

The Zine Scene



Dany Drennan had time on his hands so he decided to publish a magazine that would release

"vast reservoirs of unnecessary knowledge" he had built up while stuck in a tedious job creating marketing reports for a financial consulting firm. He joined the growing ranks of alternative publishers and the rest is a "zine-story." Drennan, a graphic designer and former student in the NYU Interaction Telecommunications program, is one of hundreds of publisher wannabes who have used the computer to make what's called a "zine," a cross between a newsletter and a magazine often devoted to the most obscure arcana on the information side streets.

Drennan's zine, *The Inquisitor*, is a model of design and content when compared to others in its genre. Unlike most zines, which are an amalgam of unharmonious, poorly leaded, default typefaces that communicate streams-of-consciousness

and other rambling babble, this 32-page, saddle-stitched journal comes perilously close to looking rather professional. And not only is it handsomely designed (though not fashionably so), but with the exception of some "meta-hyper-cyber-spiel," a rather extensive section devoted to oppressively technical data designed to perplex the digitally challenged, it is also accessible if not entertaining. *The Inquisitor* (the title derives from 10 long years in Catholic school) began as a newsletter, a communications link to friends and family. But from egocentric beginnings it evolved into a repository of curious information.

The Inquisitor's initial print run of 1,000 copies was reportedly sold out in no time, and judging from e-mail and "snail-mail" responses, Drennan is appealing to an audience of loyal zine aficionados and prison inmates. While



Drennan decided that for the moment printing on paper, rather than being an e-zine, is an efficient way to reach the



most people, *The Inquisitor* is also online in Echo's gopher (echonyc.com.) for easy access and downloading.

The Inquisitor towers aesthetically because a vast majority of zines give credence to the notion that bad design can emanate from good computers. Zines like *Fringeware Review* (Parental Advisory: Contains Explicit Thoughts), *Crash Collusion* (A Quarterly Guide to the Fringe), and *Paranoia* (The Conspiracy Reader) are composed with little concern for the nuances of typography. And why should they? Zines are neither design showcases, nor owing to their cheap production values, well-springs for visual experimentation.

But remember: *Rolling Stone* was a progressive rock zine before becoming the bible of pop culture. It won't be long before we learn whether zines like the *The Inquisitor* will become models for individualistic magazines or information packages of the future, or simply artifacts of an antediluvian print age.

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