

VIVE LA DIFFÉRENCE!

Last June, I invited readers of *Asimov's* digital editions to write in and let me know their thoughts on the electronic reading experience. The magazine has been available in digital form since the late nineties. Early adopters could purchase *Asimov's* for PalmPilots and other PDAs. While access to electronic copies of the magazine sounded like an exciting idea, initial subscriptions began as a trickle and stayed statistically insignificant for ten years. The number of digital subscriptions sold didn't start to move upward until they became available on Amazon's Kindle in late 2008. Sales have grown steadily and quickly since then. A third of our readers now purchase downloads of the magazine for the Nook, Nook Color, the iPad, all sorts of Kindles, and various other e-readers. We have lots of new readers along with some long-time subscribers who are changing how they take their *Asimov's*. Reading is reading, but I thought it would be fun and informative to find out what readers most enjoyed about the digital format.

I received lots of constructive comments about formatting and subscription problems that I've passed along to the proper departments. I also received a lot of great comments about our digital anthology, *Enter a Future*. Unfortunately, I don't have room to quote those readers. I don't even have room to quote from everyone who wrote in about why they appreciated their electronic subscriptions, but I have been able to pull together a sampling of some of those remarks.

Paul Cornell likes the look of his digital magazine and the ease with which he can maneuver around the stories: "I very much enjoy the *Asimov's* experience on the iPad (via Zinio). It's all in color, for a start, with a weblinked contents page, so I can hop straight to the story I'm after.

And there's something that satisfies my OCD soul about the little gallery of covers that builds up over a year."

Handy storage was also a plus for Tom Krolick, who sent us the following directly from his Nook Color: "Oh, no! I am a month behind on reading my *Asimov's* magazine. Uh, nevermind. I subscribe digitally so it really doesn't matter when I get to it. You see, they are all right here, current and past issues, all at my finger tips! I wouldn't have it any other way."

Easy access to an *Asimov's* subscription was another positive aspect of the digital format. Annelie Gallea of Albuquerque, New Mexico, pointed out: "As I am on the road every month, my little Sony comes in handy. I subscribe now and love it! What convenience! I can take this with me anywhere. I'm just as excited to get the latest issue via computer as I ever was when my magazine came in the mailbox."

Dennis Rockwell of Concord, Massachusetts, agrees about the ease of subscription renewal. "Due to an oversight (kids, life, job, the usual) my paper subscription to *Asimov's* lapsed a while back and I didn't notice until things lightened up and I worked through my backlog. I'm greedily buying back issues through *ereader.com*. So, thanks for being a pioneer! I'm happy to be catching up at last!"

From his mobile phone, Ron Porter let us know how much he too appreciates his access to issues of the magazine. Although he's not a subscriber, he tells us: "I'd been getting the paper version of single issues of *Asimov's* pretty much forever, but I switched once the magazine was available electronically. That was partly driven by the increasing difficulty of finding *Asimov's* on the newsstand, but it quickly became my preferred format for most of my reading. I've always managed to keep reading material close to hand,

but now it's not just close, it's always right with me. I'll probably never keep my reading material on a dedicated reader, because they're no more portable than 'the real thing.' My Android phone is still no match for a paper book or even the Kindle, but portability trumps everything else. There is still nothing like pulling out something to read on the spur of the moment when faced with an unexpected delay. I won't go so far as to say it's changed my life, but it's certainly changed my relationship with lines and doctors' offices."

Although she also appreciates the convenience, Mary Robinette Kowal nailed the gist of my original question when she explained why she enjoys the very act of reading on an electronic device: "Since I switched to reading on the Nook, I've found that it is a transparent experience. I don't notice the differences between electronic and paper until I return to reading on paper and then I'm often annoyed by how awkward it is. Simple things like needing to use two hands to read. I also adore the fact that the new issue just automagically appears on my Nook. There is something wonderful about reading an SF magazine on a device that, in my youth, used to be science fiction itself." Mary adds, "Frequently, when I'm out, I'll read *Asimov's* via the Nook app for my phone. It's great when I'm stuck in a long line, or have an unexpected wait, to be able to pull out the magazine without having remembered to pack it that morning."

I'm still a big fan of the paper editions of *Asimov's*, as are two thirds of you. I enjoy handling the physical copies of the magazine. I love looking at my shelves of paper issues and I like having the ability to pass along copies of *Asimov's* to veterans' organizations, hospitals, and SF conventions. As one reader mentioned, the original product needs no batteries (or recharging). Yet, I enjoy reading magazines on my own Kindle for many of the same reasons pointed out by these readers. I'm glad that *Asimov's* is available in so many different formats. Reading is reading, but vive la différence! ○