

## “DICK BRIEFER’S FRANKENSTEIN” (Book Review)

Written by Jorge Solis

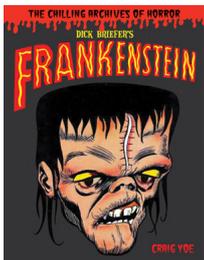
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DICK BRIEFER’S FRANKENSTEIN, from IDW Publishing, is a comprehensive retrospective on an amazing artist whose illustrious career came to a sudden halt. Edited by Craig Yoe, the book reproduces classic FRANKENSTEIN issues from the 1940s, when the comics came into fruition, until the 1950s, when publication ceased.

Cartoonist Richard N. Briefer had a budding livelihood drawing superheroes, ghosts and pirates. It wasn’t until the 1940s when he finally had a chance to add some twists and turns to the classic monster story. Briefer became a one-man army, taking on writing, lettering and penciling responsibilities.



The first issues of FRANKENSTEIN were mainly gritty, violent and dark. Just as in Mary Shelley’s novel, Victor Frankenstein creates a humanoid out of dead body parts; the Monster of Frankenstein escapes from the lab and rampages through the outside world, creating havoc everywhere he goes. Victor and Betty Frankenstein become involved in a massive manhunt for the hideous creature—who eventually arrives in New York City, climbing up the Statue of Liberty! Victor and his creation battle on top of the statue’s head, before the New York Police Department’s guns start blazing. The barrage of bullets forces the monster to fall into the bay and disappear, and Victor vows that he will never stop his search until his creation is finally put to a stop.

During the mid-1940s, Briefer revamped his FRANKENSTEIN series, changing direction. Now the Monster had a campier, goofier side—a giant with a childlike innocence. Briefer clearly enjoyed his cartoony version, working at a faster pace to meet deadlines. In IDW’s book, REN & STIMPY creator John Kricafulsi explains his excitement over these comedic issues: “Briefer combines huge contrasts with beautiful compositions, high individual style, cartooniness, and a keen observation to the real world. I can find a million things to like about this guy.”

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Due to the rise in popularity of horror comics in the 1950s, Briefer changed the series back to the mature, darker style during that decade. In the 1954 story “The She-Monster,” an older and cynical Victor Frankenstein provides his horrid creation with a bride. The Monster and his bride want to conceive a child, but Victor will not allow it and plants a bomb in a fake baby doll, hoping the explosion will kill them both. The subtext about abortion, during the '50s, demonstrates how Briefer was ahead of his time. Censorship and the growing number of anti-horror groups ended up killing the FRANKENSTEIN comics, though, and Briefer spent the last years of his life practicing fine art and portrait paintings. It’s a shame his series came to an abrupt end before his genius could achieve full fruition.

DICK BRIEFER’S FRANKENSTEIN is an interesting history book about an unsung pioneer of horror comics. This adoring tribute recognizes Briefer’s talent through its celebration of his serious and comedic takes on a legendary and oft-reimagined monster.



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