HOW DO I CREATE A ZINE?

Let's discuss the 'physical' aspect of your zine first.

In the past, before computer printers, before photocopiers, fans had to print their own zines using everything from beds of gelatin to expensive and very complicated type-setting printing presses, and many a cheaper method between those two extremes. Which is not relevant to what I'm discussing here. This is not a history lesson.

Imagine you have access to a typewriter (even though we all know you're going to use your computer or laptop keyboard).

Imagine your zine will ultimately consist of a number of paper sheets stapled together (no staples on your computer screen).

Imagine you are filling in one blank page after another with your furious typing, leaving blank spots to paste illustrations into (easy enough to do in Word).

Imagine you have some means of printing multiple copies (just tell your printer to print out X number) and THEN, having collated them, staple each copy together, stuff them into envelopes, and mail them from your nearest Post Office (to heck with that, just send them as email attachments).

My point being, while what you ACTUALLY create is a computer construct distributed online and perhaps hosted online, what you are actually DOING (at least in your mind) is composing an old fashioned paper fanzine, where a page is a page by damn and not some sort of continuous, constantly updating computer screen image. In short, a unique and discreetly separate entity which can be downloaded and printed out all-of-a-piece as an honest-to-god hard-copy issue of a fanzine. That's your goal.

Easy enough to envision. Bunch of paper pages, maybe with illustrations. Fine. But what about content?

TITLE. This is important. Dull title = dull reading in the minds of many. I use titles like:

- THE SPACE CADET GAZETTE
- CORUSCATING CONUNDRUMS
- THE FANACTICAL FANACTIVIST
- THE FRENETIC FANAC REVIEW
- ENTROPY BLUES
- BELOVED BINEMA

The above may not be 'literary' titles, but they are memorable, they stick in the reader's minds, stand out from the crowd of competing titles. So pick a good one!

TABLE OF CONTENT. Do you need one? Maybe if it your zine is fifty pages long. But you should start off by doing something short, maybe 6 to 10 pages. Assume your reader will do you the courtesy of at least browsing through all of your zine. Throw in a table of content if it makes you feel good, but it is not really necessary. (A really long listing might actually put readers off!)

EDITORIAL. For sure you should have one. You might want to wait until you have actually finished most of the zine first, then your editorial will better reflect what you actually did as opposed to what you wanted to do. A light touch is best. Make sure your reader finds it interesting, as it will set the tone for what follows.

MAIN ARTICLES. These, of course, will reflect your genre interests. Sf film? Comics? Books? Illustrations & art? Old TV shows? Convention experiences? Favourite authors? SF Gaming? Model making? Or best of all, all of the above? The wider the range of your interests, the more you can write about, the more interesting your zine will be.

Whatever the topic, you can focus on nostalgic reminiscences, hard hitting reviews, trends you'd like to see develop, popular misconceptions, fun trivia, the latest rumours of upcoming productions… the sky's the limit. But don't concentrate on news or factual aspects. Information like that can be found a million places on the web. What makes your zine attractive and enticing is that everything you write about is seen through the prism of your own subjective viewpoint. No other zine or web site can be the product of what's in your mind. These are YOUR words and thoughts recorded 'on paper.' And THAT'S why people will want to read your zine. News and info they can get elsewhere. But an interesting and original viewpoint? One that is amusing and entertaining? Now that's worth sitting down and taking a few quiet minutes to read, a sort of communing with the editor/writer, that one-on-one relationship I mentioned. That's why the personal touch is so vital. Otherwise no one will read your zine, or at least, not more than once.

It is up to you if you want to do two columns or three, or just one filling the page from one side margin to the other. Up to you if you choose portrait or landscape format. Up to you if you want to design to be most readable on screen, or on paper. (Some faneds do both, seems like a lot of extra work!)

But don't go overboard. Don't use every font in your computer just because you've got them. (I stick with Times Roman, it is good enough for me.) Mind you, if you really want your zine to appear old fashioned, `use the courier font. That's what typewriters used`. While clear and easy to read, it looks quaint now. Especially because it doesn't kern, doesn't adjust spacing between letters. No, use as few fonts as possible. Otherwise people get annoyed.

And above all, don't pick up the idiotic 'graphic arts' habits of today, like overlaying text on photographs or art. Damned hard, often impossible, to read. The essence of modern graphic art is the 'look' of the page, as if each page were a separate piece hanging in an art gallery. The contents of the page aren't worth squat in the eyes of the composer. The content suffers. The content is abandoned by the editor, then abandoned by the reader. When I ask you to contemplate

publishing your ish, I don't mean creating something designed to lie around on a coffee table looking trendy. I want you to publish something people will want to read. I'm talking written communication. Not this modern art b.s. Just so we're clear.

SHORT FICTION. I wouldn't. I read hundreds of fanzines a year, but I always skip over the fiction. Not one of my interests, apart from the occasional anthology from one of my favourite authors. Most fan fiction tends to be abysmally bad, at least by my opinion. Your thoughts on the latest SF film you've seen may be stimulating and enlightening, your tale of the sword-wielding Thongar of Carp rescuing the beautiful Hungrahilde from the dreaded Glem, perhaps less so…

POETRY. Unless you're very, very good, keep it short. I will make the effortto read it. I like almost anything on certain topics, like the crumbling glory of Martian ruins, for instance. Vogon poetry is always welcome. We all know that.

YOUR OWN ILLUSTRATIONS. Well, wide leeway here. It doesn't matter if you're bad. Sometimes it adds to the charm. As long as the caption and/or concept is cute, amusing, or intriguing. In most fan art it is the idea that counts, not so much the execution. Besides, there are numerous fan artists, mostly in the states (Brad Foster, Steve Stiles, Teddy Harvia, Sheryl Birkhead spring to mind), who will send you splendid illos, even cover art, providing you send them a copy of your zine with their art. The more popular your zine, the more pleased fan artists will be to send you art. Just don't abuse the privilege. It's THEIR art, not your property. Don't 'touch' it up, or 'improve' on it. Don't use it more than once, unless you have their permission. Be respectful. You'll never lack for art if you treat the artists right.

LETTERS OF COMMENT. Or 'locs' as fans call them. First issue? No problem. Let people know beforehand what you're planning, and with any luck (as happened with my first issue of SPACE CADET) locs will arrive in time to publish in your first issue.

Of course, in the old days, people sent hard copies through the mail, and many a fan receiving one felt obligated to write back. Nowadays, with the internet, few people bother. Still, if you exchange your zines with fellow faneds, and you take the trouble to loc their zines, at least some of them will loc you back. Sometimes the loc column is one of the most interesting features in an issue. Loc columns can be very lively.

Some faneds like to edit the locs they receive by topic, for example, they might print all the paragraphs dealing with the latest probe to Mars in one section, then follow with all the paragraphs dealing with the decline of SF clubs in another. This is not to my taste. I prefer to treat each loc as an individual communication and run it in full by itself, interjecting my own comments between paragraphs where I feel this is warranted. Some people are horrified by this, feeling it interrupts the flow of the loc, but I feel it brings locs to greater life by creating a conversational feel in its presentation. But that's just me. Handle locs as you will.

In general, the more you print of a given loc, the more likely it will be that the loc writer in question will write you more locs. And that's a good thing, not to be discouraged.

CONTRIBUTIONS. If your friends and acquaintances want to contribute articles and art of their own, and their work meets your standards, then by all means! It's a great way to fill out your zine if you're having trouble coming up with enough material by yourself. Just be sure they understand your zine won't appear until you're good and ready to unleash it on the unsuspecting world, or "soonest" as we say in fandom. Don't let your contributors time pressure you. Make sure they understand.

And I'm sure there's lots more you can think of to add to the contents. Things I would never think of, if only because your experience and your perceptions are different from mine. All part of what makes your zine interesting to read for me. And for others.

Well, now that you've polished your zine to perfection, created a 10 to 20 page word document packed with goodies, perhaps you've pdf'd it, what now?

Why, go to article three – WHERE DO I PUBLISH IT?