

NOZ NOTES by Rob Imes

Hello to all of my fellow members in the UFO! I hope that you have been having an enjoyable summer, and that you received the new issue (#85) of my fanzine **DITKOMANIA** that came out in mid-August. This issue, as I explained in the "Editkorial," was more difficult than usual because of some computer problems, distractions away from comics (primarily my emerging interest in SF digest magazines and Lady Gaga fandom, believe it or not), and fewer submissions than in the past. Jason Sacks' "Ditko at Warren" article had actually been submitted to me back in January, and around half of my "Editkorial" had been written in late April. Soon after putting out DM #83 in May, my computer crashed and the Windows operating system had to be reinstalled. Luckily I didn't lose my files but a lot of the programs were gone and had to be reinstalled, such as the Word program which I'd been using to type up DM (which allowed me to format columns and insert images into the text pages). Unfortunately, I didn't have access to that program anymore. I got another program to use instead, but it took getting used to. But I never got the chance to really use it anyway, because the same problem happened around a week before I started work in earnest on DM #84 -- the same computer problem occurred, and everything had to be reinstalled. Only this time I was having a harder time getting the modern updates I needed to be able to even install the new Word doc program I'd been intending to use. (This is an OLD computer!) So, I was reduced to putting together the pages like I had done back in 2008-09: simply counting out lines of text and making space for the images and then printing them out separately, cutting out the shapes with scissors and taping them to the master sheets. The page where I reviewed *Act 8* actually consists of five sheets of paper taped to the master sheet! The bottom sheet was a xerox of a review page from a previous issue of DM, which had two columns on it and a box in the corner. I reduce-xeroxed the cover of *Act 8* and, after several attempts, got it to just the right size to fit inside the box and taped it down. The title of the review was its own separate sheet, secured to the page using a gluestick. The left column was printed and taped down separately, as was the right column. I used this same technique for the lettercol, enabling me to make columns where the Word program I was typing it on wouldn't allow for columns. Somehow it all came together and most readers probably couldn't tell the difference.

The UFO Checklist that appears in the current DM is one I put together using the ones in TF 217 and *Tales of Fantasy* #54 as a guide. It took me about an hour to compile, trying to make sure not to make any mistakes. And I did make at least two: I misspelled Larry DuCheny's name (as "DuCheney" -- sorry Larry!) and I put "Crusader" ahead of "Convict" in my attempt at alphabetical ordering. I noticed that there were a few errors, mostly minor spelling mistakes, in the other Checklists. But these included the misspelling of actual titles in TOF's Checklist, including such titles as *PPFSZT!, *Hero Central Universe*, and *Fantasy Theater*. (Kevin made it clear in the lettercol of an old FT, I think, that it was *Theater* -- not *Theatre* -- for his series.) It also does little good to mention someone's website and then to get the URL wrong! If we are going to compile our own version of the Checklist for our publications (and I do that for DM, so obviously I'm in favor of that, so that the Checklist that appears is the most up-to-date as can be), then we must take extra care to make sure the mistakes like this are few and far between.

THE UPCOMING ELECTION FOR CHAIRMAN:

I believe that our current Chairman, **Steve Shipley**, will be running again for the position. If so, he has my vote! I will gladly accept another term as Emergency Chairman if Steve is re-elected (assuming he wants me to remain as Emergency Chairman, of course -- since it's the Chairman who assigns that position).

NEW MEMBER APPLICATIONS:

It looks like we have one applicant to the UFO right now, **Chris Ed Rock**, who is a former UFO Chairman. I read his application zine online at <http://kcor1953.tripod.com/sf50s/hardcopy50s.pdf> but unfortunately I was underwhelmed. It's a work of scholarship or research, I suppose, but not done in a literary or artistic way, I think. It resembles a movie catalog more than a fanzine, to my eyes. Sadly I am going to have to vote **NO** on his application this time around, but I would encourage him to apply again when he thinks he has stronger material to submit.

OLD MEMBER DEPARTURES:

Sad to receive the August 16th email from Brien Wayne Powell saying that he was resigning from the group. He was certainly a productive member on the web, producing that regular comic strip, but apparently it lacked a UFO Checklist (or any UFO anything) and therefore couldn't be considered a UFO publication. (I did sneak it into the UFO Checklist in an issue of DM, though.) It would have been a simple matter for Brien to simply xerox off a publication featuring 20 of those strips and mail them out to the readers, thereby fulfilling his membership quota for the year. I don't understand why he didn't do that. Surely it wouldn't cost that much to do. People talk about digital comics being free, but I know my internet connection isn't free. I have my cable TV and internet combined for roughly \$70.00 a month. If one was willing, one could take a month offline and save some money that way. Or else stay online and sell some stuff on eBay to generate some funds for publishing. It can be done. Anyway, best of luck to Brien in his future endeavors.

CONSTITUTION CHANGES:

Last issue (TF #217), Steve Shipley asked whether we wanted to retain the line about print publishers not being "required to send their zines to those publishing only on the web," or whether that line should be removed. Although I voted against the inclusion of webcomics, I would prefer that this line remain in the Constitution, otherwise those of us who mail out tangible objects of potential value (more on this below) risk getting mere email links in our Inboxes in return -- something I'm likely to receive anyway, regardless of my membership, if I'm Facebook friends with the creator, on their email contacts list, etc. Also, Jim Main wanted PDF files to be accepted the same as webcomics, and I don't see much of a difference so I vote that if webcomics are allowed then PDFs should be allowed as well.

REVIEWS OF MEMBER ZINES:

I haven't received *PPFSZT! #31 in the mail yet, hence my lack of a review of it here. Jim did email me a PDF of it, but I haven't looked at it yet!

Darrell Goza posted a webcomic called **CRUSADER** at <http://scriptgraphics.weebly.com/crusader.html> as an example of what a UFO webzine ought to be like. The comic is laid out in a fashion similar to a printed comic, with a front cover, and the UFO Checklist at the end. It's an enjoyable 6-page superhero comic (counting the cover), well-drawn in a Neal Adams type style. The writing is a bit generic and predictable, as is the costume (resembling Marvel's D-Man, whose costume was a cross between Wolverine's and the original red-and-yellow Daredevil). When the hero tells the villain at one point, "Try this on for size!" I groaned at the unoriginality of the repartee I was reading. But, still, it's a bit of light fun and I'd have been happy to have seen it in a small-press comic. Out of curiosity, I saved the last page of the story at that site on my computer and then printed it (at 100%), wondering how the resolution would look. Unfortunately, it's not as sharp as it could be, looking a little soft focus, especially noticeable in some of the lettering. I'd recommend making sure that each image is at least 1mb in size if one is going to maximize the option of readers printing out the pages.

I think that Darrell's **HERO TRIBUTE** comic was less successful. Nice art for the most part, but I was left with a kind of "So what?" feeling at the end. Perhaps it would have been better not to have mentioned in the editorial that these were leftover unpublished pieces that were being cobbled into complete stories. This causes the reader to be aware of the process behind creating it, which can have the result of the reader being ever-conscious of how the sausage is made, instead of just eating it.

Darrell also sent a zine called **I, CLARIFY!** which was intended as his manifesto on the topic of digital comics in the UFO. While I was glad to see that he wrote all this down -- and I like publications like this, narrow in subject matter as they may seem to be (hey, it's small press, right?) -- I was also a little disappointed because I felt less clear about the matter when I was done reading it. For example, on pages 10-11, Darrell writes: *"Printed copies have their good points... but the downsides seem to only be based on personal tastes. That's not a reason to not go digital or online with what we do."* But this would appear to contradict what he says on pages 13-14: *"We, the members of the UFO will ultimately decide what works best for us. ...Everyone here should send their products the way they're most comfortable to fulfill the page count requirement..."* So, on the later page he is saying we should do what we are "comfortable" with, but on the earlier page he says our "personal tastes" are "not a reason to not go digital." Um, what if one is not "comfortable" with going digital?

Darrell drags me and *Ditkomania* into the argument and says (on page 15) that *"If the web publisher only wanted a digital version [of Ditkomania], then Rob would have to honor that. This would make everything even."* But then that would require me to create a digital version of the zine, which I don't have the time or interest in doing. At the very least, it would involve me having to scan all 32 pages every time I put out an issue, adjust the contrast levels on the scanned images (since uncorrected scans can look bad on a screen), convert it into a PDF file, and then hope that the digital document doesn't get spread around for free across the internet, cutting into sales of the printed zine. On page 16, Darrell writes, *"I've already covered that print zines are being done digitally for print, so making one for online consumption is as easy as posting a PDF of product..."* As noted earlier, DM is not always produced in a manner that can be easily placed in a digitized form prior to publication. Xeroxing the master sheets eliminate the cut lines that would show up if one were to simply scan the masters.

Yes, if digital and print were completely equal, then Darrell's argument would be valid: If I preferred to receive DM in print or digital (like "paper or plastic") then it should be available to me in the format that I prefer. For a bookworm like me, however, it's hard to grasp the concept that anyone would prefer a digital document on a screen to a published magazine. But evidently such people exist. I figure that I'm doing people a favor by sending them a print copy because (as noted earlier) I'm sending them a physical object that can potentially increase in value, unlike a digital document. On page 16, Darrell wrote: *"Every argument I've heard from the members here against web comics and zines being equal to print versions comes down to the most selfish of reasons: wanting things to be the way they always have been..."* OK, well here's another argument for you then -- one which I thought I had made before, but evidently went unheeded: Back issues of *Ditkomania* are worth money, sometimes serious money.

Here are the results of some recent eBay auctions: On May 24th, an issue of DM from 1994 (#42) sold for \$31.51. On June 5th, DM #11 (from 1985) sold for \$75.00; the following week, #12 sold for \$31.00 and #28 (from 1989) sold for \$36.51. (Another copy of #12 sold on August 2nd for \$16.05.) And on July 5th, DM #29 (from 1989) sold for an incredible **\$178.50!** Who knows, perhaps 20 years from now a First Printing copy of the latest issue of DM will be similarly sought-after -- but someone who accepted a digital copy in lieu of a printed one would be out of luck. As I've mentioned in the past, it's always possible that the next Frank Miller could get his start in the small-press, perhaps even as a member of the UFO. Would you want to get the future Frank's publications as mere digital images on a screen, as hard to grasp in one's hand as the wind, or as print publications that may be someday highly sought-after due to his superstar status?

On page 14, Darrell writes, *"Those who want digital producers to send print versions of their products have to be equally ready to send digital versions of their books if that's the desired method of the receiver."* Again, I'm not prepared to create digital versions of my publications. I hand-number each copy of my fanzine and use cardstock for the covers partly to prevent people from accessing the zine in some bootleg or non-authorized fashion, which I think digital versions would make easier.

HERO CENTRAL UNIVERSE #3 was the best issue yet of Jason Bullock's series. In the last TF, other members had commented on there being too much caption-narration explaining the action, but I thought that was the case only on a couple pages. The caption dominance works until around page 4, and then you just want it to switch to more dialogue to keep things rolling, to pick up the pace of the story as you've gotten more into it. The art was good, the writing was good, the set-up (mythological gods in modern times) was good. The cover was okay, but a little boring -- but that's typical of most new comics these days, where it seems a darkly-colored portrait is preferred to an exciting action sequence on the front cover. I have to admit that I haven't checked out Jason's webcomic yet.

Steve Shipley's **BOONDOGGLE #1** is a promising beginning to this new anthology series. Everything about it, from the color front covers (done in attractive and bright hues, not dark and muddy) to the content of the material within, seems designed to make the reader feel good and smile. The Pirate Princess chapter was good, reminding me of J. Kevin Carrier's work, although truthfully I was a bit disappointed when the story jumped to her adulthood after 3 pages. I thought the idea of a spunky little girl interacting with this rough old pirate made for an interesting premise. The pirate ship being forced to play babysitter to a little brat causing all sorts of trouble sounds like the concept of a family comedy film like a "Home Alone," or perhaps an odd sitcom. Anyway, that scenario can always be shown again in flashback form in future stories. The story about SSSmoke seemed somewhat forgettable to me... and in fact, I'd forgotten all about it until I reread the comic to review it for this column. So, either my memory is going downhill, or else it just wasn't that memorable. But perhaps the next chapter will be more interesting. "Keep Your Feet on the Ground" was more memorable, and I'd like to see more whimsical stories like this one. The gag strips in the issue were not laugh-out-loud funny, but provided nice reading variety. Overall a satisfying comic with a great deal of potential.

TALES OF FANTASY #54 is another winner. In the lettercol, Larry challenged readers to identify the robot on the back cover (from an old movie, he said) and what specifically made the front cover different from his past ones. I don't know the answer to either question, but it's nice to have some mystery to mull over until next issue. Both covers were great, as usual, especially the back cover where Jesse Stuart's expression perfectly captures his apprehension at the sight of the robot slowly moving toward him. The always-wonderful and colorful Space Cat strip evoked old Casper cartoons with that long-tailed ghost harrassing our hero. The Bart Rover prose story was fairly outrageous in its plot points and I can predict that some readers may feel that Larry crossed the line of good taste in his descriptions. However, in fairness to him, this scene was told on an alien planet from the point of view of a non-human creature, and told in prose form not depicted visually, so I think we can conclude that the intent was not meant to be pornographic or titillating in nature. I'm tempted to offer some advice on the prose style here, but I'm not sure it would really be helpful, because all of the Bart Rover stories are told in a particular way which Larry has devised which presumably reflect the style in which he wants them told. Normally I would suggest that a writer not start out a story with "My name is..." etc. but instead just jump right into an exciting or important scene and then do the filling-in-of-the-reader later, and in-between other scenes. But that's just a minor suggestion; Larry's stories still work for me regardless. The main Lew Brown story, *"The Image Oscillator,"* was very satisfying because it left a lot of questions out there and didn't provide all of the answers. In the past, I think Larry has set up some great premises but then not completely fulfilled their promise because the story switches to dull explanation mode in the last half, which slows down the story and ruins the fantasy for me. So, I kept waiting for it to happen again in this story, and I was delighted as I kept reading and Larry didn't switch over to the explanations until almost the very end. It's not until the last 2 pages that we get an explanation for what is happening, and even then it is a limited explanation, showing that there are mysterious forces at work that can't be entirely explained. This leaves open the promise of more to the mystery being revealed in future issues at some point. So, I was very happy with how this story was done. From previous experience of reading Larry's stories, I wouldn't be surprised to learn that the basis of the story, the existence of the Image Oscillator, has its roots in fact, an actual pre-television device. However, I haven't Googled it to learn if I'm right. Like I said, sometimes I just like to have the mystery sitting out there, not being revealed! Anyway, a satisfying issue of TOF!