

What comic fan could forget those heroic days of yore when boy crusader Chuck Chandler's courageous chimp Squeeks applied his crime-fighting skills to the cause of the total defeat of Nazi spies and other anti-American enemies? What ape enthusiast could fail to leave room in his heart of hearts for such selfless simians as Super-Monkey and Congorilla whose apish antics graced many a comic book page? The rhetorical answer to those rhetorical questions is: many. Here to refresh our monstrous memories is Howard Phillips, a man of uneven temperament but a genius in his chosen field—namely, the history of apes in the comics.

Apes to the right of me, apes to the left of me! Apes overhead and apes underfoot! Apes are everywhere apparent and are constantly demanding their deserved due, so, in keeping with this publication's obsessive policy of going all-out to be complete, my fiendly TMT editor commissioned me to do this article on apes in the comics. Monkeys in movies are one thing, thought I, but who really cares about apes in comics? (The reason I've developed this negative attitude is because I've just found out that they plan to pay me in bananas for this piece ... and they won't even cough up the 2¢ deposit for the returned peels!) But I'm sure you don't want to hear about my petty problems. You might not even want to hear about the setbacks suffered by simians in the comics, but it's too late to stop now. So let's make the best of it and, with a grunt of resignation, trod on.

I don't know when the first anthropoid showed up in comics ... and I don't care, either. **TARZAN OF THE APES** has been around in comics since 1937, so it's a pretty good guess that his simian family and friends were the first ones to appear. (Anybody wanna correct me if I'm wrong?) **TARZAN** is still going strong today; National Comics (that's DC, of course) is currently publishing his adapted-from-the-novels graphic biography, and they're doing a pretty good job of it too. In most cases, though, the original books by Edgar Rice Burroughs are better (they're available in Ace and Ballantine paperbacks).

The next early ape I know of was a massive one created during the early '40s to appear in **CAPTAIN AMERICA** #17. A murderer's brain was transplanted into the enormous creature's body, and the fiend then went around killing his enemies (as usual). Of course, Cap and Bucky defeated the creature in the end.

#### PATRIOTIC PET

Young Chuck Chandler, Crimebuster, began in **BOY COMICS** #3 (1942). One day, he saw an organ grinder beating a little monkey. Chuck bought the animal (who wore red shorts and a cap), and it stayed with him from then on. In the tragic course of events that followed, Chuck's father was murdered by a top Nazi agent named Iron Jaw. The brave kid and the courageous



JOE KUBERT



Jack Kirby created this outsized ape who chased the **CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN** through the jungle back in 1958. The sizable simian had been spontaneously generated by a madman known as "The Monster Maker" who was able to make fiends, apes and ogres appear at will. Observing the scene with a disapproving eye is none other than Super-Monkey, member in good standing of the Legion of Super-Pets.

# APES IN THE COMICS

OR... FOR A FEW BANANAS MORE!

BY HOWARD PHILLIPS

chimp then sailed to France to find the boy's mother. When all three headed for America, a German submarine torpedoed their defenseless ship. The U-boat surfaced and its nasty crew shot the floundering survivors, but Squeeks, Crimebuster's pet, came along on a life preserver and saved his master. Returning to the States, they embarked on a mission to stop all so-called enemies of mankind (particularly Iron Jaw, of course).

Batman and Robin were once challenged by a King Kong-sized gorilla with a murderer's brain (for some strange reason, this idea sounds familiar). The thing

wanted to capture Batman so that the demented scientist who had performed the operation could transplant his brain into the hero's body. The Caped Crusader foiled the plans of the evil ones, and Robin's quick thinking made the outsized simian fall from a TV tower and land on his fat head. (I wonder where the gargantuan came from in the first place.) I seem to remember that there was once a Bat-Ape, but maybe I imagined it. What with the way DC comes up with all sorts of ridiculous Bat- and Super-things, though, I'd say that there's a good chance there once was just such a creature.

Some years ago, there was a guy called **DR. DREW, THE ZOO MAN**. This fellow hung around with a young primitive, a dog, and a monkey named Mikko. He had the unique ability to talk to animals and reptiles. Quite often, the naked ape saved the lives of the others of his group.

#### SUPER SIMIANS

Back in the '50s, "The Super-Gorilla from Krypton" fought Superman in **ACTION COMICS** #238. This gigantic, super-powered gorilla turned out to be a Kryptonian scientist who was accidentally simianized when an experiment failed. Moments before Krypton exploded, the anthropoid was sent into orbit around the planet. The experimental satellite eventually landed on Earth (pretty far-fetched, if you ask me)—in Africa, yet—and a kryptonite meteor ultimately put an end to the reign of "King Krypton."

A couple of years later, "Titano, the Super Ape" made the scene in an issue of **SUPERMAN**. He started out as "Toto, the Intelligent Chimp," but our rocket experts sent him into orbit around Earth for a week and inadvertently caused him to grow to huge proportions. The monster also acquired kryptonite vision, which gave the Man of Steel no end of trouble. In the end, Superman sent the overgrown monkey into the prehistoric past after Lois Lane tricked the ape into donning a large pair of leaden lenses. Titano returned about a year later



**BATMAN** ran into heavy ape opposition in the form of the "Gorilla Boss of Gotham City" in 1962. We at TMT remember the good old days when giant gorillas would only tote beautiful women around. Now ANY second-rate superhero will apparently do.

to plague Superman, but as usual Earth's champion found a way to save the day.

Not long afterward, Super-Monkey was introduced in an "Untold Tale of Superboy." It seems that this dumb chimp had stowed away on the rocket that had carried baby Kal-El to Earth. A few years later, the animal turned up to cause trouble for young Clark Kent. At the conclusion of this tale, Super-Monkey was frightened into deep space by a comet. Of course, DC didn't wait long to have the mischievous

**FLASH** found out that you can't always run away from it when he was forced to confront a talking gorilla named Grodd back in 1963. It was Grodd's intent to ... dare we say it? ... rule the world, but the Flash soon put an end to it in "Menace of the Super-Gorilla," illustrated by Carmine Infantino.



monkey return. He kept coming back, too, and things got completely out of hand when the Legion of Super-Pets was created. This extension of the famed Legion of Super-Heroes consisted of Comet (a super-horse that had once been a centaur), Streaky (a super-cat), Krypto (the well-known super-dog), and—you guessed it—Super-Monkey. Later on, Protj II joined the crew in a really stupid issue of **ADVENTURE COMICS** (#322). Aren't we lucky to have so many gifted creatures watching over us?

In 1958, the **CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN** were confronted by a slew of Jack Kirby terrors. The story was called "The Monster Maker," and the villain was able to create fiendish things at will. One of his mental monsters was a huge, unfriendly ape. The hairy horror tried to kill the heroes until it ran into a camouflaged mountain and knocked itself out. A hardworking, if not overly bright, sort of simian.

One year later, **FLASH** was menaced by Grodd, the Super-Gorilla. This evil, intelligent ape made his way from Africa's hidden Gorilla City to America's Central City. With the help of Solovar, another English-speaking simian (don't blame me for the plot—I'm just reporting), the Fastest Man Alive ran to Africa, where he defeated the inhuman villain. Grodd returned to fight Flash at least two more times—in the next two issues, in fact—and no doubt he will come back again some day. Let's be optimistic and hope he won't, though.

#### SIMIEN SLEUTH

During that same year (1959, in case you've forgotten), **ACTION COMICS'** Congo Bill became Congorilla for the first time. After the jungle detective tried to save the life of a medicine man, the grateful fellow gave him a magic ring. In no time at all, Congo Bill was buried in a cave by a rock slide. In desperation, he rubbed the ring and exchanged minds with a man-sized golden gorilla. After he rescued



**KONA**, a garrulous caveman brought out by Dell in 1962, battles one of a tribe of hostile apes in "Battle With Giants!"—a story appearing in a 1966 **KONA** comic. Despite their considerable size and girth, the giant gorillas proved no match for the courageous caveman.

his real body, he rubbed the ape's duplicate ring and returned to normal. For many adventures to come, Congorilla saved people and fought criminals. Interesting, but by no means original.

When the early '60s rolled around, Charlton Comics decided to publish illustrated versions of three monster flicks: **KONGA** (about a giant ape), **GORGO** (about a giant sea reptile and its much larger mother), and **REPTILICUS** (about a giant, self-rejuvenating, prehistoric flying lizard—sort of a one-headed Ghidrah). During the ensuing months, these

creatures became Earth's massive protectors (yes, just like Godzilla and his creature cohorts). Konga was a real biggie: about the size of King Kong. He was close to being indestructible and he fought everything from a Tyrannosaurus Rex to alien invaders. Of course, he was compassionate and perceptive—just like all other monsters, right? Charlton came out with a few good concepts, but Konga wasn't one of them.

Radio Comics, Inc. (Archie) introduced **JAGUAR** in 1961. This super-powered chap had the ability to communicate with animals, and he also had their individual strengths (in exaggerated form, naturally). In the first issue, there was a story in which he summoned a swarm of gorillas by thumping on his chest. The simians and a herd of elephants helped him defeat an invasion force from another world. Jaguar employed more apes (as well as every other major animal on Earth) to help him in future issues. He was a land version of DC's **AQUAMAN**, who controlled all sea life.

**KONA** was an interesting character that Dell came out with in 1962. He was a fearless, incredibly strong caveman who lived on a lost island of dinosaurs and primitive people. What made the series unique was that Kona and his friends left the island and encountered an abundance of miscellaneous horrors—most of them radioactive. In issue #20, they fought against a tribe of enormous gorillas. Predictably, the mutant simians were eventually wiped out by unbeatable Kona.

A relevant co-feature in **Kona**, **Monarch of Monster Isle** was **ANAK**, about a pre-adolescent boy who was stranded in an uncharted jungle. Soon after his arrival, the youngster was adopted by Thoth, chieftain of a family of great apes, and Naga, the cobra king of the jungle. This series began in issue #4 and continued for several years. There wasn't much humor in these tales, but in each one a lesson was taught to both **Anak** and the readers. That ape and serpent certainly had their share of smarts!

#### GOLD KEY GORILLAS

Gold Key Comics published an illustrated version of the movie, **X, THE MAN WITH THE X-RAY EYES**, in 1963. This film dealt with a guy who gave himself x-ray vision. Toward the beginning of the mag, the scientist used his special eyedrops on a monkey. The animal soon acquired the ability to see through solid objects, but it died of heart failure a few minutes later. The poor creature couldn't adjust to what it saw.

The first issue of Gold Key's **KORAK, SON OF TARZAN** was dated January, 1964. There were two adventures of Korak and his ape sidekick, Pakhut, in this edition. The first story wasn't too exciting, but in the second one Korak was confronted by a tribe of vicious, man-sized apes. He beat his opponents and went on to fight many more battles against jungle villains—human and otherwise. His tales are currently being handled by DC.

Another Gold Key character was **MIGHTY SAMSON**, who made his debut in 1964. This character was a super-strong giant who lived in post-atomic-war New York. Manhattan was a wrecked jungle, teeming with a multitude of mutated animals. In the first issue, one of the terrors that Samson faced was a six-pawed gorilla. Not only was the thing gifted with extra limbs, but on its head sat a set of spearlike antlers! Just as the thing was about to plaster the hero all over the concrete, a scientist named Mindor shot it with a rifle. Incidentally, on the book's cover was a monkey with four arms and a reptilian tail. The mutants—or composite-beasts—were what kept the series going for as long as it did.

A-Man, "the man with animal powers," started out in **STRANGE ADVENTURES** #180. A strange flash of radioactive light first gave him his temporary ability, but a few issues later aliens from another world reactivated his power—permanently! Anyway, in the origin tale he acquired the immense strength of a gorilla from—you guessed it!—a gorilla! This series was merely a revamped version of **JAGUAR**, and it didn't last long.

#### B'WANA AND THE BEAST

In 1967, DC tried out B'wana Beast in **SHOWCASE** #66. This masked, half-naked super-hero also had animal powers. In addition, his special helmet enabled him to communicate with and control jungle beasts (that sounds familiar). His faithful sidekick, by the way, was a purple great ape name Djuba. Needless to say, B'wana Beast didn't last more than a few issues, either.



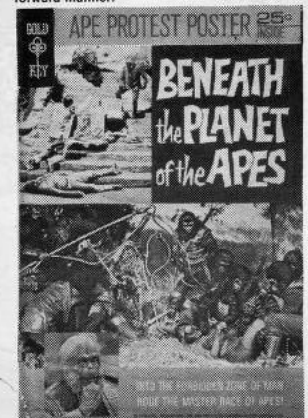
Though he appears to be just another purple ape, this Djuba character happens to be the faithful sidekick and privileged confidant of none other than **B'WANA BEAST**, DC's jungle hero. The comic was greeted by mass indifference and folded after a few issues.

**BENEATH THE PLANET OF THE APES**, the sequel to **PLANET OF THE APES**, was published in comic book form in 1970. This gave a fairly accurate, graphic version of the film. It included five stills from the movie and a large color "Ape Protest Poster" as a free centerfold.

Since the third issue of DC's **KAMANDI, THE LAST BOY ON EARTH**, intelligent apes have played a prominent role in the series. It's sort of like **PLANET OF THE APES** all over again, except that here all animals have evolved into intelligent, English-speaking, man-hating creatures. In #3, Kamandi was captured by a group of anthropoids and brought to Gorilla City. There, he fought an outsize gorilla and eventually escaped. Since then, simians have been trying to find Kamandi and his mutant human friends. The series is pretty good, but not very original.

Of course, there were many, many more apes in comics. **CONAN** once fought and killed a giant gorilla. There was a short-lived **ANGEL AND THE APE** series that DC had, about a talking simian and a beautiful young woman. And heaven forbid we forget to mention **PING PONG**, the Mad version of **KING KONG**. A great number of comic book heroes were threatened by anthropoids during their careers, especially the jungle-based ones. An untold number of science-fiction tales concerning simians have appeared in comics, particularly those published by DC, throughout the years. Apes have been depicted as killers, benefactors, scientists, mutants, and so on. They've been drawn nude, half-naked and fully clothed. They've grunted and spoken. They've come from under Earth, on Earth, and beyond Earth. Some were friendly and others were not. Needless to say, they'll continue to appear in comics for a long time to come. Right now, Marvel plans to release an illustrated series based on the **PLANET OF THE APES** movies. It looks as though we're stuck with those smelly, bananana-eating brutes, but there are a lot of more sinister creatures about. What's even worse is the fact that most of them have friends in high places.

Our frightening friends from the **PLANET OF THE APES** also stalked their way into the comics when Gold Key released a graphic version of **BENEATH THE PLANET OF THE APES** in 1970. While the artwork was far from the best, the comic told its terror tale in a well-paced, straightforward manner.



**KONGA**, yet another enormous ape, made the transition from films to comics without exhibiting even the slightest signs of having undergone any improvements whatsoever. This is how the forgettable fiend appeared in **KONGA** #2, unleashed back in 1961.

HE LIVES AGAIN, THUNDERING OUT OF THE PAST, RISING FROM THE ASHES, THE MONSTROUS HORROR THAT HAD BEEN A SCIENTIST'S DREAM AND BECAME A LIVING TERROR! ONCE MORE THE HAIRY COLLOSSUS, THE BEAST SO HUGE AND TERRIFYING THAT IT STAGGERS THE IMAGINATION, WALKS THE EARTH, AS WE BRING YOU... THE

# RETURN OF KONGA

