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# SHADOWLAND MAGAZINE

WE KNOW WHO TO CALL...

## GHOSTBUSTERS

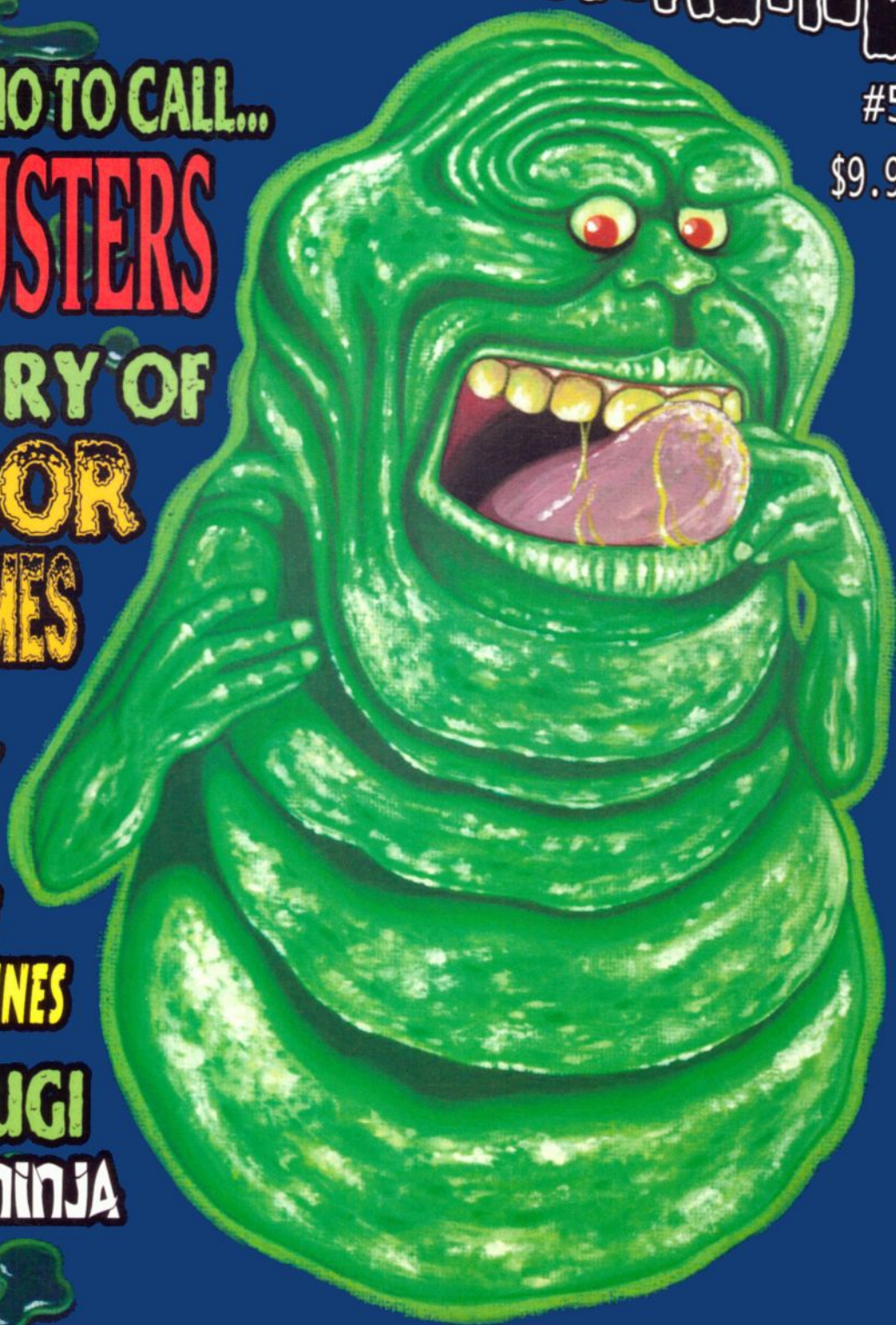
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# "BUT THE KIDS LOVE US!" A LOOK AT THE GHOSTBUSTERS FRANCHISE



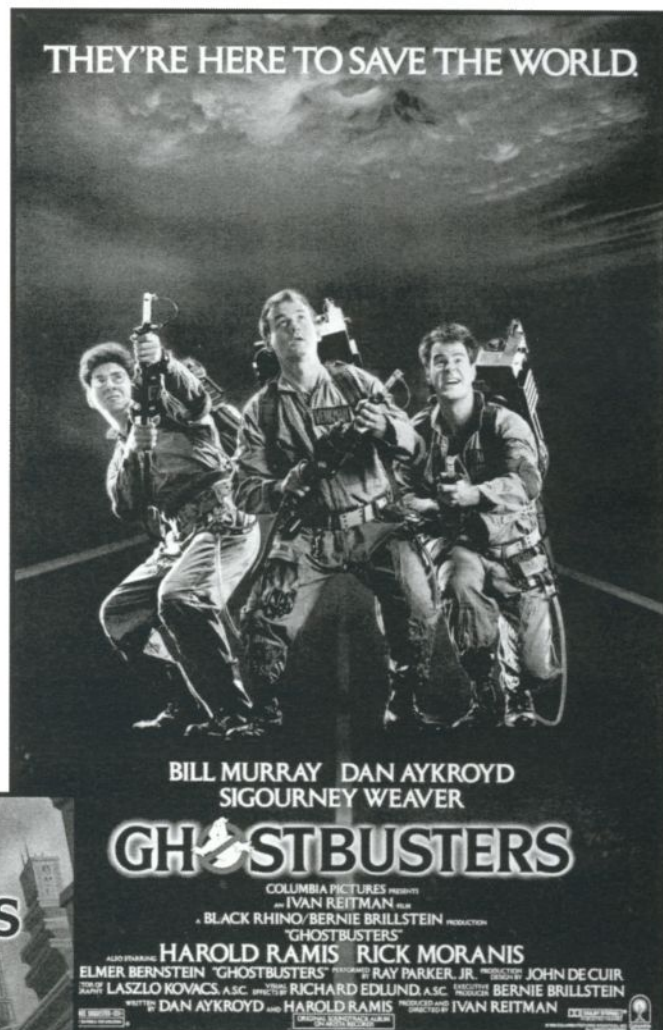
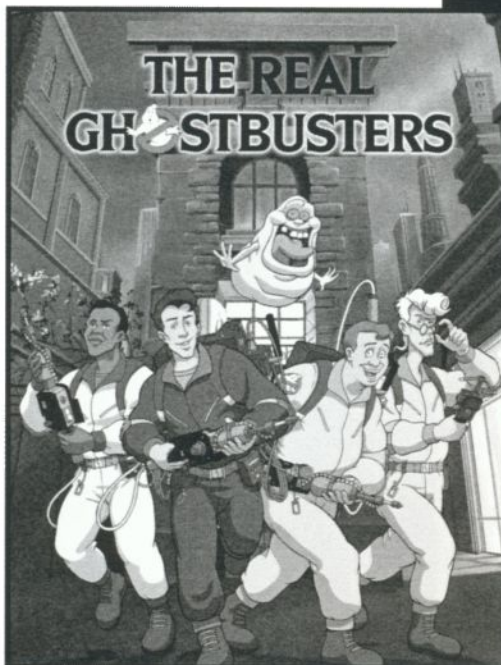
By Flynn Cook

## 1984-1988: The GB Boom

I'm sure it's a film that needs no introduction to you: the 1984 classic about three parapsychologists (and a hired hand) doing battle against spectral forces using spectacular weaponry while turning a profit from it. Probably everyone reading this has at least seen the first film (and if you haven't, stop reading this and go Netflix it!), so I'm going to be talking about the *rest* of the Ghostbusters franchise, hopefully aspects of it many of you have passed up.

The next thing to hit after the film was the 1986 television cartoon *The Real Ghostbusters*. Confused about the title? Well, it turns out that there was *another* Ghostbusters series before the movie—a live-action children's show from the 1970s by the same name. It featured wacky acting and a guy in a cheap gorilla suit! When the film came around, Columbia Pictures had to secure the right to use the title legally, which they did. This right to use the title even trickled down to television, leaving Columbia/DIC to call their show by the same name. But Filmation decided to resurrect *their* Ghostbusters as a new animated cartoon, in the wake of the '84 film's success, and desiring to clear things up for the kiddies and stick-it to Filmation in the process, the movie-based cartoon would be called "The Real Ghostbusters" emphasizing to kids that *this* was the Ghostbusters that they wanted!

*The Real Ghostbusters* (RGB) was an unusual cartoon series for a number of reasons, chief among them was its generally dark tone; uncharacteristic for an 80s cartoon. It was a period of high sanitization in



cartoons, usually resulting in formulaic stories for the Transformers, the G.I. Joes, and others. And while RGB wasn't serialized, it didn't suffer from any kind of overt sanitization (until later). The premise skirts aspects the censors would object to. It encourages teamwork; they're fighting using bizarre weapons against ghosts which leaves no violence for kids to adopt themselves.

RGB ran for six/seven seasons; a miracle in the world of cartoons. It was bolstered by a successful toylines, naturally. Running on ABC and in syndication concurrently, the show began fairly grim and witty; with much comedy to rival the film itself! By the third season, however, mandates



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came down from ABC forcing changes. Bad enough that they initially forced the villainous green hotel ghost from the movie to be the Ghostbusters' cutesy pet Slimer, but now they squeezed-out main story editor J. Michael Straczynski, and forced a more kid-friendly tone onto the series. Slimer became more prominent, voice changes were made, and elements were toned down. The show had lost its edge, and in my opinion, never got it back.

But most of you already know about *The Real Ghostbusters*. It, like the original film, is infamous. The real meat of this article is to discuss the lesser-known or lesser-noticed aspects of the franchise, and truly, that begins with the hated film sequel: *Ghostbusters II*.

### **1989-2009: Hate and Obscurity.**

There was much anticipation in the summer of '89 with GB2, anticipation that evaporated for reasons unknown to me. People generally complain about Peter's relationship with Dana's infant son Oscar, or the repetition of the first film's story beats, or even that, in whatever way, it's not as funny as the first film. I've never seen anything wrong with GB2, and truthfully, I enjoy it more than the first film. Why? Well, it's because I find it places more emphasis on actual Ghostbusting; the thing I love best about the series. If it were an actual job, that would be my chosen career path.

The characters all still resonate. The set pieces are great, the comedy is all there, and the cast nails it. I can't speak for why GB2 is hated; it's just one of those

things. If GB2 is any less funny than the first, it's because perhaps the gravity of the situation takes center stage, whereas the first film was about the quirkiness of the lead characters, GB2 is all about the villain's plan and the heroes' battle. Gozer in the first film is secondary to the hijinks. GB2 is much darker.

And that's a theme that would be recurrent with all subsequent Ghostbusters material after that second film, and perhaps it's why the world seemed to fall out-of-love with the franchise's new segments; it just wasn't very funny anymore. The subtextual things in play at

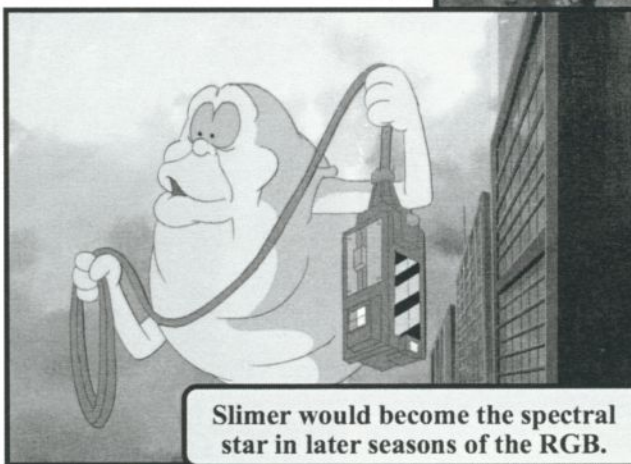
**Possessed portraits! Vigo filled in as GB2's villain.**



the heart of GB2 are frightening. Vigo, long-dead torturing warlord of the 16th century, is hoping to possess an innocent child (Dana's Oscar) to rule again. Along the way, we're reminded of his cruelty in his dialog. Gozer was a fairly mysterious and indifferent deity; it was

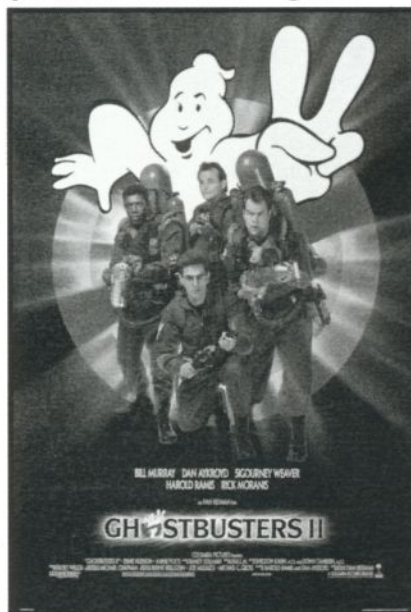
just going to destroy everything because, well, it was a cyclical thing. Happened a lot. Vigo? He bonded his soul to his own painting to live on

**Slimer would become the spectral star in later seasons of the RGB.**



and commit evil crimes again one day, after he was murdered by the people of his land for having been "...Vigo the Cruel, Vigo the Torturer, Vigo the Despised and Vigo the Unholy."

The scares in the first film were in service to the comedy. The scares in GB2 were in service to the story. And according to most movie-goers, this was bad, somehow. As if the concept of the series never enticed them at all, just the fact that it





was Murray, Aykroyd, Ramis and Moranis together. The film also dares to have a message, where the first film didn't. The theme of "love your fellow man, hate is tearing the world apart" didn't sit well with an audience that just wanted Bill Murray to crack wise about people without genitalia.

*The Real Ghostbusters* continued to run on a few years after GB2, until it was squashed in 1991 by the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. The franchise lay dormant for six years until a re-invention was tried in '97 with the new cartoon *Extreme Ghostbusters*.

EGB, for those who never saw it (read: most of you), was produced for first-run syndication, and myself, I was lucky to have noticed it one day in the TV listings. The series was a sequel to *The Real Ghostbusters* and



followed a new team of 'Busters under the guidance of Egon (a returning Maurice LaMarche), Janine and Slimer. The rest of the originals returned at the end of the show for a two-parter, whose voices returned from RGB. The show didn't do well in the ratings, nor in the toy aisles. Children won't want toys based on a show they never catch on TV!

Regardless, the show was something of a hidden gem, with few blemishes. The new team was a group of twenty-somethings recruited out of Egon's paranormal studies class at New York University; Roland, the African-American tech genius; Kylie, the ghost-obsessed goth girl; Eduardo, the Hispanic slacker and Garrett, the extreme sports guy who was wheelchair-bound. Garrett's disability was the worst aspect of the show. Not because I have anything against the handicapped, mind you, but because it stretched credibility, even in a show about catching ghosts. How did he not roll backwards from Proton Gun fire? Stairs? Keeping up with a chase? It was an issue that the show tried its best with, but it never worked in a logical way, with Garrett often doing ridiculous moves in his chair.

Garrett's disability otherwise, the characters were all believably characterized and the stories were

well-paced. The dialogue rang realistic and the four, along with Egon, didn't feel forced. And another thing working in the show's favor: it was unabashedly dark; whereas RGB at its darkest was merely disquieting, EGB was dark in ways that might stay with you. One episode sees the team going up against a creature that utilizes their own fears against them, of note is Eduardo's fear of death resulting in being plagued by a gruesome, undead version of himself. Another episode saw a wannabe-Stephen King at the mercy of his own horror novel creations; *Hellraiser*-style monsters with absolutely

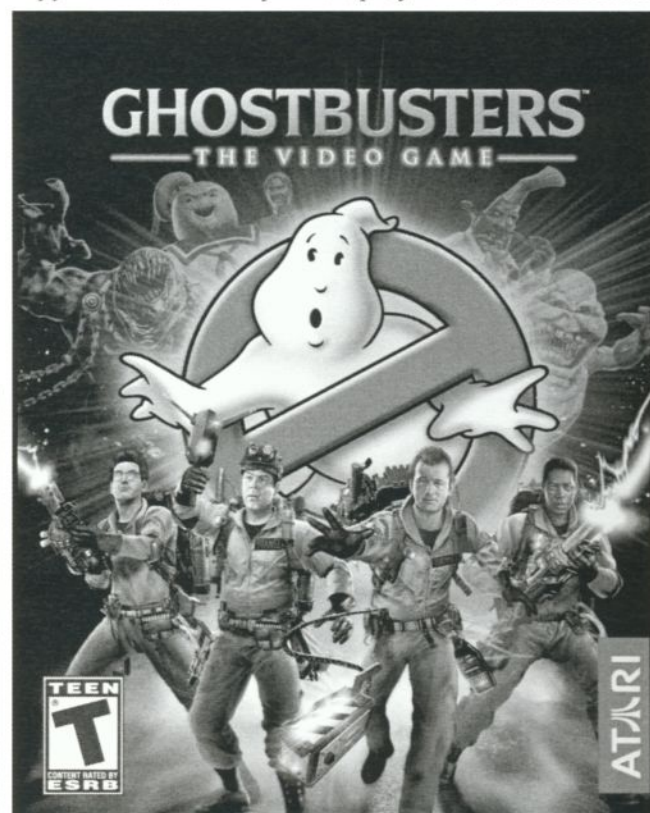
gruesome designs who capture living victims and mutilate them into one of their own. And that's just to name a few of the stories.

*Extreme Ghostbusters* met with no success, and was swiftly, sadly forgotten. The franchise at that point became a minor focal point for series-creator Dan Aykroyd for a new sequel in the same vein as EGB (with new recruits). A sequel that remains in development hell to this day. Probably better off, since "fans" of the films deplore the idea after *Ghostbusters II*. Thankfully, we did get something of a sequel in two other important

entertainment fields: comic books and video games.

### 2009-Now: Subtle Revival

2009 was a watershed year for this GB fan, at least. Somehow, the stars aligned and game developer Terminal Reality was contracted by Sony (Columbia) Pictures to make a brand new, next-gen, big budget, third-person action-adventure *Ghostbusters* video game. Hiccapped from release when Activision dropped support for it, it was picked up by Atari for distribution





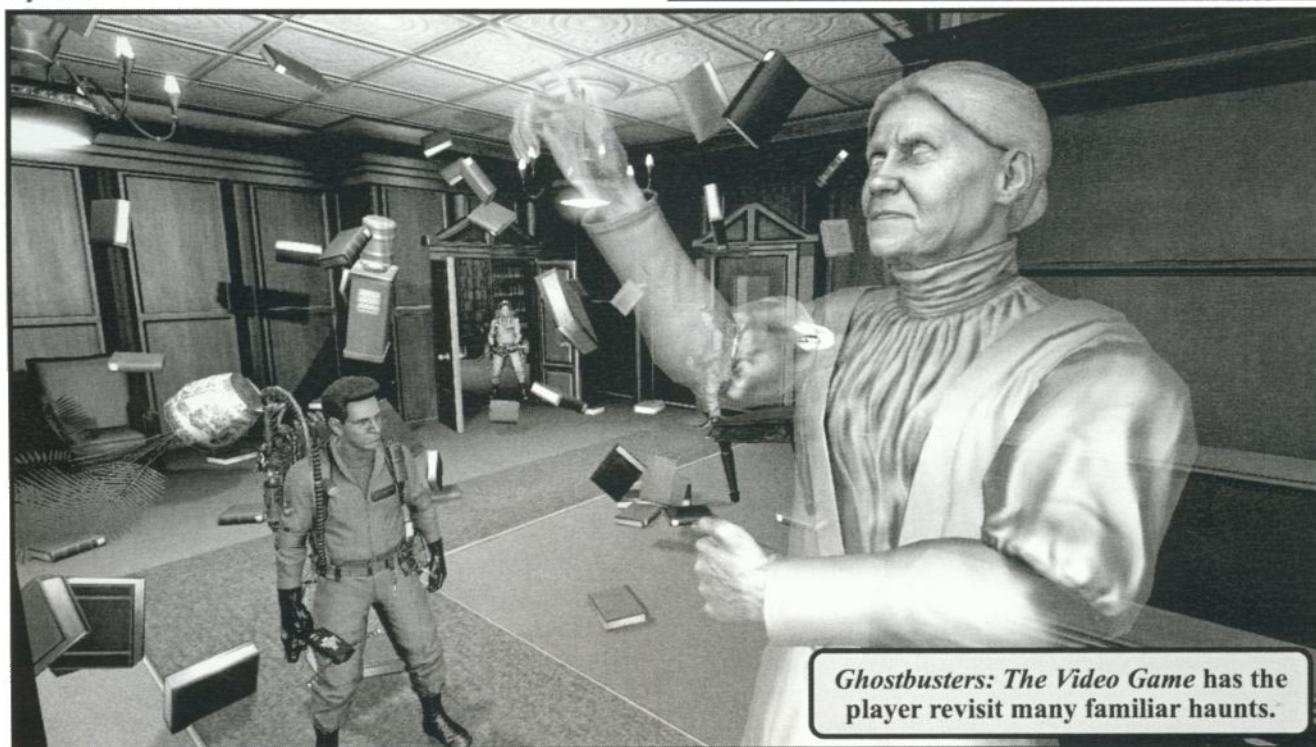
and came out a year later (it was set to debut in fall 2008, with a snappy tagline of "This fall... Who ya gonna call?"). But this wasn't a cheap cash-in video game, oh no. This game's script was tightened by series writers Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis, and also featured their vocal talents as Stantz and Spengler, respectively. Also returning vocally was Ernie Hudson, Annie Potts, William Atherton and, most surprisingly of all, Bill Murray — each of them reprising their film roles.

For these listed reasons alone, it should be a must-buy for anyone who calls themselves a fan. But sadly, though the game did very well and was played by many people, I can't tell you how many people I still come across who haven't learned of its existence, or of its quality. Movie/licensed games get a terrible rap (undeservedly in most cases, in my opinion), and *Ghostbusters: The Video Game* has been equally maligned by people who just *assume* it's terrible because it's licensed. I, and many others, can attest to the fact that it is one of the highest quality games manufactured! Terminal Reality nailed the gameplay experience, with Proton slinging akin to fishing. Other gameplay mechanics, with newly-created weapons for the team, also excite and are well-implemented.

Players control a nameless, silent rookie Ghostbuster who joins the team due to increased Psychokinetic levels. Venkman insists that the team not learn his name after "what happened to the last guy." While most people may balk at this decision to control a nobody, it was the most brilliant decision; you get to feel like the team is interacting with *you*, instead of feeling like you're playing as an existing member of the squad, making the package more immersive than you could at first imagine. The game also boasts vocal support from Max Von Sydow (reprising his film voice as Vigo, in a clever cameo), Brian Doyle-Murray (as the mayor) and Alyssa Milano as the new love interest for Venkman.

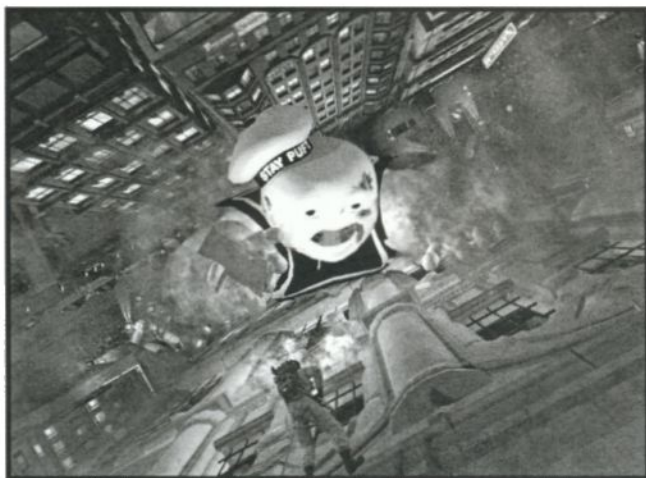
Going back to what I mentioned earlier about the tone of the series, post first-film, the game extrapolates this to the fullest degree: the game is genuinely frightening. If you're not feeling unnerved by your lonely exploits through haunted locations (you're often separated from the rest of the team and must reunite), you'll jump when the game deliberately tries to spook you. Guaranteed. Whether it's inter-dimensional exploits, or whispering demon-slime, or vicious backstories of the ghosts you're pursuing, this game ratchets up the creep factor. Some of your favorite entities from the films return, along with locations, but it's far from a trip down memory lane. These call backs are expertly woven into the narrative so that you can revisit, but not rehash, some of your favorite moments from the original film, but with creepier intentions, which is utterly keeping with the conditions of the GB universe. The job would clearly be a horrific and frightening one...the films just seldom tap into that obvious fact in favor of comedy. With this interactive experience, you can crank up the scary!

But pleasing the opposite ends of the fandom, without undercutting the spooky parts of the game, there are relentless laughs to be had! The interplay between the actors, first off, is flawless and as tight as it ever was. Everyone brings their A-game, even Murray



*Ghostbusters: The Video Game* has the player revisit many familiar haunts.



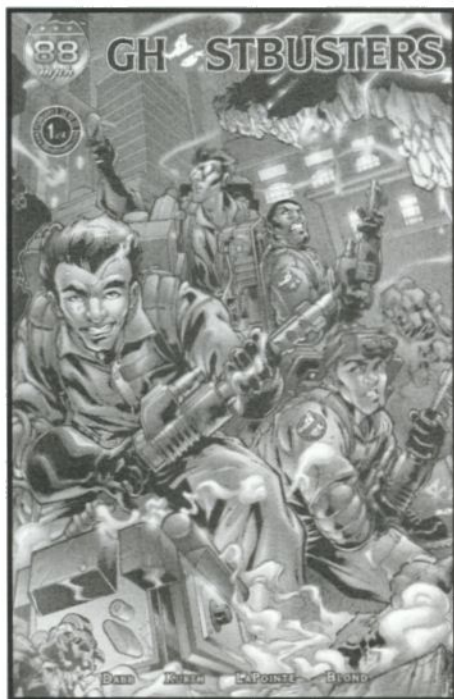


who, despite his resistance in returning to the franchise, gives his all in what may be the funniest he's been in years. Between levels in the Firehouse (which you can roam freely), you can talk to Vigo and hear hilarious (or scary) sayings as he's trapped in his painting. You can also listen to wacky answering machine messages from crazy NYC citizens. Narratively, humor happens naturally, whether it be Ray getting possessed due to his own foolish bravado, or Venkman getting slimed again in the most unexpected way.

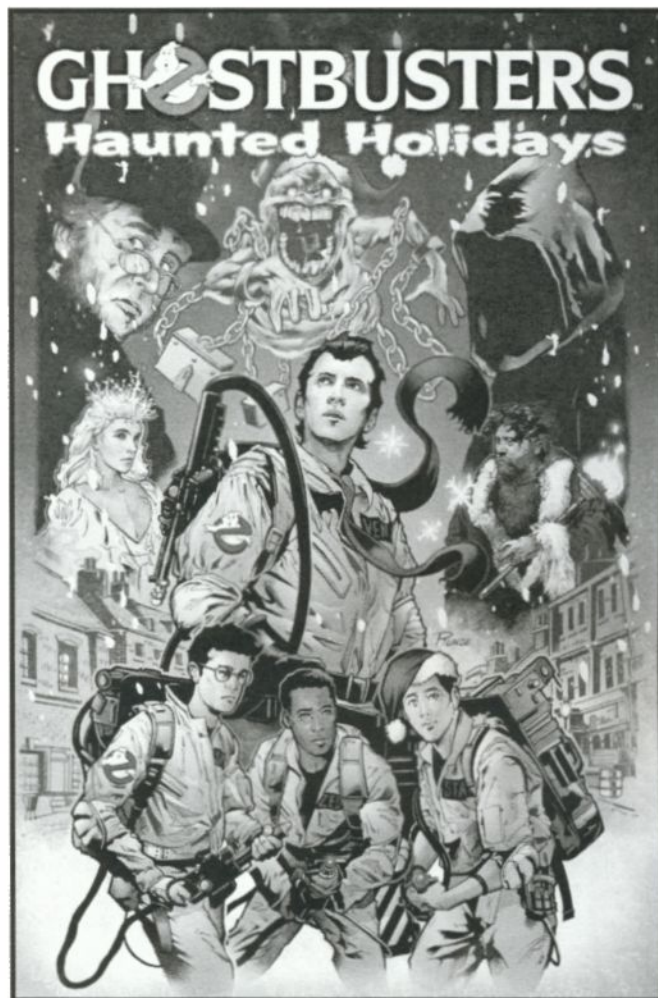
The game has something for every GB fan. It's so good; I recommend you purchase a gaming system for it if you don't have a compatible one already! As of 2012, it's available for all current platforms.

On the comic book front, publisher IDW has been producing new GB material for many years. Prior to this, though, a studio called 88mph published a four-issue mini-series called "Legion," which was fantastic. The owner of the publisher, though, turned out to be a foolish cad, and he ran off with people's preorder money for a collected book of "Legion" and his company went under.

IDW's material, though, is superior. The material



they published at first, random mini-series and one-shots, were very hit-or-miss. Mostly misses. But that has changed with their new ongoing title just called *Ghostbusters*. Scripted by the brilliant Erik Burnham and drawn by the fan-favorite caricaturist Dan Schoening, the book has been through a few story arcs



now, and the great stories keep flying. The humor, as with the video game, is dead-on. Burnham understands what made the characters tick in the first place, and Dan's art captures the humor alone!

Stories ranging from remanifestations of Gozer to a haunted tour across America, the plotting is tight and the continuity continues on from the video game (the game took place in 1991, two years after *Ghostbusters II*). Walter Peck is the team's government liaison, and can't keep from giving the four a hard time. While the franchise may be down, it certainly isn't out, and the hit comic series keeps the torch burning! Consult with your local comic shop and pick it up!

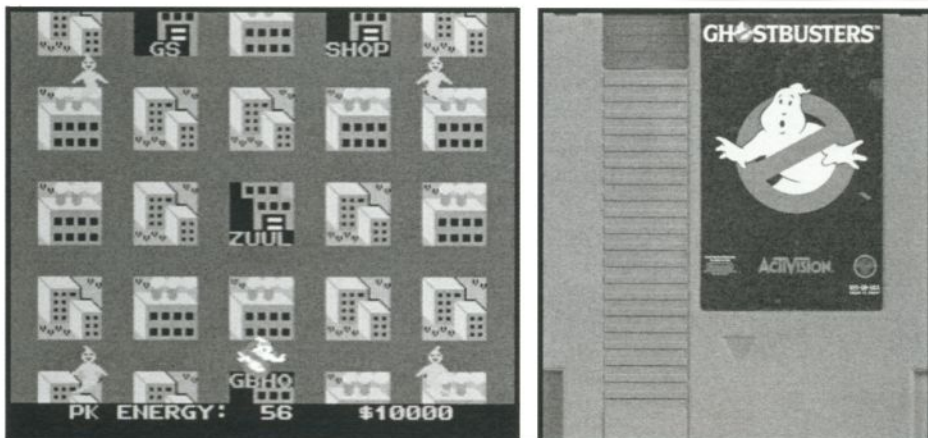
It seems that the Ghostbusters franchise kind-of lost fans as it went. With each new element added (RGB, GB2, EGB), fans decided the series had 'jumped the shark' to some degree, and they abandoned it. Frequently, I know of people who enjoy the series who never knew of the material post-GB2, and I'm shocked. Shocked at how people who claim to be fans can be so unaware of further developments in the thing they love so dear. I hope this article has helped you learn what's out there that you may have missed!

Thanks to Ray Parker, we know who to call. But when the fearsome foursome was looking to excite their audience with new prospects, they called the fans and the fans put them on hold. They always picked up for you, isn't it time you picked up for them?



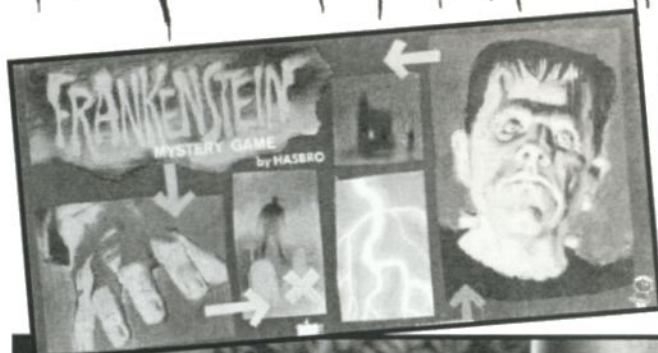
# Virtual Fear: A History of Horror Video Games by Frank Warden

1984 would continue to be a strong year for Hollywood-inspired games. Activision's *Ghostbusters* arrived on the Commodore 64 and would later be ported to the Atari 800, MSX, and Sega Master System, among others. The version that went to the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) was notorious for its altered ending and horrid spelling errors like, "Conglaturation!!! You have completed a great game. And proved the justice of our culture. Now go and rest our heroes!" Ernie Hudson, who played Winston Zeddemore in the *Ghostbusters* films, even went so far to say that his kids hated the NES version. Many *Ghostbusters* games were released since, including ones based on the sequel film and *The Real Ghostbusters*/ *Extreme Ghostbusters* cartoons.



*Left: Ghostbusters on the Nintendo Entertainment System.  
Right: Original NES cartridge.*

# BY THE NUMBERS



4

Number of "figure" pieces included in Hasbro's 1963 Frankenstein Mystery Game.



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50

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99

Minute runtime for the uncut version of *Enter the Ninja* (1981).

147

Episodes produced of *The Real Ghostbusters*.



VAMPIRES

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209

Pages in the first 1896 edition of H.G. Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau*.

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Year that *House of Dark Shadows* was released in theaters.