



Oh, the Comedic, Tentactled Horror of ELDRITCH!

A Double Team Interview with "Lovecrafty" Creators Aaron Alexovich and Drew Rausch

Aaron Alexovich and Drew Rausch would like to be to comics what Lovecraft was to futuristic (and today, a bit prognostic) sci fi. And with their Zuda-winning comic ELDRITCH! they're off to a Big Bang start! Part horror, part comedy, part blasphemy, ELDRITCH! is one of those wacky, irreverent tales that swishes and swirls on the page like a magic elixir that draws you in and sweeps you away to a Creative Kingdom you couldn't imagine. In both story structure and artistic composition, these dudes write and draw outside of the lines and the result is ... well, GODDAMN REFRESHING!!



Reading their work is exhausting and exhilarating and, whilst the off-kilter art may be too cartoony for some, me-thinks most comic denizens will find it very ultra-cool – somewhere between CHEW, Mad Magazine and Beetlejuice. Get ready for ELDRITCH! folks, because it's something you haven't quite seen before...

1. I've heard of sibling rivalry but this quirky horror comedy dropkicks it to the next level. What was the inspiration for ELDRITCH and where did the name come from?

(AARON:) It all starts with H.P. Lovecraft. I've been in love with his style since I was maybe 12 years old or so – the perfect age to have your brain scrambled by that kind of stuff. The world he created was full of these awful, dangerous, almost impossible to describe THINGS tucked away in the shadows and hiding around the corners, which is sort of how the real world felt to me when I was that age. But at the same time, Lovecraft's stories always had these scientist characters that just couldn't help themselves – they HAD to go poking at these terrifying, burbling, tentacled things. They had to figure them out, understand them, make them less SCARY, I guess. And to see if they can be controlled. Anya and Owen are both doing that, in their own way. One of them is applying her fists and her cleaver more than the other, but they're after the same kind of control. It's very Lovecrafty.

The title is Lovecraft, too. "Eldritch" is just one of those florid old words he'd pull out whenever he got a chance. Like 'sepulchral' or 'mausolean.' The original title of the book was "Fester," which I still kind of like, but the Zuda people told us there was already a comic with that title. So it's ELDRITCH! with an exclamation point now.



(DREW:) Oh god – the "Fester" comic. I almost forgot about that. When DC's Legal rep informed us that there was already a "web comic" with that title I was actually disappointed since I too liked "Fester". Then I clicked on the link they gave us and what we found was the most dazzling display of high school site building I had ever seen. I mean, the thing was SATURATED with blood dripping animated Gifs!

2. After reading issue #1, I think this is a perfect pairing of writer and artist. Your styles seem to mesh so well on the page. And the result is a fresh comic that is much more fun and easier to read than the standard "hero-in-tights" comic book fare. How did you stumble upon each other?

(DREW:) I was aware of Aaron's existence from reading *Serenity Rose* way back when it was in single issues. What really stood out was his unique ability to make each issue read like a sequential novel. And I liked that. It had substance, wit and charm what with the "spooky" cute art. Eventually, I ended up asking Aaron to do a pin up for the second volume of my creator book *SullenGrey*. On top of that, we both were working on projects for Slave Labor Graphics. I did some *Haunted Mansion* stuff and Aaron's *Serenity Rose* book is published by them. So we sort of came from the same circle and just started chatting after that. We both have a lot of similar tastes in our love for cheesy B horror movies.

3. You introduced *ELDRITCH* to the world via *Zuda*. Tell us about the experience?

(AARON:) It was sort of brutal, actually. I had knots in my stomach that whole month. But we learned a lot, particularly about marketing and promotion, which I'd never really done for myself before. Sometimes I wish I could shove all that marketing knowledge back where it came from, like cramming *Dread Cthulhu* back into his sunken crypt. But I guess all artists have to be skilled in the Dark Arts these days. We're increasingly on our own, which is in a lot of ways incredibly liberating, but in other ways absolutely terrifying.

(DREW:) It was definitely a learning experience. I think one of the things an artist of any kind learns late is the importance of self promotion. It sucks and it's hard exhausting work, but it's crucial if you want to make a career out of it. Unfortunately, *Zuda* was more like cramming a season's worth of *American Idol* into 30 days. But in the end, even after DC shut *Zuda* down right after we won, we had gained a greater exposure than what we had before which was almost more important than winning.

4. I absolutely love how you describe the main characters – “Anya Sobczek is a snarling science major with an arm full of Darwin tattoos. Her brother Owen is a sensitive young thing in a coven of teenage occultists.” Are they based on anyone you know?

(AARON:) No, Owen and Anya aren't based on anyone specific. There's definitely a lot of my wife Ami in Anya... Really analytical, fiercely committed to her ideals, deeply into science and technology, tattoos, karate... But I think most of my characters are basically just me with a bunch of interesting character traits and quirks glued on. I think most writers are probably like that. It's hard not to be!



5. As I read *ELDRITCH* the unshackled wacky characters of *Beetlejuice* came to mind for some odd reason. To what films or books would you characterize your story as “in the vein of...”?

(AARON:) Oh man, I LOVE *Beetlejuice*. The book definitely has some of that same mix of disturbing images and outright wackiness. There's actually a pretty fine line between disturbing and ridiculous, and hopefully we can jump back and forth throughout *ELDRITCH*! For me, nobody pulled off that kind of tightrope-walking better than John Carpenter and Sam Raimi back in the 80s and early 90s, especially in stuff like *The Thing* and *Evil Dead*. You're laughing at

some of the outrageous effects in those movies, but some of that stuff, it STICKS with you, you know? I'm picturing the possessed girls in *Evil Dead* right now, and it's just awful... I love it! And I want to capture some of whatever that is in ELDRITCH!



(DREW:) For me the best parts of *Beetlejuice* are the scenes with The Deetzs and Otho. Just the interaction between the three is priceless. There's a lot of Tim Burton in ELDRITCH!, I think. Also some David Lynch and maybe a bit of Twilight Zone. There are scenes, these extreme close-up scenes, with this lengthy pause and you can almost hear the grit of the teeth in a forced smile or a sweat bead trailing down a character's face. I love that kind of thing. That razor thin line between the horrifying and the insane that is constantly walked, and you never know which way it's going to go that makes the story more interesting.

6. Anya and Owen are two irreverent characters who will resonate with audiences young and old. Are you going to introduce the back story of their sibling rivalry in the 6-issue series which shows how Anya (a brainiac with an attitude) became a science tattoo queen and Owen became a nerd with a dark side?



(AARON:) Yeah, tracing how Owen and Anya got into this horrible emotional tangle of a relationship is a big part of the book. Actually, there's a LOT of that coming up in issue 2. I try not to spell EVERYTHING out, though, with underlining and highlighter and all that... A little bit of mystery is great for building characters that feel, you know, REAL. Most of us can't really follow the exact sequence of events that

smooched our brains into the shape they're in. Or, at least, I can't. Too much clarity always seems a little fake to me. But for sure, TRYING to figure out why people are the way they are is what makes writing fun.

7. Both the art and the story are very funny. It's like Tim Burton meets Mad magazine. Smart, Hip. And darkly entertaining. Aaron, was it hard to write or did it flow freely after a six pack or two?

(AARON:) Writing this book has been nothing but fun so far. But the "writing" part of comics has always been fun for me. The writing, character design, rough page layouts... I love all that stuff, where it's mostly about brainstorming and getting all the ideas out on paper. The scribbly part, that's what I like. I've always had a problem with the "making beautiful, finished pages" aspect of being an artist... not a lot of patience for the sheer craftsmanship side of things. I really envy Drew's passion for trying out different techniques and coming up with new approaches for making art. His work on this book has been phenomenal. That Mad magaziney kind of look you mentioned comes from Drew trying out a drastically different style from the one we used in the Zuda version. The extra cartooniness works incredibly well, I think, especially in the darker, more horrific scenes. It's that perfect, *Evil Dead*-style "off balance" feeling. We'll get more and more of that as the series goes on!

8. Drew, the art quickly grew on me. Your story is not confined by typical comic book panel "boxes". It flows from panel to panel – and page to page – like the eerie black tentacle goop. What did you think when you read the script for this? Did a light go off where you knew right away how you were going to tackle it?

(DREW:) That's mostly Aaron's influence. He has a strong animation background, working on *Avatar the Last Airbender* and *Invader Zim* for Nickelodeon, so his way of thinking has a very "storyboard" sense of flow and page composition. It took a bit to get used to that sort of approach. Aaron actually ended up scribbling small thumbnails that he sent along with the script which helped immensely. I just use those as a basis for the finished pages. It is collaboration in the truest sense of the word.

I have a very strong fondness for German Expressionism. The *Cabinet of Caligary* by Fritz Lang is one of my FAVORITE films, so I try to incorporate a lot of that into the look of ELDRITCH! Heavily textured shadows and odd geometric shapes and weird angles, that kind of stuff. I really enjoy making the reader feel uneasy, like they have to put the book down and take a breather. It really adds to the tension. And like Aaron said, I'm trying out a more in your face cartooniness, taking a bit of Spumco influence and really just pushing the expressiveness of the characters. I think ELDRITCH! works better with an abnormal quirky look.

9. Do you know how story is going to end? The story has such a free-flow nature to it, it almost feels as if the ending will naturally evolve. How far are you along in the six-issue series? And do you already have plans for a follow up?



(AARON:) Yeah, all six issues are written and super-roughly sketched out, actually. I have some loose ideas for what we could do in this disturbing little Lovecraftian world beyond that (maybe two or three more books worth) ... but we'll see how it goes!

10. Where can we buy issue one? And when can we expect the other issues to be available? Do you have anything else in the works – either as a team or individually?

(AARON:) You can get ELDRITCH! #1 from our website right now:

<http://www.heartshapedskull.com/ELDRITCH/issue-one/>

Download it directly from us in PDF form for \$0.99

(<http://www.heartshapedskull.com/ELDRITCH/>), or from a whole mess of other comic retailers, including Graphicly and – very soon – ComiXology.

New issues are going to be rolling out every six weeks, with #2 scheduled for July 27th, which happens to be my birthday. Hooray!

As soon as I'm finished with my ELDRITCH! duties, I'm diving into Vol. 3 of my spooky horror/comedy series *Serenity Rose*, which is about this social phobic little punk witch who lives in a supernatural tourist trap called Crestfallen. I'll be rolling that one out on my website, <http://www.heartshapedskull.com/>, starting this October.

(DREW:) I'm working on the 3rd volume of my horror series *Sullengrey*, a story about a small town gripped by the terror of being devoured by its own fear. It's written by Jocelyn Gajeway and published by Ape Entertainment. Right now, though, I'm mostly focused on ELDRITCH! We hope people get a chance to check out ELDRITCH! since every bit of money we get from that is going to help fund these other projects.

Thank you, Gentlemen. ELDRITCH! looks like a winner in my book. May the Mad "Lovecraftian" Muse always lurk in your shadows!

An award-winning indie comic creator and screenwriter, Bob Heske is currently writing/producing a micro-budget horror film called UNREST. Bob wrote THE NIGHT PROJECTIONIST, a vampire horror series to be published by Studio 407 with film rights optioned by Myriad Pictures Through his Heske Horror shingle, Bob self-published his critically acclaimed horror series COLD BLOODED CHILLERS. Bob's trade paperback BONE CHILLER (a "best of" CBC anthology) won a Bronze medal in the horror category at the 2009 Independent Publisher Book Awards. His "end times" anthology 2012: FINAL PRAYER was also released in late 2009. Email him at info@coldbloodedchillers.com.