

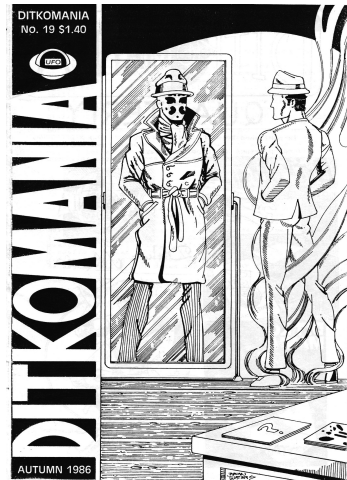
DITKOMANIA Returns to the UFO!

by Rob Imes

Well, I couldn't help myself, it seems. As you are no doubt aware by now, the most recent issue of *Ditkomania* (DM #72, April 2009) was released as a UFO title, despite my previously-stated intention to keep DM out of the UFO. But since my goal with the new DM is to recapture the enjoyment I had reading the old DM, it was inevitable that I'd find myself making DM a UFO title again, as it had been during the 1980s. To that end, I have chosen to use the old 1980s style UFO symbol on the covers (instead of the modern UFO symbol, which doesn't have quite the same nostalgic appeal for me) as well as replicating the look and wording of the old UFO Checklists. I hope that nobody minds these old-time variations of the symbol and checklist; I let Nic know of my plans to do so and, having heard no objection, went through with it.

You will notice on the UFO Checklist in DM #72 that I have included prices and snail-mail addresses, as well as email addys and URLs, when known. Larry Blake noted in DM's lettercol last year that the publications that I mention in DM ought to contain real addresses so that they can be obtained from those readers who aren't online. I know that at least three of DM's contributors aren't online; I myself didn't have home access to the internet during the period when I published DM #64-69 in 2008. Providing mailing addresses is a courtesy to all readers and could mean the difference between someone ordering your book or not.

When I revived DM in 2008, I didn't know that the UFO was still in existence. Heck, I didn't know it was still in existence when I bought my first DM (#32) back in August 1992! My only exposure to the UFO had been in DM back issues from the 1980s that DM's then-editor/publisher sent me in 1993, as thanks for my submissions. I saw the UFO checklists in those 1980s DMs, but it never occurred to me to write any of the addresses to request a UFO title; I assumed they were no longer valid. (Indeed, the address of DM's then-editor changed around the same time that he left the UFO in 1989.) It's too bad; I missed out! (And lately I've been playing catch-up by buying some of the old zines on eBay.)



The first issue of *Ditkomania* was published in January 1983, "oversized and stapled at the corner," as was noted in *Tetragrammaton Fragments* back in 1987. In 1984, DM #7 introduced the digest-size format which DM continues with to this day. And in early 1985, DM #12 was released, its first UFO issue. During this period several UFO members contributed to the zine, including Jim Main, Steve Keeter, Steve Shipley, and Larry Blake. Mike Tuz wrote a series of reviews on Ditko's pre-Code work, while Brian Waters illustrated a comics serial titled "The Last Tim Boo Ba Story" that ran through several issues. DM #27 (early 1989) was the conclusion of the serial, and also the final UFO issue.

DM's post-UFO period was followed by longer waits between issues. DM #28 came out in the summer of 1989, and DM #29 at the end of 1989. DM #30 was an extra-thick issue collecting all the chapters of "The Last Tim Boo Ba" story; I don't know *when* exactly that issue was published, but presumably sometime in 1990. The next issue, DM #31, contained an editorial urging readers to contribute if they wished to receive an issue (instead of just sending money). I saw a mention of DM in the *Overstreet Price Guide* in August 1992 and sent off for a copy; I received the most recent issue, #32. This means that there were only 5 issues of DM published between the summers of 1989 and 1992. And those 5 issues (#28-32) were the first five to follow DM's departure from the UFO. Presumably a lack of submissions, compared to the UFO era, had taken their toll on the zine's frequency.

Fortunately, this began to change in 1992. After receiving DM #32, I submitted some articles and artwork, which formed the bulk of the very next issue, #33 (Oct. 1992). The long-planned Chronological Ditko Checklist dominated DM #34-41, often only accompanied by an editorial and a Martin Hirschak cover. Marty (who had just discovered DM in late 1992) submitted a slew of potential covers to use – a fortunate coincidence since these Checklist issues needed many (and were released at a rapid clip throughout 1993). Another bit of serendipity was that 1993, when most of the Checklist issues appeared, was DM's 10th anniversary as well as the 40th anniversary of Ditko's career as a published comics artist. DM #41 was the final Checklist issue and had a cover by then-Marvel editor Mort Todd (who also drew the cover of the current issue, #72).

Perhaps DM reached its peak in 1994-95, with the publication of DM #42-44, which contained color covers. I had an article in DM #45 (May 1995), and also drew the cover. Tristan Lapoussiere, a French Ditko fan who later wrote a book about the artist, also had an article in that issue. Unfortunately, DM once again became dormant afterward, due to the lack of new Ditko comics and the arrival of more impressive-looking pro-zines like *Jack Kirby Collector*. The internet also became a factor, and I recall that I first learned of the new Ditko comic *Strange Avenging Tales* #1 from a mention on Chrissie Harper's Ditko website. News of the new Ditko comic propelled DM back into action, this time as a double-sided one-sheet newsletter beginning with #46 (March 1997). My own review of the new Ditko comic (sent to the editor as an email) appeared in the next issue. Initially the newsletter-format DM was a monthly, but in 1998 it reverted to digest-size zine format again, although at a reduced page count (usually 12 pages).

THE BLUE PLAQUE PUBLICATIONS NEWSLETTER
#1 MAY 1999



DITKOMANIA #62 (JUNE 1999) BPP



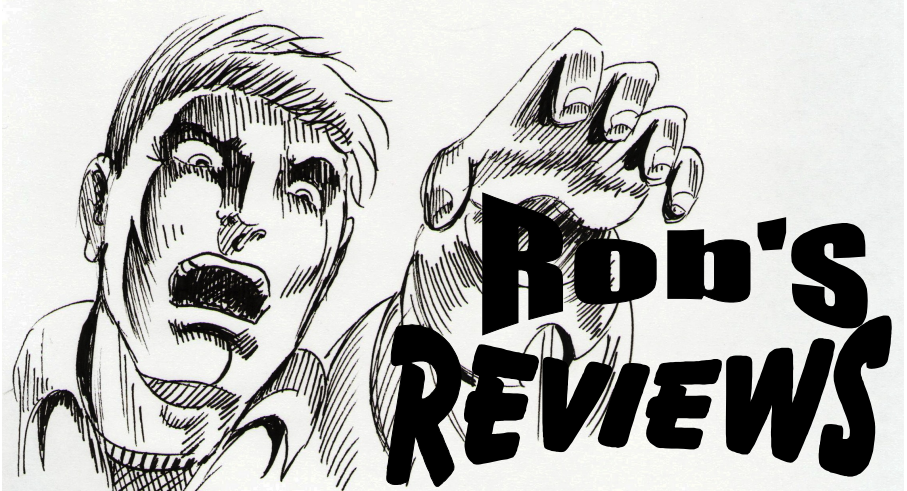
The final issues of the original run of DM were published in 1999. That same year (likely unknown to much of DM's readership), the BPP was revived by Jim Main and Steve Keeter. The first issue of the BPP newsletter was published in May 1999, was 12 pages long and had a Dick Ayers cover. The penultimate issue of DM (#62) was published in June 1999, was 12 pages long, and also had a Dick Ayers cover! In fact, when one reads the

two issues back to back, one gets the sense that DM #62 would have been right at home as a BPP title, exhibiting the same sense of fan enthusiasm that the BPP was trying to promote.

Unfortunately, the very next issue of DM (#63, Oct. 1999) was the last issue. It was not announced as such. By this time, Blake Bell's "*Ditko Looked Up*" website was in full swing and the internet was more prominent than ever. Ditko's new mainstream output had subsided considerably as Ditko concentrated more on his independent works, published with his longtime editor Robin Snyder. The final new Ditko comics (until 2008) were published in 2000: *The 176-Page Package* (featuring the return of Mr. A. and Killjoy, among others) and *The 32-Page Package* (a collection of editorial cartoon style "Tsk! Tsk!" one-pagers). In a 2000 update to his site, Blake Bell noted that DM's editor was considering its retirement. The following year it was official, DM was over, and a page of testimonials from contributors to DM (including yours truly) appeared on Blake's site in tribute. Coincidentally, Ditko himself also took a break from publishing comics. While he continued to write essays for Robin Snyder's newsletter *The Comics!* (including a series on his Spider-Man work), and a thick TPB of older Ditko material appeared in 2002 (under the title *The Avenging World*), no new Ditko comics were published after the announcement of DM's retirement in 2001.

In 2002, I emailed DM's ex-publisher and asked if I could make 2nd Printings of some of the old DM issues for people I knew who might be interested in the material. I also asked him if he had any more back issues of DM available. He replied that no back issues were available, but that I could make copies of the old issues, if I wanted to. I didn't make any 2nd Printings at that time, but did xerox a few DM articles for others. I had subscribed to Robin's newsletter in 2001, but let it run out after a year. In early 2008, I had been looking over my old DMs and decided to email DM's ex-publisher once again to see if he had any more back issues. I looked for his email address in my computer and discovered that I had already asked him that question back in 2002, so instead I asked him if he would revive DM. He replied that he had no plans to revive DM. So I looked on eBay to see if any back issues were available there and was surprised to see a "Lot of 5" DMs (including #45, the one I'd drawn the cover for) sell for almost \$200! Clearly there was a need for DM once again, despite the internet. And, in fact, the internet could be used to help promote DM. Reprints of back issues, as well as new issues, could be put on eBay, which (if they sold for a lot) might cover much of the costs of printing the issues. The normal obstacle to doing a fanzine – that it costs too much money for too little return – could perhaps be solved by using eBay auctions to bring in extra money (and help promote the existence of the zine in the process).

I suggested all of this to DM's ex-publisher, and was given his blessing to go ahead and reprint back issues as well as revive the zine with brand-new ones. To distinguish different printings and emphasize the collectable aspect, I decided that all new DM issues would now be individually numbered by me, with any reprints clearly designated as 2nd Printings. Unfortunately, it didn't work out like I had planned: when many copies of something become available, their prices drop. Still, I was able to bring some attention to DM through my eBay auctions, including the attention of my fellow UFOer Jim Main, who bought two copies early on, and sent one to Mike Tuz who has since become a frequent presence in DM's letterspage. I think Mike then let Larry Blake know about DM's revival, and Larry subsequently sent me several covers to use (DM #67, 68, 70, and one I will probably use as the cover of DM #75.) I began buying 1980s zines myself in more recent months, many of them UFO titles, and it was like discovering unknown 1980s issues of DM, since they evoked that same infectious sense of fannish enthusiasm. I felt the time had come for DM to return to the UFO with issue #72, ironically the reverse of the number 27 (which was the final UFO issue of DM back in 1989). Now, 20 years later after it left the group, DM has returned, picking up where it left off, and hopefully with many great issues ahead for both the zine and the UFO!



I should probably come up with a regular title for my TF columns, but I haven't been able to come up with one that has really grabbed me yet (I was considering either "*Funnyfarm Fancies*," which is what I call my webpage, or "*Shibboleth's Revenge*"), so right now we'll just stick with these basic self-explanatory titles for my stuff. Anyway, this page will contain my comments and feedback on the UFO releases that I've received in the mail since the previous issue of *T-Frags*. I should probably state up front that I tend to be a bit long-winded so I apologize if my length appears to suggest a self-importance concerning my own opinions, and I acknowledge that all of the below merely reflects my own prejudices and biases when it comes to comics that I enjoy. Any nit-picking attitude in this column is just a result of my attention caught by something that causes me to go off on a tangent about it.

I have received SIX publications in the mail since the previous *T-Frags*, which is a goodly amount to receive. On the other hand, most of them came from only *two* people (Jim Main and Nic). I hope that next time there will be some more stuff from the other members, so that Jim and Nic don't have the burden of issuing most of the books in each UFO Checklist.

T-FRAGS #205 (Winter 2009)

This was the first TF to which I had contributed, and in fact one of the few times in my life that I've ever contributed an article to something I haven't published myself! As Nic noted in the Chairman's blog later, there were a few typos in my column, which Nic was forced to retype because of how I had sent it to him. (And some of the typos were ones that Spellcheck wouldn't have caught anyway.) So, it was a learning experience for me and I'm now sending this column as a PDF file, so we'll see how it goes this time around. Anyway, the color covers are really impressive as is the layout of the issue -- very clear and reader-friendly. Personally I would have changed the title "Is the UFO Dead?" to something like "Back From The Dead!" -- in other words, to focus more on the positive side and not put any doubts in someone's mind about the prospects of the UFO's future. I'd like to think that the UFO will still be here long after we're gone. As long as people are putting pen to paper (or stylus to screen, or whatever it is they do on computers), then I think there will be a need for the UFO, especially since publishing a small-press zine is usually a solitary activity, and putting out your own publication can often feel like tossing a message in a bottle into a vast uncaring ocean. It was a bit funny for me to read the comments about *NOZ* #1 being dark and disturbing, since I think only half of the comic could be read that way, with the other half

being kinda silly and retro. Still, I was grateful that people took the time to comment about it. I missed seeing a column by Steve Keeter in TF #205, but I got my Skeet fix by reading his BPP *Bluesletter* column which came out around the same time. (Steve tells me that he has a column in this new TF, and I look forward to reading it, as well as all the other columns in this issue.) Actually, TF #205 is probably my favorite of the recent TFs that I have.

COMIC FAN #4 (Spring 2009)

I have to admit that I've only had a chance to read a couple of articles from this issue so far, but I definitely look forward to reading the whole thing soon. I was not expecting how high the production values were going to be in this magazine, like what TwoMorrows publishes! Highly impressive and I would say this is hands-down the best UFO issue that I've received in the mail since joining in February. I like how the mag is professional in appearance, but not so "pro" that I would feel intimidated contributing an illo or article (unlike how I feel about, say, *Back Issue!* magazine from TwoMorrows). The front cover art is a little weaker than perhaps it ought to be, although it does make sense to use it as the cover because of it being in color and because of it showing the T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents (the topic of two articles in the issue). One critique I have is in the "Kirby Tribute" article by Sam Gafford: Two of the Kirby original art pages are fuzzy and look like they were taken from eBay auction photos (because of the camera icon in the corner). Also, I would have preferred that Sam had concentrated even more on his personal history of reading Kirby's work over the years, and less on the retelling of Kirby's career. I always like to hear about people's memories that they associate with buying certain comics, so I would have liked to have read more anecdotes about Sam's reactions to Kirby's comics as they came out, the thrill (or horror) of reading such-and-such issue for the first time, buying it at such-and-such drugstore, and so on. The basic facts of Kirby's career have been covered more than any other comic artist, so I was hoping to get more of a sense of what it was like to have been alive in the 1960s buying Kirby comics off the rack for the first time, from a more personal perspective. Anyway, this is looking like a great issue, and I hope to contribute stuff to the next issue.

DREAMER #1 (April 2009)

In the latest DM, Larry Johnson mentioned that comics creators need to show, not tell. But I think sometimes (especially in the case of modern comics) there is a tendency for comics to follow too closely the techniques of film and don't do enough "telling" to inform the reader what they are being shown. Obviously this is a first issue, and is setting up things for the future, but I don't think there was enough information given to the reader to know what is going on. We are witnesses to a series of scenes, but I didn't feel emotionally connected to what I was seeing. I would have preferred more writing, more explanation, but then that may reflect my bias as a fan of more traditional comics storytelling. Mini-comics are quick reads, so I hope the next issue comes soon, or else I might forget what it was all about! Also, the UFO Checklist on the back was way too small to read. I think instead a freshly-typed Checklist should have been used (as I did with DM), made specifically for the smaller mini-comic format, so that you can read it without needing to get a magnifying glass.

PORTALS #1 (April 2009)

This was more successful and memorable than *Dreamer* #1, I think, perhaps because of the larger format and additional pages. The production quality was nearly as good as *T-Frags* #205, but most of the content was not geared to my admittedly old-fashioned tastes. The art by Joel Cotejar was very good, though – more in the style that I like than the other tales. (For example, in the lead story, the way in which nearly every character has spiky hair got in the way of my enjoyment – it just looked too trendy to me.) The two middle tales seemed more like teasers than actual stories, especially "Hot Wings." Although *Portals* is apparently a rotating anthology series (and anthology comics *are* my favorite kind of comics) I would

have liked to have seen one story with a sense of closure to it: a story with a beginning, middle, and end. Compare this comic to Steve Ditko's recent releases, which have also been anthologies; some of his tales are told complete in only one page. As much as I liked the last story in *Portals*, I think the story flew by too fast in 7 pages. Compare this to a typical Charlton ghost comic which usually had complete stories in only 8 pages. Obviously if all of the stories are intended to be serials then they aren't going to conclude in one installment, but it just seems like there isn't as much story here as I'm used to reading. I feel like I'm only seeing the first few minutes of a movie, but haven't seen enough of it yet to get me involved. Maybe cut it down to 3 serials instead of 4, and make the installments meatier.

SUNWING #4 (April 2009)



This is the new issue of *Sunwing*, despite the date of 2008 in the indicia. The editorial notes that "this will be the last issue of *Sunwing* for awhile," but I sure hope not. This zine reminded me a lot of the 1980s zines which I had recently bought, such as a copy of Jim Main's *PPFSZT! #15 (an issue which also contained a Larry Blake cover-featured tale). This is precisely the kind of comic that I was hoping to receive in the mail when I joined the UFO – and thought I probably *wouldn't* receive, because I thought that they probably didn't make 'em like this anymore! This was a fun superhero comic told in the straight-forward traditional manner that I prefer. Which doesn't mean that it is not a complex tale -- it's actually a thought-provoking, wonderfully nuanced script which doesn't portray everything in terms of black and white. In other words, what might look like a hero to us may look like a villain to those who live in an alternate dimension. I was moved and pleasantly surprised by the change of heart that Professor Peterson had at the end of the comic, making the character seem more human -- a man who makes a mistake and feels sorry about it. This was my 2nd favorite of the latest UFO releases (*Comic Fan!* #4 being my favorite this time around).

COSMIC MAN #2 (Spring 2009)

I received this just in time to include it in my customized UFO Checklist that appears in DM #72 (while *Sunwing* #4, alas, arrived a day too late, but it will go in the June UFO Checklist that I'll be putting in DM #73). However, I hadn't actually had a chance to read it until now. Once again, the production values are stellar and impressive. This comic could go on the shelf in any comics shop in America. The art inside isn't particularly to my taste, but it does tell the story. I didn't care for the lettering, obviously done on a computer using the "Comic Sans" font (or whatever it's called). Sometimes the words would be small or big depending on the space in the balloon, but this made me think the character was whispering when it was small and shouting when it was big! Unfortunately, the first half of the comic was a bit unsatisfying, as I tried to figure out what was going on. But the second half of the comic redeems the issue for me, as we are introduced to a plethora of small-press superheroes who unite to fight a common foe. Whereas I had thought the first half of the story didn't have enough of a sense of urgency for the events that were being shown, and failing that, at least a sense of humor in the dialogue (as action films will often have, where the hero will make a wisecrack amidst the chaos), but the second half of the comic answered that critique by sharpening the sense of momentum and urgency (introducing the heroes one by one in short establishing scenes) and then giving us some humor to break up the tension (when Titan said "Have we met?" as he crashed two saucers together with his hands). I'm looking forward to next issue now!

Well, that's it! Thanks for the zines, and keep 'em coming! See you in TF #207! – R.I.