

# NOZ notes by Rob Imes

Well, here we are again, back with another issue of *T-Frags*, the first issue since July, and also the first issue under the leadership of our new Chairman, **Steve Shipley**. We owe a debt of gratitude to Steve for stepping up to the plate and serving as Chairman. The SPS went defunct simply because none of the members were willing to run for Chairman; that fate could very well have befallen the UFO if Steve hadn't been willing to do the job. Thanks also to Steve for asking me to serve as Emergency Chairman.

One of the matters that concerns me about the UFO (as I've stated before) is the matter of members fulfilling the co-op's obligations. The UFO Constitution states that members need to contribute a review column to **at least every other issue** of *T-Frags* (i.e., a minimum of 3 columns per year) and **publish at least 20 pages** per year. Back in the old days, these rules were enforced, but lately they seem to be quite lax. Perhaps some members aren't aware of what's expected of membership. In the 1980s-90s, the UFO Constitution was published in each issue of *T-Frags*, and there was a continuing reminder near the front of each issue about when someone might "need to write by" or "need to publish by" in order to maintain their membership in the group. If they weren't able to meet that deadline, they could request from the Chairman a reasonable extension in order to maintain membership. Nowadays, it seems like anything goes. And when someone is kicked out of the group for lack of activity (as happened last summer), there was anger over how it was handled.

In his November 25<sup>th</sup> email to the group, Steve Shipley said, "Because of the confusion over the past 6 months, I'm giving everyone a 6 month extension of 'must publish by' dates." I think this is fair, and a way of starting everyone off fresh with a clean slate. Otherwise, at least 4, perhaps 5 members would have lost their membership this month (assuming the rules were enforced). This gives them the chance to publish by June 1<sup>st</sup> to maintain their membership. If they still are unable to do so, I say let the chips fall where they may.

Why do I care about this issue? Because I think lack of activity leads to the co-op being less attractive. If more members published more often, more people would be interested in the UFO. Some of our own members are prolific producers, but only a few of their publications are memberzines – presumably because they don't feel like mailing out tons of free comics to others and receiving little or nothing in return. There are also people out there who are active in publishing their own comics who decline to join the UFO for the same reason: they don't want to send out tons of free comics and get nothing back. Nobody can blame them for that. If we want the UFO to really be a vital gathering of small-press publishers, we need to be vital individually as members. Not just a few of us, but all of us.

The subject of **webcomics** remains a vague, gray area, and their place in the UFO needs to be firmed up in writing (i.e., in the Constitution). Apparently a year or two ago, the membership voted that webcomics would qualify as fulfilling a member's publishing obligations (20 pages per year) as long as the UFO symbol and checklist were on the webpage, and some other requirements (which I don't recall). If this was indeed voted on and passed, it needs to be put in the Constitution and spelled out for all to see. It could even be used as a selling point for webcomic creators to join the group. It just needs to be made crystal clear, not a gray area of confusion which is how it seems to be now.

The recent crisis that the group experienced when the former Chairman had been incommunicado for a few months showed the need for the Chairmanship elections to be

better stated in the **UFO Constitution**. The current version of our Constitution has only four articles; the fourth one deals with the Chairmanship, but doesn't state when elections are to be held (only "annually"). Back in the 1980s-90s, the UFO Constitution was quite lengthy and detailed, with around a dozen articles (instead of four); one version stated that the election was to be held in September and the new chairman's reign to begin in November. Obviously in this internet age, we can speed things up a bit and there's no need for a 3-month span between the vote and taking office. I'd like to see the UFO Constitution to say something to the effect of the vote will take place every November, and the new Chairman begins his reign in December. That would allow people to run for the office in September and October, if they like. I'd be interested to know what other members think about it. (There must have been a reason the Constitution was shortened from a dozen to four articles to begin with...)

OK, enough about all that... Now for stuff about me. I published six issues of *Ditkomania* in 2010 (issues #77-82) and plan to publish six more in 2011. All will be UFO memberzines. DM #83 is scheduled to be released in January, but as of this writing I have no firm idea of what will be in the issue. Comics pro Steve Bissette has expressed an interest in doing the new issue's cover (depicting Gorgo) and writing an article for inside. Mike Tuz has written an article comparing Ditko's 1950s work with 1950s EC horror (inspired by last issue's cover), but he is revising it. Jason Sacks has offered to write an article reviewing all of the stories that Ditko drew for Warren magazines in the 1960s. Martin Hirschak has drawn another EC-inspired cover (which would make a good fit for Mike's article); the cover might even be previewed in this very issue of *T-Frags* (if there's room). There have been a few new Ditko-related publications which will need to be reviewed in the next issue of DM, including Ditko's two latest comics (*Act 5* and *Act 6*) as well as the 2<sup>nd</sup> volume (titled *Unexplored Worlds*) of Blake Bell's hardcover series reprinting 1950s Ditko tales. I just ordered the latter book on Amazon, a Christmas gift to myself!

Steve mentioned that Laurence DuCheney has expressed an interest in joining the UFO. At the time I write these words (12/19/10), I haven't received an application zine from him in the mail. But I did read online his recent comic and thought it was well-done. He would seem to be a good fit for the UFO. So, assuming he does intend to join, I'd vote yes.

## **REVIEWS:**

**\*PPFSZT! #28** (Jim Main, editor/publisher): Overall I found this to be an enjoyable anthology comic. I think the "Jesse Stuart" strip had a strange and disturbing ending, which sort of set the tone of weirdness for the rest of the issue. Brien Wayne Powell's 1-pager was funny (as usual) and his 3-pager about Jimmy Valiant drew me in emotionally. (Even though I'm not a wrestling fan myself, I think any reader has had people they grew up idolizing and can relate to the idea of finally meeting their hero.) The "Mikey Moo-Moo" strip was very well-drawn, but the jokes were a bit corny. I didn't get why Mikey was in the ring but why he didn't understand that he was supposed to pin his opponent. The "Giant Gia" strip was odd but fun, and timely given the recent BP oil spill. Ebony Jett was a bit forgettable, but I enjoyed reading it nonetheless. The storytelling was solid, although I think page 6 was too caption heavy; I would have preferred more dialogue that got across Ebony's personality and why the reader should care about her. I didn't care for "Newt Tronzarr" at all... it just looked like a child's attempt at drawing a comic. The only thing it had going for it was the imaginative and fanciful outer-space setting. Matt Levin's two "Super Hero Frog" pages were OK, but fairly forgettable. The final strip in this thick comic, "Too Much Coffee: Man!" was engaging while I was reading it, but the twist ending just made me feel bad for the main character – he didn't deserve his fate. Jim's editorial was good, although I'd have preferred a stronger editorial... perhaps something outlining his vision for the anthology. Or

is it meant just to be a hodge-podge of weird strips? If so, it succeeded. But what makes \*PPFSZT! different from *Satyr* (his other “weird” anthology series)? All in all, I liked the issue and I look forward to this series continuing to have a long life.

**COMET TALES #23** (Jim Pack, creator/publisher): As always, this is a well-done, sleek-looking small-press comicbook. There were a lot of characters in this chapter of the Manjack space saga, focusing more on interstellar political intrigue than action or heroism. For that reason, I probably found the previous issue slightly more satisfying (even if this issue was longer). I can’t think of anything to complain about this series, and I always look forward to receiving it. Jim’s demeanor in the zine is often dismissive of his own efforts, referring to *Comet Tales* as a “rag,” but I see his work as an inspiring accomplishment to be proud of. There’s no UFO symbol or checklist in this issue, so I’m not sure if this particular issue was mailed out to all members as a UFO issue or not.

**PEACEMAKERS #11** (Steve Shipley, creator/publisher): Not only has Steve become our new Chairman, but he also writes, draws and publishes great comics! First off, the cover of this new issue was very striking and impressive. (Truth to tell, I was listening to a Lady Gaga CD as I read this comic, and I couldn’t help but wonder what she’d think of Angel’s eye-catching costume design!) Stefan’s new “identity” as a hulking armored strongman is an interesting twist. Will Angel be relieved to find out he’s still alive, or angry that he hid his true identity from her? (I think I know the answer to that question: “Time will tell!”) I thought the flashback opening of this issue was very entertaining. The villainous attack on page 2, where the villain turns cowardly at the first sign of resistance, was amusing. (Why don’t we see more of that in comics? It seems like in real life, bad guys who are stopped by police often will try to lie or weasel their way out of being apprehended – at least on those police-chase reality shows on TV!) The printing of this issue, like *Comet Tales*, is superb... nice sharp black inks that make the artwork pop off the pages. Backgrounds are kind of minimal, but I didn’t really notice that until re-reading it looking for something to critique. This is a very satisfying series, beautifully executed.

**HERO CENTRAL UNIVERSE #2** (Jason Bullock, creator/publisher): I went back and read #0 & #1 before reading this issue, just to get myself up to speed again on what was going on in this comic. All I had remembered from previous issues was the presence of the mythological figures, but actually I find Michael Faraday and Flora Ironwood to be far more interesting. (*Flora & Faraday* might have made a good series title, in fact... has a nice ring to it.) The scene in the bar was well-done, nicely laid out (although I did get confused about who the other guy with glasses was at first, the one who strokes Flora’s hair just before Flora decks him). The large panel showing Flora kicking a patron (the one with the caption “... impressive!”) was indeed impressive. One drawback, though – a constant problem with Jason’s art – was that the pencil lines were still visible under the inks in that panel, not fully erased. Fans of TV soap operas (I used to be obsessed with *General Hospital* a few years ago) are attracted to the relationships between the characters, and latch on to favorite couples. Sometimes these fan-fave couples come about by accident, due to the personal chemistry of the actors playing the roles, and then the writers decide to make them a couple after the fact, continually finding reasons to bring the two together, put them through the wringer, cause them to breakup and reunite, etc. Flora & Faraday have this chemistry and potential. I’m glad that half of this issue was devoted to them, and would like to see more of their story. (The Sinbad-Isis couple I was less crazy about... in fact, the heartfelt line “I love you, Sinbad” made me laugh for some reason!)

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Well, that’s all from me for this time around. Remember you can stay in touch with me on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/robimes](http://www.facebook.com/robimes) or email me at [robimes@yahoo.com](mailto:robimes@yahoo.com). I moderate the UFO Yahoo Group at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/unitedfanzineorg> and you don’t need to be a member of the UFO to join the Yahoo Group! Happy New Year, everyone! -- Rob Imes