

# The Fright Stuff



## Monsterwax Unearths Things That Go Bump in the Movie Theater

by Alan Biegel



**Y**esterday your local movie theater was just a venue for showing the latest Hollywood release, but tonight something ghastly has taken over. Tonight it has become a haunted house of unspeakable terror. Dracula will rise, Frankenstein's monster will escape, and ghosts will run wild in an asylum of blood-dripping horror. And when the lights go out, well, that's when snakes will roam the theater. Thrills, Shivers, and Shudders. Ladies, don't even think about coming without a male escort because it's all on stage and in person, and sometimes...there are ghouls in the audience! At least, that's what the advertising posters announce.

Combine eerie lighting with a measure of fog-enshrouded stage magic, add a rampaging gorilla or a few marauding monsters, and top off with a hearty helping of carnival huskering and what you get is the makings for a good, old-fashioned Midnight Spook Show.

### Coming Soon to a Spooky Theater Near You

While many may be too young to remember movie theater spook shows, Monsterwax's Kurt Kuersteiner counts himself as one of their biggest fans, so much so he is releasing a card set dedicated to the subject. "Spook shows were the forerunner of the haunted house industry," said Kurt. "They were essentially 'traveling' haunted houses with a professional magician using his best illusions and hypnotic suggestion to terrify the audience. They were a tremendous success for over 40 years."

The posters, which span the 1940s through the early 1970s, represent the essence of a bygone and near forgotten era. "They are a time capsule back to a simpler time when audiences were more superstitious and less jaded. People were also more imaginative, and clever magicians were able

to harness that power to their advantage, producing stunning effects." Kuersteiner advises.

What made the spook shows particularly fascinating was their heavy reliance on gimmicks, "The gimmicks spook shows employed to fill the theaters were so clever and manipulative it was enough to make William Castle blush! (He was clearly influenced by them.) Some spookers promised to give away a free dead body to one 'lucky' audience member. Others promised to give away a free live baby, 'walking and ready to talk.' They all promised to scare the hell out of people. Essentially, that's what made spook shows so much fun. They were always toying with the audience's imaginations, twisting and bending what people actually saw so they were fooled, and yet satisfied enough to return year after year."

While Kuersteiner wasn't lucky enough to see an actual



spook show himself (“[as a child] my mother thought I was too interested in monsters), he was fortunate enough to eventually form a relationship with a subject matter expert, “What really made the [new Monsterwax card] set possible was my friendship with Ed Shea of New York. He is a tremendous poster collector and repository of knowledge about spook shows. Most of the images in the series are from his extensive collection. [In addition,] I’ve built up a rather large collection of information [myself] on spook shows from a half decade pursuit of the topic.”

### Some Like It HOT

Most card collectors would think there wouldn’t be enough different posters available to make a full card set but Kuersteiner had so many to choose from he could afford to be selective, “Absolutely none of these posters have appeared in any other set. They are all quite rare and include amazing Halloween, horror, and monster images.”

To complement a full and informative base set, *Spook Show* will abound with coffins full of additional ghoulish goodies, “There will be Emerge-O-Vision embossed cards, special spot-finish Frightening Foils, and Gruesome Gimmick cards. We try to include a full set of inserts in every box. The exception would be unique items like autographs and sketch cards (every box would have one). Another exception is Monsterwax Metal cards (actual printing plates). There just aren’t enough to fill all 500 boxes, so there’s one in every other box. Some boxes will also include reproduction tickets from the actual shows. Many feature graphic art and titillating hype about the shows, including some of the most famous names in the business, like Raymond, Kara Kum, and Bill Neff. And because of the excitement generated by the girls and monsters found in the set, we’re providing a free ‘faint pill’ inside each box. Also since the subject matter could raise the heart rate of the collector to dangerous levels, we’re also including a free \$10,000 insurance policy to pay the estate of the purchaser should they die from fright as they open the packs. The policy stipulations and an updated list of the complete set contents will be posted at [Monsterwax.com](http://Monsterwax.com),” advises Kuersteiner.

Since many spook show artists are still living (or at least undead), autographs will be a key portion of the master set, “We are attempting to collect autograph cards from as many surviving performers as we can, including the people who played their monsters. This includes magician Phillip Morris, PR expert and author Rick Allen, and Keith Stickely, who resurrected the spook show and performs this long lost art for modern audiences.”

As usual with Monsterwax, the company pays as much attention to the packaging as to the cards themselves, “The *Spook Show* box was designed by Kevin Graham, using elements from the actual spook show posters,” Kuersteiner announced. “There’s a creepy photo of one of the monsters from the shows leering at you on the front, along with classic spook show hype and dramatic artwork on all sides. Even the bottom of the box is beautiful. You have to see it to believe it. And the wrappers are based on an early Dr. Silkini poster, and come in two different colors. We use the folding wax style wrapper [as] we prefer the retro look and feel of classic trading cards. There are six cards per pack, plus a stick of ‘ghoul gum’; the gum so hot, they serve it in HELL!”

*Spook Show* is set to release Halloween 2011 with 66 cards in the base set and 24 packs in each box. The packs retail for \$2 while the box is available for a reasonable \$45. In summing up his horrifying set Kuersteiner said, “If you were one of the lucky ones to actually experience a real spook show during their heyday, you would never forget it. For the rest of us, we can still vicariously experience the chills and thrills through *Spook Show* trading cards. The posters provide the hype and anticipation, the backs provide the memories and eyewitness accounts, and your imagination will provide the rest. It’s a magic carpet ride into a mysterious world where the supernatural reigned as king!” **NSU**

