

# An Introduction and Thank You

## by Rob Imes

This is my first contribution to *T-Frags*, having joined the UFO on Feb. 3, 2009, following my submission of **NOZ #1** to the UFO membership. I have written in detail about the content and background of NOZ on the next few pages. Simply put, it was nearly all previously-unpublished stuff that I wrote and drew back in the 1980s. In September 2007, I compiled this old material together in one digest-size comic called NOZ #1 and printed up around 25 copies, with the intention of giving them to a few friends (which I did) and trying to get them into a few comics shops (which I never did). Since I am now all out of copies of NOZ #1 (except for one copy for myself), I am planning to release a 2<sup>nd</sup> Printing in the near future, perhaps this summer.

In retrospect, printing up NOZ #1 in 2007 was good practice for what was to follow, for in February 2008 I revived the fanzine *Ditkomania* and so far have published seven issues (#64-70), with an eighth coming out around March 1st. It's possible that DM at some point may become a UFO publication again (as it was in the 1980s) but at present my goal is to produce my own "comics," apart from DM, that will have the UFO symbol and checklist.

I hope to have **NOZ #2** published by May 1<sup>st</sup>, perhaps even earlier than that. (I will have released two new issues of *Ditkomania* between now and May 1<sup>st</sup>, so this is why it may take so long to get done.) I do have a cover done for NOZ #2, but I'm thinking of re-drawing it as the woman on the cover looks a bit too much like Ms. Marvel now that I think about it. (The cover idea for NOZ #2 is based on a sketch I drew in the application letter that I sent to Steve Keeter last month.)

Having a built-in audience (i.e., my fellow UFO members) for my creative efforts provides me with a great incentive, a *purpose* for creating something and publishing the results. Otherwise, it would probably never see the light of day, never make it beyond a dream in my head, or never worked into a finished state. So, for that, I thank *you*.

I was born in 1970. In the 1980s, as a teenager, I found myself looking back more and more to the comics of the past, to those published before my birth, artifacts of an exciting "age" that I had missed out on, but which lived anew whenever their pages were opened. This love of past things helped fuel my interest in music (The Beatles and Bob Dylan), silent films, old-time radio, and old prose tales. (Poe, Lovecraft, and O. Henry were the favorites of my teen years. Today I consider Nathaniel Hawthorne to be my favorite writer.) Nowadays my interest in the past extends into an area that I had previously never considered, local history. Perhaps this present interest in my own life's history (as I near the age of 40) is apparent in the essay that follows, concerning the origins of **NOZ #1**.

# NO. ONE NOZ

by Rob Imes

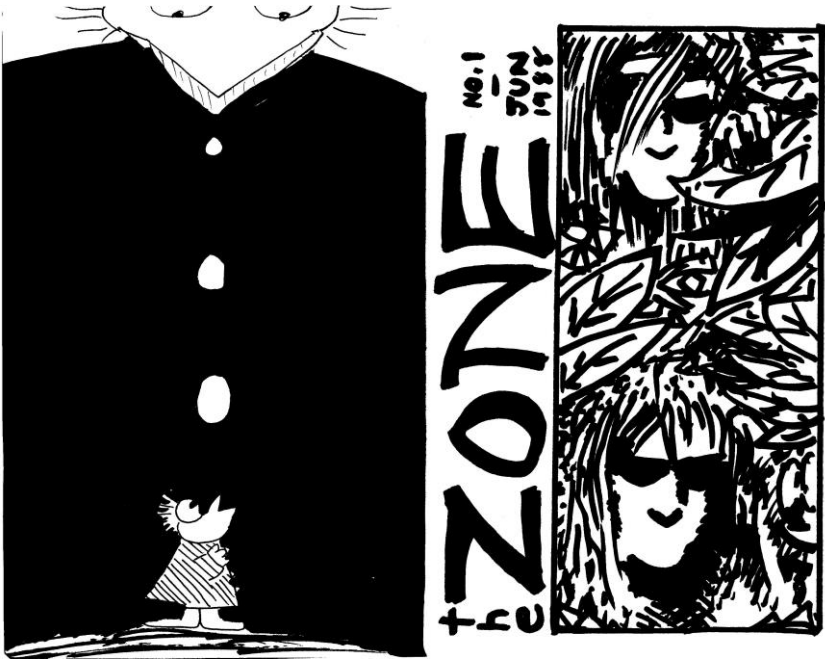
*“[Herman] Melville gathered a collection of miscellaneous poetry and prose as John Marr and Other Sailors, which he published in an edition of twenty-five copies in 1888. Thereafter, he worked slowly on the manuscript of his last novel, which was published after his death as Billy Budd, Sailor, and another volume of poems, Timoleon, which was privately printed in May, 1891. Melville died in September of the same year, unknown to the general public, and vanished into an obscurity that lasted until 1920, when the great revival of his name and work began.”*

The above passage, in a biographical essay about Melville in a paperback copy of *Moby-Dick*, struck and stayed with me when I saw it in Sept. 2007. I have a friend who is a writer, a good one, who has written many stories but not published a book. I know someone else who is a poet, but also without a volume to her name.

My initial thought was that my author friends ought to publish their own “collected works,” even if it was only “an edition of twenty-five copies,” as Melville had done late in life. Even though I know nothing about publishing books, I felt that it could be done and ought to be done – for my own convenience and satisfaction if for no other, so that I might have a copy of their work to put upon my bookshelf. How much this reminds me now of a scene in a recent *Tales of Fantasy* (#44, Nov. 2008), when creator Larry Johnson depicted bound volumes of authors such as Blake, Main, Keeter, Pack, and Tuz on a bookshelf in the background!

I soon made a frantic phone call to my lifelong friend, the author who had not published a book, to make sure that he didn’t throw away anything he wrote, even the inconsequential product of his younger years which perhaps embarrasses him today. If I were to edit a “Complete Works” of his writing, I would want to review that material, every scrap of it! The idea of editing this dream-book (which never got published, and thus remains only a dream) made me consider what works I might have lying around in boxes, my own little scraps worthy of being bound for posterity. It was this notion which resulted in the creation of **NOZ #1**.

In 1988, I was in my high school senior year and editing a short-lived (but long-remembered) “underground magazine” called the **Magic Mushroom**. MM, whose contributors used pen-names to avoid punishment by the school, contained a bit of art and poetry and the occasional short prose, but mostly consisted of articles ranting against the rules of the school and society in general. After a few months of this, I decided to create a companion zine that was non-political, more of a creative arts zine focusing on art and poetry. **THE ZONE #1** (June 1988), which was the one and only issue (since summer vacation soon came, as did graduation), was a 16-page B&W digest-size publication. Because of its lack of “relevance” (compared to the controversial MM), I printed and distributed fewer copies of it than I did MM.



But I liked **THE ZONE**. Its artsy sensibility appealed to me at that age where I was just discovering alternative comics like Chester Brown's *Yummy Fur* and the Joe Sacco-edited *Centrifugal Bumble-Puppy*. The lead story reflected this interest, a comics adaptation of an MM contributor's poem titled "Synthetic Playground." I had a hard time understanding the poem, just from the words, but when I created panels for each of the lines, I was able to enjoy it more, and felt like I was contributing to its impact on the reader. (Not that there *were* any readers!)

The title **THE ZONE** came from my all-time favorite TV series, *The Twilight Zone* (the original 1959-64 B&W series). The front inside cover, accompanying my editorial introduction, showed a whirling spiral design that was surely inspired by the spiral rings of one of *TZ*'s surreal opening sequences. I liked lettering the logo "The **ZONE**" as well... in fact, that spiral whirlpool was again used as the "O" in the logo. I liked the symmetry of the Z and the O followed by the N because of their similar forms; the E balanced things out in a way, but also was different from the other two letters in its shape. I also noticed that if I turned **ZON** sideways that it still spelled **ZON** – the N was now the Z and the Z was now the N! And if I held it upside-down, **ZONE** read **NOZE**. In late 1988, I contemplated doing a **ZONE** #2, but no longer had an audience for it, and concentrated instead (briefly) on trying to get some of my attempts at comics published by one of the alternative publishers.

"**All the Nights of Man**" was drawn, believe it or not, for a high school art class assignment. I was supposed to have graduated in June 1988, but a bout of anxiety attacks (and bad grades in general) resulted in failing many of my classes that semester. To graduate, I took four independent study classes at the end of 1988, one

of them being an art class where I was allowed to draw this comics story for a passing grade. It was based on a prose short story I'd written that year, which can be read on my site (<http://members.tripod.com/~rimes12/prose/allthenights.html>), and was based on a line I'd read in a library book about Norse mythology that referred to Ragnarok, the twilight of the gods, as being the time when all the bad things that were rose again. Since the night is associated with the time when ghosts, vampires and other monsters roam freely, the title "All the Nights of Man" suggests that this was the time when all the horrors that confront man were reborn and regrouped in one last, apocalyptic moment.

The "**Row row row your boat**" page appeared in my high school's literary magazine in 1988 (and won 2<sup>nd</sup> prize in the art category). It came about when I found that the familiar rhyme's line about life being a dream reminded me of the lyric in one of my favorite songs, "Strawberry Fields Forever," about nothing being real. My contribution to the previous year's lit-mag also dealt with suicide in a bathroom, so this was a sequel of sorts. I liked how I was taking comics into a non-comics realm without making it in any way "comic-booky."

"**Putting the Misery Out of Me**" was done in early 1989, very much inspired by Alan Moore (as was "All the Nights of Man") and the election of George Bush. Note the fifth panel, with blood dripping down toward the Presidential seal in homage of the back cover of *Watchmen*. The letters "NRA" are formed by the smoke trails of the rockets above the beggars. The street names are real, by the way.

"**Rimes Flips Out**" was an autobiographical account of that second semester of senior year when I began to have anxiety attacks and was unable to sit in class. I notice that the *Magic Mushroom* gets a mention in panel two, as does the lit-mag art in panel five. My biggest inspiration in doing this piece, back in late 1988 or early 1989, aside from the real-life events themselves, was "Prisoner on the Hell Planet," the artsy 4-page in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*.

"**A Sprinkle of This / A Sprinkle of That**" is a comics adaptation of an article I wrote in *Magic Mushroom* #4 (Summer 1988, the final issue). I actually sent this off to Rip Off Comix in early 1989 but got a rejection notice back, which kinda took the wind out of my sails, so that I stopped submitting stuff anywhere. The Squeaker character was a mascot I created for *Magic Mushroom* who also appeared on the back cover of *The ZONE* #1. The all-text first and last panels of this strip were altered in 2007, to make the references less dated.

"**Marvel Shrugged**" came about because of my dissatisfaction with Steve Ditko's Marvel work of that period. I think I probably submitted this one to Rip Off Comix, too. During the summer of 1992, I finally ordered a copy of Bill Hall's *Ditkomania* fanzine (#32 was the first issue I got) and became a semi-regular contributor. "Marvel Shrugged" was published in *Ditkomania* #33 (Oct. 1992). The title, of course, is a parody of Ayn Rand's novel *Atlas Shrugged*. Marvel was known as Atlas in the 1950s (which is when Rand's novel came out).

The first half of **NOZ #1** is the more artsy half. The second half reflects my more nostalgic side, and is more light-hearted in approach. When I was little, I created comics stories, done on my front porch, which often depicted family members and neighbors as characters. One such neighbor/character was Mickey Voss who lived next door and was a few years younger than me and my friends. As a result, Mickey was often seen as a little brat, and my “Mickey” comics reflected the gang’s condescending attitude toward our young pal. A few years later, circa 1987, I was thinking that if I wanted to use him as a real character in my comics that I ought to give him a better name. I recalled once that Mickey had played an army-type game in his backyard where he was an “M.P.” (military police) and I thought that might be a good, memorable gimmick: a kid called M.P. who always wears an army helmet. So, in late 1988 or early 1989, I re-drew one of my old “Mickey” stories as “**The Day M.P. Died!**” and it is that version which appears in **NOZ #1**. There are many little in-jokes in that story and the people depicted are all real people. (Oops, maybe I shouldn’t say that! “No similarity to persons living or dead,” etc., etc.) The shirt that M.P. wears in the final panel bears the title of a TV show that Mickey liked back then.

“**Tales of Time and Space**” started out as my attempt at doing my own “*Tale of the Watcher*,” a back-up feature in *Tales of Suspense* circa 1963. As a child, the comic which I collected was *Captain America*, and that meant that I eventually sought out issues of the *ToS* series which preceded Cap’s solo book, even those “*Power of Iron Man*” issues before Cap’s stories became part of *ToS*. I grew to love the way comics once were, with simple little back-up tales aimed at general readers who bought comics for a few moments’ pleasure and not to worry how it all fit into the Official Handbook of Marvel continuity. I found that uncomplicated approach to be refreshing, maybe because I sensed that it was dying out and being replaced by something less welcoming and warm-hearted.

I seem to recall that I submitted these two tales (plus “Monkeying Around”) around 1989, to the company Sword-in-Stone who, it was announced in *The Comics Journal*, had acquired the rights to Charlton’s comics. I’d always wanted to work for Charlton, so I sent these off, but never heard anything back.

The “Far Side” style gag panels on the back page of **NOZ #1** were done in 1988 with the intention of submitting them to my high school newspaper, but I showed them to a couple friends whose reaction to them was lukewarm (they are supposed to laugh) and so I put them back in a box.

The back inside cover was drawn by my sister Katherine circa 1984-85, when she was around 11 or 12. She did a few abstract style drawings like this that I’ve kept and which I’ll likely use in future issues of **NOZ**. Future issues may also contain contributions by others, not just me.

And if you wondered, **NOZ** is pronounced “*nah-z*” (at least that’s how I say it).  
-- **Rob Imes**

## Recently Received by R. Imes

Since joining the UFO on Feb. 3rd, I received three UFO publications in the mail, all of which were brand-new issues! Fortunately I liked everything I got, so this was an example of both quality *and* quantity being achieved.

Jim Main's **HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY** mini-comic was my introduction to the world of mini-comics, as I've seen very few of them. (I have only two others in my entire comics collection!) This was much more enjoyable than I thought it would be – obviously a lot of work went into this by the editor and the contributors – and I hope it becomes an annual tradition. The theme is perfectly suited to the mini-comic format since the comic can double as a Valentine's Day card, and arrives in the mail in the size of envelope that many greeting cards use. Well-done!

I also received Jim Kingman's **COMIC EFFECT #47** which was a wonderful tribute issue to **Julius Schwartz**, with many famous pros picking their favorite issues edited by him, as well as interesting comments throughout by Jim Kingman himself. A classy fanzine which I look forward to contributing to in the near future. (I want to do an article about Team America!)

**COMET TALES #20** by Jim Pack was an impressive publication, which I'd never seen before! The production level was first-rate with a colorful cover and excellent paper quality. (My one complaint was that the out-of-date UFO Checklist on the back cover was a bit blurry-looking. Unfortunately, the only difference between the June and Fall UFO Checklists was the T-Frags issues!) The s-f action tale of **Manjack**, an interstellar assassin, reminded me in its style of 1970s titles like *Deathlok* and *Warlock* (which is a good thing). As I read it, I got the feeling that I might have been reading a lost Atlas-Seaboard comic. The tale ends on a note that can either be pursued in future stories or else left as-is, for the reader himself to wonder about Manjack's fate. Art-wise, I particularly liked the way in which the eternal night sky of outer space was filled with stars, which really made me feel like I was actually there! The "dessert" of the issue was the fun letters-page where readers recalled early small-press zines, and Jim's own list of current worthy zines.

Other (non-UFO) new releases worth checking out are: **Ancient Tales from the Future #1** which has a sci-fi retelling of the story of Jonah, available for \$4.00 postpaid from **James Rubino**, Box 760351, San Antonio, TX 78245 or visit [www.jamesrubino.com](http://www.jamesrubino.com) for more info. **Tales of Fantasy #45** with a great story reminiscent of a pre-Marvel monster tale available for \$3.00 postpaid from **Larry Johnson**, 9 St. Peter St. #4, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130-4907. The URL of Larry's new website is <http://www.geocities.com/lewbrown75/LarryJohnsonartist.html> *Ditkomania* contributor **Ceylon Anderson** publishes his own digest-size literature and poetry zine titled **Venetian Blind Drunk**. The most recent issue (#4, Autumn 2008) contained original material inspired by Portland's Chinatown area. Ceylon's novel in progress at the back was best. For more info, email [nceylon@yahoo.com](mailto:nceylon@yahoo.com)