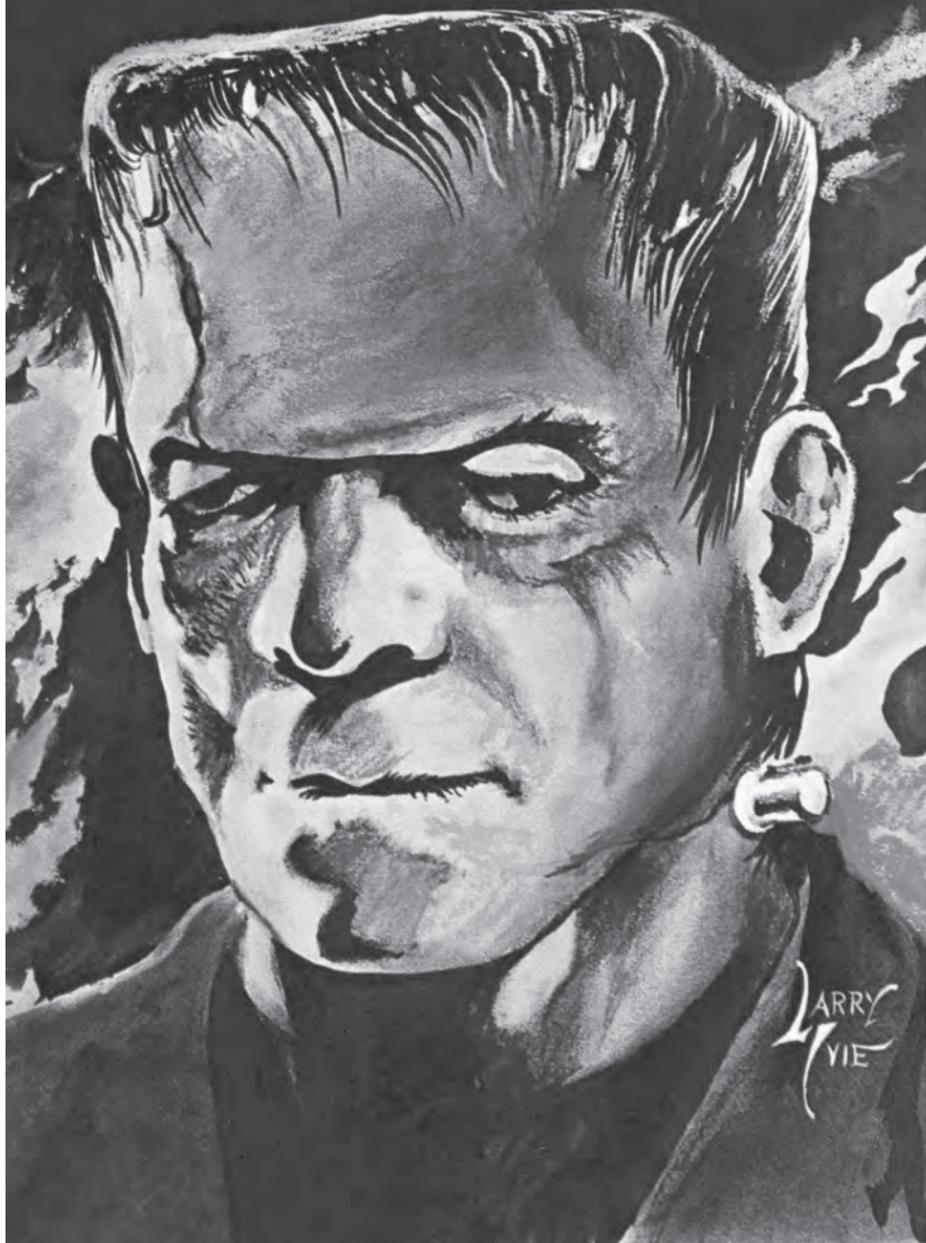


CHAPTER TWO
BHOB STEWART
OF FANZINES AND FRANKENSTEIN...





he fact is undisputable: Bhub Stewart has gathered enough feathers for his cap to last him a lifetime. An incessant fan of comic books and science fiction, Stewart published the first EC Comics fanzine, the *EC Fan Bulletin* back in 1953. In 1954, he collaborated with fellow comics scholars Ted White and Larry Stark on *Potrzebnie*, a groundbreaking fanzine that again focused on the old ECs. In 1962, he and John Benson interviewed Bernard Krigstein. The piece still stands as one of the most detailed studies of a comic book artist's work that has ever seen print.

In 1963, Stewart began his long tenure as the editor of Calvin T. Beck's seminal magazine, *Castle of Frankenstein*. Originally edited by Larry Ivie and Ken Beale, *Castle of Frankenstein* is widely regarded as the thinking man's *Famous Monsters of Filmland*. Stewart came on board with the third issue and he stayed with the magazine until the early 1970s.

Stewart went on to co-author *Scream Queens* with Calvin Beck in 1978, and has written for *TV Guide*, *Publishers Weekly*, and *Heavy Metal*. 2003 saw the publication of *Against the Grain: Mad Artist Wallace Wood*. His most recent writing can be found online on his blog *Potrzebnie*.

Bhub Stewart has enough memories and information swimming around in his brain to fill an entire series of books. In this interview, we discussed the science fiction pulps, the early days of fanzine culture, EC Comics, and the origins of *Castle of Frankenstein*...

The following interview was conducted via telephone on May 22, 2012.

JOHN SZPUNAR: When did you first get involved with fanzines?

BHOB STEWART: I started with fanzines when I was in high school. In the forties, I was really caught up with Fawcett comic books. *Captain Marvel*, *Mary Marvel*, the *Marvel Family*—I really loved that stuff. But as I got older, there came a time when I was about to totally drop it.

JS: I guess it's safe to say that you didn't.

BS: When EC comics started 1950, I decided to continue reading them.

JS: How old were you at the time?

BS: In 1950, I would have been thirteen.

JS: What was it about the ECs that held your interest?

BS: Well, I could see that what they were doing was kind of similar to what I had been listening to on the radio. I listened to *Suspense*, *Escape*, and *Inner Sanctum*. It was pretty clear that they were coming from the same area. I'd also been reading science fiction magazines—you know, *Astounding*, *Galaxy*, and the *Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*. I think there was a photo of Johnny Craig in the EC offices that showed an entire shelf of *Astounding Science Fiction* behind him. So, it was pretty clear to me that the people who were putting out these publications were very familiar with everything that I liked. At the same time, the NBC radio show

Science Fiction in the Summer of 1950. And at the end of the Summer, the very first issue of *Galaxy* came out. Each of these magazines had its own distinct personality. At the same time that I was reading all of this, I would go to the library. They had the giant Groff Conklin anthologies—I was reading every book of science fiction they had. One day, I went there and said, “I think I’ve read everything here.” The guy said, “Oh, yeah? Follow me.” He pulled *Out of the Silent Planet* off of the shelf. That was my introduction to C.S. Lewis.

JS: Why did you start writing?

BS: It was almost like a way of life. I was

interested in the whole idea of how you could express yourself, and I began putting out my own handwritten publication. I passed it around to the other students when I was in the sixth grade. This was before I even thought about doing a fanzine.

JS: Didn’t you call that the *Nutty Newspaper*?

BS: [stunned] Where did you get *that* information?

JS: I did a little research. What was it like?

BS: Well, I was a kid. I just opened my notebook, took a out pencil, and started imitating the newspaper format. Are you a reader of science fiction?

JS: Yeah. My family had a pretty big stack of books, and I got my start there.

BS: In the early fifties, I was really big on Heinlein and Bradbury. I don’t think that EC Comics really realized that they had a lot of readers who recognized that they were swiping the Ray Bradbury stories. We all read *The Martian Chronicles*, and we knew where they were getting their story ideas.

JS: My first experience with Bradbury was reading the EC adaptations. Again, from my family’s library.



BS: Did you get to read any of the science fiction magazines?

JS: No. I had access to a lot of old paperbacks.

BS: You have to realize that things were sort of in transition. By 1954, *Weird Tales* and the other pulp magazines were collapsing. What you were seeing was a transition from pulp magazines to digest magazines and paperbacks. You would walk into a newsstand and it would all be there. Mainstream magazines, a whole section of digests and paperbacks—there would be comic books up to the ceiling. I would sit on top of a stack of Collier's and read comic books.

JS: What did you think of the EC imitations?

BS: I lost interest in them pretty fast. I remember reading certain issues of *Adventures Into the Unknown*. I'd read the

stuff that had Basil Wolverton—*Weird Tales of the Future*, and that kind of thing. But for the most part, I didn't really pay much attention to them.

JS: What led up to your publishing of the *EC Fan Bulletin*?

BS: I was working with a guy on a science fiction fanzine, and I started to think, "Why don't I do something that I'm more interested in?" There had never been a fanzine about EC comics before.

JS: Was that in 1954?

BS: That would be in 1953 or '54. It lasted a couple of issues, and that led to the idea of doing *Potrzenie* with Ted White and Larry Stark. After one issue, Ted turned the publication over to somebody else.

JS: What was your goal with *Potrzenie*?

BS: I originally intended *Potrzenie* to be not so much of a fanzine as a literary publication. Larry Stark had just graduated from Rutgers with a degree in Library Science, and I knew that he had written these letters to Bill Gaines. Gaines felt so highly of them that he gave Stark a lifetime subscription. Once I got in contact with Larry, I said, "The criticism that you're writing is fascinating. We should actually do a publication where the main point is your writing."

