

NOZ notes by Rob Imes

Hopefully in 2010 I'll be able to publish a NOZ #2 so that my above "NOZ Notes" title for my UFO column will make at least *some* sense... But considering how busy I've been lately, I don't hold out much hope for a new issue of NOZ to come out this year. However, my steady pace of producing *Ditkomania* continues with no signs of stopping! As I write these words (3/26/10), I am in-between issues. DM #78 came out earlier in March, and DM #79 isn't due out till May 1st (although I might release it a little earlier, in late April). So, I have the next few weeks to slowly get the next issue together, send out reminders to former subscribers, do some reading, etc. The theme of DM #79 will be "Ditko's Women." Dave Sim drew the cover shown at right specifically for the front cover of the new issue, although I'm still undecided as to whether I want to use it as the cover, or go with an unused 1993 DM cover that Martin Hirschak sent me a few weeks ago. I will be printing in DM #80 (July; a Marvel-themed issue) a brand-new 4-page comic strip that Marty wrote & drew – can't wait to print that!



And now, some reviews of the UFO memberzines that I've recently received...

TETRAGRAMMATON FRAGMENTS #211: I don't think Nic probably gets enough credit as he deserves for putting out *T-Frags* so regularly. Thanks, Nic, from an appreciative UFO member! This particular issue was spectacular! I especially enjoyed Darrell Goza's contributions, both about his cover art and the history of blacks in comics.

TEXT NOVEL #3 (*Brothers of the Wood* #1). I imagine that some members might have a problem receiving a zine with no interior illustrations (and therefore not actually "comics"), but I enjoyed this. (Recent issues of *Tim Corrigan's Comics & Stories* that have been dominated by text have been favorites of mine, too.) I'm not particularly a fan of sword & sorcery type stories, so this tale took a long time for me to finish reading; I kept putting it down and coming back to it later, over the period of a week or more.

The "Text Novel" premise is promising, and issue #3 is good, but I can suggest some changes that I'd prefer. For one thing, I think the author's name should be more prominent. Mark Wayne Harris wrote 13 pages of this 16-page zine, and yet his name is only listed in small print on the front inside cover, underneath the credits for the cover art. Mark is also mentioned in a few sentences in the editorial on that page. I would have liked to have seen an introduction by Mark himself, or perhaps some quotes from him talking about his work -- like an "About the Author" page in a book. Also, there should have been a Copyright notice in the zine letting people know who owns this work (Mark? ScriptGraphics? Or is it

public domain?) Speaking of the cover art, I didn't much care for it -- too muddy-looking and cluttered. The cover is credited to three people -- so, *who did what* (pencils, inks, layout)? The previewed cover of #4 looks sharper, more eye-catching, and an improvement over this one. Another criticism: There was no UFO Checklist in the issue (although the UFO symbol was on the cover) and no price tag.

Since the story takes place in olden times, it would have been nice to have the page layouts reflect that. Old books often showed a lot of care in the way their pages looked, with little illustrations for chapter headings or little ornate designs to fancy up a page (such as the first letter of the page being ornately rendered, to open the story). As it stands, the pages of Text Novel #3 look like a computer print-out, which is a bit jarring for the old-time effect that the story is trying to generate. A little old-timey touch, perhaps a little decorated shield or crest on the page to separate different scenes, would have helped make the page layouts more appealing. The story's prose is written in the present tense, which has its good and bad points. The good thing about the present tense is that it adds urgency to the action scenes. The bad thing is that it sometimes reads more like a shooting script for a movie, or directions to the artist in a comics script, rather than literature. The story is told in a humorless and terse style, as one might expect to find in a Conan novel, or an episode of *Legend of the Seeker* on TV. These brave men of action are hard to relate to as ordinary people, but that's because they aren't ordinary people. They fight savage winged beasts from the skies with only their trusted sword and steed. It's enjoyable as escapist fiction, and I look forward to the next issue.

PORTALS #2: This issue is the follow-up to last year's debut issue. I generally liked this issue better (despite the loss of Joel Cotejar) because it seemed more cohesive. In #1, two of the four features seemed merely like teasers or trailers rather than completed chapters. This time, each of the stories seems to have more story content in their few pages. It's sometimes hard to know when one feature has ended and the next begun (since they are all continued, and each chapter is so short), but on the other hand, I found it an interesting reading experience to see how they flowed together when read in one sitting. Like when listening to an album and one song is followed by another song, and then another, and so on. The inclusion of a letters page was a nice bonus. (And an up-to-date UFO Checklist as well!) My one critique of the comic is the indicia's notice that "all work contained within is copyright 2010 Nic Carcieri and Portal Productions." So, does this mean that artists contributing work to *Portals* have no claim to the copyright of their own art, like if they were doing work made-for-hire for Marvel or DC?

LAND OF ZOA #2: This is another follow-up to last year's #1. I found the first few pages to be well-done, but then the layouts of some of the subsequent pages lost me as to what was going on. And also some of the pages had that problem from last time where the penciling was still visible on the page, not having been erased. A simple eraser will solve that problem. If, however, the pencils are being scanned, and then inked directly on a computer, it might be a bit more time-consuming to get rid of all those pencil lines. But it can be done. I've sometimes spent hours trying to clean up color scans of comic panels (that have been converted into B&W) for reproduction in DM. The one page showing Howl running back and forth was funny, and the appearance of the large turtle at the end was interesting (reminding me of an old Kirby monster comic).

TALES OF FANTASY #49: I'm a big fan of Larry Johnson's work and I'm thrilled that he decided to rejoin the UFO, with this issue as his application zine. I plan to write a letter of comment about this issue for TOF's lettercol, so I won't say much here, other than that I thought this was a very satisfying issue. Incidentally, speaking of prose stories (as I was earlier), wouldn't it be awesome if Larry wrote a Madame Boogala novel?

Well, that's all from me! See you next time! -- R. Imes