FOREWORD

by

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As far back as early childhood and as recently as just now, anyone who's made my acquaintance, even briefly, would know me as a diehard daikaiju nut. I caught both Godzilla – King of the Monsters (1956) and Gigantis – The Fire Monster (a.k.a. Godzilla Raids Again, 1959) when I was around kindergarten age, and if ever a kid were smitten with city-stomping monsters, that kid was me. I was already keen on dinosaurs, and Godzilla elevated my fondness for oversized reptilian critters to a whole new level.

I had a few friends who liked Godzilla, kith and kin, but I was the one who drew pictures of them day in and day out; created little comic book stories featuring them; begged, cajoled, and pleaded for my parents to take me to the theater whenever the monsters came to town; and mysteriously got sick and stayed home from school should a giant monster movie come on television during school hours. Fortunately, between our local theaters (which included four drive-ins), and the limited number of television stations available back then, I managed to enjoy a fairly regular regimen of giant Japanese monsters over the years.

In 1970, at age ten, I was an avid reader of Famous Monsters of Filmland, which—praise be to Yog—regularly appeared on the magazine racks of our local supermarket. In one issue, in the Classified Ads section, I happened upon a listing that advertised the "Godzilla" issue of something called The Japanese Fantasy Film Journal. It cost a whopping 35¢, but I sent off my hard-earned quarter and dime to the editor.

For a while, nothing arrived, and I began to get frustrated. Then, one day, a manila envelope showed up in the mail. The return address indicated it was my long-awaited issue of what came to be known as JFFJ. When I opened it, I found, not a "Godzilla" issue, but one devoted to Frankenstein Conquers the World, a movie I had never seen but had heard of (from the pages of Famous Monsters of Filmland, of course). In the editorial, called "In Right Relations," ye editor, Mr. Gregory Shoemaker, apologized to readers who had ordered the Godzilla issue via FM. Due to the lag time between the ad's submission and publication—and because the ad had drawn considerable attention—that first issue was no longer available. Thus, Greg filled the order with the most recent issue, which was #4. At first, I felt a tad disappointed. I had really wanted Godzilla.

Well, I was disappointed until I started reading the text in that cheaply printed, mimeographed fanzine. Holy cow, this thing was filled with serious, critical writing. Unlike the pro magazines of the day, which mostly made fun of my favorite monster flicks, Japanese Fantasy Film Journal took these movies as seriously as I did! And so, I was hooked. I sent in my couple of bucks for a subscription, and thus began my very long love affair with JFFJ. Not only that, I fired off a letter to Mr. Shoemaker, expressing in gushing terms how much I enjoyed the fruits of his labor.

Greg wrote me back a long, thoughtful, appreciative letter. He was clearly a bit older than I, and most definitely wiser. In my barely more than decade-long existence, I had never met anyone as well-informed about my favorite movies as Greg. Thus, we began a longtime correspondence, which evolved into a firm friendship that lasted decades. Greg and I managed to get together several times over the years, and I don't know that I've ever been more heartbroken over the loss of a friend when I received the news that he'd died in July 2019.

Anyway, to return to the early 1970s…

By way of an advertisement in JFFJ, I acquired a pen pal named Tom Murdock, with whom I began to trade cassette soundtracks of Japanese monster movies. It was a cool way to at least hear movies that I had either never seen or hadn't seen for a very long time.

Then…

In 1972, while visiting my grandparents, I discovered The Monster Times, a tabloid-style publication devoted to all manner of critters and cryptids, at a bookstore in Atlanta. I remember being blown away that such a publication existed. It was printed on cheap newsprint, featured tons of articles and photos from my favorite monster movies, and leaned distinctly toward humor. Not necessarily good humor, but humor nonetheless. Eventually, issues of TMT began to appear at our local newsstand in Martinsville, VA, which delighted me no end. I recall one day in the fall of 1973, when I was 14, going utterly, joyfully mad when I found the familiar poster art from Destroy All Monsters (which remains a favorite to this day) adorning the cover of the latest issue of TMT. And imagine my surprise when I discovered that the filmbook's author was none other than my pen pal, Tom Murdock.

I immediately wrote Tom and asked how he'd managed to get published in those hallowed pages. He told me that he wrote a letter to The Monster Times and asked if they would like a filmbook of Destroy All Monsters. They said yes, so he wrote it and sent it to them. Then they published it and sent him money. So, I wrote a letter to The Monster Times and asked if they would like a filmbook of Godzilla vs. the Thing. They said yes, so I wrote it and sent it to them. Then they published it and sent me money. ($35, though not at all quickly or without prompting; some things never change. Still, in those days, for a 14-year-old kid, $35 was a significant haul.)

In the typical way of the publishing business, it took some time between submission, acceptance, and publication. I wrote the Godzilla vs. the Thing filmbook when I was 14 going on 15; I had just turned 16 when the issue—#42—hit the street. Sadly, The Monster Times closed up shop in 1976, with issue #48, so it was well for me that my filmbook saw print before TMT's time ran out. (At one time, I had a sizable collection of TMT issues, but that newsprint didn't weather the years very well, especially since I didn't have the forethought to protect them adequately. Still, I have these two issues as well as several others, most of which feature Godzilla.)

By 1974, I had become so enamored of publications centered around giant monsters that I inevitably began to think about how I might create one of my own. At the time, plenty of fanzines existed out there in the wild, but JFFJ was the only one dedicated solely to monsters from Japan.

I figured something really ought to be done about that.

In my hometown, I had a few friends who liked Godzilla almost as much as I did, and I had gotten to know a handful of people in the larger world of daikaiju fandom. I knew a couple of budding artists who were, if not particularly accomplished, at least enthusiastic. I had some money from my regular allowance and the occasional odd jobs I worked around the neighborhood. Not much money, but I hoped it would somehow be enough to get me started.

I called the couple of printers in town and told them what I wanted to do. One of them immediately gave me a quote so far out of the ballpark that I hung up damn near in tears. The other one, though…well, it was still considerably more than I had on hand, but so much less than the first.

Time to negotiate with my dad.

I didn't have high hopes going in, but—to my surprise—Dad seemed to think this little endeavor might provide me with some good lessons about responsibility, discipline, managing a business, and all that kind of boring adult stuff. But I had some measure of creativity on my side and a whole lot of enthusiasm. So, Dad offered to make up my cash shortfall as long as I paid him back the same amount he fronted me—and that I took responsibility for managing every aspect of the magazine, no matter what.

Oh, hell, yeah, young Mark is on his way!

The title Japanese Giants came immediately to mind, so that's what I settled on. Just as I had for the Godzilla vs. the Thing filmbook, I used my cassette tape of the film's soundtrack and my recollections of its visuals to write a Destroy All Monsters filmbook. Whenever my family visited my grandparents in Georgia, I was able to watch Ultraman because it came on an Atlanta

station, so I wrote a little review of the show that included a couple of episode synopses. Tom Murdock sent me a spoken "review" of Johnny Sokko & His Flying Robot on cassette tape, which hadn't been exactly what I had in mind, but I turned it into a marginally passable article. For interior art, I drew a bunch of pictures using pen & ink, as did friends Robert Cox, Chuck Neely, and Ralph Finley. I had begun collecting movie material, such as posters, stills, and pressbooks (most of which I still have), so I cannibalized my Destroy All Monsters pressbook for the filmbook photos. (As an aside, after my mom died in 2020 and I was cleaning out the house, I found the original Japanese Giants #1 layout sheets, so I removed all those photos and taped them back into the pressbook.)

I worked up a layout and pasted up galleys. Eventually, I had all the material together in something that, if I squinted, almost resembled a magazine. Unfortunately, I couldn't afford to print the entire Destroy All Monsters filmbook, so I split it in half, figuring I'd print part two in the next issue. I ordered 200 copies from the printer. To save me money, the printer didn't collate and bind the pages; just boxed them all up and handed them over to me. So, with all those printed pages in hand, I spent a couple of days collating and stapling them together myself.

Now…to sell the damned things!

Much to my dismay, Greg Shoemaker—a true businessman—wouldn't let me run a Japanese Giants ad in JFFJ. "After all," he told me, "Playboy doesn't let Penthouse advertise in its pages!" However, Greg did run a nice review of JG #1 in JFFJ, and that was enough to open the floodgates. Orders began to pour in. Customers told other customers. I was gratified to find that, in general, people seemed to enjoy the issue. Now, it was clearly produced by a kid—as a labor of love—and more serious fans were fairly forgiving, probably for that reason. It got some acute criticism as well, which as best as I can remember was generally spot-on. For its time, 50¢ for 18 pages was pretty steep, and I think I heard about that more than anything. Still, for a while, it looked like my first entrepreneurial venture might pay off.

Ha-ha, how optimistic we are at age 15.

I sold a good number of the 200 printed copies of issue #1, but I still came in shy of covering the full cost of producing it—even when my dad forgave most, if not all, of the debt I owed him. (Happily, in later years, I managed to move the remainder of those copies, sometimes at highly inflated prices.) At the time, though, convinced I had no other choice, I sadly resolved to shut down the operation.

But then, more or less out of the blue, a certain young gentleman named Brad Boyle from Salt Lake City, Utah, stepped in and offered to grab the Japanese Giants torch and run with it. He produced issue #s 2, 3, and 4 before he, too, let go of the reins. By this time, I had become

friends with daikaiju ultrafans Ed Godziszewski and Bill Gudmundson, who thought that, as a trio, we should keep JG going. Ed was a few years older than Bill and me, and he had a real job with substantial disposable income. So, the three of us became the official Japanese Giants Guys, and the magazine continued—the last few issues under Ed's sole editorship—until issue #10, in 2001.

Who would have thunk that an enthusiastic kid's makeshift operation might have resulted in something with the longevity and the reach that it eventually achieved? All thanks to Brad, Bill, Ed, and the fans/readers who jumped on board the Japanese Giants bandwagon.

Whether Japanese Giants directly influenced the veritable onslaught of daikaiju-themed fanzines that sprang up during the late 1970s, who's to say? At the end of the day, I'd say it all goes back to Japanese Fantasy Film Journal and Greg Shoemaker's vision. Now, I ended up getting hold of almost all of those fanzines and newsletters that followed, and they are all now carefully stored away in the old, dark monster vault. These publications ran the gamut from the ultimate in crude to the damn-near sophisticated, but in the days before movies could be acquired and/or watched virtually on demand, those labors of love were how we fans managed to stay in touch with our favorite monsters whenever we felt inclined.

For former Japanese Giants Editor Brad Boyle, compiling these volumes that showcase so many amateur efforts from that long-gone era is surely a long, labor-intensive endeavor—but one that I suspect is both gratifying and fun.

I hope you will find delving into these pages as enjoyable now as it was back then.