

Panels of Fear: *The Decline of Horror Comics and Their Rise from The Ashes*

Horror has always been an intricate and necessary aspect of the Western literary tradition. From the terrifying implications of the island of the lotus eaters in Homer's *Odyssey* to the spine-chilling tale of Victor Frankenstein, we have always wanted to be scared. This desire, or need, for exposure to the sordid and macabre has shaped and created thousands of stories, mediums, and story tellers. Like many literary traditions before it, the genre of horror has had its fair share of executions. The attempt this article will be examining is the decline and subsequent resurrection of the American horror comic book.

Comics are an American art form dating back to the 1930's, where staples of pop-culture such as Superman, Flash Gordon, & Captain America were created. One less known factor in the success of comic books as a medium is the popularity of horror comics.

Horror comics became a money printing machine for comic publishers, who found that teens and adults were just as willing to buy comics as children. One of the defining success stories of the era is that of [EC comics](#). What once started as Education Comics, a place to teach kids lessons in science, history, and religion (specifically Christianity) quickly morphed into a counter-cultural comics juggernaut that was selling millions of issues monthly. These stories surrounded ghouls, monsters, serial killers, and ghosts, and were typically as graphic as any modern horror film.

This Golden Age of horror comics was all brought to an abrupt end by the creation and subsequent implementation of the Comics Code Authority (CCA).

The CCA was created as a reaction to the social critique [Seduction of the Innocent](#) which, among other things, warned Americans about the dangers of allowing children to be desensitized to violence by horror comics or influenced by a perceived homosexual relationship between Batman & Robin.

The CCA led to the decline and eventual near eradication of horror comics in America. This decline coincided with the general cartoonification of comics as a medium, what would be known as the Silver Age of comics, which birthed such pieces as the [Batman 66'](#) tv show and increasingly more ridiculous premises and characters in the books themselves.

The Code eventually lost its power and became a bygone relic of the past. Waves of change that were hitting the industry at the time as edge and grit became the new way to sell books and creators began to fight against the standard practices of the industry.

All these factors lead to creator owned and operated publishing houses that supported for much more creative freedom, meaning that horror comics were more versatile and ubiquitous than ever.

This story of censorship and eventual resurgence is a happy but cautionary tale about the importance of critical media analysis and censorship. Horror has always been a key ingredient of American comics and will remain so of the foreseeable future, and that has created a place for creators to tell stories that have never been told before in an exciting medium. So, next time you pass a comic book store don't scoff and write it off as a pass time for children, instead maybe go inside and open up a horror comic and see what the medium has to offer. I guarantee you'll be surprised, intrigued, and maybe even horrified.