MONSTER MASH

The Creepy, Kooky Monster Craze in America 1957–1972

By Mark Voger

Foreword by Zacherley, the 'Cool Ghoul'

MONSTER

The Creepy, Kooky Monster Craze

THE GENESIS

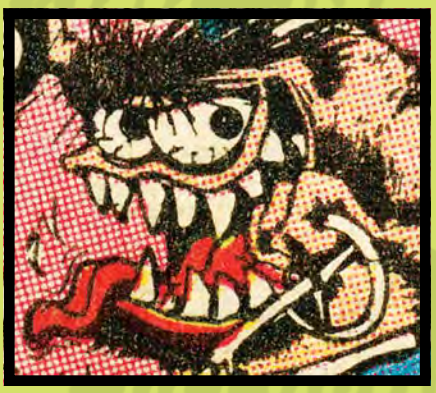
MAINSTREAM INVASION

MOVIE MONSTERS

MONSTERABILIA

TERRORVISION

MOBILE MONSTERS



MONSTERS IN PRINT

MASH
in America 1957-1972

BARNABAS AND FIENDS

THE FINAL CURTAIN

Written and designed by: Mark Voger
Publisher: John Morrow

Front cover: Shock Monster art by Keith Ward (redrafted and colored by Mark Voger); Barnabas Collins © Dan Curtis Productions; "Phantom of the Opera" and "Creature From the Black Lagoon" © Universal Studios; Herman Munster © Kayro-Vue Productions and ™ Universal Studios; Famous Monsters of Filmland © Warren Publishing; "Ugly Stickers" art by Norman Saunders © the Topps Company

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For my big brother Bud (1939-2013), who bought me vampire fangs and told me all about Roland

ISBN (NUMBER HERE)
First printing, (DATE HERE)
Printed in (COUNTRY HERE)

Published by:
TwoMorrows Publishing
10407 Bedfordtown Drive
Raleigh, North Carolina 27614

Inset images, from left: Barnabas Collins © Dan Curtis Productions; Basil Gogos art © Warren Publishing; Reed Crandall art © Warren Publishing; Norman Saunders art © the Topps Company

The man in the long black coat

"We had a makeup man who tried to make me up to look like Lon Chaney as the Phantom of the Opera," said John Zacherle.

Photo by Kathy Voglesong

"SHOCK THEATER" SOUNDS COOL, DOESN'T IT?

But actually, the title of the horror-movie show that debuted at 11:25 p.m. EST on Oct. 10, 1957, over Channel 10 in Philadelphia was a bit more of a mouthful: "The Million Dollar Movie Presents Shock Theater."

The film shown could scarcely have been more appropriate: "Frankenstein."

And neither could the host: Roland (accent on the *"land"*), played by John Zacherle — Presbyterian, Philadelphian, World War II veteran, former cowboy actor.

Roland became a local phenomenon, but before long, Zacherle's national profile would emerge. There was the little matter of a Top 10 novelty song, "Dinner With Drac - Part 1," which peaked at #6 during its seven weeks on the Billboard chart in 1958. Suddenly, the "Cool Ghoul" — as Dick Clark nicknamed Zacherle — was rocking out on "American Bandstand."

A magazine of our own

Like a bat out of Transylvania, FM flew off shelves

IT WAS SENSORY OVERLOAD: FOR THE FIRST time, kids were seeing classic horror films such as "Dracula," "Frankenstein" and "The Mummy," thanks to the 52-film "Shock!" TV rollout in 1957 and '58. And just maybe, they were noticing some cast redundancies among the films. (White-haired, bespectacled Edward Van Sloan, for example, was in all three aforementioned movies, spouting wisdom as professorial types.) Or perhaps they were noticing earmarks in the directorial styles of James Whale or Tod Browning or Reginald Le Borg. Or differences in production values between 1930s and '40s films.

Without realizing it, these youngsters were becoming movie buffs. The more they learned, the more they *wanted* to learn. So if ever a publication came along at the right time, it was *Famous Monsters of Filmland* — a magazine all about monster movies.

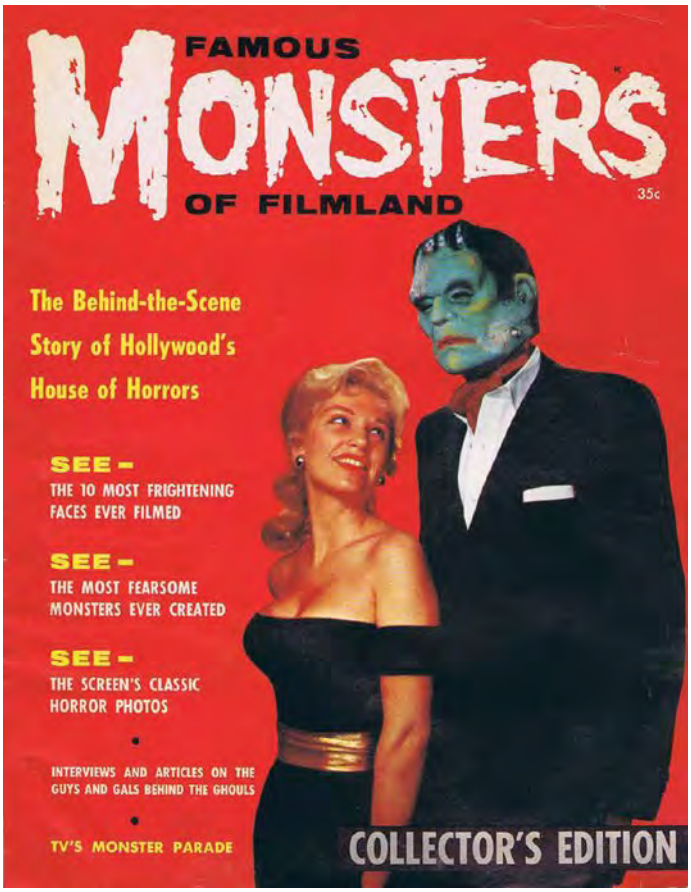
IT ALL STARTED, AS SO MANY THINGS DO, WITH a girlie magazine.

James Warren — a fledgling publisher based in Philadelphia (and an admirer of Hugh Hefner) — put out the *Playboy* clone *After Hours,* for which Forrest J Ackerman, then a writer and writers' agent, was a contributor. In Ackerman's recollection, Warren folded *After Hours* due to some transgression on the part of a partner, but had enough financial reserves to publish one more "one-shot" magazine (perhaps on Marilyn Monroe or Elvis Presley).

"I met Forry through the pages of *After Hours,* which was a shabby imitation of *Playboy,"* Warren told me in 1997. "He was a literary agent for Hollywood-based writers. He had submitted some material for *After Hours,* and I bought it. I liked him right away, because we got along over the phone and through the mail. We both had the same sense of humor.

"We met, finally, in New York City in 1957. He brought back with him, from England, a French magazine called *Cinéma 57*. The entire issue of this magazine was a pictorial history of past and present horror movies — American as well as foreign. I looked through that, and my eyes just opened up wide, because I went back to my youth, to my Saturday afternoon movie matinees, when I saw 'Frankenstein' in 1938 or '39."

While paging through, Warren had a "Eureka!" moment. He recalled: "The more I looked through it, the more I said,



James Warren parodied Hugh Hefner on the Famous Monsters of Filmland #1 cover with an ascot, shapely blonde … and Frankenstein mask. Above left: Cinéma 57, an inspiration from France.

'My God, if the kids out there are gonna respond to this like *I* responded in the movie theaters, we just may be able to take one medium — motion pictures — put it into this magazine, and give them a magazine of Saturday afternoon at the horror movies.'

"I said, 'Forry, can you write this thing for me if I tell you exactly what to write? Are you knowledgeable enough about this?' Of course, I was talking to the man who was probably more knowledgeable about this than anybody on the planet. That was a stroke of terrific luck, because Forry Ackerman was the greatest writer ever created by God to tell the story of the history of horror movies."

The men agreed that a monster-themed publication might sell.

"We looked at each other," Warren recalled, "and I said, 'Forry, I can see a one-shot magazine on this. I love the subject matter and so do you. I'm going to try and get these pictures from the publisher in France.'

"He said, 'Why go to the publisher in France? I've got 'em

The Hef of horror

How James Warren created a publishing empire

IF YOU TURN PROFESSIONAL PUBLISHER AT THE age of 10, is it your destiny to become a publishing magnate?

"I had a newspaper, a neighborhood newspaper, that was printed on a mimeograph machine," recalled James Warren. "I sold it door-to-door for 3 cents each. It was stapled together. Four pages. I did the stapling and the printing and the writing and the artwork and the ad solicitation from the neighborhood stores — a dollar each for an ad, which was a lot of money in those days. So I guess I became a professional publisher at 10."

Eighteen years later, he introduced *Famous Monsters of Filmland,* the flagship magazine of Warren Publishing, the prolific company he founded in Philly and moved to New York. *Famous Monsters* spawned a publishing empire — and countless imitators. I spoke with the Philadelphia native, who was born in 1930, in interviews conducted in 1997 and 2001.

James Warren dressed as a devil in a blue suit for the cover of Famous Monsters #2 (1958).

Q: Give me the nuts-and-bolts — how did you and Forrest J Ackerman put together that first issue of *Famous Monsters?*

WARREN: I picked the categories, laid it out and said, "All right, Forry, this is what we're going to have. We're going to have articles on A, B, C, D and E. Write this, but write it toward an 11-year-old child, because that's going to be our reader." Forry balked, because Forry wanted an adult magazine. All of his life, he wanted to have a magazine on imaginative movies. And here I am putting one together for him, but it was not for adults; it was for an 11-year-old. I forced him to get it down to an 11-year-old, because I knew that we had an audience of 11-year-olds. I didn't know if the adults would buy it. And thus, *Famous Monsters* #1 was born.

Q: You had a background in design, and *Famous Monsters* certainly had its own, unique look. For the record, how much did you have to do with *FM's* look?

WARREN: Everything. Do you need anything past that (laughs)?

Q: Well, tell me about some of the graphic techniques you employed — for instance, all of that "horrific" hand-lettering.

WARREN: I designed the logo. I designed the book. I designed the interior pages. I picked the type. I designed the two-column format. I chose every picture. And I chose the contents of the magazine completely. I even picked out the staples. Do you have any other questions? Some people generally think that the publisher is a big, fat guy who sits up there behind a desk with an accounting background and doesn't know anything about writing or art or production or printers' ink. I came from the creative end; I *became* a businessman. It wasn't the other way around.

Q: Please talk about reproduction. The covers were exceptional — the "bleeds" (trimmed edges), the process color. Your interior pages in *Creepy,* etc., sometimes blended line art (solid blacks) with "halftones" (grays).

WARREN: Those halftones had to be shot in a very special way. It was a process that we developed ourselves. If you're working with a great artist — if Michelangelo walks into your office — you're not just going to say, "Okay, we'll reproduce him the same way we do everyone else." Each guy's stories were shot and burned differently into that offset plate. A Steve Ditko was shot differently from a Jack Davis, who was strictly just black-and-white line — very little wash, sometimes. A (Frank) Frazetta was shot differently from a Reed Crandall.

Q: Why was the reproduction important to you?

WARREN: I always said: If we don't nail them graphically, we're not going to get them into the story. The story has to be good-to-excellent, but the graphics have to be great. And the company was sort of built on that premise. Because I perceived that the generation was changing. They weren't reading the Harvard shelf of books. They were watching a little thing in the living room with a tiny screen. It was called TV. And their attention span was getting shorter. They were used to things happening pictorially and graphically. They were doing less reading and more watching. I saw this

Q: But monsters have been good to you.

ACKERMAN: Oh, absolutely. I'm not going to turn my back on monsters at all, any more than Boris Karloff did. No. It's brought me a great amount of satisfaction. It may seem kind of strange in a magazine devoted to death, doom and dismemberment that I would sneak in little morals like, "Hey, kids, don't smoke, and don't dope, and don't drink." Now, the bread cast upon the waters is coming back to me. Almost daily, I'm getting letters from readers who have children of their own who say, "I never would have paid any attention to anything my dad or mom said, but if Uncle Forry said don't dope, that was gospel." So I guess I must be rather hated by the tobacco industry and the liquor industry for all the customers I lost them.

Q: You've said there was a refrain that James Warren used …

ACKERMAN: Yes. "You may be right, Forry, but I'm boss." So we did it his way.

Q: But you two had a delicate chemistry. You needed each other.

ACKERMAN: I felt that if at any time I walked out on him, there would go 100,000 stills, that he never seemed to realize was an important part of it all — that not only was I providing the memories and the words and revising things that other people wrote and so on, but along with all that editorial came all of these stills. It's taken me from 1930 onward to collect all of those — and special behind-the-scenes things from foreign countries and so on. The magazine never would have been as rich without that treasure load.

Famous Monsters editor Forrest J Ackerman in 2001.
Photo by Kathy Voglesong

Q: Sure. *Famous Monsters* was so visual. Did you have any input on the covers?

ACKERMAN: I had no input whatsoever on the covers. They were always a surprise to me. Aside from, I think, on something like the third cover. Warren wanted to go out to a magic shop and pick up a Halloween skull and put it on the cover. I said, "But, Jim, that has nothing to do with films. It's not a classic monster. By God, if you want a skull, let's put Lon Chaney as 'The Phantom of the Opera.'"

That's one time he didn't say, "You may be right but I'm boss."

Q: What was the perfect issue of *FM* for you?

ACKERMAN: Well, I kind of think the one that had the "Werewolf of London" on the cover (#24) and said "A Forbidden Look Inside the Ackermansion." Also, I liked the Boris Karloff tribute (#56), although it was very sad and I was very mad at Jim Warren. When Boris Karloff was still alive and getting along in age, I said, "Jim, you know, shouldn't we do an issue devoted to him while he's still here and can appreciate it?" And his answer was: "Let me ask you one question, Forry. Which will sell more copies, Boris Karloff alive or Boris Karloff dead?" I said, "But, Jim, do we have to be that crassly commercial? Can't we have both? Can't we do something now while he's alive, and hope he lives four or five more years, and *then* do a memorial?" But in the end, we had to wait for dear Boris to die on February 2, 1969.

Q: Have you thought about what your epitaph might be?

ACKERMAN: I think just a simple statement: "Science fiction was my life."

Monster hit songs

The unholy alliance of rock'n'roll and monsters

THE TWO REVILED DEMON CHILDREN BEGAN TO mate almost immediately.

We're talking about rock'n'roll and the Monster Craze, which exploded around the same time — the middle 1950s.

Wonderful things happened in the 1950s: TV dinners, the Hula Hoop, Marilyn Monroe. But it's no exaggeration to say the '50s was also a time of social paranoia.

The decade's defining event, what history calls the Red Scare, fostered an environment in which mainstream Americans were often mistrustful of anything different, anything that was "other."

As the Army-McCarthy hearings drilled into the proletariat: You are either one of us, or one of *them*.

This atmosphere created the perfect storm for the birth of rock'n'roll, which was all about rebellion and sex and crazy dances.

When was rock'n'roll born? That's a toughie. As you watch the 1938 Andy Hardy movie "Judge Hardy's Children," and Andy disrupts a boring cotillion by coaxing the band into playing swing, the resulting joyful chaos sure looks and sounds an awful lot like rock'n'roll.

Historians have their theories, and their disagreements, as to the moment rock'n'roll was hatched. As for me, I point to July 9, 1955, the day "Rock Around the Clock" by Bill Haley and the Comets became the first song of this embryonic type to hit #1 on the Billboard sales chart. Not just because of the Billboard thing. The song itself seemed like an irrevocable call-to-arms for this new music: *"We're gonna rock, rock, rock 'til broad daylight."*

So — if you'll accept for the moment my theory that rock was born in earnest in 1955 — the Monster Craze followed by a mere two years. Neither phenomenon exactly won universal parental approval. Ed Sullivan famously wouldn't allow Elvis Presley's hips to be seen on his Sunday night variety show. Monsters, as we've discussed earlier, were pointy-teethed, neckbolt-wearing pariahs among the Parent Teacher Association set. It's no wonder rock'n'roll and monsters formed their little unholy alliance.

Above: John Ashley and dancing girls have "ee-ooo" to spare in "How to Make a Monster" (1958).

ANOTHER QUESTION FOR HISTORIANS: when was the first song to combine monsters and rock? Certainly, "Monster Mash" by Bobby (Boris) Pickett — that freaky-funny novelty hit with references to "Wolf Man, Dracula and his son," which went to #1 in 1962 — is the one we remember best.

But there are many precedents.

As more and more living rooms became TV-set-equipped during the 1950s, families were vanishing from movie theaters so they could watch their tiny, blurry screens at home. Fine and dandy for Daddy, Mommy and the tykes, but teenagers needed to get away from their square relations. Drive-in theaters became the perfect modern surrogate for Lovers' Lane. Cars provided cover for fumblings in the dark, and movie soundtracks handily masked any heavy breathing.

Building model citizens

"SHOCK!" BROUGHT MONSTERS TO TELEVISION. ***FAMOUS MONSTERS of Filmland*** brought them to the printed page. But young monster fans yearned for something more tangible. And marketeers hadn't yet caught wise to this need.

So when, in 1960, the Aurora Plastics Corporation of West Hempstead, Long Island — manufacturers of car and airplane model kits since 1952 — conducted its first-ever survey to determine what new kits might attract customers, the answer surprised them: monsters.

That old bugaboo, fear of parental outrage, gave Aurora pause. The story, whether veracious or embellished over time, goes that the company consulted psychologists on the issue, and said psychologists suggested monster models might even be a healthy thing for kids.

Opposite: The cover of Mad #89 (1964). Above: A 1962 ad. Right: Aurora's first monster kit (1961).

Aurora's concerns weren't about backlash alone. There was a substantial financial investment to consider as well.

Bill Bruegman, author of "Aurora History and Price Guide," recalls speaking with Aurora executives about this period. As Bruegman told me in a 2014 email: "The gist of it was, the tooling for these kits was expensive and involved a lot of stages involving other companies, etc., and they wanted to make sure it was worth the initial overhead. The biggest psychological concern, of course, revolved around how the children were going to react to the Creature, King Kong and Godzilla — the naked monsters."

Hmmm ... hadn't thought of *that* one. (Well, Frankenstein, at least, wore pants.)

Famous Monsters publisher James Warren said he, too, pushed the idea to Aurora.

"I sat down with them and they saw what I was doing in the magazine," Warren said. "I told them that if they would come out with model kits of Frankenstein, Dracula, the werewolf, the Mummy, the Creature From the Black Lagoon — these would be phenomenal. They were skeptical. They looked at me like I was crazy, because they didn't know what *I*

Reel horrors

Castle Films' "Doom of Dracula" made it possible to watch Boris Karloff remove a stake from Dracula's heart . . . over and over.

"House of Frankenstein" © Universal Studios; photo by Mark Voger

WATCHING A MONSTER MOVIE WHENEVER YOU want? Without consulting your local listings for time and channel? Without your parents driving you to a theater? *Sweet.*

In the days before home video made such a luxury so common that it is taken for granted, companies such as Castle Films, Ken Films, Columbia Films and Blackhawk Films brought moving monsters into your very home.

All you had to do was turn down the lights and crank up the projector, and you could watch actual classic monster movies — albeit, versions that were silent and heavily truncated.

The 8-millimeter (and later Super 8) prints were generally 200 feet — about 15 minutes long each, according to the ads. The films could be purchased in department stores or via mail order.

Castle Films is the best remembered company, for two reasons. First, Castle had a lock on most of the Universal classics, thanks to a decades-old backstage business deal. Castle was founded by Eugene W. "Gene" Castle, a former newsreel cameraman, around 1918, and the company penetrated the home-movie market in the '30s. In 1947, Castle was gobbled up by a division of Universal Studios, hence, Universal's library was ripe for the picking. Still, it took Castle a long while — 12 more years — to release its first monster movie: "Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein."

DOOM OF DRACULA

Science Fiction at its best as Boris Karloff brings Count Dracula back to life! Realizing his mistake, Karloff plots to seal Dracula's doom. Nightmare of terror. 200' reel. Only $6.95.

King Kong trampled New York. Godzilla blasted Tokyo. Quasimodo poured molten lead on Frenchmen. But let a Martian kill one dog, and there'll be hell to pay.

This axiom was proven when the Topps Company released its infamous "Mars Attacks" trading card set of 1962, which presented blood 'n' guts, torture, mass slaughter, giant bugs — even leering sexual suggestion. The Martian shown groping a terrified blonde in Card #21, "Prize Captive," looks like he's enjoying himself a bit too much.

But Card #36, "Destroying a Dog," was the final straw. It depicted a Martian blasting a famil pooch with a ray gun as a boy looks on in horror. Such was the outrage in test-market areas over the series' visceral — albeit, beautifully painted — images of gore, panic and sexy babes, that Topps yanked the series just as national distribution was imminent.

The controversial 55-card set was conceived, co-plotted and written by Len Brown, a longtime Topps employee who believed the set's abrupt cancellation sealed its legend.

"It just had a short life," Brown told me in 1996, "which, I suppose, added to the mystique. They were always hard to get. The people who saw them, talked about them."

How did "Mars Attacks" come about? Brown, a Brooklyn native born in 1941, explained that Topps earlier released "Civil War News," a trading-card set that was wildly popular with the Beaver Cleaver generation. Was this due to kids' abiding interest in American history? Hardly. The artwork for "Civil War News" was downright gruesome. (The card titled "Death at Sea," depicting an 1862 contest off the coast of Norfolk, is like something out of a Herschell Gordon Lewis movie.)

"We were trying to brainstorm another (non-sport) card set," Brown recalled. "In those days, we didn't put too many out."

He and Woody Gelman, Topps' president, briefly considered a World War II set. But Brown had another idea.

"I was a big fan and collector of the

Above: Card #36, "Destroying a Dog." The mailbox is a homey touch. Opposite: Card #21, "Prize Captive." Um, do Martians like Earth girls that way?

PAUL IS THE CUTE ONE WHO PLAYS guitar. No, not Paul McCartney of the Beatles. Paul with the two eyeball-y heads, from the Topps Company's hair-raising "Ugly Stickers" set of 1965.

The set — which mixed comical and repugnant imagery with aplomb — is often assumed to be the work of artist Basil Wolverton, the Picasso of freaky cartoon monstrosities. It's true that Wolverton contributed 10 of the 44 creatures — his work is eminently identifiable — but other artists, chiefly Norman Saunders and Wally Wood, did the bulk of the set. However, Wolverton's artwork was the set's springboard, and he might have played a larger role but for a dispute with Topps.

David Saunders — the son of Norman, who published the gorgeous 368-page hardback "Norman Saunders" (Illustrated Press) — told Pete Boulay that Topps engaged his father to design creatures in Wolverton's style, which was a wakeup call for the elder Saunders. "They look simple and crude, but they are incredibly well designed," said Norman (as quoted by David). "It's really hard to make something like these."

But the *real* wakeup call for Saunders came when Wood pushed for artist solidarity in Wolverton's dispute. That's when Saunders found out Wolverton's freelance rate was 10 times his.

Topps eventually came to an agreement with Wolverton, and "Ugly Stickers" uglified the world.

Chintzy, cheezy and potentially hazardous, Ben Cooper Halloween costumes were monsterific nonetheless. From top left: Barnabas Collins, the Mummy, the Wolf Man, Frankenstein, Morticia Addams and the Phantom of the Opera.

YOU NEED CHEAPER STILL?

There was always Ben Cooper, Collegeville and Halco, manufacturers of super-chintzy — and, admit it, cool in their way — Halloween getups that often didn't make it through the Big Night.

The "costumes" were glorified aprons (in "rayon taffeta") … the crackly vinyl "masks" were affixed with a rubber band … crossing the street while trick-or-treating was a life-and-death proposition … every kid stuck their tongue through the mask's super-tiny "mouth," despite the likelihood of factory germs.

But, after all, Ben Cooper, Collegeville and Halco did monsters. There's something about that neon-ish, yellow-ish green on the Frankenstein mask that just *screams* Monster Craze, ya know?

Plus, not for nothing, the costumes cost about two bucks each.

All this talk of affordable masks brings us back to those cheapo generic monsters from Topstone. (Frankenstein, Topstone's only mask with a proper name, *was* in the public domain, though Topstone's design came dangerously close to that of Universal.)

These were no-name, no-origin, no-movie, no-nothing monsters concocted to sidestep costly licensing. (Many credit the designs to commercial artist Keith Ward, which I tend to believe, based on observation of illustrations officially credited to Ward.)

Despite their generic status, these orphan monsters became, themselves, classics of the Monster Craze. Their ubiquitous presence in the pages of *Famous Monsters* assured that they would be remembered by a generation of monster fans. They resonated.

The illustrations — if not always the flimsy, floppy, suffocating masks themselves — were chilling. Girl Vampire has a gloomy, hauntingly beautiful visage. She looks angry. She looks evil. What's on her mind? She's our Mona Lisa.

Another mask, the Shock Monster — originally called, simply, Horror — with its rotting face and hanging eyeball, has garnered cult status. I bought one in 1971, when I was in the seventh grade. It had green skin and blue hair. It was really, really rad. When you put it on, it felt a bit claustrophobic. But the aroma of low-grade rubber was ambrosia. It didn't matter that you could barely see or breathe. You were a monster.

Peculiar patriarch

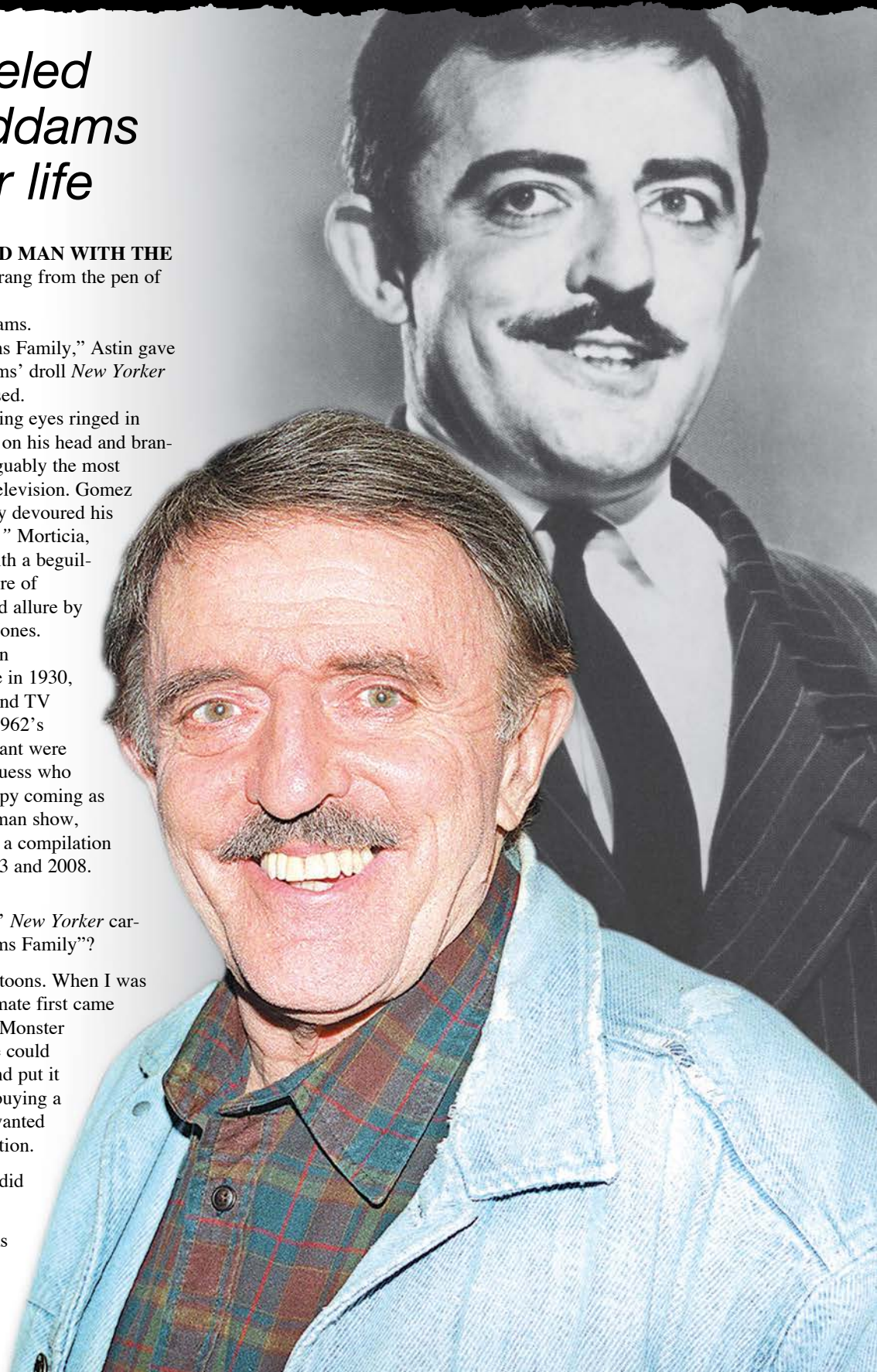
John Astin fueled his Gomez Addams with a zest for life

THE STRANGE, OVAL-HEADED MAN WITH THE jaunty mustache and pin-striped suit sprang from the pen of cartoonist Charles Addams.

But John Astin created Gomez Addams.

On the 1964-66 sitcom "The Addams Family," Astin gave Gomez a zest for life not seen in Addams' droll *New Yorker* cartoons, upon which the show was based.

Astin's animated Gomez wore piercing eyes ringed in black, and an ebullient smile. He stood on his head and brandished a sabre for exercise, and was arguably the most amorously demonstrative husband on television. Gomez practically devoured his *"querida,"* Morticia, played with a beguiling mixture of gloom and allure by Carolyn Jones.



John Astin, shown in 1998, read Charles Addams' cartoons as a college boy.
Photo: Kathy Voglesong

Born in Baltimore in 1930, Astin appeared on Broadway, movies and TV before landing the role of Gomez. (In 1962's "That Touch of Mink," he and Cary Grant were rivals for the affection of Doris Day. Guess who won?) Post-Gomez, Astin kept the creepy coming as Edgar Allan Poe in his acclaimed one-man show, "Once Upon a Midnight." Following is a compilation from five interviews done between 1993 and 2008.

Q: Were you aware of Charles Addams' *New Yorker* cartoons prior to being cast in "The Addams Family"?

ASTIN: I had been a great fan of the cartoons. When I was in college, I remember when my roommate first came home with (the Addams compilation) "Monster Rally." We bought another copy, so we could razor out a panel or two and frame it and put it up. We didn't want to do that without buying a second copy of the book, because we wanted one un-defaced copy in its virgin condition.

Q: In creating the role of Gomez, what did you derive from Addams' cartoons?

ASTIN: When I realized that a series was

Everybody's Grandpa

As eldest 'Munster,' New Yorker Al Lewis was a droll Dracula

WITH HIS LONG BEAK, COMIC MANNERISMS and distinctly Noo Yawk accent, Al Lewis seemed the least likely actor to be cast as Count Dracula. But in some ways, Lewis was a better-known Dracula than his forebears Bela Lugosi, Lon Chaney Jr., John Carradine and Christopher Lee.

That's because even non-horror fans know Lewis' Dracula, thanks to his role as Grandpa Munster.

Lewis with stogie at his New York eatery in 1989.
Photo by Kathy Voglesong

There is confusion over Lewis' year of birth, apparently created by the actor himself, who claimed to be older than he was (!). Many sources put Lewis' birth in 1923, but he indeed told me he had been a circus performer in 1922.

Oh, that Grandpa …

Lewis died in 2006. I interviewed him at his Greenwich Village restaurant, Grampa's Bella Gente on Bleecker Street, in 1989. Good conversation … not to mention, good pasta.

Q: What happened during your audition for Grandpa Munster?

LEWIS: I never auditioned. They just called me and told me they were doing a pilot, and would I be interested? They sent me some scripts, and then I flew out.

Q: Would you say you created Grandpa? For instance, did you elaborate on the character in the scripts?

LEWIS: Yeah. Of *course* I created it. Sure! I mean, there was no previous mold.

The Rat Fink's daddy

HE WAS CALIFORNIAN TO THE CORE.

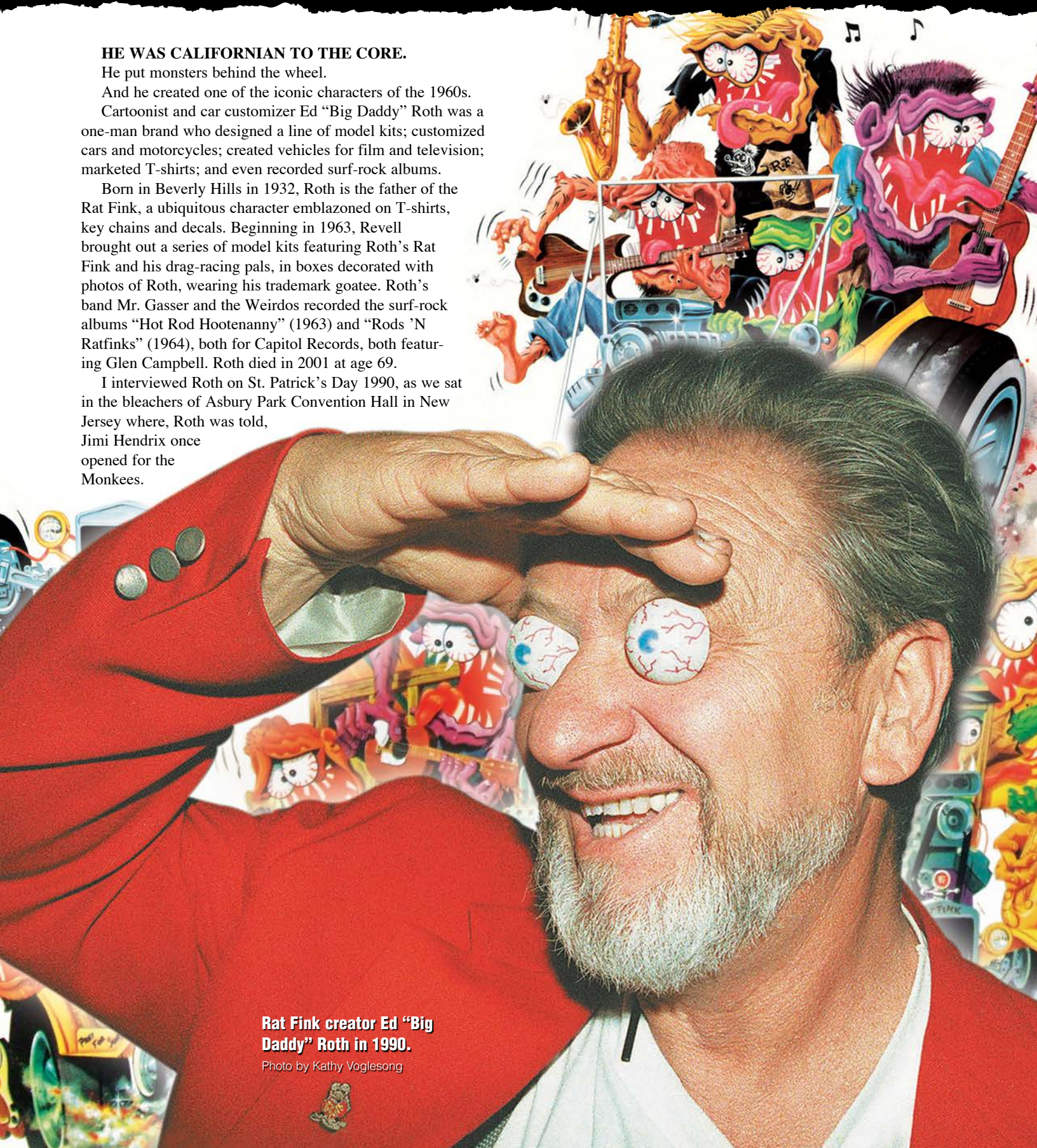
He put monsters behind the wheel.

And he created one of the iconic characters of the 1960s.

Cartoonist and car customizer Ed "Big Daddy" Roth was a one-man brand who designed a line of model kits; customized cars and motorcycles; created vehicles for film and television; marketed T-shirts; and even recorded surf-rock albums.

Born in Beverly Hills in 1932, Roth is the father of the Rat Fink, a ubiquitous character emblazoned on T-shirts, key chains and decals. Beginning in 1963, Revell brought out a series of model kits featuring Roth's Rat Fink and his drag-racing pals, in boxes decorated with photos of Roth, wearing his trademark goatee. Roth's band Mr. Gasser and the Weirdos recorded the surf-rock albums "Hot Rod Hootenanny" (1963) and "Rods 'N Ratfinks" (1964), both for Capitol Records, both featuring Glen Campbell. Roth died in 2001 at age 69.

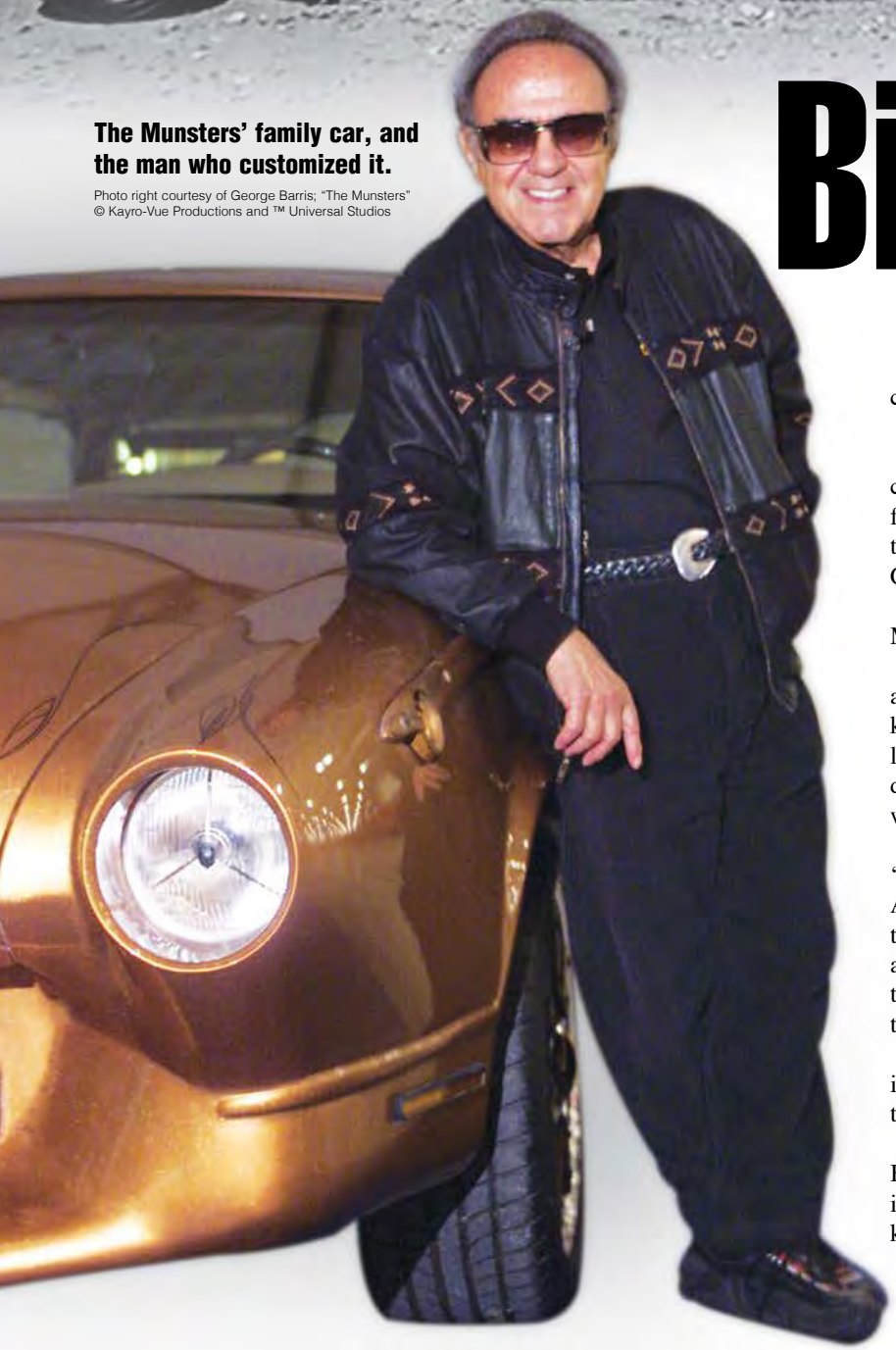
I interviewed Roth on St. Patrick's Day 1990, as we sat in the bleachers of Asbury Park Convention Hall in New Jersey where, Roth was told, Jimi Hendrix once opened for the Monkees.



Rat Fink creator Ed "Big Daddy" Roth in 1990.
Photo by Kathy Voglesong

The Munsters' family car, and the man who customized it.

Photo right courtesy of George Barris; "The Munsters" © Kayro-Vue Productions and ™ Universal Studios



Big wheel

IN THE OCT. 15, 1964, EPISODE OF "THE Munsters," Lily Munster hired a used car salesman to combine a hot rod with a hearse as a gift for her hubby.

In real life, Universal Studios turned to George Barris.

Barris is the man who made Hollywood's car dreams come true. He customized the Munsters' head-turning family car the Munster Koach, as well as the Batmobile, the "Beverly Hillbillies" truck, Liberace's piano-key Cadillac and many other iconic TV and movie vehicles.

The way Barris explained it, creating a car like the Munster Koach involves more than one skill set.

"It's not just being a mechanic and it's not just being an artist," Barris told me in 1997. "You have to have both knowledge and creativity. Psychologically, you have to look at the person or the character that you're going to design a car for. Then you have to work with the screenwriter to say, 'Yes, we can do this. We can spin out here.'

"If somebody hands you a piece of paper and says, 'Draw it' — draw *what?* What are you going to draw? Are you going to draw a car for 'Batman?' Are you going to draw a car for 'The Munsters?' Are you going to draw a car for 'The Beverly Hillbillies?' So to do what I do, that means you become a person who can create a product that follows the whole concept, not just one part."

Barris recalled that when Universal was first developing "The Munsters," a car had already been selected for the show. Luckily, Barris was called to in look it over.

"When they came to me, they came on a Friday," Barris recalled. "They said, 'We've got a new show coming up over at Universal. It's called "The Munsters." It's kind of a funny, humorous show.' They said, 'We have

Uncle Creepy's papa

Russ Jones: Resurrection man for horror comics genre

ANGRY PARENTS AND A SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ran horror comics out of town in the middle 1950s. The founder of the embattled genre, publisher William M. Gaines, was forced to cancel the infamous horror titles of his publishing company, Entertaining Comics. Horror comics were dead — or *were* they (eh, eh, eh)?

A decade later, artist Russ Jones had the idea to gather EC's scattered talent and publish new horror comics in a magazine format, thus side-stepping the censoring Comics Code Authority.

The old EC books had horrific "hosts" such as the Crypt Keeper and the Old Witch. For his new venture, Jones decided to revive that tradition — and Uncle Creepy was born.

Ontario native Jones was born in 1942 and produced cover art for *Famous Monsters* (#30) and *Castle of Frankenstein,* (1967 annual), and contributed plots to the 1967 anthology cheapie "Dr. Terror's Gallery of Horror" starring old-schoolers Lon Chaney Jr. and John Carradine.

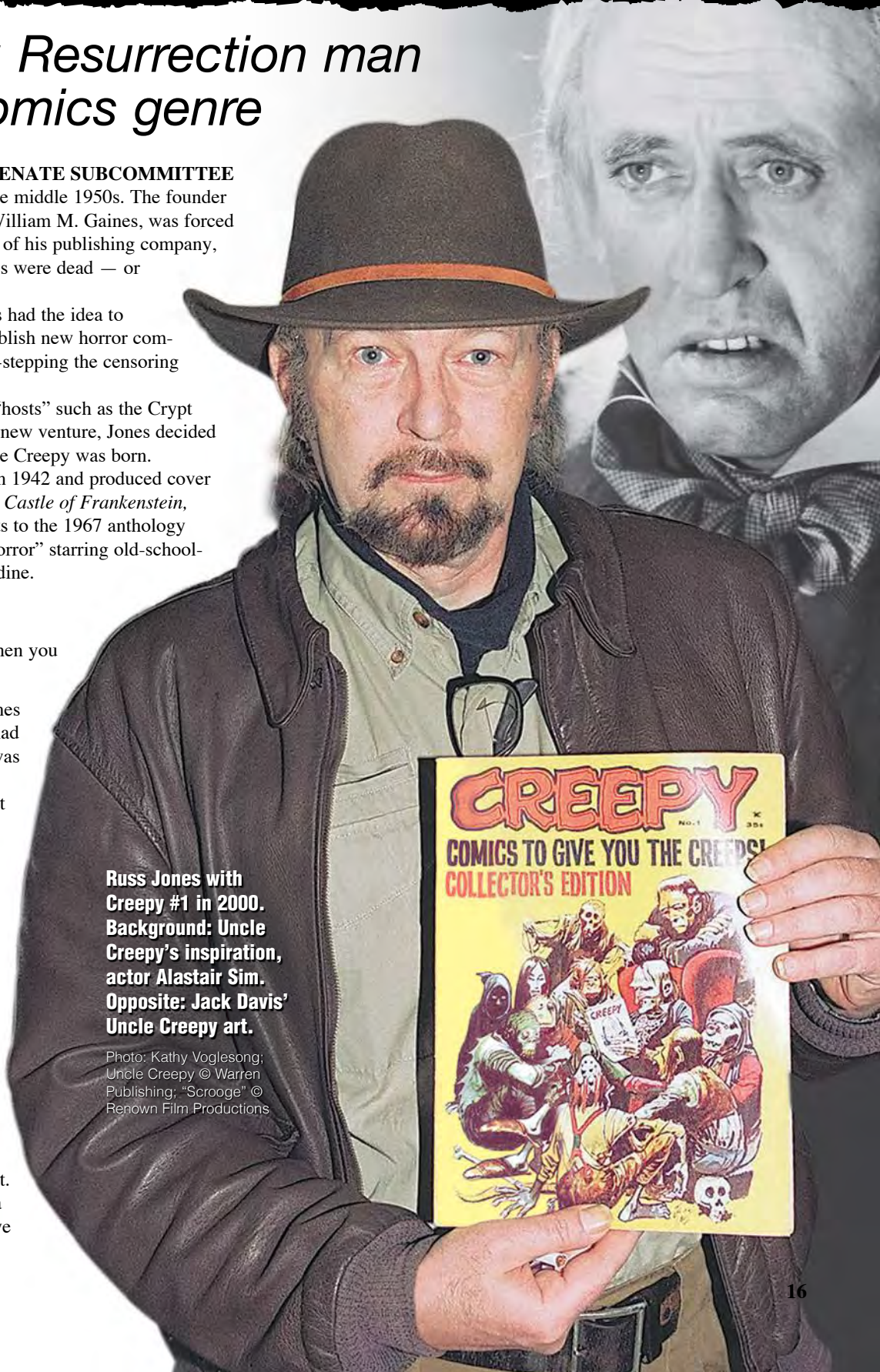
I spoke with the artist in 2000.

Q: What were the circumstances when you first tried to launch *Creepy*?

JONES: Initially, I went to Bill Gaines with the idea. And of course, Bill had had his own problems earlier. He was very supportive. He and (editor Al) Feldstein and the whole group up at *Mad* helped out a lot. And I was working with Jim (Warren), and I was pushing him on it, but he was very slow. Finally, after months and months and months of, shall we say, arbitration and negotiation, we finally decided to come up with it. Jim gave it the green light, and we did it.

Q: Jack Davis drew the cover of *Creepy* #1, but you drew the Uncle Creepy prototype?

JONES: That was the original concept drawing that I sent to Jack. That was kind of a style guide for it. I was sort of aping Jack's style as a joke for me and for him, because we were really good friends.



Russ Jones with Creepy #1 in 2000. Background: Uncle Creepy's inspiration, actor Alastair Sim. Opposite: Jack Davis' Uncle Creepy art.

Photo: Kathy Voglesong; Uncle Creepy © Warren Publishing; "Scrooge" © Renown Film Productions

Jonathan Frid

BARNABAS COLLINS KILLED DESERVING parties and random strumpets in Collinsport.

But he saved "Dark Shadows."

Luckily, the show's creator, Dan Curtis, was out of town when Canadian actor Jonathan Frid (1924-2012) was cast as Barnabas in 1967.

"It was Dan's idea to have this vampire to begin with, way back when," Frid said in 1990.

"But he wasn't in New York at the time they actually cast the role of Barnabas. I doubt whether I ever would have *been* Barnabas if he had been there. Because, he wanted somebody that was very aggressive, very macho and strong and violent, in a sense. But while he was away, the mice played.

"The associate producer, with the writers, decided that they wanted to go for a more complex kind of character, to keep it going longer. Because, they were counting on this character to keep the show going. So I had this meeting with them and we talked about the character. We developed it together."

The ploy worked. The overnight popularity of Barnabas sustained "Dark Shadows."

"The press, of course, made it up to be just a guy with a couple of fangs biting everybody," Frid lamented. "I only did that for about three minutes of the whole five years that I was on the show.

Jonathan Frid, who will forever be remembered as Barnabas Collins, in 1990.

Photo by Kathy Voglesong; collages by Mark Voger; "Dark Shadows" © Dan Curtis Productions

"There were many, many scripts that were terrible, and often, *I* was terrible. Never worse. But the variety of emotions and the complexity of Barnabas made him the most interesting character I've ever played, including Shakespeare. And it was constantly fascinating and surprising to me what I was called upon to do."

By not playing Barnabas as an outright villain, Frid believes he was able to hold the audience's interest.

"He was not just a vampire, not just a romancer," Frid told me.

"He was sometimes evil, too, but everybody's got evil in them. He had evil. He had everything. He was always falling in love; he couldn't stand the woman who loved him. He was passive. He was aggressive. He was angry, and justifiably. Sometimes non-justifiably. He was just like every other human being. He was just another person with a problem — a *couple* of problems. He had a medical problem. He needed blood in his system all the time. And he had to get it quick.

"There are no such things as heroes and villains, you know. And Barnabas was neither hero nor villain."