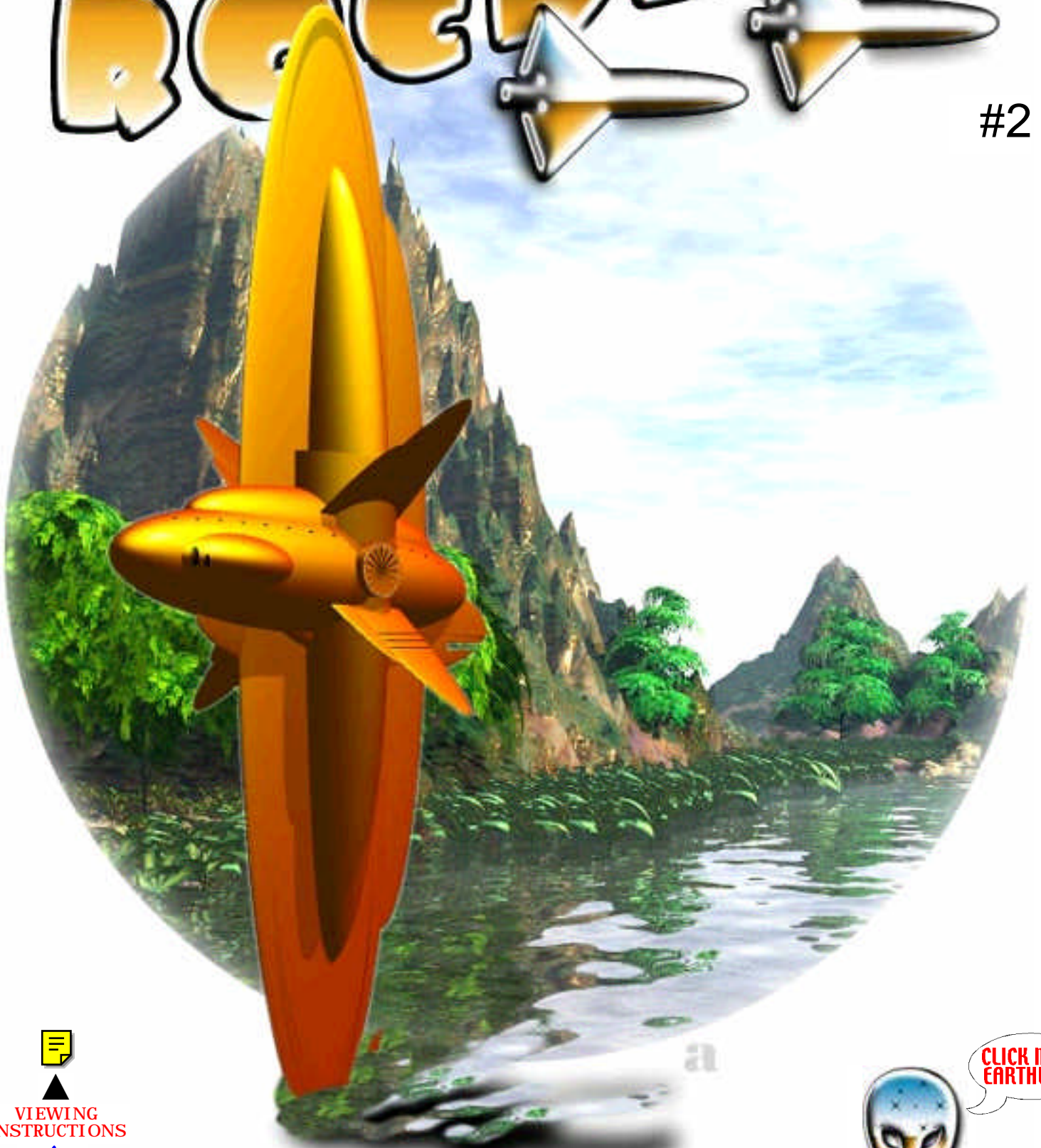


# SMOKIN' ROCKETS

#2



**VIEWING  
INSTRUCTIONS**



**CLICK ME  
EARTHLING!**

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# SMOKIN' ROCKETS

#2 • December, 2000

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Special thanks to Arnie's  
production help.

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## FAQS ABOUT THIS ISSUE. . .

Doing fanzines electronically is a learning process, especially when using PDF files and Acrobat Reader/Writer. I'm largely getting the process strained through Arnie's sieve; as he learns the do's and don't, he passes them on so I don't have to go through the same discovery cycle. For example, he learned that some fans have accounts with limitations on the size files they'll receive. To counter this, we're dividing zines in two or even three parts. And we're sending most of them out via a HotMail account because, frankly, HotMail is the lowest common denominator — if HotMail will send and receive a file, any of the more sophisticated ISPs will handle it with ease.

Several people commented that they had trouble navigating the zines. Acrobat provides several options. Personally, I usually first look at the page fitted to the screen, so I can see the full-page layout and study the art. Then I boost the type size, and read it column by column. There are a lot of options across the top of the Acrobat page to select the form that seems best to you. Heck, you can even rotate the page in order to read it standing on your head, or sideways (in case you're lying down in front of your computer.) Alan has also provided hot buttons on the index page, and on every sheet for "Previous Page" and "Next Page."

I'm curious to know if most fans read the zine on screen or a printed-out page. It's certainly desirable to look at the layout and art on screen, to view the zine in its optimal form, even if you wait to read the words on paper.

I'm also curious to know if most recipients save electronic fanzines to disk, or print hard copy for their collections. In this household, Arnie saves the e-zines he gets to hard drive in files under each editor's name. I've been printing out the ones I get. Do most of the readers make color prints? Billy Pettit recently visited and gifted me with a color printout of my first issue. Seeing how pretty it was put a new printer high on our "To Buy" list.

This issue Arnie's Golden Bagel column discusses electronic fanzines and some of the problems they face, and suggests a new method of distribution. Robert Lichtman's Entropy Reprints column features a piece by Francis Towner Laney that hasn't been seen for many years. The guest writer this issue is Bill Kunkel, describing a brush with the exotic world of stand-up comedy.

The design of Smokin' Rockets is entirely thanks to the artistry of Alan White. Alan's vision for the visuals is sparked by his experience with the electronic tools; he wrings things out of the medium that continually surprise and delight me. I've never worked on a fanzine so closely with an artist and layout editor, and it's an excellent experience. And with each new heading, cartoon or painting, Alan reinforces my opinion of his skill.

I hope you enjoy the results of the collaboration. Keep on smokin', rockets! 🚀





**By Joyce Katz**

There's an eerie and unnatural calm in fanzine fandom now. The list serves are mostly quiet — is it the result, I wonder, of the paralysis of the nation due to the crazy election screw-ups? Yet fanzines fall into my mailbox almost daily, and several new electronic fanzines have been introduced. I like to fancy that the reason the line is quiet is simply that, emboldened by the ease of modern distribution, everyone is at home typing up a fanzine.

Electronic distribution seems almost frightening in its ease, even though it still takes as much design and effort as ever to write and layout a zine. In fact, because of the more unlimited capabilities, the design and layout are more demanding, as we try to make use of the options available, such as color, photographs, more prepossessing art.

But that's where the task ends. No ink-under-the-fingers, toner-on-the-floor. No paper cuts, no collating and stapling. Best of all, no preparations of mailing labels and envelopes, and no costly trips to the post office. With little effort beyond a press of a button, the zine is zapped to the electronic mailboxes of fans around the world.

In fact, this ease has alarmed some fans, as they worry about a future in which dozens of these electronic fanzines are whizzing through the Internet and colliding in overstuffed mailboxes.

Some folks worry about the recipients' costs to receive and print out too many electronic zines. There is of course a simple cure — simply don't print or keep the ones you don't like. Don't open those downloads that you don't want to receive.

Request removal from the mailings you wish to skip.

It is undeniably possible, however unlikely, that the problem of too many fanzines could arrive. Fanzines could become spam...but one person's loathsome canned meat is another's tasty snack. I suspect judicious choice of which fanzines you read could solve that problem. And isn't it rather magnificent that suddenly we're not contemplating the death of fandom, but actually fearing an abundance of fanactivity?

Until real trouble arises, I think electronic distribution is opening a wonderful new era in fanzine fandom. Suddenly anyone can afford to publish as often as they wish. Time and talent and the effort of layout and design may curtail the numbers of zines, but I believe electronic distribution will produce a new golden age for fanzine fandom.

Will it open the door for new fans to find us? Absolutely. Will it encourage impetuous and exuberant fanac? Most probably. Will the recipients have to use judgment about which ones they read? Well, hasn't that always been the case?

There are still many unanswered questions. Would it be better to link your zine to a website that could hold most of the bells and whistles? Would it be better to post your zine on line and let others make up their own minds about downloading? There are pros and cons to every point, and it may take a while before everything gets sorted out.

Meanwhile, I'm having a lot of fun doing my thing. And I hope many of you will take me up on my offer to help you try out this mode of publishing for yourself.



## Sci-Fi or SF

Few subjects raise such heated opinions as the question of what to call our favorite reading material. Normally mild-mannered fans rise in wrath, drops of spittle flying from their mouths, to denounce one while championing the other.

The literature shed its cumbersome moniker of “scientifiction” early in the last century, and that name is now reserved only for sentimental reference by a few of us who love rolling the syllables around in our mouths, and enjoy the way it forces a smile to our lips.

The term SF, pronounced lovingly as “es-ef” by its fans, once was almost like a handshake of greeting between its readers. Now that over 30 million Americans avow themselves to be fans of science fiction, it is difficult to remember when it was scorned as “that crazy Buck Rogers stuff” and shunned by most librarians.

The third-class (or worse) status of science fiction was something fans struggled to better. We were all missionaries back then, eager to enthuse others. And why not? It was not at all unusual for a teenaged science fiction fan to be completely on his own, no one else with whom to discuss the latest prozines. It was a thrill to meet even one other person who read science fiction — in fact, it usually sparked the formation of a “science fiction club” and then those two members would plan efforts to find others to join with them, usually with only limited success.

I remember one summer evening in Poplar Bluff, Missouri in the late 1950s. The Public Library held a special event to attract more readers of anything at all, and Ray “Duggie” Fisher was asked to make a presentation about space. He was thrilled by the opportunity to promote science fiction, and hauled our telescope down to the lawn of the library to give on-the-spot looks at the sky to anyone he could interest.

Did it attract more readers? Well, not that we ever knew. One viewer looked through the telescope at the moon, then backed away and said, “Hell, that don’t look like no green cheese!” Proving that the moon was not a milk product was about all we accomplished.

The term “SF” never really caught on with the masses, not in the 50s and not now. Most people weren’t sure what it stood for. It was misread for San Francisco, and Sexual Freedom, and probably a

number of others that I have forgotten. The abbreviation was only really recognized by the inner circle. It became a brand of our arcane knowledge, and produced instant kinship in an almost secret order.

On the other hand, Sci-Fi was fun to say, and instantly recognizable by those who heard it. It was accessible, like the movies that carried that banner. If SF had been the password for the thousands, Sci-Fi was the door for millions.

The club-ness of “SF” still lays claim to the hearts of old fans, and you can still get up an argument by making people choose between the two terms. But the fact is, the world made its choice many decades ago.

## The Dune Miniseries

I’m definitely looking forward to the new “Dune” miniseries coming on the Science Fiction channel in December. The idea of a big treatment of Frank Herbert’s most popular book is intriguing.

I was never actually that fond of the Herbert book. Although I liked the overall story of rebellious freedom fighters and interplanetary intrigue, I was not fond of its pseudo-religious underpinnings.

When the first movie was released, I was apprehensive about how the film would handle those religious utterances that led off each chapter. I was pleased when I saw it, because almost all of that had been pared away, leaving only a backdrop to a rousing adventure flick. In fact, it became one of my all-time favorite SF movies, which I have rewatched three or four times in the past decade.

I doubt the new production will amputate the religion to such a degree. The length of the miniseries provides scope for a fuller treatment of the book. It remains to be seen if this is a good or bad thing — but it is certainly of interest to fans of Frank Herbert.

## Native American Month

November was Native American Month. That fact wasn’t very widely exploited, and I doubt many of you reading this were even aware of the fact. Well, next year you’ll know: in the mighty wisdom of our government, this month has been set aside in perpetuity to remember the country’s first residents.

It is the hope of those who’ve promoted this that people will use the time to read a little about the



history of the first Americans, to learn about their ways. At the same time, it is meant as a period of appreciation of the land both races hold so dear. Ideally, people will walk out into the fields and woodlands, plan an afternoon's picnic, or an overnight camping trip. No one is expecting anything elaborate — we aren't up to parades and banners just yet, though it would be nice sometime in the future.

It ties together very well with Thanksgiving, when we remember that it was the Indians who brought the turkey.

In honor of the month, I constructed a centerpiece on our table, with fall leaves, carved peace pipes, beaded symbols, leather medicine bag, and various other art items that seemed appropriate. It made a pretty display to remind my guests and myself that this is a shared holiday.

I'm very happy that Congress has named November as Native American Month. It would make me proud if you'd join me next year in remembering that the ones who were here before are still among us.

## Las Vegas Comdex Visitors

Las Vegas welcomes Comdex visitors each fall with mixed feelings. On the one hand, the city can't help but appreciate the world's largest convention. It draws from 225,000 to 250,000 each November, and if there's anything Vegans love, it's tourists to keep our coffers lined. On the other hand, it tends to be a convention of computer nerds, and they are an unpopular crew. The standing joke is that every Comdex attendee arrives with one shirt and \$20, then leaves a week later without changing either.

They eat cheap and tip lightly — a cardinal sin in Las Vegas where so many people depend on tips to live. They gamble, if at all, in the low numbers. In fact, the only thing they really like to spend money for are shows with topless girls — these places clean up. At the end of the Comdex week, there is a dramatic increase in sales of luxury cars, fur coats, permanent makeup and breast enlargements.

For Arnie and me, Comdex is welcome because it usually brings a handful of friends to town for the week. This year we shuffled the date of the Vegants' meeting, normally fixed at the first and third Saturdays of each month, to the second Saturday in

order to catch the arriving conventioners.

Richard Brandt and Linda Bushyager were the visiting stars at the meeting. Ron was tired, so stayed behind at the hotel to sleep. It was an unusually gala club meeting, with almost a 100% turnout of the locals on hand to welcome the visiting fen.

Linda surprised us with her announcement that she and Ron are house-hunting and plan to move to Vegas sometime in the next six months or so, depending on the property they find. They have already found some attractive locations. Neither of them drive, so they're hunting for a home within very easy walking distance to good shopping.

I cautioned Linda about the difficulty of doing much walking when the temperature tops 110. At its upper levels, the Las Vegas summer seems to clamp down on your ability to function normally. That's about the temperature where it begins to feel like your exposed skin is frying. Most of us cope by simply staying indoors. On the other hand, most groceries, drugstores and coin-o-mats are 24-hour affairs, so it's easy enough to make those outings during the cooler hours. And, as I pointed out to Linda, you can always do your shopping via computer. At least one of the local chains provides groceries-by-Internet so it's easy enough to get delivery.

It is delightful to anticipate Linda and Ron joining Las Vegas fandom. They'll find a lot of ready-made friends when they arrive, and a lot of fan activities to join. Or not.



Poor Richard Brandt was slightly ill with a cold when he arrived and by the next day he was completely miserable. He spent Sunday and Monday mostly in bed, and was only able to spend Tuesday at the convention before leaving on Wednesday. We enjoyed his company, but I felt bad for him that he couldn't get full benefit from his trip here.

Although he arrived too late to attend the Saturday gathering, Billy Pettit was also in town for Comdex. He visited us on Monday night and treated us to a Mexican dinner. He also gifted me with a color printout of Smokin' Rockets #1. Since we don't yet have a color printer (it's high on our list of want-to-buys) it was an especially thoughtful gift, and went immediately into my own personal collection.

Billy was such a pleasant companion that I tried to coax him into moving his family to Vegas, too. Failing that, I encouraged him to at least return as often as possible. He has an admirable memory for fan history, and is avidly archiving our past. When this traveling fan passes through your city, I strongly recommend him as a great dinner companion.

## The Blandonization of Fandom

We're coming down from an almost-decade long period of Love and Peace in fandom. Ruinous feuds in the 1980s left many fans exhausted with unpleasant confrontations, and desirous of harmony. Just when this bucolic but unnatural situation might have ended, the popularization of Internet Fandom



reinforced the same tendency to turn the other cheek.

It's not merely a move toward civility brought about by a maturing fandom. I believe there is more at play here than politeness. The same insidious forces that cause flame wars to erupt, burn, then quickly sputter into ash, is also behind the unassailable calm that has descended over electronic fandom.

We all know that fires spread rapidly on line. A foolish fan can flub his lines and cause a raging flame in hours, sometimes even minutes. The antagonism can spread from person to person and envelop an entire list serv in a day. With adequate fanning, the flame can be kept burning for days, sometimes even lasting weeks.

Compare this to snail-mail fanac, in which statement and rebuttal are generally spread over months, sometimes even years. Even an all-fanzine-fandom conflagration burns at a comparatively stately pace. The participants may suffer, but the blood has time to clot between the rounds.

On line, the spectacle of two antagonists trading blows may start as entertaining wordplay. But it quickly becomes painful to those watching, and agony for those involved, as blows fall quickly on fresh bruises, in sickeningly cruel interchanges that jar the sensibilities of the spectators.

The result is that the majority of the online fan community bends backward to avoid bloodshed. If a spark flares, they're quick to pour on the salve, to avoid all-out electronic warfare.

It seems doubtful that classic antagonists, such as Eney and White, will ever become milk-toast buddies. But the fact is, the majority of us are banning controversy from our presence. We have become the kingdom of the bland.

I do not propose that we set our manners to one side, and begin to flail at each other with sticks and stones. But I do think we should be less quick to bind the wounds with balm when disagreements pop up. Controversy is as natural to fans as communication, and opposing opinions are often the basis of better understanding...if not between the combatants, then at least among the onlookers.



## Brass-Bra'ed Babes Attract Blimps Over Babylon

Thanks to the efforts of Drs. Thurman, Lopata and Fann, as reported in Bob Tucker's e-Zombie #70, we now better understand the attraction of Bug Eyed Monsters to scantily clad space bimbos in brass bras. We are fortunate that Tucker circulated the doctors' findings, which prove that the mineral-poor aliens are actually attracted by the brass rather than by the pulchritudinous flesh inside. This undeniably explains the proliferation of blimps seen in the Southern Nevada skies. Once it was rare to see Goodyear's blimp pass overhead. Children and old men would lick their thumb, press it into the palm of the opposite hand, then stamp it to seal in the good luck.

During the last decade however, this simple ritual has been repeated so frequently that habitual blimp-watchers complain of sore palms. Hands once strengthened by pulling the levers on slot machines, are now weak and hanging on limp wrists. Obviously this is part of the nefarious plans of the aliens planning a raid on the brass-clad bosoms of Las Vegas' showgirls, whose defense depends on the fists of these over-stimulated slot-playing frails.

Where once Goodyear ruled supreme, the Vegas

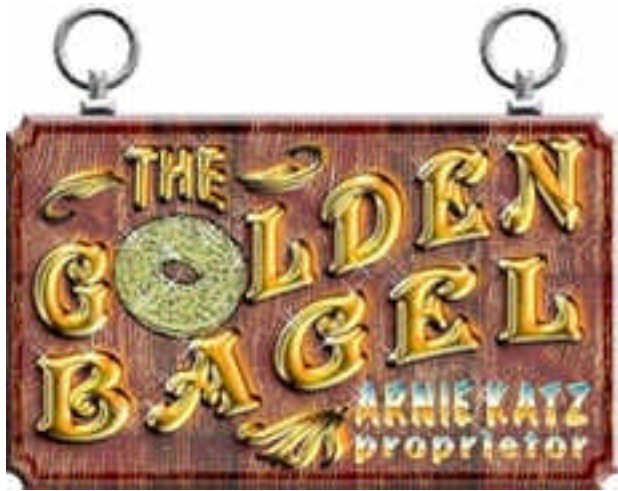
skies have filled with strange blimps bearing alien names, such as AIWA, SONY and FUJI. Why blimps? you ask. Well, aliens have to get around somehow; why not blimps. In addition to these outrè war-bubbles, a splendid pink blimp named RUSSELL STOVER can be seen traversing the city almost every afternoon, obviously a camouflage to attract the statuesque femms out of the smoky casinos into the open air where they will be vulnerable to the brass-suckers from outer space.

To lure the aliens and their balloons away from our brass-bra'ed babes, Nevada proposes to reopen the secret brass mines in the mountains North of this valley. We believe the blimps and their extraterrestrial pilots will be attracted by the massive caches of the pure metal, which barely outweigh the city's stock of brass d-cups. (Fortunately, some Vegas shows are topless; otherwise even the mines couldn't deflect the aliens' interest.)

When zooming in to harvest the brass, the spikes and spires of the Sierra Nevada peaks will burst the skins of their crafts, causing their hopes and vehicles to deflate and stranding them in the high desert.

The eventual success of this plan is thanks entirely to the research team of Drs. Thurman, Lopata and Fann. ■





## Remember When We Passed Out?

Young fans think about reproduction; old ones, I am learning, obsess with distribution. Fanzine reproduction and fanzine distribution, that is. I leave the actual smut in the capable mouth and mind of my Wife and Editor. I run a clean column here, so no sneaking looks at my package while I discuss the serious, even critical, subject of fanzine distribution in the digital age.

Starting on September 2, 2000 with the release of *Jackpot! #1*, I began to publish electronically distributed, format correct fanzines. I've done three issues of *Jackpot!* and co-edited *Baloney #2* with Tom (for TAFF!) Springer. During that period, I also helped Joyce distribute *Western Romance #2* and, of course, *Smokin' Rockets*.

I'm no techno-guru, so I've made a lot of mistakes. I've corrected as many as possible and in the process have studied the strengths and weaknesses of the various methods of electronic distribution. My conclusion is that the most popular alternatives are flawed, but workable in the short term - and that some positive action may be required for a more permanent solution.

I send my fanzines as .PDF files attached to emails. I send out a warning announcement, requested by several fans including Alison Scott, about 36 hours before I dispatch the actual files. I use Hotmail as the origination point for most of the copies precisely because it's the bottom of the barrel. If I can send and receive it through Hotmail, chances

are good that everyone on my list will get their own copies, too.

The biggest limitation of .PDF attachments is that a few old-fashioned ISPs won't handle attachments larger than one megabyte. In practice, Hotmail won't send or receive an email of more than about 850K. Two- or three-part fanzines are the rule, not the exception.

It's also regrettable that most British fans pay for download. I hope UK fanzine fans will be just as willing to spend a small sum to read *Jackpot!* and *Baloney* as I was to spend postage and conform to special handling regulations when I sent each of them dozens of fanzines over the past decade. Electronic distribution has the power to bridge the geographical gaps that separate English-speaking fanzine fandoms, but the recipients may have to shoulder the burden at least for a while. It seems likely that the next couple of years will bring UK fans greater access to email accounts that don't have an odious download fee.

Some have suggested that I post as a download on a site. This delivery system lets the reader pick the download time, won't lengthen mail queues and eliminates the need to break files into segments.

I've expressed willingness to cooperate with anyone who wants to post a *Jackpot!* download, but I haven't pursued the idea aggressively. I'm open to the idea as a secondary form of distribution and as a form of outreach, but the set-up doesn't satisfy me enough as an editor and writer to serve as the primary method.

The connection between the readers and me, as editor and writer, is at the core of my enthusiasm for publishing fanzines. I want to know the readers and foster communication in both directions. Web site posting, if it's the main way to distribute, leads to a largely unknown audience of indeterminate size. I can accept that situation if I'm getting paid, but that's not what I want from fanzine publishing.

The difference between emailing a .PDF file and posting it on a web site is the distinction between putting a stack of fanzines on a table at a convention and passing out copies to individual recipients. If I just posted my fanzines on a site, I'd never know when or even if the people who matter most to me have visited the site.

John Foyster, Victor Gonzalez and others have

