



**S F E A R 2**

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SFEAR 2

December 1985  
only 11 months late!

### Thoughts From The Depths

Science Fiction was, is, and probably always will be my primary literary love. But even so, I've always been a closet horror fan. It was my love for horror, I believe, that turned me onto Science Fiction. I was brought up on a big book of Scottish tales and legends, some of which even today can induce feelings of unease or even nightmares. Though I turned to SF from those early tales I've always retained a liking for stories of the super-and-unnatural. Unfortunately, finding quality horror is as difficult, if not more difficult, than finding quality SF. Fortunately, DAW books annually publishes The Year's Best Horror Stories, which is the perfect answer for the person who wants to read good horror, but who does not want to rake through the muck to find it. Karl Edward Wagner, the current editor of the series, has a good sense of what makes a scary story tick, and he picks, in series XII, for the most part, a collection that provides a good share of chills. Each of the stories in here is a gem, each one an excellent introduction to specific authors, and each one quite horrific. The exception is the lead story by Stephen King. "Uncle Otto's Truck" may indeed be an excellent piece of regional writing, and I'm sure it imparts beautifully the flavour and essence of Maine, but it lacks that certain edge that makes horror horror. Every other story in the collection, however, makes up for the disappointing King offering. Especially memorable are David Langford's "3:47 A.M.", a story so frightening that I'm sure most readers will share my own disbelief when discovering that it was written for a children's collection, and Dennis Etchinson's "The Chair". Etchison is hard to take in large doses (see review of The Dark Country), but provides a fascinating change of pace when found in an anthology such as this. For those looking for a wee taste of horror, for those looking for a good scare, or even for those looking for an introduction to the field, this collection is recommended.

I briefly attended Keycon here in Winnipeg a while ago and listened to Vonda McIntyre complain about the cover to the paperback release of her latest novel. Admittedly the brazen James Bond type illustration fronting Superluminal gives no indication of the serious SF novel it fronts, but what else is new? Since when do paperback covers give any indication of what lies beyond that gaudy facade? Despite the cover Superluminal is a decent novel, but not a great one. McIntyre has reworked some standard SFnal elements and moulded them into a decent story. What makes Superluminal better than the standard elements it is constructed around is McIntyre's almost fanatical devotion to the human rather than the SFnal elements of the story. Make no mistake, this is definitely SF, and the SF is integral to the story and to the characters, but there is nothing new here. McIntyre has written a basic SF novel better than most basic SF novels but that's all. Admittedly, McIntyre has improved dramatically from the disjointed novelization of "Of Mist, and Grass, and Sand", but she is no John Varley or Ursula LeGuin. McIntyre's strong point is her characterization, and because of that I recommend this book.

Varley's Gaea is a creation on par with Niven's Ringworld and Clarke's Rama. Titan, the first novel in the trilogy about Gaea, was a mind-blowing adventure filled with enough sense of wonder, enough speculation, and enough creativity for a dozen books. Gaea, that awesome living creature that is itself a world, needed more than a single novel to explore properly. So along came Wizard. The second book slid in on the coat-tails of the first, but was in itself another excellent adventure that broke new ground in Gaea, so to speak. However, despite two books being quite enough room to thoroughly explore Gaea, Varley's plotting left it necessary for a third book. A book that breaks no new ground, that has had all its speculation and creativity done in previous books, that simply wraps up all that has gone before. The characters in Titan whose sense of wonder we shared are now very much older, very much more

cynical, and very much less likeable. Cirroco Jones is, by self admission, a cold, cruel, calculating bitch, who uses other merely as tools to achieve her own ends, those ends being so important by her own estimation that individual lives mean very little to her, except of course the individual lives of those close to her. There is very little to like in this novel. The only halfway interesting character is a young Canadian who travels to Gaea to assassinate Cirroco Jones. If only he'd succeeded. No review will stop those who enjoyed the first two novels from purchasing the third, but I warn you that Demon is so unlikable that it has the ability to taint the fond memories of the previous novels.

James Herbert is a writer with so little talent that it is amazing he ever got published in the first place. Talent Herbert may lack, but enthusiasm and zest are qualities that seem to overflow from the pages of his writing. The Dark is filled with characters thinner than news-print whose motivations are ridiculous and whose actions are unbelievable. And yet...Herbert has such enthusiasm for his subject... horror, horror, and more horror...that reading the damned novel is quite enjoyable. The dark is a force released by a group of power hungry experimenters, a force that consumes minds and turns its victims into slobbering zombies who attack, mutilate, and otherwise wreck havoc with the rest of the population. Herbert plays with very basic themes of good and evil, and does some interesting philosophical speculation, but only briefly. Wouldn't want that head stuff to get in the way of the HORROR! Hunter S. Thompson might have written The Dark on a bad day. There is an unforgettable scene of a sports stadium engulfed by The Dark, a scene that so closely resembles recent tragedies in England and abroad that it is uncomfortable, and Herbert provides some uncanny and disturbing insights into the motivations of such crowds. Anyone who has attended a crowded sporting event will recognize the emotions that flare so dangerously in this chapter. Remember, this is supernatural horror, not news. For all its short-falls, for all the coincidental plotting, the poor dialog, the thin characterization, and the sometimes pretentious prose, The Dark is fun to read. Herbert makes no claims to the title of artist, all he wants to do is make reading like riding a roller-coaster. At times he succeeds.

Well, now it's time for a reputation damaging admission. Time to reveal the blot on an otherwise spotless (ha!) record. Yes, it's true, I like reading... Star Trek Novels! This absurd incongruity in a person with such obviously literate tastes (ho ho) can be explained very easily. I get lazy once in a while. This affects my reading habits as well as sundry others. Star Trek novels are filled with character whom I already know, whose voices I can hear, whose images are clear in my mind, and whom I generally like. There is no work in reading a Star Trek novel. The characters are fully fleshed out the moment the cover is cracked, and the universe is one in which most readers feel comfortable, and with which they are familiar. A home away from home. All the author must do is manipulate the characters, and I can sit back and be manipulated with them. Admittedly most Star Trek novels are very bad, and yet I continue to read them occasionally. Like The Entropy Effect by Vonda McIntyre.

Vonda McIntyre, as I've already mentioned, is not a great author, but she has considerably more talent than most Star Trek authors. McIntyre puts the crew of the Enterprise through some interesting paces, cranks out an inventive, suspenseful, exciting plot, and at the same time explores below the surface of characters most of us are reluctant to admit we know. It's obvious the prose is rushed, as it is crude in comparison to most of McIntyre's highly polished work, yet at the same time, this rushed prose balances out with McIntyre's sometimes hip deep characterization. Characterization is McIntyre's forte, but sometimes her emotional explorations are a bit much. In this book she has no time for that sort of thing. I'd hesitate to say this is McIntyre's best novel, but I have to admit that the medium does tend to make her prose more balanced and palatable. -- Steve George

## Science Fiction: Rugby of the Mind

by Tim Ender

It must be hard to imagine any similarities between the sport of Rugby and the world of Science Fiction. At least to those involved in only one of those activities. I remember clearly last night when I asked Big Jim our scrum half if he'd read Robert Forward's latest novel, Flight of the Dragonfly, and what did he think of it and how well did it compare with Forward's excellent scientific extrapolation Dragonstar? "Eat scum, Ender," was Jimbo's reply. I could only laugh, realizing his abruptness was the result of the numerous cleats that had gouged his abdomen and genitals in one of the roughest mauls I'd ever had the pleasure to collapse. Anyway, that incident perfectly highlights how disparate the two pastimes are, at least to those involved in only one. On another occasion I'd invited one of the members of the Great Northern Backyard Binocular Astronomy Club to come out to rugby practice, he having the perfect type of body for the game, and he'd laughed in my face. "I'd never get involved in that dangerous, degrading, mindless sport, Ender," he snickered. I refrained from pulling his heart out, and instead reflected on how ignorant science fiction fans and rugby players are of the similarities between their pastimes.

To be honest, it took a while for even me to realize how close science fiction and rugby really are. It was only during the last week of the season, in a game between our wonderful Wanderers and the pitiful Assassins, in a moment of utter lucidity, that the parallels became obvious to me. And so it is that wonderful game that I will recount here. One has only to read on to see that science fiction and rugby are almost identical at the core, and that one could easily replace the other as the pastime of fans of both.

The Assassins Rugby Football Club consists of some of the biggest, meanest, dirtiest, chippiest, stupidest, and skillless players in the league, but I won't get into that here, while the Wanderers R.F.C. are generally considered a team of skillfull gentlemen, out to play an enjoyable game, flex some muscles, participate in team activity, and generally better the game of rugby by playing it to the best of their ability. This was obvious in the pre-game warmup as the Assassins lay about laughing and spitting on the ground while we Wanderers went through our paces, preparing ourselves for what was bound to be a gruelling and brutal game. As I did my trunk twists and sit ups I couldn't help but think of Gordon R. Dickson's Dorsai series. It didn't need a genius to see the similarities between the organized, intelligent Wanderers and those warriors of the future. I smiled furtively, glancing up from my push ups to watch one of the Assassins sharpening his cleats.

The referee, a tall, gangling, slim man, almost alien in appearance, blew his whistle and we lined up for kickoff, Wanderers receiving. A lumbering Assassin footed the ball and it arched skyward, just like the Rocket Ship Galileo on its voyage to the moon in Heinlein's wonderful novel. Those thoughts raced through my mind as the ball began its descent, appearing, from my perspective, to be very much like Niven and Pournelle's Lucifer's Hammer. I took a moment to glance at the Assassin team who, with obvious intent to injure, were rumbling towards me like a herd of gorian bosk and almost as intelligent. I followed the descent of the ball, checked to make sure I had some support, and started to run the millisecond the ball was in my arms.

Ahead of me was one of the Assassin forwards, a giant of an idiot with flaming red hair. Just like that fool Tarl Cabot of Gor, I thought. I lowered my left shoulder and ran into him, holding the ball so my right to set up of the Wanderer forwards coming up in support. I felt my shoulder crunch into the red-head's

belly, and then I was being hammered from all sides and found myself at the centre of a maul. There were grunts, and there were groans, and there were screams, and then I was lying on the ground. Above me the horde fought. Just in front of my face, between a pair of black shorts and a hairy thigh, I could glimpse the hairy testicle of one of the assassins. No jock strap! Accidentally, as I was kicked in the back of the neck, my arm flew up and my fist connected with scrotum. There was a horrifying scream above me and suddenly the maul collapsed, but I saw with relief that the ball had popped out and big Jimbo the scrum half had grabbed it.

As the maul collapsed on top of me I couldn't help but think of Larry Niven's Ringworld. Like the Ringworld engineers, the ball had left the maul, and like the Ringworld, the maul had begun to collapse! Luckily Jimbo gave the ball a little grubber kick and sent it out of bounds, bringing play to a momentary halt. The collapsed maul separated into discrete units and we set up for a line out.

In the line out I faced an ugly brute. He glared at me, then smiled to reveal mishapen blackened teeth. "You're going to die you stinking little Wanderer whimp!" he hissed at me.

"Oh yeah," I said back quickly. "You're going to have to visit the organ bank after the next scrum!"

"What?" he hissed. But before I could explain about Larry Niven's chilling stories about the organ banks the ball was thrown in and Titanic Andy had reached up and tipped it into his own arms. Instantly, almost at the speed of light but not quite there, I formed my bind with Andy and he hugged the ball into his belly. Behind us the raging assassins battered into our backs. I felt a fist jam into my kidney, but held the bind until I saw Fast Eddie whip in and with a single fluid motion rip the ball and pass it out to Jimbo. Jim managed a quick diving pass and the backs were off and running at top speed. The Wanderer backs are known as some of the fastest in the league, and our advance was fast and furious. As I followed the backs in support I saw the ball pop into the air, and then an Assassin forward was on top of it. The ref blew his whistle. An accidental knock-on had occurred. A scrum was ordered, Wanderer's ball.

The Wanderer and the Assassin forwards gathered to set the scrum. As left prop, loose head, I knew I was a key factor in the Wanderer scrum force, and I prepared myself for the drive. As I bound to the hooker and the second row snaked their arms around us to form the famous Wanderer scrum machine, I couldn't help but think of us as genetically engineered parts in a biological structure. Each of us assumed a set position, just like cogs in a biological gear-box. As in the previous line out I faced off against the ugly bastard who had threatened me with death. But again, before I could explain about Niven's organ banks, or even ask if he'd read any Niven at all, the ball was tossed in and the scrum drove forward. I drove under my opponents shoulder, lifted, then pushed!

We pushed, and pushed, and the Assassin forwards inched slowly backwards. The bastard I faced raked his cleats across my shins and I booted him as hard as I could. I didn't see where my foot landed, but he grunted and suddenly our hooker heeled the ball out and the Wanderer backs were again on the move.

"You bugger!" the Assassin prop screamed at me.

"Eat dirt you snivelling mundane!" I yelled back, then ran to follow the play.

At half-time we were tied at 0. The waterboy came on the field and we guzzled back a mixture of water, lemon juice and salt that tasted unsettlingly like horse

urine, but which served to replenish all that we'd lost in the brutal first half. As we relaxed for five minutes before resuming play I thought about the book I'd been reading the night before. One of the members of the Great Northern Backyard Binocular Astronomy Club had leant me Varley's Wizard. It was a great book and reminded me a lot about rugby. I felt like one of the titan's creations: a left, loose-headed prop, who's purpose in life is to push, and push, and kick, and run. But enough of that, the second half was about to begin.

The second half was a nightmare, just like a Philip K. Dick novel. The rugby game was like a new reality, with different rules. "Ubik," I mumbled to the Assassin prop in one scrum. He became so confused we managed to wheel the scrum and get a cheep try. With only five minutes left in the game the Wanderers were up six to nothing after the conversion.

As the game progressed towards its close, the Assassins became more and more vicious, sensing they only had a short time left. Like the barbarian hordes in M. John Harrison's The Pastel City they attacked us mercilessly, as if they were trying to remove our brains to make us their equals.

One of their backs tried to drop-kick the ball through our posts and I grabbed the flying leather bullet as it plummeted towards me. Looking up I saw the blue horde descending. I punted the ball, then watched it rise, until at its apex it appeared as nothing more, or less, than a pebble in the sky. I thought of Asimov's novel of the same name, again marvelling at the similarities between science fiction and rugby.

The ball descended like a warhead to be grabbed by an assassin who looked very much like Abraham Lincoln. I tackled him before he ran it in for a try. "Filthy rotten simulacra," I hissed in his mashapen ear.

He lashed out at me as if he'd heard that same insult before. But as I clambered over his face, gouging my cleats into his nose, I realized he was only a dumb Assassin forward who didn't even know what simulacra meant. "Ever dream of electric sheep?" I yelled at him as I left him prostrate on the ground behind me.

Well, the game came to a rousing close with the Wanderers putting over a penalty kick to make the final score nine to nothing. The Assassins gather morosely in mid-field and gave three pitiful cheers for the Wanderers. Like the true, almost genetically bred gentlemen that we were, the Wanderers gave three whole-hearted cheers for the Assassins and a lackadazical shout for the ref.

As the teams dispersed, to meet shortly in a local bar, I couldn't help but reflect on the similarities between the game and the reading of a good science fiction book. I felt like I'd just read Dune three times without eating. I felt philosophical, like a wave without a shore. I realized, in a sudden flash of revelation, that it was my duty to talk about science fiction on the rugby pitch, to reveal the wonders of the genre to the brutes who played the game. And also, I must be witness for the joys of rugby to the simpering egg heads who read science fiction. On the way to the bar I caught a red light, and with some spare time I began to re-read Ursula Leguin's The Left Hand of Darkness which reminded me fondly of playing left prop, though I thought that might be reaching a bit. As I approached the bar I wondered, philosophically of course, if the Wanderers had been named after Fritz Leiber's novel. One thing I knew for sure. I could never give up rugby or science fiction. One wouldn't be the same without the other. Hopefully this article will enlighten others to the joys they are currently missing.

-- Tim Ender

## FANZINES

AMAZINE #3 Walt Dickinson, P.O. Box 1103, Postal Station B, Sudbury, Ontario, Canada.

Sort of a half assed concoction of comix and columns, but mostly advertisements. Amazine's goal, as stated in a message from the publisher, is "to make the best fanzine we can and to provide exposure for promising artists and writers." What can I say, boys? Very commendable, but you've got a long way to go.

CAREFULLY SEDATED 4 Alan Rosenthal and Catherine Crockett, c/o Carefully Sedated, 117 Wanless Ave., Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M4N 1W1

Neat fanzine that sports a 4 page peel away cover by Taral and a short column by Taral detailing the history of the cover. An interesting but predictable short short by Roldo is next, followed by D. A. Rafferty, who offers a viscious little piece about cryogenics and a solution to one of man's biggest problems. A well rounded little fanzine that just gets by.

CAUSE CELEBRE Garth Spencer, 1296 Richardson St., Victoria, B.C., V3V 3E1, Canada

A one shot. A collection of proposals and opinions about the Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy Awards. I'm glad somebody cares so much about this. Actually, the issues are interesting, and relatively simple. But if anybody admitted to that then what would 80% of Canadian fandom have to write about? I wish Garth success in his efforts to sort out this self-made mess, and hope he can be instrumental in coming up with a solution so we can just get on with it.

FACTSHEET FIVE #15 Mike Gunderloy, 41 Lawrence St., Medford, MA 02155, USA

This quarterly mixed genre fanzine is, if not always a joy, interesting to say the least. Large collection of zine reviews, and a number of columns on various subjects, the most interesting of which was Anni Ackner's "Stars on One." Anni gives excellent examples on 1) how to set up straw houses and tear them down again with righteous indignation and 2) on how to begin an essay with a semblance of reasonability and quickly deteriorate into a screaming fit of animal ferocity and 3) on how to stay convinced of your own "rightness" while doing all of the above.

GEGENSCHEIN #49 Eric Lindsay, PO Box 42, Lyneham, ACT 2602, Australia

A pleasant mixture of diary entries, letters of comments, reviews, and a short philosophical essay. Eric laments the seeming decline of fanzine fandom but offers no new or original analysis. Heavy emphasis on computers and Eric's interaction with them, but the writing style makes it all interesting.

IDOMO 18 Chuck Connor, c/o Sildon House, Chediston Road, Wissett, Near Halesworth, Suffolk, IP19 0NF, England

A gigantic genzine. Lots of chatty fanzine reviews, lots of grossness, but 80 odd pages is a bit much. Fiction and other stuff pad out the zine. Worth getting for the reviews, as there are lots, but I didn't read anything else. Sorry.

LINES OF OCCURENCE 9 Arthur D. Hlavaty, 819 W. Markham Ave., Durham, NC 27701, USA

Arthur's SF fanzine is a pleasure to read. It manages to maintain a personal tone, and provokes thought at the same time. Most of this issue concerns the International Conference of the Fantastic in the Arts, which sounds delightfully like a cerebral SF convention.

THE MAPLE LEAF RAG #16 see address of Cause Celebre

Garth's newszine covers primarily Canadian fannish news. Anoble effort, but the coverage is a bit spotty, and the tone gives the impression that we Canadian fans take ourselves very seriously, at least those who correspond with Garth. The zine fills a niche. Check it out.

NEOLOGY v10 #3 Georges Giguere, ESFACAS, Box 4071, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, T6E 4S8

While locally biased, NEOLOGY continues to be a clubzine that all can enjoy. Much variety, much opinion, and high production standards. Mike Glycer recently proclaimed Neology one of the year's best clubzines. Since Georges took the reins Neology has continually improved, until now it is at a comfortable plateau. A classy fanzine.

NEW CANADIAN FANDOM #7 Robert Runte and Michael Hall, 14534 - 37 St, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, T5Y 2K2

What was once touted as the Canadian fannish newsletter, now appears to be a sporadic, but well produced genzine. There is a lot of interest in here, from a medical horror story by Dave Vereshagin, to a fascinating article on obscure SF/horror movies by Dave Szurek, to fanzine reviews by Robert Runte. I was also horrified to find a short essay from myself from my haunted past as a juvenile delinquent, which is quite pretentious, ill conceived, and foolish. However, it was nice to be part of NCF #7, no matter how foolish it made me feel.

ON COMPANY TIME no 5 Steven Bieler, PO Box 1870, Seattle, WA 98111, USA

Last issue of one of the better little genzines. Bieler has produced a zine that is entertaining from beginning to end. All of the writing is good, and all the subject matter deserving of attention. It's sad to see a relatively new faned pack it in, especially when he's this good.

THE SWAMP GAS JOURNAL v3 #7/8 Chris Rutkowski, Box 1918, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, R3C 3R2

As far as I know, this is the only fanzine other than SFEAR being produced in Winnipeg. But I could be wrong as I'm not very much in touch with local fannish activity, publishing or otherwise. Swamp Gas is a treat to read, and different from any other fanzine I get. It's nice to see a zine where the editor is enthusiastic and serious about his subject, yet not in the least bit pretentious. This is a U.F.O./unexplained phenomenon zine, but Chris's interests range far and wide and include science fiction and fandom. Recommended.

WAHF FULL 15.5 Jack R. Herman, Box 272, Wentworth Building, University of Sydney, Australia 2006

A short issue merely to fill the gap between #'s 15 & 16. Mostly fanzine reviews, with some diary entries and film reviews. The fanzine reviews are pretty good, but everything else is a bit of a rush. I expect #16 will be back to the usual jam packed controversial Wahf Full.

WEBERWOMAN'S WREVENGE v4 #4 Jean Weber, PO Box 42, Lyneham, ACT 2602, Australia

As usual Jean Weber provides a wide variety of material to provoke both thought and anger. Dave Dismore's "The Sexual Revolution Isn't Dead" was a nice little promotion of true "liberation". Jean's book reviews are, as always, thorough and entertaining. A regular and welcome zine with a different viewpoint.

THE WORLD ACCORDING TO GARTH #12 see Cause Celebre for address.

Garth Spencer's perzine is chock full of letters about any subject you can name. Garth reprints a couple of tongue in cheek articles from Texas about Canadian cultural imperialism, and those alone make this issue worth getting. Otherwise, a typical Garth Spencer mishmash in which everybody can find something of interest if they dig deep enough.

These fanzine reviews were originally intended for Neology, but I've missed the deadline so many times I didn't think it was worth sending the column in. Please keep sending me your zines, faneds. If I don't respond with a LoC, at least I'll comment briefly in a review.

-- Steve George



### MORE THOUGHTS FROM THE DEPTHS

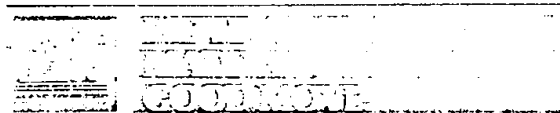
I've been thinking lately about reading habits. Why do we read the books that we read? For myself, I know there are a number of external stimuli that direct my choice of books. Reviews, peer pressure, other vague structures. One of the structures I impose upon myself is the reading of all of an author's books. These are simple programs implemented when I go book hunting, and they limit the scope of the muck I must search through. Another similar structure I occasionally impose upon myself is the reading of early books by an author, just to see how he developed. If I've been lucky enough to read an author's first published book then the problem is solved; I can go on from there and see what happens. If I'm unlucky and read a later book, as was the case with Ramsey Campbell, then I have to search for the earlier material. Demons by Daylight is the second collection of stories published by young Ramsey, back in 1973. The problem is this: every story in this collection shows the beginnings of the talent that would emerge so ferociously in later books such as The Parasite and Incarnate, but that talent is not yet fully fleshed out in this collection. If one were introduced to Campbell by this book one would be tempted to seek out more, for there are certainly the seeds of that author who imbues the normalcy of every day life with menace, terror, and evil. But only the seeds. For those who've read more recent Campbell, this collection will be a bit of a disappointment. Admittedly, there are a couple of very good stories, and every one of them has the feeling of things "not quite right" that becomes so prominent in later Campbell work, but the book holds more academic interest than any real reading pleasure. That's not fair. Leave it like this: it's obvious that there's talent here, and for those familiar with Campbell's work it is interesting to see how this master of horror started out.

Another damaging admission: Total Eclipse is the first John Brunner book I have read. Amazing. I've been reading SF since I was nine and have never been tempted to pick up a Brunner book, despite his prominence on the book racks most of the time. Reading Total Eclipse was my attempt to rectify that situation. This book is very, very dry reading, and yet it is devilishly interesting. A group of scientists is sent to a planet that once harboured a great civilization, a civilization that has seemingly disappeared soon after discovering FTL flight. What happened? Is earth in the same danger, having also newly discovered FTL flight? Brunner thoroughly explores the problem of attempting to understand a civilization when all you've got are the ruins. He highlights the predicament of our earthly archaeologists and anthropologists in a unique science fiction setting. The speculation about the Draconians is fascinating, and one finds oneself contributing to the analysis, coming up with ideas along the way. This is definitely a novel of ideas, and anyone coming to it looking for adventure will be disappointed. Brunner does inject a fair amount of drama by playing with the relationships of the scientists, but this is a fairly obvious ploy to spice up what would otherwise be an unbearably dry novel. Most of the suspense stems from the mystery of the Draconians and the attempts to understand their civilization, and to explain their disappearance. I thoroughly enjoyed this novel, and being an ex-anthropology and an ex-sociology student, I think this would be an excellent introduction to either field. It's also a good science fiction read. Recommended.

Dennis Etchison, like many things in life, is okay in small doses. Each of the stories in his collection The Dark Country would have been great if read a month apart, surrounded by a variety of other material. Together they constitute a thematically repetitive onslaught that will leave most readers as far from "begging for more" as it is possible to be. Not that Etchison is a bad writer, far from it in fact. Individual stories in this collection stand out as gems. They induce a feeling of imbalance in the reader, of something slightly askew, as the good work of Ramsey Campbell does also. Phrases and descriptions sparkle

with ferocious clarity, making the stories that much more effective. However, the theme of organ transplant gone crazy occurs in a number of the stories, and becomes quite annoying after the first two. Despite thematic recurrence, simple phrases and descriptions are used identically in a number of stories. These transplanted phrases are so obvious that they force the reader from the world of the story and into the stance of a critic. Perhaps this repetition was mere forgetfulness, or carelessness, but I'm tempted to believe it is merely Etchison being lazy. Why bother thinking up another evocative description of a woman when the description in the previous story worked so well? The Dark Country is being praised as a horror classic (at least by the blurb writers) but most of these stories aren't so easily classified. Paranoia and anomie are sometimes larger elements than anything supernatural. Ghosts don't play an important part in Etchison's world, but fear and hatred do. For those unwilling to dive head-first into this dark place a sampling in another collection might be more appropriate. Try the Year's Best Horror Stories XII, where Etchison's tale fits nicely as a change of view and pace.

It was Stephen King, I believe, who likened his writing to "a Big Mac and fries." With Ramsey Campbell, however, the food analogy falls short; there's no food on earth to do his writing justice. Campbell's best known work to date is The Parasite, I think, but that's a little hard to find these days. His newest novel, Incarnate, however, is readily available. Incarnate is closer to being SF than most horror novels. It takes the theme of dream reality. The supernatural is not an element, unless you put dreaming in that category. How natural is dreaming? And that's the disturbing question Campbell explores in this novel. Where do dreams come from? If you enjoy dreaming, then don't come to Campbell for the answer. The novel begins with an experiment in prophetic dreaming that ends in disaster. The subjects all dream a common nightmare that leave them all on the verge of insanity. Eleven years later those same subjects begin to dream again. Incarnate is a joy to read. It demonstrates a skill that has developed since The Nameless, his previous novel. From page one it is obvious that the reader has placed himself in the hands of (at the mercy of, if you wish) a master. Like the characters in this novel we are inexorably drawn into horror, and before we realize it we have been engulfed for a number of chapters. It is difficult to describe the mounting tension in this novel, or the moments of sheer horror that occur as events unfold. What makes this novel so effective is that the source of the horror is a world we are all associated with, and one we enter, however reluctantly, every night. While Stephen King and Peter Straub will no doubt continue to be the bestsellers of the horror field, I feel confident in saying that Ramsey Campbell is its quiet and unassuming master.



**C o A**

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## LETTERS

Joy Hibbert: Thanks for your fanzine, which I thought quite interesting, but since it's mostly book reviews I couldn't think of a lot to say about it.

Ben Indik: As to reasons for publishing fornicating fanzines, I'll be quite darned if I know. I gave up on the field in 1975 but found I still need a quarterly fix of Ibid. So I gave up fornicating instead. Try it. If you give up sex, the publishing fanzines will have an entirely new relevance! Make fanzines, not war!

Chester Cuthbert: Now that you have explored the facets of your personality it is only a matter of integrating these by deciding on your purpose in life. I think it is a mistake to search within for clues to identity: unless the individual has some goal greater than himself at which to aim, he cannot gather his forces and forge his way through all difficulties to achievement. And I believe that only by achieving can we establish identity. The achievement need not be a great one; my own has been merely a collection of books and the acquiring of knowledge from them, but I am happy and content with my identity because I followed and admired the pioneers of fantasy and science fiction and psychical research whose achievements were far greater than any I was myself capable of doing, and my ability to recognize the value of their achievements constituted a satisfactory reward for me. And the writers I admire, I'm sure, if they were aware of my admiration, would ask no higher reward for their efforts than having inspired me.

Mandy Slater: The art on the last page was tasteless. Not as tasteless as the recent Holier Than Thou but still, sex cartoons are boring. Will you have another SFEAR soon? We must keep of production of Canadian fanzines.

Ian McKeer: The other week I read a fanzine review column which heavily criticized the editor for producing an editorial that rambled on about his (the editor's) uncertainty about what his fanzine would be like and what he should be doing instead of getting on with it or having sorted out these problems in the first place. When I initially read SFEAR 1 I got the same feeling, but having thought about what you had to say I can see that there's more to it than that. For a start your piece is presented clearly, the muddle is not in the writing but in the person doing the writing and that does come over. Secondly you are not a neo producing your first ever issue. Even though I have never seen any of your earlier zines and so I come to a Steve George fanzine with no preconceptions it's also clear that you do know how to go about producing a zine and your editorial is not so much a "neo lost" one as a thoughtful consideration of things past is the light of present and future hopes. As I read it I came to the same conclusion that you do at the end--just carry on and see what emerges. However, in arriving there you've provided a good look at the various attitudes to be found in fanzines today and indeed, your opinions about them. Doing two jobs at once! Very good that.

Mike Nichols: I never thought I would see another fanzine with your name on it in this lifetime. What made you do it? Is it the thrill of seeing your name in print? That's why I'm writing this loc, so I can sympathize. Wanting to express yourself through your writing is a bit artsy-fartsy, don't you think. Come on Steve, tell us the REAL reason you've laid your soul on the line for all the world to dump on.

Susan Robinson: I'm glad someone else critiques the politics of Foundation. I always thought it showed nasty fascist tendencies in that 1) one man knows everything and must be "obeyed" in all things. (The Nazis called this the Fuhrerprinzip) and 2) free will does not apply at all ever anywhere.

Lloyd Penney: Personal fanzines must be tougher to produce than other fanzines. I cannot speak from experience, but from what I've observed from others. I've witnessed Torfan Mike Wallis print up his personal zine, just me. What had been designed to be a personal communications/diaryzine would up being a psycho-analytical mope every issue. The innermost self comes out and trouble can spill out. The average reader will have to care about you a whole lot to read it; if not, he won't bother. Certainly your personality will come out in your perzine, but you may have to edit out the really gritty and unhappy parts to show to the general fanpublic. Perhaps the edited self was what you saw in your previous fanzines, and not a mask.

Harry Warner Jr.: If it is any consolation to you, I feel myself from time to time in most of the roles you provide samples of from your own multiple fan personality. I'm among the minority of fans who prefer faanish material to fanxines but are still happy to read sercon stuff. I am quite capable of writing stuff in a nasty temper (but I always throw away the result instead of mailing it out) but I admit I can't quite take on the identity of a neofan. I suppose most fans have several sides to their interest and personalities, even those who make a desperate effort to exhibit only one character trait to fandom.

Mike Daly: I guess that it's natural, in the first issue of a new fanzine, for the editor to muse about what he wants to say or do with his printed words. But as natural as it may be, it doesn't (in my opinion) make for good reading. Your ability to write is not in question, but your ability to find a subject of interest to both you and your readers is, as a result of SFEAR #1, somewhat in doubt. If I had never read ZOSMA, and SFEAR was my first exposure to your writing, I'd probably be saying "Quit while you're ahead." However, I know from past experience that you can be interesting. It just seems to me that SFEAR was the product of a man who wanted to write, knew he could write, but didn't know exactly what to write...I feel that it's just a matter of time until SFEAR becomes a zine well worth reading.

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Note: The date on SFEAR 1 was January 1984. The date should have read January 1985. I bring this up only to show that SFEAR 2 is only 11 months late, not 23 months as the published dates would seem to indicate....sg  
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