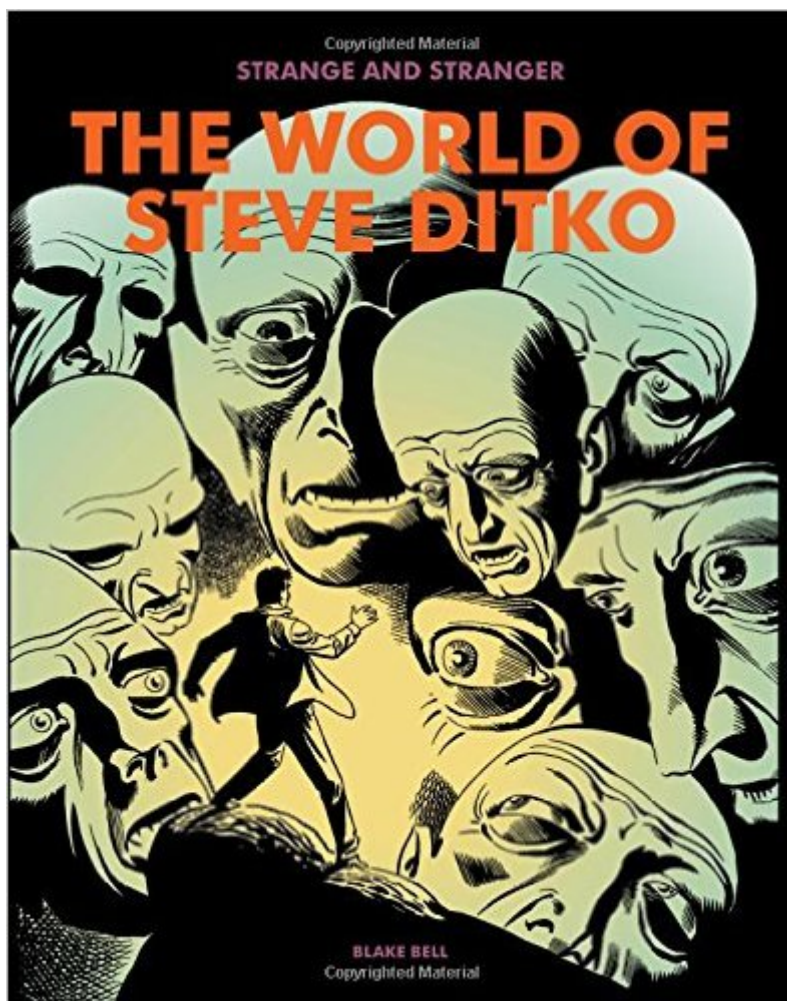


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Strange And Stranger: The World Of Steve Ditko



Synopsis

Strange and Stranger: The World of Steve Ditko is a coffee table art book tracing Ditko's life and career, his unparalleled stylistic innovations, his strict adherence to his own (and Randian) principles, with lush displays of obscure and popular art from the thousands of pages of comics he's drawn over the last 55 years.

Book Information

Hardcover: 220 pages

Publisher: Fantagraphics; Reprint edition (July 17, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1560979216

ISBN-13: 978-1560979210

Product Dimensions: 9.3 x 0.9 x 12.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.9 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (32 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,009,796 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #192 inÂ Books > Comics & Graphic Novels > Art of Comics and Manga #345 inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Genres & Styles > Comics & Graphic Novels #449 inÂ Books > Comics & Graphic Novels > Publishers > Fantagraphics

Customer Reviews

This is an incredibly entertaining book. Looking at the cover, one can tell they are not looking at just another comic book artist. Opening the book one sees the first glimpse of Ditko, a five page black and white story called "Stretching Things". The story is a look at a man grown bitter by his handicap, so much so that a possible cure to his condition doesn't bring a happy ending, but a descent into evil. This isn't your average "comic book artist". The book is a entertaining yet somber look at the career and art of Steve Ditko. The author touches lightly on his pre comic book days, perhaps too lightly in that the interesting tidbits of his life that the author gives us wets the appetite of the reader but leaves us wanting. The book quickly jumps into his career as a comic illustrator, Eisner, Foster and Jerry Robinson being his early inspirations. The book has a nice balance between text and what most Ditko fans really want to see, his art. There are nice full page splashes of art opposite the beginning of each chapter. The chapters covering his time at marvel and charlton are laced nicely with art of Spiderman, Dr.Strange, Captain Atom, as well as his later Charlton work with pictures of Blue Beetle and The Question. There is a very interesting chapter on his time working at Warren,

the publisher that put out the "Eerie" and "Creepy" magazines of the late 60s. This is interesting in that it shows some of Ditko's "wash" technique, a water/ink brushwork style of art of which Ditko was a master. The book covers his time at Marvel and the historic clashes with Stan Lee that drove him to work at other companies such as DC where he created characters such as "The Creeper" and Hawk&Dove and Charlton where he had more creative reign if less pay.

Steve Ditko was one of the iconic yet unsung popular artists of the late 1950s and especially the early and mid 1960s. Before his groundbreaking work creating Spider-Man and Dr. Strange in the 1960s, Ditko spent the late 1950s honing superb visual storytelling skills by illustrating horror and science fiction tales in popular but disposable comic books of the pre- and post-Comics Code eras. There, he learned how to draw readers in immediately, how to use lights and shadows, the drapery of clothing, and unusual perspectives to create mood. When superheroes returned to comic books in the early 1960s, Ditko used those skills to create moody pieces and offbeat heroes. Unlike most artists who drew heroes in long underwear, Ditko's strengths included drawing ordinary, often unattractive people with lackluster frames and wrinkled faces marked by life experiences. Bell traces Ditko's early life and career, showing how even small motifs, like Ditko's penchant for showing the interiors of crowded curio shops, were often traced to his experiences as a young man, or how Peter Parker's high school mimicked Ditko's own high school layout. In the early 1960s, Ditko created Spider-Man. Writer/editor Stan Lee got 99% of the glory, but nearly every feature of Spider-Man that is famous today came from Ditko, and Bell does an excellent job of tracing individual features of Ditko's style and artistic theories in the creation and evolution of Peter Parker/Spider-Man. In a similar fashion, he dissects another extraordinary Ditko creation, Dr. Strange, showing both in words and in superbly chosen illustrations how Ditko's unique visual style created a unique comic book character and world.

This is a great book in its subject matter, art and storytelling about a unique and massively gifted artist, flawed only by the overlay of the writer's small-minded commercial vision of what HE wanted from the artist. If he truly understood Ditko's work or his story, the writer would understand that this is THE very issue that Ditko seems to be fighting all these years; crass commercial exploitation and marginalizing an artist's vision in favor of what the industry seems to perceive as a mindless comic market, while remaining blind to the artist's true vision. Some of us simple-minded comic readers actually "got" the message in Ditko's work, and comic books have never been the same since without him. I personally think that the world and the message Ditko creates is perfect in itself, and

the real loss is that no-one in the industry just let go and let him share it with us, nor would pay him commensurate with his genius, or honor his ownership of his work. There are copyright laws for the music business; they should apply retroactively to Ditko and all the other artists in the comic book world that have been exploited. When I think about a lifetime spent creating such subject matter as the endless conflict between good and evil, the directions that Ditko chose make sense; just as Ditko's Spider-man or the early Batman were conflicted loners trying to fight for justice in an unjust world, the unjust treatment Ditko received at the hands of Marvel set him on his solitary path to create his own unique vision and world where there WAS justice for the oppressed, and penalty for the criminals.

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