

NOZ NOTES by Rob Imes



- DITKOMANIA #86 IS HERE!

The new issue of my fanzine *Ditkomania* was released in mid-October and all members should have received their copy by the time you read this. (Contact me if you haven't received yours yet.) This was the annual Halloween issue. *DM's* founder Bill Hall used to enjoy putting out the zine every Halloween (his favorite holiday) and I have kept the tradition going. Brian Franczak drew the front cover, and I thought it would be interesting to show here the cover being created. On the left you see the first version of the cover that Brian submitted to me, which used Ditko's illo of Spider-Man with the *DM* logo, etc. at the top. I wrote him back saying it looked more like a back cover to me, since I preferred something original for the front. So, Brian told me he had a plan for an original cover, and the illos on the middle and bottom show his progress on the cover that was ultimately printed. Awesome work!

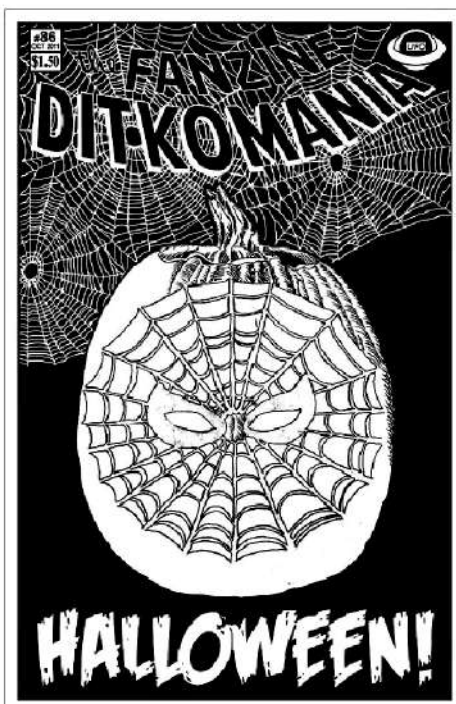


The funny thing is that Martin Hirschak also submitted a cover for *DM* #86 which was not used since it was Halloween-related but not Spider-Man or Marvel-related. I would have used it, though, if Brian had been unable to do his cover. I can simply change the issue number on Martin's cover, though, and use it for a future issue that has a supernatural or spooky theme. It's also nice to be able to have an "emergency" cover on hand, just in case.

The next issue (#87) of *DM* is scheduled for release in early January. I plan for it to have a DC theme. This will be the 24th issue of *DM* that I've published and mark the beginning of my fifth year as the editor/publisher. One would assume that there wouldn't be much to talk about after so many issues, but there are still themes that I've mentioned in the past which still haven't been used: "Ditko's Animals," "Ditko's Robots," "Ditko's Humor," a sequel to the "Ditko's Women" issue, an issue devoted to *The Fly* (one of my all-time favorite Ditko runs is *The Fly* #5-8 from 1984). So, there's still more to come as we head toward *DM* #100!

- CONSTITUTION CHANGES:

Last issue (*TF* #218), Larry Johnson suggested that member columns in *T-Frags* should have a 4-page limit. I'm a little hesitant to impose my will on the rest of the membership with any sort of speech limit, so I vote NO on a page limit. I understand Larry's point, but I don't think amending the Constitution is the answer. If a Chairman receives a column that is way too long to be included, he could ask the member to edit it down, or use a smaller type font, for space reasons. I think all members would willingly agree to limit their comments if asked to do so. I can't imagine that any member would submit an unreasonable page count for their column and



then demand that it be run as-is or else. Larry had mentioned a *TF* column by Sam Gafford that ran for more than 4 pages and used a big type font. If the Chairman had a problem with running Sam's column like that, he could easily contact Sam and suggest resubmitting it with a smaller font... or even do so himself by copying and pasting Sam's text into a word document and changing the type size himself. (As long as it is still readable, of course.) I think common sense should be the guiding rule in such a circumstance, not a Constitutional mandate. My main criticism of member columns is that some members don't review the books that they are sent, or don't submit columns at all. I'm glad that our Chairman has tried to get members back on track about their responsibilities as UFO members.

- REVIEWS OF MEMBER ZINES:

PAPER & INK #1 (published by Steve Shipley):

When this zine came out, I sent a personal email to Steve with a long critique of the issue. Briefly, I think that the zine has a lot of potential, but this debut issue failed to live up to it. My main criticism was the lack of substance among its contents. Aside from the profiles of Larry Blake and Matt Levin, it simply reads like a longer version of the UFO Checklist, with not much depth. The Levin profile is more informative than the Larry Blake one, since the latter fails to mention the names of any of Larry's comics and characters. This would be like reading a profile of Shipley without *The Peacemakers* being mentioned, or a profile of J. Kevin Carrier with no mention of *Fantasy Theater*. Also, while the front cover is nicely colored and drawn, it doesn't fit the theme of the issue. Back in the 1980s, when Bill Hall was publishing *DM*, one of the criticisms he received was whenever a cover was unrelated to the issue's contents. When I took over *DM*, one of my goals for each issue was to try and have some thematic unity, for the cover to relate to the material within. For this debut issue of *P&I*, instead of a woman in a bikini, it might have been a good idea to depict an artist at work drawing, or perhaps a scene showing an artist's tools (including pen and ink). Or there could have been a front cover drawn by Larry Blake or Matt Levin, with a blurb indicating that they were profiled inside. Instead we get a babe in a bikini. It admittedly may draw eyes to the publication (was that the reason?) but it doesn't fit the contents. Anyway, the zine does have tremendous potential and perhaps I will like future issues more. One of my all-time favorite small-press publications was *Skeet's Fan Forum & Review*, and I'm hoping that somehow *P&I* will help to fill the void left by Steve Keeter's discussion zine. To do that, it would have to have a letters section -- and my preference would be for a long, engaging lettercol where ideas are presented and debated. I think the lettercols in both *Tales of Fantasy* and *DM* have that spirit; certainly I think a general zine like *P&I* would be an ideal forum for general topics relating to small-press to be discussed. Overall I'm glad that the zine is around, just want it to improve and become more engaging and substantive.

***PPFSZT! #31** (published by Jim Main):

I neglected to review this last time because I thought it would be a printed comic coming in the mail. Turns out it was a PDF file emailed to members. I'm not that used to reading comics on my computer, but I did so to provide this review. I turned the magnification down to 80% so that the screen would show a full page, and then used the arrows to turn each page. The editorial was good (I didn't notice any typos) and it was nice to see the old Minotaur covers (although I would have liked to have seen info on when Minotaur came out -- was it the 1970s?). Brien Wayne Powell's strips were his usually funny self. He's got a real niche here of back and forth conversation which is highly accessible and entertaining despite its visual repetition. Nate Corrigan's cartooning was very impressive; he's really good at the loose drawing

style of a humor strip like the ones here. The Mysticist was very professionally drawn but light on story. No sooner are we introduced to the character than she is spirited away till next issue. A good for a teaser, but maybe it should have been at the end of the comic (where a reader expects to find a lead-in to next issue) instead of so near the beginning. George Leon's strip had an energetic cartooning style for the figures but was light on backgrounds and a story that I could make little sense of. The story by the Limacher Brothers was enjoyable fun, although the art style was inconsistent throughout (some panels looked very amateurish while others looked like they were influenced by Wally Wood). Not much of a plot here: just hunters getting attacked by monsters. But it's fun, so I didn't mind the lack of sophistication being shown. The Brunelle strips remind me of current newspaper comic strips -- mildly amusing and competently done but nothing I'm excited by. The Simon Mackie strips are more fun and ambitious, nicely done, although the small text in the word balloons were hard to read in the PDF. (I zoomed the page up to 200% just to see the panels bigger but the words were pixelated, not hi-res enough.) His coffee strip was very good, one of the best in the issue actually. It reminded me of something you'd have seen in Fantagraphics' *Centrifugal Bumblepuppy* back in the late 80s (which was my introduction to alternative humor comix, by the way). Shipley's "Death of Digital!" strip was timely and fun, also very well-drawn as usual. The "Bill the Cockroach" strips looked like more newspaper strips, reminding me of a less funny version of "Bloom County." I had to zoom in on these panels as well, to read them better. The strip has potential, but the jokes just kinda sat there instead of zinging. My favorite strip in the entire issue was Dan Burke's ingenious Legion of Annoying Heroes. It was funny, had a great idea, was well-written and well-drawn. To sum up, I'd say that this issue of **PPFSZT!* was a winner!

HERO CENTRAL UNIVERSE #4 (published by Jason Bullock):

HCU has some good page layouts every now and then (although I don't like those full page panels, they look too easy, especially the one on page 4, which is just a face) and no one can say that it's not ambitious. No, the problem with HCU is that it's just too dang complicated and convoluted! Once again we are following another character instead of the ones that have already been introduced. My advice to Jason is to stick with developing the characters he had. Also to ignore the urge to show flashbacks and long, involved explanations for everything, just have the characters act like real people instead of figures on a chess board. How would a real person act in this situation? OK, these gods aren't normal humans, but in that case have their non-human attitudes be contrasted with ordinary people so that we the reader have someone we can relate to. When you go to a movie, do they start out the movie with long monologues about who this person is, scenes from their past, and then cut away to somebody else? No, they invite the reader in by setting a scene, and gradually the viewer gets to know them. Above all, they *tell a story*. Even the front inside cover's hard-to-follow (and hard-to-read because of the dark background illo) explanation to the reader about the comic doesn't invite the reader in or help them get to know and like the characters. I think that this comic is guilty of the problem that many amateurs have when they want to do their own comic: they want to do too much at once. Instead of wanting to do a 5-page story, or even a 1-page story, that works and shows understanding of how to entertain a reader, how to tell a story clearly, Jason has jumped into a huge sprawling epic. But another problem is that it seems *needlessly* complicated since it appears to have a simple overarching theme, one of good versus evil. I have a hunch that after all this background information, all this drama, all these flashbacks, all these captions full of explanation, that in the end the good guys will win. On an unrelated critical note, I do wonder if perhaps the depiction of the Norse gods is too reliant on Marvel's version of them. The image of Asgard as an asteroid-like island floating in space with tons of gleaming buildings crammed onto it, as well as the way Odin is attired, seems to owe more to Walt Simonson than Snorri Sturluson.

HERO CENTRAL UNIVERSE: CONFIDENTIAL #1 (published by Jason Bullock):

I had been hoping that this publication might clear up some of my confusion, but it had the effect of making me concerned that Jason is in way over his head with this massive 35-issue storyline. I don't have a problem with doing a big epic, but it has to be done in a way that the reader can follow and not get lost. Usually this is done by having a central character that the reader can get to know, watching his growth as he triumphs over each obstacle. Here, we are presented with a crowd scene of characters that we are supposed to care about but who are more like written descriptions than living personalities. The biggest mistake in this issue occurs in the rundown of all the characters where Jason provides a picture and description for each character but then fails to give the names of many of them! How is the reader supposed to know who they are if they don't know their name? I had suspected that the words on the page about Isis were taken from a website since some of the words were oddly underlined (and one of the words, the unfamiliar "intercalary," was used without providing a definition of it). A Google search revealed that text on "The Myth of it all!" page was copied from the first 2 paragraphs of the Wikipedia entry for "Isis." The underlined words are links on the page leading to other Wikipedia entries. If one is going to copy text from someone else, it's generally proper to credit the source. This companion zine to HCU could have been a great help to readers of the HCU series, but due to its lack of clarity, it failed to serve its purpose.

ETERNITY #1 (published by Sam Gafford):

It's a real pleasure to see the revival of this zine. A few years ago, I bought the first issue (from 1986) and very much enjoyed its good old-fashioned fannish flavor, and this new issue repeats that feeling. Although there is an uneven quality about the book, it has a pleasant charm, reminding me of a 1970s Charlton horror anthology comic like *Scary Tales* which occasionally mixed longer yarns with shorter ones. On a more basic level, I was impressed by the look and feel of this zine -- reminds me of DM in fact -- with a nice cardstock cover, and great printing with sharp blacks. That may not seem like a big deal, but when the production looks as flawless as this, it allows the reader to just sit back and enjoy the show! Although the two stories and the various illustrations are (apparently) unrelated, except for both stories taking place in Arkham, they are unified by their Lovecraftian inspiration and just general creepy subject matter. The lead story in this issue was the most impressive of the two, my one quibble being that I doubt people back in 1931 said things like "Shut your hole!" Like I say, I got more of a 1970s vibe from it. I was a little confused by the last panel: is the convict hanging upside down in mid-air in a supernatural manner, or is he being supported by something (like a rope) in this position? That was a little unclear to me. The backup tale written and drawn by Sam Gafford was a little on the rough side, causing me to occasionally pause and try to figure out what the sketchy art was depicting, but on the other hand I was also reminded of the scratchy style of artists like Eddie Campbell and Glenn Dakin. Overall, a fine issue! Bravo!

ZOOK AND MAX IN THE MIDDLE (published by Tim Kelly):

This was an enjoyable, nicely-printed and executed mini-comic. It is a bit slight, both humor-wise and page-wise. The jokes are amusing; they made me smile. The drawing style on the first 2 pages does seem a bit sketchy, like they were knocked out quickly by the artist, but that didn't detract from my enjoyment. Because of the thinness of the comic -- only 12 panels long not counting the cover -- I'd like to see this come out on a more frequent basis, like once a month rather than once a year. This is the kind of comic that inspires me to want to do something similar, which I think is the sign of an effective small-press project. So to sum up, I enjoyed the comic, I just want to see **more**.

Well, that's all from me this time! See you in the next issue of *T-Frags*!! -- **R.I.**