

NOZ notes by Rob Imes

Well, I had planned for *Ditkomania* #84 to have been released by now, but I've just been too lazy to get the dang thang done already. I even had a paid vacation week off work in early April specifically to work on the new DM. But did I get it done that week, or the next? Nope! I did get a few things done, but not much. I have yet to even map out an outline of the issue (which I always do), determining which articles will go where, to figure out whether I need more material or not. I have gotten a few cool things for the issue already formatted and ready to go, however, including the back cover, at least one of the inside covers, Michael Aushenker's *Ditkotomy* column, and some preview pages of an upcoming Marvel comic that Ditko penciled back in 1981! I'm eager to get those pages in print, but there's still a lot more work to be done. I'm thinking that since April is almost over now (I'm typing this on 4/19/11), I'll just call DM #84 the May issue and release it in the last week of April. Martin Hirchak drew the cover of the new issue, which you can see here.



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REVIEWS:

CONVICT #1 (Laurence DuCheny): This comic was rough, looking more like an ashcan or demo than a finished comic. It's probably not a good idea to write on the comic. My copy had my name written in pen on the front, then a personalized message from Larry on page 1, and later a penned note about one of the UFO Checklists inside being a place holder. I will sometimes print up a mock-up copy of an upcoming issue of DM on my home printer, with blank pages on some not-yet-done ones, just to get a feel of what a finished issue will look like, and I go through with a pen and circle any typos, make notes to myself, etc. *Convict #1* reminded me of a mock-up copy, not the finished product. The faint pencil style artwork not being inked added to this impression. I wondered at first why the spine felt funny and then I saw that Larry had stapled the spine three times. A digest-size comic should only be stapled twice: once near the top and again near the bottom -- not in the middle.

Another jarring thing I noticed as I began reading the comic was that some of it was being repeated throughout the issue. The side-view of James Douglas smoking appears on the cover, again on page 1 inside, and again on page 3. Another side-view, with his hand on his chin in a contemplative pose, appears on pages 3 and 5. This makes it look like a cut and paste job, which is distracting unless it's being done deliberately in a humor strip like *Doonesbury* or *Peanuts*. For dramatic comics, it just looks like a short-cut to fill panels without having to draw more. Some of the drawings were very good (such as the aforementioned smoking of a cigarette, particularly in the positioning of the fingers), but

others were less so (like the last two pages). The level of skill lacked a consistency that I would have expected, since (as I say) some panels looked great and some didn't. I would have been interested in reading an editorial introduction about how precisely this comic was produced, to explain to the reader what exactly he's looking at here. How much was drawn by the artist, and how much was manipulated by the computer? As for the storyline, it started out in an intriguingly dreamlike fashion (what with the nudity and general strangeness), but the last half with the gunfight was more conventional, less intriguing to me. Some of the content is perhaps more adult in nature than the all-ages sensibility of most UFO zines.

It looked like some of the panels were drawn on notebook paper because the lines were still visible. Also, the size of the lettering was inconsistent, sometimes large or small depending on the space available. But space shouldn't determine the size of the letters because in comics, the size of the lettering indicates sound. Letters that are big indicate loudness, small letters are quieter (like when a character mumbles something under their breath). With that in mind, it makes no sense for the lettering in James' thought balloon on page 3, panel 1, to be bigger than the actual spoken dialogue that follows. The comic's cover price of \$2.95 seems a bit high. Does that price include the postage of mailing it? Larry's contact info does not appear in the issue, and I understand that he does not want his home address to be published. This may make it more difficult for some readers to contact Larry to obtain a copy of the issue. Anyway, we all have to start somewhere, and this is Larry's first UFO publication, so hopefully the next one will benefit from his experience with this one.

FANTASY THEATER #21 (J. Kevin Carrier): If *Convict #1* was a case of a comic having a lot of problems with it, then FT #21 is a case of the opposite being true, a comic so impressively done that it's difficult to find anything to criticize. This comic was sheer joy from start to finish, and really an example of the kind of comic that I'd like to see more of, and not only in the UFO. The graphic effects (like the dot pattern on the cover) were impressive, but so was the actual drawing and storytelling inside. The pages numbered 4 and 5 inside, showing the heroes in a rainstorm clinging to the side of a cliff, was particularly impressive. I wish I could draw that well. I loved how this was a standalone story (accompanied by a short 2-pager at the back, also self-contained) with a beginning, middle and end. Again, I'm forced to contrast this with *Convict*, where the end comes with a "to be continued" and the reader doesn't get a satisfying resolution to what he just read. But in FT #21, Kevin presents a 27-page story that leaves the reader with a feeling of sadness at what has transpired, but glad that Glorianna survived. One can also read deeper into the story, with its title "Below" beginning with Linna trying to keep Gavin from falling to his doom, and ends with Glorianna trying (initially) to keep Linna from falling to her doom. There's more to this story than meets the eye, and I'm sure that further re-readings would reveal additional themes and symbols hidden beneath the surface (pun intended). Bravo!!

TALES OF FANTASY #53 (Larry Johnson): As with *Fantasy Theater*, there's not much that I can complain about with this comic. As usual, Larry Johnson (aided by writer Mike Tuz in the back-up story) serves up a satisfying and impressive pair of tales, plus extra features to provide variety to the experience of reading the comic. (Comics used to do this all the time, by the way, from the Golden-Age to the Silver Age, and even in some titles into the 1980s. You'd get more than one story per issue, a letters page or text page, perhaps a pin-up page or a cartoon gag page. These days the trend is for 22 pages of serial action followed by a bunch of company ads -- not even a letters page to provide some added entertainment. I prefer the way that Carrier and Johnson do their comics, in the classic tradition.) Speaking of the back-up story, it reminded me of the classic "pre-Marvel" fantasy stories. I recall another one of those where an alien met a "typical" Earthling who turned out to be anything but (no spoilers here, I hope). The final trio of panels mimics those often found in those old fantasy tales. I'm running out of room, so I'll comment more on TOF #53 in TOF's lettercol.

That's all from me for now! See you next time! -- Rob Imes