

AN EC-STYLE HORROR COMIC
GETS A PSYCHO-SURF SOUNDTRACK WITH THE
GRIM COUNTY CORONERS' TALES FROM GRIM COUNTY

HOT RODS AND HELLFIRE

BY
APRIL SNELLINGS



THERE'S NO MISTAKING THE SUNBURNED PHANTOM OF CLASSIC SURF ROCK THAT HAUNTS THE FUZZED-OUT, REVERB-HEAVY MUSIC OF THE GRIM COUNTY CORONERS.

But Grim County is a far cry from the bright California beach towns where artists such as Dick Dale pioneered the sounds that would lay the groundwork for heavy metal. It's a place where

monsters lurk in strip-club basements, cursed tapes line the porn shelves at the local video store, and hard-partying greasers OD on the snorted ashes of murdered vampires.

That grindhouse sensibility melds perfectly with the EC Comics-style spookhouse shocks in the latest Grim County Coroners project. *Tales From Grim County*, out now from Sex and Monsters Comics, is a retro 40-page, black-and-white anthology comic with an accompanying full-length album that could easily be the soundtrack to a lost Russ Meyer flick.

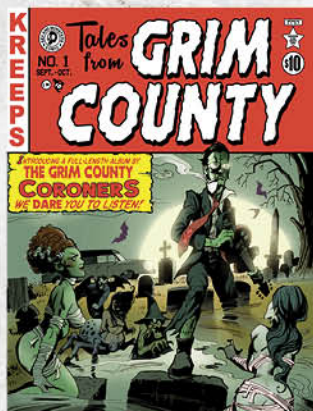
"This is one of those life-goal boxes ticked off for me," says Grim County Coroners mastermind Dom Kreep — already a well-known figure in the psycho-surf scene thanks to the music he's recorded under his other moniker, Kreeps — on crafting a vintage-style horror comic. Kreep discovered the medium at an early age, when he received a stack of horror comics in return for participating in a neighbourhood ball game. The young Kreep couldn't have cared less about sports, but the promise of new comics was enough to lure him onto the field.

"I'd never seen anything like it before and I was pretty shocked — I was only used to Sunday funnies at that age," he remembers. "But pretty soon I was totally sucked in. I remember this one story about some kind of voodoo witch hag that appeared as a beautiful woman to the hunter she was trying to lure to her den. To this day, I can still see the picture of her true face on the last page when they did the big reveal."

That shocking final-panel twist is a tried-and-true horror comic device, and it shows up time and again in the pages of *Tales*. In Mike Hoffman's "Triple Hexxx Curse," a trio of delinquent dipshits get their comeuppance after swiping a porno tape from Madame Griselda's Video Shop. In "Dance of the Spider Woman," written by Kreep and *Tales* publisher Will Penny, with art by Nik Poliwko, a sleazy scientist/titty-bar owner runs a stripper factory in his basement, turning creepy-crawlies into voluptuous humanoid bombshells, setting up a final panel overflowing with boobs, claws and spider legs.

Kreep first began mapping out the Grim County lines after he recorded the latest Kreeps album, 2013's *Spirit Clinic*. He describes the making of that record as "a pretty gloomy time," and he needed something that would make music fun again.

He found the creative spark he was looking for in an unlikely place: a pair of obscure 1969 German records. *Psychedelic Dance Party* by The Vampires'



Sound Incorporation and *Dracula's Music Cabinet* by the Vampires of Dartmoore both consist of musical cues for movies that don't exist (though the former would eventually find its way onto the soundtrack of Jess Franco's *Vampyros Lesbos*), and Kreep saw an opportunity to tap into his love of grindhouse soundtracks while pushing the boundaries of his surfsploitation sound.

"It's really fun to listen to these crazy, psychedelic Euro-funk records and imagine what might be happening in each scene," he explains. "At the same time, I've always been influenced by wild surf, rockabilly and tittyslacker music, and something about allowing myself to lean more directly into those influences scratched some kind of deep itch."

The world got its first taste of the Coroners in the fall of 2014, with the release of three limited-edition 45s that featured such tracks as "Up Jumped the White Devil" and "Graveyard Dragstrip" along with a collector's box that included a board game designed by Detroit artist Robert Paul Nixon and illustrated by Toronto's Drazen Kozjan, a.k.a. the Happy Undertaker.

"I was toying with the idea of eventually doing a full digital release of the tracks," Kreep recalls. "But I'm really more invested these days in making artistic packages to go with the music – something that makes the projects more three-dimensional."

The final piece of *Tales* fell into place when Kreep was contacted by Penny, who publishes racy horror-themed strips online under his Sex and Monsters banner.

"I was already a fan of Kreeps before reaching out to Dom," Penny notes. "I thought his Grim County Coroners music would be a lot of fun to interpret through the medium of a retro-horror comic book."

The two began exchanging story ideas and recruiting artists, and in about a year's time they had

the full *Tales* package. The album collects eleven instrumental tracks steeped in B-movie samples and twanging guitar riffs that are fuzzier than a werewolf's backside, while the comic offers six tales (including Kreep's prose entry, a black-magic daredevil yarn called "Evilous Kneivulous") and a slew of glorious fake ads that riff on comic-book mail-order junk. The stories are drawn and inked by a lineup of artists that includes Mike Vosberg, who illustrated most of the *Tales From the Crypt* covers created for the TV series.

"Each story in our comic started as an instrumental music arrangement, and from there we used the music to draw inspiration for characters and plot ideas," says Penny. "Once the story was hashed out, we requested that each of the artists listen to the specific music track [that inspired their story], and use the music to influence their artistic style. Not only was this process fun, but it also gave a unique vision and connectivity to the stories. We really lucked out because the artists who signed on for the project – Mike Hoffman, Nik Poliwko, Sam McKenzie, Robert Paul Nixon and Mike Vosberg – surpassed our own twisted imaginations and really brought the stories to life."

Kreep teases the possibility of a return to Grim County – he says he's already got new material "in the vaults" – but at the moment there are no concrete plans for future releases.

As for locating Grim County on a map, you'd have better luck borrowing tanning oil from a vampire.

"I think Grim County is more like a *Twilight Zone* affair," Kreep points out. "It's wherever you are when the unexplainable happens. You can be anywhere, doing anything when ordinary madness or the regular grotesque presents itself. That's where it lives. It's always been there. I've always been there." 🧛

TALL TALES & SCARY STORIES

The Magnificent Seven

ORKESTER TM7

As bands continue to sell their music as part of a bigger package, the need for related artwork and collectibles has opened up new creative avenues. For Sweden's The Magnificent Seven, those avenues are more of a lonely old road through a spooky forest.



The group's latest release, *Tall Tales & Scary Stories*, has the CD packed in a book featuring a photo of a headless woman standing in the woods holding the head of a man in a top hat. Limited to 500, the beautiful hardcover has the lyrics for each song, along with an accompanying (gorgeous) ink illustration by Albin Eckberg, all on aged-looking paper – for that

extra-creepy retro feel.

It may not be quite as ambitious as the Grim County Coroners' board game or EC-style comic, but it does its job in furthering the mood of this sombre album full of dirges about devils, witches, demons, ghosts, death and madness. The thirteen (naturally) tracks have titles such as "The Undertaker," "They Came From the Woods," "Devil's Island" and "Tango del la Muerte" and lyrics that are simple but effective.

For example, "I am the horror, I am obscene/Violence and murder, the White Devil on a scene" ("Grand Guignol") keep things dark. The accompanying music is more complex, however, with thirteen players credited on the album with everything from saw to Theremin.

The feeling here is forlorn with a dram of forsaken. The Magnificent Seven are the artistic kin of the likes of The Handsome Family, Those Poor Bastards and, yes, The Grim County Coroners, though *Tall Tales & Scary Stories* doesn't quite have the punch of those groups. Most of the songs follow the same simple formula, while delving into different folk sounds, adding different flourishes of jazz, rock or even gypsy-style accordion. Give it some time, and this one might grow on you like moss on the skeleton of a corpse long abandoned in the forest.



DAVE ALEXANDER

