



ENTAINED

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...

WORDS OWEN WILLIAMS ILLUSTRATION JUSTIN METZ





It's 1992, and we're somewhere in the 12th century. 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. Within lie the rudiments of a kick-ass deadite-vanquishing kit. 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 an oblique tit-for-tat game Raimi had going with Wes Craven for some years (Raimi put a The Hills Have Eyes poster in the basement in the first Evil Dead; Craven had Evil Dead playing on a TV in A Nightmare On Elm Street etc.), but it's also evidence of a broader truth: horror filmmakers, and horror fans, love *Fangoria*.

“*Fango* always made you feel like there were other people who spoke the same language you did — and got it,” current editor Chris Alexander tells *Empire*. “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 flick through his copy of issue 107, you'd find features on Freddy's Dead and The Guyver, and the FX make-up of Terminator 2. The lead review that month was 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 gory prosthetics became the magazine's *raison d'être* soon after its first publication 34 years ago, but 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 gorehound 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 we had a lot of nifty photos and two magazines’ worth of writers to write

• **Above:** *Fangoria's* gory covers caused surprisingly little controversy in the US.

articles.” Naha, already “writing or rewriting half of *Starlog*” and co-editing another of the company's magazines, *Future Life*, under various pseudonyms, took on the editorship of *Fangoria* under the monicker Joe Bonham — “which is the name of a soldier who's blinded and loses all his limbs in the Dalton Trumbo novel Johnny Got His Gun.” He contributed several articles to the inaugural issue, including the cover feature on Godzilla, under a series of aliases mostly stolen from W. C. Fields characters.

Meyers was stretched similarly thin, putting together features on “Doctor Who, Japanese *kaiju*, Christopher Lee, fantasy art, make-up masters and animation.” He laughs that, “As far as



“FOR HORROR, *FANGORIA* IS THE BIBLETTE.” **SAM RAIMI**

I could see from my desk, I was writing for ‘Starfuturgoria’ 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

• **Above:** The iconic poster image from Raimi's *The Evil Dead*, which *Fangoria* supported from early on.

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 *Fango's* future direction.

“Except for some grindhouse stuff along the lines of Herschell Gordon Lewis' films, gore films weren't that widely seen,” explains Naha. “By the second issue, Bob Martin was in charge of the magazine, and his genius was to see horror in a different way to those of us who grew up reading *Famous Monsters Of Film*land. We had an article on Tom Savini in the first issue that featured some gore effects. Bob saw the response to that and had a vision for the future of the magazine.”

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' An American Werewolf In London), *Fangoria's* content was nevertheless significantly more ‘extreme’ than Forrest J. Ackerman's much-loved *Famous Monsters*: a vibe that lent a frisson of the forbidden to the magazine, which contributed much to its immediate popularity.

“*Famous Monsters* was soft,” recalls Chris Alexander. “It was very cheeky and funny: very PG. *Fango* 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 >



“FANGORIA APPEALS TO ‘THE TARGET AUDIENCE’.”

GEORGE A. ROMERO

Dead Zone! *Fango* 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 education. 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 quest that kept readers feeling they had *earned 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. *Fango* was relegated to the porn shelves, so it was like a double awakening because you had to reach up to the dirty magazines and pull it down to read in the store. I actually used to get them in used bookstores, mostly. Finding horror, finding copies of *Fango*, absorbing all this information pre-internet... It was all kind of covert and dingy and strange. It was my punk rock, in some respects.”

Perhaps surprisingly given its content and reputation, *Fango* was rarely threatened with bans, censorship or legal action, at least during its early years. Martin “expected someone to raise a fuss” at some point, but was disappointed. Yet Tony Timpone, who took over the editorship in 1987 and stayed in the position for a remarkable 23 years, recalls the magazine frequently getting pulled from newsstands during the

late ’80s and early ’90s. “It’d be stupid stuff,” he chuckles. “We got problems from a picture we ran from *Return Of The Living Dead 3*, showing a zombie woman with pierced nipples. We got pulled from newsstands in Canada for a cover with Linnea Quigley holding a chainsaw. One of the first times we got in trouble with our publisher at the time was for a really cheesy photo of a half-naked woman in a slime nest, from this movie called *Breeders* (1986). She’s topless, but most of her is covered with all this alien goo, but maybe there was a hint of a nipple. The publisher said, ‘There should be no tits in *Fangoria*!’”

Now, as then, raunch is far more controversial for the magazine than violent death or images of torture. Alexander cites examples of extreme images that haven’t caused the faintest ripple of complaint, but says: “In issue 294, my second as editor, there was a small ad for triple-X films: no nudity, just a chick in a bikini, smiling, and it was for ‘buy three adult DVDs and get one free’ or something. I got so much hate mail about that ad! All these parents were like, ‘We cannot share this magazine with our children, because of this ad. *Fango* has sunk to a new low!’ You’ll show your kids a guy with his head exploding, but this is unacceptable!?” Incredibly, F-bombs are also *verbatim*. “We ran a quote from an Elm Street film, and then some little kid was running around his house throwing



• **Top left:** George A. Romero among his undead masses. **Above:** *Fangoria*’s gruesome posters are a favourite with horror fans.

Fs around,” sighs Timpone. “After that there were no Fs in *Fangoria*!”

TIMPONE’S LONG

editorship saw *Fangoria* settle into a comfort zone, with the shock of the new gone, and the glow of familiarity settling in. The magazine didn’t change its attitude, and there were run-ins during the ’90s with America’s second lady Tipper Gore and her PMRC: the association that successfully had ‘Parental Advisory’ stickered on offending records and CDs. But *Fango*’s success and its lengthening teeth meant it was effectively 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 pre-Scream ’90s also constituting a doldrum period for horror, it was a fight to keep *Fango* commercial, although Freddy and Jason kept the wolf from the door and a loyal fanbase allowed *Fango* 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 archive, 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 *Fango*’s death were rife, as were horror stories from disgruntled contributors like James Zahn, who publicly (and justifiably, by the sound of it) blogged about shabby treatment on

• **Top:** Tobe Hooper’s *Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. **Above:** *Fangoria* has supported the classic *Elm Street* series through 1994’s *New Nightmare* and beyond.

an outdated publication. “I do not want to be involved with your feature at all,” one former writer told *Empire*. “*Fangoria* still owes me thousands of dollars from five years ago when Tom DeFeo decided to stop paying people for no reason.”

DeFeo, formerly part of The Creative Group and *Fango*’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-2008, then, has been a period of picking up and dusting off for *Fango*. Its reduced circumstances have seen it move into a small space in New York, sharing a building with companies called things like Axiom Corp and Midtown 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 lot worse). Entering the office, *Empire* is first met with a life-size mannequin of Lon Chaney in London After Midnight, and a row of electric guitars, signed at *Fango* conventions by horror luminaries. 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 a box of money, let me know,” DeFeo jokes.

“Tom is a crazy man to buy something that was in such dire straits,” Alexander believes, “but he did, and he’s been digging out ever since. When I came 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’m at the point where I feel like renaming the magazine *Twilight*, just to piss off the asshole fans who still give me shit about it!” Martin calls the failed cover redesign “the trap of success”: readers complaining of stagnation but resisting change. “They dropped the old film-strip motif on the cover, but the fans demanded it back!” he opines.

Still, for all its recent troubles, *Fango* never missed an issue, and remains a brand with considerable clout. “When you >



THE BRITISH FANGO

A BRIEF HISTORY OF FEAR

→ **ATTEMPTS AT UK HORROR MAGS** have come and gone (*The Dark Side*, somehow, stalks on), but perhaps most fondly remembered is *Fear*, which ran from 1988 until 1991. An eclectic mix of horror across all media, often with brilliant painted covers by Oliver Frey and a certain Kim Newman among its contributors, it was published by Newsfield, home of ’80s games mags *Crash* and *Zzap!64*, and was prematurely buried in that company’s collapse.

“I’d been a fan of fantasy and horror since I was about nine,” editor John Gilbert tells *Empire*. “I was a massive *Fango* fan, and still buy it, but they always focused on directors and stars whereas I wanted *Fear* to concentrate on authors and screenwriters, because they were the ones who had the original ideas. I figured if we courted them, the rest would fall into place!” *Fear* also gave space to reader-submitted short fiction. “We were by fans, for fans,” says Gilbert.

Scoops that stick in John’s mind are *Terminator 2*, *The Silence Of The Lambs* and *Ghost*, and he says that, 20 years after the coffin lid closed, he’s still amazed to see copies of the magazine on eBay and hear from fans who have complete collections. Having retained the rights after Newsfield entered administration, he’s recently resurrected *Fear* as a subscription-only affair. “It’s had a huge response,” he grins. “We have a new format and a great new team of writers and illustrators, and we aim to get back on the newsstands this year. The future for *Fear* is looking good again!”



FANGORIA'S GREATEST HITS

... ACCORDING TO THE CREATORS OF FANGORIA



“I THANK FANGORIA FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPLORE NEW WORLDS.”

CLIVE BARKER

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...’ Tarantino’s the same (*Tarantino 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. It 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 *Fango* 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*.”

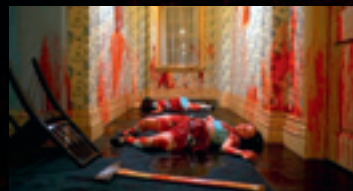
The future, it seems, is bright and bloody for *Fango*. The magazine has found its feet again, with an increased focus on retro features and considerable coverage of international cinema brought back in from the currently dormant *Gorezone*.

“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 *Fango* 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.

• Left: One of *Fangoria*’s gory prosthetics features. Above: Clive Barker’s *Hellraiser*.

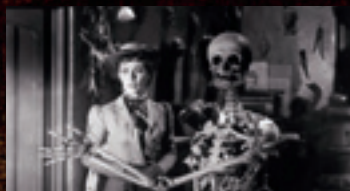
“Fans are always discovering horror,” says Naha. “It’s new to them and they make it their own. It’s the same deal when I was a kid. The classic monster movies from the 1930s and ‘40s were ‘new’ to me. I ‘discovered’ them, and magazines like *Famous Monsters Of Filmland* let me know that I wasn’t alone. *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!’” owen@empiremagazine.com



THE SHINING

→“I was very confident that, love it or hate it, the audience we were seeking would want to read about *The Shining*, and see the stills to compare it with the novel. We had a cover — issue seven — that said we had the goods.” Robert Martin, editor 1979–1986



HOUSE OF WAX

→“My favourite is issue nine, which is like the Holy Grail. Motel Hell; *The Howling*; and an amazing article on André de Toth’s *House Of Wax*, done by letter, between the writer and André, over two years. How amazing is that?!” Chris Alexander, current editor



AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON

→“We had really good coverage for *An American Werewolf In London* in issue 14, and it turned out to be another peak moment for the horror genre.” Robert Martin



THE NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET SERIES

→“Back in the day, if you put Freddy Krueger on the cover, any magazine would sell!” Michael Gingold, contributor since 1988 and current managing editor



BATMAN RETURNS

→“There was a lot of controversy about us putting that on the cover of 114, but I still think it’s a stealth horror; there’s a lot of horrific, dark Gothic stuff in there, even though it’s ostensibly a superhero film.” Michael Gingold



CRONOS

→“I still remember our first coverage of *Cronos* and interviewing Guillermo del Toro for issue 132. Watching him ascend has been amazing. It’s cool to watch someone work their way up and be there at the beginning.” Michael Gingold



THE WEEKEND OF HORRORS

→“Those conventions stand out as a highlight for me. We were the San Diego Comic-Con of horror for a long run. Meeting my childhood heroes, like Vincent Price and Christopher Lee, was a dream come true.” Tony Timpone, editor 1987–2010



STEPHEN KING, CONTRIBUTOR

→“It took more than 20 years before he came through, but we finally got a two-part article from Stephen King, which ran in issues 298 and 299: a huge, personal essay on scary movies.” Tony Timpone