

URBAN RENEWAL

A Hero History of Godzilla

by David Annandale

The question that immediately arises when dealing with Godzilla is whether or not he is, in fact, a hero. Razing cities to the ground and bringing death to countless thousands is a rather odd way for a hero to act. Should this not then be a Villain History? The question is one with which those responsible for his appearances, both on film and in comics, have wrestled, more often than not unsuccessfully. Their quest seems to have been to find some way of portraying the monster as being basically a nice guy who just happens to knock skyscrapers over. It is only now, as both books and movies move closer to the original conception of the character, that people seem to be realizing that the point is irrelevant. Godzilla, in his purest form, is a character so far removed from humanity that questions of good or evil simply don't apply.

Godzilla was created in 1954, in the Toho production of *Gojira*. This film reached North America a year or so later with additional scenes starring Raymond Burr, and its title changed to *Godzilla, King of the Monsters*. The film's original intent, at least partly, was to shock the Americans with the possible consequences of the Atomic Bomb. For Japanese audiences, he was the personification of some of their more primal fears: he represented both natural disaster and nuclear holocaust. (For much of the above information I am indebted to Denis Gifford's *A Pictorial History of Horror Movies and Cent monstres du cinema fantastique* by Jean-Pierre Andrevon and Alain Schlockoff.

All of this was, of course, quickly forgotten as the film's huge commercial success spawned one sequel after another. After another. After another. Not to mention the spin-offs (*Rodan*, 1956, and *Mothra*, 1961, for instance). Before long, the series was utterly divorced from any connection to the real world. The stories took place in their own unique universe, replete with mythical islands (Ogasawara, a.k.a., Monster Island, a sort of Club Med for monsters), Aliens From the Third Black Hole in Space, and, yes, giant robots (Mechagodzilla, Jet Jaguar). Yo, comics fans, does any of this sound familiar? There was even a *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, only it was called *Destroy All Monsters* (1968). Through it all, Godzilla's appearance and character changed drastically. His face became more squashed, until there was more than a hint of teddy-bear about the once-fearsome reptile. As screenwriters invested him with more and more human characteristics, he climbed down the ladder from ram-paging force of nature to irritable super-hero starring in films that had gone from grim expressionism to juvenile slapstick. The fact that the character has survived all this is testament to its endurance.

Two years after what would prove to be the last Godzilla film for almost 10 years (*Terror of Mechagodzilla*, 1975), Marvel released *Godzilla, King of the Monsters*. The series ran 24 issues (not too bad by late-'70s standards). Though it veered dangerously toward the ridiculous at times, it never descended to the same depths as the



later films and was never less than entertaining. Doug Moench was writer on the entire series, and Herb Trimpe was penciller on all but issues #4 and 5, where he was spelled off by Tom Sutton.

The first issue opens with a suitably spectacular splash page of Godzilla bursting from an iceberg off the shores of Alaska. The issue introduces the main characters (SHIELD agents Dum Dum Dugan and Jimmy Woo; Japanese scientist Yukiro Takiguchi; his grandson, Rob; and his assistant, Tamara Hashioka) and chronicles SHIELD's attempts to keep Godzilla from destroying an Alaska pipeline terminal. They fail. Miserably.

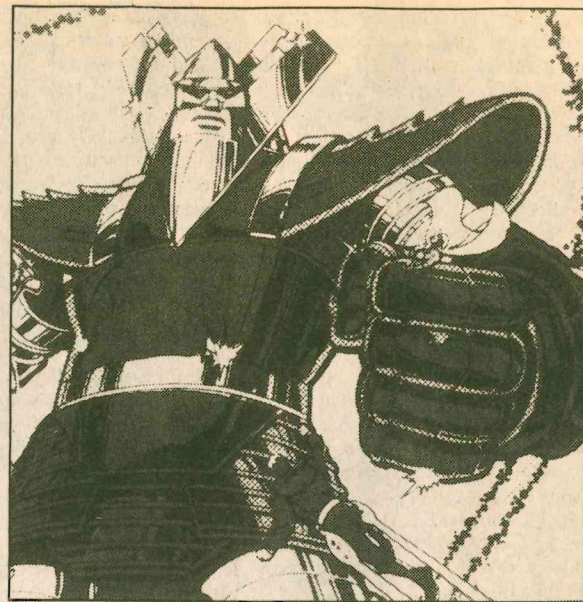
The issue's strengths were in its portrayal of Godzilla as a sort of walking earthquake, razing everything in sight. This is also probably Trimpe's most fearsome version of the monster: in the scene where Godzilla rips up the pipeline and flails it about, he is drawn as snarling with a gleeful malevolence.

There are some faults, however. As the pipeline station is being demolished, we are told that "less than three minutes have elapsed since the first sighting." And yet, on the following page we find a SHIELD helicarrier already halfway across Alaska, and Nick Fury is flying over Montana, en route with our Japanese Godzilla experts. Oh, the glories of the Information Age! Another problem is the inconsistency of Godzilla's size, especially with respect to his hands. This would be a recurring flaw in the series. Whereas in the early issues the average human is (usually, but not always) dwarfed by one of Godzilla's claws, by the end of the run the crushing fists have become quite dainty.

Issue #2 introduces Gabe Jones of SHIELD, last of the principal characters. Also featured is the laying waste of a goodly section of Seattle. Here, however, appear Moench's first ill-advised attempts to humanize the character. Rob Takiguchi claims that many in Japan regard Godzilla as a hero (thus establishing a tenuous link between the later films and the comic), and it is repeatedly hammered home that Godzilla is only trashing the city because SHIELD hurt him in Alaska (gets around quickly, Godzilla does). The issue ends with Godzilla being knocked off a cliff and into the sea by the ludicrous *deus ex machina* devices known as inertia blocks (giant bricks launched from high-tech catapults).

San Francisco gets the treatment next, and the Golden Gate Bridge is sent to the Great Scrap Heap in the Sky, as is the helicarrier. This is knocked out of the sky by Hercules as SHIELD and the Champions run afoul of each other.

Godzilla fights other creatures his



Left: The big G. lays some serious pipe in the first issue of his Marvel title. Above: Our hero's side-kick and sparring partner, Red Ronin.

size for the first time in issues #4 and 5. The action takes place on an island in the Aleutian chain ruled by one Dr. Demonicus, who has created giant monsters for the purpose of (what else?) world domination. Moench pushes Godzilla's humanitarian traits a bit too far in this story, as the monster rushes to the defense of the oppressed Inuits and goes out of his way to save Dugan's life. Oh well. The 12-year-old boy who first read these tales was delighted with such touches.

Next is a three-part storyline in which Godzilla is captured by the New, Improved helicARRIER, is brought to a base near San Diego, escapes and battles the giant robot Red Ronin, operated by Rob Takiguchi.

Issue #9 features the destruction of the Hoover Dam and the consequent flooding of Las Vegas. While this is, at first glance, one of the more amusing issues, it becomes less so when one realizes that the death of what must have been thousands of people has been treated in a manner that is, to say the very least, cavalier. This problem is present throughout the run, but this is the most blatant example. The destruction of cities by Godzilla is the super-brawl syndrome taken to its extreme. Buildings fall, firestorms erupt, bridges and dams collapse, yet nobody seems to get hurt. The disaster areas have all been instantly evacuated, people somehow manage to dodge all the cascading concrete, and if anyone is killed, we aren't told about it. This is, admittedly, a late-'70s Code-approved book, but still, the impression received is that no one, not SHIELD, not the populace, not even

Godzilla, takes this destruction too seriously.

Godzilla's tour of Scenic America continues as he and Red Ronin battle the mutated sasquatch Yetrigar in the Grand Canyon in issues #10 and 11. Buried under tons of rock at the end of the story, Yetrigar resurfaced recently in *West Coast Avengers* #32. (Poor soul.)

Salt Lake City is the scene of a three-part battle royale. Godzilla and Red Ronin (who gets decapitated in #13) face off against three megamonsters (from the planet Mega, of course). The Megans want these creatures to conquer Earth so that they can amass the necessary raw material to conquer Beta. (Obviously, in the comic book universes, Earth is at the center of the universe, Oa notwithstanding.) Though this plot is straight out of some of Toho's later monster-mashes, Moench and Trimpe manage to pull this off with panache. The story is ludicrous, yes, but they play it with a straight face and the result is both spectacular and suspenseful. As far as spectacle is concerned, this is the climax of the series (the New York episode is something of a let-down).

With issue #15, what little grimness the series had left goes out the window. This two-part storyline is played strictly for laughs, as Moench takes the archetypal Western plot of ranchers and rustlers, and plops Godzilla in as the stranger in the white hat. "Who was that masked lizard?" one of the characters asks at the conclusion. As one can see, the comic series parallels the film series in that it abandons its grim origins for decidedly

more light-hearted fare. And yet, the stories here never descend to the same level of campy ridiculousness as did the films and never stray quite as far from Godzilla's roots as a figure of menace. And, through it all, the character is never less than dignified. Even in what happens next.

The last eight issues drop the fairly episodic structure that had been the norm and form one long storyline. Dosed with Henry Pym's shrink gas, Godzilla is reduced to some 12 inches in height (#17). He is taken to New York, where he escapes upon arrival and ends up in the sewers. After battling a rat, he emerges onto street level, is found by Rob Takiguchi, and begins to grow again (#18). Now, much as Roger Rabbit could only escape from the manacles when it was funny, so Godzilla will only grow to a height that meets the demands of the story.

Rob dresses a four-foot Godzilla in a hat and trenchcoat (here things get dangerously close to being "cute") in an effort to smuggle him back to the helicARRIER. But the Best Laid Plans, etc., and a 7-foot Godzilla slugs it out with Dugan and Gabe Jones on the docks (#19). Growing to 20 feet (#20), he is lured to a museum where the Fantastic Four arrive just in time to screw things up (in this series, whenever a super-hero shows up, things get worse). Sent back in time via Dr. Doom's time machine, Godzilla helps defend Devil Dinosaur's valley (#21 and 22) before reappearing in Times Square back at full size.

Issue #23 is in many ways pointless, as SHIELD, the Avengers and the Fantastic Four lure Godzilla from Times

Square to the waterfront and make him fall in, only to have him tromp right back downtown in #24. After all the mayhem of the previous issues, New York only loses a few cars and the odd brownstone. Presumably the repercussions of having the stomping grounds for 99% of their super-heroes levelled were too much for the House of Ideas to contemplate. At any rate, in quite a touching scene, Godzilla responds to Rob's pleas and leaves the city of his own accord, to swim away from men, supposedly forever.

And so the series ended, not with a whimper, nor a bang, but with something like a sigh. For all its flaws, the series was still better than a fair bit of what is being done today, and it always respected the character. Unfortunately, Marvel was not quite through with Godzilla. He next turned up in *Iron Man* #193, resurrected by Denny O'Neil, who should have known better.

Not even the worst of films could rob Godzilla of his fire and majesty, but O'Neil and Luke McDonnell did it in one fell swoop. Marvel no longer had the rights to the character, so he is never specifically named. But it is clear who this pathetic creature is, as Dr. Demonicus is back, and refers to the monster—now mutated and under his control—as his once "greatest enemy." Godzilla here is a clumsy, flopping, awkward monster barely 50 feet in height. He messes up an island a bit and annoys Tigra before being carried out to sea by Iron Man. He was then given a couple of panels in #194 and #196. He turned up again in *The*

Thing #31, as no more than the weak punchline to a sorry joke. The character had hit rock-bottom, but then things took a definite turn for the better.

Toho released *Godzilla 1985* (1984), and this was a return to the character's roots. He was once more the Fifth Horseman of the Apocalypse (if you will), and all traces of the super-hero had been purged from his personality. There was no longer anything remotely human about the rampaging dinosaur. The addition of campy Raymond Burr didn't help the American version of the film, and neither did the extensive cuts and poor dubbing. Nevertheless, the film was a welcome relief to fans of the character.

Dark Horse Comics acquired the rights to Godzilla in 1986, and (after a long delay) released the *Godzilla, King of the Monsters Special* #1, written by Stephen Bissette and Randy Stradley, and drawn by Bissette and Ron Randall with inks by Art Nichols and Tony Salmons. This is the high point to date in Godzilla's comic book history. The cover features the most chilling depiction of Godzilla ever, a leering figure of personified destruction and evil. Previous to the release of the comic, Mike Richardson and Randy Stradley had said in interviews that they wanted to bring the character closer to the Cthulhu Mythos, and this was done admirably.

A huge boulder is discovered by a Tokyo construction crew. Covered in inscriptions and radioactive, it acts as a call for monsters. Three of them awake: Soran, the thunderbird; Inagos,

the locust king; and Godzilla. (Incidentally, Inagos is serenaded by his worshippers with "Otara vey rama Inagos," which translates as "O mighty one great Inagos.") Yoshiwara, the scientist who deciphered the slab, tries to warn the authorities but is ignored. Godzilla arrives and devastates Tokyo as he answers the call of the slab. Yoshiwara sacrifices himself to get the rock, and thus Godzilla, out of the city and back to the ocean. His daughter (the narrator) recovers one of the monster's scales and, some 30 years later, believes she knows how to kill Godzilla, should he ever return.

This is quite a different Godzilla from the one we had last seen, and the difference is more than the fact that at Marvel he said "Mraw" and here he says "Greeonk." The Dark Horse Godzilla is devoid of any trace of being a hero, and yet, in spite of the cover, he is not exactly evil either. He awakens to find his world changed, and we are as monstrous to him as he is to us. And he is utterly merciless in his method of dealing with these little monsters.

The Special scores high marks in another way. When cities are destroyed, people get killed, and this is hammered home with the death of the narrator's mother. The scene, with Godzilla's crushing foot dominating the page, also effectively portrays our ant-like stature beside this monster.

Dark Horse then began to release a six-issue translation of the manga adaptation of *Godzilla 1985*. A volcanic eruption awakens Godzilla, who surfaces near a fishing boat. Enor-

Godzilla's final, debased incarnation at Marvel, and right, his rebirth in Dark Horse's *Godzilla, King of the Monsters Special*.



mous parasites fall from him to the boat and kill all but one crew member, Okumura. This fellow is rescued by reporter Goro Maki. Professor Hayashida, upon hearing of the incident, realizes that Godzilla is back, and informs the government. Godzilla destroys a Russian sub, then trashes a nuclear reactor. Eventually there is the destruction of Tokyo, and the series ends with the luring of Godzilla into a volcano.

It is in issue #2 that we are told explicitly that Godzilla is a force of nature. And, in the film at least, Hayashida later states that Godzilla is quite simply indestructible. So we can see that, after more than 30 years, the character has been returned to his original form as an elemental power of destruction. But, unlike the first film, he cannot be killed.

The comics themselves are a bit of a disappointment after the spectacular special, but this may be more due to culture shock than anything else. The art is beautiful, but suspension of disbelief is difficult due to the jarring (to these western eyes) mixture of cartoon and realism. While all backgrounds and inanimate objects are rendered with almost photographic realism, the people, for the most part, are rubber-faced caricatures. Godzilla is reproduced almost exactly as he appeared in the film. Unfortunately, what worked on the screen becomes somewhat comical on paper, especially in the close-ups. The effect is a bit like the "Mickey Mouse, Super Secret Agent" stories where Mickey and Goofy were drawn by Paul Murry, and everything else was rendered by Dan Spigle. Nevertheless, there are many breathtaking sequences.

Dark Horse has stated that they would like to continue Godzilla's adventures above and beyond these six issues, and one would certainly hope that they do. Godzilla at long last appears to be in the right hands, and, with any luck at all, will continue to delight and terrify for many years to come. The King of Monsters has reclaimed his throne.

Checklist
(Chronological order)

Godzilla, King of the Monsters
(August 1977 to July 1979)

Marvel Comics Group
Writer: Dough Moench

Pencillers: Herb Trimpe (#1-3, 6-24), Tom Sutton (#4 and 5)

Inkers: Jim Mooney (#1), Giacoia and Tuska (#2), Tony De Zuniga (#3 and 4), Klaus Janson (#5), Herb Trimpe (#6), Fred Kida (#7-12), Dan Green (#13-21, 23 and 24), Jack Abel (#22)

Iron Man
(#193, 194, 196; April, May, July 1985)

Marvel Comics Group
Writer: Denny O'Neil
Pencillers: Luke McDonnell (#193 and 194), Rich Buckler (#196)
Inkers: Akin and Garvey

The Thing
(#31, January 1986)

Marvel Comics Group
Writer: Mike Carlin
Penciller: Ron Wilson
Inker: Kim DeMulder

Godzilla, King of the Monsters Special #1

August 1987

Dark Horse Comics

Writers: Randy Stradley and Steve Bissette

Pencillers: Steve Bissette and Ron Randall

Inkers: Art Nichols and Tony Salmons

Pin-Ups: Paul Chadwick, Rick Geary, Keith Giffen, Alan Moore, Mark A. Nelson, Charles Vess

Godzilla
(May 1988 to March 1989)
Dark Horse Comics
Original Japanese version: Kasuhisa Iwata

English script: Mike Richardson and Randy Stradley

Covers: Mark A. Nelson
Inside back cover to #1: Alex Wald

Godzilla Portfolio
Dark Horse Comics

Art by: Arthur Adams, Paul Chadwick, Doug Wildey, Mark Badger, Cynthia Martin, Alan Moore, Bill Wray, Hilary Barta, Ryan Brown, Kevin Eastman, Peter Laird, Steve Lagigne, Steve Bissette, Michael Rooney, Eric Talbot, Jim Lawson ●

TORONTO
SUPERSHOW
MONTHLY
COMIC BOOK CONVENTION

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF
BATMAN
WE ARE PROUD TO PRESENT

MARSHALL NORM
ROGERS BREYFOGLE

DETECTIVE COMICS #471-479 / SILVER SURFER
DR. STRANGE / G.I. JOE

GABRIEL MORRISSETTE
INK SAVAGE ANNUAL #1 / NIGHTGARD

TY TEMPLETON
JUSTICE LEAGUE / SECRET ORIGINS / STIC'S INFERN

MARK ASKWITH
THE PRISONER / TABOO

JIM CRAIG / STORYBOARD / ANIMATION
MILLION / DEAD ZONE / DRIDIS

DAVE ROSS
SPEC. SPIDER-MAN ANNUAL #9 / PUNISHER / ALPHA FLIGHT

RIK G. TAYLOR
WOODGUY / TABOO

ALSO: KAJA BLACKLEY: UNION JACKS • LAM CAR: SECRET ORIGINS #4 • STUART DUNN: KAREN RUDD: PLAYGROUND / HEADCASE
• BOB KRAMER: LETTERS / ADVENTURE PUBLICATIONS • P.M. RAJ: • MARTIN MORROW: RIBBON CUT CONFERENCE
• VINCE MARCHESSANO: BATMAN # 26 • FRANK REYES: NINJA ELITE

A SPECIAL PRESENTATION BY
LIGHTBOX STUDIOS
ANIMATORS OF THE BATMAN SELLERS' COMMERCIALS

A FULL-DAY SCHEDULE OF
VIDEO PRESENTATIONS
INCLUDING ANIMATION, FEATURE FILMS,
MOVIE TRAILERS
AND EXCLUSIVE
SHOWINGS
OF A NEW
LONGER
BATMAN
PREVIEW!

A PANEL DISCUSSION WITH
RON MANN
THE DIRECTOR OF THE GEMM Award
WINNING DOCUMENTARY
COMIC BOOK
CONFIDENTIAL

◆ SUNDAY ◆ MAY 28TH ◆ 1989 ◆
◆ 11 AM to 5 PM ◆ ONTARIO COLLEGE OF ART ◆ 100 MCCALL ST. ◆
◆ ADMISSION: \$4 AT THE DOOR ◆ FOR MORE INFO: 416-651-7161 ◆
◆ BOOKS • COMICS • POSTERS • FILM MATERIAL • TOYS • AND MORE! ◆
◆ DOOR PRIZES INCLUDING A LIMITED EDITION GEMM PRIZE OF THE BATMAN (FROM FIRST YEAR PRESS) ◆

ANDY MANGELS BACKSTAGE

With Dolph Lundgren

Welcome to the fifth *Andy Mangels Backstage* column, and a discussion with a man very familiar to science fiction/action genre fans. He's played a Mattel action figure, a nameless gungel after James Bond, a Russian boxer pounded to a pulp by Rocky, and soon, Frank Castle, the Punisher. To say that Dolph Lundgren is known for his cerebral, artistically demanding roles would be like saying Ronald Reagan is terminally hip.

He also holds a Master's Degree in chemical engineering, was given a full-ride scholarship to M.I.T., and represented Sweden the world over in heavyweight full-contact karate championships. Three years into Hollywood, he's made five feature films, and been known for his hunky posters and his well-publicized relationship with singer Grace Jones. To say that Dolph Lundgren is your typical Hollywood pretty boy would be like saying Marilyn Monroe was a mousy housewife.

Now, set for an early July release, Dolph Lundgren is *The Punisher*, in a major new movie from New World Pictures, the ex-owners of Marvel Comics. He co-stars in the movie with Academy Award winner Lou Gossett Jr. and Jereon Krabbe (who was also a Bond heavy in *The Living Daylights*). The Producer and co-writer of the film is Robert Kamen, the man responsible for bringing the world *Karate Kid I-III* and *Taps*, while director Mark Goldblatt has worked on such genre films as *The Terminator*, *Rambo II*, *Robocop*, and *The Howling*. Sounds to me like they've got a great line-up for the film, and the trailers (in theaters over Christmas) look action-packed enough to please any comics fan. Check out *The Punisher* this July, but first check out this interview with the man who is the Punisher!

—Andy Mangels—

ANDY MANGELS: Dolph, you're the Punisher in the upcoming movie of the same name. Why did you choose this movie to do?

DOLPH LUNDGREN: Because I liked the story. It was a good story. It was contemporary, but yet it had some larger than life qualities. It was unpredictable, new, and fresh. That's

why I liked it.

MANGELS: Did you search out the script, or was it written with you in mind?

LUNDGREN: I don't think it was written with me in mind, but they made me an offer. I never read the first version of the script. Robert Kamen came in and rewrote it, and as soon as I read it, I knew it was a movie I wanted to do.

MANGELS: Do you know who else was up for the role?

LUNDGREN: No, I don't. I think Kurt Russell was up for it. He's very good....

MANGELS: ... But not as muscular. What is the plot of the film?

LUNDGREN: It's about a young cop, Frank Castle, who is happily married,

and has two daughters. He's involved in a drug investigation with his partner, who is played by Lou Gossett Jr. They get too close to some heavy people, who then decide to take the cops out. Instead of killing him though, they kill his wife and two daughters. You don't quite know whether or not he's dead or alive.

We cut to five years later to find out that Detective Castle is presumed dead, but 100 or so organized crime figures have been murdered by the same person. They call him the Punisher, and, of course, it's Frank Castle, who's back to avenge his family. Meanwhile, his former partner is trying to bring him back to justice.

They based some of the story on a real event down in New Orleans

Dolph Lundgren as the Punisher, showing off his "don't give a damn" attitude.

