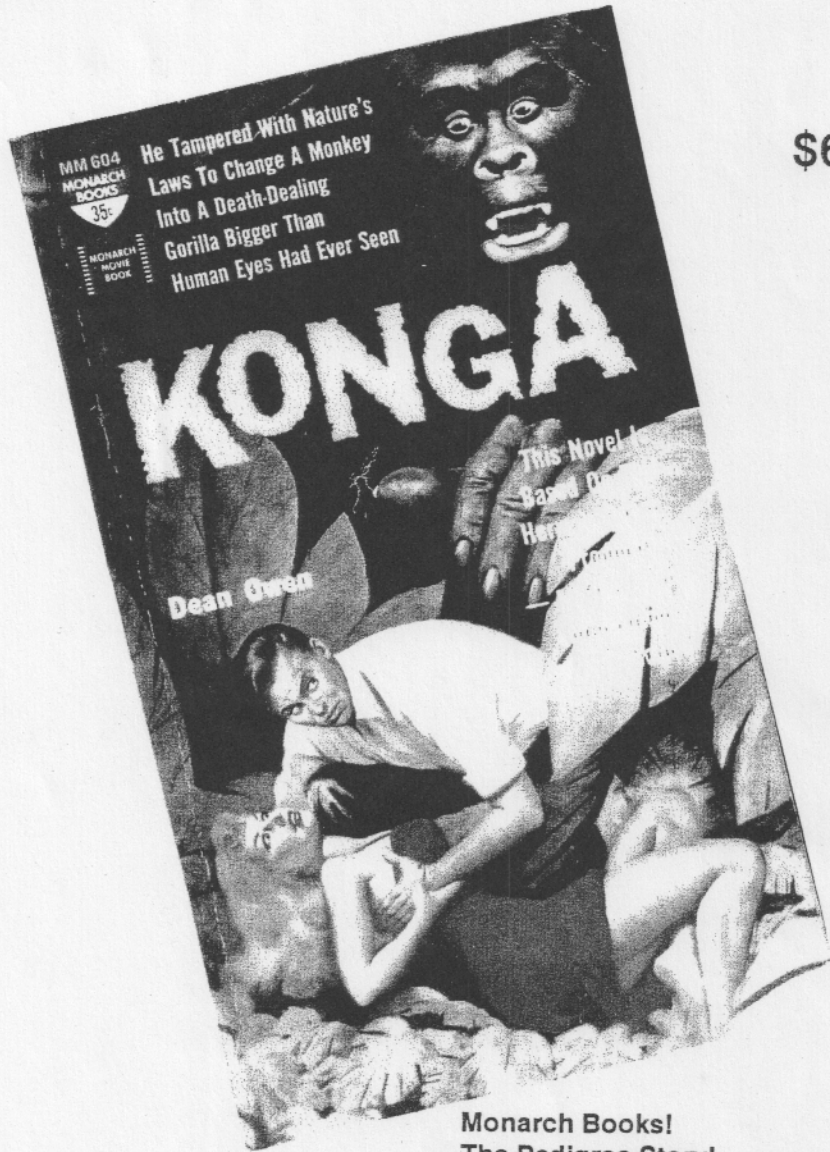


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NUMBER 35

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[Editor's Note: It's amazing how few sf fans (and even Piper fans) know about this book. It's a good book and a highly collectible one and it is getting scarce. It has been reprinted but that first printing is a PBO and worth any collectors attention. If you've not discovered H. Beam Piper's work you're missing a treat.]

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Before the discovery of FUZZIES AND OTHER PEOPLE, Ace books published a pastiche novel by this very talented writer of fantasy, horror, and science fiction as a kind of retelling of the first book from the Fuzzies point of view. Certainly alien, and wonderful, here is the author's gripping inside story of that book in:

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February of 1982 was a dreary month. While several of my sf and fantasy books had been published by both Doubleday and Atheneum, I was waiting for word from Ace on an original sf manuscript, KHI TO FREEDOM, which had been there for what seemed months. Poverty was again stalking the heels of my family.

The phone rang one morning and at the other end of the line was my editor at Ace Books, who took my breath almost at once.

"Are you familiar with H. Beam Piper's Fuzzy books?" She asked.

"Of course," I replied. "I cut my teeth on them, so to speak."

"Then would you like to write one? Mr. William Tunning has completed a third in the series, for Ace purchased the literary estate of Mr. Piper. We now want one from the viewpoint of the aliens. Because KHITOFREEDOM has such believable and unusual aliens, we feel that you can do this extremely well."

My mouth had been opening to say no, for though I liked both the Piper books a lot, I do not enjoy writing the sort of economic/political tales that those books tended to be. However I can become an alien at the drop of a hat (ask my husband, some time). The idea of going back and reliving the story Piper told from the point of view of the Ghasta was highly interesting.

The advance was quite a bit more than I had been getting, and the royalty schedule was acceptable. I referred the editor to my agent, and they came to an agreement, which called for delivery of a hundred thousand word manuscript in time for release that fall. There was no time to wait, and luckily when I write I immerse myself in my story and forge ahead at full speed. By April I had completed the first draft, and via telephone consultations I did the rewrite by May.

This sounds great. But that was the year Ace Books was sold; my book was ensnared in the resulting confusion. An embittered person in the upper echelons of the former company froze all contracts. I found myself in the position of having a completed book, which was accepted and even, by June, in galley proofs, yet without a contract, much less the generous advance promised to me.

My agent was unable to get results. At last I called the editor and asked what I might do to move things along.

"Write me a nasty letter," she replied.

Do not ask a mean little old lady for a nasty letter unless that is exactly what you want. Armed with that steaming missive, my diminutive editor bearded the (very large, I am told) honcho in his den and took that contract away from him. My lifelong grief is that I was not there to see it.

Now we had a contract, a completed book, but still no advance. It took several more months to achieve that. Then, as it was released, was on various paperback bestseller lists,

and achieved some modest success, I found myself getting royalty statements with sad notes scribbled on them.

"We are so disappointed with sales of this book. It just hasn't done what we hoped it would do." Small checks accompanied these statements.

Then in 1984, long after the normal life of a paperback novel is usually completed, the Science Fiction Writers of America began talking about auditing Ace Books' records. Almost at once, I received a VERY LARGE royalty check (more than the amount of my original advance). Word came of this on the very day when my husband quit an impossible job, without any sign of another in the offing.

I do not in any way blame the sf editors for the problems involved in this project. They were concerned, sympathetic, and helpless in the toils of the system. Those people who were disappointed when they failed to buy the company were to blame in the beginning, and the normal fantasy bookkeeping of publishers was responsible for the royalty situation.

Yet it was great fun writing the book, developing the rudimentary Ghasta language begun by Piper and Tunning, and seeing this alien world from an elevation of two feet, through golden or green Ghasta eyes. I do enjoy becoming a non-human!

When writing about aliens, I hate putting in ordinary human squabbling over trifles. I dislike fictional politics and hard-nosed business practices, though don't try to cheat me in a deal.

My only regret is something I did not know when I wrote that nasty letter: if the book had been released without a contract, I learned too late from a lawyer-friend, I would have been owed a thousand dollars per copy released by the publisher. As they published over a hundred thousand copies, I might now have owned Ace Books.

Oh well... you can't win 'em all.

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