

Adapting Frankenstein to the comic format has been a horror! No less than a half dozen comic companies, and dozens of writers and artists have tried to mold the beast into the four color medium. Few have been successful. None have ever been acclaimed. It seems that Frankenstein just doesn't blend well with the items needed for a successful comic book.

THE MONSTER TIMES now brings you TWO reports on the Frankenstein monster's career in comic books. The first report is by Richard Kyle, and elaborates on the Frankenstein adaptations that are no longer with us. This article originally appeared in FANTASTIC MONSTERS and is well-researched and quite accurate.

Our second report, by TMT's fanzine reviewer, Bob Napier, reports on the three recent adaptations of Frankenstein. And while the final verdict on these recent adaptations is not yet in, initial sales figures indicate that old Frank may well have made it in the comic medium. National Periodicals Frankenstein is blooming in PHANTOM STRANGER comics and Marvel's Frankenstein has his own book. Skywald's Frankenstein is still plugging away as a back up feature in PSYCHO and NIGHTMARE.

Without any further ado, here is TMT's comprehensive analysis of Frankenstein in the comics . . . .

## FRANKENSTEIN MEETS CLEOPATRA

by Richard Kyle

**H**ow does that grab you?

Well, a few years ago—back in 1948—you could have seen it, and in color, too. It co-starred Moish the Mummy. You've heard of him. About the same time, you could have dropped in one evening at Awful Annie's while a happy-go-lucky Monster belted a little *bat brew* with the old witch. Or maybe you'd have journeyed with the Frankenstein Monster to the Wild West where he shot it out with the local heavy and made the countryside safe for decent folks. Or been in the crowd the day the city unveiled a statue to him because of his outstanding personality and kindly humanitarianism.

You could have seen all this, really.

Not in a movie, of course, or a book—but in the pages of one of the nuttiest, waaaay out comic magazines



# FRANKENSTEIN

Don't be scared by this Dick Briefer cover for FRANKENSTEIN number 1 (May, 1954), published by the now-defunct Prize comic group.

## IN THE COMICS

ever published, FRANKENSTEIN.

And would you like to thrill as an evil,

hating, incredibly powerful Frankenstein

Monster struggles against a horde of the

undead, or robs the grave of its victims, or fights to the death a great white werewolf, or takes as a mate a female monster as evil and hating and cruel as the Monster himself?

You could have seen that, too, just a couple of years later—and in the pages of the same magazine, drawn by the same artist, and published by the same Prize Comics Group.

The Frankenstein Monster's comic book adventures started in 1946 when the Monster with the "outstanding personality and kindly humanitarianism" was invented. The scientist who did the job was sort of slap-dash about his work (he got the Monster's nose on above his eyes) and pretty careless with explosives (he managed to blow himself up) but all-in-all he must have been okay because Frankenstein (the scientist named his Monster after the book, and made the

Here is some more art from the Prize Comics' Frankenstein. Not only does Frankenstein adopt (and then lose) a pet dinosaur (left) in FRANKENSTEIN No. 5, he meets the famous horror actor Boris Karload in Frankenstein No. 11 (far right).



same mistake a lot of other people have) had a heart of gold that was as big as all outdoors. He was kind of simple-minded, too, but you can't win 'em all.

### FRIENDLY FRANKENSTEIN

After his inventor was blown to smithereens, Frankenstein went to live in an old house down by the cemetery. He was a friendly guy and pretty soon he got to know all the ghouls and vampires and werewolves and witches in the neighborhood. He had a pet spider, and in fact, there wasn't much of anything he didn't like. One day a couple of kids came by while he was building something in his workshop, and they asked him if it was a bird house. "Nope," he said, "a rat house. Lots of bird houses around. Not enough rat houses."

Like everybody else, he had to have money to keep the bacon and eggs coming in (*Franky cooked his over a Bunsen burner*), and so he had quite a few jobs. Once he was president of the Institute for the Rehabilitation of Maladjusted Ghosts. And a little while later he ran a drug store, with Awful Annie, the witch, filling in for the pharmacist. While he was a laboratory assistant, he fought a giant chicken liver that threatened to conquer the world. And in the last days of radio, he played the most fearsome monster of them all, the Booo, but the public got tired of him because they thought he was a phony.

After work, he met a lot of interesting people. Micha Goss, for one. Micha didn't have a head, and his marriage was going down the drain until Franky introduced him to Harry Shortenbred, who had a head but no body to go with it. And then there was Zara, who was a good vampire, sorta, a baby-sitter out of Awful Annie's Babysitting Agency. And Chester Demihoss, half man and half horse, a centaur down on his luck. Franky even met Boris Karload, the famous movie Master of Horror, and accidentally scared the daylights out of the poor fellow.

In the winter of 1948, Franky decided to take Moish the Mummy home to Egypt. Moish had his own room in Frankenstein's house, with sand all over the floor and a stuffed camel standing in the shade of a potted palm and a miniature pyramid sitting back in one corner, but he was homesick.

All the ghouls and vampires came town to see Moish off. Harris, the ghoul, patted him on his shoulder wrappings and said, "So long, Moish! Be careful you don't get sunstroke!"

"All set, Moish?" said Franky when the boat docked. "We're in Egypt, land of the pyramids, the sphinx, and the Nile. Feel better?"

"I should hope to kiss a camel!" said Moish.

But they had an unnerving experience with a movie company making a Cleopatra picture—and who can blame them?—so Moish decided America was the place for him. Egypt was a nice place to visit, but he didn't want to be dead there.

### A TURN FOR THE WORSE

Then, probably the only comic book in history with a split personality, **FRANKENSTEIN** came down with schizophrenia. Artist Dick Briefer—after a slight pause for retooling—turned his pen from the wild little cartoons of Franky and his weirdo friends to a serious and horrifying portrayal of the modern-day adventures of the Monster from Mary Shelley's terrifying, century-old novel, **FRANKENSTEIN**.

Gone now was every vestige of humor. Scarred, broken-toothed, scowling—unutterably hideous—the Monster's colossal, hate-filled body



shambled across the world, killing, maiming, destroying. Born to death, he had no love for life; agonized by the unending artificial existence his creator had forced upon him, he was driven to a ferocity and cruelty beyond that of any beast.

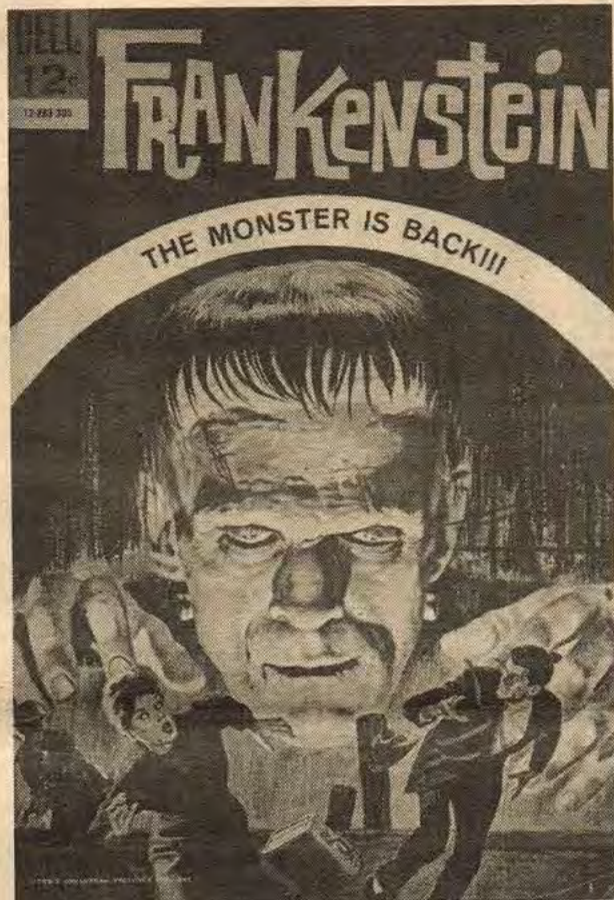
And yet, somewhere, within him, there was a love of beauty. And a need for a companion, someone like himself.

Once, a scientist gave him that companion, a monster-woman, and although she was as cruel as he—and even more mad, perhaps—he grew to love her. But in the end, the scientist, insane himself, destroyed her. The Monster befriended a blinded circus giantess, and a mob slew her. He captured a beautiful woman, and in anger, when he saw she only feared him, he almost killed her. The world would not let him have love and he could not take it; he could only revenge himself upon the universe that bound him. And he was hunted by men with a

viciousness as fierce as his own.

He prowled the earth, riddled by bullets, seared by flame, maimed by iron-jawed animal traps, attacked by the creatures of the next world as well as this, enslaved by grave robbers and greedy showmen—and yet he always gave back more than he got. He was hate and revenge and power eternal.

Or almost eternal, for in 1954 he died. A censorship board was formed then, the Comics Code Authority (*see TMT 10 for other CCA atrocities—Ed.*), to control the content of comic magazines. It outlawed all horror stories, even ones based upon an acknowledged classic of world literature.



Considering all the indignities old Frankenstein has suffered in the comic format, you'd have thought that at least Dell would keep their hands off him. They didn't, and the monster suffered still another indignity, as shown here.



Who says Classic Comics only has goody-goody comics? We do! If you've ever seen an antiseptic Frankenstein, this is it. Drawn by Norm Saunders for the 1969 comic version of the Shelley novel, he somehow has developed Chinese traits. Boris, where are you?

# FRANKENSTEIN IN FOUR COLORS

by Robert S. Napier

**W**hen I heard Frankenstein's Monster was going to be adapted for comic books I wondered if it would work. The Frankenstein story I knew was low-key, subtle horror that lanced from within, chilling the stomach long before the eyes decided to dilate. The operative word for the Monster's story was suspense, whereas comics deal in straight action. My Monster lumbered over bleak European landscapes through lazy wisps of fog, an image of suffering and self-loathing. He was the cherished memory of Karloff in scuffed construction boots, tattered flannel pants, an ill-fitting Robert Hall sportcoat and two half-inch bolts bookending his neck. I wondered if this hodgepodge of midnight requisitions in the recycled Goodwill attire could succeed in a medium that stressed tight costumes and anatomical stress. Further,



This Todd/Atkins Frankenstein gets the TMT award as worst looking Frank ever. He appears in *PSYCHO*, published by Skywald Comics... lousy!

I was dubious about a single novel being restructured for serialization. Once the original premise and plot had been digested, after all, there was nothing left but to fake it.

### SKYWALD'S THE LIMIT

The first of the modern publishers to dip into this till of public domain and fake it was **SKYWALD**. In the May, Sept., Nov., 1971 and May, 1972 issues of *PSYCHO* runs a continuing tale of the ghastly giant in which he scampers all over Europe meeting one abomination after the next. First he pulls a turnabout on his creator, reviving a deceased Victor Frankenstein to life, then joins a traveling freak show where he is drugged and exhibited *a la* King Kong in Paris. He breaks away from that to be confronted by Quasimodo (*The Hunchback of Notre*



This here fellow in the background is National Comics' Frankenstein as drawn by Mike Kaluta. Like his Marvel counterpart (below), National's monster can be called Frankenstein, but he cannot look like the Karloff version. This Frankenstein exists in 1973, having been preserved in ice and discovered in PHANTOM STRANGER comics, where he now appears.

Dame), ends up in a sewer where Le Suub, a Heapish octopus, becomes the big menace. From there he escapes into the clutches of The Phantom of the Opera only to be extracted through the good graces of a time warp. What happens next is anybody's guess as I never saw another issue.

The only good thing I can say about this SKYWALD magazine is they never tried to be anything but pure horror. There was rarely a light moment and nearly every panel was as grotesque as it could be. It was no triumph of comic literature or art, but anyone who likes this kind of incessant assault of the grisly, gross and gruesome can check out a dealer's list and see how much they're burning people for these books nowadays.

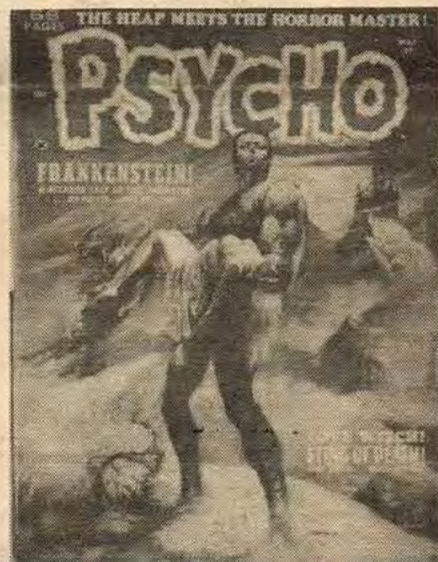
But one reason SKYWALD got away with being—shall we say, earthy?—was the fact that they were black and white magazines selling for upwards of half-a-buck. As such, they didn't have to contend with the omnipresent Comics Code like MARVEL and NATIONAL must. So let's see what these folks did in their modified handcuffs.

### MARVEL STRIKES FIRST

MARVEL struck first with The Monster of Frankenstein #1 (Jan. '73) and followed up with number two dated March '73. Their openers served a twofold purpose: First, to recap the original novel, and; Second, to update the events and introduce new characters to act as foils for the Monster. In doing so they have created a new look that just may turn off some purists out there who won't accept anything short of the Universal concoction. For one thing, the Monster has a pretty good physique, like all superheroes. For another, he speaks very correct English, unlike most of us. His scars are cursory and his sorrows and hatreds give him that "house look" that MARVEL employs from combat books to cowboys. Not that there's anything intrinsically wrong with the look but other comic characters wear it better; perhaps because they don't have a prior reputation to live up to.

To recap the mechanics of these new adventures we open up in the frozen Arctic with Robert Walton IV, great-grandson of the last man to see the

Monster alive. The year is 1898 and Walton is leading a surly crew of wharf rats and sea scum on an expedition to recover the Monster who is, naturally,



A good cover by Boris on this ish of PSYCHO, but lousy insides by Todd and Adkins.

frozen in ice. Driven by some secret inner torments, Walton manages to grab the giant in an icy cocoon and return to the ship, but bad luck follows him everywhere. Mutinies abound on the old bounty main, fire breaks out in the hold and the ice looses its hold on our horrid hero. Walton faces the double dilemma of his insurgent sailors and the escaped enigma, who managed to cop a cabin boy while gung-hoing through the gangway and ends up nesting in the netting. They mince through a Mexican standoff until a menacing monsoon puts a damp damper on the whole damn deal. Up Music, Roll Credits, To Be Continued.

### DC FRANKENSTEIN

The last on our list of recent Frankenstein reincarnations comes from National Periodicals, commonly known as DC. They bring everything right up to today in The Phantom Stranger #23 (Feb. '73) when the Monster goes to the back of the book to merge with a sagging Dr. Thirteen, The Ghost Breaker. Now relegated to a back-up feature, he still finds himself in the traditional ice-enshrouded tuxedo until he's rescued

by a college professor called Victor. Victor is a young man with a young wife and is friendly with the young couple, Dr. & Mrs. Thirteen. So one day when the Thirteens are visiting, Victor is in his basement lab shooting laser beams at the Monster hoping to reprise him for yet one more story. A chain reaction of events are set off when lightning strikes the laser killing Victor and Victor falls on the laser causing the beam to zap Mrs. Thirteen as she walks in the door. While she is knocked cold, the Monster comes to life just in time for Mrs. Victor and Dr. Thirteen to erringly surmise he was responsible for the destruction they see. The roof literally falls down on everything but Mrs. V, Dr. T, and the near dead Mrs. T manage to escape while the accommodating giant holds up the ceiling for those precious few moments so dear to all cliffhangers. For a while it's hard to tell if they've excavated Frankenstein's Monster or Big Bad John but when the final curtain is drawn the doctor swears revenge on what's-his-face while his wife lies in a coma, her life in doubt. A very slow and unspectacular start or finish for all concerned.

What may be more important than how good or bad these magazines are, however, is the fact that they simply exist. Remember the Comics Code I mentioned earlier? Let me quote a provision of that code adopted Oct. 26, 1954: (General Standards, Part B #5) "Scenes dealing with, or instruments associated with walking dead, torture, vampires or vampirism, ghouls, cannibalism and werewolfism are prohibited."

What it boiled down to was that monsters of all stripes weren't allowed to appear in comic books. This rule held fast

until about two years ago when it, as well as a few other provisions of the Code, were either deleted or revised. We may now enjoy monsters in the comics as long as they are dealt with in a classical manner.

It is because of this ruling that a rash of new titles have been appearing featuring our favorite fanged and fearsome fiends. Titles like Tomb of Dracula, Werewolf By Night, Swamp Thing and a dozen others have broken the ground on a movement that seems to steer completely away from the old mold of the superheroes and World War II knuckle squads. That is, they seem to be a new phenomenon but they really aren't.

### SAME LAME SCENE

Instead, monsters are merely filling the ranks of those who strangled in their body suits. They're doing the same things the superheroes were doing only their powers are developed along different lines. No longer do they come from Krypton but from crypts. But otherwise, for all intents and purposes, they're just ugly superheroes. The stories are the familiar vehicles, and the problems are as unsolvable as Spiderman's have been for the past decade.

In order for the monsters in the comics to look, feel and act like the hairies and hellspawn they are, they're going to have to be presented in a format different than the one used for the superheroes. The two—monsters and heroes—are different kinds of animals and they don't look right wearing a common uniform.

Frankenstein's Monster and others in comic books? Well, yes... just don't read 'em too closely.

Contestant number 44 in the FRANKENSTEIN COMICS LOOK ALIKE CONTEST is Marvel's Frankenstein. He's got his own comic, called THE MONSTER OF FRANKENSTEIN, but as you surely notice, he doesn't look a bit like Boris Karloff. That's because the Karloff Frankenstein is protected by copyright laws, but the Frankenstein character isn't.

