

Dark Matter Chronicles

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Conflicting Spectrums Review

By Richard Wright



Conflicting Spectrums, from Blindsight Publishing, is in fact a partnership of two magazines, Exodus and An Eclipsing, united to present the dark and light sides of the issue's theme—in this case, Alienation.

Exodus is the darker twin. Two short stories unify for our attention; Innocence by S.D. Campbell and Isaac's Golem by Robby Barkan. Each approaches the concept of alienation through an examination of war and children. In Innocence, exoskeletons are the weapon of the future, turning people into bristling weapons. Only children are adaptable enough to recover from the injuries these formidable suits inflict on the user, and not a listed soldier has reached the age of thirteen. Chilling in its pragmatism, Campbell's prose takes us onto the battlefield, where every man is ultimately alone, and asks questions of the sacrifices modern warfare ask of us.

Innocence juxtaposes particularly well with Robby Barkan's Isaac's Golem, set in a Nazi concentration camp. The titular Isaac befriends a strange Aryan child, whom nobody can believe is the Jew he claims. What secrets does Isaac's new friend hide, from fellow Jewish children and Nazi guards alike? Barkan has an excellent grasp of the resilience of the human spirit, authentic through

his equal comprehension of its breaking points.

Janet I. Buck completes the fictional darkness with her poem The Mighty Drip, a harsh stripping away of the preconceptions we have of the disabled. Alienation is not simply for the future or the past; it surrounds us today as well.

So where does the light side lead us? The prolific Atk. Butterfly launches An Eclipsing with The Last Date. Over dinner, a couple separate. Can Katie really have been impregnated by an alien prince, as she claims to George? Rather literal in its take on alienation, but an entertaining yarn. Jane Pek proceeds to steal the issue with The Sin of Loneliness, a heart-wrenchingly sad story of slow death by a mysterious blood plague. Here, alienation is equivalent to loneliness, and death is the most alienating force of all. Kudos to Miss Pek, who has a bright, bright future looming before her if she can continue producing material of this calibre.

An Eclipsing closes with Ant Pantoum, another rather literal take on the theme. Good fun though, as L. Ellen McMahon drenches her poetry with good humour, raising a smile as she considers her reaction to the aliens already here.

So, [Conflicting Spectrums](#) contains a range of thought-provoking, entertaining fiction, each tale complementing one another, as well as articles to ponder. There are two versions—the online is free, and the offline version costs \$2.50 to download. What to do? Take the online version of course! It has the same material in it, and it costs nothing!

Alas, a hasty decision. What of the Jeanette Durick's haunting soundtrack, enriching each tale with a profound melancholy? Don't know what I'm talking about? You read the online version. What of the



sliding graphics, or the cinematic introduction credits? Confused? Well, which version did you surf through? Had you wait an age for the front cover to load? Not if you read it offline.

Don't get me wrong, the webzine is attractively put together and easy to use, but it still suffers all the usual limitations of the Internet. The download is a fully integrated program, and an experience in itself. Hell, even the sheep icon looks great sitting on your desktop!

'The future of professional electronic publishing' is a much bandied about phrase. Here you have a genuine contender for how it could be. It's your money, so do yourself a favour and spend it. [Conflicting Spectrums](#) deserves your support, and you deserve to have read it.

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Richard Wright is a twenty-four year old actor and writer living and working in Glasgow, Scotland. His work has been published in arenas both papery and electrical. His first novel, Cuckoo, is forthcoming from Hard Shell Word Factory. Visit his website at <http://freespace.virgin.net/richard.wright5/index.htm> and say hello.

DargonZine

a review

by D. McDougle

I can sum up this review in one sentence.

Go, read. What? Not willing to take my word for it? Don't trust me, huh? OK, you want details, here you go.

[DargonZine](#) is the publication vehicle of the "Dargon Project," brainchild of Ornoth Liscomb. *FSFnet*, as it was called in its original form, was born pre-web (1984!) and conceived as a way to bring together readers with a similar interest in fantasy. A year later, Liscomb proposed devoting *FSFnet* to a shared-world milieu and, in November of 1985, the Duchy of Dargon came to be. Now, all these years later, it's a world unto itself, remaining true to the original vision with nary a plot tangle or misplaced character that I can find.

This baby has come a long way—just

check out Volume Zero, number 00 and you'll see. As a matter of fact, do yourself the favor of perusing some of the early issues. It's fascinating to watch the evolution of this fine zine.

What is it, exactly? In the words of its webmasters:

One of the things that makes [DargonZine](#) special is our sense of conviction. We are not a commercial venture, and never shall be. Reader feedback, which we encourage and enjoy, is the only compensation we receive for our work. Our purpose is to help aspiring authors become better writers, and to produce the finest quality electronic magazine that we can. While High Fantasy has its place in the literary world, it is easy to abuse. [DargonZine](#) maintains a Low Fantasy environment to ensure our authors write tighter, better stories. One of the reasons fantasy has a reputation as juvenile is because there are many fantasy writers who write simply to entertain, with little thought to the thematic development that occurs in more traditional genres. [DargonZine](#) is the longest-running electronic magazine on the Internet because we are dedicated to developing aspiring writers who believe that good fantasy should read like good literature.

I went back to the beginning and read "Simon's Song", (Volume 4, Issue 1) the first published tale of Dargon. Just out of curiosity, I searched the glossary for the trail of its characters: Dale, Ittosai Michiya, and Simon Salamagundi. Checking on the follow through, as it were. Did they get lost in Dargon's steadily growing complexity? Nope. I found all present and accounted for. And that's no small feat!

The orchestration of a project so vast as the Dargon Project has become boggles the mind. Who could keep so many characters behaving like themselves? So many threads straight and smooth? Who keeps it from becoming a hopelessly knotted jumbled mess?



DZ's very capable webmasters, that's who. Ornoth D.A. Liscomb, Jon Evans, and Carlo N. Samson manage the site with an attention to detail that borders on the incredible.

That attention pays off. There's highly entertaining reading here! Alan Lauderdale's "Mouse" tales feature a wee lass no more than three hands high who appears to live on sunlight. Stuart Whitby's "A Spell of Rain" is the haunting saga of a son and his father and the damage that "love" can do. Brandon Haught's "The Gong Farmer" is just plain fun! True, not every story is a sparkling gem but all the writers deserve credit. It's no easy job, working within an existing "world" and they seem more than equal to the challenge.

You won't have any trouble navigating this site. All that you need is laid out before you on a simple and attractive background with just enough graphics to make it interesting. You can get anywhere from everywhere in one simple click. Stroll into any issue, even completely ignorant of Dargon and its history (like me, for example), and get right with the program thanks to an exhaustive glossary, with links on hand in every tale to pop you over and clear up any questions. Or check out the "New Reader's Introduction to Dargon" before you begin. And, if you're the sort who needs to know exactly where you are, the maps will help you get your bearings.

I knew nothing of [DargonZine](#) before checking it out for this review. I thoroughly enjoyed my wanderings there and I heartily recommend it as a site to see.

"Orny" said it best in his preface to the very first story:

"Come follow, whether your pleasure be politics and court intrigue, the devilish workings of a medieval port-town, or the horror and adventure of the hinterlands. Come follow the tales of wonder and woe that unfold before you, in Dargon."

Go. Read.

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In addition to this review for Dark Matter Chronicles, Donna McDougale's work has appeared in *12th Planet*, *All Mixed Up*, and at *Suite101.com* where she writes weekly articles on "personal accountability." You can reach her at dMcDougale@bigfoot.com.

Saint Marks Consort

Do you believe in magic? Do you long to hear the music of the faeries? Do you just need a good English country dance tune from the 14th century? Then you need to check out the CD *Fines Amoretta* from Saint Marks Consort. Discover great medieval music at their webpage. Just point your browser to <http://home.mindspring.com/~rlepre/stmarks.html>

Site Review: Burn 4.0 "Horror E-zine for the Dark and Twisted"

Clark Kline, editor & sitemaster
by J.G. Stinson

Burn calls itself a "quarterly online horror e-zine with fiction, poetry, art, articles, reviews and more." Editor Kline strays a bit from the genre in the reviews section, but that's his prerogative, and he does have an entertaining if bombastic writing style. The inclusion of a dictionary definition of the word "evil" on the main page is a nice touch.

The fiction has some uneven choices. "Soul Tattooed" by Noel Ace is about a healer of violence who wants to "take a day off" from dispensing his gift to the demanding citizens of San Francisco. The tale is well-told and eerie, though its ending is vague. "Wet Tuesday" by Eve Rings suffers from a lack of editorial attention. It bears descriptive passages that do the splatterpunk subgenre proud, but there's no apparent point to the story. A man wakes up in an apartment amongst scattered body parts not his own. His existence is a living hell from which he cannot escape, so he seemingly embraces it at story's end. An unsatisfactory ending brings to an abrupt end what began as an intriguing premise.

Surreal Moon Cereal is an ongoing serial story subtitled "Collections from a Mental Patient's Scrapbook." No author names were noted, but I got the impression that more than one writer is involved. The basic story is about a man who's been incarcerated in a "mental" hospital, convicted of participating in the gang rape and murder of a young woman. It sounds like been-there-read-that fare, at first. What makes it deviate from that worn path is the introduction of a Christian Bible, and is the one of the most nefarious uses of

this book I've ever seen in fiction. I read three of the four available installments, and plan to read more.

Kline's article on DVD and Criterion Collection's recent releases offers an impassioned explanation of why DVD is better than DVIX and VHS tapes, and reviews of Criterion's DVD selections.

The movie reviews section of the site is prefaced by an outraged screed on why movie critics who reveal the entire plot of a film in their reviews should be (at least figuratively) burned at the stake. Kline, by way of an alternative, offers "The 3-Sentence Review" because "anything more wouldn't be assinine." Considering the movie reviews are in a new section of the site called Jackass, this at least follows some internal logic. Although the reviews are, indeed, limited to 3 sentences, those sentences are usually of the run-on variety. Kline does manage to be coherent most of the time. He also includes one-sentence reviews for quick praise and a "Worst of 1998" list, and the reviewed movies run the gamut from "Babe" to "The Matrix."

For the musically-minded reader, Kline heaps glory on Midnight Syndicate's "Born of the Night," a "gothic horror soundscape" (according to one of its composers) that comes across as a soundtrack for a movie that was never made. This sounds like good, scary fun to me.

The Poetry section contains some shivery little gems, like "Little Annoyances" by Richard Fein, a tale of a cockroach-fixated fellow who gets "cured" in a very interesting way. Holly Day's "America" is a war-chant against the soulless center of the speaker's world, where friends die by accident and by deliberate self-design. The poem rails against these methods of giving in "instead of turning off the tube, the dontjawannadie machine" and staying alive as spite, which is the speaker's choice. It's a powerful work, and deserves more exposure.

The section titled "Paranoid Sheep?" concerns "Conspiracies, Idiocies, Strange Opinions, Majesty 12's minions, New World Orders and News outside the Borders." Welcome to the X-Files portion of our website, ladies and gentlemen, still under construction at that. What there is here is engaging read-



ing, though a bit on the rabid side. Which means it fits in very nicely, thank you. There's also a links page, "Jackass Web Faves," which provides URLs to sites on several topics of interest to the conspiracy-riveted crowd. But Kline adds leavening, in his caution to read as many articles as possible on a topic in order to get a less-biased account of what's happening, i.e. Kosovo. Good advice not always given, and I appreciate Kline's doing so.

Would I go back to [Burn](#)? You betcha.

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J.G. Stinson got her first major scare watching the original version of "The Haunting" when it initially aired on network TV and never recovered from the experience. She resides in Florida with her family, which includes two Siberian Huskies, a breed she considers "more wolf than any other dog."

Wolfmate

by Christine G. Richardson

This story appeared in Eternity OL in January, 1998.

Elyane lay very still on her back between the roots of a sheltering oak, inviting the starlight to invade and re-make her. The wolf sat at her side, ears pricked towards the faraway howl of his pack. He would not leave her tonight.

The wolf had once been her husband Grigg, a hunter of wolves. He and his partner Pietor had ranged far and wide and brought back skins to hang on their walls and cover their beds and trade for home-brewed beer. One day, he had come home badly mauled. He had recovered, but the transformations had begun soon afterwards. For a time, she had wondered at his bad temper and unannounced absences and his sudden loss of interest in his favourite sport. When she discovered the cause, she had gone to the wisewoman Anya to seek a remedy.

Anya told her it was Grigg's destiny to hunt with the pack, and that he would eventually be unable to revert to his human form. Since her time of departing was near, she was

looking for an apprentice to learn her lore. Elyane agreed to be her pupil. She would need protection without a husband, and Pietor had ever gazed on her ravenously.

Before Anya died, she entrusted Elyane with her spellbook. "This world is uncertain. We cannot allow this to fall into evil hands. Memorize the spells with care, even if you do not understand their purpose, and then burn the book. Where you scatter the ashes will be a holy place, and you will be powerful there. The rest will come in time."

Elyane continued to memorize and practise during the long hours when her husband was away. After she learned to use a protective spell, she began to visit the wolf pack. They accepted her as Grigg's mate and let her share in the kill, provided she took her proper turn. They howled restlessly while she burned the spellbook and scattered the ashes around a spring in a canyon no hunter had found. She dragged some small logs across the creek and added mud and stones to create a pool big enough to bathe in. She always felt clean and inwardly quiet in her special sacred place.

She shivered. She was defiled now. Made bold by Grigg's long absence, Pietor had raped her in her garden patch. She had let it be known that Grigg was on a long trading journey to a neighbouring kingdom, but the villagers had already given him up for dead. The country was hazardous with brigands and large, hungry animals, and few returned from such journeys. Pietor was determined to marry her and add Grigg's property to his own, all in the name of protecting his partner's helpless widow.

Afterwards, she had run from him into the forest, without even a cloak to protect her. There was no one she could rely on now, except the one special wolf who had left the pack to watch over her.

She pushed together a pile of dry leaves to sleep in, and the wolf pressed against her side, his chin resting on her thigh. He seemed deeply asleep, but she knew that the slightest threat would wake him instantly.

Great Goddess, show me what to do.

She stroked the rough grey fur and wept for everything she had lost and everything that was to come. If she refused to marry Pietor, she had no choice but to live in the forest with the pack, even though winter

was coming. But first, she must go home, take what she could, and let the cat out of the house.

Poor Greyladykins—how will she fare? She hunts well enough, but she has always had a hearth and a fire and milk in the evening. Anya entrusted her to me, and now I must abandon her.

She was still fretting when she drifted into sleep, curled around the warmth of the wolf's body.

In the morning the sun shone bright, promising a warm day. Stiffly, she brushed the leaves from her clothes and hair, and stamped her feet to bring warmth and sensation back. She followed the wolf to the canyon, their secret drinking spot. The rest of the pack materialized in ones and twos out of the morning fog. When they were finished drinking, she lay her clothes beside the pool and washed herself, feeling stronger and cleaner moment by moment.

It was then that the hunters with their bows and knives and dogs arrived, led by Pietor the Wolfslayer. She snatched up her clothes and held them before her to protect her modesty as the dogs closed in on their prey and the men readied their bows. She watched helplessly, seared by the knowledge that she had visited death upon the pack. It was her scent that Pietor had set the dogs to track, no doubt with talk of rescuing her from the horrors of the forest.

The slaughter was swift and easy. The only way out of the canyon was blocked by the hunters. The dogs pinned the wolves against the sheer rock face while the arrows did their work.

When Grigg fell, she screamed and ran to him, leaving her clothes behind. She tried to pull the arrow out, but it was no use. His lifeblood was bubbling between his teeth and soaking the into ground. His suffering eyes looked on her meaningfully—with reproach? love? forgiveness? She pulled him into her lap as the last remaining wolf leaped desperately forward and tore the throat out of a careless dog before he collapsed with a dozen arrows in him. Weeping, she kissed Grigg's forehead.

"Behold what manner of woman she is!" Pietor cried out, his eyes shining with bloodlust. "I thought to take her to wife, and she lies with a . . . brute!"

Elyane looked up at him, black hate

coursing through her. Without premeditation, she spat out the words of the annihilation spell. She lacked the power to return him to the dust whence he came, but it was enough to throw him to his knees, grabbing his groin. "Witchcraft!" he cried. "She is a witch! Take her!"

Grigg coughed more blood and lay still. As the hunters gaped and the dogs whined uneasily, he reverted to his human form, lying broken and naked on his wife's lap.

She kissed him one final time, tenderly, heedless of the blood on his lips. Then she pushed herself to her feet and stood proudly in her blood-smearred nakedness.

Where you scatter the ashes will be a holy place, Anya had said, and you will be powerful there.

She spoke more words, deliberately now, intent on accomplishing her purpose. When Pietor noticed that his garments were becoming much too large for him, his howled threats turned to pleas for mercy. Every man stepped as Pietor shrank tinier and tinier until he became a vole. He scurried into the nearby grass, leaving his boots, his leather leggings, and his wolfskin cloak empty on the ground. She hoped fervently that the spell was permanent.

Her moment of triumph faded into an overwhelming need to lie down. The chill wind gusted, and she began to shake. She called on the spirits of the newly-slain wolves to guard her as she summoned the last of her strength. The power of the sacred spring gathered around her, holding her up. Just one more spell . . . one more.

"Great Goddess, look after my cat!" she cried in the wild language of the kestrel as she spiralled upwards into the bright sunshine. By the time the hunters collected their wits sufficiently to shoot their arrows, she was out of range.

There are no wolves in the forest now, but their howling is still heard, and none of the villagers dare go to see why this is so. Beside a hidden spring, a small grey cat tranquilly raises her kittens, while a kestrel skims on the updraught, eyes scanning the ground for the next meal. She particularly enjoys dining on voles.

Christine has lived in a dozen different Canadian communities, and is currently in Hearst, Ontario, "The Moose Capital of Canada". She is a mild-mannered minister's wife by day, and a writer of fantasy by night. Her current ambition is to get enough pieces published so that her secret identity won't be a secret any more. You can reach her at matermax@hotmail.com.

URLs

Conflicting Spectrums -
www.blindsided.net/Spectrums/
DargonZine - www.dargonzine.org/
Burn - www.blindzero.com/burn/

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The next issue of Dark Matter Chronicles comes out October 23, 1999 (remember we've moved to Saturday delivery now).

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The Matrix
Skin & Bones
Planet Relish