BARRY KAUFMAN

In 1977 when the first issue of Monsters of Japan was published, there was a contingent of Godzilla aficionados in Chicago who would gather at a library north of the city to share their latest acquisitions and creations related to Japanese fantasy cinema. I lived in the south suburbs and as I was only 12 a local friend who was older was kind enough to drive me to these gatherings. At the first meeting I attended a print of Godzilla on Monster Island was screened, and that was enough for me to be inspired to publish the first issue of Monsters of Japan.

I say "published" but the issue was typed on a Smith Corona portable typewriter and printed at the local sweet-smelling Insty Prints franchise on thick 40 bond textured yellow paper. It was a diminutive 10 pages and was essentially a channeling of my unadulterated love for the Big G, with less than thrilling content like a poll I took of schoolmates and friends regarding the quality of the Showa Gamera series, the fun really being persuading those I barely knew to watch at least some of these outlandish kid-oriented monster movies. Of course there was a feature on Godzilla on Monster Island, and all of the content was written and illustrated by...me.

Still, with a network of pen pals and advertising in Brad Boyle's Japanese Giants among other fanzines popping up at this time I was able to sell over 150 copies, enough to encourage me to start on a second issue in early 1978. This issue was definitely a step up with the help of local fans Ed Godziszewski and Bill Gudmundson and "pen pals" I was able to put together a 20 page issue with more relevant content. I printed 400 copies and only had 30 or so left at the end of the year.

Monsters of Japan #3 was published in 1979 and was the final issue as I saw the field become populated with more and more similar fanzines, many much more useful than what I was doing. My attention shifted to obscure horror films that were not being covered by US genre publications and at the end of 1979 I published the first issue of Demonique. My focus on kaiju cinema would re-emerge in 1996 when I opened the House of Monsters retail outlet in Chicago.

While today we are inundated with an avalanche of licensed Godzilla figures, clothing, ... there is something to be said for the grassroots energy and excitement of the Monsters of Japan era

of discovery. Nothing came easy for those beguiled by the singular visual style and charm of Japanese fantasy cinema as we tried to make connections with other enthusiasts and those in Japan who were closer to the source. Monsters of Japan was amateurish and only marginally informative, but at that the excitement and energy came from discovery. Opening the envelope containing that fanzine you ordered in the mail or waiting to see that film you circled in the TV Guide on Sunday.

There is certainly reward in knowing, but there can be a point where we know too much. I stopped listening to most commentaries many years ago, and while there is some reading of great interest like Ed Godziszewski's/Steve Ryfle's biography of Ishiro Honda, most of the time I prefer to watch War of the Gargantuas (1966) again to trying to read what's been written before. It's still all about the movies and their makers and the Showa period for me. So it's wonderful that Brad has taken the time to cull together these publications that document the enthusiasm and innocence of that time of discovery when Godzilla wasn't just a license or a franchise and the films weren't assimilated into a morass of Hollywood blockbuster banality and technocratic digital effects.

Many of the publications Brad has reproduced in these volumes are crude (including mine), but I thank him for allowing me to once again experience the rush of heart over mind Godzilla devotion.