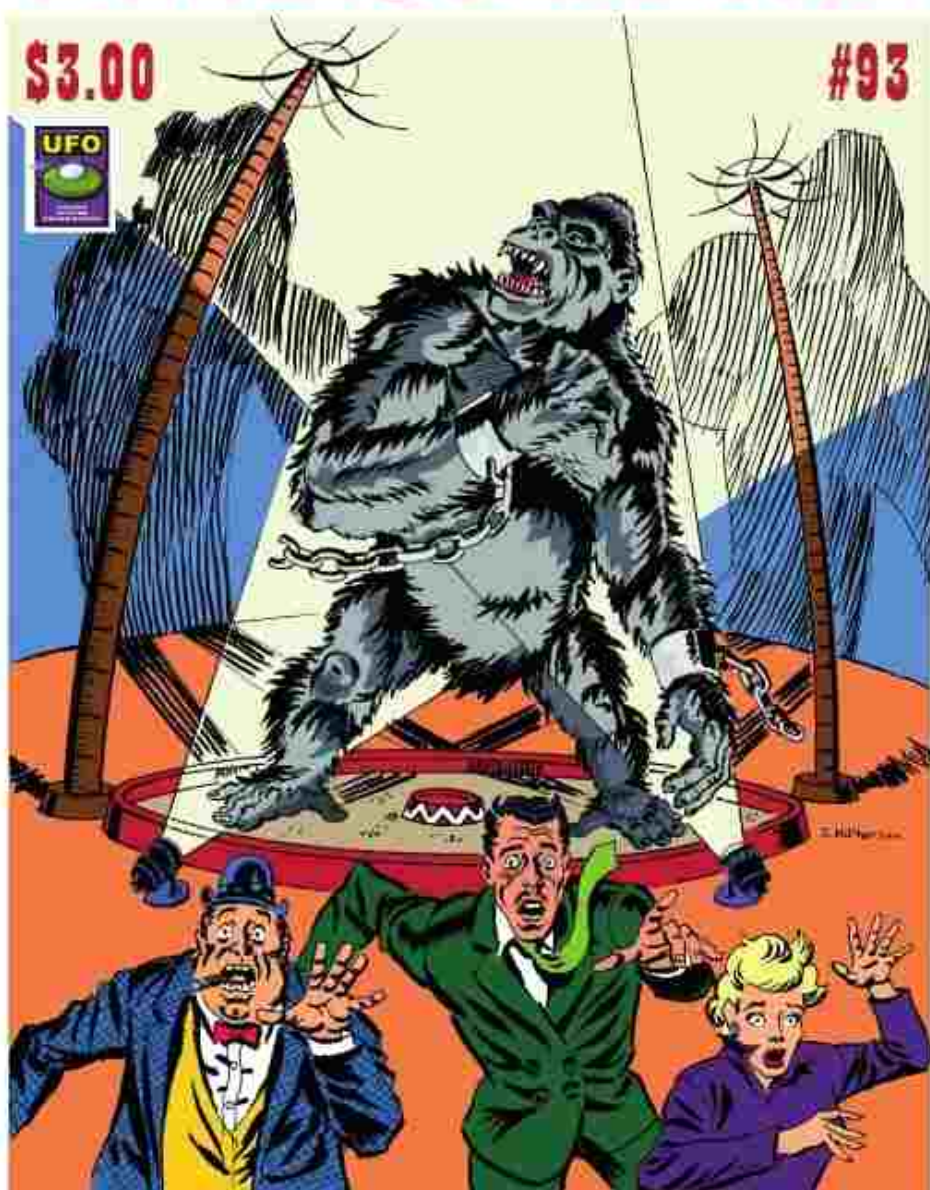


# DITKOMANIA

\$3.00

#93



**In This Issue: Ditko's Monsters!**



### **DITKOMANIA #93**

FIRST PRINTING: May 2014. This is the PDF edition of the issue, originally printed by Rob Imes, 13510 Cambridge #307, Southgate, MI 48195. USA. Email address: [robimes@yahoo.com](mailto:robimes@yahoo.com) PRICE: \$3.00 postpaid in the USA. All articles in this issue are Copyright 2014 their respective authors. GORGO is Copyright 2014 King Brothers, Ltd. KONGA is Copyright 2014 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Inc. Journey into Mystery is Copyright 2014 Marvel Characters, Inc. The Demon is Copyright 2014 DC Comics, Inc.

# EDITKORIAL

Well, here we are, with the long-awaited issue devoted to **GORG**O and **KONG**A! This issue was made possible through the funding of many generous people on Kickstarter, especially the following:

**Tim Burdick**, **comicartboston**, **Chet Cox**, **Mark S. Ditko**, **Stephan Friedt**, **Rick Frogge**, **Kevin Halstead**, **Ted Haycraft**, **Mike Jones**, **Gardner Monks**, **Lee Nail**, **Tim Paxton**, and **Mark Verheiden**.

I also want to thank **everyone** who submitted material for this issue. The front cover was drawn by **Jim McPherson** (with coloring and design by **Javier Hernandez** of [www.javzilla.com](http://www.javzilla.com)). The back cover was drawn and colored by **Darren Goodhart** (<http://darrengoodhart.x10.mx>); he explains the inspiration for the piece in our letters page (turn to the last page of this issue for it). The front inside cover is by **Gary Kato**, the artist of *Mr. Jigsaw* whose most recent issue (#12) was released earlier this year, and can be ordered at [www.indyplanet.com](http://www.indyplanet.com)

**Martin Hirschak** drew the back inside cover as well as writing this issue's article about "Kunga" (not a typo!). By the way, the fourth issue of his *Fanzine Fantasy* is coming soon; this issue's theme is UFOs in comic books. It's \$8.00 postpaid in the USA from **Martin Hirschak, P. O. Box 44678, Detroit, MI 48244**. Email [mhirschak@yahoo.com](mailto:mhirschak@yahoo.com) for more info.

The centerpiece article this issue comes from **Robby Reed** (his pen-name), who runs the popular "**Dial B for Blog**" site about comics history. Robby recently concluded a lengthy profile of Ditko's career on his blog at [www.dialbforblog.com/](http://www.dialbforblog.com/)

Speaking of Ditko on the net, recently I created a **FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions)** page on Ditko at <http://rimes12.tripod.com/ditko.html> that will provide factual information about recurring questions involving

his career. The page contains links to sites where fans can order Ditko's current work. I also recently started a Facebook group called *The Snyder-Ditko Appreciation Society*.

The **newest Ditko releases** are *#9 Teen* and *The Four Page Series #6*, both of which came out in early May. They are available from **Robin Snyder, 3745 Canterbury Lane #81, Bellingham, WA 98225-1186**. (The prices are: \$6.00 for *#9 Teen* and \$1.50 for *The Four Page Series #6*. That price is USA only and includes the postage cost.) For international rates, email [RobinBrigit@comcast.net](mailto:RobinBrigit@comcast.net) Also still available from Robin is *The Lonely One* book (of *Konga* reprints) that **Stephen Bissette** reviews in this issue. The cost is \$14.00 postpaid in the USA.

The **Gorgo** and **Konga** hardcover volumes reviewed in this issue, edited by **Craig Yoe**, can be purchased online (via Amazon) at [www.yoebooks.com](http://www.yoebooks.com)

**Mort Todd** reports that *The Charlton Arrow* #2 is coming soon. You can find ordering info about this Charlton prozine at <http://morttodd.com/arrow2.html> The price of #2 is \$10.24 postpaid in the USA. You can email [charlton@morttodd.com](mailto:charlton@morttodd.com) for more info.

Veteran comics artist **Dick Ayers** passed away on May 4th; he was 90 years old. **Nick Caputo** has written a tribute at <http://nick-caputo.blogspot.com/2014/05/farewell-to-dick-ayers.html> Back in 1999, Dick drew the cover of *Ditkomania* #62.

The **next issue** of *DM* will likely have a science fiction theme (since I have a few items relating to Starman on hand). If you'd like to submit something, drop me a line. I hope to have the issue out in a few months. I'd also like to receive reviews about Ditko's recent releases. Thanks, everyone, and I hope that you enjoy this issue!

-- Rob Imes, EDITOR.

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Information about **subscribing** to *DM* can be found at

<http://unitedfanzineorganization.weebly.com/ditkomania.html>

The DM Yahoo Group is at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ditkomania>

The DM group on Facebook is at <http://www.facebook.com/groups/ditkomania>



# "Ditko Monsters: GORGO!"

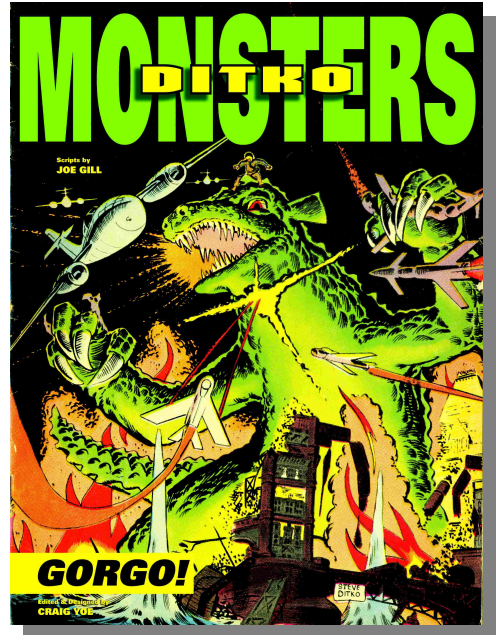
A review by Michael Tuz

I've got to confess; this book is the first in the wave of recent Ditko reprints, and the first of any of Craig Yoe's books, that I have purchased. I've been intrigued by these volumes since the first of them appeared a few years ago, thinking that they would be nice things to have. But the fact is I've got a pretty nice selection of 50's and 60's Ditko material in my comic book collection already and I was reluctant to spend money essentially for duplicates of stories that I already own.

Somehow, though, there's always been a gap in my collection where the Charlton **Gorgo** comics should be, with the series only being represented in my library by **The Return of Gorgo #2** and **Fantastic Giants #24**. These are two comics which I've enjoyed quite a bit over the years, enough so that I'd always planned to seek out the rest of Ditko's work on this series, but I never quite got around to it. Until now.

So how did I like this book? Well, let me say that this may have been the first of Yoe's collections that I've bought, but it certainly won't be my last! I enjoyed everything about this volume, cover to cover.

There was no question in my mind that I would like the comics reprinted in this volume. They were, after all, produced by Steve Ditko at the beginning of what I consider to be his peak years, working in collaboration with the incredibly prolific Joe Gill, the writer who, for all intents and purposes, was Charlton Comics. The big unknown when I ordered **Ditko Monsters: Gorgo** from Amazon was with the nature and quality of the packaging, with the presentation. And on that front I believe the book strikes a perfect balance for the subject matter. This is a high quality publication, designed to withstand the test of time. Yet at the same time it is not overly slick and glossy like the pretentious *Marvel Masterworks* editions. Rather, it captures the visual tone of the newsprint of 60's comics, allowing the art to look all the world like it did in those cheap dime and twelve cent comic books from the wilds of Derby, Connecticut. All that's missing is that delightful acidic smell. (Maybe someone should market an "acid paper" incense for us old time comic fans to burn while we're reading these reprints so



we can get the total sensory experience!)

The book opens with a fun filled introduction written with the "Gosh! Wow!" enthusiasm of a true fan, an appreciation of Gorgo, Ditko and Joe Gill that is as affectionate as it is informative. Interspersed throughout this fairly lengthy discourse are a nice selection of photos, many from the King Brothers motion picture that spawned these comics, and also one image each of director Eugene Lourie, Joe Gill and the rarely photographed Steve Ditko. There is also advertising art for the film, Dick Giordano's cover art for Gorgo #1, and perhaps my favorite extra, Basil Gogos' cover painting of Gorgo as seen on the front of *Famous Monsters of Filmland* #11. What I find pleasantly remarkable about this particular photo is the fact that it is not of some highly collectable mint edition of Forrest Ackerman's publication, but of a very dog-eared copy, one that, like my own earliest issues of *FM*, was obviously loved and read to death by its owner. It stands as a reminder that these comics and magazines were not created to be sealed away and preserved, but rather to be enjoyed, which is the whole tone and temperament infused in this volume.

Following the introduction is a gallery of the nine Gorgo covers by Ditko, each deliciously reproduced at full page size and in four color. And each one of these is a delight in and of itself. In his introduction Craig Yoe makes the claim that the cover of **The Return of Gorgo** #2 was "a rare moment [when] the artist disappoints," stating that "the figures are static" and "the composition is dull." Well, comparing these nine images side by side I can understand how he might assess this particular cover as being the weakest in the bunch, but as a kid 50 years ago I found it intriguing enough to make me want to buy the book. And maybe it's just nostalgia, but I still find it very compelling.

After all this warm up, of course, there are the comics themselves, which are absolute treats.

As Yoe mentions, *Gorgo* was the third "dinosaur on a rampage in a city" film made by director Eugene Lourie over a period of eight years (and his second film in a row in which a prehistoric menace descended on London). Respectfully, Yoe skirts the fact that *Gorgo* was also the cheesiest of the trilogy. The first two films, *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* and *The Giant Behemoth* (also known as *Behemoth the Sea Monster*), were essentially the same movie, both intelligently told with an air of mystery and top notch special effects by the era's masters of stop motion animation, Ray Harryhausen and Willis O'Brien respectively. *Gorgo*, on the other hand, was a sophomoric retread, a largely uninspired rehash of other giant monster films that had preceded it, and one in which the monster was just a guy in a rubber suit (although to be fair, the miniature sets and traveling matte work are pretty impressive.) Reading this volume prompted me to review the movie *Gorgo* for the first time in several years, and in a head to head comparison I was stricken by how much better Joe Gill and Steve Ditko handled the tale than

Lourie and company had done on the big screen. The comic book version is exciting and entertaining, while the film is a big yawn. Thankfully the movie runs only 78 minutes, though it seems much longer.

Clearly the King Brothers, who produced the movie, were no artists; they were businessmen out to make a buck exploiting a popular genre. As such they recognized a money making opportunity that would also provide ongoing marketing for their film, and thus allowed Charlton to continue to make a whole series of *Gorgo* comics. Fortunately for us, each and every one of those comics reprinted in this book is, in every way, superior entertainment to the motion picture that spawned them.

The first issue of Charlton's **Gorgo** was an adaptation of the movie script, while issue #2 featured a clever direct sequel to that story, one which dealt with the dinosaurs crossing the Atlantic to assail New York City this time. And as the comic book series wore on it is remarkable how many inventive ways Joe Gill found to reutilize the film's central premise; that of efforts to capture baby Gorgo leading to widespread destruction by the giant saurian's rescuing mama. Gradually, though, Mr. Gill began using the title dinosaur more and more as a backdrop for human dramas, adventures revolving around exploration, greed and the kindling or rekindling of romance. To my eye these are the best of the *Gorgo* comics.

Of these later tales my personal favorite is "Gorgo's Triumph" reprinted from **Gorgo** #11, a light-hearted romp about a movie maker, reminiscent of Carl Denham from the film *King Kong*, who puts his cast and crew in harm's way to make a motion picture featuring the real, live Gorgo on a South Pacific isle. This tale was created with tongue placed firmly in cheek, allowing the sense of humor of both Gill and Ditko to shine through in top form, making for an interesting and thoroughly enjoyable contrast to the other, more dramatic stories in this volume.

The book's dimensions of 9" x 12" reprints these pages in a size slightly larger than the original comics, allowing more of the fine detail of Ditko's artwork to be seen, and also making for easier reading by my own aging eyes, which I truly appreciate. This is really a wonderful volume; a fine addition to the bookshelf of any fan of sixties comics and of the artistry of Joe Gill and Steve Ditko. It gets my highest recommendation.



## **BOOK REVIEWS by Allen J. Schuler**

**DITKO MONSTERS: GORG** is an oversized, 240-page tome from IDW starring Gorgo, an oversized lizard and Godzilla knock-off. The book measures roughly 11" x 8" and reprints Steve Ditko's artwork from the old Charlton comic, *Gorgo* #1, 1960; #2, August 1960; #3, September 1961; #11, February 1963; #13, June 1963; #14, August 1963; #15, October 1963; #16, December 1963; and *The Return of Gorgo* #2, Summer 1963 and #3, Fall 1964. (Note: only the Ditko-drawn issues of the series are included, not the entirety of Gorgo's oeuvre.) Charlton stalwart Joe Gill, provided all the scripts. Volume editor Craig Yoe provided a lengthy and detailed introduction to the collection that includes not only summaries of each comic but also generous background on the 1961 movie of the same name. (It's interesting that Charlton not only licensed the movie property -- the rights must have been cheap -- but also that, *a la* Marvel's original *Star Wars* adaptation, the company published multiple issues of the title before the movie was actually released.)

Most of the stories here are decent, early-sixties fare in which the "monster"-- who often proves to be not the truly monstrous one in the tale -- serves as a fulcrum to lever stories about the perfidy of men. Gorgo is a misunderstood "monster" that wishes to be left in peace in the ocean home he shares with his mom. He would not cause all the destruction that inevitably happens when he's disturbed (not "death and destruction" since no one really died in his rampages during the Comic Code days) were it not for all of those nasty men who wished to use our gigantic lizard for some nefarious purpose. In many ways, these tales prefigure what Steve Gerber executed so well when he wrote Marvel's *Man-Thing* comics a decade or so later. With Gill scripting *Gorgo*, our true miscreants get their comeuppance in the end, after, naturally, Gorgo has done much stomping of buildings.

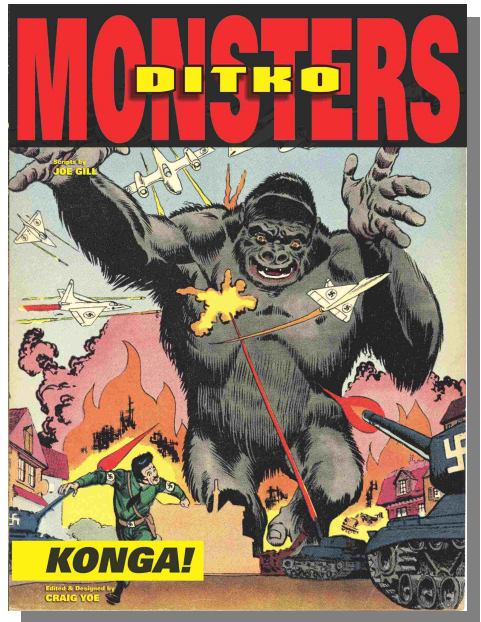
Of course, the main allure of this book is not the stories, but Ditko's art. By the early 1960's, Ditko had been a professional comic book artist for almost a decade and was nearing his prime as an illustrator. It's fascinating to realize how much product Ditko was turning out in the sixties. During the time these tales would have been on his drawing board, he was also churning out work for Marvel's *Amazing Adult Fantasy*, any number of five-page suspense tales for Marvel, as well as beginning his run on both Spider-Man and Dr. Strange. Editor Yoe makes a point of saying that even though Charlton's pay rates were considerably



less than Marvel's, Ditko did not "phone it in" when it came to the quality of the work he was doing for Charlton. I agree. In these stories, we see a freer artist at work than in the product he created for Marvel. Here, the pages are more open; there are fewer panels per page (perhaps owing to Ditko's understanding of Charlton's poor printing?). At Marvel, Ditko was known for his nine-panel grid pages, a technique adopted by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons in *Watchmen*; even six-panel grids were more common in his work at Marvel than displayed in his artwork for *Gorgo*. In this volume, numerous pages sport a mere four panels, quite a few only three, and some even two. Perhaps it was the size of the protagonist and the "weight" Ditko wanted to give to the destruction Gorgo generated that dictated his panel-size choices. Or, could the larger panels have been the result of Gill's scripts, of which Yoe quotes Ditko as saying they were "a treat" to draw from? Regardless, if you admire the unique quality of Ditko's art, you should appreciate his work here.

I do have a few caveats about the book, though: one, including a table of contents would have been nice. Yes, the publication dates for each issue are written at the bottom of the splash page of each story, but it still would have been good to have included a page listing the volume's contents and the pages on which each story appears. Room for such could have been found by eliminating one of the three pages of ads for other IDW products found in the back of the book. A second irritant for me is that Yoe chose to reprint all of Ditko's covers for the series not at the beginning of each comic, but rather all together at the end of his introduction. I would have preferred them at the head of the comic they covered. Last but not least, the pages in this volume seem to have been reproduced from scans of the original comic books, not from the original art (if such exists where someone might access it). While I like this procedure as a rule, particularly if doing so reprints the original coloring of each comic, Charlton printing was poor, to be generous. So, the colors even in the original comics had a faded quality to them. The effect in this volume is that skin-tones on white people are so washed out as to be barely tinted pink; people are almost literally white. I suspect part of this effect might be due to the superior paper in this book over that of the original comics, allowing the bright whiteness of the paper to shine through the original coloring. A deepening of the color tint throughout the volume would have been a good idea. However, there is nothing here that should keep a confirmed Ditko-head from parting with the cover price of \$34.99, which is not bad if you consider the cost of tracking down the originals.

**DITKO MONSTERS: KONGA!** This is the second volume of IDW and Craig Yoe's collection of Steve Ditko's giant-monster artwork produced for Charlton Comics in the early '60s. The first volume featured a giant lizard, Gorgo; this one features a giant gorilla. As befitting a book starring a giant ape, the collection is over-sized, clocking in at 8" x 11" and 328 pages (not that you'd know how many pages there are in the book since there are no consecutive page numbers printed. The only pagination is that of a story's initial comic book appearance). With its thick, white pages -- the better to show off the color dots which created the original hues -- the book comes in at almost an inch-and-a-half thick, making it sometimes difficult to handle when reading and also making it almost too thick for its binding. One has to be careful not to open the volume too wide for fear of cracking its spine. On the plus side, the book's large dimensions allow the story/art pages to be presented at their original comic-book size instead of having them shrunk to fit smaller dimensions, as is the case with the reproduced pages in DC's *Archives* and Marvel's *Masterworks*. Better yet, thanks to generous margins, the art doesn't disappear into the spine as too often happens in other collections.



Editor Yoe provides a well-illustrated, twelve-page introduction and added some information I did not know: *Konga*, like *Gorgo*, was first a movie. It seems one Herman Cohen -- he of *I was a Teenage Werewolf* "fame" -- paid RKO Pictures \$25,000 for the rights to exploit the King Kong name, though Cohen dropped the "king" and added an "a" to Kong. How much Charlton paid to exceed DC's gorilla edict -- "put an ape on the cover" -- by displaying a giant ape on *every* cover isn't stated. And, while it was nice to see pictures of posters and a scene or two from the *Konga* movie, know that Ditko's depiction of the protagonist is far better than the man-in-an-ape-suit featured in the film. However, beyond interesting facts about the movie and how it came to be, Yoe includes little about the comic book stories themselves beyond a brief summary of each and a snarky comment or two about writer Joe Gill's plots. It would have

been nicer had the editor given readers more analysis of Ditko's art, particularly since the man was near his prime at this point and what he produced is quite good. Although I have no way of knowing, I strongly suspect that drawing the facial expressions and body language of Konga was more appealing for Ditko than drawing the less human Gorgo.

All sixteen of Ditko's Konga tales are collected here, most twenty pages or more in length: *Konga* #1 (1960; no month, but released before the movie so the comic could be used advertising the film); #3 (October 1961; Ditko did not draw the second issue) through #15 (November 1963), as well as *The Return of Konga* (1962) and *Konga's Revenge* (Summer 1963). In addition, Ditko drew ten of the comics' covers, all of which are included in the volume. Charlton took most of the cover art from Ditko's interior work on some issue or another (art from the issue it covered wasn't always used). As done earlier in the *Gorgo* volume, Yoe reprinted all of Ditko's covers together at the end of his introduction, not fronting the actual stories they covered. I would have preferred that he had put the covers before the appropriate stories. Again, as in the *Gorgo* volume, Yoe does not include a table of contents for the book. Of course, since there are no consecutively numbered pages throughout the book, the utility of a contents page was obviated. In order to find a particular story, one must page through the book until lighting upon it. Why this lack of what should be standard book-producing etiquette is puzzling.

The premise of Konga was relatively simple: a scientist, exploring Africa, has an accident, is saved and befriended by a monkey, which proved fortuitous since the monkey comes back with the scientist to England where the scientist shows his gratitude by injecting his little companion with experimental growth serum. After successive injections, the monkey not only grows, but "evolves," becoming first a chimpanzee, then a "fully grown gorilla," and at last, well, you know, Konga, a creature impervious even to atom bomb attacks. (Seriously. A fearful mankind attacks the ape several times throughout the series with nuclear bombs only to discover that they have no effect. Eventually, mankind gives up trying to destroy the creature and opts for hoping the big ape will simply journey off someplace else before he leaves too much destruction in his wake.)

The first *Konga* issue pretty much follows the movie's plot. In the end, since Konga actually kills some of his science buddy's rivals, he ends up being killed himself by an attacking air force. Upon his death, he reverts

back to his little monkey former self. (He evidently developed his invulnerability later.) How the little guy was revived and restored to Konga dimensions isn't shown in this volume. Those details may have been recorded in Konga's second issue, which, alas, having not been drawn by Ditko, is not included in this collection.

As for the remaining Ditko issues, they are Silver Age delights. Writer Gill varies his subject matter, running the ape through multiple genres: love stories; fights with other giant monsters (creatures that have less personality than the big guy); Nazi revivalists; alien invasions ("Konga meets the Creatures from Beyond Space;" how does one get "beyond space"?); political intrigues; "mole men;" big game hunters; and one story that regales us with an incredible *shrinking* Konga.

Of course, the real draw of this volume is Ditko's art, and the artist was in fine form. He imbues the great ape with wonderful expressions revealing that there is a personality behind the "monster." We see Konga's face enraged, confused, bemused, amused, hungry, lonely, and inquisitive, in addition to a gamut of other emotions. It's obvious Ditko believed form should follow function. Given twenty or more pages for each story to unfold, he used the space he was given, filling pages with full-page, three- and four-panel art at the same time he became known for the nine-panel grids he used for Marvel (so much so that Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons used that framework for their *Watchmen* pages). A huge figure like Konga deserved lots of space and not the restrictions of placing him in a bunch of tiny panels. For current comic book readers, it is refreshing to see the excellent pen-and-ink work Ditko completed coupled with the old, four-color hues, as opposed to looking at today's elaborate, computer assisted art with finished modeling done by sophisticated color artists.

Given that it is unlikely one could buy any two of the original *Konga* comics today for the \$34.99 you'd need to purchase this volume, this package is a great deal.

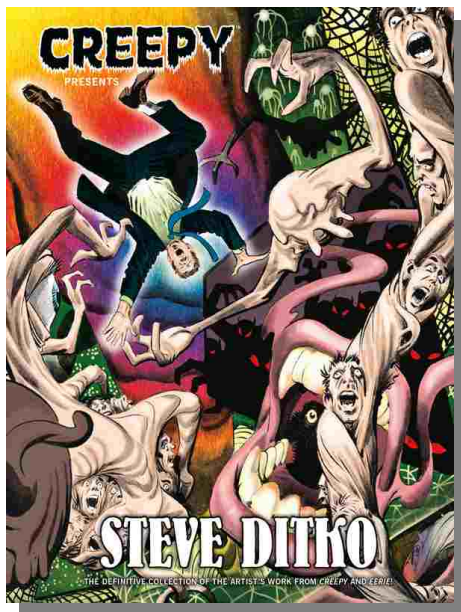
-- Allen J. Schuler





***CREEPY PRESENTS: STEVE DITKO, The Definitive Collection of the Artist's Work from Creepy and Eerie!***

Thank you, Dark Horse. Finally, my Ditko art mania may have a capstone. This collection of stories presents what I consider the apex of his work. They're all here, all in one collection, the sixteen five-to-ten page tales Ditko produced for Warren's two black and white horror magazines in 1966 and 1967. As a bonus, virtually all of the stories were written by Archie Goodwin, one of the best horror-story scribes. In this volume appear monsters, mages, other dimensions, barbarians, Ditko hands, and just plain "creepiness," all displayed at their best. To mention but a few of the *creme de la creme*, there's the icky tale, "Fly" in which a murderer is driven to his well-deserved end; the haunting "Beast Man," which gives us a twist on DC's "gorilla story" theme; and the spooky



"Collector's Edition" [shown on the next page] with its close ups of the staring, unbelieving, frightened eyes at the bottom of each page until the final, devastating ending, perhaps the best tale of a superlative lot. As Goodwin related, the slowly closing eyes at the bottom of each page were a Ditko addition to the art and story, not something he'd indicated in his breakdowns. All-in-all, the material collected here is the stuff this 13 years-old-at-the-time of first reading didn't forget, such was their impact.

To top it off, the book provides an informative five-page foreword by Mark Evanier who knowledgeably discusses Ditko's art techniques, his method of working with Goodwin, and his contretemps with Stan Lee and Marvel. Whether Ditko was, in his own phrasing, "tickling the board" with his inking or using washes with a brush, the art is outstanding and is reproduced at the same size as it was in the original magazines,. The fact that it was created in the service of some darn good stories is even better.

My only caveat with the book, and it's a minor one, is that I wish the stories had been presented in the order they were published. That would have made it easier to see Ditko's development in the use of the black-

and-white format. As it is, the *Creepy* work is presented in the stories' published order; those stories are followed by the Eerie tales, also in published order. However, since their creation overlapped, Ditko's progress in the use of washes is not as apparent. This is a small complaint, to be sure. Regardless, even if you're not Ditko obsessed, as some of us are, but you're a fan of good art and the best horror stories since the heyday of EC, then the \$19.99 price of this book is well worth it. -- Allen J. Schuler



# *The Wit and Whimsy of*

# **GORGGO**

**by Nick Caputo**

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In the early 1960's Steve Ditko worked primarily for two comic book outfits: the unnamed company soon to be christened Marvel comics, drawing offbeat vignettes housed in the back of their anthology line-up (*Strange Tales*, *Journey into Mystery*, *Tales of Suspense*, *Tales to Astonish*), and inking numerous Jack Kirby stories and covers; and Charlton Press, where beginning in 1954 he illustrated an impressive array of horror, science fiction, fantasy, crime and westerns. In this period Ditko also became associated with his first superhero, Captain Atom, who appeared in *Space Adventures*, along with two comics based on movies Charlton acquired the rights to. *Konga* was a copy of King Kong, of which Ditko drew his share of amusing stores with writer Joe Gill; the pair was again teamed on *Gorgo*, a giant lizard inspired by Godzilla. The adaptation was based on the King Brothers movie, produced in London and distributed in the states by M.G.M. It was typical horror fare, with the twist being the captured monster was actually an infant; her more powerful mother leaves London in ruins before the two reunite and they return to the sea. Ditko's distinctive characterization and meticulous inking stand out, and his enthusiasm for the material is obvious. Ditko had this to say about Gill's adaption:

*"I read the screenplay of Gorgo. From the first reading to this day I marvel at how well Joe adapted the character to comic books."\**

The undated and unnumbered *Gorgo* first edition appeared on newsstands in November 1960 (my copy has a Nov 7th date stamped on

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\* Steve Ditko, *First Choice*, Steve Ditko's 160 Page Package, November 1999

the back). This coincides with concurrent job numbers.\*\* There appears to be a seven to eight month gap before Charlton decided to revive *Gorgo* as an ongoing series, leaving returning author Joe Gill with the burden of devising interesting situations to place the monsters in. Gill (with Ditko back aboard) had one extraordinary advantage over the moviemakers, they were unhampered by budgetary restrictions. The "special effects" for their second issue included *Gorgo* and son rampaging through New York City, allowing Ditko to draw familiar landmarks, including Times Square, the Flatiron Building, Grand Central Terminal and the United Nations Building. Future issues had the monsters confronting aliens, evil scientists and, in the midst of the Cold War, a substantial assortment of communist menaces. *Gorgo* # 14 is a noteworthy case in point, reflecting the Cuban Missile Crisis. Judging by the August 1962 cover date the comic was on the stands in May or June. The real life Crisis ended in late October of 1962, so it was very much on people's minds, including writer Joe Gill. This issue includes cameos by Fidel Castro, John F. Kennedy and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, but in this tale nuclear annihilation was avoided not by diplomacy, but by *Gorgo*'s rampage through Cuba!

It's not easy to portray a sympathetic monster, although a few have succeeded. In movies, Lon Chaney dazzled the silent screen, using make-up to create horrific, though very much human creatures in films such as **The Hunchback of Notre Dame** (1923) and **The Phantom of the Opera** (1925). Boris Karloff's Frankenstein monster is perhaps the most recognized, but to create one by special effects alone is an enormous task. Willis O'Brien accomplished this with his stop-motion animation on the classic **King Kong** (1933); Ray Harryhausen followed in fantasy films such as **Mighty Joe Young** (1949) and **The 7th Voyage of Sinbad** (1958). Joe Gill understood this, as noted in his interview from *Charlton Spotlight* # 5, Fall 2006:

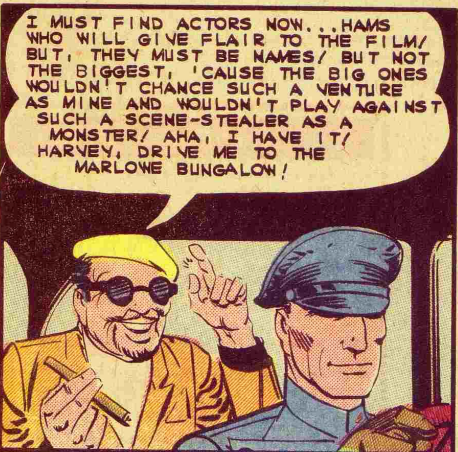
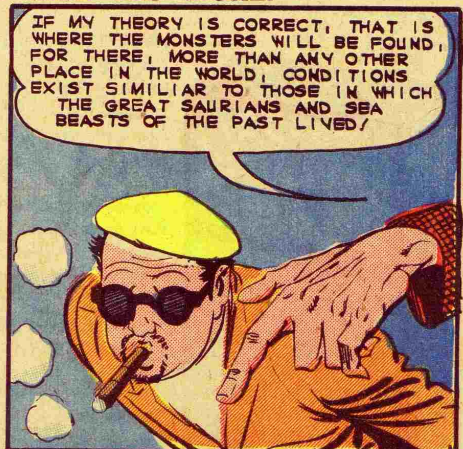
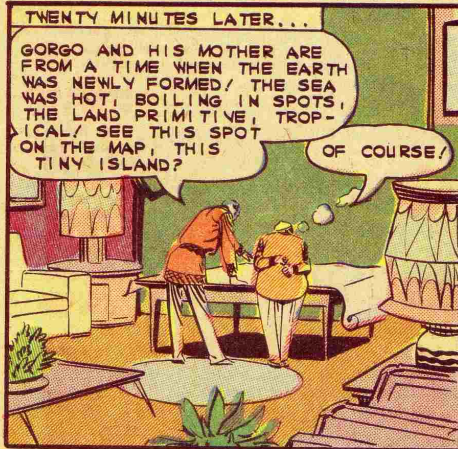
*"...you had to make them (Gorgo and Konga) a sympathetic character. I think I did a decent job on them."*

---

**\*\* Job numbers often appeared on the splash page of comic books and were used in the office to secure the production schedule. The February 1961 dated *Space Adventures*, which featured Captain Atom, coincides clearly with the publication of the first *Gorgo*. The Captain Atom story "Backfire" by Gill and Ditko, has a job # 6653. The *Gorgo* job number is 6673, meaning Ditko drew the *Gorgo* story soon after the Captain Atom story.**



# CHARLTON COMICS GIVE YOU MORE!



CONTINUED AFTER FOLLOWING PAGE

Ditko was able to take elements that worked in the movies and replicate them on the comic's page. Through the use of body language and expressions he invested the creatures with a plethora of emotions: amusement, fear, anger -- showing them in repose, playful and even smiling. One could imagine Ditko studying the characteristics of animals and replicating their mannerisms. Transcending genre restrictions, and combined with Gill's scripts, Ditko succeeded in making the characters likeable.

Gill was a prolific writer, and often stated quite frankly that he churned out stories, but he could also produce good work, and a number of his Gorgo stories fall in that category, especially when coupled with an exceptional artist like Ditko.

Of the ten Gorgo stories Ditko pencilled, "Gorgo's Triumph" (# 11, February 1963, which since it was a bi-monthly publication, shared space on comic racks with the March dated *Amazing Spider-Man* # 1) stands out as an example of not only his superb storytelling, but his knack for creating satirical characters. Here Ditko is in his element, parodying a group of Hollywood types. Gill's story has producer/director Alex Berlitz seeking to capture Gorgo and film him for a movie. Ditko's depiction of Berlitz is priceless; wearing shades and an ascot, a slight beard and mustache, worriedly pacing while puffing away on a large cigar. His gestures and body language speak volumes; one of many such characters Ditko brought to life throughout his career. Berlitz is also reminiscent of the more famous J. Jonah Jameson, who appeared the following month in *Amazing Spider-Man* # 1. Ditko was equally adept at caricaturing actors, such as Dorian Marlowe, a John Barrymore type. Ditko's knowledge of movies, not surprisingly, goes beyond the surface level of well known directors and stars. As someone who has taken a keen interest in the history of film, I couldn't help but notice Ditko's depiction of an Asian cameraman based on James Wong Howe, down to his familiar cap. Howe was celebrated for his cinematography on movies from the silent era until the mid-1970s, in films such as **The Prisoner of Zenda**, **Yankee Doodle Dandy** and **The Sweet Smell of Success**, and here Ditko pays tribute to him, in an amusing way.

While Gorgo and his parent enjoy their share of the spotlight, the real fun is in the producer and his crew attempting to film the monsters. Ditko not only focuses on the animated Berlitz (who Ditko may have based on a particular director, although I suspect it's an amalgamation of certain

types), but he and Gill parody the starlet and the very un-heroic leading man. The director succeeds in getting the footage he needs for his movie -- with cast and crew (barely) surviving the ordeal. Gill even jokingly references another monster comic he was writing, *Reptisaurus*. All told, he and Ditko turned in a superior story.

In a little over a year Ditko would revisit more movie settings and directors. In *Amazing Spider-Man* # 13 (June 1964), with Stan Lee, he introduced a disgruntled special effects man who became Mysterio. Ditko choreographed the confrontation on a movie set. The following issue introduced the Green Goblin and included another eccentric producer hoping to star Spider-Man in a movie. These settings, which Ditko likely had a hand in plotting, demonstrate Ditko's fascination in the behind the scenes workings of Hollywood.

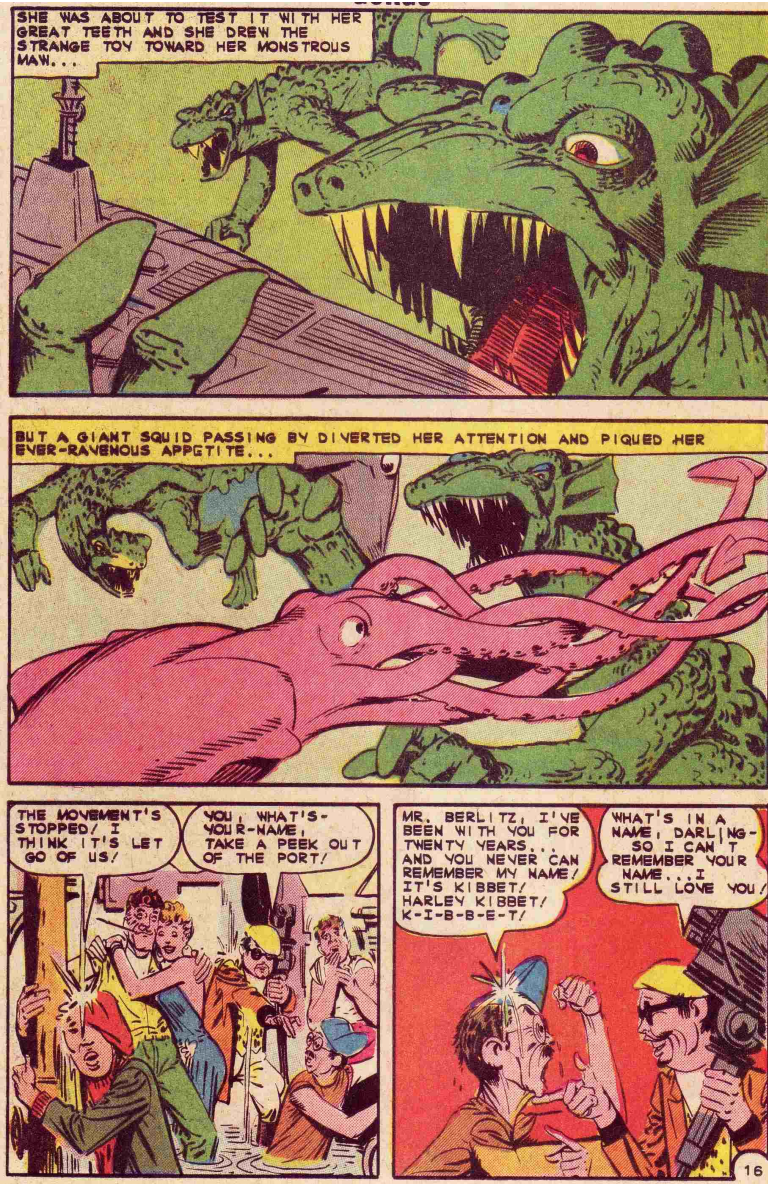
An interesting sidebar is that *Gorgo* # 13 continued directly from issue # 11 (skipping any mention of # 12, which Ditko did not draw) including a three page summary, culminating in the premiere of the *Gorgo* "movie" opening in New York. It was a rare instance of Gill referencing a past storyline.

As noted, Ditko did not draw every issue of *Gorgo*, issues 4-10 were pencilled by Charles Nicholas and Joe Sinnott, with inks by Vince Alascia and Vince Colletta, respectively. Ditko was not involved in issue 12, but returned for issues 13-16. *Gorgo* continued until issue # 23, drawn by Bill Montes and Ernie Bache, before being discontinued. *Gorgo* also starred in a second comic book series that lasted two issues, *The Return of Gorgo* (Summer 1963/Fall 1964), which Ditko drew. Although Ditko was busy at Marvel on *Amazing Spider-Man* and "Dr. Strange" he produced one story each for Charlton in the 1964-65 period; immediately resuming his association with them when he quit Marvel in 1966. At Charlton he worked on a revived *Captain Atom*, mystery stories in *Ghostly Tales* and drew the cover of *Fantastic Giants*, a one shot "Steve Ditko Special" that reprinted the first issues of *Gorgo* and *Konga*. And it was here that Ditko drew the lovable creature one final time.

Over the course of four years and ten stories, Steve Ditko's idiosyncratic artwork invigorated what was -- on the surface -- a typical monster comic. Joe Gill's scripts were a showcase for Ditko's versatility, playing up his often overlooked humorous bent. Together, they fashioned a light hearted series that, although clearly geared to a young audience, has



an inescapable charm. Ditko's single minded imagery and confident line crafted a multitude of characters, settings and personalities. Adept at using the human (and inhuman) figure in amusing ways, Ditko captured the foibles and absurdities of individuals with the comic timing of Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy, and his "character actors" were as diverse as those that existed in Hollywood's heyday, More than fifty years later comic book aficionados can look back and appreciate the effort and imagination that went into these stories.





SIT DOWN... LEAN BACK... AND GET A GOOD GRIP ON YOURSELF! FOR SOON YOU ARE DESTINED TO MEET...

# KUNGA



V-697

IN A SMOKE-FILLED DIVE ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE JUNGLE, SIT TWO MEN! THEIR FACES ARE HARD AND THEIR EYES ARE COLD... AND WITH GOOD REASON, FOR THESE MEN ARE IN THE LIFE-AND-DEATH BUSINESS OF... **HUNTING!**

AS HE LEAPT, MY SECOND SHOT CAUGHT HIM IN MID-AIR! IF I HAD MISSED, I WOULDN'T BE HERE NOW!

I ALWAYS SAY A WOUNDED LION IS TEN TIMES MORE DANGEROUS THAN A RHINO!!



**KUNGA! KUNGA!**  
I SEE KUNGA!!

**HEY! WHAT'S GOING ON OUTSIDE??**



SIT DOWN... LEAN BACK... AND GET A GOOD GRIP ON YOURSELF! FOR SOON YOU ARE DESTINED TO MEET...

# KUNGA



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**KUNGA! KUNGA!**  
I SEE KUNGA!!

HEY! WHAT'S GOING ON OUTSIDE??



**Above:** A recreation by **Martin Hirschak** of the first page of the Gene Colan-drawn "Kunga" tale from *Journey into Mystery* #81 (June 1962). Colan signature added by Hirschak.

**Previous page:** The splash page of "Kunga" drawn by Gene Colan as originally published.



## KONGA's LONG LOST COUSIN...

# KUNGA!

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The Marvel Age of Comics (June, 1961 - July, 1966) has left an enormous impact on the entertainment world, pop culture, and the public psyche. Many fans trace the birth of the Marvel Age to *Amazing Adventures* #1 (June, 1961), which featured the first appearance of Doctor Droom (not to be confused with Doctor Doom), the very first Marvel Age hero. Scripted by Stan Lee and illustrated by Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko, *Amazing Adventures* lasted only six issues before it was replaced by *Amazing Adult Fantasy*, which lasted just a bit longer...8 issues, with the 9th simply titled *Amazing Fantasy*. Stan Lee and Steve Ditko handled the creative output of this title *exclusively* -- the only title in the Marvel Age which can claim a two man creative team! Obviously, these guys had a very good working relationship during these years and the work produced speaks for itself.

Ditko's career in comics is an interesting one and also a long one... he is still working to this day! First published in *Daring Love* #1 (Sept.-Oct., 1953), the building block years for the legendary artist began humbly enough with short story assignments from a variety of publishers in the 1950's during the pre-Comics Code period. Ditko eventually found solid employment at not one, but two publishing houses -- Charlton Comics in 1954 and Atlas/Marvel in 1956. In what was to become a ten year period of non-stop production, the young artist managed to successfully and seamlessly juggle assignments from both Charlton and Atlas/Marvel from 1956 through 1966 -- turning in thousands of finished pages, (more than 90% penciled and inked)! Beginning with the April, 1956 Charlton release of *From Here to Insanity* Vol. 3, No. 1, featuring "Starlight Starbright," and the April, 1956 Atlas release of *Journey Into Mystery* #33 featuring "There'll Be Some Changes Made," Ditko's double duty efforts hit the newsstands coast to coast and accelerated an already amazing career in comics.



By 1960, Ditko had paid his dues in the business illustrating everything from romance to horror to crime, westerns and science fiction -- even superheroes, having co-created Captain Atom with writer Joe Gill for *Space Adventures* #33 (March, 1960). Was there any new ground to break for Mr. D.? Yes... adapting film into comics! Enter: *Konga*, the blockbuster movie from Herman Cohen productions! Beating other publishers to the movie rights, Charlton managed to secure *Konga* for adaptation into comics... and, as we know, Steve Ditko was assigned illustration duties for this "fantastic giant" of pop culture and comic books. *Konga* had a nice run at Charlton that began in 1960 and ended in December, 1968 with the release of *Konga's Revenge* #1... a real oddity in comics due to the fact that #2 and #3 were released FIRST! The Connecticut based company was famous for their odd numbering methods.

By late spring of 1962, *Konga* had reached his 6th issue, cover dated May. That same month Marvel released *Journey Into Mystery* #81, which featured a 5 page sci-fi tale titled "**KUNGA**" -- a story about a gigantic gorilla which no doubt was inspired by the British-born *Konga*. The name and concept are too close to be coincidental! However, enough changes were made to keep *Kunga* out of legal jeopardy. The story was scripted by Stan Lee and illustrated by Gene Colan. Ironically, this same issue of *Journey Into Mystery* also features a Ditko illustrated 5 pager titled "The Comic Strip." No large gorillas appear in the Ditko story, just a rogue, brash cartoonist who ends up being literally erased from the tale on Page 5 by Steve Ditko himself. But that's another story for another time. However, this "Kunga" story begs some interesting questions...

In comics or film or life in general, it's been said that "imitation is the sincerest form of flattery." Any good idea which captures the public's attention and dollars is nearly always copied by others -- more often than

not, in a slightly modified and updated form. Writers and editors must be careful when creating new works based on the inspiration of others' works... as there's a fine line between copyrights and copyright infringement. And so I ask: was Stan Lee following Steve Ditko's work at Charlton? The Kunga story in *J.I.M.* #81 seems to be proof that he was! A smoking gun so to speak. Lee has stated in filmed interviews that he truly enjoyed working with Ditko, and has described the artist as "brilliant" in print... so why shouldn't he have read Steve's Charlton stories?

In his introduction to the Craig Yoe book *The Art of Ditko*, (Yoe Books/IDW, Nov. 2009), Stan Lee writes "Y'know, motion pictures and comic strips have a lot in common." They certainly do! Many comic book artists have found inspiration from films and film stills just as many writers have found inspiration from films. It's a never ending cycle of one artist influencing another -- and there is nothing wrong with that. I prefer to believe that Stan was a big fan of Ditko's Charlton work with Joe Gill. Perhaps the Kunga story was his way of tipping his hat to Ditko and Gill. Regardless of what is true or imagined, *Journey into Mystery* #81 is there for all to see and draw their own conclusions.

For any fans of Ditko's sci-fi fantasy tales, I must recommend the recently released book by Craig Yoe, *Ditko Monsters: Konga* (Yoe Books/IDW, 2013), a fantastic effort which includes all of the Gill/Ditko stories in full color with cover reproductions included, as well as an in depth overview of the 1960 Herman Cohen film *Konga*. A nice addition to your home library for sure!

Listed below are Ditko's published comic books as pertaining to this article, beginning with *Konga* #1 (1960) through Dec. 1963, for both Charlton and Marvel. The short sci-fi stories by the artist from this time period are excluded from the timeline for lack of space, and to keep the focus on how the listed titles kept pace with one another. The Kunga story from *J.I.M.* #81 is listed to show its place in the creative timeline of these titles. The mind boggling amount of comic book juggling that Mr. Ditko managed to successfully pull off during this time is extraordinary to say the least!

**Konga #1** 1960

**Gorgo #1** 1960

**Gorgo #2** Aug. 1961

**Gorgo #3** Sept. 1961  
**Konga #3** Oct. 1961  
**Konga #4** Dec. 1961  
**Konga #5** Mar. 1962  
**Konga #6** May 1962  
**J.I.M. #81** May 1962 ("KUNGA" by Lee/Colan)  
**Return of Konga NN** Summer 1962  
**Konga #7** July 1962  
**Amazing Fantasy #15** Aug. 1962  
**Konga #8** Sept. 1962  
**Konga #9** Nov. 1962  
**Konga #10** Jan. 1963  
**Gorgo #11** Feb. 1963  
**Hulk #6** Mar. 1963  
**Amazing Spider-Man #1** March 1963  
**Konga #11** Mar. 1963  
**Amazing Spider-Man #2** May 1963  
**Konga #12** May 1963  
**Gorgo #13** June 1963  
**The Return of Gorgo NN** Summer 1963  
**Konga`s Revenge #2** Summer 1963  
**Spider-Man #3** July 1963  
**Konga #13** July 1963  
**Strange Tales #110** July 1963  
**Gorgo #14** Aug. 1963  
**Strange Tales #111** Aug. 1963  
**Spider-Man #4** Sept. 1963  
**Konga #14** Sept. 1963  
**Gorgo #15** Sept. 1963  
**Spider-Man #5** Oct. 1963  
**Strange Tales #114** Nov. 1963  
**Spider-Man #6** Nov. 1963  
**Konga #15** Nov. 1963  
**Gorgo #16** Dec. 1963  
**Spider-Man #7** Dec. 1963  
**Strange Tales #115** Dec 1963

Well, there you have it! A concise listing to illustrate how the Kunga story  
 oddly fits into this comic book timeline. I hope you enjoyed this  
 examination of Konga`s long lost and mostly forgotten cousin in comics -  
**KUNGA!**

-- **Martin Hirschak, May 2014**





(Above is the final page of "KUNGA," with dialogue clearly in Stan Lee's style, although the story itself is not signed. -- Rob Imes)



NOT SINCE  
**KING KONG**

HAS THE SCREEN  
**EXPLODED**

WITH SUCH  
**MIGHTY FURY!**

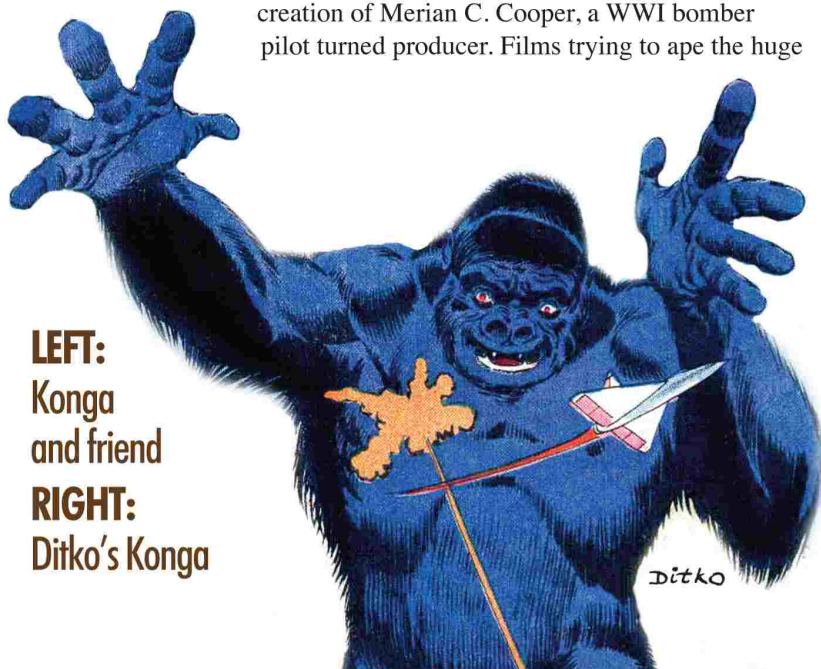


# AND **KONGA** WAS HIS NAME-O!

by **KIRK KIMBALL**  
aka Robby Reed of [dialbforblog.com](http://dialbforblog.com)

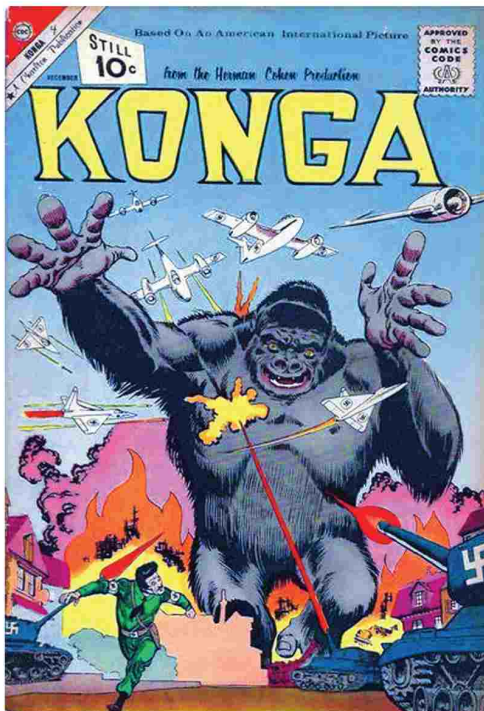
**T**HE LEGEND OF KONGA began in a lost world. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Lost World," to be exact. This novel, written in 1912 by the creator of Sherlock Holmes, is about an expedition to a fantastic hidden land filled with dinosaurs and giant monsters.

The novel was made into a movie in 1925, and it became such a huge hit that it inspired a jungle full of imitators. The most famous, of course, being "**King Kong**" (1933). Kong was the creation of Merian C. Cooper, a WWI bomber pilot turned producer. Films trying to ape the huge



**LEFT:**  
Konga  
and friend

**RIGHT:**  
Ditko's Konga



**ABOVE:**  
Konga movie poster.  
"Not since King Kong  
has the screen  
thundered to such  
mighty excitement!"

**LEFT:**  
The splash page of  
Ditko's first Konga  
story was recycled  
for the cover of  
**KONGA** #4,  
December 1961

# "I WAS A TEENAGE GORILLA"



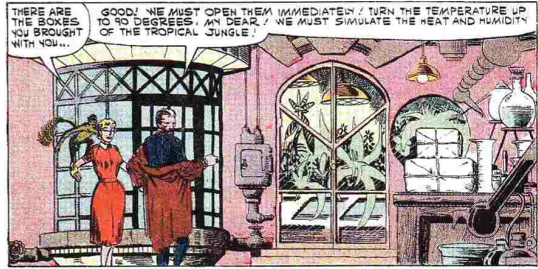
success of "King Kong" made monster movies a Hollywood staple that would endure for several decades, both in America and in England, where British producer Herman Cohen had a real hot streak going. Cohen had recently produced the hits, "I Was a Teenage Werewolf" (1957), "I Was a Teenage Frankenstein" (1957), and "How to Make a Monster" (1958), all released in the USA by American International Pictures.

In 1959, Cohen produced "Horrors of the Black Museum," starring **Michael Gough** (pictured below), who would go on to play Bruce Wayne's faithful butler, Alfred Pennyworth, in the "Batman" films of the 1990s. "Horrors" was a gigantic hit, and Cohen credited the film's success, partially, to Gough's subtle, tongue-in-cheek performance.

When Cohen was asked to make a follow-up to "Black Museum,"







The mad doctor's greenhouse of horror. Set designer Steve Ditko easily out-does the movie.

he thought of "King Kong." Cohen had always loved the original Kong movie, and he was excited about doing his own Kong knock-off. Inspired by the success of his "I Was A Teenage — " films, Cohen gave his new movie the working title, "I Was a Teenage Gorilla."

In the process of writing a screenplay, the film's star was christened KONGA, and the movie's title was also changed to KONGA -- but that change came at a price. After all, the name KONGA was almost identical to KONG, and since both movies were about giant apes, Cohen was afraid lawsuits were inevitable. So he took preemptive action. He bought the silence of KONG's owners by paying RKO Pictures \$25,000.

Who would star in Cohen's latest extravaganza? He immediately thought of Michael "Alfred" Gough, who accepted the part, although he must have had a private laugh over some of his dialogue.

At one point in the movie, Gough tells his fiancée, "Please leave, I want to be alone with Konga."

The next day, at breakfast, Gough's fiancée, Margaret, accuses him of

The movie plants look like giant purple condoms. Ditko takes a much subtler approach.







**"CHEEP! CHEEP!"** The movie's cheapo effects pale before Ditko's masterful time-lapse.

orchestrating Konga's recent murder spree.

"What are you having with your poached egg," she asks, "Murder!?"

Gough replies, not missing a beat, "Margaret, if there's one thing I can't abide, it's hysterics. Especially in the morning."

Whatever. A screenplay is a screenplay, and at least they had one. It was

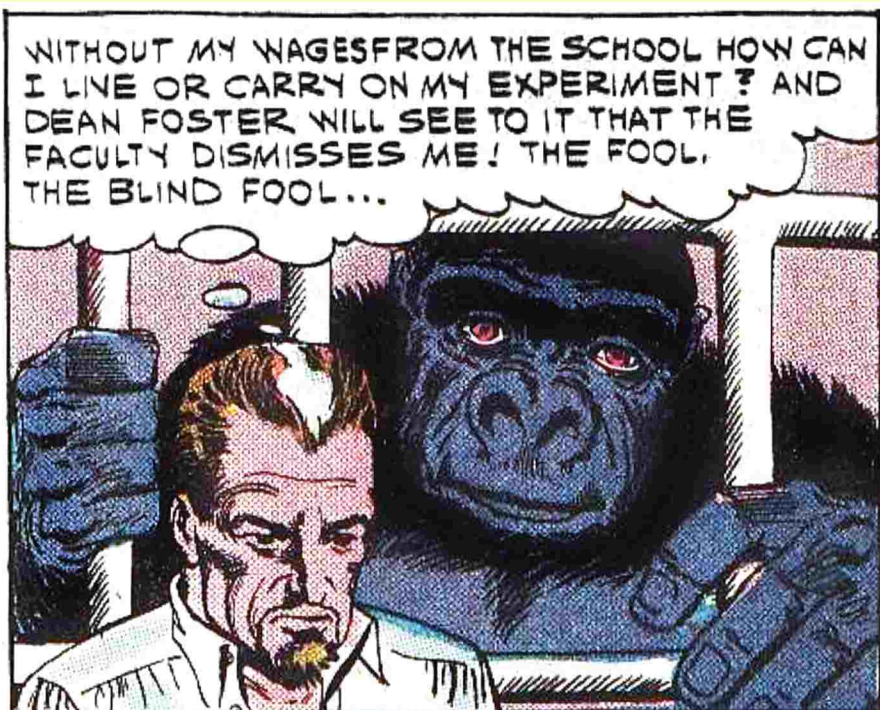
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**An injection turns Konga into a huge gorilla, but Ditko's version is twice as atmospheric.**





Mr. Konga, we're ready for your close-up! Movie Konga looks more than a bit ridiculous, but Ditko Konga, in his huge cage, has sad eyes that just exude pathos.







**ABOVE:** The mad doctor (Michael Gough) sends Konga out to murder his enemies! The Dean who criticized Gough can't afford a nice study in the movie, but Ditko's Dean gets a plush pad decorated with antiques. He enjoys it -- until Konga kills him!



Gough meets a rival scientist, and decides to sick Konga on him. Below, we see a close-up of Konga's hairy paws strangling the man. Too intense for the comics of this era! So instead, Gill/Ditko show a newspaper headline attributing the death to a fire.





**Another dose of serum makes Kong grow uncontrollably! He grabs the nearest Barbie doll, waves it around a bit, then, for no particular reason, sets the entire place on fire.**

full of more holes than a truckload of Swiss cheese, but it would do.

Unlike the original "King Kong," Cohen's film would be shot in full color, including the "special effects" — and I use the term loosely. I mean, a guy smashing doll houses while wearing the world's worst ape suit isn't really all that special. Still, primitive as they were, the effects for the film, among the first giant monster movies ever shot in color, took some 18 months to complete. Ironically, this delay caused the movie's merchandising tie-ins to go on sale long before its May 3, 1961 premiere. Herman Cohen had

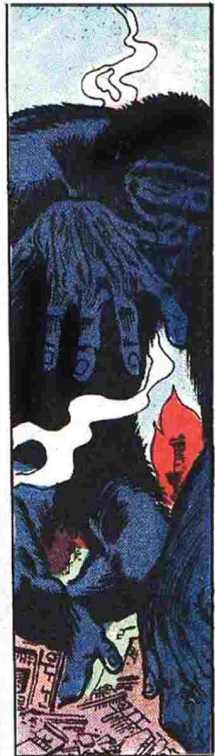
**Hey, guy in the Konga suit! Let's go! You're wanted on set, to smash a few doll houses!**







Konga's growth spurt continues until he's a big as... **BIG BEN!** Remember reader, this is a British film. In the comic, Big Ben is nowhere to be seen. American kids just couldn't identify with a huge clock. Then, movie Konga gets hit with what looks like a ray-gun blast (above, right). YEOW! Typically, movie Konga can't hope to match Ditko Konga, who has an unlimited "budget" at his disposal. Jet planes? No problemo! How many do you want? One? Two? Ten? FINE. Ink is cheap!



THE LIFE LEFT THE GIGANTIC BODY... LIFE FLED  
AWAY FROM THIS THING THAT SHOULD NEVER HAVE  
LIVED AT ALL...



Ditko Konga takes the big fall, a scene the movie didn't bother to include.





**ABOVE:**

Poor Konga! But beauty didn't kill THIS beast.

**RIGHT:**

Ditko's Konga died too, but unlike his movie twin, he returned for lots of zany new adventures.



arranged for KONGA to get a paperback novelization, as well as a comic book adaptation created by Charlton Comics.

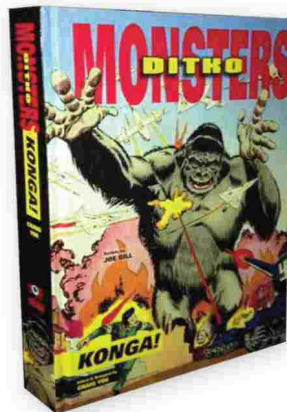
Almost a year before the KONGA movie was released on an unsuspecting public, Charlton issued a comic book adaptation of the film written by Joe Gill (Blue Beetle, Peacemaker) and drawn by Steve Ditko. The comic was cover-dated June, 1960.

How closely does the Charlton KONGA follow the movie KONGA? Does Joe Gill's writing match the screenplay? What, if any, liberties did Steve Ditko take with the story's images? To find out, just read the CAPTIONS under the movie/comic images in this article (if you

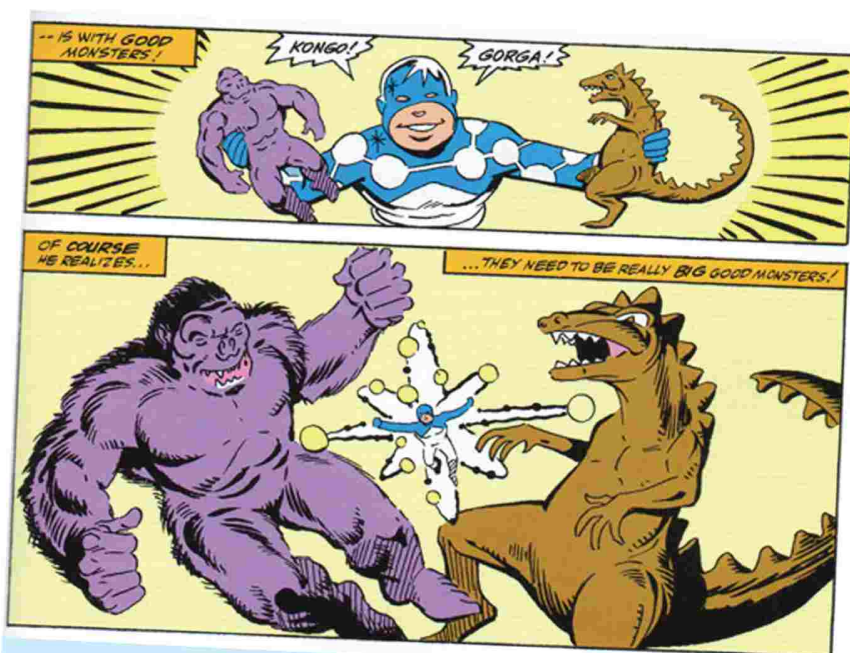


**ABOVE:** Splash page from *Amazing Spider-Man* #34. Looks like Kraven the Hunter shot and stuffed KONGA!

<b>Ditko KONGA</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> KONGA #1	June 1960
<input type="checkbox"/> KONGA #3	October 1961
<input type="checkbox"/> KONGA #4	December 1961
<input type="checkbox"/> KONGA #5	March 1962
<input type="checkbox"/> KONGA #6	May 1962
<input type="checkbox"/> KONGA #7	July 1962
<input type="checkbox"/> KONGA #8	September 1962
<input type="checkbox"/> KONGA #9	November 1962
<input type="checkbox"/> KONGA #10	January 1963
<input type="checkbox"/> KONGA #11	March 1963
<input type="checkbox"/> KONGA #12	May 1963
<input type="checkbox"/> KONGA #13	July 1963
<input type="checkbox"/> KONGA #14	November 1963



All of Ditko's KONGA stories were collected in Craig Yoe's "*Ditko Monsters v2: KONGA!*"



Ditko did a Capt. Universe back-up story that ran in a WEB OF SPIDERMAN annual.

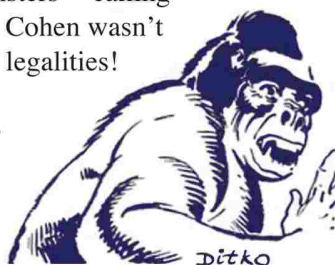
haven't already)!

There are two interesting post scripts to Ditko's involvement with Konga. The giant ape once snuck into the splash page Steve did for "Amazing Spider-Man" #34, March 1966 (pictured on the opposite page). Apparently Kraven the Hunter had a run-in with old Konga that didn't end well for our ape friend. Kraven had him stuffed and mounted!

But you know comic books. No one ever REALLY dies. So Konga returned for one last curtain call in the "Web of Spider-Man Annual" #6, August 1990 (pictured this page). There's no Spider-Man in this story, of course. It stars Captain Universe, who can give his ultimate power to anyone. When he gives it to a baby who has to fight off giant monsters, "Baby Capt. Universe" creates his OWN monsters -- calling them "KONGO and GORGA." Hey, Herman Cohen wasn't the only one who was worried about nominal legalities!

KING KONG? Never heard of him.

Long live **KING KONGA!**





# KONGA vs. KONGA

**O**n one level, it's grossly unfair to compare the 1962 **KONGA** movie to the **KONGA** comic book. I mean, after all, the **KONGA** movie was a low-budget British knock-off of **KING KONG**, and the **KONGA** comic was drawn by Steve Ditko (and written by Joe Gill). Talk about apples and oranges! It's a bit like comparing diamonds to dross. Ed Wood to Spielberg.

When the movie begins, a plane crashes in the "African" jungle, which looks like someone's wooded backyard. The movie has no scenes in Africa, but the comic boasts a full three pages of cool jungle action. When Ditko drew this story (in June 1960), he was still emerging, stylistically, from the shadow of Joe Kubert. Ditko's jungle scenes, lush and exquisitely-detailed, are heavily influenced by Kubert's trademark slashing lines and sharp edges. Every panel is crawling with monkeys and bizarre vegetation. This sequence also evokes memories of Frank Frazetta's sublime **THUNDA** strip (1952).

The movie's main character (aside from Konga) is a British scientist named Dr. Charles Decker. He's played by Michael Gough, who would go on to play Alfred in several of the **Batman** films of the 1990s. Here, he's clean-shaven, with straight brown hair. Ditko's version of Decker is far more professorial looking, with his full beard and wavy brown hair, highlighted by an exotic streak of white.

In the comic (only), Decker encounters several giant tribesmen, who Ditko depicts as towering figures clad in African attire — a stunning combination of baubles, bracelets and bones. *Tres chic!*

The natives show comic Decker a bizarre plant that looks like a tentacled horror straight out of H.P. Lovecraft's **CTHULHU** mythos. But here as throughout, Ditko's drawing is not well served by Charlton Comics notoriously underwhelming coloring. This "fearsome" plant is colored entirely in light orange, with huge green eyes. Maybe it's Maybelline?

Anyway, Decker returns to the states, bringing a sample of the bizarre plant with him. The comic doctor's study looks like a prototype of Dr. Strange's sanctum.

Decker's "Greenhouse of Horror" is soon filled with bizarre living plants that look like enormous purple condoms. They even seem

to be ribbed for your pleasure. *Seriously!* To make matters worse, they're supposed to be "alive," so they constantly undulate in the background, like some sort of trippy Trojan ad. In the comic, Ditko eschews the huge palpitating prophylactic plants, depicting them instead as a single tiny green sprout.

Movie Decker hypnotizes **KONGA** and orders him to kill his enemies, while comic book Decker is an innocent who also causes **KONGA** to kill, but only because the ape accidentally reads his mind (!), and acts out one of his stray naughty thoughts.

In a radical departure from the film, Decker as depicted by Ditko and Joe Gill is a happily married man, but (*yuck!*) movie Decker is a creepy pervert/rapist who rejects his fiancée to lust after a pretty young blonde student in a disturbing sub-plot that's totally (and thankfully) absent from the comic — even though it takes up *most* of the movie!

In the film's final 15 minutes, an injection of plant-gunk causes **KONGA** to grow to enormous size, and also to transform into a man in an ill-fitting ape suit who begins smashing doll houses, and lumbering about as if he's drunk. Ditko's Konga, on the other hand, no surprise, is a perfectly-drawn and believable "realistic" giant blue ape.

The film's climactic battle scenes can't possibly hope to match the unlimited firepower of Steve Ditko's pen. In this case, it's a small army of British soldiers shooting scores of rockets and guns vs. Ditko's full-scale U.S. Air Force attack.

As what seems like several million rounds of ammo hits him, movie **KONGA** casts his creator to the pavement like a doll (actually it IS a doll), killing him. Then movie **KONGA** finally dies, falls with a thud, and reverts to his original tiny size. It's kind of laughable.

The comic also portrays this scene, but Ditko skillfully combines spectacle with pathos to produce a genuinely moving finale.

In the end of **KING KONG**, it's said that, "Beauty killed the beast." The **KONGA** movie ends with the chimes of England's Big Ben ringing out over **KONGA**'s dead body.

And finally, the Ditko/Gill **KONGA** comic book ends with the sad lament that because Decker is dead, "No one will ever know what his mind could have produced." *Sniff sniff!*

—Kirk Kimball aka Robby Reed



# *Joe Gill & Steve Ditko's **KONGA** - The Lonely One*

*by Stephen R. Bissette*

It's amazing what the ongoing romance between academia and comics continues to offer. Case in point, June 2009 saw the publication of writer Christopher Hayton's in-depth ode to a group of comicbooks I dearly loved as a kid, but never ever thought I've see get their due, much less in academic circles. Hayton's excellent *"Fantastic Giants: Charlton Comics' Monster Movie Adaptations"* was four years in the writing, and was published in the online arts journal **SCAN** (archived at [http://scan.net.au/scan/journal/display.php?journal\\_id=131](http://scan.net.au/scan/journal/display.php?journal_id=131)). The title for Christopher's essay is lovingly lifted from one of the great Charlton specials *Fantastic Giants* (1966) [shown above], an all-Steve-Ditko one-shot that reprinted the Joe Gill/Steve Ditko first issue adaptations of the venerable early 1960s monster movies *Gorgo* and *Konga*, along with two original Ditko stories.

Hayton spotlights this fascinating chapter in '60s comics history and Ditko's career with an eye toward providing a proper context for these curious creature comics: *"The history of comic books views the early 1960s largely in terms of the superhero revival, which certainly eclipsed Charlton's monster movie adaptations, then and in the minds of historians today. But while superhero comics continue to be a mainstay of the mainstream comic book industry, an important corner of the modern market owes its origins to Charlton's experiment with creature features. ...A number of comic book industry greats worked at Charlton early in their careers, and the monster movie books showcase pencil work and inking by artists recognized today for their distinctive styles. Moreover, the extensive body of work of the books' writer, Joe Gill, offers a rich field for analysis, as this article's look at his monster movie adaptations will illustrate. The present article, then, seeks to draw the readers' attention to Gill's work as a source of natural social*



*commentary, and also to the illustrative work of Charlton artists, particularly Steve Ditko, to be found in the monster movie books, in addition to the innovation that the books themselves accomplish in terms of genre founding."*

One major oversight in Hayton's otherwise comprehensive overview of movie comics that predate the Charlton monster comics of the '60s must be noted: Dick Briefer's long-running **Frankenstein** comics (debuting in **Prize Comics** in the 1940s and landing its own title -- two series! -- through to the mid-1950s), which certainly owed a debt to the ongoing popularity of the bastardized Mary Shelley **Frankenstein** cinematic adaptations, spin-offs and endless procession of family members (**Bride of**, **Son of**, **Ghost of**, etc.). Briefer's **Frankenstein** began as a straightforward horror series, then metamorphosed into a bizarre humor comic, returning to action-horror during the Pre-Code horror comics boom of the early '50s. (For fuller articulation of this point, read the conversation between Hayton and myself about his essay and this matter; just visit the link for the original online essay this article is revised and expanded from, and read the comments thread.)

In this, Briefer's series also anticipated the Charlton monster comics; though the Charlton monster comics arguably never became out-and-out cartoony, Joe Gill's scripts did shift from sf/horror to absurdist humor, including an interspecies romance for **Reptisaurus** (successor to **Reptilicus**) -- the first 'monster sex' mainstream newsstand comicbook series!

Steve Ditko gleefully embraced the humor elements Gill introduced to the pages of **Konga** in particular, including a running gag in one issue involving a photograph of an attractive couple seen reacting to the action of the story. It's a bit like Gyro Gearloose's lightbulb-headed robotic assistant in the Carl Barks **Donald Duck/Uncle Scrooge** comics (particularly the **Gyro Gearloose** comics themselves) -- you can follow their comedic interaction like a little 'mini-movie' hidden inside the panels. **Konga** was among Ditko's most playful comics work ever, a stark contrast to the somber nature of Ditko's most popular (**Spider-Man**, **Dr. Strange**) and most controversial (**Mr. A**) Silver Age comics creations.

For the first time anywhere, Hayton analyzes the sales figures for the Charlton monster comics, and tallies their relative longevity in the marketplace by comparing Charlton's annual sales figures for their three

monster comics with sales figures from other major comics publishers, including those key titles Ditko made his mark in:

*"The numbers reported are quite impressive. For **Konga**, the figures quoted were 187,778 (March 1963, average copies per issue in previous year), 112,700 (March 1964, average circulation per issue in previous year), and 234,331 (April 1965, average print run in previous year). For **Gorgo** it was 143,818 (February 1963, issues sold to paid subscribers in previous year), 231,676 (February 1964, average print run in previous year), and 184,778 (September 1965, average per copy distribution in the previous year). While interpretation of these figures is not necessarily straightforward, some comparisons can be made with other publishers from the same time period. Average paid distribution for issues of **Superman** (DC) in 1962 was 740,000, and for issues of **Amazing Spider-Man** (Marvel) in 1966 was 340,215 (Miller 2009). However, a more realistic comparison would be with titles from similar genres: **Mystery in Space** (DC, 1962) averaged 190,000 copies, **Unknown Worlds** (ACG, 1963) 143,468, **Turok, Son of Stone** (Gold Key, 1963) 276,550, and **Strange Tales** (Atlas/Marvel, 1963) 189,305 copies per issue (Miller 2009). While distribution of the Charlton monster movie books did not reach the levels of the popular superhero books, their print runs compare well with comics of similar genre from the time period."*

This kind of scholarly work is welcome, particularly for such previously-ignored (and indeed reviled) eddies in comics history. Growing up in Vermont, I was geographically close to Charlton's base of operations (Connecticut), and Charlton titles had solid distribution even in the northern Green Mountain hinterlands. Hayton provides evidence of the wider popularity of the Charlton titles, and goes the extra mile to connect the Charlton 1960s monster movie comics with the contemporary industry standards, where their successors are popular fixtures of the comics market. Primary among those successors to **Konga** and **Gorgo** are the Marvel Comics **Godzilla, King of the Monsters** of the 1970s and, much later, the Dark Horse Comics **Aliens, Predator**, and **Aliens vs Predator**, which indeed played a vital role in how the parent studio 20th Century Fox rebooted the film franchises themselves.

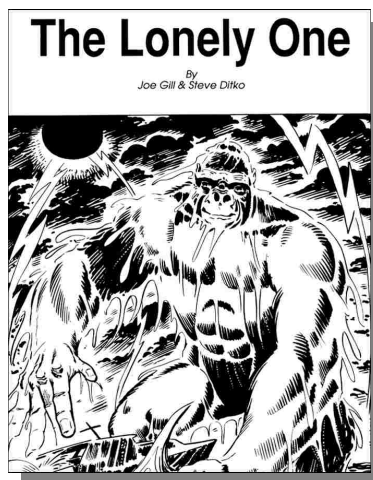
*"The three Charlton movie monster adaptations appear to have been the first substantial examples of comic book series grounded in a sci-fi movie plot but then taken off in their own directions, in this case by prolific comic book writer Joe Gill, who admitted to having enjoyed*

working on **Gorgo** and the other movie comics... These titles set a successful precedent for later attempts by Marvel and other companies, who also created series based on sci-fi movies such as **Logan's Run**, **Planet of the Apes**, **Star Wars**, **Godzilla**, **2001 A Space Odyssey**, **Alien**, **Predator**, etc."

Alas, the 1960s comics Hayton writes about have long been collector's items. Until recently, it was almost impossible to find affordable individual issues, much less complete sets, of these vintage four-color fantasies. That began to change at the cusp of the 1990s with the initial black-and-white collection of the Gill/Ditko **Konga** comics stories, compliments of publisher Robin Snyder in partnership with Steve Ditko.

Beginning in 1989, Robin Snyder and Steve Ditko launched an ambitious series of modestly-formatted black-and-white volumes composed of vintage Ditko reprint and an abundance of brand-new original material from Ditko's drawing board. The Joe Gill/Steve Ditko **Konga** collection Robin Snyder published in 1989 was **The Lonely One**, and provided an excellent and affordable introduction to this oddball genre for a new generation.

**The Lonely One** reprints four issues of the Charlton title -- **Konga** #8 and #11-13 -- and it was the first collection of any title from this body of Charlton work.



In the context of its era, and of today, **The Lonely One** is unabashedly goofy reading. Editor/publisher Snyder acknowledges and sweetens the comedic quotient by including two "*Flora the Explorer*" one-page humor strips by vet Henry Boltinoff (circa 1986 and 1989) in this package, along with one of Gill & Ditko's three-page backup stories "*Why He Survived!*" (from **Konga** #8, Sept. 1962, which opens with a sight gag involving a caveman and a saber-tooth tiger) with two of the more bemusing **Konga** adventures in the quartet of stories. Given the context of this John Stanley revival we're enjoying (thanks to the Dark Horse and Drawn & Quarterly reprints of Stanley's work for Western Publishing/Dell Comics), I honestly rank the Gill/Ditko **Konga** right up there with Stanley's **Melvin the Monster**, though there's a serious side to the Gill/Ditko work that sets it

apart from Stanley's satire.

Like *Melvin the Monster*, these were most definitely children's comics -- and I was just the kind of kid they were targeting -- but Ditko's artwork never condescended or ridiculed the narratives: in fact, the speed with which much of this was obviously executed fuels its primal immediacy and crude appeal. Gill and Ditko had their fun, but they were doing a *monster* comic -- and when Konga was *supposed* to look formidable, he was as outsized and magnificent as any monster in comics history. Springboarding directly from three iconic 1960s big-screen creature features, these were the *true* successors to the beloved Atlas/Marvel monster comics Ditko and Kirby labored over in the late '50s and early '60s, working with credited writer/ editor Stan Lee and fellow artists Dick Ayers, Don Heck and others. When Gill provided Ditko an arena for all-out monster mania (as in "*The Land of the Frozen Giants*," reprinted from *Konga* #8, Sept. 1962), Ditko cut loose with spectacular results: pages 13-19 of "*The Land of the Frozen Giants*" offers **King Kong**-worthy simian-vs.-theropod (and pterosaur) death-matches that revel in the enormity, savagery, and danger of the action. This is what the original Herman Cohen movie production promised in its ballyhoo but utterly failed to deliver -- and it's all on the page.

As already noted, *Konga* and *The Lonely One* also showcases some of Ditko's most inventive, intentionally comedic comics work to see print. There's some truly antic work here, which always made *Konga* consistently the most fun 'read' in the entire Charlton stable. "*Monster Hunter*" (from *Konga* #11, March 1963) is as much a jungle-set screwball comedy in *The Thin Man* mode as it is a monster comic, with big-game hunter E. Kellington Trent and his fiancée Lorelei Lovejoy finding an unlikely ally in Konga, who essentially plays the matchmaker, building to a capper panel in which Konga repeats a climactic *Thin Man* gag (originally performed by Asta, the beloved canine co-star of that popular movie series). "*The Peacemaker*" (from *Konga* #13, July 1963) pits Konga against a militaristic South American dictator, El Presidente Supremo, as a break from the communist dictators populating many of the Charlton monster titles. Supremo is a figure of ridicule, and Gill and Ditko milk the escalating tit-for-tat confrontations between the outsized Konga and the increasingly desperate despot's army for all it's worth. Ditko and Gill relentlessly caricature Supremo's greed, power, and mounting ire and fear uselessly railing against Konga's might (blowing and swatting El Presidente's Air Force from the sky, submerging a patrol boat with his

middle finger) with deft comedic skill.

Though Gill and Ditko were always working against tight deadlines -- they clearly *full-tilt boogied* through some of these issues, which sometimes determined how the stories and art would be executed (among my favorites: **Konga** #12, May 1963, in which the great ape spent most of second half of the issue buried up to his neck in snow, in the titular "*The Lonely One*" that closes this collection) -- Ditko always gave 100%, and some of the pen, brush and ink work in ***The Lonely One*** is still mighty sharp. It's a blessing to see it in black-and-white, evidently shot from the Charlton file photostats; it looks better than it did in the original Charlton comics (Charlton's printing was infamously haphazard and often slipshod, sporting limited palettes of color). Note, for instant, the clarity of "*The Land of the Frozen Giants*" artwork, in which Ditko's bold brushwork is enhanced by the equally bold, direct single-edge razor-blade slashes across the panels, delineating both snow-blown frozen environments (when cut diagonally across the images) and steaming primordial jungle heat (when cut horizontally across the panels). This is smart cartooning, with optimum use of time, tools, and tones.

Slim and compact as ***The Lonely One*** package is, it's ideal for a summer afternoon. The intro by the late Pat Boyette is a treat too -- Pat worked for Charlton from the mid-60s to Charlton's demise in the '80s, contributing to many of the same horror/mystery titles that Ditko regularly appeared in -- and there's an abridged Ditko checklist at the back of the volume.

In 2013, editor/packager Craig Yoe collected two definitive, handsome full-color hardcover collections of the Steve Ditko Charlton monster comics issues, ***Ditko Monsters: Gorgo*** and ***Ditko Monsters: Konga***. IDW published these exquisitely curated and produced tomes, and they are landmark books, bringing the Charlton monster comics to a wider readership than they've enjoyed since the 1960s. Furthermore, Craig Yoe and IDW had earlier curated a select collection of Dick Briefer's ***Frankenstein*** comics in a similar format, synchronistically reasserting the unintended associative genre, historical, and licensing links between Briefer's seminal Golden Age creation and the Silver Age Charlton monster movie spinoffs. It is highly unlikely we will ever see the non-Ditko issues collected or reprinted, which is unfortunate, but understandable: Ditko, after all, is the only creator involved with the original Charlton titles who is still a marketable name and talent in the



21st century.

However, the IDW/Yoe collections earn *nothing* for Ditko nor Joe Gill's estate/heirs; this is entirely legal, given the public domain status of the Charlton material (due to Charlton's failure to register copyrights during their publishing history), but ethically troubling. Reportedly, according to certain sources, Yoe, IDW, and Ditko have communicated, and this arrangement is tolerated (if not sanctioned) -- I'll not belabor the point further, save to note that as a consumer as well as a fellow creator, I still find it troubling. So be it. One can only presume the chain-of-ownership on the original film properties and licenses for **Konga** and **Gorgo** are either too tangled, or too insignificant to the parent studios or heirs, to bother with these reprints. Earlier reprints -- Ditko and Snyder's ***The Lonely One***, the one-shot ***Attack of the Mutant Monsters*** (from A-Plus Comics, 1991, reprinting the Charlton/Gill/Ditko **Gorgo** #1 and #3, with Gorgo's name relettered as "Kegor" throughout), Greg Theakston/Pure Imagination's ***Steve Ditko: Angry Apes 'N' Leapin' Lizards*** (2011, credited to editor "Earl P. Wooton") -- skirted any potential licensing issues by simply avoiding use of the movie-monster names in their titles. Obviously, the same ethical issues that exist for the Yoe/IDW reprints is relevant to all but ***The Lonely One*** reprints.

For this reason, ***The Lonely One*** remains the only authorized reprint of any of the **Konga** material -- as authorized as any public domain reprint edition can be -- and the only reprint edition I can heartily endorse; it's still available from Robin Snyder via mail-order. It's also recommended as a companion to the Yoe/IDW reprint for its crystal-clear reproduction of the black-and-white artwork, and much can be gleaned from comparing the stories in both volumes (color changes the aesthetic and impact, and it's educational to study how Ditko drew for color, even Charlton's limited palettes, during this period). Where ever you lean or stand in such matters, I urge Ditko devotees who care about their hero earning something from the ever-growing reprint industry coining revenue from Ditko's good name and always-compelling work to invest in a copy of ***The Lonely One*** for their collection, and share the wealth.

- Stephen R. Bisette, *Mountains of Madness*, VT

Revised and expanded version of the essay originally posted at The Schulz Library Blog:  
<https://schulzlibrary.wordpress.com/2009/06/14/steve-ditkos-konga-the-lonely-one/>

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# Steve Ditko and the Split Image

## by Bryan D. Stroud

I was recently gathering source material for an upcoming assignment for BACK ISSUE magazine when I had another of those unexpected surprises crop up. I bought a copy of *Detective Comics* #483 (April/May 1979) and discovered that among the "6 sensational new stories" was a sequel of sorts to one already in my collection that I didn't know existed. Of course who would have expected to see a Demon story in the pages of *Detective* or that Jack Kirby's creation would be facing an antagonist that had been seen once before, in *Man-Bat* #1 (Dec./Jan. 1975/1976)? Furthermore, readers could be forgiven for thinking this villain had been destroyed in the closing panels of his battle with Man-Bat as he had been engulfed in flames and then caught in an explosion.

(Longtime readers of *Ditkomania* may recall that in issue #74 (August 2009) Nick Caputo wrote a piece about *Man-Bat* #1 as it also contains Steve's lone work on Batman. A copy of page 8 is included in the issue.)

The returning foe was the sorcerer Baron Tyme and the Demon story is entitled "Return to Castle Branek!" A little further research revealed that the Demon story was actually the second installment in a 4-part story running from *Detective* #482 through #485; but beginning with #483, the

artwork was handled by Steve Ditko, just like Tyme's first appearance in *Man-Bat* #1.

The dramatic splash page starts things off with a bang as the Demon, Etrigan, is facing a hovering Baron Tyme, but the sorcerer has undergone a strange transformation where he is now split directly down the middle, with one half his body being normal and the other having a silhouette-like bearing with what appear to be shooting stars on the black background, not unlike that classic panel depicting "Eternity" from Doctor Strange. The Baron is declaring, ironically, that he has Merlin's Eternity Book. Etrigan, meanwhile, is having none of it and demands that Tyme return the book. To no one's surprise, the villain refuses and the struggle begins.

When it is apparent that the Demon cannot overcome the sorcerer's powers, he demands to know what Tyme requires. The Baron recaps his history, including how he gained his supernatural abilities through study and practice, ultimately summoning a hell-spawn that he promised human lives to in exchange for power. He then recounts his fight with Man-Bat and the ensuing explosion in his star chamber, which, as it turned out, actually opened a rift in reality, but pushing Tyme only halfway through, leaving him in a suspended state between worlds for months leading to his bizarre state.

He has learned that his route to freedom lies in the powers of Merlin. Thus he is now dealing with Merlin's servant, Etrigan, and he overpowers the Demon, forcing him to lead the way to Merlin's tomb. Soon they enter a portal conjured by Tyme that leads to a European village called Wolfenstags and the ruins of Castle Branek.

Elsewhere, friends of Etrigan's human alter ego, Jason Blood, fear for his well-being and an Indian seer named Randu tells them that he may not be returning.

The portal has opened at Castle Branek and Etrigan begins leading Baron Tyme to Merlin's tomb. The Demon has, however, engaged in a pattern as he leads, the Pattern of Power, which has given him greater abilities and he is now confident he is the Baron's match. The gauntlet is cast and soon the supernatural struggle begins, with great powers and forces brought into play by two determined and desperate figures.

Finally, Baron Tyme pulls a trump card, invoking the transformation

spell, changing the Demon back into Jason Blood, who is easily overcome. Striding triumphantly toward Merlin's tomb and ignoring Blood's pleas about the inherent danger, Tyme discovers the tomb itself is a massive Eternity Book, but when he opens the crypt, he finds it empty, ending the story on a cliffhanger.

This tale is chock full of signature Steve Ditko action sequences and as I mentioned, his split-image has been a technique he has long employed to great visual effect. You can find numerous examples in his work to include the cover to *Mysterious Suspense* #1 (October 1968), Angel Devlin in the Creeper's first appearance in *Showcase* #73 (April 1968), Ditko's World featuring Static #2 (June 1986), *Ghostly Tales* #87 (August 1971), countless Peter Parker/Spidey heads and even the card of Mr. A.

Back in 2007 I took the initiative to write Steve and ask him about it. I specifically wrote, "I was curious if it is symbolic of the dual nature of mankind or just a nifty visual narrative technique?"

He replied: *"It could be either one depending on the story context, an effective gimmick, a dramatic contrast, a dichotomy, etc."*

*"Drama depends on conflicts, opposites in action."*

*"Story/art drama is more effective with strong visual contrasting identifications of real opposing natures."*

*"The dual nature of mankind is freedom or slavery. The dual nature of man is life or death."*

*"The choice is how does one chooses to live, exist. A choice that has to be made every minute of one life -- a free will choice."*

It was fun to stumble across this story and to see some familiar themes. I also found it noteworthy that in a roundabout way, Steve Ditko and Jack Kirby continued to intersect all these years later. As future discoveries like these present themselves and Rob Imes is willing, I'll continue to provide them here in *Ditkomania*.







# The UFO CHECKLIST

**The United Fanzine Organization (UFO)** is a co-op of small-press comics publishers and creators dedicated to setting a higher standard of quality in independent and alternative press. The members mutually aid each other in the promotion and production of their own publications. Any small-press publisher interested in applying for membership in the UFO should contact the UFO Chairman: **Rob Imes, 13510 Cambridge #307, Southgate, MI 48195** or you can email him at [robimes@yahoo.com](mailto:robimes@yahoo.com) The official UFO website: <http://unitedfanzineorganization.weebly.com>

## **TETRAGRAMMATON FRAGMENTS!!**

**#233:** This is the UFO Newsletter, the central forum for UFO members, containing columns and artwork that can't be found anywhere else. 32 digest-size B&W pages for **\$2.50** postpaid in the USA from **Rob Imes, 13510 Cambridge #307, Southgate, MI 48195** or you can email him at [robimes@yahoo.com](mailto:robimes@yahoo.com) for more info.

**DITKOMANIA #92:** Two reviews of *Laszlo's Hammer* and an article by Mort Todd about working with Ditko on *Skyman* in 1987. A 28-page B&W digest-size fanzine for **\$2.50** postpaid from **Rob Imes** (address above).

**FANTASY THEATER #23:** A Lady Spectra and Lizard Man team-up by **Steven Myers** and **J. Kevin Carrier**, plus another adventure of the female barbarian Glorianna by **J. K. Carrier**. A 56-page B&W digest-size comic (with color covers) available in print for **\$3.50** from [www.indyplanet.com](http://www.indyplanet.com) and also available digitally for **99¢** from [www.indyplanet.com/digital](http://www.indyplanet.com/digital)

## **HERO CENTRAL UNIVERSE #10/11:**

Special double-issue of this action epic featuring mythic modern heroes. 44-page B&W digest-size comic (with color cover) for **\$6.00** from **Jason Bullock, P. O. Box 2684, Loganville, GA 30052**. Email [herocentralstudio@gmail.com](mailto:herocentralstudio@gmail.com) for more info or visit HCU on the web at <http://www.herocentral.org>

## **HERO CENTRAL JUNIOR #2:**

Still available: A 16-page full color digest comic for **\$2.50** from **Jason Bullock** (address directly above).

## **THE IMAGINATION LINK #48:**

Alan Sissom's long-running fanzine joins the UFO with this new issue! A horror prose tale; a 6-page comic strip; and a history of the *Collectors Club Newsletter*. 24-page B&W digest-size zine (with color covers) for **\$3.50** postpaid from **Alan Sissom, P. O. Box 92, Whiteland, IN 46184** or email [a1960boomer@yahoo.com](mailto:a1960boomer@yahoo.com)

**STRAW MAN #0:** A collection of miscellaneous Straw Man adventures with two never-before-seen stories. A fun done-in-one comic that is a great introduction to the hero who truly lives by the phrase "Sometimes Life Just Sucks." 32-page B&W full-size comic for **\$4.00** postpaid from **David Branstetter, 4212 Frisse Ave., Evansville, IN 47714**. Email [strawmancomics@gmail.com](mailto:strawmancomics@gmail.com) or visit [www.strawmancomics.com](http://www.strawmancomics.com)

**TALES OF FANTASY #63:** This special issue commemorates the 50th anniversary of ZOOY, with a never-before-seen adventure from 1964! 52-page B&W digest with color covers (and centerspread) for **\$3.00** postpaid in the USA from **Larry Johnson, 31 Greenbrook Rd., Hyde Park, MA 02136**. Email [LewBrown75@yahoo.com](mailto:LewBrown75@yahoo.com) or visit [www.LarryJohnsonartist.com](http://www.LarryJohnsonartist.com)

## **THE DAMNED THING Vol. 2 #1:**

The return of the zine devoted to horror! This issue contains articles on M. R. James, Clive Barker, the 1934 movie *The Black Cat*, and more! Available for **\$5.00** postpaid from **Sam Gafford, 624 Metacom Ave., #103, Warren, RI 02885**. Email: [lordshazam@yahoo.com](mailto:lordshazam@yahoo.com)

# LETTERS

What do you think of this issue? Let us know at: Rob Imes,  
13510 Cambridge #307, Southgate, MI 48195 or [robimes@yahoo.com](mailto:robimes@yahoo.com)  
If you don't want your letter printed, mark "not for publication."

Rob,

As per usual, I enjoyed the latest *DitkoMania*. Allow me to address your response to Dave Sim's letter in issue #92. In it, you said it would be a "refreshing change from the norm in fandom" to find Ditko fans with "a sympathetic understanding of Objectivism." You chide those who don't enjoy Ditko's post-'60s (Marvel) work, particularly his self-published, heavily Ayn Rand-influenced output such as "The Avenging World" or "Static" or "The Mocker." You imply that those who don't appreciate such perhaps haven't read the works -- they are merely "following the conventional wisdom" established by others in their rejection -- or that, even if they have read, they may not have come to Ditko's creations with an open mind due to an abhorrence for, or little understanding of, Rand's Objectivist philosophy. Even Sim admits to but a "nodding acquaintance" with Rand's philosophy and, as such, says he'd be limited in any attempt to understand Ditko's works since they generally mine that vein of philosophical thought.

All true enough, as far as it goes. Perhaps it takes a "true believer" or scholar to be able to explicate Ditko's Objectivist-influenced work thoroughly. But. It doesn't take one to decide if he likes or doesn't like Ditko's publications of that ilk. In 1999 I bought and read *Steve Ditko's 160-Page Package* and in 2000 his *176-Page Package*. I found little enjoyment in either and have not purchased any of his subsequent output. My first objection is to the art, which is my reason for following Ditko in the first place. I thought the art in most of both publications was, let's say, *incomplete* at best; more like sketches or layouts than completed work. And the prose was, um, turgid. The text was more screed than a story illustrating a point of view through actions and dialogue. Not caring for the work of a comic book "great," though, is not unusual. All artists have peaks and valleys. I didn't care much for Jack Kirby's post-*Kamandi* efforts, either.



As for Rand, I'd never heard of her prior to the early '70s when I'd read about Ditko's interest in her philosophy. After reading about her work, I made the decision that she was pretty much left-over, warmed-up Fredrick Nietzsche, whose concept of the "ubermensch" played such a major role in the mind set behind Nazi Germany. Still, I tried to read *The Fountainhead*. I couldn't muster more than a hundred or so pages; life's too short. I have, though, acted in Rand's play *The Night of January 16th* which was an early working out of her ideas in dramatic form. I didn't like that either, though I at least played the straw dog who opposed her budding philosophical agitprop. I'm afraid my lack of direct Rand reading puts me in the "nodding acquaintance" category, a la Sim, though to risk being overly simplistic, how many Brussels sprouts does one have to eat to know he doesn't like them?

But, heck, why not ask a Rand expert to weigh in? Here's one: In the June 7, 2010, edition of *The Nation*, Corey Robin reviewed two new books about Rand -- *Ayn Rand and the World She Made* by Anne C. Heller, and *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* by Jennifer Burns -- in a lengthy article entitled, "Garbage and Gravitas." If the title of the article isn't enough to announce Robin's attitude, check this observation he made about Heller's book: "Heller, for example, repeatedly praises Rand's 'original, razor sharp mind' and 'lightning-quick logic,' making one wonder if she's read any of Rand's work" (22). He further states of Rand herself: "Far from needing explanation, Rand's success explains itself. Rand worked in that quintessential American proving ground -- alongside the likes of Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan and Glenn Beck -- where garbage achieves gravitas and bullshit gets blessed. There she learned that dreams don't come true. They are true. Turn your metaphysics into chewing gum, and your chewing gum is metaphysics. A is A." Further proving his *bona fides* when it comes to Randian knowledge, Robin also quoted one Sidney Hook, who wrote in the *New York Times* in 1961: "The extraordinary virtues Miss Rand finds in the law that A is A suggests that she is unaware that logical principles by themselves can test only consistency. They cannot establish truth. . . . Swearing fidelity to Aristotle, Miss Rand claims to deduce not only matters of fact from logic but, with as little warrant, ethical rules and economic truths as well. As she understands them, the laws of logic license her in proclaiming that 'existence exists,' which is very much like saying that the law of gravitation is heavy and the formula of sugar sweet" (24).



From the reading I've done about Rand, as opposed to reading *her*, the number of knowledgeable scholars who inveigh against her far outnumber her supporters. And, of her supporters, one has to wonder how some justify being so. Take for example US Representative Paul Ryan, who claims to be Christian, yet Randian. How? Her philosophy is underpinned by an atheistic view of the world, just as she claimed to be an atheist. In her world view, the only higher power is the superior man; one doesn't answer to a just and loving God. Or, since I've mentioned one well-known political figure, let me answer the "superior man" view with another quote, this one from Senator Elizabeth Warren, who said in a Senate floor speech last year, "The suggestion that we have become a country where those living in poverty fight each other for a handful of crumbs tossed off the tables of the very wealthy is fundamentally wrong. This is about our values, and our values tell us that we don't build a future by first deciding who among our most vulnerable will be left to starve." That is a Christian-framed philosophy, one which is totally antithetical to Rand and Objectivism.

As for Ditko and his work, hey, a story must work *first* as a story. Certainly, a story may inform as well as entertain, but if it doesn't engage one in all the elements of "story," it ceases to be such. An essay, fine; a polemic, okay; a documentary, I'll watch. But. Don't sell me "story" and not give me story. Look at Ditko's *Blue Beetle* #5 (Charlton, November 1968). In "The Blue Beetle Faces the Destroyer of Heroes" Ditko couldn't have been much plainer about his views, yet the comic is wonderfully drawn and the *story* engaging. I couldn't say the same about the two late-twentieth century Ditko purchases I mentioned earlier. Perhaps too much Rand makes for too much bland.

Am I off the point in my dislike of Randian philosophy? Am I "unrefreshing" in my fannish view for having but a "nodding acquaintance" with her actual prose (which, if the admittedly brief sample of what I've read holds true, is fairly wooden in the main)? Perhaps. However, I have referred to her pale imitation of Nietzsche and of his connection to Nazi Germany thought. Let me end by quoting Adolf Hitler himself from a speech he gave to a group of industrialists in 1933: "Everything positive, good and valuable that has been achieved in the world in the field of economics or culture is solely attributable to the importance of personality. . . . All the worldly goods we possess we owe to the struggle of the select few." Sound familiar? Like Howard Roark or John Galt? Is this what I need to understand? Look, I can admire Ditko's

art when he's on his game; I can enjoy reading about his '90s and on work in the pages of *DitkoMania*. But, his point of view and my enjoyment of that work? Naw, I ain't buyin`.

Best,

**ALLEN J. SCHULER**

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Dear Rob,

As you well know, I'm not a fan of Steve Ditko's Objectivist output. But I'll readily acknowledge that discussion of those works belongs in the pages of *Ditkomania* -- and never more so than now, with the reissuance of *Laszlo's Hammer*. Whether I like those philosophical comics or not, they are an integral part of Ditko's career, a product of his passion. The philosophy that they contain is central to who and what Steve Ditko is.

I've never made a study of Ayn Rand, so I'm among those fans who Dave Sim (accurately and fairly) alluded to as not being qualified to be dismissive of her work. But I do feel qualified to have an opinion regarding Objectivism -- that is, to have an opinion of Objectivism as it has been interpreted and presented by Steve Ditko. This is something that I have read. I don't think that my lack of "a good working knowledge of both [Objectivism and Rand]" has "severely impaired" my "ability to perceive Steve Ditko and his work." I may not have a first-hand understanding of the source of his beliefs, but I know from Ditko's writings what those beliefs are.

(As an aside, I want to tell you that when I was reading the opening of Dave Sim's "fan letter to Steve and Robin," in which he wrote about the importance of proofreading, it made me think how rare it is to find a typo in the pages of *Ditkomania*. And then, in what seemed like a stroke of irony, on the very next page I came across the word "offence," which my American-English-trained eye perceived as a misspelling. But then I quickly recalled that this is the British spelling of "offense," and thus likely the way that our neighbors to the north in Canada write that word. I think there's a lesson in there somewhere...)

Rodney Schroeter obviously puts a great deal of thoughtful

contemplation into the things that he writes about Objectivism in Ditko's comics, a lot of "thought behind the word" if you will. And while I respect the effort, I find the results often more confusing than clarifying. Personally, I found *Laszlo's Hammer* to be pretty straightforward in its message. And as someone who has worked in home construction for my entire adult life I can appreciate just how perfect a metaphor a hammer is -- I have used one to literally tear things down as well as build things up myself.

But (and maybe this is just me) I thought that Rodney's attempt to further explain *Laszlo's Hammer* only muddled what were already crystal clear waters.

His discussion of "initiatory force" completely lost me. On the surface his statement that "initiatory force is always -- *always* -- detrimental to human life, and thus evil" reads to me as though he was saying that any catalyst which starts a reaction is bad. But I seriously doubt that that was the point he was trying to make. (At least I hope not.) He then gave four examples to clarify his point, but I found that they only added to my confusion. All I got out of these examples is that a rule is not an initiatory force ... but in actuality it is... unless it isn't... unless it is. I know that Rodney had some very specific insight that he wanted to share with us. But, for whatever reason, I'm not sure what that insight might have been.

Again, maybe it's just me. In any event, Rodney makes a compelling argument for *Laszlo's Hammer* being considered a great work of art. I will certainly agree with his assessment that it is an *important* one, at least against the backdrop of Ditko's career.

It's always a joy to read Mort Todd's reminisces; they are so well written, entertaining, and informative. I'm sure that I'm not the only one who got an empathetic chuckle out of the thought of Steve Ditko bringing art samples into his inaugural meeting with Todd! It was reminiscent of Ron Frenz getting that letter from Jerry Siegel explaining that he was the co-creator of Superman. Of course neither Ditko nor Siegel had any way of knowing how well regarded they already were by the young men to whom they were applying for work, but from a fannish perspective the whole thing is more than a little amusing. And it stands as another reminder that these icon comic book creators were just hard working guys trying to make a living.

The re-introductory strip *The Skyman Tells it Like it is* was good fun. Marty Hirschak must've been so thrilled to get to work with Frantz on this! This four pager, along with the front cover, is some of the best work that I've seen come off of Hirschak's drawing board yet. Mort Todd's Skyman back cover was pretty swell, too.

Also was quite impressed with Joe Zierman's inside front cover piece. Very nice work. And Christoph Melchert's thoughtful review of *Steve Ditko: l'artiste aux masques* just may motivate me to dust off my high school French books and buy a copy.

All in all, another stimulating issue of *Ditkomania*, my friend. It was worth the wait.

**MIKE TUZ**

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Thank you for *Ditkomania* 92. My own review starting off looked good, although I fear to be corrected in my translation, especially "sometimes in an annoying way." Mort Todd's recollections were entertaining, but I welcomed even more Rodney Schroeter, "The Thought Behind the Word." I wonder about "The two opposing moral principles in question are egoism and self-sacrifice. The two political principles are . . . mutual consent vs. force." It's easy to think of examples in Ditko's dramatic work of "initiatory force," and I recall some panels in *Avenging World* that effectively express his disdain of self-sacrifice, many more of calls for self-sacrifice on the parts of others. What I don't recall is self-sacrificing characters. On the contrary, the people who want Vic Sage fired (for example) seem egotistical and selfish. The editors who want the credit for creators' efforts sound egotistical and selfish, grasping, not self-sacrificing.

I wonder by the way what Objectivists do with the Prisoner's Dilemma. There are many real-world situations in which average welfare is highest when everyone sacrifices a little. For example, if nobody dumps raw sewage into Chesapeake Bay, everybody gets to boat around in clean water. It would do no harm if all boaters but one collected and processed their own sewage, but if each individual egoistically pursues his highest welfare and does not trouble to collect and process his own sewage, then



everybody dumps in the Bay and gets to boat around in a cesspool. Only force (fines) will keep everybody from dumping raw sewage into the Bay. Does Schroeter approve so long as the force comes from a government ultimately responsible to the citizens, or does this sound to him like the slippery slope? I have raised before the difficulty of defining initiated force. Israelis and Palestinians, for example, are both fond of stories that make themselves innocent victims of aggression.

Is art lesser for having a message? It is possible to recognize artistic power without agreeing with the message -- you mention widespread admiration for *Mysterious Suspense* no. 1 among fans who reject Objectivism, Schroeter mentions admiring the craft of *Birth of a Nation*. George Orwell jotted a note to himself, "Waugh is about as good a novelist as one can be (i.e. as novelists go today) while holding untenable opinions," mainly (I suppose) Roman Catholicism and adoring aristocrats. If you had to agree with the politics to appreciate the art, I can't see how we could enjoy anything from before, say, the later 18th century. I suppose it has partly to do with how closely involved the art is with the politics of particular times and places, how much they involve universal themes, even more with how much they acknowledge the complexity of actual political problems. *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) is still gripping. In retrospect, left-leaning viewers will probably be more skeptical of Algerian nationalism than their counterparts in the '60s, but they will probably admire all the more the way Pontecorvo makes Mathieu the French paratrooper an attractive character, standing for European efficiency and *politesse*. By contrast . . . what's another movie of that time? OK, *Easy Rider* (1969) has enjoyed no revival of esteem because it was simplistic then and even more obviously simplistic now, with all the good on the side of the drug smugglers and all the evil on the side of their redneck enemies (although there is some acknowledgement of at least ideological inconsistency when the Peter Fonda character says a little before the end "We blew it"). So what about *The Battleship Potemkin*? I'm not sure. I still think it's a great movie, even if it is almost completely one-sided (like *The Birth of a Nation* on the other side). I suppose I would say that the power of the movie depends on our divorcing it from its particular time and place; that is, if we think about the Bolsheviks at all, to regret as we see the movie that they did not in fact follow its principles any better than the officers of the movie live up to their own cultural superiority (the shot of the boot on the piano keyboard neatly summing up the precariousness of their commitment to high culture, if anybody remembers that).

I began to write this comment two months ago and have not sent it before now from uncertainty how to treat art and politics. I feel as though I ought to be an aesthetician, or at least to have read a few books. Well, thanks for raising the issue. I doubt whether it's necessary to share an artist's political leanings to enjoy his art, else we'd be baffled by practically everything from before the 18th century; or is it that there is some truth in every set of political opinions, even if not likely all truth? I'm not sure yet.

**CHRISTOPH MELCHERT**

Oxford, England

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Dear Rob,

Unlike some, I suppose, I've read much of Ayn Rand's material, both fiction and non-fiction over the years as well as issues of the newsletter *The Objectivist* and even her whimsical notations in *Letters of Ayn Rand*, and see that objectivism isn't so much a philosophy as it is a way of life for those who truly believe in its principles. It's not just a matter of right or wrong / good or evil, but what is reasonable and true vs. what is unreasonable and false. Things are what they are; a bird can't be a bush, a pencil can't be a fire hydrant, and to say they are otherwise is both false and unreasonable. So to say a man does his work and earns money which he is entitled to would be a reasonable statement, whereas to say money should be given freely to another just because they have none and want the wages of those who have earned it rightly, would be unreasonable.

Taking responsibility for your actions in life: reasonable. Blaming one's faults on the innocent: unreasonable.

The conflict between objectivism and religion is that objectivism bases that it's reasonable that something is proven through personal experience and having seen that it exists.

Religion bases its beliefs on faith of the unseen. And, although I consider my own viewpoints in life to be based on objectivism, I'll never be a "true" objectivist because I have a belief in God. To myself, "A is A" can apply to God because I can see His handiwork in creation and the universe, and the mere notion that a planet such as earth is just the right

distance from the sun, that we have a moon which helps control climates and tides, that billions of various life forms exist on this planet, all gives me reason to believe in God's existence. It reminds me of the Soviet astronaut while in orbit saying "there is no God; I see Him nowhere", and the American astronaut while in orbit stating, "funny...I see Him Everywhere!"

Objectivism in anti-fantasy, but what doesn't begin "as" a fantasy. Any thought of anything one wants to accomplish in life begins as a fantasy until the individual makes it a reality. Without fantasy, we certainly would have comic books, fiction in general.

Aristotle wrote of "master and slaves," but I think it would apply to those who create ideas, and the ones who actually carry them out. Such as an editor or writer who creates a basis for a story, but it doesn't become material until the artist, then the publisher, makes it a reality.

But, enough of that. I'm afraid I'm only vaguely familiar with Skyman, not being old enough to read his original adventures and only seeing later adaptations, but I did find the article and strip interesting.

Comparing Ditko to J. T. Chick? Both firmly believe in the material they produce but that's about as far as it goes. I have a very large collection of Chick tracts (in fact, much of what you see on the Grand Comic Database [ [www.comics.org](http://www.comics.org) ] is from my collection). Chick makes some good points, but many, MANY unreasonable ones. The artwork is secondary to me compared to his message and that message is that he has a whole lot of resentment and bigotry, which are concepts one who professes belief in God and Jesus should not possess. Some of his work is laughable, and also, somewhat sad.

*Laszlo's Hammer*: I confess is not a favorite of mine of Mr. Ditko's work. A lot has been written "why" one would vandalize *The Pieta*, but basically I would say it's the same reason someone would kill Dr. King or John Lennon: the want for fame and world-wide attention and recognition no matter what the consequences on society; an act of pure selfishness. An act of insanity. Incidentally, Laszlo Toth was hospitalized in Italy for two years after the incident and when released was immediately deported to Australia (where I suppose he still lives).

And so ends my comments on #92. Here's hoping you will do an issue

on *Gorgo*. Lots of good memories of Ditko's work on that title.

Regards,

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[ Thanks, Dave! I hope you find this issue devoted to both *Gorgo* and *Konga* to your liking! -- R. Imes ]

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I want to thank you for the inclusion of my Speedball article in #91. The first Ditko comics I encountered were my dad's copies of the Captain Universe stories Ditko did with Bill Mantlo in *Marvel Spotlight*. I actually learned how to read with my dad's comics prior to kindergarten, which also included the *Prez* comics, most of the *Kamandi* series, issues of *Superman's Pal Jimmy Olsen* and Kirby issues of *Our Fighting Forces*. Ditko's style struck a chord with me and was my earliest favorite. I was obviously a huge fan of the Speedball comics as they were released, and have long since read every Ditko story I could unearth. While I had to part with most of my funny book collection a few years ago, what remains of my genuinely modest stock is easily 50% Steve Ditko.

So to be considered "print-worthy" for *Ditkomania* was a gas! Especially for that issue to feature such a snazzy full-colour cover from Javier Hernandez!

Your own Speedball article provided plenty of food for thought, particularly as I had completely missed the old solicit for the never-released *Speedball* #11. Your article on the bouncing heroes also struck my imagination, though for unexpected reasons. In Alex Ross' *Earth X* series from Marvel we were shown a future Daredevil who looked to be a melding of both Daredevil and Ghost Rider, and was at least innuendoed to actually be the modern Daredevil foe Madcap -- which Ditko has drawn before and I believe designed as well. Well, after reading your article I now wonder if that future Daredevil may also have been some sort of homage to Ditko's Killjoy character, as there seems in hindsight to have been far more than a mere passing resemblance.



Elsewise, excellent content in #91, especially the extended letters section which is fastly becoming my favorite feature. And I must say that I enjoyed the visual interpretations of Speedball rendered by Jim McPherson and Martin Hirschak the most.

I enjoyed the great cover from Hirschak for #92 as well. As a fan I really like the idea of Mort Todd and Ron Frenz aligning forces, *Skyman* and beyond. But I feel the high point of this issue was a point made in Dave Sim's letter over how Objectivism is (and isn't) discussed, whether in *Ditkomania* or elsewhere.

To bring this home, my father was greatly molded by the writings of Ayn Rand. However, I do not believe he was enough of a comic book fan to realize the effect she had on the works of Steve Ditko. My dad died in 1998, so for me as an adult to better understand him, as well as to better understand the mindset of my favorite comic book storyteller, I have spent a great deal of time with Ayn Rand's writings. That said (and 'nuff said it is), I for one would love to see such cerebral discourses continue. Sim's pondering of whether Ditko's more semantic approach to visuals as itself a response to the ideology is wonderfully fascinating. And likely on the money.

Keep up the stellar work!

**RICHARD CALDWELL**

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Dear Rob,

Thank you for contacting me about *Ditkomania* #92. I read the issue the next day I got it. Good coverage of *Laszlo's Hammer*, as well as that French art book on Ditko. I wish that was available in English!

I don't have the issue right in front of me, but Dave Sim (or you in response to Dave Sim) mentioned how frustrating it was that few people talked about Ditko's latter-day work outside of saying "too didactic" and held up the fact that no one really talked about the Mocker, for instance.

While I think I agree with Dave Sim about the way Ditko's ideology limits him in exploring some of the nuance of the *Laszlo's Hammer* scenario (especially, for example, whether Michaelangelo would agree with Ditko's viewpoint on art), I think that *The Mocker* is a great example of how modern Ditko can explore his moral and ethical interests while writing a genuinely thrilling, sweaty, grimy pulp comic. And it's even got some of that moral complexity that people claim modern Ditko is lacking (including sympathetic villains and self-doubting heroes!) At the very least, it's due for a lengthy re-appreciation.

Funny anecdote: as a teenager, at a time when I still couldn't understand what was Ditko's appeal (based on an occasional *Spider-Man* reprint), it was picking up *The Mocker* from some dusty comic store's grimy back shelf that finally made everything click.

Thanks, Rob, (along with Jog Mack at *TCJ.com* and the Ditko weblog [[www.ditko.blogspot.com](http://www.ditko.blogspot.com)]) for keeping the discussion of modern Ditko alive!

Cheers!

**ROBBY KAROL**

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Sorry that I've been so delayed in at least getting a copy of *Ditkomania*. I only recently found out about the zine through the internet and if I didn't wander onto your Facebook group, I don't know if I would've ever been prompted to get myself a copy let alone take part in the Kickstarter campaign. I've gotten a few things through Kickstarter now and I have to tell you, I think I was more charged to receive my first issue of *Ditkomania* than anything else. And I just thought it was a terrific issue as well. I've read it from cover-to-cover and had I known in advance I probably would've tried first submitting a drawing of Speedball (and I still might down the road). Once I discovered your group and finally got an issue, I said to myself "I've got to be a part of this somehow" and of course, the best way I know how is to submit some of my art.

A little background, I've been drawing comics since around the mid 80s. I've worked for publishers like AC Comics (drawing issues of

*FemForce*), NOW Comics (the last issue of *Rust*) and Malibu Graphics (Keith Laumer's *Retief* and a Planet of the Apes mini-series called *Blood of the Apes*, along with a whole host of covers and other little jobs). Most recently (as in the late 90s) I was part of the *Big Bang Comics* team while *Big Bang* was being published by Image and drew a lot of different things there including at some points drawing Erik Larsen's Savage Dragon and Mighty Man characters (as well as my own creator-owned stuff as well). I sorta fell out of it due to a ton of real well-paying commercial freelance work that came my way, and in the last few years I've been pulling myself back in, though it's been more for my own fun than anything else. What got me back was learning to draw digitally, using my Wacom tablet and Photoshop and Illustrator; I just got really charged with what I could do with those and how I could control the look of my work. I've expanded on that even further now with my iPad and Sketchbook Pro. The recent Shade The Changing Man cover that I posted on the FB page started as a sketch on my iPad and was finished up on my desktop and I just had a ball doing it.

All through this time, I've been a big fan of Mr. Ditko's work and in recent years, it's just "spoke" to me even further. It's strange, but as I've been pursuing drawing digitally, for some odd reason, I tend to gravitate to Ditko's characters and have just wanted to try my hand with them. So anyway, onto my submission (and thanks for staying awake through this).

I was going through the Yoe Books *Ditko Monsters: Gorgo* volume and in the second issue of *Gorgo*, there was a panel midway through at the start of the page that I saw and thought, "Man, that would be a lot of fun to try and recreate that." and so I took that as my inspiration.

## **DARREN GOODHART**

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*[Thanks, Darren! Readers, the next several pages contain some bonus illustrations that weren't contained in the print version of this issue. First up, on the next page, is the original panel on which Darren's back cover was based. This is followed by versions of Darren's illustration in progress, plus a B&W version of **Jim McPherson's** front cover. We also have an illo of GORGO by **Javier Hernandez** that (oops!) I forgot to include in the print version, as well as the same illo colored by Mort Todd. Enjoy! – Rob Imes ]*

TRUBBLE 221 FINE DOCKED?

NOTHIN' OUT HERE BUT MIN-  
NOWS, DARN IT!





NOTHIN' DOWN  
HERE BUT *MINNOWS*,  
DARN IT!

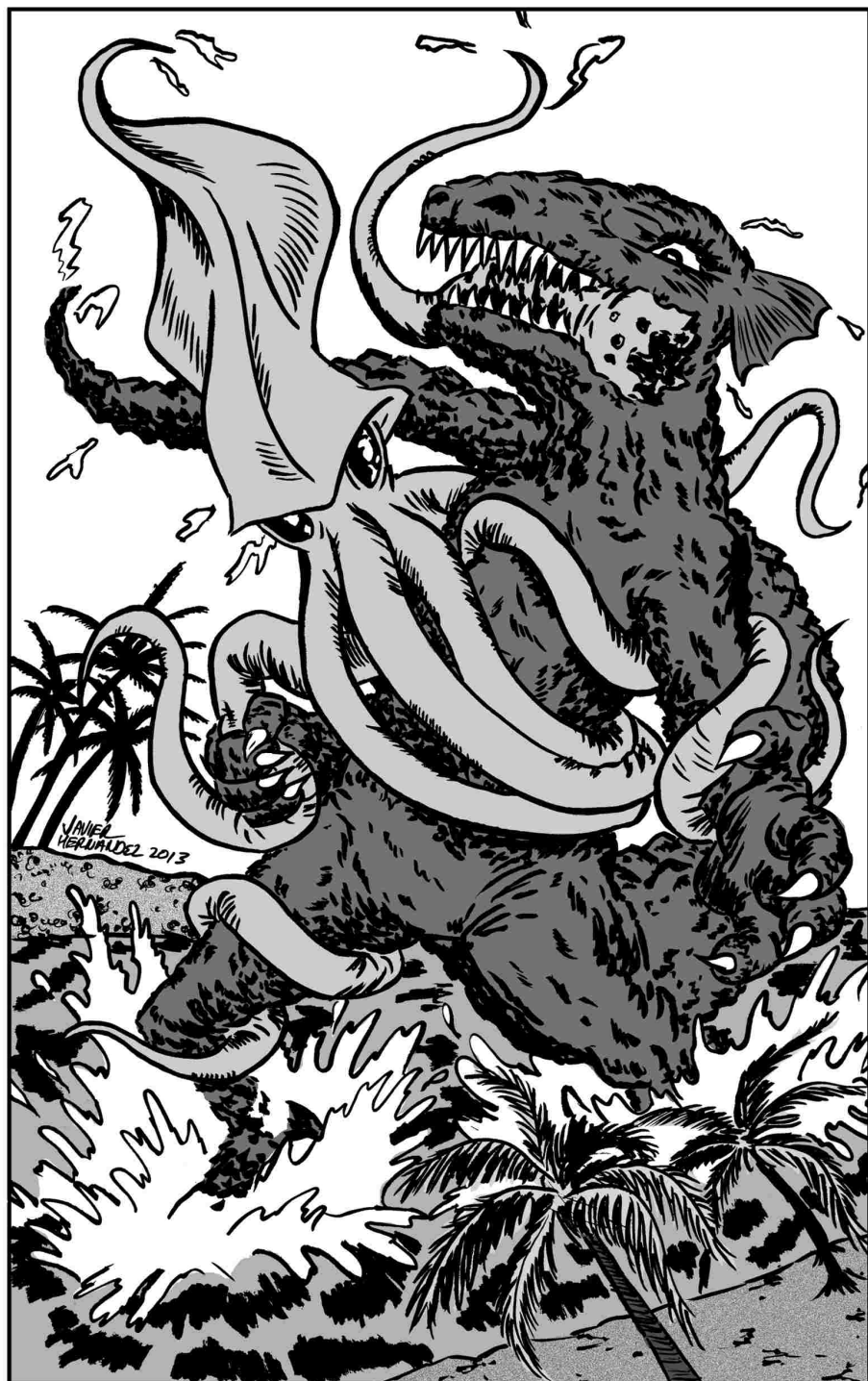












GORGOS illustration by Javier Hernandez



BASED ON A  
KING BROTHERS  
PICTURE  
RELEASED BY  
M.G.M.

JOHN  
HERNANDEZ 2013

# GORGGO

COLOR BY MORT TODD



**STEVE  
DITKO'S**

# MOUNTAIN MONSTER



From FANTASTIC GIANTS #1 (1966)



Jim McPherson's original B&W illustration for DITKOMANIA #93





KONGA  
A Charlton Publication

# DITKO MANIA



HIRCHAK  
2014