FANGORIA IS THE MAGAZINE THAT "HAD THE GUTS TO SHOW YOU THE GUTS", AND ITS TROUBLED HISTORY IS INEXTRICABLY ENTWINED WITH THE POST-'70S RISE OF HORROR...

Freddy vs. his creators!

Wes Craven's New Nightmare

Interview with The Vampire: Defending Tom Cruise

Ed Wood: Tim Burton's bizarre bio

The Shawshank Redemption

Stephen King goes to jail

Special Report: Britain bans horror

Introducing our 12th anniversary year!

BIGGEST PREVIEW EVER!
1975, and so we were somewhere in the 12th anniversary. Bruce Campbell’s Ash, having resolved to face up to the undead hordes of Army Of Darkness, has just cracked open the boot of his battered 1973 Oldsmobile Delta 88. Wasn’t it the raidmen of a kick-out-ladies-vanishing kick? There’s gasoline, a large toolbox, shotgun shells, a large pair of pliers, a saw, a chemistry textbook... and an issue of Fangoria.

Based in New York, Fangoria – Fango to its friends – has been a horror mainstay since 1979: “the horror Biblette” according to Sam Raimi, one of a generation of splatter filmmakers that it seized upon and championed early on. Obscured as it is by a Dark Horse Presents... annual, you can’t quite see that Freddy Krueger is on the cover of the (chronologically iffy) most recent issue. Ash apparently had time to buy before he headed up to the cabin in the woods. It’s there as part of a nifty photos and two articles. “It was very cheeky and软,” recalls Chris Alexander. “It opened the doors to new stuff and classic stuff, and it gave voices to all the people making these incredible films. It became a huge part of my life and it never went away.”

IF YOU WERE...

To reach past Ash and Rick through his copy of issue 107, you’d find features on Freddy’s Dead and The Guv’nor, and the FX’s make-up of Tremors 2, and heading up the books was Stephen King’s Needful Things. Eclectic and equal coverage of both large and small releases and a focus on gore prosthetics became the magazine’s raison d’etre soon after its first publication in 14 years ago, and its original remit was less clear.

Fangoria was conceived as a sister title to the successful science-fiction magazine Starlog, which had been on newsstands since 1976. “It started to make money,” is the frank assessment of inaugural editor Ed Naha, a prolific journalist and author who set up the magazine, along with close cohort Ric Meyers (never particularly a horror fan, and now a respected expert in martial-arts movies) and, slightly later, nascent powerhouse Robert Martin. “After the release of Star Wars, Starlog readers turned their noses up at mere sci-fi monster films,” Naha continues. “The publishers (Starlog Group Inc., formed by Starlog’s editor Kerry O’Quinn and his business partner Norman Jacobs) decided to create a new magazine to pick up that slack.” We’d do it on the cheap, since its original remit was less clear.

Fangoria was conceived as a sister title to the 13th anniversary of the magazine. “It was very cheeky and soft,” recalls Chris Alexander. “It opened the doors to new stuff and classic stuff, and it gave voices to all the people making these incredible films. It became a huge part of my life and it never went away.”

While it wasn’t all simply about blood and guts (Martin recalls particular high points of the early issues being significant coverage of Stanley Kubrick’s The Shining and John Landis’ American Werewolf In London), Fangoria’s content was nevertheless significantly more “extreme” than Forrest J. Ackerman’s Famous Monsters: a Biblette of gore. It was the scissor suicide poster that lent a frisson of the forbidden to Fangoria, and its genius was to see horror in a different way to those of us who grew up reading Famous Monsters Of Filmland. Instead of Scared stiff, a vision for the future of the magazine.”

For some groundwork stuff along the lines of Herschell Gordon Lewis’ film, gore films weren’t that widely seen,” Martin thinks perhaps with Richard Corben’s Fantagor comics somewhere in mind — the shorter Fangoria was coined. The shift to horror followed soon afterwards. “The word ‘gore’ is in the title,” Martin says. “It was soft,” recalls Naha. “I remember the first time I unfolded one of those posters, and it was the scissor suicide scene from (David Cronenberg’s) The Fly.”

Above: The iconic poster image from Fango’s ‘The Evil Dead’ and ‘Terror From The Year Zero!’

Above: Fangoria’s gory covers caused supermarket frills. It continues in the US.

I could see from my desk, I was writing for Starlog's ‘Fantasctica’ magazine. Originally to be called ‘Fantastica’, the magazine’s launch was delayed when rival publication Fantastic Films took umbrage at the perceived similarity. ‘Phantasmagoria’ was considered as a replacement title, until Martin thinks perhaps with Richard Corben’s Fantagor comics somewhere in mind — the shorter Fangoria was coined.

The shift to horror followed soon afterwards. “The word ‘gore’ is in the title, for pity’s sake,” Meyers points out. “What else could it be?” With John Carpenter’s Halloween bringing in unheard-of revenues for an independent film in 1978, there was clearly a growing audience for the ‘new’ kind of grungy horror that had been filling drive-ins since Craven’s The Last House On The Left in 1972, and Tobe Hooper’s The Texas Chain Saw Massacre in 1974. However, it was the work of gore FX maestro Tom Savini that really set the seal on Fangoria’s future direction.

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“Famous Monsters was soft,” recalls Chris Alexander. “It was very cheezy and funny: very PG. Fangoria on the other hand. I remember the first time I unfolded one of those posters, and it was the scissor suicide scene from (David Cronenberg’s) The Fly.”
Dead Zone! Fangoria had the guts to show you the guts. That was what was so great about it. But for all its gore and nastiness, when you dared to look beyond the front cover you were rewarded with this incredible elucidation. I don’t think Famous Monsters necessarily offered that. They just offered some good, old-fashioned rock ‘n’ roll monsters and fun.”

It was a sense of quiet that kept readers feeling they had found Fangoria. “I grew up in Toronto,” Alexander continues, “where things like The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2 and Day Of The Dead were missing upwards of 20 minutes of footage when they were released, thanks to the censors. Fangoria was relegated to the porn section, so it was like a double awakening because you had to reach up to the dirty shelves, so it was like a double awakening that.

23 years, recalls the magazine frequently stayed in the position for a remarkable who took over the editorship in 1987 and and reputation, of covert and dingy and strange. It was information pre-internet... It was all kind censors.

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EMPIRE

GEORGE A. ROMERO

APPEALS TO

THE TARGET AUDIENCE

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FANGORIA

APPEALS TO

THE TARGET AUDIENCE

FANGORIA

THERE IS NO "FEAR"

THE BRITISH FANGO

A BRIEF HISTORY OF FEAR

APPEALS TO

THE TARGET AUDIENCE

ATTEMPTS AT HORROR MADNESS have come and gone (The Dark Side, somehow, sticks out, but it’s not really memorable). Fangoria, which ran from 1980 until 1991, an eclectic mix of horror comics, reviews, and analysis, was published at the height of brilliant painted covers by Oliver Frey and a certain Kim Newman aming to contributors. It was published by Newfield, home of 500s games jams Countysand, and was grossly prematurely but had in that company’s collapse. “It was a fan of fantasy and horror lovers, a magazine for John Gilbert tells Empire. “I was a massive Fangoria fan, and still buy it, but they always focused on structure, and there wasn’t really the need to concentrate on authors and fan communities, because they were the same people, who had the original fans.”

There is a different company that successfully had Parental Advisories’ sticker on offending records and CDs. But Fangio’s success and its lengthening tenth meant it was essentially becoming the horror establishment (to the extent that for a while it had its own offshoot in Gorezone, a repository for more scurrilous, underground and overseas product). With the pro-Scannain ‘90s also constituting a gold-dredging period for horror, it was a fight to keep Fangoria commercial, although Friedly and Jason kept the wolf from the door and a loyal fanbase allowed Fangoria to weather the troughs as well as the peaks. Fangoria’s toughest couple of years came in 2007 and 2008, first with a warehouse fire that destroyed the magazine’s entire distribution channels, and subsequently with the bankruptcy of its then-publishers, The Creative Group, which had bought the title in 2000 as part of a diversification from television post-production and editing into content management. Reports of Fangoria’s death were, as horror stories from disgruntled contributors like James Zahn, who publicly (and justifiably, by the sound of it) blogged about shabby treatment on an outdated publication. “I do not want to be involved with your feature at all,” one former writer told Roman. “And you still owe me thousands of dollars from five years ago when Tom DeFeo insisted it stop paying people for no reason.”

DeFeo, formerly part of The Creative Group and Fangoria’s president since he decided to try flying solo with it (under his newly formed Brooklyn Company banner) after the bankruptcy, rolls his eyes. “It wasn’t no reason, it was a bankruptcy!” he says. “People are like, ‘You fucked up, but you’re still in business, you can still pay me.’ It’s a different company now. Unfortunately we all got stuck. I got screwed over for tons of fucking money. A lot of people did: the banks, everybody. It wasn’t a good thing. It really, really sucks. We started the business from nothing and we built it for 12 years. But what’s that saying? Everybody’s only six inches from the curb? It was very upsetting.”

Post-2009, there has been a period of picking up and dusting off for Fangoria. Its reduced circumstances have seen it move into a small space in New York, sharing a building with companies called things like Axion Corp and Multihood Health & Wellness (although it’s just round the corner from Times Square and down the road from Rockefeller Plaza, so hey, it could be a bit worse). “Limiting Fangoria’s appeal to Empire” is first met with a life-size recreation of L. Ron Haynes in London After Midnight, and a row of electric guitars, aged and blood-stained (sustained by enormously generous sponsors). But what we first notice is all the boxes: it’s as if nobody’s yet quite found the time to unpack. “If you see us!’ We see a lot of low-budget films. Let me know.”

DeFio jokes

“Tom is a crazy man to buy something that was in such short supply. Alexander believes, ‘but he did it, and he’s been digging into it since. When Fangoria on board, they were trying valiantly to make the magazine contemporary, but I think some mistakes were made. They changed the logo, which was a huge error: it’s a classic, up there with McDonald’s and KISS. And they put things like Twilight on the cover, which to this day I have not lived down. I am at the point now where if I feel like removing the magazine, just to piss off the asshole fans who still give me shit about it!”

Martin calls the failed Twilight cover redesign “the trap of success” readers complaining of stagnation but resisting change. “They dropped the old format, made it more cutting edge, but the fans demanded it back!” he opines. Still, the contest between Fangoria never missed an issue, and remains a brand with considerable clout. When you...
I THANK FANGORIA FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPLORE NEW WORLDS.

Elle Baker

FANGORIA'S GREATEST HITS
... ACCORDING TO THE CREATORS OF FANGORIA

have horror celebrities namechecking Fangoria it gives you a really good feeling,” says Timpone, who stepped down as editor in 2010 but still contributes. “Sam Raimi or Rob Zombie or George Romero or Wes Craven will always say, ‘Fangoria was there for me when I was making…’”

Tappan’s the same. (Tappan even wrote an essay on director Sergio Corbucci for a recent issue.) People who’ve worked for Fangoria have even gone on to work in film.”

Just to prove that point: “Fango was one of the first jobs I ever had,” director Axelle Carolyn told Empire on the set of her debut movie, Soulmate, last autumn. “I grew up reading it. I was so much a part of not just my film education, but learning English too. I ended up writing for them for several years. Someone from Fangoria visited the set, and I was thrilled because five or six years ago that would’ve been me. Set visits were always very special for me, because people who make horror films are crazy about Fangoria.”

The future, it seems, is bright and bloody for Fangoria. The magazine has found its feet again, with an increased focus on retro features and considerable coverage of international cinema brought back in from the currently dormant Gorezone.

“I’ve tried to make it scattered and unpredictable again, like it used to be,” explains Alexander. “I want it to be like it was when I was a kid, when it felt like it used to be, like it was taking you by the hand and leading you on an adventure.” DeFeo has cautious plans to expand the brand into television channels, video distribution and even film production.

“Fans are always discovering horror,” says Naha. “It’s new to them and they make it their own. It’s the same deal when I was a kid. The classic monster movies from the 1930s and ’40s were ‘new’ to me. I discovered them, and magazines like Famous Monsters Of Filmland let me know that I wasn’t alone. Fangoria does the same thing. It not only spotlights the films but allows hundreds of thousands of folks to feel that they’re part of a community. What’s not to like?”

“Just as David Cronenberg’s ascension didn’t surprise me, neither has Fangoria’s continued success,” says Martin. “I felt very strongly at the start that we were ahead of the cultural curve, because of the youth and energy of our readers. As long as the magazine hits the newsstands, I’m still thinking: ‘That’s my baby!’”

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