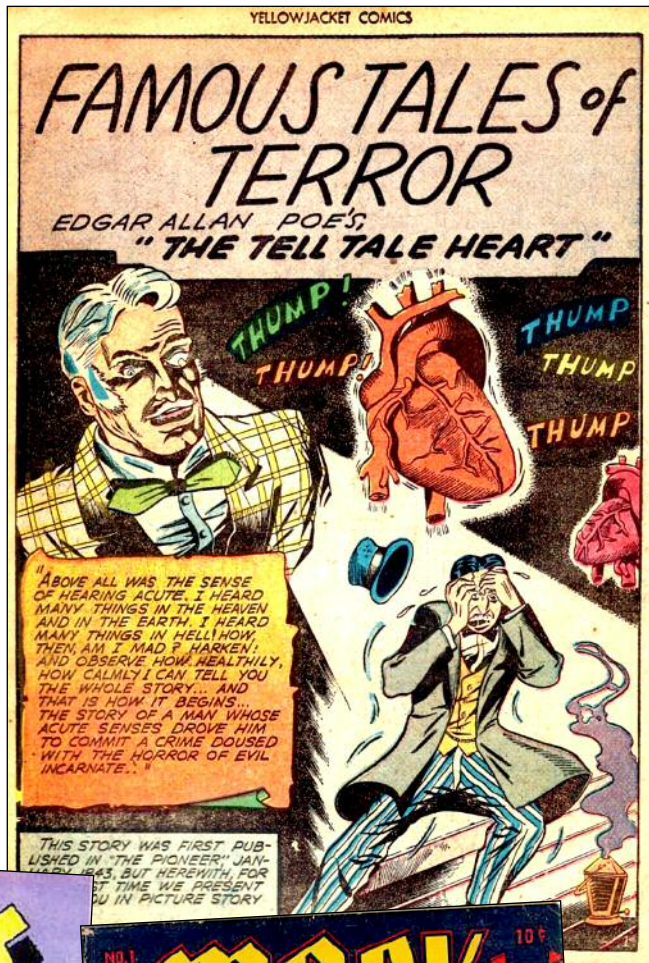
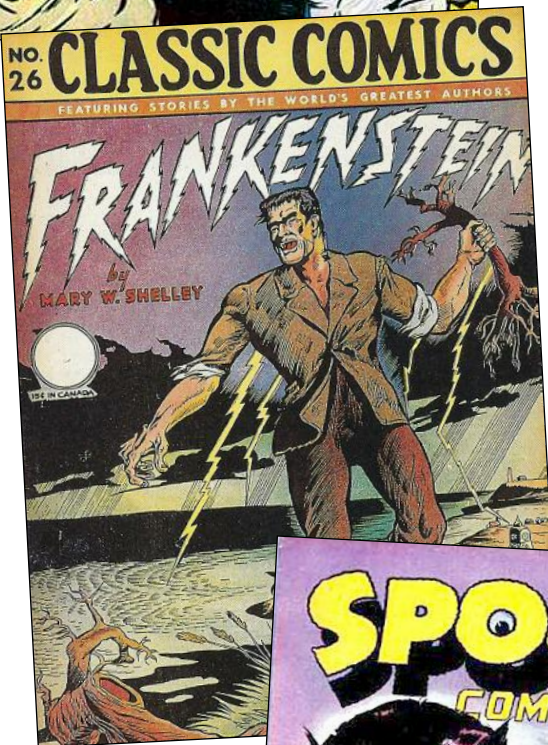
It also ran horror stories as a back-up feature in eight of those ten issues, skipping only #2 and #5. These weren't borderline stuff; they were labeled "Tales of Terror," and were narrated by an old witch. Two of them adapted classic stories by Edgar Allan Poe. It wasn't exactly a horror comic, but it was a horror *feature*, very definitely. And it had the old witch narrator that Bill Gaines later claimed to have introduced to comics—though it may well be that both Levy and Gaines were simply swiping from the same source, the 1931-38 radio show *The Witch's Tale*.

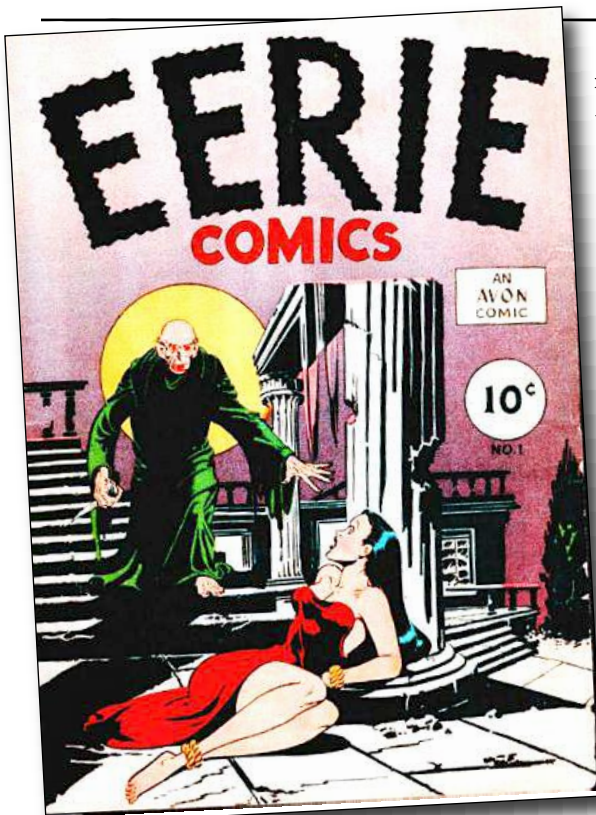
In 1945 Rural Home Publications (an established comics publisher at the time) put out two issues of *Mask Comics*, which *looked* like a horror comic. The covers, by L.B. Cole, were certainly horrific enough: one depicted moth people being lured by a candle labeled "EVIL," while the other showed Satan himself. The interiors, though, were fairly ordinary detective adventure stuff.

There were also a couple of one-shots in 1946 that bore at least a vague



Horrorbingers
 (That's "harbingers of horror" spelled sideways.) Clockwise from top left:
 Charles Quinlan's cover for *Suspense Comics* #1 (Dec. 1943), from Et-Es-Go...
 An unknown artist's (and writer's) splash for a 7-page adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's
 "The Telltale Heart," from the super-hero mag *Yellowjacket Comics* (#6, Dec. 1945)...
 L.B. Cole's cover for Rural Home's *Mask Comics* #1 (Feb.-March 1945)...
 Cover by John Giunta for Baily Publications' *Spook Comics* #1 (1946)...
 And the Robert Webb cover of *Classic Comics* #26 (Dec. 1945—the series hadn't yet been
 renamed *Classics Illustrated*)—which adapted Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*.
 [Classic Comics cover ©2010 First Classics, Inc., a subsidiary of Classics International
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resemblance to horror comics: *Spook Comics* #1, from Baily Publications, and *Spooky Mysteries* #1, from Your Guide Publishing. The former was more or less detective-adventure stuff; the latter, despite its title, was a humor comic. Both, however, used the imagery of devils and ghost stories.

And I should mention that *Classic Comics* (later *Classics Illustrated*) didn't hesitate to adapt literary horror stories, beginning with *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* in their twelfth issue. (It was a back-up feature to *Rip Van Winkle*.) #21 was *3 Famous Mysteries*, with a horrific bent; #26 adapted Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*; #40 was titled *Mysteries* and adapted stories by Poe.

That brings us to 1947.

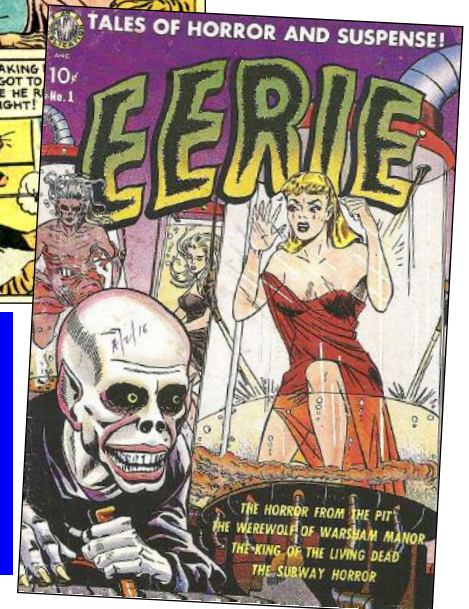
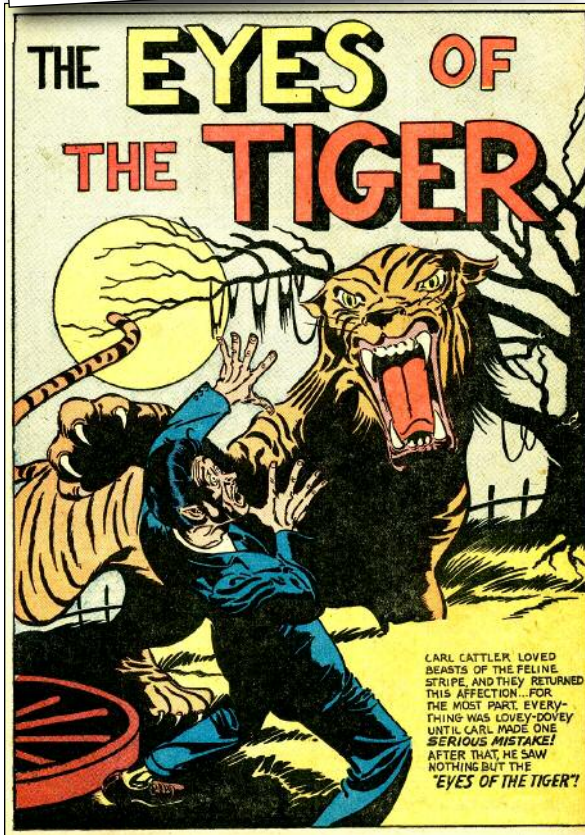
The Birth Pangs Of A Genre

Despite all these warm-ups and experiments, it wasn't until January 1947 that the first real, indisputable horror comic came along: *Eerie Comics* #1, published by Avon.

Eerie Comics #1 had a striking cover that was, well... eerie, depicting a strange-looking man with a knife on the steps of some sort of ruin, approaching a bound woman. The stories inside were not particularly good, but they were horror, involving were-tigers and the like. It's hard to point to a particular source or inspiration, such as radio or the pulps, as they were not adaptations and didn't take their form from any existing series in another medium.

Unfortunately, there was no second issue. Avon would later publish seventeen issues of *Eerie*, starting with a #1 in 1951, but there was no *Eerie Comics* #2. I don't know why; presumably #1 didn't sell well.

The astute reader who knows his EC legend will notice that this means Avon published a horror comic at least six months before William Gaines inherited the job of publisher from his father, and a full three years before EC created their "New Trend" horror titles. Avon, not EC, was the



The Eerie Canal

(Counter-clockwise from above left:) The cover, splash, and a crucial page from one of the tales in 1947's *Eerie Comics* #1 (Avon)—with interior art (& perhaps the cover?) by Bob Fujitani; scripter unknown. Only the ending of the story contains any hint of real supernatural horror, but *A/E* editor Roy Thomas recalls being terrified reading this yarn as a kid; he has no memory whatever of the other stories in the issue, even though one of them was drawn by his favorite artist, Joe Kubert. With thanks to the Golden Age Comic Book Stories website, which repro'd "The Eyes of the Tiger" from another reprint comic.

Also seen (at right) is the cover of *Eerie* #1 (Jan. 1951), which finally launched Avon's ongoing series with a similar title. [©2010 the respective copyright holders.]

first horror comic publisher.

It was left to a third publisher, however, a fairly new outfit called B&I Publishing, to produce the first *successful* horror comic book.

It's hard to imagine what the people at B&I thought they were doing when they published *Adventures into the Unknown* #1, cover-dated Fall 1948. They had previously published a handful of humor titles, such as *Ha Ha Comics* and *Hi-Jinx*, and nothing else but humor. The comics market was crowded at the time, publishers were going broke, and they started a horror title, when no one had ever made a success of horror in comics?

It worked, though. *Adventures into the Unknown* (early on, the title was followed by an exclamation point!) ran 174 issues, ending in 1967—a respectable run by any standard. The B&I name changed to the much catchier “American Comics Group” with #4—ACG, for short.

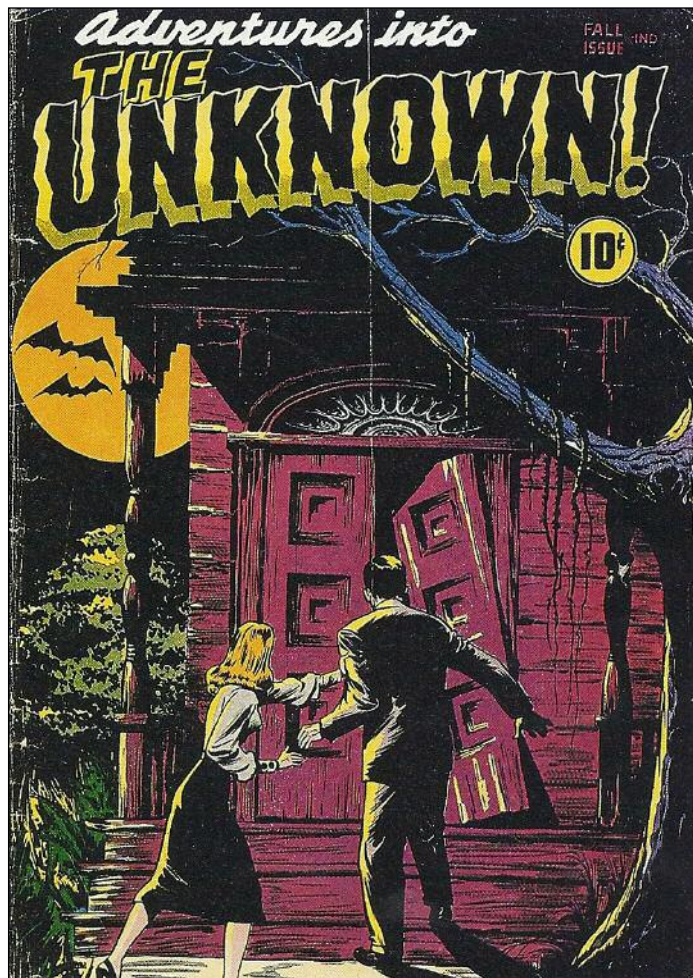
And they weren't swiping from radio shows, either; behind a dark, moody cover of a young couple approaching a haunted house, that first issue adapted (briefly and badly) Horace Walpole's classic gothic novel *The Castle of Otranto*, and it was plain throughout the title's early days that the people at B&I were basing their comic books on traditional prose ghost stories, rather than radio drama or earlier comics. I suspect they didn't even know about Avon's attempt the year before, or any of the other previous tries at doing horror in comics form.

(Incidentally, they also started a Western title at the same time—*Blazing West*. It did okay for a while.)

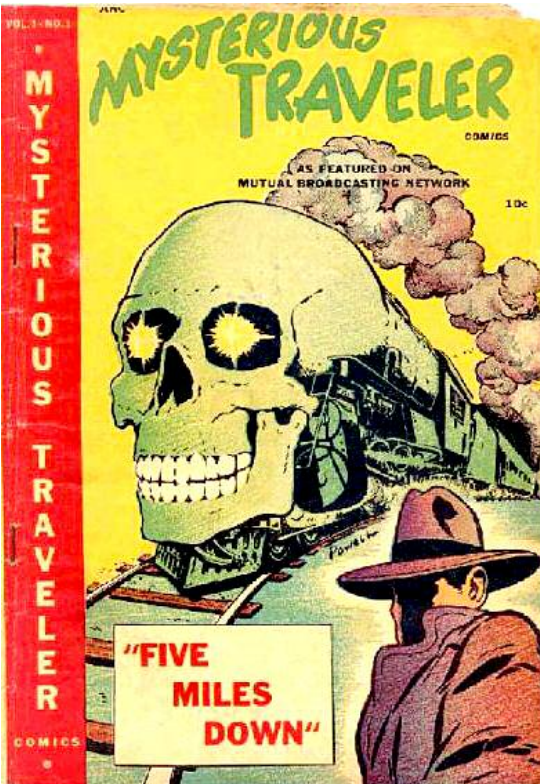
At last there was an ongoing, successful horror comic. And EC apparently hadn't noticed; EC was publishing *Gunfighter*, *Crime Patrol*, and *War against Crime*.

Or maybe I'm being unfair, because in fact EC's first horror story, “Zombie Terror,” appeared in the Fall 1948 issue of *Moon Girl*, their only super-hero title.

Remember I said that the stories in *Eerie Comics* #1 and *Adventures into the Unknown* #1 weren't very good? Well, they weren't any worse than “Zombie Terror.” That story was an amazingly inauspicious start for a line that would one day be acclaimed as the best horror comics of all time. And Bill Gaines apparently thought so, too; EC's second horror story didn't run for another full year. It's tempting to blame “Zombie Terror” for the fact that after *Moon Girl* #5 the title skipped a couple of months, apparently on the verge of



Known Milestone—Unknown Artist
 The cover of the very first issue of the very first ongoing horror comic—ACG's *Adventures into the Unknown* #1 (Fall 1948). The artist has not been 100% identified, but most experts now feel it's the work of Edvard Mortiz. See A/E #61 for Michael Vance's extensive coverage of the American Comics Group and its forebears. Thanks to Mike Benton. [©2010 the respective copyright holders.]



Beyond A Shadow Of A Doubt
 Bob Powell, no less, drew the cover and some interior art for Trans-World's *Mysterious Traveler Comics* #1—and-only (Nov. 1948). By then, Powell had already been drawing for Street & Smith's *Shadow Comics* for a while—and it showed. [©2010 the respective copyright holders.]

cancellation, but I'm sure that's going too far. [EDITOR'S NOTE: See p. 23 for a bit more on these earliest EC horror stories, which were packaged by *Moon Girl* artist Sheldon Moldoff.]

So Avon had created the first real horror comic, and B&I/ACG had published the first successful one. Was EC next?

Nope.

An outfit called Trans-World got in next, in November 1948, with a one-shot based on a radio show. *Mysterious Traveler Comics* #1, with its bright yellow cover and rather bland stories supposedly told by a mysterious man on a train, doesn't seem to have sold very well. I still feel it necessary to mention it because, hey, it was a pre-Code horror comic before EC and their imitators.

Ah, yes, those EC imitators. In interviews Bill Gaines sometimes spoke disparagingly of the Atlas line of comics, claiming they flooded the market with cheap imitations of EC's horror titles. At first glance the accusation seems reasonable; EC published three horror titles to Atlas' thirteen or so. But who was imitating whom?

Because the *next* publisher to get into horror after ACG and Trans-World was Timely Comics (occasionally called Marvel Comics in the late 1940s, and generally known by the end of 1951 as Atlas after its new self-distribution symbol). In short, if anyone was imitating, it was EC who imitated Timely!

Of course, Timely/Marvel/Atlas was probably imitating B&I/ACG.

Timely's first horror issue was *Amazing Mysteries* #32—the numbering was continued from the just-cancelled *Sub-Mariner Comics*. Super-heroes were dropping on all sides, and Timely publisher Martin Goodman seemed to think that the future lay in horror. In the course of a few months in 1949 he and his editor Stan Lee transformed all the company's top super-hero titles to horror ones.

Next after *Amazing Mysteries* came the transformation of *Marvel Mystery Comics*, Timely's flagship title, into *Marvel Tales*, beginning with #93, dated August 1949. *Marvel Mystery* had featured super-heroes; *Marvel Tales* was all horror.

Captain America Comics, once Timely's top seller, became *Captain America's Weird Tales* with #74, dated October 1949—though Captain America still appeared in that one. #75 was entirely horror stories—no Cap. It was also, alas, the final issue.

In fact, despite its plunge, Timely/Marvel seems to have lost its nerve. With its third issue, *Amazing Mysteries* switched to crime stories; the fourth issue, #35, was the last.

But *Marvel Tales* flourished. By the time EC began trying out "The Crypt of Terror" in *Crime Patrol* and "The Vault of Horror" in *War against Crime*, *Marvel Tales* had run three issues—and *Adventures into the Unknown* seven.

So much for the claim that Bill Gaines and Al Feldstein invented horror comics all by

themselves.

Incidentally, those early Timely/Marvel/Atlas horror issues really weren't very different from what was to come; mad scientists, vampires, ghouls, and assorted monsters rampaged through their pages. No gut-sucking mummies or scattered body parts yet, though; the stories were still relatively tame.

Relatively. I'm sure that kids at the time found stories like "The Ghoul Strikes!" (*Marvel Tales* #93) to be pretty darn exciting stuff.

It may seem as if I've been unduly harsh on EC. If I have, it's only to counteract the rabid fans who have gone too far in praising them. EC did produce the best horror comics of the pre-Code era; they did have a huge influence on the field; and they were widely imitated.

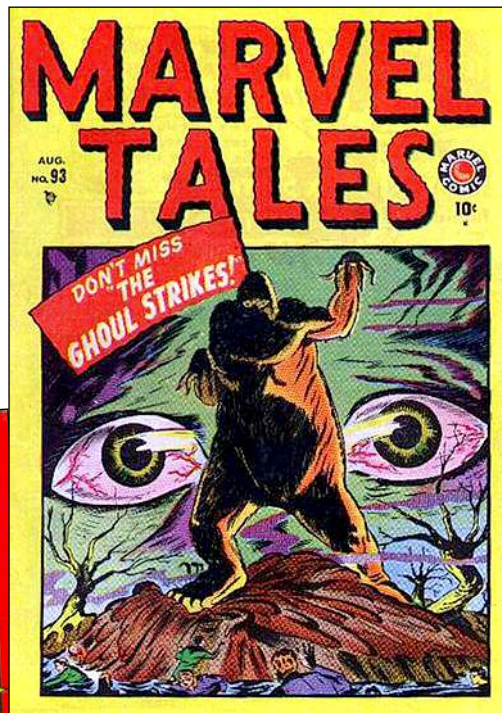
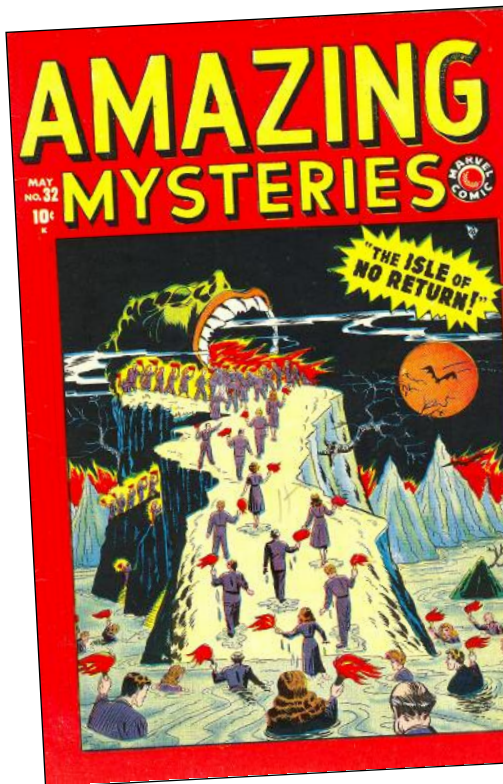
They were not, however, the first horror comics, or the only good ones, or the sole inspiration for the scads of others published between 1950 and 1955.

It may well be that Bill Gaines did not know, in the early days of 1950, that anyone was publishing horror comics. He said he didn't, that he got the idea entirely from radio. Perhaps horror comics were just an idea whose time had come.

EC Does It

And after Avon, ACG, Trans-World, and Timely, EC was the next to get into the field—in March 1950, when *Gunfighter* became *The Haunt of Fear*, *Crime Patrol* became *The Crypt of Terror*, and *War against Crime* became *The Vault of Horror*.

Enough has been written about EC's "New Trend" elsewhere that I won't go into it all again. Still, I can't resist pointing out one other bit of false mythology. The legend has it that the three horror titles were immediately a



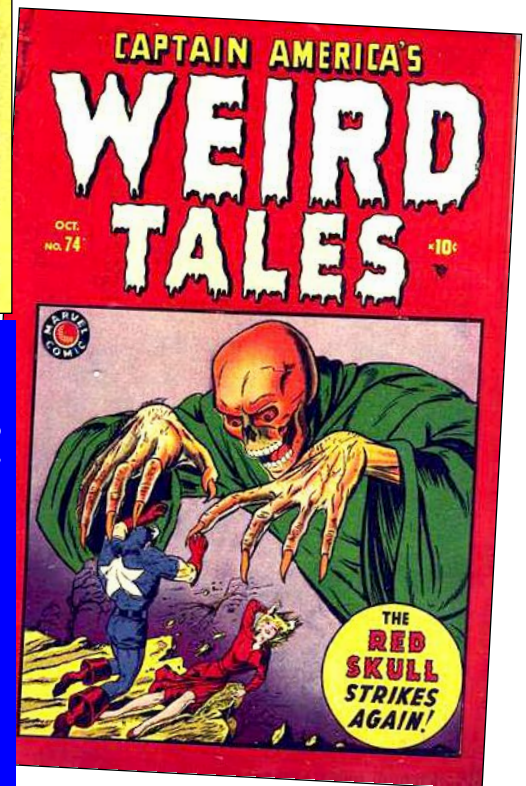
From Heroes To Horror

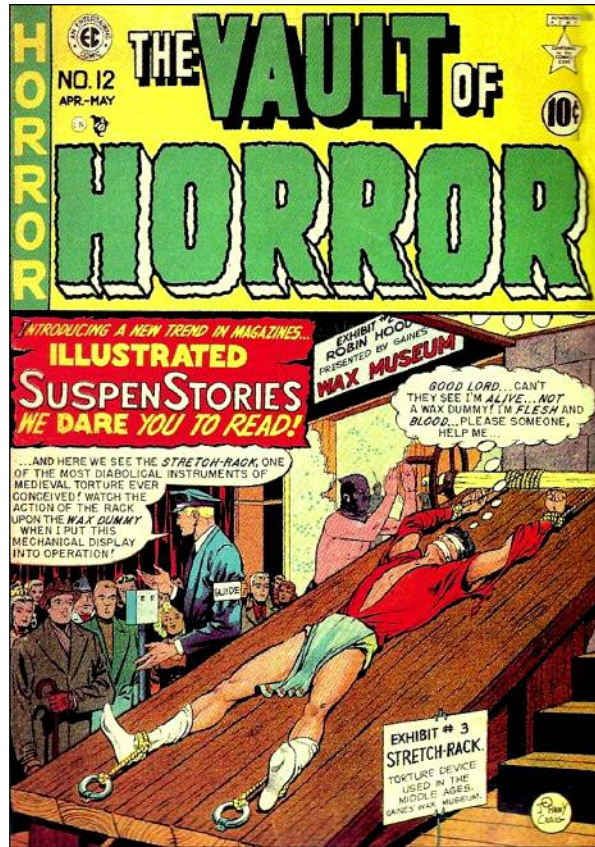
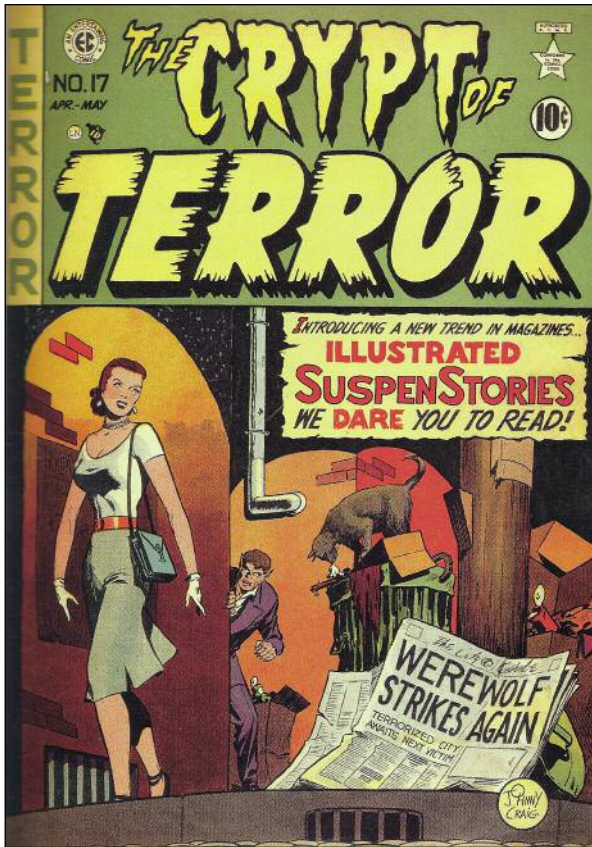
Marvel Comics'—excuse us, *Timely Comics*'—no, we mean *Atlas*'—no, actually, as the company symbol shows, we *do* mean *Marvel Comics*' very first foray into the horror field was *Amazing Mysteries* #32 (May 1949), with a cover reportedly by Gene Colan. This issue picked up where *Sub-Mariner Comics* had left off.

Thanks to Dr. Michael J. Vassallo.

It was swiftly followed by *Marvel Tales* (formerly *Marvel Mystery Comics*) #93, cover-dated Aug. 1949—and *Captain America's Weird Tales* #74 (Oct. '49). In the lead story of the latter, Cap went to hell—literally—to battle The Red Skull. He won—but immediately lost his mag for five years just the same. Both covers noted in this paragraph, incidentally, are now believed to have been drawn by "Green Lantern" creator (and later Timely staff artist) Mart Nodell.

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EC To Love

Hey, we had to show a few EC covers, didn't we? So here are Entertaining Comics' first issues of its trio of horror titles: *The Crypt of Terror* #17 and *The Vault of Horror* #12 (both April-May 1950) and *The Haunt of Fear* #15 (May-June '50), all three of whose covers were drawn by Johnny Craig. With the early name change of the former to *Tales from the Crypt*, that company's triad of terror was set—and comic books would never be the same again. EC may not have been first in horror, as the legend maintains—but they were, by and large, the best. [©2010 William M. Gaines, Agent, Inc.]

See p. 36 for a photo of the EC publishing/editorial trio of Bill Gaines, Al Feldstein, & Johnny Craig.

huge and obvious success.

If so, then why were two of the three almost cancelled six months later? *Vault of Horror* was to be replaced by *Crime SuspenStories*; *Haunt of Fear* was set to become *Two-Fisted Tales*. Even *Crypt of Terror* soon got a name change, to *Tales from the Crypt*. It was only at the very last minute, when the covers for *Crime SuspenStories* #15 (following *Vault of Horror* #14) were already being printed, that sales figures came in and convinced Gaines to keep the horror titles and simply add the new titles, rather than switching. *Crime SuspenStories* #15 was renumbered as #1 midway through the print-run. *Two-Fisted Tales* kept the old numbering, and *Haunt of Fear* started over with #4.

Apparently the very first "New Trend" issues didn't do well. Maybe readers or newsstands didn't know what to make of them. It was the second and third issues that took off.

And those issues *did* take off.

But they didn't set any records—that's another myth. Oh, they sold better than anything else that EC had published up to that point, but EC was a small and unsuccessful company. Their sales appear to have been in the 400,000-copy range, while Lev Gleason's *Crime Does Not Pay* regularly topped a million. (The cover claim of five million readers for CDNP was based on a survey that indicated after hand-me-downs, trades, and so on, at least five kids read each copy.)

Some people seem to think that, during the early 1950s, horror comics were as dominant as super-hero comics are now. This was simply not true.





Axes Of Evil

As in the case of EC's *Crime Suspense* and *Shock Suspense*, which were likewise devoid of supernatural occurrences, some of Atlas' pre-Code non-fantasy titles contained elements of horror. Case in point: the Sol Brodsky cover and George Tuska splash panel from *Men's Adventures* #24 (Nov. 1953). [©2010 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

At the peak of the market and the peak of the horror craze, in late 1953 and early 1954 (just before the boom-and-bust cycle went bust), there were about 500 titles on the newsstands; about 75 of them were horror—less than a sixth of the total. The others included super-heroes, science-fiction, Westerns, crime, jungle comics, funny animals, teen humor, romance—a whole range of genres. Horror might have been the single largest genre for maybe six months or a year in there somewhere, before it all came crashing down; many of those 75 titles were started in '53 or '54 and only lasted a couple of issues. There were probably more Westerns than horror comics even at the peak of the horror craze.

Still, all those disclaimers notwithstanding, starting in 1950 there really was a craze for horror comics. Whether EC's three titles began it or were simply in the right place to cash in on it, I don't know—nobody does.

Whoever was responsible, plenty of publishers were quick to try to get a piece of the action. Those who were already doing horror had a head start, of course.

Atlas Shuddered

Timely/Marvel/Atlas expanded rapidly. *Suspense*, based on the popular CBS radio series, shifted emphasis from crime to horror as of the third issue. A teen humor title, *Teen Comics*, became *Journey into Unknown*

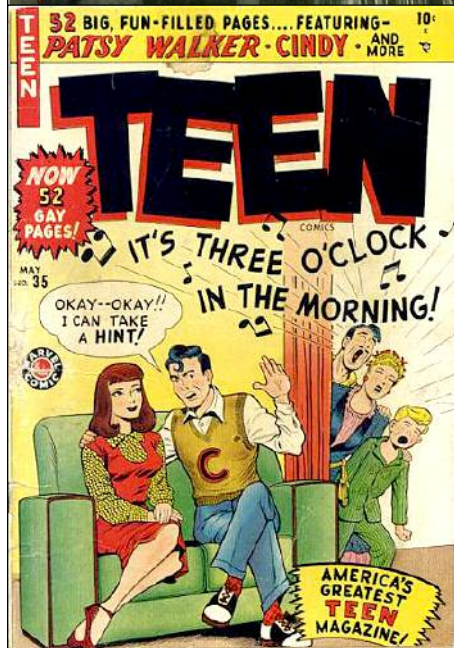
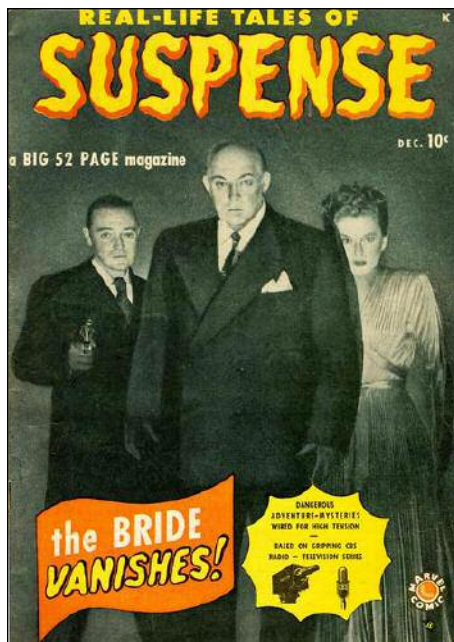
Worlds as of #36, dated Sept. 1950; *Joker Comics* became *Adventures into Terror* as of #43, Nov. 1950. (Both of those later adjusted their numbering.)

The Atlas philosophy seemed to be "as much as the market will bear"; when they found something that sold, they'd keep on adding titles until the sales per title actually dropped. (Some things don't change—or at least, they recur. Timely/Atlas is now Marvel, of course, and... well, have you counted how many *Spider-Man* titles there are out there?)

The public's appetite for horror was immense; proto-Atlas kept adding titles for quite some time. When 1951 rolled around they already had *Marvel Tales*, *Suspense*, *Journey into Unknown Worlds*, and *Adventures into Terror*, but they soon added *Mystic*, *Astonishing* (it started out as a science-fiction/super-hero title, but switched to horror), and *Strange Tales*.

And in 1952 they added *Amazing Detective Cases* (formerly a crime title, as you might expect, but for its last four issues, #11 through #14, it was pure horror), *Adventures into Weird Worlds*, *Mystery Tales*, *Spellbound*, *Journey into Mystery*, and *Uncanny Tales*.

Finally, in 1953, as the market reached saturation, Atlas only added one title: *Menace*. And they'd folded *Amazing Detective Cases*. At their peak, therefore, they were publishing thirteen horror titles. (They



dropped *Suspense*—probably because they didn't want to continue paying CBS for the license—shortly after adding *Menace*; that brought them back to twelve.)

EC fans who think the Atlas line of horror comics were mere imitations of EC mags will please notice that Atlas' titles, as listed above, generally looked a lot more like ACG's *Adventures into the Unknown* than like EC's *The Vault of Horror*. If Atlas was imitating anyone, it was ACG.

EC started with three horror titles, and stayed at three, though they did add *Shock Suspense* stories, which included some horror, in 1952, and were planning a fourth title, *Crypt of Terror*, when the market collapsed in 1954. Their two science-fiction titles, their two crime titles, and even their pair of war books often had a horrific tinge, as well.

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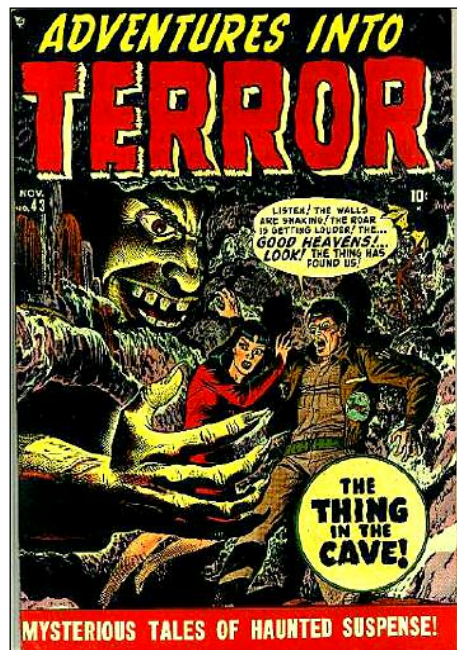
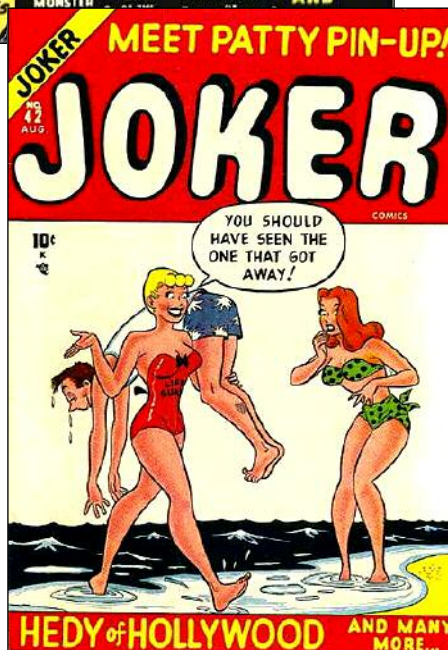
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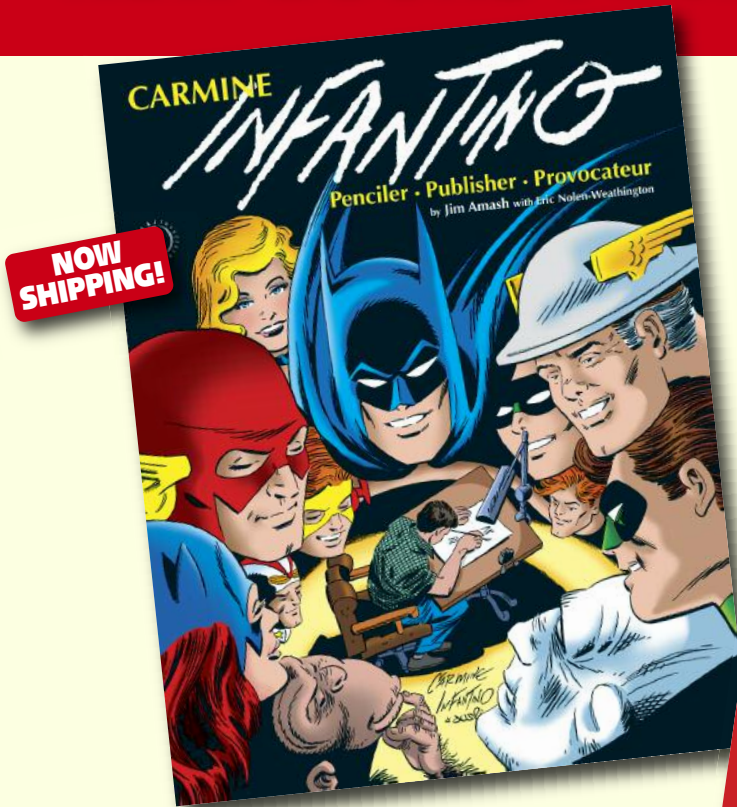
Metamorphoses Worthy Of Kafka

As the horror boom gained traction, Timely publisher Martin Goodman directed editor Stan Lee to alter the contents and usually the titles of various mags dealing with "out-dated" genres. Compare *Suspense* #1 (Dec. 1949) to #3 (May '50)... *Teen Comics* #35 (May '50) to the science-fiction-oriented *Journey into Unknown Worlds* #36 (Sept. '50)... and *Joker Comics* #42 (Aug. '50) to *Adventures into Terror* #43 (Nov. '50). Over the following year, *Journey into Unknown Worlds* evolved from sf to sf/horror to straight horror, as did one or two other Timely titles... which by then bore the Atlas globe emblem pictured at right.

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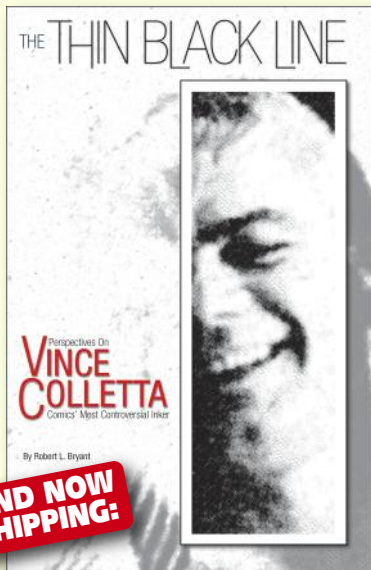
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