



A Haunt of Fears: The Strange History of the British Horror Comics Campaign (Studies in Popular Culture Series)

Martin Barker

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Between 1949 and 1955 Britain was swept by a rising tide of panic about "American-style" or "horror" comics. The British press cried out in alarm: "Now Ban This Filth That Poisons Our Children," "Drive Out the Horror Comics." As one frenzied columnist protested: "I feel as though I have been trudging through a sewer. Here is a terrible twilight zone between sanity and madness . . . peopled by monsters, grave robbers, human flesh eaters." A campaign against ghoulish comic books climaxed in an Act of Parliament making it illegal to publish or sell any material in comic form deemed to be "harmful to children."

But behind the facade of concern for the protection of children, another very different story lurked. This book explores the British campaign by asking some rather different questions. Who were the people at the heart of the anti-comics campaign? Why and how did the British Communist Party come to play a central role, and yet end up attacking a group of comics which were "on their side" in assaulting their rationality of McCarthyism?

The British "horror comics" campaign reveals the inadequacy of some conventional assessments of anti-media panics. In showing a curious gap between the private concerns of the campaigners and their public rhetoric, *A Haunt of Fears*, originally published in Britain in 1983, raises serious questions about the state of British culture during this era.

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