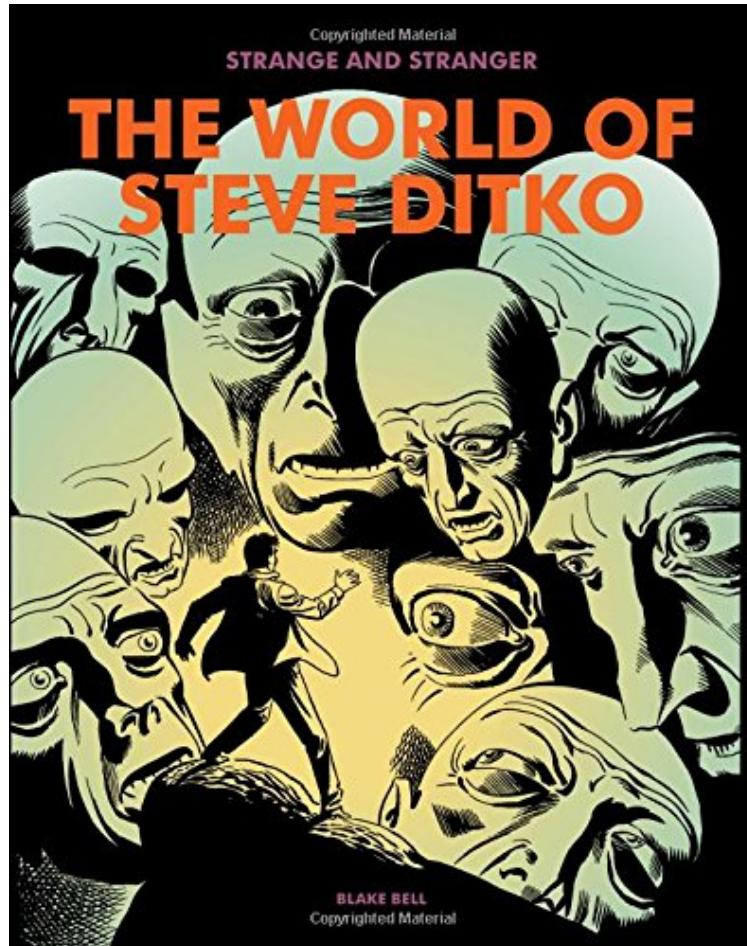


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## Strange and Stranger: The World of Steve Ditko

*Blake Bell*

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#1236261 in Books Fantagraphics 2008-07-17Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 12.30 x .90 x 9.30l, #File Name: 1560979216220 pages | File size: 31.Mb

**Blake Bell : Strange and Stranger: The World of Steve Ditko** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Strange and Stranger: The World of Steve Ditko:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A great overview of a great artist's careerBy Paul KirchnerIt was the work of Steve Ditko that first attracted me to comics as a child, moreso than that of Jack Kirby. I purchased this book partly to revisit Ditko's artwork, but also to learn more about the strange path his career took. The book is eminently satisfying on both scores. The art looks as inspired as I remember it, assuring me that my admiration for Ditko was justified. The story is well researched and superbly told--I could hardly put it down. Bell obviously holds Ditko in high regard and tells his story sympathetically and insightfully. Unlike some reviewers, I am completely in agreement with Bell's assessment of Ditko's output in recent decades, when his obsession with delivering dry lectures on objectivism have overwhelmed any effort to create characters or tell a story. At the same time, I respect Ditko more than ever as a man of principle who is doing what he thinks is right, however much he has sacrificed for it economically. He is a towering figure in the history of comics, unique in both his talent and personality.42 of 43 people found the following

review helpful. Ditko, a fascinating and uncompromising artist

**By Grant** 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 an 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 whets 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. The book examines Ditko and his objectivist philosophy which he would incorporate into his work often. Such work as "The Question" and his "Mr. A" are examined at length, and holds the reader captive and left wanting more. The efforts of Ditko to keep his work uncompromising are as epic as any Ayn Rand novel. There are a lot of treats for those looking for rare and often unseen Ditko art. The last thirty pages of the book are dedicated to nothing but Ditko art and sketches. A chapter on Ditko's relationship with comic fandom has plenty of examples of his "fanzine" work. Stories of comic book artists who didn't receive proper credit or compensation for their work are frequent when talking about gold and silver age artists. The book is, if anything, as much an indictment of the industry as it is a look at the artist. The battle over who owns art (and in some cases who "stole" art), over who created what and who didn't are exposed with jaw dropping effect. With Ditko however, the stain on the industry looks even greater by comparison than it does when held up to giants like Kirby or Superman creators Seigel and Shuster. Ditko doesn't come off as being "handled" or "paid off" or "swept under the rug" like so many companies did with artists who were vocal about creative rights. He comes off as an artist who kept his integrity intact, a rare character trait in any era. Ditko was about the "work" not about the money. One can't help reading this book and walk away looking at Marvel, DC, or Stan Lee in the same light. The end result is both a sad and heroic tale. But Ditko is not easily defined, and when the author tries to do just that in the last chapter, he misses the mark. The author seems conflicted in the end, longing for the Ditko of old, bemoaning the increasing amount of "telling" text in his art rather than "storytelling". He wants to both exalt and scold Ditko for his uncompromising attitude at the same time. The author talks about how Ditko found Marvel/DC just churning out the same old bland rereads of characters come and gone, unwilling to be innovative. He complains about how Ditko spent too much of his story on the villains juxtaposed with Ditko's objectivist vision of "Hero" as opposed to the flavor of the day, the conflicted, or "anti-hero" that had gained popularity. Yet the author makes statements about how Ditko had "become chained by the trappings of the superhero genre". It's not hard to see that Ditko's work was a scathing commentary on the "anti-hero" and on what superhero comics had become in general. Clearly, Mr. Bell seems somewhat conflicted about exactly what he wants to say regarding Mr. Ditko's legacy. This is a thankfully short bit of editorializing on the author's part to be sure. Yet the author, by trying to define what Ditko is, or had become fails to allow for the possibility that Ditko might have been evolving into something that has no definition. An artist, a master at visual storytelling, an essayist, a commentator on society, one might even say a political illustrator. Combining all of those, one comes up with something that hasn't been seen before or since. Something that eludes even the author. Something new, creative, sometimes polarizing, but definitely original and always indefinable. I couldn't begin to put a name to it, all I can say is that it's pure Ditko. This book tells and shows an incredible story. I wish it was a hundred pages longer. A must have for any comic collector.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. The mad genius of Steve Ditko

**By T.M. Finney** Not only is Steve Ditko one of my favorite artists, he is also one of the most fascinating personalities in the history of American comics. If you too are a fan or if you are a student of American comic book culture and history, Blake Bell's book, which is equal parts coffee table art book and well-researched biography, is utterly fascinating. The presented art, a mixture of pages as they appeared in print and scans of Ditko's original black and white artwork, is beautifully reproduced. It is organized mostly chronologically and it is fascinating to watch Ditko's art change and mature as he hones his craft. There were a few cases where I had to go searching on other pages to find the art referred to in the text, but for the most part, this book is well-organized and designed in this regard. As for its biographical content, Bell, an outsider to Ditko's world, does an admirable job showing how Ditko absorbed the work of the artists he admired in his youth (especially Jerry Robinson, whom he studied under, and Mort Meskin, whom he worked with for a time when they were both employed by Simon and Kirby) and how he developed the unique art style that made his best stories, especially his work on Spider-Man and Doctor Strange, so distinctive. He also brings great insight into his pivotal partnership with Stan Lee, and how his discovery of Ayn Rand's objectivist

philosophy turned him into a real life Howard Roark, a man willing to blow up his career over a set of principles only he could fully understand. Bell shows us the shades of gray in a man who believes in only black and white. In the end, Bell leaves it up to the reader to ponder whether Mr. Ditko is a sad figure cheated of both the money and the credit for his role in creating Spider-Man or an uncompromising American iconoclast admirable in his stubbornness. What he leaves no doubt about is that Steve Ditko is an American comic book legend.

*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.

Now even the comics newbie can experience the full range of Ditko's accomplishments, thanks to Blake Bell's masterful, copiously illustrated biographical study. With passionate, yet unremittingly objective scholarship, Bell chronicles the life and work of this notoriously reclusive and stubborn artist. - Paul DiFilippio, Barnes and Noble  
Bell's insight into Ditko's work and its enduring appeal combine with an abundance of powerful artwork to make this lavish volume indispensable to comics fans. - Gordon Flagg, Booklist  
Bell does the impossible and explains Steve Ditko. - Alan David Doane, Comicbook Galaxy  
Ditko's life, like that of R. Crumb or Harvey Pekar, has enough obsessive oddity and outside struggle to be a tale told wide. But Bell goes the opposite direction, getting as narrow as the lines Ditko used to restrain the action in the old Marvel and Charlton comics. - Geoff Boucher, Los Angeles Times  
His legacy is undeniable; visually he was revolutionary. - Maclean's Magazine  
A personal and professional portrait of the brilliant storyteller and polemicist. - Richard Pachter, Miami Herald  
Ditko is one of the most enigmatic, mercurial talents in comic history. - Newsarama  
A must have for both fans of the artist in particular and comic book history in general. - Rick Klaw, Sfsite.com  
Ditko remains widely recognized as one of the comic world's most admired visual stylists. - The List  
The portrait that emerges here is of an artist whose principles have ossified into bitter perversity. - Douglas Wolk, The New York Times  
Book This fascinating tale of a bull-headed individual who gave his all to the masses and then withdrew from their adulation offers a stark twist on the American Dream. - R. C. Baker, The Village Voice  
[An] effervescently written history about this peculiar and tremendously talented writer and artist. With additions of reprinted strips and un-inked pages, Bell strips away the heavily-shaded areas of this man's life and helps the reader better understand him. - Steven M. Bari, Weekly Comic Book  
sPeculiar and tremendously talented writer and artist. - Steven M. Bari, Weekly Comic Book  
sAbout the Author  
Blake Bell is the author of *Strange Stranger* (a retrospective of Spider-Man co-creator Steve Ditko); *The Secret History of Marvel Comics*, *Fire Water: Bill Everett, The Sub-Mariner, and the Birth of Marvel Comics*; *Amazing Mysteries: The Bill Everett Archives*; and *Strange Suspense and Unexplored Worlds* (two volumes in *The Steve Ditko Archives*). He lives in Toronto, Ontario, with his son.