



SCIENCE FICTION IN THE COMIX

If they ever hold a convention for old retired science fiction heroes, it's a sure bet that a lot of those heroes will come from the crumbling, yellowed comics pages of the fifties, and the even yellower pages of the newspaper strips.

Comics and science fiction have been together a long time. Buck Rogers, Flash Gordon, Adam Strange and Captain Comet are only some of the few to have risen from the pages of comics and newspapers to make their mark on

the science fiction world.

Sometimes the science fiction in comic books were funny. Other times they had a twisting sad ending (like the man who killed a monster, only to find by some strange quirk of fate that the

monster was his son), and other times they were journeys into new worlds, new galaxies and new adventure.

Gary Brown is a long-time comic fan, and in the following article he recounts the long and illustrious relation comics and science fiction has had over the years. So, put on your best Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes, 'cause the ship's about to land, and we've got to get to Ming's palace in a hurry.

BY GARY BROWN

Science fiction in comic books—a natural, right?

Well, almost, but don't expect anyone to agree with you completely on the subject. Throughout the history of comic books, science fiction has encountered an enthusiastic, but very rocky road. Despite the fact that sci-fi themes and stories have been used in every way possible by the comics, from super-heroes to funny animals, they have rarely been successful. Throw in a few monsters or a couple of muscle bound heroes though and the sci-fi formula seems to click. The mere traveling from planet to planet and firing a few ray gun blasts seem almost passe in this age of Apollo.

The first successful attempt at translating science fiction into comic form came in 1929 with the Buck Rogers newspaper strip. The idea proved popular enough to pave the way for one



He flew through the air with the greatest of ease, even before Flash Gordon did...BUCK ROGERS!

of the all-time American classics, Flash Gordon. Flash was a combination of all the proper ingredients of high adventure, new frontiers, superb artistry, beautiful women and the task of over-coming a seemingly unbeatable foe. Consequently, this formula was used to set the pattern for most, if not all, of the sci-fi stories in comics.

Planet Comics, published by Fiction House, first appeared in January 1940 and featured a running account of outer space agents, heroes



"No, I don't want any," screams Ming the Merciless. But Flash and Dale gave him plenty, anyway... plenty of trouble, that is!

and monsters. Flint Baker, Auro-Lord of Jupiter, Red Comet, Reef Ryan, The Space Rangers, Gale Arden and her Girl Squadron, Futura, John Martin, Star Pirate, Mars-God of War, Mysteria and Hunt Bowman were the weird assortment of strips chronicled in the pages of Planet Comics. In the finest Flash Gordon tradition, the stories in Planet had their share of heroes fighting for (or with) a beautiful young lady. The villains were some of the most gruesome monsters ever to be drawn for comics, and each cover featured them running off with the heroine or tangling with the hero on some rock-dotted planetoid. Yeah, Planet had some of the greatest covers. Never artistic wonders, but the kind of cover which almost dared you to buy the comic to see how things were going to work out. It didn't matter how the insides looked, as long as the cover came across. The secret behind Planet were the covers... and the trance they put you in.

When Planet Comics faded into deepest space in the late 1940's, other companies picked up their formula: Avon Comics began a line of science fiction books which were for the most part, carried by the young team of Wallace Wood and Joe Orlando. Both were artists on the

late, lamented Ec Comics. Titles like Captain Science, Space Detective, Strange Worlds, Eerie, Rocket to the Moon, and Flying Saucers slowly began to hit the comic racks throughout the country. Although mostly typical sci-fi comics, early Avon is perhaps best remembered for Wood's 1951 adaptation of Ralph Milne Farley's "An Earthman on Venus." It was instrumental in changing the comic book approach to outer space and the men who rocket through it.



PLANET COMICS... the magazine that brought you the first female astronauts wearing the last word in outer space clothing.

About this same time, the E.C. Line of Comics changed a romance comic called Saddle Romances into Weird Science and turned A Moon... A Girl... Romance... into Weird Fantasy. Instead of having a girl look at the moon... they decided to draw her on it! E.C. continually said they were, "... most proud of our science fiction magazines!" and they indeed proved it. The fact is, the E.C. sci-fi books never



"... but how the heck do you turn it on?!" An example of the fantastic gadgetry created by fantastic Wally Wood for the E.C. INCREDIBLE sci-fi comics back in the '50's.

sold well enough to merit continued publication, and the company had to rely on the profits from their horror books to keep the outer space stuff going. Producing good sci-fi became almost an obsession with the E.C. people. After several

INTERPLANETARY INSURANCE, INC.



One of the D.C. line of comix, which featured sci-fi artwork by Carmine Infantino (Now Pub for the Superman family).

years the two sci-fi books were combined into one title, Weird-Science Fantasy, then later changed to Incredible Science Fiction in a last ditch effort to keep the rockets burning.

E.C. has been looked upon as the ultimate in science fiction comic books. Not only was their artwork superb, but the stories were far from the same old plot re-done in a different setting. The E.C. writers and artists put everything they had into the sci-fi books. Check up our next M.T. issue for the full story of E.C. comics. It's an all E.C. issue.

The thing that was different about the E.C. stories was the way in which the characters were presented. The themes basically were the same, but it was repeatedly emphasized that just because some creature from another planet was large, ugly and different, it did not necessarily mean he was vicious and dangerous. The villains in the E.C. stories were often greedy, ignorant earthmen who felt they ruled the universe.

In one E.C. story, "Counter-Clockwise," an earth man and his son run into a large-headed beast climbing out of a space ship. For protection, the father pulls out a gun and kills the gesturing creature, thus saving them from certain death. Later, as the boy grows up, he joins the space patrol and winds up stranded on

Carefully developed stories, together with creative creatures who weren't always the baddies, made E.C. comics different from all the others. Devices such as time warps, and parallel worlds provided some trick endings that would have even fooled Hitchcock.



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a barren asteroid. Over a number of years he manages to fix his ship, but not before contracting a weird, spore-like disease which spreads over his body. By the time he blasts off, he is horribly infected. In returning to earth, his ship cracks the time barrier. Crawling out of his ship, he finds a man and a boy looking at him. Suddenly realizing that the pair is his father and himself as a young boy, he begins to try and stop them from shooting... but too late.

It was this type of intricate story which made E.C. different from the other comic book companies producing sci-fi. E.C. stuck to tradition, but did not back away from giving it a new and different twist. It was something different for both science fiction and comic books. They capped it off by adapting several stories by Ray Bradbury, and even though they were done without the author's permission, he consented to allow them to do additional



What is it? Is it good or evil, or somebody's son? With an E.C. story, you could never tell.

adaptations because the first few were so well done.

The E.C. sci-fi comics eventually had to be dropped and the rest of the E.C. books slowly fell from sight.

The only other companies regularly producing sci-fi in the late 1950's were National and Marvel. The Marvel books were a curious mixture of monsters, magic and science fiction.

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ACROSS 25 TRILLION MILES OF SPACE THE PLANET RANN CIRCLES THE STAR-SUN ALPHA CENTAURI! --SURELY A STRANGE PLACE TO FIND A PRESENT-DAY EARTHMAN! AND YET-- TRANSPORTED BODILY ACROSS THAT GREAT GULF OF SPACE, ADAM STRANGE ARRIVES ON RANN IN TIME TO CHALLENGE THE INVASION OF THE ETERNALS-- SUPER-SCIENTIFIC CREATURES WHO RUTHLESSLY DESTROY WHATEVER OPPOSES THEM IN THEIR QUEST FOR A FANTASTIC CITY THAT HAS NOT EXISTED IN 1000 YEARS!

IF THE DESTRUCTOBEAM FROM THE ETERNALS' SPACESHIP HITS US-- WE'RE DONE FOR! GRAB HOLD, ALANNA!



Story by:
Gardner Fox
Art by:
Milt Schvachsky
& Frank Giacoia

(C) National Periodical Publications, Inc.

Teleportation sure made a hit with ADAM STRANGE, uniting him with his far-away sweetheart Alanna on the Planet Rann, clear out the other side of Alpha Centauri. This still is from the very first Adam adventure.

From such books as Strange Tales, Tales to Astonish and Tales of Suspense came tales of weird aliens and monsters with—naturally—“tall tails.”

The lead story in the Marvels usually featured the attack of some humongous monster on civilized man. “Colossus the Stone Giant,” “Gruto-the Creature from Nowhere,” and “Orogo-The Nightmare from Outer Space” were a few of the uninvited tourists. They all followed a suspiciously familiar plot-line of having one man (an adventurer or scientist or mere common farmer) conquer that month’s creature, in spite of public fear and ridicule. Familiar sure, but a lot of fun. The gang at



HAVING THE COMBINED POWERS OF THE ENTIRE FANTASTIC FOUR-- THESE WILL ENABLE ME TO TOTALLY DEFEAT THEM-- NOW-- AND FOREVER!! --BY HURLING THEIR OWN POWERS-- MAGNIFIED MANY TIMES-- AGAINST THEM!

(C) by Magazine Management Co., Inc.

One of the many incredible creatures who have unsuccessfully challenged THE FANTASTIC FOUR. Drawn by that creator of creatures, men and gods . . . Jack Kirby.

Marvel continually managed to come up with the weirdest assortment of monstrosities imaginable.

In the form of a sort of “Monster’s Lib,” the big human hero no longer got the top billing. Instead of a “Flint Baker,” or “Captain Science,” it was now “Gargantus” and “Kraa-the Unhuman” getting all the cover credit and the big lettering. The big lugs never had it so good.

This unusual mixture of comic themes paved the way for Marvel’s “Super-Hero Sixties.” The most scientifically oriented of the lot was “The Fantastic Four.” Acquiring their powers by rocketing through a strange radiation belt which circled earth, they went on to meet foes on the moon, in microscopic mini-worlds and in deepest outer space. Leader Reed Richards is, as everyone knows, a scientist . . . but he is not content in being the everyday, run-of-the-mill lab flunky. Reed spends his time building flying cars and mixing outlandish formulas for “The Thing” to drink. If there is one super-hero group with their roots deep in science and science fiction it is the FF. Who else could tackle a ten-story giant who devours planets named Galactus?

Perhaps the most interesting treatment of science fiction in the comics has been that of National. Beginning in 1950 with Strange

Adventures and running through such titles as Mystery in Space, the current From Beyond the Unknown and a mish-mash of horror and mystery titles, the sci-fi from DC has been some of the most constant in comic books. All the stories flow within the same structured universe,

DC has published a story of science fiction and a number of years later it actually becomes fact! To do this takes more than just a lucky guess on an author’s part. It takes knowledge and someone able to turn cold facts into the probabilities they reflect.



YOU WILL BE TOO... IN A MOMENT, CAPTAIN COMET!

EVERYONE ON EARTH IS ASLEEP--BUT ME!

(C) National Periodical Publications, Inc.

The very first of the D.C. space heroes, CAPTAIN COMET did his fair share of fighting interstellar menaces.

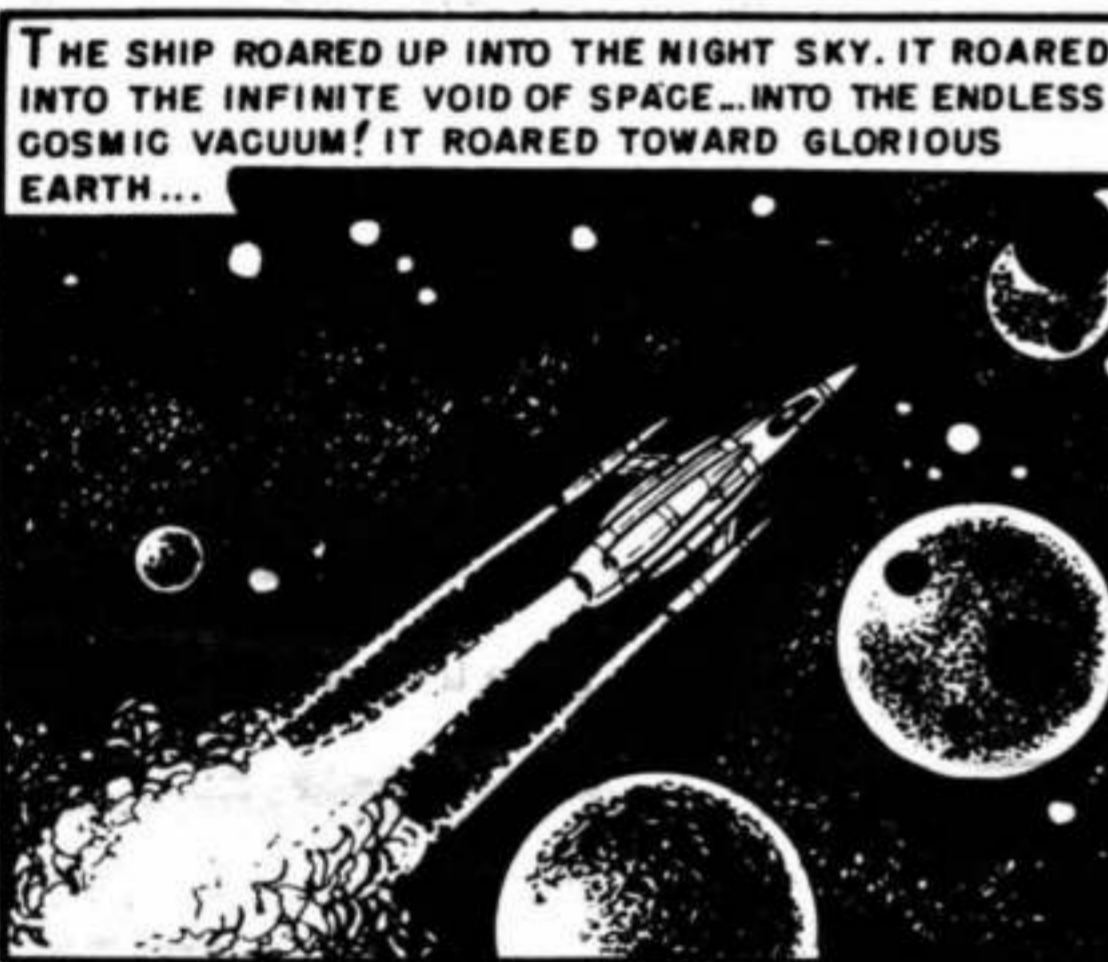
whether they were about life on earth, the future or a visit to some distant planet. It was not so much that every story related to each other, but rather they never stepped so far out of the realm of possibility that the result was laughable. Their aliens were logical and their monsters always bred out of purpose, rather than to merely terrify. Much of the credit for the handling of the DC sci-fi books must go to Julius Schwartz, National’s editor, and publisher of sci-fi’s first fan magazine.

Schwartz knows his comics and his science. There have been a number of occasions where

Like the other companies, National has had their share of the space heroes. The first was “Captain Comet” and he turned out to be more than just a strong, good-guy. The good Captain ALWAYS had a plausible explanation when he managed to overcome whatever alien menace was terrifying earth at the time. He defeated his adversaries through logic and science, and rarely had to resort to fist-fights or gun battles.

The most popular of all the NATIONAL’s sci-fi heroes has to be “Adam Strange.” Regularly zipping to the planet Rann by a weird device called the Zeta beam, Adam donned his

Space... just one of the final frontiers!



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The last panels from Judgement Day, a 1953 E.C. story drawn by Joe Orlando. Important issues such as justice, racism, & brotherhood, largely ignored in the '50's, were made clear first to the comic buying public. But more about the late, great classics in the next issue of the great of late Monster Times... in our special E.C. issue!

rocket flying suit and saved the Rannians more times than anyone can remember. The red-suited wonder fought his way through adventures in Showcase, Mystery in Space and currently is being reprinted in Strange Adventures. He was much like Captain Comet, in that he always managed to defeat his enemies by brain power rather than fist power. He would combine his knowledge of life on Earth with the advanced technology on Rann and always come up the winner.

The problem with Adam Strange is the same one which has plagued all other sci-fi strips... even though the feature maintained a steadfast audience of loyal fans, it never could draw enough readers to allow the book to be published without fear of low sales.

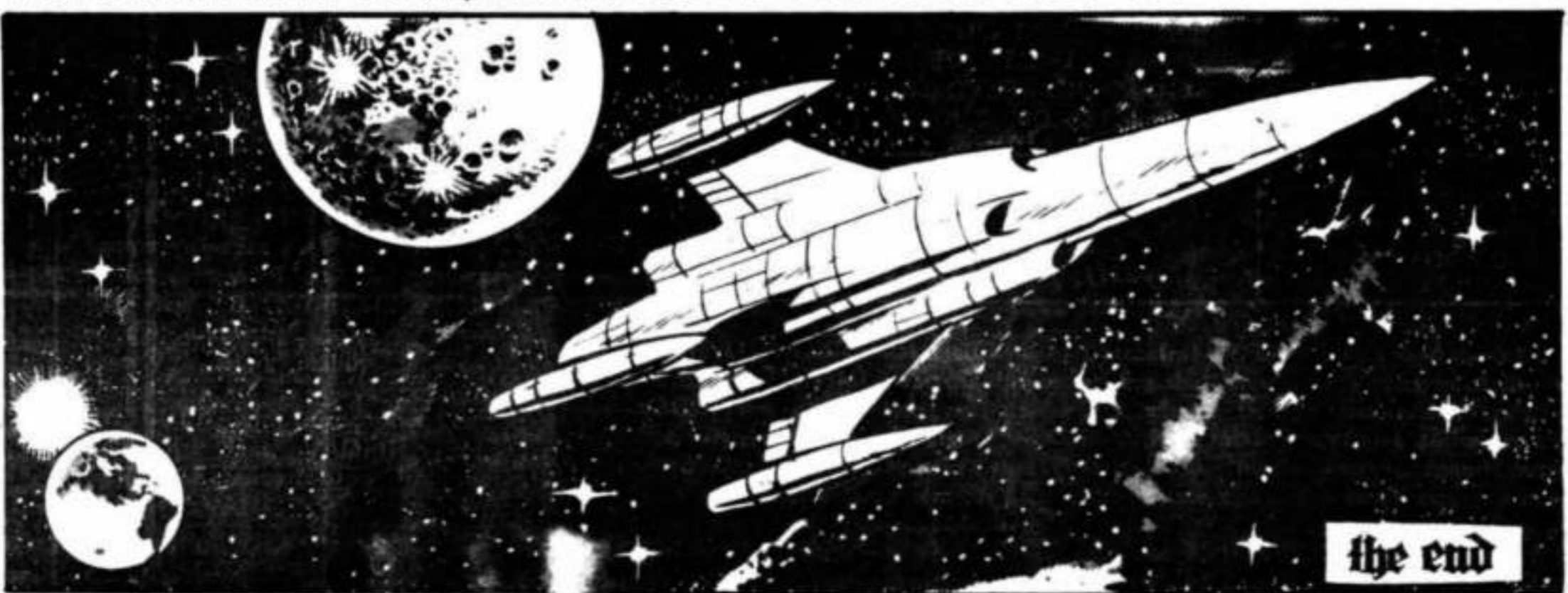
Another feature which merits mention is "Tommy Tomorrow." Tommy was an officer in

the Planeteers and provided a rather different look at the 21st Century. Interplanetary travel, space rangers and space fun in the purest sense of the word was what Tommy's strip was all about. It was rather tame in comparison with the other DC sci-fi strips.

Science fiction in today's comic books has taken a somewhat submerged role. It is widely used in super-hero stories, sword and sorcery, and the numerous monster tales, but very rarely appears as pure sci-fi. The new stories are few and far between, and the words 'science fiction' are avoided. But, with so many sci-fi fans around, men going to the moon and taking close-up photos of Mars, can it be long before some distant relative of Tommy Tomorrow, Adam Strange, or even Flash Gordon comes bursting into the comics? Fasten your seat belt and check your antigravity device...

We just had to end this article with this beautiful Wally Wood illo. It typifies the fantastic universes E.C. and science fiction comics in general opened up for us all to see.

THE SHIP ROARED ON OUT INTO SPACE. BEHIND IT, GREEN EARTH FADED. BEFORE IT, STARS TWINKLED IN THE BLACK GULF OF INFINITY. INSIDE THE SHIP, MARTIN AND JEAN HELD EACH OTHER CLOSE... READY FOR THE COMING STRUGGLE.



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The Hunchback vs. Kong vs. Godzilla

Dear Sirs,

I think the Monster Times is great. But if it is not too much trouble, could you run the Hunchback of Notre Dame? All my friends agree with me. And could you make a movie when Godzilla beats King Kong? My favorite prehistoric monster is Godzilla. I wish you the best of luck with the Monster Times.

John Sposito Brooklyn, N.Y.

Dear John:

We'll be getting around to the Hunchback one of these days, and would Godzilla ever beat King Kong, will be on hand to film it.

BROTHER ACT?

Dear Sir:

I love Monster Times, plus I love Japanese monsters. Like Godzilla, Rodan, Mothra, Ghidra, Tadzilla, and others. But there's one monster I never saw. That's Anzilla. He's the brother of Godzilla. Plus, I love to draw monsters. I hope I find Godzilla and Anzilla in one of your future issues.

Ralph Johnson
Long Island City

Okay, Ralph, you're on. We will see what we can dig up on Anzilla. And, if you've been following THE MONSTER TIMES, you know we did a big Godzilla issue in TMT #7.

TMT GOES APE?

I liked the PLANET OF THE APES article in issue No. 4. I'm sure many others besides myself would appreciate the complete "PLANET OF THE APES" series in one of your issues and a poster of it too. OK?

Bobby Bedo
L.I., N.Y.

Due to tremendous popular demand, many hard-working TMT employees are battling away on their typewriters, coming up with all kinds of perfectly ape-ish PLANET OF THE APES material. It will be in a future issue.

CHEERS FOR "GILL"

Dear Monster (Editor),

I am a new reader of The Monster Times but I think it's great. I like in Issue No. 5 The Memoirs of Gilbert "Gill" Gillman. It was amusing and a cool autobiography. I was glad his autograph was on it.

Richard Morgana

"Gill" is a good man, and he's one of TMT's favorite monsters. One of these days we're gonna convince him to take on Godzilla.

Send us so many letters, postcards, boosts, detractions, bomb threats, etc., that the Post Office will have to deliver our mail with a bulldozer. Address all correspondence to: THE MONSTER TIMES, Box 595, Old Chelsea Station, N.Y., 10011.