THE WEIRD WORLD OF EERIE PUBLICATIONS

Comic Gore That Warped Millions of Young Minds!

by Mike Howlett

Introduction by Stephen R. Bissett

Feral House
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THEY PULLED THE CLUB OUT OF MY HAND. EEEEEEEEEE! MY L-LEGS! BITEN SO I CAN'T STAND UP! PAT! D-DON'T LEAVE ME TO THEM! QHHHHH!

I'M COMING, DARLING! AS SOON AS I DRIVE THESE OTHERS AWAY, I CAN'T FIGHT ALL OF THEM AT ONCE!

SQUEEEEE-- SQUERRR--

YEEEEEEEEEE, THEY'VE GOT ME! EATING ME ALIVE! D-DON'T LEAVE THEM! AAAAAAAAAA--

FILTHY CREATURES, I'M COMING, PAT! BE THERE IN A MINUTE! KEEP ON FIGHTING!

BUT... YOU! BLOCKING ME OFF, KEEPING ME FROM GETTING TO LORNA! I'LL CLUB YOUR FIENDISH BRAINS OUT!

SQUEEEEE--

AND... GAAAA--IT--IT IS! ALL THAT'S LEFT OF MY W-HIFE! THOSE BRUTES PICKED HER POOR BONES CLEAN IN A MINUTE!

NO LONGER DOES PAT TRY TO ESCAPE! HE TURNS, AND CLUB READY FACES THE BLACK HORSE THAT CREEPS TOWARD HIM...

COME, YOU MURDERING CREATURES! YOU'LL GET ME SURE, BUT I'LL MAKE JELLY OUT OF SOME OF YOU FIRST!

IT DID NOT LAST VERY LONG! THE CREW OF THE DISTANT SHIP COULD NOT HEAR HIS CRIES AS THE LIVING ALEPH WAS STRIPPED FROM HIS BONES! BUT IN THE END, BY SOME STRANGE CHANCE, THE ANTS PLOWED THE SKELETONS TOGETHER AND LEFT THEM IN DEATH AS THEY HAD BEEN IN LIFE! PERHAPS THEY KNEW...

THE END
I ADMIT IT: I am cursed.

I have been cursed since childhood.

If you know what’s good for you, you’ll stop reading right now. You’ll stop reading this, and you won’t read another page of this book.

In fact, if you really care for your soul and well-being, you’ll destroy this book right now.

You see, I bought the first issue of Myron Fass’ Weird off the newsstand back in 1965.

Forgive me, please. What did I know? What could I have known? I was only 10 years old (I wouldn’t turn 11 until 1966), and it was a tough decision to make—but in the end, I bought that damned, cursed magazine and brought it home.

I brought it home and I brought it into the room I shared with my older brother Rick and I let it infect me.

Little did I know at the time that it was a disease, a malignancy, and that I was cursed.

Little did I know that buying Weird’s first issue meant I would forever haunt the newsstands searching for another issue, and another, and another, and then the other Eerie Publications horror comics magazines.

Little did I know that I’d be irrevocably infected by something so truly insidious,
I didn’t lose any sleep over *Weird’s* first issue. The contents page said it was “Vol. 1, No. 10,” and all I could wonder was how much worse the earlier nine issues could have possibly been. I did wonder, later, how did I miss nine issues of something like this? But that didn’t bother me; I figured if #10 looked as cheesy as it did, the earlier issues must have been so bad that Vincent’s Pharmacy just wouldn’t allow them on the newsstand.

So, you see, I was there from the beginning, though at the time it was just another odd eruption on the racks in Vincent’s Pharmacy in downtown Waterbury, Vermont. *Weird Vol. 1, No. 10* blighted the racks during a season of many such eruptions: the monster magazines had been coming thick and fast since 1964, and it was tough to hold onto my pennies long enough to afford yet another magazine, particularly one my mother and father might consider suspect.

And this particular monster magazine was *mighty* suspect, especially to a discerning customer like yours truly.

And that was what made it so—needed.

It really looked like it sucked, and sucked in a *bad* way, like something I *shouldn’t* take home with me, like a strange cocoon or a waterbug in a jar, a white pouch of spider eggs or a wasp’s nest or a bare forked branch wrapped with tent caterpillar webbing (of course, I had brought all of those home at one time or another).

mind-rotting and strangely non-contagious (anyone I ever showed these zines to simply waved them off, asking what I saw in them anyway).

Would I have still plunked down my 35 cents if I’d known what I was in for?

You bet your ass I would have.

Mind you, when I bought that first issue, I didn’t know it was the first issue. Buying *Weird #1* would have been a no-brainer, even in those pre-collector days. I bought any and all monster magazines’ debut issues, if only to see what they might turn into. But the first issue of *Weird*, just like *Eerie’s* exquisite first issue, *wasn’t a number one*. *Eerie’s* first issue—the first I saw and bought, the first listed in the back issue pages where you could mail-order what you’d missed—*was Eerie #2*, and that was a unsolved mystery that prompted sleepless nights for years.
There were a lot of things that defined *Weird* as a “suck” horror comic magazine, especially when compared to the clearly superior *Creepy* and *Eerie*.

First of all, there was that absolutely crappy cover, painted (well, drawn and partially painted) by God-knows-who (or, to be more accurate, Myron-Fass-knows-who). It had none of the evocative conviction or power of the Frazetta *Creepy* and *Eerie* covers, which completely seduced the eye. It looked rough, rushed, unfinished.

Even at age 10, I didn’t think magazines could or would look like this. How could it have even reached the newsstand, much less cost money, looking like this?

Whoever did the *Weird* #10 cover either didn’t have time or didn’t care to finish the illustration. It showed a crudely watercolored outsized Frankenstein’s Monster staggering up a line drawing of a city street and sidewalk. The background, such as it was, was splashed with an amorphous blue and purple mess of color. The hapless citizens—stumbling in the street behind the monster, screaming in the foreground, and even the poor sap plunging to certain damage and/or death from the monster’s open hand—had been sketched in and inked, but they weren’t even rendered or colored. Well, OK, the one screaming guy in the foreground had a smear of darker blue/violet watercolor splobbed onto him. I remember thinking, “well, at least they stayed inside the lines,” like it was a page from one of my younger sister’s coloring books.

Furthermore, there was an undefined splash of white (with yellow/tan lines on one side) erupting from the top of the monster’s left leg. Was it a shell detonating on the monster’s hip, fired from an off-panel cannon? A splash of water? His hip bursting with lightning-like energy? I was too young to have thought of this bizarre jizz-like explosion as representing the monster’s semen or ejaculate—that guesswork came (pun intended) later in life, when I stumbled on the issue amid my stash of better monster magazines.

On the other hand, *the cover got me to buy the magazine* (and as I tell my students at the Center for Cartoon Studies, that is ultimately the purpose of any comic book, magazine or book cover).

In 1966, 35 cents was a fair amount of swag for a kid to drop for such an ugly item—I could have gotten three color comic books and a candy bar at the same price. But I’d never seen anything like this magazine. You could see the pencil lines under the watercolor and ink lines—you could see how the cover had been drawn, even if it hadn’t been properly completed. There were drawing secrets here. This was a curious goldmine for an aspiring young cartoonist, requiring further scrutiny than I could possibly get away with in front of the magazine rack at Vincent’s Pharmacy—and then there was all that festered inside.
The Weird World of Eerie Publications

Enquirer newspapers I would find at my aunts’ and uncles’ houses. Damn, those were ugly things, those early 1960s issues of the Enquirer and its imitators: burnt corpses, decapitated car crash victims, dead people and mashed skulls and bullet-riddled criminals on the covers, worse photos inside.

Weird was like those—it even felt dirty. I would literally have to wash my hands after reading this comic! This was as close to “toxic” as any comic book I’d ever seen, and its arsenic allure was strangely irresistible.

Sick as it sounds, it was love at first sight.

The stories weren’t that toxic, as it turned out. I read them without a single nightmare rippling through my sleep. Even flipping through the magazine today, I can see why they didn’t really get to me—vampires, witches, flying decapitated heads and hoo-hah like that didn’t really register with me, not then and not now.

There was just one story in Weird #10 that I enjoyed and even copied panels from. It was the wacko mummy story “The Terror of Akbar.” My later studious reading of any horror fiction I could lay my hands on proved this was pretty derivative stuff: short stories about mummy curses—and, yes, mummy eyes were so popular, there was even a silent movie about mummy’s eyes, Die Augen der Mumie Ma (1918), directed by none other than Ernst Lubitsch and starring Pola Negri and Emil Jannings (!). At age 10, however, this
The wacko mummy tale
“The Terror of Akbar”

A STARTLED POLICEMAN
SUMMONS HELP...

A TOMB OF SOME SORT!
THE FOOLS WILL NEVER FIND
AKBAR IN THE DARKNESS OF
A TOMB! I—(CHUCKLE)—
KNOW MUCH OF TOMBS!

WHAT IS IT?
DUNNO, BUT
IT'S DANGEROUS! DON'T TAKE ANY
CHANCES!

I AM AKBAR,
FOOL! GUARD YOUR
TOMB ENTRANCE,
BUT DO NOT TRY TO
STOP ME! I AM A
HIGH PRIEST.

SUDDENLY THE
GROTESQUE
THING SLIPS
AND FALLS...

MY EYES! WHERE ARE THEY?
I MUST HAVE MY EYES!
HELP—HELP—SOMEONE
HELP ME FIND MY EYES!
YAAAAA—AGAIN I AM
BLIND!
was all new to me. It was bleakly funny how the mummy’s disembodied eyes moved on their own, how the eyeless mummy (splotches of black ink dripping from his jaws and hollow sockets) went stalking his eyes, and how—once he got ‘em back in his skull—he stupidly fell on a subway platform (which he mistook for a tomb) and sent his orbs rolling onto the tracks, where he was crushed by an oncoming train. This was dumb, dumb, dumb stuff. Still, I loved the story; as an adult, I gleefully reprinted a few choice panels in *Taboo 1*.

It was the next couple of issues of *Weird* that started to get to me. With the exception of the messy lead pen, ink and wash story about Frankenstein’s Monster in *Weird* #10 (the only new material in the issue, as it turns out, credited to “Elwood & Burgos,” as in associate editor Roger Elwood and editor Carl Burgos) and the inside-front-cover single-pagers (most likely by the same writer/artist team), most of the stories had the same relentlessly bleak tenor, tone and look.

•••

I had no idea I was in fact enjoying my first exposure to pre-code horror comics material from the early 1950s. *Weird* and its successors—more about those in a few paragraphs—were composed primarily of reprinted, ink-splattered output from Jerry Iger Studios originally published between 1950 to 1954 in Ajax-Farrell comics *Fantastic Fears, Voodoo, Haunted Thrills* and *Strange Fantasy*.

Like all kids who read comics, I had no idea at the time where this stuff came from. I hadn’t a clue who or what was behind *Weird*—I only knew that I was cursed, and doomed to stupidly buy and read *Weird* as long as it existed.

I’ve since learned how this all fits together, and you’re about to read the inside scoop (Mike Howlett will walk you through the whole checkered story—unless you took my advice right from the beginning and stopped reading this accursed tome! But you haven’t, have you? Have you??? You fool! FOOL!!!!).

I have also since tracked down and compiled a modest collection of those pre-
Introduction

It turned out that Eerie Publications was helmed by magazine mogul Myron Fass, who himself drew plenty of pre-code stories and covers, and Robert W. Farrell, another veteran of the pre-code and post-code comics industry.

Robert W. Farrell’s career arc began with the birth of the pamphlet-format four-color comic books in the 1930s, as a writer for Iger Studios, a partner with comics publisher Victor Fox, and a full-fledged publisher (Superior, Farrell, Four Star, Ajax, etc.). Myron Fass labored among the freelance comic book artist pool from 1948 until 1955, grinding out readable but unexceptional covers and stories in all genres: Westerns, romance, jungle, espionage, action, crime and horror comics. I’ve stumbled onto Fass’ signature in comics from a plethora of publishers, primarily among the likes of Toby, Gleason and Trojan, but occasionally popping up in Atlas (later better known as Marvel Comics); he was at best a journeyman, at worst a hack.

I’ve never read an account of how Fass and Farrell met; it’s likely that Fass at some point worked for Farrell during his freelancing as a cartoonist. Suffice to say that sometime after 1955 Fass made the leap into editing, packaging and eventually publishing his own magazines, beginning with the MAD imitation Lunatickle (published by Whitestone Publishing) and saucy sex rags like Foto-Rama. Somewhere before the ’60s, Fass and Farrell joined forces; by then, Fass had already packaged and published the cheesy faux-monster magazines Shock Tales (1959). Only after I was working professionally in the comics industry myself did I hear or read anything about Fass. I was later told by one of the artists who contributed to Fass’ Heavy Metal knockoff Gasm that Fass ruled over his Manhattan office bullpen with a loaded .44 Magnum jammed into his pants. Before the end of the 1990s, the most comprehensive article I’d ever found about Fass was “I, Myron” by Mark Jacobson in The Village Voice (October 23, 1978), which confirmed the Magnum reign of terror and revealed much about Fass’ empire, sadly without discussing at all the infamous horror comics Fass continued to publish.

However they came together, however it all happened, it’s obvious Farrell and Fass reveled in the horror comics, and always sought a way to bring their small ocean of horrors back to market. While most publishers fled the genre after the imposition of the Comics Code Authority at the end of 1954, Farrell and Fass soldiered on, with Farrell reprinting heavily censored Code-approved versions of his horror story backlog in 1957–58 as Strange, Dark Shadows, Strange Journey and Midnight. Those are barely readable; once packager Russ Jones, editor Archie Goodwin and publisher Jim Warren showed the way anew with the successful launch of Creepy and Eerie, Fass
and Farrell repackaged uncensored, sloppily-toned and gored-up versions of the venerable Iger Studios file material for *Weird*.

The times had changed. Instead of toning down the art, Farrell, Fass, Myron’s brother Irving Fass (art director) and editor Carl Burgos (creator of Atlas/Marvel’s original Golden Age *Human Torch*, among other chestnuts) spiked the horror quotient by slashing white-out drool and thick, black ink blots of gore onto stats of the pre-code art, making it more tactile and grotesque than it had been in its original four-color form. Farrell listed his own name as publisher on the contents page bylines of the earliest issues of *Weird*, but he soon moved on.

I should also mention Myron Fass and Carl Burgos also collaborated in 1965–66 on their own original four-color comics. Under the company name of M.F. Enterprises (the same imprint behind Fass’ crap 1959 monster magazine *Shock Tales*, among others), Fass, Burgos and writer Roger Elwood packaged and published six ill-fated issues of their own take on *Captain Marvel* (1966–67). In their incarnation, Captain Marvel was a superhero whose rather ghoulish power was the ability to make his head and limbs separate from his torso and fly to their target (“Split!”); it was arguably the strangest and least appealing of all 1960s superheroes in a crowded field jam-packed with unappealing contenders. Fass also published a short-lived *Archie* teen comic book knockoff by vet cartoonist Bob Powell entitled *Henry Brewster* (also published under the suggestive title *Jumbo Size Henry*). I’d read the first issue of the Elwood/Burgos *Captain Marvel* at my Duxbury classmate Jeff Parker’s house, but had no desire to seek it out for myself. Once was enough.

Obviously, most American kids felt the same way.

All Fass’ four-color comics folded—only the black-and-white horror Eerie Publications horror comics zines thrived and survived.

It had to have been the curse that kept them going, and kept idiots like me buying and reading them…
Crude as almost all these Eerie Publications stories were and remain, in their blunt, thuddingly literal cruelty there was an aesthetic perfectly attuned to the times. Though these were stories essentially a decade old, they were perfectly timed for rebirth: we were ready for them in the 1960s. After all, our President had been assassinated, and then his alleged assassin was assassinated right before our eyes, on television (and if we missed it, that video was played and replayed until we would never, ever forget it). We were living in a cruel new decade of civil rights protests and violence, the escalation of the Vietnam War and rumblings from a new youth movement that seemed positively tribal in nature.

How did that spill into our homes? It was on the TV news every night. We couldn’t escape it.

It also changed everything in the pop culture. If you were a kid, the first rumbles were the gory full-color *Mars Attacks* and *Civil War* bubblegum cards. If you were a kid like me, you also had convinced your parents it was OK to stay up late at night to watch 1930s and 1940s horror movies on television, and you kept your eye on the newspaper ads for a whole new breed of horror movie. Only a couple of years before the debut of *Weird*, low-budget horrors like Joseph Green’s risible *The Brain That Wouldn’t Die*, James Landis’ harrowing *The Sadist* and the collaboration of skin producer David Friedman and Florida huckster Herschell Gordon Lewis on *Blood Feast* heralded a new era in horror. The first of a rough new breed were upon us, sans a handy label to aid in either their marketing or banishment. Like Fass and Farrell, cheapjack filmmakers like Green, Landis, Friedman and Lewis were at heart hucksters hoping to turn a quick buck, pulling out the stops to show mayhem on the big screen that was a new and novel extreme in 1962–63. It worked, and the bloodgates were open, never to be closed.

For the most part, kids were initially sheltered from such cinematic atrocities, though I vividly recall the ads in the newspaper for all these films and the ache to see what I was not permitted to. The first of this forbidden breed I would get to see with my own eyes was *2000 Maniacs*, and it fried me. I had accidentally been exposed to *2000 Maniacs* at a drive-in during a family out-of-state trip the same
“No escape” was the operative term: there was no escape from the bloody images 2000 Maniacs burned into my brainpan, no escape from the addictive reruns of The Brain That Wouldn’t Die, and I have to say the grisliest fare in Weird similarly branded me, too.

• • •

If I had to cite just one Eerie Publication story that forever marked me, it would be “Black Death” in Weird #12 (October 1966). I had no idea it was a reprint when I read it at the tender age of 11, nor would have that mattered a whit: it was one of the bleakest horror stories I’d ever read up to that point in my life, and it troubled me for days.

“Love, they say is like dying a little! So if two lovers must die, what better way than to die together, hand in hand?” So begins the tale of a shipwrecked honeymooning couple, stranded on a remote isle. Its beaches sport odd cone-shaped sand formations, the surrounding sand peppered with unidentifiable claw prints. By page three, the cause of the claw tracks and denizens of the sand cones are revealed: they are ravenous lion-sized ants, and the couple is on the menu. They fight valiantly, but they are eventually overwhelmed: she is dragged away and picked clean to the bone, while he beats as many of the insects to death as he can before he, too, is reduced to a skeleton. “But in the end, by some strange chance, the ants
dragged the skeletons together and left them in death as they had been in life! Perhaps they knew…”

I kept revisiting the story, trying to sort out why it was so disturbing, why it struck such a deep nerve. It was badly written and the art was competent at best (the mewling ants were ungainly lumps with minusculine heads and what appeared to be broken sticks for legs), but every time I reread it, my unease only mounted. It didn’t matter that these people were good people who loved one another: there was no escape, no exit, no salvation or redemption. They fought hard; utterly devoted to one another to the bitter end, but the ants got ‘em. They died horribly, eaten alive, leaving the ants to feed another day—and the last shot of their skeletons side by side (hers, of course, still sporting her complete head of hair) only made things worse, as if the ants knew they were young and virile and in love and fucking ate ‘em anyways. I loved it, though I knew I shouldn’t.

OK, it’s lame stuff. But I tell you, this stupid little comic story affected me. It still bothers me when I just think about it.

That entire issue of *Weird* was an ungainly gem, from the carnivorous flower story that opened the issue (“The Blood Blossom”) to the concluding pair of ghost stories, one featuring a headless walking corpse (“Nightmare”) and the other a *Gaslight*-like tale of a husband driving his wife insane only to be haunted by her vengeful spectre (“Rest in Peril”). The scaly, drooling demon of “Fanged Terror” was pretty cool, and the “Swamp Haunt” story was cool.

But best of all was “Heads of Horror,” wherein a physicist avenges himself on his adulterous wife and her lover by shrinking their heads while they still live, turning them into freakish beings. On the final page, the pea-headed couple turned the tables, tying the scientist up in his lab and shrinking his head before seeing through an improvised suicide pact (“Goodbye! We’re going to kill ourselves! I advise you do the same!”); by the time the cops arrive, he’s a gibbering idiot, consigned in the final page to a freak-show cage.

• • •

None of these were *good* horror comics stories, but they sure were nasty, nihilistic, sexist, misanthropic and to the point. This was bare-boned exploitation in its rawest form, recycling past atrocities without a hint of remorse.
These were also precursors to the modern horror movies and literature to come. The first time I felt in a movie theater the way I had in my bedroom when I first read “Black Death” was when I saw Night of the Living Dead on the big screen.

There was no escape. No exit.

And knowing the young couple in the truck really loved each other only made it worse, as if the zombies knew they were young and virile and in love and they fucking ate ‘em anyways.

Just like those goddamned ants.

Now, I’m not saying Weird was as good as Night of the Living Dead—if anything, Weird was closest to the lurid, sexist bargain-basement lunacy of The Brain That Wouldn’t Die—but I am saying Weird and its clammy “the world’s gone to shit” brand of horror was one of the few pop harbingers of what was just around the corner. Myron Fass and his shoddily printed pre-code reprints groomed and prepared cursed readers like me for where George Romero took us all in 1968 and after.

The curse reached critical mass, and the entire world looked at times like those smeary black-and-gray panels and pages.

• • •
Introduction

I’ve held on to the first eight issues of *Weird* over the years, though I’m not sure why. I would occasionally purge my collection of entire runs of the Eerie Publications titles, but I kept those first *Weird* issues through thick and thin. The magazine never got any better, just more repugnant as Fass, Burgos and Fass kept cranking it out on a roughly bimonthly schedule.

The covers became loopier and gorier, looking more and more like carny freak show posters or hand-painted African movie posters for grindhouse shockers that never existed. They mashed monsters together into nonsensical tableaux of werewolves staking vampires (Vol. 2, No. 3, June 1967) and fishmen and hunchbacks tearing clothing off screaming women while badly-foreshortened male vampires hovered overhead (Vol. 2, No. 6, April 1968).

*Weird* lasted until 1980, as best I can tell (I never saw a new issue after that year). *Weird* had been published for 15 years, and throughout that run it never let up: it was shamelessly, unapologetically dismal and despairing to its final issue.

Some sources claim there was an earlier Eerie Publications experiment with reprinting pre-code horror comics in black-and-white magazine form. The one-shot *Tales of Terror* #1 was cover-dated Summer 1964; according to our steadfast Virgil in this tour of Fass’ Inferno, Mike Howlett, that one-shot wasn’t published by Fass at all; it was a Charlton one-shot. In hindsight, it’s likely there was something being put together by Fass and Farrell in the summer/fall of 1965 that they intended to publish as *Eerie* #1. That pending title had prompted publisher James Warren and editor Archie Goodwin to package and print overnight a few hundred copies of an ashcan-format *Eerie* #1 to secure the title as their own. It was a scam on Warren’s part—they had only placed copies in select Manhattan news and magazine vendors to sway the decisive meeting with a key distributor in their favor—but it worked. Warren couldn’t prevent Fass and Farrell from naming their imprint Eerie Publications, though.

What I believe now, though there’s no way to confirm it, is that what was published as *Weird* Vol. 1 No. 10 was Fass’ and Farrell’s intended *Eerie* magazine. That might even explain the unfinished cover painting, rushed through production in a race to beat their competitor to the pitch. It doesn’t matter—we’ll never really know, will we?
Once *Weird* hit the stands and was apparently a success (obviously, I couldn’t have been the only infected individual), Fass and Farrell kept grinding out the same hash under other titles. The plethora of Eerie Publications companion titles were, if anything, even grottier fare: *Witches’ Tales, Tales of Voodoo, Tales from the Tomb, Terror Tales, Tales from the Crypt* (yep, they were that shameless; William Gaines clamped down on that too-close-for-comfort titular rip-off), the 1977 giant special *Classic Horror Tales* and the abysmal science-fiction/horror hybrids *Strange Galaxy* and *Weird Worlds*. If anything, the covers only got wilder, woollier and more outlandishly insane. Vampires eating werewolves while ghouls ripped bloody eyes out of screaming Mimis were *de rigueur*; the intrusion of science-fiction imagery into the Gothic grand guignol tableaux had begun way back in 1966 (with *Weird* Vol. 2, No. 1, December 1966, featuring a ray gun being held to the head of a bloodied robot in the foreground while an amphibian man carried an unconscious belle in the background), but was in complete overdrive in the 1970s. My all-time favorite remains the cover to *Weird Worlds* Vol. 2, No. 2 (April 1971), in which what appears to be a multi-limbed super-jumbo primate screaming in the void of space is either trying to hold together an exploding planet, or is actually pulling apart or (more likely) humping the planet, causing it to erupt with its super-Kong orgasm. Like I say, it’s hard to tell what might really be going on. But man oh man, *what a cover*.

New artwork began to surface amid the blotchy reprint pages around 1970, though they weren’t a noticeable improvement, it must be said. I’ve traced many to being redrawn pre-code comics scripts, for that matter: Fass was still essentially recycling old material. Eventually, the market was exhausted, and Eerie Publications ceased to exist.

After Eerie Publications vanished from the stands, Modern Day Periodicals continued packaging similar material as *Weird Vampire Tales* and *Terrors of Dracula*. New titles, but it was the same old shit. Only the publishing firm’s name had changed, and maybe the street address.
FREE BONUS!
-a "WEIRD" HORROR MASK!

...CUT ALONG DOTTED LINES, PUNCH THRU HOLES and ATTACH ELASTIC!
For decades, Eerie Publications were easily found at flea markets and occasionally at comic conventions for bargain-basement blowout prices. Nobody gave a royal rat’s ass about them; they were the lowest of the low.

By the 1990s, the once-mighty and unstoppable Myron Fass publishing empire was dwindling, and I lost track of all this weird shit. I stopped seeing Fass’ wonky UFO magazines on the stands and racks, though I was told he was still at it, publishing gun magazines and the like.

Then I saw one of my favorite DVD packagers, Something Weird Video, include random galleries of old Eerie cover art as bonus items on their DVDs. Something was shifting in the pop firmament, something was changing. Magazine and fanzine articles began to appear on both sides of the Atlantic, trying to make sense of the Eerie Publications legacy. Somebody was starting to pay attention to Weird and its abominable kith and kin, because, not in spite, of their gory excesses, rank depravity and splattery kitsch madness.

I read somewhere that Myron Fass had passed away (indeed, he had, on September 14th, 2006, at the age of 80).

I’d outlived both Fass and Weird.

I was at last free, free from the curse!

Or so I thought.

Then I met Mike Howlett in 2008.

Then I was asked to write this introduction.

I bought the last issue I ever saw from the Eerie Publications horror stable in a little country store in Saxton’s River, Vermont. I couldn’t help myself—I was still cursed.

I was with a couple of my friends, and one of them said, “Why are you buying that weird shit?”

“Ya, those zines always did suck,” my other pal said.

“I don’t know, I just love ‘em,” I said, and I meant it.

I still don’t know.

I do love ‘em.

That’s the curse.

• • •
I pulled my old collection out of the boxes, and gingerly looked at those unbelievably cheesy cover paintings.

I began re-reading “Black Death”...


Heaven help you if you’ve read this far. I warned you!

I told you to stop reading right from the beginning—to destroy this viral contagion, this curse between two covers, but no, you dolt, you swine, you dumb-as-a-bag-of-hammers shit-for-brains, you ignored my advice and kept on reading, didn’t you? Didn’t you?? I warned you, and you didn’t listen!!!!

Because, see, when Mike Howlett first mentioned to me he was doing this book, I realized something that was both terrifying and a great relief:

Maybe the curse had always been a contagion; maybe I just lived amid circles of people who had a natural immunity to the contagion (they call it “good taste”).

Or maybe the curse is that we who are cursed are doomed to spread the curse.

Maybe the curse we are afflicted with spreads in a unique way.

Rather than just showing people Eerie Publications, which they could easily dismiss or ignore or shun (as others have all my life thus far), maybe those of us who are cursed have to write about them.

We have to make them sound alluring and interesting, perhaps even valuable or culturally important.

Convinced Mike was onto something, I agreed to write this introduction—and now you are cursed, and Mike and I are free! Free of the curse!! Because now it is yours!!

Believe me when I tell you that once you lay eyes on the contents of this book, you, too, will be marked for life.

There’s no washing the ink from your fingers.

There’s no un-branding your brain.

You are cursed, I tell you, cursed!!!!!!

—Stephen R. Bissette,
Mountains of Madness, VT

A text illustration from “Space Rot”—art by Ezra Jackson
I HAVE TO BE completely honest here…

As a kid in the early 1970s, Eerie Publications weren’t exactly my first choice for horror comic entertainment. I did buy them on occasion, but often as a last resort. I had my priorities; I was a bit of a snob.

Warren and Skywald magazines topped my shopping list. No big surprise there. DC’s four-color “mystery” comics were also a weekly staple. After that, I’d turn to Marvel’s horror reprint titles or Charlton’s ghost comics, both of which glutted the comic rack. If there was nothing else and I still hadn’t scratched my itch, I’d grab an Eerie Pub.

Truthfully, I sometimes couldn’t tell if I’d purchased something new or not. Eerie’s habit of recycling stories and cobbling together previously used cover art confused my already addled pre-teen brain. Once in hand, however, the Pubs always delivered the gory goods, even if they did sometimes seem a bit familiar.

Sadly, my most vivid childhood memory of an Eerie Publications magazine was trading...
forever under-appreciated art started to speak to me. An obsession was born.

I had completed my Warren and Skywald runs and had just a few dozen Eerie Pubs lying around when I saw Chic Stone’s cover for the May 1969 *Weird* for the first time. How this cover managed to evade me until the ’80s is a mystery, but when I saw it, I became a changed person and I had to have them all. Of course, I didn’t realize what I was getting myself into.

One never really knows just how many Eerie Pubs were published. I like to think that I have them all, and have for many years, but I wouldn’t be the least bit surprised to see something heretofore unknown pop up someday. In their heyday, Eerie Pubs were misdated, misnumbered, issues were skipped and titles were dropped, all without

It wasn’t until “adulthood” (in age, if not maturity level) that I began to really appreciate the Eerie Pubs books for what they were. Cheap knock-offs? You bet, but the audacity of the mags themselves, the astounding colors and garish action of the covers, the guerrilla publishing style and the

an issue of *Horror Tales* to my friend Charlie Mondrick for the drag picture sleeve 7” of the Rolling Stones’ “Have You Seen Your Mother, Baby, Standing in the Shadow?”—a trade I would still make today. I have no idea what happened to that record over the years.

I guess we’ve caught the goul! We’ve been looking for snap the handcuffs on him! Ugh! What a friend! He turned out to be and he comes from such a fine family, too.

Now Ellison knew what grandfather Martin suspected about the goul’s identity. You see, grandfather was a goul, too, as were all the eldritch ghouls. That’s why they never sealed their coffins. They wanted the next eldritch goul to have something to eat. Hey! Hey!
Foreword

This line of comics has been the collector’s worst nightmare for as long as there have been Eerie Pubs collectors.

Of course, nothing can be said about Eerie Publications without uttering the word plagiarism. That last sentence, however, will be the only time you'll see that word in this book. Borrowed, swiped, copied, influenced by, inspired by… yes, it’s all true. The practice of reusing existing material may be a little underhanded, sure, but since nobody realized that 98% of the stories were ripped from 1950s horror comics until 30 years after the fact, I’d say that no one was hurt by the practice.

I doubt there’s ever been a more maligned group of comics. Printed on the cheapest possible paper with less than household names providing most of the artwork, people have been slamming these fine publications pretty hard over the years. Only now, in the twenty-first century, are the Eerie Pubs books being recognized by normal folks as worthy comics to collect. Eerie Publisher Myron Fass himself called his magazines “masterpieces on cheap paper.”

Look, I’m not an idiot. I realize that Bill Alexander is no Frank Frazetta and Oscar Fraga is no Berni Wrightson. Warren and Skywald magazines are timeless; their artwork is as valid today as it was in the ’70s. Eerie Pubs, on the other hand, are now being appreciated (in “mainstream” circles at least) as nostalgic and kitschy, a product of their time; a throwback to something that could never fly today. They were (and are) down and dirty like 42nd Street in the ’70s: dirty and dangerous.

I enjoy them for what they are: fun, cheap, gratuitous and entertaining. Some of my favorite films could be called the same thing: Tombs of the Blind Dead (1971), The Gore-Gore Girls (1972), Werewolf vs. the Vampire Woman (1972), Hammer horrors, Santo flicks, and countless Italian zombie movies. I defy anyone to watch the finale of the Paul Naschy flick Hunchback of the Morgue (1973) and tell me that the battle between the hunchback and the primordial creature in an underground laboratory, with Rosanna Yanni laying prone in the foreground, doesn’t look like an Eerie Pubs cover come to life. I like gore, sleaze, horror and lowbrow entertainment, and I’m not afraid to admit it. It all makes me the repulsive creature that I am.

This goes out to all of my fellow repulsive creatures. ✴️
Horror comics died in 1954.

Early in that year, one could choose from over 50 different horror-themed comic books on the newsstand. They were extremely popular. The success of William M. Gaines’ EC comics, who published such legendary titles as Tales From the Crypt and Vault of Horror, popularized the horror genre, and dozens of other publishers jumped on the bandwagon, eager for a piece of the putrid pie. Horror was the comic craze of the early 1950s and newsstands swelled with product. Some of these comics were good, some were lousy, some were mild, and some were wickedly violent. Either way, when the witch hunt started, they all had to go.

Spearheaded by Dr. Frederick Wertham and his book Seduction of the Innocent, the war against comic books was on. Wertham’s book professed that comic books, specifically...
those in the horror and crime genres, were the leading cause of juvenile delinquency. This idea was nothing new. For over a decade, the comics medium had been accused of influencing bad behavior and teaching low morals, but with an outspoken psychiatrist in the spotlight, armed with “proof” of comics’ ill effects on kids, an investigation seemed to be in order.

Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency began hearings in April 1954 to determine if, in fact, comic books were detrimental to children. The hearings got a lot of press, both in print and on television. A relatively new but influential news medium,
TV sets brought the drama right into family living rooms. William Gaines became the industry's whipping boy, as he was the only publisher who took the stand during the hearings, the lone voice in favor of freedom of the press. Certainly he had the most to lose; EC was the most successful horror comic publisher and their books were the industry standard.

The fact that the investigation proved nothing mattered little. The frenzy whipped up by Wertham and the hearings resulted in boycotts and book burnings. Unopened bundles of horror comics were being returned from the distributors to the publishers. The hearings
provided no evidence of comics’ unsavory influence, but the message was loud and clear: comic publishers had to clean up their books.

Gaines was bruised, but not beaten. He rallied his fellow publishers together to come up with a remedy that would be fair and acceptable for the publishers and the public. They formed the Comics Magazine Association of America (CMAA) in hopes of battling censorship and shining up the comic industry’s tarnished image.

Or so Gaines had thought.

The group’s first motion was to ban the words “Horror,” “Terror,” “Crime” and even “Weird” from comics. This wasn’t exactly the solution Gaines had been looking for. Disgusted, he left his own meeting and didn’t join the association.

The CMAA adopted a code of comic book ethics, one that made a real horror comic impossible to exist. Horror, bloodshed, depravity, sadism, torture, cannibalism, vampires, zombies, werewolves, ghouls... in other words, the good stuff... were all prohibited. If a book didn’t conform to the code, the comic wouldn’t receive the all-important seal of approval. Without the CMAA stamp, news dealers wouldn’t display the book.

Gaines’ hands were tied. Ostracized by his
spineless peers, who were seemingly trying to weed out the stiff completion that his books presented, Gaines gave in. EC abandoned their horror titles. In fact, everybody did. Horror comics had died.

**Post-Code**

The end of horror comics came with a whimper, a painful, gurgling death rattle. The last few months of the pre-code era showed a definite softening of the material, and in early 1955, the last of the horror comics had fizzled out. With the strict code in place, family-friendly fantasy fare could be found, but nothing bloodthirsty or even remotely scary was being published. Many comic book companies simply closed their doors.

William Gaines eventually joined the CMAA in order to get his new books approved and stamped. EC attempted to launch a handful of non-horror titles, but all were short-lived. Gaines decided to quit the comic business and concentrate on his one remaining lucrative title, *MAD*, which had been changed to a black-and-white slick magazine, thus bypassing the code.
Gaines did make one last attempt at horror and crime books, EC’s former bread and butter, with their Picto-Fiction line in 1956. The comics were published in magazine format, like *MAD* (which continued to be successful and code-free), but the scars from the furor of 1954 were still fresh in the minds of news dealers, and the books never really got a fair shake.

Some remaining publishers, like Atlas (soon to be Marvel) and Charlton, continued their “horror” titles, but with watered-down, less risky (or risqué) stories. In place of horror was “mystery” and “suspense,” which was neither very mysterious nor suspenseful, and far from horrifying. The code had castrated
the medium and it looked like the cut was going to be non-reversible.

Later in the 1950s, Atlas was specializing in big monsters from space with goofy names and stories of anti-monster heroism that were fun and satisfied some of the appetite for weirdness, but it just wasn’t the real thing. The Silver Age of comics had begun in 1956, and superheroes saved the day for the industry, but...

Horror comics remained dead.

New Hope for the Wretched

In 1957, while genre comics were busy being tepid, chill seekers had a lot to smile about at the movies. American International Pictures were bringing kids back into the theaters with teenage monsters, saucer people and all sorts of gruesome creatures great and small. Meanwhile, Universal Movies brought their old horror movies to television in the wildly popular Shock Theater package. Frankenstein, Dracula, wolfmen and zombies were invading people’s homes through their TV screens. Horror-starved people were eating it up.

The stars must have been aligned, because right around the same time, sci-fi super-fan Forrest Ackerman was in France, buying a few copies of a film discussion magazine called Studio 57. It was a special all-horror issue, crammed with photos of movie monsters. Back home in the USA, he showed his purchase to James Warren, a magazine publisher who was looking for something new. Warren was impressed with what he saw. Monsters were back in the public eye and the time was right for his new creation: a full-on monster magazine. Ackerman was brought on to write and edit the project. His humongous collection of film photos would be put to good use to illustrate his pun-filled prose.

Warren released Famous Monsters of Filmland into the world in 1957 and it was an instant success. Planned as a one-shot, Warren realized that he had a monster on his hands and convinced Ackerman to dig deeper into his collection and stay on board as FM’s
editor. Finally, weirdos and monster lovers had a magazine to call their own. Like EC comics had before it, the success of FM spawned many imitations and competitors. It was once again acceptable (and profitable) to jump aboard the monster bandwagon.

Among the throngs of FM imitators was Warren’s own mag Monster World, FM’s companion title. Starting in November 1964, the first three issues had something special on display: black-and-white horror comics. The stories were adaptations of Universal and Hammer horror films, with artwork by EC alums Wally Wood and Joe Orlando. Though rather tame, scare fans were once again reading code-free horror comics. Warren was only getting warmed up.

How about an all-illustrated horror magazine? It had been tried before on a small scale with Weird Mysteries (Pastime, March/April 1959) and Eerie Tales (Hastings Associates, Nov. 1959), but both of those efforts had failed to make an impact. Warren’s timing was better. Comics had become very popular again and his company was better equipped to make a successful horror comic.

Creepy was born in 1964. The first issue, cover dated January 1965, was the best thing to happen for horror comic fans since the dreaded code had stolen our fun a decade earlier. Creepy featured EC-style stories, Uncle Creepy, a wisecrackin’ host in the style of EC’s fun storytellers (The Crypt Keeper, The Vault Keeper and The Old Witch) and, best of all, new exciting artwork, much of it from EC’s roster of greats. Jack Davis, Wally Wood, Frank Frazetta, Reed Crandall, Al Williamson and other legendary comic artists contributed to early issues. Warren had secured the cream of the crop. Being a magazine, Creepy was also code-free, so werewolves, zombies, vampires, all forbidden fruit to the CMAA, were once again stomping through the pages of a comic book, all in beautiful black and white. This was what horror fans had been waiting for and Creepy was a runaway hit.

Horror comics had finally risen from the grave. ☹️
With Thing with Fangs, A (Romero; redraw "Dinky"—Tales of Terror #6, Mar. Apr. 1953, Gillmor)

With the Edge of Darkness (Romero; redraw "Two—Terror World"—Chamber of Chills #31, June 1953, Harvey)

With Things (Romero; redraw "The Spell of the Devil"—Harper's Horror #4, Nov. 1952, Harvey)

With the Pitch Black (Romero; redraw "The War of the Black Shadows"—Chamber of Chills #32, Aug. 1953, Harvey)

With Wolf (Romero; redraw "The Face of the Beast"—Chamber of Chills #30, July 1953, Harvey)

Wolf Girl (The, The (Romero; redraw "The Wheel of Fate"—Chamber of Chills #19, June 1953, Harvey)

Wolf Man (The) (Romero; redraw "The Wheel of Mystery"—Tales of Terror #3, Oct. 1952, Harvey)

Wolf Tales (Canada; redraw "Book of Vengeance"—Chamber of Chills #42 [4], Dec. 1951, Harvey)