

Amazon's Kindle and Creative's ZEN

AudioFile's Tech Notes covers a variety of subjects, from Web resources to products that can improve your experience with audiobooks. When we find audiobook-friendly players and other products, we sample them and pass along our experience. We review as audiobook listeners, so don't expect high-tech analysis or extensive comparative testing.

Amazon's Kindle

Did you know that Amazon's fabulous new e-book reader is also a handy audiobook player? Here's the low-down on what audiobook fans need to know.

What's under the hood? With a small external speaker, mini stereo jack, and volume controls, the Kindle does double duty, allowing you to listen with headphones or out loud—I had no problem hearing Richard Price's *Lush Life* at a distance of about 25 feet. The speaker quality is reasonable, though the audio quality through the headphone jack is a little hissy on heavily compressed files and not quite as good as on my iPod or Sansa player.

Is it Audible-friendly? Yes. You download audiobooks to your computer via the Audible Manager software, which transfers it to your Kindle via a standard USB cable. Downloads appear on the Kindle home page, marked with a small

speaker symbol. Clicking on an audiobook title reveals a screen with product details, a marker indicating how long you've been listening, and controls enabling you to go to the beginning, to various sections, or to move around in increments of 30 seconds. As for file format, if you're listening via headphones, choose the highest number Audible format—4—if it's available.

Can it play ripped CD files? Yes. Rip your CDs to MP3 files using a program like iTunes, join them as one file, and then load them via the USB cable. The trick—as an *AudioFile* reader tipped me—is to drag the ripped MP3s from your computer's hard drive to the Kindle's Audible folder (not the Music folder). That way they'll appear as audiobook files on the Kindle home page. Note, the Kindle won't play AAC files (the files typically ripped by iTunes), only MP3s. I was able to use the latest version of iTunes to rip and join MP3 files. Other programs—for example Audacity—will also perform the task.

How's the memory? Kindle's internal memory comes with 180MB free and might allow you to manage two or three Audible audiobooks, but only three ripped CDs. Since most Kindle owners want to use its other features, it makes sense to add a 1 or 2 gigabyte SD memory card (\$15 and \$25, respectively).

Any tips? When playing audiobooks, use Kindle's "sleep" mode (ALT + Amazon Key). The audiobook will continue playing but you won't have to worry about accidentally pressing any of the control buttons or closing the lid.

Bottom line. If you're using Kindle solely as an audiobook player, the \$399 price tag is a bit stiff. But when

you consider all of its incredible functionality—explained in detail at the Amazon site—the Kindle is an unbeatable device, the greatest invention for readers since . . . well, the audiobook (www.amazon.com).

—Richard W. Stim

Creative's ZEN

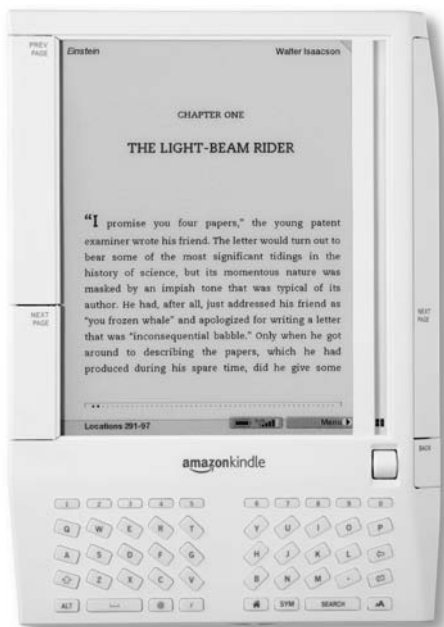
One of the most reasonably-priced and audiobook-friendly MP3 players for PC/Windows users is Creative's ZEN V and ZEN V Plus. [Editor's Note: If you're a Mac user, you may be happier sticking with iPods.]

What are the top features of the ZEN V? There are a lot: price, capacity, size, screen display, and extras.

With list prices from \$60 (1GB ZEN V) and \$70 (2GB ZEN V Plus) to \$200 (16GB ZEN V Plus), you get a range of choice and capacity. 1GB holds several audiobooks, and 16GB could hold several months' worth of listening. As this is a portable device, you probably don't need every audiobook you own on it—two or three current listening choices, plus some podcasts and some music, can easily be handled by the 1 or 2GB models. Bottom line: Actual prices range according to vendor. For under \$100 you can get a model that will hold plenty of audiobooks.

The size, 2.7" x 1.7", is small and sleek, and the unit comes with nice Creative earphones, a lanyard, and a USB connection/charging cord. The screen display is brilliant—clear and bright and readable. The navigation button is a joystick. If you are over 25, this may not be an intuitive way to navigate, but it's easy enough to get used to.

Extras are just that, since we are thinking about listening to audio-



Amazon Kindle



Creative ZEN V Plus

books—but a voice recorder and FM Radio (all V Plus models) are nice when you want them.

Is ZEN V audiobook friendly?

Downloads from Audible.com work without a hitch and can make use of the ZEN V Plus's bookmarking function that goes beyond the simple "resume," allowing you to note specific places in several audiobooks. Downloads from libraries via Overdrive and NetLibrary platforms transferred and perform well. Other downloaded audiobooks that come as WindowsMedia (WMA) or MP3 files are easily transferred and played as well.

Can I use audiobooks on CDs?

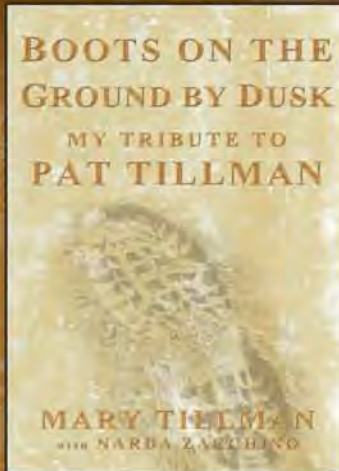
Audiobooks on CDs need to be ripped into your music manager (Jukebox, MediaMonkey, Music Manager, etc.) and then transferred to the Zen. If you are patient with the time it takes to rip CDs, the ZEN imports the files from your PC just fine.

Bottom Line. A dandy audiobook listening device for PC users, with price and quality most appealing (www.creative.com).

—Robin F. Whitten

Which audiobook listening device are you using? What are its pros and cons? Which device or product would you like to see us review next? Write to editorial@audiofilemagazine.com.

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PAT TILLMAN

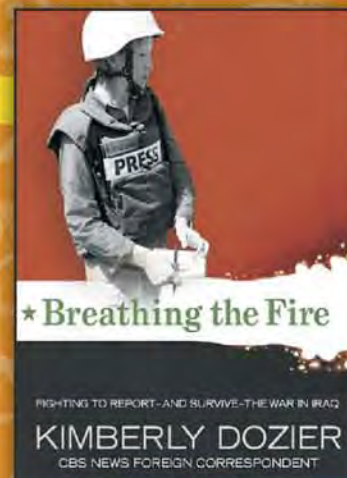
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